

**FIELD SURVEY REPORT ON THE KUYUKUL PROJECT
IN BASSAR COUNTRY (NORTH-TOGO)**

Project funded by Global partnership network (GPN), University of Kassel
(Germany)

Project coordinator: Mr. Napo Labodja OUBO-GBATI (Germany)

Research carried out under the coordination of Professor Bammoy NABE

August 2024

Research team at the University of Kara (Togo) :

- Mr. Bammoy NABE, Professor of Contemporary History, research coordinator
- Mr Nakpane LABANTE, Professor of Contemporary History, member
- Mr Assinda MAGNETINE, Senior Lecturer, socio-anthropologist, member
- Mr Kambiba KOMBATE, Doctor of Contemporary History, member
- Mr Nadjombé KPANTE, Doctor of Contemporary History, member;
- Mr Kandjime KONLANI, PhD student in archaeology and heritage, member

As part of the project “**Study in Kuyukul, in the canton of Bitchabé in Bassar country (Northern Togo), of funerary practices and ancestralization relating to the question of the restitution of human remains from Togo to Germany**”, a multidisciplinary team¹ from the University of Kara, under the direction of Professor Bammoy NABE, carried out two field missions to gather information in line with the project's objectives. During the first, carried out from July 23 to 26, 2024, the team focused on the issue of resistance in Bassar country. Interviews were held in Bitchabé and Kuyukul on funeral practices and ancestralization among the Taapu. During the second mission, which took place from August 05 to August 8, 2024, the questions raised during the first mission were taken up again, with a focus on the people's feelings, the repatriation of the skull and its management. Well before the two missions, an exploratory mission was carried out on June 20, 2024 by Professors Bammoy NABE and Nakpane LABANTE, to make contact with administrative and political officials and explain the project's merits. In addition to these three missions, a final mission was carried out on August 19, 2024, with the aim of clarifying certain questions for which we felt the data collected was insufficient.

¹ The team is made up of historians, socio-anthropologists, archaeologists and heritage specialists.

This report presents the scientific results of these missions. It is structured around four main points.

1. The research project

The present project, concerning the restitution of Togolese human remains from the village of Kuyukul in the canton of Bitchabé, is part of the vast project for the recontextualization of human remains from the German colonial era, which is already the subject of inter-ministerial and inter-state reflection. Indeed, the conference-debates held on November 21 and 22, 2022 at the University of Lomé brought together a number of researchers specializing in biomedical, biological, human and social sciences to share their views on the usefulness of bio-anthropology in the research, study and treatment of human remains from a scientific, cultural and heritage perspective.²

It should be noted that since 2019, the German authorities have decided to speed up the restitution of human remains and works of art dating back to the colonial era, marked by the massacre of several African populations. In an eight-page framework document published on March 13, 2021, the Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, as well as regional and municipal cultural authorities, agreed that German scientific and cultural institutions should draw up an inventory of “ethnological, natural history, artistic and cultural-historical assets” from the colonial era. The aim is then to establish which items “were acquired in a way that is legally or ethically no longer acceptable today”, and to organize their restitution. German officials insist that “priority in this work is given to human remains from the colonial period”.³

The hand extended by the German authorities was seized by some Togolese of the diaspora in Germany to carry out research in public establishments where many bones and cultural and cultic objects from their country of origin, a former German colony from 1884 to 1914, are stored. Their research led to the discovery of the skull of an adult from the village of Kuyukul in the canton of Bitchabé in Bassar country at the Charité Museum of the University of Medicine in Berlin. From their find came the project to study the return of this skull to the Togolese government, a project entrusted to the Laboratoire Histoire et Développement de

² Report to the Minister of Culture and Tourism on the conference-debate of 21 and 22 November 2022 on the recontextualisation of human remains from the German colonial period in Togo at the University of Lomé.

³ “Germany to speed up restitution of human remains dating back to colonial times” available at <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/03/14-/>, published March 14 at 2:42 pm, modified March 14, 2019 at 2:45 pm, accessed August 09, 2024 at 1:04 pm.

l'Afrique (HisDAf) of the University of Kara. How was the skull obtained and shipped to Germany?

According to Bassar historiography, following the pacification that followed the Binaparba massacre on May 3, 1897, the German administration appointed Von Massow as Bassari post commander in September 1897. He crushed the Konkoba insurrection. Leaving one non-commissioned officer and 17 riflemen in Bassari, he headed northwest on November 20, 1897. On the 24th, he fought at Bapuré, where he set up a post to hold the Konkomba country, then established liaison with Lieutenant Thierry, station chief at Mango. By March 1898, the great Konkomba insurrection was over.

Von Massow remained in Bassar until the arrival of Dr. Kersting, to whom he was attached as part of the conquest of the transkaragebiet. Security was virtually untroubled, and only two police patrols were reported; one of these, carried out from October 12 to 29 by Dr. Kersting with 30 riflemen, resulted in two engagements at Napari (near Sansougou) and Kouyounlé near Bitchabé (R. Cornevin, 1962, pp. 71-72). This punitive expedition by the Sokodé-Bassari station chief, motivated by “refusal to obey the station and brigandage”, resulted in 10 dead and wounded (P. Ali Napo, 2020, p. 296). It was certainly during this repression that the person from whom the skull comes was killed, more precisely on October 18, 1899. This may explain the name inscribed on the skull, which is, in fact, the name of his home village. As the Charité Museum of the Medical University of Berlin points out, it was Kersting who took the skull of the murdered man and passed it on to his counterpart Rigler in Mango, who then sent it to Berlin along with ten other human skulls, several ethnological objects and a mandible.⁴

⁴ Charité Museum of the Medical University of Berlin: Project on human remains, Provenance report, number O-Cha! 112(La 5703).

