

THE REPUBLIC



OF THE GAMBIA

Oral History and Antiquities Division  
Vice President's Office  
State House  
Banjul, The Gambia  
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KAABU ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

PROPOSAL

I. Proposal

The Oral History and Antiquities Division of the Vice President's Office of The Gambia proposes (1) to expand its present tape archive holdings on the History of Kaabu; (2) to speed up the transcription and translation of present holdings on Kaabu as well as of new collections in order to make them available to the scholarly public. This includes the checking and typing of these transcriptions and translations so as to enable the public to use them with speed and confidence; and (3) to write a major book on the general history of Kaabu.

II. Kaabu History Summarized

The Empire of Kaabu was the westernmost portion of the Manding Empire, better known to Europeans as the Mali Empire. It is generally known that the Manding Empire arose in about the mid-13th century and that at its maximum extent it stretched from east of the Niger Buckle to the Atlantic Ocean on the west. What is less generally known is that there was a western remnant of the Manding Empire which survived down to the middle of the 19th century; this was the Kaabu Empire.

During the conquests of the early Manding Empire there was a series of heavy migrations of Manding peoples out of the Manding heartland, especially towards the west, into the fertile lands along the Gambia, Casamance, Cacheu, Corubal and Geba Rivers. This was the area which came to be known as Kaabu. These Manding migrants conquered and amalgamated with the indigenous peoples and established a number of small kingdoms, whose ruling families were linked by blood to one another and to the peoples they ruled. The Empire of Kaabu, at its greatest extent, occupied most of the area of the present nations of Gambia, southern Senegal (Casamance) and Guinea Bissau.



At first the people of Kaabu gave their common allegiance to the Manding Empire and to its ruler. But when Manding lost its position as a major power towards the end of the 15th century and was superseded in the east by the Songhai Empire of Gao, Kaabu was left relatively undisturbed. It may even have been virtually independent before the fall of Manding. The people of Kaabu established their own emperor, chosen according to a system of matrilineal succession apparently unique among the Manding peoples. The Emperor ruled the whole of Kaabu from the capital at Kansala, which is now only a ruin on the upper reaches of the Geba River in present day Guinea Bissau. The families from whom the Emperor was chosen were known collectively by the title of "nyancho." They were a dynasty of warrior families, who retained their authority through descent from the most famous Manding conqueror, Tiramakang Tarawalle, as well as through descent from an indigenous woman of mysterious origins who was believed to have had supernatural powers. This dual heritage gave double legitimacy, derived on the one hand from the conquerors and on the other hand from the indigenous rulers, with their prior access to the spiritual forces of the land; and it lent to the nyanchos a particular aura of mystery and power which still lingers to the present day.

Because of Kaabu's unique blend of cultures and peoples a distinctive subgroup of the Manding peoples evolved in Kaabu: the Western Mandinkas. The Western Mandinka culture is recognizably Manding in origins, but it is quite distinctive in a number of ways. For example, a unique musical tradition sprang up in the area. Kaabu is said to be the home of the kora, a 21-stringed harp-lute which is related to instruments of eastern origin but as different from them in tone, quality and style of playing as are the songs of western origin. Kaabu's political system was also noticeably different from the eastern system; and their language is a dialect distinct from other Manding dialects. These are only a few examples of the differences that evolved.

Kaabu remained a powerful entity up to about the mid-19th century. Then a series of civil wars broke its unity, while at the same time muslim armies from the rival Fulbe Empire of Futa Jalon, to the south in present day Guinea, began a series of raids against Kaabu with the intention of destroying it as an independent power and of establishing Islam as a universal religion instead of the Animism espoused by the nyancho rulers of Kaabu. Finally in 1867 or 1868 Futa Jalon armies destroyed the nyancho capital of Kansala and killed the last Emperor, Janke Wali. Although it was a pyrrhic victory for Futa Jalon, Kaabu was effectively destroyed as an empire by this decisive battle.

With the Emperor dead and succession in doubt, the next 30 years of Kaabu history were marked by almost total chaos as the different states and ethnic and religious groups of the old empire struggled for predominance. The states plunged into an even bloodier series of civil wars than those which had preceded the fall of Kansala, each state trying to surpass the others. The hitherto subordinate Fulbe residents of Kaabu also began struggling for their own independence from their Mandinka rulers and then for rulership over them in turn. Meanwhile a number of marabout war leaders declared their own holy wars in various parts of the region in order to consolidate the advances already made against animism by the Futa Jalon victories.

The Fulbe of Kaabu emerged briefly as the victors over all, assisted by their Futa Jalon cousins, and they established the Empire of Fuladu, sprawled across the middle of old Kaabu. But the English, the French and the Portuguese then joined into the fray in order to enforce the peace upon which their trade and economic well-being depended; and to do so, they established their own political control over the whole area. Using the various leaders against one another, possessed of superior fire power, military discipline and economic might, they carved up the old empire—and its short-lived successor—among themselves. By 1901, with the death of Fode Kaba Dumbuya, the last marabout war leader, the Europeans were in full control.

Despite the fact that stories and songs about Kaabu and its epic defeat have been daily fare of radio broadcasts and live performances of traditional musicians throughout Gambia, Senegal, Guinea and Guinea Bissau up to the present, and despite the fact that the people themselves have always been very much aware of Kaabu and of its significance for the history and culture of the whole region, Kaabu remained virtually unknown to most western-trained scholars until the First International Manding Conference held in London in 1972. At that conference four major papers were presented which finally put Kaabu on the map for the western scholarly world. One of these papers was presented by The Gambia.

Kaabu remained unknown for so long because the vast bulk of material about it is embodied in oral traditions; and western scholars, trained to deal with written sources, are not sure how to deal with oral traditions. Only a very small number of histories have been written by local scholars in local languages or Arabic, using the Arabic script, which are mostly inaccessible to westerners; and the available European sources are so fragmentary that they cannot give any coherent picture if used by themselves. Only within the past decade or so have oral traditions begun to be accepted as "respectable" sources

by scholars; but there are still some problems inherent in their critical use; and the majority of scholars, even of those interested in Kaabu studies, are still hesitant to come to grips with the problems they pose, which are somewhat different from the ones they have already spent many years learning how to deal with in written sources. Most of them still seem to be waiting to be shown the way. The written work of the Oral History and Antiquities Division of The Gambia is largely undertaken with just this purpose in mind: of showing ways to deal with oral traditions.

### III. Kaabu Historical Studies as an Aspect of Development

As the foregoing historical summary reveals, over 500 years of Gambian, Senegalese and Guinea Bissau history is virtually unknown and cannot be taught effectively in modern schools in the region because it is unwritten. By contrast, the majority of written historical material easily available today to teacher, student and the average reader is largely confined to the last 100 years or so, that is, to the period of colonial conquest and rule and to the period since independence. This is bound to be misleading and unsatisfactory, as many of the developments of the last century can only be understood fully in light of the preceding 500 years. To understand the people of this region properly, one must understand Kaabu.

