Guide to Bokari Kanneh Notebooks of Mende Script

MS 2049

compiled by Charles Riley and Christine Connolly

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Collection Overview

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CALL NUMBER:	MS 2049
CREATOR:	Kanneh, Bokari
TITLE:	Bokari Kanneh notebooks of Mende script
DATES:	Circa 1950s
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:	0.25 linear feet (1 box)
LANGUAGE:	Mende
SUMMARY:	The collection of eight notebooks and additional loose pages, comprising about 250 leaves of notes, includes a manual for writing Mende numbers, a sample of the syllabary as used for teaching the script, a diary of activities, and financial accounts.
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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.   box
f.   folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Transferred from the African Art Department, Yale University Art Gallery, 2016.

Custodial History

Dr. Konrad Tuchscherer discovered this collection of notebooks while doing research in the region and acquired them directly from Kanneh in March of 1994. He donated them to the Yale Art Gallery in 2009.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Bokari Kanneh Notebooks of Mende Script (MS 2049). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

The notebooks written by Bokari Kanneh date to the 1950s. They were written in the Kikakui script of the Mende language. The creation of Kikakui is commonly credited to Kisimi Kamara, a tailor from the village of Vaama, Sierra Leone, in the 1920's. According to Konrad Tuchscherer in his article "African Script and Scripture: The History of the Kikakui (Mende) Writing System for Bible Translations", *African Languages and Cultures*, vol. 8 #2, regional oral tradition maintains that Mohammed Turay, Kamara's uncle and teacher, developed the original 42 characters of the syllabary. Kamara added approximately 150 additional characters and popularized the use of the written language. Kanneh was a Muslim goldsmith of Mende and Maninka ancestry who lived in Nyandeyema, Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District, Sierra Leone.

Scope and Contents

The collection of eight notebooks and additional loose pages, comprising about 250 leaves of notes, includes a manual for writing Mende numbers, a sample of the syllabary as used for teaching the script, a diary of activities, and financial accounts.

Arrangement

The material is arranged as received from the donor.

Collection Contents

b. 1, f. 1	**Notebook 1** *Notebook measures 32x20.5 cm. It has 59 leaves, including loose pages inserted between bound pages. Cover, which had been attached with tape, is almost completely detached.* A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 2	**Notebook 2** *Notebook measures 20x25 cm. It is written on a pad of lined paper and hashas 24 leaves.* A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 3	**Notebook 3** *Notebook measures 9x12 cm. It has 45 leaves, with some illustrations. Some of the text is written with native ink.* A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 4	**Notebook 4** *Notebook measures 13.5x16 cm. It is written in a Sierra Leone Colony and Protectorate Excercise Book No. 1A and has 6 leaves.* A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 5	**Notebook 5** *Notebook measures 10x16.5 cm. It has 35 leaves.* This volume features the Mende number writing tradition. In addition to accounts, it also contains pages of names. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 6	**Notebook 6** *Notebook measures 10x16.5 cm. It has 41 leaves.* This is a manual for writing Mende numbers. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 7	**Notebook 7** *Notebook measures 15.5x10 cm. It was made by cutting an excercise book with a picture of young Queen Elizbeth II on the cover in half. It has 9 leaves.* This is a diary of activities. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 1, f. 8	**Notebook 8** *Notebook measure 16x20 cm. It has 7 leaves.* This item contains the records of a community savings organization, listing names and amounts of money contributed. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.

b. 1, f. 9

Loose notes
Material consists of 18 leaves of various sizes.

These documents include four pages of the Mende alphabet, or syllabary, written out in the set style used for teaching the script. There is also a partial letter to Kanneh and what appears to be a story or history of some kind.

A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Mende (African people)
Mende language

Names

Kanneh, Bokari