

A FIFTEENTH CENTURY WEST AFRICAN WORD LIST¹

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In the years 1479-1480, Eustache de la Fosse, a Fleming from Tournai, undertook a trading expedition to the west coast of Africa. In December, 1479, he arrived off the coast of what is today Ghana, at 'Chama', doubtless the present-day Shama, which he describes as one of the two ports at Elmina. A few days later, de la Fosse with half the expedition sailed six leagues further eastwards to the second port, which he names 'Laldee duos partz'². Here he began to trade with the local population, but his trading was of short duration: within four or five days a Portuguese squadron arrived at the port, captured him and his ships, and confiscated all his trading goods. The unfortunate trader, after being forced to assist the Portuguese to sell these goods for their benefit, was carried back to Portugal, tried, and condemned to death for having been in Elmina without their permission. He managed, however, to escape to Spain and eventually succeeded in regaining his native country.

Some forty years afterwards, as can be inferred from his references to a work published in Paris about 1516, he wrote down an account of his experiences. The only manuscript known is at present in the Bibliothèque de Valenciennes (Q.5.9) and the copyist informs us that this was written on 29th March, 1548, before Easter. It was edited by R. Foulché-Delbosc in the REVUE HISPANIQUE for 1897, pp.174-201.

On page 182 of this edition, there is a list of 16 words which de la Fosse gives as used in the language spoken at Shama. These are as follows:

manse	king
caremanse	viceroy
berenbucs	merchants
chocqua	gold
enchou	water
berre bene	welcome!
chocque chocque	love
barbero	child
baa	white
barbero baa	white child
fouffe	cloth
concq roncq	chicken
concq ronconcq agnio	eggs
bora	brass armlet
dede	good
fanionna	bad

I had hoped to add notes on the sources of at least some of the words here, but to do so from so far away is impracticable. I thus publish the list as it is, with the hope that someone else will take up the investigation.

¹ The attention of the Editors of the JOURNAL OF WEST AFRICAN LANGUAGES was drawn to this word list by Dr. A. F. C. Ryder of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, to whom our best thanks are due.

² The phrase does not make sense, but as the editor, Foulché-Delbosc, points out, it resembles the Portuguese *aldeia em duas partes*: 'village in two parts', a term which not inaptly describes the situation depicted by de la Fosse. Some scribal confusion seems possible.