

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

African sources for African history - the sources that is, not the book series - are under constant threat. Challenges include the deaths of informants and the African climate, which ruins documents and books. However, politics too can bring the threat of catastrophe to an African source, and that is the case with the text of this volume of African Sources for African History. For example, in just a few hours in June 1998 the military rebellion that took place in Guinea-Bissau not only destroyed the entire audio-visual department of the National Research Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa, INEP), but it compelled researcher Cornelia Giesing to flee the country in such haste that she was forced to leave behind many of the copies made of her recordings. Meanwhile at the INEP the originals were possibly destroyed by the vandalism of the military. In any case they were never found again.

Therefore, as in the case of the Bijini Tarikh project (published as volume 7 in African Sources for African History), the text of the present edition is based on copies of those original recordings, from 1988. The copies Cornelia Giesing took with her to Germany when she was evacuated were part of a bigger collection, although it was not archived. That was of course one of the reasons why the reconstitution of the whole performance of Maalaŋ Galisa was such a time-consuming project, for when Giesing found the copies she discovered that they did not cover all the original recordings. However, thanks to a preliminary transcription made by her research partner Issufi Sissé, made while the recording was being done, Giesing was able to reconstruct the few seconds missing from each cassette copy.

This present publication preserves a purely oral narrative, as explicitly stated by the narrator. It describes the changing political structure of Kaabu, a kingdom in present-day Guinea-Bissau, from its mythical beginnings, through the regional wars of the nineteenth century and up to colonial rule. This narrative is probably no longer transmitted, neither in Kaabu nor beyond, in this present form and content.

Its transmission chain, at least in the Galisa family (living in the actual town of Gabú and in Guinea-Bissau's capital Bissau), has been weakened since the death of Maalaŋ's brother Sirifo a few years after this text was recorded in 1988 – after which Maalaŋ is said to have decided not to perform the account published here anymore. It ceased definitively with the passing away of Maalaŋ himself in November 2015. Political and cultural changes in Guinea-Bissau society have been so thorough and radical over the past decades that one notices in general that narratives on Kaabu such as the one published here are rarely produced anymore and when published receive very little scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup>

With the introduction of the reel-to-reel tape recorder in the 1960's (and later cassette recorders) there began a wave of historical research featuring storytellers in the role of encyclopaedic informants.<sup>2</sup> Maalaŋ Galisa's 1988 performance can therefore be positioned last in the line of a longer tradition of making tape recordings in Guinea-Bissau. The overall research situation of 1970s Guinea-Bissau has been well described by Namankumba Kouyate (1981), Yves Person (1981) and Djibril T. Niane (1981). These authors mention recordings from Senegal and Guinea-Bissau (with items recorded as early as 1965-1970 by Pepper) in the 'Archives Culturelles' of the 'Fondation Léopold Sédar Senghor' in Dakar. Those documents seem to have been poorly exploited and remain unpublished; there are no reports even by those scholars who have visited the archives. According to a list of recordings on Kaabu by Niane (1981: 133) among the documents kept at the 'Fondation Léopold Sédar Senghor' are tape recordings of Maalaŋ Galisa's father, Bulli Galisa. Conceivably, that material could be part of the Pepper Collection mentioned by Yves Person (1981: 68) but to our knowledge it has never been specifically cited by any other experts in the field, such as Sidibé, Galloway and Niane himself. The indefatigable Namankumba Kouyate from Nyagassola, in Guinea (cf. Simonis 2015) talks about having listened, during the conference on "The

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<sup>1</sup> The exception may be Tangara 2007, which (we have been told) includes a narration by Maalaŋ Galisa.

<sup>2</sup> For some critical analysis, see Moraes Farias 1993 and 2005; Wright 1989; Jansen 2017.

Oral Traditions of Gabu' (Dakar 1980), to the narrator of the present version, Maalaŋ Galisa: 'Un de nos informateurs, à Ngabou Sara, Malamine Galissa, nous a livré son récit avec un accompagnement musical approprié: Kora et chant' (1981: 37). Further investigation at the 'Archives Culturelles' might reveal whether the recordings by father and son Galisa indeed exist. Then, a comparison with the version published here would be possible thanks to the publication of the 1988 recordings on the Brill website, in the enhanced electronic version of this book. Maalaŋ Galisa's performance is the first volume in the series African Sources for African History to be enhanced with an audio-recording. The editors of the series and the authors of this volume alike see such enhancement as a methodological choice that emphasizes that the now-published transcript and its translation represent an interpretation by text-minded historians that ignores musical and performative effects. On the one hand therefore the addition of the audio recording explains, supports, and justifies the transcription, on the other hand it illustrates that writing is a limited technology when it comes to expressing the power of the spoken word. Because the published text is no longer performed we are sure that all those interested in Kaabu history will attach great value to Giesing and Creissels' enhanced text edition of Maalaŋ Galisa's performance.

The narrative of Maalaŋ Galisa is of major importance both for understanding the history of the Kaabu empire and for understanding general political processes in precolonial West Africa. In her Introduction Cornelia Giesing chooses to see Maalaŋ Galisa's narrative as commenting on historical events in the Kaabu empire. That interpretation is not only in line with the local perception of the narrative, but equally it meets the standards of most researchers who have worked on Kaabu.

