

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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THE ORAL TRADITION AS A SOURCE OF AFRICAN HISTORY

If there is an obvious fact for the observant it is the proliferation of studies or popular writings on the history of Africa. The past of this continent has been abundantly assessed. And still, it is a long time since Egypt, who produced one of the oldest, one of the most dazzling civilizations of all time, has been known as being situated in Africa; but actually the renewal of interest does not concern that Africa, it concerns the interior, that which qualifies it to be called the "dark" continent. The non-Mediterranean Africa is the most studied, Why? First, because its peoples are in the process of liberating themselves. They are searching for their identity. They are trying, not without difficulty, to reassemble the scattered elements of their personality of which the past is one of the most important facts. Their history, which, up to now was only considered and studied as an appendix, like a piece of the history of another country, is being understood more and more from the point of view of an autonomy.

Translated by Mary D. Forbes.

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Moreover, Today African countries are often placed to the front of international news. So it is normal that diplomats or world finance, and also the public itself, should ask questions on the subject: "Who are these Africans of which so much is said? Where do they come from? What happened to them in the past? In effect, the knowledge of an individual or of a community, is without depth and without historical density, and remains very superficial.

At last, astonishing archeological and anthropological discoveries have marked recent times in the research on Africa, underlining the major role played by this continent in the emergence of humanity, and has contributed to the stirring up of interest.

Briefly, a considerable demand exists for African history, which is a challenge for African historians and for the world, perhaps also a trap for the easy amateurs? That is why it seems useful to measure at their real value the objectives and the difficulties of historical research on Africa before we turn to the value of the oral tradition and eventually to the methodological techniques of its handling.

I wont delay on the subject of the myths that still today encumber the difficult road of the African historian; these often come from deliberate, unconscious or hypocritical racialism. The British writer Coupland, for example, declared in 1928: "A new chapter of the history of Africa began with David Livingstone. Until then one could not speak of Africa proper because it had not had any history. The majority of the inhabitants had been from time immemorial plunged in barbarism. Such had been, it seemed, the law of Nature. They lived stationary lives without either advancing or retreating. The heart of Africa beat painfully..." The idea, and the history, was strange to the mentality of the negro-african. Others do not deny the history of the African. But, they say, it is entirely from outside, in particular by the supposed Hamites, Caucasians, by Phoenicians, Greeks, Lybians, Romans, Jews, Arabs, Persians, Hindus, Chinese, Indonesians, Europeans, etc., etc... No internal dynasty. Lastly, the most accommodating do admit that there has been an African history, but they say in their turn, unhappily this history is not known, and it is unknown by virtue of the fact of a supposed absence of written word. There is no document, so there is no

history! In fact, the real difficulty is to be found in the incapacity of most historians to revise their methodological attitude. They resemble a surgeon who tries to operate today with a scalpel used by doctors in the 18th century. Their lack of African perspective is simply Humanist. Certainly, written documents are far fewer here than in other countries; but they are, above all, badly scattered in terms of areas and periods; the periphery of Black Africa was from this point of view privileged. The university centres and research institutes are gathering more and more new manuscripts, and the Rector, Al Al El Fassi, has said recently that Morocco has collected nearly 150 unpublished manuscripts concerning Africa.

One must also take note of centres not yet prospected in the Near East and the Middle East, near Turkey and Iran; and to speak of European sources that since the Middle Ages have gathered thousands and thousands of documents not yet made use of.

Moreover, Black Africa is not a country without writing as is spitefully suggested. Has it not been said that up to the middle of the 13th century or less, the greater majority of Europeans were unable to write except for the Counts and the Barons? Not until the Middle Ages when Friar-clerks like the Imams and Priests from medieval Timbuctu carried the flame of knowledge and history. Italy, in turn, so important and so cultured, was largely illiterate until recent years.

