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History of the Dagomba Kingdom in some Hausa *Ajami* Manuscripts

A substantial and important part of my research activities have been connected with the work on edition of the Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts: starting from my MA thesis, through Ph.D. dissertation to the „habilitation” work (which in Poland is a necessary scientific degree for obtaining the title of professor), not to mention numerous editions having been intermediary stages of my professional career. The majority of those manuscript stem directly or indirectly from the present-day Ghana. Xerox copies of some of them have been kindly dispatched to our Department in 1967 by the then Director of the Institute of African Studies in Legon. Some others were entrusted to me during my never-to-be-forgotten nine-months stay in Ghana (1973/74) as a fellowship holder of the Ghanaian government. The others have been kindly rendered accessible to us by the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The manuscripts from Mischlich/Sölken collection constitute a special case. In 1995, I was given the honour and chosen by Prof. Herrmann Jungraithmayr from Frankfurt am Main as their potential editor.

The aim of this paper is to present and describe some sources on the Dagomba history in the Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts.

According to oral tradition, the kingdoms of Dagomba and Mamprusi in present-day north-eastern Ghana should have come into being in the 15th century. It is commonly accepted that their founder was a certain Na Gbewa (spelled also Na Bawa) and his

two sons. After they had quarrelled, they separated and gave rise to two kingdoms which were independent from each other. In the end of the 16th century those states were conquered by Gbanya warriors of Mande origin who a little earlier had founded the Gonja kingdom. Until the 18th century the Gbanya exercised control over the Dagomba people. They imposed a sort of levy upon them, and had also a considerable influence on the internal matters of the Dagomba kingdom.

Of great importance for the history and development of the Dagomba kingdom was the Islamic religion. It is believed that some Muslim elements in the Dagomba culture must have been brought into the area by the founders of their state. However, this is not confirmed by Dagomba oral tradition. According to oral history, the first Muslim ruler of the Dagomba may have been a certain Na Zangina who ruled *circa* 1700. It is claimed that he may have been converted by Sabali-Yarna, a Muslim Dyula from a large group of traders who since a long had been settled in the so called first Yendi Dabari, and was engaged in gold trade.¹

Some peculiarities of the Dagomba Islam support the claim that the Dyula traders may have played an important role in their conversion. The early Muslim community in the Dagomba country was represented by *yarna* or leaders of the Dyula religious groups. In the course of time, both Hausa traders and those originating from Borno, more and more were becoming the most important missionaries who displayed their activities in the area. Their influences in the Dagomba country were characterised by a considerable intensity. Therefore, it is not curious that the main role in the Islamisation of the Dagomba was attributed not to the Dyla, but to them.

¹ Cf. N. Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa. A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*, Oxford 1968, p. 3. In fact, present-day Yendi is the second capital of the Dagomba Kingdom. The first one was founded by the valiant Na Nyagse at a place known today as Yendi Dabari („Ruins of Yendi”), some 30 miles north-west of Tamale. After the conquest of a Konkomba area (which later became eastern Dagomba), the capital was moved towards present-day Yendi, originally a Konkomba town called Chare.

The presence of the Hausa Muslims in the Dagomba kingdom was a result of an intensive trading activities between those two areas which were initiated as early as in the 16th century. The Hausa *malamai* were better educated than the *yarna*. Coming to the Volta Basin, they used to bring with them the Islamic creed which had an orthodox character and was little tolerant towards the traditional religion. It is specially true in reference to those Hausas who were coming to present-day Ghana after the holy war in Hausaland, it is at the beginning of the 19th century. All the same the Hausas were not able to eradicate a syncretic character of the Dagomba Islam. It is well known that some Dagomba Muslims were imams, and at the same time functioned as priests of their traditional religion. The Dagomba rulers used to seek advice from the *yarna* or *malamai*, but in some traumatic and critical situations they did not hesitate to ask for help from traditional religious leaders. As far as the rural population is concerned, their religious life was hardly flavoured by Islam. The villagers participated in some Muslim festivals, but those celebrations to a great extent were influenced by local religious practices and indigenous forms of cults.

Coming to the topic of this article it is pertinent to say that one of the most important sources is the *History of the Dagomba people*, recently edited in a collection of prose writings by Alhaji Umaru (1858-1934).² It is one of the numerous prose works which were put down into writing on A. Mischlich's request. Adam Mischlich (1864-1948) arrived in the Gold Coast in 1890 as a Protestant missionary of the Basel Missionary Society and spent almost a decennium in the Volta Basin to the south of Kete-Krachi. He was studying both Ga and Twi languages. In 1897, for some reasons he left (or rather was forced to leave) the missionary activities and joined the government service in the Togo

² Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *Hausa Prose Writings in Ajami by Alhaji Umaru from A. Mischlich/H. Sölken's Collection*, Dietrich Reimer Verlag, Berlin 2000, pp. 205-241. A concise note on Alhaji Umaru's life and activities can be found in the entry „Umaru Alhaji” written by S. Piłaszewicz in: Christopher Winters (ed.), *International Dictionary of Anthropologists*, Garland Publishing, New York & London 1991, pp. 714 ff.

Protectorate. A year later he was promoted to the rank of the Head of Kete-Krachi District (*Bezirksleiter*).³

A. Mischlich arrived in Kete-Krachi at the time when its Muslim community was divided over who was to be Imam. The German administrator is said to resolve the dispute by bringing out a copy of the famous Arabic dictionary *Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* by Fīrūzabādī (d.1414) and asking each candidate to read from it. Umaru proved to be more successful and therefore, was given the position of Imam.⁴

During the first decade of the 20th century A. Mischlich spent a great amount of time studying under Umaru and urged him to put down into writing his various prose accounts. He treated him with the greatest esteem and characterised Umaru as an extraordinary person. Very interesting data on the co-operation between the two men are available in a letter written by A. Mischlich on 13 September 1946 in Frankfurt am Main and sent to H. Sölken. In the letter A. Mischlich pointed to the circumstances which initiated his contacts with Imam Umaru:

