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Lifeline  
out of Africa

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ELZA MILES

Lifeline  
out of Africa

The art of  
Ernest Mancoba

HUMAN & ROUSSEAU  
Cape Town Fohannesburg

Translated from the Afrikaans by Waveney Davey

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First edition in 1993 by Human & Rousseau (Pty) Ltd

State House, 3-9 Rose Street, Cape Town

Cover design and typography by Wiekie Theron

Typeset 12 on 14 pt Plantin by McManus, Cape Town

Printed and bound by National Book Printers, Goodwood

ISBN 0 7981 3173 X

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## Preface

Grace Dieu near Pietersburg in the northern Transvaal. There he received his training as a teacher from 1920 to 1923. He passed his Junior Certificate in 1927 and between 1924 and 1929 he taught Zulu and other general school subjects at Grace Dieu. Mancoba also took an interest in archaeology. Under his guidance the pupils collected stone implements in the dry riverbeds at Grace Dieu. This collection of stone implements was given to the University of the Witwatersrand (communication from Mancoba in Paris in October 1990).

In 1925 Father Edward (Ned) Paterson (1895-1974) joined the teaching staff at Grace Dieu for a year. He was a keen archaeologist and the discovery of Middle Stone Age implements of the Pietersburg stone age culture is attributed to him. Some of these implements are housed in the Grahamstown Museum and the University of the Witwatersrand (Walker, 1985: 6).

— ,When Mancoba embarked on his overseas

voyage, he was already a B.A. graduate from the University of South Africa. He was a recognised sculptor as well. However, he had not received any formal training in art. While he was studying to become a teacher, his artistic talents were spotted when he copied pictures from magazines.

The curriculum for trainee teachers at Grace Dieu provided for elementary art studies. Emphasis was laid on skills like perspective to enable teachers to illustrate their lessons: 'so that the children could be able to follow with the eye and also with the ear what was being taught to them' (communication from Mancoba, Memos of Sekoto, May 1993). Mancoba

dated the African population. Roux was refused permission to address the students at the college. Moreover, students were 'gated' to prevent them from attending a public meeting held in the village (E. Roux, 1978: 276). 'Stereo' eloquently took the lead after he had visited Roux. He led a group of students amongst whom was Mbeki to Sandilekop, three miles from Alice. Roux and his wife, Win had pitched their tent there in the company of two nyangas (herbalists). What amazed the students was that Roux spoke out against the political coalition between Hertzog and Smuts. He introduced them to the Communist Party's little magazine *Jindlela yenkulelo* which was aimed at

African intellectuals. He also briefed them in the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

In Time longer than rope Roux chronicled the black man's pursuit for freedom in South Africa. The book was first published in 1948 and subsequently banned in South Africa. Roux was head of the Department of Botany at the University of the Witwatersrand until 1964 when he was forced from his position by the South African government after a five-year banning order had been served on him.

Mbeki remembers that Mancoba, after his acquaintance with Roux, perfectly reconciled his convictions as a Christian with his sympathy for communism. On Sundays he carried out his duties as a server in the Church of the Province under Bishop Smythe and during the week as president of the student council fulfilled his role as comrade. Jane Gool Tabata in her recollection of the friendship between Mancoba and her late companion I. B. Tabata emphasises the importance of religion for Mancoba:

Tecalls that Sister Pauline wanted her students

to develop as whole people. Unlike the general instruction where the three Râ\200\231s (reading, writing and arithmetic) were esteemed very highly, she also considered artistic expression as a means to teach.

Sister Pauline, C.R. (1883-1954), who was responsible for instruction in carving, showed him how to carve in wood. She herself had not received any training in art â\200\224 her teaching subjects were geography, history and music. Mancoba rapidly carved paper knives decorated with patterns, animals and heads (The Church Times, 28 October 1938). It was at Grace Dieu in 1929 that he carved his first large statue, the Bantu Madonna [1]\* for the chapel which the nuns dedicated to Mary.

room in Wicht Street, District Six. There he

continued his carvings which attracted attention and they were brought to the notice of government officials. On the basis of the above interview with him in the Cape Times (19 February 1936), he was approached by Dr N. J. van Warmelo, the state ethnologist and convener of the exhibit of the Department of Native Affairs at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg. Van Warmelo wanted him to carve individual items for the exhibition. He was given a concession to travel to Pretoria free of charge for an interview with the organisers. Mancoba turned down the offer because he was required to produce tourist-type souvenirs. He returned to the home of his parents which was 33 Ninth Street in Etwatwa, Benoni. There he

The early years, 1904-38

Ernest Mancoba left Cape Town aboard the Balmoral Castle in 1938. He was en route to Paris where he intended to continue his art studies. During a stop-over in London he visited the British Museum where he saw a collection of West and Central African art and artefacts, as well as those of Oceania.

On the quay to bid him farewell was Dr Goolam Gool (1905-1962), a well-known Cape Town physician and community leader whose practice in Claremont was frequented by working class people. Mancoba had got to know him and his sister, Janud (â\200\234Janeâ\200\235) during his short stay in Cape Town in 1935-6, and had often enjoyed their motherâ\200\231s delicious rice dishes at their parental home. One of Mancobaâ\200\231s close associates from Alice, Isaac Bangani Tabata (1909-91), introduced him in the summer of 1935 to Goolam and Jane Gool. The Gools and Tabata were close comrades and were eminent leaders in the revolutionary movement.

Goolam and Jane Gool were founders and members of the All African Convention. In 1937 Goolam became president of the National Liberation League but was expelled the next year. In 1943 he was a founder of Anti-Coloured Affairs Department and was elected vice-president of the Non-European Unity Movement. He was manoeuvred out of key positions in both these organisations because he had clashed with the hierarchy on their sectarianism and abstentionist politics (A. Osman, The Spark, 24 January 1963). Jane and I. B. Tataba actively took part in both organisations until they were banned in October 1961 and left for Zimbabwe. She has recently returned to South Africa and lives in Cape Town.