Giesing remarks that the content of Maalaŋ Galisa's narrative differs from most other published narratives on Kaabu which focus on Tiramakan, a military leader known from the Sunjata epic, which is the origin-history of the medieval Mali empire. Those narratives imagine Tiramakan as a 'single event founder-father' of the

political organisation of Kaabu. Giesing explains the dominant focus on Tiramakan by the location of research on Kaabu since the early 1970s; in those days most of the texts on Kaabu were collected in the Gambia or in Senegal. The difficult research situation in war-torn Guinea-Bissau during the 1970s led to the unilateral picture with the focus on Tiramakan, which the content of this present text will counterbalance – at least to a certain extent. Thus, together with the Bijini Tarikh (Giesing and Vydrine 2007), Maalaŋ Galisa's text is another example of a Kaabu narrative that does not claim a link to the epic traditions of imperial Mandiŋ via the military figure of Tiramakan.

Although he uses the stereotypical name 'Kaabu Tiramakan' for Kaabu – Maalaŋ Galisa does not mention Tiramakan as the proto-Mandinka conquering founding-father of Kaabu. Instead he mentions the Mandinka founding heroes as a series of migrants from the East looking for better living conditions and who settled in the West. The migrants often bear names suggesting local identities, such as Bajaranke, for instance, or Bedik. It is believed that they later merged with Mandiŋ identities.

In Maalaŋ Galisa's text the authority of the ruler of Kaabu – the kingdom founded, according to the text, after the constitution of the territories by the settlers – is derived from a local female ancestor found in the bush. Matrifocal situations and matrilineal rules of succession to high office occupy a major place in the text. Giesing suggests that that is perhaps witness to a matrilineal system that coexisted and partially still coexists with patrilineality, and she points to nineteenth century travel reports that mention matrilineal succession in Kaabu. However, we suggest that Maalaŋ Galisa's narrative documents (as well) the wider processes being experienced in the hinterlands of West Africa's coast during an era dominated by the Atlantic slave trade and Islamic jihads. On the one hand the inland accounts of Kaabu tell of patrilineal warriors, tracing descent from 'Tiramagan', pointing to influences from Islam and the Mandiŋ. On the other hand, stories from coastal Kaabu feature the origin of the matrilineal *nyanco* warrior elite. The suggestion there,

then, is of a strong effect from the Atlantic slave trade. That is especially so if one takes into account Paul Lovejoy's observation about the impact of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa: 'No one has argued as much, but it may be that matrilineality and the export trade were interrelated. They certainly reinforced each other' (Lovejoy 1989: 388). The Galisa narrative might therefore either highlight long term migration and assimilation processes as a background to the multi-ethnic composition of Kaabu society or represent the impact of the slave trade on the south-eastern frontier area between present-day Guinea-Bissau, Senegal and Guinea-Conakry. It will be noted that whichever of those two scenarios might be true, both patrilineal and matrilineal discourses combine classical and widespread themes in West African oral tradition. Where patrilineal traditions tend to focus on male heroes and the Mandiŋ and the force of Islam,<sup>3</sup> matrilineal traditions feature women in the bush who often display the characteristics of the aardvark. Both traditions should be seen as perspectives and not as rival voices opposing each other. In the well-known Sunjata epic, Sunjata's mother shows characteristics of a porcupine, a solitary hunter which lives similarly to the aardvark, in fact in holes originally dug by it.

This text edition has profited greatly from the input of Denis Creissels, who, as the author of both a Mandinka grammar and dictionary and many editions of texts and other linguistic works, is the foremost authority on the Mandinka language. Since meanings in Mandinka are highly 'contextual', an expert like Creissels was a prerequisite for successfully rendering both transcription and translation. Moreover, Giesing and Creissels, in their turns, profited from most helpful support from many who speak Mandinka as their first language and who were happy to be consulted in cases of differing interpretations. In order to make the reading of the Mandinka text more comfortable for those in Guinea-Bissau who have acquired literacy in Mandinka, the authors opted to leave out accents, except in the cases of the í (you)

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<sup>3</sup> Some parallel motifs in the oral traditions of Pakao and Kaabu may be noted, i.e. the stories of the marabout called Faati Baa from Maanaa (Kaabu) and Sumbundu (Pakao) (Schaffer 2003: 153). Historically, Pakao is known to have received many Sooninkee migrants from Kaabu after the war events of the nineteenth century.

and ì (they). As editors, those were indeed the kind of choices we preferred to leave to the authors of a critical source edition.

Taking into account the permanent flow of cross-influence between the written and the oral, we are of the opinion that this volume provides an outstanding example of the dynamics both of historical sources in Africa, and of scholarship on Africa. In that sense this volume will function as an illustration of the methodological challenges that scholars who work on African sources for African history have to deal with. The war of 1998 destroyed a great deal, and for a long period in its aftermath research was impossible. During that time great change took place and many individuals died. Moreover, many people have resettled along new lines and principles. This new settlement structure means that further study of Guinea-Bissau's history is complicated by the resulting lack of sources and that is the background against which Giesing and Creissels have saved an important historical source. We are proud to publish this source in our series, and we would express our hope that many historians will make use of and enjoy so great a treasure.

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