

INTERPRETING SUNJATA:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND EXEGESIS OF THE MALINKE EPIC

by

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## SYNOPSIS

Thirty-five individual published versions of the Sunjata epic, collected or produced between the years c. 1889 and 1987 are analysed and compared. After an examination of each version's date, author, form and context, comparison is made on the basis of 157 story-elements into which the epic's plot is divided. Variation in the story over both space and time is gauged, and it is suggested that the story has remained relatively stable over the century. Various factors are highlighted to account for differences in the epic from one place to another and from one teller to another. Interpretations of the epic's major portions - the paternal and maternal inheritance of the hero, his birth and childhood, his exile and return to Manding; the hero's rival, Sumanguru; the demise of Sumanguru and of Sunjata, and the expansion of Mali to the western seaboard - are advanced, employing a rigorous comparative analysis of the versions themselves, African and non-African analogues, the resources of historians and archaeologists of west Africa, folklorists, anthropologists of the Malinke and related ethnic groups, and psychologists, in order to ascertain the role of the story of Sunjata in traditional Malinke society, particularly as an explicator of social actualities, psychological verities, and historical events.

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## INTRODUCTION

Those people who trace their origins back to the Manding or Manden heartland in the Upper Niger valley, straddling the border between present-day Mali and Guinea, are now spread across an area stretching from the Gambian estuary in the west to the Ivory Coast in the east, and encompassing Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Sierra Leone, Mali, Liberia and Burkina Faso. They are often called the Malinke, although they are also known by the names Mandingo, Mandenka, Mandinka and Maninka, while their language has been termed Mandekan. They are related to the Bamana (Bambara), Dyula, Wangara, Khassonke, Jakhanke, Kuranko and Manya (Dalby 1971; Bird & Kendall 1980: 13).

### **Malinke history**

The Malinke owe their wide distribution across west Africa first to the success of their empire, Mali (thirteenth to seventeenth centuries), and later to migrations following its decadence, as well as to the abilities of the Wangara, Dyula, and Jakhanke traders, who acted as middlemen between the sedentary Malinke and the Berbers of north Africa and, later, the Europeans on the Atlantic coast, dealing in, among other commodities, gold, slaves, salt and kola nuts. It is claimed that the empire of Mali, at its apogee in the mid fourteenth century, stretched from the Atlantic seabord in the west to the Niger bend in the east, from the northern desert fringes in present-day Mauritania to the southern forest fringes of the Ivory Coast. Mali's origins appear to have been in small cantons on the Upper Niger, among them Do and Kri (Kiri) which, according to the Sunjata epic, were fused into a single state by Sunjata Keita, or perhaps by his rival, Sumanguru Kante, who controlled Manding before Sunjata's triumph, and seems to have been the first to obliterate the petty chiefdoms into which the region had previously been divided. Sunjata's own reign, which is

remembered in the Sunjata epic and reckoned as the foundation of the empire, is conventionally dated, after information derived from the Arabic author Ibn Khaldūn, writing in North Africa, 1230-55 or 1235-60. The epic, which describes Sunjata's rise to power, also contains an account of the conquest and settlement by the Malinke of Senegambia, suggesting that Mali had already reached to the Atlantic by the thirteenth century. This claim is disputed, and the reign of Mansa Mūsā (1312-37) is generally associated by historians with the westward expansion of Mali, while Sunjata's son, Mansa Uli, is linked to the taking by Mali of the eastern towns of Timbuktu, Walata, and Gao (Levtzion 1980).

Mali's greatest period of stability and prosperity is associated with the fourteenth-century Mansa Mūsā, or Kankan Mūsā, a descendant of Sunjata's brother - who is called Abu Bakr by Ibn Khaldūn, but is known as Manding Bori or Manding Bukari in the epic. Mūsā made the Meccan pilgrimage in 1324, and is said to have inadvertently lowered the price of gold through his spending and generosity towards his hosts in Cairo. Mali's wealth was based on gold, and on its export, much of it in return for salt, to the well established trade system of the Arab world and the emergent Christian kingdoms of Europe. Gold was mined in two regions under Malian control, Bambuk, between the Senegal and Bafing rivers, and Bure, between the Bafing and Tinkisso rivers. Mali successfully kept the visiting long-distance traders, both Arab and European, at a distance from these areas of production; yet the search for these mysterious and elusive regions was to fire the early European attempts to explore and control the west African interior.

A visit to the Malian court of Mansa Sulaymān in 1352/3 by the seasoned Arab traveller, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, presents us with an informative picture of the empire of Mali. The traveller stayed in the white quarter of the capital, usually the home of traders; he witnessed elaborate court etiquette and a recitation by a *jāli* (*jeli*) of the royal genealogy. He notes that the *mansa* was respected and revered and did not oppress his people, nor allow others to do so, and that travel was safe throughout the kingdom. The king and his people were Muslim, he said, and conscientious in their

religious practices, although Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was shocked at the emperor's employment of semi-naked girls as servants (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 281-316).

The first sign of a physical decline in Mali's fortunes came with the loss of Songhai in the late fourteenth century. During the fifteenth century Mali was raided several times by the independent and vigorous state of Songhai; in the early sixteenth century Mali appears to have been paying her tribute, and in 1545/6 Mali's capital was sacked. With the Moroccan invasion of Songhai in 1590/1 the pressure on Mali eased, and three attempts were made by Mali to retake the city of Jenne on the Niger. All were unsuccessful and the king had to flee from the last on horseback. At the same time, in the west, the successors to Koli Tengella, the founder of the Fulani empire of the Futa Jalon, took from Mali the important gold-bearing region of Bambuk. These two losses appear to mark the disintegration of the central authority of the *mansa* of Mali. In the place of an all-embracing polity, the Malinke and their neighbouring peoples seem to have returned to the system of small cantons or *kafuw*, although the empire of Kabu in the west remained until the nineteenth century, and saw itself as a perpetuator of the Malinke traditions first established under the *mansaw* of Mali (Levtzion 1980; Person 1972a; Sidibe 1972a).

### **Malinke social formation**

The Malinke are chiefly subsistence farmers, the cycle of life being determined by the changing seasons, with work in the fields during the wet season followed by a return to the village for the dry season, at which time other activities, such as hunting, or community festivals, such as initiation rites, may be undertaken. Malinke traditional society admits of a three-fold division. *Horonw*, "nobles" or "freemen", *jonw*, "slaves", or rather, those of slave descent, and *nyamakalaw*, a term often rendered as "castes", but which can be better expressed as "hereditary professionals". A further category may be mentioned, that of the *moriw* or marabouts. Clan names or patronyms (*jamuw*) are associated with each of these categories, but the lists are not

always consistent, varying most commonly from one region to another. Subdivisions of the major categories can also be made. *Horonw* include both the *Masalen* or *Masaren*, who are those entitled to *mansaya* (kingship), those of royal ancestry, including the Keita, Konate and Kulubali clans; and the *Ton tigiw*, or "masters of the quiver", that is, the warrior nobility. A further two subcategories, which may be coterminous with that of the *Ton tigiw* are the *Tontajonw* or "sixteen slave clans", and the *Bula* clans, which are seen as the original settlers of Manding. Among them we find the Traore, Kamara, Dunbuya and Konte families.

The *nyamakalaw* can be divided into at least five distinct hereditary professions, the *numuw* are blacksmiths and woodcarvers, the *garankew* leatherworkers, the *kulew* carpenters, basketmakers and canoe-repairers, the *finew* or *funew* are praise-singers specializing in Islamic themes, while the *jeliw* or *jaliw* are griots or praise-singers whose repertoire includes the Sunjata epic and other essentially historical pieces. (For examples of these see Camara 1976, appendix; Innes 1976 and 1978; Conrad 1981, vol. ii.) The *nyamakalaw* are endogamous and, although they enjoy freeman status, are deemed to be beyond the ambit of those allowed to wield political power (Farias 1989: 153-5; Diabaté n.d.: 17; Dieterlen 1955: 40-1; N'Diaye 1970; McNaughton 1988: 1-7; Sidibé 1959a).

Malinke kinship is patrilineal and marriage patrilocal and polygynous. Kinship terminology reflects emphasis upon differences between genders and generations, and on seniority within a generation. Individuals are grouped in households (*luw*), the head of which, the *Lu tigi*, is the senior surviving male of the group. Householders share a compound in the village, eat together, and farm common ground. Within the household, and within a generation, the chief fissures among members occur between children of the same father but who have a different mother. *Baden* is the term employed to denote those children who share the same mother, and derives from *ba*, "mother" and *den*, "child"; while *faden* denotes the wider category of children with the same father (*fa* = father). While *baden* are expected to cohere and to support each other, it is accepted that those who simply share the same father will be rivals and

may quarrel.

*Luw* (compounds) are arranged in villages (*duguw*) which generally contain several lineages and sublineages. The village chief, the *Dugu tigi*, is the senior male from the dominant lineage. Villages are arranged in *kafuw*, or cantons, presided over by a *Jamana tigi*, each *kafu* sharing common *jamuw* or patronyms, common myths and stories, ceremonies and shrines (Hopkins 1971; Cashion 1982: 91-9; Johnson 1978: 92-7).

Despite the tensions the Malinke recognize as inherent in the family unit, kinship forms the basis for social solidarity, both in the village, the canton and beyond, with individuals asserting their affiliation with those who share their *jamu* (patronym) throughout the Malinke diaspora. Beyond the ties of kinship several other important forces for coherence and solidarity exist in Malinke society. At the village level, societies or *tonw* exist which group those of a similar age for communal activities, both productive and recreational. Most important is the young person's *ton* which accepts individuals who have been circumcised or excised up to about their late thirties. The young person's *ton* organizes working parties for farming as well as arranging leisure activities, gives coherence to the village's young people, and provides a forum in which those as yet without responsibilities in household or village politics can exercise their organizational and leadership abilities (Cashion 1982: 97-9; Hopkins 1971).

On another level, solidarity within the Malinke world is promoted through the institution of *senankuya*, which is often termed the joking relationship. *Senankuya* maintains that links have previously been established by ancestors between two separate Malinke clans, or between a Malinke clan and a family from another ethnic group, and that these links enjoin mutual aid and succour, support and hospitality between individual members of participant clans. As with kinship ties, *senankuya* also operates beyond the level of village and canton, and it is often with a family linked to him or her through *senankuya* that a traveller will stay when beyond home territory.

## The Sunjata epic - a synopsis

Besides their fame as wood- and metal-workers, the Malinke and related Bamana are chiefly known beyond west Africa for the music of their oral performers, the *jeliw* or griots, whose singing, *kora* (harp-lute) and *bala* (xylophone) playing are an increasingly popular west African export, whether heard in a traditional mould, or fused with other musical genres. Much of the corpus of the *jeliw* varies from one region to another, and consists of local traditions, but held in common by griots throughout the Malinke diaspora is the story of Sunjata Keita.

It will be useful at this point to provide a brief synopsis of the story told in the Sunjata epic. Clearly the idea of an objectively complete, correct, and authoritative version of any antique oral tradition is highly problematic and indeed an impossibility. A traditional tale that is the property of bards scattered over a wide swathe of west Africa, and an *oral* tale at that - one which is told with subtle differences even by the same griot each time it is performed - cannot accommodate the notions familiar to those schooled in the criticism of literary works. Yet, despite this caveat, it is necessary to provide some kind of short summary of the story to orient the reader which, although misrepresenting a number of accounts in various respects, and representing no actual telling in every respect, conforms as closely as possible to the majority of versions we have studied. It is based upon the thirty-six versions of the epic studied in the thesis, and may also be compared with the list of story-elements in the epic given in the synoptic charts in Chapter One.

The Sunjata epic tells the story of the birth, exile, and rise to kingship of Sunjata Keita, his defeat of Sumanguru Kante and creation of the empire of Mali. It begins with several introductory sections which lead up to the hero's birth. In one, we are told how the ancestors of Sunjata's father, Nare Famaghan Konate - king of Manding, either the heartland country of the Malinke, or else one of the cantons of

the pre-imperial Malinke world - are descended from Bilali, companion of prophet Muḥammad, and how Bilali's sons or grandsons establish the first Malinke settlement of Kiri Koroni. A genealogy linking Bilali to Sunjata's father is often recited by the griot at this point in the performance of the epic.

In the second and more widespread introductory section we discover how Sunjata's mother is given as a bride to Nare Famaghan. In this story, the Buffalo-woman tale, the epic tells how, in return for a bride, two hunters, who are brothers, accept the challenge of killing a wild and dangerous buffalo who has been ravaging the village or canton of Do. The hunters initially fail to encounter the buffalo, but they do befriend an irascible old woman. She, it transpires, is the estranged sister or aunt of the king, and is, in the form of a buffalo, the one who is attacking the menfolk of the village. Because of their selfless kindness towards her, she reveals to the hunters the secret by which she, as the buffalo, may be killed; in return for this revelation, the brothers agree to choose as their bride an ugly girl, Sogolon, who is related to the old woman, and thus to the king. They do so, but are unable to consummate the marriage, and instead give the deformed princess to Nare Famaghan of Manding, who has been advised to marry an ugly stranger for the sake of his kingdom. It is from the union of Nare Famaghan and Sogolon that Sunjata is conceived.

Sunjata's birth and childhood are beset by problems which wholly belie his later achievements. His mother, Sogolon, is pregnant for many years and, when she does eventually give birth, the child is lame. Sometimes the birth is simultaneous with that of another son of the king, by a different wife, and intense rivalry develops between the two children and their mothers after a dispute over who is the king's first-born son. Equally, Sunjata is said by some to be the youngest of many sons of the king, the last and least regarded of a large progeny. Sunjata's circumstances, whatever their particulars, make him a most unlikely candidate for high office, let alone for the status of empire-founder, but at a certain age - on which the *jeliw* are not in agreement - the hero overcomes his paralysis of the legs and manages to stand, often with the aid of stout iron bars which he breaks or bends in the effort

to haul himself upright. Unfortunately for Sogolon's son, his new-found ability to walk, and his subsequent success as a hunter, rekindle the rivalry between himself and his brother or brothers. With the death of his father, the hero and his mother are sent into exile by the new king of Manding, who is often identified as Dankaran Tuman, the half-brother of Sunjata, and son of Sogolon's co-wife.

During his exile wanderings Sunjata faces trials of strength and endurance, games of skill, challenges to his forbearance, and tests of his noble ancestry and royal birth. Through these hardships he develops the skills necessary to rule Manding. Sunjata is said to visit many different settlements and states, which vary according to which *jeli* is telling the story, but for a majority of griots it is in the desert-fringe kingdom of Mema that the hero spends much of these years.

Meanwhile, Manding has been overrun by Sumanguru Kante, initially ruler of Soso, and a tyrant, and Dankaran Tuman has fled the kingdom. The remaining leading figures among the Malinke determine to seek out the exiled son of Nare Famaghan whom, they are told, will prove the saviour of their country. Sunjata is eventually located by a group of vegetable-selling *moriw* (marabouts), and asked to lead a revolt against Sumanguru on behalf of the down-trodden Malinke. Sogolon, by now an old woman, dies; Sunjata takes this as a positive omen for the mission, and accepts the challenge. The pretender to the throne gains the first of his troops from his exile hosts, the Meman Tunkara, and the alliance is strengthened by, among others, the Camara of Sibi and Tabon, Tira Makhan of the Traore clan, Sangaran Madiba Konte of his mother's family, and Fakoli Koroma, nephew of Sumanguru, who deserts his uncle after Sumanguru takes his wife from him.

In spite of his allies, which also include the Niger boatmen, the Somono, Sunjata is unsuccessful in his early battles against Sumanguru, with the Kante monarch proving invulnerable to attack. Perceiving that Sumanguru possesses magical strength, Sunjata's sister seduces him and prizes from him the secret of his invulnerability. She informs Sunjata that an arrow tipped with the spur of a white cock will remove his protection and, armed with this weapon, the allies defeat Sumanguru, and he is

put to flight, taking refuge at Kulikoro, where he either disappears into a mountain or is petrified. Sunjata is proclaimed ruler of Manding and Soso.

While many accounts conclude the story at this point, others tell of the conquest of Senegambia by Sunjata's ally, Tira Makhan Traore, who first subdues the Wolof state of Jolof, whose king has insulted Sunjata by refusing to sell the Malinke horses and declaring Sunjata and his men unfit to ride the animals. Some accounts contain details of Sunjata's death, although these details are brief and sometimes contradictory.

### **Approach adopted in this thesis**

The Sunjata epic can and has been approached in many different ways. Early French historians of west Africa Rene Basset and Maurice Delafosse employed it as a historical source in their construction of a history of the region (Basset 1888; Delafosse 1913: 1-30; 1972 ii: 163-84). This historical approach has been criticised by Charles Monteil (1929) and, more recently, by Guy Tombs (1978) and David Conrad (1981, 1983, 1984), but, for example, Nehemia Levtzion's standard work still employs elements of the Sunjata epic's story in his account of early Malian history (1980).

An uncritical use of the epic as a historical source is fraught with dangers, as Delafosse's work amply shows. Literal readings of oral traditions by historians have proved largely unsatisfactory, and as functional and structuralist social anthropologists brought out more and more of the structured or clichéd elements in oral narratives, there appeared to be less and less material that the historian could justifiably term history - i.e. that which reflects the unique and unrepeatable. In addition, anthropologists have advanced plausible interpretations of apparently historical traditions (that is to say traditions which deal with the past) which claim that the focus of these traditions was in fact not the past but the social and political issues of the present. The use of oral narrative as a historical source seemed to have reached an *impasse*. However, with the advent of more complex

methodologies for the handling of oral traditions since Jan Vansina's pioneering *Oral Tradition* (first published 1960), and more recently with the work of David Henige (1974, 1982) and the journal *History in Africa*, and with Joseph Miller and his colleagues (Miller 1978, 1980), some convincing historical interpretations of oral traditions have emerged. Rather than attempting to ignore all clichéd material as necessarily ahistorical, and to deal only with the residue of unique events, recent historical practitioners have attempted to interpret the structured narratives identified by anthropologists in a historical frame. Fundamental to this new approach has been a rigorous acceptance of the relativity of all historical discourse, whether oral or written, to the producer and the situation in which the work has been produced, and the belief that history itself is structured, is a manipulation of information to reach pre-set goals, and that even if chirographic or printed history focuses on unique events, it is nonetheless concerned with repetitious, ahistorical themes. Despite this advance, historians of oral tradition have generally been able to make only broad statements about the past on the basis of oral sources; more enlightening has been the uncovering of the oral historian's own purpose or "agenda", that is to say, the development of a historiography of oral traditions.

In this thesis it is hoped to consider the manner in which the Malinke traditionists have constructed their story of the past insofar as it is found in the Sunjata epic. The limitations of external corroborative evidence do not often allow us to make definitive statements of what, specifically, occurred in the past, but we are able more often to provide answers to the questions: How has this history been composed? and For what purpose has this history been composed? By "history" in this context we may equally write "pseudo-history" or idealized history, in that it cannot be verified as factual, but any kind of history, we must admit, is subject to greater or lesser degrees of purposefulness which run contrary to received notions of historical accuracy, inclusiveness and impartiality. To say, therefore, that the Sunjata epic is an employable historical source is, in our terms, as much to say that it is *about* the past as that it is *from* the past.

A second strand has concerned itself with the acceptance of the story of Sunjata as an epic. D.T. Niane's version of the story, which appeared in 1960 under the title *Soundjata, ou l'Épopée Mandingue*, was the first published variant to claim for the story the title of epic (previous versions had in the main made do with "legend"). Yet in her *Oral tradition in Africa* (1970) Ruth Finnegan doubted the existence of epic in Africa. John William Johnson, in his 1978 thesis and article of 1980 counters her assertions, claiming that epic does exist in Africa and that the tradition of Sunjata is an example of the genre. Isolating eight characteristics of epic poetry in world literature - that epic is poetic, narrative, heroic and legendary, attains a certain length, is multi-functional and multi-generic, and is orally transmitted in a culture (1978: 3-4) - Johnson determines that the Sunjata story meets these requirements and should therefore be termed an epic (1978: 258). Johnson's arguments are thorough and convincing, and the Sunjata story shall be referred to as an epic throughout this thesis.

An essentially separate strand in the analysis of the Sunjata epic has centred around the story's potential as a window onto the history of the social structure of Malinke society, and as a reflector of the preoccupations, beliefs and assumptions of their culture in its history. Charles Bird (1971, 1977), Bird and Martha Kendall (1980), Massa Makan Diabaté (n.d.), Nicholas Hopkins (1972), Joseph Mbele (1977, 1982), and Johnson (1978, 1979), have concentrated on the epic's relationship with the social and political structure of the Malinke world. I fully endorse this approach and accept Hopkin's assertion that the epic acts in part as a social charter for the Malinke (1972). I shall, in this thesis, attempt to bring out more clearly both the extent of this element within the legend and also the manner in which the material is arranged and manipulated in order to produce the desired effect. Inevitably - and desirably - this will involve a consideration of the interaction of the historical and social aims of the oral traditionists in their creation and reformation of the Sunjata epic.

A fourth strand discernible in the academic work treating the Sunjata legend

approaches the story as an example of heroic literature. Few readers can fail to have detected the themes that the Sunjata epic shares with many other heroic legends and myths, both in Africa and beyond. A number of scholars have touched upon this subject (Innes 1974: 24-7; Bird 1977; Bird and Kendall 1980; Johnson 1978: 179f.; Diabaté n.d.: 10f.), either by noting the epic's similarity to other hero myths or by analyzing the place and meaning of the hero in Malinke culture. Emphasis has been placed by Bird upon the ambivalent relationship between society and the Malinke hero (*ngana*), and upon the basis of the hero's makeup and development within the Malinke conception of the family. I hope to build upon these insights in an effort to examine the epic's treatment of the issue of family and of kinship in general, and upon its portrayal of the development of the individual within the context of kinship and of the wider community. In this instance, I shall be taking the hero as a role model for the individual, and will, in effect, be dealing with psychological and sociological concerns: the relationships within families, gender relations, and the interaction of individual and group. Due consideration shall also be given to the epic hero's status as an aspirant to high office, and in this way I hope to portray the Malinke conception of the ruler and, more generally, their attitude towards power and its manipulation.

In the discussion of each of these aspects of the epic - historical, social, psychological - there has been a tendency to imagine the Malinke as a homogeneous or monolithic entity, sharing a common worldview, beliefs and opinions. But Malinke society, like any other, consists of a number of sometimes intersecting and sometimes distinct interest groups, social strata, kinship units, occupational/professional groups and regional affiliations; and it is the interplay of these and other divisions among the Malinke that determine who holds what beliefs and opinions in which context. Some attempt will therefore be made in this thesis to differentiate between viewpoints, where appropriate, particularly on the basis of social status, gender and regional or religious affiliation. To some extent, however, Joseph Mbele's claim (1977) that the epic of Sunjata is an "ideological weapon" developed specifically to

endorse and perpetuate the established social and political situation can be accorded credence, and the epic's reflection of alternative or minority viewpoints is severely limited. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the epic is not itself a homogeneous entity, but is rather a tradition that is reformed in each performance (not to mention different historical periods), and one that can therefore be fashioned to suit various differing purposes by the teller - as an oral tale it can accommodate alternative voices to a greater degree than can written literature.

The approach throughout this thesis will be essentially interpretive and, notwithstanding the oral origin of the material under analysis, will consist of a close textual reading of all the versions of the epic, and all the major variants of the story-elements discerned from these. This essentially internal comparative approach will be supplemented by discussion of analogous or related traditional themes outside the epic corpus, both within Malinke culture and beyond, not with the largely sterile aim of establishing the derivative nature of large parts of the epic, but to be able more fully to interpret these themes as they appear in it. The premise upon which this method is based is the view that oral literature creates not through the invention of wholly novel elements, plots or themes, but through the manipulation and alteration of the traditional building-blocks of oral narrative: well-known motifs, clichés, or themes. Parry and Lord identified the use of such building-blocks on the level of the poetic phrase, which they called formulae (Lord 1964); Propp identified similar units on the level of the plot, which he termed functions (Propp 1968), while comparative folklorists and mythologists have identified larger structural units than these, such as the cliché of the youngest child who succeeds or the primaeval flood. In this thesis I do not distinguish between the use of the terms theme, cliché or motif, but I am generally referring to the larger structural units identified by folklorists, such as those found in the *Motif-Index* of Stith Thompson (to which all numbered references in the thesis refer), and not to the poetic phrases of Parry and Lord. I would characterize a theme, cliché or motif as a story or a constituent element of a story that can be identified as part of a number of separate traditions.

## Arrangement of the material

The approaches to the epic identified above are not treated separately within the main body of the thesis; rather, in an attempt to demonstrate how they interact with each other, chapters Two to Eight deal with the epic's story in a roughly chronological manner. Before that, in Chapter One, a full list of the thirty-six versions of the epic is presented, cataloguing, where possible, their date of performance, teller, and place of recording, discussing their form, content and other relevant issues. Incidentally, this survey provides a picture of the development of the study of the Sunjata corpus, its dissemination by both African and non-African authors, and its treatments as folklore, myth, legend, history, or great literature. Following in Part Two of Chapter One is a comparative survey of the epic variants, both in terms of their geographical situation and date of performance. The epic is divided by us into 157 story-elements and, using these as a gauge of similarity between accounts, an attempt is made to analyse variation in the story from one region to another, and from one time to another, in order to understand how the epic is both preserved and altered by successive generations.

In Chapter Two the representations of the hero's paternal ancestry are traced, his father's putative Islamic heritage is discussed, and the story of Manding's first settlers examined. Sunjata's "foreign" or "Muslim" genealogy, while an unreliable source for historians, serves to place the founder of Mali within local Islamic contexts, conferring on Sunjata *baraka* (blessing or grace), from prophet Muḥammad, while at the same time not diminishing his association with the hunter-kings who are equally, we find, accorded a significant role in the early history of the Malinke.

Chapter Three considers the hero's maternal heritage, encapsulated in the tale of the Buffalo-woman of Do. In this chapter I attempt to show how the epic establishes Sunjata as the legitimate inheritor of the pre-Malian cantons of Kri and Do, the unifier of the legacy of the lineages of Traore, Konte and Konate into the royal clan of the Keita, and the product equally of the hunter skill of the Traore, the royal

rights of the Konate, and the natural power of the buffalo-woman.

Having established in some detail Sunjata's parental inheritance, Chapter Four begins his own story, taking us from his birth to his recovery from lameness and gaining of a reputation as a hunter. The hero's own misfortunes, and his surmounting of them, I suggest, portray much of the attitude of the Malinke toward the issues of the individual's development within the family and the wider community, with the quarrels and rivalries described in the epic between Sunjata and his kin reflecting trans-historical tensions found in the polygynous family in general.

Chapter Five treats Sunjata's exile wanderings and the tests and trials which accompany them. Emphasis is initially placed upon Sunjata's trials as a model for character development enjoined by Malinke culture on its youngsters, but the exile tests equally witness an affirmation of Sunjata's legitimacy as a *mansa* (king), both in view of the personal qualities he is shown to possess, and because of the destiny which is shown to await him. In addition, the first elements of the hero's alliance against Sumanguru are introduced, in the form of the Tunkara of Mema and the Manding *moriw* (marabouts) who seek him out to ask him to return and confront Sumanguru.

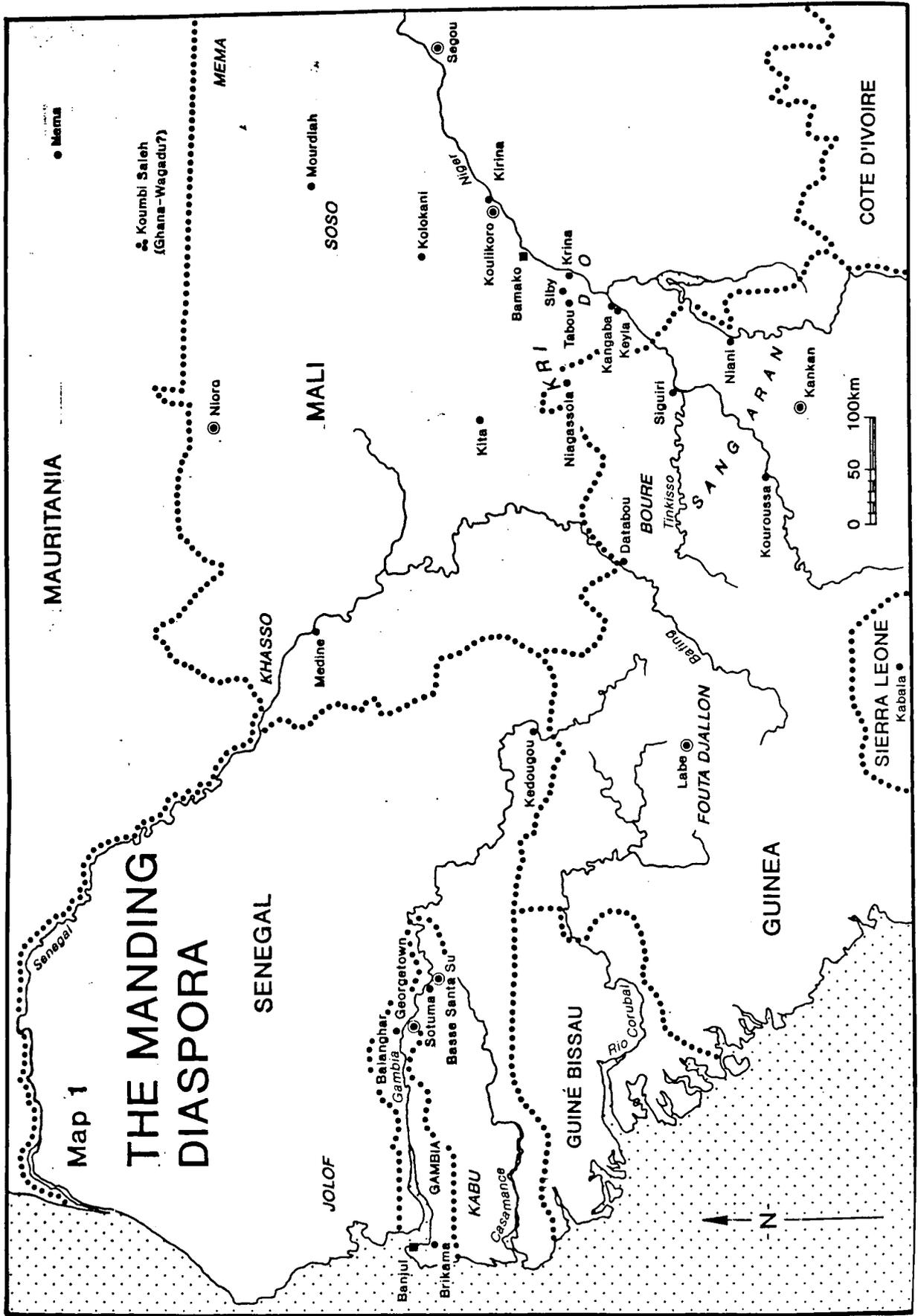
In Chapter Six attention is turned to the hero's arch-rival, Sumanguru Kante, and to his characterization in the epic. The epic narrative's general indictment of the Soso leader is shown to express itself in the description of Sumanguru's poor treatment of both his kin, such as Fakoli Koroma or his own mother, and of non-kin dependents, such as Bala Faseke, the bard whom he forcibly keeps from Sunjata. Contrasts are suggested between Sumanguru's behaviour in these respects and that of Sunjata.

Chapter Seven examines the central conflict of the tale between Sunjata and Sumanguru, enlarging on the development by Sunjata of an alliance against his rival, and upon the attitude of the two leaders towards kin and non-kin relationships. It is suggested that, while Sunjata's attitude towards both kin and non-kin, social equals and inferiors, allows him to construct a coherent alliance (and therefore a coherent society), Sumanguru fails in this task principally because of his selfishness, his arrogant trust in his own strength, and his consequent failure to maintain the

types of alliance that Sunjata has been shown to develop. A discussion of Sumanguru's death traditions reveals another aspect of the Soso hero, one which capitalizes on Sumanguru's reputation as sexually potent and driven by his passions, and which accords his shrine and other relics particular properties of fertility and potency.

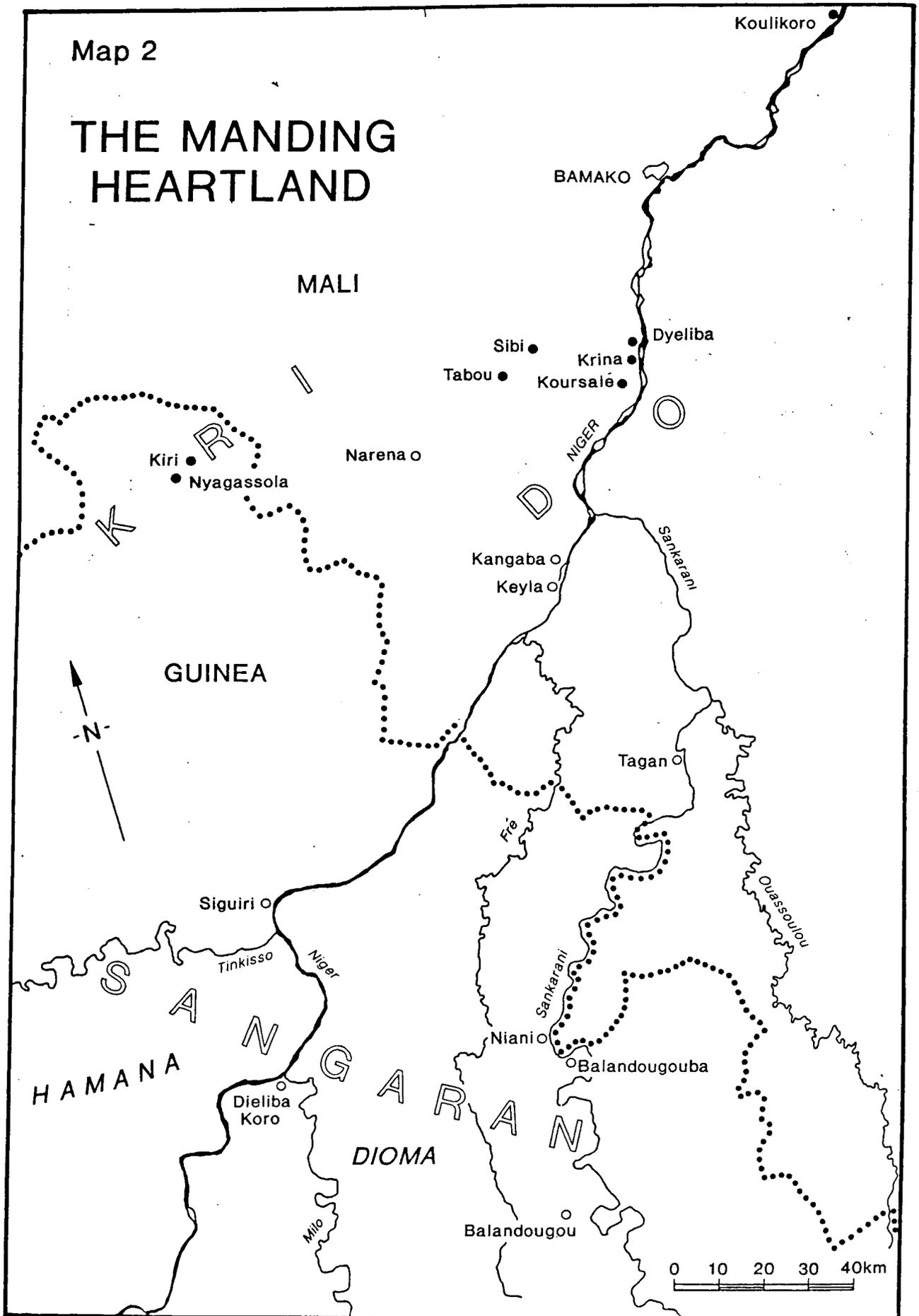
Chapter Eight treats the epic's description of the conquest and settlement of Senegambia, the consolidation of the empire, and the death traditions of the hero. Some attempt is made to address the complex issues surrounding the portrayal of Mali's westwards expansion, and further contrasts are drawn between Sunjata and Sumanguru in the manner of their deaths and legacies.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I attempt to summarize my stance on the employment of the epic as a historical source, suggesting that its use is severely limited, at least so far as conventional history is concerned. In addition, it is asserted that the epic may have a longer history than some have imagined, perhaps going back as far as the fourteenth century. Some generalities about the construction of oral traditions such as the Sunjata epic are considered, in particular the way in which they employ stock clichés and themes to create fields of reference around individual statements. Lastly, I propound the theory that the epic should be read as an allegory on the creation of Malinke society, and as affording a model for the creation and maintenance of societies in general.



Map 2

# THE MANDING HEARTLAND



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SOURCES & THEIR COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

#### **Part One: The Sources**

In Part One of this chapter I list chronologically all thirty-six versions of the Sunjata epic employed as sources in the thesis; each version's bibliographic reference is followed by an abstract of basic information - date and place of recording, name of reciter, and of the recorder and translator (where applicable), length and form of the account, and the number of story-elements it contains. I define a version of the epic as any retelling, whether a transcription of an oral performance, a literary reworking of a *jeli's* narrative, either full or excerpted, or a synthesis of tradition, of any recognized part of the tale of Sunjata, which contains more than three accepted story-elements. Story-elements are defined and employed in the comparative analysis in Part Two of this chapter; they consist of 157 individual episodes or details of those episodes into which the epic has been divided and by which we judge the relative fullness of each epic account; the story-elements are listed in the synoptic charts below, in this chapter. They provide an alternative way of judging the length of a version other than simply by counting the number of words it contains - a way which rates each account in terms of the traditional material it contains. Following the abstract, I deal with questions of authorship, date, form and context as they apply to each version, in addition to tackling any issues specific to the account. The letter(s), or letter(s) and number(s), which follow the name identity given to each version is the cipher employed throughout the thesis to identify the version, a concise list of which is rendered below, after the Appendix.

#### **Hourst (HO)**

Bibliographic details:

*Sur le Niger et au Pays des Tuaregs: La Mission Hourst par Le Lieutenant de Vaisseau Hourst*

Paris: Librairie Plon, 1898 (Version on pp. 50-3.)

English edition: *The Personal Narrative of Lieut. Hourst of his Exploration of the Niger*, translated by Nancy Bell

London: Chapman & Hall Ltd, 1898 (Version on pp. 52-8.)

**Abstract:**

Narrator: unknown, probably a griot or storyteller from Kulikoro

Recorder: *Lieutenant de Vaisseau* Hourst, of the French navy

Place of recording: Kulikoro, Mali

Date of recording: 1889 or 1895

Length: c. 1020 words

Number of story-elements: 10

Form: French prose

The version of the Sunjata epic by Hourst is probably the earliest account of the story of Sunjata we have obtained. Hourst's mission - which saw him ascend the river Senegal, cross overland to the Niger at Timbuktu, and then descend that river to the sea - brought him to Kulikoro in 1895; but Hourst had been based at Kulikoro previously, in 1889 (Hourst 1898a: 48, 50). Either date - 1889 or 1895 - may therefore be considered for the date at which Hourst heard the epic. The legend is given in *La Mission Hourst* in connection with a description of the mountain at Kulikoro. One can assume therefore (although he does not state it) that the author heard the epic from a griot or a storyteller of Kulikoro. Rastko Petrović, a Yugoslav poet, who visited Kulikoro in the 1920s, records the existence at this place of 'old men called Djale' who 'sing the glory of Sumanguru', and also says that the epic (his word) is about ten thousand lines long and is passed down from generation to generation (quoted in Bowra 1952: 369).

HO is a brief version - roughly 1020 words and only ten story-elements - and, while it includes details of the hero's childhood, his first attempts to stand, and his success in defeating Sumanguru, it excludes all mention of the hero's exile, as well as other parts of the epic not connected directly to Sunjata, such as the Buffalo-woman tale. It culminates in Sumanguru's transformation into stone, linking this metamorphosis with the rock at Kulikoro, which Hourst notes was still strongly associated with the Soso leader in his day.

**Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Ben Mohamed Kaba (MAK)**

Bibliographic details:

"Généalogie des gens de Keita", in "Livre renfermant la généalogie des diverses Tribus noires du Soudan et l'Histoire des Rois après Mahomet, suivant le renseignements fournis par certaines personnes et ceux recueillis dans les anciens livres", *Annales de l'Académie des Sciences Coloniales* 3 (1929), pp. 189-225 (Version on pp. 209-10.)

**Abstract**

Writer: Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Ben Mohamed Kaba, known as Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Diakite

Place of composition: Nioro, Mali

Date of composition: 1891

Length: c. 680 words

Number of story-elements: 17

Form: French prose

The brief version of the epic coming under the title "Généalogie des gens de Keita" was written in Arabic by Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Diakite as a small part of a larger collection of historical traditions pertaining to the western Sudan, written from an Islamic perspective. The collection starts after the death of Muḥammad, with the caliphs who succeeded him, and switches to the western Sudan via a series of migrations. Stories associated with the rulers Da (Dinga), Dama Guille (Dama NGuille),

Sunjata, the Sissibe and the Niakite, Mansa Si, Sambourou, Doukoure, the Peuls, and, finally, Cheick Omar Ben Saïd (al-Ḥājj ʿUmar) follow.

The work is said to have been commissioned by the commander of the cercle de Nioro, *chef d'escadron d'artillerie de marine* Claude, in 1891, soon after the French army had taken the town, and was passed on to Colonel Louis Archinard, commander of French military forces in the Western Sudan, who in turn made it available to the Académie des Sciences Coloniales.

Henri Labouret, in his introduction to the publication of Aïssa's history (Labouret 1929b: 189-91), recounts how the newly stationed Commander Claude was directed towards Mamadou Aïssa upon expressing an interest in the history of the region's people. Mamadou Aïssa is described as a young Sarakolle (Soninke), aged about twenty six, and literate in Arabic. He was from an established Muslim family from the region of Bakel, a member of which had been a favourite of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar. Approached by Claude, Mamadou Aïssa composed a narrative from certain 'anciens livres' (a title which is not elaborated upon), and 'des vieillards bien disants', presumably local *jeliw*.

According to Labouret, Mamadou Aïssa's history which he gave to Claude was the prototype of the more familiar western Sudanese histories published by Adam, Lanrezac, Arnaud and Delafosse. He writes:

C'est en effet le même personnage qui, directement ou non, a renseigné les différents auteurs. Mamadou Aïssa encore jeune a rédigé deux opuscules, le premier pour le commandant Claude, le second huit ou dix ans plus tard afin de documenter M. Adam (191)

Labouret also says that Mamadou Aïssa went on to be *qādī* and *imām* at Nioro, and was employed as Arabic scribe by the French administration.

Delafosse identifies the author of D as Mamadi [sic] Aïssa, *qādī* of Nioro, while Arnaud speaks of a Soninke of the Bathily (Bacili) family, and Adam of a young Soninke marabout. Delafosse's author can be clearly identified with that of MAK, while the description of the informant for A conforms to the description we have of

Mamadou Aïssa; concerning AR we are on less sure ground. Delafosse himself claims that his writer provided information for Adam, which would seem to confirm the identification of A, D and MAK with a single author. These versions are in any case very similar, A and D agreeing on 85% of details, A and MAK on 67% and D and MAK on 66% (see Table V). Conrad has doubted Delafosse's claim that the same author produced A and D, stating that it is unlikely for a young marabout of about 1900 to be *qādī* in c. 1910. Yet according to Labouret's information, Mamadou Aïssa would be about forty-five in 1910; this does not seem an implausible age for a *qādī*. Conrad also suggests that the variations between accounts are too great to have come from a single source; he posits instead a historical "school" at Nioro embracing not just A and D but AR, Montell 1953 and Lanrezac 1907. This he sees as being made up not of griots so much as Muslim clerics, accounting for the Nioro accounts' particular Islamic bias and their existence as a written rather than oral tradition (Conrad 1984: 36-9).

It is true that there are differences between A and D, and even more so between them and MAK. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis reveals marked similarities between all three accounts, and particularly between A and D, as we noted above. Labouret suggests that Mamadou Aïssa, during the time between producing the history for Claude and that for Adam, had been piecing together a more complete version of his history, and this appears a plausible explanation for the differences between the three histories. Taking the history as a whole, the structure is basically the same in Claude, Adam, and Delafosse's redactions; in each of them many of the same figures (such as Dinga and al-Ḥājj 'Umar) appear, while the account of Sunjata's life in every redaction begins by linking the hero, through ancestry, with the Middle East. From MAK to A and D, the story is enlarged and contains more details: MAK has only seventeen story-elements, A twenty-four, D twenty-two. MAK is clearly the least accomplished tale of the three - for example, Sunjata's lameness is never explicitly stated, although the standing episode is included, and Alpha Moussa is at once described as Sunjata's brother and his grandfather.

Of course, it is equally plausible to interpret these differences as those holding between different interpreters of a particular tradition, and the existence of AR may suggest that there were several different interpreters among the non-griots at Niuro. This is Conrad's view, but given the information in Labouret 1929b we must suggest that A, D and MAK do come from a single author. This belief does not exclude the likelihood that the author (as Labouret writes) consulted others - both traditionalists and the mysterious "anciens livres" - and continued his consultations, at least with the "living books", the griots, and perhaps non-griot historians as well, beyond 1891, thus leading to his history and account of the Sunjata epic altering - expanding and gaining in detail.

**Monteil (MA, MB)**

Bibliographic details:

"Simanguru et Sun-Dyata", in "Histoire et Légendes", section VII of "Fin de Siècle à Médine (1898-99)" by Charles Monteil, *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.* 28 B (1-2) (1966), pp.82-172 (Versions on pp. 166-70.)

**Abstract: MA**

Narrator: unknown, probably a Khassonke storyteller or griot

Recorder: Charles Monteil

Place of recording: unknown, probably Medine, Mali, or its environs

Date of recording: June 1898

Length: c. 1250 words

Number of story-elements: 19

Form: French prose

**Abstract: MB**

Narrator: Bakary Konte, Khassonke, marabout of Komenfara, near Medine, Mali

Recorder: Charles Monteil

Place of recording: unknown, probably Medine or Komenfara

Date: June 1898

Length: c. 450 words

Number of story-elements: 4

Form: French prose

Monteil's two short summaries of the Sunjata story can be found in the posthumously published extracts of his journal, kept at Medine, where he was posted as a colonial administrator from 1897-99.

Charles Monteil (1871-1949) first came to Africa in the French colonial service, to the Côte d'Ivoire, in 1893, but was transferred to the Sudan, for health reasons, in 1897. He was head of the Cercle de Djenné from 1900 to 1902, and in his later career he taught in Paris at l'École nationale des Langues orientales vivantes (1904-9), and held various government finance posts in the provinces (1911-36). His important publications, centring on Sudanese history, linguistics and ethnology, include *Les Khassonkhé* (1915), *Les Bambara* (1924), and "Les Empires du Mali" (1929) (Monteil 1966: 82; V. Monteil 1984: 402-3).

At Medine, at the end of the nineteenth century, Monteil was given particular responsibility for a 'Questionnaire concernant les coutumes juridiques des Naturels de l'Afrique' for part of the series *Coutumiers juridiques* the French published for their colonies. An early publication, *Contes soudanais* (1905) (Monteil 1977), demonstrates his interest in west African storytelling. These tales were recorded at evening folktale sessions among the Khassonke at which, according to Monteil, they 'chantent les haut faits légendaires des guerriers ou les atrocités terrifiants des esprits du mal' (1977: 11). MB is definitely the work of a Khassonke, while MA may also be, and it is possible that Monteil heard his two versions of the epic at similar evening storytelling sessions. The two accounts appear under the date heading 28 June 1898; the first is not credited to a narrator, the second is from Bakary Konte, a marabout from Komenfara, who Vincent Monteil says was one of his father's regular informants

(1966: 82).

Of the two versions, MA is the longer and more representative of later accounts of the epic. MB, although it includes a few details of the circumstances leading up to Sunjata's birth, excludes all his childhood and adolescent experiences, and does not explain why Sunjata and Sumanguru fought. It accounts for Sumanguru's strength by saying he possessed a forty-four-headed monster, and closes with a rare section (comparable only to an episode in S), dealing with a dispute over some cattle with a group of Fulani. MA is much closer to the majority of versions, but it does exclude all details of Sunjata's early life and the circumstances of his birth, recounting instead (in a unique passage) Sumanguru's journey from the court and service of the Wagadu rulers to Kulikoro, and his establishment of a state there.

#### **Adam (A)**

Bibliographic details:

"Le Mandé", in "Légendes historiques du pays de Nioro (Sahel)", *Revue Coloniale* nouvelle série, Juillet 1903-Juin 1904, pp.81-98, 232-48, 354-72, 485-96, 602-20, 734-44, and Juillet 1904-Décembre 1904, pp.117-24, 233-48. (Version on pp.354-62.)

Paris: Augustin Challamel, editeur, Librairie Maritime et Coloniale

#### **Abstract**

Narrator: a young Soninke marabout of Nioro, probably to be identified as Mamadou

Aïssa Kaba Diakite

Recorder: G. Adam, Administrateur du Cercle de Kayes

Place of recording: Nioro, Mali

Date of recording: between 1900 and 1901

Length: c. 3600 words

Number of story-elements: 24

Form: French prose

Adam's version of the epic of Sunjata, about 3600 words in length, forms a small part of a traditional history of (for the most part) the desert fringes of the western Sudan, beginning with the foundation of Wagadu, and continuing with Wagadu's fall, the post-Wagadu dispersals, the life of Sunjata, the life of Malik Sy, and ending with a detailed description of the life and career of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar.

G. Adam was an administrator in the French colonial office in the cercle de Kayes, at Nioro, between 1900 and 1903 (Conrad 1984: 37). It was during this time that he received the traditions that make up his article from, in his own words, 'un jeune marabout de race sarracolète' (i.e. a Soninke) (Adam 1903-4: 81). Comparing Conrad's dates for Adam's time in Nioro with Labouret's assertion that Adam received the tradition from Mamadou Aïssa in about 1899-1901 (Labouret 1929b: 191), we may suggest a date of collection between 1900 and 1901 as the most likely.

Adam may have received the information in the form of a recitation - although his informant, not being a griot, would not have been trained in the art - or in the form of a pre-existing MS. As a marabout, the informant is likely to have been literate in Arabic, and Adam speaks of the 'traduction de son texte' (Adam 1903-4: 81), suggesting that Adam received the version in a written form. In the light of the evidence advanced above in our discussion of MAK, it is probably Mamadou Aïssa to whom we can attribute the history published by Adam. The form of the history, the episodes that make up the story of Sunjata, the description of the author and his place of residence, plus the testimony of Delafosse (1913) and Labouret (1929b), point to this conclusion.

The marabout's background comes through in his version of the epic: marabouts take the place of soothsayers or sorcerers in prophesying Sunjata's greatness and advising him to leave Manding on exile.

#### **Arnaud (AR)**

Bibliographic details:

"Suite de la Singulière légende des Soninkés" in "Traditions orales sur le Royaume de

Koumbi et sur Divers autres Royaumes Soudanais", recueillies par Robert Arnaud, *L'Islam et la politique musulmane française en Afrique occidentale Française*, pp.144-85 (Version on pp.166-72.)

Paris: Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1912

**Abstract:**

Narrator: a Soninke of the Bacili family

Recorder: Robert Arnaud, French colonial official

Place of recording: Nioro, Mali

Date of recording: between 1898 and 1912 (publication), probably 1906

Length: c. 2100 words

Form: French prose

Number of story-elements: 21

Robert Arnaud's account of the life of Sunjata is, like Adam's, part of a much larger text dealing with Sudanese history from the foundation of Wagadu by Dinga to al-Hājj ʿUmar. AR is somewhat more brief than A (2100 as opposed to 3600 words, twenty-one rather than twenty-four story-elements), reflecting the shorter length of Arnaud's version of the Nioro traditions as a whole.

Arnaud was a French colonial official who, according to Conrad, had 'several assignments to the Western Sudan during which he could have visited Nioro' beginning in 1898. Conrad favours 1906 as the date of Arnaud's recording (1984: 48). Mid-way through the history, its author identifies himself as a member of the Batchili (Bacili) family, making him a Soninke (Arnaud 1912: 159). Conrad sees the author as probably 'the most erudite of the local historians at Nioro in terms of knowledge of traditional history', noting that he often provides background information on the stories he tells (1984: 37-8).

One is tempted to identify the author of AR with Mamadou Aïssa, author of MAK and D, and probably of A also. The residence of the informant, the date and the form of

the overall history link AR to MAK, A and D. But Mamadou Aïssa is surnamed Diakite, not Bacili; also, AR is shorter than D or A, and shares less episodes in common; and, in spite of the erudition claimed by Conrad for the composer of AR, our own evidence suggests AR to be a less complete version of the epic than either A or D. Delafosse does not claim that Arnaud was informed by the same author as provided D and A, although his Note tends to give that impression (1913: 3-4). Labouret believes AR equally comes from the same informant as MAK, A and D, but does allow that the link may have been indirect (1929b: 191, quoted above). It seems likely that AR was composed by a colleague of Mamadou Aïssa who shared many sources in common with the *qādī* of Nioro, perhaps one of the figures mentioned by Delafosse as being involved in the production of the MSS behind D (see below). Like Mamadou Aïssa, the Bacili narrator appears to distance himself from griots, talking about what is current among the old griots (Arnaud 1912: 159). It may be that he was also a Muslim cleric, like Mamadou Aïssa. Certainly AR shares many of the same Muslim references as do the texts we attribute to Aïssa: for example, the first of the Keita is Bilali, a companion of Muḥammad, while the whole history establishes links between the cradle of Islam and the western Sudan. This would concur with Conrad's notion that an Islamic historical "school" at Nioro was behind the Nioro versions of the epic (excepting ZA and ZB) and other historical works which came out of the town at the same time (Conrad 1984: 36-9).

AR does include sections not found in MAK, A or D: for example, the details of the dispute over Sogolon's burial and of Sunjata's death, or the linking of Sunjata's name to thieving, and the links of the Keita to the hippopotamus. Also, a detail of the circumstances related by Arnaud differentiates AR from MAK, A and D. According to Arnaud, the author presented the information in the form of a recitation, not as an Arabic or Bamana text. Arnaud tells us how 'Je prenais, à les écouter, le plaisir du gosselet aux contes de nourrice; je les transcrivais en n'omettant que le moins de détails possible' (1912: 144).

**Delafosse (D)**

**Bibliographic details:**

First published as "Histoire de la lutte entre les empires de Sosso et du Mandé (XIIIe siècle)" in *Traditions Historiques et Légendaires du Soudan Occidental, traduites d'un manuscrit arabe inédit* by Maurice Delafosse, pp.19-30

Paris: Comité de l'Afrique Française, 1913

Also appearing as an article under the same title in *Bulletin de l'Afrique Française, Renseignements-Coloniaux* (1913), no. 8, pp.291-306, no. 9, pp.325-29, no. 10, pp.355-68.

Reprinted as "Histoire de la lutte entre les empires de Sosso et du Mandé (XIIIe siècle) (Manuscrit arabe anonyme, traduit par Maurice Delafosse)", *Notes Africaines* 83 (1959), pp.76-80.

Excerpted English translation by Basil Davidson as "Sundiata's Triumph (Anonymous)" in Davidson (ed.), *The African Past: Chronicles from Antiquity to Modern Times*, pp.73-4  
New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964

**Abstract:**

Narrator: Mamadi [sic] Aïssa, *qādī* of Nioro

Recorder: Jean Chartier

Translator: Maurice Delafosse

Place of recording: Nioro

Date of recording: probably between 1910 and 1913 (publication)

Length: c. 2700 words

Number of story-elements: 22

Form: French prose

Delafosse's version of the Sunjata epic, like A, AR and MAK, is from Nioro, part of a larger narrative, dealing with much of western Sudanese traditional history, and can, like A and MAK, be attributed to the authorship of Mamadou Aïssa. It is, in length, at c. 2700 words and twenty-two story elements, between MAK and A.

Maurice Delafosse (1870-1926) was one of the most renowned and prolific writers on French West Africa's history, ethnology and linguistics. Trained as an Arabist, he came to the Côte d'Ivoire in 1894, working in various capacities in Baoule and Monrovia, Liberia. In 1904 he was made Commander of the cercle de Kong at Koroko, Côte d'Ivoire, then, in 1908, Commander of the cercle de Bamako, where he wrote *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* (1912) (Delafosse 1972). He returned to France in 1909, first teaching at l'École nationale des langues orientales vivantes, then at l'École coloniale, where he lectured on African languages, customs and history, and where he is remembered as 'the highlight of every cadet's education', according to Cohen (1971: 191). He returned to Africa, to Dakar, in 1915, and in 1918 was offered a governorship, but in an area in which he apparently could not reside for health reasons; the victim, it seems, of political in-fighting among factions within the French colonial administration. He asked for - and in 1919 was granted - retirement and returned to France (L. Delafosse 1974; *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française*).

Delafosse's information on the origin of his version is not entirely unambiguous. He notes the role of Jean Chartier in providing him with two MSS. of traditional history, the first in Bamana, the second in Arabic. The first is said to have been dictated to Chartier by two Niore notables, Hadi Ba, son of the chief of Dioka region, and Mamadou Sallama, nephew of the *qādī* of Niore. This first MS. seems to have been the history Delafosse consulted for *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*. A second MS. authored by Mamadi Aïssa, *qādī* of Niore and president of the provincial tribunal, was also given to Delafosse. This Arabic MS. appears to have been similar to the first (Bamana) MS. but to have contained additional passages - although these were apparently not relevant to the epic of Sunjata (Delafosse 1913: 3-4). In view of what has already been said about Mamadou Aïssa, it seems reasonable to identify him as author of D. The fact that the second MS. contained more details than the first can be interpreted as being consistent with Mamadou Aïssa's tendency, since MAK, to expand his work.

Conrad has put a date of 1910 on Chartier's collection of the material employed in D (1984: 37). At this time Delafosse would have been in Paris. It is likely that

Conrad's date of 1910 refers to the first (Bamana) text Delafosse used in *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*, while the second (Arabic) MS. was probably obtained by Chartier - or at least, passed on to Delafosse - later, otherwise one would imagine Delafosse would have incorporated the new MS's details into his 1912 history. In 1910, according to Labouret, Mamadou Aïssa would have been about forty-five.

Delafosse's is the last version to come from the prolific *qādī* of Nioro, who appears to have acted as informant for a succession of French military and colonial officials from Claude in 1891 - or, seeing it from his point of view, perhaps, employed a succession of French administrators as conduits for different versions of his expansive and expanding history of the western Sudan. Whichever way round we view the relationship, it seems to have been productive for both sides, and to have led, incidentally, to us being better provided with versions of the epic from Nioro than from any other town or village.

**De Zeltner (ZA, ZB)**

Bibliographic details:

"La Légende de Soundiata" [=ZA], and "Suite a la légende de Soundiata" [=ZB], in *Contes du Sénégal et du Niger* recueillis par Franz de Zeltner (Versions on pp.1-36 and 37-45.)

Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1913

**Abstract: ZA**

Narrator: Kande Kanote, a Khassonke griot of Nioro

Recorder: Franz de Zeltner, French colonial official (through an interpreter)

Place of recording: probably Nioro, Mali

Date of recording: between 1904 and 1912

Length: c. 7000 words

Number of story-elements: 67

Form: French prose

**Abstract: ZB**

Narrator: Habibou Sissoko, Khassonke griot of Nioro

Recorder: Franz de Zeltner, French colonial official (through an interpreter)

Place of recording: probably Nioro, Mali

Date of recording: between 1904 and 1912

Length: c. 1700 words

Number of story-elements: 24

Form: French prose

Franz de Zeltner's two French prose versions of the epic of Sunjata, which we term ZA and ZB, open his collection of forty-five folktales, *Contes du Sénégal et du Niger*, published in 1913. The stories were collected, according to de Zeltner, between 1904 and 1912. Between these dates de Zeltner was sent on various missions in Haut-Sénégal-Niger and Afrique Occidentale Française military territory by the Ministère de l'instruction publique, investigating the archaeology, ethnology and folklore of the regions' peoples (de Zeltner 1913: i).

De Zeltner obtained the recitation which has come to us as his "Légende de Soundiata" (ZA) from a Khassonke griot of Nioro, called Kande Kanote, whom he describes as being 'assez réputé' (1913: 37). The shorter ZB was from another Khassonke griot, Habibou Sissoko (ibid.). De Zeltner states that he spent two months in his effort to secure a full version of the epic (by which we may assume that he means ZA), that 'il me fallait souvent déployer quelque insistance pour obtenir un récit un peu circonstancié, le narrateur abrégeant volontairement certains épisodes', and that only after 'nouvelles et pressantes sollicitations' did the griot provide him with a 'version complète' (1913: ii). De Zeltner admits frankly to his incapacity to take down the recitations from the Khassonke language performance, or to translate it himself into French, and says he employed an interpreter (1913: ii-iii). These difficulties may well have distorted or stilted the end-product, but de Zeltner claims to have strived to recreate the tellers' style with, as he puts it, 'ses courtes

phrases, ses tournures un peu gauches, ses répétitions, ses images, ses longueurs...' (1913: 11). The end result in ZA is certainly the longest and fullest version of the epic at its time of publication, and is still a worthwhile version of the epic to read, while we are indebted to de Zeltner for respecting the individual performers and not attempting to synthesise Kande Kanote and Habibou Sissoko's recitations. ZB is a more sketchy version of the legend which does not flow well as a story; the griot does not appear to have been giving of his best.

Although certainly ZA and probably ZB were from Nioro informants and recorded at around the same dates as MAK, A, AR and D, there is very little in the two sets of accounts to suggest that they came from the same settlement; perhaps the fact that the authors of de Zeltner's variants were Khassonke, rather than Soninke, or were griots, rather than marabouts, accounts for the dissimilarities between the two sets of versions.

#### Frobenius (F1, F2)

##### Bibliographic details:

First full publication as "Die Sunjattalegende der Malinke", in Leo Frobenius, *Atlantis: Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen Afrikas*, Band V, *Dichten und Denken im Sudan*, pp. 303-331 (=F2)

Jena: Diederichs Verlag, 1925

First excerpted publication as "Ein historisches Dichtwert (der Mande oder Mandingo)", Leo Frobenius, *Und Afrika Sprach...*, pp.445-61

Berlin and Charlottenburg: Bita, Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1912-3

Excerpted English translation: "An Historical Poem (The Mandes or Mandingoes)", Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, vol. ii, translated by Rudolf Blind, pp.449-66

London: Hutchinson & Co., 1913 (=F1)

#### Abstract:

Narrator: *jeli* Kieba Koate [Kuyatel], alias Korongo

Recorder: Leo Frobenius (through an interpreter)

Place of recording: unknown, perhaps Kankan, Guinea

Date of recording: probably 1907-09, possibly 1910-12

Length (F2): c. 10,200

Number of story-elements: 64

Form (F2): German prose

The version of the Sunjata epic recounted to Leo Frobenius first appears in the German ethnographer and traveller's *Und Afrika Sprach...* (1912-3), translated as *The Voice of Africa* (1913). This English rendering of the epic we call F1. In F1 one finds an excerpted portion of the whole story collected by Frobenius, about two-thirds of the whole, including the story of the Buffalo-woman, the birth of the hero and his flight into exile, but not his return and triumph, nor an introductory portion concerning the origin of the Keita clan. This introduction, entitled "Ursprung", and the remainder of the epic from the hero's return to Manding, are included in the story as it appears in volume five of *Atlantis* (1925), which we entitle F2.

Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) made twelve expeditions to Africa from 1904 to 1938 after forming the Deutsche Innerafrikanische Forschungs-Expedition in order to collect cultural artifacts for a Hamburg museum. The eccentric explorer and prolific writer was not a part, nor a product, of the mainstream German academic community, but he did gain a large degree of public notice at home - particularly after his purchase, and the subsequent disappearance, of the *Ori Olokun* bronze - where his activities were often interpreted in a nationalistic frame of reference (Jahn 1974).

The full version of the epic, as contained in *Atlantis*, is some 10,200 words long, and contains an impressive sixty-four story-elements, making it of a comparable size to ZA. It is credited to the *Jeli Keiba Koate* (Kuyate), alias Korongo (1925: 304). Of this storyteller, who is called by Jahn 'One of Frobenius's major informants' (1974: 9), Frobenius, in his own particular style, writes:

And Korongo - how he delivered this! The voice modulated;  
the facial features mimed in numerous nuances individual

words and gestures; and the delivery was delayed or sped up, subsided and increased. Verily, a mighty heroism, a living epic, and a born artist - this Korongo (Jahn 1974: 9; originally from Frobenius, *Der Kopf als Schicksal*, 1924)

As the epic appears first in *Und Afrika Sprach...*, the account of the travels of the German Inner Africa Exploration Expedition, 1910-12, it would be reasonable to assume that the story was recited to Frobenius during these years. However, the route of this, his fourth, expedition was through Nigeria and Cameroon, not areas associated with the Malinke (Jahn 1974: 10). Instead, the second expedition of Frobenius, in the years 1907-09, appears a more likely time for the collection of the tradition. This trip followed a route from the source of the Niger in Senegal to Liberia, then Timbuktu, Ouagadougou, Togo and to the coast (Jahn 1974: 9). Jahn says that at this time Frobenius was particularly interested in the traditions of the old Sudanese empires, but he also asserts that Frobenius did *not* succeed in getting a version of the Sunjata epic (1974: 9). Against this, we may note that Jahn himself talks of Korongo in connection with this second trip, and not the fourth, while in the introduction to *The Voice of Africa* Frobenius states that that work is 'the final outcome of twenty years spent studying its subject' (1913: v). Also, the story itself does not appear in a discussion of Mande culture or society but as part of a comparative study of stories dealing with the Dragon-slaying myth - suggesting therefore that it may have been placed in *The Voice of Africa* simply for comparative purposes, and not because it was a product of the most recent visit of Frobenius to Africa.

As to the circumstances of the version's telling, we may note first that no direct information is given as to the location of the recitation, but that, in the following chapter in *Atlantis*, Frobenius locates his Malinke griot informants, one of whom is also a Kuyate (Hansumana Kuate), at Kankan in present-day Guinea (1925: 331). It is therefore possible that the version of the epic itself might be from this town - which is traditionally associated with the preservation of Malinke oral history (Niane 1974: 66).

Frobenius, by his own account, was not stingy in his material generosity towards his informants (Jahn 1974: 8). By these means he hoped to attract capable and impressive storytellers; Korongo was obviously one such performer. Frobenius was not competent in any African language and so was forced to employ an interpreter (ibid.).

#### **Vidal (V)**

Bibliographic details

"La Légende Officielle de Soundiata, fondateur de l'Empire Manding" by Jean Vidal in *Bulletin du Comité d'Etudes Historiques et Scientifiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* VII (1924) pp.317-28

#### **Abstract**

Narrator(s): unnamed *jeli(w)* of Keyla, probably Kuyate or Jabate

Recorder: Jean Vidal, Administrateur en chef des colonies

Place of recording: Keyla, Mali

Date of recording: December 1922 or soon after

Length: c. 3500 words

Number of story-elements: 40

Form: French prose

Jean Vidal, who is described as Administrateur en chef des colonies in the *Bulletin*, collected the version of the Sunjata epic that bears his name from the griots of Keyla (Kela, or Kyela as it appears in V), probably in December 1922 or soon afterwards (see Vidal 1923b: 606-7). Vidal is best known for his two articles on the old capital of Mali, Niani (Vidal 1923a and b). He recounts that, while staying at Kangaba and making the acquaintance of the Keita canton chief, Sankaran Mamadi Keita, he was introduced to the griots of Keyla who, as he puts it, 'sont considérés par tous les Malinkés comme les gardiens officiels de la tradition nationale et consacrés comme tels par les descendants du trône' (1923b: 607). It is this claim that leads

him to dub his version "officielle". He does not explicitly state which griot or griots provided him with the version of the epic, although he does mention two particular informants in connection with his researches at the site of Niani: Sidiki Haydara and Mbali Kaba Haydara (1923b: 607). However, Keyla has been associated with the Kuyate and Jabate bardic clans (Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 388; Niane 1974: 61), and it is probably to a bard from one of these families that we should attribute V.

It seems that Vidal may have cobbled together various recitations from different griots to produce V as he speaks of the recitation as coming from 'les griots de Kyéla' (317) and later of 'mes informateurs' (326). That these *jeliw* were all from Keyla seems probable: for example, when discussing the death traditions for Sunjata he makes a point of noting that the tradition he was given is not the most common among the Malinke - suggesting that he has not tried to present an amalgam of common traditions about Sunjata, but the actual story as reported by the Keyla griots. We can be fairly confident that he was competent in the language of his hosts. He says that 'je transcris aussi fidèlement que possible' (318), while the nature of his researches concerning Niani would seem to imply fluency in Malinke.

In spite of Vidal's probable language ability and apparent faithfulness in taking down the Keyla version of the epic, his attitude towards the material tends to be superior and sarcastic. He admits to editing what he calls 'certains détails par trop puérils et enfantins qui ne pourraient qu'allonger inutilement le récit sans rien ajouter à sa clarté' (318). We cannot be sure what Vidal has included in this category, but one likely episode that he has expunged from the epic version is that concerning the trials of strength that Sunjata often undergoes during his exile. During the exile portion of the account Vidal speaks of 'prouesses sans nombre dont le détail serait fastidieux' (322). Vidal's haughtiness is evident in his discussion of the familiar cliché of Arabian origins for Sunjata's Keita forebears. Noting it in his version he remarks: 'Quelle que soit l'invéraisemblance du fait, enregistrons le en souriant puisqu'il s'agit d'une légende, et passons' (319). Vidal also forms a low

opinion of the hero of the story, suggesting that the success the tale credits Sunjata with was most likely due to his un pitying methods and employment of mercenaries from all of Africa, eager for booty (326). As he notes that his informants told him nothing on the reasons for Sunjata's military success, we may assume this view to be his own unsupported speculation.

### **Sidibé (S)**

Bibliographic details:

"Soundiata Keita, Héros historique et légendaire, Empereur du Manding" by Mamby Sidibé in *Notes Africaines* 82 (1959) pp.41-51.

### **Abstract**

Writer: Mamby Sidibé, school teacher, author and storyteller

Place of composition: Bamako, Mali

Date of composition: 1937

Length: c. 6000 words

Number of story-elements: 34

Form: French prose, with some Malinke songs

Written in 1937 but only published in 1959, in a special independence-eve issue of *Notes Africaines* devoted to the empire of Mali, Mamby Sidibé's version of Sunjata's story is unusual and significant in several ways. Taking its date of composition, it is the first account of the Sunjata epic presented directly by its west African teller, rather than through the intermediary of a European colonial official or academic. But Sidibé was not a griot, rather he was a western-educated school teacher. S may therefore be seen as an early example of the tradition of the literary and popularising exposition of the epic by non-griots such as Niane, Camara Laye and Konaré Ba.

Mamby Sidibé was a Fulani, born in 1891 in Niamefe (Niamefero), a village in the

cercle de Kita, Mali. He was a successful school student, completing his secondary schooling at l'École Normale de Saint-Louis, Senegal, in 1913. From that date until 1949 he held numerous teaching posts through much of French West Africa. In his later years he was attached to the Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire, Dakar. He died in 1977. Sidibé was awarded several literary prizes in the 1930s and published articles on local customs and history (e.g. Sidibé 1959a, 1972). He was a renowned storyteller, and a collection of his renditions of folktales was published posthumously at Bamako under the title *Veillée avec le vieux Mamby Sidibé* (c. 1977/8).

Sidibé wrote his account at Bamako in 1937, when he was forty-six years old, teaching at l'École Primaire Supérieure. Massa Makan Diabaté claims that Mamby Sidibé's version was learned from the griot Bolin Jigi, father of Kele Monson Jabate (Diabaté n.d.: 684). S and KMJ agree on 53% of details according to our figures in Table V; this figure is not as high as one would expect were Sidibé's only source the father of Kele Monson. We do know that Kele Monson was trained by a traditionist other than his father, which helps explain the low figure of agreement between S and KMJ, but Sidibé himself was clearly aware of other traditions concerning Sunjata which he often interpolates into his account. For example, he notes that Sunjata was a cripple for three years according to some, seven years according to others (41); that Sunjata's sister was called Sogolon Kolonkan but also known as Meniemba Souko (44); and that Sumanguru had 300 or 333 wives (51). Sidibé also displays a broad comparative knowledge beyond Malinke culture, likening Sumanguru's seduction by Sunjata's sister to the tales of Samson and Delilah or Hercules and Diana, and quoting the Latin maxim, "In vino veritas" in association with the same episode (44). Furthermore, Sidibé's Fulani background may have influenced him in his description of the death of the hero, which is rare in the versions I have examined both in its details and in its negative assessment of Sunjata's final actions. The sequence (which is described in Chapter Eight) sees the hero die as a consequence of an ill-judged and unfair attack on a group of Fulani.

## Quénum (Q)

### Bibliographic details

Maximilien Quénum, "La Légende de Fama-Soundjata (Soudan Français)", in *Légendes Africaines, Côte d'Ivoire - Soudan - Dahomey*, pp.43-72

Imprimerie A. Thoyen-Thèze: Rochefort-sur-Mer, 1946

### Abstract

Writer: Maximilien Quénum

Place of origin of author: Cotonou, Dahomey (Bénin)

Date: 1946 (publication)

Length: c. 4000 words

Number of story-elements: 10

Form: French prose

Maximilien Quénum published his version of the Sunjata epic in 1946 as part of a collection of three African legends, retold by him and accompanied with drawings by P. Tardy. For this book Quénum was awarded a prize by the Académie Française (Blair 1976: 34).

Maximilien Quénum Possy Berry was born in 1911 in Cotonou, Dahomey (Benin). His *Légendes Africaines* is his only published foray into creative literature; he generally concentrated upon ethnographic research. The two other tales accompanying the story of Sunjata deal with the origin of the Baoule, whose queen, Abra-Pokou, sacrifices her son to save her people, and the story of the foundation of Dahomey by the ruthless Aho-Dako-Dogbaglin. In Quénum's own words, he presented the work to the French speaking public 'avec l'espoir de vous faire connaître et aimer la belle Afrique'. Quénum's creative writing can be considered as part of the first wave of Négritude literature, and should be compared to the retold folktales of Ousmane Soce Diop, Birago Diop, and Bernard Dadié (Blair 1976).

According to Quénum, the sources for the story of Sunjata were memories from his

own childhood: often, he confides 'je retrouve ces heures inoubliables pendant lesquelles quelques anciens, érudits et loquaces, nous faisaient le récit des belles épopées de notre race'. At the start of the epic, he recalls the following of the griots:

Ce sont des gens qui passent pour des flâneurs. Mendiants par habitude plus que par nécessité, ils parcourent les régions éloignées, se rendent dans les maisons où la mort a laissé un deuil récent, ou traversent les marchés et les places publiques, musant ou disant quelques poèmes (45)

Quénum does not give any more precise information on his sources except for one passage - the episode of Sumanguru's seduction - which he attributes to some (unnamed) pupils of l'École William Ponty at Sebikotane, who composed a dialogue around the episode for the annual fete in 1937 (Q: 65n).

Quénum's version of the epic of Sunjata is built around several contrasts. The contrast between the hero's correct sense of proportion, balance and modesty, and the excess of Sumanguru, who is described as enormously fat. Both protagonists are aided by the spirit world, and their battling is inconclusive until Sumanguru's seduction; Sumanguru's capitulation to Sunjata's beautiful sister may be a form of excess, comparable to the Soso leader's 'corpulence démesurée' (51). Nevertheless, Quénum does not condemn Sumanguru; rather, the tale ends with Sumanguru's disappearance into the rocky landscape of Kulikoro. Quénum emphasizes the Soso ruler's continued presence at the spot and, through this, the contrast between an African philosophy of holism (my word) and European notions of the discontinuity of humanity and nature.

#### **Ali Sawse (AS)**

##### Bibliographic details

"Lion of Manding: A Wolof Epic" in Harold Courlander (ed.), *A Treasury of African Folklore...*, pp. 71-78

New York: Crown Publishers Inc. 1975

## Abstract

Narrator: Ali Sawse, *gewel* (bard), a Wolof

Recorder: David Ames, U.S. graduate student

Place of recording: Ballanghar, The Gambia

Date of recording: 1950

Length c. 3800 words

Number of story-elements: 11

Form: English prose

The version of the epic performed by Ali Sawse was recorded by David Ames at Ballanghar, Gambia, in 1950. Sawse was a Wolof, and a *gewel* or bard. He is said to have 'told and sung' the tale 'accompanying himself on a *halam*, a five-stringed plucking instrument' (71).

David Ames, from the United States, presented his thesis in 1953 on plural marriage among the Wolof, so we can assume language competence on his part.

The tale, entitled "Lion of Manding: A Wolof Epic", which is about 3800 words long, is one of the more distant variants of the Sunjata epic included in our survey. One measure of this "distance" is shown by the fact that none of the names of people or places, excepting only the hero himself, are repeated in other versions of the epic I have examined. Also, it is one of the very few versions which manages to tell the story of Sunjata without mentioning Sumanguru. AS displaces Sumanguru's role as Sunjata's adversary onto Sunjata's own father. It is his father who cripples Sunjata and who arranges his exile, through the agency of jinns; when the hero does eventually return and is greeted by his father, the latter dies within a month. Much store is put by Sunjata's prodigious abilities and their disruptive potential - 'I am a man of trouble', the hero asserts (76). Another aspect of its distance from other versions is that AS contains what might be called a version of the Buffalo-woman tale, but places it at the end of the epic, with Sunjata as its hero - the defeater of a wild animal which terrorizes a community, who is, upon his success, chosen as

ruler, over the head of his elder brother.

### **Humblot (H)**

#### Bibliographic details

P. Humblot, "Episodes de la Légende de Soundjata" in *Notes Africaines* 52 (1951), pp.111-3

#### **Abstract**

Narrator(s): unknown

Recorder: Paul Humblot, French colonial official

Place of recording: unknown, possibly Upper Guinea, around Kankan

Date of recording: unknown, probably before 1918

Length: c. 2000 words

Number of story-elements: 32

Form: French prose

Paul Humblot's version of the Sunjata epic, which appeared in *Notes Africaines* (1951), gives no direct information on when, from whom, and where the account was collected. Several clues are found in the article in question, plus an earlier article by Humblot (1918/9), which, together with a little information on Humblot's career, allows us to suggest that his version was collected before 1918, in Upper Guinea, and from a number of different informants.

We can follow Tombs (1978: 27-8) in asserting that the version is probably a composite of a number of separate recitations or partial retellings of the tradition that Humblot heard. The account is not only fairly short, it also feels disjointed, a synthetic amalgam of traditions, and with the frequent insertion of alternative traditions: he gives four different versions of Sunjata's mother's name (111), two different versions of the episode of Sunjata's attempt to stand (112), and subsidiary traditions concerning Fakoli and the *bala* of Sumanguru that are not part of the main

narrative (113).

Regarding the geographical situation of Humblot's informant(s), we can note that he mentions in passing traditions of Upper Guinea, Kouroussa and Sankaran (111). These locations concur with those found in his 1918/9 article "Du Nom Propre des Appellation chez les Malinke des Vallées du Niandan et du Milo (Guinée Française)" which, as the title suggests, is based on information gathered in the area around Kankan, Guinea. Also, in this article he quotes one passage found in some versions of the epic - the episode involving Sumanguru, Bala Faseke Kuyate and the *bala* (1918: 525) - suggesting that he may have received the information on the epic while researching his article.

Humblot was Administrateur des Colonies at Baroueli (between Bamako and Segou) during 1918/9, but from the early 1920s to the mid 1930s he was resident in Paris as Inspecteur des Colonies en retraite (see members' lists of the Comité des Études Historiques et Scientifiques). In the 1951 article he signs himself Ancien Inspecteur des Colonies. While Humblot may have gathered his version of the epic later than 1918, the fact of the mention in the account of Upper Guinea, Humblot's research there in 1918, and his residence elsewhere (as far as we can tell) after 1918, all point to this date and location as the most probable for the version.

### **Bakary Diabaté (BD)**

#### Bibliographic details

"Soundiata" in Abdoulaye Sadjí, *Ce Que Dit La Musique Africaine...*

Présence Africaine: Paris and Dakar, 1985

pp. 11-38

#### **Abstract**

Narrator: Bakary Diabaté, griot of Khasso province, Mali

Recorder: Abdoulaye Sadjí, Senegalese school teacher and author

Place of recording: unknown, probably the province of Khasso, Mali

Date of recording: unknown, probably in the 1940s or '50s, before 1961 (death of recorder)

Length: c. 6000 words

Number of story-elements: 21

Form: French prose

Bakary Diabaté's version of the epic of Sunjata is found in Abdoulaye Sadj's posthumously published *Ce Que Dit La Musique Africaine...*, a collection of stories addressed (according to its publishers) to the young aged over eleven.

Abdoulaye Sadj (1911-61) was a Senegalese school teacher and author of several novels, *Maimouna, la petit fille noire* (1953) and *Nini, mulâtresse de Sénégal* (1954), and the work *Tounka* (1965), a retelling of an African legend. The publication dates are misleading: according to Blair, *Nini* was written in 1935, and *Tounka* in 1946 (1976: 73, 189). For Blair, *Tounka* was Sadj's finest work and 'one of the earliest known treatments of a legendary African theme in the form of a novel in French' (71); to her, his contemporary novels are less satisfying, dealing with the relationship between colonial and indigenous, urban and rural, but provoking the author to 'the exposition of a severe punitive, negative morality' which is in both novels 'stated with the same lack of compassion' (Blair 1976: 191).

Sadj himself tells us about his informant, the *jeli* Bakary Diabaté, whom, he says, was from Khasso (a region of Mali), was initiated while still young into his profession, and was the grandson of Morfiniang Diabaté, griot of Samori Toure (10). (His grandfather may be identified with Kifiya-Mori Dyubate, griot of Samori Toure according to Y. Person 1968-75 ii: 850.) Sadj does not tell us when or where he met this griot, although it is possible to speculate that it may have been around the time of the writing of *Tounka* (1946) when Sadj was clearly interested in the presentation of traditional African material.

Sadj gives some interesting details on the circumstances of the recitation. He notes the reticence of the traditionist to part with his knowledge, Diabaté saying

that he would only perform the epic if 'je fuisse mon possible pour qu'il fût réellement heureux ce jour-là'. Days passed by; finally the griot announced he would perform next day and Sadjì must do all he could to make the performer happy (11-2).

It is impossible to gauge the relative input of Diabaté and Sadjì in this version, beyond the obvious fact that Sadjì reworked a Malinke oral epic into French prose. Certainly the account is unusual in some respects: Tira Makhan is the defeater of the Buffalo-woman, tutor of Sunjata, and the hero's successor as ruler; Sumanguru is Sunjata's brother, but his contest with Sunjata is accorded only a few brief paragraphs; Sunjata's sister is jealous of Sunjata and tempts him sexually, is curtly reminded of her brother's powers, then married off to Fakoli - almost a total inversion of the normal motif (see Chapter Seven). Sunjata appears as the archetypal excessive hero: prodigious in development, in appetite and in belligerency, killing a marabout for the "suspicious" act of praying early in the morning, and feeding 'les hommes de petite taille' to the vultures; but also providing food for his griot from his own thigh (a familiar theme in Malinke literature accounting for the origin of the *jeli/horon* relationship, see our Chapter Six) and wrestling with water-jinns to procure the first *kora*. While most of these themes are common to many versions of the epic, and so can be attributed to Diabaté, the unique reversal of the character and action of Sunjata's sister may conform to Sadjì's own views, if one is to accept Blair's comments on his treatment of his own contemporary Senegalese heroines, Maïmouna and Nini, who are both shown to suffer for making choices other than those within the accepted ambit of cultural tradition.

## **Niane (N)**

### Bibliographic details

First published as: Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Soundjata, ou L'Épopée Mandingue*

Présence Africaine: Paris, 1960

English edition: *Sundiata, an epic of old Mali*, translated by G.D. Pickett

London: Longman, 1965

## Abstract

Narrator: *Jeli* Mamoudou Kouyate of Djeliba Koro, Guinea

Recorder: Djibril Tamsir Niane, Guinean historian

Place of recording: Djeliba Koro, Guinea

Date of recording: 1958

Length c. 36,000 words

Number of story-elements: 80

Form: French prose

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Niane's version of the Sunjata epic for the wider knowledge of the subject. As Johnson writes, 'One can almost divide non-Mande knowledge about Son-Jara Keita into pre-Niane and post-Niane periods'. He notes that the book 'hit the Western literary world like a bombshell' (1986: 229); Belcher states that N is 'now possibly the standard literary version of the story' (1985: 232). What was it about Niane's book that produced this situation?

Niane's achievement, I suggest, was to present the epic in a form that appealed both to an African audience hungry for the presentation of indigenous traditions in literary form, and to the Western academic community, which found in N a version of the story which, although it did not reject the imaginary or magical, nevertheless grounded the story in a recognizable and believable historical context; and, furthermore, which avoided the high moral tone, preaching zeal and sentimentality of much Négritude writing. Blair has commented on Niane's 'sober narrative' which eschews romanticism and ethnographic digression (1976: 79), and indeed, in comparison to such versions of the epic as those by Quénun or Sadjí or even Camara Laye, Niane's narrative does strike a very different chord: he does not eulogize the African past, nor praise the African "soul" or "imagination"; he is content to make grand claims only for the *jeliw*, and only when talking of the griots does his own sense of fulfilment in his research become plain: 'My eyes have only just opened on these mysteries of eternal Africa' he writes (1965: viii); and most importantly, he

emphasizes the historical claims of the Sunjata tradition, calling the *Belen Tigi* 'The griot who occupies the chair of history of a village' (ibid.), and constructing a narrative that allows his audience to accept the story of Sunjata as a "true" story as much in the mundane sense of the word as the mythical.

Two obvious but nonetheless significant departures in the history of the Sunjata epic's publication are marked in N: it is the first version to call itself an epic (*épopée*) rather than the hitherto more conventional "legend". Niane's employment of the term epic can therefore be seen as a conscious move to claim for Africa this most prestigious of oral genres. The second significant difference between N and all previous versions of the story of Sunjata is related to this first point. It is simply the unprecedented length of the tale: at c. 36,000 words it is about three times longer than its nearest rival at time of publication, and at eighty story-elements (excluding Niane's own comments based on tradition given in the footnotes) is more detailed than any previous published version. Niane demonstrated with his account that the story of Sunjata was a more complex, detailed and subtle tradition than had hitherto been believed, when, previously, most scholars had presented summaries or partial versions only. Length is also generally considered a criterion for epic status, and so at this level also, Niane can be seen, through *Sounjata*, to be claiming for Africa the prestigious genre of epic.

Djibril Tamsir Niane was born in the village of Baro, Guinea, situated on the left bank of the Niandan (a tributary of the Niger) opposite Fadama, in Hamana province. He attended primary school at Siguiri and later studied for his Diplôme d'études supérieures at Bordeaux, writing a wide-ranging and perceptive examination of ancient Mali - its history, from before Sunjata to the last emperors, its economy, social organization, court, political system, and the siting of its capital - using both oral and written (Arabic) sources. The results were published in three articles in *Recherches Africaines (Études Guinéennes)* (Niane 1959, 1960a and 1961), and later published in book form. Also, in 1961, with Jean Suret-Canale, Niane published the text-book *Histoire de l'Afrique Occidentale* (Niane & Suret-Canale 1961). Niane was a

teacher of history and then headmaster at the Lycée classique et moderne de Donka, Conakry, but he left Guinea during the time of Sekou Touré, moving to Dakar and the Fondation Léopold Sédar Senghor, of which he became director. He continued with his interest in ancient Mali, publishing an article in *Présence Africaine* on the historical "schools" of griots and the excavations at Niani (Niane 1974). More recently, he has been involved in the collection of oral traditions concerning the western Malinke state of Kabu (Niane 1980, 1989), and has written the chapter on ancient Mali for UNESCO's *General History of Africa* (Niane 1984), as well as editing the volume. Niane is now working for the Senegalese Ministry of Culture at Dakar, overseeing cultural exhibitions and the like, while continuing his researches.

*Soundjata, ou L'Épopée Mandingue* is, according to Niane, 'primarily the work of an obscure griot from the village of Djeliba Koro', identified as *jeli* Mamoudou Kouyate (1965: viii). According to a personal communication, Niane made the recording of the epic from this griot in 1958, while spending several weeks in the village, and holding many sessions with him. Mamoudou Kouyate was not the *Belen Tigi* of Djeliba Koro - in fact Niane identifies this figure as, at the time, Gbéssiran-Moudou (1960a: 18) - but was authorized by his master to perform for Niane the epic of Sunjata. Niane says Kouyate had *la verve*, was communicative and willing to tell him much. Niane had been introduced to Kouyate by Sakouba Keita (an old school friend of Niane's, and himself a resident of Djeliba Koro), and there seems to have been a good rapport between the three during the 1958 sessions (Niane, personal communication, Jan. 1988).

Niane states that Mamoudou Kouyate was trained as a *jeli* at Djeliba Koro and Fadama, completing his griot education in the traditional manner - by touring Guinea and Mali, hearing recitations from other *jeliw*. In N itself we read the following from the mouth of the bard: 'To acquire my knowledge I have journeyed all round Mali', naming Kita, Segou, Fadama and Keyla (N: 84). Mamoudou Kouyate died in 1967, having become *Belen Tigi* of Djeliba Koro (Niane, personal communication, Jan. 1988).

N has been criticized for its form - prose rather than verse - and particularly for Niane's claim to have been 'nothing more than a translator' (1965: viii). Belcher

notes, for example (and correctly), that the book is 'clearly not a simple transcription of the griot's words' (1985: 232), while for Johnson the book is a reconstruction rather than a retelling (1986: 229). Yves Person has asserted that Niane collected the story from Babou Conde of Fadama, not Kouyate (1973: 207). Tombs has gone the furthest in his criticism, claiming that Mamoudou Kouyate was probably a fictitious name, and that Niane in fact collated several different traditions (1978: 6, 28).

Certainly Niane's claim to be "nothing more than a translator" is open to question: it cannot be taken in the same manner as (say) Johnson or Moser might claim it for their versions of the epic. He seems to have listened to many (perhaps individually incomplete) accounts of the epic by Kouyate and conflated them into one version. This does not mean his claim is deceitful or even necessarily misleading. Niane produced his version of the epic against a history of much more cavalier reworkings of the epic by European colonial officials and academics, and in the context of Négritude literature, in which traditional African themes were popular as subjects for contemporary authors, but subjects which these authors, as creative artists rather than translators, used with a certain freedom. It is against this background that Niane's act of translation should be viewed: his version of the epic was both more complete than those of previous writers and probably closer to the griot's actual phrasing than many of his precursors; but Niane did not share our present-day preoccupation with the oral text as performance, and was not averse to conflating different performances by Kouyate nor, it seems, to interpolating a small amount into the tale that was not from Mamoudou Kouyate; nor did he attempt a linear translation of the griot's words, a form of presentation which only made its appearance in the Sunjata epic publications with TK in 1970.

Tombs' charges that Niane invented his griot as a cover for a collation of several disparate sources need investigation. Tombs is suspicious because, in a list of *jeliw* whom Niane consulted, Mamoudou Kouyate is not mentioned, while the griot from Djeliba Koro is given as Gbéssian-Moudou (1960a: 18n). As we noted above, Kouyate was not

*Belen Tigi* at the time of N's composition, and in his 1960 list Niane refers to the master griots from each important griot village. Tombs' second cause for scepticism at Niane's claims comes from the footnotes to N. In these, Niane mentions various different griot "school" traditions, suggesting that he was not always following the version of Kouyate, but was collating several traditions. In fact, Niane only mentions by name two traditions in the footnotes to N: that of Dioma, which is centred on Djeliba Koro, and so can reasonably be identified with the words of Kouyate himself, and that of Hamana, centred on Fadama, which Niane associates with Babou Conde (1960a: 18). In three places Niane notes variant traditions concerning an episode, linking them to these different "schools". Footnote 70 (of the English translation) informs us that N follows the Dioma version of Sunjata's visit to Kita, i.e. that of Djeliba Koro, presumably therefore of Mamoudou Kouyate; footnote 66 says that N here follows Hamana tradition concerning the demise of Sumanguru - that he disappeared into the mountain - and notes Dioma tradition - that the Soso emperor was petrified; note 59 says that Dioma tradition 'represents the battle of Kankigne as a semi-defeat for Sundiata', while the text of N merely says the battle was 'not a great victory but ... demoralized the Sosso' (N: 54). Thus Niane admits to departing from the Dioma version of Sunjata's story - that is to say the version of the story of the village from which Mamoudou Kouyate originated - only twice in the epic, while neither alteration matches the level of disagreement often found between different accounts of the epic. In addition, we can note that Niane does not in fact claim the work to be *wholly* that of Mamoudou Kouyate, but 'primarily' his, while Niane goes on to acknowledge his debt to the griots of Fadama and Keyla also (1965: viii).

Belcher has written that N suppresses some of the supernatural episodes of the epic (1985: 232). He does not elaborate or give examples but we can note, in contrast, that N does not avoid the supernatural aspect of the epic's story in at least two key areas: the Buffalo-woman who terrorizes the people of Do is clearly identified as the animal aspect of the old woman (N: 8); and the white cock's spur that disables Sumanguru is shown to harm him not physically but on another plane (N: 65). Perhaps

Niane has toned down some of the sexual aspect of the epic: neither of the hunter-brothers tries to consummate their marriage to Sogolon, as they do in some other accounts, and the seduction of Sumanguru is alluded to only briefly, while both issues are found emphasized in CL, which is based on the Hamana tradition, stated by Niane to be very close to that of Dioma (personal communication, Jan. 1988).

### Pageard (P)

#### Bibliographic details

Robert Pageard, "Soundjata Keita et la Tradition Orale. A propos du livre de Djibril Tamsir Niane: Soundjata ou l'Épopée Mandingue", *Présence Africaine* 36 (1961), 51-70.

(Version on pp.53-55.)

### Abstract

Narrator: unknown, of Segou

Recorder: Robert Pageard, French official and historian

Place of recording: Segou, Mali

Date of recording: c. 1954-6

Length: c. 1000 words

Number of story-elements: 31

Form: French prose

Pageard's version of the Sunjata epic is presented by the recorder in an article which surveys the already-published accounts of Sunjata's life, and compares them critically, examining in detail some recurrent themes. The article was published in the wake of Niane's successful version of the epic, and Pageard seems aware of his own version's comparative shortcomings.

P is, in terms of word-length, a very brief version of about 1000 words, but crams many traditional details into this space (thirty-one story-elements); one may conclude from this that the written account we have is a concentrated version of a longer

epic variant. P is, according to Pageard, 'malhereusement inachevé' (52) and 'un peu chaotique' (55). In fact, it presents us with a competent version of the Buffalo-woman tale, but follows this with only the sketchiest of summaries of the life of the hero himself.

Pageard gives us virtually no information on his informant, saying only that he was from Segou (P: 52). We may guess - but have no way of knowing - that the informant was a *jeli*.

Robert Pageard signs himself 'Historien français - Juge au Tribunal civil de Ougadougou (Haute Volta)' in the 1961 article (70). In 1958 he published an article on the *senankun* relationships among the Malinke and Bamana of Segou and Macina cercles (Pageard 1958). In this article he writes that he was at Segou for two years, from 1954 to 1956 (1958: 123). We may suppose, consequently, that Pageard recorded the tradition from his Segou informant during those years. Pageard has also written an article on Malinke literature in French for the Manding Studies Conference, London, 1972 (Pageard 1972).

#### **Camara Laye (CL)**

Bibliographic details

Camara Laye, *Le Maître de la Parole: Kouma Lafôlô Kouma*

Paris: Librairie Plon, 1978

English version: *The Guardian of the Word: Kouma Lafôlô Kouma*

translated by James Kirkup

Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1980

#### **Abstract**

Narrator: Babou Conde, *Belen Tigi* of Fadama, Guinea

Recorder: Camara Laye, Guinean novelist

Place of recording: Fadama, Guinea

Date of recording: March-April 1963

Length: c. 80,000 words

Number of story-elements: 87

Form: French prose

The version of the epic produced by the Guinean novelist Camara Laye is, at about 80,000 words, the longest account of the Sunjata story that we possess. It was the last publication of the author, coming out two years before his death in 1980, yet, in spite of its writer's fame and its similarities to the popular N, it has had nothing like the same circulation as Niane's account, making little impact in either literary or historical circles. It is, nevertheless, a significant version of the epic, not simply because of Camara Laye's own literary reputation, but because it records, albeit via the novelist's own editing and refashioning, the recitation of Babou Conde, *Belen tigi* of Fadama, repository of the tradition of Hamana province, and a famous *jeli*.

Camara Laye (born 1928) is best known for his two earliest novels which appeared, in French, in 1953 and 1954. *L'Enfant noir* is his own idealized account of his childhood, taking us up to his departure for study in Paris; *Le Regard du Roi* is an immensely impressive novel of imagination, of ideas and of the search for redemption. His first book won the Prix Charles Veillon, while both were highly praised by French critics. Laye had been struggling as a student in Paris up to this point, now he was able to marry and return to Guinea. In fact it is noteworthy that, almost immediately upon his return, in 1956, he started to pursue the study of west African oral traditions, travelling, in the remainder of his life, he tells us, through Ghana, Bénin, Togo, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Mali (Camara Laye 1980: 32-3). While this wandering existence was caused in part by his disenchantment with Sekou Toure's Guinea, which he left for good in 1965, he had already taken the opportunity to record traditionists in Accra, Ghana, and Ouidah, Bénin (1980: 29), and was to use his travels to further his collection of African traditions.

Camara Laye was a Malinke, son of a blacksmith and of a blacksmith's daughter who, having first been separated by Western schooling from his cultural traditions - the process he describes in *L'Enfant noir* - spent the remainder of his life constructing his own non-materialist centred, spiritual and holistic view of life, a view which he claimed to be particularly African. Eric Sellin, who reminds us that the young subject of *L'Enfant noir* declares that he has forgotten his own totem, suggests that Laye's interest in the traditional narratives of Malinke culture sprang from a desire to recover this lost knowledge (Sellin 1980).

Laye's interest in collecting oral narratives may also have some part to play in accounting for the dramatic fall-off in the author's literary output: after two novels in as many years Laye produced only the short *Dramouss* in 1966, and *Le Maître de la Parole* in 1978, while a provisionally entitled "L'Exile" from the early 1970s never appeared in print. On arrival in Dakar from Guinea in 1965 Laye was given a research fellowship at IFAN, where he was able to continue his researches into traditional literature, perhaps to the detriment of his creative writing. Other factors were clearly significant also: in 1970 his Catholic wife, Marie, returning to visit her family in Guinea, was imprisoned, returning only in 1977 or 1978, at which time she filed for divorce, her husband having since taken a second wife. Meanwhile Camara Laye had developed a kidney infection and needed treatment abroad. Struggling to bring up a family on his modest stipend from IFAN, Laye relied on the goodwill of friends to pay for treatment in Paris in 1975/6. The hardships of his later years, at which time he was apparently acutely aware of his own exiled status, certainly do much to account for the author's limited output.

*Le Maître de la Parole* has often been viewed as something of an aberration in the author's publications, a late-in-career change of direction. But, given the evidence of Camara Laye's collection of oral traditions from 1956 onwards, the reworking of the greatest Malinke epic seems a natural outgrowth of the author's interests.

Turning to the work itself, Babou Conde is identified as the original author of the tale behind Laye's book (1980: 27). He was, as we have said, *Belen tigi*, i.e. "master

of the word", at Fadama, Guinea, home of the tradition of Hamana province (Niane 1960a, 1974). There are three recorded dates for Babou Conde's death: 1963 (Niane, personal communication, Jan. 1988), 1964 (King n.d.: 96) or 1966 (Person 1973: 206). Whichever is correct, Laye describes Conde as 'old, very old' when he met him in 1963 (Camara Laye 1980: 28). Camara Laye describes how he and several others paid the griot a visit at Fadama on 15 March 1963, taking care to wear traditional dress and hence avoid being mistaken for government officials, and to bring the required gifts. Laye's party appears to have made a good impression, for the author was granted permission to tape-record Conde's recitations. This was achieved from 16 March to 16 April of the same year (Camara Laye 1980: 29-30).

According to Adele King, Laye's original title for the book was "Kouma Lafóló Kouma", but the publishers (Plon) balked at this and relegated it to being the book's subtitle (they had also altered the titles of his first two books which Laye would have called "L'Enfant de Guinée" and "Ciel d'Afrique" respectively). The Malinke *Kouma Lafóló Kouma* means "the history of the first word" and refers, in Babou Conde's division of traditional recitations, to the section dealing with Sunjata's life and times (Camara Laye 1980: 30; King n.d.: 4-5).

*Le Maître de la Parole* won a prize from the Académie Française but was not generally praised by literary critics. King rightly notes that its aims were too mixed for it to be entirely successful, being at the same time an attempt to retell a traditional epic tale as a griot might, and also a novel, complete with a limited narrator and psychological insights into the motivations and musings of the characters (King n.d.: 94-6).

Laye might claim to be 'the modest transcriber and translator' of Babou Conde's words (Camara Laye 1980: 27) - he is clearly more than this, and admitted to King in an interview that the book's form is not directly attributable to Conde (n.d.: 94). Let us attempt to assess the relative contributions of Babou Conde and Camara Laye to the final form of the work.

King notes similarities between *Le Maître* and earlier books by Laye, particularly in

his description of character's thoughts and in the prominent place he often accords women in his works. Thematically, the book returns to earlier concerns of the novelist: the spiritual dimension of mundane events, the importance of community, and 'the need to undergo an arduous initiation into adult responsibilities' (King n.d.: 93-4, 124). A major theme of *Le Maître*, that of exile, is also clearly a concern of Laye, both in *L'Enfant noir* and *Dramouss*, as well as in the unpublished "L'Exile" (Hale 1982). In addition, Laye employs *Le Maître* to criticize African government, particularly that of Sekou Toure, comparing contemporary dictators to Sumanguru and ending the book with the exhortation: 'May the example of Sundiata and his family illuminate us in our progress along the difficult road of African evolution' (CL: 220). In one of the three introductions to the book, Laye attacks modern African rulers who, he says, 'turn politics into a bloody massacre' (1980: 32). This concern with African, particularly Guinean, politics is one of the central themes in Laye's 1966 novel, *Dramouss*.

While the style in CL clearly reflects that of Laye's earlier works, and cannot be an accurate representation of Babou Conde's recitation, the relationship between the themes we have outlined above (and some other aspects of the version of the epic) and the work's two authors are not always so clear-cut. Eric Sellin notes that Laye concentrates on the early portion of Sunjata's life, giving but few pages to the years after his triumph over Sumanguru, suggesting that this emphasis may reflect Laye's own experiences and concerns (Sellin 1980: 393-4). This may be so, yet Camara Laye's stress is also that of the epic versions in general, which nearly always give priority to the hero's early years. Similarly, the themes of exile and initiation into manhood through suffering, which we noted above as being concerns of Laye, are also embedded in the traditional tale of Sunjata itself, as we shall seek to demonstrate in chapters Four and Five. And when Laye holds up Sunjata as a role model for African rulers today, castigating contemporary dictators as latter-day Sumangurus, he is doing no more than many *jeliw* or other bards themselves who traditionally have extolled the memory of past leaders and complained that today's men are, in

comparison, pale reflections, insignificant - or in the words of Seydou Camara, bard to the hunters, 'The world has cooled off' (Bird 1974: 11).

Camara Laye's relative fidelity to the tradition is also suggested by the similarities between CL and N. According to the figures in our comparative survey, N and CL agree on 82% of their details (Table V), a figure only surpassed by the agreement between A and D (85%) - but these two versions are most probably by the same author. Niane explains the similarity between N and CL in terms of the particular closeness of Dioma (Djeliba-Koro) and Hamana (Fadama) traditions which, he writes, only diverge significantly on the subject of Sunjata's successors (personal communication, Jan. 1988). Also, we may note, Mamoudou Kouyate, Niane's informant, visited and heard oral traditions at Fadama, which had, around that time, Babou Conde as *Belen Tigi*.

Barring collusion between Niane and Camara Laye, the high rates of agreement between N and CL must be due to their translators following more closely than has hitherto been generally believed the actual narratives of their informants. Certainly Camara Laye has restyled the narrative in his own way rather than simply translating the griot's words, and has added much in the way of description of characters and scenes - this factor may well account for the discrepancy in length between CL and N: although CL is over twice as long as N, it contains only seven more story-elements than N - nevertheless, in the actual episodes he renders, in their fundamental content and orientation, the role of the novelist, as opposed to the traditionist, has, I believe, been exaggerated.

#### **Tiemoko Kone (TK)**

##### **Bibliographic details:**

[Tiemoko Kone], *Soundjata*, transcribed [and translated] by Lassana Doucouré and Mme Marta

[Bamako: Institut des Sciences Humaines du Mali; and Niamey: Centre Régionale de Documentation pour la tradition Orale,] 1970

**Abstract:**

Narrator: Tiemoko Kone, *jeli* from Mourdiah, Mali

Recorder: Lassana Doucouré

Transcribers and translators: Lassana Doucouré and Mme Marta

Place of recording: Mourdiah, Mali

Date of recording: November 1967

Length: 716 "lines" or segments, c. 10,000 words

Number of story-elements: 29

Form: Bamana transcription, French literal translation, French liberal translation

Tiemoko Kone's version of the Sunjata epic was recorded by Lassana Doucouré at the griot's home village of Mourdiah (about 170km north west of Segou) in November 1967. It has been transcribed linearly from the original Bamana tongue into French by Lassana Doucouré and Mme Marta. According to Johnson the work was jointly published by the Institut des Sciences Humaines du Mali, Bamako and the Centre Régionale de Documentation pour la traditionne Orale, Niamey, Niger, although there is no information to this effect in the book itself (Johnson 1986: 233). A literal translation is given, interlinearly with the Bamana text, and a liberal translation appears on the facing page; the text and translation are arranged in verse form, but the "lines" do not seem to relate to the *jeli's* breathing pattern, as they sometimes extend to more than fifty words.

Tiemoko (or Diatourouke) Kone is a Bamana *jeli* born around 1907 who is termed by the recorder a 'célèbre traditionnaliste' who 'possède une connaissance inépuisable des traditions de ces pays' (1970: 1). His father was the griot Doh Kone and his mother Yougoudou Diabaté. His grandfather was from the village of Banna, in the old province of Waga, which was once a part of the Soso polity. Tiemoko was taught his profession exclusively, it seems, by his father, from the ages of eight to fifteen; he was not apprenticed to another griot nor did he travel to hear others perform. His father learnt the Sunjata epic from another griot, Karihala Tounkara of Waga. Kone

has followed his father's example, teaching his own children, but he declares them less interested and committed than he. He is a griot to the Kagoro and Bamana families of the area (1970: 1-6).

TK is the earliest linear transcription and translation of the epic of Sunjata that we possess, although its rarity has lessened its impact on the study of the subject (Johnson 1986: 231). Tiemoko Kone's *Soundjata* in fact concerns itself exclusively with the Buffalo-woman tale, forming a long and detailed exposition of that sub-tradition of the epic. TK contains references to the life of Sunjata and to the fight with Sumanguru as well as several genealogies, and, if we can assume that Tiemoko Kone is equally knowledgeable concerning the life of Sunjata Keita as he is concerning the Buffalo-woman tale, it is unfortunate that his version of that story has not also been recorded.

#### **Fa-Digi Sisoko (FDS)**

Bibliographic details:

First published in Malinke linear transcription and parallel English translation as part of volume ii of John William Johnson, "The Epic of Sun-Jata: An Attempt to Define the Model for African Epic Poetry", PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1978

Reissued in English linear translation only as *The Epic of Son-Jara: A West African Tradition. Analytical study and translation by John William Johnson, text by Fa-Digi Sisoko, transcribed and translated with the assistance of Charles S. Bird, Cheick Oumar Mara, Cheickna Mohamed Singaré, Ibrahim Kalilou Tèra, and Bourama Soumaoro* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986

#### **Abstract**

Narrator: Fa-Digi Sisoko, *jeli* and "agricultural bard" from Bandoma, Cercle de Kita

Recorders: Charles Bird, with the assistance of M. M. Diabaté

Transcribers and translators: J. W. Johnson, Charles Bird, Cheick Oumar Mara, Cheickna

Mohamed Singaré, Ibrahim Kalilou Tèra and Bourama Soumaoro

Place of recording: Kita, Mali

Date of recording: 9 March 1968

Length: 3084 lines, c. 18,500 words (c. 4 hours recitation time)

Number of story-elements: 84

Form: Malinke linear transcription (Johnson 1978 only) and English linear translation

The version of the epic of Sunjata (or Sonjara as the hero is called in Fa-Digi's Kita dialect) by Fa-Digi Sisoko was collected by Charles Bird and M. M. Diabaté at Kita, Mali in March 1968 (Johnson 1986: x). At over 3,000 lines and eighty-four story-elements the version is particularly full for a single performance; it lasted from three to seven pm (Johnson 1986: 97). The *jeli* was accompanied by a guitar-playing *namu*-sayer and, unusually, Johnson has included his comments and responses in parentheses at the end of each line. FDS was recorded on tape, and transcribed and translated by Johnson with Charles Bird, Cheick Oumar Mara, Checkna Mohamed Singaré, Ibrahim Kalilou Tèra and Bourama Soumaoro. The transcription and an English translation appear first in Johnson's 1978 thesis, and a slightly emended English translation forms the second part of Johnson 1986. Three modes of recitation are recognized in the translation: narrative mode (unindented lines), "praise-proverb" mode (indented lines), and song mode (italicized and indented lines). Notes concerning the language, the story and its context are provided.

Johnson himself did not meet the griot of FDS, but we are told that he came from the village of Bandoma, cercle de Kita, and was an agricultural bard by profession, which is to say that he performed in the fields for the farm workers, providing encouragement, entertainment and a rhythm to work to. Fa-Digi was trained by his maternal uncle. He attended the reroofing celebrations, at which the griots of Keyla perform the epic of Sunjata, at least once. Johnson calls him 'a greatly respected and well-known bard' (Johnson 1978 ii: 9; 1986: 91-2).

FDS, along with KMJ and MS form what Johnson called the Kita variants and Belcher

the Kita bloc (Belcher 1985: 263), owing to the remarkable similarity in structure and detail between them.

John William Johnson, born Texas, 1942, has researched into Somali language and literature, and the concept of the epic in Africa (Johnson 1978, 1980, 1986), as well as the epic of Sunjata (1978, 1979, 1986).

**Kele Monson Jabate (KMJ: KMJ,D1, KMJ,M, KMJ,D2)**

**Bibliographic details:**

First published, in a French prose translation, as *Kala Jata* by Massa M. Diabaté  
Bamako: Editions Populaires, 1970 (=KMJ,D1)

Published in linear form in Malinke, with English linear translation, as "The Epic of Sunjata" translated by Rex Moser, Mamadou Konare and Charles Bird, in R. E. Moser, "Foregrounding in the 'Sunjata', the Mande Epic", PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1974, pp.203-349. (=KMJ,M)

Malinke transcription, literal French translation, and liberal French translation in M. M. Diabaté, "Essai Critique sur l'Épopée Mandingue", Doctorat de troisième cycle, Centre de Recherches Africaines, Université de Paris I, Sorbonne, n.d., pp.48-621.

Published in French linear translation only as Massa Makan Diabaté (trans.), *L'aigle et l'épervier ou La geste de Sunjata*

Paris: Pierre Jean Oswald, 1975 (=KMJ,D2)

Excerpted English translation by Charles Bird as "The Coming of Sunjata's Ancestors", in "Bambara oral prose and verse narratives collected by Charles Bird", in Richard M. Dorson (ed.), *African Folklore*, pp.441-77 (Version on pp. 443-8.)

Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1972

**Abstract**

Narrator: Kele Monson Jabate, griot of Kita, Mali

Recorders: Charles Bird and Massa Makan Diabaté

Transcriber and translator (KMJ,D1; KMJ,D2): M. M. Diabaté

Transcriber (KMJ,M): Mamadou Koita

Translators (KMJ,M): Rex Moser, Mamadou Konare and Charles Bird

Place of recording: Kita, Mali

Date of recording: 18 March 1968

Length: KMJ,M: c. 12,500 words, 2034 lines

KMJ,D1: c. 17,000 words

KMJ,D2: c. 19,000 words

Number of story-elements: 85

Form: KMJ,M: Malinke transcription and English linear translation

KMJ,D1: French prose translation

KMJ,D2: French linear translation

The three full versions and one excerpted portion of Kele Monson Jabate's version of the epic of Sunjata all come from a single performance, which took place at Kita, Mali, on 18 March 1968 (Diabaté n.d.: 47; see also Moser 1974: 203). Present at this recitation were the American anthropologist and linguist, Charles Bird, and the Malian academic, Massa Makan Diabaté. According to Moser, two tape recorders were employed, one to record the words of the griot, the other the comments and responses of the audience (1974: 203).

The three full accounts that came from this one recitation demonstrate, in their manifest diversity, the significant role of translation and presentation in the process by which the griot's words find a wider audience. KMJ,D1, the first to appear, is a very loose prose reconstruction of the narrative, couched in the form of an address by the *jeli* to his *namu*-sayer, Seku. (In fact, Moser informs us that, although Seku was the name of Kele Monson's regular *namu*-sayer, he was replaced for the performance in question by another, called Garan, but that the griot still generally addressed this one as Seku (Moser 1974: 330).) KMJ,D1 includes a version of the Buffalo-woman tale; comparison with the other published versions of the performance reveal that it was not part of the actual recitation given by Kele

Monson. We include the Buffalo-woman tale from KMJ,D1 in our estimation of the number of story-elements in KMJ although it should be noted that Belcher, in his similar comparative analysis, excludes the tale from his reckoning.

KMJ,M, which appeared as part of Rex Moser's PhD. thesis in 1974, consists of a Malinke transcription, produced by Mamadou Koita, and an English translation, prepared by Moser, Mamadou Konare and Charles Bird, which is intended to be as faithful as possible to the original style and meaning of the *jeli*, rather than an elegant English translation (Moser 1974: 203-4). Thus, no attempt is made to gloss untranslatable lines nor to fill lacunae left by the griot in the tale. The version is occasionally abstruse, but reflects more closely than most the actual verbal form and style of the Malinke bard's performance. KMJ,D2 is in some ways a compromise between the previous two publications. Appearing under the apparent authorship of Massa Makan Diabaté as a book in 1975, giving a linear French translation of Kele Monson's 1968 performance, the original transcript and a word-for-word translation are to be found in Diabaté's "Essai Critique sur l'Épopée Mandingue", his thesis for the Sorbonne (Diabaté n.d.), pages 48-621. The translation in *L'aigle et l'épervier* is freer than that in KMJ,M, but is arranged in lines, and accompanied by helpful notes.

