



THE TSOBO

A collection of ethnographic and historical data from fieldwork 1989-1993

Series

Ethnographic and Historical Profiles of the Peoples of the Muri Mountains
- The Southern Groups

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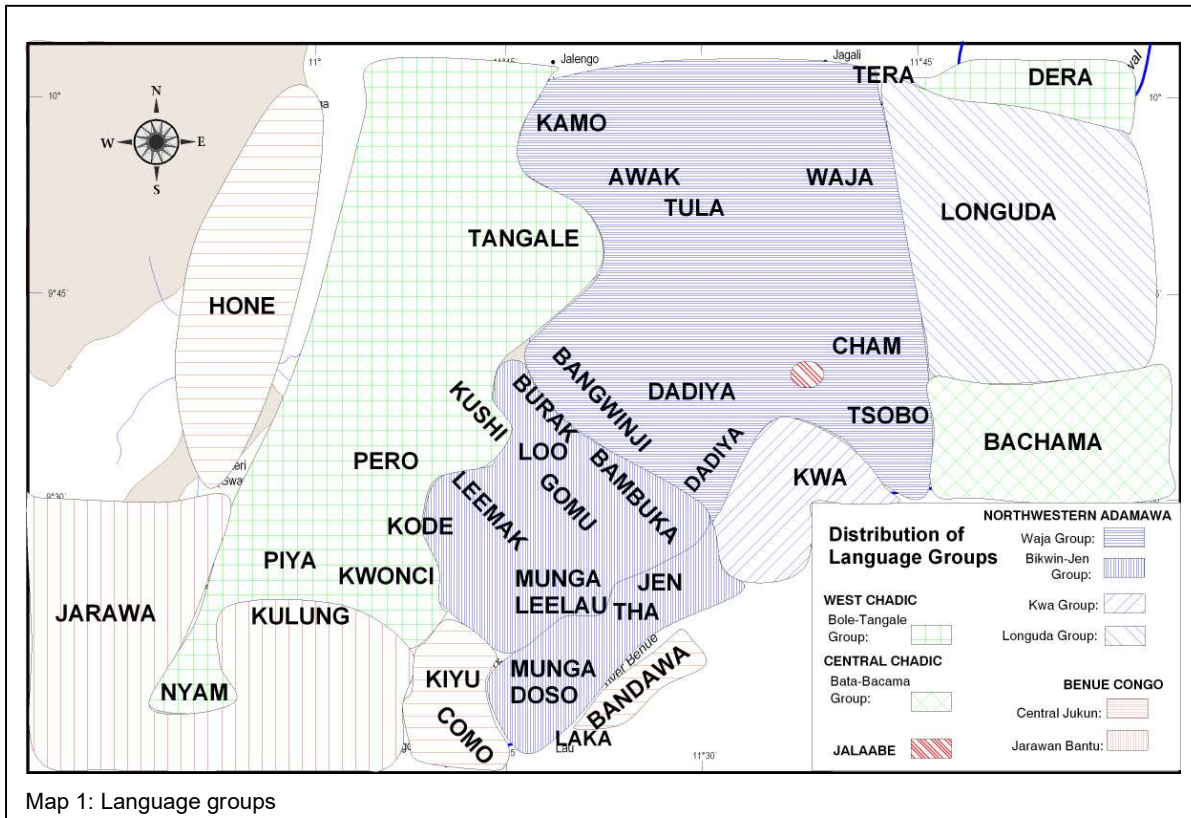
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Introduction

Ethnographic field research was undertaken within the framework of the interdisciplinary research project "Cultural Development and Language History in the Environment of the West African Savannah" (SFB 268) in the years 1989 to 1993. The information provided below reflects the situation at that time.¹



The Tso language [ldp] (sometimes also called Lotsu-Pire) is part of the Waja group,² a sub-group of the North-Western Adamawa languages of the Niger-Congo phylum. Other members of the Waja group are Bangwinji [bsj], Cham [cfa], Waja [wja], Kamo [kcq], Awak [awo] and Tula [tul]. The first mention the Tsobo (Pire) is made by the explorer Eduard Flegel who travelled by boat along the river Benue in 1879. He writes that the Pire are inhabiting the mountains to the north of the Bachama and marks the name on his map.³

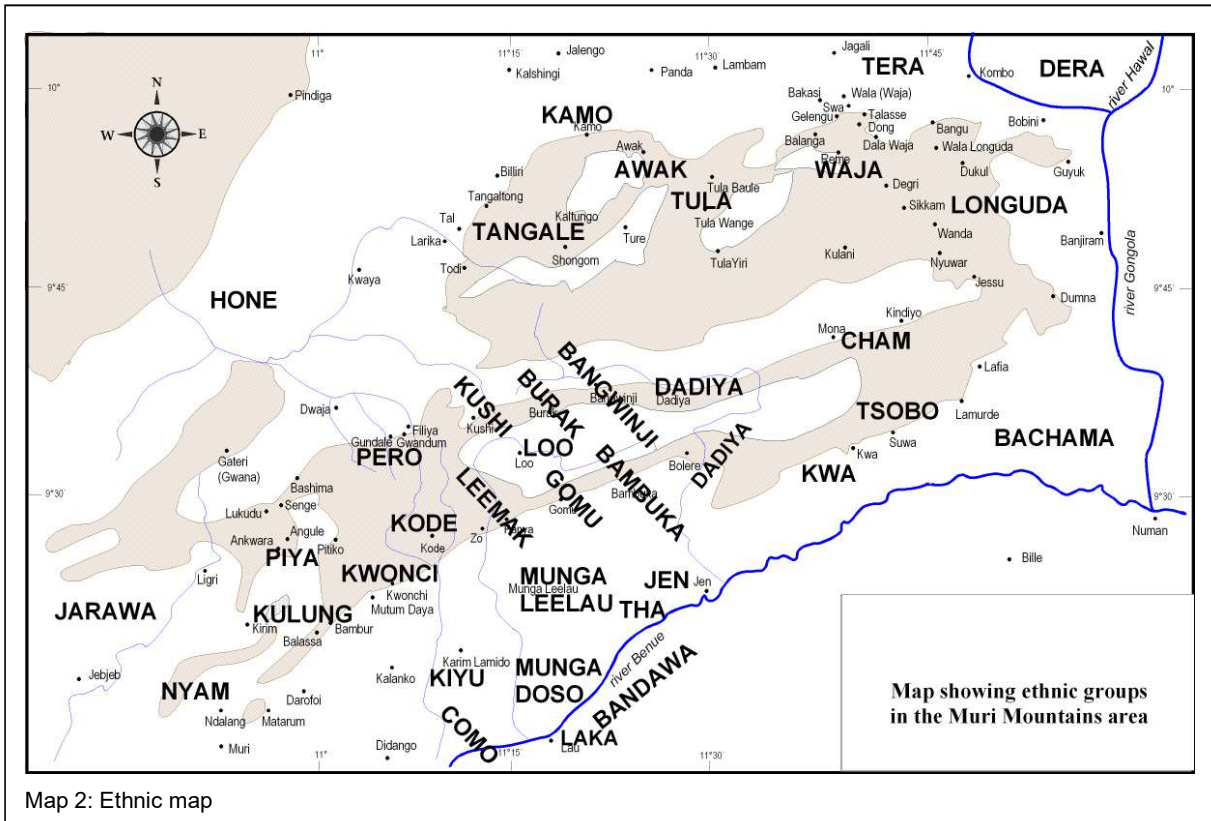
¹ I am grateful to *Sarkin Tsobo* Jeriel Galura, Emanuel Daniel, Nantari Bikwali, Ganye, Sementi and Yoonyagu for their cooperation during my research. My special thanks go to John Audu and Bitrus Galura for their untiring and invaluable assistance. I am grateful to Pete Eccles for correcting my English.

