



THE EXODUS OF A WEST AFRICAN PEOPLE: DANGME IN ISRAEL'S HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to retell the story of Dangme exodus as a pointer to the biblical Israel's own history from slavery to the Promised Land, exploring the occurrences and the experiences along the way. These occurrences and experiences along the way to liberation are what gave Israel 'a god' and a distinct theology. The range of experiences encountered by the Dangme during this never to return journey ended in West Africa, with a people called the Dangme. Originally their name was *La li* (La people) or *Le li* (Le people) which has a biblical evidence and theological significance. The Old Testament is the basis for the argument of the people's exodus. Their cultures, religions and rites have traces of Hebrew identity which makes them unique biblical figures.

Key Words: Dangme, identity, culture, religion.

INTRODUCTION

The core concern of a people's history is to know where they come from and the circumstances that brought them into being. The Dangme² are a West African people dwelling in modern Ghana and they are about the third largest ethnic group in southern Ghana aside Akan and Ewe. There are eight tribes forming the Dangme State and these are: Adaa, Nugo, Gbugbla, Kpom, Sɛ, Yilɔ-Klo, Manya-Klo and Osudoku; anglicised as: Ada, Ningo, Prampram, Kpone, Shai, Yilo Krobo, Manya Krobo and Osudoku respectively. The first four tribes are situated along the eastern coast of Ghana, sandwiched between the Ewe tribes and the Ga people. The other four are interior mountain dwellers also located between the Akan race; Akyem, Akwapim and Akwamu. They occupy the Eastern Region and the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The Dangme tribes predominantly have fishing, farming, weaving, and carving as their occupation and their language is Dangme. The Dangme society in general is patrilineal, yet with a form of matrilineal system. Patrilineal in short means: a child belongs to, enjoys first right and owes first duties to his paternal agnatic kin.³ In the patrilineal system of inheritance, emphasis is placed on legitimacy of the child's procreators, since descent is traced through the father. On the contrary, a relationship in which the essential marital rites are not performed, a child born out of that relationship is not an illegitimate-child; since he/she inherits a kind of matrilineal inheritance. The child is called *Yo bi* (a woman's child) and inherits the mother's father or grandfather, though the real father can later claim the child through a customary rite known as *La po mi*.⁴

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²Dangme, during the process of its development, suffered inconsistencies in its spelling such as: Adagbe, Adangbe, Adangme or Ada`me. Older manuscripts and books have these variant spellings.

³ H. Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*. Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1973. P23.

⁴*La po mi*; this is a rite among the Krobo which is performed to make children born out of wedlock to inherit their own father. The father of the children who did not lawfully marry the woman before having children with her, the children will be named by the woman's father and the children in turn inherit their grandfather. When the man wants the children, he is asked to pay a fine which should include a castrated ram, money, schnapps and other gifts. The man then takes the children and then re-name

The people known today as Dangme identified themselves as La li (La people or people of La). However, the Dangme people who live beyond the River Volta, in the Volta Region of Ghana, identify themselves as Le li (Le people or people of Le). These are the people of Agɔtime (Ewe language) or its Dangme translation Agɔ tɔm, meaning 'royal palm'. Reindorf brings out the issue of the Le people in the Volta Region as Dangme people. He writes "...thence to the Volta where were situated the districts of the Les, speaking Adangme, the mother dialect of the Ga."⁵ He continued by saying that "the Le people reached from Mount Langma to the Volta." They have same tongue, cultural values, mores and rites as the Dangme people who call themselves La li. In supporting the authenticity of the La claim and identity, Terkpertey writes that "Dangme li kaa bɔ nɛ wa le mɛ amlɔ nɛ ɔ hi ma kake kɛ kuu kake mi blema lokoo. Biɛ nɛ a kɛ le mɛ jamɛ a be ɔ mi ji 'La Li.'"⁶ [The Dangme people as they are known now, stayed in one community in primeval times. The name they were known and called then was people of La].