But even so, if all the writings relative to the African past were known the image resulting would be necessarily garbled because most of the documents do not come from the depths of the African people. Then? Then we must rally from conviction, from necessity, to the most modern historical school, the most comprehensive, the most able to gather all the past, the ins and outs of the complete history. Written proofs are proofs among others. In fact, man has made historic all that his creative hand has touched, from the most primitive to the most precious jewel. The question then is one of history of many sources. The ruins of Pompei yield scenes of daily life struck by the cataclysm of which we know; are they not more convincing than any description written by a contemporary? They are "the witnesses in spite of themselves" of which Marc Bloch speaks, and are more

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eloquent than any of the chroniclers. More and more history embraces the width and depth of the human stream of evolution. It is not only interesting in the superficial foam that offers nothing of value, nor anything that comes from below. For that all traces of the past signify something. The historian of today, is like a detective, who does not only gather the written evidence to reconstitute a drama but who pushes the investigation to the scientific analysis of the objects, of the traces of blood, of dregs, or cinders. This is the place to underline that archeology has already done well with African history. And that in spite of the difficulties due to upheavals of the earth, to the inversions of relief, to the violence of erosion carrying away in confusion the stratas of the earth, to the mildew and the chemical disintegration resulting from humidity, to the lack of fossils showing the chronological plan, to the limitations of the dating of carbon 14. The principal handicap is constituted nonetheless by the lack of sufficient finance to continue with systematic excavations. But, the witnesses buried in the ground can they not wait, so long as they are not buried for ever, as in Nubia under the tide of the high dam at Aswan? -

Another source remains, one that is living and of which the vectors are the depositories of the collective memory of African peoples: the oral tradition. I propose then, for the second part, to make a speech for the defence of the historical word before dealing with the difficulties and the technical operations of the oral tradition known as a tool by the historian.

It doesn't matter that the African is unable to understand the words of the Scripture: "In the beginning was the Word..." There is in effect a chronological priority and logic manifest in the words of the scripture. It is the word that distinguishes man from the animal, not writing, since there are millions of men who do not know how to write. It would be a gross error to put on the same level words and writing, in that case the first only is of the stature of man. All the same one cannot confuse the hand and the tool, because the hand that made the tool is superior to it, even if that is stronger and more exact it doesn't mean anything. The first graphic signs designed by man were reproductions of images or of sounds that he identified with the words those images represented. But, you say, this preeminence of

the word is it not a simple philosophical fact? From the point of view of the historian? This last resembles a tracker. He must have the footprints in order to find the treasures of the past. Without footprints, without signs, there is no history. But what signs? The sign is transient, and the word inconstant (a flying verb say the Latins), is it sufficient to serve as a proof for the historians? Before replying to this question let us define the oral tradition as being the collection of all the types of witness transmitted verbally by people through their own past. There are then two ideas necessary, and sufficient: spoken witness and transmission. Insults in your own home are not oral tradition, because you would not want to repeat them. It is the passing on of a spoken message in a temporal sequence that constitutes tradition.

We say at first it is comprised thus, the historical word is outside of written documents. Nearly all the history of the world has been spoken before it has been written. The most important books, to begin with the Bible and the Koran, were the object of oral tradition before being put into print. It is the same with real history. The author of *Tarik-el-Fettach*, Mahmoud Kâti, wrote unequivocally: "I want to bring together here the most remarkable events of his reign (on the subject of L'askia Mohammed), in making equal mention of Chi Ali *le Maudit* (in connection with Sonni Ali ber) as much as is possible with the aid of documents written and oral". For his part Jean Léon, *The African*, ends the wording of his book *Description of Africa* in this way: "Here in total is what I, Jean Léon, have seen that is beautiful and memorable throughout all Africa that I have travelled through. I have noted with care from day to day all the things that I have seen that appeared to me meritorious. Those that I have not seen I have been told about truthfully and completely by people worthy of trust." Writing is very often only the petrified word, it arrives petrified, and then anathema, the mistake or the lie.

What do the specialists of the oral tradition think? One knows the opinion of the American Lowie in 1917 in his book *The Oral Tradition and History*: "I cannot attach the least possible value, under any conditions to oral tradition." Many historians, who nevertheless form an ever smaller minority are of the same

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narrow opinion. The ones whom I call the functionalists, pretend that tradition is created and transmitted for an exact purpose, with the idea of completing a given fact for a determined social group (family, clan, cast, tribe etc.). According to them the tradition would not be right to be integrated with the culture of the group in question. It sets up, therefore, everything culturally anthropological or juridical of the history of ideas, but not of the history of real facts, because it collected social myths for the benefit of the cause. But what historical document, written or not, but fulfils a function social or national? The Pyramids themselves, these "abodes of eternity," so "objective" in their insensibility almost intemporal, are they not a form of publicity intended for posterity? The rupestral paintings, the writings of the historians of the time of Louis XIV, these pictures of the Napoleonic period, the universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, the official or semi-official journals, patronal, the peasants' syndicates of 1968, all these documents fulfil an exact social or political function. Nothing produced by the human spirit is foreign to the hopes and interests of man in his social function. And if one complains that the African oral tradition only helps us to know of the princes and their exploits, can one not reply that the French peasants of the 17th century are not less well known than the day of the Sun King. Besides, the oral tradition offers occasionally some anti-functional aspects. Certain people know that they have been conquered, or, on the contrary, that they are not the first occupants; the "dagomba" tradition admits that these people are descended from a minor branch, confirming the "mampoursi" tradition.

