

Extract from Abdoulaye Sako's *Epic of Sumanguru*, English translation of lines 486-522, pp. 116-119

In this passage Sako explains how Sumanguru entrusted his bala (balafon or xylophone) given to him by the King of the Genies, to Nya nkuma Duga, re-naming him Bala Fosege Kuyate, and founding the first dynasty of griots among the Manding.

At that time,

jèliw had no name.

The name Kuyate had not yet been pronounced, he hadn't yet become Kuyate.

And what was the *jèli*'s name?

It was Nyankuma Duga.

Nyankuma Duga,

arrived in Soso.

He came as a student in Soso, according to what my father told me.

He had not yet been given a surname.

When one person teaches another person, the student obtains his teacher's secrets.

He got the secret of the sparrowhawk from Sumanguru.

And yet he desired the *bála*, he wanted to get hold of the *bála*.

Sumanguru went on his sorcery,

on his hunting.

Nyankuma Duga, Sumanguru's *bála* also,

he went and took the *bála*.

He said: this *bála*,

if a foal touches the *bála*, its occult force will kill it.

Sumanguru heard the sound of the *bála*,

he flew and became a sparrowhawk, he glided over the head of Nyankuma Duga.

He thought that, upon his arrival, he would kill Nyankuma Duga.

But as he was playing it, he was praising him. One's praise is indeed nicer in someone else's mouth than in the mouth of the person himself.

The praise pleased Sunja ... that is, Sumanguru.

He said: ah! A praise song by another person, by another voice, is better than one's own voice.

So, I will no longer call you Nyankuma Duga,

I am going to call you Bála Fo Sege Kuyate, Sparrowhawk-*Bála*-Player Kuyate.

Whatever you do, it will not hurt me, nothing in you will be unpleasant to me. That is how Kuyate came about, you are not unpleasant to me. Nothing in you will hurt me, nothing in you will be unpleasant to me. It became a *jèli's* surname.

So, in this country of ours, it is the very first *jèli*.

In fact, the *nàmakala* had already been in existence in this country.

There had been Soninke bards at the time of Wagadu,
there had been Soninke bards at the time of Kumbi.

We are at each other's throats about the position of *jèliw* and the like.

The art of eloquence is older than the estate of *jèliw*.

Well, the art of eloquence existed since the time of the Prophet, but we the *jèliw* say that we originated from Surakata.

We do the same kind of work as Surakata, but Surakata was not a *jèli*.

Surakata was a Prophet, he was a companion of the Prophet.

His time coincided with that of the Prophet,

and he praised the Prophet. We sing praises, but the very first *jèliya* came with praising and organising things.