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Valentin Vydrin

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Ajami scripts for Mande languages¹

1. It is a commonplace papers dealing with African Ajami to say that the Ajami tradition is neglected by scholars. And it will not be an exaggeration to say that Mande Ajami writings are stepchildren of the African Ajami studies: not a single manuscript was published during the colonial period, and even afterwards, such publications remain very few (Giesing & Vydrine 2007; Schaffer 1975; Vydrine 1998). Among the West African Arabographic manuscripts identified recently as written in African languages (Hunwick et al. 2003), not a single Mande text has been attested. There are serious reasons to think that the Manding Ajami has been underestimated by the Western scholarly tradition, and the quasi-absence of special publications is due to the inattention by researchers.

2. **A historical introduction.** Mande people were among the first in West Africa to enter into interaction with the Islamic culture and Arabic language. One should not forget that out of three great medieval empires of Western Sudan, two were created by the Mande.

The Ancient Ghana (Wagadu) Empire, whose emergence is lost in the ages, is associated with the Soninke (Sarakole) people. During the five centuries of the intense commercial and cultural contacts with Northern Africa, an Islamized stratum of Soninke traders, *jùla*, emerged; as for the political elite of Wagadu, it remained animist by the time of the reports by al-Bakri (11th century) and al-Idrisi (12th century). Reports of Wagadu by Arabic authors are brief, and no written document of the Wagadu origin has reached us. Therefore, any conjecture concerning Ajami writing in Wagadu would be of purely speculative nature. The modern Soninke society is strongly Islamized, and Islam is regarded as the central component of the Soninke identity². However, no significant tradition of Soninke Ajami seems to exist, although it might be used occasionally by those Soninke who are literate in Arabic³.

On the other hand, it should be mentioned that the *jùla* network dating back to the Ancient Ghana played a tremendous role in Islamization of Western Sudan: “Juula were undoubtedly among the first West Africans to acquire Islamic knowledge, being originally a merchant group who traded gold with North African merchants in Ancient Ghana” (Hunwick et al. 2003: 1). They were also the main agents in creation of the local literary tradition in Arabic language and in Ajami. The question (which will hardly be ever answered) is: was the literary tradition established as early as in Ghana, or later?

We are much better informed of the Ancient Mali Empire (beginning from the 13th century⁴), both by Arab authors and through an extremely rich Manding oral tradition. Its rulers were Muslims and went to Mecca⁵, and Ibn Batuta wrote about the fervour of inhabitants of Mali and the practice of chaining young people who were negligent in learning Qur’an. Meanwhile, the predominant opinion among the historians (which I share) seems to be that the Islamization of ancient Mali concerned mainly the commercial and ruling elites, and only to a much lesser extent the broad masses. Here again, no written document from inside ancient Mali has reached

¹ This current study is a part of the project ‘Elaboration of the model of electronic corpus of texts in Manding languages (Maninka, Bamana)’ supported by the grant of Russian Foundation for Basic Research 10-06-00219-a. I would like to thank Charles Riley who volunteered to correct my English texts.

² Meanwhile, for significant groups of Soninke, Islamization might be a relatively recent phenomenon: according to the report by European authors, non-Muslim beliefs were current there at the beginning of the colonial era (Pollet & Winter 1971: 471-485).

³ My only encounter with this script took place in November 1992, when I traveled by train from Bamako to Kayes. A fellow traveler, who was a Soninke marabout, wrote on my request, quite naturally, a page-long text in Soninke Ajami, but he seemed to give no importance to this writing.

⁴ The end of Ancient Mali is difficult to date, for its decline was gradual and poorly documented.

⁵ Certain modern griots and historians (e.g. Kánte 1992) assert that even Sunjata Keita, the cultural hero of Manding and the legendary founder of ancient Mali, was a Muslim. However, this claim looks as an adaptation of the Sunjata image to the realities of the modern Manding society which grows more and more profoundly Islamized.

our time, and no mention of the use of Manding Ajami is found in the writings by Arabic authors; we can only conjecture its existence at the times of Mansa Musa or Mansa Suleyman, without any evidence.

The Mandingization of a large segment of the *jùla* network dates back to the period of the ancient Mali: its large segments may have switched to the predominant language of Mali,⁶ and, at the same time, they might have been joined by new people of the Manding origin.

A negative factor for the continuity in the Manding literary tradition (if any) was a disruption of the urban culture. Historians argue about the whereabouts of the splendid capital of the Ancient Mali described by Arab medieval authors; this and other urban centres disappeared without a trace, unlike the Songhai Empire metropolises of Djenne, Gao and Tombuktu, where numerous manuscripts have been preserved.

After the decline of Mali and disappearance of its economic, administrative and cultural centres, each of its former constituting parts evolved by its own.

