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DISTRICT COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE,

W E N C H I, W. P. A.

9th November, 1925.

2000/9/23

THE MFANTRA.
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Sir,

I transmit three copies of a small monograph on
the Mfantra people.

I shall be grateful if you will accept one and if
you approve of it forward one copy each to His Excell-
lency the Governor and the Honourable the Chief
Commissioner.

W. A. M. M.

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER.

THE COMMISSIONER,
WESTERN PROVINCE ASHANTI,
S U N Y A N I.

P/HMB.

The following brief notes concerning the Mfentra people, their customs and a small vocabulary of their language I put forward with all diffidence.

I am well aware of the difficulties which beset any individual who endeavours to represent sounds by symbols. The uncultivated ear with which he hears the sounds is only equalled by the inadequate alphabet on which he has to rely for symbols. Grave impediments both. Even to an experienced student of phonetics the task of translation would not have ^{been} easy. On this subject An University Reader in Phonetics wrote me ten years ago

"The difficulty in regard to writing native African language is that the pronunciation of most of them has not been analysed with sufficient accuracy"

I am not aware of any effort having been made to remove or reduce that difficulty, as regards the language of Ashanti, during the last decade.

I have endeavoured to write down the sounds I imagine I heard in the notation of the English alphabet. If the signs are such as another would not use at least I have been consistent. A letter to me bears the same sound each time it is used.

The small vocabulary is not and is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather is it suggestive of a people whose language and history await research.

THE MFANTRA.
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The Wenchi District is divided into three parts. Tekiman lying to the south and west, Wenchi in the centre and Jaman in the north and west.

Mr Foll, in his notes, records that the Jamans are a race distinct from the Ashantis. The chief difference being the language. He states that the Jamans have three languages Abreng, Mkren and Mfantra.

The Mfantra serve the Omanhene of Drobo, as the chief of the Jamans is styled, through the Ohene of Wireme. They occupy the villages situated on the road which runs from Mengi to Sikassike. Their principal villages are named Debibi, Namasa, Duadase, Jamara and Kekwang. Mfantra people are also to be found in Nseker and Sikassike.

Their origin, as told by themselves, is the one common to most of the Ashanti peoples. Their ancestors came out of a hole in the ground. Their particular hole is situated behind a high hill, called Boma, in the neighbourhood of Debibi. From that hole they crept until they came to a large tree from which were hanging many vines. Under this tree they sheltered until they had built a village near by. This village is now known as Debibi. From this place they moved east to Namasa, west to Duadase, north to Jamara and south to Kekwang.

Although the account of their origin is one very common in Ashanti perhaps a reason for such a belief may be suggested for this particular case. It is well known that in very early times the Ashantis with their warrior servitors, men from Denkyra, made incursions into the outlying districts of the country and killed or captured all who opposed them. It is presumed that the few who escaped fled to the hills and



and forests and there lived quietly in order to avoid attracting the attention of their fierce oppressors. The Ashantis having obtained territory by conquering and driving out the inhabitants placed over the defeated area a consul. He was often a man from Denkeyra. This certainly happened to the land occupied by the Mfantra people. To this day they acknowledge as their overlord a chief who proudly boasts that he is a Denkeyra.

Granted the presumption what is more likely than that the people who had escaped to the forest fastnesses endeavoured to conceal from their descendants the fact that they had opposed the people of the consul and tried to encourage the belief when that individual discovered their existence that they knew nothing of the former strife and that indeed their ancestors had come out of a hole behind the hill.

Whether this theory is tenable or not two things are certain. The Wiremehene states that his ancestors were met in Wireme by the Mfantras and they declare that the first chief they served was a Denkeyra. Now the Ashantis did not overrun Jaman until the reign of Opeku warri. It is not feasible that the Mfantras did not exist before that time. But it is possible that they were driven into the bush on that occasion and appeared after the second attack on the Jaman by the Ashantis under Osei Opeku the Second fifty-five years later.

Whatever their origin it is obvious that as soon as they began to live in fixed settlements, perhaps <sup>even</sup> before they did so, they came into contact with the Ashantis for their villages bear Ashanti names. Even Debibi, which they called their first village, I am informed though I cannot find confirmation for it, is the Ashanti word for the particular shade tree under which, the Mfantras took shelter.



Namasa was so named by the Ashantis who visited the place to buy the flesh of game which had been killed by its inhabitants. So plentiful and constant was the supply that no one at any time was sent away empty. Whereupon they named the place Nam - N'ase (meat no finish i.e. meat is always procurable.)

Duadase lies to the west of Debibi. Here in the early days a huge tree, famed probably for its size, must have fallen. For here the Mfantras built a village and in response to questions whence they came and where they lived they replied Duadasai. i.e. the place where the tree lies. (dua-tree da-lie se-on)

The population of the Mfantras villages as recorded by last census is two thousand five hundred. This is probably not correct. The villages are fairly large and scattered. The five Mfantra villages mentioned above, I estimate, contain nearly four thousand souls.