History is also important to the social and psychological well-being of the people to whom it belongs. The sense of personal identity and self-confidence that comes with knowledge of one's own cultural origins and values is an essential foundation on which any successful development scheme must be based—that is, any development scheme which intends to become grafted firmly onto the existing culture and not one which is simply an artificial imposition resting on top, to die as soon as the ones who instituted it leave or to become warped out of all recognition. Development experts, economists and worried politicians and civil servants still regard cultural and historical studies as being of secondary importance, while development schemes designed to increase food supplies or the amount of foreign exchange, or some other thing, are regarded as being of primary importance.

In fact, however, the true order of importance is exactly the opposite. Economist E. F. Schumacher explains why very clearly:

Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organisation, and discipline. Without these three, all resources remain latent, untapped, potential. There are prosperous societies with but the scantiest basis of natural wealth, and we have had plenty of opportunity to observe the primacy of the invisible factors after the (second world) war. Every country, no matter how devastated, which had a high level of education, organisation, and discipline, produced an "economic miracle." In fact, these were miracles only for people whose attention is focused on the tip of the ice

berg. The tip had been smashed to pieces, but the base, which is education, organisation, and discipline, was still there.

(Small is Beautiful. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975. pp. 168)

Because organisation and discipline also depend upon education, Schumacher defines what education does for an individual; and by extension, why the opportunity for a school child to study the evolution of the cultural brew which made him what he is would be of interest to a development expert:

All subjects, no matter how specialised, are connected with a centre...like rays emanating from a sun. The centre is constituted by our most basic convictions, by those ideas which really have the power to move us. (p. 94)

The truly educated man is not a man who knows a bit of every thing, not even the man who knows all the details of all subjects....the "whole man," in fact may have little detailed knowledge of facts and theories, but he will be in touch with the centre. He will be in no doubt about his basic convictions about his view of the meaning and purpose of his life. He may not be able to explain these matters in words, but the conduct of his life will show a certain sureness of touch which stems from his inner clarity. (p. 95)

The study of the history and culture of the peoples of the Senegambian and Guinea regions, the study of their basic convictions and beliefs, has been neglected, even ignored, simply because scholars have been uncertain as to how to deal with oral traditions. One book on the history and culture of Kaabu will not explain everything a people need to know about themselves, but it will certainly be a major step in the right direction. One published work springing off major research cannot fail to bring people to a conscious awareness of one or more aspects of it, as well as to point towards further research and writing needs.

#### IV. The Urgency of Kaabu Research

As a greater number of young people go to school, the number of people who take the time or have the interest to learn the things which the griots and elders have to teach is sharply diminishing. The key to success in modern society is a western-style education which gives, as yet, almost no place to the study of traditional history, literature or traditional social, economic and political values. Young people do not have time to bother with things which will not help them to pass their exams or to get a better job. So, knowledgeable elders are dying with fewer people to leave their knowledge to. Moreover, because profound changes have taken place in the social and economic structure, the griot who is the professional, hereditary repository of historical and cultural heritage, is beginning to leave his profession entirely, or to take up music primarily, leaving the less lucrative business of history.

Only a few decades more of deliberate neglect and willful shortsightedness will suffice to kill a culture which has been handed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years.

Fortunately, however, none of the states in the region is interested in consigning itself to cultural oblivion just yet. In The Gambia there is a general interest in the subject of Kaabu from the President and the Cabinet down to the poorest villager. The Leopold Sedar Senghor Foundation, of Senegal, recently sponsored an International Colloquium on the Oral Traditions of Kaabu, thus establishing Senegal's interest in its own past. President Senghor himself proudly claims descent from one of the ruling houses founded by the nyanchos. Guinea Bissau is trying as well; and Guinea is contributing some very important work from the point of view of the Fulbe traditions of Futa Jalon. Nevertheless, all these countries generally concede the leadership in the collection of Kaabu traditions to little Gambia. In proportion to its size, Gambia has invested far more in Kaabu research and has a bigger, more coherent collection of Kaabu oral materials than any other state in the region.

#### V. What OHAD Has Done for Kaabu Research

The Oral History and Antiquities Division of The Gambia (OHAD) began its collections of Kaabu materials in 1972. Since then, as opportunity arose and funds became available, it has been making several other research expeditions throughout the region of Kaabu. In eight years OHAD has collected over 100 tape recorded interviews directly related to Kaabut, either as a whole or with regard to its various states. In addition OHAD has a large number of recordings concerned with the Fuladu Empire, Kaabu's short-lived successor, as well as accounts of the chaotic period of civil and religious wars which followed the fall of Kaabu up to the establishment of colonial rule. These only scratch the surface however; there is still an enormous amount waiting to be collected, particularly on a state-by-state basis.

A considerable number of the things collected have been translated and transcribed and are available for public reference. But a larger number still remain to be processed, mainly due to the shortage of staff. This is a time consuming, exacting job which cannot be done by just any school leaver off the streets. It takes time to train people to do a good job of transcription and translation. Then there is the problem of how to pay an adequate number of trained people. Government funds have to serve all departments.

In addition to research and collection, OHAD staff have written a number of papers and edited a number of manuscripts of raw material in order to show what can be done with oral traditions and the kinds of things available. A

list of some of these is attached. However no one has yet written a major long work on Kaabu based on oral traditions. This still remains to be done.

#### VI. OHAD Needs

Through OHAD The Gambia has done much. But time is short and much more remains to be done. This means a larger investment of time, money and staff. In order to fulfill its triple goal of continued expansion of present holdings, of making more of the holdings available for public use, and of writing a major general work on Kaabu based on some of these traditions, OHAD needs increased funding and staff. Much of such an increase would be difficult, in some cases impossible, for Gambia Government to provide.

#### TWO-YEAR PROJECT ESTIMATE

	<u>Dollars</u>
<b>A. <u>To Expand Collection</u></b>	
1. Money for the payment of informants and for gifts. . . . .	2,500
2. Equipment (see B. 2. below)	
<b>B. <u>To Increase Availability of Materials</u></b>	
1. <u>Staff</u>	
a. 4 Transcriber/Translators @ \$175 (D300) per month x 24 months . . . . .	16,800
b. 1 Editor (or 2 part-time Editors) @\$250 (D500) per month x 24 months . . . . .	6,000
c. 2 Typists @ \$150 (D250) per month x 24 months . . . . .	7,200
2. <u>Equipment</u>	
a. 4 reel-to-reel transcribers' tape recorders, complete with accessories @ \$850 (D1,400) . . . . .	3,400
b. 2 standard office typewriters @ \$1,100 (D1,900) . . . . .	2,200
c. 200 cassette tapes (60-min.) @ \$7 (D12) . . . . .	1,400
d. 100 reel tapes (5-in.) @ \$13 (D22) . . . . .	1,300
<b>C. <u>To Write a General History of Kaabu</u></b>	
1. Funding for Historian, OHAD . . . . .	