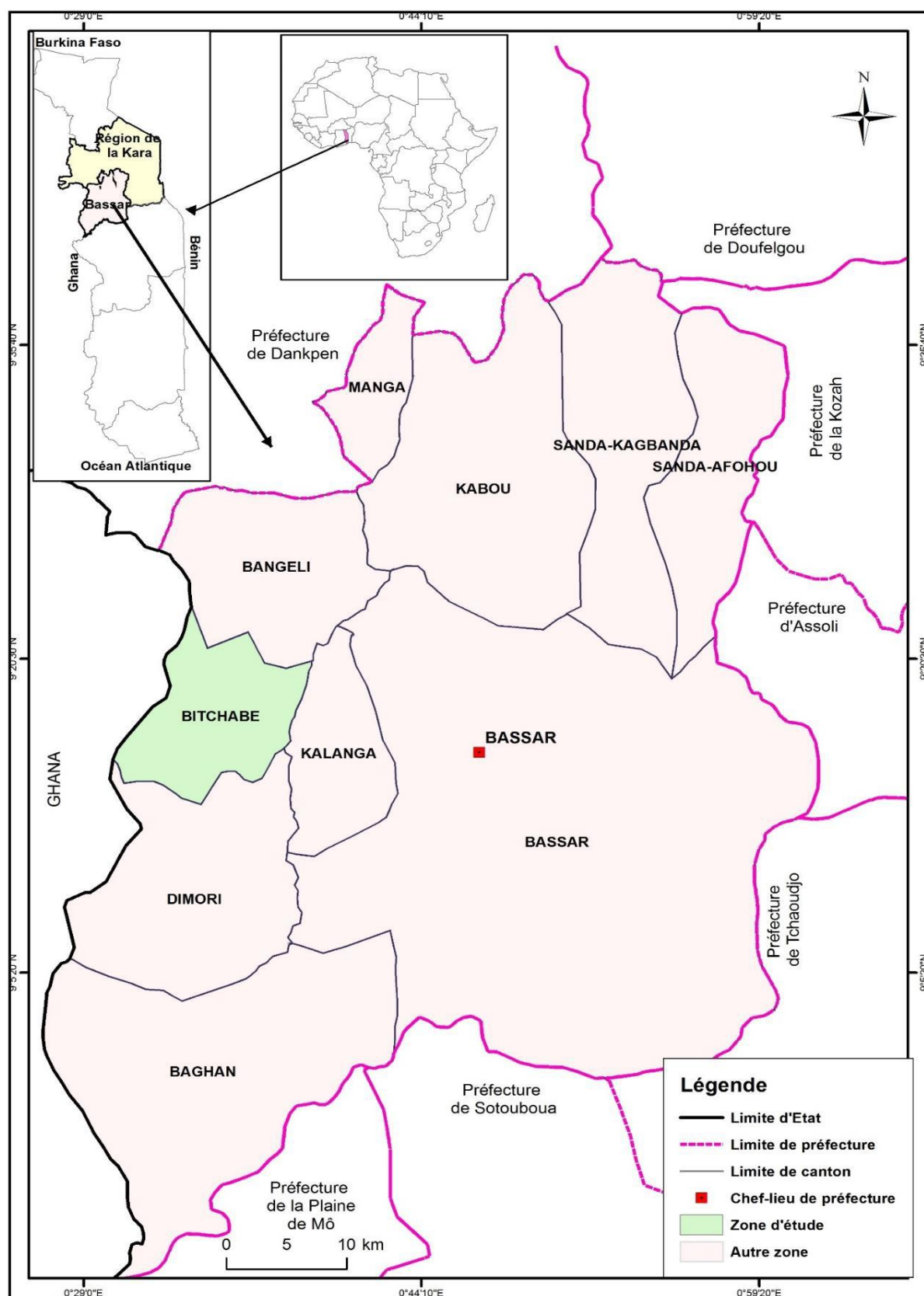
Skull in the Charité Museum at Berlin's Medical University



Bitchabé township lies some twenty-five (25) kilometers west of Bassar-ville. It is bordered to the north by Bangéli township, to the south by Dimouri township, to the east by Kalanga township and to the west by the Republic of Ghana. It comprises fourteen villages: Bitchobébé, Bidjomambé, Bissirkpimb, Inghale, Katcha-Losso, Baoulessi, Bissokpab, Bakpayam, Bikapdjab, Bibadjib, Kuyukul, Binadjoube, Gnakpal and Kissatchéou. Bitchage, an area where blacksmithing developed between the 19th and 20th centuries, provided hunter-warriors and defense tools during the resistance (Koumaï, 2014; Bakrobena, 2015). The secret of mastering fire and transforming iron enabled the Bassar to specialize in various fields of ironworking. There are blacksmiths, hunter-warriors and metallurgists (founders or reducers).

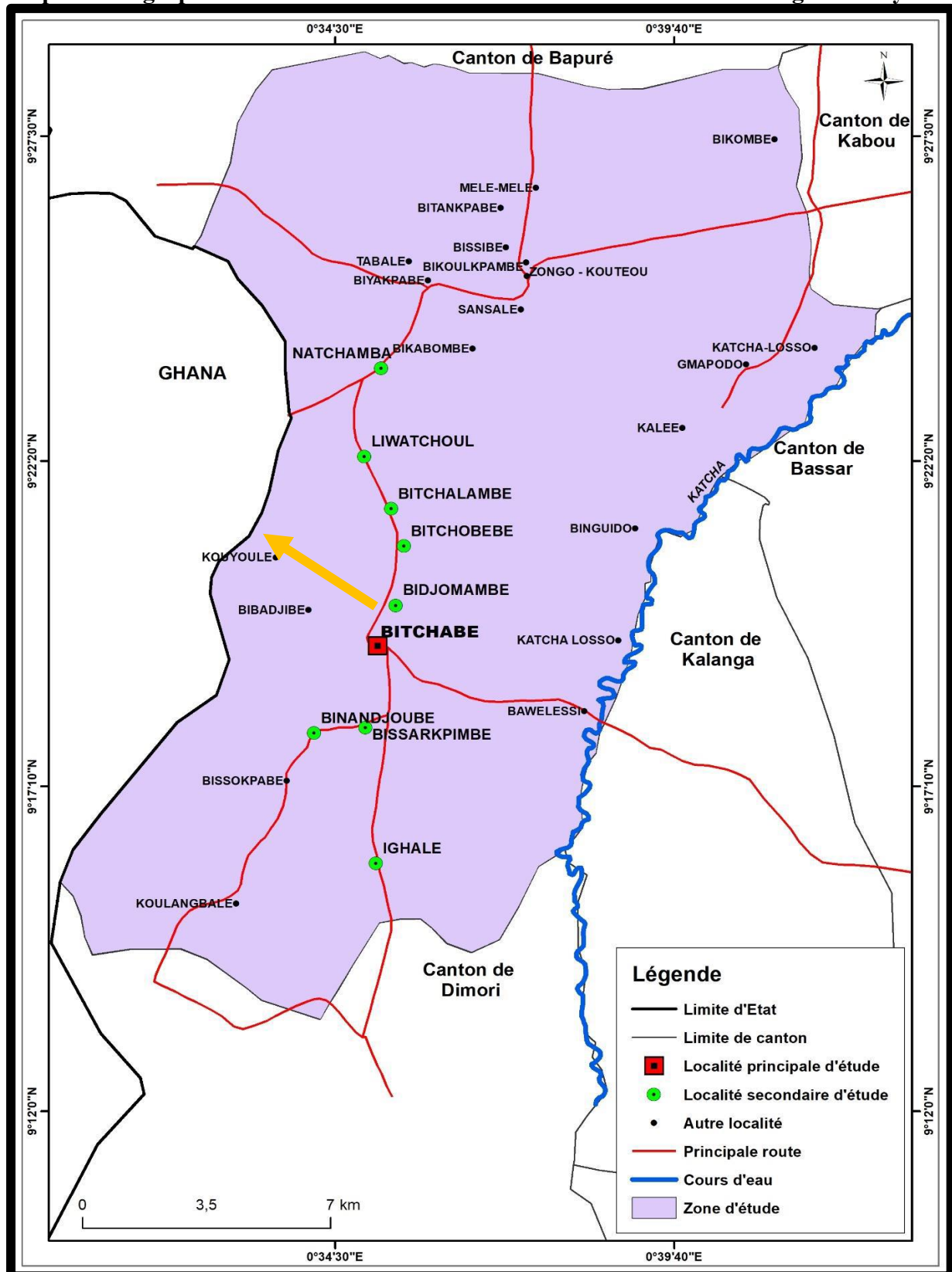
The village of Kuyukul, named after the deity Kuyungh, lies to the west of Bitchabé, in the commune of Bassar 2. It adjoins the border with Ghana, where a large proportion of the B'yukulb (Kuyukul's inhabitants) and their village chief live on the other side of the border. The village is made up of four clans: Bagbeku (those who serve their deity), Bipobetapu, Twatultapu, Tiwulman. Maps 1 and 2 below show the location of Bassar country and Bitchabé township.

