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Volume 1

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THE ROLE OF ORAL ARTISTS
IN THE HISTORY OF MALI

Thesis Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.,
University of London

by

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Abstract

Historians interested in the pre-colonial Bambara, Mandinka and other Manding-speaking peoples of Mali can draw on a rich body of oral tradition to supplement the documented evidence. While external written Arabic sources provide a core of information on such pivotal epochs as those dominated by ancient Ghana and Mali, oral tradition has been heavily relied upon for detailed impressions of particular aspects of those periods, such as the people and events involved in the career of Sunjata, the thirteenth-century ruler credited with the founding of the Mali empire. But as scholars sift the oral traditions for useful information, they are obliged to maintain a healthy scepticism regarding the historical accuracy of most of what they find, because it cannot be independently confirmed. The indigenous informants who have supplied most of the oral evidence are bards commonly known as 'griots', members of an endogamous social class the duties of which have for many centuries included recalling the glories of the past and memorizing the genealogies of distinguished lineages. In the interest of a clearer understanding of who these informants are and how certain elements of their testimony can prove useful to historians, this thesis undertakes to identify the oral artists of Mali in the context of their own history and development as an occupationally defined social group, and to examine some salient cultural features and external influences that have affected their attitudes toward, and their presentation of, specific historical traditions, several of which are analysed in the course of the discussion.

Focusing on early European encounters with Manding oral artists, Chapter I discusses the etymology of the term 'griot', and the significance of early western impressions of griot status and role resulting from observations made by European travellers to the Senegambia and Segou from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

Along with a description of the historical development of the relative social positions of different types of occupational specialists within the hierarchy of oral artists, Chapter II includes an attempt to trace the historical movements and social changes undergone by some groups of non-Manding origin who came to form part of the Manding griot hierarchy, especially in the case of the Bambara.

That oral artists have, along with the artisan groups, occupied a low position in the Manding social scale is a dominant feature of their history, and Chapter III is devoted to a discussion of the possible origins of social stratification vis à vis these groups.

The subject of the influence of Islam on Manding oral artists is approached in Chapter IV through analysis of three different traditions that claim distinguished Muslim antecedents for various segments of Manding culture, and in Chapter V the problem of finding useful historical information in griot testimony is approached through a discussion of twenty-one versions of the Sunjata tradition, with special attention to secondary characters and events.

In a separate volume, an appendix contains English translations of oral traditions collected during the course of fieldwork in Mali in 1974 and 1975.

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Introduction

The idea of undertaking a historical study of the 'griots', as the oral artists or bards of Mali have come to be known, arose from the observation that while they have supplied most of the oral testimony that has been used to supplement the limited amount of documented evidence available on pre-colonial Mali, relatively little was known about the background of the griots themselves. On first looking at the published material, it was evident that from the time the Manding bards were first noticed and commented on by European travellers to the Senegambia and Niger Bend areas of West Africa, there had been a good deal of curiosity about exactly who these conspicuous but enigmatic people were. French colonial writers soon made progress toward defining the bards' position in the indigenous social order as they saw it in the nineteenth century, and most of the gaps left in their studies of readily observable griot life have since been filled in by twentieth-century anthropologists. But the griots' historical past remained obscure, and owing to the paradox of their overall position - they appeared to be prominent and influential in some cases yet reviled in others - questions remained about how, why, and (perhaps most difficult of all) when the griots came to be restricted to the lower echelons of the social hierarchy. Nevertheless, discussions of 'the origin of griots' rarely seemed to get beyond the traditional explanations offered in myth and legend.

In the meantime, from early in the European acquaintance with

griots, oral traditions performed by them were being recorded and studied, and these sources had a definite influence on ideas about pre-colonial events in the western Sudan. Thus, owing to their ancient occupational involvement with the oral literature, the bards of Mali became an important factor in the search for information about the history of their people and culture. But again, questions on crucial aspects of the subject, such as the nature and extent of the influence of Islam, remained unanswered.

This study is addressed to several areas of major interest regarding the bardic past which, in the broadest terms, include matters pertaining to early European exposure to griots, questions concerning the development of the griot social status and role, and aspects of the relationship between griots and their oral material. The primary ethnic focus is on the Bambara and Mandinka, or Malinke, as the latter often call themselves. A culturally related group, the Soninke, are also of particular interest here, because they figure prominently in certain relevant historical events and oral traditions. These groups are among those known by the ethno-linguistic term 'Manding' (also Mande), which will be used here in a generic sense as, for example, when it is convenient to refer to the Manding griots. In the process of inquiring into the historical background of the Bambara and Mandinka bards, our main interest will be in those known to their own people as jeliw, but a variety of other types of oral artists will also come into the picture, some of them Manding, others from neighbouring ethnic groups, such as the Wolof and Fulbe. Since Manding culture extends beyond the modern national borders of Mali, and influences

have for centuries entered Mali from beyond these frontiers, it will also be necessary to consider some evidence from neighbouring regions, including the Senegambia, northern parts of Guinea, Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and southern Mauritania.

Chapter I

Manding jeliw and Related Oral Artists:
Early European ObservationsTerminology

To the earliest non-African visitors who encountered oral artists of the Western Sudan, all indigenous bards looked very much the same, and the most frequently heard local term for them was soon distorted into early renderings of a word that subsequently evolved into the now familiar 'griot'. In his discussion of the etymology of this term, the distinguished linguist Charles Bird concludes that the Bambara word jeli and the 'Frenchified' African word 'griot' are derived from the same source. The earliest references to 'griot' that he found were in early French texts that spell it gueriau or guiriot, and he concludes that the early travellers heard a word something like gerio.¹ This line of reasoning is unnecessarily speculative, because there is firm evidence that the earliest foreign travellers who encountered Manding oral artists heard them called by a term that was very similar to, if not the same, as today's jeliw. When Ibn Battuta visited Mali in 1352, he heard a word for oral artist, the singular of which translated from Arabic to French has been rendered as djali.² When Jobson travelled up the Gambia River in 1620, he was told that a musician he saw there was known

1 Charles S. Bird, 'Oral Art in the Mande', in Carleton T. Hodge, (ed.) Papers on the Manding (Bloomington, Indiana, 1971), pp. 15-23, pp. 16-17.

2 Ibn Battuta, Tuhfat al-muzzār fī gharā'ib al amṣār wa 'adja'ib al-asfār, in Joseph M. Cuoq, Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIIIe au XVIIe siècle (bilād al-sūdān) (Paris, 1975), p. 307.

by a term that he wrote down as 'Juddy',¹ which is very similar to the way jeli is still pronounced in Bambara. When we add to these references the 'Jilli kea' (singing man) of Mungo Park (1795),² the 'Jallikeas' of Gray (1818-21)³ and the 'Jelle' of Laing (1822-23),⁴ there seems no reason to assume that when early travellers wrote down guiriot, they did so after hearing a form of the word jeli. Instead, it seems far more likely that they were hearing either the Wolof term gewel, or the Fulfulde gaulo, if not both.⁵ Of the latter two, the earliest Europeans arriving on the coast would probably have had the most exposure to the Wolof gewel. According to Hair, the fifteenth-century report was that 'the first blacks are found at the Senegal River', though he says Fulfulde-speakers had been encountered on the Gambia by the sixteenth century.⁶

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- 1 Richard Jobson, The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians (London, 1623, reprinted 1968), p. 137.
 - 2 Mungo Park, Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa in 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London, 1799, reprinted 1960 as The Travels of Mungo Park), p. 213.
 - 3 William Gray, Travels in Africa in the years 1818, 19, 20 and 21 from the River Gambia, through Woolli, Bondoo, Galam Kasson, Kaarta, and Foolado, to the River Niger (London, 1825), pp. 59 and 66. He also uses the terms 'griot' and 'bard' (p. 282).
 - 4 A.G. Laing, Travels in the Timanee, Kooranko, and Soolima Countries, in Western Africa (London, 1825), p. 132. He also uses the terms 'griot' (pp. 148 and 158) and 'fino' (pp. 160 and 251).
 - 5 The similarity between the Fulfulde term gaulo and the Wolof gewel suggests the possibility of a common origin for these terms.
 - 6 P.E.H. Hair, 'Ethnolinguistic Continuity on the Guinea Coast', Journal of African History, VIII, 2 (1967), pp. 247-268, p. 249.

Seventeenth-century travellers like Saint-Lô (1637)¹ and La Courbe (1686)² used the term guiriot, as did Labat (1728)³ and Barbot (1732)⁴ in the eighteenth century. Durand was still calling them guiriots in 1802,⁵ but by Mollien's time (1818),⁶ most Europeans were writing the word as 'griot'. An interesting exception was Caillié (1824), whose spelling of the indigenous term as guéhué⁷ suggests that he was listening more carefully to the native pronunciation than to foreign distortions.

In 1882, Bérenger-Féraud wrote that 'griot' was a gallicized Wolof word, which he thought derived from the Cayor and Walo idiom.⁸ His spelling of the latter as both guéroual and guéwoual apparently allows for variations in pronunciation, which helps explain the transition from gewel to 'griot'. Guéwoual minus the extra French vowels becomes gewal, showing that some people were hearing what is now spelled gewel. If at the same time, on the

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- 1 R.P. Alexis de Saint-Lô, Relation du voyage du Cap Verd (Paris, 1637), p. 87.
 - 2 P. Cultru, Premier voyage du Sieur de La Courbe fait à la coste d'Afrique en 1685 (Paris, 1913), p. 43.
 - 3 Jean Baptiste Labat, Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique occidentale (Paris, 1728) t. II, p. 242.
 - 4 J. Barbot, A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea, and of Ethiopia Inferior, Vulgarly Angola (London, 1746), p. 55.
 - 5 J.B.L. Durand, Voyage au Sénégal (Paris, 1802), p. 221.
 - 6 G.T. Mollien, L'Afrique occidentale en 1818 (Paris, 1820, reprinted 1967), p. 77.
 - 7 René Caillié, Travels Through Central Africa to Timbuctoo 1824-1828 (Paris, 1830, reprinted 1968) Vol. I, p. 63.
 - 8 L.J.B. Bérenger-Féraud, 'Étude sur les griots du peuplades de la Sénégambie', Revue d'Anthropologie 2 sér. t. 50, 1882, pp. 266-79, p. 266.

lips of some native speakers it sounded more like the alternative guéroual, it is not difficult to see how foreign ears could hear it as guiriot, and from there to 'griot' is an easy step.

As it is now used, the term 'griot' refers to bards of several socially stratified ethnic groups dispersed over a large part of the Western Sudan. The griots occupy in varying degrees of specialization and proficiency the roles of musician, orator, praise-singer, genealogist, traditional historian, and many lesser-known functions, most of which are associated with the oral arts. While the term 'griot' has gained wide currency in a generic sense, 'bard' being a useful synonym, the languages of the cultures in which griots are found contain more specific terms. In Bambara, a major dialect of the Manding language,¹ the principal term is jeli, the equivalent of which in Soninke is geséré.²

The funew³ are another bardic group in the Manding system, and on occasion certain oral arts are also practiced by blacksmiths (numuw) and leatherworkers (garanké).⁴ In some regions, these

1 Ethnic groups coming under the ethno-linguistic term 'Manding' with which we will be concerned, are the Bambara, the Maninka or Mandinka who sometimes call themselves Malinke, and the Soninke or Sarakole who the Bambara call 'Marka'. See D. Dalby, 'Distribution and Nomenclature of the Manding People and their Language' in Hodge, Papers on the Manding, pp. 1-13.

2 A clue to the origin of this term appears in a tradition that appears to pre-date the usual legendary accounts of Ghana/Wagadu, where the original Soninke griot is named 'Gassire'. See Leo Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten der Sahel, Atlantis Vol. VI (Jena, 1921), pp. 53-60. Another Soninke term for griot, diaré, probably derives from the same root as jeli.

3 The suffix w forms the Bambara plural and is pronounced with a long U sound.

4 See N.S. Hopkins, 'Maninka Social Organization', in Hodge, Papers on the Manding, pp. 99-128, pp. 106-07.

skilled craftsmen and the jeliw, all members of the artisan class (nyamakala) of the Manding social hierarchy, are the only such occupational groups in evidence. However, for a long time, probably many centuries, oral artists from neighbouring ethnic groups mingled with their Manding counterparts, and one result of this was that some hierarchies came to include a sub-group of oral artists that was itself stratified into areas of specialization, each with its accompanying status. For example, in a segment of Bambara society studied by Zahan, he found that in addition to the jeliw and funew, specialists performing griot-type services included the mabow, gaulow, surasegiw and tyapurtaw.¹ Some of these groups apparently originated outside Manding culture, and in Chapter II their historical movements as well as their development into various occupational roles will be discussed in detail. The present object is to follow the progress of early European observations of Manding-speaking griots, with particular attention to the Bambara.

One of the earliest and most tenacious misconceptions about griots is that collectively they were feared and despised. While this attitude clearly did apply to several of the socially inferior bardic groups, it was not necessarily the case with Mandinka and Bambara jeliw. Part of the basis for the idea that all griots were pariahs can be disclosed by reviewing the observations of some of the earliest writers. This will carry us from the Senegambia where travellers first encountered griots of

1 D. Zahan, La dialectique du verbe chez les Bambara (Paris, 1963), pp. 126-28.

at least three different ethnic groups, to the heart of Manding where it was discovered that the status of Bambara jeliw of Segou could be altogether different from that of their counterparts near the coast.

Baobab Interment and Early Impressions of Griot Status

Owing to the public nature of their occupations as musicians, praisers and orators, griots were among the most conspicuous of indigenous folk, when foreign travellers first encountered western sudanic populations. The earliest external reference to oral artists appears in the early fourteenth-century writings of al-Umari, whose secondhand information from across the Sahara included descriptions of drummers and other musicians in the retinue of the mansa of Mali, though no occupational terms were mentioned.¹ The first eyewitness account referring to griots as jeliw is provided by Ibn Battuta, who visited Mali in 1352. He mentions that term in connection with public speakers, praisers and entertainers, and it is clear that Dugha, a musician who served as Ibn Battuta's interpreter was also a jeli.²

Approaching the Western Sudan from the Atlantic coast more than two centuries after Ibn Battuta visited from across the Sahara, European travellers often described griots in their journals, their interest aroused by certain extraordinary things they noticed about

1 al-Umari, Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar, in Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 271-72.

2 Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 306-07.

griot life. Remarking that griots seemed to be both despised and feared, they usually connected this attitude with the custom of interring the bodies of dead griots in the hollow trunks of baobab trees. Indeed, for a time this became a dominant subject in passages describing the local bards.

The Portuguese Alvarez d'Almada (1594) witnessed the phenomenon of baobab interment in a region of what is modern Senegal,¹ and Jobson (1620) declared that people living in the Gambia thought so little of their 'Juddies' that "when any of them die, they doe not vouchsafe them buriall, as other people have; but set his dead corps upright in a hollow tree, where hee is left to consumme ..."² Saint-Lô (1637)³ and Dapper (1668)⁴ reported the curious burial custom in connection with the status of griots, as did Labat (1728)⁵ and Barbot (1732), the latter reporting that "These men are so much despis'd by all the other Blacks, that they not only account them infamous, but will scarce allow them a grave when they die ... they only thrust them into the hollow trunks or stumps of trees".⁶ Mollien (1818),⁷ Boilat (1853)⁸ and

1 Cited by R. Mauny, 'Baobab cimitières à griots', Notes Africaines, 67 (1955), pp. 72-75, p. 74.

2 Jobson, The Golden Trade, pp. 136-37.

3 Saint-Lô, Relation, p. 87.

4 O. Dapper, Description de l'Afrique (Amsterdam, 1686), p. 235.

5 Labat, Nouvelle, II, pp. 330-31.

6 Barbot, A Description, p. 55.

7 Mollien, L'Afrique, p. 80.

8 P.D. Boilat, Esquisses Sénégalaises (Paris, 1853, reprinted 1973), p. 315.

others¹ carried similar observations into the nineteenth century, and several modern writers have discussed the subject.²

Local people have traditionally accounted for the custom of baobab interment by explaining that if griots were buried in the ground or thrown into the river or ocean, the crops would fail or the fish would die. Labat embarrassed people when he inquired as to why griots were esteemed when alive but not properly buried at death, and had to settle for the simple reply that it was the custom.³ Declaring that such explanations were worthless, Raffenel believed that Jobson and others must have been close to the truth when they suggested it was done because griots were so despised. He thought people were obliged to control their feelings while griots lived because of the importance of music and praise-singing, but that after griots died the people's contempt was manifested in the refusal to allow them proper burial.⁴ He might have added that gewel of the Senegambia were also treated with circumspection because they had the power to mock with impunity, and their insults could turn to open abuse if a sufficient reward were not offered.

1 A. Marche, Trois voyages dans l'Afrique occidentale (Paris, 1879), p. 17; Bérenger-Féraud, 'Étude sur les griots', p. 268; P. Soleillet, Voyage à Ségou 1878-1879 (Paris, 1887), p. 11.

2 See especially Mauny, 'Baobab cimitières', pp. 72-75, and O. Silla, 'Persistence des castes dans la société wolof contemporaine', BIFAN, XXVIII (1966), pp. 731-770; also Valtaud, 'Coutume funéraire des Sérères', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., V, 1922, p. 251; L. Aujas, 'Les Sérères du Sénégal (moeurs et coutumes de droit privé)', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., XIV, 1931, pp. 293-333; E. Herpin, 'Le Chevalier de Fréminville à Dakar (1822)', Notes Africaines, 66 (1955), pp. 41-47.

3 Labat, Nouvelle, II, p. 331.

4 Anne Raffenel, Voyage dans l'Afrique occidentale comprenant l'exploration du Sénégal (Paris, 1846), p. 19.

Consequently, some of them were greatly feared and sometimes amassed considerable wealth.¹

Raffenel was of the opinion that the common local belief that griots had regular dealings with the devil was more than a little responsible for the custom of baobab interment.² Similarly, Jobson found that the 'divell' had 'great recourse' among people on the Gambia River, especially the 'Rimers or Juddyes'.³ Seeing this as a source of the griots' extraordinary oratorical skills, Madrolle thought the bards themselves were sorcerers who were in touch with the spirits and whose capacities as diviners gave them the last word in all discussions.⁴ Some early observers had the impression that griots near the coast were more involved with the spirit world than their counterparts in the heart of the Manding country. Remarking that all peoples inhabiting the banks of the Senegal had their griots, Bérenger-Féraud noticed that as one descended the river, the institution became gradually modified, with the bards being increasingly connected with spirits though (contrary to Madrolle's position) he said they were responsible for recognizing and chastizing sorcerers, rather than being sorcerers themselves.⁵

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- 1 David F. Gamble, The Wolof of Senegambia (London, 1967), p. 45.
 - 2 Raffenel, Voyage, p. 19. He had previously noted (p. 18) a common belief that griots had certain occult relations with spirits, which rendered them objects of fear. In Manding society, it is blacksmiths rather than griots who are usually associated with sorcery and the spirit world.
 - 3 Jobson, The Golden Trade, p. 150.
 - 4 C. Madrolle, En Guinée (Paris, 1895), p. 95.
 - 5 L.J.B. Bérenger-Féraud, Les Peuplades de la Sénégambie (Paris, 1897), p. 375. For this writer, any bard, regardless of ethnic affiliation or social status, was a 'griot', for he claimed they were to be found on the shores of Lake Chad and the Red Sea, as well as Zanzibar.

There are elements in both the Wolof and Manding cultures that could account for the burial custom that made such a deep impression on the early European view of griots. To take the Wolof first, it could be significant that in modern times Ames found that the entire population of a village in the Upper Saloum district of the Gambia was alleged to be doma (witches), and that these people were jam i gewel (slaves of griots), that is, persons descended from the slaves of griots.¹ This sort of an association might well have affected indigenous attitudes toward griots themselves, because the term doma, says Ames, "describes a person who attacks and 'eats' his fellows, often involuntarily, because of an innate and compelling supernatural power inherited from his mother". Ames found, moreover, that "all Wolof agree that doma are a constant menace, and a greater threat to health and happiness than the malevolent jinni or other evil spirits".² This belief was popular in the same districts between the Gambia and Senegal Rivers where baobab interment was historically most common. Of further possible significance is Ames' comment that "consistent labelling of members of other ethnic groups and low-status classes as doma suggests that these have been singled out as scapegoats".³

It is doubtful that negative attitudes toward griots approached the degree of intensity of those that were held toward doma. Griots were, after all, out in public view, accessible and eager to

1 David Ames, 'Belief in Witches Among the Rural Wolof of the Gambia', Africa, XXIV, 1959, pp. 263-273, p. 271.

2 Ibid., p. 263.

3 Ibid., p. 271.

be bought off, and they functioned in a number of important roles. It was, as Raffanel observed, necessary to tolerate them while they were alive.¹ However, purses and dignity alike suffered from the uninvited attentions of some griots, and in this respect they, like doma, were uncontrollable. The bodies of griots became vulnerable after death, and perhaps, as some early observers suggested, disrespectful treatment of them provided an outlet for the frustration and anxiety of those who feared the bards alive. But vindictiveness seems inadequate as a basis for the custom of baobab interment. It seems more likely that there was a genuine fear of pollution from griot corpses, a subject to which we will return in a moment. In the meantime, Ames' idea of the doma as scapegoats suggests the possibility that they served that function for griots who were eager to free themselves from the stigma of an early association with occult practices. It may be that since the time of Raffanel, griots succeeded in transferring most of the association with threatening spirits from themselves to their slaves, the jam i gewel, descendants of whom are still said to be witches. Though descendants of former slaves of griots continue to be identified as doma, the association of griots with witchcraft noted by so many travellers from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century seems to have faded in recent times.²

1 Raffanel, Voyage, p. 19.

2 Nevertheless, according to Silla ('Persistance des castes', pp. 746-47), it was not until 1961 that the griots of Senegal succeeded, after a serious confrontation with authorities, in having the custom of baobab burial entirely eliminated on the grounds that as Muslims they deserve to be buried like others of that faith.

Something that may come closer than the Wolof belief in witches to providing an explanation for baobab interment of griots is the Manding use of a poison called korté. References to this lethal substance are common in Manding oral tradition,¹ where its alleged supernatural properties place it in the realm of the occult.² In early times it was also widely used secularly, for poisoning the tips of arrows, and in the nineteenth century it was still used in truth-telling ordeals, or to eliminate enemies. A light dose of korté would produce illness and more heavily administered it would kill promptly. This is relevant here, because according to the French doctor who studied the use of korté, it was handled exclusively by griots.³ Though others, especially blacksmiths practising as diviners, sorcerers and the like doubtless also handled it,⁴ this goes a long way toward explaining why early travellers so consistently referred to griots as being feared and despised. Furthermore, it does not take much imagination to understand how griots could have been collectively regarded as being contaminated by the lethal korté, which would explain why inquiring foreigners were so often told that if griots were buried in the earth or at sea the crops would fail or the fish would die.

1 See Appendix II, pp. 752, 758-61.

2 For more on the use of korté see Louis Tauxier, La religion Bambara (Paris, 1927), pp. 245-263.

3 Edouard Dupouy, 'Le Korté, poison d'épreuve du Bélédougou et du Fouladougou', Archives de Médecine navale, t. XLIII, 1885, pp. 153-54, cited in Tauxier, La religion, p. 254, n. 1.

4 Tauxier, La religion, p. 250.

Later Impressions of Griot Status:

Political jeliw in Nineteenth-Century Segou

If the custom of interring deceased griots in the hollow trunks of baobab trees stemmed from a genuine fear that their bodies would otherwise contaminate the earth and water, this would not have been an unreasonable precaution, and it would not necessarily imply any particular malice toward the bards. In contrast to the burial custom it should be noted that owing to the importance of their role as diplomatic agents and messengers, live griots were usually protected in times of war, as were any other nyamakalaw, such as blacksmiths, if they were functioning as messengers or go-betweens. Referring to Mandinka jeliw of The Gambia, Innes notes:

The mutilation of a griot was a particularly outrageous act. The body of a griot was normally inviolable, and griots could pass freely through enemy lines to parley with the enemy without fear of molestation. The injury or murder of a griot would arouse feelings of horror and outrage.¹

Some seventeenth-century observers remarked that this side of the grave, the bards often occupied enviable positions. Dapper noted that they were "fort bien reçus à la Cour des Princes pendant leur vie",² and Jobson declared that "their wives have more Cristall blew stones and beades about them, than the King's wives".³ When European travellers ventured eastward beyond the Senegal and Gambia Rivers, the inferior social status of griots remained very much in

1 Gordon Innes, Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions (London, 1974), p. 317, note on line 330. Nevertheless, on occasion griots did, like anyone else, fall victims to war.

2 Dapper, Description, p. 235.

3 Jobson, The Golden Trade, p. 137.

evidence, but at the same time, closer to the Niger River, the role of the Manding jeli seemed more varied than that of his counterparts to the west. Emphasis in the travel journals on the despised condition of griots gives way to frequent remarks that they were privileged or influential. Fascinated as they were at the custom of baobab burial, Europeans were equally intrigued to find some griots in the heart of Manding occupying positions near their chiefs, and even those who specialized as musicians seemed well off.

Mungo Park, impressed by the "Mandingoe's" love of music and taste for poetry, thought it fortunate for "the poets of Africa" that they were "in a great measure exempted from the neglect and indigence which in more polished countries, commonly attend the votaries of the Muses".¹ In Segou more than eighty years later, Soleillet also witnessed the musician class of griots collecting their fees from all and sundry, but retaining a more accurate perspective than Park, he remarked that "Leur vie est heureuse, mais ils sont prives des honneurs de la sepulture et leurs cadavres sont places dans des arbres creux".²

It was not uncommon for griots to be the closest acquaintances of early European travellers to the Western Sudan, because they often acted as interpreters or were assigned to look after the visitor and to protect the chief's interests. By having a congenial and perceptive agent in constant contact with the visitor,

1 Park, The Travels, p. 213.

2 Soleillet, Voyage, p. 407.

a headman could stay well-advised of his guest's movements and activities. Some sixty-five years after Mungo Park passed through, certain jeliw of Segou made a great impression on Mage, and he wrote brief sketches of them. One of the griots with whom he became acquainted was Sountoukou, whom he described as a captif who was the most intimate friend of Ahmadu, the Tukulor ruler of Segou and the son of Al-hājj Umar.¹ Sountoukou was originally from Futa Jalon, son of the griot of the ruler of Tamba, who submitted to Al-hājj Umar in about 1853.² At that time the child Sountoukou was taken as a companion for the conqueror's son Ahamdu.³

Meeting Sountoukou more than a decade later, Mage declared that although he was both a captive and a griot, he was truly "le plus grand seigneur de Ségou". Not only was his house situated next to that of Ahmadu, but it had a quality of neatness and taste that matched the griot's dress and the gentleness of his manners. The Frenchman was impressed that contrary to the usual habits of griots, Sountoukou never asked for anything, but brought him gifts instead.⁴ Aside from his companionship to Ahmadu, it is not clear what this griot's functions were, but the fact that he had joined Ahmadu's company as a captive of war obviously did not have a negative effect on his status, which is consistent with what

1 Ahmadu succeeded his father at Segou in 1864 and ruled until 1893.

2 B.O. Oloruntimehin, The Segu Tukulor Empire (London, 1972), pp. 68-69.

3 M.E. Mage, Voyage dans le Soudan occidentale (Sénégambe-Niger) 1863-1866 (Paris, 1868), p. 226.

4 Mage, Voyage, pp. 307-08.

we have learned regarding the fate of members of the nyamakala class who were on the losing side of a battle. Skilled artisans and griots escaped slavery, because they simply entered the service of the victorious chief and continued to practise their customary trades.¹ In the case of Sountoukou, he apparently acquired more wealth, power and prestige than he would have had if he had never been captured in war.

The fact that the Bambara capital of Segou was ruled by the Tukolor when Mage was there, made a considerable difference in the makeup of the local society he observed. Mage's host was a Tukolor griot named Samba Farba, whom the Frenchman described as an honest man who had been to Senegal as well as to all the stations of the Niger. Mage was as impressed by Farba as he was by the latter's friend Sountoukou, because Farba never solicited gifts from him. Indeed, Mage declared that Samba Farba was one of the people of his journey whom he remembered with the most pleasure.² Though there is unfortunately no record of what the griots thought of Mage, he reported that both Sountoukou and Samba Farba were distinguished in appearance and manner, and that when he was introduced to them they were both dressed in gold embroidered red tunics and silk-lined boubous, with leather sandals and enormous white turbans.³

1 Interview with Mamary and Lassana Kouyaté at Kolokani, Mali, August 9, 1975.

2 Mage, Voyage, pp. 307-08. Thirty years later when Rançon was in the Niger Bend country he described his griot host in very similar terms; see A. Rançon, Dans la Haute-Gambie (Paris, 1894), p. 78.

3 Mage, Voyage, p. 226.

Privileged as these griots were, they were not unique in the Segou of Mage's time. A third griot with whom he was well acquainted was Diali Mahmady, a Manding jeli, probably Bambara. Reliable eyewitness accounts of a particular griot's activities are extremely rare, but Mage fortunately recorded some relatively detailed observations about the enigmatic Diali Mahmady.¹ Mage describes this man as an exemplary member of the jeli class, willing to sing for anyone at any time and prepared to play the kora² throughout an entire journey, provided he was well paid for it. Diali Mahmady impressed Mage with his intelligence and by the fact that he had visited Sierra Leone, understood some English, and had a taste for luxury that was reflected by his house. Mage had the impression that Diali Mahmady was the wealthiest griot in Segou,³ at a time when griots were evidently flourishing in the service of the Tukolor regime and various local chiefs. Looking back to that period and to the time of the Bambara dynasties before it, a distinguished jeli of present-day Segou says, "In those days to be a jeli was like gold".⁴

Though Diali Mahmady was wealthy and privileged, an anecdote preserved by Mage makes it clear that there were definite limits to what he could get away with. Mage tells how on one occasion

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- 1 The name 'Diali' derives from the occupational term jeli. Distinguished griots and skilled craftsmen of the artisan classes (nyamakalaw) often took the occupational term as a proper name. Nowadays, 'Diali Mahmady' would be spelled something more like 'Jeli Mamary'.
 - 2 The most complex of the griots' stringed instruments, a 'harp-lute' of twenty-one strings.
 - 3 Mage, Voyage, pp. 307-08.
 - 4 Tahiru Bambira, Appendix I, p. 318.

Diali Mahmady was wandering the streets of Segou at the head of a band of griots that included his wives, playing from door to door and soliciting handouts. Along the way they met an elder named Alpha Ahmadu, upon whom they turned their attention. The elder reproached the jeli for the lack of dignity in his conduct, reminding Diali Mahmadi that as Al-hājj Ahmadu's official interpreter in dealings with the Bambara, it was not fitting for him to beg in the streets with wives who would be kept at home if he were a good Muslim. In response to the elder's reprimand, Diali Mahmady began to rail at him, loudly and publicly heaping on the abuse and ridicule. Although it was fairly standard procedure for a griot's praises to turn to abuse when he found no reward forthcoming, the elder was furious at this one's behaviour, and he complained to Al-hājj Ahmadu who immediately issued an order to seize Diali Mahmady and cut his throat. Knowing he was in the wrong and aware of his probable fate, the jeli sought refuge with the man he had insulted, imploring his forgiveness, and the elder succeeded in getting the punishment reduced to fifty lashes.¹

The material on Diali Mahmady indicates that he was more than just an impetuous griot who on one occasion overreached the limits of his privilege. Discussing the griot role during the Tukulor conquest of Segou, Bérenger-Féraud maintained that griot influence could be seen in any nineteenth-century sudanic political movement, because they functioned as couriers or even diplomats during the most crucial negotiations, and as spies during times of war.²

1 Mage, Voyage, p. 342.

2 Bérenger-Féraud, 'Étude', p. 276.

Such duties were griot specialities because they involved the art of speech, and as mentioned earlier, griots were supposed to be physically inviolable in time of war so they could move safely from one side to the other. That Diali Mahmady appeared to Mage in 1864 to be the wealthiest griot in Segou, and that he served as 'interprete officiel d'Ahmadou pour le Bambara' suggests that if any griot at that time was involved in political intrigue, it may well have been him. The order to have Diali Mahmady's throat cut after insulting the elder in the street seems harsh considering the nature of the crime, which essentially amounted to nothing more than behaving as any griot might. It is probably relevant that at the time of the street incident with Alpha Ahmadu who, incidentally, may have been a member of Al-hājj Ahmadu's staff,¹ Diali Mahmady had already been restricted from leaving the city. Though Mage does not give the reason, we are told that on at least two occasions the griot had attempted to leave in spite of orders to the contrary, and as a result had become a virtual captive as far as his freedom of movement beyond the city was concerned. Moreover, his earlier attempts to leave had been regarded as acts of treason, and at the time of the street incident the griot had already been spared his life by an act of clemency.² Perhaps this explains the harshness and abruptness of the later sentence by Al-hājj Ahmadu, who by that time may well have been out of patience with

1 Mage simply identifies Alpha Ahmadu as an elder, but he may have been a very important person. Al-hājj Umar had a brother named Alfa Ahmadu (Oloruntimehin, The Segu Tukolor, p. 70), and this was also the name of one of the military leaders Umar brought with him from Kaarta to aid in the conquest of Segou, then sent back to Kaarta after the campaign (Oloruntimehin, p. 150).

2 Mage, Voyage, p. 343.

Diali Mahmady. However, there remains the question of why the griot's attempts to leave Segou were regarded as treasonous, an attitude that suggests there was more going on with Diali Mahmady than is immediately clear.

If Diali Mahmady's efforts to leave Segou were interpreted as political crimes, it seems likely that the issue was related to the security of Al-hājj Ahmadu's regime, which was not very strong at the outset. When his father Al-hājj Umar attacked Segou in 1861, he did so against the wishes of the Muslim rulers of Masina who had hoped to add Segou to their own sphere of influence, and had been intensifying their efforts to convert the Bambara to Islam.¹ Thus, not only did Al-hājj Umar's Segou campaign place him in conflict with Masina, but he had to directly attack other Muslims in order to capture the town. Though Umar held the power in the Bambara empire for a time,² his was never a popular regime, and when he was killed in 1864, his son and successor Ahmadu was left in a precarious position. Inexperienced at governing,³ Al-hājj Ahmadu initially did not have the authority of his father, and when Mage was at Segou in 1864 the chiefs who ruled the provinces of his father's empire had become relatively independent.⁴

1 John Ralph Willis, Al-Hājj Umar b. Sa'id al-Fūti al-Tūri (c. 1794-1864) and the Doctrinal Basis of His Islamic Reformist Movement in the Western Sudan, Ph.D. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1970, pp. 214-17.

2 Oloruntimehin, The Segou Tukolor, p. 133.

3 Ibid., pp. 157-58.

4 J.O. Hunwick, 'The Nineteenth Century Jihads', in J.F.A. Ajayi and I. Espie (eds.), A Thousand Years of West African History (Ibadan, 1965), pp. 267-83, p. 280.

Although details of whatever part Diali Mahmady might have played remained obscure, the political climate at Segou during the time of Mage's visit was clearly ripe for the same sort of intrigue that had earlier characterized the downfall of Turokoro Mari (1854-59), who was the last Bambara ruler but one before Al-hājj Umar conquered Segou. Filtering through various sources is a story about Turokoro Mari's chief griot, who seems to have been acutely aware of the Segou Bambara's inability to withstand Al-hājj Umar's forthcoming campaign against them, and who wanted to ensure his own continued well-being under a future Tukulor regime. This griot is never named, and if it were not for the testimony that he did not survive his final intrigue, it might be thought that he and Diali Mahmady, who himself courted disaster on more than one occasion, were one and the same. Though they apparently were not, the story provides one of the best available examples of a griot's involvement in political intrigue.

Coming to us as it does in several versions, the story resembles an oral tradition. According to Bérenger-Féraud's sources, Turokoro Mari retained some pagan inclinations, but had been converted to Islam and was interested in negotiating for peace with the menacing Al-hājj Umar. Unsure of how to contact Umar, Turokoro Mari assigned his chief griot and confidant to carry a message to him. The way Bérenger-Féraud tells it, the griot was intimidated by reports of Al-hājj Umar's cruelty, so instead of going himself, he took into his confidence a military chief named Tierno Abdoul. Tierno Abdoul carried a message to Umar, to the effect that he and the griot looked forward to giving Umar their

support upon his taking power at Segou. This, we are told, made it impossible for Turokoro Mari to negotiate a treaty with Al-hājj Umar, and the Bambara ruler was subsequently killed in one of several small riots fomented in Segou by the chief griot and Tierno Abdoul.¹

Delafosse's version of this episode says nothing about a griot, claiming instead that it was Turokoro Mari himself who sent Tierno Abdoul to Al-hājj Umar with a message of friendship. As a result, Turokoro Mari was accused of betrayal by Kégué Mari who, though Delafosse fails to identify him, was a brother of Turokoro Mari. Turokoro Mari was executed and replaced by his brother Ali² (Ali Diara 1859-61),³ who was defeated by Al-hājj Umar in 1861.

There appears to be some truth and some fiction in each of these accounts. Mage says Turokoro Mari first received a communication from Al-hājj Umar, so the Bambara ruler responded,

1 Bérenger-Féraud, 'Étude', pp. 276-77.

2 M. Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger (Paris, 1912), Vol. II, p. 312.

3 For the dates of the Bambara rulers of Segou see L. Tauxier, 'Chronologie des rois Bambaras', Outre Mer, 2 (1930), pp. 255-66, p. 263.

using Tierno Abdoul as a messenger.¹ Mage, who personally met Tierno Abdoul later, identifies him as a Tukolor² and says that at the time of the incident in question he had been living in Segou for some time. We are told that when Tierno Abdoul returned from delivering Turokoro Mari's message to Al-hājj Umar, he collected his household and went back to Futa to join Umar. It was at this point, according to Mage's relatively detailed account, that the chief griot sent with Tierno Abdoul a message to Umar saying he looked forward to the Tukolor leader becoming master of the Bambara country, and that when the day came, to remember the griot who had pledged his loyalty to him. However, according to Mage's sources, when Umar did take Segou, the griot at first fled to Masina, leaving a wife to the mercy of Umar's forces. She avoided harm by mentioning the name of Tierno Abdoul, and when the griot saw that Umar was able to stand his ground in the face of attacks from Macina, he returned and presented himself to the Tukolor chief. The griot was well received, and when his talents

1 Descriptions of Turokoro Mari's communication with Al-hājj Umar probably place undue emphasis on this as the reason why the Bambara ruler was executed and replaced. While it was certainly a factor, any study of the downfall of Turokoro Mari must also consider the fact that from early in his reign he was in conflict with his brothers and with the people of Segou. Charles Monteil recorded several bizarre incidents involving military moves by Turokoro Mari against his own people. In one of these he attacked his own brother, Kégué Mari, at Masala but was thwarted when certain warrior factions who were weary of his fratricidal inclinations loaded the weapons of both besieged and attackers with blank cartridges. Another time Turokoro Mari dressed his son Baji in the garments of his famous father Monson, ordered the troops to accompany the son, and told him to attack Segou. According to Monteil, such things had already caused much discontent in Segou by the time Turokoro Mari added to it by sending valuable gifts to Al-hājj Umar, along with one of his sons for an Islamic education. Charles Monteil, Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta (Paris, 1923), pp. 99-100.

2 Mage, Voyage, p. 226.

at praising were revealed to Umar, he was given a house, horses and slaves. Later, when Umar left to attack Masina, instead of accompanying him, the opportunistic griot elected to stay at Segou with Umar's son Ahmadu, where, evidently feeling secure, he abided quietly for a time. However, at the earliest signs of Bambara rebellion against their Tukulor conquerors, the griot once again sought to ensure his own position in the event of a change of government. He began to send information about happenings in Segou to rebellious Bambara chiefs, but his activities were observed by those he was betraying, which was to prove his undoing.¹

None of the events to this point eliminate the possibility that this unnamed griot of various earlier intrigues and the one Mage knew in Segou as Diali Mahmady were one and the same. On the contrary, what we know about Diali Mahmady fits the profile of the other griot very well. As Al-hājj Ahmadu's interpreter on Bambara matters, Diali Mahmady could not have been in a better position to send information to the Bambara. Furthermore, Diali Mahmady's extraordinary wealth matches the description of the house, horses and slaves given the other griot by Al-hājj Umar. That the traitorous griot had been observed sending messages to the Bambara would explain why Diali Mahmady was so mistrusted that his earlier attempts to leave Segou had been interpreted as treasonous acts punishable by death, and it would also account for Al-hājj Ahmadu's order to cut Mahmady's throat when the elder complained about the griot's aggressive begging in the street. Unfortunately,

1 Ibid., p. 246 and p. 246, n. 2.

the continuity of this as a historical sketch of events in the life of a single nineteenth-century jeli of Segou is destroyed by the denouement of Mage's version of the tale of the treacherous griot. According to his sources, the griot continued sending information about Tukolor activities in Segou to the Bambara, until Sansanding was in revolt. Learning that his spying had been discovered, the griot fled toward Bamako, but was pursued and executed by Al-hājj Ahmadu's men.¹ If this account of the traitorous griot's fate is accurate, it means he and Diali Mahmady could not have been the same person. Nevertheless, the fact that Al-hājj Ahmadu had previously experienced treachery from another influential jeli could still explain his mistrust of Diali Mahmady and the severity of the penalties levied on him for minor crimes.

The sources yield no positive sightings of Diali Mahmady after Mage's time, but there are some references to prominent griots of Segou that could have been him. If Diali Mahmady was, as it seems, involved in some intrigue during the early days of Tukolor rule in Segou, the later sightings of a griot who very much resembles him in name and occupation indicate that after Al-hājj Ahmadu stabilized his government, Mahmady may have settled down to a long career on Ahmadu's staff. Fourteen years after Mage's visit, Soleillet arrived in Segou to find a Manding jeli serving as Ahamdu's chief spokesman, whose name he recorded as Yalli Ahmadi.² This is within the range of variations on the

1 Ibid., p. 246, n. 2.

2 Soleillet, Voyage, pp. 397, 402-03. When Bayol was travelling in the Niger Bend country in 1880, he was accompanied for a time by a Segou griot called Diali (J. Bayol, 'Voyage au pays de Bamako', Bulletin de la Société de Géographie sér. 7, 2 (1881), pp. 125-163, p. 159).

name Jeli Mamary or, as Mage wrote it, 'Diali Mahmady', although any prominent griot might have been called 'Jeli', and sudanized versions of 'Muhammad' (Mamady, Mamary) were very common among Muslims.

Mage mentions nothing about Diali Mahmady's size, but describing the chief of Ahmadu's griots, Soleillet says Yalli Ahmadi was a 'geant noir', a Malinke who spoke some Wolof and seemed surprised that Soleillet did not.¹ The description of Yalli Ahmadi's manner of dress suggests that like Diali Mahmady he favoured a military style,² but there is no satisfactory evidence that these two jeliw were the same man. Twenty years after Mage's visit Al-hājj Ahmadu was still in command at Segou, and several colonial observers noted that among his informal group of advisers was a Muhammad Djelia,³ which can be taken as yet another variation on Jeli Mamary, because 'Djelia' (jeliya) means the condition or occupation of being a griot.⁴ Also reminiscent of the early days of Tukulor dominance at Segou is the name of a Tierno Abdoul in the list of Ahmadu's informal councillors in 1887,⁵ so there is a possibility that both Diali Mahmady and the man who carried Turokoro Mari's message to Al-hājj Umar had long careers with the Tukulor government at Segou.

1 Soleillet, Voyage, p. 397.

2 Mage, Voyage, pp. 307-08; when Mage left Segou, Diali Mahmady gave him twenty-eight pieces of gold so the Frenchman could send him back a pair of epaulets, a dress uniform, a cocked hat, and polished shoes.

3 Oloruntimehin, The Segou Tukulor, p. 159.

4 See H. Bazin, Dictionnaire Bambara-Française (Paris, 1906, reprinted 1965), p. 159.

5 Oloruntimehin, The Segou Tukulor, p. 159; the councillor's name was recorded as Tierno Abdul Qadri.

Chapter II

Secondary Oral Artists and Others:
Non-jeli 'Griots' in the Manding Hierarchy

'Guirots' and 'Jallikeas' were not the only 'singing men' met by early foreign visitors to the Western Sudan. Dispersed among the socially stratified Manding farmers and Fulbe herders, whose symbiotic relationship involved considerable intermingling of the two cultures, were a variety of people who performed in different phases of the oral arts. Certain blacksmiths (Manding numuw) were observed strumming six-stringed harp-lutes and praising the deeds of hunters,¹ weavers were heard chanting genealogies, some of the most skilled orators and musicians proved to be something other than jeliw, and a rag-tag assortment of individuals were seen capering in the streets and soliciting, through random praise or abuse, handouts from passersby.

With the colonial era came opportunities for more detailed observation, and it was noticed that there were a number of indigenous terms to describe various categories and degrees of specialization in the oral arts. It was observed, for example, that some musicians who were called mabow functioned in Bambara society as well as Fulbe, certain Bambara orators were known as funew, and some street performers were referred to as gaulow, regardless of whether they spoke Wolof, Fulfulde, or Bambara.

1 The Manding oral artists who specialize in celebrating the deeds of hunters in music and song are called donso ngoni folaw (players of the hunter's harp-lute), and are often of blacksmith lineage. They and their art deserve a chapter to themselves and will be reserved for future writings.

While these terms were somewhat more precise than the all-embracing 'griot', a comparison of early travel journals, colonial reports, and modern ethnological works reveals that the meanings of these and related terms varied widely from one place to the next. In a contemporary study of griots in the Bambara social system, Zahan notes that the meaning of terms describing various types of oral artist changes from one region to the next, so there are instances where at some time or other, the mabow, gaulow, funew and tyapurtaw all perform the same function as the jeliw. As a result, griots of another social complex are often mistaken for those of the Bambara.¹

While the present study is primarily devoted to the principal oral artists of the Manding, that is the jeliw, an attempt will be made here to trace some of the historical movements and change that occurred with the mabow, gaulow and funew, with a view to understanding how groups of dissimilar origins came to join the jeliw in the hierarchy of oral artists.² The tyapurtaw, a less significant group, will also be looked at briefly. Since some of the oral artist groups discussed are apparently of non-Manding origin, we will be obliged at times to stray from our central ethnic focus and refer to certain neighbouring cultures, especially Fulfulde-speaking groups such as the Fulbe and Tukolor. We will commence by reviewing examples of how the mabow, funew and other

1 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 128.

2 This overlaps somewhat with the subject of the development of Manding social stratification, which is the main topic of Chapter III, but here we are concerned with how certain outside groups became part of the hierarchy, rather than how the hierarchy evolved.

oral artists fit into the Bambara social system relative to the jeliw, who were the original griots of that culture. Collective group identities sometimes overlap, but for purposes of discussion they will be kept as separate as possible. In the case of the mabow there is a closely related group called the jawambe, whose historical background will be introduced first as a means of clarifying the mabow position. Each section will include a brief outline of how other writers have described the group in question, which will underline the inconsistencies in the meanings of terms in different times and places. The observations made here do not aspire to be comprehensive. Instead, they are offered as an initial step toward investigating the historical background of some secondary oral artist groups found in Manding society, in the belief that a better understanding of them will lead to a clearer picture of the main group, the jeliw.

Relative Social Positions

Social stratification is a characteristic of all Manding groups including the Bambara, though the distinctions between classes are not as clear now as they were precolonially. One way of describing the hierarchy in its most traditional form is to say it consisted of a large base of slaves (jonw), above which were the occupationally defined, endogamous groups (nyamakalaw) which included griots (jeliw), blacksmiths (numuw) and other artisans. Above the artisans, though rarely mentioned by writers as part of the hierarchy, were two categories of marabouts (moriw).¹

1 Hopkins, 'Maninka', pp. 99-128, p. 109. The two categories are (1) those whose talents enabled them to achieve the status of saints, and (2) their descendants as well as people with other claims to religious status.

Standing outside the lineage structure of the next highest classes but not restricted to endogamy like the nyamakalaw, the marabouts filled a specialized role analogous to the artisan specialities of the latter.¹

The upper levels of society were comprised of lineages and sublineages of those who were proprietors of the land and leaders of the people.² Some of these families traced their descent from the traditional ancestor and were thereby eligible to become chiefs, while others could make no such claim. Examples of the latter include families with an ancestor of unknown origin adopted into the lineage, or who were descended from a slave who had been gradually assimilated into the clan over many generations.³

Historically, within the hierarchy of oral artists, the most highly skilled specialists, whether they were orators or musicians, came from the ranks of the jeliw, who were the original socially differentiated bards of Manding society. In addition to the jeliw there was another group of Manding oral artists called funew, some of whom would rise to prominence from time to time. For example, Major Laing witnessed a 'king's Fimo' (funew) of obviously high status haranguing a crowd during a public appearance by their ruler.⁴ Nevertheless, there is no foundation for Zahan's statement that funew generally possess a more profound knowledge of their art than do the jeliw.⁵

1 Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 108.

2 For a comprehensive discussion of Manding lineage, see Hopkins, 'Maninka', pp. 99-103.

3 Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 103.

4 Laing, Travels, p. 251.

5 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 127.

Several other groups have occasionally formed part of the griot hierarchy in Manding societies, particularly in the case of the Bambara. In some cases these groups may have evolved out of historical events involving Manding peoples, such as wars in which large numbers were enslaved, or the Soninke dispersion following the destruction of ancient Ghana. But they subsequently became identified with other ethnic groups, especially the Fulbe, with some of them later entering, or perhaps re-entering, Manding society as extra-cultural additions to the social hierarchy. At least partially employed as musicians, praise-singers or street performers, these groups have come to be identified as griots along with the jeliw and funew. Before discussing individual groups that have shared griot duties with the Bambara jeliw, it will be useful to look at examples of some hierarchies in which they have appeared.

In the Bambara populations where they have performed as griots, the mabow probably rank next after the funew in social status, with the jeliw occupying the highest level of oral artistry. Zahan emphasizes the mabo singing skills,¹ but they have been highly versatile, and as has been the case with many nyamakalaw groups, within certain limits their occupation has depended on the demand. Next down the social scale would be the gaulow. Historically they have been particularly brazen street performers who took great liberties with the language and forced their praises on people as a means of extracting payment,² although in present-day Mali there

1 Ibid., p. 127.

2 Ibid., p. 128.

are gaulow who are serious students of music and tradition. At the very lowest level are a group called the tyapurtaw, to whom the term 'griot' is very loosely applied. They have usually been described as entirely shameless folk who cavorted nude in public and committed outrageous acts to draw attention to themselves.¹

In contrast to these griots' positions vis-à-vis Bambara jeliw and funew, we have a hierarchy of the same oral artists, whom Cremer found in one branch of Fulbe society. In this case the gaulow² held the lowest status, being much despised and feared. Ranking just above them were the tyapurtaw,³ who were somewhat less despised and were allowed to marry into blacksmith families. Next up the scale were a group called galabé (sing. galabo),

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- 1 Zahan (*La dialectique*, p. 128) also describes an obscure group called surasegiw, who he claims resemble the gaulow, while some of them are woodworkers. His Bambara informants said this group is related to the segiw, who are highly specialized makers of wooden utensils. The name surasegiw literally means 'ejected' (sura) from the segiw. Whether this is an indication of how they arrived at their present status remains to be seen. Zahan has a note (p. 128, n. 7) that according to unverified reports, among the Berber-speaking 'Moors' (Bambara surakaw), the surasegiw are woodworkers and griots. This is not a common group in the Bambara social system, and it is possible that a group of these artisans from present-day Mauritania settled with the Bambara. Many suraka griots of Mauritanian Berber groups have done so, though after several generations they tend to be assimilated into the ranks of the jeliw, losing their previous identity.
- 2 The Fulfulde plural of gawlo (gawlo) is aulube or awlube, but since our focus is on those in the Bambara hierarchy, we will mainly use the Manding plural w, except for groups like the jawambe, who do not appear in the Bambara social hierarchy.
- 3 An alternative spelling of this is cupurta (pl. cupurtaaaji), according to Yaya Wane, Les Toucouleur du Fouta Tooro (Sénégal): stratification sociale et structure familiale (Dakar, 1969), p. 61, n. 32.

griots who sometimes worked in leather.¹ Cremer says these were 'Futanké', or people from the mountains of Senegal. Above them in status were the jawambé,² described as endogamous Fulbe griots. Finally, there were the mabow,³ who performed in a manner equivalent to Bambara jeliw.⁴

Clearly, the social status of a group of oral artists could vary radically from one ethnic group to the next. Similarly extreme variations could also exist within the same ethnic group. Tauxier, for example, lists none of Cremer's griots in his version of the Fulbe hierarchy. Instead, he says the musicians, storytellers and praise-singers of the Fulbe were the bambabé or the niémbé.⁵ Gaden agrees with the first of these, listing wambabé and 'aulubé (sing. gaulo) as griots,⁶ and Labouret lists the same oral artists as Gaden.⁷ The wambabé (sing. bambado) are, in most contexts, the principal Fulbe griots.

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- 1 cf. Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 54; there could well be an etymological relationship between this and the Manding term garanke (leatherworker).
 - 2 The singular for this term, which does not appear in any Bambara hierarchy, is jawando. Wane (Les Toucouleur, p. 42) spells it jaawamBe (sing. jaawando).
 - 3 The Fulfulde plural is mabube (sing. mabo).
 - 4 J. Cremer, Matériaux d'ethnographie et de linguistique soudanaises t. I, Dictionnaire Français-Peul (Paris, 1923), pp. 53-54.
 - 5 L. Tauxier, Moeurs et histoire des Peuls (Paris, 1937), p. 141. He is in error with the term nienio, which is the Fulfulde equivalent of the Bambara nyamakala, the collective term for the artisan-griot level of the social hierarchy.
 - 6 H. Gaden, Proverbes et maximes Peuls et Toucouleurs (Paris, 1931), p. 12.
 - 7 H. Labouret, 'Les Manding et leur langue', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., XVII, 1934, pp. 1-270, pp. 106-07.

The variations between griot hierarchies in different Fulbe settlements lend support to the claims of indigenous informants that most, if not all of the groups included in the Cremer hierarchy are not of Fulbe origin. The mabow and gaulow also appear in the social hierarchy of the Senegambia Wolof which is similar to the Manding system, and Gamble, contrary to much indigenous opinion, attributes their origins to the Fulbe social complex.¹ It will be seen below that though the evidence is very sparse, it points toward Manding origins for several of the groups in question.

The Tyapurtaw

In company with the gaulow at the lowest levels of some griot hierarchies are the tyapurtaw, whose classification as 'griots' is questionable. In Manding society they seem to have been deposited at the bottom of the griot class, not because they are oral artists, but because oral artists in general have traditionally been identified as dependents, in that they produce no goods but rely on the support of others in return for the services they provide. At the highest level of the jeli vocation (jeliya) this is quite respectable, and some jeli families have served the families of their patrons (jiatigiw) for centuries. However, at the opposite end of the scale, the most unproductive, dependent members of society are those who do nothing but beg. In most cases this describes the tyapurtaw, who are additionally known for

1 Gamble, The Wolof, p. 44.

acting obscenely in public. In Manding society they are considered to be beneath even the gaulow, for some of the latter do play music, and are at least skilled in both flattery and verbal abuse.

There is little agreement in the sources, either oral or written, regarding the identity of the tyapurtaw, but it is clearly inappropriate to describe them as 'griots' if the same term is used for jeliw and other genuine oral artists. Zahan lists the tyapurtaw as the lowest class of Bambara griot, and he also identifies them as griots among the Fulbe.¹ Labouret says they are the most despised of artisan groups, but does not indicate their occupation.² In his dictionary of a Fulfulde dialect Cremer places a group called the sapurbé (sing. tyapurto) just above the gaulow in the griot order, claiming that they were somewhat less despised than the latter, and were allowed to marry with blacksmiths even though they were not Fulbe.³ At the bottom of a list of Malinke griots, Humblot lists a group he called Kiapourkia,⁴ which is probably a distortion of tyapurta. Remarking on the tyapurtaw (cupurtaaaji) of Tukulor (Fulbe) society, Wane characterizes them as recipients of the universal dole. He says they do not belong to any particular caste, but have extremely evil tongues which they exercise mercilessly, especially

1 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 128.

2 Labouret, 'Les Manding', p. 107.

3 Cremer, Matériaux I, p. 54.

4 P. Humblot, 'Du nom propre et des appellations chez les Malinké des vallées du Niandan et du Milo (Guinée française)', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., III-IV, 1918, pp. 519-540, p. 525.

against griots, who are their preferred victims.¹

A possible clue to tyapurta origin exists in references to a group known by the very similar term tiapato. In the nineteenth century the tiapatos were remembered as having been a warrior class affiliated with the Soninke as well as the Fulbe.² According to Arcin, the term tiapato referred, at the same time, to the Mauritanian descendants of a certain distinguished military leader named Koli.³ There are no current indications of a warrior vocation for the tyapurtaw, and the indications are that if such was ever the case, at some point they must have suffered a definitive defeat. The testimony of a Malinke informant who claims that more recently the tyapurtaw were an enfranchised slave group,⁴ suggests that they may have originally entered Manding society as captives, an idea that gains support from their present status as pariahs.

The Gaulow

The situation of the gaulow differs from several other classes of oral artist, in that their status and role in western sudanic society does not appear to have changed from the time they were

1 Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 61, no. 32.

2 A. Arcin, La Guinée Française (Paris, 1907), pp. 261-62; J.L.M. Moreau, 'Notice générale sur le Soudan: 2^{ème} partie, ethnologique', 1897, Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-19.

3 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 262, n. 1. The specific reference is to the grand Conquérant Koli, who should not be confused with the Fa Koli who was a contemporary of Sunjata (see Chapters IV and V).

4 Interview with Yamuru Diabate, February 4, 1976.

first noticed by foreign observers. Whether they were temporarily lodging with Malinke or Bambara hosts (jiatigiw), wandering among the villages of sedentary Fulbe, or performing in the streets of Wolof communities, generations of gaulow have functioned as itinerant praise-singers, been regarded as mendicants, and relegated to the lowest ranks of the griot hierarchy. Though by virtue of their name, which is said to derive from an ancient Fulfulde term, they are most closely identified with Fulbe society, the gaulow are generally believed to have originated outside that cultural complex. In Fulfulde the plural of gaulo is 'awlube', which is thought to derive from 'awlude', meaning 'to stir up', 'excite', or 'agitate', and it has repeatedly been noted that this aptly describes the predominant mode of gaulo behaviour.¹

It is probably the gaulow, more than any other group, who are responsible for the often repeated description of griots in general as being feared and despised. Historically, the gaulow have had the reputation of being entirely lacking in modesty or shame, and of being extremely offensive in their efforts to extract payment for their 'services'. The jeliw, who took pride in their artistry, would skilfully praise and encourage their patrons and leaders by describing in music and song the heroic deeds of their ancestors, but for the gaulow, praising consisted of publicly shouting flattery or insults at perfect strangers until they were paid to stop.² Bambara gaulow are said to have been especially

1 Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 62; Labouret, 'Les Manding', pp. 106-07.

2 M. Delafosse, La langue Mandingue et ses dialectes t. II, Dictionnaire Mandingue-Française (Paris, 1955), p. 245.

brazen about exhibiting themselves nude and defecating in public.¹ Father Henry dismissed them as foul beings who were given to hurling their excrement at those who refused them handouts.² Traditionally, a griot will not solicit from anyone beneath him in social status. For example, a jeli would not perform for slaves, funew, mabow, gaulow, or any other nyamakalaw he considered beneath him. A gaulow, however, would beg from anyone regardless of their social status, which from the indigenous point of view, placed him just above a slave in the hierarchy. The gaulow have sometimes been compared to hyenas, because they would often travel in bands and attack their victims by surprise.³

Regarding their origins, the gaulow themselves, as well as other local informants, maintain that historically there were two distinct branches of their kind. One of these is remembered as having been located in the mountainous Futa region of Senegal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The gaulow say this branch was Islamized 'early', and a man named Guamli is recalled as an important ancestor. Many members of this western branch, two of whom were Yumafa Koro and Gaulo Sekou, are said to have accompanied Al-hājj Umar eastward on a military campaign into the land of the Manding. The other branch of the gaulow are said to have settled with Biton Kouloubaly, founder of the Bambara Segou empire, though nothing is said of their location prior to the early

1 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 128.

2 Father Joseph Henry, L'âme d'un peuple africain: les Bambara (Munster, 1910), p. 5.

3 Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 36.

eighteenth century. Ancestors who settled with Biton were Gaulo Dossu and his brother Kabini, and this 'Bambara branch' of the gaulow was late in converting to Islam.¹

An exhaustive investigation into gaulo history lies beyond the scope of the present work, but future lines of inquiry point in several directions. The obvious similarity between the term gaulo and the Wolof and Serer² gewel suggests the possibility, though it is admittedly a distant one, that one evolved from the other, a process that could have been facilitated by intertribal conflict. Such an event is recorded in a legend about the battle of Booborel between the Serer and invading Fulbe. According to this tradition the Serer were defeated, and some of those who fled to avoid death or enslavement became griots who were the original 'awlube (sing. gaulo).³ Another tempting line of inquiry, and one more directly applicable to the subject of Manding cultural history, is the possibility that there is some relationship between the gaulow and the freed slaves of ancient Ghana-Wagadu who, according to Charles Monteil, were called komon gallo.⁴ At least one oral source indicates that the komon gallo, who before their

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- 1 Interviews in Mali with Bubakar N'Diaye (formerly Nyung), February 3, 1976; Amady N'Diaye, February 14, 1976; Lassana Tounkara, February 16, 1976; Sekou N'Diaye, February 16, 1976.
 - 2 The Serer are neighbours of the Wolof, with whom they have exchanged some cultural traits. See Gamble, The Wolof, p. 97.
 - 3 Wane, Les Toucouleur, pp. 62-63.
 - 4 Charles Monteil, 'La légende du Ouagadou et l'origine des Soninké', Mélanges Ethnologiques (Paris, 1953), pp. 362-408, p. 403. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing if the term komon gallo was in use in ancient times.

enfranchisement had been state property, maintained a group identity and as such were among those who dispersed southward upon the demise of the Soninke state.¹

The Jawambe

The early history of the group known as mabow is entangled with that of the jawambe, so it will be advisable to identify the latter before attempting to sort out the confusion surrounding the mabow. At various times and places, different forms of the term jawambe have been used to describe an ethnic group, a lineage, and several occupational groups. Raffanel was puzzled by the diavandous, but concluded that they were a caste of Fulbe origin greatly resembling the griots, though held in less esteem.² Arcin found certain 'Diawando' among both the Soninke and the Fulfulde-speaking groups (e.g. Fulbe, Tukulor), and he described them with the 'Finanke Bamana' and the 'Selmbou Yolloff' as being of the weaver caste, though he noted that they hardly ever did any weaving. Arcin found that the Fulfulde-speaking peoples considered the 'Diawando' contemptible.³ Delafosse defined 'Diawambe' as both courtiers and weavers,⁴ and Cremer identified

1 R. Arnaud, 'La singulière légende des Soninkes: traditions orales sur le royaume de Koumbi et sur divers autres royaumes soudanais', in 'L'Islam et la politique musulmane Française en Afrique Occidentale Française, Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1912, pp. 144-185, p. 167; see also the discussion in Chapter V, pp. 203-05.

2 Raffanel, Voyage, p. 204.

3 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 261.

4 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, I, p. 135.

the dyawambe as endogamous Fulbe griots.¹ Other sources place them at a higher level of the social hierarchy. Gaden referred to the dawambe as 'nobles', though of inferior rank,² and Wane called them praisers and councillors at the lowest level of the proprietary class.³ Tauxier said the diawambe were traders, cattle-raisers and teachers, among other occupations,⁴ and Moreau described the 'Diawandos' as hommes d'affaires and intermediaries.⁵ According to Pageard it was traditionally prohibited for members of the Diawambe lineage to engage in artisan or griot activity,⁶ and Urvoy describes the 'Diawambes' as a branch of a Tukulor lineage who speak Fulfulde and are fanatical Muslims.⁷ Bertin despaired at placing the diawambe accurately within the Fulbe social scale, having found that while they were restricted from intermarriage with the higher proprietary ranks, neither were they allowed to intermarry with members of the artisan classes.⁸

1 Cremer, Matériaux I, p. 54.

2 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 12.

3 Wane, Les Toucouleur, pp. 31 and 33.

4 Tauxier, Moeurs, p. 140.

5 Moreau, 'Notice', ID-19.

6 R. Pageard, 'Note sur les Diawambé ou Diokoramé', Journal de la Société des Africanistes XXIX (1959), pp. 239-260, p. 239.

7 Y. Urvoy, Petit atlas ethno-démographique du Soudan (Paris, 1942), p. 25.

8 Jean Bertin, 'Étude sur les Toucouleurs du Bondou (Cercle de Nioro)', 1954, Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-51-10.

The variety of jawambe identities rivals the number of descriptions offered for the mabow, but one of the earliest references provides what could be an accurate explanation for this. From observations made between 1849 and 1855, Barth concluded that the 'Jawambe' had once been a distinct ethnic group who called themselves 'Zoghorán', but who were absorbed by the Fulbe and "reduced to the occupation of mere brokers". He says that in the sixteenth century they were still ethnically distinct from the Fulbe.¹ Barth's identification of the Diawambe as 'Zoghorán' is supported by Siré-Abbâs-Soh, who notes that in the East the 'Dyawambe' are called 'Dyogorane', and that this corresponds to 'Dyagarani' or 'Zaghrani' in the Tarikh es-Soudan.² The evidence in the Tarikh es-Soudan is consistent with Barth's statement that as late as the sixteenth century the Diawambe and the Fulbe were ethnically distinct. At one point we are told that in 1492-93, Sonni-Ali made an expedition to Gourma against two different forces, the 'Z.ghrānī' and the Fulbe,³ and there are several references to military events in 1591 involving the 'Z.ghrānī', where they are clearly regarded as a distinct ethnic group.⁴

1 H. Barth, Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa ... in the Years 1849-1855, Centenary Edition in Three Volumes (London, 1965), Vol. III, p. 112.

2 Siré-Abbâs-Soh, Chroniques du Fouta Sénégalais, translated by M. Delafosse and H. Gaden (Paris, 1913), p. 148.

3 Abderrahman al-Sa^cdi (wrote c. 1655), Tarikh es-Soudan, Arabic text and French translation by O. Houdas (Paris, 1911, reprinted 1964), p. 116.

4 Tarikh es-Soudan, pp. 223, 229, 243, 253, 284.

On the question of Jawambe origins, Siré-Abbâs-Soh recorded a tradition that the Jawambe were engendered by an ancestor named Kinānata, of a village called Kofā, located 'à l'est du Tagant', where his descendants lived for a long time in company with the Fulbe. At some point a famine caused the Jawambe to disperse in several directions, with some moving toward Masina, and others into Manding country. It was subsequent generations of the latter group that found their way to the Futa region.¹ If the sources of Siré-Abbâs-Soh were accurate, it would indicate that other traditions suggesting Kaarta origins for the Jawambe² stem from recollections of one of the groups that emigrated from Kofā to the Manding country.

Not necessarily incompatible with the above tradition is a legend of Jawambe origin that implies a very early Soninke affiliation. This story tells how, in the time of Muhammad, a daughter of the ruling dynasty of Wagadu (ancient Ghana) married a Muslim who had come there from the Middle East.³ She bore four sons, each of whom was destined to become an ancestor of a Fulbe lineage. These infants began to spontaneously speak a language different than either Soninke or Arabic, which led to a decision by their father, Wakbatu ibn Yacer, to return to the East for news of the Prophet. Before leaving, ibn Yacer told his wife that if

1 Chroniques, pp. 146-48. He cautions that Kinānata should not be confused with an ancestor of Sunjata by the same name.

2 Bertin, 'Étude', ID-51-10.

3 The claim to middle eastern origins in Manding tradition is discussed in Chapter IV. On the identification of Wagadu with ancient Ghana see Chapter V, p. 202, n. 1.

he did not return within a reasonable period of time, he wanted her to remarry, and that in choosing a husband, she must marry only a man who went far from the village into the bush to relieve himself. When ibn Yacer failed to return, his wife followed his directions, and the man who went farthest into the bush to defecate turned out to be her husband's slave. So she married the slave, whose name was Diawa, and their offspring became the ancestors of the 'Diaouandos'.¹ It is doubtful that there is any historical basis whatsoever to this legend, but it merits acknowledgement as an ingenious bit of folklore explaining a jawambe social status that has them straddling the barrier between the proprietary and artisan classes.

Barth's assessment of the Jawambe, as an ethnic group that was absorbed by the Fulbe and later reduced to a subservient role as the jawambe artisans and griots, appears to have merit, though there were some Jawambe lineages that remained in the lower proprietary ranks instead of being reduced to the artisan level. According to Bathily, at one point there were three principal 'Diawando' groups: the Diawandos, the Lahtimbés (slaves of the Diawando), and the Kida Mabos, from whom were descended griots known as 'Mabos'.² Bathily maintains that the griots known as

1 Arnaud, 'La singulière légende', pp. 152-53. Another version of this legend mentions an eastern connection, but says nothing of the Soninke or ancient Ghana; see M. Sidibé, 'Les gens de caste ou nyamakala au Soudan Français', Notes Africaines 81 (1959), pp. 13-17, pp. 15-16.

2 I. Bathily, 'Les Diawandos ou Diogoramés', Éducation Africain 25 (1936), pp. 173-193, p. 191; he identifies the 'Diawandos' as Tukulor stock, and he lists some twenty-four family names by which they are recognized (p. 173). Pageard ('Note sur les Diawambe', p. 241) claims they were divided into only fifteen families.

mabow are members of the Kida family who are of 'Diawando' stock that stemmed from two particular lineages.¹ This is in accord with Pageard, who found that a principal griot family connected from early times with the Jawambe was the lineage known as Mabo Aliou Kida. In his opinion, European writers have confused the mabow with the jawambe.² It appears that some mabow were griots of the Jawambe when the latter were still a relatively distinct ethnic group. Indeed, some mabow have claimed that their origins are the same as those of the Jawambe.³ Later, when the Jawambe were assimilated by the larger and more powerful Fulbe, some families maintained their independence, hence the above references to Jawambe as traders, teachers, and 'nobles' of inferior rank. Others were obliged to accept subservient roles, entering the artisan and griot classes as jawambe, where they shared or competed for certain tasks with the mabow.

The Mabow

The origins of the mabow are no less obscure than those of other types of griot, but we do know that by the sixteenth century they were a clearly differentiated occupational group within some sudanic social hierarchies. In 1550, the powerful Songhay ruler Askiyā Dāwūd (1549-1582) led a military expedition into the land

1 Bathily, 'Les Diawandos', p. 192.

2 Pageard, 'Note Diawambe', p. 239.

3 Bertin, 'Étude', ID-51-10.

of Bāgh.nā,¹ and he brought back from there a great many men and women singers called 'Mābī', settling them at Kagha in their own special quarter of the town.² It is interesting that these sixteenth-century mabow were oral artists, because by the nineteenth century, in some places the primary occupation of the mabow was weaving. Though he offers very little evidence to support his conclusion, Desplagnes was convinced that weaving was the primary mabo occupation. He believed they were originally an independent mountain tribe, part of which settled among the sedentary Fulbe as subservient weavers, while the rest of the group remained independent.³ However, that at least one major branch of the mabo group commenced its duties at the artisan level as oral artists, is attested by Gaden's note that the word mabade means 'to sing'. He concluded that in early times the primary duty of the mabube (Bambara mabow) was to encourage warriors on the eve of battle by chanting their genealogies and praising the heroic deeds of their ancestors.⁴

According to some writers, the mabow had more than one occupational speciality. Pageard remarks that the mabube were griots of the Fulbe, Tukulor and Diawambe, in addition to often

1 'Bagana' (Baghana, Bakunu) is the Mandinka equivalent of the Soninke 'Wagadu'.

2 Tarikh es-Soudan, p. 168. Bertin ('Étude') noted the presence of a mabo group of inferior status who were called askinobes, and who performed as griots for the Fulbe and Jawambe; it would be interesting to know if there was a connection between the askinobes and the 'Mabi' of the Askiya.

3 L. Desplagnes, Le plateau central Nigérien (Paris, 1907), p. 173.

4 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 323.

being skilled weavers,¹ and others have reported similar findings.² In one place Delafosse says that among the Fulbe the mabow were griots and weavers,³ but elsewhere he lists them as a caste of singers and musicians.⁴ Tauxier refers to the Fulbe mabow as weavers only,⁵ but Diagne distinguishes between the 'Maboubé' who are weavers and the 'Diawambe Maboubé' who are griots.⁶

Among those who say nothing about a weaving occupation for the mabow is Cremer, who describes them only as Fulbe griots.⁷ Rouch, doubtless following the Tarikh es-Soudan, identifies the 'mabe' of Timbuktu as a caste of Fulbe singers descended from slaves of the Askiya.⁸ Sidibe says the 'Maboube' are Fulbe griots.⁹ Zahan describes the Bambara mabow as a caste of griot singers, but says the Fulbe mabow are tanners and weavers, and those connected to the Tuareg are blacksmiths as well as griots.¹⁰

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- 1 Pageard, 'Note sur les Diawambe', p. 239.
 - 2 V. Monteil, 'Le Dyolof et Al-Bouri Ndiaye', BIFAN t. XXVIII sér. B, 3-4, 1966, pp. 595-636, p. 602; Bertin, 'Étude sur les Toucouleur', ID-51-10.
 - 3 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger III, p. 118, n. 1.
 - 4 Delafosse, La langue Mandingue II, p. 483.
 - 5 Tauxier, Moeurs, p. 141.
 - 6 P. Diagne, Pouvoir politique traditionnel en Afrique occidentale (Paris, 1967), p. 196.
 - 7 Cremer, Matériaux I, p. 54.
 - 8 J. Rouch, Les Songhay (Paris, 1954), p. 42; cf. Tarikh es-Soudan, p. 168.
 - 9 Sidibe, 'Les gens de caste', p. 15.
 - 10 Zahan, La dialectique, pp. 127-28.

It is obvious that in some societies mabow are weavers or artisans of other skills, while in others they function as griots, but it is less clear if reports of some of them being both griots and weavers are accurate.

In Fulbe society, all mabow, regardless of their ancestry or occupation, were among the lesser worthies held in contempt by the ruling lineages of herdsmen and warriors. This attitude is reflected in the Fulbe aphorism Ko 'Alla wari e ko fũire wari e Mábube foti, which means roughly, 'Stupidity kills as many mabube as a natural death'.¹

Though most sources imply that the mabow have the closest affinities with the Fulbe, mabow ancestry remains largely unaccounted for. According to Christiane Seydou, the mabow who function as griots among sedentary Fulbe claim to be of Manding origin,² and Gaden found that mabow weavers, also of the Fulbe, made the same claim, in support of which he offered some rather thin etymological evidence.³ However, Gaden also collected a tradition that emphasizes the importance of genealogy to mabow who claim Manding origin, in addition to which, it indicates a source of some of the confusion surrounding the term mabo.

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- 1 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 322. Compare another Fulbe aphorism that places the jawambe at the opposite pole of social opinion: Joyre ko jaawando jey, 'Intelligence is the lot of the jawambe' (Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 45).
- 2 Christiane Seydou, 'L'épopée Peule au Mali et ses rapports avec la culture Mandingue', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972, p. 4.
- 3 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 322.

According to Gaden's informant, when a traveller stopped in a village for the night and introduced himself as a mabo, the local mabow would welcome him, though if they did not immediately recognize the traveller, he would be asked to identify himself. But the question would be asked in a special way,¹ and if the traveller was truly a mabo, he would answer by chanting his own genealogy, as well as those of other mabow lineages with which he was familiar. The reason given for this custom is that there were also weavers of slave origin, and the mabow had a strong desire to be distinguished from them. It was said that a weaver of slave origin calling himself a mabo would not have understood the special question which, significantly, was phrased in a Manding dialect, rather than Fulfulde.² Thus the Manding phrase functioned as a kind of code, the proper response to which was the chanting of genealogies unknown to the uninitiated.³ These mabow may well have been the ones some Europeans have described as both griots and weavers. Actually, they were simply weavers of Manding origin who memorized their own lineages as a means of retaining their identity outside their native cultural environment. According to Gaden, singing or reciting his 'asko or genealogy was a special characteristic of certain mabo weavers. When a novice was serving his apprenticeship as a weaver, the master would teach

1 The mabube intone the question in a sing-song manner, using the special phrase, mu-le ... woni 'an?

2 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 322. Delafosse (La langue Mandingue II, pp. 516-17) lends support to this.

3 According to Wane (Les Toucouleur, p. 51), the distinction between mabube weavers and slaves who also weave was also maintained by referring to the slave weavers as maccuBe.

him the genealogy of his lineage. Gaden claims some mabow did specialize as genealogists, serving a number of distinguished Fulbe lineages, the implication being that they were weavers performing a griot function, rather than griots who doubled as weavers.¹

With regard to non-weaving mabow, Gaden noted that those in the Futa Senegal who were singers and musicians never did any weaving, and that they solicited gifts, which was something a weaver would not do. These singers were the 'Mabube sudu Pate' (mabube of the hut of Pate), which is to say they were descendants of a common ancestor named Pate. Gaden also mentions the presence of the 'Mabube Dawambe', who specialized in Jawambe genealogy, but he does not place them in a separate category from the other mabo griots.² More recently, Wane has clarified the position of the mabow or mabube in the Fulbe social context. He found that among the Fulbe people known as Tukulor, the overall mabo class is formed of three sub-groups which vary greatly in their respective roles. He says there is a clear distinction made between the maabuBe sanyooBe, who are strictly traditional weavers, and the singing and praising mabube who form the other two sub-groups: those who specialize in Jawambe genealogy (maabuBe jaawamBe), and those who specialize in Peul (Fulbe) genealogy (maabuBe suudu Pate).³

1 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 323.

2 Ibid., p. 323.

3 Wane, Les Toucouleur, p. 51.

As will be seen in Chapter III (p. 77), when they are described in the literature, these occupational categories often appear to be more rigidly structured than was actually the case in daily life. Fulbe and Manding griots of lowly status have been known to apprentice themselves to weavers as a means of improving their station in life, and it is said that upon mastering that vocation, the former griot would complete his change of identity by adopting the family name of his teacher, as well as the occupational title.¹

Recalling that Tautain once warned against confusing the name of the 'caste' with the vocational term, Arcin noted that although individuals belonging to the weaving group were known as 'Mabo', it was actually the word t'anawo that meant 'man who weaves'. He pointed out, moreover, that while gauilo and bambado described types of griots, bards were professionally named according to the instruments they played. The vocational names mentioned by Arcin are 'Litowo', 'Kodowo' and 'D'unowo'.² There is an obvious link between the last of these and the Manding term for 'drum', which is dunu, but it is also interesting to compare these names to those Bathily gives as the 'true Diawando clans': the 'Diawandos' (compare D'unowo), the 'Lahtimbés' (Litowo), and the 'Mabos Kida' (Kodowo).³ Bathily's 'Mabos Kida' are the above-mentioned mabube who are said to be descendants of the ancestor

1 Interview with Hamani Ba (a bambado) at Bebugou, Mali, February 25, 1976.

2 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 262.

3 Bathily, 'Les Diawandos', p. 191.

Pate. Bathily does not mention this ancestral name, but Leriche lists under ancient masculine names, 'Koda: S. de Pate',¹ which shows that Bathily's genealogy simply fell a bit short. The similarity between the three clan and professional names suggests that the clans may have originally taken their names from their occupations.

The descendants of Pate who are named Kida or Koda² and who have functioned as mabow griots were apparently dispersed over a wide area. Zahan reports that the family names of the mabow in Bambara country are 'Gise' and 'Kida'.³ According to Gaden, the Pate ancestor is not very obscure. He is said to have been the first to solicit the patronage of the Jawambe and was supposedly a contemporary of the Almamy Abd-el-Qader, which is to say he lived at the end of the eighteenth century.⁴ Though this merits further study, at this juncture it appears that griots of Pate stock were widely dispersed in the Western Sudan, and that they became affiliated with Bambara lineages as well as with ruling families of the Fulbe. It seems likely that it was griots rather than weavers who first came to be known as mabow or mabube, and the extensive travels of the Pate stock, among others, facilitated the wide distribution of the term.

1 A. Leriche, 'Anthroponomie Toucouleur', BIFAN XVIII 1-2 (1956), pp. 169-88, p. 183.

2 Wane (Les Toucouleur, p. 52) spells this name 'Kiide', and he says that whether a mabube weaves or sings, he will carry either this patronymic or one of nine others, including 'Gise', which along with Kida is the common name of Bambara mabow.

3 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 128.

4 Gaden, Proverbes, p. 323.

The Funew

As is the case with other occupational groups in the nyamakala level of Manding society, funew tasks have varied widely at different times and places. Though their primary, or at least most consistent function seems to have been as orators, they have been known to fill several other roles. Observing Manding funew in the 1880s, Tautain concluded that collectively they had no particular vocational speciality, but performed whatever tasks were not covered by blacksmiths, griots, or slaves. He specified that they often served as a chief's agents, collecting his taxes, carrying messages, or serving as guards and spies, with their women working as dyers.¹ Sidibe lists the funew simply as mendicants, without specifying an occupation.² Labouret places the funew on the lowest level of the nyamakala class, describing them as canoe-makers and calabash-menders who were as much despised as the tyapurtaw.³ Dieterlen says they were basket-makers,⁴ and two sources equate the Finanke (or funew)⁵ to the selmbou of the Wolof and the diawambe of the Fulbe. Of these, one identifies the three as belonging to a weaving class that hardly ever did any

1 L. Tautain, 'Notes sur les castes chez les Mandingues et en particulier chez les Banmanas', Revue d'Ethnographie t. 3 (1885), pp. 343-352, p. 345.

2 Sidibe, 'Les gens de caste', p. 14.

3 Labouret, 'Les Manding', p. 107.

4 G. Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan française', Journal de la Société des Africanistes t. XXV (1955), pp. 39-76, p. 40.

5 The Mandinka equivalent of funew is fina, and the suffix nke = people, hence 'Finanke' = fina people.

weaving,¹ and the other says they served as agents and diplomats.² Usually the funew have been identified with some form of the oral arts, as was the case with those encountered by Laing in 1825, who were very active and conspicuous as orators.³ In one place Delafosse describes them as religious mimes and magicians,⁴ and in another he refers to them as griots of inferior caste.⁵ Hopkins identifies the Mandinka funew (fina) as musicians and mimes,⁶ and Zahan says they are griots,⁷ as does Zemp.⁸ Camara describes them as a type of griot that plays no musical instrument,⁹ and Kaba says that among the Maninka of Guinea they are thought of as griots subservient to the jeliw.¹⁰

In The Gambia, the Mandinka funew role was evolved into an exclusively Muslim vocation. As Innes describes it, whereas a jeli (jalo) would attend upon a chief, a fino (pl. finolu) attends upon a Muslim scholar. The fino knows his patron's family

1 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 261.

2 Moreau, 'Notice', ID-19.

3 Laing, Travels, pp. 132 and 251.

4 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger III, p. 118, n. 1.

5 Delafosse, La lange Mandingue II, p. 204.

6 Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 106.

7 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 127.

8 H. Zemp, 'La légende des griots malinké', Cahiers d'Études Africaines 24, VI (1965), pp. 611-642, p. 627, n. 1.

9 Sory Camara, Gens de la parole: essai sur la condition et le rôle des griots dans la société Malinke, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Bordeaux, 1969.

10 Lansine Kaba, 'The Maninka-Mori of Bate, Guinea: A preliminary survey for research in ethno-history', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972, p. 6.

history, and is well acquainted with the Koran and with Islam generally: 'A fino's performance is usually of a homilistic nature, concerned with proper behaviour and supported by copious quotations from the Koran.¹ According to Darbo, they are fond of invoking the many names of Muhammad during their performances, and this in addition to their use of Arabic helps to maintain their reputation as scholars, especially among the older generation.²

Though somewhat less conspicuous among the Bambara and other Manding societies, the funew affiliation with Islam is nevertheless a general one, and is expressed in several traditions that connect their ancestry with Muhammad and his faithful companions. The funew claim their ancestor was named Fosana or Fisan, and though details vary, the main thrust of their legend of origin describes how Fosana provided food and lodging or performed some other service for Muhammad, thereby acquiring the Prophet's blessing for himself and all his descendants.³ In Chapter IV it will be seen that Surakata, whom the jeliw traditionally claim as their ancestor, was derived from an Arab traditionist named Surāqa ibn Mālik who lived at the time of Muhammad,⁴ and Fosana is the funew counterpart of Surakata. Darbo identifies Fisan as an Arab poet who lived at the time of the Prophet, though he offers no supporting evidence.⁵

1 Innes, Sunjata, pp. 3-4.

2 Seni Darbo, 'A Griot's Self-Portrait: The Origins and Role of the Griot in Mandinka Society as seen From Stories Told by Gambian Griots', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972, p. 2.

3 For more on Fosana see Chapter IV, pp. 127-28, and p. 128, notes 1 and 2.

4 For more on Surakata see Chapter IV, pp. 115-29.

5 Darbo, 'A Griot's Self-Portrait', p. 2.

The Fosana tradition has been the most current one of recent times, but there have been others that have also served to link the funé with the life and times of Muhammad. One of these was recorded by Humblot in what he called the 'Chronicle of the griot of Teliko'. This identifies the funé ancestor as having been of the Camara lineage, and it claims that the Camara descended from an Arab who delivered a letter announcing the arrival of Muhammad.¹ Curiously, all funew do in fact go by the name of Camara, though by no means are all Camara funew, for many branches of that lineage are of the proprietary class, and it is also one of the most common blacksmith patronymics. Darbo believes the joining of the Camara name with the funé occupation might have taken place in the region of Timbuktu, and that this would account for their early conversion to Islam and for the strong Arab influence on them. Following oral tradition, he places the funé conversion to Islam in the time of Sunjata, and suggests that at a period when high status was determined by feats of arms, if a branch of the Camara family converted to Islam and laid down its weapons for lack of a holy war, this would account for their reduction to the social level of griots.²

As an explanation for the close funé affiliation with Islam, Darbo's idea has merit, but it is based on very thin evidence and might lay undue stress on post-Islamic origins for the funew, something that is by no means clearly established. Moreover,

1 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 539.

2 Darbo, 'A Griot's Self-Portrait', p. 2.

it fails to take into account the heavy concentration of Camara folk in the region of present-day northern Guinea. Arcin believed the Camara were the earliest Manding-speaking people to occupy Guinean soil. He found that the Camara maintained their links with northern Manding antecedents by tracing their descent from an ancestor named Fina Silla Makha.¹ In the Sunjata tradition, Fina Silla Makha, also known simply as 'Silamakhan', is identified as an ancestor of the Camara,² and in one interesting episode, he serves in a distinctly griot-like, subservient capacity in company with Bala Faseke, ancestor of the Kouyate jeliw.³ Silamakhan is an important secondary figure in the Sunjata legend,⁴ and the association between him and the funew is interesting, because it suggests the possibility that an extensive pre-Islamic tradition of funew origin was current before the establishment of the legends linking them so emphatically with Muhammad.

In spite of the ties they have built up with Islam, there are taboos associated with the funew implying that historically they have been regarded as impure, in a sense reminiscent of the

1 A. Arcin, Histoire de la Guinée Française (Paris, 1911), p. 58.

2 M. Delafosse, 'Traditions historiques et légendaires du Soudan occidentale', in 'Renseignements Coloniaux et Documents', Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française et du Comité du Maroc, 1913, pp. 293-301, p. 300; M.-G. Adam, 'Légendes historiques du pays de Nioro', Revue Coloniale, 1903, pp. 354-372, p. 358.

3 Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 358-359.

4 See Chapter V, pp. 227-29.

custom of baobab interment for the jeliw.¹ As in the latter case, the restrictions are probably pre-Islamic in origin. It will be seen in Chapter IV (p. 121) that traditions of their own Islamic origins have been carefully cultivated by the jeliw and funew who, as bards, were in the best position to repress past events that were uncomplimentary to their kind. Nevertheless, vestiges of their respective pre-Islamic identities do surface from time to time. In stark contrast to the prestigious legend of the ancestor Fosana being personally blessed by Muhammad, is a tradition heard by Tautain, that attributes the origin of the funew (whom he calls 'Finankes') to an ancestor who was the offspring of a union between a corpse and a living person.²

It is not likely that this sort of legend would have been repeated in reference to any but the very lowest ranks of society, that is to say the slaves. If it was in fact addressed to the oral artists known as funew, it would indicate that they were at least partially descended from servile antecedents, which they probably were, in any case. However, the grotesque tradition of necrophilia heard by Tautain may not have been about the bards known as funew at all, but about albinos, whose lot at one point in Bambara history was an unfortunate one, to say the least. In addition to being the occupational term for a class of oral artist, the word funew in the Bambara language means 'albino'.³

1 One of the most emphatic taboos was that funew must never touch the bed of a member of the 'noble' or proprietary class.

2 Tautain, 'Notes sur les castes', p. 346.

3 Bazin, Dictionnaire, p. 214.

This is why, when Soleillet talks about the Founes of Segou, he describes people of abnormal skin colouration instead of griots or artisans.¹ It seems more likely that the tradition of funew descent from an act of necrophilism applied to the albinos rather than to the bards. In eighteenth-century Segou, albinos were in the unenviable position of being reserved for periods of crisis involving the kingdom, the ruler, the chiefs, or a family plagued by numerous deaths. At such times, albinos became the victims of ritual sacrifice.² The tradition of a union between living and dead could well be related to the mortal role played by albinos in rituals designed to curtail infant mortality, or to protect the Bambara state and its leaders from destruction. As the Bambara word for 'albino' and the term for a class of oral artist are one and the same, the possibility remains that there is a historical connection between the two, though the present study has so far failed to turn up any evidence to that effect.

If there should prove to be a historical relationship between funew sacrificial victims and the griots known as funew, it would explain why, of all nyamakala groups, their occupation has been the least clearly defined in Manding society as a whole. Whatever their original function may have been, if it became obsolete at some point, this could have left a clearly defined social group with no occupational speciality. Historically,

1 Soleillet, Voyage, pp. 420 and 463.

2 G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion Bambara (Paris, 1951), pp. 94-97. See also Tahiru Bambira, Appendix, pp. 410 and 414.

the basic components of the nyamakala level of Manding society have been the blacksmiths (numuw), the leatherworkers (garanke), and the griots (jeliw). At various times and places, when there have been enough prosperous patrons to support them, bards of other ethnic backgrounds have settled among the Manding and shared the griot tasks, as was the case at Segou with the Bambara Kouloubaly and Jara dynasties, as well as the later Tukulor regime. If the occupational identity of the newcomer was familiar to the people among whom they settled, they continued to be recognized by their previous vocational titles. This is how mabow and gaulow became part of the Bambara griot hierarchy. Other bards who went to Segou in search of a generous patron were, provided their musical and vocal skills were of sufficiently high quality, absorbed into the ranks of the jeliw.¹ However, the funew appear to have evolved as an occupational group within the context of Bambara society, as opposed to arriving from elsewhere with that occupational identity already defined. Yet it is difficult to see where they filled a specific need. They seem to have doubled as griots or artisans when there were already clearly differentiated groups who had been performing these tasks from ancient times. If, as the funew themselves would have us believe, their raison d'être commenced with the introduction of Islam into Manding society, this would account for the differentiation of a new nyamakala group, one dedicated to attending upon a rapidly expanding class of Muslim clerics.

1 Interview with Jeli Tahiru Bambira, February 27, 1976.

Historically, modes of occupational specialization have developed in Manding society according to demand. Where copper was produced, blacksmiths who turned to specializing in working with it became known as lorhow,¹ and another occupational group was added to the ranks of the nyamakalaw. Similarly, at the gold fields of Guinea, those who shaped the precious metal ceased being called numuw (blacksmiths) and gained the occupational title of siakiw.² Perhaps certain griots or other persons of low status saw a vocational opportunity in the service of Muslim clerics, and as specialists therein came to be known as funew. Although to assume a connection between the two meanings of the term may be entirely unjustified, it is interesting to speculate that if albino sacrificial victims or other unfortunates known as funew were among the first to embrace Islam as a refuge from a grim fate, this would explain how bards who chant the praises of Muhammad came to be known as funew.

1 Delafosse, La langue Mandingue II, p. 471.

2 Kaba, 'The Maninka-Mori', p. 6.

Chapter III

Nyamakalaw and the Origins of
Manding Social StratificationThe Problem of Dating

In attempting to assign a time period to the origins of social stratification among Manding-speaking peoples, it is difficult to be more precise than to say "it happened in the distant past". There are no written records pertaining to the beginnings of the hierarchical system, and oral sources addressing such ancient times reside in the realm of myth and legend. Manding-speaking peoples may have existed as tribal entities for several centuries before this kind of structure came to characterize their social system, and once the process was under way, further centuries may have elapsed before it spread throughout the western Sudan and developed into the form observed by the earliest foreign travellers.

Sociologists differentiate between the sort of ranking of people that is common in any society, and the more rigidly structured social systems, which they describe as 'stratified' or 'hierarchical'. It is believed that stratification is essentially a structural phenomenon that follows a distinct pattern wherever it occurs. On the subject of ranking, Tuden and Plotnikov are of the opinion that "All societies have a division of labor, evaluation of statuses, and unequal distribution of rewards and valuables, with the result that some form of social inequality is universal".¹ This results, say Tuden and Plotnikov, in the

1 A. Tuden and L. Plotnikov (eds.), Social Stratification in Africa (New York, 1970), p. 4.

ranking of individuals that occurs in all human societies, and it is something altogether different from stratification, which above all implies that a particular society has been organized into a layered structure.¹ According to this view then, when we speak of the beginnings of social stratification among the Manding-speaking peoples, we are referring to the time when they moved from the mere ranking of individuals that is found in any society, to the arrangement of specific hierarchical levels for the various social groups. It will be argued here that Manding social stratification as we know it was not derived from a single source during one time period, but that its development was influenced by a combination of cultural factors and historical events contributing to a process that may have taken several centuries to unfold.

Though we do not know what period could accurately be called 'prehierarchical', it seems clear that the beginnings of social differentiation, especially among artisans, would have been associated with certain technological advances and political developments. It is doubtful that before the general spread of iron technology² tool makers would have been obliged to congregate in separate groups, much less practice endogamy, and it is unlikely that prior to complex political systems there were powerful chiefs who required retinues of griots to sing their praises and otherwise

1 Ibid., p. 3.

2 It seems more appropriate here to refer to 'the general spread' of iron technology rather than its 'introduction', because it has not been satisfactorily proven that it was introduced rather than independently invented, and whatever its source, once it appeared, a considerable amount of time must have elapsed before it spread widely enough to have any significant sociological impact.

enhance their prestige. Instead, individual hunters or small bands of warriors would sing of their own exploits, perhaps plucking their bowstrings in accompaniment. Charles Bird believes that many of the praise songs later addressed to the mansaw (supreme chiefs) had their origins as hunters' songs.¹ Though hunters' societies may have been among the earliest organized groups, they never did become socially exclusive.²

Among the crafts, the spread of ironworking may have had something to do with early stages of social differentiation, and if so, this might help to determine the epoch involved.³ The introduction of iron as well as an agricultural revolution are thought to have been responsible for important early social developments,⁴ and a movement toward stratification may have been one of these. Nevertheless, iron technology probably existed in the western Sudan for several centuries before blacksmiths came to

1 Charles S. Bird, 'Oral Art in the Mande', in C.T. Hodge (ed.), Papers on the Manding (Bloomington, Indiana, 1971), pp. 15-23, p. 16.

2 Y. Cisse, 'Notes sur les sociétés de chasseurs malinke', Journal de la Société des Africanistes 34, 1964, pp. 175-226, p. 126.

3 Thurstan Shaw, 'The Approach Through Archaeology to Early West African History', in J.F.A. Ajayi and I. Espie (eds.), A Thousand Years of West African History (Ibadan, 1965), pp. 23-28.

4 N. Levtzion, Ancient Ghana and Mali (London, 1973), p. 11. At the L.S.B. Leakey Foundation symposium 'The Hand of Man' (San Francisco, California, February 17-18, 1979), archaeologists aired the view that post-neolithic technology developed only after the development of elaborate social structures, mythological beliefs, and kinship systems that controlled family relationships, made increased intelligence and abstract reasoning power an advantage. However, in this context an elaborate social structure does not necessarily imply a social hierarchy.

occupy a subordinate position in an organized social hierarchy.¹ According to Mauny, there is evidence of iron being worked as early as the fifth century B.C. in the Bauchi plateau area of Nigeria, and by 500 A.D., knowledge of ironworking had spread throughout West Africa. Though some stone implements were probably still in use, essential weapons and agricultural tools were of iron,² so it can be assumed that blacksmithing was current among the Manding by 500 A.D. Archaeologists are not yet certain if the large settlements in either savannah or forest even had centralized governments by the period between 500 B.C. and 200 A.D.,³ so regardless of how the technology was acquired, by the time Manding society had developed to the point where a hierarchical system fitted into the scheme of things, blacksmithing could have been a well established craft among sedentary groups that had access to iron deposits.

1 Though it has never been proven beyond doubt that iron technology was not independently invented in West Africa, most scholars have accepted the idea that it was introduced from elsewhere. See especially R. Mauny, 'Essai sur l'histoire des métaux en Afrique occidentale', B.I.F.A.N., sér. B., XIV, 1952, pp. 545-595; J.D. Clark, 'A Record of Early Agriculture and Metallurgy in Africa from Archaeological Sources', in C. Gabel and N.R. Bennet (eds.), Reconstructing African Culture History (Boston, 1967), pp. 3-24 and P. Huard, 'Nouvelle contribution a l'étude du fer au Sahara et au Tchad', B.I.F.A.N., sér. B., XXVI, 1964, pp. 297-397. For an argument in favour of the autochthonous invention of iron technology, see L.M. Diop, 'Métallurgie et âge du fer en Afrique', B.I.F.A.N., sér. B., XXX, 1968, pp. 10-38. For a description of the indigenous craft see C. Francis-Boeuf, 'L'industrie autochtone du fer en Afrique occidentale française', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F. XX, 1937, pp. 403-464.

2 R. Mauny, Tableau géographique de l'ouest africain au Moyen Age d'après les sources écrites, la tradition et l'archéologie (Paris, 1961), p. 316.

3 J.D. Clark, The Prehistory of Africa (New York, 1970), p. 215.

During the epoch in sahelian history that preceded the emergence of the state of Ghana by around 800 A.D. warrior chiefs were taking advantage of iron weapons and cavalry to assert their superiority over their neighbours.¹ Some of these leaders may have been obliged to acquire a portion of their weapons from culturally unrelated people who had long since settled near iron ore deposits and developed their blacksmithing skills. Perhaps this was the period when those interested in expanding their areas of influence began to officially differentiate between themselves and artisan groups. As expansionist ambitions were realized and a larger centralized state began to take form, the demand for weapons and tools would increase until it would be desirable for extra blacksmiths to be permanently attached to the dominant group, perhaps at a reduced social level. Referring to the central plateau area of the Niger Bend, Desplagnes (1907) believed that some invading groups lacked skilled artisans and that they recruited craftsmen from other cultures and organized them into groups that could be exploited.² Similarly, artisans could have begun to serve dominant groups when environmental conditions made it desirable for militarily superior nomads to settle among sedentary populations. Though the nomads sometimes imposed their authority over the sedentaries, the more advanced culture of the latter was adopted by the new rulers.³ On the other hand, depending on the region in question and the era involved, there must have been

1 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 14.

2 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 173.

3 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 8.

occasions when it was the invader who introduced iron technology, with the conquered group eventually acquiring previously unknown craft skills.¹ In any case, it seems that a likely era containing conditions favourable to the development of a social hierarchy would be the one prior to the ninth century which saw the amalgamation of sudanic chiefdoms into the state of Ghana or its predecessor.²

A tradition of Wagadu (ancient Ghana)³ that was collected by Leo Frobenius in 1909 contains archaic remnants of lore that may date from these seemingly turbulent times.⁴ The legend 'Gassire's Lute' supports P.J. Munson's theory that ninth century Ghana was not the first, but the second complex Manding society to exist in the area of southern Mauritania and western Mali.⁵ Though we cannot be certain that the relevant passages refer to the time of Munson's pre-Ghana Empire 'Tichitt Tradition' or thereabouts, 'Gassire's Lute' does contain the earliest available oral reference to differences in social status. According to

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- 1 See Mauny, 'Essai sur l'histoire des métaux', pp. 574-583.
 - 2 For archaeological evidence of an earlier complex political system, see Patrick J. Munson, 'Archaeology and the Prehistoric Origins of the Ghana Empire', J.A.H., 21 (1980), pp. 457-466.
 - 3 Though it has never been established beyond all doubt that the Ghana of Arab geographers and the Wagadu and Kumbi of oral tradition refer to the same Soninke state that flourished between the eighth and eleventh centuries, local oral informants are consistently of the opinion that the names 'Ghana' and 'Wagadu' refer to the same place.
 - 4 Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten, pp. 53-60.
 - 5 Munson, 'Archaeology', pp. 457-466.

this legend there were four different epochs in the history of Wagadu, the first of which was terminated by the vanity of Gassire, heir to the chieftancy of the Fasa clan. Gassire's consuming desire for power and fame cause him to squander the lives of seven of his own eight sons in battle, after which he is sent into exile and becomes a griot (Soninke 'gesere').¹ Though this was clearly a lowering of Gassire's status, the tradition does not claim this as the beginning of the social differentiation of bards. Earlier we are told that in another time, heroes of Gassire's clan battled warriors of inferior status:

When the kings of the Fasa lived by the sea, they were also great heroes, and they fought with men who had lutes and sang the Dausi.² The enemy's Dausi often struck fear into the hearts of the Fasa who were themselves great heroes. They never sang the Dausi because they were of the first rank, of the Horro, and because the Dausi was only sung by those of the second rank, of the Diare. The Diare fought not so much as heroes for the day, but as drinkers for the glory of the night.³

As noted earlier, all societies have evaluation of status which results in the ranking of people, so this passage does not necessarily describe levels of an organized social hierarchy. Moreover, there is the possibility that references to the lower status of singers of the Dausi could have been added to the original framework of the narrative at a much later date, though there are no textual indications that it was. If the legend

1 Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten, pp. 58-59.

2 Thought to be a heroic epic of Soninke oral tradition, only fragments of which remain.

3 Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten, p. 56.

'Gassire's Lute' is related to the time of Munson's 'Tichitt Tradition', the mention of differences in rank at the very least indicates that the kind of social consciousness that could engender a formal hierarchical structure was present among Manding peoples at a very early date. However, if the beginnings of social differentiation do date from times prior to ancient Ghana, this is not to suggest that by the time Ghana was flourishing it had a social hierarchy as complex as the one observed centuries later by early travellers in the land of the Manding. Many forces which probably contributed to the development of the hierarchy as we know it were still at work, especially at the level of the nyamakala groups.

The Question of Non-West African Origins

Almost as elusive as a reliable date for the beginnings of social stratification, is a solution to the problem of how this kind of system became part of Manding culture, for it was a process that combined a multitude of factors. In attempting to discover the origin of a social structure that is supposedly characterized by rigidity, one is confronted by the paradox of being repeatedly thwarted by factors, such as ethnic blending, which seem more characteristic of a relatively flexible system. From very early times there has been so much dispersion and intermingling of ethnic groups as well as changing of names and occupations, sometimes by entire village populations, that it is difficult to trace the history of any single group in order to discover how they came to occupy their particular niche in the

hierarchy. Indeed, it was the fairly constant movement of herders, traders, armies and refugees from man-made as well as natural disasters, combined with the crossing of ethnic boundaries, kinship lines and social barriers that helps to account for the presence of a stratified social system.

Though the present study focuses on the endogamous, occupationally defined griots and artisans, Manding social stratification did not necessarily evolve from the special status of these groups.¹ Manding society was stratified at all levels, so the origins of nyamakala and the origins of the hierarchy in general may not be synonymous. Each of the major levels of traditional Manding society - proprietors of the soil (tontigiw or horonw), griots and artisans (nyamakalaw) and slaves (jonw) - contained lesser groups occupying various degrees of status.²

Scholars giving passing attention to the origins of the Manding hierarchy have tended to distort the picture by focusing almost solely on the so-called 'castes'. For example, some writers have concluded that the practice of socially differentiating artisan groups must have originated outside West Africa. Murdock presumes that "long exposure to Arab influence" was

1 The Hausa and related peoples of the central Sudan also had complex social hierarchies, but except in the westernmost provinces, their artisans were not endogamous and occupied the second level with the wealthy merchants and peasant farmers. See G.P. Murdock, Africa: Its Peoples and Their Culture History (New York, 1959), pp. 143-44.

2 See Chapter II, pp. 36-39.

responsible for "the widespread prevalence of despised endogamous castes".¹ This view has influenced subsequent writers like Vaughan who, in a superficial study of 'caste systems' in the western Sudan, accepts Murdock's conclusion without question.² Launay believes "craft status systems" were not an "indigenous invention", but he is not convinced about the Arab influence. He suggests that this custom may have been 'exported' across the Sahara before the Arab invasion of North Africa, though he does not elaborate on the process.³

Not only do these arguments contain echoes of the so-called Hamitic Hypothesis that favours diffusion over independent invention of cultural advances, but they fail to take into account the ecological factors that would affect the development of certain culture traits among desert and savannah-dwelling peoples whether they occupied the Arabian peninsula, North Africa, or the West African sahel. An exhaustive treatment of ecological factors is beyond the scope of this project, but it should be observed that the harsh desert environment as well as that of the drought-threatened sahel may have had a good deal to do with the fact that social stratification characterizes the societies of many groups

1 Murdock, Africa, p. 76.

2 J.H. Vaughan, Jr., 'Caste Systems in the Western Sudan', in Tuden and Plotnikov, Social Stratification, pp. 59-92, p. 65.

3 R. Launay, 'Manding 'Clans' and 'Castes'', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, London, 1972.

who inhabit these regions.¹ For example, when the environment dictated that people of different cultural backgrounds, say, nomads and sedentaries, develop symbiotic relationships in order to increase their chances for survival, intermingling must have sometimes occurred to such an extent that people of one culture were absorbed by another. The former would adopt the language and other characteristics of the latter, but would fall short of obtaining social equality.²

In Murdock's argument that 'caste' systems were introduced to Africa by Arabs, he provides two examples in support of the opposite view:

The minimal development of social stratification among the ... Berbers contrasts sharply with the situation in those groups who have been politically subjugated by the Arabs and among those who have themselves subjugated indigenous Negro peoples.³

In the first place he indicates that there was already 'minimal' stratification in Berber society without strong Arab influence, and in the second he notes that while Berbers who were subjugated

1 See for example, J. Nicolaisen, Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg (Copenhagen, 1963); A.G. Gerteiny, Mauritania (New York, 1967); L.C. Briggs, Tribes of the Sahara (London, 1960). Herbert S. Lewis admonishes us that when considering the relation of pastoralism to African history, more weight must be given to ecology than to hypotheses that envision a relationship between race, language and means of subsistence. See 'Ethnology and Culture History' in C. Gabel and N.R. Bennet, Reconstructing African Cultural History (Boston, 1967), pp. 27-44, p. 41.

2 This is not to suggest that people were never entirely absorbed by another culture. Barth noted high status groups that were so completely absorbed by the Fulbe that their origins were included among the latter's ancestors (Travels, III, p. 111).

3 Murdock, Africa, p. 118.

by Arabs developed complex hierarchies, so did Berbers who themselves subjugated other peoples. Thus the significance here is not that there was a 'caste' system in Arab society when they subjugated some Berbers, but that once Berber groups had been sufficiently exposed to any other culture, they developed complex hierarchies of their own.

Similarly, Launay provides an excellent argument against his own statement that 'craft status systems' were not indigenous. He reasons that since these systems are absent from Manding-speaking peoples such as the Mende and Guro who emigrated early toward the forest,¹ social stratification must have come to the Manding after the emigration of these peripheral groups.² But he subsequently describes how a peripheral Manding group that emigrated toward the forest as recently as sometime between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries has been found to be losing some of its nyamakala characteristics, including the practice of endogamy.³ If movement into the forest belt by hierarchical Manding groups had something to do with them becoming undifferentiated, this would imply support for the idea that social stratification may have developed at least partially owing to the circumstances of a desert or savannah environment.

1 For the Guro, see Claude Meillassoux, Anthropologie Économique des Gouro de Côte d'Ivoire (Paris, 1964), and for the Mende see Kenneth Little, The Mende of Sierra Leone (London, 1951).

2 Launay, "Manding", p. 8.

3 Ibid., p. 10.

The question of how we can tell when we are dealing with diffusion and when we have a case of independent development has been one of the thorniest for anthropologists.¹ It will subsequently be shown that there were probably sufficient local factors to account for autochthonous development of a social hierarchy. Nevertheless, the intermingling of culturally diverse peoples has apparently been so important in the Manding type of social differentiation, that any exposure to other cultures, including Arab and North African, should not be ignored. Influences from north of the sahel doubtless figured in the evolution of the Manding social hierarchy as we know it. However, they should be considered not as the sole source, but as additional elements in a complicated process that must have blended a multitude of factors over a long period of time. The dynamic nature of the Manding social system makes it unrealistic to try to attribute it to any single source, and it will be argued here that while the Manding hierarchy was not exclusively a product of that culture, most of the forces that nurtured it were of the western Sudan.

The Hierarchy of Bambara Slavery

The manner in which slaves were distributed within the Bambara social structure of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Segou may reveal something about how the overall social hierarchy developed. During times of war, masses of new captives were introduced into

1 Daniel F. McCall, Africa in Time-Perspective: A Discussion of Historical Reconstruction from Unwritten Sources (New York, 1969), p. 82.

Segou, and this caused new categories of slave groups to evolve because a place had to be found in the social system for those who were not sold off or killed. As the number of slaves increased in Segou, their occupations became more diversified, and their organization became complicated and hierarchic.¹

The Bambara slave hierarchy at Segou was not typical, in that it was more complex than most, a condition that was one result of the military conquests of the powerful Kouloubaly and Diara rulers. One level of society, that is the previously established servile class, became flooded with extra people. Briefly, there were several slave categories, membership in which depended on the length of time the person had been a captive, or what duties he had been assigned. Newly captured slaves held a special temporary status that was also affected by the person's condition - free or slave - before the recent captivity. Many male captives served in a community association (tôn),² while others served in the fama's³ personal guard or in the army of Segou as sofaw.⁴ Some slaves were chiefs in these organizations, and individual rank

1 V. Paques, Les Bambara (Paris, 1954), p. 60.

2 For the history and function of the tôn see Charles Monteil, Les Bambara de Ségou et du Kaarta (Paris, 1924), pp. 290-299.

3 Fama is often translated as 'king', but a more accurate equivalent would be 'lord' or (literally) 'power'. Fama referred to the holder of the power of directing a lineage group, and if the lineage group held sway over a large town and the surrounding regions, the power could be considerable, as was the case with the famaw of Segou and Kaarta.

4 A literal translation of sofa would be 'horse master', which was the designation of grooms, though the term also referred to warriors in an established military organization.

depended upon such considerations as age, ability and experience. Slaves who were born in the master's house (wolosow) were distinguished from those captured in war or purchased. In contrast to the more recently captured ones, the status of a house-born slave relative to other wolosow depended on the individual's household position, how many generations since his ancestor was captured, and the master's rank in the overall social hierarchy. A slave born in a chief's household would rank higher than a woloso of the same generation in a blacksmith's family, while any woloso would hold higher status than say, a newly arrived captive. The position of slaves in precolonial Bambara society was more complex than this, but these examples sufficiently indicate what effect a surfeit of slaves had on the Bambara social system.¹ Moreover, it demonstrates that stratification at the servile level could be at least as important as it was at the level of griot and artisan groups.

Bambara Status and Ancestral Land

Stratification was also much in evidence at the upper levels of society where there were lineages and sublineages of those who were proprietors of the land and leaders of the people.² Some of these families traced their descent from the traditional ancestor and were thereby eligible to become chiefs, while others could make

1 These remarks on slavery are from this writer's paper 'Slavery in Bambara Society: Segou 1660-1861' given at the conference 'Islamic Africa: Slavery and Related Institutions', Princeton University, 12-15 June 1977.

2 For a discussion of Manding lineage, see Hopkins, 'Maninka', pp. 99-128, p. 108.

no such claim. Examples of the latter include families with an ancestor of unknown origin adopted into the lineage, or with a slave ancestor who had been gradually assimilated into the lineage over many generations.¹

Clearly then, Manding attitudes toward varying degrees of social worth applied to all levels of society, and it is not necessary to look abroad for the origin of the consciousness that could engender social differentiation. A significant difference between the social hierarchies of the Bambara cultivators and the sedentary Fulbe² is that the latter reflected their ancestral nomadic ways by believing that only herding was a truly noble occupation. Consequently, in their system farming was performed by a special class of cultivators (rimaibe) who occupied the same low status as artisans and griots.³ Among the Bambara, on the other hand, cultivating was regarded as a noble task, and most other work was left to the lesser worthies.⁴ In traditional Manding culture, people who got their living by means other than the cultivation of the soil placed themselves in positions of dependency. The basic attitude was that only work on the land was noble work.⁵ Therefore, in addition to the lineal connection

1 Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 103. Members of this class (tontigi or horon) were also eligible to fight in wars and participate in politics as councillors and chiefs.

2 Though the social structure of the strictly nomadic Fulbe is not rigidly stratified, there is a contrasting group of Fulbe sedentary village dwellers who have a complex social hierarchy. See Murdock, Africa, p. 414.

3 See Tauxier, Moeurs, pp. 140-41.

4 Desplagnes noted the importance of this difference in Le plateau, p. 168.

5 Paques, Les Bambara, p. 81.

to the founding ancestors, a factor that confirmed and reinforced the status of the lineages and sublineages was that they were independent cultivators of crops that were the foundation of the local economy.¹

Though independent food production through cultivation was one of the most important status criteria held in common by all proprietary lineages, those of direct descent from the ancestral village founder were thought to have an even more profound connection with the soil, and this accounted for their chiefly privileges. As Hopkins describes it,

This right is related to the special relationship which the original inhabitants are believed to have with the spirits of the earth, whom they had to appease in order to settle. In secular terms, people say that the right is based on their having cleared the land.²

It is generally believed that the land originally belonged to spirits,³ and many traditions about village origins describe how the founding ancestor succeeded in settling on the land only after acquiring it through conquest or diplomacy from the original inhabitants who were genies, spirits or some monstrous creature.⁴

1 In recent times, many nyamakalaw farm in addition to, or instead of their traditional vocations, but the traditional attitudes for the most part still hold that their status is related to their economic dependency, as well as to their position 'outside' the founding lineages.

2 Hopkins, 'Maninka', pp. 103-04.

3 Paques, Les Bambara, p. 69.

4 The traditions of the founding of Wagadu are good examples; see Monteil, 'La legende', pp. 377-78.

Certain terms in the Manding vocabulary also reflect the importance of the chief's connection to the soil. The same word, dugu, means 'earth' or 'soil', as well as 'land' and 'village', and one title for a chief is dugutigi, which means 'master' or 'lord' thereof. Additional support for the chief's authority was derived from the fact that the autochthonous religion was also based on the people's relationship to the soil,¹ hence the title dugutigi was religious as well as civil.²

Indeed, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the land and its cultivation to the Bambara. In seventeenth century Segou, the rivalry between farming associations and even the outcome of the millet harvest were crucial issues in Biton Kouloubaly's struggle for power.³ As Sosan, traditional founder of Kaarta expresses it in one tradition:

We Bambara people rely completely on our farming.
We have no other interest from sunrise to the
time for sleeping.⁴

Considering the fundamental importance of cultivation in the Manding scheme of things, it is not surprising that just as the

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- 1 Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 128-175, and 'Myth et organization sociale au Soudan française', pp. 39-76.
 - 2 Tauxier, La religion, pp. 195-96.
 - 3 Monteil, Les Bambara, pp. 30-36.
 - 4 Jeli Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, p. 268.

Fulbe social hierarchy reflected their contempt for people who did not herd cattle, the hierarchies of the Bambara and other Manding peoples demonstrated their disdain for those who engaged in pursuits other than farming. The daily expression of this in traditional Manding society was that all those who stood outside the founding lineage structure and hence were not masters of the soil were regarded as dependents and were obliged to occupy a lower social status.

Theories of Western Sudanic Origin

When discussing the possible sources of stratification in Manding society as a whole, it is difficult to separate this from the origin of the nyamakala groups. Perhaps this is because the differentiation of griot and artisan groups was, after all, a seminal factor in the overall development of the social hierarchy. Desplagnes (1907) noted that in certain mountainous areas of the Niger Bend there were early populations indépendantes¹ whose people performed whatever task they chose, with no ranking according to occupation.² The significance of this is that if even members of chiefly lineages performed tasks such as ironworking, a relatively large portion of the population was likely to be acquainted with some type of craft skill. This means that these groups constituted a pool of skilled artisans that could be tapped

1 Though he was apparently referring to relatively small, sedentary groups that were for the most part ethnically separate from the Manding and other dominant groups, there were similar small communities of hunters and the like who were part of the Manding cultural complex.

2 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 168.

by more militarily powerful but technologically less versatile peoples. Desplagnes believed that some of the skilled sedentary populations became nyamakalaw because they happened to live in the path of an invading conqueror and found themselves obliged to enter his service at a reduced social level, while in a neighbouring region that was not invaded, members of the same clan might remain independent.¹ Thus, he was convinced that

... la formation des castes soudanaises en général, n'a été ... qu'une série d'évènements indépendants les uns des autres et agissant différemment sur des éléments ethniques souvent très variés.²

As an example of the random selection of future occupational groups through the invasion of their home regions, Desplagnes related how he thought the Koromei became blacksmiths to the Mossi.³ He said that sometime during the supremacy of ancient Ghana (ca. 800-1100), part of a population occupying the banks of the Niger moved to the inland plateau area where they became known as the 'Koromei'. They founded villages in what was to eventually become the Mossi territory of Yatenga, and were followed a century later by several hundred more families who dispersed into neighbouring valleys. Until the Mossi arrived, the Koromei were the masters of the territory, cultivating, mining, and producing iron which was exported back to the Niger River. When Yagha the Mossi chief invaded this region in the twelfth century, the

1 Ibid., p. 169.

2 Ibid., p. 169.

3 He combined his own observations with traditions collected by a Captain Noiret.

Koromei chose submission over resistance and enslavement, and they were subsequently absorbed by their conquerors, whose language they adopted. Later, another chief who was impressed by their ironworking skills had the Koromei distributed throughout the land, assigning one or more families to each village. This is why some Koromei could be found serving the descendants of their conquerors as blacksmiths, while their relatives continued to live independently in areas not invaded by the Mossi.¹ According to Barth (1857), it was not uncommon for a similar process to occur as the result of Fulbe movements. He described the Fulbe as

... conquerors who absorbed and incorporated with themselves different and quite distinct national elements ...²

Support for these theories comes from the recent findings of William Brown, who says the nyamakala fishermen known as somonow³ were among the earliest populations along the Niger but were

1 Desplagnes, Le plateau, pp. 171-72.

2 Barth, Travels III, p. 111. Lewis, 'Ethnology and Culture History', argues that "pastoralists tend to be inveterate fighters, constantly feuding with their neighbors" (p. 41), but that "the ethnographic data fail to support the idea that pastoralists have been great conquerors in Africa" (p. 40).

3 Delafosse has the somono as nyamakalaw who are navigators and fishermen (La langue Mandingue II, p. 508, and Haut-Sénégal-Niger III, p. 118, n. 1). Desplagnes (Le plateau, p. 168) also identifies them as such.

reduced in status by succeeding populations.¹ Some somono lineages claim descent from early Soninke clans of ancient Ghana, some were derived from Minianka, Senoufo, Bambara and Malinke hunting clans,² while others are said to have descended from mingled Soninke and Bozo stocks.³

When these groups became nyamakalaw of proprietary lineages, they often adopted the clan name (jamu) of their new patrons. Moreover, it was not unknown for an entire nyamakala group to later change its allegiance, its occupation and its jamu, something that occurred as recently as the nineteenth century:

... lorsque les Foutankés de l'armée d'El Hadj Omar firent la conquête du Masina, récemment occupé par les Foulbés, les membres d'une tribu des montagnes, les Tapo que les amirou Foulbés d'Hamdallahi, avaient placés dans la caste de leurs tisserands, vinrent trouver Tidjani Tall, Fama de Bandiagara, et se déclarent ses griots, puis changèrent leur nom contre celui du chef Tall.⁴

1 William A. Brown, The Caliphate of Hamdullahi ca. 1818-1864: A Study in African History and Tradition (unpublished thesis) University of Wisconsin, 1969, p. 86, n. 13. Brown inappropriately refers to nyamakala craftsmen as 'caste corporations'. He also says they were 'slaves' whose servility dates at least from the time of Askia 'al-hajj Muhammad I (1497-1528). However, Brown is quoted by Levtzion, in support of the latter's argument that servile status was 'forced' upon the somonow and other occupational groups, by the author of MS C of the Tarikh al-Fettash, whereas in the more authentic MS A, there is a clear distinction between slaves and endogamous occupational groups, the latter of which include the somonow. See Nehemia Levtzion, 'A Seventeenth-Century Chronicle by Ibn-Al-Mukhtar: A Critical Study of Ta'rikh Al-Fattash', Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, XXXIV, 3, 1971, pp. 571-593, pp. 588-91.

2 Brown, The Caliphate, pp. 86-87.

3 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 339.

4 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 172.

Barth took the seemingly extreme view that groups like the laube (woodworkers)¹ were originally a distinct 'tribe' called the 'Laube' who had been reduced in status and retained to serve their Fulbe masters.² Indeed, Barth and Desplagnes both seem to confuse occupational groups with 'tribes'. However, this touches on a grey area that requires illumination, because the collective identities of substantial portions of some ethnic groups may in fact have changed during the period when western sudanic societies were becoming differentiated, though probably not in the way Barth suggests. His identification of the laube or woodworkers as 'a distinct tribe' called 'Laube', extended to other Fulbe occupational groups as well.³ Similarly, Desplagnes referred to the 'Garanke' (a name normally rendered as garanke and designating leatherworkers), as being among les anciens peuples Rouges, along with the Koromei and others.⁴ For the most part, these are probably simple cases of confusing occupational groups with 'tribes'. However, the possibility should not be ignored that in a process similar to the case of the Koromei outlined above, there might have been early occupationally undifferentiated sedentaries known by terms such as 'Numu' or 'Garanke' which at the time identified them as ethnic groups. Though his ideas along these lines must be treated with caution, Desplagnes claimed that various peoples of

1 The Bambara nyamakala class also includes woodwork specialists known as kulew, segiw and surasegiw. See Dominique Zahan, La dialectique, pp. 125-26.

2 Barth, Travels, III, p. 113.

3 Ibid.

4 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 197.

the Bandiagara plateau united to form a confederation, the Ndogom-Guindo (now commonly known as Dogon), in order to preserve their independence, and that one of the collective terms by which they were known to fishing populations was 'Garanke'.¹ He also mentioned an early group, the Gara, of the same region, who were later known as the 'Ganninkobes'.²

Another group with an ethnic character and a nyamakala name is the Numu of the Cercle Boundoukou in the Ivory Coast, and the adjoining Akan hinterland of modern Ghana. They are thought to have come from the Mandinka-Bambara area of the Niger Bend around 1450.³ Scholars identify the Numu as a 'caste' of artisans,⁴ but aside from the fact that they are skilled craftsmen whose

1 Ibid., pp. 185-87.

2 Ibid., p. 186. Both 'Garanke' and 'Ganninkobe' have common Fulfulde suffixes. Desplagnes identified the latter as anciens tributaires of people who were dispersed after the destruction of the capital of Ghana in 1230.

3 Jack Goody, 'The Mande and the Akan Hinterland', in Vansina, Mauny and Thomas (eds.), The Historian in Tropical Africa (London, 1964), pp. 192-218, pp. 196 and 211. There is an ambiguous passage, p. 195: "The Proto-Dyula are almost entirely concentrated in the Banda-Bonduku area. The Numu scattered throughout the Niger bend apparently regard this area as their homeland ..." It is not clear whether 'this area' refers to Banda-Bondukou or the Niger Bend, though on page 196 he says the Numu and Ligby probably came from the area of the Upper Niger.

4 D. Westermann and M.A. Bryan, Handbook of African Languages: Part II, Languages of West Africa (London, 1970), p. 36; Goody, 'The Mande', p. 195; M. Delafosse, Vocabulaires comparatifs de plus de 60 langues ou dialectes parlés à la Côte d'Ivoire et dans les régions limotrophes (Paris, 1904), p. 167. The somonow, among others, are another example of a group with a name that is both occupational and ethnic. Compare above, n. 62 with Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 34, who say the Somono are a tribe of fishermen.

collective name is the Mandinka-Bambara word for 'blacksmith' (numu), they apparently resemble other so-called 'Proto-Dyula' groups of the area, the Ligby and Hwela.¹ They have their own language, numu kpera, which is a Manding dialect,² they practice an autochthonous religion and are not endogamous.³ The fact that the Numu are artisans in general, skilled at leatherwork, woodwork and pottery as well as ironworking, is normally taken to confirm them as a 'caste',⁴ but their combined cultural traits bear a noteworthy resemblance to those of Desplagnes' prehierarchical populations indépendants of the Niger Bend,⁵ which is where they are said to have come from.⁶

Are the Proto-Dyula Numu remnants of one of these early groups, segments of which were conquered and absorbed to become nyamakalaw, with the rest retaining their independence? Powerful Manding states in need of artisans could have recruited skilled

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- 1 Louis Tauxier, Le Noir de Boundoukou (Paris, 1921), p. 52; Goody, 'The Mande', pp. 194-96.
 - 2 Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 36. It is related to the Ligby and Hwela dialects and all three are associated with the Vai language which, along with Soninke, Maninka, Bambara and Khassonke is part of the Mande Tan language group.
 - 3 Goody, 'The Mande', p. 195 and 195 n. 7. He makes no distinction between the Numu of the Banda-Boundoukou area and the numuw (blacksmiths) scattered among the Mandinka-Bambara of the Niger Bend, except for following Delafosse (Vocabulaires, p. 167) in noting the latter's endogamy.
 - 4 Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 36; Goody, 'The Mande', p. 195.
 - 5 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 168 and above, p. 87, n. 1.
 - 6 Goody, 'The Mande', p. 196.

workers from the ranks of independent sedentaries living near the forests. Blacksmiths (numuw) of the Niger Bend are said to regard the forested Banda-Boundoukou area of northern Ghana as their homeland.¹ On the other hand, we are also told that people speaking languages of the Proto-Dyula groups in the Banda-Boundoukou area maintain that they came from 'Mande', and Goody himself believes that the Numu probably came from the Manding area of the Upper Niger.² Does this mean that the Proto-Dyula Numu were, at one point, craft specialists of the Mandinka-Bambara, but emigrated toward the forest in search of iron, settled there and lost their nyamakala characteristics?³

The background of the Numu and of similar groups that appear to have much in common with those described by Barth and Desplagnes demand investigation, because this might shed light on the earliest processes of social differentiation. A basic problem with the nineteenth century theories of origin is that we cannot be certain that they actually apply to the time when a hierarchical order was in its earliest stages, or if they merely

1 Ibid., p. 195.

2 Ibid., p. 196. Though opinions abound, there is no agreement on the approximate date of arrival of the Proto-Dyula peoples into the Banda-Boundoukou region (Goody, 'The Mande', pp. 210-11).

