

# Kouroukan Fouga or Manden Charter: An African-centered Deictic Fractal Analysis

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## Abstract

Using a combination of the linguistic analytical tool of Deixis (i.e. words or phrases whose meanings hinge upon the specific context of the utterance/text, including a speaker's/writer's identity, location, and time) and the mathematical analytical tool of Fractals (i.e. complex, never-ending geometric patterns that are self-similar across different scales), this paper delineates the deep structural meanings embedded in the Kouroukan Fouga or Manden Charter/Constitution undergirded by the African-centered Approach (i.e. a philosophical and analytical framework that prioritizes African agency, history, and culture to counter Eurocentric domination). Thus, the analysis is triangulative: i.e. the use of a mixture to qualitative and quantitative techniques to generate findings and enhance their validity, credibility, and depth. There are a small number of works that have broached the Constitution, albeit these are descriptive. This paper transcends these works by offering a systematic analysis of the Constitution. Therefore, the essence of the paper hinges upon how structured, objective and reproducible methods are employed to break down a complex subject, eliminate bias, and draw accurate conclusions. It replaces intuition and guesswork with a rigorous, step-by-step approach to problem-solving and information evaluation

Keywords: African-centered Approach, Deixis, Fractal, Kouroukan Fouga or Manden Charter/Constitution

## Introduction

To commence with, from Gregory Mann (2022), one obtains that the Kouroukan Fouga or Manden Charter is a 13<sup>th</sup>-Century oral Constitution, proclaimed around 1235–1236 following the Battle of Krina by Sundiata Keita and his council to “govern the Mali Empire.” Mann adds that the Constitution established “social organization,” “human rights,” and “laws covering peace, equality, and abolition of slavery.”

One also learns from Mann (2022) six major aspects of the Constitution. The first aspect is the “Proclamation.” This was originated after the battle of Krina (1235) in Kurukan Fuga (now Guinea) as a social contract for the Mandinka clans. The second aspect is “Oral Tradition.” The Constitution was passed down orally for centuries by griots, and it was often put to paper in the

modern era (notably by Youssouf Tata Cissé). The third aspect concerns the “Core Principles:” The Constitution is viewed as an early charter of human rights, advocating for the sanctity of life, freedom of expression, and social peace. The fourth aspect has to do with “Social Organization.” The Constitution divided society into clans (warriors, marabouts, nyamakalas) and introduced age groups for governance. The fifth aspect relates to “Content Pillars”: i.e. (a) “abolition of slavery,” specifically ended slavery by razzia (raids); (b) “rights:” the focus is on food security, education, and protection of the individual; (c) “rule of law”: it established the “Hunters' Oath”—a “no iron in the mouth” rule (prohibiting brutal punishment), and allowed for freedom of trade. And the sixth aspect is vis-à-vis “Recognition”—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) added the Charter to its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009.

In addition, according to Just Alessa, the Manden Constitution is considered one of the oldest constitutions in the world. The author adds:

According to UNESCO, in the early thirteenth century, following a major military victory, the founder of the Mandingo Empire and the assembly of his wise men proclaimed in Kurukan Fuga the new Manden Charter, named after the territory situated above the upper Niger River basin, between present-day Guinea and Mali. The Charter, one of the oldest constitutions in the world albeit mainly in oral form, contains a preamble of seven chapters advocating social peace in diversity, the inviolability of the human being, education, the integrity of the motherland, food security, the abolition of slavery by razzia (or raid), and freedom of expression and trade (2022, 1).

Indeed, there are a small number of works that have broached the Constitution, albeit these are descriptive (examples, Mann, 2022; Alessa, 2022; UNESCO, 2026; Correct Connect Africa Foundation—CCAF, 2026). This paper transcends these works by offering a systematic analysis of the Constitution. Therefore, the essence of the paper hinges upon how structured, objective and reproducible methods are employed to break down a complex subject, eliminate bias, and draw accurate conclusions. It replaces intuition and guesswork with a rigorous, step-by-step approach to problem-solving and information evaluation. Before doing all this, however, I first describe the three methodological approaches employed to ground the research and analysis of the paper: (1) African-centered Approach, (2) Deictic Analysis, and (3) Fractal Analysis. I address them one at a time in the ensuing sections for the sake of cohesion.

