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NINGI SUCCESSION ORDER WITH PRAISE SONGS  
IN NIGERIAN HAUSALAND ca. 1730-1973

by Adell Patton Jr., Ph.D.\*

Ningi Division is located in the Bauchi State Government of Nigeria. It is situated 115 miles southwest of Kano and about 72 miles northwest of Bauchi. The Ningi territory generally is an extension of the Jos Plateau massif at the northernmost end. While the altitude in Ningi rises to 3,000 feet at its center and peaks at 6,000 feet in the ranges known as the Kabara Hills, the greater part of Ningi lies over 2,000 feet, and the entire Division is just over 1,950 miles.<sup>1</sup>

Demographic data for the nineteenth century were never attempted; as a peripheral frontier settlement, Ningi had not reached a level of observation permanence, and even more, the Ningi fringe did not reach the stability of organized settlements at which time demographic data collection usually occurs.<sup>2</sup> In the first population assessment of 1908, Ningi totaled 21,470, and in the second assessment in 1931, the population had grown to 40,911. By the time of the 1963 census, Ningi had an approximate total of 112,865.<sup>3</sup>

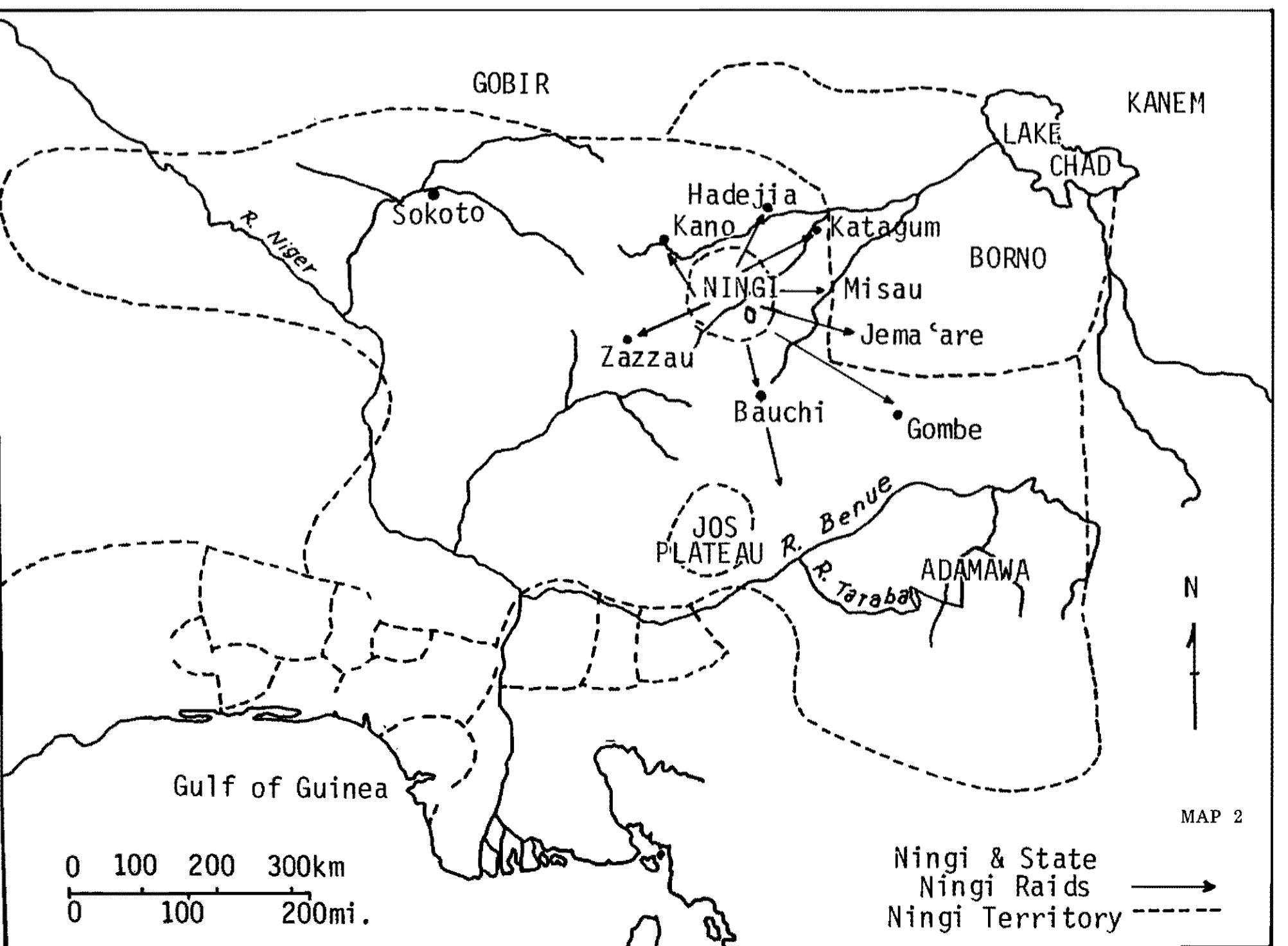
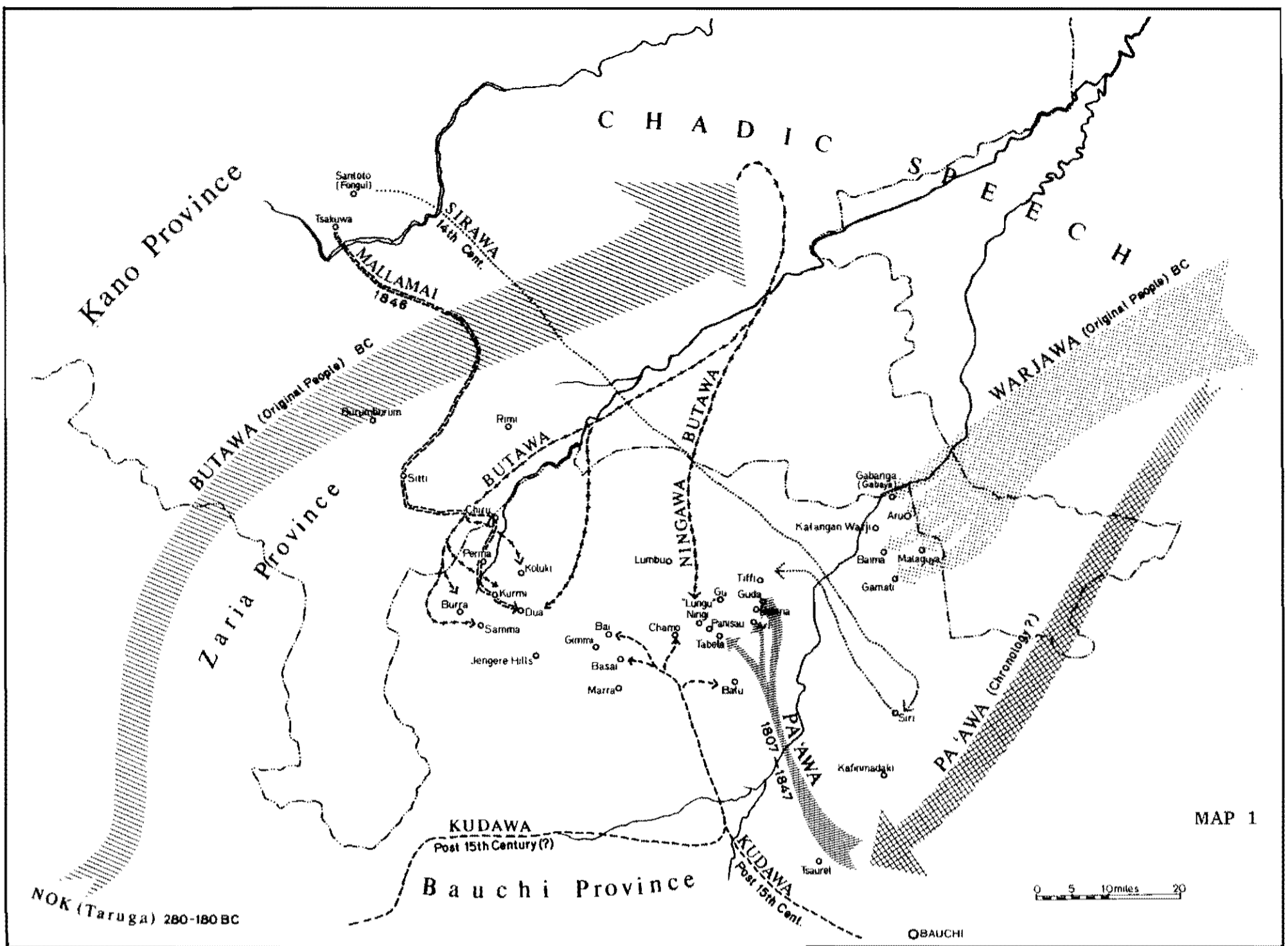
Although the Hausa language is the most widely spoken language in the area, Ningi was very culturally and linguistically diverse in the past. It is said that at least thirteen different languages were spoken well into the twentieth century, all because of a staggered population movement into this plateau region which may have begun as far back as 5,000 years ago (Map 1). The Butawa and Kudawa (Chamawa and Basawa) belong to the Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo family of languages, while the Warjawa, Siri, Pa<sup>c</sup>awa, and Hausawa belong to the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family of languages so predominant in North Africa and the Middle East. The Hausa *mallamai* (religious practitioners and teachers), however, were the last immigrants of enduring importance to arrive in Ningi from a Qu<sup>c</sup>ranic center called Tsakuwa near Kano during the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of genealogy, the *mallamai* can be documented more thoroughly than the remaining immigrants for a variety of reasons. First, the heterogeneous plateau societies had short genealogical depths because of their hoe culture; natural resources were few and inheritance considerations were of minor importance. Additionally, these societies suffered disruptions in their succession and genealogical orders because metropolitan centers had raided them for slaves for over several centuries.