On his departure Mancoba's objective was to work and study in Paris for two years. Little did he know that Paris would become his home.

Ernest, the eldest child of Irvine and Florence (née Mangqangwana) Mancoba, was born on 29 August 1904 in Boksburg where his father worked on Comet goldmine. His parents were both of the Fingo tribe from Tsomo in the Transkei. Irvine was also a respected evangelist in the Presbyterian church on the East Rand. Florence was a member of the Anglican church. She did social work and also taught pre-school children. Ernest received his early education at the Anglican church school in Boksburg (1909-15). Irvine was instrumental in having this school established:

It was through Mancoba's father, who pressed the great need of the children on the missionaries, that a school was begun. (The Church Times, 28 October 1938)

The family later moved to Benoni where Ernest attended another Anglican church school (1915-20). His uncle, the Reverend Alvin Mangqangwana then arranged for him to attend the well-known Diocesan Training College at Grace Dieu near Pietersburg in the northern Transvaal. There he received his training as a teacher from 1920 to 1923. He passed his Junior Certificate in 1927 and between 1924 and 1929 he taught Zulu and other general school subjects at Grace Dieu. Mancoba also took an interest in archaeology. Under his guidance the pupils collected stone implements in the dry riverbeds at Grace Dieu. This collection of stone implements was given to the University of

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the Witwatersrand (communication from Mancoba in Paris in October 1990).

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In 1930 Mancoba received a three-year bursary from the Transvaal Education Department. This enabled him to undertake further study at the South African Native College in

Alice in the Eastern Cape. This college is now



known as the University of Fort Hare. At the end of every year examinations were held and conducted under the auspices of the University of South Africa. Mancoba matriculated in 193] and continued studying for a B.A. degree until 1935. It was his intention to embark on a career in journalism. During this period he became friendly with J. Ramfakir, who excelled at mathematics. His other friends were George Singh, George Carr, Cadoc Kobus, Govan Mbeki and I. B. Tabata.

\*) Figures following titles of works indicate catalogue inscriptions â\200\224 see from p 00 onward.

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He not only played in the position of hooker for the university rugby team, but also took leading roles in the Pathfinders-movement and the debating and literary societies. He had been elected president of the student council for 1934 and his downright rejection of stereotypes gained him the nickname â\200\234Stereoâ\200\235.

In a telephone conversation (2 March 1993) Govan Mbeki (1913- ) recalls the occasion in 1933 when activist Eddie Roux (1904-66) visited the eastern Cape in an effort to publically address students on issues of the political degradation of the African population. Roux was refused permission to address the students at the college. Moreover, students were â\200\234gatedâ\200\235 to prevent them from attending a public meeting held in the village (E. Roux, 1978: 276). â\200\234Stereoâ\200\235 eloquently took the lead after he had visited

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### LIFELINE OUT OF AFRICA ]3

Roux. He led a group of students amongst whom was Mbeki to Sandilekop, three miles from Alice. Roux and his wife, Win had pitched their tent there in the company of two nyangas (herbalists). What amazed the students was that Roux spoke out against the political coalition between Hertzog and Smuts. He introduced them to the Communist Partyâ\200\231s little magazine /ndlela yenkulelo which was aimed at African intellectuals. He also briefed them in the teachings of Marx and Lenin.

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acquaintance with Roux, perfectly reconciled his convictions as a Christian with his sympathy for communism. On Sundays he carried out his duties as a server in the Church of the Province under Bishop Smythe and during the week as president of the student council fulfilled his role as comrade. Jane Gool Tabata in her recollection of the friendship between Mancoba and her late companion I. B. Tabata emphasises the importance of religion for Mancoba:

These two young school friends as I subsequently heard, had long midnight sessions on the beach at Woodstock. Religion seemed to have been the chief topic. It appeared that Ernest was brought up in a religious home and was deeply involved with the nuns at Grace Dieu near Pietersburg. Tabata was a Marxist and gave Ernest a number of 'ratio-nalist' and scientific books to read on the history and nature of religion. There was a great deal of heat generated during these discussions. Somehow Tabata believed and was even convinced that Ernest could not fail to see the purpose and nature of religion but there were other 'issues' that somehow had to be taken into consideration. As he told me afterwards: 'Ernest cannot reject religion because he is involved with the church' which alone will provide him with the material means to pursue his ambitions to become an artist. (Letter from Jane Gool Tabata, 28 February 1993)

In a letter to Sister Pauline C.R., soon after his arrival in Paris, Mancoba wrote:

I go to St George's Church and I am one of the servers there. (Grace Dieu Bulletin, December 1938)

Mancoba still regards spirituality as one of the

coba during the first half of 1932 at Fort Hare vividly recalls Mancoba's inspirational bouts:

When his inspiration came, he would leave in the middle of a conversation and go for his chisel and a piece of wood. The chips would fly as long as the mood lasted. At the time I was there he was working on the mother and child. (Letter from C. M. Kobus, 20 April 1993)

In 1935 Mancoba interrupted his university studies in order to carve a front altar panel [5] for the sisters of the Community of the Resur-

This catalogue of the art of Ernest Mancoba is a tentative checklist for future researchers. I do not maintain it to be a complete and fully argued list of the work of Ernest Mancoba. The listed works include those pieces which I have been able to research and those I have merely encountered in my research into his oeuvre. From there the omissions of relevant data in some cases.

Asterisks indicate works which I have been unable to locate.