Vast territories where Manding language was spread fell within the sphere of control of non-Muslim political organisms, such as the Bamana Kingdom of Segu (18th century – 1861), or the Kaabu confederation (15th century – 1867) in Southern Senegambia. In Segu commercial activities were in the hands of Soninke merchants, while the Manding population was largely pagan; therefore, there was no incentive for the development of Manding Ajami writing (in any case, unambiguous accounts of its presence there seem to be lacking).

In Southern Senegambia, where non-Manding populations predominated, Manding was a prestigious language of the pagan aristocracy and, on the other hand, the language of the Muslim merchant network of Jakhanke. The existence of the Manding Ajami in that area was attested already in the first half of the 18th century (Labat 1728, cit. by Giesing & Costa-Dias 2007: 63), long before the definitive smashing of the pagan *ñàncòò* rule of Kaabu by the Muslim Fulbe troops from Futa Jallon. In any case, the emergence of Ajami is not related to the establishment of a Muslim political power in the area: the main holders of the Islamic writing in the area, the Jakhanke merchants, were for centuries integrated into the social system of Kaabu and often served advisers and intermediates for the political elites⁷.

To the south of the Segu Kingdom, the Manding speaking Muslim *jùla* maintained and reinforced their role in the spread of Islam, to the extent that Manding grew to be “the language of Islam” in vast areas of the Western Sudan. In some instances, the prominent position of the *jùla* in the economic and religious spheres was converted into political power: the Kong Empire emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, and Samori Ture’s Empire in the second half of the 19th century. It is the second major area (beside Southern Senegambia) where Manding Ajami was certainly used.

3. Colonial scholars and Manding Ajami.

The only record of the existence of Manding Ajami in French colonial studies seems to be by Maurice Delafosse (1904: 259ff), who provided basic reading rules and a couple of words in the Ivoirean Jula Ajami, expressing in the meantime his utter contempt for this writing system. It might be Delafosse’s pejorative attitude that predetermined a quasi-total neglect of the Manding Ajami by the French colonial scholars and the absence of its reports in the subsequent academic literature.

One would expect the British to give more regard to this writing tradition. However, the tiny Gambia was not their most important colony in Africa at all, and linguistic research was more or less reduced to practical needs: a couple of practical textbooks⁸ and a small dictionary of Mandinka appeared; on the eve of independence of the Gambia (1965) an academic grammar of

⁶ Numerous clans of Muslim clerics and merchants belonging today to the Manding communities claim to be Soninke by origin: Ture, Sise, Komma, Jaane, etc.

⁷ There is an abundant literature about Jakhanke, their history and social functions; among the most recent publications, see (Giesing & Costa-Dias 2007; Giesing & Vydrine 2007).

⁸ Most of them merely mention the existence of Ajami writing; the first such report seems to be by MacBrair (1837). Only Hamlyn (1935) provides a description of the rules of Ajami and a small sample text.

Mandinka (Rowlands 1959) and a practical manual of Ajami (Addis 1963) were published, but no collection of manuscripts or analysis of the real functioning of Ajami was carried out. In Portuguese Guinea and in Southern Senegal, no study of Ajami was carried out at all; it was merely mentioned by Antonio Carreira (1947).

This job was postponed to a period when a new scholarly paradigm replaced the colonial school.

4. Current situation⁹

In the Manding world, we observe today a competition among three graphic systems: Roman, Ajami and N'ko. Of these, the Ajami is in the weakest position, for different reasons: it is the least adapted to the phonological systems of the Manding languages; it is the least standardized; it is practically never used for publications and is therefore reserved for personal use; there is no country where Ajami became official or enjoyed any kind of official support.

The Manding area is divided among several countries (see the map below), and in each country the situation is different. Let us consider each case separately.¹⁰



4.1. **Southern Senegambia** is today the main stronghold of the Manding Ajami. This writing system remains so far uncontested in this region which remains practically untouched by the diffusion of N'ko (although there are some punctual essays in this field too), and the impact of literacy campaign in Roman script seems to be low. There are no reliable statistics; the 50% of Mandinka population of the Gambia literate in Ajami (UNESCO estimate for 1985) can hardly

⁹ I am aware of the ISESCO effort in standardization of the Ajami writing systems for Manding, Soninke and Susu languages. However, in what follows I am not going to survey the performance of the standardized Ajami; I will deal with only with "spontaneous" Ajami scripts for Mande languages.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, I have no information concerning Manding Ajami in Burkina Faso.

be considered seriously. My personal impression in Pakao (Casamance, Senegal)¹¹ is that Ajami literacy remains rather in a latent state. For religious purposes, people write in Arabic; for administrative ones, in French; and Ajami is reserved for all other needs, which are not numerous at all. People may use it for correspondence and for personal notes; they mention the existence of *tarikū* ‘chronicles’ elsewhere (however, when I came to the indicated village, it turned out that the *tarikū* were not available, and still another village was mentioned as their ‘whereabouts...’).¹² During my short sojourn in the Mandinka villages, I witnessed no instance of its current use for any practical purpose. However, the day preceding my departure from the Samakun village, my host Abdulay Senghor Daafee produced a sheet of paper with Ajami writings which turned to be hunters’ incantations (the texts are represented and analyzed in Dumestre & Vydrin, current volume). It is indicative that Abdulay himself (a very smart and industrious man otherwise) had trouble with reading this text; it was evident that he had not exercised reading often.