Map 1: Location of the Bassar region in northern Togo



Source : L. Bakrobena, 2021, p. 17.

Map 2: Geographical location of the canton of Bitchabé and the village of Kuyule



Source : L. Bakobena, 2021, p. 18, slightly modified by K. Konlani, 2024.

This report is therefore concerned with answering the following questions:

How did the Bassar people in general, and those of the village of Kuyukul in particular, react to German colonial penetration and domination?

What are the ancestral and funeral traditions and practices in taapu country (western Bassar country)?

What do the people of the canton of Bitchabé and the administrative and political authorities think of the issue of restitution and repatriation of the “Kuyunle” skull?

2. Research objective and expected results

The main objective of the present study is to collect and analyze the funeral traditions and practices, those of ancestralization, as well as the feelings of the populations of the canton of Bitchabé on the issue of the restitution and repatriation of the human remains of their relatives killed during the German colonial period.

The aim of the project is to understand the importance of ancestralizing people who died in special circumstances in Taapu country, and who deserve a dignified funeral. This may contribute to justifying the need for the restitution of these people's remains. For the community of victims, these practices are a guarantee of dignity, serenity, peace and social cohesion.

The expected results of this project are as follows:

- the concept of death that justifies organized funerals for the deceased and funeral practices in Taapu country are known, as is ancestralization ;
- the views of local administrative and political leaders, and the people of Bitchabé township (especially Kuyukul) on the issue of restitution and repatriation of the skull of their resistant relative to Togo;
- suggestions are made as to how the skull, which is kept at the Charité Museum of the Medical University of Berlin, should be managed once it has been repatriated.

3. Methodology

The working methodology consisted, first of all, in the collection and analysis of a body of documentation. This documentation covers various themes such as the settlement and occupation of the sites, the technical activities and know-how of the Bassar, the funeral rites and practices of the Bassar Taapu and works on the history of the German colonial period. This work helped to set the context and define the problem.

This was followed by the development of an interview guide for data collection in the field. In addition to questions relating to the Kuyunle ancestor, the guide takes into account anthropological, historical, ethnological, sociological and heritage issues relating to funeral practices in Bassar country and skull management. In addition, part of the questionnaire is devoted to collecting qualitative data on people's representations of the issue of restitution of human remains from Togo to Germany. The questionnaire was administered via focus groups⁵ and individual interviews. Data collection took place in several areas and with various resource persons. These included the general secretary of the Bassar prefecture, the mayors of Bassar 1 and 2 communes, the deputy mayor of Bassar 2 commune (originally from Bitchabé canton), the regent of Bitchabé canton, the village chiefs of Kuyukul (from Togo and Ghana⁶), notables from the various chiefdoms, elders and a few other people. It should be remembered that prior to this collection phase, the management team first had to go through administrative formalities with the Bassar authorities. This led to administrative authorization for the field survey.

In addition to the teacher-researchers who coordinated the fieldwork, Professors Bammoy NABE and Nakpane LABANTE, four assistants and four doctoral students, most of them from Bassar country, took part in data collection in the field during the two different missions mentioned above. In addition, given the particularity of *Taapu* (the language spoken in Bitchabé canton) compared with *Ncam* (the language of the Bassar people), we used the services of a secondary school teacher who acted as interpreter for the researchers.

The method used to process the historical, anthropological and cultural data collected involved analyzing the content of the testimonies, comparing them with the documentary data and comparing the different testimonies on funeral and cultural practices in order to construct the most plausible facts and understand Bassar mentalities and the Bassar conception of life and death. Criticism of the various field data and the corpus of documentation, and their interpretation, have therefore led to the results presented below.

4. The results obtained

These results are presented according to the areas of interest evoked in the problematic.

⁵ Focus group from Bitchabé: TIGNAMKPA-SEIDOU Kpabou; MONDO Bitchénighan; SEIDOU Djawaï; GMAPOMOYOU Kpabou; KOUMAI Komi; NADJOMBE Kossi.

Focus group from Kuyukul: BITCHATIKO Nambou; NABASSE N'Yolokoun; WADJOLE Bitchassakin; NINA Djapin; NAGBIDJA Kodjo Emmanuel; TANDJA Kpatchine; KONKONDJI Dandja.

⁶ The Biyoukilib clan is now divided between Togo and Ghana following the partition of Togo on 10 July 1919 after the German defeat. Part of this clan can be found in Tantalé.

4.1. The historical context of Bassar resistance to German occupation in the late 19th century

The study of the resistance of the peoples of northern Togo to colonial domination and its consequences is not unique. It has been the major preoccupation of many researchers in various fields of knowledge, notably in the human and social sciences. They have addressed these issues in a variety of ways. Addressing the question of the German presence in Togo, R. Cornevin (1962) and P. Ali Napo (1995, 2020) accurately describe Bassar resistance.

It is important to understand the general context of the German conquest of the Bassar country and the Bassar challenge to German presence and authority, as known to Togolese historiography.

□ The context of the conquest of Bassar country and the challenge to German authority

From 1889 onwards, the Germans who had settled in southern and central Togo continued their exploration of the north and especially the northeast. Medical major Ludwig Wolf, on his return from the great excursion to Salaga, decided to visit Tchaoudjo, Djougou and Borgou. Leaving Bismarckburg in April 1889, he was received on May 1 by Ouro Djobo Boukari, who was in the process of imposing Paratao's authority over the whole of Tchaoudjo and its neighbors by force of his Semassi mercenaries. Wolf is killed in the Borgou region.

□ Captain Kling, the first white man to arrive in Bassar in 1891?

In early October 1891, Captain Kling set out to follow Wolf's route (in 1889) to Ndali and beyond. He passed through Kpessi, Anyanga, Tchaoudjo and arrived at Yalo, near Kouandé in Borgou. But faced with difficulties, he turned back and signed protectorate treaties, including that of December 12 1891 with Chief Massa Sana of Soubouroukou in Djougou, and that of December 19 in northern Tchaoudjo with the independent chief Ouro Sama of Bafilo. Continuing on his way, he passed through Daudè (Dako) in Bassar, Fasaou via Boutoun and returned to Bismarckburg.⁷

It is clear that Kling's passage through Dako, now in Assoli, went unnoticed by the Bassar, as evidenced by the fact that the Tagba chief told von Doering in June 1894 that he was the first white man to arrive in his area.