² Cf. Kleinewillinghöfer 2014. In square brackets are the ISO 639 names of the languages.

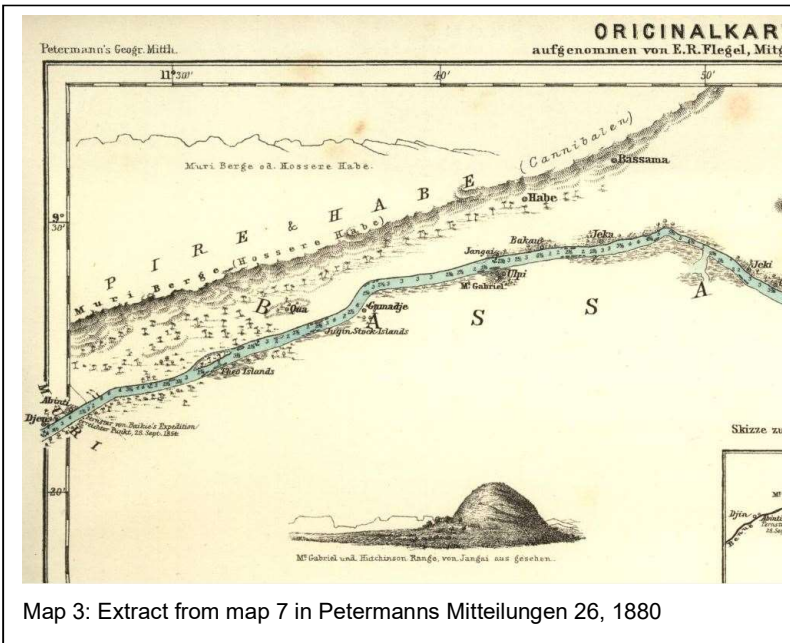
³ Flegel 1880a: 227 and accompanying map (table 7) of which an extract is presented here. For an overview of Flegel's explorations see Adelberger 2000.

Settlement area and demography

Tsobo⁴ is the autonym of this ethnic group; they are sometimes called Pire by neighbouring



groups, but the term is considered derogatory by the Tsobo. British colonial authorities used the term Piri.⁵



The Tsobo live in the south-eastern part of the Muri Mountains and may number about 20,000 people; according to Ethnologue they are 16,000. In the early 1990s there were 5,491 taxpayers (2,995 male, 2,566 female) recorded in Suwa alone, one of their main settlements, lying on the Numan - Karim Lamido road. Sometimes the Longuda are also designated as Pire by

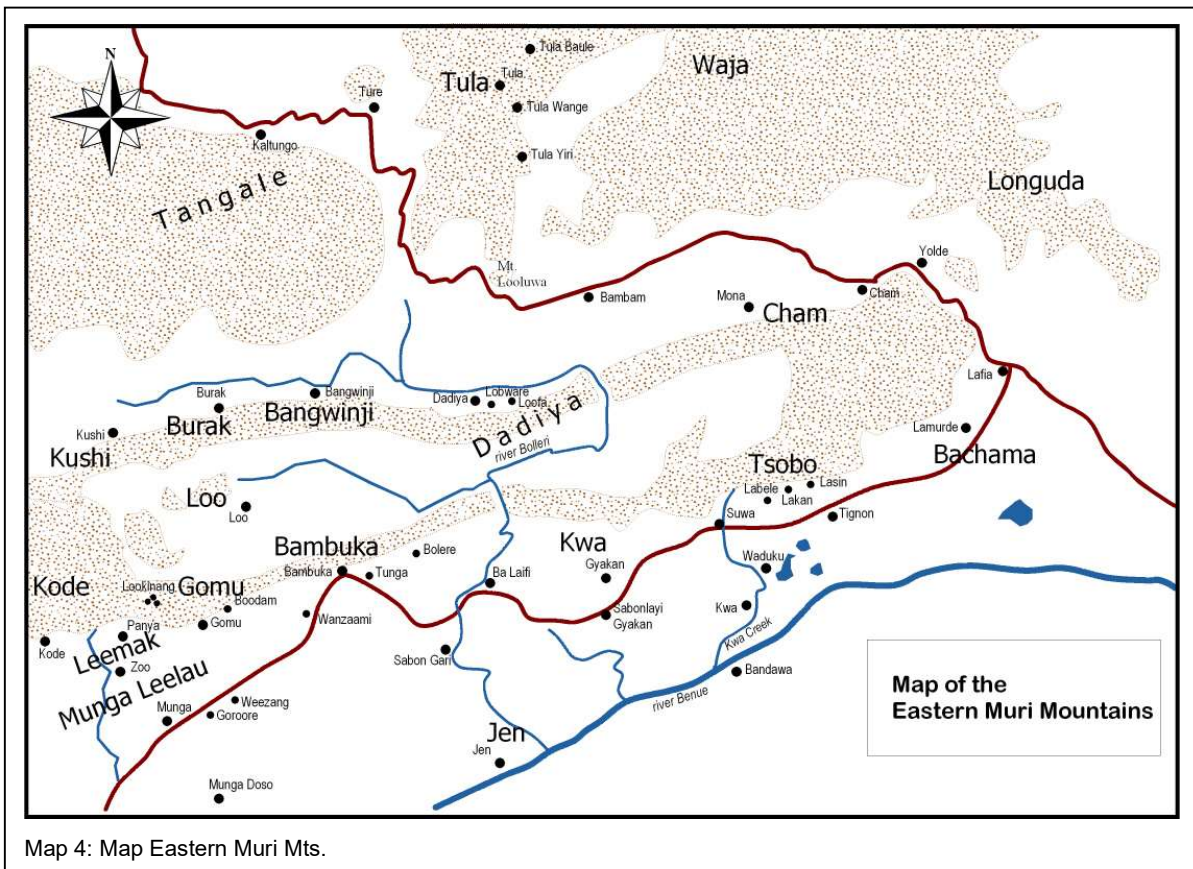
⁴ In the ethnographic survey of Adamawa and Taraba states by CAPRO (1992: 124-129) they are called Chobbo.

⁵ Brackenbury in his Assessment Report from 1917 on the Piri Sub-Division writes, that the Longuda in the eastern part and the people in the western part are both called Piri or Niam Niam meaning cannibals (SNP 10-374P/1917, p. 2).

outsiders, suggesting a relationship between the two ethnic groups.

The Tsobo are subdivided into four sections: the **Berbo** living in the hills in the northern parts of their settlement territory close to Mona, the **Suwabo** living in the western parts, the **Kwaazin**, which is only a small group living in a settlement called Sulni just to the north of Suwa (and seem to be regarded as a sub-division of Suwabo), and the **Gusubo** in the eastern region.

In more detail, the **Suwabo** are found in the following settlements: Suwa Bariki, Luafute, Wamsa, Kyauto, Furtu, Bulkutu, Bumsibu (=Ruwan Zafi), Wonkang, Bagaani, Swong, Dutsen Maka, La-



Map 4: Map Eastern Muri Mts.

bele, Bageshi, Nimngbe, Kiisa, Swelni, Wurki (also called Laasim); their *kufai* (old settlements in the mountains, now deserted) were Badangle (where their chief resided), Lure, Nimbe, Gwe and Wurki/Laasim (there is a new, as well as an old, Wurki/Laasim).