3 Goody is of the opinion that the presence of the Proto-Dyula in the Banda-Boundoukou area of northern Ghana is connected with trade. He denies the possibility that the ironworking Numu were there in connection with that craft, on the grounds that while knowledge of ironworking was, as he believes, introduced by the Berbers around 300 B.C., the differentiation of the Proto-Dyula from the other Manding-speaking peoples appears to be later than that. For this reason he believes it unlikely that Manding-speakers introduced ironworking into the Ashanti hinterland ('The Mande', pp. 210-11).

refer to the later addition of some artisan groups to an already stratified system. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the hierarchical organization was at least still evolving when previously independent sedentary craftsmen were becoming associated with powerful expansionist groups, and the latter process may reflect earlier trends of social development.

In the case of Barth's 'Laube', whom he called a 'degraded tribe', it is unlikely that an entire ethnic group was absorbed by the Fulbe and assigned to woodworking tasks as he claimed,¹ though such a fate could have befallen a village or group of villages advanced in woodcraft, the way it supposedly did the Koromei blacksmiths who became associated with the Mossi.² In times before there was any formal connection between artisans and patrons, trade routes over which raw materials could be transported may, like the social system, have been in their formative stages, so craft skills might have been most advanced among those who had easiest access to essential materials. Thus blacksmiths like the Numu of the northern Ivory Coast and Ghana would congregate near mineral deposits,³ and woodworkers would dwell near forests,⁴

1 Barth, Travels III, p. 113.

2 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 171.

3 Sub-saharan Africa is unique in having soil that produces ore of high iron content. The ore is found close to the surface, making mining unnecessary and conditions favourable for a basically simple but effective ironworking industry.

4 Originally there was probably no formal differentiation between ironworkers and woodworkers. Most blacksmiths also work with wood, and the basic village nyamakala unit consisted only of a lineage of jeliw and one of numuw (Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 107).

similar to the way the Maninka siakiw (goldsmiths) still congregate near the gold fields of upper Guinea.¹

When an independent group of a cultural background different from that of their invaders was subjugated and assigned artisan tasks as the Koromei and Laube supposedly were, they would gradually lose their own languages and take on much of the cultural identity of whoever was being served by their industry.² In the earliest instances, however, some of them continued to be known by the names of their original ethnic groups which may have included the Numu and Garanke. But as they gradually lost their original language and other aspects of their previous culture, these names would come to apply more to their occupation, which was the basis of their new identity in any case. Thus, previously independent Numu who were subjugated by a powerful Manding group would become endogamous numuw, artisans of reduced social status dependent on say, a Bambara patron. Desplagnes declared, perhaps adventurously, that

la pluparts de ces castes sont toujours qualifiées
du nom de la première tribu qui s'est vu imposer
le servage industriel ou agricole ... 3

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- 1 Kaba, 'The Maninka-Mori', p. 6. Coppermiths (lorho) also congregated near sources of copper (Delafosse, La langue Mandingue II, p. 471). It is said that the earliest inhabitants of Kano, Nigeria, were blacksmiths who went to Dala hill there in search of 'ironstone' (S.J. Hogben and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, The Emirates of Northern Nigeria, London, 1966, p. 184).
 - 2 The reverse is also known to have happened, with the invaders assuming many cultural traits of the invaded. See Levtzion, Ancient, p. 8.
 - 3 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 172.

In the case of some nyamakala groups, the earliest members probably practised as generally skilled artisans, as the Numu of the Banda-Boundoukou area still do.¹ Later, however, as technology improved and the social system became more complex with increases in the ranks of the nyamakalaw, certain groups apparently became identified with particular skills. Thus, after the hierarchy was established and a term like garanke had come to be the name of a specialized group, anyone joining that class of nyamakala would thereafter be known by that term regardless of their ethnic background.²

Whether or not some occupational terms were originally names of ethnic groups, they later came to function as such. Artisans and griots do not normally refer to themselves by the ethnic term that describes their patrons. In Bambara society, for example, a nyamakala is not a 'Bambara', for that term is reserved for members of the proprietary, or tontigi lineages. Instead, he is a numu, jeli, garanke, or some other.³ A change in occupation is not necessarily accompanied by a change in the so-called

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- 1 Goody, 'The Mande', p. 195. It is common for nyamakalaw to assume tasks apart from their usual vocation if those who normally perform them are absent from the area. The distribution of artisans is very uneven, and in some villages jeliw do leatherwork and pottery, while in others numuw perform all artisan tasks.
 - 2 Desplagnes (Le plateau, pp. 172-73) claimed that the first rimaibe cultivators (pl. dimadio) were from the Madio clan, and that the Mabo clan provided the first weavers (mabo pl. maobe), some of whom continued to dwell independently in the mountains. However, he also said that the first servile group of the Bambara were people named 'Dion' which accounted for the word jon meaning 'slave', and this would require substantial supporting evidence before it could be taken seriously.
 - 3 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 129. Nyamakalaw who were asked if they were Bambara or Mandinka invariably replied in the negative and identified themselves by what are normally considered to be occupational terms such as numu or jeli.

occupational term. Manding jeliw who live and perform among the Dan of the Ivory Coast derive their main income from leatherworking, but this does not make them garankew, any more than a garanke would become a jeli if he earned money chanting genealogies.¹

The theories of the western sudanic origin of social stratification that have so far been discussed are all based on the assumption that the earliest nyamakala groups were of a different ethnic background from that of the proprietary class, the tontigiw, whom they came to serve. However, an alternative possibility is that some of these groups may have consisted of people who at some point lost contact with their Manding ancestry owing to the nature of their occupational pursuits, and eventually came to serve as nyamakalaw to Manding-speaking tontigiw.

We can postulate that prior to the stage of social development which saw the appearance of nyamakalaw, the blacksmith's craft and the ritual significance accompanying many of his duties would have been undergoing their own evolution.² A possible motive for the social differentiation of blacksmiths was inherent in their craft, owing to its mysterious nature. As Person expresses it,

Ses hommes, maîtres du feu et du fer, sont les
alliés des puissances surnaturelles ...³

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- 1 Hugo Zemp, 'Musiciens autochtones, et griots malinké chez les Dan de Cote d'Ivoire', Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines 15, IV, 1964, pp. 370-382, p. 379.
 - 2 For a discussion of the ritual significance of the numu craft see Zahan, La dialectique, pp. 129-30.
 - 3 Y. Person, Samori: Une Révolution Dyula, 2 Vols., Paris, 1970, II, p. 919.

As masters of the art of taking a raw substance from the earth and converting it through the use of fire into vital tools and weapons, the earliest blacksmiths must have been regarded as holders of awesome powers. Recognizing the advantage to themselves of such sentiments, blacksmiths might have encouraged their own separation from the rest of society in order to maintain their secrets and enhance their considerable powers, which eventually came to include priesthoods in certain spirit societies, though these were closed to other nyamakalaw.¹

Another aspect of the blacksmith occupation that could have removed them from their ancestral connections would be their search for iron deposits. After ranging far afield for the substance of their craft, they might at times have found it desirable to settle near the source. While several generations of blacksmiths were practising their esoteric craft far from their place of origin, their genealogical connections could easily become blurred, especially if they intermarried with other cultures. Endogamy would not prevent this if, as in the case of the Proto-Dyula Numu who may have been drawn from the Niger Bend to the Banda-Boundoukou area by the iron to be found there, they either never were endogamous,² or lost that trait after arriving in their

1 Tauxier, La religion, pp. 276-77; Zahan, La dialectique, pp. 129-30; and Jean-Loup Amselle, 'Histoire et structure sociale du Wasulu avant Samori', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, London, 1972, p. 10. Desplagnes (Le plateau, pp. 174-75) claimed the blacksmiths were responsible for preserving the religious beliefs and divinities of the ancestors, and that it was they who organized the spirit societies.

2 See above, p. 93, regarding the question of whether the Proto-Dyula Numuw are remnants of an early group, part of which became nyamakalaw, with other remaining independent.

new location.¹

Similarly, if in earliest times there were jeli ancestors whose roots lay in Manding (or proto-Manding) culture, rather than in some smaller group that was absorbed by a larger one, absence could have contributed to the deterioration of their original family connections. The life of a bard was often the life of a wanderer, and even during the earlier phases of the development of their art, those who aspired to greatness may have travelled far for their knowledge, just as they did in later centuries.² Often, instead of returning home, they would seek out a generous patron and settle with him. The jiatigi-nyamakala relationship accommodated the griot's mobility, because wherever they went they could find a host to support them in exchange for their services.³ However, their itinerancy, which could involve permanent settlement far from home, would tend to dissolve ancestral ties, and in the earliest instances this may have contributed to their differentiation from the rest of society.

1 The numu vocation of spirit priest would account for the fact that of the three Proto-Dyula groups, only the Numu remain strictly pagan (Goody, 'The Mande', p. 195).

2 D.T. Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali (London, 1965), p. viii.

3 Ethnic and political boundaries were of little consequence to bards. For example, the ancestors of Tahiru Bambira, a jeli of Segou (see Appendix), were bards of the Suraka of Mauritania who emigrated to Segou in the eighteenth century when they heard about the powerful and prosperous Bambara state. According to Bazin (Dictionnaire, p. 569), 'Suraka' is the Bambara term for 'Moor' or 'copper-skinned person'. The bards (ighyuwn) of Mauritania are great travellers of low status (Gerteiny, Mauritania, p. 53).

The above remarks about how members of early or proto-Manding society could have been among the original members of nyamakala groups are offered as a contrast to Desplagnes' view that the earliest nyamakalaw were small independent groups culturally unrelated to those who absorbed them. It seems clear that social stratification evolved from a combination of factors and that it would be unrealistic to argue that all nyamakalaw were originally drawn from a source qualified by any particular limitations. Historical vicissitudes were heedless of subsequently contrived categories.

During the time when sahelian societies were still evolving a formally differentiated system, there were periods of turmoil resulting from the rise and fall of sudanic states like Ghana, as well as from natural disasters such as drought and famine. News of better prospects elsewhere, perhaps in the service of powerful leaders in more prosperous regions, would attract refugees from a variety of ethnic, clan and occupational backgrounds. People in flight from drought-stricken lands, political unrest, or simple poverty would move quickly to enter the service of a prosperous patron in whatever capacity was available. Social stratification could occur under these circumstances, because the newly located people would have no connection with local lineage groups. Moreover, things like occupational preference and social status would not be high priorities to starving people who could find security in the service of a prosperous lineage. Whether or not the newcomers were linguistically related to those they came to serve, if they assumed the dependent role of what came to be known

as nyamakalaya¹ and accepted the patronage and protection of a host, their subordinate position in the social hierarchy was permanently established.

Distinctions between nyamakalaya and the Servile Estate

While considering the roots of the Manding social hierarchy, it is difficult to determine what it was, in the earliest instances, that distinguished between the first occupants of the role of nyamakala and those who were enslaved. As Barth and Desplagnes both implied, an important factor may have been if the subjugated group boasted technical skills that would make them more desirable as free but dependent artisans than as slaves.² It was noted earlier that the Bambara slave hierarchy increased in complexity when war flooded Segou with captives. Some artisan classes could have evolved on a similar basis, in that if entire populations were 'absorbed' on occasion, especially in a relatively peaceful manner, the formation of a new status group may simply have been the most practical way of accommodating such a large addition to society.

The wide-ranging movements of Fulbe herders and the sedentarization of Fulbe who settled among farming peoples like the Manding, as well as the military conquests of Fulbe leaders, all involved the sort of ethnic intermingling that could account for the Fulbe's apparently strong influence in the development of

1 The suffix ya renders it 'the condition of being' nyamakala, thus jeliya is the condition of being a griot.

2 Barth, Travels, III, p. 113; Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 171.

stratification in western sudanic societies. An obvious question regarding early differences between slavery and nyamakalaya, is whether people ever passed from the servile estate into the free artisan classes. While one suspects that this was, in some instances, a significant source of personnel for the nyamakala class, evidence of how it happened is extremely scarce. Charles Monteil claimed to have such information about a branch of Fulbe society, though it is not clear how he acquired such a complete understanding of the process. He claimed that in the Fulbe social system, the cultivators (rimaibe), who occupy a lower level of the hierarchy in company with the artisans and griots, arrived at that condition as a result of the Fulbe having, at an undetermined period, acquired slaves and assigned them to farm. This spawned a need for overseers, which meant that some previously nomadic Fulbe became sedentary.¹ These Fulbe overseers then married some of the local women, and their offspring began to have a progressively large influence over both the rimaibe and the Fulbe masters. Gradually the mixed group became more ambitious, and eventually they assumed the role of a ruling class. In the meantime, the descendants of the slaves who had been assigned to farming had settled into their identity as the cultivators known as rimaibe, and they became part of the intermediate occupational class along with the artisans and griots, while at a higher level, the herders themselves were divided into a hierarchy with status based

1 Lewis regards the Fulbe and other herders as "generally only minority group specialists among sedentary peoples", and he points out that though pastoralists have impressed outside observers with their disdain for farmers, most of them depend on someone else to supply them with vegetable foods at least occasionally ('Ethnology and Culture History', pp. 39-40).

on the type of herding done, horsemen at the top followed by cattle herders and sheepmen.¹ While this does not apply directly to the Manding, though some of them were probably among the slaves who became rimaibe, it serves as an example of how some nyamakala groups may have originally passed through slave status or something akin to it.²

When considered in connection with the origin of nyamakala groups, Barth's description of the Fulbe as " ... a conquering tribe, sweeping over a wide expanse of provinces" and absorbing other "national elements", conveys an exaggerated impression of violence.³ Though enslavement often involved acts of violence,⁴ the process by which people arrived at the nyamakala condition seems to have been usually peaceful. It appears that during the era which saw the development of sudanic social hierarchies, the nature of the initial meeting between two culturally unrelated

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- 1 Charles Monteil, Une Cité Soudanaise: Djenne, Métropole du Delta Central du Niger (Paris, 1932, new edition 1971), pp. 121-22. According to Labouret, first generation slaves of the Fulbe were called mattyu-do, and their children were the rim-ay-be (H. Labouret, 'Le servage étape entre l'esclavage et la liberté en Afrique occidentale', in J. Lukas, Afrikanistische Studien (Berlin, 1955), pp. 147-153, p. 151).
 - 2 There is a Soninke tradition that the jawambe (sing. jawando) who, according to Tauxier (Moeurs, p. 140) are 'hommes de caste' functioning as traders and teachers among other things, were descended from a slave (Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 152-53); see also Chapter II, pp. 47-52.
 - 3 Barth, Travels III, p. 111. Barth was referring to events which, according to Murdock (Africa, p. 417) occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. See also above, p. 89, n. 2.
 - 4 Martin A. Klein, 'The Study of Slavery', J.A.H., XIX 4 (1978), pp. 599-609, p. 602. He follows Meillassoux on this point.

groups¹ - violent confrontation or peaceful intermingling - was closely related to whether the weaker group wound up as nyamakalaw, or as slaves of the dominant group.

When violence was the mode of encounter, people who confronted an invader by engaging him in battle to defend their ancestral soil established themselves as adversaries who could be considered counterparts of their attackers. For combatants on either side, the penalty for defeat would be death or enslavement, and the willingness to accept the possibility of such a fate would carry with it a different status from that of an invaded people who submitted to an alien power without resistance. The latter instance resulted in the client-patron (nyamakala-jiatigi) relationship, the essence of which is described by Numu Satigi Soumarouo, an elder blacksmith of the Wasulu region of southern Mali:²

If you honour someone and say to him, "We come to live as your subjects and we seek your protection", this is very different from slavery. The numuw placed themselves under the protection of Fula Mansa Jan who then became their jiatigi

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- 1 Here we are following Barth's and Desplagnes' assumptions that groups 'absorbed' and made nyamakalaw were becoming associated with a culture alien to their own. Though we know Bambara enslaved other Bambara, there is no evidence that Bambara coerced villages of other Bambara into becoming nyamakalaw.
 - 2 Soumarouo's ancestors were associated with the Mandinka, but members of his clan as well as Camara numuw of the same village have served as blacksmiths of sedentary Fulbe for an undetermined number of generations, at least since the nineteenth century when Samory's exploits influenced the movement of many blacksmiths (See Person, Samori II, p. 920), but possibly much longer. Amselle ('Histoire', p. 10) notes that the numuw of the Wasulu region are predominant and occupy a higher status than the jeliw.

in token of friendship. This is why the blacksmiths are considered inferior to their jiatigi and treat him with respect ... Numuw became subordinate to Fula Mansa Jan because he protected them. In this way a special class was born, that of the numuw whom the Peul soon came to think of as inferior to themselves.¹

It can be assumed that in prehierarchical times, in addition to there being no nyamakala, the upper or tontigi level was probably less stratified than it was in later centuries, and the same would be true of the servile class. Though there would have been division of labour and some ranking, the social structure would have been altogether less complex, and this would have reduced the options for those defeated in battle. In later times, after social stratification with all its accompanying facets was established, the kind of wartime captivity that actually led to a change in status for members of the proprietary class may, by the eighteenth century at least, have been the exception rather than the rule.² Mungo Park (1795) found that the vast majority of people captured in Bambara battles were already slaves. He was told that when Monson Diara, fama of Segou (ca. 1790-1808) went to war against Kaarta and took some nine hundred captives, only about

1 Interview with Numu Satigi Soumarouo, Kabaya, September 2, 1975. He was nearly eighty at the time and died in 1977. A literal translation of 'Fula Mansa Jan' is 'Tall Fulbe Chief'. Mamby Sidibe recorded a tradition which, like so many others, provides middle eastern roots for western sudanic peoples: "Les forgerons du Soudan sont les descendants de Nou Mansa Dian, petit frère de Foula Mansa Dian, né dans le Yemen (Arabie), fils d'un Sémite ancêtre des Peuls dispersés en Afrique". See Sidibe, 'Les gens', pp. 13-17, p. 15.

2 Except for periods when the western Sudan was in turmoil owing to slaving expeditions (razzias) and anyone was fair game.

seventy of them had been free men previously.¹ Even those stood a chance of avoiding enslavement, for it was possible for them to be ransomed by their families,² or they might be given their freedom on the basis of a joking relationship (senankou) between the lineages involved.³ In prehierarchical times, when the social structure was less developed, such options were probably absent. This suggests that the consequences of defeat were more final then, and it may be that a willingness to face death or defeat in battle carried with it a different status from that of people who submitted to invaders without a struggle. That is to say, the attitude of the dominant group toward those who offered resistance to them would be different from their attitude toward those who did not. This is not to suggest that death or slavery was viewed as being more desirable than say, entering the service of the conqueror as a griot or blacksmith. It is merely to point out that these fates appear to have been arrived at via different routes.

In contrast to the battles and raids that led to the enslavement of previously free men, the original nyamakalaw seem

1 Park, The Travels, pp. 221-22. Part of the reason for this was that the free men, being better armed and sometimes mounted, could fight more effectively and escape more easily.

2 Park, The Travels, p. 222. See also Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 190.

3 This would of course apply only to the results of battles between culturally related rivals. See R. Pageard, 'Notes sur les rapports de 'senankouya' au Soudan française particulièrement dans les cercles de Segou et de Macina', B.I.F.A.N., sér. B. 1-2 1958, pp. 123-41; D. Cisse, 'Elements de culture et de structures malinké', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, London, 1972.

to have arrived at their position in a more peaceful manner, either through gradual intermingling with dominant groups that settled among them, or by actively seeking out a prosperous, powerful leader and offering him their services in return for his support and protection. Sometimes expansionist groups such as Manding cultivators or Fulbe herders would move peacefully into a new territory, settle among its inhabitants, and over a period of time gradually assert their authority.¹ Even when the potential for a violent encounter existed, it was apparently not uncommon for the previous inhabitants of the territory to submit without a struggle, because they realized they were not powerful enough to resist successfully. They preferred to accept a subordinate social position rather than become war captives or abandon their homelands and lose the protection of their local deities.²

At such times it was the blacksmiths who preserved the religious ideas and ancestral deities, and some aspects of the secret societies they organized were designed to exploit the superstitions of their new masters.³ Numu Satigi Soumarouo believed the peaceful, submissive nature of the original encounter between client and patron was a significant feature of the relationship between Wasulu blacksmiths and their Fulbe patrons:

In those days there was division of labour.
Each person chose the occupation he liked best.
The numuw were docile and their elders placed

1 Murdock, Africa, p. 416.

2 Desplagnes, Le plateau, p. 174.

3 Ibid., p. 174.

themselves at the mercy of the Peul. The numuw were the masters of iron and the Peul divided them up, each wanting to get the most skilful ... The weakness of the blacksmiths in face of the Peul resulted from submissiveness, the willingness of the blacksmiths to allow themselves to be dominated. They acted that way in recognition of Fula Mansa Jan and his descendants who are their patrons. When the numuw allowed themselves to be shared among the Peul for the working of iron, they became subordinate ... The Peul were not superior to the blacksmiths. They did not capture us in battle. The numuw simply understood that goods must be repaid by goods and accepted the role of being ironworkers for the Peul.¹

The association of submissive, dependent groups with more dominant peoples with whom they had no kinship connection helps to account for the fact that descendants of the former were held to strict endogamy. But while endogamy is generally regarded as a negative feature of nyamakala status, some of the most important functions of artisans and griots hinged on the fact that they stood outside the lineage structure. This position allowed them to be officially regarded as politically neutral, a condition that may reflect the original peaceful encounter between the nyamakala ancestors and those who became their protectors. Though artisans and griots could not marry outside their class, neither could they be enslaved. Perhaps the most striking manifestation of their political neutrality was that in times of war, nyamakalaw on the losing side simply entered the service of the conquerors and

1 Interview, September 2, 1975. There is a possibility that this testimony is adulterated by outside influence because Satigi Soumarouo's son Bourama worked as a translator at Indiana University for Charles Bird, and some reverse flow of ideas could have occurred.

continued to practise their customary trades.¹ It is interesting to compare this positive feature of nyamakalaya with the destiny of some descendants of those who chose battle over submission and wound up as slaves. In Bambara society, through a process that spanned several generations, captives' descendants who were born in the household gradually lost their slave status and were eventually recognized as members of the sublineage.²

To conclude with a general observation about the overall social position of the Manding nyamakalaw, the relatively low status of this class has probably been over-emphasized by scholars interested in the hierarchy. When French scholars of the colonial era compiled the first dictionaries of the Bambara language they consistently translated the nyama of nyamakala to mean 'trash' or 'excrement',³ when they could just as well have emphasized an alternative meaning, which is 'power' or 'force'. Moreover, the suffix kala can be taken to mean 'handle', indicating a possible definition of nyamakalaw as 'handles of power', that is to say, those who provided their patrons of the proprietary class with the tools and motivation required to carry out their daily duties. Seydou Camara, a blacksmith as well as one of the greatest bards of Mali, makes effective use of the 'handle' image in the lines of

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- 1 Paques, Les Bambara, p. 60. This point was confirmed in an interview with griots Mamary and Jassana Kouyate at Kolokani, August 9, 1975. Other functions related to their neutrality include the nyamakala role as intermediaries in political negotiations and spokesmen in life crisis rites. See Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 107.
- 2 Labouret, 'Le servage', pp. 147-153 and 'Les Manding', p. 107; Paques, Les Bambara, p. 60.
- 3 Bazin, Dictionnaire, p. 447.

a song where he stresses the critical importance of the nyamakala role:

The world rests on handles, four handles.

God sent down these four handles that man cannot do without:

Hoe handle, gun handle, knife handle, spoon handle.

It's no lie, God is the blacksmith.

Ah people, everyone calls for the blacksmith.¹

Although Seydou specifies four important implements in this reference to handles indispensable to man, inherent in his meaning is a reference to four other handles sent by God, the basic occupational categories of nyamakala: the numu, the garanke, the jeli and the funu. These were the handles required by the horon class in order to meet their daily responsibilities. It was the nyamakalaw who were the 'handles' attached to whatever led to horon effectiveness in daily life, because the nyamakalaw provided the tools for farming, the weapons for hunting and war, and the altars and rituals for meeting spiritual needs. It was the nyamakalaw who were endowed with the power of 'the word' that encouraged the horon to lead with honour and distinction, and that recorded their deeds once accomplished. And if the leaders of society began to deviate from their responsibilities, it was the acknowledged duty of any master nyamakala, but especially of the most skilful jeli available, to set the elders straight. In an example of such an incident reproduced by Jeli Tahiru Bambira, the master of speech delivers his message in the plainest terms, and it is not incidental that in his address he includes what may well be an accurate expression of the traditional ideal of the

1 See Appendix II, p. 737.

distinction between the conditions of nyamakala and horon as it would have applied in pre-colonial Manding society:

The flesh of the horon is not the horon himself.

What is the meaning of horon?

Horon means a man must honour his given word.

You must do what your mouth said you would do.

You must not do in this world what you swore not to do.

This, and not your body, is nobility.

We all have two arms,

We all have two legs,

We all have one head,

We all think the same way.

Whether you are a jeli, a fune, a garanke, or a numu,

you are included in this.

Everyone is at that level, but what separates us?

The quality of your humanity.¹

¹ See Appendix I, pp. 319-20.

Chapter IV

Islam in Manding Oral Tradition:
Surakata, Fajigi and Bilali

In 1068 al-Bakri found significant Muslim populations already occupying towns in Manding areas of the western sahel,¹ and in subsequent centuries Islam was to become a commonplace though not universal aspect of Manding culture.² During the centuries when Islam was being integrated into Manding society and gradually becoming an African religion,³ Manding oral artists were assimilating elements of Islamic tradition. Some of the stories told by Muslim clerics, scholars, and returning pilgrims were particularly appealing to Manding audiences and were easily adaptable to indigenous narrative repertoires. The prophet Muhammad, as well as characters and episodes from his life and times, were adopted by the griots and woven into the fabric of their most important myths and legends.

Among the Islamic ideals absorbed by western sudanic Muslims was the notion that direct ancestral links to the Prophet's original followers were an especially desirable source of prestige. This notion increased the importance of one of the griot's primary

1 Al-Bakri, Kitāb al masālik wa al-mamālik in J.M. Cuoq (ed. and tr.), Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIIIe au XVIe siècle (bilād al-sūdān) (Paris, 1975), p. 99; for an earlier translation see El-Bekri, Description de l'Afrique septentrionale, French transl. by Mac Gucken de Slane, Paris, 1913, p. 328.

2 For the enduring importance of indigenous belief see Tauxier, La religion.

3 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 200.

occupational responsibilities, which was to help maintain his patron's¹ status by recalling his ancestors in song and story and praising the most distinguished among them. Genealogies were sometimes fabricated for those in need of lineal amelioration, and when distinguished Muslim ancestors became desirable, Islamic tradition offered a source. The traditional griot ancestor Surakata is one example of an ancestor drawn from Islamic tradition, and Bilali, claimed as the progenitor of the ruling Keita lineage, is another. At the same time that Islamic elements from abroad were being introduced into local oral accounts, the western Sudan was engendering its own Muslim heroes, among whom were some early Malian rulers (mansaw) who undertook the arduous trans-saharan pilgrimage to Mecca. When an Islamic basis became desirable for indigenous religious institutions, the fourteenth-century pilgrim Mansa Musa Keita became the Manding hero Fajigi, who was responsible for acquiring it.

The following discussion of the legends of Surakata, of Fajigi, and of Bilali identifies the prototypes of these traditional Manding heroes, and in a comparative study of all available versions, the process by which each of them became important in Manding tradition is examined. All three of the legends discussed here are widely known among Manding griots of Mali. Along with Sunjata, founder of the Mali empire, Surakata is a standard feature of most griot repertoires. Almost any jeli could at least identify

1 Griots and their families lived with patrons or 'hosts' (jiatigiw) who, in return for their services in the oral and musical arts, provided food, clothing, lodging and miscellaneous gifts.

Surakata, and most could give a version of his exploits. Knowledge of Fajigi is less widely distributed, though most bards encountered in the field could identify him, and many could tell his story. Often identified with the blacksmith occupation because of numu (blacksmith) leadership in Komo and other spirit societies, Fajigi is a favourite among singers and storytellers of blacksmith lineage. Bilali is widely known because of his connection with the Keita lineage, but he is mainly an ancestral figure listed in genealogies introducing the Sunjata tradition, with only rare appearances in narrative texts. These three legendary figures were chosen for this study because in each case their origins were traceable and an adequate number of versions were available for purposes of comparison.

Surakata

The main theme of the Surakata tradition is a claim by Manding griots that their collective ancestor was a faithful companion of the Prophet Muhammad. In nearly every version of the legend Surakata is described as the ancestor of all griots or of a certain griot lineage. The basic narrative describes how the infidel Surakata rides in pursuit of Muhammad, intending to kill the Prophet on his journey from Mecca to Medina. Foiled in every attempt by Muhammad's extraordinary powers, Surakata is converted to Islam and joins the Prophet's followers. In some versions the griot ancestor, after his conversion, is himself persecuted by unbelievers.¹ The pursuit of Muhammad, conversion

1 Zemp, 'La légende', pp. 611-42, p. 620, 627-28.

to Islam, and service with the Prophet constitute the fundamental though not invariable theme of the tradition, appearing in most of the versions collected by Zemp in the Ivory Coast between 1961 and 1965, and in five of the eight versions which I collected for this study in Mali in 1975.

Though the Surakata tradition basically reflects a powerful Islamic influence, a motif more characteristic of pre-Islamic times is present in a number of the Ivory Coast narratives, in which Surakata is associated with blood. In some accounts he drinks the blood of Muhammad's injury to save it from spilling on the earth,¹ and in others he is smeared with the blood of slaughtered cattle or fallen enemies. Henceforth, according to a popular etymology, Surakata was called jeli,² which is the same word in Manding for 'blood' and 'griot'.³ On a symbolic level, the drinking of Muhammad's blood could be interpreted as testifying to the piety of Muslim griots, or even as their claim to a lineal connection with the Prophet. Clearly it constitutes a griot claim to special status. In a version collected in 1975, Muhammad rewards Surakata's courage and fine speech by appointing him his jeli. In this case, the informant varies the blood motif, as Muhammad cuts off a piece of his own flesh for Surakata

1 Ibid., p. 630.

2 Ibid., p. 637.

3 A popular etymology is the kind of explanation invented by a clever narrator and incorporated into a tradition to account for an incomprehensible event (Jan Vansina, Oral Tradition (New York, 1965), p. 44).

to eat,¹ showing that "the jeli was not the same as the others".²

The blood motif may also be related to an aspect of indigenous religious practice involving blood offerings dripped onto several types of altar as part of a ritual process of communicating with the spirit world. This is discussed more fully in the section on Fajigi. In the Surakata tradition, the motif of blood dripping from the meat of freshly slaughtered cattle and from the severed heads of fallen enemies onto the shoulders of a griot injects a touch of ancient ritual into a predominantly Islamic narrative. It implies a unique status for griots, in that while they are consecrated in the ancient non-Muslim way, the ritual is performed with blood spilled by Muhammad and his followers.

A similar instance of griot consecration by blood occurs in what seems to be a purely pre-Islamic legend called 'Gassire's Lute'. This tradition probably pre-dated the Surakata legend as an account of griot ancestry. It describes how Gassire, born into the chiefly class, struggles to avoid the fate predicted by a diviner, that he will carry a lute and become a bard instead of

1 The cannibalism motif is a primary feature of the ubiquitous tradition of two brothers who are lost and starving in the bush. The elder brother secretly carves a piece of flesh from his own leg and gives it to the youth who eats it, thinking it is from a forest animal. See A.M. Diagne and H.S. Télémaque, 'Origine des griots', Bulletin de l'Enseignement de l'Afrique Occidentale Française, Gorée, 1916, pp. 275-78, p. 277; Bathily, 'Les Diawandos', pp. 192-93; R. Colin, Les contes noirs de l'Ouest Africain (Paris, 1957), p. 65; Sidibe, 'Les gens', pp. 14-15.

2 Fanyama Diabate, Bamako, October 18, 1975. See Appendix, p. 780.

succeeding his father as chief. In a lengthy battle episode seven of Gassire's sons are killed on seven consecutive days, and each day Gassire carries the body home over his shoulder with blood dripping on the lute. The hero, whose name resembles the Soninke term gesere (= Bambara jeli), is finally forced into exile with a small company including his one remaining son, and when they are in the wilderness the lute begins to sing, having been consecrated in battle by blood that transformed it from a piece of wood into a living thing, as the blacksmith who made it had prescribed:

The wood must ring with the stroke of your sword, must absorb the blood that drops, the blood of your blood, the breath of your breath. Your pain must be its pain, your fame its fame. The wood may no longer be like the wood of a tree, but must be penetrated by and be a part of your people. Therefore it must live not only with you but with your sons. Then will the tone that comes from your heart echo in the ear of your son and live on in the people, and your son's life's blood, oozing out of his heart, will run down your body and live on in this piece of wood.¹

The process by which the lute is transformed into a life force is very similar to the manner in which a boli or altar is consecrated with sacrificial blood offerings by leaders of Bambara spirit societies, and the lute itself functions as a boli by putting its owner in touch with his destiny.² Many Muslims among the Manding peoples retain connections with indigenous religious ritual, and the resulting consciousness among griots, possibly

1 Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten, pp. 53-60.

2 Charles Monteil describes the use of boliv in Les Bambara, pp. 252-56; cf. the Bambara cosmology listing boli as one of the twelve elements that determine a person's destiny (Dieterlen, Essai, p. 13).

combined with faint recollections of fragments of the Gassire tradition, may help to account for the blood motif in Ivory Coast versions of the Surakata legend.

In some cases, griots will find a place for Surakata in the Sunjata epic. In one version his status has increased to the point where he ranks as no less than a cousin of Muhammad, as well as being the grandfather of Bala Fasari (Bala Faseke) Kouyate, Sunjata Keita's griot.¹ It is no coincidence that the informant in this case is a Kouyate, the lineage that has served for many centuries as griots of the Keitas. Here the family relationship between griots and Muhammad is more boldly stated than in the traditions where Surakata drinks the Prophet's blood, as it is not uncommon for an informant to alter the content of the tradition in order to make it correspond with his own interests.² Similarly audacious is a griot of the Doumaya clan who claims that Surakata entered Manding country during Sunjata's reign and married the mansa's daughter.³

Surakata also appears in Dieterlen's 'Mande Creation Myth', where he is again associated with blood sacrifice. In this case the griot ancestor was created from the blood of the sacrificed Faro, one of two male twins involved in the early creative process.

1 Zemp, 'La légende', p. 624.

2 Vansina, Oral Tradition, p. 79. Even though the Sunjata tradition is of vast significance to Manding society in general, by fulfilling his duty as its preserver, the Kouyate griot also serves his own purposes and those of his lineage.

3 Zemp, 'La légende', pp. 626-27.

Surakata brings Faro's skull (the first drum) down from heaven,¹ proclaims the propagation of man throughout the world, and figures in another popular etymology connecting jeli (griot) with joli-ba, a local name for the River Niger.² Assuming this tradition dates from pre-Islamic times, at first glance it appears that when griots began to feel the impact of Islam they simply invented a connection between their traditional ancestor and Muhammad, even going so far as to claim that Surakata was of Arab origin, though he had figured in pre-Islamic Manding cosmogony. Arcin (1907) thought the Surakata tradition he heard from a non-Muslim was distorted by the influence of Islam. In his version the griot ancestor drinks Muhammad's blood but refuses to embrace the faith.³ The Tarikh of the Teliko griot (published 1918) is vague regarding Surakata's religion,⁴ but Frobenius (c. 1909) was told that he did adopt the faith after confronting the Prophet.⁵ In all later accounts Surakata converts to Islam, and many of the narratives become more complex and artistic. Thus it appears that after the connection is made between Surakata and Islam, the tradition gradually develops into its modern form. But this is how easily one can go astray when working with griot-related traditions, because the fact is that Surakata entered Manding oral tradition

1 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', p. 45.

2 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', pp. 54-56, and English translation, 'The Mande Creation Myth', Africa, 27, 1957, pp. 124-37, pp. 133-34.

3 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 266.

4 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', pp. 539-40.

5 Leo Frobenius, Dichten und Denken im Sudan, Atlantis Vol. V (Jena, 1925), p. 333.

with Islam, and was catapulted backwards in time to when the earth and man were created.

The proto-Surakata is Surāqa ibn Mālik ibn Ju'shum, and it seems the griot ancestor sprang fully armed from the pages of Arabic literature. Ibn Ishāq (d. A.H. 151 = c. 760 A.D.) wrote down the tradition after hearing it from another traditionist named al-Zuhrī who heard it from 'Abdu'l-Rahmān ibn Mālik ibn Ju'shum. The latter's father was the nephew of Surāqa ibn Mālik and heard the tale from the protagonist himself.¹

The Arabic episode from which the Surakata tale is drawn appears to be from Ibn Ishāq's account of the Hijra. According to Ibn Ishāq,² when Muhammad left Mecca to go to Medina, the tribe of Quraysh offered a reward of one hundred camels for anyone who would bring him back. Attracted by the offer, Surāqa ibn Mālik slipped away from his companions and rode in pursuit, ignoring the unfavourable omen he had received after casting his divining arrows (qidah). Each time he drew near to the Prophet, Surāqa's horse would stumble and throw him, and he realized Muhammad was divinely protected. Surāqa then asked for and received an amulet from the apostle and later, after the conquest of Mecca, he showed Muhammad

1 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, translated by A. Guillaume as The Life of Muhammad (London, 1955), pp. 225-26. That Surakata was derived from Surāqa has been previously noted by Zemp, 'La légende', p. 621.

2 W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca (London, 1953), pp. 150-51, notes that "the whole story of the Hijrah has been much embellished and even the earliest sources are probably not free from additions".

the amulet as a sign of their earlier meeting and was converted to Islam.¹

There is no evidence of when the tradition of Surāqa's attack on Muhammad and his subsequent conversion reached the western Sudan, or how it was transmitted. The version published by Arcin in 1907² is the earliest one we know, so there is no proof that it was current among Manding griots earlier than the end of the nineteenth century. However, the references to three separate Surakata lineages in Humblot's Tarikh³ appear to have come a considerable distance from their Arabic origin, suggesting that when Europeans first heard of Surakata, the basic narrative had been established in Manding tradition for many generations. The Surāqa ibn Mālik and other narratives could have been transmitted orally by pilgrims returning from Mecca or by Muslim scholars, but biographies of Muhammad like the one by Ibn Ishāq and others⁴ could have been circulating among sudanic Muslim clerics and scholars several centuries before the colonial era.

Versions of the Surakata tradition collected in 1975 in the Bamako, Wasulu and Beledugu regions of Mali tend to follow the original Arabic tale more closely than do those collected by Zemp

1 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. 225-26; also Ibn Hisham, Sīrat al Nabī Vol. II, ed. Al-Hamid (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 102-04.

2 Arcin, La Guinée, p. 266.

3 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 540.

4 See Guillaume's introduction in Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. xiii-xix.

in the Ivory Coast more than a decade earlier. They are also generally longer, because they are more detailed and sometimes include additional passages from the Hijra story, or episodes based on other events in the life of the Prophet. Two of the more recently collected versions mention the conspiracy to assassinate Muhammad, as well as Gabriel's warning and the Prophet's escape. Both of these versions relate the story of how when the Prophet took refuge in a cave, a spider spun its web over the entrance and a dove built its nest there, so the enemies were deceived into thinking that no one was there.¹

The Mamary Kouyate version features extremely accurate details of these incidents. This blind griot of Kolokani describes the conspirators' meeting in which alternative proposals on how to deal with Muhammad include imprisonment, exile and murder, and he accurately recounts the objections to the first two alternatives. Mamary also tells how after Shaykna Jibril (Gabriel) warned Muhammad the latter had someone else sleep in his usual place, and how the Prophet escaped the assassins by sprinkling dust on their heads and reciting verses which blinded them to his passing.² All of these incidents are prominent in the story of the Hijra as told by Ibn Ishāq,³ and it is clear that Mamary Kouyate's version of

1 Fakama Kaloga, Bamako, September 17, 1975. See Appendix, p. 775; Mamary Kouyate, Kolokani, August, 1975, Appendix, p. 790. That reports about the cave given by the Quraysh were contradictory is noted by al-Tabātabā'i, Al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'an (2nd ed. Beirut, 1971), IX, pp. 291-92.

2 Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, pp. 786-87.

3 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. 221-23.

the Surakata legend is simply a close retelling of that story. This is made possible by the fact that the story of the Hijra as well as other episodes from Muhammad's biography can be heard regularly on Radio Mali.¹

Surakata's part in the creation myth was outlined earlier, and this fits Henige's definition of 'feedback', which he says "occurs in oral tradition when extraneous material, usually from printed sources, is incorporated into the tradition".² Thus, the appearance of Surakata in an episode of the Sunjata tradition is also feedback. However, the basic narrative of the Surakata legend originated in Arabic literature rather than evolving as a product of the Manding oral arts. So it does not seem quite accurate to regard recent infusions of the original literary version into griot repertoires solely as feedback. Instead, when Bambara griots hear the story of the Hijra on Radio Mali, it is simply a renewal of the source from which earlier generations derived their collective ancestor.

Less popular episodes from the life of Muhammad tend to be more distorted, taken at random and combined with other elements as griots build a tale that suits their requirements. The story of

1 During recording sessions in Kolokani, Mamary's relative, Lassana, sometimes sat off to one side wearing earplugs and listening to a transistor radio. In Bamako, at Radio Mali, I tried to learn which literary sources were used for the broadcasts, but failed to locate the person who could, or would give me that information.

2 David P. Henige, 'The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands', J.A.H., XIV, 2 (1973), pp. 223-35, p. 223.

Badara Alou describes how, after Surakata joins Muhammad's company, he always precedes the others from one town to the next, praising the Prophet and heralding his arrival. This allows the townspeople time to prepare for Muhammad's appearance which they celebrate by presenting him with food and gifts. In recognition of Surakata's services, the Prophet always rewards his griot with the largest share of the booty. This angers Muhammad's son-in-law Badara Alou, and he complains to the Prophet that the spoils should be divided equally among his companions. In response, Muhammad directs Surakata to feign illness and not participate in the next campaign. In the griot's absence, the Prophet's company arrives in towns unheralded, no one prepares food for them or recognizes them, and they undergo severe privations.¹ In the meantime, according to some versions, Surakata visits Badara Alou's wife and calumniates her husband so effectively that when he returns she refuses to perform any wifely duties.² Muhammad advises Badara Alou that the only way to resolve the problem is to present Surakata with many gifts, bringing us to the main point of the story, which is to remind the griot's audience of the importance of his role so they will be generous to him. The episode also justifies the aggressive manner in which the bards sometimes demand payment for their services.³

1 Fanyama Diabate, Appendix, p. 780; Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, p. 792 (in this version Surakata's victim is Badara Alou); Fadian Soumanou, Bamako, November 5-23, 1975, Appendix, p. 801 (in this version the victim is Sedina Alou, not Badara).

2 Compare punishment ordered by the apostle in Ibn Ishāq (Sīrat, p. 612), where the man is denied access to his wife.

3 Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, p. 793; Fadian Soumanou, Appendix, p. 802.

Considering the extensive impact of the Hijra story, the theme of dissatisfaction over distribution of the booty may well have been inspired by an incident occurring later in Muhammad's life, in which his men quarrel over the division of the spoils of Hawazin, which included some six thousand captives and 'innumerable' sheep and camels. After the people of Hawazin accepted Islam, Muhammad returned the captives to their homes and divided the herds among his men, but 'Abbās ibn Mirdās was dissatisfied with the number of camels he received and blamed Muhammad who had grown weary of such complaints:

The apostle said, "Get him away and cut off his tongue from me", so they gave him (camels) until he was satisfied, this being what the apostle meant by his order.¹

Mamary Kouyate, whose version of Surakata so closely follows Ibn Ishāq's story of the Hijra, used the tongue cutting image in his account of the confrontation over booty between Surakata and Muhammad's son-in-law. When the Prophet tells Badara Alou to resolve the problem by appeasing Surakata, he says,

Go to Surakata and bow to him.
Go to Surakata and cut the tongue out of his mouth.

As Mamary tells it, Badara Alou takes this advice literally and begins to sharpen his knife until Muhammad explains that the way to cut out Surakata's tongue is to present him with a large gift.²

1 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. 592-95.

2 Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, p. 793.

There is another feature of the Surakata tradition that deserves brief mention here, keeping in mind the fact that any member of the nyamakala level of the social hierarchy can and often does function to some degree as an oral artist. While the Surakata narratives are of course primarily concerned with associating the griot ancestor with Islam, they occasionally include episodes that provide similar background for the legendary progenitors of other nyamakala groups.¹ To take the funew for example, the role of this group varies from place to place,² but an important historical aspect of their generally ill-defined occupation is a largely Islamic orientation. When they function as griots in the Bambara context, their oral artistry usually focuses on Islamic themes. An episode that is sometimes woven into the Surakata tradition gives various explanations of how Fosana, traditional funew ancestor, gained Muhammad's blessing as the most righteous and trustworthy of men. In one version the Prophet disagrees with a disciple who declares that being the son of a good man is better than being the son of one who is well dressed. They arrive in Medina with Muhammad the only one among them wearing ragged clothes, and the townspeople welcome everyone to their homes except the Prophet who is left standing alone by the mosque. A blind man finds Muhammad there and takes him home and feeds him his last kilo of maize, for which he is rewarded with a perpetually full granary and a nasi (amulet)³ that restores his

1 Though weavers are artisans they are not nyamakalaw, and I have not encountered a tradition naming an Islamic ancestor for them.

2 See Chapter II, pp. 60-62.

3 The kind of amulet or nasi (well-being) referred to here was a blessing in the form of holy scripture written in ink, then dissolved in water and drunk or used to bathe ailing parts of the body. See Dieterlen, Essai, p. 95, n. 3.

sight. Moreover, for being the only one to offer Muhammad lodging, the man is praised as 'Fosana', the most virtuous of men in Medina.¹

In another explanation of the fune ancestry, Muhammad places one of his wives in Fosana's care before embarking on a journey. Fosana is sorely tempted to couple with the woman, so he cuts off his own testicles. Observing everything from afar, Muhammad casts a spell so the severed parts can be preserved and restored to the disciple. When the Prophet returns he chooses Fosana as the most trustworthy of his people.² An interesting aspect of this anecdote, is that as in many versions of the Surakata-Muhammad relationship, the connection between the ancestor figure and the Prophet involves blood sacrifice.

Other legendary nyamakala ancestors, including lesser-knowns like Walali Ibrahima of the leatherworkers and assorted blacksmith progenitors, also appear in episodes of the Surakata tradition linking them with Islam. Moreover, the entire pantheon of nyamakala ancestry is occasionally brought together with the greatest traditional Manding hero of them all, Sunjata, in a tale that connects the combined company with Muhammad. To conclude with one of the more sweeping claims to Islamic antecedents, there is a tradition that Tiramakhan, one of Sunjata's greatest generals,

1 Fadian Soumanou, Appendix, p. 804; Satigi Soumarouo, Kabaya, September 2, 1975, Appendix, p. 811; Compare the blind man Abai Boulazairou (Mali Balansari) to the monk Bahīrā in Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. 79-80.

2 Fanyama Diabate, Appendix, p. 780.

provided sixteen warriors for Muhammad's famous battle at 'Kaybara' (Khaybar). All but one of them were killed, and the lone survivor, ashamed because he did not accompany his fellows in making the supreme sacrifice, threatens to commit suicide. Admonished that he must not do so before having children because a man who dies without heirs cannot get revenge, he is reminded that Muhammad still has four ngaraw,¹ and that as the lone survivor he must send them to announce the names of the fallen warriors. The survivor of the battle of Khaybar first goes to Fune Fosana and offers him payment in gold to announce the deaths of the other warriors, but Fosana refuses, as do Walali Ibrahima and the blacksmith ancestor, who in this version is indentified as Ndamangiri.² They decline to carry the message on the grounds that it is better to refuse great wealth than to be the bearer of bad tidings.³ Finally Surakata is asked to carry the message of death, and as the ancestor of all jeliw, he maintains the griot ideal of commanding a high price for his service as a master of speech. Unlike the other nyamakala ancestors, Surakata does not hesitate to accept the commission, but he contrives to collect the payment of gold while cleverly avoiding the stigma normally attached to people who inform others of the death of their relatives.⁴

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- 1 Savants of the nyamakala class, masters of the oral arts.
 - 2 Tradition names several figures as blacksmith ancestors, and in other contexts Ndamangiri is said to be the progenitor of the Jawara lineage.
 - 3 The bearer of such news subsequently became identified with the deaths because it was customary for the mourners to wander through the village crying that 'so-and-so' told them about it.
 - 4 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix II, pp. 807-08.

Fajigi

To a considerable extent, the Fajigi tradition is the internal oral account of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324. Taken together in all his manifestations, however, the collective protagonist of the legend is an ambiguous figure, and the traditional narrative corresponds only very roughly to the historic pilgrimage as it has been pieced together from the written Arabic sources. Taken by themselves and at face value, the individual oral accounts are virtually worthless as sources of information about the historical deeds of Mansa Musa, something that is unusually clear in this case because the oral traditions can be checked against the relatively substantial external written accounts. However, Fajigi (or Makanta Jigi as he is also known) has not remained one of the standard heroes because generations of bards have been particularly interested in preserving the memory of a pilgrimage by a pious mansa, though this doubtless had much to do with the tradition's origin. As others have observed, the traditional recollection of Mansa Musa does not extend beyond his identity as the legendary character Fajigi.¹ The Fajigi legend has endured in large part because it has been an expression of the traditionalist Manding way of accommodating indigenous religious practices to Islam. But it has had other functions as well, and perhaps a useful way to describe it is as a kind of framework on which Manding griots have posted their messages to the greater Islamic world regarding the 'legitimate' origin of several autochthonous social groups and institutions. The clearest of these is the bardic statement of

1 Cisse, 'Notes', p. 216; J. Spencer Trimingham, A History of Islam in West Africa (London, 1962), p. 3.

the position of indigenous Manding religion vis-à-vis Islam.

It seems clear that the basic narrative line of the Fajigi tradition was based on Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, which is to say it was engendered in the fourteenth century, though the earliest accounts probably differed greatly from those we know. By the mid-seventeenth century when Ibn al-Mukhtār was collecting information, episodes of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage were being recounted orally,¹ but no traditions mentioning Fajigi were recorded before the colonial era, so any dating of his appearance in the oral literature would be highly speculative.

The basic narrative line of the tradition commences with Fajigi desiring to atone for some sin involving his mother. He undertakes a pilgrimage to Mecca where he acquires the spiritually powerful altars (boliw) of the major Manding religious societies, including the prestigious Komo society. As the hero returns through the lands of the Manding, he distributes some of the boliw and various potions and amulets to people who help him. When Fajigi reaches the rivers of Mali he uses a magic canoe to transport the boliw. When the canoe encounters rough waters, some of the cargo falls into the water and is transformed into several life forms such as fish and scorpions. On arriving at home, the location of which varies according to the informant,²

1 Ibn al-Mukhtār (wrote c. 1665), Tarikh el-Fettach, Arab text and French translation by O. Houdas and M. Delafosse (Paris, 1913), p. 56.

2 Koura near Narena in Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270; Tikko on the Niger in Dieterlen, Essai, p. 92; Nora near Siguiiri, Cercle Kankan, Guinea, in Seydou Camara, Bamako, September 1975, Appendix, p. 756, Satigi Soumarouo, Appendix, p. 726, and D. Traore, 'Makanta Djigui fondateur de la magie soudanaise', Notes Africaines, 35, 1947, pp. 23-27, p. 24.

the canoe sinks to the bottom of the lake or river where it remains to this day, itself a powerful boli that receives periodic offerings.

Some elements of the Fajigi tradition are obviously derived from episodes of Mansa Musa's historical journey, in fact in one version of the legend the protagonist is 'El Hadj Moussa'.¹ But there is more than one facet to the tradition, and when viewed from alternative angles, the relationship of the legendary hero to the mansa becomes somewhat elusive.

Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 made such a deep impression on the Islamic world that it was well documented by Arab chroniclers, and it thereby occupies a conspicuous place in the history of fourteenth century West Africa. Although Mansa Musa was preceded to Mecca by at least two other Malian chiefs of state,² his pilgrimage caused the greatest stir owing to the large numbers in his retinue and his extravagant spending of gold in Egypt.³ The mansa was known for his spirit of penitence and devotion, and his pilgrimage was recorded in several Egyptian

1 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270.

2 Mansa Wali (1260-1277) and Sakura (1298-1308). See Al-Umari, Masālik el Absār fi Mamālik el Amsār, French translation L'Afrique moins l'Egypte by Gaudefroy-Demombynes (Paris, 1927, pp. 89-93, and Ibn Khaldūn in Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 344-45. For the possibility of pre-Sunjata pilgrimages, see Jean-Louis Triaud, 'Quelques remarques sur l'islamisation du Mali des origines à 1300', B.I.F.A.N., t. XXX, sér. B. no. 4, 1968, pp. 1329-1352, pp. 1342-44.

3 Al-Maqrizi in Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 91, n. 4.

chronicles as one of the principal events of the year.¹ Though the Fajigi legend is generally perceived to be the oral account of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, the external Arabic writings contain little that corresponds to Manding tradition. About all that can be said in this regard is that both the historic mansa and the hero of the legend went to Mecca, and that the former purchased many works on Muslim law to take back to Mali,² while the latter returned with boliv for the indigenous spirit societies.

It is not until we compare the oral accounts with Ibn al-Mukhtār's description of Mansa Musa's journey that we find significant corresponding elements. The author of the Tarikh al-Fettash was a Soninke who wrote in the western Sudan in the seventeenth century,³ and many of his sources were oral, so his account of the pilgrimage fits somewhere between the earlier written sources and the later oral accounts. Several passages about Mansa Musa seem more akin to oral tradition than to historical documentation, including the extraordinary numbers of people claimed to have accompanied him,⁴ the many mosques he is said to have had built on the way to Egypt,⁵ the story of the bath prepared in the desert for the wife and her five hundred attendants,⁶ and the incident at the well.⁷ Ibn al-Mukhtār

1 Levtzion, Ancient, pp. 209-10.

2 Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 91.

3 See Levtzion, 'A Seventeenth-Century Chronicle', pp. 571-593.

4 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 58.

5 Ibid., p. 58.

6 Ibid., pp. 59-61.

7 Ibid., p. 62.

identifies an informant on the deeds of Mansa Musa as the learned Mohammed Kouma who was familiar with the traditions of the ancients.¹

The parts of the Tarikh al-Fettash for which roughly corresponding elements can be found in the oral sources begin with Mansa Musa's motive for embarking on his famous journey. According to Mohammed Kouma, the mansa accidentally killed his mother Kanku (Gongo) and was advised by a learned Muslim that the way to obtain pardon was to plead for it in Mecca.² One version of the legend has Makanta Jigi leaving for a pilgrimage after committing incest with his mother.³ The Seydou Camara account gives the same motive for departure, but has Fajigi killing his mother after he returns.⁴ In the Tarikh al-Fettash we are told that the mansa prepared for his pilgrimage by collecting provisions from all over the land, by consulting a diviner regarding the most auspicious day for departure, and by loading forty donkeys with gold.⁵ Seydou Camara's story of Fajigi is very similar, with the village imam advising the hero to go to Mecca, and here too the pilgrim gathers his provisions, consults the diviners, and collects much gold.⁶

1 Ibid., p. 56.

2 Ibid., p. 59.

3 Traore, 'Makanta', p. 24.

4 Seydou Camara, Appendix, p. 761; cf. Sunjata's threat to kill his mother in Innes, Sunjata, p. 53, lines 287-88 and note 284, p. 110.

5 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 63.

6 Seydou Camara, Appendix, p. 747; but such preparations would be standard for any journey of the time.

Ibn al-Mukhtār does not mention any items brought back from Mecca by Mansa Musa, though he does describe how the mansa induced four shurafā from the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh to accompany him back to Mali so the land would be blessed by their presence.¹ Elsewhere, Ibn al-Mukhtār claims that on the way to Egypt, each time Mansa Musa passed a village on Friday, he built a mosque there the same day,² and there are traditions from Dioma and Hamana in Guinea that make the same claim.³ The same Guinea tradition names Sirimanban among the mansa's companions,⁴ a name that is very close to that of Silman-Bana Niahate who encounters the villain at the well in the Tarikh al-Fettash.⁵ Ibn al-Mukhtār also describes how, on arriving at Timbuktu on the return journey, Mansa Musa sent on ahead by canoe his wife's entourage, the shurafā, and much of the baggage. As they made their way upriver, the canoes were attacked and raided by the chief of Jenne who had declared himself in revolt against the mansa.⁶ Aside from the basic theme of the boliv being brought from Mecca, the one element common to all oral versions of the legend is the story of the canoe running into troubled waters, spilling some boliv, and finally sinking to become a boliv itself. The difficulties encountered by

1 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, pp. 63-64.

2 Ibid., p. 58.

3 D.T. Niane, 'Recherches sur l'empire du Mali au moyen age', Recherches Africaines, 1959, pp. 17-46, p. 26.

4 Niane, 'Recherches', p. 26.

5 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 62.

6 Ibid., p. 64.

the canoes come from storms and whirlwinds,¹ which may be the equivalents of the attacking and looting described in the Tarikh al-Fettash.

These are the corresponding elements, however slight, between the Tarikh al-Fettash and the Fajigi tradition. Aside from the versions naming Mansa Musa outright as the legendary hero, it is these points on which rest the assumption that the Fajigi tradition is the oral version of the mansa's pilgrimage. Considering Ibn al-Mukhtār's heavy reliance on oral sources for the same episodes collected centuries later as part of the Fajigi legend, it appears that the Tarikh al-Fettash account of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage contains early stages of the tradition as we know it.² This suggests that Mansa Musa first appeared in oral accounts as a Muslim hero but subsequently evolved into the pagan hero Fajigi who was better suited to the needs of the bards seeking an accommodation of local spirit societies to Islam.

On the whole, the links connecting the boli tradition to the historic pilgrimage are not very impressive, but in addition to this evidence, it can be argued that the names 'Makanta Jigi' and 'Fajigi' originated as praise-names for Mansa Musa. The name 'Fajigi' (N'Fajigi) can be translated as 'Grandfather' or 'Ancestor of Hope', which carries a sentiment similar to that contained in

1 Henry, L'âme, p. 132; Seydou Camara, Appendix, p.

2 It is impossible to know to what extent the Tarikh al-Fettash might have influenced oral accounts in the centuries since it was published, but it is well to keep in mind the possibility of feedback.

the Bambara aphorism N'jigi ye Alla ye (God is my hope).¹ A full rendering of the legendary hero's longer name would be 'Makantarajigi', which can be loosely translated as 'Master of the journey to Mecca'.² The shorter 'Fajigi' seems to be preferred among griots who sing their versions of the legend, probably because its sound and syllabification are well-suited to the rhythm and style of their performances.³

The most significant feature of the Fajigi tradition is the paradoxical claim that the mansa most famous for his devotion to Islam provided his subjects with the essential paraphernalia of the ancestral religion. Thus, from the traditional non-Muslim point of view, Mansa Musa's pilgrimage emerges, not as a triumph of faithful Islamic endeavour, but as a boon for indigenous modes of worship. In order to understand this, it is necessary to briefly review relevant aspects of indigenous Manding religion.

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- 1 Bazin, Dictionnaire, p. 163. The significance of the name is related to the term jigi seme which is the essence sought by making offerings to the boli (altar) of the nyama (spirit, force). Monteil (Les Bambara, p. 273), translates it as 'powerful protector', and it could also be taken as 'giver of hope', the aim being to obtain the power of realizing all desired goals. A similar sentiment is expressed in the saying M'bi jigi seme Alla lahidou kan, 'My hope is in the promises of God' (Bazin, Dictionnaire), though in the context of traditional ritual the name of a boli such as Komo would replace the word for God.
- 2 Tauxier, La religion, p. 287. This translation requires changing jigi to tigi. A more literal rendering would also be more awkward, as with 'Mecca-goer for hope', though with the idea of hope being implicit when jigi is used as a proper noun, something like 'Mecca-going Jigi' would suffice.
- 3 See for example, Seydou Camara, Appendix, p. 741, and Mamary Kouyate, Appendix, p. 767

Pre-Islamic Manding religion was based on a complex cosmogony that included a supreme creator and a pantheon of lesser deities.¹ Its daily expression involved rituals associated with farming and blacksmithing,² a system of life-crisis associations with accompanying rituals,³ and spirit societies like the Komo that were of profound social and political significance.⁴ Referred to by various writers as 'cults', 'secret societies' and 'brotherhoods', the Komo, Nama, Kore and others are village organizations that function as protectors of the community and as intermediaries between the temporal and spiritual worlds. The latter function involves the use of objects called boliw, a kind of altar used in ritual sacrifice, some of which the Fajigi tradition claims were brought from Mecca. Blood sacrifices are performed over several kinds of boliw⁵ in order to call upon and influence the vital spiritual force known as nyama (nyana, gnama).⁶ The boliw differ from the tree stump (pembele) and stone altars,⁷ in that they can be

1 See Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 1-33; 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', pp. 39-76; 'Myth et organisation sociale en Afrique occidentale', Journal de la Société des Africanistes, t. XXIX, 1959, pp. 119-38; 'The Mande Creation Myth', pp. 124-37.

2 Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 98-127.

3 Tauxier, La religion, pp. 355-469.

4 See Labouret, 'Les Manding', pp. 87-95. For other societies see D. Zahan, Sociétés d'initiation bambara: le N'domo, le Koré (Paris, 1960); Tauxier, La religion, pp. 272-338; Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 142-75.

5 This refers to boliw owned collectively by a society, in contrast to those that are individually owned and privately used. See Dieterlen, Essai, p. 93.

6 For detailed explanations see Henry, L'âme, pp. 26-28, and Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 252.

7 Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 90-92.

fashioned of virtually any kind of material including wood, metal, bone and hair.¹ One of the most essential of ritual objects, the boli is both a symbol of the universe and a receptacle of the forces that animate the universe. It is, moreover, an intermediary that permits communication with the ancestor or supernatural power whose force permeates it.² The boliw are listed in Bambara cosmology as one of the twelve elements determining the qualities and destinies of a person,³ and in the creation myth they were introduced into the world by Faro, a principal agent of creation.⁴ This supposedly pre-Islamic tradition of the origin of boliw does not conflict with the Fajigi legend because the latter claims, not that all the original boliw were brought from Mecca, but that the principal ones were.

If the boliw are such potent symbols of indigenous Manding religion, why does tradition claim they originated in Mecca? Both Trimmingham⁵ and Person⁶ interpret the tradition of Mansa Musa procuring the boliw as indicating that the mansa sought to control the spirit societies, especially the powerful Komo. However, there is no evidence that Komo or any other secret society ever had any

1 Other materials include animal tails, horn, claws, parts of the human body, peppers and honey. See Dieterlen, Essai, p. 92, and Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 253.

2 Dieterlen, Essai, pp. 92-93 and 145.

3 Ibid., p. 13.

4 Ibid., p. 92.

5 J.S. Trimmingham, Islam in West Africa (London, 1959), p. 107, n. 1.

6 Person, Samori, I, p. 81, n. 62.

kind of centralized organization that could have been subject to effective government control. Indeed, a salient characteristic of these societies has been their lack of centralization with, for example, the Komo of one village being independent of the Komo in the next.¹ Mansa Musa faced a dilemma, in that he was the Muslim ruler of a predominantly pagan state, with his authority continuing to be based on pre-Islamic traditional values, and in spite of his reputation for piety, he was probably not an entirely unqualified Muslim.² Providing the Komo or other societies supported the mansa, they might well have served him in a useful capacity such as aiding in the collection of taxes. But if the societies figured in Mansa Musa's power base, this would probably have been more a matter of influence on his part, than of control. And if the societies were as important in the fourteenth century as they were in later times, that is to say if they were a significant social force, their manner of functioning would have been such that the main flow of influence most likely extended not from the mansa to them, but from them on behalf of the mansa into other elements of the population. Noting that the emphasis of leadership roles was more on power than on authority, Hopkins succinctly describes a situation that would have applied to Mansa Musa:

The most enduring of the powerful polities were those where control of a key resource or trade

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- 1 Tauxier, La religion, p. 272. Though villages not possessing their own Komo can be linked to the Komo in a neighbouring village (Dieterlen, Essai, p. 144).
- 2 Nehemia Levtzion, 'Patterns of Islamization in West Africa' in D.F. McCall and N.R. Bennett (eds.), Aspects of West African Islam (Boston University Papers on Africa), Vol. V (Boston, 1971), pp. 31-39, p. 36.

routes gave stability or where a leader was able to mobilize support from certain elements of the population in order to establish dominance over the rest of it.¹

Mansa Musa controlled key resources as well as trade routes, and he must have had adequate support from his subjects, or he could not have absented himself long enough for a pilgrimage to Mecca.² Rather than being among those particularly subject to domination by their ruler, societies like Komo were probably part of the elements providing the mansa with the means to dominate others.

Another interpretation of the Fajigi legend has been offered by Levtzion, who suggests that the tradition of the Komo being brought from Mecca indicates that the spirit society may have been revitalized during the apogee of the Mali empire.³ Person also thinks the tradition points to a renewal of the societies during Mansa Musa's era, and he adds that this may have been the time when they were crystallized into their present form.⁴ Dieterlen expressed a similar idea when she suggested the possibility that the person represented in legend by Makanta Jigi was a religious legislator who codified certain beliefs and founded associations around previously existing boliw.⁵

1 Hopkins, 'Maninka', p. 113.

2 Levtzion also makes this point (Ancient, p. 209).

3 Nehemia Levtzion, 'The Differential Impact of Islam among the Soninke and the Manding', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972, p. 16.

4 Person, Samori I, p. 81, n. 62.

5 Dieterlen, Essai, p. 92.

If Komo and other societies were renewed or revitalized during the reign of Mansa Musa, it is not likely that this resulted from his efforts alone, because it would have required a means of exercising authority over them, in addition to a system of communication between the spirit societies that almost certainly never existed. If traditional religion received new impetus during the first half of the fourteenth century, Islam may have provided a good deal of impulse for the thrust. A powerful Islamic presence could have stimulated ideological and ritual adjustments in the practices of Komo and other societies, leaving them stronger than they were before the foreign religion was introduced. If so, it probably happened more or less spontaneously, as a result of the general non-Muslim way of interpreting Islam in the context of indigenous religious practices. Received versions of the Fajigi tradition appear to be a by-product of the 'sudanization'¹ or 'Africanization'² of Islam, and at some point the legend began to function as a statement of the position

1 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 331. Remarking on this process of the 'sudanization' of Islam, Monteil concluded that in certain respects the effect of Islam was to strengthen indigenous religious practices. He believed this strength accrued when blacksmith leaders of spirit societies stopped considering Islam a rival hermetism and became Muslims so they could utilize the arsenal of Islamic magic power. The example he gives is that the divination by geomancy so popular among the Bambara was introduced by Muslims, which to local traditionalists meant that the practices of their diviners were corroborated by the holy books of Islam and that this accorded the diviners power equal to that of learned marabouts (Les Bambara, p. 333).

2 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 200.

of traditional belief vis-à-vis the foreign religion.¹

An example of how Manding people regarded Islam from the point of view of traditional practices is revealed in an anecdote told by Raffeneil (1856). During a visit to the Bambara state of Kaarta, the explorer's host was a blacksmith named Niany who one day complained to Raffeneil that some of the latter's African escort were dipping water from the household supply. When asked why this troubled him, the blacksmith angrily replied that he was not a Muslim, and when Muslims dipped water from his container with the kettle (satala, satale) they used for their ablutions, the family water supply became sanctified by its contact with the satala. The blacksmith explained that he and his children drank that water, and since they did not pray or fast, and since they ate pork, God would punish them. The blacksmith's father had told him that any water touched by a satala made a 'marabout' of the person who drank it.² Manding traditionalists seem to have conceived the Muslim god Allah as a powerful manifestation of the life force nyama.³ The satala appeared to them to be a kind of boli, and it was treated with the same kind of circumspection accorded the boli of any local spirit society.

1 Niane, who is probably not critical enough of oral tradition as a historical source, regards the paradox of Mansa Musa bringing boliv from Mecca as an indication of the regression of Islam in Mali at the beginning of the fifteenth century, resulting from the loss of the eastern provinces commanding the pilgrimage routes. He feels this is supported by a tradition that the son of Mansa Musa renounced Islam ('Recherches', pp. 26-27).

2 Anne Raffeneil, Nouveau voyage au pays des nègres ... (Paris, 1856), t. I, pp. 463-64.

3 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 332.

There are cases where this same sort of veneration has been accorded certain volumes of Islamic literature, as at Larabanga in northern Ghana. According to local tradition, a copy of the Koran was made by an Arab who settled among the people of what was to become the state of Gonja. An Arabic history of the area tells us that the book remained among his descendants:

When any distress falls upon them, or they want anything, they pray to Allah, seeking his favour, calling 'Our Lord, for the sake of our forefathers who brought us this Book we turn to you, being omnipotent, praying to give us whatever we ask for'. Then they all say 'Amen', and wipe the palms of their hands on their faces. If there is a cow they slaughter it. Then they fold the Koran and return it to its bag. Others regard this Koran as a shrine.¹

Obviously the frequency with which Islamic relics have seen service as boliv in the centuries since Mansa Musa's pilgrimage can never be known, but some of them could have functioned as family or village institutions for many generations and still have died out so long ago as to be forgotten. Still within memory is the legacy of Bemba Kamara, distinguished Muslim ancestor of the Kamara lineage group of Selefoukou, south of Kangaba. His dates are unknown, but the tradition is that he made seven pilgrimages to Mecca, and that relics of these journeys in the form of several books were left to his descendants. At some point these were sewn into leather and consecrated as boliv that received so many blood offerings through the years that a hard shell was formed around them,

1 M. El-Wakkad and I. Wilks (eds. and trans.), Oissat Salagha Tarikh Ghunja - 'The Story of Salaga and the History of Gonja', Ghana Notes and Queries, 3, 1961, pp. 12-15, p. 14; revised translation by Nehemia Levtzion, Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa (London, 1968), p. 73.

which is thought to have contributed to their preservation. These boliw were destroyed in 1914 when a marabout converted the Selefoukou people to Islam and removed the books from their coverings.¹ In view of the main theme of the Fajigi tradition, it is interesting to speculate on the possibility that the Kamara ancestor was one of Mansa Musa's companions, but the multitude of destructive factors coming to bear on the relics over almost six centuries must surely place this outside the realm of possibility.²

Though essential in the ritual of petitioning a nyama for favours, the boliw can, as noted earlier, be made of virtually anything. In the Fajigi tradition, it will be remembered, even one of the canoes that carried the baggage brought from Mecca became a boli, and according to Dieterlen, the bases of Komo altars sometimes contain what is said to be wood from Makanta Jigi's canoe.³ In the light of this, it is not surprising that a kettle or a copy of the Koran could be ascribed the status of a boli.

1 Cisse, 'Notes', p. 217 and 217 n. 1.

2 The loss of the Selefoukou relics is regrettable because an analysis of the paper on which the books were either hand written or printed would provide approximate dates of the ancestor's pilgrimage. High quality paper sewn into leather and encased in an airtight carapace of dried blood might have lasted several centuries. Paper made in early phases of the industry was generally superior to later products, and the science of papermaking and printing was sufficiently advanced in the Middle East by the fourteenth century that the books purchased by Mansa Musa would have been of high quality material. Paper was first used in Mecca in 707 A.D., brought there from China. In 900 A.D., true paper was made in Egypt, and by 1035 it was so common that Cairo merchants were using it to wrap vegetables, spices and hardware, something unheard of elsewhere. There was block printing in Egypt by 1250 (DardHunter, Paper-making: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft (New York, 1943), pp. 464-473).

3 Dieterlen, Essai, p. 148. Earlier (p. 92) she notes that Makanta Jigi's name is cited in numerous prayers, especially during the course of Komo ceremonies.

Al-Umari reported that Mansa Musa purchased a great many works on Muslim law,¹ and if the treatment of Islamic literature at Larabanga and Selefoukou is any indication, numbers of these could have found their way into the hands of local spirit societies and been consecrated as boliw. The potential exists for the main statement in the Fajigi tradition to contain an astonishing degree of accuracy.

It is difficult to gauge the degree to which the bolitigiw (altar masters) and other Manding theurgists felt threatened by Islam in the fourteenth century. Early on, the foreign religion may have been regarded as a mere rival at worst, and as a provider of opportunity at best. Levtzion believes that in the time of Mansa Musa, Islamic influence varied from one social group to the next,² and remarking elsewhere on the same era he notes that

Within the political system, Islam and traditionalism ... represented different social groups competing to extend their influence over the rulers.³

However, the possibility of rivalry between different indigenous societies should also be considered. Commenting on the lack of centralization of spirit societies, Tauxier describes how the Komo or Nama of one village would claim to be older and more powerful than the next.⁴ Alert leaders of some societies may have adopted

1 Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 91.

2 Levtzion, 'The Differential Impact', p. 13.

3 Levtzion, 'Patterns', p. 36.

4 Tauxier, La religion, pp. 272-73.

Islam and given their boliw exotic origins in hope of gaining an advantage over their counterparts in neighbouring villages.

The Fajigi legend carries the usual compliment of fantastic elements and distortions both intentional and unintentional that are encountered when working with ancient tradition, and it could be argued that the paradox of a Muslim mansa providing his pagan subjects with the materials essential to their spirit societies was a distortion of the intentional variety. Such was the belief of Father Henry who, it will be seen below, was convinced that nineteenth-century griots and bolitigiw claimed the boliw came from Mecca in order to justify their attention to non-Muslim ritual. Though the Fajigi tradition as we know it could be less than two centuries old, it is interesting to speculate that its basic theme might have blossomed very soon after Mansa Musa returned from his pilgrimage. Certainly the legend as we know it reflects attitudes that could have been current in fourteenth century Mali when the power and mystery of Islam were beginning to impress leaders of the spirit societies.

While the impact of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage on the Islamic world is well known, little has been said regarding the impression it made on the mansa's ordinary subjects, most of whom remained non-Muslim,¹ and thousands of whom are said to have accompanied him on the journey in 1324.² The external written sources

1 Levtzion, 'Patterns', p. 34.

2 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 211.

emphasize the pilgrimage's importance to Islam in Egypt and the Holy Land, but the internal oral accounts provide useful insights regarding the significance of the journey for the non-Muslim populace in general, and particularly for those actively engaged in maintaining ancient spirit societies in the face of an encroaching foreign religion.

If Mansa Musa's subjects in outlying regions were impressed by their ruler's pilgrimage, it may have been for different reasons than those prompting Arab chroniclers to record the event. The initial impact of the mansa's adventure on the ordinary Manding farmer, hunter or artisan was probably felt when their lord's agents scoured the land for the provisions necessary for such a vast undertaking.¹ In preparing for a journey of more than a year on which he was reportedly accompanied by thousands of his subjects,² and during which he was to dazzle the Islamic world by his extravagance,³ Mansa Musa's demands must have been substantial and might well have caused economic stress in at least some regions of a land not known for its large food surpluses. Great numbers of ordinary subjects gained more intimate experience of the pilgrimage by being included in the mansa's retinue. Many of these were from the lower echelons of the social hierarchy,

1 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 57.

2 Al-Sadi, Tarikh es-Soudan, Arab text and French translation by O. Houdas (Paris, 1911), p. 13; Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 58; Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 90.

3 Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 79; Ibn Kathīr, Al-Bidāya wa l-nihāya (Cairo, 1351-58/1932-40) in Cuoq, Recueil, p. 327; Al-Maqrizī in Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 390-91.

including hundreds of slaves serving as carriers,¹ and in addition to the hundreds of other servants,² warrior-guards, traders and courtiers, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that there were representative numbers of artisans and griots.³ There is no record of how many Muslims accompanied the mansa, but even if the entire company down to the lowliest of the baggage carrying slaves professed to be converts, there must have been a significant number who retained some consciousness of the indigenous Manding religion. Indeed, one suspects that there were a good many who, when they were on their home soil, had closer ties to their traditional local beliefs than they did to Islam. The point is, that while Mansa Musa and his immediate escort conducted their affairs in Cairo and Mecca, there must have been a great many Manding people acquiring their own impressions of these places, who still observed through the eyes of people used to thinking in terms of the ancient spirit societies. According to al-Umari, the Malians were involved in a great deal of trading in the Cairo market where they were severely exploited by Egyptian merchants.⁴ When they returned from Mecca and Cairo, these non-Muslims reported their impressions of the journey to those who stayed at home, and it seems quite possible that in their accounts, the 'grand nombre d'ouvrages de droit malékite' that al-Umari says were purchased by

1 Al-Sadi, Tarikh, p. 13; Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 90.

2 Ibn al-Mukhtār, Tarikh, p. 59.

3 Niane, 'Recherches', p. 26.

4 Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 79.

the mansa¹ became the one thousand, four hundred and forty-four boliv which the traditions of Dioma and Hamana claim Mansa Musa (here not called Fajigi) brought from Mecca.² We can only speculate about what things seen and purchased in the land of Islam meant to the ordinary thousands in the mansa's company, but when they returned and began to recount their versions of the journey, their experiences entered the realm of oral tradition.³ The impact of this may have been considerable, and it could have contributed to the origins of the Fajigi legend.

Versatile tradition that it is, versions of the Fajigi legend may reflect certain events of the colonial era as well as of the fourteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the Manding spirit societies faced new pressures from jihad movements aimed at reforming Islam and re-establishing it as the predominant religion and governing force. This could have caused a resurgence of interest in the tradition of bringing the boliv from Mecca, in fact it may have been then that the Fajigi legend acquired its present form. In 1861 the jihad of al-Hajj Umar came to the Bambara of Segou, and the boliv tradition was subsequently very

1 Al-Umari, Masālik, p. 91.

2 Niane, 'Recherches', p. 26. A similar reference in Frobenius (Dichten, p. 331) has the number of boliv at 1,004. The significance of the more common number 1,444 is obscure, but in one version of the Sunjata tradition it is given repeatedly as the number of soldiers brought by various commanders to serve with Sunjata (Innes, Sunjata, pp. 63, 65, 67 and Innes' note 524, p. 118).

3 According to Dr. Lamine Sanneh, less than a year after griots of the Gambia performed at the 1972 Conference on Manding Studies at SOAS, their responses to questions regarding their experiences in London were already highly imaginative (African History Seminar, SOAS, March 20, 1974).

popular among them, though versions heard by Father Henry departed from the usual narrative line in that they lacked any mention of Mansa Musa or Fajigi.¹

The Henry version describes how a group of youths in search of fortune took the road to the East and ultimately found themselves in Mecca where they remained for several years. They were absent for so long that they were presumed dead, but the young Bambara men finally returned, 'unstained', we are told, by 'Mohammedanism'. They reported that in Mecca they met a group of 'Bambara'² who initiated them into rituals of the spirit societies and sold them boliv. Finally, rich in gold and silver, flocks of sheep and goats, women and boliv, the youths made their way homeward. When they arrived at the Niger River their loads were placed in canoes for the rest of the journey, and storms caused great damage, with many boliv lost in the water and changing into fish and other living creatures.³

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- 1 Henry, L'âme, pp. 131-33; Father Henry was highly prejudiced against Islam, which to him soiled everything it touched (p. 51). He claimed to have heard this version often from elders, so it is evidently a composite. It clearly contains adjectives and sentiments alien to normal Bambara narrative style, and the anti-Muslim sentiments are attributable to the Catholic missionary. He may also have edited out significant elements, but the account is singularly long and detailed, and throughout Henry's work the tendency is not to delete what he considers odious, but to underline and berate it.
- 2 This use of the term 'Bambara' (more accurately 'Bamana') by Henry's informants (he remarks on it, p. 132, n. 2) does not amount to a claim that there were pagan Manding living in Mecca and dealing in boliv. The original sense of the term, as with many names of ethnic groups, was simply 'the people', and in the context of this tradition divides the world into two groups: Muslims and non-Muslims or 'Bambara'.
- 3 Henry, L'âme, pp. 131-32.

The idea of pagan ritual in the heart of Islam¹ which in the Henry account is a dominant motif, could be taken to imply rivalry between the ancestral Bambara religion and Islam.² In the same vein, in the Monteil version al-Hajj Musa fails to obtain pardon in Mecca for his sins, so he turns to the study of magic and trades his miraculous shirt for the Komo.³ Similar sentiments appear in the Traore texts where in one, Makanta Jigi resolves to go to Mecca, the reputation of which 'comme ville aux idoles de toutes sortes, était parvenue au Soudan'.⁴ In the other Traore version, Makanta Jigi is accepted into Islam by the Prophet himself and is blessed with instant and complete knowledge of the Koran. However, the hero soon meets the 'chef du quartier fétichiste de La Mecque' and is presented with all the most prestigious boliw of the Manding spirit societies, so he promptly renounces Islam in favour of the ancestral religion.⁵ It should be emphasized that nowhere does the Fajigi tradition claim that the boliw and other things brought from Mecca were Islamic in origin. Instead, the basic argument is that the principal symbols of indigenous Manding religion sprouted in the same soil that engendered Islam.

1 On the subject of idolatry in Mecca and Medina see Ibn Ishaq, Sirat, pp. 35-38 and pp. 207-08.

2 Alternatively, it could reflect the fact that in major towns of the sahel, Islam and the indigenous religion lived peacefully side by side in separate quarters.

3 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270.

4 Traore, 'Makanta Djigui', p. 23.

5 Ibid., p. 24.

Father Henry believed the tradition of bringing the boliw from Mecca arose as a consequence of debate between marabouts and bolitigiw.¹ He stresses the nineteenth-century Muslim persecution of Bambara pagans whom he claims were pursued from every side, unable to perform even their simplest religious rituals, the penalties for which included the confiscation of possessions, imprisonment, slavery and death.² Says Henry,

The legend that the boli came from Mecca was born inevitably out of the Bambara's need to soften their crime of idolatory and to preserve it by lending it extenuating circumstances.³

In order to reach an accommodation with Islam, the bolitigiw acknowledged the supreme power, not only of Allah and Mecca, but of 'Stamboul', their name for Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Constantinople.⁴ In other words, Henry's perhaps oversimplified view was that the spirit societies' defence against hostile nineteenth-century Islamic proselytism was to adopt Mecca as the centre of religious life and to acknowledge that not only was it the source of all true belief, but that the boliw came from there as well.

At the beginning of this section it was noted that the Fajigi tradition has functioned as a versatile medium of communication for griots, and this can be elaborated on in the concluding paragraphs.

1 Henry, L'âme, p. 131.

2 Ibid., p. 70.

3 Ibid., p. 71.

4 Ibid., p. 70 and p. 131.

Legendary heroes often take the form of flexible composites that are altered according to the knowledge or whim of the storyteller, even though the historical prototypes for the figures involved may have lived centuries apart. In addition to Mansa Musa, the character of Fajigi embraces blurry images of other pilgrims. Allakoi Moussa is one of these, and Fa Koli is another. The peripatetic figure of Allakoi Moussa straddles the Fajigi and Bilali traditions and will be returned to in the next section. The important legendary character Fa Koli belongs to the Sunjata legend, but he is sometimes directly mingled with Mansa Musa and Fajigi. One version of the pilgrimage tradition collected by Charles Monteil has the Komo brought from Mecca by Fa Koli Sissokho, a member of Mansa Musa's retinue.¹ Tradition firmly places Fa Koli in the early thirteenth century, more than a hundred years before the time of Mansa Musa, but for the griots, 'long ago' (folofolo) is all one period. Whereas Monteil's informant brings Fa Koli forward in time, Seydou Camara pushes Fajigi backward and merges him with Fa Koli in the era of Sunjata.² Though they normally belong more than a century apart, there is more to this chronological juxtaposition of two legendary heroes than a case of mistaken identity, because it exposes some additional facets of the pilgrimage tradition.

1 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270.

2 Seydou Camara, Appendix, p. 738; Frobenius' informant also does this, naming Fajigi as Sunjata's brother (Dichten, p. 331). The possible association of Fa Koli with Mansa Musa occurs in Innes, Sunjata, note on line 907, p. 127.

The Manding griots are widely agreed in identifying Fa Koli as a relative, usually a nephew, of Sumanguru Kante, early thirteenth-century ruler of a Soninke group known as Soso, a dominant Manding power after the decline of Ghana and just prior to the rise of Mali. That some sources give Fa Koli's clan affiliation (jamu) as Koroma (Kourouma)¹ while others say he was a Sissoko² is not contradictory, according to a system of clan equivalents found to exist in the same regions that have yielded numerous versions of the Fajigi tradition. According to this system, the Koroma and Dumbia (Doumbouya) lineages are considered to be the same,³ and since the Dumbia are a branch of the Sissoko lineage,⁴ all three can and do claim Fa Koli as their ancestor.⁵

A related feature of the Manding system of clan relationships is the expression of honorary names whereby members of a particular family are addressed by the given name of an illustrious ancestor of the same lineage.⁶ The citing of heroic names is the basis of

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. 42; Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 531.

2 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270.

3 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 528.

4 Charles Monteil, 'Les empires du Mali', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F. 12, 1929, pp. 291-447, p. 316, n. 2.

5 Niane, Sundiata, p. 78. The same holds true among the Gambian Mandinka where additionally, the Danjo and Geyi lineages are said to descend from Sora Musa, that is Fa Koli (Innes, Sunjata, p. 69, lines 616-621).

6 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 528. A line from one Sunjata version (Innes, p. 227, line 1830), indicates that 'Soora', from Fa Koli's praise name 'Soora Musa', is a nom honorable for Sissoko families of the Gambian Mandinka. For possible origins of the name 'Soora Musa' see Innes, Sunjata, p. 121, note for line 598.

the griots' praising technique, and the more general use of honorary names is a standardization of that aspect of the griot art. The most familiar among the noms honorables are 'Sumanguru', by which members of the Kante lineage can be called, 'Naremakhan' or 'Sunjata' for the Keita, and 'Fakoli' for the Koroma.¹ It was stated above that some griots seem to merge the characters of Fa Koli and Fajigi, but apart from the chronological telescoping that can encompass several centuries, this can be simply a function of the use of standard praise names.²

Earlier it was noted that in some instances 'Fajigi' and 'Makanta Jigi' appear to be praise-names for Mansa Musa, and in the language of griots, the alternating of the name 'Fa Koli' with these could be taken to mean that the bards were implying a genealogical connection between Fa Koli and the mansa. Since praise-names are the coin in which griots deal, it is possible that the occasional mention of Fa Koli is made in the sense of a nom honorable applied to Mansa Musa, indicating that he was related to the Koroma or Dumbia lineages. Mansa Musa was supposedly the grandson of Sunjata Keita's brother Abu Bakr,³ so this would have to be a matrilineal link. Alternatively, it might simply point to some

1 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 529; for example, singing of the blacksmith ancestors, Seydou Camara refers to his wife, Numuso Dumbia, as 'Fa Koli' (Appendix, p. 740).

2 Some informants specify that Fajigi was a descendant of Fa Koli (Soumarouo Satigi, Appendix, p. 727). Elsewhere, the linking of Fajigi with Fa Koli's Dumbia lineage (Traore, 'Makanta', p. 24) and his Koroma lineage (Seydou Camara, Appendix, p. 738) amount to the same thing.

3 Ibn Khaldūn in Cuoq, Recueil, p. 344.

residual traditional awareness of an incident involving Musa's mother Kanku, hinted at as we have seen, by curious references to murder and incest.¹ Admittedly, the drawing of a connection between Mansa Musa and the Koroma or Dumbia lineages on the basis of praise-naming is hazardous, but it is a minor point that might be considered in any future discussion of the question of matrilineal succession in the periods immediately preceding and following the reign of Musa Keita.²

A final, relatively obscure aspect of the Fajigi tradition has to do with occasional links between the legendary Mecca pilgrim and the blaw or 'Bula'. Zahan found that in Bambara culture, leaders of spirit societies and others possessing authoritative degrees of knowledge on esoteric subjects are called blaw and belong to a special though vaguely defined social category of their own.³

1 The incest motif also appears in an episode of the Sunjata tradition, involving the abduction of Fa Koli's wife Keleya by his uncle Sumanguru (Niane, Sundiata, p. 42), and in another version of the same episode Fa Koli's wife is named 'Kango' (Monteil, 'Les empires', p. 355), which is virtually the same as 'Kanku' (Gongo), the name of Mansa Musa's mother. Elsewhere we are told Fa Koli's mother was Kankoba Kante (Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix, p. 718), but this woman who was also Sumanguru's sister is also said to be named Kassia (Niane, Sundiata, p. 42) which is very similar to 'Kasa', the wife of Mansa Sulayman (d. 1360) who was put to death for plotting a coup d'etat (Ibn Battuta in Cuoq, Recueil, p. 309). If these random elements spanning more than a century and occasionally touching documented history have been thrown together in the collective memories of the griots, it dramatically underlines the hazards of attempting to glean historical information from these traditions.

2 See Nawal Bell, 'The Age of Mansa Musa of Mali: Problems in Succession and Chronology', I.J.A.H.S., Vol. 5, 2 (1972), pp. 221-234, and N. Levtzion, 'The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Kings of Mali', J.A.H., IV, 3 (1963), pp. 341-353.

3 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 126.

A bla is a savant of high status, traditionally an authority in a particular area of knowledge, regardless of the position occupied in the social hierarchy.¹ There is a tradition that it was Bala, one of their number, who went to Mecca and returned with the principal Manding religious institutions, thereby acquiring the name 'Makanta Jigi'.²

Among the Maninka there is a similar term that is rendered either 'Bula' or 'Bla', which is the name of the ancient genetic stock from which descended perhaps a dozen families, including the Sissoko and Koroma lineages with whom Fa Koli is connected.³ Indeed, one source names Fa Koli as ancestor of the Bla,⁴ and some bards still refer to him as 'Bila Fa Koli'. It is said that from the ranks of the Bla come the people of superior knowledge, and they have a tradition that an ancestor named Bala Susogo brought secrets from Mecca concerning initiation ritual.⁵

It is noteworthy that the emphasis in these traditions shifts from the material symbols of spirit societies to the abstract knowledge, possession of which is the hallmark of a genetic stock or social category. The legend continues to function as a foundation of the indigenous argument for early links with Islam, only here we

1 Interview with Lassana Kouyate, Kolokani, August, 1975.

2 Zahan, La dialectique, p. 126.

3 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 526.

4 M. Sidibe, 'Soundiata Keita, héros historique et légendaire, empereur du Manding', Notes Africaines, 82 (1959), pp. 41-51, p. 45.

5 Person, Samori, I, p. 80, n. 44.

have Mecca as the recognized source of the most effective kinds of knowledge. Approximate pre-Islamic equivalents of Bala and his bringing forth of knowledge would be, on one level, Kani Simbon and Simboumba Tagnagati, mythical ancestors of man who were the celestial Faro's agents in spreading knowledge of 'the word'.¹ More prosaically, the original knowledge of individual occupations was generally attributed to nyamaw (spirits) in the form of various pastoral beings often described by informants as roughly the equivalent of Arab genies. However, an element here that is probably more significant is the surfacing with the Blaw of the question of descent in certain prominent lineages, which brings us to the role of the legendary character Bilali.

Bilali

The Bilali tradition consists mostly of a genealogy that provides the ruling lineage of ancient Mali, the Keitas, with Islamic origins, and by choosing Bilāl ibn Ribāh as the progenitor, the griot genealogists managed to do so without denying the black origins of that lineage. Bilāl was a freed black slave who became a companion of the Prophet and the first mu'adhdhin (caller to prayers). His mother's name was Hamama, and he was sometimes called ibn Hamama after her,² which is the case in Bambara tradition where he is known as Bilali ibn Hamama (Bilali Bounama, Bilali Boum Hamama). Though born a slave, Bilāl was 'a faithful Muslim,

1 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', pp. 46-47; and 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 127.

2 Encyclopédie de l'Islam, Nouvelle Édition (Leyde, Paris, 1960), t. I, p. 1251.

pure of heart', whose master tortured him by making him lie on his back under the sun during the hottest part of the day with a great stone on his chest, in a vain effort to force him to renounce Islam. Freed by Abū Bakr who was impressed by the strength of his belief,¹ Bilāl joined the company of Muhammad, and when one of the other companions saw in a dream how the faithful should be called to prayer, he was chosen as the first mu'adhhdhin because he had a penetrating voice.²

In addition to Bilāl's black origin, his devotion to Islam and direct association with Muhammad made him a natural choice as progenitor of ancient Mali's ruling lineage, but it is not clear how Bilāl's earlier slave status was reconciled in the minds of the Keitas and their griots. Normally, the presence of slaves in the family tree affected the descendants' place in the social hierarchy,³ but the descent from Bilāl was apparently regarded as something different. It may be significant that the occasion of Bilāl's heroic deed derived from his devotion to Islam and the fact that his enslavement and torture were at the hands of an unbeliever. Moreover, one cannot help but wonder if a subliminal awareness that the claim to descent from Bilāl is based in a legendary milieu rather than in local history has not contributed to the acceptance

1 Encyclopédie de l'Islam, p. 1251; Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, pp. 143-44.

2 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, p. 236.

3 According to Monteil ('Les empires', pp. 315-16), at one time a distinction was made between mansarin (masare), members of lineages of former mansaw, and boulaw (Bulaw) whose ancestors had at some point been captives. This is why an alternative name for the Keitas is 'Massare' (Humboldt, 'Du nom propre', p. 528).

of his servile background. That the traditions do not in the least play down Bilāl's servile background demonstrates how the importance of a lineal connection with one of Muhammad's companions outweighs factors that in the normal train of events would have been considered undesirable. An instance of brazen acknowledgment of Bilāl's servility shows how one tradition can sprout from another: Arnaud's informant (a Muslim) described a custom whereby if a sharīf in quest of alms encountered a member of Sunjata's lineage, instead of asking for a gift the sharīf would give one, saying "Je suis le maitre et je favorise d'un don mon captif".¹ There is no record of whether this was meant as insult or praise, though the latter was presumably the case, and it implies a source of prestige for the Keitas while at the same time acknowledging their acceptance of Islam and its representatives.

An additional point of identification between Bilāl and the Sunjata tradition derives from Bilāl's participation in the battle of Khaybar, one of Muhammad's most famous campaigns. In the oral sources references to the battle of 'Kaybara' are frequent, but none of them amount to anything like a complete episode. In Ibn Ishaq's account, Bilāl's role at Khaybar was limited to handling prisoners,² standing nightwatch and calling the faithful to prayer.³

1 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 168. The informant identified Sunjata as a Konate, which was originally Sunjata's family name; see Innes, Sunjata, p. 105, note on line 149. For the traditional etymology of the name Keita see Innes, Sunjata, p. 250, note on line 753, and Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 50.

2 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, p. 515.

3 Ibid., p. 517.

The griots' frequent mention of 'Kaybara' doubtless results from the Muslim sentiment that descent from an ancestor who participated in one of Muhammad's campaigns is a great source of prestige. The importance of this is illustrated by the case of Shurahbīl ibn Sa'd (d. 123 A.H.), a writer who reported traditions from some of the Prophet's companions. He was discredited in his old age after becoming so cantankerous that he blackmailed his visitors in a manner similar to that which some griots have been known to employ: "if they did not give him anything he would say that their fathers were not present at Badr!"¹ For Manding griots, 'Kaybara' was the important battle because not only was Bilali there, but they say their own ancestor Surakata encouraged Muhammad in that campaign by singing his praises.² One tradition even claims that before 'Kēbara', Muhammad shaved Surakata's head and appointed him chief of the army.³

In the mouth of Vidal's informant, Bilali Bounama becomes 'Binetouma Fili'. The way this griot remembered the story, the ancestor of Sunjata lived at Kaybara in the Yemen during the time of Muhammad's conquests. After the battle there, Binetouma and his son Latel Kalabi were reduced to slavery by four of the Prophet's men, but the son was later freed owing to his superior qualities.

1 Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, 'Introduction', p. xv. Badr or Badr Hunayn (March, 624) was the first great battle of Muhammad's career (Encyclopédie de l'Islam I, p. 892).

2 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix, p. 805; Zemp, 'La légende', p. 623.

3 Zemp, 'La légende', p. 623. Elsewhere 'Sorakhata Bunjafara' delivers a message from the Prophet to Sunjata's father, requesting soldiers for the battle of 'Haibara' (Innes, Sunjata, p. 149, lines 89-94).

Following extensive travels, Kalabi settled in Mali and engendered the lineage which nine generations later produced Sunjata.¹ Another account merely mentions that Muhammad's 'slave' Bilali who was ancestor of the Keita, Konate and Kouloubaly lineages was born the day after the Prophet and that at Kaybara he held the bit of the apostle's camel and blew the trumpet to assemble the army.²

Though Khaybar appears to have entered Manding tradition through Bilāl's involvement, many references leave him out altogether and focus instead on the exploits of certain Manding blacksmiths. This emphasis apparently derives from the identification of Khaybar with a counterpart battle in the Sunjata legend. This relating of Islamic events to their approximate Manding counterparts and vice versa, is a fairly constant characteristic of much of the Bilali material, and it occurs with Sunjata and Fajigi as well. In pre-Islamic Mali the Sunjata epic was the 'definitive' story of the ancestors, but with the advent of Islam, Muhammad began to share the limelight with Sunjata, and episodes from the two lives became intermingled in tradition to the point where it is difficult to separate pre-Islamic from Islamic elements. A case in point is the iron gate or wall which is an important feature of battles led by both Sunjata and Muhammad. In the traditions, this iron gate or wall introduces the

1 J. Vidal, 'La légende officielle de Soundiata fondateur de l'empire Manding', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., 7, 1924, pp. 315-328, p. 319.

2 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix, p. 806; cf. Ibn Ishāq, Sīrat, p. 517.

participation of distinguished blacksmith ancestors like Sumanguru and Fa Koli, a matter corresponding to the interests of blacksmith performers who help to perpetuate the tale. We are told, for example, that Numu Fa Koli, ancestor of the blacksmiths, was chief of the ironworkers and that he built the wall of iron at Kaybara. When it was destroyed in the battle he received compensation from Muhammad.¹ In Niane's highly embellished Sundiata, part of the description of Sumanguru's capital city seems to owe a good deal to the traditional idea of Kaybara and the blacksmith role: "Sosso had but one gate; colossal and made of iron, the work of the sons of fire".²

That the blacksmith connection with Khaybar has been of considerable importance in Manding tradition is underlined by the statement of one genealogist who, emphasizing the 'Noumou' (blacksmith) people's formidable qualities, states that their true name is 'Kheibar'.³ Perhaps the legend was at some point developed to such an extent that the Islamic place-name became an honorific title or praise-name for blacksmiths, but such honours normally have a historical rather than a mythical basis. It would be ill-advised to lend too much weight to such an obscure reference, but in West Africa as in other parts of the world, family names sometimes reflect ancestral origins - geographical and occupational - and the reference to 'Kheibar' as a former blacksmith patronymic,

1 Satigi Soumarouo, Appendix, p. 723-24.

2 Niane, Sundiata, p. 68. One version collected by Innes refers to Sumanguru's town as 'fortified' or 'walled' (Sunjata, p. 73, line 702 and note on line 702, p. 124), and another version mentions 'four wondrous gates' (Sunjata, p. 233, line 1987).

3 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 540.

combined with the curious preoccupation with that place, might point to some Arab influence on sudanic ironworking technique. However, until this can be investigated further, the safest interpretation is that the blacksmith element is a consequence of the numu bards' participation in the traditional associating of Muhammad's Khaybar and Sumanguru's Soso.

The mythical genealogy linking Bilali to the Keita mansaw gains substance by usually appearing, appropriately, early in the Sunjata tradition. Depending on the version, the number of generations between Bilali and Sunjata ranges from a half dozen to almost twenty, in lists that combine pre-Islamic and Islamic names. The insertion of Bilali at the top of the Keita lineage has the effect of moving all other names down the list and forward into the Islamic era, thus eliminating recognition of pre-Islamic forebears for Sunjata.¹

As noted earlier, Surakata is an Islamic element in the Manding creation myth and there may be other less obvious ones, but in spite of this, the creation myth is the most substantial tradition available that can be considered mainly pre-Islamic. During the period 1953-55 when Dieterlen was collecting material on Manding ideas of creation she was told that when God (Mangala)²

1 For a Sunjata genealogy with a non-Muslim, matrilineal emphasis, see Innes, Sunjata, pp. 195-96, lines 1132-1153.

2 The name 'Mangala' may itself be derived from the Arabic 'Allah', as may be 'N'gala', the Bambara equivalent which replaces earlier appellations like 'Bemba' (Dieterlen, 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 126 and p. 126 n. 1).

was creating the world, he sent Faro to earth accompanied by eight original ancestors of mankind, in the form of four sets of male and female twins. The names of the four males were Kanisimbo, Kani yogo simbo, Simbomba Tangnagati, and Nounou.¹ The creation myth subsequently describes in detail how the first three of these male ancestors participated in getting the world started by planting the first seeds, bringing rain, and introducing speech. However, important as they are in the creation myth, the same three characters also appear regularly in the genealogies of an entirely different genre of oral tradition, the Sunjata legend.

In a version of the Sunjata epic published in 1965, there is a genealogy that begins by naming Bilali Bounama, a faithful servant of Muhammad, as ancestor of the Keita lineage. We are told that Lawal, one of Bilali's seven sons, settled in Mali and fathered Lahilatoul Kalabi who was the first Manding ruler to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. A grandson of the latter was Mamadi Kani, a great hunter whose sons were Kani Simbon, Kamignogo Simbon, Kabala Simbon and Simbon Tagnogokelin, the last being the progenitor of Sunjata's line.² Variations on the names of the three celestial 'Simbon' ancestors of the creation myth appear in twelve of thirteen Keita genealogies available for this study. The twelve containing 'Simbon' names were collected between 1900 and 1975, and of these, seven were recorded before 1924.³

1 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', p. 45, and 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 127.

2 Niane, Sundiata, pp. 2-3.

3 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 354; Zeltner, Contes du Sénégal et du Niger (Paris, 1913), pp. 37-38; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 44-45; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 333 and p. 337; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 319.

To give a sampling of earlier versions, sometime before 1903 a colonial administrator at Kayes was told that the progenitor of the ancient royal lineage was 'Digui Moussa' who was in the habit of visiting Mecca, and who fathered Sunjata by one wife and eleven sons by another, among whom were Kanannioko Cinebo, Kabala Cinebo, and Mare Taniakele.¹ Another version of Sunjata's lineage collected by Frobenius (c. 1909) includes Kanu Simbong, Kanu Njoro Simbong and Simbong Mba Marenta.²

We have seen how the Fajigi tradition connected indigenous religious institutions to the same soil that nurtured Islam. With this in mind, it could be argued that generations of griots have been transferring celestial beings from autochthonous cosmography to the Keita genealogy in order to provide the mythical creators, as well as Sunjata and others, with Muslim ancestors. But we have also seen how the griots borrowed their own collective ancestor Surakata from Islamic tradition, then at some point - possibly during Dieterlen's research visit - placed him in the creation myth where he operates alongside the Simbon ancestors.³ Did the griots borrow some of Sunjata's ancestors and give them roles in the creation myth to help satisfy the anthropologist? It seems clear that the Simbon names are pre-Islamic, though as we have seen from the Surakata example, their presence in the creation myth is no proof of this. The extraordinary consistency with which they

1 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 354.

2 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 337.

3 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', p. 45, and 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 127.

appear in the Keita lineages attests to their significance and suggests that they deserve more attention than they have heretofore received.

In eight of the twelve genealogies in which Bilali is the Keita ancestor, an intermediate figure is Mamadou Kani (Mamary Kanou), father of the Simbon brothers.¹ Whether or not the griots meant him to be, Mamadou Kani can be regarded as a transitional link between the purely Islamic Bilāl and the purely indigenous Simbons. The name 'Mamadou' (Mamadi, Mamary) is an Africanization of Muhammad, but 'Kani' is from the Manding and is often part of one or more of the Simbon names.²

There are individual traditions connecting Mamadou Kani with both the Islamic world and pre-Islamic Manding culture. In one of these, a Sunjata ancestor named Tubi la Wal³ made a journey to Medina before the birth of the Prophet, at a time when Mecca was not yet a holy place. While there, he gained advanced knowledge of the birth of Muhammad so he vowed that the first son born to him after his return home would be named after the apostle, and this was 'Mamadu Kanu'.⁴ Elsewhere the indigenous half of the name

1 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 337; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 339; Vidal, 'La legende', p. 319; Niane, 'Recherches', p. 43; Niane, Sundiata, p. 3; Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix, p. 806; Sory Camara, 'L'Histoire pour les Mandenka', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972 (Mandinka) p. 6, (English) p. 24.

2 For numerous meanings of 'ka' and 'ni' see Bazin, Dictionnaire, pp. 252-54 and 430-433.

3 Frobenius discerned that the 'Dubila Wali' of another version (Dichten, p. 339) was a corruption of 'Bilali', so presumably 'Tubi la Wal' is too.

4 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 337.

comes into focus when 'Mamadi Kani' is said to have invented the simbon or hunter's whistle.¹ The name of this whistle is said to have become an honorific title reserved for the greatest hunters or warriors,² and we are told that Sunjata held the Simbon title.³ Whether honorific title or patronymic, 'Simbon' could date from very early times, before prototypical Manding peoples were differentiated into groups like the Bambara and Maninka, and when clan or tribal leadership was determined by superior hunting skills and battle prowess.⁴

There is one example of a name appearing in both the creation myth and the Sunjata tradition that might be inserted here for purposes of comparison. In the Delafosse version, the descendants of Bilali son of Hamama include Sunjata and his eleven half-brothers. Among these 'brothers' are the usual variations on the Simbon names: Kononiogho Simba, Kabali Simba, and Mare Taniekele, but the list also includes Moussokoro (Mossokoro) and Moussogandake (Mosso Kandake).⁵ In Bambara, muso is a strictly feminine term meaning 'woman' or 'wife', and like the word fa (father, ancestor) among others, it is sometimes incorporated into a name. In the cosmography, Mouso Koroni is the female twin of

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. 86 n. 5.

2 Cisse, 'Notes', p. 186; see also p. 176.

3 Niane, Sundiata, p. 86, n. 5. On the significance of the name 'Simbong' in Gambian Mandinka, see Innes, Sunjata, p. 106, n. 154.

4 See Cisse, 'Notes', p. 176 and Niane, 'Recherches', p. 44.

5 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, pp. 176-77, and 'Traditions', p. 298.

the celestial troublemaker Pemba, and she has a major role in creation.¹ Her full name is Mouso Koroni Koundye, and she probably holds an origin in common with both Moussokoro and Moussogandake.

The feminine identity of these mythical ancestors could easily have become submerged by centuries of repetition, as is evidently the case with the sex of Hamama, Bilali's mother, which was lost somewhere between the Middle East and West Africa. Manding genealogies normally trace lineage through male descent, but Ribah, Bilāl's father, is never mentioned in the oral accounts, so it appears that very early on the griots understood Hamama to be the father. In one genealogy Hamama is shortened to 'Mama', immediate predecessor of Bilali Bou Hamama,² while elsewhere 'Hamamata' occupies that niche,³ and in a Frobenius version, 'Mamata' precedes Bilali as 'the first man'.⁴ The confusion about Hamama's sex touches on another point to which we will return shortly.

The simultaneous presence of the Simbon brothers in the list of Muslim Bilali's descendants and among the celestial creators of the world could be a consequence of early Manding adjustment to

1 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', pp. 48-49, and 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 129.

2 Zeltner, Contes, p. 44.

3 Sallah Kouyate, Appendix, p. 817.

4 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 304.

Islam and late griot response to academic inquiry. It seems clear that Bilali was simply inserted at the head of an already existing list, but for the rest of it, we should note that in its most comprehensive form - something that may never be available to us - the Keita genealogy is, on regular occasions, recited apart from the Sunjata legend, in close proximity to the creation myth. Every seven years when the Keitas and their griots gather to rebuild their traditional shrine at Kangaba, a major part of the ceremony takes place when the Diabate griots of nearby Keyla enter the sanctuary where

... for a whole night they recite the creation myth, the story of the mythical generations, and, lastly, the genealogies of the Keita and of their related and allied lineages.¹

This circumstance might have something to do with the Simbon brothers' appearance in a double role. If we regard the sequence of this recitation in a pre-Islamic context, removing Bilali and other Muslim-influenced names from the top of the list, in most versions of the genealogy it leaves the Simbon brothers at the head of the lineage. This places them next to whatever comes before the Keita genealogy in the recitation, which according to Dieterlen has something to do with those involved in the creation myth.² From this point of view, the appearance of Simbons in both cosmography and Keita lineage becomes less a case of borrowing and more a matter of simply running the two together, something that is very common in oral tradition. In a significant number of

1 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', p. 40, and 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 124.

2 Ibid., p. 40, and p. 124.

the genealogies studied, a particular Simbon brother is singled out as the ancestor of Sunjata's line,¹ so the weight of the evidence favours the Keita lineage over the single version of the creation myth as the more normal location of the Simbons. The Kangaba recitation was performed in 1954 while Dieterlen was on the scene collecting information on Manding cosmography, though she was not permitted to hear it. When the anthropologist's informants were asked for the names of what may have been previously unnamed celestial male twins, they might well have responded with the names of three brothers from early in the Keita genealogy, names that were among the oldest any griot could recall.²

Returning to the question of the sexual transformation of Bilāl's mother Hamama between the Middle East and West Africa, this circumstance casts into bold relief one of Delafosse's audacious academic forays. The Keita genealogy in the tradition

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. 3 (Simbon (Bamari) Tagnogokelin); Niane, 'Recherches', p. 43 (Simbon Bamarin alias Bamaritagnaki); Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix, p. 807 (Lawali Singo); Zeltner, Contes, p. 38 (Koto Simbou); Zeltner, Contes, p. 44 (Simboumba Marenta Niakoukili); Frobenius, Dichten, p. 333 (Simbomba Marenta); Frobenius, Dichten, p. 337 (Simbong Mba Marenta).

2 The fourth name they gave was 'Nounou', which was the name of a Koulobaly ancestor, Nounou Soma (Zeltner, Contes, p. 41). Dieterlen's interpretation of this being from nono (milk), is as unconvincing as her translations of the Simbon brothers' names: Kanisimbo ('from Ka's womb'), Kani yogo simbo ('from the same Ka's womb'), Simboumba Tangnagati ('the big remaining part of the womb which took command'). A Manding word for 'womb' is denso (denyo) (See Delafosse, La langue Mandingue I, p. 531), but she apparently gets 'womb' from si, which can have more than a dozen meanings depending on usage (See Bazin, Dictionnaire, pp. 529-32). Si can mean 'breast', but unlike the French 'sein', it does not also mean 'womb' (Delafosse, La langue Mandingue I, p. 623). All things considered, the association with early hunting societies and hunters' equipment seems more credible.

he translated from an unpublished Arabic manuscript lists Allakoi Moussa Dyigui as a descendant of Bilali son of Hamama, and as the grandfather of Sunjata, the Simbons, and others.¹ In his 'Traditions historiques et légendaires' (1913), Delafosse identifies Bilali son of Hamama as

un esclave negre de Mahomet; ce fut lui le premier muezzin₂

but in Haut-Sénégal-Niger (1912) he writes that

... vers 1150, le trône du Mandé était occupé par un nommé Hamama, le plus ancien souverain dont la tradition proprement indigène ait conservé le nom exact.

Continuing his list of mansaw down to the time of Sunjata's father, Delafosse says Hamama died about 1175 and was succeeded by his son 'Dyigui-Bilali' who was followed about 1200 by his son Allakoi Moussa Keita.³ Delafosse offers no evidence to support his naming of Hamama, Bilali and Musa as the three mansaw prior to Sunjata's father, and as the sequence and names in this king list match perfectly - except for minor spelling variations - with the genealogy he translated from the Arabic, there can be little doubt that the latter was his source. Why Delafosse listed Hamama and Bilali as mansaw in spite of his awareness of their origins is a mystery,⁴ though he could have been taken in by Allakoi Musa, a

1 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger Vol. II, pp. 175-77, and 'Traditions', p. 298.

2 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298, n. 3.

3 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, p. 175.

4 There was at least one other Bilāl in western sudanic history, but he was a slave. See Al-Sadi, Tarikh, p. 351 and p. 377.

shadowy figure who leads us inexorably back to the subject of pilgrimages to Mecca.

In Delafosse's Arabic version of the Sunjata tradition, Allakoi Moussa Dyigui is credited with the improbable total of four pilgrimages to Mecca.¹ In Haut-Sénégal-Niger 'Dyigui' becomes part of Bilali's name, but Allakoi Moussa Keita's alleged four pilgrimages are mentioned, as well as his great reputation for piety.² Among the genealogies, the only other one listing Musa as a Sunjata ancestor is the Adam version, which agrees on a significant number of points with Delafosse's Arabic account. Adam's informant, a Soninke marabout, named 'Digui Moussa' the habitual visitor to Mecca as progenitor of Sunjata's lineage, and nine of the twelve other names in the list have clear equivalents in the Delafosse version.³ These are also the only two genealogies studied that list the Simbons and others as Sunjata's brothers instead of as his lineal ancestors. It seems safe to assume, then, that Allakoi Moussa Dyigui and Digui Moussa refer to the same legendary figure.⁴ Both informants were Muslim, and it appears that it was not uncommon for Arabic scholars to pay a good deal of attention to indigenous as well as Islamic tradition.

1 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298.

2 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, p. 176.

3 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 354; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298.

4 The chanting of a list of familiar, heroic-sounding names would often take precedence over any other consideration, as in a list of distinguished warriors who accompanied Sunjata in his battle against Sumanguru, among whom was 'Alioro Mussa Djigui' (Zeltner, Contes, p. 41).

In the legend of the founding of the Jawara lineage, the ancestor Daman N'guille (Dama N'Guilli, Ndamangiri) is sometimes portrayed as a contemporary of Sunjata. In some versions, there is a frequent traveller to Mecca, a marabout named Allakoi Moussa who loses a bag of gold that is found and returned to him by the Jawara ancestor. On his next trip to Mecca, the grateful Allakoi Moussa acquires for Daman N'guille a magic sword which provides him with the power to rule.¹ Elsewhere the marabout who brings the sword goes unnamed,² and in a Soninke version set in the fourteenth century and exhibiting less Islamic influence, the swordgiver is Dogori Tukara who has nothing to do with Mecca.³ As in the legend of the boliv brought from Mecca, the pilgrim's identity depends on the cultural affinity of the storyteller, and as in the case of Fajigi, Allakoi Musa is an insubstantial figure at best, really more of an Islamic symbol, the inspiration for which was probably Mansa Musa.

Perched in the Keita family tree with or without Bilali, Allakoi Musa provides the mansaw and their subjects with an early link to Islam and with the protection of the spiritual powers associated with the foreign religion. As the sword provider,

1 G. Boyer, Un Peuple de l'ouest Soudanais: Les Diawara, Mémoires de l'institut Française d'Afrique noire, no. 29 (Paris, 1953), pp. 23-35; Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 236-37.

2 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, I, p. 272.

3 Claude Meillassoux, Légende de la dispersion des Kusa (Dakar, 1967), p. 12. In a version of the Sunjata tradition, Jinna Musa makes a pilgrimage to Mecca and returns with a magic spear for his son Fa Koli (Innes, Sunjata, p. 209, lines 1431-34, and note on line 1431, p. 255).

Allakoi Musa performs a service similar to that done by Fajigi the boli provider: He is the means by which an adjustment is made in an important pre-Islamic facet on indigenous Manding culture, and by which an accommodation with Islam is achieved. Allakoi Moussa Djigui was sometimes listed as a Keita ancestor, not simply because Mansa Musa, the historical figure on which he was probably based was in fact a Keita, but because like Bilali, the pilgrim mansa was one of the most distinct Muslim heroes in the collective griot memory. Since Allakoi Moussa Djigui is almost certainly another facet of the composite pilgrim hero based on Mansa Musa, Delafosse's list of three mansaw preceding Sunjata's father is composed of Muhammad's first mu'adhdhin, the latter's mother, and a mansa who flourished more than a century after Sunjata.

While owing to his fourteenth-century pilgrimage to Mecca and its documentation by Arab scholars, Mansa Musa is historically one of the most distinguished rulers of early Mali, he also occupies a unique position in the oral tradition. His journey apparently had at least as great an impact on his own people as it did on the Islamic world abroad, and because the people of Mali interpreted the historic event in their own way, Mansa Musa is still travelling in many parts of Manding oral tradition. Sometimes Mansa Musa goes as himself, but more often he is a more shadowy figure in the collective griot mind, known by names and titles familiar to any Manding audience. To various degrees he is Fajigi, Makanta Jigi, Bala Jigi, Jigi Musa, Allakoi Musa Jigi, and he even has affinities with Fa Koli, a contemporary of Musa's own ancestor Sunjata, who preceded him by more than a century.

Chapter V

The Search for History in Griot Testimony:
The Sunjata Tradition

Certain ancient traditions preserved by the griots of Mali are regularly sifted for historical evidence by some scholars, while other writers express doubts that these sources can contain any information of value to historians. A period markedly affected by this question is the early thirteenth century, because it was supposedly then that the Mali empire was founded and consolidated, and because most of the evidence for this is derived from the Sunjata tradition which is pivotal in the griot repertoire. A limited amount of information on thirteenth-century Mali is available from Arabic sources, but these were written a century to a century and a half after the reign of Sunjata, and although Ibn Khaldun confirms the existence of the famous mansa and reports that he subdued the Soso,¹ the external writings provide no biographical details about the purported empire-builder. Conversely, the internal oral accounts are mainly addressed to the life and times of Sunjata. Some elements are obviously mythical, while others could have a historical basis but cannot be independently confirmed. Thus any historian addressing himself to early thirteenth-century Mali is faced with the dilemma of either accepting the severe limitations of the external written

1 I have referred to the French translation of Ibn Khaldun in J.M. Cuoq (ed. and tr.), Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIIe au XVIe siècle (Bilad al-Sudan), Paris, 1975, p. 344. Here Sunjata is called Mari Djata, another name by which he was well-known.

sources and saying very little indeed about that period, or supplementing these with a critical treatment of relevant oral material, in the hope that he is not nourishing an illusion instead of contributing to knowledge of his subject.¹

The primary objective of this chapter is to illuminate some aspects of the Sunjata tradition that seem to have some historical value but which may not have received the attention they deserve. While acknowledging that any pretensions to historicity in the Sunjata tradition may be open to question because there is so little that can be independently verified, the present study approaches the material with the attitude that particularly given the absence of firmly documented material on Sunjata's life and times, historians cannot afford to ignore the possibility that there is some information worth distilling from the oral accounts of early Mali and the related Soninke era that preceded it. This is not to suggest that historians have failed to make use of this material, for a glance at the literature tells us otherwise. However, writers addressing themselves to a general study of ancient Mali, as opposed to those studying a particular aspect, focus on the central figure of Sunjata because they are concerned with an overall view of how the Manding state achieved its greatness. The problem with this, is that the traditional passages directly concerning Sunjata and his rise to power are among the least likely to yield substantive information about early thirteenth century

1 P.F. de Moraes Farias, 'Great States Revisited', J.A.H., XV, 3 (1974), pp. 479-88, p. 484.

Mali, because for centuries the griots have directed their best efforts at projecting Sunjata above all others as a symbol of the glorious Manding past.¹ The object here then, is to examine some secondary characters and peripheral aspects of the Sunjata tradition in an effort to locate material that might help to achieve a more balanced view of the era in question.

Sources: The Tradition as A Collection of Episodes

Though all twenty-one versions of the Sunjata legend available for this study were originally taken from spoken testimony, nineteen of them come to us in print and two were heard directly from informants in the field. Eleven of the twenty-one were collected between 1898 and 1950,² and ten were recorded between 1950 and 1975.³ The Sunjata tradition is shared by all Manding peoples and can be found wherever there are Manding griots.

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- 1 For an excellent discussion of the contemporary griot role and the griot approach to the art of story telling see Innes, Sunjata, pp. 2-15 and the companion volume, Kaabu and Fuladu: Historical Narratives of the Gambian Mandinka (London, 1976), pp. 4-8.
 - 2 Charles Monteil, 'Fin de siècle à Médine (1898-1899)', B.I.F.A.N. t. XXVIII, sér. B, 1-2, 1966, pp. 166-70 (two versions); Monteil, 'Les empires', pp. 352-356; Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 354-62; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 1-45 (two versions); Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 303-35; Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 166-72; Delafosse, 'Traditions', pp. 298-301; Vidal, 'La légende', pp. 317-28; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 41-51.
 - 3 P. Humblot, 'Episodes de la légende de Soundiata', Notes Africaines, No. 52, 1951, pp. 111-113; R. Pageard, 'Soundiata Keita and the Oral Tradition', Présence Africaine (English ed.) VIII, No. 36, 1961, pp. 53-72, pp. 55-57, (French ed.) 'Soundiata Keita et la tradition orale', P.A. VIII, No. 36, 1961, pp. 51-70, pp. 53-55; Niane, Sundiata; Camara, 'L'Histoire'; M. Diabete, Kala Jata (Bamako, 1970); Innes, Sunjata (1974, three versions); Mamary Kouyate, Kolokani, 1975, Appendix, pp. 711-17; Jeli Baba Sissoko, Bamako, 1975, Appendix, pp. 671-710.

Sixteen of the versions referred to here are from Mali, three came from the Gambia, one from Guinea, and one from Senegal.

A comprehensive version of the Sunjata tradition combining the various parts of these twenty-one accounts could include some forty episodes,¹ depending on how it was divided. These episodes include passages of pure myth, genealogies, hunters' tales, and assorted legends. Occasionally one encounters fragments of narrative, or miscellaneous comments from an informant, that appear to have some historical basis. Additionally, the principal hero as well as several secondary characters seem to be derived from distinguished people who lived in the distant past.

A narrative made up of the collected episodes might begin with the traditional Islam-influenced genealogy that connects Mali's ancient ruling lineage with Muhammad through his companion Bilali (Arabic Bilāl), one of whose descendants is said to have settled in Mali.² This could be followed by a little-known

1 The term 'episode' is used here in reference to what might be called 'narrative units', the passages of myth, legend and other elements of oral tradition that are carried in a griot's head like ammunition in a hunter's pouch. These anecdotes or mini-tales are brought forth according to demand and recounted individually or as part of a longer narrative. One of the most ubiquitous of these is the tale of the two lost and starving men, one of whom saves the other by cutting a piece of flesh from his own leg and serving it disguised as wild game. Bamba Suso includes it in his version of the Sunjata legend (Innes, *Sunjata*, pp. 59-61), and for other versions see Chapter IV, p. 117, n. 1.

2 For an assortment of Sunjata genealogies, see Adam, 'Legendes', p. 354; Zeltner, *Contes*, pp. 37-38 and 44-45; Frobenius, *Dichten*, p. 337 and p. 339; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 319; Niane, *Sundiata*, p. 3, also D.T. Niane, 'Recherches sur l'empire du Mali au moyen age', *Recherches Africaines*, 1959, pp. 17-46, p. 43; Camara, 'L'Histoire', p. 6 and p. 24; Diabete, *Kala Jata*, p. 12; Jeli Manga Sissoko, *Appendix*, p. 806. See also Chapter IV, pp. 165-68.

founding episode employing a common folk motif, in which the three Simbon brothers¹ each inherit a chest, the contents of which determine how the land of Manding is to be shared.² This fits into the category of foundation tales that comprise a kind of mythical charter justifying the authority of the clan.³

Next in order would be the buffalo story, one of the most common parts of the tradition, and the one with which griots often begin the lengthier narratives. Probably influenced by the Manding hunter's tales, of which it has many characteristics, a comprehensive version of the buffalo story can stand alone as a complete folktale, itself containing several episodes. It often includes the diviners' prediction that ugly Sogolon of the land of Do (or Dodugu)⁴ will bear the future mansa (ruler), and it unites her with Sunjata's father through the tale of the sorceress who turns herself into a buffalo and ravages the land until she is killed by the hunter ancestors of the Traore lineage who receive Sogolon as their reward and deliver her to a mansa, Nare Fa Maghan, in the heart of Manding.⁵

1 For a discussion of the Simbons, see Chapter IV, pp. 166-69.

2 Camara, 'L'Histoire', p. 1.

3 See Philip D. Curtin, 'The Uses of Oral Tradition in Senegambia: Maalik Sii and the Foundation of Bundu', Cahiers d'Études Africaines, 58, XV-2, 1975, pp. 189-202, p. 190.

4 dugu = land, hence Dodugu = land of Do.

5 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 1-7 and pp. 39 & 43; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 304-09 (here the animal is an antelope); Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 111; Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 55; Camara, 'L'Histoire', p. 5; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 4-9; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 24; Sissoko, Appendix, p. 700.

In the episode of the hero's extraordinary birth, Sogolon remains pregnant for several years and the mansa declares that the first son borne by any of his wives will be his heir. According to some versions Sunjata was born first, but the message is delayed and the father hears of the birth of another son first.¹ This becomes one of the factors involved in the sibling conflict leading to Sunjata's exile.