The bard Kele Monson Jabate was highly respected and came from an illustrious *jeli* family. His parents were the griot Bolin Jigi Jabate and Dusuba Kamara, and he was born at Karanya in the cercle de Kita, Mali, before 1904 (Diabaté n.d.: 45). Kele Monson received training from his father and from the Keyla *Belen Tigi*, Bintou Fama (d. 1946) (ibid.: 16). Although reckoned to be inferior in performing ability and knowledge to these famous *jeliw*, the skills of Kele Monson were greatly admired. Charles Bird called him 'the great bard from Kita' (1972: 443), while Diabaté records that his services were in great demand, he was well paid, and was a frequent performer on the radio (n.d.: 46). In 1975 Diabaté described how Kele Monson dominated Malinke oral art

par sa prestance physique que l'âge ne ternit en rien, par son élocution facile et imagée qui très rarement se desaccorde d'avec l'accompagnement de Modibo Diabaté... (1975: 9)

Massa Makan Diabaté, who is the nephew of Kele Monson, was born in Kita in 1938, educated at the Lycée classique de Conakry, and at the Universities of Nantes, Strasbourg and Paris I. He has worked at the Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako, and for UNICEF. His publications, aside from those already mentioned, include a book of Malinke traditional songs, *Janjon* (1970), poetry, *Si le feu s'éteignait...* (1967), a prize-winning play (Blair 1976: 110), and articles on Malinke oral art (e.g. Diabaté 1972). Rex Moser was born in Oklahoma in 1935 and translated KMJ into English as part of his thesis for Indiana University, in which he examined this version of the epic in terms of its formal literary and rhetorical characteristics. No information is available on Mamadou Koita or Mamadou Konare. Charles Bird is professor of anthropology at Indiana University and a leading writer on Malinke culture and language (Bird 1971, 1972, 1974, 1977, Bird & Kendall 1980).

**Dembo Kanute (DK)**

Bibliographic details:

Dembo Kanute, "Faa Koli" in Gordon Innes (editor and trans.) *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions*

London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974

pp. 260-323

**Abstract**

Narrator: Dembo Kanute, Gambian *jeli*

Recorder: Seni Darbo, agricultural officer, Yumdum, Gambia

Place of recording: Serrekunda, a village c. 8 miles from Banjul, Gambia

Date of recording: 1968

Transcriber: Bakari Sidibe

Translator: Gordon Innes, with Bakari Sidibe

Length: 1021 lines, c. 7200 words (c. 1½-2 hours of recitation)

Number of story-elements: 32

Form: Gambian Malinke linear transcription and English linear translation

Dembo Kanute's version of the epic of Sunjata is in fact entitled "Faa Koli", taking as its main theme the career of Fakoli, the lieutenant of Sunjata. Nevertheless, the stories of Fakoli and Sunjata are intertwined, and DK takes up the story of Sunjata at the point of his return from exile, having previously concentrated on the interactions of Sumanguru, his sister, and Fakoli (her son).

Dembo Kanute was born in about 1920 in Niani-Kayayi, McCarthy Island Division of Gambia. Born into a reputed family of griots, he was trained by his father to recite and play the *bala*, a rare instrument in The Gambia. On the death of his father he moved with his family to Tambacounda, Senegal; he travelled widely in Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Gambia and, according to Innes, 'established himself as one of the leading griots in Senegal' (1974: 260). Much of his popularity seems to have stemmed from his radio performances. At the time of publication (1974) he was living in Dakar and still highly regarded, although not so popular as previously. Dembo was reckoned to be a skilful *bala* player, but switched to the *kora*. He had a good knowledge of the traditions, and performed in Fula and Wolof as well as Gambian Malinke (Innes 1974: 260-1; 1973: 106).

The performance of "Faa Koli" by Dembo Kanute was tape-recorded by Seni Darbo, an agricultural officer, at Serrekunda, near Banjul, Gambia, in 1968. Seni Darbo and Dembo were both present at the naming ceremony for a daughter of Banna Kanute, Dembo's brother, at which Dembo himself requested to perform in honour of Seni Darbo, an old friend, and whose wife the child was being named after. Dembo was accompanied by an unnamed *kora* player (Innes 1974: 264-5).

Gordon Innes was Reader in West African languages in the University of London at SOAS, and has published several collections of Gambian oral recitations (Innes 1974, 1976, 1978) and a comparative analysis of griot recitations (Innes 1973). Innes made a copy of Seni Darbo's tape, Bakari Sidibe transcribed it, and Gordon Innes translated

it into English, presenting it in linear form, providing very helpful notes on the language and other relevant issues. Three modes are recognized in the translation: speech mode (unindented lines), recitation mode (indented lines), and song mode (double indented lines). In DK there are very few songs.

DK is unusual in several respects (noted by Innes). The recitation was performed at the griot's own request, rather than as a commission. The audience did not, so far as we know, contain a representative of the western world, but griots, their families and friends - cultural "insiders". DK might therefore be expected to be tailored to meet these specific circumstances. Seni Darbo comes from a distinguished Malinke family which is often mentioned in the epic. In DK we find that an ancestor of Seni Darbo is said to shoot the fatal arrow at Sumanguru, rather than this task being performed by Sunjata or another of his allies (DK: 309).

#### **Banna Kanute (BK)**

Bibliographic details:

Banna Kanute, "Sunjata", in Gordon Innes (ed. and trans.), *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions*

London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974

pp.136-259

#### **Abstract**

Narrator: Banna Kanute, *jeli* from the Georgetown area of Gambia

Recorder: Gordon Innes

Transcriber: Bakari Sidibe

Translator: Gordon Innes with Bakari Sidibe

Place of recording: Serrekunda, Gambia

Date of recording: 1969

Length: 2067 lines, c. 12,400 words, estimated performance time 3-3½ hours

Number of story-elements: 24

Form: Malinke linear transcription and parallel English linear translation

Banna Kanute's version of the Sunjata epic was recorded by Gordon Innes at the village of Serrekunda, Gambia, in 1969, at the recorder's request. Banna Kanute accompanied himself during the performance on a *bala*, frequently varying the accompanying tune.

Banna Kanute was born in about 1925 at Niani-Kayayi, in the McCarthy Island Division of Gambia. He is the younger brother of Dembo Kanute, and was taught by Dembo, in addition to the training he received from his father. The Kanutes are said to be the only *bala*-playing family in Gambia, where the *kora* is more popular, and Banna Kanute is considered to be a skilled musician. Banna has travelled widely in west Africa, adding to his knowledge of oral tradition; he has worked on the radio in Gambia, and is now a resident of Dakar, Senegal. In earlier days he stayed in London working for SOAS. According to Innes, Banna Kanute's style is lively and exciting; Banna has harnessed these skills to promote various Gambian politicians, both in public places and on the radio (Innes 1973: 106-7; Innes 1974: 136-42; Sidibe 1980: 47.)

BK is in some ways an eccentric version of the epic: it concerns itself to a large extent with the vain attempts of Sumanguru to prevent the predicted rise of a usurper to his throne by employing the magical powers of successive marabouts; mass battles are ignored in favour of single combat and the struggle for domination on the supernatural or magical level; historical references and details are sparse, instead, the narrative revolves around several key players, who are mostly kin: in addition to the two protagonists, Sunjata and Sumanguru, there are the hero's mother, sister and her lover, and Sumanguru's sister and her son (Fakoli). Banna has apparently altered the story from that which he received from his brother, as Innes demonstrates in a comparative analysis (Innes 1973). For example, Manga Yura is Sunjata's sister's lover in BK, not Sumanguru's sister's lover, as in DK; Bala Faseke is originally Sunjata's griot in DK (and many other accounts), but is Sumanguru's griot,

taken by Sunjata, in BK.

**Bamba Suso (BS)**

Bibliographic details:

Bamba Suso, "Sunjata", in Gordon Innes (ed. and trans.), *Sunjata: Three Mandinka*

*Versions*

London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1974

pp. 34-135

**Abstract:**

Narrator: Bamba Suso, Gambian *jeli*

Recorder: Gordon Innes

Transcriber: Bakari Sidibe

Translator: Gordon Innes with Bakari Sidibe

Place of recording: Secondary School, Brikama, Gambia

Date of recording: 1969

Length: 1305 lines, c. 10,000 words (c. 2-2½ hours performance time)

Number of story-elements: 33

Form: Gambian Malinke linear text, English linear translation

Bamba Suso's version of the epic of Sunjata was recorded by Gordon Innes at Brikama Secondary School, in the Gambia, in 1969. Suso was asked to give as full a version as possible (this is generally not *jeli* policy), and this request may, Innes suggests, account for the unusual interrogatory interruptions of the *kora* accompanist, Amadu Jebate (1974: 37-8). Bamba Suso played before a large audience of senior school students, staff and other interested parties, presenting a moderately sized recitation which, Bird estimates, lasted from 2-2½ hours (1977: 353). The form of publication is the same as with the other Gambian versions presented by Innes, BK and DK, and has been noted above. Innes recorded at least three other recitations from Bamba Suso in

the same circumstances, a version of the life of Kelefa Sane, of Musa Molo, and the story of the empire of Kabu, which have been published in Innes 1976 and 1978.

Bamba Suso was born in about 1900 at Sotuma, a village with a large griot population in Fuladu East, Gambia, and appears to have lived much of his later life in the same village, from which he would travel extensively during the dry season. Through his mother and father Bamba Suso was well-connected to two of the leading families of Gambia. His mother's family were griots to the Dumbuya clan of Fode Kaba, the Muslim leader involved in the wars between Soninkes and marabouts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; his father's family were griots patronized by the Bades or Baldes, rulers of the kingdom of Fuladu, and on the opposing side in those wars. According to Innes, Bamba Suso's paternal grandfather was 'associated with' Alfa Molo; an uncle was griot to Musa Molo, while 'Bamba claims that he himself played at the funeral of Musa Molo in 1931' (1974: 34; Sidibe 1980: 47). During the second world war Suso became griot to Sekouba Jajusi in the Kombo region of Gambia, who became Protectorate Representative to the Legislative Council in the 1950s (Innes 1976: 72). In later years Bamba refrained from playing the *kora*, complaining that his fingers were too stiff; in 1972 he suffered a heart-attack which impaired his memory and performance ability; he died in 1974.

Bamba Suso had a very high reputation as a bard in the Gambia. Bakari Sidibe calls him 'one of the most able and respected Gambian griots' (1980: 47), while Innes declared, shortly before the *jeli's* death, that 'he has for decades been pre-eminent in his field', highly esteemed, and is regarded by some as Gambia's best griot (1974: 34). In another place (1978: 11-2) Innes attempts to explain why Bamba Suso provoked such statements from his listeners. He notes that Suso had in fact several weaknesses as a bard: he had a poor singing voice, rarely departing from the speech mode in his recitations, and lacked a dramatic ability or flamboyance in retelling his stories. While these weaknesses could have counted against him, I suggest that they actually appear to have heightened Suso's particular bardic qualities. These qualities were, according to Innes, a great amount of knowledge concerning the old

clan relationships of Gambia, and their connections to the Malinke heartland of Sunjata, and an unusually slow and clear delivery, allowing all his words to be heard, and hence avoiding the charge of covering up areas about which his knowledge was hazy - a charge levelled at some griots who slur their speech. Both his parents' connections and his own widespread acquaintances can account for this high degree of knowledge. (Innes remarks: 'he seems to have met and got to know virtually everyone of any consequence in The Gambia during the last 40 years' (1976: 72).) Suso's slow delivery and concentration upon clear facts gave him an air of authority: 'his pronouncements were regarded as authoritative', says Innes (1978: 12). Suso was regarded chiefly as a bard in whose recitations historical tradition came first: in eschewing - if by necessity - the dramatic or aesthetic in his performances, he merely enhanced the effect that, for him, it was "bare facts" that were alone important.

BS is the fullest account of the life of Sunjata presented by Innes in terms of the number of episodes it contains, but it actually gives over the final third of its lines to the settlement of the west under Tira Makhan, allowing Suso to display his knowledge concerning the links between the Malinke heartland families of the epic and the leading Gambian families who claim descent from them, those families by whom Bamba Suso's ancestors were patronized. In this way Suso employs the epic to locate these families in the history of the founding of Mali, and of Sunjata.

#### **Yeli Fode Gibate (YFG)**

Bibliographic details:

Version appears in Michael Jackson, "Prevented Successions: A Commentary upon a Kuranko Narrative" in R. H. Hooke (ed.), *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation*

London: Academic Press, 1979

pp. 95-131 (Version on pp.101-3.)

## Abstract

Narrator: Yeli Fode Gibate, *jelibá* (Kuranko griot)

Recorder: Michael Jackson, anthropologist from New Zealand

Translator: Michael Jackson

Place of recording: Kabala, Sierra Leone

Date of recording: August 1970

Length (of abstracted portion appearing in Jackson 1979): c. 630 words

Number of story-elements: 5

Form: English prose

YFG, the version of the epic given by Yeli (*jeli*) Fode Gibate, is among the shortest and most incomplete of the accounts in our survey. This is neither the fault of the traditionist, who gave a fuller account, nor of Jackson, who has merely excerpted those portions of the epic version relevant to the paper in which it is reproduced. A later book by Jackson may perhaps render a complete version. It warrants inclusion in our survey first because it is from the Malinke-related Kuranko who share much of the same culture as the Malinke, but have, according to Jackson, only a hazy knowledge of Sunjata; and because it contains several interesting motifs which are at times replicated and at times expanded upon or varied in other accounts of the epic.

Michael Jackson, an anthropologist from New Zealand, carried out field work among the Kuranko of highland Guinea in 1969/70 and 1972, producing several papers and two book-length studies (Jackson 1977, 1982). He recorded the version of the epic from Yeli Fode Gibate, a *jelibá* 'widely travelled in Guinea' at Kabala, Sierra Leone, in August 1970. It was, he says, the only version of that story which he heard among the Kuranko, and was told it 'as an explanation of the origins of the xylophone and of praise-singing' (1979: 101).

YFG contains the birth sequence of the hero, concentrating on Sunjata's apparent unwillingness to be born, the stratagem employed to bring about his birth, and his prodigious development and precocious talent. It also explains how Sunjata stole a

xylophone from genies in the forest and how Sira Kaarta took up praise-singing upon it. It gives an etymology for the word Keita and one for Sumaworo, claiming that the latter name was simply a praise-name for Sunjata.

**Roland Bertol (B)**

Bibliographical details:

*Sundiata: the epic of the Lion King, retold by Roland Bertol, illustrated by Gregorio Prestopino*

New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970

British edition published by Hamish Hamilton: London, 1972, and illustrated by Trevor Stubley

**Abstract:**

Writer: Roland Bertol

Date of publication: 1970

Length: c. 15,000 words

Number of story-elements: 31

Form: English prose

*Sundiata: the epic of the Lion King* is a synthetic retelling of the epic by the French-American author, Roland Bertol, and is designed for children. In its layout it is reminiscent of Maximilien Quénum's *Légendes Africaines*, with striking illustrations forming an integral part of both volumes, and, to a lesser extent, of Abdoulaye Sadjí's *Ce que dit la musique africaine*.. The author was educated in France and America, and has lived in north Africa. He has taught in both colleges and schools (Bertol 1970: 83).

Concerning his sources, Bertol first notes the wide number of variants of the tale available and then says that

I selected what I felt were the most interesting elements from the wide choice I had and put them together. Sometimes

I suppressed long episodes which, although beautiful, wandered away from the main thrust of the epic.

I have relied upon several thirteenth-century Arab texts; upon unpublished manuscripts, plays, and fragments which my Malian friends gave me; and to a lesser extent upon published fragments and a recent French translation by D. T. Niane... (1970: x)

Among those elements that Bertol may have purposely suppressed are the Buffalo-woman tale, Sunjata's trials of strength, the dispute over Sogolon's burial, and the seduction of Sumanguru, as well as the events beyond Sumanguru's demise, all of which are absent from B. Bertol may have relied upon N for his description of the hero's exile wanderings, for both versions present a similar account of events. Of his other sources, we can only guess. The "thirteenth-century Arab texts" are a puzzle, for none dealing with Sunjata are known to exist. He may be referring to the fourteenth-century Arab writers on Mali: al-Umarī, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, Ibn Khaldūn). Out of these only the last mentions Mārī Jāta and his story, although Ibn Baṭṭūṭa refers indirectly to him (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 295). Another Arabic MS. to which he may possibly be referring is the Arabic Nioro text of D. Although a twentieth-century source, he may have been misled by the title of Delafosse 1913 which calls the "histoire" thirteenth century. There are significant similarities between B and D, at least in the early portion of the epic. Sunjata is a cripple for the same number of years; both accounts record the use of an iron bar in the hero's attempt to stand, its failure, and the successful employment of a sceptre in its place; and both record the same list of Sunjata's elder brothers killed by Sumanguru. Elsewhere, B is presumably a patchwork of other sources, most of which will be known to us. Bertol does claim to have used 'unpublished manuscripts', and it is partly on the basis of this claim that we include his otherwise highly derivative version of the epic.

Bertol's *Sundiata* demonstrates a north African and Muslim bias, which squares both with the author's own experience of Africa and with our contention that he leaned heavily upon Delafosse's Nioro text, which was the product of a Muslim cleric of that town. For example, emphasis is placed on Sunjata Keita's links to Bilali, the

Prophet's companion; the tale is purportedly told by a Muslim who invokes the name of Allah before he begins; and the contest between Sumanguru and Sunjata is couched in terms of a struggle between the sorcerer Sumanguru - who curses Allah and eventually descends into the underworld of his dwarf (genie) helper at Kulikoro - and Sunjata, who gains support from the Arab-influenced Muslims of Mema and is called the "Sword of Islam".

**Djeli Mahan Djebahate (DMD)**

**Bibliographic details:**

first published in Malinke linear text and French linear translation in Sory Camara, "L'histoire pour les Mandenka", paper presented to the Conference on Manding Studies, SOAS, London, 1972

Reprinted in French linear translation only as "L'histoire du Māde" in Sory Camara, *Gens de la parole: Essai sur la condition et le rôle des griots dans la société Malinké*

Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1976

pp.254-66

**Abstract:**

Narrator: Djeli (*jeli*) Mahan Djebahate, griot originally from Kangaba

Recorder and translator: Sory Camara

Place of recording: Kedougou, Senegal

Date of recording: July 1970

Length: c. 3000 words

Number of story-elements: 36

Form (Camara 1972): Malinke linear text and French linear translation

(Camara 1976): French linear translation

The version of the epic given by Djeli (*jeli*) Mahan Djebahate first appeared in

Malinke linear text and French linear translation in Sory Camara's article for the Conference on Manding Studies at London in 1972, entitled "L'histoire pour les Mandenka" and was subsequently published as an appendix to Camara's excellent book *Gens de la parole* of 1976.

DMD was recorded by Sory Camara in Kedougou, Senegal, in July 1970 from the Malinke bard Mahan Djebahate. This griot came originally from Kangaba, Mali, but had lived in Kedougou, Manding, for some years prior to the date of recording (Camara 1972: 1).

DMD is a short account, and is evidently only the start of Mahan Djebahate's recitation of the Sunjata epic (Camara 1972: 5). It comprises a section on origins, including the links of the Keitas to Mecca (Maka) and Bilali, via the Simbon brothers, Bilali's grandsons, who are told by the Prophet to settle in Manding. This version of the story of the three Simbons is followed by a full account of the Buffalo-woman tale, which ends with the marriage of Sogolö and Mahä Keñfi and their creation of Mahä Söjata.

Sory Camara notes, in connection with the griot's linking of the Keitas and Bilali, that the bard was a Muslim. Aside from this, we know very little about the version's author, but can suggest that his account has been influenced by the Keyla tradition. Coming from Kangaba, Mahan Djebahate would have been very close to the effective heart of Malinke oral tradition, Keyla and, in his version of the rare Simbon tale the *jelf's* narration resembles KMJ which, as we know, was a version of the epic based at least in part on a Keyla tradition.

#### **Wa Kamissoko (WK1, WK2, WK3)**

Bibliographic details:

*L'Empire du Mali: Un récit de Wa Kamissoko de Krina, enregistré, transcrit, traduit et annoté par Youssouf Tata Cissé: Fondation SCOA pour la recherche scientifique en Afrique Noire (Projet Boucle du Niger): Premier Colloque international de Bamako, 27 janvier - 1er février 1975*

Paris: Fondation SCOA, 1975 (=WK1)

*L'Empire du Mali (suite): L'enfance, l'exile, le testament et les funeraillles de Magan Sondyata; les Peuls du Manding: Un récit de Wa Kamissoko de Krina, enregistré, transcrit, traduit et annoté par Youssouf Tata Cissé: Fondation SCOA pour la recherche scientifique en Afrique Noire: Deuxième Colloque Internationale de Bamako, 16 février - 22 février 1976*

Paris: Fondation SCOA, 1977 (=WK2)

Youssouf Tata Cissé, Wa Kamissoko, *La grande geste du Mali: Des origines à la fondation de l'Empire* (Traditions de Krina aux colloques de Bamako)

Paris: Editions Karthala/Association ARSAN, 1988 (=WK3)

### **Abstract**

Narrator: Wa Kamissoko, *jeli* from Krina, Mali

Recorder, transcriber, translator: Youssouf Tata Cissé, ethnologist from San, Mali

Places of recording: San and Krina, Mali

Date of recording: from March 1972

Length: c. 62,000 words (liberal translation)

Number of story-elements: 87

Form: Malinke text, literal French translation, liberal French translation, arranged in extended linear form

The published recitations of Krina bard Wa Kamissoko form the largest corpus (in terms of word length) on the subject of the epic of Sunjata from a single griot (whose words have not been mediated through an interlocutor) in our survey. Wa Kamissoko's pervasive knowledge, his verbose declamatory style, and Fondation SCOA (now Association ARSAN)'s generous publication policy have produced between them three large volumes of narrative (in Malinke and two French translations) - which we dub, in order of publication, WK1, WK2 and WK3 - in addition to two volumes of exchanges between Wa and various academic interlocutors, published as *Acts du*

*Colloque* in 1975 and 1977. The recitations themselves do not form a continuous, chronological account of the epic, rather, thirteen discrete narratives are arranged in the order in which Y.T. Cissé translated them (plus several chapters concerning the Peuls (Fulani) in *L'Empire du Mali (suite)* (1976), which we exclude from the analysis). Some of these thirteen sections are equivalents or rough equivalents, and various themes (such as Sunjata's abolition of slavery) make frequent reappearances. The obvious matches are listed below:

- Wk2, chapters 1 and 2 = Wk3, chapter 2 (rough equivalent)
- Wk1, chapter 4 = Wk3, chapter 3 (equivalent)
- Wk1, chapter 1 = Wk3, chapter 4 (equivalent)

In total, Wa Kamissoko presents in the three volumes recitations on almost every aspect of the Sunjata legend as we know it (the one major theme WK omits is Sunjata's sister's discovery of Sumanguru's secret strength). Reordered in the conventional sequence, they are presented below:

1. Bilali (Wk3, annexe 1)
2. Simbon brothers; Buffalo-woman tale; birth of Sunjata (Wk3, chapter 1)
3. Childhood and exile of Sunjata (Wk2, chapters 1 and 2; Wk3, chapter 2)
4. Sumanguru's attempt to form an anti-slavery pact with Manding; Sunjata's abolition of slavery (Wk1, chapter 1)
5. Sumanguru's invasion of Manding; Sunjata's return and victory (Wk1, chapter 4)
6. Execution of Niani Mansa by Fakoli (Wk1, chapter 2)
7. Conquest of Jolof by Tira Makhan (Wk1, chapter 3)
8. Death of Sunjata (Wk2, chapter 3)
9. Funeral of Sunjata (Wk2, chapter 4)
10. Succession disputes (Wk1, chapter 5)

These narratives were published first as subject-matter for two conferences held in Bamako in 1975 and 1976 at which African and Western scholars were invited to enter into discussion with Wa Kamissoko concerning his recitations. The conferences, which produced the two volumes of *Acts du Colloque*, were sponsored by Fondation SCOA pour la recherche scientifique en Afrique Noire and the Institut des Sciences Humaines du Mali. Y.T. Cissé mediated between conference delegates and the griot, translating where necessary (Johnson 1975; Farias forthcoming).

The griot Wa Kamissoko was born at Krina in 1919. According to Cissé he developed his declamatory skills early and was, by the age of nineteen, pronounced a *nwara*, or "griot of talent". His early instruction was from his parents: Mori Moussa Kamissoko, his father, a reputed guitarist, storyteller and historian; and his mother, N'Koro Koumannian Soumano, a redoubtable woman who was still alive, aged nearly 100, at the time of Wa's death. Among other teachers Cissé names Wa's uncles, Sanio and Segui Kamissoko, the smith Ba-Lamini Sinaba, and Djamoussa Soumano, chief of the griots of Bamako (Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 21-2).

Wa Kamissoko was a farmer and had travelled through much of west Africa as a kola nut trader; he had three wives and seven children. He had a good knowledge of the *komo* society and became, in 1965, "spokesman" for the *donso ton*, or hunter's association, of the Krina area; he had also travelled much as a *jeli* (*Acts du Colloque* 1975: 10; Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 21-2; Farias forthcoming).

Cissé met Wa in 1959 when returning from an interview with some griots from Keyla, the tapes of which had sadly been lost *en route*, and began recording Wa's recitations almost immediately. Wa was both knowledgeable and keen to share this knowledge. A respectful friendship quickly developed between the griot and ethnologist. Cissé comes from a Muslim background; his patronym links him to the Soninke of Wagadu and the first of the Malinke clans to accept Islam; he attended Koranic school but has since taken the stance of a defender of Malinke culture against external influences; his mother was of *Masalen* or royal descent. Cissé studied under, and later worked with, Germaine Dieterlen and Jean Rouch; he has published, among other things, a study of Malinke hunters (Cissé 1964) and, with Emile Leynaud, a study of traditional Malinke society in the Upper Niger (Leynaud & Cissé 1978).

The recitations of the epic published by SCOA/ARSAN were recorded from March 1972 in the house of Cissé's parents and at Krina. Although the ordering of material in the published volumes is eccentric, we know that Wa began (as griots conventionally do) with the episodes leading up to the hero's birth, the Simbons and the Buffalo-woman tale, though not apparently the story of Bilali (Cissé and Wa 1988: 45). Wa

was diagnosed as suffering from bone cancer in 1976 and died in that year. He was fifty-seven years old. At his funeral there were rumours that his death was prompted by his revelations of esoteric knowledge (Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 1-21).

Wa's appearance at the Bamako conferences of 1975 and 1976 prompted, according to Farias, two general reactions from the collected academics. Some saw him simply as a griot, and therefore one whose recitations were to be understood in a traditional context, as statements of received wisdom; while for others Wa stood somewhat apart from a purely traditional status: he had acquired knowledge on Malinke culture and history, they said, in a fashion not dissimilar to that of the western researcher, and he interspersed, or even angled, his recitations with statements of personal opinion (Farias forthcoming).

WK is certainly a more discursive version of the epic than any other in the survey; where other modern, tape-recorded *jeliw* have presented narratives with only a few personal asides, Wa frequently digresses from the line of the plot to discuss an etymology, to explain a custom, to make a moral point, or to express a judgement. Some of these asides are prompted by Cissé, who at times asks Wa questions. In some ways WK is more akin to CL with its personal, "modernized" version of the story than that of a griot's traditional recitation; indeed, KB, whose version is not dissimilar to CL - in its desire to be relevant to a modern audience - claims WK as an inspiration. But while CL is clearly a recitation of the epic reworked by a novelist, and KB a synthetic account by a historian, WK is the pristine translation of a griot's actual words.

In addition to the asides, which are not difficult to spot, several of WK's ten sections identified above have a questionable basis in tradition - that is to say, we have found no analogues to them. These are section four, the attempt by Sumanguru to found an anti-slavery pact with Manding, and Sunjata's abolition of slavery; and sections eight and nine, the death and funeral of Sunjata. (Section ten, in which succession issues are discussed is more difficult to judge as such material generally varies from one local tradition to another.) There are traditions dealing with the

manner of Sunjata's death, but WK does not relate any of these; instead, he tells us about certain Malinke wedding customs and actually says very little about the hero's death.

The validity of section four, on Sumanguru's anti-slavery drive against the pre-Sunjata petty chiefdoms of Manding, and on Sunjata's decision to outlaw slavery among the Malinke, has been examined by Paulo Farias in a general attempt to determine whether Wa was acting within or beyond the confines of tradition (Farias forthcoming). He notes that the section is clearly based to some extent on memories of nineteenth-century slave trading in west Africa. (We can also note that some accounts of the epic, e.g. MA, give Sumanguru himself a slave origin.) Farias situates the issue within the wider context of Wa's perceived tendency to portray Sumanguru in a more favourable light than is usual. According to WK, Sumanguru only invades Manding after the Malinke chiefdoms refuse to cooperate in Sumanguru's anti-slavery campaign, and Sumanguru is credited with being the first king of a unified Manding. While the petty chiefs criticize Sumanguru for his rulership pretensions when he is a *numu*, a blacksmith, and therefore a *nyamakala*, Wa comments that Manding owes its greatness in part to these "four little men" (i.e. four of the hereditary professions). For Farias, Wa's comment is within the ambit of tradition insofar as it agrees with the general logic of the epic, contrasting *horonw* and *nyamakalaw*, nobles and "little men", but not polarizing this division into worthy/unworthy. Similarly, WK's claim that Sumanguru is to be recognized as the first king of a unified Manding, Farias notes, is a claim supported in several other versions of the epic (MB: 169; FDS: 149, 210; BK: 147).

The argument that Wa was expanding his recitation in line with the basic logic of the epic traditions has much validity. There is enough ambiguity in the epic's characterization of Sumanguru and Sunjata to allow WK's stance. A similar process may be underway in WK's apparently eccentric description of marriage customs in his account of Sunjata's death: these customs have to do with the important role, and subsequent honouring by the involved families, of the *jeli*, *garanke*, and *numu* (griot,

weaver and smith) in the ceremonies signifying marriage. Wa relates this picture of esteem and interaction between *horon* and *nyamakala* in the context of the creation of the marriage customs by Sunjata. Within a description of the hero's death Wa interweaves a discourse on the functioning of the society which is deemed Sunjata's creation; as the *mansa* dies a marriage is enacted.

But is this a traditional section, an episode, or Wa's skilful sermon on one aspect of Sunjata's legacy? In this section Wa may be employing elements that are traditional, but the finished discourse does not therefore constitute tradition. They are, rather, Wa's meditations on certain concepts of the Sunjata story. But we should note the possibility that in certain cases Wa may be relating esoteric information hitherto not made available for publication. This claim would explain the rumours floating around at the time of the griot's death but is, of its nature, an issue we cannot resolve at this time.

WK is an invaluable source for scholars of the Sunjata epic: a full, carefully translated and annotated account of the epic. Wa's premature death in 1976 was a serious loss to the griot community of central Manding, but never has a Malinke *jeli* left behind him so generous a legacy.

#### **Magan Sisoko (MS)**

Bibliographic details:

First published in Malinke linear transcription and parallel English translation as part of volume ii of John William Johnson, "The Epic of Sunjata: An Attempt to Define the Model for African Epic Poetry", PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1978

Also published as *The Epic of Sun-Jata According to Magan Sisòkò, collected, translated and annotated by John William Johnson, with the assistance of Cheick Omar Mara (transcription), Ibrahim Kalilou Tèra (translation), Cheickna Mohamed Singaré (translation)*

Bloomington, Indiana: Folklore Publications Group, Indiana University, 1979

2 volumes

**Abstract**

Narrator: Magan Sisoko, *jeli* from Kabe, cercle de Kita, Mali

Recorder: John William Johnson

Transcriber: Cheick Omar Mara

Translators: John Johnson, Ibrahim Kalilou Tèra, Cheickna Mohamed Singaré

Place of recording: Kita, Mali

Date of recording: 19 April 1974

Length: 3631 lines, c. 21,000 words

Number of story-elements: 90

Form: English linear translation

With a tally of ninety story-elements, Magan Sisoko's version is, by our own system of reckoning, the fullest account of the epic of Sunjata that we have in our possession. It was recorded in April 1974 at a performance arranged by Cheick Omar Mara, at the house of a friend in Kita, in the presence of several invited guests, as well as the recorder, John Johnson. Two tape recorders were employed, to avoid interrupting the performance in which Magan Sisoko was accompanied by a guitarist. Johnson claims the recitation to have lasted two hours (1979: 19): this sounds like an underestimate, as FDS, at only just over 3,000 lines, was said to have lasted some four hours.

Magan Sisoko performed in the Kita area dialect of the Malinke tongue. Transcription and translation details are given above in the bibliographic reference. Translation was, according to Johnson, free, but notes explain any deviation from the original. The notes also provide the cultural context to the epic. Three modes of recitation are indicated in the translation: narrative (unindented text), "praise-proverb" (indented), and song (doubly indented).

Magan Sisoko was born in the village of Kabe, about 18km from Kita, in 1943. He

was the son of the bard Fa-Digi Sisoko, and it is from his father that Magan was trained in his profession and received his version of the Sunjata epic, although only on a casual basis, and not as an official apprentice. As Magan Sisoko explained in a post-performance interview with Cheick Omar Mara:

My father is Fa-Digi Sisòkò. I received the narrative [of Sunjata] from him. I did not sit by his side to receive instruction [i. e. he was not an apprentice].

...

In my childhood, I used to sit near him. He used to recite narratives. Well, he brought my attention to things. He used to say to me, your memory is bad. Otherwise, you would take in this or that narrative. Well, I kept at it until I found a way to do it. Well, I used to pick up narratives one by one. (Johnson 1979: 268-9)

Magan Sisoko was relatively young to be performing as a bard. He possessed considerable skills, judging from his recitation of the epic. Sadly he has since been killed in a road accident (Johnson 1986: xi-xii; Johnson 1979: 9-19, 267-74).

Given that Magan Sisoko learned his version of the epic from his father, and apparently was taught by no other griot, it is unsurprising that MS is very similar to FDS (according to our figures, the accounts share 81% of their story-elements). Johnson and Belcher both note the similarities with KMJ also, and call MS one of the Kita variants or part of the "Kita bloc" (Johnson 1979: 9-10; Belcher 1985: 228). Nevertheless, Magan Sisoko does make the story his own: Belcher notes how, in MS, he has a penchant 'for dramatizing events, for making characters talk with each other, where his father and Kele Monson simply recount the event' (ibid.).

### Jeli Baba Sisoko (JBS)

Bibliographic details:

"Wagadu and Sunjata" by Jeli Baba Sisoko, in David C. Conrad, "The role of oral artists in the history of Mali", PhD. dissertation, London University, 1981, volume 2, pp.649-710 (JBS = pp.670-710)

### Abstract

Narrator: *Jeli* Baba Sisoko

Recorders: staff of the Institute des Sciences Humaines, Bamako

Transcriber and translator: David Conrad

Place of recording: Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako

Date of recording: 24 July 1975

Length: c. 8000 words

Number of story-elements: 44

Form: English linear translation

JBS comprises the latter two-thirds of *Jeli* Baba Sisoko's narrative "Wagadu and Sunjata", which appears in English translation in David Conrad's 1981 thesis for London University. The first third of the recitation deals with the empire of Wagadu and its collapse; in the portion we have designated as JBS (pp.670-710) the bard tells the story of the Buffalo-woman at some length, then gives a much condensed version of the life of Sunjata himself.

"Wagadu and Sunjata" was recorded by staff of the Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako, in July 1975. Conrad was not present at the session, but tells me that the griot was asked (quite unrealistically, in his opinion) to recite both the stories of Wagadu and Sunjata in one sitting. He was also placed in a room, alone, with a tape recorder, which is hardly a conducive environment for the *Jeli* (Conrad, personal communication, January 1988). These particular circumstances seem to account for the shape of the final narrative, which telescopes much of epic, dealing with the final contest between Sunjata and Sumanguru in about nine lines. Nevertheless, Baba Sisoko does provide us with a stimulating and dynamic version of the Buffalo-woman tale, which, it appears, he refrained from shortening.

David Conrad is an American historian of the Western Sudan, specializing in the Soninke and Malinke groups. Aside from his thesis on the *Jeli* (Conrad 1981), he has written articles on Wagadu (Conrad & Fisher 1982, 1983), and on various historical aspects of the Sunjata epic or related subjects (Conrad 1983, 1984, 1985). He is now

teaching in the history department of the State University of New York at Oswego.

**Mamary Kouyate (MK)**

Bibliographic details:

"Sunjata" by Mamary Kouyate, in David C. Conrad, "The role of oral artists in the history of Mali", PhD. dissertation, London University, 1981, volume 2, pp.711-17 (MK = pp.711-13)

**Abstract**

Narrator: Mamary Kouyate, *jeli* living at Kolokani, originally from Kita

Recorder: David Conrad

Transcriber and translator: David Conrad

Place of recording: Kolokani, Mali

Date of recording: 9-10 or 16 August 1975

Length: c. 700 words

Number of story-elements: 12

Form: English prose

Mamary Kouyate's summary of aspects of the Sunjata epic was recorded by David Conrad at Kolokani in August 1975 and translated to form part of his thesis. At the time of the recitation Conrad reckons Kouyate to have been in his late thirties; he was blind, and accompanied himself on the *ngoni* (*nkoni*), frequently breaking his narrative with songs. Although now living at Kolokani, which is about 100km north of Bamako, Mamary Kouyate was originally from Kita (Conrad, personal communication, January 1988).

MK gives the episode in which Sunjata first stands with his legs; Sunjata's discovery of the *bala* and Bala Faseke's invention, through his playing of the xylophone, of praise-singing; and (briefly) Sumanguru's disappearance and the cult at Kulikoro. As an erstwhile resident of Kita, we can recognize in Kouyate's version of

Sunjata's first steps, a Kita influence: in common with, out of all the accounts, only KMJ, FDS, MS - all from Kita - and DMS, Kouyate says the iron bars repeatedly failed to support the hero, but a stick of wood, given him by his mother, put him on his feet. The other episodes given in MK are too brief to afford reasonable comparison with other versions.

**Ousmane Sako (OS)**

**Bibliographic details:**

"Two brothers, Kirama and Kankejan", in Harold Courlander, "Three Soninke Tales", *African Arts* 12, 1 (1978), pp.82-8, 108 (Version on pp.84-8, 108.)

**Abstract**

Narrator: Ousmane Sako (Sakho), a Soninke

Recorder: Harold Courlander

Place of recording: unknown

Date of recording: unknown (published 1978)

Length: c. 3200 words

Number of story-elements: 20

Form: English prose

Ousmane Sako's "Two brothers, Kirama and Kankejan" appears as one of three Soninke tales published by Harold Courlander in *African Arts*. The other two are a version of the flesh-from-the-thigh motif called "The origin of Dieli", and a retelling of the Bida myth, entitled "The abandonment of Wagadu". All three are by the same storyteller. Ousmane Sako's third tale - the one which is included in our survey of epic variants - is a variant of the Buffalo-woman tale. Its elements are conventional except in a few areas: the woman transforms into a rhinoceros, not a buffalo, and the disfigured girl the brothers take as their reward is Sunjata's grandmother, not her mother.

The teller, Ousmane Sako is a Soninke, born in Bamako in 1946, and educated in Dakar and Paris. He speaks French and English and narrated the tales recorded by Courlander in English. He is not a professional storyteller or griot (Courlander 1978: 82). No information is available on where he learned the stories he retells.

**Bakari K. Sidibe (BKS)**

Bibliographic details:

*Sunjata: The story of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire, Compiled and edited by B. K. Sidibe, Introduction by Winifred Galloway*

First publication: Banjul, Gambia: Oral History and Antiquities Division, 1980

Reprinted: Banjul: Oral History Division for The Gambia Traditional Griot Society, 1984

**Abstract**

Narrators: Bamba Suso, Dembo Kanute, Banna Kanute and Jabir Kuyate

Recorders: Gordon Innes and Bakari Sidibe

Synthesizer: Bakari Sidibe

Place of recordings: See entries on BS, BK and DK; no information available on Jabir Kuyate

Date of recordings: See entries on BS, BK and DK; no information available on Jabir Kuyate

Length: c. 9500 words

Form: English prose

BKS is an English prose version of the epic of Sunjata which has been compiled by Bakari Sidibe from four recitations given by griots from the Gambia. Three of these griots, and the specific recitations Sidibe used in BKS, are already familiar to us, being the versions by Bamba Suso, Dembo Kanute and Banna Kanute included in this survey. The fourth is a version by the bard Jabir Kuyate which is not available in its pristine form.

Jabir Kuyate was, according to Sidibe (1980: 47), a *jeli* from Tambasansang in Fuladu East, Gambia, who died, aged in his early eighties, in 1978. Both in style and language he was apparently similar to the Senegalese bards of Kedougou and to the griots from the Malinke heartland, as his father had had contacts with kin from those parts. He accompanied himself on the *kontingo* (*nkoni*).

It is impossible totally to unravel Kuyate's recitation from the three others employed in Sidibe's synthesis, particularly given that his version, which was given after that of Bamba Suso, was unusually brief, in recognition, according to Sidibe, of the fact that Jabir Kuyate 'felt that Bamba had already covered most of the main points [in the epic] which they agreed upon' (1980: 47). Nevertheless, two episodes in BKS do not come from either of the three accounts we already know. The first is a reworked version of the Buffalo-woman tale, in which it is Sunjata's father who goes to the court of Sankaran Madiba Konte to claim an ugly bride who becomes Sunjata's mother (as in H), but in which no ferocious animal is first subdued (BKS: 1-2). The Buffalo-woman tale does not seem to be a staple of Gambian versions of the epic, but, given Jabir Kuyate's connections with the east, it is plausible that it formed part of his narrative. Secondly, later in the epic much is made of Sunjata's choice of a horse from a selection of the animals spirited up by his griot, and we are given a song on the subject (32-3).

Bakari Sidibe, who worked with Innes in the collection and presentation of the variants in Innes 1974, was a school teacher before assuming the role of researcher for Gambia's Oral History Division at Banjul. He has written several articles on the traditional history of Kabu (Sidibe 1972a, 1972b, 1981).

Sidibe's synthetic version of the epic is intended as a classroom text for the students of The Gambia. It is endowed with an informative introduction by Winifred Galloway in which explanations are offered for various happenings in the tale; it is written from the perspective of the epic not simply as cultural history (although this is given importance too) but as a socially progressive force for today's children. Thus is Sunjata held up as a 'paragon of leadership' while, for example,

Fakoli is castigated for his torture of a freeman (xv, xvii). The text itself is easy to comprehend, with meanings stated rather than implied (in contrast to the way many griots perform), a set of explanatory notes, and a number of songs taken from the original recitations.

**Adam Konaré Ba (KB)**

Bibliographic details:

Adam Konaré Ba, *Sunjata: le fondateur de l'empire du Mali*

Libreville, Gabon: Lion/Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983

**Abstract**

Writer: Mme Adam Konaré Ba, lecturer, École Normale Supérieure, Bamako, Mali

Date of publication: 1983

Length: c. 28,000 words

Number of story-elements: 69

Form: French prose

Adam Konaré Ba's version of the Sunjata epic is a synthetic account of the story written in French. A bibliography on pages 115-6 lists several familiar published versions as well as discs of performances of the epic which we may assume she has employed in constructing her *Sunjata*. Among the versions she lists is that made for the SCOA seminars in Bamako in 1975 and 1976 by traditionist Wa Kamissoko. This *jeli's* work she cites as a particular influence in her introduction; we can note a number of similarities.

Mme Konaré states as one of her aims in publishing the book as

faire connaître autant que possible à un large public la  
société mandingue, ses grands concepts philosophiques, ses  
us et coutumes (1983: 11)

Part of the rationale behind Wa Kamissoko's discussions with an audience of

academics, and the publication of his recitations, was to reach a similarly wide public with the notions of Malinke culture. Wa himself was not one to eschew his own comments and value-judgements concerning the tradition he retold; likewise we find Konaré Ba explaining how she has avoided the actual words of griots in her text except those of *jeliw*

qui, dans la trame de leurs récits, glissent des réflexions personnelles qui apparaissent avant tout comme des sujets de méditation, voire de morale sociale... (1983: 13)

Some of Konaré Ba's themes are found in Wa Kamissoko's work. Like WK, KB claims (controversially) that Sumanguru attacked Manding only after attempting to win Malinke support for his anti-slavery drive; like WK, KB emphasizes Sumanguru's blacksmith background. Also (a point Mme Konaré notes herself, p.13), her text concentrates less on the hero himself and more on the secondary figures who feature in the story.

Other themes are peculiar to the author: KB gives much time and consideration to the role of Nana Triban, the half-sister of Sunjata in this version. As in many accounts, it is she who gains Sumanguru's secret through her relationship with the Soso ruler; unlike in other accounts, we hear Nana Triban pondering her predicament (an unwanted marriage) and on her only means of aiding her country - her beauty and attractiveness to Sumanguru. In Nana Triban we see brought to life the anthropological archetype of the woman denied access to official power structures, but who exerts influence unofficially: what in most versions remains implied is here explained. Again, later in the epic we find Sunjata debating with himself what reward he might bestow on his half-sister in view of her part in the defeat of Soso. Nana Triban tells him she does not want a reward, but Sunjata makes her a ruler of a part of his empire nonetheless; yet this abandonment of previous custom is quickly qualified when Sunjata declares that

si les femmes ne peuvent devenir Masa, sachez, Mandenka, que leurs enfants ne seront pas exclus de pouvoir. La préférence ira d'abord, naturellement, aux fils d'hommes... (KB: 89)

Custom is flouted but then reinstated, albeit in a slightly modified form, and the structure of Malinke social relations is, as before, made explicit rather than remaining implied.

Other areas of social policy are spelt out in like manner. At the close of the work, Sunjata establishes the relative status of professional groups (hunters, blacksmiths, griots, marabouts, traders and farmers) and of clans, outlining the inter-marriage rules. This section is a hypothetical rendition of the claim made by many Malinke and in some versions of the epic - that it was Sunjata who established society as it now is. Among all the accounts of the epic in our survey, only N and CL realise this theme of the epic as a particular section of the narrative. KB is, of course, linked to both N and CL more closely than WK or any other of the versions. Like N, KB seeks to educate and inform a wide audience (but unlike N, KB is no novelised rendition of an actual griot's recitations) and, like CL, KB is an uneasy mixture of characters fulfilling epic roles but pondering on these roles with twentieth-century sensibilities. More than either N or CL, KB marshals the relevant written sources relating to Malinke history, social formation and economics, deploying them in conjunction with griot recitations and authorial insights, to produce a new and often stimulating synthesis of the Sunjata story, which only occasionally strikes one as an awkward hybrid.

**Djely Mady Sissoko (DMS)**

Bibliographic details:

Published in *Music of the Royal Courts: A celebration of the musicians' place near the thrones of Africa and the Orient: Epic singing - Sunjata, from Mali*

Concert programme notes, BBC Radio Three/South Bank Centre, 6-7 July 1987, Purcell Room, South Bank Centre, London

## Abstract

Narrator: Djely (*jeli*) Mady Sissoko

Recorder: Lucy Duran

Transcribers: Toumani Diebate and Lucy Duran

Place of recording: unknown

Date of recording: January 1987

Length: 75 lines

Number of story-elements: 16

Form: English linear translation

DMS is an abbreviated version of the epic of Sunjata sung to Lucy Duran and included in the programme notes for a couple of concerts at London's South Bank Centre in the summer of 1987 which featured Malian *jeliw* Sidiki Diebate and Mady Sissoko.

DMS was recorded by Lucy Duran in January 1987 at an unknown location and translated in linear form. Djely Mady was accompanied on the *kora* by Sidiki Diabate. According to Duran, 'In Mali today, there are perhaps no two musicians more famous for their knowledge of *Sunjata* than Sidiki Diebaté and Djely Mady Sissoko'.

In this short version we are told (briefly) about Sunjata's birth, the conflict between Sogolon and her co-wife, the hero's attempts to stand, his exile, Sumanguru's invasion of Manding, and Sunjata's reentry into Manding.

Part Two: Comparative analysis of thirty-five versions of the Sunjata epic

The Synoptic Charts

Chart One: Origins of Sunjata & Manding

|  | MAK | MB | A  | AR | D | F | ZB | V | H | N  | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | BK | B | DMD | WK | MS | KB |
|--|-----|----|----|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|---|-----|----|----|----|
| Ancestor of Keita/King of Manding came from east:  | +   | 1  |    |    |   |   | +  | + | + | +  |    |    | 2   |     |    |   |     |    | +  |    |
| 1st ancestor of Keita was Bilali:                  | +   |    |    | +  |   | + | +  |   |   | +  | +  |    | +   | +   |    | + | +   | +  | +  |    |
| -he was slave of infidel, bought by Bubakr Sidike: |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |    | +  |    |     |     |    |   | +   |    | +  |    |
| -Companion of Muḥammad:                            |     |    |    | +  |   |   |    |   |   | +  | +  |    |     | +   |    | + | +   | +  | +  |    |
| Mamadu Kanu/Kani                                   |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |    |     |     |    |   |     |    |    |    |
| -son of Bilali & Simbons' father:                  |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |    | +   |     |    |   | +   | +  | +  | 3  |
| -father of Simbons (only):                         |     |    |    |    |   |   |    | + | + | +  |    |    |     |     |    |   |     |    |    |    |
| -was a hunter:                                     |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   | +  | +  |    |     |     |    |   |     |    |    | +  |
| Link between ancestors & Khaybar:                  |     |    |    |    |   |   | 4  | 5 |   |    |    |    | 6   |     | 7  |   |     | 8  |    |    |
| Genealogy of Keita:                                |     |    |    | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +  | +   | +   | +  | + | +   | +  | +  | +  |
| -includes a pilgrim:                               | 9   |    | 10 | 10 |   |   |    |   |   | 11 |    |    |     |     |    |   |     |    |    |    |
| -includes a merchant:                              |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   | 12 | 13 | 13 |     |     |    |   |     |    |    | 14 |
| -includes the Simbons:                             |     |    |    |    |   |   |    | + | + | +  | +  | +  | +   | +   |    |   | +   |    | +  |    |
| Simbons came from Mecca:                           |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |    |     | +   |    |   | +   | +  |    |    |
| -established Manding:                              |     |    |    |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |    | +   | +   |    |   | +   |    |    |    |

**Key:**  
 The symbol + indicates the presence of a story-element. Arabic numerals refer to notes at the foot of the page, except for italicized and underlined numerals in Charts Five and Six, which denote actual numbers mentioned in the accounts.

- Notes:**
1. Father of Sunjata left for Manding after fall of Tower of Babel.
  2. From India.
  3. Given here as Mamadu Sinbo.
  4. First ancestor left Khaybar at time of Muḥammad.
  5. Konde ancestor lost forty sons at battle of "Bisimillahi".
  6. Tarawere (Traore) ancestor lost sons at Khaybar.
  7. Sogolon lost forty sons at Khaybar.
  8. Sama Loman lost 1000 sons at Khaybar; they were rejuvenated and populated the twelve towns of Do.

continued overleaf

9. Alpha Moussa, grandfather/brother of Sunjata, made Meccan pilgrimage four times and emigrated from Hedjaz.
10. Allakoŋ Moussa Digui (Digui Moussa) made Meccan pilgrimage four times.
11. Lahilatoul Kalabi made Meccan pilgrimage; stranded in desert seven years.
12. Latel Kalabi settled at Dieriba near gold-mines.
13. Kalabi Dauman/Doman was a merchant.
14. Bilali was a merchant.

Chart Two: The Buffalo-Woman tale, I

|  | ZA | F | H | BD | N | P | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DMD | WK | MS | JBS | OS | KB |
|--|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Action set in Do:                          |    |   | + |    | + | + | +  |    | +   | +   | +   | 1  | 1  |     | +  | +  |
| Action set in Sangaran:                    | +  | + | + |    |   |   |    | +  |     |     |     | 1  | 1  | +   |    |    |
| Ruling family                              |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| -Konte/Konde/Kone:                         | +  |   |   |    | 2 |   | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  |     |    | +  |
| -Diara:                                    |    | + |   |    | 2 |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     | +  |    |
| King dies:                                 |    |   |   |    |   |   | +  |    |     | +   | +   |    |    |     | +  | +  |
| Daughter disinherited by bros:             |    |   |   |    | + |   | +  |    |     |     | +   |    |    |     | +  | +  |
| -excluded from feast:                      |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    | +   | +   |     | +  | +  | +   | 3  |    |
| -attacked by (new) king:                   |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    | +   | +   |     |    | +  |     |    |    |
| She is aunt of king:                       |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    | +   | +   |     |    | +  |     |    | +  |
| -sister of king:                           | +  | + |   |    | + |   | +  | +  |     |     | +   | +  |    |     | +  |    |
| She transforms into buffalo:               | +  | 4 | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | 5  | 6  |
| Parts of animal are gold<br>and/or silver: | +  | + | + |    |   |   | +  |    | +   |     |     | +  |    |     |    |    |
| She attacks crops:                         | +  |   |   |    | + |   | +  |    |     |     |     |    |    | +   |    | 7  |
| -men:                                      | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| -hunters:                                  | +  | + |   |    | + | + |    |    | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| King calls for aid:                        | +  | + | + | +  | + |   | +  |    | +   | +   |     |    | +  | +   |    |    |
| -offers wealth:                            |    |   |   |    |   |   | +  |    |     |     |     |    |    |     | +  |    |
| -bride:                                    | +  | + |   |    | + |   |    |    |     |     | +   |    |    |     |    |    |
| -half the kingdom:                         |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    | +   |     |     | +  |    |     | +  |    |

**Notes:**

1. Both locations are named.
2. Both names are given.
3. Old woman excluded from village charity.
4. She becomes a Koba (a mythical sort of antelope).
5. She becomes a rhinoceros.
6. She leads a rebellion against the king.
7. She achieves this by creating a drought.

Chart Three: The Buffalo-Woman tale, II

|                              | ZA | F | H | BD | N | P | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DMD | WK | MS | JBS | OS | KB |
|------------------------------|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Two bros. respond to call:   | +  | + | 1 | 2  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| They are Traore:             |    | + |   |    | + |   |    | +  | +   | +   |     | +  | +  |     |    |    |
| They seek advice from        |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| -sorcerers:                  | +  | 3 |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | +   | 4   | 4   | +  | +  | 5   | +  |    |
| -jinn:                       |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    | +   |     |     |    | +  |     |    |    |
| They are told to befriend an |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| old woman:                   | +  | + |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   |    |    |
| -to choose Sogolon:          | +  | + |   |    |   | 6 | +  |    |     |     |     | +  | +  |     |    | +  |
| Bros. go to country,         |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| befriend old woman:          | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  |     | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| She reveals secret of        |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| strength:                    | +  | + | 7 |    | + | + | +  | +  |     | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| -tells them to choose        |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| Sogolon:                     |    |   |   |    | + | + |    |    |     | +   |     |    |    | +   |    | +  |
| Bros. kill buffalo           |    |   |   |    |   |   |    |    |     |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| -using spindle:              |    |   | 7 |    | + | + | +  |    |     | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   |    | +  |
| -there is a chase:           | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| Younger bro. kills buffalo:  | +  |   |   |    | + |   | +  | +  | +   |     |     | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| -linked to Jabate origin:    |    |   |   |    | 8 | + |    |    | +   |     |     | +  | +  | +   |    | +  |
| -linked to griot origin:     |    |   |   |    | 8 |   |    |    |     |     | +   |    |    |     |    | +  |

Notes:

1. The role of the brothers is filled by Nare Famaghan, the father of Sunjata.
2. The role of the brothers is filled by Tira Makhan, usually credited with the establishment of Mali's western empire.
3. They seek the advice of the Sand Oracle, *Kengebugurilala*, derived from *kenye* or *kenge*, sand + *bugu-ri-lā-la*, diviner who uses the dust to predict the future (Delafosse 1955: 81, 360).
4. They consult marabouts.
5. Advice is given by Fakoli.
6. A cat tells the brothers to choose Sogolon.
7. Nare Famaghan is the hunter, see note 1.
8. See footnotes in N for these connections.

Chart Four: The Buffalo-woman tale, III

|   | ZA | F | H | BD | N | P | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DMD | WK | MS | JBS | OS | KB |
|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|----|----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Bros take tail, etc. leave signs of accomplishment: | +  | + |   | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   |     |     | +  | +  | +   | +  |    |
| King searches for successful hunter:                | +  |   |   |    |   |   |    | +  | +   |     |     | +  |    |     |    |    |
| Bros choose Sogolon in parade of women:             | +  | + | 1 | +  | + |   | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  |     | +  | +  |
| -she is pointed out by an animal:                   |    |   |   |    |   |   | 2  | 3  |     |     |     | 4  |    |     |    | 2  |
| -King tries to dissuade bros:                       | +  |   |   |    |   |   | +  | +  |     |     |     |    |    |     | +  |    |
| -crowd bemused at choice:                           |    | + | + |    | + |   | +  | +  |     | +   |     |    |    |     |    |    |
| -linked to <i>senankuya</i> between Traore & Konde: |    | + |   |    | + |   |    |    |     | +   |     | +  |    |     |    |    |
| Sogolon is ugly:                                    | +  | + | + |    |   |   | +  |    | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  |     | +  |    |
| -has boils/warts:                                   | +  | + |   |    |   |   |    | +  | +   | +   |     | +  | +  |     | +  |    |
| -has a hunchback:                                   |    |   |   |    | + | + | +  |    |     |     | +   |    |    |     |    |    |
| Sogolon is niece of old woman:                      | +  | + |   |    |   |   | +  | +  |     |     | 5   | +  | +  | 5   | 6  | +  |
| Elder bro tries to lie with Sogolon:                | +  |   |   |    |   | + |    |    | +   |     |     | +  |    |     |    | +  |
| -both try:  |    |   |   |    |   |   | +  |    |     | 7   |     |    |    | +   |    |    |
| -Sogolon becomes animal-like:                       | +  |   |   |    |   | 8 | +  |    | +   | +   |     | 8  |    | +   |    |    |
| Bros take Sogolon to Manding:                       | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  |
| Sogolon marries king:                               | +  | + | + | +  | 9 | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | 9   | +  | +  | +   | 10 | +  |
| -there is a prophecy about their offspring:         | +  |   |   |    | + | + | +  | +  |     |     |     | 11 | +  | +   |    | +  |
| Bros get a substitute bride from among the Keita:   |    | + |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  |     |    |    |
| Sogolon is mother of Sunjata:                       | +  | + | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | +   | +   | +   | +  | +  | +   | 12 | +  |

Notes:

1. Nare Famaghan chooses Sogolon
2. A cat
3. A hawk
4. A dog
5. Sogolon is sister of old woman
6. Sogolon is granddaughter of old woman
7. Only the younger tries
8. Sogolon uses sorcery
9. The character is given the same name but is described as soothsayer (P) or magician (DMD)
10. Sogolon marries sorcerer who advised the bros
11. There is a communal dream in Manding about their offspring
12. Sogolon is the grandmother of Sunjata

Chart Five: Birth & Childhood of Sunjata  
Versions up to N

|   | HO | MAK | MA | MB | A | AR | D | F | ZA | ZB | V | S  | Q | AS | H | BD | N |
|---|----|-----|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|
| Sogolon repulses husband's advances:              |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |    |   |    |   | 1  | 2 |
| Long pregnancy ( <i>in years</i> ):               |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |    |   | 8  | 7 | 9  |   |
| Sunjata leaves mother's womb before birth:        |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |    |   |    |   | +  |   |
| Birth of Sunjata:                                 | +  |     | +  | +  |   | +  | + | + | +  | +  | + | +  | + | +  | + | +  | + |
| Unusual events at birth:                          |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | 3 | 3  |    |   |    |   |    |   | 4  | 5 |
| Birth-order dispute                               |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |    |   |    |   |    |   |
| -first born, announced second:                    |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + | +  |    |   |    |   |    |   |    |   |
| Sunjata is crippled:                              | +  |     |    |    | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | + | +  | + | 6  | + | +  | + |
| Sunjata remains crippled for ( <i>in years</i> ): |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | 7 | 17 | 19 |   | 17 | 3 | 7  | 7 | 7  | 7 |
| Sunjata is unable to pick leaves for mother:      |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + | +  | +  | + | +  |   |    |   |    | + |
| Sunjata stands using iron bar:                    |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + | +  | +  |   | +  |   |    |   | +  | + |
| -iron bar fails to support him:                   | +  | +   |    |    | + | +  |   |   |    |    |   | +  | 7 | +  | + |    |   |
| -using sceptre:                                   |    | +   |    |    | + | +  |   |   |    |    |   |    |   | +  |   |    |   |
| -using piece of wood:                             | 8  |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |    |   |    |   |    |   |
| Sunjata uproots tree:                             |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + |    |    | + | +  | + |    | + |    | + |
| -injures occupants:                               |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + |    |    |   |    |   |    |   |    |   |
| -picks single fruit:                              |    | +   |    |    | + |    |   | + | +  |    |   |    |   | +  |   |    |   |
| -episode is linked to circumcision:               |    |     |    |    |   |    |   | + | +  |    |   |    |   |    |   |    |   |
| Sunjata is a thief:                               |    |     |    |    |   | 9  |   |   | +  |    |   |    | + |    |   |    |   |

**Notes:**

1. Sogolon grows feathers
2. Sogolon becomes covered in long hair
3. Midwives or sorcerers die at birth
4. Sunjata is developmentally advanced; he can talk at birth
5. Storms out of season accompany birth
6. By his father
7. Sunjata breaks an enormous bar of iron in a trial of strength
8. Sunjata uses, unsuccessfully, a piece of wood, a tree trunk, then an iron bar
9. The name Sunjata is linked to "thief" etymologically

Chart Six: Birth & Childhood of Sunjata  
Versions from P

|   | P | CL        | FDS      | KMJ       | BK       | BS        | YFG      | B | WK        | MS       | JBS | MK       | KB       | DMS      |
|---|---|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|---|-----------|----------|-----|----------|----------|----------|
| Sogolon repulses husband's advances:          |   | 1         |          |           |          |           |          |   |           |          |     |          | 2        |          |
| Long pregnancy ( <i>in years</i> ):           |   |           |          | <u>14</u> |          |           | 3        |   | <u>17</u> |          |     | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> |          |
| Sunjata leaves mother's womb before birth:    |   |           |          |           |          |           | +        |   | +         | +        |     |          |          |          |
| Birth of Sunjata:                             | + | +         | +        | +         | +        | +         | +        | + | +         | +        | +   | +        | +        | +        |
| Unusual events at birth:                      |   | 4         |          |           |          |           | 5        |   | 6         |          |     |          | 5        |          |
| Birth-order dispute:                          |   |           |          |           |          |           |          |   |           |          |     |          |          |          |
| -first born, announced second:                |   |           | 7        | 7         |          | +         |          |   |           |          | +   |          |          |          |
| Sunjata is crippled:                          | + | +         | 8        | 8         | 9        | +         |          | + | +         | 8        |     | +        | +        | +        |
| Sunjata remains crippled ( <i>in years</i> ): |   | <u>17</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>9</u>  | <u>9</u> | <u>14</u> | <u>7</u> |   | <u>17</u> | <u>9</u> |     | <u>7</u> |          | <u>9</u> |
| Sunjata unable to pick leaves for mother:     | + | +         | +        | +         |          |           |          |   | +         | +        |     |          | +        | +        |
| Sunjata stands using iron bar:                | + | +         |          |           |          |           |          |   | +         |          |     |          | +        |          |
| -iron bar fails to support him:               |   |           | +        | +         | +        | +         |          | + | +         |          |     | +        |          | +        |
| -using sceptre:                               |   |           |          |           |          |           |          | + |           |          |     |          |          |          |
| -using piece of wood:                         |   |           | +        | +         |          |           |          |   |           | +        |     | +        |          | +        |
| Sunjata uproots tree:                         |   | +         | +        | +         | +        |           |          |   | +         | +        |     |          | +        |          |
| -injures occupants:                           |   |           |          | +         |          |           |          |   | +         | +        |     |          | +        |          |
| -picks single fruit:                          |   |           |          |           | +        |           |          |   |           |          |     |          |          |          |
| -episode linked to circumcision:              |   | +         |          |           | +        | +         |          |   |           |          |     |          |          |          |
| Sunjata is a thief:                           |   |           |          | +         |          |           |          | + |           |          |     |          | +        |          |

**Notes:**

1. Sogolon grows spines
2. Sogolon grows spines and hairs
3. Sunjata's gestation lasts four million four hundred and forty years, four months and four days
4. Out-of-season storms accompany the birth
5. Sunjata born with teeth
6. The people of Manding experience a communal dream
7. The theme is reversed: Sunjata is born second but announced as first-born
8. By the co-wife of Sogolon
9. By Sumanguru

**Chart Seven: Exile of Sunjata  
Versions up to N**

|   | HO | MAK | MA | A | AR | D   | F   | ZA | ZB | V   | S  | AS | H  | N  |
|---|----|-----|----|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|
| Sunjata meets unfriendly<br>sorcerers & wins them over: | 1  | +   |    | + |    |     | ++  | +  |    |     | ++ |    |    | 2  |
| Sunjata goes hunting:                                   |    | +   |    | + |    |     | +++ | +  |    |     | +  |    |    | ++ |
| Sunjata wears kingly garb:                              |    |     |    |   |    |     | ++  |    |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| Sunjata is exiled:                                      |    |     | +  | + | ++ | +++ | +   |    | +  | +++ |    |    | ++ |    |
| -he goes to Mema:                                       |    |     |    | + | +  |     | ++  | +  |    | ++  |    |    |    | +  |
| -he goes to Krina:                                      |    |     |    |   | +  |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| -he goes to Tabon:                                      |    |     |    |   |    |     |     | 3  |    | 3   |    |    |    |    |
| -he goes to Wagadu:                                     |    |     |    |   |    |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |    | +  |
| -he goes to Sangaran:                                   |    | +   |    | + |    | +   |     | 4  |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| Sunjata undergoes tests                                 |    |     |    |   |    |     |     |    |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| -archery contest:                                       |    |     |    |   |    |     | +   |    | +  |     |    | +  |    |    |
| -sigi contest:  |    |     |    |   | +  |     | +++ | +  |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| -incident involving tree:                               |    |     |    |   | +  |     | +   | +  |    |     |    |    |    |    |
| Messengers sent to ask<br>Sunjata to return:            |    |     |    |   | +  | ++  | +   |    |    | ++  |    |    | ++ |    |
| -they include marabouts:                                |    |     |    |   |    |     |     |    |    | ++  |    |    |    | +  |
| -they include Tumu Manian<br>(Maninyan):                |    |     |    |   |    |     |     |    |    |     | +  |    |    | +  |
| -they find Sunjata by<br>selling vegetables:            |    |     | +  |   |    |     | +   |    |    | ++  |    |    | ++ |    |

**Notes:**

1. Sunjata is healed of his lameness by a sorcerer
2. Sorcerers steal from Sogolon's vegetable patch
3. Sunjata travels to the settlement of the Dabo, sometimes identified as Tabon
4. Sunjata said specifically to avoid Sangaran

**Chart Eight: Exile of Sunjata  
Versions from P**

|  | P | CL | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | B | WK | MS | JBS | MK | KB | DMS |
|--|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|
| Sunjata meets unfriendly sorcerers & wins them over: |   |    | 1   | 1   |    |    | +  | 2 | 1  | 1  |     |    |    | +   |
| Sunjata goes hunting:                                | + | +  | +   | +   |    |    |    | + | +  |    |     | +  | +  |     |
| Sunjata wears kingly garb:                           |   |    |     |     |    |    |    | + |    |    |     |    |    |     |
| Sunjata is exiled:                                   | + | +  | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  | + | +  | +  | +   | +  | +  | +   |
| -he goes to Mema:                                    |   | +  | +   | +   | 3  | 3  | 3  | + | 3  | +  | +   |    | 3  | +   |
| -he goes to Krina:                                   |   |    |     | +   |    |    |    |   | +  | +  |     |    | +  |     |
| -he goes to Tabon:                                   |   |    |     |     |    |    | 4  | + |    |    |     |    |    |     |
| -he goes to Wagadu:                                  |   | +  |     |     |    |    |    | + |    |    |     |    |    |     |
| -he goes to Kole (Kura):                             |   |    | +   | +   |    |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |    |     |
| -he goes to place of sorcerers:                      |   |    | +   | +   |    |    |    |   | +  | +  |     |    | +  |     |
| -he goes to Sangaran:                                |   |    |     |     |    |    | 5  |   |    |    |     |    |    |     |
| Sunjata undergoes tests                              |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    |    |     |
| -archery contest:                                    |   |    | +   |     | +  |    | +  | + |    |    | +   |    |    |     |
| -sigi contest:                                       |   |    | +   |     | +  |    | +  |   |    | +  | +   |    |    |     |
| -incident involving tree:                            |   |    | +   |     | +  |    |    | + |    |    | +   |    |    |     |
| Messengers sent to ask Sunjata to return:            | + | +  | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  | + | +  | +  |     |    | +  | +   |
| -they include marabouts:                             |   | +  |     |     |    |    | 6  | + |    |    |     |    | +  |     |
| -they include Fakoli:                                |   |    | +   |     | +  |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |    |     |
| -they include Tumu Manian (Maninyan):                |   | +  |     | +   |    |    |    | + | +  | +  |     |    | +  | +   |
| -they find Sunjata by selling vegetables:            | + | +  | +   | +   | +  |    |    | + | +  | +  |     |    | +  |     |

**Notes:**

1. Sunjata meets sorcerers on exile travels
2. Sorcerers steal from Sogolon's vegetable patch
3. Nema, rather than Mema
4. Sunjata travels to the settlement of the Dabo, probably Tabon
5. Sunjata specifically avoids going to Sangaran
6. The messenger is called Fofana, i.e. the name of a maraboutic lineage, but is said to be Sunjata's brother

Chart Nine: Sumanguru

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|  | MA | A | AR | D | F | ZB | V | S | H | N | P | CL | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | B | WK | MS | MK | KB | DM |   |
|--|----|---|----|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Sumanguru was a Kante:   | +  |   | +  | + |   |    | + | + | + | + | + |    | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  | + | +  | +  | +  | +  | +  | + |
| Sumanguru was borne by<br>more than one woman:                                   |    |   |    |   | + |    |   |   |   |   |   | +  |     |     |    |    | +  |   |    |    |    |    |    | 1 |
| Sumanguru linked to<br>Wagadu or the Kayamagha:                                  | +  | + | +  |   |   |    |   |   |   | + | + |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |    |    | +  |   |
| Sumanguru lived in<br>the bush:  |    |   |    |   |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |    |     | +   | +  |    |    |   |    | +  |    |    |    |   |
| Sumanguru explicitly<br>said to be a smith,<br>linked to smithing<br>or to iron: |    |   |    |   |   | 2  |   | 3 | + |   | + |    | 3   | 3   | +  | 2  |    |   | +  | +  |    |    | 3  | 3 |

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**Notes:**

1. Sumanguru's father had three wives
2. Sumanguru forged the iron bar with which Sunjata attempted to stand
3. Sumanguru's father forged the iron bar with which Sunjata attempted to stand

**Chart Ten: Return of Sunjata  
Versions up to N**

|   | MAK | MA | A | AR | D | F | ZA | ZB | V | S | H | N |
|---|-----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| Sunjata's sister performs<br>sorcery over meal:                           |     |    |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | + |   |   |   |
| -Sunjata & bro are hunting:   | +   |    |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | + | + |   | + |
| -Sunjata's bro & sister argue:  |     |    |   |    |   |   | +  |    |   |   |   |   |
| Sogolon's death linked to<br>Sunjata's destiny:                           | +   |    | + |    |   | + |    |    |   | + | + | + |
| Dispute over Sogolon's burial:  | +   |    | + |    |   | + | 1  | +  |   | + | + | + |
| -Sunjata sends symbolic gift<br>to host:                                  | +   |    |   |    |   |   | +  | +  | + |   |   | + |
| Sunjata told to bear insults:   |     |    |   |    |   |   | 2  | 3  |   |   |   |   |
| Sunjata returns from exile:   | +   | +  | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | + | + | + | + |
| -he crosses the Joliba (Niger):   |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   | + |
| Sunjata gains support from  |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |
| -Mema:  |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | + |   | + |
| -Tabon:   |     |    |   |    |   | + |    |    |   |   |   | + |
| -Sibi:  |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | + |   | + |
| Declaration of war/verbal duel<br>against/with Sumanguru<br>or his agent: |     |    |   |    | + | + |    |    |   |   |   | + |
| Inconclusive battles fought at  |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |
| -Tabon:   |     |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | + |   | + |
| -Kankigne:  |     |    |   |    |   | + |    |    |   | + |   | + |
| -site(s) unnamed:   | +   |    | + |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |

**Notes:**

1. In ZA, unlike other versions, the king does not relent and allow Sogolon to be buried, but is defeated and killed by Sunjata
2. Sunjata is told this by "Kengebugurilala", the "Sand Oracle"
3. Sunjata is told this by sorcerers

**Chart Eleven: Return of Sunjata  
Versions from P**

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|   | P | CL | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | B | WK | MS | JBS | KB | DMS |
|---|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|----|----|-----|----|-----|
| Sunjata's sister performs<br>sorcery over meal:                           |   |    | +   | +   | +  |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |     |
| -Sunjata & bro are hunting:   | + |    | +   | +   | +  |    |    |   |    |    | +   |    |     |
| -Sunjata's bro & sister argue:  |   |    | +   |     |    |    | +  |   |    | +  |     |    |     |
| Sogolon's death linked to<br>Sunjata's destiny:                           | + |    |     | +   | +  |    | +  | + | +  |    | +   | +  |     |
| Dispute over Sogolon's burial:  | + | +  | +   | +   |    |    | +  | + | +  |    | +   | +  |     |
| -Sunjata sends symbolic gift<br>to host:                                  |   |    | +   | +   |    |    | +  | + | +  |    |     | +  |     |
| Sunjata told to bear insults:   |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |   | 1  |    | 1   |    |     |
| Sunjata given advice by Sogolon:  | + |    |     |     | +  |    |    |   | +  |    |     |    |     |
| Sunjata returns from exile:   | + | +  | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  | + | +  | +  | +   | +  | +   |
| -he crosses the Joliba (Niger):   |   |    | +   | +   |    |    |    |   | +  | +  |     |    | +   |
| Sunjata gains support from  |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    |     |
| -Mema:  | + |    |     | +   |    |    |    |   |    | +  |     | +  |     |
| -Tabon:   | + |    |     |     | +  |    |    | + | +  |    |     |    |     |
| -Sibi   | + |    |     |     | +  |    |    |   | +  |    |     | +  |     |
| Declaration of war/verbal duel<br>against/with Sumanguru<br>or his agent: |   |    | 2   |     | 2  |    |    |   | +  | 2  |     | +  |     |
| Inconclusive battles fought at  |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    |     |
| -Tabon:   | + |    |     |     |    |    |    |   | +  |    |     |    |     |
| -Kankigne:  | + |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     | +  |     |
| -site(s) unnamed:   |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    | +   |    |     |
| Sunjata founds towns upon<br>defeats:                                     |   |    | +   | +   |    |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |     |

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**Notes:**

1. Sunjata is told this by his mother
2. A bird is employed as an intermediary

**Chart Twelve: Defeat of Sumanguru  
Versions to N**

|   | HO | MAK | MA | MB | A | AR | D | F | ZA | ZB | V | S | Q | H | BD | N |
|---|----|-----|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|----|---|
| Sunjata's sister seduces Sumanguru  |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |   |
| -of her own volition:   |    | +   | +  |    | + | +  | + |   |    |    |   | + |   |   |    |   |
| -sent by Dankaran Tuman:  |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | + |   |   |    | + |
| -sent by Sunjata:   | +  |     |    |    |   |    |   |   | +  |    |   |   | + |   |    |   |
| -Sumanguru's mother interrupts:   |    |     | +  |    | + | +  | + |   |    |    |   | + |   |   |    |   |
| -sister discovers secret of Sumanguru's strength:                         | +  | +   | +  |    | + | +  | + |   | +  |    |   | + | + | + |    | + |
| Bala Faseke goes to Sumanguru:  |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   | 1  |    | 1 | 1 |   |   |    | 2 |
| -discovers <i>bala</i> :  |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | + |   |   | 3  | + |
| Fakoli joins Sunjata after quarrel over wife with Sumanguru:              |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   | + |   |    | + |
| -involves wife's cookery:   |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   | + |   |    |   |
| Sunjata defeats Sumanguru:  | +  | +   | +  | +  | + | +  | + | + | +  | +  | + | + | + | + | +  | + |
| -final battle at Dakajalan:   |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   | +  | 4  |   | + |   |   |    |   |
| -final battle at Kankigne:  |    |     |    |    |   |    |   |   |    | +  |   |   |   |   |    |   |
| -final battle at Krina:   |    | +   |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   | + | 5 |    | + |
| Sumanguru defeated by white cock's spur:                                  |    | 6   | +  |    | + | +  | + | + |    |    |   | + | + | 7 |    | + |
| Sumanguru had a monster or could transform himself into another creature: |    | +   |    | +  | + |    | + | + |    |    |   |   |   |   | +  |   |

**Notes:**

1. The griot accompanies Sunjata's sister
2. Griot and sister are sent separately by Dankaran Tuman
3. Bala Faseke gains the *bala* off Sunjata
4. An earlier, inconclusive, battle is fought at Dakajalan
5. An earlier, inconclusive battle is fought at Krina
6. A "white feather" is said to defeat Sumanguru
7. A black and white arrow is said to defeat Sumanguru, or a black and white arrow with a cock's spur attached.

Chart Thirteen: Defeat of Sumanguru  
Versions from P

|   | P | CL | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | YFG | B | WK | MS | JBS | MK | KB |
|---|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|---|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Sunjata's sister seduces Sumanguru  |   |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |   |    |    |     |    |    |
| -of her own volition:   |   |    | +   |     | +  | +  | +  |     |   |    | +  |     |    |    |
| -sent by Dankaran Tuman:  | + |    |     | +   |    |    |    |     |   |    |    |     |    | +  |
| -Sumanguru's mother interrupts:   |   |    | +   |     |    | +  | +  |     |   |    |    |     |    |    |
| -sister discovers secret of Sumanguru's strength:                         | + |    | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  |     |   |    | +  |     |    | +  |
| Bala Faseke goes to Sumanguru:  | 1 |    | 2   | 1   |    |    |    |     |   | 3  | 2  | 1   |    |    |
| -discovers <i>bala</i> :  | + |    | +   | +   | +  | 4  |    | 4   | + | +  | +  |     |    | 4  |
| -tendons are cut:   |   |    | +   | +   | +  | 5  |    |     |   | +  | +  |     |    |    |
| Fakoli joins Sunjata after quarrel over wife with Sumanguru:              | + |    | +   | +   | +  |    |    |     |   | +  | +  | +   |    | +  |
| -involves wife's cookery:   | + |    | +   |     | +  |    |    |     |   | +  | +  |     |    |    |
| -Fakoli plays major role in campaign:                                     |   |    | 6   | 7   | 7  |    |    |     |   |    | 6  |     |    |    |
| Sunjata defeats Sumanguru:  | + | +  | +   | +   | +  | +  | +  |     |   | +  | +  | +   | 8  | +  |
| -final battle at Kankigne:  |   |    |     |     |    |    | +  |     |   |    |    |     |    |    |
| -final battle at Krina:   | + |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |   | +  |    |     |    | +  |
| Sumanguru defeated by white cock's spur:                                  | + |    | 9   |     | +  | 9  | +  |     |   | +  | 9  |     |    | +  |
| Sumanguru had a monster or could transform himself into another creature: |   |    |     |     |    | +  | +  |     |   | +  |    |     |    |    |

**Notes:**

1. The griot accompanies Sunjata's sister
2. The griot is sent by the people of Manding
3. Bala Faseke discovers the secret of Sumanguru's strength
4. Bala Faseke obtains the *bala* from Sunjata
5. Sunjata cuts his achilles tendons
6. Fakoli attacks Sumanguru's stronghold
7. Fakoli kills Jibirile, one of Sumanguru's generals
8. In JBS it is said that some claim Sunjata was victorious, others that Sumanguru was
9. Other elements are added to the white cock's spur

**Chart Fourteen: Demise of Sumanguru & conclusion of epic  
Versions to N**

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|  | HO | MA | A | AR | D | F | ZA | ZB | V | S | Q | H | BD | N |
|--|----|----|---|----|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|----|---|
| Sumanguru chased to Kulikoro:                      | +  | +  |   | +  |   |   | +  | +  | + | + | 1 |   |    | + |
| -he drops a bracelet thru which<br>a baobab grows: |    |    |   | +  |   |   |    |    | + | + |   |   |    |   |
| -he disappears into a cave:                        |    |    |   | +  |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |    | + |
| -he turns to stone:                                | +  |    |   |    |   |   | +  |    | + | + | + |   | +  |   |
| -his death linked to bird:                         |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   | 2 |   |   |    | 3 |
| Sunjata takes Soso:                                |    |    |   |    |   |   |    | +  |   |   |   |   |    | + |
| Campaign against Jolof:                            |    |    |   |    |   | + | +  |    |   |   |   |   |    |   |
| Conquest of Gambia by Tira<br>Makhan:              |    |    |   |    |   |   | +  |    |   |   |   |   |    |   |
| Defeat of Niani Mansa:                             |    |    |   |    |   | 4 |    |    | 4 |   |   | 5 |    |   |
| Death of Sunjata                                   |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |   |
| -by drowning:                                      |    |    |   | +  |   |   |    |    | 6 | + |   |   |    |   |
| -by Fulani arrow:                                  |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    | 6 |   |   |   |    |   |
| -peacefully:                                       |    |    |   |    |   |   |    |    | 6 |   |   |   |    |   |

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*Notes:*

1. Final battle takes place at Kulikoro.
2. A bird marks the site of Sumanguru's shrine.
3. The "bird of Krina" appears on the battlefield.
4. Undertaken by Fakoli.
5. Undertaken by Sunjata.
6. This story is noted among others.

**Chart Fifteen: Demise of Sumanguru & conclusion of epic  
Versions from CL**

|   | CL | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | B | WK | MS | JBS | MK | KB |
|---|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|---|----|----|-----|----|----|
| Sumanguru chased to Kulikoro:             | +  | +   | +   | +  |    |    | + | +  | +  |     | +  | +  |
| -he disappears into a cave:               | +  |     |     |    |    |    | + | +  |    | +   | +  | +  |
| -he turns to stone:                       |    |     | +   | +  |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |    |
| -his death is linked to a bird:           | 1  |     |     | 2  |    | 3  | 2 |    |    |     |    | 1  |
| Sunjata takes Soso:                       | +  |     | +   |    | +  |    |   |    |    |     |    |    |
| Sumanguru's son punished:                 |    | +   | +   |    |    |    |   |    | +  |     |    |    |
| Campaign against Jolof:                   |    | +   | +   |    |    | +  | + |    |    |     |    | +  |
| Conquest of Senegambia by Tira<br>Makhan: | +  | +   | +   |    |    | +  | + |    |    |     |    | +  |
| Defeat of Niani <i>Mansa</i> :            |    | 4   | 5   |    |    |    |   | 5  |    |     |    | 5  |
| Death of Sunjata                          |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    |    |
| -by drowning:                             |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    | 6  |
| -by Fulani arrow:                         |    |     |     |    |    |    |   |    |    |     |    | 6  |
| -peacefully:                              |    |     |     |    |    |    |   | +  | 7  |     |    | 6  |

**Notes:**

1. The "bird of Krina" appears on the battlefield
2. A bird marks the site of Sumanguru's shrine
3. Sumanguru is transformed into a bird in final battle
4. Undertaken by Tira Makhan
5. Undertaken by Fakoli
6. This story is noted among others
7. This information is given by the bard in a post-recital interview

The synoptic charts presented on the preceding sixteen pages form the basis of our comparative survey of the Sunjata epic; they map the appearance of 157 separate story-elements in thirty-five distinct versions of the epic. The charts have been divided into eight main sections: (1) the origins of Manding, covering the Keita genealogy, the story of Bilali and other early ancestors; (2) the Buffalo-woman tale; (3) the birth and childhood of Sunjata; (4) the exile of Sunjata; (5) Sumanguru; (6) the return of Sunjata; (7) the defeat of Sumanguru; (8) the demise of Sumanguru and conclusion of the epic. The charts covering the life of Sunjata have been split into two halves, to include the larger number of versions dealing with this portion of the story. Versions are arranged chronologically, from left to right. Of the versions listed in Part One of this chapter, only BKS has been excluded from the comparative survey, owing to the fact that it is largely derived from versions already included in the survey. Story-elements appearing in either F1 or F2, WK1, 2 or 3, and KMJ,M, D1 or D2 have been listed simply under their respective general title, F, WK or KMJ. The story-elements listed down the left-hand side of the page are intended to categorize the major, repeated sections of the story. I have not listed as a story-element any incident or theme which did not occur in at least three versions of the epic in our survey; in this way it is hoped that, although the list of story-elements can never aspire to be complete, no elements have been included that are not endorsed by a number of *jeliw* and, it is therefore assumed, of a traditional nature. Evidently large numbers of details have been omitted - each episode of the epic could theoretically be divided into numerous categories and sub-categories; but within the parameters laid down above, I have attempted to include what seemed to me the most salient episodes in the epic and their significant variants. Some attempt has been made to list all the details referred to in the discussions in the ensuing chapters, allowing the synoptic charts to be employed as an easy index. Presence of a story element is indicated by a cross (+); numbers refer to footnotes explaining a more singular or complex deviance from a theme; italicized and underlined numerals, which appear in charts Five and Six, refer to the actual numbers of years given in the

individual versions for Sogolon's pregnancy with Sunjata, and the duration of Sunjata's lameness.

Two researchers have previously approached the Sunjata epic in a comparative fashion. In Guy Tombs' 1978 thesis twenty-eight "commoner episodes" - which he defines as episodes present in at least three accounts - from sixteen versions of the epic are listed, covering the main points of the story; significant variants are also listed, by version (1978: 14-8). Belcher (1985: 240-58) attempts a much more ambitious comparative survey. Although he employs only sixteen variants of the epic (like Tombs), he isolates 209 separate details of the story, whose appearance in the versions of the epic he tabulates. Belcher does not limit his story-elements to those appearing in a certain number of accounts, which in part explains his very large number of separate charted elements. Belcher's results, and his interesting conclusions, will be brought into our discussion as is appropriate.

Two forms of analysis are attempted in this chapter, a comparison of changes between versions chronologically, and a comparison of changes between versions from one part of the Malinke diaspora to another. The two fundamental questions behind these forms of analysis are: Has the epic altered measurably during the span of up to ninety-nine years covered by our sample? and, Does the epic vary according to the village, town, or region from which it came? Discussion of this second question will lead to an enumeration of the various factors thought to account in general for the similarity and dissimilarity between the thirty-five versions here compared.

### **Alterations to the epic through time**

With a recording date of between 1889-95 for our earliest account, HO, and a composition date of 1891 for MAK, the sample of thirty-five versions begins, chronologically, between 1889 and 1891, and ends in 1987, the date of the performance of DMS. This gives us a chronological depth of between ninety-seven and ninety-nine years. Although it is not always possible to be accurate about the recording dates,

we can say with some certainty that the chronological spread of published versions between these two end-points is far from even. Four versions in the decade up to the end of the nineteenth century (HO, MAK, MA, MB) and six versions in the first two decades of this century (A, AR, D, ZA, ZB, F), are followed by only one in the 1920s (V), one in the 1930s (S), and one (published) in the 1940s (Q); the 1950s produced four accounts (AS, H, BD, N), although it is probable that H was based on information received earlier; the 1960s produced eight (P, CL, TK, FDS, KMJ, DK, BK, BS), as did the 1970s (YFG, B, DMD, WK, MS, JBS, MK, OS); the 1980s see a dramatic down-turn, with only two versions forthcoming (KB, DMS) - although we may have to wait a few years before more accounts of the epic recorded in the 1980s are published.

In spite of this markedly uneven spread of the versions of the epic over time, it is worth following the appearance and disappearance of story-elements through time, which can be done by reading the synoptic charts from left to right. Out of the 157 elements listed in these charts only about twenty-two fail to show a reasonable rate of recurrence in time throughout the corpus of versions. These particular twenty-two story-elements either disappear from the versions in the latter half of the sample years, or fail to appear in the early half of the sample years. Certainly other disappearing or newly appeared details of the story could have been amassed; the figure of twenty-two is in no way supposed to be a definitive index of the level of stability or instability in the epic. In fact, the story-elements have been chosen for their presence in at least three accounts; what the twenty-two vestigial or "novel" motifs represent, then, are relatively strong traditions which are nevertheless absent from one half of the time-span covered by the survey. What it is hoped we are not dealing with are the inventions of single *jeliw* which are not endorsed by the tradition or schools of tradition.

We shall discuss some of these twenty-two unstable motifs, provisionally dividing them into three categories, (1) vestigial, or "dying" motifs, including those which only appear in the first (chronological) half of the survey versions; (2) transforming motifs, or those that appear to have altered their shape from one half of the survey

years to the other; and (3) "novel" motifs, motifs which seem, according to our thirty-five versions, to have only recently been added to the story of Sunjata.

### **Vestigial Motifs**

In A, D, V and S is reported the tradition that, during his flight to Kulikoro, or at the site of his last battle with Sunjata, Sumanguru dropped a silver bracelet through which a baobab tree has since grown (Chapter Seven). The bracelet is sometimes said to have left a mark around the bole of the tree, which is either sited at Kirina, Konina, or Kulikoro, according to different accounts. S, composed in 1937, is the last version to record this tradition. Delafosse noted the existence of a marked baobab at Kirina, c.10 km north of Kulikoro, in 1913 (1959: 81), while Hourst and Vidal make mention of a very old baobab at Kulikoro associated with the epic of Sunjata (Hourst 1898a: 58-9; Vidal 1924: 325). Present-day informants say nothing of the baobab at Kulikoro (no information is available on Kirina). Is it possible that the traditional element of the story has died with the death of the baobab or baobabs thought to be connected with it, and which perhaps acted as visual cues?

Another vestigial motif is that which connects Sunjata with the decision to send his sister or half-sister to Sumanguru as a bride. It is this move (whoever makes it) which leads to the discovery of Sumanguru's secret source of strength. Twelve versions say Sunjata's sister went to the Soso leader of her own free will, five claim Dankaran Tuman sent her in order to placate Sumanguru, and three (HO, ZA, Q) that Sunjata performed this role. Q was published in 1946, and this is the last we hear of this variant of the tale. One factor which may conceivably have affected the composition of the episode in this particular is the desire to disassociate Sunjata from the cause of his sister's admittedly sacrificial act on behalf of the Malinke people. Dankaran Tuman is generally criticized for his decision to send his sister to Sumanguru, and some versions set up an implicit opposition between his behaviour in general, which is condemned, and Sunjata's, his half-brother, which is praised. In

this context, the association of Sunjata with the dispatch of his sister to Sumanguru's court blurs an otherwise clear contrast between the actions of the two brothers.

### **Transforming motifs**

The story of Fakoli's defection from Sumanguru's camp to that of Sunjata's is a popular tradition, appearing in some thirteen of the thirty-five versions of the survey. We examine the episode in some detail in Chapter Six, for the moment it is enough to note that Fakoli leaves Sumanguru, his maternal uncle, because Sumanguru takes Fakoli's wife from him, sometimes because she is said to have been a prodigious cook, able to prepare food for the whole of Sumanguru's army. None of the versions in which the episode is present was recorded before 1937, leading us to ask whether the motif might not be novel. Indeed, out of his twenty-eight commoner episodes, "Sumanguru alienates Fakoli" was the only one Tombs suggested may have been a 'late introduction'. However, a story found in two of the Nioro accounts, A and D, needs to be investigated before a conclusion is reached. In A and D we are told that Sumanguru is asked by diviners to sacrifice a child in order to avoid defeat at the hands of Sunjata, who has just obtained knowledge of Sumanguru's secret power; that he chooses the son of his sister, prompting the child's mother to defect from Sumanguru's side with information on Sumanguru's secret strength. Obvious parallels exist between this story and the tale of Fakoli in the epic. The sacrificed child is in the same relationship to Sumanguru as Fakoli; both stories describe Sumanguru's inhumanity to a family member; both involve the provision of food for the army, either in the form of a child sacrifice or through Fakoli's wife's cookery skills; both aid the process by which Sumanguru is defeated. It can also be noted that the tale in A and D in some ways makes the seduction episode - in which Sumanguru reveals his *tana* to Sunjata's sister - redundant, although both accounts still contain the seduction episode. Is it possible that the story in A and D evolved

into the common story of Fakoli's defection? This may seem plausible on chronological grounds, but given the location of the accounts A and D - in Nioro - it seems unlikely that they would have influenced versions from the Malinke heartland, although this is not impossible. Also, the A and D story rids the epic of Fakoli, one who is a major figure in many versions, the putative founder of the *bula* clans, a leading actor in the *Komo* initiation society, a reputed blacksmith and warrior. It is more likely that the A and D story represents a regional variant (or perhaps an individual variant, given that the two versions were most probably by the same author) which reflects a limited knowledge of certain aspects of Malinke tradition. From what we know of Mamadou Aïssa, likely author of both A and D, who was a Muslim cleric, not a griot, and something of an amateur historian, this latter option appears the most likely.

Another possibly transformed motif relates to the episode in which Sumanguru's son is punished by Sunjata after the defeat of Sumanguru. This story is contained only in FDS, KMJ and MS (see Chapter Six). According to these accounts, Sumanguru's son is made to carry on his back the griot Bala Faseke Kuyate, whose achilles' tendons have previously been severed by Sumanguru. Now Sumanguru's son is called Soso Balla in N (49), Sosobali in H (112) and Balla Diarrasso in CL (187), while in KMJ Soso Bala is the name of Sumanguru's brother (KMJ,D1: 56). Yet, as is explained in Chapter Six, the Soso Bala is often identified as the xylophone (*bala*) owned by Sumanguru (or Sunjata) and played by the griot Bala Faseke Kuyate. Given that the story of Sumanguru's son's punishment is limited to three chronologically late variants (post 1968), it is possible that this episode has been formed through a misunderstanding of an earlier tradition. What may have occurred is that the musical instrument in Sumanguru's possession, the Soso Bala, has been identified with the son of Sumanguru; and that the son's transportation of the griot on his back is an inversion of the griot's own transportation of the musical instrument. According to some authorities, the Soso Bala is now in the possession of the griots of Niagassola, who on occasion parade the large xylophone through the village, carried by one of their number

(Kouyate 1970: 31).

In Chart Nine, which deals with some traditions associated with Sumanguru, we find the motif of the Soso ruler's life in the bush, where he usually subsists as a hunter, while opposed by his brothers and preparing to make a bid for the throne of Soso (see Chapter Six). This theme is found only in three accounts recorded in 1968 or later. Potentially a novel motif, it is worth exploring its links with an earlier story. Six accounts link Sumanguru to Wagadu or to the Kayamagha, the ruling dynasty of Wagadu, and only one of these - the synthetic KB - was produced later than 1963. Some of these versions say Sumanguru or his family were slaves to the Kayamagha who later became independent rulers; one, MA, tells how Sumanguru received permission from his master to travel south and found a kingdom, which he does, settling at Kulikoro. Despite their obvious differences, both the story of Sumanguru's slave past and his hunter past retain common elements. Both repeat the cliché of the ruler's rise from initially unfavourable circumstances; one gives the cliché a historical context (Wagadu), the other couches it in the folkloric language of the hunter (see Chapter Three), but they fulfil similar roles in the epic variants in which they appear by placing Sumanguru in an initially unfavourable, lowly state, and thus creating a greater contrast with his later successes.

### **Novel motifs**

Three story elements connected with Sunjata's conception and birth (see Chapter Four) appear at first sight to be novel motifs. Sogolon's long pregnancy, a feature noted in eight epic variants, is found only since AS (1950); Sogolon's repulsion of her husband's sexual advances, present in three accounts of the epic, is not found before H; and Sunjata's nocturnal pre-birth peregrinations from his mother's womb, a motif rendered in four versions of the epic, is not attested to before AS (1950). The second case given above must be put on one side as we are not certain of the date of composition for H, but believe it might be as early as the second decade of this

century (see Part One of this chapter). The third case - that of Sunjata's pre-birth excursions from the womb - is apparently an example of a "floating" motif which we shall have cause to discuss further in Chapter Six, when considering the story of the *bala*. Floating motifs do not appear to fix themselves to one particular character, but can be variously attributed, according to the *jeli* or to the tradition from which he works. Concerning our present example, we find the same story told of Sumanguru in F2 (probably recorded between 1907-09). Whether F's association of the motif with Sumanguru represents an earlier tradition or is simply an individual aberration from the tradition represented by AS and subsequent versions, which attribute the story to Sunjata, we cannot tell; all that is clear is that the motif itself has a longer history in the epic than AS (1950). Of the three cases listed above, only in the case of Sogolon's unusually long pregnancy are there no factors to modify our earlier suggestion that the story-element may be a recent addition to the epic; but if one notes the wide spread of versions retelling the story - AS and BK in the Gambia, YFG in Sierra Leone, WK from Krina, and MK from Kita - such a position becomes less tenable, the broad distribution of the theme suggesting a long, if invisible, history in the epic corpus.

Two story-elements dealing with Sunjata's exile and return to Manding have their first appearance in the survey of epic variants in N (1958); they are the exile visit of Sunjata to Wagadu, and the support for Sunjata in his fight against Sumanguru from the people of Sibi. However, Niane states that the hospitality the hero received from the Cisse and Tunkara families of Wagadu is a traditional theme (1960c: 125). Two of the three accounts that contain the motif (N and CL) come from two putatively separate traditions, that of Djeliba Koro, Dioma province (N), and that of Fadama, Hamana province (CL). As these traditions do not seem to be represented earlier in our survey, it would be unwise to dub the exile visit to Wagadu a novel motif; nevertheless, it must be mentioned that, aside from the very similar N and CL, only the synthetic B records the incident. The support Sunjata receives from Sibi is more widely attested to: although our earliest record of the detail is N (1958), it also

appears in Hamana tradition (CL), Krina tradition (WK) and a Gambian version (DK).

With this breadth of appearance it is hard to claim that the motif is novel.

Another plausible candidate for a novel motif is the story of the griot Bala Faseke and Sumanguru (or sometimes Sunjata). Discussed fully in Chapter Six, the tale goes that Sumanguru, finding the *jeli* playing the ruler's *bala* (xylophone), first determines to kill him in punishment, but then relents upon the griot's utterance of a panegyric to the accompaniment of the instrument; instead Sumanguru decides to keep Bala Faseke always by his side, singing his praises, and in some accounts severs his achilles' tendons in order to prevent his escape. The basic story is found as early as S (1937) in our survey, but other tellings are recorded from much earlier in Montell 1929 and Humblot 1918. It is not until FDS (1968) that the detail of the griot's tendons being cut is recorded. This motif has analogues in other oral tales, both in Africa and beyond, and it is possible that the theme has been recently borrowed from one of these tales. But two factors make this conclusion less likely: the theme is also present in two Gambian versions from about the same time, suggesting it had already spread across the Malinke diaspora; and, secondly, there is a tradition of the association of griot origin tales (of which the above case is one) with the spilling of blood (Zemp 1966), a tradition that the story of Bala Faseke's severed tendons clearly relates to, and which may imply that this detail is a more integral part of the story than at first appeared.

The case of the "bird of Krina" suggests another factor determining the appearance of elements of tradition in versions of the epic. The linkage between the bird of Krina and the final battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru is found first in our survey in S (1937), but has since been quite common, appearing in N, CL, KMJ, WK and KB. The bird of Krina refers to a cult called *Kirina Kono*, discussed in Chapter Seven. While it is possible that the bird's association with the epic may be novel, it seems much more likely that the linkage between the cult and the epic represents a tradition held only by certain portions of Malinke society, perhaps having at one time remained confined to initiates of the cult.

One final example demonstrates the limitations of this form of analysis given the narrowness of our sample. The story of Sunjata's foundation of certain Malinke settlements, among them Niani, upon being defeated in early battles against Sumanguru is found only in three late accounts, all from Kita traditionalists (FDS, KMJ, MS), prompting a reasonable question as to the story's depth in the tradition. In fact, however, Montrât, in his account of interviews with Keyla griots in the 1930s, records a similar tradition relating to the foundation of Niani (1958: 91).

### **Recapitulation**

The provisional nature of the above discussions must be stressed: the sample is relatively small and covers a limited period of time; within this time period the spread of versions is uneven. There is an unfortunate tendency for versions from one area to be concentrated within a few years: all versions bar two (HO and F) from the first two decades come from the Nioro area, while no later Nioro versions have been examined; all the Gambian variants were recorded between 1950 and 1969; all the Kita versions were recorded between 1968 and 1975. This coincidence of regions and times means that it is often impossible to separate a potential regional variant from a temporal alteration in the form of the epic.

A few story-elements were thought plausible "dying" traditions: the story of Sumanguru's bracelet and the baobab that grew through it, and the association of Sunjata with the decision that his sister should become Sumanguru's bride. It was suggested that the former tradition may have died out owing to the recent absence of the tree or trees in question which acted as visual cues, while the latter tradition may have been at odds with Sunjata's image as an exemplary brother, in contrast to Dankaran Tuman and Sumanguru. Apart from these two cases, no story-element in our survey has disappeared from the more recent variants of the epic, a fact which seems to point to the relative stability of the epic tradition and a lack of evidence for marked evolutionary change within the corpus.

Three possible transforming motifs were considered. It was not possible to determine the link between the role of Fakoli in the epic and the variant story of a child sacrifice in A and D with any exactitude; all that we can say with some certainty is that they seem connected and demonstrate a potential for variance within the corpus; but given that A and D probably share the same author, and that this man was not a *jeli*, it is perhaps unwarranted for us to make generalizations on the basis of this case. The story of the punishment of Sumanguru's son appears to be an example of a confusion of two stories from the tradition which has created a third; while the two related stories concerning Sumanguru's youth may represent either two equally traditional versions of the epic, or a temporal shift from a historically based cliché about humble beginnings to a folkloric one. Either way, it should be recalled that both fulfil similar functions in the versions in which they are present.

There is more evidence from an examination of our synoptic charts for the existence of novel motifs in the epic corpus. However, it was noted that the sample of versions itself is weighted in favour of the latter years, while we have tried to show how some apparently new story elements most probably had an older basis within the corpus. In some cases a motif, although only recently attested to, made its belated appearance across a wide geographic spread of variants, suggesting that it had long been circulating among Malinke and related griots. In other cases the versions associated with the putative novel story-element come from an identifiable regional tradition which was hitherto unrepresented in the survey, allowing us to question the apparent novelty of the motif. And in the case of the cutting of Bala Faseke's achilles' tendons, the seemingly new element was thought consonant with other traditions which linked the condition of griots with the spilling of blood.

Finally, in two cases, that of the traditions associated with Fakoli, and that of the bird of Krina story, the suggestion can be made that such traditions may represent information once limited to certain interest groups or segments of Malinke society. In the case of Fakoli, whose reputation varies considerably from version to

version, he is a significant figure for blacksmiths and members of the *Komo* society (two groups which overlap); in the case of the bird of Krina, the tradition may have been limited to the immediate vicinity of Krina, where the cult of the bird is practised.

