

Patterns
of poetic
discourse
in the
Dogon *bajani*

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Context of the *baja ni*

- Part of *yu yana* funeral
- 2nd night
- 11 PM – 06 AM
- Men: self-appointed
- Women for ululation
- *Barubo* drums
- Lead singer + chorus
- No sleep!



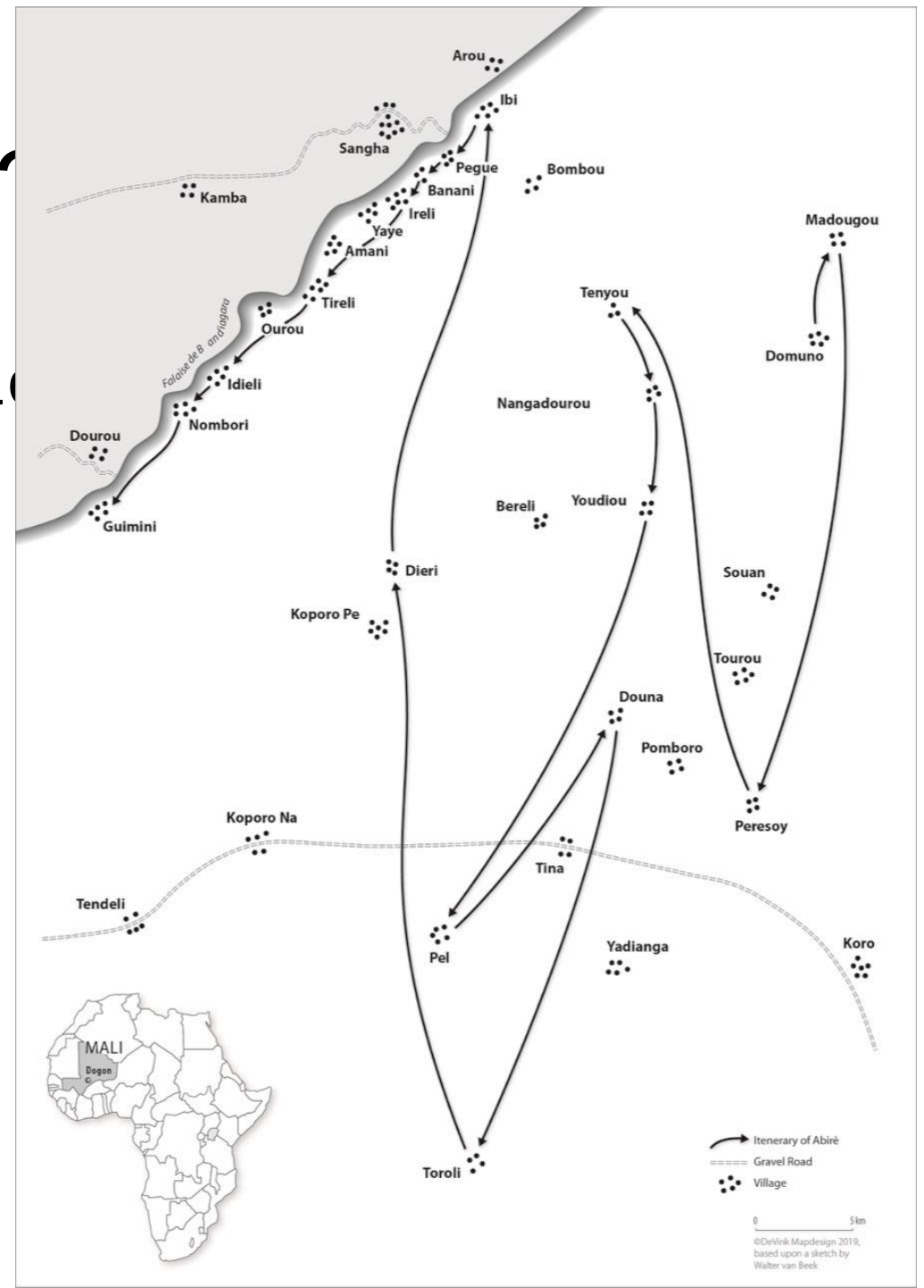
Origin of the *baja*

- Two forms: *Sembɛle ni* // *baja*
- *Sembɛle ni*: general mourning
- *Baja na*: songs attributed to
- Abirɛ: blind poet/prophet, Do
- Prob. 1820s-1867
- Source: prophecies, oral hist
- Birth, personal stories, Fulb



What kind of text?

