

“THEY SING OUR ORIGINS”: A STUDY OF THE LUNGSI DRUMMERS OF MAMPURUGU

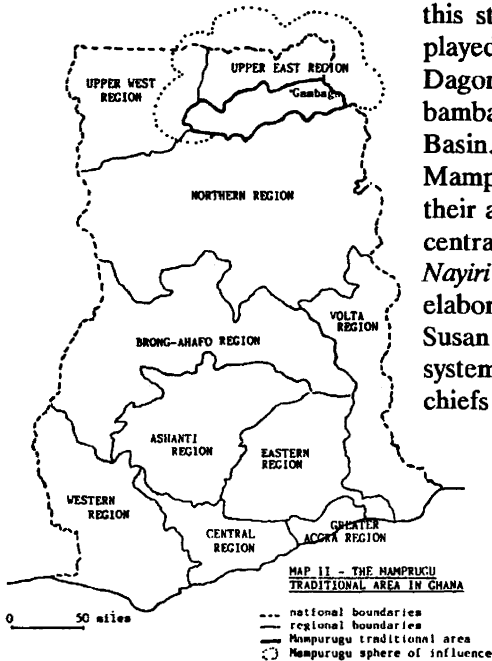
by

DAVID C. DAVIS

Introduction

Mampurugu, the territory occupied by the Mamprusi, lies in the Northern Region of the West African nation of Ghana and neighbouring Togo. Recent studies suggest that

this state developed as early as 1475 A.D. and played a key role in the emergence of the "Mossi-Dagomba", or more accurately, Nakomse-Dagbamba, complex of centralized states in the Volta Basin. One of the distinctive features of both Mamprusi and Dagomba societies, by contrast to their acephalous neighbours, is the presence of a centralized political structure. In Mampurugu, the *Nayiri* is the recognised paramount, ruling over an elaborate hierarchy of chiefdoms. Anthropologist Susan Brown likened this structure to “a planetary system in which the King is the sun, and the village chiefs are planets. The more important chiefships are those which have their own satellite chiefdoms” (Brown, 1975:31). The *Nayiri*'s court in Nalerigu is replicated throughout the state with even minor village chiefs surrounding themselves with elders and advisors (Davis, 1984:14-16).



At each of these courts, the *lungsi* drummers are an integral part of court life. Playing the hourglass-shaped drum found throughout the West African savanna, they perform at weddings, funerals, and installations. Most importantly, they are the custodians of the traditions about the Mamprusi past, maintaining the annals of the ruling family. The Mamprusi say, “*Ba nyuum ti piligri*” — “They sing our origins” (Brown, 1975:64). These men, and the traditions they retain, are the focus of this study.¹

¹ The research for this study was carried out under the auspices of a Fulbright-Hays Dissertation Abroad Fellowship in 1982-83. The material presented here is the first account of these Mamprusi drummers and was collected in the course of more extensive investigation of the history of Mampurugu. Special thanks are due to John Sule Yakubu, Damba Karaga Dakurugubila and Yissifu Yakubu, *lungsi* who willingly co-operated with me, sustained by the belief that the elucidation of their past was crucial to the determination of their people's future.

Bamsi Zulia – The court musicians

When the British first arrived in Mampurugu in the 1890's, they made the startling discovery that the Mamprusi did not possess any written records. Furthermore, wrote Lieutenant Colonel Northcott, "there is among them no class whose business it is to transmit tradition orally" (1899:12). Some of the events of the past were known but the British commander cautioned that "the value of any item of significance so peculiar as to have rescued it from the general oblivion is greatly discounted by the inability of the historian to assign even an approximate date to its occurrence" (Ibid). Northcott, stationed in Gambaga and removed from the *Nayiri's* court in Nalerigu, was unaware of the *Bamsi* title class of musicians attached to the court. The members of this group do, indeed, form a professional group who are not only musicians, but also court historians; chroniclers of the past and recorders of the present. Within this titled group, there is a recognized hierarchy of titled skins (Brown, 1975:64; Opong, 1969:38-9; Davis, 1983:FN 52, 53, 54, 59)²

The acknowledged senior member of the class is the *Banyo*, who resides today outside Nalerigu in the village of Sakogu. Unlike other members of *Bamsi*, the *Banyo* performs his recitations unaccompanied by any musical instrument. A recitation of the present *Banyo*, Abukari Koligu, consisted of short, clipped phrases referring to the creation period, naming specific animals, trees, and plants formed by *Nawuni* (Davis, 1983:FN 54, 59). At the present time, Koligu does not play a prominent role in court life and is called on primarily to lead the *lungsı* dummies during the installation of a new *Nayiri*. The senior status of this office is based on the length of time it has been in existence. When asked why his office was senior, Abukari Koligu replied that it was started before any of the other offices. He recounted that *Banyo* was the son of Gbewa, the first *Nayiri*:

Banyo's mother died in the palace. Our grandfather turned into an orphan, and during meal times, children with their mothers had a special treatment over orphans, so Na Gbewa gave a walking stick to our grandfather and told him to carry it along during meal-times; so he was instructed to hold that staff and sing during meal-times and directed all his generations both present and future to meet this orphan's needs; whenever they see him and hear his song along with the walking stick and Gbewa said that in his generation whoever hears the orphan sing, or even a member of his generation, ...that person should pay him...(Davis, 1983:FN 59).