Tables measuring rates of agreement between versions

TABLE I: Total number of story-elements (out of 157) appearing in each version - arranged chronologically, in columns

|     |    |     |    |     |    |
|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| HO  | 10 | Q   | 10 | BS  | 33 |
| MAK | 17 | AS  | 11 | YFG | 5  |
| MA  | 19 | H   | 32 | B   | 31 |
| MB  | 4  | BD  | 21 | DMD | 36 |
| A   | 24 | N   | 80 | WK  | 87 |
| AR  | 21 | P   | 31 | MS  | 90 |
| D   | 22 | CL  | 87 | JBS | 44 |
| F   | 64 | TK  | 29 | MK  | 12 |
| ZA  | 67 | FDS | 84 | OS  | 20 |
| ZB  | 24 | KMJ | 85 | KB  | 69 |
| V   | 40 | DK  | 32 | DMS | 16 |
| S   | 34 | BK  | 24 |     |    |

TABLE II: Total number of story-elements (out of 157) appearing in each version - arranged in order of size

|         |    |        |    |         |    |
|---------|----|--------|----|---------|----|
| 1. MS   | 90 | 13. S  | 34 | BD      | 21 |
| 2. WK   | 87 | 14. BS | 33 | 26. OS  | 20 |
|         | CL | 15. H  | 32 | 27. MA  | 19 |
| 4. KMJ  | 85 |        | DK | 28. MAK | 17 |
| 5. FDS  | 84 | 17. P  | 31 | 29. DMS | 16 |
| 6. N    | 80 |        | B  | 30. MK  | 12 |
| 7. KB   | 69 | 19. TK | 29 | 31. AS  | 11 |
| 8. ZA   | 67 | 20. A  | 24 | 32. Q   | 10 |
| 9. F    | 64 |        | ZB | HO      | 10 |
| 10. JBS | 44 |        | BK | 34. YFG | 5  |
| 11. V   | 40 | 23. D  | 22 | 35. MB  | 4  |
| 12. DMD | 36 | 24. AR | 21 |         |    |

TABLE IIIa: Elements in common between thirty-five versions of the epic - out of 157 story-elements (continued on next page)

|     | HO | MAK | MA | MB | A  | AR | D  | F  | ZA | ZB | V  | S | Q | AS | H  | BD | N  |
|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|----|----|----|----|
| HO  | 4  | 3   | 2  | 5  | 3  | 6  | 4  | 8  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 6 | 4 | 4  | 4  | 5  |    |
| MAK |    | 6   | 2  | 13 | 7  | 13 | 8  | 8  | 7  | 7  | 9  | 7 | 4 | 5  | 1  | 10 |    |
| A   |    |     | 2  | 9  | 15 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 9  | 13 | 16 | 4 | 1 | 9  | 2  | 13 |    |
| MB  |    |     |    | 2  | 2  | 3  | 2  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 2  | 2 | 1 | 3  | 2  | 3  |    |
| A   |    |     |    |    | 9  | 21 | 11 | 12 | 8  | 10 | 11 | 3 | 5 | 8  | 2  | 12 |    |
| AR  |    |     |    |    |    | 10 | 9  | 8  | 7  | 10 | 15 | 3 | 1 | 7  | 2  | 15 |    |
| D   |    |     |    |    |    |    | 12 | 12 | 9  | 12 | 15 | 5 | 6 | 10 | 4  | 16 |    |
| F   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    | 45 | 18 | 16 | 18 | 2 | 6 | 24 | 18 | 40 |    |
| ZA  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    | 16 | 15 | 17 | 6 | 4 | 24 | 19 | 33 |    |
| ZB  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 12 | 13 | 2 | 4 | 9  | 4  | 19 |    |
| V   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 21 | 7 | 4 | 14 | 5  | 25 |    |
| S   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 7 | 4 | 13 | 7  | 25 |    |
| Q   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   | 1 | 3  | 2  | 5  |    |
| AS  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   | 4  | 4  | 4  |    |
| H   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |    |    | 11 | 24 |
| BD  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |    |    |    | 17 |

TABLE IIIb: Elements in common between thirty-five versions of the epic -  
out of 157 story-elements

|     | P  | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | YFG | B  | DMD | WK | MS | JBS | MK | OS | KB | DMS |
|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| HO  | 3  | 5  | 0  | 9   | 9   | 4  | 5  | 6  | 1   | 6  | 0   | 6  | 9  | 2   | 6  | 0  | 7  | 4   |
| MAK | 4  | 9  | 0  | 11  | 9   | 7  | 7  | 9  | 0   | 10 | 1   | 11 | 8  | 3   | 3  | 0  | 8  | 3   |
| MA  | 8  | 15 | 0  | 16  | 14  | 14 | 11 | 14 | 1   | 10 | 0   | 13 | 15 | 7   | 4  | 0  | 15 | 7   |
| MB  | 2  | 3  | 0  | 3   | 2   | 1  | 2  | 2  | 1   | 2  | 0   | 3  | 2  | 2   | 2  | 0  | 2  | 1   |
| A   | 6  | 10 | 1  | 16  | 11  | 9  | 12 | 12 | 0   | 9  | 1   | 10 | 14 | 5   | 4  | 0  | 14 | 5   |
| AR  | 6  | 15 | 0  | 13  | 13  | 11 | 11 | 13 | 1   | 12 | 2   | 13 | 14 | 8   | 4  | 0  | 12 | 6   |
| D   | 9  | 13 | 1  | 19  | 13  | 12 | 14 | 17 | 1   | 14 | 1   | 16 | 15 | 6   | 7  | 0  | 15 | 8   |
| F   | 23 | 42 | 22 | 41  | 43  | 13 | 13 | 21 | 2   | 14 | 22  | 47 | 41 | 28  | 5  | 15 | 34 | 10  |
| ZA  | 23 | 40 | 23 | 42  | 38  | 15 | 11 | 21 | 2   | 13 | 21  | 45 | 45 | 30  | 6  | 17 | 32 | 7   |
| ZB  | 9  | 17 | 1  | 20  | 18  | 11 | 9  | 11 | 1   | 11 | 2   | 18 | 16 | 8   | 5  | 0  | 15 | 7   |
| V   | 11 | 26 | 2  | 25  | 26  | 14 | 14 | 12 | 1   | 18 | 2   | 22 | 27 | 5   | 7  | 0  | 24 | 12  |
| S   | 12 | 24 | 0  | 25  | 25  | 18 | 16 | 19 | 2   | 19 | 0   | 25 | 25 | 6   | 8  | 0  | 24 | 10  |
| Q   | 1  | 6  | 0  | 7   | 6   | 6  | 4  | 5  | 0   | 5  | 0   | 4  | 7  | 1   | 3  | 0  | 6  | 1   |
| AS  | 2  | 3  | 0  | 6   | 5   | 0  | 6  | 6  | 3   | 5  | 0   | 7  | 5  | 2   | 5  | 0  | 4  | 4   |
| H   | 17 | 24 | 8  | 25  | 28  | 10 | 12 | 11 | 2   | 11 | 10  | 27 | 24 | 14  | 7  | 8  | 23 | 9   |
| BD  | 14 | 17 | 12 | 15  | 16  | 3  | 6  | 4  | 4   | 5  | 10  | 19 | 18 | 13  | 6  | 8  | 14 | 3   |
| N   | 26 | 69 | 20 | 42  | 48  | 19 | 15 | 15 | 4   | 24 | 25  | 52 | 51 | 28  | 9  | 14 | 48 | 13  |
| P   |    | 26 | 11 | 20  | 23  | 7  | 8  | 8  | 1   | 10 | 12  | 25 | 25 | 17  | 6  | 9  | 20 | 8   |
| CL  |    |    | 20 | 46  | 52  | 19 | 17 | 19 | 3   | 26 | 28  | 59 | 52 | 30  | 9  | 16 | 49 | 13  |
| TK  |    |    |    | 20  | 20  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 0   | 1  | 20  | 22 | 23 | 21  | 0  | 13 | 13 | 0   |
| FDS |    |    |    |     | 63  | 25 | 20 | 22 | 2   | 21 | 21  | 59 | 71 | 26  | 10 | 14 | 41 | 12  |
| KMJ |    |    |    |     |     | 20 | 17 | 20 | 2   | 25 | 26  | 47 | 68 | 27  | 10 | 14 | 46 | 14  |
| DK  |    |    |    |     |     |    | 12 | 14 | 1   | 13 | 0   | 23 | 25 | 8   | 4  | 0  | 16 | 7   |
| BK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    | 15 | 3   | 14 | 1   | 15 | 17 | 5   | 8  | 0  | 14 | 10  |
| BS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    | 1   | 13 | 0   | 19 | 20 | 8   | 6  | 0  | 17 | 12  |
| YFG |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     | 2  | 0   | 5  | 3  | 1   | 2  | 0  | 3  | 1   |
| B   |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    | 3   | 23 | 21 | 6   | 10 | 0  | 20 | 11  |
| DMD |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     | 26 | 27 | 20  | 0  | 16 | 17 | 0   |
| WK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    | 60 | 31  | 10 | 18 | 51 | 12  |
| MS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    | 30  | 9  | 18 | 43 | 13  |
| JBS |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     | 3  | 13 | 21 | 3   |
| MK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    | 0  | 8  | 7   |
| OS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    |    | 11 | 0   |
| KB  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    |    |    | 11  |

**TABLE IVa: Agreement between thirty-five versions of the epic - expressed as a percentage of version total (continued on next page)**

Read horizontally, the table expresses the percentage of agreement in terms of the version in the left-hand column; read vertically, the table expresses the percentage of agreement in terms of the versions listed at the top of the page (e.g. HO agrees with MAK in 40% of HO's incidents but in 25% of MAK's incidents).

|     | HO | MAK | MA | MB | A  | AR | D  | F  | ZA | ZB | V  | S  | Q  | AS | H  | BD | N  |
|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| HO  |    | 40  | 30 | 20 | 50 | 30 | 60 | 40 | 80 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 60 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 50 |
| MAK | 25 |     | 37 | 12 | 81 | 44 | 81 | 50 | 50 | 44 | 44 | 56 | 44 | 25 | 31 | 6  | 62 |
| MA  | 16 | 31  |    | 11 | 47 | 79 | 53 | 63 | 53 | 47 | 68 | 84 | 21 | 5  | 47 | 11 | 68 |
| MB  | 8  | 8   | 8  |    | 50 | 50 | 75 | 50 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 50 | 50 | 25 | 75 | 50 | 75 |
| A   | 21 | 54  | 37 | 8  |    | 37 | 87 | 46 | 50 | 33 | 42 | 46 | 12 | 21 | 33 | 8  | 50 |
| AR  | 15 | 35  | 75 | 10 | 45 |    | 50 | 45 | 40 | 35 | 50 | 75 | 15 | 5  | 35 | 10 | 75 |
| D   | 24 | 52  | 40 | 12 | 84 | 40 |    | 48 | 48 | 36 | 48 | 60 | 20 | 24 | 40 | 16 | 64 |
| F   | 6  | 12  | 19 | 3  | 17 | 14 | 19 |    | 70 | 28 | 25 | 28 | 3  | 9  | 37 | 28 | 62 |
| ZA  | 12 | 12  | 15 | 4  | 18 | 12 | 18 | 67 |    | 24 | 22 | 25 | 9  | 6  | 36 | 33 | 49 |
| ZB  | 20 | 29  | 37 | 12 | 33 | 19 | 37 | 75 | 67 |    | 50 | 54 | 8  | 17 | 37 | 17 | 79 |
| V   | 15 | 18  | 33 | 7  | 26 | 26 | 31 | 41 | 38 | 31 |    | 54 | 18 | 10 | 36 | 13 | 64 |
| S   | 21 | 27  | 48 | 6  | 33 | 45 | 45 | 54 | 51 | 39 | 64 |    | 21 | 12 | 39 | 21 | 76 |
| Q   | 60 | 70  | 40 | 20 | 30 | 30 | 50 | 20 | 60 | 20 | 70 | 70 |    | 10 | 30 | 20 | 50 |
| AS  | 40 | 40  | 10 | 10 | 50 | 10 | 60 | 60 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 40 | 10 |    | 40 | 40 | 40 |
| H   | 12 | 16  | 28 | 9  | 25 | 22 | 31 | 75 | 75 | 28 | 44 | 41 | 9  | 12 |    | 34 | 75 |
| BD  | 19 | 5   | 9  | 9  | 9  | 9  | 19 | 86 | 90 | 19 | 24 | 33 | 9  | 19 | 52 |    | 81 |
| N   | 6  | 12  | 16 | 3  | 15 | 19 | 24 | 50 | 41 | 24 | 31 | 31 | 6  | 5  | 30 | 21 |    |
| P   | 10 | 13  | 26 | 6  | 19 | 19 | 29 | 74 | 74 | 29 | 35 | 39 | 3  | 6  | 55 | 45 | 84 |
| CL  | 6  | 10  | 17 | 3  | 11 | 17 | 15 | 48 | 46 | 19 | 30 | 27 | 7  | 3  | 27 | 19 | 79 |
| TK  | 0  | 0   | 0  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 3  | 76 | 79 | 3  | 7  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 27 | 41 | 69 |
| FDS | 11 | 13  | 19 | 3  | 19 | 15 | 23 | 49 | 50 | 24 | 30 | 30 | 8  | 7  | 30 | 18 | 50 |
| KMJ | 10 | 10  | 16 | 2  | 13 | 15 | 15 | 50 | 45 | 21 | 42 | 29 | 7  | 6  | 33 | 19 | 56 |
| DK  | 12 | 22  | 44 | 3  | 28 | 34 | 37 | 41 | 47 | 34 | 44 | 56 | 19 | 0  | 31 | 9  | 59 |
| BK  | 21 | 29  | 46 | 8  | 50 | 46 | 58 | 54 | 46 | 37 | 58 | 67 | 17 | 25 | 50 | 9  | 62 |
| BS  | 18 | 26  | 41 | 6  | 35 | 38 | 50 | 62 | 62 | 32 | 35 | 56 | 15 | 18 | 32 | 12 | 44 |
| YFG | 20 | 0   | 20 | 20 | 0  | 20 | 20 | 40 | 40 | 20 | 20 | 40 | 0  | 60 | 40 | 80 | 80 |
| B   | 19 | 32  | 32 | 6  | 29 | 39 | 45 | 45 | 42 | 35 | 58 | 61 | 16 | 16 | 35 | 16 | 77 |
| DMD | 0  | 3   | 0  | 0  | 3  | 5  | 3  | 61 | 58 | 5  | 5  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 28 | 28 | 69 |
| WK  | 7  | 13  | 15 | 3  | 11 | 15 | 18 | 54 | 52 | 21 | 25 | 29 | 4  | 8  | 31 | 22 | 60 |
| MS  | 10 | 9   | 17 | 2  | 15 | 15 | 17 | 45 | 50 | 18 | 30 | 28 | 8  | 5  | 17 | 9  | 57 |
| JBS | 4  | 7   | 16 | 4  | 11 | 18 | 14 | 64 | 68 | 18 | 11 | 14 | 2  | 4  | 32 | 29 | 64 |
| MK  | 50 | 25  | 33 | 17 | 33 | 33 | 58 | 42 | 59 | 42 | 58 | 67 | 25 | 42 | 58 | 50 | 75 |
| OS  | 0  | 0   | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 75 | 85 | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 40 | 40 | 70 |
| KB  | 10 | 12  | 22 | 3  | 21 | 18 | 22 | 51 | 48 | 22 | 36 | 36 | 9  | 6  | 34 | 21 | 72 |
| DMS | 27 | 20  | 47 | 7  | 33 | 40 | 53 | 67 | 47 | 47 | 80 | 67 | 7  | 27 | 60 | 20 | 87 |

TABLE IVb: Agreement between thirty-five versions of the epic - expressed as a percentage of version total

|     | P  | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | YFG | B  | DMD | WK  | MS | JBS | MK | OS | KB | DMS |
|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| HO  | 30 | 50 | 0  | 90  | 90  | 40 | 50 | 60 | 10  | 60 | 0   | 60  | 90 | 20  | 60 | 0  | 70 | 40  |
| MAK | 25 | 56 | 0  | 69  | 56  | 44 | 44 | 56 | 0   | 62 | 6   | 69  | 50 | 19  | 19 | 0  | 50 | 19  |
| MA  | 42 | 79 | 0  | 84  | 74  | 74 | 58 | 74 | 5   | 53 | 0   | 68  | 79 | 37  | 21 | 0  | 79 | 37  |
| MB  | 50 | 75 | 0  | 75  | 50  | 25 | 50 | 50 | 25  | 50 | 0   | 75  | 50 | 50  | 50 | 0  | 50 | 25  |
| A   | 25 | 42 | 4  | 67  | 46  | 37 | 50 | 50 | 0   | 37 | 4   | 42  | 58 | 21  | 17 | 0  | 58 | 21  |
| AR  | 30 | 75 | 0  | 65  | 65  | 55 | 55 | 65 | 5   | 60 | 10  | 65  | 70 | 40  | 20 | 0  | 60 | 30  |
| D   | 36 | 52 | 4  | 76  | 52  | 48 | 56 | 68 | 4   | 56 | 4   | 64  | 60 | 24  | 28 | 0  | 60 | 32  |
| F   | 36 | 66 | 34 | 64  | 67  | 20 | 20 | 33 | 3   | 22 | 34  | 73  | 64 | 44  | 8  | 23 | 53 | 16  |
| ZA  | 34 | 60 | 34 | 63  | 57  | 22 | 16 | 31 | 3   | 19 | 31  | 67  | 67 | 45  | 9  | 25 | 48 | 10  |
| ZB  | 37 | 71 | 4  | 83  | 75  | 46 | 37 | 46 | 4   | 46 | 8   | 75  | 67 | 34  | 21 | 0  | 62 | 29  |
| V   | 28 | 67 | 5  | 64  | 67  | 36 | 36 | 31 | 2   | 46 | 5   | 56  | 69 | 13  | 18 | 0  | 61 | 31  |
| S   | 36 | 72 | 0  | 76  | 76  | 54 | 48 | 57 | 6   | 57 | 0   | 76  | 76 | 18  | 24 | 0  | 72 | 30  |
| Q   | 10 | 60 | 0  | 70  | 60  | 60 | 40 | 50 | 0   | 50 | 0   | 40  | 70 | 10  | 30 | 0  | 60 | 10  |
| AS  | 20 | 30 | 0  | 60  | 50  | 0  | 60 | 60 | 30  | 50 | 0   | 70  | 50 | 20  | 50 | 0  | 40 | 40  |
| H   | 53 | 75 | 25 | 78  | 87  | 31 | 37 | 31 | 6   | 34 | 31  | 84  | 75 | 44  | 22 | 25 | 72 | 28  |
| BD  | 67 | 81 | 57 | 71  | 76  | 14 | 28 | 19 | 19  | 24 | 48  | 90  | 85 | 62  | 28 | 38 | 67 | 14  |
| N   | 32 | 86 | 25 | 52  | 60  | 24 | 19 | 19 | 5   | 30 | 31  | 65  | 64 | 35  | 11 | 17 | 60 | 16  |
| P   |    | 84 | 35 | 64  | 74  | 22 | 26 | 26 | 3   | 32 | 38  | 81  | 81 | 55  | 19 | 29 | 64 | 26  |
| CL  | 30 |    | 23 | 53  | 60  | 22 | 19 | 22 | 3   | 30 | 32  | 68  | 58 | 34  | 10 | 18 | 56 | 15  |
| TK  | 38 | 69 |    | 69  | 69  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 0   | 3  | 69  | 76  | 79 | 72  | 0  | 45 | 45 | 0   |
| FDS | 24 | 55 | 24 |     | 75  | 30 | 24 | 26 | 2   | 25 | 25  | 70  | 84 | 31  | 12 | 17 | 79 | 14  |
| KMJ | 27 | 61 | 23 | 74  |     | 23 | 20 | 23 | 2   | 29 | 30  | 55  | 80 | 32  | 12 | 16 | 54 | 16  |
| DK  | 22 | 59 | 0  | 78  | 62  |    | 37 | 44 | 3   | 41 | 0   | 72  | 78 | 25  | 12 | 0  | 50 | 22  |
| BK  | 33 | 71 | 4  | 83  | 71  | 50 |    | 64 | 12  | 58 | 4   | 64  | 71 | 21  | 33 | 0  | 58 | 42  |
| BS  | 23 | 56 | 0  | 65  | 59  | 41 | 44 |    | 3   | 38 | 0   | 56  | 59 | 23  | 18 | 9  | 50 | 32  |
| YFG | 20 | 60 | 0  | 40  | 40  | 20 | 60 | 20 |     | 40 | 0   | 100 | 60 | 20  | 40 | 0  | 60 | 20  |
| B   | 32 | 83 | 3  | 68  | 81  | 42 | 45 | 42 | 6   |    | 10  | 74  | 68 | 19  | 32 | 0  | 64 | 35  |
| DMD | 33 | 78 | 55 | 58  | 72  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 0   | 8  |     | 72  | 75 | 55  | 0  | 44 | 47 | 0   |
| WK  | 29 | 68 | 25 | 68  | 54  | 26 | 17 | 22 | 6   | 26 | 30  |     | 69 | 36  | 11 | 21 | 59 | 14  |
| MS  | 28 | 58 | 25 | 79  | 75  | 28 | 19 | 22 | 3   | 23 | 30  | 67  |    | 33  | 10 | 20 | 48 | 15  |
| JBS | 39 | 68 | 48 | 59  | 61  | 18 | 11 | 18 | 2   | 14 | 45  | 70  | 68 |     | 7  | 29 | 48 | 7   |
| MK  | 50 | 75 | 0  | 83  | 83  | 33 | 67 | 50 | 17  | 83 | 0   | 83  | 75 | 25  |    | 0  | 67 | 58  |
| OS  | 45 | 80 | 65 | 70  | 70  | 0  | 0  | 0  | 0   | 0  | 80  | 90  | 90 | 65  | 0  |    | 55 | 0   |
| KB  | 30 | 73 | 19 | 61  | 69  | 24 | 21 | 25 | 4   | 30 | 25  | 76  | 64 | 31  | 12 | 16 |    | 16  |
| DMS | 53 | 87 | 0  | 80  | 93  | 47 | 67 | 80 | 7   | 73 | 0   | 80  | 87 | 20  | 47 | 0  | 73 |     |

Table Va: Agreement between versions expressed as an average of version percentages given in Table IV (continued on next page)

|     | HO | MAK | MA | MB | A  | AR | D  | F  | ZA | ZB | V  | S  | Q  | AS | H  | BD | N  |
|-----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| HO  |    | 32  | 23 | 14 | 35 | 22 | 42 | 23 | 46 | 35 | 37 | 45 | 60 | 40 | 26 | 29 | 28 |
| MAK |    |     | 34 | 10 | 67 | 39 | 66 | 31 | 31 | 36 | 31 | 41 | 57 | 32 | 23 | 5  | 37 |
| MA  |    |     |    | 9  | 42 | 77 | 46 | 41 | 34 | 42 | 50 | 66 | 30 | 7  | 37 | 10 | 42 |
| MB  |    |     |    |    | 29 | 30 | 43 | 26 | 39 | 43 | 41 | 28 | 35 | 17 | 42 | 29 | 39 |
| A   |    |     |    |    |    | 41 | 85 | 31 | 34 | 33 | 34 | 39 | 21 | 35 | 29 | 8  | 32 |
| AR  |    |     |    |    |    |    | 45 | 29 | 26 | 32 | 38 | 60 | 22 | 7  | 28 | 9  | 47 |
| D   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    | 33 | 33 | 36 | 39 | 52 | 35 | 42 | 35 | 17 | 44 |
| F   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    | 68 | 56 | 33 | 41 | 11 | 34 | 56 | 57 | 56 |
| ZA  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 45 | 30 | 38 | 34 | 23 | 55 | 61 | 45 |
| ZB  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 40 | 46 | 14 | 28 | 32 | 18 | 51 |
| V   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 59 | 44 | 25 | 40 | 18 | 47 |
| S   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 45 | 26 | 40 | 27 | 53 |
| Q   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 10 | 19 | 14 | 29 |
| AS  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 26 | 29 | 22 |
| H   |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 43 | 52 |
| BD  |    |     |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 51 |

Table Vb: Agreement between versions expressed as an average of version percentages given in Table IV

|     | P  | CL | TK | FDS | KMJ | DK | BK | BS | YFG | B  | DMD | WK | MS | JBS | MK | OS | KB | DMS |
|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| HO  | 20 | 28 | 0  | 50  | 50  | 26 | 35 | 39 | 15  | 39 | 0   | 33 | 50 | 12  | 55 | 0  | 40 | 33  |
| MAK | 19 | 33 | 0  | 41  | 33  | 33 | 36 | 41 | 0   | 47 | 4   | 41 | 29 | 13  | 22 | 0  | 31 | 19  |
| MA  | 34 | 48 | 0  | 51  | 45  | 59 | 52 | 57 | 12  | 42 | 0   | 41 | 48 | 26  | 27 | 0  | 50 | 42  |
| MB  | 28 | 39 | 0  | 39  | 26  | 14 | 29 | 28 | 11  | 28 | 0   | 39 | 26 | 27  | 33 | 0  | 26 | 16  |
| A   | 22 | 26 | 3  | 43  | 29  | 32 | 50 | 42 | 0   | 33 | 3   | 26 | 36 | 16  | 25 | 0  | 39 | 27  |
| AR  | 24 | 46 | 0  | 40  | 40  | 42 | 50 | 51 | 12  | 49 | 7   | 40 | 42 | 29  | 26 | 0  | 39 | 35  |
| D   | 32 | 33 | 3  | 49  | 33  | 42 | 57 | 59 | 12  | 50 | 3   | 41 | 38 | 19  | 43 | 0  | 41 | 42  |
| F   | 55 | 57 | 55 | 56  | 58  | 30 | 37 | 47 | 21  | 33 | 47  | 63 | 54 | 54  | 25 | 49 | 52 | 41  |
| ZA  | 54 | 53 | 56 | 56  | 51  | 34 | 31 | 46 | 21  | 30 | 44  | 59 | 58 | 56  | 29 | 55 | 48 | 52  |
| ZB  | 33 | 45 | 3  | 53  | 48  | 40 | 37 | 39 | 12  | 40 | 6   | 48 | 42 | 26  | 31 | 0  | 42 | 38  |
| V   | 31 | 48 | 6  | 47  | 54  | 40 | 47 | 33 | 11  | 52 | 5   | 40 | 49 | 12  | 38 | 0  | 48 | 55  |
| S   | 37 | 49 | 0  | 53  | 53  | 55 | 57 | 56 | 23  | 59 | 0   | 52 | 52 | 16  | 45 | 0  | 54 | 48  |
| Q   | 6  | 33 | 0  | 39  | 33  | 39 | 28 | 32 | 0   | 33 | 0   | 22 | 39 | 6   | 27 | 0  | 34 | 8   |
| AS  | 13 | 16 | 0  | 33  | 28  | 0  | 42 | 39 | 45  | 33 | 0   | 39 | 27 | 12  | 46 | 0  | 23 | 33  |
| H   | 54 | 51 | 26 | 54  | 60  | 31 | 43 | 33 | 23  | 34 | 29  | 57 | 51 | 38  | 40 | 32 | 53 | 44  |
| BD  | 56 | 50 | 49 | 44  | 47  | 11 | 18 | 15 | 49  | 20 | 38  | 56 | 47 | 45  | 39 | 39 | 44 | 17  |
| N   | 58 | 82 | 47 | 51  | 58  | 41 | 40 | 31 | 42  | 53 | 50  | 62 | 60 | 49  | 43 | 43 | 66 | 51  |
| P   |    | 57 | 36 | 44  | 50  | 22 | 29 | 24 | 11  | 32 | 35  | 55 | 54 | 47  | 34 | 37 | 47 | 39  |
| CL  |    |    | 46 | 54  | 60  | 46 | 45 | 39 | 31  | 56 | 55  | 68 | 58 | 51  | 42 | 49 | 64 | 51  |
| TK  |    |    |    | 46  | 46  | 0  | 3  | 0  | 0   | 3  | 62  | 50 | 52 | 60  | 0  | 55 | 32 | 0   |
| FDS |    |    |    |     | 74  | 54 | 53 | 45 | 21  | 46 | 41  | 69 | 81 | 45  | 47 | 43 | 70 | 47  |
| KMJ |    |    |    |     |     | 42 | 45 | 41 | 21  | 55 | 51  | 54 | 77 | 46  | 47 | 43 | 61 | 54  |
| DK  |    |    |    |     |     |    | 43 | 42 | 11  | 41 | 0   | 49 | 53 | 21  | 22 | 0  | 37 | 34  |
| BK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    | 54 | 36  | 51 | 3   | 40 | 45 | 16  | 50 | 0  | 39 | 54  |
| BS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    | 11  | 40 | 0   | 39 | 40 | 20  | 34 | 0  | 37 | 56  |
| YFG |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     | 23 | 0   | 53 | 31 | 11  | 28 | 0  | 32 | 13  |
| B   |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    | 9   | 50 | 45 | 16  | 57 | 0  | 47 | 54  |
| DMD |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     | 51 | 52 | 50  | 0  | 62 | 36 | 0   |
| WK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    | 68 | 53  | 47 | 55 | 67 | 47  |
| MS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    | 50  | 42 | 55 | 56 | 51  |
| JBS |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     | 16 | 47 | 39 | 13  |
| MK  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    | 0  | 39 | 52  |
| OS  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    |    | 35 | 0   |
| KB  |    |    |    |     |     |    |    |    |     |    |     |    |    |     |    |    |    | 44  |

On the preceding seven pages are four tables measuring the rates of agreement between all the versions in the survey. The basis of the figures are the 157 story-elements detailed in the synoptic charts. Tables I and II list the total number of these story-elements present in each version, arranging the variants chronologically and then by number of story-elements. These figures, which are also found in Part One of this chapter by each version, allow epic accounts to be differentiated on the basis of the breadth of the traditional elements that they contain, rather than their word length (for example, although CL is over twice as long as N, it contains only seven more story-elements than N's eighty). From this table we can see that MS is the fullest account, according to this criterion, while MB is the slightest. A significant cut-off point is that below F at sixty-four incidents: in our terms MS, WK, CL, KMJ, FDS, N, KB, ZA and F are the fullest and most representative versions of the epic available. This is not to say that all the other variants are poor versions of the story: many are simply partial accounts: P, TK, DMD, JBS and OS concentrate to a greater or lesser extent upon the Buffalo-woman tale; others have simply been sketchily recorded (HO, MB, YFG, MK); still others are too idiosyncratic to score well in terms of our 157 elements (Q, AS, BD, BK).

Table III rates the similarity/dissimilarity levels between versions according to the 157 common story-elements. From this table it can be seen that, as one would expect, it is the variants noted above, with numbers of incidents above sixty-four, that score highest. To give a more accurate set of figures, taking into account the relative length of each version, tables IV and V have been drawn up. Table IV displays rates of agreement between accounts in terms of two percentages, one in terms of the total number of story-episodes in the account listed down the left hand column, the other in terms of the version listed along the top of the table. Table V averages out these two figures to give an overall picture of the level of similarity between any two versions.

The results from these tables to a large extent confirm what we understood from Table III, that the versions with the largest number of recognized story-elements

also score highest in terms of general similarity between each other. But the rates have been accentuated via the percentages to reveal some interesting groupings. Taking the composite percentages from Table V, the highest rate of agreement is in fact between two accounts beyond the top nine accounts identified above. A and D agree in 85% of the 157 story-elements listed in the charts. Considering that both were most probably composed by the same individual this result is unsurprising; MAK, also produced by the same man, agrees with A at 67% and D at 66%. MA and AR are also very similar (77%); one comes from Medine, the other from Nioro, towns which are relatively close to one another, suggesting perhaps a regional tradition which both share. The high rate of agreement between ZA and F (68%) appears to run counter to any view of the epic varying according to region: ZA is from Nioro and F quite possibly from Kankan, far to the south. Even if we cannot be sure of F's origin, ZA does not share a particularly high number of elements with other Nioro accounts.

Second only to the pair A and D in terms of agreement are N and CL. They have a rate of agreement of 82%, highlighting the closeness of Djeliba Koro and Fadama versions of the epic and perhaps the fact that the griot of N visited the village of the griot of CL. Both accounts are similar to the three Kita bloc variants of FDS, KMJ and MS, as well as to WK, from Krina, and the synthetic KB. We must note the impressive rates of agreement among the Kita variants themselves (MS/FDS 81%, KMJ/MS 77%, KMJ/FDS 74%). WK shares an impressive 69% of details with FDS, and 68% with MS.

Stephen Belcher has conducted a similar statistical comparison - although employing only sixteen versions of the epic - and based on 209 incidents or details in the story (1985: 260-8). For the versions he studies, his results are generally in agreement with ours. His list of most complete versions is headed by MS, as is ours, followed by FDS, ZA, KMJ and CL - all versions which figure in our top eight. Only the position of WK is significantly altered: we place it second, he places it eleventh. The reason for this is simple: at the time when Belcher conducted his survey the last volume of the work, WK3, had yet to appear, meaning that his version of WK was incomplete.

Examining the rates of agreement between versions presented by Belcher (1985: 261), which are comparable to the figures in our Table IV, Belcher isolates the Kita triad of accounts which his figures suggest agree most with each other, as well as agreeing more often with other accounts, both with those from different regions and from different times. He does not remark on the high rate of agreement between N and CL; he does not include A, so is not aware of its similarity to D.

### Alterations to the epic through space

The second question that was raised at the beginning of this Part of the chapter was: Does the epic, or has it in the recent past (i.e. to the time depth of our sample) varied from region to region? In Part One of this chapter we attempted to locate each version of the epic; for most accounts, where information was available, this was a straightforward task. Reference to the maps at the end of the Introduction in conjunction with the information provided in Chapter One, Part One, will give the locations of the tellers of these versions. Some versions cannot be placed at a location on the maps: B, BKS and KB are syntheses of traditions which cannot be located in one specific spot and have therefore been excluded from the analysis; no information was available as to the specific place of origin of the griots of JBS or DMS, which have also had to be excluded from the analysis; some doubt remains as to the location of F at Kankan. The griots of DMD, DK, BK, BS, YFG and MK recorded their versions in places at a significant distance from those of their origin; both sites are marked, but for the purposes of this analysis the *jeli's* place of origin is taken as the place of origin of the version. Altogether thirty-two versions can be located to a specific settlement or at least a province. We are now in a position to examine the question of regional variants of the Sunjata epic.

D.T. Niane has written at some length on the notion of griot historical "schools" (1974: 59-71; see also 1984: 127n). He presents a picture of a number of regional centres of learning among the *jeliw* of Manding whose interests lie mainly in the

preservation of local traditions but which retain at their heart a version of the Sunjata epic. He sees these schools as having been consciously formed in response to the political fragmentation of Mali since the close of the sixteenth century. Most schools he associates with a particular lineage of griots. He names the following schools (which we have also indicated on the above maps): Keyla, whose griots are the Jabate; the Kita and Niagassola school, whose griots are also the Jabate, in addition to the Makalou and Camara; Fadama (called the Hamana-province tradition), whose griots are the Conde; and Djeliba Koro (called the Dioma-province tradition) and Kankan, neither of which school he associates with a particular clan of *jeliw*. Niane notes some differences between the schools. Keyla's tradition is said to be Islamicised, while Kita-Niagassola's is "animist"; Kankan's school he says was established by marabouts and traders. In addition to these centres for historical tradition, Niane mentions the reroofing ceremony at Kangaba every seventh year, presided over by the Jabate griots of Keyla, at which the epic and other traditions are rehearsed, and the old capital of Niani, which retains the tradition of the Kuyate *jeliw*.

Niane's list of schools can to an extent be corroborated and enlarged. Namankoumba Kouyate writes about the 'écoles provinciales' of the Manding, naming Keyla, Kita, Niagassola, Niani, the provinces of Dioma and Hamana, and that of the Futa Jalon; he does not specifically link these schools to clans of *jeliw*, but mentions the Kuyate and Jabate clans, followed by the Diawara, Danho, Camara, Konde, Kamissoko and Sisoko (1970: 87-90). Y.T. Cissé records a number of regional centres of griots in Manding, and their respective clan or clans, among which are the following:

|                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Keyla                                | Jabate, Kamissoko, Kuyate        |
| Kita                                 | Tunkara, Kuyate, Soumano, Jabate |
| Niagassola                           | Kuyate, Jabate                   |
| Hamada or Famada in Hamana [Fadama?] | Konde                            |
| Djoliba Koto (Djeliba Koro)          | Kuyate                           |
| Krina                                | Kamissoko                        |

In addition, he notes that the settlements of Boudofo (Kita province), Dialakoro (Siguiri), Kayes, Komakara (Narena), Leba (Guinea) and Narena are associated with

particular clans of traditionists (Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 388). Elsewhere, he states that the school of the Kamissoko at Krina is the most ancient among them (*Acts du Colloque* 1975: 23). Emile Leynaud also records the existence of the Keyla school and Krina school, but rates the former as the most senior (1972: 24), in which opinion he is joined by N. Kouyate. M. M. Diabaté notes that the Jabate griots of Keyla are considered the only true griots (n.d.: 41); Bird notes that Keyla is still today considered a place of considerable griot learning (1977: 356), while Vidal (1923b: 607) says the Keyla griots are thought of by the Malinke as the guardians of the official tradition of Sunjata.

This scheme of centres of learning to some extent conforms with the versions we have in our survey. F may well have been from a Kankan bard, V was a product of Keyla, N and product of Djeliba Koro, CL of Fadama, WK of Krina, and FDS, KMJ, MS and MK products of Kita. We are less sure about the griot lineages. In the cases of WK, CL, MK, N and KMJ our sample does confirm the statements of Niane and the other authors recorded above. However, two of the Kita versions are by Sisoko griots, and not Jabate, Makalou or Camara, as Niane identifies the *jeliw* of this town, nor Tunkara, Kuyate, Jabate or Soumano, as Cissé identifies them. Also, Niane's claim that Keyla tradition was Islamicised while Kita-Niagassola remained "animist" is not borne out by the versions we have examined. Certainly V (and DMD from nearby Kangaba) record the Keita's Islamic, Middle-Eastern heritage, but these details are equally present in three of our versions from Kita.

Besides this, most of the practising griots identified in our survey come from settlements and regions not referred to in the scheme of provincial schools, which only covers the Manding heartland in any detail. It is clear that, if the griot school system was once a full explanation of the location of Malinke bards, it is no longer. Those that do conform to the school system, as Niane and others have identified it, are too few upon which to conduct any statistical analysis. The exception to this is Kita-Niagassola. Kita has produced four versions included in our survey. The rates of agreement between them is at least seven points above the

average, which is 35%, while between KMJ, FDS and MS it is a very impressive 77%. This is perhaps evidence that the griot school might still exercise a homogenizing influence over the bards which come under its aegis. However, we are led to the conclusion that the bardic school is in no way a complete explanation for similarity and dissimilarity between versions of the epic. N and CL are said to come from two separate centres of learning, but return very high rates of agreement (82%); while KMJ, FDS and MS all record high rates of agreement with WK, supposedly from a separate griot school. As we shall discover shortly, a number of griots who are not resident at Keyla and who do not originate from there, claim their accounts to be based on that of the Keyla school. Under these circumstances it would be unwise to attribute variations between versions of the epic simply to the bardic school from which their performers emanate - other factors are clearly at play.

Beyond the centres of griot learning identified above, what of the general theory of variation between the epic versions according to the region which produced them? To test this theory I have divided twenty-three of the versions in our survey into five broad area groups. They are a northern group of MA, MB, MAK, A, AR, D, ZA, ZB and BD, all of which come either from Nioro, Medine, or the nearby province of Khasso; a north-eastern group of TK, P, HO and OS, all of which were recorded in the region of Mali to the north and east of Bamako; a western group of Gambian variants, BK, BS, DK and AS; a central group of KMJ, FDS, MS, MK, WK and S, which either come from Kita or Krina or, in the case of S, is said to be based on the version of a Kita griot; and a southern group of N, CL, DMD, V, H and F. Of these, the first four are certainly from the area to the south and west of Siguiri, while the last two are most probably so.

Composite rates of agreement within the north-eastern group are ten points below the average rate of agreement between versions of 35%; rates of agreement within the northern and western groups (36% and 37% respectively) are approximately equal to the average; while those of the central and southern groups (at 47% and 57%) are well above the average. While these results suggest the absence of any significant

homogeneity among versions from either the northern, north-eastern or western regions, they do indicate the potential existence of regional variants in the central and southern areas. These two groups also agree between themselves to a respectable level of 49%, implying that we may have not two separate regional variants, but one. What these figures seem to indicate is that, while griots in outlying parts of the Malinke diaspora - Gambia, the Sahel fringe or the Bamana region of the Niger - do not each repeat a specific version of the epic of Sunjata, those from the heartland region stretching from Kita in the north to Kankan in the south, and centring for the most part on the Niger river, do conform to a greater than average degree in the version of the Sunjata story they perform.

Let us compare these findings with those produced by two other investigators.

Gordon Innes states the following:

From the diversity of the versions of the Sunjata epic which I recorded in the Gambia and from a comparison of these with published versions from elsewhere, it seems clear that there is no such thing as a Gambian version. The differences between versions occur at the level of the individual griot, not of region (1974: 30)

Innes' conclusion is prompted by an examination of BK, BS and DK, three closely related versions from the Gambia which form a tonic to the Kita triad. Like Kele Monson, Bamba Suso was a respected and popular bard, and like Fa Digi and Magan Sisoko, Banna and Dembo Kanute were related, the first two as father and son, the latter two as brothers (but ones who both studied under the same father). Yet while the composite rate of agreement between the Kita variants is 77%, that among the Gambian triad is but 46%. Regional proximity (or kinship, for that matter) is in no way a guarantor of similarity between versions.

Stephen Belcher's analysis of comparison among sixteen versions of the epic did not produce strong evidence for regional variants either. In his opinion, 'there is little perceptible regional unity' among versions (1985: 266). Belcher considers two further hypotheses to explain his rates of similarity/dissimilarity, which are generally in agreement with our own. The first is that the epic has evolved over time, with more

outlying regions preserving older forms of the story, while newer versions of tradition emanate from the centre. This theory, which Belcher rejects in favour of a second hypothesis, would conform to our findings, but would place them in a temporal scheme for which there is no clear evidence. Belcher's second theory revolves around the high rates of agreement among his three Kita variants and between these accounts and other versions, both from region to region and through time. As he writes:

Agreement with this Kita bloc stretches through time (Frobenius and Zeltner [A] agree more with Fadigi Sisoko than any other text except each other) and over space (Dembo Kanute agrees more with Fadigi and Magan Sisoko than any other text), and this would seem to preclude the possibility of regional variants of the story (1985: 267)

Belcher concludes from this that the Kita bloc represents the authoritative version of the epic, against which all other accounts are to be measured.

Comparing Belcher's statistics to our own we find that F agrees in fact with WK more than any member of the Kita bloc, while ZA agrees with WK to the same extent that it agrees with MS. In addition, Belcher reports from a survey of agreement rates among his sixteen versions that two of the Kita variants, FDS and MS, agreed more frequently with other accounts and to a higher degree than any other version. However, according to our own survey, the pair N and CL agree an equal number of times with versions above the rate of 60% as do FDS and MS (seven times), while WK itself agrees with versions above the rate of 60% five times. I suggest that, while Belcher's notion of an authoritative version of the epic from the Manding heartland is a plausible interpretation of the evidence, his idea of what versions constituted that tradition was too narrow; rather than limiting it to the Kita variants I would suggest that the evidence points to a more general level of homogeneity between epic accounts originating from the whole area from Kita in the north to Kankan in the south. This zone would include all the griot schools identified by Niane and the other authors quoted above, and might suggest that, rather than accounting for differences between versions of the epic, the historical schools act to some extent

as controls upon the amount of variation that is permissible between versions of the epic; that where these schools exist the epic retains a more recognizable shape, while beyond the influence of these centres more heterodox versions flourish.

Innes has stated that there are no griot historical schools in the Gambia such as are said to exist in Mali and Guinea to the east; although he admits there are high numbers of griots living in villages such as Sotuma (where Bamba Suso lived) or Boraba, he claims that to see these settlements as training centres is 'a total misconception of the situation' (1974: 7). If Innes is correct, might this absence of griot historical schools account for the lack of homogeneity among Gambian versions? If this situation were constant throughout the Malinke diaspora it would do much to explain why versions from these regions tend to retain less in common with each other than do versions of the epic from the Manding heartland. David Conrad speaks of a Niuro historical school, as we have mentioned earlier, but his school was peopled by Muslim clerics rather than *jeliw*, and is in a Soninke rather than a Malinke region; in any case, having identified at least three of the Niuro accounts of the epic with one author (Mamadou Aïssa), and given that ZA and ZB are not part of Conrad's putative school, we are left with only one separate version of the epic which can clearly be identified with the Muslim historical school - AR. It seems then that one factor which may account for the lack of homogeneity between versions of the epic in the Malinke diaspora may be the absence of the griot schools such as have been identified in the Manding heartland.

Another factor which must influence the degree of homogeneity among versions is the manner in which griots are trained: how they receive their version of the epic tradition, and how they develop it. The training of griots has been well documented in a number of sources (Innes 1973; Innes 1974: 6-7; Diabaté n.d.: 39-40; Bird 1971; Johnson 1986: 22-9). Briefly, it can be stated that training generally falls into three phases: (1) a period in which the trainee is apprenticed to his father or to another griot in the family, during which time the novice may act as *namu*-sayer to his trainer or accompany him on a musical instrument; (2) a period of tutorship under

a local master griot, with whom he will complete his formal study; and (3) an unstructured element of touring to hear the recitations of other bards.

This pattern is in the main endorsed, although occasionally countered, by the information we have on the *jeliw* who performed versions of the epic in our survey. Kele Monson was taught by his father; Fadigi Sisoko was taught his craft by his maternal uncle; Dembo Kanute by his father, and Banna Kanute by his father and brother; Magan Sisoko learnt his version from his father - Fa-Digi - although he was not formally apprenticed to him. Tiemoko Kone was taught by his father but received no external training, nor did he travel. Other griots were taught by bards who were not kin, although we may suppose that they had originally received some basic instruction from a family member. Tiemoko Kone's father learnt his version of the epic from a griot of a different family; Kele Monson received training (in addition to that from his father) from Bintou Fama, *Belen Tigi* of Keyla; Wa Kamissoko was taught by (in addition to several family members) the head of the Bamako griots. Concerning the third stage noted above, that of the travelling by bards to hear other versions of the traditions, Innes has written the following:

For griots, learning their craft is a continuing process, since griots travel extensively and hear other griots performing. Banna [Kanute] told me that if on his travels he met a griot whose version he liked, he would stay with that griot for some time until he had acquainted himself with that version (1973: 107)

Innes believes that griots tend to incorporate the elements from other bardic recitals which they hear and like into their own versions of the traditions. As regards the griots represented in our survey we know that Mamoudou Kouyate travelled to Fadama, Kita, Siguiri and Keyla to hear other griots perform, while Wa Kamissoko, Bamba Suso, Dembo Kanute, and of course Banna Kanute, have also travelled as bards. More structured means exist for griots to be influenced by each other's versions of traditions. The famous reroofing ceremony of the *Kama Bolon* at Kangaba, held every seven years, at which the Jabate griots from Keyla recite the epic, is the most well-

recorded example of a formal gathering at which griots can hear the epic. And as Bird writes concerning Keyla itself,

Keyla is . . . a center where both young and old bards go to add to their repertoires, discuss interpretations and technique, and often perform for each other. Bards, in singing their vitae, often cite the places they have visited, particularly places like Keyla that have high reputations as sources of knowledge, and these visits add to the bard's authenticity (1977: 356)

Fa-Digi Sisoko seems to have attended the reroofing ceremony at Kangaba. According to his son, Magan, Fa-Digi heard the Malinke narratives performed at the sacred hut at Keyla, but as Johnson points out, he is certainly referring to the Kangaba ceremony, over which the Keyla griots preside. Magan claims that 'All of that added to his knowledge', that

When he [Fa-Digi] left here [Kital] to go to Kela, well, he didn't have any understanding at all about narratives of the Manden. When he arrived at Kela he found the seeds of those narratives there, and brought them here' (Johnson 1979: 271)

Magan Sisoko's claim may be an overstatement; we know Fa-Digi was trained as an agricultural bard by his maternal uncle, but it may indeed be the case that Fa-Digi dropped the version of the epic he had been taught completely and took up that promulgated by the bards of Keyla. It can be noted that Kele Monson was in part trained by the *Belen Tigi* of Keyla; KMJ is very similar to FDS, and this may indicate that both versions originated not from any specific Kita variant of the epic, but from that of a Keyla bard. Whether or not Magan Sisoko is overstating the importance of his father's visit to Kangaba, his assertion does indicate the prestige and authority that attaches to the *jeliw* from Keyla.

In the griot's training the essentially family-based first stage - at which point we can assume that the young bard knows only the corpus of Malinke tradition as it is recited by his familial trainer - is potentially countered by the second stage, at which the novice is taught by a local leading griot, and definitely countered in stage three, in which the bard travels and listens to other versions of the tradition. Of

course, a *jeli* can miss out this third stage altogether, as Tiemoko Kone did, but Kone is the only griot in our survey that we know for sure did not travel, and we can assume that most griots do travel and seek out versions of tradition by other bards. The main variable that then remains is how much of what they hear do they reject, and how much do they incorporate into their version of the same tradition? Two factors can be identified as influencing this variable. The first has to do with the griot's own personality; the second with the apparent authority of a version.

Innes has already been quoted to the effect that versions of the epic vary not from region to region but from one individual griot to another. Returning to the comparison between the high rate of similarity between FDS and MS, produced by father and son, and the much lower rate between DK and BK, whose tellers are brothers, we might try to see some differences in the characters of the griots involved. We do not know much about the character of Magan Sisoko; we know that he was only thirty-one at the time MS was recorded, and was still living in the same town as his father, facts which might suggest he had not had much opportunity (or perhaps inclination) to travel widely and modify his version of the epic that he received from his father. In contrast, Banna Kanute, ten years or so Magan's senior at the time of the production of BK, had moved from Gambia to Senegal, had already lived in London for several years, and struck Innes as 'an extrovert, with a forceful personality and an ebullient manner' (1974: 137). Banna Kanute was not limited to his home town, nor to his home country or even home continent. The differences between his version and that of his elder brother - BK and DK agree only in 43% of their story-elements - suggest that he was similarly not to be limited by the form of the Sunjata epic that he received from his family trainer. While it would be wrong to base a theory on this one example, it seems likely that a griot's adherence or lack of adherence to the version of the epic that his family trainer imparted to him varies in part according to that bard's general response to the novel, the different, and in terms of how similar a character he is to his familial trainer, and thus according to his overall personality.

The second variable I identified was the apparent authority of the version. By this I mean the regard in which any given griot, or his recitation, is held. It has already been seen that Magan Sisoko, who followed his father's version so closely, believed that version to have been derived from the prestigious bards of Keyla; perhaps this conviction made him more likely to repeat his father's version of the epic rather than that of any other bard. The great similarity between N and CL may also be connected with the fact that Fadama, the griot historical centre of Hamana province, Guinea, and the village of Babou Conde, who was a highly respected bard and its *Belen Tigi*, was visited by Mamoudou Kouyate during his travels to hear other griot performances.

Authority may emanate from an individual *jeli* who is thought particularly knowledgeable or around griot historical schools; where the two coincide the pull of authority may be very strong, but beyond the zone of the griot historical centres that we know of the apparent authority of even a respected bard may be limited. Bamba Suso, regarded by some as Gambia's leading griot in the 1960s or early 1970s and a radio performer, seems to have had only a limited impact on the recitations of Dembo and Banna Kanute. Although there may be numerous particular factors involved in the situation of which we know nothing, it may be that Bamba Suso, while regarded as a very knowledgeable griot, is followed less closely by his fellow bards concerning the details of his account of the life of Sunjata than over the information he provides concerning Gambian history, specifically, its leading families. A large section of BS relates elements of the history of Gambia after Tira Makhan's conquest of Senegambia. While Gambian bards seem unabashed at relating details of the Sunjata story itself at variance to the way in which BS presents them, it may be that these griots are less likely to make contrary statements to those of Bamba Suso on the subjects in which he is recognized to have a particular expertise, the history of Gambia. It may be that griots from the Malinke diaspora are more likely to follow the words of a Manding heartland *jeli*, if they get the chance to hear one, than those of a bard who is as distant as they from the accepted centre of Malinke civilization.

## Recapitulation

The picture which seems to be emerging of the factors which determine the similarity and dissimilarity of versions of the epic can be summarized as follows.

There is little evidence of an evolution of the epic over the time-span of our survey (97-99 years). Where variants exist it is often difficult to distinguish between regional or individual differences between versions and evolutionary changes to the story. There is little clear evidence from our 157 story-episodes for novel motifs having been introduced into the epic corpus over the last 97-9 years, while only two dying motifs have been discerned from our list of 157. The lack of balance in our sample of versions - with only eleven accounts clearly before 1935 but at least twenty-three after that date - may be partly to blame for this, but other factors generally discounted the notion that a motif was novel in the examples that were considered. On the other hand, there is some evidence for pseudo-novel motifs which involve a transformation of pre-existent elements to obtain new patterns. It is possible that motifs may be dropped from the epic as visual cues disappear or as those motifs become incompatible with the overall characterization of the hero in the epic.

Geographic location of the version and its performer is significant in accounting for rates of agreement between versions of the epic; not because each region has its own variant of the epic, but because a central zone stretching from Kita in the north to Kankan in the south, and centred on the Upper Niger valley, appears to retain a number of homogeneous variants of the epic. All the versions recorded in this region, regardless of their length or completeness, agree on 49% of the story-elements identified in our survey. Within this broad zone of similarity there are much higher pockets of agreement, such as between three Kita versions (FDS, KMJ, MS) or two from Guinean villages (N, CL). While these high rates of agreement might suggest the existence of individual village traditions in line with Niane's "school" theory, they are more reasonably explained by reference to the particular histories

of the *jeli* involved, and most of all the details of their training. The homogeneity of versions of the epic coming from this central area appears dependent upon the influence for conformity exercised by the griot historical centres which have been identified with this zone (but not beyond it) as a whole: rather than accounting for differences between versions, the schools have apparently produced a generally accepted version of the epic between them. Evidence for interchange between griots' versions from Keyla and Kita, and between Djeliba Koro and Fadama, makes the idea of separate, clearly identifiable village traditions hard to accept.

Versions of the epic from the centres of Malinke people beyond southern Mali and northern Guinea are more heterodox than those of the central zone. Geographical distance from this central zone does not explain why versions of the epic from a given region, apart from the central zone, are less in agreement among themselves than those from the Manding heartland. Lack of conformity among versions from these outlying regions may be because these areas do not contain, as far as we know, griot historical centres to act as a conforming influence. It may also suggest that the historical schools of southern Mali and northern Guinea exercise an influence over the versions of diaspora bards; that diaspora bards are more likely to follow a version of the epic heard from a griot from Keyla, Kita, Fadama, or another reputed bardic centre, than that of another *jeli* from their own region.

Against the influence of an authoritative version of the epic of Sunjata as recited by griots of the Manding heartland has to be placed the pull of the version that the griot was taught by his father, uncle or other family member. The factors affecting how much a griot alters the account given to him involve, among other things, (a) how much the bard travels, (b) his general level of receptivity of novel elements, and thus his personality in general; (c) the level of conformity in terms of style and aims between him and his griot trainer, and (d) his own estimation of the relative authenticity of the new version of the epic he hears and the original version his family trainer imparted to him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORIGINS OF MANDING & THE KEITA

This chapter deals with the material in the epic corpus that takes as its subject events prior to the birth of Sunjata Keita, excluding material relating to the Buffalo-woman tale. Its most popular element is a genealogy for the hero, found in half of the variants of the epic consulted. Otherwise, this section of the epic tells the stories of significant figures from the Keita genealogy, many of whom are considered to have had a prominent place in the story of Manding. I argue that, although the genealogy itself presents insuperable problems as a historical source in the conventional sense, with no clear agreement concerning the exact relationship between the figures it lists, it nevertheless reveals important aspects of the Malinkes' composition of their history, not least in its apparent synthesis of Muslim and non-Muslim elements in that past.

#### **Genealogy of Sunjata Keita**

Eighteen variants of the Sunjata epic examined in this dissertation contain versions of the genealogy of the hero.<sup>1</sup> Of these versions, one (ZB) contains two different lists, another (WK) contains four lists, while KMJ's version of the genealogy has been presented in three alternative forms. To differentiate between these lists, the first in ZB (on pp. 37-8) is called ZB1, the second (pp. 44-5) ZB11; WK1 denotes the list found on p. 43 of WK3, WK11 is found on pp. 81-3, WK111 on p. 375, and WK1v on p. 385 of the same volume (see also pp. 386-7); the three alternate forms of the genealogy in KMJ are designated after the version in which they appear. These lists, plus a version of the genealogy given in Niane 1959, are found chronologically arranged in the Appendix. Information on the dating and geographical placing of each of these

versions has been given in Chapter One and is summarized in Table VI, below.

While most of the versions of the genealogy were recorded from individual griots, those in B and KB are synthetic literary creations, as are the narratives themselves. B's version of the genealogy is clearly based upon D's, while KB appears to have employed a variety of sources. The version of the genealogy in Niane 1959 is said to have come from 'les traditionistes du Dioma et Hamana' (Niane 1959: 43). It is almost identical to the list found in N, which was recorded at Djeliba Koro, the repository of Dioma province tradition, and very similar to that of CL, recorded in nearby Fadama, the home of Hamana province tradition. The version of the genealogy in N appears in some respects to be a simplification or rationalization of that in Niane 1959: the repetitive descent sequence in Niane 1959 of Bilali Bounama-Lawalo-Bilali-Lawalo is replaced by Bilali Bounama-Lawalo in N; also different in N is the figure of Kabala Simbon, who replaces Simbomba in Niane 1959. The differences between N, CL and Niane 1959's version of the genealogy may reflect Niane's own editing, but are equally likely to reflect the small variation either between the two villages and their respective traditions - which, as we have seen in Chapter One, are basically similar in their treatment of the Sunjata legend - or between different griots at Djeliba Koro: Niane interviewed Mamadou Kouyate for N, but also spoke to the *Belen Tigi* of Djeliba Koro, Gbessiran Moudou (Niane 1960c: 126).

The differences between the three lists of Sunjata's ancestors based upon KMJ seem to have arisen both at the stage of transcription and of literary reworking. KMJ,D2 and KMJ,M are both linear translations of the griot's 1968 performance, but KMJ,D2 omits Moser's figure of Masa (= *mansa*) Beloko and instead appears to conflate Masa Beloko and Beloba Kuman (given as brothers in KMJ,M) into Mansa Beleba Kuma. These differences may well be due to variations in transcription. Elsewhere the two accounts agree. The differences between these two accounts and KMJ,D1 are more marked. Diabaté's 1970 book (KMJ,D1) is a literary reworking of his uncle's performance, and Diabaté has stretched out the hero's family tree from six generations to eight, by adding Mamadou Kanu and Kaba Malike (from "Malinke"?) as

brothers directly below Bilal, and stringing out the brothers Mansa Beremu and Mansa Beremu Dana in a father-son relationship. Possibly, had his transcription included Masa Beloko (as does KMJ,M) KMJ,D1 would have given the hero's genealogy a depth of nine generations. These alterations and additions may reflect Massa Makan Diabaté's own traditional knowledge, supplementing that of his uncle, or may represent a historicist gloss on the performance by its author, bard Kele Monson.

The versions of the genealogy of Sunjata can be categorized according to basic form. The simplest is a list of names linked in a father-son relationship, and this is the form found in ZB1 and 11, F, V, KB and BK. The three alternate lists from KMJ, the four from WK, plus N, CL, TK, FDS, DMD and MS follow the more complex tree form which includes two or three brothers per generation; while in A, D and B one or a few single-name generations are followed by a long list of brothers, which includes Sunjata. V, N, CL, KB, MS, TK and WK intersperse their lists with narratives concerning the deeds of some of the genealogy members, the most extended of which detail the lives of the Simbon brothers and Bilali.

Overtly, these lists of names serve two basic purposes in the Sunjata epic which usually, but not always, overlap; these purposes are not generally distinguished in the variants. Firstly, the list is a genealogy for the hero, tracing his ancestry via his putative Keita forebears to an ostensible first ancestor; secondly the list is a kinglist, claiming to record in order the names of those who held the office of *mansa* of Manding from its inception until the time of the empire. Now it is implied in most variants that these functions overlap exactly (excepting a few early ancestors such as Bilali or, in some accounts, Mamadu Kanu, who lived before Manding was in existence) for Manding's ruling lineage is given to have been the Keita. However, as will be suggested below, claiming that Sunjata's ancestry and the kings of Manding form the same basic list has most probably led to distortions.

Table VI, on the next page, displays comparatively the basic data of the variant's versions of the genealogy of Sunjata, giving the date and place of origin of each account, its size (i.e. number of names), depth (number of generations), and the type

TABLE VI : Comparative data on versions of the genealogy of Sunjata

| Version    | Page Reference | Date         | Size<br>(Number of Names) | Generation<br>Depth | Type of<br>Succession |
|------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| MAK        | 209            | 1891         | 4                         | 4                   | f-s                   |
| A          | 354            | c. 1899-1901 | 15+2*                     | 4                   | f-s, b-b              |
| AR         | 168            | c. 1906      | 5                         | 3                   | f-s, b-b              |
| D          | 19-20          | c. 1910      | 15                        | 5                   | f-s, b-b              |
| F          | 304            | c. 1907-9    | 7                         | 7                   | f-s                   |
| ZB1        | 37-8           | 1904-12      | 13                        | 13                  | f-s                   |
| ZB11       | 44-5           | 1904-12      | 11                        | 11                  | f-s                   |
| V          | 319            | c. 1922      | 12                        | 12                  | f-s                   |
| Niane 1959 | 43             | 1958         | 19                        | 15                  | f-s                   |
| N          | 2-3            | 1958         | 19                        | 13                  | f-s                   |
| CL         | 65-72          | 1963         | 20                        | 12                  | f-s, u-n              |
| TK         | 10-20          | 1967         | -                         | -                   | -                     |
| FDS        | 105, 107       | 1968         | 15                        | 10                  | f-s                   |
| KMJ, M     | 206, 226       | 1968         | 10                        | 6                   | f-s, b-b              |
| KMJ, D1    | 12, 18         | 1968         | 11                        | 8                   | f-s, b-b              |
| KMJ, D2    | 12, 24         | 1968         | 9                         | 6                   | f-s, b-b              |
| BK         | 147            | 1969         | 4                         | 4                   | f-s                   |
| DMD        | 254, 256       | 1970         | 8                         | 6                   | f-s                   |
| B          | 5, 32, 39      | 1970         | 15                        | 4                   | f-s, b-b              |
| WK1        | 43             | 1972         | 8                         | 8                   | -                     |
| WK11       | 81-3           | 1972         | 9                         | 6                   | -                     |
| WK111      | 375            | 1972         | 11                        | 6                   | -                     |
| WK1v       | 385            | 1972         | 12                        | 6                   | -                     |
| MS         | 36-7           | 1974         | 14                        | 9                   | f-s                   |
| KB         | 70             | 1983         | 12                        | 12                  | f-s                   |

**Key:**

\* the extra figures are indicated but not named

f-s = father-son succession

b-b = brother-brother succession

u-n = uncle-nephew succession

of succession between kings described in each version. Some accounts (MAK, AR, D, B, A, KB) imply that their lists are incomplete and that generations have been omitted, so their depth figures are not comparable with those of the other accounts. For comparative purposes, all name and depth figures include Sunjata Keita whether or not he is listed in the version of the genealogy in question, but non-Keita figures (e.g. wives) are excluded in size totals, even if they appear in the charts in the Appendix.

### **Historical approaches to the genealogy**

French and German historians of the nineteenth century gained almost all their knowledge concerning mediaeval Mali from Arabic sources, the chief among them being al-Bakrī (died 1094), al-Idrīsī (wrote 1154), al-ʿUmarī (died 1349), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (visited Mali 1353), Ibn Khaldūn (died 1406) and al-Maqrīzī (died 1442). Of these only al-Bakrī and Ibn Khaldūn (and perhaps al-Maqrīzī) present us with novel genealogical information concerning the history of Mali before or during the time of Sunjata. Al-Bakrī describes the conversion to Islam of a monarch of Malal henceforth known as "al-Muslimānī"; Ibn Khaldūn records Barmandāna as the first Muslim king of Mali, saying he made the pilgrimage, as did other Malian kings after him, and begins a version of the dynasty of the Mali emperors with Mārī Jāta, whom he says reigned for twenty-five years. Al-Maqrīzī, who studied with Ibn Khaldūn and may have copied from him, writes that 'The first of the kings of the Takrūr to make the Pilgrimage was Sarabandāna or Baramandāna' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 82-3, 333, 351). Pioneers in the field of the Malian kinglist were Heinrich Barth and René Basset. On the basis of dates given for later monarchs by Ibn Khaldūn, the German traveller and writer Heinrich Barth dated Mārī Jāta to 1235-60; he also suggested a tentative date of 1213 for Barmandāna's pilgrimage (Barth 1858 iv: 609-10). French historian René Basset linked al-Bakrī's "al-Muslimānī" to Ibn Khaldūn's Barmandāna, suggesting that the one king in question lived much earlier, in about the middle of the eleventh century; Basset also provides us with a reconstruction of Ibn Khaldūn's Malian

kinglist, including Mārī Jāta among the monarchs (Basset 1888: 135-51).

Only with Maurice Delafosse's work do we get the first comparison of Arabic and oral sources. Using information from the Nioro MS. he translated (i.e. D) or an earlier Bamana version of this, and employing, it seems, no other oral source, Delafosse constructed, in 1912, a dated kinglist for Manding from Sunjata, whom he dated five years in advance of Barth, from 1230-55, back to Hamama (c.1150-75), via Nare Famaghan (1218-30), Moussa Keita, or Allakoï, (c.1200-18) and Dyigui-Bilali (c.1175-1200), as part of a kinglist for Mali stretching to the end of the fourteenth century. Delafosse identified Ibn Khaldūn's Mārī Jāta with the Sunjata of Malinke oral tradition; in addition, he postulated a date of around 1050 for Barmandāna, the king recorded by Ibn Khaldūn, and asserted, in line with Basset, that he was to be identified with al-Bakrī's "al-Muslimānī", *mansa* of Malal (Delafosse 1972 ii: 173-85).

Despite the fact that Delafosse's dates were intended only as approximations, he has rightly been criticized by subsequent historians for his generally cavalier approach to pre-Sunjata Malian history. Aside from the dates for Sunjata's reign, which are derived from Ibn Khaldūn's list of emperors of Mali, and the length of their time in office,<sup>2</sup> all the dates are more or less educated guesses. As Levtzion commented on Delafosse's Mali kinglist:

The dates have been adopted by many other writers, although some of them are not based on historical evidence, or at least Delafosse gives no reference for the sources of his information. (Levtzion 1963: 343)

Charles Monteil rejects Basset and Delafosse's identification of Barmandāna and "al-Muslimānī", rightly pointing out that no direct evidence supports the assertion (Monteil 1929: 339). Instead, he suggests that Barmandāna was simply the first Muslim king of whom Ibn Khaldūn was aware, and dates him somewhere between "al-Muslimānī" (converted, he suggests, sometime between 1046 and 1067/8) and Sunjata Keita himself, returning, therefore, to Barth's scheme (Monteil 1929: 343). Monteil dismisses Bilali, Hamama and Allakoï as figures which 'ont été inventés par les

islamisés' (1929: 350). He begins his own much-shortened version of the kinglist with Sunjata's father, Nare Fa Maghan, whose reign he dates 1200-18, about twenty years earlier than Delafosse had done; the dates he gives for Sunjata are about the same as those given by Delafosse and the gap between father and son is filled by the hero's half-brother, Dangaran Touma (Dankaran Tuman), who Monteil claims ruled 1218-28 (1929: 318-9). Despite Monteil's more stringent approach to the evidence, the dates anterior to Sunjata must still be afforded the status of educated guesses.

David Conrad elaborated on Monteil's point about the early kings in Delafosse's list being "inventions of Muslims", demonstrating how some of the names were amalgams of popular folkloric figures. As had been noted before (for example by Levtzion 1980: 55), the Bilali of Delafosse's Dyigui-Bilali could be identified with the Arabic figure of Bilāl ibn Ribāḥ, associated with the Prophet Muḥammad. Connecting Bilali with Dyigui appears to have been an error of copying on Delafosse's part from his own MS. source in which the name Dyigui is clearly associated with Allakoï Moussa (D: 19). The only other appearance of this figure in our collection of variants of the genealogy is in KB, who lists as primal ancestor Jigi Bilali; it seems most likely the synthetic KB has employed Delafosse as a source. Even so, the figure of Allakoï Moussa Dyigui himself, Conrad suggests, is one made up from traditions concerning the fourteenth-century Mansa Mūsā of Mali, who is often called Makanta Jigi or Fajigi, and Daman N'Guille, the legendary Jawara lineage founder whose success is attributed to a sword he gained from a marabout called Allakoï Musa. In Delafosse's kinglist, which is based on D, Hamama is the name of the monarch immediately preceding Bilali; this claim is repeated in some other oral sources: F records Mamata as Bilali's father, claiming him to be the "father of all men", and we may reasonably identify this figure with Hamama, as Conrad does; ZBi lists Bilali's father as Mama, and again this may be a shortened form of Hamama/Mamata. In addition, several of the genealogies connect Bilali to Hamama through the character's own name: he is called Bilali Ben ("son of") Hamama in MAK, Bilali Bou (= *abu*, "father of") Hamama in ZBi, Bilali Bounama in N and Bilali Ibn ("son of") Ka Mama in CL. Now, according to Conrad,

Ḥamāma was in fact Bilāl's *mother* in Arabic tradition (Conrad 1983: 336-7; cf. Guillaume 1955: 235-6).

For all the pertinent and justified criticism of Delafosse's kinglist one fundamental shortcoming has not been sufficiently emphasized - namely that Delafosse was prepared to base the so-called historical list on one oral source, making no reference to any other version of the genealogy. This shortcoming in Delafosse's work was to an extent dictated by the circumstances under which he composed it: before 1912 only two versions of the epic had been published, H0, which contained no genealogical information, and A, which, as Delafosse would have been aware, was probably composed by the same author as D. Now, as more traditionalist's accounts have become available, any treatment of the early kings of Manding must contain a comparative component.

The Israeli scholar Nehemia Levtzion made two important contributions to the study of the Malian kinglist, first in a 1963 article "The thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Kings of Mali", and then in the excellent survey, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (1980, first published 1973). Nevertheless, Levtzion tends to side-step the difficulties involved in employing various divergent accounts of Sunjata's ancestry. In *Ancient Ghana and Mali* he refers to D, V, Montell 1929, and N concerning Sunjata's genealogy, although he could also have consulted MAK, AR, A, ZB, F, KMJ,D1 and perhaps DMD. He generally follows N, and notes only in a footnote that 'there is some disagreement about the names of rulers and their chronological order' (1980: 229 n.7). This is an understatement: while V and N do have many names in common and a similar depth (although the relationships between the figures is often different) they agree very little with D who, for instance, presents ten of the thirteen names in his list as brothers, in contrast to V who has each of his names in a generation of their own. Levtzion does not always refer to representative figures: he notes, for example, the tradition that Allakoī made four pilgrimages to Mecca (1980: 55): the doubtful authenticity of this character has already been discussed, and in any case, he appears in none of the other sources Levtzion employs. While Levtzion's narrative is always

accurate to its sources in the particular statements it makes concerning the early rulers of Manding, it tends to present a picture of greater harmony than the sources taken as a whole justify.

With some twenty-five different versions of Sunjata's genealogy from eighteen sources the prospect of examining comparatively the hero's ancestry and Manding kinglist forcefully presents itself. Two basic questions need to be answered: (1) are the versions of the Keita kinglist that we possess consistent to any degree? and (2) can the genealogy/kinglist be employed as a historical source?

The picture that emerges is a mixed one: on the one hand, there is a strong consistency in the names found in the genealogy while, on the other hand, the relationships between these figures shows a marked degree of fluidity.

From the evidence of the variants studied there appears to be a common pool among the names in the genealogy of some fifteen characters - excluding Sunjata's father and the hero himself - which recur through at least five separate versions of the genealogy; these are presented in Table VII on the next page. Identification of these names in each version mentioned is not always certain as there is often great variation in spelling between accounts of the genealogy. The figures are based on a total of twenty versions of the genealogy from nineteen separate sources. ZB's two different versions of the genealogy are counted separately while the three variations on KMJ's list, which all come from a single performance, and four versions of WK, which generally present the same names, are counted as one list each.

Some of the recurrent names can be correlated with what connections we know exist between the various traditions to which the variants belong: A and D are most probably from the same author and certainly from the same place (Nioro), and the versions of the genealogy reflect this, with both versions giving virtually the same list (except that A omits D's Bilali Hamama and D omits A's Mansa Ganda, Mare Tchakourou and Digui Mahiamba Soukho). Likewise, the versions of the genealogy in Niane 1959, N and CL are clearly related. Niane 1959 and N have been compared already; CL gives basically the same list as N excepting Lawalo but adding four

TABLE VII: Most common names in Keita genealogy according to twenty versions of the list from nineteen separate sources

| name of character                                      | number of versions in which it appears | list of versions in which it appears                                      |
|--|--|---|
| Bilali   | 16                                     | MAK, AR, D, ZBi, ZBii, F, Niane 1959, N, CL, KMJ, DMD, FDS, B, KB, MS, WK |
| Kanu Nyokon Simbon                                     | 14                                     | A, D, ZBii, Niane 1959, N, CL, MS, TK, KB, B, KMJ, DMD, FDS, WK           |
| Simbon Bamari Tagnogokelen/<br>Mare Taniakele/Simbomba | 12                                     | A, D, ZBii, N, CL, Niane 1959, B, KB, F, V, TK, MS                        |
| Mamadu Kanu/Kani                                       | 11                                     | V, ZBii, Niane 1959, N, CL, KMJ, DMD, FDS, KB, MS, WK                     |
| Kanu Simbon  | 10                                     | V, Niane 1959, CL, N, KB, KMJ, FDS, TK, MS, WK                            |
| Lawali Simbon/ Lawalo/<br>Toubi Lawali                 | 9                                      | Niane 1959, N, KMJ, DMD, FDS, ZBi, ZBii, MS, WK                           |
| Bele Bakon/ Beleba Kuma                                | 9                                      | V, ZBii, Niane 1959, CL, N, KMJ, KB, FDS, MS                              |
| Latel Kalabi   | 8                                      | ZBi, ZBii, F, V, Niane 1959, CL, N, KMJ                                   |
| Kabala Simbon  | 8                                      | A, D, ZBii, V, CL, N, B, KB   |
| Mansa Ganda/ Kandia                                    | 7                                      | A, D, ZBi, ZBii, A, TK, B   |
| Mansa Bello/ Beleton                                   | 6                                      | V, N, Niane 1959, CL, KMJ, MS   |
| Mansa Koro   | 5                                      | ZBi, ZBii, CL, TK, B  |
| Mansa Beremu/ Belemu                                   | 5                                      | V, KMJ, FDS, KB, MS   |
| Belembu Dana/ Beremu Dana                              | 5                                      | V, KMJ, FDS, KB, MS   |
| Kabali Doman   | 5                                      | F, CL, N, KMJ, Niane 1959   |
| Finadougou Koumakha/<br>Koukoumara                     | 5                                      | A, D, ZBi, ZBii, B  |

brothers two generations before Sunjata. The close relationship between N and CL has already been discussed in Chapter One, while Niane 1959 is another version of the list from either Djeliba Koro or Fadama, or a mixture of both. The versions of the genealogy in KMJ, FDS and MS share many common features. They vary in detail but retain the same basic structure, names and inter-relationships, i.e., Bilali, followed by the three Simbons and a list of four monarchs prior to Sunjata's father. It can also be suggested that there are links between the Kita group of variants (KMJ, FDS, MS) and DMD: DMD omits some names common to the Kita group's version of the genealogy and gives one of the Simbon's names differently, but otherwise it is very similar. In addition, links can be suggested between V and the group Niane 1959, N, and CL with the following names from V appearing in versions of the genealogy according to N, CL or Niane 1959: Latel Kalabi, Mamadou Kano, Kano Simbo (= Kani Simbon of CL), Mansa Belembon (= Bele Bakon of CL), Mansa Bello, Beliba Koôn (= Bele Bakon of CL).

As the largest recognizable group of traditional accounts in our sample of versions that contain the Keita genealogy which can be clearly linked with one author, one place of origin, or one griot historical school is four - MAK, A, AR and D from Nioro, followed by two groups of three, KMJ, FDS and MS, from Kita, and Niane 1959, N and CL from Djeliba Koro and Fadama - any name that appears in more than four versions of the genealogy - as do all the names listed above in the pool of fifteen - can be counted as traditional, i.e., not just the preserve of one settlement tradition or one griot and his particular pupils.

Having established to our satisfaction the names which can in all probability be counted as traditional in the genealogy of the Keita, we are now in a position to compare our evidence to other historical sources on the subject. Unfortunately, the Arabic written sources available to us for this period in Malian history are - as has been shown earlier - very poor, counting only one real name, Barmandāna, or Baramandāna, as he appears in al-Maqrīzī, and one nickname, "al-Muslimānī", the designation applied to new converts to Islam. Nevertheless, this single real name,

preserved as that of a monarch said to have reigned in Mali before Mārī Jāta by Ibn Khaldūn, is almost certainly also preserved in Malinke oral tradition. The name Beremu Dana or Belembu Dana can surely be identified with Barmandāna/Baramandāna; the Malinke version of the name appears in five versions of the genealogy: V, FDS, KMJ, MS, KB. Our identification of Barmandāna and Beremu Dana is not novel: Niane suggested it, based on his knowledge of Kele Monson's rendition of the epic (Niane 1974: 61n). The last of the four accounts to contain the name is a synthetic account, and it may be countered that the name has perhaps been fed back into oral tradition by Malinke traditionists and historians familiar with the claims of Ibn Khaldūn; but V comes from the Keyla griots of the early 1920s, and it seems far-fetched to interpret their record of "Belembou Dana" to feedback from written sources. The griots of KMJ and MS both have clear links to the Keyla school (see Chapter One), and it seems much more likely that their knowledge of Beremu Dana is traditional also. Ibn Khaldūn received his information on Mali in 1393/4; we can be fairly certain, therefore, that Malinke oral tradition has retained the name of Barmandāna/Beremu Dana for over five hundred years. The actual date at which this king is supposed to have reigned is obscure; nevertheless, it does not seem unlikely that his name may have been part of the Malinke oral corpus for another two hundred years before Ibn Khaldūn's time.

The case of Barmandāna/Beremu Dana is not quite unique; the other name to be retained for numerous centuries by Malinke oral tradition from this period is, of course, that of Sunjata, who can be identified with Ibn Khaldūn's Mārī Jāta. Both cases demonstrate fully the ability of oral tradition to preserve specific information for many centuries. This ability should not be thought to be limited to names only. As has been mentioned already, Ibn Khaldūn imparts two pieces of information concerning Barmandāna: that he was 'the first among them to embrace Islam', and that he made the pilgrimage, in which practice he was followed by his successors. Although neither of these details is specifically accredited to Beremu Dana in the Sunjata traditions, a pilgrim king among Sunjata's ancestors is present in four

versions of the epic (MAK, A, D and N), while eighteen versions of the epic imply or state that the early Manding monarchs were Muslims, through their linking of the Keita to Bilali or the East in general. What of the details Ibn Khaldūn relates concerning Sunjata? The Arabic historian tells us of Mārī Jāta that he 'overcame the Susu' and reigned for twenty-five years. While the latter assertion is nowhere supported by the oral corpus, the former detail, in that it corresponds to Sunjata's defeat of the Soso monarch, Sumanguru, is repeated in twenty-nine of our thirty-five separate versions of the epic (see Chapter Seven).

Returning to the list of traditional names we have isolated from the genealogy of Sunjata; given the concurrence of oral tradition and our Arabic source from the fourteenth century in the one case of a pre-Sunjata monarch of Mali, we may feel confident in treating the names as plausibly historical. Unfortunately, closer examination of the genealogy's structure reveals a marked level of dissimilarity between the versions of the family tree that we possess, while investigation of the names themselves reveals many to be emblematic designations rather than true names (see section below on the Simbons). Inter-relationships between these common names listed in Table VII generally prove not to be constant beyond the epic variant groupings identified above, and a certain amount of variation is not infrequently found within these groupings. Thus it can be noted that A and D present as brothers of Sunjata a number of figures counted as his ancestors in many accounts. For example, Koniogho Simba Keita of D, or the analogous Kananioko Cinebo of A, can be identified with Kanu Nyogon Simbon, the second of the Simbon brothers of KMJ, FDS, DMD, N and CL, who are in these accounts presented as the hero's ancestors. The Simbon's status as brothers is also rejected by ZBii, V and KB, who all present them in separate consecutive generations. Even between closely related versions of the genealogy the relationships between some characters varies: while KMJ has Masa Beremu and Masa Beremu Dana as brothers, as he does Masa Beloko and Beloba Kuman, FDS presents them in a father-son relationship. MS was recited by the son of the griot of FDS, yet MS makes the third of the Simbon brothers, Lawali Simbon, the direct

ancestor of Sunjata, not the second, Kanu Nyogon Simbon, as in FDS. Also, MS alters the ordering of later kings from that of his father's account, and omits a generation.

The lack of consistency concerning the relationships between characters in the genealogy is shown most clearly when one griot presents his version of the hero's ancestry more than once, as in the case of ZB and WK. Taking ZB first, the two versions of the genealogy that Khassonke griot Habibou Sissoko presents - the first of which comes before the story of Sunjata's life, the second towards its close - vary in several key respects: the name of the first recorded ancestor differs, as does the name of Sunjata's father, and although about half the names in ZBi are repeated in ZBii, the second list gives three of them as descendants ("sons") of Sunjata, not ancestors.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the differences between ZBi and ZBii may be due to the inadequate methods of recording employed at the time (which either slowed the reciter down, altering the dynamics of the process, or struggled to note down the performance at normal speed, admitting the possibility of errors in the transcription). No such qualification need be added to the evidence from WK, recorded on tapes in the 1970s. This account presents four different versions of the genealogy of Sunjata, which were recorded from the griot Wa Kamissoko in various sessions. As can be seen from the charts in the Appendix, Wa retains the same names, by and large, in each version but alters the relationships between the characters, presenting the Simbons in a father-son relationship in WKi, ii and iv, but as brothers in WKiii. Also, for example, Wa gives Toûbi Lawalé to be the son of Assé Bilali in WKiv, the son of Bouroumoun Djan Konate in ii, and the son of Bintou (from *bint* = "daughter of" in Arabic) Mafili in iii; as chronologically *after* the Simbons in WKii and iii, but *before* them in WKiv.

Some of the inconsistency regarding the relationships said to hold between the characters in various versions of the genealogy may reflect the list's dual purpose as a genealogy for the Keita and kinglist of Manding. If, as KMJ avers in his version of the three Simbons tale, the three Simbons each held (or at least attempted to hold) the office of *mansa* - the first two unsuccessfully - then a kinglist would

present them one after the other; such a list may then be misread as denoting a father-son relationship in the context of the list giving Sunjata's ancestry. This may explain why the Simbons are brothers in one variant of the epic, then given in separate generations elsewhere, but it does not explain why one griot would at different times give different versions of the genealogy. The griot may have heard two conflicting traditions, which he employs at different times or in different contexts; it may be that the practitioners themselves have become confused by the list's dual purpose to the point at which there is no agreement on the correct manner of presenting the relationships between the genealogy's figures, or as to whether the list is a genealogy or kinglist; perhaps the differences between versions of the list are not noticed by *jeli* or audience, preserved as they are in the mind rather than in graphic form. Whatever the situation, it is clear the relationships between figures in the epic's Keita genealogy are to some extent fluid, that this fluidity is not restricted simply to geographically or temporally distant variants, but can be between two closely related griots (e.g. Fa Digi Sisoko and Magan Sisoko) or between two different versions of the genealogy by the same *jeli* (e.g. Wa Kamissoko). This being so, the genealogy's usefulness as a historical source must be severely circumscribed.

More blatant alterations and differences of opinion between versions of the genealogy and other genealogical material, redolent of the shortcomings of oral transmission and recitation for the western historian, have been noted by others. Johnson records how four place or battle-site names recited as a praise-poem for Sunjata by Fa Digi Sisoko appear in another version of the epic transformed into four generations of ancestors for the Kuyate clan (Johnson 1986: 4). A similar misappropriation of information may account for why Tiemoko Kone speaks of an ancestor of Sunjata's (or two figures) called Massa Ganda or Kene Ganda (TK: 18, 20), while in JBS it is said that the Keita lineage's founders were three brothers, Massa, Kene and Ganda (JBS: 673). Tombs notes the similarity in name between Diankouma Doga, given in ZBi as next in line after Bilali, the first recorded ancestor of

Sunjata, and Sunjata's griot, called Dioukoma Doge in P, or his griot's father, called Guankouman Doua in N (Tombs 1978: 31).

Turning to the depth of the genealogy, a comparison of the versions does reveal some consistency, at least among the groupings of variants noted above, but provides no basis for an accurate composite version. MAK, A, AR, and D do not claim to present a full version of the kinglist or ancestry of the hero, so their depth of four generations can be excluded from the comparison, along with B, which copies D, and TK who likewise does not present a full, or at least coherent, list; BK must be excluded from comparison as its list bears no resemblance to those in other accounts. Among the remainder (counting KMJ's three versions as one), an average figure of some nine and a half generations in depth emerges, varying from a peak of fifteen generations in Niane 1959 to a mere six in KMJ, DMD and WKii, iii and iv. The distance between Bilali and Sunjata varies from only four generations in WKiv to fourteen in Niane 1959, averaging at about eight and a half (excluding those accounts which do not claim to give a complete king-list). Taking a generation to equal thirty years (Jones 1970), and Sunjata's reign to commence in 1230, this average gives a rough date for Bilali of 990, varying from as early as 810 (according to Niane 1959) to 1110 (WKiv). Therefore not even the longest genealogy actually reaches Bilali's supposed time in the seventh century. The Simbon figures, if given as brothers, vary from three to six generations back from Sunjata (e.g. DMD gives three, MS gives six). If not represented as brothers, one of the Simbons can be up to eight generations back from the hero (Kano Simbo in V), excluding the non-traditional KB, or just two generations back (Simboumba Marento Niakoukili in ZBii). If they are to be seen as state founders, it would place Manding's formation anywhere from 990 (i.e. eight generations back) to only 1180 (two generations). Clearly we are not here dealing with a consistent tradition with accepted, consensual timescales for its major figures; one must conclude that there is no agreed dating for Bilali, for the Simbons, or for others of Sunjata's putative ancestors, or that if such accepted dates do exist in tradition, they are not based upon or reflected in the Keita

genealogy/Manding kinglist itself.

In its capacity as a kinglist for Manding the genealogy also gives rise to suspicion from a historical perspective. As can be seen in Table VI, the type of succession noted is almost invariably an unbroken line of father-to-son successions. This is of course to be expected, considering the list's nature as a family tree, but in that it is also considered a kinglist, it is problematic. David Henige has noted the large number of kinglists worldwide which trace a perfect line of father-to-son successions, despite the fact that, according to his own studies, 'the possibilities of more than eight or nine such successions is extremely low' (Henige 1974: 76). The reasons he suggests for the improbability of repetitive father-to-son successions include likely interruptions in dynasties due to foreign conquest, alterations in the rules governing succession, which might cause uncertainty regarding the rightful heir, collateral usurpation, particularly if the king's son is still young, and indeed, the low probability of there always being a male heir available to succeed (Henige 1974: 76-7).

Moreover, the pattern of succession in imperial Mali itself, as far as we know it, does not suggest repeated father-to-son successions as the norm. Nawal Moccus Bell has written:

The text of Ibn Khaldūn does not warrant the widely held assumption that the normal transmission of power was from father to son and that brothers succeeded only when sons were too young to rule. (Bell 1972: 232)

Rather, she writes:

The pattern which emerges ... is fundamentally one of horizontal succession, of brothers succeeding brothers and of brothers or brothers' descendants overthrowing sons in the name of legitimacy. (ibid.)

On Henige's grounds alone the two lists in ZB, and those in V, N, Niane 1959, FDS and KB are all historically suspect, each of them recording eight or more continuous father-to-son successions between the start of the list and Sunjata's father, and insofar as they identify each name with the kingship of Manding. Six versions of the

kinglist/genealogy record other modes of succession - D, AR, A, B, CL and KMJ. KMJ has brother-to-brother succession, claiming that each of the Simbons ruled or attempted to become *mansa*, but D, A and the derivative B each records a sequence of some eight or more brother-to-brother successions of Manding kingship, ending with Sunjata himself. This tradition appears equally formulaic: the number of brothers involved (sometimes up to twelve), whose names frequently occur in other versions of the genealogy - not as brothers but as ancestors - makes the claim extremely implausible. CL's list includes two "non-formulaic" successions - Mansa Bele to Namandian (uncle-to-nephew), and Namandian to Magan Kon Fatta (also uncle-to-nephew). Namandian, it can be noted, does not appear in any other version of the genealogy studied. CL's case is also interesting in that the two uncle-to-nephew successions effectively neutralize each other, returning succession/descent to the original line in which fatherhood or sonhood is equated with kingship.

The conflict between the list's dual roles - the griots' desire to equate Sunjata's ancestors exactly with Manding's kings - means, as was suggested above, that it is almost certainly the case that the lists are not true to either of these aims. This could have happened in several ways, either through non-Keita rulers being suppressed and excluded from the recited list, or alternatively co-opted into the list, but recorded as Keitas; or from complex and unusual successions being converted into formulaic lines of brother-to-brother or father-to-son successions, or from kinship relations being changed in line with perceived successions, such as perhaps happened with the Simbons - who are seen as brothers in some accounts, but are in separate generations according to others. In the case of A, D and the non-traditional B who list up to twelve brothers of Sunjata but very few other ancestors in their versions of the genealogy, it may be that a list of monarchs of Manding each in separate generations has been converted into a list of brothers of Sunjata through the influence of a tradition that says that Sunjata invaded Manding nine times, which is present in A, D, MS, WK, BK and DK. In A, D and B (although not in the other versions that contain this story) all of the elder brothers of Sunjata are defeated and

killed by Sumanguru as they assume the kingship of Manding.

### **Non-historical approaches to the genealogy**

In view of the inconsistency as to the relationships claimed to hold between the figures in the various versions of the genealogy, in view of the large variation in the time-depth between versions of the genealogy, and in view of the apparently formulaic nature of the modes of succession said to exist between the genealogy's figures, it would be unwise to interpret the genealogy of the Keita as a straightforward historical source. However, other, non-historical approaches to genealogy have been advanced by scholars of African oral tradition that nevertheless reveal much about the society which retains such genealogies. In *Oral Tradition* Jan Vansina wrote of genealogy that

It is a type of tradition which is never primarily aimed at recording history. The historical data it contains are only used for the vindication of rights. (Vansina 1965: 153)

For Henige, genealogies

serve, not so much as tools for plumbing the past, but as weapons for preserving or subverting the present. More than any other form of credential, genealogies can provide instant legitimacy, self-esteem, and enhanced status. (Henige 1982: 97)

And Joseph Miller notes that

Recent work with oral traditions has shown that the apparent simplicity of the purported genealogies is deceptive. The individual figures forming the lines of descent in them turn out to be personifications of social groups. (Miller 1980: 19)

Emphasis has been placed by these scholars on non-historical aspects of genealogy, particularly in terms of genealogy as a legitimizing device or social organizing principle, and also upon genealogy as an independent, discreet entity, rather than as

the *de facto* result of the memorization of past rulers or ancestors.

Concentrating specifically on the genealogy's perceived role as legitimator, several aspects of this role can be highlighted. At the most basic level, a long list of rulers said to belong to the same dynasty provides, of itself, a kind of legitimation for the putative inheritors, based upon a general respect for that which remains unchanged and on what Henige terms 'the universal propensity to revere antiquity for its own sake' (Henige 1974: 39). Beyond this level, establishing a link via a common ancestor between a local ruling dynasty and an older or senior family, or to a significant ideological, religious or political figure or group, may legitimate that local dynasty by association. For example, the Holy Roman emperors tried to link their office in a unbroken line to Romulus Augustulus (Cuthbertson 1975: 202). In addition, the connection by means of a genealogical link to a founding figure in myth or legend in some cases explicitly legitimates the purported descendants by virtue of that founding figure's right to dwell in a certain location, often couched in terms of his "agreement" with the land or the non-human "owners" of the land as detailed in the stories associated with him.

Turning to the genealogy of Sunjata, Johnson writes that 'the episodes leading up to the birth of Son-Jara establish his heritage, stylistically accomplished through the recitation of genealogy', stating that the variations which exist between different versions of the genealogy do not, by and large, 'distract from the function of legitimizing the hero's place in destiny' (Johnson 1986: 5). For Johnson, this legitimizing function is fulfilled both through a sanctioning of the ruler's claim to authority by means of the citation of his ancestors who held power, and on another level, by acting 'to establish the culture hero's inheritance of occult power' (ibid: 4) which is, he says, deemed to be of great importance for the success of the Malinke hero's mission. This power he links to the Muslim concept of *baraka* - power or good fortune that comes from association with Muḥammad, in this case via Bilali.

In accord with these general principles, it can be said that Sunjata's genealogy provides him with a legitimate right to authority by according him an unbroken line

of Keita ancestors who held the office of *mansa*. In the light of this legitimizing role, the dual dimensions of the list - both as genealogical tree and as kinglist - as well as its concomitant features - the absence of foreign rulers and unusual modes of succession - become explicable and are, in fact, to be expected. In order for Sunjata Keita's right to rule to be in no doubt each generation of his Keita ancestry must contain a ruler and also, conversely, each of Manding's rulers must have been a Keita clan member. That Manding's kinglist and Sunjata's ascent list are identical in the epic corpus is therefore neither an accident nor merely a practical solution to the problems of oral transmission, but a logical result of the need for Sunjata's right to rule to be beyond question.

If one accepts that the genealogy's form as a whole has been created for the purposes of providing idealized history whose aim is the legitimation of the hero, then the specific content of the genealogy, it can be posited, may be determined by similar motives. In fact, the specific characters recorded in many versions of Sunjata's genealogy, and the deeds associated with them, can be shown to be determined - strongly in some cases - by explanative and idealized types of history, and often legitimate, if not the hero directly, then the Keita line of which he is a part, or rather, for the oral traditionists, the culmination. The remainder of this chapter deals in turn with the major figures of the genealogy, drawn from that pool of common names identified from all the versions of the list examined above, and the traditions associated with them.

### **Bilali and the genealogy's link to the Middle East**

Eighteen of the thirty-five analyzed variants of the Sunjata epic make some reference to a connection between the ancestors of Sunjata and "the east".<sup>4</sup> Overwhelmingly, this link is via the Prophet Muḥammad, Mecca, or Bilali; sometimes it is via Khaybar (the Jewish oasis settlement attacked and reduced by Muḥammad in 628 A.D.), the pilgrimages of early kings of Manding, or even Babel, Egypt or India.

The most popular link to the Middle East is via Bilali, or Jon Bilali (*jon* = "slave") as he is often called. Thirteen versions of the genealogy from twelve separate sources have Bilali as the first recorded ancestor of the Keita line;<sup>5</sup> in addition, F makes Bilali second in the genealogy to Mamata, "father of all people" (304), and ZB11 has Bilali third after Toubi Ouali and Mama. In MAK, AR, ZB, KMJ, FDS, MS, N, DMD, B, CL, and WK there is a link between Bilali and the Prophet Muḥammad or Mecca - often through stating that Bilali was the Prophet's slave or Companion - while MS, DMD, CL and WK in addition relate specific stories concerning the events of his life.

MS and CL state that Bilali was a slave who suffered at the hands of his non-believing master (MS: 34; CL: 65); MS, CL and DMD note that he was bought by Bubakari Sidike (i.e. caliph Abu Bakr al-Sidiqi) and taken by him to Muḥammad at Mecca (MS: 35; CL: 68; DMD: 254). MS claims he became a merchant between Mecca and Medina (MS: 35), while CL states that he was freed by the Prophet and became one of his Companions (CL: 70). WK notes that Assé Bilali (*asse* = "slave", WK3: 373) was a Companion of the Prophet and that he was one of the first people to join Muḥammad at Medina, although he mentions nothing of his slave origin (WK3: 373).

The specific link between Manding and Bilali or another event or character from the Middle East is often given in the form of a migration. The most common claims that it was Bilali's sons or grandsons who emigrated to Manding. DMD, KMJ and FDS say that it was the "three Simbons" who travelled from Mecca to Manding - according to DMD, at the specific request of the Prophet (DMD: 254; FDS: 105-6; KMJ,M: 206). In N it is Lawalo, said to be the eldest of Bilali's seven sons, who made the trip (N: 2), who can be equated with the third Simbon, Lawali; in CL and V it is Latel Kalabi who travels, who is Bilali's son in CL (CL: 70), and Binetouma Fili's son in V.<sup>6</sup> In D Allakoï Moussa is said to have come from Hidjaz (i.e. Hijaz, the province around Mecca) (D: 19), while in MAK it is Alpha Moussa who migrated from Hedjaz (MAK: 209).

One account makes a link to Khaybar. In V we read that Latel Kalabi left for Manding from "Kaybara" as a merchant after the Islamic conquest, and eventually settled at Dieriba, on the Niger (V: 319). V is the only account which suggests the

Keita's ancestors suffered because of the Muslim conquest. But the story in V may be compared with tales in BK, H and WK. BK says that Sogolon, Sunjata's mother, lost forty children at the battle of Khaybar before she had Sunjata (BK: 147); Humblot records in a note that a Konde ancestor (i.e. someone from the same clan as Sogolon) lost forty sons at the battle of "Bisimillahi" (from Arabic *Bismillāhi*, "in the name of God") fighting for the Prophet (H: 111n); while WK reports that Sama Loman lost a thousand sons at Khaybar but, at the Prophet's request, the parents were rejuvenated and produced a further twelve sons who populated the twelve towns of Do (i.e. the state with which Sogolon and the Konde are associated) (WK3: 375-81). These stories appear to attempt to associate Sunjata's maternal ancestry with Muḥammad and his time.

Further links to the Middle East are present in those versions which claim that early Manding *mansaw* made the pilgrimage to Mecca. MAK claims Alpha Moussa, grandfather of Sunjata, made the pilgrimage four times (MAK: 209); D states that Allakoŋ Moussa Dyigui (whom we have discussed already) visited Mecca four times (D: 19); A that Dyigui Moussa was a "habitual" visitor (A: 354); while N writes 'Lahilatoul Kalabi was the first black prince to make the Pilgrimage to Mecca' (N: 2), echoing, as we have said before, Ibn Khaldūn's claim about Barmandāna.

The story of a migration from Mecca to Manding by an early member of the Keita lineage can be taken as a symbolic motif rather than a claim to historical actuality. Migrations have of course long been popular among many peoples as explanations of origin, and are in fact necessary given certain religious or ideological premises (e.g. that all humans are descended from Noah). On the other hand, population movements must certainly have played a significant role in the development of human societies and cultures; it is in part because of its importance in our history that migration has become such a potent and widespread motif in our explanations of the past. As with all successful motifs of this type, the cliché of migration is both historically plausible and symbolically alluring. But in spite of its historical plausibility in general, detailed study of individual cases of migration has often led to serious

doubts about their historicity. David Henige cites examples from Europe, the Pacific, the Middle East and from Africa of purported migrations which are now believed to be, if not entirely specious, then radically reworked statements of origin (Henige 1982: 93-4; cf. Fage 1978: 61-5, Farias 1989: 152). As Joseph Miller remarks of the African context:

Recent work suggests that mass population movements in Africa generally have taken the form of slow and uncoordinated drifts of clan or lineage segments, villages, or individuals, none of them the sorts of unified migration that turn up recorded in oral traditions (Miller 1980: 32)

Migration has proved an equally alluring explanation of origin to western historians of Africa. Seligman's Hamitic hypothesis is the most obvious example, while closer to our own subject area, Delafosse suggested Ghana was founded by "Judaeo-Syrians" (Delafosse 1972 ii: 22f.)

Attempting to explain the popularity of the notion of migration as an account of origin, Miller notes that the significance of the motif lies in the two groups or places a migration unites, suggesting that these links can be either social, political or ideological (Miller 1980: 32-3). Henige notes how some migration stories link the traveller or travellers to a significant individual or group such as, for the Greeks and Romans, a mythological hero, for some Christian communities, a son of Noah, and for many Asian peoples, Alexander the Great (Henige 1982: 91-2).

Migration stories posit an external origin for all or part of a society. As Henige suggests, the migration of a ruling group in a society can be employed to distinguish the royal immigrants from the remainder of the population, who are given to be autochthonous (Henige 1982: 96). Migration stories of this kind, which involve not a whole society or group but one or a few representatives of an important lineage can be linked to the hunter-stranger motif which (as a lengthy discussion in Chapter Three seeks to demonstrate) gains much of its power through the mediation of the external-internal polarity and its concomitant terms, claiming that the ruling dynasty was formed by the marriage of a wandering hunter and an autochthonous

princess.

Briefly, it is suggested that the motif of migration gains meaning in general by positing a real connection by means of travel between two groups who are perceived to share common values or beliefs, and that it can work specifically in combination with the motif of external origin of the ruling stratum by stating that the ruling group originated from some significant external place, or from among a significant community, and that it gained its present situation by means of a migration.

Among the Islamic societies of North and West Africa, the claiming of a link to Muḥammad and his times is very common, often in the form of an early ancestor and migrant.<sup>7</sup> In specifically Malinke traditions other groups than the Keita make their origins go back to the Middle East. A Gambian griot claims that the ancestors of the *gwelowar* or *nyancho* warriors of Saloum came from Mecca 'where people go to pray' (Wright 1979: 149-50), while one of the most popular ancestors for Malinke griots themselves is Surakata, a figure from Arabic tradition (Surāqa ibn Mālik ibn Ju'shum) who was converted to Islam after attempting many times to kill the Prophet.<sup>8</sup>

If it can be granted that the Malinke tradition concerning Keita origin in the Middle East has, like so many other similar traditions of origin from that region, no historical substance,<sup>9</sup> but is a cliché with symbolic reference, then the task before us is to elucidate the meanings contained in the symbolic statement.

As long ago as 1924 Vidal commented that it was

la tendance invariable de tous les peuples noirs qui professent la religion musulmane à faire remonter leur origine au pays qui fut le berceau de cette religion (319).

Recently the formulation has become more specific. Johnson believes that genealogical links to the Prophet or one of his Companions are due to

the Moslem belief in *barakah*, "blessing/grace". This mysterious and wonderful force is necessary for the survival of a Moslem community, because it encompasses a certain amount of power. ... one major source of *barakah* is through inheritance. Ties to the Prophet's descendants and those of his Companions are of paramount importance. (Johnson 1978: 114)

This view is reinforced by a statement of bard Wa Kamissoko, who claims that 'la baraka, le prestige et le pouvior des Massalens [Keitas] leur vennient incontestablement d'Assé Bilali' (WK3: 385).

David Conrad has made a more detailed investigation of the Keita's link to Bilali, and the reasons behind such a claim.<sup>10</sup> He points out that, according to Arabic tradition, 'Bilāl ibn Ribāḥ was a freed black slave who became a Companion of Muḥammad and was appointed the first *mu'adhdhin* (caller to prayers)' (Conrad 1983: 336). His position as the first *muezzin* and also his ethnicity make him, Conrad suggests, doubly suitable as a Keita ancestor. Arabic traditions report Bilāl's torture at the hands of a non-believing master - traditions presumably reflected in the story of Bilali's rescue from an unbeliever in CL and MS - his resilience in the face of suffering, that he was freed by Abu Bakr, joined the Prophet and became caller to prayers 'because he had a penetrating voice' (Conrad 1985: 37). His purported presence at the battle of Khaybar adds to his positive qualities as a putative ancestor for a black lineage keen to establish Islamic credentials. Only his slave origin might appear incompatible, given the nature of Malinke society in which slavery and royalty are both inherited, but mutually exclusive, states. Conrad notes (1985: 38) his slave background appears not to have been glossed over. It should be said that he is often referred to as Jon ("slave") Bilali in the epic. We can follow Conrad in suggesting that, because he was a slave of an unbeliever, whose dominance he resisted, but was freed by a Muslim, such a seemingly ignominious background may have been thought to be neutralized (1985: 38).

The only reasonable way to view Bilali's place in the genealogy of Sunjata is therefore as an idealization of the past, giving a concreteness to the Keita's claimed Muslim piety - a piety attested to in the writings of al-Bakrī, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and Ibn Khaldūn - and affording Sunjata the *baraka* necessary to enhance his claim to authority.

## Mamadu Kanu

Bilali's son, according to DMD, MS, FDS, WK (iii and iv) and KB was Mamadu Kanu (or Mamadu Sinbo in KB), who is given as the father of the three Simbons in DMD, FDS and MS. This same figure appears in the genealogy of Sunjata given in V, N, Niane 1959 and CL, where he appears further down the genealogy but still immediately above the Simbon characters. In N, CL and KB Mamadu Kanu/Kani (the spelling varies) is linked to the art of hunting among the Malinke. In N we read that 'Mamadi Kani was a hunter king like the first kings of Mali', and it is then stated that he invented the *simbon*, which is the Malinke name for the hunters' whistle (Cashion 1982: 180), that he 'communicated with the jinn of the forest and bush' and was 'loved by Kondolon Ni Sané'; he is also said to have organized a large group of hunters and have made significant territorial gains for Manding (N: 3). CL credits Mamadi Kani with the same actions and adds that he introduced the *sérébu*, which CL describes as a 'garment of the hunter' (CL: 71). KB contains similar assertions to N on behalf of Mamadu Sinbo (KB: 70).

"Kondolon Ni Sané" - Kondolon and Sane, or Kontron and Sanin - are hunting deities for the Malinke, sometimes given as man and wife, otherwise as son and mother (sharing, we might note, the same kind of relational ambiguity as Sunjata Keita's ancestors), to whom the hunter traditionally attributes his success in the chase and to whom he directs his prayers. Hunting, although it has been of limited economic importance for Malinke communities for centuries, continues to hold a prominent place in the Malinke worldview and ethos, as is evidenced by their folktales, customs and beliefs (see Chapter Three). Mamadu Kanu represents - at least in N, CL and KB - this hunter aspect of early Keita ancestry. Yet in DMD, and WK, his position is very different; here he is placed with the Prophet in the Middle East, as his Muslim name might suggest. WK records how, at Medina, Muḥammad (here Mahamadou) asks Bilali what Bilali's newborn son will be called: '-On prénommera cet enfant Mahamadou-Kanou, "J'ai aimé Mahamadou"', replies Bilali (WK3: 375).

Such double reference, in which one figure appears to represent in an idealized manner two very different facets of the Keita/Malinke past, is encountered in a more complex form with the Simbon characters.

### The Simbons

The versions of the Keita genealogy in V, Niane 1959, CL, N, DMD, MS, FDS, WK and KB make the Simbons sons or direct descendants of Mamadu Kanu; Niane 1959, N, CL, DMD,

FDS, MS and WK (iii) also make them brothers. Versions of the genealogy in KMJ, DMD, MS and FDS claim there were three Simbon brothers; N, Niane 1959, CL and WKiii say there were four; but in fact, although spellings vary considerably, five names are distinguishable among all the names they list: Kanu Simbon,<sup>11</sup> Kanu Nyogon Simbon,<sup>12</sup> Lawali Simbon,<sup>13</sup> Kabala Simbon,<sup>14</sup> and Simbon Tagnogokelin.<sup>15</sup>

The presence of the Simbon figures stretches beyond the fifteen versions of the Keita genealogy in which they are found: they are also characters in the Malinke creation myth from Kangaba; they are central characters in a tale of land settlement found in a few versions of the epic - in which they are farmers and are seen as making the migration from Mecca to Manding bearing gifts from the Prophet - while their surname implies a link to hunting; as already noted, *simbon* can mean "hunter's whistle"; it can also mean "master hunter" (Cashion 1982: 180).

An assessment of the Simbons' complex and multi-faceted status can begin with a discussion of the tale in which they are the central characters. Only two versions of the epic studied - DMD and KMJ<sup>16</sup> - contain the "tale of the three Simbons", and these two accounts disagree on many points. Nevertheless, both state that there are three brothers (although their names vary, cf. their versions of the genealogy of Sunjata in the Appendix). DMD claims they were the sons of Mamadu Kaani, and grandsons of Bilali but KMJ avers that their father was Bilali himself. The story begins with the brothers in Mecca, where they are given three boxes by Muhammad and, in KMJ, told to 'aller loin d'ici, fonder un royaume' (KMJ,D1: 12). When they arrive in

Manding, where they settle, they become farmers, clearing the land and planting crops. In KMJ we read that for three years the harvest failed. In both accounts the brothers open their boxes, which yield gold, wood and earth. The apparent inequality of the gifts causes a quarrel among the brothers, and in KMJ a wise man named Kabaku is visited after a long journey, replete with unexpected and inexplicable phenomena, and called upon to settle the dispute. In both accounts the gifts are interpreted as follows: gold stands for the land's mineral wealth, wood for its vegetable wealth, and earth for the land itself - the basic element upon which all depends. In consequence, each brother, while he possesses a segment of the country's wealth, is seen as being mutually dependent upon the other two. DMD ends the tale at this point, with the Simbons intent upon a cooperative future; in KMJ a further series of droughts and harvest failures follows until the correct Simbon - in fact the youngest brother - is chosen as king by means of various sacrifices to the land and sky.

Questions about the tale's authenticity as a section of the Sunjata epic can reasonably be raised. Out of thirty-five separate versions of the epic that we have examined only two contain the story, and Niane's list of the major elements in the Sunjata corpus makes no mention of the tale, although the link of the Keita to Bilali is recorded (Niane 1974: 67). Two elements in the story are clearly cross-cultural; although this does not in itself mean that the tale is inauthentic it does make a non-Malinke, and therefore a non-Sunjata corpus, origin of the story more plausible. The three boxes, opened to reveal three differing gifts for the brothers is reminiscent of motif L 211, Modest choice: three caskets type, which has an Oriental origin and can be found in the Persian *Kalila wa Dimna*; and the fact of the younger brother being eventually chosen as Manding's first ruler is itself an example of a widespread cliché which we shall discuss in Chapter Four. More pertinently, a folktale rendered by Birago Diop in *Les Contes d'Amadou-Koumba* (Diop 1947: 162-71), entitled "L'Héritage", recounts a very similar story; this is how Dorothy Blair describes the philosophical tale, as she calls it:

Before he dies a wise and wealthy farmer bequeathes to each of his three sons a sack. One contains sand,

another string, and the third gold-dust. To find the meaning of their unequal legacies they undertake a long journey to consult a man whose wisdom is far-famed. In the course of this journey they see all manner of strange and miraculous happenings, all reversing the logic of everyday existence. The sage, when they eventually find him, turns out to be a child who interprets the symbolism of their inheritance and the lessons of the many strange experiences of their journey (Blair 1976: 46)

Although the borrowing may have been from Malinke tradition to Diop, we cannot rule out the possibility that certain elements in the tale of the three Simbons have been recently introduced into some versions of the Sunjata epic, perhaps via Diop's literary reworking of the oral tale.

Both Rex Moser (1974: 169-72) and Massa Makan Diabaté (n.d.: 641) seem aware that the tale's essence lies in its moral nature; both have interpreted the tale of the three Simbons as an allegory, employing KMJ's version alone, and emphasizing the consultation with Kabaku and the eventful journey to Kabaku's abode described in KMJ, during which the brothers encounter various paradoxes, which the wise man later explains. Moser sums up Kabaku's advice as 'to get wealth, yet to have charity; to gain knowledge and experience, yet to recognize personal limitations', and claims that this advice is 'fundamental to the happiness and prosperity of individuals and of societies' (1974: 172). As for the dispute over the division of the boxes' contents, Moser suggests that they stand for 'the quarrels over the distribution of the new nation's wealth' (1974: 169). For Diabaté, Kabaku symbolizes work and 'la règle du monde' and his presence marks the three brothers' initiation into the rigours of the real world via an 'évocation subtile de la pert de l'Eden' (n.d.: 641).

These interpretations gain some weight from an examination of the etymologies given for the Simbon's names. Most commonly (as with Mamadu Kanu) *kanu* is translated as "love" or "friendship" or "desire" (Diabaté 1975: 12; Johnson 1978: 112; Delafosse 1955: 339) and Kanu Simbon is called, in TK, 'Simbon "l'aimé"' (TK: 16) and in WK (according to Cissé) 'Héros de chasse animé de beaucoup d'amour' (WK3: 43). *Nyogon* is translated "together" by Johnson (1978: 112); *nyogo* or *nyoro* can also mean "friend"

or "companion" (Delafosse 1955: 585), hence Kanu Nyogon Simbon is 'Simbon qui-aime-son prochain' (TK: 16) otherwise, 'celui avec qui on est lie d'amitié' (Diabaté 1975: 12), or 'Compagnon du héros de l'amour' (Cissé 1988: 43).

The references to love or friendship - M.M. Diabaté asserts that the Malinke do not distinguish between these two concepts (1975: 12) - and to neighbourliness can be seen to express the Simbons' characters in the tale of the three Simbons: brothers who overcame quarrelsomeness and are remembered for their later friendship and cooperation. The same emphasis is present in etymologies which vary in specifics from those given above. Sory Camara says that *kanloyo* means "love" while *fudunoyo* means 'la personne avec laquelle on est marié' (Camara 1976: 319), while Konaré Ba states that Kanu Nyogon Simbon was 'ce héros de l'amitié' (KB: 70).

Diabaté's reference to the Simbon brothers as symbols of work and Moser's view of the story as being about early wealth creation and distribution are also supported by some etymologies. Diabaté gives *lawali* (as in Lawali Simbon) to be a 'synonyme de Ki: travail' (1975: 12),<sup>17</sup> while KB records Kabala Sinbo as 'ce Sinbo du travail' (KB: 70).<sup>18</sup> As noted above, Diabaté suggests that the wise old man of the tale symbolizes work,<sup>19</sup> and the connection to work reappears in the name of the settlement that the Simbons founded which was, according to KMJ, Kiri Koroni (the old village in the hills to the south west of Bamako which is thought to be the capital of the pre-imperial canton of Kri or Kiri, see Chapter Three) which derives, says Kele Monson, from *ki*, "work" (KMJ,D1: 15).

Although the relationship between the Simbon brothers, their feuding, and their ultimate cooperation over the distribution of work and power dominate the story as given in KMJ and DMD, a further aspect of the tale can be identified from those scrutinized by Diabaté and Moser. Nicholas Hopkins records a Malinke tale from Kita which he describes as a story of land settlement and community origin. Hopkins identifies the following major components in the Kita tale which closely parallel elements in the three Simbons tale: 'the arrival of the first people', 'the pacification of the earth spirits', and 'the naming of Kasuma Keita as chief' (Hopkins 1972: 4).

Concentrating on the second component, underlying such a type of tale is the belief - stated in its simplest terms - that the establishment of a community by immigrants necessitates some kind of accommodation of the earth spirits, "owners" of the land or indigenous population, by whose consent the migrants have the right to settle the land. A classic African example of such a tale is the Soninke myth of Bida in which the immigrant founders of Wagadu agree a pact with the snake Bida in return for assurances concerning the land's productivity; when the agreement is broken drought and famine ensue (Adam 1903-4: 87-93). It is perhaps in these terms that the crop failure noted by KMJ, and also the choice of the third Simbon as king as determined by sacrifices to the earth and sky, should be viewed.

Aside from the Sunjata epic, the Simbons are also present in the creation myth of the Malinke. Germaine Dieterlen recorded the myth from the griots of Keyla during the reroofing ceremony at Kangaba in 1954.<sup>20</sup> It contains the following section:

Where the ark came to rest near Kri there was a cave called *kaba koro*, or more commonly *ka*. Near this cave appeared a hollow in the earth which became the first pool, *ko koro* or *ko ba*. On the ark stood Faro, brought back to life, and also the eight original ancestors of men, created from Faro's placenta, that is to say four pairs of male and female twins called *mogo si segi*. The males of these twins were called: Kanisimbo ('from Ka's womb'), Kani yogo simbo ('from the same Ka's womb'), Simbouba Tangnagati ('the big remaining part that took command'), Nounou (from *nono*, milk). (Dieterlen 1957: 127)

As Johnson has written (1978: 112), the above-mentioned characters of this myth can be identified with the Simbons found in the genealogy of Sunjata and the three Simbons tale. "Kanisimbo" can be identified with Kani or Kanu Simbon, found in many of the versions of the genealogy of Sunjata and in KMJ's version of the three Simbon tale; "Kani yogo simbo" can be identified with Kanu Nyogon Simbon of KMJ, Kanioyo Sibou of DMD, and many versions of Sunjata's genealogy; "Simbouba Tangnagati" is not referred to in the three Simbons tale but is one of the names of the Simbons identified above; Nounou is found only in TK (TK: 14) where he is mentioned along with the Simbons.<sup>21</sup>

What is the relationship between the Simbons of the creation myth and those of the epic? Johnson suggests that the Simbon figures were first associated with the myth recorded by Dieterlen, which he sees as the Malinke's pre-Islamic creation/origin tale, but that with the arrival of Islamic views of creation this myth was replaced by a tale that explained merely the origin of the Malinke, not of humankind, and did so with reference to Muḥammad, i.e. the three Simbon tale, which links the Malinke community founders to the Prophet via his companion Bilali (Johnson 1978: 112-3).

Although it may appear logical to view Dieterlen's creation myth replaced by the three Simbons tale, there is no direct evidence to support this assumption, while several factors militate against it. The creation myth is presumably still recited every seventh year as part of the *Kama Bolon* or reroofing ceremony at Kangaba, by the same group of griots, the Jabate of Keyla. DMD, one of the recitations that includes the Simbon tale, is from Kangaba, which is just 7km north-east of Keyla and the settlement at which the *Kama Bolon* ceremony is conducted; it is hard to believe Mahan Djebahate could be unaware of the claims the Keyla griots were making for the same characters; in addition, Kele Monson himself, whose version contains the tale of the Simbons, was trained in part by a Keyla *jeli*. Moreover, the three Simbons are specifically linked to Kangaba by Niane, who says that three majestic fromagers near to the ceremonial museum-hut used in the septennial celebration 'symbolisent une querelle mémorable entre trois frères en compétition pour le pouvoir', which seems to be a reference to some version of the tale of the three Simbons (Niane 1974: 61). Given the apparent simultaneous existence of both traditions concerning the Simbons - the creation story and the tale we find in the epic - at Kangaba, it becomes difficult to argue for a replacement of one explanatory tale by the other.

The example of Surakata also serves to caution us against assuming even that the contents of the creation myth necessarily preceded those of the Simbon tale. Surakata is shown in the Malinke myth of creation coming down from heaven with the skull of Faro (Dieterlen 1957: 127). He is the ancestor of the griots, according to this myth and to other Malinke traditions (Zemp 1966: 615f), yet he is clearly a

figure from Arabic tradition, closely associated with Muḥammad, who has been fed back into the supposedly Islam-free creation myth.

Rather than attempting to determine the origin of the Simbon theme, which on present evidence is probably not possible, let us compare the two stories in which they appear, bearing in mind that both tales are current among Malinke *jeliw* and may therefore have some connection. Several obvious parallels can be drawn: Firstly, in both the creation story and the epic's tale the Simbons are, in some senses, the first ancestors. The creation myth makes this plain, viewing them as descending from the sky, and as the male component of the eight original twins. In the epic the Simbons (also brothers) do have ancestors - Mamadu Kanu and Bilali, usually - but they are certainly seen as the first generation to occupy the Malinke homeland, and one of the brothers goes by the name Lawali, which is most likely derived from the Arabic *al-awwal*, meaning "the first".

Secondly, in the creation myth, after the Simbons have descended in the ark, we read that Simboumba Tangnagati was given the 'first thirty words' and the first seeds to plant, and that he was 'responsible for the seeds, the rain, and speech', while Kanisimbo also sowed some of the first seeds (Dieterlen 1957: 127-8). For the creation myth, then, as for the tale of the three Simbons in the epic, the brothers are the first cultivators among the Malinke.

A third link between the two stories can be seen in the placing of the action in the tales. The three Simbons, as was noted above, were said by KMJ to establish themselves at Kiri Koroni, while Dieterlen notes that the ark of Faro 'came to rest near Kri' (Dieterlen 1957: 127).

A fourth potential parallel may be drawn: it can be noted that it is the third Simbon who, in the epic, becomes the ruler of Manding, according to KMJ. Dieterlen records the third Simbon's name of those in the creation myth as meaning 'the big remaining part of the womb that took command', which sounds like a reference to a similar event or status. The names of the Simbons in both tales are not the same - Simboumba Tangnagati in the creation myth, Lawali Simbon (KMJ) in the epic's tale -

nor is the third Simbon the youngest brother in the creation story, but the claims associated with them remain the same, as does their status as the third brother.

These comparisons suggest that the two stories under examination are not simply comparable because they contain characters with related names, but that the stories themselves are similar and perhaps deal, at one level, with the same issues. The three Simbons tale of the epic describes the arrival of the Simbons in Manding; they are immigrants from Mecca. In the creation story the Simbon brothers are also immigrants - this time from the sky. In both cases, therefore, the tales couch Malinke origin in the familiar cliché of external origin that was discussed above.

Given the structural similarities between the two tales, and in view of their apparent co-existence among Malinke griots, one could suggest that, rather than existing in a relationship of "original" and "derivative", "authentic" and "tainted by alien influence", or "pre-Islamic" and "Islamic", they might represent equally acceptable alternative versions of Malinke origins, with that acceptability varying, depending upon the context. Were both the Muslim traditions concerning the three Simbons and the non-Islamic ones concerning the same figures to co-exist, this situation would not be novel for Malinke oral tradition, at least not for the Keyla traditionists. Farias notes that

the Keyta *Kamablon* rituals at Kaaba [Kangaba] are centred upon the pre-Islamic Mandenka mythology of creation. Yet their public part includes the recitation, by the Kela *jeliŋ*, of the story of Prophet Muḥammad and the beginnings of Islam' (Farias forthcoming).

Closer examination of the creation myth reveals an interesting variation in the established structural pattern. The ark in which the brothers come down from heaven is said to come to rest near a cave called Kaba Koro, or simply Ka. Now it can be noted that the first three brothers are said to come from the womb of Ka, according to the etymology of their names. If Ka is in fact a cave then the Simbons can be seen as being born from a cave, i.e. coming from the earth. This seems to be the common cliché of origin which views the first ancestors as appearing from a hole in

the ground - compare motifs A 1232, Mankind ascends from under the earth, and A 1232.3, Mankind emerges from caves - and it is the opposite of the story of origin elsewhere on earth.

A possible explanation for this anomaly might go something like this. Myths of origin often attest that part or all of the community came from outside. The popularity of the migration motif, its cognate, has been noted above; whatever this motif specifically links the migrants to, what is constant and basic is the apparent desire to make origins external. This is certainly manifest in the three Simbons tale and all those versions of the epic that claim Sunjata to be descended from Bilali. Nevertheless, external origins create some problems, it might be argued. As was noted above, in connection with the Bida myth of the Soninke, the immigrants appear to be dependent upon the cooperation of the "owner" of the land, the snake Bida, for the success of the new community; or upon the earth spirits, as in the tale from Kita reported by Hopkins; or upon the autochthonous population, as in the Hunter-stranger motif (see Chapter Three). The agreement or cooperation of this internal element appears to be crucial for the community's prosperity, as the drought following the Bida's death attests to, or as the harvest failures in the Simbon tale seem to suggest. It is possible to see the creation myth's dual origin for the Simbon brothers as an attempt to reconcile both forms of idealized origin explanation, viewing the original ancestors as immigrants - coming from the sky - and as autochthonous - coming from the earth. As with the Muslim and non-Muslim aspects of the three Simbon characters, Malinke oral tradition here seems to be attempting to combine disparate, contrary elements into a single whole.

### **Recapitulation**

When Johnson in passing characterized the indeterminacy among versions of the genealogy of Sunjata as 'Variation in the specific ancestors named, with a few exceptions like Bilal and Magan Konate (Son-Jara's father), which occurs naturally in

the oral tradition from region to region and even from bard to bard in the same region...' (1986: 5) he was in fact being both too harsh yet not harsh enough. As has been shown in this chapter, much more than 'a few' names are constant both across the tradition and across time, rather, some fifteen names, excluding Sunjata's father, can be noted. On the other hand, not only is there variation 'even from bard to bard in the same region' but between different tellings of the genealogy by the same bard.

To sum up, conventional approaches to the genealogy of Sunjata were found to be largely unprofitable, both because of the lack of external complementary sources - only Beremu Dana could be identified with a pre-Sunjata Manding king noted by external sources - and because of the nature of the material itself, which, despite the regular reappearance of the fifteen names, demonstrated a marked inconsistency regarding relationships between figures, and a historically suspicious use of repetitive father-to-son or brother-to-brother successions, which was thought to stem from the list's claim to be both genealogy and inclusive kinglist.

This dual role of the list and the likely historical inaccuracies it produced - by insisting that all Manding *mansaw* were Keita and, at any given time, a Keita was the *mansa* - was related to the list's role as a legitimator for Sunjata's status; it was suggested that, for the hero's right to rule to be beyond question, the two categories of Keita and *mansa* must, in a sense, include each other.

The figure of Bilali was also seen as affording Sunjata's line *baraka*, through contact to one of the Prophet's companions, as well as demonstrating the Keita line's Muslim piety.

The figures of Mamadu Kanu and the Simbon brothers, it was shown, existed at once within the Muslim world of their putative ancestor, Bilali, and within the homeland of the Malinke: Mamadu Kanu was both "loved of Sanin and Kontron" and "the one who loves Muhammad", the Simbons were both the first ancestors of humanity, and sent out by the Prophet. At least in the case of the Simbon brothers some categories were found to apply in both pictures of the brothers, and it would be misleading to highlight one aspect of their character at the expense of the other. Either as

Islamic figures or as non-Islamic figures they are the first ancestors, and first cultivators among the Malinke, and in both cases they come from outside the society. The stories in which they appear can be viewed, on one level, as transformations, therefore, on a common structural pattern.

Something of the same kind of syncretism may even be seen in the most obviously Islamic of motifs - the claim of eastern origins by the Keita. Among the Malinke, the east is commonly associated with the rising sun which is, by extension, a symbol of 'l'éclat, de l'ardeur et de la puissance divine' (Cissé 1988: 379, n.19)<sup>22</sup>. The Senegambian Malinke refer to the land of their origin - the Manding heartland - as *Tilibo*, which means simply "the east" (Wright 1979: 43, n.22); the Malinke-related Kuranko claim that they come, according to Jackson

"from Mande, from up"; "up" (*telibo*, literally "sun comes from") signifies the east, by contrast with "down" (*teliyige*, literally "sun go down") which signifies the west and south (1977: 1)

Even without the obvious Muslim associations, then, "the east" presents itself as the natural "place of origins" or "starting point" for all people - given the earth's movement in respect of the sun - and particularly for the western Malinke and Malinke-related peoples, whose own migrations, or putative migrations, are deemed to have led them from an eastern heartland on the upper Niger. To some extent, therefore, the Islamic and non-Islamic symbols can be interpreted consistently with a common underlying pattern.

