

Fortifications in their Natural and Cultural Landscape: From Organising Space to the Creation of Power

Edited by
Timo Ibsen, Kristin Ilves, Birgit Maixner,
Sebastian Messal and Jens Schneeweiß

Papers presented at the

International workshop
‘The location of hillforts in their natural and cultural landscape’,
organised by the EAA Community on Fortification Research (COMFORT)
Schleswig, March 5th/6th, 2020

and the

EAA-session #448 (Budapest 2020)
‘Just a demonstration of power?’
The setting of strongholds within their landscape’
August 29th, 2020

Habelt-Verlag · Bonn 2022



Fluid fortresses in changing states: *Tàta* in southern Senegal (13th–19th centuries AD)

Sirio Canós-Donnay

Keywords: Tàta, Kaabu, Fulaadu, Mali Empire, Casamance

Abstract: The term t̃ata is a Manding word designating a fortified political and military centre. In southern Senegal, t̃ata have been a key element in the articulation and conceptualisation of political landscapes through multiple polities since at least the 13th century. In a landscape characterised by fluid political territories and changing power arrangements, t̃ata marked the centre of a political unit and the presence of an armed ruler. Both power centres and rulers – and thereby the territories they controlled – could be subordinate to others, but the hierarchy of subordination fluctuated together with changes in regional power balances. The right to build a t̃ata was centrally regulated; as a result, periods of stability were marked by a limited number of fortifications, while times of central weakness resulted in an upsurge in the quantity of t̃ata. While varied in size and construction, some of these fortresses were very substantial, reaching up to 12 m in height and featuring multiple rings of walls. They fulfilled both practical and symbolic functions: they were often large defensive structures, capable of resisting sieges and attacks, but their very presence also indicated the existence of a state-controlled territory linked to Manding political traditions as opposed to a no-man’s land suitable for raiding. However, despite their sturdy appearance, t̃ata were often relatively ephemeral structures, with their existence limited to the reign of a particular ruler. In this chapter I explore the nature, location and roles of the network of t̃ata associated with the state of Kaabu in southern Senegal.

INTRODUCTION

The word *t̃ata* is a Manding¹ term used to describe mudbrick or rammed earth² fortresses across the region formerly occupied by the Mali empire (13th–16th centuries) and its successor states. Its use is widespread across the historical literature, including oral traditions and European accounts, but it is almost never analysed or questioned (with some notable exceptions like MACDONALD’s [2012] study of Segou fortifications and AYMERIC NSANGOU’s [2019] PhD thesis on the *t̃ata* of the Falemé). So far, the only attempt at analysing *t̃ata* globally is Thierno Moctar Bah’s *Architecture Militaire Traditionnelle en Afrique de l’Ouest* (BAH 2012; and its previous 1985 version), which is pioneering in nature but limited in both scope and data.

1 Mandé language spoken across West Africa, particularly in Mali, Guinea-Conakry, Senegal, and The Gambia.

2 *T̃ata* built partially or completely out of stone also exist (cf. BALDE 2015; AYMERIC NSANGOU 2019), but they are rarer and seem (dating is still limited) to belong to later periods (17th–19th centuries).

In this chapter, I intend to partially fill this gap by focusing on the *tàta* of Kaabu, Mali’s westernmost territory and subsequently an independent state until its 19th-century demise. Through a combination of oral traditions, archival sources, linguistic evidence, and archaeological research, I discuss the different types of fortifications, their nature, and the social, political, military and ideological roles they played in the configuration and articulation of Kaabu society.

KAABU: A BRIEF HISTORY

Kaabu is a fascinating polity whose history is, unfortunately, still poorly known. At its maximum extent, it controlled a vast confederation of kingdoms stretching from The Gambia in the north to Guinea Bissau in the south, and from the coast to over 400 km inland (Fig. 1). Its origins are still unclear: according to oral traditions the area was annexed to the Mali Empire during its early expansion in the 13th century, when the local Bainouk rulers were either expelled or integrated into the new Manding political system. From then on, Kaabu flourished, thanks in part to its involvement in the Atlantic trade sphere, gaining its independence from Mali in the 16th century and surviving until the late 19th century, when a combination of internal and external problems (most notably a Fulbe revolt), put an end to its rule. From this collapse emerged the short-lived Fulbe state of Fulaadu, which controlled the northernmost part of Kaabu until the European colonisation of the region at the beginning of the 20th century.

Kaabu’s socio-political system was in some ways similar to that of Mali, with a tri-partite social division into free people (*boron*), casted specialists (*nyamakala*), and slaves, and its flexible approach to ruling its multiple territories with varying degrees of centralisation (NIANE 1989). In other aspects,



Fig. 1. Map of the Senegambia with key sites mentioned in the text and research area framed in red. Top right detail: map of the Mali Empire (brown) and Kaabu (green).

however, its structure differed substantially from Mali's, most notably in the widespread presence of female rulers and the existence of an aristocratic class,³ the *nyanthio*, whose three original territories took turns in ruling Kaabu (LOPES 1999). The *nyanthio* were also known as great warriors, and Kaabu's involvement in the Atlantic slave trade was substantial. In a region that saw so many upheavals, wars, and slave-raiding, it is therefore not surprising that fortifications played a key role.