The walking stick was later planted and grew into the tree which produces the staff chosen by each new *Banyo*. The title remains within one family, and unlike the other offices, he is not installed by the *Nayiri* (Ibid; Brown, 1975:64).

Next in the *Bamsi* hierarchy is the *Pugurana*, who resides in the village of Bindi, near the Togo border. Dakum, the first *Pugurana* to settle there, came from Binduri, near Nalerigu. During the reign of Na Bariga, he was 'sent away' and founded Bindi. Mackay reported that he was "head drummer to the Na and chief of all the Na's drummers" (1931:5). In reality, *Pugurana* is not a drummer, but accompanies himself with a large calabash instrument called *gbintili* (Davis, 1983:FN 54).

² Chiefs and other office-holders sit on animal skins, *gbana*, and so the term 'enskinment' is used to picture this installation.



The Nalerigu drummers performing at Damba, 1983

At the present time, two junior members are the most prominent and active *Bamsi*. Both the *Lunaba* and the *Sampanaba* are titles held by *lungsi* drummers who reside in Nalerigu. The court drummers participate in all court ceremonies, from installations to funerals, and are essential for the performance of annual festivals. These titles are held by two families claiming diverse origins. *Lunaba* Yidana, whose office is the senior, traces his descent through six generations of Mamprusi drummers. In an early study, it was found that figures based on the reign lengths of twentieth-century *Nayiris* suggested a high average generation depth of 40 years. The social status, marriage, and succession patterns result in a high life expectancy among privileged groups. No such figures are available for commoners in Mampurugu, but if 40 years is taken as the maximum then it can be suggested that this title has been held in this single family for at most 240 years. This would date the first *Lunaba* to the mid-eighteenth century, at the earliest (Davis, 1983:FN 52, 53, 54).

The 'gate', or family, that provides the *Sampanaba* claims to have originated in Dagbon. *Sampanaba* Yakubu, who was enskinned in 1983, traced his genealogy back to his great grandfather, in the process illustrating the development of a patron-client relationship between the drummers and the royal family. His account is also indicative of the process by which an outsider and his family is integrated into Mamprusi social structure. During Na Bariga's rule (1864-1901), *Sampanaba* Yakubu's great grandfather arrived in Nalerigu from Gushiegu in Dagbon. He served the Na until his death, but when this patron-client relationship was severed, the Dagomba drummer returned home. Na Sigiri called on this family to supply another drummer for his court and so Yakubu's grandfather left Gushiegu for Mampurugu. He married a Mamprusi woman and con-

tinued to serve the court under Na Sigiri, Na Zori, and Na Wubiga (Davis, 1983:FN 52; Oppong, 1968:63-4). Between 1909 and 1915, the family left Nalerigu and returned to Gushiegu, where Yakubu's grandfather died. When Na Wafu was enskinned, he sent word to Gushiegu for Salifu, Yakubu's father, to come and to serve him as a drummer. He played an active role in the activities of court, serving as a second to *Lunaba* Yakubu when he was too ill to fulfill his duties (Davis, 1983:FN 52). Salifu became a permanent part of the court establishment and was rewarded for his loyal service by being enskinned as *Sampanaba*:

Na Salima died and Na Zoro came. He questioned why there were many drummers in town and yet no single one of them is recognized as a chief drummer. So the drummers replied, "It is really true but one can not enskin oneself as chief unless one does it on another." So Na Zoro replied, "If God blesses my life, I will enskin all of you chief drummers", so they came to one festival, Na Zoro had some gown and a hooded cape so that he called all the drummers in town and told them that he was going to enskin Salifu as *Sampanaba* (Ibid).

Lunaba Yidana objected because of Salifu's kinship ties with the royal class through intermarriage. Despite this protest, Salifu was enskinned as the first *Sampanaba* during Na Zoro's rule, between 1943 and 1947. Salifu was particularly influential at Na Sheriga's court, and was rewarded by the *Nayiri* with the gift of one of the Na's daughters as a wife for Salifu's eldest son (Ibid). When *Sampanaba* Salifu died in 1982, Na Bongu called *Lunaba* Yidana in for a conference:

"You have finished with the funeral of the late *Sampanaba*, who then do you have for me to enskin?" So *Lunaba* replied that they have no saying other than his. The chief said, "As Na Zoro loved the previous *Sampanaba* so it is with me and lunga Yakubu, and I will also enskin him as my *Sampanaba*." Once again *Lunaba* was protesting...So the chief called Tarana and Kpanarana and told them of his intention of enskinning lunga Yakubu as the *Sampanaba*, so the two elders called on lunga Yakubu and advised him to accept the post of *Sampanaba* to help *Lunaba* be drummers of the Mampurugunaba and to create a good atmosphere in Mampurugu for him. "I was instructed by my senior brother Abudulai to handle lunga Yakubu very carefully for he was a helpful man in his reign...I can not bypass my brother's words so I must make him a recognised man in Mampurugu." As the elders confronted me, I also accepted the post, and they enskinned me as *Sampanaba* (Ibid).