## CHAPTER TWO: NOTES

1. MAK, A, AR, D, ZB, F, V, N, CL, TK, KMJ, DMD, FDS, MS, BK, B, WK, KB. Page references will be found in the Appendix.
2. See Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 333-7.
3. Bataman Dembougarî (= Batan Makhan Bougarî in ZBi - this character is more often identified as a *brother* of Sunjata), Mansa Kourou, Torokou Kanda (= Mansa Kanda in ZBi).
4. MAK A, AR, D, MB, ZB, F, V, H, DMD, FDS, KMJ, MS, BK, N, CL, B, WK.
5. MAK, AR, D, ZBi, N, CL, FDS, KMJ, B, WKiii, WKiv, MS, KB.
6. Binetouma Fili is the first recorded Keita ancestor in V; the name does not appear in any other version of the genealogy studied.
7. Norris 1972: 26.
8. See Guillaume 1955: 225-6. For the Malinke connection see Conrad 1985: 39-40 and Zemp: 1966: 615ff.
9. Yet Jean Vuillet suggested that the link of the Keita to a trader from Khaybar was factual, noting that it was in a: 'Situation particulièrement favorable à la réussite d'un homme d'une intelligence et d'un sens des affaires remarquables comme l'ancêtre des Keïta l'aurait été selon la tradition. Toutes les grandes routes commerciales de l'époque s'ouvraient devant lui, si l'on s'en rapporte aux traditionnalistes de Kyéla, il prit celle du Soudan par la Haute-Egypte' (Vuillet 1950: 283).
10. Conrad 1981: 159-71; 1983: 336; 1985: 36-9. Cf. also Guillaume 1955: 143-4, 235-5, 515-7.
11. Cf. genealogy in V, Niane 1959, N, CL, KB, KMJ, FDS, TK, MS and WK (i-iv).
12. Cf. genealogy in A (Kanannioko Cinebo), D (Kononiogho Simba Keita), ZBii (Kanioro Simbo), Niane 1959, N, CL, MS, TK, KB, B (Kononioko Simba), FDS and WK (i-iv).
13. Cf. genealogy in Niane 1959, N (Lawalo), KMJ, DMD (Awalu Sibo), FDS, MS and WK (i-iv). Cp. Tubi Lawali (KMJ,M: 221), Toumbila Oulidjou (ZBi), Toubila Ouali (ZBii) and Toubi Lawale (WKii, ii, iv). Tubi probably derives from Tubba<sup>c</sup>, the title of pre-Islamic Yemeni kings, for Lawali see note 18, below.
14. Cf. genealogy in A, D, ZB (ii), V, CL, N, B, and KB. Cp. Latel Kalabi. Kabala may perhaps derive from Kabara or Khaybar, the site of Muḥammad's famous battle.
15. Cf. genealogy in CL (Simbon Bamari Tagnogokelen), N, Niane 1959 and F (Simbonbatanganjati). Cp. Mare Taniakele (A), Mare Taniakele Keita (D), Mare Taniakele (B), Masa Simbonba Magan Tangnagati (KB), Simboumba Marento Niakounkili (ZBii), Simboumba Naikate (V), Kabara Simbon Maramo Tanya (TK) and Simbomba (Niane 1959).

16. DMD: 254-6; KMJ,M: 206-26.
17. Although Cissé gives the name to mean 'Héros de chasse des temps anciens' (Cissé & Kamissoko 1988: 43).
18. Although *lawali/lawale* may derive from *al-awwal*, which in Arabic means "the first"; equally, in Malinke it could derive from *la* "my" or "your" + *wale* "thanks", linking it again to the theme of friendship (Delafosse 1955: 449, 807).
19. Kabaku may possibly be linked to Kabala Simbon, the fourth, who does not appear in the variants of the Simbon tale.
20. This ceremony, at which the sacred hut, or *Kama Bolon*, is rebuilt and during which the griots of Keyla (the Jabate and Kuyate) recite the Sunjata epic and other Malinke oral works, occurs every seven years. See Dieterlen 1955, 1957, Meillassoux 1968 and Farias forthcoming.
21. Nounou may possibly be identified with the second Simbon who appears as Kononiogho Simba (D) and Kanignogo (Niane 1959); note that the second Simbon does not appear after this excerpt from the myth, although Nounou does.
22. *Tiliboo* or *Tilebo* can be compared to *Tiligi* which means "the west" (ibid.: 142 n.10); cf. also de Zeltner 1913: 36, where Musa Molo's country is called *Tilidjigui*, and Mungo Park, who says the Gambian Malinke call the east *teelee bo*, meaning "sunrise" (n.d.: 315).

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE BUFFALO-WOMAN TALE

While in Chapter Two the hero's paternal heritage was considered - the Keita clan and their putative ancestral members - in this chapter Sunjata's maternal heritage forms the subject. The Buffalo-woman of Do is most commonly described as the aunt of Sogolon, Sunjata's mother; the tale links the epic's hero both to the Buffalo-woman's clan, the Konde, and to the Traore clan of her hunters, and through these two clans, to the cantons of Do and Kri. I suggest that by linking Sunjata and the Keita clan to these two clans and pre-imperial states, Mali itself, and its apparent founder Sunjata, are perceived as the culmination of the leading clans and cantons among the Malinke.

What I have called the Buffalo-woman tale is an optional preface to the hero's life in the Sunjata epic, and is found in sixteen of the thirty-five separate versions of the epic analyzed in this thesis.<sup>1</sup> The fact that it is optional should not be taken to mean that the tale is marginal - it is actually one of the most vigorous portions of the Sunjata corpus, appearing in detailed form in two of the earliest accounts studied (ZA and F) while still being a key section of the epic in contemporary renditions: we can note that seven of the twelve variants of the epic produced since 1970 contain an account of the tale. One can categorize the sixteen published variants of the Buffalo-woman tale as follows: ZA, F, H and P are précis made by colonial officials, travellers or academics, N, KB, BD and CL are prose versions by Africans, while FDS, MS, DMD, TK, WK3 and JBS are linear renditions. OS's version is one of a group of three short tales on related subjects presented in prose. KMJ,D1, the 1970 French prose version of Kele Monson's performance, is the only one of the three publications based on this recitation to contain the Buffalo-woman tale; it is a loose translation of the original recitation, and we can assume that M. M. Diabaté added the account of the Buffalo-woman tale either from another performance by Kele

Monson, or from his own knowledge of the Sunjata corpus.

The Buffalo-woman tale describes events which led up to the birth of the epic's hero, recounting how his parents came to be married and Sunjata conceived. It tells of a ravaging buffalo that destroys crops and kills men, resisting all attempts of hunters to defeat it. Details of the story vary from account to account (cf. synoptic charts Two to Four), but the following composite of the tale can be produced. Set either in the kingdom of Do, or in Sangaran, or sometimes both,<sup>2</sup> the story goes that, upon the death of the king, his daughter, a member of the Konde, Konte or Kone clan, was offended by the behaviour of her brothers who confiscated her inheritance<sup>3</sup> or who excluded her from a ritual feast.<sup>4</sup> She vowed to avenge herself and went to live in a solitary hut on the edge, or sometimes in, the bush. From here, in the form of a buffalo,<sup>5</sup> the woman made raids upon the village, destroying its crops and attacking its menfolk.<sup>6</sup> The hunters of Do/Sangaran were unable to overcome the beast, many of them being killed in the attempt, and the desperate king - the buffalo-woman's brother or nephew,<sup>7</sup> although he did not know the animal's identity - made the community's situation known further afield. Two brothers, hunters, and members of the Traore or Tarawere clan, hearing that the king would offer the hunter who successfully killed the beast a significant gift in reward - a bride, wealth, or half of the kingdom<sup>8</sup> - determined to try their luck.<sup>9</sup>

Before leaving Manding - their country of origin - for Do or Sangaran, the brothers consulted soothsayers or marabouts as to the way in which to approach the task, and were told that on reaching their destination they were to befriend an old woman who lived alone by the side of the road.<sup>10</sup> The two hunters duly met this woman - she was the buffalo-woman herself, in her human form - and offered to perform domestic tasks for her, such as collecting wood, gathering food or cooking. These offers she bluntly refused, or else refused to acknowledge, but after much persuasion she allowed the brothers to help her.<sup>11</sup> Following on from this meeting the hunters helped the old woman, sometimes lodging with her, and always being kind and generous towards her, despite her irascibility. Meanwhile they were having no success

attempting to hunt the ferocious buffalo and were on the point of giving up their quest when the old woman - impressed by the hunters' kindness towards her - admitted her dual identity and gave them the information necessary to kill herself in her animal form.<sup>12</sup> She made one proviso, that upon her death they should choose from among the young women of Do/Sangaran offered to them one particular girl, disfigured by warts, boils, or a hunchback, called Sogolon. She was the niece of the old woman and daughter of the king.<sup>13</sup> Armed with the old woman's instructions, that night, or the next day, the two hunters encountered the buffalo and were able to kill it, after a long and dangerous chase, and employing magical means (usually using a spindle rather than a conventional arrow).<sup>14</sup> In some accounts the buffalo is endowed with extremities made of gold and/or silver, most often a gold horn and a silver horn (but also sometimes ears, hooves and tail).<sup>15</sup> At the celebrations in the village next day the brothers chose the ugly Sogolon as their bride, often to the crowd's bemusement<sup>16</sup>, and took her with them back to Manding. On the way, the elder brother tried to consummate the marriage, according to some accounts, but was fiercely repulsed by Sogolon, who became animal-like.<sup>17</sup> At Manding they therefore offered the woman to the king, Nare Famaghan Konate, who had been informed through a prophecy that he must marry an ugly but powerful stranger if he were to have a successful heir.<sup>18</sup> At first, according to some variants of the story, he had as little success as the hunters in coupling with his new wife, as she became animal-like again, and he succeeded only by raping her.<sup>19</sup> Sogolon conceived a child - Sunjata<sup>20</sup> - and after the night of his conception she became a model wife and later mother, patiently enduring rejection from her husband and humiliation from her co-wife, until, in exile with her son, she died.

### **Interpretation of the tale**

The remainder of this chapter is concerned with the task of interpreting the Buffalo-woman tale, particularly in the light of its connections with the epic's hero, Sunjata.

John Johnson has successfully illuminated much of the story's psychological-sociological import, its moral message; he suggests the tale is about balance versus chaos, which can also be translated as cooperation versus rivalry or as *badenya* versus *fadenya* (see Introduction) (Johnson 1979: 208). Noting that the old woman's metamorphosis and destruction of crops and people is a direct result of her exclusion from the sacrifice ceremony of the king, he states that

This monster of the occult world ravages the land and upsets the balance of life in a manner which would prove the end of the clan. Such sorcery requires hunter-heroes to counteract the forces and reestablish the order... These hunters correct the imbalance by reestablishing the responsibility of youth to respect and love their elders. Generosity succeeds where weapons fail, for it was not weapons but a relationship which was violated in the first place. (Johnson 1979: 207)

Concerning the tale's purpose, Johnson elsewhere remarks that, while Sunjata's lineage links via his father's Keita ancestry to Bilali bring the hero *baraka*, 'his mother's line brings the *nyama* of local religion'.<sup>21</sup>

Johnson's analysis conforms to our own understanding of the two early sections of the epic - those dealing with the Keita genealogy and the Buffalo-woman tale - in its perception of these portions of the narrative as detailing the means by which the hero's inheritance is established, an inheritance that provides Sunjata both with an incontestable right to rule and the necessary power to achieve that end. Nevertheless, we should add that Johnson's division between *baraka* from his father and *nyama* from his mother is not a strict division that we can endorse. As we saw in Chapter Two, some of Sunjata's paternal ancestors, such as Mamadu Kanu or the Simbons, were recalled both as Muslims and as non-Muslims. Taking Johnson's point about the central role of hunters within its action, our first step is the identification of various stock themes relating to hunters, and we shall attempt to examine how these various themes have been combined and refashioned to produce the tale in question. It is also suggested that the tale has been employed to transmit, via these stock themes and reworked versions of them, idealized historical material

relating to the origin of dynasty and state, and the origin of some social institutions.

### **Hunter folklore and practice**

The Buffalo-woman tale is to some extent a story about the aims and achievements of hunters. One approach to interpreting the tale is therefore to examine it in relation to hunting among the Malinke. There is a specific type of folklore among the Malinke traditionally associated with hunter societies - see for example Bird's translation of the epic "Kambili" as recited by hunters' bard Seydou Camara (Bird 1974) - and there are certain attitudes towards society which have been claimed to be the views of hunters (Cissé 1964; Cashion 1982: 265ff., 309ff.). Charles Bird has seen this folklore as the root of the Sunjata epic itself (Bird 1972: 291-2), while Youssouf Cissé believes hunter folklore to have retained traditional conceptions by resisting Muslim learning (Cissé 1964: 218). This folklore, the concepts it embodies, and the practices of hunters might therefore be expected to illuminate our interpretation of the Buffalo-woman tale.

Studies in traditional hunting practices among the Malinke refer to an institution which shows marked similarities to the position in which we first find the hunters of the Buffalo-woman tale. One source tells of a journey of exploration undertaken by the initiate hunter, often with a companion, to communities far from his own, with the aim of acquainting himself with the wider world, practising his trade, and learning from those hunters he meets. The itinerant hunter would lodge with a related family in the village he comes to or, we are informed, he might stay with an old woman or "grandmother" of the village (Cissé 1964: 184-5).

A second source, which calls the institution the *Dali-masigi*, describes it as a "hunter's adventure", translating literally as "temporary camp". According to this source, it is not restricted to initiate hunters or to members of hunters' societies at all, although its main aim is hunting, and the seeking of fame, wealth and

knowledge. The adventurer travels in like manner to the initiate hunter, and earns his keep at a village through selling game he catches, protecting livestock from wild animals, and sharing his valuable herbal knowledge with the community (Cashion 1982: 240-3). It is difficult to imagine that a Malinke audience could comprehend the Buffalo-woman tale, with its journey by the Traore brothers, sojourn with the old woman, and hunting of the buffalo, except in the light of these practices.

Furthermore, the hunters' relationship with the old woman and Sogolon reflect traditional Malinke hunter stereotypes of women. These find expression in what has been called - by Cissé (1964: 176) - the hunters' "constitution": the myth of Kondolon and Sane, or Sanin and Kontron, as Cissé has it. As mentioned briefly already in Chapter Two, authorities differ as to the relationship between these two characters. Some sources say that the couple were both wife and husband, sister and brother (e.g. Sidibé n.d.: 50), others that they were mother and son (Cissé 1964: 177-8). According to Cissé, Kontron was born parthenogenically, and as an adult he remained very close to his mother, to the exclusion of relationships with other women. His followers, those that he initiated into the secrets of the chase, were the ancestors of today's hunters. Deep respect for and devotion to the mother is a feature of ideal behaviour among Malinke hunters: the mother (or maternal grandmother, if she is still alive) receives the best part of a hunter's game, according to the traditional division of the kill; and it is from the maternal side that the hunter believes he receives his strength (Cashion 1982: 243-7, 105, 246n, 344). In contrast, wives are viewed very differently. It is true that the hunter husband is supposed to have no secrets from his wife (Cashion 1982: 315), but in fact women as sexual beings are perceived with a certain amount of suspicion and apprehension. In what is a local variant of a widespread theme (Burkert 1979: 118), the Malinke hunter is warned against too much interest in sex, as this will distract him from his pursuit of glory, and sexual intercourse before the hunt is believed to impede the chances of successful hunting in the bush (Cashion 1982: 345-6; Bird 1974: 104-5).

These differential views of women are manifest in Malinke hunters' tales, providing

us with a clue to the interpretation of the half-animal half-woman of the tale under examination. Some of these hunters' tales record metamorphoses of human beings into animals - for example Cekura and Kumba in the epic of Kambili (Bird 1974: 95; cp. also the Gow hunter tales in Dupuis-Yakouba 1911: 21-88) - while others tell of animals who transformed into humans. One story in particular, variants of which have been recorded in many places, and which tells of an animal - buffalo or elephant - who became a woman in order to deceive a hunter, is worth examining in some detail.<sup>22</sup>

The story goes that a hunter was so successful in his hunting that he killed nearly all of the animals in the bush. Apprehensive about their future, the remaining animals determine a plan to discover the hunter's secret powers - those that enable him to kill so much with impunity. A female antelope, elephant or buffalo (depending on the variant) volunteers to carry out the mission, and transforms herself into a young woman. In this shape she approaches the village and becomes the hunter's lover or wife. In such a position she is able to ask the hunter to reveal the secret of his success to her. In one variant (Sidibé n.d.) we are informed that her victim has told her all but one of the objects into which he can transform himself when, in the nick of time, his mother interrupts him. Nevertheless, the young buffalo-woman departs and, armed with her knowledge, the next day the animals prepare a trap for the hunter. They are able to locate him even when his shape changes but, because of the mother's foresight, he escapes as his last transformation. In another variant, the buffalo-woman discovers that his secret is a pair of "hunting glasses" which enable him to see in the dark; she steals these, and the hunter is only saved by the help of, in this telling, his wife but usually, Jackson informs us, his mother, who manages to get them back from the animals (Jackson 1982: 230).

The seduction episode which forms the core of the tale, and which is represented cross-culturally by the Judith theme, is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, where we learn that Sumanguru's own downfall is attributed to a similar seduction; its popularity might lead to its being seen as the leitmotif of male anxiety concerning

women among the Malinke, revealing dramatically an apparently deep-rooted fear of sexual intimacy, and detailing the dangers of such intimacy for the male. As Michael Jackson, the anthropologist who recorded one of the variants of this hunters' tale from among the Malinke-related Kuranko of highland Guinea, says, 'the greatest supernatural danger for hunters is believed to be an unfaithful wife or an adulterous liason'. He also notes that 'the hunter-hero, who in many ways embodies the ideal attributes of Kuranko manhood, is shown to be vulnerable to sexual love.' And concerning the mother who saves him: 'The mother, symbolizing maternal love, helps him regain his power, and thus the whole narrative takes the form of an allegory in which the male order is maintained and perpetuated only through the constancy and perspicacity of the mother.' Concerning the buffalo-woman of the tale, he writes that 'the buffalo ... is, according to Kuranko hunters, the most formidable, clever, and dangerous of all animals.' Finally, Jackson notes how the tale correlates the hunter's excessive killing of animals to his failure to prevent his own seduction (i.e. his excessive love), while contrasting this sexual excess and its sad consequences to maternal love and its rewards (Jackson 1982: 230-2).

So we can say in identifying the motifs employed to build up the buffalo-woman tale in the Sunjata epic that, on one level, various elements of idealized hunter practice, their folklore and "worldview" are embedded in the text. Specifically, that the journey the hunters make, and the stance they adopt of protecting the village from outside threats, corresponds to established paradigms of hunter narratives. Likewise, the attitude of respect and generosity that the tale's hunters display towards the old woman, and by which means they eventually win her confidence and respect, reflects the accepted ethos of hunters; the buffalo is to be seen as a particularly dangerous foe; while the lack of success they experience with Sogolon and her peculiar characteristics conforms to the commonplace distrust of women as sexual beings found in hunter folklore in general. Finally, that a half-human half-animal figure, often construed to be a threat to hunters and/or society, is found with some frequency in their folklore, and, in this one hunter tale that we have

examined at least, is able to dupe the hunter-hero, revealing his vulnerability and need for support.

Further meanings accrue to the notion of human-animal transformation in the Malinke context. As can be seen from Sidibé's variant of the hunters' tale analyzed above, some hunters are believed to possess powers of metamorphosis into various objects or creatures. A belief in transformation of this type, to evade pursuit, is found in Malinke and Bamana narratives in general,<sup>23</sup> including some variants of the epic of Sunjata, in which Sumanguru is said to possess powers of transformation (BS: 77; WK1: 395). This is a local variant of the widespread theme encapsulated in motif D 671 transformation flight.

What of the transformatory power of the Buffalo-woman and her niece, Sogolon? It might be linked to the Malinke notion of the *tana* of a clan. That which is *tana* to a person is incompatible with him or her and is tabooed. Each clan has a *tana* which is usually an animal (but can be a natural object such as a plant, or a human confection, or even, occasionally, another clan) that the members of the clan must not harm in any way. The interdictions are explained by saying that a special relationship exists between the clan and the particular species, which is often couched in a story that details how a person of the clan became indebted to an animal of the species. So, for example, members of the Fulani Sidibe clan will not harm the *jibirile* bird, for it is said that one of these birds once saved a Sidibe clan member from death by directing him to water during a drought (Camara 1976: 26-7). A belief is held that certain members of the clan can transform themselves into their *tana*, particularly upon death, but also - if they possess the requisite magical resources - at other times (Camara 1976: 27).

But there is no evidence that buffaloes were *tana* to the Konde clan, either in the form of an explanatory story or a reference in the Buffalo-woman tale. Other explanations must be sought to account for the relation of the old woman to the buffalo. Pierre Smith notes how the Malinke hold that two distinct species of animal may be related to a clan, one of which represents the *nyama* (life-force) and

engendering power of the clan, and the other which represents the deceased ancestors and is taboo. Transformation into the latter is of course said to occur upon death, but the form of the other animal, that representing *nyama*, can (it is claimed by some) be assumed during life. Smith notes how some traditions say that Sunjata Keita became a hippopotamus upon death, and that this is the Keita *tana* (see Chapter Eight), but that a Keita can assume the form of a lion while still living, particularly if angered or aroused in some way (Smith 1981: 482; cf. also Meyer 1987: 74). FDS (153), we can note, claims Sunjata turned himself into a lion before killing nine buffaloes for the sorceresses who were initially opposed to him (Chapter Four), and again (179) upon receiving an insult from the king of Jolof (Chapter Eight). A belief in this *nyama*-based transformatory ability may more adequately account for the old woman's metamorphosis into a buffalo upon the confiscation of her inheritance, and perhaps the similar transformation of Sogolon when threatened by the unwanted attentions of the hunters and Nare Famaghan.

This interpretation of the old woman's transformatory powers is supported by statements by Henri Labouret, who writes concerning the animals and human beings considered by the Malinke especially endowed with the life-force *nyama*; among them are the buffalo and the koba (the type of antelope the old woman is said to have changed into in F) and, interestingly, the disinherited and the old (Labouret 1934: 123). The buffalo-woman of the tale, it is becoming clear, represents to the Malinke a particularly formidable and fearful adversary, combining in herself the *nyama* of the buffalo, the old and the disinherited. Further to what Labouret asserts about the *nyama* of the old, we can note that in some African societies, old women - that is to say post-menopausal women - are viewed as freed from the usual societal controls restricting female behaviour and therefore can be seen as powerful individuals and formidable opponents. As T.O. Beidelman writes of the east African Kaguru, 'old women take on a liminal, ambiguous status for Kaguru, figuring as sometimes benign, sometimes malevolent, but usually powerful figures' (1980: 149). The theory that the animal transformation of the old woman represents, for the Malinke, the notion of

*nyama* would also concur with Johnson's statement that Sunjata gained *nyama* from his mother. In this case, a display of *nyama*-induced metamorphosis on the part of Sogolon and her aunt, the Buffalo-woman, whatever other reasons might account for it, would act as a demonstration of the hero's powerful heritage of *nyama*. *Nyama* is important in Sunjata's heritage because the Malinke believe that a hero is successful through his possession of a greater abundance of *nyama* than any of his challengers. While *nyama* can certainly be gained in an individual's own life - through hunting and killing animals, for example - an initial inherited quota of *nyama* will clearly be advantageous (Johnson 1978: 114, 184-9; Bird & Kendall 1980: 13-7).

### **The Hunter-stranger motif**

In addition to the hunter-related folklore themes identified above, it can be suggested that a widespread story pattern, also concerning hunters, underlies the Buffalo-woman tale.

If the tale is viewed from the perspective of the two hunters it can be told in the following terms: Two hunters enter a kingdom in response to a call for help; they destroy a wild beast which was threatening the populace and in return are allowed to marry the king's daughter. From this angle, the Buffalo-woman tale clearly shares many common features with those stories known as the Hero myth and Dragon-slaying myth of Indo-European and Middle Eastern traditions. Lord Raglan and Jan de Vries, in their comparative surveys of the motifs involved in the Hero myth as a whole, both record that the typical hero of the pattern fights and defeats a dragon or monster before marrying the heir to the throne; another common feature is that the hero comes from outside the society in which he performs his deeds - that he is a stranger.<sup>24</sup>

Variations on this pattern are also found in Africa, where the resultant tale is often employed to account for the origin of a ruling clan. For example, the story in the *Tarikh al-Sudan* accounting for the early dynasty of Songhai which, it claims,

originated from two destitute brothers from Yemen, one of whom killed the sacred fish of the inhabitants of Kukiya and was then proclaimed ruler (al-Sa'di 1964: 4-8). In other cases of the African incidence of this motif the stranger is identified as a hunter. The Nyoro story of Rukidi tells of an uncouth and wild hunter who comes from outside to marry and establish the chiefdom; reference is made to an earlier killing by the same hunter of a strange creature, half-monkey and half-lion (Wrigley 1973: 219-35). The Shambaa story of Mbegha follows similar lines: Mbegha was an itinerant boar hunter who, through his profession, gained a position in his adoptive community and who became king upon killing a dangerous lion (Feierman 1974: 43-4). Igala legends of origin also centre around a hunter-stranger who marries into the group, having first shared his game with it, and whose descendants became rulers (Boston 1964: 116-26). Finally, the Bashu tale of Muhiyi, part of the Bashu chiefdom origin tale, records how a wandering hunter gave meat to the members of a sedentary community and then married into the group (Packard 1980: 160).

Comparing the stories, at one end of the spectrum a stranger, who is a hunter, in return for his services as a provider of meat and protection, gains a wife, while at the other end a stranger rids society of a grave threat and is rewarded by marriage into the ruling family. In both cases the basis of the motif is one of an exchange between indigene and stranger resulting in a synthesis. The Buffalo-woman tale operates in the same manner, with the hunters exchanging their skill and bravery - in their destruction of the buffalo - for marriage to the daughter of the king. And as in the examples cited above, it is the progeny of this marriage who becomes the ruler of the state.

What is the basis of the powerful attraction that this pattern appears to exert? The connection between hunting and kingship is a familiar cross-cultural motif, with the art of hunting being both practically and symbolically associated with rulership; we can note that for the classical Romans, according to Yvon Thébert, 'Skill in hunting had long been one of the ways in which the *imperator* manifested his *virtus*', and that 'To overcome an animal's strength and savagery by means of stamina,

intelligence, and skill became one of the signs of power' (Thébert 1987: 404). But why is it that the ruling line is said in the cases we documented above to be formed by the joining of a hunting stranger and an indigenous woman? Some commentators have seen in the motif a reference to an earlier historical reality: under a system of matrilineal descent and intermarriage between matrilocal ruling houses, prospective male monarchs would have by definition been foreigners.<sup>25</sup> The possibility of this situation cannot be denied, but it is not necessary to posit a historical stage of this type in every community in which the motif appears. Explanations for the widespread use of the hunter-stranger motif should concentrate rather on the pattern's immanent categories; these, I suggest, hold the key to why the motif, historical or not, retains its prominent position in so much folklore and myth.

Note the contrast between the descriptions of the stranger and those of his indigenous bride. While the woman is described as the daughter of the king, the outsider is in the Songhai story a destitute and vulgar prince, in the Nyoro tale a wild and uncouth hunter, an outcast hunter of boars to the Shambaa, and simply a hunter in the Igala, Bashu and Malinke tales. Except for the Songhai prince - whose status is itself ambiguous - therefore, all the other strangers are hunters and lack hereditary status. J.S. Boston has noted how hunting in Igala society is reckoned as a status-achieved profession, in which all men, regardless of rank, can excel according to their skill and courage (Boston 1964: 123). The position is analogous in Malinke society. As Gerald Cashion has remarked:

Whereas in Malinke society in general, ethnicity, age, noble birth, freeman status, occupational specialization, descendancy from former slaves, or circumcision are all hereditary determinants of status or political power, none of these distinctions apply within the hunter's society. (Cashion 1982: 102).

A first contrast of achieved/prescribed can therefore be set up between the hunter-stranger as status-achieved, and the indigenous woman whose status is hereditary.

Hunting is also a profession that exists, by definition, on the edge of society, as the hunter moves from village to bush. In common with many African societies, for

the Malinke, the village (*dugu*) and its compounds (*luw*) are considered the safest places for people, and, the farther one progresses from the compound, the greater the level of danger thought to be encountered; the bush or wilderness (*wula*) is considered the most dangerous environment of all, and is approached only with caution; those who make it their work-environment, the hunters, are therefore viewed with much respect (Johnson 1978: 95-6). In this context, the opposition of village/bush can come to imply social/non-social (Jackson 1982: 16). To succeed in his task, the hunter must comprehend and to an extent partake in the *milieu* of his quarry - the bush, nature - as well as in the life of the village. Add to this general conception the particular description of the stranger-king Rukidi of the Nyoro story, who was "wild and uncouth", and of Mbegha, who was an outcast from his original community, and the Songhai princes, who were destitute and dressed in animal skins, and this prompts a second contrast between hunter-stranger and indigenous woman of bush/village, nature/culture. We see that the stranger's externality does not merely signify his foreignness from that particular society, but rather it implies that he is foreign to society and culture in the abstract.

Turning to the interaction between hunter and society, the two most extreme variants we postulated for the motif suggest either that the hunter saved society from a monstrous threat which therefore entitled him to marriage, or that his supplying of the community with meat similarly entitled him to marriage within it. In those cases where an animal or monster is killed what the stranger achieves is a neutralization of a threat external to society, that is, a threat from nature (or supernature, in the Songhai case). In the other examples, the situation is structurally similar, for the hunter gives of the natural world insofar as he shares his meat. The hunter-stranger is able to fulfil this task of mediation because of his closeness to the natural. In the same way, the gift from society to the stranger provides the hunter with two things he cannot gain in his semi-natural state: marriage, and a position of hierarchical dominance. It may thus be said that the interaction brought about by the hunter-stranger motif partakes of a two-fold

socializing or reframing of society. The hunter is socialized, his achievement subsumed within the structure of society, through his encounter with the community and his marriage, while society itself is redefined by the hunter's removal of the external, natural threat which surrounded it. A new society, involving elements of the natural and of the hierarchical is created in the synthesis.

One might say that the hunter is the classic Lévi-Straussian mediator between opposites, for in overcoming the natural threat, yet partaking at the same time in a partially natural constitution, he subsumes something of that natural threat within himself and thereby facilitates the integration of the natural element into the new society.

Marshall Sahlins has suggested that the significance of the hunter-stranger (or stranger-king) motif is that it separates state and society, conceiving of an original configuration in which authority existed apart from the social group, and that power was added to society through a fearful but necessary interaction with the stranger, who contained state power within himself. To quote: 'Power and nature are alike as what is beyond and apart from the norms of culture', and, 'Kingship makes its appearance from outside the society' (Sahlins 1987: 76, 73). The opposition state/society carries within it some of the connotations of the male/female opposition; he writes

The immigrant sovereign is a ferocious male: virile young warrior and penetrator from outside. ... The indigenous people are, *at the initial moment*, "the side of the woman". They are associated with the powers of earth and underworld ... (Sahlins 1987: 90)

The hunter-stranger motif, then, pictures the reformation of society with an internalized authority by means of a semi-natural stranger who, by destroying the external threat (which was in fact authority or power, exercised beyond the control of society), internalizes that power (through himself as mediator) in his marriage into the cultural hierarchy, the land possessors, represented as female.

A second series of themes beyond those specifically associated with Malinke hunter

folklore have now been identified in the Buffalo-woman tale. The Traore brothers, it is suggested, correspond to the mediating stranger who comes from outside the community, while their destruction of the buffalo corresponds to the combat myth element found in many versions of the hunter-stranger story. This series of themes carries with it, it has been proposed, its own significant sociogenic meaning relating to the origin of the state, the formation of which is attributed to the double inheritance of the foreign hunter's skill and sublimation of the natural, and the autochthonous woman's legitimate right and power over the land.

#### **Alterations to the motif**

On four significant points at the end of the Buffalo-woman tale the story departs from the pattern of the hunter-stranger motif identified above. To begin with, it should be noticed that neither of the two hunters actually became Sunjata's father, this role being reserved instead for Nare Famaghan; rather, they were warded off by Sogolon's animal aspect. Secondly, Nare Famaghan himself, the actual father of Sunjata, is no "natural stranger" as the motif suggests, but a static, hereditary figure. And thirdly, Sogolon, the supposed representative in the tale of the autochthonous woman, the symbol of culture, embodying the concept of hereditary authority, is in fact a wild half-woman half-animal in the mould of her aunt, the buffalo-woman. Finally, according to some accounts, Sogolon does not accept the king's advances any more than she did those of the hunters, putting up strong, though eventually futile, opposition to her spouse, by recourse to her animal transformation.

These four points of alteration are, I suggest, purposeful and, rather than invalidating our thesis, point to further levels of meaning in the tale, specifically to its political and social dimensions.

## The political dimension of the tale

Taking the first variation from the hunter-stranger motif described above, it can be noted that the Traore hunters, who win Sogolon as a bride because of their defeat of the buffalo, do not in fact marry her or at least, if they do, don't consummate the marriage. Much ambiguity pertains to the relations between Sogolon and the hunters, and this is perhaps recognized by some versions of the Sunjata epic which, later in the story, attribute the hero's failure to pass the *sigi* contest - a ritualized trial of strength undertaken to prove legitimacy as a *horon* (noble) - to his mother's links with the Traore brothers before Sunjata's birth, with the faint implication that the hero may have been illegitimate (e.g. JBS: 707). But this alteration in the hunter-stranger theme has, I believe, great significance for the specific purpose of the Buffalo-woman tale as an explanation for the political makeup of the Mali empire.

Over two-thirds of the examined variants place the story at Do.<sup>26</sup> Do was not of course a fictional setting but was an ancient canton or chiefdom of the Malinke. It can be identified with the 'great kingdom' of 'Daw' that al-Bakri placed beyond Ghana in the eleventh century (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 82). And of course Manding, given in the tale as the home of the hunter and of Nare Famaghan, Sogolon's eventual husband, is equally historical, and is probably to be identified with al-Bakri's Malal, which he refers to in conjunction with Daw. In some Malinke oral traditions, apart from the epic itself, Do is spoken of together with Kri (or Kiri). As D.T. Niane reports:

There is a verbal refrain: Do ni Kiri / Dodugu tan  
nifla ... which means "Do and Kiri, country of twelve  
towns ..." (Niane 1984: 129)

Charles Monteil stated that the origin of Mali was to be found in the two cantons of Do and Kri. He believed that Kri was the more ancient of the two, and was later superseded by Do (Monteil 1929: 344-47). Emile Leynaud has more recently affirmed the primacy of Do and Kri in Malinke traditional history (1972: 6). Kri is not

directly mentioned in the Buffalo-woman tale, but it is implied through the figures of the Traore brothers, the hunters of the story. The Traore, Tarawere or Tarawele clan, some oral traditions claim, was the leading clan of ancient Kri (Niane 1984: 127; Monteil 1929: 344; Leynaud 1972: 6). The names of the hunters themselves in six versions of the Buffalo-woman tale connect the Traore brothers to kingship, relaying as part of their names *mansa*, *masa* or *massa*, i.e. "king" (see note nine of this chapter). Some traditions link the clan of Konde (Konte or Kone) to ancient Do (Niane 1984: 127; Leynaud 1972: 6), while over half of the versions of the tale are in agreement in seeing the clan to which Sogolon, the old woman/buffalo-woman and the king of Do belonged as the Konde (Konte or Kone).<sup>27</sup> In the same way, the leading clan of Manding, which might be identified with al-Bakri's eleventh-century canton of Malal, is given in oral traditions as being (before the Keita) the Konate (Monteil 1929: 345; Leynaud 1972: 6n). Some versions of the tale link Nare Famaghan to the Konate<sup>28</sup> and the Buffalo-woman tale nearly always links the hero and his father to Manding.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, Traore, Konde and Konate, three of the leading clans among the pre-imperial Malinke, are referred to in the Buffalo-woman tale, along with three major pre-imperial chiefdoms or states - Kri (Kiri), Do (Daw), and Manding (Malal). The Buffalo-woman tale, in that it describes the process by which Sunjata, the first emperor of the united Malinke state, came to be born, can therefore be read as an origin tale for the empire. By reference to the early states of the Malinke people, and their roles in accomplishing the first resolution of the story - that is to say, Sunjata's birth - the tale implies that each of the states was an important contributor to Mali's formation; and by recording the clans of the participants in the drama, the tale similarly emphasizes each clan's significance in that genesis.

In some senses each clan can also be seen to share in the formation of the royal clan of the Keita. The origin of this name is not easy to determine. While Sunjata's ancestors are generally called Keita, there is almost no reference in the versions of the Keita genealogy we have examined to the name Keita before Sunjata or his

father's generation (the two exceptions being ZBi, which has Bilali Bou Hamama Keita as the hero's first recorded ancestor, and MAK, which Alpha Moussa Keita as Sunjata's grandfather, see Appendix). ZA calls Sunjata's father a Keita (ZA: 1), but other versions state him to be a Konate (see n.28). The relationship between Keita and Konate is also difficult to determine. Niane's version suggests Konate is the junior name for Keita (N: 78); Dieterlen also reports that Keita clan members under the age of twenty-two do not officially carry the name (1955: 40 n.2), and certainly Sunjata is often called Konate as a youth (e.g. F1: 461; MS: 80; FDS: 122). Some sources say that the name Keita derives from *ke* (= inheritance) and *ta* (= to take).<sup>30</sup> Two of these sources (Johnson 1986; YFG) link this "taking of inheritance" to Sunjata's own usurpation of his elder brother's claim to the Manding throne (see Chapter Four), while WK2 links it to his taking of the possessions of the petty chiefs of the Malinke lands. Leynaud reports the tradition that the *jamu* (clan name) of Keita originated in Sunjata's time and not before: 'Selon certains informateurs, c'est seulement après la mort de Soundyata que ses descendants prirent le *dyamu* de Kéita' (1972: 9). Insofar as the name Keita is deemed to originate in the hero's time, then, the three clans Traore, Konde and Konate might claim, via the Buffalo-woman tale, to have each played a part in the imperial clan's genesis.

So, in addition to being an origin tale in the abstract, speculating on the nature of power and authority, the Buffalo-woman tale gives a specific political origin for Mali. The empire is seen as a unified expression of Malinke states; the Keita as the unity of leading Malinke clans. I suggest that it is on this level of the narrative, in which specific political realities are encountered - albeit in an idealized form - that the cause is to be sought for some of the divergence from the hunter-stranger motif - essentially, that which "prevented" the marriage of Sogolon to the hunters, and determined that her husband - the father of Sunjata - should instead be Nare Famaghan. The reasons have to do with the system of succession practised in Mali, and the motif's incompatibility with this.

As was noted above, the aetiological pattern of the hunter-stranger motif is

explicable in terms of a descent of kingship through the sister or daughter, in which husbands are sought externally. Now Mali's system of succession is not certain in all cases, but was clearly not exclusively matrilineal. In such circumstances the motif's implications become problematic, for it assumes the right to rule to be passed through the woman, who is seen to embody prescribed status, while the husband is the outsider. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of some successions in imperial Mali through the female side, for some evidence of matrilineality does exist. Since Levtzion's discovery of the error in de Slane's translation of Ibn Khaldūn referring to Abu Bakr as a 'descendant of Sunjata's sister' rather than the correct 'son of Sunjata's brother' (Levtzion 1963: 346) most scholars have assumed Mali's succession to have been wholly patrilineal. Nawal Moccus Bell, however, has pointed to a case of matrilineal descent involving Abu Bakr I's right to rule, and has supported this case with other points which lead her to believe that imperial Mali may have had a "flexible" system of succession, if not a bilateral one (Bell 1972: 227-34).

Such a system which, depending on various factors, might trace eligibility to rule through either the male or female lines could account for the actual situation presented in the Buffalo-woman tale. Here we find that *both* Sogolon and Nare Famaghan are of royal descent, and both in a way represent prescribed status, culture and society. Were Sunjata the offspring of the Traore, presented by the epic as itinerant hunters with no actual kingly position, Sunjata's right to rule would find itself supported only by his mother's connections to the royal house of Do. I suggest it is by ensuring that both his parents have links to undoubtedly royal families that the traditionists can make certain that none can doubt Sunjata's right to rule, whether it was traced through the female or the male side.

Of course it can be countered immediately that the Traore are traditionally associated with the rulership of Kri and so have an equally strong claim to a part in Sunjata's parentage. In the tale, though, they are presented simply as hunters, and although sometimes named *mansa*, are effectively without a state. But the epic might

be said to accept something of this royal link, and this might account for the ambiguity noted above surrounding the relationship between Sogolon and the Traore brothers. One might suggest that the tale seeks to link the brothers in Sunjata's birth, although stopping short of according them a direct fathering role, but implicating them and their connections with the ancient rulership of Kri in the process of Sunjata's creation. If a parallel could be given it might be the way in which Saint Luke's gospel recites Joseph's genealogy, affirming his descent from King David, and then proceeds to claim that Joseph played no part in the creation of Jesus, but that the Messiah was conceived by the Holy Spirit; Joseph's link to the royal house of Israel seems to retain its significance in Jesus' own ancestry, despite the text's own statements; a trace of the former genealogical connection remains in spite of the actual denial of its validity. One might say that for the hero, two parents, two heritages, are not always enough.

The Traore brothers' heritage may be considered of particular benefit to Sunjata in several ways: in addition to their being seen as the ruling clan of Kri, as was noted above, they are, according to Leynaud, archetypally associated with hunting, being known as "devins-chasseurs"; and hunting, as we have seen from our examination of the hunter-stranger motif, is strongly linked to kingship. They are also considered to have been the original *dugukolo-tigi* or masters of the land in the Upper Niger Valley (1972: 17-8). It may be suggested that such a powerful heritage - both, in our terms, of achieved and prescribed status - must find a place in the story of Sunjata's genesis.

### **The social dimension of the tale**

Several variants of the Buffalo-woman tale mention the beginning of the relation of *senankuya* between Traore and Konde in connection with the hunters, linking it to these hunters' choice of Sogolon.<sup>31</sup> Other authorities affirm that the clans of Traore and Konde are *senankun*<sup>32</sup>, which is to say that certain special modes of

behaviour operate between them, certain actions are prescribed, while some relationships are prohibited. Y.T. Cissé writes:

on trouve les clans Tarawélé et Koné unis comme les doigts de la main; ils sont alliés par les femmes, alliés par le sang et alliés militaires. De nos jours encore, ils sont, du Burkina-Faso au Sénégal, et du Mali à la Côte d'Ivoire, des *senenkoun* (1988: 71 n. 48)

The institution of *senankuya* (the joking relationship) forms bonds between Malinke clans in different regions and between the Malinke and their neighbours such as the Fulani and Bamana. Related clans must perform certain services (for example at marriage and funeral ceremonies), they may disregard the normal forms of politeness; they may not intermarry (Labouret 1934: 100f.; Camara 1976: 32-47; Leynaud 1972: 3-4). Tales accounting for the origin of particular *senankun* relationships in terms of a personal story are often found. For example, one story from the Fulani of Senegal tells of a man of the Diakhabi clan who prepared a meal for a prospective son-in-law from the Kaba clan, and who asked the guest to choose between the rice and his daughter; the Kaba man chose the food and his clan henceforth was forbidden to intermarry with the Diakhabi (Smith 1981: 474).

Examined in these terms, the non-marriage of the Traore hunters to Sogolon Konde can be viewed as an explanatory tale of origin for the *senankun* relationship between the two clans. So ridiculous and insulting is the choice of an ugly hunchback from among all the eligible daughters of the Konde that future Traore forfeit their right to marriage with the Konde clan. Several of the variants of the tale do indeed make this point. N hints at it, noting that the hunters left Do 'pursued by the mockery of the Kondés' (N: 9), while F (who has Sogolon as a Diarra) comments that 'Thus, for the first time, the Diarra and the Traore reviled each other and since then have done the like until our days' (F1: 457). The hunter's failure to consummate the marriage acts, in this context, as a justification or verification for the *senankun* relation between Traore and Konde. That the Buffalo-woman tale should be the context of the Traore/Konde *senankuya* aetiology is also fitting. The *Dali masigi* or "hunter's

adventure", which was connected earlier to the Buffalo-woman tale, often uses the network of *senankun*-related clans as the basis of the hospitality received by the itinerant hunters.

On the other side, the marriage of Sogolon Konde to Nare Famaghan Konate, father of Sunjata Keita, is emblematic of a further aspect of marriage convention among the Malinke. Some versions of the epic record that, after his victory over Sumanguru and establishment of Mali, the emperor Sunjata decreed that all Keita of Manding should take their wives from the Konde of Do (to quote Niane's account): 'in memory of the fruitful marriage between Nare Maghan and Sogolon' (N: 78). Massa Makan Diabaté writes that the Malinke consider the Konde as the parents-in-law of the Keita and maternal uncles of Sunjata; that 'La coutume voulait que toute les femmes prise à la guerre par un Keta revienne de droit à la famille Konde' (1975: 25, n.38). It has been noted that the conjunction of *senankun*-based prohibition of marriage between clans and positive rules concerning marriage obtaining between other clans leads to a system of generalized exchange (Camara 1976: 32-3, 46). So far we have seen that, in some versions, the epic enjoins marriage between Konde and Keita while banning it between Konde and Traore. Further to this, in roughly two-thirds of the versions of the tale examined we can note that, in exchange for giving Sogolon to the king of Manding, this one offers the Traore brothers his sister or daughter.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps - although we can supply no supporting evidence - this can be seen as a justification for preferred exchange between Traore and Keita.

#### **Restatement and reformation of the motif**

Returning to the issue of Sogolon's marriage to Nare Famaghan, and the significance of variations from the hunter-stranger theme, it should be noted that, in spite of the sanction that this marriage receives later in the epic, according to some accounts, the king of Manding is at first no more successful with Sogolon than either of the hunters had been. When approached by her husband Sogolon is said to stretch

out to an enormous size, to grow feathers (H: 112), hair (N: 11), or spines (CL: 62, 95), and to assume a far greater strength than that of her would-be partner. Eventually Nare Famaghan overcomes his bride's resistance through a ruse, and thenceforward Sogolon (as we shall see in later chapters) is a model of the docile, obedient and dutiful wife. But why should Sogolon be described in this way as an animal-like creature in the image of her aunt, the buffalo-woman?

Sogolon's stance is reminiscent of the motif familiar in many tales of the woman who presents an extremely unwelcoming image for would-be suitors but later reveals an aspect more appealing to the man who accepts her in her original state. We can recall the wife of Bath's tale in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in which a young woman is transformed and appears as a decrepit old woman, only to assume her original form when a man agrees to sleep with her in her present state; or the *Nibelungenlied* in which Siegfried subdues, through a ruse, the animal-like and all-powerful Brunhild, who thence lost all her powers, 'for at love's coming her vast strength fled so that she was no stronger than any other woman' (Hatto 1965: 93). This motif can be read as male propaganda, a self-congratulatory story of female subjugation, but its reverse also exists in tales such as the Frog Prince, where the woman disenchant's the prince from his frog state by kissing or sleeping with him. What we may be dealing with here, at base, is a celebration of the transformatory power of love and acceptance.<sup>34</sup> Whether this is how we should read the nuptials of Nare Famaghan and Sogolon is not clear, but we can note that Sogolon's animal aspect helps the progress of the tale when she employs it earlier on in the story to ward off the Traore brothers when they would consummate the marriage. Also, as has already been noted, transformatory powers are traditionally associated with *nyama*, which the Malinke child obtains from his mother, hence Sogolon's animal aspect can be read as a demonstration of Sunjata's powerful inheritance. But another purpose, I suggest, has to do with the basic hunter-stranger motif on which the tale is formed, and in fact acts to reinstate - but also reform - the pattern that was upset when Nare Famaghan became Sunjata's father instead of either of the hunters.

It was proposed above that the essence of the hunter-stranger motif lay in its joining of a series of oppositions around the terms achieved/prescribed, stranger/indigene, nature/culture, and so on; and that it sought to institute authority as a mediation between natural power and cultural or political order. This it achieved by the marriage between an indigenous woman of high birth and a hunter who mediates nature from outside society, so that the resulting dynasty should partake equally of cultural and natural elements.

But by marrying Sogolon, the indigenous symbol, and part of the ruling family of Do, to Nare Famaghan of Manding, someone similarly indigenous and "cultural", to which the tale generally ascribes no feats of prowess or other signs of natural strength,<sup>35</sup> the final equation in the Buffalo-woman tale would have lacked the natural portion: Sunjata would have merely been the product of a marriage between two representatives of culture. To avoid this, I believe, the elements that marked out the buffalo-woman - animal strength and a disregard for social norms - are reapplied to Sogolon, her niece or sometimes her "double" (N: 8). In this way, at the expense of the prowess of the hunters - who overcame the buffalo only to find themselves presented with another - Sogolon is able to bring to the marriage the natural element that the reworked formula of the hunter-stranger motif had lost. By these means is Sunjata presented as an archetypal hero figure, the product of both the cultural order and of natural prowess, and the fundamental message of the hunter-stranger motif is reinstated.

Furthermore, this equation is closer to the realities of gender differentiation as perceived by the Malinke. Sogolon is seen to share the same characteristics of the feared animal-woman of the hunters' tale which was analysed earlier. Then it was noted how wives are generally regarded with suspicion, and that sex is cautioned against for the successful hunter. As Sory Camara has remarked, Malinke society is totally male controlled, with women fulfilling subordinate domestic roles alone. Official village, cult, or society positions are an exclusive male preserve; marriage is patrilocal and controlled by men; tasks are clearly demarcated, and character

traits differentiated (men are associated with anger - but not emotionality - and war, women with passivity and sensitivity) (Camara 1976: 48-57). Moreover, women are thought not to be able to keep secrets, to be led astray by their desires, and to be basically untrustworthy. Men are warned to be on their guard against women. All this can be compared with what Jackson writes of the Malinke-related Kuranko. He brings out the implied position among the Malinke when he states that, for the Kuranko, there is a paradoxical contrast 'between a dogma of male control and an "unofficial" admission of the actual importance of female influence' (Jackson 1982: 199-200). Women are 'popularly thought to be untrustworthy, temperamental, weak-willed, refractory, and capricious' (ibid.: 201). He notes that women can either be seen as 'actively malevolent' or 'passive victims of their own unrestrained emotionality' (ibid.: 202); and that - in contrast, we might say, to male-controlled marriage - women are thought of as the seducers in extra-marital affairs.

From this evidence it is possible to state that, in general, women are thought of by the Malinke to be dangerous to men, and that this danger comes from those elements within them - emotionality, capriciousness, untrustworthiness, etc. - that are uncontrolled, unsocialized, i.e. natural. In contrast, all the official extra-domestic life of the village or state is exclusively the preserve of men - culture is male.

Such an association of culture/male and nature/female - although a widespread cross-cultural theme (Ortner 1974) - is clearly contrary to the sense of the hunter-stranger motif as we described it; and it appears to us that, at the same time as the motif has altered to fit the political necessities of imperial Mali, the male/female and nature/culture oppositions have come into line with those generally perceived among the Malinke. Sogolon is still given to be a cultural indigene, the offspring of the leading clan of Do, but her characteristics, like her aunt before her, are far from those associated with a cultural emblem, and she is in fact partly a symbol of nature - the woman whose natural strengths/dangers must be subdued and transformed into culture by "man the hunter", the mediator between these two realms.

## Recapitulation

To start with, I shall summarize what I suggested has occurred in the formation of the Buffalo-woman tale. Two interconnected series of themes have been identified as the basis of the tale. The first, termed the hunter-stranger motif, widely dispersed in west Africa and beyond, consists of the journey by a "wild" stranger to a community in which he establishes a dynasty by defeating a natural threat and marrying into the leading family. The second series of themes is derived from Malinke hunter folklore and consists of the idealized behaviour of hunters in travelling upon adventures, protecting villages and hunting dangerous game; and of the transforming animal-woman who is their natural enemy. In addition, the stock hunter motifs form the basis for the way hunters relate to the old woman.

These two levels of "input" have been mapped one upon the other and produce, to my mind, two levels of "output" or readings. The first of these I term the sociogonic level of meaning. As I have tried to demonstrate above, the hunter-stranger motif carries within it a model outlining the development of society: society is seen to be achieved through the mediation of a natural, external, male element and a cultural, internal, female element; the resulting synthesis sanctions natural power and strength by endowing it with prescribed authority. The second level of meaning is concerned with the formation of imperial Mali. Here, the three leading pre-imperial states and clans are linked in the action of the tale: Traore hunters perform the travelling and fighting role of the hunter-stranger, but their prize, the Konde woman Sogolon, they hand over to a Konate of Manding, Nare Famaghan. The goal to which they all work - the birth of Sunjata - is the symbol of Mali's formation and initial growth, and thus can all three leading pre-imperial chiefdoms and families claim a part in building the empire. This imperial level has been seen to interact with and transform the sociogonic level: new elements make up the equation as the natural male stranger and cultural female indigene duo is replaced by a natural-cultural female stranger and

cultural male indigene. The reasons suggested were to ensure that Sunjata had an incontestable right to the throne and to involve all leading pre-imperial clans and chiefdoms in the creation of empire. Also, this reworked sociogonic level expresses Malinke associations of female with danger and nature, which the original formulation ignored. Furthermore, *senankuya* between Traore and Konde and marriage arrangements between the Keita, Konde and Traore are grounded within the narrative. Sunjata's inherited powers are also described: from Sogolon Konde, who was the niece of the Buffalo-woman, and retained her *nyama*-rich powers of transformation into animal form; from the Konate a right to the throne of Manding; and from the Traore a link to the archetypal hunters among the Malinke, and to Kri.

At this point we can attempt to analyse the way in which these input and output levels have interacted to create the tale's form. We can suggest two procedures which may have been employed to mould the hunter-stranger motif into the Buffalo-woman tale. The first is a process of culturization. Elements of Malinke hunter folklore - ideas concerning hunter adventures, metamorphosis, women as mothers and wives, and hunters' attitudes towards them - have made of the cross-cultural hunter-stranger motif a specifically Malinke narrative. Also, when the imperial output level interacts with the sociogonic level to give a new sociogonic equation, that which is produced integrates easily with the views on gender usually found in Malinke culture. This kind of contextualization of widespread themes to fit specific cultural situations must have been a key element in the creation of a regional tradition such as the Buffalo-woman tale.

The second procedure operates on the level of narrative and employs the audience's accepted knowledge of the basic motifs involved in the tale. Juxtaposed to this implicit knowledge are the realities of the tale, in which expectations, we might say, are continually disappointed. This procedure can be illustrated through an examination of the role of the Traore brothers. They begin the story as its apparent heroes: they answer the challenge of the buffalo and pit their strength against nature in the accepted way. Gradually, however, this role is undermined: they fail to

catch the buffalo except through its own agreement, they must take as reward a semi-wild woman who then rejects their advances, and their assumed role as dynasty-engenderers is finally usurped by Nare Famaghan.

The narrative appears to play on the difference between the audience's expectations, given their knowledge of the story genre, and the actualities of the tale's plot. Traditional motifs and plot patterns found in Malinke folklore might be seen as acting as a measure by which meanings in the Buffalo-woman tale are gauged. New meaning is created through the taking of traditional forms, which carry implicit messages, and transforming them according to the new tale's use. It is in this "falsification" of given tradition that meaning resides; it is through such transformations that the tale is able to convey messages concerning social and imperial origin. So what is not said in the tale is as important as what is said in order to read the narrative correctly, and only through a knowledge of the traditional motifs and patterns upon which the narrative draws, therefore, can one hope to understand the tale's significance.<sup>34</sup>

CHAPTER THREE: NOTES

1. ZA: 1-8; F1: 449-457; H: 111-12; BD: 14-9; P: 53-54; N: 4-12; CL: 35-64; KMJ,D1: 19-29; FDS: 109-29; MS: 39-77; DMD: 254-66; TK: 22-342; JBS: 673-701; OS: 84-88, 108; KB: 18-20; WK3: 45-95.
2. Do is given in H: 111, N: 6, CL: 35, KMJ,D1: 21, FDS: 110, DMD: 262, OS: 84, KB: 18; Sankaran/Sangaran in ZA: 1, F1: 451, BD: 14, TK: 42, and JBS: 672; both locations are given in MS: 39, 40, and WK3: 57 n.35.
3. N: 8; CL: 36; DMD: 257; JBS: 674; KB: 18.
4. KMJ,D1: 22; FDS: 111; MS: 41; JBS: 674; WK3: 47.
5. Except in F1, where she becomes a Koba (a mythical antelope) (451), and OS, where she becomes a rhinoceros (85).
6. ZA: 1; F1: 451; P: 53; N: 7; CL: 37; KMJ,D1: 23; FDS: 113; MS: 45; DMD: 257; TK: 44; BD: 14; JBS: 676; OS: 85; KB: 18; WK3: 51.
7. Brother: ZA: 1; F1: 451; N: 8; CL: 36; DMD: 257; TK: 42; JBS: 674; WK3: 47. Nephew: KMJ,D1: 22; FDS: 110; MS: 40.
8. A bride: ZA: 1; F1: 452; N: 9; DMD: 257; wealth: TK: 50; JBS: 677; half the kingdom: WK3: 51; JBS: 677; FDS: 125.
9. The names of the hunter brothers are usually a variation upon a common theme. ZA, who uniquely has them as members of the Dembele clan (but we can note that Delafosse equates the Dembele and Traore clans, 1959: 79 n.11), calls them Oualanmansa Ouolimba and Oualanmansa Ouolindi (ZA: 2), F calls them Damba Masolomba and Damba Sowlindi (F1: 452), P has them as Dan Oula and Natamba (P: 53), N as Oulamba and Oulani (N: 6), CL as Moke Mussa and Moke Dantuma (CL: 35), KMJ as Damansawulenba and Damansawuleni (KMJ,D1: 23), KB as Dan Masa Wulenba and Dan Masa Wuleni (KB: 18), FDS and MS style them Dan Mansa Wulandin and Dan Mansa Wulanba (FDS: 109; MS: 48), DMD as Da Mäsa Wulädí and Da Mäsa Wuläbä (DMD: 254), WK as Dan Massa Woulani and Dan Massa Woulan Tamba (WK3: 51), TK as Silamba and Silanden (TK: 54), OS as Kirama and Kankejan (OS: 84), and JBS as Wulamba and Wulani (JBS: 678). In BD the hunters are replaced by Tira Makhan, who is sometimes surnamed Traore, and in H by Nare Famaghan.
10. ZA: 2; F1: 452; CL: 37-8; KMJ,D1: 23; FDS: 113f.; MS: 48f.; DMD: 258-60; TK: 62ff.; JBS: 679f.; OS: 85; WK3: 55f.
11. ZA: 2-3; F1: 452-4; P: 53; N: 7; CL: 39-44; KMJ,D1: 24; FDS: 115; MS: 52-5; DMD: 260f.; BD: 15; TK: 92ff.; JBS: 685-7; OS: 85-6; KB: 18; WK3: 57-61.
12. ZA: 3-4; F1: 454; P: 53; N: 8; CL: 44; KMJ,D1: 24; FDS: 116-7; MS: 55-8; DMD: 262-3; TK: 154ff.; JBS: 692; OS: 87; KB: 18; WK3: 61f. In BD the old woman is deceptively kind, she then challenges Tira Makhan to a contest (15-6).
13. N: 8; CL: 45; KMJ,D1: 24; JBS: 692; OS: 87; KB: 87.
14. ZA: 4-5; F1: 455-6; P: 53; N: 8; CL: 46-52; KMJ,D1: 25; FDS: 119-20; MS: 58-63; DMD: 263-4; TK: 190-210; JBS: 692-4; OS: 87.
15. ZA: 5; F1: 453; H: 111; CL: 52; FDS: 113; WK3: 63. This motif, which acts in the Buffalo-woman tale to mark out the wild animal as a remarkable beast, and a

special prize for the hunters who capture it, may be derived from the folkloric figure of Dhū'l-Qarnain, "Lord of the Two Horns", known in west Africa partly through the *Qur'ān* (18:83-98), where he is said to have built a gate against Gog and Magog, the enemies of civilization. Dhū'l-Qarnain is usually associated with Alexander the Great (Arabic al-Iskandar) who, according to some sources, claimed descent from the Egyptian ram-headed god Amun (Ammon), whence his two horns; alternatively, the horns are said to represent the extent of his travels and conquests, from the land of the rising sun to the land of the setting sun (Anderson 1927). Nowhere outside of Africa, to my knowledge, are Dhū'l-Qarnain's horns said to be gold and silver; this appears to be a motif associated with the Malinke figure of Djurukaraneni or Djoula Kara Naini, a western Sudanese variant upon Dhū'l-Qarnain. This figure is linked to, among others, the Cisse of Wagadu (WK2: vii-viii; B: 61) and Sunjata Keita himself (see Chapter Four, note 7). According to WK, the Cisse claim descent from Djulu Kara Naini, 'he on whose own head grew a golden horn and a silver horn' (WK2: vii-viii). A Kuranko variant of this figure, Yilkanani, grew a golden horn on his head after bathing in the "Lake of Poverty" (Jackson 1989: 158). Also, B says that in Africa Alexander is known as the King of Gold and Silver (B: 22), as does N (23).

16. ZA: 6; F1: 456-7; P: 54; H: 111-2; N: 9; CL: 53-8; KMJ,D1: 25-7; FDS: 125-6; MS: 65-72; DMD: 265-6; TK: 228-64; JBS: 697-9; OS: 88; KB: 18-9; WK3: 69-71.
17. ZA: 7; P: 54; KMJ,D1: 27 (here, it is the younger brother); CL: 62; FDS: 127; MS: 74; JBS: 699-700.
18. ZA: 7; N: 5-6; CL: 75; FDS: 128; MS: 76; TK: 30-6; JBS: 703; KB: 19-20.
19. H: 112; N: 11-2; CL: 95-103; KB: 20.
20. ZA: 8-10; F1: 457; P: 54; H: 112; N: 12; CL: 103-7; KMJ,M: 227-37; FDS: 129; MS: 79; DMD: 266; BD: 19; TK: 336; JBS: 703; KB: 20-1; WK3: 72-3.
21. Johnson 1978: 14; though cp. WK3, 'L'enfant tient naturellement de son père sa généalogie et le prestige qui s'y attache, mais il n'acquiert jamais la baraka sans le concours de sa mère' (p. 383, cf. also p. 73).
22. Sidibé n.d.: 52-9; Thoyer-Rozat 1978: 27-117; Jackson 1982: 213-6; Meyer 1987: 25-9.
23. E.g., Meyer 1987: 25; Dumestre 1979: 255-69; Thoyer-Rozat 1978: 51-8; Sidibé n.d.: 55; cp. Dupuis-Yakouba 1911: 205.
24. Raglan 1936: 180; de Vries: 1963: 215f; cf. also Fontenrose 1959: 9f. for themes in the dragon-slaying myth. Frobenius discusses some similar stories which he relates to the Buffalo-woman tale; he suggests a Lybian origin for what he calls "The Fight with the Dragon" theme (Frobenius 1913 ii: 467-94).
25. Graves 1955 i: 13; Neumann 1970: 139; see also Cashion 1982: 3, 7, 243.
26. Four accounts place the action at Sangaran rather than Do (see n.2). Sangaran is often linked to Do: MS and WK3 mention both together (see n.2), Sangaran is linked to the Konde, as is Do (see n.27), while some traditions record a migration from Do to Sangaran (Niane 1974: 64; Cissé & Leynaud 1978: 26-7).
27. N: 9; CL: 54; KMJ,D1: 23; FDS: 109-10; MS: 39; DMD: 257; KB: 18; WK3: 46. ZA: 1 and TK: 42 place the action in Sangaran, though keeping the same

name for the ruling family.

28. BK: 147; WK3: 54; KB: 15; Diabaté 1970: 6. Sometimes he is given as a Keita (ZA: 1) which, according to Niane (1965: 78), is the senior clan name of the Konate (see below).
29. ZA: 7; F1: 457; BD: 14; DMD: 266; FDS: 128; KMJ,D1: 20; CL: 65; MS: 74; KB: 19; WK3: 71; TK: 282; or Mali, N: 4.
30. Johnson 1986: 182; YFG: 103; WK1: 441; WK2: 141-7; JBS: 705; Leynaud 1972: 9; Dieterlen 1955: 40 n.2.
31. N: 88 n.17 (note of translator); KMJ,D1: 24; WK3: 69-71; F1: 457 (here it is the Diarra instead of Konde).
32. Pageard 1958: 128; Camara 1976: 36-7; Leynaud 1972: 4; Leynaud also links *senankuya* between Traore and Kone to the Buffalo-woman tale (18).
33. TK: 316; JBS: 701; KMJ,D1: 28-9; DMD: 266; FDS: 128.
34. See Opie and Opie 1980: 239-40.
35. Except for H, in which the king of Manding himself plays the role of the hunters.
36. For an earlier, published, version of this chapter see Bulman 1989.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BIRTH & CHILDHOOD OF SUNJATA

This chapter examines the episodes in the epic variants detailing aspects of Sunjata's birth and childhood. At this point in the narrative, the epic narrows down its perspective from the genealogical details with Muslim pretensions analysed in Chapter Two and the state-founding myth, which underlay the Buffalo-woman tale, discussed in Chapter Three. The birth and childhood episodes allude to no wider, historical context, instead, their clearly clichéd form addresses the issues of family structure, its inherent tensions, the development of the individual, and the individual's response to his own social situation. The episodes present a standard picture of the hero's early life, employing familiar and recognizable motifs also attested to from other parts of the world, but nonetheless produce thereby a strongly African and Malinke tale.

#### **Part One: The birth episodes**

Twenty-six of the thirty-five separate versions of the Sunjata epic analysed in this thesis contain narrative portions relating to the birth of Sunjata.<sup>1</sup> While many of these record incidents or relate details peculiar to their own version, or found only in a few accounts, some themes recur in many variants. These can be found listed in Synoptic Charts Five and Six (above, in Chapter One), and can be described as follows: First, the unusually long pregnancy of Sogolon, Sunjata's mother, when carrying the hero. This long pregnancy ranges from two-and-a-half years in MK to seventeen in WK3, to the hyperbolic 'four million, four hundred and forty years, four months and four days' in YFG (101). Eight accounts contain this theme.<sup>2</sup> In addition, four accounts relate how, while still unborn, Sunjata would indulge in nocturnal hunting trips, leaving his mother's womb but returning by daylight. In fact, in these

accounts the hero is only properly born from Sogolon through a ruse: a calabash or mortar is set between his mother's legs into which Sunjata crawls, persuaded he is returning to her womb.<sup>3</sup>

Second, strange events surround the birth: ZA recounts how Sunjata, only recently born, attacks the seven midwives who aided his mother (9), while F notes how nine women died at the hero's birth (F1: 458); two versions say Sunjata was born already with teeth (YFG: 102; KB: 22); in N and CL storms accompany the birth (N: 13; CL: 112-4), while in WK3 the people of Manding experience a collective dream-prophecy concerning the importance of the child to be born on the night of the hero's conception and again on the night of his birth (73).

Third, six versions studied claim that Sunjata's birth was virtually simultaneous with that of another son of the king of Manding.<sup>4</sup> Both mothers send messengers to inform the king of the birth of the child, but the party which set out first is diverted from its task and it is the second group of messengers which is the first to inform the king of the birth of a son. The king designates that child his first-born and heir, provoking intense rivalry between the two mothers and their sons.

Finally, twenty-four of the examined variants of the epic record that Sunjata was lame or paralyzed in his legs during his childhood.<sup>5</sup> These accounts claim that he remained in this state for anywhere between three and nineteen years, although the most common lengths given are seven years, nine and seventeen (see Synoptic Charts Five and Six). KMJ, FDS and MS state that the crippling was caused by Sogolon's jealous co-wife Sasuma (or Saman) Berete; BK links the lameness to action inspired by Sumanguru; AS says Sunjata's own father had a jinn paralyze him.

### **Sunjata's birth episodes & the hero pattern**

Many of these themes bear a striking resemblance to the motifs of the widespread myths about heroes which have been elucidated and compared by, among others, von Hahn (1876), Rank (1914), Raglan (1936), and de Vries (1963).<sup>6</sup> The overall

similarities in the structure of the Sunjata epic and the hero pattern (as the generalized format can be called) have been commented upon by Gordon Innes, who writes of Sunjata's life as given in the epic as that of the "expulsion and return formula" in which the hero is exiled but returns to become ruler; he goes on to note how 'this common core is ... suspect [historically] because of its striking similarity to the pattern of the hero's life in other literatures' (1974: 26). Adrian Tronson (1982) sees specific parallels between the career of Sunjata and that of Alexander the Great, which he believes may indicate that Sunjata Keita actively emulated Alexander. Yet the life of Alexander is no more than a particular instance of the hero pattern.<sup>7</sup> Johnson comments on the similarities between Sunjata's story and other hero stories, although he believes there are 'significant differences between the Mande pattern and the patterns of those heroes whose legends provided the raw data from which Western scholars have generalized' (1978: 180). Nevertheless, he estimates Sunjata's level of agreement with the patterns laid out by von Hahn and his successors, and, while claiming to be conservative in his calculations, produces agreement rates of between 44% (de Vries) and 66% (Rank), with von Hahn at 56% and Raglan at 59% (1978: 208 n.91).

J. G. von Hahn, whose "Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula" was published (posthumously) in 1876, compared Persian, Indian, Greek, Roman and European hero figures. He concluded that the hero is generally described as illegitimate, born of a god and a princess; that his birth is accompanied by a prophecy, and that he is abandoned by his parents, to be suckled by animals and raised by shepherds (von Hahn 1871-6, see also Dunlop 1888: 504f.; Dundes 1978: 229-33).

In *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (first published in German, 1909), the psychologist Otto Rank took fifteen characters from Babylonian, Indian, Greek, Hebrew, Roman and European traditions and compared the stories of their lives. Rank concluded that the hero of these stories is in general the son of a king; that 'his origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or secret intercourse of the parents'; that his birth is accompanied by a prophecy

informing his parents of his dangerous nature, and that he is abandoned by them and brought up by other, poorer, parents, having been placed in a box at sea (Rank 1914: 61).

Lord Raglan published a paper in 1934 entitled "The Hero of Tradition", which was the basis for his 1936 book *The Hero, a Study in Tradition, Myth & Drama*. It compared the lives of twenty-one heroes of mainly Greek and Roman (but also Hebrew, Far Eastern, North African and European) origin. Raglan noted that the hero's parents are usually royal, the mother a virgin; that 'The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and ... he is reputed to be the son of a god'. An attempt on the hero's life is made by the father or maternal grandfather, but fails, and the boy is taken off to be reared in a far country (Raglan 1936: 179).

In de Vries' list, which is found in *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend* (first published in Dutch, 1959), and is based on Indo-European stories, the typical hero is said to be of royal birth, his father sometimes a god, and his mother a virgin. The birth 'takes place in an unnatural way' (1963: 212), and his life is threatened by exposure because his father has been warned of the danger inherent in his son. The hero is rescued and raised by others, often shepherds (213-4).

Comparing these generalizations concerning the hero's childhood with the childhood of Sunjata, as it is given in the epic variants studied here, several marked similarities can be noted. Although Sunjata's father is never described as a god, both the hero's parents are usually given to be royal. Only HO and P disagree, P (54) making Sunjata's father a magician, but keeping a variant of the normal name (Farako Makan Djini), and HO (51) making the father a hunter from Kita. Sogolon's virginity might perhaps be inferred from her ferocious repulsion of the Traore hunters' advances and, in some accounts, those of her husband (Chapter Three). The difficulties her husband, Nare Famaghan, experiences in consummating his marriage to Sogolon (N, CL, KB and H) can also be compared with the unusual conception recorded by Raglan for the hero, or with the hero's birth "preceded by difficulties" remarked upon by Rank. The hero's "unnatural birth", as noted by de Vries, may be compared to

Sogolon's long pregnancy and to the need to trap Sunjata into leaving his mother's womb. The prophecy regarding the hero's great destiny, listed by Rank, von Hahn and de Vries, is comparable to the prophecy about the greatness of the offspring of Sogolon (or simply an ugly stranger) and Nare Famaghan, recorded in nine versions of the epic.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Sunjata's attacks on the midwives in ZA, the claim that his teeth were already grown at birth in KB and YFG, and his hunting expeditions before birth, contrasted with his lameness in most versions of the story, agree with de Vries' description of the hero of the pattern as at the same time retarded and advanced in his development. To quote:

The hero reveals his strength, courage, or other particular features at a very early age. ... On the other hand the child is often very slow in his development: he is dumb or pretends to be mentally deficient. (de Vries 1963: 214)

In addition, we can note that, in a more impressionistic survey of the hero myth, Joseph Campbell also divines a paradoxical duality in the description of the hero. He is often "the despised one", "the handicapped", "the abused youngest son" or the "ugly duckling" - all epithets which would apply in some measure to Sunjata in his state of lameness - while the hero's infancy is, for Campbell, equally a time of his 'precocious strength, cleverness and wisdom' - again, these attributes can be compared with Sunjata's already-present abilities in the hunt, and his thieving (Campbell 1949: 325-7). This is the description of the young Sunjata in YFG: 'When he went into the bush he would be a grown man, but when he came back to town he would be like a baby again' (102).

Faced with these significant analogies between Sunjata's early life as recorded by Malinke (and other) griots, and the birth and childhood of numerous heroes from other - almost exclusively non-African - cultures, several responses are open to us. As has already been noted, Innes made the point that such wholesale duplication of the common core of Sunjata's life-story in tales of other cultures casts doubt on the epic's claim to be recounting history:

Folklorists have rightly pointed out that there is reason

to suspect the historicity of any purportedly historical account when similar accounts are found elsewhere in literature, either oral or written (1974: 26)

Charles Bird appears to have misunderstood Innes' position, or exploited his loose wording when he retorts 'Did World War II ever take place? It couldn't have since there are too many literary accounts of it which, in Innes's terms negate its possible veracity' (1977: 366). The view Innes is presumably presenting is that the repetition of distinct patterns of the type described by von Hahn et. al. in a number of narratives dealing with separate individuals, time periods or cultures, which might all claim historicity, leads to doubts about the claims of those accounts which do purport to be relating historical events.

Two broad explanations have been offered for these cross-cultural similarities: borrowing (or diffusion), and the existence of underlying common patterns in the human population over large swathes of the earth. The former explanation does not really answer the issue directly, as one still has to ask why certain details or patterns have been borrowed and not others. If certain story-elements are repeatedly borrowed by diverse cultures, we must then ask what it is about the story-element that is so alluring?' The second explanation for widespread story patterns - the view that certain patterns are basic to human experience and perception - encompasses Jung's archetypes and Bastian's elemental ideas but may also be prompted by environmental similarities among the living circumstances of human population groups and by similar social patterns that emerge in these groups. An analogy to the idea of environmental or immanent factors explaining the popularity of certain themes in a given culture or group of cultures may be taken from the world of art. Frank Willett writes of how 'weaving techniques, whether in matting, basketry or cloth, tend by their very nature to produce a series of motifs of essentially geometric character, which we might call "technomorphs" since their form arises from the technique' (Willett 1971: 34).

The belief in "universals" has to some extent been qualified by more careful

examination of the evidence, and the actual existence of any true universals throughout all humankind may now be doubted (Kluckhohn 1965); nevertheless, a good number of motifs are found in many separate cultures and societies. The cliché of an original migration, discussed in Chapter Two, the dragon-slayer, and the deluge appear to be examples of these.<sup>10</sup> Whether or not these story-elements are truly universal is not fundamental to our analysis; what is fundamental is that they are common in several distinct communities separate to the Malinke.

A third approach to the issue of *wandersagen*, or "wandering themes", brings us back to the question of historicity. Bird makes the point that common elements in human life necessarily repeat themselves, and that this by itself need not surprise us. We can point to two studies on clearly historical figures which identified evidence strongly suggestive of mythic, non-historical material in their biographies: Francis Utley claims that Abraham Lincoln scores fully twenty-two points in Raglan's list outlining the hero's life (Dundes 1978: 235); Dorothea Wender attempts with some success to interpret the life of George Washington according to the solar or nature myth proponents of the nineteenth century (Wender 1984), while Jean Baptiste Pérès did the same exercise in the last century with Napoleon (Cuthbertson 1975: 21). These studies are tongue-in-cheek but they do illustrate the failings of a rigid dichotomy between the "mythic" and the "factual"; also, they help demonstrate the important role latterday heroes still play in Western societies. These figures are historical, but the stories of their lives as we now possess them are more than a mere rehearsal of accepted factual occurrences. History may be defined as that which is unique, singular, but actual recorded and retold history also contains repetitive patterns and cycles. As in the cases of Napoleon, Washington and Lincoln, truly resonant history is often an amalgam of the unique and the archetypal. Alan Dundes comments on Utley's article:

The fact that a hero's biography conforms to the Indo-European hero pattern does not necessarily mean that the hero never existed. It suggests rather that the folk repeatedly insist on making their versions of the lives of heroes follow the lines of a specific series of incidents (Dundes 1978: 235)

The question remains however: Why certain details are repeated, and not others? What are the resonant elements? Numerous details in the lives of human individuals are presumably common to many other lives, but only certain details are preserved in the hero myth or other semi-universal story patterns. It is the specific causes for the popularity of the particular way of viewing a life that is encoded in the hero pattern that must be our subject, whether historical or not in the actual example of Sunjata; what is significant is that these things, and not some others, have been retold concerning the Malinke figure: our task is to answer the question: Why these things and not others? and to attempt through that an interpretation of the clichés' meanings.

One obvious criticism of the cross-cultural approach to such motifs is that it negates or at least plays down the culture-specific meanings accruing to the particular motif in question. Bird makes this point, and suggests that an analysis of the Sunjata epic in terms of its similarity or dissimilarity with the hero pattern of Raglan tells us nothing about the Malinke figure of Sunjata (Bird 1977: 367). Also, Johnson claimed, as was noted above, that the similarities between the epic's plot and the hero pattern were less significant than the differences in the relative conceptions of the hero between Malinke and Indo-European cultures. There are of course important culturally specific notions relating to the hero and his life which can in no way be set to one side, but there is also a significant amount of common ground between the description of the Indo-European hero and Sunjata, as Johnson's own analysis of the Sunjata epic in terms of the hero pattern has shown, and as we have tried briefly to demonstrate above. Cross-cultural analysis is a starting-point which, in terms of the Sunjata epic, we should be myopic to ignore. In common with my approach throughout this thesis, I shall attempt to interpret story-elements from the Sunjata epic both in the context of Malinke values and preoccupations, and, where applicable, in the light of these story-elements' appearance in the tales of other cultures and societies - i.e., in the light of their immanent characteristics.

Our first step shall be to describe the work of earlier researchers who attempted to understand the hero myth in psychological terms, and to assess its applicability for the description of the birth and childhood of Sunjata that we are given in the Malinke epic.

### **Rank's interpretation of the hero myth**

Otto Rank's psychological reading of the hero pattern was the earliest contribution to this subject area and in many ways is still the most important. For Rank, the myth of the hero who suffers and survives his father's hostility and aggression is the story of the child's revolt against the father. He saw the hero of the myth pattern as analogous to the ego of the child in what he called the "family romance of the neurotic"; believing that 'the detachment of the growing individual from the authority of the parents is one of the most necessary, but also one of the most painful achievements of evolution' (1914: 61-2). For him, writing from a Freudian perspective, 'Myths are ... created by adults, by means of retrograde childhood fantasies' (82). Employing the same symbols found in dreams, 'the extraordinary childhood of the hero ... is constructed by the individual mythmakers ... from the consciousness of their own infancy' (81).

Rank's specific interpretation of the hero pattern is based on the Oedipus complex: the son, desiring his mother, fears his father's retribution. This is, said Rank, inverted in the hero myth itself into the father's desire to rid himself of the son who will supplant him. Rank says that the common belief that the hero has two sets of parents - one royal, the other poor - comes from the child's disillusionment with his own (inevitably imperfect) mother and father, whom he replaces with a set of fantastical parents (67). Exposure of the young hero, which Rank characterizes as desertion in a box at sea, he understands as symbolic birth, in which the box is a transformation of the womb (69). Rank notes that rivalry between brothers is an element in some variants of the hero myth and suggests that this jealous competition

is paralleled in the family group: the ego desires the removal of competitive, hostile brothers from its fantasy in the same way as it desires the removal of the father, both of whom are seen as standing between it and the mother (74, 87). Regarding the physical deformities that some heroes are said to suffer from, Rank says that they

are perhaps meant to serve for the vindication of individual imperfections, in such a way that the reproaches of the father for possible defects or shortcomings are incorporated into the myth, with the appropriate accentuation, the hero being endowed with the same weakness which burdens the self-respect of the individual. (1914: 90)

How far does this psychological reading of the hero pattern help in the interpretation of the common themes in the story of Sunjata's birth? Directly, very little can be gained. Nothing is said that might obviously account for the long pregnancy of Sogolon in psychological terms, nor the mixture of advanced and retarded development in Sunjata, while the explanation for the hero's lameness does not appear to advance our understanding of the story. Nevertheless, Rank has pointed to rivalry between brothers as an element in the hero pattern, which could be linked to the birth-order dispute of the epic and its effects. This rivalry he sees as operating in the same way as resentment of the father in the Oedipus complex: the brother is a rival in the affections of his mother. But this theory makes little sense for our context when it is noted that in this case the sibling rivalry centred around the birth-order dispute is between two brothers of different mothers, and that these mothers are themselves often portrayed as arch rivals.

Concerning the hero's father, Rank's reading of the pattern in psychological terms appears equally inapplicable to Sunjata's case. For Rank, the father is the son's great rival who, out of fear of his own replacement, seeks to destroy his offspring. Now in a number of versions of the Sunjata epic the hero's father dies around the time the hero first walks, while in many he all but disappears from the griots' narratives as soon as he has impregnated Sogolon. Only in AS does he play the traditional hero pattern role as persecutor of his son. In AS it is said that Suxlu Nyamadu, the father of the hero in this version,

became fearful of his son because of the miraculous things he was doing. He was afraid Sunjata would kill him or take over the rule of Manding. So he went to the jinn in the big gui tree and asked him to get rid of Sunjata. (AS: 72)

In AS it is the jinn's powers that cause the hero's lameness, which leads us to conclude that, in this account, the crippling of the hero is a result of the father's wish to destroy his successor. This reading of AS bears out Rank's thesis admirably in the case of the epic, but AS is the only variant to make the link between lameness and the father's hostility towards his son, while, indeed, no other version suggests any animosity between father and son. AS was recorded from a Wolof bard in the Gambia, and is one of the more distant variants of the epic we have studied (Chapter One); its separateness from most of the other accounts appears confirmed in this aspect of its narrative.

Nevertheless, Rank's analysis of the hero myth also states that in some examples the father is replaced in the role of persecutor of the son by either the grandfather, another relative or simply another character (1914: 96-7). One might say that, in Oedipal terms, the role of the father, as persecutor, in the Sunjata epic is filled by Sumanguru. In most accounts Sumanguru overruns Manding, supplanting Sunjata's father or brother(s): it is therefore Sumanguru who performs the role of an omnipotent father-figure; it is from Sumanguru, and not his father, that Sunjata must wrest his inheritance, and it is Sumanguru, not Nare Famaghan, who fears his replacement by the hero.

Two variants of the epic expound this view directly. JBS records how

sixty sorcerers and sixty sorceresses knew when Sogolon became pregnant with Sunjata. 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." (JBS: 703)

In JBS's account of the "murder of the innocents" (cf. motif M 375 Slaughter of

innocents to avoid fulfilment of prophecy) it is Fakoli who plays Angel Gabriel to Sumanguru's King Herod. Fakoli alerts Sogolon to the danger to which Sumanguru's decree has given rise, and consequently the child is hidden (704). In BK we find that Sumanguru becomes aware through diviners of a threat to his kingship and he therefore prohibits the conception of any children in Manding for seven years:

Susu Sumanguru Baamagana's diviners by stones said to  
him,  
'The child who will destroy your kingship  
Has been conceived within Manding.'  
Sumanguru gathered together all the women of the town of  
Manding  
And for seven years  
He kept them within a walled town.  
A man and a woman did not lie on the same bed,  
A man and a woman did not come near each other.  
As for those women who did become pregnant,  
If they gave birth to a child and that child was male,  
Its throat was cut ... (BK: 155)

It seems clear then that for JBS and BK at least Sunjata is seen to suffer from the persecution of Sumanguru who, fearful of the loss of his power to the young pretender, attempts to destroy him. However, the connection between this attempted liquidation and Sunjata's disability, even in these two accounts, is not straightforward. In the case of AS it seems correct to interpret Sunjata's lameness as a partially successful attempt at the destruction of the hero, however, neither JBS nor BK link Sumanguru's attempts to rid himself of the threat against his rulership to Sunjata's lameness: JBS omits the motif of lameness altogether (which may however be due to his brief rendition of the central portion of the epic), while in BK, as in most of the variants of the epic of Sunjata studied here, I suggest below that the link between Sunjata's persecution and his disability at birth is more complex than that suggested so far.

## **The African hero myth: contextualization of the psychological reading for the polygynous setting**

At one point in particular - when discussing the Oedipal view that brothers are rivals for their mother's attention - the limitations of a psychological interpretation of the hero myth in all its contexts based solely on the European family model becomes evident. The formulation is clearly unsatisfactory in a polygynous setting such as Malinke society. It is now a commonplace that Freud's theses in general suffer from their writer's restricted bourgeois Viennese milieu and consequently are of limited value in other cultural settings. The writers I shall discuss in this section - Melville and Frances Herskovits, James Fernandez and Michael Jackson - have all attempted in various ways to reconstruct a psychological reading of Oedipus, and the hero myth in general, for the African context.

If the impression was given above that the hero pattern itself was solely an Indo-European entity, this view can easily be discounted. Many of the popular clichés of the hero pattern are of course present in African oral art. The "expulsion and return formula" is found not only in the Sunjata epic but in the stories of the Zulu hero Chaka, the Nyanga hero Mwindo, and the Wolof hero Samba Gelaajo Jeegi.<sup>11</sup> The theme of the fearful father attempting to destroy his son is found clearly in Mwindo's dealings with Shemwindo, his father (Biebuyck 1969), and, in the attenuated form noted by Rank in which the father is substituted by a relative, in the tale of Samba Jeegi, whose uncle usurps the throne and from whom the hero must retake it (Lanrezac 1907: 615).

Specific themes discussed above are also duplicated. The hero's birth is marked out as special in the case of the Ibo hero Ozidi, whose birth is presaged by a storm, as is Sunjata's in N and CL (Clarke 1977: 12); or by a dream in the case of Samba Jeegi, as with Sunjata in WK3 (Sar 1980: 13). The mixture of advanced and retarded development is also visible in the stories of African heroes other than Sunjata. Peculiarly advanced behaviour is noted in Ozidi, who bullied much older children

(Clarke 1977: 13) and in Mwindo who, like Sunjata in some accounts, leaves his mother's womb at night to hunt and, when eventually born can already speak (Biebuyck 1969: 53-4, 57). Both heroes retain childlike elements nonetheless: Ozidi is guided by his mother through all his adventures; Mwindo is known as "Little-one-just-born-he-walked" (ibid.: 20). Chaka displays a similar mixture in his development. Ritter tells us that he was a weak and backward child but that by his mid-teens he was disliked by his elders for 'he surpassed them in all their sports and undertakings' (1955: 17).

In addition to these well known themes, the African hero pattern contains its own particular clichés. As was suggested above, these often have to do with the polygynous family structure common in much of Africa. Sibling rivalry, and its cognate, co-wife jealousy, can be noticed in many African epic stories: Sunjata, Chaka, Samba Jeegi and the Malinke hero Kambili are all said to be the sons of less-favoured (or "despised") wives, and therefore grow up in the family at a built-in disadvantage and with good reason to resent other more favoured members of the kin group, while tensions are said to exist between co-wives and half-brothers in the stories of Samba Jeegi and Kambili (Sar 1980: 21; Bird 1974: xii).

Melville and Frances Herskovits, in their 1958 article on Dahomean myth and society, stress the importance of sibling rivalry in the African context, and attempt to alter the phrasing of the Oedipus complex in the light of their findings in Dahomey (Bénin). They note how, in Dahomean family structure, in which the child is initially constantly with its mother, the appearance of a second child inevitably has a powerful negative effect on the first child's relation to its mother, promoting rivalry between siblings (1958: 4); and that, in a polygynous family, wives will vie with each other to see that their child or children are more favoured than others of the same father. They note how the mechanism for determining succession tends to exacerbate this rivalry, that, 'Though on the institutional level the principle of seniority is paramount it is never so rigidly applied as to rule out exceptions' (1958: 6).

The Herskovits suggest another alteration in the Oedipus complex to fit better the African context. This alteration concerns Rank's belief that in the hero myth it is the son who wishes to remove the father, and initiates tension between them. Instead, the Herskovits point out that, in the myths from Dahomey (and equally, it can be said, in hero myths in general), 'invariably it is the father who initiates the hostility' that leads the son to flee, because the father fears his own supercession by the son (1958: 10-1). Rank read the situation in the myth as an inversion: the son wishes to remove the father, and these emotions are displaced onto the father. The Herskovits suggest that the father's part in initiating hostility be recognized equally along with the son's.

James Fernandez (1969) goes further than the Herskovits in his revision of the Oedipus complex for African cultures, suggesting that what Oedipus is for Mediterranean cultures, Chaka might be for African cultures. The "Shaka complex" that Fernandez formulates to account for the African hero's experience he describes as:

the product of a failure satisfactorily to dissolve the attachment to the mother coupled with the failure to resolve hostility toward, and identity with, his father. (1969: 51)

Concurring with the Herskovits, Fernandez believes that, for the African male child, some factors in his situation are at variance to those emphasized by the Oedipus complex; that in African "diluted marriage"

the child is more likely to be preoccupied with his full and half-sibling's claims than with those of his father. We are dealing not with a castration anxiety but with concern over replacement by siblings. (ibid.)

Fernandez believes the Shaka complex will develop only, given these constants, when the male child fails to break the strong bonds with his mother and begins his association with the male group. As he sees it, males are responsible for training the child in social awareness and restraint, while the child's mother tends, due to the competitive atmosphere between co-wives, to offer her own son unconditional

support in his ambitions. The child who fails to join the male segment of the community and continues to emphasize the mother-bond will exhibit 'a maladaptive compulsivity in adult life', 'egocentrism and a compelling ambition', claims Fernandez (1969: 52, 53).

This is Fernandez' explanation for the behaviour of Chaka; he also quotes N on Sunjata concerning the co-wife jealousy and sibling rivalry between Sogolon and Sunjata, on the one side, and Sasuma Berete and Dankaran Tuman, on the other (53-4).

Co-wife jealousy, as the correlate of sibling rivalry, is of course a stock theme in African tales (Jackson 1982: 246-7; Meyer 1987: 44-6). Clyde Kluckhohn, in his survey, "Recurrent themes in myths and mythmaking", notes that sibling rivalry is, as a theme, 'appreciably more frequent in the Insular Pacific and in Negro Africa' than in any other of the six culture areas into which he divides the world; that 'The rivalry between brothers is portrayed far oftener than any other', and that 'in parts of Negro Africa it appears that it is always two siblings born in immediate sequence who are chosen as protagonists' (1965: 163). Winifred Galloway writes for the African context:

Co-wife jealousy and sibling rivalry is a constant theme in any traditional literature, particularly when dealing with ruling families, where there was a constant jockeying for position among wives for favour for themselves and their children (Galloway 1980: xiv)

She goes on to term it 'the one in-built weakness of the polygynous family' (ibid.), echoing the words of CL:

in polygynous families ... it was not unusual to have conflicts between the wives on the one hand, and on the other hand, between the children born of different mothers. Such rivalry, often very heated, would then become a political crisis (CL: 107)

Mungo Park wrote in the eighteenth century of how the Malinke polygynous family 'concentrates all the mother's jealous tenderness to one point, the protection of her own offspring' (Park n.d.: 235).

The significance of tensions between co-wives and half-brothers is recognized in

Malinke terminology. Labouret notes the Malinke terms *bara muso*, meaning "preferred wife" and *gara muso*, meaning "old wife", and says that the co-wife is known as the *si na muso*, which means "the woman with whom the husband passes the night"; from this, he goes on, the Malinke derive *si na ya*, 'état et sentiment réciproque des co-épouses et, par extension, rivalité, jalousie' (1934: 110): rivalry and jealousy are, it appears, basic, grammatically embedded parts of the polygynous family structure among the Malinke. Bird and Kendall state that the Malinke identify two strong but contrary influences on a child, one stressing individuality, called *fadenya* ("father-childness"), the other stressing *communitas* and known as *badenya* ("mother-childness") (Bird and Kendall 1980: 14). As we have noted in the Introduction, *faden* is the Malinke term for children who share the same father, and *baden* the term for children who share the same mother. Bird and Kendall say *fadenya* is associated with 'envy, jealousy, competition, self-promotion', while *badenya* connotes 'submission to authority, stability, cooperation' (ibid.: 15). This diagnosis appears at odds with Fernandez' thesis, which sees the male group as the inculcator of social values while blaming the mother-son relationship for promoting division and selfishness. Yet the Malinke clearly recognize the problems inherent in the mother-son bond and relations between mother-son units (Johnson 1978: 94-5; see also Jackson 1982: 125). For them, it is not the reciprocal devotion of mother and son that creates tensions within a family, but the forces which compell children to fight amongst themselves for the limited resources of the father and, by extension, of male-controlled society which he represents; for the Malinke it is this striving to succeed within the male world that creates enemies among half-siblings. The sense that the problems of jealousy and rivalry in families arise from each individuals' interaction with the wider world of village hierarchy and state apparatus emerges in Michael Jackson's examination of variants of the hero myth among the Malinke-related Kuranko.

In his 1979 essay "Prevented Successions: A Commentary upon a Kuranko Narrative" Michael Jackson takes up the insights of Rank and the Herskovits into the Oedipus and hero myths and develops their ideas in new directions. His analysis is particularly

pertinent to our enquiry because of its elucidation of the Kuranko story of Yata who, as the name suggests, is probably to be seen as a distant folkloric variant of the Malinke Sunjata, and whose story could be taken as the most far-removed of the versions of the epic that we have examined.<sup>1 2</sup>

Jackson refers to the Herskovits' point about tension and hostility between father and son being initiated by the father rather than the son, but develops this further, suggesting in place of the Oedipal notion of the son's fear of the father the idea that the father-son relationship is surrounded by ambivalent feelings on both sides. For him, both father and son face 'a contradiction between social necessity and personal inclination' (1979: 122). On the one hand, the father resents his inevitable replacement by the son, wishing instead to remain dominant, although recognizing his own mortality; the son, on the other hand, wishes for his own independence, wishes to succeed his father, but is both reluctant to assume the concomitant responsibilities and unwilling to accept his own part in his father's demise (1979: 121-2).

It is this "double-bind" situation, as Jackson terms it, that can help in the interpretation of the episodes surrounding the birth and childhood of the hero. The unusually long pregnancy of the mother, the dispute over birth-order, and the hero's manifestation of advanced and retarded behaviour are all discussed by Jackson in relation to Yata, other heroic characters, and Sunjata himself.

These common elements in the hero myth Jackson interprets as "solutions" to the tensions surrounding the succession of a father by his son. From the myth of Heracles he isolates three related themes concerned with delayed birth and slow development which all relate to the African context as methods 'for delaying or disguising the rightful succession' (1979: 115), and therefore reducing tension between father and son. Alongside these themes Jackson notes how tension between father and son can be reduced by another two "solutions": banishing or exiling the heir, therefore removing the heir from the arena of potential conflict (110), or 'increasing the number of eligibles' for accession (112), thereby displacing conflict from the "vertical axis" (the father-son relationship) to the "horizontal axis"

(brother-brother relationships) (109).

Jackson's analysis of the hero pattern in the African context also makes much of the contradictory elements in the hero's makeup. He notes how the hero is often the 'Youngest of several brothers, yet most able' (1979: 122); how, in the case of Yata and Sunjata, he can be a baby by day and hunter by night; and how he is 'Apparently weak and retarded, yet actually strong and precocious' (ibid.).

Taking these new insights, along with the ideas of Rank, the Herskovits, and Fernandez, I shall attempt to interpret the major themes in Sunjata's birth and childhood.

### Long pregnancy

AS (1950) is probably the earliest account of those examined to claim an unusually long gestation for the hero. Sunjata remains inside his mother's womb for eight years (AS: 72). The motif is linked to that of the unborn child's nightly hunting expeditions, which are only brought to a close with the capture of the hero in a calabash. WK3 and YFG, which both claim unusually long pregnancies for the hero's mother (seventeen years for WK and four million and four hundred and forty years four months and four days for YFG), also have this motif. BK, which claims that Sunjata was in his mother's womb for fourteen years, links the long pregnancy to Sumanguru's order that all new-born babies in Manding should be killed, in an attempt to prevent the prophesied development of a successor (BK: 155). BD, which says Sunjata remained in his mother's womb nine years, says that the people of Manding each believed that Sogolon 'était atteinte du mal terrible' (leprosy?), and in this version Sunjata himself decides to be born at this time, to prove his mother's detractors to be wrong (19). H, which says Sogolon was pregnant for seven years (112), MK, which gives the figure as 'thirty months' (712) and KB, which puts Sogolon's pregnancy at three years (20), do not comment on or give a reason for the exceptional gestation time.

For Jackson, the theme of the long pregnancy of the hero's mother can denote, in the hero, unwillingness to be born, and is a manifestation of the hero's ambivalent feeling towards his father. In this sense it is isomorphic to retarded maturation in the hero, i.e., in Sunjata, lameness. This interpretation is consistent with the version of events offered in AS, YFG and WK3, which all suggest Sunjata's unwillingness to be born through coupling the long pregnancy theme with the motif of the unborn hero's hunting exploits. In addition, the fact that in WK3 - as well as H and BK - the length of Sogolon's pregnancy with Sunjata is equal to the length of the time the hero is lame might also support Jackson's assertion that the two themes - retarded birth and retarded development - equate in their symbolic significance. In BD we read that, upon Sunjata's eventually standing with the aid of an iron bar, his father dies; it may be a correct reading of the hero's long period of gestation to say that it was caused by his ambivalence regarding his heroic destiny. Nevertheless, when his mother becomes the victim of malicious slurs, Sunjata does not delay in confounding her critics by announcing to his mother his intention to be born. In BD, as in the versions which relate Sunjata's power to enter and reenter his mother's womb as he chooses, we are also presented with a picture of an individual already in control of his own actions, despite his age.

Jackson also suggested that the long gestation of the hero may help in disguising or camouflaging the actual heir, thereby causing a reduction in the tension surrounding succession. Jackson was referring to the tension around the father-son relationship, but this same interpretation appears correct for BK, in which Sunjata remains in the womb for fourteen years, avoiding detection by Sumanguru as the foretold heir.

Another meaning arising from the application of this motif can be mentioned. Winifred Galloway categorizes Sunjata's mother's long pregnancy under the rubric of exaggeration common to much epic poetry. For her, 'long pregnancy is counted as an omen for an unusual future' (Galloway 1980: iv). A long period of gestation can be taken to imply the prodigious nature of the one to be born. The more complex the

organism the longer the period of development needed to reach maturity. Long pregnancy is here a shorthand for heroic stature. This is paradoxical, considering that for Jackson the same motif is deemed to *camouflage* the heir. We may say that, *for the audience*, the theme does indeed signal the heroic potential of the subject, but that this interpretation need not conflict with that which reads the theme as a disguiser of the hero *for the other characters in the tale* (as in BK). Nor indeed need it conflict with the psychological interpretation of the motif as expressing the hero's own ambivalence towards his role, a reading which seems to be implied in WK3, YFG and AS, which all contain the hero's pre-birth nightly peregrinations.

### Birth-order dispute

Of the six accounts of the epic examined in this thesis containing this episode, ZA is one of the earliest (recorded between 1904 and 1912). Franz de Zeltner reconstructs the griot Kande Kanote's recitation describing how the king of Manding, here called Nareng Mahan, slept with Sogolon and with his first wife on the same night, impregnating both.

Le roi dit ensuite: "Je n'ai jamais eu de garçon: la première personne qui m'annonce la naissance d'un fils, je lui donne dix captifs, dix vaches et dix moutons." Sougoulong Kotouma accouche la première d'un fils: on envoie un homme, Moussa Kamara, annoncer la nouvelle au roi: celui-ci mangeait avec dix personnes. Il attend pour l'annoncer qu'ils aient fini de manger. Koutouyoro [co-wife of Sogolon] accouche aussi d'un garçon. On envoie Fodé Sissokho l'annoncer, qui dit: "bonjour"; le roi dit: "Viens manger avec nous." Fodé répond: "D'abord je vais te donner une nouvelle puis nous mangerons." "Quelle nouvelle?" dit le roi. "Ta femme Koutouyoro est accouchée d'un garçon." "Non! dit Moussa Kamara: c'est Sougoulong Kotouma qui est accouchée la première." "Pourquoi ne l'avoir pas dit? dit le roi: puisque c'est la nouvelle de Koutouyoro que j'ai entendu la première c'est son fils qui est mon premier fils." (ZA: 8-9)

Each of the other versions of this episode in the epic also employ a variant of the "message that failed" motif, commonly found in African literature to account for the

arrival of death among humanity.<sup>13</sup> In most other respects they are similar to ZA's rendition of the tale. One surprising difference does emerge however: ZA, F, MS and BS hold that Sunjata was born before his half-brother but, through the messenger's laxity, was not proclaimed as first-born; KMJ and FDS record the reverse: Sunjata was born *after* the son of Sogolon's co-wife but, through the mix-up in informing the king, Sunjata was actually proclaimed as the king's heir.

The theme of the birth-order dispute appears to be a popular cliché in west African oral literature. A Bamana tale, "Douga de Kore" by Segou griot Sory Komara, recounts how the hero, Da Monzon, was born on the same day as his brother Tiefolo, but that although Da Monzon's mother dispatched the message of his birth to the king first, Tiefolo's mother's messenger arrived before and consequently it was Tiefolo who was announced as first-born. Nevertheless, it is Da Monzon who eventually succeeds to the throne (Dumestre 1979: 219-20). E.P. Skinner writes the following concerning new-born sons of royal wives among the Mossi:

If the child was a boy, the ruler or Crown Prince was notified immediately, because the important privileges of a first-born hinged upon this notification. Since several wives of the Mogho Naba might be pregnant at the same time and errors might be made about the onset and duration of pregnancy primogeniture had to be established immediately to forestall dynastic conflicts. For example, it is commonly believed that the present Doulougou Naba was born several days before Mogho Naba Sagha II (1942-57) but was deprived of the nam because the messenger who brought the news of his birth reached Mogho Naba Kom after the messenger who announced Sagha's birth. (Skinner 1964: 45)

A related incident can be reported from Igala dynastic tradition. J.S. Boston notes how a chief of Benin and his wife had a quarrel; because of this, the wife failed to announce to her husband the birth of their son; then a co-wife gave birth to a child and immediately informed the chief, and this child was duly proclaimed heir to the Obu. However, a dispute arose upon the chief's death, for people realised that the heir was not in fact the first-born; to avoid civil war the younger brother - the officially declared heir - gave up his claim and travelled abroad, where he was given

another related title, that of Ata. The story is told to explain why the new title of Ata is in fact seen as senior to the older Obu title (Boston 1969: 32-3).

In the Bamana example, the theme of a birth-order mix-up is given in the same orientation as ZA, F, BS and MS, in which the hero is deprived of his birth-right but is shown, through his innate abilities or his destiny, to recover his correct position. The Mossi and Igala examples show interesting, perhaps attenuated, uses of the motif. The Mossi version holds (as in the Bamana case) that a rightful heir has been deprived of rulership through an accident, but no correction due to heroic destiny is suggested. We are, in the Mossi example, further from the realms of the popular tale than the Bamana story - although the Bamana tale would by no means be considered a pure fiction - but the motif still seems to have a suggestive power based upon its heroic associations. Skinner notes how such allegations of a birth order mix-up 'were sometimes used to foster dynastic rebellions' (1964: 45).

The Igala example might be seen as related to the version of events given in FDS and KMJ. Here, the hero, the eventual "senior" figure, is in fact the junior of the two brothers but through his own superior abilities or actions - in the Igala case, his magnanimous renouncement of his declared kingship - he is seen to triumph over his initial disadvantage. In the case of KMJ and FDS's version of the birth-order dispute the same notions are at work. Sunjata's destiny overrules, it is suggested, the normal conception of the first-born being the heir. As a hero he breaks traditional patterns.

David Conrad writes that the birth-order dispute in the epic of Sunjata can be seen as 'An artful device designed to conceal the illegitimacy of the hero's claim to a seat that rightly belonged to his elder brother' (1981: 226-7). KMJ and FDS's versions seem motivated by the desire to reconcile the birth-order dispute episode with the usual version of events regarding the hero's childhood to which Conrad is referring, viz. that Sunjata was the younger son. According to HO, MAK, A, D, S and B, Sunjata was the youngest of many brothers; according to AR, V, N, CL and KB he had one elder brother (Dankaran Tuman). Charles Monteil's list of the pre-Sunjata *mansaw*

of Manding reflects this latter tradition when it names Dangaran Touma as monarch from 1218-28 (1929: 318-9). Overwhelmingly, then, Sunjata is presented by the epic variants as not being the official, expected heir to his father's throne. However, the birth-order dispute, in all but two accounts in which it appears, claims that Sunjata is the rightful heir to Manding kingship, robbed of his birth-right by a younger sibling. Here we have two traditions, both of which have a reasonable depth in the corpus, although one is clearly the more dominant, which make contrary assertions about the hero; I suggest that KMJ and FDS's upturning of the birth-order dispute motif has arisen through their attempt to combine these two contrary traditions. They have combined the birth-order dispute and the common tradition that Sunjata was the *younger* son of his father by claiming it was Sunjata, not his brother, who was wrongly given title of elder son.

If the traditionists did indeed make this alteration, as I suggest, then they are not to be seen as breaking with tradition; in fact, the new variant they produce is an equally acceptable heroic cliché - that of the youngest child who is the cleverest and who succeeds against the odds (cf. motif L Victorious youngest child). The Herskovits note how this motif is common throughout west Africa and they say that, in practice, it is a product of the flexible and intermittent application of the primogeniture rule (1958: 6).<sup>14</sup> FDS and KMJ in fact simply return the epic to its normal position, regarding Sunjata as a usurper of his brother's rights, but they do so at the same time as retaining the birth-order dispute motif. Their action - if our speculation is correct - is an economic and deft manipulation of epic material.

What is the meaning of the motif when Sunjata, the elder child, is proclaimed second-born, as he is in the majority of cases of the birth-order dispute? Jackson's own analysis of the birth-order dispute is based on the Kuranko tale of Yata; and in this story the motif appears in the same orientation as it does in ZA, F, BS and MS: the hero is the elder child, but wrongly announced as second-born (1979: 97-8). Jackson interprets the theme as a procedure for masking the real heir and consequently reducing tension and possible conflict between father and son over

succession. By transferring the 'formality, restraint, and latent antagonisms' Jackson suggests colour the relationship between a father and his designated heir to high office onto a substitute nominee, the actual heir can avoid this 'experience of paternal rejection' (1979: 99, 100). The teller of the Kuranko story observes that 'Since that time rivalry between brothers has existed' (1979: 98); for Jackson, father-son conflict is transformed into brother-brother conflict (1979: 108-9).

Consistent with my interpretation of the long pregnancy of Sogolon in some instances as a masking of the heir from his persecutor, the erroneous designation of the hero as second-born acts to keep him out of the conflict between Sumanguru and the other sons of Nare Famaghan. His lameness makes him, effectively, ineligible for rulership and a most unlikely candidate for the great successor both the people of Manding and Sumanguru have been told to expect.

Being announced second in this instance can be viewed as a variation and effective equivalent of the situation in those accounts in which Sunjata is the youngest brother of a number of sons of the king of Manding. By placing Sunjata at the end of a long list of brothers his elders are seen to bear the brunt of Sumanguru's animosity and are all killed, while the hero's battles remain in the future. ZA, F, BS and MS, however, might be seen as attempting to retain the effective value of this situation in which Sunjata is the youngest brother while at the same time according Sunjata first-born status. Tradition may want to regard Sunjata as the first-born in order to underline the legitimacy of Mali's greatest ruler. As I have suggested in Chapter Three, the griots have gone to significant lengths to ensure that Sunjata is seen as legitimate royalty on both sides of his family tree. But, viewing Sunjata as the eldest son leaves the hero vulnerable again to Sumanguru - as the designated heir he would be the natural target from birth, and as the successor to Nare Famaghan he would be the monarch associated with the early defeats at the hands of the Soso state.

Here we are perhaps witnessing conflict between the epic as a purveyor of edifying and stimulating heroic clichés - the youngest son who succeeds against the odds -

and as a tradition with a particular historical context to communicate, and which seeks to establish thereby the legitimate basis of the Keita clan's rule in ancient Mali. The birth-order episode neatly ameliorates the situation in this instance, combining the benefits of those versions which claim Sunjata to be the youngest son of many, and those who see him as the eldest son. It allows Sunjata all the legitimacy of being the first-born, the natural heir of his father, while at the same time affording him the protection of younger son status in the face of Sumanguru's attacks. In the case of the majority of versions of the birth-order dispute episode, it can be said that, contrary to Conrad's claim that the motif is 'an artful device to conceal the illegitimacy of the hero's claim', it actually acts in reverse, concealing the *legitimacy* of Sunjata's position, by making him appear the second-born of his father.

#### **The hero's lameness**

An interpretation has already been suggested for those variants of the episode which blamed Sumanguru or Sunjata's father for the hero's paralysis. It was put forward that the father in AS, and Sumanguru in BK, feared their supercession by the hero and attempted to prevent or at least delay the event. This is in effect what the accounts themselves say. But beyond these two variants of the lameness theme such an Oedipal reading was found to be inconsistent with the accounts themselves. KMJ, FDS and MS suggest that Sunjata's lameness was caused by Sasuma Berete, the co-wife of Sogolon, who had magic spells placed on the child Sunjata. In FDS we read:

The Berete woman,  
She summoned to her a holy-man,  
Charging him to pray to God,  
So Son-Jara would not walk.  
and summoned to her an Omen Master,  
For him to read the signs in sand,  
So Son-Jara would not walk. (FDS: 132)

However, most versions do not name any overt cause for the hero's lameness. For example, F simply states the hero to have been 'weak on his feet' (F1: 459), D that he 'était atteint de paralysie' (20), V that 'Il était paralysé des deux jambes' (320), ZB simply that he 'ne pouvait se lever' (38).

When the source of the lameness is attributed to Sogolon's co-wife, Sasuma Berete, then the interpretation of the motif must revolve around the issues of co-wife jealousy and sibling rivalry that were discussed above. Rank himself noted how a brother could be perceived by the subject as a threat in the same way as the father, although it was the Herskovits who pointed out the significance of sibling rivalry in a polygynous family. Fernandez similarly suggested that castration anxiety may, in the polygynous setting, be replaced by sibling rivalry, noting how in the Sunjata epic 'for a good portion of the account the animus is co-wife jealousy and competition' (1969: 54). Of the three accounts which definitely lay the blame for Sunjata's lameness at Sasuma Berete's feet, two (KMJ, FDS) are those versions which reverse the orientation of the birth-order dispute, making Sunjata the second-born child but announced as the first-born. This version of the motif presents Sunjata as a precocious usurper of his brother's rights; it can also be said to give Sasuma Berete a justifiable reason for her jealousy toward Sogolon, having seen her son stripped of his status as senior and heir to the throne. As Belcher remarks: 'The story seems to me to require that Sunjata be born second and announced first, to account for the hostility of Saman Berete' (1985: 234). Thus it can be said that this variant of the birth-order dispute and the attribution of the cause of lameness to Sasuma Berete are complementary and reinforce each other.

For Jackson, lameness in the hero has the same value as the mother's over-long pregnancy - namely that the heir is disguised and that 'there is uncertainty about his capacity to succeed' (1979: 112). Again, the motive behind this created uncertainty is said to be the desire to reduce tension around the succession by displacing it onto the "horizontal" (brother-brother) axis. WK furnishes us with a detail which may bear out Jackson's assertion. Wa Kamissoko describes Sunjata as a

lame child sitting in a hole which he had excavated, which hid all but his head and shoulders, and from where he did not budge for the seventeen years of his paralysis (WK3: 99). WK also claims the gestation time of the hero was seventeen years; one might also see the hole in the ground as a second womb. Both of these details would tend towards acceptance of the isomorphism of long pregnancy and paralysis, and allow the interpretation that Sunjata's claim to the throne was by both means camouflaged.

According to Jackson's thesis, crippling should not be seen as the *result* of jealousy and rivalry between co-wives and siblings so much as the *cause* in as much as tensions and rivalries are displaced onto sibling relations from inter-generational relations. This paradox can be traced to the differing views of the origin of the hero's lameness. While it is consistent for FDS and KMJ to suggest Sunjata became a cripple because Sasuma Berete resented her son's demotion to second-born status, it makes no sense in those versions which claim Sunjata to have been proclaimed second-born (ZA, F, BS, MS), or in those accounts which say Sunjata was the youngest of many siblings, to see the crippling of the hero as motivated by the overweening jealousy of a co-wife whose son has in fact been proclaimed the rightful heir - Sasuma Berete has here no obvious cause for great jealousy. Looking at the issue from the other end, so to speak, and regarding the actual *effect* of the hero's paralysis, in the versions which state Sunjata to have been proclaimed second-born, Sunjata's lameness in fact appears to *reduce* rather than promote sibling rivalry: Not only does Sasuma's child become promoted to heir-apparent but his so-called rival is afflicted with a serious physical handicap, greatly reducing his potential as a threat to Dankaran Tuman's ascendancy.

What, however, is to be the interpretation of those remaining variants which claim Sunjata was crippled, give no overt cause, but note the existence of an older half-brother or brothers, and of ill-feeling between the two related households? This is the case in MAK, AR, A, D, V, S, B, N, CL, WK3 and KB, possibly also in P and DMS (ZB and MK make no mention of any fellow siblings of the hero). Several causes can be suggested. Co-wife and sibling rivalries only really become significant once Sunjata

has been cured of his paralysis - until that moment he is no real threat to an elder and much fitter brother. A more plausible reading is that the hero's paralysis acts in these accounts to camouflage the hero and deflect the attention of his half-brother and Sumanguru from him.

Another possible interpretation concerns the hero's supposed ambivalence to his accession, also suggested by Jackson as a reading of the mother's long pregnancy. The hero's "psychological immobilization" results from the knowledge that his succession implies the death of his father. In the Yata story, the moment Yata stood up his father became ill and died (Jackson 1979: 98). In BD Sunjata's father dies the day after the hero manages to take his first steps with the aid of an iron bar (20); in AS - as we have seen - Sunjata's father clearly feels his own vulnerability in the face of his son's development, and acts to sabotage Sunjata's growth. Also, in MAK (209) and A (355) we find the following incident: Sunjata is told by a marabout or magician that his father's life is linked to the life of a particular sheep; one day this sheep swallows the king's wife's necklace; Sunjata intervenes in vain to spare the sheep, and upon its death - to enable the recovery of the necklace - his father dies too. Interestingly, the identity of the wife alters from MAK to the later A: in the former she is Sunjata's own mother, in the latter she is Sogolon's co-wife. In what seems to be a refining of the story, the blame for the father's death is shifted from Sunjata's mother to her rival and thus is the theme of co-wife jealousy introduced into this version of the tale.