The **Berbo** live in these settlements: Bang, Tipto, Badəm, Butoni, Bayoni, Mebuto and Kəsa.

And the **Gusobo** are found in the settlements of Luuzo (or Bwebunge, a Bachama name), Gundeli, Suntu, Wami, Bala, Labun, Cigaatou or Kyaatou, Kutu and Shikware.

Interethnic relations

Their neighbours to the east are the Bachama, to the north are the Cham, to the north-east the Longuda, to the north-west the Dadiya (who the Tsobo call Kwaabo), and to the west live the Kwa.

The Tsobo have relations with the Longuda in ritual matters, and they attend each other's festivities. The Longuda are called Jusubo by the Tsobo.

Probably due to the pressure exercised by their immediate neighbours, it is related that there were conflicts with the Cham, Dadiya, Bachama and Kwa. Regarding the Kwa, there is also a tradition that the Tsobo offered the Kwa refuge when the latter were raided by Fulani emirate forces in the 19th century.

Some families of the Tsobo migrated to the Waja and the Jen, and joking relationships are retained between the Tsobo clans of origin and their off-shoots among the Waja and Jen.

History

Pre-colonial migrations and movement of settlements since the beginning of the colonial period

In their traditions⁶, the Tsobo state that they had originally lived together on the Bang plateau in the eastern Muri Mountains at a site called Lassun. Due to famine, they moved and founded three new settlements, representing the three main subdivisions of the Tsobo: Lusuwa (home of the Suwabo), Lubire/Lubore (home of the Berbo) and Luzoor/Lootsu (home of the Gusubo).

From these places they further spread into various settlements.

At Bang can still be seen the marks of feet of people and animals and a spear blade showing where the Tsobo vanished into a cave when being attacked by enemies (John Audu MS). This is a symbolic expression of relationship with the ground and may be interpreted as a sign of an autochthonous status of the Tsobo.

The British colonial authorities made the Tsobo move from their mountain villages to the plains in the mid-1940s.

From a comment made by Stevens (1973, p. 74, 276, 483-4, also 1976: p. 31) on the migrations of the Bachama, (their eastern neighbours), one may deduce that the Tsobo were already settling in the area prior to the Bachama's arrival which he considers to have taken place well before the Fulani exercised pressure on them at the beginning of the 19th century.

According to the historical traditions of the Tsobo, after having moved from Bang, in the area of Lusuwa, they lived alongside a people called Mona (John Audu MS). Mona and Kindiyo are the main subdivisions of the Cham people, but there is also a population element among the Cham representing an older and autochthonous group called Jalaabe.

At the end of the 19th century, the Cham were driven out from Fitolai, (a settlement to the north of the Muri Mountains), by invading Waja and settled in the Muri Mountains, splitting into Mona and Kindiyo (NAK SNP 17-9150, Walker 1929).

While the advent of the Cham in the northern Muri Mountains can reliably be dated to the end of 19th century, this appears to be too late for a historically plausible co-existence of the Tsobo with the (Cham-) Mona at Lusuwa. It is more probable that the people who in the traditions today are

⁶ John Audu MS 1991.

named as Mona were Jalaabe (or a group speaking that language) who had a much longer history in the area before they were absorbed by the Cham (Mona) and other immigrating groups⁷

Relations with Fulani emirates⁸

As far as oral, archival or published sources can tell, the Tsobo were never conquered by the Fulani.

The military strategy of the Fulani emirates was largely based on their cavalry, with noble horsemen leading the attacks (Marjomaa 1998:218–19, 232–34, 254–56; Smaldone 1977:29–32). Mounted warriors could employ their military tactics to great effect on the undulating plains of the Northern Nigerian savannah, but could not exploit their superiority in the craggy and hilly landscape of the Muri Mountains area nor in other mountainous regions. The inhabitants of the plains surrounding the hills, especially in the Tula area, built defensive stone walls and thorn hedges, which were successfully used to check attacks by horsemen. As a protective measure, the villages were strategically well-placed in the steep and rocky hills. Usually, they were protected by stone walls and could only be reached through narrow, winding paths, partly obstructed by gateways. These could be well defended against emirate raiders, even if they approached armed with rifles.

Firearms were part of the weaponry of the emirate forces, especially since the middle of the 19th century, but since they were of the front-loader musket type and, compared with contemporaneous European standards, few in numbers, their effect was mostly psychological, inducing fear through their loud discharge. The arms of the mountain dwellers consisted of spears with varying, often quite vicious, tips, bows and arrows, the latter often poisoned, daggers, short swords and clubs. For protection, shields made of buffalo hide and elephant ears were used.

Thus, although the different emirates exercised considerable pressure by undertaking frequent raids on the population groups of the wider Muri Mountains area and adjacent regions, their control of the area was rather loose and varied over time. Supported by a suitable terrain, the mountain dwellers could successfully defend themselves or were able to withdraw into even more inaccessible regions. The acephalous nature of their societies and the existence of a multitude of factions on the one hand made it difficult to form alliances for more successful defence, on the other hand the subjugation of a single community did not entail the conquest of any wider political network.

Mountain dwellers, such as the Awak, Cham, Dadiya or Pero, were able to retain their independence against the Fulani (Temple 1922:34, 87, 88, 365).

⁷ See also Kleinewillinghöfer 2001 and Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.

⁸ The following is largely taken from Adelberger 2009.

Colonial encounters

In the early years, the British colonial authorities had a negative attitude towards the Tsobo, as well as other groups that had managed to evade subjection by the Fulani Emirates in their mountain retreats, and regarded them as “savages [who] in their primitive state understand nothing but force.”⁹

I quote further from this report of 1907 by Resident Fremantle because it gives evidence that the attitude of the colonial power was also exploited by some ethnic groups - in this case the Bachama – to advance their own interests:

“18. The chief Jaro of the head Bassema [=Bachama] town LAMURDE has complained against some pagans living at a village called MONA BATUI 12 miles or so to the N.W. He reports that they are continually robbing strangers and refuse entry into their neighbourhood to fellow pagans or traders; and that a few months ago they [sic] killed 14 people of the neighbouring Bassema village MONA. Since the beginning of the year it has been known that these are cannibal pagans, and Mr. Vereker has been sending to obtain further information. The village it appears is as large as LAMURDE and is situated at the foot of the LAMURDE hills. At the top of the hills are the PIRI tribe who were visited by an expedition in April last year [1906] and punished for constant depredations on the plains below. [...] 19. The Bassema are not as yet taxed by us but they have a moral claim on our support, and their Chief has a 2nd class Staff of office. They are powerless to retaliate, thanks to us, and their very undesirable neighbours should be dealt with.” (SNP 7 - 4230/1907)

In their attempt to subjugate the region, the British colonial power undertook a series of military patrols, and the first encounter with the Tsobo people was a violent one.¹⁰

From April to July 1906, on the southern fringes of the Muri Mountains, the Tsobo (Pire), as well as the Libo, were visited by a patrol for constantly raiding neighbouring groups. The patrol consisted of about 50 rank and file with a British NCO and a Maxim gun, led by Lieutenant Blackwood with Dr. Temple (Medical Officer) acting as Political Officer. The patrol destroyed Gunshi, a large Tsobo settlement with an estimated population of 3,500, and about 50 Tsobo were killed in the fighting. On their way back the force then visited Libo. Because they met opposition, the town was destroyed and about nine Libo killed. Cynically enough, all this happened during a time when the country was ravaged by famine, and it was estimated that 50 percent of the Gongola valley population had died of starvation.¹¹

⁹ Resident J. M. Fremantle in a Quarterly Report on Yola Province, Sept. 1907 (SNP 7 - 4230/1907).