KEY TERMS

The two key terms to discuss Kaabu's fortification system are *tàta* and *saosan*, which translate roughly as 'fortress' and 'enclosure'. While the limited amount of archaeology in the region does not allow us to place a precise date on the origin of *tàta*, linguistic evidence – including the widespread presence of the word across West African languages⁴ – suggests the term might potentially be over four or five centuries old (VYDRIN in prep.). Its appearance in written form, however, does not occur until the early 19th century, when Captain Leblanc described villages 'surrounded by a wall called *tata*, made of posts very close together, bound with an interweaving of twigs, and covered with a coat of clay'⁵ (author's translation) in northern Senegal (LEBLANC 1822, 137). From then on, references to *tàta* become extremely common in French reports all across Mande West Africa (e.g. RAFFENEL 1846; TARDIEU 1847; HECQUARD 1853; GALLIENI 1885) as well as in British texts (e.g. MACBRAIR 1842, 37). Strangely, the term is much less frequent in Portuguese documents, with only occasional and much later mentions (e.g. CORREIA GARCIA 1948, 479). As for oral traditions, references to *tàta* are ubiquitous, and present since the earliest surviving written versions in the 19th century, such as the Tarikh Bijini (GIESING/VYDRIN 2007, 103–104) and the Pakao manuscripts (SCHAFFER 2003, 24).

While most sources use *tàta* to refer to walled earthen fortresses, other terms are occasionally employed. BAH (2012, 44) notes how the suffix *-dyin* is sometimes used to refer to a fortified village, and in the centre of Bambara country the form *dyinkala* is also common. MacDonald reported how in his survey of the heartland of Segou, the term employed by the elders was *kananga kogo* – from *kana* (to protect), *nga* (channel) and *kogo* (wall; MACDONALD 2012, 345). However, none of these terms appear to have been used for Kaabu.

When discussing less sturdy structures, the key term is *saosan*. The main meaning of *saosan* (also *sansan*) is, as previously stated, 'fence' or 'enclosure', but in the context of fortifications it is often used in the sense of 'palisade' or 'stockade'. Like *tàta*, it is a wide-spread term across Mande languages.⁶ Contrary to *tàta*, however, its antiquity is well documented, as it was used by the Cape Verdian trader André Alvares de Almada in the 16th century, who described how: 'there are certain war fortifications called by them *cão-sans*, along the river and creeks, forts made of very strong wood, planted vertically with an earthen rampart behind, with their guard-towers, bastions, and parades, from which they fight and shoot arrows'⁷ (author's translation; ALVARES DE ALMADA 1841, 28).

3 Aristocratic classes also existed in other parts of the Mande world, such as the Soninké *wage* (pl. *wago*) in Ghana/Wagadou and *hankanleme* (pl. *hankalenmu*) in Jaara, but no such class appears to have existed in Mali.

4 Mandinka (*tàta*), Khansonka (*tàta*), Guinea Maninka (*tàta*, *tada* or *tàra*), Bambara (*tàta*, *tàra*), Susu (*tàt'éé*), Jallonké (*tata*). Also present in non-Mande languages like Pular-Fulfulde (*tata*; cf. VYDRIN in prep.).

5 French original text: *entourés d'un mur nommé tata, fait au moyen de pieux très rapprochés, liés entre eux par un entrelacement de petit bois, et recouverts d'un enduit de terre glaise.*

6 Mandinka and Khassonka (*sànsan*), Guinea Maninka (*sànsan*), Bambara (*sinsan*), Koranko: (*sànsan*), Kakabe (*sànsan*), Vai (*sánja*), Susu (*sànsan*); Jalonke (*sànsán*), Bozo-Tegemaxo (*sansan*), Bozo-Sorogama (*san*, *sinsan*; cf. VYDRIN in prep.).

7 Portuguese original text: *há algumas fortalezas de guerra chamadas por eles cão-sans, ao longo do Rio e esteiros, fortes de madeira muito forte, fincada toda a pique e terra-plenada, com suas fuaritas, baluartes, praças de armas, nas quais pelejam e frecham.*

In the 19th century, French officials also employed the terms *sague* and *sane* to refer to these constructions (e.g. TÉTART 1894; RANÇON 1894, 353; LIOTARD 1888, cited in MANÉ 1979, 156–157), suggesting the non-reduplicated form (*sàn* or *san*) was also in use (VYDRIN in prep.). Another word for these palisades, collected by the Portuguese colonial officer CORREIA GARCIA (1948) is *kàlalo*, lit. ‘standing stakes’, but this term appears to be far less common. There are also many historical references to palisades and stockades that do not specifically mention them by name, such as Richard Jobson, who in his 1620s trip along the Gambia described enclosures made ‘of reede, platted and made up together, some sixe foot in height, circling and going round their towne, with doores of the same, in the night time to be orderly shut’ (JOBSON 1999, 43). A century later, Francis Moore visited a Gambian settlement which was ‘only surrounded with a cane cirk, much like our English hurdles, fastened up with a great number of sticks’ (MOORE 1738, 114).

Tàta and *sansan* thus often refer to two very different types of fortifications: the former made of mud, permanent and with specific political functions (as will be discussed later); the latter made of reed and more temporary in nature. According to this definition, *tàta* and *sansan* are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary: 19th-century reports show how *sansan* were erected around a *tàta* as extra protection in times of war (MANÉ 1979, 156–157). In other contexts, however, the distinction between *tàta* and *sansan* is much less clear. Firstly, because since *sansan* does not just mean palisade but enclosure in general, sometimes *tatàs* are also referred as *kelo sansan* (war enclosure, e.g. NIANE 1989, 72) or just *sansan*, creating significant confusion. For instance, the 19th century French writer Bérenger-Féraud wrote that ‘the Manding in general have care to surround their villages with a palisade called tata and which is more or less solid, more or less complicated’⁸ (author’s translation; BÉRENGER-FÉRAUD 1879, 203). Adding to this confusion is the fact that there were sometimes structures that combined reed and mud elements, such as those described by MOORE (1738, 114) in the Gambia, towns ‘fortified with a vast number of ciboa trees, fix’d in the ground, and clay stuffed in between, to strengthen it, so that it is little inferior to a brick wall’.

To avoid this confusion, in this article I shall use *tàta* and *sansan* in the first sense, as two distinct types of fortifications with different sociopolitical roles. These are of course ideal types, and in many political periods – particularly those of central weakness – those types got blurred, with settlements that claimed to be *tàta*, but were materially less sturdy and may not have been recognised as such by their rivals and/or neighbours. However, the fact that the *idea* of *tàta* was still relevant reinforces the utility of the distinction between *tàta* and *sansan*, while also highlighting the material variety and often contested nature of their identification. On a linguistic note, since the plural of *tàta* varies depending on the language, I shall be using *tàta* as both singular and plural.