Ningi captives, however, did not become part of the African diaspora; the plantation structure of the Sokoto Caliphate created the widespread use of slaves internally rather than for export. These considerations explain in part why the Reverend S.J. Koelle's linguistic inventory of 1849 in Sierra Leone contains no references to narrations of slaves from Ningi, and yet it must not be ruled out that Ningi repatriated captives were present but Koelle did not interview them.

Unlike the plateau people, the *mallamai* brought with them to the Ningi

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periphery a more cohesive cultural baggage, such as an Islamic tradition of literacy and a familiarity with metropolitan culture, its government and mode of warfare. For the sake of brevity, our story unfolds in the following manner.<sup>5</sup>

Ca. 1847, dissident Kano *mallamai* organized non-Muslim mountaineers into revolt against the Sokoto Caliphate, culminating in the foundation of the Ningi Chiefdom. The *mallamai* and the plateau people resisted successfully the emirates of Bauchi, Kano, Zazzau, Misau, Jema<sup>c</sup>are, Hadejia, and Katagum down to 1902, when the British imposed the colonial situation (Map 2).

The oral traditions were grouped under two headings in order to reconstruct the succession order. 'Core traditions' consisted of those recorded in Ningi Division proper. Praise songs about the pre-colonial leaders of Ningi by the Ningi palace musicians were recorded with commentary. The palace musicians began the chain of transmission for these songs as far back as the 1870's. As a historical source, the praise songs generally may serve to elevate individuals in the stratification of status, may further function as conveyers of news in the society, and may also supplement extant traditions about the past.

