SUNJATA: A West African Epic of the Mande People
Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by David Conrad,
from a performance by Djanka Tassey Condé
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[From the translator’s Introduction and notes: "A naamu-sayer, or responding person, is a secondary performer whose job it is to reply to and encourage the main performer with short, interjected comments. The most common interjection is naamu, for which there is no very accurate translation, though it is what people also say when they hear their name called, and it can be rendered as ‘yes,’ or ‘I hear you.’
According to the context usually seen in oral tradition, dalilu is defined as magic, or occult power; more generally, it is any means used to achieve a goal, referring to a secret power, whether supernatural or not.”]

SOGOLON BESTOWS THE LEGACY
OF MAGHAN KONFARA

Sogolon said to her children, “Let us go outside the town.
Let me give you my last words.” (Naamu)

When she took them out of the town, (Naamuu)
They left the Mande delegation behind them in town. (Naamuu)
When they arrived outside the town, (Naamu)
Ma So’olon Condé said to Manden Bori, (Naamu)
“Break off that termite mound.” (Naamu)

When Manden Bori broke off the termite mound, (Naamu)
She said, “Pick some leaves.” (Naamu)
He picked some leaves. (Naamu)
She said, “Lay them on the termite mound.” (Naamu)
When they were laid on it, (Naamu)
She said, “Ma’an Sunjata, you sit on that.” (Na-amu)

117 As the youngest of the three sons, Manden Bori is ordered to perform the menial tasks.
118 Of the many kinds of termite mounds (some well over 6 ft. tall), the type referred to here is c. 1–2 ft. high, shaped like a hard clay mushroom, and the larger ones could be used as stools.
If present at a hunters’ meeting, women would be seated in the background. In this and the following line, the bard explains that mother and daughter remain standing because Sogolon is in charge of this solemn occasion.

On occasions where oral communication must be precise, it is customary for an important speaker’s words to be repeated several times by various people in the presence of the person addressed. When a jeh is available, the speaker addresses the bard, who repeats and validates what was just heard. At Sogolon’s secret meeting, the youngest son serves to repeat and affirm her words (cf. Fakoli’s remarks to Sunjata via Turama’an, l. 4277 ff., and to Sumaworo via Bala Fasali, l. 4427 ff.).
He said your father also had dalilu. (Naamu)
But he did not know where the dalilu was located. (Naamu)
That is why he was plotting against you, (Naamu)
Thinking that when he killed you, (Naamu)
He would get the dalilu. (Na-amu)
My son, (Naamu)
You do not have the dalilu. (Naamu)
He does not have it either. (Naamu)
I have your father’s dalilu here. (Naamu)
If you see that a man’s dalilu went to the last wife, (Na-amu)
It is because I obeyed my husband.” (Naamuu)
(You heard it?) (Naamu)

“When my husband was dying, (Na-amu)
He gave it to me, (Naamu)
That I should keep it safe for you, (Naamu)
That when you reached maturity, (Naamu)
I should give it to you, (Naamu)
Now that the Mande people have come for you, (Na-amu)
And you are going to war, (Naamu)
That is why I have brought you here, (Naamu)
To give you your father’s dalilu. (Naamuu)
But what worries me (Na-amu)
Is that there are three things, (Naamu)
And they cannot be separated. (Na-amu)
They can only go to one person. (Naaaam’)
Ah! There are three things, (Naamu)
There are three people. (Na-amu)
If the things should be divided up, (Naamu)
They would not benefit any of you, (Na-amu)
Since the Mande messengers have come,
They brought the name of your brother Ma’an Sunjata. (Naamu)
You must allow him to be given the three things. (Naamuu)
Because the three things, (Na-amu)
The sorcery horse, (Naamu)
The sorcery bow, (Naamu)
And the sorcery mask, (Na-amu)
When you sit on the sorcery horse, (Naamu)
You put on the sorcery mask, (Naamu)
You take up the sorcery bow, (Naamu)
Then you are ready for combat against all comers. (Naamu)

3705 If you mount the sorcery horse (Na-amu)
Without carrying the sorcery bow, (Naamu)
Without wearing the sorcery mask, (Naamu)
While the horse is galloping, (Naamu)
Somebody will strike you down. (Na-amu)

3710 If you put on the sorcery mask (Naamu)
Without carrying the sorcery bow, (Naamu)
And you are not on the horse, (Naamu)
You will see enemies, (Naamu)
But you will not be able to kill them. (Naamu)

3715 If you take up the sorcery bow (Naamu)
Without wearing the mask, (Naamu)
And without being on the horse, (Naamu)
What good is that? (Naamu)
The three must go to one person. (Na-amu)

3720 Allow them to be given to Ma’an Sunjata,” (Na-amu)

So’olon Jamori spoke. (Naamu)
He said, “Manden Bori, (Naamu)
Tell our mother that I do not agree to what she is saying. (Naamu)
Ah! She herself says there are three things. (Naamu)

3725 There are three of us. (Naamu)
They are easily divided. (Naamu)
Have you not heard the Mande people say (Na-amu)
That if you cannot take your father’s legacy on your head, (Naamu)
You must at least drag part of it behind you? (Naamu)

3730 If I cannot carry it, I will drag it behind me. (Na-amu)
There are three of us, (Naamu)
There are three things, (Naamu)
Let her bring them out and divide them among us.” (Naamu)
Ma So’olon Condé said, (Naamu)
121 In many variants of the epic, Sogolon’s son Jamori is not mentioned at all, and the claim here that Manden Bori was the youngest of the three brothers is an especially rare detail.

3733 “Eh, So’olon Jamori my son! (Na-amu)
        Eh, So’olon Jamori! (Naamu)
        If you see that I brought you out of the town, (Naamu)
        It is because of the fear of you alone. (Na-amu)
        Did you not hear me say, (Naamu)

3740 There are three things but they can only solve one problem?
        Will you not be agreeable?” (Naamu)
        Manden Bori spoke. (Na-amu)
        He said, “Big brother So’olon Jamori,121 (Naamu)
        Will you not have pity on our mother? (Na-amu)

3741 What is worrying our mother,
        This is it. (Naamu)
        Let us agree to give it to brother So’olon Maghan.” (Naamu)

Ah!
        Jamori said if Manden Bori did not take his mouth away from him,

3750 He would slap his ears. (Na-amu)
        Manden Bori said, “You cannot slap my ears. (Naamu)
        Why should you slap my ears for this? (Naamu)
        Aside from our father’s legacy, (Na-amu)
        Don’t you know our brother can battle Soso without our father’s legacy? (Na-amuu)