The tribes forming the Dangme State have their La names as follows:

Table 3:1 Anglicised and La names of the Dangme tribes

TRIBE	ANGLICISED	LA NAME
Adaa	Ada	La Okɔ
Nugo	Ningo	La Sibi
Gbugbla	Prampram	La Kplɛ
Kpom	Kpone	La Sega (Kplɛku)
Sɛ	Shai	La Sɛku (Ladoku)
Klo (Yilɔ)	Yilo Krobo	La Aklo
Klo (Manya)	Manya Krobo	La Aklo
Osudoku	Osudoku	La Gbɛse / Lanɔ

These La names were the aboriginal identity of the tribes.

The Genesis of the People

The tribes of the world have been moving in search of a safe dwelling place since creation and the Primeval Narratives in Genesis 1-11, allude to this fact. Therefore, the search for a safe dwelling place has been the basis of migration from one place of abode to another in search of peace, freedom and sustainable livelihood. The Bible recorded many exodus aside the major one that took the wondering Israel from Egypt to the Promise Land.

Similarly, there were a people called *Layshah* or *Laish* with *Leshem* being a variant spelling, who dwelt in a city far north of Ancient Palestine. The Hebrew root of *laish* applied to the lion in two of the 'Poetic books' (Job 4:11 and Proverbs 30:30). This people may be called Laish based on their overt nature which identified them as lions. The writer of the Book of Judges describes the People of Laish as people who dwelt safely prior to the invasion of the Danites in Judges 18. The Danites being Israelites employed Moses' military strategy of sending spies ahead of the invading troops to scout the territory. The spies described inhabitants of Laish as people who 'dwelt safely.' Their way of life depicts that of the Sidonians. Sidon is a significant Phoenician city after Tyre. Well known Mediterranean seaport which developed because of its international shipping activities and also it is a dominant religious centre.⁷ It could be that the inhabitants of Laish were not Phoenicians nor Canaanites, but a unique tribe. Laish was situated in modern Israel, to the west is the southern part of the Lebanon Mountain and to the east and north is the Hermon Mountain. It lay near the source of the Jordan and the melting snow from the Hermon Mountain

them. For a discussion see J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, *Interpreting the Pauline Salvation Imagery of Adoption in Krobo Religio-Cultural Thought*. Journal of Applied Thought 1(1) (2013):71-88.

⁵ C. C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* 3rd Ed. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 2007, p. 23.

⁶ T.T. Terkpertey, *Dangme Blebo Nɔ: Dangme Culture*. Volume One. Odumase-Krobo: Universal Printing Press, 2004, p. 7.

⁷ Don Flemin, *Bridgeway Bible Dictionary*, p. 405

provided most of the water in the River Jordan. This water passes through Laish, making the Land very fertile for agricultural purposes. The verdant vegetation around the immediate surroundings of Laish, appear mystifying; considering otherwise the parched territory around it. The Deuteronomistic Historian(s) in his/their narration, explained that Laish had an alliance with the people of Sidon, though lived very far from Sidon.

So the five men departed and went to Laish. They saw the people who were there, how they dwelt safely, in the manner of the Sidonians, quiet and secure. There were no rulers in the land who might put them to shame for anything. They were far from the Sidonians, and they had no ties with anyone.

.....and went to Laish, to a people quiet and secure; and they struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. There was no deliverer, because it was far from Sidon, and they had no ties with anyone. It was in the valley that belongs to Beth Rehob. So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish. And the border of the children of Dan went beyond these, because the children of Dan went up to fight against Leshem and took it; and they struck it with the edge of the sword, took possession of it, and dwelt in it.

They called Leshem, Dan, after the name of Dan their father (Judges 18:27-29 and Joshua 19:47).

This biblical reference presents the foundation of the Dangme migration from Northern Palestine which this paper presents as exodus of a West African people.

The Exodus

The Dangme or La li seem to be people whose identity, original language and culture and other anthropological values might have suffered slight corruption with the effect of migration. Considering their anthropological values, social organizations and religious traditions, it could be deduced that they were sojourners from a destination in the ancient Northern Palestine province. It is without much doubt that the people might not be from the twelve tribes of Israel.