Although Pakao is usually regarded as a bulwark of Muslim faith and one could expect therefore a higher proficiency in the use of Arabic writings by its inhabitants, I do not mean to generalize the described situation to the entire Mandinka area.¹³ The lull in the currency of the Manding Ajami may be a local phenomenon; it may be also explained through certain progress of the formal schooling and alphabetization in Mandinka in Roman writing. The Mandinka Ajami might be more present in the Gambia where it is occasionally used in the publicity of state organisms and NGOs; one should also mention a publication of the Gospel of Mark in Mandinka Ajami by the W.E.C. (Worldwide Evangelization for Christ) Mission in 1990s.¹⁴ In Guinea-Bissau, according to Cornelia Giesing (personal communication), the period of 1980-1990s was characterized by a lull in the use of the Mandinka Ajami, which gave place recently to a revival of interest: new copies of old manuscripts are being produced, and there are again young people currently using Ajami for their everyday personal notes.

Whatever may it be, manuscripts in Mandinka Ajami do exist. Apart from those which have been already published (Giesing & Vydrine 2007; Schaffer 1975; Vydrine 1998), Cornelia Giesing (personal communication) has collected half a dozen of manuscripts in different villages of Guinea-Bissau, and some other Ajami texts were found by Eduardo Costa-Dias (personal communication). In 2004, Fallou Ngom undertook a travel “to collect historical and cultural texts and religious poems and to take digital images of Wolof, Pulaar and Mandinka Ajami manuscripts used in major Senegalese Muslim communities” (Ngom 2010) – unfortunately, this author does not specify the results of his travel with respect to Mandinka.¹⁵

4.2. In the pre-colonial times, the Maninkaphone area of what is now the Republic of Guinea was another stronghold of the Manding Ajami. Two names can be mentioned in this relation. Alfa Mahmud Kaba was a mid-19 century political leader and writer from Kankan who translated some Arabic poetry into Maninka (in Arabic characters), and Karamoko Talibi Kaba, a

¹¹ It was a fortnight trip to Ziguinchor, then to Samakunda and neighbouring villages to the east of Marsassoum, in the traditional region of Pakao.

¹² Two explanations seem to me equally plausible: (a) there are no chronicles in the area, there is just an idea that they should exist somewhere; (b) the chronicles exist, but people are not ready to show their sacred writings to a stranger, especially a white, who came to their village just for a couple of days.

¹³ Cf, however, to sober estimates of the currency of the Pular Ajami in Senegal in Marie-Eve Humery’s paper in the current volume.

¹⁴ W.E.C. Missionaries in Serrekunda put me the story of this publication as follows: After the Gospel of Mark was published in Mandinka in Roman script, a Mandinka man from a neighbouring village called on and asked why wouldn’t they publish the book instead in Ajami. When the missionaries told him of their lack of skill in Ajami, he offered his assistance, and the next time he came with a pile of sheets, the entire book being retranscribed in Ajami. The missionaries photocopied his writings and put it out as a book.

¹⁵ In his interview to the BBC on September 17, 2010 (<http://www.theworld.org/2010/09/17/africa-ajami-writing/comment-page-1/#comment-17197>, accessed Dec. 24, 2010), Fallou Ngom speaks about a poem in Mandinka Ajami cursing Hitler and dating back to the period of World War II. However, on his site “Ajami in the Senegambia” <http://westafricanislam.matrix.msu.edu/ajami/>, Ngom provides no concrete information about Mandinka manuscripts.

poet and translator of Islamic literature into Maninka who lived in Kankan in the first half of the 20th century (Conde Ms.). Ajami suffered a setback during Sékou Touré's era (1958-1984, especially in 1967-1984), when Roman writing for Guinean languages was promoted with a support of the apparatus of the totalitarian state. Another great blow to this writing tradition was dealt by the creation of N'ko alphabet in 1949 by Suleymana Kante, a writing system correctly representing the phonological system of Maninka (including tones). The N'ko writing spread very quickly (in spite of a slowdown during Sékou Touré's times), and in today's Guinea it enjoys an incontestable popularity and prestige among Maninka. The Maninka Ajami still persists in Guinea in a semi-clandestine form, for its proponents are labeled by militants of the N'ko movement as retrogrades (Ibrahima Sory 2 Conde, personal communication); its outlook is pretty dim.

Unfortunately, no sample of the Maninka Ajami from Upper Guinea is available.

4.3. In Côte-d'Ivoire, Jula was written in Ajami at the beginning of 20th century, as testified by Maurice Delafosse (1904) with respect to Bonduku (in the east of the country). In Samatigila, near Odienné (northeast), Ajami has been witnessed to be used for writing Muslim poetry in the milieu of Hamalists (personal communication by Kalilou Tera). Unfortunately, no further evidence is available so far.