The story of Sunjata's youth is another section that consists of several lesser episodes. The most prominent of these are the hero's struggle to stand and walk with an iron staff,² and the related incident of the baobab leaves that throws into relief the bitter rivalry between the two wives and between the hero and his half-brothers, or fadenw.³ There is also the incident of the naming ceremony in which the child Sunjata takes on the character of the archetypal trickster,⁴ and another episode describes the child's thievery of objects to give to his griots.⁵ Many omens

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- 1 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 8-11; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 311-12; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 30; Innes, Sunjata, p. 43.
 - 2 Adam, 'Legendes', p. 354; Zeltner, Contes, p. 38; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 311-12; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 41; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 112; Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 57; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 14-15; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 35; Innes, Sunjata, p. 43 and p. 179; Kouyate, Appendix, p. 711.
 - 3 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 41-43; Vidal, 'La legende', p. 320; Zeltner, Contes, p. 15 and p. 38; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 315-16; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 112; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 19-22; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 35; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 189-93.
 - 4 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 11-13.
 - 5 Ibid., pp. 13-14; Innes, Sunjata, p. 47.

point to Sunjata as the next great mansa,¹ and some versions include tests to determine the identity of the next ruler, involving a fight between two animals,² or the trying on of enormous articles of clothing to see whom they fit.³

The accounts of the hero's exile also include several minor episodes. There is the description of the wanderings from place to place before refuge is found at Mema with Birama Tunkara,⁴ including an isolated incident where Sunjata helps an old man clear a forest in exchange for a talisman of royalty,⁵ and also during this period occurs the ordeal of reaching into a pot of boiling liquid to prove legitimacy.⁶ Some versions include the tale of how the messengers sent to recall Sunjata from exile identified themselves by carrying items of produce that grew mainly in the

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- 1 Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 354-55; Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 57; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 30; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 47, 147-49, 177-79, 223, 287, 291.
- 2 Innes, Sunjata, pp. 159-63, 169-71.
- 3 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 24, 26-27; Innes, Sunjata, p. 45; Lanrezac, 'Au Soudan: La légende historique', La Revue Indigène, 1907, pp. 292-97, p. 296 (I have not counted this as a version of the tradition because it does not include much more than the 'trouser test' episode).
- 4 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 357; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 18-23; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 317-20; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 168; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 43; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 112; Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 57; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 321; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 48-55; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 26-36; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 51-55.
- 5 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 299.
- 6 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 19-20, 44; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 299; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 51, 291; Sissoko, Appendix, p. 709.

hero's homeland.¹ Probably the most popular anecdote in this section describes how the death of Sunjata's mother was interpreted as an omen of his kingship. Their host demands payment for a burial plot, and the angry hero replies with a symbolic threat of his future revenge on Mema by presenting the chief with bits of grass, feathers and potsherds, representative of the ruins of his town.²

Of the episodes centreing on Sumanguru, the two most frequently encountered tell how Sunjata's sister seduces the Soso leader into telling the secret of his vulnerability in spite of warnings from his mother,³ and how Bala Faseke, ancestor of the Kouyate griot lineage, acquires a balafon from Sumanguru but is retained as his captive.⁴ Lying outside the common narrative line are Sumanguru's plot to kill the youthful Sunjata during his circumcision rite,⁵ Sumanguru's sacrifice of his sister's son,⁶

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- 1 Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 112; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 54-60; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 43-44; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 281-83; cf. Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 57, in which the passage about da leaves and gombo fruit has affinities with this episode, one perhaps being evolved from the other.
- 2 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 323; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 169; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 43; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 112; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 25-26, 43-44; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 62-63; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 46-47; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 57-59, 289; Sissoko, Appendix, p. 708.
- 3 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 170; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 322; Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 359-61; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 44-45; Delafosse, 'Traditions', pp. 299-300; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 28-30; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 73-79, 215-19, 303-07.
- 4 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 44; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 57; Zeltner, Contes, p. 28; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 38-40; Kouyate, Appendix, p. 712; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 209-15, 279-81; cf. Monteil, Les empires, p. 355. The various versions consistently indicate that the Maninka acquired the balafon (the indigenous xylophone) from the Soninke.
- 5 Innes, Sunjata, pp. 193-205.
- 6 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 300.

and the story of how Sumanguru's horse was selected from Maghan Diabe's herd at Wagadu.¹

Several episodes describe the exploits of some of Sunjata's generals, probably the most famous of whom is the warrior and magician called Fa Koli, who was Sumanguru's nephew. One of the two main tales about him tells how Sumanguru steals Fa Koli's wife though he has hundreds of his own, causing Fa Koli to go over to Sunjata's side, taking his army with him.² In the other, the diminutive Fa Koli enters a council hut with a high door, bending low as if he were too tall for it. In response to the mirth occasioned by this seemingly absurd gesture, Fa Koli informs his peers that most of his height is underground, upon which he causes himself to grow so tall that his head raises the roof from its supports.³ A story of one of Sunjata's generals, Tiramakhan, describes his rescue of Sunjata's sister from Sumanguru, and how Tiramakhan fought one of their pursuers so long and hard that when the two combatants remounted to depart, they found themselves riding each other's horses.⁴

Miscellaneous episodes about the principal hero include one in which the chief of Somono fishermen refuses to help Sunjata and

1 Monteil, 'Fin de siècle', pp. 166-67.

2 Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 69-70; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 45; Monteil, Les empires, p. 355; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 42-43; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 275-77; cf. Sissoko, Appendix, p. 704.

3 Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 69-70; Sissoko, Appendix, p. 702; Innes, Sunjata, p. 295.

4 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 29-30.

his army cross a river,¹ and another involves a dispute between Sunjata's favourite wife and his younger brother, Manding Bakary.²

The description of the final battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru and the latter's disappearance into the mountain at Koulikoro is the climax of most versions,³ but subsequent events described by some griots include later campaigns against recalcitrant chiefs and the appointment of the conqueror's generals to governorship of various provinces.⁴ One post-Sumanguru campaign is mounted against a Wolof chief who robs Sunjata's agents and sends them home with insults in place of the horses they were sent to purchase.⁵ In another campaign, Sunjata goes to war against the Fulbe herders of Wasulu because of a dispute over some cattle. In so doing he violates an ancient ancestral pact between his Keita lineage and that of the Fulbe, which is said to have resulted in his defeat and the loss of his life as he tried to retreat across a river.⁶

1 Vidal, 'La légende', p. 324; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 66; cf. crocodile incident in Zeltner, Contes, pp. 22-23.

2 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 47-48.

3 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 171; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 328-30; Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 361-62; Delafosse, 'Traditions', pp. 300-01; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 324; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 45; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 72; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 31-32; Sissoko, Appendix, p. 710; Kouyate, Appendix, p. 713; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 59-67.

4 Vidal, 'La légende', pp. 325-26; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 301; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 171-72; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 70-82; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 83-99, 237.

5 Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 325-26; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 33-36, 42; Innes, Sunjata, p. 83; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 81-85.

6 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 46-47; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 172; see also Vidal, 'La légende', pp. 327-28.

Clearly, a large part of the Sunjata material is composed of the stuff of myth and folktale, and on the face of it, the thought of trying to glean historical information from it is not an encouraging one. But woven into the patchwork fabric of this narrative are infrequent threads bearing faded reminiscences of people and events of the distant past. Vague, inaccurate, and potentially misleading as these archaic fragments must be, they merit whatever attention is necessary to interpret their significance, in the hope that they might yield some useful historical insights. The present study cannot encompass all the possibilities in this regard, but it is intended to point out some areas that appear to deserve more attention than they have heretofore received.

Sources: Informants and Scholars

In matters of historical interest, the quality of the oral sources varies considerably from one version to the next. Some informants have had more to say than others, and a few have offered some genuinely provocative fragments of information aside from the usual narrative line. Faithfully reproduced, any indigenous account of the tradition can be useful for comparative purposes if for nothing else, but some collectors of extensive versions failed in this respect, perhaps because of different interests. Niane clearly departed widely from the original style of his informant, as did Diabete. Fleshed out with extra dialogue and stylistic conceits apparently borrowed from European prose fiction, the versions published by these two African writers

are so far removed from griot storytelling modes that they would probably be most accurately classified as novellettes based on the Sunjata legend.¹

In contrast to these radical departures from traditional narrative form, the fragment collected by Sory Camara and the three lengthy versions published by Innes come to us in a form adhering closely to the original oral narrative style, precisely translated and accompanied by the original language texts. The two 1975 versions are also faithfully reproduced, though without the Bambara texts. Among the remaining Sunjata sources, the versions collected by Arnaud, Frobenius, Sidibe and Zeltner are particularly notable for assorted passages of possible historical interest.

Some of the material consulted here involving secondary characters in the Sunjata legend occasionally touches upon the period between the apogees of ancient Ghana and Mali that is usually referred to as the era of Soninke dispersion, and a few of the references reach farther back, into the era of Ghana/Wagadu.² Some of the informants who provided useful versions of the Sunjata legend were also well informed about the Wagadu tradition, but seldom do we find anything substantive in the oral sources about

1 Pageard has noticed that Niane enlarges upon his informant's testimony, but finds nothing disadvantageous in this, calling Niane's translation a superior work of art in which he "has supplemented the griot's story whilst preserving its naiveté, seriousness and flavour" ('Soundiata', p. 71).

2 See below, p. 202, n. 1.

the era of dispersion immediately following the destruction of the Soninke state. Arnaud's informant at Niore had something to say about the dispersion of formerly servile groups from Wagadu at a time when the powers of the ruling dynasty had greatly declined, and on this subject his remarks mesh well with information from other sources.¹

The testimony of Arnaud's informant stands out generally, because it repeatedly offers background information and thoughtful commentary extending beyond the frequently shallow depths of oral tradition. For example, one of the most common episodes in the Sunjata tradition is one mentioned earlier, involving the death of Sunjata's mother at Mema where they have been living in exile. When Birama Tunkara, the chief who gave them refuge, requires a burial fee, Sunjata responds in anger, presenting the chief with a calabash containing potsherds, bits of charcoal, straw and other materials symbolizing the ruins of Mema. The Arnaud version is conspicuous in that in one of his engaging asides, the informant, whose name is Batchili, explains that at that time in Mema as well as in neighbouring regions of the Sudan, when a stranger died there, the family were required by custom to pay something to the native residents for the privilege of burial in their village

1 This informant identifies himself as being of the Batchili family (Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 159). Apparently literate, he was probably employed by the colonial office at Niore, and it would be interesting to study archival documents from there in an effort to determine if any of his testimony was influenced by his work there, especially regarding passages like the one where he traces the footsteps of Soso survivors of the Sunjata/Sumanguru conflict to their new home in Futa Jalon (p. 171).

territory.¹ As a point of social history this has a ring of truth to it, and it raises the episode a notch above the level of a mere anecdote of passing interest, which is how it appears in most versions. Moreover, in a literary genre characterized by fantasy and illogical circumstance, it provides an explanation where none could normally be expected. The tradition has it that Chief Tunkara had welcomed Sunjata and company after they had been denied sanctuary in several other places, and the host's demand of payment for burial space usually appears as an abrupt contradiction to his former generosity. But in the light of the above explanation it appears more likely that Tunkara was simply upholding the customs of his people and that the burial incident involved a simple misunderstanding between a host and a stranger unfamiliar with local practices.

On any such point it can of course be argued with good reason that any attempt to glean insight from such a source is futile because it is unrealistic to assume that anything like an accurate oral record of something like a disagreement between two individuals, however famous, could be maintained through more than six centuries. Though the oral sources favour Mema as Sunjata's haven while in exile, there is no independent evidence to confirm this, and even if there were, it would not substantiate the burial incident. On this level, perhaps the best that can be done in a general study of ancient Mali is to isolate the aspect of the

1 Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 168-69; the custom of purchasing the burial plot is mentioned in a Monteil version ('Fin de siècle', pp. 167-68).

tradition having the relatively highest likelihood of a historical basis, and then to preface any mention of the relevant episode with appropriate qualifications. On another level, the possible value of information about something like burial customs in ancient Mema should not be dismissed out of hand, because this fragment appears to be among those of relatively substantial texture. Such fragments may shed light on minor facets of daily life in extinct sahelian societies, while the episodes in which they appear remain open to interpretation.

The Arnaud account is one of four related oral sources collected by French colonial officials at Nioro in the first decade of this century. Nioro is located in what was the heart of ancient Ghana, in the region known locally as Wagadu, and in all cases the primary emphasis of these accounts is on the Soninke tradition of Wagadu, though three of the narratives continue into substantial versions of the Sunjata legend,¹ and the fourth includes a fragment of it.² The Nioro sources are unusual in that there was a high rate of literacy among the informants, all of whom were Muslim,³ and one of the accounts was found to have already been written down in both Bambara and Arabic.⁴ The individual

1 Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 354-62; Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 168-72; Delafosse, 'Traditions', pp. 298-301.

2 Lanrezac, 'Au Soudan', pp. 296-97.

3 Adam's informant was a young Soninke marabout ('Légendes', p. 82); Lanrezac's was the Arabic scrivener at his administrative office ('Au Soudan', p. 380); the Islamic faith of Arnaud's is inherent in his commentary (e.g. 'La singulière', p. 151); the author of the manuscript from which Delafosse's version was copied was a Muslim judge at Nioro ('Traditions', p. 293).

4 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 293.

narratives about Wagadu and Sunjata are as different from one another as would normally be expected in oral sources, but each of the four contains a list of descendants of Dinga, Wagadu's founding ancestor, and these lists are so similar that the sources must have converged somewhere along the line of oral transmission. Delafosse assumed that the scribes who produced the manuscript he collected were also responsible for the testimonies recorded by Adam and Lanrezac,¹ but a comparison of the texts lends no support to this idea, for it is only the Wagadu descent lists that are quite similar. It appears that the Niuro versions of the Wagadu and Sunjata traditions were originally collected from griots by indigenous Muslim scholars who wrote them down or retold them to the colonial officials who published them. There is no mistaking the fact that the individual narratives constitute distinctly different versions of the same tradition, with the exception of the lists of Dinga's descendants, which are so similar as to suggest that at some point they were circulated in written form among the Niuro scribes. It appears, moreover, that the original oral informants from whom they acquired the information probably shared a cultural background with Monteil's 1898 informant, Tudu Yaressi.

The Soninke griot (gesere) Tudu Yaressi was from Gumbu, also in the heart of the old Soninke territory,² and his account of the Wagadu legend contains a descent list³ so similar to those held in

1 Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 293.

2 Monteil, 'La légende', p. 365.

3 I refer to these as 'descent lists' rather than genealogies because they name more than one lineage and they include names of marabouts and various royal retainers.

common by the Nioro sources, that they were clearly drawn from the same culture complex. In addition to being generally the same regarding Dinga's wives and descendants, they agree in a number of obscure elements, such as the claim in all five versions that a distant descendant of Dinga emigrated to the north and settled with the Duaish (alt. sp. Idaouich) people.¹ One of the informants distinguishes himself by admitting to not knowing the name of the descendant who was associated with the Duaish,² which testifies to his sincerity and reflects the generally high standards of these informants. The griot Tudo Yaressi and the four Muslims at Nioro all appear to have given the most thorough and objective accounts in their respective powers, something that researchers have not been able to count on in recent years.³ Though we do not know as much about the griots who delivered the Zeltner, Frobenius and Sidibe accounts, the texts of their narratives exhibit a similar degree of conscientiousness on their part, and on the whole, we can consider ourselves fortunate in the quality of the Sunjata sources from the first third of this century.

1 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 85; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 148; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 295; Lanrezac, 'Au Soudan', p. 382 (this version is garbled, naming the Duaish (Douassi) as a son who went into the sahel and founded a Moorish clan); Monteil, 'La légende', p. 373. According to Murdock, the sahelian Duaish are culturally indistinguishable from the Zenaga, except that some of them still speak a Berber language (Africa, p. 112).

2 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 85.

3 Though the Nioro informants were not griots, their original sources almost certainly were, and one of them makes it plain that he respected 'les vieux ... parmi les griots' as the ultimate authorities on matters of the past (Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 159).

An early sceptic regarding the possible historical value of the Sunjata tradition was Charles Monteil, who raised the important question of the influence of the griots' own contemporary culture on their testimony:

... tout est invention des dyali en ce qui concerne l'origine et la généalogie des Keita non moins que les détails de la vie de Soun Diata. Ces légendes qui empruntent leurs éléments aux circonstances de la vie sociale actuelle, sont de précieux documents de folklore, mais elles ne peuvent fournir à l'histoire que des témoignages suspects.¹

More recently, Gordon Innes has taken a similar stance. Viewing the Sunjata tradition strictly as oral literature, he doubts that anything in it is based on historical events:

Even if historians can establish that Sunjata did exist, I should regard with extreme suspicion any aspect of his life reported in the oral tradition. Indeed, I would need convincing that his career as it is recounted by the griots bears any relationship to the career of the historical Sunjata.²

Though historians searching for information on early thirteenth century Mali cannot afford the luxury of such extreme scepticism, these views are of importance at a time when scholarship has begun to exhibit a trend toward uncritical acceptance of the popular narrative line about Sunjata's life and times. They provide a useful counterweight to the work of a writer like Niane, who has an unrealistically high regard for the historical value of griot

1 Monteil, Les empires, p. 364.

2 Innes, Sunjata, p. 26.

testimony, and whose Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali has had a wide circulation. In his preface to the French edition Niane takes an unnecessarily defensive position as he laments that

the West has taught us to scorn oral sources in matters of history, all that is not written in black and white being considered without foundation.¹

The essence of Niane's enthusiastic but specious defence of griots as historians is contained in a paragraph that has probably influenced popular conceptions of the griot occupation:

The griot who occupies the chair of history of a village and who bears the title of 'Belen-Tigui' is a very respectable gentleman and has toured Mali. He has gone from village to village to hear the teaching of great masters; he has learnt the art of historical oratory through long years; he is, moreover, bound by an oath and does not teach anything except what his guild stipulates, for, say the griots, 'All true learning should be a secret'. Also the traditionist is a master in the art of circumlocution, he speaks in archaic formulas, or else he turns facts into amusing legends for the public, which legends have, however, a secret sense which the vulgar little suspect.²

That some griots have special titles, are respectable, well-travelled and have practised long to become master orators does not testify to their reliability as sources of historical information. The doctrine that true learning should be kept secret, and the practice of turning fact into legend are curious credentials for historians, and on the whole, the qualifications

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. viii.

2 Niane, Sundiata, p. viii; (French) Soundjata, p. 9.

Niane lists seem more appropriate for the portfolio of an entertainer, which of course has been one of the griot's primary functions. To suggest that griots have organized themselves into some kind of guild gives an inaccurate impression of the situation, and to imply that they make a conscious effort to turn fact into legend further muddies the waters. To refer to the jeli (griot) class of nyamakalaw (endogamous, occupationally defined artisan groups) as a guild would be hard to justify, and though owing to problems of distortion inherent in the chain of oral transmission¹ their art characteristically turns fact into legend, to suggest that they do so intentionally while retaining a secret store of accurate historical data, is as extravagant as it is to say griots occupy chairs of history. Probably more to the point is Innes' remark that

Certainly the griots give accounts of historical events - or at any rate purport to do so - but a griot is not concerned to give a full, objective, historical account of events.²

Though scholars finding it desirable to examine the Sunjata tradition for historical information must be very critical of their material, they can hardly be expected to ignore it altogether, because while it contains nothing that can be used as hard evidence, it is the only source that gives some indication of the kinds of

1 For discussions of distortion in the chain of transmission see Vansina, Oral Tradition, esp. pp. 19-46; and David P. Henige, The Chronology of Oral Tradition (Oxford, 1974).

2 Innes, Kaabu and Fuladu, pp. 5 and 27. Though this is not to deny that griots practise, to some extent, according to the Manding belief that knowledge is power, and that it is advantageous to keep some of one's knowledge to oneself (See Innes, Sunjata, p. 13).

events that might have had some bearing on history. While it is true that few of the events as related by griots can be confirmed, neither can it be proven that there is not some historical basis for those aspects of the tradition that do not obviously belong to the realms of myth and fantasy.

A distinguished writer who has made use of the oral sources on Sunjata in recent years is Levtzion in his Ancient Ghana and Mali. His account of the founding and consolidation of the Mali empire follows the general outline of the more common versions of Sunjata's career. This begins with the hero's birth as a cripple and his early struggles with his rival brothers, leading to his withdrawal into exile. Mostly following the Niane version,¹ Levtzion describes how Sunjata grew to be a formidable military leader, how Sumanguru's tyranny over the Manding became oppressive, and how the two clashed in a war ending in victory for Sunjata. Battle with Sumanguru's allies followed, as Sunjata consolidated his empire, the tributary provinces of which were governed by his most capable subordinates.²

1 He also refers to the Vidal and Delafosse versions, but he basically relies on Niane, introducing it as part of Malinke historical tradition (p. 58). Discussing the events in which Sunjata is supposed to have been involved, he makes it fairly plain that this is not documented history by referring to 'Niane's sources', 'different versions', and 'tradition', but there are passages like the first two paragraphs on p. 59 that an uncritical reader could easily construe as history instead of legend, and on the whole, it seems like the Sunjata material might be set off more distinctly for the benefit of readers with little historiographical background.

2 Levtzion, Ancient, pp. 58-60.

Unfortunately, as noted earlier, owing to the lack of independent documentation for anything more than the existence of the mansa Mari Jata (Sunjata) and his subduing of the Soso,¹ we cannot be certain of the historicity of any of this. It may be as Innes suggests, that the traditional narrative of Sunjata's youth, exile and rise to power is simply an ancient hero tale following a pattern commonly found throughout world literature. In his argument against the historical value of the Sunjata tradition, Innes anticipates one possible response with the observation that

It might be thought that while griots make use of a selection of common motifs to embellish the story, they all adhere to a small common core and that this is likely to be based on fact, namely that Sunjata was driven from home, spent some time in exile, returned home and established himself as king.²

Innes maintains that even this common narrative core is suspect, because it so closely resembles the standard formula of departure-initiation-return found in the lives of many fictional heroes.³

However, art tends to follow life, rather than the reverse, and the reliably documented careers of many prominent historical figures also follow the standard path of the heroic adventurer

1 Ibn Khaldun in Cuoq, Recueil, p. 344.

2 Innes, Sunjata, p. 26.

3 He cites Raglan's list of twenty-two items in the pattern of the hero's life which was applied to various heroes to see how many points each scored out of a possible twenty-two. Raglan found, for example, that Oedipus scored twenty points, Jason fourteen, and King Arthur sixteen. See Lord Raglan, 'The Hero of Tradition' in Alan Dundes (ed.), The Study of Folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), pp. 142-157.

in world literature. Given the chronic unreliability of oral sources, the griots have been surprisingly consistent with the part of their story maintaining that there was hostility between Nare Fa Maghan's two eldest sons, that this resulted in Sunjata's leaving with his mother to live for a time with a chief of the Tunkara lineage, and that he was later recalled by his people to assume the chieftancy and lead them in a war against the neighbouring Soso. Pared down to its barest essentials, this does of course fit the pattern of departure, initiation and return of the composite literary hero, as does the experience of every Manding child undergoing the life-crisis ritual of circumcision. Innes' point becomes somewhat diluted when the core of the Sunjata narrative is viewed, not against the background of western classical literature, but more appropriately, in the context of Manding culture.

To take one facet of the core narrative as an example, the motivation for Sunjata's departure from home is firmly rooted in local custom. In some polygamous West African cultures, including the Manding, it is not uncommon for bitter rivalry to arise between sons of the same father and different mothers. In Bambara society the concept of enmity or at least rivalry between half-brothers (fadenw) is often taken for granted, with the term fadenw itself having clear connotations of rivalry, if not outright hostility. Indeed, some mothers traditionally regard it as their responsibility to help their own sons gain any possible advantage over the sons of her husband's other wives. In cases where the father is a man of means and there is considerable wealth

to be gained by his heirs, this rivalry can escalate into serious hostility, with the weaker party eventually being sent away empty-handed. Thus the enmity between the son of Sogolon and his brother by a different mother reflects a common situation in Manding society.¹

Obviously this proves nothing about the accuracy of the oral explanation of what led to Sunjata's exile. It is merely to point out that instead of being a product of pure fantasy, the traditional episode has a solid cultural foundation, and that the best effort to exploit the oral sources for historical information will involve studying potentially useful elements in the proper context. It is also important to take all the most comprehensive versions into account, on the chance that something might be learned through comparative study.²

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- 1 Adhering to the popular line that whatever Sunjata did was heroic, Pageard believes Sunjata's exile was voluntary and that while it could be interpreted as flight, it "is justified to the extent that it prevents a brotherly struggle and everyone knows the strength of 'fadenya' ... in the Manding country" ('Soundiata', p. 63).
 - 2 The desirability of making use of all available information is particularly apparent in a work like Niane's study of Sunjata's lineage ('Recherches', pp. 39-43), in which he presents a genealogical chart in contrast with Ibn Khaldun's fourteenth century one (Cuoq, Recueil, p. 344), but bases it solely on the Dioma and Hamama (Guinea) traditions while ignoring seven other important genealogies, reference to which would have made a more meaningful study: Adam, 'Légendes', p. 354; Zeltner (two versions), Contes, pp. 37-38, pp. 44-45; Frobenius (two versions), Dichten, p. 337, p. 339; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 298; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 319.

Sumanguru

The academic scepticism regarding the historical worth of griot testimony about Sunjata himself may be largely justified, because the bards' purpose has been to glorify the hero as the symbol of the greatness of ancient Mali and its people, a subject we will return to shortly. In the meantime, the traditional glorification of Sunjata may account for the fact that many of the elements in the legend that seem to have a relatively high likelihood of historicity have to do with secondary characters. Of course, these supporting figures are also subjects of griot panegyric, but to a lesser degree than in the case of the central hero.

One of the earliest secondary characters to come into focus is Sumanguru. Much of the testimony about him is considerably more restrained than what we get from say, the Niane version, which characterizes Sumanguru as the archetypal monster, a flogger of old men and a defiler of virgins¹ who meets his match in Sunjata, a dashing knight of the savannah and saviour of his people.² Innes' comments relating Sunjata's legendary career to the standard literary pattern of the life of the composite hero³ are relevant to this level of the narrative, in which Sunjata and Sumanguru, representing the inexorable opposites of good and evil, assume the proportions of larger-than-life mythological figures

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. 41.

2 Ibid., p. 47.

3 Innes, Sunjata, p. 26.

able to accomplish deeds far beyond ordinary human limitations. In sharp contrast to this are many earlier versions that remain free of this sort of dramatic overlay, in which the picture is neither so emphatically black and white, nor necessarily a product of pure fantasy.

The sources indicate that Sumanguru, or at least his Kante lineage, was a product of the servile estate in ancient Ghana/Wagadu,¹ and it is therefore of interest here to observe what the sources say about the Kante and other lineages that extend from that period into the time of Sunjata. Sumanguru, or perhaps one of his ancestors by the same name,² is said to have figured

1 The positive identification of legendary Wagadu with the Ghana of written Arabic sources has never been established. Early writers like L. Tautain entertained no doubts in this regard ('Légende et traditions des Soninke relatives à l'empire de Ghanata ... 1887', Bulletin de géographie historique et descriptive, t. 9-10, 1894-95, pp. 472-480, p. 473), and recently Meillassoux seems to have accepted the connection between Ghana and Wagadu where he notes that "Les Wago, dont le nom a donné Wagadu, sont les plus clairement associés à l'histoire du Ghana" (Légende, p. 8). For further discussion of this see V. Monteil, L'Islam Noir (Paris, 1971), pp. 65-79, and Levtzion, Ancient, pp. 20-22.

2 Characteristically, the time values are unclear, and many references to Sumanguru are anachronistic because ancient families tend to be identified in the traditions by their most distinguished member, while the rest are forgotten. Thus it is conceivable that the Kante-Bamagana lineage in general could be remembered through many generations simply as Sumanguru, and the one hero could be credited with deeds, not just of others in the lineage, but of anyone with whom they were associated in the minds of the griots. Also to be considered, is the fact that 'Sumanguru', in modern times, at least, is also a surname rendered 'Soumarouo', and this may have been so in ancient times as well. Arcin (Histoire, p. 50) gives as alternative spellings, 'Souma N'Kourou' and 'Souma-Horo', and adds that Hor or Har means 'noble' in Berber, and that it is the name of one group of the 'Souma' people. This may be a contrived association, but perhaps worth checking in view of Sumanguru's alleged servile descent, suggesting his forebears could have originated with a nearby Berber group. See also, p. 206, n. 4.

prominently in events that occurred during the politically fragmented era between the apogees of Wagadu and Mali. Therefore, much of the material on Sumanguru has to do with the unsettled period just prior to the rise of Sunjata, and, as might be expected, some of the scholarly statements about the Soso leader's career reflect the confusion of that era.

Collectively, the sources give the impression that during the epoch when Ghana was ruled from Kumbi by the Cisse dynasty, whose leaders were known as magha or kayamagha,¹ a very considerable part of society consisted of slaves and former slaves, and it appears that toward the end of that era, certain servile groups or individuals occupied prominent positions in the social hierarchy. The sources indicate that servility in Wagadu was similar to that of seventeenth-century Bambara society² in which there was a system of gradual enfranchisement whereby houseborn slaves (wolosow) of the third generation moved out of the master's compound and into one of their own. Known by the term jon gorow (roughly, freed slaves), these people were an important source of their

1 Though Delafosse was aware that in the Manding language variations on the term maga meant 'master' (Delafosse, La langue, p. 493), and acknowledged that the Tarikh al-Fettash (p. 75) gave 'Kayamaga' as 'king' or 'master' of gold, on the strength of its popular use in recent times as a proper name and because of the way it appeared to him in the Nioro descent lists, he concluded that 'Maga, Maghan or Makka' was the name rather than the title of the rulers in the Cisse dynasty (Tarikh al-Fettash, p. 75, Delafosse's n. 1). On the contrary, 'Maghan' (Maga, Manga) appears much more likely to have been the title held by the Wagadu Cisse, and may well be the term construed by Arab writers into the familiar 'Ghana' (see Ibn Hawkal (A.D. 988) in Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 75-76; al-Bakri (1068) in Cuoq, pp. 98-99; Kitab al-Istibsar (1192) in Cuoq, p. 177).

2 This could be somewhat illusory because an informant can be influenced by cultural conditions in his own time and may project this into his narrative.

masters' power, wealth and prestige, a situation from which the slaves derived a good deal of security.¹ At the same time, certain male captives served as the ruler's personal guard,² in the army,³ or in community associations, and some of them were chiefs in these organizations with individual rank determined by such considerations as age, ability and experience.⁴ There is evidence that similar conditions prevailed in Ghana/Wagadu, where the equivalent of jon goro was komon gallo.⁵

Certain servile clans in Wagadu are said to have been state property ('captifs de la couronne'),⁶ and though they initially retained their own patronymics,⁷ there were also names by which they were identified collectively. One such group was known as Kusa, and there may have been another called Kagoro.⁸ Arnaud's informant names the Diariso, Dukure, Jimbiga and Tunkara clans as Kusa, and though he does not specifically place Sumanguru's ancestors in that group, he says "les Siman'gourou, dont le diamou [jamu] est Kante, avaient été les captifs personnels du Kayamagha".⁹ Monteil's informants did specify that Sumanguru's

1 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 193.

2 Bokar N'diaye, 'Les structures politico-sociales de l'ancienne société Mandingue', Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, University of London, 1972, p. 15.

3 Paques, Les Bambara, pp. 78-79.

4 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 191.

5 Monteil, 'La légende', p. 403.

6 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167.

7 Monteil, 'La légende', p. 404.

8 Monteil, 'La légende', pp. 403-05; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167.

9 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167.

lineage was a part of the Kusa, and he concluded that during Wagadu's declining years the power of certain slave chiefs accrued to such a degree that the head of state was obliged to maintain extreme vigilance against the 'usurpateurs présumptifs'.¹

Some of these slave chiefs evidently came into their own during the era of Soninke dispersion from drought-stricken Ghana, and according to Arnaud's informant, one of those who emigrated south to establish autonomy for himself and his people was an 'ancien captif' of Kayamagha Tanne, Sumanguru Kante, who settled at Soso.² This is said to have occurred 'pendant les derniers temps de l'empire des Soninkes', and during the same epoch when Marinfá (Nare Fa Maghan), father of Mahamadou Konate (Sunjata) was chief of Mande.³

Monteil's sources agree with this possibly meaningless chronology and confirm that Sumanguru had been a jon santigi or chief of slaves of the Kusa group under a ruler of Wagadu,⁴ though by that time there apparently was not much remaining of a Soninke state that was worthy of the name. According to Cheik Usman, one

1 Monteil, 'La légende', p. 404.

2 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167. As used here, the term 'ancien captif' could signify that Sumanguru was a descendant of those who had served the Kayamaga, rather than that he himself had been a slave.

3 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 168; Monteil, 'Fin de siècle' (first version), p. 166.

4 Monteil, Les empires, pp. 354-55; Monteil, 'Fin de siècle', p. 166.

of Ibn Khaldun's informants, the last sovereigns of Ghana became so weak that the Soso attacked and reduced them to slavery.¹ Barth dates this event at A.D. 1203,² and Delafosse was convinced that Sumanguru was the leader responsible.³ Nevertheless, the circumstances of Sumanguru's relationship -or that of his lineage - with Ghana or its rulers remain unclear, a condition made all the more tantalizing by the name Bamagana, an evidently archaic appellation which some informants claim was originally the Soso leader's patronymic.⁴

There have been some conflicting statements about the relationship between Sumanguru's Soso and the people called Diariso, during the era of the Soninke successor states that followed the decline of Ghana/Wagadu. Pageard says the Diariso were masters of the Soso before Sumanguru rose to power, naming Labouret as the source of this information but neglecting to cite

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- 1 Cuoq, Recueil, p. 343. It might be worthwhile to investigate the possibility of a connection between this and the tradition recorded in the Tarikh al-Fettash (pp. 70-71) that says the Kusa were among the people of Kaniaga during the time of the Kayamaga, but left after the capital was destroyed by war.
 - 2 Barth, Travels, III, p. 660.
 - 3 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, p. 165.
 - 4 Monteil's informant (Les empires, p. 355) claimed the Bamagana were a branch of the Kante, and Innes' informant Dembo Kanute (Sunjata, p. 311) gives Bamagana as the original surname, saying Kante was acquired at the time of the conflict with Sunjata, which agrees with Bamba Suso's statement (Innes, Sunjata, p. 81) that presently familiar surnames originated in the time of Sunjata. There are many popular etymologies accounting for the name Kante, one of which relates it to Sumanguru's other name, Bamagana (Monteil, 'La légende', p. 370, n. 5, and 'Fin de siècle', p. 166). See also p. 202, n. 2.

a specific reference.¹ Levtzion refers to legends claiming the Diariso were the first dynasty to rule over the Soso, but fails to mention which legends.² Instead, his nearest footnote leads us to a remark by Charles Monteil who says that Delafosse borrowed from Tautain the idea that the history of the Soso was an extension of that of the Diariso, a point of view Monteil found unacceptable.³ This is not surprising, because Delafosse's interpretation of the Tautain material is too creative to be useful to historians.

For his account of the Diariso occupation of the Kaniaga region in the neighbourhood of what later became the land of the Soso,⁴ Delafosse relies on the Niore informants, who agree that Gumane Fade, one of the Soninke ruler Maghan Diabe Cisse's principal chiefs, governed that area in the great days of Ghana/Wagadu.⁵ Delafosse was convinced that Gumane Fade was an ancestor of the Diariso clan.⁶ Moving into the century following the

1 R. Pageard, 'Note sur les Kagoro et la chefferie de Soro', Journal de la Société des Africanistes XXIX, 2 (1959), pp. 261-272, p. 264.

2 Levtzion, Ancient, p. 51.

3 Monteil, Les empires, p. 354.

4 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, pp. 163-64.

5 Lanrezac 'Au Soudan', p. 385; Adam, 'Légendes', p. 92; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 151; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 297.

6 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, p. 162. There is evidence for this: in the version Delafosse collected ('Traditions', p. 296) Goumate Fade is ancestor of the Yaressi, whom Delafosse, probably with good reason, equates with the Diariso (p. 296, n. 4); the Adam version ('Légendes', p. 89) is close to this, giving Soumane Fade's clan as the Diareni.

demise of the Cisse dynasty in Wagadu, Delafosse says Kaniaga came into its own as a political power under a succession of seven rulers of the Diariso lineage, and it is at this point that he begins to borrow from Tautain, though he neglects to specify his source.¹

The list of rulers collected by Tautain is conspicuous in its divergence from the Nioro version, and it is accompanied by an obscure tradition about events leading to Sumanguru's appearance as chief of the Soso. Looking first at the list of rulers, Tautain's informant parallels most others in naming Dinga as the patriarch who came from elsewhere to settle the land, and the Cisse lineage as the early power in Wagadu. However, from there he departs from the Nioro progression, listing Wakane Sakho, D'amera Sokona, Gumane Fade and Sero Khumma as brothers of and successors to Khaya Makha Sise (Diabe Cisse), the dynasty's founder.² This contrasts sharply with the Nioro accounts which list several Cisses in the founder's dynasty, and name Sakho, Sokona and Fade among Diabe Cisse's provincial governors and as founders of other lineages.³ But more to the point is the

1 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, II, p. 163; he merely attributes the list of kings to local tradition. Elsewhere, he mentions Tautain among others as having reported on a Soninke legend of the founding of Wagadu (Haut-Sénégal-Niger I, p. 256, n. 2).

2 Tautain, 'Légende', p. 475.

3 Adam, 'Légendes', p. 89; Lanrezac, 'Au Soudan', p. 385; Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 151; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 296. It is noteworthy that neither of these sources nor Tautain's list mention al-Bakri's Tankaminin (1062-1068) or his predecessor Basi (Cuoq, Recueil, pp. 98-99), nor is Kanissai of the Tarikh al-Fettash (p. 76) included.

remainder of Tautain's list. With no mention of any decline in the fortunes of Wagadu, or of a dispersion from the heart of the land, Tautain's informant states that the power then passed to the Diariso lineage, commencing with Kambine, who was followed successively by Suleyman, Banna-bubu, Wagadu Makha, Gane, Musa and Biramu.¹

Ignoring the first part of the list of kings in which, as we have seen, Tautain's informant names Gumane Fade as a Cisse, Delafosse separates from the rest the section beginning with Kambine and purporting to list the Diariso dynasty. He places it in Kaniaga after the destruction of Wagadu and calls Kambine Diariso a descendant of Gumane Fade.² He then assigns each of Kambine's six successors reigns of precisely ten or twenty years,

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- 1 Tautain, 'Legende', pp. 475-76. He adds that according to some, the story of the snake and the destruction of Wagadu occurred during Birumu's reign, while others say it was later.
 - 2 References to Kambine Diariso are rare, but a fragment in the Mali archives supports his importance as the primary hero of that group. It describes how he was seriously wounded in a fierce battle with one Manga Khonne. Though the manuscript has been partly destroyed by termites, it is possible to make out that the battle continued on foot after the horses were killed, and that Manga Khonne threw Kambine to the ground, giving him a bloody wound that stained his blue gown. We are told the Diariso later claimed the blood issued from Manga Khonne instead of Kambine, and that thereafter the Diariso adopted the striped boubou in place of the blue, with their chiefs taking the name of Manga, apparently as an honorary title ('S/du Commandement chez les Diawara "Historique" Nara - 1918', Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-78). For a note on the deterioration of manuscripts in the Mali archives at Kouloba, see David Conrad, 'Archival Resources in Mali', History in Africa Vol. 3 (1976), pp. 175-180, p. 177.

with Biram's tenure ending in 1180.¹

In the interest of clarity, let us briefly review the situation to this point. The most comprehensive and well-known list of leading people in Wagadu is the one that is more or less repeated in the Monteil account of the Wagadu legend and the four versions from Nioro, one of which was collected by Delafosse. One of the patriarch Dinga's wives was Katana Bori (Boli, Boro), who bore the beginnings of the Cisse line, with Diabe Cisse becoming the first magha of Wagadu. All five versions list four or five brothers or sons of Diabe as his successors in the Cisse line, and the four Nioro accounts list four generals as Diabe's provincial governors: Wakane Sakho, Diamera Sokona, Makha Doumbe Silla, and Gumane Fade.²

Contrasting sharply with this in what appears to be a fragment of the same tradition, Tautain's informant lists as Dinga's descendants Khaya Makha Sisse, Wakane Sakho, Diamera Sokona, Gumane Fade, and Sero Khumma, specifying that the last

1 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, II, pp. 163-64.

2 Lanrezac ('La légende', p. 385) has Diacouraga Traore in place of Diamera Sokhona.

four were Diabe's brothers and therefore of the Cisse family.¹

He says the power then passed to the Diariso, ruled successively by the seven beginning with Kambine and ending with Biramu.²

In Haut-Sénégal-Niger, Delafosse uses the Niuro version for the Wagadu era, then borrows Tautain's Diariso dynasty beginning with Kambine and locates it in the dispersion era as the ruling dynasty of Kaniaga.³

Returning to the Tautain account and the above-mentioned tradition of events leading to Sumanguru's appearance as leader of

- 1 Whatever the truth of these particular relationships, the Wagadu tradition in general has Dinga occupying the mythical role of a more or less divine creative force, father of Wagadu and all its inhabitants, rather than a more historically rooted figure designated patriarch of a single lineage. The magha or kayamaga Diabe Cisse and his descendants of the same title seem to be remembered as the only ruling dynasty, because tradition has them in power both at the founding of Wagadu and during the killing of the snake Bida which heralded the destruction of the great Soninke state. However, other lineages, such as those repeatedly mentioned as holding provincial governorships, may also have ruled at some period, though the possibility of this ever being confirmed is more complicated than usual, in that the provinces they are said to have governed also appear in the collective griot memory as Wagadu itself, and so do the later Soninke successor states (see especially Frobenius, 'Gassires Laute' in Spielmanns-geschichten, pp. 53-60.
- 2 Tautain, 'Légende', p. 477. Tautain noted that 'Suleyman' is the first Muslim name in the list, and he attaches a date of 1087 to Suleyman's reign. Among the other names succeeding Kambine's in this list, 'Wagadu Makha II' is difficult to accept as a proper name rather than a simple title meaning 'second chief of Wagadu', in spite of Delafosse's references to the contrary (e.g. Haut-Sénégal-Niger I, p. 261); 'Gane' is a rare occurrence in the oral sources of a name similar to the 'Ghana' of the Arabic writers who give this as the name of the ruler and his city or country: Ibn Hawkal (A.D. 988) in Cuoq, pp. 75-76; al-Bakri (1068) in Cuoq, pp. 98-99; Kitab al-Istibsar (1192) in Cuoq, p. 177; 'Musa' is of course also a common Muslim name; 'Biramu' stands out because it is close to 'Birama', the name of the famous Tunkara ancestor who ruled at Mema. On the whole, this list has the catch-all flavour of some of the Keita genealogies discussed in the 'Bilali' section of Chapter IV, pp. 165-173.
- 3 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger, II, pp. 163-64.

the Soso, Tautain's informant explains that Biramu, last of the Diariso dynasty, left nine sons, four by one wife and five by another. Upon their father's death a war of succession commenced between the sons of the two wives, and the side with five sons called to their aid a warrior named D'ara (Diara, Jara) from the land of Tiraka, south of the present Bamako. This led to victory for the five, with one of them assuming power, but his brothers soon revolted. One by one, each of the brothers had a turn at seizing power and being deposed and exiled to Kaarta, with the warrior Diara successively taking up the cause of whoever was in revolt. At this point, we are told, the land was so weakened by conflict that the Soso easily intervened and Sumanguru Kante secured the power for himself.¹

Following his account of the Diariso dynasty of Kaniaga ending with Biramu in 1180, Delafosse moves directly into Tautain's story of the war of succession, again without acknowledging the source. Arriving at the point where the five brothers send for help, he identifies the warrior as a famous chief named Diara Kante, and adds that he was Birama's (Biramu's) principal general.² Delafosse offers no justification for these additions, and it can only be assumed that in his eagerness to establish a link between the alleged Diariso dynasty and Sumanguru's Soso, he simply contrived a father for Sumanguru, though such a person is not named anywhere else in tradition, by adding the patronymic Kante to the

1 Tautain, 'Légende', p. 476.

2 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, p. 164.

name Diara, which is itself a very common Bambara patronymic. Even if Delafosse had not been aware of this, the Tautain version clearly states that the warrior called to the aid of the five brothers was 'de la famille des D'ara'.¹

Continuing his griot-like adjustment of the tale to suit his purpose, Delafosse says that after the five brothers won the war, Diara Kante saw that the disputes were continuing among them, so he seized the power for himself and exiled the sons of Birama to Kaarta. This, according to Delafosse, was how the Diariso dynasty was succeeded in 1180 by that of the Kante. He says the latter endured through only two generations, one being that of the Diara whom he chose to call Kante, and the other being that of Diara Kante's 'son', Sumanguru.²

Since Pageard and Levtzion do not adequately identify the sources of their statements that the Diariso ruled the Soso before the appearance of Sumanguru, we cannot be sure their views were influenced by Delafosse. However, the mark of this enterprising colonial administrator seems clear in a footnote by G.D. Pickett, English translator of Niane's widely circulated Sundiata, where he says Sumanguru "was the son of a Soninke warrior, Djara of the Kante clan", and that "the Diarisso dynasty was founded by a certain Kambine in the eleventh century".³ We might add that

1 Tautain, 'Légende', p. 476.

2 Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger II, pp. 164-65.

3 Niane, Sundiata, p. 92, n. 47.

this note seems oddly incompatible with the line in the main text to which it refers, reading in part, "Soumarouo was descended from the line of smiths called Diarisso".¹ The combined effect of note and text is that they seem to be saying that Sumanguru descended from both the Kante and Diariso lineages.

This kind of confusion doubtless stems in part from the ambiguity of certain names. Looking to the earliest era mentioned in the oral sources, we find references to the Kante Bamagana, Diariso and Tunkara lineages as members of the servile Wagadu group known as Kusa.² But when they are referred to in connection with the era of dispersion, the Diariso appear to be thought of more as a tribe than a clan, perhaps a sub-ethnic group like the Soso, seeking its own political autonomy and coming into conflict with other groups.³ This status has held into modern times, where they are classified as 'a tribal section' of the Soninke.⁴ At the same time, the Kusa emerge as another ethnic minority under the leadership of the Tunkara lineage, supposedly one of its original member families.⁵ Meanwhile, whereas the same early tradition describes the Kagoro as another group composed of different servile lineages,⁶ we also find them referred to as

1 Niane, Sundiata, p. 38.

2 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167; Monteil, 'La légende', pp. 403-04.

3 Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-78.

4 Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 32.

5 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167; Monteil, 'La légende', pp. 403-04. The Kusa studied by Meillassoux identify themselves as a distinct Soninke group, but their association with the Kusa of Wagadu is not clear (Légende, pp. 8-9).

6 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167; Monteil, 'La légende', p. 405.

an individual lineage¹ and, similar to the Diariso, as a minor ethnic group.²

Another prominent character in the Sunjata tradition whose ancestral path crossed that of Sumanguru, and whose roots can also be found in the oral accounts of Wagadu and the Soninke dispersion, is Birama Tunkara. It will be remembered that he was the chief of Mema who provided sanctuary for Sunjata during his period of exile, and who required payment for the mother's burial plot. In Chapter IV³ we saw how tradition borrowed Fa Koli from the Sunjata era and carried him forward to the time of Mansa Musa the pilgrim, and similarly, Birama Tunkara and Sumanguru become time-travellers, back to the era when Wagadu was flourishing.⁴

The earliest traditional reference to either Tunkara ancestry or to Sumanguru's forebears, is in the retinue of the patriarch Dinga, as he wanders from place to place, sowing the seeds of Soninke civilization. With him is the ancestor Biranin Tunkara, serving as Dinga's chief of slaves. Also in the retinue is a cook named Tenengille, mother of two daughters, one of whom is said

1 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 523.

2 'L'organisation sociale et politique du Cercle de Kita 1944: Les origines du peuplement', Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-43-7. According to Westermann and Bryan (Handbook, p. 34), the Kagoro around Kolokani and Nioro are a mixture of Bambara and Fulani.

3 See p. 154.

4 The naming of these individuals can also be taken as references not to them specifically, but to their lineal ancestors (see p. 202, n. 2 and p. 205, n. 2).

to have become the mother of Sumanguru.¹ The time reference here is to the beginnings of the Soninke state, but the griot Tudu Yaressi's assignment of slave status to the Tunkara of that period agrees with the testimony of Arnaud's informant on the point that the Tunkara were slave chiefs, though in the final days of Wagadu.²

We have noted elsewhere that the distant past is all one to these informants, but they are strikingly consistent regarding the formerly servile status of the Tunkara lineage, a clan that nevertheless became known early on as a ruling force.³ The sources also agree that the slave group of which Biranin Tunkara was chief were known as Kusa. In the Arnaud version the Tunkara are said to have been 'Koussos' along with the Diariso, Dukure and Jimbiga.⁴ Monteil's informant also mentions these lineages, associating them more intimately with one another by placing them on different branches of the same family tree. We are told that Biranin had one child of each sex, with the daughter giving birth to none other than Kambine Diariso, from whom sprouted the line called Dukure. Biranin's son was Birama Tunkara of Mema, and the

1 Monteil, 'La légende', pp. 369-70, and p. 370, n. 5. Another legend of Sumanguru's birth collected by Frobenius (Dichten, p. 321) gives him two mothers and a birth more contemporary with Sunjata.

2 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 168.

3 Tarikh el-Fettach, p. 38 and p. 38, n. 9. Monteil believed there was a direct association between the name Tunkara and the Soninke term tunka, meaning 'chief' ('La légende', p. 404).

4 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 167.

latter's daughter in turn produced Garare, ancestor of the Jimbiga.¹ Though we dare not place any trust in precise details like who gave birth to whom, one cannot help being impressed by the consistency with which these lineages are traced to the servile estate in ancient Ghana/Wagadu.²

Fa Koli

Fa Koli is a pivotal figure in the Sunjata tradition, and as a key military commander closely associated with both Sumanguru and Sunjata, he is worthy of more attention than he has received. Also called Musa, which may have been his original name,³ he is claimed as a founding ancestor by several Manding lineages of Guinea and Mali, most notably the Sissoko, Koroma and Dumbia.⁴ In the Gambia, in addition to these families, one distinguished griot claims Fa Koli is also the forebear of the Danjo and Geyi

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- 1 Monteil, 'La légende', p. 404. The mother of Kambine also had another son, Birama Samura.
 - 2 Although in testimony addressed to later times there is less emphasis on former Tunkara servility, and some informants make no reference to it at all (see Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-78 (1918), and ID-43-7 (1944)).
 - 3 In Zeltner's second version (Contes, p. 42) he is Moussa Sissokho; in Arnaud ('La singuliere', p. 172) he is Kelea Moussa Sissoro; in the Bemba Suso and Dembo Kanute versions (Innes, Sunjata, pp. 69 and 267) he is Sora Musa. Pierre Smith has also concluded that Sora Musa Sissoko and Fa Koli are one and the same ('Les Diakhanke: histoire d'une dispersion', Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Anthropologiques No. 4 in Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris t. 8, XIe série, 1965, pp. 231-262, p. 241.
 - 4 Monteil, Les Bambara, p. 270; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 45; Niane, Sundiata, p. 78; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 531.

lineages,¹ and another bard counts no less than ten clans as being of his stock.² The point here, of course, is not that Fa Koli's line really extends to such awesome lengths, but that he is of sufficient legendary status to merit such credit. That he is remembered by a large number of praise-names further attests to his traditional importance,³ as does the fact that in one Gambian version of the Sunjata story, Fa Koli and not Sunjata is the central figure.⁴

There are aspects of the Fa Koli episode suggesting that if historically Sunjata and Sumanguru battled each other in a crucial thirteenth-century military campaign, Fa Koli played an important role in determining the outcome. The oral sources consistently refer to Sumanguru's loss of some key elements of his army to Sunjata, an event that swayed the balance of power in the latter's favour, and according to several versions, Fa Koli was very much involved in this. The most common account of how this happened has it that Sumanguru stole or violated Fa Koli's wife,⁵ with several versions containing implications of incest because

1 Innes, Sunjata, p. 69.

2 Ibid., p. 303; The griot's meaning is discussed further on p. 222.

3 Ibid., pp. 225, 267, 303.

4 Ibid., p. 267.

5 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 45; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113, n. 2; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 275-77; Monteil, Les empires, p. 355; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 42-43.

Sumanguru is said to have been Fa Koli's uncle.¹ Though Jeli Baba Sissoko agrees with the tradition about Fa Koli's dramatic change of sides in the war between Manding and Soso, he believes Sumanguru's offence was more general and more serious than an uncle's theft of his nephew's wife. In an incident reminiscent of the Biblical episode of Pharoah's mandate to kill the newborn Hebrews, he claims that owing to his diviners' prediction of Sunjata's birth and rise to power, Sumanguru wanted Fa Koli to supervise the killing of all male infants born in Manding.² The Diabate version concurs on the seriousness of the offence, stating that the reason Fa Koli left his uncle's service was too dreadful to mention.³

Whatever the reason for Fa Koli's change of allegiance, this event has survived in tradition as a significant factor in determining the outcome of the conflict between Soso and Mali, and some accounts convey a relatively sober impression of general political turmoil in contrast to those emphasizing a sensational head-to-head duel between two superhuman heroes. One of these describes the enmity between two early Manding chiefdoms, Dodougou

1 Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113, n. 2; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 275-77; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 42-43.

2 Jeli Baba Sissoko, Appendix, p. 703; related to this through the infanticide theme and through the tradition that Fa Koli was Sumanguru's nephew is an episode in which the diviners tell Sumanguru he will be killed by Sunjata unless he makes a propitiatory sacrifice of his sister's son. Sumanguru follows their advice but alienates his sister, who leaves him and carries the secret of his vulnerability to Sunjata (Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 300).

3 Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 69-70.

and Kiri. In this account, four Keita brothers settled at Dodougou where one of them, Nare Fa Maghan, married the chief's daughter, Sougoulou Koutoumou (Sogolon, Sunjata's mother). After quarreling with his brothers, Nare Fa Maghan fled to Kiri, whose people took up his cause and refused to deliver him to his enemies. In spite of Dodougou receiving support from seven other chiefs (mansaw), including Fa Koli Sissoko,¹ Kiri won out and Fa Maghan became supreme chief of Mali.² Sometime later, we are told, a daughter of Nare Fa Maghan was to be married to Sumanguru at Soso, but during the wedding celebration a griot committed an indiscretion³ that threw the Soso chief into a rage, and he made hostages of the bride's entire company, which led to war with Mali. The chiefs, including Fa Koli, who had formerly supported Dodougou against Fa Maghan and Kiri, saw an opportunity for revenge, so they joined the Soso cause. However, an incident involving Fa Koli's wife caused him to turn in favour of Mali, taking many who had supported the Soso with him.⁴

In Manding culture it has long been a great source of prestige to trace one's ancestry to Sunjata's supporters in the campaign against Sumanguru, an attitude very similar to one that developed in heavily Islamic times, when it became equally desirable to claim

1 Bamba Suso also remarks that Sora Musa (Fa Koli) had been a mansa of Manding (Innes, Sunjata, p. 81).

2 Monteil, Les empires, pp. 352-53.

3 The griot laid hands on Sumanguru's sacred bala (xylophone), which tradition implies had the significance of an altar (boli) of the indigenous religion. Most accounts name Bala Faseke Kouyate, also known as Jakumanduka, as the griot involved with Sumanguru in the incident with the bala, the collective message of which seems to be that Soninke groups were familiar with this instrument before their linguistically related southern neighbours the Bambara and Maninka.

4 Monteil, Les empires, p. 355.

descent from a faithful companion of Muhammad. We saw in the previous chapter how the Surakata tradition among others was apparently devised as a means of linking certain Muslim Manding lineages with Muhammad and his companions, and it is possible that the tradition of Fa Koli and his followers leaving Sumanguru to support Sunjata in his rise to glory was contrived for similar reasons. If the Sissoko, Dumbia, Koroma and other lineages traditionally associated with Fa Koli were on the defeated side, they might well have chosen to alter the oral record for posterity, and the Sissoko at least have certainly produced enough griots to help sway tradition in that direction. This would of course help to account for the large number of clans who claim an early ancestral relationship with Fa Koli. If there is anything to this, the earlier noted families claiming descent from Fa Koli all stem from ancestors who accompanied Sumanguru in defeat.

The names and numbers of clans said to have followed Fa Koli into the service of Sunjata vary from one account to the next, but some lineages are mentioned consistently, and several sources favour the total of sixteen clans. There is consistent emphasis on the servile origin of these lineages, which lends credence to the claim that they were previously in the service of Sumanguru who, as we have seen, is himself said to have both descended from a servile group and to have commanded people of similar background.

At the beginning of the present century Frobenius acquired one list of the sixteen subjugated groups known as the

tontajontaniworo (roughly, sixteen nobles slaves),¹ and in the 1950s Dieterlen collected another, listing sixteen families of 'captifs nobles'.² A tradition collected in the region of Jenne lists sixteen clans that were allied with Sumanguru against Sunjata,³ and since the Soso army is said to have been formed of the Kusa originating in Wagadu,⁴ it seems safe to assume that the reference is to the same formerly servile groups, though no more than a third of the names match on the combined lists.⁵

Tradition generally credits Fa Koli with leading these people in the war between Soso and Mali. After describing one of Fa Koli's great battles, the griot Dembo Kanute refers to the supporting clans as Fa Koli's ten gates, and though he mentions only seven names, some of them are variations on those most often included in the lists of sixteen. It therefore becomes apparent that when Kanute says "They are all Sora's Fa Koli's stock",⁶ he refers, not to mythical ancestry, but to Fa Koli's chieftaincy or influence over these people, and he appears,

1 Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 333-34.

2 Dieterlen, 'Myth et organisation sociale au Soudan', p. 41; 'The Mande Creation Myth', p. 125.

3 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 528, n. 2.

4 Monteil, Les empires, p. 355.

5 Among the most frequently mentioned names are those said to be branches of Fa Koli's lineage: Koroma, Dumbia and Sissoko, as well as Bagayoko, Danyoko, Kamara, Senayoko, and Kante. Some of the variations are owing not to oral distortion and griot inaccuracy, but to the fact that some lineages have more than one name for themselves (see Humblot, 'Du nom propre', pp. 526-29).

6 Innes, Sunjata, p. 303.

moreover, to be telling what he knows about the same formerly servile groups who are known elsewhere as the tontajontaniworo, the sixteen noble slave groups. A griot of the Beledougou region, formerly part of Sumanguru's territory, remembers with a song:

Sixteen slaves have taken the quiver,
Sixteen slaves have left the quiver.
Sixteen slaves have taken the arrows,
Sixteen slaves have left the arrows.

And he adds, "The leader of all these slaves was Fa Koli".¹

In another reference to these ancient clans, Sidibe's informant echoes Dembo Kanute's mode of describing Fa Koli as their progenitor, saying of his earlier allegiance that he was Sumanguru's "meilleur conducteur d'hommes, Faganda ou Fakoli, ancetre des Bla ..."² Descendants of these 'captifs nobles' share the upper echelons of the social hierarchy in more recent times, and one of the terms by which they are known, tontigiw, can be translated as 'masters of the quiver', perhaps stemming from their ancestral warrior background.³ Nevertheless, they are also known as blaw (or boulaw), which differentiates them from the massare (or mansarin), whose forebears are considered to have

1 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix II, pp. 805-06.

2 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 45; the informant identifies the Bla as 'Sisso, Doumbia, Koroma, Bagayoko, etc.').

3 H. Labouret translates tontigiw as 'porteurs de carquois' ('Les Manding', p. 105).

remained free through centuries of political and social change.¹

The essence of Fa Koli's legendary military career is summed up in Jeli Manga Sissoko's remark that "He did the big war for Sunjata and the small war for himself".² The 'small war' is the quarrel Fa Koli had with Sumanguru, leading to his joining of forces with Sunjata, but according to one episode, this was not the end of adversity with his superiors. We are told that once Sumanguru had been vanquished, Fa Koli was known as the terror of his enemies, and he realized his fame was becoming so great that Sunjata was growing suspicious and distrustful of him. In order to offset his leader's jealousy and anger, Fa Koli directed his own griots to credit Sunjata with most of his heroic deeds, but Sunjata wanted him dead anyway, and Fa Koli was forced to flee.³

Other Secondary Characters and Sunjata's Feet of Clay

The suggestion that Fa Koli would direct his griots to credit Sunjata with his own heroic deeds is interesting, because griots may well have long been borrowing from the deeds of others to the advantage of the principal hero, while those from whom the heroics

1 Monteil, Les empires, p. 316. His informant names eight of the formerly servile lineages, and says the massare are basically descended from the old royal lineages of Keita and Konate (p. 315), which agrees with Humblot's findings ('Du nom propre', p. 528), and with the testimony of my field informants (Lassana Kouyate and Jeli Manga Sissoko, Kolokani, July 9-10, 1975). See also Chapter IV, pp. 157-58.

2 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Appendix II, p. 806.

3 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 46.

were borrowed have rested in the shadow of Sunjata. Moreover, this borrowing has not been limited to the deeds and heroes of Sunjata's own time. In 1937 Mamby Sidibe cautioned that most griots, even those at Keyla who are guardians of the chronicle of the Manding, report everything as having happened in the era of Sunjata in order to perpetuate the memory of the hero who led the Manding to victory over the Soso.¹ If this is true, it means that the received versions of the tradition result, at least to some extent, from a conscious effort on the part of the griots to emphasize the accomplishments of Sunjata and his thirteenth-century companions at the expense of other historic figures and their eras.

Griots praise their patrons by associating their lineages with Sunjata or a related figure, and since the benefactors' generosity is likely to increase the more they shine by association, Sunjata has long been the subject of the most elaborate panegyric from all quarters.² Nevertheless, the emphasis on one principal hero and a handful of characters from other lineages also results partly from simple attrition through many centuries, with the griots clinging to a few representative figures after the rest were forgotten. We have seen how Birama Tunkara and Sumanguru Kante appear in both the Cisse era of Wagadu and the Sunjata epoch, which suggests that these are references to lineages rather than

1 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 48.

2 For further discussion of this see Innes, Sunjata, pp. 8-10.

to individuals. The specific naming of Birama, Sumanguru and others in different periods centuries apart indicates that they were the most distinguished members of their patrilineal groups, but not that they actually participated in all the events with which they are traditionally associated. As an anonymous colonial researcher looking at the Sunjata legend expressed it,

Encore ne faut-il pas oublier que fréquemment dans cette tradition, un nom propre désigne toute une dynastie, ou toute une période, ou encore un empire et non pas seulement le chef dont la personnalité les domine.¹

Not all of the major accounts adhere to the familiar image of Sunjata as a gallant military tactician who rose in spite of persecution by his enemy half-brothers to personally lead the Manding army in a triumphant campaign against the oppressive tyranny of a villainous Sumanguru. Griots have been known to invent or alter stories in order to cover some fault of the hero or to enhance his reputation, a fact that they do not always bother to conceal.² The popular and seemingly guileless tale about how the message of Sunjata's birth was delayed, allowing his rival brother to be announced as the first-born and gain succession to

1 Archives Nationales du Mali, ID-43-7.

2 Two different Gambian griots tell of Sunjata running away from battle (Innes, Sunjata, pp. 71 and 301), one of whom describes a scene where Fa Koli admonishes the griots not to mention their leader's flight, then breaks the arm and leg of an enemy and tells the griots to add those to Sunjata's praises (p. 301); cf. Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 46. Innes was told that Sunjata's griots made up a special praise-name in order to prevent adverse reports of the running away incident (Sunjata, p. 245, n. on line 263; see also p. 321, n. on line 780).

the chieftaincy¹ could be an artful device designed to conceal the illegitimacy of the hero's claim to a seat that rightfully belonged to his elder brother. It will be remembered that Sunjata's initial confrontation was not with Sumanguru, but with his father's senior wife and her son Dankaran Tuman,² who followed their father as mansa and who may have had good reason to fear his younger brother's ambition. If Sunjata coveted power before he had a right to it, tradition makes no claim that he received any support from neighbouring chiefs before Dankaran Tuman's reign had completed its due course, either through his death, or his definitive defeat by the Soso. According to some informants, when Sunjata was banished into exile, before he finally found sanctuary with Birama Tunkara at Mema he was refused asylum by several other headmen who, we are told, did not want to get involved in a quarrel between brothers.³

In the tradition, once the forces of nascent Mali are engaged against those of Soso, several secondary figures appear as prominent military leaders. Fa Koli is the most notable of these,⁴

1 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 8-11; Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 311-12; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 30; Innes, Sunjata, p. 43; Monteil (Les empires, p. 356) emphasizes the Zeltner version which claims Sunjata was the one born first.

2 Monteil, 'Fin de siècle', p. 167; Adam, 'Légendes', pp. 355-56; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 8 and 16; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 313; Vidal, 'La légende', pp. 320-21; Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 43; Camara, 'L'Histoire', p. 5; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 13 and 15-16; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 49 and 279.

3 Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 51-52; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 19-21.

4 Zeltner, Contes, pp. 30 and 42; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 299; Vidal, 'La légende', p. 325; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 70 and 84; Niane, Sundiata, p. 70; Innes, Sunjata, p. 81.

but outstanding deeds of war are also regularly attributed to Tiramakhan Traore,¹ Faren Kamara,² and Faganda Kanote,³ all of whom are said to have been great mansaw in their own rights.⁴ Other prominent warrior chiefs are Silamakhan Koita⁵ and Madiba Konte of Sankaran, said by one informant to have led the battle against Sumanguru, with Fa Koli (Moussa Sissokho) and Sunjata occupying supporting roles only.⁶

It could be argued that secondary characters like these might have entered the tradition because at some point griots found it profitable to flatter patrons from these lineages by associating them with Sunjata.⁷ However, this possibility is significantly offset by an independent tradition that describes how, in the generation of Fa Koli's father, five fundamental lineages were

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- 1 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 335; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 29-30; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 299; Vidal, 'La legende', p. 326; Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 84; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 67-69, and 85-99. Tiramakhan is identified as both a Traore and a Dembele, patronymics that are regarded as synonymous (Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 299, n. 1).
 - 2 Zeltner, Contes, p. 30; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 335; Niane, Sundiata, p. 70.
 - 3 Diabete, Kala Jata, p. 84; Zeltner, Contes, p. 30; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 335.
 - 4 Frobenius, Dichten, p. 335; Innes, Sunjata, p. 81.
 - 5 Arnaud, 'La singulière', pp. 171-72; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 300; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 59-60, 66, 84. There is a tradition about Sira Maka, quite possibly referring to the same hero, in Frobenius, Spielmannsgeschichten, pp. 86-89.
 - 6 Zeltner, Contes, p. 42; Madiba Konte of Sankaran also appears in Delafosse, 'Traditions', pp. 298 and 300; Monteil, 'Fin de siècle', p. 170; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 83-85. For some unusual details on the makeup of Sunjata's army see Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 329-335 and Zeltner, Contes, p. 41.
 - 7 See Dembo Kanute's praising of the Darbo lineage (Innes, Sunjata, p. 309) and Innes' note on line 974, p. 322.

allied in a series of marriages featuring three sisters of the Kamara clan. In addition to Fa Koli's father, Chief Konte of Sankaran is mentioned, along with Faren Kamara and the Konate and Keita lineages,¹ which only leaves out Tiramakhan and Silamakhan among the above-named military leaders. Therefore, in the general traditional context there is a firm association of these clans, especially in the case of the Konate and Keita, because while Keita is usually given as Sunjata's lineage, Konate is also said to have been his patronymic.²

There are several relatively obscure, nameless figures that may be historically significant. The sources indicate that the Soso were by no means the only people with whom early thirteenth-century Mali was in conflict. For one thing, the tradition makes it clear that the defeat of Sumanguru did not mark the end of hostilities between Sunjata and neighbouring peoples, for he continued to expand and consolidate his sphere of influence.³ In addition, one informant stresses the difficulties Sunjata had with his own people revolting while he was warring elsewhere.⁴

1 Humblot, 'Du nom propre', p. 531.

2 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 168; Frobenius, Dichten, p. 328; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 47 and 179. It is said that the name changed from Konate to Keita at the time of the conflict with Sumanguru (Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 50; Innes, Sunjata, pp. 281 and 287), and that in ancient times only elders could go by the name of Keita (Sidibe, 'Soundiata', p. 51, n. 18).

3 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 171; Delafosse, 'Traditions', p. 301; Vidal, 'La légende', pp. 325-26; Humblot, 'Episodes', p. 113; Niane, Sundiata, pp. 70-71.

4 Innes, Sunjata, pp. 235-37.

More specifically, it appears that on at least three different occasions Sunjata was critically lacking in certain resources because they were controlled by chiefs outside his domain whose attitudes toward the Malian leader ranged from indifferent to hostile.

In one case, informants say that during his campaign against the Soso, Sunjata found it necessary to transport his troops across a river to engage the enemy. We are told that he was temporarily thwarted in this manoeuvre because the canoes were controlled by the Somono fishermen,¹ and their chief, who favoured Sumanguru, refused to transport Sunjata's army.²

In the second instance of supply problems, once the Soso were defeated, Sunjata is said to have found it necessary to replenish his horse herds, so he sent agents to the west with gold to purchase new mounts from a mansa of the Wolof.³ The horse-dealing mansa kept the gold, but instead of horses sent insults back to Sunjata, who retaliated by dispatching a punitive expedition against the Wolof.⁴

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- 1 The Somono are Manding-speaking fishermen closely related to the Bambara, inhabiting the rivers area near Segou (Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 34).
 - 2 Vidal, 'La légende', p. 324; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 66-67. This episode may be the basis of Sunjata's mythical crossing of a river on the back of a crocodile (Zeltner, Contes, pp. 22-23).
 - 3 It remains to be confirmed if this was an important source of horses for thirteenth-century Mali.
 - 4 Frobenius, Dichten, pp. 325-26; Zeltner, Contes, pp. 33-36 and p. 42; Diabete, Kala Jata, pp. 81-85; Innes, Sunjata, p. 83. The orthography given for 'Wolof' is 'Diolof' (Djolof), a variation of which is Jolof (Dyolof), according to Westermann and Bryan, Handbook, p. 18.

Our final example of Sunjata's struggles over vital resources has to do with cattle, and it includes a rare description of how the hero died. We are told that there came a time when Sunjata's self-esteem reached the point where he considered himself semi-divine, which resulted in his committing the error of dishonouring a brotherhood pact between his ancestors and the Fulbe (here called Peul).¹ The Manding hero is said to have had an agreement with a Peul chief of the Wasulu region,² to the effect that Sunjata sent to this chief all the cattle he acquired as booty from his military conquests. The Peul was to manage and protect the livestock, in exchange for which, half of the herd became his. Trouble arose when Sunjata had used up his share of the herd but insisted the Peul chief continue to supply him with cattle. When this was refused, Sunjata prepared to march against Wasulu, ignoring the advice of his councillors who reminded him of his ancestors' sacred pact with the Peul. His warriors were reluctant to follow him because they dreaded the consequences of breaking the pact, and when they clashed with the Peul army they were driven back to the banks of the Sankarani River. When the defeated warriors of Manding tried to escape by swimming across the river, many of them drowned, and it is reported that Sunjata and his

1 The pact is said to have included the type of alliance between clans called senankuya, which is sometimes described as a 'joking relationship'. For a discussion of senankuya in the Wasulu region, see M. Montrat, 'Notes sur les Malinkes du Sankaran', Outre-Mer, 1935, pp. 107-127, pp. 119-122; see also Pageard, 'Notes sur le rapport', pp. 123-41.

2 This is a relatively fertile area in modern-day southern Mali and northern Guinea.

favourite wife were among the casualties.¹ It is said that sacrificial offerings used to be made at the place where the drownings occurred,² and the battle remains a popular theme in the local traditional theatre.³ Today in the Wasulu region some people's memories of Sunjata as a great leader are qualified by the belief that in the end he failed, because he tried to assert his authority where it was resented.⁴

1 Sidibe, 'Soundiata', pp. 46-47; the Arnaud version (p. 172) also mentions the death by drowning, something Vidal was also aware of, though he heard Sunjata died a natural death at the Sankarani River, or from a Peul arrow ('La légende', pp. 327-28). Delafosse quotes Gaillard as having heard something similar to the Sidibe version in 1923, in 'Le Gana et le Mali et l'emplacement de leurs capitales', B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F., VII, 1924, pp. 479-542, p. 479. This is also discussed by Pageard, ('Soundiata', pp. 70-71), and another misunderstanding over cattle between the Keitas and Peul herders occurs in Monteil, 'Fin de siècle', p. 170. At Keyla, in the heart of what was ancient Mali, my host, the distinguished jeli Yamuru Diabate, emphatically denied that the Fulbe ever defeated Sunjata. Interview February 4, 1976.

2 Pageard, 'Soundiata', p. 71.

3 Interview with André Moctar Sangare at Yonfolila, Cercle Wasulu, Mali, September 10, 1975. I was told that traditional theatre in this part of Mali is called koteduga or koreduga, and that some of the favourite themes of these open-air performances that last only a few minutes apiece, are historical. Farther north, in the Bamako and Beledougou areas, the local theatre is called koteba. See C. Meillassoux, 'The Koteba of Bamako', Présence Africaine 24 (1964), pp. 28-62.

4 Interview with Jeli Yoro Kouyate and André Moctar Sangare at Yonfolila, September 11, 1975.

Conclusion

In searching for information about the general historical background of the oral artists of Mali, we have approached the subject through several related avenues of inquiry which in their broadest terms include topics related to the European introduction to griots, influences in the development of the griot social position, and aspects of the griot relationship with oral tradition.

Commencing with a discussion of the etymology of the word 'griot' in Chapter I, it is suggested that the term most likely stems from a corruption of either the Wolof gewel, or the Fulfulde gauilo, rather than from the Manding jeli. Continuing with subjects related to early European acquaintance with the griots, it appears, according to some of the early travellers' observations, that early in the development of the Manding social system, some groups of those who were later best known as specialists in the oral arts were closely associated with sorcery, though it is not clear to what extent, if any, these aspects of their vocation were related to indigenous religion. The possibly related custom of interring the bodies of deceased griots in hollow baobab trees may have received more attention from European travellers than it merited, but in any case the practice apparently developed from a serious conviction that if griots were buried in the normal way they would contaminate the earth. The evidence indicates that this is because in addition to being associated with witchcraft, the griots were specialists in handling poisons, the use of which

was quite popular in pre-colonial times. In contrast to this darker side of griot existence, some jeliw in nineteenth-century Segou occupied positions of wealth and influence, and may well have been involved in some important political negotiations carried on between the Bambara and their Tukulor enemies.

In Chapter II, the problem of understanding the background of the social environment that engendered the Manding oral artists known as jeliw is taken up by looking at other types of performers who are also called 'griots', in Manding society and in some neighbouring groups as well, the Wolof and Fulbe in particular. It is evident from tracing the historical movements that occurred with the gaulow and mabow who probably originated outside Manding society, that while these groups have, like other griots, been endogamous and restricted to the lower echelons of society, they have also been extremely widely travelled, moving freely throughout the western Sudan and settling wherever the best opportunities appeared, regardless of ethnic considerations. In some instances they followed leaders of the nineteenth-century jihads, and in others they emigrated to areas where there were powerful rulers who could provide generous patronage, as in the case of those who settled with the Bambara of Segou and Kaarta. In such instances, it was their occupation that determined their overall social status, and even those who were originally Wolof or Fulbe apparently had no trouble joining the ranks of the Bambara griots though they assumed a position below that of the jeliw in the hierarchy of oral artists.

Some terms have applied to both ethnic and occupational groups,

as in the case of the Fulbe related jawara, and it appears that there may have been cases where conquered segments of certain populations were reduced to the occupational level occupied by artisans and griots of greatly varying degrees of skill. It appears, moreover, that the griot social category has served as a catch-all for groups that sometimes retained their identity as a social unit, but had somehow become separated from any particular occupational speciality they may have had previously. This could have been the case with the tyapurtaw, who may have functioned as a warrior class at some point in their history, though the evidence for this is rather weak.

The final non-jeli bardic group discussed is the funew, a people who clearly merit further study. Though in most places they have successfully cultivated an identity as bardic specialists in Islamic subjects, some of the evidence indicates that in pre-Islamic times funew were a special class of unfortunates who were retained for sacrificial purposes, though the connection between the two types of funew is, at this point in the research, tenuous.

With regard to the possible origins of social stratification as it affected the development of the nyamakala class to which oral artists belong, the position is taken in Chapter III that the origin of the hierarchical system or, more specifically, the social differentiation of griots and artisans, cannot be attributed to a single source, such as Arab influence. It is argued that Manding social stratification evolved from a combination of cultural factors and historical events such as, for example, the

spread of iron technology, in a process that must have taken several centuries to unfold, but which may have begun to affect the social structure as early as the period prior to the rise of ancient Ghana.

It is acknowledged that Arab or North African influence may have been involved, but it is pointed out that there were sufficient western sudanic factors to account for the autochthonous origin of a hierarchical social system. Evidence presented in support of independent development includes the argument that the complex Bambara slave hierarchy developed as a practical means of making places in society for masses of additional people. Furthermore the Manding ancestral connection with the home soil, upon which the indigenous religion is partly based helps account for the importance of lineage and the Bambara belief that cultivation is a noble task, the combined effect of which may have helped engender the differentiation of lesser worthies.

The possibility is recognized that the origin of the nyamakala class on the one hand, may have helped to stimulate the organization of an overall hierarchy on the other, and a discussion of this is based on Desplagnes' and Barth's theories that some griot and artisan groups were derived from small independent populations that were partially absorbed in dominant groups. It is suggested that previously undifferentiated sedentary populations of craftsmen-farmers constituted pools of skilled artisans that could be tapped by more militarily powerful but technologically less versatile peoples.

In contrast to cases where nyamakalaw originated from outside the Manding culture complex, it is pointed out that other occupational groups may have been derived from people who lost contact with their original Manding family alliances, owing to the fact that the bard's vocation as well as the artisan's search for materials drew them far from the ancestral home and often included settlement in distant regions. In the case of blacksmiths, it is suggested that they encouraged their own separation from the rest of society in order to promote and maintain the secrets of their craft, thus enhancing their powers.

The diffusion and convergence of cultures are taken into account with the observation that participants in the Soninke diaspora as well as the intermingling of pastoralists and sedentaries were involved in processes of differentiation. It is pointed out that people in flight from disaster and hunger might have eagerly entered the service of others at a reduced status in exchange for support and protection.

Finally, the question is discussed of what it was, in the earliest instances, that distinguished between the first occupants of the role of nyamakala and those who were enslaved. There seem to have been instances where descendants of captives evolved into nyamakalaw, but just how important this was as a source of occupational groups is not yet clear. It is suggested that where two culturally unrelated groups were concerned, it was the nature of the initial meeting - violent or peaceful - that determined whether the weaker party were enslaved or became free but dependent

members of an endogamous artisan class.

In Chapter IV the subject of the influence of Islam on Manding oral tradition is approached through a study of three major legendary figures: Surakata, Fajigi and Bilali. It is noted that among the Islamic ideals absorbed by western sudanic Muslims was the notion that direct ancestral links to Muhammad's original followers was a highly desirable source of prestige, and that this resulted in the appearance of both Surakata and Bilali in stories told by griots. Whereas these two Muslim heroes were drawn from Arab culture, the third, Fajigi, was derived from ancient Mali.

The traditional griot ancestor, Surakata, is traced to Surāqa ibn Mālik ibn Ju'shum, an Arab traditionist who lived during the time of Muhammad and is said to have been an early convert to Islam. It is observed that the ancestors of other nyamakala groups, including the blacksmiths, leatherworkers, and funew, are also given early links with Islam, often through the medium of the Surakata tradition.

The character Fajigi, credited with bringing the essential symbols of indigenous Manding religion from Mecca to Mali, is shown to be based on a ruler of ancient Mali, Mansa Musa Keita, who made a famous pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324. It is seen that while the legend gives virtually no information about the historical mansa, the Fajigi tradition is of great importance as an expression of the traditionalist Manding way of accommodating indigenous religious practices to Islam. It is also noted that the Fajigi tradition is

used to 'legitimize' several other autochthonous social groups and institutions by forging links between them and Islam, and that a number of other legendary figures have been combined with the historical Mansa Musa and merged into the legendary character of Fajigi.

The Bilali tradition, essentially a part of the traditional genealogy of Sunjata, provides the ruling lineage of ancient Mali, the Keitas, with Islamic origins. The legendary Manding character Bilali is traced to Bilāl ibn Rabāh, a freed black slave who became a companion of Muhammad and the first mu'adhdhin. It is pointed out that griots have inserted the names of Muslim ancestors into pre-Islamic descent lists, and that by placing Bilali at the top, all other names, including pre-Islamic ones, are effectively moved down the list and forward into the Islamic era, thus eliminating pre-Islamic forebears for Sunjata. In the course of this discussion it is shown that the French colonial writer Maurice Delafosse evidently contrived an erroneous descent list of Sunjata's immediate ancestors, and it is also noted that the genealogical figure Allakoi Musa, who appears in some descent lists headed by Bilali, constitutes one of several facets of the identity of the composite pilgrim hero Fajigi, who was originally based on Mansa Musa.

The problem of gleaning useful information about the past from griot testimony is approached in Chapter V through an examination of elements in the Sunjata tradition that seem to have historical value but which have not received much attention because

of a general preoccupation among scholars with the central figure of Sunjata. It is suggested that passages directly concerning Sunjata are among the least likely to yield substantive information, because for centuries griots have projected this hero above all others as a symbol of the past glories of Mali.

Separating the Sunjata tradition into its component episodes from twenty-one versions, it is seen that much of the material is composed of mythical elements, but it is argued that woven into parts of the narrative are threads of reminiscences of the distant past that are worth investigating by historians. Skirting the best-known episodes about Sunjata's youth and rise to power, this study emphasizes the potential historical interest of some secondary characters and events. In a section on Sumanguru there is a discussion of the evidence that suggests servile antecedents for the Soso leader, and it is pointed out that Sumanguru's background is very much involved with the politically fragmented era separating the apogees of ancient Ghana and Mali. It is suggested here that groups of formerly servile peoples played a very significant role in events accompanying the decline of ancient Ghana and the ascendancy of Mali.

The traditional background of Fa Koli is discussed in a study of this prominent legendary figure who was one of Sunjata's most important generals. It is noted that if any credence can be given to the traditional evidence, Fa Koli's change of allegiance from Sumanguru to Sunjata may have been a determining factor in Sunjata's victory, because the accounts consistently indicate that

Fa Koli was accompanied by a very formidable military force.

It is found that many elements in the received versions of the Sunjata tradition have probably been influenced by the fact that in Manding culture it has long been a source of prestige to trace one's ancestry to Sunjata's early supporters, just as in Islamic times it became desirable to claim descent from a companion of Muhammad. It is suggested that the griots may have long been borrowing, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps not, from the deeds of historic personages in other times and places as a means of enhancing the legend of Sunjata and his thirteenth-century companions. Finally, it is pointed out that not all of the accounts adhere to the now familiar image of Sunjata as a purely exemplary hero, and that the legendary founder of Mali continued to encounter significant resistance from various quarters after he defeated Sumanguru and the Soso.

Not surprisingly, the least promising area of study regarding the role of oral artists in the history of Mali has to do with the participation of individual griots in specific events. The amount of relatively detailed information available about the activities of certain jeliw in nineteenth-century Segou is highly unusual, and as we saw in Chapter I, even this is not very extensive. It is apparent from the material that was uncovered in the course of research for Chapters II and III, that there is sufficient evidence to allow for a good deal of inquiry into the historical development of the bardic occupation and its position in the Manding social hierarchy, and there is much that remains to

be done with these subjects. However, the most significant role played by oral artists in the history of Mali has had to do with their capacity as informants providing background material to supplement the documented evidence, and discussions of the relative value of their testimony are likely to continue for as long as these sources are consulted.

Griots like to remind us, during the course of their narratives, that in the heroic days of the distant past every man of consequence was accompanied by his jeli, and there may well be enough truth in this to allow for the assumption that bards were generally present at events marking important turnings in the history of ancient Mali. Nevertheless, there are enormous chronological gaps in the oral accounts, especially for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the significant events of these periods having lost all recognizable form by the time Arab or European scholars began to take note of oral tradition. An encouraging aspect of this writer's experience with the bards of Mali, is that in many cases, those who are true masters of their art tend to be very candid regarding its deficiencies with regard to historical information. In spite of the fact that it has not been in the traditional nature of their art to be concerned with historical accuracy, western scholars have looked longingly to the griots for, say, genealogical data, and a bard like Jeli Baba Sissoko is acutely aware of the dilemma in which this places him. Though he gives what information he can, he indicates his own reservations about certain events in his story, with the disclaimer that he only knows it as it was told to him.¹ No one is more

1 Jeli Baba Sissoko, Appendix, p. 668.

aware of the formidable complexities of subjects like Manding family relationships, clan alliances, and ethnic intermingling than Jeli Baba, though he sums up this thorny situation with the deceptively simple remark that "That is how the people were related to each other, like the vines of a gourd".¹ In the final analysis, once even the most knowledgeable and willing of oral informants have extended themselves to the limits of their art, they can do no more than rest apart from our curious academic struggle, comfortable in their awareness that some things will remain beyond the reach of mortal man. As one of the most distinguished informants of the colonial era expressed it, "Qui est capable, hors Dieu, de scruter le passé?"²

1 Jeli Baba Sissoko, Appendix, p. 671.

2 Arnaud, 'La singulière', p. 151.

Glossary

<u>balafon:</u>	the indigenous xylophone; also <u>bala</u> .
<u>bilakoro:</u>	uncircumcised boy, immature youth.
<u>boli:</u>	a kind of altar over which sacrificial offerings are made by spirit societies as a means of establishing communication with the powers of the spirit world.
<u>donso:</u>	hunter.
<u>dugu:</u>	earth, soil, land.
<u>dugutigi:</u>	local chief or master of an area of land or group of villages.
<u>dunu:</u>	a type of medium-sized drum.
<u>faden:</u>	brother of the same father but of a different mother, often referred to as a 'rival' or 'enemy' brother.
<u>fama:</u>	supreme chief, ruler, head of the lineage that holds the power to command.
<u>fune:</u>	a type of bard; a member of a class of oral artists now often specializing in Islamic subjects.
<u>garanke:</u>	a leatherworker; a member of a class of artisans specializing in leathercraft.
<u>gaulo:</u>	a type of griot; a member of a bardic class of mendicants and praise-singers occupying a lower rank in the griot hierarchy.
<u>gesere:</u>	a Soninke griot, roughly equivalent to the Bambara <u>jeli</u> .
<u>gewel:</u>	a Wolof griot, roughly equivalent to the Bambara <u>jeli</u> .
<u>horon:</u>	of high status in the social hierarchy; the proprietary class, some lineages of which are eligible to become chief.
<u>jamu:</u>	family name, lineage identity.
<u>jawambe:</u>	historically an ambiguous term that has evidently referred both to an endogamous artisan class, and to an ethnic sub-group, mainly associated with the Fulbe society.

- jeli: the predominant class of bard in the Bambara and Mandinka griot hierarchy, specialists in all oral arts.
- jeliya: the condition or occupation of being a jeli.
- jiatigi: patron, host, benefactor.
- jon: slave.
- kayamagha: a title of the Soninke ruling lineage of ancient Ghana or Wagadu.
- korte: poison, or poisonous substances of various quality and type.
- koteba: indigenous Bambara theatre; also koteduga.
- lorho: a coppersmith; a member of the class of artisans specializing in working with copper.
- mabo: a class of oral artists specializing in genealogy and praise-singing, usually associated with the Fulbe; a class of Fulbe weavers, known in Fulfulde as mabube.
- magha: a title of the rulers of ancient Ghana and Mali; also maghan.
- mansa: supreme ruler, chief, lord.
- mori: a marabout; a member of the class of Muslim clerics.
- muso: woman, female, wife.
- ngoni: indigenous four-stringed lute favoured by many griots.
- numu: a blacksmith; a member of the class of smiths.
- nyamakala: a generic term for all artisans and griots; the level of the social hierarchy occupied by artisans and griots.
- nyamakalaya: the condition of being a member of the nyamakala class.
- senanku: the joking relationship between certain clans; a system of aid or hospitality between lineages who have this relationship.
- siaki: a goldsmith; a member of the class of goldsmiths.

- sofa: a mounted warrior.
- ton: council.
- tontigi: chief, head of a council.
- tyapurta: an itinerant class of indeterminate occupation; mendicants, street performers sometimes classified socially at the lowest level of the griot hierarchy.
- woloso: originally second generation slaves born in the master's household; more recently itinerant groups of drummers, dancers, entertainers.

Abbreviations

<u>B.C.E.H.S.A.O.F.</u>	<u>Bulletin du Comité des Études Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française</u>
<u>B.I.F.A.N.</u>	<u>Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire</u>
<u>B.S.O.A.S.</u>	<u>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</u>
<u>I.J.A.H.S.</u>	<u>International Journal of African Historical Studies</u>
<u>J.A.H.</u>	<u>Journal of African History</u>
<u>P.A.</u>	<u>Présence Africaine</u>
<u>S.O.A.S.</u>	<u>School of Oriental and African Studies</u>

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 Modibo Bugunte, Kolokani, 10 August.
 Jeli Manga Sissoko, Kolokani, 13, 20 August.
 Sagone Kone, Kolokani, 17 August.
 Almamy Malik, Bamako, 27 August.
 Numu Satigi Soumarouo, Kabaya, 2 September.
 Karamoko Bagayoko, Kabaya, 3 September.
 Karamoko Diabate, Kabaya, 3 September.
 Dauda Camara, Kabaya, 2, 7 September.
 Sallah Kouyate, Kabaya, 8 September.
 André Moctar Sangare, Yonfolila, 10, 11 September.
 Jeli Yoro Kouyate, Yonfolila, 11 September.
 Fakama Kaloga, Bamako, 17 September, 11-28 October,
 3 November.
 Seydou Camara, Bamako, 29 September 1975 - 29 April 1976.

Fanyama Diabate, Bamako, 18, 21 October, 1975.
Kele Monson Diabate, Kita, 30 October.
Fadian Soumanou, Bamako, 5-23 November.
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Masalu Diabate, Keyla, 3 February.
Damory Diabate, Keyla, 3 February.
Mamady Diabate, Keyla, 3 February.
Karonga Diabate, Keyla, 3 February.
Yamuru Diabate, Keyla, 4 February.
Mahmadu Diawara, Keyla, 5 February.
Lamine & Mamady Hydera, Keyla, 5 February.
Fanta Diabate, Keyla, 5 February.
Musa & Bala Diabate, Keyla, 5 February.
Amadi N'Diaye, Dioila, 14 February.
Lassana Tounkara, Konobougou, 16 February.
Sekou N'Diaye, Konobougou, 16 February.
Hamani Ba, Bebugou, 25 February.
Tahiru Bambira, Segou, 27 February - 11 March.
Jeriba Kone, Deningoura, 2 March.
Mamadou Serita, Tamani, 2 March.
Ba Tougoune Dabo, Tamani, 3 March.
Jeli Fotigi Diabate, Ngama, 3 March.
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THE ROLE OF ORAL ARTISTS
IN THE HISTORY OF MALI

Thesis Submitted for the degree of Ph.D.,
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by

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Volume II

APPENDICES

School of Oriental
and African Studies

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List of Contributing Oral Artists

- Tahiru Bambira Now a Bambara jeli, he says his ancestors were griots of the Suraka or Berber-speaking peoples, and that they came from a village called Suala near Nioro. According to Tahiru, the Bambira and Drame families stem from the same roots. Tahiru was forty-five years old in 1976, with three wives and several children. A devout Muslim, he lives in Segou as well as Ngoin where he farms during part of the year.
- Modibo Bugunte Aged about twenty, son of a Peul father and a Bambara mother. Modibo had come to Kolokani to study the art of jeliya with Mamary Kouyate, whom he held in great respect. Modibo had quickly become competent on the ngoni and was already a skilful storyteller.
- Seydou Camara A Mandinka blacksmith (numu) from Kabaya, Cercle Wasulu, a few kilometres from northern Guinea. In his late sixties, Seydou is a famous hunter's singer whose recorded songs were played regularly on Radio Mali. He specializes in playing the six-stringed donso ngoni (hunter's lute) and singing of the exploits of great hunters, as well as of some of the more standard heroes of tradition. When asked where he learned all his songs, Seydou replied that the genies put them in his head. He also said that when he sings, spirits enter his body and give him special power, and one does in fact feel extraordinary energy coming from this man while he is singing.
- Fanyama Diabate A Mandinka jeli in his sixties. Living in Bamako in 1975, but originally from Toumora near Mahina, Cercle Bafoulabe. He accompanies himself on the ngoni while narrating his stories. Occasionally one of his wives would come into the room to sing a chorus, then go back out to her chores while he continued his story. Very thoughtful and serious about his art, he does not tolerate noise and interruptions from his family while he is performing.

- Fakama Kaloga A Mandinka from the garanke (leatherworker) class, claims he was ten or twelve when Samory went to Kita, but in 1975 he looked to be in his eighties. Fakama had lived in Bamako for many years while he worked for the railroad, but was originally from Yaterra near Kita. He said he learned his stories as a youth from marabouts and griots, and that he was so clever that he never forgot them. His wife was very ill, and after my first visit it was many weeks before he would speak again, which he finally did after I procured medicine that made his wife feel better.
- Nantene Je Kamissoko A famous female bard or jeli muso, thirty-eight years old in 1975. She is a Mandinka from Krina, living since 1963 in Bamako where she has often sung on Radio Mali. Divorced, mother of four, three of whom are still living. She sang to the accompaniment of a balafon played by a jeli named Diabate.
- Sagone Kone A Bambara jeli muso about fifty-five, specializing in praise-singing. She lived in Kolokani all her life, but her ancestors came from Sabugu near Massantola.
- Lassana Kouyate A Bambara jeli of Kolokani related to Mamary Kouyate, though not a master oral artist. While Mamary was recording, Lassana would often sit off to one side listening to Radio Mali through ear plugs, but he was knowledgeable on certain subjects and very amiable.
- Mamary Kouyate A Bambara jeli aged about forty, living in Kolokani but originally from Kita. Mamary, who is blind, accompanies himself on the ngoni and frequently enhances his prose narratives with songs. A particularly amiable and hardworking informant, devoted to his art.
- Sallah Kouyate A Mandinka jeli from Kolomoko, Guinea, who had crossed the river for a visit to Kabaya. Before keeping his appointment with me, Sallah stopped at the house of Satigi Soumarouo and learned that I was not paying high fees to informants. He later told my assistant, Sekou Camara, that he had only responded to my questions by halves because I could not pay enough money. Sallah was in his late forties, about

6' 6" tall, very fast-talking, extremely rude, and difficult to interview.

Amady N'Diaye

A gauilo in his thirties, related to another gauilo named N'Diaye whom I interviewed in Keyla. Amady is from Konobougou, though we met in Dioila.

Baba Sissoko

A Bambara jeli living in Bamako, with a weekly one hour storytelling programme on Radio Mali. The tradition he contributed to this collection was recorded at the Institut des Sciences Humaines at Bamako. I was not present for the original recording, but I was told that for much of the time Baba was left alone in a room while he performed, and that they had expected him to do the entire tradition of Wagadu and Sunjata in one sitting, an altogether impractical idea. He accompanies himself on the ngoni.

Manga Sissoko

A jeli about sixty years old who says he is of the Kakolo people, a Manding group. He had moved to Kolokani from Nioro, some ten years previously. He is considered a knowledgeable master, and young griots come to learn from him, but at the time of our meeting he was much preoccupied with his farming.

Satigi Soumarouo

A Mandinka of numu or blacksmith descent, Satigi was in his seventies in 1975, and is now deceased. He was a highly respected patriarch of his community, which was Kabaya, also the home of Seydou Camara.

APPENDIX I

JELI TAHIRU BAMBIRA'S
TRADITIONAL HISTORY OF BAMBARA SEGOU

A TRADITIONAL HISTORY OF BAMBARA SEGOU

Informant: Jeli Tahiru Bambara

Recorded at Segou between 27 February and 11 March 1975

PROLOGUE

This is knowledge older than any other knowledge.

A slave¹ must know the being who made him.

He must know who sent him if he wants to be pious.

Once this is done he has accomplished what he came to do.

I, Jeli Tahiru, I come from Ngoin.

Eh! The stories I will tell you here in Segou are stories of events that happened in ancient times.

The mansaw² who performed these deeds are now in lahara.³

None are alive.

They have gone to lie in their own shade.

The dust from their heads could be used to plaster a bath-house wall.⁴

What mansa and what mansa do we talk about in Segou,

In the place of many karité trees, the place of the balanzan trees?⁵

1 Used in this sense by Muslim Manding-speakers, the term 'slave' (jon) refers to all mortals, in that they were created by God and are therefore subject to his will.

2 mansa (pl. mansaw) = 'supreme chief', 'king'; syn. fama. The letter w forms the Bambara plural.

3 lahara = 'the other world', 'the great beyond', 'God's kingdom'.

4 That is, the mud made from the dust of their heads.

5 The karité yields the nuts from which shea butter is made; the balanzan is a type of acacia (acacia abida).

Four thousand balanzan, four hundred balanzan, four balanzan and one small humpbacked balanzan.

No native knows where they all are, least of all a stranger.¹

In those days Segou was not called 'Segou', it was called 'Sekoro'.²

There was only one entrance and one exit because Segou was enclosed by a wall.

Nzan the dog merchant was in the market, for the Bamana³ used to sell dogs.⁴

If anyone had not sold his dog by mid-afternoon⁵ the market did not do right by him.

His dog would be served to the mansa for breakfast.

The Bamana ruled in Segou for 200 years, less ten years and four months.⁶

Biton Kouloubaly and his council were six in number, and they ruled for forty years.⁷

1 This is a veiled reference to Segou's traditional reputation as a place of great intrigue.

2 The name 'Sekoro' (Sikoro) is said to have a double meaning: 'under the karité (shea, shi, butter) tree', 'under the life tree'. Sekoro, the seat of Bambara power, especially in the eighteenth century, is a village a few kilometers south of Segou. The 'Segou' of the time actually encompassed four main villages: Segou-Sekoro which is now known simply as 'Sekoro', Segou-bougou (Seboujou), Segou-kura (Sekura), and Segou.

3 Bamana = the indigenous form of 'Bambara'.

4 Before Islam became well established among the Bambara, dogs were sold in the Segou market for hunting, sacrifice and food.

5 alasara or lasara = around 3.30 - 4.00 p.m.

6 There is disagreement regarding the dates of the reigns of the Bambara rulers prior to 1766. See Louis Tauxier, 'Chronologie des rois Bambaras', Outre-Mer 2 (1930), pp. 119-130 and 255-266.

7 Delafosse gives Biton (Mamari) Kouloubaly's dates as 1660-1710, while Tauxier suggests 1712-1755 (see Tauxier, 'Chronologie', p. 263).

Biton Kouloubaly the man-killing hunter and his council were six
in number:

Biton himself, his son Bakary, Pelenkana Kanuba Nyuma, Gashin
Kafa Jugu and Ngoin Ton Mansa.¹

That day found the Bamana ruling their own land,

No one had spoiled the reign of another in Segou.

At that time, what was the work of Biton Kouloubaly the man-
killing hunter?

He was a master hunter because he loved to hunt,

His work was to hunt.²

Oho, we will begin the story.

We will begin the story of Biton Kouloubaly the man-killing
hunter.

Before Biton's day, the days of other Bamana older than Biton had
passed,

Older than Ngolo, older than Monson,

But we will not speak of this, it would be very long.

If we begin so far back we will not finish in a week.

This is why I will begin with the deeds of Biton Kouloubaly the
man-killing hunter.

1 Not only were these men members of the tôn or council, each of them later came to be rulers of Segou: Biton's son Bakary is said by some to have ruled for six months after his father's death, possibly in 1710, though all dates are in question (I am following Monteil here); Dékoro, Biton's second son (1711-1736?); Ton Mansa Dembele of Ngoin, a former council chief (1736-1740?); Kanuba Nyuma of Pelenkana, a former council chief (1740-1744?); Kafa Jugu of Gashin, a former council chief (1744-1748?).

2 These praises are in reference to Biton's political acumen and to his ruthlessness in punishing his enemies.

Otherwise, if you want to start earlier,¹

We will speak of the Koné, the Koné, how they became Diara.

Koné, Koné, how they became Diara.

Yes, if we want to talk about Segou the big village, Segou the old
village,

We will begin with Markadougouba and end with Dodougou,

Dodougoubani, Dodougoubani.²

Dokalosa, Dokalosa had their origins there, but when their works
were done, there was no one to record their passing.³

When we nyamakala⁴ lie down to think, we say everything has
changed:

The goat is sick, the goat owner is ailing,⁵

The knife is dull, the goat's throat is tough,

1 At this point Tahiru was reminded that I desired as complete a narrative as possible, so he decided to recount some legends of earlier times before continuing with his story of the Kouloubaly.

2 Villages in the Segou area, some of them mainly occupied by Soninke, who are known to the Bambara as 'Marka'. For more about them see p. 85.

3 In this reference to an extinct people, possibly Soninke, Tahiru underlines the importance of the griot occupation.

4 In the Manding social hierarchy, this is the collective term for those occupying the endogamous, occupationally defined level below that of the proprietary class, among whom are the blacksmiths (numuw), leatherworkers (garankew), and griots (jeliw). (The suffix w in these terms forms the Bambara plural.) By referring to the nyamakala class in general here, Tahiru emphasises their collective role as people outside the proprietary lineage structure. Unqualified to become chiefs or to directly participate in council, they could act as spokesmen in political matters without being suspected of being motivated by self-interest. In actual practice this ideal was seldom realized, because most nyamakalaw were attached to a particular proprietary family who were their patrons (jiatigiw).

5 This line commences a typical, though unusually poetic griot lament about the passing of the days when wealthy, noble patrons performed glorious deeds and were generous to the jeliw who sang their praises.

The day is nearly ended, the ground is hot,¹
 We have no basket to sit on in the sky while we tell our troubles
 to the angels of God.
 Hail to the mouth of ancient times!
 In the days before Sunjata² came out of Sogolon's stomach, a
 master of speech was no slave.

THE DIARA

It is said that Segou is composed of four villages,
 Markadougou is composed of nine villages,
 Dodougou is composed of twelve villages.
 Great Koné ancestors of Sankaran, wulu wala!³
 If people speak of Koné, Koné, the Koné came from Sankaran.
 Sankaran, Sankaran, where is Sankaran itself?
 Sankaran is far away near Kankan,
 Kankan in Guinea, Kankan in Guinea,
 Sankaran is between there and the West.
 This village was christened Baji Sangalan.⁴
 When wind touches the river water and pushes it toward shore,

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- 1 'Hot' is a traditional metaphor meaning 'bad' or 'evil'; a fierce battle in which many were killed would be described as 'hot'.
- 2 The greatest hero of Manding tradition, Sunjata is credited with the thirteenth-century founding of the Mali Empire, and he and his era are lauded as the heroic ideal.
- 3 Praising sounds, expressing wonder at the greatness of the ancestors; a general expression of astonishment.
- 4 lit. 'river-water waves', a village located on the Sankaran River in Guinea.

It is said that there are waves in the water, and the village of Sankaran took its name from this.

Modiba Koné lived in Sankaran at first, but he left there and came to Dodougoubani which is composed of twelve villages. Modiba Koné's first wife was a scorned wife, she was despised. Though she was scorned she became pregnant, and her belly contained twins, two sons.

When this wife was near her time she suffered great pain. Her co-wives went to tell Modiba the news.

"Your wife is about to deliver", they said to Modiba Koné.

"What!" said he, "Not in this house, tell her to get out."

When the woman heard this she was dismayed,

Modiba's first wife was dismayed and did not know what to do, and she cried,

"Does contempt lead to all this trouble,

"That a woman is made pregnant by her husband,

"That she comes near her time,

"That she suffers stomach pains and her husband chases her from the house?

"Aiee", she said, "This contempt has gone far today."

That wife was dismayed and did not know what to do.

She walked through the bush for she had no father,¹

She walked through the bush for she had no mother,

She left her husband's house to go into the bush,

The husband banished her because the pregnancy would result in a child of bad omen.

1 Normally a woman in such trouble would return to her father's village.

At last the woman delivered without trouble:

When she walked through the bush with no father,

Through the bush with no mother,

She arrived at a grove.

When she arrived at the grove she went in,

At last she went into a grove and sat down.

There in the bush the woman felt very bad stomach pains.

She had no father there,

She had no mother there,

She had no other relatives there.

At last the woman crouched facing the East, and after facing the

East she threw down two sons.

When she had given birth to two sons,

When she had finished delivering, her body was relieved.

When relief entered the woman's body she had no more stomach pains

and she sat up.

When she sat up she saw a lioness and her cubs.

The lioness was also recovering in the grove,

She had delivered three cubs.

When the woman saw the lioness with cubs in the grove,

She believed her life in this world was at an end.

She said "I and my children will be a meal for a lion".

Just then some genies came and surrounded the woman.

They said to her, "Get up and go home.

"As for your twins, if it please Allah and his prophet,

"You will meet them one day, go home."

So Modiba's wife left the bush,

She went and left her sons behind her in the grove.

The woman went home and the two sons spent fifty years in the bush
with the genies.

The two sons stayed, and Modiba did not survive those fifty years.

Before the end of the fifty years, Modiba was dead.

Modiba sired 250 sons who lived in Busen.

There was no Segou, no Sebougou, no Sekura,

None of these had been founded.

At that time Markadougouba was founded by Kalajan Kouloubaly.

We could speak of no Ngolo at that time,

No one could speak of Biton at that time,

Toku was not leading at that time, and we could not speak of
Kolé.

The reign of Kalajan is older than any of these.

Kalajan Kouloubaly settled at Markadougouba.

Those two sons of Modiba were full, full of gaiety,

Those two sons were full of kindness.

They started off to look for their mother, so we are told by
legend:

[song]

We are looking for our mother,

We are looking for our mother.

Walking carefully with the arrow,

Walking carefully with the big arrow,

We are looking for our mother.

All of the villagers came out to see the two men, and everyone
claimed them as their own:

"We gave birth to you,

"I gave birth to you."

Every woman who saw them claimed them as her own, and the two men would reply,

"Very well, tell us where and how you gave birth to us,

"Where did you give birth to us?"

Some said, "I gave birth to you in the veranda", and the men replied, "Then you are not our mother".

Some others said, "I gave birth to you in my sleeping room."

But the men said, "Then you are not our mother".

As the two men stood there, some others came near and said,

"No matter who you are, I claim you as my own sons."

"Then tell us how you gave birth to us", said the men,

"Tell us where you gave birth to us".

"I bore you in the entry room", was the answer.

"Then", said the men, "You are not our mother".

Someone even said, "I gave birth to you in the bath hut".

They mentioned every place in a compound but no one could find the right answer.

Those women finished every place in a compound,

The women named every place in a compound,

All the important places were mentioned.

They were so baffled that they even named the bath hut,

They were so baffled that they even named the veranda.

They mentioned all the places in the compound but nobody could find the right answer.

The men finished walking through Dodougou and they arrived at Fangadougou.

They finished walking through Fangadougou,

They came by Sekoro and arrived at Markadougouba where Kalajan

Kouloubaly was chief.

Oh, the two sons finally passed Markadougouba, went through
Dodougouba and arrived at Busen.

At that time the mansa of Faraku was at the height of his power¹
at Faraku.

In those days Busen was famous, it had as many people as it could
hold.

The fine appearance of the two men, their good manners, their
gaiety and their wealth were admired by everyone.

The men and women of Busen, the young and the old,
The mansa and his followers all rushed joyfully to meet them.
In Busen the two men were welcomed as never before.

They were welcomed with cheerfulness and respect,
They were welcomed with honour that day at Busen and given every
attention.

All the women came out and gathered together saying,
"They are my sons, these two are my sons".

The men demanded proof of this, but nothing any of the women
said proved they were the mother.

As the crowd was gathered there an old woman came.

The one who was the real mother of the two men came.

Oh! That day she said, "Let me through, I want to come near
those two men.

"I want to tell what I know about these two sons."

When the old woman approached the men everyone was surprised to
see her coming.

¹ lit. 'in his twelve', that is at the height of his formidable
power.

No one thought she would win the two sons,
Surely they could not be hers.

The mansa told the people to let her pass, and only then was she
allowed to get near the two men.

For no one would have allowed such a dirty old woman to approach
such fine looking men.

At last the old woman got near the two men who sat mounted on
their horses.

She took hold of the mane of Wanasi's horse,
She took hold of the mane of the other twin's horse, and finally
she said, "I am your mother".

The crowd around them was astonished.

"I am your mother", she said.

"Oho!" said the men,

"How could you be our mother?"

"Give us proof that you are our mother.

"Where did you give birth to us?"

"You say we are your sons, so where did you give birth?"

"I bore you in a grove", said the old woman.

"And what was in the grove?" asked the men.

"A lioness that had just delivered cubs was in the grove",
replied the old woman.

"That is right", said the sons, "You really are our mother".

This song is still sung in our day:

Walk carefully with the arrow,

Walk carefully with the big arrow,

No lie, you are our mother.

Walk carefully with the arrow,
 Walk carefully with the big arrow.
 We are looking for our mother,
 We are looking for our mother.
 Walk carefully with the arrow,
 Walk carefully with the big arrow.
 I am certainly your mother because I bore you in a grove,
 And a newly delivered lioness was also in that grove.
 That is right, you are our mother.
 Walk carefully with the arrow,
 Walk carefully with the big arrow,
 You are our mother.

The Diara descended from these two sons.

Diara, Diara originated with these two men.

On that day they dropped 'Koné' and became Diara,

Otherwise all Koné came from Sankaran as I have told you.¹

They took the name 'Diara' because the woman gave birth in a
 grove where a lioness had just delivered cubs.²

Those cubs and the infant twins became milk brothers.³

"Oh!" said the twins, "That is right, we were born in a grove,

"We lived with a lioness."

1 Tahiru is claiming that it was only the Koné of Busen who adopted the name 'Diara' (Jara).

2 diara, dyara, jara = 'lion'.

3 'Milk brothers' = children of the same mother, the implication being that the lioness suckled the twins along with her own cubs.

At that time they lost the name Koné and took the name Diara, but
 if you say "Koné" they will answer you.
 If you say "Diara" they will answer you, because these names are
 the same.

NTIGINYE AND KONG

The twin brother of Wanasi lived in Busen and his name was Alimu
 Kulifali.

Alimu Kulifali was a Muslim ascetic.¹

Oh! Here is how the nyamakala praised him:

"Sakira luma zunuunu, walaw kaana eluman,

"Sabiyu, sabiyu, akiraba garibu,²

"Look to the holy book, resolver of all problems,³

"Look to the twig with one joint, the doer of many deeds."⁴

"When people walking in single file are told to turn and go in
 the opposite direction,

"Those who were last will be first."

A son of the twins had 250 children who lived in Busen.

Busen was destroyed during the time of their reign.

Why was Busen destroyed during their reign?

1 haasiyusu = local Arabic equivalent given as waliyu, meaning a recluse, often a Sufi mystic.

2 These two lines are a combination of Bambara and Arabic that may mean something to Tahiru, or they may also be largely nonsense syllables, mysterious, semi-Arabic words uttered to impress the audience with the narrator's erudition.

3 The Koran.

4 The pen of the Muslim cleric.

It was destroyed by a chief named Ntiginye.¹

Oh, the village of this Ntiginye was called Bolikungo.²

Ntiginye was a mansa but he came from Wagadu,

He came from Wagadu like all the other black-skinned people.³

The first village founded by Ntiginye was called Bolikungo,

The second village Ntiginye founded was called Kokri.

Kokri is a Mossi word.

Wagadougou, where everyone is Mossi, originated as Bolikungo.⁴

At that time Ntiginye was the possessor of 115 boliw.⁵

At that time Ntiginye had 115 boliw in Bolikungo, and there were

none among all those boliw that was not watered with the
blood of a living soul.⁶

All of these 115 boliw except one were watered with the blood of
living souls.

1 lit. 'big ant'.

2 lit. 'bush of idols'.

3 This appears to be a reference to the ancient Soninke state of Wagadu, which is the indigenous term for what was known to Arab geographers as 'Ghana'. Most well-informed jeliw are familiar with the tradition of Wagadu, and many are knowledgeable about the great Soninke dispersion following the drought that destroyed Ghana-Wagadu.

4 In other words, Tahiru is saying that this village grew to be Wagadougou, the capital of present-day Upper Volta, and that its founder's origins were in the sahelian Soninke state of Wagadu.

5 boliw = altars made of virtually any kind of material, including wood, metal, bone and hair, over which blood sacrifices are performed in order to call upon and influence the vital spiritual force known as nyama (nyana, gnama). One of the most essential of ritual objects, the boli is both a symbol of the universe and a receptacle of the forces that animate the universe, as well as an intermediary that permits communication with the ancestor or super-natural power whose force permeates it.

6 To 'water' a boli was to pour blood on it. The 'living soul' refers to any animal, such as a goat or a chicken.

Only one boli was given a human being.

A girl with a protruding navel was used to water this boli at the beginning of each new year.

A two-legged person, a girl,

A girl with a protruding navel was given to the boli at the beginning of each new year.

Oh, it happened that one year they could not find a girl with a protruding navel.

They didn't find a large-naveled girl.

At the time there was a trader from Kong in the town,

A fugitive merchant who had taken refuge in Ntinginye's village of Bolikungo.

This trader from Kong had a daughter with a protruding navel.

One day the merchant of Kong went to his field to clear away the millet stalks, and when he returned to his hut, his wife said to him,

"While you were in the fields the mansa's men called our daughter.

"She went to answer the mansa's summons and I have not seen her since daybreak."

Ntinginye and the trader of Kong had both returned from the fields with their long-bladed hoes, and they went to meet at the council hut where the trader complained to the mansa about the matter of his daughter:

"Oh!" said he, "When I returned from the bush my wife said your people had taken my daughter, and she has not been seen since then."

Ntinginye replied, "Oho! Yes, that is true, for I used her to water my boli".

Then the merchant of Kong said, "You have done very well,

"You have done very well,

"Even if I were to be used to water that boli myself, I would agree to be sacrificed if it would bring prosperity to this land.

"So it is quite all right if my daughter has been sacrificed to water the boli."

"Oh!" said Mansa Ntiginye to the merchant of Kong, "Aha! You find no fault then, you find no fault here.

"Then no more harm will be done you here.

"Eh! Have you been so generous as to speak like this?

"Then I am quite certain that you are a son of this land.

"You are truly a son of this land and you will meet no more harm here, for you have found no fault with our deed."

When the mansa had finished speaking, the merchant of Kong returned to his hut, and he remained in that land for one more season.

He finished clearing the millet stalks from his field in the dry season.

He ploughed his field in the rainy season, and after the following harvest he left Bulikungo.

He finally returned to his home in Kong.¹

When the trader of Kong returned home, Komo of Kong was the mansa.

The mansa was a Watara.

¹ Tahiru does not return to the story of the merchant of Kong, and when asked why, he said there was no more to tell.

His family name¹ was Watara, Komo of Kong.

He was master of the land of Kong at that time.

Komo of Kong had a son named Seri.

Seri cancelled his war against one chief and went to help
another chief named Yamuazi.

This Yamuazi's family name was Saanoko, and these two divided
their forces against two villages.

What two villages were attacked by their troops?

They divided their forces between Gau² where there was a chief
at the time, and Sangrin where there was also a chief.

Five hundred and fifty cavalry units³ were divided between these
two villages.

They all had bows and arrows but no muskets.

The troops facing Gau destroyed it, then turned against Tokoba.

The troops that took Sangrin turned next to face Famaana.

When these two villages had been destroyed, the war ended.

It was at this time that the Bamana were gathering together.⁴

1 jamu = lit. 'identity', but also patronymic or lineage name.

2 Not to be confused with Gao, on the Niger Bend.

3 karafé = a cavalry unit of varying numbers of sofaw (mounted warriors). The term is derived from the 'bit' or metal mouthpiece on a horse's bridle, the karafé. Large numbers like the five hundred and fifty mentioned here have no historical basis.

4 Establishing themselves as a power in the region of Segou.

SEGOU HONOUR

Ask him, ask Da¹ for me in Segou,
 Monson son of Ngolo Diara
 Ask Da, for he is master of much water,²
 Master of many people,
 He is master of war, master of hunting,
 He is master of gunpowder, master of bullets,
 He is a wealthy Bamana slaughterer of cows.

Copper will not make a horse disappear, but it will force ahead
 the souls of many a man-killing chief.³

In those days of the mansaw, the world was not like it is now.
 They bent the world like a scythe and unrolled it like a road,
 They walked the four directions of the world, then they came and
 settled at its centre.

In their day, in those times, every human being respected his
 own given word.

There was nobility then.

To call a man horon meant that he was truly noble.

When a horon swore an oath, he said,

"I am serious, it is the word of a horon".

That is how people pledged their honour.

1 This was the beginning of a recording session, and Tahiru chose to commence with a praise song to Da and Monson Diara, two Segou rulers who appear later in his narrative.

2 In this instance, 'water' is a metaphor for wealth. These praises are purposely sung in the present tense, implying that the spirit of a great leader lives on.

3 Copper was used to make bullets.

If a horon swore such an oath, everything was alright, he would
keep the promise.

Later on, people added "Or never trust me again".

If a horon made such a vow, "Or never trust me again",

Everything was alright, no need for anything more.

If he swore to kill a man, he would kill him.

Whatever was promised would be done.

Eh! But in our day we are confused.

After the honourable people were gone, we began to swear

walahi.¹

We swear bilai,

We swear to Allah,

We swear to the Prophet,

Though we are lying.

We conspire against each other before we become friends.

This is why the white man made the watch,

To respect the given word,

To help honour be maintained.

If a white man tells you he will come at one o'clock,

If you miss the time by two minutes,

This reflects on your nobility, and shows that you do not honour
your word.

In their land, you would be banned from human society.

Everyone else would take care of their business and leave you out.

Oh, we black-skinned people promise each other to do something

¹ The most common of oaths, roughly equivalent to 'by God', said to derive from the expression 'If I am lying, cut off my head'.

but end up making an excuse:

"Eh, God did not let it happen.

"Eh, after I left you, my relative made an unexpected visit,
and I went some place with him, so God did not allow it."

This is a lie.

Everything you want to do, God will help you to do it.

If a horon gives his word, he must honour it.

This is a point between us and the white man.

This man told me he would come at 2.30.

I stood up here at 2.30 and when the hand of the watch touched
the thirtieth minute, I saw his head coming.¹

If it had been as usual in Africa, I would have gone away without
meeting him.

BITON AND THE ANTELOPE

The grandfather of Biton Koulobaly came from Baramandougou to
settle here at Segou.

The nyamakala praised him like this:

"Man from the land of Bendougou,

"Master of the big nyama² drum,

"Master of the nyama kenken.

"The talking drum can be played for anyone, but only he is worthy
of the big wooden drum."

1 A reference to the present writer.

2 Spirit, force, power.

Biton Kouloubaly came from three women.¹

The nyamakala also praise him with the names of those three

women:

"He came from Masunun", thus the jeliw praise him.

"He came from Dalibaje", thus the jeliw praise him.

"He came from Kaabaje", thus the jeliw praise him.

The jeliw say, "Sunun Mamary, son of Masunun Sakho,

"Sunun Mamary, son of Dalibaje Sakho,

"Sunun Mamary, son of Kaabaje Sakho,

"Your mother was the sister of Mamary of Kaanba."²

Mamary shot an antelope near Bendougou.

The wounded animal carried the bullet and crossed a river near

Kaana,

It crossed the river near Kaana and ran to the big river near

Segou,³ and at last it reached Sekoro.

At the time there was a forest shelter there, a sokala⁴ of the
genies there at Sekoro.

When the antelope came near the genie's little hut,

It went into a grove by the river at Sekoro.

This Mamary who is also known as Sunun Mamary son of Masunun

Sakho,

Sunun Mamary son of Dalibaje Sako,

Biton Kouloubaly left Bendougou to pursue his wounded antelope.

1 His father had three wives.

2 This passage explains that Biton's given name 'Mamary' was taken from his uncle, Mamary of Kaanba, and that his actual mother was Masunun Sakho.

3 The Niger, known locally as Joliba.

4 sokala = a makeshift forest shelter.

He was a hunter.

He shot an antelope but it carried the bullet and fled to Sekoro.

As the wounded antelope was running to Sekoro, Biton stopped at

Kaana where a friend of his father lived.

"Where are you going, my son?" asked the friend.

"I shot an antelope last night", said Biton.

"It carried my bullet and crossed the Bani River,

"It crossed the big river and I have come to track my wounded
antelope."

Then the father's friend said this:

"Stay here with me a while, I have had a good year.

"I had a large crop and I want you to help me harvest my millet."

So Biton spent a week cutting millet with his father's friend,

and after the millet was in the granary they gave him some
special medicine.¹

"Take this with you for your protection", said the father's friend.

"It will protect you from injury."²

"If you have this when a snake bites you, the poison will have no
more effect than if you touched some nettles."³

"If you have this when a genie sees you, he will be afraid and
run away."

1 furamaku = a kind of medicine made from wood ash.

2 Here he used nyama again, in the sense of an evil force or power.

3 The stinging bua plant.

"If you have this with you, forest spirits¹ cannot touch you."

The father's friend gave Mamary the medicine.

Mamary took the medicine with him to Sekoro.

When he arrived he found many genies around the shelter.

They were holding their wounded friend,

For the antelope Mamary shot was a genie.

It had changed from its genie form to a four-legged antelope.²

A genie said, "Two-legged being, why have you come here?"

"Why are so many of you here?" asked Mamary.

Replied the genie, "It is for no other reason than that we have
a sick one here.

"We are trying to heal him but cannot find the proper remedy.

"Do you have the means to cure him?"

"Indeed I do", said Mamary, "I have a special medicine to give you."

1 wokolow = dwarf genies whose feet point backward; a kind of trickster character in Manding folk-lore. Seydou Camara told one story about them: Long ago, in the time of a great sorcerer, the wokolow were mainly herders. The sorcerer lost some cows and told the herders to find and bring them back. The sorcerer needed the cows urgently, but the herders were long in their search, and the impatient sorcerer pronounced a curse on them. The herders had been perfectly good and normal people, but they were transformed into dwarfs that remained in the bush, never returning to human society. Examples of their trickster character: If you meet one, he will challenge you to a wrestling match, but no matter how many times you throw him down he will say, "Let us begin again, I wasn't ready", and he will carry on thus through the night and into the morning. Sometimes, if you are walking alone through the bush, he will confront you and say, "I will never let you pass by this way, you must take another route". It is said that they like groundnuts so much that if people have been eating them in their courtyard and throwing the shells about, the wokolow will come at midnight and search among them for uneaten nuts.

2 yelena = to change or transform; in the hunters' legends, wild animals and great hunters are said to have the power to yelena or transform themselves into another form.

"It will take effect in fifteen days, and if by then your sick one has not recovered with fur growing in the place of the wound, I will go to my father and ask him to teach me the lore of Bamana healing, if he has not tricked me and gone on to lahara."

At that time Segou was not called 'Segou', it was called 'Sekoro'. Segou had one entrance gate and one exit gate, and was encircled by a wall.

Zan the dog merchant was in the market, the one where the Bamana sold dogs.

If you had not sold your dog by alasara,

The market had not done well for you,

The dog would be served to the mansa for breakfast.

The Bamana had four important boliv in Segou:

Bakungoba, Nangoloko, Kontoron, and Binyejugu;¹

Those four powerful boliv were here.

The genie asked Mamary for the medicine.

They said, "Give us the medicine to cure our sick one."

Mamary gave the medicine to the genie and returned to Bendougou to wait fifteen days.

Mamary, whom we know as Biton Kouloubaly the man-killing hunter, waited fifteen days in Bendougou, then he returned to Sekoro where he again found the genies gathered at their forest shelter.

1 See note 2, p. 364.

"Two-legged being, have you come back?" said they.

"Yes", said Mamary, "Has not my appointed day arrived?"

"It has", said the genies, "And things happened just as you said they would."

"Here is the cured one standing by, the wound has healed and fur has covered it."

Then the genies asked Mamary to tell them how to make the special medicine, but he said he could not give them that secret.

Then the genies said, "We beg you to tell us how to make the medicine".

Now the genies had begged him.

Genies are different from men, so Mamary walked through the bush without a father,

He walked through the bush without a mother.

He burnt some nyaman branches,

He burnt some dry nkunje wood,

He burnt some dry nkolobe wood,

He burnt some dry ngiliki wood,

He made a powder from the ashes and tied it in a cloth.

He gave it to the genies and said,

"Here is all the medicine I possess".

This is how the genies got that herbal remedy.

BITON UNDER THE BAOBAB

Mamary was a hunter, a very skilful hunter.

One night he crossed the big river and stopped to rest on the other side.

He dug a kind of hole called taraba, under a baobab tree,

He dug a taraba and hid himself inside.

As Mamary crouched in his taraba an old hyena came and sat down
under the same baobab, and in that same tree an old vulture
chief was perched.

The old hyena said to the old vulture chief,

"Old vulture chief!"

"I hear you", replied the vulture.

Said the hyena, "You are up and I am down.

"Get me the news from above, and I will tell you the news from
below."

Mamary sat quietly listening.

"Very well", said the vulture,

"The mouth is short but its wind blows long.

"The man who can chop down this forest will rule this land.

"God has made it impossible for any of His slaves to accomplish
such a task.

"The man who can clear this forest and settle here will rule the
entire land,

"God will see to that."

After this exchange between the hyena and the vulture, after
hearing these words,

Mamary returned to Bendougou and said to his mother,

"Mama, I have a thing to tell you:

"It is said that when the world nears its end, instead of having
kittens the cat will lay eggs.

"It is also said that if you are caught by the rain in a ruined
hut, it will never stop pouring when you want it to."

"Well", said his mother, "What has happened to make you talk like this?"

"Mama", he replied, "I have heard that the world is nearing its end.

"There are two kinds of places where a man can find happiness:

"He can be happy in a village where people help each other in time of need, and he can be happy in a place by the side of the river."

"I hear you", said the mother.

And Mamary said, "I want to settle in such a suitable place."

Then Mamary got up and collected his belongings, and he and his mother went to settle at Sekoro.¹

BITON AND THE WATER GENIE

Biton's mother Sunun planted a field of nkoyo, the bitter pepper plants they use in cooking.

When she had prepared the field, the bitter plants grew to the height of two leaves.

Then it grew to the height of three leaves, until at last one part of the crop was in flower, and the other part had not yet blossomed.

Sunun went home to rest once the bitter pepper had grown to the height of three leaves.

Part of the crop was ripe but the rest of it was not.

¹ That is, they went to the place across the river where Mamary had helped heal the wounded antelope, a place that would later be known as Sekoro.

At this time a kind of water genie called a faaro would leave the river and go into mother Sunun's bitter pepper field.¹

She cut unripe bitter pepper to her right, and she cut ripe bitter pepper to her left.

The faaro did this on three different occasions,

Three merry times, three times.

When mother Sunun saw what the genie had done, she was very upset and she said to Mamary,

"My son, why do we value the birth of children?"

"Mama", replied Mamary, "We have children so we can sit in the shade of their hair."²

"Well", said mother Sunun, "I am under a hot sun that will surely dry me up."³

"Why is that?" asked Mamary.

"I planted a field of bitter pepper here to feed you and your brothers, but the whole question of this crop is causing me distress.

