

Burkina Faso

This is the first of a series of profiles of some African countries brought to you by courtesy of African High Commissions and Embassies in Canada. The information in these articles will be the main source for questions to a quiz on the February, 18. Winners will be announced at the Africa Nite celebrations on February 19.

Situated to the interior of the Niger loop, Burkina Faso is an African country of 274,000 km² with no outlet to the sea. It is bordered to the north and the west by Mali, to the northeast by Niger, to the southeast by Benin and to the south by Togo, Ghana and the Ivory Coast. The flatness of the land hinders drainage of the country's three rivers - the Black Volta, the White Volta and the Red Volta. The nearest point to the Atlantic is 500 km away, the average height of the plateaux is 500 m, with the highest point, Tenakourou, being 747 m and being situated the west of the country.

Owing to its situation between 9° 20 and 15° 54 latitude north and 2° 20 latitude west, Burkina enjoys a two-season tropical climate: a dry season from March to June and a rainy season from July to October. Between these two main seasons, there is a transition season lasting from November to February, and this is the season ideally suited to tourism, for the climate of Burkina is healthy, sunny, warm and dry.

With over 8,000,000 inhabitants, Burkina is one of the most highly-populated states of West Africa. The population is composed of varied ethnic groups: Mossi, Gourounsi, Lobi, Bobo, Peulh, Gourmatché, Sénoufo, Boussancé, Mandé, etc. Like most countries in the heart of West Africa, Burkina Faso has an economy essentially based on agriculture and livestock rearing. Food-production cultivation - sorghum, millet, maize, rice, groundnuts, potatoes, hay - comes a long way in front of commercial and

industrial products (cotton, karite, sesame, tobacco, soya).

Although livestock rearing has suffered badly from the ravages of drought, with its complementary industries it constitutes a large part of exports. To agriculture and livestock rearing can be added very fine artisan art work, individual and multifarious: leatherworkers, sculptors, jewellers, potters, basket makers, etc.

The subsoil is rich and the outlook hopeful. The main known deposits are: manganese at Tambao, gold at Poura, copper at Gaoua, limestone at Tin-Hrassan, etc. Industry mainly comprises agro-industrial processing units: breweries, pasta-making plants, oil factories, soap factories, large mills, alcohol factories, mechanical and metal processing units, etc. There are also leather and hide units, slaughter houses, etc. 90 percent of the active population works in the agriculture sector. Besides French (the official language), the most widely used national languages in Burkina are the following: Moré, Dioula, Peulh.

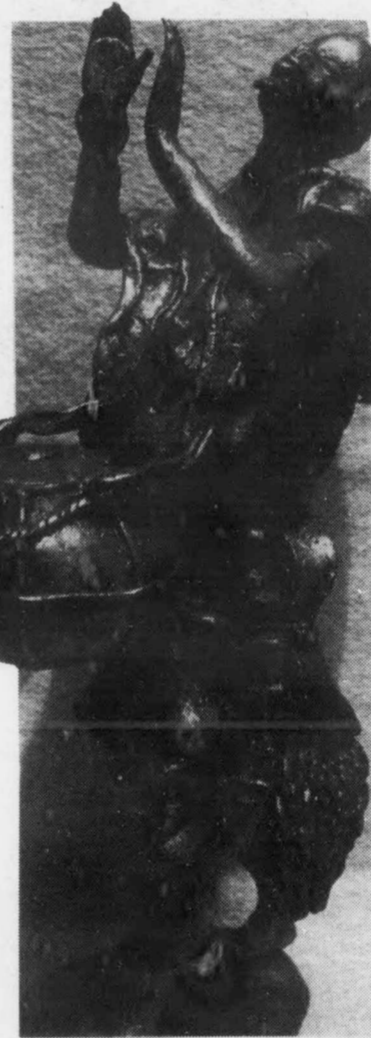
History of Burkina Faso

The history of the country has been characterized by the existence of powerful kingdoms in the east and centre of the country (Ouagadougou, Tenkodogo, Yatenga, Gourma), while to the west there lived societies which were not organized into states and which jealously guarded their independence. These peoples managed to preserve their unity and their independence and through back the Sudanese conquerors (the Mali and Songhai empires) and the zealots of Islam. It was only at the end of the 19th century that the people of Upper Volta (as it was known at that time) were finally caught up in a struggle between the various colonizing powers of the period

(France, Great Britain and Germany).

From 1896-97 the Voulet Chanoine mission undertook conquest of Upper Volta. In 1904, Volta territory was joined to the colony of Upper Senegal-Niger, which became a separate entity in 1919 - giving birth to the colony of Upper Volta. It was abolished in 1932 and its territories divided up between the Ivory Coast, Sudan and Niger.