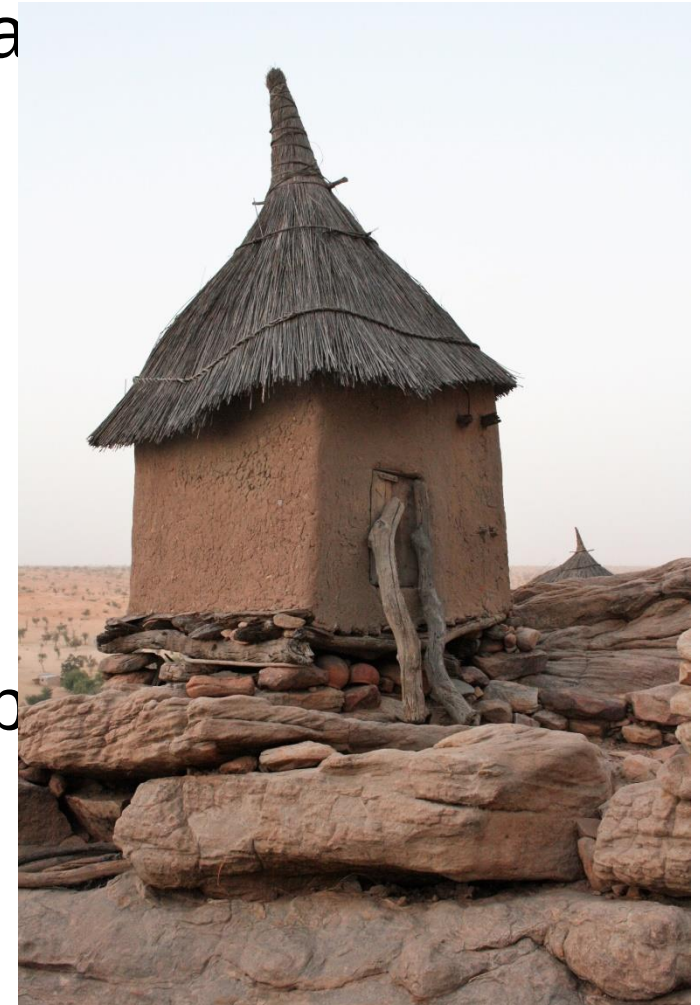
- Not an epic, no mini-stories
- String of songs
- Commentaries on events
- Songs of mourning!
- Personal history
- Recruitment of troupe
- Jamsay & plains



The texts: topics



- Greeting and welcoming songs (a
- Praise songs for the deceased
- The life of Abirε
- Elegies for the prophet's close
- War and its devastation
- Death, destiny, and the philosop