"I planted the bitter pepper for your future benefit and the benefit of your younger brothers, but when I go into the field to cut ripe bitter pepper the plants are always empty."

"Alright", said Mamary, and he took his musket and put it over his shoulder.

1 According to Manding tradition, any unsettled land belonged to supernatural beings who were the original occupants, and many legends tell how the ancestors had to win the land from these beings before it could be settled. In the social hierarchy, it is those who can trace their lineage back to these ancestral founders who are eligible for positions of leadership.

2 It is the children's responsibility to provide for their parents' welfare during old-age.

3 She complains that her son is not looking after her properly.

With his musket on his shoulder, Mamary crept toward the field
as slowly as a bad marriage.

(In a bad marriage there is so much quarreling that nothing gets
done.)

Mamary built a blind in his mother's bitter pepper field and sat
down inside it with his gun.

At midnight, as Mamary sat in his blind, the genie came out of
the river and entered the field.

She cut bitter peppers on her left,

She cut bitter peppers on her right.

Mamary the scorpion stuck out his head and saw the genie.

When the eyes of Mamary and the genie made four,¹ Mamary said,

"faaro!"

"I hear you!" replied the genie.

Mamary said, "Every day belongs to a thief, but the owner must
have a day for himself.

"My mother worked hard to plant this wide field to provide
benefits for my brothers and me, but day after day you come
and cut the bitter pepper that does not belong to you."

"That is true", said the genie, "and I beg your forgiveness.

"This world is a blessing and the other world is a blessing, and
an eye without blessings scarcely sleeps."²

The genie asked Mamary to forgive her, but he refused, saying,

"My bullet is sure to strike you in the pupil of your eye,

"My bullet will certainly strike the pupil of your eye."

1 When they saw each other.

2 A life with no benefits is not worth living.

"I hear you", replied the genie, "but I asked you to forgive me
because there is a reason for everything."

"What is your reason?" asked Mamary.

"I am the reason", said the genie.

"I am a genie and my father dwells in a cave by the water,

"My mother dwells in a cave by the water.

"I want you to come with me to see my mother,

"I want you to come with me to see my father.

"When you see them you will profit by what they have to tell you."

Mamary agreed, so he set aside his musket.

The genie and Mamary whom we know as Biton entered the water
together.

When they arrived at the cave the genie's father splashed water
at Mamary, who started to turn away, but the genie stopped
him, begging him not to leave.

The genie took Mamary by the hand and led him to her father,
saying,

"Father, do not harm this man,

"Whatever you want to do to him, do it to me instead."

"Why should I do that?" asked her father.

The genie said, "This man's mother worked hard to plough a field.

"She hoed and watered the fallow ground, planted bitter pepper
there and made it grow.

"The bitter pepper sprouted and grew to a height of three leaves.

"Part of the field was not yet ripe,

"The other part was in flower,

"Part of the field was green,

"Part of it was ripe.

"I went and cut the bitter pepper plants and brought them here
to you.

"We did not water this bitter pepper field,

"We did not clear the field,

"We did nothing at all and we are the wrongdoers.

"The owner caught me today and wanted to send me to the place of
the dead, but I asked him to forgive me.

"An eye without blessings scarcely sleeps.

"When a man goes to bed it is the blessings of life that allow
him to sleep, for the life of a man with no blessings is
wasted.

"I have asked this man to come with me to meet you and he agreed."
Then the genie's father said to Mamary, "You have spared the life
of my daughter.

"May God grant you long life.

"You had mercy on the soul of my daughter,

"May God have mercy on yours.

"Here are a hundred horses for you."

"I thank you", said Mamary, "But a hundred horses is too much,
I did not come for that."

"Then I will give you a hundred cows", said the genie's father.

"Thank you", said Mamary, "But a hundred cows is too much, I did
not come for that."

"Then I will give you a hundred sheep", said the genie's father.

"Thank you", said Mamary, "But a hundred sheep is too much,
I did not come for that."

"Then I will give you a hundred mutukali¹ of gold", said the

1 From the Arabic mithqāl, amounting to about five grams.

genie's father.

"Thank you", said Mamary, "But a hundred mutukali of gold is too much, I did not come for that."

The genie's father said, "Son of mperi,¹

"Spoiler of neighbourliness,

"Son of a goat raiser who needs no meat,

"I will give you a hundred goats."

"Thank you", said Mamary, "but that is not why I came here."

The genie's father said, "I will give you a hundred girls."

"Thank you", said Mamary, "but a hundred girls is too much, I did not come for that."

At last the genie's father said, "In that case, please explain yourself."

Mansa Moriba, Nyangolo and Baramangolo,² Kouloubaly known as Biton finally explained himself.

The genie girl had warned Biton in advance to not accept anything her father would offer him, but to ask only for some millet seeds to plant at Sekoro.

After he had been offered a hundred of all those things,

Mamary finally remembered what the genie had told him.

Everything that happens does so for a reason.

Mamary refused all the hundreds of things and said to the genie's father,

"Baba, I come only to ask you for some seeds of millet so I can

1 A game based on a principle similar to checkers or chess, employing two rows of six shallow holes in a board, along with a set number of beans, small stones, cowries or the like. See Tahiru's explanation, pp. 527-29.

2 Praise names for Biton Kouloubaly.

plant them where I want to settle.

"I am a Bambara and I love to farm, my work is to grow things."

Said the genie's father, "To know your way around Nje's house is not a bad accomplishment, but if you can show me the house of Nje son of Nyakura you have been well-informed by a local native,

"Nje son of Nyakura could only be known by a native of the village."¹

The genie's father then brought some millet seeds, and tying them in a piece of cloth he gave them to Mamary.

He gave some of his millet seeds to Mamary and told him,

"When you plant these millet seeds you must do your own ploughing.

"You must also pull your own weeds, but when the crop is ripe you must not harvest it.

"You must let the birds eat it.

"For every bird that eats a seed and flies east to a village,

"You will become master of that place.

"For every bird that eats a seed and flies west to a village,

"You will become master of that place.

"For every bird that eats a seed and flies to a village near the river, you will become master of that place.

"Everywhere the birds fly you will become master of the villages and the lands."

Mamary said, "I hear you Baba, and I will do as you say."

The genie's mother was also there, and she said,

"My husband offered you a hundred of everything, and I offer you

1 The father is saying that he realizes his daughter had previously coached Mamary on what to say.

a hundred of everything as well."

Biton replied to the mother,

"No, I have come only so you can press the milk of your left breast into my ear.

"I want you to press the milk of your left breast into my ear."

"Very well", said the mother, and she pressed the milk of her left breast into his ear.

Then the genie's mother told Mamary that the milk from her left breast would guarantee his power, saying,

"When you become mansa you will hear of all conspiracies in your land from east to west.

"You will hear of it on the same day, though you may only learn of it from the signs of flying birds.

"The same day someone conspires against a mansa, others will come to his support."

The millet seed given to Mamary by a genie's father was the first sign of his power.

The milk pressed into the ear of Biton Kouloubaly from the left breast of a genie's mother was a guarantee of his power, an invocation for his power.

It represented a radio for his power,

It represented a telephone for his power.¹

Anyone who was elected a mansa,

Everyone who was a mansa heard much more in a day than ordinary people did.

1 It enabled him to hear what was going on in the far corners of his domain without being physically present.

Mamary returned home, and when his rival brothers¹ began to plough, he also prepared his field.

When the millet was ripe the rival brothers harvested theirs, but Mamary said he was going on a journey and would cut his when he returned.

When he had gone, flocks of birds landed on Mamary's millet, Flocks of birds landed on his millet and ate it all.

Then the old men began to gossip about Mamary:

"We thought he was a hard-working boy, but he is just a good-for-nothing.

"We thought he would give us millet seeds for next year but he has let the birds eat it all.

"His mother helped him plough such a big field, but he let the birds eat the whole crop.

"His future does not look good."

THE ELECTION OF BITON

The old men of Segou gathered together,

The Bamana wanted to hold a hunters' council.²

They wanted to choose a leader but could not agree on how to do it.

"Let us hold a council and choose a leader among us", they said.

"If it is heard that enemies will be killed tomorrow,

1 fadenw = rival or enemy brothers of the same father, but different mothers.

2 donso ton; though the council is usually referred to simply as the ton, this reference to a 'hunters' council' is related to the fact that at the time when Biton was gathering his power, the ton members, who also farmed together, would sometimes form large hunting parties.

"Someone will spend the day seeking the support of somebody else's friend.

"The world is built on this truth.

"The enemy of one person is the friend of another,

"The world is built on this truth.

"If we just point at someone to elect him as our leader, it will not turn out right,

"Such an election would end with war on the land, but what can we do?"

From the time of that council the Bamana ruled the land for two hundred years less twenty years and four months.

These were the things that allowed the Bamana reign to last one hundred and seventy-nine years and eight months.

Someone said, "Let us vote for two people, let us choose two people and then vote on them.

"The one who wins the most supporters will become our leader."

Others said, "It would be worse than ever to use such a system.

"To choose two people like that is to bring certain war.

"We will withdraw from the council if you adopt such a system of voting."

"Then what shall we do?" asked the others.

"We must do what we did before there were marabout schools in this land.¹

"In the big villages we used to slaughter cows and divide the meat into small piles.

"No one knew how to write, and it was the work of wise men to

1 Before the coming of Islam.

share out the meat."

"But what can we do?" asked the others.

"If fire from river water ignites sand on the shore, it must be extinguished with wisdom."¹

An elder replied, "We must look to the past for the solution to present problems.

"Bamana of ancient times would each bring his own piece of straw.

"Each would come and lay his straw on a pile of meat, and he was then obliged to take the pile thus chosen for him by destiny.

"Let us gather our pieces of straw and hang them from a dubalen tree.

"The day of our vote will be a noble day.

"No one will lie, no one will conspire against one another.

"We must choose our leader in the way of the piles of meat.

"Let us summon the people of all the villages,

"Let us summon the elders² and the village chiefs."

Biton Kouloubaly agreed to this plan,

Ngoin Ton Mansa agreed to this,

Kanuba Nyuma of Pelenkana agreed to this,

Kafa Jugu of Gashin agreed to this,

Yoro Bari of Pelemana also agreed,

Bina Danfin of Danfinbougou agreed to the plan,

Zokofode of Zoko agreed to it,

Red Baa of Shido agreed to it,

1 A seemingly insurmountable problem must be approached intelligently.

2 gwatigiw = roughly, family heads; the sunshelter men sit under during the heat of the day is called a gwa, and the owner of the gwa is a gwatigi, and this evolved into its usage signifying the head of a family or an elder; less commonly, a patriarch, head of many branches of the same family.

Binaaba of Ngolokunna also agreed to the plan.¹

These worthy men gathered together and decided what should be done.

They cut pieces of straw and put them together, saying,

"Now let us call three people, one at a time.

"Let each of the three choose one piece of straw."

The first person would come and choose a straw, and a second person would choose a straw.

A third person would choose a straw, and when the straw of one candidate was finally chosen three times in succession, it was agreed that this man would be mansa because God had chosen him.

The worthy councillors sat in a circle around the straws, trying to choose a leader.

Some uncircumcised boys² had been out hunting lizards.

As the boys returned from their hunt they passed near where the elders were sitting.

The elders called to them and said, "Who is the youngest among you?"

All the boys pointed to one of their group, saying "Here is our youngest."

The elders said, "Come here and choose one of these straws.

"The straws we have cut in Segou are noble straws.

"You cannot tell the difference between the straw of one man and the straw of another.

"Come and take a straw so we can choose a leader."

1 As important members of the tôn, these men would have helped form Biton's power base.

2 bila koro = an uncircumcised, that is immature, boy.

The youngest boy took the straw of his choice, but the Bamana

grumbled, saying, "Put down the one you have taken.

"That one belongs to a stranger, Biton of Sekoro.

"He left Bendougou and came here to settle, and he cannot be our leader."

On that day many nyamakalaw of Segou were present.

Jeli Tietigiba Danté was there, and so was Nangoi.

Jeli Kori had settled with the Bamana.

If he told the Bamana to eat beans, they would buy butter.¹

In those days, to be a nyamakala was like gold, like diamonds and emeralds.

If a nyamakala told his patron² to spend the night standing up, he would do it.

If he told him to lie down all day, he would do it, for if the patron's reputation were ruined, he would get neither sex nor marriage during his lifetime.³

In those days the world had not changed to the way it is now.

When the young boy chose that straw the Bamana elders grumbled and put it down.

At that time there were some newly circumcised boys in their isolation hut.⁴

1 He had great influence; shea butter was an essential ingredient in the preparation of beans.

2 jiatigi = host, patron; the jiatigi was normally of the horon or proprietary (chiefly) class, and in exchange for the goods and services provided him by artisans and griots, he would see that they were housed, clothed and fed.

3 A reminder that nyamakalaw, especially griots, were responsible for encouraging a man to succeed in life, for singing his praises and maintaining his prestige, for supervising in life-crisis rituals, and for acting as agents in his various affairs.

4 Newly circumcised boys are kept in isolation while their wounds heal, and at this time they are instructed in the responsibilities of adulthood.

When they came out to go for an initiation walk,¹ the elders
said, "Come over here.

"The straws we have cut in Segou are noble straws.

"We want to choose a leader among us, and we know you cannot tell
the difference between the straw of one man and that of
another.

"Take one straw for us so we can choose our leader."

The youngest of the newly circumcised boys chose a straw.

He took the straw of his choice, but the Bamana elders grumbled,
saying, "Drop what you are holding.

"That one belongs to Biton of Sekoro, a stranger.

"He came from Bendougou land, and he will not be our leader."

They refused that straw, but a pregnant woman came and chose the
same straw.

Again the Bamana grumbled, "Put down that straw."

At this point a jeli stood up, and this is what he said to the
horon² elders:

"Please be silent.

"It is not your turn to speak now, you must let me speak.

"A horon does not sprout a tail for people to pull and say

'This is your noble tail'.

"A horon does not possess a mane for people to grasp and say

'This is your noble mane'.

"The flesh of the horon is not the horon himself.

1 In the final week of their isolation the newly circumcised boys parade around the village shaking rattles made of calabash fragments, singing songs, and receiving small gifts.

2 Members of the proprietary or chiefly lineages, the upper level of the social hierarchy, are called horon or tontigiw.

"What is the real meaning of horon?

"Horon means a man must honour his given word.

"You must do what your mouth said you would do.

"You must not do in this world what you swore not to do.

"This, and not your body, is nobility.

"We all have two arms,

"We all have two legs,

"We all have one head,

"We all think the same way.

"Whether you are a jeli, a funé, a garanké or a numu,¹

you are included in this.

"Everyone is at that level, but what separates us?

"The quality of your humanity.

"Even if you are supposed to be descended from the Prophet,

if someone happens to ask your neighbour,

"'Who told you such and such a thing?'

"And he replies, 'It was this man who told me',

"People will say to him, 'What, this man? Do you trust his word?'

"You will have lost your reputation,

"You will have lost your dignity.

"The Prophet's morality will have gone from you, and you will

not be ranked among the sharifs of eternity.

"If you are a son of the slave Bilali² but you strictly honour

your given word, people will die for your sake and your

1 These are the four principal nyamakala groups of the Bambara social hierarchy: jeliw = the principal oral artists, funew = bards specializing in Islamic subjects, garankew = leather-workers, numuw = blacksmiths.

2 The slave Bilāl, an early convert to Islam, became a companion of Muhammad and the first mu'adhdhin or caller to prayers.

nobility will be assured.

"This and nothing else is nobility.

"It is not a tree you can climb on,

"It is no other special thing.

"Your given word and your behaviour must correspond.

"What do you think of this?

"First you said you would choose someone, but you could not agree.

"Then you were going to vote on two people but you did not agree.

"Finally you decided to cut straws and call three people to come
and select them.

"If the second person chose the same straw as the first, and
if the third one chose the same straw as the other two,
if three different people chose the same straw, you were
to recognize him as our chief.

"He would be the one chosen to lead us, to talk about our problems.

"Biton's straw was chosen by the youngest of the young boys.

"Next, the youngest of the newly circumcised boys came and chose
the same straw.

"Then a pregnant woman came and chose the same straw again.

"Eh! One porcupine has died and another porcupine has died,¹
and if the hedgehog is not a bastard, his time has come to
rule the fatherland."

Then the elders said, "So be it".

When the griot finished speaking, all the horon pushed their
heads into goatskin bags,² and then they looked at one
another.

1 References to Biton's ancestry; 'porcupine' is a metaphor for 'warrior'.

2 They were ashamed.

The griot stood up and praised Biton:

"Son of Mother Sunun Sakho, your straw has been chosen.

"Sunun Mamary, son of Dalibaje Sakho, your straw has been chosen.

"Sunun Mamary, son of Kabaje Sakho, your straw has been chosen.

"In case we might not recognize you, we will call you 'He-Came-
From-Mansa-Kuru'.¹

"Mansa Kuru descended from Sonzoguru Souma,

"Sonzoguru Souma descended from Sonzo,

"Sonzo Danintiemoko descended from Jina Kataba,

"Jina Kataba descended from Fantawuye,

"Fantawuye sired Jina Barikonjan.

"Your grandfather Mansa Kuru went to make war on Baningsirayila,

"He came back with one hundred stilts² and one hundred boliv.

"As he passed by Suba he dropped a boli, and the people of Suba
called it 'Suba Mansa'.

"He dropped another one at Kaana and the Kaana people named
it 'Kaana Mansa'.

"He threw three boliv into the river.

"The first became an electric fish, the second became a spiny
fish, and the third became a catfish.

"If an electric fish shocks you in the water, it is one of Mansa
Kuru's boliv.

"If the people nearby do not come to help you, it will be worse

1 Mansa = chief or master, kuru = canoe; some informants claim that the patronymic Kouloubaly was 'Kurubali' in an earlier form, and that it derived from the word 'canoe'. Tauxier names Souma as Biton's predecessor, with Danfassari before Souma as the one who settled at Segou ('Chronologie', p. 263).

2 This is puzzling, but it could refer to stilts used by dancers who performed in some spirit society celebration; the Dogon have stilt-dancers.

than electric shock.

"Other hands must bring you near a fire to protect you from the cold,¹ and unless God is with you, you will go to lahara, killed by Mansa Kuru's boli.

"If a spiny fish sticks you in the water, and people do not pull the spines from the skin of your foot and put palm oil on the wound and burn it, the poison is very dangerous.

"It can easily kill someone.

"As for the catfish, the sons of Kouloubaly's sisters do not eat it because it is their ancestor's boli.

"Any woman in the world whose jamu is Kouloubaly never eats the catfish.

"This is because the catfish is their ancestor's boli."

The griot told all this to Biton after he was elected.

SEGOU ECONOMICS

Even if a dreadful event is hidden from you, it affects the family of someone else.²

In those days there were no automobiles in this land.

In those days there were no horse-drawn wagons in our land.

We used to send our messengers on horseback.

We griots praise the horses like this:

1 The griot is warning Biton Kouloubaly that he must not try to rule alone, that he will encounter many problems for which he will require the help of his councillors.

2 There is always tragedy somewhere, and those who are happy today may be sad tomorrow.

"Fawaali, possessor of the ruins,
 "Host-killing hunter,
 "Stranger in the afternoon and village chief by morning,
 "Mouth full of chain,
 "Back full of saddle,
 "Your forefeet dig a grave and your hind feet close it.
 "Your tail swishes angrily,
 "Your bridle joggles angrily,
 "Your eyes blink angrily,
 "Your nostrils flare wrathfully,
 "Your ears shake wrathfully,
 "Your head tosses wrathfully."

In those days donkeys carried all our loads.

They would travel from here to Man, from here to Denenin,¹ and
 bring back kola nuts to our land.

There were no automobiles here in those days.

This is how we praise the donkeys.

We praise them "tibi and taba, dangerous lake and treacherous
 river,

"Tukun-tukun and pari-pari,²

"Donkeys of different colours travelling together,

"Marka woman's dowry.³

1 Old centres of commerce in the area of the present-day Ivory Coast.

2 tibi-tabu = the sound of donkey hooves; tukun-tukun and pari-pari = donkey colours.

3 The Marka (Soninke) were known for their long journeys as merchants, carrying their goods on donkeys which they valued highly.

"The he-donkey has a white mouth, though it was bleached by
nobody's mother's tô¹ flour.

"Its eyelids are large, but they are nobody's mother's distaff.

"Its ears are large, but they are not used to fan the chaff from
anybody's mother's millet.

"Its legs are thin, but they are not used to stir anybody's
mother's tô.

"Its tail hangs near the ground, but all Marka cannot reach it.²

"If a Marka touches its tail he will be rich in ten years and
ten months, or he will know a lot about the world."

In those days, donkeys were here by fives, by tens, by twenties,
They were used to travel through thick forests from here to Man.
Donkeys were loaded with kola nuts, and old men followed them
with sticks.

They would bring kola nuts very far from Abidjan country.

Now that automobiles are here, donkeys seem slow.

Many have been abandoned, but autos are not enough.

Everyone knows we are in a world that looks for speed, and the
world will have no more peace.

They said, "This is not a bad idea, let us agree on it."

Everything the council decided became the practice,

Everything the council decided was maintained by traditional law.

The law was not a separate tree,

The law was a fact on which people agreed.

1 A starchy food staple made from pounded yam or manioc.

2 Only prosperous Marka could afford to own a donkey.

In those days there was no money in our land,

In those days there were no cowries in our land.

Small river stones were not here either.¹

In early times our trading was done by simple barter.

If you had some millet you took it to someone who had fish.

If you had fish you took them to someone who had sumbala²

and traded for it.

If you needed something, you would take what you had to your

neighbour and make a trade.

This one who wanted to trade his milk would come to the one who

wanted to trade his millet.

This one who wanted to trade his millet would come to the one

who wanted to trade his milk.

Another would take his millet to get fish.

This is how trade was done in former times.

Things you had were exchanged for things you needed.

Then came the small white river stones.

The men of ancient times used to trade with them, but the white

river stones finally fell out of use.

The men of ancient times travelled to the land of Sierra Leone,

and on the riverbanks there they found cowrie shells that had

not been used.

1 ba bete kese: ba = river, betew = stones, kese = small. Small white and beige stones are sometimes kept by diviners who cast and read them to foretell events, and they are also sometimes used in the game of mperi, but there is no documentation to support Tahiru's claim that they were once used as currency.

2 A strong-smelling black condiment sold in fist-sized balls made from the seeds of the néré plant which is related to the mimosa family.

Little by little they brought the cowries here and began to
use them for trade.

They traded with these cowries, five five, ten ten.¹

When the Bamana sun went down, the white men came and ruled the
land.

With them they brought the 'four-cornered-son-of-the-bank',

The 'kick-on-the-buttocks',

The 'put-him-in-jail', and the 'wedding-wealth-of-madam'.²

The white men made them in Paris.

He made them and sent them to Dakar.

He brought them to Bamako, and they even reached Nioro.

They would say dalashi³, 'spend-the-night-at-the-door'.

Next to dalashi came dubali,⁴ 'family-heads-are-unable-to-rule'.

Next to dubali came tama⁵, 'not-every-man-was-a-traveller'.

In former times nyamakalaw would travel, but nowadays all the
world travels, everyone is on his feet.

Next to tama came tanka,⁶ 'honor-were-respected-in-former-times'.

Nowadays there is no respect for people.

What came next to tanka?

They called it pikini,⁷ 'forced-labour-and-bad-food'.

1 Bambara counting is done in increments of five.

2 These were satirical Bambara names for four different denominations of French banknote.

3 The five franc piece.

4 The two franc piece.

5 The one franc piece.

6 The fifty centime piece.

7 The twenty-five centime piece.

They worked with shovels and picks,

They ate zakaroba¹ with dried-fish sauce for dinner.

They² used people to dig their dry rivers.

People dug canals at Markala, and they made a bridge at
Jabaribougou.

Next to pikini came koporo³, 'people-have-been-spoiled'.

Next to koporo came shu,⁴ 'if-he-died-they-paid-his-taxes'.

Unless you died, you had to pay taxes to the government, even if
you had to steal to do it.

Finally came the santimin,⁵ 'you-must-stick-to-the-job-you-are-
doing'.

When the white men brought coins to the Bamana, every one of them
came to have a special meaning.

In those days Usuman Jire was in Sekoro teaching the Koran to
his students.

Kolomba Dembele from Minianka land was also there, having
settled near Usuman Jire.

Sumanbare Tiere from black Bobo land had settled there too.

He had come to live near the others.

In those days the Tigenbon family controlled the river water at
Segou.

1 A roughly pounded preparation of millet that is cooked with shea butter and salt, regarded as unpalatable and usually reserved for prisoners and the like.

2 The French colonials.

3 The ten centime piece.

4 From the French sou, five centimes.

5 From centime, the one centime piece.

There were four famous women in Segou: Mother Dunanba,

Mother Sunun, Mother Jonin and Mother Makore.

After Biton was chosen mansa, he went to see his mother at Sekoro.

He told her about the election council, and how the elders and

hunters of Segou had made him their leader.

Mother Sunun was very glad of this, she was very happy to hear it.

She gathered one hundred girls at Sekoro, one hundred young boys

at Sekoro,

She gathered one hundred women at Sekoro.

She collected all these groups together and told them why they

were summoned.

Some had to fetch dry wood for making millet beer.

Some had to water the beer millet to make it grow.

Some had to mix water with honey for beer.

Some had to make wild raisin beer, because the killing of a goat

for a feast should not prevent the killing of a dog.¹

Every meat has its eater, and her son had become a mansa.

After Biton became chief of the council, the Bamana used to leave

Segou and come to drink at Sekoro.

When they went they walked along the path, when they returned

drunk, they stumbled through the brush.

That was the origin of the saying, "Followers of wrong paths,

"Two water skins and two bags,² you came on the right path but

returned through the brush."

1 Though they were making the best kinds of beer for the celebration, they did not scorn the more ordinary kind.

2 The stomachs and heads of drunks hold beer like water-skins hold water.

The Bamana did this three times,

They did this three merry times,

They did it on three occasions.

They said, "Heee, let us see what the problem is.

"When Biton came to power, we all knew his mother did not lead us
by a cotton thread, and Biton himself did not shoot to
catch us."¹

"There was no force, for the council agreed on him and chose him
our leader, and he has not done wrong by us.

"Since Biton came to power his mother has given us beer and
honey.

"We have spent the whole day drinking in their compound and
returned home after, but we have not done any ploughing for
her, nor have we cleared a field for her.

"Let us see about this problem, for things have become good
for us."

The Bamana realized that things had become very good for them,
so they each brought ten cowries and put them all together.

"Ko di ya ran na, things-have-become-good-for-us", they said,

"We must give these cowries to Biton's mother at Sekoro".

This became a permanent custom.

The cowries were given to Biton, and he replaced 'things-have-
become-good-for-us' with 'the-price-of-honey'.²

The honey-price was collected and given to Biton throughout his
reign.

1 He did not get himself elected through conspiracy, force or guile.

2 This is Tahiru's explanation of how taxes first came to be collected, and how they became known as the 'honey-price'.

The honey-price was collected and given to Ngolo during his time.

The honey-price was collected and given to Fama Da and to Monson,
as well as to Bamuku Nje here in Segou.

After the days of the Bamana power, Alhaji Shaykh Umar brought
Islam with him into the land, and the honey-price was
collected for him.

After he had gone, the white men came, and they were given the
honey-price.

After the days of the white men's power, the money is given to
the Malian people themselves, and this is what we now call
'soul-price'.

It was not a fama who started it, but the people themselves.

This was the origin of soul-price.

To anyone who asks you about the origin of soul-price, tell him

"Things-have-become-good-for-us,

"Let us collect our hands¹ and give them to the mother of our

tontigi,

"For we hold her in high esteem."

This became a permanent custom.

It was the councillors' tribute, and it came to be called the

'honey-price'.

In those days Binaba was chief of Dougoukunan.

The Bamana had been paying the honey-price for many years, but

1 Take up a collection.

Bina of Fabougou¹ said "Hey!

"If a man cannot tolerate a joke at his expense, he must start

a quarrel so people will leave him alone and looking virtuous.

"This yearly tribute will never end.

"It began so long ago that it has become the custom.

"I will pay no tribute this year."

Though all other people had agreed, saying "Things-have-become-

good-for-us, let us collect our hands and give them to the

mother of our tôntigi",

Bina of Fabougou said, "This will last and become the custom, so

I will refuse".

When he refused to pay the honey-price, the sons of the tôn²

gathered and marched on Fabougou.

They said to Bina, "You have corrupted the name of the land!

"For corrupting the name of the land, the sons of the tôn have

come to take you.

- 1 Bina is Binaba, one of the chiefs mentioned earlier. The suffix ba here means 'big'. Dougoukunan would have been the name of his village group, but the chief's home village within that group was Fabougou, which can be translated as 'place of fullness', meaning it was very prosperous, a place where there was plenty to eat. This is significant because the chief was refusing to pay his tribute.
- 2 Originally a kind of men's age grade society that was independent from the rest of the community. Biton Kouloubaly developed this group into a base for his political power. The tôn's strength derived partly from its large membership comprised of men from all levels of society. The tôn prospered from the hunting and farming productivity of its members, who in addition to having plenty to eat were independent of any master's authority. Thus it was an attractive refuge for the poorer members of society, free men as well as slaves who, according to Charles Monteil, abandoned themselves to the tôn and became its first 'slaves' (tôn jonw). Later, there were war captives who served the tôn in a servile capacity, and they too were referred to as tôn jonw. See Charles Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou et du Kaarta (Paris, 1923), pp. 290-299.

"All of your people will be divided among the chief warriors."
 They destroyed the chief's house and captured the men and women.
 They shaved the men's heads, leaving only a thin braided patch.
 The women were shaved in the ordinary way, but the men were
 shaved with a braided patch so they could be easily
 recognized among the other people.

These men became known as tôn jonw or council slaves.¹
 They were punished for having offended the land council.²
 If you hear tôn jon, this is the origin of that name.
 Now the ruins of Fabougou lie between Zoofle and Sekoro.

Some of those tôn jon were in the house of every warrior.
 Whenever you saw one, his head was shaved except for a thin
 braided patch.

He did the dirty work of the village, he performed menial tasks
 in the houses and no one took notice of him.

They would say, "Leave him alone, he is just a tôn jon."

Jeli Sumaila still sings the song "Ton Chief of Segou", which was
 one of Biton's titles:

Ton Chief of Segou, Binaba corrupted us,
 Who told you the Bambara language is easy?
 Ton Chief of Segou, Binaba corrupted us.

But nowadays people have changed the song and they say,

"The day Segou was founded, Binaba called for us.

1 These were captives who served the tôn in a servile capacity, and are not to be confused with the original members of Biton's tôn who referred to themselves as tôn jonw as a title of honour.

2 Here Tahiru employed the term jamana tôn, which translates as 'land council'.

"Who told you the Bambara language is easy?"

This is wrong, they should say,

"Ton Chief of Segou, Binaba corrupted us".

Binaba was a native of Fabougou, and later his people were called

tôn jonw.

Biton Kouloubaly the man-killing hunter and his people ruled

for forty years.

He and his people who ruled for forty years were six in number:

Biton himself, his son Bakary, Pelenkana Kanuba Nyuma, Gashin

Kafa Jugu and Ngoin Ton Mansa.¹

They reigned for forty years.

At that time Ngolo had not come into this land.

At that time Ngolo was in Nyola, for he was the son of Yayiri

of Nyola.

The grandson of Balikoro had not yet come into this land.

If the world were changed into a man, that man would not

tolerate what this world has had to hear.

Since it was created, much speech has been heard in it.

1 The order of succession was Bakary (also known as Ali), Dekoro, Ton Mansa Dembele, Kanuba Nyuma (family name Bari of Fulbe origin), and Kafa Jugu. Some sources claim Bakary was only an insignificant intermediary between Dekoro and Ton Mansa, who were bitter enemies.

SIKA

During his time, Biton had a daughter named Sika.

Sika had many suitors from Shido.

Sika, who lived in Sekoro, did not want to leave her father's village, but her father had already promised that she would be given to someone at Shido, and there was nothing she could do about it.

The bride and her wedding procession left Sekoro, and when they were between Sekoro and Sebougou, Sika let herself fall down on the path.

When she fell down on the path, the griots gathered round and began to praise her.

They said, "The new bride refuses to go".

The griots praised her until Sika, Biton's daughter got up, and they continued on their way until they arrived at the bridegroom's house.

When she got there the Bamana were happy and began to drink, saying, "Sika has arrived in Shido".

This saying, Sika bi sera Shido became a familiar expression in the language.

Sika arrived in Shido and the Bamana said,

"Let us drink, Sika has arrived in Shido".

Later, Biton was told that his daughter had refused to go, and he said, "Very well, this will become the custom for all brides in the land.

"I am master of the land,

"I am the highest noble tontigi of the land, and the refusal of my daughter to go will become the custom for all brides in the land."

When any Bamana bride is on the way to her husband's village,

When she reaches the halfway point, the young girls of the

procession block her path, singing,

"If you want to go, if you want to go, don't fall down, go
willingly.

"But if you don't want to go, fall down in the path."

Then the bride falls down.

This custom is still practiced in the country, but townspeople
have abandoned it.

A girl here in Segou never lets herself fall down any more.

Instead, the escorts give the bride some money which is called
the 'falling-down-price'.

This is how the custom of brides falling down on the path, or
being given falling-down-price originated.

The daughter of Biton the chief tôntigi finally agreed to go to
her husband's house, though she did not want to leave Sekoro
for Shido.

We started the story of Biton yesterday afternoon, and we will
stop here.

I think the story of Biton is finished.

We started this story with the village of Dodougou and how the
Koné clan became Diara.

We told the story of Modiba Koné and his sons, and then we told
the story of the Bamana reign from Biton to Ngolo.

Now where will we start the new story?

We will begin with the story of how the family of Ngolo came to
this land.

We will begin the story tonight and finish it another time.

NGOLO

When they say "Sekoro, Sekoro", the one who founded Sekoro was called Sekou Marifu Karikusi.

Sekou, Sekou: Know that as a man gets older and older here in our land, he will be called 'Sekou'.¹

One who is old and has reached eighty years or one hundred and more, he is called 'Sekoroba'.

This condition of old age, we call it, learned men call it sekouya, what-a-man-knows-how-to-do.²

When Sekou Marifu was in his travelling days, he passed by Jire, where Usuman lived.

Usuman was a learned man who had reached old age, but Sekou's wisdom was older than his.

The wisdom of the one who founded Sekoro was greater than his.

At this time Sekou Marifu Karikusi, who was known as Sekoroba, met Sekou Usuman Jire.

They decided to learn from each other, with one to be the teacher and the other to be the mendicant.³

They say "Usuman Jire, Usuman Jire", but his jamu was not 'Jire' before.

He came from Jire, he was a Jire man.

People would say "Jire man, Jire man", and 'Jire' finally became

1 This name derives from the Arabic shaykh = elder, savant, chief, patriarch. This is also the root of the Bambara name Tiekoro (Cekoro), which for wise old men becomes 'Tiekoroba'.

2 Hereafter translated as 'wisdom'.

3 The idea being that they would take turns in the two roles. Traditionally, Islamic students support themselves and their teachers by soliciting alms.

his jamu.

Jire had a frontier with the Arabs.¹

When the two wise men had been together awhile, one of them settled in Sekoro to instruct his students.

The one who settled in Sekoro was Sekoroba, and he lived there and taught his students.

The one who settled in Sekoro was called Sekoroba, and the village took that name, Sekoro.

Usuman Jire and Sekoroba of Sekoro cleared the trees for this village, and one of them later settled here in Segou.

While one was in Segou and the other was in Sekoro, people needed the two learned men who lived in different places.

Some said, "We are going to Sekoroba's house", and that village took the name 'Sekoro'.

Others said, "We are going to Usuman Jire's house, and his clan took the name 'Jireba', which is here in Segou.

They are almanys² here in Segou.

If anyone else becomes an almany in Segou, it is this family that authorizes it.

No one can ever take away their authority.

When Sekoroba settled in Sekoro it became a crowded village, so he gathered his students and went to start a new quarter, which they called 'Sebouyou'.

They built the bougou of Se, the quarter of Se, and they called it 'Sebouyou'.

1 Possibly a reference to Egypt; Usuman Jire was an almany who lived at Sekoro and advised Biton on some important matters.

2 Muslim clerics.

Later Sebougou became so crowded that Sekura was founded, and

it was called 'New Se' or 'Sekura'.

The power of this village finally reached Segou.¹

The song still says:

They are coming little by little,

The power is coming little by little,

And will soon arrive in Segou.

The youth of Sekoro's power is coming little by little,

And will soon arrive in Segou.

In the days when Biton sat on his royal cowhide, Tiemoko Ngolo

lived in his father's village of Niola, which was the second place they had lived.

The third place was Mantanna, and finally he arrived at Busen.

In the days of Biton's power, Tiemoko Ngolo was only a youth,

but learned men had already noticed omens in his favour.

When Alhaji Salifu Kanin Diallo was returning from his pilgrimage

to Mecca, he came to Niola as some young boys were playing

mperi near a dubalen tree under which sat the elders.

Passing into the village, he addressed the elders, "Old men!"

"We hear you", they replied.

"Please send a boy to bring water for me, I want to drink.

"Please get water for me, I am thirsty."

¹ These villages lie along the Niger River between Sekoro and Segou. Sekoro, Sebougou and Sekura are substantial villages by traditional standards, but small compared to Segou, which is one of the larger towns in Mali, being an important river port, and formerly a primary seat of colonial government. But for the Bambara, Sekoro looms large in historical significance.

They called Ngolo, who filled a ladle and gave it to Alhaji

Salifu Kanin Diallo.

Alhaji Salifu Kanin Diallo drank and handed the ladle to Ngolo,

who had been staring at him.

After drinking the rest of the water, Ngolo took the ladle home.

Alhaji Salifu Kanin Diallo asked, "Whose son is this?"

No one in Niola replied.

"Whose son is this?"

No one in Niola replied.

The third time he asked,¹ Yayiri answered,

"He is my son, I am from Niola".

Said Alhaji Diallo, "Whosoever's son he is, his father will one

day sit in his shade.

"He will sit in the shade of the son he will sire, and he will

sit in the shade of the son of his son."

The shade spoken of by Alhaji Salifu Kanin Diallo was an omen

of power.

All learned men foresaw that one day Ngolo would master all

these lands.

His rival brothers, because of their jealousy, dug a well of

conspiracy against him.

In those days a honey-price of ten cowries was collected from

every person and sent to Biton at Sekoro.

When it was nearing time for the honey-price to be collected,

the rival brothers said,

"We must make a plan on this matter of Ngolo.

1 Traditionally, even a hard question, one that nobody wants to answer, must be responded to when it is asked for a third time.

"Let us cast a bad spell¹ against this thing he has in his head,

"For if we do not, he will become master of the land while we
just sit here.

"Let us contrive to make him fail before that can happen.

"What plan can we make?

"Let us prepare it for when the honey-price collectors come this
year.

"We will refuse to pay the full number of cowries,

"We will give two hundred cowries less twenty and say our hands
could not reach.²

"We will send our brother with the cowries to Biton Kouloubaly
the man-killing hunter.

"We can redeem our brother some other time."³

They agreed on this plan, it became their conspiracy.

They collected two hundred cowries minus twenty, an amount which
the Bambara call fila muganya, one hundred silamiya less
twenty.⁴

1 dabali as Tahiru uses it, has to do with conspiring to cause someone serious misfortune. In the context of sorcery, an example of a dabali would be to take a black hen and kill it while pronouncing the name of the person whose injury or death is desired, then to bury the hen while uttering the appropriate incantation.

2 Fell short of what they reached for, could not obtain the full amount.

3 This appears to refer to human pawnship, but the sources usually indicate that in such cases the individual was simply reduced to slavery in order to liquidate the debt. Nevertheless, in an earlier version, Ngolo accompanies his uncle Menkoro, who goes to deliver the annual tribute of millet, but gambles it away in Segou and offers Ngolo as a substitute. In a clear reference to pawnship, Biton gives him twenty days to buy back the boy with 300 loads of millet, but this is never done.

4 This needs to be confirmed. Tahiru indicated that there was a two-cowrie unit called a 'noble' or silamiya, so one hundred silamiyaw minus twenty was another way of saying two hundred cowries minus twenty (fila muganya). Delafosse lists silamiya as 'Islamism' and silami-ya-keme as cent, centaine (La langue Mandingue II, p. 659).

They chose this number so the honey-price would be incomplete.

The day came when the honey-price collectors arrived, saying,

"We have come for the honey-price, we have come for the honey-price!"

They collected the full honey-price from everyone in the village except for the sons of Yayiri of Niola.

The sons gave their cowries to the honey-price collectors, saying,

"Our hands have only been able to reach the amount of two hundred less twenty, but we will add our brother to make up the difference.

"You can give the boy to Biton Kouloubaly at Sekoro, and when the time is right for us, we will come and redeem him."

The honey-price collectors agreed that Ngolo could be added to the cowries and taken to Sekoro, but when they went to take him, Ngolo said,

"How can you take me away while Mother Makore and Mother Dunaba are picking koro fruit in the bush?

"Wait until Mother Dunaba comes home, she has my shirt and I want to take it with me.

"I cannot go with you while I am naked."

"That may be so", replied the honey-price collectors, "but we are worthy men sent by Biton to collect the honey-price.

"You are now a slave and we cannot let you wait for your mother."

They took Ngolo by the back of the neck and pushed him in front of them while Mother Dunaba was in the bush,

They took Ngolo and gave him to Biton Kouloubaly at Sekoro.

When Mother Dunaba returned from picking koro fruit, she said,

"Where is Ngolo?"

His brothers replied, "The honey-price collectors came in your absence.

"Our hands were only able to reach two hundred cowries less twenty, we had to give him to the honey-price collectors to complete the amount.

"This is why we turned him over to the village chief,¹

"He has been given to Biton Kouloubaly at Sekoro."

"What have you done to me?" cried Mother Dunaba.

"You sent my son away while I was picking koro!"

She took the calabash of koro fruit off her head and dashed it on the ground, saying,

"Be blind, every descendant of Ngolo who eats koro."

This is how the koro became taboo to the Diara.

Because of jealousy they added their younger brother to the honey-price, and gave him to the mansa while his mother was picking koro fruit.

When the mother returned she was dismayed and she made a curse, and after that koro was taboo to the descendants of Ngolo.

Ngolo was given to Biton.

He was well-built, with a long neck, perfect feet, and a long waist.

God gave Tiemoko Ngolo a beautiful face.

No one in the world could challenge his beauty.

When he was given to Biton Kouloubaly at Sekoro, the mansa had Ngolo sit next to his mat so he could admire him.

¹ It was the village chief's responsibility to see that everyone in his village had their taxes ready for collection.

Ngolo was a surprise to Biton, who was astonished by his beauty. Weary from the journey, Ngolo lay down near the mat and sleep took him.

As he slept, his nostrils made this sound:

"Fanga, fanga, fanga, power, power, power."

Biton was amazed, and he said, "Whomsoever this person might be, whatever his fate might be, only God knows.

"I do not know the nature of it."

As Biton sat perplexed near Ngolo, he shrugged and said,

"So be it!"

In those days Biton had divining masters in the seven-doored council house.

He also had young marabouts at the seven-doored council house.¹

Biton summoned them and said, "When I, Biton, when my soul departs,

"When all men known as 'Kouloubaly, Kouloubaly' are finished, who will take our place and rule Segou after us?

"I want you to spread your dust and read the omens of this Ngolo before I go to lahara."

The diviners filled the floor of a hut with tien signs² and studied them carefully.

1 Tahiru often refers to the seat of power at Segou as 'the seven-doored council house', by which he means that the council chamber was approached through a series of entrance rooms, each opening into the next, though there may not have been more than three of these. Monteil mentions a council house at Sekoro called the Biton blon-da (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 31), and he subsequently gives the local definition of blon-da as 'the door of the dead', meaning the place where the elders sat and made their sacrificial offerings (p. 171).

2 Certain diviners were called tiendalaw, and their method was to make signs (tien or 'truth words') in the dust, which they would read to foretell future events.

The cowrie throwers scattered cowries on the floor of a hut and sat studying them.

After they all read the omens, the diviners addressed Biton

Kouloubaly the man-killing hunter, saying,

"Very well, Sunun Mamary, son of Masunun Sakho,

"Sunun Mamary, son of Dalibaje Sakho,

"Sunun Mamary, son of Kaabajé Sakho, Koyan Sange and Koyan Mamuru,

"Mamuru the grove dweller and taster of big cailcedra.¹

"Wily lion with the big odd-shaped drum.²

"Bravest of the brave, grandfather of women.

"When people walking in single file are told to turn and go in the opposite direction, those who were last will be first."

They said this to Biton Kouloubaly the man-killing hunter:

"If you want to know who will rule when you are gone, you must make a dege, a porridge of offering.³

"Put a mutukali of gold at the bottom of the calabash under the porridge, and take notice of the child who brings out the gold in his ladle when drinking it.

"One of the boys in the village will take your place when you are gone."

"So be it", said Biton, "Pound millet for the porridge and call

1 The cailcedra tree, khaya senegalensis. The praising is obscure, but may refer to the hunter's tale of Mamary's early adventures in the grove with the genies who healed the antelope.

2 The big drum refers to the 'thunderous sounds', e.g. powerful force wielded by the mansa. A reference to the mansa's head could also be involved in the metaphor.

3 dege = a porridge made of pounded millet or corn flour mixed with sugar and water favoured by children, but also eaten by adults for breakfast.

the children of my lineage to come and drink it."

Ngolo was living among these children, and when Biton's sons gathered, he watched them begin to eat.

Soon the other children called Ngolo to come and help them drink the porridge.

As the others took theirs from the surface of the calabash, Ngolo dipped his ladle deep into the bottom.

He took one ladleful, a second ladleful, always bringing up what was in the bottom.

At the third ladleful, Ngolo took the mutukali of gold from his mouth and put it in his pouch.

In those days children did not need nice clothes like they do nowadays,

People in those days did not make clothes for babies who were not yet born.

A child could grow big wearing only the young boy's loincloth, a piece of cloth two strips wide with the ends hanging down on either side.

An uncircumcised boy could grow big wearing only the loincloth two strips wide, and when he was old enough they would sew him a loincloth three strips wide.

When a boy was big enough, he had to be circumcised, and after circumcision he could wear the three parts of a man's clothing, the hat, shirt and trousers.

When he could wear these clothes, when a boy could wear the three parts of a man's clothing, it meant he had become a mature man.

On that day Ngolo was wearing his loincloth,

He wore a loincloth and a small pouch for cowries hung at
his side.

He put the mutukali of gold into his cowrie pouch.

When the children had drunk their fill of the porridge, they
went to Biton to thank him saying,

"Thank you, thank you, may all things be as you wish,

"Thank you, thank you, may all things be as you wish."

But the mutukali of gold had not gone into the mouth of a child
of Biton's lineage, nor had it gone into the mouth of a
child of one of the other village families.

The great man summoned his lineage children and asked if they
had found anything, but each child replied that he had found
nothing in his mouth.

Then Biton asked, "Did I not see you eating the porridge with
a stranger?"

"Yes", replied the children, "That was Ngolo".

"Why did you invite Ngolo to drink my porridge?" asked Biton.

The children replied, "He is a child too, and was with us,
so we thought he might also be hungry.

"He sat down with us and we drank together, but we did not ask
if he found anything in his mouth."

Biton sent for Ngolo, and said to him,

"When you were drinking, did something enter your mouth?"

"Did you find something, or not?"

Ngolo replied, "If I will not be punished, I have found something."

"What did you find?" asked Biton.

Ngolo said, "A mutukali of gold came from the porridge I had in
my mouth."

And Biton said, "That is what was worrying me."

Though a misfortune has missed your house, it must be happening
to someone else.

People deceive each other for nothing.

It is true that we are from the same mother,
We are from the same father, but until the world is rolled up,
people will not be united.

Since God created the world, people have been different and they
always will be.

"Very well", said Biton, "Keep what is in your hand, it is
worth your life.

"The thing you have in your hand is worth your life.

"The day you lose it we will cut your big head from your big
neck."

"Very well, I hear you", said Ngolo.

He put the gold in his pouch,

He slept with it and woke up with it.

A man will be what he is born for, even if people scorn him.

You will always be what God created you for.

Biton assigned five people to follow Ngolo everywhere.

They wanted to cut the bag while he slept so the gold would
be lost.

This would give them reason to kill him and make him disappear
from the land, but that which had been foreseen would be
made to come true by God.

They did not want Ngolo to master the land, so the five men
followed him day and night, everywhere he went.

Sleep never allows a debt, and one day sleep took Ngolo away.

As he slept, they cut the pouch from his neck.

They took the mutukali of gold and threw it in the river.

When they threw the gold into the river, a dogfish swallowed it.

The men reported to Biton that what he had wanted was done,
saying,

"We got the mutukali of gold and threw it into the river, and
even God does not know where we threw it, not to mention
anyone He created."

Biton said, "Then Ngolo must have his head cut off.

"When you lose a thing though you have been told you will be
killed if you lose it, you must be determined to have your
head cut off."

When Ngolo awoke the next morning, he looked in his pouch and
saw that the gold was gone.

That day he was very dejected and sad.

If someone spoke to him, he did not answer.

If someone tried to laugh with him, he did not respond.

If someone tried to joke with him, he turned it into a quarrel,
and people said, "Ngolo, what is wrong with you today?"

"What have you heard to make you sad?"

"You speak to no one, you laugh with no one, what is the matter?"

"What have you been told?"

Ngolo replied, "My belly is my belly.

"To tell one's business to others brings misfortune, and I do
do not like too many words."

Ngolo was greatly loved by Biton's favourite wife.¹

¹ bara muso = privileged wife. According to Monteil's griot, Ngolo's protectress was Dante Balo, the wife of Biton's blacksmith.

She loved him to the point of swallowing him.

The favourite wife heard the men tell Biton they had taken the mutukali of gold, that they had thrown it into the river where even God could not find it, not to mention anyone He had created.

Biton was full of confidence.

He was sure Ngolo would be taken to the execution clearing, and that he would have his head taken from his neck.

There was an execution hut in that clearing.

If you were taken there, you could be certain you would have your head cut from your neck.

In those days the Somono of Segou were masters of the river.¹

They covered the river with their nets, and they would fish all night.

They caught many fish and brought them to the shore.

Ngolo was to have his head cut off the next morning, but Biton's favourite wife said,

"Do not kill him right now, first let him go and buy some fish for me.

"If he can first buy and prepare my fish for me, then you may do with him whatever you want to do."

"Very well", they said, "this will not prevent us from cutting off his head", and they released him.

Ngolo came into Segou and went to where the Somono were selling fish.

¹ The Somono are Bambara-speaking fishermen of the Niger and Bani rivers in the region of Segou and San.

The almighty God said, "If I set aside all my other work to send someone to do something, no one can stop it from being done.

"Everyone will perform the tasks I assign him,

"Everyone will speak of whatever I assign him to say."

Ngolo bargained with the seller of the first large fish¹ he saw.

They soon agreed on a price and Ngolo bought the fish.

He took it home, and when he sat down on the ground to scale it, the executioners told him to hurry.

He scaled the whole fish and then cut it open to clean it.

Ngolo felt afraid, because death was near him.

Now, as soon as the favourite wife's fish was cooked, there would be nothing separating him from losing his head, nothing except the time it would take to walk to the place of execution.

The executioners said, "We will cut off your head now, because our power has eaten you.

"You were given something to keep with you in trust, but you did not guard that trust well."²

"You betrayed the trust and we are going to cut your head from your neck, as everyone has agreed."

Ngolo sat dejected near the cooking fish until it was done.

At last he had to take the prepared fish to Biton's favourite wife, who said,

1 Tahiru specified that the fish was a capitan, which is a large, especially delicious type similar to a bass.

2 The implication here is that Ngolo was being wrongfully blamed for betraying the custom of kalifa. When someone was entrusted with the guardianship of a child, livestock, or some other particularly valuable possession, this was regarded as a sacred trust (kalifa). To betray this trust was one of the most serious crimes imaginable.

"A slave of God cannot know as much as his creator.

"Come and open the intestines of the fish, for one never knows."

Ngolo opened the intestines of the fish and found the mutukali of gold inside.

Biton's men had thrown the mutukali of gold into the river and this fish had swallowed it.

Ngolo bought the same fish, opened its belly, looked in the intestines and found the mutukali of gold there.

As Ngolo sat there, he laughed and laughed.

He was so full of relief and happiness that he fell over, for he was saved from the execution sword.

Ngolo was told to hurry because the executioners were waiting. Finished with the fish, he went to the council house to answer the summons.

The councillors said, "You have kept us waiting".

Ngolo replied, "That is true, but I was working".

Said the councillors, "Was that work more urgent than ours?"

"We have summoned you for no other reason than to hand over that which was left in your trust."

Ngolo put his hand into his pouch, took out the mutukali of gold and placed it in Biton's hand.

Then Biton the man-killing hunter spoke to his executioners.

He spoke to the men who had followed Ngolo, the ones who said they threw the mutukali of gold where even God did not know, much less anyone He had created.

Angrily, Biton said, "You have fooled yourselves.

"You have intrigued against yourselves, for you have tried to deceive me, but you have fooled yourselves.

"You conspired against yourselves, for you did not ensnare Ngolo.

"You said with your mouths that you threw the mutukali of gold where even God did not know, but Ngolo is not God, he is not a genie, nor is he an angel, so how did he find it?"

The councillors agreed, and they spared Ngolo from the executioner's sword.

The five men were taken to the killing ground and their heads were cut from their necks.

When the big heads were cut from the big necks, the two shoulders became milk brothers,¹ and the rest of their bodies were done away with.

As their blood ran like kolobaji,² they staggered and fell like sacrificed cows of Manding.

After the execution the councillors said, "Alright, now what shall we do with Ngolo?"

He was allowed to stay in the village, but another conspiracy was soon mounted against him.

This is why people use the expression, 'A Segou-type conspiracy'.

When they say "Diara in the shea trees, place of the balanzan trees, four thousand balanzan, four hundred balanzan, four balanzan and one small crooked balanzan."

"Not every native knows where they are, least of all a stranger."

They are not really talking about balanzan trees,

They are talking about conspiracy.

These intrigues did not concern the common people.

1 They became closer because there was no longer a head separating them.

2 This is an odious, worthless liquid left over from making shea butter.

In former times when the wickedness of a mansa had become intolerable, the people would say, "Alright, let us change the millet now, because this has become spoiled, and time has come to replace it."

In Bamana-land this meant that a well of conspiracy was being dug.

In those days, if you were a wicked mansa, they would conspire to come for you at midnight, and you would be replaced.

The next plot agreed upon was to send Ngolo out with the hay cutters.

Ngolo was a dawulama, a very popular person, and he was followed everywhere by the village children.

He had kadarama¹ and the village children went everywhere with him.

Ngolo was sent out with the hay cutters, and men were assigned to spy on his every move.

They planned that when he came along in front of the others with a load of hay on his head, they would cut his head from his neck.²

As the hay cutters returned with their loads, it was as if some magic thing warned Ngolo to walk behind the others.

Ngolo came behind all the other young boys, carrying his load of hay, and as the first boy came along, tchow! They put the sword to his neck.

They took his big head from his big neck, and his two shoulders

1 Roughly the equivalent of charisma.

2 This plot hinged on two points, the first being that when people carry a load of hay, it sags down around the face so they cannot be recognized, and the second was that since Ngolo was always followed everywhere by the other boys, the assassins assumed he would be first in the file of hay carriers.

became milk brothers and the blood flowed like the
kolobaji of Manding.

The rest of his body spun around like the sacrificial goat of
a worthy man of Manding, but Ngolo was still alive.

The second day they again cut off the head of the first boy in
line.

The third day, they again sent Ngolo out with the hay cutters, and
it was as if Ngolo was told by God to walk in the middle
of the line, for on that day he walked in the middle of
the group.

They cut off the head of the boy who came at the end of the line,
but it was not Ngolo.

A man will never be what he is not created to be.

Biton said, "So be it", and Ngolo remained in Biton's house,
doing all the hard labour for him.

The family of Biton made him suffer much.

It was a case of 'Today is bad, but tomorrow is worse'.

Biton's favourite wife feared that the intrigue would one day
succeed against Ngolo, and she decided that the boy must be
sent away with the Suraka¹ salt traders.

They took Ngolo with them to Walata² and left him with Sekou
Mukutari Kabiru Kunta of Lakaban.

Biton and his councillors said, "Alright, there is a little
village between us and the Bani River, called 'Dona'.

From Segou they launched an attack on Dona because they were told

1 The Bambara term for Berber-speaking Saharan peoples.

2 A town in the southern Sahara, once an important terminus of
the trans-Saharan trade.

Ngolo had gone there.

When this war came to Dona the people said, "kele dona an kan, war came in to us", and this expression kele dona an kan became the name of the village.

It is near the banks of the Bani, and they called it 'Dona' then, but nowadays people call it 'Tona'.

The warriors stopped at a place where they could eat much sebe fruit.¹

Later the seeds from these sebe sprouted, and they still grow there.

Even tomorrow morning, if you go to the bank of the Bani, you will see the grove of sebe trees.

The warriors crossed the river and launched an attack on the Chief of Tona, but he claimed he had not seen Ngolo, so they turned away and went elsewhere in their search.

Ngolo lived with the Kunta family, and there came to be a special friendship between the family of Ngolo and the Kunta family.

Sekou Mukutari Kabiru Kunta told his councillors not to force Ngolo to return to Segou before he was ready to go, so Ngolo stayed with Sekou Mukutari Kabiru² in Lakaban.

In those days, Alhaji Salif Kane Diallo was reckoned among the learned men there.

Ngolo lived with the Kunta as his childhood ended and he became an adult.

1 From a tree called the rônier in French.

2 Shaykh Sidi al-Mokhtar, whose dates (c. 1730-1811) support Tauxier's argument that the dates usually given for the Bambara rulers are too early ('Chronologie', p. 263).

They told him no one would force him to go back and that when Biton's day was finished, God would allow Ngolo to return. One day Ngolo went and sat down by Sekou Mukutari Kabiru Kunta and said, "Segou has called me and I want to go back". "So be it",¹ said Sekou Mukutari Kabiru Kunta, "I will gather my family and show them the word". He called his clan and said, "The ward who was entrusted to us has been called by his fatherland. "Ngolo wants to go home, so let us meet in a perfect way² and say something to each other. We must send him on his way with words of value." The Kunta clan gathered and held a meeting in which they agreed to let Ngolo return to his fatherland. They blessed him and gave him six talismans to take with him to Segou. What were the six talismans? They gathered seven girls who had never slept with men and gave each of them some cotton. The virgins cleaned the cotton, removed the seeds, and combed it. They spun the cotton into thread and wound it on a distaff. They separated the weft thread³ from the warp thread⁴ on the same day, and they gave it to a weaver who wove it on his loom.

1 bashite = (roughly) 'so be it', a phrase often heard in Tahiru's narrative.

2 In peace and harmony.

3 gese = the 'weft' or 'woof' threads that cross the warp and are carried by the shuttle.

4 fale = the warp threads that are extended lengthwise in the loom and crossed by the weft or filling threads, usually stouter than the weft.

They cut seven strips of cloth and gave them to Ngolo to take to Segou.

The Kunta told him, "These seven strips of cotton cloth will bring you the love of the Segou people, for they contain the energy of your power in Segou."

The Kunta also gave Ngolo some balls of shea butter, and they made an oil lamp for him to take to Segou.

They said, "The lamp is the light of your power in Segou.

"As long as you light this oil lamp in your sleeping room, you will remain master of Segou.

"If you remain on good terms with the Bamana, you will be loved as no other mansa was before, and you will be more respected than any other.

"The prosperity your power will bring will be greater than that of any other mansa before you.

"We made these for you as talismans and blessings to help you return to your fatherland.

"A fatherland can be pawned, but it cannot be sold."

The work of the seven virgins was the first thing they gave Ngolo, and it made him very happy.

Next the Kunta told Ngolo to fetch some river sand, put it in a pile, and build a small hut over it.

Then Sekou Mukutari Kabiru Kunta blessed Ngolo, saying,

"God has granted what the diviners foresaw,

"God has agreed with what they said.

"If God refuses to answer the prayers of a young marabout, it is certain that the marabout has not respected God's taboos.

"If you respect God's taboos, do not do what he told you not to do,

"Do what he told you to do, and he will answer your prayer.

"God has given us Kunta what we desired from him."¹

Ngolo brought sand from the river and built a small hut on it,

and after the blessing, this sand turned to gold.

The gold was all stuck together like an ant hill, an ant hill

with eaves like a thatched roof.

It resembled a fan in the bush.²

Sekou Mukutari Kabiru Kunta gave all this gold to Ngolo.

"Take this with you", he said, "The power of a mansa is

not complete without food.

"An owner of much food is the only man to whom a mansa gives

up gunpowder.

If famine enters among the warriors, they will run away, they

will scatter.

"The world is a strange place.

"So give thanks to God,

"The only one who created the night,

"Who created the day,

"Who created the man,

"Who created the woman,

"Who created sickness and health.

"Add this gold to the seven strips of cloth and the oil lamp.

"I did this for you so that you may be blessed,

1 The Kunta are known to have been early converts to Islam.

2 The ant hill referred to is not the giant red type that can be six or eight feet tall, but the short, grey mushroom-shaped ones which viewed from the side would resemble a fan. The tops of the latter type can withstand rain better than man-made mud bricks, and are often placed along the tops of walls to keep them from eroding in heavy rains.

"I did this for you so that you may gain power,

"I did this for you to help you when you become a mansa."

Next, the Kunta blessed the milk of a young black cow, poured it

into a new clay pot and gave it to Ngolo, saying,

"Take this with you.

"If you keep it with you, cows of Segou may die, but not of

cattle disease.

"I give this to you so people will bless you."

Then the Kunta blessed three millet plants and gave them to

Ngolo to take to Segou, saying,

"Even if other millet plants will not bear an ear of millet,

these will bear.

"Even if other millet plants will not pollinate, these will

pollinate.

"Even if other millet plants will not flower, these will flower.

"If you keep these on your land, Segou may hear about famine,

but famine will never kill anyone there as it does in other

lands.

"Famine will never kill anyone in Segou.

"You will only hear of famine.

"Famine will never shame anyone in Segou, for we have provided

the blessings against that."

Ngolo received the three millet plants of Lakaba, and Sekou

of the Kunta said,

"I add this to the blessings I have already given you,

"I add this to the things destined to support your power,

"I add this to your other talismans."

Then the Kunta blessed a chicken that was sitting on three eggs

and gave it to Ngolo.

He said, "You will keep this hen sitting on these eggs while you are in power, and it will be the symbol of the secrecy you need to retain power in Segou.

"As long as this hen nests on its eggs, even two uncircumcised boys could not hatch a plot in Segou without giving it away, not to mention two men.

"This is the secret of your power."

This became a custom in the land.

Every mansa who ruled this land,

Everyone who became a chief benefited by Ngolo's blessings, for this custom was preserved as the basis of power.

All Bamana agreed not to divulge secrets upon which they had agreed.

Then came the white men's day, and they called this practice securité.

If you cannot keep a secret, you are not allowed to enter the council.

In the Securité¹ only men who can keep secrets can be policemen and gendarmes.

This is the basis of power, and the keeping of well-guarded secrets originated in Ngolo's time.

A hen nesting in a clay pot is the symbol of secrecy, and the secret will never be divulged unless the hen is killed.

This ancient symbol of secrecy continued with later rulers.

If you have a relative who is about to be executed and you ask for information about him from a man in the Securité, he

¹ The present-day Malian police force, known as the Securité Nationale du Mali.

will simply answer you, "It is not a serious case".

It may be a serious case, but he will never agree to discuss the problem.

In the matter of power, if you have a relative called to the police office or gendarmerie, if they tell you it is not serious, it is a bad thing that has been started.

They will never explain the real problem to you.

This became the custom in all governments, ancient and modern.

All governments are guaranteed by such secrecy.

If a man is to be executed, he will be executed to the great surprise of his relatives.

A secret that is agreed upon is never divulged ahead of time.

Kunta gave these six things to Ngolo, and he took them with him to Segou.

Since that day, every man who has come to power in Mali has feared people who are said to be natives of Segou.

People say Segou is a bad place.

Everyone who has to move to Segou is afraid and says,

"I will soon be going to Segou, and Segou is really bad".

Ngolo's talismans were prepared for this place.

After Biton's day, there was an old man in Sebougou named Nzan of Domila.

(Domila is beyond Kati in the Beledougou region.)

Nzan was from Domila in Beledougou, but he came and settled in Sebougou.

Nzan of Domila played a horn called ndomari.

Ngolo returned to Segou, and when he arrived, he had to contend

with Nzan of Domila¹ in Sebourgou.

Nzan of Domila was older than Ngolo, but Ngolo had come to live in Segou earlier than Nzan of Domila.

People said, "If they are fighting because of age, Nzan of Domila will become master of the land, but if they are fighting over who came first, Ngolo will become master of the land."

It was decided that Ngolo would be elected as the fama², but before Ngolo came to power, the councillors said,

"What can we do? No one can come to power until we summon all the slaves."³

"No one can come to power until we summon all the sofaw."⁴

After they said this, they gathered the Bamana and crossed the river.

Ngolo had a first son called Nje of Bamabougou.

Nje of Bamabougou organized the army and followed his father across the river with it.

On that day the Bamana did a ritual.⁵

They swore an oath together, saying,

"Until the descendants of Ngolo are finished, we will install no other person in place of them."

1 Nankoroba Nzange, formerly chief of the slaves of Biton's mother. He had collected many partisans.

2 A synonym of mansa, roughly 'supreme chief', the difference being in the emphasis on the lord's position as head of the dynasty or lineage group in power.

3 Members of the tôn (council); see n. 2, p. 332.

4 Mounted warriors.

5 A 'truth-word' ritual, swearing the strongest possible oath.

"They will have the power until their line has ended, for no other person can be put in their place."

The Bamana went to do the tien ritual across the river and swore this oath.¹

They brought a red kola nut, cut their arms, and poured the red blood on it. Everyone swore the oath and crunched the kola, saying,

"If anyone should spoil this union, may the four big boliw of Segou not spare him.

"May Bakungoba not spare him,

"May Nangoloko not spare him,

"May Kontoron not spare him,

"May Binyejugu not spare him."²

They all swore this oath and returned home across the river.

1 For about two years following the death of Kafa Jugu, the office of mansa of Segou remained vacant. According to a version of this ritual told more than seventy years before Tahiru's, the meeting that ended the 'period of anarchy' took place across the river from Segou. Ngolo called the meeting, and he arranged it so each chief would take along only one servant, while on the day of the meeting Ngolo secretly dispatched his son Nje across the river with a large mounted force. Each chief took a chicken and a red-haired dog to sacrifice over the four principal boliw of Segou, while Ngolo took a chicken and an ox. However, Ngolo refused to swear an oath that was acceptable to the elder chiefs, and when the latter balked, Nje appeared with his cavalry and forced them to swear the oath that made Ngolo mansa of Segou. Ngolo himself avoided swearing any oath at all (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 69-70).

2 At the turn of the century, the names of the last two of these boliw or altars were given as Kolokoloni and Nye Dingedu.

NJE OF BAMABOUGOU

Ngolo settled his first son, Nje, in Bamabougou.

His next son was Monson, and he settled him at Mpeba.

His sons Jonkele, Nyanankoro, Seri and Mamuru were settled
in Sebourgou.

Ba settled in Kirango, and Demba settled in Masala.

Nalekoma, Turokoro Mari,¹ these were also his sons, and he gave
them each a place to settle.

Nje of Bamabougou had a troubled mind, so he went to see his
father and said, "Baba".

"I hear you", said Ngolo.

Then Nje said, "The thing I have heard is true.

"It is said that before dying and going to lahara, every old man
strikes a blow with an axe in his fatherland, and this
is really true."

"I hear you", said his father.

Nje continued, "You divided up your sons and gave them each a
place to settle.

"Where did you settle Nje? In Bamabougou.

"Where did you settle Monson? In Mpeba.

"And what about Jonkele, Nyanankoro, Seri and Mamuru?

"They are settled in Sebourgou.

"Ba is in Kirango and Demba is in Masala.

1 This is an error. Turokoro Mari (1854-1859) was the next to the last Bambara ruler before the Tukulor conquest of Segou under Al-hājj Umar in 1861. The Monteil version differs on the son's assignments: Monson was at Mpebala, but Nyanankoro was at Sekoro, Pene Mamuru at Sebourgou, Ba at Bia near Togou, Seri at Sofinna, and Nje at Bamabougou (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 75).

"Let us see the problem together.

"The mouth can fail to say something, but the thoughts reveal it."

Ngolo said, "Why do you speak like this?"

Nje replied, "Bamabougou is very far from the riverbank, while
Mpeba is very near the river.

"What about the distance between Sebougou and the river?"

"It is right beside the river.

"This is why I say the mouth can fail to say something but the
behaviour will reveal it.

"You have shown that you prefer your other sons over me."

Ngolo said to Nje of Bamabougou,

"Segou is a group of four villages,

"Markadougou is a group of nine villages,

"Dodougou is a group of twelve villages, six of them on one side
of the river and six on the other side.

"Segou is a group of four villages,

"Markadougou is a group of nine villages,

"Dodougou is a group of twelve villages, and if I am not mistaken,
Markadougou begins in Kukul not far from here.

"From there you reach Little Markadougou, then Busen, then Koke.

"The Fula of Masina are great horsemen and can come easily to
Segou.

"Little Markadougou is an old village where wise, learned and
worthy men reside.

"If the Fula of Masina ride to attack Segou, they will ally
themselves with Little Markadougou, and if they ever become
allies of Little Markadougou, it will be a serious threat
to Segou.

"This is why I settled you in Bamabougou.

"I want you to be our barrier between Segou and the Fula of Masina combined with Little Markadougou.

"The Bamana say 'Nje' and the Fula say 'Hamadi' to describe first sons.

"There are three kinds of 'Nje' in Bamana land:

"Nje the sauce-eater, Nje the dog-seller, and hard-working Nje.

"You are the hard-working Nje."

"I hear what you say", said Nje, and his heart became calm, and he returned to Bamabougou.

While Nje was away, a griot woman named Musokura Diabaté¹ left Segou and went to his home in Bamabougou.

In those days, to be a jeli was worth diamonds.

If one of us destroyed the reputation of a horon, the horon would lose his place in society.

No one would give ten francs for him, much less five thousand, and an uncircumcised boy would not respect him, much less an elder.

But if we praise a horon beyond his rank, no one will keep up with him, and he will work hard to live up to the praise.

If a jeli told his patron to eat beans, he would buy butter.

In those days there was no wealth but nobility, but nowadays nobility is dead, for we live in a day of material wealth.

If a man does not respect his given word but is rich, even if he is not a Muslim and does not respect his given word, people will include him among the nobles anyway.

1 From the patronymic 'Diabaté' it is to be understood that this was a griot woman (jelimuso).

In former times, material wealth could not rank a man among
the horon.

In those days, it was your given word and your behaviour that
made you noble.

It was not because of your wealth that you would get someone's
daughter in marriage, it was your honour and conduct that
got you a wife.

Honour is dead today, but we now live in a time of material wealth.
If you are not rich, you are not allowed to speak.

Even with ordinary things, others will make the decisions and
you will be told about it later.

Musokura went to Bamabougou and said to Nje's wives,

"Good morning noble women who never wash their bodies.

"Good morning noble women who never oil their bodies.

"Good morning ones with grit in their eyes.

"Good morning ones with scum in their mouths.

"Those-who-never-wash-or-oil-themselves,

"I have come from Segou to greet you, and now I am going back."

Musokura Diabaté stayed away for a week and then went back again
and said to Nje of Bamabougou's wives,

"Good morning noble women who never wash their bodies.

"Good morning ones who never oil their bodies.

"Good morning ones with grit in their eyes.

"Good morning ones with scum in their mouths.

"Those-who-never-wash-or-oil-themselves, good morning.

"I have come from Segou to greet you, and now I am going back."

Musokura Diabaté did this three times, and Nje of Bamabougou's
wives were angry.

After Musokura had gone, Nje of Bamabougou returned home.
 He was a true Bamana, and he wore a two-strip bark cloth.¹
 His cap measured two nonkon² and the tassle hung down to his
 buttocks.

He snuffed tobacco to clear his breathing.

From his shoulder hung a semin, a curve-bladed axe of the old
 style.

The horon wives reported what had been happening:

"Listen, our old man, something is happening and we do not
 know why.

"We have been told something we do not understand, and this is why
 we are reporting to you.

"Musokura Diabaté of Segou came here three times to insult us,
 saying,

"Good morning noble women who never wash their bodies.

"Good morning ones who never oil their bodies.

"Good morning ones with grit in their eyes.

"Good morning ones with scum in their mouths.

"Those-who-never-wash-or-oil-themselves, good morning.

"I have come from Segou to greet you and now I am going back."

The wives said, "Whenever you see a griot woman doing such a thing,
 she is doing it for a reason.

"Maybe you have done something to her or told her something.

"We think maybe something has been done to her."

Nje of Bamabougou said to his wives,

"Calm down, this is only between us and our griots.

1 The cloth was woven in strips and sewn together.

2 One nonkon (elbow) equals the distance from elbow to
 fingertips.

"They are thorns, they are stickers, and if we fall on them they will pierce us.

"If they fall on us they will pierce us, and if we fall on them they will stick to us.

"If they fall on us we will get back up together, and I have heard what you said."

The fourth time Musokura came, she found Nje of Bamabougou near the council house where some jeli women were playing the gita.¹

Musokura repeated the insults to Bamabougou Nje, who said to her, "Musokura!"

"I hear you", she replied.

Nje said, "I know you have not spoken like this for no reason, something must have happened.

"You are our soap, and if you wash us, we are clean.

"If you throw dirt on us, we are soiled.

"What is the matter? What are you looking for?"

Musokura said to Nje, "You have said something that pleased my ears.

"The word is an uncircumcised boy, and 'I hear you' circumcises it."²

"Ask me why.

"People ridicule you when they say you have a big name."³

1 A musical instrument in the form of a rattle made of a calabash with cowries and beads hanging on it. The implication is that the griot women were sitting around gossiping.

2 'The word' = speech; the namu or 'I hear you' is the hearing of the words, the respect given them by the listener, which is what gives speech its value, the way circumcision turns a boy into a man.

3 They do not really mean it.

"People ridicule you when they say you are respected.

"People ridicule you when they say you are a warrior chief.

"You have been shamed in a way that no horon has ever been, and
you are scorned as no other noble has ever been.

"You married daughters of other horon like yourself, but you
brought them to the side of a well.

"Six kwa, seven kwa, fifteen kwa, they draw the chickens'
drinking water.¹

"They draw the goats' drinking water, donkeys' drinking water,
cows' drinking water.

"They draw bath water for you, and they draw bath water for your
brothers and your friends.

"When noble women draw water they get sore hands.

"If a horon woman spends all day carrying calabashes of water,
she gets headaches and she will say,

"'Ah, I am so tired I cannot wash myself today, I washed yesterday
or the day before'.

"She does this for no other reason than a shortage of water.

"She fears to use up water because she will have to draw more.

"After much hard work a horon wife will spend the night unwashed,
and she will go all day unoiled.

"This is why I spoke as I did.

"We live in Segou on the bank of the Joliba.

"If we are dirty we take a grass sponge and put it in a wooden
soap dish.

1 She is exclaiming at the great depth of the well, which means much hard work for the wives. A kwa equals the distance between the fingertips of each hand with the arms stretched horizontally to either side.

"We sit on rocks to lather ourselves and then dip into the river.

"We take our cooking utensils with us and wash them at the same time.

"No one will have overheated hands, and no one will have overheated heads.

"A young Bamana like you, you have been given the world.

"Your father rules the land but you are begging for alms.

"People ridicule you when they say you are a worthy man.

"This is why I have shown you that you are not maintaining the prestige of your great name.

"You are not among the worthy men for whom praises are sung."

Nje went to see Ngolo his father and said, "Baba!"

"I hear you", replied his father.

"We have come to what I already told you about", said Nje.

"I would rather die than hear what my ears have heard today."

That is how Nje explained himself to his father.

In those days Ngolo had some labourers.

His workers had long-bladed hoes, axes and baskets.

They began near Bamabougou and dug a canal as far as Tionkony.

The canal passed Tio and finally ended at Markala.¹

They left both ends unfinished while they dug the main part of the canal.

The day they were ready to dig the two end sections they divided

1 There is a canal at Markala, but it was a colonial project. According to Delafosse's informants, when Ton Mansa Dembele was in power (possibly 1757-1760), he commenced the digging of a canal to bring water from the Niger to his village of Ngoïn which lay several kilometers south of Segou. This grandiose project angered the other tôn chiefs, and is given as a reason Ton Mansa was killed and replaced by Kanuba Nyuma (M. Delafosse, Haut-Sénégal-Niger (Paris, 1912), Vol. II, pp. 287-88).

into two groups.

One group was at the Bamabougou end, the other at Markala.

They dug out the two ends and connected the whole canal.

The water flowed from the old river to the walls of Bamabougou.

When the river water reached Bamabougou, Nje prayed to God with
all his Bamana magic power.¹

He wanted two male hippopotamuses to come to his new port.²

Two male hippopotamuses left the old river and went up the canal
to Bamabougou Nje's port.

They drank water three times, splashed three times, and bellowed
three times.

The jeli women took their gitaw and sang about the coming of the
hippopotamuses:

Ju ja ju yo,

Hippopotamus has bellowed,

This is a new happiness.

The hippopotamus of the new port has bellowed,

Every jeli has his mansa of happiness.

This was sung to Yiri Diara and to Yiriba Diara.

It was sung to the grandson of Barikoro Diara.

It was sung to the master of water, the master of people.

It was sung to the master of war, the master of hunting.

No grave will be dug in a pit where Bamana slaughter cows, but
anyone who is not blind and sees the pit must be aware
of death.

1 The Bambara often intermingled Islamic and indigenous religious practices.

2 The word for hippopotamus is mali, and this animal was a popular totem of some clans of Mali.

This hero's song was sung to Bamabougou Nje.

A fasa¹ was never sung to a horon unless he had done something worthy of it.

A fasa was never sung to a man just for being rich or beautiful.

He would not get a fasa unless he had done great deeds.

The real praise song of Da was not 'Ask, ask Da for me'.²

The real fasa of Da was:

Star of the canoe bow, take us forward with you.

One chief cannot face a whole army alone.

Shouts were heard, the war was coming,

There were no men to meet the attack,

There were no women to talk about the war.

Star of the canoe stern, take us backward with you,

One chief cannot face a whole army alone.

Now they sing the song like this:

"Brother onion let us get together, so everyone can profit
from the onion field."

This is wrong, the song should be sung,

"Star of the canoe bow, take us forward with you,

"One chief cannot face a whole army alone."

The hard labour for that canal was done in the day of

Bamabougou Nje.

1 A praise song for great deeds.

2 Da was fama of Segou from 1808 to 1827. This refers to the distortion of an old praise song into a common one sung by field-workers, and implicit in this is once again the standard griot lament that the age of heroic deeds is just a fading memory.

MONSON

Ngolo himself came with some baggage and set it down.¹

Bamabougou Nje came and sat beside the baggage, but when he picked up the baggage he was not in favour.

After the decline of Bamabougou Nje's popularity, the people wondered who would be handed the baggage.

It was said that Monson had a right to the baggage because Monson came next to Bamabougou Nje among Ngolo's sons.

They said, "Let us build a mansa's house for Monson in Mpeba."²

But some Mpeba people did not think this should be done.

They said it would never be possible.

They thought it could never be done.

If the powers command that a road be built on the head, the two eyes must pop out.

"It will be built", said Monson's supporters.

They made bricks here in Segou and loaded them into canoes.

They cut poles and went to build Monson's house in Mpeba.

The diviners told Monson that before he could enter his new house he must kill a white ram.

They said he must jump over the ram while it was still twitching when he entered his house.

When the new house was finished the ram was slaughtered.

While it was still twitching, Monson leaped over it and entered his new house.

1 Ngolo died and left his power to be passed on to his successor.

2 In the Monteil version (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 92) Da is said to have campaigned in Mossi country where he founded three villages. He decided to have built in one of these, Banankoro, a special house as a monument to his reign, a project that would pose building problems owing to distant and hostile terrain.

Then his supporters said, "Who will prevent Monson from having his residence here at Mpeba?"

No one answered.

"Who will prevent Monson from having his residence here at Mpeba?"

"We want to see those who did not agree that his chiefly residence should be built here."

One man answered, "Ala de ye se, no one but God could refuse him.

"No one but God could prevent Monson from living here at Mpeba."

Ala de ye se became that man's name,

He became known as 'Alase of Mpeba'.

The man who took the name 'Alase' sired Mahamane who was the father of Abidini.

Those people had an axe, the handle and blade of which measured one nonkon in length.

If an entire family died, this axe was used to kill the nyama in the dead family's compound.¹

The axe is still there, even tomorrow morning.

On the day of the tôn fete here in Segou, Abidini carried it on his shoulder.

When Monson came to power he founded the village of Njedabougou and cooled the eyes of Nje Daba.²

He founded Konin and cooled the eyes of Kari Kouloubaly.

The brothers Jonkele, Nyanankoro, Seri and Mamuru who lived in Sebougou went to see Mother Makore and said,

1 When an entire family was wiped out by war or by disease, the spirits that came from their dead bodies had to be dealt with. The same was true of the nyama that came from taboo animals that had been wrongfully killed.

2 nb'a nya suma, 'I cooled his eyes' = 'I made him happy';
nb'a nya gwan, 'I heated his eyes' = 'I made him angry'.

"Hey! Monson does not yet have so much power that he can build two villages of his own.

"It seems certain that he will use up all the inheritance from our father, including our share.

"Monson was chosen in the council house, so what can we do now?

"We want to share the inheritance from our father."

But Monson said, "What kind of talk is this coming from my younger brothers?

"The inheritance of a Bamana is not to be divided,

"Each will have to wait his turn.

"A hundred heads can only wear the same hat if they do it one at a time.

"If each does not wait his turn and everyone tries to put on the hat at the same time, the hat can never cover them all and it will be torn into many pieces.

"When a Bamana father leaves an inheritance, it has to be given to the eldest brother.

"If that one leaves it, then it goes to the next eldest brother.

"If that one also leaves it, then it is given to the next eldest brother.

"I want each to wait his turn until the end.

"Even if we wanted to share the inheritance from our father, a Bamana legacy cannot be divided."¹

At this time, Nzan of Domila who fought against their father was chief of the gwatigiw of the twelve villages of Sekoro.

1 Nevertheless, there was a war of succession between Monson and Nyanankoro, which Monson eventually won (see Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 76-80).

These twelve gwa, these twelve clans, had all left Sekoro and
 come with Biton to settle here in Segou.

They wanted to farm the land, and they said,

"The power of a mansa without food cannot shine."

Nzan was from Domila between Kati and the Beledougou region.

The reason Nzan came here, was that his rival brothers

accused him of stealing an old beehive.¹

He was called to account for the theft and exposed to shame.

When he had been exposed to shame, he said, "Who told you I stole
 a beehive?"

His accusers said, "It was so-and-so who told us."

And Nzan said to that one, "Was it you who told my rival brothers
 that I stole their beehive?"

"Yes", said the man.

"Then", said Nzan, "I must slash your mouth."

In less than ten days they met in the bush.

In the place where he met this rival brother, Nzan lifted him
 over his head and threw him on the ground.

Then he drew a knife and slashed the man's mouth.

"Until you die", said Nzan, "you will never again say someone
 has stolen a beehive."

The one whose mouth he slashed had many relatives, so Nzan could
 not go home.

He left Domila and came to settle here.

1 The earlier testimony of Monteil's griot disagrees with this. As mentioned in note 1, p. 363, the Nzan who fought against Ngolo's succession was Nankoroba Nzange. The Nzan who stole a beehive was Nzan Fato, the consequence of which was that he became a slave to Biton, the same time Ngolo did (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 44). Nzan Fato subsequently became a famous slave chief and military leader, who served Ngolo faithfully throughout the latter's reign.

It was because of him that Ngolo's father had a place to settle.

Nzan of Domila had a horn called ndomari.

If he blew this horn, his younger brothers and other relatives would gather around him, and together they would decide on what they had to do.

Nzan of Domila was chief of the twelve clans of Sekoro.

When he blew his horn, he commanded each person to come and be assigned a section of his fields to be farmed for him.¹

In those days there were wide spaces between the quarters here in Balanzando.²

Gwanje was assigned to divide up the land.

Some of Nzan's fields were assigned to the ~~people-of-the-central-~~quarter, the Tiemantielakaw.

Some were assigned to the Sigimaminakaw, the ~~people-of-the-~~newcomers'-quarter.

Some were assigned to the ~~people-who-live-by-the-small-~~solitary-balanzan-tree, the Balanzaningkelekoromaw.

The people of Fesikila also had their share to cultivate for the chief.

1 This passage may derive from Tahiru's fragmentary knowledge of something told in more detail by Monteil's informant: When Biton Kouloubaly was forging his power base, a Soninke slave asked to be taken into the tôn. He became one of the first council slaves (tôn jonw), and was given the important role of trumpeter. Using a horn which he sounded three times, he would call together the members of the tôn when ordered to by Biton. He was called tôn mansa because his summons was not to be disobeyed on pain of a heavy fine (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 31-32). It is said that after the battle of Kirango this Ton Mansa was awarded many slaves and went to settle at Ngoin, but there are reports that he was later killed in an engagement against invading Kong forces, so he could not have been the same Ngoin Ton Mansa who held power for a time after Biton's sons Bakary and Dekoro (see note 1, p. 282 and note 1, p. 334).

2 Balanzando = place of the balanzan trees, place of intrigue.

In the afternoon, people would say, "Let us go and make a strip touch the end of our big field.

"Let us go and make a strip touch the end of our big field."

After they had finished working on the chief's field in the morning, they would say,

"Let us go and make a strip touch the end of our big field."

Some pronounced the sentence so quickly that they only said,

"Segou foroba kun: end of the big Segou field."

These twelve sections were farmed for the forotigi, the field master.

In the afternoon the sons of different clans would work in their own fields, and they would say, "Let us go and do the afternoon work, now that we have finished in the big field."

Then they would go and work in their own fields, and now they call this "Segou foroba kun: end of the big Segou field."

The sons of Ngolo wanted to divide up their father's legacy. Bamabougou Nje, Monson's elder brother, refused to do it, but three of the other brothers agreed that the legacy should be divided.

They went to see Mother Makore about it.¹

"Well", said she, "Monson is my only son and you others are my co-wives' sons, but I fed all of you with my breasts because your mothers had short lives.

"I do not understand why you and your brothers are fighting to share your brother's wealth.

¹ Ngolo's widow, mother of Monson. She cared for Nyanankoro from infancy because his mother died in childbirth.

"Monson is right, the inheritance of a Bamana is never to be divided.

"Each must wait his turn according to the blade of the gravedigger's hoe.

"I know you do not agree with what your brother Monson has said.

"He is my only son, and if he is closer to the truth than you, may God make him happier than you.

"But if you all are right, may God shame him for you.

"This is all I have to say."

"Mother Makore, is this your opinion?" asked the brothers.

"This is it", said Mother Makore.

"We will never accept this", said the brothers.

They went to see their sister Ngolo Niakoro and said,

"We have come to see you because Monson does not have a right to take our father's legacy, yet he has already built two new villages.

"We fear he will use up all the inheritance and we want it divided among us, but he does not agree.

"What do you think we can do about this?"

Ngolo Niakoro said, "My brothers, we are from the same father, but Monson stands between you and the legacy.

"The inheritance of a Bamana can never be divided."

"We will never follow your opinion", said the brothers.

"Very well, I hear you", said their sister,

"But the link between you and me is like the amulet of a newly circumcised boy.

"Why do they wear these amulets?"

"As long as you have such a thing around your neck, you will never have anything, but with it around your neck, anything

can happen to you.¹

"The link between us is just like this, and I will never bless you, nor will I curse you."

The brothers refused to agree.

When people say Ngolo's descendants fought for three years, it was because of this problem.

The battle was fought between Sebougou and Sekura where the military firing range is now, and the war ended in the place where they now stockpile cotton.

It was because of Nzan of Domila that this conflict ended.²

They would fire gunpowder at each other for a week, then they would look at each other's eyes for a week.

It was a war between sons of the same father, and a war between milk brothers smokes but never flames.

The griots came to see Monson and said,

"This war you are waging between brothers,

"Have you not heard what Nzan of Domila, the chief of Sekoro has said about it?"

1 Newly circumcised boys are in a state of transition between boyhood and manhood, and are considered to be particularly vulnerable to misfortune until their wounds are healed and their initiation is complete.

2 There is an earlier tradition that a man named Nzan was responsible for ending a war of succession, but it was the conflict between Ngolo and Nankoroba Nzange (see n. 1, p. 363) rather than the one between Monson and his brother Nyanankoro. We are told that when the feud between Ngolo and Nankoroba Nzange had lasted for two years, one of Biton's old followers, Nzan Gueba of Ngoin intervened. He called for help from Nankoroba Nzange, saying Ngolo was about to attack him at Ngoin. When Nankoroba came to Nzan Gueba's aid with a large force, Nzan Gueba informed Ngolo, who cornered Nankoroba at Ngoin and massacred his entire force. Later, Ngolo called the old man, Nzan Gueba, out from the town, ostensibly for a conference, and when he came unsuspectingly with no escort Ngolo ordered him seized and sacrificed to the boliv of Segou (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, p. 67).

"I have heard nothing", said Monson.

The griots said, "You are from the same father,

"You are from the same mother,

"You are all descendants of Ngolo, so Nzan does not understand why you are firing gunpowder at each other.

"The twelve patriarchs of Sekoro are there, but you have never asked their advice.

"This is a very serious problem, so what do you want to do?"

Monson said, "I do not know what to do about it."

The griots told Monson he must go to see Nzan of Domila and ask for his help in fighting against the rival brothers.

Monson went to see Nzan of Domila and said, "Father Nzan of Domila!"

"I hear you", said Nzan of Domila.

"I have come to see you with a problem", said Monson.

"What is the matter?" asked Nzan of Domila.

Monson said, "Father Nzan of Domila, you are tired under your load so you have put it on my head".

"What load is this?" asked Nzan of Domila.

"Whose responsibility is Mother Makore?" asked Monson.

"After my father died, it was up to you to take care of Mother Makore."

At this, Nzan of Domila blew his horn to summon his councillors and when the gwa¹ arrived, he said, "Monson has come to see me about taking up my load.

"He claims Mother Makore is my load, but he has not really come to make me take care of Mother Makore.

1 See n. 2, p. 316.

"He only wants me to help him in the brothers' war.

"What is your opinion of this, my younger brothers?"

The gwa replied, "We are the saucepan of Segou that is used to carry fire, but we will never burn our hands for anyone for nothing.

"Monson is more bitter than all the other sons of Ngolo.

"Monson is like the west branch of a cailcedra tree, for he never gives anything to anyone.¹

"If you filled his hand with cowries to string on a thread, he would not drop a single one, much less give one away.

"Unless he gives us something, we will never help him."

Those were the days of cowries.

Granaries standing side by side were the legacy from Ngolo, and there was an entire granary full of cowries.

It was so full that if a lizard hit it with its tail, cowries would come pouring out.

This granary was known as 'kamale nyuma, pretty young man'.

Monson gave kamale nyuma to the twelve gwa of Sekoro that day.

They poured out the cowries until the bottom of the granary was bare.

The councillors drank many gourds of millet beer that day.

They became merry and prepared for war.

The rival brothers had forty companies of warriors.

Monson had only three karafe² chiefs on his side and the rival brothers had all the rest.

1 Nuts growing on the west side of the tree are said to be very bitter.

2 See n. 3, p. 296.

Monson finally acquired five more companies of karafe and Nzan
said,

"Very well, your war between brothers has lasted too long.

"Very well, I shall put an end to it."

He went to the rival brothers' group of forty companies and said,

"Load your muskets with powder in the presence of your chief
warriors, but do not put in any bullets.

"This is a war between brothers of the same father.

"I want to end this war peacefully, so we will fire white powder
only."¹

The forty companies loaded white powder only, and Nzan went to the
five companies of Monson and said,

"Alright, when you load your muskets put in bullets.

"Use five fingers of powder and five bullets.

"I want to put an end to this war between brothers."

The rival brothers' forty companies were told to load only with
white powder.

Monson's five companies were told to load with both powder and
bullets.

Neither side knew what the other was doing.

Nzan said, "A clever child has found a silly old man in the world.

"The war between brothers of the same father will be ended today."

1 'White powder' = powder with no bullets, blanks. It is possible that Tahiru borrowed the idea for this episode from a tradition about the bizarre behaviour of Turkoro Mari (1854-1859). This mansa quarrelled simultaneously with the people of Segou and with his brother Kegue Mari, who lived at Masala. Turokoro Mari ordered an attack on Masala, but both the besieged and the attackers fired blank powder, and the astonished mansa was told that the tôn chiefs were responsible because they were weary of his fratricidal feuding. (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, p. 99).

The two armies met between Sebougou and Sekura where the cotton
is stockpiled now.

When the forty companies fired their muskets, wuuu! nothing
could be seen but smoke.

When the five companies fired, wuuu!

Dead men could be seen lying about like locusts.

They engaged forces three times, and after the third time the
younger brothers crossed their hands behind their backs.

They said, "We submit to you, we agree with your ideas."

This was one of the famous conspiracies of Segou.

After three years Monson finally put the arrows all in one hole.
Monson declared to his younger brothers that what they had done
to the brotherhood was not worthy of them.

He said, "I will not harm you or kill you.

"But as for our father's place, as for the mansa's goatskin,
I will not allow you to sit on it.

"You will never occupy the mansa's goatskin."

"Very well", said the brothers, but they summoned another of
their brothers and said to him, "Where have you been, Seri?
In this war between brothers we heard no word from you."¹

Seri replied, "I am the youngest of us all, and I cannot go
behind the river, I cannot go behind the lake.

"Whatever you have agreed upon is alright with me."

They all agreed then that Monson should remain as mansa.

1 In the Monteil version, Monson sends for his brothers Seri and Ba and demands to know what they had been doing while he and Nyanankoro were fighting. Not trusting them, he sent Seri to farm at Bamabougou, and had Ba imprisoned at Denebougou (Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 80-81).

MONSON'S WARS

When Monson was still a young chief, he captured some villages.

The day of his first battle was at Ndekorro where he captured

Fale Tounkara.

Some of Fale Tounkara's descendants are with us here in Segou.

Fale Tounkara was a headstrong chief.

Monson sent a messenger telling him to submit the honey-price

from his village.

But Falé Tounkara took the messenger and made his back look like

a striped suruni fish.

Monson said, "I have been told, Fale Tounkara, that you are

wicked and I see it is true,

"A fama's messenger must never be beaten.

"If you see an uncircumcised boy holding a bone, do not take it

away from him for it is his father's share."

They organized forty companies of warriors and marched on Ndekorro.

They captured Falé Tounkara and brought him back to Mpeba.

That was Monson's first battle.

The second battle was at Masantola where he captured Kawele.

In memory of capturing that chief, they christened a child Kawele

in Mpeba.

One of our Diabaté jeliw who was in Mpeba christened the child

Masantola Kawele.

The chief called Kawele of Masantola was a learned man, he was

a mansa.

Fale Tounkara was also a learned man.

Fale was a mansa, and he had two whips.

One whip was known as 'Give-Up-His-Bad-Behaviour'.

The other was called 'I-Will-Not-Do-It-Again' .

Even tomorrow morning you could find these whips with Mamadou of Mpeba.

If a marriage was breaking up, Falé Tounkara would summon the husband and wife.

If the wife was in the wrong, she was told to make a loincloth of her head scarf.

Then they would use 'Give-Up-His-Bad-Behaviour' and 'I-Will-Not-Do-It-Again'.

The wife would have to carry the husband home on her back, and the marriage would go on.¹

Monson also captured Dugakoro of Koré at the village of Koré.

In those days they did things differently.

There was a young marabout named Mamadou Bisiri who was the Imam of Koré.

He was an Islamic teacher from the Dafing people.²

The people of Koré knew Segou was preparing to attack them.

They asked Mamadou Bisiri to pray to God for them.

He took a piece of straw and secluded himself in his compound.

He pointed it toward the sky and the people heard a noise coming from the sky.

The marabout's novice³ was frightened and began to shake.

1 The partner who was considered to be in the wrong received the whipping and had to carry the other home on his or her back.

2 The Dafing speak a Manding dialect closely related to Dyula, and are found mainly in Ghana and Upper Volta.

3 garibu = an Islamic student who solicits alms to support himself. The meaning of the term falls somewhere between 'pupil' and 'beggar'.

He said to the novice, "Do not bring misfortune on yourself and choose me as the cause of it."

The marabout made his prayers to God and prepared his amulets.

In the meantime, Monson left Segou with forty companies of warriors.

They went to stretch themselves at the gate of Koré town.

They sent a message to Dugakoro telling him that war had come to his village.

Dugakoro put a bundle of kola nuts on a man's head and sent him with a message that said,

"If you plant these and wait until they sprout and wait until they bear fruit,

"If you can wait for that length of time, you will be able to conquer Koré.

"If you cannot do so, you had better go about your other business.

"I am not sure you will ever be able to conquer Koré."

That town was so big that if some people fired gunpowder all day in one part of the town, and some others were beating wedding drums all day in another part of the town, no one would know what the others were doing.

This battle was quite different from the three-month war that took place at Kenyen.

The expression 'Koredaka, a Koré-siege' came from that battle.¹

¹ According to an earlier version, Monson's longest siege was in Kaarta against Tyitya of Dedougou, who held out for about two years, though as with most figures, this may be greatly exaggerated (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 82-83). Dugakoro of Koré was not conquered until after Monson's death, when the latter's son Da was campaigning against whoever Monson had failed to vanquish.

They tried every tactic but were unable to enter Koré.

Monson himself was helpless and he said,

"The day Koré is captured, the first man to bring me the news
will be made a chief."

Mankoi Koné, a chief of the nyamakalaw was there that day,

Jeli Guruku Koné was also there that day.

They were both chiefs of the nyamakalaw.¹

At last the marabout's prayers and amulets were exhausted.

One day Koré was destroyed like an old calabash, smashed like an
old clay pot.

Jeli Tietigiba Dante ran bara, bara, bara to where Monson sat
and said,

"Destiny is realized today, the marabout's blessings are exhausted.

"We have destroyed Koré like an old calabash.

"We have smashed it like an old clay pot, and its property has
become a dead man's legacy."

Monson said, "Then I appoint you chief of the nyamakala of Segou.

"It was my own mouth that said the first man to tell me Koré
was conquered would be made a chief."

It was Tietigiba who ran to tell Monson that Koré was conquered,
and he became jelikuntigi that day, chief of the jeliw of Segou.

Before that there had been some jeli chiefs above him.

That was the end of the war with Koré.

¹ See n. 4, p. 283.

In those days there were twenty and ten ebony¹ horns here,
and they were blown to prepare for war.

There were twenty and ten horns of bad omen, and they were also
blown.

There was the copper whistle as well as a donka drum that was
beaten to accompany the warriors.

The white men replaced these things with the bugle.

When the warriors went to battle, the twenty and ten horns of
bad omen were blown.

The twenty and ten ebony horns were played.

The copper whistle was blown, and the donka was beaten.

The young men would dance all night and boast of what they would
do in battle:

"When we attack that village tomorrow I will capture the first
person who fires at us.

"I will do that, or I will put my hand in my father's armpit
in lahara."

They would dance all night and each warrior would swear an oath
in his wife's presence.

The next place Monson conquered was Markadougoubani.

At the time, Lasa was living in that village, and one day he
returned to find it destroyed.

He came home to find that all his brothers had gone to lahara.

Lasa said, "Who in this world will I feed now?"

"Everyone in the village has gone to lahara."

1 gwele wood = a kind of mock ebony.

He had no way to live, so he went to see Monson.

When Lasa arrived at the gate of the seven-doored council house
the Bamana axemen ran out to meet him.

In those days there were keepers of small axes at the seven-
doored council house.

The handle of each small axe had a hole with a loop of rope
through it for fastening to the wrist when heads were being
chopped off.

The gendarmes and police have replaced the small-axemen today.

Those axemen were all slave chiefs and each had a special name:

'Kanuba Nyuma, The-One-I-Love-Best',

'Kafa Jugu, Bad-Stone',

'Bika Gelema, It's-A-Bad-Day-For-Me',

'Siniyeto Alama, Leave-Tomorrow-To-God',

'Blonkonon Nanyumanifing, Black-Nanyumani-Of-The-Council-House',

'Nanyumaninje, White-Nanyumani',

'Famin Koroba, Old-Famin',

'Famin Nintchini, Littlest-Famin',

'Nyumakanyi, To-Do-Good-Is-Good',

'Nyumatilete, It-Is-Not-A-Day-Of-Good-Deeds',

'Tukumana-Abimatoro, Sticking-To-Anyone-Bores-Him',

'Kabila Yerema Segou Makotenyan, In-Segou-The-Goals-Of-A-Do-
Nothing-Are-Never-Realized',

'Sidiloki, Shirt-That-Lasts-A-Lifetime',

'Yamusa', and 'Mina-Balake'.

These were all slave chiefs, keepers of the small axes, and they
lived separately from the other young people.

They lived at the seven-doored council house and provided the
solution to difficult problems.

Lasa came and stopped at the gate of the seven-doored council house and said, "Where is your Monson?"

The axemen rushed to meet him and demanded what he wanted there.

Lasa said, "I come from Dougoubani where I have found that all my people have gone to lahara and I myself have no food, so I want to follow the others."

A messenger was sent to Monson to tell him about this man who wanted to follow his people to lahara.

Monson said, "Tell him to wait until tomorrow, and we will do whatever is decided upon."

And Lasa replied, "Why do you speak to me of tomorrow?"

"For a man who comes asking to be sent to lahara, there is no need to speak of tomorrow.

"Tomorrow is too long to wait for my death,

"I refuse to wait, I must be killed today."

But they took Lasa and put him in chains and left him in a lonely hut to wait for morning.

When the first light of dawn bleached the river water, Monson donned his finest attire.

He went to sit in the seven-doored council house where the twenty and ten ebony horn blowers stood at the doors.

Monson said, "Bring me the man who said tomorrow is too long to wait for his death.

"It is time for me to make use of him."

This was expressed in music by the ebony horns:

"Sini ka jan, Tomorrow-Is-Too-Long-To-Wait, the Power is calling you."

The name of the man who said "Tomorrow is too long to wait for my death" was dropped.

In place of his old name he became known as 'Sinikajan'.

"Sinikajan", said Monson, "Asikai!"¹

"A father may sire a beautiful son and the son may resemble the father, but the son's behaviour is his own.

"According to your astonishing behaviour, you should be called 'Sikai'.

"Your home village is destroyed by the mansa and his people, and you are the only survivor, but you come here demanding to follow the others to lahara.

"You must be one of the bravest of all men and I will never kill you.

"If you are spared, even though you may never achieve anything for me, when God gives you a son he will surely be someone who will give me strong support."²

Monson settled Sinikajan in the village of Samankoro where he became a chief of the foroba Fula.³

He was a chief along with Bonge Koulobaly who came from Masala-Sonina and had been one of Biton's men.

Those foroba Fula were different from the red Fula.⁴

Sinikajan sired Bakary, Bakary Koné.

Bakary Jan and Bilisi made tlabi and tlabiyara⁵ against each other here at Segou.

1 A kind of salute, expressing admiration.

2 This was especially difficult to translate. More literally: 'If someone keeps you, even if you do not become a source /sabu = cause, reason/ for the power, when Allah gives you a thing, it will be a thing people can depend on'.

3 foroba Fula = literally 'field Fula', sedentary Fulbe.

4 'red' Fula = nomadic Fulbe, traditionally described as being of reddish hue.

5 See n. 2, p. 508.

People called him 'Bakary Jan' or 'Tall Bakary' but he was not tall.

His father was called 'Jan' for Sinikajan ne falila, Tomorrow-Is-Too-Long-To-Wait-For-Death.

But Sinikajan's real name was Lasa or Jan Koné and he named his son Bakary.

Those Fula combined the name of the father and son, so they said 'Bakary's Jan' and this became simply 'Bakary Jan'.

Everyone who hears the name Bakary Jan will think he was tall, but he was not tall, his father's name was Jan.

The place where they settled first was Samankoro.

Later they moved to Bakarijani here on the other side of the river.

The third place they lived was Nyama and they finally settled at Joforongu.¹

Bakary Jan and Bilisi made tlabi and tlabiyara here in Segou.

Bakary's sacrifice before their fight was the most successful.

He took Bilisi's head from his neck and sent him to lahara.

The stories of Sinikajan and Bakary Jan are linked to the village of Dougoubani.

Dodougou, Dodougou; Dokalosa, Dokalosa; these originated at Dodougoubani.

Bakary Jan did what he had to do, but we have not arrived at these stories, they will come later.

1 On the left bank of the Niger across from Segou, Ngolo had organized twelve Fulbe (Peul, Fula) settlements. Monson later divided these into two groups: one governed by the sons of the deceased Fulbe chief Bonge, and the other by the Fulbe chief Jan, who was succeeded by his son Bakary Jan.

FAMA DA

Monson's first son was Da and his second son was Tiefolo.

It was Ngolo who started the practice of dispersing the sons and settling them in different places.

Monson also divided his sons and settled them in different places.

Monson settled Da in Banankoro and had two houses built for him.

Of the two houses built for Da, one was for the uncircumcised boys under nine or ten years old.

There was also a house for unmarried men under the ages of thirty or forty years, and the bala¹ players mention this in a song:

Here is the house of black hair,

There is the house of growing children.

Here you see the house of black hair of Banankoro,

Let us go into the house of the growing children.

One day Da sat down beside his father and said,

"Father, the day you are no longer alive, how will I get sauce for my fish?"

"That is easy", replied Monson.

They made a journey to the east where they got four families of Bozo² and brought them back to Banankoro.

There were Jonka among these Bozo, as well as Nunka and Kwaka.

The purpose of these families was to catch fish just for Da here in Segou.

1 The indigenous xylophone.

2 River people of the Niger and Bani also known as Sorko, most of whom speak a Soninke dialect of the Manding language.

Everything in the world has its time, everything has its moment.
 A thing will be realized when its time has come, but nothing can
 be realized before its time.

Monson had destroyed many villages in his time.

In later years his forces turned toward Samanyana, but Monson
 failed to enter Samanyana.

Monson's forces turned toward Kaarta, but Monson failed to
 enter Kaarta.

Monson's forces turned toward Mpebala but Monson failed to
 enter Mpebala.

The time had come for him to go to lahara.

The day Monson was caught by the sickness that would send him to
lahara, he called for someone to fetch his sons.

He sent for Jeli Tietigiba Dante.

It was this jeli's duty to carry such a serious message.

When Jeli Tietigiba Dante came, he recited Monson's genealogy.

He started with Wanasi and his nine generations, told how the
 Koné left Sankaran and ended with his own day.

When he had finished, the people said, "This one's speech is
 endless, danti ka kuma na.

"Is his speech not true?

"Is his speech not serious?

"His speech is very important.

"We cannot choose one part of his speech at the expense of the
 rest.

"The words from your mouth are endless.

"The words from your mouth are perfect and you are truthful,
 you are truthful."

What did the phrase 'danti ka kuma na, danti ka kuma na' later become?

This jeli was truthful, his speech was endless and he took the name Tietigiba Dante, Possessor-Of-Endless-Truth.

Monson said to Jeli Tietigiba Dante, "Bring my beloved son to me."

"Which is your beloved son?" asked the jeli.

"Da", replied Monson, "and he is at Banankoro".

Tietigiba Dante went to summon Da, saying, "Your father has called you."

Da came and said, "Baba, have you called me?"

"Yes", said Monson, "but it is not for a bad reason.

"I, Monson, have been caught by the illness that will send me to lahara.

"I have destroyed the villages I had to destroy.

"I have captured the villages I had to capture.

"But I have been weak in the face of three villages and I want to tell you which they are.

"Here are the keys to Segou, one hundred, twenty and ten in number.¹

"Among them is the old dogs' key,

"Among them is the bitch dogs' key,

"Among them is the four slaves' key,

"Among them is the key to the four big boliw which are the power of Segou.

1 The numbers are not to be trusted, but the 'keys' to Segou were the symbols of its power, some of which were the talismans given to Ngolo by the Kunta clan (see pp. 357-62). According to my informants, one of the 'keys' was a hen that was kept locked up and sitting on its eggs, the idea being that as long as the hen stayed on her eggs the mansa would retain his power and Segou could not be conquered.

"Never lose them after I am gone.

"If you lose them, you will be separated from Segou ahead of
your time.

"If you keep them, you will spend your entire life with Segou.

"Your enemies will never succeed in dislodging you from this
port.¹

"But, as for those three villages, I will die with my anger
against them.

"Except for them, I have conquered every village I went against."

Da said, "Very well, father, I have heard you.

"What are the villages you have not been able to conquer?

"Name them for me."

Monson said, "Old Ngenyin is at Mpebala,

"Old Bilisi lies down at the village of Bilisi,
and Basi is at Samanyana.

"I failed to conquer these three villages.²

"If you succeed in conquering them after I have gone,

M'bakungoba will bless you.

"Kontoron will bless you.

"Polijuku will bless you.

"The four big boliw of Segou including Tiekolonsu³ will bless you.

"I myself will bless you to lahara because I have failed to

1 More literally, 'Your enemies will never succeed in breaking the port on you'. In addition to its obvious strategic importance, the river port represented the power of authority in Segou because it was a centre of trade.

2 In the earlier version, Monson laments not having conquered Samanyana, Boubankoro, and Majala Datu (Monteil, Les Bambara du Segou, p. 89).

3 That the third and fourth boliw here are different from those in the earlier lists is of no particular significance. Segou was a centre of indigenous religion and sheltered many powerful boliw.

conquer them."

"So be it", said Da.

Da went to see Jeli Tietigiba Dante and said, "Dante!"

"I hear you", replied the jeli.

"My father's illness is getting more serious but he will not die."

Da was impatient for his father to die because he wanted to get
the power here in Segou.

His heart was like that.

He came and spent a whole week with his father.

In the second week, the illness became a fire crisis.

In the third week, Monson set down his baggage here in Segou.

They began to beat the tambali,¹

Men gathered while women went into the dead mansa's house.

The griots shouted:

"The world has become kirikasa watita, full of chaos and confusion.

"The world has become a strange place.

"The goat is sick and the goat owner is ailing.

"The knife is dull and the goat's throat is tough.

"The sun burns down and the ground is too hot.

"We have no basket to sit on in the sky while we tell our troubles
to the angels of God.

"Where will we go to bathe?

"Where will we go to bask in the sun?

"Our bathing place is gone,

"Our basking place is gone.

"It all rested on the only forked post in Segou, and now the

1 The big ceremonial drum beaten only on important occasions.

forked post is broken.

"The crossbeams, roof timbers and wall posts have fallen.

"Monson has set aside the baggage against the will of the
nyamakalaw.

"The cooking meat is finished,

"The one who gave us our riding horse is gone."

Some people were sent to dig the grave.

Segou and all the surrounding villages gathered for the great
man's funeral.

The mourning lasted three days before they stopped.

On the eighth day after Monson's burial, Da called a meeting.

"Dante!" said Da.¹

"I hear you", replied Dante.

"My father is dead", said Da.

"This has happened", Dante replied.

Da said, "We are facing a serious problem".

"But what can we do about it?" asked Dante.

"It seems there is no way to solve it", answered Da.

"What do you think then?" asked the jeli.

Da said, "It is my opinion that after the ceremony of the fortieth
day of my father's death we must gather the chiefs of the
Segou villages.

"We must gather the gwatigiw of Segou,

"We must gather the nyamakalaw of Segou and tell them all that
I want to sit in my father's place.

1 This is supposed to have been a meeting of Monson's sons, with Da speaking through his griot, Tietigiba Dante, though Tahiru tells it as if it were simply a conversation between Da and the griot.

"What do you say about this?"

Dante replied, "Your mouth is filled with something very large,
but there is a way to deal with it.

"The day your father died he had keepers of small axes,¹

"He had diviners and he had seven marabouts.

"All I can tell you is that if you try to take your father's
place there will be much noise about it here in Segou.

"The Bamana will never in this world accept it, so you will have
to make friends with the axemen.

"They are fond of beer, and when they lack their favourite kind
of water their hearts are spoiled and they cannot do
anything right.

"But if you get them to drink a lot they will do whatever you
wish."

Da said to Jeli Tietigiba Dante, "Go to the execution clearing
and call the axe keepers.

"Tell them to meet me at the gate of the seven-doored council
house."

Dante went to summon the executioners.

They came in such a hurry that they tangled the ropes in the
handles of their axes.

They said, "Oh Manke De,² you called us? Why have we been
summoned?"

Da said,³ "I did not call to give you trouble, it is not for any

1 jelenikalatigiw = 'masters of the small axes', and could also be translated as 'executioners'. These were slave chiefs.

2 Title of respect.

3 In actual practice, the jeli would have made the speech that follows.

bad reason.

"Monson was my father, Ngolo was the father of Monson and Ngolo came from Wanasi.

"The nine generations of Wanasi came from Sankaran, and they all ruled the land and had their day.

"A porcupine has died, another porcupine has died, and if the hedgehog is not a bastard it is time for him to become the master of something.

"Baba is now dead, and we will soon observe the fortieth day of his death.

"After the sacrifice I will gather the chiefs and gwatigiw of Segou and neighbouring villages.

"I will occupy my father's seat if they allow it.

"Let us seize the power without doing harm to anyone if possible.

"But if they refuse, slash the mouths of half the elders, and cut off the heads of the other half.

"After them, we younger men will hold the power here in Segou.

"Nothing but this will do.

"For each old man whose head you break you shall have his shirt, his trousers, his hat and his sandals.

"All these will belong to you."

The executioners replied, "This is the work for us.

"We look for nothing more than bloodshed.

"We have no use for peace.

"If the toes of a hen's feet are not spread, they will never fill the mouth of the person who eats them.

"If the brave men do not fight, we cannot know who is the strongest.

"When that day comes, think of us, for we have very few shirts."

Da gave them twenty mutukali of gold to buy beer.

In those days there were three women in Segou who made beer:

There was Sekoro Ke from Sekoro,

There was Mother Nyeba who lived here in the big village of Segou,

There was Tienyumamusoni, Wife-Of-A-Handsome-Man, who sat among
the men and passed around the drinking ladle.

They made beer for the Bamana to drink.

Here is what the Bamana beer drinkers say:

"The marabout of the east says not to drink for it is bad.

"The marabout of the west says there is no harm in drinking.

"There are two different opinions,

"While the marabouts argue about the difference, let us drink
our fill before we depart from the execution clearing of
the world.

"Having never been to lahara we know nothing about it, and we
will never give up our habits while we wait for it, so
let us poison ourselves."

The Bamana drink so much that they flood the ears of their hearts.

The axemen returned to their clearing where they waited a week
without being summoned.

The second week they went to Da and said, "What shall we do now?"

"We'll do what I told you", said Da.

Jeli Tietigiba Dante had removed his master's doubts, but he
warned Da,

"Never go a long time without contacting the axe keepers,

"If you do not see them often they will become sober and lose
their courage."

Dante went to summon the axemen with a secret men's signal.

The jeli called each axe keeper by name:

"Kabakaju!"

"I hear you!" came the reply.

"Kamu Banyuma!"

"I hear you!" replied the axeman.

"Bika Gelema, Siniyeto Alama, Blokonon Nanyumanifing,

"Nanyumaninje, Famin Koroba, Famin Nintchini, Nyumakanyi,

"Nyumatilete, Tukumana-Abimatoro, Kabila Yerema Segou Makotenyang.

"Sidiloki, Yamusa and Mina Balake.

"Come here all of you, you are summoned!"

Da gave them twenty more mutukali of gold and said,

"Go to Mother Nyeba's house in the centre of the village and
flood the ears of your hearts.

"Drink to remove the slime from your throats,

"Drink to harden your hearts.

"We will soon summon the village elders and the gwatigiw of
the surrounding villages.

"I want to inform them of my desire for my father's power.

"If they agree, we will become milk brothers.

"If they refuse, slash the mouths of half of them and break the
heads of the other half.

"After them, we younger men will hold the power here."

"So be it", said the axe keepers.

The three drinks of bravery were all prepared.

They drank straight millet beer,

They drank straight honey beer,

They drank straight raisin beer.

The time came for Monson's fortieth day burial ceremony.

Da summoned the chiefs and gwatigiw of the surrounding villages.

He told them all to gather at the seven-doored council house, and

the seven-doored council house was so crowded that it looked
like a mouthful of teeth.

Those who could not get in sat by the house of Mamuru under the

dubalen tree.

That house was on its third foundation at the time.¹

When everyone had gathered at the seven-doored council house,

they said to each other,

"Alright, what have we been called here for?"

Tahiru sings:

They wandered about here and there,

They collected at the houses of Segou where the best
honey beer was brewed,

At the houses with the best honey beer.

The chiefs and gwatigiw of villages near Segou,

They gathered in Segou at the houses where the best
honey beer was brewed,

At the houses with the best honey beer.

They gathered in friendship, in friendship,

They met among people of common interests,

They sat down together and drank.

1 Had been occupied by three generations of the same family.

Da the fama called, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" replied Dante.

"Do you know what is happening?" asked Da.

"What is it?" said Dante.

"We must talk about my power", said Da, "the village chiefs have
come and are in the beer-drinking houses,

"The village gwatigiw have come and are in the beer-drinking
houses.

"Now I would sit in the seat of power.

"If this pleases the people of Segou I want them to join me and
discuss the problems involved.

"If it does not please the people of Segou I still want them to
join me and discuss the problems involved."

"How can we know their minds?" asked Dante.

Da said, "We must prowl through Segou from gate to gate,

"We must listen to what is being said in the different beer-
drinking groups.

"Move stealthily about and listen to the drinking talk.

"Go furtively and listen to their speech."

They took Segou from door to door and heard what was said in
every group.

As they prowled from door to door and lurked in the corners,
they would hear,

"Is it you Boliko?"

"Yes, it is me."

"Where is Jamako Nje?"

"Here I am."

"Where is Konimathe?"

"I am here!"

"What is happening?"

"What goes on?"

"Have you come?"

"Yes, I have come."

"Why were we summoned?"

"Leave me in peace, I know not why I am here nor do I know why
the others have come."

"You all know Da, even before Monson died he showed his eagerness
for power."

"The day after Monson died he summoned us to say he would sit
in his father's seat of power."

"Aiee!" they all said, "let us drink!"

"Tomorrow at the seven-doored council house, if he tells us
elders that he wants to sit in his father's seat of power,
he will be as if he had not been created by God."

"His brother Tiefolo is here, and he does not demand power."

"His uncles are also here."

"If Da pokes himself among us tomorrow saying he will seize
the power, he will be as if he was never created by God,
for other hands will deal harshly with him."

Da beckoned to his jeli and said, "Let us go, they will not
accept us tomorrow."

"Eh! This is a distressing thing."

Who else did he nudge?

He beckoned to his spies, saying, "Let us leave here."

They left that house and joined another beer-drinking group,
where they heard,

"Is that you Boliko?"

"Yes, it is me!"

"Is that you Jamako Nje?"

"I hear you!"

"And what is happening?"

"What is going on?"

"Leave me in peace, father."

"I do not know why I am here and I will not ask why anyone
else has come."

"You all know Da, everyone knows what he did to the people even
before his father died."¹

"Tomorrow he will dare to claim his father's seat of power."

"Elder brother, spit that from your mouth."

"We mature men have gathered here in Segou, we who snuff tobacco
from the small mortar."

"All of us old hats who have met here, we sometimes wipe away
the snot before blowing our noses."²

"If Da claims the seat of power tomorrow we will make it as if
he was never created by God."

"Spit this from youth mouth!"

Da beckoned to his old jeli and said, "Let us go, these will
not accept us tomorrow,

"These men will never accept us tomorrow."

The conspirators visited all the gathering places that night.

They went to all the playgrounds of Segou that night.

1 He had an evil reputation.

2 They already know what Da is up to and how they will react.

They heard no one say he would be pleased to have Da claim the seat of power the next day.

Everyone said he would not dare to try such a thing.

They said, "If he dares to try it, we will make it as if he had never been created by God."

Da was greatly troubled, and his jeli said to him,

"When a young man is thwarted, he immediately seeks revenge, but if he does this, a still worse hindrance will result.

"If a bad thing happens to you, do not be in a hurry,

"Go to bed and sleep a little, then make up your mind,

"When you awake from your sleep just go and act on whatever decision you have made.

"Then you will meet happiness, then you will be glad."

They went to lie on their mats.

As they lay down on their mats a rooster crowed.

"Who has a need?" it said.

And Fama Da said, "Only brave men and I have needs.

"There is no one behind me, there is no one in front of me."

Da had a hole dug in the floor of the council house.

He put one hundred albinos¹ in it and laid skins over the top.

These one hundred men waited in the hole under the skins upon which he sat in the seven-doored council house.

Da put on his father's ceremonial attire and sent for the tôn jonw,² sent for the small-axe keepers.

1 Albinos (funew) were reserved for human sacrifice rituals that were deemed necessary in periods of extreme crisis (G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion Bambara (Paris, 1951), pp. 94-97). The number one hundred here is of course a gross exaggeration.

2 See n. 2, p. 332. These tôn jonw or 'council slaves' were important chiefs, on the level of Ton Mansa, Kanuba Nyuma, and Kafa Jugu, who later ruled Segou. In fact, Tahiru includes Kanuba Nyuma among the axemen.

Then he called Tietigiba Danté, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" said the jeli.

"Dante, go and summon my fathers", said Da.

All the elders and gwatigiw of Segou were there for the meeting
at the seven-doored council house.

One hundred council slaves sat at the doors like locusts.

One hundred axemen squatted at the doors like frogs, as they
held a meeting of brave men.

Any woman who says her husband will not attend a men's meeting
in a dirty shirt will never say such a thing twice.

The council slaves were there, and with no one to clothe them,
they were mostly naked.¹

They were in an evil position, for they achieved happiness from
violent deeds.

All the elders had declared that Da would not dare to sit in
the seat of power that day.

These axemen had been ordered to slash the mouths of half
the elders, and to break the heads of the other half if
they refused Da's wish.

Then the council slaves could remove the trousers of their
victims,

Take off the dead elders' boubous,

Take off the hats of the elders they killed,

Take off the sandals of the elders they killed, and all this
would belong to them.

¹ On the contrary, some slave chiefs are known to have been
wealthy and powerful.

Everyone met at the seven-doored council house and filled it
like teeth in a mouth.

When the small-axe keepers had filled the seven doors of the
council house, Jeli Tietigiba Dante went in.

Da said, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" said Dante.

"Tell my fathers I greet them,

"Tell my brothers I greet them,

"Tell my peers I greet them,

"Tell my younger brothers I greet them,

"All of these people can be found here now."

Jeli Tietigiba Dante got up and stood at the gate of the seven-
doored council house under the seven dubalen trees.

He said, "Village chiefs of the Segou country, you have been
summoned.

"Gwatigiw of the Segou villages, you have been summoned.

"It was not I who called you,

"You have been summoned by the master of water, the master of
people.

"You have been summoned by the son of the master of war,
the master of hunting.

"You have been summoned by the master of gunpowder, the master
of bullets.

"He is the wealthy Bamana slaughterer of many cows.

"A copper bullet cannot pierce the skin of a horse, but it
forces ahead the souls of many man-killing mansaw before
their time.

"The descendant of Wanasi Diara has summoned you,

"Ngolo's grandson has summoned you,

"The son of Monson has summoned you,

"The nephew of Bamabougou Nje, Da has summoned you, for he needs
you in the seven-doored council house."

The Bamana met in the seven-doored council house that used to be
where the dubalen tree now stands at Mamuru's house.

Da said, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" said the jeli.

"Tell my fathers and brothers that I did not call them for a
bad reason", said Da.

"I called them for two words only.

"Each word is easy to say,

"But if one of those words is spoken we will do harm to each
other."

Then Da said, "Those of the families into which I can marry,
those whom I can love,

"My fathers and elder brothers, I want to sit in my father's seat
here in Segou.

"These are threatening words.

"'I want to sit' is a threatening phrase.

"You all see me sitting here on the hide of a white cow,

"There is a white tail lying beside me.¹

"I have a leather snuff bottle at hand.

"I have snuffed tobacco from the small mortar into my nostrils
and you can hear my breath.

"If my breath is good or bad, you know it."

1 The white cowhide and tail were symbols of authority.

The one hundred albinos were in the hole covered by the hides
beneath Da.

Da took a drink of beer, kicked the hides with his foot and
struck them with an adze.

When the albinos in the hole heard this, they raised a terrible
din and shouted,

"Little Allah! Little Allah!"

Then Da said, "Lie down there in your hole,

"I deal only with the living, not with the dead."

To the assembled elders Da said,

"While Allah above solves the problems of heavenly things, I,
Allah below, will resolve your problems here on earth.

"Ones-Who-Refuse-Something and Ones-Who-Accept-Something,
what is your decision?

"I have said only one thing,

"I have showed my fathers,

"I have showed my brothers,

"I want to sit in my father's seat of power at Segou.

"I want them to answer now and tell me what they think of this.

"This is what I look for from them, only to tell me if they do
not agree."

The Bamana just sat there with their heads in goatskin bags.

No one had an answer for Da.

Da said, "Jeli!"

"I hear you!" said Danté.

"Tell my fathers and mothers,

"Tell my brothers and my peers to take an interest in what I
have said to them.

"There are only three words.¹

"If a horon needs to say more he becomes a nyamakala.

"I am not a nyamakala, I am not a beggar.²

"I ask nothing from them, and I am not envious of them.

"I only want them to give an opinion about my claim to power so

I can hear it with my own ears."

The Bamana just sat there and no one could reply.

Da said, "Jeli Dante!"

"I hear you!" replied the jeli.

"Tell them that I have finished with the three words,

"I will not add any other thing to this."

Danté stood up and said "You are right."

Then the jeli said to the Bamana and gwatigiw of Segou,

"Bamana of Segou and gwatigiw of Segou!"

"We hear you!" they said.

"These are the words Fama Da told me to report to you here in

Segou:

"He said his grandfather took the power and then relinquished it.

"He said that Monson, his father, took the power and then

relinquished it.

"He said a porcupine has died and another porcupine has died, and

if the hedgehog is not a bastard it is time for him to

lead something.

"He finally asked you what is the matter,

1 On important issues, a man of noble rank asked his question three times, a woman four, and a reply must be made after the final question. It may be relevant here that warnings were also issued three times, after which action was taken.