The catalogue description is as follows:

Measurements are given in centimetres with height preceding width in the case of paintings, drawings and prints. In most cases measurements of sculptures indicate height, width and depth. These are followed by ownership and where applicable provenance, exhibitions and \_ references.

. Ernest Mancoba participated in the last two Hmst exhibitions which were held in Copenhagen in 1948 and 1949. On these occasions he showed respectively eight and four works. The 1949 exhibition was also presented in the town hall at Aarhus.

On Mancoba's return to Paris in the early sixties his friend Gerard Sekoto invited him to join him in a show at Vichy. I have been unable to track down which pieces were selected. .

In 1969 Mancoba exhibited at both the art museums of Holstebro and Aarhus. At Holstebro he exhibited oil paintings and drawings. His selection of works at the Aarhus Kunstmuseum included drawings, linocuts and watercolours.

Catalogue .

Mancoba was also invited by the art association Den Frie to participate as a guest artist in its annual exhibitions in Copenhagen in the early seventies. Of these exhibitions I could ascertain that he took part in the one of 1972.

Troels Andersen and Steingrim Laursen were responsible for the selection of a retrospective exhibition of Mancoba's work in 1977. This, a travelling exhibition, visited the following centres in Denmark: Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen (September-October), Fyns Stifts Kunstmuseum, Odense (October-December) and Silkeborg Kunstmuseum in Silkeborg (December-January). In reference to this exhibition my catalogue inscription indicates "Ernest Mancoba", 1977-1978. The retrospective exhibition catalogue has no pagination.

For Mancoba 1993 was marked by a renewed and keen interest in his art. Works dating from 1950-90 were selected for the exhibition "Afrika-Danmark Kunst i Dialog", which was presented at the Vejle Kunstmuseum in Vejle, Denmark. In Paris, Artcurial highlighted the contribution of Cobra and again Mancoba's work was included in two exhibitions under its auspices: "Retour sur Cobra" and "Choix d'estampes-Cobra".

# 1. Bantu Madonna, also African

Madonna/Madonna (1929)

Yellowwood, 86x22x17

Inscribed back on base: 1929 E Mancoba

Convent of the Sisters of The Order of the Holy Paraclete, Manzini, Swaziland

Provenance: Sisters of the Community of the Resurrection of Our Lord, St Mary's Chapel, Grace Dieu, Pietersburg

Exhibited: St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, during Lent for two or three weeks in 1936 in a fundraising effort for the drought stricken communities of the northern Transvaal (p. 20, Grace Dieu Bulletin, June 1936).

References: Inscribed verso on photograph of the sculpture: "1929"

â\200\230Madonnaâ\200\231 carved by boy who  
won bursary to Fort Hareâ\200\235. â\200\234Er-  
nest Mancobaâ\200\235 is inserted above  
â\200\234boyâ\200\235 in a different handwriting  
(photo from the archives of the  
Church of the Province, Univer-  
sity of the Witwatersrand); H. P.  
Thompson: The Society for the  
Propagation of the Gospel in For-  
eign Parts, 1933, frontispiece and  
p: 141; Grace Dieu Bulletin, June  
1933, p. 13; Grace Dieu Bulletin,  
December 1934, p. 13; Dr Gub-  
bins, Director of the Africana Mu-  
seum, Johannesburg: â\200\234Madonna  
to my mind is really remarkableâ\200\235,  
Grace Dieu Bulletin, December  
1935, p. 4; â\200\234Exquisite works in  
woodâ\200\235, Cape Times, 19 February  
1936; Grace Dieu Bulletin, June  
1936, p. 20; Grace Dieu Bulletin,  
December 1937, p. 5 and 14; â\200\234The  
sorrow of Africaâ\200\235, The Church  
Times, 28 October 1938 (from

~ scrapbook, St Peterâ\200\231s Home, Gra-  
hamstown); Lippy Lipshitz: â\200\234Se-  
kotoâ\200\235, The African Drum, June  
1951, p. 20; Christopher Neve:  
Leon Underwood, 1974, p. 156; M.  
Figlan: â\200\234Ntate Sekotoâ\200\235, Staffrider,  
1982, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 39; Elza

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~ Miles: â\200\234Anglikane se kunsskatteâ\200\235,  
Kalender, bylae tot Beeld, 4 April  
1988, p. 2; Elza Miles: â\200\234Geen be-  
drieglike Bybelprente nieâ\200\235, Ka-  
lender, bylae tot Beeld, 27 Decem-  
ber 1988, p. 2; Elizabeth Rankin:  
Images of wood, 1989, p. 28; Joe  
Openshaw: The Star 11 June 1990;  
Elizabeth Rankin and Elza Miles:  
â\200\234The role of the missions in art ed-  
ucation in South Africaâ\200\235, Africa  
Insight, 1992, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp.  
35, 36; Gerrit Olivier: â\200\234Speurtog  
na die ontwykende Mancobaâ\200\235, Die  
Suid-Afrikaan June/July 1992,  
No. 39. p. 40; The Watchman,  
March 1993, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 1.