One should also note the ambiguity surrounding whether the hero simply *could* not walk or in fact *would* not. Recall de Vries' assertion that the classic hero is either dumb or perhaps only pretends to be dumb. Bamba Suso actually states that Sunjata refused to walk for seven years in a fit of pique brought on by his brother being declared the first-born of his father (43). Galloway takes up the idea, interpreting Sunjata's paralysis as follows:

When his half-brother is named as heir, Sunjata is not portrayed as being ordinarily annoyed. No indeed. When he sulks, he must be shown to sulk in a big way, refusing to walk for years (1980: iv)

This is another part of her interpretation of heroic elements as stylized exaggeration. This reading would be workable with (in addition to BS) H, which says simply that Sunjata 'il resta couché' (112), with ZA, which asserts that that the hero 'est resté dix-neuf ans sans marcher' (13) and with N, who notes merely that Sunjata 'crawled on all-fours' (15); but beyond these accounts there is no ambiguity - Sunjata is accepted as being unable to walk. Certainly if Galloway's understanding of the hero's lameness were followed generally it would create problems with the interpretation of the episode in which Sunjata starts to walk, which is usually viewed as an epic struggle against calamitous disadvantage.

#### **Part Two: The childhood episodes**

Two major episodes connected with Sunjata's childhood, together with various related incidents, are found in whole or part in most accounts of the epic, and lead up to the hero's eventual exile from Manding. The first of these concerns Sunjata's gaining or regaining the use of his legs. Twenty-five variants of this episode have been examined which contain at least the basic story of how Sunjata stood up for the first time with the aid of a crutch.<sup>15</sup> In fourteen of these accounts Sunjata first stands up as a result of his mother's request for some baobab leaves for a sauce that she is cooking.<sup>16</sup> The story often goes that Sogolon asked for these leaves from her co-wife Sasuma Berete, was refused them and told that her son, the crippled Sunjata, ought to pick them for her. This incident is linked in twelve variants of the tale to Sunjata's first act upon standing which is, in these accounts, to fetch for his mother not only some baobab leaves but the whole tree, which he uproots and places in front of her dwelling<sup>17</sup> - in five accounts injuring the tree's young occupants, who fall out, breaking arms or legs (F, KMJ, WK, MS, KB). Seven variants of the epic record another tradition associated with a baobab tree, and F, CL and BK interweave this tradition with the incident just reported. This tradition is that

Sunjata, upon standing, picks the single fruit of a baobab tree, a task which is made difficult either by the fruit's height above the ground or by the rarity of its appearance. The one who picks this fruit is said to be destined for kingship.<sup>18</sup>

Various different versions of the episode in which the hero first stands are given, but constant throughout is the notion that Sunjata's standing was a very remarkable event, made possible only through the utilization of a large amount of power, either physical, mental or magical. Ten accounts state that Sunjata stood with the aid of an iron bar which was forged specially for the occasion at his command by his father's blacksmith, and which was employed by the hero as a crutch. Five of these variants claim three iron bars were forged in succession, each one thicker than the last. Sunjata snapped or bent out of shape the first two - they were not strong enough to take his weight - and only the third and stoutest bar was able to support his attempt to stand upright.<sup>19</sup> Fifteen versions of the epic say that Sunjata at first tried to stand using an iron bar but that this proved to be an inadequate support, despite its massive proportions, and that the hero eventually stood using some other means of support, not always purely physical. In MAK, A, D, AS and B the hero is handed his father's sceptre, and using this (presumably slender) instrument, hauls himself upright.<sup>20</sup> In KMJ, FDS, MS, MK and DMS support is provided by a branch or stick of wood, sometimes of the custard-apple tree.<sup>21</sup> In V and BK the hero employs the side of a hut as a support; in F, V, BK and BS his mother supports him herself.<sup>22</sup> In KMJ, FDS, MS, MK and DMS Sogolon successfully intercedes for her son, after he has failed to stand with the use of the iron bar, praying to Allah and swearing an oath on her own faithfulness as a wife and mother.<sup>23</sup>

The second major episode to occur before the hero's exile, found in thirteen variants of the epic, involves Sunjata in a contest with sorceresses over a bull.<sup>24</sup> These powerful women (or men in MAK), of whom there are usually said to be nine,<sup>25</sup> are given a bull by Sunjata's brother or his brother's mother, and told to use their sorcery to kill the hero in the form of the bull. They divide the animal up into nine parts and are about to consume the meat - which represents Sunjata - when the

hero himself appears. Discovering what they are doing, he offers them one buffalo each in place of the portion of the bull, manages successfully to hunt nine buffaloes (in KMJ and FDS by transforming himself into a lion), and then persuades the sorceresses to reconstitute the divided bull in order to demonstrate their magical powers.

In KMJ, FDS, MS and WK3, rather than taking place before the hero's exile, Sunjata's meeting with the sorceresses is said to have occurred while he was away from Manding. The context of this episode for most variants is, however, the hero's gaining in prowess and popularity after having recovered from his paralysis. His prowess is illustrated through his hunting achievements in connection with the sorceresses; and in some versions that do not contain the episode of the sorceresses, Sunjata is still described as a hunter.<sup>26</sup> His kingly destiny is suggested, in addition to the incident of the baobab fruit, when he is found to be large enough to wear the heavy royal or circumcision clothing (ZA: 26-7; F1: 461; BS: 45). These events lead to jealousy on the part of his half-brother, Dankaran Tuman, and his mother's co-wife, Sasuma Berete, who plot to remove him, enlisting the services of the sorceresses, and leading to the contest with them that we have already described. Another incident underlining Sunjata's kingly destiny, at the expense of Dankaran Tuman, is found in four accounts.<sup>27</sup> In it, Sunjata and Dankaran Tuman each have a dog; Sunjata's dog, even though it is often described as the smaller of the two, kills that of his brother.

### **Initiation and the hero pattern**

Innes makes the point that the episode in which Sunjata first stands occurs, according to two of the Gambian versions he records, at the time of the initiation ceremony for young males, 'and is presumably a symbolic statement of that transition' (1974: 27). Several authors have made a connection in general between the hero pattern and rites of passage, particularly initiation rites. Raglan wrote of his

twenty-two point chart paralleling the lives of heroes:

the incidents fall definitely into three groups - those connected with the hero's birth, those connected with his accession to the throne, and those connected with his death. They thus correspond to the three principal *rites de passage*, that is to say, the rites at birth, at initiation, and at death (1936: 190)

Although Raglan supported this link with the thesis that the hero myth was - like other myths - the spoken accompaniment of a now forgotten or disconnected ritual, it is not necessary to posit such a connection in order to accept a link between the hero pattern and rites of passage. Jan de Vries discusses the idea that the hero myth represents symbolically the transition of society from the death of an old form to the birth of a new (1963: 220). But Alan Dundes, in his wide-ranging study "The hero pattern and the life of Jesus" (1978: 223-70) suggests that the hero pattern addresses not just issues of state but of the individual's growth in society; he writes in conclusion:

In Mediterranean family structure, one of the crucial problems for boys remains breaking the strong bond existing between them and their mothers so as to join the world of mature men. I suggest that the hero pattern in general and the life of Jesus in particular are an expression of this problem. In this sense, the hero pattern is analogous to male puberty rites. (1978: 259-60)

Dundes' statement does not necessarily imply that the hero myth and initiation rites are parts of a once coherent whole as the myth-ritualists would have; rather, the story of the hero, as it appears in different cultures and in different forms, and the rites of initiation, which likewise vary from culture to culture but which have a wide manifestation and share basic similarities, are both aspects of society's concern with, comment or reflection upon, and partial solution to the problems of the individual's development in - and in relationship to - the group. Dundes' general viewpoint on the hero pattern is one held by some Jungian psychologists. Joseph Henderson asserts that 'the essential function of the heroic myth is the development of the individual's ego-consciousness - his awareness of his own strengths and

weaknesses - in a manner that will equip him for the arduous tasks with which life confronts him' (1964: 112); while for Erich Neumann 'the hero is the archetypal forerunner of mankind... His fate is the pattern in accordance with which the masses of humanity must live', and 'the stages of the hero myth have become constituent elements in the personal development of the individual' (1970: 131).

Dundes' specific point - that initiation ceremonies are important for reorienting the male child from his mother to the male group - is also claimed by Fernandez:

One of the common ways of balancing this bond [the mother-son bond] is through initiation ceremonies. Societies in which child-raising practices give the male child a strong primary identification with his mother, and yet where male dominance in patrilineality and patrilocality creates secondary identification with males, initiation ceremonies will be introduced to resolve the conflict in sex identity. (1969: 52)

Following the authors cited above, I shall posit a connection between the hero pattern and initiation rites in general; following Innes I suggest that the episode in which Sunjata stands symbolizes that initiation. Can any specific links be made between Malinke initiation practice and the details of the epic's episode which would confirm this theory? To that end I shall furnish a brief description of Malinke attitudes to and performance of initiation of their young.

### **Malinke initiation rites**

Malinke circumcise all their male children and excise all their female children. While increasingly initiation rites and the operation of circumcision are becoming separate, as circumcision is conducted at hospitals and clinics (Meyer 1987: 64), traditionally circumcision marked the central village-based rite of transition from childhood to adulthood. At present circumcision is performed on children of the age of six to thirteen in the Gambia (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 95) or eight to fourteen on the Upper Niger (Hopkins 1971: 104-5), in the past the operation occurred later: between twelve and fifteen according to Labouret (1934: 77), between about fifteen

and seventeen according to Chéron (1933: 297), and at about the same ages as Chéron gives in seventeenth-century Gambia (Jobson 1968: 138).

Male children are circumcised in large groups in a ceremony that occurs only every so many years, depending on the width of the age-band eligible for the operation. Labouret suggests the operation occurs every two to four years (1934: 76). The group formed for circumcision continues to play a significant part in the life of the individual after the event. 'All those circumcised in the same year are held to belong to the same age-grade; further, those circumcised in the same three year period are also held to be twins (*fula*)', writes Hopkins (1971: 104). Each of these groups receives a name, and these names tend to reappear according to a cyclical pattern (Leynaud 1966: 47-8). The groups slot into the age-grade or class system (Charest 1971: 134-5).

A synthetic account of the ceremony and its aftermath among various Malinke communities will now be furnished. The operation takes place in the dry season, in the months of December or January, after the harvest has been gathered in and the workload consequently diminished (Labouret 1934: 77; Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 95). Celebrations, consisting of feasting and dancing, surround the event in which all the villagers are involved. The initiands are issued with special clothes - their first adult garb - in which they dance repeatedly during the week before the ceremony (Camara Laye 1959: 94). The operation of circumcision itself takes place in the early morning, outside the village, and is performed by a blacksmith (Chéron 1933: 297; Labouret 1934: 79; Cashion 1982: 100; Meyer 1987: 65). After having been circumcised, the initiates spend about six to eight weeks in retreat in a specially built shelter in a far corner of the village (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 97). During this time they are taught songs and stories which emphasize their new role in society, and how they should deport themselves (Camara Laye 1959: 107). Restrictions exist on interaction between initiates and villagers; these are gradually relaxed over time. Fathers can visit their sons, the initiates can take supervised walks, but must keep away from women; only after three weeks can mothers visit their sons - Camara Laye records a

meeting between him and his mother that was watched over and was conducted with a neutral space between the two participants (1959: 106-12). The period of seclusion ends when all the initiates' wounds have healed; a feast is held, and the shelter is burnt to the ground (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 99).

What are the symbolic resonances and social implications of initiation for the Malinke? Circumcision, as a process of transformation and a rite of transition, is sometimes symbolized as a second birth. Camara Laye describes the change from childhood to adulthood as entry into 'that second life' (1959: 90). The concept of initiation as a second birth is implied in the behaviour, real or purported, of the "masked figures" of Malinke villages. These leaf- or bark-covered actors are connected to circumcision ceremonies in several ways. In the Gambia they marshal the novices' movements and protect them from intrusive bystanders (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 102). Labouret links them to the *Komo* initiation society, where they are used to test the nerves of the initiands (1934: 83-4). Camara Laye's description of the pre-initiation ceremony of "Konden Diara" speaks of a roaring "lion" which is supposed nearly to eat up the young children (1959: 79ff.). Richard Jobson records that children are told of masked figures who will swallow them up and spew them out some days later (1968: 148). Peter Weil writes for modern-day Gambia that 'During the years before attendance at the circumcision camp, little boys are told that they are to be devoured by a monster and spat out whole'. He suggests that this is in fact a metaphor for circumcision itself, noting the association of masked figures with the 'death and rebirth' of the novices (1971: 288).

The fantasy of monsters who devour children and disgorge adults is widespread in west Africa and beyond. Frazer himself linked this fantasy to the notion of initiation as a second birth, and Mircea Eliade has discussed the links between the concept of a devouring monster and that of initiation as rebirth (Frazer 1963: 905-17; Eliade 1961: 14, 35f.). Joseph Campbell, who describes the use of similar images in the initiation rites of some Australian societies, notes the frequent employment of the motif of the swallowing and disgorging of the hero by a monster in the hero

pattern itself, and interprets the motif as the self-annihilation and rebirth of the hero (Campbell 1949: 90f., 137f.).

Initiation into this "second life" has both individual and social implications. Chéron describes the meaning of circumcision/excision for the Malinke as giving strength to men and beauty to women (1933: 297). Leynaud echoes this: circumcision and excision 'ont pour le but, en effet, d'éliminer pour l'un et pour l'autre sexe les supports des principes opposés qui font d'être humain, à sa naissance, un androgyne' (1966: 48). Initiation is seen as defining rather than simply affirming the individual's gender and consequently, to a large degree, determining their role within the community. As to individual qualities, Jackson notes that for the Malinke-related Kuranko initiation is supposed to help the novice master his emotions and desires, to 'curb his impetuosity' and to allow him to be able to 'defer immediate gratifications' (1982: 24). Camara Laye recalls post-initiation teaching which emphasized 'conduct befitting a man: to be absolutely straightforward, to cultivate all the virtues that go to make an honest man, to fulfill our duties' (1959: 107).

As a new individual in his own right, the novice is introduced to the *cult sacra* and informed of the secrets behind the bogeys of his youth - the "monsters" (masked figures) and the "roaring lions" (bull roarers). His new status is emphasized by the alteration in his relationship with his mother. The restrictions on mother/son contact during seclusion have already been mentioned; also, Jackson notes how circumcision has the aim, for the Kuranko, of breaking the child's emotional ties with his mother (1982: 24).

### **Sunjata gains the use of his legs**

With the information presented concerning Malinke circumcision rites and their significance it ought now to be possible to enlarge upon the statement made by Innes concerning the symbolic link suggested to exist between initiation and the episode in which Sunjata gains the use of his legs.

As Innes noted, for BK and BS the context of the episode is that of the circumcision ritual. In BK Sunjata is fourteen years old and still cannot walk when the time for circumcising the youngsters arrives. With some irony, one imagines, Banna Kanute recounts how Sogolon goes up to Sumanguru - who spends the greater part of the narrative trying to destroy the unknown pretender - and asks him to help her son to stand by forging iron bars for him (BK: 181-5). In BS the time for the circumcision rites arrives when Sunjata is seven years old, but his lameness at first excludes him (BS: 43-5). In addition to these versions, three other accounts note this context. In ZA we read that Sunjata asks to be circumcised, but that his father says he must first walk (ZA: 14). In F, on hearing that the hero can at last walk his father exclaims that Sunjata has 'arrived at man's estate and now one may set about his circumcision' (F1: 461).<sup>26</sup> For CL, Sunjata's new-found ability to walk qualifies him for entry into the association of the uninitiates, the pre-circumcision age-grade (CL: 142). While these five accounts give circumcision rites as the context of the episode only one, F, actually mentions the circumcision of the hero itself, and here only in a brief clause (F1: 462), suggesting that the episode of the hero's first steps might itself take the place of the ritual of circumcision in the narrative.

In addition to the context of the episode, five points of similarity between narrative and ritual can be advanced in support of the claim that the standing of the hero symbolizes the initiation rite of passage.

First of all, all twenty-five variants of the episode examined record that Sunjata attempted to stand with the aid of one or more iron bars. These bars are often said to have been forged for Sunjata by all the blacksmiths of Manding or by the king's blacksmith himself. In many cases the smith is linked to Sumanguru, who might be seen as the archetypal blacksmith figure in the epic. We have seen already that BK says Sumanguru forged the iron bars for Sunjata, on Sogolon's request, as he is said to have done, at Sunjata's request, in ZB (38); in DMS the smith's name is Sori Jan Kante, which is the name of Sumanguru's father in KMJ (KMJ,D1: 56); in MS it is Dun Fayiri, who is said to be Sumanguru's father (229), and in FDS (136) and KB (26) it is

Nun Fayiri, while in WK3 (102) it is Nun Fayiri's descendants who do the forging. Now, as has been said, among the Malinke it is traditionally the blacksmith's task to circumcise the initiand. Calling for an iron bar from a blacksmith to facilitate Sunjata's transformation from a cripple to an able-bodied youth may be viewed as a symbolic representation of the forger's role in circumcision.

Three portions from the stories of three other African heroes present interesting potential parallels to the Sunjata epic's episode with the iron bar, and suggest a more general link between blacksmiths, their products, and the attainment of manhood in Africa. Chaka, we are told, ordered the manufacture of a special assegai while still a youth, and is said to have been dissatisfied with the smith's initial efforts (Ritter 1955: 30); Ozidi asks a blacksmith to forge for him a sword, but breaks the first two that he receives from the smith, finding neither of them sturdy enough for him (Clarke 1977: 43); and the young Mwindo has a suit of armour made of iron fashioned for himself (Biebuyck 1969: 82).

Second, Sogolon's request for leaves with which to make a sauce, which prompts the hero's first steps in fourteen accounts, can be linked to the circumcision rites. B. K. Sidibe, in his synthesis of BS, BK, DK and Jabir Kuyate's version of the epic (BKS), spells out the link:

it was customary for the circumcision candidates to go and collect baobab leaves, which they would dry for their mothers to use in cooking. The mothers pounded and winnowed these baobab leaves until they were a fine powder. This powder was put on the food prepared for the circumcision candidates (BKS: 4)

Innes also makes the connection, stating that the baobab leaves were 'needed for the preparation of rice for boys about to be circumcised' (1973: 109). Viewed in this perspective, Sunjata's inability to pick baobab leaves for his mother's cookery directly implies his unsuitability for initiation into manhood, and is an acute representation of the hero's apparent failure to match up to the expectations of the community. Also, Sasuma Berete's refusal to let Sogolon use baobab leaves picked by her son is intelligible, given the leaves' role - both symbolic and practical - in the

ritual of circumcision. It is not so much Sasuma's reply to Sogolon that is humiliating, rather the need to ask her co-wife in the first place. If the requirement of leaves implies the circumcision of one's son, then asking for baobab leaves from another child is tantamount to saying one's son is to be circumcised despite his patent shortcomings for entry into adulthood.

Third, it is worth recalling the age at which Sunjata first walked. He is lame for seven years in D, AS, H, BD, N, BS, B and MK; for nine years in FDS, KMJ, MS and DMS; for fourteen years in BK; and for seventeen years in F, V, P and WK3. Leynaud writes that, on the Upper Niger, the age-band eligible for circumcision encompasses those aged between eight and fifteen (1966: 47), which would coincide with the seven years of lameness Sunjata is said to have endured in eight accounts listed above. Hopkin's age-band is eight to fourteen, tying in with BK; Chéron and Jobson say seventeen is the top age of their eligible band of youngsters, tallying with WK3, F, V and P; while Labouret says the maximum age for initiates among the Malinke is nine years (1934: 77), tying in with the remaining versions listed. We shall not attempt to tie in the age-bands prevalent in particular areas and at particular times to individual versions from the same place and time, nevertheless, we are able to say that the age at which most of the accounts imply Sunjata's lameness ended corresponds to the age at which various Malinke communities circumcise their male children, suggesting a conscious attempt to connect the episode of the hero's first steps with the initiation cycle.

Fourth, two versions (ZA: 26-7; BS: 45) claim that Sunjata tried on the trousers associated with the kingship of Manding. These are of a large size and fit none of his brothers; Sunjata, however, finds them to be too small for him. Another variant of this incident of the epic, one which exploits fully the dramatic and hyperbolic potentialities of the theme, is recounted by Lanrezac:

Soundjata, un chef mandingue, dispute le pouvoir à son frère aîné. Pour savoir si ce frère est digne de régner, on apporte le bonnet national, le bonnet royal; on le pose sur la tête du frère qui disparaît tout entier sous la coiffure. Ce bonnet, ainsi que vous allez en juger, n'était pas un bonnet ordinaire et

il ne devait pas être très commode à mettre: la coiffe supportait en effet "300 têtes de boeufs, 300 têtes d'hippopotames et 300 têtes de toutes les espèces d'animaux de tout ce qui a vie". Soundjata met à son tour le bonnet, mais ce dernier est trop petit pour lui et, cherchant à l'enfoncer, il le crève violemment. Cette première épreuve subie, Soundjata endosse le boubou, le grand vêtement lui vient à peine jusqu'au nombril, tandis qu'auparavant son frère avait manqué périr en l'essayant (Lanrezac 1907: 610)

This incident in the epic is a local variant of the widespread motif H 36.2 Garment only fits true king, but conforms to what al-ʿUmarī tells us about fourteenth-century dress conventions at the court of Mali. He writes that the *mansa* of Mali donated a pair of 'wide trousers' to any hero who achieved a great exploit, and that the more a hero achieved, the bigger his trousers (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 265). In the epic, the incident is clearly a signal of Sunjata's kingly destiny. Nevertheless, as was noted above in passing, another variant of the incident (F1: 462), in which Sunjata must wear a heavy cap and mantle, states that the clothes were part of the circumcision ritual. Certainly, the donning of new, adult, garments is a feature of Malinke circumcision ceremonies (Camara Laye 1959: 94; Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 97) and given the context of the incident as it appears in F we can suggest that the motif may have this resonance for the audience, whether the griot specifically gives it this context or not.

Fifth, in eight versions of the epic Sunjata is linked in some way to thieving at this stage in his life.<sup>29</sup> N describes how 'whenever his mother went out he would crawl on all fours to rummage about in the calabashes in search of food, for he was very greedy' (N: 15).<sup>30</sup> In ZA we hear that Sunjata led a gang of sixty 'a quatre pattes' to steal gold, cattle and jewellery, and that noone dared stop him (ZA: 13). In JBS, 'After he had begun to walk he would pick up objects attractive to any child.' These objects he would keep from the other boys in the safety of his mother's company. *Jeli* Baba Sisoko derives "jata" from *ya ta* which he translates as "has taken" (705). In BS Sunjata steals some cloth from his brothers in order to pay his

griots (BS: 47). BS, ZA, S and KB explicitly link Sunjata's thieving activities to his name. Sunjata means 'voleur comme un lion' according to ZA (14); for KB Sunjata's behaviour is also likened to that of the lion, hence 'on l'affubla dès-lors du surnom de "Son-Jata" ou "Jata-le Voleur"' (23). S says the hero's name comes from *Soun*, "thief" and *diata*, "lion", because 'Celui-là est un voleur fort comme le lion!' (41). AR calls Sunjata 'le pillard' (168). For Vidal "Soundiata" means 'stronger than a lion' (V: 318-9); Johnson notes how some derive "son" or "soon" from *nson*, "thief" (1986: 183). The derivation of "jata" from the Malinke word for lion is also attested by Ibn Khaldūn (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 333), by Delafosse (1972 ii: 177) and by Innes (1974: 107).<sup>34</sup>

Sunjata's status as the "lion thief" is sometimes said to derive from his stealing of the throne from his elder brother, Dankaran Tuman. The surname Keita is often derived from *ke*, "inheritance" and *ta*, "to take", as was noted in Chapter Three. But, in view of the evidence presented above, Sunjata's "lion thief" tag also seems to be linked to his thieving while still a child.

How is one to view this thieving behaviour from the young hero? It can be seen as part of his general status as a child-hero of prodigious abilities, one way in which the narrative indicates its subject's heroic destiny. In this context it can be linked to Sunjata's hunting sorties from his mother's womb - in ZA and KB the thieving hero takes meat, in ZA he steals at night. More significantly for this analysis, thieving is also associated with initiation among the Malinke. This is attested to as early as the seventeenth century by Jobson, who wrote of the novices in the Gambian area:

there is unto these youthes allowed a certaine licentious liberty, whereat they may steale and take away peoples hennes, or poultry; nay from the Fulbies, a biefe or cattle to eat and banquet themselves without any offence to the lawes, or government of the countrey (1968: 146)

Van Gennep notes that among the Malinke and related peoples 'the novice's right to steal lasts from the beginning of the cicatrization of the wound until it is completely healed' (1960: 115). Jackson records a similar practice among the Kuranko;

here, though, the leniency extends to the child in the years before initiation but ends as soon as the period of seclusion following initiation is over (1982: 25). For Jobson the acceptance of stealing among neophytes was a matter of indulgence to those suffering the stresses of circumcision (1968: 146); van Gennep, however, was right to state that the practice in fact was related to the initiates' status as external to society: they are sacred and dangerous to society, equally they are immune from society's sanctions - hence they may take other's property with impunity (1960: 114). A similar view is expounded by Mary Douglas:

we find them [initiates] behaving like dangerous criminal characters. They are licensed to waylay, steal, rape. This behaviour is enjoined even upon them. To behave anti-socially is the proper expression of their marginal condition (1966: 96-7)<sup>32</sup>

This conception of the state of initiates can be linked to Malinke notions of the status of children in general. Patrick McNaughton writes that the Malinke see children as 'creatures whose natures are considered quite ambiguous at best and who are said to be at least as wild as they are human' (1988: 146). Maria Grosz-Ngaté, who characterizes Bamana circumcision and excision as a key part of the process of achieving personhood, notes how children are accorded a much lower status to adolescents and adults; that a child can be called "worthless" without implying the same offence as if the epithet were applied to an adolescent or an adult (1989: 172-3). Jackson quotes a Kuranko informant as saying: 'We never take seriously the deeds of an uninitiated boy. A boy is just as he was when he was born; he knows nothing, he has no understanding. A boy can swear or steal with impunity' (1982: 25). Jackson characterizes Kuranko initiation as a "taming process", turning amoral children into moral beings (ibid.). If the "untamed" condition of the child is stressed in the thieving activity of the initiate, it is because at initiation itself the novice leaves this state behind him for good. The fact that Sunjata is often said to have been a thief at this point in his life, I suggest, links his experience to that of the initiate and to the rite of circumcision, underlining the connection

between the episode of Sunjata's standing and male initiation.

If the similarities between the episode in which Sunjata stands and circumcision rites is accepted, how does this influence the interpretation of this episode in the epic? The episode describes Sunjata's transformation from a cripple to an active individual. This transformation can be seen to subsume a whole series of changes in the hero's behaviour: from a thief in the village to a hunter in the bush, from a burden on his mother's and his community's resources - in his inability to collect food - to a provider of both meat (as a hunter) and vegetables (the baobab leaves); from a supposedly royal child, yet with no hope of acceding to the throne, to the natural choice for leader, whatever his purported birth-order position. All these transformations can be placed under the rubric of socialization, which was noted as one of the chief aims of initiation rites among the Malinke: the change from pre-social, selfish and gender-undifferentiated individuals to socially aware community-oriented members of a group, with clearly defined (gender-based) roles. Before he can walk Sunjata is described as a gluttonous thief - in other words, someone whose main concern is his basic drive for satisfaction and who pays no regard to the well-being of the group; his first act upon standing is, however, to fetch food for his mother to cook with, implying a response to community or familial needs. Food acts as a powerful metaphor for Sunjata's transformation in another way. In eleven versions of the epic Sunjata is said to have hunted upon gaining the use of his legs; and, as a good Malinke hunter, he would not keep the game to himself but divide it up among his kin according to established precepts (Cashion 1982: 243-7). Here we see a transformation from village-based "hunter" - who in fact only took from fellow villagers - to a hunter who brings game from the bush. Finally, the change from cripple to an agile and athletic - or even superhuman - person can itself be seen as a powerful metaphor for the transformation from nonsocial to social. Jackson speculates on the significance for early humanity of the opposition lame/fleet-footed, suggesting that while agility would have implied a higher chance of survival and therefore have connoted 'socially adaptive behaviour', lameness would have been a

significant hindrance to survival and connoted 'social breakdown and discontinuity' (1979: 125).

Bearing in mind the similarities noted between the episode of the hero's standing and Malinke initiation rites, and noting also the metaphorical implications of the episode in terms of an initiation-like transformation from pre-social to social being, it seems fair to suggest that, rather than the traditionists simply employing initiation symbolism to describe the transformation of the hero, the actual process works also in reverse: the traditionists employ their description of Sunjata's standing to highlight key notions concerning initiation, in other words, they employ Sunjata's passage from crippled child to agile man as a model of the transition sought from every young Malinke male.

#### The sorceresses and the bull

The final episode in the epic before the hero departs for exile is, for nine accounts, his encounter with the sorceresses who have been instructed to kill Sunjata with their magic power; a further four versions locate the same theme later in the narrative.<sup>33</sup> In a brief discussion of this episode I hope to show that it restates some of the themes already discussed above, linking the hero's exile to familial tensions and describing Sunjata's growth and development via initiation symbolism.

The bull that the sorceresses were given should not be seen merely as a reward for their services, rather, it is the means by which they seek to kill the hero. As F puts it, the 'Subagas [sorceresses] changed Sunjatta into a Turani (bull)' (F1: 462), for ZA they 'prennent un tureau et elles mettent en lui la respiration de Soundiata' (16). Franz de Zeltner suggests the translation "respiration, l'âme" for the Malinke word *nio* (ibid.). Innes translates *nio* as "vital principal, the immaterial part of a man's makeup" (1974: 114). Explaining the ideas behind the episode, he writes that 'a witch is believed to be able to remove the victim's *nio* from his body and hang it up somewhere, often on a tree. When the *nio* shrivels up, the victim dies' (ibid.).

Johnson states that it is the *ja* (wraith or spiritual double) that the sorceresses attack and remove from the body of their victims:

The wraith is then put into an animal ... which is slaughtered and eaten in a communal ritual. Once the animal is consumed, there is no possible reversal of the sacrifice (1979: 236)

The episode of the sorceresses and the bull is based on very widespread beliefs about the behaviour of witches found in Africa, Europe and North America. These beliefs hold that witches participate in cannibalistic feasts during the night at which they consume the soul, shadow or spirit of kin or neighbours. They are believed to be able to conjure the soul out of the body of those who are asleep or dead. Alice Werner describes the fantasies concerning cannibalistic feasts of witches in East Africa which involve the resurrection of a dead individual, his second death, dismemberment and consumption (1925: 337). Tauxier notes the belief among the Bamana that both men and women can be *subaw* (sorcerers), but that women predominate, that 'ce sont les femmes qui ont surtout la réputation de détruire les âmes, de "manger" les âmes' (1927: 44). This female bias seems to be reflected in the etymology of the terms: *suba* may to be derived from *su*, "night" and *ba*, "mother" (Delafosse 1955: 15, 690). Tauxier (1927: 45) can be quoted to describe the exact beliefs or fantasies which seem to underlie the episode in the epic:

Voici comment les sorciers ou sorcières procèdent pour manger le double de gens: ils changent d'abord le double dont ils veulent se repaître en boeuf, puis on tue le boeuf, on en mange le corps et on en laisse la tête de côté pour s'en régaler plus tard. Le jour-là arrivé, l'homme dont le double a été enlevé et transformé et qui mène depuis le premier repas une triste et misérable existence, meurt définitivement

Cashion writes that *subagaw* or *subaw* are approached by those wishing to attack someone out of jealousy or a desire for revenge (1982: 100), a point affirmed by Gérard Meyer (1987: 46). Belief in the efficacy of witchcraft demonstrates itself in the levelling of accusations against those suspected of having practised or prompted the practice of witchcraft. Ordinarily, the pattern of these accusations reflects the

same tensions, jealousies and desire for revenge that are said to lead to the employment of witches in the first place, centring around personal or political rivalries and prompted by illness, death or natural calamity in the community. In general, all such events are ascribed a particular cause; among the potential causes canvassed may be the malevolent actions of a member of the community. In this particular case, the agency is said to be witchcraft or sorcery and attempts are made, through divination, to "discover" the culprit. Specific accusation of an individual resulting in drastic retribution is rare, however, and often the hint of an accusation is an end in itself, employed as a weapon for the outworking of rivalries, personal, familial or political.

The three Kita bloc versions' accounts of the lameness of Sunjata demonstrate a typical attitude to witchcraft, showing how the belief in witchcraft might promote the outworkings of rivalries in the community or the family. Sunjata's lameness is attributed to a human-directed force, rather than being treated as an accidental event beyond human control. Those deemed to have the most to gain from the lameness of one of the king's sons - i.e. the family of the king's other son - are suspected of having been actively behind the crippling, via the agency of sorcery.

As has been pointed out above, most versions do not explicitly link Sunjata's lameness to the actions of Sasuma Berete, as do those in the Kita bloc. This difference in emphasis seems to affect their treatment of the sorceresses and bull episode. While MAK, A, ZA, ZB, AS and BS are clear that the sorceresses' action was prompted by Sunjata's brothers,<sup>34</sup> and N and B lay the blame with Sasuma Berete (N: 24; B: 53) - both linking the actions of these people to their fears at the new-found strength of Sunjata - KMJ, FDS, MS and WK3, although they still link the sorcery to Sunjata's relatives, place the episode during the hero's exile, long after he has regained the use of his legs. It is not possible to be certain about the reason for this difference, but it can be noted that KMJ and FDS claim that Sunjata stole his elder brother's position as first-born heir, giving his half-brother and this one's mother good reason for their jealousy. On the other hand, ZA, F and BS, who suggest

Sunjata was first-born but proclaimed second-born, locate the cause of his half-brother's anxiety and jealousy at the point when the hero begins to walk and, through his abilities, is a threat to the established sequence of succession. The Kita bloc variants, it can be argued, by locating the cause of jealousy towards Sunjata at the point of the hero's birth, no longer employ the sorceresses and bull episode as a signifier of co-wife tension, and instead they slot the episode into the exile sequence of the narrative, where it becomes part of a wider series of heroic tests (Chapter Five).

By placing their version of the sorceresses and bull episode during the hero's exile, the Kita bloc variants and WK3 might be said to lose some of the episode's symbolic significance. This significance relates to the episode as a death and rebirth sequence, suggesting that it is a further representation of initiation rites. As the story goes, Sunjata is transformed into a bull, he is cut up, threatened with being eaten, and then remade and reformed. On a cross-cultural level this scenario corresponds to the widespread tale of the dismemberment and rejuvenation of the hero in Greek, Egyptian and sub-Saharan African myth and ritual.<sup>35</sup>

Death and rebirth is also one of the stock images employed to describe initiation rituals; its presence as a symbol of the initiation rite of passage among the Malinke has already been noted, particularly in the fantasy told to youngsters concerning the masked figures - that they will swallow the boys whole and regurgitate them some days later. The story of Sunjata's meeting with the sorceresses clearly parallels this scenario - death, dismemberment, (threatened) consumption, and reconstitution. Coming in most accounts straight after the episode of the hero's standing, which was interpreted as a symbol of initiation, the episode of the sorceresses and the bull restates and underlines, I suggest, that same initiation representation in the form of another common motif. In addition, we can note that the newly initiated are believed by the Malinke to be particularly vulnerable to the attacks of cannibalistic witches, and that it is the job of the blacksmith circumcisers to protect the novices from these attacks (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 97; McNaughton 1988: 69).

## Recapitulation

Much of the foregoing reading of the birth and childhood of the epic hero Sunjata rests upon the premise that the Malinke take their heroes, at least to some extent, as role models. However, Charles Bird has written:

The Mande political hero is not to be taken as a role model for good behavior or for social and/or moral improvement. . . . His example to the epic audience is not an illustration of man's potential, but rather a caution to those who might themselves have ambitions to power (1977: 358)

In denying the didactic and exemplary, if not the inspirational, role of the Malinke political hero - including preeminently Sunjata - Bird is taking a stance at variance with most commentators. Galloway suggests that Sunjata is 'a paragon of *foroyara*, the quality of being a freeborn' (1980: xv), while for M.M. Diabaté Sunjata is the only model the Malinke present to themselves (n.d.: 640), epitomizing the Malinke qualities of conservatism, love of power and of hierarchy (ibid.: 651). Innes, when discussing the Gambian hero Kelefa Sane, whose career is in some respects similar to that of Sunjata, claims that Kelefa 'embodies in their highest form not only the ideals of the princes, but also ideals of everyday life like unselfishness, loyalty to a friend, courage' (1978: 10). In addition, both Diabaté and Charles Cutter comment on the significant symbolism of Sunjata's heroic triumph against adversity for more recent African rulers. Diabaté alleges that Samory Ture, Modibo Keita and Moussa Traore all modelled themselves on the epic hero (n.d.: 52-3), while Cutter records how the episode in which Sunjata stood with the aid of an iron bar appeared in the form of a popular song at the time of Mali's independence. Cutter suggests the following implicit meaning: 'Just as Sunjata triumphed over physical disability, so too will Mali overcome the difficulties of underdevelopment, emerging from the self-struggle victorious and glorious' (1968: 76). And indeed, another of Bird's own statements seems to tend towards the opinion that the hero's behaviour is to be emulated; he terms the hero's deeds 'the yardstick against which the individual must measure

him/herself' (1977: 358).

Such an interpretation of the epic's hero as a role model for the behaviour of Malinke youths is central to my understanding of the birth and childhood episodes. Sunjata is subjected to loss of physical agility and (sometimes) status; he and his mother are taunted and ridiculed by Sasuma Berete. Yet he triumphs over his physical disability and social disadvantage and, in his transformation from cripple to agile young hunter, embodies many of the significant changes that initiation is supposed to achieve in the Malinke youngster, particularly awareness of the needs of the community rather than individual desires.

Nevertheless, Bird's statement is helpful in as much as it acts as a caution against the interpretation of all of the hero's actions as socially desirable; this they clearly are not. Bird and Kendall's own conception of the Malinke hero emphasizes society's ambivalence towards him. Quoting the traditional proverb to the effect that "the hero is but welcomed on troubled days", they suggest that the hero develops to the extreme the qualities of *fadenya* - the desire for individual reputation, for gain and for competition - at the expense of the stability and supportive ordering of the community, summed up in the term *badenya* (Bird & Kendall 1980: 14-5). Bird says that, according to Malinke hunter bards, the hero is 'the man of the moment and the man of destiny, he-who-comes-for-a-reason and he-who-is-born-for-a-reason' (1977: 358). Society's ambivalence towards the hero consists in its dislike of the disruptive force of the hero, for whom the village is too small and its structures too constraining, and yet its recognition that 'because he is shameless, he has the capacity to act when social conventions paralyze others', so that the hero becomes the only viable effector of change (Bird & Kendall 1980: 16).

The disruptive and unconventional elements of the typical Malinke hero are clearly visible in this section of the epic of Sunjata. In various versions we have seen how Sunjata stays in his mother's womb for much longer than usual, refusing (some versions imply) to be born; how he indulges in nocturnal sorties from the womb to hunt; how he attacks or kills the midwives present at his birth and how he steals

from members of the community. All these incidents occur in Sunjata's early life, before he gains the use of his legs and, consistent with the view that the childhood of the hero represents the alteration from an asocial to a social being, they might be interpreted as simply exemplifying his pre-social stage. But even upon walking - upon supposedly entering the social domain - Sunjata exhibits behaviour which breaks norms. According to some versions he usurps his elder brother's position as heir to the throne of Manding; while for five accounts, as he uproots the baobab tree in order to place it before his mother's hut (itself an act which goes beyond what was necessary), Sunjata injures the occupants of the tree, who fall out and break their bones. Yet, as shall be argued in the next chapter, the epic's description of its hero alters significantly during the period of his banishment, with Sunjata no longer demonstrating his massive powers in wilful and intemperate acts. The exile itself should be viewed as a final stage in the maturation of Sunjata. While Sunjata can be characterized as a *ngana* (hero) - in Bird and Kendall's understanding of the term - during his childhood and adolescence, this description does not accord with his behaviour upon his return from exile.<sup>34</sup>

Turning now to an examination of the form of the birth and childhood episodes, a similar pattern to that identified in the Buffalo-woman tale (Chapter Three) can be proposed. A prominent and widespread *wandersage* - the myth of the hero's birth and childhood - is clearly identifiable as the basis of this section of the epic. But the actual story of Sunjata's birth and childhood shows this wandering theme to have been heavily remodelled to reflect the African polygynous context.

Considerable diversity has been identified in the various accounts of the themes that make up this section of the epic - most dramatically in the different claims made about Sunjata's birth-order position. Some connections between these alternative views have been suggested; here I shall try to examine this issue systematically.

First, it can be restated that each of the major themes allows for different interpretation from the narrator. Three separate views were identified for the long

gestation of the hero: (1) the hero's ambivalence concerning his birth, (2) masking of the hero from persecutors, and (3) a "shorthand" for heroic destiny/greatness. These alternatives tend to logically exclude each other - particularly (2) and (3) - although it is possible to see them as articulating different vantage points on the epic: i.e., (1) denotes the hero's own standpoint, (2) that of other characters in the tale, and (3) that of the audience.

The theme of the hero's long gestation is mutually exclusive of the birth-order dispute, as can be seen in the spread of these episodes among variants of the epic. Although it is not inconceivable that the two episodes be combined in one account of Sunjata's life (as they are in the Mwindo epic) the near simultaneous birth of the brothers is sometimes linked to their near simultaneous conception (as for example in ZA), ruling out the employment in these accounts of the cliché of long pregnancy. Of the two variants of this theme found in the Sunjata epic, both can be demonstrated to relate to more widely held views concerning Sunjata. Where Sunjata is older than his brother but wrongly proclaimed second-born I suggest the theme be compared to the cliché of Sunjata as the youngest brother who succeeds against the odds. Both clichés effectively mask the young Sunjata from his adversary, Sumanguru, but the versions of the epic which employ this orientation of the birth-order dispute episode maintain simultaneously that Sunjata was indeed the legitimate heir of his father, that he was the natural successor to the throne of Manding.

The reverse variant of the birth-order dispute, in which Sunjata is the younger brother but proclaimed first-born, draws on the widespread cliché of the youngest child as the cleverest. This orientation of the theme matches it to the common view that Sunjata did indeed have an elder brother and emphasizes Sunjata's heroic destiny rather than simply his royal prerogative. It also fits more closely with those accounts which claim Sunjata's lameness to be a direct result of Sasuma Berete's jealousy, as it affords that woman ample cause for resentment against the child of her co-wife.

Sunjata's lameness is related to the birth episodes in so far as it can be

interpreted as a further device to mask the hero and a further demonstration of his eventual triumph over adversity. As the necessary precursor of his gaining of strength and agility the motif also signifies his initially asocial character and can be compared to his thieving, which serves a similar purpose.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: NOTES

1. HO, A, D, ZA, ZB, F, V, S, AS, BD, H, P, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, BK, BS, B, JBS, MK, WK3, KB, DMS, YFG.
2. H: 112; AS: 72; BD: 19; MK: 711; KB: 20; WK3: 73; BK: 155; YFG: 101.
3. AS: 72; YFG: 101-2; WK3: 73-5; MS: 81. A variant of this theme is applied to Sumanguru; he is said to have two mothers, between whom he divides his time in his foetal state; the ruse employed to achieve his birth is the same (F2: 321) (see Chapter Six).
4. ZA: 8-9; KMJ,M: 228-33; FDS: 129-31; MS: 82-5; BS: 43; F1: 458-9.
5. HO: 51; A: 354; D: 20; ZA: 13; ZB: 38; F1: 459; V: 320; S: 41; AS: 72; BD: 20; H: 112; P: 54; N: 15; CL: 124; KMJ,M: 238-9; FDS: 132; MS: 85-6; BK: 179; BS: 43; B: 40; MK: 711; WK3: 77; KB: 21; DMS: line 15.
6. For an overview of the work on the hero pattern see Taylor 1964 and Dundes 1978: 233-70.
7. Alexander the Great is known to the Malinke as Djoula (or Djoulou) Kara Naini, a variant of Dhū'l-Qarnain, the "Lord of the Two Horns" found in numerous sources, including the Qur'ān (see Chapter Three, note 15). Tronson's implication is that Alexander the Great's exploits as detailed by the classical sources (Plutarch, Josephus, etc.) would be known to the Malinke, and hence available for Sunjata to emulate, but this is doubtful. We know that the late Pseudo-Callisthenes was the source for the mediaeval European Alexander Romances, rather than the earlier biographies of Alexander, and knowledge of the classical sources for Alexander's life is not likely to have been greater in mediaeval west Africa. Tronson's detailed comparison of the careers of Sunjata and Alexander thus seems largely academic. Niane writes 'In all the Mandingo traditions they like to compare Sundiata to Alexander. It is said that Alexander was the second last great conqueror of the world and Sundiata the seventh and last' (1965: 90n) but, in our survey of epic variants, there are only a few references to Alexander the Great and Djoula Kara Naini. N says that Sunjata heard the story of Djoula Kara Naini while a young man and then again before embarking on his conquests (N:23, 35). B connects Sunjata to Alexander, saying that the soothsayers predicted that Sunjata would be 'more noble than Alexander the Great' (B: 25). Neither are Djoula Kara Naini and Alexander exclusively linked to Sunjata Keita in the epic. N (32), WK2 (vii-viii) and B (61) say Djoula Kara Naini or Alexander was the ancestor of the Cisse of Wagadu, while B equally compares Sumanguru to Alexander the Great (B: 72).
8. ZA: 7; N: 5-6; CL: 75; FDS: 127-8; MS: 76; TK: 30-8; JBS: 703; KB: 19-20; WK3: 73 (here it is a dream).
9. As Gilbert Cuthbertson states: 'The key question in contemporary anthropology is not so much the source of the parallels as the cause for the repeated adoption of certain themes' (1975: 12).
10. Cuthbertson suggests as possible universals the hero pattern, flood story, and struggle with the serpent, while he notes themes such as the earth-diver as being of wide-occurrence (1975: 35 n.41).
11. For Chaka see Ritter 1955 and Bryant 1965; for Mwindo see Biebuyck 1969; for Samba Jeegi see Lanrezac 1907 and Sar 1980: 12-23.

12. Jackson 1979 also contains a bona fide version of the Sunjata epic, YFG, (see Chapter One) which should not be confused with the Yata narrative, which is by a different teller.
13. See Abrahamsson 1951 for a comparative survey of this motif.
14. Cp. Jackson on the Kuranko: 'Succession ... generally follows the principle of primogeniture, although in practice an eldest son will be passed over in favour of a younger brother if he is not capable of shouldering the responsibilities of the office' (1979: 99). For a Kuranko example of the victorious youngest child see Jackson 1982: 36f.
15. HO: 51-2; MAK: 209; A: 355; D: 21; ZA: 14-5; ZB: 38; F1: 459-61; V: 320-1; S: 41-2; AS: 72-3; BD: 20; H: 112; N: 18-21; P: 54; KMJ,M: 244-50; FDS: 135-8; MS: 92-8; CL: 128-34; BK: 181-93; BS: 43-5; MK: 711-2; WK3: 99-105; KB: 24-6; DMS: lines 8-41; B: 45-8.
16. ZA, F, V, AS, S, P, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, WK3, KB, DMS.
17. F1: 461; V: 321; S: 42-3; H: 112; N: 22; CL: 138-9; KMJ,M: 252-6; FDS: 140-1; MS: 99-102; BK: 191; WK3: 105-7; KB: 26.
18. MAK: 209; A: 355-6; ZA: 15; F1: 461; AS: 73 (here the fruit is from a *gui* tree); CL: 138-9; BK: 183, 191.
19. Three bars: ZA: 14-5; ZB: 38; F1: 460-1; S: 42; WK3: 101-3. One bar: BD: 20; P: 54; N: 20-1; CL: 132-4; KB: 26.
20. MAK: 209; A: 355-6; D: 21; AS: 73; B: 47.
21. MS: 96-8 (custard-apple tree); KMJ,M: 247 (*jomba* tree); FDS: 137f. (custard-apple); MK: 711; DMS: line 31f.
22. F1: 460-1; V: 321; BS: 45; BK: 191.
23. KMJ,M: 247-9; FDS: 138; MS: 96-7; MK: 711; DMS: lines 34-6.
24. MAK: 209; A: 356-7; ZA: 16-7; ZB: 38-9; F1: 462-3; S: 43; AS: 73-4; KMJ,M: 271-8; FDS: 148; MS: 117-25; BS: 49; WK3: 124-7; KB: 31-2. In a related episode in N and B no reference is made to a bull but the sorceresses try to anger Sunjata by stealing from his mother's vegetable garden, a ploy that fails (N: 24-6; B: 53-5).
25. MAK: 209; FDS: 148; ZB: 38; F1: 462; S: 43; N: 24; B: 53; KMJ,M: 271; MS: 47.
26. HO: 51; H: 112; P: 54; MK: 711.
27. KMJ,M: 259-62; FDS: 143-4; MS: 89-90; P: 54.
28. The whole of the episode of the hero's first steps is entitled "The Circumcision of Sunjatta" in F1 (459), although this title is presumably the work of Leo Frobenius and not of the griot, Kieba Koate.
29. ZA: 13-4; S: 41; KMJ,D1: 37; B: 40-1; KB: 23; BS: 47; N: 15; JBS: 705.
30. Cp. Niane's comment, 'It is said that he [Sunjata] went marauding from house to house' (1965: 89).

31. An equally popular derivation of Sunjata has "sun" as a contraction of Sogolon, his mother's name. See Monteil 1929: 357; Niane 1959: 45; Johnson 1986: 182; Innes 1974: 107.
32. A passage from Xenophon suggests the same practice may have existed among the Spartans, see Xenophon 1949: 158. Also, we can recall that Krishna was known as "Butter-thief" when a youth, according to Campbell (1949: 327).
33. MAK, A, ZA, ZB, F, S, AS, BS, KB. KMJ, FDS, MS and WK3 place the same episode during the hero's exile; N and B contain a variant of the episode (see note 24).
34. A: 356; ZA: 16; ZB: 38; AS: 73; BS: 49.
35. E.g. the Greek myths of Tantalus and Pelops, the Egyptian myth of Osiris, Set and Isis and, for sub-Saharan Africa, the Ruandan cult of Ryangombe (de Heusch 1985: ch. 5). Cf. motif D 1885.1 Rejuvenation by dismemberment and boiling.
36. For a Malinke-related hero who conspicuously fails to mature and reform, see the Mende Musa Wo (Cosentino 1989).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EXILE

Chapter Five takes as its subject the events in the life of the epic hero from his departure from Manding till his decision to return to his father's kingdom and attempt to regain the *mansaya* (kingship) from Sumanguru, the ruler of Soso, who has, since Sunjata's banishment, dethroned Manding's king, who is usually given to be a half-brother of Sunjata, Dankaran Tuman. In this portion of the epic we sometimes follow its hero from one court to another of those said to have then existed in the western Sudan, or we find Sunjata spending all his exile at one particular settlement; either way, we see him face several challenges to his status and abilities and watch him determine his destiny, as he accepts the task of taking Manding's throne, at the request of a delegation of his fellow countryfolk. I argue that Sunjata's character development reflects that endorsed by Malinke society in general, that he alters from a precocious child-hero to a potential ruler, and that the exile portion of the epic also shows Sunjata forming alliances for the defeat of Sumanguru not among his potential kin but among the unrelated Tunkara clan of Mema and the Malinke maraboutic clans, the *moriw*.

Twenty-six of the thirty-five separate versions of the epic examined in this thesis relate how Sunjata left Manding as a young man to travel to one or more locations.<sup>1</sup> Most commonly, this departure from his homeland has for its context the animosity of his half-brother and mother's co-wife, who are said to fear his popularity among the people of Manding. In some versions it is the sorceresses (see Chapter Four) who advise Sunjata to leave for his own safety (e.g. ZA, F), or it is his half-brother, Dankaran Tuman, who banishes him (H), or Sasuma Berete, his mother's co-wife (FDS). In other accounts he is said to leave of his own volition, although his decision is influenced by his half-brother's hostile attitude towards him. Sometimes Sunjata apparently travels alone (A, D), but generally he is accompanied by his mother,

Sogolon Konde, his sister, Sogolon Kolonkan, and his younger brother, Manding Bukari (or Manding Bori), while in ZA he takes with him a whole entourage of blacksmiths and marabouts as well as his personal slave (ZA: 18-9).

The description of Sunjata's exile varies from a single journey made to one place of refuge (MAK, MA, H, P, BK, JBS, DMS, AR, DK, ZB, S) to a long drawn out peregrination during which the hero stays at up to five settlements (N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, WK3, KB). Less commonly, the exile is described as a military venture, with Sunjata either seeking the armed support of local leaders or subduing by military conquest the places to which he travels (A, D). While on exile, the hero is often said to be pursued by messengers sent by Dankaran Tuman who offer gold to his hosts if they will kill their guest. The variants offering this story-line often merge it with another prominent theme of the exile - tests of cleverness, strength and endurance to which the hero is subjected. This aspect of the exile will be examined later in the chapter.

### **Exile itinerary**

The twenty-six versions of Sunjata's exile I have examined recount the names of many places to which Sunjata is said to travel, and often have the clannic name of the people with whom he stays. Of the names which recur in a number of accounts by far the most common is Mema of the Tunkara. Fifteen versions state that Sunjata went to Mema as an exile<sup>2</sup> and thirteen of these connect the place to the Tunkara clan.<sup>3</sup> A closely associated tradition - probably a variant of the Mema tradition - states that Sunjata spent all or part of his exile at Nema.<sup>4</sup>

Krina (or a variant of this name) is recorded as a place visited by Sunjata during his exile in five accounts.<sup>5</sup> The ruler is given as Tara Maghan Traore (D) or Tana (or Tala) Masa Konkon (KMJ, WK3, KB) who is perhaps to be identified with Tira Makhan, an important ally of Sunjata in his defeat of Sumanguru, and conqueror of Senegambia (Chapter Eight). He is traditionally seen as a member of the Traore clan,

but the ruler of Krina is said elsewhere in KMJ, and in WK3 and KB to be a Kamissoko. The tradition about Tira Makhan of Krina may be linked to MS, which mentions Sunjata's stay with Tala Mansa Kongo - 'Rescuer-King of the Wilderness' (MS: 112) - and to N and CL, who record a stay with Mansa Konkon, although placing this ruler at Djedeba (N: 31) or Badou Djeriba (CL: 150).

A further popular tradition connects Sunjata's exile to the village of Tabon and to the Dabo (or Darbo) clan. ZA, N, CL and B state that Sunjata visited Tabon or Tabou.<sup>6</sup> ZA links this settlement to the Dabo clan, while D claims that the hero visited Labe, whose chief was called Tabo and who was a Dabo (D: 22). This can be linked to the tradition in A, where Sunjata visited Lambe (A: 357), and to F and BS, both of whom say Sunjata sojourned with the Dabo clan while he was an exile (F1: 463; BS: 51f.).

Five accounts record a visit by Sunjata to the dwelling place of the sorceresses (Warankantamba-Fouga, for WK3: 124).<sup>7</sup> Dankaran Tuman is said to bribe these sorceresses with a bull in order to kill Sunjata, but Sunjata converts them into his allies (see Chapter Four). The same five accounts say Sunjata stayed with the ancestor of the Magasubas, Kolen Masa Turumbe, who some accounts place in the region of Kole (or Kura), around present-day Siguiri.<sup>8</sup>

Four versions state that the hero visited Soman Jobi, known as Jobi the Priest or Seer (*soma* = sorcerer).<sup>9</sup> KMJ and KB say he was of the Konate clan, but there is scant agreement on his place of residence. Another five accounts link the hero to Sangaran (or Sankaran). MAK, A and D claim Sunjata stayed with Sankara Danguina Konte, who they identify as the hero's maternal uncle, while ZA and BS note specifically that Sunjata chose not to visit Sangaran Madiba Konte.<sup>10</sup>

### **Exile of the hero**

Viewed from a comparative perspective, Sunjata's exile can be related to the exiles of numerous other heroic figures of history and literature. Exile or banishment is an integral part of the lives of many of these heroes. Von Hahn's version of the hero

pattern is called the Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula, referring to the child's abandonment by his parents, and thus taking exile as its most typical element (Dunlop 1888: 504f.; Taylor 1964: 114-6; Dundes 1978: 229), and it is noted by von Hahn that the hero generally went abroad (Taylor 1964: 115). Rank's hero is said to be deserted and raised by lowly parents (1914: 61); while Raglan writes that the typical hero is at birth 'spirited away, and ... Reared by foster-parents in a far country' (1936: 179). As in Sunjata's case, exile is often viewed as a means of escape from persecution.

The theme of the hero's exile is equally common in African cultures. Shemwindo, father of the Nyanga hero Mwindo, attempts to kill his son at birth and, failing to do so, places the child in a drum which he throws into the river. Mwindo survives this ordeal and, after many adventures, eventually returns to confront his father (Biebuyck 1969: 54ff.). The Wolof hero Samba Gelaaajo Jeegi quarrels with his uncle, who has taken the throne after his brother's (Samba's father's) death, and goes into exile. There he proves his abilities and develops his skills, then returns with an army to take the kingship (Lanrezac 1907: 615f.). Chaka Zulu is said to have been born out of wedlock and to a mother within the prohibited degrees of kinship, and to have been dismissed, with his mother, from his father's kraal. Mother and son wander together as despised vagrants before settling with maternal kin. Here, Chaka is said to enter the army and hone his abilities and display his prowess (Ritter 1955: 21-52; Bryant 1965: 49, 62-4).

The notion of an exile in early manhood is also sometimes found referred to as a practice in rulership systems in Africa and beyond. We read of how in 584 A.D. the Merovingian king Chilperic sent his son away to be brought up in a distant manor, 'for he was afraid that if he appeared in public, some harm might befall him and he might even be killed' (Rouche 1987: 415); and how, in general among that dynasty,

Great aristocrats sent their young sons to the courts of Neustria and Austrasia to learn tasks that they would later perform in the cities and countryside. They were called *nutriti*, "fed ones", for they were fully taken in

charge by the king, who became a sort of adoptive father  
(ibid.: 426-7)

In west Africa, among the Mossi chiefly lineage of the Mogho Naba, E.P. Skinner notes that the king's wife, when pregnant, would be sent away from the compound to maternal kin in order to avoid jealousy among co-wives, and the woman's son would be raised among these relatives, away from the court (Skinner 1964: 45). A similar practice has been noted among the Shilluk (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 10). Also, Donald Wright relates the following concerning aspirant members of Malinke chiefly families in Gambia:

Frequently, when they reached an age approaching manhood, these young men would leave their homes and travel to live with a *mansa* in another state. They served in something approaching an apprentice capacity, helping where they could but through it all learning the art of *mansaya* [kingship] (1979: 145)

This may have been the practice in ancient Ghana where, according to al-Bakrī, the king sat in court with, on his right, 'sons of the kings of his country' (Levtzion 1980: 112; Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 80). Also, according to the *Tarikh al-Sudan*, the sultan of Mali, as with other Sudanese rulers, made a practice of bringing to his court the children of vassal rulers. Thus we read how the founders of the Songhai empire were taken into the service of the sultan of Mali, for, 'A cette époque, en effet, ces princes étaient ses vassaux et il était d'usage que les fils des rois fussent astreints au service de leur suzerain' (al-Sa'di 1964: 10; cf. Levtzion 1980: 112).

Speaking of the Gambian case, Wright suggests that this practice of sending princes abroad helped avoid conflict between brothers and heirs and that the aspirants often stayed away until chosen as the next ruler (1979: 145). Jackson interprets the heir's exile, when it is decreed or encouraged by the state, as a potential "solution" to tensions surrounding succession of father by son which, he notes, has been dubbed the "Prince Hal Complex" by Jack Goody, after the uneasy relationship Shakespeare portrays

between Henry IV and Prince Hal (the future Henry V) (1979: 110). In contrast to some of Jackson's proposed solutions to this conflict (see Chapter Four), exile is seen to operate not simply on the level of a narrative device but on the level of actual practice. The historical potential of the theme was noted by Raglan, who proposed among other possible interpretations of the hero's exile that it might have been 'actually the practice for kings to send their sons to be brought up by other kings' (1936: 192-3).

Another related historical interpretation of exile is as a flight from persecution or danger. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa recounts how Jātil, a successor of Sunjata in Mali, was 'in flight' from Mansā Sulaymān - while he was most probably conspiring against the king with Sulaymān's wife, Qāsā (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 295). Jātil can be identified with the Jāta who acceded to the throne of Mali a few years later (Levtzion 1980: 68). This scenario of exile and return has clearly been rehearsed many times by those, in whatever culture and age, whose aspirations to positions of power alienate them from the present holders to the extent that their lives are threatened. As we saw in the case of Samba Jeegi - and as is indeed the case in the epic of Sunjata - such a flight can, in this type of story, serve as an aid in the formation of the military alliances which often enable the aspirant to reach his goal.

#### **Places visited during Sunjata's exile**

Guy Tombs, who has compared the various routes presented by the griots of Sunjata's exile wanderings, believes that they are not to be taken as an accurate historical representation of events. He attempts to map the different routes proposed in some seventeen versions of the epic, determines that nine are unmappable - because 'they include more than one place which is unmentioned in other versions and/or not recognizable from available maps' (Tombs 1978: 11) - and says of the remainder:

we can see from the bewildering trajectories [of the mapped routes] ... that the places to the griots are really only *names* for stages in Soundiata's career. The places are *not* thought of as physical spots (1978: 31-2)

Mema, suggests Tombs, merely connotes to the griots a large distance from home - it means simply "the back-of-beyond" - and is not seen by them as an actual physical place (1978: 33). His main justification for a symbolic reading of the hero's flight is the disagreement between alternative routes proposed in various versions of the epic as well as clear instances of geographical error on the part of some griots. The anonymous *jeli* of MA says that Sunjata went south to Mema, not north, others say Nema rather than Mema, others suggest places to the west, others to the south.

Although Tombs usefully demonstrates the limited use of a naive literal or historical reading of the epic's data on Sunjata's exile movements, his expectations for the griots' geographical accuracy seem too high; similarly, his expectation that the bards will conform to one tradition concerning the hero's exile movements appears misplaced, given the diversity in both date and place of origin of the variants compared. Many griots in our survey live outside of the area in which Sunjata is said to have been born. Thus, for the teller of MA, who most probably lived in the Medine area, Mema is more easterly than northerly. Also, in D we read that Sunjata left Sangaran for Kirina 'du côté du Sud' (D: 22), which is clearly a mistake on the part of the performer. However, as Delafosse notes (1913: 22), in relation to the region of the story-teller (Nioro), Krina is indeed to the south.<sup>14</sup> The town of Mema has long been deserted and its position is no longer certain; in these circumstances it seems harsh of Tombs to criticise those versions (such as WK) which identify Mema with the present-day town of Nema (Tombs 1978: 32), for this appears as a straightforward attempt to relate received tradition to perceived reality. Even so, the agreement rates on Mema are impressive. Even in Tombs' smaller sample that place is mentioned in connection with the exile in over one third of the accounts, while in our sample it appears in over half of those versions which include the exile portion of the narrative. And seven versions of the epic reconcile the differences between the places Sunjata is supposed to have stayed at by claiming that he visited a number in succession.

Certainly Tombs is right to draw attention to the fact that the "physical spot" is not all-important, rather, the places are remembered and reiterated for other reasons. These reasons often have to do with the clans that griots associate with Sunjata's life. We can note that the clan or the ruler of a place supposedly visited by the hero often rates more mentions than their place of residence. The Dabo clan are recorded as often as Tabon is; Tala Masa Konkon (or variations on the name), who is usually associated with Krina, is recorded in eight versions - three more than the number which record Krina; Soman Jobi appears in four accounts of the exile, while there is no agreement on his place of residence; and even when griots disagree over whether Sunjata visited Mema or Nema all those who suggest the latter still associate the place with the Tunkara clan, as do nearly all of the accounts which record a visit to Mema.

I shall now examine and discuss the most widespread traditions concerning the individual settlements and/or clans visited by Sunjata: Mema, Krina, Tabon, or the Dabo, and Sangaran.

### **Mema**

Mema was most probably located in the area around present-day Nampala, some 250km north-north-east of Segou. Vidal, Monteil, Pageard and Mauny all report the existence of the remains of ancient settlements in this area<sup>1 2</sup> and although the site is now distant from the waters of the Niger it was once connected to that river system (Mauny 1961: 93).

The origins of Mema are bound up in the history of the disintegration of ancient Ghana. Monteil says Mema was founded by a clan of royal slaves from Ghana called the Khoussa (Kusa) in the wake of the Almoravid advance (Monteil 1929: 353). The Kusa are a Soninke sub-group, along with the Wago and Karo (Meillassoux 1967: 8). Niane suggests that Mema may have been developed by those who 'remained faithful to the ancient rites' rather than accepting Islam (Niane 1984: 124). According to AR,

one of the *jamuw* (clan names) of the Kusa was Tunkara (AR: 167) and, following Levtzion, it can be noted that a figure called Biranin Tunkara is said to have accompanied Dinga as his slave during his desert travels, according to Monteil's version of the story of the fall of Wagadu (Levtzion 1980: 49). We can note that Birama Tunkara is the name given to Sunjata's host at Mema according to AR (168) and ZA (23), while the ruler of Nema for BS is Farang Burema Tunkara (55). *Tunka* is a Soninke term for king (Bathily 1975: 13) and Levtzion translates Tunkara as 'one who belongs to the Tunka', in agreement with Monteil's hypothesis on the Meman rulers' origins as royal slaves (Levtzion 1980: 228).

Ibn Baṭṭūṭa stayed at "Mīma" on his return journey from Mali in 1353, probably indicating that it was on the route of the trans-Saharan traders of the time. The Arab traveller says little about the place except to describe it as a village, which may mean that it was not walled (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 299). At this time Mema was an administrative region of the Mali empire. At the beginning of the fifteenth century it briefly became an independent state, but was incorporated into Songhai by Sonni Silman Dama about fifty years later (Levtzion 1980: 50).

As has already been mentioned, the four accounts that state that Sunjata visited Nema (or Neema) rather than Mema all still link the place to the Tunkara clan. The Nema exile tradition is prominent among the Gambian griots recorded by Innes (1974). Innes notes that, in Gambian Mandinka, *neema* means 'prosperity, good fortune, to flourish, be generous to', while the word "mema" does not exist in the language, suggesting that this homonymy may explain the tradition (1974: 113). However, the situation is the same in the central dialects of Malinke (Delafosse 1955: 541). While it may be that the meaning of *nēma* has made it an attractive alternative to Mema as Sunjata's exile destination, it nonetheless seems clear that BK, BS, WK and KB have confused the long-deserted Mema for modern Nema, a settlement to be found some 200km north-west of Nampala, in Mauritania. As Madina Ly-Tall writes, commenting on WK's mention of Nema rather than Mema as the place of the hero's exile,

d'après les renseignements archéologiques que nous avons sur cette ville ... elle est très récente. Il n'est pas

impossible donc qu'il y ait eu déformation de Mema en  
Néma ... dans cette version (1977: 66)

Tombs suggests that WK's replacement of Mema by Nema was 'generated by twentieth-century scholarly debate, filtering through to Wâ [Kamissoko] in his travels and discussions with Youssouf Tata Cissé' (1978: 32). However, this assertion ignores the fact that Nema is also given as Sunjata's destination in the Gambian versions (BS, DK) which are both geographically distant to WK and of an earlier date.

Significant in attempting to determine the resonances of Mema for the Malinke are the connections it had to Ghana or Wagadu of the Soninke. Levtzion writes that 'Of all the smaller Soninke states Mema seems the closest heir to Wagadu' (1980: 50), while Pageard believes Mema to have been an important province in the Ghana empire (1961: 61). In B, N and CL Sunjata first visits Ghana or Wagadu, said to be home to the Soninke Cisse clan, before travelling to their "cousins" the Tunkara (N: 35). In addition, KB notes the Soninke nature of the Tunkara realm, here Nema (KB: 34) and, at one point, V calls the ruler Tounkara Soninke (V: 321). Wagadu has for many in the western Sudan a semi-mythical position as grand originator of the structures of government and civilization (Conrad & Fisher 1983: 53; BD: 12). The author of MAK, A and D begins the indigenous portion of his western Sudanese history with Dinga's foundation of Wagadu, while Bakary Diabaté and Baba Sissoko link their recitations of the Sunjata epic to the story of Wagadu. With these associations to Ghana and the Soninke, Mema may at one time have represented that old empire to the Malinke, and may have been seen, during the time of Mali's strength, as containing the last vestiges of Wagadu's greatness. If we are to attribute the practice of "apprenticing" princes to related *mansa* to the medieval Malinke - or simply to see it as a narrative device of symbolic import employed by them - then Mema might be seen as the obvious choice as the destiny of a would-be ruler of Mali. In the company of the Soninke Tunkara Sunjata becomes associated with the powerful rulers of Ghana and to Wagadu with its mythical significance as a place of beginnings.

However, the epic rarely portrays Sunjata as merely basking in the reflected glory of Ghana/Wagadu at Mema. Seventeen versions of the epic record the following episode connected to Sogolon's death. His mother having died in Mema (or Nema), Sunjata asks the king for land in which to bury her; the king refuses to give him a plot of land, saying the hero must pay a large sum for it. Irritated at this, Sunjata sends the king a derisory "payment" consisting of cheap found items, such as broken pottery or guinea-fowl feathers, symbolic of a threat to destroy the town. When the king's advisors correctly interpret the payment the ruler relents and gives Sunjata the piece of land he wanted.<sup>13</sup>

Some versions remark in conjunction with this episode that such a payment for land required for the burial of a stranger was, or still is, a prevalent custom throughout the area (AR: 169; DK: 289; WK1: 295). WK also links the episode to the origins of a *senankun* relationship (or joking relationship), and S appears to do the same, although in a different manner. For S the relationship between Kuite (Kuyate) and Keita began when Sunjata gave his Kuite griot powder and shot that had been employed as part of the payment given to the ruler of Mema. Having received this, the Kuite were deemed indebted to the Keita, says S (43). Mamby Sidibé does not expressly link the ensuing relationship to *senankuya*, but we can note that assistance during burial of clan members is a recognized duty for those linked by *senankuya* (Labouret 1934: 103), and that the Kuyate and Keita are said to be in a *senankun* relationship according to Camara (1976: 37).<sup>14</sup>

For WK, the episode is related to a Malinke custom which requires payment for land used in burials, which payments are said to be part of the *senankun* duties (WK1: 295). But WK also sees the relationship between the Tunkara and Keita, Mema and Manding, in terms of *senankuya*, in as much as both are allies in the hoped-for defeat of Sumanguru (WK1: 309). Here again, we can note that military aid is sometimes deemed a function of those united by *senankuya* (Labouret 1934: 101; Camara 1976: 35-6) and that the Tunkara and Keita are said to be *senankun*, at least in the Kita area and Upper Niger valley (Leynaud 1972: 4). Hopkins notes this with specific reference

to the epic:

The relations between Tounkara and Keita are expressed in terms of the Keita having been the guest of the Tounkara because when Soundiata Keita fled from his *faden* [paternal kin] he took refuge with some Tounkara who were his hosts and later supported him in his struggle to regain his land (1971: 101)

*Senankun* relationships hold between the Malinke and various related ethnic groups across west Africa (Niane 1960a: 24; Dieterlen 1955: 41-2; Pageard 1958; Brun 1910: 866-8). The role of these relationships is often the giving and receiving of hospitality when travelling beyond one's own region. Here again, the epic refers to another of the duties of *senankuya* in its narration of Sunjata's exile.

The alliance between the Tunkara and Keita against Sumanguru is clearly couched in the language of *senankuya*. It also acts itself as an explanation, a narrative outworking, of the joking relationship - hospitality abroad, war aid and assistance with the burial of the dead are all deemed to be duties of those in a *senankun* relationship, and all are found detailed in this episode of the epic.

### **Krina**

Krina is recorded as a place of sojourn for the wandering Sunjata in five accounts. The spelling varies: Krina in KB and WK3, Kirina in KMJ and D, Krine in A. The present-day village of Krina, associated in some versions of the epic with the last battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru, is to be found on the west bank of the Niger, some forty-five kilometres south of Bamako. KMJ, KB and WK3 link Krina to the Kamissoko clan. Delafosse suggests D's Kirina may be the village some 10km north of Kulikoro (1959: 79; 1972 ii: 171). D associates the place with the Traore or Dambele clan.

The ruler of Krina according to KMJ, WK3 and KB is Tala (Tara) Masa Konkon. D gives the ruler as Tara Maghan Traore (or Dambele), suggesting that we are dealing with the same tradition in D as in the other versions recording Krina and that

Delafosse's identification of Kirina is probably misplaced, as Niane believed (1960a: 20).

Mansa Konkon appears as ruler of Djedeba in N and Badou Djeliba in CL, allowing us to link the Djeliba tradition to the Krina tradition. Djeliba (or Djeriba)<sup>15</sup> is said to have been an early capital of Mali in some traditions (M. Kāti 1964: 66; Vidal 1923b: 607; Montrat 1958: 92). As Niane remarks, there are many places called Djeliba or Djoliba in the Manding region (Niane 1961: 42). The three sites discussed by those interested in locating the early capital of Mali are found at (1) the Milo-Niger confluence, called by Niane Djeliba-Koro, (2) the Sankarani-Niger confluence, near Kangaba, and (3) the west bank of the Niger, a few kilometres north of Krina, called Badougou Djeliba. Niane claims the second settlement, discussed by Delafosse (1924), does not exist, and it is certainly not to be found on modern maps of the area, although this does not preclude its ancient existence; he is sure the most southerly site is recently settled, and determines that the "Dieriba" of the *Tarikh al-Fattash* was the site near Krina (Niane 1961: 42-3). The sketch-map in Niane 1965 marks "Djeliba-Koro" at the Milo-Niger confluence, suggesting that it was this town that Sunjata visited, although the map does not include the place on Sunjata's exile itinerary (1965: vi); while CL's map marks "Badou Djeliba" roughly at the position of the most northerly alternative - i.e. Badougou Djeliba - although on the east bank of the Niger (CL: 7). Therefore, while N is ambiguous as to which Djeliba Sunjata visited during his exile, CL clearly identifies it with the most northerly alternative, Badougou Djeliba.<sup>16</sup> This Djeliba is located not far from Krina, and their proximity might explain why Mansa Konkon is given as the ruler of Djeliba in N and CL while Tara Masa Konkon - presumably a reference to the same person - is ruler of Krina for KMJ, WK3 and KB. Here we have a clear example of the name of the individual ruler with whom Sunjata is said to have stayed occurring more frequently in the exile tradition than the settlement over which he is said to have ruled.

## **Tabon and the Dabo**

Tabon is given as a place to which Sunjata travelled during his exile in ZA, where it is styled Tabou, N, CL and B. Sunjata's exile is linked to the Dabo clan in D, ZA, F, BS, A and FDS. The connection between Tabon and the Dabo is made in ZA, where Tabon is said to be the home of the Dabo, and implied in D, where the chief of the Dabo is called Tabo.

Two possible sites exist for Tabon as referred to in the epic. CL identifies it with the village in the Manding heartland between Sibi and Narena, called Tabou, which is some sixty kilometres south-west of Bamako (CL: 7). This is the settlement that Charles Monteil identifies as the early capital of the Konate of Do (1929: 345). But for N Tabon is in the Futa Jalon, between the Tinkisso and Bafing rivers. It is possible that N is referring to Databou, in Guinea, near the Bafing, and close to the border with Mali. Yves Person argues against N's placing of Tabon and in favour of CL's, saying that there is no evidence that Mali's power extended so far west at this time (Person 1973: 207). Person assumes that Sunjata's exile path indicates the extent of Malian control, which is unwarranted, but in any case two other pieces of evidence suggest that N's positioning of Tabon may have equal claim to be the traditional one. D, which records Sunjata visiting a chief Tabo of the Dabo clan, calls his region Labe, which may connect it to the present-day town of Labe, some fifty kilometres to the west of Databou (D: 22-3), while in A Sunjata travels to the province of Lambe (A: 357), which could be a reference to the same region. In addition, both CL and N name rulers of Tabon who are Djallonke Camaras, i.e. Camaras from Futa Jalon.

## **Sangaran**

In MAK, A, and D, Sunjata visited his maternal uncle, Sangaran Danguina Konte, ruler of Sangaran (in A, Sougara), while in ZA and BS it is specifically noted that the hero

chose not to follow the path that led to Sangaran.

Sangaran (Sankaran), a large Malinke province to the south of the Manding heartland, between the Niger and Tinkisso rivers, and extending towards the Sankarani river in the south west (Delafosse 1959: 79), is usually associated with the Konde (Konte or Kone) clan. But as was noted in Chapter Three, the Konde clan are more often said to have resided at Do, and the Kondes of Do are Sunjata's mother's family according to most versions of the Buffalo-woman tale. Niane reports a tradition of a migration of the Konde from Do to Sangaran which he places sometime before the fifteenth century (Niane 1974: 64), while Leynaud and Cissé link the Konde's move to a drought of an earlier century (Leynaud & Cissé 1978: 26-7). It is possible that this Malinke clan was in the Sangaran region at Sunjata's time but, given the tradition Niane mentions, it is unlikely and the reference is therefore probably anachronistic. One version states that Sunjata stayed at Do during his exile and was helped by his grandfather, the *mansa*, in his bid for power (KB: 55). It may be that this version reflects another, perhaps earlier, tradition in which the Konde were associated with Do rather than Sangaran.

ZA and BS give similar explanations for why Sunjata should, in effect, have thought of going to Sangaran but decided against it, and both explanations occur in the same setting, symbolic of making a choice - a fork in the road. ZA records Sunjata as saying: "'Si mes oncles disent du mal de ma mère je ne pourrai y faire la guerre, puisque c'est son pays'" (ZA: 19). In BS Sunjata exclaims that 'if I go to my uncle's residence,/My cousins and I are bound to end up quarrelling' (BS: 51). Innes comments that Bamba Suso employs the same phrase for "my uncle's place" as would be used in reference to a village compound, not a kingdom (1974: 109), and it seems that the point being made here is to be understood on the level of kin relations - that Sunjata needs to find safety and support beyond the ambit of his kin who have, thus far, proved in general to be his adversaries rather than his friends.

### Recapitulation: significance of the exile visits

Contrary to Tombs, I do not think the exile itinerary presented by the griots is necessarily unhistorical. Of the more popular traditions concerning where Sunjata stayed (the ones treated here), all are plausible destinations or stopping-off points for the hero, excepting Sangaran and Nema, references to which are probably anachronistic. Certainly there is widespread variation in Sunjata's purported exile route, if one takes all versions into account, but if we limit ourselves to those places mentioned by several accounts, which may be counted as traditional, the exile is historically plausible, particularly in the light of the probable practice of Malian monarchs of sending heirs to the throne away from their natal court, and given that, in some accounts, the hero's exile took him to more than one settlement. This much said, there is no external evidence that allows us with any certainty to count the exile as historical; and indeed, like Tombs, I do not think that the places mentioned are recalled by the bards for reasons of historical verity; rather, their mention serves to promote several themes, which I shall now outline.

With respect to most of the settlements recorded by the griots, mention of village or clan serves simply to link it to Sunjata, the empire-founder, and thereby connect that place or clan to the formation of Mali and the all-important Sunjata-*tele*, or Time of Sunjata. Most probably these traditions were originally localized attempts to draw the emperor into regional history and traditions that varied accordingly from area to area. There is, however, no evidence from our sample of epic versions for a marked correlation between the places or clans Sunjata is said to have visited and the location or clan of the teller. One suspects that over time only those traditions associated with a memorable story or *aition* (origin story) are likely to survive in the broader, non-localized, traditions of the Sunjata epic. Thus Djeliba may be recalled because of its connection with the early Malian capital, Krina because of the battle between Sumanguru and Sunjata often said to have been fought there (Chapter Seven) and perhaps because of the phonetic link to Kri, putative place of origin for

Manding (Chapter Two), and Tabon of the Dabo because of the tests and clan-origin tale and etymology associated with it in some versions (A: 358-9; FDS: 168).

The variation in potential sites for the places Sunjata is said to have visited - Djeliba, Tabon, Mema/Nema and Krina all have more than one possible situation - may have to do with the expansion of Mali during the empire period. Using the Sangaran visit as a model, the constant factor between Do (said to have been visited by Sunjata in KB) and Sangaran is the Konde clan who, it is claimed, migrated from the one place to the other. While Do can be seen as the early home of the Konde, Sangaran was their later residence, and it is possible that the tradition concerning Sunjata's visit (as with the Buffalo-woman tale itself, perhaps) altered accordingly. Could Tabon of the Camara near Sibi and the Djallonke Tabon be related in a similar fashion, with a Manding heartland settlement being superceded by a peripheral one at a later date? On present evidence such a shift is impossible to prove, and it may be that there has always been an element of confusion or rivalry in interpretation between potential sites, or simply purposeful ambiguity in the traditions of the exile visits. We are on safer ground in suggesting that Mema was replaced by Nema in some accounts in response to Mema's disappearance since the time of the epic's formation.

A further level of interpretation can be put forward for the exile visits, one which theorizes on the importance of extra-kin relationships at the expense of family ties. It has been noted how recitation of the hero's visit to Mema is taken as an opportunity in some accounts for discussion of various *senankuya* relationships - between Kuyate and Keita, Tunkara and Keita and, by extension, Manding and Mema - and that, furthermore, the telling of the episode of Sogolon's burial is also an opportunity for exploring the several strands of *senankun* parties' commitments: hospitality, war aid, burial assistance. When this theme is connected to the incident surrounding Sunjata's decision not to visit his maternal kin at Sangaran a pattern can be seen to emerge. The reasons given for Sunjata's avoidance of Sangaran have to do with the hero's fear of quarrelling with his kin or being limited by kin obligations, and with his desire to promote alliances beyond the ties of blood.

A contrast may be drawn between this negative view of Sunjata's kin relations and the emphasis placed on *senankun* relations established at Mema. *Senankun* relations are at once analogous and opposite to kin relations; they employ kin relations as a template but are of course based on the absence of actual blood ties between participants; they help establish wider mutual dependence beyond village or local ties (Jackson 1977: 153-6). In the case of the epic, they can be seen as forming one basis for Sunjata's alliance against Sumanguru, an alliance not built on kinship ties but on, among other things, the networks of friendship and loyalty encapsulated in *senankuya*.

Here we return to the basic banishment of the hero pattern which formed the starting point of this discussion of Sunjata's journey into exile. Typically, the exiled hero of the hero myth leaves his original set of parents for a surrogate pair - in other words, a pair who mimic blood relations without in fact sharing a blood tie with him - he turns his back on, or is forcibly disillusioned of, his actual kin and creates new ties based on grounds other than that of family responsibility. Typically also, the foster-parents are fully aware of the hero-child's origins, and their devotion rests on impulses of love beyond the obligations of kinship. Relating this insight to our contention that the hero pattern has as a didactic aim the socializing of individuals, here we can say that the hero pattern teaches that the adequately socialized individual must look beyond the structures formed by blood ties if he is to be properly integrated into the community and to succeed in that community.

## Tests during exile

In addition to its historical potential, the theme of exile has strong associations with a "time of testing" for the Hero, brought out clearly, for example, in Jesus' forty days in the wilderness - a time of physical and mental endurance, and a time during which the task ahead is clarified and accepted (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4). Joseph Campbell and Gilbert Cuthbertson, in their comparative surveys of the hero myth, lay particular stress on the theme of tests. Campbell writes of the "Road of Trials" upon which the hero must embark; he notes that the hero 'must survive a succession of trials', and how these often take the form of difficult ordeals which test certain facets of his character. For Campbell, in these tests the hero must 'put aside his pride' and must renounce his own ego (Campbell 1949: 97-109). Cuthbertson writes of "Tested heroism"; he links this concept to the establishment of the hero's legitimacy and the development of social values: 'Tests cover perseverance, loyalty, honesty, courage and power. The tests therefore determine social values' (Cuthbertson 1975: 116-20). Sunjata's own exile contains prominent elements of testing, as the hero undergoes physical ordeals and games whose stakes are life and death, relying on his cleverness, strength and endurance in order to prove his legitimacy, his heroic capabilities, and his destiny as *mansa* of Manding.

Leon and Rebeca Grinberg, in their recently translated *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile*, note the distinction between migration, which is seen as a voluntary movement, and exile, which is imposed upon the individual, and often seen as a punishment. Migration they characterize as a search for truth, writing that

There seems to be a universal fantasy, variously expressed in myths and legends and children's stories of all eras, in which the satisfaction of curiosity, after a long and difficult journey, fraught with dangers, confers great powers (Grinberg & Grinberg 1989: 7)

We might identify this element of a search for knowledge in the Sunjata epic and suggest that it is a familiar element of the hero myth in general, which manages to

create out of a forced migration (an exile) a valuable journey of discovery. In the epic of Sunjata we can say that subtly, the emphasis of the exile alters: no longer is the hero simply attempting to evade his half-brother's grasp; it is no longer seen as a flight; gradually he is developing and equipping himself and those around him for the return and fight for the throne of Manding.

Of the several stories commonly told by *jeliw* about Sunjata which can be placed under the folkloric rubric of "tests", the most popular concerns a procedure known as *sigi*, which involves the participants in the following ordeal. In a pot containing one of various boiling substances (oil, water, butter, potash etc.) is placed a bracelet of metal; this bracelet has to be retrieved using the bare hand and arm. An oath is sworn and, according to the folklore associated with the ordeal, those whose oath is true will draw out the bracelet without harming hand or arm. Sunjata is subjected to this test during his exile according to at least nine of the accounts I have studied.<sup>17</sup>

In up to six accounts of the epic Sunjata competes in a game with the ruler whose guest he is, which is often said to have been prompted by Sunjata's half-brother, *mansa* Dankaran Tuman, who bribes the host to kill Sunjata by beating him at the game, offering the host a reward of gold.<sup>18</sup> There is some confusion between this game and *sigi*. N and CL identify it as *wori*, F2 calls it "siggis", but is clearly describing a different procedure to *sigi*, while FDS, MS and WK3 describe sequences which seem to combine elements of both *sigi* and *wori*. *Wori* (or *woli*) is a game played by two contestants involving the shifting of tokens (either seeds or made wood, stone, bone, etc.) around a board containing a certain number of indentations (Johnson 1986: 214).

In five accounts Sunjata competes in an archery contest, either against his ruler-host or against a preset goal.<sup>19</sup> Sunjata must shoot an arrow through a number of doors or plates leant up against a tree. In F, AS and BS the arrow is said to go through the objects and into the tree supporting them, causing it to fall. There then ensues a competition of wills as the ruler orders the tree to rise, and Sunjata orders it to fall again. ZA, which does not contain the archery contest, nevertheless

recounts this incident (ZA: 21).

A further incident involving a tree occurs during the hero's exile, associated with the hero's decision to return to Manding. DK, JBS, WK and FDS tell how a leafy tree loses its leaves or how a dead tree sprouts new ones when Sunjata speaks some formulae beneath it or asks it to provide an omen concerning his destiny.<sup>20</sup>

Another tradition usually linked to Sunjata's return is found in five accounts.<sup>21</sup> In CL and WK Sogolon, the hero's mother, recites to Sunjata three or four sayings before her death to aid him in his quest to recover his father's throne.<sup>22</sup> In JBS Sogolon tells Sunjata's sister that her brother must avoid becoming angry on three separate occasions, otherwise he will not become *mansa* of Manding. In ZA and F the same warning against becoming angry in three situations during the exile is made, either by the soceresses (ZA) or the Sand Oracle, Kengebugurilala (F), just before Sunjata's flight.

#### **The exile as a time of testing: literary & social comparisons**

Beyond the comparisons to the hero pattern itself, the exile of Sunjata has been compared to the *hijra* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Johnson writes: 'The exile, or retreat, in order to gain strength is a common motif in Africa and Arabia' (1979: 235); while M. Montrat notes how, according to the Keyla griots of the early 1930s, after returning from Mema Sunjata took refuge in the Sankarani river area, at Niani, and that this flight is viewed 'comme une sorte d'hégire' (Montrat 1958: 91). One suspects that by means of such a comparison negative connotations of the exile merely as a flight to escape danger are avoided.

Another potential model in the audience's mind may be that of the *Dali-masigi*. Already described in connection with the Buffalo-woman tale (Chapter Three), this Malinke hunter's or adventurer's journey is undertaken by newly initiated men and involves them in travel beyond their local region, acquiring new skills and developing their independence. Cashion also notes how 'during the course of their travels, the

hunter establishes a network of ties' (1982: 242), while Y.T. Cissé remarks that the young hunter would preferably be lodged at the house of a *senankun* (1964: 185). All these points link the hunter's adventure to Sunjata's exile: the usual status of the traveller, the aims of the journey, and the emphasis on extra-kin networks of support. In addition, the basic idea of the hunter as a model for the hero has already been discussed in Chapter Three, with emphasis being placed on the non-hierarchical and status-achieved nature of hunting associations. During his exile Sunjata must prove his own worth aside from his inherited status.

A further comparison might be drawn between the exile of Sunjata and the post-circumcision young person's *ton* (association or society). *Ton* members undertake group farming tasks and public works; they celebrate and recreate communally. Although there is no strict age-range and married individuals can be members, the young person's *ton* is usually made up of those in between initiation and wedlock (Hopkins 1971: 104-6; Leynaud 1966). Hopkins emphasizes the perceived unhierarchical nature of the *ton*, writing:

the *ton* seems to have represented historically a place where young men, not yet advanced to the status of heads of household could be with others of their own age and organize their own affairs, notably in matters of recreation (1971: 106)

He goes on to remark that 'It may also be seen as a training ground for future adults' (ibid.). While Sunjata's exile in no way offers direct parallels to the *ton*, nevertheless, the concept of a period from circumcision to marriage set aside for the development of skills and talents outside of the kinship structure seems reflected both in the *ton* and in the hero's exile. Several versions note that Sunjata's exile lasted seven years (AS: 75; H: 112; N: 28), which corresponds to the length of an age-grade in the age-grade cycle (*kari*) of the Malinke on the Upper Niger (Leynaud 1966: 47).<sup>23</sup> Seven years is the length of the gestation time of the hero in some accounts and is also the length of time of his paralysis in some accounts (Chapter Four); by making Sunjata's exile this same length of time the epic may be creating a pattern in

the life of Sunjata which corresponds to the age-grade cycle in which all Malinke males are involved. In this case, Sunjata during his exile corresponds to the position of the recently initiated young male in Malinke society, in the same way that it has been argued in Chapter Four that Sunjata as an initiate in some respects represented the experience of Malinke neophytes.

### The tests: legitimacy, destiny and courage

In F we read the following concerning the *sigi* test:

Now, whoever would take an oath, would take a ring from his arm, throw it into the boiling oil and take it out again with his naked arm. He who had falsely sworn had his flesh burnt... But he who had spoken the truth drew forth his arm unscathed (F1: 463)

Jeli Baba Sisoko describes a variant of the *sigi* test in which meat rather than bracelets are employed:

Those who are legitimate *horon* [nobles] 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 (JBS: 707)<sup>24</sup>

Y.T. Cissé defines *sigi* as 'lancer, jeter au loin le doute'. He sets the test in the context of hospitality: for him the test of pulling out the bracelet from the pot proves that the guest feels no ill-will toward his host and also that the guest and host are not related (1988: 111). Diabaté sees *sigi* as a 'préfiguration du combat', an attempt to settle a quarrel without coming to blows (1975: 63). Johnson, in his own explanation of *sigi*, avers that his ideas are based on the statements of the bard Wa Kamissoko. Johnson's description (1986: 214) is similar to that found in F except that it says potash is employed in the test. He notes that 'the two men recited their genealogies' over the pot and swore they spoke the truth. Johnson (or perhaps Wa Kamissoko) also appears to rationalize the ordeal when he writes: 'If a hand was burned before its owner could get the bracelet on, he was lying'.<sup>25</sup>

The *sigi* test can, cross-culturally, be compared to motifs H 221.2.3 Ordeal by burning oil and H 221.4 Ordeal by boiling water. In ZA, ZB and F the oath over which Sunjata is tested in the *sigi* ceremony is that he has never been afraid. In JBS the oath concerns his legitimacy as a *horon*, specifically a *hulala*, a legitimate descendant of a lineage founder (Conrad 1981: 709). The swearing of an oath concerning his legitimacy as a royal child is also found in F and BS in connection with the archery contest, while in AS this shooting competition is concerned with the assertion by the hero that, during his seven years in the bush, he feared nothing (AS: 75-6).

In ZB and F, where Sunjata swears a similar oath on his fearlessness, he excludes the time he spent in his mother's womb or his childhood, and his arm retrieves the bracelet from the pot without injury.<sup>26</sup> But in cases where the oath of fearlessness involves time as a child or time in his mother's womb, or in the case where the oath is over his legitimacy (JBS), Sunjata fails the test. In ZA Sunjata burns a small piece of his flesh in the *sigi* pot; in JBS he burns his hand and mouth on the meat from the pot; in AS Sunjata's arrow does not pass through all the plates; and in BS the tree he knocks down with his arrow stands again when he boasts that his mother was never afraid during the seven years he was in her womb. In those versions in which Sogolon is present with Sunjata at the test the hero demands an explanation of her. In BS we read:

He drew his knife,  
He went and grabbed his mother's arm,  
And said to her, 'Tell me about myself;  
Tell me about the circumstances of my birth in Manding,  
Otherwise I will kill you (BS: 53)

Ideas concerning legitimacy and a mother's fears during pregnancy are mixed together in these incidents. In JBS, where the oath was clearly concerned with Sunjata's legitimacy, Sogolon, in foretelling this event before her death, relates her son's failure to pass the *sigi* test to the night she spent with the two Traore brothers, the hunters from Manding who won her as a bride (JBS: 707). In all the

other cases, except AS, Sogolon explains that one night during her pregnancy, when there was a thunderstorm, her husband called out to her and she was frightened - and that it was because of this that Sunjata failed the ordeal. In AS the bard says that it was because a jinn appeared to her during her pregnancy that Sunjata's mother was afraid (AS: 75-6).

So far as the thunder itself is concerned, Innes comments that the fright of a pregnant woman is supposed to harm the foetus (1974: 109), while B.K. Sidibe says that the Gambian Malinke aver that a shock received by a pregnant woman can cause the child to be nervous and fearful, 'two qualities which are considered highly undesirable, especially in a ruler' (1980: 45). Behind this belief is the Malinke's concern over legitimacy of birth, and the great significance that they attach to the mother's raising and nurturance of the child. Jobson remarked of the Gambian Malinke: 'there is no people in the world ... [whol] stand more upon their antiquitie, and dignity of blood' (1968: 71). Concerning the importance of the mother in the development of a child, a Malinke proverb quoted by Cashion can be translated as 'Everyone is in his mother's hands'.<sup>27</sup> The role of the mother in determining how her child develops is deemed to begin when the child is still in her womb. This belief extends beyond the Malinke; Alain le Pichon, writing about the hero model in west Africa, notes

l'importance des relations avec la mère, dès avant la naissance, pour la constitution de la personnalité de l'enfant, ainsi que des circonstances de la conception et du comportement de la mère durant la grossesse (le Pichon 1980: 31).

Beyond the womb, the mother's influence on her child is described in the following ways by the Malinke. Innes writes that a 'dutiful wife' is said to produce successful sons, while an 'unsatisfactory wife' won't (1974: 109). Bird notes that 'the child of an unheroic woman will never have the ability to perform great deeds' (1974: 112) while, according to Thoyer-Rozat, 'Si une femme endure la disgrâce jusqu'à la fin du monde, son enfant sera fort' (1978 i: 212). Galloway enlarges on Thoyer-Rozat's statement:

There is a deeply rooted belief that a woman should live, not for herself, but for her children, and that she is rewarded for her virtue by the success of her children. ... A chaste woman, obedient to her parents, husband, elders, and all others who have authority over her, patient even under mistreatment and extreme provocation, is bound to have worthy sons (1980: xiii)

Jackson says of the Malinke-related Kuranko that if a wife works hard to please her husband, her child will be fortunate (1977: 138).

The differential inputs of mother and father in the development of their child have already been touched on in Chapter Two, where it was noted that while the father was seen as providing the child's heritage - its genealogy - this inheritance was always mediated through the mother. As Wa Kamissoko says:

l'homme, le vrai, ne peut naître à l'insu de sa mère.  
En effet, l'enfant tient de son père sa généalogie,  
mais acquiert la baraka grâce à sa mère, et jamais à  
son insu (WK3: 73)

The same view holds among the Kuranko: 'The importance of the mother in the destiny of her child is considerable since it is the mother who mediates between the child and its agnatic forebears' (Jackson 1977: 138; cf. 1982: 199-200, 247). In this way, while the child is officially the product of his father, in practice the mother's significant role in determining the child's character is acknowledged, albeit only in terms of facilitating or preventing the "flow of power" from the father's ancestors to the child.<sup>26</sup> In practice, the putative role of the mother may lead merely to her being blamed when a "blockage" is deemed to have occurred. Jackson reaches a similar conclusion concerning the situation of the mother among the Kuranko. He suggests that the mother's feeling of personal responsibility for the child and her guilt if the child's development goes awry may account for both jealousies among co-wives and the witchcraft confessions that are commonplace among Kuranko womenfolk, which express these tensions (1977: 141). These factors help explain the situation in which Sogolon finds herself in the epic - it is her purported indiscretions or momentary lapses of confidence (and not any that may have occurred to Nare Famaghan,

the father) which Sunjata focuses upon when doubts are raised as to his legitimacy or fearlessness.

In some other versions (A, D, DK, BS) the oath which Sunjata swears and the test which he undertakes concerns not his legitimacy directly or the fearlessness of either himself or his mother, but his ability to lead the rebel army against Sumanguru, and his destiny to rule Manding. To quote from A's version of the *sigi* test:

Comme on craignait l'approche de nombreux ennemis, il était indispensable de donner le commandement à l'homme le plus énergique, le plus courageux; celui-là réunirait les conditions exigées qui plongerait son bras dans une marmite, contenant du fer en fusion. Tous les concurrents hésitèrent sauf Soudiata [sic] qui sortit sain et sauf de l'épreuve. (A: 357)

The remaining tests identified in this section are also clearly related to the issue of Sunjata's kingly destiny. In two versions (N and CL) it is said that Sunjata contested a game of *wori* with the ruler of Djeliba, while in F, FDS, WK3 and MS a game played with the ruler of Mema (or of other places at which the hero sojourned), which is actually identified as *sigi*, shares some features with the game of *wori*.<sup>29</sup>

The game of *wori* has a very ancient origin, being associated with the Sumerians, and is familiar throughout Africa and the Near East (Zaslavsky 1973: 116-36). Jobson noticed the skill and speed with which the Gambian Malinke played the game. He describes how:

... in a piece of wood, certain great holes [are] cut, which they set upon the ground betwixt two of them, and with a number of some thirtie pibble stones, after a manner of counting, they take one from the other, untill one is possessed of all (1968: 48).

The "manner of counting" to which Jobson refers may be connected to the formulae recorded in some versions.<sup>30</sup> Zaslavsky notes how some players develop codes which enable them to count the tokens in the holes with greater speed and accuracy (1973: 125). These formulae are one of the features that unite the game of *wori* as it is described in N and CL to the *sigi* contests of FDS, MS, WK3 and F. From the point of

view of the griot's recitation, they form song-mode passages which can be repeated (as they are, for example, in WK3) and which help break up and enliven the narrative.

Johnson remarks that, according to what he was told by griots, 'gaming in old Mali was a widespread and serious matter' (1979: 264). *Wori* itself is identified by Zaslavsky with kingship and power. She gives a Bugandan example in which a king's success at *wori* stands as a metaphor for his power over his subjects (1973: 116), while it can be noted that the defeating of an opponent in a game of strategy is often found as a symbol of kingly destiny in narrative art in Africa and beyond.<sup>31</sup>

In four accounts, Sunjata's future as *mansa* of Manding is signalled by a foliating or defoliating tree. For example, DK recounts how Sunjata, while at Nema, stands under a tree in leaf and asks it if he shall return to Manding and defeat Sumanguru. At this the leaves immediately die and fall. They grow back at once when he asks if his mother will accompany him or die at Nema (DK: 287). In FDS, JBS and WK it is Sogolon herself who asks Sunjata to "consult the dead tree", which then miraculously grows leaves (JBS: 706; WK1: 283). In FDS and WK the type of tree which bears leaves is significant. In these accounts the tree is a *shea* or *karite* tree. Johnson notes how a pun on the homonym *se* (= shea) and *se* (= power) is employed in a Malinke ceremony in which a new king must go into the forest at night and shout in a *shea* tree "power/shea-butter is in my hand/possession" (1986: 196). In WK the limit of the *karite* tree-bearing land is said to be contiguous with the extent of Sunjata's empire, as it is in N (WK1: 285).

Also concerned with Sunjata's destiny as ruler of Manding are the incidents involving the prohibition against anger. ZA, F and JBS are each clear that the three occasions on which Sunjata must refrain from rising to anger have a deciding influence on his kingly destiny. In JBS his mother says on her death-bed:

Sunjata will encounter three obstacles, but he must not allow 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 (JBS: 706)

In F the Sand Oracle links Sunjata's future as 'King of Mandeland' to his avoidance of being 'stirred to wrath' three times (F1: 463). These three occasions on which anger must be avoided vary from version to version and are not in fact fully spelt out in F or JBS.<sup>32</sup> ZA and JBS are agreed in seeing the ruler of Mema's refusal to bury Sogolon without the purchase of a plot of land as one "affront" to Sunjata's dignity; another, found in ZA and F, involves members of the Dabo clan; while in JBS, as in F, the hero is roused to anger by his failure to pass the *sigi* test. In WK the three affronts follow in quick succession during the return sequence. Attempting to raise support for his bid to attack Sumanguru, Sunjata is told in turn by the rulers of Nyenguema, Tabon and Sibi that he is not capable of succeeding in his quest.

In all versions containing this theme Sunjata is said in fact to become angry at first, but is then reminded of the prohibition. In F it is one of the sorceresses who fulfills this role, but in ZA, JBS and in WK it is his own sister who plays the part of the reminder.

#### **Recapitulation: the tests**

The tests which have formed the subject of this part of the Chapter emphasize both the heroic and kingly aspects of Sunjata. They seek to determine his status as a legitimate *horon* and as the son of a *mansa* - in this way they give the hero a just claim to the Manding throne - but they also bring out Sunjata's courage and his superhuman capabilities, traits equally important in determining the success of his quest.

I have already stressed the role of the exile as a time of testing and a time in which the hero defines - and is equipped for - the task ahead. The roles of the tests in the Sunjata epic are analogous to those outlined for the hero pattern in general. Psychological development and the constraint of the desire for immediate gratification are stressed in Sunjata's need to restrain his anger at three specific points during his exile; legitimacy and kingly destiny are stressed in the *sigi* game,

archery contest and the incident of the foliating tree; physical prowess in the archery contest; endurance in the *sigi* game; and cleverness in the game of *wori*. The parallels noted with the *Dali-masigi*, the *hijra*, and the young person's *ton*, also suggest that the exile should be viewed positively, as a time of growth and maturation; while the recurrence of the number seven to describe the length of the hero's gestation, his lameness and his exile can be seen as connoting an equivalence - perhaps in the sense that the work of individual development and character formation begun in the womb (as the Malinke aver) continues through initiation and on into exile.

With the exile, I suggest, the process of personal growth is effectively completed for Sunjata. As the epic recounts Sunjata's return to Manding, the central focus of the story shifts from his own fate to that of the Malinke and their struggle for freedom from Sumanguru. Sunjata's own personality also appears to undergo an important alteration at this point in the epic. The impulsiveness and reckless strength of his childhood and youth are replaced by a figure of greater caution and self-control. The number of heroic or fantastic feats associated with Sunjata tends to decline in the latter portion of the epic: although Sunjata triumphs over Sumanguru using his special powers, he is often said to share the victory with his lieutenants (Fakoli, Tira Makhan and others), and in some accounts it is not even he who fires the fateful arrow at Sumanguru. The alteration in the epic's portrayal of Sunjata can be, in essence, described as the change from child-hero to *mansa*, and I suggest that it is in these tests during the time of exile and return that the alteration in Sunjata's character can be located.

The Malinke definition of the hero includes the epithet *malobali* (shameless), the notion that he is anti-social, self- and reputation-centred, and consequently "welcome only on troubled days" by the population at large (Bird & Kendall 1980: 15-6; Bird 1974: vii). On the other hand, the picture of the ideal *mansa* is very different. For the Malinke it involves, according to Innes, the belief 'that patience and restraint are virtues, and that a man destined for leadership should learn self-control' (1974:

113).<sup>33</sup> A *mansa* is also someone who delegates his functions to his satellites while he assumes a position beyond or "above" quotidian events. One can note that, according to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa the *mansa* of Mali always spoke, and in turn was spoken to, through his interpreter, who is probably to be identified as his griot (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 291), and that according to the fifteenth-century Portuguese visitor Fernandez the *mansa* was said to eat alone - perhaps with the inference that he need not eat at all (Levtzion 1980: 107). The idea that rulers ought to be able to dispense with humanity's general physical functions is discussed by Frazer (1963: 119-39), while Ernest Jones writes of the "silence of the wise" which is often seen as a kingly attribute: 'invisible and silent action', he avers, 'is the highest limit of imaginable power' (Jones 1951 ii: 347-9).

The change in Sunjata's character perceived at this point in the epic conforms to the idea that the hero represents, in some respects, through his life's pattern, the pattern to be followed by the Malinke male himself. One can note that, according to Maria Grosz-Ngaté, among the Bamana a child is often referred to as *malobali*, "shameless one", employing the same term as Bird and Kendall used to describe the Malinke idea of the hero; and that, in contradistinction to this, but in agreement with my description of royal virtues, a *horon*, or noble, is expected to possess 'A highly developed sense of shame (*maloya*)'. She writes that the *horon* must be 'discreet, generous, honest', and that he 'does not laugh or talk loudly' (Grosz-Ngaté 1989: 170). The Malinke bard Kanku Madi Jabate of Keyla puts the following words into the mouth of one of his characters: 'Il est dit que l'homme qui reste silencieux est noble et que celui qui parle se met au cou la corde de l'esclavage' (Jabate 1987: 15).

It is on this contrast between hero and *mansa* and their differential attributes that the alteration in Sunjata's character is based. Sunjata, as was shown in Chapter Four, displays ample evidence of his heroic character while still an infant (or sometimes even while technically still a foetus), but this often wilful and disruptive aspect of his personality recedes as the epic unfolds, at least in most versions, and

the Sunjata who returns to defeat Sumanguru and form an empire bears little resemblance to the figure who terrorized his mother's midwives, stole from his neighbours and hunted while still unborn. The transformation of Sunjata, as I argued in Chapter Four, is described and should be understood in terms of initiation into adulthood and maturity - the movement from asocial taker to social actor and provider. Many of the tests, and particularly the "three affronts", emphasize the sublimation of self-oriented, immediate, retributive action in favour of a more tolerant, cautious or measured response. In one sense, therefore, the "three affronts" element of the narrative, which as we have seen can be related to several of the different tests or other incidents of the exile period, marks the alteration of Sunjata as hero to Sunjata as ruler and, to a large extent, signals the completion of the first phase of Sunjata's life, the phase of personal growth and maturation. Sunjata has embarked on the "road of trials" and returns to his natal land having been tested and having endured.

#### **Messengers from Manding & the decision to return**

Twenty versions of the epic that have been examined in this thesis recount how Sunjata's exile is brought to a close by a delegation, or a single messenger, sent to petition for his return to Manding and to his father's throne.<sup>34</sup> The context of the request to the hero is normally as follows: either Dankaran Tuman, Sunjata's half-brother and *mansa* of Manding, has been driven out from the land by Sumanguru, or all the older brothers of Sunjata have in turn been defeated and killed by Sumanguru. Sumanguru is said to have overrun Manding, and his rule is often described as onerous, using the expression "He put gourds over the mouths of the people".<sup>35</sup> DMS has it, 'No-one dared open their mouths - only Sumanguru Kante spoke out loud' (DMS: line 50). The people of Manding decide to ask Sunjata to return and attempt to reclaim the throne.<sup>36</sup> This decision is, for some accounts, in response to the statements of soothsayers or diviners. As N has it:

The soothsayers were united in saying that it would be the rightful heir to the throne who would save Mali. This heir was 'The Man with Two Names'. . . . The man with two names was no other than Magan Sundiata. (N: 42)<sup>37</sup>

Thirteen accounts record the names of the delegation or single messenger sent to search out Sunjata.<sup>38</sup> Some versions associate the mission with Fakoli (FDS, MS, DK) or Tira Makhan (FDS, KMJ), others with the griot Bala Faseke (BK, B). Most commonly, however, the delegation is said to comprise marabouts (*moriw*) and a female *jeli*. The female *jeli* is called Tumu Manian (or Maninyan), and is sometimes present at the outset of Sunjata's flight into exile (e.g. in F1: 462, where she is "Djalimussu tumbumannia", i.e., *jeli* = griot + *musu* = woman). She appears (her name is variously spelt) as part of the delegation in V, N, CL, MS, WK and KB. The marabouts come mainly from the following clans: Berete (V, N, WK, CL, KB), Cisse (N, WK, CL), Ture (Touré) (V, N, WK, CL, KB) and Jane (Diané) (WK, CL, KB).<sup>39</sup> Some of the individual names recur, thus Tomoudo Mandian Berete of V's delegation is Mandjan Berete (N), Tomono Mandian Berete (CL), Tomono Magan-Dyan Berete (WK) and Tumana Magan Jan Berete (KB). (The Berete marabout's name would appear to link him to the female griot of the delegation, Tumu Manian, although this connection is not made in any of the versions.) Similarly V's Seriman Kanda Toure reappears as Siraman Toure (N), Siriman Kanda Toure (CL), Sirimanfing Kanda Toure (WK) and Siramanjin Kanda Ture (KB). There is less agreement over the Cisse and Jane marabouts.<sup>40</sup>

Having composed the delegation, or chosen the messenger, one difficulty still remains for those who wish to challenge Sumanguru's paramountcy - that is to say, actually locating the hero, whose whereabouts, according to many accounts, is unknown. The solution adopted in fourteen variants is as follows. The delegates take certain fruits or vegetables, or the seeds from which they will grow, which are peculiar to Manding, and hawk them in the towns and villages through which they pass.<sup>41</sup> In this way they hope to come to the notice of those they meet who are originally from Manding; for, as the griot Dembo Kanute comments in his recitation,

You know yourself, Seni Darbo [guest of honour at the

recital, that even if you are in Europe,  
When you see something from your own country in the  
market,  
That is the first thing you will buy (DK: 283)

The produce that they carry with them most commonly includes *gombo* (okra) (MA, S, H, P, B, WK, CL, DK, FDS), various tree leaves, used as condiments: baobab (N, CL, KB), "sira" (F), "da" (P), custard apple (MS), maize or corn (V, SK, KMJ, MS), and aubergine (V, S, H, WK).

Eventually the messengers come to the market of the town in which Sunjata, his mother and sister, and sometimes his younger brother, are staying. For twelve accounts this is Mema, for at least four it is Nema.<sup>42</sup> Often it is said that the messengers meet Sunjata's sister, Sogolon Kolonkan, in the market. She recognizes the produce as having come from Manding and, being identified as the sister of the man they are searching for, leads them to her brother.<sup>43</sup> He is sometimes said to be away in the bush hunting with his younger brother, and in some accounts there follows an incident in which Sogolon Kolonkan removes by magic the heart and liver of a wild animal her brothers have recently killed, using the organs in a meal that she cooks for the messengers. Her action provokes an argument with Manding Bukari (Bori) when he returns from the hunt with Sunjata. This incident is discussed in Chapter Seven.

The delegates ask Sunjata to return to Manding and to take the throne from Sumanguru. While in A the hero is said to accept the challenge speedily and leave at once at the head of an army, in most accounts his decision is taken either with the aid of his mother or out of concern for her welfare - more specifically, in connection with her death. She is described as being ill in MA (167), AR (168), N (46) and BS (55-7), and as being too old to travel in MA, H (112), KMJ,D1 (61), MS (168) and F2 (323). In fifteen accounts the death of Sogolon is said to be related to Sunjata's destiny as king.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes Sunjata vows that he will not leave his mother and return because of her infirmity.<sup>45</sup> In other cases Sunjata prays that, if he is to be king, his mother may die before he leaves for home, to spare her the

journey, but that if he is not destined to be king, she remains alive.<sup>46</sup> A third group of variants have Sogolon herself making a similar vow: if her son is to rule in Manding, she will not keep him from the task.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in some versions, the link between Sunjata's kingship and Sogolon's death is stated explicitly (F2: 323; DMS: lines 62-5). In DMS we read: 'She [Sogolon] went to the soothsayers, who said that the Lion would never rule Manding as long as his mother was still alive' (DMS: line 63). In all fifteen versions recording the episode Sogolon dies the next night, or within a few days - proof positive of the hero's destiny to conquer Sumanguru and rule Manding.

### **The hero's destiny**

It has already been noted in Chapter Four how, for the Malinke, the hero is considered as the "man of destiny", that much of the hero's early life is spent attempting to determine the nature of his heroic mission. Great heroic potential, without a heroic destiny is as naught, says Charles Bird, who writes of the Malinke hero:

The trick is to know one's destiny, but there lies the rub, since only God can know one's destiny. The group will always profit from the success of its heroes. The failures slip quietly into ignominy, so as not to discourage the new crop of pretenders (1977: 358)

Already in this chapter it has been seen that the *sigi* test, the game of *wori*, the archery contest and the "three affronts" act as determiners of Sunjata's potential destiny by signalling his legitimacy (as a *horon*, as the child of royalty), his superhuman or heroic capabilities (his fearlessness and athletic prowess), and his kingship potential (his self-control and magnanimity). In the episode of the delegation Sunjata's actual destiny as ruler of Manding is affirmed in two ways.

Firstly, the soothsayers or diviners of Manding declare that Sunjata is the only one able or destined to retake Manding from Sumanguru. He is The Man with Two

Names (N: 42; WK1: 253), for KB he is the man with many names (KB: 46), for CL 'the prince with the triple baptismal name and the triple totem' (CL: 178; the totems are identified as the lion, the buffalo and the panther).