2 See n. 4, p. 283.

"Nothing else has happened except that we are looking for what

Da has told you.

"We want your answer to his question.

"He only spoke two words and the third is left to the nyamakalaw
so we must report the rest to you.

"He only wants to sit in his father's seat of power.

"'I want to sit' is really a threatening phrase, but you have
a part in the decision.

"He sits on the hide of a white cow with a white tail beside
him as well as a leather snuff box,

"And there are one hundred albinos in a hole covered by a hide.¹

"He said he wanted to sit in his father's seat of power, and
you all see him sitting in his father's place.

"He has snuffed tobacco from a small mortar into his nostrils
and it is making the sound of his breath loud.

"He wears a long-tailed cap that hangs down to his buttocks, for
he is a true Bamana."

The Bamana just sat there.

Even after the question had been asked three times, no one could
reply.

Da said, "Jeli!"

"I hear you!" said Dante.

"Speak to the Bamana and let them give their opinion so we may
hear it."

Tietigiba Dante stood up and said,

"My patrons, these are not my own words,

1 The implication of the albinos in the hole beneath him, is
that he has the power to deal with the most critical problems.

"These are the words of the master of water,

"These are the words of the master of people,

"These are the words of the master of war, master of hunting.

"These are the words of the master of gunpowder, master of
bullets.

"He wants me to make you speak.

"He said there are only two words, both of which are easy to
pronounce, one of which will bring violence."

The jeli said, "Bamana!"

"We hear you!" they replied.

"Do you take the side of Da?"

No one spoke.

"Do you take the side of Da?"

No one spoke.

The jeli asked twice and the third time he said, "Bamana!"

"We hear you!" they replied.

"Do you not take the side of Da?"

"No!" they said,

"Jeli, you have forced us to speak the words hidden in our
hearts.

"We often spoke with the descendants of Wanasi,

"We often spoke with Ngolo.

"If Da insists on claiming his father's seat of power, how
can we accept it?

"His elder brother¹ is here in the village,

¹ Tiefolo, who succeeded Da and reigned from 1827 to 1839.
Da was in fact the eldest, and reigned from 1808 to 1827.

"His uncles are also here, and none of them has claimed the seat of power.

"Da says he wants to occupy the seat of power, but tell him we refuse, we do not agree."

When Da heard that the Bamana refused him, he crossed his arms over his head and shouted in the seven-doored council house.

When he shouted, Kabaka Jugu and Kanuba Nyuma ran to him and said,

"Son of the master of water, master of people!"

"I hear you", said Da.

"Why are you weeping?" asked the axemen.

"I must really weep", said Da, "for a father's death is grievous.

"I sat in the seven-doored council house and showed the Bamana that I wanted to take my father's place,

"The Bamana have seen me sitting on the white cowhide,

"But when I claimed my father's seat the Bamana refused.

"They have said they would not accept my power, and it was spoken in the presence of all.

"What can we do about this?"

"We will do what you tell us to do", said the axemen.

"What can I tell you to do?" asked Da.

"What we have agreed on!" said the council slaves.

From the seven doors of the council house they came running with their axes.

From beyond the seven doors rushed the council slaves with their axes.

They seized some of the elders by the neck and struck them on the head with the axes.

As the elders' souls departed from them in the seven-doored council house, they cried,

"Oh God, my life is ended!

"My part has gone wrong and my family is destroyed,

"My gonads have plummeted inside me and my manhood is finished!"

The axemen stripped the trousers from the elders' buttocks,

bounced the gowns from their bodies,

pulled the sandals from their feet,

took their caps and put them on their own heads.

They seized the necks of other elders who cried,

"Oh God! What have we done?"

They struck the elders on the heads with axes and as their

souls departed they cried,

"My life is ended and my family is destroyed,

"My gonads have plummeted inside me and my manhood is finished.

"Oh God, I have truly died!"

As the elders' souls departed, their trousers were stripped from

their buttocks,

Their gowns were bounced from their bodies,

Their caps and sandals were taken and put in the axemen's bags.

The axe keepers were excited in the council house, because the

clothes of the dead elders belonged to them.

They said, "Our lives are now made!"

As the slaughter went on, cries filled the air and the inside of

the council house seemed as if God had not created it.

No axeman waited for the others.

Each of them seized the neck of the first elder he came to.

An elder would be struck on the head by one axe, and before he

could fall another would hit him in the back.

Before his soul departed he would cry, "Oh God, life is ended and

my family is destroyed.

"My gonads are broken inside me and my manhood is finished!"

As his soul departed his trousers were stripped from his buttocks,

His gown was bounced from his body,

His cap and sandals were taken away.

The axemen took their clothes and as they worked they said,

"My dance has gone well today!"

The axemen made the council house as if God could not have
created it.

Finally the axemen came to a talkative elder who said,

"Young men, I understand what must be done so do not touch me.

"You never asked us before.

"If you had asked us we would have told you what we thought.

"Da did not say anything wrong, he said what a horon must say.

"He said 'My father has died and I want to take his place'.

"He told the Bamana to answer him, but no one answered.

"When you ask for an answer and get none, you must do what
seems best for you.

"We who are untouched by the axes agree that he must take his
father's place."

Finally Da spoke to the council slaves, saying,

"Lower the noise of the axes,

"The millet seeds are sprouting at last.

"The Bamana have spoken two words.

"Some refused before but those who are not dead now agree that
I must take power.

"From now on I am in command so let us not kill them all.

"If we kill them all we will be lacking in elders."

So they spared the rest of the village elders.

Then Da said to the jeli, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" said the jeli.

"Since my father died I have not mourned his passing", said Da.
He told the jeli to call the Bamana to come and help him mourn
his father's death.

The Bamana began to leave the council house, ready to go and
mourn the late mansa's death.

Those who had been sitting outside under the dubalen tree,
Under the seven dubalen trees at Mamuru's house,

They met them and said,

"Is that you Boliko?"

"Yes", said the elder.

"Where is Jamako Nje?"

"He is in the council house."

"Where is Konimathe?"

"He is in the council house."

"And did Nyantu not get out?"

"No, they all died in the council house."

"Eh! How did this happen?"

"Ah, I do not know, I understand none of it.

"Now we have been called to go and mourn a father's death."

"Whose father's corpse?"

"Eh, Da says that since his father died he has not mourned
his death."

"So, we must go to mourn his father's death after he has already
seized the power."¹

1 It was customary for the succession to be decided only after the official period of mourning, which was seven days.

"Yes, he seized the power only this morning."

"Eh, elder brother, when you went to represent us at the council house you went there for a reason,

"But you never came back to tell us the result.

"You only say that you agreed, but why did you agree?"

Then the elders who had been in the council house replied,

"Alright, if you think we should have refused go and look inside the seven-doored council house, you can go and see for yourself.

"When you see what we have seen, you will be converted even more quickly than we were."

"Very well then," said the others, "let us go to the funeral."

Da followed the crowd of mourners and when they arrived at his father's grave he placed his hand on it.

He said, "It is right to mourn a father's death, but two words are quite sufficient."

Placing his hand on Monson's grave, he shouted "Woe, father!"

A second time he placed his hand on the grave and shouted

"Woe, father!"

Then Da said, "Dante!"

"I hear you!" replied the jeli.

Da said, "It is right to mourn a father's death, but two words are quite sufficient."

Dante replied, "Son of the master of water and people."

"I hear you", said Da.

"One must mourn a father's death three times", said the jeli.

"You must say 'woe father' once,

"You must say 'woe father' a second time,

"And the third time you must say 'woe father, I suffer'."

Da said, "Dante, I refuse, I will not say it.

"It is a person's responsibility to mourn a father's death,

"But to say I am suffering would imply that my father died not
leaving the village prosperous,

"And I am far from suffering.

"Segou is a group of twelve villages,

"Markadougou is a group of nine villages,

"Dodougou is a group of twelve villages.

"From Korosa Banankoro to Toroyiri Kurunje the honey-price was
collected for my grandfather.

"When my grandfather passed on, my father took control of that
region.

"When my father passed on, I took control of it,

"And the honey-price is now collected by me.

"You want me to say I am suffering but I refuse,

"I am not suffering.

"If you tell me to say I am suffering after my father's death,

"Perhaps it is because you were suffering in my father's day."

"That is true," said Dante,

"In your father's day I did suffer a lot."

"Well", said Da, "that was my father's day, not mine."

"I hear you", said the jeli.

Da said, "Though you suffered in my father's day, you will not
suffer in mine.

"From Farko¹ on the other side of the river to Koulikoro,

1 The Monteil version lists Farko-la as one of the places Da conquered in campaigns subsequent to his succession (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 92).

"I give you all the Bamana villages.

"All these villages will work for you.

"From Farko to Koulikoro I will not collect the honey-price

for Segou, and I do not want the Bamana¹ to ask why.

"All this wealth will belong to Jeli Dante of Segou."

This meant that there were twelve work groups at the service

of Jeli Tietigiba Dante.

The millet they planted was harvested and stored in his compound,

And in those days of the Bamana chiefs, Dante always succeeded

in collecting his honey-price.

Da gave Jeli Tietigiba Dante all the villages between Farko

and Koulikoro,² and Dante said, "God's blessing upon you!

"To receive such a thing without spiritual blessing would be

worthless."

At that time all the villages between Farko and Koulikoro

belonged to the jeliw.

In former times we had influence, but not nowadays.

1 This use of the term 'Bamana' refers to the proprietary class or horon, as opposed to the artisans and griots (nyamakalaw). I have never heard a griot or blacksmith identify himself as a 'Bamana'. Instead, they will say they are jeli or numu respectively, or either of them might say he is nyamakala, which is what Tahiru often uses.

2 This would be an exaggeration designed to emphasize the happier lot of the griot in the days of the Bambara empire.

DA'S BRIDGE

After Da became the fama, he wanted to do something special.

No mansa wanted to rule a land without doing great deeds that people would remember after he died.

It was important to them to be able to demonstrate their magic powers.

Da said, "Jeli Tietigiba Dante!"

"I hear you", said the jeli.

"Jeli-Whose-Speech-Is-Endless!" called Da.

"I hear you", replied Dante.

Da said, "Go and call Suma Baretchero and Juru Mangana.

"Summon Bare Lamini and Bare Sulimani and tell them they are needed."

Dante called them and they were sent to collect canoes.

Suma Baretchero and the others collected every canoe they could find to the east and west of Segou.

Then Da told his jeli, "Go and fetch Ba the blacksmith, call for the grandson of Dawula.

"No young man is worth as much as a young blacksmith.

"A fly cannot land on hot iron slag, and when it is cool a dog cannot chew it.

"If you throw a piece of slag out behind your house it will never turn to soil.

"Go and fetch Ba the blacksmith.

"Tell him I am calling for the beloved blacksmith.

"Tell him I need all the blacksmiths."

All the blacksmiths came here to the big port of Segou and began to build some forges.

When the forges were finished they made a great many wood-punches.

When they had plenty of wood-punches they began to pump the

bellows to heat the forges,

Then they heated the points of the wood-punches and pierced the

sides of the canoes.

After making small holes in the canoes' sides they enlarged

them with axes,

Then they put sticks through the holes and joined the canoes

together.

Da had the canoes of all the river villages brought to Segou and

placed side by side.

They were joined together from the port of Segou to the other

side of the river.

Da had branches lain across them all the way to the last canoe.

Then straw mats were laid on the branches and a layer of mud was

spread over the mats from the port to the other side of

the river.

When the layer of mud was finished, Da had built a bridge.

This is why he was called 'Babilimansa, Bridge-building mansa'.

Anyone who wanted to cross the river did not have to bother with

a canoe,

They could walk on the canoes Da had pierced and strung

together like prayer beads.

You only had to walk across them and you would find yourself on

the opposite side of the big river from Segou.

After Da bridged the river they called him 'Babilimansa'.

At that time there was a misirimanke, a 'mosque man' or blind

beggar who often crossed the river to beg for alms,

The work of beggars is to walk.

A canoeman had taken this blind beggar across the river to beg

in the villages there.

While the beggar was gone, all the canoes were collected and

strung together like prayer beads to bridge the river.

When he wanted to come back across the river he could not find

a canoe.

The beggar stood on the river bank and shouted,

"Eh, Allah! What kind of slave of Allah will come and carry me

across the river to the port of Segou?

"I hear no one talking,

"I do not hear the splash of paddles,

"I hear no sounds of bamboo poles,

"I hear no canoe sounds at all.

"How will I ever get back to Segou?"

There were some Bamana hidden near the river bank in a grove of

trees.

They were looking for slaves.

Those times were different from nowadays.

If you caught a person you could sell him,

And if someone caught you, you could be sold.

There was no such thing as prison, and they never tied people

up and punished them with a beating.

If you killed someone it was alright,

But if someone killed you, that was alright too.

Some Bamana would prowl around like that, looking for people to

sell.

No one was there to put them in jail,

They could do whatever they wanted.

The blind beggar shouted and shouted until the Bamana came out
of the grove and said,

"There is no profit here, he is just a blind man."

"Eh! Do not call me that", said the blind beggar.

"Then what shall we call you?" asked the Bamana.

"You must say misirimanke, said the beggar.

"I refuse to call you that", said one of the Bamana, 'mosque man'
is a holy name.

"Your proper name is 'blindman' for you are blind.

"If you find yourself wandering helplessly here, it is because
you are good for nothing.

"If you had eyes we would take you and sell you so we could buy
drinks in Sekoro at Ten's house or Mother Nyeba's.

"Come here so we can lead you to Segou."

The blind beggar said, "Eh, my men!

"Your words follow mine so quickly that they are very hot and
I fear you.

"I do not hear the splash of paddles or bamboo poles,

"I hear no canoes, so how can I go with you to Segou?"

The Bamana said, "Is your life coming to an end?"

"It is true that you are blind but are you also deaf?"

"When I take the end of your stick, you follow me.

"If you hear me walking in water, drop the end of your stick
and turn back."

"That is alright", said the blind man,

"Those words are soothing to my nerves.

"I accept this."

The Bamana man took the end of the beggar's stick and led him onto the bridge that Da had built.

They walked across the river to the port of Segou.

The blind beggar sat down in the shade of some trees by the river and said,

"Whoever did such a great deed, if it is not a grandson of Ngolo it must be a son of Monson.

"I congratulate the one who has connected the opposite sides of Segou's big river.

"It has always been said that a man who has no canoe cannot drink beer on the other side of Segou's big river.

"When a poor man speaks a fama's praises, the time to slash his mouth has passed.

"Those who have canoes and those who do not can cross the river to either side.

"We must truly bless the mansa who did such a big task.

"May his descendants be powerful,

"May his days be good for him,

"May divine power place great weight on his words."

Some people heard him and said, "What strange words is this blind beggar speaking?"

They told Fama Da about the words, saying the blind man was blessing him because of his great work.

Da sent for the blind man and he was brought to the mansa's compound.

When they brought the beggar in, Da said, "Misirimanke!"

"I hear you", said the blind beggar.

"I have heard about your fine praises of me", said Da, and I want to reward you.

"I give you one hundred slaves,

"I give you one hundred goats,

"I give you one hundred sheep,

"I give you one hundred cows,

"I give you one hundred mutukali of gold.

"When you return home, greet your family for me."

The blind beggar replied, "They will not hear it."¹

Da was surprised at this response and he said,

"Mosque man, why do you say such a strange thing?

"I send greetings to your family but you say they will not
hear it."

"Fama, they truly will not hear it", said the beggar.

"Why do you say so?" asked Da.

The beggar said, "When a stranger visits your house and you tell
him to greet his family when he goes home,

"If you hear him say 'they will hear it', it is certain that
he will be going home.

"But where shall I go?

"As poor as I am, if I had not been blind I would have been
captured and sold for someone's honey-price.

"Now that you have given me all this wealth, all the slaves,
goats, sheep, cows and gold,

"You send me on my way with your greetings for my family.

"But I know that if I leave here, as soon as my back is out
of your sight all these things will be stolen from me.

1 The standard reply is u naa men, 'they will hear it', and it would be extraordinary to hear the negative response instead.

"I am not very worried about that, but I do fear the beating

I will receive,

"And after that I will have had enough of this life.

"Therefore, I am not going anywhere."

"You will not leave here then?" asked Da.

"No", said the blind beggar, "I am not going anywhere."

Then Da sent some Bamana workers to the east of the village to

build a house.

They settled the blind beggar there and told him it would be his

new home.

The mosque man and his people settled there, and that place

became the village of Misirimanbougou.

Misirimanbougou is just east of here.

Da gave it to the blind beggar who never went anywhere else,

and he ended his life there.

Later, Da sent seven other blind beggars with their families to

that village and it became very crowded.

Da said to Jeli Tietigiba Dante, "What do you think of these

works?

"These are things people will talk about when I am dead."

Da bridged the river here at Segou with cleverness and people

called him Babilimansa.

This was his first honorary title and it became part of the

fame he was seeking.

BASI AND SIJAMA

One day, Fama Da called Jeli Tietigiba Dante, "Jeli!"

"I hear you", said Dante.

"Before my father died", said Da, "before God touched him,

"He called me and gave me the keys of Segou.

"There are one hundred and twenty and ten keys of Segou,

"There is a key for the old dogs and one for the bitch dogs,

"A key for the women slaves and one for the four big holiw.

"These are the keys my father gave me.

"He said that as long as I have them in my possession Segou will
not conspire against me.

"The day my father died he told me about three villages he had
failed to conquer.

"His anger at these villages went with him to lahara."

"What were the three villages?" asked Dante.

Da said, "My father failed to capture Mpebala where Old Ngenyin
is the chief.

"He did not conquer Old Dese at Kaarta,

"And he did not succeed against Basi at Samanyana.

"My father asked me to do my best, once I had gained power,
to make war on these villages.

"He said I should attack them and turn their wealth into a dead
man's legacy.

"He said that if I succeed I will be blessed by the four big
holiw, M'bakungoba, Kontoron, Nangoloko and Binyejougou.

"He said the men and women slaves will bless me,

"The spirits of departed elders will bless me in lahara,

"He himself will bless me.

"Now that I am governing from Korosa to Yirikurunje and all there sleep under my control,

"I want to move against the villages my father told me about.

"What village do you think I should begin with?"

Dante said, "I think you should first move against Basi at Samanyana."

"But", said Da, "if one wants to fight an enemy brother, can this be done simply because he is said to be a brave man?"

"What do you mean?" asked Dante.

"I mean that such a thing cannot be done", said Da,

"A horon cannot attack another noble without a cause, a reason that will justify the deed.

"Must I go against him just because I am the fama without finding a beginning or an end?

"Will we attack Basi only because he is a courageous man?"

"Such a thing cannot be done.

"I want you to find me an excuse for moving against Samanyana."

Jeli Dante said, "What reason can I give you?"

"Well, Basi has a ripe daughter in Samanyana.

"Her breasts stand out like the horns of a waterbuck,

"She has buttocks like a blacksmith's anvil.

"Let us send a messenger to Basi asking him to give us his virgin daughter because you want her for a wife.

"If Basi gives you his daughter then we will become allies.

"We will become relatives, and then we will not fight against each other.

"We will not have to kill each other.

"If Basi refuses to give us his daughter, ahaa!

"If he refuses to give us his daughter we will then have a cause.

"Then the people of Samanyana will know Basi refused to give us
his daughter for a wife,

"They will know why we came to attack and destroy their village.

"This will give us a cause that could turn some of Basi's own
people against him.

"If one horon refuses such a thing to another horon, he can lose
his people's confidence.

"The forming of alliances through marriage is important.

"Someone who refuses you a wife does so at the risk of spoiling
relations between people."

When the jeli finished speaking, Da said, "So be it. How shall
we proceed?"

"Choose four jeliw", said Dante, "and have them saddle four
horses for the ride to Samanyana.

"Send them to Basi with the message asking him to give us his
virgin daughter."

Da sent the four jeliw with his message.

They went to Samanyana and said to Basi,

"We have been sent to you by the son of Mother Makore's Monson,

"We have been sent to you by the grandson of Tiemoko Ngolo.

"He sent us to tell you that he wants you to give him your
daughter to marry,

"He wants you to give her to us so we can take her back to him,

"He wants her for a wife."

When the four jeliw told Basi they had been sent by Da to ask
for his daughter, Ba just sat and laughed.

Then Basi laughed some more and finally he said, "Jeliw!"

"We hear you!" they replied.

"There are three kinds of messengers", said Basi, "and you must
be one of the three:

~~"He-Who-Is-Older-Than-The-Message,~~

~~"He-Who-Is-Younger-Than-The-Message,~~

~~"He-Who-Is-The-Same-Age-As-The-Message.~~

"These are the three kinds of messengers.

"If you send ~~He-Who-Is-Older-Than-The-Message~~, he will report all
that he was told to say and will finish by adding his own
opinion.

"He understands the message perfectly for he is older than
the message.

"If you send ~~He-Who-Is-The-Same-Age-As-The-Message~~, he will
report and then stop exactly where you stopped.

"He will add nothing new to embellish your words.

"If you send ~~He-Who-Is-Younger-Than-The-Message~~, he will not
even finish reporting your words.

"These are the three kinds of messengers.

"I know who sent you and the message is older than you.

"You do not know what you were supposed to say.

"You have not even realized that you should never have been sent
the way he has sent you.

"This is why the message is older than you.

"He sent you here but you have forgotten how you were sent.

"You made a mistake in what you were supposed to say, you jeliw.

"Even though you are jeliw you did not report in the proper
manner, but you are messengers, and I will do you no harm.

"In spite of everything you are messengers and I will not harm
you.

"If Da himself who sent you here had put a saddle on a horse's
back,

"If he had left Segou to come here and ask for my daughter,

"He would never again hear the voices of the Segou people who
told him to give their greetings to Samanyana.

"He would never hear them say 'Welcome back, how were the people
of Samanyana'.

"But since you are messengers I will do you no harm."

Thus spoke Basi.

"You are only messengers", he said.

"You reported what you were told to say.

"If a calf in the bush sees a lion he dashes toward it and tries
to drink milk, thinking it is his mother.

"But if the mother cow smells that lion in the bush it flees so
fast the herders will never catch her.

"A calf does not know the lion but the mother cow does.

"Now I will give the answer to Da's message and you will tell
him.

"When you return tell Da that instead of telling me to give him
my virgin daughter to marry,

"He should have sent you to me for some baskets that he could
carry on his head, so he could gather ant hills to break
up for the chickens.

"He is the son of an ant hill collector.

"Instead of Da telling me to give him my virgin daughter to
marry, he should have sent you to me for a weaver's shuttle,
comb and foot-pedals.

"I would find them for him so he could thread his loom, for he

is a slave.

"A slave's work is to weave,

"A slave's work is to collect ant hills.

"Ask Da if he did not know that his grandfather Ngolo was taken
to make up the honey-price.

"He was sent from Niola and given to Biton Kouloubaly in Sekoro.

"Does he not know that all his ancestors were slaves?

"How can a slave dare tell me to send him my daughter?

"Da has thrown me down and slain me before I am ready for my
grave.

"He should rather have asked me for a shuttle, comb and foot-
pedals or a small basket.

"I would send him a long-bladed hoe for cutting ant hills to
feed the chickens.

"A slave's work is to cut ant hills or to weave.

"If he put some weft thread in his loom he would be doing his
work, for he is a slave.

"Da has dared to send you to ask me for my daughter because he
wants her for a wife.

"Da has made a great mistake with the words of his mouth.

"I will let you go now, but when you return do not forget to
report all that I have said to you.

"Go and tell Da that he is not anyone with whom I could discuss
the subject of marriage.

"Tell him I know who the eligible ones are,

"That one of these is Mansa Bwaje and another is Mansa Saro,

"That the other two worthies of Segou are Mansa Sizani and
Ngoin Ton Mansa.

"Tell Da that after these three there are no important people
in Segou.

"He is a man whose ancestor came to Segou by force.

"If people journey to Segou every year, it is only to see the
three important men.

"How can a slave like Da ask to marry my daughter?

"How dare a slave like him ask for the daughter of a horon like
me?

"How could such a thing ever be approved?

"I know who the eligible men are and he is not one of them.

"Tell Da he is not worthy."

The four jeliw left Basi and went home.

They came back to Da in Segou and said, "Alright, we are back,

"But Basi told us to tell you that you should not have sent us
in the way you did.

"Fama, we cannot give you his reply unless you swear that after
we tell you what he said you will not harm us.

"It is hard for us to open our mouths and report what Basi said
unless you swear first to our safety."

Da said, "Jeliw, how shall I swear to this?

"I sent you with words from my mouth.

"Whether words from the mouth are good or bad, what would I do
to you?"

The jeliw said, "Fama, this is not good enough, you must swear
that you will not harm us."

"Very well", said Da, "if I should harm you after you tell me the
truth may M'bakungoba not spare me,

"May Kontoron not spare me,

"May Binyejougou not spare me,

"May Tiekolonsu not spare me before lahara."

"Stop! That is enough", said the four jeliw, "We will tell you all we heard from Basi.

"He told us that when we returned we should tell you that the way you sent us was wrong,

"And he said that you made a big mistake in the way you spoke the words of your mouth.

"Basi said that instead of sending us to get his virgin daughter for you,

"You should have told him to send you a basket,

"You should have told him to send you a shuttle, comb and pedals.

"He said you should thread a loom because you are a slave.

"He said you should gather ant hills for the chickens because you are the son of an ant hill collector.

"Basi also said that no matter when the sun sets, a real man always knows his own situation.

"He said if you do not know who you are, he does know and will be glad to tell you.

"He said your grandfather was Ngolo who was sold to complete the honey-price and sent to Biton in Sekoro.

"He said Ngolo sired Monson and Monson sired Da.

"Basi said there are only three kinds of people in Segou:

"Those who came here by force,

"Those who came because Segou is an important place,

"And those who came because someone said 'Let us go to Segou'.

"Basi said that you should know there are only three kinds of people here in Segou.

"He said he knows who the worthy ones are and that you are not one of them.

"He said those eligible to discuss marriage with his family are Mansa Bwaje, Mansa Saro, Mansa Sizani and Ngoin Ton Mansa.

"Aside from these men there are no other important ones in Segou and you are the least worthy of all.

"Basi said he would not harm us because we were messengers,

"But if you yourself had saddled a horse and gone to Samanyana,

"If you yourself had asked him for his virgin daughter,

"The mouths of Segou that sent greetings with you to Samanyana would never say to you 'Welcome back, how were the people of Samanyana'.

"Basi said he heard you and that when the snake and the feet are moving along the ground at the same time they are bound to meet sooner or later.

"Basi also said that you have done your best and that it is now time for Basi of Samanyana to do whatever he must."

When Da had heard all this his eyes turned as red as a weaver bird's and he said, "Eh! You jeliw.

"I have already sworn not to harm you, otherwise any mouth that says such things,

"Any mouth that speaks of my father and grandfathers as slaves,

"Anyone who would dare to repeat such things,

"I would have slashed the mouths of half of them and broken the heads of the other half.

"I would have done this or I would have gone to put my hand in my father's armpit in lahara.

"But I already swore not to harm you, so what can I do?"

The four jeliw said, "We knew this, Fama, and that is why we wanted you to swear not to harm us.

"We knew you would show no mercy to anyone here in Segou who dared tell you such things.

"Grandson of Jiri Diara and Jiriba Diara, we knew this,

"Grandson of Balikoro Diara, we knew this,

"Great grandson of Wanasi Diara, we knew this.

"Though the molar sprouts after all the other teeth, it is the only one that can break large bones.

"Millet-Sown-Last-Which-Grows-Faster-Than-The-Rest, we knew this.

"Though sambala millet sprouts after all the rest, it surpasses the others after a week and three days.

"We knew it was not possible to tell you such things,

"This is why we wanted you to first swear that you would do us no harm.

"Once you swore, we knew you would not harm us, we knew we were safe."

Then Da said to Jeli Tietigiba Dante, "Jeli!"

"I hear you", said Dante.

"We now have our reason to attack Basi of Samanyana", said Da.

"This is true", said the jeli,

"But remember that when your father died he left behind him seven cowrie diviners.

"When your father died he left behind him seven diviners.

"When your father died he left behind him seven marabouts.

"If you find that Basi has been invincible up until now it is not for nothing, there is a reason.

"Your grandfather took his turn but failed to conquer Basi.

"Your father took his turn but failed to conquer him, and this

was not for nothing.

"That Basi has resisted you up until now is not because there are no more brave men,

"There is a reason for this matter of Basi.

"Unless God informs you of his secret, anyone who says you could conquer Basi at Samanyana is lying.

"You must have these groups of seven men isolate themselves in the divining hut for an entire week.

"They must search carefully for omens on this matter of Basi and discover why he has been invincible.

"We will then take action against Basi according to what the diviners tell you."

Da sent his diviners and marabouts into the divining hut to read the omens.

They were given two sugar cakes in the morning, two in the afternoon and two in the evening.

A young marabout must never be overfed or he will not recognize the true name of God.¹

At last the diviners and marabouts were called out of the divining hut and asked what they had learned about Basi.

The diviners and marabouts said they saw only three omens about Basi, three things without which no man would ever defeat Basi.

1 It is believed that of all the names for God, which number more than a hundred, there are only two or three that the divining marabouts can use effectively to create amulets and read omens. If a marabout is asked to intercede with God for someone who needs help, it is most desirable for him to use the special names, to which God will respond most quickly. All marabouts know the many names for Allah, but only a few are thought to know the special names.

"Speak quickly", said Da, "what are the three things?"

"The things that hold Basi's power", replied the diviners,

"The things that support his soul are three in number.

"Without these three things no one can defeat him.

"The three things are Basi's first handful of food, Basi's hat
and Basi's sandals.

"Someone must bring these to us.

"We will speak our prayers and chants over them, tie them to a
rock and throw them in the river.

"If they disappear under the water you will never conquer Basi,

"But if they float on the water you will be able to defeat him."

Da said, "How can I get the three things from Basi?"

"We do not know", said the diviners and marabouts, "for no man
can do it.

"Only a woman can get Basi's first handful of food, his hat and
his sandals."

These were the sources of Basi of Samanyana's bravery.¹

His village was encircled by a thick wall.

There was no open entrance and no open exit.

No matter how high a man could jump his hand would never reach
the top.

The council house faced the entrance of Basi's own compound,
and everyone who wanted to enter the village was asked his
reason:

1 In the Monteil version, Basi (recorded there as 'Bani') had remained invincible because of amulets that were effective only against Monson, so the latter's death was kept a secret. Da asked a marabout for a talisman and was told it would require one of Basi's sandals and some hair from his beard. A pretty woman succeeded in acquiring these things by yielding her favours to Basi and getting him drunk. Basi had always been forewarned of an attack by Monson, but the talismans made it possible for Da to surprise him and take Samanyana.

"Why do you come to the village?"

"What do you want in the village?"

"What will you do in the village?"

Everyone had to tell why he was there.

If they came for a good reason they would enter peacefully.

If they came with evil intent their heads would be cut off before they could enter the village.

There were seven huts in front of the village gate and no one could enter without passing by them.

Da sat and pondered these problems.

Every day for a week he called his female slaves, but when they came he would say "Alright, go on back."

He called them the first day but said nothing to them.

The second day he called them again and the female slaves came and said, "What can we do for you, Fama?"

"Nothing", said Da, "go on back."

He called them the third day and they came and stood near him, saying, "Fama, have you called us?"

"What do you want us for?"

"Nothing, go on back", said Da.

For an entire week Da called for his female slaves¹ but would say nothing to them.

At that time there was a female slave in his house who was created when the angels had no other work to do.

She was more beautiful by a whole night than any genie, and her

1 At this point Tahiru began using the term gwadaw, meaning groups of women, each of which consisted of one wife, all her children, and the slaves assigned to work for them. Each of these groups was a gwada.

name was Sijama.

Sijama went to Da and said, "Fama, it is now a week that you have been calling us but saying nothing.

"You call us only to leave us standing around,

"You have not said you need someone to sacrifice,

"You have not said you need someone for a messenger,

"You have not told us anything.

"Why do you call us only to leave us standing around?

What does this mean?"

"Nothing, my daughter", said Da, "I am troubled."

"Eh, you are troubled?" said Sijama.

"Spit that word from your mouth.

"Segou is a group of four villages,

"Markadougou is a group of nine villages, and Dodougou is a group of twelve villages.

"From under the kapok tree of Korosa all the way to Jiri Kunje, this is the legacy of your grandfather.

"All this is your father's legacy.

"You are master of all this yet you say you are troubled in Segou.

"Why are you troubled?

"Have you been told to sacrifice a human being?

"If you are worried about finding one, use myself as a sacrifice.

"Though I am a woman, use me as a sacrifice so you can speak to people again.

"I cannot understand how a fama like you can say he is troubled."

Da said, "It is not about a sacrifice that I am troubled, my daughter.

"I want to conquer Basi of Samanyana,

"But I have been told that no one can conquer Basi without
having three things from him.

"On some morning, the first handful of food that Basi starts to
eat has to be taken away from him,

"The sandals from his feet have to be taken, as well as his hat.

"I have been told that I must have these three things and that
no one but a woman can succeed in getting them.

"I am troubled because I do not know of any woman who could
get Basi's three things for me.

Sijama laughed and said, "Fama!"

"I hear you", replied Da.

"You let the beans cool too long before adding the butter",
said Sijama.

"Otherwise, those things will not be difficult to get.

"You have been calling us all week without telling us anything.

"If this is why you are troubled here in Segou there is really
no reason for it."

"Is that really so?" asked Da.

"Yes, it is nothing to worry about", said Sijama,

"It is nothing to worry about,

"It is nothing to worry about,

"It is nothing to worry about."

"Are you sure of this, my daughter?" asked Da.

"Eh!" said Sijama, "it will be as easy as drinking water to get
Basi's handful of food, sandals and hat.

"But you must not cross to the other side of a river or lake
while I am gone."

Da said, "If you succeed in doing this I will make you the happiest person I have seen in my life.

"If you succeed in doing this I will free you from slavery and make you a horon.

"If you succeed in doing this I will give you any amount of gold you ask for in this world."

Sijama said, "Stop speaking now, Fama, that is enough;

"All I want from you is a single thing and that is honey."

In those days there were people who specialized in gathering honey.

Da sent some Bamana into the bush and they gathered every ant hill they could find where bees had left honey.

They gathered honey from hollow trees as well and brought it back with them.

Da called his special honey gatherers: "Where is Nampelu?"

"Here I am!"

"Where is Barako?"

"Here I am!" they replied.

"Do you have some of the short-winged work with you?" asked Da.

"Yes, we have some here with us", said the honey gatherers.

They brought one hundred and twenty gourds of honey and set them down.

Sijama laughed and said, "It is an amazing thing to have such power.

"Fama, one hundred and twenty gourds of honey is too much for casting a spell on only one person."

"That is easy enough", said Da, "here is the honey and you may choose the quantity you need."

That day there was one gourd full of nothing but the purest honey.

As Sijama searched among the gourds she found it and said,

"This gourd alone will be all I need, Fama."

She took that gourd of honey to her hut.

She had to make it into beer herself, in the special women's way
of doing it.

Some people use the expression "Are you possessed?"

Sijama made some I-Am-Possessed-Powder and put it in the honey
beer.

Some people use the expression "Have you drunk nkana?"¹

Sijama put some nkana powder in the honey beer.

The honey beer fermented and became stronger and stronger and
began to bubble and smoke, toi, toi .

Sijama told Fama Da that she had finished making the honey beer.

From that time on, all the important beer-brewing women of
Segou imitated Sijama.

They would say, "Can you make honey beer the way Sijama used to?"

And someone else would reply, "On the question of honey beer, if
my husband gave me rotten meat to prepare,

"I would cook that meat and add to it a sauce with the flavour
of Sijama's honey beer."

"Would you really?"

"Yes, I mean it."

This is why there are three kinds of sauce, though a slovenly
cook makes it four.

1 I was told this is a bitter, honey-like substance, made by certain black insects in old ant hills, and used as an ingredient in making beer.

Kumbakete is the sauce of a skilful woman.

She puts a hundred ingredients into it, and when she serves that sauce, the last bit is cleaned from the bottom of the pot.

The tô passes quickly from hand to mouth and soon the husband says "The sauce is finished, give us another ladleful."

Kumbakalokete, when you put that in the sauce and add the white man's kind of salt to it, they will eat each other it tastes so good.

When you put kumbakalokete in the sauce all the horon and Muslims present will eat without saying a word to each other.

The slovenly woman can convert this to kumbafwaa.

~~She-Who-Enters-The-Kitchen-Only-Once~~, if you put her sauce on the ground in front of you, you can see your ears and nose reflected in it.

If you say, "Woman, what kind of sauce have you made today?"

"This is no good at all."

She will reply, "Eh! You are right mankalaki, worthless man,

"Do you dare tell me such a thing?"

"I put what you gave me into the sauce.

"Shall I cut off my finger and put it in your sauce?"

"I have no secret powers, otherwise I would have used them."

If you have two wives you can say what you want.

But if you have only one wife don't say a word, because she will pack her belongings and return to her father's village, and you will be going to the market to eat dry couscous.

After Sijama made the special honey beer she told Fama Da that she needed to have her hair plaited so it would not be in

the style of slaves.

They called for a woman who was a clever hair dresser.

She plaited Sijama's hair in a style different from slaves.

She plaited her hair like the horon women.

They plaited Sijama's hair in the karoji style,

And they gave her a small girl to carry the honey beer.

Ba the Somono summoned one hundred of his young men to cross the

river and take her to Samanyana by canoe.

Sijama said, "Eh! Fama, it is amazing to have such power, but

there is a problem with one hundred men in a canoe.

"There are too many for one canoe."

They finally selected fifteen men for the bow of the canoe and

fifteen others for the stern.

Those canoemen were so muscular that their chests were a meter

wide.

Their chests were a meter wide from shoulder to shoulder.

These strong men were chosen for their speed with the bamboo

poles against the current.

Sijama and the young girl carrying the honey beer gourd got

into the canoe.

The Somono poled the canoe so fast that Sijama lay on a bamboo

pallet to keep out of the wind.

Even so, when the young Somono canoemen left from here it took

them a week to get to Samanyana.

At the end of a week they came within sight of the walls of

Samanyana.

Sijama prepared to leave her escort at the riverbank saying,

"If someone asks you why you are here tell them you have come

here to fish.

"I am going to do a job I have been sent to do in the village."

Sijama and the girl carrying the honey beer gourd set off for the village.

But morning had not quite arrived so they sat down by the village gate to wait until it was opened.

As they sat waiting, Sijama told the young girl to come and look at her head.

She thought she felt a louse crawling under her hair.

The girl began to search through Sijama's hair and each time she ruffled a different place Sijama would say,

"Mmm, my daughter!", because it felt so good.

Then she would ruffle another place and Sijama would say,

"Mmm, my daughter, may God put power in your body, my head is full of lice."

She kept saying "Mmm, mmm", and this became a woman's expression here in the land of the black-skinned people.

If lice invade a woman's head she will call a small girl to ruffle her hair.

In order to encourage the girl to keep ruffling her hair she says

"Mmm, mmm", over and over again.

When the girl ruffles a certain place you might hear the woman say "Mmm, that is just the place."

This way the lice killer will not be lazy or get discouraged.

If the girl pinches a louse and does not hear the woman say "Mmm" she will get discouraged.

She will think there are not really any lice on the head, and go about other work.

So this "Mmm, mmm" became the expression for our women when they are having their lice killed.

The women say this so the girl will not stop cleaning her head and scratching all the places that itch.

This is why women always say "Mmm, mmm", when they are getting their lice pinched.

Sijama and the girl waited by the gate until Basi's door-opener kicked the door, "poi!" and opened it.

Basi's jeli came out first and walked three times around the village.

On this morning when Basi's jeli came out, his eyes and Sijama's made four.

When the jeli saw her he stepped back and said, "Eh! This is not a person."

He took another step back and repeated, "Eh! This is not a person."

Sijama said, "Jeli, what is the matter with you?

"Are you crazy or a maniac?

"Is your head flying away with you?

"Have you never seen such a person before?

"What do you think a beautiful person looks like?

"I am not a genie and I am not a dwarf."

"Ah, my daughter", said the jeli, "it is good that you have spoken, otherwise I would not look at you.

"At first I took you for a genie.

"Is this beauty?

"Is this a well-formed head?

"Is this a well-built body?

"Never have I seen such womanly perfection.

"I was afraid, thinking you were a genie.

"Thank God you are a human being and I am glad of it."

Basi's jeli returned to where his chief was sitting and said,

"Basi!"

"I hear you", said Basi.

"Praise be to God, His blessings are upon us", said the jeli,

"There is a fine thing in the village today.

"There is something wonderful at the village gate.

"There is a thing I have never seen or heard of before."

"Is this true, my jeli?" asked Basi.

"Yes", said the jeli, "as far as you know, how many wives do
you have?

"Tell me how many wives you have."

"I have ten wives", said Basi.

The jeli said, "There is a woman at the gate who says she has
been travelling with a group of traders.

"She was waiting for the gate to open so she could learn if
her companions have passed by our village.

"She says she is on her way somewhere else, that she comes from
the East and is travelling West.

"The first time I saw her I did not think she was human.

"She is so beautiful that she looked like a genie.

"Ah, Basi, she is an exceptional daughter.

"If you miss this woman your life is ended.

"If you do not get her for a wife during your reign, our
jeli-horon relationship is ended.

"I will say no more about it."

Basi and his jeli rushed out through the door so fast that they did not have time to say "Let us go".

The jeli secretly thought every beautiful woman in those days must be a nyamakala woman, and Basi was sure that she must be a horon.

They were each looking out for their own interests.

Neither of them wanted her for the other.

Each had hopes for himself.

They got to where Sijama was waiting at the same time,

But the nyamakalaw were always quickest with words and the jeli said,

"Greetings, my sister, how are you?

"How are the people you left behind?

"How is your husband and your family?

"How are you getting on?

"You are welcome here."

Then Basi said, "Greetings, my beautiful sister, how are you?

"How are the people you left behind?

"How are your husband and children?

"How are you getting on?

"We are happy to see you. You are welcome here."

When Sijama responded to Basi's greetings and addressed him as

"My brother", the jeli was very disappointed.

He sat down sadly nearby because he knew then that she was not a jeli woman,

For when she addressed Basi as "My brother", it meant she was of his class.

Basi said, "Where are you going, my sister?"

"I am coming from the East and travelling to the West", said
Sijama.

"What will you do there?" asked Basi.

Sijama replied, "Mansa, please let me enter.

"My fellow travellers are traders and sometime ago we agreed to
meet at this village.

"I want to find out if my companions have passed this way.

"My feet are in a hurry and I have a long way to go.

"I owe a debt to a certain horon and that debt is a heavy one."

Basi said, "And what horon clan would that be?"

"I have made honey beer for the grandson of Ngolo.

"I have made honey beer for Monson's son.

"He is a mansa named Fama Da and he has taken his father's place
in Segou.

"I have made honey beer for Fama Da in Segou and this is why I
am travelling."

The jeli said, "Eh, may daughter."

"I hear you", said Sijama.

"Are these the words of your mouth?" asked the jeli.

"Yes", said Sijama, "these are truly the words of my mouth."

The jeli said, "Do you think you can be allowed to leave here after
speaking such words?"

"Would you present this honey beer to any other mansa but ours?"

"Eh! Your mansa?" said Sijama, "Where is he?"

"He is standing right beside you", said the jeli.

"Is he really the mansa?" asked Sijama.

"Eh! He certainly is", said the jeli.

"In fact he is not just any mansa, but the one who breaks the necks of other mansaw.

"Beside you stands the mansa who breaks the necks of other mansaw.

"Here is the Basi of God and of the people.

"This is Sarafo, leader of other men.

"The father of men and grandfather of women stands here beside us.

"Here you have a brave man who has never known shame since his birth.

"He is a man who never says "ptui" and fails to do it.¹

"Basi himself stands right here beside you."

Sijama said, "Eh, jeli, is this man truly one of the most worthy mansaw?"

"Eh! Of course he is", said the jeli, "I have already told you, my sister.

"He is not just any mansa, but the one who breaks the necks of other mansaw.

"He is the Basi of God and of the people.

"Sell the honey beer to me so I can give it to my mansa."

"Eh, jeli!" said Sijama, "Spit these words from your mouth,

"Spit this idea from your mouth, treachery is wicked.

"How can I prepare honey beer for my brother of the same father and then sell it between the bush and home?

"Eh, Basi's jeli, if I sell you this honey beer right now it will be a breach of faith,

1 Swearing an oath or making a pledge usually includes spitting lightly onto the ground, into the palm of the hand, or onto whatever object might be involved.

"You will witness this and stop having trust in me even before I finish speaking these words."

"But why would we do that?" asked the jeli.

"You really would not trust me", Sijama said.

"I prepared this honey beer in the name of Fama Da, in honour of his power in Segou,

"So how can I sell you this beer between the bush and home?

"Then you would surely always whisper among yourselves before telling me anything.

"I prepared this beer in the name of Da and I cannot give it to anyone else."

"Eh, my sister", said the jeli, "are these the words of your mouth?"

"Indeed they are", said Sijama.

"Now please calm yourself", said the jeli,

"If I tell you to sell us your honey beer you must do so.

"We know better than you the man for whom you intended the honey beer.

"Do not refuse us this honey beer."

The jeli had finally become angry at Sijama's stubborn words.

The jeli was very angry and he said, "Sijama!"

"I hear you!" she replied.

"My sister!" said the jeli.

"I hear you!" she replied.

"Are you truly a horon?" asked the jeli.

"Yes, I am a horon", replied Sijama.

The jeli said, "A person can be born a horon and yet not be a horon."

"You refuse to give us the honey beer intended for Da, so you are no horon."

"How can that be?" asked Sijama.

"Eh", said the jeli, "because no one in our land ever heard of a nyamakala failing to convince a horon woman of anything.

"Da, to whom you were going to give the honey beer has a daughter in Segou.

"Though I am a nyamakala and he is a horon, if I go and ask him for his daughter he will give her to me.¹

"You see our mansa standing here beside you.

"If I ask him to give me his daughter he will give her to me even though he is a horon.

"Chief Dugakoro is at Koré and if I ask him to give me his daughter he will give her to me though he is a horon.

"My sharp-tongued horon woman, I am a sharp-tongued man of the nyamakala.

"How can one horon woman simply wipe all these words from the mouth of a nyamakala?

"Though you claim to be a horon I am not convinced of it,

"Though you were born a horon you are no horon."

"Ah, jeli", sighed Sijama, "must we go through all this?"

"Yes", said the jeli, "I should have said worse than that."

Sijama said, "Jeli, treachery is a very wicked thing among horon."

"Among us, cheating is very bad, but you are a jeli."

"Slave-Say-'Allah', you will make me fall on my carving knife.

1 An example of griot hyperbole. No such thing would have been remotely possible, because nyamakalaw were strictly endogamous and could not marry out of their class.

"I do not like this, I was not looking forward to it."

The expression jonkoala, 'slave-say-Allah' became a custom among our women.

If you want to marry a girl or have her for your lover,

If she chatters and chatters and says she does not love you,

If you plead with her yourself or send a good talker on your own behalf,

If the discussion goes on and on, her heart will turn cold and you may hear her say 'Ah, slave-say-Allah'.

If she says 'Slave-say-Allah', don't go away.

Wait a minute, because you will know you have succeeded.

This is the way of women, this has become the women's way.

If you hear a woman say 'Slave-say-Allah' don't go away.

Wait a minute, because you will know you have succeeded.

Sijama said, "Jeli, slave-say-'Allah', you will make me fall on my carving knife."

The jeli said, "I only spoke that way to know if you are truly a horon."

"Very well", said Sijama, "I will sell you the honey beer for fifteen hundred cowries.

"The young girl will deliver it but I will not go into the village myself."

"Spit this from your mouth", said the jeli, "are you saying you will not come in?"

"Yes", replied Sijama, "I will not enter."

They placed the gourd of honey beer on the little girl's head

and she went off with it to Basi's council house.

As the jeli was speaking those words to Sijama she had pretended to be ashamed and had acted subdued.

Now she said, "Thank God, now that the girl has delivered the beer that is enough.

"Leave me in peace now, jeli.

"I do not want to enter the village myself because I feel ashamed.

"You make me lose the integrity of my horon hands,

"You have made me go against my better judgment.

"I cherish my self-respect but you have spoiled it."

The jeli said, "Leave that now, if you do not come in and visit Basi's house what will you have to tell the people at home?

"What will you report to the people where you are going?"

As Sijama started to reply, the jeli seized her by the wrist and ran with her.

This became another woman's custom.

Even if a woman wants to go somewhere, the first time you ask her she will refuse.

To stop the woman from resisting too long, take her by the wrist and run with her.

She will hold back, pretending to refuse or trying to stop but she will not really stop.

She will pretend to stumble but she will not really fall.

You will hear her saying, "Eh, Allah, you will kill me, no lie, you will!

"Release my hand, I said I will not go!

"Eh, Allah, calm down before you kill me!"

Do not worry, keep on pulling and running with her,
 She will not fall and none of the threatened harm will come to her.
 She will follow you all the way into your house.

The jeli seized Sijama by the wrist and ran with her to Basi's
 private room.

The jeli called to Basi, "Basi!"

"I hear you", replied the chief.

The jeli said, "Now I withdraw myself from this matter of the
 honey beer.

"Give me the ladle so I can taste the honey beer, I am ready
 to leave."

Taking the ladle and gourd from the basket, Sijama dipped into
 the beer.

When she had filled a clay pot the jeli drank deeply, karala-wan,
karala-wan, karala-wan.

Before the jeli could even take the ladle away from his mouth it
 filled up with his sweat.

The jeli said to his mansa, "Basi! Blessings of God upon us.

"A fama can say no more than 'Ala ka nda, since God created me'.

"What do you think of this?"

"Since I was born I have never drunk such beer.

"I cannot stay under the gwa.¹

"I cannot stay under the dubalen tree.

"I must go to the riverbank."

The jeli walked down to the riverbank and dived right into the
 water leaving only part of his head showing.

1 See n. 2, p. 316.

Basi said, "Ah jeli! How can only a ladleful make somebody not know who he is?"

"Instead of staying at home under the gwa or under the dubalen tree you run madly off to the river.

"Clearly this honey beer has been made as honey beer should be made.

"Eh daughter, give me a ladle of this beer.

"The jeli could not stay under the gwa without running to the river after only one ladleful.

"Give me a ladleful."

Sijama dipped a ladle of beer for Basi and he drank deeply,

karala-wan, karala-wan, karala-wan.

He dropped the ladle and said, "Ahan, daughter, bruuu!"

"Your honey beer, ha! It was made right.

"But one ladleful cannot make a man forget who he is, like my jeli.

"Give me another ladleful."

Sijama gave Basi a second ladleful and he drank deeply,

karala-wan, karala-wan, karala-wan.

Before he could take the ladle away from his mouth, his sweat had soaked his undershirt up to his neck.

Basi said, "Bruuu, daughter it is true that God exists, but the spirit in the boli is also a serious matter.

"Where did you get this honey beer?"

"Who brewed it for you?"

"Mansa" said Sijama, "drink you honey beer, it was only my elder sister who made it.

"If we had known in time, my sister would have seriously brewed some honey beer.

"She would have made some honey beer that nobody could drink
as you have done."

"Huh", said Basi, "if this is true then things are going well."

"At first I only wanted to buy her honey beer but now I want
your sister for a wife."

"I will marry her and add her to my other wives."

"She will become my honey beer brewer."

"Nobody in this land can brew honey beer like she does."

"Give me another ladleful and let us make it four."

Sijama gave Basi another ladle of beer.

Basi drank and drank until he could no longer blink his eyes.

The head of his heart became as hot as two hearth stones, and
the honey beer finished him off.

When he tried to raise his eyelids they would drop shut,

He could not smile because his lips would not let his teeth be
seen.

"Give me another ladleful", said Basi, "my jeli is not used to
drinking such fine honey beer."

"How can one ladleful make someone forget who he is?"

Then Basi said to Sijama, "You will have a long life, daughter."

"You have charm and you have good health."

Sijama said, "Why do you say so, Mansa?"

"Because I will make you my wife", said Basi.

"Eh! Spit this idea from your mouth!" said Sijama.

"My people are afraid of marriage with mansaw of these lands."

"How can I marry among them when they know nothing but treachery?"

"But do you not realize how pretty you are?" asked Basi.

"How could a man ever betray you?"

"Besides, you are lucky and you bring good fortune with you.

"Was Da the man in whose honour you prepared the honey beer?"

"Yes", replied Sijama.

"Are you thinking of the grandson of Ngolo?"

"Yes", said Sijama.

Basi said, "The art of speech is the work of a native.

"If I bless you with long life, health and charm it is because

I do not want you to pass by with your honey beer.

"I do not want you to give it to Da who is nothing but a slave."

Sijama said, "Eh, Basi, is it true that Da is a slave?"

"Are you not talking about Ngolo's grandson?" asked Basi.

"That one recently sent his jeliw to ask for my daughter for

him to marry in Segou,

"And those jeliw reported my answer to him, while he sat there like

a fool with his mouth open.

"I told him to give up his thoughts of conquering me.

"No one in all these lands can overcome Basi.

"So beware of this and go to sleep with it in mind.

"Anyone who wants to destroy me must first acquire my first

handful of food, my hat and my sandals.

"You yourself have entered my village and seen the inside of my

council house.

"Even a fly cannot fly in it without my Bamana guards asking why

it has come in, not to mention you and any other creature.

"Da is a true slave yet he asked me to give him my daughter.

"Instead I told him he should be out collecting ant hills or

weaving with a loom.

"I told him he is a fool who lies in Segou with his mouth hanging

open.

"I told him that we would certainly meet each other soon.

"Da thinks he will conquer me.

"His grandfather did his best against me here but he failed.

"His father had his day here but he also failed to conquer me.

"Considering that, what horns could Da possibly sprout that I should be afraid of?

"Though you are blessed with a long life, good health and charm you were going to refuse us the honey beer and present it to a slave."

Sijama said, "God must really be with me.

"I would have left you here and gone to give myself to a slave who would put his stinking hands on my back in Segou.

"I am feeling very happy, you have been medicine for me.

"I will never again think of going to Segou with honey beer for Da.

"I would myself become your favourite wife.

"Everything is going well, this marriage has arranged itself."

Basi said, "Give me another ladle of beer and then your long life and health will be mine."

Sijama gave Basi another ladle and as he drank she said,

"Basi, I do not trust you in any way,

"I fear that you will betray me, though I would never betray you.

"I accept the marriage you propose with me but there is a condition upon which I must insist.

"My condition is that when your food is ready we will eat together.

"We will exchange handfuls of food and swear an oath not to betray each other."

Basi said, "So be it, my marriage is made."

He called to his other wives asking if his food was ready.
He told them to hurry and bring it before his new marriage was
broken.

By this time Basi was so drunk his voice sounded like Ngoin Ton
Mansa's frogs.

Ngoin Ton Mansa's frogs would croak at the end of every year on
the tenth of Jomina.¹

When they croaked, it was the custom for every Bamana to waken
his wife saying,

"Wake up and listen to the croaking of Ton Mansa's frogs."

The next morning, if a woman complained to the chief that her
husband refused to wake her up when the frogs were croaking,
the husband would have his head cut from his neck.

At the end of every year, on the tenth of Jomina, you could hear
the frogs croaking like this:

"Mba mbamu, mba mbamu, mother take me on your back, mother take
me on your back."

And the mothers would all reply:

"Fini taan bolo, fini taan bolo, we have no cloth, we have no
cloth."²

"Ngoin Ton Mansa has given us no cloth to celebrate our daughter's
wedding, to celebrate our daughter's wedding."

Basi said, "Our marriage is all arranged."

1 Jomina = possibly Jumada from the Arabic calendar months
Jumada al-Akhir or Jumada al-Aula, though these fall in the
middle of the year, rather than at the end.

2 Babies are held on the mother's back by the cloth wrapped
around her waist.

"But Mansa", said Sijama, "do you really love me?"

"Yes, I do", replied Basi.

Sijama said, "When you marry a new wife to add to the others

you must try to make her friends with your favourite wife.

"Show me your favourite wife's hut so I can go and meet her before we eat."

The young girl who had carried the honey beer gourd was fanning

Basi because he was sweating so much.

His eyes were closed and he could not open them because he was as drunk as he could be.

The honey beer had taken care of him and he could not even open his eyes, so the girl kept fanning him.

"Very well", said Basi, "to the east of my house you will see a tall hut which is my powder magazine.

"The hut next to that belongs to my favourite wife.

"She is quite a nice one but not as nice as yourself."

Sijama went and found Basi's favourite wife sitting on a stool

and said, "Greetings, my pretty sister."

"Greetings", said Basi's favourite wife, "where do you come from?"

"Let us speak privately", said Sijama, "let us go inside your hut."

When they were inside, Sijama said, "My sister."

"I hear you", said Basi's favourite wife.

"I come from Segou", said Sijama.

"The son of Makore Monson¹ has sent me to you with his greetings.

"The grandson of Ngolo sends you greetings.

"Fama Da of Segou told me to come here and meet with you.

¹ Monson, son of Makore, who was his mother.

"He told me to tell you that though every child is forgetful,
the child whose father was murdered must never forget.

"He told me to remind you that Basi killed your father and mother
and forced you to marry him to be his favourite.

"Da said that instead of enjoying this favoured position you must
remember how your parents were killed.

"You must remember because though every child is forgetful,
the child whose father was murdered must never forget.

"Da intends to bring his warriors against Basi.

"He wants to attack Basi from Segou and when he arrives at
Samanyana he begs you to do your best to help.

"He told me not to come back without speaking with you.

"This is the message from your brother of the same father.¹

"Give me your answer so I can report it to him."

Basi's favourite wife said, "Sister Sijama, I have heard your
message.

"When you return tell Fama Da that I have heard his message.

"Tell him I have no rope to tie up my husband for him,

"I have no chain to pour on my husband for him,²

"But tell him there is a way I could be of help.

"A hut full of gunpowder spends the night near my door, and I
have female slaves.

"A hut full of gunpowder spends the night near my door, and
I have male slaves at my service.

1 Phrase used as an expression of close friendship.

2 No chains to bind him with; the expression derives from the way that chain links seem to pour onto the ground when let down gradually.

"Tell Da that when Basi's men use up their gunpowder and return
to the village for more,

"The thing that happens then will be of my doing.

"I will flood the powder hut like a lake,

"I will have my slaves carry water to pour in it and wet all
the powder.

"Da himself knows which is easiest to fire, dry powder or wet
powder.

"Tell him this is what I can do and that I have not forgotten
how my parents died."

Sijama said, "Asikai! This kind of help for a horon man is truly
worthy of a horon woman.

"If you do this for your brother you will bring him great joy.

"Now I must go back to your husband."

"Go then", said the favourite wife, "I am sure he is eager to see
you now."

Walking like someone returning to a broken marriage, Sijama went
back to Basi who was still being fanned by the girl.

When his food was ready the meal was brought in to where Basi and
Sijama would eat together.

The finger bowl was set down beside Basi but his eyes remained
shut.

They took his hand and put it in the finger bowl but his eyes
stayed closed.

They took his hand and put it in the tô but his eyes were still
shut.

Basi dipped a handful of tô in the sauce with his eyes still
closed.

He dipped the tô in the sauce and stirred it twice, then placed it in Sijama's hand and said,

"This is my sworn word as a horon.

"If you ever betray me may this be the cause of sending you to lahara."

Sijama took the food in her right hand, passed it behind her back to her left hand and gave it to the little girl while Basi's eyes remained shut.

The girl quickly tied up the handful of food in a corner of her cloth and hid it behind her.

Basi sat waiting for Sijama to give him her first handful of food. Sijama dipped her first handful of tô in the sauce and gave it to Basi.

He took it and put it in his mouth and swallowed it in one gulp, saying,

"Give me a ladleful of beer so I can wash this tô away from my heart.

"I only ate this tô because of our marriage vow, otherwise the effect of your honey beer is enough for me.

"Your honey beer is the best thing around.

"Ah daughter, do you remember what I recently told you?

"Now that we are married you cannot betray me and I cannot betray you.

"The first handful of food I just gave you is one of my sources of power but that is not enough.

"The first handful you gave me, it did not last from Sunday to Monday.

"I swallowed it as quickly as you gave it to me.

"And besides that, there you see my old sandals hanging from
the centre beam of my hut,

"And here you have my old hat hanging beside them.

"My soul is suspended from these things.

"Without all three of them no one can conquer me.

"Eh! How can poor Da ever get them?

"There is no way for him to do it because he does not even know
their secret.

"This is why I told you he had no control over my fate.

"Now that you have had my first handful of food everything is
fine with us,

"For I have swallowed your first handful as well.

"Now, after all this I want you to give me one more ladleful."

Basi had another ladleful of honey beer, then he said to Sijama,

"Stretch out your legs so I can rest my head on them."

Sijama stretched out her legs and Basi lay down with his head on
them.

The thing that was stalking him was more than his match.

He was lost to the world.

He no longer knew himself.

Sijama signalled to the young girl to gather up some of Basi's
old clothes.

The girl wet the rags, rolled them up and, wrapping them in a
dry cloth, she placed them under Basi's head.

He was at the height of drunkenness and the damp rags would cool
his head and help him to remain asleep.

Basi slept so soundly that he was aware of nothing as Sijama
directed the young girl in the plot.

Basi had a fine new boubou that was familiar to the villagers.

Sijama and the girl stirred up the dregs of the honey beer and poured it on the new boubou.

They took the sandals and hat down from the roof beam and put them in the empty gourd with the handful of food.

They put the gourd and ladle into their basket and placed the soiled boubou on top.

Sijama told the girl to leave as if to do laundry at the river, but to warn the Somono when she got there.

Sijama would soon follow and the canoemen must be ready to leave.

The girl set out with the basket containing the gourd covered by Basi's boubou that was as soiled as a dung heap with the dregs of the honey beer.

When she arrived at the village gate the first council slave who saw her said,

"Uh huh, something has happened today. Eh, something has happened today."

The guards nudged each other and said, "Do you see this young girl?"

"It is understandable that the jeli could not stay in the council house.

"It is acceptable that the jeli could not remain under the gwa but had to run to the river,

"But now the Mansa himself is dirtying his clothes."

The guards said, "Daughter, take this to the river. It cannot be washed here."

The girl passed safely by the first guard hut and when she got to the second one the council slaves said to themselves,

"Elder brother, what does this mean?"

"Do you see the Mansa's boubou?

"Eh, my fellows, two men only for that big gourd of honey beer.

"They called no one to help drink it, so how could the Mansa help
but make such a mess of dung?

"Daughter, take this to the river and wash it."

The guards at the third hut nudged each other and said to
themselves,

"Eh, my men, what is going on? Can this be happening?

"Eh, this is to be expected after such a big gourd of honey beer,
they called no one to share it.

"The jeli drank one ladleful and ran off, leaving the Mansa to
finish it all.

"If he did not vomit, who else would?

"Daughter, take this to the river and wash it."

The guards of all seven huts let the girl pass and she got safely
out of the village.

The girl went to where the Somono were waiting and said,

"My sister says you must get ready to leave.

"She says we have what we were sent for and she will soon follow
me.

"I am out of that village but I do not know how she will do it."

The long-eared goats under the balanzan tree,¹

Friends of wealthy men,

If they tell you "wait for me by the door of the hut",

You would be better off going about your other business.

If you hear them say "I swear that even if you wore only a
loincloth I would love you",

1 A song in praise of beautiful women.

Do not believe it.

You had better not fail to have the price of a new pair of
trousers or they will leave you.

They will talk about your poverty more than your wealth.

The day they say they love you, you will think too much of
yourself,

But if they want to betray you they will,

No matter how things are.

Sijama wanted to get away.

She wanted to leave Samanyana.

She picked up a stick and walking to the first guard hut said,

"Eh, I am so ashamed I could die, my honour is spoiled.

"Eh, child of the last day of the world.

"Child of a drunkard,

"Shrunken little chameleon.

"If you love a child of the last day of the world she will always
bring you shame.

"My hopes are spoiled.

"I have just become the Mansa's lover and already he has messed
his clothes.

"I told that bastard child, I told that good-for-nothing,

"I told that idiot to wash them here at the well.

"I told her to wash the Mansa's finest boubou here at the well
where people would not notice,

"But that bastard child took them to the river.

"If I catch her she will go to lahara today.

"If I do not give her twenty blows with this stick I will put my

hand in my father's armpit in lahara.

"Eh, she has really shamed me, she has broken my marriage.

"How can anyone leave with the Mansa's best boubou?"

The guards at the first hut said,

"Our sister, do not do what you are threatening.

"These children of the last day of the world,

"If they live with you they will always do the wrong thing when
they are afraid of you.

"Because of this fear they will always do what you told them not
to do.

"Do not do as you threaten; put down that stick.

"Just go after her and bring her back before the mansa awakens."

Sijama passed the first hut and the council slaves at the second
hut said,

"Why are you making so much noise?"

Sijama said, "Eh, I am shamed to death.

"My marriage was happy but then the mansa vomited on his clothes.

"I told my little sister to wash them here at the well but that
daughter of a drunkard took them to the river.

"If I find that idiot today I will break her guts inside her."

The guards said, "Do not act like this, sister.

"She is a child of the world's last day and she misunderstood what
you told her to do.

"If you follow your anger you will poke your finger in your
own eye.

"Go and bring her back and then leave her alone."

When Sijama got to the other guard huts she carried on in the same
way.

No one knew what was behind her words.

None of the guards knew their true nature.

Sijama escaped to the river where the Somono were waiting and

she said to the canoemen,

"Alright, I have come and I am bringing what I was told to get

as well as something I was not told to get.

"Now the rest of the work is up to you.

"We must do the distance between here and Segou.

"I know my honey beer has really caught Basi and he will sleep

all day and all night,

"But when he awakens and finds me gone he may send runners and

canoemen after me.

"If they catch up with us, I know what I will say to save myself

and you know it too.

"I am a woman, I am beautiful and no harm will come to me but

you will be in great danger."

The leader of the Somono canoemen said, "Why are you talking like

this, daughter of hell?

"You may have your catching words and your releasing words but

we have not even been in the village.

"No one has seen us or knows us.

"Only you went into the village and are known by everyone there.

"After making such a plot against Basi you dare to boast about

catching words and releasing words?

"We will just paddle slowly then and see what happens.

"You will suffer worse than we do if we are caught."

Sijama said, "Very well, when the mansa catches up with us I

will show him how he soiled his clothes.

"I will tell how I told my little sister to wash them at the well
but she took them to the river.

"I will say I came to take her home but found these Somono here
whom I do not know.

"I will tell him that they forced me into their canoe.

"I will say I cried for help but we were too far from the village
and no one heard me.

"I will say the Somono took me with them and then you will see if
they do me any harm or not."

When the Somono heard this they believed that if she said such
things to Basi they would never get away.

They would all have their big heads cut from their big necks.

They said to their leader, "Sekou of Nkofa, what shall we do?"

"Shall we churn up the water like a woman making tô?"

They churned up the water like a woman making tô.

There were fifteen men in the bow and fifteen men in the stern.

They bent their backs and leaned so far that their ears scooped
water.

They arrived in Segou on the same day they left Samanyana,
and Mansa Basi slept all that day and night.

When Basi awoke the next morning his jeli came back from the
river to greet him saying,

"Basi of Allah and of the people, how did you sleep?"

"Every jeli has his blessing, how did you sleep?"

"Every jeli has his patron, how did you sleep?"

"Mansa who breaks the necks of other mansaw, are you at peace?"

"How is the daughter of our most excellent honey beer maker?"

"Is she well? How is her health today?"

Basi replied, "Thank God she is well, she is here, she is here."

The jeli said, "I have come to greet her.

"I have not seen her since yesterday."

Basi said, "I still feel the effects of the honey beer and cannot
yet sit up.

"She must be in the other room."

The jeli looked into the private hut but it was empty.

They could not see the little girl, not to mention her mother's
head.

They searched all the neighbouring huts but did not see one or
the other.

They asked the other wives but they replied, "Why do you ask us?"

"We did not even know you had a strange woman here.

"We know nothing about any stranger."

They asked the council slaves but they dared not admit that the
fugitives had passed through the gate.

Some of the guards said, "We have not changed our places the
whole time we have been sitting here.

"Not one among us has shut his eyes day or night, we saw no one
pass here."

Basi said, "My life is finished, everything in me is spoiled.

"My reputation is ruined.

"My house has been cursed."

"Eh, Mansa", said the jeli, "why do you say so?"

"You have ten other wives like her with you here still.

"Do not worry about this strange thing.

"New things are nice but each of your wives is as pretty as the
next one.

"Why are you in grief over her?"

"From the first time I saw that daughter I did not think much of her.

"I knew she was a genie visitor.

"I knew she was not a real person.

"How could anyone come in or out of our house without being stopped or questioned?"

"Even a fly who wants to leave will be questioned,

"So how can a two-legged son of Adama¹ leave our house on two feet without being seen?"

"And what about the council slaves at the gate?"

"They all swear that not a single guard in the seven huts has closed an eye.

"She is not a human being.

"She is a genie visitor.

"No, no, she is not one of us, do not worry at all."

They went about peering into every corner of the village and when they found a little hole in the wall the jeli said,

"Ah hah, I told you! It was through this hole in the wall that she escaped.

"Our nerves are now calm."

"But jeli", said Basi, "it is not the woman that is worrying me now."

"If it is not because of her then what can be troubling you?" asked the jeli.

"Allah once showed me, Basi, that no one could ever conquer me without acquiring my three sources of power.

"I dipped my first handful of food and gave it to Sijama and she

1 Adama and Hawa = Adam and Eve.

gave me her first handful of food.

"I ate hers but I do not know what she did with mine because I did not know myself by then.

"I showed Sijama my sandals and I do not see them here anymore.

"I showed her my hat and it is also gone.

"This is why I say my hand has tried to destroy itself.

"I am not worried about the question of a wife."

The jeli said, "I have no fears about your mansa power.

"I was worried about your mansa power but I have no fear for it now."

"Why do you say so?" asked Basi.

"Eh!" said the jeli, "because Da of Segou is a newcomer to his power and would not dare to begin a war with us.

"If your three sources of power are in a safe place we have nothing to fear.

"We will destroy any army that attacks us."

When Sijama arrived back in Segou she was greeted by Da who said,

"You are welcome, did you have a good journey?"

"How is Basi and his virgin daughter?"

"How are the people of Samanyana?"

After Sijama responded to the greetings she said, "Fama Da",

"I hear you", said Da.

Sijama said, "Let us talk inside your house."

They met inside Da's house and Sijama said, "You sent me to

Samanyana to get Basi's first handful of food and here it is.

"You sent me to Samanyana to get Basi's sandals and hat and here they are.

"Here is Basi's finest boubou though you did not tell me to get it.

"I have done the best I could."

"Yes", said Da, "you have done your best.

"You have fulfilled the hopes we sent with you."

Da called for the seven marabouts and seven diviners and showed them the three sources of Basi's power.

They saw that everything was there and they brought a stone and set it on the ground.

They tied Basi's hat and sandals to the stone and put Basi's handful of food on it.

Then the marabouts prepared an amulet and tied it to the stone and said,

"We do not have many words to say.

"We wanted these possessions of Basi of Samanyana,

"We got his hat, sandals and his first handful of food on which to do our marabout work.

"We have put them in a canoe and are now ready to throw them onto the river water.

"If we will triumph over Basi may the stone float.

"If we cannot conquer Basi may the stone go to the bottom of the river.

"We do not have many words to say."

They threw the bundle into the river and it disappeared under the water.

After ten minutes had passed it was still under water.

But at the end of fifteen minutes the bundle with the amulet suddenly reappeared on the surface of the river.

Da said, "Take a bamboo pole and sink it again, sink it again with a bamboo pole.

"I do not want to make any mistake about this."

They pushed the bundle down again with a bamboo pole and after ten minutes it was still gone.

Then at the end of fifteen minutes it again appeared on the surface of the river.

Da said, "You marabouts are right now, your work is truly effective."

"Now the war of Segou against an enemy brother will take place and everyone here will join in the attack."

DA'S WARS

Fama Da's army was composed of fifty karafe.

A karafe was a group of skilful marksmen.

There were fifty karafe that were organized like the military are nowadays.

This is what the soldiers now call a "section".

Each group of a thousand warriors¹ had a commander which the Bamana called karafetigiw.

There were fifty karafe here at Segou.

If you hear debedlanyan, it is sixty minus ten which is the Bamana way of saying 'fifty'.

There were fifty karafe here at Segou.

There were sixty minus ten karafe chiefs here.

Each chief had a thousand warriors in his karafe.

The fifty karafe left Segou to do what Monson had asked Da to do

¹ All such numbers should be regarded as highly exaggerated.

before he went to lahara.

Fama Da said no man could be chosen above another.

He said every man could take part in Segou's war against the enemy brother.

"Get up everyone", he said, "and let us march on Samanyana,

"We have what is needed to put an end to Basi's reign.

"Sijama, you are free to go."

"I hear you", said Sijama.

"Seven marabouts of my father, you may join us", said Da.

"We hear you", said the marabouts.

"Seven diviners, you are among the warriors", said Da.

"We hear you", said the diviners.

"Twenty and ten ebony trumpeters, you will go with the warriors",
commanded Da.

"We hear you", said the trumpeters.

"Twenty and ten drummers, you will go with the warriors", said Da.

"We hear you", said the drummers.

"Twenty and ten blowers of copper whistles, you will go with the
warriors".

"We hear you", said the copper whistle blowers.

In those days there were twenty and ten trumpeters here.

There were twenty and ten drummers and blowers of small copper
whistles.

Nowadays all these have been replaced by the soldiers' bugles.

But in the time of Bamana power the horns were of wood, not
metal like nowadays.

Wonderful music and songs to excite bravery in men were played
on them.

When they were played everyone was ready to give himself to death. From morning to noon people rushed about and horsemen galloped here and there.

From early morning the karafe chiefs of Segou had been rushing about.

Horsemen, axemen, bowmen and riflemen had been rushing about from early morning to noon.

People scurried everywhere as Da's army left Segou.

The musicians walked in front of the troops beating war drums and blowing whistles.

The twenty and ten drums were speaking.

The twenty and ten ebony trumpets were speaking.

As Fama Da and his men rode along on their horses the Fama suddenly said, "Oh, I have forgotten something!"

"What did you forget?" asked Jeli Tietigiba Dante.

"I forgot my snuff bottle", said Da, "I want to put some tobacco in my nose so I can sneeze."

As they were talking, the person behind Jeli Dante heard them and said, "What are you talking about up there?"

"Nothing serious", said the jeli, "the Fama just forgot his snuff bottle at the port."

Then another person farther back in the line said, "What are you talking about up there?"

"Nothing serious", was the reply, "the Fama has forgotten his snuff bottle at the port."

This phrase was like a string that went from Fama Da's mouth to the mouth of his jeli.

The string went from the jeli's mouth to the one who followed him, and from that one to the mouth of the man behind him.

People were following in a file and made a telephone line with that phrase all the way back to Segou.

The people at the port took the snuff bottle and passed it from hand to hand the same way the phrase had travelled, each one saying to the one in front of him,

"Fama Da forgot his snuff bottle, pass it on."

They did this until the snuff bottle reached Jeli Tietigiba Danté who handed it to Da when they stopped to rest.

Fama Da said, "Jeli Tietigiba Dante!"

"I hear you", said Dante.

"I think you have insulted me", said Da.

"How could I have insulted you, Fama?" asked the jeli.

"There is no need to ask", said Da, "of course you have insulted me.

"When I said I forgot my snuff bottle you had it in your pocket and have waited all this time to give it to me."

Danté said, "I did not have it, son of the master of water, son of the master of people.

"I did not have it, son of the master of war, son of the master of hunting.

"I did not have it, son of the master of gunpowder, son of the master of bullets.

"Oh wealthy Bamana who slaughters cows for people.

"Copper will not make a horse disappear but it will force ahead the souls of many a man-killing chief.

"It was you yourself who blew the trumpet in Segou saying the war against the enemy brother will commence and never be put off.

"You said the war against the enemy sister will commence and never be put off.

"Your father told you about three villages and asked you to sit
in his place.

"He asked you to do everything you could to conquer those three
villages.

"Everyone in Segou from sofa to slave has rushed out to go to war.

"No one stayed at home.

"Since early this morning when we set out people have followed
in swarms, everyone is coming away from Segou.

"Your remark about forgetting the snuff bottle became like a
knife-thong that people passed from mouth to mouth.

"It went all the way to the port where the snuff bottle was,

"Then the people at the port took the snuff bottle and passed it
along until it reached us at the head of the line."

Da said, "Jeli Tietigiba Dante, I hear you.

"Eh, since early morning people have been hurrying out of Segou."

"This is true", said the jeli, "and now the others who are leaving
should be told to stay at home.

"The people we have with us now are quite enough."

This was transmitted in a song that was heard by the rest of the
people in Segou:

The son of the master of water,

The son of the master of people said,

The son of the master of war,

The son of the master of hunting said,

That the people here now are quite enough,

He said the rest of the people must stay across the river
in Segou,

For those who are here are enough.

But those people said, "Tell him we will not go back, we will
come anyway.

"His father told him to go against Nyenyekoro of Mpebala.

"He and his troops will go and shoot Nyenyekoro and capture
Mpebala.

"They will turn everything there into dead men's legacies,

"Then they will return and find us sitting around peacefully
and will speak badly of us.

"We will not accept this.

"You will go to Kaarta and shoot Deseboro and capture Kaarta,

"You will turn everything there into dead men's legacies,

"But we will be sitting around in Segou doing nothing and our
rival brothers will speak badly of us.

"We cannot bear such an affront and nothing will prevent us
from coming.

"Then you will go on to Samanyana where you will shoot Basi and
turn everything there into dead men's legacies.

"You will return to Segou with all the wealth of Samanyana won
by the sofaw and slaves of Segou,

"But we will just be sitting here while they speak badly of us.

"We cannot bear such a thing.

"This is not our second time, it is not our third time,

"This is only our first time of going to war, it is our first
time.

"We have never entered anyone like a disease,

"We have never come back like a relapse.

"Whether you try to avoid us or not, we will be there with you.

"We will be there for the good and we will be there for the bad.

"Tell Da he will find us there on good days and he will find us there on bad days.

"Tell him he can go back himself, but we will be there anyway."

"Very well", said Da, "keepers of the small axes walk slowly in case I need you."

Those axemen were among the warriors but they stayed near Fama Da in case he needed them.

When the army of Segou arrived at Mpebala the karafe chiefs began to lay siege to the village.

Nyenyekoro of Mpebala sat and exhorted his people, saying,

"Eh, what about these warriors?"

"They are the warriors of Da of Segou,

"May the sun break his back and the backs of his warriors where they spend the night."¹

"I would not give them a bit of tô, not to mention a drop of water."

People repeated his words and they reached the ears of Jeli Dante who said to Fama Da,

"Son of the master of water, son of the master of people,

"Son of the master of war, son of the master of hunting,

"Son of wealthy Bamana who slaughter cows for their people,

"Copper will not make a horse disappear, but it will force ahead the souls of many a man killing chief."

"I hear you", said Da, "what is happening?"

Jeli Dante said, "Grandson of Old Fale Diara, great grandson of Wanasi Diara.

1 The usual expression is 'May the sun break your back where you sleep', meaning 'May you be so feeble that the heat of the sun will be enough to finish you off!'

"Grandson of Ngolo, son of Tiemoko Monson,

"Brother of Bamabougou Nje Diara,

"Have you not heard the challenge?

"Whether or not you have heard the challenge it is up to you to
make the next move."

"What do you mean?" asked Da, "What do you mean by this?"

"What have you heard from Mpebala?"

Jeli Dante said, "What I have heard will not happen in your
absence."

"A nyamakala's bluffer and a nyamakala's patron are not the same.¹

"Some people are bluffers to their nyamakalaw but they are not
their patrons."

"Your father was a patron but he was not a bluffer."

"Coming from such fighters it would be surprising if you were a
bluffer, but then everyone has his fate."²

"Have you not heard Nyenyekoro's challenge?"

"He asked whose people are here and was told they are the warriors
of Da of Segou."

"He said may the sun break our backs where we spend the night."

"He said he would never give us a bit of tô, not to mention a
drop of water."

"Jeli!" said Da.

"I hear you", said Jeli Dante.

Da said, "That challenge does not frighten me."

1 A play on words: jiatiké = 'bluffer', 'blusterer'; jiatigi = 'patron', 'host'.

2 One of the most important traditional roles of the jeli was to urge his master on to great deeds that would distinguish his name and provide material for praise songs about him.

"I have already loaded my gun with elephant killing powder,

"My gun is loaded with elephant killing powder and I will not
fire it at a rabbit.

"If you shoot a rabbit with an elephant killing charge you can
forget about its meat, skin and bones.

"Nyenyekoro's words are bigger than his mouth.

"When a mouth boils like a big clay pot a head will be cooked in
its water.

"To think of someone as a rooster head that will always stay
afloat in the sauce is misleading.

"The day you cook a cow's head in the same pot you will look in
vain for the chicken head."¹

"This is why I do not want to use an elephant killing charge
on Nyenyekoro of Mpebala.

"Let us go on and when we come back this way he will still be
here."²

1 The enemy is not invincible.

2 According to Monteil, part of the campaign Tahiru describes here was waged by Monson after he ended the struggle with his brother Nyanankoro (n. 1, p. 377). We are told that during the conflict between the two brothers, Dese Kouloubaly (mansa of Kaarta, 1789-1802), who was once a captive of the Diara in Segou, took advantage of the situation and captured Niamina, an important river town with a large Marka (Soninke) population belonging to Segou. When Monson was free of his problem with Nyanankoro, he embarked on his first expedition outside Segou, reportedly with a very large army, and accompanied by his sons Da and Tiefolo. First he summoned Nyenyekoro Boare and demanded to know why the latter had allowed the Marka town to be captured. Not satisfied with Nyenyekoro's reply that the town had not been entrusted to him, Monson demonstrated his wrath by ravaging the entire territory of Misekala, which was under Nyenyekoro's authority. Monson then continued into Kaarta and furiously pursued the Massasi (ruling lineage of Kaarta, descendants of Massa Kouloubaly, 1670-1690) whom he conquered, though Dese had already died in the meantime (Les Bambara du Segou, pp. 81-82, 114-16). It was immediately following these events that Monson, still in Kaarta, turned against the Bambara chief Tyitya of Dedougou in the long siege episode (see n. 1, p. 389).

Da and the warriors of Segou went on, moving as slowly as a faltering marriage.

Once a marriage turns bad there are many long discussions about it.

Fama Da and the warriors of Segou moved on toward Kaarta.

In those days in Kaarta, Desekoro had two famous men who read omens and performed sacrifices for his power.

The first of these diviners was called Makiyeredonsa-Inadondoye, 'To-See-The-Future-Know-Yourself'.

The second diviner was called Makelensato-Dawamanyin, 'One-Who-Sees-Death-In-Advance'.

These diviners read omens from water contained in special calabashes.

At this time Desekoro had consecrated a new calabash in Kaarta.

The diviners poured water into the calabash and immediately there was a horsehair floating on the water.

When they saw this they said, "Someone will attack us today!".

The Segou warriors were coming on their horses.

They were so closely bunched that the saddle on one horse would rub the hair of the horse next to it.

The wind blew the hairs onto the water in the calabash and the diviners knew what that omen meant.

They knew that warriors were coming on their horses.

That day Makelensato-Dawamanyin went to Desekoro of Kaarta and said, "Ah, something will happen today".

"What will happen?" asked Desekoro.

The diviner said, "Horsehairs darken the surface of the water in the calabash".

"Ahah! Is that so?" said Dese, "Pour out that water and replace

it with fresh".

The calabash was refilled with fresh water but before the diviner could stand up straight, horsehairs filled the calabash as if there was no water in it.

The diviner said, "Ah, Old Dese, it is worse than before".

"Pour out that water and bring fresh", said Deseoro.

After they did this three times the mansa told the diviner to go out and look at the road.

The diviner went out of the village and climbed a high tree, stretching his neck to see.

When he could see the road he saw it crowded with Segou warriors. He saw axemen, bowmen and riflemen raising such clouds of dust that they were hidden from each other.

Makelensato-Dawamanyin rode, rode and rode his horse, full-speed back to Deseoro.

The diviner said, "Ahah, Old Dese of Kaarta!"

"I hear you", said Dese.

"We have work to do", said the diviner.

"What kind of work?" asked Dese.

The diviner said, "Ahuh, ahuh, this matter of today, bruuubua!

It is different than ever before.

"The war horses of Segou are shedding that hair as they come.

"Ah, Kaarta is doomed, Kaarta is doomed."

Deseoro said, "Eh, Makelensato-Dawamanyin!"

"I hear you", said the diviner.

"Are you losing your wits?" demanded Deseoro.

"It is not for you to say that a great town like Kaarta will be easily conquered."

Makelensato-Dawamanyin was taken away.

His big head was removed from his big neck, and his two shoulders became milk brothers.

The rest of his body spun around and his blood poured out like a sacrificial cow of Manding.

War is hard on a coward.

Then Desekoro told Makiyeredonsa-Inadondoye to go out and verify what the other diviner had reported.

Makiyeredonsa-Inadondoye went out and climbed a tall tree and stretched his neck.

He saw a great cloud of dust rising and rising from ground to sky. As far as he could cast his eye he could not see the end of the army of Segou.

The diviner scampered down the tree and rushed back to Desekoro.

He said, "Ahuh, Dese, Da's war horses are coming, they are coming feebly, yiyoyi."

"We will destroy them all but we must tighten our belts."

Desekoro said, "You say we must tighten our belts?"

"Yes", said the diviner.

"For that", said Desekoro, "I give you two baskets of millet,

"I give you two bars of salt,

"I give you two male slaves to care for your horse."

The war horses of Segou arrived at the walls of Kaarta,

The warriors laid siege to Desekoro of Kaarta.

They spoke magic words over their first charge of powder,

They fired a sacrificial charge of powder at the walls of Kaarta.

They sent their challenge to Desekoro.

When the sacrificial powder was fired at the village, smoke rose from ground to sky.

No villager had to tell another villager that the warriors from
Segou had arrived.

The war horses of Kaarta went out.

Desekoro was a Kouloubaly, son of Masa Moriba,
Barama Ngolo, son of Nyangolo,
Moriba Kouloubaly, son of Masa.

Desekoro was a Kouloubaly with the same name as Biton here in
Segou.

They were descended from the same ancestor but with different
mothers.

The two enemy forces met on the river sand that was neither Kaarta
nor Segou.

There was a big mound of sand between them.

There was also a great kapok tree, the scene of historic deeds.

There was enough space for nine war horses beneath it.

There are porcupines that scurry, kuturuka.

There are porcupines that shake, yukuruba.¹

The younger warriors attacked each other immediately.

It was a tragic occasion.

Brave men attacked each other immediately and the strongest would
soon be known.

In those days a Bamana musket would fire only one shot at a time.

But once the battle had started the warriors on both sides bravely
stood fast in their positions ready to go to lahara.

When the Bamana went into battle they would divide the warriors

¹ Some warriors advance sporadically and wait for the battle to come to them, while others explode in a frenzy of action, striking out in all directions.

into three different groups.

They lined the men up in ranks one in front of the other until three ranks were formed.

The three ranks were like men in different stages of prayer.¹

After the front rank fired their guns they would step back behind the other two ranks and reload.

Before the other two ranks had finished firing their first charge, the first rank would finish reloading.

Otherwise, once you had fired your gun you were like an empty-handed man.

In a battle where all warriors fire at the same time they are using white men's guns.

They can put ten bullets in a gun at one time.

Twenty bullets can be put in some others.

They shoot and shoot and shoot, but our guns shot only once.

The battle heated up.

When the guns of Kaarta fired wuuu, there were so many Segou guns that the Kaarta bullets and wadding² flew into their barrels.

When the Segou guns fired wuuu, their bullets and wadding flew into the barrels of the Kaarta guns.

The enemies were separated from each other by a pile of river sand.

The battle heated up.

The brave men took each other, took each other, took each other.

Finally Segou took Kaarta, but then Kaarta took Segou.

1 Specifically Muslims who, as they face Mecca during prayers, stand upright, bow, and kneel.

2 The guns were flintlock muskets using powder and ball.

After Segou would overrun Kaarta, Kaarta would overrun Segou.

The battle heated up and Fama Da said, "Jeli Dante!"

"I hear you", said the jeli.

"Tell the warriors to cease fire", said Da.

The Segou warriors stopped shooting and gathered near their leader.

Da said, "I have gathered you here to give you my last command.

"Which do you prefer: to be killed by hot bullets or to be taken to lahara by a cold sword?

"I want you to choose one of the two.

"When the battle begins again I do not want to see Kaarta overrun Segou.

"If they again succeed in driving you back toward me I will take the nearest men and send them to lahara with a cold sword.

"You know if I am able to do that or not.

"I have more to do after this and I do not want to take all day on one village.

"I do not want to take all year laying siege to one village."

The warriors discussed this among themselves.

They said, "It is better to be killed by a hot bullet than sent to lahara by a cold sword!".

The Bamana swore an oath that day, saying "Any man of Segou who flees now is the son-of-a-mother-who-mated-with-a-dog.

"Any man of Segou who flees now is the son-of-a-mother-who-mated-with-a-dog."

Every man who swore this oath never retreated again, preferring to die.

The fighting began again and Segou overran Kaarta, then Kaarta overran Segou.

They took each other, took and retook each other but no Segou man retreated toward Da.

Those who were impervious to bullets and feared only short-handled axes shouted "Heee!

"You gun masters, you will be used for our battle supper.

"If you are so brave come out of the crowd or we will find you by the noise of your gun.

"This battle will soon be all cleaned up!"

The musketeers stayed in the rear ranks and whenever an axeman met a warrior he would seize him by the collar and say,

"Eh, elder brother, are you one of ours?"

And the other would reply, "Eh, little brother, are you going crazy?"

Then the axeman would say, "Alright, you must be one of ours".

This is how the Segou men spoke to each other.

The eyes of the man whose collar was twisted would pop out like those of a frog carrying a hot clay pot.

They could be heard saying "Brother, are you one of ours?"

And if someone replied, "Uh huh, do you hear? I am one of yours", the axeman would say,

"No you are not, you are a liar, you said 'Do you hear?' and that is not a Segou expression."¹

Then the Segou axeman would crush his head with a hammer blow that took him to lahara.

Every warrior seized by an axeman would be asked, "Elder brother, are you one of ours?"

¹ The expression: ilamen.

If he was from Segou the warrior might say, "Eh, younger brother, when did it get so dark that we could not recognize our own sleeping room?"

And the axeman would say, "Ah, that is right, you are one of ours, that is a Segou expression."

If an axeman seized a warrior who said "Do you hear?" he would know the man was not from Segou and would kill him.

In this way the axemen cracked people like guinea fowl eggs.

They broke people like hen's eggs, like partridge eggs.

Finally one skilful Kaarta horseman galloped to Desekoro and said, "Old Dese!"

"I hear you", said the Chief of Kaarta.

"Are you sitting here peacefully?" asked the horseman.

"Yes I am", replied Desekoro.

The horseman said, "If you are sitting you will soon stand up, you will stand up".

"What is happening?" asked Desekoro.

The horseman said, "The Segou warriors have something dangerous called a hand axe.

"Though many of us are impervious to bullets we have no amulets against hand axes and we have run away.

"Now they are on their way here to break your head like a dog."

That was how Fama Da and the warriors of Segou conquered Desekoro of Kaarta.

After they finished with Kaarta they decided to attack Mpebala
which was the first village they had passed.¹

They wanted to capture Nyenyekoro of Mpebala.

But Nyenyekoro knew Desekoro had more warriors than he did, and
that they were braver than his own.

He knew that the war that destroyed Desekoro would not pass him by.

He knew he had made a mistake and should never have made the
challenge he sent out to Da before.

When Nyenyekoro saw Segou warriors passing by with their booty
from Kaarta he knew they would soon get to him.

Nyenyekoro of Mpebala made a plan.

He summoned all the elders and brave men of his village and said
to them,

"Let us not use our guns because we cannot stand up against the
man who is coming against us.

"We have said a wrong thing and have been caught by our own mouths.

"Now everyone of us must do his best.

"All the elders must wear no trousers, they will wear only loin
cloths.²

"Every old man is to wear a loin cloth only.

"We will take our drum and I myself will carry a pair of sandals.

"I, Nyenyekoro, will hang the sandals on my ears.

"You will unroll a long piece of cloth and tie it behind me.

"This will be a big artificial tail attached to my buttocks.

"This is how we will go to meet the Mansa.

"Everyone who says he is a Diara will suffer for it.

1 It was to the northeast of Segou, while Kaarta was northwest.

2 Tahiru inserted the remark: 'Some call these kokolo, others mpoki'.

"Everyone who says he is a Koné will suffer for it.

"Everyone who says he is a Tounkara will suffer for it.

"We will carry only one clan name with us.

"We will be Traoré only, so that this war can pass us by.

"This deed of ours will create a joking relationship¹ between us
and Fama Da.

"There is no other way that we can face the army that conquered
the Mansa of Kaarta."

The people of Mpebala agreed to Nyenyekoro's plan.

Outside the walls the Segou warriors were already loading their
muskets.

They were priming their muskets and waiting for the Mansa's order
to attack Mpebala where Nyenyekoro had spoken scornfully
of Segou.

The elders of Mpebala removed their trousers and put on loin cloths.

Nyenyekoro and his elders set out with their drum, singing as
they went.

It was from that day that the uncircumcised boys got their custom
of the yukuri mask.

The yukuri mask played with by the uncircumcised boys originated
on that day.²

1 senankuya = a kind of alliance, usually between clans, calling for mutual aid when needed, in the form of food, lodging, material goods, or refuge in time of war (see Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion Bambara, p. 83; R. Pageard, "Notes sur les rapports de 'Senankouya' au Soudan français particulièrement dans les cercles de Segou et de Macina", Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N., T. XX, ser. B, 1-2, 1958, pp. 123-141).

2 It is very unlikely that this was the origin of the young boys' game using the mask called yukuri (Malinké kongden). One boy dons the wooden mask with its dangling fibres and feathers, and chases the other boys with a whip. This takes place around the beginning of the rainy season to ensure a propitious year for the boys scheduled to be circumcised.

Nyenyekoro and the elders of Mpebala shuffled out to Fama Da and
said,

"Fama, we come to greet you, is there some way we can serve you?"

Da said, "Eh, village elders! Why have you come, or are these
the uncircumcised boys of the village?"

"But I see you have white hair."

The men of Mpebala said, "We are not the uncircumcised boys."

"Fama, we have come to greet you."

"What is your clan name?" asked Da.

"Traoré", they replied.

Then Da saluted them, saying "Traoré!"

"Marahaba!" replied the men of Mpebala.

"Traoré!"

"Marahaba!¹ Yes we are Traore."

"Eh!" said Da, "Then you are really not important people."

"I thought important people were coming to see me, but that you
are not."²

"Fama", said the men of Mpebala, "we have come to greet you and
now we would like to return home safely."

"If you do not harm us, your generosity will increase your fame."

Da did not shoot Nyenyekoro.

"I cannot harm you", he told the elders of Mpebala.

Da said to Jeli Dante, "Jeli, I told you we should not attack
these people."

"We conquered Kaarta first and now Nyenyekoro has given himself
to us."

1 The traditional response to certain greetings.

2 With this joking response Da acknowledges the elders as Traoré,
a patrilineage with which the Diara have a senanku relationship.

"He says his clan name is Traorè, so he is our joking relative.

"If we had attacked them while there is a joking relationship between us we would have broken a taboo and spoiled our war.

"You know our joking relatives, they are not important people."

Then Da saluted the men of Mpebala: "Traorè!"

"Marahaba!" they replied.

"Traore!"

"Marahaba! replied the men of Mpebala, "Tama, we want to go home now."

Da let Nyenyekoro go free that day.

He delivered the Mpebala people to the Bamana of Segou.

He told them to take the Mpebala people and exchange them for beer.

They were set free, and now in Segou when something is so common as to be of no value it is called 'Mpebala people'.

That was the origin of the expression 'Mpebala people' and it is still in use.¹

After the Bamana of Segou rested, they said, "Where shall we go now?"

They knew they must attack Samanyana.²

They went to Samanyana and encircled it at a distance.

They sent a message to Basi saying that war had come to him.

"So be it", said Basi.

The armies of Segou and Samanyana each prepared their magic for a terrible battle.

The army of Segou also did a sidi, they cast a strong spell that would destroy the magic of Samanyana.

1 mpebalakaye.

2 Following the Monteil version, the attack on Samanyana returns us to the campaigns of Da after the death of Monson.

The two enemy forces met in the bush and began to fire at each other.

Basi's warriors soon used up their gunpowder.

Basi's favourite wife whose father and mother had been murdered said, "One whose father was murdered never forgets".

She told her slaves to make a hole in the wall of the powder magazine.

Basi's favourite wife told her slaves to bring water and pour it on all the gunpowder stored in Samanyana.

Just then Basi was sending men to get more gunpowder because their powder horns were empty.

A hundred men went back to the village for more gunpowder, but every powder magazine they opened was soaked with water.

Basi's favourite wife had soaked all his gunpowder and the warriors of Samanyana were at a loss.

They said, "Oof! If the year is already spoiled there is no use counting the months.

"If you say to someone 'How is your father?' he will not be offended, but if you say 'How is your mother's husband?' you will find yourself in a fight with him though both questions refer to the same person."

('Father' and 'Mother's husband' refer to the same person but the ways of saying it are different. One way makes it sound good and the other way makes it sound bad.)¹

The first hundred men stayed away so long that Basi grew impatient and sent another hundred men.

¹ Tahiru incorporated this explanation directly into the text of his narrative.

This second group went and met the first hundred men who were running for the bush.

They said, "What has made you stay away so long?"

"There is much carrion on the field and you are needed, why have you stayed away so long?"

The others replied, "Things have turned upside down.

"The ears of last year's millet are different from those of this year's millet."

"Eh, what do you mean by such words?" asked the second group.

"Ai", said the others, "you will hear it from other mouths, but not ours.

"How can we report such a thing?"

"There is no way to tell about it, we really cannot report such a thing and are running away."

They went off into the bush.

All two hundred of those Samanyana men ran away.

The Samanyana warriors had no more powder and the Segou warriors entered the village.

They went into the village with their small axes and their magic power against bullets.

All the axemen were impervious to bullets and the men of Segou entered Samanyana in masses.

Basi knew there was no need to worry about shame on the day of death.

He knew there was no need to worry about death on the day of shame.

He knew his favourite wife had betrayed him and given him to his enemy.

At last Basi went out and gave himself up to the army of Segou.

The Segou warriors looted Samanyana.

They took away everything that had become dead men's legacies.

This was one of Da's great deeds.

When they were done, the Segou warriors sat down and snuffed their tobacco.

The twenty and ten ebony trumpets were told to speak.

That day the twenty and ten ebony trumpets sang a song about Basi:

Nyanamu, nyanamu,¹

You, Basi of Samanyana,

You knew the history of Segou,

But you strutted about full of pride,

Saraku, saraku everywhere.²

Now the power of Da has reduced your value to the price of a big kola nut.

The twenty and ten ebony trumpets sang this at Basi's ears.

The twenty and ten drums answered them:

The slavery of important people,

We prefer this kind of slavery to some people's nobility,³

The slavery of important people.

Samanyana was looted of all its wealth and Basi was brought back

1 The sound of the trumpets, but at the same time connoting arrogant mischief; a busy child will be chided: 'You nyanamu, nyanamu everywhere!'

2 Synonymous with nyanamu.

3 This mocks Basi's earlier statements about Da being the descendant of a slave.

here to Segou.¹

When they were back in Segou, Da summoned Sijama and said,

"Sijama!"

"I hear you", she replied.

"You succeeded in your mission to Samanyana", said Da,

"By getting Basi's first handful of food, his hat and sandals
you brought us the power to conquer him.

"Because of this we cannot keep you among the people or you would
be able to do the same thing to us.

"You might someday deliver us to another chief."

They took Sijama away and broke her head.

This was done by Da's command.

Then Da said, "Basi's favourite wife!"

"I hear you", she replied.

Da said, "You who made holes in the walls of your husband's powder
magazines and poured water on the gunpowder.

"You who caught your own husband for us.

"We cannot keep you among our people because you might dare to
deliver us to another enemy.

"Anyone who would keep you in his land for the love of a woman,
you would deliver him to another."

They took away Basi's favourite wife and broke her head.

Da said, "Seven marabouts, you served my father but you are not
mine.

1 According to Monteil's informant, Basi tried to flee on horseback but was captured by a griot named Sotuma. Instead of being killed, Basi was exiled to Digon because with his auburn hair, he was one of the men the Bambara called Gonbile. It was believed that to put a red-haired man to death was to incur frightful misfortune (Les Bambara du Segou, p. 91).

"You succeeded in reading omens about someone who lived very far from here.

"You knew we had to have Basi's first handful of food, hat and sandals.

"You helped us catch a man as brave as ourselves.

"Anyone who would keep you among his people thinking you will be useful,

"The day will come when you will do the same to him.

"You will catch him for another chief."

The seven marabouts began saying "subahanalai, subahanalai".¹

Da said, "What is this 'banalai' you are saying there?"²

"Bring your tails here.

"You are on your way to the execution ground but all you can say is 'subahanalai, subahanalai'.

"There is no reason to say 'subahanalai' to us."

They took away the seven marabouts and cut off their heads as easily as breaking an egg.

SINIKAJAN

Now, with God's blessing, the blessing of the Prophet and that of our Muslim brothers,

I, Jeli Tahiru will go on with our story.

The part of the story I have been telling you during the past days

1 A Bambara expression of distress; from the Arabic subhān Allāh = 'praise be to God'.

2 Implying that Da was not attached to Islam.

was ended last night.

That was about the mansaw of Segou from its beginning to the time of its last masters.¹

The things we will speak of today, this entire talk will deal with other people here in Segou.

Those worthy men who once dwelled here in Segou,

Those who bent the world like a scythe and unrolled it like a road.

They performed deeds worth remembering after their deaths,

deeds that could be told to their grandchildren.

After their deaths their deeds could be recounted to entertain their relatives.

We will tell that story today.

Who is this story about?

It is about Koda and Jeneba.

Who is this story about?

It is about Jan Koné's son.

Who is this talk about?

It is about Hamari of Bonge,

It is about Soro and Safing's son.²

We call him 'God's truth-teller', the man who did tlabi and tlabiyara, sidi and sidisoto.³

1 The Bambara mansaw of Segou following Da were Tiefolo (1827-1839), Nyenemba (1839-1841), Kerango Ben (1841-1849), Naluma Kuma (1849-1851), Masala Demba (1851-1854), Turokoro Mari (1854-1859), Ali Diara (1859-1861). See also notes 1, p. 282, 1, p. 334, and 2, p. 374.

2 These are praises of Bakary Jan, which Tahiru explains below, p. 512.

3 According to my informants, these expressions derive from the names of villages, one named Tla or Tlabougou near Markala and the others named Sidi and Sidisoto, where famous battles took place. Therefore, to 'do' tla or sidi is to perform spectacularly in combat. I have not been able to confirm this.

This man is Boubakar Sidiki whom people call Bakary Jan.

Bakary Jan, son of Koda and Jeneba, grandson of Keleke and
Mangoro,

Grandson of God's truth teller, he is the one who did tlabi
and tlabiyara.

Well, people call him 'Bakary Jan' or 'Tall Bakary' but he was
not tall.

His father's name was Jan or Sinikajan, 'Tomorrow-Is-Too-Long'.
What is the reason for that?

Well, his father's name was Lasa when he lived at Markadougoubani,
But one day Lasa came home to find that Segou's thirty-five
karafe had destroyed Markadougoubani.

He said, "All the worthy men of this village have gone to the
other world. How did this happen?"

He was told, "Kele Monson's thirty-five karafe came and destroyed
your village,

"All its worthy men are in lahara today, they have gone to lie
on their shadows."

Then Lasa raised his voice and said, "On such a day of death there
is no living,

"I am ashamed that I am not dead."

"Ah! Why is that?" he was asked.

Lasa said, "When someone has gone away and comes back to find his
village destroyed,

"If he considers himself one of the worthies of that village
it is shameful to be the only one left alive.

"There were many others here as brave as myself."

Lasa had nothing to live for, so he went to Segou to see Monson.

He came to the place of the balanzan trees,

Four thousand balanzan, four hundred balanzan, four balanzan and
one small humpbacked balanzan.

No native knows where all of them are, least of all a stranger.

Lasa arrived at the gates of Segou and said to the Bamana axemen,

"All the worthy men of my village have been sent to lahara by
the thirty-five karafe of Segou.

"Now I have come here myself because I want to follow my father's
other sons."

The axemen went to tell Monson about this man from Markadougoubani
and asked what they should do with him.

Monson said, "Let him wait until tomorrow and then we will decide
what to do".

When Lasa heard this he said, "Tomorrow is too long to wait for
my death,

"I want to be put to death today."

But they took him and tied him up and left him in a lonely hut
to wait for morning.

When the first light of dawn bleached the river water Monson went
to the seven-doored council house.

The twenty and ten ebony trumpets were there that day,

The twenty and ten drums were there,

The copper hunting whistles were there with the war drum.

They all replied to one another.

Monson summoned the man who said tomorrow was too long to wait
for death, and the horns made that into music:

"Sini ka jan, Tomorrow-Is-Too-Long-To-Wait,

"The Power is calling you."

The twenty and ten ebony horns would blow that and the twenty and ten drums would answer.

Monson said to Lasa of Markadougoubani, "Why have you come here?"

Lasa replied, "When I returned to my village I found that all my worthy brothers had gone to lahara."

"I have come here for no other reason than wanting to follow the other brave men of my village."

But Monson said, "I must make use of a man like you, you must become one of my people."

"You show great courage by leaving your broken town and coming here to follow your brothers to lahara."

"Death is a bitter thing, and a man with that kind of courage, a man who does the work of manhood in such a way, you must be one of the bravest of all men and I will never kill you."

"If I have you among my people, even though you may never achieve anything for me yourself,

"When God gives you a son he will surely be someone who will achieve something for me."

The name of the man who said "Tomorrow is too long to wait for my death" was dropped.

In place of his old name he became known as Sinikajan.

Sinikajan was settled in the village of Samankoro¹ and he became a chief of the foroba Fula.

When you hear 'foroba Fula' in Bamana land, they are different from the red Fula people.²

We in Bamana land believe they originated with Biton.

1 See n.1, p. 395.

2 See notes 3, p. 394, and 4, p. 394.

Biton once made a visit to Masala-Sonina and stayed at the house
of a friend.¹

That friend gave Biton one of his sons whose name was Bonge,
Bonge's last name became Kouloubaly but he was from Masala-Sonina.
Biton finally sent that Bonge Kouloubaly to Samankoro and that
is how the common Fula got started there.

When the Bamana would conquer a town and take away the cattle,
they would send the cattle to Samankoro.

The common Fula at Samankoro would take care of those cattle.
Bonge Kouloubaly was in charge of Samankoro and Sinikajan later
joined him there.

They were in command of the common Fula.

This Sinikajan's wife was Koda and the name of Koda's co-wife
was Jeneba.

People praise Bakary Jan by saying 'Koda and Jeneba's son',
His mother's name was Koda and his father was Sinikajan so that
is how we praise him,

We say 'Sinikajan's son'.

We also say 'Hamari Bonge's son' though Bonge was a Kouloubaly.
Bonge and Sinikajan became close companions so we honour them
both with the fatherhood of Bakary Jan.

That is how they got on in those days, my esteemed elder master.²

1 The friend was a Fulbe (Peul, Fula).

2 karamoko farama sidima = esteemed elder master: this is Tahiru's acknowledgement of the master griot (jeli ngara) from whom he learned these traditions. As a master now himself, Tahiru might do this once or twice in a long narrative, while a young griot who is still learning, may address his teacher (karamoko) at the end of every few lines.

BILISI

In those days Bilisi was here in Segou,

But when Bilisi's story is told some people take it to mean he
was a genie.

Bilisi was not a genie and he was not a dwarf.

Bilisi himself, you must understand, was a man of this country.

What was his origin?

Bilisi himself was a Jokorome.¹

His first name was Amadu and his family name was Nyangadu.

In God's creation of his body, Bilisi was not a well-made person.

God made other people's heads in one block, but Bilisi's head was
made in three blocks with three corners like women's
cooking stones.

So Bilisi was there in the time when the Bamana of Segou ruled
the country.

The Bamana ruled here for one hundred and eighty years and four
months.

The white men had not yet arrived.

Al-hajj Shaykh Umar had not yet arrived.²

Our old ones have told us about a few of the things that
happened during those hundred and eighty years.

We jeliw do our work with these things we have been told.

We believe that anyone who follows the ways of those ancestors
will not have shame.

1 Another informant (Jeli Manga Sissoko, Kolokani, Mali, Aug. 20, 1975) told me that the Jokorome are a Marka (Soninke) group, but I have not been able to confirm this.

2 The Tukolor chief who conquered Segou in 1861.

Bilisi himself was called 'Bilisi' because he was deformed.¹

Bilisi's two legs were white up to his knees.

Bilisi's two hands were white up to his wrists.²

His face was white and his head was made with three corners.

He was a dreadful sight.

He was a hideous thing, but he was also brave.

In those days we had a saying:

"The chief is master of the village, but he cannot stop someone from saying 'I will not sleep with life tonight'.

"The village streets will be given to that one so he can make his journey."

This meant that the chief had no power over someone who was really determined to do something.

The brave men who were with us here in Segou, every new year they would take a black ox and slay it and call it 'brave men's meat'.

Each year, anyone who was not a brave man, he was not given a share.

When the ox was slain at the new year it was divided into shares.

Every stalwart man was given a share in his own name.

When Bilisi lived with us here in Segou he always had a share.

When Bilisi would go out for a drink, if he met someone's child in the street he would catch the child.

He would take the child and give him to the brewer in exchange for all he could drink.

If he met someone's daughter he would catch her.

1 bilisi or bilizi = ghost, phantom.

2 On the subject of abnormal skin pigmentation, see n. 1, p. 410.

He would go and sell that one to the brewer for drinking money.¹

The parents of those children went and raised their voices to

Fama Da, saying,

"What about this matter of Bilisi?

"If this matter of Bilisi does not change he will deprive Segou
of all its children.

"Any time he goes out of his door on the way to a honey beer
house, if he meets a child, be it boy or girl, he catches it
and trades it away for a drink.

"If you think about this thing, a man's child is not a baby chick.

"If you think about it, a man's child is not the offspring of a
goat.

"If you think about it, the child of a black-skinned man is not
the offspring of a lamb.

"We have a saying, 'If the non-owner of a thing does not act more
hurt than the owner, he will get something the owner will
not!'"²

That is how the mothers and fathers would go and complain to

Fama Da.

Fama Da would send someone to bring Bilisi to the council house.

When Bilisi went into the hall he would always ignore all our
customs.

1 On this well-known legend another informant remarked that Bilisi was not really enslaving the children. He would seize a child in public, and no one would stand up to him, which added to the local perception of him as invincible. Taking the child to the brewer, he would exchange it for drinks, and the parents could later come and redeem the child. In other words, Bilisi was coercing the parents into buying him drinks.

2 This is a warning to Da that if he does not do something about Bilisi, the situation will deteriorate into something more serious for the mansa.

Our Bamana custom was that when you went into the Mansa's chamber you would remove your cap with your left hand and put it into your pocket.

When Bilisi went in, he wore his cap pulled clear down to his ears.

Eyes would see this, but mouths could not speak of it.

Everyone would carry on as if nothing had happened.

When Bilisi was summoned again, everyone else would remove their caps and put them in their pockets,

But if anyone said he saw Bilisi take off his cap he would be lying.

People talked about this matter, they asked each other what was to be done, saying,

"Eh, this Bilisi is the arrogant man of our town!

"Bilisi has no respect for anyone,

"Bilisi has become insolent.

"You know, this is something that cannot be tolerated.

"He was born but you must know that all of the people were born as well."

They said, "Let us consider this matter, there must be a solution."

But everything comes in its time, everything will begin and end in its time.

When the time comes, God will allow it and if you try to force a thing before its time you will bring shame upon yourself.

The Segou people were baffled by the matter of Bilisi, so things continued the way they were.

As Bilisi's infamy rapidly grew, people began to say,

"There is no real harm in this, why were we so troubled?"

They said, "There is nothing in this, let us leave it alone".

Then, you must know, the people would carry on without doing anything.

They would go about their business and leave things as they were.

Finally things got so bad that even if you met a one-eyed man you would not dare to let your eyes make three.

People were so afraid of Bilisi that they would not spend three moments together in the streets of Segou.

The resentment toward Bilisi was growing,

Bilisi's infamy was increasing.

A day came when the elders were sitting in the council house and one of them said,

"It is a Bamana saying that 'If Self-Sufficiency lays its eggs on the road, I-Do-Not-Care will come along and break them'."

Another elder said, "To say 'I have no equal among my mother's other children' is all right, but to think you have no equal among all women's children is to wind up as the offering at somebody's birth."

Then another elder said, "If somebody's son begins to do wicked things, to say he will stop by himself is false.

"He will only stop when he meets someone more heartless than himself."

The Bamana sat there in the seven-doored council house.

Everyone was drinking and telling drinking stories.

All the Bamana had snuffed tobacco into their nostrils.

Everyone's nose was as red as if they had dipped them in dried mushroom powder.¹

1 This is an indigenous medicine that resembles tobacco.

Just then a stouthearted Segou man came in and said,

"Death will happen, but it will only happen once, not twice.

"There is only one death, not two.

"We will get rid of the annoyance of Bilisi today or I will go
to lahara."

He went into the hall where Bilisi was sitting.

Slipping an arm out of the sleeve of his boubou, he reached down
from inside his boubou and snatched the cap off Bilisi's
head.

When the other men saw that the cap had been snatched off Bilisi's
head it was as if petrol had been spilled among the elders,
and fire had suddenly broken out in the council house.

"Eh!" said one of the elders, "It would have been better to leave
the cap on his head.

"I fear its removal will cause a still more serious problem."

When Bilisi returned to his house he sat down and thought about
what had happened.

He shook his head and said, "Well, so be it.

"When the lion's roar is no longer heard in the bush,

"When the lion roars near the village you know it is headed your
way.

"I have heard the lion roar and that is all right.

"The Bamana say 'A man who has never felt rage and frustration'¹
hasn't the heart to seek revenge'.

¹ mone = rage caused by frustration; informant's example:
you are fighting someone bigger and stronger than you, but
gaining the advantage, convinced you can beat him until he
somehow cheats, perhaps with the help of friends, and overcomes
you. As a result you feel mone.

"But it is also said that 'A man who rushes to get revenge on the same day he suffers may suffer again'.¹

"Otherwise, the day my cap was taken off among the rival brothers in the Bamana council house of Segou, ah, I would see that it was counted as a day among days to be remembered.

"But a word cannot refuse to be told and an action cannot refuse to be done."

Bilisi went to Fama Da and said, "The thing that was done to me the other day, I saw it and heard it.

"I threaded it like beads on a rosary and will always keep it with me.

"A day can be far off but it will arrive.

"The cause that makes today may make tomorrow as well.

"I will leave Segou, Fama Da, and I want to tell you the conditions of my going and my coming back.

"If the day comes when a horon must leave the town, the people must know the conditions of his leaving.

"I am not running away, I have no shadow that can flee, and I am not afraid.

"You are the mansa of the land and we are the stalwart men of the land.

"We are your worthy men, and the porcupine benefits from the work of the mole."

Da said, "I hear you, and I am pleased".

"But before I leave Segou" said Bilisi, "I must lay stress upon some words I have to say:

¹ When you feel moné stay calm, because if you are not careful, what caused it could happen again.

"The brave men's meat that is divided up every Thursday,
"When I, Bilisi, have left Segou let no man touch my share.
"Let me hear that birds or beasts have eaten it,
"But if I hear that a person with two legs has taken my share
on any day here in Segou,
"Eh, the people of Segou may lie down that night but they will
get no sleep.
"And that goes for all the dependent villages of Segou.
"I make no difference between the people.
"This is my only warning and I want you to keep it in mind as if
I spoke the kilishi words of a magic spell.
"When I depart from Segou I will leave a sign that will remain
after me and you will always see it here."

Soon the rainy season arrived and when it was in full swing
Bilisi got ready to leave Segou.
As he was leaving the town he set his foot in a place that became
a great hole.
The rain came down hard all that rainy season, but the mark of
his foot could not be hidden.
Bilisi journeyed eastward from Segou.
There is a town east of here which we call Masina and that is
where Bilisi went.
What was the name of the village he went to at Masina?
Saye.
Bilisi settled in Saye.
Bilisi and the Fula of the East became allies.

Together they made tlabi and tlabiyara, dreadful battles and terrible war.

Bilisi and the Fula of Masina conquered many villages together. They did sidi and sidisoto, horrible fights and bloody conflict. Let me tell you, master, compared to the things Bilisi did here in Segou,

What he did there at Masina was much worse.

Bilisi was very wicked at Masina.

His actions were terrible there, and the Fula of Masina were as baffled by him as the Bamana of Segou were.

Fama Da summoned his dust diviners and cowrie throwers and said, "When Bilisi left for Masina he gave a warning.

"He drew a line and then went away.

"I know it would be dangerous to cross over that line.

"But if one man were able to ravage an entire population, it would only be because that population was too passive.

"However brave one man is, he can never overwhelm all the people together, for they are stronger than he.

"When you hear someone say 'I am not like other men', if he is not being humble then he must think he is better than others.

"But no matter what he means by saying 'I am not like other men', all the people combined will be better than him.

"This is worth thinking about, for everything in the world has its cause, and we must rid ourselves of Bilisi's threat to Segou.

"We must prevent Bilisi's successful return to Segou.

"He must disappear from the land of Segou so we can live in peace.

"The things Bilisi did here in Segou were no small deeds, and now he has gone to Masina.

"He and the Fula of Masina have been involved in much bloody violence.¹

"This is why I want the dust diviners to see for me,

"I want the cowrie throwers to see for me,

"I want the ngoni seed² throwers to see for me,

"How we can rid ourselves of Bilisi's threat to Segou."

The diviners made their signs and read their omens, and when they were finished, the dust diviners said,

"No cause is ever small.

"If you meet someone through a friend, you can trust the new person.

"But if a bad cause, no matter how small comes to you, you will be busy day and night.

"Our omens show that a young man will come from the West.

"We the dust diviners, this is our word."

When the cowrie throwers were consulted, they said,

"The wind that blows out the flame of Bilisi's power will come from the West."

Finally, the seed throwers looked at their omens and said,

"The flaw in Bilisi's future will come from the West."

But time went by and nothing happened, so Da summoned his beloved jeli, Jeli Tietigiba Dante.

In those days to be a jeli was like gold.

In those days to be a nyamakala was like diamonds and emeralds.

1 katabali bani ani sulasi yoro kononton = an under-statement to the effect that they got themselves into some fierce wrestling matches, but meaning something more in the nature of deadly conflict.

2 From a local shrub called ngoni, which is also the name of the small indigenous four-stringed lute favoured by griots; the seeds are similar in colour to the red kola nuts, though much smaller.

Da said, "My favourite jeli!"

"I hear you", said Jeli Dante.

"What about this matter of Bilisi?" asked Da.

Jeli Dante replied, "We will do what you think should be done,
but we must not wait too long."

"Very well", said Da, "then I want you to search through the four
villages of Segou, the nine villages of Markadougou and
the twelve villages of Dodougou.

"Walk through them all and look for a courageous man who can
challenge Bilisi.

"You must find a bold man who can do the tlabi and tlabiyara,
face Bilisi in bloody battle."

Jeli Dante said, "You are my patron and on your death day I will
die with you."¹

"On your day of shame I will be ashamed with you.

"Whatever you command I will follow you.

"I will never go ahead of you.

"When you hear a calabash ladle called a galama, that is when
it has a handle,

"But if you break off the handle it becomes a jimi.

"Anytime you hear a man's turban being called a disa, that is
because of its fringe,

"But if you cut off the fringe it becomes a woman's waist cloth
called a tafe.

"The hope of the nyamakala is his patron, just as a woman's hope
is her husband and a child's hope is its father.

¹ Not to be taken literally; the griot means his fortunes rise
and fall with those of his patron.

"It has been said that we are called nyamakalaw because of the kala which means 'handle'.¹

"It is you who give me significance.

"You make a tall tree of me, so I act according to your will.²

"We have consulted the cowrie throwers, the dust diviners and the seed throwers.

"All the diviners agree that the answer to Bilisi's threat will come from the West.

"But an omen is just an omen and we cannot point our finger at the exact person.

"We cannot direct our mouth toward the exact person and speak his name, saying he is of such and such a family.

"If we call for 'the people', all the people will answer.

"But all people do not fit the same container and just because a man looks brave it does not mean he is.

"You may hear the sound of snoring coming from many houses, but they are not all inhabited by worthy men.

"When one mother aborts a child and another mother gives birth to a child, the issue will be different.

"Everyone loves his child, but if you see a child better than your own you will know it.

"It is the same thing if you go into the bush with a deaf man.

"If he suddenly comes running out of the bush toward you, do not stand and wait for him,

1 The effectiveness of this metaphor hinges on the listener's awareness that the word nyana (spirit, force, power) is sometimes heard as nyama, which here represents the griot's patron.

2 A continuation of the word-play in the previous metaphor: nyama = tree.

"Because between you and God, you know he did not just hear something, he saw it with his eyes and is running away.

"The wild beast that saw the dogs runs differently from the wild beast that did not see them,

"But we have seen our omens and we know what we think.

"Son of the master of water and people, master of war and hunting, son of the master of powder and bullets,

"Between you and your men of the nyamakalaw, you will find the solution to this matter of Bilisi."

Da said to Jeli Dante, "The diviners have told us about the West, so stand up and look to the West.

"Bilisi has stirred up the Fula of Masina with his violence,

"And I will not be glad to know that his dust will fall next on us here in Segou.

"I will not be glad to know his dust will not reach us in Segou until later.

"If you hear someone say 'I have escaped', you know he ran at the right moment.

"If he had not run at the right moment his pursuer could have caught him as easily as if he were running on the ceiling.

"It would not take long.

"Now is the time for us to find the solution to this problem of Bilisi."

They saddled a horse and gave it to Jeli Tietigiba Dante.

BAKARY JAN AND BILISI

For a long time the chief of the foroba Fula was Bonge Kouloubaly.¹

When Bonge Kouloubaly passed away, Jan Koné who was called

Sinikajan became chief of the foroba Fula.

That Jan Koné's first son was Bakary and Bakary became one of our famous men here in Segou.

The Bamana say that a hawk cannot steal a crowing rooster,

And Bakary Jan became a crowing rooster of Segou.

The Bamana say, "Stand up and leave the place where you are sitting."²

That is possible, but it is not possible to leave your destiny.

A man of destiny must live out his fate.

I once had an amulet I made for myself, and a leatherworker took it away from me.³

But what God makes and puts in your head, that cannot be taken away by a leatherworker or anyone else.

Jan Koné and his family had settled first at Samankoro.

Then they came here to the other side of the big river to a village which they named Bakarijani.

Later they moved toward the setting sun and settled at a village called Nyama.

Jeli Tietigiba Dante rode into Nyama and asked for the house of Jan Koné.

1 See p. 512 and note 1, p. 395.

2 Get busy and make something of yourself.

3 The making of amulets is a speciality of the leatherworker (garanke).

He went to Jan Koné's house and introduced himself, saying,

"Well, here is a stranger for you".

Jan Koné said, "Welcome, where do you come from?"

"I come from Segou", said Jeli Dante, "the place of the karite
and balanzan trees,

"Four thousand balanzan, four hundred balanzan and four balanzan."

"I am a nyamakala from there and I have come to visit you in
your village."

Jan Koné replied, "I am pleased to welcome you."

"We nobles like the nyamakala because they tell us of ancient deeds."

"They clean out our ears with the deeds of our grandparents,
the deeds of our ancestors."

"They tell us that if we cannot equal our ancestors' deeds we
can at least remember what they did."

"You are welcome, I am pleased that you have come."

Jan Koné gave the jeli a room and had some chickens killed for that
man of the nyamakala.

That was our traditional hospitality.

Tietigiba Dante asked no questions that day, nor did he tell
anyone why he had come.

The next day when the sun was high he went to lounge near the
mperi players.

When they were in Nyama, many of the foroba Fula and Bamana
would gather under the dubalen tree to play mperi.

The white people came and changed one of the Bamana's old
traditional games.

Our ancient Bamana used to play mperi with holes in the sand
and sticks for the figures.

Then when the white people came into this land they transformed
the game and put it on a board like their chess.

But our ancient people used to outline a four-cornered place in
the sand for their games of mperi.

Anyone who did not know what it was might step on it, thinking
some children had been playing there.

In those days no writing had come to this land.

There was no script as with Arabic or European writing.

So the strategy for the army was worked out with the mperi game.

If they wanted to attack a certain town, they would do so if they
had no father or mother there.

They would go to make war only on men who were their equals.

By playing mperi they would decide how to counter the enemy
strategy.

If they did not know what that strategy was, they would use the
mperi to learn how to get into the enemy town and how to
get out again safely.

They would plan their moves against the enemy by arranging the
mperi sticks:

Kill this one and capture that one, take a position over there.

This is a good position, be careful here or you will be killed.

Even when people play chess one pawn will kill another and take
it away,

Or they will arrange their men so a certain one cannot be touched.

Well, the battle plans were worked out in this way by the Bamana
playing mperi.

If there was a village that had been attacked and conquered
by a man's father,

That man had to be careful if he went there, because it was his enemy village.

If they caught him they would do to him what his father had done to them.

That is the way mperi is played.

You are wary of one another.

As in chess you watch your opponent while you work out your strategy so you can beat him.

Mperi is played like that, with the aim of penetrating your enemy's defences.

This was why the ancient Bamana played it, to practice getting at their enemies through fair means or foul.

If you succeed in penetrating your opponent's defences you can take his mperi pawn the way you would a chess pawn.

You can blow out five of them and say, "I kill these five".

And if you take away enough of your opponent's men you will win the game.

If a Bamana chief was aiming at a village, the leader that was the most clever would capture his enemy.

Many Bamana won their battles because they practiced their strategy by playing mperi.

When Jeli Tietigiba Dante went to lie under the dubalen tree the mperi players were chatting idly,

But Bakary Jan who was also there sat quietly all day without speaking a word.

Koda and Jeneba's son sat all day near the mperi players but did not say a word.