Bitte, vergessen Sie nicht, wie meine schönen Handmanuskripte zustande kamen. Sie alle wurden von Imam Umaru auf meine Veranlassung niedergeschrieben. Wir verkehrten 4-5 Jahre oder noch länger miteinander. Er kam fast täglich von Kete zu mir auf die Station Kete-Kratschi geritten u. blieb stundenlang da, oft sogar nachts. Ich gab ihm genau an, was er schreiben sollte. Ohne mich wären diese Ms. nie zustande gekommen. Ich übersetzte sie alle ins Englische. Der Imam wurde von mir bezahlt, er erhielt monatlich 30 RM in bar. Daneben liess ich ihm ein schönes Wohnhaus in Kete bauen. Außerdem bekam er oft noch Stoffe, Zeug u. Lebensmittel. Alle Ms. gedachte ich zu bearbeiten u. nach u. nach

³ Cf. P. Sebald, *Malam Musa. G.A. Krause - Forscher, Wissenschaftler, Humanist*, Berlin 1972, p. 89; H. Jungraithmayr, W.J.G. Möhlig (eds), *Lexikon der Afrikanistik. Afrikanische Sprachen und ihre Erforschung* Berlin 1983; H. Meyer-Bahlburg, *Adam Mischlich*, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, XIII, Berlin 1994, p. 562.

⁴ Cf. D.E. Ferguson, *Nineteenth Century Hausaland. Being a Description by Imam Imoru of the Land, Economy, and Society of his People* (typescript of Ph.D. dissertation), Los Angeles 1973, p. 25.

erscheinen zu lassen in den 'Mitteilungen des Seminars für Oriental. Sprachen' in Berlin (pp. 3 ff.).

The fact of remuneration for Umaru's services was by no means an exceptional practice in those days and areas. Both German and British administrators did much to encourage inquiries into the history and ethnography of the subdued peoples, principally, although not exclusively in order to facilitate the supervision of their affairs. Local scholars were encouraged to produce new recensions of oral history but at the same time they were urged to write in Hausa rather than in Arabic wherever possible, for few administrators had any knowledge of the latter language though most had at least a nodding acquaintance with it.⁵

A considerable number of Umaru's manuscripts have been edited by A. Mischlich himself or in co-operation with other scholars. There is no doubt that in the editorial work, at least as far as some manuscripts are concerned, he was actively assisted by Imam Umaru. Mischlich carried on his publishing work at the time when he was functioning as the colonial officer. In the period of the First World War, he was an inspector of the field hospital (*Lazarettinspektor*). As a result of the war defeat Germany lost its African colonies. When the First World War came to an end, Mischlich set himself to carrying on his editorial work on the Hausa manuscripts. He planned to work out and gradually publish them in „Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen” but it proved to be unrealistic at that time.⁶

A. Mischlich had managed to publish only a volume of new fables from Africa (1929) and to edit a manuscript on the origin of

⁵ Cf. N. Levtzion, *op. cit.*, p. XX ff.; I. Wilks, N. Levtzion, B.M. Haight, *Chronicles from Gonja. A Tradition of West African Muslim Historiography*, Cambridge-London-New York 1986, p. 28 ff.

⁶ Since the members of the Editorial Board were considering the contingency of suspending the publication of MSOS (due to the high costs of paper and printing), Mischlich's collection of the Hausa manuscripts went to Sir D. Ross who was then the Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. The whole story of their destiny when in Great Britain has been presented by S. Piłaszewicz, *Hausa Prose Writings...*, pp. 26 ff.

Fulani (1931) before he handed over the rest of his Hausa manuscript collection to Heinz Sölken in the 1930s. H. Sölken was a distinguished German scholar specialising in African matters. It was not possible to find out the exact reason why Mischlich decided to hand over some of the manuscripts to him for further elaboration. It seems most likely that he considered Sölken to be the most appropriate person who would adequately deal with such important source materials. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, Sölken managed to publish history of general Ada (1937), the history of Bauchi (1939), and a manuscript on some technical necessities of the caravan journey and trade. In the Post-War period, he edited a history of Kebbi (1959 and 1963) and published a biographical article on Imam Umaru (1970) in which he provided some information taken from the Umaru's autobiography.

According to personal communication of prof. H. Jungraithmayr, poor health condition was one of the obstacles which prevented Sölken from continuing his editorial work. When he died in 1980, his wife, Dr Ilse Sölken took care of the manuscripts from Mischlich's collection. They were still in her possession when in 1993 S. Reichmuth was allowed to publish one of them dealing with the emergence of the Ilorin Emirate.⁷ Eventually, Dr I. Sölken and her daughter, Mrs Höhn, handed over the manuscripts to prof. H. Jungraithmayr who befriended Sölken's family in the early 1960s. In 1995, I was given the honour and chance to continue the editorial work.⁸

Both A. Mischlich and H. Sölken were convinced that all those manuscripts had been written down by Imam Umaru. However, the *History of the Dagomba People* must be looked at in a broader perspective. It contains a direct statement on its authorship. Initially it was composed by a certain Mallam Alhasan of Dagomba origin. As for him, he heard the story at the place of Mallam Kundu

⁷ Cf. *Imam Umaru's Description of the Origins of the Ilorin Emirate: A Hausa Manuscript in the Heinz Sölken Collection, Frankfurt*, „Sudanic Africa. A Journal of Historical Sources” 1993, 4, pp. 155-173.

⁸ There were eleven original manuscripts, i.e. autographs: 1. Life of Priest Umaru (Umaru's autobiography), 2. Proto-Fulani and Fulani, 3. Sokoto I, 4. Sokoto II, 5. Kano, 6. Katsina, 7. Zamfara, 8. Nupe, 9. Masina, 10. History of the Dagomba People, and 11. History of Gurunsi.