At the present time, this family supplies fourteen drummers to the *Nayiri*'s court, under the leadership of *Sampanaba* Yakubu (Ibid).

Another important drummer family also traces their origins to a Dagomba musician. The Dawuni family provides drummers to the court of the *Pwa'anaba* of Samini, one of the female skins in Mampurugu. Bawuni Samini explained that his grandfather, Naribi, came from Dagbon and settled at Janga, seat of the *Soonaba*. From Janga, he moved to Nasia, and eventually to Nalerigu, where he served in Na Bariga's court. Naribi married Bariga's senior daughter, Awa, who was later enskinned as *Pwa'anaba* of Samini. Dawuni, the senior son of this marriage, inherited his father's drum and served as the leader of this family. When Awa's successor, *Pwa'anaba* Najia, died, Dawuni contested for the skin and was successful. His uncle, Na Wafu, enskinned him as *Pwa'anaba* of Samini (Davis, 1983:FN 53; Brown 1975:86-7).

The evidence derived from an examination of these drummers' gates suggests several conclusions. The *lunga* drummer and his style of recitations are recent innovations in the retention of oral traditions in Mampurugu, dating from perhaps the mid-eighteenth

century. Furthermore, the oldest drummers' gates are probably all of Dagomba origin and their styles are based on those of their southern neighbors. Finally, ties of kinship and affinity enhance the patron-client relationship between chiefs and drummers and ensure the continuity of traditions.

The hierarchical organization of the *Bamsi zulia* suggests that despite the present importance of the *lungsi*, they have not always held this dominant position. Two other titled *bamsi* are considered senior to *Lunaba*, suggesting that their offices and functions existed prior to those of the *lungsi*. It can be suggested that the *Banyo* is representative of the oldest method of retaining traditions among the Mamprusi. This form was subordinated to that used by the *Pugurana*, and later by the *lunse* recitations accompanied by the *lunga* drums. There is some evidence that the *lunga* may have replaced an earlier type of 'talking' drum, the *daligu*. Kinney suggests that this was the case in Dagbon. The *daligu* was a five-foot long instrument, usually dragged along the ground or carried on heads. No examples are found in Mampurugu today (Kinney, 1970:259).

If the *lungsi* gates are a recent innovation, where did they come from and when was their method of recitation incorporated into the Mamprusi socio-political scene? The drummers themselves explain that the first drummer in Mampurugu was an orphan son of Gbewa. The story is similar to that told by the *Banyo* as an explanation of the origins of his office (Davis, 1983:FN 59). It appears that this orphan cliché serves not as a literal explanation of the origins of any particular office, but rather explains the relationship between chiefs and drummers and other musicians. Banyo Abukari Koligu even said, "We are the three traditional culture's beggars." (Ibid) This story emphasizes the dependence of the drummer on the chief for patronage and recognition.

The discussion of Mamprusi drummers' gates would seem to indicate that the *lungsi* originally came to Mampurugu from Dagbon. These early drummers intermarried with Mamprusi women and became permanent fixtures in Mamprusi society. Even divisional courts acquired drummers by the same process. The *Lunaba* of Janga indicated that his grandfather left the area of Yendi Dabari to come to Janga to farm. Once settled, he became attached to the local court (Davis, 1983:FN 35). Not until c.1740 were these drummers officially recognised at the *Nayiri's* court by the appointment of the *Lunaba*, chief of the *lungsi*. Later, more drummers were added to the *Bamsi zulia* and the recitation of *lungsi* texts became an essential and vital part of the traditional governmental process.

It is possible that the first *lungsi* in Mampurugu were itinerant Hausa drummers who followed the trade caravans through the Volta basin. This core of drummers was later supplemented by drummers from Dagbon who migrated north during the shift of Dagomba interests from west to east (Ferguson, 1970; 1972). A similar process appears to account for the origins of *lunse* in Dagbon. J.H. Nketia noted the use of the hour-glass drum and fiddle in Dagomba and commented:

One not only hears music played on these instruments in a fashion similar to Hausa style, but also one sometimes finds songs and drum texts in Hausa. Praise-singing by wandering musicians is an important part of the tradition here, and it is organized on more or less the same pattern one finds in Hausaland and Yorubaland. There are a few musical types common to Dagomba and Hausa, such as *damba*, *tora*, and *lua*, but there are also other musical types that belong solely to the Dagomba area...According to Dagbani traditions,

their instruments are importations from Hausaland (Nketia, 1971:23).