Biblical narratives and historical records of the Ancient Near East both attests to the fact that, there were a Northern Palestine people whose identity and the end of their story in the Northern Palestine region seem to be the beginning of the migration of the Dangme or La nation.⁸

Biblically, the writer of the book of Judges describes the people of Laish as living securely, undisturbed and unsuspecting and lived without a king. Biblical records explain that Laish/Leshem had very fertile land, meaning farming will be their identifiable vocation. In fact, Laish/Leshem is a place that lacks nothing on earth! The Danites after invading Laish conquered and drove the people out and the Danites rebuild the city and named it Dan after their ancestor Dan, the son of Israel.⁹

The current authors hypothetically state that the Dangme people were the people of Laish/Leshem, who fled their homeland in the Northern Palestine because of the Danites (Israelites) attack, in search of safety. It is possible that their language and cultural values might have experience slight corruption which could possibly reduce their name Laish to La and Leshem to Le.¹⁰ Oral traditions preserved in Klama¹¹ alluded to the fact that the Dangme descended from Israel, though this study carries a different opinion. Fiorgbor in his long essay presented to School of Ghana Languages, Ajumako in 1986, claims that:
Dangme li a biε kpa hu ji La li. Lɔɔ he Manya Klo ɔ La li ji mε. Nε bɔnε La li a kɔ nya ni peemi kε kusumi komε kε Islae nihi komε kɔ ha a, nɔje tsɔ be he kaa blema ko ɔ a kε La li ɔmε hi he kakε hyε.

⁸ E. T. Fiorgbor, "Some Translation Problems in the Pentateuch of the *Ngmami Klɔuklɔu* ɔ (the Dangme Bible)." Unpublished thesis presented to the School of Graduate, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, for the award of Master of Philosophy degree, 2014. p.55.

⁹ Judges 18:27-29 and Joshua 19:47.

¹⁰ Fiorgbor, "Some Translation Problems in the Pentateuch of the *Ngmami Klɔuklɔu* ɔ (the Dangme Bible), p. 56.

¹¹ *Klama* is the indigenous language and song of the ancient and modern Dangme nation. The current Dangme language derived from Klama, the cultural language of the Dangme nations. Klama has been preserved by the older generation, priests and priestesses, because the historical songs, culture, herbalism and aphorisms of the Dangme nation are enshrined in it. T.T. N. Accam, 'Forward' M.E. Kropp-Dakubu ed. *Dangme and Klama Proverbs Part I*, Legon: IAS, 1972, p. I.

*Olua Mamatta ye he odase kaa Dangme aloo La li kple si kɛ je Sudan.*¹²[The Dangme are also called La li. Therefore, the people of Manya Krobo are also La li. Cultural patterns and traditions of the La li prove some similarities with some cultural patterns and traditions of the people of Israel. There is no much dispute that they ever stayed together. Mr Mamatta also testified that the Dangme or the people of La descended from Sudan].

Fiorgbor's claim though cannot be substantiated, is supported by a ton of oral traditions and oral history among the Dangme. Their Northern Palestine origin and Sudan stopover never received much documentation¹³. Smith explains that "almost all the inhabitants of Ghana are of Sudanese Negro stock with a small admixture of Hermit in the north. Oral traditions again, give reasons to believe that they came mostly from the Sudan area although the Gas, Adangmes and Ewes reached Ghana from the east."¹⁴ Reindorf also supported this claim as he mentioned that Ga and Adangme tribes emigrated together from the East¹⁵. The Dangme settled in Samɛ¹⁶ and to this, Reindorf writes 'Samɛ, a country situated between two rivers, Efa and Kpola, near Niger, is supposed to have been the former seat of the Adangme tribes. The hostility of their neighbouring tribes¹⁷ caused them to quit the place; leaving Oyo on the North and Dahome on the South.¹⁸ Azu on his part also sighted Samɛ as an island situated on the south west of river Ogum adjoining Ladah and Dahome.¹⁹ For a reason that earlier writers could not authenticate the Palestine origin of the Dangme, the people now settled on Samɛ unanimously as their ancestral home. Azu, recounted that, from Samɛ they journeyed to Akpe and continued to Zugu²⁰ where they encountered Apɛte Sukluku²¹ the king who demanded human lives for their passage through his colony. These episodes are captured in these Klama songs: *Apɛte Sukluku, moo ngmee zu he, se mo ji Zutsɛ!* Meaning 'Apɛte Sukluku, release the land for it belongs to you'!