¹⁰ See Adelberger 2009 for a fuller account of the British patrols to subjugate the region. The following is largely taken from this publication.

¹¹ NAK SNP 7 - 1757/1907, Annual Report on the Yola Province for the year 1906: Yola Province, Annual report for 12 months ending 31st December 1906 by Resident G. N. Barclay. See Weiss (1997) for the relationship between hunger crises and colonial policy in Northern Nigeria.

At the end of 1913, Assistant Resident Carlyle of Gombe Division made a tour through Waja, Cham and Longuda country.¹² On 14th October Carlyle was joined by Houghton, Assistant Resident Lau Division Muri Province, and engaged in boundary demarcation from 15th to 21st November, which brought them to Lo and Bolere. On 18th November at Lo they were joined by 11 WAFF (West African Frontier Force) soldiers from Nafada. At Bolere they also met Mr. Ryan, 3rd Resident Numan Division Yola Province, who was there because the trade road to Lau via Bolere had been closed due to some incidents. Carlyle learnt that the Pero and the Cham, except for the Kindiyo, had paid their tax. He left Bolere on 24th November passing through the Tsobo town of Suwa (or Wobongil) and arrived at Kindiyo on 25th November.

From 2nd June to 15th July 1916 a patrol of 70 soldiers, led by Captain Gardner, toured the country of Yungur, Lala, Longuda, Kanakuru and Tsobo (Pire). Among the Yungur, the compound of a deserter from the WAFF was burnt, and they left Guyuk, (which had already been punished ten years before by Oliver Howard), burnt for not having delivered their taxes. On 11th July they visited Dumna in Tsobo country without any incident and were back at Yola on 15th July 1916.¹³

The Tsobo at the south-eastern end of the Muri Mountains were eventually brought under control in 1917, but were visited again by a patrol during the following year for having attacked the District Officer.¹⁴

A combined patrol, consisting of officers from Gombe and Numan Divisions with 20 rank and file, toured the common border and the Tangale-Waja area in 1918 without causing any violent incidents.¹⁵ The ADO of Gombe Division, Pembleton, met with his military escort of 20 soldiers under the command of Colour Sergeant Mackenzie at Deba Habe on 10th March 1918. They first visited the Tangale area and collected the tax of all Tula and Tangale communities with the exception of the southern villages. Then they continued via Pero to Kindiyo where they met W. C. Moore, ADO Numan Yola Province, on 1st April. Moore collected tax from the Tsobo who had been subjugated the previous year. The Kindiyo and Jessu also paid their tax. Pembleton and Moore together investigated the Yola-Bauchi border near Dadiya. Pembleton then went from Dadiya, to Filiya to collect tax. Here the Pero people had suffered from a smallpox epidemic. At Kampani he found that the inhabitants had returned and their ward head Lawili was arrested. On 2nd May they went to the Waja district where some men were convicted of murder. On 8th May Pembleton met Moore again at Kombo to continue with border matters. Pembleton then proceeded to Gelengu to collect

¹² NAK SNP 10 - 745P/1913, Military Escort for Mr. T. F. Carlyle: From 3rd class Resident I/C Gombe Division to the Resident Central Province, Naraguta (by T. F. Carlyle).

¹³ NAK SNP 10 - 297P/1916, Yola Province, Patrols to Lala, Longuda and Yunguru tribes, sanction for: Report on pagan tribes in the Yola province visited by a patrol of 'A' company 2nd N.R. June 2nd - July 15th 1916 by Capt. A. Gardner, 18th July 1916.

¹⁴ NAK SNP 10 - 640P/1917, Bauchi Province - Waja-Tangale District, Military Escort to. NAK Yola Prof K.5/SII, Gazetteer of Adamawa Province (1936:163).

¹⁵ NAK SNP 10 - 640P/1917, Bauchi Province - Waja-Tangale District, Military Escort to: Waja-Tangale Escort, March-June 1918 by E. S. Pembleton, ADO Gombe Division.

the Waja tax and returned to Western Tangale on 20th May. On 23rd May he went to Kwaya and Pindiga, before returning to Nafada where he arrived on 2nd June 1918.

Social structure

The Tsobo comprise a number of patrilineally organised clans that are grouped into three main regional sections of Suwabo, Berbo and Gusubo.

Clans

The following table lists all the clans of Tsobo according to the section they belong to, and gives information on their origin. The variants of the clan names are due to variations in the local manuscripts by John Audu; the definitive spelling has yet to be clarified.

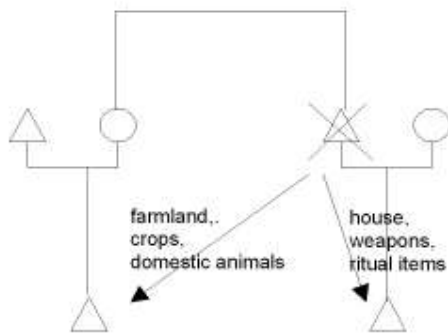
Table 1: Tsobo clans

Clan	Section	Origin	Comments
Bangbo/Barigbo/Bambo	Berbo	Bang	
Bilangbo	Suwabo	Bang	do not eat monkeys
Budambo/Budanbo	Suwabo	Bang	some members of the clan can change into monkeys
Bulangyubo	Suwabo	Bang	
Burubo/Butobo	Gusubo	Lootsu	
Bwalbo/Bualbo	Suwabo	Bang	joking relationship with the Zimborbo
Diyabo	Gusubo	Lootsu	
Giniibo/Giribo	Suwabo	Bang	do not eat leopard, joking relationship with the Labanbo. Some members of the clan can change into leopards
Gunabo/Gurabo/Bunaabo	Gusubo	Lootsu	take care of <i>tsa</i> (wooden ritual sculptures, male and female)
Jikido/Jilido/Juilibo	Suwabo	Bang	
Juabo/Zuwabo/Zuwalbo	Suwabo	Bang	
Kanbo/Koobo	Gusubo	Lootsu	
Kassibo	Berbo	Bang	do not eat baboons. Some members of the clan can change into baboons
Kulangyubo	Suwabo	Bang	
Kwarbo/Kwabo	Berbo	Bang	
Labanbo/Labanzou	Suwabo	Bang	do not eat monkeys, as well as leopard, because of joking relationship with Ginibo. Some members of the clan can change into monkeys
Lammanwabo/Lammawebo/Lamaabo	Gusubo	Lootsu	
Limbrabo/Lambrabo/Limbirabo	Suwabo	Bang	
Loubo/Loobo	Gusubo	Lootsu	
Miyabo	Suwabo	Bang	

Clan	Section	Origin	Comments
Tibuto/Nibuto	?	?	
Wazabo/Kwazabo	Berbo	Bang	
Yanbo/Yambo	Berbo	Bang	
Zimborbo/Zimboobo	Suwabo	Bang	joking relationship with Bwalbo

While filiation into a clan is patrilineal, assets are inherited patrilineally or matrilineally, depending

Inheritance of assets among the Tsobo



on the nature of the asset. Houses and weapons, as well as ritual or sacral items are passed from father to son, farmland, animals and crops are passed from MoBr to SiSo in a matrilineal way. The farmland in the possession of a woman is inherited by her children or her sister.