Secondly, and of equal significance, Sunjata's destiny is revealed in the death of his mother. We have noted how the Malinke emphasize the crucial role of the mother in the nurturance and development of her child. It was said that the child's prosperity and strength of character grew from the mother's own equanimity in the face of suffering and hardship. We can say that, for the Malinke, while the child of the forceful and independent wife will be ineffective (as in the case of Sasuma Berete and the weak king, her son, Dankaran Tuman), the child of the mother who is self-effacing and pliant to fortune will be strong and determined. In this context, Sogolon's acceptance of death, when she realises the conflict of interest in Sunjata - between tending his mother in her infirmity and returning to Manding - appears as the greatest statement of motherly concern and beneficial self-sacrifice. To Malinke standards, Sogolon's life, from the birth of Sunjata, follows an ideal pattern in which everything is given and nothing selfishly demanded - even to the extent of curtailing an old age which hindered the progress of her son.

### **Social & historical context of the delegation episode**

As was noted, in five accounts (V, N, CL, WK, KB) the delegation sent to secure Sunjata's return was comprised mainly of marabouts (*moriw*) from the clans of Berete, Ture, Jane and Cisse. In addition, S says that Sunjata

went to protect the five marabouts (*Manding mori kanda lóloú*): Béré-té, Touré, Sissé, Diané, Koma or Kouma, who prayed to God for his victory and his renown (S: 43).

And ZA says that Sunjata took into exile with him four marabouts: Touré, Cissé, Bahayoro and Silla (ZA: 18). Malinke tradition normally records five of these "Manding *mori*".<sup>48</sup> They are given by the griots of Keyla as Berete, Toure, Haydara,

Fofana and Saganogo (Dieterlen 1955: 40); BK records four - Berete, Sisse, Jane and Komma (BK: 173-5), KB five: Berete, Cisse, Diane, Ture and Koma (KB: 94), and Diabaté also five: Berete, Sisse, Ture, Jane and Saganogo (Diabaté n.d.: 17). From a comparison of these sources we may say that there are actually some ten clans whose names appear under the title Manding *mori*: Berete, Ture, Jane, Cisse, Koma, Fofana, Saganogo, Bahayoro or Bagayogo, Silla and Haydara, but that the first five names of this list are the ones which recur with most regularity.

According to some accounts, at the special assembly of the Malinke and their allies after the defeat of Sumanguru, the Manding *moriw* are 'proclaimed great divines of the empire' by Sunjata (N: 78; cp. KB: 94-5). Niane himself connects this proclamation to their role in securing the return of Sunjata:

the five maraboutic clans, the first of Sunjata's allies, including the Toure and the Berete, who had actively sought Sundiata in exile were proclaimed the 'five guardians of the faith', or Mori Kanda Lolu. This group included the Cisse of Wagadu, who had become Muslim converts and Sundiata's political allies (1984: 134)

The supposed rationale behind the alliance between Sunjata Keita and the Muslim clans is articulated fully by Adam Konaré Ba. She writes:

Cette délégation était essentiellement composée des représentants des grandes familles maraboutiques, celles qui étaient le plus farouchement opposées au régime animiste, lésées dans leurs intérêts vitaux, en tant qu'intermédiaires privilégiées entre les commerçants de Wagadu et les Mandenka. Depuis que les transactions commerciales périclitaient, elles vivaient dans l'aigreur (KB: 46-7)

Konaré Ba's identification of the marabouts as his Muslim allies who were in the van of opposition to that ruler's 'régime animiste' is plausible, and it is possible both that Sumanguru's war and his opposition to slave-trading may have interrupted their trading, although we have no reason to suppose that Sumanguru or those elements which he represents were against trading in itself. Cisse is a Soninke patronym and, according to N, CL and B, the Cisse clan were ruling Wagadu/Ghana at

the time of Sunjata; Ghana's ruling elite had long professed Islam. Ture is also a Soninke patronym and is the name of a clan mentioned by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, along with Saghanaghū (which might be identified with the Keyla griots' Saganogo), as residing at Zāgharī (Dia) and practising Islam (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 287). Dia was a Wangara trading town, serving as a southern terminus of the trans-Saharan trade, and its origin is linked to the Soninke of Wagadu/Ghana (Perinbam 1974: 680). Among the clans of the Diakhanke - those who claim their origins to be at Dia - are the Fofana and the Silla, as well as the Ture and Cisse (Smith 1965: 258), all of which are names that appear in the lists of Manding *moriw*.

Konaré Ba says that Sumanguru placed an embargo on trade in the area he conquered by stopping traffic on the Joliba, or Niger river (KB: 55). Her source for this information is most probably WK1: 323. Wa Kamissoko claims that Sumanguru only overran Manding after first asking the inhabitants to cease trading in slaves captured from among the Malinke themselves, a request which was turned down (WK1: 1-39), and it is reasonable to attach his blockade of the Niger to an attempt to curtail this trade. No other version mentions the association of the maraboutic families with the slave trade, and it is probable that WK is in fact referring to the Saharan slave trade of later centuries (Farias forthcoming). However, the tradition of the delegation in the epic appears to associate the maraboutic messengers with trade of some kind - at least obliquely - by equipping the travellers with fruits and vegetables which they sell at the markets along their route. The connection between Muslim holy men and west African trading groups such as the Wangara, Dyula and Diakhanke (Jakhanke) is affirmed by many researchers, although it is not without its critics (Sanneh 1979: 19, 23).

We have noted that the Ture, Cisse, Saganogo, Fofana and Silla - all names of marabout families either in the delegation or connected with Sunjata's exile - were linked to Dia, the Wangara trading town. Dia is less than 150km from the probable siting of Mema and may have been part of the province of Mema during its time under Malian rule. *Jeli* Baba Sisoko claims that the Tunkara of Mema, originally inhabitants

of Kumbi in Wagadu, made their way first to Dia (Conrad 1981: 669). While the confluence of these facts - Sunjata's exile in Mema, the marabout messengers' clans' association with trade, and these clans' links with Dia - does not allow us to prove any historical hypotheses with regard to the hero's exile, it nonetheless demonstrates a logical "fit" in the epic - marabout-traders would naturally travel between the Manding heartland and the area of Mema and would therefore be ideally suited to deliver the message seeking Sunjata's return.

In this context, Jobson's comments on the "Mary-buckles" (marabouts) of seventeenth-century Gambia are of interest:

one chief reason to encourage their [the Mary-buckles'] travell, we have learned, which is, that they have free recourse, through all places, so that howsoever the kings and countries are at warres, and up in armes, the one against the other, yet still the Mary-bucke is a priviledged person, and many [sic] follow his trade, or course of travelling, without any let or interruption of either side (1968: 99)<sup>49</sup>

Whatever the historical status of the episode of the delegation, Sunjata's involvement with the Manding *moriw* is significant from the point of view of the role it affords the marabouts in the formation of Mali. Niane's statement concerning the creation of the marabout families which participated in the delegation into "imperial guardians of the faith" has already been quoted, and he himself calls them Sunjata's first allies. In fact, the four or five marabout clans are commonly viewed as an integral part of Malinke social structure, along with four *nyamakala* clans, the *horon* families and the *bula* or *bla* - the original "slave clans" or "noble captives" (Diabaté n.d.: 17; Dieterlen 1955: 40-1; Farias 1989: 153-4). It seems to me that, notwithstanding the motif's potential historicity, it is essentially for the purpose of involving these marabout families in the story of the creation of Mali that they are given to have formed the delegation that sought out Sunjata and secured the hero's return from exile. Similarities can be detected between the categories involved in the traditional structure of Malinke social and political life and the epic's enumeration of Sunjata's allies in the struggle against Sumanguru. The association

of the Manding *moriw* with Sunjata's victory seems part of a general pattern that acts as a principle of social organization for the Malinke by establishing the societal order through the medium of an idealized history of Mali's formation at the hands of Sunjata.

### **Recapitulation**

Although Sunjata is sometimes said to be forced out of his homeland and to wander from town to town an unwanted exile, pursued by his half-brother's messengers bearing bribes of gold for his hosts - is pictured in other words as a desperate vagrant - in fact almost from the moment he begins his wanderings (from the first of the many tests he undergoes, that is to say) Sunjata is clearly demonstrated to be making of the exile a solid foundation for his later exploits. This foundation is constructed in two ways: firstly, in the identification of his own destiny to rule Manding and of his ability to achieve this end, which is demonstrated through the ordeals he successfully undergoes; and secondly, the construction of an alliance of forces against Sumanguru, made up, in the first instance, of the Meman Tunkara and the Manding *moriw*.

The outworking of Sunjata's exile in the epic illustrates again the thesis proposed in Chapters Three and Four, viz, the employment of a *wandersage* to form the basis of the narrative construction, which is mediated through a culturization process in which the so-called universal theme is reoriented to fit a specifically Malinke referential grid. In this way the basic idea of the banishment of the hero, which already contains within it the seeds of a disaffection with familial ties - in the hero's expulsion from home - is developed into an explication of the importance of *senankuya* at the expense of the often tense and competitive ties of kinship. Likewise, the widespread motif of a time of testing, in which the hero discerns his task and prepares for it by moulding his character and channelling his powers, is realised in the Malinke context through an emphasis on Malinke preoccupations with

legitimacy and the paramount role of the mother in the mediation of blessings from father to son, reaching its apogee in Sogolon's death before the hero's return, as well as in the manifestations of the hero's physical strength, mental agility and self-control.

## CHAPTER FIVE: NOTES

1. MAK: 209; MA: 167-8; A: 357; D: 21-3; AR: 168; ZA: 18-23; ZB: 40; F1: 463-6, F2: 320-1; V: 321-2; S: 43; AS: 74-5; H: 112; N: 26-38; P: 54; CL: 143-64; KMJ,M: 263-79; FDS: 145-60; MS: 106-43; DK: 227-8; BK: 207; BS: 51-5; B: 53-68; JBS: 705-6; WK3: 108-28; KB: 32-5; DMS: lines 41-7, 68.
2. MA: 167; AR: 168; ZA: 23; ZB: 40; F2: 320-1; V: 321-2; S: 43; N: 35-8; CL: 161-4; KMJ,M: 287; FDS: 155-6; MS: 124-43; B: 66-8; JBS: 705-6; DMS: lines 47, 68.
3. AR, ZA, ZB, F, V, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, B, DMS, JBS.
4. DK: 227-8; BS: 55; WK3: 127-9; KB: 34-5.
5. A: 357; D: 22; KMJ,M: 267; WK3: 109; KB: 34.
6. ZA: 19-20; N: 31-2; CL: 157-8; B: 60.
7. KMJ,M: 271; FDS: 148, 152; MS: 117; WK3: 124; KB: 34.
8. Johnson 1986: 209. The ruler's name varies: Kolon Masa Turumbe (KMJ), Kolen Massa Touroukelen (WK), Tulunbe, king of Kura (MS). See KMJ,M: 270; FDS: 147; MS: 113; WK3: 120; KB: 34.
9. KMJ,M: 268; FDS: 146; WK3: 117; KB: 34.
10. MAK: 209; A: 357; D: 21-2; ZA: 19; BS: 51.
11. In fact, Delafosse identifies Kirina with a village to the north of Kulikoro rather than Krina south of Bamako (1913: 22), but the point still holds good.
12. Vidal 1923b: 606; Monteil 1929: 353; Pageard 1961: 61; Mauny 1961: 93f. Niane disagrees with this siting of Mema. The sketch-map on p.vi of Niane 1965 shows Mema to the north-east of the usual siting, and on the present-day course of the Niger. The map in Camara Laye 1980 (7) puts Mema even further to the east, between Timbuktu and Gao.
13. MA: 167-8; ZA: 23-6; ZB: 43; F2: 323-4; S: 43; H: 112; N: 46-7; AR: 169; CL: 183-4; KMJ,M: 298-301; FDS: 165-7; MS: 169-72; DK: 287-9; BS: 57-61; JBS: 707-8; WK1: 287-311; KB: 53-4. In H the incident takes place at "Nianimba". In H and ZA the ruler does not relent upon the receipt of the payment, and Sunjata defeats him, destroying his settlement.
14. Compare similar customs among the Dogon (Paulme 1939: 437-8), Wolof (Labouret 1929a: 250), and Kuranko (Jackson 1977: 154).
15. Probably to be derived from *jeli*, griot and *ba*, great. A variant name is Djoliba, the Niger, literally "great water" (Park n.d.: 173).
16. Badougou can be derived from *ba*, great and *dugu*, village or settlement.
17. A: 357; D: 23; ZA: 19-20; ZB: 44; F1: 463-5; DK: 291; BS: 51; JBS: 709; WK3: 111-25. In JBS the candidate must remove meat, not a bracelet, from a pot.
18. N: 29-30; CL: 153-7; F2: 322; FDS: 155-60; MS: 129-43; WK3: 111-25.

19. ZB: 40; F1: 465-6; AS: 75-6; DK: 291; BS: 51-3.
20. DK: 287; JBS: 706; WK1: 283-7; FDS: 165. Two other stories may be related to this tradition. In A Sumanguru makes a tree bloom when he rests his hand on it (A: 358); in D Sunjata's warriors cut down a wood but the trees mysteriously regrow (D: 23-4).
21. ZA: 19; F1: 463; CL: 147-8; JBS: 706-7; WK1: 283-7. In JBS and WK this incident is linked to the tradition of the budding tree.
22. In WK the formulae are not noted. In CL they are as follows: 'Love your wife, but never tell her state secrets'; 'A king has no friend'; 'The son of another is not your son, the land of another is not your land'; 'A kingdom cannot be run without the cooperation of the old' (CL: 147-8).
23. The period of seven years can also be compared to the time needed to elapse between circumcision and marriage, which is ten years or more for the Gambian Malinke (Shaffer & Cooper 1980: 95) but seven years or more for the Malinke-related Kuranko (Jackson 1977: 109). We can also note that Jackson says that many Kuranko folk stories take as their hero a *kemina*, that is to say, an initiated male who is not yet married (1982: 43).
24. We can note that it is exactly this "celebration of nobility" from which Do Kamissa, the Buffalo-woman, is excluded by her brothers in JBS, provoking her transformation into a buffalo (JBS: 674-5).
25. One should note that the Dogon practise a ceremony called "sigui", which occurs every sixty years and commemorates an episode in Dogon mythology in which the soul of a mythic ancestor died from the breaking of an interdiction. However, the rites detailed by Marcel Griaule (1938: 166-340) do not conform to the practice of *sigi* as it is found in the Sunjata epic.
26. Except that in F one hair on Sunjata's arm is singed. This makes his hosts laugh. Sunjata is about to attack them but his sister reminds him of the Sand Oracle's prophecy and he relents. Taking the test a second time, the hair is restored (F1: 463-5).
27. Cashion 1982: 264. Compare, for the Bamana, Dumestre 1979: 307 and, for the Kuranko, Jackson 1977: 137.
28. This view of the relative importance of each parent in the conception and development of the child does not appear to be restricted to west Africa. De Sade writes: 'it isn't the mother's blood which forms the child, but only that of the father. The female breast nourishes, maintains, and helps build the child, but in reality it furnishes nothing' (de Sade 1964: 139). Ernest Jones notes how some Australian tribes believe 'that the child is created solely by the father and merely nourished by the mother', citing Westermarck (Jones 1951 ii: 153). For a mythological statement of a similar opinion, see Campbell, who writes: 'the world-generating spirit of the father passes into the manifold of human experience through a transforming medium - the mother of the world' (Campbell 1949: 297).
29. Magan Sisoko claims that *sigi* is the same as *woli* (MS: 134). His father, Fa-Digi, says: 'That sigi-game, /From that comes the wori-game. /From that comes the mperi-game.' (FDS: 155). FDS still identifies the game played between Sunjata and the king of Mema as *sigi* (*ibid.*). What F calls "siggis" involves an iron cube which is shaken and thrown (F2: 322). WK3 includes a description which matches the conventional understanding of *sigi* in his narrative

- (113), but some details link it to the game in N and CL. Sunjata is said to win the game in these accounts, but no exact description of how he achieves this is given. Diabaté notes that *mpari* is a derivative of *wori*, being similar, but played in the sand (1975: 67).
30. N: 30; CL: 156; F2: 322; FDS: 155-7; MS: 135-43; WK3: 111-23.
  31. See also Sigwalt 1980: 145, 148; Biebuyck 1969: 108-9. Cp. motif H 509.3 Chess game as a test. *Wori* is played in the Bida myth of the Soninke, although here the victor is the one who shall be sacrificed to the monster.
  32. F1 contains one "affront" - the *sigi* test. At this juncture the *Voice of Africa* narrative ends. There are no further affronts in the resumed story in F2. In JBS only two affronts are mentioned - the dispute over Sogolon's burial and the *sigi* test.
  33. Compare Biebuyck on the Nyanga ideal: 'The Nyanga have a profound dislike for boasting and megalomania'. While 'in most of the epic the hero Mwindo behaves like an arrogant boaster' it 'caused reactions of unease and sarcasm' in the audience; that these attributes were only forgiven on account of Mwindo's father's injustice towards his son; and that 'the personality of the hero would ultimately have been unacceptable to the Nyanga if a moment of crisis and restraint had not come into his life' (1969: 145). In the Mwindo epic, as in the Sunjata epic, this alteration in the hero's character is facilitated through a journey - in Mwindo's case a journey to the land of the gods in the sky (Biebuyck 1969: 138ff.).
  34. MA: 167; A: 358; AR: 168-9; F2: 322-3; V: 322-4; S: 43; H: 112; P: 54-5; N: 42-6; CL: 178-82; KMJ,D1: 59-61; FDS: 151, 160-1; MS: 152-3, 158-62, 165-9; DK: 279-87; BK: 213; BS: 55-7; B: 69-70; WK1: 249-87; KB: 41-53; DMS: lines 48-65.
  35. KMJ,D1: 59; FDS: 151; MS: 158; KB: 42.
  36. Except in BK, where it is Sumanguru who sends a message asking for Sunjata to return from exile (BK: 213).
  37. See also H: 112; CL: 178; WK1: 253-5; KB: 46-7. For N and WK the two names are Maghan Sunjata.
  38. V, S, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, DK, BK, BS, B, WK1, KB.
  39. Fofana can perhaps be added to this list. It is the name of a *mori* clan. BS names his single messenger "Fofana", but he is identified as Sunjata's brother, and not a marabout.
  40. Singbin Mara Cisse (N) and Sengben Mara Cisse (CL) but Bougariba Cisse in WK; Sere Bogari Diane (KB) and Sere Bogari Dyane (WK) but Sadi Maghan Diane in CL.
  41. MA, F, S, H, N, CL, V, KMJ, FDS, MS, DK, B, WK, KB. P contains a variant in which the delegates take a drink made from *nassi* and *gombo* to Sunjata (P: 54-5).
  42. MA, AR, F, V, S, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, B and DMS say Mema; BK, BS, WK and KB say Nema. P has Sunjata fetched back from Mossi territory, A has Lambe.
  43. MA: 167; F2: 322-3; V: 323-4; S: 43; N: 43-4; CL: 178-83; MS: 158-62; DK:

281-7; WK1: 249-87; KB: 48-53.

44. MA, AR, V, F, S, H, N, CL, KMJ, MS, DK, WK, KB, DMS, BS.

45. MA: 167; H: 112; KMJ,D1: 61.

46. S: 43; N: 46; CL: 181-3; MS: 168-9; DK: 287; BS: 55-7; WK1: 281.

47. AR: 168-9; KB: 52-3; DMS: lines 62-5.

48. Or: *Mori si ke duru* (Dieterlen 1955: 40); *Mori Kanda si lolu* (Diabaté n.d.: 17).

49. In a potentially analogous cliché, a Dioula (Jula) trader is employed as a messenger to deliver a shirt to a chief by his enemy in a tradition recorded in Adam 1903-4: 487-8.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMANGURU, BALA FASEKE KUYATE, & FAKOLI

In this chapter our focus shifts from the wanderings of Sunjata to the epic's characterization of his rival in the pursuit of power, Sumanguru. Although Sumanguru's background and some of his actions make him in a sense comparable to Sunjata, I attempt to demonstrate here how, through his dealings with two significant secondary figures in the epic story, Bala Faseke and Fakoli, Sumanguru is portrayed by the traditionists as an abuser of power. Nevertheless, the wealth of traditions which surround Sumanguru, and the nature of these traditions, clearly indicate that Sumanguru is an important figure in the Manding past, and is afforded a positive role in the construction of Malinke society.

Sumanguru appears as a character in thirty-one versions of the Sunjata epic analyzed in this thesis; in all but one of these accounts, YFG, he is cast in the role of Sunjata's adversary.<sup>1</sup> YFG claims that Sumaworo is a praise-name for Sunjata; BD makes Sumanguru a brother of Sunjata, but they are still described as enemies. Beyond these thirty-one versions, Sumanguru's omission from the epic recitations is for the most part unsurprising: DMD and OS concern themselves exclusively with the early, pre-Sunjata portions of the epic (although TK, which is almost wholly given over to a recitation of the Buffalo-woman tale, still mentions the contest between Sunjata and Sumanguru, even though the hero is as yet unborn). In consequence, we can say that only AS, the Wolof version from Gambia, portrays a life of Sunjata without at the very least mentioning Sumanguru; in other words, Sumanguru is a vital component of the Sunjata corpus.

There are numerous versions of the name: Simanguru (MA, MB), Simangourou (AR, ZA, ZB), Samanguru (F2), Soumanhourou (V), Soumahourou (H), Soumaoro (N, CL), Sumangurun (KMJ,D1), Sumamuru (FDS, MS), Soumankourou (TK), Sumaworo (YFG, KB), or Soumaworo (WK), as well as the most common, Sumanguru (DK, BK, BS, B, JBS, MK, DMS) or Soumangourou

(HO, MAK, A, D, P, BD).<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the name of Sunjata, the variants of the epic contain no etymologies for Sumanguru, except for the non-Malinke variant YFG, where it is claimed that Sumaworo derives from *sume*, "elephantiasis of the scrotum", and *woro*, "calf of the leg" (103).<sup>3</sup> Beyond the versions of the epic, again, there is little speculation as to the origin of the name, although Conrad suggests that the latter portion of the name, which sometimes appears as "hourou" or "woro" may derive from the Malinke word for "noble" or "freeman", *horon* or *horo* (1984: 49); and Humblot writes that Sumanguru may derive from the Arabic name Ismaïl, variants of which appear in west Africa as Ismaïla, Ousoumaïla, Soumaïlou, and Samaïla (1919: 401).

Nevertheless, Sumanguru's name provides a number of associations for the epic's figure: he is a member of the Kante clan in nineteen accounts,<sup>4</sup> about which more will be said shortly, and is related to Soso, Sosso or Susu, in twenty,<sup>5</sup> with half of them employing the term as a prefix to his name.<sup>6</sup> He is also connected to a mountain (*kuru*) in FDS, KMJ, MS, TK and DMS, being called Soso Kuru Sumamuru. This term may refer to Kulikoro (Kulukoro), where *kulu* means mountain, which is where Sumanguru flees to from Sunjata (see Chapter Seven), or to his fortress, which is sometimes said to be located on a hill.

Sumanguru is described as king or emperor of Soso, or as living at Soso, in twelve accounts.<sup>7</sup> The term Soso can refer equally to a settlement, a state, and an ethnic group. The settlement was described by Monteil in his time as a 'misérable petit village' found to the south-west of Kaniaga (1929: 354). Delafosse marks it on his sketch-map in *Haut-Sénégal-Niger* some 100km due north of Kulikoro (1972 ii: 171). In his 1924 article on Ghana and Mali Soso appears about 125km north of Kulikoro. This siting, which would put the settlement of Soso about 35km north west of Banamba, is roughly adhered to by Cissé (1975: 473) but not by Niane. According to the sketch-map in Niane 1965 (vi), Soso is some 75 miles east of Kulikoro, while in his 1984 article Niane says the settlement was 'about 80km north of Bamako' - in the mountains, in other words, about 80km north west of Kulikoro. But as he notes, no archaeological work has been undertaken to attempt to ascertain the site of the

capital of Sumanguru's state (1984: 124-5), and I have not been able to locate the settlement on any contemporary map. The polity of Soso is generally ill-defined in the epic variants, and often appears to be no more than a town or village. Delafosse describes the area ruled by Sumanguru's putative predecessors as northern part of Beledugu and the southern part of Kaniaga, the region between the Baule and Niger river valleys (1972 ii: 162). Monteil writes:

La circonscription territoriale dont Soso était la capitale s'étendait depuis le nord de cette agglomération jusqu'à Koulikoro compris sur la rive gauche du Niger et sur la rive droite de ce fleuve elle englobait le territoire de Baguinta (1929: 355)

### **Sumanguru's birth & parentage**

Four accounts of the Sunjata epic record a tradition concerning Sumanguru's birth.<sup>8</sup> As with the epic's description of Sunjata's birth, Sumanguru's birth, where described, contains unusual or miraculous elements. DMS simply notes that Sumanguru's father had three wives and that Sanso Toure was Sumanguru's mother, but F2, BS and CL claim that Sumanguru was borne by two or, in CL's case, three women: Sanso and Dabi (F), Susuo and Dabi (BS), or Kaya Toure, Daby Toure and Sansun Toure (CL), and that these women shared Sumanguru's gestation and, according to CL, the birth pains between them. In addition, we can note that WK gives Sumanguru's mother as Dyani Bangale (WK2: 143).

Innes comments on the birth incident as it appears in BS saying that 'it does not seem to be very widespread among the griots' - which is correct according to our sample of the traditions - but goes on to claim, mistakenly, that 'It does not occur in the published versions [of the epic]'. Innes links the incident to the rare motif T 589.9 Child with several mothers. He suggests that, in the epic's case, the motif may imply that the Soso leader 'was an amalgam of two different peoples or perhaps that in Susu there were two royal houses which took the kingship in turn' (1974: 125).

As to Sumanguru's paternal ancestry, at least seven versions of the epic name or

give details of his father, although there is little agreement between them. Many more attribute to the Soso chief an identifiable clan name. For MAK Sumanguru's father was Tangale (209), for CL he was Diarra Diarasso (166), for KMJ,D1 Sorijan Kante (56), for FDS Kankuba Kante (148) - usually the name of his sister - for MS Dun Fayiri (299), for KB Diara Kante (38). In a detail reminiscent of the hero myth, in which the hero's father is often not a human being, BS says Sumanguru's father was a jinn (73). Testimony from a *jeli* outside of our epic survey supports BS's claim that Sumanguru's father was a jinn, calling him Genie Bantamba (Manga Sissoko in Conrad 1981: 718). Another griot interviewed by Conrad gave the name for the Soso ruler's father as Soso Bali Kemoko (Satigi Soumarouo in Conrad 1981: 721). As we have already mentioned, the most common family name associated with Sumanguru is Kante, found in nineteen of the thirty-one versions which mention Sumanguru.<sup>9</sup> Less frequently the surname Bamangana is given to Sumanguru.<sup>10</sup>

CL and N link the Soso leader to the Diariso (or Jariso), a connection which has become controversial. Delafosse also makes the link, calling Sumanguru's father Diara Kannte. According to Delafosse's history, *Haut-Sénégal-Niger*, Sumanguru was not in fact a Diariso himself, but was the son of a general in the employ of the Diariso ruler, Birama Diarisso, whose reign he dates 1160-80. This figure was the last of a dynasty which began, according to Delafosse's account, with Goumate-Fade, around 750 A.D.. Initially a vassal of the monarch of Wagadu, Goumate-Fade established, he claims, an independent kingdom in the north of Beledugu and south of Kaniaga. Around 1180, Diara Kannte, commander of an army, and father of Sumanguru, intervened in a succession dispute between two brothers, descendants of Goumate Fade, exiling both of them and taking control of the kingdom (Delafosse 1972 ii: 162-5).

This scenario for the foundation of Soso and the reign of Sumanguru - who Delafosse says began to reign around 1200 (163) - has been heavily criticised by Conrad as being 'too creative to be useful to historians' (1984: 42). Following up a point made by Monteil that Delafosse's history of Soso was 'le prolongement de celle des Diarisso qu'il emprunte à Tautain', and was not a version of events which Monteil

himself could accept (1929: 354), Conrad examines how Delafosse used L. Tautain's story to form his own narrative. According to Conrad, Delafosse constructed his descent list of Diariso monarchs by selecting parts of Tautain's own account:

Delafosse set aside the first part of the kinglist in which Tautain's version names Gumane Fade and others as Cisse. Separating from Tautain's overall list the section beginning with Kambine and purporting to list the Jariso dynasty, Delafosse placed it in Kaniaga after the destruction of Wagadu, and called Kambine Jariso a descendant of Gumane Fade. He then assigned each of Kambine's six successors terms of precisely ten or twenty years... (Conrad 1984: 43)

Furthermore, Sumanguru's father, Diara Kannte, is, according to Conrad, a figure made up by joining the Kante lineage ascribed to Sumanguru to the name of a commander mentioned by Tautain called D'ara (ibid.: 44).

As we have noted, KB records Sumanguru's father's name as Diara Kante, while CL and N link the Soso leader to the Diariso clan. It is probable that KB is here, as elsewhere, following Delafosse, but this still leaves CL and N among the versions of the epic claiming links between Sumanguru and the Diariso. For N, Sumanguru was 'descended from the line of smiths called Diariso' (38); for CL he was the son of Diara Diarrasso, brother of Burama Diarrasso, who seized the throne from the latter's nine sons (165-6). Certain details in N and CL are close enough to those in Delafosse 1972 to posit either direct copying of Delafosse's history by the versions' redactors or a common separate, and presumably traditional, source. Neither of the versions follow Delafosse exactly, though: both name Sumanguru as an actual descendant of the Diariso, unlike Delafosse; CL also lists several members of the Diariso dynasty: they are basically the same names as those in Delafosse 1972, but spellings vary.<sup>14</sup> In view of these facts a third possibility can be noted which is that Delafosse's story has been re-oralized into Malinke griot tradition.

## Sumanguru's links to Ghana-Wagadu

If Delafosse's history of Soso prior to Sumanguru is largely unrepresentative in its connection of Sumanguru's kingdom to the Diariso, it nevertheless incorporates into itself elements of another, more common, tradition concerning the origins of Soso when it claims that the founder of Soso was a vassal of Wagadu's monarch before gaining independence (Delafosse 1972 ii: 162-3). Seven versions of the epic claim that Soso's rise was linked to Ghana-Wagadu or to the Kayamagha.<sup>1 2</sup> On this point the epic tradition conforms closely to Ibn Khaldūn's fourteenth-century synopsis of political change in the Western Sudan, which is the earliest source linking the rise of Mārī Jāta (Sunjata) to the fall of Soso, and which was based upon oral traditions recorded from Malian scholars (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 317-8). Part of Ibn Khaldūn's history reads as follows:

Then the authority of the rulers of Ghāna dwindled away and they were overcome by the Sūsū, a neighbouring people of the Sūdān, who subjugated and absorbed them (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 333)

The story of the rise of Soso mirrors that of Mema, which has already been discussed in Chapter Five, both of which were at first, it appears, dependencies of Ghana-Wagadu before securing their autonomy from that empire. However, only Soso went on to dominate its former master.

According to AR and MA, the Simangourou were a division of the personal slaves of the Kayamagha, the ruler of Ghana-Wagadu, and their descendants are the Kante of Soso. For A, Sumanguru was the slave of the last ruler of Wagadu, Manga Koumas. For MAK, Sumanguru was the slave of Da, who can be identified with Dinga, putative founder of Wagadu. N, CL and KB report how Soso began as a tributary of Ghana-Wagadu but developed at the expense of the latter, gaining independence at some stage. A and MA differ from the other accounts in phrasing the origin and split from Ghana-Wagadu in personal terms, locating the events in Sumanguru's own life-time. In the most developed narrative of the two, MA tells how Simanguru Kante Banbagana was

a slave of Manga Diabe, ruler of Wagadu; how he asked and was given permission to seek his fortune in the south, and chose a magic horse for the journey; and how he reached Kulikoro and settled there, eventually becoming chief of a large state, that of Soso (166-7).

Commenting on this version of Soso's foundation, Abdoulaye Bathily says that elements of the story are historically plausible and also familiar themes: that the freeing of a faithful slave was a common custom in the Western Sudan; that many west African kingdoms employed high-ranking slaves in the administration; and that Sumanguru may have been one 'who took advantage of a political crisis to render himself independent by taking control of a province by force of arms' (1975: 36). Monteil also interprets the story as history, writing that Sumanguru was an '*Ex-dyon-sandigui*, c'est-à-dire chef de captifs, du chef du Gana et chargé par lui du gouvernement d'une province' (1929: 354-5).

Another set of variants seem to echo elements of this tradition while giving it a different context, and bringing out elements within it of the hero myth: family jealousies, expulsion, a time of hardship, and successful return. According to MS Sumanguru was a hunter who lived alone in the bush (146), while for KMJ,D1, and DK, Sumanguru lived in the bush, having been ejected from his home by his brothers or half-brothers. KMJ,D1 says that Sumanguru's brothers, Manda, Samakan and Soso Bala Kante, were jealous of his abilities and, upon his father's death, exiled him. In the bush he gathered men around him and founded a kingdom (56). In DK, Sumanguru, driven out by his half-brothers, lives at Tuu Sinna (271). In KMJ,D1 and DK Sumanguru lives with his sister (Konkuba or Kumba Kante) who, according to DK, is the lover of a jinn or "spirit king" called Mange Yura, who aids Sumanguru against his brothers (271-5). Also, in WK we find a relationship between Sumanguru's sister and a genie employed to account for the origin of Sumanguru's army (WK1: 325-331). This Mange (or, in BK, Manga) Yura might be compared to the ruler of Wagadu in MA who is called Manga Diabe and the ruler in A called Manga Koumas. The former figure is found in many descent lists for Wagadu monarchs (Conrad 1984: 54-5). The name Manga

is in fact a Soninke title for king, perhaps analogous to the Malinke *maghan*. It is possible that the figure of Manga Diabe or of Manga Koumas, or simply the title Manga, has crossed into the Sunjata epic traditions of Gambia, where the figure has become the "king on the hill" and a jinn (DK: 271; BK: 165-7). But in these accounts, as in MA, he is still portrayed as the helper of Sumanguru, the one who aids him in setting up his kingdom.

#### **Sumanguru's blacksmith status**

Sumanguru and the state of Soso are frequently associated with the working of iron, and sometimes with the genesis of this process, at least among the Malinke. For N, Sumanguru is descended from the Diariso smiths 'who first harnessed fire and taught men how to work iron' (38); and the same point is made by CL (165). In Niane 1984 (125) we read that the Soso were a Malinke clan who specialized in iron working, while in KB it is said that Soso was a land rich in iron where the rulers of Wagadu had their weapons forged (38). WK says Sumanguru is a blacksmith (335-7), as does BS (73), while other authorities link the Kante clan to iron working.<sup>13</sup> Several versions of the epic link Sumanguru to iron forging in a different way. In ZB and BK it is the Soso leader who makes the iron bars with which Sunjata attempts to stand (Chapter Four), while in H, FDS, KB, DMS and KMJ it is Sumanguru's father who performs this task.<sup>14</sup>

There are other ways in which Sumanguru is connected to blacksmithing. Sumanguru is sometimes said to be invulnerable to iron weapons (Chapter Seven), a belief that probably points to his supposed skill in their manufacture. Also, there is Sumanguru's fortress. BD describes it as built out of iron (32), N says its gates were of iron (38), while other descriptions, although not mentioning iron, emphasize its size and strength (B: 19; F2: 329), with some mentioning the gates in particular (F2, BS: 73). In addition, for several versions, the key event in Sumanguru's defeat is the storming of his fortress rather than a battle in the open. Conrad notes the

tradition that Sumanguru's town was made of iron, and suggests that it may be a 'distant echo of the legend of the City of Brass from popular medieval Arabic literature' (1985: 39).

### **The image of Sumanguru in the epic: a preliminary sketch**

According to Johnson, Sumanguru is portrayed as the 'scourge of Islam'; his praise-name "king of yesteryear" 'strongly suggesting a pagan versus Moslem theme in the epic, with Son-Jara representing the Moslem forces' (Johnson 1986: 210). This view is found in some histories. Niane writes that 'The Soso people under the Kante dynasty, rose against the Muslims' (1984: 124), while Levtzion says that 'the Soso remained faithful to their ancestral religion' against Muslim incursions, and goes on to say that 'traditions stress the pagan character of this kingdom [Soso], by presenting Sumanguru as arch magician who spread terror among his subjects and neighbours' (1980: 51). The view is also found in the words of Rastko Petrović, Yugoslav traveller and poet, who wrote in 1930 how a legend at Kulikoro tells of

a decisive battle [which] took place between Sundujat, the Moslem leader and chief of the Malinka, and the Bambara. ... Sumanguru was killed at Koulikoro, after being defeated, according to Malinka tradition, but unconquerable, according to the Bambara (quoted in Bowra 1952: 369)

Petrović calls Kulikoro 'this little place which is to the blacks as Kosova is to us' (Petrović 1955: 197). At the battle of Kosovo, fought in 1389 on the "Field of Blackbirds" near to Kosovo in present-day Yugoslavia, the Christian Serbs were defeated by the Muslim Turks, ushering in over four hundred years of Muslim domination. Petrović's understanding of the defeat by Sunjata of Sumanguru is therefore as a national disaster with far-reaching political and religious consequences. But, we can note, he was speaking of a Bamanan tradition of Kulikoro; and the town of Kulikoro, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, retains a strong cult

memory of Sumanguru which may be regarded to some extent as separate from the epic's own memory of the figure. Among the Malinke, the division between Sunjata and Sumanguru is less easy to establish, and some commentators, if they have not questioned the polarization between Sunjata and Sumanguru as between Muslim and traditional religion, have cautioned against this opposition being understood in terms of good versus bad. Johnson remarks that while the Islam versus "pagan" theme may be present in the epic, other themes of equal importance are discussed (1986: 210). Also, he writes that the traditional audience of the epic will not view the distinction between Sunjata and Sumanguru as 'one of good versus evil, of admired hero versus scorned antihero' (ibid.: 42). Conrad suggests that, while in N Sumanguru is portrayed as 'the archetypal monster, a flogger of old men and defiler of virgins', in the older versions from the area around Nioro (A, D, AR) his characterization is 'considerably more restrained' (1984: 39). In what appears to be a contrary move, Farias notes how some of the participants of the SCOA conferences at Bamako in 1975 and 1976 were surprised at what they saw as the unusually positive image Wa Kamissoko presented of Sumanguru in his recitations (Chapter One).

Taking Conrad's assertion first, he is almost certainly mistaken in believing that N caricatures the epic figure of Sumanguru by presenting him in the mould of the oppressive tyrant or archetypal monster. Some of the accounts from the Nioro area with which he contrasts N in fact contain versions of the theme, which will be discussed fully in Chapter Seven, of Sumanguru's literally monstrous aspect. Thus Sumanguru is said to have a seven-headed or forty-four-headed monster (ZA: 30; MB: 169) or is said to be able himself to develop eight heads during battle (D: 28; A: 361). These details are surely classic elements of the archetypal monster/tyrant theme that Conrad believes N to have introduced or accentuated in its portrayal of Sumanguru. But rather, in N (and in some other later accounts) Sumanguru's monstrous aspect seems to have been translated from the literal expression found in ZA, A, D and MB, into a metaphor. This we can see as a decoding of the original message of Sumanguru as a literal monster, and does not therefore appear to be a distortion of

the tradition.

But a few of the metaphorical expressions of Sumanguru's "monstrous" personality are themselves present in some of the earlier accounts. Sumanguru's unacceptable treatment of Fakoli (to be discussed below), although recorded only as far back as S (recorded 1937), is paralleled in a vicious incident found in A and D in which Sumanguru sacrifices his sister's son, i.e., Fakoli, in order to aid him in his struggle against Sunjata. Also, Sumanguru is explicitly given to have instigated the war against Manding as early as Frobenius' version (recorded c. 1907-09), and to have killed all of Sunjata's brothers as early as A and D (recorded c. 1900-01). Both of these details are omitted from N, where it is Dankaran Tuman who attacks Sumanguru, and in which Sunjata is preceded on the throne of Manding only by this one brother. None of this is to deny that certain ambiguities surround the characterization of Sumanguru and the relationship between the epic's two protagonists, but is simply to suggest that it is not possible to ascribe the often malicious characterization of Sumanguru to a recent trend in the epic traditions of the griots.

Although consequently it does not seem justified to play down the monstrous aspect of Sumanguru's characterization in the epic, Johnson is in my view correct to imply that the distinction between Sunjata and Sumanguru is not necessarily to be correlated with the opposition Islam versus traditional beliefs. Sumanguru is certainly often described as a powerful sorcerer by the traditionists,<sup>15</sup> but the epic's hero is also ascribed the abilities of a sorcerer in some instances. One of Sunjata's praise-names is 'sorcerer seizing sorcerer' (FDS: 100), while Bird notes that a praise-song of Sunjata's includes the line 'sorcery and kingship' in describing him (1977: 357), and Delafosse records the tradition that the Keita were a family of *subaw*, sorcerers (Delafosse 1913: 19). The sense of these claims for the power of sorcery in both Sumanguru and Sunjata is less to do with any oppositional scheme in the epic than with the mode of the battle between the two protagonists. According to both Bird and Johnson, Sunjata and Sumanguru confront each other on the plane of magic or sorcery, where each strives to acquire power through the manipulation of

ancestry and through individual actions, and which they can translate into political authority (Johnson 1978: 183-5; Bird 1977: 357-8). In this sense, sorcery is not one pole of the opposition Islam-"paganism" but the *modus operandi* of the epic's conflict and resolution.

Other ambiguities in the epic's description of Sumanguru can be noted. Although a blacksmith and therefore a *nyamakala*, according to many sources, Sumanguru is equally described as the ruler of Soso and, later, of Manding. *Nyamakalaw* were traditionally barred from political office. While he may have usurped the Manding throne, some accounts view him as the natural ruler of Soso. We can recall that Conrad suggests that the name Sumanguru, or Soumahourou, may derive in part from *horo* or *horon*, "noble", i.e. one entitled to exercise political power. Equally, although Sumanguru is, as we have seen, generally placed in opposition to Islam, two versions of the epic (DMS and CL) give his mother or mothers the surname Toure (Ture), a *jamu* (clan name) normally associated in Malinke traditions with the Manding *moriw* or marabouts (Chapter Five).

The relationship between Sunjata and Sumanguru is multifaceted, defying simple binary polarities, and Johnson is right to question the value of unqualified oppositions in defining it. It is the purpose of the remainder of this chapter and of Chapter Seven, among other things, to attempt to describe how the epic traditions under discussion perceive Sumanguru. I suggest that our starting point should be some basic similarities between the characters of Sumanguru and Sunjata as given in the epic. We have seen how the opposition Islam/"pagan" does not accurately account for the epic's description of the differences between Sunjata and Sumanguru; we might say that sorcery is instead a basic language in which the epic's events can be couched. In the same way, the hero myth provides the traditionists with a further register for expression. We have detailed how the epic describes both Sunjata and Sumanguru's lives in terms of traditional heroic clichés; both of their lives follow a pattern of family difficulties, expulsion, testing, and triumphant return. Certainly, Sumanguru is equally portrayed at some points in the epic as a monstrous tyrant, the

hero's deadly foe, but this characterization does not explain fully his image among the Malinke. Even in key areas of Malinke political and social formation described in the epic, the two figures are sometimes equally involved. For example, as we shall discover later in the chapter, both Sumanguru and Sunjata are deemed to have been instrumental in the formation of the griot profession. Farias has noted how it is Sumanguru, and not Sunjata, who is often perceived as Mali's first emperor, as the one who presided over the initial creation of the polity (Farias, forthcoming). In Chapter Eight it is noted how many of the death-stories and cult practices traditionally associated with the dead hero cluster around Sumanguru, not Sunjata, and how it is Sumanguru's shrine that possesses powers of fertility. Sumanguru cannot be characterized simply as the villain of the piece.

In as much as the epic does clearly differentiate between Sunjata and Sumanguru, the key question is: On what basis is this dichotomy constructed and justified? If sorcery is on one level a means employed by the epic's characters, and is not in itself morally value-laden, nevertheless, ethical judgements are made by the traditionists concerning the opposition between Sumanguru and Sunjata. The epic's criticisms of Sumanguru do involve his considerable powers, gained through the use of magic, but it is not the power itself that is criticised, rather, it is the way in which he employs it. As I shall suggest below, his treatment of Fakoli, or of his own sister, and his treatment of his mother, of Bala Faseke, and of the people of Manding in general - whom he is said to have oppressed, "putting gourds over their mouths" - form the epic's main indictment of Sumanguru - and, I suggest, a major opposition between Sumanguru and Sunjata. These failings of Sumanguru are failings on familial, social, and political levels, failings in the distribution and use of power, and not in the means of its acquisition.

In the remaining pages of this chapter I intend, among other things, to focus on the two main areas of social interaction in which the traditionists, to my mind, demonstrate Sumanguru's inability to construct workable social relations with members

of his family and other members of the community.

### **Sumanguru & Bala Faseke Kuyate**

In this section of the chapter I deal with the tradition that links Sumanguru, or sometimes Sunjata, to the griot Bala Faseke Kuyate, his role as praise-singer, and to the origin of his musical instrument, the *bala*. Variants of this tradition are found in fourteen accounts of the epic, while a further five versions of the tradition can be found in sources beyond the epic versions in our survey.<sup>16</sup>

The most common account of the story<sup>17</sup> says that Bala Faseke Kuyate was Sunjata's *jeli*, who was sent, either by Dankaran Tuman or by other Manding leaders who remained behind after Sunjata's departure, as an emissary from the court of Manding to Sumanguru's kingdom of Soso. Sometimes he is said to accompany Dankaran Tuman's sister or daughter, who is sent by the monarch of Manding as a bride for Sumanguru in an attempt to patch up relations between the two states (see Chapter Seven), or upon a separate mission. When he is staying at Soso, Bala Faseke comes upon the *bala*, or xylophone of Sumanguru, which the latter has secreted in his own quarters and which he forbids any other person to play. As Bala Faseke takes up the instrument and begins to play it Sumanguru hears this from a distance, through some magical link between himself and the *bala*, and returns at once to confront the intruder. When he meets Bala Faseke, however, rather than killing him for his crime, which is his first impulse, Sumanguru is impressed by the griot's playing, for the latter has improvised a song of praise for Sumanguru. Up until now, it is said, Sumanguru has sung his own praises; now he decrees that Bala Faseke shall remain with him as his praise-singer. As Bala Faseke is already Sunjata's *jeli* he protests but, according to six accounts, Sumanguru cuts his achilles' tendons in order to prevent his escape. In addition, in some accounts, Sumanguru is said to change his praise-singer's name to indicate his new status, most commonly from Jankuma Doka to

Bala Faseke Kuyate.

A further tradition regarding the Kuyate griot and the *bala* found in the epic claims that Sunjata was the possessor of the *bala* and that it was from him that the griot took the xylophone. For some traditionists, Sunjata is equally impressed with the praises of Bala Faseke as was Sumanguru, and the action results in a similar patron-griot relationship being formed, and in the association of the *bala* with the *jeli*.<sup>18</sup>

In both of its basic types, the tradition concerning Bala Faseke Kuyate and the xylophone is deemed to account for several significant aspects of Malinke social formation, any of which, it seems, may be brought out by the griot in his recitation, depending on the circumstances. In the first place, the story accounts for the formation of the Kuyate clan of griots by claiming that the patronym was given to the griot by Sumanguru. Secondly, it explains the genesis of the Kuyate-Keita clan tie, initiated, it is said, by Sunjata Keita and Bala Faseke Kuyate. Thirdly, the story gives an account of the origin of praise-singing and the *horon-jeli* relationship in general. Fourthly, it accounts for the general association of the *bala* with the griots of the Malinke.

A key element of the tradition, encapsulating several of the themes identified above, is found in FDS, KMJ, MS, DK, and the versions in Diabaté n.d. and Zemp 1966. It concerns the changing of the griot's name and, in all but Zemp 1966, the severing of his achilles' tendons. In these accounts the griot's name at the start of the tale is Jankuma Doka (KMJ), Jangoma Doua (Zemp 1966), or "Doka the Cat" (FDS, MS) (*dyakuma* = cat, Delafosse 1929: 387). This name is found in other versions of the story: it is the name of the griot himself in V (Diankouma Doka) and Humblot 1918 (Nankouman Doua Traore), while it is the name of the griot's father in N and CL (Gnankouman Doua). The second portion of the name may be identified with Dūghā, the "interpreter" in the Malian Mansā Sulaymān's fourteenth-century court, according to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 290) - a point made by N. Kouyate (1970: 25 n.1).

Bala Faseke Kuyate - the new name with which Sumanguru endows the griot, is

deemed to be etymologically linked to his new status and role as a praise-singing bard. "Bala" links the griot to the musical instrument of the same name.<sup>19</sup> "Faseke" is etymologically derived in different ways, depending on which authority one consults. Diabaté (n.d.: 26) links it to *fasere* meaning "to witness" (*témoin*); BK derives it from *i be sigi la le*, meaning "you will settle here" (BK: 215); according to Innes, DK derives it from *fasa*, meaning "tendon" and *sege*, meaning "cut" (DK: 317); while FDS's etymology of the word, according to Johnson, derives it from *i fasa ke*, meaning "do your praise" (Johnson 1986: 211). The patronym "Kuyate" is said to come from the Malinke phrase *ku ye an ce*, meaning "there is a matter/secret between us" (Johnson 1986: 211; Diabaté n.d.: 26). The word is not derived by the Gambian griots in their recitations, but Innes suggests it may be linked to the Gambian Malinke verb *kuya* which he translates as to "be unpleasant" (1974: 317). As a whole, Diabaté suggests the name Bala Faseke Kuyate means 'Toi qui a va mon balafon (mon secret) il y a une chose entre toi et moi (un secret)' (n. d.: 26). For Johnson it means: 'I praise thee with the balaphone, for there is something between us' (1986: 211).

Although in their individual derivations some of these etymologies contradict each other, as far as their overall message is concerned they are consistent in providing us with a cogent exegesis of the role and status of the Malinke bard, as well as providing an explanation for the origin of the patron-griot relationship. The *jeli* is named after the musical instrument of his profession, the *balax*; his middle name denotes his role as a bard, to "do your praise", or the restrictions imposed by his new patron, "you will settle here" or "cut" and "tendon", while his family name evokes the relation between the griot's clan and that of his noble patron as one of shared esoteric knowledge - "there is a matter/secret between us".

In addition to the *jeli-horon* relationship's consisting of the sharing of intimate knowledge, the story of Sumanguru and Bala Faseke explores various further aspects of this relationship. Central to this bond is the cutting of the bard's achilles' tendons, a detail recorded in six of the variants.<sup>20</sup> The crippling of the griot is often said to be in response to Bala Faseke's avowed intent to leave the court of

Sumanguru and return to Sunjata, and the laming is consequently clearly effected in order to immobilize the griot and prevent his departure. Such a crippling also has wider implications for the status of griots. For one thing, the reference to tendon cutting seems to refer back to a large body of origin tales for Malinke bards which link the genesis of *jeliw* to the spilling of blood. Zemp notes that the word *jeli* (or *jali*) is itself a homonym for the Malinke word for blood (1966: 632; see also Camara 1976: 100-2).

One of the most familiar of these origin legends, a version of which is found in Zemp 1966, and which I shall call the flesh-from-the-calf motif, goes as follows: Two brothers are travelling together during the dry season and can find no food to eat. One is suffering from hunger and complains to his brother. The latter secretly cuts off a portion of his own flesh from one of his calves, roasts it, and gives it to his brother to eat. Later, the deed of kindness is uncovered, on account of the donor's limp, and his brother praises him unceasingly, deeming himself to be in his debt. In the example Zemp quotes, the tale is given to explain the relationship between the Peul (Fula or Fulbe) and the Mabo, who traditionally act as their griots (1966: 632). The same motif also appears in two versions of the epic of Sunjata where the *dramatis personae* are Sunjata Keita and Bala Faseke Kuyate. Sunjata feeds his hungry griot with flesh from his own calf or thigh in BD (29) and BS (59-61). According to Bamba Suso, the incident explains the origin of the special relationship between Kuyate and Keita.

Examining the tale, we can say that the *horon*-to-be is shown to be generous, self-sacrificing and able to control his own hunger, while the *jeli*-to-be is characterized as one who cannot withstand the desire to satisfy this physical appetite.

In the flesh-from-the-calf motif we find clichés familiar to us from another griot origin tale. In the tradition explaining the genesis of the Jabate clan of griots, embedded in the Buffalo-woman tale (Chapter Three), the elder brother compensates for his ineptitude and cowardice in the chase by the verbosity and skill with which he heaps praises upon his younger brother, the one who successfully killed the buffalo.

One may note that, in this tale, as in the one which Zemp quotes, both participants are brothers. This familiar cliché is often employed to imply initial equality, although in the Jabate origin tale the equality of the initial situation is further emphasized by making the successful hunter, i.e. the brother who becomes founder of the noble lineage, the younger brother, thus underlining that the *horon-jeli* relationship is not a product of birth-order status but the result of abilities and qualities inherent in the participants. Both in the tale used to explain the origin of the Kuyate griots and that for the Jabate griots one finds that a debt is incurred between two equal individuals which establishes a social and status difference between them, based on relative abilities. These differences fall along lines of stereotypical behaviour patterns expected of the *horon* and *jeli*. The freeman or noble, as we noted in Chapter Five, is expected to be generous, stoical, dignified and self-sacrificing, and is not supposed to raise his voice, nor to laugh loudly, both of which are deemed to denote a lack of control. The *jeli* is on the contrary seen as verbose in his panegyrics and dependent on the support of others, and in both tales exhibits a lack of control, in the Jabate origin tale by being unable to master his fear of the buffalo, and in the flesh-from-the-calf motif by being unable to control his hunger.

The view of the griot as a dependent individual is discussed by Sory Camara, who has noted that Malinke tales and accepted wisdom tend to portray the *jeli* as weak, vulnerable and dependent upon others (Camara 1976: 145ff.). The severing of Bala Faseke's tendons may symbolize this dependence of the griot on his freeman patron and underline - as the cutting of flesh does in the flesh-from-the-calf motif - the dichotomy inherent in the relationship between patron and griot as that between active hunter or warrior, one who "speaks" only through his actions, and otherwise refrains from laughter and loud talking, and the less active but verbose praise-singer, who compensates in the Jabate griot origin tale and in the flesh-from-the-calf motif for his paucity of successful action or for his inability to control his physical appetites with a superabundance of words.

The imposition of a sedentary and restricted life-style upon the griot may equally reflect the patron's anxiety over the possible uncontrolled dissemination of the individual or clan's esoteric knowledge held by the griot as the official repository of traditional information. Having imparted to Bala Faseke the knowledge of the *bala*, Sumanguru seeks to limit or prevent the further spread of information regarding the instrument. One might also add that the Kuyate griot origin tale characterizes the *jeli* as one who is curious to gain esoteric knowledge, and that it appears to sanction this potentially disruptive urge by institutionalizing it in the definition of the griot's task as a gainer and storer of tradition.

In a cross-cultural perspective crippling is often associated with blacksmiths. One can recall the lamed smith of Greek tradition, Hephaestus (Graves 1955 i: 87), and the Norse crippled forger, Weland, of the *Older Edda*, who is, like Bala Faseke, lamed to prevent his escape (Chadwick 1926: 12, 134). Robert Graves suggests that blacksmiths at one time may have been lamed on purpose to prevent the spread of their valuable knowledge to competitors or enemies (1955 i: 58), and Mircea Eliade makes a link between the knowledge that the Greek metal-worker Hephaestus receives and his lameness, writing that Hephaestus 'paid for his knowledge of the smiths' and artisans' trades by his physical mutilation' (1979: 266). Physical disability is sometimes also associated with the bard; one can mention the tradition that Homer was blind, also, H.M. Chadwick reminds us of the blind Phaeacian minstrel Demodocos and the similarly sightless Frisian bard Bernlef (1926: 222). Chadwick makes a connection between the lame smiths and blind bards, suggesting that 'smith's work may be regarded as a vocation natural to the lame man, just as minstrelsy [is] to the blind' (134).

In the Malinke context, some parallels can be drawn between the position of the blacksmith (*numu*) and of the griot. Both are *nyamakalaw*, both feature early on in the creation myth: Surakata, the putative griot ancestor, descends from heaven with the skull of Faro, one of the first male twins, as a drum; the smith ancestor hits a rod to produce water from a rock, alleviating a drought (Dieterlen 1955: 45-6). In language that recalls the ambiguous status of the griot, Luc de Heusch has written

that the blacksmith in Africa is both 'feared and honoured, both respected and despised' (quoted in Dieterlen 1973: 41). Conrad's comments suggest that a similar view may have prevailed among the Malinke, provoking toward the blacksmith both envy and fear:

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 the holders of awesome powers (1981: 99)

Equally, in his valuable study, *The Mande Blacksmiths* (1988), Patrick McNaughton stresses the priestly functions of the *numu* in Malinke society. The parallels between the blacksmith and griot may indicate that the crippling of the griot can be interpreted in a similar fashion to the crippling of the blacksmith, in other words as the price to be paid in return for esoteric knowledge or power, as a kind of initiation, and as a manifestation of society's anxiety concerning the apparent powers of the craft in question.

### **The origin of praise-singing**

Often the episode involving Sumanguru and Bala Faseke explains the origin of the praise-singer, and of praise-singing itself, in the following terms: Sumanguru, who has up till now been the only one to play the *bala*, upon hearing Bala Faseke's song in praise of him, his ancestry, and his achievements declares, in the words of Mamby Sidibé: 'Il est bon qu'un homme entende chanter ses hauts faits par un autre. Désormais ce xylohone t'appartient' (44). In MS Sumanguru declares: 'Tis shameful for a nobleman to boast./Self praise is not appropriate./Sing my praises to me!' (150). N states that 'under the skilful hand of Balla the instrument had found its master' (39). In those accounts in which it is Sunjata and not Sumanguru who is said to possess the *bala* before handing it over to the griot, the scenario is sometimes the same. BD reports that Sunjata, hearing Bala Faseke's song on the xylophone, exclaims 'Il est plus doux d'entendre la musique par la main d'un autre que par sa propre

main' (23).

While the episode of Bala Faseke and the xylophone indicates that it is the griot's abilities at playing the instrument and singing his patron's praises that fit him for the role of *jeli*, it may also be implied in the story that Bala Faseke's griot status arose from his infringement of his patron-to-be's proprietorship of the *bala*. Several versions note the interdictions surrounding Sumanguru's xylophone: the versions in H, Humblot 1918 and Zemp 1966 say that none should play the instrument on pain of death; N says that Sumanguru was the only one to play the instrument (39); the account in Monteil 1929 states that the *bala* was sacred, and KMJ,D1 writes that it was housed in the Soso monarch's secret hut (57). Bala Faseke, who is described as coming across the xylophone during Sumanguru's absence and playing it for his own pleasure, clearly contravenes the restrictions surrounding the instrument. As with numerous tales designed to account for the origin of *tana* prohibitions or *senankun* relationships, where recourse is made to an original debt incurred either through the good offices of another or through the infringement of a regulation, Bala Faseke's griot status, it could be argued, is derived in part from his improper behaviour towards his host, Sumanguru.<sup>21</sup>

In those versions in which it is Sunjata, not Sumanguru, who owns the *bala*, the pattern is often unchanged. BK states that 'Noone played it except Sunjata himself' (213), MK recounts how Bala Faseke takes the instrument from under a pile of brush where Sunjata had hidden it, and records Sunjata's anger at finding the griot playing the *bala* (712). Only in YFG, a much abbreviated version, and BD is there no hint of the infringement of an interdiction in Bala Faseke's playing of the *bala*.

### **The origin of the *bala***

The *bala* is also known as the balafon or balaphone, a word which is derived, according to Delafosse, from the Malinke term for the player of the *bala*, *bals fò* (1955: 25), but which it is equally possible to derive from a combination of the

Malinke *bala* and the Greek-derived "phone" (= voice). In addition to the Malinke harp-lute, the *kora*, it is the musical instrument most closely associated with the griots among the Malinke. It is certainly much older than the *kora*, dating back at least to the fourteenth century. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa records that at the court of Mali 'musical instruments are made out of reeds and gourds and played with a striker and have a wonderful sound' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 290). In comparison, the first written record of a *kora* appears in Mungo Park's *Travels* of the late eighteenth century, where he speaks of a "korro", which is described as 'a large harp with eighteen strings' (Park n.d.: 248f.; Anon. 1988). The contemporary *bala* has on average eighteen keys, made of rosewood, attached to which are calabash gourds of varying sizes corresponding to each key's pitch (Innes 1974: 315; Johnson 1986: 210; Anon. 1988).

As well as explaining how the *bala* came into the hands of the griots, in seven versions of the episode the epic goes some way to accounting for the origin of the instrument itself.<sup>22</sup> In all of these accounts the *bala* is said to have belonged first to the spirit world, to jinn.<sup>23</sup> MK and YFG say Sunjata obtained the instrument from jinns of the forest, either by fighting with them for it (YFG) or as a gift from them (MK). Niane also reports a tradition that Sumanguru discovered the *Soso bala* in the forest of Tiniman, on the Niger, that he was taught to play it by a jinn, and that he was the first xylophone player in Manding (1974: 64n). In BD and Zemp's version Sunjata or Sumanguru gain the xylophone from water-jinns by winning it in an aquatic struggle. In DK and BK Sumanguru or Sunjata are given the instrument by Manga Yura, the "king on the hill", said to be a jinn and the lover of Sumanguru's sister (DK) or Sunjata's sister (BK).

Here we have a manifestation of what appears to be a common cliché for the explanation of the origin of musical instruments and musical ability, and perhaps artistic ability in general. Hugo Zemp records that:

Nous avons recueilli en Côte d'Ivoire, chez les Dan, Guéré, Baulolé et Sénoufo, un grand nombre de récits attribués aux premiers instruments de musique aux génies ou aux animaux (1966: 625; see also Zemp 1964)

Francis Bebey, who speaks of the 'mystical, almost magical relationship' linking music and the performer in his book *African Music*, records the story of a harp-lute player from the Ivory Coast who, asked to explain the origin of his playing, told of an encounter with a dwarf-genie whose words he took as an exhortation to take up musicianship (Bebey 1975: 20).

This link between the world of spirits or magic and the creative urge behind music ties in with a further set of traditions regarding the *bala*. Dieterlen, in her account of the Malinke creation myth, records the following story concerning the origin of the *bala* which links the xylophone to the first ancestors of the Malinke:

Kaniyogosimbo avait pris Moussou Koroni comme femme. A la suite d'une rupture d'interdit, concernant le fonio et le *mannogo ble* [a type of fish], provoquée par la maléficié de cette dernière, on le trouva mort dans son champ où on l'enterra. Pour le ressusciter, Simboumba Tangnagati confectionna le premier xylophone, *bala*, qui a la forme et représente le *mannogo*. Les lames étaient faites de bois de *gwe* ayant poussé dans le champ de défunt, les supports en bambou (*bo*), la tête de l'instrument en bois de *dyun*... (1955: 57)

By playing the "soso rhythm" Simboumba is able to resurrect his brother in the form of a snake.

This origin story for the *bala*, while in complete variance to that found in the epic in its details, does share some common features with it, on a structural level. Both accounts link the instrument to a non-human or semi-magical realm or time - either to genies or to the first ancestors - and both link the xylophone to water - water genies in some versions of the epic's story, the *mannogo ble* (*Heterobranchus bidorsalis*) in the creation myth, a point noted by Zemp (1966: 625-6), while in both cases the xylophone is associated in some way with the breaking of an interdiction.

Dieterlen and Niane report the existence of an instrument called the *Soso bala* which seems to link the xylophone of the first ancestors to that of Sumanguru via the name of his realm. Dieterlen says that a replica of the original *bala* of the creation myth is conserved in the Keita patriarch's sanctuary, under the control of

the Kuyate griots, at Kangaba (1955: 57 n.3). Niane states that the *Soso bala* is in the possession of the griots of Niagassola. He says it once belonged to Sumanguru, but equally regards it as 'le plus beau trophée de Soundjata'. He also notes its unusually large dimensions (1974: 63). Namankoumba Kouyate reports that at Niagassola 'Le Sosso-balla est un véritable objet de vénération de la part des Kouyaté ... de même qu'une source de fierté' (1970: 30). He adds that it is believed to have been made to dimensions stipulated by Sumanguru and that only four or five gourds have since been replaced. N. Kouyate makes the link between the *Soso bala* and the episode in the epic, but does not connect it with the creation myth of the Malinke recorded by Dieterlen.

A further set of traditions which can be linked to the *Soso bala* must be noted, although exactly how they connect to the ones already considered is far from clear. In these traditions Soso Bala is the name of a character appearing tangentially in some versions of the epic. N calls Sumanguru's son Sosso Balla (49), while in CL he is called Balla Diarrasso (187); Humblot reports a tradition that calls Sumanguru's son Sosobali (1951: 112 n.1); KMJ,D1 identifies Soso Bala as the brother of Sumanguru (56). Elsewhere, Soso Bali Kemoko is said to be the name of Sumanguru's father (Conrad 1981: 721).

One possible connection between this figure and the more familiar traditions regarding the famed xylophone of the same name may be found in an incident reported in the Kita bloc accounts. This tells how, upon the sacking of Soso town by Sunjata, the hero comes across his griot, Bala Faseke, who is unable to walk, because his achilles' tendons have been cut. The bard is therefore placed on the shoulders of Sumanguru's son, here called Mansa Sama or Mansa Magan Kante, and carried by him (KMJ,D1: 75; FDS: 177-8; MS: 190-1). As Bala Faseke is sometimes said to be carrying the *bala* and praising Sunjata, we have a potential point at which traditions may be confused, mixing carrier, i.e. a figure sometimes known as Soso Bala; that which is carried, called Bala Faseke; and baggage, the *Soso bala*. N. Kouyate suggests that it was at the defeat of Sumanguru that Sunjata came into the possession of the

xylophone of Sumanguru (1970: 31). As was argued in Chapter One, it may be that this prized possession of the Soso leader has been interpreted by some traditionalists as a human figure, giving rise to the incident of his humiliation as a "son" of Sumanguru in the Kita bloc versions; and that this incident still preserves its connection with the musical instrument, the *Soso bala*, through the device of the griot's transportation on the back of "Soso Bala". Along similar lines it may be speculated that an earlier incident told simply of the rescue of Bala Faseke and how the hero gained possession of the *Soso bala*. For all that this is speculation, one thing these traditions do demonstrate clearly is that Sumanguru's family are closely associated with the xylophone or *bala*.

### **Kuyate aetiology**

As has already been noted, according to the etymology proffered by some versions of the episode of Sumanguru and the xylophone, the name Kuyate is derived from the phrase "there is a matter/secret between us". In some versions of the episode emphasis is placed on the story's role as an origin tale for the Kuyate griots and their patronym. Humblot and Diabaté's versions of the tale are told expressly to fulfil this function. Diabaté implies that it is on this story that the Kuyate base their claim to be the original griots of the Mali empire. This claim is bolstered in some versions of the epic. According to N, at the post-victory gathering of the clans Sunjata instituted the Kuyate as the griot clan of the emperors, the Keita, and gave them the right to make jokes about the Keita (78; see Kouyate 1970: 88).

This right to joke recalls the *senankun* relationship. We have already noted how the episode of Bala Faseke and Sumanguru is reminiscent of *tana* and *senankuya* explanative tales in its structure. Also, as is stated in Chapter Five, S couches the special relationship between Keita and Kuyate, stemming from the bond between Sunjata and here 'un Koité' (Kuyate), in terms reminiscent of a *senankuya* relationship formed at the court of Mema during the hero's exile in which, among other things, joking is

permitted (43). By relating the griot-patron tie to *senankuya* between two clans further points can be inferred concerning the nature and status of the *jeli* in relation to his *horon* patron. Like the junior partner in some *senankun* ties between clans (Labouret 1934: 103), griots are at once socially inferior to their patrons, obliged to perform certain services for them, but are equally permitted to transgress behavioural norms which constrain other members of society from undue frankness toward a social equal or superior. Such openness is, of course, a necessary and an accepted part of the griot's relation to his patron, in which the *jeli* is supposed to know his patron's clan's genealogical secrets, to preserve them from outsiders, and to be an advisor, exhorter or admonisher, depending on the circumstances. For example, according to ZA (35), Bala Faseke roundly insults Sunjata for his apparent laziness - something that most people would not have dared to do - while in F2 (325-7) only his *jeli* is willing to bring bad news to Sunjata (see Chapter Eight).

#### **Recapitulation: Sumanguru, Sunjata and the origin of griots**

As indicated already, there is some difference of opinion among the traditionists as to who, among humans, first possessed the *bala* before entrusting it to Bala Faseke, with some stating Sumanguru and others Sunjata. Nevertheless, the majority of accounts are agreed in naming Sumanguru rather than Sunjata as the xylophone's first human owner.<sup>24</sup> Of the four accounts which say Sunjata originally controlled the xylophone, BK alone reverses the entire formulation, making Bala Faseke originally Sumanguru's griot, later crippled and retained by Sunjata; the other three (YFG, BD, MK) appear to present a telescoped version of the episode in which the origin of the Keita-Kuyate relationship is fused with the origin of the musical instrument. It can be noted, as a mitigating circumstance, that none of these accounts dwell on the figure of Sumanguru, and indeed, YFG does not view him as a separate figure at all. If Sumanguru is associated by most traditionists with the actual genesis of the *bala*, and even with its construction, according to some authorities (Kouyate 1970: 30;

Niane 1984: 125-6; KMJ,D1: 57), Sunjata's role is as the initiator of the lasting *horon-jeli* relationship, modelled on his tie with Bala Faseke. As Galloway writes:

The griots believe that Sunjata was their first great patron, the first person really to appreciate their unique contribution to society (1980: viii)

Here we have an apparent contradiction. According to most accounts of the episode, it is Sumanguru who first learns to play the instrument and praise himself upon it, and it is he who then discovers the benefits of employing another to praise his deeds for him. It is also Sumanguru who cuts Bala Faseke's tendons, instituting the dependent characteristics of the griot's condition. These elements suggest that, for the epic traditions, Sumanguru is the instigator of the profession of the praise-singing bard among the Malinke.

Sumanguru's attempt to create the griot-patron relationship is, however, deemed to be flawed and fails over time; Bala Faseke either escapes from Soso with Sunjata's sister or is at least returned to Sunjata, his real patron, after Sumanguru's downfall. Several reasons can be isolated which explain the logic behind this state of affairs - Sumanguru as the originator of the praise-singing bard, but Sunjata as the real, accepted founder of the model *horon-jeli* relationship.

Sumanguru is, as has been noted, often portrayed in the epic as a blacksmith (*numu*), a member of the *nyamakalaw*, like the *jeliw*, and consequently barred from entering into a patronage relationship with a griot in the manner of a freeman. According to the norms of Malinke society, therefore, Sumanguru's pact with Bala Faseke is void. Yet the epic does not, I believe, merely state this point, for its aim is not simply to categorize individuals into social groups, but to account for those categories. And so we find, I suggest, that aspects of Sumanguru's behaviour themselves explain the failure of his relationship with the *jeli*, Bala Faseke.

It is often stated that Bala Faseke is already the griot of Sunjata, or at least the representative of the court of Manding before he makes his visit to Soso. After he plays the xylophone Sumanguru attempts to make him stay as his singer by severing

his tendons. In this respect, Sumanguru's behaviour is unacceptable by Malinke standards. As Innes asserts:

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. (1974: 317)

It may be countered that, as was claimed earlier, Sumanguru's actions towards Bala Faseke follow the pattern established in other griot origin tales which involve the spilling of blood and contracting of an obligation because of an initial failing. However, there are significant differences between the cases. In the example of the Jabate griot origin tale, the elder brother praises his junior upon the defeat of the buffalo with no promptings, and he is said to accede willingly to his new inferior status relative to his junior brother, to accept it as a recognition of the differences in their abilities. In the case of the flesh-from-the-calf motif, again, the prospective griot voluntarily accedes to the role allotted him through his brother's generosity. Furthermore, it is of course not the griot-to-be who is mutilated by the patron-to-be, rather, the brother who becomes the patron cuts his own flesh, thereby putting the elder brother in his debt and prompting the establishment of the patron-griot tie between them. Sumanguru attempts to prevent Bala Faseke from leaving by force; his action towards Bala Faseke is shown to be cruel, intemperate, and selfish, while the action of the *horon*-to-be in the flesh-from-the-calf motif is self-sacrificial. The episode of Sumanguru and Bala Faseke therefore appears to be something of a parody of a griot origin tale rather than a straight duplication, retaining the semblance of the traditional clichés while inverting a key element, and thereby altering its sense.

## Sumanguru & Fakoli

Ten versions of the epic recount an episode concerning Fakoli which tells how this figure deserts Sumanguru and becomes an ally of Sunjata Keita after a quarrel between Fakoli and Sumanguru.<sup>25</sup> Four accounts also describe Fakoli's significant role in the defeat of Sumanguru's forces, which he achieves either by killing Sumanguru's general, Jibirila, or by attacking his fortress.<sup>26</sup> Other traditions concerning this character, which will also be discussed here, are found in DK, whose version of the epic is in fact entitled "Faa Koli", BK (181, 209, 221, 227-9), BD (23, 28-9), and V (325-6).

Fakoli is described as a member of the Koroma clan by some griots and as a member of the Kumba clan by other epic traditionists.<sup>27</sup> He is also connected to the Sisoko, the Dunbuya, and the Bagayoko (Bagayogo) clans.<sup>28</sup> The explanation for his links to numerous clans would appear to be his purported connection to the *bula* (*bila* or *bla*) group of clans. These clans contain both *horon* and *nyamakala* families and are viewed as Manding's original settlers. According to Farias, common *bula* patronyms are Dunbiya (Dunbuya), Kamara, Kamissoko, Bagayogo, Sinayogo, Kuruman (Koroma), Danyogo, and Sisoko (Farias 1989: 156). The *bula* clans are sometimes known as the sixteen clans of *captifs nobles* who, according to Dieterlen's information, voluntarily allied themselves with Sunjata against the Soso (1955: 41). Fakoli is, for some authorities, the ancestor of these *bula* clans (S: 45; KB: 100; Johnson 1979: 249; Farias 1989: 159). We can note that, in his version of the epic, Fa Digi Sisoko calls Fakoli the 'Hero of the original clans', i.e. of the *bula* (175). According to Farias, Fakoli is 'claimed as ancestor by all the Bula lineages specializing in metal work' (1989: 159). In some versions of the epic Fakoli is also linked to metal forging (N: 61; KB: 45). Johnson notes that Fakoli's role as original ancestor of the *bula* clans must be anachronistic (1979: 249); Farias suggests that the *bula* clans actually claim an eagle by the name of Fakoli as ancestor, and that this bird has become fused with the epic's character (1989: 159; cf. WK3: 169-75). Dieterlen's claim - that the sixteen "servile" clans

allied themselves with Sunjata - might suggest that the *bula* group of clans was in fact formed in connection with the Soso-Manding war.

Fakoli's perceived links in the Malinke world do not end here. According to several, mainly Gambian, traditionists, Fakoli is to be identified with the figure Sora Musa.<sup>29</sup> Sora Musa is claimed as original ancestor by seven Gambian Malinke clans, who link his life to that of Sunjata, asserting that he helped Sunjata win victory over Sumanguru before migrating west. Similar traditions are told about Tira Makhan (Wright 1977: 41, 45). Donald Wright believes Sora Musa is a composite character, partly based upon Mansa Mūsā, partly upon Fakoli (1977: 45).

Some versions of the epic give details of Fakoli's parentage. His mother, Kankuba Kante (KMJ, MS), Kumba Kante (DK), or Nasia (H) is Sumanguru's sister, making Fakoli Sumanguru's maternal nephew, a point noted by a number of accounts.<sup>30</sup> His father was a genie, say BK (181) and DK (271), called Jinna Musa - a name which probably reflects the tradition associating Fakoli and Sora Musa. For WK his father is Tamba Fotigui (379); for CL he is Makata Djigui Koroma of Nora Soba (177), i.e. the figure Makan-Taa-Jigi, connected by some traditions with the introduction of the *Komo* society into Manding, as is Fakoli himself in some traditions (McNaughton 1988: 130; Farias 1989: 160).

#### **Fakoli's quarrel with Sumanguru**

The story of Fakoli's desertion of Sumanguru goes as follows. Fakoli is married to a woman called Keleya (N), Keleya Kanko (CL), or Kiliya (DK).<sup>31</sup> This woman is sometimes described as beautiful (DK: 275) but more often she is envied for her cookery skills. Seven accounts<sup>32</sup> assert that she was able to cook more food for Sumanguru or for Sumanguru's army than all of Sumanguru's numerous wives - of whom he is said to have anything from forty-four to 333.<sup>33</sup> Because of her talent, Sumanguru desires to make her his wife. He asks his nephew, Fakoli, for her. Fakoli is affronted at Sumanguru's suggestion and refuses to give her up. When Sumanguru takes her anyway

Fakoli leaves his uncle's forces, taking with him his own supporters, and joins Sunjata.

Fakoli's break with Sumanguru, and the events which precipitate it, form, in the hands of some griots, a significant critique of Sumanguru, and mark a turning point in the epic in Sumanguru's fortunes. Sumanguru's action in stealing Fakoli's wife is criticised by the traditionists in their handling of the theme. Keleya, the name of Fakoli's wife in several accounts, means "jealousy"<sup>34</sup>, referring to the driving motive behind Sumanguru's actions; while the Soso ruler's relations with his nephew's wife are termed incest in CL (177) and N (61). CL has it that 'Sumaoro undoubtedly thought only of his own pleasure' in determining his actions (177), while Dembo Kanute records Sumanguru glorying in his own strength and saying: 'Power is enjoyable;/When someone has power over someone else,/He can do to him whatever he pleases' (277). Sumanguru's arrogance is also to be noted in his apparent disregard for the effect of losing Fakoli and his followers from his army. Employing a memorable and effective metaphor, DK reports that Sumanguru answers his nephew's threat to desert him by saying:

If you had nothing more to do with someone,  
It would be like a thatched roof  
From which a single stalk of thatching grass was  
removed.

While Fakoli presciently retorts:

If I were a stalk of thatching grass on a house,  
When I moved from the roof of that house,  
Water would drip into the owner's ear whenever it  
rained. (277)<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, Sumanguru's arrogant, self-centred and short-sighted behaviour is directed toward his maternal nephew, one to whom Sumanguru would be expected to show especial kindness. As Johnson remarks:

This breach is especially significant because Fa-Koli is a sister's son to Sumamuru, and this relationship is one of *ba-denya* and affection (1979: 249)<sup>36</sup>

Sumanguru flouts accepted social behaviour by taking another's wife. He also expresses his arrogance in, as Johnson states, causing a breach with his maternal kin - relations traditionally expected to be free from the damaging competitiveness associated with relations between paternal kin (*faden*). Through his action he demonstrates his belief that he is dependent upon nobody but himself.

Stealing Fakoli's wife also reveals Sumanguru's unrestrained sexuality which, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, in fact causes the downfall of the Soso ruler when he is seduced by Sunjata's sister, who then betrays his secrets to her brother. As we shall attempt to demonstrate in some detail in the next chapter, and as has already been mentioned in Chapter Three, Malinke folklore and custom reveals anxieties in Malinke men concerning sexual relations with women, and the Malinke are critical of the man who is deemed to be a slave to his sexual impulses.

A distant variant of the episode of Sumanguru and Fakoli is to be found in A (361) and D (27). In these accounts Sumanguru, after revealing the secret of his *tana* to Sunjata's sister, asks his marabout advisors what he might do in order to counteract the effect of the *tana*. He is told to sacrifice an only child of a mother, according to A, or the son of his sister, according to D. In both cases the child that is sacrificed is the same; in D the sacrifice is said to be to improve the chances of success of his army. The mother of the dead child, horrified at Sumanguru's actions, leaves her brother at once and joins Sunjata, revealing to him, for a second time, the secret of Sumanguru's invulnerability, while the sacrifice itself has no apparent beneficial results for the Soso leader.

As was noted in Chapter One, the links between this story and the episode of Fakoli's quarrel and desertion are clear, both structurally and in terms of the actors involved. Sumanguru's sister - the woman whose child is killed - although not named in A or D, is clearly to be identified with Kankuba Kante, mother of Fakoli according to KMJ, MS and DK. Such an identification makes the child in question Fakoli, who, as we have noted above, is frequently called the maternal nephew of Sumanguru. Structurally, the incident also produces similar results - the defection of a maternal

relation - from similar initial actions - the gross neglect of accepted behaviour toward kin - brought about by a similar cause - sexual desire.

Another level of meaning in the episode of Fakoli's quarrel with Sumanguru is suggested by Belcher. He has noted what he considers the significant use of food symbolism in the epic in general, and in this tradition in particular (1985: 102f.). He suggests that, while Sunjata, who is often described as a hunter, is 'a fairly standard Bringer-of-food culture hero' (103), Sumanguru is connected to food in a negative fashion: he stops up the Manding peoples' mouths with gourds; may be considered a cannibal because of the popular tradition of his garments made from human skins<sup>37</sup>; and, in the case of Fakoli's wife - the pertinent point here - 'steals women who can cook' (104). One can recall that, although Sunjata is described by some traditionists as stealing food when he was a youngster, this behaviour was connected with the early stages of his life and, I argued, was linked with his asocial, pre-initiated self, and counteracted by his action of fetching Sogolon baobab leaves, or a baobab tree, and also by his successful hunting for the sorceresses, upon gaining the use of his legs. Sumanguru, on the other hand, is pictured as stealing a preparer of food while he is an adult, and indeed, while he is a powerful ruler. Here again we have, it seems, a level of interpretation of the epic which contrasts Sunjata and Sumanguru in terms of their interaction with other people, portraying Sumanguru as one who flouts accepted and necessary standards of society in order to satisfy his own desires.

#### **Other traditions concerning Fakoli**

We have already recorded how, according to some versions, Fakoli performs the actions necessary to cause Sumanguru's fortress to fall,<sup>38</sup> while according to two versions he kills Sumanguru's general, Jibirila, or "Great Jibirila", *Ngana Jibirila* (DK: 295f.; KMJ,D1: 69). Four accounts also record that Fakoli killed the ruler of Niani, known as Mansa Kara (KMJ), Massa Kara Kamara (WK, KB) or Mansa Mamourou (V).<sup>39</sup> A similar

tradition is reported by Niane (1984: 132), although there are some differences. For Niane, the ruler, Mansa Kara Noro, is not linked to Niani, and is on Sunjata's side in the conflict, while Fakoli's assault is said to have taken place before this figure's defection. A unifying point between this version of the story and V, KB and WK is to be found in the cliché explaining the *mansa's* demise: he is betrayed to Fakoli by his wife who points out that her spouse is vulnerable during his morning bath, at which juncture he is without his protective suit of chain-mail. While KMJ and the tradition reported by Niane place the incident before Sumanguru's defeat, V, KB and WK say that the king was a Malinke monarch who refused to accept Sunjata's overlordship after Sunjata had defeated the Soso ruler, Sumanguru.

The traditions concerning Fakoli, while they emphasize his significant role in Sunjata's victory, do not dwell exclusively upon his praiseworthy deeds or qualities. A key element brought out in DK's account of Fakoli's victory over Jibirila and KB's account of his defeat of the king of Niani is this warrior's excessive use of violence. DK describes how Fakoli twists and breaks Jibirila's legs before killing him (301); KB describes Fakoli breaking the bones of Mansa Kara (100). Both DK and KB implicitly criticise Fakoli's action, placing in the mouth of the warrior's victim the phrases 'l'homme peut tuer l'homme sans l'humilier' (KB: 100), and 'You should kill a freeman like yourself without tormenting him' (DK: 301). As Galloway writes about the Malinke:

Torture was against the code of chivalry; there was a very strict code which made all manner of spitefulness, cruelty, pettiness, gossip or any other meanness beneath the dignity of a freeborn. . . . It was absolutely wrong to torture a freeborn in order to make him break down and do or say something which would shame him and his family for many generations to come. Faa Koli falls far short of this ideal when he defeats Jibirila... (1980: xviii)

Wa Kamissoko, in by far the most detailed variant of the story of the death of the king of Niani, also portrays Fakoli's victory over Mansa Kara in a manner which could be assessed as critical. WK notes that Fakoli promises to marry the king's favourite

wife after she has betrayed the king's secrets to him, enabling Fakoli to kill her present husband and make her his own wife (117-9). In fact Fakoli clubs her to death, stating that, if she would betray her first husband, she might betray him also (WK1: 177-81). WK also identifies Fakoli as a slave trader in the time before the Soso-Mande war (WK1: 39-41).

S, DK and KB share a tradition that Fakoli, in the words of Mamby Sidibé, 'pria ses griots d'attribuer la plupart de ses hauts faits à ce prince [Sunjata]' (46). In DK and KB Sunjata's praise-name "bone-smasher" comes in fact from Fakoli's action which he has persuaded the griots to add to Sunjata's memory. To quote from DK: 'Faa Koli said to them [the griots], 'This arm which I have broken -/Add that to Sunjata's praises./They said, 'Arm breaking Mahara Jata.' (301).<sup>40</sup>

This tradition of Fakoli's modesty appears at variance with the popular conception of the figure who is often known by the epithets "big head" and "big mouth", or *da ba*,<sup>41</sup> while we can recall BD's description of Fakoli as someone who 'ne tient pas sa langue' (29), which suggests the epithet "big mouth". Egotism and pomposity are equally suggested by the tradition that Fakoli once stooped to enter a meeting hut although he was only of small stature and in no danger of hitting the lintel.<sup>42</sup> Fakoli was mocked by Sunjata but then proceeded to raise himself up so that eventually the roof of the hut was supported on his head (DK: 281f.; KMJ,D1: 70). Fakoli is sometimes associated with the *Janjon*, a poem which celebrates the valourous deeds of hunter-warriors and is what Johnson terms 'floating praise-poetry' (1979: 243; DK: 269; KMJ,D1: 69). According to KMJ, Fakoli in fact performs his redoubtable feats - including raising the hut roof - in order to qualify for having the praise-poem *Janjon* sung in his honour.

On the other hand, a very different picture is presented of Fakoli by Patrick McNaughton's interviews with Malinke blacksmiths. McNaughton records the tradition giving Fakoli a large head and a large mouth, but interprets the former as a sign of his reputedly great intelligence, while he sees the latter as a symbol of his capacity for great action and for *Kumakolo*, or "true speech", 'speech that is without ornament

and goes concisely to the heart of the matter'. McNaughton writes that Fakoli is claimed to have won many supporters to Sunjata's cause through his "true speech", although he equally notes Fakoli's reputation as a great warrior (1988: 109, 136-7).

### Recapitulation

In sum, we see that the traditions associated with Fakoli form a mixed picture of the warrior. He is a *bula* ancestor, a blacksmith, a Gambian forebear and is sometimes given a genie father. He is a true speaker, a concise speaker, but a loudmouth; someone who strives to gain a reputation worthy of the *Janjon*, but who reappropriates his feats to Sunjata. Fakoli is both a victim at the hands of his maternal uncle and a cruel victimizer of Jibirila, the king of Niani, or Mansa Kara's wife. His ambiguous position is summed up in his defection: beginning as a part of Sumanguru's army and ending up an ally of Sunjata.

M. M. Diabaté has compared Fakoli to Achilles (n.d.: 657), and the comparison is apt. Aside from some interesting parallels in the specific details of their respective lives,<sup>43</sup> both represent, I suggest, the figure of the flawed hero. A similar judgement can, I believe, be levelled at Sumanguru. A comparison between Sumanguru and Fakoli implies that, while both possessed many of the attributes of a *horon* or a *mansa*, such as courage, strength, skill and intelligence, they both were lacking in other equally vital qualities for this station. In his defeat of Sumanguru's allies Fakoli shows neither restraint nor mercy. McNaughton writes that Fakoli 'was feared for the catastrophe he could visit on a foe' (1988: 136), while S records that Fakoli had an arrow which would kill two hundred people in one shot (46). In his displays of strength and in the praise-names attributed to him he lacks modesty. His epithet *da ba*, "big mouth" and his *kumakolo*, "true speech", emphasize his skills as an orator, worthy skills indeed but, as we have seen, skills associated among the Malinke with the *jeli* and not the *horon*. If Sumanguru alienates Fakoli because of the attractiveness of his wife, then Fakoli allows his wife to come between him and his

maternal kin; if Sumanguru fails to make a lasting patron-griot relationship with Bala Faseke partly because of his injustice and cruelty towards Bala Faseke, then Fakoli is equally cruel and vengeful towards the ruler of Niani. As Fakoli impunes the wife of Mansa Kara Kamara for her disloyalty towards her husband and her potential disloyalty towards him, so he is equally guilty in his ability to desert Sunjata as he deserted Sumanguru. As Sumanguru prefigures and competes with Sunjata in his attempt to create a united kingdom and in his attempt to form a praise-singing profession, yet is portrayed as a merciless and tyrannical ruler and an inadequate patron, so Fakoli prefigures and competes with Sunjata in his valourous deeds and praiseworthy actions, yet is similarly, ultimately a character lacking in certain essential qualities for the role of *horon* or *mansa*: mercy, restraint, modesty, and loyalty.

## CHAPTER SIX: NOTES

- 1 HO: 52; MAK: 209; MA: 166; MB: 169; A: 357-8; D: 20; AR: 167; ZA: 28; ZB: 40; F2: 321; V: 321; S: 44; H: 112; N: 38; P: 55; CL: 165-6; KMJ,D1: 56; FDS: 148-9; MS: 129; DK: 271, 275; BK: 147, 161; BS: 73, 79; TK: 334; BD: 32; YFG: 103; B: 10-1, 16; JBS: 671; MK: 713; WK1: 3, 249; KB: 38; DMS: line 52.
- 2 The variation between "Sumanguru" and "Soumangourou" is, in effect, only a difference between the conventional orthography of French and English writers.
- 3 The latter part of the etymology may be related to the popular tradition of a man who gives his companion flesh from the calf of his leg to satisfy his hunger, instituting the patron-griot relationship between them (see below). Sumanguru is, as will be shown below, traditionally involved with the origin of the hereditary profession of *jeliw*.
- 4 MA, D, AR, V, S, N, P, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, DK, BK, BS, B, MK, WK, KB, DMS.
- 5 A, AR, F, V, S, N, P, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, BK, BS, TK, B, JBS, MK, WK, KB, DMS.
- 6 F, FDS, KMJ, MS, DK, BS, TK, JBS, MK, DMS.
- 7 A, AR, V, S, N, P, CL, BS, B, JBS, WK, KB.
- 8 F2: 321; CL: 166; BS: 75; DMS: line 54.
- 9 MA: 166; D: 20; AR: 167; V: 321; S: 44; N: 38; P: 55; CL: 166; KMJ,D1: 56; FDS: 148-9; MS: 129; DK: 275; BK: 161; BS: 79; B: 16; MK: 713; WK1: 3; KB: 38; DMS: line 52.
- 10 DK: 271; BK: 147; MA: 166; WK1: 253; Montell 1929: 355; Conrad 1984: 41.
- 11 CL has Diomate Fode Diarrasso as the founder (cp. Delafosse's Goumate Fade); Kabine Diarrasso (cp. Kambine Diarisso); Kani Diarrasso (cp. Gane); and Burama Diarrasso (cp. Birama). CL omits Delafosse's Souleïman, Banna-Boubou, Makhan and Moussa. Both accounts state that Birama had nine sons.
- 12 MAK: 209; MA: 166-7; AR: 167; A: 358; N: 38; CL: 165; KB: 39.
- 13 B: 16; BK: 147; Levtzion 1980: 51; Humblot 1918: 524; McNaughton 1988: 61, 161; Conrad 1981: 720.
- 14 H, FDS and KB call the blacksmith Nun Fayiri, while in MS we read that Sumanguru's father is Dun [*sic*] Fayiri. In KMJ and DMS the blacksmith is Sorijan Kante, who in KMJ,D1: 56 is identified with Sumanguru's father. This tradition is also reported among Gambian *jeliw*, see Wright 1979: 30f.
- 15 HO: 52; MA: 168; S: 43; N: 39; CL: 166; B: 16. See also Zemp 1966: 624, where a Siguiri griot calls Sumanguru a great magician.
- 16 V: 321; S: 44; H: 113n; N: 38-40; CL: 165-76; KMJ,D1: 57-9; FDS: 148-51; MS: 145-52; DK: 275-81; BK: 165-215; MK: 712; WK1: 359-67; YFG: 103; BD: 20-3. The extra-epic versions are to be found in Humblot 1918: 525n; Montell 1929: 355; Zemp 1966: 622; Diabaté n.d.: 26; and Kouyate 1970: 30.

- Humblot's tradition was retold in a discussion about the Malinke of the Milo and Niandan valleys; Zemp's was told by a Kuyate griot of Siguiri.
- 17 This version is found, at least in a basic form, in S, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, WK, Zemp 1966, Humblot 1918, Diabaté n.d. and Kouyate 1970.
  - 18 This version is found in BK, MK, YFG and BD. DK has a version that mixes elements from both basic types of the story.
  - 19 Diabaté n.d.: 26; Innes 1974: 317; Johnson 1986: 211.
  - 20 KMJ, FDS, MS, BK, DK, Diabaté n.d.. In BK it is Sunjata who cripples the griot.
  - 21 In Zemp 1966's version of the story another familiar feature of *tana* origin tales appears: a bird advises Bala Faseke of the song with which to praise Sumanguru, thereby mollifying the Soso ruler and avoiding death.
  - 22 MK, YFG, BD, DK, BK, S, Zemp 1966.
  - 23 In this context we can recall the line Sumanguru is said to speak when apprehending Bala Faseke playing the *bala*: 'Who is there? A genie or a man?' (e.g., WK1: 363).
  - 24 S, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, DK, WK.
  - 25 S: 45-6; N: 61; CL: 177-8; KMJ,D1: 70-1; FDS: 174-5; MS: 146-56; DK: 275; B: 69; WK1: 379-83; KB: 44-5.
  - 26 KMJ,D1: 69; DK: 295-7; MS: 184; FDS: 174.
  - 27 Koroma: H: 113n; N: 61; CL: 177; Humblot 1918: 421; Kumba: KMJ,D1: 69; DK: 267; BK: 181; BD: 23.
  - 28 S: 45; BD: 23; WK1: 5; Niane 1984: 132; Farias 1989: 159.
  - 29 DK: 267; KMJ,M: 309; Bamba Suso in Wright 1977: 45 n.26. Note also that M.M. Diabaté asserts that Sora is the 'nom emphatique' of the Sisoko, a *bula* clan sometimes linked to Fakoli (1975: 77).
  - 30 CL: 177; KMJ,D1: 69; MS: 146; DK: 271; KB: 44; N: 61; H: 113n.
  - 31 Alternatively, in WK she is called Kenda Kala Nanyouma Damba, and in MS Sigiri Tabun.
  - 32 CL: 177; FDS: 173; MS: 154; DK: 275; WK1: 381; S: 51 n.11; H: 113n.
  - 33 MS: 153; WK1: 379. See also S, CL, FDS, DK, H.
  - 34 Diabaté n.d.: 645. See also Innes 1974: 316 where he translates Kiliya, the place in DK where Sumanguru takes Fakoli's wife, as meaning "jealousy".
  - 35 See also WK1: 383 for a similar metaphor.

- 36 Although one can note that, according to Diabaté, in Malinke tradition, 'l'oncle (*nbari*) aime son neveu, mais il n'a jamais d'égard pour lui' (1975: 78).
- 37 N: 40; CL: 57; FDS: 149; KMJ,D1: 57; MS: 129; DK: 275; Humblot 1918: 525 n.1.
- 38 FDS: 174; MS: 184; KMJ,D1: 71.
- 39 KMJ,D1: 70; KB: 99-100; V: 325-6; WK1: 87-181.
- 40 Elsewhere, the same praise-name is said to originate from the youngsters who fell from the tree that Sunjata uprooted when he first walked (Chapter Four).
- 41 S: 46; N: 61; CL: 177; KMJ,D1: 69; DK: 267; BK: 209; WK1: 391; McNaughton 1988: 136-7.
- 42 S says it was believed that Fakoli was deformed because of the loose clothing which he wore (S: 46). Loose clothing was also a sign of prowess among medieval Malinke men (Chapter Four).
- 43 Fakoli, as we have seen above, according to some traditionists, has one supernatural parent, like Achilles; both defeat the opposition's champion (Jibirala, Hector), but fight with unchivalrous zeal; both quarrel with their commanders over a woman (Keleya, Briseis).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUNJATA'S RETURN FROM EXILE & DEFEAT OF SUMANGURU

From discussing various traditions associated with Sumanguru in Chapter Six, here we revert to the major action - indeed the culmination of the action - of the Sunjata epic: the contest between Sumanguru and Sunjata. This chapter deals in turn with Sunjata's return to Manding, crossing of the Niger river, early battles against his adversary, discovery of the power behind Sumanguru and its antidote, and final triumph over the Soso monarch; Sumanguru's flight to Kulikoro, and his relics at Krina and Kulikoro are also discussed. Although, according to the epic traditionists, the triumph over the Soso monarch is Sunjata's greatest achievement, most of the following pages are, like Chapter Six, taken up with an assessment of Sumanguru who, in fact, even in the epic variants, tends to occupy a greater part of the narrative, at this point in the story, than does Sunjata.

#### **Sunjata's allies, & his route of return**

Altogether, some twenty five of the thirty five versions of the epic I have consulted record Sunjata Keita's return from exile to his homeland of Manding.<sup>1</sup> According to fourteen accounts he leaves from Mema;<sup>2</sup> according to four accounts from Nema.<sup>3</sup> From where does Sunjata gain the support for his bid to retake Manding from Sumanguru? Six accounts state that Sunjata was provided with an army by the Tunkara clan of Mema,<sup>4</sup> with N, KMJ, KB and CL noting that this force was cavalry. CL claims the group was commanded by Bandiu Tunkara, while KMJ asserts its leaders were Farin Jatigi and Farin Birama, sons of the king. Six versions state that the hero was supported by soldiers from Tabon.<sup>5</sup> D claims that Sunjata stayed during his exile with king Tabo from Labe, who was a Dabo clan member, securing his support. N, CL and WK identify the leader of the Tabon contingent as a Camara; N and CL say he is

Fran Camara, nick-named Tabon Wana; WK has him as Tabon Nouana N'Faran Kamara.<sup>6</sup> A further six accounts state or imply that Sunjata gained support from Sibi.<sup>7</sup> N and KB identify the ruler of Sibi as Kamandjan Camara, CL has him as Framandian Camara, WK as Sibi Nouana N'Faran Kamara, while ZB includes among Sunjata's allies Sibingan Fara Kamara. For N and DK, Sibi was the meeting point for all those allied against Sumanguru; in the words of Dembo Kanute, 'The whole population of Manding gathered at Sibi' (DK: 289).<sup>8</sup>

Other prominent supporters of Sunjata Keita are Tira Makhan, whose presence among the allies is noted by ZA (30), D (22), BS (69) and KB (58). Niane records Tiraman as one of Sunjata's allies, who may be identified with Tira Makhan (1984: 131). The Traore clan, usually associated with Tira Makhan, are given as Sunjata's allies in DK (291), CL (193) and Niane 1960a (19). Fakoli, as we found in Chapter Six, is an important lieutenant of Sunjata, and Sangaran Madiba Konte is mentioned as an ally of the hero in ZB (40), D (22), BS (69) and MB (168). In addition, two accounts claim Sunjata recruited cavalry from Wagadu-Ghana (N: 48; CL: 185), N noting that they were under the command of Soamba Cisse.<sup>9</sup> CL and KB say the hero was joined in the struggle against Sumanguru by the Konde of Do. CL identifies their chief as Fa Wori Conde (193), KB as Faory Konde (55), while this same figure appears in the lists of allies of Sunjata in two articles by Niane as Faony Conde (1960a: 19; 1984: 131). Lists of allies also appear in ZA (30), ZB (40), CL (193) and BS (65-9).

From the above it is clear that, according to the traditionists, Sunjata enjoyed support in his fight against the Soso state from a wide range of Malinke clans and settlements, viz, the Tunkara of Mema, the Cisse of Wagadu-Ghana, the Camara of Tabon and of Sibi, the Konde of Sangaran and Do, and the Traore, as well as clans associated with Fakoli, the Koroma and Kumba.

Concerning the route back to Manding which Sunjata took, several major variants can be identified among the versions of the epic. The most straightforward path indicated for the hero takes him directly from his point of departure to Manding itself, with no specific details of the places he passes through being recorded. MAK,

MA, A, D, ZA, F, S, H, P, BS and JBS follow this pattern.<sup>10</sup> The second variant I have identified, found in V, KMJ, FDS, MS and DMS, notes Sunjata's crossing of the Joliba or Niger river, but otherwise adds no details concerning the homeward journey. The third variant, found in N, CL, B, DK, WK and KB, introduces several stopping-off points during the journey for the purposes of raising troops. N, CL and B take the hero in a circular, anti-clockwise movement from Mema or Nema, through Wagadu-Ghana and down to the Futa Jalon, before re-entering Manding via Bure. As CL notes, this route skirted the state of Soso (CL: 186), while the direct route from Mema to Manding would appear to take the hero through the state of Soso itself.<sup>11</sup> KB's route takes Sunjata to the east, through Do, before entering Manding, while DK and WK agree with N and CL in claiming that Sunjata's journey took him through Tabon and Sibi. The various routes are tabulated in Table VIII, on the next page.

The episode of the hero's triumphant return to re-establish himself in his homeland is, of course, fundamental to the biographical pattern of the mythic and legendary hero, as has been established by scholars of comparative literature. Von Hahn noted for points ten and eleven of his scheme the 'Triumphant home-coming, and return from abroad', plus the 'Fall of the persecutor, acquisition of sovereignty; liberation of mother' (Dunlop 1888: 504f.; Taylor 1964: 116). Rank wrote that the hero

finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion; takes revenge on his father, on the one hand, is acknowledged on the other, and finally achieves rank and honors (Rank 1914: 61)

For Raglan, 'On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom' (1936: 180). In respect of his home-coming, his defeat of Sumanguru, and his ascension to the throne of Manding, then, Sunjata's life story, as presented by the epic, conforms to the biographical pattern of the hero, as it does in many other instances already noted.

Table VIII Details of Sunjata's return journey & battles against Sumanguru

| version | route & battle details ( <i>battles in italics</i> )   |
|---------|--|
| HO      | <i>Massala</i>   |
| MAK     | Sangaran → <i>Krina</i>  |
| MA      | Mema → Mande   |
| A       | Lambe → Mande  |
| D       | Labe → Mande → <i>Kirina</i>   |
| AR      | Mema → Mande   |
| ZA      | Mema → Mande → <i>Dahadiala</i>  |
| ZB      | <i>Taoubara</i> → <i>Missiriba</i> → <i>Tabon</i> → <i>Kounkagna</i> → <i>Balia</i> → <i>Kankinianfora</i> → <i>Kouroukambia</i> → <i>Darhadiala</i> |
| F       | Mema → Mande → <i>Kankinja</i> → <i>Djendjenke</i> → <i>Djabefuga</i> → <i>Tingambere</i> → <i>Dagadjalla</i>  |
| V       | Mema → Joliba → Manding → <i>Daga-Diala</i>  |
| S       | Mema → Manding → <i>Krina</i>  |
| Q       | <i>Kirina</i> → <i>Koulikoro</i>   |
| H       | Nianiba → Manden → <i>Kiri-Koro</i>  |
| P       | Mossiland → Manding  |
| N       | Mema → Wagadu → <i>Tabon</i> → <i>Negueboria</i> → <i>Kankigne</i> → Sibi → <i>Krina</i>   |
| CL      | Mema → Wahadu → <i>Tabon</i> → <i>Nagueboria</i> → <i>Kankigne</i> → Sibi → <i>Kirina</i>  |
| KMJ     | Mema → Jaleba Koro → <i>Nyani</i> → <i>Gnogonson</i> → <i>Sobeya</i>   |
| FDS     | Mema → Joliba → <i>Dark Forest (Tu Fin)</i> → <i>Nyani</i> → 'Resolve' → 'Sharing'   |
| MS      | Mema → Joliba → <i>Kalifaya</i> → <i>Susu</i> → <i>Manden Kakama</i>   |
| DK      | Nema(?) → Sibi ('in Taabong') → Kelela   |
| BS      | Nema → <i>Dakhajala</i> → <i>Taumbaara</i> → <i>Kankinyang</i>   |
| B       | Mema → Valley of the Serpent → Bafing river → <i>Tabon</i> → <i>Krina</i>  |
| JBS     | Mema → Mande   |
| WK      | Nema → <i>Nyenguema</i> → <i>Tabon</i> → Sibi → <i>Dakadyalan (Joliba)</i> → <i>Krina</i>  |
| KB      | Nema → Do → Sibi → <i>Kankigne</i> → <i>Krina</i>  |
| DMS     | Mema → Joliba → Manding  |

## Crossing of the Joliba

Six accounts record this short incident as part of Sunjata's homeward journey from exile to Manding.<sup>12</sup> In these accounts, the crossing of the Niger marks Sunjata's final return and entry into his homeland. The story usually goes that Sunjata, on attaining the left bank of the Joliba or Niger river, wishes to cross the river, but is prevented from so doing by the ferryman, a Somono, who has been ordered by Sumanguru to keep out the hero, or simply to halt traffic on the river. However, Sogolon had previously made this boatman a gift of a silver bracelet on the outward journey, or at some other unspecified time, and being reminded of this, the Somono boatman ferries Sunjata and his supporters across the river.

V and WK locate the incident specifically. V says Sunjata halted at Kourousale, which can be identified with the village of Coursale, to be found 8km south west of Krina. This siting of the incident concurs with that in WK, where it is claimed that Sunjata was attempting to cross the Niger to enter Dakadiala (Dakajalan). A village of this name is to be found on the Niger, roughly opposite Coursale, on sketch-maps in Niane 1984 (128) and Cissé & Kamissoko 1975 (475), although I have not found it marked on contemporary maps. Also, other settlements of the same name do exist in the Manding heartland, either further upstream on the Niger itself, by the Sankarani fork, or in the Manding hills, to the west (see sketch-maps in Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 475; Mauny 1961: 121; Niane 1984: 128).

The boatman is named in five accounts.<sup>13</sup> Although none of these accounts agree on his name, all six versions which relate this incident identify him as a Somono, either their chief or patriarch. The Somono are fishermen and boatmen who work on the Niger; they are not a *nyamakala* group, nor do they form a separate ethnic group, according to Johnson (1986: 217). Bokar N'Diaye identifies them, along with the Bozo, as *Dji Tigi* or Masters of the Water, and claims that they number members from all the Malinke clans (N'Diaye 1970: 59f.; cf. Arnaud 1912: 163 on the related Bozo). Youssouf Cissé reports a tradition that they came from Wagadu; he also identifies

their main settlements as Forakoba, north of Bamako, and Dakajalan, the latter of which places would tie in with the siting of the river crossing incident in V and WK (Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 347).

The incident of Sunjata's crossing of the Niger can be read on a symbolic level. Passing through water commonly connotes a significant transition. Water/moisture is often a symbol of life, and the birth of life - semen, uterine fluid, rain (Jones 1951 ii: 133-4, 303); baptism ceremonies employing water often mark the start of life, while in terms of its death symbolism, a watery passage to the underworld is a familiar part of Greek mythology in the shape of Charon, ferryman of the Styx (cf. motif F 141.1 River as barrier to the otherworld). Passage through water is also commonly employed in Africa to symbolize other important transitions. Thus the Nyoro story of Rukidi involves his being ferried across a river in a ritual for monarchs based on the idea that 'it was deemed necessary that a young king should enter his realm by crossing a river on its eastern boundary' (Wrigley 1973: 224). Sunjata's successful crossing of the Niger can be read as an endorsement of his campaign to gain the throne. Outside of Africa, we can recall how Xenophon, when he saw Cyrus' safe passage across the Euphrates, read it as a signal of his destiny to rule (Xenophon 1949: 35). On the other hand, Xerxes had the waters of the Hellespont thrashed with whips when a storm prevented the passage of his troops across the bridges he had built - on his way, of course, to defeat at Thermopylae (Herodotus 1972: 457). As with many other folkloric motifs which rely for much of their power upon a basis of quotidian reality (Jones 1951 ii: 39-42), the successful crossing of a river has symbolic value in part precisely because, in a pre-technological age, a campaigning army would, as a matter of course, have to ford or swim rivers; that this was a venture that often entailed considerable risk and, in consequence, that rivers often formed the most enduring of boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

Two tales involving the Kulubali clan also centre around an incident in which passage across the Niger river is at first denied and then allowed, but with certain repercussions. Johnson records how the Somono are said to have refused to allow the

*mansa* of Karta to cross the Niger because he had taken a Somono woman as a bride without paying the bridewealth. The king summons to his aid the catfish and hippopotamus, and crosses the river without the Somono's boats. The appellation Kulubali is supposed to derive from the Malinke *kurun-bali*, which is translated as "without a boat", in memory of this crossing (Johnson 1977: 107). Joseph Brun records a tale which explains how the Kulubali gained their *tana*, which is the *mpolio*, a type of fish. Two brothers are trying to cross the Niger but are denied passage by the boatmen; an *mpolio* offers them a passage on his back, which they accept. However, after crossing, the younger brother decides to eat the fish, and because of this his elder's descendants take the *mpolio* as their *tana* (Brun 1910: 857).

Cross-culturally, the gift of the bracelet to the ferryman is reminiscent of the payment made to Charon to cross the Styx, and also to a passage in the *Nibelungenlied*, which seems consciously to echo the Greek myth and to underscore the immutability of fate, in which the Burgundian knight Hagen offers an uncooperative boatman a bracelet in order to let his force cross the river and thence proceed to their unwitting doom (Hatto 1965: 190-8). In the Malinke context, Cissé writes that Sogolon's actions in giving a bracelet to the ferryman signified her placing of the child in the care of the Somono boatman, and that:

Cette pratique existe encore de nos jours: les mères maliennes confient volontiers leurs enfants à un homme sage ou influent ou le placent sous la protection "magique" d'un prêtre animiste ou d'un marabout (Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 347)

The incident in which Sunjata crosses the Niger with the aid of a boatman may indeed reflect practices related to the care of Malinke children and can be seen as acting as a further piece of evidence concerning Sogolon's vital role in her son's victory. In addition, on another level, its significance in the epic concerns the way in which it involves the Somono in the alliance against Sumanguru.

As we have noted in Chapter Five, several versions say that Sumanguru had curtailed trade on the Niger (WK1: 323; KB: 55; DMS: line 70). This action would have

meant, effectively, having the cooperation of the Somono and Bozo, the groups who traditionally plied the waters of that great river. KMJ says the Somono were loyal to Sumanguru before this incident (KMJ,D1: 66), while FDS says Sumanguru had paid the Somono gold to prevent Sunjata from entering Manding across the Joliba (FDS: 169). It is, I believe, in this incident of Sunjata's river crossing that is recorded the realignment of the Somono grouping to the side of Sunjata and his allies, and it is the supportive action of the Somono boatmen, in spite of Sumanguru's gold, which is recalled to account for their place in the traditional social and economic structures of the Malinke of today. Niane writes, concerning the post-victory assembly of the allies:

The Niger boatmen, Somono and Bozo, were rewarded for their contribution to the war when Sunjata proclaimed them "masters of the waters" (Niane 1984: 134)

And he is presumably referring to the incident we have just described. Here, as with the *senankuya* relationships discussed in Chapter Five, an element of Malinke social formation is held to be a direct result of the actions of individuals in the time of Sunjata, and the particular position in the social structure attained by a group is deemed to be dependent upon that group's role the Soso-Manding war.

#### **Declaration of war & early battles**

Several accounts preface the early combats between Sunjata and Sumanguru with what amounts to a declaration of war.<sup>15</sup> In FDS, N, MS and DK a bird, either a partridge, an owl or a bush-fowl, is given a message announcing the hero's safe return to Manding which it is sent to deliver to Sumanguru. In a humorous section in DK it is said that a bird is sent because noone else dare approach the Soso ruler; that the bird delivers the news, is killed and eaten, yet still proclaims the message of Sunjata's arrival. In A, D, H and KB the two leaders meet face to face and a verbal duel ensues. A similar fight of words is found in N, although here it is conducted

between the bird and Sumanguru (60-1), and is also recorded by Niane (1960a: 19-20), where it is described as 'les paroles de provocation' (19). Niane suggests that 'la guerre alors était toujours précédée de nombreux discours et pourparlers entre les belligérants' (19-20).<sup>16</sup>

Thirteen accounts of the epic record the fighting of battles between the protagonists before the decisive engagement at which Sumanguru is put to flight or killed.<sup>17</sup> Most of the versions (MA, AR, F, KMJ, FDS, MS, BS, KB) assert, or at least imply, that Sunjata lost these battles to Sumanguru. Some blur the issue, however, and others declare the reverse. ZB merely lists a series of battles said to have been fought between Sunjata and Sumanguru; JBS asserts that the belligerents fought for seven years, and the descendants of each side claim victory. B, CL and N claim Sunjata won the first engagement, which they say was fought against Sumanguru's son, while N and CL say Sunjata defeated the Soso troops in the next two battles but that Sumanguru himself was impervious to attack. As for the numbers of engagements before the final battle, over half who note a figure state that three battles were fought (BS, AR, N, KMJ, FDS, CL), while ZB lists eight battles, F four, MS two, and B and KB one each.

Where did these battles take place? Out of those versions recording these early combats, only MA, AR and JBS do not connect each battle to a settlement; of the names associated with the battles, however, only two are found recorded in more than two versions each - they are Tabon and Kankigne. Tabon is recorded as the site of a battle between the Malinke and Soso in ZB, N, CL and B.<sup>18</sup> N, CL and B note similar details concerning the battle: it is fought over the narrow approaches to Tabon, with the Soso forces, under the command of Sumanguru's son - Sosso Balla (N, B) or Balla Diarrasso (CL) - guarding the pass. Sunjata attacks in the evening despite a long march during the day, to the surprise of the enemy troops, and a way is forced through to Tabon, the town of Sunjata's ally, Fran Camara. These particulars are contradicted in Niane 1960a where we read that Sunjata and his allies 'essuyèrent une première défaite devant Tabo dans le Labé' (19). Also, as we have already noted in

Chapter Five, the placing of the settlement of Tabon is disputed. N sites it in Futa Jalon and speaks of Fran Camara's men as 'mountain-dwelling Djallonkés' (49), and is supported by evidence from D, while most other accounts that mention the place imply or state that it is to be identified as the Manding heartland settlement of Tabon (Tabou), also in hilly terrain, near to Sibi. Both Sibi and Tabon are connected to the Camara clan, and they are often spoken of together, for example in WK, where Sunjata visits Tabon then Sibi on his homeward journey (WK1: 317-23) and in DK, where the bard says that the area around Sibi was called Taabong (289).