KAABU’S TÀTA: AN ANATOMY

Like any mud structure, *tàta* do not survive well the passage of time unless they are regularly maintained. We therefore have very few surviving examples of these impressive structures, but through a combination of archaeological research, oral traditions, and European accounts we can learn about their appearance and construction. From the European side, we have the account of Hyacinthe Hecquard, who on his way to the Futa Djallon in 1849 passed through the town of Kankelefa (now in northern Guinea Bissau), main settlement of the territory of Paquesi and one of Kaabu’s main political centres. There he described how: ‘The residence of the king, located at a height that dominates the country, has at its feet a marsh that fills with water during the rains, and is surrounded by a double

8 French original text: *les Mandingues ont soin en général d’entourer leurs villages d’une palissade qui s’appelle tata et qui est plus ou moins solide, plus ou moins compliquée.*



Fig. 2. Drawing of Kankelafa by Hyacinthe Hecquard from his 1849 trip (Frobenius Institute, Reference n° EBA-B 02458-a).

square tata, 12 m in height and over a meter thick. This fortification is built so it forms a series of acute angles whose walls are equipped with arrow slits and flanked by four 2-storey towers⁹ (author's translation; HECQUARD 1853, 204).

Surprised by the zig-zagging walls (Fig. 2), Hecquard asked about the reasons behind this shape, and the local ruler replied that it was the only way a mud wall of that height and length could be strong enough (HECQUARD 1853, 205). While not universal, zig-zag walls appear to have been rather common in *tàta* across the old territories of the Mali Empire as documented during the French conquest: They were described by the military officers GALLIENI (1881; 1885) and BINGER (1892) in Mali, and by NOIROT (1881) in the Kedougou area of Senegal (Fig. 3). More recently, MACDONALD (2012) documented an impressive zig-zag triple enclosure at the 18th century Segou capital of Ton Masala in Mali.

Another common element in these descriptions is the presence of multiple concentric enclosures. The most famous case is that of Kansala, last capital of Kaabu (destroyed in the 1860s), that according to oral traditions contained seven concentric enclosures, each representing a different territory (GIESING/VYDRIN 2007, 191). While the case of Kansala was extraordinary, *tàta* with two or three enclosures were relatively common, the interior one acting as the keep where the ruler resided. This was the case, for instance, of the most recent *tàta* in Korop, excavated in 2013 (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016a; Fig. 4) and was also described described by HECQUARD (1853, 188) in the region of Toumana: 'Each ruler lives in a *tata* generally well built. Mané's *tata* has two enclosures, separated by a space

9 French original text: *l'habitation du roi, située sur une hauteur qui domine le pays et au pied de laquelle se trouve un marais plein d'eau durant les pluies, est entourée d'un double tata carré de 12 mètres de hauteur sur plus d'un mètre d'épaisseur. Cette fortification est construite d'une manière à former une suite d'angles aigus dont les murs sont garnis de meurtrières et franchés par quatre tourelles à deux étages.*



Fig. 3. *Kedugu tàta* drawn by Ernest Noiro (after NOIRO 1881).

of around 6 m in the middle of which there is a 3 m ditch. This *tata* is flanked by square towers, tall enough to dominate all the plateau and, in case of internal sedition, sweep with fire the *tata* itself¹⁰ (author's translation).

This description also highlights two other common features of *tàta*: towers and ditches. Towers, illustrated in Hecquard's drawing of Kankelefa (cf. Fig. 2) and Noiro's sketch of Kédougou (cf. Fig. 3) often served as accommodation in times of peace, and as defensive positions during wars (HECQUARD 1853, 162); they could be square (HECQUARD 1853, 162, 188) or round (HECQUARD 1853, 159) and were sometimes covered by a thatched roof (GALLIENI 1885, 554; cf. Figs. 3–4). Both towers and walls often had arrow-slits for shooting, which according to the Portuguese colonial officer CORREIA GARCIA (1948) were known as *potôda* (or more correctly *pôtodaa*, lit.: 'orifice in the mud' in Manding).

As for ditches, these were sometimes a useful byproduct of the building process of the wall, as the earth for the *tàta* was often sourced from its immediate vicinity (GALLIENI 1885, 554), and could be up to 3 m deep (HECQUARD 1853, 188). These ditches sometimes had additional protection mechanisms, such as water (HECQUARD 1853, 90; DONELHA 1977, 150) or thorns (HECQUARD 1853, 154). According to Correia Garcia, they were locally known as *biti faió* (i.e. *bitifayoo*), from *bíti* 'to close, to cover', and *fáyi* 'to throw away, to cast out, to throw at/to', i.e., literally, 'a cover made through throwing (earth)' (VYDRIN in prep). These *bitifayoo* could also be found next to smaller *sansan* fortifications (HECQUARD 1853, 90).