The nyamakalaw have a saying, "If you see a noble with a busy tongue, if he is not a robber he must be a liar".¹

We say to the horon, "When a noble controls his legs, we nyamakalaw favour you,

"When a noble controls his mouth, we nyamakalaw favour you,

"When a noble controls his stomach, we nyamakalaw favour you,

"But when a noble controls his hand,² we are soon parted from you."

We say to a noble, "We do not share father, we do not share mother,"³

"But whatever you have to give us, we will favour you for that."

When a noble controls his legs we can find him at home.

When he controls his mouth we can tell him what we have to say and he will hear it.

When he controls his stomach at mealtime we can pour the sauce on his food for him.

Then we can say that we know him well because we were in his house and poured the sauce on his food.

But when a noble controls his hand he is distant from us.

If he gives us something we will want to speak well of him,

But if he gives us nothing we will merely greet him and go on to the house of someone more generous.

Well, after he told all this to a noble, the nyamakala would visit the noble's house.

1 It was considered undignified for a noble (horon), especially a chief, to talk very much. Speech was the realm of the nyamakalaw in general, and of the jeliw in particular.

2 When he is not generous in compensating the nyamakalaw for their services.

3 We can never intermarry, we are of different social classes.

When a noble hosts a nyamakala he must never say "My beggar has come".

He must say "My observer has come".

We nyamakalaw observe everything a horon does:

The way he enters his house, the things he says there and how he occupies his position as head of the family.

We observe the limits of his manhood, whether he is brave or cowardly.

Once we enter his house, we will know all these things by observing how he speaks and looks.

Jeli Tietigiba Dante stayed at Nyama for a long time and observed Bakary Jan.

He saw that Bakary Jan might not speak twice in a year.

During some days Bakary Jan would not say a word to anyone.

He was wrestling with the things he had in his mind.

The soul he had was not a little soul.

He knew that in a time of crisis he would prove himself.

He would know what he had to do.

Jeli Dante observed everything he could about Bakary Jan.

He concluded that if the end of Bilisi's threat was coming from the West, Bakary Jan must be the man.

Dante decided it would be a mistake to pass up Bakary Jan and put his hand on the head of another man.

That day he went to Bakary Jan's father who was Jan Koné and said, "Sinikajan!"

"I hear you", said Jan Koné.

Dante said, "I have been visiting with you, with you and your

family, asikai!

"Blessings be upon you, it has been a rewarding visit.

"Our mothers can give us birth and make us handsome young men.

"Our mothers can give us birth and make us clever young men.

"Our mothers can give us birth and make us tall young men,

"But there is something a father cannot give his son, for a man
must acquire that himself, asikai!

"That is a man's own personality, he brings that to himself.

"If he is a worthy person, people will say to him asikai .

"But if he is a worthless person, even if he is a leader,
people will say to him moria .¹

"A father does not give that to his son, the man brings it to
himself.

"Asikai to you, Jan, Sankarana² to you.

"Balan'ni kadajo, jonge ni sukula,³

"You are a descendant of Modiba Koné,

"You are a descendant of Dokamisin, Dokamisin and all the other
villages of Dō,

"The twelve villages founded by Modiba Koné.

"The Sankaran from which Modiba Koné came is in Guinea,

"Sankaran is between Kankan and the West.

"The deeds of the Koné are not hidden in Mali because we jeliw
do not let people forget.

1 An expression of contempt for a person, the opposite of asikai, which expresses admiration.

2 A special praise name for people of Koné lineage, harkening back to Modiba Koné, the ancestor from Sankaran in Guinea.

3 Further research will be necessary to decipher this obscure form of praising which so far has left my informants at a loss.

"Koné, if we call you Diara you must answer, for they are the same clan.

"Koné and Diara are different names for the same identity."¹

"There is a reason they have different names."²

When this speech was finished, Bakary Jan came and held the bridle of the jeli's horse.

Tietigiba Dante put his foot in a stirrup and settled into his finely wrought leather saddle.

The jeli put his horse into a trot, finiforo,

He put the horse into a canter, baraforo,³

He spurred it into a gallop and the hooves echoed over the ground.

The pebbles flew, twigs crackled, friends laughed and enemies cried.

The horse galloped until it was so tired it ran like a middle-aged woman with her wrapper caught between her legs.

Then the jeli halted the horse as suddenly as if he had spied a virgin girl he hoped to marry.

When he had mounted his horse with Bakary Jan holding the bridle, the jeli meant to plant his spear in the earth.

Instead, it pierced Bakary Jan's foot and pinned it to the ground.

1 jamu = family name, clan, ancestry, lineal identity.

2 See pp. 285-92, and n. 1, p. 291.

3 In addition to the obvious onomatopoeic quality of these words as imitations of types of a horse's gait, there is a related image based on agricultural terms: to fini tyonko is to thrash millet with the feet; fini foro = millet field, bara foro = gourd (calabash) field, and one of my Bambara assistants is convinced that the differences in the depth of the holes required for planting millet (shallower) and for gourds (deeper) are part of this imagery, in that the depth of the hoofprints vary as the horse changes speeds.

As he held the jeli's stirrup, Bakary Jan did not say 'hum',

he did not say 'hah',

He did not let on that his foot was pierced, did not let on that

he felt any pain.

Nobody noticed that anything was wrong until Jeli Dante tried to

take his spear out of the ground.

As the jeli pulled out his spear, Bakary Jan's foot came with it.

When he saw that Bakary Jan did not show any pain, Jeli Dante was

sure he was the man Da had sent him to find.

Here was something worth telling about, something fine sent by

Allah the beneficent.

Jeli Dante set out from Nyama to return to Segou and report to Da.

He went to the grandson of Jiri Diara and Jiriba Diara, the

descendant of Nzan Diara and Nzanjekeba Diara, grandson of

Balikoro Diara.

Jeli Dante said to Da, "Master of men, I have come back.

"Spiritual power is earned through deeds performed for God.

"Ill fortune does not chase people like a mad dog, it is purchased

through bad deeds.

"Asikai! You are blessed.

"Fama Da, I went and saw things, I looked at things and heard them.

"I have come to tell you what I have seen, I have come with

good news.

"I went to Nyama and I found Jan Koné there.

"He is capable in his position and I found something encouraging

in his family.

"Some people say an ox's horns can substitute for the ox, but an

ox's horns are its horns only, and the only true substitute

for one ox is another ox.

"When you see a snake shed its skin, the old skin is never as big as the snake itself, and when you see a small snake crawling along, you know it will someday be a big snake."¹

"We can set our hopes on what I have seen in Nyama."

"What did you find there?" asked Da.

"I saw Jan Koné's son at Nyama", said Jeli Dante, "I saw Koda and Jeneba's son.

"A clean-handed youth can mix the grown-ups' cream."²

"I saw him and he sends you his greetings.

"Well, it is not this week and it is not the coming week, he requests four weeks of you,

"Allow him one month before you send for him."

"Very well", said Da "I have heard this".

They set a limit of four weeks and when that time had passed they sent a message to Nyama.

They told Jan Koné that the Fama needed Bakary Jan in Segou.

When Bakary Jan came, Fama Da said to him, "The reason we have called for you, it is not for a bad thing.

"To say 'I have no equal among my mother's other children' is alright,

"But to think you have no equal among all women's children is to wind up as the offering at somebody's birth ceremony.

"We have summoned you because of our problem with Bilisi,

"Bilisi has worried Segou the year round.

"For many months he has troubled the peace of Segou.

1 The ox and snake metaphors refer to Bakary Jan as the true hero for whom they were searching.

2 You can place your trust in one showing such great promise.

"Bilisi left here and went to Masina because there was
hostility between him and Segou,

"And I know he will not give up his struggle against Segou
because he went and joined the Fula of Masina.

"Bilisi has allied himself to the Fula of Masina, and there
he is at Saye.

"The Fula of Masina are the owners of slender barbed spears
which they call yatawarta.¹

"If they hit you with one of these barbed spears, it cannot be
pulled out, wherever it pierces you.

"If you try to pull it back it will make another hole, if you
try to push it through it will not go.

"The Fula call it yatawarta but the Bamana call it atita
atiseki, Will-Not-Go-Or-Return'.

"When a Fula throws it at you, even as far as from here to the
other side of the compound, it will be sure to reach you
unless you are well protected by your magic.

"Bilisi has allied himself with Masina and one day he and the
Fula will attack Segou.

"We do not know when, but if you hear someone say 'I hid and
they passed me by', it is because there were too many for
one man.

"To be forewarned is better than getting thrown down and having
to say 'Get off me'.

"Before we reach that point we must prepare a defence for
ourselves and that is why we summoned you.

1 Or possibly nyatawarta.

"If we should praise someone with the name of Segou, we think
it will be you, 'Bakary the Great of Segou',
"Otherwise I fear for the villages of Segou."

In those days the land of Segou here extended from the upper
frontier with Masina down to Koroko.¹
That Koroko was one limit and Kurusa² was another, as was
Jirikurunje.

So when we said we would begin this story at Samankoro near here,
that is part of Segou,
And when we said we would begin this story at Bakarijani, that
is also part of Segou.

What about Nyama?

Nyama is part of Segou, not to mention Joforongu which is Segou
itself.

Da was still talking to Bakary Jan and he said,

"They say that when you become a master of many people you must
deal with every kind of person.

"You will deal with worthless ones, you will deal with madmen,
you will deal with fools.

"All of these have their places.

"When good people are sitting at their talk, if a madman comes
and speaks his mad words,

"If there is someone among them who is also mad, the two of them
will quarrel, and the good people will not get involved in it.

1 The Ivory Coast.

2 In Guinea.

"They will say 'Leave them to it, they are mad'.

"If there is a fool in a group of people and another fool comes
along to disturb them,

"The first fool will rush out at him and the others will say,
'Leave them alone, it is between fools'.

"It is the same with worthless people.

"To govern good people and bad people alike is what makes it
desirable.

"That is why I am master of this land.

"I do not like adversity, and when I see disaster heading toward
me I try to avoid it.

"You have been summoned because of the problem with Bilisi.

"Here is the weapons hut and anything else you need will be
given to you.

"Jeli Dante, show Bakary Jan to the horse pastures and let him
choose any horse he thinks can stand the fatigue of a
battle against Bilisi."

If someone is unaware of a tragedy it is because it has not
visited their house,

But the bad thing will come to someone else in any case.

When two powerful men meet they can be bad for one another,

But if you see them fighting, a woman incited them to it.

Otherwise they would have recognized their equals and not
challenged each other.

Bakary Jan took up his saddle and bridle and Jeli Dante showed
him out to the first horse pasture.

When Bakary Jan approached a horse with his saddle and bridle
the horse said,

"Go on, it is not me you came for, I am not the one to do it."

In those days animals used to talk, but we do not hear what they say anymore.

Every time Bakary Jan approached a horse it would say,

"Go on, it is not me you came for, I am not the one to do it."

He could not find any horse in the first pasture that would do what he had in his mind.

They all said they could not do what he had come for.

They went to the second pasture but when Bakary Jan would approach a horse it would say "I am not the one".

No horse in the second pasture said "I can do it" until he found a very skinny one.

It was thinner than thin, but when Bakary Jan approached it with his saddle it said,

"Alright, I have been waiting for you, I am the one that can fight to the end of the battle with you.

"I am the only one that can walk into trouble with you, so let us go."

Bakary Jan took that thin horse and they returned to the town.

The jeli said, "Well, Fama, the Fula ... says this is the one that can do it, this is the horse he chose".

Da said, "Dante, you have deceived me, this Fula does not know what he is doing.

"Out of all those fine, well-fed horses the only thing he could choose was this one.

"He is so thin that if you blow on him with your mouth he will fall over.

"This is not a horse to fight Bilisi, and if Bakary Jan says

it can, I do not trust him."

Bakary Jan just said "Very well", and took his horse and tied it up. He fed it bean stalks and millet, he gave it sorghum and a block of salt.

There is a saying, "Feed your horse because the day of reckoning may be far away but it will arrive."

The day Bilisi left Segou it was very wet and his foot made a big hole that stayed there to remind the people of him.

Bakary Jan took note of this and said to the people of Segou, "The day I leave to fight Bilisi you people of Segou will know about it.

"But I will not go until I am prepared because there is more to travelling than saying 'Alright, let us go'."

Bakary Jan took his horse to the river and washed him.

You know what a horse likes after you wash him:

If you do not prevent it, he will lie down and roll.

When Bakary Jan led his horse out of the river with only a simple bridle in its mouth it lay down on the ground.

The horse rolled and rolled from one side to the other, then he stood up and shook himself.

When he shook himself, big lumps of mud fell off but much of the mud stayed on him and Bakary Jan did not wash him again.

When Bakary Jan went through the town on the way home with his horse he passed by the men sitting under the dubalen tree and they said,

"Eh! The man they say has come to fight Bilisi, is this the horse he will ride?"

"Look at that horse, it is all wet."

Bakary Jan heard them and said, "Very well, my brothers, you have named my horse".

He called the horse Nyote, 'Wet Coat'.

Bakary Jan and Nyote would accomplish great deeds together.

They would do tlabi and they would do tlabiyara, they would do sidi and sidisoto,

That was the day Nyote was named.

Bakary Jan went on feeding his horse and soon he began riding it.

There is a very big ditch on the way from Sekura to Sekoro.

When you pass Sebougou between there and Sekoro there is a big ditch.

In those days they called this spot the 'watering bank' and the cattle used to come and drink there.

Bakary Jan would practice with his horse, what you call 'training'.

He would plan his strategy as he rode out on the horse,

baraki, baraki in the afternoon.

They would come up to the great ditch and Bakary Jan would put the spurs to the horse.

Nyote would jump over the ditch and land on the other side.

Koda and Jeneba's son, Keleke and Mangoro's grandson.

God's truth teller, the man who did tlabi and tlabiyara, sidi and sidisoto,

He would go out on his horse Nyote.

He would ride around Segou and all the nearby villages.

After riding along the walls of Segou they would go on to Sekura.

When they got to Sekura they would go on to Sebougou and finally they would arrive at the big ditch.

Bakary Jan would suddenly spur the horse and Nyote would jump
over the ditch and land on the other side.

At first the horse was afraid of the ditch but Bakary Jan kept
taking him there and jumping him over it.

After many weeks Bakary knew the horse could jump that ditch as
easily as drinking water or crunching millet.

It became as easy as eating hay for Nyote, so the training period
was over.

Then Bakary Jan turned to the second part of his strategy.

What is manhood?

The state of manhood is based on secrecy and the recipe for
that is control of the mouth.

A brave man suffers many things and these he bears through silence.

Some things happen to a man, but they happen and pass on, and if
he does not complain he becomes worthy.

But if he cuts open his stomach and reveals his insides to
everyone, he deserves nothing better than cowardly flight.

If he keeps his own council no one will ever hear him say
"I am frightened".

The people will not panic and cry "What shall we do? Eh, God!
We are doomed, we will never survive this."

And when the crisis has passed, if he is alive to hear it, the
man will not be called a disgrace to manhood.

If a man does not talk and just keeps his mouth closed, even though
he fears for his life,

If he is not killed, he will hear people say "By the slave of
Allah, that man is truly brave.

"That was a bad time that came and passed, hum! But no one heard him worry about it."

This is the reason we say manhood is based on secrecy and the recipe for it is control of the mouth.

If a man cannot master his own mouth, a woman is better than him.

When Bilisi left for Masina during the rainy season, his foot made a permanent hole in one place.

Sometimes after Bakary Jan had finished with his horse training he would go and put his foot in that hole.

He would measure his foot against the print made by Bilisi and find that his own foot was smaller.

Shaking his head, Bakary would say, "This is not the year, it is not yet time.

"A thing must not be forced to happen ahead of its time."

That year passed on, and when the next year came Bakary again tried his foot in the hole left by Bilisi.

But there was still a small difference in the size of their feet.

Finally, when the third year was full Bakary went and measured his foot in Bilisi's track.

This time, let me tell you, it was a case of the right size needs no pushing.

Bakary went to see Jeli Dante and said,

"Dante, the brave men's meat is shared every Thursday here in Segou.

"Even though Bilisi is no longer in our town you put out his share only to have the animals take it.

"Spilled water cannot be picked up again, and I can do nothing

about the shares that have been wasted for so long.

"But this year you must take Bilisi's share of the Thursday brave men's meat and add it to my share.

"I will add salt and its brothers, pepper and sumbala, to it, and eat it with my family.

"Though it is Bilisi's share, we will be comfortable here in Segou.

"There will be happiness night and day, and more happiness will come later."

Jeli Dante said "Eh! Son of Jan the Elder and Jan the Younger, you have said this!

"Grandson of Keleke and Mangoro, you have said so!

"Son of Koda and Jeneba, you have said so!

"Grandson of Safin the Elder and Safin the Younger, are these the words of your mouth today?

"Does this mean that the beasts and birds will not eat this year's share?"

"Yes", said Bakary, "the beasts and birds will not eat this year's share."

"Hamari of Bonge's grandson, son of Sinikajan!" said Dante.

"I hear you!" said Bakary.

Three times Dante asked, "Did you say that this year's share of Bilisi's meat will not be eaten by the beasts and birds?"

And three times Bakary answered, "That is right!"

"Then I am pleased", said Dante, "all of Segou will hear of this from here to Koroko.

"The four villages of Segou, the nine villages of Markadougou, the twelve villages of Dodougou will all hear about this.

"One does not tell a newly circumcised boy to endure the pain like a man.

"The real pain comes with manhood, and he must face that with courage to avoid shame among his brothers."

When the next Thursday arrived, the brave men's ox was slaughtered and skinned.

A share was laid out for every man of the area who was known for his bravery.

Every brave man had his share and Bakary Jan had his own and Bilisi's share as well.

Jeli Dante went to Fama Da and said, "Well, Bakary Jan has spoken today.

"The Fula man has spoken.

"The Fula man with slender legs but whose kick cannot be withstood by a wall,

"The Fula man who occupies very little space on a mat when he lies down on it, but who can go among many men and make them cry,

"He has spoken today and he said to add Bilisi's meat to his.

"The birds will not eat it, not to mention the beasts.

"I asked him three times and he answered me three times with his own voice.

"The word of a horon is stated three times.

"Otherwise it is the word of a nyamakala, a profuse and begging word.

"Well, when the meat was cooked and salt and its brothers were added to it, Bakary Jan and his family ate until they were full.

"If you inquire into how a sparrow would dare insult the father of a vulture, you will find that the sparrow's guardian is an ostrich."

Bakary Jan went to Kuku.¹

In those days at Kuku there was a famous marabout named

Nganzumana, though some people called him Marabout Bala.

Bakary Jan went to see Nganzumana of Kuku and said, "Nganzumana!"

"I hear you", said the marabout.

"I, Bakary have come", said the Fula, "If you hear that the wasp is brave, it is brave over its own nest.

"I have come to see you about Bilisi's share of the meat which has been given every year to the beasts and birds.

"Before Bilisi left he gave warning that beasts and birds could eat his share,

"But he said if he hears that a two-legged person has eaten it, people may go to bed in Segou but they will get no sleep.

"It is true that I have no equal among my mother's other children,

"But to think that I have no equal among all women's children may be to wind up as the offering at somebody's birth ceremony.

"I have come here because you are an accomplished marabout.

"There will come a day when Bilisi and I will meet here in Segou.

"We will ride against each other and clash headlong in combat."²

"We will try all our battle techniques³ on one another.

"Now I want you to read the omens of that day for me, because I have already eaten Bilisi's share of the meat."

1 A nearby village, between Segou and Markala.

2 katabali banani ani sula seki kononton = a phrase describing a kind of formalized duel on horseback allowing rest periods for the antagonists.

3 kuturuki ni bala yukuba = wrestling holds, another understatement.

"Very well", said the marabout, "I understand that you are concerned about your fight with Bilisi.

"You are wondering how it will begin and how it will end.

"I will prepare one amulet for you, but no more than that.

"It is to be attached to the front of your saddle.

"On the day you meet in mortal combat you will try all your powers on one another.

"Bilisi has some secret fetters that are not for hobbling his horse.

"Anyone who touches those fetters will die, so do not allow them to touch you.

"If you are not certain of your success against Bilisi and fear that he might defeat you in Segou, I have something more for you.

"I, Nganzumana will pray to God for you, and here is what you must do to satisfy yourself:

"You must buy two roosters, naming one of them Bilisi and the other after yourself.

"Let them go in your yard and have some uncircumcised boys there to watch them fight.

"When your rooster beats Bilisi's and throws it to the ground, have the young boys seize your rooster.

"Then, you must quickly lay it on the ground and kill it.

"When your rooster is dead, take the uppermost part and give it as alms to a beggar.

"But the side which lies next to the earth, that is the earthward meat and you must cook it on your fire and share it with your family."

Then the marabout prayed for Bakary Jan:

"Father of miracles in this world we thank you,

"God the omnipotent, the exalted,

"Maker of the sunset and the dawn who made everything by twos,

"You made the night and the day different¹ wives of the same
husband,

"You made man and woman different wives of the same husband,

"You made life and death different wives of the same husband,

"You made heaven the opposite of hell.

"Let anything you mean to happen in this world be accomplished
by the one with the most worthy cause."

Then Bakary Jan said, "I have heard you, Nganzumana, it is what
I came for, and now I must return to Segou."

So Bakary Jan took his leave of Nganzumana after receiving a
talisman from one of Segou's wisest men.

When Bakary Jan returned to Segou, he thought to himself,

"If one thing fulfils a purpose, why not double it?

"Better to add to one's power than diminish it.

"When we hear about the goats of Cakadougou, it is because of
the quality of their wool."

So saying, Bakary Jan went off to Sirableng which is there on
the other side of the river.

He went to the sage of Sirableng and said, "Oh master teacher of
Sirableng."

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the sage.

Bakary said, "Once a man begins a thing he does not stop unless
he bites into pepper.

1 siné = opposite, but he is referring to co-wives.

"A man who will not stop once he begins a thing must take fire
into his hand to make him stop.

"It is about Bilisi that I have come.

"From under the kapok tree of Korosa all the way to Jirikurunje,
everyone has heard about this thing.

"When Bilisi left Segou he gave warning that beasts and birds
could eat his share of the brave men's meat.

"But he said if he hears that a two-legged person has eaten it,
people may go to bed in Segou but they will get no sleep.

"Well, I, Bakary, I have taken Bilisi's share.

"I added it to my own and ate it.

"Now I have come to you to learn what hope I may have in this
matter."

At last the sage of Sirableng welcomed Bakary Jan into his
courtyard, saying,

"You did right in coming, I am pleased.

"A bone can break a bone and iron can cut iron.

"If you prepare yourself you can be stronger than your enemy.

"If you are concerned about Bilisi, I will provide you with
enough time to go home and buy two rams.

"You must name one of them after Bilisi and the other after
yourself.

"Then let them go in your yard with some young boys to watch them.

"When your ram throws down the one called Bilisi, have yours
caught and slaughtered at once.

"Take the uppermost part and give it away as a sacrifice, and
share the meat that lies next to the earth with your family.

"Now I will give you one amulet and that is all, and you must

attach it to the back of your saddle.

"Bilisi has some fetters with the power of God.

"They are dreadful things, lethal instruments.

"Anyone who is touched by them will die, so do not let them touch you.

"When you go into battle against Bilisi you must take care.

"I warn you in earnest, iron cannot cut Bilisi and iron cannot cut you, Bakary.

"That battle will be won not by the sword, but by supernatural powers."

By this time the news about what Bakary Jan had done was spreading everywhere.

Some people went to tell Bilisi at Saye in Masina that a young man had risen in Segou.

They said they had heard this youth might have taken his share of the meat.

When Bilisi heard this he did not understand how his share of meat could have been eaten in Segou.

He did not trust what he was told because he could not believe that his words of warning had become like a meaningless tale.

He did not believe anyone would dare pass over the line he drew before he left.

When he had given such a dire warning to Segou, how could anyone dare to eat his share of the meat?

Bilisi told the people not to anger him uselessly as he sat peacefully in his place.

He did not want to fall on the people of Segou and harm them for nothing.

What people were telling him was just a tale, just dream words.

He said their words were like a bird's noise and could not be counted as human speech.

The people kept telling Bilisi that his share of the meat had been eaten.

But he said, "That is just talk, it cannot be done."

Every day Bilisi heard more about how his share of meat had been eaten in Segou.

At last he sent someone from Saye in Masina to find out if it was true.

When the messenger returned, he told Bilisi that the man who did it was named Bakary.

That his father's name was Jan and his grandfather's name was Hamari,

That his praise names were Jan of Hamari and Bongé of Hamari,

That his mother's name was Koda and her co-wife's name was Jeneba,

That his praise names were Son of Koda and Jeneba, grandson of Keleke and Mangoro, grandson of Lasa the Elder and Lasa the Younger.

Finally Bilisi said, "Very well, I have heard it."

Oh, father of the wonders of the world, if men do not struggle, the winner cannot be known.

If the chicken claw is not spread open, it cannot fill the eater's mouth.

Bilisi sent word to the youth who had taken his share of the brave men's meat.

He wanted Bakary Jan to know that he was coming to meet him.

Bilisi came with a thousand bridles behind him.

They came out of Masina in the Fula country,

They came here to the banks of the river at Soninkura and there they spent the night.

In those days Segou was enclosed by a big wall called karangakoko with only one way in and out.

All the worthy men of Segou were so fearful of Bilisi that they locked the gates of the big wall.

They climbed onto the roofs of their houses and lay there trembling.

They said, "Now Bakary Jan will confront this problem".

It is said that if men do not fight, the winner cannot be known.

Bakary Jan took his saddle and put it on his horse Nyote.

The time had come for him to meet with Bilisi at Soninkura near Segou.

Bakary had been told of Bilisi's tastes, that he loved to take snuff, crunch kola nut, and smoke tobacco in his pipe.

So Bakary bought a bunch of tobacco leaves and three snuff boxes to take with him.

Then Bakary Jan went out to meet Bilisi and his army.

When they saw him coming, the Fula warriors said, "Eh! This must be the midget who is said to have eaten Bilisi's share of the meat".

And Bilisi said, "This is just a child, he must be a last-born.

"Last-borns are impudent and don't even know it.

"If he knew what he was doing, he would not do it.

"Those who are aware do not dare to do a thing, but those who do not know will dare to try."

Bakary Jan approached as slowly as the procession at a bad marriage.

The Bamana of Segou had closed the gates behind him, and at last he arrived in front of the thousand Fula bridles.

After saluting them all, Bakary handed the three snuff boxes to Bilisi.

He greeted them all and then gave the ten kola nuts to Bilisi. He saluted all the Fula and presented Bilisi with the tobacco leaves and three pipes, and on top of them he put a flint lighter.

The flint lighter was here in Bamana country before the Europeans brought matches.

Our blacksmiths used to hammer a piece of iron and bend it.

There is a kind of stone that we call flint,

And the fibres of the kapok fruit are made into tinder.

They strike the iron and flint together downward,

And light comes out and takes the fibre.

This will become our fire to light our pipes and cook our food.

Our old people called this kind of lighter taneke when there were no matches.

Taneke were made by blacksmiths.

Bakary took one of those and presented it along with the pipes and tobacco when he greeted Bilisi.

Bilisi was astonished at this and he said,

"The man who is said to have taken my share in Segou and who has caused me to lose respect,

"The one whom I am supposed to meet at the entrance of lahara today,

"Is it really that one who is honouring me like this?"

"Do you wish to disavow your challenge because you have become afraid?"

"Eh, young man, I am asking you!"

"I think it is being said that you took my share in Segou."

"You have destroyed my reputation and I have come so that you and I can meet at the entrance of lahara."

"So how is it that you honour me with kola nut and snuff?"

"Why do you bring me pipes, tobacco leaves and a flint lighter that I may redden my lips with these things?"

"Are you afraid of what you have done and want to withdraw your challenge?"

"No", said Bakary Jan, "it is not that."

"Men can spend the whole night amusing themselves, but that does not keep them from going to lahara in the morning."

"If you are not ready to die, I am already decaying."

"Worthy men may spend the night enjoying themselves, but in the morning those who are prepared to part from their souls will do so."

"I was told the things you like and I brought them for you to enjoy before your last journey."

"Otherwise, I do not know this fear of which you speak."

"I do not know what that means."

"I do not recognize the thing moving at my side that is called a shadow."

"When a man says his hair is moving, it means he is afraid,"

"And though you may not be prepared to die, I am already decaying."

"Very well", said Bilisi, and he took some snuff and put it in his mouth.

Then he put some tobacco into a pipe and lit it with the flint lighter.

Blowing a cloud of smoke from his nose and mouth, Bilisi said, "Very well, little brother, the words you have spoken are the words of an elder.

"You say that I may not want to die but you are already decaying.

"You are a late-born, and late-borns do not understand how to deal with people.

"Now I want you to try me first."

Then Bakary loaded his double barrelled gun and fired at Bilisi, but the bullets were like fresh water poured on him.

"Well, little man", said Bilisi, "when heroes cannot do without killing each other they had better not fire blank powder.

"Why are you firing blank powder, have you no bullets?"

Bakary said, "If that one missed you, this one will not!"

He loaded again and fired his two-mouthed gun at Bilisi.

But Bilisi caught the bullets in his hand and said,

"Take these and add them to what you have, these are just calabash fragments, not bullets."

Bakary said, "If that did not do it, the third time will!"

Again he loaded and fired, but before the smoke had cleared

Bilisi said,

"I have not heard a shot, not to mention any bullets.

"Have you come here to play, or have you come for something serious?"

Bakary replied, "You will find out what I have come for".

"So be it!" said Bilisi, "But now, my child, you must let me have a try".

Bilisi took up his two-mouthed gun and fired at Bakary Jan.

Before the smoke had cleared, Bakary said,

"What is it, elder brother? I have not yet heard any noise.

"Have you loaded your gun with water and tried to shoot it?

"I have heard no shot and seen no bullets."

"Really!" said Bilisi, "Well, if that shot missed you, this one will not."

This time he put four bullets in his gun and fired, but Bakary caught them in his hands and said,

"You know, when we eat tô we do not rub it on our stomachs.

"It may be true that you have no equal among your mother's other children, but to think you have no equal among all women's children is to wind up as the offering at somebody's birth.

"Elder brother, is this the way you came?

"You came to town but did not follow the path, you learned nothing about me first.

"A nose may be very large and still not smell efficiently."

Bilisi replied, "Take my third shot", and he fired again.

But before the smoke had cleared, Bakary Jan had mounted Nyote and was making the horse prance sideways, saying,

"Well, elder brother, I thought you came so we could take each other to lahara.

"I did not know you came for a lesson in combat.

"You pretend to fight, but this is no battle."

"Well, little brother", said Bilisi, "I see that you have not eaten the meat for nothing.

"You did not eat it and go to sleep, and that is very well.

"You have eaten my bullets with your mouth, now let me see what you can do with your sword."

Bakary Jan drew his sword and struck Bilisi on the shoulder.

Take it as the clear truth, Bakary's sword was suddenly curved like a sickle.

He straightened his blade and gave Bilisi's shoulder a terrible stroke, but again Bakary's sword curved like a sickle.

Three times he tried, but Bakary Jan's sword could not find a way into Bilisi's body.

Bilisi said, "Now, little brother, you have had your turn so let me try".

Bilisi drew his sword and took three mighty cuts at Bakary, but each time his sword curved like a sickle and the youth said,

"To merely say 'we are at strife' is no way to fight a battle.

"Falling on one buttock is not the end, this is just a cock-fight."

And Bilisi replied, "Then, brother, do you have another means?"

"Yes", said Bakary Jan, "I have something here".

Taking his spear he hurled it at Bilisi, but when it struck, it twisted like a centipede.

Bakary straightened his spear and threw it again, but it never met the truth.

Bilisi said, "Little brother, your power is finished, you are at your wit's end."

And Bakary replied, "Brother, your own power is ended and you too are at your wit's end.

"Your first hope was your gun which you tried on me three times,
 thinking I was a child.

"But I am no one's uncircumcised boy.

"Then you drew your sword and tried that on me three times,
 and you know what happened next without my telling you.

"You know the rest, the same things happened to me.

"Now, do you have any other weapons to test?"

Bilisi suddenly became so furious at this, it was as if blood
 poured into his eyes.

His eyes became like those of the ngoncoro bird and he punched
 the front of his saddle with his fist.

When Bilisi hit his saddle a swarm of bees rose out of it,
 and it is better to be here than where he was.

The swarm of bees rushed at Bakary Jan and the more he slapped
 at them the worse it got.

As the bees covered his body, Bakary laughed and said,

"To say 'we are at strife' will not end the battle.

"Some people know du, but they do not know dudadu!"¹

Bakary struck the front of his own saddle and out came a horde
 of lizards.

The lizards rose up and rushed at the bees and swallowed them
 as if they had never been there.

Let us not deceive one another, one bone can break another bone

1 No matter how great you are, there is someone who is better:
 Once there was a student of wrestling who became very skilful.
 No matter how strong his opponents, he would throw them down,
 saying du! as they struck the ground. Finally he felt ready
 to challenge his teacher, and as the match heated up, the
 student said du! thinking he had his master down. But
 suddenly recoiling, the teacher threw the upstart to the ground
 and said, dudadu! Hunters will do the same thing: they will
 teach you much of their lore, but they will always hold some-
 thing back, in case you try to challenge their prowess.

and iron can cut iron.

But the world has lost its magic and people do not respect
tradition like they used to.

Otherwise, God would still allow miracles to happen.

On his side, Bilisi was in a rage and he punched the back of his
saddle, bap!

Bismillahi! Out came a horde of vipers that swarmed around
Bakary Jan.

They tried to coil around the horse's legs and climb up to
the saddle but Nyote kept stamping his feet.

Bakary Jan laughed and said, "To say 'we are at strife' will not
end the battle.

"You will tell a different tale than that!"

Just then Bakary struck the back of his saddle, bap!

And out jumped a flight of hawks.

Those are the birds that fly about and hover in search of
snake holes.

They put their claws into the holes so the snakes will bite them.

Aside from some nerves and bones they have no marrow in their
claws, so they pull the snake out of the hole and swallow it.

When Bakary Jan hit the back of his saddle the hawks flew out
at once.

They spied the snakes and rushed at them and swept them away.

"Hee!" said Bakary, "Well, as people say, when you blow on ashes
they will scatter.

"If the chicken claw is not spread open, it does not fill the
eater's mouth.

"When men are at war there can be no mercy."

By now Bilisi was at the height of his fury, and reaching down

he drew his hand slowly from under his saddle.

He pulled out the deadly Allah-blessed fetters and prepared to

use them against Bakary.

When Bakary saw this, he stopped his horse and made him walk

backwards, little by little.

"Well, little brother", said Bilisi, "what is the matter, are

you unable to stay in one place?"

"It is not that", said Bakary, "I am very young and my horse is

young too.

"I am only thirty years old and my horse is ten, and we still have

wind in our nostrils.

"We are so young that we have not seen a day of life and a day

of life has not seen us.

"My horse just likes to step backward sometimes, and there is

nothing else to it."

While Bakary was speaking, Bilisi was coiling one end of the

Allah-blessed fetters over his hand.

Suddenly Bilisi rushed at Bakary and the youth wheeled his horse

and galloped away with his enemy in pursuit.

The gates of Segou were locked tight, so the chase went around

the walls.

The Bamana who watched from their roofs said, "Hau! Bakary and

his men are doing what they came to do."

Sometimes they sang this part:

Do not run away yorosa, yorosa,

Do not run.

Do not make your words just empty boasts before women,

Do not run away.

A worthy man does not run from anything,

Do not run.

They circled Segou three times, Bakary Jan in front and Bilisi in pursuit with the deadly fetters.

Bakary knew very well that if Bilisi caught him and struck him with the fetters, his life in this world would be over, and his life in lahara would be spoiled.

After circling the wall three times, Bakary thought of a familiar place and he headed for Sekura.

He passed between Sekura and Sebougou with Bilisi after him.

He passed Sebougou on the way to Sekoro, and there was the great ditch.

Galloping straight for the ditch, Bakary spurred his horse and Nyote threw himself clear over it.

When you hear of a cunning blind man who knows all the streets of the town, that is the town he was born in, and where he lost his sight.

Bilisi came galloping after, woroba, woroba, and pap! He landed in a cloud of dust.

When they went into the ditch, krap! The horse fell on its neck, and krip! Bilisi's backbone was put out of joint.

Bakary Jan and his horse ran on for about ten meters before he looked back and saw that the only dust following him was his own.

He said, "There are people who know du, but they do not know dudadu.

"There is not much distance between 'I have done it a long time' and 'I perished doing it'."

When Bakary saw that no one was following him, he returned to the ditch and found a brave man who had been thrown on his back.

Bilisi had no way to sit up because his backbone was broken.

His horse had fallen on its neck and it was broken as if God had never given him one.

Bakary Jan stood above the ditch, and looking at Bilisi he said,

"Well, brother, what is the matter?"

"Could you not do so well in the play with the horses?"

"Why do you not come out and carry on?"

"I am just a youth with his horse."

"We are just an animal and a boy, so what is the matter?"

"Most days belong to the robber, but one day will come that belongs to the owner of the thing."

"Did you not say that your share of meat in Segou could be eaten by beast or bird, but that if it was eaten by a two-legged person, Segou would go to bed but there would not be any sleep?"

"Well, the mouth is a curse when it boasts."

"A mouth is like the barrel of a gun, because words once spoken will get back to you one way or another."

"Now, are you in the condition of a man, or the condition of a woman?"

Bilisi replied, "I am still in the condition of a man."

"I have never yet betrayed my manhood."

"I know that when the day of death arrives there is no life, and
when the day of living comes there is no death.

"I am going to give my body to you myself, so that you can kill me.

"Otherwise, there is no way you could do it, for I could survive
from now until next year.

"I do not know of any other way that you could kill me."

"Eh!" said Bakary Jan, "You still say this?"

"Yes", said Bilisi, "it is true".

Bakary went down into the ditch with his gun and fired it at
Bilisi but it had no effect.

He struck at Bilisi with his sword but it did not cut a hair.

"I told you, brother", said Bilisi, "you may know something, but
someone else will still show you the way.

"There are some bushes in the forest that you do not know yet.

"Come here and lift up my braid."

In those days, elder Bamana men let their hair grow long and
plaited it.

They let a braid hang down in back by their neck or over their
shoulder.

Those Bamana plaited their hair into very long braids.

Bilisi was one of those who had his hair plaited into long braids.

The secret of his power was in an amulet hidden under a braid.

Bilisi said, "If I do not help you find this amulet under my hair
you will spend the rest of your life here trying to finish
me off.

"You have done a heroic deed, but you would never be able to
finish the job."

Bakary raised Bilisi's head and drew the amulet out of his hair.

Suddenly, it was as easy as sticking a knife into a pumpkin.

Bilisi became as soft as a piece of liver.

Bakary cut his throat and wrung his neck until the neckbone broke,

kap!

But as the neckbone snapped, Bakary was suddenly blinded in both eyes.

Bakary raised his voice and shouted, "Brother! I defeated you, but in the end you have defeated me.

"My sight is gone."

Bakary's horse Nyote stood waiting above the great ditch.

The horse pawed the ground with his hooves, for beasts know something too.

From under his hooves Nyote sent dirt mixed with his own dung rolling down to Bakary in the ditch.

Bakary groped with his hands to find some of the dung.

He picked it up and rubbed it around on his eyes three times.

When he had done this his eyes opened up and were as good as if he had just been born.

When he could see again, Bakary finished cutting off Bilisi's head and put it into his bag.

Bilisi's head had three corners, so it gave the bag a three-cornered shape.

It had a middle and two horns and looked like a horse's feed-bag.

Feed-bags are made in the shape of Bilisi's head.

Bakary Jan left Bilisi's corpse behind in the ditch and walked painfully toward Segou.

When Bakary arrived at Segou he knocked at the gate, but there

was not one among the elders who dared to get up and open it for him.

They all said, "We must not go out, Bakary must have been killed by Bilisi.

"That will be Bilisi trying to get in, so do not open the gate for anything in the world."

No one dared to open the gate, and Bakary was left standing alone outside.

Finally he took Bilisi's head out of his bag and threw it over the wall.

It landed in the middle of the group of elders who were sitting together.

They all jumped to their feet and looked at it, then they cried, "This is Bilisi's head! This is Bilisi's head!"

They called for the men and women of the nyamakalaw, who came and sang this song in Bakary's honour:

Who has stirred up Bilisi and brought him down on us?

Who aroused Bilisi-balasa and then threw him at us?

Who but Bakary Jan?

Bakary Jan alone.

Who brought Bilisi back from Masina?

Who aroused Bilisi-balasa and then threw him at us?

None other than Bakary Jan.

On the day that Bilisi was beheaded, the jeliw created that song in honour of Bakary Jan.

It was not sung for any Fula man but him.

The thousand bridles that had come with Bilisi,

The thousand Fula warriors from Saye in Masina were left with
empty hands outside the walls,

But for them the defeat of Bilisi was like winning gold or
finding diamonds.

Bilisi had pushed the people of Masina to their limits and
baffled them just as he had the people of Segou.

When the battle was over, the nyamakalaw made a great noise and
accompanied Bakary Jan to his home.

BAKARY JAN AND THE ABYSS

One year passed by, in which there was no other talk in Segou
except about Bakary Jan.

A year passed by while all the talk in Segou was about the fight
between Bilisi and Bakary Jan.

Bakary Jan would sit in his house and chat with his followers.

Some griots would come by with a friendly calabash gitafle.¹

They would turn it over and keep time as they sang:

Who stirred up Bilisi and brought him down on us?

Who aroused Bilisi-balasa and then threw him at us?

No one but Bakary Jan.

Koda and Jeneba, call the great man!

Who aroused Bilisi to throw him on us?

Who aroused Bilisi-balasa and threw him on us?

¹ On informal occasions held indoors where a drum would be too loud, a half of a calabash would be turned open-side down over a cloth on the floor and used as a sort of quiet drum played with sticks or tapped with rings on fingers; this was a gitafle.

Koda and Jeneba's son,
The grandson of Mangoro Kone,
The grandson of Safing the Elder and Safing the Younger,
Son of Sinikajan and Hamari Bonge,
None other than Bakary Jan.

That was the praise song dedicated to the man who killed Bilisi.

But to tell the truth as it comes from the sky, in that year,

Bakary Jan became boastful and proud.

When his friends came to visit and do him honour, he would strut

about lifting up one foot and shaking his head.

Just as the Fama's attendants would entertain their leader,

Bakary Jan had his own group of followers.

One day, at the usual gathering, Bakary Jan would raise one foot

and put it down, then he would shake his head.

After he had done this three times, the people asked him,

"Well, Bakary, what is the meaning of this?"

"This is the third time you have done this thing where you raise

one foot and set it down, then shake your head."

As the nyamakalaw sat there observing him, Bakary Jan said,

"It is nothing, except that there is an abyss beneath Segou,

"And I, Bakary Jan, I cover that abyss with my foot.

"If I remove my foot from over that abyss, Segou will fall into

it and not fill it up.

"This is why I raise my foot and then set it back down.

"I want to lift my foot from over the abyss so that all of Segou

can see how I protect it.

"When I think about it, I know it would be a great disaster for

Segou if I were to withdraw my foot from over the abyss.
"I can see that through my own eyes, with no advice from anyone.
"One should always know the truth about one's own position without
having to be told."

Well, you know, some people think the white men brought politics
to this country,

But the white men did not bring politics here.

They found it with us when they arrived.

We called it fanaya folaw,¹ which means 'people who go about
with secrets in their heads'.

Those people were paid fifteen hundred cowries if they brought a
valuable piece of information to the mansa.

They would say, "Such and such has been done, or said, or is
going to happen".

When that was told to the mansa, the culprit would be summoned
and beheaded and the informant would get fifteen hundred
cowries.

We called this fanaya but the white men arranged it into politics.

The white men did not bring politics with them, they found it
already with us here.

Some of those politicians who were here then went to see Fama Da
and said,

"Well, you must know that we have been among Bakary Jan's group
for the past three days.

1 Literally 'secret players'; peddlars of information.

"We have seen him strutting about, raising one foot and shaking his head.

"When we asked him the meaning of it, he said there is an abyss beneath Segou.

"He said he covers the abyss with his foot and that if he takes his foot away Segou will collapse into the hole and not fill it."

Da said, "What, has Bakary said this? Eh, Bakary!

"When has the night fallen and the day broken that we no longer recognize the sleeping place of our mouths?

"All this for only one great deed?

"Very well, we have heard it."

Da then had some beer prepared.

He brewed the beer of betrayal.

When the beer was ready he sent someone to summon Bakary, who was to be killed here in Segou.

Bakary Jan's son's name was Simala Koné.

Simala Koné heard about the plot to betray his father.

He knew there would be council slaves waiting at each of the seven doors of the council house.

He knew that they were not going to let Bakary get out alive.

When the message came from the fama inviting Bakary to go and enjoy some beer, Simala Koné said to him,

"Father, when you go there to drink, I will go with you."

But Bakary replied, "What will a boy like you do while we are drinking?"

Bakary was scornful of Simala.

He always said he was the son of a no-good woman.¹

He said the son of a no-good woman would become like his worthless mother and never amount to anything.

In fact, he had just been saying so when he received the message from Fama Da.

Bakary refused to allow his son to go with him, but Simala loaded his gun and followed him anyway.

He tracked his father like a hyena, lurking behind each corner that Bakary turned until he saw Bakary enter the council house.

The whole world came to know about Simala's daring.

Whatever problem came to him, once he started a thing,

nothing in the world could stop him from finishing it.

Even if you took iron between your teeth, he would deal with the problem.

Simala followed his father into the seven-doored council house.

He passed through each of the seven halls, one after the other

until he arrived at the seventh, where Da himself was sitting.

Bakary Jan and Fama Da were sitting in the seventh hall drinking,

and Da said,

"Eh, Bakary, I have been told what you said the other day at your gathering when you were lifting your foot and shaking your head.

"I have heard that you said your foot was covering an abyss beneath Segou, and that if you took away your foot Segou would fall into the abyss and not fill it."

Bakary became very cold where he sat in his place and Da said,

¹ A bastard, his wife's son by another man.

"Well, I am just wondering if this is something you said, or if it is something you did not say.

"I would like to know."

Bakary remained silent and very cold where he sat in his place. Suddenly, Simala appeared with his gun cocked, and sticking the barrel into Da's chest he said,

"Father, say you said it.

"Father, I tell you to say you said it."

"Eh, eh", said Bakary, "those words had slipped out of my mind.

"Well, if that's what it is, I said it alright, I did say it.

"I said my foot is covering an abyss beneath Segou and if I withdraw it, Segou will fall into the abyss and not fill it.

"I had forgotten about saying that, if that is what you mean.

"I did say it, I thought you were talking about something else."

Da said, "Eh, Bakary, I only invited you here for some drinking and amusement.

"Why have you brought your audacious son into this situation?

"Stand up and leave me, get out of my chamber."

"Never!" said Simala, "My father will not go to the vicious dogs that are waiting for him at every door.

"You will precede us and withdraw them before we pass."

So Fama Da went in front of them, and as they entered the first hall, some council slaves rushed at them.

But Fama Da said, "The thing will not take place".

When they entered the second hall, more council slaves rushed at them.

Again Da said, "The thing will not take place".

Bakary Jan was led safely out through all seven doors and escorted to his house.

When they got home, Simala said, "Father!"

"I hear you", replied Bakary.

Simala said, "What about the son of the no-good woman?"

"You said he would be good for nothing until the end of the world."

Bakary Jan said, "If I hear you speak of that again I will tear
your mouth.

"You are truly my son."

BAKARY JAN AND THE CATTLE THEFT

Things carried on peacefully in Segou for one year after that.

Then the Fula of Masina swept down and ran off all the cattle of
Segou, taking them back to Masina.

The Bamana strove with both legs and hands to get them back, but
everything they tried was a failure.

In those days there was a young Fula man here whose name was
Red Musa.

Fama Da gave Red Musa a company of the Segou army and sent him
to Masina to bring back the cattle,

But when Red Musa and his warriors got there, the Fula of Masina
made it as if they had never come.

Red Musa and his men trampled the bush in their hurry to get away.

This was put into a song:

I will not go with him into the bush,

I will not go with a good-for-nothing man into the bush.

If you go with a good-for-nothing man into the bush,

Even if his old father goes with him,
 Even if his old mother goes with him,
 He will run away and leave them in the bush of battle.

This song was dedicated to Red Musa the day he ran away and left
 his army.

They sing this song when they do the Bamana bon dance.¹

Segou's public herd remained with the Fula of Masina and the
 Bamana were complaining about the lack of beef and milk.

They were at their wit's end and everyone was saying "What can we
 do about this?"

Nobody had the mouth to tell Bakary Jan about the problem.

But Fama Da had a daughter who went to see Bakary and said,

"Listen father, oh father Bakary, things are bad and they will get
 worse if you do not stand up.

"Segou's public herd has been taken.

"All the cattle of Segou have gone into the hands of the Fula
 of Masina.

"If you do not stand up, there is nothing more to be done."

Bakary Jan respected the words of that child who was the daughter
 of Fama Da.

Bakary took Simala with him and they went to Masina with a company
 of the Segou army.

When the son of Koda and Jeneba got to Masina, he said to the
 Fula there,

¹ Characterized by high leaps into the air, extravagant arm movements and foot stamping, in imitation of someone crashing through the bush in full flight, to the accompaniment of bon music, played on a drum.

"I have come for the cattle of Segou.

"Send ten men to herd them back, or tonight there will be no
sleep in Masina."

The Fula of Masina chose ten men and sent them out to herd the
cattle back to Segou.

When the cattle had been returned to Segou, Fama Da was asked
what he wanted done with the ten men who brought them.

Da said, "I have no need of those Fula, send them back to Masina."

But his jeli said, "No, that is not the best thing.

"Let them be taken to Kuku and put in school with Nganzumana.

"If they become learned, they can become an asset to our country
one day."

"Very well", said Da, and the ten Fula were sent to Kuku where
they became students with Nganzumana.

The famous old marabout began to teach them, but one day he sent
them out to cut grass for his horse.

Instead of cutting grass they ran away toward Masina.

As they fled toward Masina they passed Busen in the night and
did not even stop there.

When their pursuers from Kuku arrived at Busen they asked some
people if they had seen the Fula runaways.

The Busen people said, "The Fula passed by when it was still
night",

And the Bamana devised the expression "ka Busen nteme ni shu to
ye, pass Busen while it is still night".

Then they were in a dilemma because they did not dare tell Fama Da
that the Fula students had run away.

Still, he had to be told somehow.

In those days, there were sons of slaves here in Segou.¹

No horon sang in those days,

No horon danced in those days,

No horon beat the drum in those days,

Slaves did all of those things.²

There were twelve families under the karite trees of Segou who
beat the drum and sang of themselves:

The slave sons have taken the bon drum in the place of
the karite trees,

In the place of the balanzan trees,

The great slave sons of Sekoro have taken the bon drum,

In the place of the karite trees,

In the place of the balanzan trees.

Nobody could decide how to tell Fama Da that the Fula students
had run away to Masina.

At that time there was a famous wolosow³ woman here, and she told
them to take out the bon drum.

The bon drum was brought out and taken to where all the mansaw
of the country were sitting around with Fama Da.

The drummer held the drum between his legs and began to play,

1 jon denw = slave sons, meaning generations born into servility rather than captured or purchased.

2 Families who are descendants of slaves still travel from village to village in Mali, entertaining with their drumming and dancing. Known as wolosow, these people are not part of the griot hierarchy.

3 This word originally described only first generation slaves born in the master's household, but now usually refers to a segment of society that retains its identity as being of slave descent, though several generations removed, as in the case of certain itinerant groups of drummers and dancers who are known as wolosow.

and the famous woloso woman began to sing at once.

She composed a song:

The students had gone to school, wuyo!

The eastern Fula have betrayed Segou, wuyo!

The students had gone to school, wuyo!

The eastern Fula have betrayed Segou, wuyo!

The mansaw turned to Da and said, "Well, Fama, have you heard this?

"She is saying that the Fula who herded the Segou cattle back from Masina,

"The same ones who were studying in Kuku with Nganzumana,

"They have run away while cutting grass for the old marabout's horse.

"It seems there was no other way to tell you, so that woloso woman has put it into a song,

"And that is what her song is all about."

But before Da could become very angry they said,

"That is alright, Fama Da, let us leave Bakary Jan to live out his life in peace.

"The son of Koda and Jeneba has done his work."

Bakary Jan spent the rest of his life in Joforongu.

His lifetime was ended in Joforongu.

Up to now Bakary Jan's spear is at Joforongu.

Even tomorrow morning his battle things will still be at Joforongu.

APPENDIX IICOLLECTED TRADITIONS FROM THE BARDS OF MALI

Sosan

Informant: Jeli Mamary Kouyate
Recorded at Kolokani on 19, 20 and 21 August 1975

If you hear "Kouloubaly", the first village they founded here at Beledougou was Koulikoroba.¹

In those days of the Kouloubaly no one had a jamu.²

There were twelve families in Mande headed by sons of the same parents.

These twelve men helped our chief³ in the war of Kaybara.⁴

When Kaybara is mentioned people think it means another town,

They think Kaybara is another town far away.

Kaybara is not a remote town, it is Kayes.⁵

Even today the sun has more force at Kayes than at any other place.

After the battle of Kaybara, of the twelve men only seven remained.

Among these, three were named Simbon.

When the land had been laid to waste they were asked by the chief if they wanted a place in paradise.

1 From at least the seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century the Beledougou region was prominent in the Bambara states of Kaarta or Segou, depending on which was the most dominant at a particular time. Koulikoro is an historic town on the Niger River.

2 Family name, lineage identity.

3 Muhammad.

4 "Kaybara" is the Bambara rendering of "Khaybar", the site of one of Muhammad's most famous campaigns.

5 Kayes is a major town in Mali on the railway line between Dakar, Senegal and Bamako. Mamary's association of Kayes with Kaybara is not common.

This was not just any chief, this was the Prophet,

They had helped him in the battle of Kaybara.

He said, "Do you not want a place in paradise?"

And they replied, "Bobbing up and down all night,¹

"Bobbing up and down all day in order to gain such a reward,

"We have no time for that".

So the Prophet said, "Very well, what would you like instead?"

"We want powder and bullets", they replied.²

"Very well, they are yours said the Prophet, "and good

luck to you".

The three Simbon travelled to the Somono country on the bank

of the river, hoping to get across.

The Somono and Bozo fishermen said this would be no problem:

"We will take you across", they said,

"On the condition that you unpack your loads and divide them

among us,

"Then we will take you across the river".

But the Simbon did not want to do this so they refused.

In those days there was such a thing as very dangerous sorcery,

This sorcery was very powerful.

Such a thing still exists, but it is not as strong.

On that day of sorcery the Joliba³ was full to its banks,

1 Bowing toward Mecca in prayer five times a day.

2 That the Simbon brothers refuse Islam and request powder and bullets is consistent with their place elsewhere in Manding tradition as ancestral figures in apparently pre-Islamic Manding cosmology. Moreover, the Bambara word for "hunter" is simbon.

3 The Niger River.

But the three Simbon walked across it and the water was not
up to their hips.

There were many people on the riverbanks and they were
astonished by this deed.

Ah, those three men went ahead of the canoe,

They did not bother to use a canoe,

Ah, those three men went ahead of the canoe.

Where the mountain sits by the river,¹

They built three huts near that mountain.

They cut down groves of trees to build three houses.

When you go out, when you go out to those houses,

When you are asked "Where are you going?"

You who go to those houses, you reply,

"Mun ye kurun beli, 'those who precede the canoe', I am
going to their place".

Later that was shortened and they just said "Kurun beli" or
Kouloubaly,

And that is how they got their name.

They got that name at Tufing Kumbe, the place of shade.

The Malinke call Koulikoro "the place of much shade".

It was there that they got their names.

The names of those three Simbon became famous.

There were Lawali Simbon, Kanu Simbon and Furu Simbon, all of
the same parents.

In those days children were called by the father's or mother's
names.

1 Koulikoro; this is the same mountain where, according to
legend, Samanguru disappeared after being defeated by Sunjata.

The son of Lawali Simbon was called "Nje".

In Bamana,¹ "Nje" is the name given to first-born sons.

They say "Konate" to a family that is different than Konare.²

The sons of Kanu Simbon became the Keita and among them
were the Masare.³

The mother of the sons of Furu Simbon was Kalankela,
Kalanke Kouloubaly.

This Kalanke was the daughter of Tigiton.⁴

It was Tigiton who cut the groves of trees at Segou and
settled there,

In those days there was no town there.

If you hear "Segou", that was the name of a student of Islam.⁵

A Muslim had come there.

At that time a Muslim came there from the North.

He had been on pilgrimage for many years.

When he came from his hajj he settled under three groves
of trees by the river.

He stayed in the three groves with three Koranic pupils.

1 The indigenous form of "Bambara".

2 He means these are two different jamuw or family names.

3 Or "Masarin", the noble branch of the Keita lineage that produced Sunjata, founder of the Mali Empire.

4 This name translates as "Council Chief".

5. Though Bambara Segou was clearly non-Muslim in its founding and rise to power, Mamary is associating the name "Segou" with the popular Muslim name "Sekou", which stems from the Bambara pronunciation of the Arabic "Shaykh".

One day when it was time to pray at two o'clock, the third pupil whose name was Sekou was praying with the others. At four o'clock the one named Sekou was dead. He had no resistance against the stomach sickness. The pupil named Sekou had shown great respect for his teacher and was loved by the old man. That teacher said, "the boy's body must be washed before it is made supple".¹ They dug a grave and buried him in the three groves of trees. They took a flat rock and placed it at the head of the grave. They wrote on that flat rock:

He who was respected by this pupil,
 He to whom this pupil never said "no",
 He who enjoyed the honesty of this pupil,
 He whose aged limbs this pupil massaged
 through the night,
 If he told this pupil to go to bed, he went to bed,
 He whose pupil sat down if he told him to,
 He whose pupil would stand up all night if told to,
 He whose pupil never said "No" to what he said,
 He whose pupil's name was Sekou,
 He whose pupil was taken by the mansa Arahamani,²
 It is he who put these writings at the head of
 that pupil's grave,
 He whose idea it was and who cut the trees to
 settle here.

1 The stiff limbs of corpses were manipulated to soften them before burial.

2 God.

May God cause the fourteen sides of the world¹

to hear the name of this village.

May God never cause this village to be hidden

from the rest of the world.

It was Tigiton who later found that place.

By that time Tigiton had married a woman of the Sakho clan

at Nyamina,

Her name was Sounou,

She was given to Tigiton.

Tigiton cleared that place and settled there,

He never called the village by any other name.

He named the village for Sekou.

Sekou, Sekou, then they began to say "Segou",

We say "Segou".

Sekou, Sekou it was, but now we say "Segou".

All the villagers say Segou.

In those days Sounou was a very obedient wife to Tigiton.

She went twenty-two years without having a son.

But in those twenty-two years, anything that might offend

a husband,

Sounou could not do it to hers.

Anything that pleased a man, Sounou did it all for her

husband Tigiton.

But she went twenty-two years with menstruating.

One night she lay awake thinking about the son she wished

to have.

1 Jen fan taninani; ta ni na ni = fourteen.

When morning came and breakfast was finished Sounou took a white blanket, folded it and put it in a calabash. She went to her husband Tigiton and told him she wanted to make a journey.

Tigiton said, "Very well, Sounou, that is possible.

"If you see a husband forbid a wife to travel it means the wife has made him a bad sauce.

"The wife has done something displeasing so the husband does not agree to her journey.

"But you will never hear me say that of you.

"Ah, Sounou you have never done anything to displease me, so go where you will.

"I give you my blessings and not my curses, and that is all I can do".

Sounou turned toward Mecca.

Sounou made her way for thirty days in the month,

Two months Sounou walked,

Three months Sounou walked onward, ninety days.

Sounou arrived at Jia¹ on the nintieth day.

This Jia is the capital of Medina, in the holy land.

Sounou arrived there in the middle of the night,

In the middle of the night she arrived.

Sounou did not want to waken anyone at that hour,

So in the dead of night she went to the mosque, opened the door, went in and sat down at the back.

1 Probably Jeddah, the seaport on the Arabian peninsula.

At about four o'clock, at first cock-crow, all the devout women gathered at the well.

They all rose early to heat water to put in their husbands' ablution kettles.

They all made their toilets in preparation for prayer.

Then the men gathered at the mosque.

In those days there were no proper lamps,

They had only an ancient kind of lamp that was a small pot of oil.

They would put a bit of rag in it to serve as a wick that could be lit.

This is our ancient kind of lamp and it did not give off much light.

So that morning at early mosque they did not bother to light their lamps and could not see Sounou in back.

Sounou prayed at four o'clock.

She made the four bows at four o'clock.¹

When the prayers were all finished, the almamy² said,

"Bisimila, worshippers, there is something strange in the mosque".

After the others had dispersed, the almamy spoke to the woman, saying,

"Greetings madam, from whence do you come?"

"I come from Segou", replied Sounou.

"How are the people of Segou", inquired the almamy, "your husband, your family and all the people of the street?"³

Sounou responded to the greeting and the almamy said,

1 Women do not go to mosque at this hour.

2 A Muslim priest, from the Arabic imām.

3 These are standard forms of Bambara greeting.

"And what are you doing here, good madam?"

Sounou said, "Ah, I have come to ask a favour of God".

"Ah, madam", said the almamy, "you have a claim to make of the Creator?"

"Yes", replied Sounou, "I have a claim to make of the Creator, I have a request to make of him".

"But", said the almamy, "did you see no house in the village where you could go instead of the mosque?"

"I came to the mosque to do it", said Sounou.

The almamy said, "But why here?"

"Because", replied Sounou, "if you want to claim a debt from a husband,

"If you want to claim a debt from no matter whom,

"The best thing to do is go to their house.

"As for me, if God has a house, the mosque must be it and that is why I have come into the mosque".

"Woman you have spoken the truth", said the almamy.

"Madam you have spoken the truth.

"God has no other house but the mosque.

"If God has a house it is the mosque,

"If God has a village it is the mosque,

"If God has a room it is the mosque.

"What sort of request do you want to make of the Creator?"

Sounou said, "Almamy, it is said by Muslims and pagans alike,

"A woman who respects her husband will not bear a good-for-nothing son.

"I Sounou have been married to a man for twenty-two years this year.

"Anything that displeases a husband, I Sounou, have never done to mine.

"I, Sounou, have never forgotten to look directly at my husband with eyes of truth.

"But I have not given birth to children, and I have not even menstruated for a day.

"I, Sounou, have not had the good fortune to bear a child,

"And it is for this reason that I come to claim my credit of a son from God".

"Ah, madam", said the almamy, "if that is it, you may go home and rejoin your husband.

"I will pray to God that you receive what is owed you".

Sounou said, "Almamy, if that is what you say, I, Sounou, will agree to it".

Sounou returned to Segou and she was not even asked by Tigiton where she had been.

Tigiton did not reproach her for staying away a long time.

He did not say "Sounou you stayed away too long".

Three months after her return to Segou, Sounou discovered that she was with child.

Perhaps the almamy had prayed to the Creator who made it possible for Sounou to have a child,

For during those three months she had the good fortune to become pregnant.

When her stomach had done twelve months of the year, Sounou gave birth and the child was a boy.

When the umbilical cord fell off they shaved its head and named it Mamary.

The father and mother of Sounou were at Nyamina, and Tigiton went to tell them the news of Mamary's birth.

The grandfather and grandmother of Mamary were very surprised. They gave shouts of amazement, saying,

"Ah! Hali bi to ni na", 'may she continue thus', our Sounou has given birth".

That was too long for the ngara¹ to sing, so they shortened it to "Biton".

That is why today they say "Biton",

The Kouloubaly came from them.

It was they who cut the trees at Segou and settled there.

It was too slow for the ngara, so they simply said "Biton Kouloubaly".

The sons of Biton Kouloubaly each had in addition to their name, the name of their mother.

The first wife of Biton was called Koya, and her son was Mamuru.

The jeliw say "Koya Mamuru and Nzan and Dese",

They say "Soro and Alaye, Donkoro and Baji and Ngolo Wolo".²

Ngolo Wolo's real mother was Nya and his real father was Soro.

The wife of Soro was Nya.

They were called Soro Wolo and Nya Wolo.

There were many men,³ so when the jeliw began to do the praises of the Kouloubaly they called the sons thus:

1 Master griots or artisans, in this case the former.

2 These are the names of famous nineteenth-century Bambara chiefs.

3 Many famous Kouloubalys of various generations.

"Soro Wolo, Nya Wolo, Moriba Wolo, Kolon Nyama and Diosse".

Njekoro Bo had three names: "Sira's Bo, Jeneba's Bo and
Musokura's Bo".¹

Those were the names of his father's wives.

There were also many children of Seri.

The children of Seri were boys.

They also had many Nyabele and Wolobele.

The skin of the Wolo was of reddish hue.

Then there was Burama Wolo Kouloubaly.

Later they left Segou with all their possessions and the
Diara settled in that town after them.²

But the first dugutigi³ of Segou was a Kouloubaly.

They later dispersed from Segou with their possessions
because of the three Wolo Kouloubalys, Soro Wolo,
Nya Wolo and Burama Wolo.

It was owing to their initiative that the Kouloubalys dispersed.

When the population became large, Nya Wolo said to Soro Wolo
and Burama Wolo,

"I want to go and start another village apart from here".

They agreed that this was a good idea and advised him to
take 250 axes and find a new place to settle.

They went with 250 axes so they could clear the trees and
found a new village which they called Jonkoni.

1 Biton, or Mamary Kouloubaly, was known by the names of all three of his father's wives, implying that he was an extraordinary child, loved by all, with no rivalry from his mother's co-wives. The praise-name Njekoro indicates that he was a first son.

2 The Diara dynasty succeeded that of the Kouloubaly as rulers of Segou.

3 A term for "chief", literally "land master" or "earth master".

"Jonkoni" was hard for them to say, so later they said

"Jonkoloni".

This Nya Wolo had a wife named Maladon and she was from the village of Nkanyo.

It was she who gave birth to Markeli and she also bore Mari Maladon.

Some time later, Burama Wolo went to collect his belongings from Soro Wolo, saying he also wanted to found a new village.

Soro Wolo agreed, saying,

"It is good for one of the young birds to fly east while the others go west."¹

"You must also take 250 axes to clear the land for your village.

"When our millet runs low I will come to you for more."

Burama Wolo left Segou with his 250 men, passed near Banamba and went on to the north of Banamba.

They cleared the trees and founded a village called Gweregwena.

This was difficult for the Marka of the area to pronounce and later it became known as Gwegwa.

Burama Wolo had seven sons in that place, the first of which was Kuntu.

The second son was Banfo and there were Gweneke and Sosan.

Sosan and his sister were the only two children of one of Burama's wives.

But the seven boys and the girl all had the same father.

1 Kononi de do kanyi korono dow yere kanyi kilebi.

There were seven boys in all, but Sosan was the favourite
because of his ways.

He was loved by everyone.

From the time he could tell his right hand from his left,
Even if he was just walking through the village in the
morning,

Even if he was on his way to wash his face,

He would be accompanied by a group of his friends, sometimes
as many as ten of them.

Even now you will see children doing this.

If you want to send a child on an errand to another compound,

The father of the house can explain to the child where he
wants him to go,

Simply by telling him the name of the boy his age who lives
there.

Then he will make no mistake.

If the child did not know the place from the name of its
family head, he would say,

"Oh yes, the father of my friend".

He would always know it by the boy in his own age group.

It was like that until Sosan had been circumcised,

But even when that was done the other boys and girls of
the village would go around with him.

At night the children of his age would meet at Burama

Wolo's and enliven his compound.

When a Fula¹ would come to Gwegwa he would be sent to stay
with Sosan's family,

When a Marka came he would also be lodged with Sosan's family.

When the blacksmiths came they would stay with Sosan's family,

When the jeliw came to Gwegwa they would stay with Sosan's
family,

When the funew² came they would be sent to stay with Sosan's
family,

When the Suraka³ came they would be lodged with Sosan's family.

And this had an effect on Sosan's brothers.

In those days the way they built houses in Bamana country,
they had small and large huts.

One day Sosan's elder brother, the one named Kuntu called
his five younger brothers into the small hut and said,

"There is something for which we must find a remedy, and
that is Sosan.

"The back feet have passed up the front feet.

"Eh! The Fula, the blacksmiths, the jeliw, the funew, the
leatherworkers, the Kakolo,

"All the strangers who come and go stay at the house of Sosan.

"The father is not yet dead, but if it is like this while
he still lives,

"Then when he dies Sosan will surely become head of the family.

"Let us go after Sosan and kill him.

1 A Fulbe, also known as Peul.

2 An individual class of bard or griot usually specializing
in Islamic subjects.

3 This is the Bambara name for Berber people.

"Otherwise when our father dies and things remain as they
are now,

"I will not be head of the family, according to the way these
strangers come and go".¹

The rival brothers collected the sum of 6,000 cowries and
gave it to Kuntu.

This was so Kuntu could see the diviners and learn how to
kill their younger brother Sosan.

So they went to see the diviner.²

The diviner sat down and smoothed the dust in front
of him so that he could trace his magic signs.

He would search in the dust for a message, an omen that
would guide the rival brothers.

The diviner cast some dust in different directions and
chanted.

He addressed the tien masters, diviners living and dead.

He said "Ala ka sari sari, Allah bless this dust.

"The omens are written in the dust,

"Nzan Diara ka sari sari, Nzan Diara bless this dust,"³

"I trace the figures like this, sari sari sari".

The diviner took a bit of the dust where he had traced
his symbols and casting it from him said,

"Sambaratu, here is your witness, your witness,

1 Sosan's popularity with all people seems to assure him
succession to the chieftaincy.

2 The tiendala is the type of diviner who forecasts events by
reading symbols or tien that he draws in the dust.

3 He invokes the name of a powerful Bambara ancestor figure as
a means of establishing communication with nyama, the force
or power of the spirit world.

"Free village and free place,
 "Blacksmith dust and apprentice dust,
 "River snake and Fabu the twin,
 "Slave of the genie village,
 "Infertile field of Nonko, fetish of infertile fields,
 "Bala of Jitumu, immortal Bala, Bala who never disappears,
 "Duba, father of the whirlwind,¹
 "Twice-burning shame, Bala who caught his father,
 "Dead mansa of the dust,
 "Live mansa of the dust.²
 "All your names are here whether you are living or dead,
 "My hand has covered all your faces.
 "I can trace in the dust but I can make no sense of it
 without your help.
 "Follower of father's customs,
 "Follower of mother's customs,
 "Men speak of Kuntu.
 "Those who have seen him speak of him,
 "Those who know him speak of him.³
 "Kuntu has come to me with all the father's wealth and all
 the mother's wealth.
 "He has left the father's family and the mother's family,
 "He has put his right foot in front of his left foot to do
 evil to his younger brother Sosan.

1 There is an inference here of the concept of father and family as a blessing.

2 An appeal to master diviners of the past and present.

3 Still addressing the powers of the spirit world, the diviner introduces to them the man who has come to him with a request.

"He is doing evil to him today and he will be doing evil
to him tomorrow in order to kill him.

"I am asked by Kuntu to send eight genies and eight humans
in the form of slaves and nobility.¹

"Even though Kuntu is anxious he must keep calm.

"Even though he is not anxious he must keep calm.

"Then the good bird of Sosan's good name will fall in the dust.

"Eight genies and eight humans, I have been asked to make you
work as slaves or nobles.

"When my hands move up and down, bad sit and bad rise.

"If it is a bad position let eight genies show that it is bad,

"If it will be good may eight genies show that it will be good,

"If it is bad may eight humans show that it is bad.

"Show me how the wish of Kuntu will be realized.²

1 "Genies", "humans", "slaves" and "nobility" refer to the different kinds of tien signs the diviner will trace in the dust. The reference to eight and eight means he is forming sixteen "houses" of the lateru, that is sixteen sets of signs, eight addressed to the spirit world and eight to the temporal world.

2 When someone goes to a diviner, it is understood that there are two possible results or omens, the good and the bad, which are referred to as "positions", and before the diviner begins in earnest he must announce what the two possible positions are. First, if he is a cowrie diviner for example, he praises the cowries by picking six of the twelve he is using and says, "I am sure so-and-so will fail, he will not succeed in doing what he wants, he will not be able to kill so-and-so. Cowries, do not let me tell lies, show me clearly that he will fail from the beginning to the end of the time I will be casting you". This is the bad position. For the good position he would then put down the six cowries he had been addressing, then he would spit "Tew, tew, tew", and say, "I am sorry to say so" (his speech on the bad position) "if he will succeed, show me good signs from beginning to end". After he has announced the two possible positions the diviner begins to mutter and spit over the cowries, casting them to the ground in front of him and reading the omens as they fall.

"Unh, unh, I am sorry to speak of it tew, tew, I spit this
bad saliva from my mouth.

"May this bad dust disappear from under my hand.¹

"O dun chi tun tun tun,

"O dun chi nta nta nta,²

"If I lie may I die between Tekodo and Wolodo,

"May the elephant tread on the bow-string.³

"The mouth begins by saying bad things but ends by saying
good things.

"Speak to Kuntu who respects his father's customs,

"Speak to Kuntu who respects his mother's customs,

"Those who know Kuntu speak of him, those who have seen
Kuntu speak of him,

"He has taken his father's wealth and his mother's wealth,

"He has gone away from his father's family and his mother's
family.

"He has put his right foot in front of his left foot,

"He needs eight genies and eight humans to work as slaves
and nobles.

"He is doing evil to his younger brother Sosan today and he
will be doing evil to him tomorrow in order to kill him.

1 The diviner rubs out one set of signs and prepares to begin another.

2 Here the diviner begins to mark a set of symbols in the dust, with a dash each time he says tun. Then, each time he says nta, he crosses the alternate dashes, ending with something like - + - + - + - + - +.

3 This is a passing reference to the kalajan, the "big bow" or "far shooting" method of divining, which projects the distant future. He is swearing an oath to the effect that if he is lying, may he lose his powers as a diviner.

"Even though Kuntu is impatient, even though he is not
impatient,

"He must be patient, he must be patient.

"He cannot do anything against Sosan today,

"He cannot do anything against Sosan tomorrow.

"He will just shake his head in regret, slap his thigh
in regret.

"He will regret it all night and be angry all day.

"When I move my hand up and down, good sit and good rise.

"If the dust is good may the eight genies make it look good,

"If the dust is good may the eight humans make it look
good.

"Show me how the wish of Kuntu will be realized.

"Only a small omen in the dust can reveal the truth of the
dust.

"May the truth of the dust grow so I can see it and tell of
it.

"The bird flies, but not the tree on which he perches.

"A little bad news is better than a lot of lies".

The diviner traced sixteen houses of lateru, the signs for
the near future, and finally he said,

"Eh, Kuntu, you can do nothing against your younger brother.

"God has chosen Sosan, so leave him in peace".

Kuntu was angry at this and he said,

"That big-headed diviner knows nothing,

"He sits in the dust and the dust is worthless".

Oh! It was Kuntu who said that the dust was nothing. He tried to get someone to kill Sosan by throwing him into a well, but it was impossible. Kuntu himself even sat in the dust and traced signs in it with his fingers. And he took back the 6,000 cowries he had given the diviner. No matter what diviner he went to, they all said there was nothing he could do against Sosan, that he must leave him alone. Kuntu lost his faith in diviners, and he told them, "None of you know anything". Kuntu returned to his compound, and calling his brothers into his reception hut said, "Eh, my young ones, I have been to the dust-diviners and they all say nothing can be done against Sosan. "I have also been to the cowrie-diviner and he says we cannot kill Sosan. "I have been to the thrower of stones and he also says we can do nothing against him. "I have been to the thrower of seeds who advises that we attempt nothing against him.¹ "All the diviners say we can do nothing against Sosan, but I have thought of something the diviners do not know. "The thrower of cowries did not see it, and the thrower of pebbles did not see it.

1 Different diviners have a variety of specialties. Some speak incantations over pebbles, seeds, small sticks, or even a pair of old sandals, then they cast them on to the ground and read the omens from the way they fall.

"Tomorrow after breakfast we will tell our father we are going to clean the inside of the big well.

"If he agrees with this, we will go there with Sosan. .

"When we get there, we will tell Sosan to climb down into the well.

"Then we can drop a big rock down the well and crush his head.

"The diviners did not see this, nor did the marabouts see it".

The younger brothers agreed, saying "Eh, that is how we must do it".

If the thief knew the informer, he would never give him his daughter.¹

The night passed, and the next day after breakfast the brothers spoke to their father who was Wolo, the same Wolo whose father was Barama.

They said, "Father, we want to go and clean the big well today, and we want to take Sosan with us".

Sosan was his best-loved son, so the father said, "When he goes with you, he must not go into the well, he is not old enough to go into the well".

The brothers said, "Father, we will only let him raise the buckets of dirt that come out of the well".

The father said they could do that, so they went together and found many women by the well where they went every morning to clean their cooking utensils.

The men told them to take their things and leave because they were going to clean the big well.

1 If the father knew their plan, he would not allow Sosan to go with his rival brothers.

So the women gathered their utensils, whether they had been washed or not, and returned to their husbands' compounds.

When everyone had gone and the chief was safely in his own house,

Kuntu said,

"Sosan, come, we are going to put you in the well, for our father thinks that he is not going to die without you.

"Come, we are going to put you in the well".

They attached a rope to an axe handle and had Sosan sit on it.

They lowered him into the well, all the way to the bottom.

Sosan said, "You can let go now, I am down".

When he said that, they let go of the rope and Sosan was left sitting at the bottom of the well.

Kuntu looked down into the well and called, "Sosan!"

Sosan replied "Hó!"

And Kuntu said to him, "Sosan, the jéliw will never again pronounce your name,

"The numuw, wolosow, Peul, none of them will speak your name again.¹

"Sosan, the Suraka will never again speak your name.

"Sosan, today is your last day, it is the end of your life.

"The strangers come and go speaking always of Sosan, but now it is the end of your life, it is your last day.

"Little brothers, go and find some large stones".

Kuntu sat with his two hands on the edge of the well while his little brothers gathered stones for him.

1 All the strangers who stayed at the house of the charismatic Sosan when they passed through the town: numuw are black-smiths; wolosow are former slaves born in the master's household, now often itinerant drummers and dancers; the Peul are Fula, or Fulbe.

Every stone they gave to Kuntu, he threw it into the well, from morning until noon.

"Ah!" said the five little brothers of Kuntu, "we are tired".

Kuntu put his mouth in the well and called, "Sosan!"

No voice answered, and Kuntu said, "The little one is very cunning, go and find me a white chicken".

Song:

He has no equal among other men,
 Data has no cow,
 Data has no horse.
 You have no equal among other men,
 Data has no mason to build him a house,
 But you have no equal among other men.
 Data has a wife,
 You have no equal among big men,
 You have no equal among men.

Kuntu said, "We will tie up the white chicken and lower it into the well.

"If it comes back up covered with blood, we will know Sosan has died.

"Otherwise, he is not dead, and the little one is too cunning".

They found a white chicken, tied it to a rope, and lowered it into the well.

Now, Sosan was sheltered in a hole at one side of the bottom of the well.

The falling rocks thrown down on Sosan all missed him.

When the chicken reached him he caught it, took out his knife, and cut his finger, letting the blood drop all over the chicken's feathers.

When the chicken was pulled out of the well, its whole body was red with blood.

Kuntu said, "Ah, he is dead. Go and announce it to our father.

"Let us go weeping, let us all go crying to meet our father".
The six enemy brothers held their heads in mock grief and said,
"Oh, father, we are a long time finding our way back, for
we are so sad".
They returned to Barama Wolo like that, crying and rolling on
the ground.

Barama Wolo said, "What is going on?"

The brothers replied, "Father, when we were at the well we
let Sosan down into it and the sides broke away and fell
down on to Sosan".

The father said, "Did I not tell you not to let your little
brother down into the well?"

"Your son has died, but not mine."¹

"Go back to that well and get Sosan out. Why don't you get going?"

Kuntu said, "Father, now the mud of the well is still falling
inside, and if someone goes in again there will be two dead
instead of one".

They went to tell the mother of Sosan, who had Sosan's sister
with her.

The sister ran crying between the well and the house.

Messages were sent to inform everyone of the death of Sosan.

Sosan's mother said, "Ah, big well, you have had me.

"The bird has taken my only grain of millet and it has fallen
where you could eat it.

"That was my son, who was the reason for my coming to Gwegwa,

"But, big well, you have had me".

1 He refuses to accept their news, it is so terrible.

Those who came for the funeral said, "May God not add to this tragedy any more of our village's strength".

For a long time there had been jealousy between the parents.

From the time the sun was high in the sky, the mother and sister had no place to sit until night.

Until after the evening meal, Sosan's mother had no place to sit.

She also ran between the well and the house.

She let herself fall into the mud by the well where she knelt and wailed piteously:

"Oh, the big well of Gwegwa, you have had me, truly you have had me".

The mother continued to mourn like that into the night.

Even when a goat came into the mud with her, she continued to wail,

"Big well of Gwegwa, if you have eaten Sosan, if you have taken my only seed, you must also take us, you must also eat my daughter and me".

Sosan heard what she said from where he was down in the well.

He climbed on to a rock and said from the well, "Is that Mama?"

The mother looked down into the well and Sosan said again, "Is that Mama?"

The mother said it was, and Sosan said, "Ah, I am not dead".

As soon as she heard that, the mother turned and ran to her house.

She had twelve metres of new cloth.

She called her daughter and said, "Come on, we are going to get your brother out".

They went with the twelve metres of cloth.

They stopped at the edge of the well and unrolled the cloth, letting it down to Sosan in the well.

When it got to Sosan he held on tight, and his mother and sister pulled him out of the well.

When they had gotten him out of the well and he was safely beside them, the mother said to him, "Is it really you, Sosan?"

He replied that it was, and his mother said, "Oh, Sosan, have you been able to escape the jealousy of the Kouloubaly?"

"Sosan, go wherever you wish, my son. I give you blessings and not my curses.

"My son, if you direct yourself to the East, wherever you set your feet,

"In place of where your brothers would find nothing, may you always find good fortune there.

"If you go to the West, where your brothers would find nothing, may you always find good fortune there.

"If you make your way to the South, wherever you put your feet, in places where your brothers would find nothing, may you always win something there.

"If you go toward the North, wherever you put down and raise your feet, where your brothers would find nothing, may you win good fortune there.

"Go, my son, now that you have survived the jealousy of your brothers.

"My son, go with my blessings and not my curses.

"If God brings you to manhood while I still live, I will come and join you".

Sosan left Gwegwa and headed toward the North.

He went out the door in the middle of the night to find his way
toward the North.

For three days he travelled on foot, always headed toward the
North.

On the fourth day he arrived in Marka country at Dorko.

In that Marka village he presented himself to Tigi Bara Dorko.

Sosan greeted the chief politely, and the chief returned the
greeting, saying,

"Eh! Here we have a Bamana man. Sit yourself down and visit
with us".

After he had been properly welcomed with all the customary
greetings, Sosan was asked where he was from and where he
was going.

He said, "I am the son of Barama Wolo and I come from Gwegwa".

The Marka people said, "How are the people of Gwegwa, how is
your father, your mother, and the chief, how are they all?"

"They are all well", said Sosan.

Song:

Oh girl of noble birth,
Eh, haaoo, and Baba the strangers shout,
Haaoo Baba, eh haaoo and Baba the bullets shout,
Haaoo Baba the brave warrior,
Ooh Baba the brave warrior,
Ooh haaoo and Baba the bees shout,
Haaoo Baba, eh haaoo, and Baba the bullets shout,
Eh haaoo Baba the brave warrior,
Haaoo Baba the brave warrior.

Even if you are beautiful,
Even if you are beautiful,
If you have nothing else, the beauty is ignored.
Eh, if you have nothing nobody knows you.
Even if you have had pity for a poor man, if he
becomes rich,
If you have pity on the village poor, if he
becomes rich,
He does not show his gratitude,
He does not show his gratitude.

Someone is loved by someone, that is not so, Baba.
 That is not so, Baba, that is impossible.
 You say that I have lied,
 You say that I have lied.
 Eh haaoo Baba, the jeli shouts,
 Haaoo Baba and haaoo Baba the bullets shout,
 Eh haaoo Baba, the noise of the bullets goes on after
 the rifle is fired.

When the chief of the Marka village had welcomed him, Sosan
 told him the story of how his jealous brothers tried to
 kill him.

Sosan said, "Marka, if that was not the end of life, then
 death cannot happen.

"We the Bamana say, 'Death is hard, but it still leaves someone
 to sit around the dinner bowl'.

"They dropped rocks to the bottom of the well, but none found me.

"I have escaped the jealousy of my brothers, so now Marka chief,
 I have come for your protection".

"Good", said the chief, "we would be happy to have a son of the
 Bamana among us,

"So if you have come to give yourself to us, I am truly pleased.

"This will be no problem, and I will summon the elders to come
 after dinner so I can inform them of your arrival".

The elders came on Friday and were told why they had been called.

The chief stood up and told Sosan's story, and how he had come
 for their protection.

The chief said, "I think we can live together", and all the
 Marka elders agreed that this was good.

The elders said, "we are pleased to have a Bamana with us.

If this one has come for our protection, it is because God
 has sent him".

That is how the Marka received Sosan, and he stayed with them.

After Sosan had rested at Dorko for several days, he said to

the Marka chief,

"Chief, please ask your wives if one of them has some balls of
cotton thread she can give me so I can keep my hands busy.

"We of the Bamana become bored when we have nothing to do, we
are used to keeping busy".

The chief said, "Ah, Bamana, that is true".

Some thread was gotten from one of his wives and given to

Sosan who began to weave.

Song:

Chi cho, dossokolodo,
Chi cho, chi cho,
Chi cho chi, bayee bayee.
Whoever speaks to sons of the blacksmiths,
The sons of blacksmiths who are there,
The sons of blacksmiths who are there,
You will find nyama¹ in back of that,
Speaking to sons of the blacksmiths.

Bayee, bayee,
Who speaks to the sons of blacksmiths,
Who speaks to the sons of blacksmiths,
Who speaks to the sons of blacksmiths?
It is nyama that is behind that,
Speaking to the sons of blacksmiths.

Bayee, bayee, bayee,
Never marry a good-for-nothing.
I will not marry a good-for-nothing,
I will not marry a good-for-nothing,
For the wife of a good-for-nothing is nothing
more than a parasite, until the end of the world.

Bayee, bayee,
Never marry a fool.
I will never marry a fool,
I will never marry a fool,
For the wife of a fool brings grief to her mother
and father until the end of the world.

1 Spiritual force or power, ability to communicate with the
supernatural world.

Bayee, bayee,
Never marry a strong man,
I will never marry a strong man,
I will never marry a strong man,
For the wife of a strong man is always quarrelling,
until the end of the world.

Sosan finished the weaving.

When the women saw the cloth he had made, the Marka men never
wove again for the Marka women.

Whenever a Marka would ask a woman if it was time to have her
weaving done, the woman would reply,

"If the Bamana will do the weaving it is time to weave, but if
someone else is to weave my wool I will wait.

"I will not give my wool to anyone but the Bamana".

Sosan spent a year there.

The rainy season passed, and as summer approached the black
millet was harvested.

Sosan took his knife and cut some of the best millet stalks.

He split the stalks into thin strips and laid them in the sun
to dry.

When the stalks were dry he removed the skin and tied them in
bundles.

Then he took them to where the Marka women were by the well and
laid them where the dirty water was thrown.

When the millet stalks were wet, he gathered them to make mats.

In the evening Sosan went out of the gates of Dorko to search for
bark to finish the edges of the mats.

There was a grove of trees at Dorko, known as "The grove of the
chief of the genies".

That place was the grove of the genies, and nobody could go to the toilet there, for it was a sacred place.

It was forbidden to gather chewing sticks there, and nobody could even enter that grove with an axe.

As Sosan passed near this grove on his way to the bush, the genie chief saw him.

The genie chief said to his wife, "When that Bamana returns past here, change yourself into a Marka woman and meet him along the way.

"After he greets you, tell him to ask the Marka to give him this sacred land on which our grove is standing.

"If they agree to this, he will have to cut down the grove to clear his field for planting.

"His destiny, his fame, his life, are all contained in the earth of this grove".

The genie wife did as she was bid.

In those days we had good genies, but the corruption of man's innocence has spoiled all that.

At the beginning of their friendship with genies the men were good, but at the end they turned bad.

The miser must die near his shop.

If the thief knew the informer, he would not give him his daughter.

A free woman asks God to let no evil come between her and her absent husband, otherwise something worse than evil can happen between them.

Song:

Ha, if you kill your wicked dog, another man's dog
will bite you.
If you kill your wicked dog, another man's dog will
bite you.
If wicked neighbours urge Nyenenkoro to divorce his
worthless wife, someone else's wife will kick him.
If people urge you, if wicked neighbours urge you to
chase your brother away, someone else's brother
will give you a kick.
If people urge him, if wicked neighbours urge
Nyenenkoro to disown his son, the son of another
will give him a kick.
Kill a wicked dog,
If you kill your wicked dog, someone else's dog
will bite you.
Kill a wicked dog,
If you kill your wicked dog, someone else's dog
will bite you.

Ah, those blacksmiths were brave.
We play for the brave blacksmiths.
The fly sits on the dunghill of someone he does not
respect, but young blacksmiths put dung near
the hearth all day, and the flies pass it by
every time.
Termites build their house on the dunghill of those
they do not respect, otherwise the waste may lie
ten years on the rubbish heap touched by
nothing until uncircumcised boys throw it on
young girls' heads.

Salute the elephant,
The bravest of the elephants is a great elephant.
Salute the elephant,
The bravest of the elephants is a great elephant.
Salute the elephant,
The bravest of the hyenas is a great hyena.
Salute the elephant,
The bravest of the warriors is a great warrior.
Two brave men do not know each other until they meet.
Two heroes do not know each other until they meet.
The bravest of the elephants is a great elephant.

Sosan went out to cut the soft nuan-nuan bark for trimming

his mats, and loading it on to his head he started home.

When he got near the grove of the genies, the wife of the genie
chief changed herself into a beautiful Marka woman on the
path.

Sosan, who had a big sun hat on his head came near, and she greeted him: "i ni che,¹ Bamana man".

Sosan replied, "Good afternoon,² Marka woman".

Then the Marka woman said nuwari, which is a Marka greeting, and Sosan said, "Marka woman, I do not understand that language.

"I am Bamana and I do not know Marka".

The Marka woman said, "Bamana man, if you hear the Marka say nuwari, that means the same as i ni che".

They greeted each other in Marka, but Sosan then repeated that he was a Bamana and asked the woman to speak that language.

She replied, "Bamana man, you are afraid!"

Sosan said, "No, I am not afraid.

"I, Sosan, if I suspected that any part of my body was the least afraid, I would take my knife and cut off that part, so do not say that again".

Then the woman said, "Very well, Bamana man, I am not really a Marka woman, I am a genie.

"Do you see that grove of trees?

"That is the dwelling place of my husband, the chief of genies.

"He told me to come and tell you to ask the Marka to give you that grove.

"If they agree to give it to you, you must return and cut it down to clear your field and thus gain your destiny, your fame, and your life.

1 Though Marka, she gives him the standard Bambara greeting, roughly the equivalent of "hello" or "good day".

2 I ni wula, "Good afternoon".

"All of this you will find in the earth of that place, oh
Bamana man.

"That is what my husband has commanded me to tell you".

Sosan said, "That is all right. When you go back, tell
your husband that I understand and that I shall ask the
Marka to give me the land.

"If they agree to let me have it, all right, but if they will not
give it to me, that is the end of the matter."

Song:

Among the people of God, no two people are alike,
No two people are alike.
The worthy men are gone,
The worthy men are gone,
The worthy men are gone.
People, death is a pity,
Death is a pity.

Asikai, asikai!¹
Kalan Famory, they show you the hand.²
They show you the hand,
They show you the hand,
They show you both hands.
Kalan Famory, no two people are alike.

I speak to men of the same work as me.
The worthy do not entertain themselves.
The worthy do not entertain the people of different lands,
No two people are alike,
Death is a pity.
Death is a pity, people of different lands.

I speak to the women who do the same work as me.
Death is a pity,
Death is a pity.
Death is a pity, people of different lands,
Death is a pity.

Praises are the kind of speech that encourages
someone who must do something.
Death is a pity,
Death is a pity, people of different lands.
Death is a pity,
No two people are alike.

1 A kind of salute, expressing admiration, respect.

2 Kalan Famory is a hero of the past, and the expression is a
reminder that man is mortal: death is approaching.

Soro Wolo and Barama Wolo,¹
 The hum of the strings is heard.²
 The humming strings call out,
 The humming strings call out to people of different lands.
 Nobody is alike,
 The humming strings tell me that no to people are alike.

I'll tell you more, brave warrior, you who can dance
 the Janjon.³
 Nobody is alike among people of different lands,
 Death is a pity.
 The Nyangara is rarely sung.⁴
 When they sing the Janjon, no two people are alike,
 Death is a pity.
 Whoever is born must die,
 Whoever is born must die.

The foreigners claim that bravery has brought an end
 to the world,⁵
 No two people are alike,
 The way is lost,
 The great way of the world is lost,
 But it was man who brought an end to the world.
 No two people are alike,
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

The great Nje is lost to the world,⁶
 The great Nje has abandoned the world.
 No two people are alike,
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

Lamine is lost,
 Lamine is lost.
 Lamine of Sirokoto has abandoned the world,
 No two people are alike,
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

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- 1 Sosan's ancestors.
- 2 The strings of the griot's ngoni.
- 3 The Janjon dance and its accompanying music are only performed for the most distinguished heroes.
- 4 A song reserved for praising the great heroes.
- 5 The brave men have gone and the world is not like it used to be.
- 6 The names in the next seven stanzas are of past heroes, famous in Kaarta or the Beledougou.

Banyou is lost,
 Banyou is lost.
 Banyou of Wessebougou has abandoned the world,
 No two people are alike.
 People of different lands, death is a pity,
 Death is a pity.

Mbabile is lost,
 Mbabile is lost.
 Mbabile of Senegal has abandoned the world,
 Death is a pity.
 People of different lands, no two people are alike.

Jurou is lost,
 Jurou is lost.
 Jurou of Jalakoro has abandoned the world,
 No two people are alike.
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

Samba is lost,
 Samba is lost.
 Sambabile of Missandoula has abandoned the world,
 No two people are alike.
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

Diosse is lost,¹
 Diosse is lost.
 Koumikonon Diosse has abandoned the world,
 Death is a pity.
 People of different lands, no one can be replaced,
 Death is a pity.

Truly, people of the world, a good-for-nothing is
 not my friend.
 I declare to you that a good-for-nothing must be
 despised.
 The good-for-nothing should be tied up with the bark
 of a gombo tree.²
 The race begins with slow steps and ends with fast steps.
 No one is replaceable, death is a pity.
 Poverty begins with a smile and ends with tears.
 People of different lands, death is a pity.

The rat sits on the hide of the cat,
 Death is a pity.
 Death is a pity, people of different lands,
 Death is a pity.

1 Koumi Diosse Traore of Beledougou, born c. 1840.

2 A shrub that produced a fruit called gwan, sometimes used as
 an ingredient in sauces.

The ram imitates the hyena's cry and the hyena goes away in a rage.

People of the world, no one is replaceable.
The lion has nothing to eat but unripe nere fruit,¹
Death is a pity.
Death is a pity, people of the world,
No one is replaceable.

The cock crows and people attend the funeral,
The dog jumps high, but though a bird jumps higher,
he still does not mock other people.
The death of a good-for-nothing is cause for rejoicing.

Sosan returned from gathering his nuan-nuan bark and stored it in the rafters of his hut.

He passed that night and the following day without saying anything about the grove of the genies.

Toward evening he went to see the Marka village chief and asked him to assemble the elders.

After the evening meal, the elders came to the chief's compound and Sosan said to them,

"The reason you have been called today is not a serious matter, it is I who asked for this meeting.

"I have seen something you have here which I would like you to give me, and nothing else will do.

"Because I am a Bamana, nothing pleases me so much as a good piece of land.

"I like your sacred grove very much, Marka people, and I pray that you will give me that grove of trees so I can clear my field for planting".

"Safourou lai!"² shouted the Marka elders.

1 No two beings are alike, and what is eaten by a man is worthless to a lion.

2 Expression of shocked disapproval.

"Do not say that again!

"Do not say that again!

"Leave it alone!

"Take care that your thoughts are not dried by the wind.¹

"You escaped your jealous brothers and came here asking for our protection, and yet you want us to give you that place?

"Since the time when our ancestors lived, both fathers and brothers, that grove has stood there.

"No one can go to the toilet there, no one can cut chewing sticks there, no one can even enter it with an axe.

"Bamana man, that is the sacred grove of the genies, and it must remain untouched.

"You look again in the bush, and if you find another place you like that has nothing to do with that grove, Bamana man, even if you decide to found a village there, we will give you that place and everything around it.

"But we cannot give you that grove".

Sosan said, "People of the Marka, I love that grove".

But they said, "A man cannot fear he-death and then give himself up to she-death.

"Weakness cannot allow anyone to do heavy work in the village".

Sosan passed that night without reaching agreement with the Marka on the subject of the grove.

The next day he walked through the bush, and when he returned in the evening, he said,

"Chief of the Marka village, I have not found any other place except that grove".

1 Do not put them into words.

The Marka chief replied, "Bamana, we cannot give you that place".

"Marka chief", said Sosan, "if it is just a question of genies,
I have a good remedy against genies".

The chief said, "We know that, but it is not just a matter of a
remedy".

The next day, Sosan requested another meeting with the village
elders.

When everyone was present, Sosan said,

"There now, Chief, this is not so difficult, just tell your
village elders that we, the Bamana say, 'The act of gathering
once to tell the truth is better than gathering ten times to
tell lies!.

"I like that grove of yours right now, and that is why I have
called you here.

"If you will give me the grove, I will be very grateful".

The elders were divided on the matter.

Some of them agreed, saying, "The Bamana say to the Marka that
'To prevent is better than to cure', no one can say we did
not warn him".

But the others said, "This is impossible. This Bamana who has
lived with us, who has escaped the jealousy of his brothers,
who has come here for our protection, must never have that
grove.

"That grove has stood there since the time our ancestors were
living.

"That grove has existed since our grandfathers lived.

"That grove has been there from the time of our fathers, and it
must not be given away".

And the others still insisted, "Let him have the place".

At last the Marka agreed to give the sacred grove to Sosan.

They asked Sosan to warn them when he intended to cut down the grove of trees, so they could protect themselves from the genies' wrath.

The next day Sosan went to the blacksmith and asked him to make an axe.

If you want to clear some trees for a field, you must have an axe.

When he got home, he asked the Marka chief to assemble the elders again that evening.

Song:¹

The Bamana language, the Bamana language is difficult,
is difficult.

Oh, the Bamana language is difficult,
The Bamana language is difficult,
The Bamana language is difficult.

I am glad of this,
I am glad of this,
I am glad of this.
This special fact makes me glad,
I did not know it before.

Kindness is an act of love,
Kindness is an act of love,
Kindness is an act of love.
I did not know that before,
I did not know that before.
The strings of Jeli Mamary,
The strings of Jeli Mamary,
The strings of Jeli Mamary are good to hear.
The strings of Jeli Mamary are good to hear.
Jeli Mamary, I am going home,
I feel happy and I'm going home.
Kindness is an act of love.
Come all chiefs of the golden village, the jeli speaks.

1 A song of happiness, celebrating Sosan's success.

I am going to sing this part about those who have been caught
by M'baudi, so we know they are lying.

I, Jeli Mamary am going to tell you about that.

This part is different from Sosan's story.

This story about M'baudi I am telling makes me think of the
great Soro Silamakan Keita.

He was at Sorotyoko with his younger brothers Jume and Bogoli,
and M'baudi was played for him.

Song:

M'baudi

Even tomorrow morning when the jeli begins to call
the horse,¹ she says, Soni yoo!
Jume who fools the sky,²
Jume who says what he comes for,
Jume who says what he goes back for,
Soni and Silamakan, Jume is called.
He was Sekou Karamoko Keita's younger brother.
Silamakan was the grandson of Saman,
N'dea and Aisatu were the parents of Saman.
His mother was loyal to his father,
With luck begotton from danger.
Her distinctive kerchief,
Her way of tying her kerchief on her head caught the eyes.
His mother bought power for him.
The genie gave her a war horse,
It was a reward for her loyalty to his father.
The horse was called "Kankan",
Kankan of the house,
Kankan of the bush.

Kumba, mother of Silamakan,
Silamakan, grandson of Kamissa Konte of Sankaran,
When Diarra³ rides his horse if he had a hundred
enemies to his right he was invincible.
If he had a hundred enemies to his left he was
also invincible.
If there were a hundred enemies behind, he was invincible.
Only those who were already in front could not be outrun.
This Kankan would trot like a hyena,
This is how he went.⁴

-
- 1 Sometimes when a griot woman begins to shout praises she will ululate or make a warbling sound that resembles a horse's whinny, hence "to call the horse".
 - 2 From this line the song is sung in Fulfulde, the language of the Fulbe or Peul.
 - 3 The ruling lineage of Segou that followed the Kouloubalys, and like the latter also prominent further west, in Kaarta.
 - 4 Here Jeli Mamary taps on his ngoni to simulate the sound of a galloping horse.

One day two ko n'ka n'kon birds¹ were arguing about the two ears of the great Soro Silamakan Keita's horse.

One said, "The great Soro Silamakan will become somebody in the world,

"For the world is not a drum that lets a person dance twice to its beat.

"You must dance it right the first time, whether your style is good or bad".

But the other bird said, "No! Do not put all of your body into the world at once.

"Though it be said in the middle of your years that you are greater than someone else,

"Someone else is also greater than you".

The world is like a long warp thread in a loom with not enough of the people as woof threads to make a cloth.

Silamakan called for Nyagale, the wife of Soro Saman. She was a woman who spoke like a man.

She went to Samanyana and destroyed it like an old calabash, broke it like an old clay pot.

She made her twelve sons become like Sansaramo Keita. Those who did not become wealthy became famous.

To say "My mother has given birth" and "My mother has finished", are two different things.

To say "I wear a pair of trousers" and "I have something wrapped around my buttocks", are two different things.

All infants named N'kakoussa² have not succeeded as great men.

To give birth to many men-children is not necessarily a fortunate thing.

I wanted to tell you this part, but now let us go on with the story of Sosan.

The Marka chief called an assembly of village elders as Sosan requested.

When all the elders were present, Sosan said, "Tell all the villagers that tomorrow I want to go and cut down my grove.

"That is why I have called this meeting".

1 The name of the bird is said to be the same as the sound it makes.

2 Literally, "I am better".

Song:

Oh, the old warriors, there are few of them now.
 People I say to you,
 The Bamana, Nje are not all gone, but only a few
 remain.

In the meantime the war has ended, and for me the
 Nje are almost gone.

In the meantime the war has ended, and for me the
 Nje are almost gone.

Whose side do I take?²

In the meantime, the warrior Nje is among us.

Nje got ready for war.

He who came has gone.

Fémi!³ I have prepared myself, Nje of Bamana land.
 N'koni Seriba was a famous warrior of Segou.

Fémi! I have heard the name of the famous
 warrior Nje.

I have heard the name of another famous Nje warrior,
 Keleke N'koni was also one of the famous Nje
 warriors of Lafitanan.

Who and who were the famous Nje warriors of Bamana land?
 Wessedougou Banyoukou was a great Nje warrior,
 Banyoukou is gone.

Who and who were the famous Nje warriors of Bamana land?
 Babile was one of the great Nje warriors,
 Babile is gone.

Who and who were the famous Nje warriors of Bamana land?
 M'pela Jurukoro was one of the great Nje warriors,
 M'pela Jurukoro is gone.

Who and who were the famous Nje warriors of Bamana land?
 Samambile of Messedonon was one of the great Nje
 warriors,

Samambile is gone.

Who and who were the famous Nje warriors of Bamana land?
 Longnecked Diosse was one of the great Nje warriors,
 Diosse is gone.

In the meantime, the Bamana Nje are not all gone, but
 for me there are few Nje left.

All the Nje of Bamana land are now alike.

All the Nje warriors are not all gone, but few of them
 remain.

The war did not touch me until I arrived at the door of
 the council house.

The dead men's council house was not yet full, and I
 shed the blood of many another man.

1 That is, there are none left who are as great".

2 Would I prefer to be among the dead heroes, or among the less
 illustrious who are still living.

3 Exclamatory oath.

Song:

The hyena walks, "jou jou", and the hyena walks,
 "ja ja".
 When the hyena and the family head came from the
 judgment court,
 Even if the family head won the case, he was full
 of sorrow.
 Even if he₁ lost the case, he was always full of
 sorrow.

The hyena did not leave empty-handed, people.
 When the hyena said, "I stick out my head",²
 the old Bamana folk began to worry.
 Ah, my children, one₃ can pass by the hyena's
 faltering mother,³ but the hyena never passes
 up the faltering mother of anyone.

All who are called do not come.
 To say, "Do not catch me" and "Come here" are two
 different things.
 If the clan weeps for a man-child, people,
 If the man-child is born and is a failure,
 The clan will pass a night in fasting.

Eh! It was morning, and after breakfast Sosan took his axe and
 went out the gate of Dorko.

When he was gone, the people locked the six gates of the village.

Sosan cut trees in the grove from morning to noon.

When the sun was high he knocked at the village gate and the
 people let him in.

He spent that night, and the next morning he went out of Dorko
 and again they locked the six gates behind him.

He cut in the grove of trees until the sun was high over head,
 then returned to the village and was let in at the gate.

1 The sentiment that one always comes out the loser against a hyena stems from the animal's ruthless nature, and from his image as a trickster character in the folk-tales.

2 "Here I come."

3 "Faltering" in the sense of one who lags behind the pack because of illness or injury, thus becoming easy prey.

Song:

He danced the fissan,¹
 He danced the fissan and he went to bed.²
 Who danced the fissan?
 He danced the fissan,
 Wassabara Tieba danced the fissan and went to bed.
 Letioki danced the fissan and went to bed.
 Who danced the fissan?
 He danced the fissan,
 Senegali Baru danced the fissan and went to bed.
 Letioki danced the fissan and went to bed.
 Who danced the fissan?
 He danced the fissan,
 Bakari danced the fissan and went to bed.
 Letioki danced the fissan and went to bed.

Eh! I call the names of those who fought with
 the heroes.
 I call the only slave of the people of Bomoti.³
 I call those who fought against Tata, the only
 slave of the people of Takrou.
 I call those who fought the sorcerer of Takala.

A good leader tells us to go home.⁴
 Home is a good place to be, the bush is good
 for no one.
 The man who stays at home is⁵ not the same as the
 man who goes to the bush.

-
- 1 A dance for warriors; to say "he danced the fissan" is to say "he went to war".
 2 He died.
 3 "Slave" in this sense refers to all men, as slaves of God, and in this case it designates a hero of Bomoti, whose name would be known by most of the narrator's audience.
 4 In other words, the best kind of leader in a battle is the one who tells you to go home.
 5 The man who stays home is a talker, while the man who goes to the bush is a doer, a courageous person.

The man who stays home is the king of happiness,
 After the war comes freedom.
 The hall of the dead is not full, but the living
 do not speak of this.¹
 A brave house is never a dead house,
 If one son is cut down, another goes out.

The next morning after breakfast, Sosan took his axe and left
 the village, and the gates were locked behind him.

For eight days he cut in the grove, from dawn until the sun
 was high over head.

At last Sosan finished cutting down the sacred grove.

The trees lay in the sun throughout the summer, and after they
 were all dried out, the Marka said to Sosan,

"Eh, Bamana, now whenever you go into your grove, you must be
 sure to warn us so we can protect ourselves from the genie's
 wrath.

"As you know yourself, we are helpless if they attack us".

At that very moment the chief of the genies was nearby, but the
 Marka did not know it.

Song:

Nouhoun, you have seen that the patron² had a genie.
 You have seen that the patron had a genie, a
 benevolent genie.
 The elders have seen that the patron had a
 benevolent genie.
 Ever since cows have had calves, the patron had
 a genie, a benevolent genie.
 Since gold appeared, the patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.

1 I have used the word "hall" where the French vestibule would also apply, for the Bambara blon, dlo, or bolo, the entrance hut, the floor of which is the burial place for the head of the family. The living do not speak of it because they know the vacant spaces in the hall of the dead are reserved for them. This is a praise song to the patrons (jiatigiw) of the nyamakalaw, in which they are both praised and encouraged to be generous.

2 The jiatigi is the host, patron, family head or householder who provides the griot, blacksmith or other nyamakala with food, lodging and other necessities, in exchange for his services.

Patron of jeliw, my patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 Patron of blacksmiths, my patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 Patron of funew,¹ my host has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 Noble youth, my patron has had a genie,
 a Benevolent genie.
 Oh hooo, hey Sitan Diarra, my patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 Hey, Lala Diarra, my patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 No man is immortal, my patron has had a genie,
 a benevolent genie.
 Hey, everybody, my patron has struggled long
 for what he has.

Sosan said, "Marka people, you must be careful tomorrow.

"I intend to go into my grove".

The next day, the Marka chief and the elders warned their

women and children that no one was to go outside the gates

because the Bamana was going to burn off his field.

The lion set fire to the brush of the grove and it burned until

there was nothing but ashes.

One afternoon when Sosan went to the site where the grove had

been, the chief of the genies sent his wife to him.

She said, "Sosan, you must begin to plant cotton, gourds, and

maize, for the destiny and fame of your life as contained

in the cotton, maize and gourds".

That is what the genie woman told Sosan.

Song:

The hyena, prowls, jou jou,
 The old hyena, prowls, jou jou.
 I was far away at nightfall,
 I was far away at nightfall.

Sosan asked the Marka to give him some seeds so he could plant

cotton, maize and gourds.

1 The funew are also people of speech or oral artists, but they specialize in Islamic subjects.

Song:

You are in a forest full of gold.¹
 It calls out to the women if they come into
 the big forests,
 The big merchants call to the women.²

I, Jeli Mamary, stopped the story of Sosan on Wednesday, and

I am going to begin again today, Thursday.

No matter how deep the river is, its depth must be measured.

All burned things must be discarded.

There is a thing in the world that smells worse than any other
 creature, it smells so bad.

These are Bamana maxims.

We say "The son of the Fula".³

Who is this son?

When I say there is a thing in the world that smells bad, I
 mean that hatred is bad and pride is bad.

Sosan asked the Marka for seeds of cotton, gourds and maize,
 and they gave them to him.

Sosan ploughed his field and planted maize, gourds and cotton.

They sprouted, and he weeded and tended the mounds.

The cotton sprouted, the maize sprouted, the gourds sprouted.

The cotton did not bother the gourds, the gourds did not

1 The marketplace.

2 Hère Jeli Mamary said "Sarans" (sirens?), but I was told that Sarans were a type of woman, so in the interest of coherence I translated it as "women".

3 The reference here is to a local stereotype of the Fulbe herders as disdainful and arrogant.

bother the cotton, the maize did not bother the cotton,
the cotton did not bother the maize.

They all sprouted together.¹

Song:

Little mother, little mother is alone.
Little mother, little mother is alone.
Little mother, little mother is alone,²
Little mother alone is the man.
She has a lot of horses, including many stallions,
She has cows, horses and gold.

It is bad, your mouth is bad.
I will kick the mouth of your village,
I will kick the mouth of your village,³
I will kick the mouth of your village.

Song:

Lassana, Lassana, he met a duiker at Nyamina and
ran away as fast as he could.
It was a hard day at Nyamina.⁴
Lassana of Nyamina claimed the town was not
affected by this trouble,
But it was a hard day at Nyamina.
There were bits of wood there, axes, African guns,
and European guns.⁵
There were also many chiefs.
Who were these chiefs?
N'kabakoro Dioma was there, hey!
The pen-carrying marabout came.
Who were these chiefs?
Sidi Baba was there,
Young Duba was there,
Young Sekou was there.

-
- 1 These three crops are considered to be particularly compatible, and the Bambara often planted them together in the same field.
- 2 Because she is alone, she does all the man's work.
- 3 The meaning here is obscure; Mamary spoke these lines at the end of the stanza.
- 4 The reference is to a battle.
- 5 Locally-made muskets and imported rifles.

The cotton, gourds, and maize did not bother each other.

Ah, long had the Marka feared the genie's grove,

But at last the Marka had no more fear.

Marka men and women spent the whole day there picking cotton,
while the old men opened the gourds.¹

Ah! One afternoon when Sosan went to his fields to gather the
dried vines from the cotton, maize and gourds, the genie
met him there.

The genie said to Sosan, "Bamana, you must now asked the Marka
chief to assemble the village youth to help you build some
houses on the site of your field.

"You are going to found a village there, because your happiness,
fame and destiny are contained in its soil."

Sosan replied that he would do so, and going to the Marka chief
he said,

"Sir, I have something on my mind now that I want to tell
you about, and if you could agree to it, I would be very
grateful.

"It is nothing so very serious, but we Bamana people rely
completely on our farming.

"We have no other interest from sunrise to the time for sleeping.

"Ah! Your way is not right for me, because your village gates
are closed in the evening and not opened again until the
next morning.

"I therefore beg you to lend me the help of the village youths
so I can build a house at my farm.

1 A gourd growing in the field is a bara, and after it is
harvested, opened, and dried, it becomes a calabash, file.

"That way I will be able to rise at any hour to begin work in my field".

The Marka chief said, "Bamana, what you say is true, for no matter how early we rise, we find you already up, even as early as four o'clock.

"A Bamana is very fond of rising early, while we Marka prefer to wait until we have had a leisurely meal, for our farming is not an urgent matter".¹

That evening, at an assembly of elders it was agreed that Sosan should have the help of the village youth to build his huts.

They mixed mud at the old grove site, and when the new bricks were dry they built three round houses.

If you hear a Bamana speak of jemele, that is a round house.

In former times we built our houses in a different manner.

Then they were round, but now they have four sides.

If you want to change your round house to a four-sided one, you must complete it with banco.²

Even today, the first house in a new village begins as three or four round thatched huts connected by mud walls to make an enclosed compound.³

1 This is in reference to the Markas' preferred occupation of being travelling merchants.

2 That is, remove the conical thatched roof and replace it with a flat terrace made by laying rough timbers across the top of the walls and covering them with banco (African adobe).

3 This is the simplest type of house to build near a cultivated field far from the village, where the farmer can stay during the busy time of clearing, planting and harvesting, thus saving a long daily walk from the main village. These hamlets sometimes grow to become regular villages.

Sosan now moved to his new compound.

When someone left Dorko to visit Sosan, they would say they were going to Sosan's place.

But later that became too long to say, and they began to call the place "Sossana".

That is how Sossana was founded.

One Friday afternoon Sosan was at home talking to the genie.

The genie said, "Sosan, now you must find a wife.

"As I tell you to find a wife, I will also tell you where you must make your search.

"Get ready to go to Nambala.

"There is a Peul there named Alou Sangare, and you must try to get his eldest daughter for your wife.

"If he is agreeable, you must marry her.

"No matter how Duba Sangare looks to you, do not despise her, you must bring her home with you".

This was all right with Sosan.

Having saved much from the crops he harvested, Sosan got a fine horse.

Early one morning when all was ready, he mounted his horse.

As he rode away, the horse went bala kusu-kusu and bala yukuba-yukuba.

The hind feet of Sosan's horse shook the earth, its breath moved the rocks, its two ears danced, its tail blew in the wind, and the earth was blistered by its hooves.

Song:

I have seen my patron with problems, but he took no notice of the trouble.
 The son of old Boukou my patron has met with trouble, but he took no notice of the problem.
 Since the drinker from the cup of woe, my patron, has met with evil, he has not taken notice of it.
 The drinker from the mortar of gold, my patron, has met trouble, but he has not noticed the pain.
 The killer of climbing animals, my patron, has met with problems, but he took no notice of them.
 The patron of jeliw, my patron, has met with trouble, but he took no notice of it.
 The patron of funew, my patron has met with trouble, but he took no notice of it.

At the house of Alou Sangare, Sosan met four jeliw who were singing N'tiaro for their patron as he reclined on his bed.

Song:

Aiee! Janjon is not good for everyone.
 Janjon is sung for those who have faced danger.
 I have not heard the name of the chief.
 The dead are better off than the living,
 The dead are better off than the living.
 Aiee, Janjon is not good for everyone,
 Call for Modibo Kane.

Alou Sangare greeted Sosan and welcomed him to Nambala, and Sosan said,
 "Sir, if you see me here today, it is not because I come with any bad news".
 Then Sosan told how he had escaped the jealousy of his brothers and gone to seek the protection of the Marka people.
 That kind of protection is called by the Bamana soloda de.
 That is what the Bamana say.
 We hear kalifa but that is a recent word.¹

1 To kalifa a person or possession is to leave it in trust with a guardian, and to break this trust is regarded as one of the worst possible crimes. In addition to soloda de, another ancient term in some dialects, according to Mamary, is tenemonda de.

Formerly the Bamana said soloda; all Bamana words have more than one meaning.

Sosan said, "I am the son of Barama Wolo of Gwegwa.

"I come to you in search of a wife."

Alou Sangare said, "That is no problem, there is nothing here

I would refuse you.

"But first spend the night, and tomorrow I will show you my six daughters so you can make your choice".

Song:

If they do not go to bed,
 If they do not go to bed,
 Malians will avenge themselves.
 Mali will avenge itself,
 If it does not go to bed,
 If it does not go to bed.
 Malians will avenge themselves.
 Mali will avenge itself,
 If it does not go to bed.
 Mali has men,
 The men of Mali will avenge themselves.
 Mali will avenge itself,
 If it does not go to bed.
 Mali has Russians,¹
 Malians will avenge themselves,
 Mali will avenge itself,
 If it does not go to bed.
 Guinea is with the men,
 The men of Mali will avenge themselves.
 Mali will avenge itself,²
 The people of Mopti, yo!
 The hare has killed the elephant, and you have
 betrayed it.
 This is no thanks to the gun, no?
 You are not noble.

Sosan spent the night, and the next morning the six daughters of Alou Sangare were bathed and dressed.

1 Military advisers.

2 At different times in Bambara history, the large river port of Mopti, on the bend of the Niger River north of Bambara country, was a stronghold of various enemies, such as the Peul and the Songhai.

Each of the six daughters had attractive breasts.
 Below the navel they were rounded and tempting.
 Their bodies were as shiny as a fool with a sack of boiling
 millet on his head being chased through the sands of the
 Sahara by his worst enemy.

In those days young men in search of wives were not ashamed to
 voice their approval of an attractive girl.

When she said to a man, harankume joni, it meant that he
 must do a duck-walk all around the house, to prove his
 interest.

Alou Sangare brought out his six daughters and told Sosan to
 make his choice.

Sosan got up and looked over the six daughters.

Walking around each of them he viewed them thoughtfully and
 then paused, saying,

"Alou Sangare, your first daughter who is named Duba, is she
 among these six?"

Alou said to his six daughters, "Go back to your mothers.

"The Bamana Sosan is not interested in a wife".

To Sosan he said, "Bamana, if all you want is Duba Sangare who
 is rotting in her mother's hut, I do not ask even a piece
 of kola nut for her".

Song:

He went to fetch the son of the genie,
 He went to fetch the son of the genie.
 The Wolof went for the son of the genie, and that
 pleases me,
 That pleases me.

He went to fetch the son of the genie,
 He went to fetch the son of the genie.
 The Wolof went for the son of the genie, and
 that pleases me.¹

At that time, Duba Sangare had suffered from an open wound
 for seven years.

The only way she could get about was to scoot along on her
 buttocks.

She could not even go out to urinate except by scooting
 along on her buttocks.

When someone brought her meals, they would hold their nose
 and slide the food into the room, then hurry away.

Sosan went to Duba's room and found her sitting on a mat.

He sat down and greeted her, saying "Are you the daughter
 of Alou Sangare?"

When Duba replied that she was, Sosan said, "You see me here
 today, but I bring no problems with me.

"I have come seeking you to marry, so please tell me if you
 like me or not".

Duba began to weep, saying, "Bamana, everyone who mocks a
 person does not say kete-kete."²

"You do not really want to marry me, you only come to mock me".

Sosan replied, "Duba, I do want to marry you.

"I want to marry you today, I will want to marry you tomorrow,
 and I will be very happy when I have married you".

Duba said, "Bamana, you have come to mock me".

1 The Wolof of Senegal and the Gambia have a wide reputation
 for being associated with genies, witches, and sorcery.

2 Though you are not laughing aloud or making mocking sounds,
 you are nevertheless mocking me.

She began to cry again, saying, "Bamana, you have had me,
you have come to mock me.

"Everyone who makes fun does not say kéte-kéte, and you
have come to make fun of me.

"You have not come for marriage.

"You see that I cannot even move except by scooting along on
my buttocks.

"When someone brings my food, they hold their nose, push it
into the room, and hurry away.

"Ah, Bamana, you do not come to marry me, you come to mock."

Sosan said, "Duba, I truly have not come to mock you, I
have come to marry you.

"If you like me, say so, and if you do not, say so".

Duba said, "Bamana, if I said I like you, how would I go with
you?"

"That is no problem", said Sosan, "everyone knows I have a
horse."

"All right", said Duba, "go and tell my father that I like you."

Sosan went to Alou Sangare and said, "Your Duba Sangare
says she is fond of me".

Alou Sangare said, "All right, Bamana, I thank you very much.

"You will relieve me of a burden if you take that filth out
of my house, and it will please me very much".

Sosan saddled his horse and removed its hobbles, then he asked
for someone to carry Duba out and put her up behind him.

Alou said to his slaves, "Get up and go get that obscenity
and put her on the horse behind Sosan.

"Sosan has relieved us of a big problem".

Duba was placed on the horse, and Sosan galloped away with her.

When they arrived at Sosan's compound, he carried her into his house and placed her on a mat.

After caring for his horse, Sosan heated water and began to bathe Duba, and before he had finished, the chief of the genies arrived with special medicines.

There was a red powder for cleaning Duba's sore, and a white powder to heal it, and the genie's wife showed Sosan how to use them.

The sore improved quickly under this treatment, and after two weeks Duba could walk with a cane.

Song:

A bird has no breasts, but a bird feeds its young,
A bird has no breasts, but a bird feeds its young.
A bird has no breasts, but a bird feeds its young,
Marka people.

The guinea fowl eats no n'kolo berries,
Follow the lead of the Bamana.¹
The guinea fowl eats no n'kolo berries,
The guinea fowl eats no n'kolo berries,
The guinea fowl eats no n'kolo berries.

When Duba Sangare had been at Dorko for one month, she could walk without any help.

She was ready for Sosan, but he and Duba had not yet begun to sleep together,

They spent the night on separate mats.

They lived together in the house, spent their days together, and slept in the same room, but on different mats.

1 The Bambara people also find the berries inedible, and the message here is that it is good to follow their ways, because they are knowledgeable about many things.

Song:

Hnnh! I have seen my patron with troubles in
 spite of his goodness.
 Peoples, I have seen my patron with troubles in
 spite of his goodness.
 Mother Bougou, my patron has met with problems
 in spite of his his goodness.
 Elders, my patron has suffered in spite of his
 goodness.
 Drinkers of cow's milk, my patron has met trouble
 in spite of his goodness.
 Hoarders of gold, my patron has suffered in spite
 of his goodness.
 Drinkers of the genie water, my patron has
 suffered in spite of his goodness.
 Patron of jeliw, my host has suffered in spite
 of his goodness.
 Patron of blacksmiths, my host has suffered
 in spite of his goodness.
 Patron of funew, my host has suffered in spite
 of his goodness.
 Patron of leatherworkers, my host has suffered
 in spite of his goodness.
 Oh hooo, Satan the tempter, my patron has
 suffered in spite of his goodness.
 Nyama the tempter, my patron has suffered in
 spite of his goodness.
 Elders, my patron has suffered in spite of
 his goodness.
 Death forgets no one, my patron has suffered in
 spite of his goodness.
 People, I have seen my patron with problems in
 spite of his goodness.

When Duba had been with Sosan for six weeks, her wound had
 healed, leaving only a white scar.

Duba could now get her own water and bathe herself.

She was ready for Sosan, but so far they had not shared a
 sleeping mat.

When they had been at Dorko for three months, Duba's sore
 had healed so completely that there was not even the trace
 of a scar.

Duba had changed so much, that anyone who did not know she was
 a Peul would have thought she was a Marka woman.

She gained weight and learned to speak the Marka language perfectly.

One afternoon, Sosan and the genie chief were talking, and Sosan said, "I have something on my mind.

"Tomorrow I want to take Duba and present her to her father so he can name the amount of the bridewealth payment.

"If he will not accept compensation from me, I cannot appreciate Duba as I should,

"For I am no Muslim and I will not take a wife without paying the proper bride price".

The genie chief agreed that this should be done, for "A woman's power comes from marriage".¹

That night, when it was time for bed, Sosan said to Duba, "Get ready to leave tomorrow morning, for I am going to return you to your father so he can name a bride price.

"If he does not do this, I cannot hold you in proper esteem, for I could never accept a wife gratuitously, like a Muslim".

"There, Bamana", said Duba, "I told you you were only mocking me and that you never really intended to marry me.

"My father has already told you he would not accept even a piece of kola nut for me, and now you say you are taking me back to him. I will not go".

Sosan said, "Wait until tomorrow".

1 Muso de barikola ye furu de ye, i.e., the greater the amount of bridewealth given for her, the more status and power she will have.

Song:

The hyena is coming to take me away,
 The hyena is coming to take me away,
 The hyena is coming to take me away.
 No, Koniraba, the fact that the hyena is coming
 with a rope does not please me.
 Koniraba of the horse, the fact that the hyena
 is coming with a rope does not please me.
 In the name of lightning, the idea of a hyena with
 a rope is not a happy one.
 A woman up in a tree fears the first lion she sees,
 But I am afraid of the hoe that digs graves.
 I warn the children to pay heed to their elders
 because disobedience is a cause of failure.
 If you see a man become a lion, it is because he
 listened to his elders and learned something.
 If you see the uncircumcised boys going through
 their rites of circumcision, this is how they
 will learn something.
 If you see a girl become old, that is how people
 come to know something.
 The hyena has gone for a walk,
 She is going to Dorko to search for lions that
 chase the goats,
 For lions annoy her.
 The hyena has gone from Dorko,
 She is going to Fouladougou to search for lions
 that chase the cows,
 For lions annoy her.
 The hyena has left Fouladougou,
 She is going to Masina to look for lions that
 chase the sheep,
 For lions annoy her.
 The troublesome lion has visited many pastures.

The night passed, and the next morning Sosan saddled his
 horse and said, "Duba, let us go, I am going to return
 you to your father".
 Duba began to weep, saying, "I will not go.
 "My father has told you that you have saved him much trouble,
 that you have removed the filth from his house.
 "Now you want to throw me back into that house. I will not go,
 you can go without me".