Another Klama song: *A kpa ngɛ Zago (Zugu) Nɛ a nu ngɛ La (Ladah)* Meaning 'They cried at Zago (zugu) and it was heard in La (Ladah).²²

An oral tradition has it that during their encounter with Apɛte Sukluku, his demands and oppressions on the wayfarers, cried out calling their brethren at Ladah. The migrants departed from Zugu and headed towards Huatsi²³ and then continued to Tuwo in Togoland, attacking and conquering minor tribes along their way. The exodus continued to Tsamla where they stayed for some years before moving to Kpesi and stayed there and made acquaintances. Together with some of the Kpesi friends, they departed to Atakpame also in Togoland. They continued marching to Agɔmɛ where their brethren settled to this day. The people of Agɔmɛ call themselves Le li and live beyond the River Volta. All the rest crossed the

¹² S. T. Fiorgbor, *Nadudomi Ng1 Many Kloo*. Unpublished Long Essay Submitted to the School of Ghana Languages, Ajumako, 1986, p. 1.

¹³ S. T. Fiorgbor, *Nadudomi Ng1 Many Kloo*, p. 1

¹⁴ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1960*, p.3.

¹⁵ C. C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante 3rd Ed.* p. 23

¹⁶ It has not been possible tracing Same or the two great rivers mentioned, Efa and Kpola on either Niger or Nigeria maps as claimed by C. Reindorf. However, Teyegaga, *Dipo Custom and the Christian Faith*. Accra: J'Piter Press Ltd. 1985, p.11, made a claim that Same today is a semi grass land between Dahome now (Benin) and Nigeria in the Ogum state called (S1m1) the ancestral home of the Dangmes – who were known and called Le, La and Dangme people.

¹⁷ The neighbouring tribes have been named as the *Babalulu* tribe that attacked and drove the La li or Dangme people out of Same. Teyegaga, p. 11.

¹⁸ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante 3rd Ed.*, p. 47.

¹⁹ Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*, p. 3.

²⁰ Zugu is at the northern part of Togoland. The name on the old Togo map was written as Zoo Goo.

²¹ Ap1te Sukluku, the king of Zugu (Azu spelt the name, Apete Sukluku, while Teyegaga spelt it Opete Zungmlugmu) who demanded the sojourners pay for their passage through his territory with seven human lives.

²² Accam, T.N.N., *Klama Songs and Chants*. Accra: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1967, p. 63

²³ The then king of Huatsi was Agɔ Kɔli, a very wicked king who enslaved the Dangme people for years before they flee together with the Anlɔ people. It is spelt *Hwatshi* by C. Reindorf.

Volta at Ayibom, (a small village between Akrade and Kpong) and arrived at Tagologo as a unified La people.²⁴

The Schism

The narration thus far never contained a human figure with the title King. This means that right from their Palestine home of Laish, they never lived in a kingdom and so had no monarchy. Rather their system of governance was theocracy, with each La tribe having spiritual leader(s) in the form as priestly-warriors who led under divine intuition. Under this kind of leadership, they settled in tribes on the plains between Noweyo and Manya – Paplayo. Teyegaga described this area as the present Osudoku, Akuse, Zago Hue near River Okue, the Krobo Mountain and Lolovv hills.²⁵ The Dangme settled and prospered and became mighty and expelled all enemies. It might be possible that their name changed from La li or Le li to their present name Dangme at this point.²⁶

According to oral tradition, the people became a strong unified force, expelling all others that come to fight them. This made their neighbouring Anglo people, to describe them as Ada wo, meaning warriors and their language became *ada wo gbe*. Etymologically, Adawogbe means the voice/language of the warriors. The name changed in spelling and pronunciation with the passage of time to Adagbe, Ada`me, Adangme and now Dangme²⁷.