The size and shape of Kaabu's *tàta* varied considerably. HECQUARD (1853, 204) describes the Kankelefa *tàta* as being up to 12 m high and over a meter thick, but less important *tàta* were significantly smaller, often being around the 2 m mark (LOPES 1999, 134). During the 2013 Upper Casamance survey (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016a), we identified twelve historical *tàta* (Fig. 5). Of these, four were partly

10 French original text: *Chaque chef réside dans un tata généralement bien construit. Celui de Mané a deux enceintes, séparées par un espace de 6 metre environ au milieu duquel est creusé un fossé de 3 mètres. Ce tata est flanqué de tourelles carrées, assez hautes pour dominer tout le plateau, et, en cas de sédition intérieure, bilayer de leurs feux le corps même du tata.*

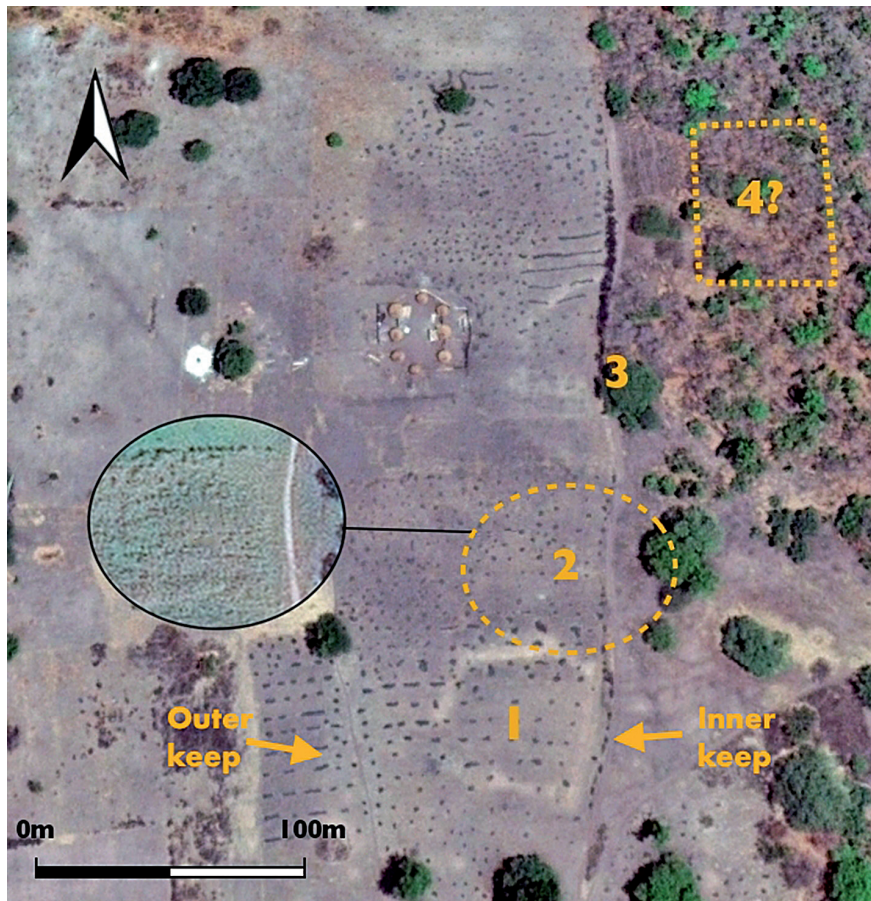


Fig. 4. Map showing the contour of Korop's four tãta according to oral traditions. According to the elders, n°1 was the Fulaadu tãta, n°2 the late Kaabu tãta (where the excavation unit was located). N°3 and n°4 were locally described as the Bainouk and Soninké tãta, respectively. The hut compound in the middle is the current neighbourhood of Korop Sinthian (Base map © 2015 Google).

or completely traceable on the ground, and an additional two could be identified in satellite imagery. In all other instances, the remains had recently been obliterated by construction or agriculture (but the elders remembered them from their childhood), or there were memories of a tãta in the locality, but nobody could point to its specific location. The six that were measurable ranged from 40 x 40 to 80 x 90 m in size (cf. Fig. 4). Except for the rectangular tãta at Bantanguel Yawayou and the round one in Korop, all recorded fortifications were square or almost square, and with walls (more or less precisely) aligned with the cardinal points. The only one that was still partly standing was the tãta at Kabendou (Fig. 6), its stumps measuring just over a metre.

While our knowledge of the materiality of Kaabu's tãta has improved in the past few years, our understanding of their chronology is still very limited. We know they were in use for centuries, and it is unlikely that their shape and form would have remained unchanged. However, because our sources are still sparse and archaeology is still limited, it is difficult to determine what the nature of such changes was. A large part of the elements previously described (zig-zag walls, covered towers) appear mostly in 19th-century descriptions, while others (arrow slits, multiple enclosures) are mentioned also in the few 16th- and 17th-century accounts we have. The two excavation units placed in the middle of the tãta areas at the sites of Payoungou and Korop in 2013 (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016b) provided dates from the 17th and 18th-19th centuries, but the small size of the units (2 x 3 m) preempted any conclusions with regards to the internal structure of the fortifications.