2. Saint Augustine of Canterbury

(1932)

Teak, 122,5x30,5x27,9

Inscribed back on base: N. E. Man-  
coba 1932

St Augustineâ\200\231s Church, Belvedere,  
Kent, England

References: Inscribed verso on pho-  
tograph of the sculpture: â\200\234S. Au-  
gustine of Canterbury in teak  
life size carved by Ernest Mancoba  
Price Â£20â\200\235 (photo from the ar-

\_ chives of the Church of the Prov-

xi

ince, University of the Witwaters-  
rand); Church Council Minutes: 3  
October 1932, 7 November 1932,  
5 December 1932; Grace Dieu Bul-  
letin, June 1933, p. 13: â\200\234He has re-  
cently completed for an English  
Church a fine statue of St. Augus-  
tine which was seen by His Excel-

lency the Governor-General when  
he visited the College last Septem-  
ber. On a visit to Fort Hare in  
May his Excellency sent for Mr.  
Mancoba and congratulated him  
upon the beauty of the statue.â\200\235;  
Grace Dieu Bulletin, December  
1934, p. 13; Elza Miles: â\200\234Angli-  
kane se kunsskatteâ\200\235, Kalender, by-  
lae tot Beeld, 4 April 1988, p. 2;  
letter Father Leonard Stapleton to  
Elza Miles, 9 May 1988; Elizabeth  
Rankin: Images of wood, 1989, pp.  
20, 21; Elizabeth Rankin and Elza  
Miles: â\200\234The role of the missions in

~~ art education in South Africaâ\200\235, Af-  
rica Insight, 1992, Vol. 22, No. 1,  
pp. 33, 36; The Watchman, March  
1993, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 1.

Font cover (c. 1933-4)

Wood

Church of Saint Mary and All An-  
gels, Grahamstown

x0

Reference: Elizabeth Rankin: Images  
of wood, 1989, p. 65.

I have no proof to sustain this attri-  
bution to Mancoba.

3. The Future of Africa\*, also Af-  
rica to be/Future Africa (1934)  
Jarrah wood, 61 (height)

The late Bishop Wilfred Parker of  
Pretoria

Exhibitions: The South African Aca-  
demy, Selborne Hall, Johannes-  
burg, 1934, Cat. No. 321; May Es-  
ther Bedford Bantu Art  
Exhibition, Fort Hare awarded  
first prize of £25.

References: Grace Dieu Bulletin,  
June 1934, p. 10: â\200\234A statue of two  
Native boys by E. Mancoba . . .



This has been sold for seven guineasâ\200\235; â\200\234Exquisite works in woodâ\200\235, Cape Times, 19 February 1936; â\200\234The work of an African Sculptorâ\200\235, Supplement to The South African Outlook, May 1936; â\200\234The Sorrow of Africaâ\200\235, The Church Times, 28 October 1938; Elizabeth Rankin: â\200\234Images of woodâ\200\235, 1989, pp. 22, 23; Elizabeth Rankin and Elza Miles: â\200\234The role of the mis-

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sions in art education in South Africaâ\200\235, Africa Insight, p. 36; The

\* Watchman, March 1993, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 1.

4. Nobantu\* (The mother of the people) (from life, c. 1935)

Wood

Exhibition: South Africa Academy, Selborne Hall 1935, Cat. No. 349 (Â£10-10)

I recall having seen exhibited in the Gertrude Posel Gallery, University

â\200\224 of the Witwatersrand, a wooden carving by an artist (unknown to me) who left the country to further his art studies in Paris, France. This information accompanying the exhibit also stated that the ac-

quisition was made by Dr Rex Martienssen. The exhibition featured art works in the possession of the University of the Witwaters-

â\200\230rand and I am today fairly sure that it was carved by Mancoba. Unfortunately the University Galleries have no record of the exhibition which I think took place in the late seventies. This carving

could have been acquired from the  
exhibition of the South African  
Academy which is referred to as  
â\200\234. . .a figure of a native Madonna  
and Childâ\200\235 (Grocott, 13 December

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50. Untitled (1954)

Oil on canvas, 54,8x38,2

Inscribed verso top left: E Mancoba  
54

E. Mancoba, Paris

51. Untitled (1955)

Oil on canvas, 41x33,3

Inscribed verso top: E Mancoba 55  
E. Mancoba, Paris

52. Drawing (1955)

Ink on paper, 30,2x22,1 (30x29,5)

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 55

Mrs Clarisse Penso, Fresnes, France

Exhibition: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 1969, Cat.  
No. 10.

53. Drawing (1955)

Ink on paper, 43,7x30,3

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 55

Mrs Clarisse Penso, Fresnes, France

Exhibition: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 1969, Cat.  
No. 11

54. Drawing (1957)

Ink on paper, 25x32,5

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
-57

Mrs Clarisse Penso, Fresnes, France

Exhibition: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235, Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 1969, Cat.  
No. 12

55. Painting (1957)

Oil on canvas, 59,4x39,7

Inscribed verso bottom right: Man-

coba 57

Ernest Mancoba, Paris.

56. Drawing (1958)

Ink on paper, 30,5x22

Inscribed bottom right (recto): E  
Mancoba 1958; verso A mon ami  
Steingrim E Mancoba 1969

Silkeborg Kunstmuseum, Silkeborg

Provenance: Steingrim Laursen, Copenhagen

Exhibitions: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235,

Holstebro Kunstmuseum, 1969,

Cat. No. 24; â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235,

Aarhus Kunstmuseum, 1969, Cat.

No. 13; â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235, 1977,

Cat. No. 21.