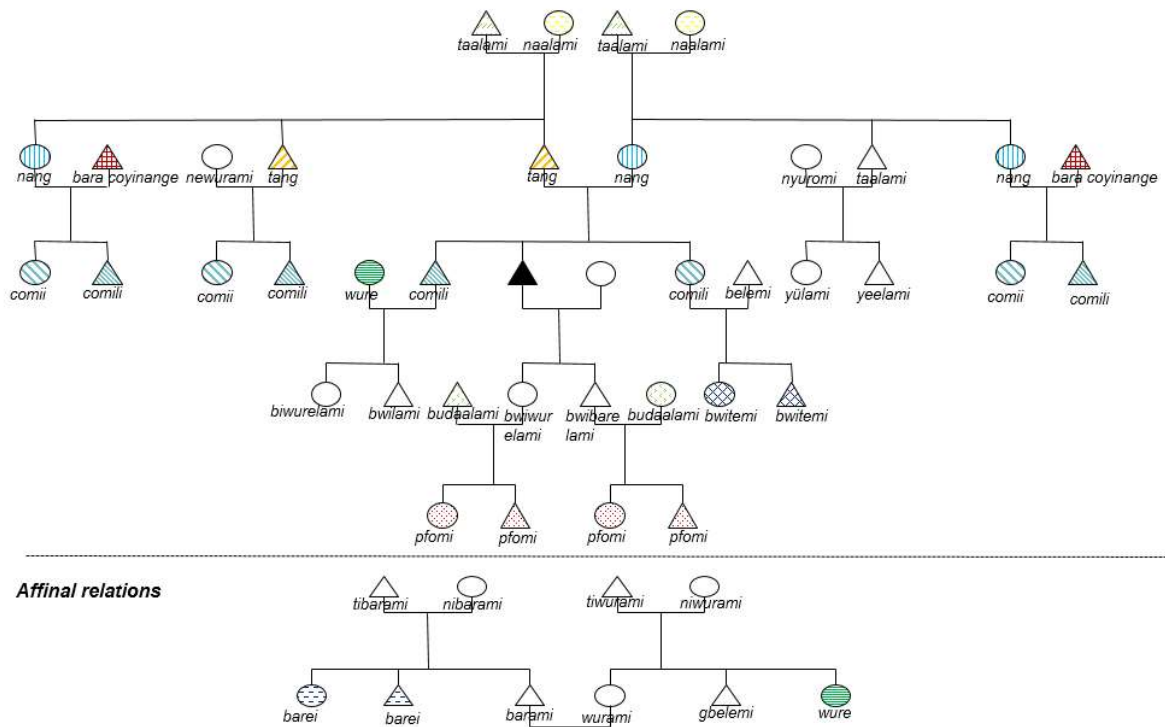
While, for instance, among the Cham the general rule of inheritance through the matriline may be overridden by a last will, this is not the case among the Tsobo.

Kinship terminology

The kinship terminology of the Tsobo has features of the Hawaii system, where in ego's generation all cousins are equated with siblings, only differentiated by gender. However, the exceptions are MoBrChi who have their own terms.

In the first ascending generation, the terminology also defies easy classification, for it would be generational (Mo=MoSi=FaSi, Fa= FaBr=MoBr), if the MoBr would not have a term of his own.

Kinship Terminology - Tsobo



Family

In a polygynous household, each wife has her own kitchen, where she cooks meals from her own supplies for herself, her children and the husband.

In the situation where their parents die, children will be cared for by the relatives of their mother.

After a divorce, children stay with their father.

Marriage

Clan exogamy is practised, but there are some cases where a girl belonging to the same clan as the father of the husband has been married. There is no preference to marry from the clan of the mother.

Levirate (*swilawuri*) is practised- There is no sister exchange. The residence rule is virilocal.

Fa, Mo, MoBr, MoSi and other maternal kin help in raising the bridewealth.

The brideprice is paid by the prospective husband to the father and mother of the bride, the mother receives a larger part which she then gives to her son (the brother of the bride). The mother provides the bride with household utensils; her brother has to take care and assist her in every respect. Her brother can use the assets received for his own marriage.

Besides the payment of bridewealth, brideservice is also performed. Brideservice seems to have died out for it is done in mountain settlements, but not anymore in settlements in the foothills like Suwa.

In the case that a woman marries again after having been divorced, her new husband will compensate the ex-husband by giving him the brideprice that the latter one had originally paid, added to that are payments or fines which the ex-husband had paid for the wife.

Some statistics

In a sample of 50 married Tsobo men, there were a total of 157 wives, of which 156 were from Tsobo, and only 1 wife from Bachama.

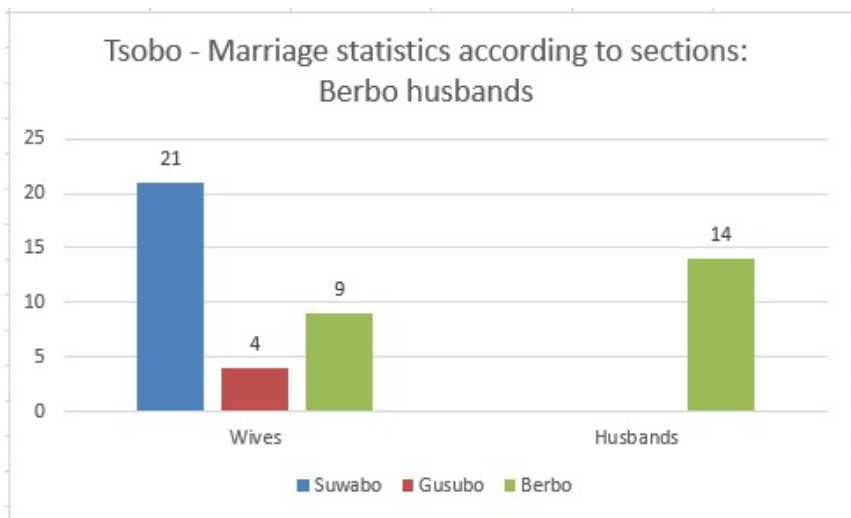
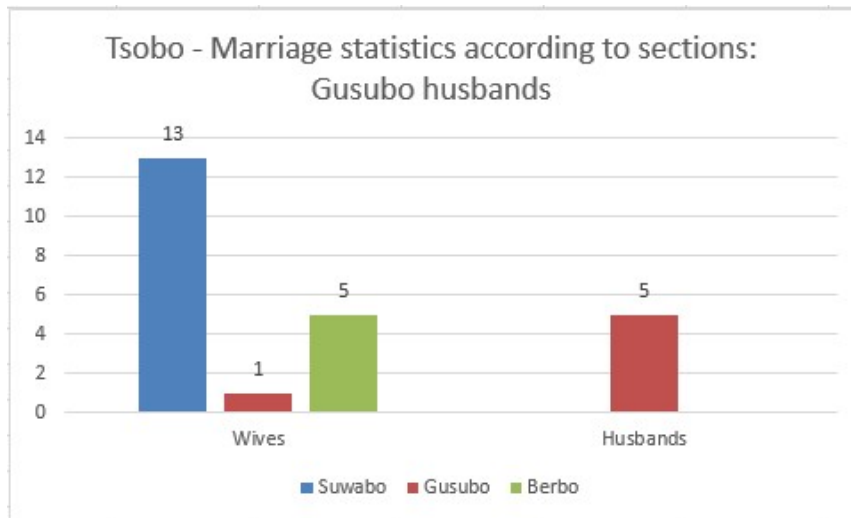
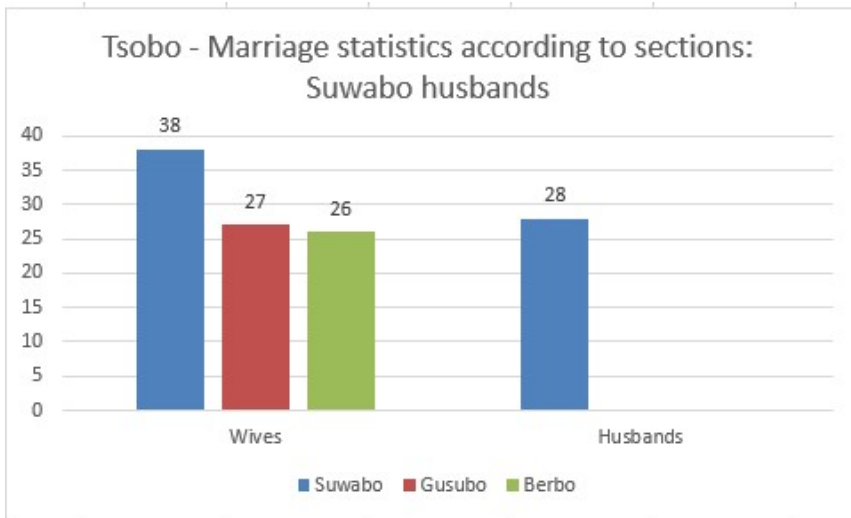
The polygamy rate with concurrent wives (i.e. wives who were divorced or deceased were not counted) was 1.7.