We consider our present Historian, Dr. Winifred Galloway, as a key element in our plans for writing a major study of Kaabu. She has a PhD in history and has over 8 years of research experience in Senegambia; her specialty is the handling of oral traditions. Because of her experience and qualifications we believe that she is the right person to deal with this project; anyone else would simply have to repeat work and take the time to gain the experience and expertise which she already has.

This aspect of our request is so important to us that if we have funding for just this one item and no other, it would be of the greatest single help to us. Funds without skilled people can be wasted; but skilled people, even without adequate funds, can work seeming miracles.



Colloquium on the Oral Traditions of Kaabu  
Sponsored by the Leopold Sedar Senghor Foundation  
Dakar, The Republic of Senegal  
19th-24th May, 1980.

THE ORAL TRADITIONS OF KAABU:  
An Historiographical Essay on Some Problems  
Connected with Their Finding, Collection,  
Evaluation and Use

by  
Winifred F. Galloway

Historian  
Oral History and Antiquities  
Division  
Vice President's Office  
Old National Library  
Independence Drive  
Banjul, The Gambia  
May 1980

## ORAL TRADITIONS OF KAABU:

### An Historiographical Essay on some Problems Connected with their Finding, Collection, Evaluation and Use.

#### Introduction

One of the main reasons why Kaabu remained unknown territory to western scholars, and even to western-trained African scholars, for so long is that almost all the sources pertaining to the history and culture of Kaabu are embodied in oral traditions; and oral traditions have only become "respectable" sources of information in western scholarly circles within the last 10 to 15 years. Even now, articles based on oral tradition, and those who write such things, are regarded with a great deal of suspicion by the majority of scholars--with some justification. The skeptics themselves don't know how the writer chose his sources of information; they know they themselves are not trained to deal with it, and they have no way of knowing if this person knows much more about it than they do. They don't know what internal or external criticisms the ~~author~~ is using on his material, or even if he is using any at all. But they do know two things:

(1) that it would be difficult to check this writer's work because they, as scholars, would probably not have easy access to this writer's sources even if they should want to; and

(2) that oral tradition is notoriously unstable (they would say "unreliable"), sliding and slipping under one's fingers.

So the scholarly community does have some reason for viewing works based on oral tradition with some misgiving. It is one of the tasks of this essay to try to alleviate some of this suspicion and to make the use of oral traditions seem less of an esoteric and arbitrary exercise.

There are many problems connected with the finding, collection, evaluation and use of oral traditions which have not yet been settled to everyone's satisfaction. But these problems are going to have to be solved with regard to the study of Kaabu history because there are virtually no sources for it except oral ones. Even the *tarikas*, those local histories written in Arabic or local languages by Muslim scholars, are mostly oral traditions set down in writing.

This paper will therefore attempt to discuss something of the nature of oral traditions, how they are found, from what

kinds of sources, some of the problems involved in their collection and use and, in the process of discussion, to make some positive suggestions as to the directions which Kaabu research ought to go for best and fastest results.

### Finding Oral Sources

There are three main sources of oral tradition for the Kaabu region: jalis (griots), elders and koranic scholars. The kinds of material to be gained from each of these sources has its own strengths and weaknesses.

1) Jalis. One of the most important sources of information about the history of Kaabu is the jali or griot, the hereditary musician, historian and entertainer of the Manding peoples. Everybody concerned with the Manding regions is aware of this class of individuals and their role in traditional society, so there is no need to go into a long discussion of this.

The main strength of jali traditions is that they tend to be wider ranging in time and geography than almost any other source of oral history. The repertoire of any good griot almost always includes the story of Manding and Sunjata, the migrations of the Mandinkas to the West, with particular reference to the migrations of the patron families of the narrator, and their settlement. From there he moves to stories of their great heroes, then to the fall of Kaabu, and sometimes to the aftermath. Some know more than others, some less; but this is generally the pattern of a griot's presentation of Kaabu history. Those interested make it a point to find out what they can about the connections of their patron families to other great families, both within their home regions and beyond them, so that one can often get clues to ties over a fairly wide geographical area.

The main drawback of the jali is that he is a professional entertainer and crowd-pleaser as well as a historian. Thus a good griot has many points in common with a good historical novelist who has done his homework thoroughly before sitting down to write. This can be a trap for the unwary, because sometimes it is difficult to tell where truth ends and fiction begins.

Nevertheless the griot's "historical novel" should not be sneered at, not if he is any good at his profession at least. Like the good historical novel, his story preserves the facts relevant to his story. But in order to give his listeners the full impact and significance of them, he endeavours to make them live again, to give his listeners an emotional attachment to them, to make them sympathize with their problems and to emphasize their common heritage, culture and humanity. To do this he has to introduce details of costume, daily life, conversations, believable emotions, and conflicts which give a total picture and understanding of a people and a culture impossible to achieve any other way.

2) Elders. A second important source of Kaabu history is the elders. As a general rule village elders can give quite a good picture of local history and family connections within their immediate area; and once in a while there are some who are familiar with the history of the states around them.

Most elders will not knowingly tell something that they do not believe to be true. Most of them make a very clear distinction between what they heard and what is merely speculation; and most of them will preface their remarks by saying that they will say only what they remember having been told.

3) Koranic Scholars. The third kind of oral source is the koranic scholar. Such people are often interested in knowledge for its own sake; and if they are interested in history at all, they make it a point to listen to oral traditions of their own areas and to write down what they learn. Often the koranic scholar combines all the best features of griot and elder's knowledge, especially those who have travelled widely and who have taken an interest in the people and places where they have been. Some have the wide ranging knowledge of the griot (partly because they are more mobile than the average elder), combined with in-depth local knowledge about their own families and neighbours. Their main strength is usually in the histories of the muslim families, but the best of them know a great deal more.

4. Tarikas. A fourth source of oral material on Kaabu is the tarika.

Tarikas are written history, and as such have many of its advantages. However, those which deal with local and traditional history are almost invariably drawn from oral sources, written down in the form of an outline or genealogy, so that the writer will not forget the main points of the story. Thus the tarika shares qualities of oral material because that is its source.

Because of the great dependence of western-trained scholars on written sources, the helpfulness of the average tarika has been, and still is, highly exaggerated. A tarika can be anything from a half page of writing to, in a very few cases, a voluminous manuscript complete with all the trimmings of Arabic scholarship. But most are rarely more than a few pages and seldom consist of more than a bare outline of what the writer knows. The most common types are little more than a genealogical list or king list or other kinds of details which take a great deal of mental effort to retain. The average tarika owner uses it as a simple memory aid when he is called upon to "read" it; he can, and often does, expand orally on the items in his tarika.

