LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Serer are famous throughout Senegal and Gambia for their clothing. Serr is a traditional clothing woven by men. Serr is believed to bring good luck to those who wear it. The Serer people are also famous for a form of wrestling that is popular throughout the region called Laamb or Njomb. Serer religion is centered on universal supreme deity called Rog. There are also lesser gods, goddesses and spirits. The Serers strongly believe in the importance of the ancestral spirits (pangool) and reincarnation.

The Serer people are also known for their music. The drum tradition called Sabar originated from the Serer kingdom of Sine. It has since gained popularity among Wolof people. The Serer are also credited with creating the traditions of Njuup and Tassu. These are oral traditions; which similar to chants and are traditionally used in the Serer religious contexts, marriages, naming ceremonies and praise songs. Some say they are precursors of modern rap music. The Senegalese music legend Youssou N’Dour is Serer and incorporates the Tassu oral tradition into many of his songs.

STUDYING SERER-SINE IN THE US

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/
WHO SPEAKS SERER-SINE?

There are two theories on the origins of the Serer people. One holds that they originated from the Kabbu Empire (present-day Guinea Bissau). They were then forced to migrate to the Futa Toro area of Southern Senegal under the control of the Tukulors. In the 12th century, Wolof forced them to migrate again to the Sine-Saloum area. The Serer then established small states which included areas in present day Senegal and the Gambia. Although the Mandinka controlled the Sine-Saloum area, Serer tradition, language, and culture allegedly prevailed and Mandinkas absorbed many of these notions. The second theory holds that Serer people actually originated north of Senegal in the Kabu empire. They migrated about 400 years ago after a civil war and settled in the present-day Senegal.

The Serer people were traditionally organized into five societal class groups: The ruling nobles, soldiers (Tyeddo), Free-Born commoners (Jambar), low-caste artisans and the slaves. The leader of Serers was called ether Burr, Maat, Maad, or Lamane. The Lamane was the controller of the state and the forces of nature. He was ritually killed when he reached old age as he could no longer ensure the fertility of females or livestock-critical to the strength of the Serer kingdom.

WHY STUDY SERER-SINE?

Serer-Sine is spoken in Senegal and the Gambia. There are approximately 1.2 million speakers of the language. Serer are the third largest ethnic group in Senegal. They make up approximately 15% of the population in Senegal and about 2% of the population in the Gambia. Serer-Sine is taught in primary school in Senegal and can also be heard on the radio and in television. Students interested in African Art, African history, anthropology, archaeology, the international relations, non-governmental organization work and government work will find the Serer-Sine a valuable language to study.

Some typical Serer-Sine greetings:
Na feto ------------------------ general greeting
Ndio ko ---------------------- morning greeting
Guiro po ko --------------------afternoon greeting
Nam fi’o?--------------------how are you? (to one person)
Mexe meen ----------------------reply to Nam fi’o?
Nam nou biyou ------------------how are you? (to a group)
Inn ixre meen ---------------reply to Nam nou biyou
Ta mbind na?----------------------how is the family?
Owa maa ------------------reply to Ta mbind na