⁷ B. NABE: 'La conquête du pays bassar par les Allemands et la résistance de Binaparba (1891-1897)', Conference held in Binaparba on May 7, 2017 on the occasion of the celebration of the 120 th anniversary of the Binaparba massacre on the theme: Les Allemands à Binaparba, il y a cent vingt (120) ans, unpublished document, p. 3.

□ The Bassar protectorate treaty of June 8 1894 between von Doering and Chief Tagba or Atakpa Bem

On May 26, 1894, von Doering left Bismarckburg with a 14-strong escort and his interpreter, Amouzou. When he arrived in Fazaou, he was warned of the inhospitality and savagery of the Bassar, in an attempt to prevent him from going there because he would not return alive. The Bassar have certainly earned a bad reputation among their neighbors. That's why the old chief of Fazaou and his people have a bad image of the Bassar, as von Doering puts it:

When it became known in Fasugu (fazaou) that I intended to continue towards Bassari, I was constantly begged by the notables to abandon this visit: we would probably have little chance of surviving, as the murder and theft of foreigners was an everyday occurrence there. Everyone could tell me numerous examples of the bad character of the Bassari, with whom no neighboring people could trade. The old chief, whose own son had been taken prisoner and killed by the Bassari, would show me his fly swatter, a buffalo tail, and say: "All the Bassari lack is a tail to make them real wild animals" (von Doering in Schäfer and Barbier 1985: 48-49).

These warnings did not deter the German, who continued on his way and arrived in Binaparba on June 2, 1894, where he was very well received, as he himself testifies:

Riding as usual at the end of my caravan, I was suddenly stricken with a high fever, and remained in the saddle for some time, until I fell unconscious from my horse. I remained in this state in the middle of the road, without any of my people noticing. Awakened a few moments later by the acclamation of naked people, armed with clubs and sticks, crouching around me and shouting "fo, fo, fo". These were the messengers Atakra, chief of the Bassari village of Naparba, had sent to meet me (von Doering in Schäfer and Barbier 1985: 49).

Von Doering was in fact carried in a hammock to Binaparba, where he stayed for 5 days, awaiting authorization to go to the Tagba superior chief of Bassari. But first he had to negotiate with Atakra, the chief of Binaparba.

Von Doering finally obtained an audience with Chief Atakra:

I finally managed to get an audience with the Naparba chief, Atakra, who was already very old, and, after giving him some important gifts, we became very good friends. I explained to him that it was a pity to cut ourselves off from foreign relations altogether, that foreigners only wanted to trade and thus do good for the country. I finally had the satisfaction of convincing him" (von Doering in Schäfer and Barbier 1985: 50).

Chief Atakra responded to von Doering's message:

He said he had no knowledge of any other white man having passed through Bassari. Atakra made a great speech to me and the people around us, the main idea of which was that my visit and the friendly relations thus established between Bassari and foreigners would result in an end to the continual killings in their country.

The Atakra chief is said to have added, "Now human blood will only flow when a woman gives birth, or if a lion tears a peasant apart" (von Doering in Schäfer and Barbier 1985: 60).

How can we explain these cordial relations between the German von Doering and the Atakra chief? Was it a strategy, or was it fear of an unknown stranger who was certainly militarily stronger?

After 5 days' waiting, von Doering went to Okoré, to the residence of the superior chief Tagba, on June 7, 1894, where negotiations were held that led to the signing of a protectorate treaty on June 8, 1894. Von Doering himself describes the event:

In the morning, after a long wait and after I had been taken several times from one place to another, the great reception took place in the open air. First, the mat, the cushion and the cowhide were brought to me, each time a quarter of an hour apart. Then Tagba himself arrived. He arrived on foot, surrounded by a jubilant crowd and accompanied by numerous men-at-arms and a large retinue. He was dressed in a "haussa" boubou and wore a ribbon that covered most of his face. His "herald" gave a long speech, in which he emphasized that since Bassar's inception, no foreigner had ever been able to appear like this before the lord's eyes; then all the sub-chiefs present were asked if they would accept the German protectorate. At this, an old man stood up and said, not without opposition from some, that for him, and probably for most of the others, it was only because of my presence that he had realized the good that the whites could bring them. So he begged Tagba to grant my request. Tagba asked for the German flag. I sent for one, which was hoisted as three salvos were fired by my few people. Beer was then fetched and there was a great festive drinking party. In the afternoon, Tagba sent me his gifts: a sheep, sorghum, millet and a few large pots of beer. In all, the Bassari were able to offer me 400 liters of beer. The next day, Tagba received my gifts and received written confirmation that he was now under German protectorate (Von Doering, 1895: 268).

The contents of the protectorate treaty:

Okorré in the Basari on June 8, 1894

I, Tagba, chief of the Bassari, place my

and my people established under my sovereignty

and that of my successors, under the protectorate

of the German Empire, whose flag I have today received.

The text is followed by three crosses: one indicating the signature of the chief, the other the signature of the interpreter, and the last that of von Doering.

The act is greeted by three cannon shots and marked by the planting of the German flag. And as Badjow Tcham and Mako N'Mana (2016, p. 138) point out, did the Tagba chief fully understand the meaning and scope of the act he had just performed? Did his people know and realize that their status had changed and that their country no longer belonged to them? The Tagba chief and his people, at least those of Binaparba, only learned the true meaning of the paper signed on May 3, 1897, when Gruner demanded that his order be respected and used violence to impose the authority of the German Empire. A violation of the treaty? Certainly,

because the aim was, in fact, to protect the Bassar from external aggression, not to impose the German order on them.

In any case, it was after the protectorate treaty of June 8, 1894 that the Germans believed they were the new masters of Bassar country, taking the liberty of repressing any challenge to their authority. The repression of the people of Kuyukul on October 18, 1899, which resulted in the death of the ancestor “Kuyenle”, took place some six years after the signing of this treaty.

According to our informants, the passage of the Germans left its mark on the Bassar country in general and on Kuyukul in particular. The collective memory is very familiar with the repression in this village by the Germans at the end of the 19th century, even if it has not kept the names of the victims and their families.

When it comes to the causes of Bassar resistance, testimonies gathered in Bitchabé, Kuyukul and other localities in the various communes highlight the extortion of their rich lands by the Germans, the loss of their autonomy, forced labor and the payment of taxes, corporal punishment⁸ and so on. What's more, these initial contacts were punctuated by clashes, sometimes bloody, and the capture of resistance fighters, provoked by the dominators. As the regent of the Bitchabé canton told us on June 20, 2024, during our first visit: “Bringing the heads of slaughtered Bassar resistance fighters back to the German post commander was the best proof for the colonial soldiers or policemen that the order to repress the population had been properly carried out⁹”. The effects of this situation are no less serious for the Bassar people.