Some jalis have compiled tarikas for their own reference and for the instruction of their children and apprentices. But these likewise seldom consist of more than a few pages, again consisting mainly of names and lists. A few are outline chronicles. When a jali is persuaded to give an oral account as well as to read his tarika, the tarika will probably be found to be a perfect

outline of what he has recited in greater and more interesting detail. Most griots however are reluctant to allow their tarikas to be recorded and keep them in reserve, an ace-card so to speak, especially if they contain long king lists.

There are very few long tarikas in Kaabu like the Bijini manuscript owned by the Bayos of Badora Bijini. The Kabajo Manuscript, owned by the Jabang family of Kombo Kabajo in Casamance, is another true, long history written in Mandinka, of the migrations and settlement of the Jabangs, Bojangs, and Jattas in Kombo.

Tarikas are nice to use. There is a comfort in using stable written documents. They are countable and handleable; they never change their minds. Still, it should not be forgotten that most of them are, in essence, oral tradition.

5. "New Tarikas": Transcriptions and Translations of Recorded Interviews. Once a tape recorded interview is translated and transcribed, it becomes a written document, like any other archival reference. The very act of writing it down has automatically transformed it from oral tradition into a tarika, has frozen it in mid-flight, accuracies, inaccuracies and all. It is now a stable primary source for posterity to deal with and make of what it will.

But these "new tarikas" which archives and research scholars are including in the sources of oral tradition have two main advantages over the tarikas written down by traditional scholars--if the collectors have done their work well, that is. The first advantage is that there are usually several of them collected at once from a wide variety of sources and around particular topics, such as Kaabu, Kombo, Niumi, Pajadi, Badoora, Fode Kaaba, Musa Molo, Fuladu and so on, and they are usually collected systematically over a wide area. Therefore, rather than having an isolated document from here or there to work with, the researcher is now on the road to having groups of documents in dozens and scores to work with.

The second advantage of these "new tarikas" is that, unlike the average tarika, they are full accounts rather than outlines. Freed from the cramping limitations of the pen by the tape recorder, articulate informants have been able to talk freely and allow their minds to wander more quickly around the subjects they are dealing with.

### Collecting Oral Traditions

Locating informed sources to interview is not much of a problem for the scholar with transport and money after he has gained permission from the Ministry of Government responsible for research as well as from local officials. One has only to go to the villages in the area where one wants to conduct research and enquire from the village elders the names of knowledgeable jalis, elders and scholars in the locality. The general body of elders in any traditional village is like a walking card catalogue of all the knowledgeable people in their area because they generally make it their business to know such things. In larger towns and administrative centres, Commissioners, Prefets, Chiefs, or prominent African traders can often suggest useful starting places.

The real problems of collecting oral traditions are not in finding good sources, but in getting to them, of first coaxing them to talk and then of asking the right questions. For the scholar who does not speak Mandinka or Fula there is the added problem of finding an able interpreter. Finally there is the problem of finding money as "kola" for the elders and scholars and as pay for jalis.

Research in Kaabu has been getting rapidly and steadily more difficult and expensive even over the last four to five years, and it will get increasingly and rapidly more difficult as the number of researchers wanting to work in Kaabu increases. The cost of field research has now gone beyond the means of all but foundations, universities, governments and the most handsomely endowed private scholars. At the very time when scholars are beginning to realize the importance and necessity of collecting oral tradition, and are ready and willing to plunge into the field to do rapid salvage work before the more knowledgeable elders die out, research in oral tradition is in danger of being choked at its infancy.

Transport is a prerequisite for the field researcher in Kaabu, and the cost of purchase and maintenance of a vehicle is becoming prohibitive for private funds.

Even provided that the researcher can get to the informants he wants, he is going to have an increasingly hard time getting griots and koranic scholars to talk freely to him without first agreeing to pay large sums of money--with no guarantee that he will be given the full account even then. There is an ever-growing feeling among those to whom scholars go most frequently that they are being exploited somehow and their resentment increases every year. For example, whereas even five years ago the elders of Bijini were glad to read their tarika for only a substantial "kola", they now demand something in the neighbourhood of \$125 before they will do it. Others make similar demands, but at the same time will not always give complete information; sometimes they edit out certain key portions.

There are a variety of factors at work. For one thing, they have been told by their western educated relatives and by government officials that those who come to them are making a

great deal of money from the books and articles they write based on the information gained in their research. In one way they are wrong, because most of the scholars' publications bring little or no money directly. But in another way they are right, because the prestige resulting from these same articles guarantees these authors grants, or teaching and research jobs at salaries that are immense in terms of what the African scholars make in a year.

In addition, having a few scholars come to listen to or to copy one's material is flattering and interesting. But when the world starts beating a path to the Islamic scholar's door, asking him to take hours of his time translating the same manuscript over and over again from Arabic to Mandinka, it gets to be hard work, a nuisance and a bore.

If it were just a matter of someone seeking knowledge for its own sake, and of getting the same rewards in their own countries that the Islamic scholar has got in Africa, then he might be willing to continue doing it for a present, even for mere gratitude. But the scholar is not convinced that they are working for the same rewards; consequently, if he is not going to get paid a substantial amount for his time, he would rather spend it doing something else.

Moreover attitudes towards knowledge are not exactly the same. The Koranic scholar leans toward the belief that whereas knowledge should be shared, it should not be shared indiscriminately. In addition, the scholar and his family know that they have prestige in their area because of their possession of this manuscript; when people want to know about it they come to the owners of the document. They fear that if this information is spread too widely this prestige will be diminished or cheapened somehow and that people will stop looking to them as a source of information. This, to a traditional African family, is probably worse than being cheated out of the money rewards to which they feel entitled.

Like the Koranic scholar, more and more jalis are becoming convinced that scholars who come to them for information are making a lot of money from the things they write based on this information. The jali does not see why he should not share in some of the rewards.

As with the Muslim scholars however, there are other factors involved as well. The jali is a professional musician. The very popular griot can keep busy almost all the year round and make money by giving live performances for patrons and large audiences. Although some very good ones will perform over the radio and television, more and more of the best ones have realized the dangers of technological unemployment inherent in recordings and in television and radio. They have no desire to compete with themselves over the radio. Why should anyone pay them large sums to perform, when he can turn on the radio or bribe a radio station technician to copy recordings for him? (It is done all the time!) Few musicians have the access that European professional performers have to the big recording companies, which could record their music and distribute the recordings in the quantities necessary to keep such piracy from going on. If a jali is already suspicious

of the researcher, he won't be convinced that an archival or private recording can be little threat to his living, that the research scholar is after only content or wants merely to study his style, or that writing will pose no competition, and that his main source of income will still be his traditional patrons.

The jalis react in a number of ways. Some will absolutely refuse to be recorded. Others will demand very high fees and then give what information they can. Still others will give only incomplete information for a very high fee. Not all knowledgeable jalis feel this way and carry on as usual, but these are in a growing minority.