### **African-centered Approach**

Also referred to as “African-centric,” “African-centrality,” “African-centric,” “Afrocentric,” or “Afrocentricity,” the African-centered Approach is a “philosophical and analytical framework that prioritizes African agency, history, and culture to counter Eurocentric domination” (see Asante, 1987; Bangura, 2011a, 2011b, 2020;;Bangura et al., 2019). And as Abdul Karim Bangura the leading scholar on African-centered research methodologies, proffers, Western methodologies have historically marginalized African communities and fail to fully capture the continent's social and scientific realities. He therefore calls for “deneocolonizing” (transcending “decolonizing”) knowledge by integrating indigenous African thought with rigorous scientific and mathematical frameworks (Bangura, 2011a, 2011b, 2020;;Bangura et al., 2019).

Also, Bangura tenders five major concepts for the African-Centered Approach. The first concept is about “Mathematical Foundations.” He utilizes “mathematization” to validate indigenous knowledge. For example, he has converted African axioms and cultural ideas into differential equations to test their scientific validity, a method he traces back to Kemetic/Ancient Egyptian traditions. The second concept deals with “Linguistic Integration.” Bangura highlights the importance of the “African Mother Tongue” in shaping mathematical and scientific concepts, arguing that language and thought are inseparable in the production of knowledge. The third concept concerns “Denecolonizing Methodology.” He avers that alternative, African-centered approaches are necessary to rectify the “oversight” of three centuries of Western dominance in African discourse during colonialism and neocolonialism. The fourth concept pertains to the “Diopian Influence.” His work is heavily influenced by Cheikh Anta Diop, adopting a pluridisciplinary approach that seeks to demonstrate the historical and cultural continuity of African civilizations. And the fifth concept has to do with “Methodological Diversity.” He promotes various indigenous-focused frameworks such as (a) “Ubuntugogy”—a teaching and research method based on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* (“humanity toward others”); (b) “Sankofa Methodology”—using historical understanding to inform current and future progress; and (c) “Ujamaa Methodology”—applying concepts of collective brotherhood and sisterhood and cooperation to social research à la Julius Nyerere’s philosophy (Bangura, 2011a, 2011b, 2020;;Bangura et al., 2019).

### **Deictic Analysis**

Once again, based on the works of Bangura, the leading African scholar on the subject matter of Deictic Analysis, the underlying concept, of the approach, i.e. “Deixis,” refers to words or phrases whose meanings hinge upon “the specific context of the utterance/text, including a speaker’s/writer’s identity, location, and time.” As a multidisciplinary scholar, he utilizes Deictic Analysis as a core component of his “pragmatic linguistic” methodology to examine the deeper meanings and power dynamics within historical, religious and political texts (Bangura, 2011c, 2020, 2023).

In addition, Bangura, utilizes three major applications of Deictic Analysis alongside other pragmatic tools like “Presupposition” (i.e. an assumptions made by a speaker/writer that is taken for granted, which is typically “backgrounded” rather than asserted, maintaining its truth even when a sentence is negated), “Implicature” (i.e. how speakers/writers imply meaning beyond the literal, truth-conditional content of an utterance), “Speech Act” (i.e. what is accomplished by speaking, such as ordering, promising, or apologizing), and “Conversational Structure” (i.e. the organization of interaction, such as turn-taking and adjacency pairs) to decode how speakers ground themselves and their audience in a narrative. The three major applications are in (1) “Religious and Literary Analysis” (e.g., Bangura, 2023), (2) “Political Discourse” (e.g., Bangura, 2011c), and (3) “Methodological Integration” (e.g., Bangura, 2020). In all of these applications, he contends that Deictic Analysis is essential for identifying the “supernatural, person, place/space, time, discourse, and social” anchors that reveal an speaker’s/writer’s true intent or ideological stance, which is often missed in standard historical readings (Bangura, 2011c, 2020, 2023).