A legend has it that the people stayed at Tagologo for a longer period until an issue broke out and they separated. They renamed the place Lolovv; an Ewe phrase meaning ‘love is finished.’²⁸ Reindorf explained that ‘having no king but every tribe its own priest leader or headman, there was no difficulty in separating.’²⁹ The Krobo tribes (Manya and Yilo) went to the Krobo Mountain under the leadership of Muase and Maja, both hunters and Kloweki a priestess. Part of the Osudoku people who moved to Ga, maintained their name as Osu, the other group kept their aborigine name La. The rest of the people departed to their present locations.³⁰

The Worldview of the Dangme

The Dangme State has a worldview which they uphold and live up to. Worldview is a person’s way of thinking about and understanding life, which depends on their beliefs and attitudes.³¹ Worldview may also mean the way a person understands and interprets issues and circumstances that befall him or her and others. O’Donovan explains world view as the view a person has of his world.³² A person’s worldview is the spectacle through which he or she sees what is true, right, good, moral, bad, evil and wrong.³³

Dangme has its own way of constructing knowledge, understanding, analysing and evaluating social, moral, religious, economical, political and ethical phenomena. Dangme before and after the schism, are united only by their culture, religious beliefs, and language; all put together in a functional context as Dangme worldview.³⁴

Culture is the way of life of a people, brought forth from generation to generation as their response to environmental reactions. Culture grows and when a primeval culture meets contemporary culture, the

²⁴ B. D. Teyegaga, *Dipo Custom and the Christian Faith*. Accra: J’piter Printing Press Ltd., 1985, p. 13

²⁵ Teyegaga, *Dipo Custom and the Christian Faith*, p. 16.

²⁶ Teyegaga, B.D., p. 18.

²⁷ A. A. Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*. 1926 p. 14.

²⁸ Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*, p 4.

²⁹ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante 3rd Ed.*, p. 48.

³⁰ Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*, p. 5.

³¹ Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 7th edition.

³² W. O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*. India: Oasis International Ltd. 1997, p. 3.

³³ O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, p 3.

³⁴ Arlt, V., *Christianity, Imperialism, and Culture: The Expulsion of the Two Krobo States C.1830-1930*. Basel: Copy Quick, 2005. p. 43

primeval culture is suppressed and sometimes killed, giving way to the contemporary culture to dominate; this is why culture is said to be dynamic.³⁵

John Corrie says the concept of culture came to include material (technological), social (customs), and ideational (world-view, language, symbols, and religion) dimensions.³⁶ He placed worldview in the domain of culture; hence worldview becomes a subset of culture. But worldview rather gives culture its authenticity, because it is the worldview that places culture into a functional context. According to Asante, culture is 'the sum of patterns of behaviour acquired from humans' dealings with their environment and transmitted to later generations through art and symbols, the aims of which is to define a group's identity and aspiration, to serve as the basis of social behaviour, and as a factor determining what is to be accepted or rejected in a given situation.³⁷ He explained 'this definition of culture underscores culture as dealing with a specific way of life. This specific way of life includes a specific way of thinking, of living, and of viewing the universe. This definition and explanation cross over from culture to worldview. Though worldview and culture look fused, there is a point of divergence. Culture is an overt attitude and worldview is a covert attitude of a people and it is easy to exhibit a people's culture, but one need the heart of the people to accept their worldview.

All people have culture and worldview, and these are the spectacles by which they profess what they speak, wear, eat, vocation, and even their belief. It is a people's worldview that makes them strangers to others, even if they spoke the same language, eat the same food, and wear the same cloths. An individual person shares the worldview of the background group he or she belongs. A worldview of a person is defined by environmental factors such as the community where the person grew up, the social education the person had, and the religious discipline the person is subjected to.

The worldview of a group is very necessary in determining the group's faith, and their interpretation of the sacred and secular. It is the worldview on which the people build their theology, interpret the Scriptures and applied biblical principles. This is the intent of the research, to investigate how much biblical interpretation is influenced by worldview. The Dangme worldview is a covert attitude on which their culture is based, and few themes will be considered: rulership, humanity according to the Dangme, the religious life of the people and the idea of the Creator God.

Rulership

Rulership among the Dangme is worthy of study with the reason that the Dangme had a unique and distinctive system of rulership. Their rulership style is absolute theocracy, thus a system of governance where rulers were priests with divine intuition. The primeval Dangme had a system of governance like the ancient Hebrew before the time of the monarchy; hence the idea of chieftaincy and stools is quite borrowed. Akrong after a careful study of the Dangme (Ga-Dangme) governance, comments that this form of traditional governance can, properly speaking be described as theocracy.³⁸

Their rulers were just like Israelites under Moses, Joshua and the Judges. A straight line can be drawn from the Israel's priestly experience to that of the Dangme. The ruler here is a priest or a spiritual leader whose rulership mandate is given by the deity of the land. In the case of Israel, Yahweh.