Fortunately, the village elder is still glad to cooperate with researchers--unless he too is inhibited by local or national, social or political tensions, or is warned off by government officials. He is happy to tell what he knows. He does not expect any fees for what he does. Nor will he ordinarily name a price if he is left to his own devices. It is customary to give presents to someone who has done one a service, but the attitude towards these presents is very like the attitude of a European informant who receives a thank you letter or a copy of the published work from a writer he has helped. In the past, it has been customary to give material gifts, such as kola nuts or hats, etc., but the shortage of cash and low material standard of living tends to make people prefer their gifts in cash. It must be emphasized however, that up to now at least, even these cash gifts are not considered as fees.

#### Some Proposals for Relieving Some of the Difficulties of Field Research in Kaabu Oral Traditions

Because the cost of oral research, particularly in Kaabu, is rapidly placing field research beyond the means of the private scholar, I offer the following proposals as a way of partially easing the difficulties.

1. National Governments, universities, private foundations and international funding bodies such as UNESCO and OAU should be asked to take up among themselves more and more of the financial burden of funding qualified public and private research institutions and scholars in the field. In view of the urgent need for rapid, wide-scale collection of oral traditions in Kaabu before another generation of informants dies out or, even worse, dries up, this help needs to be forthcoming very quickly. All tape recordings collected under the auspices of such grants should be deposited in a national or international archive specified in the terms of the grant.

2. There needs to be a greater effort by already established national and international archives of oral tradition to expand not only their collections of Kaabu materials on a systematic basis, but also to hire and train the staff necessary to make transcriptions and translations of holdings available to the public more quickly. This is a serious bottleneck in the flow of information from the field to the scholar, forcing scholars into the field to duplicate work already done by archives, either



because they don't know it is there already or because they cannot get access to it quickly because of processing difficulties.

For example the tape recordings collected by the Oral History and Antiquities Division of The Gambia include interviews with some of the most knowledgeable oral sources on Kaabu history. But a disheartening number of them still need to be transcribed and translated; and of those already done, there still remains the monumental job of checking the translations so that they can be used quickly and confidently by anyone. The staff qualified to check them is hard to find. Transcription and translation is not something that just any high school leaver can begin to do well immediately. It is a skilled job which needs to be learned and practiced before one is good at it.

At this point in time, if the researcher wants to have ready access to the full range of OHAD material, he is going to have to show up with his own tape recorder and interpreter. Even then, if more than one or two researchers showed up at a time, there would very likely be a jam at the copying machines because archival recordings have to be copied onto work tapes for use by translators and transcribers.

If archival staff and facilities could be expanded to make present holdings more easily available, it would ease the job of the researcher and informant alike. Researchers would not have to keep going back over the same ground again and again, needlessly duplicating efforts already made. It would relieve any traffic congestion at the doorsteps of better-known informants, thus removing at least some of the causes of tension and growing antagonism there. Researchers need only to go to them for additional information or to clarify points already made; and then they could spend the rest of their money and time breaking new ground and finding other informants, of whom there are still plenty in Kaabu.

3. It is time for the international scholarly community engaged in Kaabu oral research to discuss the implications of, and to come to some sort of gentleman's agreement about, national laws requiring Researchers to deposit copies of all their tape recorded work in the archives of oral tradition in the country where material has been collected. The Gambia has such a law affecting private scholars. OHAD has also made a rule which guarantees in writing that these collections will remain closed to other research scholars for three years in order to allow the collector a head start in finishing and publishing any thesis, book or article based on this research. But after this time, their deposits are to be opened to the general public.

To date, this law has been more often ignored and resisted than complied with. Only a tiny handful of scholars have ever tried to cooperate fully and willingly.

The antagonism and resistance that this law has generated on the part of researchers has to be seen to be believed. This resentment is particularly strong in those trained in British higher institutions, which are deliberately geared to turn out highly independent, self-reliant, individualistic and competitive scholars. But there are many other European, American and African

scholars who agree with them. They vary only in the degree of tactfulness or untactfulness with which they deliberately circumvent the law.

They regard any information which they acquire on their own initiative and at their "own" expense (many are funded by private and public grants) as their own private property to be used or not used as they see fit, just as any book or private collection of papers would be. And they genuinely believe, with some reason, that if an African government really cares about preserving its oral traditions, it will provide sufficient staff, money and materials to build its own tape archive, which would be far better and more extensive than anything scholars working independently could provide. Although some scholars argue that what they collect for their own information cannot be of much use to other scholars, this is not true of the work of most experienced field researchers. Many do not trust promises made by African governments to close their material to the public for a specific period. Others argue that they may not be able to get certain informants to talk to them if they know that what they say will be deposited in a national archive. While this may be true in some cases, particularly for political scientists working in the modern period, it is not true for the majority of informants or researchers, and is mostly an excuse offered in place of the real reason.

It seems to me that the underlying reason for the extreme hostility of the majority of research scholars to the deposit laws and their resistance to them is a combination of the long tradition of academic freedom and of the highly competitive nature of western scholarship. The total freedom of thought and movement the scholar demands in order to get at the truth is one of the things, though not the only thing, which makes his work valuable to the world at large. He hates, fears and resents bitterly the idea of anybody, particularly a government, breathing down his neck, perhaps even dictating how he should conduct his research, and of trying to ride on his back instead of standing on their own feet and working to help themselves and their own people. Moreover, the spectre of someone else getting a job or a grant in competition with him, on the basis of original field work he did, is a very real fear in his mind.

Since these are sincerely held views and fears of a large number of research scholars, many of whom have contributed greatly to African studies, the implications for Kaabu research of this clash of wills between researcher and African governments ought to be discussed and some common meeting ground needs to be found.

But while the discussions are going on, and while the merits of the private scholar's views are being aired, the following propositions ought also to be considered:

1. That the oral traditions and culture of an African country or a region are just as much a part of their heritage as any rare material object; therefore the private collector ought to have no more right to buy and remove examples of this art without government permission than he would have to buy and remove a rare material object without permission;

2. that due to the way in which oral traditions are dying because fewer and fewer people are interested in preserving them, and due to the fact that oral tradition contains information valuable to the people of the culture from which it comes, it would serve the needs of the general public better if open to the public rather than in private hands, where only the owner has the right to consult it;

3. that the collector and guardian of any oral tradition, whether elder, jali, Koranic or western scholar, is owed a special debt of gratitude by the international scholarly community and the African public as a whole; because of this they should be given first chance to use any materials they might collect in order to further their own careers, and they should always be given credit in the works of others who have benefited from the labour and expense to which they have gone in order to preserve oral traditions;

4. that in the past, well-meant and friendly efforts of African governments to share in the raw results of a researcher's labours have not been meant to restrict his physical or intellectual freedom in any way, but that his refusal to cooperate and to sympathize with the efforts of African governments to get control of their own heritage is even now on the verge of bringing into reality the very kinds of restrictions and policing which the researcher so fears.