Gunda, a grandson of Yakubu, the king of Yendi⁹ (Ms p. 2, 12 ff. - p. 3, 1 ff.). The type of writing is a little different from that in the other *Ajami* texts of Alhaji Umaru, except for the manuscript on the origin of Fulani.¹⁰ It was written less carefully and is distinguished by somewhat cursive script. However, H. Sölken did not hesitate to state that all the manuscripts (including those on Mossi and Dagomba) were characterised by their unity in style and manner of presentation (*Darstellungsweise*). When reading them - according to Sölken - one would easily recognise that they all came from the same pen and thus constitute a homogeneous work of a broadly educated scholar; one not restricted to standards of the Sudanic Takrur.¹¹

The above mentioned Mallam Alhasan should certainly be identified with „Mallam al-Ḥasan, a man of Kobia”, that is from Kpabia which is situated some 20 miles south-west of Yendi.¹² He was a son of ‘Umar al-Faqīh of Salaga, an ‘*ālim* (learned man) descended on his father’s side from Shaykh Alfā Sabi, who left Djougou for Salaga in the early 19th century, and on his mother’s side from Alfā Ḥamma, a Masina Fulani whose son, ‘Uthmān, established a school at Kpabia.¹³ In his further life, Mallam al-Ḥasan became Imam of the Friday mosque in Salaga, where he died in 1933.

The original work by Mallam Alhasan must have been written approximately at the same time as the *History of Gurunsi*; it is before 1899. The exact date of this version is not known. The *History of the Dagomba people* spreads over 15 folios (29 pages)

⁹ Yakubu was enskinned c. 1850 (M. Staniland, *The Lions of Dagbon*, Cambridge 1975, p. 19). E.F. Tamakloe (*A Brief History of the Dagbamba People*, Accra 1931, p. VI) was of opinion that he may have ruled in the years 1824-49.

¹⁰ Edited by A. Mischlich, *Über die Herkunft der Fulbe*, „Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen”, XXXIV, III, 1931, pp. 183-97.

¹¹ Cf. H. Sölken, *Die Geschichte von Kabi nach Imam Umaru*, „Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung”, 1959, VII, 1, Part I, p. 125.

¹² Cf. I. Wilks, N. Levtzion, B.M. Haight, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

¹³ Cf. J.R. Goody, I. Wilks, *Writing in Gonja*, in: J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge 1968, p. 243.

and provides readers with the following information: linguistic affinities of five Gur languages by comparing the shape of some words; the origin of the Dagomba people from the Zamfara country; Bagale as the cradle of the Dagombas; the dependence of the Dagomba on the Gonja country; the liberation of the Dagomba by Na Zangina at the beginning of the 18th century; the foundation of Yendi, the capital of Dagomba; the dependence of the Dagomba on the Ashanti; internal quarrels and struggles starting from the middle of the 19th century; the madness of King Yakubu; the rebellion of Kuwatiri (Kutiri) Lagafu, a village head; the appointment of Kundu Gunda to the chieftaincy of Karaga being the main reason of a civil war; the rebellion of Abdullahi and his accession to the „skin”, i.e. chieftaincy of Yendi; an unsuccessful Dagomba expedition against the Basari people; the genesis of the *Gaamaaji* office; the rule of Andani; the revolt of the Kumbungu chief, and the arrival of the Europeans.

The question of warfare, be it external or internal one, seems to be the most important concern of the author. It even has a reference to the present-day situation in Ghana, and especially to the ethnic anxieties and struggles between the Nanumba and the Konkomba in the Northern Region which broke out on 3rd February, 1994. The Nanumba people live today to the south of the Dagomba, and they are closely related to them. They may have migrated into the area at the same time as the Dagomba did, and have retained myths of common origin. As far as the Konkomba are concerned, they belonged to a stateless society and were treated as the subjects of Dagomba. Now they live on the eastern edge of the Dagomba territory. In olden days the Dagomba pushed them back and established divisional chiefs among them.

At the beginning of the manuscript there is an enigmatic but important information concerning the dependence of the Dagomba on the Gonja kingdom. It is said that Ndwura Jakpa, the founding ancestor of the Gonja dynasty came into conflict with the paramount King of Dagomba (*Ya-Na*) when he seized control of Daboya, north-west of Tamale, and made himself the overlord of Tampolensi. Daboya had been a useful asset to Dagomba as a salt-producing and cloth-dying centre, and the King of Yendi claimed

suzerainty over the Tampolensi.¹⁴ Having appointed his son as Chief of Daboya, Jakpa is said to move south to attack the Dagomba. *Ya-Na* Dariziegu was defeated in battle of Yapei and was killed. Subsequently, the Gonja conqueror caused the trade in kola nuts to be directed through the town of Salaga, which now became an important caravan centre.

The emphasis is laid in the manuscript on a certain Zangina Bila who is presented as a saviour of the Dagomba. *Ya-Na* Zangina may have ruled at the beginning of 18th century and he is also remembered as the one who brought Islam into Dagomba. He „untied the rope” (Ms p. 6, 2 ff.) from their necks. According to the author,

Now, when the Dagomba people enumerate their kings, they just start from Zangina Bila. They do not take into account the ones before [him] who were living in Bagale because they consider them as if they were village heads (Ms p. 5, 9-11).

During Zangina's reign the final eviction of the Gonja from the Dagomba towns occurred. Towards the later years of his rule, a powerful prince of Gonja, known as Kumpati, waged war against the Dagomba people. The two armies met in the hillocks of Sanso, and fierce fighting took place. Kumpati was killed, and his warriors were forced to retreat.

The independence of the Dagomba was rather short-living. Soon after the Gonja had been expelled from Dagomba, the Dagomba kingdom became subject to the raids of Ashanti which may have spread over as many as 50 years. There was a period of some 130 years (1744-1874) during which the Ashanti exercised a strong influence in Dagomba.¹⁵ Every year the Dagomba had to pay a heavy slave tribute. The slaves were supplied by the Dagomba raid caravans which used to be harassed by Basari, a warlike people living in the mountains to the east of Yendi.¹⁶ When *Ya-Na*

¹⁴ Cf. J. Goody, *The Over-Kingdom in Gonja*, in: D. Forde, P.M. Kaberry (eds), *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford 1967, p. 184; M. Staniland, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Goody, *op. cit.*, p. 185; M. Staniland, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Cf. R. Cornevin, *Histoire du Togo*, Paris 1969, p. 115.

Abdullahi (enslaved probably in 1862) was not able to fulfil his duty, the Ashanti representatives in Yendi began to threaten him with the destruction of his capital. This was the main reason of the Dagomba-Basari war.