In the Ningi case, the songs reveal insights into the militant character of each leader, for Merit In War determined who led Ningi rather than such factors as hereditary and primogenital factors. The warrior tradition of the Ningi past made the collection of oral variants outside the Division necessary. These traditions were grouped as 'peripheral traditions' representing the metropolitan centers.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the *mallamai* and their peregrinations from Tsakuwa into the Ningi fringe is the heart of our story. Led by *Malam Hamza*, the forceful departure of some sixteen Hausa families was caused by their refusal to pay a tax considered excessive. (See Kano Malams of Tsakuwa - Appendix.) The praise song on Hamza does not allow this factor to go unnoticed:

Hamza was asked to give *Kurdin Kasa* [the land tax] but Hamza refused; there is no grounds for taxation except that which belongs to Allah -- Praise Song of *Malam Hamza* by Ningi Palace Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>7</sup>

Hamza then went on to organize the non-Muslims into rebellion against the emirates, and thus he became the first leader of Ningi in the order of succession, ca. 1847-1849. (See Ningi Succession - Appendix.)

After a brief interregnum, *Malam Ahmadu* became the second leader of Ningi. On Ahmadu the praise song holds:

Truth is the saying of God, let us call upon *Malam Ahmadu*. May God have mercy upon Ahmadu; he was the younger brother of Shehu [*Malam Hamza*] -- Praise Song of *Malam Ahmadu* by Ningi Palace Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to Hamza, Ahmadu's reign was short indeed, for they both died on the battlefield in skirmishes against Caliphate forces.

*Malam Abubakar* <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje assumed the mantle of leadership next, and a new family lineage entered into the succession order. (See Ningi Succession - Appendix.) He was among the original families who departed Tsakuwa



Women Praise Singers of Ningi, Ningi Town, Nigeria (1973). Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center



*Sarkin Jauge* (second from left) and Ningi Palace Musicians, Ningi Town, Nigeria (1973). Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

with Malam Hamza, and the fact that his reign was a successful one is borne out in an extensive song:

Let us call upon Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje. He transformed men into women. He is the owner of the world; and never spent a night with doubt about subduing his enemies . . . Garba [<sup>c</sup>Dan Maje], the tree of *Magori* [any part can be used as a source of medicine; <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje is compared with this tree]. He protects his people from raids by enemies, and gives his warriors courage in war. Hamza taught Maje; Maje begot Abubakar. Hamza brought Abubakar to Ningi, and in Ningi, Abubakar became known as "the son [<sup>c</sup>Dan] of Maje"; thus Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje, who shaved the head of Hamza. God have mercy upon Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje -- Praise Song of Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje by Ningi Palace Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>c</sup>Dan Maje reigned from 1855-1870. And like his predecessors, he died at the hands of Bauchi Emirate forces.

Malam Haruna Karami, the son of Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje, became the next leader of Ningi. As the praise song suggests, Malam Haruna Karami is regarded as the most powerful leader of all in Ningi history:

Let us call upon Gimson, owner of the large end of the spear [when he goes to war, he does not use the sharp pointed end of the spear] . . . let us face any opponent. He [Haruna] is the one who did not run from the pointed end of the spear nor the sharpness of any metal. He who has *talisman* [Kambi] for war, Haruna, Son of Abubakar <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje . . . The stranger of Ringim, the stranger of Gubi, the stranger of Anchau, the stranger of Kuzuntu, and stranger of Soba [towns raided in Kano, Bauchi, and Zazzau]. He who never climbs upon a horse for play [he rode horses only to go out to war!]. The Bull of Ningi, he burnt the district of everybody! He transformed men into women, Haruna Gimson -- Praise Song of Malam Haruna Karami by Ningi Place Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>10</sup>

Haruna Karami was leader of Ningi ca. 1870-1886. Unlike his predecessors, he died in the palace but from wounds, it was said, that he received in battle.