4.4. The Islamization of Bamana in Mali accelerated with El Hadj Umar's conquest and the fall of the Segu Kingdom. At the beginning of the 20th century, Hyppolyte Bazin wrote: "En fait d'écriture, les Bambara ne connaissent que les caractères arabes appelés par eux l'écriture des Noirs. Mais il n'y a, en fait, à savoir en lire ou tracer les caractères que ceux qui ont étudié dans les écoles des marabouts, et ceux-là sont bien rares" (Bazin 1906: XXIII). This witness does not clarify what is meant, Ajami or Arabic writing. However, the texts published in Dumestre & Vydrin in this volume and dating back to 1911 testify that Bamana Ajami was current to a certain extent, at least in San (which was and is an ancient commercial center on the periphery of the Bamana area). According to Kalilou Tera (personal communication), who is a native of San, a Sumare cleric family possesses an Ajami manuscript (or may-be more than one) on the history of San.

By the 1990s, the Bamana Ajami was sporadically used in Mali for personal purposes (see reports in Vydrine 1998: 15-17, 63-64) by members of the Islamic intelligentsia and by traditional merchants. No new evidence appeared in the first decade of this century. In all likelihood, this writing system has little chance in Mali, where the major combatants of the "war of scriptures" are the Roman writing and N'ko: the former is supported by the official establishments (although in a chronic dysfunction), and the latter enjoys a charisma of the "authentic Manding writing" and a great enthusiasm of its supporters. This great battle leaves little or no space for the Ajami, poorly adapted to the specifics of the Bamana language and languishing in the shadow of Koranic education where it has recurred to from time to time as an auxiliary means.¹⁶

Outside the Manding branch, there are two Mande languages whose speakers use Ajami to a certain extent. Both cases were handled in Vydrine 1998; unfortunately, no further evidence was found ever since.

4.5. **Mogofin** (Mikhifore) is a tiny ethnic group¹⁷ in the northwest of Guinea, to the south of Boke. The Mogofin language belongs to the Mokole group of Mande, it is particularly close to Kakabe spoken in the central Futa-Jallon (an endangered language being ousted by Pular, see Vydrin & Vydrina 2010). Today's Mogofin are descendants of several waves of refugees from

¹⁶ In this relation, of interest is an experimental Bamana Ajami literacy work carried out by a Morocco-financed NGO in a Bamana village; the success story of this experiment was related by Mohamed Chtatou at the April 2010 workshop in Köln "Arabic script in Africa" (unfortunately, the name of the village was not revealed). However, it remains a punctual action with a limited impact; in the literacy work in Mali, the main difficulty is not in launching an experiment, but in generalization of its results.

¹⁷ 3600 speakers, according to a 1991 evaluation.

Futa-Jallon during the period following the 18th century Jihad. These were rejecting Islam, and they seem to have remained animists by the beginning of the 20th century (N'Daou 1999: 163). Their conversion to Islam is therefore a recent phenomenon, and the Mogofin Ajami might have appeared not long ago, under the influence of the Pular Ajami tradition. Four texts written by Alhousseyni Diallo, a young Mogofin living in Conakry, published and analyzed in (Vydrine 1998) remain the only document of this writing. In the meantime, Alhousseyni affirms that Ajami is quite current among the Mogofin who regularly use it for the correspondence.

4.6. **Susu** (Soso) language was spoken in Futa Jallon till the 18th century Jihad.¹⁸ Ousted by Muslim Fulbe, ancestors of modern Susu migrated to the coast, while other segments of the same group moved to north, north-east and south-east; their descendents are modern Jalonke (in the north) and Yalunka (in the south-east). Today, Susu is the third largest language of Guinea (1,200,000 to 2,000,000 speakers). Their Islamization is also relatively recent, and the Susu Ajami cannot be ancient either. Apart from two texts published in Vydrine 1998, I do not dispose of any other sample of this writing.¹⁹

5. Graphological properties of the Mande Ajami.

Mande phonological and morphological systems are radically different from Arabic: all these languages are tonal; most of them have 7 vowels (with the exception of Mandinka and Soninke with their 5 vowels); they lack inflection; vocalic oppositions serve mainly for lexical oppositions, and only marginally for grammatical ones. On the other hand, Mande languages lack an opposition between emphatic and non-emphatic consonants, and the emphatic characters cannot realize here their original value. The result is that the Arabic writing system cannot be effectively applied to Mande languages without serious adaptation.

In what follows, the graphemic inventories of each Mande Ajami variety will be represented in a concise way (for more detailed presentations, see Vydrine 1998; Giesing & Vydrine 2007; Dumestre & Vydrin, this volume). Taking into account the limited volume of the corpus available, all generalizations should be regarded as preliminary, they will be certainly amended with new sources introduced into the scholarly circulation.