4.2 Consequences for the country and its inhabitants

Discussions with informants¹⁰ revealed that resistance to the German colonial order had several consequences, the most notable of which were:

- The loss of human life: the Binaparba massacre, repression leading to the death of resistance fighters, whose heads were sometimes cut off as war trophies, but also as objects of anthropological research in Germany (e.g. the Kunyele skull in Berlin's Charité Museum);
- Migration to the west (Gold Coast, present-day Ghana), notably to Tantalé in present-day Ghana;

⁸ Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24 July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25 July 2024.

⁹ TIGHANKPA -SEIDOU Kpabou, Regent of the canton of Bitchabé, interview on 20 June 2024, in Bitchabé.

¹⁰ Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24th July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

- Punishments (caning, drudgery, corporal punishment, etc.), imprisonment;
- The disappearance of valiant resistance fighters and extensive material destruction;
- Prohibition of the practice of iron metallurgy;
- The imposition of taxes (12-day labor tax and personal tax in cash, i.e. mark);
- Above all, the administrative and political integration of the Bassar into the German colony of Togo at the very end of the 19th century, with the signing of a protectorate treaty on June 8, 1894, between von Doering and the Bassar chief, Tagba, and the creation of an administrative post at the current site of the Bassar prefecture offices. The Bassar country thus became part of Deutsche Togoland, with a heavy heart, hence their permanent rejection of the colonial order until independence.

4.3 Funeral rites in Bassar country (taapu)

The settlement, culture, rites and traditional practices of Bassar metalworkers and blacksmiths have also been the subject of historical, ethnographic, enthno-anthropological and archaeological research. These include the work of Stéphane Dugast (1987, 1991, 1992); Philip De Barros (1985; 1986; 1989; 2003, 2014 and 2021); Koumaï's master's thesis on the settlement and civilization of Bitchabé (2014) and the archaeological work of Bakrobena (2015; 2019; 2021). All these works have addressed, in a fragmentary way, the funeral rites and practices of the various Bassar communities.

According to existing literature on Bassar history and anthropology, the Taapu community of Bitchabé conceives of two kinds of death: ordinary death and sudden death. Among these Taapu, every death has an explanation, even if it occurs naturally. In such cases, it is necessary to find out the reasons for death. These causes are not scientifically proven, but they always find their origins in the meanders of African mentality. Thus, for all Taapu, death is caused by a close relative, a neighbor or simply a call to God (unimbôr) (S. Koumaï, 2014, p.51).

By means of divination and interrogation of the dead, the Taapu of Bitchabé use diviners to explain the death of an individual. It may be discovered that someone died because someone else “ate” his or her soul, or because someone else put a curse on him or her, or because he or she was called back by the ancestors for a fault committed against them (S. Koumaï, 2014, p. 51).

According to ordinary people, lack of respect for the dead (ancestors) can be the cause of sudden death. The dead are considered to be punished for one fault or another. Those struck by

lightning, for example, are considered punished by heaven, especially if they are reputed to be witches or thieves. There are also those who drown and are buried in the river (S. Koumaï, 2014, p. 52).

In Bassar country in general, and in the Taapu community in particular, funeral rites are made up of three clearly differentiated phases: the ceremonies surrounding the burial, those corresponding to the end of mourning and the establishment of a relationship with the ancestral spirit. Based on the specific characteristics of these different rites, S. Dugast (1991, p. 183) has called the first phase the “funeral of the body”, the second the “funeral of the representation of the deceased” and the last the “inauguration of dialogue with the ancestor”.

The results of our fieldwork in Bitchabé and Kuyukul confirm those of S. Dugast, notwithstanding some slight differences in the way the rites were carried out, certainly a peculiarity of Taapu country.

As for funeral rites for victims of resistance in Bassar country, informants from Bitchabé, like those from Kuyukul, mentioned different rites for different genders. The manifestations of mourning are characterized by the announcement of the death to the family and close relatives and allies, the care of the corpse, the digging of the grave, the burial of the body of the deceased, widowhood, coming out of mourning, the funeral for the repose of the soul and ancestralization¹¹.

In Taapu country, mourning is announced by the sound of tom-toms and cannon fire if the deceased is a man. But if it's a woman, we take a castanet (n'tchal) and cry out in lament. Moreover, if it's during the night, a wake is held, and the following day the dead man is buried. The vestibule in which the body is kept is covered with néré leaves and kinunuui, the fragrant plant (African basil), to identify the mortuary¹².

Specifically, if a man dies as a result of confrontation, combat or war, the rite¹³ is identical to that for a person who died with a swollen belly, or who died accidentally or from a snake bite. In the case of accidental death or death on the battlefield, the body is sought for burial. The deceased's relatives then return to the place of death with a hen. The eldest member of the group

¹¹ Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24th July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

¹² Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24th July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

¹³ It is marked by the immolation of certain animals and the way in which they are eaten. A goat and roosters are killed and their flesh is braised over a fire for two days before being eaten on the third day. The roosters are sacrificed at a crossroads (sanpolale). The first cock is given to the uncles of the deceased, the second to the maternal aunts and the third to the sisters of the deceased. See Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24 July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25 July 2024.

utters incantatory words and then beats the hen against the ground until it dies. They leave with the hen to bury it on the grave of the deceased¹⁴. This rite purifies the site and brings the soul of the deceased back to his grave to rest there forever. If this rite is not observed, the soul of the deceased may cause other deaths under the same conditions and in the same place. The dean in charge of taking the soul asks the spirit of the deceased to reveal everything about his death on the day of his funeral. It should be noted that this rite, held on the third day, marks the end of mourning¹⁵.

During the first three days of mourning, the men sleep in the vestibule of the deceased. On the third (3rd) day, ceremonies are held for the widow and orphans. These ceremonies consist of washing the widow and orphans in order to cleanse them of the misfortune that has befallen them. Occasionally, a soothsayer is called in to consult the oracles. When he has finished questioning the dead, the nephew of the deceased is given a rooster if he is young, and a dog if he is old¹⁶.

As for the rituals associated with the widow, according to the informants, the day after the funeral, the nephew designated by the diviner, after consultation, is taken into the bush for the continuation of the rituals. He is led under a *néré* tree with an arrow in his hand. Under the *néré* tree, he shoots the arrow at a branch of the *néré* tree with his left hand, and the branch hit is cut off, to be placed in the vestibule of the deceased. All this ceremony has a meaning. It symbolizes the widow's strict observance of mourning. The branch must not touch the ground. If she is found to have observed her husband's mourning, she is covered with the leaves of the *néré* tree and returns naked, accompanied by her brothers-in-law. She remains in the vestibule for a few hours, after which she is taken to a *sanpolale* (crossroads) where she is washed with a maceration of *néré* and shea leaves. The invocation of all the deceased takes place at the entrance to the vestibule¹⁷.

In the same vein, the widow is taken to the field to look for a tuber of yam. On her return home, this tuber is thrown in the air until it splits in two. These two pieces of tuber are used to make *fufu* (mashed yam paste) for the widow. All these rites help to ensure that the widow remains faithful. One might wonder why the widow goes in search of yams. Yams are one of the Bassar's main staple crops. The Bassar are known for their yam cultivation, the first-fruits festival of

¹⁴ Sampour Batcharko, aged 85, oldest member of the lineage; interview in Bitchabé on 07th August 2024.