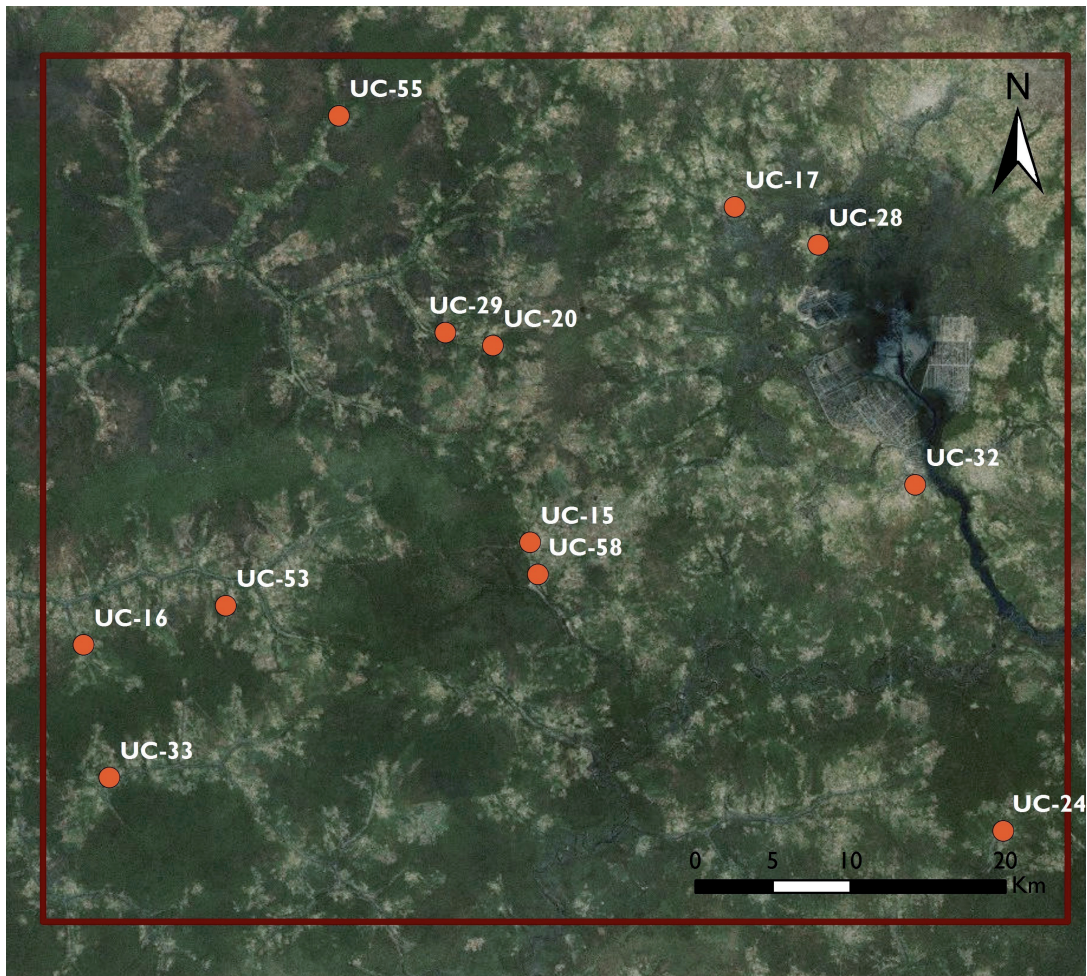


Fig. 5. Map of the twelve *tàta* identified during the Upper Casamance Archaeological Project. Research area framed in red.

To summarise, our current knowledge of the anatomy of Kaabu’s *tàta* is still limited, but not entirely absent: we know they are not a recent phenomenon, and suspect they may have been present since at least the 16th century, but do not have confirmation yet. We know they could be very sizeable structures, up to 12 m high, and have up to seven concentric enclosures, but also be substantially more modest; and that their size and complexity was directly proportional to the political role they played in Kaabu. We know they varied in size and shape, but most archaeologically-recorded cases were square/rectangular and aligned with the cardinal points. Many had a ditch and/or towers, which could be both round and square and often had a thatched roof; they could also feature additional defense mechanisms, such as arrow slits, palisades and ramparts. *Tàta*, however, were not isolated structures, and in order to fully understand them we must now look at how they fitted within the wider landscape.

TÀTA AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPES

Tàta fulfilled both practical and symbolic functions. As previously described, they could be large defensive structures, capable of resisting sieges and attacks. But they were also key in the conceptualisation of Kaabu’s landscapes, as reflected by both oral traditions and European accounts. The



Fig. 6. Remains of the Kabendou tãta with village elder on top (photo S. Canós-Donnay).

political landscapes of both Kaabu and Fulaadu were defined by three key interdependent notions: territories (*banco/leidi*), power centres or fortresses (*tãta*), and their respective rulers (*mansa/lamdo*). Territories were fluctuating and loosely defined political spaces, identified by a name, a ruler, and a power centre; and comprising the area/people from which a ruler could extract taxes at any given point in time. Both power centres and rulers – and thereby the territories they controlled – could be subordinate to other power centres and rulers, and the hierarchy of subordination itself fluctuated with changes in regional power balances. Oral traditions often claim Kaabu had 37 *tãta* in total (BAH 1985, 168), but other numbers are also cited and the total quantity undoubtedly varied over time.

The political centre of each territory was defined by a *tãta* where the ruler lived, to the point where *tãta* and territory became synonymous; for instance, the *tãta* controlling the Pathiana region was often also referred to as Pathiana (e.g. UCAP 2013: Interview with Bouly Mane from Sare Pate Bouya). The very presence of a *tãta* thus marked the existence of a state-controlled territory linked to Manding political traditions, a tax-collecting area and a legal catchment, whereas their absence marked a no-man's land suitable for raiding (BENOIT 1988).

The right to build a *tãta* was centrally regulated: Only centrally-endorsed rulers had the right to build one. Within each territory, rulers made sure no other *tãta* were constructed (HECQUARD 1852, 150; QUINN 1972, 211). As a result, periods of stability were marked by a limited number of fortifications, while times of central weakness resulted in an upsurge in the quantity of *tãta*. One such period started in 1850: As Kaabu's central power waned, rulers were no longer able to prevent the walling of towns, and there was a substantial increase in fortifications of all sorts (QUINN 1972, 213). While as



Fig. 7. Unit F at Payoungou, located inside the *tàta* area, featuring two rubbish pits with evidence of feasting (photo S. Canós-Donnay).

previously discussed archaeological evidence for Kaabu's *tàta* is still limited, the homogeneity (shape, orientation, size) of the *tàta* recorded during the 2013 survey (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016b) would be in accord with a certain degree of political centralisation and coordination. Additionally, excavations inside the *tàta* in Payoungou and Korop confirmed these were indeed elite areas, as demonstrated by the abundance of European imports, the quantities of cattle consumed, and evidence for feasting events (Fig. 7; cf. CANÓS-DONNAY 2016b).

TÀTA AND SETTLEMENT LANDSCAPES

Contrary to other stronghold traditions, *tàta* did not stand by themselves, but always as part of an existing village. As a result, their remains are always found in the vicinity of fertile land and permanent or seasonal water sources (BAH 1985, 51). *Tàta*, however, were not settlement walls containing most or even a sizeable part of the city: they were fortresses in which the ruler (*mansa*) and his/her court and family lived. Depending on the importance and actual size of each *tàta*, the amount of people living in it would vary, but it did not include the people in the village, who could only move inside the *tàta* as a refuge in times of war. The rest of the time, the village spread around and/or next to the fortress (MOORE 1738, 115; HECQUARD 1853, 188, 204–205).

