

Letters in Mandinka 2¹

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Letter 1²

Tell Mr. B. S. and Mr. B.J. that Y. says that if his marriage project does not move forward, let us drop it because he thinks there is no agreement. Concerning the woman, Mr. B. did not give his opinion. He is not interested. So, it's not worth pursuing it.

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Letter 2: Part A³

This letter comes from Mr. N.D. of the Dafee family and is intended for Mr. B.D. in Dakar. I greet you very well. After the greetings, don't think I have forgotten about you. I think about you a lot. It is only that I was very focused on Mrs. M.J.'s toothache. I am very much concerned about that.

That's why you haven't heard from me for a long time. I think about you. God willing, I plan to go to Kafountine. When I am there, God willing, I will come see you with Mr. A.J. I ask you to help me acquire the book: *History of Islam: Part 1 and 2*. Tell

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Letter 2: Part B

Mr. I.D. to help me get a copy of the Quran with reddish pages. I ask Mr. B.B.D to give me clothes and shoes. That's it. Peace be upon you.

¹ To protect the anonymity of the people mentioned in these letters, we have abbreviated their names.

² Letter from a father about a marriage project of one of his sons which failed because of the silence of a close relative of the daughter.

³ Letter from one brother to another giving his news and that of his sick sister and asking for help.

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Letter 3⁴

B., I pray for you night and day. I wish you a long life and prosperity. I haven't forgotten about you, and never will. It's just because I'm worried about your mother. But be brave. I pray for you. Be brave. I continue to pray for you. This is what family is about! However, what worries me the most is the disagreement between the Fanda family members and those in Guinea [Bissau] during your absence. The most important thing for me is to hear the good things people say about you. But it's all over. I pray for good things to be said about you. Hearing that makes me really happy.

Apart from that, I also greet Mr. Y. I wish him a long life and success. I pray for him constantly, night and day. The divination I made for him indicates that he must make the following offerings: offer four bowls of rice, pants, curdled milk, a white rooster, and cloth to people.⁵

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Letter 4: Part A⁶

Praise be to Allah who brought the message to us through His Messenger [Muhammad]. After that, Mr. U.D., Mr. Y.S. [the letter writer] says that he sends his warm greetings to you and to your family members. He begs you in the name of God and your father to call Mrs. M.⁷ to speak to her seriously. Never be ashamed to tell her the truth because she represents you wherever she is. He [Mr. Y.S., the husband] says that the daughter he had with Mrs. M. refuses to marry. Her little sister B. doesn't want to get married either. So, she has to discipline the [older] girl. It is imperative that

⁴ Letter from a father to one of his sons.

⁵ Here the pants in question are the local ones that are very wide, with a low inseam and a rope belt. Divination is widely practiced among the Mandinka people and offerings such as those named in the text ward off evil and attract happiness.

⁶ Letter from a traveling husband to his father-in-law concerning his daughter who refuses to marry and engages in small business.

⁷ The letter writer's wife.

she abandons the small business. He [the husband] does not like it at all. You have to discipline her if she wants to engage in petty commerce. She should be entrusted to Mrs. M. However, if she continues to engage in small business, the day she has problems, you would be responsible yourself, because people can call [the husband] and tell him that it is you [Mr. U. D] who let [the girl] do petty trading. He [the husband] says he doesn't want to hear that again. Let she [his wife] never send her to do petty trading again. That's all, Mr. D. I send you my warm greetings. Mrs F.S. H,

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Letter 4: Part B

I send you my cordial greetings. In addition, I inform you that Mrs. T. gave birth on Saturday the eleventh of the month of bannaa konoŋ.⁸ Also, Mr. A. U. D, I send you the most cordial greetings of Mr. M. S. as well as to the members of your family. Mr. A.D.D, I also convey to you the greetings of Mrs. K.D. I also convey to you the greetings of Mr. J. Peace be upon you.

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Letter 5⁹

This letter comes from the hands of Mr. N.D. and is intended for Mr. B. residing in Dakar. I send you my warm greetings. Apart from greetings, I, Mr. N.D., I am letting you know that I did not appreciate your behavior at all. You left without coming to visit me. I have no idea about your business. Regarding your official documents, I have no idea what is happening because you did not come to see me. You did not write to me. You can write to me and give the letter to Mr. A.D. when he comes home. Please help me with two pairs of pants. Please help me because I have no more clothes. That's all. Peace be upon you.

⁸ The 11th month of the Mandinka lunar calendar.

⁹ Letter of complaint and request for help from an elderly person to a young close relative.