

A NOTE ON THE ANANA SHRINE

by E.O. Apronti*

The ANANA shrine is one of several shrines located at Big Ada, capital town of the Ada Traditional Area of Southern Ghana. It houses what is claimed to be a war god dating back to the founding of the town. Although the language indigenous to the area is Adangme, devotees of this shrine (notably the women devotees) speak a special ANANA language which they claim was imported alongside the shrine. This appeared an interesting enough phenomenon for study, especially since there appears to have been no constant renewal of connection with the original home of the shrine, and since this ANANA language appears to be spoken by only a small group of people to none of whom it is a first language.

The aim of this study, which is still in progress, is to establish the organisation and functions of the shrine as a background to a linguistic study of this group. For, unlike the YEVE cult whose numerous devotees in many localities speak a special language of the cult, the ANANA language is in the nature of a linguistic island, surrounded entirely by an Adangme-speaking community and, on a preliminary analysis, incorporating no linguistic links with an environment in which it has been planted for the last few hundred years. It is hoped that facts will eventually emerge from the study to illuminate the rather dim history of the area. The investigation has so far covered the historical and religious background of the shrine; some information of a linguistic nature has been collected as well but cannot be extensively reported on here at this stage.

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The shrine has been claimed to be the abode of a war deity. This deity is said to have gone to all the wars in which Adas have been involved, but no precise information could be elicited on which was the first war on the list, or on how many wars there were. In contrast, information was available on who imported the war god. It was one NATEKI who bought it for the protection of her children in days when wars were very rife. There is a male deity called SOVI and a female deity called ANANA. The two were originally jointly housed but, during the time of a District Commissioner called Caulley, the government decided to construct a street which had to split the shrines and, (in their words) "since no one stands in the way of Government", they had to content themselves with the performance of various customary rites and they let the street through. ANANA is now on the western side of the main street of Big Ada and SOVI is on the eastern side. ANANA, the female deity, possesses only women.

NATEKI, the first priestess, was succeeded by her children. The successors included ASUMIA, ALORGBE, KPENTEY and BORYOR. Priestesses have to be trained for a period of seven years, during which they are instructed in various rites and customs, and also in the ANANA language. There is matter of pedagogical interest here which will later be investigated further: how instruction in a language with such a restricted number of speakers and set in a wider (foreign) linguistic community gets transmitted, so that a trainee emerges with full control of its linguistic structures and systems. It is alleged that the training is quite rigorous and that is why it has such high efficacy.

The incumbent priestesses tended to be reticent when asked about how much it cost to train her, what taboos and regulations she had to observe and how old she was when she first got possessed. On costs she said they were borne by her parents who are both dead; on the other issues, she merely said she "could not know to tell". But she did say she finished her training before the great earthquake (of 1939).

In these times of comparative peace, the shrine performs many beneficent functions. Fishermen, farmers and members of other occupational groups come and ask for libations to be poured so that their work may prosper. They usually promise a thanks-offering in anticipation of the fulfilment of their desires, and they are said to come voluntarily later to give these thanks-offerings. Women who lose successive babies are also said to approach the shrine for help, and they get satisfaction. The priestess insisted that what she did was merely to pour libation, and that libation was no cure. She disowned any powers for curing physical ailments, but was quite emphatic about the efficacy of ANANA in its chosen fields of activity.

There is an ANANA proverb in Eve which proclaims the superiority of the power of ANANA over that of the YEVE cult: E' dzo Agbee (i.e. YEVE), se me dzo Anana o. In affirmation of this belief and in answer to the question as to whether ANANA has won any converts from Christianity, the priestess maintained that no Christian can lay claim to a spirit as strong as that of ANANA and that when the latter set out to capture a Christian, the subject's Christian spirit or faith would desert him at once.

Regular rites are performed at the grove every Sunday morning. These involve the sweeping and fumigating of the grove, and the offer of any sacrifices by any devotees so minded. The ceremonies begin at about six in the morning and last for about four hours. Cloth only may be worn on entering the grove, and the shoulders must be bared. Also, no footwear may be worn in the grove. Women devotees decorate themselves by smearing a brown clay-like substance called tum on their shoulders, arms and feet, with little white clay (ayilo) circles dotted all over the same parts of the body. The devotees sit facing interviewers, with the men grouped on the left (of the interviewers) and the women on the right. The latter outnumber the men and are on the whole more active in the proceedings.

The demands made on prospective interviewers are quite elaborate. The training period for priestesses was stated earlier to be seven years. The number seven figures prominently in the requirements for granting interviews. There is a charge of thirty-six shillings (i.e. three new cedis and sixty new pesewas) times seven, seven white fowls, seven kukus (i.e. double yards) of white calico, seven pieces of white clay and seven pieces of tum, a brown clay-like substance. In addition customary drinks have to be provided as well, and there is an insistence that these should be imported drinks since the god "does not know" the newly blended local drinks.

Devotees were initially very touchy about granting further interviews; they expressed their disappointment at not seeing what use was made of earlier interviews and of pictures taken of them. They singled out the late Mr. Divine Puplampu as one who disappointed them most, and were anxious for an assurance that the results of the current investigation should see the light of day.

A brief word of conclusion on the linguistic aspect of what has been elicited so far. It has been noted that women devotees were the main speakers of the language. In the course of three interviews over a period of five weeks, only once was a male devotee (the one incidentally acted as linguist or okyeame for the proceedings) heard to speak the ANANA language. The other male devotee confessed that they understood only a few words, but that they had no fluency of either production or of comprehension of this language.

Most of the questions put were answered by the incumbent priestess, with occasional interruptions and additions by one or two male elders. On one occasion the priestess took exception to such an interruption and spontaneously broke into the ANANA language with considerable feeling and at quite a racy speed. A translation of this outburst and of a few libations and songs in the language is in preparation and will form the theme of later reports on this project. Some lexical items were extracted, though, and a selection of these will serve as a conclusion to this report:

<u>Adangme</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Anana</u>
we	home	lɪlɛ
sɪnyã	door	gbãã
lɛ	firewood	ɲ
dido	water pot	ðkòkò
bo	cloth	aso
dòmĩ	rubbish	gùógu
honyũ	soup	wóliwóli
húngme	eye	zũũ
nyũ	mouth	ànũ
yi	head	ɲiwo
gugũ	nose	nũdũ