Other adverseries of the spoken tradition bring forward the fragile nature that must necessarily affect the transmission of a spoken message; a sort of coefficient of erosion was to be sure automatically applicable to all witness transmitted orally. But every document, every sign, is that not ambiguous? Every sign matters to him who send it and him who receives it; these are the two poles that give scope and sensibility. A feudal seigneur, a mother and a lover can make the same gesture of appeal, they are completely different. When they are a witness, they are an interpretation. The indication one sees is not therefore privileged by rapport with him who hears. In effect, one cannot often

lay hands on written historical documents for a long time, they are only in manuscript. One is therefore at the mercy of a deliberate or unintentional mistake by the clerk or the copyst.

At the last African Congress professor Monteil alluded to the imminence of a better translation of the Al Bakri manuscript, because the translation by Slane, made from the manuscripts in London were very old in the matter of names of places and people. In effect the translator ignored the Soninké and the Berber. In addition to which other sources and new information have appeared since. And so, when the text is definitely agreed, questioned by different experts, it will give replies not strictly identical. For the written evidence, as for oral documentation, one must often begin by rebuilding the chain of testimony for reconstruction by means of going back to the transmission in all its forms and its changing context. To make history of history is one of the master techniques of the historian, and the work of the goldsmith who made the Charter to define the genesis of a text is of the same nature as that by which one tries to define the identity or at least the quality of the evidences that have contributed to make the oral tradition. As in judicial procedure, the identification of witnesses is the first step to the discovery of the truth.

Also, other adverseries of the oral tradition could be qualified chroniclers; but for them, the tradition does not allow itself to be chronicled systematically, nor absolutely, nor sometimes even relatively. Or it is at the time the man makes the history and in the cadre temporal that he must be taken back. There is no history without an arrangement of facts in their proper sequence, without introduction of the principle of priority and causality of events the one resulting from the other, and without a minimum of dates. If you wish to travel along the route of the past without recourse to chronology, that would be like a driver who followed a route without milestones or visible landmarks in a vehicle without a speedometer. The risks of confusion, of inversion, of contraction or the opposite of the distances are considerable. It is in this sense that Herskovits classes the source of history in two categories: on the one hand the written documents and the archeology constituting the "hard" sources, the certainties because we speak of them, they are supported by

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the dorsal spine of chronology; on the other hand the oral tradition and ethnology that would be the "soft" sources governed simply by probabilities. I do not think one can introduce such an absolute segregation between the sources of history.

At the international ethnological congress at Paris in 1960 the Russian scholars Sokolova and Levine insisted on the importance of the oral tradition for the history of a people without writing, as for example, those in Siberia. It is important to note that the sense of chronology does not escape traditional black Africans, even though so different. In a society without writing the sense and the meaning of the past weigh much more heavily, besides. The social hierarchy is a replica of the hierarchy of long ago; everything has a vital interest in defining the place in time. The ranks of age allow in this way their place sometimes in the history of certain groups to the end of the 18th century. Besides, certain summary processes of computation exist here and there. But generally there is a lack of apparatus and mathematical precision necessary, so much that the notion of the first rarely exists, as, for example, in the Islamic milieu.

The elements of temporal rhythm are the natural rhythm where facts mark collective life, such as famines and migrations, in particular those which have led the group in question on their present site. On this subject the origin of myths or of war must be strictly interpreted; magic exploits attributed to Soundiata and Soumaouro Kanté in front of the battle of Kirina, without being taken too literally help us to learn something of the origin of the Sudanese districts. Meanwhile historians or sociologists take pleasure in creating myths where they have enough hard facts. It is in this way that M. Zahan, in an article in Number 2 of the *Revue l'Homme*, in 1961, upbraided the historians for sticking too much to the legend of Yennenga and the story of the migration of the Mossi: "They emigrated," he said, "all together from Gambaga not only the porters of the districts, but the whole districts themselves in principle." Yennenga was not, to be sure, a real woman, having had a child by Ouedraogo, but a simple symbol of the power coming from the South. This statement is matched by a development of the Nakomsés represented by the sky or the sun, and the Nyonyosé figure, by the earth, two elements cosmic, antagonistic but complementary. It is