Before examining the peculiarities of the Manding Ajami varieties, let us list the characters which correspond everywhere more or less directly to those in the Maghrebi Arabic: ب *b*, ت *t*, د *d*, ر *r*, س *s*, ف *f*, ك *k*, ل *l*, م *m*, ن *n*, ه *h*, و *w*, ي *y*. Let us notice that *fa:* and *qa:f* are written everywhere (with the only exception of the Mogofin Ajami) in the Maghrebi way (*qa:f* with one upper dot, and *fa:* with a dot below); *ka:f* has only one variant (“initial”) in all positions, and *nu:n* in the final and independent positions has no dot. In all the varieties, vocalic diacritics are obligatory (otherwise, the reading of Manding texts would be impossible).

In Chart 1, deviations of the Manding Ajami varieties for Arabic writing system are put together.

5.1. Mandinka Ajami of the Southern Senegambia is documented better than those from any other region. The analysis of the texts reveals two major varieties: one appears in Hamlyn's sketch (1935); the other is found elsewhere and can be regarded as the predominant one.

The main Mandinka Ajami variety is represented by:

– the second part of the “Tari:kh of Bijini” (Giesing & Vydrine 2007), from the Bijini village in Guinea-Bissau, in subsequent citations: TBII;

– the third part of the “Tari:kh of Bijini” (Giesing & Vydrine 2007), in subsequent citations: TBIII;

¹⁸ There is a well-entrenched tradition among historians to consider modern Susu as descendents of the ancient kingdom of Soso ruled in 13 century by Sumaoro Kante, a rival of Sunjata Keita. Without examining this hypothesis in detail, I shall just mention that the closeness between the Susu language and Manding is often overevaluated. In reality, it turns to be closer to the South-Western Mande languages (Mende, Looma, Kpelle, Loko, Bandi, Zialo) than to Manding (Vydrin 2009).

¹⁹ A couple of years ago, I saw in Conakry a Gospel in Susu Ajami published by the Pioneer Bible Translators mission. Unfortunately, I failed to get a copy of this book.

- the “Pakao Book” (Schaffer 1975; Vydrine 1998), from Casamance, in subsequent citations: PB;
- texts written by my informant Keba Singateh (Vydrine 1998), a native of Gambia, further on: KS;
- hunters’ incantations from Pakao (Dumestre & Vydrin, this volume);
- Ajami manual by Addis (1963), in subsequent citations: AD.

The sources vary in the degree of their orderliness: texts of PB and especially TBII are relatively regulated, while those written by KS manifest a much higher variability; Addis also speaks about lack of codification in arabographic Mandinka texts.

In what follows, peculiarities of each variety will be analyzed (as extended comments to the Chart 1).

5.1.1. **Bijini Chronicle, part II (TBII).**

In addition to the data of the Chart 1, it can be said that the characters used for *j* (ج، ذ، ð) are in free variation. *c* and *ñ* are not distinguished in this orthography, both are designated by ð (occasionally, *c* can be also rendered by ð).²⁰ *y* is normally rendered as ى, but in some instances as ع. ش appears rarely in proper nouns, i.e. شام Saama (name of a province in Kaabu; may it be a reference to the Arabic name of Syria?).

A striking peculiarity of the TBII orthographic system, not found anywhere else, is its way to differentiate closed and middle vowels (*i* and *e*, *u* and *o*) when preceded by dental consonants: *kasra* and *damma* on the letters for emphatic Arabic consonants (ط، ض، ص) designate middle vowels (*e*, *o*), and the same vocalic diacritics on the non-emphatic letters (ت، د، ن) stand for closed vowels (*i*, *u*). This rule is certainly based on the fact that Arabic upper vowel phonemes preceded by emphatic consonants are represented by their –ATR allophones which are more open. This rule is observed quite consistently (there are only a few exceptions attested).²¹

Suku:n is used rarely and its function is not quite clear; supposedly, it designates absence of a vowel resulting from elision. Vocalic length marking is most often correct, errors are relatively few. Vowels not preceded by consonants are supported by ع، ا or (in the inner position within the word) by ا.

The word-final –*ŋ* can be rendered by three different means: a *nu:n* without diacritics; a *tinwi:n*; a *tinwi:n* + ‘*alif*. In the word-internal position, the latter means is replaced by *tinwi:n* + *nu:n*. A syllabic nasal element is designated by ‘*alif* + *damma*: اْ ن ‘I’.

5.1.2. **Bijini Chronicle, part III (TBIII).**

Only Part II of the Bijini Chronicle is in Manding Ajami, the rest of the manuscript is written in Arabic. However, there are proper nouns and single Mandinka phrases inserted into the Arabic text which permit to conclude that the rules formulated above for TBII are not applied to TBIII. In particular, the opposition “emphatic : non-emphatic dental consonants” is not used for differentiation upper and middle vowels; more precisely, emphatic letters are used more or less at random. *c* is designated in the same way as *j*, i.e. by ð or ج.