Malam Abubakar Gijigi followed his brother Haruna Karami into power. The praise song indicates that he was a man of peace (*amana*) rather than war and shows even more the basis of his support - the palace slaves - in attaining the leadership:

Let us call upon Abubakar Gajigi - the chief of righteousness - and owner of patience as the largest gift. He was the 'father' of *Shamaki*, the servant of the chief -- Praise Song of Malam Abubakar Gajigi by Ningi Palace Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>11</sup>

Malam Gajigi's reign, which lasted for only four years, was ended by a success-

ionist dispute (ca. 1886-1890). He died at the hands of his nephew in a triangle of palace intrigue. (Gajigi's son, Malam Yahaya, who was born ca. 1869, was my chief informant for much of the reconstruction of Ningi history; he was ninety-five years old in 1973 during the active fieldwork period.<sup>12</sup>)

Malam Usman Dan Yaya was the chief beneficiary of the intrigue against Malam Gajigi and entered the palace ca. 1890. A third and separate family lineage now became part of the succession order. The oral tradition holds that Dan Yaya was a sizable and muscular figure, and interspersed on his shaven head were plats of hair on the top and just above the ear. Special charms for protection in war hung from his neck and from around his waist. He wore the half-length gown (*riga*) which freed his legs for speed in mounting and dismounting during the wars when he often faced a foe and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. In short, his bravery made him an awesome figure in war.<sup>13</sup>

The praise song of Dan Yaya indicates that his reign was characterized by continuity in the tradition of resistance to empire:

Let call upon Dan Yaya! . . . the ant hill, the hump of the farm [when scattered over the land, ant hills give fertility to the soil]; he who is courageous; he that belongs to Haruna Baba [father and commander of war, *Sarkin Yaki*, under <sup>c</sup>Dan Maje]; he that had *talisman* for war [a type of medicine placed around the arm for protection]. In each village that he approached, there would be no morning prayers, nor cooked food nor remains of the previous night . . . ant hill, hump of the farm!

*Wandara*, the cow that became a bull by force [In war strategy, he deceives the enemy; people thought that he was coming in one direction but to their surprise he appears someplace else]. . . Dan Yaya, even his enemy would not call him a coward! The father of Shaho and Dada [powerful slaves of Dan Yaya]. . . twice the Emir of Kano came [Aliyu came 1895, 1898] but he could not win and left the Ningawa alone -- Praise Song of Malam Usman Dan Yaya by the Ningi Palace Musicians, *Sarkin Jauge*.<sup>14</sup>

Malam Dan Yaya's rule came to an end at the hands of a British colonial expeditionary force on 23 July 1902. Our story ends in lore. Realizing that the end was near, Dan Yaya sat by a tree and told the Buta people to send a small boy to shoot him with a non-poisonous arrow, for special charms protected him against poisonous ones. The boy came and did as told. Dan Yaya died at his hands. But for Dan Yaya, the violent end was not over. The villagers cut off his head, placed it in a calabash and gave it to the colonial Resident who hung the head of Dan Yaya outside the palace for three days before final burial at "Kukar makau."<sup>15</sup>

Ningi, indeed, passed under colonial administration as the twentieth century dawned. But the tradition of resistance had become too much of an integral part of the Ningi political culture, and so it was not until about 1925 that the Ningi accepted some semblance of control under colonial rule.



Malam Yahaya (age 95), oral historian, Ningi Town, Nigeria (1973). Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center



Malam Yahaya. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

## NOTES

1. The Foreign Area Fellowship Program (now SSRC) provided funds for the original fieldwork for this paper in northern Nigeria in 1972-1973. This essay is based upon the following completed work: Adell Patton Jr., "The Ningi Chieftdom and the African Frontier: Mountaineers and Resistance to the Sokoto Caliphate, ca. 1800-1908" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975); henceforth expressed as Patton, Thesis. I express the usual disclaimer.

The Ningi oral history collected is on deposit for use at the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru-Zaira, Nigeria, and at the Archives of Traditional Music, 013 Maxwell Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

2. H.L. Lefferts Jr., "Frontier Democracy: An Introduction," in *The Frontier: Comparative Studies*, eds. David W. Miller and Jerome O. Stefen (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), p. 35.