John Chernoff, an ethnomusicologist who has studied the *lunse* of Dagbon, referred to Peggy Harper's observation of the *takai* dance of the Batonuba people in Hausaland and concluded that "it is reasonable to assume" that it is the same dance as the *takai* of Dagbon (Chernoff, 1979:61, 202). In light of the ranking of court musicians outlined above, it is interesting to note F.E. Besmer's comments on the musicians attached to the court of the Emir of Kano. He noted that the *Sarkin Janga* and *Sarkin Kalangu na Sarki*, two drummers' offices, are considered junior titles, and concluded that "while there is some evidence that the pressure drum is an old West African instrument, it is suggested that its use in court ceremony may be recent" (Besmer, 1971:38-41).

If an outside origin for Dagomba and Mamprusi drummers is accepted, the researcher must then explain the traditions which suggest that drummers were a part of the court from the earliest periods. It is possible that *lungsi* were a part of the socio-political structure when the first Dagbamba settled in this area. Christine Oppong suggested that this specialized segment "appeared at an early date" (1969:38), and Nketia noted that the instruments used "betray the Hausa affinities of the immigrants who founded this state" (1971:23). According to one Dagomba tradition, the first drummers were descendants of Na Nyagse, whose son Bizung is said to have been the royal ancestor of subsequent drummers. Another says that drummers originated at a place called Bizung, near Diari, during the reign of Na Luro (c.1650-60) (Davis, 1979:42-43). The Ya Na built a bridge and called musicians to come and sing of it. Eventually, he chose a drummer called Bezung and enskinned him as Namoo Na, the first chief and ancestor of all present-day drummers. One titled drummer even gave his ancestry through six generations to Bezung and his father, Na Nyagse (Oppong, 1968:38).

These traditions should not be dismissed out of hand. Both traditions refer to a drummer, Bezung, who was the original drummer in Dagbon. It is suggested that the name Bizung or Bezung, in these accounts, refers not to a proper name, but to the status of the son as an orphan. In Mamprusi traditions, the son is called *Bi biya zunga*, literally 'a stranger child' or simply, *Bezuna*, 'an orphan or lonely boy' (Davis, 1983:FN 16, 52). It would appear that these traditions are presumably not so much an historical account of the origins of drummers in these societies as a validation of the patron-client relationship and an explanation of the dependence of the drummer on his chief. The fact that two titled drummers in Nalerigu and Yendi can trace their offices back only six generations strongly suggests that this type of 'traditionist' dates from the mid-eighteenth century and not the foundation of these states.

The Dawuni and Salifu drummer gates provide evidence on how ties of kinship served to enhance the relationship between chiefly patrons and their drummer clients in Mampurugu. The marriage of Sampanaba Yakubu to Na Sheriga's daughter was more than just a reward for loyal service. The arrangement benefitted the *Nayiri* by ensuring a steady supply of drummers loyal to his gate and enhanced the *Sampanaba's* status by making his sons and grandsons eligible for chiefly office. The latter actually developed in the case of the Dawuni gate in Samini. Because of Niriba's marriage to Awa, Na Bariga's daughter, their son Dawuni was eligible to succeed to a formerly 'female' skin. This may lead to a process of alternating male-female holders.

Data collected by sociologist Christine Oppong among Dagomba drummers reinforces this evidence. "Even allowing for the fact that spurious claims to chiefly patronage for spouses may have been made by informants and that not all titled parents were in fact royals," she concluded, "the fact that over 40% of the 83 marriages recorded were with members of the ruling estate shows a definite tendency for chiefs to choose drummers as sons-in-law or to marry their daughters" (Oppong, 1969:38-41). Analysis of 85 marriages contracted by men of the ruling estate showed that 25% had married drummers' daughters, who constitute less than 2% of the population; 14% of 93 princesses' marriages were with drummers (Ibid).

These figures support the hypothesis that there is a tendency for the patron-client relationship to be changed into one of kinship and affinity by the exchange of females in marriage. Even though other social groups refrain from giving daughters to drummers as wives because of the strict sanctions controlling an offspring's future, such marriages between royal and drummer gates ensure a further supply of recruits for the drumming profession who will have bonds of allegiance with their princely relatives and will be ready to serve them. The result is a mutually beneficial relationship.

The *lungsi* and their traditions

1. *Nam Yuri*

As noted earlier, the *lungsi* attached to the *Nayiri*'s court are among the most important participants in all ceremonies, performing at installations and funerals, communicating royal messages and serving as the *Nayiri*'s representative at events throughout Mampurugu. Most importantly, the *lungsi* maintain the annals of the ruling dynasty. In the performance of any court ritual, it is the drummers who call out the names of the *Nayiri*'s ancestors and who are considered 'custodians of their names'.