The relationship between *tàta* and their surrounding villages was further complicated by the fact that both of them were often relatively mobile. Survey and excavations in the Upper Casamance region in 2013 revealed that settlements in the area have for centuries been characterised by what I

have termed ‘shifting sedentism’, a pattern by which settlements gradually or abruptly move a few hundred metres every few decades (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016a). The village would thus often gradually ‘shift’ around the *tàta*, as described by Payoungou Seydi, an elder from Payoungou in 2013: ‘If they settled in a place where there were many deaths, they would move, with a jump of a few meters. And they would never go back. The *tàta* which I know of, never moved. It was the people who moved towards and around the *tàta*. Thus the *tàta* I know in Payoungou stayed in the same place. It was the village which moved around it. This movement was constant. The elders told me so’¹¹ (UCAP 2013).

While archaeological work in Kaabu is still limited, the fact that this settlement pattern has also been documented for the northern bank of the Gambia (LAWSON 2003, 18) would suggest shifting sedentism patterns may have been common across the wider region, but more archaeological research is needed to confirm this possibility.

To complicate matters further, it appears that Kaabu’s *tàta* were often more impermanent and mobile than in the Payoungou case. As previously explained, the right to fortify and have a *tàta* was centrally controlled, so changes in the balance of geopolitical power meant towns would win and lose this right, and *tàta* would come and go. Additionally, there is some evidence that *tàta* were often tightly associated with particular rulers, and abandoned after their death or demise. Such was the case of the site of Korop, where after the Kaabu ruler was defeated, his *tàta* was abandoned, and a brand new fortification for the Fulaadu ruler was built right next to the former one (cf. Fig. 4). Not only that, but excavations in the earlier Kaabu *tàta* revealed also a relatively short occupation (18th–19th centuries); yet archaeologically we know Korop was occupied since at least the 13th century, and local oral traditions speak of at least two other *tàta* having existed prior to the excavated one (CANÓS-DONNAY 2016a). Consequently, the combination of the information from oral traditions, survey, and excavation indicates that despite the sturdy appearance of these fortifications, *tàta* were sometimes as fluid and transitory as the political landscapes they represented – erected and destroyed depending on the balance of power between local, regional, and supra-regional forces.

TÀTA AND SACRED LANDSCAPES

Prior to the widespread adoption of Islam across the region in the 20th century,¹² the key elements in the definition of sacred landscapes were *dyalan*. Often translated as ‘fetish’, ‘oracle’, or ‘genie’, *dyalan* were sacred and powerful places; generally trees, caves or standing stones, connected to a djinn or spirit (GIRARD 1992, 96). *Dyalan* were absolutely fundamental to Kaabu’s ideology and operation: Its ruling elite derived its legitimacy from their mythical origin at one of these *dyalan* (Guedi Nyanthio Be, in Mampatim), and all the candidates to emperor had to first receive the approval of several *dyalan*, including those in Payoungou, Kankelafa, and Kansala. Important decisions about war and peace were also run through the pertinent *dyalan*, and critical state meetings were held before them (UCAP 2013, Interview 16, Ousmane Camara). Kaabu’s *dyalan* thus constituted a network of power loci which largely coincided with that of political authority, as all the great *dyalan* were located in, or in the vicinity of, Kaabu’s main political centres.

11 Manding original text: *Nii bé kampérin dian nin saaya nataI la mo bé la fa la doron ké kolon fata Doula to doron a ka bondii dian all na Saounté dian I bé bolalé kotonké a yé Déplacé tàta kampé doula doté Bariii tato wolé baa nolé to wo man ta dé Tato wo ba note ab mann ta dé molle bé Bodian na saounté tato wo djéla I sii bé Bodian a yé saouna a ya nan dian la Yo bariii tato wo ba nolalé yo Payoungou inté nga lone nialon Saaté nin ka fo bodian I yé taa diéli Ya kanaan bodié I ya nata dianan kéba Lé fo nian dian I ka fonié lé* (translation: Thierry Baldé).

12 Islam has been present in the Senegambia since at least the 15th century, probably much earlier, but strict widespread conversion did not occur until the late 19th century, and particularly in the early 20th century (LEARY 1970; ROCHE 1985; DRAME 2006).

This was not a coincidence: The network of *tàta* and that of *dyalan* were intrinsically linked. When a new ruler was appointed to a given territory, the transference of power took place under the town's *dyalan* and had to be endorsed by its spirit (CISSOKO 1969, 332; GIRARD 1992, 234–235). When new political centres were created, a piece of an existing *dyalan* had to be transferred to the new locale, as the presence of a *dyalan* was necessary to guarantee both the legitimacy and success of the political power invested in the town (GIRARD 1992, 101).

We do not know exactly when this system of ordering the landscape started; the earliest written mentions of *dyalan* I have encountered are from the 1910s (TODD/WOLBACH 1911, 161–162; LEGRAND 1912, 252), but there are descriptions of a very similar but unnamed phenomena going back all the way to the 16th century (LABAT 1728, 107; ALVARES DE ALMADA 1841, 43).

This has important archaeological implications because the location of *dyalan*, despite their often organic nature, appears to have been far more stable than that of *tàta*: Even when a town ceased to be a political centre, its *dyalan* still operated as a sacred reference point. This was the case of Payougou, whose *dyalan* kept playing a key role in the appointment of Kaabu rulers and the judgement of state traitors long after its role as political centre had ceased (CANÓS DONNAY 2016a). The memory of *dyalan* is also more durable than that of both *tàta* and settlements. For instance, during the 2013 Upper Casamance survey, local elders from Mampatim perfectly remembered the location and name of the *dyalan* near their village but nobody could remember that there had also been a *tàta* or that Mampatim had in fact been Kaabu's most important early political centre (MANÉ 1978, 21).