As the Basari lived in a mountainous country, they used to descend into the valley in order to fight against the Dagomba invaders. The Dagomba horsemen were not able to mount the inaccessible slopes of the mountains where the Basari entrenched themselves. After three years of siege the army of Abdullahi, endangered by famine, was forced to retreat. All the same *Ya-Na* Abdullahi was successful in a sense, because he brought to Yendi a few hundred Basari captives.

Despite this setback in the Basari campaign,

[...] Abdullahi, the King of Yendi, exercised [his] office very well. The Dagomba people even said that they never had such a King of Yendi like him (Ms p. 19, 10 ff.).

While *Ya-Na* Abdullahi was making war against Basari, the Chiefs of Karaga and Savelugu went to the Gurunsi country, also in order to catch slaves.¹⁷ At that time the Zabarma migrants weakened their traditional ties with the Dagomba, and established themselves in the Gurunsi country, carrying on slave-raids on their own. The traditional friendship between the Dagomba and the Zabarma transformed into a great hostility which resulted in bloody clashes.

A substantial part of the manuscript contains accounts on the internal quarrels and anxieties. One of them is a rebellion against *Ya-Na* Yakubu led by a certain village head named Kutiri (Kuwatiri) Lagafu. He is to be identified with Zibirim Idantoma Lagafu, the Chief of Zabzugu, who initiated the civil war in the Dagomba kingdom. Kutiri Lagafu aimed at dethronement of Yakubu under the pretext of his being a madman but

[...] at that time the Dagomba people assembled, and they made war on Kuwatiru Lagafu until they killed him. Well, it was like

¹⁷ To complete the enormous payment for Ashanti in slaves, the Dagomba chiefs began even to catch their own people on big market days in the bush and on the principal trade routes.

that. Such was the beginning of the fall of the Dagomba. At that time they began to fight each other (Ms p. 8, 4-6).¹⁸

The dispute over the chieftaincy of Karaga was another example of the internal dissent. *Ya-Na* Yakubu enskinned to the office a certain Kundu Gunda who was his full (coming from the same mother) younger brother. However, Kundu Gunda was rejected by the heirs of Mahama, the former chief of Karaga. This resulted in many vicissitudes and ended with a revolt of Abdullahi against Yakubu, his own father. In such a way *Ya-Na* Yakubu was succeeded by his eldest son Abdullahi, the leader of the insurgent party.

Another threat to the internal stability of the Dagomba kingdom were its princes who had no chiefdoms. They lived on robbery and were called *nabiyonga* „vagabond princes”. The author of the manuscript tells the story of one of them. Yakobu, a free-lanced prince, made dangerous the Kumbungu-Kasoriyiri main road. On a certain weekly market day of Kasoriyiri, he hid himself in the bush and having seen women from the Kumbungu village going to attend the market, he attacked them. Then he caught the wife of an important follower of the Chief of Kasoriyiri. It resulted in a general turmoil and necessitated military intervention of *Ya-Na* Andani II (1876-1899).

Long-distance trade is believed to be the main factor bringing prosperity and welfare. The *History of the Dagomba people* is poor in information on its organisation and on the trade routes. All the same there are some hints in this respect. One of them is the story of the Mossi merchants who set out from Yendi and were returning to their country. They passed through the war-camp of the king of Yendi who was sitting at the foot of a shea-tree. Then they greeted

¹⁸ Cf. E.F. Tamakloe (*A Brief History...*, pp. 33 ff. and *Mythical & Traditional History of Dagomba*, in: A.W. Cardinall (ed.), *Tales Told in Togoland*, Oxford 1970, pp. 270 ff.) gives another reason of the unrest in the Dagomba kingdom. Zibirim Idantoma Lagafu had a claim to the Savelugu stool and decided to obtain the chieftaincy by force of arms. When Mahama Nubila, the new Chief of Savelugu, proceeded to Yendi to be confirmed in his office, Lagafu met and defied him. A skirmish took place in the vicinity of Yendi in which the Chief of Zabzugu fell.

him, and the headman of their trade-caravan gave him kola nuts as a gift (Ms p. 27, 1-4).

Of great importance is a passage explaining the origin the *Gaamaaji* office. Gamanji is a small village about a 15 minutes walk from Yendi, once important market on the outskirts of that town. When the kola nuts market was moved by the Ashanti from Gbuipe to Salaga, the route of the Hausa traders also changed and went through Yendi. At the very beginning there was no Hausa man in Yendi who could understand *Hausanci*. It was like that until a Katsina man came and settled down there. One day a Hausa trade-caravan came and lodged in the vicinity of Yendi, as the trading caravan was not allowed to halt in the town. The traders wanted to greet *Ya-Na* and offer him a tray of potash, a numnah of padded and embroidered cloth, ten bundles of paper, and some perfume. Thanks to the Katsina man (existence of whom was not known to the traders) the Dagomba king was able to understand them. The Hausa merchants exclaimed full of surprise: *Gaa mai ji, Gaa mai ji* - „Behold, The-One-Who-Understands”. Thus the Dagomba people started to call him *Gaa Mai Ji* which became *Gaamaaji* later on. *Ya-Na* told the Katsina man to go behind the town and to build his compound there. In the course of time it changed into a town which was called Gamanji. *Gaamaaji* became a hereditary office. Its holder was an intermediary between the Dagomba ruler and the Hausa traders as well as the Hausa growing community.

History of Gurunsi is the largest manuscript from the Mischlich/Sölken collection¹⁹ as it numbers 21 folios (41 pages). At the very beginning it describes the dependence of the Hausa countries on the Songhai empire: the history of the Hausa province known as Arewa; the service of Isa, Arewa's prince, to the king of Songhai by smelting iron ore; the settling of Isa in the place of Dolbizan (an Isala or Sisala town) and the origin of the Isala people. Further on one can find a description of various Gurunsi peoples, containing many linguistic remarks. Of special interest for this review is a presentation of the Zabarma horsemen who arrived into the Dagomba country; the Zabarma raids and conquests of the Gurunsi people in the company of the Gonja and Dagomba

¹⁹ Edited by S. Piłaszewicz, *Hausa Prose Writings...*, pp. 243-298.

detachments; a discussion on the relations between the Zabarmas and Dagombas in a historical perspective.