The names which constitute the texts of the recitation and drumming are considered *tibsa*, literally 'heavy or sacred', and no royal or commoner will mention these names publicly. These 'names' are in fact rhythmic phrases drummed by the *lungsi* or the *Akarima*. The latter is the drummer of the *timpani*, large, standing male and female drums from Akan, which were introduced into Mampurugu through Dagbon in the late 19th century. At Damba, the local celebration commemorating the arrival of the *nabisi*, and coinciding with *Mawlud al-Nabi*, the birth date of Muhammad, these rhythms serve to regulate the accompanying vocal recitation and punctuate the oral performance with the most recognized 'name' of a particular *Nayiri*. In Mampurugu, the oral text referring to a *Nayiri* consists of one or more *nam yuri*, or 'chiefship name', followed by a list of his *bisi*, 'children', and their achievements (Davis, 1983:FN 51). In the drumbeat, the 'name' is composed of the tonal and rhythmic representation of the tone and accent patterns of a phrase of speech. If these phrases are known, words or names are recognizable, but if the phrases are unknown to the listener, the drumming cannot be interpreted correctly. Thus, a drumming rhythm can be recognised as the name of a certain person by all the local population, but the meaning of the phrase it represents may be obscure to all but the drummer.

The names themselves provide insight into the personalities and politics of the *Nayiris* who selected them and provide a skeletal structure to which other narrative traditions are oriented by the elders and traditionists. Mamprusi who have acquired a certain level

of social status compose their own ceremonial names, *solima*, which identify them during public gatherings (Brown, 1975:65). Each village chief in Dagbon and Mampurugu has such names, as is illustrated by the traditional account of Yana Zangina's selection by Na Atabia:

On the day Na Gungobili died, Dagbon split...Then everyone sought the chieftaincy on his own. Then he Na Zangina said, "If matters are very troublesome in Dagbon and there is no Ya Na, it would be well for them to take them to the chief of Mamprusi in order that he may separate them." All the Dagombas present told him "What you have said is the truth." The chief of Mamprusi then told them, "You have all disagreed, no decision can be arrived at. To me it seems you have taken bribes from the princes of Dagbon that is why you have disagreed. But, I, the chief of Mamprusi know one thing and that is what I am going to do; a man's tongue (word) is like a ladder, it is by that you can descend into his inside in order to know what he has inside...". The Chief of Mamprusi said, "Now princes of Dagbon call your drum names." The chief of Yelizoli stood up and swore an oath, "My grandfather, Na Luro, and swore, my father, Na Tutiyiri, I own the chieftaincy." The chief of Mamprusi said, "Then call your drum name that I might hear." He said, "I am the mortar dove that will terrify fowls."

After Zangina and the others had called their names, Atabia announced:

It is Zangina who called his name and it is good. He has eaten the chieftaincy. He said that he is the broad chest that will bear the garments. He said that if he gets the garments of Dagbon he can bear them alone. He said, he is the stone anvil that rolls and rolls but does not break. He means that if he gets the chieftaincy he will roll and leave for his children and grandchildren. Therefore Zangina has called his drum names and they are good, he is the owner of the chieftaincy (Davis, 1970:59; 1983:FN 9; Iliasu, 1971: 61, also Tait; Ferguson, 1970).

These ceremonial names differ from the *nam yuri* which the new *Nayiri* chooses during his installation ceremony, and by which he will be known during his reign (Brown, 1975: 155-56; Rattray, 1932:2/559). The name chosen is usually a word used in common conversation, typically some feature of the natural environment such as *wafo* - snake; *soro* - strong room; or *sheriga* - needle. These are associated with local proverbs; for example, *Na Sigiri* is derived from the proverb, *Mam yela Sigiri, sig' sono ne male burega*, which means "I am the first rains: good rains make the sowing." Na Zori's name is explained by the proverb, *N'yela salema Zori nwon ban dubo o-ni pae salema*, meaning "I am the golden hill; he who knows how to climb will get gold." (Davis, 1984:38-39). Since no analysis of these Mamprusi proverbs exists, the full significance of these phrases awaits further research.

In choosing a particular *nam yuri*, the future ruler may be making a political statement as surely as any modern demagogue. Like Na Sigiri, who envisioned his rule as the first rains that would ensure the prosperity of his people, or Na Bongu, who likened himself to a peaceful valley where animals could always find pasture and farmers could raise good crops, the ruler may try symbolically to represent the manner in which he expects to rule. In other cases, the names could indicate how the ruler obtained the *nam*, such as Na Bariga's name, which means 'blade', referring to how he removed *Gua*, the 'thorn', who had pricked him by contesting for the skin. Some names were issued as warnings against any potential threat. Na Zomsa chose his name from the phrase, *Wuruhu kpangu ni zomsa*, "a thick cloud of dust will rise high in the sky", a warning that any challenge would result in a great battle. The proverb associated with Na Dambongu states that "a

falling stick will hit even the elderly man, much less the young”, suggesting that no matter who challenged him, they would be struck by the falling stick, *Dambongu* (Ibid:40).