Furthermore, Bangura provides denotations for the various types of Deixis. They are as follows: (a) “Supernatural Deixis” are those referring to entities such as God, gods, ghosts, demons, spirits, etc. within a shared context; (b) “Person Deixis” are those referring to

participants in a discourse, including the speaker/writer, the addressee, and others; (c) “Place/Space Deixis” are those used to indicate locations relative to the speaker’s/writer’s position in a communicative context, acting as linguistic “pointers”; (d) “Time Deixis” are those used to locate events temporally relative to the speaker’s/writer’s moment of utterance/writing; (e) “Discourse Deixis” are those used to refer to specific parts of an ongoing spoken/written discourse; and (f) “Social Deixis” are those used to encode social relationships, status, and familiarity between speakers/writers, listeners, and referents (Bangura, 2011c, 2020, 2023).

### **Fractal Analysis**

Culling from the works of Ron Eglash (e.g., 1999) and Bangura (e.g., 2015), the two leading scholars on African Fractals, the “Fractal Analysis” approach can be generally denoted as the systematic examination of “complex, never-ending geometric patterns that are self-similar across different scales.” Nonetheless, Bangura pioneered the use of Fractal Analysis to study the deep-level linguistic and social patterns within the works of major African and Black thinkers. By combining mathematical modeling with linguistic tools, he identifies recurring self-similar structures—fractals—in literature, political thought, and indigenous artifacts.

Anchoring his Fractal Analysis on the Pluridisciplinary Approach, Bangura transforms “qualitative literary or social meanings” into “quantitative mathematical models.” The models are the following: (a) “Linguistic Presupposition”—he analyzes the implicit “truth” or background assumptions in a statement; and (b) “Fractal Complexity”—he uses the mathematical concept of Fractal Dimension to measure the complexity and “self-similarity” of these ideas across different scales of a text or culture (e.g., Bangura, 2015).

In addition, Eglash (e.g., 1999) and Bangura (e.g., 2015) utilize four major “methods of estimation.” These methods include (1) “Box-Counting” used to divide images into smaller grids to calculate how detail changes with scale; (2) “Higuchi's Method” used for calculating the fractal dimension of time series directly in the time domain; (3) “Hurst Exponent” used to evaluate the long-term memory of a time series; and (4) “Multifractal Analysis” used to extend analysis to systems with multiple scaling behaviors.

Moreover, Eglash (e.g., 1999) and Bangura (e.g., 2015) are not oblivious to the major “characteristics and challenges” of Fractal Analysis. These include (a) “Self-affinity”—often, natural structures are not perfectly self-similar, but “self-affine” (different scaling in different directions); (b) “Finite Limits”—unlike theoretical fractals, real-world data have limits (pixels on a screen, noise in data) that restrict the range over which fractal behavior can be observed; and (c) “Validation”—a non-integer dimension does not automatically prove that a pattern is a true fractal, thereby requiring further validation of the structure’s scaling properties.

### **Data Analysis**

For clarity, the data analysis is segmented into two interrelated subsections. The first subsection entails the Deictic Analysis as it logically facilitates the Fractal Analysis in the second subsection.

## Deictic Analysis

To start with, the Constitution is divided into four sections or categories with a significantly disproportionate numbers of articles. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Constitution's Sections by Articles

| Section Title                | N of Articles | % of Articles |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Social Organization       | 31            | 71            |
| 2. Property Rights           | 5             | 11            |
| 3. Environmental Protection  | 3             | 7             |
| 4. Personal Responsibilities | 5             | 11            |
| Total                        | 44            | 100%          |
| Mean                         | 11            | N/A           |
| Standard Deviation           | 13            | N/A           |
| Range                        | 28            | N/A           |
| Variance                     | 173           | N/A           |

Source: Self-generated by the Author Using  
Data from the Constitution

Noted: The computed results using MATLAB  
are rounded to the nearest tenth

As shown in Table 1, the overwhelming majority of the articles (31 or 71%) are in the first section titled "Social Organization." The number of articles in the remaining three sections (ie. "Property Rights," "Environmental Protection" and "Personal Responsibility" ranges from 3 (7%) to 5 (11%). Also, the mean of 11, standard deviation of 13, range of 28, and variance of 173 indicate that the differences among the sections are statistically quite significant.

