

## QUESTIONNAIRE INTO TRADITIONAL AFRICAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

by

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What is understood by a questionnaire? The mere mention of questionnaire has something formidable about it even to a European, however accustomed he may be to indiscreet investigation. In fact the present questionnaire is not a cross-examination but a tool designed simply to remind the investigator of what he may have to ask, so that he will not miss some interesting piece of information.

There can be no question of arriving with pencil and paper at the ready and proceeding with a systematic investigation. Anyone with the least knowledge of African life knows that to use a questionnaire in this way is the best way of collecting mistaken and imaginary information. Only a long stay, and intimate and lasting contact, can give real information. In practice, this will be in addition to the other, non-scientific information about every-day life which comes through reciprocity.

"Employers" are not advised to beg for this information; in fact it is they who most often destroy customary life, and it would be improper and ineffectual on their part to seek information about this. But one cannot give precise advice about the rational use of this questionnaire. Everything depends on the particular situation and on contact with the people.

Note that the questionnaire is designed to reveal information about musical life, but is intentionally restricted to "musical instruments". In fact musical life can only be explored using more subtle and varied methods. Nevertheless it would be interesting to film, and record at the same time, an instrumentalist so as to be able to show the film in slow motion. Devices exist whereby one can hear the sound at a slower speed without the frequencies being changed. The two hands, of a lute player for example, would have to be filmed together, with the "working" part of the instrument viewed so as to make it possible to "read" what is happening, and without changing the camera angle throughout the piece. This kind of document would give valuable information about instrumental technique, and would help to get past the stage of "abstract impressions" of musical structure.

### QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Date and place.
2. Names, Christian name, age, sex, occupation, social status, name of village and ethnic group of informant.

The questionnaire should be followed through as many times as there are varieties of a type of instrument. For some headings the answers may be common to several varieties (for example if two forms are used for the same purpose, or one form used for two purposes).

3. Vernacular name of instrument, with literal translation.
4. Morphological description:
  - general shape, with sketch, front, side view . . . as precise as possible.
  - details, with precise close-up sketches:
    - hollow parts: transverse and longitudinal cross-sections of the lips of slit drums, embouchures of wind instruments . . .
    - fastenings: methods of attachment of strings on stringed instruments, reeds on mbiras, bodies and clappers on bells, skins on membranophones . . .

- description of accessories (sticks, plectrum, bow etc.) with sketch.
- 5. Description of decorations: precise drawing of the designs, natural size if possible.
- 6. Size and weight.
  - total length, width, diameter and height, also length, width, diameter and height of working parts (for example, an instrument with a handle has a total dimension including the handle, and a working dimension without it); note possible variations in dimensions (for example, length between . . . and . . .).
  - approximate weight.
- 7. Techniques:
  - materials used for each part of the instrument (with vernacular names and literal translation); for plant matter complete names are desirable for purposes of identification;
  - treatment of materials: how have they been treated from their natural state? What are the other uses of this material, if any, in this, or another form?
  - construction of the instrument: description, in chronological order, of the different steps in construction (tools and techniques used).
  - decoration: sculpture (with knife or other tool), poker-work, painting, dyeing (vegetable dye or other, method of preparation).
- 8. Social context:
  - who makes the instrument, when is it made? Is it exchanged, sold or bought?
  - is the manufacture linked with ritual? In what circumstances are the decorations made (meaning of the motifs)?
  - who plays the instrument (village member or outsider, adults or children, men or women, the maker, the owner or a family member)?
  - when is the instrument played? Is its use restricted or not (sects, rituals, magic, healing, funerals)?
  - is the instrument or its use linked with particular phases of collective or individual life (hunting, fishing, harvesting, mourning, end of mourning, warfare, appointment of chief, movement of chief, exercise or assignment of his powers, healing, circumcision, initiation, ritual dances, invocation of spirits, sickness, games, weddings, child-birth, trials)?
  - is it used collectively or individually? If collectively, is the instrument part of an orchestra or an instrumental ensemble? Of exactly what instruments does the orchestra consist? How is it formed, to what use is it put?
  - who maintains the instrument, and how? Where is it stored?
  - is the instrument inherited, or passed on in some other way? Is it a royal perquisite? What happens to it after its owner's death? Can it be purposely destroyed?
  - has the instrument any other than a musical role (possible significance)?
  - are there legends, stories, anecdotes about the instrument, its manufacture, particularly about its origin (revealed by spirits etc.), its creation, borrowings or diffusion? Note all variants, in the story teller's language, and if possible with literal translation;
  - are there other examples of the instrument (in the village or elsewhere)? Are there still craftsmen capable of making it in the traditional way (in the village or outside)? Note carefully their ethnic affiliation. If others exist, to what use are they put? Are they simply kept and not used? Can one see them (should the occasion arise, purchase them, or take photographs, sketches or measurements)? If an instrument has disappeared, has it been replaced by something else, if so what? Who could still make the original instrument, and for how much?

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- if at all possible, ascertain the distribution of the instrument in the area (how many per village, diffusion into other ethnic areas, introduction by outsiders).
9. Musical aspects:
- *tuning of the instrument: by whom, how, description of different ways of tuning, if any; if the instrument gives different tones (flutes, pluriarcs, harps, zithers, xylophones, bells, slit drums etc.) is the tuning done according to a specific pattern, or is it left to the player's initiative? Who decides the tuning of the instrument, and on what criteria? Is the tuning fixed, or does it vary according to the music to be played?*
  - *performance: playing position (standing, sitting, stooping . . .); hand position, accessories such as sticks, plectra or bows;*
  - *is the instrument used to accompany songs, if so collective or individual? Which songs?*
  - *vernacular names (with literal translation) of basic rhythms or patterns used. When are these used, and what is their meaning?*
  - *composition of the orchestra or ensemble in which the instrument takes part; how do the musicians organise their playing together? How do they tune?*
  - *how does one learn to play the instrument? Who teaches it?*
  - *is it used to send messages, and how (examples)? Is this its only function or not? If used for this purpose, who decides on its tuning, and how?*
  - *notation of different messages which the instrument can or should send (in the vernacular, with literal translation); write beneath each syllable of the message the sound on the instrument which corresponds to it.*