As far as the authorship is concerned, one can not exclude the possibility that large parts of the manuscript may have been written by a copyist under Alhaji Umaru's supervision. Anyhow, it is not a genuine work of Umaru. If its stylistic features are taken into account, it is quite similar to the *History of the Dagomba people*, originally composed by Mallam Alhasan. The date of the work can be fixed on the basis of the following statement: „They were taken to Andani, the King of Yendi, who has been King of Yendi until now” (Ms p. 41, 10). *Ya-Na* Andani II died in 1899. It means that the original work must had been completed before that date.

Dependence of the Dagomba, Maprusi and Gonja peoples on the Ashanti is presented in the manuscript in the following way:

Well, at that time the Ashanti people were troubling the Dagomba and the Gonja peoples. Every year they had to give [them] one hundred and twenty slaves. Thus the King of Yendi was providing [them with slaves], as well as the King of Kpembe, and the King of Mamprusi (Ms p. 8, 1-4).

It is well known that the successive paramount chiefs of the Dagomba kingdom were obliged to send to Kumasi each year not only a fixed number of slaves, but also cattle, sheep, and some cloth.

The Dagomba were invited by a certain Tacankura, the ruler of Kpon, to take part in common slave raids. It is the Chiefs of Karaga²⁰ and Kumbungu (Savelugu) who started to make war on the Gurunsi in order to catch captives who were sent as tribute to Kumasi. Muhamman (Mahama), the Chief of Karaga, died when campaigning in the Gurunsi country. He was succeeded by Adama who was the son of *Ya-Na* Yakubu. Adama continued the slave-raids not only to satisfy his Ashanti overlords. It was a part of combined activities which were significant for the welfare of the Dagomba country. This is described in the following way:

²⁰ Mahamman is meant here who was the Chief of Karaga during the reign of *Ya-Na* Yakubu.

Now, at that time Karaga was like a war-camp. People came [there] from everywhere, and they assembled [in it]. When the harvest time came, it was the time of war, and the people used to go and make war. When the rainy season came, they used to come back home. Well, at that time people used to bring the King of Karaga [different] things for sale, expensive things of the kings' sort: harnesses, gowns, trousers, burnouses, swords, and spears. They also brought him horses from the Zabarma, Hausa and Mossi [countries]. He bought them all on credit. After he had made war, he used to pay [them] back. The King of Karaga, Adama, became a great king in Dagomba. People came to him from trading countries, as well as those who wanted to make war. At that time a certain Zabarma man known as Hamma arrived there with his son, a young man named Isaka. He had nothing, he was alone, and he was looking for food. Now, he settled in the place of Adama, the King of Karaga. Now, when the time of war came, he asked them to give him a horse. Now, the King of Karaga gave him a horse because, as for the Zabarma people, since their sojourn in the homeland, they had loved war (Ms p. 11, 2-14; p.12, 1).

A group of Zabarma came to Dagomba during the reign of *Ya-Na* Abdullahi (second half of the 19th century). At the beginning they were functioning as Muslim missionaries and traders. Soon they took part in a slave-raid into the Gurunsi country. It was led by Adama, the Chief of Karaga. The further part of the manuscript is devoted to turbulent relations between both ethnic groups, inscribed in their campaigns in the Gurunsi country. Alfa Hano was the first leader of the Zabarmas on the Dagomba territory. He was a Muslim learned man, and before he arrived in Karaga, he had stayed for some time with Gazari (another Zabarma leader).

Gazari led the Zabarma people in their first campaigns in Gurunsi, and it was he who consolidated their position in north-west Ghana. After Alfa Hano's death (c. 1870), the relations between the Zabarma and the Dagomba worsened rapidly. The Dagomba continued to consider the Zabarma as their subjects, and they were afraid of their growing power. A few months after Alfa Hano had died, the Dagomba expedition (headed by Na Andani of Savelugu), was despatched to the Zabarmas in Gurunsi. The

Zabarmas, in coalition with the inhabitants of Sati, set out against the Dagomba and they put them to flight, killing thousands of them. Na Andani was forced to retreat, and he may have returned to Dagomba around 1874.

Babatu succeeded Alfa Gazari in the early 1880s, and soon he became an unchallenged leader of the Zabarma people in Gurunsi. He summoned his Sisala chiefs to reaffirm their loyalty to him which was refused. Then hostilities broke out between Babatu and Dolbizan.²¹ The latter one asked for assistance from Na Mahama of Savelugu, one of the most powerful divisional rulers of Dagomba. After nine months' preparations, and probably in 1887, the Dagomba made a hasty march into the Sisala country. They were accompanied by their wives and children, as if for a permanent stay in the host land. Na Mahama was heavily defeated when he collided with the Zabarma outside Dolbizan. Some 400 men were slain on the battle-field, and the Savelugu state drum was captured. Na Mahama took refuge in the walled town of Dolbizan but having seen that the Sisala defected with Dolbizan in large numbers, he himself retreated to his camping place in Basiasan, and he lost his life there.

The story of the Dagomba-Zabarma relations ends with the „arrival of the Christians”. In October 1897, taking advantage of an old friendship, Babatu went to Dagomba with a few hundred Zabarma horsemen. The Zabarmas settled peacefully there. They built houses and started to farm for the maintenance. Babatu and many other Zabarma leaders died in Yendi.

Another valuable source of information on the 19th century Dagomba kingdom is a Hausa *Ajami* manuscript entitled *Histories of Samory and Babatu and others*. It is deposited in the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and bears a SOAS call number 20 871. The manuscript was written about 1914 by a certain Mallam Abu for Dr J.F. Corson in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, and then it was given by Dr Corson to F.W.H. Migeod in January, 1926 (Ms. 98 017).

²¹ Dolbizan was a Sisala chief who for many years collaborated with the Zabarmas in their slave-raiding. It is also a locality which was given his name.