¹⁵ Sampour Batcharko, aged 85, oldest member of the lineage; interview in Bitchabé on 07th August 2024.

¹⁶ Focus group members in Bitchabé, at the house of the canton chief, on 24th July 2024. It should be remembered that this rite is not observed for young people who have died.

¹⁷ Focus group members in Bitchabé, at the house of the canton chief, on 24th July 2024.

which takes place on the second Saturday of September every year, which explains why *fufu* is one of their favorite dishes.

In Bassar country, there is a final, brief but decisive rite that completes the transformation of the dead into ancestors. While all the rites of the second funeral follow one another in a week according to a well-defined order, this one takes place at the earliest one week after the last manifestations of the second phase of funeral rites, and is totally isolated from them. Sometimes, this rite does not take place for several weeks, and in some cases, the delay can reach one or more years. In view of its characteristics, S. Dugast (1991, p. 191) considers it to constitute a third stage in itself, completing the ancestralization process begun with the burial of the body, then extended by the treatments to which the representation of the deceased is subjected.

This ceremony is referred to by the expression *bi pukuti utankpiil-nyôkô*, which literally translates as : “we open the ancestor's mouth”. To carry out the ceremony, a diviner is needed, a figure who plays an important ritual role in Bassar society. The ceremony explicitly involves opening the ancestor's mouth so that he can speak for the first time. Among the Bassar, the descendants of an ancestor have the opportunity, when they feel the need, to dialogue with their ancestor in order to find out about his desires, complaints and moods, as well as to seek his advice on particularly sensitive issues that could affect the future of a family member or even the entire group. Even if the ancestor is not physically present, he makes his voice heard through the diviner, speaking successively to each of his descendants, who feel the need to speak directly with him (S. Dugast, 1991, p. 192).

What meaning do the Bassar give to this ceremony? The opening of the ancestor's mouth is the step that allows the living to enter into contact, for the first time, with the one who at the same time takes the name *utankpii*, “ancestor¹⁸”. Until this stage is reached, no sacrifice to the ancestor is possible, precisely because he or she is still only a non-ancestralized deceased. When the diviner is handed the calabash containing the solution¹⁹, the personified diviner is able to speak. By this action, the deceased's mouth has been opened. He is now a fully-fledged ancestor, who can be spoken to, who can speak to other ancestors, and who is entitled to sacrifices (S. Dugast, 1991, p. 194).

¹⁸ Until then, and since the funeral, he had been *utankpiipôn*, ‘new ancestor’.

¹⁹ Before the diviner arrives, the oldest members of the deceased's lineage soak some *kinunuui* (African basil) in water, then take care to hide this preparation from the diviner (S. Dugast, 1991, p. 191).

All in all, the ceremony of opening the ancestor's mouth is an extension of the preceding rites, with which it maintains a certain number of structural relationships. Most of the testimonies gathered in the field corroborate the ancestralization process described by S. Dugast (1991), with a few nuances relating to the naming and certain stages of the ceremony. Among the Taapu of Bitchabé, the ancestralization process ends with the construction of a mound of earth beside the grave. Some of this earth is also used to build an altar at the entrance to the vestibule of the deceased's family²⁰. From this point onwards, the spirit of the deceased can be invoked with a piece of bamboo topped with the fruit of the rowan tree.

It is on the basis of this conception of death, of the relationship established between the living and the ancestral dead, that the people of the Bitchabé township are asking the Togolese government to arrange for the remains of their relative, currently in Germany, to be repatriated, so that he can be offered funeral ceremonies worthy of the name, to ancestralize him forever.

4.2. Public perceptions of the issue of restitution and repatriation of human remains from Togo to Germany: the case of the Kuyukul resistance fighter

The reactions of the people in Bassar country come from both administrative and political leaders, and from the people themselves. They concern both the issue of restitution and repatriation, and the management of these remains once repatriated.

□ The feelings of local administrative and political leaders

Whether prefectoral, communal, cantonal or village administrative authorities, they all remember the atrocities of German colonization, with their corollary damage, notably corporal punishment, forced labor and imprisonment. The fiercest resistance fighters or those who committed serious offences were killed or taken away to deter others. This was the fate of the 40-year-old resistance fighter from Kuyukul, whose skull was taken to Germany.

On the question of restitution, these local officials are unanimous in their support for the repatriation of his remains, so that funeral ceremonies can be organized in keeping with his status as a fallen hero of the Bassar resistance. During these ceremonies, the skull in question will not be buried; an egg representing the deceased is to be buried in place of the corpse, in accordance with Tapu customs for those who die outside the concession and whose body has not been found²¹. They propose the erection of a stele, on which his identity references will be

²⁰ Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24th July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

²¹ Testimonies from focus groups in Bitchabé and Kuyukul on 24 and 25 July 2024.

engraved, in his memory. This will serve as the grave of the illustrious resistance fighter, considered the most emblematic of the refusal of the colonial order in Bassar (taapu) country. As for the skull, according to these local administrative and political leaders, they want this human remains to be preserved in a museum for two main reasons: to transmit the collective memory of the history of the resistance and to promote tourism for the general public²².

Opinions differed on the choice of site for the museum. In all, four proposals were accepted. Some suggested the town of Bassar (capital of the prefecture)²³, Bangeli (capital of the Bassar 2 commune, which includes the canton of Bitchabé)²⁴ Bitchabé-centre (chief town of the canton on which the village of Kuyukul depends administratively)²⁵. And, finally, for others, the chief of the village of Kuyukul and his notables²⁶, the choice of site for this museum is a priori Kuyukul, the village of origin of the resistant.

□ **How local people feel**

The inhabitants of Kuyukul recall clashes between their ancestors and the German colonialists. They recount the various types of repression they suffered at the hands of the Germans. But they don't know much about the ancestor whose skull was taken away, or his biological family. This memory lapse is all the more understandable given that many of these inhabitants were shot or executed during this period of resistance, and some heads were cut off by the victors. Such events were commonplace, they say. A cross-check of the testimonies of the inhabitants on the Togo side, on the one hand, and those in Ghana, on the other, leads us to believe that Kuyungh remains their ancestor²⁷. They all recognize themselves as his descendants²⁸.

As for the reasons for their ancestor's death, they mainly refer to disobedience to the German authority and its local representatives in Bassar country regarding the execution of forced and agricultural labor. The Germans, who abhor indiscipline, did not hesitate to use force to subdue

²² Interview with the secretary general of the Bassar prefecture, the mayors of Bassar 1 and 2 and the deputy mayor of Bassar 2, on 6 and 7 August 2024 in Bassar and Bangeli.

²³ Mayor of the Bassar 1 municipality, 6th August 2024 in Bassar.

²⁴ Mayor of the Bassar 2 municipality, 7th August 2024

²⁵ Deputy Mayor of the Bassar 2 municipality, originated from the Bitchabé township and Secretary General of the Bassar Prefecture.