Sosan went into his house and came out with his big sword, saying, "So you will not come? Get up and jump on that horse".

Duba was so frightened that she immediately mounted the horse and they galloped off toward Nambala.

As they approached the pastures of Buare where the Peul of Nambala grazed their cattle, Duba said,

"Bamana, when I left Nambala I could not walk, and now I beg you to let me down so I can walk in front of the horse the rest of the way.

"I do not think the people there will recognize me".

Duba got down and walked ahead through the pastures and Sosan followed as the horse walked.

When the Peul herders saw the two coming, they recognized Sosan but not Duba.

They said, "The Bamana and a beautiful Marka woman are coming.

"How pretty that Marka woman is, how charming she is".

At the house of Duba's father, they were greeted by Alou Sangare, who said,

"How are the people of Dorko, the chief, elders and all the others, and how does it go with your suffering wife?"

Sosan replied, "The sufferer is not cured, but she is better".

Then Alou Sangare greeted Duba, thinking she was a Marka woman.

Duba said, "Do you not know me?"

"No", said Alou, "from which Marka family do you come?"

"It is only by hearing your father's name that I can know you".

"But father", said Duba, "I am your own daughter."

"No", said Alou Sangare, "you are not my Duba Sangare.

"When she left she had a sore that was unhealed for seven years.

"She could not go anywhere except by scooting along on her buttocks.

"No, you are not Duba Sangare".

Then Duba got up and raised the wrapper that hid the scar of her wound.

When Alou Sangare saw the scar he called to Duba's mother to come in to where they were.

When Duba's mother Sira came in, she did not recognize her own daughter, so again Duba raised her wrapper to show the scar.

When Sira saw the scar she began to weep.

Good or bad news for women is always accompanied by tears.

Sira threw herself on Duba Sangare and cried, "Eh, Bamana man, you have raised the dead,

"You have raised the dead".

Once they had recognized Duba Sangare, Sosan said, "Alou Sangare, here is your daughter.

"I came and took her to heal her wound, for I had medicines that are good for such sores.

"Now I have come to give her back to you because you never did tell me the bride price".

Alou Sangare said, "No, Bamana, the fact that you cured Duba's wound is quite enough, I am content.

"I have nothing further to ask today or tomorrow, I will take no kola from you".

"Very well", said Sosan, "here is your daughter. I will not accept her today or tomorrow.

"I am no Muslim that I should take your daughter without a bride price.

"If you will tell me a marriage price, I will accept her, but without such a thing I cannot.

"Here is your daughter, I cannot accept her".

Then Alou Sangare said, "All right, Bamana, there is no problem.

"For your first journey here¹ you must pay eleven kolas, and for the second visit eleven kolas and 300 francs.²

That is the price you must pay to marry my daughter".

Sosan got out the twenty-two kolas and the 300 francs and gave them to Alou Sangare.

That settled the marriage agreement.

The wedding was held, and the bride was given to Sosan.

They they returned to Dorko, and it was only after the marriage that Sosan and Duba passed the night on the same mat.

Sometime later, Duba Sangare became pregnant, and she bore a son which they named Masa.

About the time Masa learned to walk, Duba gave birth to

1 Traditionally, the prospective bridegroom makes several visits to the father, each time paying part of the bride price.

2 About 30p.

another son, and this one was named Bakary.

When Bakary could walk, Duba gave birth once again to a son,
and they named him Tieba Mana.

When Sosan's mother heard he was well established at
Dorko, she joined him there.

When she met Sosan at Dorko, she sang his praises.

Song:

Speaking of encounters between the brave, the cow
that has just calved should never meet the lion.
My Sosan has no equal.
Speaking of encounters between the brave, better
the hyena and the lamb not meet.
My Sosan has no equal.
Speaking of encounters between the brave, better
the hawk and the chicken not meet.
My Sosan has no equal.
Speaking of encounters between the brave, better
the white man and the black not meet,
For the meeting of two brave ones is dangerous.

Song:

The hyena is right,
The donkey is right.
You do not know that the donkey has no equal.
Even now they say, especially the jeliw say,
"Sounou Sako, Sounou Mamary, Koya Sako, Koya
Mamourou, Desse Wolobile.
"Sisaba, Saman, Sonko, Dossolo, Soro, Abdoulaye,
Doukoro, Badji, Nyankolo, Moriba Ngolo were
the ancestors of Masa, Bakary, and Tieba Mana".
They descended from them.

The chief of the genies came one day and told Sosan that he
should buy some guns.

So Sosan bought fifty muskets and stored them in his house.

In those days, the villages were constantly preparing for
war.

Sosan had built a secure, enclosed compound, and he had
those fifty muskets as well.

One day, fifty lost men wandered near the Marka village. The Marka took them captive and tied them together by their necks with rawhide and locked them in Sosan's compound. The captives were told that those who accepted slavery would be turned loose, and those who refused slavery would be killed.

One afternoon Sosan sat down where he could see the fifty men who were tied by the neck with ropes attached to the beams of a hut.

When Sosan looked at the fifty men, he lowered his head and wept.

When he raised his head and saw their eyes, he lowered his head and wept.

Some of the captives saw this, and one of them said to Sosan,

"Why are you weeping?"

"You are the owner of this house, so why do you weep?"

"I must weep", replied Sosan, "I must weep because you are Bamana.

"The only reason I am here myself is because of the greediness of my brothers,

"The same sort of greediness that touches you now.

"There are my three sons who are still young and can do nothing for themselves.

"If the Marka decide to confiscate my goods, they will do the same thing to me that they have done to you,

"And my sons will have no chance in the world, for they would never be recognized as my heirs.

"You are Bamana and I am Bamana, yet they have captured you and imprisoned you in my house.

"It is the same kind of greediness that brought me here, so if you see me weeping it is because I am reminded of how I too have suffered.

"I have a plan, and if you will go along with it, I will be glad.

"I want us to plan together as Bamana".

The captives wanted to know how they could do this, and Sosan made them swear an oath of loyalty before he told them his plan.

Sosan cast a spell over some water, and all the men drank it and swore their oaths.

Any man who broke his oath would die.

Sosan said, "In addition to my own rifle, I have fifty muskets for you men, and I have powder and bullets.

"Tomorrow morning I will free you and give each of you a musket and a pouch with powder and bullets.

"After I have gone to greet the Marka chief, you must send Duba to find me.

"Duba will shout at me and ask why I never stay home in the morning, and I will threaten her.

"Then Duba will return weeping to my house.

"When she gets back, I want you to kill my horse, cut off the tail, and give it to her.

"She will go and give it to me at the Marka chief's house, and when I see that my horse is dead I will begin to wail.

"When I cry out, the Marka chief will assemble all the villagers and I will run to my house.

"When I come in and lock the door, be sure you have your muskets already loaded".

The captives agreed to this, and the next morning Sosan got everything ready.

He freed the prisoners and laid all the muskets, powder and bullets on two large hides in the middle of the compound.

Then Sosan went into the village of Dorko and greeted the chief.

The chief said, "Good morning, do you still have the fifty prisoners there?"

Sosan said they were there, but while they were talking, Duba Sangare came along and said,

"I have told you the Marka are doing you wrong, you live alone in your compound while they are in their village,

"But they have taken the fifty prisoners and tied them in your house.

"Now the fifty captives have cut their ropes and I and the children are left alone in the house with them.

"Why do you allow this?"

Sosan said, "Leave me in peace, leave me in peace.

"How can men tied with fresh cowhide cut themselves free?

Leave me in peace.

"Get away from me. You women think that we men must sit all day watching you.

"Leave me in peace. What kind of nonsense is this?"

Duba went back home and the captives killed the horse, cut off the tail, and gave it to her.

Duba went weeping back to the chief's house and stopping at the door, threw the horse-tail at Sosan.

She said, "You say that during the day I want you to do nothing but sit and watch me, and now they have killed your horse.

"Now you know you are mistaken!"

Ah, Sosan began to wail, saying, "Chief, how can this be?

"I thought her words were nothing, and now I am truly unhappy for it".

As the chief shouted for his men, Sosan ran to his house and locked himself inside the compound.

Each of the fifty men took his musket and sat on top of the wall with their weapons ready.

The Marka chief told the village men to go after the fifty captives at Sosan's, and to leave no one alive.

They were going to kill them like chickens.

When the first man tried to open Sosan's door, the guns suddenly fired.

The villagers cried out, "It is a Bamana plot, Sosan has betrayed us, Sosan has betrayed us".

By the time the sun was high overhead the Marka had agreed to submit to Sosan's demands.

He told them that they must change the name of the village and call it "Sontiana", which they did.

This is the same Sontiana that is north of Kolokani, and that is how it was named.

Sometime later, Masa, Bakary and Tieba Mana left Sontiana and went west from Kolokani to settle, giving the name of Kaarta to their new village.

All of those who are Kouloubaly at Kaarta are the descendants of Sosan.

They came from Sosan, and Sosan's father was Barama Wolo, whose father was Tontigi.

All those who descended from Sounou Sako and Sounou Mamary came from Sounou Simbon, Lawali Simbon, Furu Simbon and Tigiton.

This Tigiton's wife was Sounou Sako.

There, then, is Sosan.

Ah, my listeners, that brings to an end the story of the Kouloubaly,

I have told you all of it that I remember.

That story ends here.

Song:

A king has no house,
A king has no house.
It is no good for a master to make a mistake,
It is no good for a master to make a mistake.
Praise God, praise God.

WAGADU AND SUNJATA

Informant: Jeli Baba Sissoko
 Recorded on 24 July 1975

We call this style of playing nyame.¹

Nyame was first played at Wagadu for Dinga.

Before they went to Wagadu,

What village did they leave to come to Kumbi?

They left Soni.

Dinga and his followers left Soni and came to Kumbi.

In those days that place was a large forest populated by birds,
 lions and genies.

This style of playing is called nyame.

When Dinga and his followers arrived at the forest of Wagadu
 there was no village there.

They halted near a large grove of trees.

At that time there was a well in the grove.

No one knew who dug the well.

Dinga himself did not know if the well had been dug
 by a human or a genie.

They found a well there.

Maman Dinga told his three hundred and three slaves to descend
 into the well to find out how deep it was.

The bodies of all who entered the well would never be seen again.

They would never leave the well.

1 He is accompanying himself on the small, four-stringed ngoni favoured by many griots; nyame refers to a musical style appropriate for a narrative about the early ancestors and their ancient spirit world.

Of the three hundred and three slaves, three hundred and two
were never seen again.

Only one returned alive.

The only slave who came back said,

"Ah, maman Dinga,

"I did not see the bottom of the well.

"It is very deep, it is bottomless.

"But I did see something in the water of the well.

"It looked like a snake, a ka nalo".

In Marka the word for nalo is bida.¹

Dinga said, "So be it."²

"Three hundred and three people went into the well, and

I now see only one.

"Those three hundred and two people all rest at the bottom of
the well, yet I cannot see their bodies.

"How deep this well is!

"It is bottomless, so we will build a town next to this well

and call it Kumbi.

"And the name of this land will be Wagadu".

Wagadu means something that has no limit.

They founded the town and named it Kumbi,

And they called the land Wagadu.

This town was the first land of long, long ago.

The first town was called Kumbi.

1 In many versions of the Wagadu tradition, bida is given
as 'Bida', the name of the snake.

2 Ko te basi ye or ko bashi te, roughly 'very well', or
'so be it', a frequently heard expression.

One year after the settling of the new land Maman Dinga went
to look at the well.

He found a snake in the well, and that snake was black.

"Ah!" said Maman Dinga, "here is the snake of the well.

The slaves who said it knows nothing have named it Bida".

There is a snake found in the bush, nkoroko, that is very black..

It does not bite, but if it spits on the nape of the neck, .

You will go blind because its venom is very powerful.

The Bambara call it nkoro, and it is nkoro that is

bida in the bush.

Dinga and his followers settled at Kumbi.

In those days, black people had no family names.¹

Everyone called himself woke, which means if someone does wrong

to you, you respond by doing good.

In those days, black people had no jamuw.

In those days, the lands around the grove were empty.

There were no villages.

Dinga and his followers had left Soni to go to Kumbi,

And that is why they are called "Soninke".

Soninke are Marka.²

Nyame means you have the same jamu as your father,³

You have the same jamu as your mother,

You have the same jamu as your grandfather.

There is no change.

That is the meaning of nyame.

1 This commences Jeli Baba's discussion of lineage identity, or jamu, which could be translated as 'surname', 'clan name', or patronymic, but which refers, not just to the individual, but to his entire ancestral background.

2 The Soninke or Sarakole are called Marka by the Bambara.

3 A reference to the individual's spiritual relationship with his ancestors.

On the seventh month, Maman Dinga and his followers decorated
the most beautiful girl of Wagadu with much gold and silver.
At midnight they gathered at a single hut near the edge of the well.
Bida rose out of the well and took the young girl down with him.
During the next winter the millet, rice and peanuts flourished.
So much rain fell that the people gained much wealth.¹
Kumbi was thriving.
There were many people,
There were many animals,
And everyone was very prosperous.
Maman Dinga's first son was born and he named it Keno.
Keno was a hunter.
His body was very hairy..
The second son was named Diabe.
The third son was named Kuru.
The fourth son was named Ganda.
The fifth son was named Massa.
Maman Dinga lived to be very old.
A story that is told for a long time and never written down
may be told in many ways.
Some say Maman Dinga lived for nearly one thousand years.
He grew blind because of his great age, and could not
recognize his sons by sight,
But he knew each one by his smell.
The sons each smelled different to him.

1 Here, 'wealth' is a reference to rich harvests, a conception that probably has much to do with the claim in many versions that there was an annual rain of gold in Wagadu.

If a son came and sat near the blind old man,
Maman Dinga would smell him and say "Is it so-and-so?"
And the son would reply "Yes, it is me".
Maman Dinga had twelve clay pots of herbs in his hut.
Only the first sons of the families of Wagadu were
 allowed to bathe with these herbs.¹
There was one herb pot that would bring wealth,
There was another pot for fame,
A pot for getting sons,
A pot for millet,
A pot for health,
And a pot for royalty.
The first sons bathed with these herbs on the fourteenth night
 of the twelfth month of the year.
Only the first sons and no other were allowed to bathe with
 the herbs.
One of Maman Dinga's sons was named Karuba, which means
 "something new".
Keno was a hunter who left for the bush very early each
 morning,
In those days there was much wild game in Wagadu,
More than in any other place.
Those animals had not yet disappeared.
Keno would often make a kill early in the morning.
He would remove the heart and liver, cook them,
And give them to his father.
Maman Dinga relished this meat, and he would bless his eldest son.

1 That is, the first sons of the noble families.

It was because of this practice that Dinga's son Diabe gained his fame and became king of Wagadu.

Diabe was known for his kindness,

Especially to Maman Dinga's old slave named Faman.

Faman was very old, but he knew all of Maman Dinga's secrets.

When Diabe would finish working in his own field,

Sometimes he would go to the field of Maman Dinga's old slave.

He would do some work there.

And on his way home he would stop by the old slave's hut and

leave him some firewood.

The old slave said "Diabe, I am your father's slave.

"It is I who should gather firewood for you.

"You should not bring firewood to me.

"It is I who must go and work in your field, Diabe.

"I am your father's slave, and you must not do my work".

"It does not matter", said Diabe,

"For as I desire my father's blessings so do I value yours".

The old slave said, "Diabe, don't worry about me, I am content.

"May God bless you.

"I have been with your father for a long time.

"Your father is a thousand years old,

"And for five hundred years we have been together.

"Your father is so old that when he was told one of his sons

had died at the age of about one hundred,

"He said, 'My son did not last many years'".

Diabe continued thus, working a bit each evening for Faman

and bringing him sticks of firewood.

Such kindness went to the old slave's heart,

And Diabe continued to pay his respects to the old slave.

One evening when Diabe came with a bit of firewood,
The old slave took him by the hand and led him into his hut, saying,
"Master Diabe, whatever cannot be bettered by respect can never
be bettered by insolence.
"In spite of your being horon,¹ you have respected me and I am
going to tell you your father's secret,
"But I do not want people to know I have told you.
"At the end of this year, on the fourteenth night of the twelfth
month when the moon is bright,
"You must know that your father will call your eldest brother
to come and bathe in the clay pots of Wagadu.
"If your brother bathes in the herbal waters of these clay pots,
"He will gain the fame of Wagadu,
"The wealth of Wagadu,
"The health of Wagadu,
"And happiness to the end of life.
"When you go near your father he recognizes your smell.
"Your brother the hunter goes to the bush every morning and
kills some game.
"He removes the liver and heart, cooks it and brings it to
your father who eats it.
"Now you follow my advice and do as I say.
"We now have one month until the end of the year.
"When the end of the month draws near,
You must rise very early one morning and slaughter one of the
sheep in your pasture.

1 Of noble birth.

"Mix a lot of wool into the blood and rub it all over your body.

"Then, after the wool and blood have dried on your body,

"Cook the heart and liver of the sheep and take them to your
father.

"But before that, you must also have an earring made from five
grams of gold to put in your left ear.

"You must also have a bracelet made from fifteen grams of silver
to put on your left arm,

"Because when you sit down near your father he is going to pass
his hands over your body.

"How do they recognize the noble first sons of Wagadu?

"They wear a gold earring in the left,

"And a silver bracelet on the left arm.

"So before you sit down with your father,

"Put a five-gram golden earring in your left ear,

"And a fifteen-gram silver bracelet on your left arm.

"Also, be sure that the sheep's wool and blood have dried on
your body.

"Only then must you remove the heart and liver,

"Cook them and give them to your father.

"He will then tell you the secret of Wagadu as if you were the
eldest son.

"But if you do not follow my directions he will recognize your
smell,

"Because it will not be the same as that of your brother".

Thus the slave told Diabe his secret.

The end of the year approached.

Only one week remained before the ceremony of the fourteenth day,

And soon it was the day before.

Diabe rose very early in the morning.

He slaughtered a sheep, removed the heart and liver, cut off
the wool and mixed it with blood.

After covering himself with the sheep's wool and blood,

He sat in the sun until it dried on his body.

He put a five-gram golden earring in his left ear,

And a fifteen-gram silver bracelet on his left arm.

He cooked the sheep's heart and liver, and went to sit by
his father Dinga.

He greeted him saying ini sogoma 'Good morning, father',

(Though in Marka that is an mudi jan mudi),

And the father replied mba, ini sogoma.

In ancient Kumbi they always played the ngoni like this.

The name of the village was Kumbi.

The land that took the name of the wells,

The wells that had no bottom.

Bida was in the well.

They called the land Wagadu.

The village was Kumbi.

The first king was Dinga.

The first son of Maman Dinga was Keno.

He was a hunter in the bush.

He was a hunter with a very hairy body.

Dinga himself was blind.

He saw nothing but he knew the smell of his sons,

To him each son smelled different.

Diabe came and sat down near Dinga to give him the cooked heart and liver.

Dinga took the heart and liver and ate them.

When he was finished he said, "Keno, you are early today".

"Yes", said Diabe.

Dinga said, "Keno, is that you who have come today?"

Diabe said, "Yes, I have come today".

Dinga said, "Are you not Diabe?"

Diabe said, "No father, I am not Diabe, don't you know me today?"

Dinga said, "But you smell like diabe.

"That is not the smell of Keno,
Come nearer so I can touch you".

In those days the mark of the eldest son was a gold ring
in the left ear,

And a silver bracelet on the left arm,

And Diabe had both these things.

Diabe was the second son and he had no jamu.

Cisse later became his jamu,

But at this time he was called only Diabe.

Diabe came near to Maman Dinga,

And the old man passed his hands over his son's body.

The sheep wool on Diabe resembled the hair of the first son.

Dinga said, "It is surprising because your hair is very much
like Keno's but your smell is that of Diabe".

Diabe said, "It is strange that today you do not recognize
that it is me, Keno".

The old man said, "I do not see anything, but I can smell.

"Come here and let me touch you".

Diabe went near and his father felt him until he found his
left ear.

He felt the gold in his son's left ear and said,

"Well, you have gold like Keno has in his ear,

"But you don't smell like Keno, you smell like Diabe".

Diabe said, "I am Keno, does Diabe usually bring you meat?"

The old man said, "Diabe does not usually give me meat,

"And you have given me meat as if you were Keno though you
have the smell of Diabe.

"Come here". Diabe went hear his father.

Dinga took Diabe's left arm and felt the silver bracelet
and said,

"That is surprising.

"Before I became blind I made a bracelet of silver for Keno.

"You have the same silver, but you don't smell like Keno.

"You have the smell of Diabe.

"You have hair like that of Keno,

"You have the same gold earring as Keno,

"You have the same silver bracelet as Keno,

"But you do not smell like Keno.

"You are Diabe.

"The smell of your hair is not the same as that of Keno".

Diabe said, "When one gets old, one loses the senses.

"You just don't recognize me today".

"That must be so", said the blind old man.

"If you are truly Keno, go into the Wagadu men's house,

"It contains the secret of Wagadu.

"There you can bathe in the herbal water of the clay pots.

"If you bathe in the water of wealth you will be rich.

"From the water of children you will have many sons,

"The water of health will keep you well.

"The water in the pot of fame will bring you renown,

"And you will be celebrated throughout Wagadu.

"When you have bathed in the pot of royalty,

"You will become the ruler of Wagadu".

When Maman Dinga had explained all this to Diabe,

His son went to bathe in the herbal water of the clay pots.

After Diabe had departed from the hut, Keno arrived.

The first son came,

He came from the bush.

He brought cooked heart and liver.

And presented them to his father as he sat down beside him.

Dinga said, "Keno, have you just come?"

And Keno replied, "Yes, I have just arrived".

The old man said, "The one who just left was not you?"

"No, that was not me, it was Diabe", said Keno.

"Eh!" said Dinga, "Diabe has tricked me to gain all the secrets.

"He had hair like yours,

"A gold earring like yours,

"The same silver bracelet as you,

"But from the beginning I swore he did not have your smell.

"God has provided him with the kingdom of Wagadu,

"For I have told him all the secrets,

"And he has entered the hut and bathed with the herbal water
of the clay pots".

Keno began to weep, but Dinga said, "Do not weep.

"I will bestow a blessing upon you anyway.

"I will name your younger brother Chief of Wagadu,

"But he must consult you before making any decisions".

That is how Maman Dinga blessed those two sons.

Dinga died and the power passed on to Diabe.

Diabe became ruler of Wagadu.

All the horses of Wagadu belonged to him.

He was the first man of the land.

His horse was the best of all the horses of the land.

His horse ran faster than all the others in the land.

It was a very fine horse.

Dinga died and the kingship passed to Diabe,

Though Diabe was the second son.

The eldest brother Keno was not recognized,

But if Diabe wanted to do something, he went to Keno and asked,

"My brother, how do I do this?"

Keno would explain and Diabe would return to the royal hut.

If they went to war, Diabe's horse was the most richly

caparisoned.

They said in the Marka language, Diabe sissere numantigi

nawari,

Which means "greetings to Diabe of the fine horse".

Sissere then became his jamu.¹

Sissere was shortened to Sisse.

That is how jamu began.

The third son, who was Kuru, changed his name,

And the people said "Kurubeli".²

1 Cisse.

2 It is to be understood that this is a reference to the famous name 'Kouloubaly'.

After Maman Dinga died, Diabe had some sons.

All the sons were called by their jamuw.

One son was born on the night of a battle, and he was

named Keletigi though they also called him Burekama.

That was his jamu.

Almamy Tamba fought so hard during one battle,

He lost track of his whereabouts and attacked his own war camp.

His men shouted at him, "This is your own camp,

"You are in your war camp!"

"My war camp" is ndukure.

This means "It is my war camp".¹

That became a jamu "Dukure".

Some men are called Kamankile,

Others are known as Silla.

These are jamuw of the wage.²

Diabe remained ruler of Wagadu, with all the fame and

fortune of Wagadu.

They called him Diabe Cisse.

It was a slave who told him the secret.

This is how they cut off the head of Bida and Wagadu was

destroyed.

1 Another popular etymology for a family name; he is saying Almamy Tamba shouted "My war camp", and so this became his jamu.

2 Wage is the Soninke equivalent of the Bambara terms horon and tontigi, roughly "nobility", that is the proprietary or chiefly class.

At the end of each year the most beautiful girl of Wagadu
would be ornamented and sacrificed to Bida of the well.
He would devour her, and it would rain in Wagadu.
The millet would thrive and everything would flourish at
Wagadu.

Up to the time of this story that was the custom,
Because if they gave no girl to the snake,
It would not rain that year in Wagadu.
A sister of Diabe, Karia Cisse, had a first son named
Wakane Sakho, a Koranic student.

Diabe had a daughter named Sia Cisse.
She was the most beautiful girl of Wagadu.
She was the most charming,
But she had to be sacrificed to the snake.
This was the daughter of Diabe Cisse,
And he had no other daughter.
Sia Cisse had been promised in marriage to Wakane Sakho,
the son of Diabe's sister.

He was supposed to marry Diabe's daughter.
In those days at Wagadu some Arabs had come from Missira¹⁴
to trade at Kumbi.

Wakane Sakho had gone to Missira for his Islamic studies.
Karia Cisse sent a message to her son Wakane Sakho, saying
"They are trying to do something terrible."
"Sia Cisse, whom you intend to marry is to be fed to the snake
of Wagadu,

1 From the Arabic Misr, Egypt.

"Even though she is your uncle's only daughter.

"It is the end of the year and your wife will be given to the
serpent this year,

"Because it is something that is always done".

Wakane Sakho left the Koranic school to rejoin his mother, saying,

"If my uncle's rule must end, it must end,

"Because my wife will not be given to the snake.

"It is Allah who owns the water.

"The snake does not keep Wagadu alive,

"The snake cannot make it rain if Allah does not will it.

"If the snake is capable of feeding Wagadu,

"Why can it not feed itself?

"My wife will not be given to him".

Thus spoke Wakane to his mother.

Then he sharpened his sword without saying anything to his uncle
or the other villagers.

That night Diabe Cisse had his daughter Sia Cisse bathed and
adorned with gold and silver, dressed in a white cloth
and taken to the white hut at the edge of the well.

At midnight Bida came out of the well to where Wakane Sakho
was waiting for the snake, hoping to kill it.

Bida had feet, and he ran,

And when he was tired he flew like a bird.

Wakane Sakho gave chase until the snake was so tired it could
neither fly nor run.

It was the middle of the night.

Wakane Sakho took his sword and sat down by the well.

When Bida came out of the well,

When Bida came out of the well,
Wakane Sakho trapped it and cut off the head.
When the head of Bida was severed,
It soared over Wagadu, high over Kumbi.
The soaring head cried, "The head of Bida is severed,
"Wagadu is ruined.
"Wagadu is scattered.
"For seven years, seven months and seven days,
"It will not rain in Wagadu,
"And people will no longer be able to live there".
The head of Bida flew until it fell at Bure, which they call
"Bure Sanu".
The head turned into a cup.
Karia Cisse told the villagers, "It was my son who killed
the snake!
"During the seven years, seven months and seven days when it
will not rain in Wagadu,
"I will support the people of Wagadu with the millet in my
granary.
"For seven years, seven months and seven days my millet will
not run out.
"I will also support Wagadu with the water of my cistern..
"For seven years, seven months and seven days that water will
not run out".
Karia Cisse responded to the head of Bida with this speech.
The following day, Diabe Cisse and his followers attacked
Wakane Sakho.
They believed he was responsible for the end of Diabe's power.

Wakane Sakho's horse was very fast,
And he could outrun those of his pursuers.
His mother told him to flee to his uncle Nyame Sakho at
Nyamina.

At that time Nyame Sakho lived at Amina,
Which was called "Nyame Sakho's Amina".
Diabe Cisse and his men rode in pursuit of Wakane Sakho.
All the horses except Diabe's became tired and fell behind.
As Diabe caught up with Wakane Sakho he made as if to slash
at him with his sword.

Looking back, Wakane said,
"Oh my uncle, would you kill me because of that snake?"
Diabe lowered his arm and said,
"Run my son, for if the others catch you they will kill you".
Diabe fell back and waited for the others, who asked what had
happened.

Diabe said, "Ah, when I swung my sword it caught in the branches
of a tree. Let us continue the chase".
Again the uncle caught up with Wakane and threatened to cut off
his head.

Looking back, Wakane said again,
"Ah, uncle, would you cut off my head because of that snake?"
And Diabe said, "Flee, my son, because the others will not
spare you".

That was how Wakane Sakho and his wife Sia Cisse escaped.
During the next seven years, drought descended on Wagadu.
The wells went dry.
No rain fell on Wagadu.

And no millet grew at Wagadu.

That is how Kumbi became deserted.

After Kumbi was deserted, what was the first village of the
people of Wagadu who had left Kumbi?

Some people of Wagadu gathered together and founded the village
of Gungu.

The settling of Gungu took place in the same year that Muhammad
left Mecca for Medina.¹

God accepted the speech of Karia Cisse.

The animals of Wagadu,

The cows, horses, goats and sheep,

And all the people's needs for water were taken care of by the
water in the cistern of Karia Cisse.

The water of her cistern did not dry up or go bad and the
animals drank it.

In the mornings village women would wash clothes in the water
from the cistern.

They would also cook with water from the cistern,

For it never got dirty and was never used up.

Karia Cisse supported Wagadu for seven years with water
from her cistern and the millet from her granary.

But because of the hostility of some,

There were people in Wagadu who refused water and millet
from Karia Cisse.

1 622 A.D.

They were driven to such hunger that they collected human
excrement and ate it.

It is said that they did not all die,

But that the famine caused much suffering.

Some suffered so much from the famine that they ate dried
excrement.

Those who suffered in the famine had a special jamu.

They called them Gumane.

There is a large family at Banamba.

They are all of the Gumane jamu,

And all the horon have red teeth.¹

When Wagadu was ruined and the people of Kumbi scattered into
other lands,

The remaining Dukure gathered together and settled at Gungu.

The founding of Gungu occurred in the same year that Muhammad
left Mecca for Medina.

That is what some people have calculated.

To say that the people of Kumbi dispersed in a certain year
is very difficult,

But this is how it was told to me.

After the founding of Gungun the few people who remained in
Wagadu went and settled at Diara.

That was the founding of Diara.²

1 They chewed red kola nut, which stained their teeth.

2 In this instance, the term kunfing refers to people who are uninitiated into certain knowledge or secrets and is used to describe those who dwelt in or near a village populated by sorcerers, but were not privy to their lore.

After a hundred years the kunfin Marka left Diara.
They went and cleared the trees at Dia and settled there.
People of Dia are called Diakaw, and they are Bozo.
The Bozo and Marka languages are the same.
A hundred years after the founding of Dia the Tunkara left in
a body and settled at Mema.
Their first king was Tokori.
His first son was Hari,
And Hari's first son was Bogoli.
It was they who settled at Mema.
In those days the grandfather's name was allowed to disappear.
During that time the son name Hari died.
Bogoli the grandson was well known, so people added Hari to
his name, which became Hari Bogoli Tunkara.
They lived at Mema.
The few Marka who remained at Diara moved together to a new
location.
They cleared the trees and founded a village called
Diakunu.
They became identified with that place and were called
Diakunuka.
Diakunu is in the Cercle of Yelimane.
Their capital is Bo^u and they are called Bo^udenw.¹
That is how the people were dispersed after the ruin of Kumbi.
Some of the Cisse stayed together.

1 Children of Bo^u.

Their first village was Darko.¹

It is deserted now and there is nothing there but an
old field.

The village near the site of old Darko is Suntianan.

Another group of Cisse left Diara and settled at Sorokoro.

The great Siramakan Keita was born at Sorokoro.

Some of the people who were at Sorokoro gathered together
and left that place.

They came to Mali and were called Malinke.

These people continued to disperse and some went to settle
in Gambia.

The fact that this one is a Malinke or that one is a Marka,
all this has been known in the Gambia.²

People continued to disperse.

They left Sorokoro and went to settle at Kita.

People increased their numbers so rapidly at Kita,

That we thought the water there must make them more fertile.

Massa, Kuru and Ganda left Kita to settle at Kirikoroni which
was the first village of Mande,

And they call it Krina.

In those days there were not many Traore.

Two men, Woulani and Woulamba, settled at Balansa.

The two Santigi settled at Segin.

After the ruin of Wagadu, the people who suffered from the
drought,

1 That is, the first place they settled after they left Kumbi.

2 He is saying that descendants of the Soninke who dispersed
from ancient Wagadu settled as far away as the Gambia.

We called them a jara nununa 'it had been hard for them',

and these are the Diara.

There were twelve of them.

These twelve settled beside the Sankarabani River.

That river is called Sankaran.

The village was founded and that territory was called Sankaran.

They were all Diara.

Soso Koli Sumanguru lived at Soso.

Fa Koli lived at Mane which was a village but no longer exists.

Nothing remains but fields.

That was the home of the father of Fa Koli, who was called Tubai.

Tubai sired Fa and Fa sired Koli.

It was awkward to say 'Koli son of Fa' so they shortened it
to Fa Koli.

Soso Koli Sumanguru was the uncle of Fa Koli.

Fa Koli was the son of Sumanguru's sister.

That is how the people were related to each other,

Like the vines of a gourd.

Altogether there were twelve black-skinned jamuw¹ which
were people's names.

The jamuw were started at Wagadu.

They would say, "This is my fune,

"This is my jeli,

"This is my numu,

"This is my garanke".

1 He is claiming there were twelve original negroid
(farafing) lineages.

These four ngara¹ had their beginnings in Mande.

To say "This is my mori" was started in Mande.

They speak of "the four ngaraw and the five moriw²
of Mande".

In the Maninka language they speak of the first five marabout
families, and the first four ngaraw.

The Cisse were the first,

The Koman were the second,

The Diane were the third,

The Berete were the fourth,

The Ture were the fifth marabout jamu.

Who are the four ngara?

The first was the numu ancestor Dunfaila,

The second was the fune ancestor Fosana,

The third was the garanke ancestor Ibrahima,

The fourth was the jeli ancestor Surakata.

They call these people the four ngaraw.

These people continued to reproduce their own kind.³

The Diara were the first to settle at Sankaran.

They controlled the wealth of that place.

There was much wealth there.

At that time Sunjata was not yet born.

1 Jeli Baba uses ngara as a synonym for nyamakala, which refers to the endogamous, occupationally defined groups of artisans and griots; usually ngara refers to one who is a master of his art or craft.

2 Marabouts, or Muslim clerics.

3 A reference to their endogamy.

Sumanguru maintained the power of Soso.

There were no Keita at that time.

They were still called Kouloubaly.

Their ancestors were the three men Kuru, Massa and Ganda.

If Kuru wanted a certain territory he would tell his younger
brother Ganda.

Ganda would attack the territory, plunder it and bring the
booty to Kuru.

This greatly pleased Kuru, and he began to refer to Ganda as
"Keita", saying,

"Whatever territory I urge you to attack, you plunder it and
add the goods to my own,

"So I shall call you 'Tyinta'".

This was gradually changed to "Keita" and that is how that
jamu began.

The Diara dwelt at Sankaran.

They bothered no one and no one bothered them.

The twelve brothers and two sisters all had the same father
and the same mother.

Their father's name was Mari.

Their younger sister was named Sogolon and was an ugly girl.

She had seven large bumps on her body.

They called her Sogolon Kejugu.

In the Marka language they say "Sogolon Kutuma", but she
was a Diara.

The older sister was named Kamissa.

One day the village diviners instructed Moriba Kanoute to find
a cow and to slaughter it in the family compound,
To be sure the family consumed it entirely within their
own walls.¹

Moriba Kanoute and his eleven younger brothers slaughtered
the cow.

As the brothers ate the meat, their sister Kamissa sat alone
next door in her mother's hut.

When the meat was finished, Kamissa went to the hut where they
had been eating and said,

"Ah my brothers, you have treated me badly.

"Before our father died he disposed of all his possessions but
left nothing to me.

"He said a woman had no right to any inheritance, and I said
nothing.

"Now you were told to kill a cow to celebrate our noble status,

"But you have finished it and given nothing to me, Kamissa.

"You have celebrated your nobility,

"And you have made a fool of me.

"We are of the same father and mother,

"And you should not have eaten the meat without sharing it
with me.

"I am very angry."

1 This is said to have been an annual ritual conducted by families of the chiefly class, in which the meat was boiled in a pot, and each adult male was required to dip his bare fingers into the boiling sauce, with the understanding that if he did so without burning himself, it confirmed his legitimacy as a member of the lineage.

Her brother Moriba said,

"Ah Kamissa, what you have said is true.

"But it happened this way because the seers told us to kill
the cow in our father's hut and not take it outside.

"You were not with the family,

"You were alone in your hut,

"And this is why we ate the meat without giving you any".

Kamissa said to her brother,

"If they said the meat must not go outside the family compound,

"My hut is not outside but in the same compound as yours.

"They said the meat must not go to another compound".

"Sister forgive me", said her brother.

"Tomorrow morning I will go to the pasture for whatever cow
you desire.

"We will slaughter it especially to celebrate your nobility and
prove your legitimacy.

"You are a woman, but you are no bastard".

Kamissa remained very angry, and she said to her twelve brothers,

"I don't want your cow.

"I don't want anything else from you.

"You are the sons and I am the daughter,

"And I will look for my sacrificial meat of nobility among the
horon of Sankaran".

The angry Kamissa returned to her hut.

The next day was Thursday and before dawn Kamissa put
an axe over her shoulder.

She put a small white calabash on her head, as if she
were going to search for firewood.

She went to a place between Sankaran and the river, where jun
trees grew on a plain.

This place is called Junfara.

Kamissa went into a grove of small trees at sunrise on
Thursday morning.

Old Kamissa changed herself into a buffalo.¹

She went to the village of Sankaran to catch and kill
two legitimate sons.²

Kamissa began to do this every week.

When she would come to catch and kill two legitimate sons,
the people would fire their muskets at her,

But the bullets could not pierce her skin.

Still in the form of a buffalo she would run back into
bush.

Before the sun reached its zenith she would change back into
the old woman she was, and return home
carrying a load of firewood.

1 The buffalo episode has many features that characterize the hunter's tales sung by the specialists known as donso ngon
folaw or players of the hunter's ngoni, and it may once have been a separate story that at some point was incorporated into the Sunjata tradition. As it is used here, the term yelema describes the action of a human changing into animal form and back again. In the hunter's tales the heroes usually have the ability to do this, and the animal forms are referred to as their yelemaw, so the term functions as both a verb and a noun. The more powerful the hunter, the greater the number of animal or other forms he can assume, though there is usually a time limit for remaining outside his human self, beyond which he risks not being able to change back.

2 Yerewoloke, legitimate male child. In other words, as perhaps the first militant feminist in West African folklore, she takes her revenge on sons of the nobility for having been excluded by her own brothers from their ritual feast.

For one year Kamissa went each Thursday morning to kill

two horon at Sankaran.

The alarmed Diara said, "This animal is a terror.

"This beast of Sankaran has become the scourge of our people.

"The hunters can do nothing against that animal.

"What shall we do?"

In desperation, Moriba Kanoute and his brothers sent a message

to all the hunters of Mande and neighbouring territories.

They told them of the terrible beast in the Sankaran bush.

They told how it came every Thursday morning and killed two

people of Sankaran before returning to the bush.

Ah, that beast was dangerous.

They told all the hunters of Mande and surrounding areas,

That whoever was able to kill the terrible beast of

Sankaran,

The gold of Mande would be divided with them.

They would be given half.

The same would be done with the gold of Sankaran.

They would divide up the cows and give them half.

They would divide all the silver and give them half.

They would divide all other goods and give them half.

All the hunters of Mande and nearby regions prepared themselves.

Just as they began the hunt on Thursday morning,

The buffalo entered the village and killed two people of Mande.

The hunters hurried after it, but when the beast went

into the trees they could find no trace of its footprints.

The hunters were astonished.

This beast had killed forty hunters of the land,
and they feared it.

Moriba Kanoute and his brothers were at a loss.

They had offered the wealth of Mande to the hunters, but nothing
could be done.

When the hunters from all over Mande and nearby regions
could do nothing, Woulamba and Woulani came from Balansa.

They were Traore and had the same mother and father.

Woulamba was the elder brother and Woulani the younger.

One night Woulani said to his brother Woulamba,

"My brother, no one knows the source of good fortune.

"But I would like for us to go and see about this vicious
beast of Sankaran".

Woulamba replied, "All the hunters of Mande and surrounding
lands have not been able to do anything against that animal.

"How can the two of us do anything?"

Woulani said, "Let us go and see.

"One never knows by what means God will bring favour.

"Let us go".

Upon arriving in Mande, Woulani and Woulamba went to the
house of Magan Keni and said,

"We are youths of Balansa and we want to meet the beast of
Sankaran".

Magan said, "You two boys want to meet that terrible beast?

"All the hunters of Mande and nearby lands could do nothing
against this animal.

"And you think you want to try?"

They replied that they did, and Magan said,

"Clearly you are courageous men.

"If we are going to send out the likes of you,

"We must make you an offering of red kola.

"I present you with four red kola,

"And I give you two red cocks,

"Two red goats,

"And two red nkoble berries.

"We offer these red things in recognition of your courage.

"No one has been able to do anything against that beast, and you
have come to meet it".

At this the two brothers took their leave and went to bed
for the night.

Woulamba the eldest slept soundly, but Woulani was restless.

In the middle of the night he rose and went out.

As he walked about he met Fa Koli.

Sitting down beside him, he said, "Good evening father".

"Good evening", replied Fa Koli, "Where do you come from?"

Said Woulani, "I come from Balansa with my elder brother
Woulamba, father.

"We have come to challenge the vicious beast of Sankaran.

"I wonder if you might advise me about this.

"Can you foresee if it will go well for us?"

"Will we be able to accomplish our quest?"

Fa Koli sat for a time there in the night and pondered the
future of Woulani.

Then Fa Koli said to the youth,

"Woulani my son, God will make your name famous.

"What I see about that terrible beast is that it is really a
person, not an animal.

"This animal is a woman.

"It is Kamissa, the sister of Moriba Kanoute.

"Kindness will bring you success with her.

"When you arrive at Sankaran with your brother, go to the
entrance hut of Moriba Kanoute.

"From there you will see a single hut near the village gate.

"Before dawn on Thursday you will see the old woman leave with
an axe on her shoulder and a small white calabash on her head.

"You will follow her, and as you follow her she will come to Junfara.

"You will hide while she puts down her axe and calabash.

"She will set the calabash on the ground and lean the axe
against the calabash.

"Then she will enter the grove, and from your hiding
place at dawn you will see her
change into a buffalo.

"As the sun rises she will go to the village of Sankaran where
she will kill two nobles.

"Then she will return to the forest and change back into her
human form and take up her axe and calabash.

"When you see her take her axe and calabash and go to a fallen
tree to cut firewood,

"You must come out of concealment and bid her good-morning.

"When she answers you, ask her to give you the axe so you can
cut the wood for her.

"You will find that she will refuse.

"You must keep asking her until she gives you the axe and
allows you to cut the wood for her.

"Tie up the firewood with a rope, load it on your head, and walk
ahead of her carrying the wood to her door
before going to your own lodging.

"Early the next morning before she is up, go to the bush.

"You must kill a small animal, remove the
heart and liver, salt it and cook it.

"When the old woman goes out to wash her face before leaving
to hunt firewood, give her
the heart and liver of the animal to eat.

"Because of this she will explain to you how to kill her.

"Otherwise nothing can be done against her.

"Bullets do not touch her since she quarrelled with her
brothers.

"She is a quick-tempered woman and very angry".

Fa Koli told all this to Woulani in the middle of the night
while the elder brother Woulamba was asleep.

The next morning Woulani said nothing to his brother about
what he had heard.

They started on their way and arrived in Sankaran at the
reception hut of Moriba Kanoute.

Woulani said, "We are only boys, but we are hunters.

"I have come with my elder brother Woulamba.

"I am Woulani.

"We have heard about your animal and have come to challenge it".

Moriba Kanoute said, "Boys, it was good of you to come,
"But this animal you have come to hunt is a very dangerous
beast.

"Every Thursday morning it comes into the village and kills
two horon, then returns to the forest.

"It has also killed forty hunters, but you are welcome to try.

"The offer I have made to all hunters applies to you as
well.

"For whoever can kill that beast,

"I will divide the gold of Sankaran and give them half.

"I will divide the silver and give them half.

"I will divide up the horses, sheep, cows and all other
goods and give them half.

"I would be greatly relieved if you could do something about
this beast.

"It has brought much grief and you are welcome to try".

Woulani and Woulamba spent the night there.

At the first cock-crow, while Woulamba still slept, Woulani
rose and washed his face.

Going to the window, Woulani saw Kamissa leaving with a
calabash on her head and an axe over her shoulder.

Woulani followed her to the forest as far as Junfara where
she put down her calabash and axe.

She went into the clearing and transformed herself into
a buffalo.

She went to the village of Sankaran and killed two people.

The hunters fired at her with their rifles, but she
disappeared into the forest.

She changed back into human form, picked up the small white calabash and took the axe in her hand.

Woulani followed her to the dead tree where she usually cut firewood.

Woulani walked up to her and said, "Good morning, mother".

She whirled to look at him, saying, "Well, little boy, good morning".

Woulani said, "Mother, you are out early, are you looking for firewood?"

"Yes", said Kamissa, "I have come in search of wood".

Woulani said, "Give me the axe and I will cut the wood for you".

Kamissa replied, "Woulani my boy, don't trouble yourself.

"I knew you immediately.

"Have you not been told things by Fa Koli?

"Did he not tell you that the animal you came to hunt is not really an animal but a human?

"Has not Fa Kili already told you these things?

"Never mind.

"Before cutting wood for me you had better tend to your mother's needs at home.

"I will not give you my axe".

Woulani said, "Mother, that is not why I came".

Said Kamissa, "I already know why you came.

"The animal you are looking for is dangerously angry, little boy, so you had better stop.

"Next to that animal you are a needle that has fallen into a river.

"I will cut my own wood".

Woulani said, "Mother, we have not come to hunt that buffalo.

"How can someone as small as we hunt such a vicious beast?

"That animal has killed forty hunters, so how could we be looking for it?

"I am but a child who noticed you cutting wood.

"I want to take your axe and cut the firewood for you to gain your blessing".

Kamissa said, "Before worrying about my blessing, you'd better try being blessed by your own father and mother".

Kamissa also said many other rude things to Woulani.

But he continued to insist that he had not come after the buffalo.

Then Kamissa said, "My boy, I know who you are.

"Is not your brother named Woulamba?

"Did you not come from Balansa and visit the house of Magan Keni?

"Did he not tell you that the animal you came to hunt at Sankaran is vicious?

"Did not this same Magan Keni present you with two red kolas, two red roosters and two red goats?

"Did he not tell you that red things are always offered to heroes before an adventure?

"Did not Fa Koli tell your fortune in the middle of the night while your elder brother Woulamba was asleep?

"Stop, my child, you are too small for that beast".

Woulani said, "But I have not come to hunt the buffalo.

"I am merely a stranger who saw you searching for firewood.

"An old woman like you must not cut wood when someone like me
is here to do it for you".

Said Kamissa, "There are many children like you in the village,
but none of them gather wood for me".

Woulani replied, "Mother, all people are not the same".

Woulani continued to beg old Kamissa until she finally gave
him the axe.

After he got the axe, Woulani cut the firewood, tied it up,
loaded it on his head and carried it home for Kamissa.

Early the next morning Woulani went into the bush.

In those days they hunted with bows and arrows.

Woulani succeeded in shooting a small animal called nkolo.¹

He skinned it, cooked the liver and heart, salted it and
went to sit down in front of Kamissa's door.

When Kamissa got up, she went to the bath hut.

As she washed her face and prepared to go out,

she noticed Woulani sitting by her mat.

As she approached, Woulani met her and said,

"Good morning mother.

"I went to the bush early this morning and killed a
small animal.

"Here is the heart and liver which I have prepared for you.

"I think the heart and liver are good for old people because
they are easy to chew without teeth".

1 A small antelope about the size of a goat.

Kamissa said, "My child, I can eat perfectly well with what
teeth I still have".

"But mother", said Woulani, "this is the heart and liver and
they are good for old people".

Kamissa finally took the heart and liver and ate them.

In the meantime, Woulani had told none of this to his brother,
Woulamba.

One day Woulamba said to his young brother,

"Let us go for a walk and try to find that buffalo we came
to look for".

Woulani agreed, and they went into the bush.

They spent the entire day searching, but all

They found were some footprints and fresh droppings
of the animal.

In the evening Woulani and Woulamba returned to their lodgings.

They went to see the old woman at her hut.

When they got there, Kamissa told them everything they had
said while they were in the bush.

She said, "Ah, Woulani, your conversation was interesting
today in the bush.

"Your brother said if he saw the buffalo he would change
himself into a tree".

Woulamba said, "Mother, were you there?"

Said Kamissa, "Where you not seated in the shade of a big tree
at the time?

"Stop your boasting in the forests of Mande,

"The trees of Mande have ears".

Woulamba became fearful and took his leave of Kamissa, saying,
"Woulani, this is astonishing, everything we said in the bush
is known to that old woman".

Said Woulani, "My brother, it may be that this old woman is a
sorceress".

The two brothers spent a month at Sankaran without seeing
the buffalo or hearing anything more about it.

One day Moriba Kanoute said to them,

"Children, you told me you came to hunt the animal,

"But during the thirty days you have been going into the bush
you have told me nothing".

Woulamba said, "We have no information to give you.

"We spent the days searching.

"Sometimes we find footprints of the animal, and sometimes we
see droppings.

"But we have not yet seen the wild beast".

Every day of the month Woulani shot some small game and

brought the heart and liver to Kamissa at her hut.

Kindness remedies many things.

One day Kamissa changed into a buffalo, killed two people in
Sankaran, and returned to the forest.

Woulani followed her and again cut the firewood and carried it
to her hut.

Later Kamissa said to Woulani, "Tonight I want you to come to
my hut because I have something to tell you".

That night as Woulamba slept, Woulani rose and went alone to
see Kamissa in her hut.

Kamissa said to him, "Woulani, kindness can remedy many things.

"Today I am going to tell you how to kill me.

"If I am to die I want you to be the one who does the killing.

"When you have killed me you will be famous throughout Mande.

"Until the end of this land,

"Until the end of the world,

"No fame will surpass that of yours.

"The person who changed into the buffalo known as the wild
beast of Sankaran is myself.

"I, Kamissa, am that very animal.

"But I am invulnerable to iron, and nothing else can stop me.

"I am even invulnerable to the spear.

"The only thing that can harm me is my spindle for
spinning cotton thread.

"My spindle, because that spindle is of bo wood.¹

"Bo wood is lethal to me.

"How is that spindle lethal to me?

"Next Thursday, tell your elder brother to go into the bush.

"Take a spear and this spindle, and fasten the spindle to the
end of the spear.

"Take a rifle with you as well.

"When I change into a buffalo I will go into Sankaran, kill two
people and go back to the forest in the form of a buffalo.

"I will return to the grove where I change back into human form.

1 The same kind of wood used for making the frames of thatched roofs.

"You wait for me there.

"When I arrive, before I change back into human form, you must
fire the rifle.

"When I hear the sound of the rifle I will become enraged and do
everything I can to kill you.

"I will surely try to kill you and your brother,

"Because at that moment I will know nothing in my rage.

"You must take these three stones.

"I have done the kissi¹ to them and they are for you.

"You must fire the rifle at me in my buffalo form,

"And when I charge you and your brother, you must run.

"As I get close to you I will bellow.

"When I bellow, throw the stones behind you.

"The stones will become a mountain between you and me.

"Before I have time to get over the mountain you must run away.

"When you are out of sight and I can no longer hear the rifle
or see you,

"As I am running I will remember your kindness to me and my
wrath will be appeased.

"Take this egg, and when I approach you again you will fire
the rifle at me.

"I will be unharmed by the bullets.

"You must tell your elder brother to run away.

"You run with him, and when I come too close I will bellow.

"You must then break the egg I gave you.

"Before I can catch you, the broken egg will become a big
lake between us,

1 She has held them in her hand and spat softly on them while muttering an incantation, thus endowing them with magic qualities.

"And as I circumvent the big lake I will have time to
remember your kindness.

"You must wait for me a third time,

"And as I approach you will fire at me again with the rifle.

"When I hear the noise of the rifle I will charge you again.

"As you flee you will tell your elder brother that the gunpowder
is finished.

"You will have the spindle I gave you attached to a spear.

"And you will stop running and hurl the spear at my neck.

"If the spindle pierces my throat it will continue into my
heart and I will fall.

"When I have fallen I will die,

"But before I die I will leave the buffalo's body and take
my human form.

"The buffalo's body will remain where it falls and I will
go home as a human.

"I will arrive at my hut sick with fever.

"My elder brother will come to greet me the same morning,

"And he will tell me that the buffalo has killed two more people.

"Before you leave the buffalo's body, cut off the four feet and
the head and leave one of your sandals and your knife-
sheath by the carcass.

"Bring the feet and head back to the compound with you.

"Inform my elder brother of what you have done and leave the
head and feet there,

"Then go and hide yourselves because they are going to discover
that I have died,

"And that my head, feet and hands are cut off.

"From this my elder brother will realize that it was his
 younger sister who had been changing into a buffalo.
 "When they see my body they will feel remorse,
 "Because I was their sister of the same parents,
 "And they will begin to search for you.
 "You must remain hidden until after my burial.
 "When I have been buried they will send out an appeal for the
 hunter who killed the buffalo to come forward.
 "When you are identified my brother will tell you that he is
 presenting you with half the wealth of Mande.
 "But you will tell him that you do not want riches.
 "He will offer to divide all the gold and give you half,
 "But you will say you do not want gold.
 "He will offer to divide all the silver and give you half,
 "But you will say that you do not want silver.
 "At last he will ask you what you do want.
 "I have a young sister there named Sogolon Kejugu.¹
 "She has seven large bumps on her body, and they also
 call her Sogolon Kutuma.²
 "You must tell my brother you want her.
 "The people will talk of how ugly she is, but you
 must say you love her.
 "They will give her to you, but you cannot marry her.
 "You do not know what Sogolon knows.³

1 Ugly Sogolon.

2 Hunchbacked Sogolon.

3 A reference to Sogolon's sorcery.

"You must go and give her to your Magan Keni.

"Magan Keni will give you his first daughter, whose name is
Nantene.

"You will marry her,

"It is she who is in your future.

"Hunchbacked Sogolon will have Koufaseke Magan Keni for
her husband.

"When he marries her she will give birth to the somanfolo
of Mande".¹

Kamissa explained all the details of the killing to Woulani
during the middle of the night.

Very early that Thursday morning, Kamissa put her small white
calabash on her head, placed her axe over her shoulder
and departed for the bush.

Woulani woke his elder brother Woulamba, saying,

"Let us look for the beast today.

"Last night I dreamed that we would meet it today".

He did not tell his brother anything else,

He did not want to tell Woulamba the terrifying tale he had
heard from Kamissa the night before.

At dawn the two boys entered the bush.

As they walked, Kamissa was doing evil work in the village
of Sankaran.

She returned to the edge of the grove in her buffalo form,

Woulani and Woulamba arrived at the same time and saw the
big animal stop.

1 A praise-name for the yet unborn Sunjata, referring to him as
a type of spirit priest.

Woulamba asked his younger brother, "Is that not the animal we have been searching for?"

Woulani replied that it was the very animal they had been seeking.

They fired the rifle at it, and suddenly through the smoke the buffalo came charging at them.

Woulani shouted at his elder brother to run, or the beast would surely kill them.

Woulamba cried, "Little brother, you have done it now, firing at this vicious beast.

"If it catches us we are dead!"

"In that case, run!" said Woulani.

They ran.

They had the three stones with them.

When the buffalo got close and bellowed, Woulani threw the stones behind them.

Suddenly there was a mountain between the two brothers and the buffalo.

The two ran on as fast as they could.

As the buffalo was climbing over the mountain, Woulani said to his brother,

"Stop so we can take another shot with the rifle, it won't catch up very quickly".

Woulamba replied, "But brother, the last time we shot at it,

"If the beast could have caught us we would be dead now".

But Woulani insisted they wait,

So they sat down together against the trunk of a tree.

Suddenly the buffalo appeared with a snort.

As it approached, Woulani fired and it bellowed in rage.

"Run, brother!" shouted Woulani, "the gunpowder is already
used up.

"If that beast catches us now we are dead".

As they ran, Woulani threw the egg behind them, and the broken
egg became a large lake between them and the buffalo.

As the buffalo ran around the lake the brothers increased
the lead and Woulani said,

"Big brother, let us wait for the buffalo.

"I must attach the spindle to the spear so I can throw it".

Woulamba said, "Little brother, that beast is unharmed by
bullets,

"How can a spindle do any damage?"

Woulani said, "I shall aim it very carefully".

"Eh!" said Woulamba, "we will never get home today,

"That beast will certainly kill us.

"It has already killed forty hunters,

"And now it will kill us too and put an end to our lineage".

But Woulani insisted they wait, and again

the buffalo came upon them with a snort.

When it raised its head to get their scent, Woulani

aimed the spindle carefully and hurled the spear at
the huge neck.

The spindle went straight to the heart, and the buffalo fell
with a thundering roar.

All the villagers of Sankaran heard it.

They said, "That is the roar of the wild beast.

"Maybe it has killed those two young boys".

When the roaring had ceased, the brothers cut off the buffalo's
head and four feet.

That same morning Moriba Kanoute went to greet his sister in
her hut.

He found her on her mat covered with a cloth, very ill
with the fever.

Moriba said, "Kamissa, what is wrong with you?"

She replied, "I am ill today,

"I am very ill today".

In the meantime, Woulamba and Woulani left the buffalo's
feet and head at Moriba Kanoute's door, along
with one of Woulani's sandals and his knife-sheath.

Then they went to hide in the bush.

When Moriba Kanoute returned to his hut he found the buffalo
feet and head in front of his door.

Rushing to tell his sister the news, he found her lying
headless with no feet or hands and the blood still flowing.

Then Moriba Kanoute realized that it had to be Kamissa who
had been changing into a buffalo.

Astonished, he said to himself,

"The buffalo was killed this morning and its head and feet
are at the door of my compound.

Kamissa lies dead with no feet, hands or head and the blood
still flowing".

Moriba Kanoute flew into a rage and said,

"Whatever hunter killed my sister, if I can find him today,

"He will disappear from this world.

"If we had known our sister was changing into the buffalo, we
would have offered her anything she wanted to stop her
from doing evil.

"We ourselves are responsible for calling the hunters out
against our sister to have her killed.

"We will never know the hunter who killed her, unless
we can learn from the hunters who it was that
killed the buffalo.

Kamissa's burial was over.

Moriba Kanoute sent a message asking all the hunters to come
in because the beast had been killed.

He told them, "The head and four feet of the beast are at the
door of my compound.

"I will honour the pledge I made to the hunter who killed the
buffalo.

"I will divide all the wealth of Mande and give him half".

The hunters were coming in.

Woulani had left a sandal and his knife-sheath by the head
and feet of the buffalo.

The hunters all arrived, and all claimed credit for killing
the beast.

Moriba Kanoute said, "We will know which hunter truly killed
the buffalo when we find the one whose feet fit this sandal,
and whose knife fits this sheath".

A hundred hunters tried to fit the sandal.

But if it was not too large for their feet it was too small.

When they tried their knives in the sheath,
 If it was not too small it was too large.
 None of those hunters present was the owner of the sandal or
 knife-sheath.

Then Moriba remembered the brothers and said,
 "Eh! There were two young boys who came to hunt the animal,
 send for them".

Messengers were sent out with the call:

"Woulamba and Woulani come in.

"There is something happening in the village you must come and see".

Woulamba and Woulani came in to see and were asked,

"Who killed the buffalo?"

Woulani replied, "It was I who killed it".

Everyone said, "How did you kill it?"

"I killed her with the spindle she gave me, because bullets could
 not harm her", said Woulani.

Then he walked over and put his foot into the sandal which
 fit him perfectly.

He placed his knife in the sheath and it was a perfect fit.

Said Woulani, "It was I who killed the wild beast.

"I, Woulani and my brother Woulamba killed it".

Woulamba then began to praise his little brother, saying,

"You have a name as great as Magan Sunjata.¹

"You have a name more famous than Magan Keni.

"Your name is greater than Soso Koli".²

1 A great exaggeration, this would be taken as the ultimate
 in praise.

2 Sumanguru.

Woulani replied to his elder brother, saying,

"Ah, big brother, if you were a jeli no one could refuse you anything.

"From now on I shall call you i die bate, 'you are not refused'".

That expression continued to be used, and Woulamba's descendants are known as "Diabate" but they were originally¹ Traore.

Moriba Kanoute said, "Woulani, I made a pledge to you and your brother Woulamba and I shall honour it.

"I said I would divide the gold, silver, cows and all the other wealth.

"I said I would give you half of everything".

But Woulani said, "We do not want gold, silver and cows.

"These are not what we want".

Even Woulamba was surprised at this.

He asked his brother, "In that case, if we refuse all this wealth, what will we take?"

Then Woulani said to Moriba Kanoute,

"What we want is your younger sister over there.

"We want the one named Sogolon Kejoucou.

"We want her".

Moriba replied, "Eh! But she is ugly.

"She has seven bumps on her body.

"Her feet are twisted, and she cannot even walk properly.

"In fact they call her hunchbacked Sogolon!"

But Woulani insisted that she should be their prize, so

Moriba called for her.

¹ The Diabate are one of the oldest and most distinguished Manding griot lineages.

Woulamba, who could not understand what his brother was doing,
was very unhappy.

He said, "Little brother, we have refused great wealth in favour of
this ugly woman whose body is a mass of bumps.

"What good is she to us?"

Just then Moriba Kanoute said,

"All right, here is Sogolon.

"Take her as the prize of your brave deed.

"If you really prefer her over great wealth she is yours, and I
remain in your debt.

"You have killed the wild beast of Sankaran and freed us from
bondage.

"Here is your prize".

Woulani and Woulamba took Hunchbacked Sogolon.

Woulani said to his brother, "Big brother, since you are the
eldest, you had better escort Sogolon".

Kamissa had directed that this woman be given to Magan Keni.

She said Magan Keni's first daughter Nantene would be
married to them¹ and go with them back to Balansa.

But before they arrived at Magan Keni's, Woulamba decided
he would go to bed with Sogolon.

That night Woulamba and Sogolon retired near midnight.

Sogolon was a sorceress.

As soon as she lay down on her mat, she grew fur all over her
body and changed into a lioness.

1 A wife was considered to belong to the entire family, hence reference to her being married to "them".

She was lying behind Woulamba, and when

he reached back to touch her he felt the
fur and claws of a lion.

Fleeing from the hut, Woulamba said, "Little brother,
that woman is no fit wife.

"She changes into a lioness in the middle of the night.

"You can have her".

Woulani replied, "Are you afraid of that woman?"

"All right, I will go to bed with her".

The next night Woulani went to bed with Sogolon.

At midnight Sogolon's body was again covered with fur
as she changed into a lioness.

Woulani was also frightened.

He said, "Big brother, what you say is true.

"She changes into a lioness at night and no one can
lie with her.

"Just as Fa Koli told me, we must give her to Koufaseke
Magan Keni".

That same day they took Sogolon and presented her to
Koufaseke Magan Keni, saying,

"We visited you on our way to kill the wild beast of Sankaran.

"God gave us power, and we have killed it.

"They gave us their younger sister Sogolon and we have brought
her to you.

"But you are requested to give us a woman to marry".

Magan Keni replied, "I can agree to that.

"I have a daughter named Nantene. I will give her to you
for a wife".

So Magan gave his daughter to Woulamba.

They were married and he took her home to Balansa.

The first child born to Nantene was a son who was named Daman.

He was very tall, so they called him Daman Jan.

He was a hunter.

Daman the hunter went on a journey to Kaarta.

He went for a day and a night with nothing to eat.

Very early one morning he arrived at the house of a leatherworker.

Searching the house for food, he saw the tanned hide left there
by the leatherworker.

He took it to trade for something to eat.

As he was taking the skin away, the old leatherworker came
out and saw him.

The leatherworker said, "Dia a wara", which means "Leave it alone"
in Marka.

Daman looked back at the old man and dropped the hide.

But the leatherworker said, "I have caught you stealing".

Said Daman, "No, I was not stealing, I am a horon.

"I have gone all day and night with nothing to eat.

"When I saw that hide I wanted to trade it for food".

But the old leatherworker replied,

"Because of this deed you must become our slave".

Daman submitted to his demand.

This was the origin of the Diawara who are really Traore.

In the meantime, Kufaseke Magan Keni had married Hunchbacked
Sogolon.

In those days Sumanguru was fama.

Sumanguru had sixty sorcerers and sixty sorceresses.

Each night they told Sumanguru everything that happened
inside and outside of Mande.

Fa Koli, ancestor of the blacksmiths, was the chief sorcerer.

Fa Koli was the son of Sumanguru's sister.

Fa Koli knew all the secrets of war.

When people entered Sumanguru's reception hall, the tall men
stooped so they would not bump their heads on the lintel.

Fa Koli was very short, but he also stooped to enter.

Everyone laughed at him.

They said, "Fa Koli, you think you have no limit.

"The tall men stoop so they won't bump their heads on the
lintel,

"But you are very short so why do you bother to stoop?"

Fa Koli became very angry.

He said, "You say I am short, but I am bigger than anybody in Mande.

"Don't you know that the rest of my height is below the ground?"

"In that case", said the other sorcerers, "show us the rest
of your height".

Fa Koli was very angry, so he performed some sorcery.

He extended his body until his head raised the roof of the
hall and the wind blew in.

Fa Koli grew still taller, until the roof was very high.

The others became alarmed.

"A bla-a bla!" they said, "Let it down, let it down!".

That is how the village of Bla was named.

Among the sixty sorcerers and sorceresses, Fa Koli had three sisters.

They were all of the Sokonan family.

These sixty sorcerers and sixty sorceresses knew when Sogolon became pregnant with Sunjata.

They went to tell Sumanguru.

They said, "You should be aware that during the past night a woman became pregnant in Mande.

"When the child is born it will rule this land.

"It will take over the kingship of Mande".

Then Sumanguru said,

"I want the elders to watch every woman who gives birth.

"If the child is a boy they must bring it to me so I can kill it".

But the sorcerers did not want to tell Sumanguru which pregnant woman it was.

Sumanguru argued until dawn with Fa Koli.

Some say they fought because of the woman, but this is not so.¹

Sumanguru wanted to send Fa Koli on an errand of evil-doing.

But Fa Koli said, "Uncle, I want to go and wash myself".

And Sumanguru replied, "Fa Koli, you are insolent.

Instead of washing, you do as I tell you.

"You have been one of my generals, but you will be my general no longer.

"If you leave my army you will be missed no more than if a blade of grass were removed from a pile of hay".

¹ According to most versions, Fa Koli split with Sumanguru because Sumanguru coveted Fa Koli's wife.

This enraged Fa Koli, and he resolved not to tell any more of his secrets to Sumanguru.

Sogolon Kejougou was brought to bed and the child was a boy.

The sorcerers came and told Sumanguru,

"You should be aware that the child who will rule Mande has been born".

Sumanguru called Fa Koli and said,

"You must go and find this child that has been born to rule Mande so I can kill him".

The other sorcerers were willing to go after the child of Koufaseke Magan Keni,

But Fa Koli deterred them.

He said, "That child is not yet old enough to cause any problems.

"Let us leave it for now.

"When it grows bigger it can be disposed of".

The child continued to grow.

What did Fa Koli do?

He went to see Sogolon and said,

"If you do not hide your child, beware.

"The day he goes outside, Sumanguru will kill him.

"The diviners have told him that your child will rule mande.

"They say he will be fama of Mande".

The child was christened Sogolon Kutama ka Sugule ye Ahmadu, Ahmadu son of Hunchbacked Sogolon.

He was later known as Sunjata.

Sunjata.

After he began to walk,¹ he would pick up objects attractive
to any child.

The other young boys² would chase him
to take the thing he found,³

But he always got away and ran to his mother.

"Aw mon de ye ni ta", "See what your boy has taken", he
would tell her,

Sunjata ya ta, Sunjata has taken.⁴

Sunjata ya ta.

This name gave him great power and fame.

They call him Sunjata, but his given name was Ye Ahmadhu.

When Sunjata had grown older, Fa Koli went to Hunchbacked Sologon
and said,

"You must take your son away and entrust⁵ him to Bukary at Mema.
Sumanguru has sworn he will never allow the boy to live".

Sogolon took her son Sunjata and his sister Sologon Kolonga
and fled with them.

They entrusted themselves to Bukary Tunkara at Mema.

When Sunjata and his mother left Mande, the griots sang,

"He has taken his spear and gone for a walk".

By this time Sumanguru's power had grown great.

1 The legend has it that Sunjata did not walk for his first seven years.

2 The actual term is bila korow

3 Other griots plainly state that the child Sunjata was a thief.

4 In a popular etymology more awkward than most, Jeli Baba is trying to say that the name Sunjata came from this phrase.

5 To entrust people or possessions to the guardianship of someone is to kalifa them, to give them in sacred trust for a period of time. The betrayal of such a trust is considered inconceivable, for it would be one of the worst imaginable crimes.

At Mema, Sunjata's power had also increased, but his mother had grown old.

When the power of Sumanguru had grown very great, griots were sent to Sunjata to say,

"You must come now, for Sumanguru is abusing the people of Mande".

Sunjata went to his mother and said,

"I would like to go and seize power in Mande.

"I want to seek my fame".

His mother replied, "Very well, go to Mande,

"But first go and look at the old dead tree".

When Sunjata went out he found the dead tree covered with new leaves.¹

While he was out, Sogolon called his sister and said,

"Kolonga, your brother will be back soon, but before he is I will be dead.

"Sunjata will encounter three obstacles, but he must not allowed himself to get angry.

"If he does not lose his temper, he will succeed in vanquishing Sumanguru.

"But if he becomes angry he will never conquer him.

"What is the first obstacle?

"Before your brother returns, I shall die.

"When he goes to tell Bukary Tunkara that he wants to bury me here,

"Tunkara will demand payment for my burial plot.

1 This symbolizes the birth of the Mali Empire.

"Sunjata must not lose his temper.

"When he returns to Mande he will come to a place where

Some people are cooking the meat for their nobility feast.

"Those who are legitimate horon will plunge their bare hands

into the boiling pot to get their meat.

"Their fingers will not be burned,

"Their lips and tongues will not be burned.

"Sunjata will try in order to test his own legitimacy.

"But his hand will be burned and so will his mouth.

"He must not get angry.

"Before I arrived in Mande as a young girl, I spent a

night with two men, Woulani and Woulamba.

"That is why his hand will be burned.

"He must not lose his temper, for he is truly legitimate.

"When your brother comes back, you tell him this".

Before Sunjata could return from the old tree, Sogolon was

dead.

His sister went to meet him and said, "Our mother is dead.

"But before she died she said you will encounter three obstacles

and you must not let them make you angry.

"When you go to tell Bukary Tunkara that your mother has died

He will demand payment for her burial plot,

"But Sogolon said never to get angry".

Sunjata asked, "What shall I say when Bukary tells me to pay?"

His sister said, "You must find a piece of broken calabash, some

partridge feathers, and some chekala grass.¹

1 This grass is used to weave mats that are sometimes used as the walls of thatched huts.

"Put some charcoal on top of these and give them to Bukary Tunkara,

"Tell him they are the price of the burial plot.

"Then he will ask his advisers what it means.

"When they tell him its significance, he will give you the
ground.

"Then you can bury our mother before we leave for Mande".

Sogolon was washed and wrapped for burial,

Sunjata sent a message to Bukary Tunkara, saying his mother
was dead and he needed a place for her burial.

But Bukary Tunkara said he must be paid for the ground.

Sunjata found a piece of calabash, some partridge
feathers and some chekala grass.

He put everything in the broken calabash and covered it with
charcoal.

He gave it to Bukary Tunkara as payment for burial
ground.

Bukary asked his elders, "What is the meaning of this thing
Sunjata has done?"

The elders said, "Did you not demand a price for the
burial plot?"

"If you do not allow him to bury his mother, he will
sack your village.

"If the village is sacked, there will be nothing left but
some partridge feathers, charcoal and some chekala grass.

"You had better let him bury his mother".

Bukary said, "Go and tell Sunjata to come and bury his mother".

Sunjata buried his mother at Mema.

Then he left with his sister Kolonga to go to Mande.

They took Bala Faseke with them.¹

Just as they arrived at Balansa it was time for the celebration of nobility.

The meat was being cooked in a pot on the fire.

Each horon would swear, "If I am legitimate,² when I dip my hand into the pot to take meat, my hand will not be burned nor will my lips or tongue be burned".

Then he would plunge his hand into the boiling pot and nothing bad would happen.

Sunjata watched them and said, "I will also see if I am halala".

He took the oath and plunged his hand into the pot.

His hand was burned and so was his mouth.

He started to lose his temper and Kolonga said,

"When our mother died she said you must not get angry now, because you are halala.

"Before she was married she spent a night with Woulani and Woulamba.

"That is why you are burned.

"If you allow yourself anger, that which you hope to accomplish will be impossible".

They went on to Mande.

1 Bala Faseke was Sunjata's griot.

2 The term used is halala, meaning legitimately the descendant of the founder of a lineage, one whose claim to being of the horon or chiefly level of the social hierarchy is untainted.

For seven years Sunjata made war against Soso Koli Sumanguru.

When they talk about that war nowadays,

The descendants of the warriors of Soso report victory over
Sunjata.

The people of Soso say, "The laughter came to Soso and the
lamenting went to Mande".

But the descendants of the warriors of Mande claim victory
over those of Soso.

The people of Mande say, "The laughter came to Mande and the
lamenting went to Soso".

After seven years, Sumanguru was lost at Koulikoro in the spirit
mountain.¹

Sumanguru disappeared into that mountain, and they
made it a place of sacrifice.²

That is all I know.

1 According to the legend, after Sumanguru was finally defeated in battle by Sunjata, he fled to the mountain at Koulikoro and disappeared into it. It is said that the mountain acquired Sumanguru's power, spiritual force, or nyama.

2 For as long as anyone can remember, women who have difficulty in conceiving a child go to an altar at the base of the mountain and sacrifice a white chicken. If they later bear a male child, he will be called "Nyamankoro".

Sunjata

Informant: Mamary Kouyate
 Recorded in Kolokani, 16 August 1975

You know, the days of Magan Sunjata had their origins in the time of Sumanguru, because there was going to be a change in leadership.

This Magan Sunjata's mother was Jume Je. Jume Je was carrying a big stomach for thirty months. When she gave birth in Mande, her offspring was lame for seven years, seven months and seven days in Mande. People became worried because he had not begun to walk.

Sunjata's mother went to some blacksmiths and had them make a staff of iron to help him stand. Thirty young blacksmiths made an iron crutch and gave it to Sunjata. But when he tried to stand up, he bent the iron. Forty young blacksmiths made another iron staff and gave it to him. When he tried to stand and walk, he bent this one also.

That day, his mother purchased great strength and gave it to him. Eh! The charm of the son was from the father, but the strength was from the mother. Sunjata's mother broke a piece of wood from the garden and gave it to him, saying, "Magan, thirty young blacksmiths made an iron staff for you to walk with, but you were not able. Forty young blacksmiths made another iron staff and you still could not lean on it to walk. I am going to give you a piece of wood from the garden. Since I have been your father's wife, if I have jumped the feet of another man,¹ no man or woman will ever see you walk in Mande. But if I have never jumped the feet of another man, you will walk in Mande among other men and women". Then Sunjata

1 She swears by her fidelity to his father.

stood up and walked with the piece of wood containing the strength his mother had purchased him.

The day Sunjata walked in Mande, you know, his mother sang three hundred songs and thirty songs and three songs. Now, if you hear that the kingship was to change, his days were born, you know, in the time of Soso Sumanguru. He became a hunter, Magan Sunjata became a hunter. When the day came, he went to the bush, he went to the hunt. During one hunting trip, a genie gave him the bala.¹ When he became tired of walking in the bush, he sat down under a tree and played the bala. He would often play the bala, and when he was tired he would hide the bala under a pile of brush and go home without it. He would often do this.

One day, you know, Fasseke Kouyate went there in his absence and found the bala under the pile of brush. Faseke, you know, had noticed Sunjata with the bala. He pulled it out from under the brush and began to sing as he played:

Song:

Nyama, nyama, nyama,²
 Many things can be hidden under it,
 But it cannot be hidden under anything.
Nyama, nyama, nyama.
Nyama can go anywhere,
 But nothing can go anywhere with nyama.

Faseke Kouyate sang this song with the bala, and it filled him with such joy that he took it home.

Now, when Magan Sunjata saw him with the bala, he became so angry with Faseke that he cursed him and told him to keep it. And from that time on, you know, they called him Bala Faseke Kouyate. This was the origin of the griot's bala.

1 The indigenous xylophone.

2 Spirit, force, power.

Magan Sunjata, you know, when he took his bow and quiver of arrows, he chased Soso Sumanguru from Mande. Sumanguru disappeared into a cave at Koulikoro. From that time it has been called Koulikoro-Nyanan and is regarded as a sacred place, though it was only a man who disappeared there.

It is called nyana. Nyana is a man, it is Soso Sumanguru. Even today, people make sacrifices to this place, going there when they are lacking in children. When a woman has trouble conceiving children, she will go there and make a sacrifice. If someone who had made such a sacrifice gets a baby boy, they call it Nyanan Koro, and if it is a baby girl, it is called Nyanamba. All of these things are Soso Sumanguru.¹

When the warriors of Magan Sunjata came from the battle, there were some children of Sumanguru who had survived the war. These children had taken refuge with some blacksmiths and were sitting with them near the smith's house. When the returning warriors saw these people, they said to the children, "What has happened?" But it was the smiths who replied, saying, "Anh! Nou nou n'kate, nou nou n'kate, they do not speak to you". This was spoken unclearly, and it became the jamu Kante. Their origin was at Nyakano, near Kaarta.

Lamaru

Praise be to God, Lamaru Keita, who was descended from Sundiata, left Mande and travelled to the north of us where he cleared some trees and founded the village of Nema, now called Jire. In those days there were Suraka² in that place, and they allowed no one to

1 They result from his spiritual power.

2 "Moors", or Berber-speaking peoples.

establish new villages in that area. They were very brave and powerful Suraka, skilled with their rifles. One day Lamaru and his little brother Masira were sitting in the village under some shelters they had made. As they sat there in the shade, a Suraka came to Lamaru and said, "No one is allowed to build here. We Suraka allow no one else to settle here. If you disagree, take a needle and pound it into that tree stump and watch the bullet from my gun".

Lamaru pulled a needle from his pouch and stuck it into the stump. As soon as he had done this, the Suraka fired his rifle and a bullet hit the needle on the stump and cut it in half. When Lamaru saw this, he said, "Ah, Suraka, if that is how it is, I shall certainly leave. But first, sit down and have lunch with us, and afterwards we will go our separate ways". The Moor sat down, and when lunch was ready Lamaru told his brother Masira to begin the meal with their guest. Then Lamaru went into his hut for his own rifle. By now Masira and the Moor were eating and the guest had just dipped a bit of food into the sauce and started to raise it to his mouth, when Lamaru fired a bullet which passed right through the food in the Moor's hand. At this the Moor jumped so high, he came down on the other side of his dish, saying, "Gasaramara!"

Lamaru came out of his hut and said, "Suraka, is it true that no one can settle here?" And the Moor replied, "Hali, wala hila, yes certainly! Lamaru can, yes". And that is the village of Jire.

At that time Lamaru had his griot with him, because any person of consequence had his jeli walking behind him. Anyone who had a griot would provide his food, his kola nuts, his water and his clothes, and he would also have a blacksmith.

Lamaru told his jeli that they would go to see his uncles. Lamaru's uncles' village was Daama, yes, Daama Jariso. When they rode into the uncles' village on their horses, they found that the Suraka had come and stolen all the uncles' cows. The uncles' wives told Lamaru of the theft, and said that the uncles had followed the raiders. Then Lamaru and his griot went after them, carrying their double-barrelled rifles with them. When they met the returning uncles, they said to Lamaru, "Eh! Let us go home, these Suraka are dangerous in the bush, they are at home here". Lamaru replied, "That's all right, you go on home. As for me, I cannot return without seeing those Suraka".

Then Lamaru and his griot began to follow the Moors. They travelled all day until they came to a flooded river. The Moors had arrived there at sunrise, and crossing it with the cows, they had lain down to rest on the opposite bank. When Lamaru got to the river his horse told him that the Moors were there on the other side. Lamaru and the griot dismounted, and after tending to the horse they rested until nightfall. When it was time for them to get up, the horse told Lamaru that there was only one old Moor who was still awake. Lamaru sent his griot to the west side of the Moor's camp, and he went to the east. As the Moors slept, Lamaru and the griot fired their rifles at the same time, tali, tali! The Moors leapt up, crying, "Moróoh'ya nte! I am not here!" They did not stop to

take the cows, but made their escape in the night. Lamaru took their guns and the cows and returned to Daama.

At that time there was a drought in Daama, and every well they dug failed to yield water. As Lamaru and the griot arrived, they found the uncles digging a well. As Lamaru exchanged greetings with his uncles and had something to eat, they told him about the problem. Lamaru told them he would see about it, and he descended into the well. He passed the entire day digging, and when the sun was setting, they shouted at him to come up. But Lamaru said he would not be up until he saw water. Every day his lunch found him down in the well, and so did his blanket. If they saw him come up, it was only to "go out"¹ or to go and "take the buckle".²

For three months, Lamaru dug in the well. Then the first day of the third month, you know, he found water. And from that day to this, that well has never gone dry. He came out of the well on that day, and after his uncles greeted him, he prepared to take to the road.

Lamaru wanted to go back to Jire, and everyone agreed that this was a good idea, for they had a secret plan. When Lamaru and his jeli were ready to go, the uncles took a girl named Tata and seated her behind Lamaru on his horse. She was a gift, a blessing from the uncles. She gave birth to Dagaba Keita, this was his origin.

Song:

Maghan Sunjata, his days were born.
This cat and his friend the devil,
Sogolon Jata and Yamaru Jata³ slept in Narena,
The quiver and bow slept in Narena.

1 To defecate.

2 To urinate.

3 Sunjata's mother and father.

Sunjata feared no man,
Ha, Sunjata feared no man.
Sunjata feared no man, Sunjata the sorcerer.
Sunjata feared no man, ha.
All things can be hidden under nyama,
But nyama cannot be hidden under anything.
All things can run in nyama,
But nyama cannot run in anything.

Sumanguru and Blacksmiths

Informant: Jeli Manga Sissoko
 Recorded at Kolokani, 13 August 1975

Sumanguru was not a blacksmith. The first numu was Ndamangiri, who was a Fane. Kante was the son of Soso Sumanguru. The Kante who engendered the numu were Kante Babakana. Soso Sumanguru came from the genies. Genie Bantaba, Genie Tabataba, Genie Mantroussi, Genie Falou, Genie Massaduwa. Genie Massaduwa had been cursed and turned into a whirlwind. Genie Bantaba was the father of Sumanguru, Habaliya Kante, Kaman Kante.

The daughters of Sumanguru were named Musokura Kante, Boro Kante, Kankoba Kante. Kankoba Kante gave birth to the mother of the grandfather of Fajigi, whom we call Fakoli. The mother of Fakoli was Kankoba Kante, and we call them Sissoko. Kaman Kante gave birth to the Fofana. She gave birth to the grandfather of the Fofana, Bakary Sidiki, called Bakary Tietigi. Mamadu Fofana was called Karo Walaf Mohamadu, Musa Turissina Bala Ka Musa. Musa was at the hill of Turissina. These three men are the ancestors of the Fofana and were descended from Kaman Kante. The daughter of Sumanguru Kante, Boro Kante, gave birth to Habu Kante. As with the jeliw, Habu Kante was married like this:

The son of your little brother is given to your daughter in marriage. That's also how we do it among the jeliw. This is why Musa gave his daughter Boro Kante to Habu Kante. The descendants of Habu Kante are the blacksmiths.

Habu Kante was raised by a blacksmith who had no children of his own. Habu would gather grass for the blacksmith's horse, while

he learned about the work. As the blacksmith made the hoes, hoe handles, needles, knives and axes in his presence, he learned the craft and became a blacksmith himself. That is how he left the other Kante and became a blacksmith, and his descendants have also been blacksmiths.

Sumanguru was not a blacksmith, he was a horon. He ruled in Mande for seventy-three years.

Sumanguru and Blacksmiths

Informant: Lassana Kouyate
 Recorded at Kolokani, 9 August 1975

The Sissoko come from Sumanguru, and the Bagayoko, Sinayoko, Kamissoko and Kante, all these numu families descended from Sumanguru.

When the first son of Sumanguru, who was named Fajigi, came back from Mecca and arrived in the sahel, the people he stayed with to rest were the Bilaw.¹ In return for their hospitality, he gave them Komo. Fajigi was the first to have Komo in the sahel. This is why Bila women can be in Komo, but not horon or nyamakala women. When Fajigi came from Mecca, this was the time when Bilaw could choose to either be either numu or horon. This was also the time when it was decided that young numu boys could also go into Komo.

In the time of Sumanguru, his men would go to war against other villages and they would take many people captive. One day as his warriors were returning from a raid, they passed through a village and saw several children playing near the blacksmiths' huts, shouting to one another. The warriors, not understanding them, or maybe trying to frighten them, said "Are you speaking to us?" And the children replied, "No, we don't speak to you, Ayi, an ka n'te". The warriors went on their way, but ever after the smiths and their children were called "Kante". It was both nyamakala and horon children playing together at the blacksmiths', and this is why today there are both horon and nyamakala with the name Kante.

1 I was told that the Bilaw were not originally Bambara, and that when they joined the latter they became either horon or numu. A female Bila is called Demba, and Demba can participate in Komo ritual.

Blacksmiths in Ancient Mali

Informant: Satigi Soumarouo
Recorded in Kabaya, 2 September 1975

People say that Numu Fajigi was the first man of the world. But I say that Numu Fajigi came from a person, so he was not the first man of the world. He was selected to be a worker of iron. Numu Fajigi became the king of iron. Numu Fajigi knew iron and became a famous blacksmith and built the wall of iron at Kaybara.

Nabilai Dauda was the true founder of the blacksmith class. Tabayere was the son of Nabilai Dauda. Gwenwolo was the son of Tabayere, and Tugufudu was also the son of Tabayere. Numu Fajigi was the son of Tugufudu. Numu Fajigi built the wall of iron at Kaybara, and the Prophet destroyed that wall.

Camara Simbo was the son of Numu Fajigi. Camara Simbo was the founder of the Camara clan. Soso Kemoko was the son of Camara Simbo. Manding Soumarouo was the son of Soso Bali Kemoko.

Manding Soumarouo destroyed Mande nine times and rebuilt it nine times. Soso Bilan was the son of Soumarouo. Fa Bilan was the son of Solo Bilan. Wajeba was the son of Fa Bilan. Baoun was the son of Wajeba, and later Jigi was born. Satigi was the son of Jigi, and Samunjan was the son of Satigi. Samunjan Burama was the son of Samunjan, and Samunjan Buran Solomini was the son of Samunjan Burama. I, Satigi Soumarouo, I am the son of Samunjan Buran Solomini.

The blacksmiths placed themselves under the protection of Fula Mansa Jan who then became their patron in token of friendship. This is why the blacksmiths are considered inferior to their hosts

and always hold them in respect. The blacksmiths became subordinate to Fula Mansa Jan and gave him their respect in all places and in every circumstance, because he protected them. Thus was born a special class, that of the numu, which the Peul quickly came to think of as inferior to themselves.

Mohamadu was a son of Nabilai Dauda, and Mohamadu Mutali was the son of Mohamadu. Ali Malinati was the son of Mohamadu Mutali, and Latasi was the son of Ali Malinati. Burudame was the son of Latasi, and Bilo was the son of Burudame.

When Bilo was born, Mulukai Solomani was not yet king. At that time the genies and the men were good neighbours. The genies received their instructions from the men, but the men were also students of the genies.

Burudame became the founder of the Fula. Bilo was the son of Burudame, and Bilo became devoted to the genies. Bilo became a student of the genies and was studying with them when Mulukai Solomani became king. The genies taught Bilo and gave him their daughter to marry. Bilo was then married to a genie, and their offspring was Solabata. Bukatiki was the son of Solabata. After the fall of Mulukai Solomani, Solabata decided to go with the father's branch of the family.

The genies gave Solabata a cup and said, "Your future depends on that cup. Go straight ahead and do not look back until you finish crossing the plain. When you have crossed the plain, break the cup". Solabata obeyed the genies, and when he was on the other side of the plain, he broke the cup and all kinds of cows were suddenly grazing in the plain. And when Solabata looked back at

them, the cows that were standing on the bank of the river descended into the water and turned into hippopotami. .

Bukatiki was the son of Solabata and Kalakala was the son of Bukatiki. Njan was the son of Kalakala, and Njan was a contemporary of Numu Fajigi.

When the Prophet destroyed the wall of Kaybara, he asked all the different groups each to give one person as a gift to Numu Fajigi. So, in compensation for the destruction of the wall of Kaybara, Numu Fajigi received many people. In token of trust, Numu Fajigi, master of many people, placed himself at the disposal of Fula Mansa Jan. In return for his protection, the blacksmiths paid homage and respect to Fula Mansa Jan and regarded him as their perfect patron. If you entrust yourself to a person, are not the descendants of that person considered the patrons of your descendants? That is how the class of numu was born.

The numuw are by no means slaves of the Fula, but the two ancestors, Fula Mansa Jan and Numu Fajigi of the two different classes, were good friends. As the blacksmiths continued to live with the descendants of Fula Mansa Jan, they tried to transform the terms of the friendship into a kind of servitude. The Fula transformed the terms because Numu Fajigi had been the first to entrust himself to Fula Mansa Jan. The Fula are in no way superior to the numu. The Fula do not surpass us in anything.

Fula Mansa Jan was a real person. Njan was the son of Kalakala. This Njan was known as Fula Mansa Jan, and he was a friend of Numu Fayiri. Numu Fayiri knew iron. When they destroyed the wall of Kaybara, Muhammad decided to give some men to Numu

Fayiri, and this was done. Each clan that you see here, the Koroma tontigiw and Koroma numuw, the Kamara tontigiw and Kamara numuw, the Bagayoko tontigiw and Bagayoko numuw are those who gave and those who were given.

The Peul have never been blacksmiths, but Numu Fayiri told Fula Mansa Jan that he would make him guns, bullets and spears, for a war chief cannot protect his people without fighting, can he? So Numu Fayiri entrusted himself to Fula Mansa Jan, who vowed to be his protector. When Numu Fayiri undertook the task of manufacturing all the weapons of war, such a large amount of work did not permit him to fight. His work did not leave him time to join the battle. The two men became confidants, and it was during this time of friendship that Fula Mansa Jan became the father of Tinkalan. If you hear of the jamuw here, the custom of having family names began in the time of Tinkalan.

When Tinkalan was born, the Peul did not have family names like the white people do. Tinkalan married five wives. The first wife was Hali who was barren, so he married Jaloba. Jaloba gave birth to Abu Salanke. When Abu Salanke was born, he became the founder of the first family of Peul. His descendants came to be called the Jalobalaka, "descendants of Jaloba". Abu Salanke and his descendants were twelve in number.

The third wife of Tinkalan was Jakateba. Yorobafing, son of Jakateba, numbered twelve people with his descendants and his brothers. The descendants of Jakateba were called the "Jakatebalaka".

The fourth wife was named Sidibeba, and her first son was Mojasume. The other sons were Gwanaka, Karamanke, Basidibe,

and Jalonfula. All these sons were known by the name Sidibebon Tanifilen, "twelve families of Sidibe".

Tinkalan had Sakariniken as his fifth wife. Sakarijedi was the son of Sakariniken. The twelve families of Sangare had for their ancestor Sankarijedi.

All the Peuls together formed forty-eight families. In those days the labour was divided among all the people, and each chose the vocation he liked best. But the blacksmiths were docile, and their elders left themselves at the mercy of the Peuls. The numu were the masters of iron and the Peuls divided them up, each wanting to get the most skilful. I ask you then, was it a penalty to have a clever blacksmith or a bad one? So there was a rush of Peuls to select the most skilful blacksmiths. The weakness of the blacksmiths in face of the Peuls results from the generosity, the acceptance of the blacksmiths in allowing themselves to be shared. The blacksmiths acted that way in recognition of Fula Mansa Jan and his descendants who are their patrons. So the numuw were divided up and shared among the Peuls for the working of Iron, and came to be subordinate to them.

After the destruction of the wall of Kaybara, Numu Fajigi became the dependant of Fula Mansa Jan, and they were great friends. Numu Fajigi swore that neither he nor his descendants would ever do evil to Fula Mansa Jan and his descendants. In return for the generosity of Fula Mansa Jan, the numuw left themselves at the mercy of the Peuls. The Peuls are not superior to the blacksmiths. They did not capture us in war. The blacksmiths have simply understood that goods must be repayed by goods and have accepted the role of ironworking for the Peuls.

Fajigi, the one named Fajigi. Fajigi was a descendant of Fakoli. Fakoli and the mother of Sumanguru were of the same father. Their father was Soso Bala. Fajigi was a descendant of Sumanguru. If you hear "Fajigi! Fajigi!", this is to praise someone. We hear tell of Sakojigi, Kokodongigi and Balajigi because of his trip to Mecca.

The Jigi I am telling you about, my ancestor Sumanguru gave him gold for a trip to Mecca. His mission was to find boliv to bring back that would give power of conquest. The boliv that came from Mecca were brought by Fajigi. The Kolokilo Kurun¹ of which we speak is a boli. This Kolokolo Kurun is even today in the lake of Nora near Siguiri. When he returned from Mecca he brought with him nine tafow,² and he threw the nine tafow into the water. These nine tafow became scorpions. The grain of korté³ that accidentally fell into the water became the electric fish. If you step on an electric fish, he will shock you with electricity. If you go to Mecca, there is a little hill to the east of the Kaaba. That hill is the place of pilgrimage for boliv. Fajigi returned with 110 idols from Mecca and settled them in Mande.

Fajigi left for Mecca after the battle between Sumanguru and Sunjata. The father of Fajigi was Fakoli. When Sunjata fled to Nema, Fakoli who was the ancestor of Jaware, went to find him there. In those days the elder brother of Sunjata, Dankarantuman, had plotted against him to chase him from Mande. That is why Sunjata returned from Nema. He had gone to Nema with his younger brother

1 His canoe, which became a boli.

2 Amulets.

3 Prison.

Manding Mory and his younger sister Sogolon Kolonkan. Sogolon Kolonkan was well versed in sorcery and so was Mansa Sunjata. Fakoli and the grandfather of the Jawara went with five other men to bring Sunjata back so he would chase Sumanguru from the throne of Manding. If you see that Soso Sumanguru gave up the throne, that was not because they favoured Sunjata. The arrival of Sunjata coincided with a great drought and a famine. The people of Manding were in agreement in conspiring to turn over the kingdom to Sunjata. Sumanguru realized that the tenure of his reign was exhausted and he abdicated the kingdom of Manding. Chaque chose à son temp, n'est-ce-pas? To each corresponds the period of his reign. N'Fajigi was the son of Fakoli. The success of Fajigi in matters of the boliw was realized after the death of these two ancestors.

Sumanguru had set aside some gold to give to Fakoli. Fakoli was told to give the gold to his son Fajigi who was to go to Mecca and buy the boliw.

Sumanguru had the boliw of war and was therefore invulnerable. Even if you have the boliw, you never have enough knowledge. He himself¹ has been to school, but you see that he comes to the African continent to hear the sages and augment his knowledge. Fajigi went to Mecca when there were already boliw in Manding, and he brought back more boliw. No one was Muslim before the departure of Fajigi for Mecca. Men praise him even though they already had boliw in Manding before he left for Mecca.

1 A reference to the interviewer.

The Origin of Blacksmiths

Informant: Mamary Kouyate
Recorded at Kolokani, 10 August 1975

It is said of the blacksmiths, that they come from Mansa Suleiman.¹ This Mansa Suleiman, his mother gave birth to him in the bush on the dust of an ant hill, how pitiful. On that day the mother was there all alone. God, who commands all things, sent the angel of death to take the soul of the mother of Mansa Suleiman. But when he came near her, the angel of death had pity on her, he could not take her soul. The angel of death returned to God and said he could not take that woman's soul because she had just given birth.

God said to the angel of death, "Go back to her. I shall send something ahead of you, which you will find near her. Before you take her soul, break open this thing, and when you see what is inside it, you will agree with me".

Before the angel of death was able to return to the mother of Mansa Suleiman, God placed a stone near her. When the angel of death came near, he found it and broke it open. There was another stone inside which he also broke, and inside that one he found a worm with a piece of fresh grass in its mouth. So the angel of death agreed with God, and he took her trust.²

Sometime later, the baby Mansa Suleiman was found and taken home by a family who raised him until he grew to manhood. They

1 King Solomon.

2 That is, he retrieved from her the ni (spirit, soul) that God had entrusted to her for her lifetime. Without the ni a Bambara is dead, and to say "God has taken his trust from so-and-so" is a euphemism meaning the person died.

called him Suleiman, and he was the father of Ndamangiri.

Ndamangiri was the father of Dunfaila. Mansa Suleiman ruled over all things of the world. He commanded everything from men to devils to genies, to birds, to trees. Whenever he walked anywhere, the birds shaded him with their wings.

Mansa Suleiman gave the secret of iron, you know, to Ndamangiri. This is how the blacksmiths do gwazikita, the making of iron. This is the same Mansa Suleiman to whom God gave a wind horse, a horse that ran as fast as the wind. Yes, the blacksmiths came from those men. We called their descendants "Fane".

Men say, you know, that Mansa Suleiman's first son was Ndamangiri, and Ndamangiri's little brother was Dunfaila. This is how the blacksmiths came.

Even today, if you go to the house of the ants, you will see the place where Mansa Suleiman died unnoticed. Alahtana took his trust from him there. As he was leaning on his stick on the ant hill, the termites came out and chewed on the stick until it broke. He fell down on the ant hill. He commanded the ants. Even today the ants do his work. If you go to the house of the ants, if you stand on the ant hill, you will find that you cannot safely say do wo do.¹ If you say this on the ant hill, you will see some kind of warning, a kind of threat you never saw before.

Yes, the blacksmiths came from that man.

1 The equivalent of "boo".

Fajigi

Informant: Seydou Camara
 Recorded at Bamako, September 1975

The blacksmith, the blacksmith ancestor was called old Fande.

His first wife was called Fanbukudi.

No, no blacksmith is older than Old Fande,

No blacksmith is older than Old Fade.

Ah! The genies loved Fakoli, Nufande.¹

Ah! Eh! The genies love Seydou the ngoni player, Nufande.

The bellows in the afternoon says jidi,

The bellows in the morning says jigi.²

No blacksmith is older than Jidi.

Old Fande's wife was called Fanbukudi.

They dug in the ground to get the rock that holds the iron.

Old Fande dug a hole, a hole that was stained.³

What did he bring out of it?

The stained rock.

1 It is not clear if Seydou Camara regards Fakoli and Fande as the same ancestor. There are more traditions about Fakoli, but the name given for the original blacksmith ancestor is usually Fande, sometimes Fajigi.

2 Here the singer makes use of the multiple meanings of these words, as he does later in the story of Fajigi's trip to Mecca. Seydou also means for the sound of the words jidi and jigi to describe the sound of the blacksmith's bellows. The name "Jidi" is the oldest name blacksmiths have for a cow, and Seydou's son Sekou says there is always a cow bearing that name in a blacksmith's herd, if he has one. The name goes back through so many generations that it is assumed the first cow was named "Jidi". Thus Seydou achieves a connection here between the name of the oldest blacksmith ancestor, the bellows, and the cow.

3 Iron-bearing rock is said to be "stained".

What came out?

The stained rock.

Eh! Fande made some charcoal, charcoal in great quantity.

He lit the charcoal and the charcoal burned.

Nufande carried the stained rock, Nufande.

Then he built a furnace, Nufande.¹

1 At one point in his song, Seydou Camara digresses into a spoken description of the iron-making process: The way the numuw make iron, they first dig holes to look for the rock. This rock is different from the usual kind, it is black. They build a little furnace which is called gwansulu. There are many holes in the top, just so. We make a pipe in the.... We put a pipe like this. The pipes enter like this and like this. This is blown on, and when the wind comes, the fire. If it is windy, no man is required. Then we dig a hole under the furnace to put the charcoal in, with two hens and a small piece of wood [for a sacrifice].

Yes, the charcoal must be placed carefully, tac tac, by a man who goes to bed early, a calm man who does not go out at night [a pure man who does not woo the Fula girls or sleep with another man's wife]. When the fire is burning brightly, we pour a small quantity of iron rock into it. God blows on it, and when the rock gets red it begins to be iron. All you hear is koutia, koutia, koutia [the sound of molten liquid bubbling]. But the little red hole there cannot be looked at, it is bright as the sun, it is just like it. Three nights pass like this. When you add charcoal, you put iron rock on top of it. The third day the bellows isn't needed, the draught comes naturally through the top. So the third day the iron is finished. We leave it there for three days to cool.

A big tunnel is there, a hole at the bottom where the iron comes out. The cinders are thrown aside with tongs, always thrown like this. When you only hear kodo, kodo, kodo, like going to the toilet, the iron is becoming separated. There is a hard thing we break it with, like this. It is the slag running out ah, ha! It flows all the night, but when that is done, you take it out. The sixth day we open a big door and attach a rope. Then it takes at least ten, thirteen or fourteen men to pull the iron out of the furnace. We take hammers and break it into six parts or four parts. I did it myself. I am primarily a blacksmith. Even today I can do it. The iron is carried home, it is very hard work. We put it in the fire again at home. Then we make hoes, axes, knives, and many other tools. The blacksmith's work is very tiring.

He built a furnace, Nufande,

Then he carried the stained rock, Nufande.

Ah! Eh! He built a forge, Nufande.

He built a hot furnace, Nufande.

He put charcoal in the hot furnace, Nufande.

He took dry thorn tree branches and piled them in the
charcoal, Nufande.

He poured the stained rock into the fire, Nufande.

Ah! To be a blacksmith demands sorcery.

Numu Kulumba, sorcery originated with the blacksmiths.¹

Ah! To be a blacksmith is to be a sorcerer.

I cross my hands behind my back,

I beg your pardon, blacksmiths.

When I want to speak, I beg the pardon of the blacksmiths.

Blacksmiths, pardon me, for the love of God.²

Dama put a singer into the world,

A singer who did not come from the earth.

My mother put a singer into the world,

A singer who did not come from the sky.

I am learning the art of singing, people.³

Everyone is born with his own destiny.

Charcoal is put in the furnace, Nufande.

1 Numu Kulumba or Nukulumba was a famous 'Komojelima' or griot for the Komo society who was in charge of the Komo bóli known as Nedi Koro. Seydou's son Sekou claims that this bóli is now in their home village of Kabaya, but that it was previously in the village of Kona, 42 km distant during the time of Samory. Throughout his songs, Seydou frequently addresses various ancestors, heroes, or other characters in his narratives, as well as participants in his performance, or members of the audience.

2. He asks forgiveness for talking about blacksmith secrets.

3. At this time he was one of the two most famous hunter's singers in Mali, and a recording of his songs could be heard every morning on Radio Mali.

Fire is put in the furnace, Nufande.

Stained rock is put in the furnace, Nufande.

The rock is melted and becomes iron, Nufande.

The iron is used to make the hoe, Nufande.

The axe, Nufande.

The pin for plaiting hair, Nufande.¹

The knife, Nufande.

The millet is harvested with the knife, Nufande.

They use the knife to circumcise, Nufande.

The head is shaved with the knife, Nufande.²

All this is provided by the blacksmith, Nufande.

Ah! The art of blacksmithing allows no lies,

Eh, we! Blacksmiths, it is hard to admit that one is a sorcerer.

Fakoli did not play around.

Old Fande was the first to take iron from the rock.

May this not worry the other singers,³

Seydou is a singer, a singer of all the years.

1 I translated this as "pin" rather than "comb", etc., because it is shaped like this:



2 This is an especially effective testimony to the importance of the blacksmith's art, in that the reference is to three of the most important aspects of Manding culture: the harvest, the circumcision ritual, and Islam (the shaved heads).

3 May the other singers not feel threatened by his skill at making songs and his talent as an ngoni player and singer.

The world is ruled by four mansaw,¹

They never found the fifth.

Who is the first mansa?

It's the blacksmith mansa.

Who is the second?

It's the farmer mansa.

The third is the world-ruling mansa,²

The fourth is the woman mansa.

Aside from these four mansaw, God created no other kings.

Eh, we! What is supporting the world?

Three black things.

On what rests the world?

Three black things.

What holds the soul of the world?

Three black things.

What makes the world live?

Three black things.

Fliers, walkers and crawlers, what is your soul?

Three black things.

1 Seydou explains the identity of the four mansaw (supreme chiefs, kings) of the world as follows: The blacksmith mansa is the first because we cannot live without eating. Who produces food? Those who make iron, the blacksmith is one, and another is the farmer. There are four chiefs in life. The blacksmith chief is the first. The farmer chief is the second. He who is armed to avoid war is called chief that rules the world ('Dunya Mara Mansa'), the third. The fourth is the woman, woman is a great queen of life. If she wants, you will eat well. If she doesn't want, she can spoil your meal: "If you want it, eat it! If not, too bad!". It is the woman who is the most capable of anyone.

2 Sekou Camara said his father was referring to civil servants, presidents, governors and clerks.

The first of the three black things is the clouds.¹

If there are no clouds, no water is seen.

If the rain does not come, no farming is done.

If no farming is done, there is nothing to cook.

Eh! The world rests on the clouds, people.

If the thunder roars, the big farmer's heart promenades
inside him like a hunting python.

Where does the farmer go?

To the forge.

He goes to see the blacksmith at the forge.

"I have no hoe, Nukulumba,

"I have no axe, Nukulumba,

I have no belt-knife, Nukulumba,

"My wife has no pot, Nukulumba.

"Tell your wife to make me a large clay bathing pot, Nukulumba,

"Tell her to make me a small clay face-washing pot, Nukulumba".

No lie, the world depends on the blacksmiths,

Ah people, the blacksmith must not be insulted.

Camara Jan is dead,²

Death won't spare you because you have been to Mecca.

Camara Jan is dead,

Death won't leave you alone because you have mastered the world.

1 After mentioning that the clouds are the first of the three black things, Seydou never says what the other two are, though the second may be the forge which he talks about in the next lines.

2 Camara Jan was Seydou's father, whom he praises as one of the great blacksmith people.

Camara Jan is dead,
 Death won't spare you because you are rich.
 Camara Jan has died and left me in the world.
 People, Camara Jan has become one with God.

Eh, Kani my favourite,¹

Let us go to the furnace, Badakani.

Let us go and build a furnace, Badakani.

Our hot furnace is called "Fat Girl", Badakani.

Eh! The battle of Kokoron warmed up, people.²

Jan was a wild animal.³

It won't do to offend a blacksmith, Numu Kulumba.

The rock has melted, Numu Kulumba.

It is for making a hoe, Nukulumba.

That is to be given to the Fula, Nukulumba.

That is to be given to the Malinke, Nukulumba.

That is to be given to the griots, Nukulumba.⁴

- 1 Camara Jan's first and favourite wife who drowned in the Sankarani River. "Bada" as a prefix to her name signifies "best loved" or "favourite".
- 2 Kokoron was a small river near the Jaban River, near Kabaya. The village is no longer there, and its site is said to be a place of genies who turn themselves into snakes and bite people. I am told that Samory killed many people of Wasulu there during the time when Seydou's father Camara Jan was one of Samory's blacksmiths. The river was also named Kokoron (bad river) at one time, possibly because it became so violent during the rains, but when Samory killed so many people there, the water turned red with blood and since then it has been called "Jaban" or "Red River".
- 3 A very brave man.
- 4 In the Wasulu region as well as the Beledougou and others, griots keep their own farm plots.

The world rests on handles, four handles.

God sent down these four handles that man cannot do without:

Hoe handle, gun handle, knife handle, spoon handle.

It's no lie, God is the blacksmith.

Ah people, everyone calls for the blacksmith.

Eh! If you offend a blacksmith, unhappiness will follow you.

If you offend a blacksmith, you will disappear.

If you offend a blacksmith, you will die at random.

Eh! If you wrong a blacksmith, ah people, the world will

be a place of suffering for you.

Ah, this is no tall tale, Nukulumba.

To whom belongs the hoe, Nukulumba?

The hoe comes from the blacksmith, Nukulumba.

The axe comes from the blacksmith, Nukulumba.

The knife comes from the blacksmith, Nukulumba.

The mortar comes from the blacksmith, Nukulumba.

The pestle comes from the blacksmith, Nukulumba.

All these come from the blacksmith.

Ah, people, to be a blacksmith is no joke.

Since the world was born it has lived on the fruits of the

blacksmith's labours.

The blacksmith's art cannot be revealed.

No blacksmith is older than Fande.

No Bambara is older than Nyamingiri.

No Fula is older than Diallo.

Ah! Eh! To whom will I speak?

To whom will I give my speech?

Monsieur Charlou,¹

Charlou made me a gift of a tape recorder.

Charlou did me the honour of giving me 100,000 francs.

He gave this to the singer, and for this I speak.

It's no lie, Dama put a singer into the world.

Ah, ah, the world is hard to understand.

Big headed Fakoli, big mouthed Fakoli,

If you said "Bila", he would throw you his daughter.²

Fakoli did not play around.

If you said "Bila", he would give you a wife.

If you said "Bila", he would give you a shirt.

If you said "Bila", he would make you a gift of trousers.

If you said "Fakoli", he would give you a cap.

He did so much good, that his right foot became longer

than his left foot.

Koroma Jigi has lain down.

Death won't spare you because you have been to Mecca.

Koroma Numuso, I speak of the blacksmiths.³

Ah people, eternal life is not possible.

Kuda Jan Kali gave birth,

He sired Numuso who plays the narinya.⁴

1 Professor Charles Bird, linguist from the University of Indiana, who has worked much with Seydou Camara and published some of Seydou's work in The Songs of Seydou Camara, Bloomington, Indiana, 1974.

2 This serves to demonstrate not only how generous the legendary Fakoli was, but how great praise singing is worthy of any gift, no matter how extravagant.

3 Numuso is one of Seydou's wives, the one who lives with him in Bamako, and she is also Sekou's mother.

4 The narinya is a ridged metal pipe that is scraped with a thin metal bar to provide the basic rhythmic background to the hunters' songs.

Play the narinya for me, Numuso.

Let us look for success and fame in this world, Numuso.

Death is inevitable, Numuso.

The other world allows no debts, Numuso.

Nufaramba is dead, Numuso.¹

Camara Jan has gone back, Numuso.

Eh! God is powerful.

Ah people, Kali Jan has left the world.²

Koroma Jigi, Jigi was a blacksmith at Nora.³

Eh, string player for Fajigi,

Ngoni player for Fajigi.

Koroma Jigi has fallen, and the world has calmed down.

Koroma Jigi is dead,

Death will not spare you because you have gone to Mecca.

Koroma Jigi is dead,

Death will not leave you alone because you live in a
skyscraper.

Koroma Jigi is dead,

Death will not spare you because you are loved by everyone.

1 Nufaramba (Numu Faramba) was Seydou's grandfather.

2 Kali Jan is Kuda Jan Kali, Numuso's father.

3 The noun koroma when used this way is understood to signify "old" or "ancient". However, Sekou Camara has heard that in ancient times it was a jamu or clan name of people who were related to the blacksmith art, but were more powerful than blacksmiths in that they were great healers and sorcerers, practising these arts exclusively, never working with iron or wood. Thus, to praise an ancestor with the name "Koroma" is to credit him or her with these great powers. Nora is a village in northern Guinea, part of the same cultural complex as the Wasulu region of southern Mali, home of Seydou Camara.

Jigi Koroma should not have died, but the oracle of eternal life on earth gives no satisfaction to the possessor of a soul.

The slave is on a playground, but not on an earth where he can remain.¹

No matter how tall a man is, he will end up as a ridge in a ploughed field.²

No matter how great is a house in which people quarrel, it will always end up as a field lying fallow.³

Old age cannot make a person stay in one place if there is no one to replace him.⁴

Fajigi Koroma should not have died.

Fakoli! Play the iron for the blacksmith.⁵

Ah people, everything that stands will lie down.

Eh, Bereme Wule, the world depends on the blacksmith.⁶

1 In this context "slave" refers to every mortal man. Jon bi sumun yi la jon ti toyi la do. Sekou says this proverb is based on a Koranic concept of the existence of seven skies and seven earths.

2 Moko jenya jenyama ide ke lon kelen tomandi.

3 Benbali so bonya bonya lon kelen tomon. This is literally true of any abandoned village made of mud brick houses.

4 Kodote moko sigi nitake baka tibolo. No matter how old the head of a family is, if he has no offspring to take care of the duties, he cannot rest.

5 In this case, Fakoli refers to Numuso, Seydou's wife, because she is a Dumbia and people of that jamu are said to be the legendary Fakoli's descendants.

6 We failed to identify this reference. Seydou often addresses obscure ancestors or people in the audience, or the names of people that come into his head as he sings.

Ah people, do not insult the blacksmith trade.

No blacksmith is older than Old Fande.

Eh, we! Nufande was a blacksmith.

Ah people, Nufande has lain down.

Heee! Koroma Jigi got up, N'Fajigi.

N'Fajigi was handsome as a genie.

Fajigi was pretty as a European.

Fajigi was prettier than a woman.

Koroma Jigi, the first woman who fell in love with Jigi was

his mother.

Jigi's mother had a passion for him.

She wailed, "Jigi is so pretty that they say he could not

have come from my loins!"

Ah people, it was a miracle.

Ah! Eh! Night time is bad, night time is bad!

The night is a serious thing.

Fajigi, leave the millet beer alone, Fajigi.

Do not drink the millet beer, Fajigi.

If you drink millet beer, Fajigi,

Don't get drunk, Fajigi.

It's risky to drink, Fajigi.

Koroma Jigi filled himself with millet beer.

Jigi had no lover at Nora except for one girl.

This girl had gone to a hamlet for millet.¹

1 People in the Wasulu and other places often cultivate farm plots a day or two's walk from the home village. They will build a flimsy, temporary shelter and sleep there while they tend the crops. This is called a hamlet, and often it will gradually develop into a proper village, settled by a newly-married son who is subsequently joined by others seeking fresh farm plots.

She had gone with her father and would spend the night away.

Before Fajigi came home, his mother took a supporter and

fastened it to her breasts.¹

What else did she do before Fajigi came home?

She took a bracelet and fastened it to her wrist,

She took some waist beads and fastened them around he waist.

On a dark and rainy night she went and stretched herself on

Jigi's bed.

Ah people, man is not equal to God.

Koroma Jigi came home from the millet beer hut and lay with

his mother.

He made her his wife, N'Fajigi.

Ah people, N'Fajigi had an accident.

He! Jigi did a very bad thing.

Ah! N'Fajigi was upset.

Koroma Jigi had made his mother his wife , so he decided to

go and see the village Imam.

Fajigi said, "Listen, Imam of the village.

"Almamy, I have lain with my mother.

Almamy, how can I avoid the darkness of hell?"

"Koroma Jigi, clear a field alongside the road.

"Farm for three years, Fajigi.

"Give your harvest to the beggars without touching a single

grain, N'Fajigi, then your sin will be absolved.

"If you cannot farm, go and dig a well in the bush, Fajigi.

"Fill a jar with cool water and put it by the well, Fajigi.

1 She wanted to make her sagging breasts more attractive as she attempted to seduce Fajigi.

"The thirsty people will come to drink, Fajigi, and this
will absolve your sin.

"Ah, Fajigi, you have done wrong.

"If you cannot do that, Fajigi, I do not know how to help you".

Fajigi said he was no well digger.

He said he could not farm or make a jar.

The Almamy said, "Eh! Fajigi, if you cannot do all this,
you must go to Mecca.

"Go to Mecca and wipe out your sin".

If it is said that Fajigi went to Mecca, he did not do it by
chance.

Ah people, Fajigi did not play around.

Koroma Jigi decided to go and see Soso Bali Sumanguru, who
was his uncle.¹

He said, "Eh! Uncle, I have been told to go to Mecca, but
I do not have any travelling food.

"Spread the dust for me, uncle".²

Sumanguru began to play the far shooting bow, the arrow of
the far shooting bow.

He put his hand in the far seeing tien, arrow of the far
shooting bow.³

1 This is merely a random association of two legendary figures by Seydou, and no importance can be attached to the claim that they were related, except for the blacksmith link.

2 This refers to the kind of divining done by making signs in the dust. To spread the dust is to do the tien by a tiendala or divining master.

3 There are two kinds of tien, one for seeing far into the future, and one for seeing the immediate future. The far seeing tien is called "kalajan"; kala = bow; jan = far, thus kalajan bigne is the arrow of the far-shooting bow. Charles Bird (The Songs of Seydou Camara, n.116, p.115) says the kaladen or twenty-four possible signs drawn in the dust are called "children of the bow", and he describes how an actual bow is laid in the dust and used in the divining process.

"Namissa, Namboroma, Burum Burumba.¹

"Hide the kola nut and bring it out again, Balaba of Jitumu,

Balamissa of Jitumu.

"The old habits of Nonko, twin brother Fabu,²

"Twenty-four sons of Kala.³

"Fajigi will go to Mecca, Fajigi.

"If the journey is good, show me a good omen.

"Fajigi will go to Mecca, Fajigi.

"If the journey is not good, show me a bad omen".

He, we! Soso Bala Tiemoko cast the tien for Jigi who
was told to go to Mecca.⁴

SONG

Someone know a thing, another knows it not.

A sorcerer knows a thing, another knows it not.

He! People do not know the same things.

A singer knows a thing that is unknown to another.

He, someone know a things, Bila Fakoli,

Someone can do a thing another cannot do.

Someone knows a thing,

A farmer knows a thing that is unknown to another.

A person knows a thing,

1 Here Seydou addresses ancient divining masters (tiendälaw, latarudalaw), the names of whom coming down from ancient times become part of the divining incantation. "Borum Burumba" means "big dust".

2 The "old habits" refers to ancient diviners using kola nuts in their divining, something which is still done.

3 Here Seydou mentions the kaladen or twenty-four sons (signs) of the bow. Each sign was actually a set of marks:

11	11
1 One son (sign)	11 another son (sign)
11	1
11	11

4 Tiemoko was another name for Sumanguru.

Everyone is born for a special task.

Someone knows a thing that is unknown to another.

No lie, all ngoni cord pluckers are not the same.

Someone knows a thing that is unknown to another.

Someone knows a thing,

All old soldiers are not the same.

One knows a thing that is unknown to another.

He! A pilot knows a thing that is unknown to another.

He! An American knows a thing that is unknown to another.

All men are not equal.

Someone knows a thing,

Marabouts are not equal.

One knows a thing that is unknown to another.

Someone knows a thing,

There are many Komo society masters.¹

One knows a thing that another does not know.

He! Dakafune is a Komo.²

Someone can do a thing that is unknown to another.

He, someone knows a thing, Jigi Koroma,

Someone knows a thing that is unknown to another.

1 Komo is probably the most important of the spirit societies, and it may be thought of as the legislative, judicial and spiritual branch of society. The knowledge gained through membership in the Komo is crucial to all men, but especially hunters and others involved in dangerous undertakings.

2 This is the name of Seydou Camara's Komo.

"Fakoli!" Sumanguru said, "Bila Fakoli, your tien signs
have turned out very well."¹

"Kumi Diossi has appeared,

"Maro Maro has appeared,

"Soro Sike has appeared,

"Karlan has appeared,

"Tere Misse has appeared".²

Ah, namu sayer, what did the tien show?³

Happiness in the house.

Sumanguru said, "Eh, nephew, give a white horsehead kola,"⁴

"We will present it to the oracle.

"Give a pure white ram, nephew,

"We will present it to the oracle".

Koroma Jigi gave a silver ring for the tien oracle.

He sacrificed a horsehead kola and a ram.

Fajigi followed his uncle's advice.

He! God is a fama.⁵

God refuses to do some things, but he is never unable to
do those things.

1 All twenty-four signs together are called the salle.

2 The various configurations of the complete groups of signs (salle) at the end of the divining process are given individual names, such as 'Tere Misse' (horsehead) and 'Karlan', signifying a light complexioned or tall man.

3 More literally, he said, "What has the oracle become?"

4 There is a type of white or yellowish kola nut that has the general shape of a horse's head.

5 Fama is a synonym of mansa.

They made the necessary sacrifices for Jigi who must go to Mecca.

Sumanguru said, "He! Koromo Jigi, go to Mecca, for you will not meet any danger".

Koroma Jigi began his trip to Mecca with a ram.¹

He accepted everything Soso Bala Sumanguru told him.

Soso Bala gave one hundred and fifty bags of gold for Fajigi's journey.

"Go on your journey, Fajigi,

"The trip to Mecca will be a source of happiness, Fajigi".

.....
SONG

If you don't tighten your belt for work, blacksmith,²

If you don't tighten your belt,

People will laugh at you.

If you don't take good care of the fetish inherited from your father,

People will laugh at you.

Heee! People of Nora, if you don't tighten your belts,

People will laugh at you.

People, if you don't take good care of Ntorofere,³

And take good care of Dibi Komo,

Take good care of it.

-
- 1 The ram and several animals are referred to as jigi (roughly: master, leader, chief, head), thus saka (ram) as a sakajigi allows Seydou the play on sounds agreeing with the hero of the narrative.
- 2 This is an example of the kind of song griots use to encourage workers in the field. To "tighten your belt" is to work hard.
- 3 Many of these boliw or altars of the spirit societies, are said to remain in the village of Nora in Guinea.

Take good care of Loko Duman,

Take good care again.

If you do not take good care of the boliw inherited
from your father,

People will laugh at you.

If you do not tie up your belt...

You will have a lot of enemies if you don't tighten
your belt.

He! If you don't tie up your belt,

Koroma Jigi will go to Mecca.

People, tie up your belts.

He! Tighten your belts, those who are ploughing,

Tie up your belts.

Tighten your belts, those who are traders,

Tighten your belts.

Tighten your belts, Military Committee of Mali,

Tie up your belts.

Tie up your belts, youth of Mali,

Tighten your belts and keep Mali healthy.

He! Namu saye, Koroma Jigi walked and walked.

Soso Bala Sumanguru told Fajigi to go to Mecca and make an
offering of four jigiw.

Fajigi had only one, the sakajigi, but his uncle said

he would have the others along the way.

Koroma Jigi walked until he saw a male baboon¹

sitting in the dust of the road.

When the baboon raised its head and saw Koroma Jigi, it said,

"Jigi of men, you face the East and go makassi, makassi."²

"Where are you going?"

"Ngonjigi, bring your head near me", said Fajigi.

"Everyone who has lain with his mother, if they do not go to

Mecca, they will be unhappy, Ngonjigi.

"They will begin with hell, Ngonjigi,

"They will end with hell, Ngonjigi,

"Let us go to Mecca and wipe out our sins, Ngonjigi".

"Have you not heard about Ngonjigi?" replied the baboon.

"All the children around me were born of the love between

my mother and me.

"Koroma Jigi, do not take another step without me, let us go

together".

So Ngonjigi followed Koroma Jigi, and the number of jigiw

were three:

The baboon walked ahead of the ram, and Mokojigi³ followed

on the way to Mecca.

The journey of Fajigi to Mecca is not a lie, my dear,

It is not a lie,

It is not a fiction.

1 Ngonjigi.

2 The sound of rapid walking.

3 Mokojigi = jigi of men, another name for Fajigi.

It is not just a song by a player of the hunter's ngoni.¹

Koroma Jigi walked and walked until he found a male porcupine²
squatting in the road.

Fajigi said, "Eh, man of thorns".

The porcupine looked at the jigi of men and said,

"Jigi of men, where are you going so fast, marata, marata,
in the direction of the East?"

"He, good fellow porcupine, I am not lying to you.

"Every man who has lain with his mother, if he does not
make a journey to Mecca,

"He will begin with hell, Balajigi,

"He will end with hell, Balajigi.

"We are going to Mecca to wipe out our sins, Balajigi.

"Ah people, we are cursed".

The porcupine told his children to choose a jigi among them,
a new family leader, and he said,

"Awa, Koroma Jigi, do not take another step without me.

"All my children were born of the love between my mother and me.

"I will go to Mecca to erase my sins".

The jigiw of Koroma Jigi were then three, and he himself was
the fourth.

They walked and walked until they met an Nkonkodonjigi in
a grassy plain, browsing on the fresh grass.

The antelope raised its head to look at Faijigi,

"Jigi of men, you walk quickly,

1 The term donso n'goni fola (lit., hunter's ngoni player) is the term describing Seydou Camara's profession, thus, he is not a jeli, but a blacksmith who specializes in praising and singing the exploits of the great hunters.

2 Balajigi.

"Where are you hurrying to, Fajigi?"

"I am going to Mecca", said Fajigi,

"I have lain with my mother and made her my wife,

"I am going to wipe out my sins at Mecca".

"Eh, Fajigi", said the antelope.

"You will never go without me, thank you very much.

"My mother has seven children and they are all by me.

"I will go with you to wash away my sins".

Ah people, thank the Father Of The World for that walk.

They walked until they arrived at Mecca on the day of the

boli market.

There were boliw everywhere in that market,¹

The boliw were everywhere that day.

The boliw wandered through the market as the Komo played
at tripping them.²

Ah! Fajigi and his people were astonished.

There was no sorcery in Mande,

There were no powerful sorcerers in Mande,³

There was no Nama Komo in Mande,⁴

The bird dance did not exist in Mande,

1 The type of charm mentioned here is tafo, consisting of a string with many knots tied in it for protection against sorcery.

2 From the storyteller's point of view this is a fabulous scene involving a bonanza of powerful altars, or boliw of the Manding spirit societies.

3 Seydou means that compared to what Fajigi brought from Mecca, the powers previously held by the sorcerers of Mande did not amount to much.