The other early battle which is found recorded in more than two versions of the epic is that said to have taken place at Kankigne. Kankigne is mentioned as the site of an early battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru in N, CL, KB, and F, where it is called Kankinja, in BS, where it is styled Kankinyang, and perhaps in ZB, who records both Kounkagna and Kankinianfora in his list of battles.<sup>19</sup> Monteil notes a tradition which places the major Sunjata-Sumanguru battle at Kankigi (1966: 90), while BK gives Kankinya as the headquarters of Sumanguru's troops (207).<sup>20</sup> Kankigne is to be found, according to N, in the gold-bearing province of Bure, to the north-west of the Manding heartland (see sketch-map in Niane 1965: vi), but I have not located it on any contemporary map. F, BS and KB are agreed in seeing the battle at Kankigne as a defeat for Sunjata's forces, but for CL it is a victory for the epic's hero, who surprises the Soso warriors in their camp and routs them. This is almost the reverse of the circumstances described in N, where the battle of Kankigne begins with a surprise assault by Sumanguru on the allies' camp, although it does end with a Soso retreat. For N, 'The battle of Kankigné was not a great victory but it demoralized the Sossos' (54). This version's redactor, Niane, goes on to quote some traditional lines associated with the engagement, which are translated as: 'The battle of Kankigné was terrible; men were less dignified than slaves there' (93). These lines might suggest that the battle was something worse than 'not a great victory', and indeed, Niane 1960a maintains that 'à Kankigné, Soumaoro battit complètement les alliés', quoting the same few traditional lines (20).

Concerning the siting of other early battles recorded in the epic traditions there is less agreement. N and CL both recount a fight at Negueboria which, like Kankigne, is to be found in Bure, according to Niane's own sketch-map, at which the Soso forces retreated but Sumanguru himself proved invulnerable (N: 51; CL: 189). ZB and BS both record a battle at Taoubara (ZB: 41) or Tauombaara (BS: 71) which, according to BS, Sumanguru won.

In the Kita bloc versions there is a tradition that Sunjata, after each of his three defeats at the hands of Sumanguru, founded a new settlement. KMJ,D1 and FDS agree that after his first defeat which, for them, occurred at Sumanguru's stronghold, called "Dark Forest" or Tu Fin<sup>21</sup> in FDS (170), Sunjata founded Niani, which they translate to mean "anguish" (FDS: 170) or "désepéré" (KMJ,D1: 67); and that after his second or third defeats the hero founded towns called Nyoon-son (FDS) or Gnogonson (KMJ) meaning "Soit l'entraide matérielle, soit le partage des responsabilités" (KMJ,D1: 95) or "sharing" (FDS: 171) and a town called Sobeya, meaning "resolve" (ibid.) or "La ville du sérieux" (KMJ,D1: 95). Also, KMJ,M and MS agree that Sunjata proceeded to Kalifaya after a defeat at the hands of Sumanguru (KMJ,M: 306; MS: 179). There are various interpretations of this move: KMJ identifies Kalifaya as a forest; M.M. Diabaté reports a tradition that at Kalifaya Sunjata was proclaimed king (1975: 75); Moser translates Kalifaya as meaning "security" (1974: 346).<sup>22</sup>

Commenting on MS's claim that Sunjata entered Kalifaya upon defeat, M.M. Diabaté notes that this place does not appear on any map (1975: 75); the same can be said for Sobeya, Gnogonson or Nyoon-son, as far as can be established. He suggests that the name is allegorical, and this seems the most likely explanation for most of the others as well. The case of Niani is a little different, for this settlement clearly did exist at the time (Filipowiak 1979). Although this does not preclude its allegorical import, it does add a potential historical dimension. As we have already mentioned in Chapter Five, Montrât reported a tradition of the Keyla griots from the 1930s which maintained that Sunjata retreated to Niani on the Sankarani river, presumably after a setback in his campaign, in a sort of *hijra* called, to quote him,

'*niani-ma-bori* (de *niani*: misère, oppression, souffrance morale; *ma*: liason; *bori*: fuir, courir, éviter, se sauver)' (1958: 91). This tradition may be related to the incident in BS in which, according to Bamba Suso, Sunjata's quick movement during a battle with Sumanguru was interpreted by his followers as him running away (71; see also DK: 301). BS employs the same word - *bori*, which Innes translates as "run" (1974: 123) - as is found in the Keyla tradition, and, as with the notion of the *hijra*, which is conceived less as a flight than a tactical withdrawal, BS implies that the hero's followers were mistaken in their perception. These two incidents can be interpreted at the very least as giving support to the view obtained through our examination of the records of the early battles between Sunjata and Sumanguru, namely, that Sunjata's defeat of Sumanguru was by no means a straightforward task without setbacks.

As to the potential relationship of these setbacks to the settlement of Niani, Montrat himself asks whether Niani, or at least the name of the settlement, does not date from this time (1958: 91)? Clearly Sunjata Keita cannot be credited with the establishment of the first settlement on the site of Niani, which dates from the sixth century A.D. (Filipowiak 1979: 166), but the hero may be linked to the first of the successive settlements that the griots of Niani, interviewed by Gaillard, spoke of (Gaillard 1923). Certainly the Polish-Guinean team which excavated the site believe that Niani may well have been the capital of Mali and established as such by Sunjata. Filipowiak writes:

La tradition orale parle du choix de Niani comme siège et capitale du nouvel État [of Sunjata], unissant plusieurs tribus.

Nos recherches ont, du moins partiellement, confirmé ce fait. (1979: 301)<sup>23</sup>

However, it is partially through an etymology of the name Niani that the griots link Sunjata to the settlement, and one should not forget that Malinke griots have a love of etymologies which can only be regarded as spurious in many cases (Johnson 1977). And as with the towns and villages that Sunjata is said to have visited during his

exile, where I suggest much of the impetus behind the claimed visits simply comes from the desire to link these settlements the founder of Mali, the linking of Niani to Sunjata's defeats may be a clever connection of a traditional episode in the hero's life - that of his early setbacks against Sumanguru - with a purported explanation of the meaning of the name Niani, in terms of the Malinke word for "suffering" or "anguish" or "despair".

Concluding this section on Sunjata's early battles, although it would be unwarranted to make any definite historical claims on the basis of our survey of the information provided by oral traditions on these early battles - which has demonstrated that the epic variants by no means follow a standard path in their narration of these events in Sunjata's career - it is possible to compare this information to the historical claims of others, and to thereby raise questions about the accuracy of their portrayal of the traditions. Levtzion writes that Sunjata

scored a series of victories against the Soso which marked the retreat of Sumanguru towards his own country and the advance of Sundjata into the heart of the Malinke country (1980: 59)

According to our survey of the traditions, on balance, Sunjata is neither presented making a steady advance nor as enjoying a series of victories over Sumanguru before finally disposing of his adversary; rather, he is often presented as only being successful after first suffering a run of three early defeats. Levtzion has presumably based his account on N which, along with CL, gives this impression, but as we have seen, N is often out of step with the majority of versions surveyed. More representative than N is Niane's own 1960a article, said to be based on two further traditions besides that forming the recitation N. This article claims that Sunjata suffered three defeats at the hands of Sumanguru - a representative view of the majority of early-battle traditions. However, twenty-four years later Niane asserts to the contrary that: 'After two indecisive battles the Malinke took courage' and defeated Sumanguru (1984: 132) - a claim which, on the basis of a survey of those

accounts of the epic which record more than one battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru, cannot be wholly endorsed.

### Sumanguru's secret power

After failing to defeat Sumanguru in repeated battles, according to nineteen versions of the epic, Sunjata's sister comes to the aid of her brother and his allies and secures from Sumanguru the knowledge of the secret source of his power.<sup>24</sup> While the episode in which she succeeds in making this discovery will be examined fully in the next section, here I shall address the issue of the nature of this magic power itself.

That there is magic behind Sumanguru's repeated victories is stated or implied in several accounts. For example, in AR Sunjata's sister says the following:

- Mon frère, écoute ma parole; tes défaites ne se comptent plus, et cependant nos guerriers sont plus nombreux et aussi braves que ceux de Sousou; et tu es toujours vaincu; il y a là-dessous de la magie. (AR: 170)

In CL and N, at the battle of Negueboria, Sumanguru proves himself able to defeat Sunjata's physical strength through magical power. The hero spots Sumanguru during the fighting and aims an arrow at him; rather than avoid it, Sumanguru catches it in his hand; then, as Sunjata charges him with his spear, the Soso chief vanishes from sight, appearing on a distant hilltop (N: 52; cp. CL: 190-1). It is after this incident that, according to N, Sunjata realises that defeating his adversary 'was not a question of having a lot of troops. In order to defeat Soumaoro it was necessary first of all to destroy his magical power' (N: 56).

The emphasis upon a non-physical aspect of the battle between Sumanguru and Sunjata is a feature of the Sunjata epic noted by several commentators. Levtzion states that: 'The legends dramatize the battle of Krina as a struggle between two powerful magicians' (1980: 59). Johnson asserts that, through obtaining knowledge of Sumanguru's secret power, with the aid of his sister, the hero succeeds in reducing his enemy's supply of *nyama*; for Johnson, 'the role of magic in the Mande heroic epic

cannot be overstressed' (1986: 42, 45); he asserts: 'The heroic life of Sun-Jata may ... be viewed as a series of transformations in the pursuit of power' (1978: 185). In addition, we can note that Bird and Kendall have written:

For Westerners familiar with the Homeric tradition or with the medieval epics like *Chanson de Roland*, where so much of the text is devoted to the instruments and operations of battle, Mande epic texts may seem curious. They contain no extensive references to warfare, and few descriptions of physical prowess, yet they show great attention to detail where the particulars of sorcery and its outcome are at issue and where the tokens of power are described (Bird & Kendall 1980: 19)

Indeed, Bird and Kendall propose a six-point scheme to describe the action in Malinke epics which begins: 'The hero and the adversary confront each other with no resolution', and which goes on to detail how the hero discovers the 'occult source' of his enemy's power and a sufficient 'antidote' which gains him victory (ibid.: 20).

An example of this magically based motif of conflict and resolution is to be found in the Malinke hunter epic of Kambili. In this story, as told by Seydou Camara, the wife of Kambili goes to Cekura, the enemy lion-man, in order to obtain from him items which can be used against him magically. These are said to include a pair of trousers, sandals, and hair from the armpit, crotch and head (Bird 1974: 87-8). In a Bamana tale, Douga de Kore, told by Sory Komara, the same scheme is present: we are told that anyone wishing to seize the town of Kore from Douga must first neutralize a crocodile which keeps Douga's stronghold secure (Dumestre 1979: 237f.). The same pattern is common in numerous African tales. Ozidi's opponent Ogueren is apparently vulnerable to

... a new born child.  
He may not see an unglazed pot.  
The new spring frond of a plantain he may not also see.  
The bud end, the fresh flowering part, once shown to him,  
Ogueren is beaten. (Clarke 1977: 110)

According to an east African tale, the secret of Kalifolo's village's impregnability is a bull with charms attached which bellows at the approach of danger (Willis 1981: 95); and in south Africa, in the story of Chaka, we are told how Dingiswayo is

defeated after his enemies have obtained his semen in order to employ it against him magically (Ritter 1955: 113-5).

Despite Bird and Kendall's point that this magical resolution distinguishes the Malinke epic from European examples of the genre, the concept of magical resolution is by no means unfamiliar to Indo-European or Middle-Eastern oral literature *per se*. The emergent scheme for the magical resolution of a tale's conflict such as is found in the Sunjata epic might be categorized under motif C 600 Unique prohibition or, as Innes does (1974: 125), under Z 312 Unique deadly weapon. The best known examples of this theme are probably the Hebrew tale of Samson and Delilah, the Greek tale of Scylla and Nisus - in both cases of which it is the hero's hair which is the source of his power, rather like in the epic of Kambili - and the Egyptian myth of Re (or Ra) and Isis, in which Isis forces the sun-god Re to reveal his secret name by withholding the antidote to a poison with which she has afflicted him (Pritchard 1950: 74-5). Frazer discusses a similar type of tale and the notions behind it in *The Golden Bough*. In his examples, of which he describes a large number, the victim succumbs after he has revealed the object or animal in which is hidden his vital principle (1963: 874-917).

Returning to the epic of Sunjata, the magical power that holds the key to Sumanguru's defeat is, according to seventeen versions of the epic, linked to the white cock.<sup>25</sup> More specifically, fifteen of them claim the antidote to Sumanguru's magic power resides in the spur of a white cock.<sup>26</sup> It is this alone that, shot at Sumanguru, can defeat him. For example, in BK Sumanguru says the following to Sunjata's sister:

'A spear will not kill me,  
An arrow will not kill me,  
A gun will not kill me,  
Korte will not kill me,  
Witchcraft will not kill me;  
There is only one thing,' he [Sumanguru] said, 'Which will  
kill me:  
A one year old cock which crows,  
Provided it is a white fowl,'  
He said, 'You must catch it and kill it,  
And you must remove its spur,  
And you must put pure gold dust and pure silver dust inside

it,  
And you must put it in a gun,  
If you shoot me with that,  
I shall die.' (BK: 219)

In six accounts elements are added to the concoction or process which is fatal to Sumanguru. In addition to those recorded in BK, quoted above, in BS the spur must be employed in conjunction with wild guinea-corn and *korte* powder (75); in S it must be attached to a spear of *tiekala* wood (44). Also, DK and BS say that Sumanguru has a 'gnome/With a hundred heads' (DK: 305), or that his father is a jinn with seven heads (BS: 75), and that, were this monster hit with specially prepared arrows, the power of Soso would be greatly reduced. Lastly, in KMJ, FDS and MS the ability to destroy the power of Sumanguru, while requiring a white cock, also depends on other elements: one hundred arrow shafts (KMJ,M: 309; MS: 183), or barren groundnut plants (FDS: 172), among other things, which must be "sacrificed" or buried near Sumanguru's fortress gates.

Robert Pageard has suggested that the white cock's spur symbolizes virility and that, consequently, 'la flèche atteint essentiellement Soumangourou dans sa virilité'. In support of his argument Pageard notes that, according to his own researches, the arrow is said to have been thrown at Sumanguru by an uncircumcised boy and that, according to S, the shaft which carries the spur is of *tiekala* wood which is, for him, 'une plante de la virilité et de la génération, utilisée à ce titre pour fabriquer les couches nuptiales' (1961: 66-7). Pageard links the uncircumcised thrower of the arrow to the Bamana concept of *wanzo*. The uncircumcised are, according to the Bamana, endowed with the energy *wanzo* or *waāzo*. This is, according to Gustav Jahoda,

an interior vital force, obscure and disordered, which agitates children and adolescents and yet charges them with extraordinary vitality. (1982: 198; cp. Dieterlen 1951: 64-5)

Jahoda goes on to link *wanzo* to the foreskin of boys and the clitoris of girls, which are removed by the Bamana and Malinke at initiation into adulthood. He also says,

significantly, that *wanzo* is 'opposed to fecundity'. Innes agrees with Pageard. He notes that the arrow does not effect Sumanguru 'on the physical plane', rather:

it operates by depriving him of all his vital powers; it attacks his virility, his power of creation, symbolized by the cock's spur and the self-seeded guinea-corn (1974: 125)

While the versions of the epic in our survey do not support Pageard's contention that Sumanguru was speared by an uncircumcised boy, and in no other account but S is the employment of *tiekala* wood recorded, nevertheless, his general thesis is plausible. The white cock itself, and equally its spur, may be regarded as symbols of male sexuality (Jones 1951 ii: 56, 326f.); while, in addition to BS's wild guinea-corn (noted by Innes), we can mention FDS's 'barren groundnut plants' in the antidote along with the white cock's spur as an equally clear, although reversed, symbol of procreation. McNaughton reports a tradition among Malinke blacksmiths that Sumanguru wore a *nègè-haya* amulet, which protected him from iron weapons, and notes that this prophylactic is made by an uncircumcised smith (1988: 60). Could this explain why the antidote to Sumanguru's invulnerability might involve an uncircumcised male? Sumanguru's general association with sex and fecundity must also be recorded. As has already been mentioned in Chapter Six and will be fully discussed below, the manner in which Sumanguru gives up his secret shows that the Soso leader's fall can be attributed in part to his sexual appetite, while, as we shall see later in the chapter, the traditions which surround Sumanguru's shrine at Kulikoro emphasize the Soso ruler's sexual potency. More generally, one can recall that, in the examples quoted above of the "one thing that can harm" motif, sexual or procreative symbolism is rife: the fresh bud of a plantain, pubic hair, semen, a bull....

Another symbolic quality of the white cock's spur that may be significant in assessing the symbolism behind its effect upon Sumanguru is that it is natural, that is to say, not manufactured. Several versions note or imply that Sumanguru is impervious to iron and, consequently, to most conventional weapons (BK: 219; CL: 191; S: 44; see also Levtzion 1980: 59). Some link this claim to his own status as a

blacksmith (KB: 68; Niane 1984: 132), as did one of McNaughton's forger informants, saying that: '[Sumanguru] Kante's power, *fanga*, derived from his secrets, *gundow*, and from the fact that he was a blacksmith' (1988: 61).

The effect of the white cock's spur is explained in many accounts in terms of the white cock being Sumanguru's *tana*. In V we are told that:

c'était le secret du tana de Soumanhourou qui devait lui  
[Sunjata] permettre, même sans grandes forces, de venir à  
bout de son adversaire (V: 324)

In S it is said that Sunjata's sister came to draw out of her husband 'le secret de son *tènè* (l'arme qui seule peut le tuer)' (44). The white cock's spur is also identified as Sumanguru's *tana* in N (58), CL (173) and KB (67). In his commentary on the epic, Vidal explains the *tana* concept as that with which contact is always fatal (323); for Camara Laye it is an 'interdiction formulated by an ancestor possessing one or several totems and which his descendants must respect' (CL: 173). G.D. Pickett also links the *tana* to ancestral actions, calling it a 'hereditary taboo', maintaining that, by avoidance of the white cock's spur, Sumanguru 'could concentrate in himself the power of his ancestors' (in Niane 1965: 93-4).

As was noted in Chapter Three, the Malinke observe prohibitions against killing, eating, or in other ways harming or endangering certain animals to which they are linked. The animal in question is described as their *tana*. These prohibitions are organized on a clan basis, each clan avoiding a different animal (Labouret 1934: 127-8; Camara 1976: 26-7; Brun 1910). In some instances an inanimate object is tabooed (Labouret 1934: 128; Brun 1910: 852), or even another clan (Camara 1976: 30). The origin of a clan's *tana* is often given in the form of an explanatory tale<sup>27</sup>, examples of which are found in Chapter Three and earlier in this chapter. As has been noted in Chapter Six, these tales are not dissimilar to those stories which claim to account for the origin of the hereditary profession of *jeliw* in Malinke society or, indeed, to those which perform the same function in respect of *senankun* relationships between clans - a point noted, among the Kuranko, by Jackson (1977: 155). The story of

Sumanguru's downfall as a result of the discovery of the power of the white cock's spur over him can also be read as a *tana* origin tale in itself. Bamba Suso asserts, at the close of his description of the episode in which Sumanguru divulges the secret of his strength: 'That is why the members of the Kante family do not eat white chicken' (BS: 79); and BK makes the same point (161).

### The seduction of Sumanguru

In the previous section I examined the mechanism by which the epic claims Sumanguru's power can be neutralised, connecting that mechanism to a general emphasis in Malinke epics on the magical resolution of combat which, in turn, can be seen to be part of a much more general interest in non-physical conflicts in the oral literature of Africa and beyond. I turn now to the means by which this information concerning Sumanguru's strength is drawn out of the victim and presented to his adversary, Sunjata. Here again, I hope to show that the cliché employed is by no means unique to Malinke art, or even to African oral literature in general, but is a popular *wandersage*. Nevertheless, this wandering theme, in its manifestation in the epic of Sunjata, throws into relief, I believe, particular Malinke concerns and attitudes towards women. In this respect I shall be developing ideas discussed in Chapter Three.

The secret of Sumanguru's power is revealed to Sunjata by his sister, according to nineteen versions of the epic.<sup>28</sup> In twelve of these accounts the sister goes to Sumanguru of her own volition,<sup>29</sup> often first suggesting her plan to Sunjata. In some recitations the impression is very much that a direct approach to defeating the Soso has failed, and now more subtle tactics are required. Thus BS has the sister saying: 'To be sure, hot water kills a man,/But cold water kills a man./Leave the smith [Sumanguru] and me together.' (73). In KMJ it is the men who have had their chance

to defeat Sumanguru, now it is the turn of a woman: 'Mon frère, dit Sogolon Kolonkan, tu es né pour le Mande, et moi de même. Laisse-moi affronter Sumangurun avec les ruses de la femme' (KMJ,D1: 71). In five versions Sunjata's sister is given to Sumanguru as a bride in an attempt by Dankaran Tuman - or in HO and ZA by Sunjata himself - to placate the Soso chief.<sup>30</sup> But even in these accounts the plan to discover the secret is generally given to be the woman's idea.

In all nineteen variants of the episode the method by which she gains the knowledge of Sumanguru's power - seduction - is basically similar. Six accounts state specifically that Sunjata's sister was beautiful.<sup>31</sup> In MA we read that 'Simangourou était connu pour aimer beaucoup les jolies femmes' (168); a similar statement can be found in AR: 170, and in all versions of the episode the Soso chief is said to be attracted to Sunjata's sister. In eleven accounts they are married<sup>32</sup> and in all versions of the story they sleep together, although in BS, BK and DK they do not consummate the relationship.

In effect, Sunjata's sister teases the secret of his strength out of Sumanguru by withholding sexual favours. Either she simply flatters him into a boast of his powers (e.g., N: 57-8), or she gets the ruler drunk to put him off his guard (CL: 168; S: 44). Sometimes she feigns disaffection with Sunjata's cause (BK: 215-7; DK: 305), or suggests that she must know what things can harm Sumanguru in order to prevent herself from accidentally injuring him (D: 25-6). Whatever the particular form of the ruse, it is always successful despite, in eight versions, the warnings of Sumanguru's mother.<sup>33</sup> After obtaining the information she desires, Sunjata's sister makes her escape, by means of various tricks, often while the duped chief is calmly sleeping off their love-making, and successfully relays the news to her brother. This is one of the earliest versions of the episode that we possess (1898):

La soeur de Sundiata partit pour le village de Sim.  
[Sumanguru]. Le chef, apprenant qu'une belle étrangère  
venait d'arriver, l'envoya chercher et, émerveillé de  
sa beauté, la fit conduire dans sa propre case. Il  
s'amusa avec elle toute la journée et, la nuit venue,  
ils couchèrent côte à côte. Quand elle sentit le  
moment venu, la femme demanda à son ami: 'Mais tu es  
donc bien puissant pour battre ainsi Sundiata, dont les

états sont cependant bien plus vastes que les tiens.' 'Oh, dit Simangourou, tant que j'aurai un gri-gri, nul ne me vaincra.' Elle se fit insinuante et, enfin, S. [Sumanguru] s'appretait à lui dire ce qu'il suffisait de faire pour vaincre lorsque sa vieille mère, qui de l'autre côté de la cloison, écoutait leurs bavardages, s'écria: 'Prends-garde, mon fils, il est imprudent de confier ainsi nos secrets à une étrangère, que tu connais depuis un jour à peine!'

Trois fois Simangourou fut sur le point de se trahir, et trois fois les avertissements de sa mère l'arrêtèrent. Enfin, subjugué par les caresses de la femme, il confessa tout bas ses secrets et lui révéla que pour le vaincre il suffisait d'amarrer à une flèche les ergots d'un coq blanc. Si cette flèche le touchait au milieu de la bataille, le charme était à tout jamais rompu et s'en était fait de sa puissance. (MA: 168-9)

This episode in the epic, inasmuch as it is a local variant of a wandering theme, we have already had occasion to discuss in some of its aspects in Chapter Three. There, we compared elements in the Buffalo-woman tale to a popular Malinke story of a hunter who is seduced by an animal disguised as a woman, and deprived thereby of his special hunting powers; from this predicament he is only rescued by his mother. The fact that the episode of Sumanguru's seduction in the epic is paralleled in other works is noted in some versions of the epic.<sup>34</sup> Let us first establish these parallels and the nature of the folkloric cliché behind them all.

Joseph Fontenrose, in his comparative survey of the combat myth, or the fight with the dragon, in Classical and Middle-Eastern sources, entitled *Python*, describes a version of the combat sequence in which 'the dragoness puts off her horrid features ... and becomes a beautiful temptress who helps the dragon by luring the champion to his doom' (1959: 257). This he calls the Venusberg Theme. A variation of the theme identified by Fontenrose is that in which seduction is used on behalf of the hero himself (ibid.: 259). Here, 'the heroine lures the enemy to his destruction by dressing herself seductively and leading him to suppose that he will enjoy her favours' (ibid.: 488). This variation he calls the Judith Theme, after the Hebrew story of Judith and Holophernes. Judith it was who killed Holophernes, an Assyrian commander, when the Assyrian army was poised to overrun Judea. She achieved her aim

by feigning disaffection with her people's cause, gaining his favour and trust, then decapitating him when he was in a drunken stupor (see the Apocryphal Book of Judith 8-13).

More widely known - and recalled in connection with Sumanguru's seduction in A and S - is the Hebrew tale of Samson and Delilah (Judges 16), which also contains a further element found in the epic's episode of seduction: the search for the secret source of Samson's strength. Frazer, who deals with the numerous parallels from different cultures to this motif (Frazer 1918 ii: 480-502) notes the motif's reversibility, commenting that, in some tales one's

sympathy is all enlisted on the side of the betrayed warlock, who is represented in an amiable light as a patriot and champion of his people... [while in other cases] ...we applaud or condone the cunning of the woman who betrays him (ibid.: 501)

The same point can be made about the Malinke manifestations of the theme: in the hunter's tale, discussed in Chapter Three, the seductress is a wily animal-woman while the hero is an upstanding, if gullible, hunter; in the epic the seductress is the sister of the hero, while the victim is a hated oppressor.

In African hero myths and epic literature itself the Venusberg and Judith themes are clearly popular. We can note that a version of the seduction episode of the Sunjata epic was performed as a play at a high school in Sébikotane, Sénégal, in 1937 (Q: 65), and that a dramatic version bearing the title "La Ruse de Diégué" was published in *Présence Africaine* in 1949 (Anon: 1949). Beyond the epic, in an episode from the story of Chaka, part of which has already been mentioned, we are told how the enemy commander Zwide sends his sister and a beautiful cousin to Dingiswayo, chief of the Mtetwa tribe, so as to procure some element of Dingiswayo's body in order to use it against him, and how Dingiswayo soon dies. She is told to 'try and win the love of Dingiswayo', and returns with some of his semen (Ritter 1955: 113). In the Ozidi saga the wife of Odogu, a champion that the hero is later to fell, attempts repeatedly to seduce Ozidi in an effort to discover the secret of his power

and to thereby prevent the death of her husband (Clarke 1977: 286-94). Stories could also be told from east Africa, from Bamana griots, as well as from other Malinke traditions.<sup>35</sup> It should be clear to the reader by now that this theme is almost always found in conjunction with the "one thing that can harm" or Unique Prohibition motif discussed above.

What is it in the motif that accounts for its popularity? In discussing the images behind the Buffalo-woman tale in Chapter Three we have already had cause to note the differential views of women among Malinke hunters depending on their relationship to the subject, either as mother or as wife/lover. Speaking generally, while mothers are traditionally treated with great kindness and respect, and viewed as the source of much of the hunter's strength, wives and lovers are treated with caution and suspicion, for they are believed to be untastworthy, while sex before a hunt is said to harm the hunter's chances of success.

The seduction motif can be read as a narrative expression of the anxieties that Malinke hunters, and presumably Malinke men in general, feel concerning sexual relationships. In it, the hunter-male gives up his inmost secret in return for sexual satisfaction. If this is not a contravention of the specific hunter prohibition on sex before the hunt, it does run contrary to other beliefs concerning the issue, some general and others specific. There is the general and widespread opinion that the sexual act is debilitating for men (Burkert 1979: 118), often connected to the belief that unnecessary loss of "vital fluid" (semen) is damaging to a man (Dundes 1980: 121-2), which ties in with our earlier association of water or moisture with life. For the Malinke, Bird asserts that: 'women ... it is said, sap man's strength and break his ability to concentrate' (1974: 104); while for the Kuranko, Jackson states:

Men protect their own privacy with an almost obsessive concern since their protective fetishes and medicines should never be seen by women. It is feared that if a wife or woman sees these personal medicines then she will gossip about them or deliberately divulge the secret of their whereabouts, so endangering a man's safety (1977: 82)

Here we see that, for the Malinke-related Kuranko at least, the seduction motif, with

its emphasis on the revelation of secrets to a third party with unfriendly intentions, is a direct narrative expression of the particular fear that Jackson pinpoints. Bird also maintains:

A man who is too interested in women will never be able to perform great deeds because he will be weakened both physically and spiritually. A woman is said to represent those forces which make society cohere and which are therefore in opposition to heroism. (1974: 104-5)

In other words, for the hero above all other men, sexual relations are deemed dangerous and contrary to the achievement of his heroic goals. Some of the variants of the epic point to a similar valuation of sexual relations for the hero. Magan Sisoko says that: 'Only a woman can vanquish a brave man' (182), while in CL one of the four pieces of advice Sogolon gives to Sunjata is: 'no one has ever been able to capture a king, in our land, a powerful king, without the complicity of his wife' (147). We can recall that Fakoli defeats the king of Niani only through the complicity of his wife (Chapter Six). It seems clear from the foregoing that Sumanguru's acceptance of the advances of Sunjata's sister is deemed by the traditionists to be an inexcusable lapse on the part of a powerful monarch and is, as such, a cause of his impending doom.

Sumanguru's downfall is also brought about in this episode by his behaviour towards his mother. Sumanguru, according to eight accounts, is warned by his mother either against marrying Sunjata's sister (A, D) or against revealing his secret to her. To her warnings in BS Sumanguru responds with the patronising 'She is an old lady' (75); in FDS the Soso leader reacts to her words by taking a knife and slashing off her breasts, prompting the injured woman to disown her son by cutting the menstrual cloth associated with Sumanguru's birth (172). As Johnson remarks, each of these acts symbolizes the severance of the mother-son relationship and diminishes his power (1986: 217). We can recall that in the hunter's tale discussed in Chapter Three it is the hunter's mother who saves him from the seductress. This narrative situation conforms to traditional beliefs concerning the importance for a man of his

relationship with his mother, which has been discussed in Chapter Five, and Sumanguru's response to his mother is clearly to be read as an intemperate act of arrogance, and as a disavowal of his dependence on his mother.

Examining the seduction motif from the point of view of Sunjata, we can note his real dependence for his ultimate victory over Sumanguru on his sister. The situation in which a hero is dependent for victory upon a woman is common in Malinke folklore and beyond. Campbell notes cross-culturally how freedom from the tyrant-monster is often symbolized in the hero myth by a woman, 'the maiden of innumerable dragon-slayings' (1949: 342), while Neumann asserts that it is the 'helpful, sisterly side of woman' which aids the hero in slaying the dragon (1970: 201). The Gow hunters of the Niger bend frequently use the device of a sister's aid to rescue an overconfident hunter-hero (Dupuis-Yakouba 1911). In the Malinke context, Bird notes the reliance of the epic hero Kambili upon his mother (1972: 282); Cashion talks of the prominent role played by women in Malinke hunter epics, and goes on to say of the Malinke and Bamana "royal epics": 'In most instances a woman turns out to be the person who enables the heir to attain success', citing many examples, including the episode under discussion (1982: 302). Moser has studied the importance of women in Sunjata's own career in the version of the epic by Kele Monson Jabate (KMJ,M), talking of a "balance of roles" in which, seemingly, the hero can only act after a woman has first acted herself (1974: 197). As well as the episode at present under discussion, Moser lists several instances of prior action by a woman and reaction of the hero which I have paraphrased as follows:

- (1) Sogolon's fetching of baobab leaves, an iron rod, and wooden staff before Sunjata can stand;
- (2) the nine witches' direction of which road to leave Manding by on exile;
- (3) Sunjata's success at the *sigi* game after being advised by his contestant's daughter;
- (4) Sogolon's death, allowing the hero to return to Manding;
- (5) Sunjata's crossing of the Niger after Sogolon's gift of a bracelet to the boatman. (see Moser 1974: 198)

It may be that the seductress motif is popular among the Malinke because, as I

suggested, it throws into relief the differential beliefs concerning women as mothers, on the one hand, and as wives or lovers on the other. In the epic's episode the seductress, the same woman, is sister to Sunjata, connoting and demonstrating uterine solidarity, but lover-wife to Sumanguru, connoting and demonstrating suspicion and anxiety. Tacitly, then, Malinke tradition accepts the crucial role of women in the attainment of the hero's goals, but the power of women is equally strong should it be employed to hinder the same heroic aims, as the example of Sumanguru and the seductress demonstrates.

#### **A Quarrel between Sunjata's brother and sister**

The expected solidarity between brother and sister can be illustrated in another part of the epic, in the incident mentioned in Chapter Five, in which Sunjata's sister prepares a meal for the delegates sent to recall her brother when they arrive at the hero's place of refuge. Found in seven versions of the epic,<sup>36</sup> the story usually goes that Sunjata's sister cooks a meal made from the hearts and livers of animals that the hero and his younger brother, Manding Bukari, or Manding Bori, have only just killed in the hunt, magically removing the organs from the animals while they are still in the bush. Opening the dead animals, the brothers find these parts missing. Sunjata identifies the loss as the work of his sister and brushes it off (in KMJ he is said to laugh, KMJ,D1: 61), but Manding Bukari takes the surprise badly, according to F2, MS and FDS, and an argument ensues between brother and sister. In F2 we hear the sister exclaim to him: 'You have insulted me' (323); in FDS and MS the pair have a contest of magical powers in which Manding Bukari causes his sister's clothes to fall to the ground. At this, Sogolon Kolonkan, the sister, pronounces a curse upon Manding Bukari: that his descendants shall never be kings (MS) or warriors (FDS). This incident can be related a story told in BS. According to Bamba Suso, Sunjata's younger brother, here called Fofana, bumps into his sister and pushes her to the ground when he is seeking out the hero to petition for his return to Manding. At

this action Sunjata declares: 'You will never be king of Manding' (BS: 57).

According to FDS, Manding Bukari's descendants today live at Hamina; according to MS at Sigiran and Deyela. I have not been able to locate Hamina on any map, but FDS may be referring to Hamana, a province in what is today northern Guinea. According to Person, Manding Bori is said to be the ancestor of the *Kafu* chiefs of Hamana (1972a: 21f.). Another tradition, from S, tells of an argument between Manding Bukari and Sunjata's wife, Diouroundi, which results in the brother's flight to Kita, where his descendants are still to be found today (S: 50). Perhaps these traditions, which seem to be employed to justify purported Malinke clan migrations, are etymologically connected to Sunjata's brother: *bori*, as we noted earlier, can mean "flight" in Malinke. The tradition that Manding Bori's descendants forfeited the right to rule in Manding, claimed by MS, is contradicted by oral traditions which link Manding Bori to the Abu Bakr of Ibn Khaldūn's history, whose descendants include the famous Mansa Mūsā (Levtzion 1963; Niane 1959). Nevertheless, the tradition that Sunjata's younger brother was excluded from the *mansaya* of Mali may reflect an attempt by Sunjata Keita's lineage to restrict, at least in the first instance, the descent of kingship to direct descendants of the first emperor.

Returning to our discussion of the relationship between brother and sister among the Malinke as presented by this incident in the epic, we can note that the heart and liver are the most highly prized parts of the game, with a traditional association with strength and bravery, and are usually reserved for the hunter himself (Cashion 1982: 247). The sister's action of stealing them from the cadaver of the animal her brothers have just hunted is therefore apparently provocative. In DK Sunjata calls her 'hot-headed' (285), which might imply censure, but as we have seen, he does not in fact openly criticise her act; rather, he learns from its unusual nature that special circumstances have prompted it, and rightly declares: 'We have a guest waiting for us at home' (DK: 285). Manding Bukari lacks his brother's understanding: in FDS he rails at his sister, prompting the (male) bard to offer the following apologia:

It was he after all had suffered the hunger.  
It was he after all had suffered the thirst,

And undergone those hardships,  
Having gone into the bush [to hunt] (162)

An added dimension can be given to the incident if we examine comparative evidence concerning the brother-sister relationship among the Kuranko. Jackson notes that, because, as he puts it, a sister often has to sacrifice her own desires and happiness to ensure her brother's successful marriage, there is an emphasis in their relationship of "spiritual indebtedness" on the part of the brother (1977: 125). This emotion is translated into special rights that a sister has over her brother, involving his physical and moral support for her in her marriage. Also - and significantly, for our discussion - she 'has the right to take food freely from a brother's plate' (ibid.). If this particular right were to hold, or to once have held, among the Malinke then it would render Manding Bukari's reaction indefensible, and thereby help to explain his sister's curse. The brother-sister bond, says Jackson, 'seems to be the most important of all male-female relationships' among the Kuranko; this relationship can normally be expected to produce blessings for the brother, but it has a downside - the curse which a sister can pronounce on her brother. Jackson quotes an informant:

If your mother curses you then God will tend to ignore that,  
but if your sister curses you then the curse will really  
fall (1977: 126)

This curse may cause a man's crops to fail and his marriage to be unfruitful (ibid.: 129). Thus it seems to attack a man's virility, his power to procreate. This belief can be compared to the putative result of Sogolon Kolonkan's curse on Manding Bukari - that his descendants would not be kings or warriors. We should also note that, among the Kuranko, a brother is prohibited from seeing his sister naked, as he is from any intimate contact with her; and that he should do nothing in front of her that might be construed as having a sexual connotation (ibid.: 128). In one Kuranko tale the themes of the sister's curse and her nakedness are intertwined. In the tale, two brothers pass their sister while she is bathing. One refuses to look at her,

while the other gazes at her despite, or rather, because of her nudity. The first brother is likened to the sun, which it is impossible to stare at, the second is like the moon, which is gazed on by all (i.e. who has no secrets from anyone). The same injunctions on brother-sister relations may hold among the Malinke. In BD, in a unique section of the narrative, we read how Sunjata's sister stands naked before the hero 'pour mettre rapidement fin aux jours de Soundiata' (26).<sup>37</sup>

The Kuranko view of brother-sister relations helps us to understand more concerning the details of the epic's incident. FDS and MS note that Sogolon Kolonkan cursed her brother after he removed her clothes by magic, which is a violation of the respect a brother should show for his sister, while in BS, where the brother (here, Fofana) and his sister fall down together after Fofana has pushed her, the brother breaks the injunction to refrain from activity which may be deemed to have a sexual implication. As Innes writes, attempting to understand the apparent severity of Sunjata's response to Fofana's act, 'it is possible that he may have suspected incest' (1974: 114-5).

Viewed in the light of the Kuranko evidence - if we can apply it to the Malinke - the incident which escalates into a quarrel between Sunjata's brother and sister appears as a severe indictment of Manding Bukari's behaviour toward his sister, while Sunjata is shown to respect her and accept her actions. It is in the light of this relationship between Sunjata and his sister that her seduction of Sumanguru, in the cause of Manding's independence, is to be viewed. Sogolon Kolonkan rewards Sunjata's correct behaviour with her beneficial support - support which gains him an empire and the kingship - while Manding Bukari's incorrect behaviour is said, according to this tradition, to result in his ancestors being excluded from the kingship or from the Malinke stratum of warriors.

We can also see more clearly now how the Malinke distinguish between women as mothers or sisters, on the one side, or as lovers or wives, on the other. The chaste mother-son and brother-sister relationships are wholeheartedly endorsed, so long as they are indeed above suspicion. Sumanguru is seen to fall partly because he ignores

his mother's advice, and because he puts too much trust in a woman who is his lover or wife; Manding Bukari is seen to suffer because he behaves wrongly toward his sister; but Sunjata is shown succeeding in his quest because of the aid of the same sister. On the other side, the sexual role of women is shown negatively in the seduction of Sumanguru, and, in that Manding Bukari breaks the prohibition on any actions between brother and sister that may be construed as sexual, in his exclusion from the *mansaya*. As Mamby Sidibé states at the start of his version of this episode, "Un dicton local dit: "Dans ta famille, ta soeur et ta mère son ceux qui t'aiment le plus"" (S: 44).

#### **The final battle between Sunjata & Sumanguru**

Twenty-nine of the thirty-five versions of the epic consulted record Sunjata's victory over Sumanguru<sup>38</sup> with only one of them, JBS, inserting a caveat to the effect that the outcome of the war is disputed, with Sunjata's descendants claiming victory for their ancestor and Sumanguru's descendants likewise asserting the triumph of their predecessor (JBS: 710). JBS's claim is supported by the Yugoslav traveller and poet Rastko Petrović, who wrote in 1930 of how Sumanguru's demise was disputed, with the Malinke claiming he was defeated, but the Bamana claiming he was 'unconquerable' (in Bowra 1952: 369). We shall discover later in the chapter how Sumanguru's memory is kept alive still today by the Bamana and Somono populations of Kulikoro, and it is probably to this reality that the griot Baba Sisoko and traveller Petrović are referring.

Insofar as Sumanguru can be identified with the Soso, and Sunjata with Mārī Jāta and "the people of Mālī", Malinke tradition appears to have retained the story of Sunjata's defeat of Sumanguru at least since the time of Ibn Khaldūn who, in the 1390s, heard from a Malian scholar in North Africa how the people of Mali had earlier

'vanquished the Sūsū and acquired all their possessions', and how 'Their greatest king, he who overcame the Sūsū, conquered their country, and seized the power from their hands, was named Mārī Jāta' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 317-8, 333).

Of these twenty-nine accounts, all but six<sup>39</sup> note the site of the final battle. The most common tradition locates the last battle at Krina (MAK, N, B, WK, KB, S) or Kirina (D, CL). Q also records an earlier, inconclusive battle at Krina (56). D, B and KB locate Krina/Kirina to the north of Bamako - approximately 10km north of Kulikoro, according to Delafosse's sketch-map (1972 ii: 171; see also Niane's map, 1984: 153 for a roughly similar position). Niane disagrees with Delafosse's identification of this village with the site of the final battle between the two combatants, favouring instead the site which is, as he puts it, 'entre Bamako et Kangaba' (1960a: 20 and n.1), commonly known as Krina, and home to the late bard Wa Kamissoko. This settlement, which is said to be the site of the last battle in N, CL, S and WK, is found some 40km south of Bamako on the west bank of the Niger, 4km south of Djeliba, to the west of which there is an extensive plain, sometimes said to have been the battlefield (N, CL, KB: 77; Q: 56). Other generally older versions locate the final battle at Dakajalan (Dakadyalan): F2 says that 'At Dagadjalla the Mande laughed and the Susu were beaten' (325); V names the site as Daga-Diala; ZB as Dahadiala. BS claims an earlier inconclusive battle occurred at Dakhajala. As was noted above, Dakajalan is not found in contemporary maps, but is placed on the east bank of the Niger, about 7km south of Krina, according to Cissé (Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 475), although a village called Dakadiala is located by Mauny (1961: 121) and Niane (1984: 128) in the hills to the west of the Niger river, near Niagassola. ZA and BS both claim that the last battle occurred at Kankigne, styling the settlement either Kankegnan or Kankinyang. Kankigne is given as the battle-site for an earlier confrontation in some versions (N, CL, KB) and, although not to be found on contemporary maps, has been placed in the province of Bure by Niane. BS asserts that Kankinyang was the name of Sumanguru's fortress, and V notes that it was at Daga-Diala that the Soso leader was based. KMJ, FDS and MS also link the final engagement

to Sumanguru's fortress town, which is called Bantan in KMJ, "Dark Forest" or Tu Fin in FDS, and Susu in MS. HO locates the last battle at Massala, which I have not been able to identify on any map, and H places it at Kiri Koro ("old Kiri"?, from *koro* = old), which is near Niagassola.

Appearing in less than a third of the versions which contain this portion of the epic, the association of the final battle between Sumanguru and Sunjata with Krina or Kirina is therefore not an undisputed tradition, although it has found its way into various modern histories of the period (Levtzion 1980: 59; Niane 1984: 131; Cissoko 1966: 44). Krina on the west bank of the Niger appears a plausible site for the battle, particularly because of the large plain in the vicinity; in addition, its proximity to Dakajalan makes it possible that these two traditions may in fact refer to the same actual battle-site. The name Krina or Kirina can also be compared to Kiri Koro, Kiri Koroni or Kri Koro, a village some 8km north-east of Niagassola in the Manding hills to the west of the Niger (Niane 1984: 128; Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 475), which is associated in Malinke creation or origin stories with the birth of Manding (Chapter Two), as well as itself being associated with the defeat of Sumanguru in H. The similarity in the names of this village and the site for the victory of Sunjata's Malinke forces may account for the popularity of this version of the story for, to a great extent, the defeat of Sumanguru is perceived by the Malinke as the birth of the empire.

The decisive weapon with which the Malinke army under Sunjata defeats Sumanguru is an arrow tipped with the spur of a white cock, the significance of which has already been elucidated. Eight versions claim it was Sunjata himself who fired the arrow,<sup>40</sup> but an equal number associate the act with one of Sunjata's followers, most commonly Sangaran Madiba Konte (Sunjata's mother's father or mother's brother, depending on the authority consulted), who is said to shoot the arrow in MAK, MB, D, ZB and BS. Fina Manga or Silla Makha fires it in A, Faganda Kanote in ZA, and Taabunna Kamara and Sanatara Fofana Darbo are both involved in DK. In addition, we can note that Fakoli is responsible for various "sacrifices" deemed necessary to destroy Sumanguru's

powers in KMJ, FDS and MS. Innes notes that the choice of a member of the Darbo (or Dabo) clan to fire the arrow in DK was probably prompted by the fact that the recitation was given in honour of a Darbo clan member, Seni Darbo (1974: 322). It is possible that a similar factor may have affected the griots' choice in some of the other recitations where a figure other than Sunjata Keita is credited with delivering the fatal blow to Sumanguru; but we can also note that Sangaran Madiba Konte, the figure most commonly associated with the fatal arrow, beyond Sunjata himself, is a maternal relative of the hero.

While in thirteen accounts the arrow is aimed at Sumanguru himself<sup>41</sup>, according to four accounts the aim of the weapon is a monster belonging to Sumanguru which has hitherto been the source of much of the Soso's strength.<sup>42</sup> The tradition linking Sumanguru to a monster, which has already been mentioned in Chapter Six, is found in one form or another in eight accounts,<sup>43</sup> while a further two note that Sumanguru had powers of transformation which he employed during his final battle (BS: 77; WK1: 395).

According to MB Sumanguru controlled 'un serpent monstre' with forty-four heads (168), ZA speaks of 'un diable à dix-sept têtes' which was called Sousoufengoto (30), Q speaks of a ten-headed serpent covered in flaming scales (57), while in DK it is a one-hundred-headed gnome (307) and in BS a seven-headed jinn living 'on the hill', Sumanguru's father, who had hitherto helped prevent the Soso ruler from suffering defeat (79). In addition, MAK, D and A report that Sumanguru was himself able to grow seven or eight heads during battle (MAK: 210; A: 361; D: 28).

That Sumanguru should be said to possess a monster or to resemble one in battle, rendering him invulnerable until special means are deployed to dispatch it, links the struggle between Sumanguru and Sunjata to the dragon-slaying or combat theme (already referred to in Chapter Three), which is itself a common constituent of the hero's biographical pattern. De Vries notes that a fight with a dragon or monster is a frequent part of the hero myth (1963: 215), and Raglan lists as point number eleven in his hero myth scheme 'victory over the king, and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast' (1936: 180).

The details of well-known stories such as those concerning the Hittite Illuyankas, the Babylonian Tiamat, or the Greek tale of Perseus and Andromeda, need not be rehearsed here; nor indeed do we need to repeat familiar African dragon-slaying tales such as the Soninke Bida, Nyanga Kikumu and Mwindo, Hausa Bayajidda or al-Sa'di's story of the founder of Songhai's defeat of the fish that terrorized the people of Koukiya. However, a few details germane to the interpretation of Sumanguru's monster or monstrous aspect can be mentioned.

While many of the Indo-European and Middle-Eastern dragon-slaying myths have been linked to the idea of creation (Fontenrose 1959: 461-2; Hooke 1963: 41-6; Cuthbertson 1975: 123), African stories associated with dragons or monsters can often be linked to a similar theme which one might term the passing of one order and establishment of a new one, in which the dragon-slaying ushers in the new situation. As Farias has written concerning the famous Wagadu legend, 'the decapitation of the Bida is not treated in the myth as marking only an end but also as indicating a beginning. Past and future grow from it' (1974: 484). The death of the Bida marks the downfall of Wagadu, but a common detail states that where its head or heads fell there prosperity was established (Bathily 1975: 8; Adam 1903-4: 94; Farias 1974: 485). In the Bayajidda myth, and the tale of the Songhai empire-founders, the classic motif of a wandering stranger who rids a community of a water-hoarding monster and thereby establishes a new, prosperous epoch is rehearsed (Frobenius 1913 11: 493; al-Sa'di 1964: 4-8). In the Mwindo epic the dragon, Kirimu, is slain by the hero, releasing still-living individuals from the dragon's carcass, who are previous victims of the creature (Biebuyck 1969: 129-34). This story is reminiscent of the widespread cliché, which we discussed in Chapter Four, concerning monsters said to be involved in circumcision rites of passage, according to which a creature swallows up the novices, spewing them out several days later as initiates (Frazer 1963: 905-17). In these stories we see most clearly the link between the dragon and the idea of creation or rebirth. The association of a dragon or monster with the defeat of Sumanguru seems therefore to underline the role of the epic of Sunjata as that of describing the

genesis of a new order, the termination of Sumanguru's rule and the establishment of a new Malinke state.

Also, one can note that several characteristics commonly associated by the traditionists with Sumanguru are typically found in the cross-cultural description of the dragon. We can quote Joseph Campbell on the image of the "tyrant-monster", whom he describes as

the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of "my and mine". The havoc wrought by him is described in mythology and fairy tale as being universal throughout his domain. . . . The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world (1949: 15)

Sumanguru, we can recall, is sometimes said to have embargoed trade on the Niger, to have "placed gourds over the mouths" of the Malinke, and to have brought upon himself his own downfall by his arrogant belief in his own ability to do without the support of his mother, who is often said to try to warn him about the seductress, and Fakoli. Joseph Fontenrose makes the following assertions regarding the characteristics of the dragon archetype:

The dragon's lechery . . . makes him an easy mark for the heroine's designs. His inordinate lust is the counterpart of the dragoness' erotic nature (1959: 260)

He also notes that the dragon is often tricked into defeat through an invitation to a feast. As we have seen, inordinate sexual and culinary desire are constituents of the traditions surrounding Sumanguru's downfall: he is persuaded to disclose the secret source of his strength by a seductress in return for sexual favours, while, as we saw in Chapter Six, he quarrels with Fakoli over the latter's wife, who is remembered chiefly for her prodigious abilities as a cook.

### **Flight to Kulikoro**

A few versions simply assert that Sumanguru died upon being hit by the arrow tipped

with a white cock's spur (MB: 170; BK: 231), but for the majority of accounts Sumanguru's demise is of a more complex nature. Five accounts place his death or disappearance at the site of the battle itself (A, D, Q, BS, BD), but seventeen versions recount a flight made by Sumanguru which ended at the settlement of Kulikoro.<sup>44</sup> As Q sites the final battle at Kulikoro, and JBS and MK also end the life of Sumanguru at the same town, altogether nineteen versions of the epic link the Soso ruler's demise to this place. In MA, the Soso armies are gradually pushed back to Kulikoro by Manding's forces, but for most accounts Sumanguru escapes on horseback, alone, or with a companion - his wife, griot, slave or son - making for the hills.<sup>45</sup> A few versions give details of the pursuers, often claiming that Sunjata was accompanied by Fakoli or Tira Makhan.<sup>46</sup>

Kulikoro (Koulikoro or Kulukoro) is a sizeable, traditionally Bamana and Somono, town about 50km north-east of Bamako on the west bank of the Niger river, some 90km from the riverine sitings of Krina or Dakajalan, and is today populated largely by Somono. In contrast to the wide plain by Krina, the land around Kulikoro is hilly and replete with rocks and caverns. The name of the settlement derives from the terrain: *kuru* means "rock", "hill" or "mountain", while *koro* can mean either "old" or "at the foot of" (Delafosse 1955: 423, 404-5). Hourst says the name is more accurately rendered "Kuoroukoro", which he translates as 'le vieux rocher' (1898a: 50); but Johnson, who says the name should be written as "Kulukoro", reports that the name is commonly given to mean "Under-the-Mountain" (1979: 259), which is a derivation also given by Petrović (in Bowra 1952: 369). Delafosse himself renders the name "au pied de la montagne" (1955: 406).

There are two distinct traditions relating to Sumanguru's demise, as well as several other traditions grouped around his fate and his memory. According to eight accounts, Sumanguru disappears into the mountain of Kulikoro, never to be seen again.<sup>47</sup> Thus we read in N how

having reached the summit of Koulikoro, Soumaoro hurried down the slope followed by [Sun] Djata. To the right he saw the gaping cave of Koulikoro and without hesitation he entered the black cavern (N: 67)

WK and KB say that the cave was sealed by a slab of stone after he had entered it; N and CL say it was linked to the river. AR writes that Sumanguru was 'englouti dans la montagne sacrée de Koulikoro' (171); JBS simply says that he disappeared into the mountain.

Commenting on this tradition, Niane asserts that it comes from the Hamana province school of griots, which is usually associated with the village of Fadama (1965: 98 n.66). Johnson claims this tradition to be the origin of the name of the settlement - "under-the-mountain" (1979: 259). Cross-culturally, we may note that disappearance into a cave may be identified as motif D 1552.5 Cave opens and hides fugitives or R 315 Cave as refuge. Caves have been utilized for centuries as refuges, storage spaces, and grave sites in the mountainous reaches of the Sudan, where the rock strata naturally furnish openings often hidden or inaccessible to the casual climber. Raymond Mauny writes:

Très nombreux sont au Soudan les aménagements de grottes ou d'abris sous roche, dont certains ont dû servir de refuges, depuis la préhistoire, lors de toutes les époques troublées ou bien, comme c'est le cas en pays dogon, de lieux de sépulture ou, dans d'autres cas, de réserves à provisions (1961: 129)

And Louis Desplagnes has written of these cave burial sites:

Les plus anciennes de ces sépultures paraissent être celles que l'on retrouve dans les crevasses profondes des roches au fond de grottes et d'excavations surbaissées ou dans des fissures étroites de la montagne (1907: 50)

One can also note that, according to the story reported in Adam, al-Ḥājj 'Umar met his death in a cave in which he took refuge when a gunpowder store was accidentally ignited, and that the cave was then turned into a shrine (1903-4: 123-4).

The second major tradition concerning Sumanguru's demise asserts that he was petrified, either at Kulikoro or elsewhere, and it is found in ten versions of the epic.<sup>46</sup> For Niane, who says that this tradition is from the Dioma province school of

griots, usually associated with Djeliba Koro, Sumanguru 'invoked his protective jinn for the last time' in this transformation (Niane 1965: 94 n.66). As we have already noted, Sumanguru is believed to possess the power of metamorphosis in BS and WK. ZA also sees the petrification as an act of will on Sumanguru's part, as does Johnson (1979: 259), but DK views it as God's punishment on the Soso leader.

Several European travellers have reported seeing stones associated by the inhabitants of Kulikoro with Sumanguru. Lieutenant de Vaisseau Hourst, who visited Kulikoro in the 1890s, reports that

pétrifié, le chef soninké [Sumanguru] conserve sa puissance magique et couvre le village de sa protection. Au pied de la colline, deux rochers sacrés reçoivent les offrandes des noirs, épis de mil, poulets, Calebasses de degué (bouillie claire de farine de mil) (1898a: 53)

In the 1920s two Europeans also reported seeing rocks linked to Sumanguru. Vidal writes that:

Le bloc de pierre dont il s'agit qui affecte vaguement la forme d'un cheval monté par trois cavaliers est situé près de l'ancien campement de tirailleurs, derrière les bâtiments de l'ancienne d'artillerie de Koulikoro (1924: 325 n. 1)

Rastko Petrović, who committed his African travel experiences and thoughts to paper in the book *Afrika* (Petrović 1955), visited Kulikoro in the company of a French colonial administrator, Jean Vuillet, in the 1920s. He describes how

Two enormous basalt stones as red as blood are overgrown by bushes and trees, according to the beliefs of the people they are Sumanguru and his wife (1955: 197)

Abdoulaye Sadjì (d. 1961), in his written version of the epic from the rendition of Bakary Diabaté (BD), writes that the stone "statue" of Sumanguru still exists, but that it speaks only to the descendants of Sunjata, while 'Aux yeux des autres mortels, elle passe pour un tertre sans intérêt' (BD: 32).

Another factor to be considered in assessing the tradition of Sumanguru's

petrification is the presence of megaliths at sites in the region around Kulikoro, some in the form of phalluses, some carved with geometric designs, and of an indeterminate age. The most famous are found at Tondidarou, 16km north-west of Niafounke, on lake Takadji, some distance from Kulikoro, but others are to be found at Moribabougou, about 30km from Kulikoro, on the road to Bamako. Here Desplagnes saw three megaliths varying in height from 1m 50cm to 2m 70cm and later Mauny identified two (Desplagnes 1907: 39 and figure 41; Mauny 1961: 129-34). While these particular stones could not be confused with those associated with Sumanguru, which seem to be natural rock formations at Kulikoro, they suggest that the veneration of stones at Kulikoro may be part of a more general culture of megaliths in the area.

The tradition regarding Sumanguru's petrification can be classified under motif D 231 Transformation: man into stone or D 671.0.1 Fugitive transforms himself to stone. African examples can be found, for instance, in Franz de Zeltner's *Contes du Sénégal et du Niger* (1913: 177-80, 193). While it is often thought that these tales tend to arise to account for the existence of anthropomorphic rock formations (Gaster 1969: 160f, 366n), the idea of a person being transformed into stone can also express the conviction or hope that life is not simply a transient and fleeting phenomenon for, according to Eliade, the stone can represent the imperishable, mineral, "eternal soul" (1979: 114-8; see also Jaffé 1964: 232-4). Stone may also be regarded as a symbol of death, forming a binary opposition with liquid/water, often associated with life and birth (Dundes 1980: 101-8). We can note that both FDS and MS describe Sumanguru's demise as "drying up" - a potent image of human mortality, particularly in areas where lack of water is a constant threat to life. Symbolically, both traditions of Sumanguru's demise or disappearance may be identical, both effectively presenting a picture of the Soso ruler's dehydration and petrification, either by entering a cave in the mountain or being "swallowed up" by the mountain, or by turning to stone.

A, D, S and V contain another tradition concerning Sumanguru's demise and legacy.<sup>49</sup> They record that Sumanguru left behind him, either on the battlefield at Krina (D), at

Konina (S), or at Kulikoro (V), a silver bracelet through which a massive baobab has since grown. A says that the bracelet had such a wide circumference that the trunk of the baobab never in fact touched it; but D says that it was the bracelet pressing on the bole of the tree which marks it out. He wrote in 1913 that:

on montre en effet encore, sur l'emplacement de Kirina, un baobab portant au niveau du sol un étranglement remarquable que l'on attribue au fait qu'il a été, dans son jeune âge, encerclé par le bracelet de Soumangourou (1959: 80 n.37)

Hourst writes (1898a) about the existence of an enormous and sacred baobab in the centre of Kulikoro which he says is many hundreds of years old and of which he provides a photograph (58-9). Vidal talks of a very old baobab, sited near the central avenue of the village of Kulikoro, near the river bank, which is said to be the same one that grew through Sumanguru's bracelet (1924: 325). Contemporary informants make no mention of the baobab at Kulikoro which we may assume has since disappeared. The silver bracelet may be connected to the tradition noted by McNaughton which we mentioned above. He reported how Sumanguru was said to be protected by an amulet, called a *nègè-haya*, which is formed into a twisted bracelet of metal, and which protects the wearer from metal weapons (1988: 60).

Six accounts link Sumanguru's demise to birds - in addition to the widespread tradition which says his career was ended by the spur of a white cock. In BS Sumanguru transforms himself into a Senegalese coucal, evading his pursuers (79), which the *jeli* says is the reason for the fact that 'Even today, if you fire at a Senegalese coucal in the bush, /Quite often the gun will shatter in your hands' (77). In N, CL and KB a large black bird is said to hover over the battlefield at Krina, and to be noticed by Sumanguru, who takes it for a bad omen, calling it the "bird of Krina" (N: 65; CL: 204; KB: 77). WK, S and KMJ report that a bird used to be seen at the site of Sumanguru's purported disappearance, at Kulikoro, which they call the "coq de pagode", although Wa Kamissoko styles it the *dyamba toutou* (WK1: 405; S: 45; KMJ,D1: 72). The "coq de pagode" (*Centropus monarchus*) is rendered in Malinke *Kōroko*,

but this does not imply a link to Kulikoro, rather, it is supposed to derive from its song (Delafosse 1955: 409). There is still today an esoteric cult associated with the "bird of Krina" called the *Kirina Kono*, of which the chief of Krina is the presiding high priest, termed *N'Fa Soma* ("my father the priest"). Upon accession to this office the candidate must renounce his wives, give up sexual relations, and cease to pray (Farias forthcoming). It is not clear what the connection is between the present-day cult - for which there is in fact an origin tale couched in Islamic motifs, according to Farias - and the appearance of the bird of Krina in the Sunjata epic, or between these and the Kulikoro "coq de pagode".

One common element which binds many of the traditions surrounding Sumanguru's demise and his material legacy is the idea that his remains exude great sexual potency. S, KMJ and WK assert that the "coq de pagode" responds, or used until recently to respond, according to KMJ,D1, to questions concerning Sumanguru's continued virility - in the affirmative. For example, WK says:

Si tu disais: 'Ah! qu'il était bien viril, Soumaworo,'  
Le *dyamba toutou* répondrait: Même aujourd'hui encore,  
Soumaworo garde toute sa virilité (WK1: 405)

According to S, V, and Hourst, it is the baobab associated with Sumanguru which is believed to have the properties of sexual potency. The image of a large tree growing through a bracelet speaks for itself. Hourst (1898a: 58) and Vidal (1924: 325 n.2) both report that it is believed to give children to barren women, while de Zeltner and some other sources say that the same claims are made about the stone remains associated with Sumanguru (1913: 42-3), as we shall see below.

### **The Cult of Sumanguru (*Nyanan*)**

Some authorities also associate the cult of Sumanguru with fertility. This cult is described to us by several European travellers and colonial administrators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and by other writers more recently.

Hurst, de Zeltner and Petrović report that sacrifices were made at the stones associated with Sumanguru at Kulikoro, as does Lieutenant de Vaisseau Jaime, another early French visitor to Kulikoro (1894: 331). Petrović gives us this first-hand description from the 1920s.

We found Nyamkoro under a big ... tree sitting on the roots of the tree. He is very old, he is dirty, thin, but his eyes are still clear. His hair is twisted. Vuillet is explaining to him that I believe in his fetishes and the power of Sumanguru and that I am asking him to make a sacrifice for me. As a man who does that all day long he calmly says that he will do it and we send someone to buy a white chicken (1955: 198)

Petrović goes on to describe the site: 'Two stones a thousand times scattered with blood, a few broken calabashes, in which there used to be doll (holy beer) [*dolo*], one round stone or ostrich egg stuck with feathers' (199). Vidal, writing in the early 1920s, also speaks of the cult associated with Sumanguru at Kulikoro which, he says,

se traduit par de nombreuses offrandes en colas, poulets, moutons, victuailles, remises à une sorte de prêtre sacrificateur, dénommé Nianankoro, qui veille jalousement sur le rocher hanté par l'esprit de Soumanhourou (1924: 325 n.1)

Hurst, who also notes the sacrifices, tells us how, in order to construct a military encampment near Kulikoro in the 1890s, he had first to consult the oracle in the village linked to Sumanguru to obtain permission (1898a: 54).

The hill of Kulikoro is called Niama by Petrović, Niania Kourou by de Zeltner (1913: 42), and Nianan Kuru by contemporary informants, the latter being the name given to the priest of the cult by Vidal (Nianankoro) and Petrović (Nyamkoro).<sup>50</sup> Lieutenant de Vaisseau Jaime, who was in Kulikoro in 1889 and 1890, gives us the fullest description of the hill:

Ce massif, nommé le rocher de Koulikoro ... est coupé, depuis le faite jusqu'au pied en deux parties distinctes, par une crevasse aux parois inaccessibles, large de 15 mètres et profonde de 40. (1894: 79)

This crevasse, which is populated by snakes, was once a river bed, suggests Jaime.

Jaime's description of the terrain of the hill, accompanied by a sketch of it, alludes to several features of the legends associated with the demise of Sumanguru. He writes of how it

est un fouillis de roches dont les unes, surplombant la plaine, ne tiennent que par des miracles d'équilibre; d'autres forment des arceaux et des portiques aux proportions gigantesques; on y trouve des grottes et des cavernes profondes. (1894: 81)

Jaime also notes how the plateau of the hill, which was surprisingly well-watered, was home to snakes, lizards, monkeys, and large maroon-plumaged birds, which reminded him of large quail (1894: 83), and which may perhaps be compared to the "coq de pagode" associated by some authorities with Sumanguru's cult. This hill is described as a sanctuary for runaway slaves by Jaime, Hourst and Petrović, as it was earlier in the nineteenth century by the travellers William Gray and Dr. Dochart. They report how

The population of Kooli-Kooro, which is a considerable town, is entirely composed of murderers, thieves and runaway slaves, who live there exempt from the punishment their crimes merit in consequence of their wearing about their persons, a stone (taken from a hill in the vicinity of the town), and which, from a superstitious belief among the Bamarras, would immediately kill any one who should touch them; and such is the dread entertained of this place, that the very name must not be mentioned in presence of the king [of Segou, See Korro] (1825: 255)

Although they do not mention Sumanguru, it seems clear the "hill in the vicinity of the town" is Nianan Kuru, the mountain linked to Sumanguru, and the "superstitious belief" concerns the Soso chief's still-extant powers. In addition, we can note that Petrović and Vidal both say that no Keita clansmen will venture to climb the hill.<sup>51</sup>

The cult as described by contemporary authors shares similarities with that reported from the 1890s and 1920s. Several commentators and epic accounts give the name of the cult as *Nyanan*.<sup>52</sup> Johnson translates this word as "sacred fetish" (1979: 260), and it is described by Cissé as 'le nom générique qu'attribuent les Bambara et le Malinkés à tout esprit divinisé'(1975: 407). Johnson describes the cult object as 'a

globe-shaped stone, which has been carved into interlacing diamond patterns', which we can identify with Petrović's "round stone" or "ostrich egg". Diabaté speaks of 'une bûche entourée de trois pierres' (1975: 80), while both note that sacrifices are made there.

These sacrifices are primarily to overcome barrenness in women, as is stated by commentators as well as some versions of the epic.<sup>53</sup> For example, speaking of Kulikoro, MK states:

Even today [1975], 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 (MK: 713)

That Sumanguru should be remembered chiefly through his putative ability to provide fertility to those who lack it offers an interesting insight into the traditions associated with the ruler's demise. As has already been pointed out, Sumanguru's downfall is often associated with his sexuality - he gives up the secret of his strength in return for sexual favours, and loses his general, Fakoli, over his desire for that one's wife. The white cock's spur has been taken by Pageard and Innes to be a symbol of an attack on Sumanguru's virility, while several of the traditions associated with his disappearance can be said to have sexual overtones. We have already noted the sexual connotations of the baobab which supposedly grew through the silver bracelet; in addition, the stones into which Sumanguru was transformed might be viewed as phallic symbols, in common with the phallic-shaped megaliths found in the area. Also, the linking of Sumanguru's death to a bird of some kind has, potentially, sexual significance. Birds have been seen as symbols of male sexuality. While the Bird of Krina is viewed as an omen of death, the *coq de pagode* continues to proclaim Sumanguru's virility, according to some accounts. Sumanguru's disappearance or death, it might be argued, is to be seen not as the termination of his powers but as the point of their transference into another sphere, that of transcendent sexuality and fertility: Sumanguru's extraordinary powers during life, which exhibited a strong sexual aspect, are seemingly transformed in his

disappearance or death into an inexhaustible fount of sexual potency.

The *Nyanan* cult associated with Sumanguru at Kulikoro shares many features with village cults among the Bamana as described by the French ethnologists Louis Tauxier and Germaine Dieterlen. These cults in general consist of a sacred tree (*dasiri*), a protected species of animal, and a ritual of sacrifices, often for childlessness, upon the success of which the mother's child's name would bear witness to the cult's efficacy (Tauxier 1927: 195-8; Dieterlen 1951: 90-2). Desplagnes (1907: 39) and Tauxier (1927: 205-6) note how the central cult object is on occasion a standing stone rather than a tree. Now we can compare the *dasiri* to the baobab at Kulikoro or Krina associated with Sumanguru, and the stone monuments linked to the Soso ruler with that variant form of central cult object, both of which are said to serve as places of sacrifice, as they do in the *Nyanan* cult. The practice of naming a child of a once barren mother in a particular fashion and linked to the cult shrine is mentioned for the *Nyanan* cult by MK (713), WK (WK1: 407) and de Zeltner (1913: 43n). Petrović describes monkeys as roaming freely over the hill associated with Sumanguru (1955: 197), while Dieterlen states that the monkey is the sacred animal at Kulikoro (1951: 139). The round stone reported by Petrović and Johnson as the central object of the cult at Kulikoro may be compared with the *boli* or *nyana* at which Dieterlen states sacrifices are made in Bamana village cults, and which she describes as globule-shaped objects, made out of a variety of materials.

In conclusion we can note some examples which suggest Sumanguru's memory has become a matter of local custom and pride for Kulikoro, assuming a life beyond the epic itself. Jaime notes how Sumanguru's memory is invoked by the local griots of Kulikoro when a theft has occurred, threatening the miscreant with Sumanguru's vengeance, while Hourst described Sumanguru as covering the village of Kulikoro with his protection (1898a: 53). Today, even the local football team is called "Nianan de Kulikoro", and McNaughton notes that Sumanguru is honoured at Kulikoro by the Bamana, who believe he will grant any wish to them (1988: 63), confirming that the cult of Sumanguru, which shares many traditions with the epic of Sunjata, remains a powerful

element in contemporary Bamanan society.

### Recapitulation

This chapter, while treating a number of diverse story-elements from the epic, each with their own contexts and meanings, has revealed nevertheless a rich layer of sexual symbolism concerning Sumanguru. Comparing these insights with those gained in Chapter Six, we note how Sumanguru is portrayed as rejecting and debasing kinship ties, but as overvaluing sexual, or perhaps generally non-kin ties. He discounts his maternal link to Fakoli in favour of a culinarily-expert woman; he ignores his mother's warnings in favour of trust in a sexually attractive stranger. Both the manner of his death and the nature of his cult memory emphasize his status as a sexual being, dangerous but potent. Sunjata is, in contrast, rarely depicted in the epic as sexually motivated. Occasionally he has a wife (S) or, earlier, a "sweetheart" at the court of Mema (e.g. CL), and traditions certainly accord him direct descendants; yet in the epic story itself he is described as remaining close to his mother until her death and, after that, as employing his sister in order to defeat his enemy. Even when another figure fires the fatal arrow at Sumanguru, it is most commonly a maternal relative. As far as I am aware, no cult which stresses fertility surrounds his memory, and certainly in death - unlike his great adversary - he is not symbolised as fecund or potent (Chapter Eight). Sunjata, in contrast to Sumanguru, undervalues those non-kin relations which, we might say, are based on personal desire, in favour of familial ties, the ties of duty and responsibility.

However, one should not form the opinion that Sunjata fails to make alliances beyond his kin: as we have attempted to show in Chapter Five, the exile of the hero emphasizes these alliances, while Sunjata's forces are largely composed of non-kin. And even in the seduction of Sumanguru by Sunjata's sister, three accounts (N, CL, KB) make the sister who gains the secret of Sumanguru's power not a daughter of Sogolon herself, but of Sogolon's co-wife, Sasuma Berete - sister, in fact, of Sunjata's early

rival for the throne, Dankaran Tuman. In this way the epic seems to be implying that the beneficial brother-sister relationship, highlighted in the relations between Sunjata and his sister, need not actually be limited to maternal sisters (*baden*), but may equally apply between those with only the same father (*faden*), providing the two participants share the same generous emotions.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: NOTES

1. MAK: 209-10; MA: 168; A: 358; D: 24-5; AR: 169; ZA: 30-2; ZB: 42; F2: 324-5; V: 324; S: 43-4; H: 112-3; P: 55; N: 47-56; CL: 184-93; KMJ,D1: 64-8; FDS: 167-71; MS: 172-79; DK: 289-93; BK: 221f.; BS: 59-71; B: 70-6; JBS: 710; WK1: 311-77; KB: 55-9; DMS: lines 68-75.
2. MA, AR, ZA, F, V, S, N, CL, KMJ, FDS, MS, B, JBS, DMS.
3. BS, WK, KB. DK does not say, but implies Nema. According to H, Sunjata returned from Nianiba; according to P, from Mossiland; according to A, from Lambe; according to D, from Labe; according to MAK, from Sangaran.
4. V: 324; N: 47; CL: 185; KMJ,D1: 64; KB: 55; MS: 172.
5. D: 22-3; N: 48; DK: 289; B: 76; WK1: 317-9; CL: 188.
6. Niane (1960a: 19) notes that Sunjata was supported by the king of Tabo, identifying him as Fran Camara and also linking him to Labe.
7. N: 54; CL: 193; DK: 289; WK1: 321-3; KB: 55; ZB: 40.
8. Cf. Niane, who notes that Kamandian Camara of Sibi supported Sunjata and that 'the meeting with Sundiata took place on the plain of Sibi' (1984: 131). Niane also notes that the rulers of Sibi and Tabon were cousins (*ibid.*), as does N: 54.
9. Cp. the tradition of Kele Monson Jabate recorded in Ly-Tall 1977 where the griot claims that the Tunkara, whose support Sunjata enjoyed, came from Wagadu, not Mema (191-2).
10. All but MAK, A, D, H and P note Mema or Nema as the point of departure.
11. See sketch-maps in Niane 1965: vi and Ly-Tall 1977: 40 for this curved route.
12. V: 324; KMJ,D1: 66; FDS: 169-71; MS: 173-4; WK1: 345-53; DMS: lines 44-6 and 70-3.
13. Santraule Dan'na (KMJ), Sasagalo the Tall (FDS), Salenya Kono (MS), Kankan Saro (WK), Sansang Sagulung (DMS). Diabaté says Santraule Dan'na is an allegorical name, meaning 'celui qui va loin' (1975: 73).
14. The Rubicon, for example, which was crossed by Julius Caesar in 49 B.C., marked the boundary between Cisalpine Gaul and the Roman Republic. Other, African, examples of military-based river crossing tales can be found in Adam 1903-4: 602f. and Lanrezac 1907: 209.
15. A: 358; D: 24-5; H: 113; FDS: 169; MS: 175; DK: 293; WK1: 367-77; KB: 56; N: 59-61.
16. Compare N: 'One does not wage war without saying why it is being waged. Those fighting should make a declaration of their grievances to begin with.' (59-60).
17. MA: 168; AR: 169; ZB: 41-2; F2: 324-5; N: 48-53; CL: 187-93; KMJ,D1: 67-8; FDS: 170-1; BS: 71; B: 76; JBS: 710; KB: 57; MS: 178-9.

18. ZB: 41; N: 49; CL: 186; B: 76. This battle is also recorded in Niane 1960a: 19.
19. ZB: 41; F2: 324; N: 53-4; BS: 71; KB: 57; CL: 192-3.
20. In ZA "Kankegnan" is the site of the decisive battle between Sunjata and Sumanguru (31).
21. Compare to DK, where the area in which Sumanguru has his headquarters is called Tuu Sinna (271).
22. In addition, MS says Sunjata "entered" Manden Kakama after a defeat (179), a settlement that is linked by some traditions to Sunjata's father's agricultural lands (Johnson 1979: 223). Also, KMJ,M mentions a stop by the hero at Bantan (305), which Moser identifies as an allegorical name meaning "endless" (1974: 346).
23. Diabaté also claims, quoting Niane, that Sunjata may be portrayed as a settlement founder in order to liken him more closely to Alexander the Great (1975: 75). I have not traced the origin of this quote. On Sunjata and Alexander see Chapter Four, note 7.
24. HO: 52-3; MAK: 210; MA: 168-9; A: 359-61; D: 25-6; AR: 170; ZA: 27-30; V: 321, 323, 324; S: 44-5; Q: 60-5; N: 56-8; CL: 149-73; KMJ,D1: 71; FDS: 172-3; MS: 182-3; DK: 303-7; BK: 207-19; BS: 73-9; KB: 63-9.
25. MA: 168; A: 360; D: 26; AR: 170; ZA: 28; S: 44; Q: 66; N: 65; CL: 173; KMJ,D1: 71; FDS: 172; MS: 183; DK: 307; BK: 219; BS: 75; KB: 67; B: 72-3.
26. MA, A, D, AR, ZA, S, Q, CL, N, KMJ, DK, BK, BS, KB, B. According to MAK, Sumanguru's strength resided in a white feather (209-10).
27. See Camara 1976: 27, 30; Brun 1910: 855-8; Frazer 1910 ii: 543-5.
28. See note 24, above. The sister's name is not given in MAK, MA, AR, DK or BK. In HO she is Ma (52), in D (25) she is Dyigui Maniamba Soukho, in A (359) Digui Maniamba Soukhou, in BS (73) Nyakhaleng Juma Suukho. In V (321) she is Sougolon Kalouka, in S (44) Sogolon (or Meniamba Souko), in Q she is Jyegue (60), in Anon. 1949 she is Diegue. In KMJ (D1: 71) she is Sogolon Kolonkan, in FDS (171) and MS (182) she is Sugulun Kulunkan. In N (57), CL (194) and KB (63) she is Nana Triban. In ZA she is Kilidioumasourho (17).
29. MAK, MA, A, D, AR, S, KMJ,D1, FDS, MS, DK, BK, BS.
30. V, Q, N, CL, KB. Monteil (1929: 355) records that it was Sumanguru who in fact asked for a daughter of Nare Famaghan in marriage. He calls her Kango-ba. This version of events does not agree with the tradition he recorded in 1898 (MA), where the sister goes of her own accord to Sumanguru. It may be that he was presenting another tradition, or trying to make MA more historically plausible. In a contrary move, while Sunjata's sister is sent to Sumanguru by her brother, Dankaran Tuman, in KMJ,M, in Diabaté's prose version of the same telling (KMJ,D1), she decides to go to Sumanguru herself.
31. A: 360; AR: 170; S: 44; KMJ,D1: 71; BS: 73; KB: 63.
32. MAK, A, D, AR, ZA, V, S, N, CL, BK, KB. In KB, ZA, V, N and CL marriage was part of a prearranged deal to placate Sumanguru.

33. MA: 168; A: 360; D: 25; AR: 170; S: 44; FDS: 172; BK: 217; BS: 73.
34. A calls Maniamba Soukhou the "new Delilah" (360); S speaks in this context of Samson and Delilah as well as Diana and Hercules (44). However, it is possible that, in the case of A, the reference is an interpolation on the part of the collector, G. Adam, as no reference is found in the generally similar text D; while for S, we must note that Mamby Sidibé was not a *jeli* but a school teacher and writer on Malinke culture. Johnson notes the clichéd nature of this episode, comparing it to Motif N 476 Secret of unique vulnerability disclosed (1979: 258-9).
35. See Willis 1981: 95 (east African); Dumestre 1979: 183-269 (Bamanan); Bird 1974: xiii, 85-7 (Malinke); Wright 1979: 35 (Gambian).
36. ZA: 24; ZB: 43; F2: 322-3; KMJ,D1: 60; FDS: 161-4; MS: 162-5; DK: 285.
37. This unique episode in BD (26-9) appears to be a distant variant of the seduction episode, but in which many of the key elements are reversed. Thus: it is Sunjata's sister who tries to seduce Sunjata, by appearing before him naked, out of jealousy for his success; while Sunjata then makes her marry Fakoli after forcibly demonstrating to her his military prowess. BD here goes against the norms established in the other accounts examined - such as Sunjata's good relationship with his sister - norms which, as we have shown, accord with basic Malinke values - in this case, the solidarity of children of the same mother.
38. HO: 53; MAK: 210; MA: 170; MB: 170; A: 361-2; D: 27; AR: 171; ZA: 31; ZB: 42; F2: 325; V: 324; S: 45; Q: 67; H: 113; P: 55; N: 64-5; CL: 203-4; KMJ,D1: 72; FDS: 174; MS: 185; BS: 79; BK: 227-31; DK: 309-11; B: 76-8; WK1: 403; KB: 75-8; BD: 32; JBS: 710; MK: 713.
39. MA, MB, A, AR, DK, BD.
40. AR, S, Q, N, CL, BK (here the white cock's spur is fired from a gun), B, KB.
41. MAK, A, D, AR, ZB, S, Q, N, CL, BK, DK, B, KB.
42. MB, ZA, BS, DK. In DK both the monster (here a gnome) and Sumanguru himself are the objects of various magic arrows.
43. MAK: 210; MB: 168; ZA: 30; DK: 307; Q: 57; BS: 79; A: 361; D: 28. A ten-headed monster is also found in "La Ruse de Diégué" a theatrical version of the contest between Sunjata and Sumanguru (Anon. 1949: 796, 800).
44. HO: 53; MA: 170; AR: 171; ZA: 31-2; ZB: 42; V: 324; S: 45; H: 113; N: 65-7; CL: 205; KMJ,D1: 72; FDS: 175-6; MS: 186-7; DK: 311; B: 79; WK1: 403; KB: 78.
45. Sumanguru is accompanied, on horseback, by his wife (V, FDS, DK), his son (N, CL), slave (V) or griot (HO).
46. See KB, DK, FDS, MS, N, CL.
47. JBS: 710; MK: 713; WK1: 403; KB: 78; N: 65-7; CL: 205; B: 79; AR: 171.
48. Q: 67; HO: 53; ZA: 32; V: 325; S: 45; KMJ,D1: 72; FDS: 176; MS: 186-7; DK: 311; BD: 32.
49. A: 362; D: 29; V: 325; S: 45.

50. The informants, whom Paulo Farias was kind enough to interview for me in January 1988, were Yahya Coulibaly and Cheick Oumar Mara, of the Institut des Sciences Humaines, Bamako.
51. Hourst 1898a: 54; Vidal 1924: 325n.1; Petrović 1955: 197; Jaime 1894: 329.
52. Johnson 1979: 260; Diabaté 1975: 80; Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 407n; S: 45; WK1: 407; MK: 713.
53. MS: 187; WK1: 407; Johnson 1979: 261; Diabaté 1975: 80; de Zeltner 1913: 42-3n.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE WESTWARDS EXPANSION OF MALI & THE DEATH OF SUNJATA

In this chapter we are concerned with what are, chronologically and in terms of the narrative, the ultimate episodes of the epic of Sunjata; we are told of Tira Makhan's expedition to defeat the king of Jolof and to obtain horses for Sunjata's warriors, of the same general's campaign of conquest in Senegambia, and finally, of the death of Sunjata Keita. Considerably fewer versions of the epic narrate these story-elements than those which deal with the war against Soso and the death or disappearance of Sumanguru; the epic narrative loses its dramatic focus at this stage now that the contest with Sumanguru has been concluded and won; indeed, it is quite common for a recitation of the epic to end with Sumanguru's death or disappearance at Kulikoro and for the bard to move on to discuss local traditions arising from the time of Sunjata. For the Gambian Malinke, the conquest of Tira Makhan in the west is a local tradition, yet it is clearly also part of the wider Sunjata corpus of traditions, appearing in many recitations by *jeliw* from the Manding heartland.

In the course of the chapter I suggest that the episode of Mali's quest for horses, while reflecting an actual trade route for horses, also serves to demonstrate elements of the *jeli-horon* relationship; and that the epic's account of the westward expansion of Mali also reflects actual historical events, to some degree. In contrast, I argue that the traditions concerning Sunjata's death must be analyzed in a purely symbolic context, and that they provide further pointers to the true nature of the opposition between Sunjata and Sumanguru outlined in the epic.

#### **Campaign against the king of Jolof**

Seven of the thirty-five versions of the epic analysed in this thesis contain an episode associated with the king of Jolof, known as Jolof Mansa, or Jolofin Mansa, in

which this one is defeated by a Malinke force under Tira Makhan.<sup>1</sup> In N Jolofin Mansa is defeated by Sunjata himself (84). In addition, Ly-Tall 1977 contains a paraphrased version of the episode of Jolofin's subjugation and of Tira Makhan's conquest of Gambia by the bard Kele Monson Jabate (191-2); B.K. Sidibe reports a version of the story from Gambia itself (Sidibe 1972a: 6); and Niane gives a short summary of the episode (1984: 133 n.40).

The tale goes that Sunjata, after the defeat of Sumanguru and the Soso, determines to procure horses for Mali. According to Ly-Tall and B.K. Sidibe's versions of the episode, his aim is to use them for a mounted military force in the Malian army. He sends a messenger or a delegation with gold, either to the king of Jolof himself or to an unnamed trader in Senegambia. The figure most commonly associated with the mission is one whose name appears variously as Wulan Wulan Suleman (KMJ), Bulan Bulan Sulemani (FDS), Were Were Solomani (KB) or Woure Woure Solomani (WK). This messenger travels west to buy horses but, according to ZA, F, KMJ, FDS and Ly-Tall's rendering of Kele Monson, the king of Jolof refuses to sell horses to the Malinke, while in BS, KB, WK, Niane, KMJ,M and B.K. Sidibe's account he is said to confiscate the horses that the mission has already bought elsewhere. Jolofin Mansa declares that the Malinke are not fit for horses: they are 'hunters and drinkers' (F2: 325), or 'they who are only fit to look at dogs' (KMJ,M: 319), while in KMJ,D1 the king describes Sunjata as 'un vulgaire chasseur' (82) or in FDS as a 'runner of dogs' (178).<sup>2</sup> In line with his categorization of the Malinke in general as "mere hunters", the king of Jolof offers the mission from Mali typical gifts for hunters: animal hides (ZA, BS, F, KMJ, KB, Ly-Tall, Niane), sandals or leather to make them (ZA, BS, WK, Ly-Tall, Niane), and dogs (KMJ, FDS, KB, Ly-Tall). The implication, as Innes notes, is that Sunjata 'should not aspire to ride a horse', but should be content simply to hunt (1974: 128).

The messenger returns to Mali with these articles from the king of Jolof but, according to ZA, F, WK and B.K. Sidibe, each of those the messenger asks to convey the news to Sunjata refuses to do so, until a griot agrees to perform the task. This is how the incident is recorded in F2:

Sirmangande [the messenger] returned to his land. He first met Ulali Brahima, the ancestor of the Garanke, and said to him, 'Go to Sunjatta and tell him that the King of Wolof has mocked his messenger and said that the Malinke are hunters and drinkers, but not warriors, and that horses are only for real kings.'

'I am a worker and work well', he replied, 'but I am not the man to speak such a thing to Sunjatta.'

Sirmangande then met Fosanna, the ancestor of the Fina.

'Go to Sunjatta and tell him that the King of Wolof has mocked his messenger and said that the Malinke are hunters and drinkers, but not warriors, and that horses are only for real kings.'

'I play the drums well', Fosanna said, 'but I am not suitable to say bad words to Sunjatta'.

Sirmangande, the messenger, next interviews Dumfalia, the ancestor of the *numuw* (blacksmiths), who also declines to perform the task; however, Surrakata, ancestor of the "Djalli" (*jeliw* or griots) replies to the messenger in the affirmative, with the words 'I know what to say' (F2: 325-6).

In this incident F brings out clearly the theory behind the Malinke system of hereditary professions or *nyamakala* groups. The messenger interviews the *garanke* (leatherworker), the *fina* (a type of bard, with different responsibilities to the *jeli*), the *numu* and *jeli*. Only one of these counts as one of his functions the "mastery of words" - the *jeli*; while each claims to perform good work they rightly decline to assume responsibility beyond their presumed abilities, and refuse the task offered them. Of course the story is itself told by a griot and, as with other sections in the epic, it is possible that the tellers exaggerate their own importance in the life of the hero; nevertheless, this "division of labour" is a concept basic to the Malinke system of hereditary professions, and is a widely accepted pattern among members of traditional Malinke society. In WK the messenger approaches first the "four men of talents in Manding" - that is to say, the hereditary professionals - and the five clans of marabouts before settling on the griot, Bala Faseke, for the performance of the task (WK1: 191-3).

ZA does not present such an unambiguous explication of the Malinke system of hereditary professions, but it does relate how various individuals decline to inform

the emperor of the bad news until a griot - in this case, as in WK, he is Bala Faseke - is approached. In B.K. Sidibe we are told that 'None but the griot could be found who dared to break the news to Sunjata' (1972a: 6); while in KMJ it is also a griot (Kalajan Sangoi, ancestor of the Jabate) who announces the results of the mission to Sunjata, although we do not hear of the multiple refusals leading up to this choice. But in all of these versions the message is clear: that it is a griot's task to act as go-between for people and ruler - he is the *Belen Tigi*, "master of the word", whose expertise allows him to speak to the ruler of things which others would not dare to mention. We can examine some practical aspects of this special relationship between griot and patron, which was discussed formally in Chapter Six, in the description of the interview between Sunjata and the griot in ZA and F2.

In ZA the emperor is said to sit in his hammock all day and to be overweight, and Bala Faseke jokingly insults Sunjata for his laziness and his obesity before introducing the topic of the king of Jolof, bidding Sunjata direct his anger not at the griot but at this man, although of course the actual and desired effect of the griot's approach is to deflect Sunjata's anger from the bad news (ZA: 35). Such an approach would not, one imagines, have been countenanced by any individual other than the king's griot. The *jeli's* freedom of expression in this passage in ZA brings to life the theoretical similarity between griot-patron relations and *senankuya*, or the joking relationship, recorded in Chapter Six. In F2 the griot's approach shares some common features with that recorded in ZA. Surrakata, as the griot is here called, notifies the emperor that some news has been received from the mission to the Wolof, but refuses to tell Sunjata until the morning. In a rare comic section in the epic, Sunjata attempts to speed up the ostensible arrival of the day - by lighting a fire in the east to make the sky red, by making the cocks crow, etc. - while Surrakata procrastinates, manufacturing various excuses for the delay in imparting the news. Here, the griot prepares Sunjata for the fact that the news is bad while, at the same time, and as in ZA, he allows the emperor's anger to be deflected from Jolofin Mansa to the griot himself; and as in ZA, the incident reveals a strong familiarity in the

relationship between the emperor and his personal *jeli*.

That Sunjata does in fact take the news of the king of Jolof's insult badly is recorded in several accounts. ZA has him as 'furieux' (35), as does Niane, FDS says he transformed into a lion on the spot (179), in WK he 'sursauta d'indignation' at the news (WK1: 201), in B.K. Sidibe's version his 'rage was indescribable' (1972a: 6), while KMJ,D1 pictures him in 'une colère démente', spending three days up a tree and eating nothing (82-3).

In FDS, KB, F2 and B.K. Sidibe it is Sunjata himself who is determined to lead the punitive expedition against the king of Jolof - and according to N, as we noted above, it was indeed Sunjata who defeated the king - but in the seven accounts which record the whole episode of the campaign against the Wolof, and in the three versions of the episode beyond the accounts included in our survey, it is Tira Makhan who in fact heads the Malinke army. The incident in which the general is chosen to lead the army in some respects resembles the incident in which the bearer of the bad news concerning the Jolof king is chosen. In ZA, each general who is approached declines to lead the army, counting the defeat of the Wolof too insignificant a challenge to be worthy of acceptance; only Tira Makhan accepts the command (35). On the contrary, in F2, KMJ, FDS, WK, Niane 1984 and Ly-Tall 1977 each of Sunjata's generals clamour for the honour of avenging Jolofin Mansa's insult to their emperor. Tira Makhan proves more determined than the rest: he threatens to kill himself, digging his grave and lying in it until Sunjata promises him command of the force.<sup>3</sup>

Leaving the actual expedition and subsequent Senegambian conquests of Tira Makhan to the next section, I shall for the moment concentrate on the context of the mission to purchase horses from the king of Jolof.

The Jolof state of the thirteenth century, which can be placed roughly south of the river Senegal and north of the river Gambia, is believed to have been formed by Wolof who, under Berber pressure from the north, migrated southwards from Mauritania to present-day Senegal. It is likely that populations of Serer, Soce and Malinke were already resident in the area at the time (Charles 1977: 1; Person 1974: 12). Indeed,

WK claims that Barafing Bandyougou left Manding to found a Senegalese state during the Soso-Manding war (WK1: 225), while KMJ claims the same for Jolofin Mansa himself (KMJ,D1: 81). Niane writes that Jolofin Mansa 'had been an ally of Sumanguru and, like him, was hostile to Islam' (1984: 133n), while Ly-Tall also notes the existence of this alliance (1981: 124-5).

The Wolof were renowned for their horsemanship (Gamble 1957: 78). As S.M. Cissoko relates concerning the relationship between horse and rider among the Wolof elite:

Le cheval, animal guerrier et noble, coûtait très cher et seuls les seigneurs et les nobles pouvaient se le procurer.... Le seigneur tirait gloire du nombre de chevaux qu'il possédait ou qu'il avait possédés. Il gardait en effet dans sa maison les queues des chevaux morts et ses femmes les exhibaient les jours de fête et se vantaient de la puissance de leur époux (1967: 133)

Philip Curtin asserts that the relationship between horse and rider was similar to the chivalric ideal of medieval Europe, but closer: 'In the Senegambian historical traditions ... each hero, like Samba Gelaajo Jegi, had an equally famous horse' (1974: 211). Not only did the Wolof glory in their horses, they also traded in them, buying horses from Moorish merchants who obtained them from the Arabs of north Africa (Charles 1977: 8). Gamble writes that the Wolof 'dominated trade in horses which were obtained from the Mauriticians in exchange for slaves, and sold to the Mandinka' (1957: 36). According to the eighteenth-century traveller and trader, Francis Moore:

The Generality of Horses in this River [the Gambial], are brought from the Borders of *Barbary*; but as the Grand *Jollioffs* are nearest them, they buy them up, and reap an Advantage, by selling them to the *Mundingoes* and *Mahometans* (1738: 63)

The first evidence for horses in this part of Senegambia comes from Portuguese writers of the 1450s who, according to Robin Law, report that the Jolof kingdom possessed horses at this time, which they obtained overland, from the north, although not in great numbers (Law 1980: 11).

Senegambia was an area in which horses could be successfully bred, but, because of the difficulties in breeding these animals in regions infested with tsetse flies,

some areas of the interior of west Africa, including the Upper Niger valley, were dependent upon the importation of horses to maintain their numbers (Curtin 1974: 221). As a result of these problems, horses were treated as luxury items and rarely employed as pack or agricultural animals; instead, they became associated, as was the case with the Wolof, largely with military and ceremonial functions (Goody 1971; Fisher 1973, 1974). These status associations are evident in the episode under discussion. As we have seen, the Jolof monarch, who refuses to sell horses to the Malinke, whom he calls 'hunters and drinkers', asserts that 'horses are for kings' (F2: 325). The same reasoning may be applied to the Malinke under Sunjata. Madina Ly-Tall suggests that the Malinke monarch was aware of the importance of procuring a cavalry for his forces as 'la cavalerie était à cette époque l'élément déterminant sur les champs de bataille' (1981: 124-5). We can note that some versions of the epic say that Mema provided Sunjata with cavalry, or in N, Ghana-Wagadu, but that no version relates that Sunjata's Malinke forces consisted in part of cavalry for his bid to topple Sumanguru (although horses are of course mentioned in many accounts, usually as mounts for Sunjata and Sumanguru). Bearing in mind what we have earlier suggested concerning the significance of Mema in the epic - as a memory of the greatness of Ghana-Wagadu - and in the light of the status associations of horses outlined above, we might also suggest that Sunjata's desire to purchase horses was partly for reasons of the prestige they would afford his fledgling empire. In this context, the extreme manner in which Sunjata took the news of Jolofin Mansa's slight is explicable, for in refusing to sell Sunjata horses the Jolof king asserted in so many words that he did not regard Sunjata's realm as a significant polity, or Sunjata as a significant monarch.

Robin Law argues that cavalry was introduced into Mali by Mansa Musa, inspired by his visit to Egypt during his Meccan pilgrimage of 1324 (Law 1980: 120-1). Certainly we know from al-'Umarī that Mali possessed horses for military purposes in the fourteenth century; he says the empire had ten thousand cavalry mounted on small Tartar cross-breed horses (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 263, 266). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, writing

concerning the 1350s, records that horses were 'very expensive' in Mali, costing one hundred mithqals (ibid.: 297). It seems likely that at least some of these horses recorded as possessions of Mali by al-'Umarī and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa would have reached the Malians via the Wolof of Senegambia, in exchange for gold, as the episode under discussion recounts. Law believes that the traditions which associate cavalry with the wars of Sunjata Keita are anachronistic (1980: 10, 121), although we can note that the episode in which Sunjata gains horses occurs after the major victory of his career. The epic may perhaps be associating with Sunjata events which occurred some ninety years later (as is often claimed for Mali's westwards expansion, see below). Yet we can still say that this episode in the epic has a firm historical context in mediaeval west Africa, whether it is linked to Sunjata Keita himself or a ruler a few generations later, and suggest that it forms a narrative memory of the first efforts of Mali to gain for itself horses, both for reasons of military advantage and for prestige, allowing the new state both practically and symbolically to see itself (and to be seen by others) as more than a power of merely local importance.

### **Conquest of Senegambia**

WK is the only account to dwell at length upon Tira Makhan's defeat of the king of Jolof (WK1: 211-45). In common with F2 and ZA, it reports that Tira Makhan returned to Manding after having killed the king of Jolof, taking that ruler's head with him, as evidence for Sunjata that vengeance had been secured.<sup>4</sup> But, in five versions of the epic, after giving a brief description of Tira Makhan's defeat of the king of Jolof, the narrative goes on to recount Tira Makhan's further activities in Senegambia: his land conquests, his fathering of children, and his death while returning to Manding.<sup>5</sup> In addition, AR records that Sunjata's empire reached as far as Gambia in the west (172). CL asserts that Tira Makhan 'subjugated the valley of the Gambia' (218); FDS says that he defeated Nyani Mansa, "Sanumu King" and "Ba-Dugu King" on the way to Jolof (181). KMJ,D1 reports that, after defeating the Wolof, Tira

Makhan made for Bandumu, then Wuli (or Wudi, in KMJ,D2: 89), where battles were fought and won, to the loss of Sukuta, king of Jara, after which the general entered Dankungu (85-6). KMJ,M, which calls the conquerer Siraman (see below), records victories at Bantun, Suba, Wudi, Jarasuguba, and Dankungu (326-7). KB concurs in part with KMJ, recording victories for Tira Makhan at Bandumu, Wudi, Sarasukuta and Dunkunja, saying that in this way he conquered Senegambia (103).

Wuli was a pre-colonial state to be found on the north bank of the Gambia (Innes 1976: 2); Dankunja, according to Diabaté, can be identified with Basse (n.d.: 646), but may be identified with Dankunku, a village in Jarra (Innes 1976: 2). Diabaté places Bandumu only vaguely, in Senegambia, and Wudi (perhaps Wuli?) in Gambia (1975: 89). Basse (Basse Santa Su) is on the Gambia, about 135km upriver from Georgetown.

Some accounts note further details of Tira Makhan's time in the west. ZA reports that the general

épouse des femmes dans le pays qui est maintenant à Moussa Molo (près de Sierra Leone), le Tilidjigui. Tous les enfants qui en sont nés s'appellent *Ouali*, ils sont devenus nobles dans le pays (ZA: 35-6)

Musa Molo, who died in 1931, was the last *mansa* in the Gambian valley, of whom there are still memories among some of the griots of the region; Bamba Suso, who died in 1974, claimed to have played at his funeral (Innes 1976: 4). The word "Tilidjigui" (*tilifigi* or *tiligi*) means "setting sun" and, by extension, "the west"; it is the conventional term, in the Manding heartland, for the western portion of the Malinke community (Wright 1979: 142 n.10; Cissoko 1972: 3-4; Park n.d.: 315). BS also claims that Tira Makhan fathered children in Senegambia. To quote,

He married a woman there [at Gongel] by the name of Nyaaling.  
He had a child by her;  
At the naming ceremony there was a quarrel,  
And the griots said, 'Don't quarrel!'  
The father declared, 'I am going to name him Saara,'  
The mother's side said, 'We are going to name him Jeenung.'  
The griots took the child and called him Samaafa Nyaaling  
Jeenung (BS: 87)

BS says that Tira Makhan had two other children in the west: Sira Bala Jeenung and

Samanka Dalla Jeenung. FDS connects certain families in Gambia to Tira Makhan, asserting that the Sane and Mane clans, which are leading families in the Gambia, are, in fact, Taraweres (or Traores) (181). Traore is the patronym commonly associated with Tira Makhan.

Some versions give details concerning Tira Makhan's death. KMJ,D1 reports that the general died while returning home, at Balanzan, having received a message from an eagle that he should make the return trip to Mali; that he is buried under a baobab at Balanzan, and that Traule (or Traore) come to sacrifice to him there (86-7). KB claims that death overtook Tira Makhan at Base (Basse), after the death of Sunjata himself (103). For CL, Tira Makhan died while returning to Manding, and disappeared into the waters of the Gambia river (218). According to Diabaté, Tira Makhan was killed when 'un incirconcis l'aurait atteint d'une flèche empoisonnée' (1975: 90), a death which is reminiscent of Pageard's account of Sumanguru's demise (Chapter Seven).

Most authorities concur in giving Tira Makhan the patronym Traore.\* There is some variation in the spelling of his name: aside from obvious orthographic differences (Tira Makan, Tira Maghan, Tira Magan or Tira Mahan), in CL he appears as Fira Maghan (218), in FDS as Tura Magan (181), while WK3 gives three alternative versions of his name: Tiramakan, Touraman, and Taramakan (53); one Gambian tradition calls him Tourouman (Kouyate 1981), another Tiramang (Sidibe 1972a). Also, it has been suggested in Chapter Five that he might be identified with Tala (or Tara) Masa Konkon, ruler of Krina in some accounts. Tira Makhan has also been identified with Sira Makhan by Monteil (1929: 355n.) and Sidibe (1980: 45). Siraman may be an abbreviation of Sira Makhan as Tiraman appears to be for Tira Makhan, or as Touraman is for Tira Makhan in WK3, allowing us equally to identify Siraman with Tira Makhan. In Niane 1961 Siriman is the name of the conqueror of Senegambia, suggesting identification with Tira Makhan (46), and in F2 Sirmangande is the name of the messenger Sunjata sends to obtain horses off the Wolof, again apparently linking the figure with the name Tira Makhan, yet in Niane 1989 we read that Sirimang is the

griot brother of Bala Faseke and accompanies Tira Makhan into Senegambia as his bard (20).

Tira Makhan is an important figure in the epic traditions but, due to his association with the western expansion of Mali, he tends to be more prominent in Senegambian Malinke traditions than those from the Manding heartland. BS recounts how Sunjata refuses to engage Sumanguru in battle until Tira Makhan has joined his forces (67-9); CL calls Tira Makhan one of Sunjata's 'best generals' (218); Diabaté calls him Sunjata's best companion (n.d.: 656), and Innes writes of him as 'Sunjata's greatest commander' (1974: 118). In BD we find him described, uniquely, as Sunjata's father's chief minister and the ancestor of Malinke hunters; it is also asserted that he it was who defeated the Buffalo-woman of Do, and equally that he reigned in Manding after Sunjata's death (14, 38).

The claimed link in BD between the hunter-brothers of the Buffalo-woman tale and Tira Makhan is worthy of some examination. Both the two brothers and the general are usually seen as Traore'; but what is the accepted kinship connection between the hunters and Sunjata's companion? Here the versions are not in agreement. Three versions provide Traore genealogies, BS (69), FDS (108-9) and WK (WK1: 203, 209, 215). In BS the two hunter-brothers are excluded, though Tira Makhan is mentioned, in FDS the situation is the reverse. The situation of mutual exclusivity may be explained in WK, where the griot identifies Tira Makhan with the younger brother of the two hunters, here called Dan Massa Woulani, the one usually credited with having killed the buffalo of Do. This identification is also made in WK's version of the Buffalo-woman tale itself, where it is claimed that 'Dan Massa Woulani was originally Taramakan, Tiramakan or Touraman Tarawe'le' (WK3: 53), and would agree with BD's apparently eccentric account of the same story. Niane asserts that Sunjata and Tira Makhan were cousins, noting a Senegambian tradition which says that the two hunters who killed the buffalo of Do received from the king of Manding his sister in recompense for Sogolon, whom the king took from them to be his wife. Although he does not state it, he implies that Tira Makhan is to be identified with one of these

brothers (Niane 1989: 19n.). M.M. Diabaté claims that Tira Makhan was descended from one of the hunter-brothers, but also that he was ruler of the pre-Sunjata polity of Kri (n.d.: 656, 645). B.K. Sidibe reports a story from Gambia in which Tira Makhan's sons are called Daamansa Wulemba Sane and Daamansa Wulending Sane (1972a: 8), names which could be identified with the Traore hunter-brothers; while ZA refers to the general's offspring as, collectively, "Ouali" (36), again, potentially linking them to the two hunter-brothers, whose names frequently include the portion "wali" or "wala" (ZA, P, FDS, MS, DMD, JBS, WK).

In sum, then, we have, equally, assertions for (or implications of) Tira Makhan's descent from, identification with, and fathering of, the hunter-brother Traores who killed the buffalo, or at least names which suggest identification with these figures. A historicist line of argument would rule out Tira Makhan's chronological precedence over the Traore brothers - who are themselves a generation before Sunjata - on chronological grounds, but would accept identification with them or immediate descent from them as plausible. Malinke griot tradition seems to claim some kind of close kinship or even identification between the hunter-brothers and Tira Makhan - perhaps simply because they share the same patronym and are roughly contemporaneous - but there appears not to be a consensus as to the exact nature of this link.

### **The expansion of Mali in the west**

According to al-'Umarī, Mali 'lies to the south of the extreme West and adjoins the Atlantic Ocean' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 261). Because of the dating of al-'Umarī's information, which he appears to have obtained from Egyptian ministers who met with Mansa Mūsā's party in Cairo in 1324, we can say that the westernmost province of the empire, which he calls Takrūr, and should be placed roughly between the Senegal and Gambia rivers, acknowledged the suzerainty of the *mansa* of Mali by 1324 (ibid. 253). This means that the incorporation of Senegambia into the Mali empire may have occurred either during or after the reign of Sunjata, according to its conventional

dates. Levtzion associates the western spread of the empire with the reign of Mansa Mūsā (c.1312-37) (Levtzion 1977: 381). Other scholars, such as Niane and Ly-Tall, link the emergence of a western Malinke state with the time of Sunjata himself. In Niane 1961 we read how

Les deux grandes provinces de l'Ouest (Gambie et Casamance) étaient essentiellement peuplées de Malinké descendants des guerriers de Soundjata et de Siriman (Niane) (Général et cousin de Soundjata). (Niane 1961: 46)

In his 1984 article Niane repeats the assertion that, according to oral sources from the Malinke heartland and the west itself, the western Malinke provinces were formed during the reign of Sunjata, although here he calls the conqueror Tiramaghan Traore (1984: 133). Mme Ly, who is of a similar opinion, bases her view, at least in part, on an interpretation of what Ibn Khaldūn wrote about Mali's development. The north African historian asserts that the people of Mali 'vanquished the Sūsū and acquired all their possessions as far as the Ocean in the west', and later, that it was Mārī Jāta (Sunjata) who 'overcame the Sūsū' (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 333). Ly-Tall takes these statements to imply that it was under Sunjata that Mali expanded to the western seaboard (Ly-Tall 1977: 82-6). This may be reading too much into Ibn Khaldūn's brief scenario. Soso is nowhere in the oral traditions credited with extending to the Atlantic, as Ibn Khaldūn implies, and so it may be that the Arab historian is, from a vantage point at the close of the fourteenth century, telescoping various separate campaigns and advances of the empire into one neat, succinct expression, that of the defeat of Soso.

Aside from the Arabic evidence, which gives us only a hazy picture of Mali's expansion in the west, there is a rich store of oral evidence, only recently investigated and published, concerning the western Malinke provinces, which originates from Senegambia itself.<sup>8</sup> These traditions are primarily concerned with the origin and development of Kabu or Kaabu, also known as Gabu (to the Serer) and Ngabu (to the Fulani) (Mveng 1981: 8-9). Kabu was a state which stretched from the Rio Corubal in the south (Guinea Bissau) to the Gambia in the north, which saw itself as Malinke,

owing allegiance to the *mansa* of Mali until the final collapse of that central authority, and which lasted from an indeterminate time, probably in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, to the latter half of the nineteenth, before falling prey to internal disputes and civil war, arising from the spread of Islam (Innes 1976: 27; Sidibe 1972b; Niane 1989).

The history of the region has been divided into five segments by Yves Person. A pre-Malinke phase, lasting until the thirteenth century; a period of Sudanese influence, from about 1250 to 1450; a period, up to 1600, in which Sudanese and Atlantic influences were in balance; a period, up to 1750, in which the disappearance of Malian hegemony and the rise of Atlantic commerce reoriented Kabu towards the sea, at which point, he says, Kabu's power was at its height; and, finally, a period of gradual decline, to 1870 (Person 1981: 72).

Concentrating on the second phase of Kabu history identified above, the oral traditions from the area that was once Kabu appear unequivocal in their support for the story told in the Sunjata epic, namely that Kabu was formed from the conquests of a Malinke army under the command of Tira Makhan Traore. In the words of S.M. Cissoko, 'Toutes les traditions orales du Kabou attribuent à *Tiramakhan Traore* la conquête des pays gambien et Kabounké' (1972: 2).<sup>9</sup> B.K. Sidibe writes that the story of Tira Makhan's conquest of Gambia is, in some traditions, prefaced by an episode in which Sunjata sends a mission to obtain horses from the west - in other words a variant of the episode of the epic recently discussed. In B.K. Sidibe's account of the formation of Kabu, news reaches Sunjata of women rulers in Kassa (the pre-Kabu name for the region). Sunjata is curious, and his generals clamour to be offered the mission. Tira Makhan threatens suicide and is sent. Before departing, Sunjata requires horses to equip the force and sends a trading party to procure them. The familiar tale of the insults of the Jolof king and his eventual defeat follow. After conquering Jolof, Tira Makhan is said to cross into Kassa:

When he arrived at Damantang, the Mandinkas there, led by Mankotoba Sane, joined him; and they proceeded to clear the area of Jolas and Bainounkas. When the Bainounkas were pushed out of Upper Kassa, they took their last stand at

Pakau, where they are said to have taken a ruler called Mansa Nyana Sira Banna. At Pakau, the Bainoungas were joined again by Mandinka settlers. And when Nyana Sira Banna died, the Mandinkas took control. (1972a: 7)

Although Malinke heartland traditions of the conquest lack the detail found in the Kabu accounts, it can be seen that both the Sunjata epic and Kabu sources tell a basically similar tale, both including, at least in this version collated by B.K. Sidibe, the same immediate cause for the conquest, viz., the insults of Jolofin Mansa. Other common points between the Sunjata epic traditions and Kabu traditions can be noted.

In Cissoko's version of the Senegambian conquest from Kabu oral sources it is asserted that Tira Makhan departed for the west with two marabouts, called Fariba and Sanoba, installing the first at Wuli and the second at Kantora (1972: 2). In another Kabu tale, reported by N. Kouyate, we are told that Tira Makhan founds the village of Sokoma in which he stations the griots who have composed an epic poem for him, based on his feats (1981: 35). Niane reports a western tradition which says Tira Makhan took with him on his travels to Senegambia the griot brother of Bala Faseke, Djali (i.e. *jeli*) Sirimang (Niane 1989: 20). These stories can be compared with WK's claim that Tira Makhan left Manding in the company of the griot Sitan Fata Diawara, who had offered his services on the basis that, should the commander succeed in his mission, he would need a *jeli* to record the events in a panegyric, while if he should fail and die, he would need a *jeli* to announce his death to Sunjata in the proper fashion (WK1: 211-3).

The story about the quarrel over the naming of Tira Makhan's children as told by BS is also paralleled in Kabu sources, although in these it is attributed to the figure Mankotoba Sane, whose relationship to Tira Makhan is, according to Sidibe, uncertain (1972a: 3 n.7). In the Kabu version of the quarrel, as in Bamba Suso's, the griots compromise, giving the children composite names, suiting both mother and father; and, as in ZA's description of the fate of Tira Makhan's offspring, the children are said to be the originators of the three princely families of Kabu -

Sama, Jimara and Pachana (Sidibe 1972a: 5).

FDS's claim that the Sane and Mane clans of Gambia are descended from Tira Makhan Traore is also a commonly held opinion among the traditionalists of Gambia. Cissoko reports that it is claimed that two of Tira Makhan's children, called Sane and Mane, conquered the land of Patiene, Sama and Jummera (1972: 2). Here we have not only the clan patronyms given as individual's names, but the three princely houses of Kabu, as identified by Sidibe, recorded as, it seems, regions. B.K. Sidibe reports a tradition that the Sane and Mane were originally Traore, descended from Tira Makhan, but that the descendants changed their patronym, and split into two clans. It may be that the tradition of a quarrel over the names of the children of Tira Makhan and his indigenous bride reflects and dramatizes this view of events. An explanation for the disappearance of the Traore patronym among Tira Makhan's putative descendants considered by Sidibe is that the mother's clan name may have taken precedence over the outsider's. Certainly we know that the *nyanchos*, the warrior elite of the western Malinke, reckoned descent through the maternal line, making this explanation more plausible (Innes 1974: 130). In fact, B.K. Sidibe rejects the validity of the tradition that the Sane and Mane clans were descended from Tira Makhan, counting as evidence the appearance of these clans in Gambian history before the arrival of the general from Manding. Of course this would not preclude the possibility of later intermarriage linking the Sane and Mane to the Traore.

Details about Tira Makhan's death are also held in common between the epic of Sunjata and Kabu recitations. Here is B.K. Sidibe's account of the warrior's death, culled from Gambian griots:

Later Tiramang left Kabu to return to Mali. But when he came to Basse on the River Gambia, he died. They buried him near the river where the old French company now stands. When the French company was built there, every European who came, died; they never lived long on that spot. At Kabakamba, near Basse, there is a tree with many bees where you can find his spear (1972a: 8)

Cissoko reports similar details, including that Tira Makhan's spear was once suspended

from a tree at Kabakaman (1972: 2). Basse (or Base) is where KB claims Tira Makhan died; and as has already been noted, KMJ and CL both assert that the commander perished while making the return journey to Manding; while CL associates Tira Makhan's demise with the river Gambia, and KMJ links his grave to a tree. Also, in both B.K. Sidibe's account and in KMJ Tira Makhan is returning home in response to a summons when he dies.

From the foregoing it should be clear that the Sunjata epic's story of Mali's westward expansion and Gambian traditions of Kabu's origins are congruent in many respects, both in the broad outline of Mali's conquest under Tira Makhan and in some specific details. Nevertheless, such congruence, while to a degree providing some increased grounds for accepting the story of the expansion in the west as told by the epic, cannot be taken as independently confirming the epic's story. To a large extent (and this is demonstrated in the far-flung versions of the epic of Sunjata itself) the area from the Upper Niger valley in the east to the Gambian estuary in the west forms one single Malinke culture zone, sharing a common heritage which includes, among other things, similar oral traditions. Because the Kabu stories are, in respect of their treatment of the origin of Kabu, western Malinke versions of a commonly held tradition, they do not constitute completely separate, independent evidence for the actual events of early Kabu history.