²⁶ This position is shared by the chiefs of the villages of Kuyukul and Tantalé (in Ghana) and their notables, which is easy to understand!

²⁷ Today, Kuyun is a sacred and deified place. Every year, his descendants gather to thank him after the harvest. It has become a place of remembrance (see appendix).

²⁸ Focus group from Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

them. As a result, the most recalcitrant were captured and their heads cut off, as in the case of this ancestor²⁹.

As for the places of confrontation and the graves of the victims of colonial resistance, they certainly recognize the first sites of occupation of their ancestors, but no longer remember the burial places of the victims. It should also be noted that the descendants of the Kuyungh now occupy the villages of Kuyukul in Togo and Kuyukul in Ghana, which were in fact created by those who left the mother village. The Kuyukul village in Ghana claims to have heard of one of their ancestors whose skull was taken away by the Germans. It claims to have obtained this information through one of its contacts in Ghana within the framework of an association dedicated to the promotion of Ncam culture³⁰.

□ **The solemn request for restitution**

On the question of the return of the remains of the Kuyukul ancestor, the local people have expressed a favorable opinion on the return of their ancestor's skull. They would like a solemn request to be formulated by the regent of the canton of Bitchabé, the chief of the village of Kuyukul and the notables to plead for the return of the remains of their ancestor to his place of origin, so that he can undergo the funeral rites worthy of a warrior of his rank³¹.

The people of Bitchabé and Kuyukul will be delighted to have their ancestor's skull back after more than a century.

□ **Management of the skull once returned**

According to the descendants of Kuyungh, in particular the village chiefs of Kuyukul (Togo) and Kuyukul (Ghana), their ancestor died a violent death. To this end, they will mobilize all their ancestor's descendants in Kuyukul-Togo to pay him tributes worthy of a warrior. “Before the symbolic burial rites, we have to make supplications to the ancestors so that they can accept him. So, *“we'll give a goat or a ram to the Kuyungh deity to receive his descendant. Back home, the diviner will consult us to tell us which animals to use for the funeral rites*”³².

²⁹ Focus group from Kuyukul on 25th July 2024.

³⁰ NAGBIDJA Kodjo Emmanuel, chief of the village of Kuyukul in Ghana, interview in Kuyukul, 25th July 2024.

³¹ Focus groups in Bitchabé on 24th July 2024 and in Kuyukul on 25th July 2025.

³² Focus group in Kuyukul, 25th July 2024

The people of Kuyukul also express their wish that the skull be preserved in a museum as a memorial. Such a museum would contribute to the development of the area and, by extension, of the entire Togolese nation³³.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of this study, it is clear that Bassar resistance to the German conquest of their country and to their colonial order is part of the collective memory of the populations of Bitchabé canton and especially Kuyukul. Numerous accounts of German repression and atrocities in their communities continue to haunt the minds and memories of the Taapu and Bassar people in general.

Although our attempts to trace the biological family of the person from whom the skull came during the field survey were unsuccessful, the fact remains that this person did indeed come from Kuyukul in the canton of Bitchabé. This is borne out not only by Togolese historiography (R. Cornevin, 1962; P. Ali Napo, 2020), but also by numerous accounts of the bloody repressions of German colonial power, with references to severed heads presented to the representative of the German administration as proof of a mission well accomplished.

According to the concept of death in Bassar country in general, and in the Taapu sub-group in particular, the soul of the deceased survives. Communication between the living and the dead is established through the process of ancestralization, the final phase of all funeral rites. It therefore appears that the ancestralization of the person from whom the skull comes cannot take place without the restitution and repatriation of the remains necessary for the first two phases of consecrated funerary rites.

This preliminary requirement is fundamental and explains the different opinions and wishes of local administrative and political leaders, as well as the populations of Kuyukul and Bitchabé canton in general. All the opinions are in favor of setting up a museum to preserve the skull after it has undergone all the funeral rites to which it is entitled. This would contribute to the collective memory and promote tourism for the general public. The curiosity of Kuyukul residents at the sight of this remnant of their deceased relative bears witness to this.

³³ Focus group in Kuyukul, 25th July 2024, at Kuyukul.

The results of this survey could serve as a springboard for the Togolese government's formal request to its German counterpart for the restitution and repatriation of the remains of Kuyukul's ancestor. To achieve this objective, he will be able to count on the teacher-researchers and their assistants who took part in this survey.

SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Oral sources: List of informants or resource persons

Full name	Age	Status	Place and date of interview
ABESSONKAI Adédokou	64	Mayor Bassar 2	Municipality/Bassar 2, 7th August 2024
BITCHATIKO Nambou	70	farmer	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
BOURI Takobtché	49	Deputy mayor of the Bassar 2 municipality	Municipality/Bassar 2, 6th August 2024
GBATI D. L. Kokou	68	Mayor Bassar 1	Municipality /Bassar 1, 7th August 2024
GMAPOMOYOU Kpabou	70	farmer	Bitchabé, 24th July 2024
KONKONDJI Dandja	84	farmer	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
KOUMAI Komi	66	farmer	Bitchabé
KOUNA Takperbou	87	farmer	Bitchabé, 7th August 2024
KPABOU Gbandi	45	farmer	Bitchabé, 7th August 2024
LIDOL Wada	50	S/G Bassar 2	Municipality /Bassar 2, 7th August 2024
MONDO Bitchanighan	75	Chief township notary	Bitchabé, 7th August 2024

NABASSE N'Yolikoum	53	farmer	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
NADJOMBE Kossi	64	farmer	Bitchabé, 24th July 2024
NADJOMBE Napo	62	S/G prefecture	Prefecture/ Bassar, 6th August 2024
NAGBIDJA Kodjo Emmanuel	43	village chief Kuyukul/Ghana	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
NAMONGMA Bilighan	62	farmer	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
NINA Djapin	86	farmer	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
NTCHABI Ifédjombe	65	farmer	Bitchabé
NTCHABI Ouadja	60	farmer	Bitchabé, 7th August 2024
SAMPOURE Batcharko	85	Eldest of lineage	Bitchabé, 7th August 2024
SEIDOU Djawaï	66	farmer	Bitchabé, 24th July 2024
TANDJA Kpatchine	72	Chief of Kuyukul/ Togo	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
TIGNAMKPA-SEIDOU Kpabou	80	Regent of Bitchabé township	Bitchabé, 24th July 2024
WADJOLE Bitchassakin	45	Notable	Kuyukul, 25th July 2024
WADJOLE Magnibo	62	Chairman of the Canton Development Committee (CCD)	Bangeli, 8th August 2024