CONCLUSIONS

In his paper 'African city walls: a neglected source?' Graham Connah argued some two decades ago that African pre-colonial fortifications and city walls constituted a great but heavily underresearched resource (CONNAH 2000, 48). In the 20 years since Connah's call to action, multiple and diverse projects across West Africa and beyond have demonstrated the extent to which these structures can illuminate a wide range of issues from military and sociopolitical matters (MAGNAVITA et al. 2006; DECORSE 2012; MACDONALD 2012; AYMERIC NSANGOU 2019), to sacred and ideological topics (NORMAN/KELLY 2004), and even medical questions (CHOUIN 2013).

In the case of *tàta*, the term has been widely used in the literature for over a century, but its archaeological manifestations remain underresearched and only partially understood. In this paper I have attempted to provide an initial summary of what we know about a specific subset of *tàta*: Those connected with the state of Kaabu in the southern Senegambia. Through a combination of oral traditions, European accounts, and archaeological work I have explored the materiality, structure, and location of *tàta*, and how they interacted with the wider political, social, and sacred landscapes around them. From this discussion it has become clear that *tàta* were far more than defensive structures: They constituted a key element in the conceptualisation and articulation of political landscapes, powerful but changing nodes plugged into the more stable sacred networks and constantly moving settlements around them. While much remains to be known about this complex and ever-changing web of fortifications, I believe this preliminary work has shown both the importance and potential of this research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 844159.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALVARES DE ALMADA 1841: A. ALVARES DE ALMADA, *Tratado Breve Dos Rios de Guiné Do Cabo-Verde*. Edited by Diogo Köpke (Porto 1841 [1594]).
- AYMERIC NSANGOU 2019: J. D. L. AYMERIC NSANGOU, 'Défendre sa communauté pendant l'ère atlantique: Étude des fortifications endogènes de la vallée de la Falémé (Sénégal oriental)'. Unpubl. PhD thesis, Université de Genève (Genève 2019).
- BAH 1985: T. M. BAH, *Architecture militaire traditionnelle et poliorcétique dans le Soudan occidental, du XVIIe à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Yaoundé 1985).
- BAH 2012: T. M. BAH, *Architecture Militaire Traditionnelle En Afrique de l'Ouest Du XVIIe à La Fin Du XIXe Siècle* (Paris 2012).
- BALDE 2015: T. A. BALDE, 'Histoire et Archéologie de Deux Centres de Pouvoir du Fuladu (XIXe- XX siècles) : Korop et Hamdallaye'. Unpubl. Master's thesis, Université Cheikh Anta Diop (Dakar 2015).
- BENOIT 1988: M. BENOIT, *Espaces Francs et Espaces Étatisés En Afrique Occidentale. Remarques Sur Quelques Processus de Territorialisation et Leurs Fondements Idéologiques en Haute Casamance et Haute Gambie. Cahiers de Sciences Humaines* 24(4), 1988, 503–519.
- BÉRENGER-FÉRAUD 1879: L. J. B. BÉRENGER-FÉRAUD, *Les peuplades de la Sénégambie. Histoires, ethnographie, mœurs et coutumes, légendes, etc.* (Paris 1879).
- BINGER 1892: L. G. BINGER, *Du Niger Au Golfe de Guinée Par Le Pays de Kong et Le Mossi* 1 (Paris 1892).
- CANÓS-DONNAY 2016a: S. CANÓS-DONNAY, *Shifting Sedentism in the Upper Casamance (Senegal)*. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa: Special Issue: Mobility and African Archaeology* 51(4), 2016, 453–468.
- CANÓS-DONNAY 2016b: S. CANÓS-DONNAY, *Territories, Fortresses, and Shifting Towns: Archaeological Landscapes of the Upper Casamance (Senegal), 7th-19th C.* Unpubl. PhD thesis, University College London (London 2016).
- CHOUIN 2013: G. L. F. CHOUIN, *Fossés, Enceintes et Peste Noire En Afrique de l'Ouest Forestière (500–1500 AD). Réflexions Sous Canopée. Afrique: Archéologie & Arts* 9, 2013, 43–66.
- CISSOKO 1969: S. M. CISSOKO, *La Royauté (Mansaya) Chez Les Mandingues Occidentaux, d'après Leurs Traditions Orales. Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Série B: Sciences Humaines* 31(2), 1969, 325–338.
- CONNAH 2000: G. CONNAH, *African city walls. A neglected source?* In: D. M. Anderson/R. Rathbone (eds.), *Africa's Urban Past* (Oxford 2000) 36–51.
- CORREIA GARCIA 1948: L. CORREIA GARCIA, *A Habitação Dos Mandingas*. In: A. Teixeira da Mota (ed.), *A Habitação Indígena Na Guiné Portuguesa* (Bissau 1948) 456–482.
- DECORSE 2012: C. R. DECORSE, *Fortified Towns of the Koinadugu Plateau: Northern Sierra Leone in the Pre-Atlantic and Atlantic Worlds*. In: J. C. MONROE/A. OGUNDIRAN (eds.), *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives* (Cambridge 2012) 278–308.
- DONELHA 1977: A. DONELHA, *Descrição de Serra Leoa e Dos Rios de Guiné Do Cabo Verde (1625)*. Translated by Avelino Teixeira da Mota (Lisboa 1977).
- DRAME 2006: A. DRAME, *Planting the Seeds of Islam: Karantaba, a Mandinka Muslim Center in the Casamance, Senegal*. Unpubl. PhD thesis, Univ. of Illinois (Champaign 2006).
- GALLIENI 1881: J.-S. GALLIENI, *Mission dans le Haut-Niger et a Ségou, 1880–1881* (Rochefort 1881).
- GALLIENI 1885: J.-S. GALLIENI, *Voyage au Soudan français (Haut-Niger et pays de Ségou) 1879–1881* (Paris 1885).
- GIESING/VYDRIN 2007: C. GIESING/V. VYDRIN, *Ta: Rikh Mandinka de Bijini (Guinée-Bissau): La Mémoire Des Mandinka et Des Sooninkee Du Kaabu* (London 2007).
- GIRARD 1992: J. GIRARD, *L'or Du Bambouk: Une Dynamique de Civilisation Ouest-Africaine* (Geneva 1992).
- HECQUARD 1852: H. HECQUARD, *Coup d'œil Sur l'organisation Politique, l'histoire, et Les Mœurs Des Peulhs Du Fouta-Dialon. Revue Coloniale* 2(9), 1852, 319–349.
- HECQUARD 1853: H. HECQUARD, *Voyage Sur La Côte et Dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris 1853).
- JOBSON 1999: R. JOBSON, *The Discovery of River Gambia (1623)*. Ed. by D. P. Gamble/P. E. H. Hair (London 1999).
- LABAT 1728: J.-B. LABAT, *Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique Occidentale V* (Paris 1728).
- LAWSON 2003: A. E. LAWSON, *Megaliths and Mande States: Sociopolitical Change in the Gambia Valley over the Past Two Millennia*. Unpubl. PhD thesis, Univ. of Michigan (Ann Arbor 2003).
- LEARY 1970: F. A. LEARY, *Islam, Politics and Colonialism: A Political History of Islam in the Casamance Region of Senegal (1850-1914)*. Unpubl. PhD thesis, Northwestern University (Evanston 1970).
- LEBLANC 1822: C. LEBLANC, *Voyage à Galam, en 1820, contenant la description du cours du Sénégal, des pays et des peuplades noires qui bordent les rives de ce fleuve, depuis Saint-Louis jusqu'au rocher Felou. Revue Maritime et Coloniale* 1822, 133–159.
- LEGRAND 1912: R. LEGRAND, *Le Fouladou. La Géographie. Bulletin de La Société de Géographie* 26, 1912, 241–253.
- LIOTARD 1888: LIOTARD, *Mission Liotard dans le Fouladou, le Niani et le Kalonkedougou, 28 October 1888*. Unpublished report, Archives Nationales du Sénégal, ANS 1G 75.
- LOPES 1999: C. LOPES, *Kaabunké: espaço, território e poder na Guiné-Bissau, Gâmbia e Casamance pré-coloniais* (Lisboa 1999).
- MACBRAIR 1842: R. M. MACBRAIR, *A Grammar of the Mandingo Language; with vocabularies* (London 1842).
- MACDONALD 2012: K. C. MACDONALD, "The Least of Their Inhabited Villages Are Fortified": *The Walled Settlements of Segou. Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa* 47(3), 2012, 343–364.
- MAGNAVITA et al. 2006: C. MAGNAVITA/P. BREUNIG/J. AMEJE/M. POSSELT, *Zilum: A Mid-First Millennium*