Ray opines that the main task of a priest is to sustain and renew the life of the community he serves. Often the priest contains within himself the life-force which he seeks to mandate his people.³⁹ The irony here is that though the people are not monotheistic, all other priests are subjects to the divine ruler, whose authority is constructed based on rules, taboos and rituals of the deity as in the case of Israel.

³⁵ E. T. Fiorgbor, 'Christian Mission and Traditional Religion: The Encounter Between the Basel Mission and Traditional Religions at Odumase-Krobo 1835-1917. A Long Essay Presented to Trinity Theological Seminary in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Bachelor of Theology Degree. Unpublished Thesis, 2010. p. 15.

³⁶ J. Corrie, *Dictionary of Mission Theology*. Nothengham: InterVarsity Press, 2007, p. 82.

³⁷ E. Asante, *Culture, Politics and Development: Ethical and Theological Reflection on the Ghanaian Experience*. Ghana: Challenge Enterprise, 2007, p. 2.

³⁸ A. Akrong, 'Religion and Traditional Leadership in Ghana' in Irene K. Odotei and Albert K. Awedoba (Eds.) *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*. Accra, Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2006, p. 202.

³⁹ B. C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbol, Ritual and Community*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976, p. 116.

This pre-monarchical theocratic governor is the Lanimo or Lenimo, which is translated “Lord over lords” or “King over kings”⁴⁰. Lanimo’s position is both religious and political. It is religious in the sense that he mediates between ‘Nyingmo’ and His people. Politically, Lanimo must be a warrior in all respect, to lead the people to battle. Reindorf mentioned that the ‘Le or Ningo or Adangme’s king had the title Ladingcour or Lanimo.’⁴¹ The next in the hierarchal-theocratic rulership is the Ga nɔ literally translated the ‘Wise one’ but could mean wise counsellor who has command over towns. The Ga nɔ has both spiritual and political oversight of the people. He settles disputes and he is the judge of the land. On these two positions, Reindorf writes ‘Lanimo, the father of Late Odoi, who was the first King of the Krobo (Dangme) was both priest and king, and Sodshe was the most powerful general of the priest (Ga nɔ), having command of sixteen towns.’⁴² Occupation to these positions is by Nyingmo’s own prerogative. Konɔ is the next in the hierarchy and it means the one who is carried on the shoulder as a sign of honour or respect during public functions. This has no religious or spiritual association; rather it is a leader of the youth for communal or public work and gives guidelines as to people’s behaviour.⁴³

The taboos, laws and rituals of the Dangme are embedded in the Jemeli who service the Jeml a w4. According to Akrong, the Jemeli (which he spelt Djemeli) function as the custodians of the taboo laws that controlled human life overall. He translates Jemeli as rulers of the world who because of their knowledge and wisdom about life can rule the people in the sense of showing them how to live the good life.⁴⁴ In contrast to Akrong’s opinion, the Jemeli are a batch of religious rulers who are pure in conscience and behaviour and their functions include, purging the land of sin, misfortunes and curses (musu jemi). Akrong was right to say that w4n4 4m1, the priests were at later dates incorporated into the Jeme li.

This type of rulership has given way to chieftaincy leadership with the *Lanimo* or *Lenimo* and *Ga nɔ* are reserved to cultic use and in the domains of religious practitioners; example *Wa nimo* now means our overlord and used to address *Jemɛ a wɔ nɔ* (sacred priests). *Ga nɔ* on the other hand made its way into the *Ngmami Klɔuklɔu ɔ* (Dangme Bible) to mean officials. Chieftaincy was almost certainly introduced as a political structure to breathe some military organisation into Dangme rulership. Just as the monarchy was also introduced in the ancient Israel. It is noteworthy that the chief stools were introduced somewhere about eighteenth century as war stools.⁴⁵

Humanity According to the Dangme

In the worldview of the Dangme, is the concept of humanity. It is held that human beings are in transition from *huanimi* (the spirit world), into *jemi* (this material world), then to *gbeje* or *gboje* (the world of the dead or Hades), then to *anɛwe* or *bosowe* (where one spends eternity).⁴⁶

Huanimi

The Dangme belief is that all human beings come from *huanimi*, (the spirit world) to *jemi* (this physical world) and *Nyingmo* (the Supreme Being) is its overlord. Huanimi has no geographical location, yet it is believed that ‘people’ live there in families such as husbands, wives, children, just as they are here on earth.⁴⁷ It is believed that people live there in the form of *kla* or *susuma*⁴⁸ (souls). According to this

⁴⁰ A. A. Azu, ‘Adangbe (Adangme) History.’ Arranged and translated by Enoch Azu in 1926, p. 20

⁴¹ Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* 3rd ed., p. 23.