3. Patton, Thesis, p. 38.

4. Adell Patton Jr., "The Name Ningi and Developing Pre-Colonial Citizenship: A 'Non-Tribal' Perspective in Nineteenth-Century Hausaland," *Afrika und Ubersee* Band LXII: 4(1979): 241-252. The "awa" suffix is the plural for "people" in the Hausa language, and "ulama" refers to "scholars" in the Arabic plural. (See Ningi Succession - Appendix)

5. J.A. Barnes, "Genealogies," in *The Craft of Social Anthropology*, ed. A.L. Epstein (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), pp. 101-128; and Patton, Thesis, p. 75.

6. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1961), p. 21; Patton, Thesis, pp. 4-5.

7. Sarkin Jauge (Kidani Jauge) et al, interviewed at Ningi Town on 24 July 1973 (Tape 12, Side A and B).

8. Sarkin Jauge (Tape 12).

9. Sarkin Jauge (Tape 12).

10. Sarkin Jauge (Tape 12).

11. Sarkin Jauge (Tape 12).

12. Patton, Thesis, pp. 250-255.

13. Patton, Thesis, p. 257.

14. Sarkin Jauge (Tape 12).

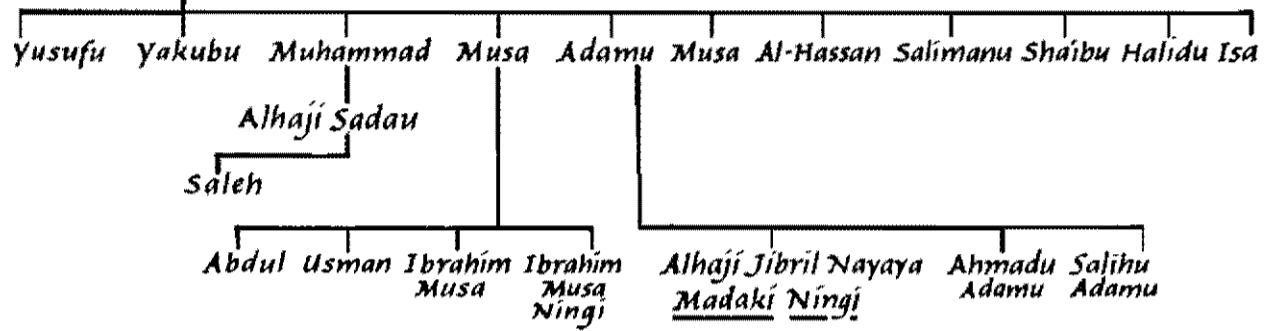
15. Patton, Thesis, pp. 277-278.

**KANO MALAMS OF TSAKUWA  
WHO CAME TO NINGI, CA. 1846**

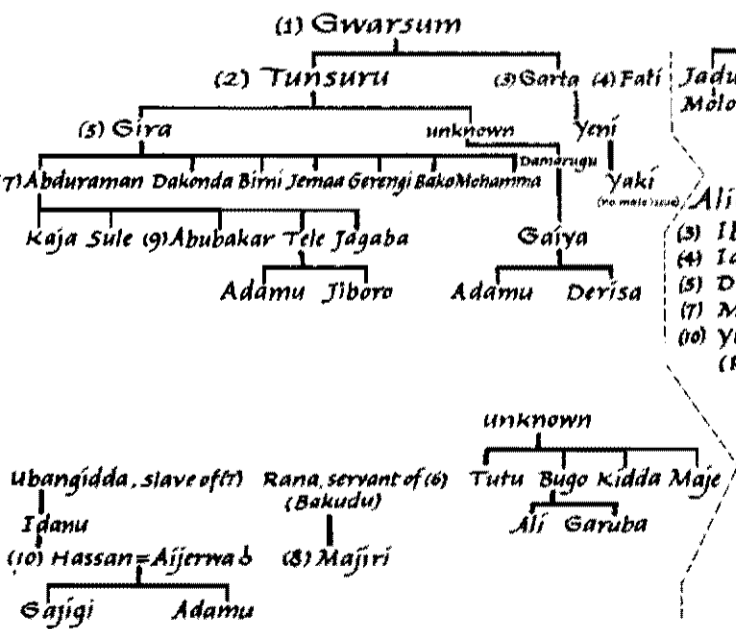
1. Malam Hamza
2. Malam Ahmadu
3. Malam Umoru
4. Malam Musa Mai Mazari
5. Malam Baau
6. Malam Haruna Baba
7. Malam Yakubu
8. Malam Bako
9. Malam Musa Mai Godia
10. Malam Audu
11. Malam Abubakar Dan Maje
12. Malam Usman
13. Malam Dan Goriba
14. Malam Amidu
15. Malam Jibirin
16. Malam Chigeru