#### Evaluation and Criticism of Oral Materials: The Basic Nature of Oral and Written Sources Compared.

The main advantage of a written source, as everybody knows, is its stability. If the literate scholar should lose a completed manuscript he has written and has to write it over again from his notes, he would find himself roughly in the position of the oral traditionist who is asked to give an account of the same thing over again from the beginning. The first account did not reflect everything the writer or informant knew. He simply said or wrote what he had to say in the order that seemed most appropriate at the time and left it at that. If he has to say it or write it again, he may tackle it from a slightly different angle, add some things, leave other things out, and even use a different order.

In both writing and recitation there is a tremendous mental and physical effort involved in marshalling all one's thoughts to give a coherent account. The writer therefore has a distinct advantage over the oral historian because, once he has his thoughts down on paper, he does not have to go to the sweat of reorganizing his thoughts again and again every time somebody wants to know what he has to say on the subject; he will simply refer them to his book, and answer only questions related to it. Jalis and sometimes the more eloquent elders and scholars have an oral equivalent to the tarika and book. This is a "set" account. If they are called upon to give an account often enough on a particular topic, they evolve a standard account, which comes out the same way every time, almost word for word, except for such details as numbers, relationships, etc., which tend to be forgotten easily. But if they are asked to talk on a different topic or to

deal with it thoroughly from another angle, they are like the writer who has to write again on a different aspect of his subject. Once again a great mental effort is involved in marshalling thoughts on the subject. Both writing and oral presentation are very hard mental work.

When oral history crosses over into the realm of written history, either in a tarika or translation of a tape recording, the researcher should never forget that because these were originally oral traditions they still possess its slippery and contradictory characteristics because they were captured on tape recorders and in writing only long after these events happened. They won't change any more, it is true, but before they were caught and frozen, they had a long time to change and for many things to be left out and forgotten.

### Evaluation and Criticism

#### Time and Some Tricks Played by Oral Traditions

Most elders repeat as exactly as they can what they themselves remember hearing or being told. The integrity of those who tell it is why oral history remains such a valuable source of information. But unless people memorize an original account word-for-word, and each succeeding generation of hearers memorizes it word-for-word in turn, the human mind does some interesting things as it processes items for storage and quick recall in its memory banks. It is almost as if the mind were conserving space and energy so that it could store and recall as many different items as possible with the least amount of effort. It takes a great deal of energy, concentration and practice at instant recall to hold events in memory in correct time and space relationship to one another and to keep similar but different, people and events separate. Consequently oral traditions can play a number of tricks on the unwary. Most of these tricks have to do with time and sequence, which is the greatest weakness of oral history.

#### A. Events "telescope" or collapse into one another

That is, a series of events taking place over a long period of time may be told in correct sequence, but as if they took place within a few days or a few weeks of one another. This happens in almost every oral account which I have been able to check against archival sources in Kombo history for events which took place even as late as the late 19th and early 20th century.

The following is a perfect example of "telescoping". This account is told as a single, continuous narrative. The facts are correct and so is the sequence. But the story is told as if the events took place within a short time of one another rather than over a 40-year period. And, because some relevant facts have been left out, it gives the reader an erroneous cause-effect relationship. I have placed the correct dates in brackets after each event is described:

When the English came, they took a liking to the land. They came to Busumbala and asked them to give them the land. Busumbala said they were fighting with Kombo Silla (in reality they were fighting with Kaba Touray of Gunjur). "Both you and Kombo Silla must stop fighting," said the Europeans. "Give us the land; we want it." (1852)

Busumbala considered and then gave it to the Europeans. (1853) The Europeans then asked them to pack up and come to Tubab Banko (British Kombo) after Kombo Silla had conquered Busumbala by siege. So all the Busumbala families packed up at night and went to Tubab Banko, where they joined forces with the Europeans. (1875)

The Europeans sent a message to Kombo Silla and asked him to stop fighting. But before Silla could reply, his closest followers said, "Moro, do not agree. Tell the Europeans that only bullets will get this land."

The Europeans would wait a little longer, and they would send another message to Kombo Silla. But they always got the same answer. So the Europeans said they would attack him. (1894) (Source: Bakari Kuti Jatta, Busumbala. OHAD Tape: 223C:B0-60)

B. Not only do events widely separated by time become pushed together, a series of similar events taking place over a long period of time and involving the same people often merge into a single event. For example a series of wars and raids by a ruler against the Jolas will be turned into a single, long raiding expedition. Three European battleships sent to bombard a coastal town become one battleship, and so on.

This happens with such predictable regularity in oral accounts that are checkable, it is almost a certainty that it happens in all oral accounts. A classic example of such telescoping is the epic account of the settlement of Kaabu, as recited by Lasana Kuyate of Chewel Lawo in the Casamance. According to this account, Tiramakang Tarawalle is said to have founded 32 Kaabu towns and settled them with the tens of thousands of settlers believed to have accompanied him. This is telescoping on a grand scale. The migration legends of individual Kaabu states, themselves severely telescoped, indicate that there were a series of migrations which took place over a considerable period of time.

This telescoping does not invalidate the information; it merely makes it harder to interpret. But there is nothing one can do about it except to be aware that it is happening in every account which goes through one's hands, and to cross-check over a wide number of sources before coming to any conclusions about cause and effect relationships.

Evaluation and Criticism

When Time is foreshortened or flattened in this way stories of People and Events become pushed to the extreme Past or the period of the last great figures discussed

Oral tradition flattens and foreshortens everything in the way that a landscape of mountains and hills is foreshortened. If you stand in one spot, you can see the tallest hills and mountains in the distance; they are so big and so obvious you can't miss them. You can get a clear view of the hills immediately in front of you. But almost everything else in between is hidden from your sight by the hills closest to you. They look bigger even than the mountains behind, but you know it is only because they are closer. You also know that there are probably bigger hills than those immediately in front of you, but knowing this does not make the landscape between any more visible to you.

In Kaabu traditions, the distant mountains on the horizon are the founders and early settlers. The hills in front, hiding the hills between them and the founders, are the last great figures and important events which the oral traditionist remembers. These are so near in time and played such a role in changing the lives of Kabunkas that they have obscured most of the people and events who came between. In the story of Kaabu as a unified empire, this last great figure is Janke Wali, and the last great event the fall of Kansala. In the history of individual Kaabu states these hills are the last great rulers and war leaders just before colonial rule was established. When an articulate informant is asked to give the history of Kaabu from beginning to end, he starts with the foundation and settlement and then most of the time goes straight on to Janke Wali.

There are a good many stories of events which took place during this middle period, and some of their names are even remembered in kinglists and genealogies. But as a result of the foreshortening of time and events in most peoples minds, stories of things known to have happened early are credited to the founders and things known to have happened later tend to be credited to latest figures.