Upper Volta was refounded in 1947. The 1957 constitutional law and the September



1958 referendum were the stages which led the country towards proclamation of a Republic on 11 December 1958 and independence on 5 August 1960. After 23 years of civilian and military regimes, Upper Volta was to experience the accession of the Popular Democratic Revolution on 4 August 1983.

On the occasion of the celebration of the first anniversary of the Revolution, Upper Volta took the name of Burkina Faso, on 4 August 1984. It also changed its national anthem and its flag (horizontal red and green bands, with a golden star in the middle). Burkina: means honour, dignity, respect, honesty. Faso: means Fatherland,

Republic, Burkina Faso: means country of whole, honest, and courageous men, worth of respect. Its motto is: the fatherland or death, we will overcome! The inhabitants of Burkina Faso are called the Burkinabé.

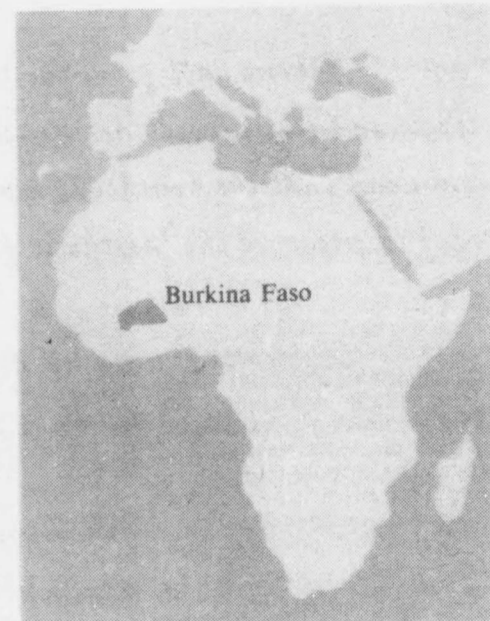
The history of the city of Ouagadougou is linked to that of the Mossi Empire. After Tenkodogo, the second zone of implantation of the Mossi was Ouagadougou. Ouagadougou in fact became capital of the Mossi kingdom in 1441, and the permanent residence of the Naba in 1681. Following numerous internal wars, stability of the kingdom led to the creation of new quarters, with installation of dignitaries and their followers. We could point also to the strategic position of the city with respect to trade (the Salaga-Tombuktu axis). The structure of the city of Ouagadougou was at first drawn up around the imperial palace. With colonization came the installation of military posts.

The transfer of government functions in 1947 from the town of Bobo-Dioulasso to Ouagadougou accelerated the latter city's development process. Owing to its central position, Ouagadougou then became the political and administrative capital. Many estates were built then without the aid of any initial plan, which explains the disparity we find between traditional quarters on the one hand and administrative quarters on the other. The rural exodus in its turn changed the appearance of the city, with proliferation of spontaneously inhabited quarters.

With the coming of the Revolution, however, new improvements came in the form of housing developments with all appropriate infrastructure - Cité An II (Estate year II), Cité An III, etc. The annual growth rate of the city of Ouagadougou is 7 to 8 percent, and the notion of the quarter has given way administratively to that of the Sector with the city being divided into thirty (30) such sectors.

Burkina Faso Cuisine and Crafts

The most common dish in Burkina Faso is Tô, which is a thick pasta made from millet flour, sorghum or maize. It



is accompanied with a sauce whose composition and preparation method varies from region to region. Tô is generally eaten steaming hot. Bronze is one of Burkina's most traditional sectors of artisan art, one which brought fame to the royal courts. Using the "lost wax" process, the master bronzeworkers of Nionghsi (Ouagadougou) draw from their burning hearths ever-unique pieces of a rare beauty. The working of leather and hides is a very widespread activity in Burkina Faso (the great wealth of Burkina livestock), and one can admire amongst other items at the Burkina Leather Manufacture Society some very fine articles in pyrographed hides (jewellery case, chessboard, draughts, etc.).

Pottery is the most widespread artisan craft in the country.

Pottery combining utilitarian toughness with the fineness of artistic creation, represented by famous villages such as Dalgan in Dagari country, Tcheriba in Dafia country, Sikiana, etc.

It is the history of an entire people in deft hands.

The rich basketry sector of Burkina rests mainly on skilful use of available vegetation - hence the variety of style, form and colour.

In parallel with traditional artisans, in Burkina Faso there abound artisans of the so-called modern sector, with unequalled creative genius. Particularly in the large urban centres, a multitude of small workshops daily place at people's disposition articles whose quality and perfection can easily match imported products.

Compiled by George Ato Eguakun

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for a quiz on February 18.
Winners will be announced at
the Africa Night Celebration
on February 19