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALI NAPO P., 2020, *Le Togo de l'époque allemande, Fondation, gestion administrative et conditions des autochtones*, Lomé, Editions Saint- Augustin Afrique, 515 pages.
- BAKROBENA L., 2021, *Archéologie d'une communauté de sidérurgistes d'Afrique subsaharienne : savoirs, techniques et histoire des forgerons de Bitchabé (pays bassar, nord - Togo)*, Thèse de doctorat en Archéologie, Lomé, Université de Lomé, 463 p.
- BAKROBENA L., 2015, *Savoirs techniques des forgerons de Bitchabé (pays bassar, nord-Togo) : approche ethnoarchéologique*, Mémoire de master en archéologie, Université de Lomé, 149 p.
- BARROS Ph. (de)., 1985, *The Bassar : large-scale iron producers of the West African Savana*, Ph. D. dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 789 p.
- CORNEVIN R., 1962, *Les Bassaris du nord Togo*, Paris, Berger Levrault, collection Monde d'Outre-Mer, série Peuples, 156 p
- DUGAST S., 1987, *L'agglomération de Bassar : classement selon le clan fondateur ; classement par village*. Lomé (Togo) : ORSTOM 83 (2) 23-57.
- DUGAST S., 1991, « Ouvrir la bouche de l'ancêtre ». Le processus d'ancestralisation à travers quelques séquences des rites funéraires chez les Bassar du Nord-Togo », *Systèmes de pensée en Afrique noire*, 11/ 1991, p. 181-206.
- DUGAST S., 1992, *Rites et organisation sociale : l'agglomération de Bassar au Nord-Togo*. Thèse de doctorat, Paris, EHESS. 990 p.
- KPABOU A., 2009, *La chefferie de Bassar au cours de la colonisation : mutation sociopolitique (1897-1960)*, mémoire de Maîtrise d'histoire, Lomé, Université de Lomé, 76 p.
- KOUMAÏ S., 2014, *Monographie du canton de Bitchabé du XVII^e siècle à 1960*, mémoire de Maîtrise en histoire, Kara, Université de Kara, 96 p.
- NABE B., 2017, « La conquête du pays bassar par les Allemands et la résistance de Binaparba (1891-1897) », Conférence animée à Binaparba le 7 mai 2017 à l'occasion de la célébration du 120^{ème} anniversaire du massacre de Binaparba sur le thème : *Les Allemands à Binaparba, il y a cent vingt (120) ans*, document inedit, 10 pages
- TCHAM B., 2009, « Travail du fer et peuplement du centre du Togo : les Koli du XIV^e au XIX^e siècle », *Centre d'études et de recherche en lettres, sciences humaines et sociales*, (CERLESH), Tome XXIV, n°34, P.U.O, Ouagadougou, pp. 49-90.
- TCHAM B. K. et N'MANA M., 2016, « Atakpa bem : le signataire du traité qui mit fin à l'isolement de Bassar ? », in TCHAM B. K. (éd.), *Des Heros et des hommes - Biographies de personnages célèbres des différentes communautés togolaises*, Collection « Patrimoines », N° 19, Presses de l'UL, p.129-143.

APPENDICES

Photo 1 : Interview at Bitctabé township regent's palace (photos 1 and 2)



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 24/07/2024 at Bitchabé

Photo 2 : Data collection session with the fucus group at Bitctabé



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 24/07/2024 at Bitchabé

Photo 3 : Preparing for the departure to the village of Kuyukul



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 24/07/2024 at Bitchabé

Photo 4 : House of the chief of Kuyukul village



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 24/07/2024 at Kuyukul

Photo 5 : Kuyukul residents' curiosity about the skull photo



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 25/07/2024 at Kuyukul

Photo 6 : Discovering the divinity of the Kuyungh ancestor



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 25/07/2024 at Kuyukul

Photo 7 : The Kuyungh divinity



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 25/07/2024 at Kuyukul

Photo 8 : Interview with the secretary general, representing the prefet of Bassar



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 06/08/2024 at Bassar

Photo 8 bis : Interview with the secretary general, representing the prefet of Bassar



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 06/08/2024 at Bassar

Photo 10 : Interview with the mayor of Bassar 1 municipality



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 06/08/2024 at Bassar

Photo 11 : Interview with the mayor of Bassar 2 municipality and his staff



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 07/08/2024 at Bangeli

Photo 12 : Interview with the deputy mayor of Bassar 2 municipality, native of the Bitchabé township



Source : shot taken by K. Konlani, on 07/08/2024 at Bangeli



PROJECT: FIELD STUDY IN KUYUKUL IN BASSAR COUNTRY ON FUNERAL PRACTICES RELATING TO THE RETURN OF HUMAN REMAINS FROM TOGO IN GERMANY

FIELD SURVEY GUIDE

This questionnaire serves as a guide for gathering information on three complementary themes relating to the issue of the restitution of Bassar human remains in Germany. Firstly, the resistance of Bassar metallurgists to German conquest and colonisation; secondly, anthropo-cultural practices relating to the dead and the ancestralisation of Bassar hunter-forgers, especially in the canton of Bitchabé; and thirdly, representations of the issue of the restitution of Bassar human remains in Germany.

Identity of Witness:

Surname:

Forename(s):

Social status:

Age:

Village:

Township:

Date testimony taken :

I- General information about Bassar contact with the Germans (Djama)

1. What do you know about the first contacts between the Bassar and the Germans (Djama)?
2. When did these first contacts with the German (Djama) take place (season, informant's family tree or dynastic list)?
3. What name did you give this foreigner and what was your parents' attitude towards him?
4. How did he manage to impose himself on them and how did they react to this stranger's domineering spirit?
5. Were there any confrontations? How and where exactly?
6. How can you explain your parents' resistance?
7. Are you aware of the consequences of these confrontations?

8. What happened to the soldiers who were killed by the enemy?
9. What ceremonies were held for those who fell at the front?

II- Anthro-po-cultural surveys

1. What are the different funeral rites and practices of a man in Bassar country?
2. Is there a particular ritual among the people of Bitchabé? If so, what is it?
3. What are the last rites of an adult in Bitchabé before death?
4. What meaning is given to mourning in Bassar country?
5. Does mourning depend on the type of death? If so, what are the different types of death and how do they correspond?
6. What elements symbolise mourning and what are the stages involved?
7. What happens if mourning is not observed in the event of death and the rites are not performed after a certain period of time?
8. What is required (to be specified) at each stage of mourning from beginning to end?
9. What are the ancestral rites and cults?
10. Have you heard of the severed heads of the soldiers who died, taken away and handed over to the Germans (commanders)?
11. According to eyewitness accounts, do you know the names of the soldiers whose heads were severed and taken away and the villages to which they belonged?

III - The views of the people of Bitchabé on the issue of the return of human remains from Togo in Germany and their management

1. Have you heard of the claims made by African countries, victims of the spoliation of their cultural and religious property and human remains, to the former colonisers for their restitution to the countries of origin that were once colonised?
2. What is your opinion on these claims? In other words, are you in favour of their return?
3. Are you aware that there are remains of some of your relatives in museums in Germany?
4. Would you like to see the skull of your ancestor returned, the remains of which are currently in the Charité Museum in Berlin?
5. Do you have the same wish for other Bassar, Kabiye, Moba, Konkomba or simply Togolese human remains?

6. What would you do with these remains once they have been repatriated to your home here in Bitchabé or Kuyukul? Make proposals for their management once repatriated.
7. To whom would you address your requests for their return?
8. Your final word!