This point must be borne in mind when assessing the historical validity of the traditions concerning the formation of Kabu. Rejecting the traditional story of Tira Makhan's conquest, Donald Wright asserted:

the western movements of Mandinka was no single, massive effort of "conquest" as traditional accounts portray. Rather, it was a long, progressive movement that included people from all classes of society, moving for a variety of reasons, and settling among and mixing with peoples from other ethnic bases. A purely military conquest could hardly have had the same profound effects - the continued social, economic, and political dominance of peoples living over an area of several thousand square miles ... that was so far from the traditional Mandinka homelands (Wright 1977: 89-90)

Wright seems to have based some of this view on Winifred Galloway's opinions. She sees Tira Makhan's conquest as (according to Wright, who quotes her), 'the historical bridge which carries the memory of their own [i.e. the immigrants from Manding] journey' (in Wright 1977: 25). Tira Makhan is, according to this thesis, to be seen as a purely legendary figure upon whose military conquests it is possible for the Malinke migrants to place the burden of their own links to their homeland. Wright's views can also be seen as conforming to some recent general opinions enunciated on the literal validity of conquest stories in African history. A dramatic conquest is a more suitable cliché, it is argued, with which to construct a memorable explanatory history (particularly one of an oral nature) for the establishment or spread of a cultural identity than a long drawn out, *ad hoc*, migration of individuals and families which lacks any central, dominant reasoning or motif (see Miller 1978, 1980). A west African example might be the story of the Almoravid conquest of Ghana in 1076, whose historical validity has been cogently questioned by Farias (1974) and Conrad & Fisher (1982, 1983), but whose dramatic potential make it attractive and a suitably succinct expression of a political and religious alteration which probably took a much longer time to effect.

Wright divides up the migration from Manding to Senegambia into two phases, which are parted by Sunjata's formation of the Mali empire. The centuries before the time of Sunjata saw, he suggests, a gradual drift of Malinke, along with other ethnic groups, into the western zones, in search of land for farming or hunting and trade opportunities; while the later phase increased the volume of this drift and added warriors, 'seeking to fulfill their strongly felt destinies to conquer and rule', to the groups of farmers, hunters and traders thus far constituting the migrants (1977: 8-28).

Wright's view of Mali's westward expansion as a mixture of long drawn out migration and piecemeal military campaigning is not as far from the picture that the Sunjata epic and Kabu origin traditions present as it might first appear. We have already noted how, for some versions (WK and KMJ), Jolofin Mansa was a Malinke emigré

himself, from the Soso-Manding war; and it can be recalled that in B.K. Sidibe's version of Tira Makhan's conquest the Malinke general is said to have been supported by already-present Malinke people, under Mankotoba Sane. Niane reports the existence of Malinke colonies in Senegambia before the time of Sunjata (1989: 17). So the conquest is not presented in these traditions as the only element in the western expansion. This conquest itself also displays elements equally suitable to a migration. Tira Makhan has travelling with him, according to traditions to which Niane refers, seventy-five thousand men, forty thousand women, twenty-five thousand slaves, a master-forgers of the Kante clan, a master-weaver, as well as the aforementioned griot, Sirimang, and other unnamed artisans (1989: 20). Tira Makhan fathers children with an indigenous bride and founds settlements for griots or marabouts. In addition, B.K. Sidibe's description of the conquest (quoted above) appears to make the event take a significant length of time - enough time for the Bainoungas to move to Pakau and then be joined by Malinke settlers, while Niane says Tira Makhan campaigned in the west for twenty-seven years (Niane 1989: 26). In fact, in the epic sources in particular, the story is very short on actual military details, paying much greater attention to the episode in which Sunjata's mission searches for horses in the west. The story of Jolofin Mansa may have lent itself to greater elaboration by the griots than Tira Makhan's eventual victories in Gambia partly because in the king of Jolof we have a bold and colourful "villain" - the type of character wholly missing from Tira Makhan's later exploits. But that the epic sources' reticence to provide details on the military campaigns of Tira Makhan in Gambia could be construed as putting into doubt the conquest itself in the minds of the traditionists would be to claim too much, for there remains the stark assertion of the occurrence of this conquest in a number of epic sources, as well as in many Kabu traditions.

In a more recent article (Wright 1985), Wright has altered his own view on the nature of Mali's expansion in the west. He suggests that the number of those who made the migration from Manding to the western provinces has been greatly

exaggerated, and offers several lines of argument to support his claim that it is cultural assimilation, not migration, that is the most significant explanative factor in the formation of a western Malinke province. Firstly, he touches on a subject already considered in Chapter Two in connection with stories concerning some early Keita ancestors - of how migration stories in Africa have recently been reinterpreted in many cases, with the replacement of a straightforward, literal acceptance of their historical validity by a belief that "migration" is a cliché employed to account for cultural transfer - that the story of a group of people making a physical journey from place A to place B satisfactorily explains the emergence of the culture of A at B. Wright notes how personal acquaintances of his in Senegambia have perceived and presented themselves as Malinkes in spite of clear non-Malinke ancestry. He also notes how the written evidence of travellers, which shows a growth in the Malinke population between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in certain areas of the Gambia, may reflect not a conquest or large-scale migration between these dates, as it has conventionally been taken to do, but simply the assimilation of many in the population to Malinke culture. Finally, he suggests that, in addition to the "official" Kabu traditions which link families to Malinke-heartland originators, other traditions still exist which point to some of these families' indigenous origins (Wright 1985: 337-40).

Wright's recent views have much to recommend them. Certainly some families in Senegambia who claim Malinke descent and links to the Malinke heartland will be doing so with no historically valid grounds. It is surely true that, from the point of view of those who formulate the traditions, the desire of individuals and groups to link themselves to the centre of their perceived ethnic, cultural or religious universe is strongly felt by the putative Malinke of Senegambia. They may look to *tilibo*, "the rising sun" or "the East", meaning the Manding heartland of the Upper Niger, and claim their ancestors once lived there, in the same way as the Keita family look east, to Mecca, and associate their origins with the Prophet's companion, Bilāl (Chapter Two). It is also true that "gradual migration" can be a cliché equally appealing to the

western-trained historian as that of the sudden and dramatic conquest, when attempting to account for cultural and ethnic transfer.

Nevertheless, if one excludes from the ambit of the historically plausible both sudden conquest and gradual migration, on account of their suspected clichéd nature, one is left with little with which to account for the Malinke population and long history of Malian domination over the Senegambian region; one is left with a vibrant community of western Malinke who were neither conquered by Mali nor descended from Malinke emigrants. Of course this is to take Wright's stance further than he would probably wish: he himself accepts the likelihood of some migration of Malinke from the east to Senegambia, and presumably still believes some of these to have been warriors, effecting Mali's political control over the west. However if, as Wright argued in 1977, one of the reasons against belief in Tira Makhan's conquest of the Gambia is that no single event of this sort could have produced such a strong Malinke identity in present-day Gambia, and if, in line with his second thesis, many fewer Malinke than hitherto believed actually migrated westwards, then how is one to account for the strongly held Malinke identity of these westerners? Cultural assimilation does not by itself offer a reasonable explanation; it must be accompanied, it seems to me, either by significant levels of immigration - enough to afford the likelihood of such assimilation occurring - or by a transfer of control effected through conquest, making assimilation a desirable option for the indigenes - and most probably by both of these.

While any individual claims of ancestry from *tilibo*, the east, by any specific Senegambian family, may be treated sceptically, and the specific story of conquest by Tira Makhan at the time of Sunjata remains uncorroborated beyond oral tradition and the doubtful phrases of Ibn Khaldūn, it seems inescapable that both these "clichés" do, on the broad level, relate to historical events, viz., that both some kind of migration and some kind of military conquest were significant in Kabu's formation.

## Death of Sunjata Keita

Only nine accounts of the epic examined in this thesis provide us with information on the death and/or burial site of the hero.<sup>10</sup> Additional information concerning Sunjata's death and burial is rendered by Magan Sisoko, in an interview conducted after the recitation of MS, between the *jeli* and Cheick Oumar Mara, one of Johnson's assistants (Johnson 1979: 267-74), by Delafosse (1972 ii: 183-4) and Niane (1960a: 21-2; 1965: 95-6; 1984: 145-6). Between them they offer many different and contradictory versions of Sunjata's demise, with two accounts (V and KB) presenting two or three alternative scenarios, and one account (KMJ,D1) offering three potential burial sites. When the statements of Magan Sisoko, Delafosse and Niane are compared to those of the versions of the epic themselves, we can provisionally identify four basic traditions concerning Sunjata's demise. First, that he was drowned in the Sankarani, and either buried nearby or transformed into a hippopotamus (AR, S, V, KB, Niane). Second, that he was killed by an arrow wound, inflicted accidentally by a Fulani (V, KB, Delafosse, Niane). Third, that he simply disappeared from sight (BD, Magan Sisoko), and fourth, that he died a peaceful death (V, WK, KB). Besides these, two versions (ZA and WK) offer unique stories or treatments of the hero's death. ZA reports that Sunjata was transformed into a bird, called *Kirine Konoba*, "the great bird of Kirine", who lived in a hut in Kirine (perhaps Krina, or Kiri Koroni), made an appearance once a year - when the griots sang and danced, at which point the bird would grow to the size of its hut - and which eventually died, after pointing out its successor. ZA's tale may be compared to the tradition that connects Sumanguru to the Bird of Krina (Chapter Seven), and it seems that the griot has misappropriated this story to Sunjata. Comparison of the death traditions of Sunjata and Sumanguru, admitting both the elucidation of similarity and contrast, will be one of the themes of this chapter, allowing us to attain, I hope, a greater understanding of both of these characters. WK contains a long treatment of the death and burial of Sunjata in which the *jeli* is able to detail Malinke marriage and burial customs, as well as

employing the funeral as a opportunity to begin to list the major Malinke clans (WK2: 141-335).

### Sunjata drowns

Support for this version of the hero's demise comes from AR, S, V, and KB, and is additionally provided by three successive statements from Niane, made on the basis of a knowledge of the oral traditions. All but AR associate this version of Sunjata's death with the Sankarani, a tributary of the Niger, on whose left bank was probably to be found the capital (or one of the capitals) of old Mali, Niani. Most versions are silent about the causes and immediate context of Sunjata's drowning, but S presents us with the following story. Sunjata has a quarrel with a group of Fulani from Wassulu (a province to the east of the Sankarani) over an agreement concerning the raising of cattle; the emperor demands more than the agreed share of cattle from the Fulani herders and goes to war to obtain satisfaction; his army is defeated and driven back to the Sankarani where, with his favourite wife, he jumps into the waters (46-7). The Bamako teacher and story-teller, Mamby Sidibé, thus provides us with one answer to Niane's rhetorical question: 'but following what events did Sundiata meet his death in the waters?' (1965: 96). As Niane's book version of the epic was published only a year after Sidibé's article saw the light of day, it is quite possible that the Guinean historian was ignorant of the tale S tells; nevertheless, Sidibé's story, with its negative treatment of the emperor's last deeds, is unlikely to find favour with most traditionists. Sidibé was by descent a Fulani, so it may be that he has produced a tale that discredits the *mansa* and favours the Fulani. The only similar story is found in MB, where the moral force is reversed - it is the Fulani who try to renege on a deal with the Keita.

Returning to the issue of the context of Sunjata's death by drowning, KB offers two possible explanations: that Sunjata was drowned, i.e. died accidentally, or that he 'descendit volontairement dans un gouffre sous l'eau, lorsque son heure fut venue' in

a place she identifies as Sangaradun (KB: 105). Niane's stance on the death of Sunjata Keita can be seen gradually to harden over time, presumably in response to new information he has received. In 1960 he wrote that 'La mort de Soundjata reste entourée de mystère' (1960a: 21), and recorded with equal weight the story of the emperor's drowning and that of his death by an arrow wound; in 1965, while that second story is mentioned, the drowning tradition is termed 'very popular in Mali' and 'rendered feasible by the presence of Sundiata's tomb near the Sankarani' (95-6); while in 1984 he states the following:

I believe that he [Sunjata] was drowned in the waters of the Sankarani, in obscure circumstances, for it is known that some 10 km upstream from Niani there is a place called *Sundiata-dun* (Sundiata's deep water). This part of the river is very deep and has many eddies; the pirogues take care to avoid it (1984: 145)

This "Sundiata-dun" may be compared to KB's "Sangaradun" - the place Mme Konaré associates with the emperor's watery grave. While Sidibé's version of the *mansa's* death is an apparent critique of Sunjata's *hubris* in later life, with overtones of ethnic tension, it may also be deemed to provide a rational, historical context for the drowning tradition. Niane's latest statement on the drowning tradition is also clearly an attempt to rationalize the story: Sunjata died at this point, accidentally, because of the unusually strong currents and deep water. However, the sources are far from clear on the accidental nature of the death. Although KB admits the possibility of an accidental death, it also reports the view that the emperor "voluntarily descended" into the water; and although AR says 'Soundjata se noya en traversant un marigot' (172), V states enigmatically that Sunjata 'aurait disparu dans le fleuve' (328). In addition, we can recall the story told in BD, and reported by Magan Sisoko, that Sunjata disappeared from view on a predetermined day, surrounded by his praise-singers - a story which clearly sees the emperor's death as a planned, rather than an accidental, occurrence. Whether traditionists interpret the drowning story as implying a chosen or accidental demise, the peculiar symbolism of death in water leads us to doubt any historical context provided for the event, and instead to

treat it as a purely symbolic image.

We have already noted in Chapter Seven how water can be both a symbol of the birth of life and equally the passage into death. Here it is perhaps worth elaborating on these remarks. For Jung, water is a symbol of the unconscious itself (1959: 18); for Joseph Campbell, water is most commonly associated with rites of passage, with the passing from one state to another (1973: 62). Water is often linked to the creative process, from the creation of the world (motif A 810 Primeval water) to human creation (A 1232.2 Mankind emerges from lake) and to procreation (T 546 Birth from water) (Rank 1914: 69-70). Death is equally a threshold passage with which water is associated (Campbell 1973: 62). In Chapter Seven we mentioned Charon's ferrying of the dead across the Styx (E 481.2 Land of dead across water, F 93 Water entrance to lower world), we can also recall the myths of the Isle of the Blessed, Atlantis, etc., to which the souls of the dead are believed to depart (Jones 1951 1: 102-7).

Deaths associated with water are found in several Malinke and Malinke-related recitations of traditional history. According to one Gambian griot's version of Koli Tengella's death, it came about after a fight with a dragon in a river, which proved fatal to the hero (Wright 1979: 36-7). According to a Kuranko story, a warrior is killed after his wife betrays his secret night-time bathing spot (Jackson 1977: 90), while a similar motif has been seen to be employed in the Sunjata epic tradition of the death of Niani Mansa Mamuru who, according to V and WK, is murdered while taking his morning bath, which is said to be the only time that he is vulnerable (Chapter Six). The motif of death in water also appears in CL's version of Tira Makhan's death, as we saw earlier, where it is claimed that the general disappeared into the waters of the Gambia.

Comparing the African stories noted above one might say that each of those who are said to have died in water in one way or another are respected and revered individuals - heroes, at least in their own communities. Even the king of Niani, who was killed by Fakoli during his morning bath, and is usually described as an enemy of

Sunjata, is in fact favourably compared to Fakoli, his killer, in many accounts. In this context, it is possible to venture the claim that death in water is viewed in some sense as an idealized form of death. If passage through water symbolizes change, process, then death in water is a recognition of the inevitability of death, and of its status as simply another transition through which all must pass. In addition, since Freud, psychologists have suggested that the ideal form of death, that which is accepted by the unconscious, is a return to the womb (Jones 1951 i: 102f; Campbell 1973: 62). In view of the established link between water and birth, death in water may be an expression of this idealized, unconscious symbolization of death.

Sunjata's death in water may be compared to two of the prominent traditions concerning the death of his adversary, Sumanguru. Many versions claim that Sumanguru was transformed on death into a block of stone or that he disappeared into a mountain. Both traditions denote petrification or, in MS's evocative phrase, that Sumanguru 'dried up' (187). This might be taken as the dramatic opposite of Sunjata's watery death, producing a contrast for Sunjata/Sumanguru of water/earth or wet/dry.

Another layer may be added to this opposition by considering the varying attitude of Sunjata and Sumanguru to the crossing of rivers. On his return from exile to claim the throne of Manding, Sunjata has to cross the Niger river, against the wishes of Sumanguru, who is sometimes said to blockade it, and manages to cross with the aid of a silver bracelet which had previously been given to the Somono by his mother, as we found in Chapter Seven. On his flight to Kulikoro, Sumanguru is sometimes depicted crossing the Niger, or as attempting to cross that river, and in V we have the added detail that a silver bracelet was at this point dropped by Sumanguru. This crossing of the Niger can be contrasted to Sunjata's insofar as the hero's crossing leads to his successful establishment of the empire, whereas Sumanguru's crossing, or attempt to cross, foreshadows his imminent demise. The two adversaries' attitudes to water can also be generally contrasted. While a passage through water marks both of their deaths, Sunjata drowns, i.e. is submerged in water, but Sumanguru dries up, suggesting a failure to cross; and while Sunjata's earlier passage through water

signalled the beginning of his triumphant homecoming, Sumanguru attempts to prevent the passage by making the Somono boatmen his allies. If water is a symbol of passage - into life, into death - as we argued earlier, then Sunjata's attitude is one of acceptance of such change, while Sumanguru's is one of attempting to arrest change - by trying to prevent Sunjata's crossing of the Niger, trying to prevent his own downfall and Sunjata's success, and, I suggest, is symbolized by not dying in water but turning to stone. Sumanguru may perhaps have been characterized as one who denies the process of change: this may be illustrated in his severing of the achilles' tendons of Bala Faseke, to prevent his movement; in his covering of the people of Manding's mouths with calabashes, to prevent their speaking or eating; and in his blockade of the Joliba river. Sumanguru is comparable to the classic father-figure of the hero myth who resents and attempts to prevent his own supercession by his son, while Sunjata is presented as one who accepts change, including his own mortality.

A second part of the tradition of Sunjata's death in water is the idea of his metamorphosis into a hippopotamus. AR and S make this claim. To quote AR:

un moment après qu'il eut disparu sous les eaux, ses suivants, ses captifs et ses guerriers virent surgir du marigot un hippopotame de forte taille. Et aussitôt les griots clamèrent que leur maître s'était métamorphosé en hippopotame, et depuis ce temps cet animal n'a pas cessé d'être sacré pour les descendants et les alliés de Soundiata (AR: 172)

S, who reports the same story, notes that 'C'est pourquoi ce mammifère aquatique est devenu le téné ou totem des Keita et Konaté' (47). MA also asserts that the Keita 'ne touchent pas l'hippopotame' (166). As an aetiological tale for a *tana* relationship we come across a variant of the story in André Rançon's *Dans la Haute-Gambie* (1894):

les Keitas sont parents de l'hippopotame, sans doute parce que leur ancêtre Soun-Dyatta, d'après la tradition, avait été métamorphosé en hippopotame un jour qu'il baignait à Koulicoro, sur le Niger (1894: 444-5)

Rançon's siting of the emperor's demise at Kulikoro is probably another case, like

that of ZA which we mentioned earlier, in which the deaths of Sunjata and Sumanguru appear to have been confused (or deliberately juxtaposed) by some traditionalists. The story Dr. Rançon presents is typical of many *tana* explanation tales in which an ancestor assumes the form of the related animal upon death, which of course reinforces the prohibition against injuring members of the *tana* species (Brun 1910: 856-7, 859; Frazer 1910 ii: 560).

Furthermore, for Joseph Brun and Louis Binger the hippopotamus *tana* is related etymologically to the Malinke people as a whole. Binger writes: 'L'hippopotame ou *mali*. Cette famille port le nom générique de *Mali-nke*' (1892 ii: 375), while for Brun, '*Maninka* peut dériver de *mani* ou de *mali* qui l'un et l'autre signifient bien "hippopotame". Le suffixe *ka* a le sens de "habitant de"' (1910: 848). It seems highly appropriate that the explanative legend for the *tana* of the whole of the Malinke population should revolve around Sunjata, founder of the empire of Mali and the greatest figure of traditional Malinke history. However, one should note that Delafosse has dismissed the link between the name of the empire and the Malinke word for hippopotamus, noting that there are other names for the empire which do not accord with this link (such as Mande or Manding), and that the connection is denied by his Malinke informants. Nevertheless, he does confirm that the hippopotamus is the *tana* of the Keita clan (Delafosse 1972 i: 121-2).

Transformation upon death is another area of similarity between the death traditions associated with Sunjata and Sumanguru. But whereas Sumanguru is metamorphosed, in many accounts, into an inanimate object - stone - Sunjata becomes a living creature. Both leaders are said, then, to remain on earth in some form after their death, but in very different ways: Sumanguru's is the eternal presence of inanimate matter, Sunjata's the eternity of the cycle of birth and death.

## Sunjata is killed by a Fulani arrow

Of the two versions of the epic in our survey which give this story of Sunjata's death, both present other tales which are said to be equally popular accounts of the emperor's death. Vidal reports the story despite the fact that his Keyla griot informants deny its veracity. The details he reports - that, according to this tale, Sunjata was shot by an arrow fired by a Peulh (Fulani) called Maham Boli during a celebration, differ in no way from those given in Delafosse 1972, making it possible that he may have employed Delafosse, whose account was first published in 1912, as his source. This is what Delafosse writes:

Soundiata fut tué d'une flèche, par maladresse, au cours d'une fête donnée dans sa capitale en 1255. Son meurtrier involontaire était un Peul nommé *Maham Boli*. Ce dernier descendait d'un nommé Nima, ancêtre du clan peul des Boli, qui, au moment de la dispersion des Peuls du Fouta (XI<sup>e</sup> siècle), avait émigré avec les siens vers le Kaniaga. L'un des descendants de Nima, Bida fils de Garan, ne trouvant plus assez de terres disponibles au Kaniaga pour nourrir sa famille, était venu demander à Soundiata de le laisser s'établir auprès de Mali. L'empereur l'ayant fort bien reçu, Bida organisa des réjouissances, accompagnées de simulacres de combat, pour remercier Soundiata de son accueil; c'est au cours de ses réjouissances que Maham, l'un des fils de Bida, décocha une malecontreuse flèche qui atteignit l'empereur et le blessa mortellement (1972 ii: 183-4)

Apart from this version of the story and the details that appear in V, KB mentions the tale (105), as does Niane (1960a: 21; 1965: 95). Neither KB nor Niane add any new information to what we already know from Delafosse, implying that Delafosse may be the sole authority for the tale. Indeed, in his 1984 article, Niane attributes the story to Delafosse and to no other source (145).

At least at first sight, this story about Sunjata's death provides us with a historical context. The fact that it links the *mansa's* death to the Fulani immediately recalls Sidibé's version of Sunjata's demise. A similar story, although not leading to the emperor's death, is told in MB. The Peul act as herders for the Keita and Konte clan's herds. When it comes to the time to divide these herds, the

Fulani herders hold back the best cattle for themselves, presenting only the old or infirm; their deception is uncovered, and the Fulani lose the animals (170). The story of Sunjata's demise in Delafosse 1972 can be compared to the tale in MB and equally to the story of Sunjata's death in S. All three record the interaction of Fulani and Malinke and involve the division of resources, either cattle or land. Tension is generated in MB and S owing to premeditated deceit, from either of the two sides, while in Delafosse 1972 it is due to an accident, but one which leads to the flight of the Boli clan of the Fulani from Malinke lands.

The Malinke-Fulani tensions recorded in these stories are also to be found in other Malinke oral sources, as well as in the writings of European travellers, and seem therefore to reflect a historical reality of Malinke society. As, by and large, nomadic cattle herders, the generally taller and lighter-skinned Fulani (also known as Peul, Fula or Fulbe) have, in areas of Malinke domination, tended to use the populations of Malinke settlements as a market for their bovine by-products, while remaining outside of the Malinke social order itself. They depended upon the sedentary population for grants of land on which to graze the herds, in return for which taxes were exacted from them. B.K. Sidibe reports from oral sources a story from the Gambia which relates how, at the time of the Malinke conquest of the area, the Fulani were forced into paying taxes, in the form of bulls, for land their cattle grazed upon (Sidibe 1972a: 4). Also, during the time of the empire of Kabu, oral traditions assert that taxes were systematically overcollected by the *nyanchos*, stating that these ones felt justified in taking from the Fulani anything that he owned, whether or not taxes had already been payed (Sidibe 1972b: 1-2). Richard Jobson writes to similar effect concerning the "wandering Fulbie" of seventeenth-century Gambia, stating that they

live in great subjection to the *Mandingo*, under which they seem to groane, for he cannot at any time kill a beefe but if they know it, the black-men [i.e. the Malinke] will have the greatest share (1968: 44)

Jobson, and later Mungo Park, explain the way in which the pastoral Fulani gained

land for grazing. Jobson says they choose the best land for their purposes and settle there, 'with the Kings allowance of the Country' (1968: 43); Park says they act as 'herdsmen and husbandmen [to the Malinke], paying tribute to the sovereign of the country for the lands which they hold' (n.d.: 15). The position of the Fulani under Malinke political control appears, therefore, to have been that of tolerated outsiders, given land for grazing and jobs as herders as was appropriate, but heavily and often over-taxed by the sedentary population.

Given this context to the tale of Sunjata's death as reported by Delafosse, it is possible that the death of the *mansa* has here been blamed upon the Fulani, as a vulnerable, and perhaps resented, marginal group in society. Ill-feeling between Fulani and Malinke may have been exacerbated by the rise, from the late fifteenth century, of Koli Tengella's separate Fulani state, which managed to take sizeable chunks of previously Malian territory in the west during the sixteenth century.

However, several factors militate against interpreting the story told by Delafosse as anti-Fulani propaganda. For one thing, the arrow is fired accidentally, not with intention, by the Fulani Maham Boli; nor does the story detail any Malinke retribution, in striking contrast to the follow-up to Jolofin Mansa's insults against Sunjata. In fact, examination of the tale shows that it is told from the point of view of the Fulani, and not from that of Sunjata Keita, or his lieutenants. None of the familiar figures of the epic appear in the passage in Delafosse 1972, while numerous details on the origins and later development of the Boli clan, chiefly their migration history, appear in the narrative and appended in a footnote. As a story of how the Boli clan of the Fulani reach their eventual home, the accidental death of Sunjata Keita is simply another contributory factor in the migration's course, determining in this case that the clan members cannot remain in Malinke territory.

Added to the sparse reference to the story outside of Delafosse's history, the fact that the tale appears to be part of a Fulani tradition of migration leads us to question whether it can be counted as part of the corpus of the Sunjata epic. This question cannot be answered definitively on present evidence; in any case, the mere

fact of the story's repetition by several authorities - V, KB, and Niane - suggests that the tale has been accorded some credibility as part of the epic's traditions. Working on the basis of this hypothesis, I shall examine the tradition from a symbolic point of view.

Two specific qualities of the death accorded to Sunjata in Delafosse's tale can be noted. One is its accidental nature, the other is the apparent youth of the assailant, who is described as one of the sons of the man honouring with festivities Sunjata's decision to grant them land.

The death of a hero at the hands of a young, weak, infirm opponent may perhaps be a cliché. We can note that the Malinke hero Kelefa Sane is shot by an arrow, fired from up a tree by a leper or an albino, according to Gambian griots (Innes 1978: 7). According to a Mauritanian tradition, the Almoravid Abū Bakr died from the wound inflicted by an arrow shot by a near-blind old man, whose eyes were held open by his daughter (Farias 1967: 850). Both these tales recall Pageard's comment on the death of Sumanguru, where he claims a tradition says that the fatal arrow was fired by an uncircumcised boy (1961: 66-7). Indeed, Diabaté claims the same death for Tira Makhan, as we noted earlier. In all these cases, as in Sunjata's death at the hands of the youth Maham Boli, the final adversary of the hero could be characterized as both inappropriate and unworthy.

Accidental death of the hero may also be a cliché. We can recall al-Ḥājj 'Umar's death according to a story Adam reports which we mentioned in Chapter Seven: the warrior is said to die when an ammunition dump explodes in the cave in which he has taken refuge (Adam 1903-4: 122-4); or even the death of Henri II of France, who dies of wounds accidentally inflicted in a joust held to celebrate the weddings of his sister and daughter. Unifying both the idea of accidental death and death caused by an unsuitable, unworthy opponent may be the notion of inappropriateness - a death that confounds expectations established during the figure's life. In Sunjata's case he is shot by a Fulani, a member of a minority ethnic group, a group rarely perceived as a threat (except for the time of Koli Tengella's empire), a probable youth, and in

error. Neither his adversary nor the means of his death, I suggest, were to have been expected. The concept of an inappropriate death can perhaps be contrasted to our interpretation of the tradition that Sunjata died in water, which we suggested was an archetypal, in other words, wholly appropriate, demise. Yet, what both traditions equally avoid is asserting that the emperor should have been struck down in combat by a worthy, *horon* or warrior opponent.

### The Burial site of Sunjata

The earliest information we can present on this issue is from the colonial official Jean Vidal, who wrote in 1924 that

mon enquête dans la région de Niani ne m'a pas permis  
d'obtenir des descendants mêmes de Soundiata une indication  
précise sur l'endroit où aurait été enterré le héros (328)

Vidal's findings set the tone for most subsequent statements, which emphasize the secrecy, or perhaps uncertainty, of the traditionists on this subject. Nevertheless, Vidal says that the recitation which he reproduces claims that Sunjata died at Balandougou, which he says is on the banks of the Sankarani, near Niani (327). Balandougouba (*ba* = great, Delafosse 1929: 490), is a village roughly 8km south-south-west of Niani, on the left bank of the Sankarani, while Balandougou itself is some 35km further south, on the same bank of the Sankarani (Cissé & Kamissoko 1975: 475; Mauny 1961: 121; Niane 1984: 128). Also, Balandougou is given as the site of Sunjata's sepulchre in N (83) and as a possible site in KMJ,D1 (89). Either of these settlements as the site of Sunjata's grave would agree with Magan Sisoko's statement of tradition that the grave is to be found in Sankaran, although he denies the tradition's validity, saying it is told merely 'to calm people's minds' (Johnson 1979: 273). Balandougouba would conform with Niane's statements on the subject. In 1960a (21) and in *Sundiata* (1965: 96) he says that the emperor's tomb is to be found on the Sankarani, near Niani, although he does not mention either the name

Balandougou or Balandougouba. In his 1984 article he appears to draw back from this stance, claiming only that sacrifices are made to Sunjata Keita by his descendants at several sites on the banks of the Sankarani (145-6). The Balandougouba siting of the grave may also agree with KB's "Sangaradun" and Niane's "Sundiata-dun", which they both associate with the drowning tradition, and which I suggested may be referring to the same spot. KB offers no exact location for Sangaradun, but Niane places Sundiata-dun 10km upriver from Niani, which is about where Balandougouba is sited.

Sacrifices to the dead emperor are recorded as taking place at Bankongo by Magan Sisoko (Johnson 1979: 273). Bankongo may be identified with Bakunku, said by Kele Monson to be a potential site for the grave of the hero (KMJ,D1: 89). Dakajalan is associated with Sunjata's death in three accounts. WK says the hero died a peaceful death at Dakajalan (WK2: 141f.); KB reports this tradition (105); Magan Sisoko claims that all Sunjata's jinn and 'all his power' were once to be found at Dakajalan (Johnson 1979: 273), while WK asserts that Sunjata buried all the material effects of his power - that is his amulets and perhaps his weapons, clothing and his *mansaya* regalia - in a hole called *Keyla Kolon*, translated by Cissé as the "hole of masculinity", at Dakajalan, between three hills, where it is still found today (WK2: 151-3). Tigan (perhaps Tagan) is, says Niane, found about 30km south of Kangaba, in the Sankarani-Niger fork, and is also associated with Sunjata's grave. Niane says that there a 'pile of ashes' called *Bundalin* is believed to cover the emperor's knife, armour and shoes (1984: 128, 146). In addition, both Duguba and the Forest of Nora are recorded by Kele Monson as possible sites for Sunjata's grave, himself favouring the latter place.

As we said earlier, the paucity of information concerning the exact placing of Sunjata's grave may be due to either of two factors: reticence on the part of griots to furnish such information, or ignorance. Niane has made a statement that can be interpreted as implying ignorance on the part of traditionists on the subject: he notes that no royal tombs are to be found in Mali's later capital, Kangaba, that funerary monuments did not develop as the norm among the Malinke, but that they

interred their monarchs in huts which have since decayed (1960a: 21). But Niane has at the same time stressed in his writings what might be called the dual role of griots as both purveyors of traditional information and as guardians of secrets, implying that *jeliw* may know more than they reveal. In his own version of the epic the griot, Mamoudou Kouyate, prefaces his brief account of the site of the emperor's grave with the following assertion:

Mali keeps its secrets jealously. There are things which the uninitiated will never know, for the griots, their depositaries, will never betray them (N: 83)

And the interlocutor informs us that Mamoudou Kouyate at this point 'declined to go any further' (1965: 95). In his 1960a article Niane himself had suggested that the griots of Niane and Kangaba were keeping the story of the *mansa's* death from him (22), while in 1984 he states that a prohibition on disclosing the grave-sites of Malinke monarchs in effect exists (145).

The desire to keep the information about Sunjata's death and burial from the uninitiated may explain the silence from most accounts on these subjects - out of thirty-two versions which record a story of Sunjata's life, only nine give any information on his death and burial in their actual recitations. Magan Sisoko, who as we noted earlier, refrains from mentioning Sunjata's death during his narration, but is persuaded to speak on the subject in an interview afterwards, when he was probably very tired, supercedes his sparse comments with an 'Inaudible conversation' (perhaps esoteric details?) and then makes statements to the effect that there is more information that has not been recited (Johnson 1979: 267-74). Magan Sisoko appears to have kept information back from his recitation, perhaps in the manner claimed by Mamoudou Kouyate - secrets which are not to be publicly disseminated. However, as Johnson comments (1979: 274), Sisoko's claim that he has left some things unsaid is actually a common statement from griots, who are supposed to refrain from telling all. The most straightforward manner for a griot to imply that he knows more than he is telling, we might suggest, is for him to stop his recitation before the

accepted end of the story, thereby excluding details on Sunjata's death. Again, in line with Johnson, we can note that this bardic cliché of not telling all, whether or not true in all cases, probably serves for some griots as a useful excuse when dealing with subjects about which they are ignorant. We cannot rule out the possibility, therefore, that some of the silence about Sunjata's death and burial from the traditionists may reflect a lack of actual information.

However, the situation may be more complex than this. One noticeable feature of the available death and burial stories for Sunjata is the apparent disagreement between *jeliw*. A number of very different stories about his death and even more confusion over the site of his burial has been uncovered in our survey. In the same way, accounts which include traditions concerning Sunjata's death tend to report more than one tradition. Bardic reticence may arise less from an absolute lack of knowledge on the subject than an inability to reach a consensus amongst themselves, and from a subsequent unwillingness to air in public the effective disagreement, with its potentially damaging consequences for their profession's standing. Conversely, it is possible to read the contradictory statements as an attempt to confuse listeners and dissuade the curious from further enquiries. Magan Sisoko seems to suggest this when he notes that the story of Sunjata's burial in Sangaran is told merely to "calm people's minds", as we noted above.

Belcher gives another possible cause for the rare treatment of Sunjata's death. He says that discussion of the emperor's death would raise issues of succession and therefore questions concerning the variation in the local traditions which often follow the epic's performance (1985: 88). The evidence of our own survey of Malinke traditions does not provide strong support for this argument. Out of nine versions which relate details concerning Sunjata's death, four do deal with Sunjata's successors (ZA, V, BD, WK), but four do not (S, N, KMJ,D1, KB).

## Recapitulation

In this, the closing section of the epic of Sunjata, and one of the least commonly performed portions of the corpus, we have found several themes encountered in earlier sections rehearsed and elaborated upon, as well as uncovering some areas of bardic confusion, disagreement or secrecy. In addition, as with earlier episodes within the epic, what sparse evidence there is provided by Arab historians and travellers has tended to confirm the picture presented by the oral traditionists of this century and the last.

Enclosed within some of the traditional descriptions of Tira Makhan's search for horses with which to equip Sunjata's army was found an illuminating portrayal of the traditional relationship said to hold between the *jeli* and his *horon* patron, and an explication of the division of tasks enshrined in the *nyamakala* system of hereditary professions, reinforcing statements which we made in Chapter Six, on the basis of an examination of the relationships between Bala Faseke, Sumanguru and Sunjata.

A symbolic interpretation was advanced for the tradition of Sunjata's death in water, and a contrast drawn between this death tradition, and those which assert that Sumanguru's demise involved his petrification. It was suggested that the contrasting story-elements may be consistent with the two adversaries' portrayals in some other aspects of epic tradition: Sumanguru as an arrester of change, Sunjata as an accepter of change.

The epic's depiction of the western expansion of Mali was found to accord with both oral traditions still current in Senegambia and, as far as this goes, to the description of events provided by Ibn Khaldūn. The episode of Mali's attempt to purchase horses from the Wolof was seen to conceal behind it a more or less accurate memory of one of the equine trade routes employed by the Malinke, at least as far back as the seventeenth century, while we noted how Arab travellers from the fourteenth century recorded Mali's possession of a considerable force of cavalry. While these congruences do not establish this portion of the epic as a narration of

historical events, they do demonstrate that this episode retains in certain respects an accurate record of the actualities of the past. Tira Makhan's conquest of Senegambia may be similarly treated as a potentially fabulous rendition of an accepted and necessary historical occurrence: the military conquest and migration of Malinke people to the western seabord of west Africa which, although in its timing, scale, and exact nature may be open to question, cannot in itself be a matter of doubt.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: NOTES

- 1 ZA: 33-5; F2: 325-8; KMJ,D1: 81-3; FDS: 178-80; BS: 83; KB: 101-2; WK1: 185-209.
- 2 See also WK1: 187 where Sunjata is described as a hunter and KB: 102 where Jolofin Mansa says that Sunjata has only ever been known to the Wolof as one who walks dogs.
- 3 In BS we find a variant of this incident occurring earlier in the epic: Tira Makhan wraps himself in a burial shroud, saying 'when I see Susu Sumanguru, either I put him in a shroud or he puts me in a shroud' (BS: 69).
- 4 WK1: 211-45; F2: 328; ZA: 36. WK may be collating Tira Makhan's Gambian conquests with his defeat of Jolofin Mansa. WK calls the Jolof capital Basse Sira Soun Koro, "Basse under the feet of the Baobab" (185). Basse is associated with Tira Makhan's subjugation of the Gambia in a number of sources (e.g. KB). F2 implies that other conquests were made in the Senegambian region when it notes the defeat of "Ulimansa", who is said to reside near the land of the Wolof (328).
- 5 KMJ,D1: 85-7; KB: 103-4; CL: 218; FDS: 181; BS: 85-7.
- 6 BD: 23; Niane 1984: 133; BS: 69; Diabaté n.d.: 656; CL: 218; WK3: 53. In ZA Tira Makhan is called a Dembele, which Delafosse equates with the Traore (1959: 79); and in BS the griot notes that the Dembele are descended from Tira Makhan (69).
- 7 On the names of the brothers, see Chapter Three, note 9. Even in ZA, where the brothers have the patronym Dembele, Tira Makhan comes from the same clan.
- 8 See Niane 1984: 133 n.40, 1989: 15-26; B.K. Sidibe 1972a, 1972b; Cissoko 1969, 1972; Wright 1977, 1979, 1985; Innes 1976, 1978; *Ethiopiennes* (Revue socialiste de culture négro-africaine) 28 (1981) (special issue).
- 9 See also B.K. Sidibe 1972a: 7, Mveng 1981: 10, and Kouyate 1981: 35 for similar statements.
- 10 ZA: 36; V: 327-8; AR: 172; S: 47; N: 83; KMJ,D1: 89; KB: 105; BD: 37-8; WK2: 141-335.

## CONCLUSION

### THE EPIC AS AN ALLEGORY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

#### **History & cliché in the epic**

Recited as a story about the past, it is tempting to read the Sunjata epic as history. The bare bones of the epic's narrative are present in Arabic sources. Al-Bakrī confirms the existence of the pre-imperial *kafuw* (cantons) of "Daw" (Do) and "Malal" (Manding) in the eleventh century; these we have come across in the tale of the Buffalo-woman, along with Kri, where we are told that the three are merged in the formation of the Mali. Ibn Khaldūn records how the people of Mali were first subjugated by the Sūsū and then reasserted themselves under Mārī Jāta, who created an empire that stretched to the western seaboard. Equally, these points are brought out in the epic. Of course, Ibn Khaldūn himself may have been reporting an early version of the story of Sunjata by the griots of Mali, obtained via his Muslim informants such as *shaykh* ʿUthmān. Nevertheless, there is nothing implausible about this scheme of things having occurred in the Western Sudan in or around the thirteenth century. Certainly we know that, from a series of petty chiefdoms into which the area was divided in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which were subject to raids by neighbouring peoples in search of slaves, a powerful empire had emerged by the fourteenth. It does not seem implausible to account for this transformation via the agency of a powerful and dominant warrior-king, as does the epic. However, if one tries to go much further than this in terms of historical reconstruction, on the basis of the versions of the epic, one soon realises that one is dealing with a set of stories much of which have been retold by other people, at other times, and to account for other events. Numerous motifs or clichés have been identified throughout the epic in this thesis, and they can be briefly reiterated here.

The Keita genealogy, with its putative progenitor, Bilali, and its migration of an

early ancestor from the Middle East, and then again, the same list's claim to be a king-list, despite its long series of suspicious father-to-son successions (Chapter Two). The Buffalo-woman tale, with its repetition of the motif of a hunter-stranger who founds a dynasty by marrying an autochthonous princess, overlaid with Malinke clichés about women as lovers and as mothers (Chapter Three). The birth and childhood of Sunjata, which is surrounded by difficulties and exceptional circumstances, such as the father's problems coupling with his wife, the mother's long pregnancy, and the child's lameness, and contextualized by familial rivalries, is clearly reminiscent of the early life of many heroes in the hero biographical pattern (Chapter Four). Sunjata's exile, with its combination of ideas of rejection and suffering with those of a quest for knowledge and power, a development of character and skills, and an alternative home for the hero, is likewise a familiar pattern of many heroic myths (Chapter Five). The depiction of Sumanguru is equally consistent with that of the villain of many combat myths: Sumanguru is a usurper, a figure who is determined to cling to power at all costs, a tyrant, an oppressor of his subjects and a menace to his kin, but one who possesses a secret weakness (Chapter Six). Sunjata's return and eventual triumph are equally clichéd: at first he has no success, and he is victorious only upon gaining the knowledge of his opponent's strength from his seductress sister (Chapter Seven). In death as in life, both Sunjata and Sumanguru present themselves as the stuff from which myths are made. Traditions about their deaths are told which are unclear, allowing several variants, and ambiguous, some saying the figure died, others simply that he disappeared. Sumanguru transforms to stone or is swallowed up in a mountain; Sunjata turns into a hippopotamus and is swallowed up by water (chapters Seven and Eight).

As we argued in Chapter Four, the presence of clichéd material in a story does not necessarily invalidate that story's use as a historical source: the presence of clichés implies structure and repetition, both of which are present in history as they are in fiction. For example, the hero myth pattern is discernible in clearly historical figures as well as in the lives of those we would term mythic.

Nevertheless, in the case of the Sunjata epic, without corroborative independent written or archaeological evidence to support the story it tells, we are unable to prove its historicity.

A few claims made by previous historians can be doubted. Delafosse's reconstruction of the pre-Sunjata portion of the Malinke past complete with Hamana as the "father" of "Dyigui Bilali" and both as dated, *bona fide* Malinke monarchs can, following Conrad, be rejected; likewise with Delafosse's identification of Barmandāna with al-Muslimānī (Chapter Two). Niane's assertion that Sunjata did not lose his early battles with Sumanguru can be queried as a correct statement of tradition on the basis of a thorough examination of the sources; in the same way Levtzion's claim that Sunjata was victorious over Sumanguru at Krina rather than at another place, according to the traditions he quotes, is not a claim wholly endorsed by a more complete study of the available evidence (Chapter Seven).

In view of the paucity of corroborative evidence for most of the statements made in the Sunjata epic, it is tempting to construct a symbolic history on the basis of some of the corpus' elements. Conflicts between Sunjata and his paternal kin might be interpreted as splits within the Malian ruling house, which Soso exploited (Chapter Four); the call for Sunjata's return from the Manding *moriw*, who are described in the epic as travelling with vegetables, which they sell on their route, may imply an alliance between Sunjata and the Muslim traders against Sumanguru (Chapter Five); Sumanguru may indeed represent a resurgence of traditional religious beliefs in the face of the encroachment of Islam. But such symbolic readings of the epic are merely speculative, and cannot be accorded the weight of historical assertions.

At times the epic preserves a memory of a historical reality, for all that it may be recorded in a clichéd fashion. The episode in which a messenger sent by Sunjata seeks out horses from the Wolof of Senegambia reflects the trade in horses established between the Malinke and Wolof, although this trade route may not have been opened up during Sunjata's time. Similarly, the epic's account of Tira Makhan's subjugation of Senegambia and the settlement in the west of Malinke people reflects

Mali's expansion towards the Atlantic seaboard. As with the trade in horses with the Wolof, however, it is not possible to confirm the epic's claim that this westwards movement occurred during Sunjata's reign (Chapter Eight). These instances prove the epic capable of retaining historical information, albeit in what is most probably a reworked, formulaic, state.

These two episodes - obtaining horses from the Jolof state and subjugating Senegambia - are marginal to the epic's central plot. Concerning the historicity of this central plot we must admit to being unable to provide a definitive answer in the face of a lack of corroborative evidence. In any case, I suggest that the epic's content is retained and retailed for other purposes. My thesis is that the epic should be read as an allegory for the development of society. The epic, insofar as it is a story which purports to describe how Sunjata created a cohesive society and state out of disparate smaller groupings should, I believe, be understood as embodying perceptions of the essential structure and inter-relationships that make up Malinke society and, in addition, providing an abstract model for the creation of civilization in general. And reading the epic as an allegory need not diminish its potential historicity. Hayden White has suggested that all narrative history allegorizes and moralizes its content, that this may indeed be the addition that narrative makes to create history out of a plethora of unconnected events (White 1981, see also White 1973). Before considering this thesis in detail, let us first consider briefly the issues of the dating of the epic's initial composition and the manner in which it has been constructed.

### **Dating the epic**

Niane has suggested that the epic developed in response to the disintegration of the empire of Mali since the close of the sixteenth century, after which historical schools were established in Manding to preserve Malinke traditions (Niane 1974). This view of the epic perceives it as a celebration of Mali's early achievements

against the might of Soso in response to current encroachments from Songhai in the east and the Fulani empire in the west. However, given the essential agreement between the epic's plot and the scenario given by Ibn Khaldūn, in so far as it goes, and given that we know from Ibn Baṭṭūṭa that the king's *julā* (sing. *jalīd*) recounted to the court of Mali details concerning the king's forerunners on the throne, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest an earlier date for the epic's composition (or at least for the composition of certain elements of the epic), perhaps as early as the fourteenth century.

Of course, we cannot tell how much the epic may have altered since then, and one might initially believe that it would be highly implausible that the epic of today should resemble that which the medieval *mansaw* of Mali may have heard from their griots. Three factors can be advanced to counteract this assumption (although it is true that they cannot be counted as refutations). Firstly, we have noted that the essential structure of the Sunjata epic and the scenario found in Ibn Khaldūn are fully compatible. Whatever else in the story of Sunjata may have altered over time, certain elements in the plot have remained unchanged since the fourteenth century, viz., the subjugation of the Malinke by Soso, and their liberation and unification into a strong and expanding state by Sunjata. Secondly, although the epic of Sunjata is sure to have gone through a certain amount of alteration over time (at the very least, anachronistic elements such as guns have been added in some accounts), our own comparative survey of the epic, which covered the last ninety-seven to ninety-nine years, presented no conclusive evidence for the gradual evolution of the epic (Chapter One). Admittedly, the survey's timespan is brief in comparison with the purported depth of the tradition; also, recorded versions of the epic made in the last one hundred years may have in some cases been disseminated in west Africa, acting as stabilizers of the oral tradition. Yet (and this is my third point) our comparative survey does indicate the potential for oral tradition among the Malinke to perpetuate intact a complex story for at least a century, and also, where complementary evidence exists to prove it, to retain certain specific details such as the name of a king

earlier than Sunjata - i.e. Beremu Dana, who can be equated with the Barmandāna of Ibn Khaldūn - not to mention the name of the hero himself (Mārī Jāta in Ibn Khaldūn), for a much longer period of time - in these cases for over five hundred years (Chapter Two).

Niane suggests that the epic was produced in response, effectively, to national decline, and this would date the epic much later than the golden age of Mali in the fourteenth century. But my own reading of the epic as an allegory for the creation of society need not be thought to restrict the epic's possible date of composition to the days after imperial collapse. The epic's message - in emphasizing the way societies are built and maintained, and in accounting specifically for the genesis of Mali - can be seen as equally applicable to the apogee of the empire as to the time of its decadence. Indeed, we can recall Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's description of the poetry of the *julā* of Mansa Sulaymān's court, where he calls it an "exhortation", and records how the king is reminded of the "good deeds" of the previous occupants of the throne, and encouraged likewise to be remembered for his good deeds (Levtzion & Hopkins 1981: 293). It appears that, even in the fourteenth century, Malinke griots told of their past rulers in order to inspire their present *mansa* to achieve good deeds - in other words, they recounted history as a moral tale. If it is correct to view the Sunjata epic as a moralizing narrative, then it would perhaps have fitted well into the griots' corpus at the time when part of it was heard by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.

In sum then, although in truth we cannot be sure that the epic as we now have it is any older than the 1890s, this being the earliest date from which versions are extant, it is most probably of considerable antiquity, perhaps having been formed after the decline of the empire, as Niane avers, but (and I think this equally plausible) perhaps earlier, while the empire was still flourishing.

## The construction of the epic

The premise, mentioned in the Introduction to the thesis - that oral literature is manufactured through the employment of stock themes and clichés - seems admirably borne out in the case of the Sunjata epic, as the list of identifiable motifs presented near the start of the Conclusion demonstrates. However, it is by no means clear whether these themes are consciously employed by the bards or simply evolve through the gradual creation of traditions.

By way of a general proposition concerning the nature of the Sunjata epic, we can say that meaning is in part generated through comparison, i.e. through the specific use of a cliché with reference to its previous uses in other narratives. This may take several forms. As we argued in Chapter Three, stock themes may be retained in the tale, behind their reworked forms, as shadows or traces. Some evidence of this was shown to exist in the Buffalo-woman tale, where both of the Traore hunter-brothers failed to become the father of Sunjata, as the standard motif would suggest, but where they were nevertheless not entirely removed from the project of Sunjata's creation. The "echoes" of other, alternative renditions of particular themes act as references, or "controls", upon the meaning of the theme in its present form. Thus Sumanguru's attempt to form a relationship of patronage with the bard Bala Faseke (Chapter Six), where he severs the tendons of the griot, reveals itself to be a parody upon other griot origin tales, in some of which it is the patron-to-be who cuts his own flesh, and not the flesh of his would-be *jeli*. Meaning is created through the superimposition of one narrative pattern upon another, allowing the slight discrepancies between the two to remain discernible. At a general level in the epic we might say that Sunjata's role as a patron to the griots is superimposed upon Sumanguru's attempt at patronage; Sunjata's *mansaya* (kingship) upon the "kingship" of Sumanguru; his *horon* (noble) qualities upon the failed attempt at nobility of Fakoli and Sumanguru.

In other cases reference is made to several subjects at once through a single

theme. In Chapter Two we noted how certain putative ancestors of the Keita, such as Mamadu Kanu and the Simbon brothers, were recalled as Muslims, linked directly to the time and place of prophet Muḥammad, but equally grounded in the pre-imperial past of Manding itself, as hunter-kings, experts in the art of the chase or favourites of the hunting deities, Sanin and Kontron. Also it may be recalled how, at least for the western Malinke, the cliché of an eastern migration referred at once to the purported home of early Keita figures in the Middle East and to the eastern heartland of Manding, towards which the western migrants look as their original home; and how in any case the east, designated by the Malinke as the "rising sun", is in consequence easily associated with metaphors of origin and birth (Chapter Two).

The epic can be seen to create meaning through stock themes by over-determining that theme, simultaneously referring to several registers of meaning. Sunjata's crossing of the Niger river recalls notions of watery birth, the alteration of status by means of a passage through water, kingly power over the elements, and the successful crossing of a natural boundary implying pre-ordained destiny; it also evokes ideas of maternal care or protection, as it is his mother who has prepared for his crossing by depositing a silver bracelet with the boatman (a specific example of a general Malinke custom in which the child is placed in the care of a wise or powerful figure); in addition it acts as the basis for Sunjata's alliance with the Somono, and as the origin tale for the Somono's traditional designation as *Dji Tigi* or masters of the water (Chapter Seven). Similarly, the relationships between Bala Faseke, Sunjata and Sumanguru serve to account for several aspects of traditional Malinke society: the origin of praise-singing by the griots, the origin of the *bala* as their musical instrument, and the link between Keita and Kuyate (Chapter Six). The epic of Sunjata might be described as employing the cliché or theme as a reference or code which allows its listeners to draw upon implicit knowledge of analogous or related traditions rather as a reader employs a book of synonyms and antonyms, or a student of the Bible uses a concordance. Faced with severe limitations in the retention of numerous unique narratives, the oral traditionist, we can say, combines

several layers of meaning within a single episode, and utilizes the stock theme or cliché, familiar to his audience, to refer the present narrative to many previous, analogous narratives.

### **Social formation in the epic**

I shall now return to the major theme of this Conclusion - that the epic should be read as an allegorical tale concerning the creation of society. My premise is that the basic condition upon which the success of human societies depend is the solidarity and cohesiveness of its members; society, as the amalgamation of individuals into larger, interconnected units demands the bending of individual wills to the will of the commonality, the sublimation of individual concern to that of the collective, both in the case of the family unit or wider kinship structure, and in the case of social hierarchies inherent in the division of labour. Society's basic building block is the family, kinship; beyond that, it is composed of an inter-related hierarchy of interest groups and professions. In the case of the epic of Sunjata, I believe that the narrative is concerned both with the issue of kinship and the family unit, and with the hierarchy of Malinke social categories. In the following sections I attempt to outline how the epic suggests that the means to achieve social cohesiveness, through an explication of the way in which individuals are conjoined in the family, beyond kinship through *senankuya*, and by the inter-relations across the basic division in Malinke society into nobles and hereditary professionals.

### **The family & the individual**

A society which is to endure must provide for the creation, nurture and socialization of its young, and most societies have taken the family group as the solution to these needs. Among the Malinke the family unit, narrowly defined, is the husband, several wives, and their offspring. In Malinke culture, as in many other African cultures,

the infant is perceived as a raw form from which the prospective future member of society must be fashioned, and it is to the task of fashioning socialized human beings that the epic directs its focus when narrating the childhood and exile of Sunjata. Sunjata is to be seen as a role model for individual maturation, his sufferings and triumphs an inspiration to current listeners. The problems inherent in polygynous families - sibling rivalry and co-wife jealousy - are not side-stepped in the epic, despite the fact that the narrative offers no profound solution to these difficulties. Kinship is presented not in an idyllic, perfected form, but as an institution which, although meeting many social and individual needs, also throws up its own problems. Sunjata is, however, shown to triumph over his *faden* (paternal kin) as he is over his specific disabilities - in this case the epic is inspirational in its solution to a social problem rather than programmatic.

As a lame individual, I believe, Sunjata can be taken at one level to represent the Malinke view of their children: dependent, selfish, demanding. His recovery from paralysis should be understood as one aspect of the initiation into adulthood, with emphasis in the tale being placed on Sunjata's independence, and his ability to bring food to the family (by fetching leaves for his mother and through hunting game) (Chapter Four). Exile stresses the importance for the individual of making friendships (alliances) beyond the kin group; it is also a time of testing, a time in which qualities and skills are developed, knowledge is sought and goals are established. Socially, Sunjata is representative of the ideal member of the young persons' *ton* (society), which aims to develop the aforementioned skills and qualities in its members by providing them with certain responsibilities and challenges. Sunjata is also the young initiate hunter embarking upon the *Dali-masigi*, or "hunter's adventure", living off his own ability to exploit the resources of the bush, and sojourning with non-kin, often people linked with him through *senankuya* (Chapter Five).

Although it is true that the Malinke hero (*ngana*) can be depicted as an exemplar of the promotion of individual aims and desires at the expense of group solidarity,

it is nevertheless accurate, I believe, to interpret the epic as a promoter of group cohesion, even in its depiction of its hero, Sunjata. While he is seen engaging in arrogant and intemperate acts of prowess while still young, the epic seems gradually to exclude these from its narrative during the exile portion of the hero's career. With his controlling of his desire to repay his detractors in the episode of the "three affronts" (Chapter Five), Sunjata has, we may say, reached maturity. Rather than showing him as one who breaches group solidarity and isolates himself, the epic actually emphasizes the hero's dependence on others, particularly his maternal kin, in the achievement of his goal. On the contrary, it is Sumanguru who is represented as having developed an arrogant belief in his own ability to succeed in his aims without the support of others (see below), and of course it is Sumanguru who fails.

Beyond the level of individual growth and maturation for which Sunjata's life acts as a model for the Malinke, the epic considers relationships between family members in what I take to be its project of offering a template for the construction of society. Two particular relationships in the family are idealized in the story of Sunjata, and, I believe, offered by the Sunjata tradition as examples to its listeners: that between mother and son, and that between brother and sister.

Sogolon is portrayed, from the moment of her conception of Sunjata, as the ideal mother, forgiving of her son's tardy development and of her co-wife's jibes, yet ready and able to cajole and support her child when he eventually tries to stand. When Sunjata is exiled she accompanies him through the various kingdoms of their wanderings, sometimes is said to impart to him advice necessary for the success of his quest; and when Sunjata receives the call to return and reclaim his father's throne and she is now old and infirm, her life fast concludes (sometimes at her own request), so that her son's speedy departure need not be hampered on her account. Later, when the hero comes to cross the Niger river, and is prevented from so doing by the Somono river folk, he discovers that his mother has smoothed the path before him, having previously made a present of a bracelet to the boatmen on his behalf. Loyal, self-sacrificial and supportive, Sogolon, in her relationship with Sunjata,

epitomises those qualities demanded by the Malinke of the mother in her role as nurturer and developer of the young.

Sunjata, in his relationship with Sogolon, is both demanding and considerate. Even if we exclude his behaviour as a child as beyond his control (which is a moot point, considering his heroic status), he demands the truth of his mother when he fails a test of his legitimate, *horon*, status while an exile; yet he is sometimes shown as gaining the use of his legs after seeing his mother humiliated by the taunts of her co-wife, and his first action upon walking is to fetch for her leaves from a baobab tree (or the whole tree) for her cooking. And when considering his response to the marabouts who ask him to lead the rebellion against Sumanguru, he first consults Sogolon and is prepared to remain in exile so long as she is alive.

The relationship between Sunjata and his sister can also be interpreted as an ideal, and as a model from which the audience might be expected to learn. If the hero's mother is supportive of her son in his quest, and self-sacrificial toward his needs, then his sister is perhaps more so, for without her he would not have obtained the secret of Sumanguru's strength, for she succeeds in gaining this secret through her seduction of the Soso ruler. And in a separate incident, when his sister magically removes the internal organs of an animal Sunjata and his brother have killed, Sunjata is both temperate and understanding in his response to this surprise.

Further significances are uncovered concerning these pivotal relationships when we consider the negative examples of kinship relations provided in the epic. Sumanguru's relationship with his mother can be read as an object lesson in how not to behave towards one's bearer and nurturer. When entertaining the seductress, Sunjata's sister, it is Sumanguru's mother who warns her son against giving away to a stranger any of his secrets. Sumanguru ignores this maternal advice; in some accounts he even attacks his mother, provoking her to break her ties with him. Sumanguru believes he is strong enough on his own to withstand the challenge of Sunjata; on the contrary, Sunjata is shown to succeed only through the aid of his supporters - harmony and unity are extolled while individuality and selfishness are condemned. In a few

accounts we also find that Sumanguru alienates his sister through taking her child from her, thus precipitating her defection to Sunjata's camp with the secret of Sumanguru's strength. In many more accounts Sumanguru is shown to be dismissive of the rights of his maternal kin, in the shape of Fakoli, the son of his sister. Sumanguru demands that Fakoli give to him his wife, and Sumanguru's insistence prompts the warrior Fakoli to desert his uncle with all his followers.

In addition, the epic furnishes us with another specific example of a poor brother-sister relationship - that between Sunjata's own brother, Manding Bori, and his sister. Manding Bori, who is with Sunjata when their sister takes the internal organs of an animal they have recently killed, reacts in a contrary fashion to Sunjata, becoming angry, confronting his sister, arguing with her, and stripping her naked in a contest of magical powers. Manding Bori contravenes the generally accepted norms governing the tenor of brother-sister relations, as well as a specific prohibition against behaviour that could imply sexual attraction. In the epic, his descendants' exclusion from the kingship, which is reserved for Sunjata's, is attributed to this quarrel.

What of the remaining basic relationship of the family unit, that of husband and wife? It is true that the epic offers no model for this relationship. Indeed, it is tempting to argue that the epic has a basically negative view of male-female sexual relationships. Not only do the two hunters of the Buffalo-woman tale and Sunjata's own father all suffer in attempting to copulate with Sogolon (Chapter Three), but Sumanguru's defeat is attributed, essentially, to his sexual liaison with Sunjata's sister, in addition to his desire for Fakoli's wife (Chapter Seven). While Sogolon may be an ideal mother to Sunjata, she is not an ideal wife to his father; and while Sunjata's sister may be an ideal sister to Sunjata, she leads Sumanguru to defeat as his lover. It is true that the epic is emphatic in its expression of the dangers of sexual relationships, and equally true that Sunjata is rarely presented as a sexual being at all. As with the polygynous family unit and its inherent tensions, the epic does not present an untenably rosey view of male-female sexual relations.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that the epic is somehow condemning marriage; rather, in the example presented by Sumanguru at least, it is sexual desire and the single-minded pursuit of its satisfaction that the epic cautions against, and not the institution of marriage itself. What it does seem to imply, nonetheless, is that relationships based upon sexual desire are not secure enough foundations for society, and that marriage, insofar as it contains within it such an element of sexual desire, will be less stable than other forms of interpersonal links.

### ***Senankuya* - ties beyond kinship**

The family unit, the inter-relationships that constitute it and the clan groupings that it forms, are an indispensable base for most societies, it seems, but do not in themselves produce a unified, homogeneous society - family ties are not enough to create and maintain society. The epic of Sunjata, I suggest, outlines in exemplary form how the wider unity of society is to be achieved beyond the ties of kinship. The institution of *senankuya* is the fundamental instrument in this project. *Senankuya* mirrors kinship, extending the privileges and obligations inherent in kinship to those from different, specific clans. Two examples of *senankuya* are portrayed in the epic. First, in the Buffalo-woman tale, the Traore and Konde become linked through *senankuya* after failing to consummate the anticipated marriage with Sogolon (Chapter Three). *Senankuya* appears to step in, according to this example, when the usual solidifying bond between clans (marriage exchange) fails to materialize; it is a substitute for the bond created by marriage exchanges. Out of the three clans involved in the Buffalo-woman tale, Traore, Konde and Konate (or Keita), the last two are linked by marriage, the first two through *senankuya*, while some accounts state that the Traore hunters gained wives from the Konate or Keita in exchange for giving Sogolon to Sunjata's father. Marriage exchange and the institution of *senankuya* between them create cohesion in society. The second example of *senankuya* in the epic concerns Sunjata's allies, the Tunkara clan of Mema,

who are claimed to be the *senankun* partners of the Keita (Chapter Five). The Meman Tunkara, in their relationship towards Sunjata, exhibit many of the qualities demanded of those related by *senankuya*: they provide hospitality to the exiled Sunjata, they offer him an army with which to help combat his enemy, and (in an ambiguous episode) raise the subject of aid in the burial of the dead expected from those bound by the ties of *senankuya*.

### Hierarchical solidarity

But Malinke society also consisted of a hierarchy of exclusive groups: *horonw* (nobles or freemen), *jonw* (slaves) and *nyamakalaw* (hereditary professionals). To obtain a unified society while maintaining such endogamous, status-differentiated groupings, required the formation of yet another order of bonds. While the epic says nothing about the relationship between *jonw* and other members of society, it has much to say about *horon-nyamakala* relations.

Although it may be the case that the view of the *nyamakalaw* as "despised" held by some earlier investigators was misplaced, it is nonetheless clear that the hereditary professionals are traditionally said to be excluded from positions of political power and from military combat. The elements of the epic which treat *horon-nyamakala* relations suggest that the *nyamakalaw* inhabit a secondary stratum of the political hierarchy, below the *horonw*, and sets about explaining and justifying this categorization.

Two stories detailing the origins of the relationships between particular clans of *jeliw* and *horonw* serve, I suggest, to promote the putative merits of the *horon-nyamakala* division in Malinke society, while one example of a misalliance between two hereditary professionals serves as a cautionary tale against ignoring the division.

In some versions of the Buffalo-woman tale (Chapter Three), we hear of the origin of the Jabate *jeliw*, personal griots, the story says, to the Traore clan. The tale suggests that the griot-to-be and noble-to-be were brothers, and often that the

griot-to-be was the elder. While the noble-to-be demonstrates his hunting and fighting skill in defeating the buffalo, the griot-to-be manifestly fails in this respect (he is often said to have taken refuge up a tree), but then proceeds to praise his brother with volubility. Their final relationship as *horon* and *jeli* is shown to reflect the natures of the two participants, their talents and inclinations, avoiding thereby any suggestion that the status-differentiated relationship was the result of coercion, but nevertheless emphasizing this status difference through the fact that the elder brother is deemed to be praising his junior (the buffalo's killer) from a position of indebtedness.

A similar, although less clearly defined, formula emerges in some accounts of the epic in which Bala Faseke Kuyate becomes griot to Sunjata after having been given, or having taken, Sunjata's xylophone (*bala*) (Chapter Six). The griot is said to play the instrument well (thus his status follows his skills) but is also in Sunjata's debt for receiving, or having taken, the musical instrument. This tale, and that of the Traore and Jabate, link future generations of the participant clans, and not just the individuals themselves - thus Kuyate are still today seen as the royal griots in Manding. They create ties between members of society, in this case across the barriers of status differentiation and endogamy, while at the same time promoting hierarchical difference through the invocation of a debt and of a sort of natural scale and/or exchange of abilities.

Bala Faseke Kuyate also appears in the cautionary tale we identified above concerning the misalliance of two *nyamakala* sub-groups. Finding himself at the court of Soso, Bala Faseke discovers Sumanguru's *bala* and plays it, in this way incurring the wrath of its owner. Sumanguru is placated when Bala Faseke plays him a panegyric upon the xylophone and the Soso ruler determines to keep the bard at his court to sing his praise, and severs his achilles' tendons to prevent his departure (Chapter Six). Sumanguru's precipitous act is not the behaviour of a potential *horon* patron, and indeed, Sumanguru is often described as a member of the Kante clan of *numuw* (blacksmiths) - a *nyamakala* group - and thus theoretically barred from

political office. As with the previous examples concerning hierarchical relations among the Malinke, inherent traits in the individual and the demands of a particular status position are seen to coincide. In Sumanguru's case they coincide in a negative manner: he is neither at liberty to exercise patronage over a *nyamakala* group, nor is he apparently able to do so, or at least not without alienating his prospective griot.

Generally speaking, we can say, the epic offers Sunjata as a role model for the status of *horon*, while offering Sumanguru and Fakoli to us as examples of failed attempts to fulfil this same role. Sumanguru fails to make a workable alliance with Bala Faseke; he also alienates his mother and maternal nephew (or sister). Fakoli is powerful, but has neither restraint nor loyalty. Conversely, Sunjata, despite early estrangement from his paternal kin, retains the support of mother and sister, while developing alliances with the Tunkara and Kuyate, as well as with the *moriw* (marabouts) and Somono boatmen. Sunjata may have begun life, according to the epic, as an arrogant and unruly child-hero, but it is only in effect Sumanguru who attempts to constitute and maintain a society while remaining arrogant and convinced of his own singular strength.

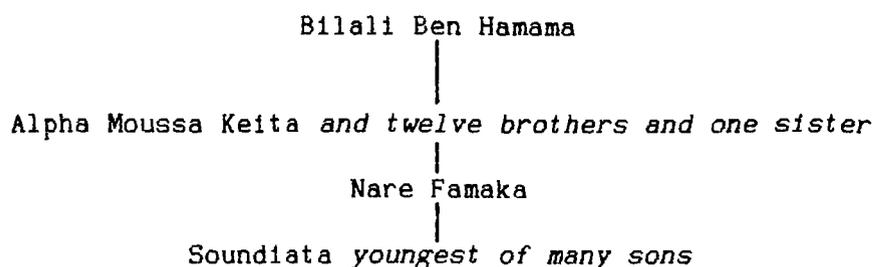
Society, I suggest, is seen by the epic as a coalition of disparate individuals and groups, with great potential for internal fractiousness and hostility. While military force, intimidation and tyranny can create apparently homogenous societies for a short while, a lasting society, I believe the epic asserts, rests only upon the establishment, and acceptance, of a sufficient number of mutually rewarding ties and bonds between individuals and groups. Sumanguru's state, which emphasized control and coercion, while neglecting the development of a sturdy grid of relationships and alliances linking people together, is shown in the epic to fail; Sunjata, whose military support itself was an extension of both the alliances of kinship and of the mutually rewarding and obligatory *senankuya* institution, and whose relationships with status-inferiors tempered firm control with benevolence, in his rise to power presents us with a model for the development of a viable and lasting society.

Yet it might still be argued that Sumanguru's contribution to the epic is not merely that of providing a negative example for the audience. In some of his actions he prefigures Sunjata. He, rather than Sunjata, first unites the petty chiefdoms of the Malinke into a single state, his imperial pretensions are a model for the Mali empire Sunjata was to create, and he first institutes the *jeli-horon* relationship which Sunjata later emulates and perfects as a model for hierarchical relations within Malinke society. Even in the accounts of his lowly origins and meteoric rise to prominence which some versions of the epic contain, Sumanguru's early career resembles and prefigures that of Sunjata. Sumanguru might be seen as preparing the way for Sunjata; despite the fundamental flaws in his project, Sumanguru's actions, it can be argued, were helpful to the achievements of Sunjata. If the hero, according to the Malinke conception of this figure, is resented and feared for his dislocation of society, then we can say that Sumanguru, in his violent act of disruption of traditional Malinke society, through his abolition of the petty chiefdoms, allows Sunjata to achieve the goal of a unified Malinke state without taking the blame for any initial disruption. Sunjata perfects the revolution that Sumanguru initiated; his synthesis develops from Sumanguru's antithesis.

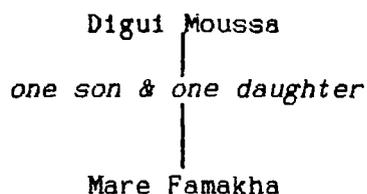
APPENDIX

THE GENEALOGY OF SUNJATA KEITA

Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to MAK: 209



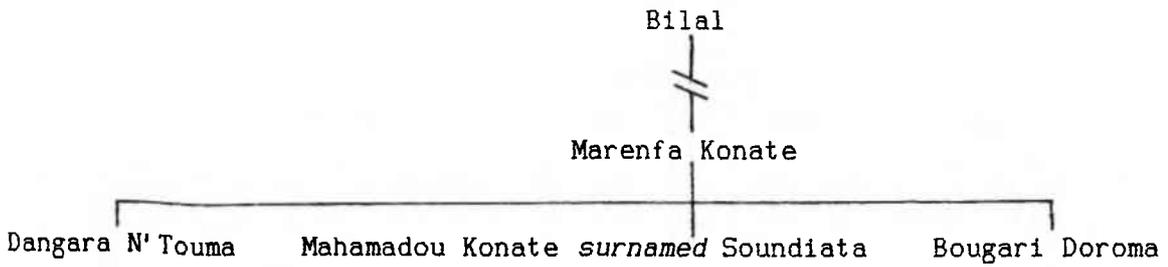
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to A: 354.



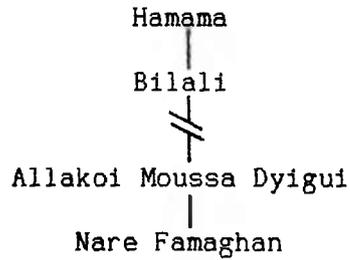
*He had the following sons:*

Kanannioko Cinebo, Kabala Cinebo, Mare Taniakele, Notobia Mare Yeresegue, Saso Touroula Kandia, Mare Tchakourou, Mansa Ganda, Mansa Makamba, Finadougou Koumakha, Gako Boukary, Kalambaba Dioukounte, Soudiata, Digui Maniamba Soukho.

Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to AR: 168



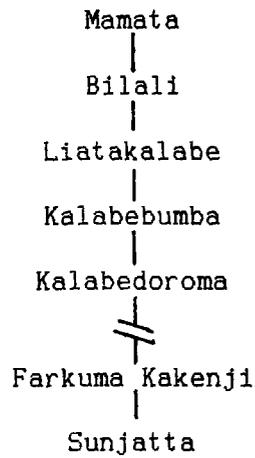
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to D: 19-20



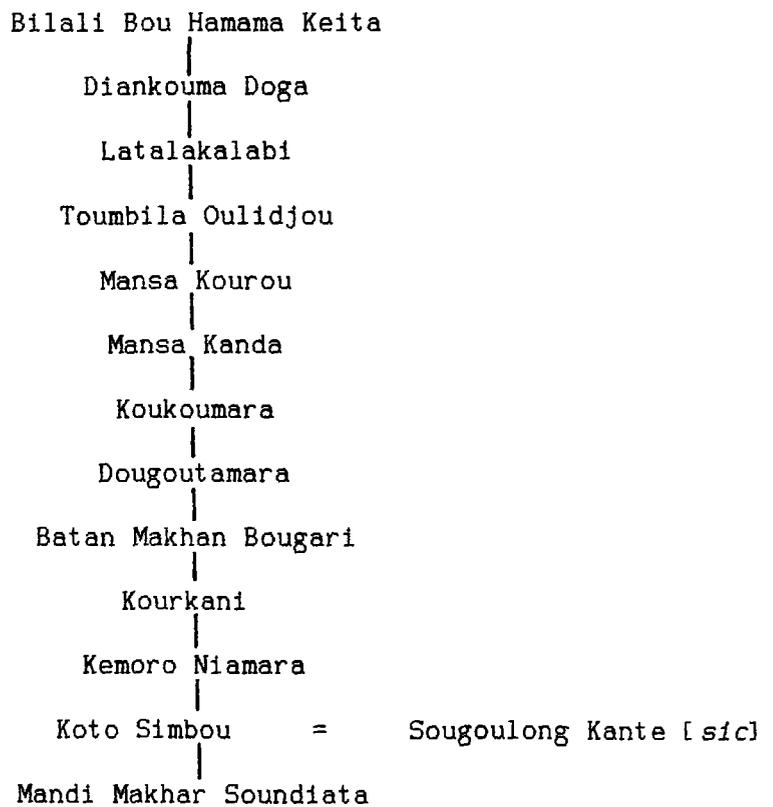
*He had the following sons:*

Kononiogho Simba Keita, Kabali Simba Keita, Mare Taniakele Keita, Nontouye Mare Yeressegue Keita, Sossotourou Lakandia Keita, Mosso Kandake Keita, Mansa Maghamba Keita, Finadougou Komagham Keita, Gagha Bougari Keita, Kalamba Dioukounton Keita, Soundiata Keita.

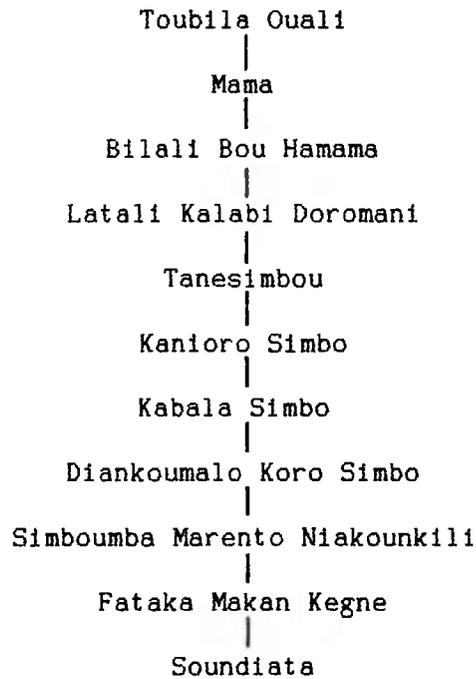
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to F2: 304



First genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to ZB: 37-8 (ZB1)



Second genealogy of Suniata Keita according to ZB: 44-5 (ZB11)



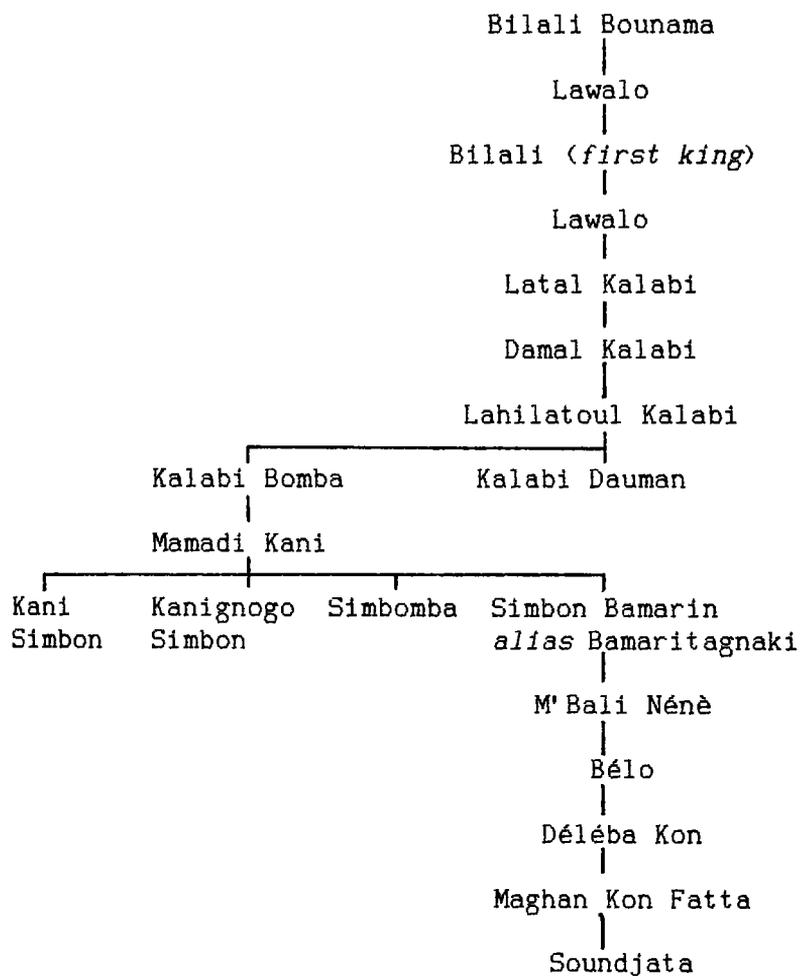
*Soundiata had the following sons:*

Diouroudi, Diourounifi, Mamady, Belebakou, Bataman Dembourgari, Dialimansa Mamoudou, Mansa Kourou, Faganda, Niamaga, Dinamakan, Torokou Kanda, Diangou Baroule, Tenembakou Makan, Nantoule, Sougoulongkori, Niagalelei, Serebori, Serebandiougou, Mansa Karayala, Kinie Mansamakan, Finadougou Komagan, Tankon Bougari, Ouassa Bougari, Koali Mourou Djingouma, Araco Tamba, Sinemakan, Bakama Gaï, Setigui Kassouma, Leï Komoussa Djigui, Nagou Mansa Kansiamagan Mourama.

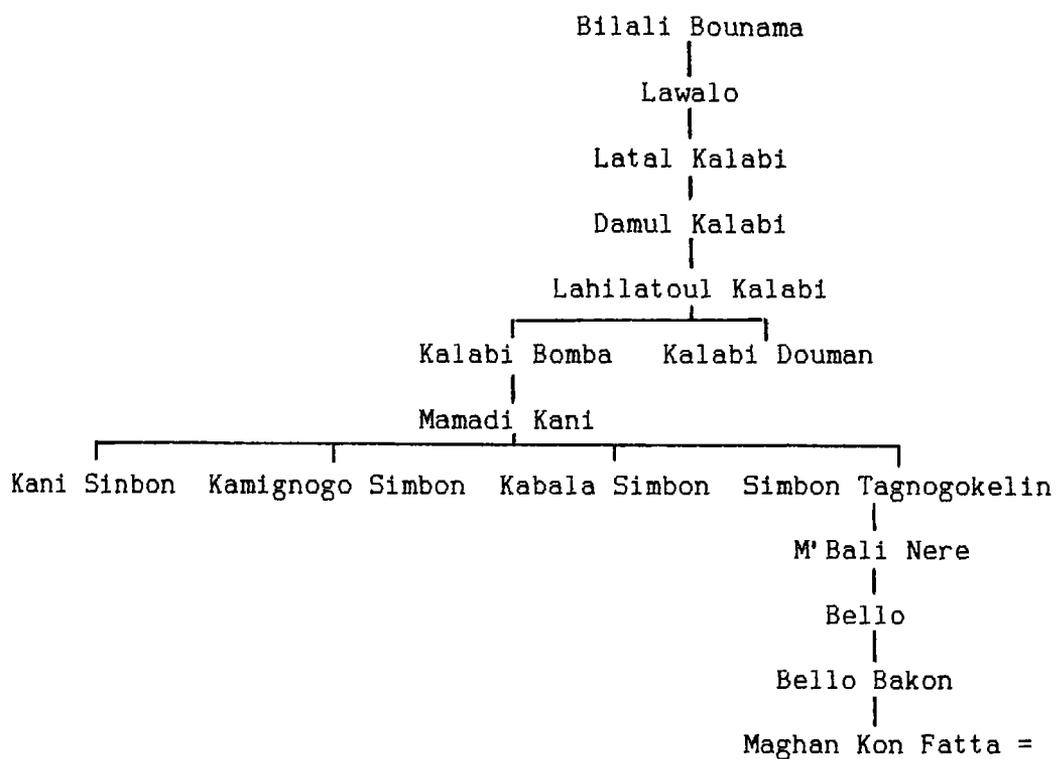
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to V: 319



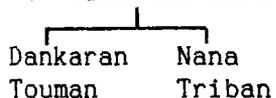
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to Niane 1959: 43



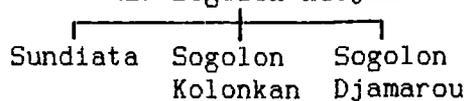
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to N: 2-3



(1) Sassouma Berete



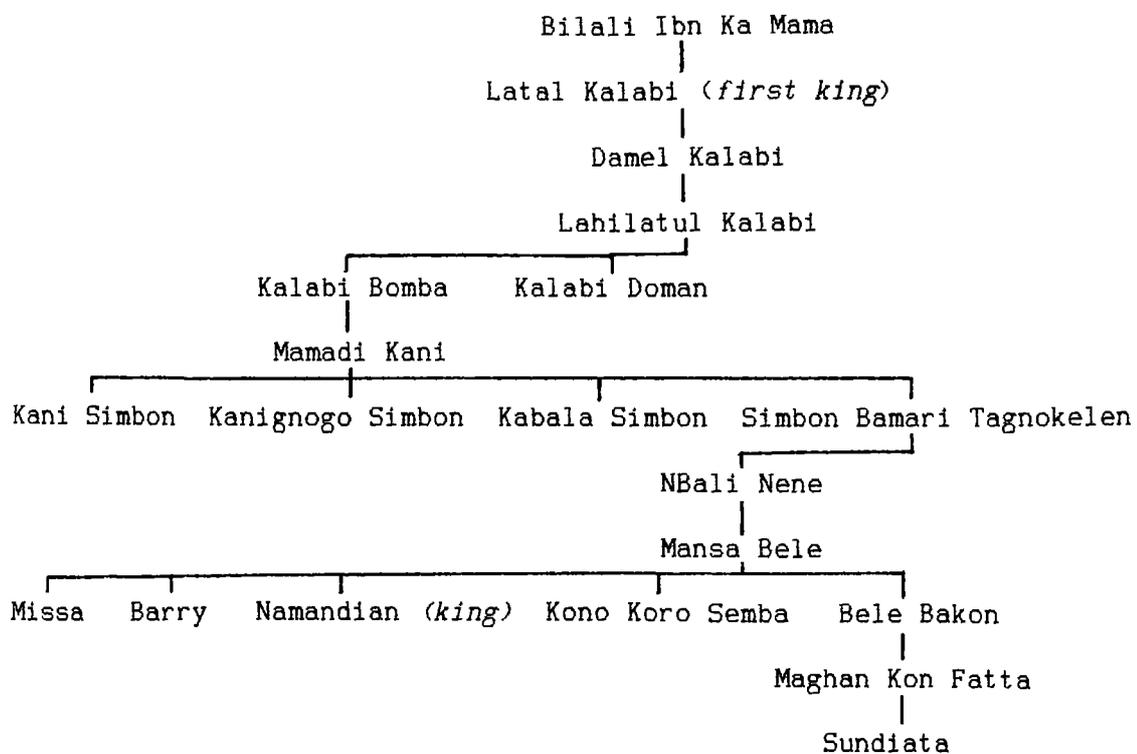
(2) Sogolon Kedjou



(3) Namandje Kamara

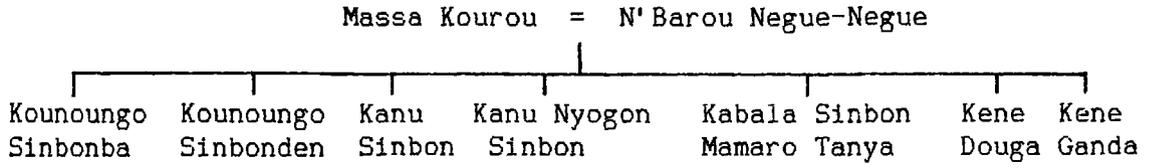


Genealogy of Sundiata Keita according to CL: 65-72

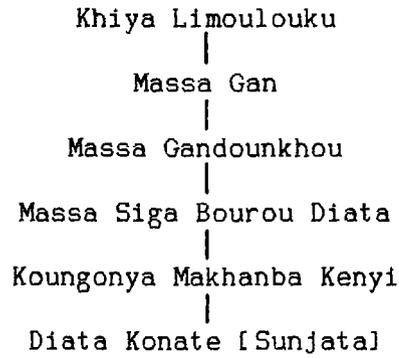


Fragments of the genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to TK: 10-20

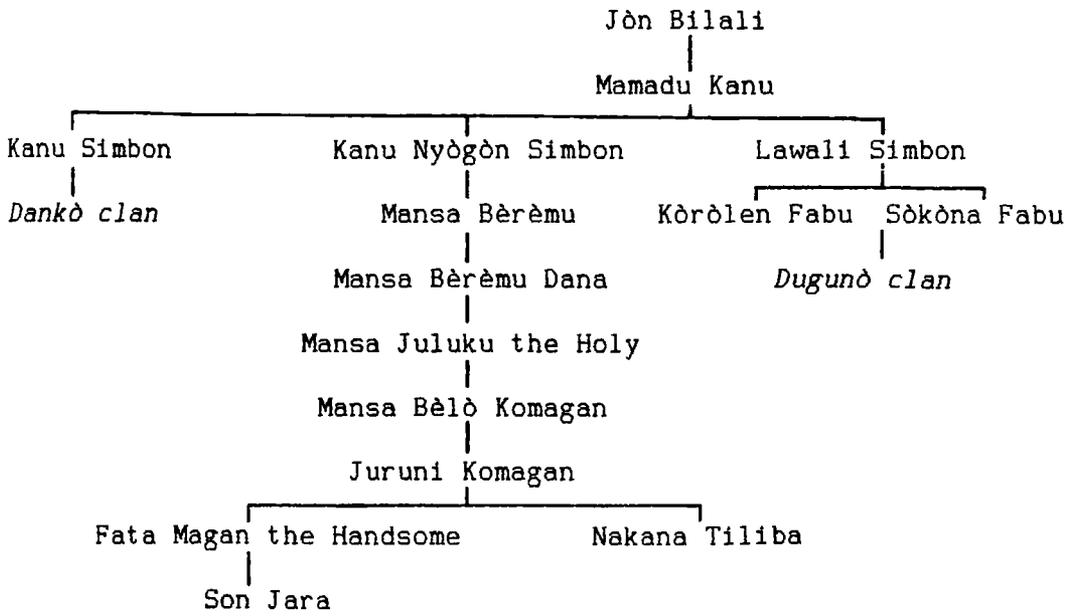
*The Simbons:*



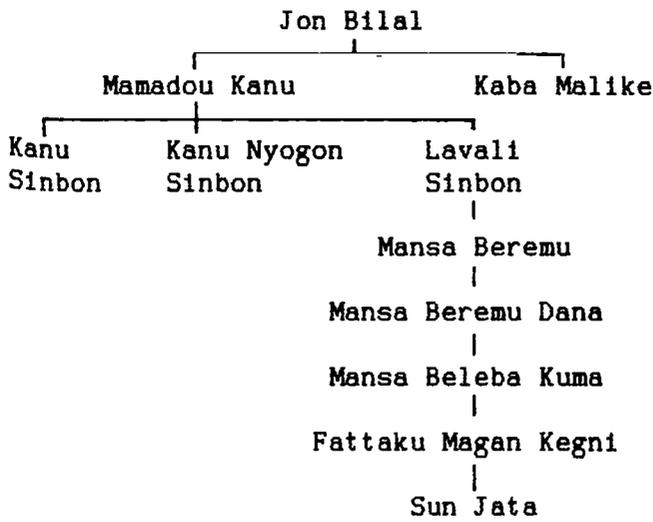
*Sunjata's direct ancestors:*



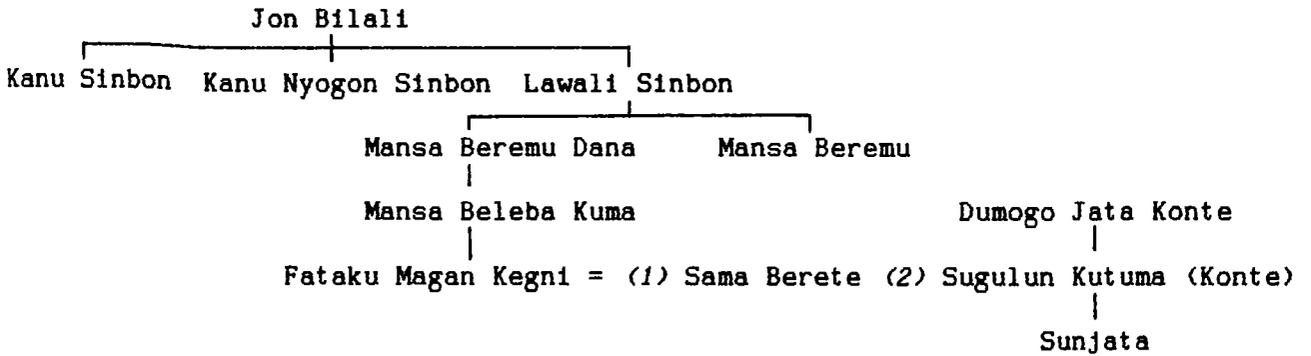
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to FDS: 222 (cf. pp.105 and 107)



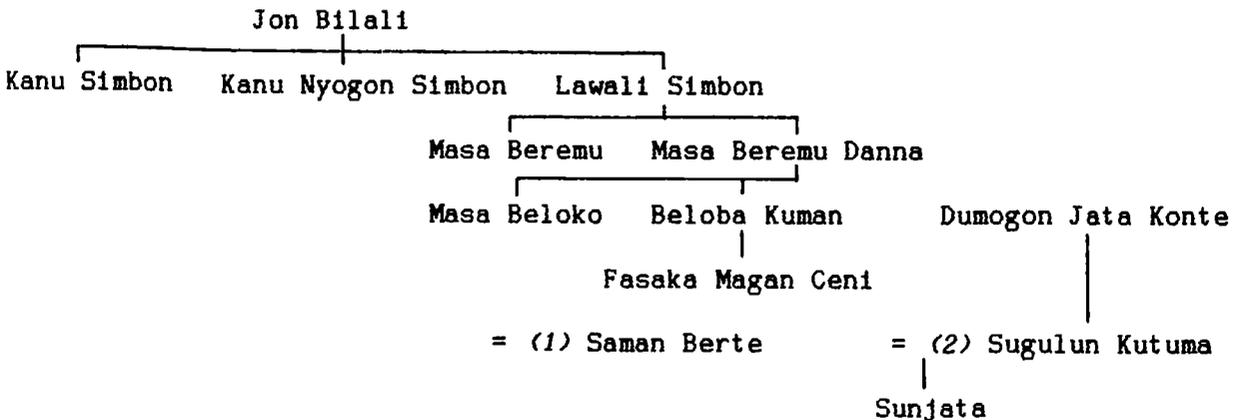
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to KMJ, D1: 12 and 18



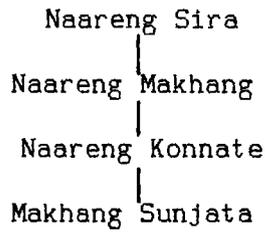
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to KMJ, D2: 12 and 24-5



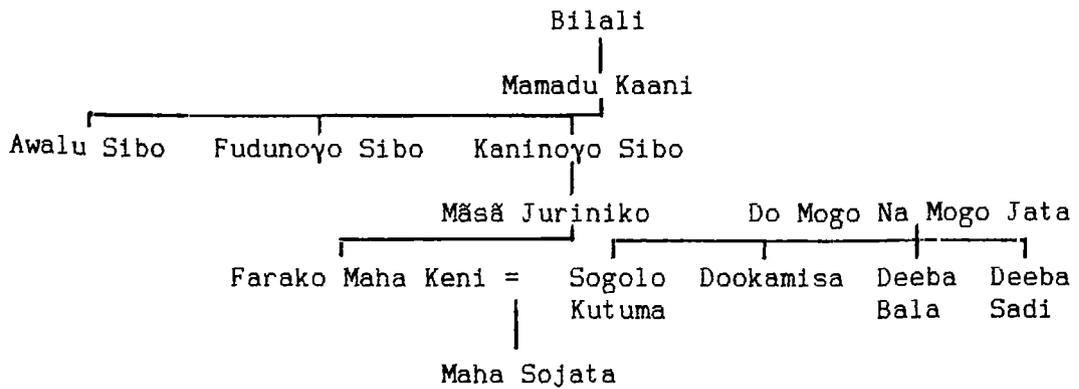
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to KMJ, M: 206 and 226



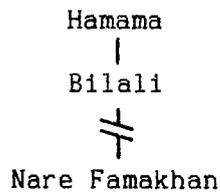
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to BK: 147



Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to DMD: 254 and 256



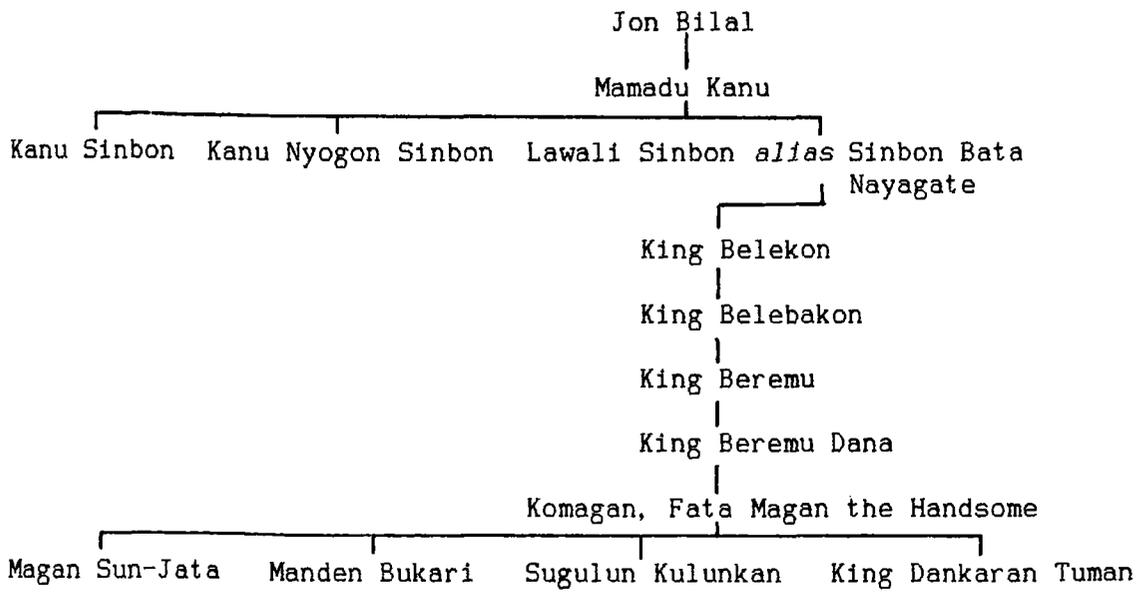
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to B: ix. 5. 32. 39



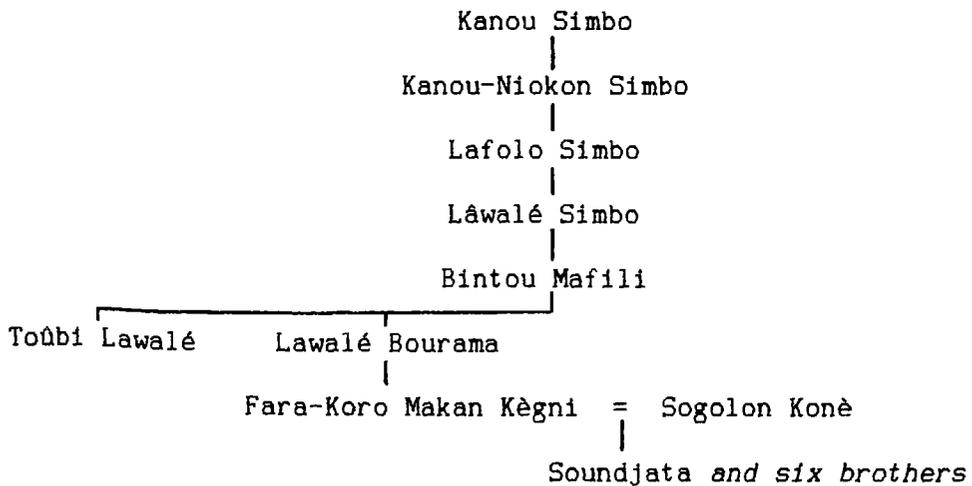
*He had the following sons:*

Kononioko Simba, Kabali Simba, Mare Taniakale, Nutuye Mare Yeressegue, Sossoturu Lakandia, Mossokoro, Mosse Kandake, Mansa Makamba, Finadugu Komakham, Gaga Bougari, Kalamba Diokunto, Mari Jata [Sunjata].

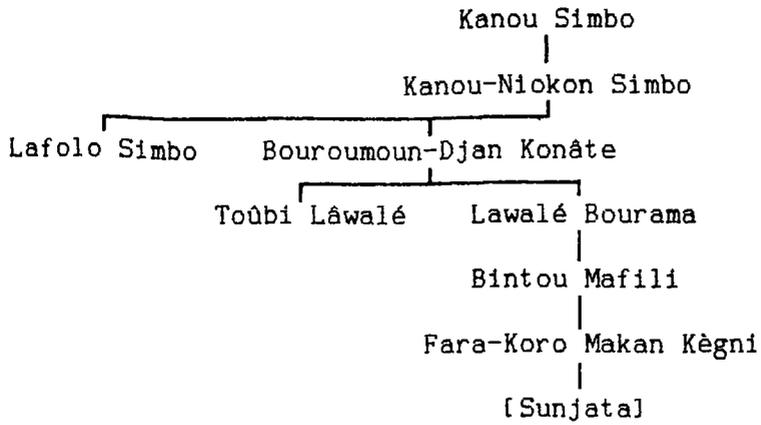
Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to MS: 36-7



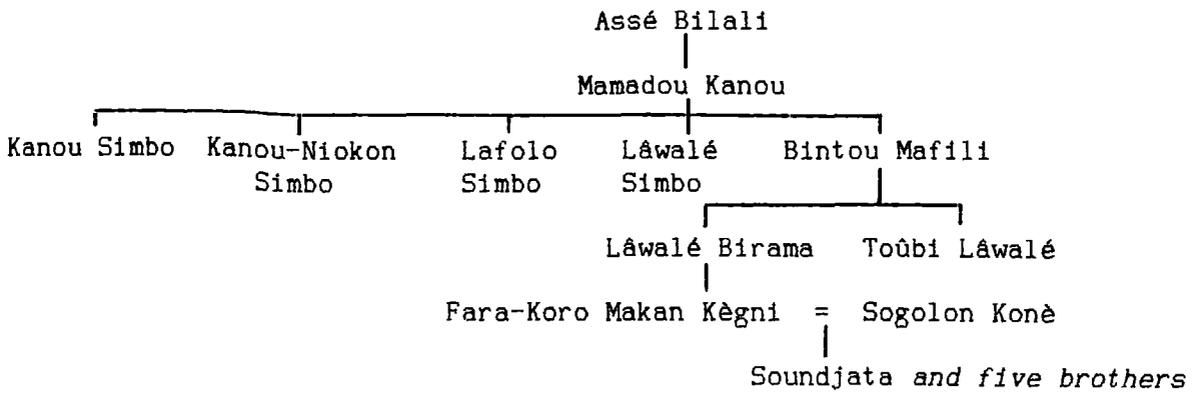
First genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to WK3: 43 and 386 (WK1)



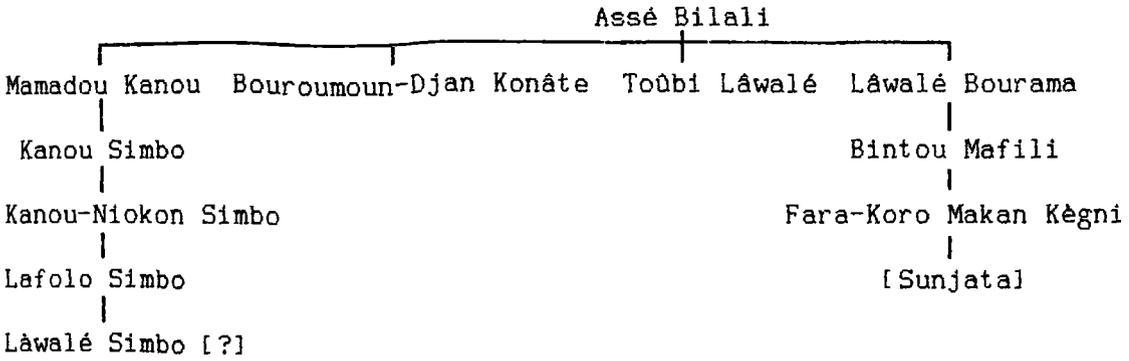
Second genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to WK3: 81-3 and 386 (WKii)



Third genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to WK3: 375 and 387 (WKiii)



Fourth genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to WK3: 385 and 387 (WKiy)



Genealogy of Sunjata Keita according to KB: 70



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS OF VERSIONS OF THE SUNJATA EPIC CONSULTED IN THIS THESIS

(Arranged in alphabetical order)

N.B. where appropriate: Page numbers refer to the version of the epic itself, and not to the whole article.

- A Adam G. Adam, "Le Mandé" in "Légendes historique du pays de Niore (Sahel)", *Revue Coloniale* 3 (1903-4): 354-62.
- AR Arnaud Robert Arnaud, "Suite de la Singulière légende des Soninkés", in his *L'Islam et la politique musulmane française en Afrique occidentale Française*, 1912, 166-72.
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- BK Banna Kanute "Sunjata", by Banna Kanute, in Gordon Innes, *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions*, 1974: 136-259.
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- D Delafosse Maurice Delafosse, "Histoire de la lutte entre les empires de Sosso et du Mandé", in his *Traditions Historiques et Légendaires du Soudan Occidental*, 1913, 19-30.
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- H Humblot Paul Humblot, "Episodes de la légende de Soundiata", *N. A.* 52 (1951): 111-13.
- HO Hourst Lieutenant de Vaisseau Hourst, *Sur le Niger et au pays de Touaregs: La Mission Hourst*, 1898, 50-53.
- JBS Jeli Baba Sisoko part of "Wagadu and Sunjata" by Jeli Baba Sisoko, in David Conrad, "The Role of griots in the history of Mali", PhD. dissertation, 1981, 670-710.
- KB Konaré Ba Adam Konaré Ba, *Sunjata, le fondateur de l'empire du Mali*, 1983.
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- MAK Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Ben Mohamed Kaba "Généalogie des gens de Keita" in Mamadou Aïssa Kaba Ben Mohamed Kaba, "Livre renfermant la généalogie des diverses Tribus noires du Soudan et l'Histoire des Rois après Mahomet, suivant le renseignements fournis par certaines personnes et ceux recueillis dans les anciens livres", *Annales de l'Académie des Sciences Coloniales* 3 (1929): 209-10.
- MB Monteil B Charles Monteil, "Simanguru et Sun-Dyata" in "Fin de siècle à Médine (1898-99)", *Bulletin de l'I. F. A. N.* 28 B (1966): 169-170, 'autre version', from Bakary Konte.

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- P Pageard Robert Pageard, "Soundiata Keita et la Tradition Orale", *P.A.* 36 (1961): 53-55.
- Q Quénum Maximilien Quénum, "La Légende de Fama-Soundiata" in his *Légendes Africaines*, 1946, 43-72.
- S Sidibé Mamby Sidibé, "Soundiata Keita, héros légendaire, Empereur du Manding", *N.A.* 82 (1959): 41-51.
- TK Tiemoko Kone *Soundiata*, by Tiemoko Kone, trans. Mme Marta and Lassana Doucouré, 1970.
- V Vidal Jean Vidal, "La légende officielle de Soundiata, fondateur de l'Empire Manding", *Bulletin du C.E.H.S.A.O.F.* 7 (1924): 317-28.
- WK1 Wa Kamissoko, first part Wa Kamissoko of Krina, *L'Empire du Mali*, trans. Y.T. Cissé, 1975.
- WK2 Wa Kamissoko, second part Wa Kamissoko of Krina, *L'Empire du Mali (suite)*, trans. Y.T. Cissé, 1976.
- WK3 Wa Kamissoko, third part Wa Kamissoko, *La grande geste du Mali, des origines à la fondation de l'empire*, trans. Y.T. Cissé, 1988.
- YFG Yeli (jeli) Fode Gibate version of the Sunjata story by Fode Gibate in Michael Jackson, "Prevented Successions: A Commentary upon a Kuranko Narrative" in R.H. Hook (ed.), *Fantasy and Symbol*, 1979, 101-03.
- ZA Zeltner A "La Légende de Soundiata" by Kande Kanote, in Franz de Zeltner, *Contes du Sénégal et du Niger*, 1913, 1-36.
- ZB Zeltner B "Suite de la légende de Soundiata" by Habibou Sissoko, in F. de Zeltner, *Contes du Sénégal et du Niger*, 1913, 37-45.

## ABBREVIATIONS

(Excluding those referring to versions of the epic)

- ARSAN            Association pour la Promotion de la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Noire, Paris. Formerly Fondation SCOA.
- C. E. A.        Cahiers d'Études Africaines. Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales.
- C. E. H. S. A. O. F.    Comité d'Études Historiques et Scientifiques d'Afrique Occidentale Française. Paris.
- C. N. R. S.      Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris.
- HIA            History in Africa: A Journal of Method. Los Angeles: African Studies Association.
- I. F. A. N.     Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noir. Dakar: Université de Dakar. (Formerly: Institut Français d'Afrique Noir.)
- J. A. H.        Journal of African History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- J. S. A.        Journal de la Société des Africanistes. Paris: Musée de l'Homme. (Now: Journal des Africanistes.)
- N. A.          Notes Africaines. Dakar: Université de Dakar, I. F. A. N.
- P. A.          Présence Africaine: Revue culturelle du Monde Noir. Paris.
- R. A. L.        Research in African Literatures. Austin: African and Afro-American Studies and Research Center, University of Texas.
- SCOA          Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain.
- S. O. A. S.     School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

## GLOSSARY

N.B. In Malinke, according to the present official rules, the plural is created by adding the suffix *-w*, while the quality of a thing, or the state of being associated with a term is denoted by the suffix *-ya*, hence *mansa*, "king", *mansaya*, "kingship".

- Baden, Badenya** children of the same mother; from *ba*, mother, + *den*, child. *Badenya*, lit., "mother-child-ness". Usually connotes, by extension, cooperation and support. q.v. *faden*, *fadenya*.
- Bala** xylophone; also known as balaphon or balaphone. Between fifteen and nineteen rosewood keys are amplified through calabash resonators.
- Baraka** Arabic, "blessing" or "grace".
- Belen Tigi** Master of the Word, lit. "master of the spear". Chief *jeli* in a village.
- Boli** a kind of a altar used for sacrifices in village or esoteric cults.
- Bori** run, flight.
- Bula, bila or bla** a group of Malinke clans encompassing different strata of society, regarded as the earliest or original settlers of the Manding.
- Dali masigi** lit. "temporary camp". Journey of adventure undertaken by young male initiates, often hunters, in which the novices travel afar, living by hunting and through the hospitality of villagers, either related by clan or through the *senankun* relationship.
- Donson, donso** hunter.
- Dji (or Ji) Tigi** Master of the Water, referring to fishermen and boatmen, the Bozo and the Somono.
- Dugu** village, settlement; also land, earth. Hence *Dugu tigi*, "master of the land", and head of the village.
- Faden, Fadenya** children of the same father; from *fa*, father, + *den*, child. *Fadenya*, lit., "father-child-ness". Usually connotes, by extension, rivalry and disharmony. q.v. *baden*, *badenya*.
- Fama** supreme chief, ruler or king.
- Fanga** power.
- Fina, fune** orator, praise-singer, mime-artist, often performing Muslim themes. The *finaw* are a separate and less regarded group to the *jeliw*. They are *nyamakala*.
- Fula** twins.

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Garanke                  | leatherworker; a member of the <i>nyamakala</i> .   |
| Gundo, gundu             | secret  |
| Horon, foron             | noble or freeman.   |
| Hulala                   | legitimate descendant of a lineage founder.   |
| Ja                       | shadow, double, wraith.   |
| Jakuma, dyakuma          | cat   |
| Jamu                     | clan or family name; patronym.  |
| Janjon                   | praise-poem glorifying the deeds of hunters, and also recalling the feats of Fakoli.  |
| Jeli                     | griot, bard, praise-singer, oral artist, musician. A member of the <i>nyamakala</i> . <i>Jelike</i> , male bard, <i>jelimusu</i> , female bard.   |
| Joliba                   | the Niger river.  |
| Jon                      | slave.  |
| Kafu                     | regional polity or canton among the Malinke and Bamana.   |
| Kama Bolon,<br>Kama Blon | sacred hut at Kangaba (Kaaba) in Mali which is rebuilt every seven years in festivities during which the <i>jeliw</i> of Keyla recite Malinke traditions, including the Sunjata epic.   |
| Kari                     | age-grade cycle.  |
| Kayamagha                | title of Soninke ruling lineage of Ghana-Wagadu.  |
| Kengebugurilala          | diviner who employs sand (also <i>kenyedāla</i> ). Translated in F as the Sand Oracle.  |
| Komo                     | male initiation society among the Malinke and Bamana.   |
| Kora                     | harp-lute, formed from a calabash, with a long wooden neck and, usually, twenty-one strings. Related instruments constructed in similar fashion are the <i>bolon</i> and <i>solon</i> . |
| Korte                    | poison.   |
| Kule                     | basket-maker, carver, canoe-repairer; a member of the <i>nyamakala</i> .  |
| Kumakolo,<br>Kó-ma kolo  | "true speech" (McNaughton), "le fond d'un discours" (Delafosse)   |
| Kuru                     | mountain, hill.   |
| Lu                       | compound or household in a village.   |
| Maghan, makhan           | title of rulers of Manding states.  |

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Malo</b>             | shame; <i>maloya</i> , the state of being in shame; <i>malobali</i> , "shameless".   |
| <b>Mansa</b>            | king, ruler; hence <i>mansaya</i> , "kingship".  |
| <b>Masalen, masaren</b> | royalty, those belonging to the kingly clan.   |
| <b>Mori</b>             | marabout.  |
| <b>Musu, muso</b>       | woman, wife, female.   |
| <b>Namu-sayer</b>       | accompanyist to a performing bard, who exhorts the singer. From <i>namu</i> , Arabic for "yes".  |
| <b>Ngana</b>            | hero.  |
| <b>Ngoni, nkoni</b>     | narrow four-stringed lute; also known as <i>kotingo</i> . The <i>halam</i> is the Wolof five-string version of the same instrument.  |
| <b>Nio</b>              | soul, vital principle.   |
| <b>Numu</b>             | blacksmith, wood-carver. Member of the <i>nyamkala</i> .   |
| <b>Nyama</b>            | power, life-force, energy of action.   |
| <b>Nyamakala</b>        | Malinke social classification encompassing hereditary professionals, the <i>numuw</i> , <i>jeliw</i> , <i>finew</i> , <i>garankew</i> , and <i>kulew</i> .   |
| <b>Nyanan</b>           | cult associated with Sumanguru at Kulikoro.  |
| <b>Nyancho</b>          | a member of the western Malinke warrior elite.   |
| <b>Senankuya</b>        | relationship holding between specific pairs of clans conferring upon the members obligations of hospitality, support and succour, but also sanctioning a greater degree of frankness and familiarity between <i>senankun</i> , hence, the "joking relationship". |
| <b>Serebu</b>           | hunter's garment.  |
| <b>Sigi</b>             | ordeal involving removal of a bracelet from a hot substance, often to test the veracity of a statement or of freeman status.   |
| <b>Simbon, sinbon</b>   | hunter's whistle; also "master hunter".  |
| <b>Suba, subaga</b>     | sorcerer; also <i>soma</i> .   |
| <b>Tana</b>             | relationship holding between members of a particular clan and a species of animal or plant, or an inanimate object, forbidding harm to be done to any of that species or thing.  |
| <b>Ton</b>              | association, society, hence, e.g., <i>donso ton</i> , society of hunters, and <i>ton tigi</i> , head of association.   |
| <b>Tiligi, tilijigi</b> | "setting sun", the west; by extension, the Malinke western province.   |

- Tilibo** "rising sun", the east; by extension, the Malinke heartland of the Upper Niger valley. Cp. the Kuranko *telibo*, "sun comes from".
- Wori, woli** game played with counters between two contestants, widespread in Africa.
- Wanzo** vital force retained by the young, lost at initiation into adulthood.
- Wula** the bush, the wilderness.

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