An incident drawn from late Nineteenth Century Kombo history, which can be checked against European despatches illustrates this point. Every Kombo oral account collected to date credits Kombo Silla (Fode Ebraima Touray) of Kombo Gunjur with the establishment of Islam in Kombo. The best informed sources, including those from Gunjur itself, say that there were two other Gunjur Muslim War leaders who began the holy war, Kaba Touray and Manjang Fing, but that they did not accomplish very much of importance. It was not until Kombo Silla came to power that the Soninke towns were conquered and Islam established.

A cross-check in archival sources, however, indicates that the soninkes were desperately hard pressed by these first two war leaders and that in the year that Kombo Silla took leadership, every town in Kombo, with the exception of the two soninke capitals of Brikama and Busumbala, had fallen to the Muslims; and that even these two were undergoing a tight siege which they were not expected to survive for more than a few more weeks. This is given as an illustration, not to lessen the importance of this last charismatic figure in Kombo history, but merely to illustrate how such figures tend to overshadow those before them, perhaps even more able and charismatic.

So when we turn to Kaabu history, for which we have no written records to check things against, we realize that we are facing the same problem. What can be done about it? Again, nothing can be done about it except to be aware that the phenomenon is probably happening in almost every story about Kaabu, and to cross check over a number of oral accounts before coming to any conclusions about who probably did what, and when. But no matter how carefully one checks, we will have to live with the realization that Kaabu history will always be foreshortened, and that important figures of the middle period will probably continue to be forgotten or cheated out of their due credit.

#### Evaluation and Criticism: The Floating Name and Story, the "Surface Finds" of Oral Traditions

For the researcher trying to reconstruct a story of Kaabu from a variety of oral sources, one of the most frustrating phenomena is the floating story and floating name. These are rather like the broken pot sherds, stone tools, etc., that the archaeologist finds littering the surface of a site known to be have been occupied by prehistoric man. Because they are out of context, lying jumbled together on the surface with other objects possibly from other periods, they are meaningless except as indicators that something else may lie below the surface. They become meaningful only if found in the ground undisturbed, lying in their true context with other objects from the same period. Only there can they be dated by studying other objects, the layers of soil or bits of carbon and so on.

Floating stories and names are the "surface finds" of Kaabu oral traditions. Floating names most commonly belong to very early figures, whom people know to have been extremely important and influential, and to whom many try to claim relationship, but whose true origins, ancestry and connections have been forgotten. Such names as Daa Mansa Wlending and Daa Mansa Wulemba, Mankotoba Saane, Sarafa Nyaaleng Jeenung and others are very early Kaabu figures, and that is about all that can be determined. Every story of early foundation and settlement puts them into a different kind of relationship. One expects this with early figures and can learn to live with it, but it can happen to later figures as well, especially when genealogical connections are given for any figure.

Some floating stories, especially motifs, are fairly easy to recognize because they are used so frequently. For example, one common motif in the region is an account of how Muslims use a man disguised as a madman, clown, travelling musician, or fool to plant dangerous charms in a soninke village which they intend to attack. If the story of what really happened prior to attack is not known, then some variety of this story is often put in its place.

However, other stories do not appear to be motifs; rather, they appear to be accounts of something that may really have happened, but which have later come wholly or partially loose from their original moorings. They never seem to float very far away, but you never quite know what to make of them or where they belong; and they are sometimes hard to recognize if you are working with an intensive collection in a small area. It is very disconcerting, once having gotten a series of events about the history of an area nicely put together, suddenly to discover that one of your most interesting stories is told exactly the same way by an entirely different family in an entirely different area--though it is usually not too far away.

For example, there is the story of the ruler of the Kaabu state of Kansonko, who is said to have offered dog food to the Sonkos of Sankolla in order to provoke them into a fight. The same story is told about Kamako and Sankolla. Or, as another example, the ruling family of Wulli and their neighbours on the north east, the Saanes of Niani Koussenar, tell exactly the same story of how each family gained independence from the kingdom of Jolof. There is also the story of the Kombo-Kaabu Dankuto, an oral treaty of perpetual peace and friendship. Both the Jabangs of Kombo Kabajo and the Bojangs of Kombo Brikama claim to have been the family with whom the people of Kaabu made the dankuto; each town claims the other was not involved.

There are many more such contradictory claims that one could think of; and as the histories of the individual states of Kaabu are revealed, more such stories will be found. One should merely be braced to accept that some of the stories that one now takes on face value may later show up elsewhere.

#### Evaluation and Criticism: Kinglist and Genealogy.

In the past rather more faith than was warranted was put by scholars on such things as king lists and genealogies, especially those of the soninke families. These too can be changeable. Most people who have collected oral traditions in Mandinka areas have discovered that no two lists are ever the same. Some names are left out, some are added, the order is changed, and so on. The relative position of the major figures tends to remain fairly constant, but those between constantly float. The number of years that any individual is said to have reigned should also be regarded with skepticism as well. If an early ruler is said to have reigned for 19 years and 6 months, one should substitute "a long time": if someone is said to have ruled for 80 years, one can substitute "a very long time," and so on. Names also shift in genealogies. In one genealogy, for example, a woman may be named as a ruler's sister; in another genealogy of the same family, she may appear as his mother.



The most reliable lists of family heads and genealogies are those of the Muslim families, particularly of the Jahankas, who have writing to assist them, and who travel and communicate widely with one another, copy one another's lists and take note of various family connections.

#### Evaluation and Criticism: Chronology and Event, the Bath and the Baby

These four characteristics of time in oral traditions are not the only tricks that are played by oral traditions on the historian trying to reconstruct a chronological story of the formation of Kaabu, but they are some of the most obvious and troublesome. They do not necessarily invalidate oral tradition; they merely complicate the interpretation of it. To the owners of Kaabu traditions, and of oral traditions generally, the drama of the events of history and their didactic value are what really matter. On the other hand, the western-trained historian wants to find sequence and time depth in history. To him, events are truly significant only if seen in their proper time relationship to one another. If he finds that oral history cannot always fulfill his demands about chronology, then he tends to reject its content as well because he does not know how to interpret the one without the other.

To the oral traditionist, such rejection must seem all out of proportion to the circumstances, rather like killing a baby because you don't have enough water to bathe him with. While granting that a well-washed baby is nicer to have around than an unwashed one, a baby has an intrinsic value of his own, quite divorced from cleanliness--at least for the people to whom he belongs. So if there isn't enough water to wash him in, one just has to make do with an unwashed baby. Similarly, one need not become psychopathic about oral tradition just because it has some chronological shortcomings.

#### Uses of Oral Materials: The Compilation and Writing of History Based on Oral Traditions.

There are several ways to compile an oral history of Kaabu, each having its own merits.