Reference: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235, 1977

57. Drawing\* (1958) (photo in Silke-  
borg Kunstmuseum)

Ink and watercolour on \_ paper,  
48 5x31

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba

Statens Kunstfond

Exhibitions: â\200\234Ernest Mancobaâ\200\235,  
Holstebro Kunstmuseum, 1969,

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Untitled [159]

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Untitled [145]

htr ticketsheet

## 66 LIFELINE OUT OF AFRICA

Copper is one of the metamorphoses of the spirit of water, whose influence extends over a great part of Africa. Copper is water itself and also light rays, excrements of this spirit who has almost become a god. He is goldâ\200\231s elder brother and forms the skeleton of albinos, those victims preferred to all others for solemn sacrifices. (1950: 47)

Florence Mancoba left a lasting impression on her son by means of her bedtime stories, narratives of the family history and her practice of traditional pottery. When he had to go to bed as a little boy he found comfort in her reading from the tales of Hans Christian Andersen (1805-75). Later he would comfort Wonga similarly (Grethe Inge Pederson, 8 September 1991). He still remembers her clay pots and the esteem in which they were held. Periodically she went away with members of her age group to make these household articles. She encouraged her children to read books by African writers. Among the Xhosa authors she regarded the effective command of language of the spiritual leader Walter Benson Rubusana (1858-1936) as an example worth following. (When Mancoba was a student at Fort Hare, he went to visit Rubusana. He and Govan Mbeki spent their holidays in East London where Mancoba resided in a boarding house in Rubusana Park. )

They also held Jtyala Laâ\200\231mawele (The Trial of Twins) of Samuel Edward Krune Mghayi (1875-1945) in high regard. His motherâ\200\231s interest in literature impressed upon Mancoba the function of poetry. He remembers that as a child he was shocked by the crude language sometimes used by poets. His mother explained to him that the inexpressible had to be voiced for the good of society.

Her account of the Fingo flight from Natal is imprinted in his memory. When the Fingoes could not come to terms with the despotism of Shaka (c. 1787-1828), they searched for and found a new home amongst the Xhosas in Transkei. Amidst the Fingoes who fled with

Untitled [112]

the Zulu forces in hot pursuit was Mancobaâ\200\231s maternal family. In their little party was an aged great-grandmother who was so old and weak that the younger members had to carry her. When she realised after a few days that she was an impediment to the flight of her people, and that the distance between them and their pursuers was decreasing, she ordered them to leave her and to proceed without her.

She stood and they walked. She waved and  
she waved. It was the last they saw of her. . .  
because she saw that she hindered  
quicker, practical progress so she sacrificed  
herself. (Communication from Mancoba, Paris,  
15 September 1990)

Mancoba's narrative is corroborated by Hammond-Tooke's account:

Untitled [115]

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POSITIVES BY

McManus

BLACK

PARIS SINCE

1960

67



Drawing [140]

138. Sans titre (1986)

Lithograph on paper, 61 x 44,5  
(paper), edition of 70 printed by  
Peter Johansen, Valby

Inscribed bottom left: e.a.; right:  
E Mancoba 86.

Fonds National d'Art Contemporain,  
Paris

61 x 44,4 (paper), 40 x 32,5 (image)

Inscribed bottom left: 44/70; right:  
E Mancoba 86.

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

Exhibition: 'Acquisitions', Louvre,  
1989

Reference: Laurence Bouquin, 'Acquisitions',  
catalogue, 1989

139. Untitled (1986)

Lithograph on paper, 40 x 32  
(paper), 25 x 20 (image); edition of  
70 printed by Peter Johansen,  
Valby

Inscribed bottom left: 46/90; right:  
E Mancoba 86.

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

140. Drawing (c. 1986)

Ink on paper, 46,2 x 34,5

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

Untitled [146]

141. Untitled (1986)

Ink, oil pastel and pencil on paper,  
41,8 x 59,9

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 86

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

142. Untitled (c. 1976-88)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 62,7 x  
26,5

Inscribed bottom right: EM

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

143. Untitled (c. 1976-88)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 50 x 32,5  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

144. Untitled (c. 1976-88)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 50 x 32,5  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

145. Untitled (c. 1976-88)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 50 x 32,7  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

146. Untitled (c. 1986)

Ink on paper, 50 x 32,6  
Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

Untitled [151]

147. Untitled (c. 1986)

Oil pastel on paper, 43,4 X 50,3  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

148. Untitled (c. 1986)

Oil pastel and ink on paper, 50,2 x  
32,5

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

149. Untitled (c. 1986)

Lithograph on paper

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

150. Untitled/Composition (1988)

Ink on paper, 26,2 x 37,9

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
88

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

151. Untitled (1989)

Colour lithograph on paper, 64,5 x  
46,7; edition of 200 printed by  
Peter Johansen, Valby

Inscribed bottom left: VI/XVI; bot-  
tom right: E Mancoba 89; bottom  
centre: Pour Constance à\200\224 Ernest.

Mrs Constance Njongwe, Matatiele

Untitled [161]

64,5 x 46,7

Inscribed bottom left: VII/XVI; bot-  
tom right: E Mancoba 89; bottom  
centre: Pour Elza et Elske Miles à\200\224  
Ernest

Elske and Elza Miles, Johannesburg

152. Untitled (1989)

Colour lithograph on paper, 64,5 x  
46,7; edition of 120 printed by  
Peter Johansen, Valby

Inscribed bottom left: 119/120; bot-  
tom right: E Mancoba; bottom  
centre: Pour Edith à\200\224 Ernest

Mrs Edith Ntomtela, Johannesburg

153. Untitled (c. 1989-90)  
Lithograph on paper, 46,2 x 34,5  
Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

154. Untitled (c. 1989-90)  
Ink on paper, 28,2 x 27,7  
Inscribed bottom left: EM  
Ernest Mancoba, Paris

155. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on blue-grey  
paper, 49,4 x 64,5

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

156. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on beige paper,  
41,5 x 58,9

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

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Untitled (1 65]  
157. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 42,2 x 59  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

158. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 59,5 X 42  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90  
Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

159. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 25,8 x  
37,4

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

160. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 29,5 x  
42,2

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

161. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 29,5 x  
42,2

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

162. Untitled (1990)  
Ink and oil pastel on paper, 41,8 x  
59,9  
Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

163. Untitled (1990)  
Sepia and oil pastel on paper, 26,1 x  
37,57

CATALOGUE 89

Inscribed bottom left of centre:  
E Mancoba 90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

164. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on beige paper,  
41,7 X 59 (paper torn to the right  
of 90)

Inscribed bottom left: E Mancoba 90

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

165. Untitled (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 49,8 x  
64,4

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Galerie Mikael Andersen, Copenha-  
gen

166. Untitled (c. 1990-2)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 29,8 x  
41,8

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

167. Drawing (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 43,7 x  
30,2

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

168. Drawing (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 40,7 x  
29,7

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

169. Drawing (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 42 x 29,7

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Mikael Andersen, Copenhagen

170. Drawing (1990)

Ink and oil pastel on paper, 59,9 x  
41,8

Inscribed bottom right: E Mancoba  
go

Ernest Mancoba, Paris

Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg where it was displayed during Lent in order to raise funds for those in need in the drought-stricken northern Transvaal. A sum of twenty-seven pounds and 300 rations were collected (Grace Dieu Bulletin, 1936: 20). In this way the carving realised the significance of the nurturing mother.

The following remarks by Christopher Neve in his biography of the British sculptor Leon Underwood concerning Mancoba's Bantu Madonna, were based on incorrect information:

Almost as though to make Underwood's point for him, or that of George Harwood who had first commissioned the carving, a Bantu sculptor was hastily prevailed upon to make a second madonna, as a kind of corrective, that was installed amid much acclaim in St Mary's Cathedral. The sculptor's name was Ernest Mancoba. (1974: 156)

George Harwood, the English teacher at the Anglican Secondary School St Peter's in Rosettenville, Johannesburg, asked Underwood (1890-1975), who was an authority on African art, to carve a Madonna and child for the school. He directed the sculptor to create a work to represent an African type (Rand Daily Mail, 9 March 1936). Underwood's interest in African art resulted in three books: Figures in West Africa (1947), Masks of West Africa (1948) and Bronzes of West Africa (1949).

Harwood felt that the oleographs in use at the school were meaningless to the African students. Underwood's resultant Black Madonna carved of lignum vitae was indeed a great shock to the art tastes of Johannesburgers when it was displayed at St Peter's in 1936. Many philistine opinions were aired in the letter columns of the local press. For Underwood the negative reactions were disconcerting and he responded, hoping that one day his madonna would be appreciated:

. . . by the descendants of those superb African artists, whose simplicity of expression

helped to rescue Western art from the slough of naturalism and vulgar sentiment into which it had fallen by the end of the nineteenth century, it will be accepted as a new and different order of beauty. (Rand Daily Mail, 21 May 1936)

Underwood's Black Madonna has been housed in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, since 1987.

In 1932 Ernest Mancoba completed his St Augustine of Canterbury [2] in teak for the St Augustine's Church in Belvedere in Kent. The Church Council Notes of 7 November 1932 read:

Miss Birch explained that St Augustine's Boys Club had originally wished to buy a plaster statue, with the Vicar's approval, and the idea was later diverted towards the purchase of a figure carved in teak wood by a young African student. The work had taken a long time to carry out, being done in the student's holidays, but at last came over from Africa. (Letter from Father Leonard Stapleton, 9 May 1988)

The freestanding, erect figure shows some resemblance to the Bantu Madonna, but also differs from her in that Mancoba did not use an African model. Another noticeable difference between this statue and the madonna is that St Augustine of Canterbury's hands, in relation to his head, are not as small as the Virgin's. One can also view this figure as a prototype for the sort of figure which appears later in his oeuvre. Here I think specifically of the 'militant' figure which looks as if it is armed [79, 112, 115, 118].

However, both these prototypes differ technically from his later figures.

One should bear in mind that Mancoba could only carry out larger pieces on commission (Bantu Madonna and St Augustine of Canterbury) because he was otherwise lacking in material means:

St Augustine of Canterbury [2]

My mind is full of ideas . . . If only I can get the material to execute them. Sometimes I have wanted to do something big but I have only had a small piece of wood, and the carving has come out quite different. (The Star, 8

June 1936)  
And

often he could obtain but scanty wood for his work. (The Church Times, 28 October 1938)

In Europe his circumstances were not to change. Since the 1950s, Mancoba has there-

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THE EARLY YEARS, 1904-1938 23

fore devoted himself exclusively to the art of painting and drawing.



St Augustine of Canterbury [2] has an archaic appearance. This is expressed in the simplicity of detail in the cruciform decorations and the trimmings on the episcopal band, the attitude of the hands and the placing together of the feet so that the mass is evenly spread. The symmetry of the cross in St Augustine's hand is repeated in his bodily posture and in the episcopal band. This repetition is meaningful as St Augustine's band, like the cross, symbolises the yoke he bears. All of this emphasises the frontal nature of the image. In the execution of this

## LIFELINE OUT OF AFRICA

## Preface

The very private life led by Ernest Mancoba, Sonja Ferlov and their son Wonga has given rise to many misconceptions about Mancoba's art and most art loving South Africans, with the exception of the few friends who knew him before he left South Africa in 1938, are unaware of his contribution to contemporary art.

Because of Mancoba's reclusive life style few writers and critics have made a real effort to find out about his life and art. Eschewing a hearsay approach, Laurence Bouquin interviewed Mancoba and came up with a well-researched biographical entry when two of the artist's lithographs were selected for the collection of Fonds National d'Art Contemporain and its subsequent exhibition in Paris in 1989. In the light of this exhibition and Bouquin's excellent catalogue entry there seems to be nothing which holds water concerning Mancoba in another recently published book on contemporary African art.

In Pierre Gaudibert's *L'Art Africain Contemporain* which was published in Paris by Editions Cercle d'Arts in 1991 all the facts are wrong. One reads that Mancoba, born in 1910, travelled to Paris by way of Holland, where he married a Dutch sculptor. In 1938 he and his wife (she is not named) moved to Denmark, where he joined Cobra.