In addition to these key names, which are the most commonly used and are included in the names recited in Nalerigu, the *Nayiri* also selects a number of other proverb-names which are set to rhythms by the *lungsi*. In many cases, these follow a theme or pattern and were added throughout the reign, commemorating important victories or other memorable events. Two of Na Bongu's names refer to his being blessed by receiving the *Nam*, but emphasize that the blessing would in turn benefit all those around him. Once the key name is chosen, that word becomes forbidden to the *Nayiri*'s subjects and a euphemism is substituted in ordinary conversation. For example, *kparikipiri*, meaning 'a sharp-pointed thing', is used instead of *sheriga*, which is the common word for 'needle'. This identification of the *Nayiri* with everyday objects, according to Brown, makes kingship a part of the normal social environment of every Mamprusi who uses these words. Furthermore, she claims this identification shows that the *Nam*, like needles, snakes, razors, exists independently of the *Nayiris* and is essentially amoral. Hence the phrase, *nam zi seili* – “Kingship knows nothing” (Brown, 1975:155-56).

These observations on the Mamprusi *nam yuri* are reinforced by the praise names of the *Ya Nas* of Dagbon. Even a cursory comparison shows striking similarities. One name of Ya Na Uthman *Zoli*, 'the steep hill', resembles that chosen by *Nayiri Zori*, 'the gold-bearing hill, indicative of some parallels in the character of these names, and may indicate a common source from which the proverbs are drawn. As with the *Nayiris*, each *Ya Na* seems to have chosen a key word derived from a proverb, as in *Jibril kulunku*, based on the proverb, “a hundred *kulunku* (water insects) will never look like a cricket”. Other proverb phrases are listed, and some *Ya Nas* are associated with many different praise-names. Some repetition occurs, but the full significance of this is not evident. As with the Mamprusi proverbs, these seem to provide some interesting clues about the character of each ruler. Na Zangina's wealth, acquired as a trader, is alluded to in the proverbs, “a bowl of gold to be carried should not be put down on the ground”, and “during the reign of a wealthy chief, there is no poverty”. The advanced age at which Ya Na Gungobile 'ate' the *Nam* is illustrated in the sayings, “I am the aged hyena who will not refuse the bone”, and “the aged prince seldom refuses to become chief”. These names are certainly a potential 'hill of gold' for the patient researcher (Davis, 1984:41-2).

2. Oral narratives

The *nam yuri* form the framework to which the narrative accounts about the Mamprusi past are attached. Lacking chronological references, the events and personalities of the past are assigned to the era of a specific *Nayiri*. In this way, the *lungsi* recount that Na Pa'ari “went to Na and Kunkoru and fought a battle. They were his subordinates under him and a foreign force was wanting to take them and this brought about the war. This area is between Wungu and the Grunshi area” (Davis, 1983:FN 91). The material retained by the *lungsi* is supplemented by the narratives transmitted by the elders, warriors and other community leaders. Kpanarana Issifu is the custodian of detailed information on Mamprusi history. When questioned about why the seat of government was moved from Gambaga to Nalerigu, the *Masu* replied that it was moved during the time of Atabia, because,

there was not enough water in Gambaga; another point was that he had a friend in Nalerigu, the *Nalinaba*. When Atabia came he entered the house of this his friend, who welcomed him and provided him meals. The following morning, they greeted one another and Na Atabia told the *Nalinaba* that he had finally packed to his home. The *Nalinaba* asked Atabia that if this was true, where will he, the *Nalinaba* stay? Atabia told him that he should not think he will live since they both cannot survive. Atabia told his *Gbandari* to kill the *Nalinaba*. So these men beheaded him and brought his head to Atabia. So they destroyed *Nalinaba's* house and Atabia built his own house and that ended his coming; so they went to Gambaga to bring everything of his (Davis, 1983:FN 13).

The elders are, in fact, spokesmen for all of Mamprusi society, retaining those traditions which validate and explain Mampurugu as it exists today. In this role, they serve a function similar to that performed by the recognized senior members of the various segments of society, such as the *Lunaba* and the *Limam* of Gambaga. As leader of the Muslim community in Mampurugu, the *Limam* of Gambaga preserves those traditions which explain how the first Muslims arrived and established his family's credentials for holding the *Limamship*: "It was during Na Bariga's reign that Islam really came on the scene" (Davis, 1983:FN 20). This statement ignores any of the Muslim community that predated the arrival of his family. Each of the senior warriors recalls how his office originated and its past duties. It is the responsibility of the *Kambonakpema* to explain how a *Tampolensi* became the senior Mamprusi warrior: "There came time when brothers fought among themselves....So the *Tampolensi* people came up with war and helped the man conquer his half-brother,...so they enskinned the elderly *Tampolensi* man among them as a senior chief warrior before the Mamprusi warriors" (Davis, 1983:FN 68).

The traditions discussed above are widely-known and retold publicly after the traditionist has sought the approval of his ancestors, who are the real 'owners' of this body of knowledge. The role that this reverence for the ancestors plays in ensuring the continuity of the traditions is essential. As John Chernoff noted, the departed themselves are judged and their lives are expanded by those who remember them. "A person truly dies when his influence on the living ends, when he is forgotten, and in this sense we can perhaps understand the gravity of the offense for the drummer to make a mistake..." (Chernoff, 1979:165).