Next, a painstaking examination of the Constitution yielded a total of deixis: Person, Place/Space, Time, Discourse, and Social Deixis. There is no Supernatural Deixis. The following are the 37 Person Deixis:

1. Marabouts
2. Nyamakalas
3. everyone
4. age groups
5. young people
6. old people
7. one's fellow
8. Mandinka
9. brothers-in-law
10. sisters-in-law
11. grandparents
12. grandchildren
13. children
14. We
15. wife
16. child

17. neighbor
18. son
19. father's brethren
20. he
21. women
22. mother
23. married woman
24. husband
25. our
26. man
27. wives of the chief
28. foreigners
29. she
30. young man
31. father
32. those who are in need
33. owner
34. guardian
35. kinship
36. enemy
37. him

There is only one Time Deixis:

1. three years

There is also only one Discourse Deixis as follows:

1. sixteen clans of quiver carriers

The ensuing are the 16 Social Deixis:

1. slaves
2. chiefs
3. counsellors
4. teachers
5. educators
6. The members of the intermediary class
7. The Keita family
8. reigning family
9. minor
10. Nyaaras (the talented)
11. master of the slave
12. ambassador
13. Fakombè i(nominated chief of hunters)
14. representatives

15. Kouyaté (nominated chief of ceremonies and mediator in Manden. He is allowed to joke with all groups, in priority with the royal family)
16. The royal family

There are six Place/Space Deixis:

1. The Great Mande Society
2. the society
3. the whole territory
4. the empire
5. Manden
6. neighborhood

Also, as displayed in Table 2, the largest number of Deixis are the Person variety (37 or 60%), followed by the Social variety (16 or 26%) in a distant second. The rest of the categories are quite negligible. In addition, the mean of 12, the range of 36, the standard deviation of 15 and the variance of 229 mean that the differences among the various categories of Deixis are statistically significant.

Table 2: Deixis in the Constitution

| Type               | N   | %    |
|--------------------|-----|------|
| Person Deixis      | 37  | 60   |
| Place/Space Deixis | 6   | 10   |
| Time Deixis        | 1   | 2    |
| Discourse Deixis   | 1   | 2    |
| Social Deixis      | 16  | 26   |
| Total              | 61  | 100% |
| Mean               | 12  | N/A  |
| Range              | 36  | N/A  |
| Standard Deviation | 15  | N/A  |
| Variance           | 229 | N/A  |

Source: Self-generated by the Euthr Using Data from the Constitution

Note: The computed results using MATLAB are rounded to the nearest tenth

The ultimate question that emerges here is the following: What are the major meanings underlying the preceding Deixis? The ensuing paragraphs encompass an attempt to provide an answer to this query.

First, seven major thematic meanings are embedded in the Kurukan Fuga. They are the following: (1) the “Sanctity of Human Life”—the Constitution proclaims that “every human life is a life” and that no life is superior to another, thereby establishing the inviolability of the human being; (2) “Abolition of Slavery and Slave Raids”—it explicitly condemned slavery (*razzia*) and sought to eliminate the raiding and selling of fellow humans, declaring that “the essence of slavery is extinguished this day”; (3) “Social Peace and Diversity”—the Constitution aimed to manage relations between diverse ethnic groups and encourage peaceful coexistence,

and it established the *sanankunya* (a “joking relationship”) and the *tanamannyonya* (“blood pact”) to manage disputes; (4) “Women’s Rights and Protection”—the Constitution includes clauses emphasizing the respect for women, stating “never offend women, our mothers” and mandating their inclusion in social management; (5) “Freedom of Expression and Trade”—it advocated for freedom of speech and trade, allowing citizens to enjoy the fruits of their labor; (6) “Food Security and Education”—the Constitution prioritized combating hunger and recognized that educating children is a shared responsibility of society; and (7) “Environmental Responsibility”—it introduced regulations regarding the protection of nature, such as requiring people to look for fruit before setting fire to the bush and the protection of trees.

Second, there are three major meanings vis-à-vis the aspects of the Constitution. These include (1) “Oral Tradition”—the Constitution is mainly transmitted through oral tradition by griots, although it has been transcribed in modern times; (2) “Structure”—it is comprised of 44 edicts; and (3) “Focus on Community”—while containing modern-sounding liberties, it primarily emphasizes the rights of communities, social roles, and responsibilities rather than solely individualistic rights.