⁴² Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* 3rd ed p.70.

⁴³ Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*. 1926 p. 19

⁴⁴ Akrong, ‘Religion and Traditional Leadership in Ghana’, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Azu, *Adangbe (Adangme) History*. 1926 p. 20

⁴⁶ Terkpertey, *Dangme Blebo Nɔ: Dangme Culture*, p. 15

⁴⁷ E. T. Fiorgbor, ‘Christian Mission and Traditional Religion: The Encounter Between the Basel Mission and Traditional Religions at Odumase-Krobo 1835-1917, p. 22

⁴⁸ *Susuma* or *Kla*: they are likely to be derived from the neighbouring Akan vocabulary *susum* and *kra*. According to G.J. Christerler *Dictionary of Asante and Fante Languages*, p.484 and 262 respectively. Cited in Hugo Huber. They mean the soul and the spirit of man.

assumption, a person predetermines how his/her life should be on earth at *huanimi*; life span, marital status, ability to bear children, even how one departs this physical life. These are termed *se:se* (destiny or fate). To the Dangme, the human soul or spirit does not die, but passes on to the next state. Terkpetey expresses this idea as; *Kla a ji nɔ ne woɔ siade ha nɔmlɔ, ne le ji nɔmlɔ nitsɛ ɔne. Kla a gbo we.*⁴⁹ [It is the soul that decides one's fortune; it is the real human being. It does not die]. This opinion about the Dangme is based on their belief in the immortality of the human soul.

Jemi (the physical world)

It is believed that on entry into the physical world, one must fulfil the obligation of *S1s11*. *S1s11* may be translated as destiny or fate; thus, life is already predestined from *huanimi*. This may be similar if not the same understanding as the Calvinist's theology of predestination in Romans 28:29-30. Nevertheless, one can change for better or for worse; if for better the soul lives happily in the body, but if for worse, the soul leaves the human body. It is common to hear the 'depressed, the disturbed, the frustrated, being described as *E kla je e se* or *E susuma je e se*. That is to say 'his/her soul has left him/her. To the Dangme, when a human body is disturbed, the soul departs from the body leaving the body in a state of distress. When a person exits this physical life, he/she pass on to *Gbeje*⁵⁰ (the land of the dead).

Gbeje

Gbogboe hi a je or *Gbeje* means the world of the dead. The Dangme believe that it is the human body that dies, but the soul goes to a place where another form of life exists. At death, the soul departs to *gbeje*, a stopover kind of place. At *gbeje*, the soul is known as *kpade* (this word is translated as ghost) and waits a form of judgement from the *Nimeli* (ancestors) who are just in their verdict. The soul hovers between 'the land of the dead' and 'the land of the living' as it awaits the jury's verdict. They believe these two worlds are in constant interaction with each other; hence the dead can be called through soothsayers to tell what killed them, and how their funeral should be conducted. The ancestors have the power to bless and curse, to save and to kill, to heal and to afflict with sickness; and whether to accept the deceased being sent to them or not. Geographically, they believe that *gbeje* is beyond *wo se* (the oceans or the seas). Therefore, when a person dies and is about to be buried, money and some items are put in the coffin of the deceased, to enable the departing relative to pay the ferry charge so he/she will be ferried across the oceans and live there with the items. But the dead can be at *gbeje* and oversee the world of the living. They can be called to help the living solve problems, through soothsayers.⁵¹ It is often heard in their prayer to the dead as: *Ke o ya a ne o ya da wo kpongu nɔ o gbaa wo*⁵² [When you get there, stand on an Isle in the sea and bless us].

After the judgement from the *Nimeli*, the soul passes to the next stage. This might be similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory,⁵³ where the dead awaits judgement.

