LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Gbaya are also known as the Baya, the Mbere Baya or the Gbaya-Bossangoa. They are the largest ethnic group in the Central African Republic. The Gbaya are closely related to the Mandija people (also called Mandja). In 1880 the exiled Fulani slave raids and holy wars (Jihad) connected with the founding of the Sokoto Caliphate; the ancestors of the Gbaya migrated to the region from present-day northern Cameroon and Nigeria in the early 1800s. They incorporated many of the indigenous inhabitants creating the six basic subgroups of the Gbaya. Fulani continued to raid the Gbaya region each year to capture slaves for sale both in the Caliphate and to the trans-Saharan caravans.

Ngbaka (Ngbàkà) is a Gbaya language spoken by a million people in DRC Congo. It is a regionally important language, used by the Gilima, Ngbundu, Mbandja, and Mono peoples. It is taught in primary schools; 10% are literate in Ngbaka. “Ngbaka” is a common local ethnic name; the language may be distinguished from other languages called ‘Ngbaka’ as Ngbaka Gbaya or Ngbaka Minagende. There are no significant dialectal differences within Ngbaka, and it may be mutually intelligible with members of the Manza dialect cluster.

STUDYING GBAYA IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/

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WHO SPEAKS GBAYA

The Gbaya (Baya) people are one of the four major ethnic groups found primarily in Central Africa. The other ethnic groups are: the Banda, the Mandija and the Sara. There is also a small European population that are primarily French. The Gbaya are found in:

1. A country named Bossangoa Batangafo (Gbabana) in the western Central African Republic (has the potential to be one of Africa’s richest countries; it is in the center of Africa).
2. Eastern Cameroon (African country on the Gulf of Guinea).
3. Northern Republic of the Congo (a highly urbanized, oil-rich country in Central Africa).

Gbaya people have a very interesting history, life and culture. Traditional Gbaya political organization was decentralized, with village chiefs acting as symbolic leaders and judges, rather than political rulers. Only in emergencies were war chiefs temporarily elected as among the Banda. In war, age sets insured unity among the various clan identities. The clans managed trade with foreigners, marriage arrangements, and religious customs.

Today most Gbaya remain rural farmers, growing cassava, corn, peanuts, tobacco, and yams and supplementing their diet by hunting and fishing. For cash many Gbaya grow rice or coffee, prospect for diamonds or work for mining companies. They use the likembe, a type of lamella phone (a small instrument with hand-plucked metal strips that is often mistakenly called a thumb piano).

WHY STUDY GBAYA

Students interested in African Art, African history, anthropology, archaeology, the international relations, non-governmental organization work and government work will find the Gbaya a valuable language to study. Gbaya has available 8 spoken languages and dialects:

1. Gbaya: Other names are, Kpala, Kpara, Kparla, Kredj, Kreich, and Kreish
2. Gbaya-Dongo or just Donga
3. Gbaya-Dara or just Dara
4. Gbaya-Gboko or just Gboko
5. Gbaya-Ngbongbo or Kresh-Hofra
6. Gbaya-Naka or just Naka and Naka
7. Gbaya-Orlo or just Orlo and Woro
8. Gbaya-Ndogo: Other names are, Kparla and Kresh-Ndogo or just Kresh

Gbaya Funeral: The women greeting one of the Grandmother’s daughters after the burial. A sign of respect at a funeral is to greet someone by laying on the ground. Then who you are greeting will then lift your head to say “thank you”.

Gbaya Python hunters in Cameroun

Leaf shoulderpads from the traditional beekeeping garb of the Gbaya people of Cameroon.