**'ULAMA LINE**

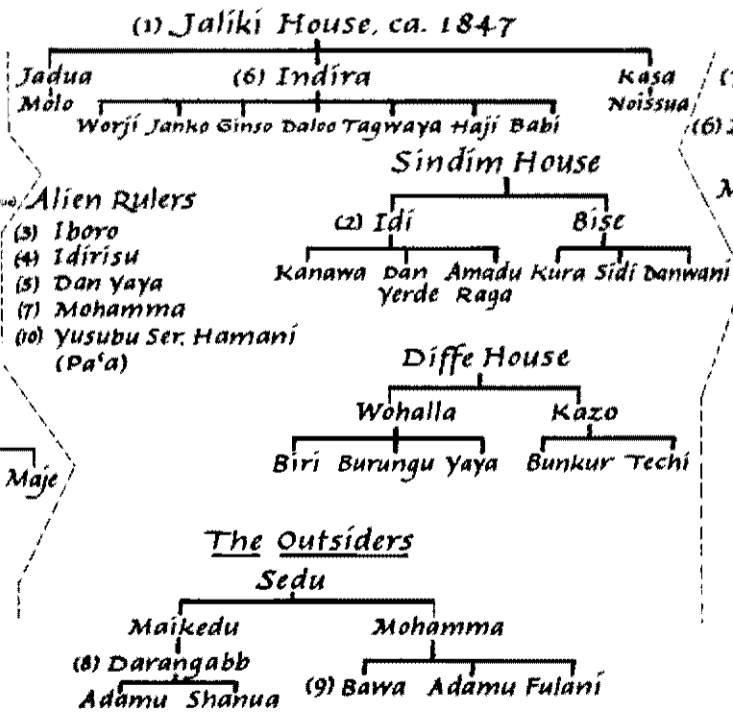
Malam Abdullahi (Kano City)  
 Malam Muhammadu Dawa  
 Malam Muhammad Nafiu Mai Tsamiya (Ningi, ca. 1860)  
 Malam Jibril Sankace