The case of different parts of the Bijini Chronicle is indicative of the resistance to standardization: this document was written by the members of two families, Kasama (Parts I and II) and Baayoo (Part III), who lived in Bijini and were in close contact. However, I have no idea in an elaboration of uniform transcription appeared even in this case.

5.1.3. **Pakao Book (PB).**

The orthography of the source is relatively stable. ش and س are in free variation, they may alternate in one and the same word; the same is true for ð and ج. The character ð may also be rendered as the voiceless palatal affricate *c*. As for the characters for the Arabic phonemes non-existent in Mandinka, there is a tendency to maintain them in Arabic loans and to use them in proper names (it should be noted that the PB contains many names of villages and people).

Upper and middle vowels are not distinguished: both *u* and *o* are rendered by a *damma*, *i* and *e* by *kasra* and *suku:n*. *Suku:n* appears usually after ل and ى, but this is rather a trend than a rule; it can be occasionally found in other contexts too. Vowel length is rendered most often correctly, only in a few cases fake length markers appear at the end of a word.

²⁰ In the text available, these characters never appear in a word-final or isolated position, for which reason it is impossible to figure out which character serves for their basis, ب or ى.

²¹ It is notable that only dental emphatic consonants are involved, while oppositions ك : ق، ز : ظ are left aside.

The word-final *-ŋ* is most often rendered by a *tanwi:n*. Another frequent means is a *tanwi:n fatha* or *tinwi:n kasra* followed by a vocalic length marker, ا or ی: تَا *tán* ‘ten’, جَاسِيْ *Jaasiy* (proper name), مَسَمَى *Mansamay* (proper name). In the Part III of PB, a *tinwi:n* may be followed by a *nu:n* without diacritics: بَاكُون *Baakun* (proper name).

The syllabic nasal (at least, in prenasalization) is rendered by ‘*alif* with *kasra*: اِدُنْب *Ndunbe* (proper name).

5.1.4. **Keba Singateh’s texts.**

In comparison with PB and TB, these texts represent a much less codified style of Mandinka Ajami: letters for emphatic consonants and ش are never used; vowel length is marked very inaccurately (short vowels may be transcribed like long ones, and vice-versa), and fake length at the end of graphic word is omnipresent in certain fragments of his texts (a phenomenon also mentioned by Addis).

An interesting innovation of KS is the designation of palatal affricates, *j* and *c*: a new grapheme has been created on the basis of two Arabic graphemes. In the word-internal and initial positions, the respective variants of ج are used (ج), and in the independent and word-final position, ځ appears. Alternatively, the voiceless affricate can be designated by ځ (the combination of positional variants analogous to ځ).

Another peculiarity of KS is a great liberty in respect to the word limits. It is true that all Mandinka Ajami texts tend to agglutinate postpositions, auxiliaries and quantifiers to content words, however, KS exceeds them by far. It is not infrequent to find entire sentences written in one word, e.g.: مَانِي جُونُولُو مَوْتَا *màni jùunoolu mòota* ‘the early sorts of rice ripened’.

5.1.5. **Hamlyn’s data (HM)** are scarce: a chart of the graphemes, a couple of sample words, and a four-line sample text. The most striking divergences of this variety from the ‘major’ one is the designation of *p* by an ordinary ب (instead of پ), and an introduction of the character *sing &&&* for the palatal nasal sonant *ñ*. According to Hamlyn, *sing* is a Wolof borrowing. In the variety of Wolofal described in Fallou Ngom’s paper (2010), this character is missing, however, combination of upper and lower diacritic dots (in particular, three upper dots) is a very current Wolofal strategy. Therefore, an assumption of a Wolof influence in this point seems plausible.

Another peculiarity of this variety is the use of ش for the voiceless affricate *c* (elsewhere, it is associated with ج and ځ or new graphemes derived on their basis).

Like KS, Hamlyn’s text displays frequent word-final fake lengths; in the text available, it is always an ‘*alif*, whatever may be the preceding vocalic diacritic (لُو كُونْتَا *lòo kuntu* ‘piece of wood’).

The word-final *-ŋ* may be rendered by a bare *tinwi:n* (like in the major Mandinka Ajami type), or by a combination of a *nu:n* with a character for vocalic length: لُونِي كِيلِي *lún kiliy* ‘one day’.

5.2.1. **Bamana Ajami from San, beginning of 20 century.** For the presentation and analysis of this variety, see (Dumestre & Vydrin, this volume).

5.2.2. **Bamana Ajami from Mali of 1980-90s** is represented by short texts produced at my request by three people: Musa Kulibaly, then (in 1980s) a student in the Leningrad State University; Seku Haydara, a middle-age man from Bamako (1992); Shaka Tarawele, a middle-age trader from Kolokani (his family is from Tengerela by origin).

Analysis of these texts displays a great instability of the writing system, both among different authors and within a graphical idiolect of one author. Let us characterize briefly the variety of each author.