true that if the Mossi tradition offers a relatively small sketch of the migration of these people to Gambaga, its origin coming from the East, eventually, remains shrouded in a thick fog. This theme interests, besides, a certain number of actual States, as, for example, Senegal and the Niger, after a tradition, Soundiatam coming from Mesopotamia, a refugee in the Mossi country as a hunter, left a young girl pregnant of whom the son became the first of the Nabas Mossi. The Niger, Ghana, the Mali and Guinea were also concerned with this history.

The handling of the chronological elements of the oral tradition is very arduous. One has observed that in the dynastic lists the ancestors who have not given birth to a secession among groups are sometimes omitted. In a system with the matriarchial line the genealogy of the patriarchial lines are obliterated. In the Islamic milieu they are, on the contrary, stretched to include obligatorially an ancestor from Mecca, preferably from among the prophet's entourage. In the same roll the exact relationships between the monarchs are not always indicated. Collatorals are introduced into the direct line thus augmenting the number of generations and lowering in consequence the duration of a generation. Besides, polygamy caused a deviation; an old chief of 60 or more could have a young daughter of 20, a child which, from the point of view of problematical chronology is almost a grandchild, when there are already children of 40. As M. Y. Person suggests, must one consider that the duration of generation is shorter in relation to the matriarchial line than the patriarchial? Shorter with the Muselmans than among the Animists? Shorter in the households of the chiefs than among the ordinary people? Nobody admits it. Must one consider a longer average generation among the Yatenga than the Ouagadougou, because, as suggested by M. Izard, the procedure of succession in the former kingdom was closer to the ancient idea of the transfer of power from brother to brother, than from brother to son? These are debatable points. As for the idea of using the average length of a reign, that is a convenient idea, but the abstract nature of it is obvious. To consider from the past the average drawn from more recent reigns is an extrapolation that, if it is isolated for each proof becomes very uncertain. To accept directly the duration of similar reigns as given by tradition would sometimes result in grave

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inaccuracies. But what is one to do if there are no obvious reasons for rejecting them? The result, to take only the case of the Mossi kingdoms, would result in three or four centuries of deviation between the historians who began with the 12th century, like Larhlé Naba, and those who opted for the end of the 15th century, like Fage. Chronology will remain for a long time one of the most difficult problems of the oral tradition.

Now we will see, in the last part of this essay, the safeguards to guarantee or improve the standard of the oral tradition. There is, first of all, the set, rigid character of the dynastic lists of certain countries, as for example, the Mossi, the Dogamba, in Ashanti, Dahomey, Yoruba, Ruanda, etc. In the case of the kingdom of Ouagadougou, for instance, one observes an exact coincidence between all the lists available, with the exclusion of one or two debateable names, for inclusion or rejection. One feels that one is in the presence of slices of archeological-culture which come to us intact in the same form in which they originated, several centuries ago. Special clerks, real living archivists responsible from father to son going to authentic schools of anamalists and working every morning, existed in numerous kingdoms. Like Kpalingan that Hazoumé has written about, making at the same time every day a tour of the palace of Abomey to call out to the sound of drums the names and the exploits of the kings, so kindling the flame of memory. One understands at that time that the bulk of traditions were considered as a sacred repository that one recited at a stretch, meditated on, and that the drums also had their rhythms that were part of the language.

The sacrificial rite of the Biktogho which consisted, for the Moro Naba, having attained 30 years reign, of killing the chief of the village, and that, Pajeard compared with the pharaonique fete of the south, could serve also as a landmark in relation to the duration of reigns. But, you say, the Biktogho Naba, whose life was ended at the prophetic expiration of thirty years, must avoid a tendency to count the wrong way. Certainly the Biktogho was not only interested in the duration of reigns; and that is one of the strongest buttresses of the tradition: the comparison of versions. The evidence of the tradition is rarely "*testis unus*," of which one mistrusts the real title of the Latin jurists. The tradition, except when it is esoteric (and often even then in