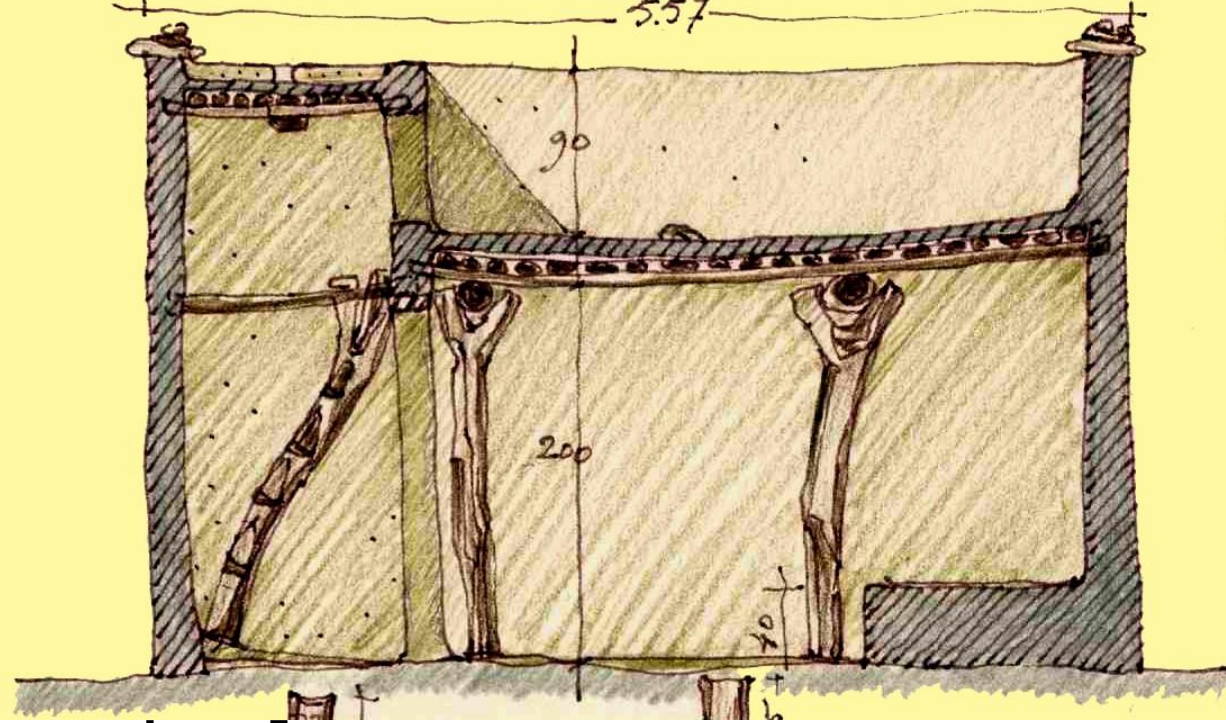
Poetry in the lyrics: *tanniye*

- *tanniye* = → metaphor (+)
- *εwεnε* = folktale
- Speaking well → distinction
- Speech mastery = use of metaphors
- Three major types:
 - Metaphors of loss
 - Metaphors of ambivalence
 - Metaphors of life



Metaphors of loss

- 'The housepost has fallen'
- 'The horse is broken'
- 'the counsel is spoiled'
- 'the path of the ancestors is lost'
- 'the *babinu* are lost'
- → *ηawai/ηonwon*
- 'we have become orphans'
- 'where can we turn to?'



Metaphors of loss 2: Praises for the deceased

- 'who sat in the shadow of his granary'
- 'who made no distinction'
- 'who received everyone'
- 'who healed with the word'
- 'who was never hidden'
- 'who fed with both bread and milk'
- 'who kept her *kanwan* 1000'
- 'with a family of thousands'
- 'who cultivated like water'



Metaphors of ambivalence

- *Ama*, *Λεωε*, *Nomo* + various spirits
- Ambivalent! Otherworld!
- '*Ama* sits in the middle of the road'
- '*Ama* the changer'
- 'like a new wife'
- *Ama* → ← Death (*tige* of *Ama*)
- 'The elephant fell into the well'
- 'the gathering of the blankets'



Metaphors of ambivalence: the Pact

- 'the cord is cut'
- 'paying the debt of life'
- → life through a prenatal
- Pact with Death:
- Agree to die in order to
- 'Children of Heaven/Death'
- → 'Death is fair, Heaven



Metaphors of life:

- 1. Praises of the singers
- 'Children of Abire'
- 'Crowned cranes'
- 'If the cow has drunk ...'
- 2. The deceased as example:
- 'Light of the moon ...'
- 'small knife without fear'
- 'Little frog ...'



Metaphors of Life: D

- Limits to human agency:
 - 'Pregnant women cannot carry each other'
 - 'a needle cannot pick a baobab from its roots'
- What is destiny?
 - 'A white chicken does not escape its fate'
 - 'Meal with sauce will never end'
 - 'what is destiny?' (*noonron*)
 - 'the Fulbe war washes the face'
 - '... the jealousy of women'
- Use of folktales in the songs



Metaphors in Oral Poetry

- 'Words we live by' (Lakoff & Johnson)
 - From mourning → acceptance
 - From emotion → contemplation
 - From loss → feasting life
 - From mortality → philosophy
 - From intensity → normalcy
-
- Metaphors are the ZIP files of life



Part of DigiDogon

- Digitilization of Dogon Cultural Heritage
- Baja ni → radiating out
- Leiden + University College London (JP-ICH-Europe)
- Dogon researchers, reports
- Books: Chanter le baja ni: Abirè le Voyant Dogon (ASCL/UCL)
- Singing with the Dogon Prophet (Lexington UP)
- Dogon Songs of Mourning (Text edition) Brill, Leiden