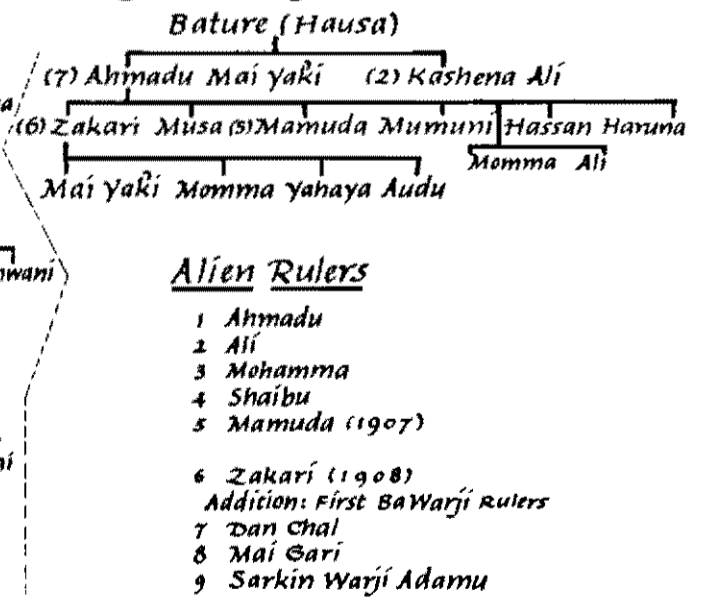
**Butawa Succession, Burra**



**Pa'awa Succession, Ari**

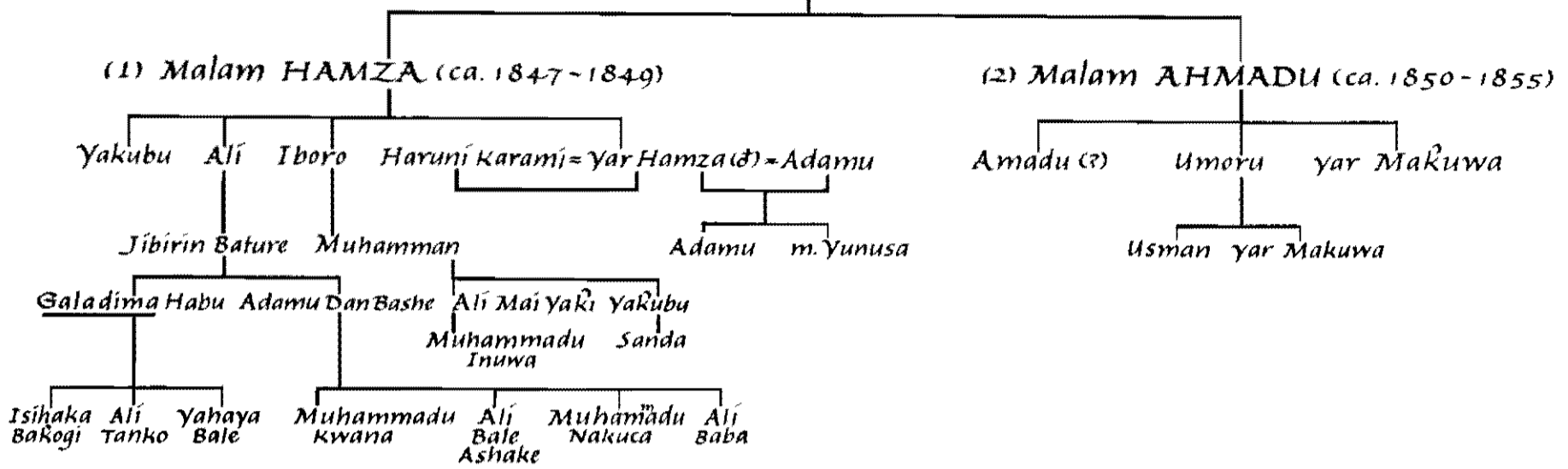


**Badunga & Warjawa Succession, Warji**



# NINGI SUCCESSION

## MAKA TSAKUWA

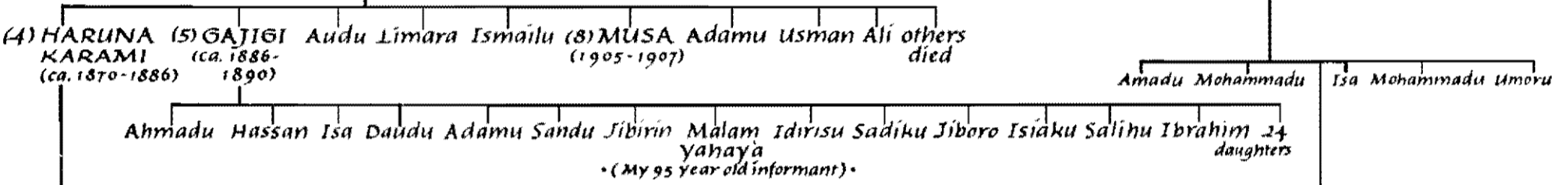


## MAGE

Haruna Baba

(3) Malam ABUBAKAR DAN MAJE (ca. 1855-1870)

(6) USMAN DAN YAYA (1890-1902)



MAMUDA Yunusa Babua Isiaku Adamu Da Mohammeda Idi Ali Alhassan Audu Ibrahim Sule Adamu Yukubu Salifu (?) (1902-1905) (1906-1915)

