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*Photographs showing uses of Vai script, Arabic, and English follow page 34.*

## A Note on Orthography

Except when the Vai script is used, the Vai language in this book has been transcribed into a modified form of the English alphabet. Consonants are pronounced approximately like their English equivalents, with the following additions (equivalents from the International Phonetic Alphabet are shown in brackets):

- $\bar{b}$ , like English *b* but with air forced inward [ɓ]
- $\bar{d}$ , like English *d* but with air forced inward [ɗ]
- $\bar{n}$ , like English *ng* in *hang* [ŋ]

The clusters *kp* and *gb* are pronounced rather as if the two consonants were spoken simultaneously.

Vowels are pronounced as follows:

- $i$ , like *i* in *machine* [i]
- $a$ , like *a* in *bah* [a]
- $u$ , like *u* in *rune* [u]
- $e$ , like *é* in *sauté* [e]
- $\bar{e}$ , like *e* in *then* [ɛ]
- $o$ , like *o* in *bone* [o]
- $\bar{o}$ , like *o* in *lost* [ɔ]

Double vowels indicate lengthening of the vowel sound. The mark  $\sim$  indicates nasalization. Although Vai is a tonal language, tonal marking has been omitted except in instances where it is essential to analysis. High tone is indicated by  $^$ , low tone by  $`$ , high to low by  $^$ , and low to high by  $\sim$ .

In some Vai words, the phonetic representations may vary. For example, *kai* and *kali* are two possible spellings of the word for “hoe”; the word for “paddle” may be rendered *laa* or  $\bar{d}aa$ . Names of places and people in this book are given their customary English-alphabet spellings. Spelling of place names generally follows that appearing on the 1973 geographic maps of Liberia published by the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the Liberian Geological Survey, as approved by the Liberian Board of Geographic Names.