A large corpus of narrative material, however, is not recited publicly, and even some of the public drum language may have a false meaning. The names of *Nayiris* prior to Na Salifu are recited only rarely and few drummers know them at all. Although the *Lunaba* explained that this is because of time limitations during festivals and the burden of sacrifices, it is probably because it is unnecessary to perform these names. The present four gates to the *Nam* are traced to sons of Na Salifu, and it is therefore important to validate those particular gates' claims to the *Nam* (Davis, 1983:FN 36, 54). Only after lengthy negotiations could one of the Nalerigu drummers be persuaded to recite the *Nayiris* from Gbewa to Na Bongu. Even then, when the drummer finished his account of Na Gbewa, he said "Na Gbewa gave birth to his children of which there is something the Mamprusi does not leak, for unknown reasons, between Gbewa's time and that of Atabia, and so we take Atabia to be the next chief" (Davis, 1983: FN 90).

Some of the traditions and names recited in public probably have both a 'public' meaning and a 'secret' or true meaning to the traditionists. Because of an oath taken

before learning the historical accounts, drummers are not to divulge these esoteric meanings freely or carelessly. Once assured that the outsider is trustworthy and will use the information with discretion, the *lungsi* will enlighten the serious investigator. A.A. Iliasu and the writer were privileged in this manner; Chernoff overcame the same obstacles in Dagbon:

Bangumanga is a victory dance... The drum language is *Bem bo ma, be pam bo ma je* ("They will search for me, but they will not see me"). One false meaning is *Man daa yeli, mam bi lan yeli* — ("I said it; but I don't say it again"). The meaning is a "secret" because of the seriousness of war. In its truth, Bangumanga recalls the blood that was shed in the war, and so too blood must be shed in respect of the dead: animals are killed in sacrifice before drummers will beat the history, and I also killed animals before I learned the meaning of Bangumanga, as I did when I learned Zhem (Chernoff, 1979:206).

What significance does this esoteric body of knowledge have in an historical investigation? If a definitive reconstruction of past events is attempted, this hidden material is vital and may alter conclusions based only on the public traditions. If the investigation focuses on the role of these traditions in society, it is less significant. From this perspective, the public corpus is most important because it is this body of knowledge which enables the researcher to view the past through the same filter used by each Mamprusi.

As a professional traditionist, the *lunga* in Mampurugu preserves that of the past which is relevant to the present and future continuity of Mamprusi culture. There is no effort on his part to recreate the past, since no purpose would be served by this endeavor within the Mamprusi social context. Therefore, it is not important for the majority of Mamprusi to see their 'history' analyzed and evaluated in the Western sense, i.e. a reconstruction of the past. This is an exercise by the Western historian, for the Western historian. For the *lunga*, no further questioning or investigation is necessary. Everything necessary for the social function of history is readily available in the mind of the traditionist. The selective bits of the past preserved for the present serve to conform and to strengthen the status quo rather than to fully illuminate the past. This follows J.H. Plumbs' distinction between the past and history. The past forms the basis of present ideology (Davis, 1983:FN 40).

Interestingly, none of the oral accounts are ever questioned or independently verified by the traditionist or his audience. Their validity is not suspect until the Western-trained historian enters the picture. The fact that this information has been transmitted; that it has been deemed 'factual' by previous generations; that it is important enough to have survived the obscurity of the past, these truths are verification enough, i.e. sufficient 'proof' of the historical nature of the traditions. These are the standards by which the accuracy of these traditions is determined. To question or to discard any of these essential traditions would be an affront to the real 'owners' of this knowledge. In theory, the corpus remains intact from generation to generation, but in practice only the relevant material is retained (Davis, 1983:FN 61). In Mampurugu, history is found in every person. Since there is no official, established, complete 'picture' of the past, each individual creates for himself an explanation of his present situation based on the bits of information he has at hand, transmitted from the past. Each person then establishes his own historical and social identity, and if fortunate, retains those traditions relevant to the validation of that identity. As Chernoff has noted, "individual destiny is inseparable from family,

community, and history" (Chernoff, 1979:165). Self-serving distortion of the past is checked by the need to establish that individual identity within the broader context of the social, religious, and political environment of Mampurugu.

The continuity of Mamprusi traditions

Several factors ensure the continuity of these traditions, despite the changing status of the traditionists themselves. This continuity is graphically illustrated by comparing the traditions and the *nam yuri* recorded by R.A. Irvine in 1908 and those collected by the writer in 1982-83. Over a period of eighty years, there is little variation in the basic information transmitted. The professional nature of the *lungsi* training and performance is an essential part of this remarkable achievement. The task of learning is an arduous and painstaking one, involving long hours of patient application and practice. Young males within the drummers' family usually start to learn the basic drumming techniques at the age of five or six. In Sampanaba Yakubu's family, the senior son should be responsible for training his younger brothers, but because he does not have much interest in drumming, the next son, Yissifu, has taken up this task. Damba Karaga recalls that he learned recitations while massaging the legs of his father (Davis, 1983: FN 52). The senior or most proficient pupil would sing the leading phrases which were repeated by others, without drums. The first song learned by these youngsters begins, "A bachelor is a junior; a married man is a senior; whoever has should eat; and who does not have should sit down." (Ibid: FN 54)

These young drummers then practice by themselves in the bush or on the farm. By the age of eight, they are allowed to practice publicly in the market, or to join older *lunga* at funerals, dances or festivals. Over the years, these men learn more complex drumming rhythms, narratives and genealogies. In this way, the oral material is preserved intact and is kept fairly esoteric by strongly sanctioned taboos against reciting too much history on any one occasion. Sacrifices must be made before each performance because the drummers believe illness will pursue them if they reveal too much of their knowledge of the past (Oppong, 1973: 54).