Marriages with partners from a different section (Suwabo, Gusubo or Berbo) are prevalent.

Marriage within the same section: 33.3 %

Marriage with a wife from a different section: 66.7%

While clan exogamy is the rule, in the sample there were 3 cases where the wife was from the same clan as the husband.



Granaries

Granaries (*tou*) are built only by men, during the dry season. Men and women have their own



Photo 1: Granaries at Suwa

granaries, but they look alike. Men, as well as women, fill their granaries with corn on their own. The men's corn supplies are used for festivities and brewing beer; the women's corn supplies are used to prepare the family meals.

During *ware*, a festivity that takes place after the harvest of pennisetum (*maiwa* H.), a granary (from



Photo 2: *mulangi* decoration on granary at Suwa

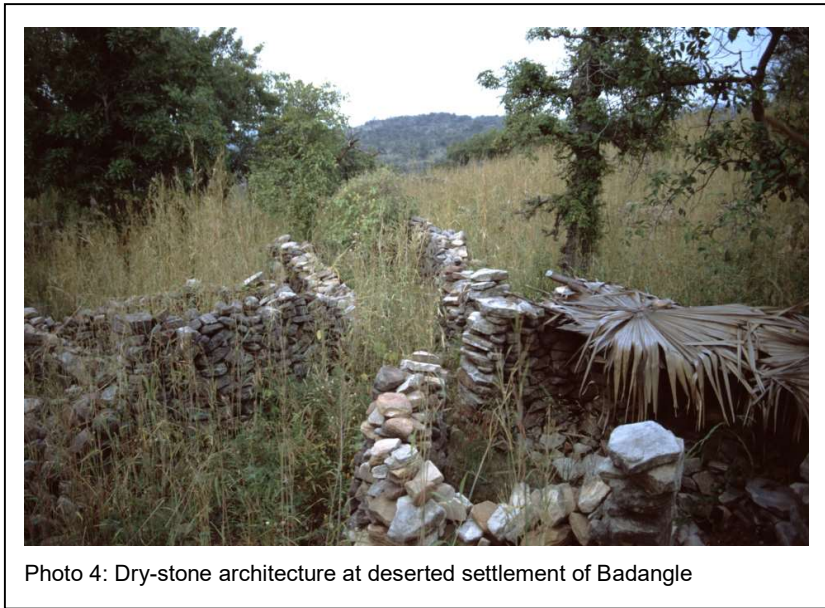
which the pennisetum corn for the preparation of beer for ritual purposes was fetched), is sprinkled with beer. Also on this occasion, anthropomorphic decorations (*mulangi*) are placed on some granaries. The *mulangi* are only found on granaries belonging to men, and they are made by age-mates of the owner as a sign that he is a good and successful farmer.



Photo 3: A Tsobo granary (*wuri tou*)

Village

The traditional compounds in the mountain settlements were built of dry-stone walls. A British officer in 1928 remarks on the architecture: “[...] the most striking feature is the universal use of very well built dry stone walls to surround the compounds” (SNP 17 - K.7782).



In a census conducted among 39 compounds at Suwa Bariki, a total of 478 inhabitants were counted, of which 244 were males, 234 females. The mean number of persons living in a compound was 12, with an approximately even distribution of males (6) and females (6).