No concrete information concerning the author and his literary activities is available. One has to accept his own statement that he took part in the Zabarma raids. It is quite probable that he may have accompanied the Zabarmas in their expeditions under Gazari and Babatu's leadership. The participation of the Hausa malams in the Zabarma campaigns was mentioned by Mallam Abu many times. Despite I. Wilks' tall talk, he does not provide anything concrete in this respect, either. He states in a clear way that Mallam Abu's „[...] precise identity remains a mystery”.²²

The manuscript consists of 323 pages and it is divided into two parts. Part one is devoted to the life and activities of Samori Ture: it numbers 184 pages (pp. 1-182 plus two pages with double pagination, 159A and 159B). Part two (139 pages), which is of interest for the present study, describes the Zabarma conquests in present-day Ghana and Burkina Faso. It consists of five untitled chapters. The titles have been given by the editor:

- „History of the Zabarma people” (p. 1-17) describes the circumstances of the Zabarma arrival into the hinterland of the Gold Coast and presents the beginning of their military career.
- „The story of Gazari” (pp. 1-36) depicts the slave raids under the guidance of this Zabarma ruler who was direct predecessor of Babatu.
- „Another story of Gazari” (pp. 1-18) provides information on the final raid of Gazari which ended with his death.
- „The history of Gazari and Babatu” (pp. 1-22) analyses relations between those two Zabarma leaders and takes into consideration disputes between some other leaders.
- „Babatu” (pp. 1-46) is devoted to the Zabarma campaigns under the command of Babatu.

²² Cf. I. Wilks, *Wa and Wala. Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana*, CUP, Cambridge-New York-New Rochelle-Melbourne-Sydney 1989, p. 106. Mallam Abu is mentioned also on pp. 106, 107 ff., 116, 121, 218 ff., 122-4, 126-8, 131, 136.

The chapters are divided into smaller units which are called *labari* - „story, piece of information, narrative”. There are 97 such stories (*labarai*) each describing an episode from the life of one of the main characters, one of his raids, or one of the important events.

The second part of the manuscript has been partially exploited by J.J. Holden in his article on the Zabarma conquest of north-west Ghana,²³ and then edited by the present author.²⁴

The Zabarma presence in northern Ghana is closely interwoven with the history of Dagomba. Today they live in scarcely populated areas near Niamey and Dosso (Republic of Niger), and partly in the vicinity of Sokoto in northern Nigeria. Although they were subject to Islamic influences for many centuries, they did not accept Islam and cultivated their own religious practices until the *jihād* of Uthman dan Fodio. As early as in the first years of the holy war, the Fulani attacked Dendi, Kebbi and Zabarma territory. Peoples of those areas for almost fifty years resisted the Fulani invasion. Few decades later, the Zabarma revolted against the invaders, and - aided by their neighbours from Kebbi and Dendi - drove the Fulani out of their territory (ca 1860).²⁵

Many years of confrontation with the Fulani caused significant transformations in social, economic and political life of the Zabarma. War destruction and devastation of the economy were the factors which forced them to leave the areas they had occupied. The Muslim Zabarmas, being literate and under influence of the Muslim culture, gradually began to shift to trade activities or to devote themselves to the missionary work. Some of them followed a military career.²⁶ In the second half of the 19th century, Zabarma

²³ Cf. his *The Zabarma Conquest of North-West Ghana - Part I*, „Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana”, Vol. VIII, 1965, pp. 60-86.

²⁴ Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *The Zabarma Conquest of North-West Ghana and Upper Volta. A Hausa Narrative „Histories of Samory and Babatu and Others”* by Mallam Abu, PWN - Polish Scientific Publishers, Warszawa 1992.

²⁵ Cf. J. Spencer-Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa*, London 1965³, p. 202.

²⁶ Cf. N. Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs...*, p. 152.

warriors appeared as mercenaries in the service of the Kotokoli chiefs of present-day Togo, and in the kingdom of Dagomba.

During the reign of *Ya Na* Abdullahi a group of the Zabarmas came to Dagomba to sell horses. Since the Dagombas delayed their payment, the traders stayed in the country for some time, until the arrival of a Zabarma malam, Alfa Hano, whom they appointed their leader. Mallam Abu informs that before arriving in Karaga (one of the divisional capitals of the Dagomba), Alfa Hano and Gazari stayed for some time in Salaga (Gonja) where Alfa Hano devoted himself to religious studies.²⁷ Local Zabarma tradition also ascribes their arrival in Dagomba to a proselytising mission. It credits both of them with having made the pilgrimage.²⁸

Soon the Zabarma took part as mercenaries in a slave-raid to the Gurunsi country. It was led by Adama, ruler of Karaga.²⁹ After some time, the Zabarmas weakened their ties with the Dagombas and established themselves in the Gurunsi country, carrying the conquest on their own. Even then, after they had finally settled in north-west Ghana, they continued to send some tribute to Karaga, including captives, cattle and cowries.

When around 1870 Alfa Hano died, Alfa Gazari became his successor, and in some ten years he laid the military and organisational basis for the growing Zabarma „state”. According to Mallam Abu’s account, his major problem was the rapidly worsening relations with Dagombas who wanted to bring them back under *Ya-Na* Abdullahi’s control. It culminated in the Dagomba expedition headed by *Na Andani* of Savelugu which took place a few months after Alfa Hano’s death. After initial defeats, the Zabarmas had to retreat to Sati where Muslim allies were found and Musa Sati lent Gazari a substantial assistance. Spiritually reinforced by a certain Alhaji Muhammad, the Zabarmas and the inhabitants of Sati set out against the Dagombas and put them to flight, killing

²⁷ Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *The Zabarma Conquest...*, p. 108.

²⁸ Cf. J.J. Holden, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

²⁹ This is how the beginning of the Zabarma career on the Gold Coast is presented in one of the Hausa manuscripts, edited by D.A. Ol’derogge in *Zapadnyi Sudan w XV-XIX vv.*, Moskva-Leningrad 1960, pp. 175-189 (transliteration of the *Ajami* text and its translation into Russian) and pp. 225-232 (facsimile of the Hausa text in *Ajami*).

thousands of them. *Na* Andani had to retreat and he may have returned to Dagomba around 1874.