In *Lifeline out of Africa* an attempt is made to provide a homecoming for this artist who left South Africa in 1938 and to introduce his work to a wider audience in his own country. In Denmark his images are well represented in the State Museum for Art in Copenhagen and in contemporary art museums in Aarhus and Silkeborg. His art was included in the major exhi-

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bitions of the vibrant Cobra art movement of 1948-51. However, influential art critics and historians in South Africa like F. L. Alexander, Esme Berman and Hans Fransen were unaware of his extraordinary images and completely oblivious to his involvement in the Cobra movement when they wrote their authoritative books.

It was by chance that I learned of Mancoba. Karin Bredenkamp told me of the Cobra retrospective exhibition which she visited in Paris (1982-3) at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville and mentioned a South African whose name I did not catch. Five years later, in March 1988, I paged through a copy of the catalogue of that exhibition. I made my acquaintance with the South African: Ernest Mancoba.

An ink drawing by Mancoba reproduced in the catalogue sparked off my fascination with his art. I have seldom encountered a drawing of such strength and simplicity. I knew that the work of this artist was going to open unforeseen perspectives for me. My search for more of his work and for details of his life had started and it became a passion. I followed up whatever lead I was given. After many discouraging experiences I eventually met Ernest Mancoba and his son Wonga in Paris at the end of July 1990. From that moment onwards we worked in unison.

Lifeline out of Africa would not have been possible without a grant from the Human Sciences Research Council which enabled me to travel to Europe and Great Britain for research.

I want to thank the following people who put me up in Europe and England. Franka Severin placed at my disposal in Paris a flat conveniently situated for my purposes. In London

htr ticksheet

## SO LIFELINE OUT OF AFRICA

to an image of the crucified Christ in R. Broby-Johansen's book, *Den Danske Billedbibel i Kalkmalener* (118). Christ's ribcage with its wound and spear is evocative of the horizontal

bands, scribbled blotch and crooked line in.

Tegning. No symbol is explicit in Mancoba's art, but the signs remain open for interpretation.

The Mancobas have a copy of *Den Danske Billedbibel 1 Kalkmalener* and esteem it highly.

Sonja Ferlov and Ernest Mancoba shared in the interest which their fellow artists had shown in the mediaeval murals of the churches in rural Denmark. During the Second World War, when Denmark was occupied by Germany, the activities of *Linien* passed on to the magazine *Helhesten* (1941-44), with the architect Robert Dahlmann Olsen (1915-1993) as the editor. Amongst the artists of *Helhesten* (Devil's horse) there was great interest in the frescoes (Kalkmalerier) of the Middle Ages. According to Olsen

. . . the whole artist group went out gathering material on the fresco painting in Danish churches, and photographic material on the subject was gone through in the archives of the National Museum. (1964: no pagination)

Many of the wall paintings were covered when they were white-washed during the Reformation. Widespread interest was expressed in this subject when *Den Danske Billedbibel i Kalkmalener* appeared in 1947. Ferlov and Mancoba's interest did not wane and they later added to their collection of books another authoritative text on the subject: *Kalkmalerier fra Danske Landsbykirker* (1969) by Hjort and Franceschi.

~ It seems that the discovery of the Danish frescoes had an effect on Mancoba's technique of painting. During the fifties, two features can be identified in Mancoba's art. The impasto of *Komposition* gives way to a dry, fresco-like quality and in places the canvas is visible. The un-

painted canvas forms a passage of no-man's-land between line and colour touch, so that the horizontal or vertical nature of each colour surface dominates. By this means the tactile nature of the material paint and canvas is recognised. In the early fifties Mancoba's application of paint also corresponded with the way in which Fernand Leger (1881-1955) painted in 1912-4.

However, Mancoba's drier method of painting reminds one of Danish frescoes. In the case of *Kalkmalerier* the wall surface retains its two-

dimensional quality and is not altered by the use of perspective which invariably creates the illusion of depth. As a result of the continuous decay of the plaster on which the murals were painted, each colour surface vibrates with varying intensity. It was with this organic and living colour quality that Mancoba found an affinity in his own paintings.

Mancoba admired the natural colour changes which took place over the centuries. For him the bright colours and clear forms of restored pieces lost the qualities which resulted from ageing. In 1979 during a visit to Assisi he was stirred by the power of human expression in Cimabue's (c. 1240 - c. 1301) Crucifixion. The poor condition of the mural in no way suppressed the emotionality between Christ and his mother; on the contrary, the Sistine Chapel today no longer has the appeal which it had for him before its recent restoration. He therefore doubts whether restoration serves a purpose (communication from Mancoba, Paris, September 1990).

The application of pigment to masks and images out of Africa has a dry, powdery quality which corresponds with the colouring in the frescoes. From the time of his arrival in Europe, Mancoba's art does not display clearly traceable references. In fact, for him imitation implies the creation of an illusion. Consequently, through this fresco technique, he makes the process of decay visible, thus expressing the indiscernible and the invisible, as well as that which is difficult to put into words.

All of this goes hand in hand with one's questions on the meaning of existence. Thus he maintains the ephemeral aspects which society wants to control through restoration. The varying intensities of Mancoba's touches of colour vibrate and read like an account of mankind's experiences.

In the quality of the pigment in the frescoes of the Middle Ages and in the painted masks and images out of Africa, Mancoba sees a double history of survival: the passion of groups to survive for generations by means of their customs and conventions on the one hand, and through their images on the other, in spite of the latter's vulnerability to vandalism, misunderstanding and natural decay. His painting and drawing surface increasingly becomes the background for an ancestral image. The untold, undisclosed history is expressed. Mancoba painted these images during 1950-1, just before he, Ferlov and Wonga moved to France.

