

Manga

The Manga are a subgroup of the Kanuri. They are tall and stately; a dignified people. They are hospitable, generous, friendly, helpful, and open, particularly to those who show respect for their language.

The Manga claim to be originally from Yemen. They say their leaders were already in Niger before the Kanuri conquered them. The Kanuris trace their ancestry back to the Bornu Empire established by the Saifawa family, the deposed ruling family of the Kanem Empire who fled to the area southwest of Lake Chad during the fourteenth century because of civil war.

The Manga Kanuri are proud of their history as the rulers of the Bornu Empire. They live in the Lake Chad and Sahel desert region of Niger and Nigeria where they are the dominant people group.



SIM Ministry

One SIM couple is serving the Manga people of Niger. They are working in Bible translation and long to have co-workers to work with them, to take the message of Jesus to the Manga people, most of whom have never heard of Him, and to plant churches among them. Many observers say the Manga people are closed to outside influences, especially the Gospel. However, Christian workers trying to reach the Manga report that they are friendly and open as long as they do not feel they are being "proselytized." The handful of Manga Christians are praying that entire households and villages of Manga people will become Christians at the same time in order to provide safety and support in the face of serious religious persecution. They're praying, too, that West African Christians from other people groups will bring the story of Jesus to their Manga friends. Fewer than ten people among the Manga in Niger have come to faith in Jesus as their Savior.

Scripture Availability

Some of the Kanuri people groups do not yet have a translation of the Bible in their own language, including the Manga. To our knowledge, only one group, the Yerwa of Nigeria, has a complete New Testament. The few Manga Christians in Niger have only portions of the Old Testament and the Gospel of Mark in their own language, and some OT passages are available on MegaVoice in the Manga dialect. Most of them cannot easily read Manga; consequently, written Scriptures remain inaccessible to them.

The New Testament is available in the Yerwa Kanuri dialect, which some Mangas understand, and the JESUS film is available in Manga. Christian workers are also beginning to translate Bible stories into Manga to use in chronological storying of the Bible, seeking to provide oral forms of the Bible for this very oral culture.

Location

The Manga live in the Lake Chad and Sahel desert region of Niger and Nigeria where they are the dominant people group. An estimated 280,000 Manga are in Niger and 200,000 in Nigeria.

Culture

Population: The Manga form a sub-group of the Kanuri people, who number about 4.5 million. Today about 500,000 Manga Kanuri live in the Lake Chad region—280,000 in Niger and 200,000 in Nigeria.

Language: In addition to Kanuri, many Kanuri speak Hausa, Arabic, or another area languages.

Religion: The Kanuri people have practiced Islam for more than 1,000 years. The Manga Kanuri strongly guard their Muslim faith. In fact, the Manga are considered "0 percent evangelized," according to evangelical missions researchers.

The Manga are mostly orthodox Sunni Muslims. They practice their superstitions in conjunction with Islam. Charms and amulets are worn around the neck or in pockets for various reasons: to ensure a good pregnancy for a mother, to keep the ghost of the dead from haunting its descendants, to ward off disease, poverty, drought and crop failure. While they practice the rituals of Islam, most have little knowledge of the Koran or the Arabic language.

Livelihood: Most of the Manga are subsistence farmers. During the region's sparse rainy season, they struggle to raise enough food—mostly millet, sorghum, beans, and peanuts—to feed their families and animals for the entire year. Flocks of sheep and goats supplement the Mangas' meager existence. Some Manga Kanuri also raise cattle, horses, and camels. During the dry season when farming is over, often men socialize during the day by sitting on mats discussing news and keeping an eye on the world.

Among the Kanuri, horses are a symbol of prestige. Horsemen, often in special dress and carrying swords or spears, display their abilities on their colorfully-decorated horses at any major Manga celebration.

The Kanuri who live in cities are involved in government jobs, public service, construction, transportation, and commerce. The Kanuri who have occupations that are related to politics or religion have a very high social status; whereas, those who work as blacksmiths, well-diggers, or water carriers have a low social status. The majority of the Kanuri, however, are farmers, craftsmen, and merchants.

Food: A typical family meal for the Manga consists of porridge made of millet and soup or stew with onions, tomatoes, chilies, meat scraps, or dried beans.

Housing: Kanuri settlements vary in size; but most contain walled-in compounds surrounding several rectangular flat-roofed mud or mud or grass houses with thatched, cone-shaped roofs. These houses are relatively cool during the hot months. Farmland surrounds each settlement. Their houses and boundary fences are made out of baked mud bricks or millet stalks.

Society: Towns serve as local market places and administrative centers for the Kanuri. They usually contain a local school and mosque.

The cornerstone of Kanuri society is the household (not necessarily the family itself). The greater the number in a family or household, the more



prestige the family head is given. For this reason young men are often "loaned" to households to help with field labor, to provide support, and to help in defending the family. In return, the head of the household will clothe, feed, pay bride price, and possibly provide brides for them. At that time, they will move to a different property, but still remain part of the extended family. This type of relationship is widespread in Kanuri society. It is similar to the father-son relationship in that supreme loyalty and respect is given to the head of the household at all times.

The Manga people hold rituals and ceremonies marking the stages of the life cycle of the individual—birth, naming, circumcision for males, puberty, marriage, and death. Their Muslim society places heavy emphasis on authority, and it is a shameful thing to disobey Islamic law or one's parents or husband.

Marriage and Family: Kanuri men marry while they are in their mid- to late thirties. Polygamy is common, and a man may have as many as four wives. Young girls marry while they are in their teens. Ideally, a man wants his first wife to be a young virgin. However, the bride price for a virgin is quite expensive, so men often take divorced women as their first wives. The divorce rate among the Kanuri is extremely high, with eight out of ten marriages ending in divorce.

The Koran emphasizes the importance of the supreme authority of the father. Women are considered inferior to men and are treated as such in Kanuri society.

Dress: The traditional men's Kanuri clothes consist of large robe-type garments worn with turbans or brightly embroidered caps. The large robes provide protection from the consistent heat.

Women wear outfits made of matching headscarves, loose blouses, and wrapped skirts of brightly printed cottons, solid cotton damask, or elaborate eyelet of solid pastel colors. When outside their home they wear a loose, bright shawl over their head and shoulders. The Kanuri highly value fancy clothing, which they wear for festivals and Islamic ceremonies.

Economy: While most Manga are agriculturalists living in villages of three or four families, some villages grow into towns of several thousands. Artisans, merchants, educators, religious teachers and politicians are all present. Those who occupy positions in the civil and religious hierarchy have greater prestige than those engaged in occupations such as woodcutters, barbers, and tanners. Patron-client relationships are the basic social structure governing daily social life.

History

The Kanuris trace their ancestry back to the Bornu Empire established by the Saifawa family, the deposed ruling family of the Kanem Empire who fled to the area southwest of Lake Chad during the 14th century because of civil war.

The Bornu Empire reached its height in 1575-1750. Over the following years it gradually dissolved as powerful Hausa states and neighboring kingdoms began to pressure it. In 1846, the 1000-year Saifawa dynasty came to an end. Shortly after this, the British and the French dominated this region, colonializing the territory. While the Bornu Empire dissolved, the Mangas and other subgroups of the Kanuri have remained.

In spite of the British and French control, the Kanuri have remained politically active and still have much influence on the surrounding people groups. In fact, aspects of Kanuri culture, language, and religion have been adopted by many of the neighboring people groups.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.