In a campaign against the Kipirsi, Alfa Gazari was seriously wounded at Goru (near modern Reo), and died. Due to succession disputes, several months elapsed before Babatu replaced him, and in the early 1880s he became leader of the rapidly growing state. Had not the French and the British begun their scramble for the area shortly after this, the Zabarma would eventually have created a powerful political unit.

At the beginning of his rule Babatu led the policy of overambitious military expansion which resulted in a revolt of hitherto loyal Gurunsi chiefs and in a second Dagomba invasion. When the Sisala chiefs refused to reaffirm their loyalty to him, and after hostilities had broken between Babatu and Dolbizan, this Sisala chief asked for an assistance of *Na* Mahama from Savelugu, one of the most powerful Dagomba divisional rulers. Around 1887, the Dagomba army advanced into Sisala country and won a few victories. However, finally it was abandoned by Dolbizan and other Sisalas, and in such a discouraging situation had to retreat. On the return journey, *Na* Mahama as well as many of his elders and malams were killed. After that, a Zabarma embassy was sent to Yendi. It was received with great esteem and an oath of perpetual peace was sworn between the Dagombas and the Zabarmas.

Mutiny of the Gurunsi captains under Amariya leadership, the presence of a large contingent of Samorian troops under the command of Sarantye Mori, Samori Ture's favourite son, and arrival in Gurunsi of the British and French forces brought to an end a brilliant career of Babatu. When outlining the rise and fall of the Zabarmas in the then Gold Coast and Upper Volta, some authors are of opinion that had such leaders as Samori and Babatu lived 50 years earlier, the Europeans would have found them as heads of states as much respectful as the Fulani emirs, and perhaps as rich as the rulers of Songhai and Mali.

In the late 1890s the situation of the Zabarma conquerors became disastrous, and it is shown by Mallam Abu as follows:

He [Babatu] came upon the Europeans of English origin. They were many in Yagaba. They exchanged greetings with Babatu. As for Babatu, they summoned Babatu and said: 'Babatu, stop fighting'. Babatu said that he agreed and that he would appease.

[Then] a European of French origin came to Yagaba, together with Amariya. The European of French origin and the European of English origin came together and held a council. The European of French origin returned. Babatu and the Europeans of English origin, they set out from Yagaba and went to a certain town. The town was called Yabum. They [the Europeans] parted from Babatu. Babatu started on a journey to a certain town. The town was called Bantala. Babatu set out from Bantala and went to Ducie. He defeated the people of Ducie and stayed [there]. The Europeans of French origin heard the news and came to Ducie. They and Babatu, they fought with each other very fiercely. Babatu was not doing well. The Europeans of French origin were not doing well. Babatu started on a journey to Zantani. The Europeans of English origin defeated [them] and separated them. With the rest of his troops Babatu went to Dagomba and passed away among the Dagombas in poverty. Emir Babatu, ruler of the world. May God pardon him. This story of Babatu is also finished.³⁰

The history of the Dagomba kingdom and people was reflected in a few local manuscripts written by Hausa mallams. Some of them belong to G.A. Krause's collection. When leaving Gold Coast in 1887, he took away with him a rich body of Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts. They were placed in the Prussian State Library, and later on facsimile of 28 of them were published in the Reports of the Seminar of Oriental Languages.³¹ A part of G.A. Krause's collection has been edited by D.A. Ol'derogge.³² One can find among them some historical sources, including **an account of the movements of the Gazari troops in the Dagomba country**. It deals with the Zabarma arrival into the Dagomba kingdom and with their first raids into the Gurunsi territory.³³

³⁰ Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *The Zabarma Conquest...*, pp. 93 ff.

³¹ Cf. *Gottlob Adolf Krause's Hausa Handschriften in der Preussischen Staatsbibliothek*, „Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen”, Vol. XXXI, 1928, III Abt., Afrikanische Sprachen, pp. 105-107 and XXVIII-LXXX.

³² Cf. his *Zapadnyi Sudan...*, pp. 137-254 + facsimile.

³³ Cf. D.A. Ol'derogge, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-189 (transliteration of the Hausa *Ajami* text and its translation into Russian) and pp. 225-232 (facsimile of the Hausa text in *Ajami*).

In 1961, the Institute of African Studies was founded as a part of the University of Ghana in Legon. Almost since the very beginning of its existence, some of its staff members commenced a wide-scale action of acquiring Arabic and Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts. Those activities were headed by the late T. Hodgkin, and later on by I. Wilks. They were assisted by a certain Al-Hājj 'Uthmān ibn Ishaq Boyo.³⁴ Some five hundred manuscripts were collected at that time. The most numerous were the works in Arabic (some 90 %). The Hausa manuscripts amounted to some 10 %. Single manuscripts were in Dagbane, Gbanyito, Mamprule, Guan, and Dyula languages. As for their contents, some 35 % are historical sources of different kinds.

Thanks to the good offices of Z. Frajzyngier (then a staff member at the University of Warsaw) who stayed in Legon in 1963 and 1964 I was provided with xerox copies of some of those manuscripts and given a chance to publish them.

Ms IASAR/22 is a collection of various documents in Arabic and Hausa, comprising lists of rulers and imams of Wa, some stories from the history of Wa, letters exchanged by rulers, etc. The manuscript was probably compiled on request of Commissioner Whittall around 1922 by a certain Malam Ishaq.³⁵ Among other things it contains an account of the Zabarma arrival into the Dagomba kingdom, mentions their common slave-raids in the Gurunsi country, and comments upon the relations between them. It refers also to the foundation of the Wala chieftaincy and to its relationship with the Dagomba.

The topic of the Dagomba contribution to the history of Wala is more elaborated in the **Ms IASAR/152**. It was compiled in 1922 by an unknown author and consists of 16 folios. Folios 1-9 contain Hausa text in *Ajami*. The remaining ones provide an Arabic version of the Hausa text. The Hausa version is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the settlement of the Dagomba, Mamprusi and Gonja

³⁴ Cf. A. Triulzi, *Di alcune attività nel campo storico dell'Institute of African Studies della Università di Ghana a Legon*, „Bolettino della Associazione degli Africanisti Italiani”, 1970, III, 3-4, pp. 24-27.