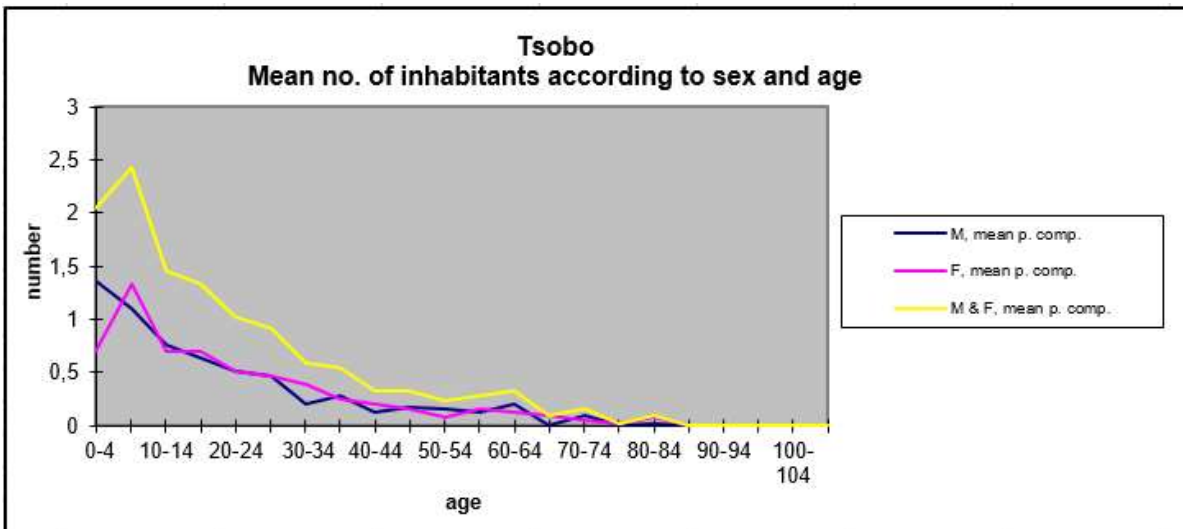


Figure 1: Statistics of compound inhabitants at Suwa

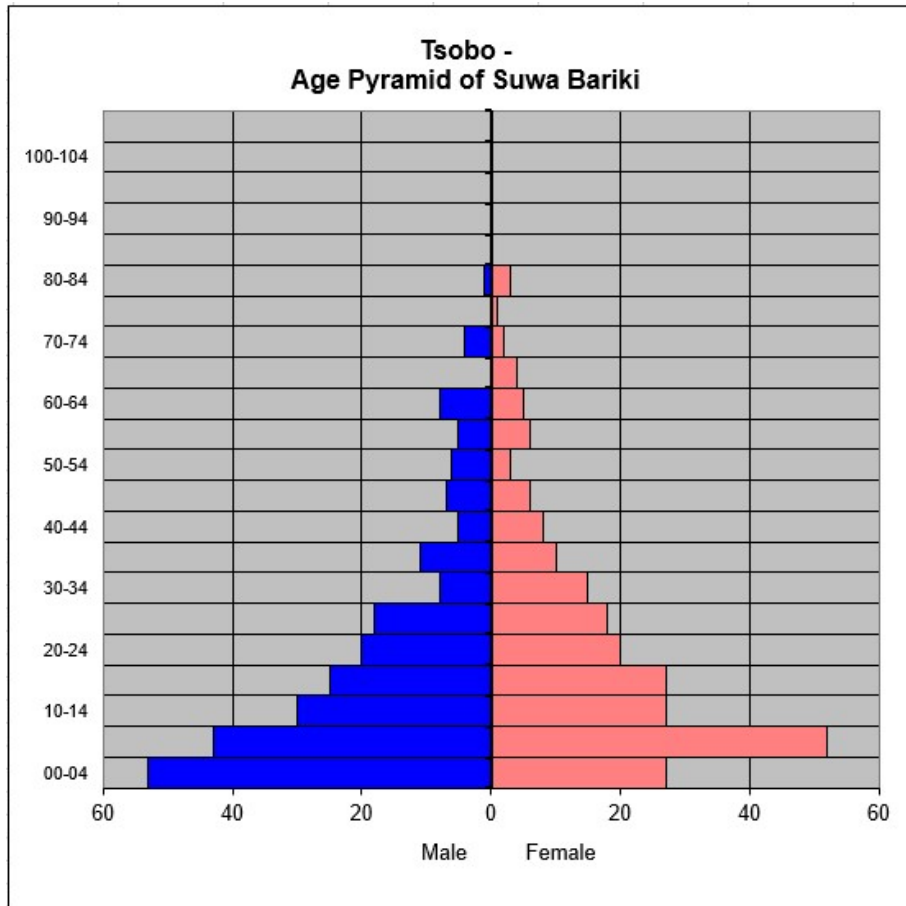


Figure 2: Age pyramid of selected compounds at Suwa Bariki

Age groups

There are informal age-groups (*fula*) where males born within the same time range of about two years are grouped together. There is no initiation into these age-groups.

Political organisation

Village Head

The title of Village Head (VH) was introduced by the British administration. At the time of research, the VH of Suwa was Jeriel Galura, the VH of Luuzo was Lamabo.

There are two chiefs: one is heading the sections Gusubo and Berbo, the other is heading Suwabo. Their title is *fuong*. During colonial times they brought the corn as tax payment to Numan. They are responsible for the administration of the people and organisation of ritual activities.

Fuong is a general term for 'chief'; a priest is also called *fuong*. In pre-colonial times the authority of a chief did not exceed the level of a ward. They solved conflicts within the wards and were spokesmen for the residents of the ward. There was no paramount chief.

Kwol is the term for a group of men who are united on the basis of co-residence and who support each other in fights and times of war.

Economic activities

Division of labour

Table 2: Gender-specific division of labour among the Tsobo (m: male, f: female)

Activity	Gender
clearing	m
sowing	m & f
weeding	m & f
harvesting	m & f
irrigating	-
threshing	m & f
prepare threshing ground	m
winnowing	f
build house walls	m
build house roof	m
prepare house floor	f
cut wooden poles	m
cut firewood	f
collect firewood	f
build well	m
build terraces	m
build fence	m
weave food cover	f
weave mats	m
weave baskets	m
make ropes	m
fetch water	f
pounding	f
grinding	f
cooking	f
brewing beer	f
clean house	f
make pots	m
weaving cotton	-
spinning	f
tailoring	m
blacksmithing	m
wood carving	m
butchering	m
hunting	m
collect honey	m
produce salt	f

Agriculture

Traditionally, the Tsobo cultivate millet (*maiwa* H.), two kinds of guinea corn (*jigare* H. and *mairi* H.), finger millet (*tamba* H.), beans, sesame, groundnut, melon, pumpkin, okra, garden-egg, roselle (*yaakuwaa* H.) and *borkono* (?).

On sloping farms, they build terraces (*tiilawunti*), this is done by both men and women. They also use terraces to level the building ground for houses.

Iron working

In pre-colonial times the Tsobo used special pieces of iron called *kyemnotsodo* as money. The



Photo 5: A piece of traditional iron money

Tsobo produced it, but also bought a lot from the Yandang on the Benue.



Photo 6: Remains of firing device for iron working

Remains of a firing device found in a deserted old settlement is evidence that the Tsobo processed iron.

Pottery

There are pots used for ritual purposes called *taali*. Millet beer is sacrificed for the ancestors by



Photo 7: A *taali* ritual pot



Photo 8: A water jar with lizard decoration

pouring it on as well as in the *taali* pot.



Photo 10: A special *taali* pot

For outstanding persons with remarkable achievements, a special *taali* pot is placed on a triple forked wooden pole.



Photo 9: A sample of *taali du*

Another example of a ritual clay object is *taali du*: traditionally they were made for good head-hunters. *Taali du* are anthropomorphous terracotta that come in pairs of male and female, usually they have an open mouth and a hole at the belly, in which beer is poured for ritual purposes.

Markets

Market days rotate in the settlements in and around Tsobo country. On each day of the week there is a market in another village:

- on Monday in Bambam,
- on Tuesday in Suwa Bariki,
- on Wednesday in Cham, Dullum near Gyakan, Bushkiri near Lafia,
- on Thursday in Tingno,
- on Friday in Gyakan and Jen,
- on Saturday in Balaifi and Lafia, and
- on Sunday in Suwa Bulkutu.

Animal husbandry

The Tsobo keep various species as domestic animals, however, in pre-colonial times the species of domestic animals were fewer.

Table 3: Domestic animals and their uses (m: male, f: female)

Animal	Kept by	Uses	Comments
cattle	m&f	milk, meat, leather, draught animal	no cattle in the past
dwarf cattle (<i>tinga</i>)	-	-	-
horse	m	riding	only used by chiefs
pony	-	-	-
donkey	m	beast of burden	no donkeys in the past
goat	m&f	meat, leather, for sacrifice	dwarf goats in the past, these still exist
sheep	m&f	meat, leather, for sacrifice	no sheep in the past
pig	m&f	meat	no pigs in the past
dog	m&f	meat, assists in hunting, for sacrifice	only used as sacrifice to cure illness caused by witchcraft; during the ritual the healer eats the dog-meat
chicken	m&f	eggs, meat, for sacrifice	feathers are used in rituals
duck	m&f	eggs, meat	no ducks in the past
guinea fowl	m&f	eggs, meat	no guinea fowl in the past
pigeon	m&f	eggs, meat	no pigeon in the past
cat	m&f	meat, for protection against rats	no cats in the past

Material culture

In the valleys, raffia palms (*raphia sudanica*) are growing well. This fact was already remarked upon by the British colonial administration (SNP 10-374P/1917). The Tsobo have a reputation for producing bedsteads from the wood of the palms.