Source Books. One way is simply to put a series of annotated accounts together and let the reader sort it out for himself. This is very nice for the researcher because the result is a sourcebook of raw materials, a well-stocked fishing pond which saves him the hard, expensive field work and the difficulties of processing it into final form. In addition, some of the oral accounts are so interesting and so well put together that they deserve to be published by themselves for what they are: the work of very able oral historians. However, if one has committed himself to writing an oral history of Kaabu, or of any of the states of Kaabu, he is avoiding the issue with a source book.

Texts. Another way is to pick out the aspects of the story which appear to be factual and to weave them together into a continuous story, bringing in "legends" and "myths" only when necessary, and clearly labeling them as such. This is the textbook approach.

Codifications. A third way is to collate the accounts one has collected into a single narrative. To do this one starts with the most complete account available, using it as a skeleton outline. This framework is then filled up and extended with stories from other sources, putting in everything that does not contradict anything else. If several stories conflict, one is chosen, either on the basis of internal or external evidence, or simply because it is aesthetically more pleasing if no other reason can be found. That version is put into the text, and the others can be relegated to footnotes or appendices, with or without explanations. If there are gaps, one can bridge them in the text either with some artistically arranged floating names and stories or with some educated guesses.

This is the method which is favoured by Mr. B. K. Sidibe, (Conservator of the Oral History and Antiquities Division, Gambia) and which he used to put together a very interesting account of Kaabu history for the 1972 Manding Conference in London.

It is intrinsically the most interesting of all other methods of presenting oral traditions because it is told as a continuous story and does not become bogged down with academic discussions. It is probably the most valid way of presenting it because it is exactly the same method as that used by elders, koranic scholars and even by jalis when they make deliberate researches with the intent of building their own repertoires. The main difference between them and Sidibe is that Sidibe can do it on a larger, more complex scale in a shorter time because he has the advantage of tape recorder and written translations. Oral tradition thus has its own method and character which ought to be taken into consideration by those who work with it.

The finished product probably fits the needs of African primary and high schools and the general reader far better than any of the others, even the textbook approach, which can also be useful. It is a straightforward codification of the material used, encouraging the reader to view his own culture and ancestors with respect and letting him see for one work what a number of different oral historians have to say on the subject.

This method had disadvantages however. For one thing, in order to achieve a unified, flowing story, there is a certain amount of "forcing" together of elements, particularly floating names and stories, which may not necessarily belong together, but giving the impression that they do. Oral historians very frequently do this in order to make a smooth story.

Another disadvantage of that method is that different "schools" of traditional interpretation may be combined in a misleading fashion or even be lost sight of entirely. For example, there tends to be a muslim interpretation and a soninke interpretation of the causes of the various battles between the two. The very differences are

interesting and revealing. But to discuss them very much, or to present first one side and then the other sometimes hinders the flow of the story; so one version tends to be left out or else the two may be run together in a way which hides the differences and inadvertently disguises some valuable social or political information.

Most university trained scholars tend to be highly suspicious of this method--and of those who use it. However, it must be remembered that a story evolved in this manner is probably just as valid as the story presented by a very knowledgeable elder, who has selected and incorporated the information he gives in precisely the same fashion. If one is valid, then so is the other.

Analysis. Most western-trained scholars favour a method which not only presents the story, but which also examines its elements critically from all points of view, differentiating between fact and fiction, and carefully pointing out all the blank spaces and contradictions. But although it avoids the shortcomings of the codified oral history, its own disadvantage is that it is often boring and irrelevant to all but the history specialist at university level. It should also be remembered that tearing things to pieces, and then examining the pieces, no more constitutes the whole of historical studies than dissection of animals constitutes the whole of zoology. It is merely one useful aspect of the whole discipline. Once one has cut a few animal specimens apart to see what they look like inside and to understand their physical nature a little better, then one can go on to the next, most interesting, and ultimately more profitable step of watching the behaviour of the live animal in its natural environment. One can learn more from a live animal than from a dead one.

Each of these approaches to the compilation of oral accounts and the writing of Kaabu traditions has its own uses and potential readership. There are doubtless other methods for the presentation of oral traditions, but these are the ones which come immediately to mind.

#### Uses of Oral Materials: Citation of Sources

More historians who use oral traditions for information are beginning to cite them in the same way that they would cite any book or article. In the past this was done very seldom, even though oral sources might have been used. It was almost as if, not being written, they became the property of the writer and did not merit being acknowledged as sources. Even now there are still works which list a large number of oral sources in the back, cite a few of them in the notes, and the rest of the time make vague references in the text, such as "Some oral traditions say...." and then go on to give key information. Which oral sources? Ought they not be cited if their information is worthy of being considered? Citing them with precision would serve the double purpose of giving credit where it is due and at the same time let the reader know who, from what region, said what, so that he has a basis of comparison for some of his own material collected from other people in other regions.

As already stated, there are different "schools" of interpretation in oral traditions. Citing sources helps to pinpoint them. Also some people may be in a better position to know than others. For example, if I have been told certain things about the ancestry of a prominent Kaabu ruler by a knowledgeable jali, though not one directly connected with that family; and if I then read that you have interviewed that man's son, who told you something different from what the jali told me; then I may be inclined to accept what you have written over what I have collected, simply because I think that the son is probably in a better position to know about such things than that particular jali.

Kaabu is a big area, and time is against the researcher in oral traditions. Because of this researchers ought to try to be as helpful and as specific as they can in attributing particular statements to particular sources, so that everyone can depend upon the groundwork laid by others working in different areas; and those who come after can build upon all our work with confidence, without having to do it over again.

### Conclusions

The foregoing comments reflect some of my thoughts on some of the problems I have found in my work in connection with the finding, collection, evaluation and use of oral traditions. I have tried to apply these to the study of Kaabu traditions in particular. Kaabu is a big area whose history lies embodied in a great mass of oral tradition. There are few written sources. The number of people who know Kaabu traditions and who are dying without leaving their knowledge to anyone else is increasing. It is therefore of utmost urgency that as many scholars as possible should begin now to salvage in a systematic fashion as much as they can of what remains. To do this I have suggested we need to stop duplicating one another's work and to make the work which has been done more easily available to the scholarly community as a whole, so that more time and money can be spent in opening new sources and new areas of research. I have suggested that governments, universities and funding agencies and international bodies must be called upon to help fund such research. In addition I have indicated some common historiographical problems in evaluating and using oral traditions, and have made some suggestions for ways of dealing with them.

Nothing said here is intended by me to be "the last word" on the subject. Nor do I expect everyone to agree with all my evaluations or with all my proposals. I hope, rather, that some of these remarks will serve as points of departure for further discussions, particularly within the scholarly community which intends to collect the oral traditions of Kaabu and which has undertaken to reconstruct Kaabu history. Some kind of understanding needs to be reached within this community so that each scholar can better depend upon and understand the work of others, and so that the study of Kaabu history can move forward steadily, and not become trapped on a treadmill.

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