that case), is very divided. A Kouba king questioned on the past of his dynasty was evasive until a meeting of his Council, and it was in front of his ministers that he gave the recitation. Contrary to the written document which is an individual act (think of Caesar drafting his *De bello Gallico*, or Archinard putting down his records in face of a Vercingétorix, or a Samory who had written nothing), the oral tradition is evidence that requires the same caution as other witness. The diversity of people interested in his good conversation and whose interests are divergent or even antagonistic is a serious guarantee of automatic control. So with Ouagadougou, one of the original princes, more a chief of the drums (Bend Naba), there was the Ouagadougou Naba, who is the voice of the aboriginals, the guardian of the royal tombs etc. The fact that the tradition could be so confused between people of very different lineage and generations hinders the question of continuity in the process of transmission. There is a place in which to fit every one without neglecting anyone. An obscure village with a people considered quite unimportant could possibly offer the secret of the genealogy of a nearby people much more important. It is necessary to compare identical traditions, related, parallel or different ones, and to reply upon the "laws" of genetics and variations and deformation in order to reconstitute the archetype and isolate the hard kernel. It is the same when considering written reports, as, for example, the different versions of a battle in the European Middle Ages.

In addition, when analysing a witness it is not necessary always to stick to the main theme, often different information, very important, is quite unintentional. The terms such as the pipe, tobacco, horse, maize, powder, gun, and so on, can become evidence like leading fossils for this prospecting in the realm of archeological-culture.

Finally, it is important to understand the type of evidence offered: dynastic poems, religious verse, panegyrics, recitals of family history, etiological explanations of environment, aesthetic recitals and myths, etc. One must know how to reveal hidden meanings, to distinguish the metaphors from realities, gauge the sense of obscure formulas, track down and eliminate, as Pascal said, "the false windows there for symmetry," in other

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words sort out the valuable metal from the dross. From this point of view the manner, the composition of the accounts offers the possibility of a stylistic analysis, if the language is more or less archaic, for instance, if the song has five instead of the four classical verses, and so on. This betrays the age of an oral document as the script reveals the age of a written text, in the way that the bronzes of Bénin show one the historic period.

Thus in the dynastic poems of the Ruanda, where all the warrior kings are changed to a stereotyped quality of "ntaré"; if this conquest is attributed a "non-ntaré" can be considered as practically certain.

That is to say, otherwise the oral tradition must not be isolated from all the other sources available that constitute the exterior buttresses; and first of all archeology. This, that can sometimes furnish the elements of substitute dating to the chronological deficiency is the veritable Achilles' heel of the oral tradition. It is so with certain royal tombs that were available for scientific research, that were chronological landmarks of the surest kind to be excavated. Written documents are another source of strength. In this connection there will be for West Africa the list of all the events and subjects for which one can find the double guarantee of the written evidence, and oral, according to the formula of the author of *Tarik-el-Fettach*. These subjects are numerous and all the swamp countries can benefit by this twofold approach, profiting by Arab manuscripts, while the coastal countries can rely since the 15th century on the relations with Europeans. And in this confrontation of two sources there is no special place for written evidence since that itself often depends on oral sources, and the oral tradition sometimes makes it possible to correct errors in recent books. It is in bringing together the Portuguese sources and those of the "tarikis" of Timbuctu that Djbril Tamsir Niane has recently, at the African Congress, brought to light a communication, throwing a new light on the history of Koly Tenguella, or rather, of the Tenguella, the great conquerers of the Tekour. At the international congress of African historians at Dar-es-Salaam, the president, Julius Nyerere insisted also on the interest of this double approach: "It is possible," he declared, "that the Islamic histories in Swahili bring together the traditions of our illiterate tribes giving proofs of a past à

propos of which we cannot at the moment formulate a hypothesis on the basis of half-knowledge.”

The third outside source that can consolidate the oral tradition is that of cultural facts of all kinds. The advantage here is that the african-negro traditional, although undergoing a rapid deterioration is still sufficiently alive in certain ways to support proofs. Linguistics can play an interesting role on condition that one does not draw hasty conclusions from simple statements gathered rapidly. It is necessary to have a profound descriptive knowledge of the languages. In deducting sometimes an ethnic connection the genetic relationship can be seen through several languages; linguistics can facilitate the study of migrations and carry through the delicate problems of chronology, by reason of the law of loss which one tries to establish and which indicates the connection with a percentage of words changed, and the period of separation from the original genetic group of a language. Could not the separation of the Samo and Bisa groups be made clear by such an approach? The Toponymie carries a precious aid of the same type.

