

BOWDICH'S "ADAMPE" WORD LIST

by M.E. Kropp Dakubu*

In his famous book A Mission from Cape Coast Castle - to Ashantee (published 1819) Bowdich includes a chapter on Language, which consists largely of grammatico-philosophical discussions of "Fantee" and "Accra", and an Appendix in which he gives word lists for a number of languages including "Inkran". Despite orthographical oddities, it is clear that "Accra" or "Inkran" is a recent ancestor of the Ga language spoken today. Bowdich also gives (in Appendix VI, page 504) a very short list of eight words in what he calls the "Adampe" language. On the frontispiece map the section of the coast between Ningo and the mouth of the Volta is marked "Adampe". It might therefore be expected that the "Adampe" word list should have been drawn from an earlier stage of the Adangme language which is spoken in that area today.

The earliest specimen of Adangme known to this writer is Zimmerman's of 1858, but this, although extensive, is of the Kpone dialect and not representative of the more conservative (and more widely spoken) varieties. In spite of its brevity, therefore, Bowdich's list is of potential philological interest. Unfortunately from the point of view of Ga-Adangme reconstruction, the list is extremely aberrant with respect to modern Adangme. Bowdich himself contrasts his list with a list of Ga words of the same meanings in order to show that the two languages are not at all related. Although he does not say so, one has the impression that his vehemence on this point was motivated by a desire to disprove a current notion that Ga and Adangme were similar. He goes so far as to say that "...all the other words I ever heard (i.e. except for 'fire' - MEKD) cannot be assimilated to those which denote the same objects in any other African language."

* Dr. M.E. Kropp Dakubu is a Research Fellow in Linguistics.

In what follows, each of the "Adampe" words are discussed, and an explanation for the nature of the list is proposed. This explanation, if correct, is of significance for the cultural history of the area.

Bowdich gives the numbers from one to ten for a number of languages, including "Inkran". For "Adampe", he gives only 'one', "kakee", which is comparable to modern Adangme kake. He goes on to say that "Excepting Kakee, one, the Inkran numerals have been adopted as those of Adampe, for the convenience of trade and intercourse, ..." While the numbers of modern Adangme from two to ten are not in all details exactly like those of Ga, they are sufficiently similar that a casual observer might well regard them as "the same".

"aooosoo" 'house'. This is clearly not comparable to modern Adangme we. It may however be compared to Larteh a-wu, Awutu a-wi 'house', awuso 'home' (as in 'he went home'). Rapp gives Kyerepong "awi so" 'home'.

"odja" 'fire'. Modern Ga and Adangme have la, but the modern Akan word is similar to Bowdich's word, as are also Awutu e-ja, Larteh o-je, Nkonya o-ja.

"ossa" 'man'. Neither Ga nor Adangme has a comparable word in the sense of either 'male' or 'person'. In the meaning 'man, person' it may be compared to Awutu o-fānī, plural n-fā, Larteh o-sē. Westermann gives Nkonya "o-sa" and Winneba "o-sā", 'person'.

"osse" 'woman'. There is no similar word in modern Adangme, the normal word being yo corresponding to Ga yoo. There is however a resemblance to Stewart's Awutu o-ce, Larteh and Nkonya o-tsi, Krachi o-ci, and Westermann's Winneba form "o-se".

"ode" 'victual'. In Ga and Adangme the word for 'food' is derived from the verb ye 'eat'. Bowdich's word resembles the verb meaning 'eat' in Akan and in the

Guan languages (di, ji). According to Westermann the word for 'food' in the Guan languages is derived from this verb with the prefix e-. Although he does not mention a nominalizing prefix o- or ɔ-, such as appears in Bowdich's form, one certainly exists as in Stewart's Awutu and Larteh bɔ 'fill', o-bɔ 'full'.

"attay" 'father'. In modern Adangme the normal word for 'father' is tʃɛ, but ataa is used addressively in Ga, especially in religious invocations, with the meaning 'father' or 'male ancestor'. For Nkonya Westermann lists "ata" with the meaning 'ancestor'.

"awoo" 'mother'. As with ataa, awo is not the normal word for 'mother' in modern Adangme, but it occurs in Ga in invocational contexts, and is sometimes prefixed to personal names. In Kyerepong, awo 'mother' is used in a similar way.¹

We come to the conclusion that Bowdich's "Adampe" material represents a southern Guan language, but with Adangme numbers.

The historical interest of this list lies in the evidence it affords that a Guan language was associated with the area between Prampram and Ada as recently as the early nineteenth century. Although Bowdich himself did not travel on the Adangme coast, there seems no reason not to associate his word list with the area of the same name on his map. He quotes (pp. 219-220) Isert's description of that "Adampe" coast. The fact that the numbers appear to have been in Adangme is evidence that the association of words, place and name is correct. This does not mean, however, that an antecedent of modern Adangme was not spoken there as well. According to Isert, who made the journey by land from Christiansborg to Keta and back in 1783-84,

"In der Sprache sind der Ningoer schon von den Akraern verschieden. Sie nennen sich selbst adamper, und ihre Sprache adampich, die ein Mit-

telding von Assiantheisch,
Krepeisch und Akraisch ist."
(Isert page 27).

By "Krepeisch" he means Ewe. The above quotation leaves some doubt as to the nature of "adampisch", but Isert goes on to say that

"Die Adaer sind ebenfalls von
der adampischen Nation."

He quotes one phrase of the Ada language, which appears to be definitely Adangme. He says that about fifty years previously a king of Ada had taken the vain-glorious title "Numbo kus puntse", 'Lord of heaven and earth', which may be interpreted as Adangme nomó-kú pū-tse 'mighty old man, owner of the sun'.²

There is thus reason to think that less than two hundred years ago two languages were intimately associated with part of the coast of Ghana that is now Adangme-speaking, namely, Adangme and a southern Guan language, the second of which has since been eliminated by the first. We may observe a stage in this elimination in the linguistic division between the numbers and the rest of the words in Bowdich's list. There is no doubt that there are Guan elements in Adangme, (although probably not as many as in Ga), and absorption of a considerable group of Guan speakers into the Adangme-speaking population provides an obvious avenue for the acquisition of these elements.

Notes

- (1) Information from Miss E. Addo.
- (2) Isert page 44. I am indebted to Dr. E.O. Apronti for help in the interpretation.

Isert gives only one other word of Adangme, other than place-names. On page 25 he mentions a fish in the "Ponny" river called "hardis", modern Adangme adi.

Works Cited

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Sources on Guan

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- Stewart, J.M., Comparative African Wordlists No.1. Awutu, Larten, Nkonya and Krachi. IAS, 1966.
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