Musa Kulibali’s orthography is the most chaotic of the three. *s* is rendered indiscriminately by س, ش or ث; *d* by د or ض; both *k* and *g* can be transcribed by ك or ف. ي may refer to the palatal approximant *y* or to the palatal nasal sonant *ɲ*. ه (the median variant appears in all positions) may be used for *h*, *w*, and also as support to a vowel preceded by no consonant (كُهُو *kùhu*).

k'ò [kòò] *dún* ‘to eat it’). For the voiced affricate *j*, three different graphemes are used: ج, ذ and خ; however, ج and خ never appear in word-final or independent positions (may it be a case of a merger of these graphemes, in the same way as in the Mandinka-KS variety?). At the same time, خ and ذ and ج can designate *z*, while ذ and ت can stand for the voiceless palatal affricate *c*.

Naturally, ت is also used for *t*... Therefore, the ambiguity beats all the records: each of the phonemes can be designated by two or three Ajami characters, and each of the Ajami character refers for two or three different phonemes.

Geminated consonants are missing in Bamana, and *tašdi:d* is used at random, without any relation to the phonemic composition of the text.

For the 7 vowels of Bamana, Musa Kulibali uses 5 vocalic diacritics: in addition to *fatha*, *ḍamma* and *kasra*, there is *suku:n* (as there are neither word-final consonants, nor sequences of consonants in Bamana, its function of zero-vowel marker would be void) and an innovative diacritic, a dot (most often on the bottom, rarely on the top). However, two extra markers have failed to lessen ambiguity in the vowel marking, because they are used in the most confused way: *ḍamma* renders all the back vowels (*u, o, ɔ*); *fatha* can stand for any non-back vowel (*a, e, i*), while *kasra*, *suku:n* and the upper/lower dot may refer to any front vowel (*i, e, ε*).

Nasal vowels are most often not differentiated from oral ones, *tinwi:n fatha* and *tinwi:n kasra* are used for nasalization only occasionally. Vowel length (which is relevant in Bamana, though less present than in Mandinka) is not taken into account at all; on the other hand, ‘*alif*, *ya:* and *wa:w* are broadly used as markers of the word-final fake length, without any visible relation with the preceding vocalic diacritic: *يَلْمُو yelma* ‘to transform’, *كَأ كَبِي ká bòn* ‘to be big’.

Seku Haydara’s consonant notation is much more orderly, as far as one can judge by one short page. ك is used for both *g* and *k*, in both initial and inner position; ف is used in Arabic loans (although it does not necessarily correspond to *qa:f* in the original Arabic words). No other emphatic letter appears in the text, except for ع which is used as support for a vowel preceded by no consonant, and *ḍal* always appears in the word *dó* ‘certain’ (and nowhere else). *j* is always designated by ج; *c, p*, syllabic nasal and prenasalized consonants are not attested in the text.

Vowels are also transcribed by Seku Haydara in a much more coherent way than in Musa Kulibali’s texts: *fatha* for *a*, *ḍamma* for *u, o, ɔ*. Like in the majority of the Manding Ajami varieties, ambiguities appear in relation with the front vowels. *Kasra* can render any of them (*i, e, ε*); *suk:un* stands for *i*, and there are additional vocalic diacritics created for middle vowels: a lower dot which may appear alone or in combination with any other vocalic sign, *kasra*, *ḍamma*, *fatha* or *suku:n*, without any visible difference of meaning: *شِنِي sèné* ‘farm work’, *تِي كَلِي té kelen yé* ‘not the same’. In one instance, a combination of the lower dot with *ḍamma* is used for *ɔ*: *دَوُ دَوُ dów* ‘certain (PL)’. Vocalic nasality remains unmarked.

Shaka Tarawele’s variety is relatively stable, it is close to Seku Haydara’s one in what concerns the lack of use of emphatic consonants. The only instance of the use of *qa:f* (with two dots! or may it be ع with two upper dots? – it is difficult to say, for the letter appears in the word-internal position) is in the word *تَقْرَلَا Tengerela* (geographic name); in another instance, the same word is written with ك. Both voiced and voiceless palatal affricates, *j* and *c*, are rendered by ج.

No additional diacritics for vowels are introduced: *ḍamma* stands for *u, o, ɔ*, *fatha* for *a*, *kasra* for *i, e, ε*, and *suku:n* for *i*, occasionally for *e*. Vocalic nasality is not marked, the only exception is the 1PL pronoun *án* (otherwise, it would be impossible to distinguish it from two other pronouns, 3SG *à* and 2PL *á*): it is designated by a combination of ‘*alif* + *fatha* with a *wa:w* + *ḍamma*, or *wa:w* + *fatha*, or *wa:w* + *suku:n*. No evidence for the marking of vowel length is available.

An original device is applied by Shaka Tarawele for the orthography of monosyllabic words: they are regularly provided with a ع at the end, its vocalic diacritic is the same as that of the

preceding letter: بع *bé* (imperfective marker), فَعِ *fà* ‘father’, etc. This graphic extension seems to have no other function except for the decorative one.