As noted by Christine Oppong "sanctioned rules and restrictions, limiting and ensuring the continuity of recruitment" are important to the maintenance of unbroken traditions over time (Ibid; Davis, 1984:50-51). She classifies the role of the drummer in Dagbon as a 'recruitment' role in that the boy whose father is a drummer is compelled to assume the role, at least in the nominal sense. This holds true for Mampurugu. Drummers' daughters, since they are not eligible to assume the role themselves, give at least one of their offspring to replace them in the next generation (Oppong, 1973:54). Thus, a drummer's sons stay at home, helping on the family farm while being taught to play by a brother or paternal uncle. It is traditionally considered unthinkable for a drummer's son to stay in his father's house and not learn to play. Oppong noted, however, that should he object strongly to learning his father's profession, then he may go and live elsewhere. No evil shall befall him as long as he always keeps his drum and plays it symbolically on Mondays and Fridays. "But", she continues, "if a son learned [to drum] when small and later goes away without taking his drums then it is said that misfortune and even death will pursue him" (Oppong, 1969:43).

Difficult as it is for a drummer's sons to escape becoming drummers when they grow

up, it is even more difficult for a daughter's son to escape this profession for he must replace his mother. The particular child that is to represent his mother and siblings with his maternal kin is chosen by divination and then 'adopted' by his maternal uncle or grandfather (Davis, 1985:51; Oppong, 1968:43). Should a drummer's daughter bear only female children, then she must send a daughter, who will later be given in marriage to a drummer, or to another man, on the understanding that one of her sons will be given to learn to play. Thus it is a strongly sanctioned rule, and any drummer's daughter, wherever she is, must send a child back to her natal family, otherwise illness, in the form of insanity or leprosy, or death will befall her children (Oppong, 1969: 43).

These sanctions at work in the recruitment of uterine descendents ensure pupils are added to the professional ranks. These also explain why there is a tendency to professional in-marriage among drummers, since members of other groups are fully aware of the misfortunes which may occur should an outsider marry into the group and refuse to allow his offspring to join the profession when chosen (Davis, 1984:52). Oppong has demonstrated a tendency toward professional endogamy among Dagomba drummers. Coupled with the large number of drummers' royal marriages noted earlier, a continuous supply of drummers is ensured (Ibid; Oppong, 1969: 47-49).

Summary

The *lungsi* are a specialized segment of the Mamprusi population who serve as chroniclers of the past and recorders of the present. The unbroken historical narrative and royal genealogy which they retain and recite explain the origins of Mampurugu and serve as an ideological charter of the present political establishment on all levels. As such, these professionals are vital to the continuity of the traditional social and political system. The continuity of the traditions is directly linked to a reliable supply of these traditionists. As in Dagbon, strong sanctions encourage both male and female members of the drummers' clans to contribute their part to the 'pool' of qualified drummers. Ties of kinship and affinity between the drummer clients and their chiefly patrons not only enhance the status of the *lungsi* in Mamprusi society, but also guarantee that there will continue to be a supply of drummers loyal to the chief's gate. Through these mechanisms, the continuity of the transmission of oral traditions has been ensured, in spite of the changes in the individuals, methods, and tools involved in the transmission process.

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CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

- Dr. Daniel C. Agu:** C/o Dept. of Social Anthropology, Queens University of Belfast, Belfast BT7 1NN, N. Ireland, UK.
- Dr. Daniel K. Avorgbedor:** School of Performing Arts, Music Division, University of Ghana, P.O.Box 19, Legon, Ghana.
- Christopher Ballantine:** Professor of Music, University of Natal, King George V Ave, Durban 4001, South Africa.
- Prof. Marie-Louise Bastin:** Ave. Emile Max 182 - Bte 1, B-1040 Brussels, Belgium.
- Prof. Peter Cooke:** School of Scottish Studies, 27 George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, Scotland, UK.
- Prof. David C. Davis:** Dept. of History, Millsaps College, 1701 N. State St, Jackson, Mississippi 39210, USA.
- Moya Aliya Malamusi:** Singano Village, Chileka, Blantyre, Malawi.
- Dr. Kazadi wa Mukuna:** Hugh A. Glauser School of Music, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio 44242-0001, USA.
- Dr. Richard C. Okafor:** General Studies Unit, Anambra State University of Technology, c/o P.O.Box 9368, Enugu, Nigeria.
- Andrew Tracey:** Director, International Library of African Music, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.
- Robin Wells:** P.O.Box 12, Morija 190, Lesotho.