- BC Fortified Settlement near Lake Chad. *Journal of African Archaeology* 4(1), 2006, 153–169.
- MANÉ 1978: M. MANÉ, Contribution à l'histoire du Kaabu: des origines au XIX siècle. *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire, Série B, Sciences humaines* 40, 1978, 87–159.
- MOORE 1738: F. MOORE, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London 1738).
- NIANE 1989: D. T. NIANE, *Histoire Des Mandingues de l'ouest : Le Royaume Du Gabou* (Paris 1989).
- NOIROT 1881: E. NOIROT, 50 Dessins des Voyages Du Docteur Jean-Marie Bayol Au Sénégal, Au Soudan et Dans La Haute-Guinée (Fouta-Djallon). <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7702012d>.
- NORMAN/KELLY 2004: N. L. NORMAN/K. G. KELLY, Landscape Politics: The Serpent Ditch and the Rainbow in West Africa. *American Anthropologist* 106(1), 2004, 98–110.
- QUINN 1972: C. A. QUINN, *Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia: Traditionalism, Islam, and European Expansion* (Evanston 1972).
- RAFFENEL 1846: A. RAFFENEL, *Voyage dans l'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris 1846).
- RANÇON 1894: A. RANÇON, *Dans le Haute-Gambie; voyage d'exploration scientifique, 1891–1892* (Paris 1894).
- ROCHE 1985: C. ROCHE, *Histoire de la Casamance: conquête et résistance, 1850–1920*. *Hommes et sociétés* (Paris 1895).
- SCHAFFER 2003: M. SCHAFFER, *Djinns, Stars, and Warriors: Mandinka Legends from Pakao, Senegal* (London 2003).
- TARDIEU 1847: A. TARDIEU, *Sénégal et Guinée. L'Univers: Histoire et Description de Tous les Peuples* (Paris 1847).
- TÉTART 1894: C. TÉTART, *Lettre du capitaine Tétart, administrateur supérieur du district de la Casamance à Monsieur le Colonel Commandant Supérieur des Tropes sur les renseignements recueillis sur l'affaire de Paroumba*. Manuscript, held at Aix-en-Provence, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, MIS19.
- TODD/WOLBACH 1911: J. L. TODD/G. B. WOLBACH, *Stone Circles in the Gambia*. *Man* 11, 1911, 161–164.
- UCAP 2013: UCAP, *Upper Casamance Archaeological Project Interviews*. Interview transcripts, in Pulaar/Manding and French, collected in 2013; held at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Dakar.
- VYDRIN in prep.: V. VYDRIN, *Etymological Dictionary of Mande Family* (in prep).

Sirio Canós-Donnay
 INCIPIT-CSIC
 Institute of Heritage Sciences – Spanish National Research Council
 Avda Vigo s/n
 Santiago de Compostela
 Spain
 sirio.canos-donnay@incipit.csic.es