

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE MINA VOCABULARY OF 1479-80

DAVID DALBY AND P. E. H. HAIR

In an earlier note¹ one of us commented that 'any definitive attempt to identify de la Fosse's vocabulary should begin with a re-examination of the manuscript'. In the course of preparing a monograph on the early documentation of West African languages, we have now examined a microfilm of the relevant section of MS 493 of the Bibliothèque Municipale at Valenciennes;² and can report a few corrected and variant readings in the African vocabulary.

The readings of the following terms in the printed text (edited by Foulché-Delbosc in 1897) and in the list in vol. II, no. 2 of this journal, p. 5, are confirmed: *manse*, *caremanse*, *chocqua*, *chocque chocque*, *barbero*, *baa*, *fouffe*, *bora*, *dede*. This list corrects versions in Basset's article of 1911 and in the previous note.

Other terms have now been read as follows:

barbero blaa: this follows the single items *barbero* 'ung enfant' and *baa* 'blanc' and is glossed as 'ung blanc enfant'. Undoubtedly by confusion with 'blanc', *baa* has been repeated as *blaa*: in the previous note, the gloss was queried, but we now consider that the term may have been applied to the cabin-boys in the ships, and perhaps even to de la Fosse himself, who was certainly youthful ('en ma jeunesse') and may have been only in his late teens; cf. modern Twi *aburo-ba* 'European (white) child'.

berenbues/berenbuts (both forms appear): bearing in mind the gloss 'qui descendoient des môtaignes et venoiët pour achapter noz marchandises', and a possible mutation *m > b* in Akan (as back-formation from an assumed plural?), cf. Arabic *murābiṭ*/Portuguese *marabuto*- 'marabout, in West Africa often any Northerner bringing Sudanic influences to the coast'.

berre be [end of line, next begins] *re*: this confirms Basset's suggestion that the printed reading be emended towards the form *berre-berre* in de Barros: cf. modern Twi *bëra bëra* 'come!'.

coucque roucq/coucque roucoucq aguio 'ung poulet'/'oefz': medial *u* and *n* are not distinguished orthographically in the manuscript, but Foulché-Delbosc's readings *conque roncq/concque ronconcq agnio* seem much less likely: cf. modern Ewe/Fon *koklo* and Koelle's (1854) Ewe/Fon *koku:lo/koku:ro*, apparently closer than modern Twi *akokɔ*, (all) 'hen'.

¹ P. E. H. Hair, 'A note on de la Fosse's "Mina" vocabulary of 1479-80', *J.W.A.L.* vol. III, no. 1 (1966), pp. 55-7.

² We are much indebted to M. Paul Lefranq, Conservateur de la Bibliothèque Municipale de Valenciennes, for providing with the microfilm not only his own reading of the manuscript but also considerable information about its history; and we are also indebted to M. Henri Moniot and Mr W. G. L. Randles of the Sorbonne for procuring this material from Valenciennes. MS 493 (453) of Valenciennes (cited by Foulché-Delbosc under an older designation, Q. 5. 9) is a volume containing accounts of three later fifteenth-century voyages: Eustache de la Fosse's account is the third, and the vocabulary is found on f. 450 (f. 135 of an older foliation).

enchoũ: the diacritic is superfluous, since final u and n are distinguished orthographically (the latter having a leftward tail): cf. modern Twi nsu (for earlier ſ, see chocqua below).

famoma 'cest mauvais': since medial m and medial ni/in/ui/iu are indistinguishable orthographically, there are many possible readings: but cf. modern Twi fa 'get' mũmõ 'badness'.

Apart from these corrected readings, the following additional points can now be made.

caremanse: it is worth noting that this title (or name) reappears in a Portuguese document of c. 1635, in the form Caramanza (R. Gray and D. Chambers, MATERIALS FOR WEST AFRICAN HISTORY IN ITALIAN ARCHIVES, 1965, item 658).

chocqua 'lor': cf. modern Twi sika, but for earlier ſ, cf. a source of 1555 (Towerson, in Hakluyt, PRINCIPALL NAVIGATIONS (1589), p. 108), sheke (English sh), and a source of c. 1680 (J. Barbot, DESCRIPTION OF GUINEA, 1732, p. 418), chika (French ch), (all) 'gold': cf. also John M. Stewart, 'Asante Twi in the Polyglotta Africana', SIERRA LEONE LANGUAGE REVIEW, vol. v (1966), pp. 111-15 (on p. 114, for Twi ſ > s).

chocque chocque 'le jeu d'amours': although de la Fosse seems to have thought that this was an African term (and Barbot c. 1680 included in his list of Gold Coast terms hoque 'lie with', p. 416), and the previous note accepted this, in fact it appears to derive from—or coincide with—Portuguese choque (cf. French CHOC, English SHOCK) one of whose meanings is 'embate violente de dois corpos': the reduplicated form choque choque does not appear to be listed in dictionaries of Portuguese, but this may be because the term is vulgar: it is certainly employed today in the Portuguese of Angola, which might suggest that the reduplicated form derives from contact with African languages. On the other hand, a similar term shuk-shuk with the same meaning is found in North African French, and Partridge says of the English term jig-[a]-jig that it was 'used by French touts in both wars and also by Arabs in Africa'. These references might imply that choque choque and similar terms, all reduplicatives, originated in a Mediterranean argot, predating the Portuguese voyages to Guinea;³ or, finally, the various reduplicated forms may have been invented independently.

The Valenciennes MS is dated 1548: had Eustache de la Fosse been still alive at this date, he would have been in his mid-eighties at least. It is therefore virtually certain that this manuscript is a copy of the account written or dictated by de la Fosse much earlier. However, since the account includes a reference to a publication of 1516, it was apparently not composed until at least thirty-six years after the voyage of 1479-80. Examination of the Valenciennes MS has established the form the African terms were given in 1548, but since the terms were gibberish to the copyist, it is possible that they were copied inexactly from the original manuscript. This is perhaps a more likely source of error than de la Fosse's delay in composing his account: his word-list is surely too long to have been carried in the memory for four decades, and we must assume that he made notes during the voyage or immediately after.⁴ But even if the Valenciennes MS were a correct copy of de la Fosse's

³ Information on the use of choque choque in Angola and of shuk-shuk in North African French was kindly supplied by Professor L. Bourdon of the Sorbonne. For jig-[a]-jig, see E. Partridge, A DICTIONARY OF FORCES' SLANG 1939-45.

⁴ Even a single African word might be difficult to remember over a period of several decades. Diogo Gomes, who composed an account of another African voyage thirty years or so after the event, and included a single term in a particular African language, almost certainly composed from notes: see D. Dalby and P. E. H. Hair, 'A West African word of 1456', J.W.A.L. vol. IV, no. 1 (1967), pp. 13-14.

A FURTHER NOTE ON THE MINA VOCABULARY OF 1479-80

notes, it is certain that the young Fleming lacked the technical ability to hear and record African vocabulary exactly, and his word-list in fact gives the impression of being very corrupt. Yet it is noteworthy that, despite these defects of recording and copying, and despite five centuries of linguistic development by the language in question, it is still possible to relate the greater part of this vocabulary, with some confidence, to the corresponding modern terms of a single language, spoken at the same point on the coast today.