### Fractal Analysis

Here, I analyze the self-repeating attribute of Fractals that are embedded in the Constitution. The unit of analysis utilized is Deixis. The data were categorized in a “two-dimensional ad hoc classificatory system” of “Order” or “Disorder” for the analysis. Bangura defines *Order* as “a condition of logical or comprehensible arrangement among the separate elements of a group” and *Disorder* as “a condition or place of confusion, mess, disturbance, disarray, or muddle” (e.g., Bangura, 2011c, 2015, 2023). Accordingly, for this analysis, following Bangura,

the two categories (i.e. *Order* versus *Disorder*) are based on the bottom-up processing approach (i.e. a sensory analysis that begins at the entry level with what our senses can detect whereby the environment influences our thoughts), as opposed to the top-down processing approach whereby our thinking influences how we perceive the environment that is well-known in linguistic analysis for further examination. This called for working out the meanings of the linguistic tokens processed and building up composite meanings for them (see Bangura, 2011c, 2015, 2023).

For starters, in order to compute the univariate and bivariate statistics for the descriptive and inferential analyses of the data derived from the text of the Constitution, as I aforementioned, a “two-dimensional ad hoc classificatory system” was developed within which the data were categorized as belonging to the various types/categories of Deixis vis-à-vis the *Order* or the *Disorder* category. *Order* is triggered by, for example, the Person Deixis “guardian,” which refers to a person who is legally responsible for the care of someone who is unable to manage his/her own affairs. *Disorder* is triggered by, for example, the Person Deixis “enemy,” which denotes a person who is actively opposed or hostile to someone or something.

Thereafter, after computing the descriptive and inferential statistics, the data were then plotted for “oscillations” between *Order* and *Disorder* in the text of the Constitution by employing the MATLAB computer program. This technique made it possible to display visually the “attractor reconstruction” for the various types of deictic token shifts in the text.

As presented in Table 3, a total of 61 deictic tokens were identified in the text of the Constitution. Of these, 54 or 89% are deictic tokens of *Order* and 7 or 11% are deictic tokens of *Disorder*. The mean for the *Order* category is 11 tokens, with a standard deviation of also 14 tokens; the mean for the *Disorder* category is 1 token, with a standard deviation of 2 tokens. The range for the *Oder* category is 33 tokens and that for the *Disorder* category is 2 tokens, while the variance for *Order* is 195 tokens and that for *Disorder* is 2 tokens. These results indicate that overall, there are statistically significant differences between tokens of *Order* and those of for *Disorder*. In light of these results, it was unnecessary to conduct a paired samples test.

Table 3: Univariate Statistics by Types of Deictic Tokens in the Constitution

| <b>Types of Deictic Tokens and Statistics</b> | <b>Order</b> | <b>Disorder</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Person Deixis                                 | 34           | 3               | 37           |
| Place/Space Deixis                            | 6            | 0               | 6            |
| Time Deixis                                   | 1            | 0               | 1            |
| Discourse Deixis                              | 0            | 1               | 1            |
| Social Deixis                                 | 13           | 3               | 16           |
| Total   | 54           | 7               | 61           |
| Percentage                                    | 69%          | 11%             | 100%         |
| Mean  | 11           | 1               | N/A          |
| Standard Deviation                            | 12           | 2               | N/A          |
| Range   | 33           | 2               | N/A          |
| Variance                                      | 195          | 2               | N/A          |

Source: Self-generated by the Author Using Data from the Constitution and Computed by Using MATLAB

Note: The computed results using MATLAB are rounded to the nearest tenth

Also, as displayed in Figure 1, the data are plotted in a phase space. The vectors show sharp upward slopes for both *Order* and *Disorder* with very slight interaction at the bottom of the graph.

In addition, Figure 2 is the log-log plot (or log-log graph) generated to represent the observed units described by the two-dimensional variable encompassing *Order* (y) and *Disorder* (x) as a scatter plot/graph. According to Bangura (2011c, 2015, 2023), the two axes are supposed to “display the logarithm of values of the two dimensions, not the values themselves.” If the relationship between y and x is described by a power law,

$$y = x^a;$$

then the (y, x) points on the log-log plot form a line with the slope equal to a. As Bangura adds, “log-log plots are widely used to represent data that are expected to be scale-invariant or fractal because, as stated before, fractal data usually follow a power law. A logarithm is an exponent, and it is illustrated in the following definition” (Bangra, 2011c, 2015, 2023):

For  $b > 0, b \neq 1$  and for  $x > 0$ ,  
 $y = \log_b x$  if and only if  $b^y = x$