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Left: Ernest, Sonja and Wonga with Grethe Inge Pedersen in Kattinge, 1949. Right: Wonga

in Kattinge, 1949.

KATTINGE, 1947-1951 5]

When Mancoba painted these pictures in the early fifties, none of the European art museums exhibited African art. African art was accommodated in ethnological collections. Its exotic uniqueness to the European eye is brought into focus when one considers that to this day a tropical aquarium is housed under the same roof as the art of Africa and Oceania in the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens in Paris. Tropical fish and the art of Africa share the same catalogue. Wonga Mancoba points out that cultural circles in Paris are at present putting pressure on the Louvre to open its doors to African art.

In the Centre Pompidou as well, no African art work is included in the permanent exhibition, even though the innovative effect of African art is most remarkable in the work of some contemporary artists. However, in Danish art museums African art is given a place.

It seems as if the painter revised his pre-war

philosophe le réduit à ses concepts le  
physicien à ses lois (André Mal-  
raux).

In early youth the African is  
struck by the sudden and abrupt  
change of the spiritual context of the  
cultural life which marks the passage  
from infancy into adult-life. He dis-  
covers that the beautiful nursery-  
rhymes and child-stories that he had  
loved had served to prepare him for  
yet another phase of existence more  
intimate, more directly associated  
with daily life activities. The cultural  
patterns of childhood had for pur-  
pose to form his attitude and behav-  
iour in order to enable him more  
easily to understand the meaning of  
living in contact and in co-operation  
with others.

The child-games, the dances and  
the songs that accompanied them  
had given him occasion to feel and  
appreciate the nearness of his com-  
rades and to have confidence in  
them. His joys had become their joys  
and his sorrows their sorrows. He  
had learnt to speak to them with  
open confidence and they had solved  
together their common problems  
which were not the problems of the  
grown-ups. Comradeship in Africa is  
determined by the Age-groups which  
hold together throughout life so that  
at no stage of one's existence does  
one find oneself alone. At the same  
time one does not lose individual  
freedom of action and initiative.

Les chants rituels les danses sym-  
boliques au bruit du tambour du  
pipeau ou des instruments à cordes,  
les longues des merveilleuses his-  
toires des ancêtres ce sont la l'heri-  
tage transmis à chaque génération  
qui brode sur ces vieux thèmes et les  
recrée lentement.

The initiation into adult-life is car-  
ried out amid special and impressive  
ceremony and from this moment the  
cultural content takes other forms  
forms which contain and carry in  
them more tangibly the ideas and the  
philosophy of life as has been taken

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from experience in the course of man\200\231s survival throughout the ages and by means of which man has preserved himself from extinction and from the fate of the prehistoric mammoth \200\224 an animal which could not learn by trial and error to readapt itself to a constantly changing world environment.

The expression of art-form changes from the merely pleasant and didactic to the more searching and hesitating attitude. One feels standing at the frontier of the known and the unknown and becomes aware of the need of courage, endurance, solidarity and determination. Poetic-expression takes more liberty of movement and becomes more daring because it is the \200\234feelers\200\235 of society in search of life bringing situations and the avoidance of stagnation.

The African child is often shocked and dismayed by the terrifying intransigence of all true African art-expression and African poetry; but as he comes nearer it, he sees its \200\234raison d\200\231être\200\235 and begins to appreciate the invigorating and life-giving effects of its power and rhythm. I was surprised as a child at the language idiom and expression that I had been brought up to regard as indecent for a good child to employ but which found acceptance in the highest forms of the poetry of our culture. I was made to see that the poet is the man who can elevate human diction to such heights and dignity that he can say and utter under certain particular circumstances the \200\234unsayable\200\235 and the unutterable \200\224 facts and realities which cannot be said in the ordinary everyday language and which it is vital for the community to know and to see.

This attitude towards art expression in African culture is specially emphasised in sculpture. For a long time people of the Occident have been shocked and repelled by the rudeness and the violence of African sculpture just because they have not

been aware of the underlying motives which have given rise to such expression. They considered it comic and grotesque.



There is no doubt that African sculpture is in direct contradiction with the criterions and norms of the Greek ideal which the rest of the Occident has adopted after the Romans. The Greeks in the statues such as Venus de Milo and Apollo have concretised the ideal of perfect human form â\200\224 gracious and athletic â\200\224 a form truly enough which could be extended to all human activities to strive towards the ideal of perfection in all oneâ\200\231s endeavours. African sculpture on the other hand tends to other horizons. It is easy to see at once that a Negro sculpture is far from trying to copy nature at the same time far from any ideal of the human form. In African culture the notion of Art for Artâ\200\231s sake is unknown. Art must have a social meaning or it does not exist at all. For the African Venus de Milo is certainly very beautiful but very depressing and static. For the object of African art is not to please the eye or the senses but it is to use art as a means, as a language, to express feelings and ideas in relation to the present, the future and the past, to discover new concepts by which to regard the world for the salvation of man. It is more collective and social.

â\200\234Ainsi portÃ© par le rythme de la vie environante et par le souvenirs du passÃ© le dépassant quelquefois, par sa puissance propre lâ\200\231artiste Negre crÃ©e une forme nouvelle |â\200\231expression cristallisÃ©e de son peuple et de sa propre personalite.â\200\235

(Both French quotations in the text are from Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro: La Sculpture NÃ©gre Primitive.)

In an interview which took place in Paris in 1972 Ernest Mancoba expressed himself on the survival of man through art. Troels Andersen translated the transcript into Danish

Â» â\200\230|