4 The origins of Komo are obscure, but there is no evidence that they were connected with Islam.

There were no stilt-dancers in Mande,
 There was no Komo in Mande,
 There were no poison korte powders in Mande,¹
 All these things were brought from Mecca by Koroma Jigi.
 Salute the Fula patriarch for clearing many dark ways.²
 The burning deadly things would not have filled a red
 duiker's horn.³
 Eh, we! Since Jigi died, the world has calmed down.
 Koroma Jigi exchanged the antelope for sunoko korte.⁴
 Ah, namu sayer, the porcupine was traded for gwambinye
 korté.
 As for the baboon, he was traded for the gweleke korté.
 The ram was traded for the dawulene korte, and Fajigi
 returned from Mecca with nine horns of korté powder.
 Nine kolon bird's heads were sewn to his cap when he came
 from Mecca.⁵

-
- 1 In ancient times, we are told, a korté included all kinds of powders and potions, made of a variety of herbs and other ingredients, used to put people to sleep, poison, heal; used for both good and evil purposes.
 - 2 This seems to refer to Fajigi as a Fulbe (Fula, Peul, Fulani) rather than a member of a basically Manding-speaking group such as Maninka or Bambara. In the Wasulu, which is Seydou's home region, the village chiefs are often Fula who rely heavily on tools and goods produced by Maninka blacksmiths like the Camaras.
 - 3 In other words, before Fajigi's journey, there were not many lethal poisons in Mande.
 - 4 Sekou Camara says this was a sleeping powder, but the uses of the korté that follow remain obscure.
 - 5 This was described as a blue bird with a red head and a yellow beak which was a good omen for sorcerers and was used to decorate their costumes.

Fajigi had a bark-dyed sorcerer's cap,
 He had the mud cloth sorcerer's cap and the sorcerer's boubou.¹
 N'Fajigi got all these things in Mecca.
 Eh! He who imitates a thing is different from the one who
 really owns it.²
 Fajigi did not play around.
 Patron, don't play around with the blacksmith art,
 Do your work well for the blacksmiths.³
 Sorcery came from blacksmithing.
 Ah people, blacksmithing is no joke.
 Eh, we! Numu Kulumba, Jigi who went to Mecca bought so many
 boliw that he could not carry them alone.
 He asked the people of Mecca to help him find a canoe, saying,
 "Ah people, there are too many boliw for me to carry alone".
 They felled a kolokolo tree to make a canoe for Fajigi.
 He put the boliw in the canoe, including the big ntamani
 drum.⁴
 The griot's ntamani drum was given to Fajigi, as well as
 the stick for playing it.
 The boliw talk a lot, Fajigi.

1 Sorcerers had special costumes, as did hunters. The cloth was usually decorated with designs made from a special kind of paint made from mud. These costumes were covered with charms and amulets.

2 Kola dekin ba ka na tigi te. The apprentice can never approach the master in skill and knowledge.

3 Pay the blacksmith well for his services. This is also a reminder to the interviewer to pay the singer well for his work.

4 This is the big, hourglass-shaped drum favoured by griots and other drummers at dances and celebrations.

They are too talkative, Fajigi.

If they break your eardrum, play the ntamani drum, Fajigi,

Then the holiw will shut up, Fajigi.

Hear how Koroma Jigi's holiw chattered:

"Eh, Koroma Jigi, you have done well.

"When I arrive at your father's compound, I will fight
your enemies.

"I will make them swell up, Fajigi.

"They will not be able to get out the door, Fajigi.

"I will give someone a hernia,

"I will eat the heads off the penises of others,

"I will cut off the testicles of many.

"What will I do, Fajigi?

"Don't you know, Fajigi?

"I will put worms into the living bodies of those who
would be your enemy".

That is how the holiw talked.

The marabout vocation began at Mecca.¹

The Komo originated at Mecca.

The first Komo master at Mecca was named Yamusa.

There is a mountain east of Mecca.

Even today, if a bee from this mountain stings you, you
will die before you can open your mouth to scream.

This is the mountain of korté powder near Mecca.

SONG

He! Bila Fakoli.

Everything has lost its mystery,

1 In Manding society the duties of marabouts and diviners are closely related and overlap in many instances.

But the blacksmith things cannot be explained.
 He, we, they have turned everything upside down,
 But the secret of Komo cannot be betrayed.
 People of the country, everything has been scattered,
 But the things of Ntorofere cannot be scattered.
 He, we, people have betrayed many secrets, but the
 darkness of the grave cannot be betrayed.
 He, nowadays people scatter everything,
 But Sayasila cannot be scattered.¹
 People of the country have finished scattering everything,
 But the things of the hunter cannot be scattered.

No one can turn himself into a woman or a man without God.²

Namu sayer, Koroma Jigi put the boliw in the canoe.

He took the paddle himself and left from Jedda.³

From Jedda he paddled to the Bagwe River,⁴

From the Bagwe he went to Lake Debo,⁵

And from Lake Debo he entered the Joliba.⁶

-
- 1 According to Sekou Camara, this is a boli of the Komo society.
- 2 This line which Seydou inserts between the song and the narrative seems to be a comment on the main theme of the song: You can't change the sex you were born with any more than you can learn the secrets of the Komo fetishes, which will stand up to all change because they are so powerful.
- 3 The Saudi Arabian seaport 46 miles west of Mecca which is the major port of embarkation for pilgrims.
- 4 A tributary of the Niger River in West Africa.
- 5 Lake Debo, which figures prominently in Manding mythology, is located on the western portion of the Niger Bend.
- 6 The Manding name for the Niger River.

The boliv chattered constantly.

If they break your eardrums, Jigi, play the ntamani and they will shut up.

Ah, namu sayer, when Jigi arrived at Keka, the ntamani drumstick was dropped there.

No one could lift it but Tiramakhan, who picked it up and set it on a tamarind tree.¹

If the war was won, they spoke of Tiramakhan,

If the battle was lost, they spoke of Tiramakhan,

If the river overflowed, they talked about Tiramakhan on the other side of the river.

If the river was dry, they talked about Tiramakhan.

The war of Dibuntu had heated up.²

This is no lie, Jigi Koroma returned from Mecca.

Koroma Jigi returned slowly to Nora.

The journey had gone well for Fajigi.

Sad to say, the enemies had put a curse on Fajigi with a louse.

The louse was stuck into the mud of the river.

The day Koroma Jigi arrived on the lake, there would be a great whirlwind.

The wind would enter the water and there would be a hurricane.

The wind was destined to make Fajigi's canoe disappear in the lake of Nora.

The whirlwind entered the water near the main entrance of Nora village.

1 As a great legendary warrior, Tiramakhan is second only to Sunjata in Manding tradition.

2 Dibuntu, I was told, was a village near Sekorole. To say the war or battle "heated up" means it grew more intense.

Do you not hear what Ntorofere Komo said from where it
lay in its chest?

SONG

Tighten your belts, sons of Somono,¹
Tighten your belts.
Eh! If you don't tighten your belts,
The boliw brought by your elder will be drowned
and people will laugh at you.
He! Tighten your belts in those canoes,
Tighten your belts.
If you don't tighten your belts,
The boliw brought by your elder will be drowned
and people will laugh at you.
Tighten your belts as you paddle,
Tighten your belts.
If you don't tighten your belts,
Jigi who has been to Mecca will be drowned.
He! If you don't tighten your belts,
Enemy brothers will triumph and people will laugh²
at you.

1 The Somono are the fishermen and expert canoeemen of the Niger River.

2 Enemy brothers (fadenw) are usually brothers of the same father, but of a different mother. The various mothers are very jealous of each other's sons, looking out that the others are not favoured over their own, often encouraging their own sons to commit crimes against the rivals, often in the nature of buying harmful charms and applying them to the rivals.

There was a great struggle, but the canoe turned over
in the flooded lake.

The Somono came quickly to fish for Jigi,

And Jigi was not drowned.

They fished for days for the boliw.

The boliw completely filled a hut.

Jigi brought the tien oracle from Mecca,

Jigi brought the bere pebbles from Mecca.¹

Jigi had a six-knotted tafo charm on his toe,

And this charm became a scorpion.

Fajigi had a poison korté called 'wasp sting' in his
armpit,

And this poison became a wasp.

If it stings you, you will run in place.

Jigi had a korté powder called 'to-make-unconscious',

And this was given to the white men.²

Eh, Fajigi brought a korté called 'beware'.

And this became a bee that made very good honey.³

Eh, the rescued boliw were distributed all over Mande.

Koroma Jigi brought the Komo from Mecca.

Fajigi brought the dust divining from Mecca.

He brought the divining pebbles from Mecca.

He brought the divining cowries,

1 Pebbles are used in one popular method of divining, one method of which involves eight rows for foretelling the future.

2 Seydou meant that it was given to them as a useful medicine.

3 We are told that in early times there were various kinds of good korté, but that now all of them are poisonous.

He brought sorcery,

Sorcery for eating people.

He brought sorcery with him,

Sorcery for saving people.

He brought the korté powders from Mecca.

Even now, Jigi's cap is at Nora,

And they make sacrifices to it.

Every Wednesday of the month of November they make these
sacrifices.

This cap fits all the legitimate descendants of Fajigi.

Ah people, Fajigi was an unbeliever.

Koroma Jigi brought the power of preventing cannibalism.¹

Fajigi gave that to the old women.

Fajigi, Koroma Jigi took the sorcery of cannibalism and
gave it to the evil so that they could eat people.

Fajigi took the korté powder and gave it to the Komo
masters,

Korté he gave to the great healers.

He gave marabouts the power to enfeeble.

He gave the Komo masters the power to transform themselves,
saying,

"Protect yourselves with this.

"However long the course of life, the last day will arrive".

The Komo of Jigi Koroma comes out [and shuffles around singing]:

1 The nyágwa power allowed some sorcerers to prevent other sorcerers from indulging in cannibalism.

SONG

Jigi has come,
 Eh, Jigi has come.
 Jigi has come,
 Mansa Jigi has come.
 People, Mande will know evil.
 Jigi has come from Mecca,
 Jigi who went to Mecca has come.
 Jigi has come with the Komo Kondo.¹
 Jigi has come.
 Jigi who went to Mecca has come with the kórté whip,
 Jigi has come.
 Eh! Jigi has come with our legacy, people.
 Mande will prosper.
 He, Jigi who is feared by evil sorcerers has come.
 He, Jigi has come,
 Jigi who shames the enemy brothers has come.
 He, Jigi has come,
 Jigi who shames the enemy sisters has come.
 Awa, Jigi has come from Mecca, people,
 The plot to kill him has failed.

SONG

He! Ayi, things are done this way,
 Blacksmith things are done like this.
 My friend, things are done this way,

1 This was a large chest in which Komo paraphernalia like masks and bóliw were kept.

My friend, blacksmith things are done like this.

My friend, things are done this way.

My favourite mother, Komo things are done like this.

Eh, things are done this way,

Mother who bore me, Komo things are done like this.

Eh, things will be done this way, my favourite mother,

Komo things will be done like this.

Eh, griot of the Komo, swallow's things are done this way,¹

Blacksmith things are done like this.

He, we, we, things are done this way,

my favourite mother,

Blacksmith things are done like this.

He, namu sayer, Koroma Jigi threw körté powder on his

mother,²

And before morning lice had invaded that woman's entire body.

Her head, her armpits, her pubic hair, everything was full

of lice.

His mother swelled up so bad that she could not go out

the door.

Eh, we, namu sayer, Jigi's mother left the earth.

1 The significance of the swallows is not clear, except that they often nest in the eaves of the hut that houses the blacksmiths' forges; and may therefore have a traditional connection with that vocation.

2 In addition to demonstrating the ruthless power of the Komo against women who would dare to look at the masked figure as it dashes and dances through the village, Fajigi is taking revenge against his mother for seducing him.

She died, and Jigi shouted like this:

"If destiny has chosen that you must go to hell, do
everything you can to be the little sister of
Diahanama Malikiba".¹

Ewe, namu sayer, they dug a grave for Jigi's mother.

SONG

Walaki, walaki on the jekin tree branches when the
monkey chief is away.²

If you see a small orphaned he-monkey jumping on the
jekin tree branches,

Then you will know the monkey chief is away.

Walaki, walaki on the jekin tree branches when the
monkey chief is away.

If you see a little orphaned monkey in the jekin
tree,

Then you will know there is no monkey chief.

Walaki, walaki on the jekin tree branches when the
monkey chief is away.

If you see a little monkey capering in the branches
of the jekin tree,

You will know there is no monkey chief.

SONG

Eh, the shade tree has fallen,

Death has removed it from me.

My mother was a shade tree,

1 This is the angel who escorts bad people to hell.

2 Walaki, walaki signifies the actions of a monkey capering
in a tree.

Death has taken her from me.

Griot of the Komo, death has taken the shade tree
from me.

Numu Camara Jan was a shade tree,¹

Death has taken him from me.

I am not telling lies,

The shade tree has fallen,

Death has removed it from me.

Numu Faraban was a shade tree,²

Death has removed him from me.

Ayi, death has taken the shade tree from me.

Sele of Koulikoro was a shade tree,

Death has removed him from me.

Numu Kulumba the shade tree has fallen,

Death has taken him from me.

Numu Camara Jan was one of the shade trees.

Death has removed him from me.

Death is bad,

The shade tree has fallen,

Death has removed it from me.

He, we! Kuda Jan Kali was a shade tree,³

Death has removed him from me.

1 Seydou's father again, identified as a blacksmith (numu), as among nyamakala groups the occupational title sometimes becomes part of the name.

2 Seydou's grandfather.

3 The father of Seydou's wife Numuso.

SONG

There was a Komo here, but it has gone.

The Komo of Jigi who went to Mecca was here, but it
has gone.

Wara was here, ah, he!¹

Numu Kulumba, there was a Komo here, but it has gone.

There was a Komo here,

A mother-killing Komo was here, but it has gone.

Wara was here, but it has gone.

He, Torofere of the Komo was here, but it has gone.

Let me get into the chest and lock me inside.²

Let me get into the chest and lock me inside.

Eh yi, tie the Wara for me,³

Tie it very tightly.

Eh yi! Tie me up the Komo that foresees,

Tie it very tightly.

Eh we! My friend, tie the Wara for me,

Tie me very tightly.

Lay me in the chest and carry me a long way from home.

A slave must never betray another slave.

Tie me the Komo that foresees,

Tie it very tightly.

1 Any fierce animal, but also a praise name for Komo, and in this case a Komo mask for a dance that involves the telling of future events.

2 This refers to the kondo mentioned earlier, the chest in which Komo things are kept.

3 When the Komo man puts on the mask to dance, he becomes the spirit of the boli and takes on its powers.

Heyi, haya! Tie the Wara for me,

Tie it tightly.

Komo that foresees is tightly bound, Komo griot,

Tie the Wara for me and put me into the chest.

Fajigi

Informant: Mamary Kouyate
Recorded at Kolokani, 9 August 1975

He was a genie.

Three thousand genies, those three thousand genies came from
genie Hatuma.

They were his descendants, yes they were his children.

Three thousand, three hundred genies, three thousand, three
hundred and thirty-three.

The last of these was Wataba.

Wataba gave birth to the Soso, Sumanguru was a son of the Soso.
Sumanguru lived to the age of seventy-seven years, seven months,
and seven days in Mande.

In those days he wore trousers of human skin and a shirt of
human skin.

A cap of human skin was on his head, sandals of human skin were
on his feet, and he sat on a mat of human skin.

Sumanguru was the father of Fajigi.

Fajigi sired Jala, sired Boukary, sired Bagui, sired Saga.

Life was hard in Fajigi's day.

Seven times he tried to go to Mecca.

On the seventh try he made his hajj, his hajj was made at last.

Fajigi came back with all the Bambara boliw.

It was he who first brought the sacred Bambara things to Mande.

When he got back to Mande the young boys ran to meet him.

They shouted, "Our father Fajigi has returned.

"Jigi who went to Mecca has returned.

"Greetings, Fajigi, how are things in Mecca?"

"There is nothing bad", he replied.

They said, "Was your journey to Mecca a success, did you
make the hajj?"

He said, "Yes, the hajj is made".

The boys asked, "Fajigi, what have you brought us?"

Fajigi said, "I brought you four thousand, four hundred and
forty-four Ndomow and four big Ndomow.¹

"They are for you to play with in Mande.

"Nothing bad for anyone today, nothing bad for anyone tomorrow".

The girls of Mande hurried to meet Fajigi.

They said, "Our father Fajigi has returned.

"Jigi who went to Mecca has returned.

"Greetings Fajigi, how are things in Mecca?"

"There is nothing bad", he replied.

They said, "Was your journey to Mecca a success, did you
make the hajj?"

"Yes", he said, "the hajj is made".

The girls asked, "Our father Fajigi, what have you brought
us from Mecca?"

Fajigi said, "I brought you four thousand, four hundred and
forty-four Jankow and the four great Jankow.

"They are for you to play with in Mande.

"Nothing bad for anyone today, nothing bad for anyone tomorrow".

The young married women of Mande hurried to meet Fajigi.

They said, "Our father Fajigi has returned.

"Jigi who went to Mecca has returned.

1 The reference is to the boliw or sacrificial altars of the Ndomo, or boys' society. Subsequent references to boliw are for the societies of girls, women, and men respectively.

"Greetings Fajigi, how are things in Mecca?"

"There is nothing bad", he replied.

They said, "Did you make the hajj?"

"Yes", he said, "the hajj is made".

The young married women asked, "What have you brought us
from Mecca?"

Fajigi said, "I brought you four thousand Moribayasaw, four
hundred Moribayasaw, forty Moribayasaw and four great
Moribayasaw, yes.

"These are for you to play with in Mande, for you to laugh
with in Mande.

"Nothing bad for anyone today, nothing bad for anyone tomorrow".

The young men of Mande ran to meet Fajigi.

They said, "Our father Fajigi has returned.

"Jigi who went to Mecca has returned.

"Greetings Fajigi, how are things in Mecca?"

"There is nothing bad", he replied.

They said, "Did you make the hajj?"

"Yes", he said, the hajj is made".

The young men asked, "What have you brought us from Mecca?"

Fajigi said, "I brought you four thousand Komow, four hundred
Komow, forty Komow and four great Komow.

"These are for you to play with in Mande.

"These are for you to laugh with in Mande.

"Nothing bad for anyone today, nothing bad for anyone tomorrow".

The son of our father Fajigi was Jala, his first son was Jala.

The little brother of Jala was Boukary,

The little brother of Boukary was Bagui,

The little brother of Bagui was Saga.

Even tomorrow morning there is a meeting of the Komo.

Tomorrow morning, if the Komo hyena screams outside the

village,¹ this is what the dalamina jeli² will say:

"Hello Jala, greetings to Jala Boukary,³

"Bagui of the nkiliki grove,⁴ and Saga the shaggy sheep".⁵

After this the dalamina jeli adds his good ideas of speech.

After this he will say, "the blacksmith's hammer and its

- 1 When the Komo hyena screams, it is a warning that the Komo is about, and all women and children are to stay inside out of sight, for any who see the Komo are in danger of losing their lives.
- 2 The dalamina jeli is never a regular jeli, in fact, though blacksmiths are members of Komo, griots can never be. The dalamina jeli may be a heron (member of the proprietary class), blacksmith, or any other member of the Komo society. Da la mina means "to answer the mouth", so to repeat the words of someone else is to be a dalamina. Thus, the Komo dalamina is the mouthpiece of the society.
- 3 To say "Jala Boukary" means "Jala, brother of Boukary". This is a praising of Jala, Boukary's younger brother. When praising illustrious ancestors, it is enough merely to mention their name, because the names are so famous that the praise is inherent in the word.
- 4 The nkiliki is a kind of tree that grows in clusters. The use of it as Bagui's praise-name, suggests some great adventure of his life that happened in association with it.
- 5 "Yuguba Saga", or "Saga the shaggy sheep" is Saga's praise name, which may refer to some distinguishing physical characteristic, or to some event or deed in his life.

sound,¹ the loin cloth of death² hangs uncomfortably
on its wearer".

If you wear it tight, your brother's death pleases you,

If you wear it loose, you are too grief-stricken to enjoy
the inheritance.

1 The word numu (blacksmith) is not used, but my assistants tell me that taro is a kind of blacksmith's hammer, and that the taro is used in a Komo secret ceremony, but that its full meaning cannot be explained. The full phrase here was taro ni gwa gwa. The gwa gwa is the sound made by the taro, hence my translation. An alternative translation would be "The blacksmith's hammer goes gwa gwa".

2 "Loin cloth of death", Su ko m'boko. The m'boko is a tiny loin cloth, the briefest possible apparel for a man, because it just covers the genitals.

Surakata

Informant: Fakama Kaloga
Recorded at Bamako, 17 September 1975

The jeliw are descended from Surakata. Surakata became a jeli because of Muhammad. Sitane¹ was the first on earth, and he worked for God but he did not pray. One day God called Sitane to tell him that he had worked well for God, but that God was going to put something into the world that God would like better than him. Then God made some bainco,² and Muhammad came from Surien.³

Sitane made a walking stick, saying, "God told me that he would put into the world something better than me. Therefore he will repay me for the work I have done for him". Wherever Sitane placed his stick there came many diseases. It is since that day that people began to be paid for working.

When he spoke, Sitane sprayed some drops of saliva, and these drops of spit were transformed into various things: snakes, scorpions and many other harmful things. God said to Sitane, "I am going to reward you. If a father and his son are friends, you will cause them to have a falling out". Sitane was pleased, and God said, "You must also create discord between wives and husbands and between good friends". Sitane agreed to all this, but even he was surprised when God told him to create misunderstanding between brothers of the same family. Such was the reward of Sitane.

After this came the appearance of fire, as God showed it was He who put everything into the world and not His opposite.

1 Satan.

2 A Mix of mud and straw for making bricks.

3 God created Muhammad.

A good man was born one night in a lonely watering place where there was nothing else but termites. After he was born, his mother died. Muhammad found himself all alone there, crying. Some travelling merchants stopped nearby and heard something there. They went to see what it was, and they found a newborn infant. They loved the child and took it to give to an old Fula woman, saying, "Feed him for us, and we will collect him later". The old woman adored the baby. She fed it and it grew.

One day the traders came to see the old woman and told her that since the child had grown big enough, he should begin to work as a herder to pay for his keep. "He must work for us", they said, "he will be our slave". The old woman agreed, and the child became a herder. When he was out in the bush he was always protected from the sun by clouds. While out herding, he had very little to eat, and had to wait until he came in from the bush for his nourishment. He continued like this until one day some other herders saw how the clouds always protected him from the sun, and they realized that this was a great man.

In those days there was no Islam. They drank anything. God told Jibril¹ that he wanted Muhammad to build a mosque. In those days they did not pray at Mecca. Nabilai Ibrahima² went to build a mosque. After he had begun to work on the mosque, some infidels came in the night and destroyed what he had done, so there would be no prayers in Mecca nor any mosque built.

God told the earth that he had something for it to do. Nabilai Ibrahima would begin to work from six in the morning until dark, then

1 The angel Gabriel.

2 Muhammad.

the earth must conceal what work had been done. The earth agreed and did what God had commanded. Then the infidels came and said, "Where is it? Where is it? He did not work today". That is how the Kaaba was finished. When it was done the infidels were astonished and promptly began to pray.

The Prophet commanded the people to pray and some agreed, but others refused. Those who refused said Muhammad could be a man of God, but not them, and they would not pray. But when they entered the Kaaba they were in awe and became converted. Then Muhammad found that their refusal was not serious, and as payment for their share of the mosque that they refused to help build, he took some baggage they had of the kind called sakalêta.

The Prophet met with many problems. To help with the problems he would sometimes look through the eyes of Soumana Bounafali, which made it possible to see everywhere. When the Prophet wanted to go to war he would command Soumana to search out his enemies for him. Where were they? He searched for them and showed them to the Prophet.

One time Muhammad was hungry. He tied a cloth around his stomach so he could get something to eat. He was seen by a man who had two sons and a wife. The man saw that Muhammad was hungry, so he said he was going to kill his sheep. "Why do that?" asked the eldest son. "I am going to give it to Muhammad because he is hungry." The father killed his sheep to prepare Muhammad's meal.

The two sons were nearby talking. The elder brother said to the younger, "There, our father has killed the sheep. Now I am going to kill you". The little brother came and was killed. The elder brother went to the house and told his mother that he had killed his

little brother the way his father had slaughtereded the sheep. The grief-stricken mother went to get her youngest son without telling anyone, and brought him back to the house to wash him. The elder brother started to climb to the top of the house, but he suddenly fell and was also killed. The mother took the elder son, and putting him next to his brother, covered them both.

Later, when the food was prepared, the mother took the meat out to Muhammad to feed him. Muhammad told the woman to wake her sons so they could eat. But she said they were not hungry and that she would set their portion aside. Muhammad said he wanted them to come and eat. He went to see them and tried to awaken the younger brother first, and then the elder brother. Suddenly they both got up and began to eat. That happened because of their parents' faith.

God sent Jibril to tell Muhammad that He was going to operate on him. (The French know how to do this kind of operation.) God operated on Muhammad and took out his nervousness. After that Muhammad was never again angry. It is the nervousness that makes people mean.

Some brothers were astonished. They wondered why God favoured this man over everyone else. They decided to fight against him because everything he said was not agreed to in Mecca. Between them they made a sinister plan. They planned to kill Muhammad in the night. Because Muhammad was loved by God so much, they would kill him. But Muhammad was informed by God who sent Jibril to tell him that his enemies intended to murder him while he slept and that he must flee. Jibril came and told Muhammad to leave during the night to keep from having his throat cut. He must leave Mecca for Medina. Ah, yes!

In the darkest hour the enemies surrounded the bedroom. But a fortunate rain began to fall, which made the villagers sleep. The rain lessened the heat and everyone was so comfortable that they slept soundly. Jibril then told Muhammad to hurry and leave, and the Prophet fled with his warriors. The enemies knew nothing about it until morning when they said, "Ah, he has gone! He has gone!"

Muhammad became tired as they came near a cave. They went into the cave, and after they were inside a turtle-dove came and built a nest in front of the entrance and laid some eggs. Then a spider came and wove a web over the entrance.

As Muhammad and his friends were entering the cave, they passed a snake which tried to follow them in. But one of Muhammad's friends barred its path and would not let it go to the Prophet. Finally, the snake struck at the man and killed him, tok, tok. He killed the friend, and after the man fell, the snake joined the Prophet, saying, "I wanted to come to you but there was a man in front of me. I asked him to let me pass but he refused, so I killed him and he is gone". Muhammad said, "Ah, that was one of my companions. You could kill everyone but I am going to remove all your nervousness". He gave the snake some water and it lost all its venom. The snake said, "Good Muhammad, after you touch me I will lose my ability to kill". The Prophet touched him, and after that the snake killed no more. That snake was the boa which has no more venom.

The enemies came to the cave and were surprised to find a dove's nest and a spider's web in the entrance. They had a diviner with them, and he did some sorcery. He conjured with his stones and said the Prophet was in the cave. But the enemies thought the diviner was lying, because of the dove's nest and the spider's web, so they returned to Mecca.

In Mecca the enemies of Muhammad found a brave and willing man whom they asked to do their bad deed for them. They asked the man to go and kill Muhammad, and he went in search of the Prophet.

The Prophet and his companions were near Medina. They looked behind them and saw someone in pursuit. "Ah, ah! He is coming nearer. Let us go! Let us go!" The man who said he would lead the attack went ahead of the others and soon was alone in pursuit. He drew close to Muhammad, and God told the earth that the man must not be allowed to attack the Prophet, that it should make the man disappear. Then the earth opened up a big hole and swallowed the man and his horse. He tried everything to escape but could not. Jibril asked the man why he was pursuing Muhammad. Jibril told the man that if he would enter Medina as a Muslim, the earth would release him, but if he would not, he would never get loose. The man said, "Jibril, if I worship Muhammad will the earth release me?" Jibril said it would. When he had been released, the man went to the Prophet and said, "Eh, Muhammad! Since all men came from the Yatare, we are of the same ancestors. If God loves you, then I do too. I would like to be your jeli. I am your Surakata". There are really no such things as jeliw or nyamakalaw or the like. We all come originally from Adama and Hawa, of the same ancestors. After he was released from the earth, Surakata followed the Prophet and went with him to Medina. That is how the jeliw first came into the world. That is the end of the story of jeliw.

Surakata

Informant: Fanyama Diabate
Recorded at Bamako, 18 October 1975.

Our chief Muhammad made Surakata a jeli, otherwise he would not have been a jeli. Muhammad searched for people who did not pray and showed them his laws. When the Prophet was at Mecca, Sedina Umar, Sedina Zumana and N'fa Boubakar Sikidi fought with him against the kafirs.

One night when Muhammad went to bed in his house, the kafirs plotted to set fire to his house as he slept. But Sidiki went to Muhammad and said, "If you spend the night here, the kafirs will kill you. They plan to set fire to your room, but I have a camel on which you can escape to your uncle's in Medina".

Late at night Muhammad mounted the camel and rode away toward Medina. As he passed alone in the night, an old farmer and his wife happened to see him, and they felt afraid.

There were three mountains between Mecca and Medina, called Kulu Yome, Madalmagadasi Kulu, and Turusani Kulu. They were the first mountains in the world, and as Muhammad approached them, he heard the pursuing kafirs shout at him. At dawn he went into a cave in one of the mountains, and a turtle-dove built a nest in front of the entrance as if no one had passed through for a long time. The kafirs followed the camel tracks but failed to find the Prophet, so they returned to Mecca. The kafirs returned to Mecca and told Surakata that since he was braver than they, he must follow Muhammad and bring him back if he found him. Surakata mounted his horse and rode off in pursuit.

In the meantime, the kafirs called the dust diviners. The diviners made their signs in the dust and said, "If Surakata bends

his knee thus, his foot will arrive in the place where he will find Muhammad. If Surakata straightens his left thus, the foot will arrive in a place that will cause him to miss Muhammad".

Muhammad heard this and said, "May God give no power to the dust diviners".

The cowrie thrower cast his cowries and said, "Muhammad is here, he did not pass that place". Then Muhammad said, "May God give power to the cowries".

Surakata was on his way, but before he arrived, Muhammad left the cave and took the path to Medina. When Surakata on his horse came in sight of Muhammad he shouted, "Are you our chief Muhammad?" Muhammad replied that he was, and Surakata said, "Then get ready, for I have come to take you back". As Surakata drew nearer, Muhammad commanded the earth to trap him. Surakata and his horse sank into the earth, and Surakata became afraid and turned back. When he had gotten away from Muhammad, Surakata thought to himself, "Eh, my companions sent me to catch Muhammad and kill him, but I couldn't do it, it is not possible". But he turned again in pursuit, and when he came near he shouted, "Are you Muhammad?" And Muhammad replied that he was. Then Surakata said, "Get ready, for I have come to catch you". But when he tried to do it, Muhammad commanded the wind to stop Surakata. The wind blew so hard around Surakata that he could not see, and he shouted to Muhammad, "Tell the wind to release me and when I am free I will pray". And Muhammad said, "You have not spoken any words to show that you are afraid, you do not yet believe in prayer". Only after Surakata showed he was afraid did Muhammad command the wind to free him. When the wind had freed him he shaved his head and followed Muhammad.

They travelled together to Medina, and Surakata suggested to Muhammad that they go to war against the kafirs, the unbelievers. They returned to Mecca, and when they arrived Surakata said, "People of Mecca, you have not seen the equal of our chief Muhammad. You must love him and follow him".

Then the people said, "Surakata has gone mad, we must cut grass for him to wash himself with". They cut grass for Surakata who said, "If you will not accept Muhammad voluntarily, you will accept him through force". Surakata rejoined Muhammad and they killed the people who refused to pray.

Muhammad and Surakata travelled from village to village along with Sedina Umar, Sedina Zumana and N'fa Boubakar Sidiki. They came to the house of Seydou Oudjou who was very poor. Seydou Oudjou told his wife to bring what little corn they had, and to kill their chicken to prepare a meal for their visitors. The other villagers said, "There is a light in Seydou Oudjou's house, and the people in that house are not good people". God gave all things in the world to Muhammad, for God loved people. There is a way people must work.

Muhammad and Surakata travelled from village to village, and when they entered a village, Surakata would shout, "Our chief Muhammad has come!" Then some of the villagers would bring horses, others would come with gold, and others with silver. Surakata, Fosana and Dumfaila, these three nyamakalaw followed the Prophet. When they got gold, Muhammad divided it into three portions, giving two portions to Surakata and one to the others. The others said, "Muhammad, why have you given two portions of gold to Surakata and only one to us?" Muhammad replied, "Because Surakata and you are not the same. Whether or not

one gains respect depends on Surakata. If you are jealous of Surakata I will leave him at home tomorrow and I will take only you with me". The next day he left Surakata at home and took the others with him. When they came to the gate of a mosque they had to beg for drinking water.

The next day Surakata went and said to the people, "Villagers, did you not know that the person who spent the night at the gate of your mosque is our Prophet Muhammad?" Then the villagers brought many gifts which Muhammad divided into three portions. He gave two portions to Surakata and only one to the others.

They came to another place and Muhammad said to Fosana, "I have a wife I want to leave with you while I continue my travels". Muhammad left his wife there and went on a journey. Fosana was tempted to couple with her, but he remembered that she had been left in his trust. He went into the bathing hut and cut off his testicles, and said, "One's manhood depends on his sex. Our chief Muhammad trusted his wife to me, and though I wanted to couple with her, I could not let it happen".

Though Muhammed was travelling far away, he saw what Fosana had done, so he cast a spell to preserve the sexual parts from rotting. When the Prophet returned from his journey, he said, "Fosana, I saw what you did. I choose you as the most trustworthy of my people".

To Surakata Muhammad said, "You will be a jeli". Surakata asked him what a jeli was, and Muhammad said, "People who speak well are jeliw, so you are my jeli. You are brave".

Muhammad cut of a piece of his own flesh and gave it to Surakata to eat. This showed that the jeli was not the same as the others.

All the jeliw descended from Surakata. Muhammad gave Surakata a wife to marry, and Surakata had three sons who were the ancestors of all jeliw in the world. This is the end of the story of Surakata.

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Surakata

Informant: Jeli Mamary Kouyate
 Recorded at Kolokani, August 1975

The truest of the true,

The wisest of the wise,

Wahidu is God Himself,

Also known as Alatana.

He who made Wasamusu,¹ He who made the sun in the sky,

He who made the moon in the sky.

He who made the jeliw.

He who made Wali Kamaru.²

Drawer of the sun,

Maker of the moon.

If you hear jeli, the jeliw came from Surakata.

The father of Surakata is Bounou Maliki.

The father of Bounou Maliki is Bounou Kataliki.

If you hear jeli, the jeliw themselves,

This is about them.

The whole earth was made for the Prophet Muhammad.

The one who created the whole earth without using any roof supports,

He who made the fliers in the sky,

Things that crawl on their bellies,

1 Mamary said this was the name of one of the angels.

2 Another angel.

Things that jump,
Things that stay in one place and things that walk on their feet,
Things that have ears and things that have no ears,
God made all these things for Muhammad.
Before that there was no celebration.

We are the things that have ears, and things that have no
ears lay eggs.
Those who have ears give birth, but those with no ears lay eggs.
If you hear about the fliers, those are birds,
And if you hear about things that crawl on their bellies,
those are snakes.
If you hear about things not moving, those are trees, and things
that jump are frogs.

Surakata was fearless.
He was so fearless that his heart was drunk.
There were 313 prophets, all of them older than Muhammad,
Though Muhammad was older than all of them.
He was their youngest brother,
But he was older than all of them.
His little brother was Badara Alou.

At the time of Muhammad's birth, nobody agreed with him.
They incited Surakata to attack the Prophet, because Surakata
was fearless.

Surakata and his horse raced after the Prophet.

When Surakata drew near to Muhammad, the Prophet stood still
on the ground and shouted at him.

Then the earth trapped Surakata and his horse, and Surakata
begged Muhammad to free him.

As for Muhammad, it was not easy to make him angry, so he asked
the earth to release Surakata.

Surakata, you must know, got angry then, and he continued his
pursuit of the Prophet.

When he drew near to Muhammad he tried to capture him, but
Muhammad shouted, and once again Surakata was trapped,
with his horse buried up to its knees.

This Surakata begged Muhammad to release him.

So God's Messenger again asked the earth to release Surakata.

By this time, you must know, Surakata, was very angry.

He began to catch up with Muhammad, but just as he got close,
Muhammad again commanded the earth to trap him.

This time the horse was burried to its chest.

Once again Surakata begged Muhammad to free him, and the Prophet
commanded the earth to release him.

From that time, Surakata joined Muhammad's faith.

He told the others that if they agreed with Muhammad, they agreed.

But if they did not, that was their business, for he was the
messenger of God.

Surakata was the first one of them to agree with Muhammad.

If a mansa went somewhere, the jeli accompanied him and sang
his praises with gusto.¹

This was the work of the jeli.

Every mansa had a griot, every mansa had a blacksmith.

The jeli played ngoni for the mansa.

If someone came to attack or threaten the mansa, the griot would say,

"Why do you allow this, a mansa such as you?

Will you be brave, or not?"

This is the griot's work,

You know, a jeli was the first brave man of ancient times.

They were very brave.

Such a one was Surakata, Surakata Bounou Maliki.

The role of a jeli was not great in time of war, but it was great.

Nowadays we have a commandant, and they have advisers.

In those days the mansaw had griots who served them that way.

The role of the griot was like that of our guardians and
managers of today.

Surakata Bounou Maliki was a brave man, Surakata yes.

When our Holy Chief was born, he was the Prophet who was

older than everyone,

And everyone was older than him.

1 The remainder of this tradition is Mamary's response to the question "What did griots do in time of war?"

In those days they did not pray.

Even in Mecca they did not pray.

There were twelve tribes in the world in those days.

Those twelve tribes, when the Prophet was born,

Those twelve tribes joined together and said,

"If we do not betray¹ this man, he will be a great problem for us".

Three of the chiefs of the twelve tribes agreed on this.

One of them said he would put Muhammad on a camel and send
him into a far away land.

The second chief disagreed.

He said, "If we do that, we will release danger from ourselves
and put it in someone else's house".

The third chief said,

"No, here is what we should do.

"Let us build a hut and put him in it and seal up the door.

We can make two small windows and pass him his food
through them".

"Ah!" said the others,

"If we do this, we know the men who follow him will find the
prison and rescue him.

"It will be better to kill him".

They agreed to do it at night.

That night they would kill the Prophet.

But you know, that day God told his messenger,

1 The Bambara word here is danfa, which normally has the sense of treachery or betrayal, but Mamary uses it more in the sense of a verb meaning "to assassinate" or "eliminate".

That was Shaykna Jibril,¹

To go and warn the Prophet to escape.

So that day the Prophet told Boubakary to take his place.

There were four men there.

Boubakary, Shaykna Usman, Shaykna Umar and Shaykna Alou.

And at that time the Prophet was called Nabiou.

To go from earth to heaven took five hundred years.

The first heaven yes,

The first heaven.

Shaykna Jibril came down in the wink of an eye,

In one wink of an eye.

Just as he arrived, the three conspirators were preparing

to kill the Prophet that night.

The Prophet Muhammad,

God in his kindness and mercy replaced him with Boubakary.

But when Muhammad tried to leave he found them waiting at the door.

You know, he filled his hand with dust and said a blessing.

And as they lay in wait at the door he threw it in their eyes.

All the dust flew in three men's eyes and put them to sleep.

They all went to sleep.

They did not wake up until the next morning.

When dawn came, they awakened.

When they got up they said, "Eh! What has happened to us?"

"We cannot let this happen,

"We must follow him".

1 The angel Gabriel.

In those days Surakata was the bravest of all.

He saddled his horse and followed the Prophet.

He searched for Muhammad's tracks and followed his trail

but did not see anything.

Continuing in pursuit, he at last saw an object in the distance.

As he gradually drew nearer, he saw that it was a man.

Surakata rode his horse in pursuit of Muhammad.

When he got close to the Prophet he tried to capture him.

The Prophet shouted to the earth and the ground opened to

trap Surakata and his horse.

Surakata pleaded with the Prophet who commanded the earth

to release him.

Surakata swelled up with anger.

He still wanted to capture the Prophet.

But when he tried again, Muhammad commanded the earth to entrap him.

Surakata begged the Prophet to release him.

He prayed to Nabiou.

Again the earth released him because Muhammad praised Allah.

Whatever he asked of God, God would do it.

You know, Surakata tried once more to capture the Prophet,

And Nabiou once again commanded the earth to entrap him.

The ground opened up and buried them up to the chest of

Surakata's horse.

Again Surakata beseeched the Prophet.

Muhammad praised God, and the earth released them.

That day Surakata was the first of the kafirs to adopt the faith.

The other unbelievers were betrayed that day,

Because the bravest of them all went over to the Prophet,
Though they had relied on him for their courage.

Surakata was the first convert to Islam.

He told the other conspirators that Muhammad was the prophet
of God and that they must accept the faith whether they
liked it or not.

This is how Surakata was converted.

The entire company of Surakata also converted and became
followers of the Prophet.

On that day, Surakata sang the Prophet's praises with two
hundred and one different names,

Praise names for Muhammad.

On being released from the earth he sang two hundred and one names,
Two hundred and one praise names for the Prophet.

At this time they went on a jihad.

What is a jihad?

In those days, if you refused to pray,

You know, they would kill you.

In spite of this the men of Mecca refused to pray.

In those days the men of Mecca were rebellious and fought
against the Prophet.

This caused him to leave Mecca and go to the house of his
uncle in Medina.

God sent Shaykna Jibril to tell Muhammad to go to his uncle.

The day he took the road from Mecca, they followed him on
their horses.

Muhammad took refuge in a cave,

Yes, a cave.

As soon as he entered the cave,

The cave you know,

A spider spun a web over the door.

When the spider finished spinning his web,

A dove built a nest at the door.

The men of Mecca followed the Prophet straight to the cave

and stopped in front of it.

"Eh!" they said, "A spider has spun a web over the door,

"A dove has built a nest at the door, and the tracks stop here.

"It looks like no one has passed here for a year".

In those days laterudaliw¹ were numerous.

In those days the lateru required one hundred and twenty signs.

The laterudali sat down and began to make his signs in the dust.

He said, "If you seek the Prophet, search for him in the cave.

"If you do not seek him, do not look for him in the cave, for he
is in there".

Muhammad heard this and he said to him,

"You speak the truth, but God gives no baraka² to your truth".

Then the koloni merekela³ sat down and began to throw his cowries.

He said, "I do not want to contradict the laterudali,

"But the Prophet is not in the cave.

1 Diviners who foretold the future by drawing symbols in the dust.

2 Power, force.

3 Cowrie diviner.

"He is not there".

When Muhammad heard this he said,

"You are wrong, but God give you baraka in your lie".

Then the men of Mecca followed the advice of the cowrie
thrower and went away from the cave.

Shaykna Jibril you know, changed himself into a bird.

He changed into a hawk that flew down, you know,

And va ta barikala,¹

He took away the baraka from the laterudali's hundred and
twenty signs,

He left him only sixteen.

Nowadays, all laterudaliw have only sixteen signs to draw
in the dust.

The people of Medina were waiting to welcome the Prophet.

They were happy to have him come to Medina.

It was from there that he made his jihad.²

When Mohammad and his followers visited the villages,
Surakata would go ahead of them. When they approached a village
Surakata would run ahead and tell the women to prepare their best
food, to cook their tastiest dishes. He told them the friend of
God was coming, the comrade of our Creator. Everyone cooked the
best food that they possibly could. When all the meals were

1 Expression of rejoicing.

2 Mamary stops singing here and continues his narrative in prose.

prepared, Muhammad had Surakata taste them all first. Then he would tell Surakata to choose the one he liked best and take it for himself. This made Badara Alou¹ angry.

Badara Alou, you must know, said to the Prophet, "Sallehli Alsalemu means Muhammad,² God's bounty and happiness be upon him. Now you tell Surakata to take for himself the food he likes best. Is he better than the rest of us?"

Then Muhammad asked God to cause Surakata's eyes to become sore. The next day when they began their journey, Surakata was not among the travellers. Muhammad and his followers walked all day, but no one offered them food. They walked all the next day and again no one offered them a meal. And yet another day they walked and no one said come and eat. You must know that Badara Alou then said to the Prophet, "Nabiou, when we began travelling we had plenty of food, but now as we travel, why have we nothing to eat?"

Muhammad replied, "You wanted the man from whose mouth we got food to stay behind. You said that his feet must not be in the travelling with us. So how can we get food?" Badara Alou said, "Then let us return now, and you must praise God so that Surakata's sore eyes may be healed". Then the Prophet prayed to God and Surakata's eyes were made well. When you cause suffering to someone, it can be paid back to you in many ways.

Surakata was provoked at Badara Alou because of the words he had spoken to Muhammad. You must know that Badara Alou had been

1 Muhammad's son-in-law.

2 A style of praising.

impudent. Badara Alou's wife was Muhammad's first daughter, Binta. She was called Fatamata Binta. While Badara Alou was away, Surakata went to see Binta. He said to her "Have you never loved a worthy man? Why did you marry such an insignificant one? This is something that is not natural. I have never heard of such a thing". Surakata exaggerated the faults of Badara Alou. Before this, Binta had loved Badara Alou, but now she had no more desire for him. In the past, when he would return from the holy war, Fatamata Binta would bring him water. But the next time Badara Alou returned, Fatamata Binta refused to fetch water to give him. She refused to give him water.

Badara Alou tethered his horse and got his own water to drink, then he went to see Nabiou. He went to the Prophet and said, "Oh Muhammad, Surakata has been there before me". Muhammad said, "Go to Surakata and bow to him. Go to Surakata and cut the tongue out of his mouth, go and cut his tongue". Badara Alou began to sharpen the blade of his knife. He sharpened his knife, you must know, and prepared to cut out Surakata's tongue. But the Prophet told him to stop. He said, "I did not mean for you to do that. If I told you to go and cut out his tongue, I did not mean the tongue in his mouth".

Said Muhammad, "There is another way to cut out the tongue of Surakata. Go and bow to him and try to give him some important thing. Present him with a large gift". That day, Badara Alou loaded seven camels and offered all of them, with their loads, you must know, to Surakata. For Muhammad had said, "Go you now and give him a gift"; t'i jaraman 'na'sa. Muhammad's mouth was fast

to say this, and it sounded like he just said jeli. This is how the word jeli was discovered. When they said to go and give him a gift, they just said jeli.

Surakata

Informant: Nantene Je Kamissoko
Recorded at Bamako, 21 July 1975

The fighting marabout Aliou is right.¹

Solinade, Badara is right.

Sing out to Sinali Dara, Badara Saja, Sinali² is right.

On the marabout's left hand, Sinali is right,

On the right hand of the marabout, Aliou is right, Badara Saja.

The ancestor of the jeliw,

Surakata was the jeli ancestor.

He combined with the disciples to fight the man of the sword

who was the Prophet our leader, to fight him.

Surakata was brave and he was urged on by the others,

He went ahead of them to battle our chief.

It was Surakata who was brave,

And when he got near, Muhammad cast a spell on the earth.

When he dissolved the earth he took Surakata and put him

in that hole, Surakataaa.

1 Aliou is Muhammad. His being "right" refers to the fact that the griot ancestor would not convert to Islam until Muhammad had demonstrated his power. Therefore, the griots now sing that Muhammad and his disciples were right. One meaning implicit in this tale is that by attacking Muhammad, Surakata provided an opportunity for the Prophet to demonstrate his awesome powers, and thus the griot ancestor was instrumental in the establishment of Muhammad's acceptance as the true prophet of God. In a way, he was stimulated to perform great deeds the way West African griots have traditionally urged on their patrons.

2 These are the Bambara names for some of Muhammad's disciples.

Cry out to Sinali Dara, Solinade Aliou is right.

The right hand of the marabout,

The left hand of the marabout,

Darajanni is right.

The son of the Hausa,¹ man of the staff, Darajanni is right.

The jeliw have come.

If you have not been Muslim, if you are not Muslim, neither
will we become Muslim.

The funew have come.

If you have not become Muslim, if you will not be Muslim,
neither will we become Muslim.

They who have hair say Muhammad,

Those who have no hair say Muhammad,

Darajanni is right.

Those who pray to Muhammad, those who pray not to Muhammad,

If Muhammad was not born, the earth was not created.

If Muhammad was not made, the sky was not created.

Praise to Allah, Muhammad is His prophet.

Darajanni is right,

While the enemies laugh and the friends only dream,

While the enemies laugh and the friends only dream.

Badara Sajan took the jeli back to his patron, took the
wife to her disgraced husband.

Badara is right, Aliou is right,

Breaker of big heads and slasher of big mouths.

The ancestor of jeliw, the jeliw came from Surakata.

The marabout is not good,

1 The reference is to travelling Hausa merchants.

The marabout is not good,

The marabout who mixes evil in his gourd, you must be his enemy.

The marabout is not good,

The marabout is not good.

The marabout with a scarf, that marabout is not good.

Sidi Bakaye, Bakaye Camara,

Ah, Sidi Bakaye,

Sidi Bakaye, Bakaye Camara,

Ah, Sidi Bakaye.

Suffering is not good,

Suffering is not good.

The suffering of enemies, ah, suffering is not good,

I remain in suffering.

The son of Hausa, the man of the staff,

The son of Hausa, man with much merchandise,

Darajanni and Hausa.

The fighting marabout Aliou is right,

Salinade Darajanni is right, Jurukafa.¹

1 Jurukafa was identified by my informants as the sword of Badara Aliou, who is usually said to have been Muhammad's son-in-law.

Surakata and Fosana

Informant: Fadian Soumanou
Recorded at Bamako, 5 November 1975

God created the seven parts of the sky for the love of the Prophet. He created Larasi for the love of the Prophet. He created Sabine for love of the Prophet. He created Habine for love of the Prophet. He created Haruta for love of the Prophet. He created Maruta for love of the Prophet. There is but one God, Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet.

The Prophet's mother bore him, and he was born noble. His mother died in childbirth and left Muhammad lying alone in his infancy. Everyone in all the lands of Africa, they called all the women and asked how this little man of God might be saved. But the baby put a finger in its mouth and sucked on it as if it were a breast, tjoi, tjoi, tjoi. The Prophet sucked his finger like a breast when he was a baby, and this is how he nourished himself.

Among the women of Africa who came to see him, Fulematu had only one breast on her chest. This grandmother of the Ture, Fulematu Ture was married to an Arab. They were poor. They had only the clothes they wore. "Ah", they said, "the Prophet has been born, but how can we go there? We have no clothes, we are nude".¹

At this time the Prophet was born. Fulematu Ture and her Arab husband came to Muhammad's door where the baby prophet was lying in a room. She greeted the Prophet and he raised his head, tjoi. When Fulematu put one of her feet into the room, a second breast appeared on her chest. She sat down on the ground, took the Prophet

1 At this point Soumanou was interrupted by one of his wives, who said, "Don't talk about that, don't speak about their nudity or their way of living. I only offer this advice, it is no big thing".

on to her lap, and the baby began to suckle her breast, tjoi, tjoi, tjoi. The people were shocked and said, "Eh! The ways of God are hard to understand, God's ways are unknown. This dirty woman, this death-like woman, the Prophet has suckled her breast".

That is why we call the Ture "Manju": Ture Manju Mori,¹ Berete Mande Mori, Tomoro Makan Jan, Berete Manju.

So the Prophet suckled Fulematu's breast and this is why she was called Manju..

The Prophet gave nobility to the people of Mecca though he wore a torn shirt like a beggar. Some people of Mecca said Muhammad had no equal there. Muhammad humbled himself and God gave him great nobility. But Muhammad had brothers who were enemies, so God in His kingdom gave a message to Jibril to take to the Prophet, telling him to go to Medina. He was to go to his mother's home in Medina. The people of Medina believed that if you know God you receive great respect, but if you don't know God, you will receive no respect.

When Jibril gave the Prophet his message, Muhammad started for Medina. Surakata Boun Jafara, Surakata Boun Maliki, Surakata was an Arab. The people of Mecca said to Surakata that if he could catch Muhammad and bring him back to them, they would reward him well. Surakata got ready to pursue the Prophet. He mounted his horse and rode after Muhammad, and when he began to catch up with the Prophet, Muhammad asked God to make the earth trap Surakata. Suddenly Surakata and his horse sank into a hole. Muhammad then prayed to God and the earth released Surakata. Again Surakata tried to catch Muhammad and take him back to his enemies in Mecca. Again Muhammad prayed, and the earth trapped Surakata, burying him up to the neck. Seeing that

1 Mori = marabout, Muslim cleric.

he could not free himself, Surakata became a believer and said, "There is but one God, Allah, and Muhammad is his Prophet". Then the earth released Surakata, and he began to praise Muhammad with the name Sejul Basaru Mamadu.

After Muhammad freed Surakata and gave him his turban, Surakata looked very different. When he returned to Mecca, the people did not recognize him, saying "Ah, this is not Surakata". But Surakata said it was truly him, and when the people asked why he was so changed, he said, "I have joined the religion of the man I went to catch". Then the people said, "We had confidence in you, you who are the bravest of the men of Mecca. If you have agreed to pray with Muhammad, then we will also pray with Muhammad".

Surakata Bunu Maliki, Surakata Bunu Jafara, when he travelled with the Prophet, they went with the other disciples to convert people to Islam. When they arrived in a village, Surakata Bunu Jafara would say, "Sejul Basaru, Sejul Kawadini, Sejul Kurahayi,¹ the man for whose love the sky was created has come! The man for whose love the earth was created has come! The man for whose love the furry and non-furry animals were created has come!"

When Surakata said this, the villagers would come out and give much gold, silver and other things. When they gave these things to the Prophet, he would give much of it to Surakata Bunu Jafara and only a little to the other disciples. This angered the disciples, who said "It is we who work hard to carry the baggage, and yet when the Prophet gets anything, he gives most of it to Surakata Bunu Jafara and only a small portion to us". They said this to Sedina Alou who was the Prophet's son-in-law, he was married to Fatamata Bintu.

1 Praise-name for Muhammad.

So Muhammad heard about the disciples' protest and he told Surakata that when the time came for their next journey, Surakata should plead illness and not go. When it was time to leave, Surakata said he had a headache and would have to stay home. The Prophet and his disciples started off and at the first village they spent the day outside the gates without anyone inside knowing it was Muhammad. Finally, the travellers begged some water to drink and continued on their way. When they arrived at the next village, the people did not know Muhammad had come, though he and his disciples spent the night there.

As Muhammad continued to pass through many villages without anyone knowing he was the Prophet, Surakata prepared to follow, saying "The jealousy of enemy brothers is a hard thing". Surakata went to the first village Muhammad had visited on that journey and asked if the people had seen the Prophet. They said, "We saw some marabouts outside, but we did not know it was Muhammad".

The Prophet's son-in-law, Sedina Alou, was one of the disciples who thought Muhammad gave too much to Surakata. This made Surakata angry, for he knew Sedina Alou was against him. Surakata went to see Fatamata Bintu who was the wife of Sedina Alou, and said to her, "Ah, Fanta, so you wanted to marry the most disrespectful man of us all? It is your own husband who is the ugliest man in the world". Fatamata did not reply, she just sat down and bowed her head. At that moment the shame of women first began.

Surakata returned to Muhammad and said, "I saw your daughter today, and she was not happy. Perhaps someone has done her a wrong". Then Sedina Alou got up and said, "Great Muhammad, I want to see my wife". He went and called to Fatamata but she did not answer him.

He called many times but received no reply. Sedina Alou returned to Muhammad and said, "Ah, Muhammad, my wife is angry at me today. I have had a quarrel with my wife". But Muhammad said, "No, you had no quarrel with your wife, you have a quarrel with Surakata. You said I gave too many things to Surakata and not enough to you. You have no quarrel with your wife, you have a quarrel with Surakata. If you give many gifts to Surakata, then you will be happy again with your wife".

Sedina Alou went to Surakata and gave him one hundred things. After that Surakata went back to Fatamata Bintu and said, "Eh, Fanta, God has made you happy. The man you married whose name is Sedina Alou, he is greater than any man". This made Fatamata happy again. Surakata returned to the Prophet and said, "Muhammad, your daughter is happy today". When Sedina Alou returned home, Fatamata Bintu welcomes him warmly, and he raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Praise God, the thing Muhammad respects must not be disrespected by anyone. Surakata must be respected". From then on, Sedina Alou gave his share of things to Surakata.

Surakata Bunu Jafara was a constant companion of the Prophet. Surakata was an Arab. This is the story of Surakata, and it ends here.

Abai Bulazairu who was the funu ancestor, was a blind man in Medina. When the Prophet and his followers arrived in Medina they went to the mosque, and the people of Medina rushed to them there, yirrr! The people said, "The Prophet and his followers are coming! Muhammad and his disciples are coming!" The disciples said to Muhammad that being the son of a good man was better than being the

son of a well-dressed man. The Prophet disagreed, saying, "No, being the son of a well-dressed man is better than being the son of a good man. If you are well dressed now and go home with people, they will give you a nice place to stay. But if you wear ragged clothes when you go home with people, they will give you a bad place". The Prophet said this, but the disciples did not agree. So the Prophet wore ragged clothes, and the disciples wore their good clothes. When the people of Medina came rushing to welcome them, they went up to the men wearing good clothes and offered them nice places to stay, and took them home. But the Prophet in his ragged clothes was left sitting at the mosque.

The blind man Abai Bulazairu went tapping with his stick to the mosque and said, Salam alekum, rambatoulaye; salam alekum, rambatoulaye. When he heard someone reply to his greeting, the blind man said, "I came to find a man of the Prophet to spend the night at my house". And Muhammad said, "But I am only a beggar". The blind man said, "Are you not among the people of the Prophet?" And Muhammad replied, "Yes, I am among his followers". Then the blind man said, "Come then, and spend the night at my house so I may gain the Prophet's blessing.

The Prophet agreed, and they went to the blind man's house. When they got to his house, the blind man told his wife to go to the granary and bring a kilo of maize for the beggar's meal. The wife asked the blind man how they would live if she did that, and her husband replied, "It is God who brings life". The wife went to the granary door and said, Maidala hibahi; yakou wala ibafou, lahila, "People's things get used up, but God's things do not". She brought her husband the kilo of maize and said, "This is all we have". The blind man replied, "Yes, it is God who brings life".

Turning to the Prophet who sat huddled in a corner, the blind man said, "Beggar, this is all we have to give you". And Muhammad said, "If it pleases God, may he give you maize and people to eat it". The blind man replied, "May God answer your blessing". Before the next day, the granary from which the kilo of maize was taken was found to be overflowing with maize.

Muhammad said, "Though I am only a beggar, I will give you a nasi.¹ When you pray at dawn, tell your wife to bring you a pot of water, and you must put the nasi in it and wash your face. What you find will be given you by God for your generosity and faith".

The Prophet passed the night there, and the next morning after dawn prayers, he and his disciples departed. The blind man called for a pot of water, put the nasi in it, and washed his face. Suddenly the blind man's eyes were clear, frerrrr! He could see again. he said, "Thanks be to God the all-powerful". All the villagers went to see him. They said, "Fisana, Fisana, his eyes have been opened, and his hunger is banished. Fisana, Fisana, it is you who are the best in all Medina, for you gave lodging to the Prophet". All the villagers then called him "Jeli Fisana".

1 Nasi = blessing or amulet in the form of scripture written in ink, then washed off, and the resulting solution is washed with or drunk.

Nyamakala Ancestors

Informant: Jeli Manga Sissoko
Recorded at Kolokani, 10 July 1975

The griots came from Surakata. Surakata was half divine and half human, and he was with Muhammad, the messenger of God. Surakata was kind, intelligent, and faithful. He encouraged Muhammad by praising him in the war of Kaybara, and Muhammad blessed him, saying, "May none of your race be behind the others. May no one be poor, unhappy or ill. May everyone be before other people. May God give them the world. May they always be able to do as they like. May rich and poor alike provide for them".

This Surakata fathered Jakumanduka.¹ Jakumanduka was the father of Bala Faseke Kouyate and Tuntun Manian Kandian. Bala Faseke Kouyate was the father of Musa, Manjamaka, Baturu Mori, Satemadesa and Duku Moko Toro. From these we got jeliw.

When we are bathing, we sing:

Sixteen slaves² have taken the quiver,³
Sixteen slaves have left the quiver,
Sixteen slaves have taken the arrows,
Sixteen slaves have left the arrows.

There were four ngara:⁴ one was the blacksmith ancestor Ndamangiri. We call him "Golo'golo'ba wolo" antelope and goat hide.⁵ The second ngara was the fune ancestor, Fune Fosana. When

1 Cat vulture.

2 This can mean slaves in the literal sense, or it can refer to men in general who, as God's creation, are subject to His will in all things.

3 Gone to war.

4 Master craftsmen or artists.

5 A reference to the bellows with which the blacksmith fires his forge.

begging they will enter a compound and leave a coat there, then before leaving the village they will go back to that compound and demand money.¹ They are not liked. The third ngara is the jeli ancestor Surakata, and the fourth ngara is the garanke ancestor, Walali Ibrahima.

Sixteen slaves. These slaves carried the arrows, these slaves carried the quiver. The chief of them all was Fakoli. Fakoli came from Genie Kaba, Genie Kabataba, Genie Mandarusi, Genie Malahu and Masaduwa. This Masaduwa went with the Genies. He was a whirlwind. Genie Taba was the father of Sumanguru of Soso. Habili Jan Kante, Soso Bala, Kama Kante, Kankoba Kante. This Kankoba Kante was the father of Fakoli.

Sixteen slaves have taken the arrows, sixteen slaves have left the arrows. Sixteen slaves have taken the arrows, sixteen slaves have left the arrows. The leader of all these slaves was Fakoli. He did the big war for Sunjata and the small war for himself.

Sallala Aliyu Salimu² was born on Monday. His slave Bilali was born on Tuesday. This slave Bilali held the bit of Muhammad's camel. This slave Bilali, on the day of Kaybara, blew his trumpet for all to assemble. This slave Bilali was the father of Mamadou Kanou. Mamadou Kanou was the father of Kanan Singo, Kanou Nonkon Singo, Lawali Singo. Bilali sired these three men. These three Singo were divided into three families. Kanan Singo's descendants

1 This is more often said to be a practice of the gaulow, who are often identified as itinerant mendicants, praise-singers and street performers.

2 Muhammad.

are the Kouloubaly, Kanou Nonkon Singo's descendants are the Konate and Lawali Singo's descendants are the Keita. That is how they were divided up.

The Diarra's ancestor, Woron Kante, was a famous warrior from Sangaran. And what about Tiramakhan, who is descended from Muhammad? He was Muhammad's grandson. He gave this jamu to himself: An tara wele, "We want to call you". Antarawele. Antarawele became Tarawele or Traore. That Tiramakhan gave thirteen men and three great, famous warriors to Muhammad on the day of Kaybara. They all died from the guns except Tukuru Jambatigi, who came and said he was going to kill himself. But Tiemoko Kumabafo, "big speaker"; Tiemoko Kobadan, "expert in all things"; "Tiemoko's-mouth-never-bypasses-any-words, he says what he likes",¹ he said, "Do not kill yourself. The person who kills himself cannot get revenge on his enemies". He said, "Are there not still four ngara? Does Muhammad not have four ngara? Are there not still Muhammad's five Muslims? Don't Muhammad's five Muslims: Cisse, Jiame, Kouma, Berete and Simaga Toure also still exist?" Tukuru replied, "Yes, they are still here". Then Tiemoko said, "If they are still here, go and have them announce the names of the deceased. You must not kill yourself before having children. If a person kills himself without sons, he cannot be revenged".

Having heard this, Tukuru went on his way and arrived first at the house of the fune. "Fune Fosana", he said, "thirteen men and three famous men went with Muhammad to the war of Kaybara and

1 These praise-names probably refer to a famous griot named Tiemoko.

all died except Tukurú. I have come for you to go and announce the names of those who died. I will give you one hundred pieces of gold". That one, Fune Fosana refused,¹ so Tukurú left him and went to the garanke ancestor, Walali Ibrahima, and said, "We went to the war of Kaybara, thirteen men and three famous men for the war. Everyone was killed except for myself. I wanted to kill myself, until someone told me that he who kills himself is not revenged. I come for you to announce the names of those who were killed. I will give you one hundred pieces of gold". Walali Ibrahima said, "A person can refuse to say such a thing, even if well paid".

Then Tukurú went to the place of the numu ancestor. He said, "Ndamangiri, ancestor of the smiths". This Ndamangiri's clan was called Fane, and they were famed as masters of the bellows. Those people took iron from the fire with their bare hands until God prepared tongs and sent them to the numu with the angel Gabriel. Gabriel gave them to the numu so they could keep their hands out of the fire. This Ndamangiri said, "One person dare not take it upon himself to announce the names of the dead to all their families, the thirteen and three famous warriors. It is better to refuse to carry such bad tidings, even if you are well paid".

Then Tukurú went to the jeli ancestor, Surakata, and asked him to announce the deaths for one hundred pieces of gold. Surakata said, "That is no problem". He sent a message to Baturu Mori, Musa Mantia Makhan, Jelimuso Toumou Mandian Kandian, Sate Wadessa, Dankan Mokotoro and Niane Kouyate, saying they would have

1 To be a bearer of bad tidings was considered something to be avoided, because the bearer's name became attached to the incident when the mourner would wander through the streets crying that so-and-so had told them of the death.

to go to Tiramakhan.

Then they made the drums. They made four hundred big drums to play for Tiramakhan. They made a very big balafon, four hundred balafons for Tiramakhan. They took along a very big tiele, four hundred tieles for Tiramakhan. They took a very big gaga, four hundred big gagas for Tiramakhan.

Tiramakhan's two children, Damassa Woulamba and Damassa Woulambi killed the buffalo in Liswangara. One of its horns was gold, the other was silver, one eye was gold, the other silver, two feet were gold, and the others silver, half of its body was gold and the rest silver. It was Woulamba who killed it, so they took Sogolon the hunchback and gave her to Woulamba telling him to take her as payment for his arrow. When Woulamba had killed the buffalo, his older brother came and said to him, "Oh, my brother, if you had been a jeli, no one would refuse to give you money". This is where the Diabate jeliw came from.

As for the jeli-dunu, I have told you that it is a very big drum. Four hundred big drums were made. They also made the gagan, which is a very big drum of the jeliw, as is the tiele. About their bala, you yourself know it, you have seen their small bala, but the jeli's big drum, jeli-dunu, it came from the ancestor Surakata. The real jeliw are descended from Surakata, and the jeli-dunu came from them.

Those jeli-dunu were played for Sumanguru in Soso, a village near Banamba. They played gaga for Sumanguru, a big bala and four hundred smaller ones were played for Soso Sumanguru. But when he was killed, the jeliw were kept in Mande by Sunjata.

The jeliw are the masters of the big drum, and jeli-dunu came from those times. Yes, the jeli-dunu came from Bala Faseke Kouyate, but the ancestor of all jeliw is Surakata. The jeli-dunu, bala and ntamani, another drum, were all played in the time of Soso Sumanguru. The jeli-dunu was taken from a bird-mask dance in Kirina, in Mande. The bird-mask of Kirina. The dancing of the bird-mask of Kirina in Mande was taken from the Koumare. "Koumare" was the jamu of some numu people. All kinds of jeli dancing have been taken from the Koumare, the Koumare of Wagadu.

Nyamakala Ancestors

Informant: Satigi Soumarouo
Recorded at Kabaya, 2 September 1975

The ancestor of the funew was named Mali Balansari. He was a blind man of Mecca who had only one wife. One day the Prophet and his disciples were having a discussion. Muhammad said knowledge was more important than clothing, but the disciples claimed clothing was more important than knowledge. So they decided to attempt a journey of chance. They started on their way and arrived at the village where Mali Balansari lived. When they arrived, the village notables came to meet them. The well-dressed disciples were taken to lodge in nice houses, but Muhammad in his rags was abandoned in the village square. Mali Balansari, who was not a native of that place, came hobbling and groping his way along, and when he felt the presence of Muhammad, he cried, "Eh! Is there still one of the strangers here?" Muhammad said, "Yes, one of the strangers is still here". Then Mali Balansari invited the Prophet to his house.

When they got to his house, Mali Balansari took the few particles of millet he had left and told his wife to cook it. He had nothing else to eat, but the wife prepared it and they shared it with the Prophet. Muhammad said to Mali Balansari, "You are better than everyone". If you hear "Fosana", the descendants of Mali Balansari took that name. The Prophet set a charm on Mali Balansari's granary so it would always remain full, and he placed his hand on the face of Mali Balansari, and his eyes were well. All his descendants became known as funelu, they who are superior

to everyone. And when they come to your house, you must give them something. The son of Mali Balansari was Fosana.

The reason jeliw cannot be in Komo is explained by their treachery. If you see that the numuw and the jeliw do not intermarry, if you see that the jeliw are isolated from our secret things, it is because our ancestor Numu Fayiri was the friend of Surakata. Our ancestor Numu Fayiri was the intimate friend of Surakata, so he raised his daughter to give her in marriage to Surakata. When the daughter attained the age of marriage, he dressed her, gave her gold and many things, then he called Surakata and gave him his daughter. The daughter was named Noufatima. After the marriage of Noufatima and Surakata, the grandfather of the garanke, Walali Ibrahima went to praise Surakata. The garanke praise the jeliw.² Surakata made a vow to give all he possessed to Walali Ibrahima, even if he didn't ask for it.

When Surakata left Numu Fayiri to return home with his new wife, he had to cross a river. By chance, it was the same day that Walali Ibrahima was on his way to the home of Numu Fayiri. As they crossed the river, the canoes of Surakata and Walali Ibrahima met in the middle. Immediately, Walali Ibrahima began

1 One of the most important Manding spirit societies.

2 That is, the jeliw are of higher status in the nyamakala hierarchy.

to give praise upon praise to Surakata. Surakata had nothing with him to give to the garanke, so in order to keep his vow, he gave to Walali Ibrahima the daughter of Numu Fayiri whom he had just married. Surakata said, "I give you this girl. I will go on across the river, and when you get to the home of her father, tell him I passed her on to you". When Walali Ibrhahima arrived at the house of Numu Fayiri accompanied by Noufatima, he explained what had happened. Numu Fayiri accepted Walali Ibrahima as his son-in-law and vowed never to show his Komo altar¹ to Surakata. He vowed to bar the jeliw from all his ritual activities, and he swore that if ever a jeli saw the Komo, he would castrate him.

1 Boli, the santified object on which sacrificial offerings are made as a means of establishing communication with the spirit world.

Nyamakala Ancestors

Informant: Sallah Kouyate
Recorded at Kabaya, 8 September 1975

The origin of the jeliw, and of the birth of the world to our day is issued from one person only. That person and the Prophet had the same father. His first son was Maliki. This Maliki had for a son Surakata. This is why they say Surakata boum Maliki, Surakata boum Jafara. This boum Jafara did the soubahanalai, he recited for the Prophet. At this time he gave birth to Melemanyakoumadouman Nyanduma Duko, and he in turn was the father of Balafon.¹ Balafon was the father of Sosobali, Sosobali was the father of Sumanguru, Sumanguru was the father of Kukuba, Kukuba was the father of Bantama, Bantama was the father of Maninyalinyali. Kamissoko was the son of Maninyalinyali, Massare was the son of Kamissoko, Kumassawura was the son of Massare, Kumassawura was the father of Mawuramba, Malakunu was the son of Mawuramba, Dudu was the son of Malakunu, Kafali was the son of Dudu, Kafali Massikibi was the son of this Kafali, Kumassawura was the son of Kafali Massikibi. This Kumassawura was called "No griot is worth a Kouyate", and they sing that song:

Ba bo no len ne
Premature birth,

San jeli ba
The mother of the jeli from San,

Bo no len ne
Has given premature birth.

Jeli ma Kouyate bo
No griot is worth a Kouyate.

1 The genealogy given here is largely nonsense, a list of random names thrown out carelessly to the interviewer who had refused to pay the exorbitant informant's fee demanded, e.g., "Balafon" was not a person's name, it is a musical instrument, the indigenous xylophone.

Thus we were glorified by Man Sunjata, thus are we the masters of the other jeli, so it is said of the 101 races of jeli. That is to say, Sinadi boum Andi was the son of Fande Koroba. No blacksmith was equal to Fande. This Sinadi boum Andi, whose father was Fande Koroba, was the father of Nabilai Dauda. Dauda was the father of Muluku Soloman, Solomana was the father of Samassuna, Samassuna was the father of Nuhun, Nuhun was the father of Karabadi, and Karabadi engendered Badaka. Badaka was the father of Daba. As for us, they have said, "Anything you seek at someone's house, you shall not lack". To be a Kouyate means that whatever I want, I can get it at anyone's house. If I desire it, it will be presented to me as a gift. It is as if I come to your house and ask you for a chicken, and you give it to me. As I return from your house someone asks me where I got the chicken, and I say, "Go to the numu's house, a ko ya te, he lacks nothing". Finally, people began to refer to us as the a ko ya te, and that is the origin of Kouyate, that is how the clan was born. Otherwise, the Kouyate are not a separate people. The rest of the 101 jeli clans are as follows:

Tunkara had for a son Kassilo, Kassilo had for a son Balaloko, Balaloko had for a son Bunturungwe, Bunturungwe had for a son Tiramakhan, Tiramakhan had for a son Kanke Jan, Kanke Jan had for a son Moke Musa, Moke Musa had for a son Moke Nantuman. This Moke Nantuman was the father of Damassa Wulani and Damassa Wulamba who were the ancestors of the Traore. When that one praised his elder brother:

Tukuru dan i ya dan ye

Tukuru is a dan, here is you dan,¹

Bakara dan, i ya dan ye

Bakara dan, here is your dan,

Jilenfing dan i ya dan ye

Jilenfing dan, here is your dan.

The elder brother said, "Little brother, if you were a jeli, no one would refuse you anything". And the other decided that this was his destiny, and he said, "Tabun Camara, Sibi Camara, Manafaran Camara, you go back this night to Bissikuna, Bissaina, Jinnjinna, Tuwurana, Bassiduku, Kobjila, Komaijila and Sadudou". When the Camara ancestor² had finished the sikifidi he said, "Ah, my father, they must leave you in your workshop". They left him at the workshop and thus was born the Kamanjan Kuru clan. They were then called the 101 clans of the numuw, and these 101 clans were descended from Sinadi boum Andi. Muluku Salamana was descended from Sinadi boum Andi, and they said to him, "Rise up, you are the king. All the mansaw will be subordinate to you on the day of judgment". All the rest were liars.

Surakata was the son of Maliki, and Surakata was the father of Jafara. Bala Fasseke was the son of Jafara, Jacumanduka was the son of Bala Fasseke, and Jacumanduka was the father of our ancestor Soronfoje Mori. This Jemorikodo had for a son Soso Bala. Soso Bala was the chief of the warriors of Soso Bali Sumanguru. The grandmother of Soso Bali was Siga Kante. This man who followed her,

1 A dan in this context, is any animal that was a loner in the bush, a kind of maverick. Here it refers to a buffalo, in a vague reference to the tradition of the Traore ancestor, Damasa Wulamba and Damasa Wulani, who killed such an animal in an episode of the Sunjata tradition.

2 Here the griot switches carelessly from a fragment of the Traore tradition to a fragment of a Camara family tradition.

her son was the ancestor of the Berete, and his wife was Tumumaninyan.
She took the narinya¹ and used it to praise the wife of Berete, singing:

I am Kukuba and Bautama and Sonkoma,²

I am Bankoma³ and Balankoma,⁴

I am Fobakadagnikinsa⁵ and Kokobele.

The animal hide that would refuse to be dry on the
ground of Mande,⁶

I would tear it up, and who would dare to ask why?

A partridge in a tree answered like this:⁷

Tutubali with a big head and a bigger mouth,

Tutubali who runs around the pen,

The father of the brave Man Sunjata is born.

Bibali was the ancestor of Man Sunjata. Hamamata was the father of Bilali, Hamamata was the son of Farara. Bilali was commanded to pick up the turban of the Prophet when it fell, and this is why he was given the name "turban", which in Arabic is Hamamata. Man Sunjata was the descendant of Farara, Latali Kalabi was the son of Sunjata, Kalabibumba was the son of Latali Kalabi, Kalabibumba had for a son Tumani Lawali, Tumani Lawali had for a

1 A short piece of ridged metal pipe scraped with a metal bar to provide rhythm accompaniment to a griot's song, usually played by women.

2 "Agree to do something."

3 "Refuse to do something."

4 "Keep something."

5 "Slit the gossip's mouth."

6 The animal hide is a symbol of a chief's power and authority.

7 The partridge is a symbol of the jeli.

son Diorolonko, Koman was the son of Diorolonko; Koman sired Lubu Suraka, Kala bali Suraka, Babali Suraka called Da Monson. They called Biton Kouloubaly: Lubusoma, Kadabalisoma, the first and last mansa of Manding, Sayabali Kundian, the knife of the infidels, the neck chain of the infidels, the hair on the side of the cat.

The people who became griots such as the Camara, Koroma, Diabate and Traore, they were neither horon nor jeli. During a time of famine they came to beg their livelihood from Surakata and resolved to remain subordinate to him when he had satisfied their needs. 101 people came begging in that way from Surakata our ancestor, and they became the jeliw. Even the nightingale, who is a good jeli, was a member of that group of beggars who became griots. They were not originally griots, as I have said. Out of kindness, Surakata blessed them and wished them prosperity in their newly-acquired occupation as griots. There is no single origin for the griots.

One time a place on Muhammad's head was swollen, and he concealed it under a cap. When Surakata came to his house, the Prophet told him about his illness. Surakata immediately unwrapped the gauze which covered the wound and sucked the coagulated blood which caused the swelling under the skin of the Prophet's head, and it was cured. Seina Jibulea¹ was sent by God to cure Muhammad's illness, but when he arrived on earth Muhammad told him that a man had already sucked out the bad blood and that he was now well. Surakata, who had been previously converted, had come again to demonstrate his devotion to the Prophet, and he was thus named joli mina, sucker of blood, from whence came the term jeli.

1 A variation of "Jibril" or Gabriel.

The 101 other jeli clans became nyamakala by begging. They begged from the Prophet who made them jeliw, though they had been horon. Have I not just said that?

Damassawulani means "small bush", and Damassawulamba means "big bush". Damassa Wulani was the elder brother. When he did the praises of his younger brother, the youth said to him, "If you were a jeli, no one could refused you anything". The elder brother nodded and said, "That is not bad, little brother, I will be a jeli and carry the name 'Diobakate'". It was thus that Diobakate, otherwise known as Diabate, became jeliw from the level of horon. We, we are the jeliw, we are the rabe, Kouyate.

I am a nyamakala because ny ancestor respected the Prophet. The nyamakalaw are the people who place themselves at the mercy of others. If you say to someone, "I like you, I will stay with you", and if that person then tells you to do this or that, if you are to respect them, you thus become subordinate to that person. It is because of this respect that we have become nyamakalaw. As I have said, there are not really any jeliw. We are of the same father as the Prophet, he became a jeli.

The ancestor of the numuw was a mansa. Sinadi boum Andi was a mansa. When he died, his son was Fande. They say then that there were no numuw earlier than Fande. When he in his turn died, Muluku Solomani became mansa. He commanded all things of the air and all the things below. It was he who had been the Dalayilikawurati who fell from the sky. He did his time and so did Mandi. Mandi also became mansa, all descended from the numuw. Soso Bali Sumanguru was an ancestor of the numuw. The day when Sunjata battled with him, Sunjata came and put his foot on the threshold

and said to Sumanguru, i kandi, "What have you got to say?", and Sumanguru replied, n kan te, "I have nothing to say". Since that day they gave him the name of "Kante". The ancestors of numuw were mansaw.

Hamadi

Informant: Modibo Bugunte
 Recorded at Kolokani, 10 August 1975

Oh teacher,¹ the world has many branches for change, and so
 do I.

The Bugunte come from the Fula mabo.²

Mabo also, were two brothers, rich Fula they were.

It was a good day for them, with their riches: many cows,
 many coats, many sheep.

Rich Fula they were, my teacher.

Oh teacher, in those days, when the little brother went out
 to tend the cows and goats,

Hey teacher, there was obedience in the world.

Teacher, he went into the fields with the cows,

But in the fields his head began to ache, he suffered much.

He prayed to God that he might go back home before the
 headache could exhaust him.

When he left the bush and came into the fields near the
 village, he left the cows scattered there.

He went to lie down in his hut, and as he was lying down,
 his brother called to him, "Hamadi!"

The little brother's name was Hamadi.

"Why are you lying inside?"

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- 1 The singer is an apprentice griot, and he addresses his narrative to his mentor, Mamary Kouyate.
- 2 Some mabow function as oral artists, others are weavers.

"If you see me lying like this in the hut, it is nothing more than that.

"When I went into the fields I got a headache, and this is why I am lying in the hut, my brother.

"Excuse me, my brother, I could not bring the cows back to the shed".

"Ah, Hamadi!" said the elder brother, "go and bring the cows to the shed, then if you want to go to bed, you will go to bed.

"This is better than leaving the cows scattered about and going to bed".

Oh teacher, the little brother refused.

Illness is an enemy.

As Hamadi lay in the hut, his brother came and beat him fiercely. The youth was very angry, but when this brave Fula was angry, the women thought he was only ashamed that his brother beat him.

The Fula came from four seeds, and of those four seeds, one was millet.

We call this n'kene, and if it grows, it will stand with head bowed until the day you come to slaughter it.¹

The Fula grows like the millet,

The Fula grows like a grass we call fla muso fini n'kolo, "the ragged cloth of the Fula woman".²

1 Among the Bambara and others, the Peul or Fula have a reputation of being extremely shy and retiring, hence the metaphor of the millet with its bowed head.

2 This metaphor compares the Peul to a very tough, durable grass that is a constant threat to choke out the millet seedlings. Throughout the Western Sudan, the Peul have a reputation of acquiring a piece of land or an animal by occupying it or watching over it until it becomes theirs.

It will choke out your seedlings unless you exchange your
old rubber belt for a new one

Otherwise, the first time you pull the hoe, your two
buttocks will know all about it.¹

The Fula grows like a tree,

We call this tree zereninye, the tree that kills trees.²

If it wraps around another tree, they will fight for a
thousand years.

If you are not strong, it will do something bad to you.

The Fula grows like a disease we call soko soko ni je.³

This is also known to the Nazaraw.⁴

This soko soko ni je, may God protect us from this disease.

If it attacks your heart without cutting it, it will never
leave you until your death.⁵

When Hamadi left his village, he went to the town and became
a herder of Bambara goats.

He was distressed, he was orphaned, his brother's farm no
longer existed for him.

1 That is, if you work as hard in the fields as you should, you had better not wear a rotten belt, or your trousers will fall down. The farmers' belts are often made out of strips of old bicycle inner-tube.

2 The third type of Peul is like a kind of parasitic vegetation that chokes out trees and eventually kills them. This type of Peul is very brave and tenacious and will fight to the death in any conflict.

3 Tuberculosis.

4 Europeans.

5 The Peul is treacherous - if you fight with him he will do anything to gain the advantage.

The world moves in strange ways.

After God made the world, he walked away and never stopped
to look back, oh teacher.

The world and its contents are vast, but we do not know it.

Man is angry at many things, oh teacher, but he is wrong.

Though two hares meet in a grove of trees, that does not
make them in-laws.¹

Oh teacher, when Hamadi came into the town to be the
herder of Bambara goats, he took them into the bush.

When he went into the bush with the goats, he took his
adze to cut small trees for herders' staffs, and as
he did this, he learned to make wooden bowls.

One day Hamadi, sad to say, went farther into the bush than
usual.

Sitane² had called him, and Hamadi became lost.

He went far into the bush, but thanks to the grace of God,
he saw a weaver sitting in a grove of trees.

This weaver was weaving, and eh! Hamadi was surprised.

The weaver said, "Eh! Are you a man from home?"³

"Has a bird eaten you and shit you out here?"

"Has a monkey eaten you and shit you out here?"

Hamadi replied, "Nothing has eaten me and left me here".

1 The two hares are Hamadi, a Peul, and the Bambara who took him in when he went to the town. Though not of the same ethnic group, they would protect an orphan like him.

2 In the oral literature, "Sitane" or Satan may have a devil-like identity, or may be identified as a chief of the genies; in either case, he has genie-like qualities.

3 The local audience would understand that the weaver is a genie surprised at his work by Hamadi. At the time in question, weaving had not been discovered by mortal man.

The weaver said, "Man from home, please excuse me,
 "It is God's will that you have seen me,
 "Eh, man from home, this is all God's doing.
 "It was me to whom the art of weaving was given.
 "Now, I will show you how to do it, but you must not
 teach anyone else except the man who sees you and
 learns it for himself".¹

He then taught Hamadi how to weave,

Hamadi was initiated.

Hamadi received the secret and returned home.

Hamadi said no black to any woman,

Hamadi said no white to any man,

Hamadi kept his silence.

With the loom he brought from the bush, Hamadi began to
 weave for himself.

He made the thread and began to weave.

When the people saw him weaving, they said, "What is this?"

That day they called him mabo.

Now, my patron, that was the origin of the mabow.²

Now, this is how some of the mabo weavers became griots after
 Hamadi was chased from the house of the Fula. It was when Hamadi was
 chased and became a weaver, that he began to play the juruni nkele.³
 Little by little, he began to play the kirine.⁴

1 This amounts to an explanation of why weavers are not nyamakala,
 along with the griots, blacksmiths and leatherworkers.

2 At this point, Modibo Bugunte stopped played the ngoni and
 spoke without musical accompaniment.

3 Similar to the ngoni, but with only one string.

4 The Peul or Fulbe name for the same one-stringed instrument.

When he came to the village, everyone knew that even for a man who suffers, it is possible to find an occupation. Hamadi often played the one-string at evening gatherings, and he began to be well known. He continued to herd the Bambara goats in the bush. He did this often, and he suffered. During this time of going with the goats, the juruni nkele was important to him, the kirine was important for him. Whenever there was a celebration, the men of the village called for Hamadi. By this time, other Fula had heard him, and they too were happy with the one-string. Awa! Even though he was himself a Fula, when he was with other Fula and played the one-string, they enjoyed it.¹ He continued to play the one string, He lived to play the one-string.

On the same day in the bush when Hamadi had discovered weaving, he had also found the ngoni nkolo.² That day he brought out of a tree, one wooden bowl and one ngoni. He covered the ngoni with a skin and attached four strings to it. He began to play the four-stringed ngoni, and little by little abandoned the one-string.

Awa! Hamadi continued to play the ngoni until he became very well known. It was said, "How this mabo plays ngoni, how this mabo plays ngoni". He was becoming a nyamakala. As he

1 The implication is that even though Hamadi had forsaken the manly Fula life of the cattle-herder and was a mere herder of goats for Bambara farmers, other Fula still enjoyed his music. The general attitude in the hierarchical societies of the western Sudan, is that those directly responsible for providing what is necessary for the daily sustenance are the first-class citizens, and the supportive groups such as blacksmiths and artisans, are second-class citizens, something like useful parasites. The fact that weavers are not nyamakala like other artisans, suggests that this craft was introduced much later, after the hierarchical structure with its craft lineages was firmly established.

2 The wooden body of the ngoni.

continued to play the ngoni, Hamadi became separated from the other Fula because his role was different from theirs. Gradually he came to rely on others for his support, and later even the Fula gave him the means to live. Thus mabo became griots, and there is nothing more to say about that. It was they who are the Bugunte.

The Gaulow

Informant: Jeli Manga Sissoko
 Recorded at Kolokani, 20 August 1975

The ancestor of the gaulow is Gango Boukary. Gango Boukary bought some chickens. The chickens became numerous and they filled twelve chicken houses. He sold the chickens and bought some goats. The goats multiplied and took up twelve goat sheds. He sold the goats and bought some cows. The cows multiplied and filled twelve barns. He sold them and changed the money to gold. The gold multiplied and filled twelve houses. Gango Boukary sent a message to the Prophet to come and get his jaka.¹ The Prophet came for it before dawn. He began to count his jaka until sunset and even then he continued to count. Gango Boukary came to see the jaka and told the Prophet that all of the money he was taking was not jaka, and that he was taking some gold that was not rightfully his. The Prophet said to him, "From what you say, it is clear that you do not respect me. Am I not above being a thief? Those creatures who fly, those who crawl, those who walk on two feet, those who jump, those who walk on four paws, were all made for me. Ah! You respect no one, therefore God will make your descendants so unhappy that they will not be able to do anything for themselves except follow their fellows and beg from them". That is how the Keita became gaulow. Their jamu is Keita.

1 Tithe.

The Kone Griots

Informant: Sagone Kone
Recorded at Kolokani, 17 August 1975

There are two families of Kone who are jeliw. We who have the varan lizard for our totem, we come from the same ancestor. The other Kone jeliw have their own totem and a different origin.

Why are there two different kinds of Kone jeliw? That was brought by a war. The warriors had been organized to go and attack a village. The distance was very long, and thirst separated the warriors. Some were lying on the left side of the road and the others were on the right side. When they raised their heads they saw a varan come down a kapok tree. Just where a branch came out of the trunk, there was a hollow, and in this hollow there was plenty of water. The varan went in and came back with its tail wet, and some of the water splashed on the warriors. Suddenly they realized there was water in the tree, and one by one they quenched their thirst. When they had finished drinking, those on one side of the road said they would never again eat the lizard because it was through its mercy that they had not died. The others did not agree, because they thought that they were not dead owing to the mercy of the kapok tree in whose hollow the water was held. The warriors who said they would not eat the varan kept it as their totem, and those who believed the kapok tree saved them, took it as their totem.

The Kusatage

Informant: Jeli Manga Sissoko
 Recorded at Kolokani, 13 August 1975

The kusatage were also horon.¹ They changed themselves when they saw the nyamakalaw begging. They are the same people, but with two jamuw, the Sambura and the Jarisso. The kusatage come from those two jamuw and they serve the Sambura and Jarisso horon. All of their class are called kusa. Among them, the kusatage are the only nyamakalaw. Their jamu is Sakone, but if you call them Sambura, they will answer you.

Two brothers, Sambura and his younger brother went to war, but the war ended in a rout, and they had to flee for their lives. The older brother was suffering from starvation and could not go on. He was in such pain that he asked his little brother to shoot him. The little brother entered a grove of trees and cut off a piece of his leg and cooked it. He brought it back wrapped in leaves and gave it to his elder brother, saying he had shot a wild bird in the grove. The elder brother ate the meat and was revived. The younger brother had torn a piece off his cotton boubou and wrapped it around his leg, and the elder brother did not know what he had done. When they got home, their parents asked what had happened to his leg, and the younger brother replied, "My elder brother was starving and asked me to shoot him, so I cut off a piece of my leg and fed him". Then the elder brother said, "Ah! I thank you, Sambura, I will become your nyamakala. I, Kanu Sambura will be called Mankara Sakone, and I will be your nyamakala."

1 According to Meillassoux, the Kusatage are the griots of the Kusa Soninke, though the word means literally, "blacksmiths of the Kusa."

Shaykh Umar

Informant: Fakama Kaloga
Recorded at Bamako, 11 October 1975.

Shaykh Umar was a celibate and he came from Futa Jalon near Conakry. He went to Dinguiray alone. He built a small house there and was a marabout, a good man.

There was a hunter in that place who failed to hit the game he shot at whenever he went hunting. One day he went to see Shaykh Umar and said, "My father, every day I shoot at game but never hit it. I want you to help me, for I must kill something for the pot". Umar said, "All right, give me your gun". The hunter gave him the gun and Umar washed it with water he had blessed and returned it to him saying, "Go and kill your game today". The hunter went out into the bush, and when he saw some partridges he fired and one fell to the ground. He went home with his kill, and things continued like that. Every day he killed something because Umar had washed his gun with a nasi.

Soon another hunter saw how well he was doing and asked for help. They went together to see Shaykh Umar, and the unskilful hunter said, "Master, I have come for you to wash my gun like you did that of my comrade because I must also kill game". Umar washed the gun of that hunter with a nasi. Then that hunter went out and when he saw some game, he just went "pan!" and it fell dead. After that he also began always to get his game to take home.

Many other hunters later did the same as these two men. Finally, one of those who came to have his gun washed said to Umar, "I do not have a family, so I pray that you will agree to let me come and build a small house near yours". Shaykh Umar agreed, and that hunter

settled near him. Soon more people followed until there were many people who spoke of the man who could treat a gun so it would kill game with one shot. People would ask where he could be found and they were told Dinguiray. So later it became a big village and there were many young hunters there.

Shaykh Umar said, "Now I am going to get the war in motion. I have many young hunters to help me conquer villages. Ah! These young hunters are loyal to me in this village which I have created and named Dinguiray".

Tamba Bakary was in his own village, and he said, "Well, a Peul has become famous, but I have not, so I am going to fight him". He went to do battle with Shaykh Umar who had all those hunters with him, and Umar said, "Eh! This man is not a worthy opponent". He fought Tamba Bakary and Bakary fled to Masina. Shaykh Umar said, "Though he has run away, I will not spare him". And he chased him to Masina.

Tamba Bakary went to a marabout and said, "I entrust myself to you, the Peul is searching for me, and if he finds me he is going to kill me". When Shaykh Umar got to Masina he went to the marabout and said, "The man who has fled to you, you must give him up to me, for I intend to kill him". But the marabout said, "Heh! You must spare him in the name of Allah, for your religion and mine are the same". At that, Shaykh Umar relented and spared Tamba Bakary.

At the end of that war, Shaykh Umar returned to Dinguiray, then he left there to go to Medina, and on his way he passed the seacoast. All the pure Khassonke came from Medina. Shaykh Umar said he was going to conquer that area too, after he went to the Malinke country.

But before all that, before Shaykh Umar was born, his father was named Magan and his mother was Minata. Umar was disliked by his Futanke enemies, who asked him, "Will those who do not like you go to hell?" He replied, "No, Allah did not create hell for me". And God said to them, "I say to you, if you do bad deeds, it is you and those who are unbelievers who will go to hell. Otherwise, you will not go there. The doer of good has paradise for his reward, and the evil-doer has hell for his reward".

The father of Umar, Magan, was a Sufi. The Sufi do not marry wives. They take their religious materials and go into the bush. They have no need of women, they do not need a woman's cooking, they just wander in the bush.

One night Umar's father was wandering in the bush when he stumbled into a field. The owner of that field had planted watermelon, and the watermelon had flourished. When Shaykh Umar's father saw the watermelon he took one and broke it and ate until he was refreshed. That is now watermelon came to be favoured by the Futanke. In the morning, he followed the watermelon vines to the base of the main plant and there he waited, with no clothes to cover his nakedness. That morning the owner of the field came and said, "Eh! What is that? I cannot tell if this is a man or a beast". Magan said, "It is a man. Is this your property?" The man said it was, and Magan told him, "Last night I ate a watermelon and so I have waited here for you before going away. If you will forgive me, I will be on my way, and if you do not forgive me, I will make a pilgrimage to Mecca". The girl who was to become the mother of Shaykh Umar was still unmarried at that time, she was very young. The owner of the watermelon said, "I will excuse you on one condition. I have a daughter that I want to give you for a wife. If you agree, I will excuse you, but if you

do not agree, I will not forgive you". The father of Shaykh Umar, who was a Sufi, said, "Otherwise you will not forgive me?" The watermelon farmer said, "If you marry my daughter I will forgive you". Magan replied, "In that case, I entirely agree". And the farmer said, "Hah! Then I forgive you". Then the farmer let Magan get washed and dressed, and brought him out of the field. This is how the mother of Shaykh Umar was married to his father, and the father's travels were finished.

They went to Dinguiray and settled there. Shaykh Umar was born there and lived there until he became famous and began to travel. He decided to go to Mecca. On the way to Mecca there lived a marabout who was a seer. He had seen all that was to happen because he was very, very powerful. He said to his followers, "I am going to die, but before I die, I have something to tell you. A man will come here dressed in rags and carrying a staff. When he comes, he is going to say, 'Who will give to Allah, give to Allah, who will save for tomorrow?' He must not pass without you giving him something. My daughter is here, and I want you to give her to him. But he will not stay here, he will move on". And that is the way it happened.

Shaykh Umar travelled on until he arrived in the presence of Allah. Allah said to him, "Shaykh Umar, where are you going? There is nothing more ahead, it is I who am God, and you have come to your stopping place".

After Shaykh Umar came back the Futanke hated him, and said they would fight against him. They said if they found him they would kill him. Shaykh Umar went to Dinguiray and declared the Jihad ¹

1 Holy war.

with the intention of conquering Medina. Demba was the village chief, and he said, "Eh! The Peul wants to conquer my village? Then I will call Faidherbe, otherwise he will succeed". So he sent a call to Faidherbe at Paris (he was a white man), that if he did not come, the Peul would destroy his village. In all the Sudan, the first white man to come here was Faidherbe, and he came by St. Louis.

At that time, Shaykh Umar had gone to Lontu where there are many large flat rocks. Faidherbe left St. Louis for Kayes, and from Kayes went to Futi. Demba was told that Faidherbe had arrived. Demba went to meet him at Futi and they embraced, so they renamed Futi "Embrassement" which is near Kayes.

Faidherbe said to Demba, "You sent for me and I have come". The first village of the whites was Medina. Said Faidherbe, "I will battle the Peul, but you must repay me. You do not know with what you will pay me? You will give me a place to put my hide".¹

Shaykh Umar had gone on to Felu by this time, and in the evening he made a prayer. He left the marks of his knees, feet, hands and head in the flat rock there. When Faidherbe arrived at Lontu, he asked the whereabouts of Shaykh Umar, but the people replied that he had gone elsewhere.

Faidherbe destroyed Kale and went as far as Nioro, then he returned to Demba and said, "I have worked for you, now you must repay me". Demba replied that he would do so, and he had a cow killed and skinned. He gave the hide to Faidherbe who was to have as much

1 Chiefs customarily sat on a tanned cowhide or sheepskin as a symbol of office; this is a request for a town in which to establish a colonial government.

ground as the hide could cover. But Faidherbe took a knife and cut the hide into thin strips and made a long rope. He staked out a large area and connected the stakes with the rope and said, "Demba, we agreed that you would give me a place to put my hide, and this is that place". Demba said, "Ah, but the uncircumcised one has tricked me. He said a place to put his hide, but he has cut up that hide and made a rope". In all the Sudan, the first Cercle¹ of the whites was Medina. That was the payment made to Faidherbe.

Shaykh Umar's enemies from Futa pursued him, and he said to them, "Eh, Futanke, my father has his equal, but my mother has not". Shaykh Umar followed by his enemies, went to Kado² country at Bandiagara. The Kados come from the Malinke, the Guindos. Shaykh Umar came, pursued by his enemies. He passed Bandiagara and climbed the hill of Deginbere and spoke to his enemies who said they would kill him. He said, "All right Futanke, I am going to tell you something. For those who hear it, it is good, for those who do not listen, it is too bad. I am going to enter the cave of this mountain, and those who watch me will go to hell, and those who do not watch me will go to heaven". And that is how Shaykh Umar was lost.

1 Province, governed region.

2 Dogon.

Shaykh Umar

Informant: Fanyama Diabate
Recorded at Bamako, 18 October 1975

Before Shaykh Umar was born, his elder brother was already on his mother's back. His father was Seydou Antuane and his mother was Aisa. One day they were late leaving their field and the setting sun found them still on the path toward home. It was time for the evening prayer, so Aisa untied the baby from her back and set him aside while she stood behind her husband to pray. While their foreheads were touching the ground, a hyena came and snatched the infant and took it away. Aisa did not shout at the hyena because she was praying. When he had finished praying, Antuane turned around, and not seeing the baby, asked Aisa where it was. She said, "While my forehead was touching the ground, a hyena came and carried it off".

"But", said the father, "did you not shout at the hyena to leave the baby alone?"

Said Aisa, "Do you forget about God?"

"Very well", said Antuane, "let us go home, and God will send us another child even better than the last".

The two went on home without their infant. The next night there was a storm with much rain, and Antuane was in his sleeping hut, in bed with one of his other wives. The wind blew the door open and he called, "Aisa! Come and close the door, the storm has blown it open". Aisa got up and went to close the door. It was a grass mat door, and when she closed it, the wind blew it open again. This happened three times, and the third time she closed the door and leaned on it to hold it shut. There she stayed until morning, as the rain beat on her through the night.

The next morning, Seydou Antuane took his kettle and went to wash for his prayers. When he had finished praying he called Aisa and blessed her, saying, "Aisa, may God give you a child who will be better than we are. May God give you a child who will shine like the stars and moon".

"Thank you", said Aisa, "and may God hear your blessing".

Soon Aisa became pregnant with Shaykh Umar. Her stomach grew large, and she gave birth. For three years she suckled Shaykh Umar. As soon as he was old enough, he was sent to koranic school. His master wrote some koranic verses on a wooden prayer board and gave it to Shaykh Umar in the morning. That afternoon, the student wrote on the other side of the board and returned it to his master. When the master read it, he said, "Shaykh Umar, you have already been to school".

"No sir", replied Shaykh Umar, "I have never been to school before now".

Then the teacher said, "Here is a man of God".

The pupils would often go to the bush to gather firewood which they would light for their evening studies. One day when they were in the bush it rained very hard. It beat down on the students all day, but where Shaykh Umar was sitting, it looked like there must be a roof, because no rain fell on him. When the rain stopped, the other students asked Shaykh Umar where he had been that his clothes were not wet. He replied that he was under a tree, and when the teacher heard about this, he sent someone to go and look at the place. The student reported that where Shaykh Umar had been sitting was all wet from the rain. Then the teacher said, "This is a man of God. From now on, no matter what any of you others see him doing, there

must be no taunting of him. I do not want to hear anything said or done against him".

When the koranic students went out to search for firewood, their food would be left for them in the entrance hut. When any of them returned before Shaykh Umar, they would eat all the food and he would find nothing to eat. The master asked his wives if they always saved some food for Umar and they said they did, but this was not true. This happened three times, then Allah himself prepared for Shaykh Umar a plate of rice and sauce with meat and left it in the entrance hut. As usual, Shaykh Umar returned after the other pupils had finished eating. They laughed at him and said, "We have eaten, but we left your share inside", though they really had not. Shaykh Umar went into the hut and found his covered dish of food there. After eating his fill he went outside where the others were still laughing at him. Umar said to them, "You laugh 'ho, ho' at yourselves. Come in here and you will see that you are not my equals". The other pupils went in and ate what was left of Shaykh Umar's food. Later, the master asked his wives who had prepared the rice and sauce, but none of them had. From that time forward, everyone knew that Shaykh Umar was a man of God.

During the holidays, Shaykh Umar returned to his village. He arrived home at the beginning of the rainy season during planting time. With his brothers, Shaykh Umar went to work in the field across the river. It was his job to carry water for his brothers to drink while they worked. One day Shaykh Umar forgot to bring the drinking water and his elder brother was very angry. The elder brother began to beat him, but Shaykh Umar fled across the river by running over the top of the water. He stopped on the other side,

and his elder brother called out to him, "Umar, you have done an astonishing thing". Shaykh Umar replied, "You have beaten me, but now you must stop the beating and look at who I am". When they got home, the elder brother told their father what had happened, and the father said, "Eh! My son, you must not speak of the things your brother does, or enemies will try to harm him. No matter what you see Umar do, speak not of it to anyone".

Shaykh Umar finished his studies and returned home. He got himself ready, and taking his leather bag, he departed for Mecca. He left Futa and paid a visit to Malik Sy. From there he went to where Bumatigi Sy lived at Budun and stayed with him for a while. Bumatigi Sy asked Shaykh Umar where he was going, and he replied that he was going to Mecca. Bumatigi Sy said, "Shaykh, you are not old enough to go to Mecca by yourself". But Shaykh Umar said, "I am going anyway". And suddenly he was gone like a gust of wind.

Next Shaykh Umar went to the home of Mamadu Lamine Fofana. He was a marabout, and he said, "Shaykh, where are you going". Umar replied, "I am going to Mecca". He left there and went to Mamadu Fofana in Dumba, and when Mamadu asked where he was going, Shaykh Umar again replied, "I am going to Mecca".

From Dumba, Shaykh Umar went to visit the Almamy of Misira. The Almamy had a daughter who was as beautiful and charming as a genie, but she was mad because she was under the power of a male genie. One day Shaykh Umar saw the girl come out and sit down by the door, and he asked the Almamy whose daughter she was. The Almamy replied, "That is my daughter, and she has seen a male genie. If any man tries to marry her, the genie will beat the man to death". Shaykh Umar said, "If I cure her, will you give her to me?" The Almamy

said he would, and Shaykh Umar then asked for three bowls of cream to be prepared. He took them and went into seclusion, and the three bowls of cream were all he had to eat while he stayed in his isolation.

The chief of the genies was named Samarusu. This Samarusu lived at the edge of the sea, where the genies had their houses and animals. If you see that the animals are more numerous there than here, that is why. If our cows went there and the cows of the genies came out and coupled with them, when the calves were born, the new breed could not be killed by any disease. That is why the cows of the East are more numerous than those of the West.

While Shaykh Umar was in seclusion, he saw Samarusu, the chief of the genies. Shaykh Umar said, "Samarusu, you must call all the genies everywhere, to find out who is in possession of the daughter of the Almamy of Misira". Samarusu sent a message to summon all the genies.

Song:

Think how hard is the work of jeli,
 Think about the troubles of the jeli occupation.
 Alfa Umar Seydou Tall, the jeliw speak of you,
 True friendship is hard to break.
 The jeliw say they love you,
 The funew love you too.
 Seydou Tall, it is hard to break a friendship.

Samarusu told the other genies to catch the one who possessed the Almamy's daughter, and to tie him up and beat him. They bound and beat him until he had suffered greatly. Then Samarusu said, "Was it you who possessed the daughter of the Almamy of Misira?" The genie admitted he had done it, and his chief said, "Why are you attracted to the local people more than to genies like yourself? Are you going to touch her again?" The genie said he would not, but Samarusu kept him tied up.

Song:

I love you, the young Peul girl sings,
 I love you, I love Jony Maky,
 The jeliw say they love Maky,
 The blacksmiths says they love Maky.
 The funew say they love Jony Maky,
 But I am going with Jony Maky to Futa.
 Alfa Maky, Seydou Tall, the Peul girl has been
 disgraced, her enemies won't let her go.¹
 Maky, who turned you against Tamba?²

Shaykh Umar saw everything from where he sat in seclusion.
 Samarusu's young genie said, "I will not touch her again. If I
 touch her again, may you kill me".

The next morning, Shaykh Umar came out of the hut where he had
 been in seclusion and said, "Almamy, you may let your daughter come
 out of her room". When the young girl came out, Shaykh Umar took
 his amulet, and spitting on it, rubbed the girl's head three times.
 He then told the girl to draw water from the well to bathe, and
 when that was done she was given new clothes to wear.

Song:

I love you, the young Peul girl sings,
 I love you, I love Jony Maky,
 The jeliw say they love Maky,
 The blacksmiths say they love Maky.
 The funew say they love Jony Maky,
 But I am going with Jony Maky to Futa.
 Alfa Maky, Seudou Tall, the Peul girl has been
 disgraced, her enemies won't let her go.
 Maky, who turned you against Tamba?

The Almamy gave his daughter to Shaykh Umar, who said, "Good,
 I will be a mendicant for a time, and with the alms I get I will
 marry this girl". Shaykh Umar coupled with his new wife, and she
 became pregnant, then he went to Mecca.

1 Her jealous rivals don't want her to go with such an important
 man. Saïd (Seydou) Tall was Umar's father. Jony or Alfa
 Maky is a praise-name for Umar, who was himself a Peul, also
 known as Fula, Fulbe and Tukulor.

2 One of Umar's important battles.

When Shaykh Umar got to Mecca, he found that Faidherbe¹ had spent seven years there. One Friday when the people were called to mosque, Shaykh Umar went but he refused to pray behind Faidherbe, who was the Almamy. When the prayers were finished, a man said to Shaykh Umar, "Why did you pray by yourself rather than with the others? There is a law in Mecca that everyone must pray together, and if anyone refuses he will be killed". Shaykh Umar replied, "Before you kill me, let me tell you why I refused to pray with the others. If you see me praying alone, there is a reason." Then Shaykh Umar said to Faidherbe, "Faidherbe, who has allowed you to pray here for seven years? Your prayers have not been accepted by Allah".

Faidherbe asked why this was so, and Shaykh Umar said, "Because you are a white man, and the white men are not circumcised, and that is why your prayers of the last seven years have not been accepted by Allah. Allah will only accept those prayers if they are recited by someone who knows the right blessings".

When the people heard this, they offered Shaykh Umar a kilogram of gold to say the blessings, but Umar said he did not want gold. When they asked him what he wanted instead, he said, "What I want is an elbow² of cloth from the boubou worn by our chief Muhammad". They gave it to him, and Shaykh Umar took his half metre of Muhammad's boubou and made a gris-gris³ with it. If there was any village he wanted to conquer, he only had to tap this gris-gris on the ground and he would take the village.

1 Faidherbe was Umar's French opponent in the conquest of the Western Sudan.

2 A half metre.

3 An amulet.

When Faidherbe heard about this, he went home to his female slave and said, "Please help me. I have been here for seven years, but now the law has trapped me. If they find me, I will be killed. God has given me everything I searched for these seven years, and all my descendants who are white men like me will be able to possess the world. If you slaves will help me escape, as your master I will set you free". Faidherbe wrote down his promise, and the female slave hid him under her bundle. A search was made for Faidherbe, but he could not be found. At midnight, Faidherbe sneaked out and mounted his big donkey. He went to Jeddah and crossed the river to safety. The first village he stayed in was N'dra.

Shaykh Umar left Mecca and returned to Misira. He studied with the people of Misira and was the first among them. He wrote his name over the gate of Misira: "I left Futa where I had no equal. I came to Misira and did not see my equal here". No one among all the students could say he was better than Shaykh Umar.

Shaykh Umar met his brother there, and began to prepare to leave for Segou. When the Almamy heard Umar was going to Segou, he said, "I gave my daughter to him and he should stay here because he is a man of God. I did not give him my daughter to go to Futa". At that time, the first son of Shaykh Umar, whose name was Lamijulbe, was learning to walk. When Shaykh Umar heard what the Almamy said, he declared, "All right, I will leave with my son and your daughter will stay here". Shaykh Umar took his son and put him on the horse behind him, and left for Segou. As they rode, Shaykh Umar would put a finger in the child's mouth and milk would come from the end of the finger and feed the child. In that way he took the child to Segou.

In Misira, Hausa Bintu¹ was the mother of Lamijulbe. She went three days without eating, weeping all the time. Her father said, "Why are you weeping? You must eat something". "Eh!" she replied, "my father, you have taken my child and given him to his father. My husband did no harm to me. You love me, and as you love me, so do I love my own child, and now my baby is gone with his father. That is why I am in a fever". Her father sent her with ten slaves to rejoin Shaykh Umar at Segou.

Later Shaykh Umar and his followers left Segou and went to Masina. From Masina they went to visit Tamba Bakary at Tamba. Shaykh Umar said, "Tamba Bakary, you have powder and bullets. I am a marabout, and I have come to place myself in your protection". Tamba Bakary said, "That is no problem, though I am not one of the faithful, for I drink spirits and I eat the meat of animals that die naturally". "Well", said Shaykh Umar, "I am a marabout, and I need a place to stay". He was given a place and he stayed there, but he had to pay taxes to Bakary Tamba.

At that time, Bakary Tamba had black policemen. These policemen would go into the village, and any beautiful young girl they saw, they would take to Bakary Tamba. He had a jeli who was called Mustafa Jeli, and at that time all the girls were entrusted to this jeli. One of the girls was especially beautiful, and the jeli loved her. He went to bed with her and took her virginity. When Bakary was ready for this girl, he ordered her to be bathed and brought to him. She was taken to his private room where he coupled with her, but found that she was not a virgin. When he asked her who had done it, she replied, "It was your jeli who did it, Mustafa Jeli".

1 On his way back from Mecca, Umar spent a long period of time with Sultan Bello in the Hausa state of Sokoto and married into the family.

Late that night, Mustafa Jeli went to find Shaykh Umar and said to him, "Shaykh Umar, I have come to put myself under your protection and in the trust of God and the Prophet, because the man I serve is an unbeliever who has no mercy. If he catches me, he will kill me". Shaykh Umar then gave the jeli his blessing and said he could stay with him.

Later, one of Bakary Tamba's warriors went to Shaykh Umar and said that the unbeliever wanted him to give back the jeli who had run away to him. Shaykh Umar said, "Go and tell Bakary Tamba that the jeli has entrusted himself to me for protection by God and the Prophet, so Bakary may excuse him". When Bakary Tamba heard, he said he did not know where God or Muhammad were. This message was brought back to Shaykh Umar, who said, "That is no problem, go and tell Bakary Tamba that I know where God and Muhammad are, and that I will not give back his jeli until I have cut off Tamba's arm and taken out the marrow. Only then will he receive his jeli".

Shaykh Umar had eighteen disciples with him, but Bakary Tamba was a warrior chief. He came to Shaykh Umar and said, "Get ready, for I will take back my jeli". "Very well", said Shaykh Umar. Bakary Tamba's warriors surrounded Shaykh Umar's house, each with a musket. Shaykh Umar said, "Wait, I have only eighteen people and I know I can do nothing against you. I ask you to wait while I pray so I will not die unclean". Then Shaykh Umar prayed while it was so dark he could not see his hand in front of his eyes. The wind began to blow, and with it came some genies, sixty of them. Those sixty genies had followed Shaykh Umar since Medina. They came to Shaykh Umar with their guns. These genies were very brave, and in the battle that followed, every warrior unlucky enough to be struck by one of them never got up again. When most of Tamba Bakary's men were dead,

he ran away. But he was pursued by Shaykh Umar, who caught him and cut off his head. The head was tied with a rope and hung up, because it was the head of an unbeliever. From that time, the people of Futa said Shaykh Umar really must have the genies with him.

Shaykh Umar was asked if, since diviners had special powers, it was still necessary for them to present gifts to jeliw. Shaykh Umar said he gave things to jeliw himself. Then he was asked what sort of things should be given to jeliw, and he said, "If a jeli goes to your house, you can give him a horse. If you have no horse, give him a cow. If you have no cow, give him a goat, and if you have no goat, give him a slave. If you cannot give any of these things, the jeli will not go to your house".

Shaykh Umar journeyed next to the home of Malik Sy. He was very wary of Malik Sy, because that chief had a large supply of powder and bullets. So Umar said to him, "Malik Sy, we must never go to war against each other, for we come from the same mother".¹

Next Shaykh Umar went to Kunju which was fortified by a surrounding wall. He broke through the wall and sacked Kunju. From Kunju Shaykh Umar passed through Yakanan, went on to Dukasamara, and from there continued on to attack Kayes-Medina. He was stopped there for six months with no success. One night in a dream Allah showed him a woman inside the walls and told him, "If this woman gives birth to a child in your presence, you will never be able to engage in war here again".

Earlier, when Shaykh Umar was at Dukasamara, he told the chief there that he wanted to travel to the East, and requested a guide to

1 They were both from Futa Toro.

show him how to get across the river. The man deceived Shaykh Umar, and instead of showing him the ford, took him to the deepest part of the river. Two of Shaykh Umar's men were drowned because of this man's treachery.

In the meantime, there were some men not far away on the river-bank. Their names were Keruane, Mamadou Kumba, Buna Kumba, and Kinkele Kumba. They saw that Shaykh Umar's forces were approaching, and hastened to cross the river. They took their loads and crossed to the west bank. When Shaykh Umar and his people arrived at that place they wanted to pursue the four men, but did not know how they had crossed. Finally, some of the sofaw¹ tied bundles of sticks together, and they began to float across on those. But when they reached the middle of the river, the four men who had crossed ahead of them changed into crocodiles and pulled the bundles of sticks under the water. Shaykh Umar shouted, "Go back! There is something under the water". They struggled back to the riverbank and left that place.

Shaykh Umar never caught the four men on the west bank of the river, and later those four men came to Demba's house in our village, Tumora. Later Shaykh Umar told one of his fiercest warriors to go after Demba, saying, "If you find Demba lying with his face to the East, you must cut off his head. But if he is lying with his face to the West, let him live, because that will mean he is not human". As it turned out, Demba proved to be a sorcerer and was not killed.

Later, Shaykh Umar spent several months there. One day he said to Demba, "Demba, I want to go to Nioro, and I need some of your

1 Mounted warriors, cavalrymen.

jeliw. Let us divide them up between us". Demba said, "I will not divide up my jeliw because jeliw are the clothing of the nobles. If I divide up my jeliw, those who do not know the reason will say I am afraid of you". Shaykh Umar said, "You have two daughters here. Let them be married to two of my men so there will be an alliance between us, for we are both of the chiefly class". Demba agreed to this and gave away his two daughters.

Shaykh Umar left there and went to Soroma and conquered it. He left Soroma and went to Jogwa and conquered it. He left Jogwa and went to Nioro and conquered it. He built a mosque at Nioro, first blessing an amulet, then placing the first brick on the ground over the amulet. This mosque is still there in Nioro, for neither rain nor anything else can knock it down.

Shaykh Umar next went to Murjian. The people of Murjian said to their chief, "Eh, Falike of Murjian, Islam is coming, you must shave your head". And Falike did shave his head, so Shaykh Umar and his religion came there without a battle.

Then Shaykh Umar and his followers returned to Hamdalaye in Segou and did battle with Hamadou Amadou there, with much skirmishing in various parts of the town. They did the mani-mani there, the coming and going that marks the turmoil of a town in troubled times.

Batu Dembele and Yaranka. Batu Dembele was a slave¹ of the Masina people, and Yaranka was a slave of Shaykh Umar. Shaykh Umar and his army were in their camp on one side, and the people of Masina were on the other side. Batu Dembele was a good horseman. He and Yaranka met in the middle of the battleground. They fired at each

1 A servant, a warrior.

other, but the bullets failed to penetrate either of them.¹ They said to each other, "We two slaves must go on fighting here until the end of the world. We must remove all our gris-gris against bullets. Let us take them off". They took all the gris-gris off their bodies. They remounted their horses and charged, irrr! against each other in the field. They fired at each other, tiouw! and both were struck by bullets and they fell from their horses. The Masina people said, "The vultures will not eat our slave". And the Futa people also said, "The vultures will not eat our slave". That was a time when Shaykh Umar did the mani-mani. One of the horses was invulnerable to bullets, and the wind blew some of its hair onto the Joliba.² The river carried this hair down river, all the way no N'dra.

Shaykh Umar took his blacksmith and his old gaulo³ woman with him and left there, going to a little village where he could rest. In the meantime, the Macina warriors were in pursuit, saying, "We must not let this Toronke⁴ get away. We must kill him, for he has wiped out many of our people". The Maşina warriors arrived in the village shortly after Shaykh Umar had departed.

1 Instead of saying the two fighters missed each other, or their aim was bad, the griot says the bullets did not go under either of their skins. This is an example of the way a griot will tell a story, consistent with the traditional ideas about such things. When a man goes through a battle without suffering a wound, he is not lucky, nor are the enemy bad marksmen. Instead, the man has proven himself invulnerable to "iron". Similarly, if there were a rogue animal abroad killing people, and it repeatedly escaped its hunters, it was not lucky or wily, nor were the hunters cowards or bad marksmen. Instead, the animal is the possessor of magic powers, probably a sorcerer that has changed itself into the animal.

2 The Niger River.

3 A type of griot, of lower status than a jeli.

4 Man of Futa Toro.

There is a mountain there called Degebre. Shaykh Umar met some Kado women carrying water on their heads. He asked them the name of the mountain, and they replied that it was called Degebre. Then Shaykh Umar said, "This is my end. They told me in Mecca that when I heard the name of a mountain called Degebre, my time will have come". He asked the Kado women for drinking water, and they gave him a pot. He drank some and washed himself for prayers, saying to his blacksmith, "Go and find my son Shaykh Tijani and give him all my possessions". Shaykh Umar packed his njeforoko¹ and gave it to his blacksmith. He made a gris-gris for Shaykh Tijani with which to fight Masina, and said, "Tell Tijani that during the battle a small animal will run into his camp. Some of his men will see it and shout, 'Look at the little animal!' He must tell them to catch it and tie this gris-gris to its leg. The little animal will then run with the gris-gris to the Masina camp. They will catch it, kill it, and burn it in the fire without noticing the gris-gris. If this is done, Shaykh Tijani will conquer Masina".

Before he left, the blacksmith asked Shaykh Umar how he would be able to escape to Bandiagara. Shaykh Umar replied, "By the grace of God, you will not find your way beset by thorns. Give me your hands". The blacksmith gave him his hands, and Shaykh Umar made a blessing in them for the man to rub on his face. Then it was time for the blacksmith to leave. By now the Masina warriors had surrounded the mountain of Degebre. The blacksmith succeeded in passing through their ranks without being seen by anyone. He had put much distance between himself and the enemy before they realized

1 Literally "He bag", a pouch containing all medicines, gris-gris, amulets and fetishes, secrets deemed crucial to Umar's power.

someone had gotten through. He continued his flight until he found Shaykh Tijani and gave him the belongings of Shaykh Umar. The blacksmith told Tijani, "Your father said you will not see each other again until you meet in lahara". Shaykh Tijani wept.

At the mountain of Degebre the Masina army had a hut full of powder. They said, "This Toronke has caused us too much grief. Let us set fire to the powder hut and blow him up". In the meantime, Shaykh Umar had descended into a deep hole in the mountain. A hut has been built over the hole where Shaykh Umar disappeared, and the pot he drank from was put in the hole. To this day, there is water in that pot. Shaykh Umar ended his life there. He is in the mountain of Degebre. His son Shaykh Tijani continued the war against Masina. He pursued them to Konon where he dug a big hole, killed many Masina warriors, and filled the hole with their bodies before he closed it.

The war was finished there.

Al-hajj Umar and Faidherbe

Informant: Amady N'Diaye
Recorded at Dioila, 14 February 1976

Al-hajj Umar went to Mecca. In those days Faidherbe was the imam at Mecca. He had been there for seven years. Faidherbe is the ancestor of the whites, the Europeans. Al-hajj Umar left Futa to go to Segou where he stayed for five years. From Segou he went to Mecca. He saw an inscription on the Kaaba: "Any stranger, however great he may be, will meet his equal here".

In those days, Mecca was known to be a place of great power. God had given it the ability to revive the dead. If a child died, the parents would bring it, and it would be brought back from the dead. It was the arrival of Al-hajj Umar that put an end to this state of affairs.

For seven years Faidherbe was imam at Mecca, and all that time the citizens were completely unaware of his race. They took him for an Arab, though he was really a European. Al-hajj Umar did his five prayer sessions without going to the mosque. The people of Mecca were astonished at this behaviour, and they asked him why he did not go to the mosque to pray. Shaykh Umar declared that he had a very good reason for not going to the mosque. Then he asked the people of Mecca if they knew the race to which their imam belonged. When they replied that their imam was an Arab, Al-hajj Umar smiled to himself, for he knew the imam was really a European. But he decided to wait until later to tell the people of Mecca.

When the other people had gone away, Shaykh Umar told an old woman who was standing nearby, that Faidherbe was a European. As soon as she heard this, the old woman went to the imam and told him

what she knew. He offered her fabulous wealth in return for not exposing his secret, but the old woman rejected all his proposals. Instead, she demanded that Faidherbe set all of his slaves free. When they agreed that this would be done, the old woman said to Faidherbe, "There is a stranger visiting in my household, by the name of Al-hajj Umar, and he is the one who noticed that you are a European. If the people of Mecca ever learn that you are a European, it will be the end of your days. I will tell Shaykh Umar that you, as the imam, have decided to liberate all your slaves, in the hope that this will lead to the banishment of all slavery".

It was at this time that Faidherbe conceived the idea of the bicycle, something he could build that would enable him to make his escape. When he was about to flee, Al-hajj Umar saw him and captured him. But then these two men came to an agreement. According to this agreement, Faidherbe and all his descendants would show respect for all the members of Al-hajj Umar's race. Upon coming to this understanding, in the wink of an eye, Al-hajj Umar sent Faidherbe to France with the letter that announced their agreement. When Faidherbe arrived in France he delivered the letter that abolished slavery.

Stories of the Beginning

Informant: Fanyama Diabate
Recorded at Bamako, 18 October 1975

Adama and Hawa

When Muhammad was sitting by God, there were no people yet. When God decided to make men, there was water on seven parts of the earth. God sent Jibril to the seventh part of the earth to gather banco¹ for making people. Jibril brought the banco up to God. God looked at the banco and saw Satani, so he did not use it. God saw a person and said, "Is this Adama a person?" And Satani said, "I do not like this person".

God divided the banco. One part for Adama and the other for Hawa. Then he said, "Satani, if you do not like the person, I will kill you". When God made these two people, he put one in the East and the other in the West. They searched for each other for forty years. They found each other at Mecca on a mountain.

Adama saw Hawa first. He went and put his hand on her, saying, "Is this Hawa?" And she replied, "Yes, I am Hawa. Since God made us and separated us, I have waited in this place without moving".

Adama had looked for Hawa until his shoes were worn out. In those days they had no clothing except leaves. They had to pick leaves and put some in front and others behind. If those leaves dried out, they threw them away and picked new ones.

They went to a minko tree and picked some fruit and put it in their mouths. God said, "Jibril, you must not let these people swallow the fruit of that tree". Jibril came down at full speed

1 Clay, or mud for making bricks.

and caught Adama by the neck and the fruit became his Adam's apple. Hawa swallowed the fruit and it became her menstrual cycle. Then Adama and Hawa coupled and Hawa took the stomach.¹ She bore twins, a boy and a girl. Adama and Hawa coupled again, and again she bore twins, a boy and a girl. Altogether they had forty children, half girls and half boys.

The Twins

A he-twin became fond of a she-twin and married her. More of them did the same, until two he-twins became fond of the same she-twin. They fought, and one killed the other. The corpse lay on the ground, and no one knew what to do with it. God sent Jibril again, who caught a lizard. He killed the lizard and put it in a tree. Then the lizard fell down to the ground, so Jibril dug a hole in the sand, put the lizard in it, and covered it up. When the people saw Jibril do this, they knew what to do with the dead twin. They began to bury every dead person that way.

Nabilaye Nouha

Another son was Nabilaye Nouha. In his village he made a big canoe and put it on the river saying, "If this pleases God it will rain until many people are drowned!". Some of Nouha's sons came to the village until they were all there.

Nouha's wife was wicked. She heated a pot and put it on her husband's head. Nouha said, "The great flood will come to the place where this wicked woman does her cooking". But the woman said, "Eh, you are not God".

1 Became pregnant.

One day when this wicked woman was cooking, water began to come pouring out near her, poi! The woman filled a pail with water and cast it far away. Nouha laughed at her and said, "Water will bring this wicked woman to grief". Then he went to keep a careful watch on his canoe.

One of Nouha's sons climbed up a mountain and sat there so water could not find him. Nouha said, "If you do not come down, the water will find you there". And the water climbed up the mountain, and Nouha's son was drowned.

At the time when there was much water and the sons of Adama and Hawa were drowned, there were no black bodies. Everyone got into Nouha's canoe, and Nouha said, "Now we are all white bodies. If anybody takes a woman now, his body will turn black". Some of them took girls, and their bodies turned black. Those who did not stayed white.