³⁵ Edited by S. Piłaszewicz, *Stories from Northern Ghana. A Hausa Text from the IASAR/22 Manuscript*, „Rocznik Orientalistyczny”, Vol. XXXIV, Part. 2, 1971, pp. 73-107.

peoples in Wa and contains a list of 28 chiefs of Wa. Part II tells the story of Islam in Wa and distinguishes two waves of the Moslem missionaries: the arrival of Mande and then Hausa Moslems in Wa. It also comprises a list of 23 Wa imams who had been functioning until 1922.³⁶

Having come as victors, the Dagomba, Mamprusi and Mande settled down and spread themselves among other ethnic groups inhabiting the area of the future Wala chiefdom. All the peoples mixed, united and allied themselves by marriage. The Wala community is composed of three strata: Nabihi, Yerihi and Tindamba.

Nabihi, or princes, are of Mamprusi-Dagomba origin and they function as political leaders. They choose the *Wa Na* from among them who - like *Ya Na* of the Dagomba - is a secular ruler of the chiefdom and resides in Wa. Also the chiefs of the surrounding towns are chosen from among the Nabihi.

Yerihi, or Moslems mainly of Mande (Dyula) and Hausa origin, constitute local intelligentsia. They choose from among them a leader of the faithful, a Friday imam who presides over the Friday prayers, and a town imam who is directly responsible before *Wa Na*.

Tindamba are landowners, of mixed and largely „autochthonous” origin (probably of Dagari, Wili and Birifor ethnic groups), and they provide priests for the earth shrines.

All the researchers dealing with the history of Wala are of opinion that its origin should be looked for in a victorious march of the Dagomba and Mamprusi, most probably in the 16th century. The appropriate fragment in the IASAR/152 Ms runs as follows:

The origin of their kingdom. They came from the Dagomba tribes. There are various tribes in this country. As for the chiefs of Wala, they also came from those tribes. The first of them descended from Yendi. Yendi is a region of the Dagomba country. It is their capital. Their second town, another one, is the old town of Nalerigu. As for Nalerigu, it is the cradle of all their tribes.³⁷

³⁶ Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *A Story of the Wala People. A Hausa Text from the IASAR/152 Manuscript*, „Africana Bulletin”, No 10, 1969, pp. 53-76.

³⁷ Cf. S. Piłaszewicz, *A Story of Wala...*, p. 61 ff.

As far as the rivalry between the Gonja and the Dagomba over the Tampolensi country is concerned, the IASAR/152 Ms presents it in a way which is quite different from that commonly accepted:

So it was. The Tampolensi people lived here together with the Gonja [people]. The Tampolensi were stronger than the Gonja, and they oppressed them very much. The Gonja cried and went to the Chief of Yendi [asking him] to aid them militarily and to stand at their head. The Chief of Yendi did not refuse their request and conducted them against the enemy.

And so it was. They came, fought, and conquered [the Tampolensi people]. They divided the Tampolensi country into two parts. They gave the area of Wala to the royal children from Yendi, who settled [there]. As for the Gonja, they went to live in their country, as well as in the Tampolensi country. As for the royal children from Dagomba, they divided the Wa country into three and took it over.³⁸

In the further part of the manuscript one can learn how the royal children from Yendi took possession of Wa and of some other neighbouring towns, and how they were oppressed by indigenous people. This was the reason for which they sent a messenger to Nalerigu, the capital of the Mamprusi kingdom, asking for help. The then chief of Nalerigu dispatched his son named Saliya who went with his army and with three field commanders in order to rescue their Dagomba relatives from the Dagarti threat. After the victorious military campaign the chiefdom of Wala was transferred to Saliya. He is the first person placed on the list of the Wala rulers.

What has been presented above is only a rough material for historians, provided by a humble philologist, for years working on the Hausa *Ajami* manuscripts which deal mainly with the history of kingdoms and peoples of the former Gold Coast. In this paper those source materials have been looked upon from a single point of

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

view, concentrating on the history of Dagomba. Apart from the homogeneous *History of the Dagomba people* there are manuscripts referring to other peoples and kingdoms but which supplement also our knowledge on the turbulent history of the Dagomba. The data on external and internal warfare are not too superfluous but in many cases they are unique, and therefore are of the greatest value.

Two factors seem to be of great significance for the existence and welfare of the Dagomba state: war and trade. In the earliest history of the Dagomba kingdom a tendency towards enlargement of the spheres of influence is clearly visible. The Dagomba competed with the Gonja and struggled over the possession of the Tampolensi country. They played an important role in the political organisation of the Wala state as their princes from Yendi were the first to rule in Wa and in some neighbouring towns. Later on, starting from the 17th century, external wars were not aimed mainly at expansion and enrichment of the state, but rather served the preservation of its independence or semi-dependence from the growing political power of the neighbouring states, first Gonja and then Ashanti. It is in order to cope with levies imposed by the Ashanti that the Dagomba went in the wake of the Zabarma, and they commenced slave-raids in the Gurunsi country. This was also the reason for which they engaged themselves in a bloody and rather unsuccessful war with the Basari. Starting from the second part of the 19th century, the unity of Dagomba was severely endangered by internal quarrels and rebellions. They used to spring from the rivalry over the succession, and from the institution of „vagabond princes” who had no chieftainships and lived on an institutionalised robbery.

The welfare of the Dagomba people seems to depend heavily on the international trade. Their country was covered by important trade routes which were frequented by merchants of the Mande, Mossi, and Hausa origin. The manuscripts under review provide some useful information on trading goods and organisation of trading activities. Of special interest is the institution of Gamaji, an intermediary between Hausa traders and *Ya Na* of Yendi. The first Gamaji was given a compound in the vicinity of Yendi which became an important international market on the outskirts of the town. Today Gamanji (*sic!*) is a small village, a 15 minutes walk

from Yendi. This is one of the elements of infrastructure clearly discernible in the manuscripts presented above. As far as the others are concerned, they are left to a professional and closer scrutiny and examination by the historians.