Photo 11: Bedstead made from raffia palm



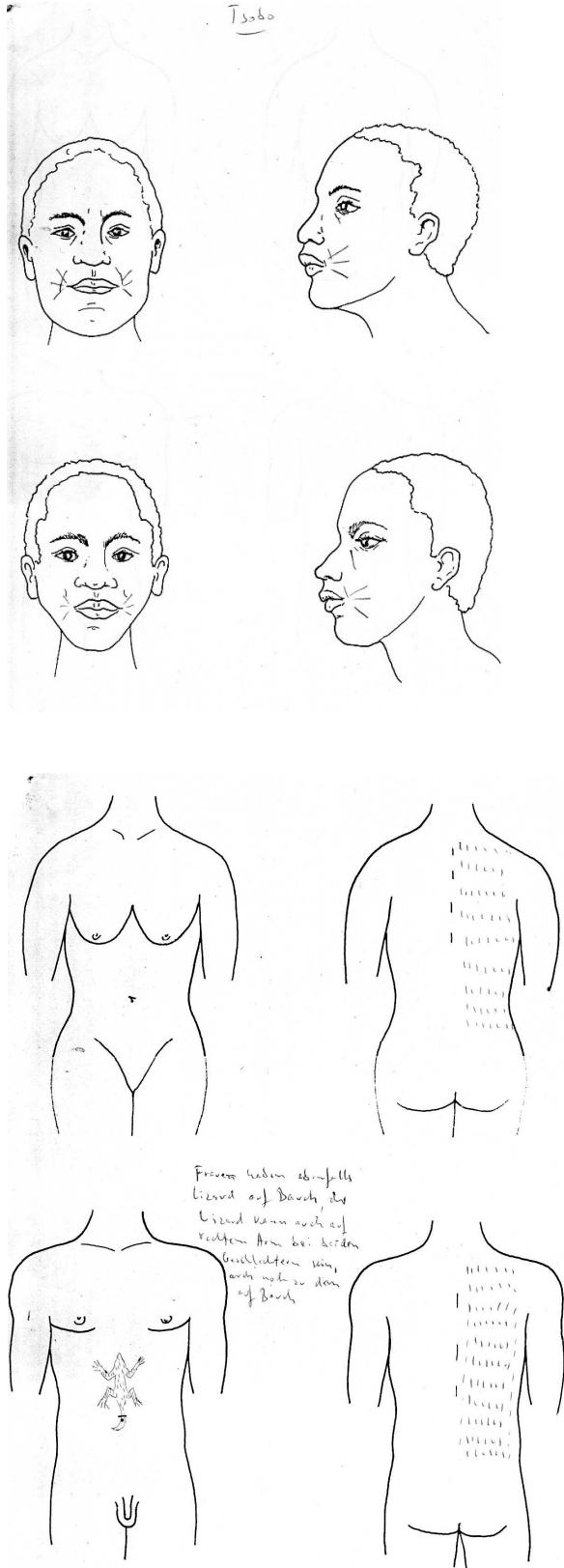
Photo 12: Special axe used on ceremonial occasions

There are special drums used for ritual or celebratory purposes:

Futula weretu, *futula luatu*, *dukumbang*. The latter one is beaten for a new-born baby.

Cicatrization, bodily ornamentation

Women may also have a lizard tattooed on their belly. Both sexes may have an additional lizard on their right arm.



Ritual and religion

Spirits and associated rituals¹⁶

In local traditional religion, *Lua* is the high god, he is both a protecting god and a god of war.

The spirits of ancestors are called *burba*, for their veneration a pot (*taali*) is placed inside the compound and beer sacrificed there.

There are spirits called *leero* that have an ambiguous nature: associated with the wilderness, they may attack people in the bush in the night, but *leero* may also help a traditional healer in his endeavours.

Bur is an individual protecting spirit: if someone takes away fruit from the farm of his host, monkeys will chase him; if someone takes away something from the compound, rats will chase him.

In the mountains at Bang there is a rock spring named *suungnesiit* where a spirit called *botule siitoto* resides. The water from this source is used for ritual purposes only, not for everyday consumption. Members of the clan Giniibo are responsible for that source. The Labanbo clan has a joking relationship with the Giniibo, and the Labanbo play an important part in handling the water from this source. A member of the Labanbo has to grant permission for water to be fetched, and, if someone else is fetching the water, a member of the Labanbo has to be present.

At the occasion of the festival *siitu tsorto* in March, water is fetched from the source and used to prepare millet beer, which is then sacrificed and consumed by the participants.

If someone wants to fetch water from the source and the spirit does not like the person, the spirit thwarts the endeavour by turning the water into chaff or sand, or by blocking the flow of water with fish or turtles.

A python with a horn lives in the water source, and a leopard lives nearby. Both animals are considered as being the owners of the source.

At Ruwan Zafi is a hot spring where a spirit feared by the Tsobo lives, and they do not dare to mention its name.

There is a rain-maker whose title is *nuwogomabotolaati*. The title is inherited patrilineally within the clan Bambo. The rain-maker acts for all Tsobo people. During the rain-ritual he sacrifices millet and a goat at Bang, and asks the spirit *zung* for rain. *Zung* is believed to be male and living in a cave.

¹⁶ See also CAPRO 1992: 124-128 for information on rituals and traditional beliefs.

Table 4: Religious concepts and material expressions

Tsobo

Concept	Name	Manifestation / Comments
high god	<i>lua</i>	protecting god and god of war
ancestors	<i>burba</i>	in pots within compound where beer is sacrificed (see <i>taali</i>)
water spirit	non existent	
bush spirit	<i>leero</i>	attack people in the bush in the night, but may also help traditional healers
protecting spirit	<i>leero</i> (in general), <i>bur</i> (individual protecting spirit)	individuals may have a <i>bur</i> -spirit: if someone takes away fruit from their farm, monkeys will chase him; if someone takes away anything from compound, rats will chase him
Material expression		
<i>gunki</i> (wooden idol, fetish)	<i>tsa</i>	male and female, one pair for the whole ethnic group, in a shrine house near Bang. Is the god of millet.
<i>dodo</i> (masked dancer, masquerade)	non existent	
drum	<i>futulaweretu</i> , <i>futulaluatu</i> , <i>dukumbang</i>	drums for celebrations, 3 pieces, <i>dukumbang</i> is for newly born babies
clay pot	<i>taali</i>	
clay figure	<i>taali du</i>	for good head-hunters, anthropomorphic terracotta with open mouth and a hole at the belly, in which beer is poured. Come in pairs of male/female.

Ritual calendar

Tsobo Annual festivities

Name of festivity	Jan.	Feb.	March	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
<i>Siitutsorto</i>			—									
<i>Kurewaani</i>				—								
<i>Siitumeltau</i>									—			

Siitutsorto is a thanksgiving ritual where the successful harvest of new crops is celebrated.

Kurewaani takes place before the clearing of the farms for the new season, marking the beginning of the rainy season.

Siitumeltau (also called *kauwelatimme*) marks the end of the rainy season and start of the harvest, it must be performed before the new millet corn may be consumed. Flutes or marimba may only be played in the farms after that ritual.

Taboos

Lions are not hunted or eaten because they are believed to be friends with the Tsobo. Dogs are only eaten by men. For some clans, certain animals are taboo and may not be eaten, because it is believed that members of that clan can transmogrify into one of these animals (see list of clans above).

Glossary¹⁷

Tsobo

bere tou

botule siitoto

bur

burba

fula

fuong

kauwelatimme

kurewaani

kwol

kyemnotsodo

leero

lua

mulangi

nuwogomabotolaati

siitu tsorto

siitu meltau

suungnesiit

swiilawuri

taali

taali du

tiilawunti

tou

were

wuri tou

zung

Gloss

granary for women

a spirit living in the rock spring *suungnesiit*

sp. protecting spirit

ancestral spirit

age-group

chief

another term for *siitu meltau*

sp. festival marking beginning of farming season

during fights or times of war a cooperating group, based on coresidence, uniting different clans and age groups

trad. iron piece of money

sp. spirit

high god

anthropomorphic decoration on a granary

rain-maker

sp. festival in March, where millet beer with water from the *suungnesiit* source is pre-pared

sp. festival marking the end of rainy season and beginning of harvest

sp. water source at Bang

levirate

ritual pot used for sacrifices to ancestors

anthropomorphous ritual clay vessels

terrace

granary (in general)

festival where successful farmers are praised by their age group

granary for men

a spirit which brings rain

¹⁷ H. = Hausa term.

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