

Notes on Sapashin-waa Recordings

- **Ethnic Group:** Dagomba
- **Language (dialect):** Dagbanli
- **Country:** Ghana
- **Recording date:** June 9, 2014
- **Recording location:**
Jisonaayili neighborhood, Tamale, Ghana
- **Technician:** Mohammed Alidu

Musicians:

- Buaru Alhassan Tia – luṇa
- Fuseini Yusif Nakɔha

Track Names:

Track 1: Praise-singing and –drumming, followed by “Sochendili”

Tracks 2-7: Praise-singing and –drumming

Group Introduction:

The two gentlemen in these recordings are two of the finest and most widely respected musicians of the Dagbamba performance genre called Sapashin-waa. They are each members of a lineage of warriors, called sapashinima, who trace their ancestry to Akan migrants who moved into northern Ghana sometime in the late 18th or early 19th centuries. Buaru is among the most senior and revered sapashini drummers in Tamale and throughout the surrounding village communities. Nakɔha is a praise-singer from the community of Tampion, about 30km northwest of Tamale. He is well-known for his knowledge of history and powerful voice.

Buaru and Nakɔha perform a genre of music that is separate from the better-known music of the Dagbamba lumsi drummers (see Harouna Abdoulaye and sons <http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/the-language-of-african-music-dagbanli#HarounaAbdoulaye>). Like the lumsi, they recount history and praise chiefs, but the topics are typically limited to the deeds of past warriors and sapashini chiefs. The musical ensemble includes the Dagbamba talking drum, called the luṇa, and is augmented by the iron double-bell called dawule, which is of Akan origin. The warriors’ Akan lineage is also manifested in the use of Akan-Twi proverbs in some of the chiefs’ praise-names.

Nakɔha sings the praise of his family ancestry as well as that of great sapashini warriors and chiefs, past and present. Buaru’s drumming both mirrors and extends upon Nakɔha’s texts, adding praises using drum language, rendered as melodic rhythms on the luṇa. The majority of the praising is done through musical settings of “praise-names”—proverbs that are associated with chiefs and their descendants—although portions of the praise-singing are done through prose that recalls historical actors and events.

The written texts are transcriptions of interviews with Nakɔha and Buaru, in which they explain the praise-names, proverbs, and some of the historical contexts for their singing and drumming.

The interviews were conducted by John Issah and Saeed Alhassan Dawuni, and translated by John Issah.

Recording context:

The recordings on this site were taken from a recording session at a studio set up in the courtyard of Muhammed Alidu's Jisonaayili home, and produced by Karl Haas. The full session features a full Sapashin-waa ensemble which performs several of the most common pieces in the sapashini repertoire. The men who perform in this ensemble typically perform in the retinue of the sapashini chief of Kakpagyili, a community located in the southernmost outskirts of Tamale. They perform frequently throughout the Dagbon traditional area at funerals, wake-keepings, traditional festivals, and the enskinments of chiefs.