The Mfantras assert, most emphatically, that they are not Ashantis. A casual inspection reveals no marked physical difference. The heads of the men appear to be a little squarer than those of the Ashantis and that markedly typical head, called the Ashanti head, is perhaps less prevalent. The women have not small feet and hands like the Ashanti aristocratic women. That they have a language distinct from the Ashanti is certain. They are bilingual. Among themselves they speak Mfantra. To outsiders they speak Ashanti fluently.

They live in small compound huts built of wattle and daub with thatched roofs. No arrangement is visible in the position of the compounds. Hence the villages are bizarre in appearance and, I dare say, under normal conditions, none too clean.

The chief occupations of the Mfantra people are farming and hunting. The former is the more important. From it they derive their name. In addition to the ordinary feedstuffs they cultivate cotton and rubber.



Tribal markings are not enforced by customary law.

The elder men and women have three small crescent shaped marks on each side of the neck. The younger <sup>men</sup> to decorate their cheeks as fancy dictates. Many have three parallel marks on the right cheek and a rough parallelogram with a line drawn horizontally through its centre on the left cheek.

Their customs differ little from those of the Ashantis. These at birth and death are similar. It is only in the marriage customs that any marked difference appears.

Marriages are celebrated only at the time of the first rains after the fires have burnt the bush. That is at the time when the earth begins to bring forth its natural crops afresh. The spring of the year. When the day of the marriage arrives the groom carries presents of salt, meat and yam together with a pot of *pete* to his prospective father-in-law. The *pete* is consumed in public. This public drinking is regarded as the outward and visible sign that the marriage has been celebrated. It is also a warning to all men that the lady is no longer unattached. After the consummation of the marriage the husband has to present his mother-in-law, every year at the yam festival, with a chicken and four yams. Should he not do so the omission is taken as a token that he desires a divorce. Naturally the separation of the parties spells the discontinuance of the presents.

MEANTRA VOCABULARY.  
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Man	Lulle	Fire	Kase
Woman	Chulle	Water	Iwumu
Child	Peeh	Stick	Ka
Boy	Nyangabire	Stone	Bonge
Girl	Bichebire	Knife	Bresia
Father	Ndeo	Food	Sille
Mother	Ma	Meat	Kyara
Brother	Lille	Salt	Winge
Sister	Nega	Yam	Fenyingi
Aunt	Nabille	Peto	Pinne
Husband	Nepie	House	Munge
Wife	Neehe	Pot	Chie
Head	Ndainga	Money	Suba
Arm	Batia	Gold	Subanya
Fist	Kangure	Ring	Pegile
Feet	Djellie	Beads	Sarle
Eye	Nybegia	Drum	Binge
Nose	Manna	Gun	Poca
Mouth	Nuw	Pipe	Tubachio
Ear	Neige	Tobacco	Tuba
Breast	Yireme	Cotton	Codoli
Hair	Neure		
Whiskers	Yusanoura		

NUMERALS.

One	Nomu	Twenty	Felco
Two	Shi	Thirty	Felco na kay
Three	Terre	Forty	Felco shi
Four	Djirie	Fifty	Felco shi na kay
Five	Keneng	Sixty	Felco terre
Six	Kekenanu	Seventy	Felco terre na kay
Seven	Kekenashi	Eighty	Felco djirie
Eight	Kekenaterre	Ninety	Felco djirie na kay
Nine	Kekenadjirie	Hundred	Laffar. !
Ten	Kay		
Eleven	Kamunu		
Twelve	Kameshi		
Thirteen	Kamoterre		
Fourteen	Kamedjirie		
Fifteen	Kamokeneng		
Sixteen	Kamokenanu		
Seventeen	Kamokenashi		
Eighteen	Kamokenaterre		
Nineteen	Kamokenadjirie		

The natives of Debibi maintain that in their language they count only from one to one hundred.

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Sun	La	To walk	Nyere
Heen	Yengi	To run	Pea
Stars	Wallo	To sleep	Sinne
Sea	Sesa	To die	Wuku
Lightning	Kinyale	To be born	Wuposse
		To cut	Kiku
Hyena	Kemi	To burn	Kisure
Leopard	Wengfie	To catch	Muyiri
Lien	Wengabe	To cook	Kise
Elephant	Sowa	To buy	Kille
Cow	Nu	To sell	Segapelli
Sheep	Nboa	To call	Wuwuri Naringo
Herse	Sogo	To speak	Kiye
Dog	Muka	To hear	Kilege
Chicken	Ngollo	To marry	Lange
		To quarrel	Wabi
		To make Peace	Chiko