5.3. **Bonduku Jula** (Delafosse 1904).

Unfortunately, Delafosse provides no text, and a dozen words reproduced by him do not allow going beyond his chart of characters.

5.4. **Mogofin.**

The only two supplementary characters for the consonants are پ *p* and پِ *p* (the latter is sometimes replaced by پِ). No letters for emphatic consonants are used, except for *qa:f* (for *g*). It is interesting to mention that in the texts written by Alhousseyni Diallo (and no other Mogofin texts are available) *qa:f* is written with two upper dots (like in Mashriq) and *fa:* with one lower dot (like in Maghrib), which is exceptional among Manding Ajami systems (they always follow the Maghribi pattern). I suppose, this peculiarity may proceed from Alhousseyni’s acquaintance with modern Arabic publications.²²

Two additional vocalic diacritics are used: a lower dot for *e, é* and a *damma* with a dot inside for *o, ɔ*. Fake final length markers are very current, they always correspond to the vocalic mark on the preceding letter. *Suku:n* indicates the absence of a vowel on nasal sonant (it is the only consonant which can be followed by another consonant).

The Mogofin orthography stands out for its regularity and lack of ambiguity.

5.5. **Susu.**

The Susu orthography, as represented in the texts, is relatively well adapted to the specifics of the language. To its peculiarities mentioned in the Chart 1, it should be added that both ‘*alif*’ and *ʔain* may serve support for a vowel devoid of preceding consonant. The syllabic nasal *N* (personal pronoun 1SG) is transcribed as غ or غ. The character خ is used for the phoneme *x*, very frequent in Susu. *tašdi:d* is often used for no visible reason.

The only deviation from Arabic in the vocalic notation is the introduction of a diacritic for a middle front vowels (*e, é*), a lower dot. *Suku:n* stands for the lack of vowel, like in Arabic. Fake final length marks are very frequent; they correspond to the preceding vocalic diacritics. The nasalization of vowels is rendered by *tinwi:n*, there is even a *tinwi:n* for the lower dot diacritic.

6. **Conclusion.**

A comparison of characteristic features of the Ajami varieties for Mande languages reveals that they may differ greatly in their degree of codification, even within one geolinguistic area: Mandinka texts of KS vs. TBII and PB; San Bamana and Shaka Tarawele’s texts vs. Musa Kulibali’s writings. Obviously, the degree of stability should be attributed to the difference of writing styles and to individual characteristics of the authors. The same factors might be also decisive in the use of emphatic letters for transcribing Arabic loans.

Certain deviations from Arabic can be attributed as individual innovations of authors. Among these we can mention the use of emphatic dental letters in TBII for the discrimination between upper and middle vowels, use of ش for *s* (*š* has no phonological status in all the languages in question, except for Bamana, where /š/ is a marginal phoneme), various means for transcribing the voiceless affricate *c* (which has a phonological status only in Bamana, everywhere else it is an allophone of /k/ or /t/),²³ and the use of ع at the end of monosyllabic words in Shaka Tarawele’s text.

However, there are devices that might be regarded as diagnostic for establishing genetic affinity among the Ajami varieties. Among these I would mention:

- پِ for the palatal nasal sonant *n* (*ñ*) (Mandinka; Susu; Mogofin);
- پ for *p* (Mandinka, with the exception of HM; Mogofin);

²² Cf. Fallou Ngom’s (2010) observation that in Wolofal, both Maghribi or Mashriqi forms of these letters can be used, “depending on the author’s background”.

²³ I do not think that the fact غ stands for *g* in the Bonduku system and in KS Mandinka (where it is very marginal) is anything more than a mere coincidence.

– lower dot for the front middle vowels (San Bamana; modern Bamana, with variations; Susu; Mogofin);

– probably, also *qa:f* for *g* (modern Bamana; Susu; Mogofin).

Three former devices are new characters created for Mande phonemes absent from Arabic, rather than adaptations of existing Arabic letters. So, they look more like shared innovations than like coincidences.

According to two former features (ﻯ for *n*, ﺑ for *p*), western Manding Ajami varieties (Mandinka, Mogofin and Susu) constitute one area, which can be referred to as “Western”, or “Coastal”. According to the other features (lower dot for the front middle vowels, *qa:f* for *g*), Mogofin and Susu can be put together with Bamana. Both features are also found in the Futa-Jallon Pular Ajami (Koval, Zubko 1986: 27-30), and it would be reasonable to consider them as common isoglosses of the other Ajami area, “South-Eastern” (Mogofin – Susu – Futa-Jallon Pular – Bamana).²⁴ Both recent Ajami systems, Mogofin and Susu, are at the intersection of both areas, which may reflect the role of both Fulbe and Jakhanke in their Islamization.

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²⁴ Another common feature between the San Bamana and Pular Ajami systems is the “inversed damma” for the back middle vowels (o, ɔ).

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