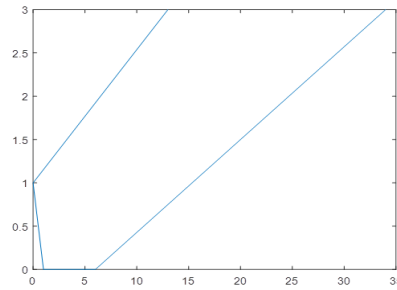


Figure 1: Phase Space Portrait Mapping  
 Deictic Tokens of Order and Disorder  
 Source: Self-generated by the Author Using Data from  
 the Constitution and Computed by Using MATLAB

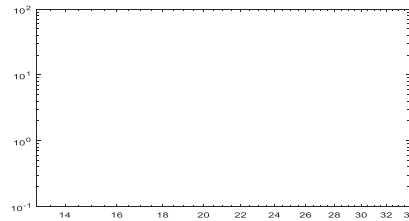


Figure 6.2: Log-log Plot Order vs. Disorder in the Constitution  
 Source: Self-generated by the Author Using Data from  
 the Constitution and Computed by Using MATLAB

In essence, simply put, the Kouroukan Fouga or Manden Charter/Constitution is a more orderly than disorderly and positive Constitution. The final question in this paper is therefore this one: Why is this triangulative analysis combining Deictic Analysis and Fractal Analysis tools undergirded by the African-centered Approach important? The answer to this question is presented in this essay's concluding section that ensues.

### Conclusion

First, the triangulative analysis of the Kouroukan Fouga is important because it moves beyond Eurocentric legal interpretations to accurately honor the Constitution's original oral, communal,

and spatial context. Combining Deictic Analysis, Fractal Analysis, and the African-centered Approach provides a holistic framework for understanding this complex, oral legal system.

Second, more specifically, this multi-faceted approach is significant for several reasons. One reason is that the African-centered Approach is utilized for the “Contextual Grounding.” Undergirding the analysis with the approach ensures that the Constitution is not judged solely by Western legal standards (e.g., the Magna Carta). It emphasizes “Orality” by acknowledging the Constitution as a living oral tradition transmitted by *jeliw* (griots), rather than just a static written text, thereby validating African epistemologies. It focuses on “Communitarianism” by analyzing the Constitution’s focus on social cohesion, kinship, and communal responsibility, rather than Western individualistic rights. It identifies “Indigenous Legal Mechanisms” by highlighting systems like *sanankunya* (joking relationships) for conflict resolution and clan-based governance.

Another reason is that the Deictic Analysis serves as a tool for “Situational and Oral Analysis.” Deictic Analysis locates the “Event” by helping the analysis of how the oral narrative anchors the Constitution in specific places (e.g., *Kurukan Fuga*—“clearing on granite”). It identifies “Speaker/Writer and Audience” as it helps to clarify the relationship between Sundiata Keita, the Griots, and the 29-seat *Gbara* (Assembly) in the performative act of proclaiming the Constitutional mandates. It “Interprets Oral Legal Terms” as it helps to identify how speakers/writers (“here”) and times (“now”) are defined in oral transmission.

The other reason is that the Fractal Analysis facilitates “Structural Organization” by revealing self-similar patterns that repeat across different scales. It identifies “Hierarchical Scaling:” by demonstrating how the social organization of the Manden—divided into 16 clans of quiver carriers and four clans of guardians, with further internal subdivisions—mirrors the overall empire structure. It illustrates “Systemic Cohesion” as it shows how the structure of small familial units (microcosm) reflects the organization of the entire empire (macrocosm). It “Analyzes 44 Edicts” by helping to uncover how the 44 edicts are organized structurally to handle complex, interrelated areas like property rights, social organization, and ecological sustainability in a positive and mostly orderly manner.

In sum, triangulating these methods allowed me to (a) “Deconstruct” the Constitution through its internal 44-edict structure (Fractal); (b) “Contextualize” the oral performance and the physical space it covers (Deictic); and (c) “Interpret” the philosophical, non-Western legal underpinnings (African-centered). This comprehensive method revealed that the Kouroukan Fougua is a sophisticated legal framework of 1236 that combined social, environmental and personal rights, thereby validating its status as a foundational, yet misunderstood, document in world history.

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