It is the same even with ethnology and cultural anthropology; the comparison of implements and cultural traits allow one to follow the evolution of societies. That is particularly true of music, of which the rhythms and tunes often accompany the verses of the oral tradition. In effect, every cultural trait being a molecule of the base of the culture united as a total, if one finds the identity of two different societies the only hypotheses are as follows: the autonomous double-invention, the origin like a print. Professor Vansina who has done much for the oral tradition has suggested, at the Congress of African historians at Dar-es-Salaam, a panoply of rules to help one through the *maquis* of detecting the cultural traits at base, and to disentangle the successive influxes in an optical *diachronique* from the present ethnography. A very delicate task that makes one think of the use of a lancet. Can one go on from there to qualify such a reconstruction of ethnological-history? Evidently no. To say that cultural characteristics while showing traces of the past assume more importance for peoples without writing, that is acceptable. But keep the word ethnological-historical only for these societies, then these people having used the writing would be the only

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judges worthy to have a history, and there you have too tight a description, and one not denuded of racialism. I propose in this case that one thinks of the hippies of Manhattan, of Trafalgar Square or Saint Germain des Prés, or those of the French or the Germans whom we only know by reason of very peripheral written evidence.

In conclusion, oral tradition used by itself is a historic source both incomplete and uncertain. But, given proper methodological treatment, it is irreplaceable in the reconstruction of the past and the degree of certitude that is generally conventional with historic investigations. In fact, one cannot make a valid history of the African peoples without the oral tradition. It is nonetheless impossible to furnish, outside general methodological rules, a complete equipment and standard for the good collector and interpreter of oral traditions, because, like a military tactician, the method of approach depends essentially on the ground. The best expert in the matter will be the one who will best become assimilated in the milieu, and, like the oyster fisher, will dive sufficiently deep; the shells containing the oyster live with the truth.

In this connection the surest technique is the widespread way of going from village to village and gathering all the oral evidence worthy of interest, the wrecks of the great navy that must be reconstrued. But the cultural structure of countries without writing is closely integrated, so, like a spider's web, one cannot tear a thread without destroying the whole. The widespread method must also be exhaustive and global, like the trawl that drags the sea-bed and brings up an irregular lot of things from which the fisherman must draw his prize. It doesn't help to attach all the points of national territory simultaneously; There, also, one must choose one's sites strategically and it will be seen which are the centres of particular interest.

In this battle for history, chronology is important; only this gives the depth and historical perspective necessary. This alone allows one to fix on the wrinkles of the moving waters of tradition our face of yesterday in an effigy clear and pure like a medal. But one must not give way to chronology, historical history—the dates of battles, of treaties, the events such as the fall of kings and the president of the republic—is largely finished.

The fact that one gives more and more to candidates, submits historic dates to scholastic proof as given data, shows well that one must not continue to consider the memorisation of such dates as the quintessence of historic science. In aligning formulas to find at all costs an unhappy date that in spite of everything remains uncertain, are we not perhaps fighting a rear-guard battle? Algebra must serve history. But history is not algebra. Besides, with the acceleration of history past facts get telescoped and rubbed out in a period more and more indifferent. William the Conqueror, the battles of Valmy, of Verdun, of Stalingrad, become more and more piled together on the same rung of the ladder of time. The collection of traditions is not an end in itself; it makes us think of the final objective of this gigantic scientific effort: "we explain and explain our continent" according to the excellent expression of Boubou Hama. A history that loses itself in the erudite maze of disincarnate reasoning and disputes of different schools, will never find anything in the palpitating world of today. Knowledge of the past, without being made up by reason of the cause, must furnish reasons to live, and live better today than yesterday. A colourless history, without smell or flavour, manipulated from afar by artificial arms, like a radio-active product could also be well described as a robot. It must be understood that history made by peoples must be written by the peoples. One must find again the human warmth of the recital of the *griot* which is never satisfied by an arid list of the names of princes, but which serves as mediator to introduce to the listeners the bloody storms of the human drama, the tremendous uproar of the epics or the shivering hearts of the hardest men. So, in this episode of the tradition that shows Soundiata abruptly stopping his army and demanding them to turn back because he thought he heard far off the cries of his friend Diouroundi.

But, at bottom, is not the principal source of African history the fierce desire of African searchers themselves, and their foreign colleagues, to save, while there is yet time, all that can be saved of the spirit and the ancient body of Africa? Such a resurrection alone would be the prelude and the challenge of real knowledge.