

## The myth of the sigui, Dogon

In the village of Yougo lived Sen Senu, a young boy, with his father Sanga Yèngulu and his mother Na Yèngulu. When herding his father's cattle, Sen Senu grew tired and thirsty and climbed a tamarind tree to suck its fruits. The owner of the tree came along: 'What are you doing in my tree? Shall I throw my stick at you?' Sen Senu, showing no respect, answered: 'I want to suck them with my mouth, not my anus'. Of course the owner grew angry and hit him. When he came limping home, Sen Senu's parents asked why he had been beaten and how he had lost the herd. 'I have been hit by the owner of the tamarind tree!' His father promised to come with Sen Senu next day and kill the owner. In the early morning, the birds awakened Sen Senu and his father, and they walked to the tree. The owner met them. 'Why have you beaten my son?' The owner answered: 'Because he has insulted me' and told how Sen Senu in answer to his question what he was doing in his tree, had answered that he sucked with his mouth not his anus. The father asked his son whether this was true, and his son agreed. 'Please accept the apologies for my son', the father said. The owner, accepting the apologies, told the father: 'Climb the tamarind and take whatever fruits you like, or suck as many as you like now.' The father, with his gun at the foot of the tree, climbed and plucked a number of fruits. From beneath Sen Senu called him 'Why do you climb the tree, father?' 'The owner has given me fruits for the porridge.' Sen Senu retorted: 'That is not the way, father. First you come to kill him, now you accept his fruits as a gift. If you are like that I am no longer your herdsman.' 'That I entirely up to you, son.' 'My way', Sen Senu said, 'is the way of the sigui, I shall follow the sigui. 'All right, my son, that is entirely up to you!' So Sen Senu set out alone into the bush, and met someone herding chicken. After exchanging greetings, the stranger asked where Sen Senu was heading. 'I am following the road of the sigui.' 'That is a hard road, the road of the sigui.' 'Still I want to try it', said Sen Senu. Somewhat further in the bush, in encounters with people herding goats, sheep, horses, donkeys and cattle, the same exchange was held: 'Where are you going?' 'I follow the sigui oju.' 'The sigui oju is a hard road.' 'I shall try it anyway.' At last Sen Senu encountered an elephant [in some versions it is a lion]. 'Where are you going?' Sen Senu: 'I follow the road of the sigui.' The elephant trumpeted: 'I have the sigui.' Sen Senu: 'If you have the sigui, then do as you like.' The elephant ate Sen Senu, and for three whole years Sen Senu remained inside the elephant's belly. At length the elephant grew thirsty, and set out to drink in a water-hole just outside the village. The animal then defecated, and out came Sen Senu, carrying with him the *dalewa* (the forked sigui stool), the oblong calabash (*koju pom*) and the horse tail (*sô duro*). Then his sister came along to fetch water. Seeing Sen Senu, she tried to speak to him, but he could not speak. She ran back into the village, and cried out loudly: 'Sen Senu is at the pool.' Her father thought she was crazy, as Sen Senu had been away for three years, eaten by the elephant, and the period of mourning him had long come to an end. 'Look for yourself' she said, and so he did. At the water-hole, his father asked Sen Senu to come home. Sen Senu started to speak in the language of sigui (sigui so): 'Go and brew beer, let everyone adorn himself in his finest; if not, I will not be able to return home. So, go and receive me' [in the long version Sen Senu gives very detailed instructions on how to brew beer, how to fetch water, how to make porridge, how to ferment the beer and how to ration it]. When everything had been done as instructed, the elders came to Sen Senu and asked: 'Who shall be in front?' Sen Senu then sang one of the twelve sigui songs, 'Please forgive, elders, you are the oldest, but if you do not know the road of the sigui, I am the first, and I will turn to the left.' The elders responded: 'Yes, you know the way. Three years is not three days; you have been inside the elephant, you know more than we do.' Thus Sen Senu came home, and this is the way that the sigui came to the villages.