Anɛ we aloo Boso we

⁴⁹ Terkpetey, *Dangme Blebo Nɔ: Dangme Culture*, p.14.

⁵⁰ E. T. Fiorghor, 'Christian Mission and Traditional Religion: The Encounter Between the Basel Mission and Traditional Religions at Odumase-Krobo 1835-1917, p. 23

⁵¹ H. Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*. Fribourg: St. Paul's Press, 1973, p. 23.

⁵² Terkpetey, *Dangme Blebo Nɔ: Dangme Culture*, p. 15.

⁵³ The teachings of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches set forth a place of temporal punishment in the intermediate realm known as purgatory, in which it is held that all those who die at peace with the church, but who are not perfect must undergo penal and purifying suffering. Only those believers who have attained a state of Christian perfection are said to go immediately to heaven. All unbaptized adults and those who after baptism have committed mortal sin go immediately to hell. The great mass of partially sanctified Christians die in fellowship with the church but nevertheless encumbered with some degree of sin go to purgatory, where, for a longer or shorter time, they suffer until all sin purge away, after which they are translated to heaven. W. A. Elwell (ed); *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2nd, Michigan: Grand Rapids; 2006, p. 972.

The last stage of the Dangme worldview of the human being is *Anɛ we* or *Boso we*.⁵⁴ It is their opinion that after judgement by the *Nimeli* (the ancestors), the righteous and the just are sent to a place of rest from the toils of this world; and the wicked and evil doers are sent to a place of punishment and torment. The distinction here is not too apparent as to which place carries the notion of punishment for the wicked and which place carries the notion for eternal rest or reward for the righteous. At the death of a person, elderly mourners and sympathizers ask: *E nɛ ɔ nɛ, e yaa Anɛ we aloo Boso we* [As for this, is he/she going to Anɛ's home Boso's home]?

This is similar to the Christian doctrine of Heaven or Paradise and Hell.

In sum, this worldview of the Dangme about the human being is not cyclical as T. T. Terkperter put it; that from *Huanimi*, one goes to *Jemi* then to *Gbeje* and then back to *Huanimi*. Rather, it is a journey with indefinite course, because some people pass from *Huanimi* to *Gbeje* (in the case of stillbirth) and some people come to *Jemi* with distinctive marks. Such people are believed to come back to *Jemi* from *Gbeje* and are called *Gboba* 'died and has come back.' The concept of *Gboba* has not been thoroughly investigated by this study. Diagrammatically, the Dangme worldview of the human being is represented as:

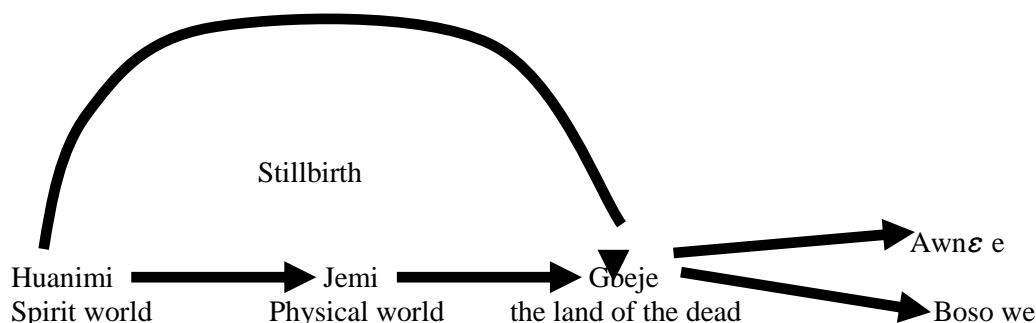


Fig. 3.1 Dangme worldview of the Human Being

The Religious life of the Dangme

The Dangme are religiously pluralistic people hence it is impossible to have a pre-westernized Dangme who is an atheist or one who does not owe allegiance to any deity. As African people, the Dangme traditional religions cannot be defined, but rather be described, because it has no limits and boundaries. It can be explained and defended that the Dangme has no religion, but a religious life of a people brought forth from generation to generation, as they attempt to interact with reality and truth. Traditional religions like cultures grow and when indigenous traditional religion encounters a modern religion, the original religion is sometimes suppressed and killed. This has been the case of the Dangme in light its encounter with Westernization and foreign religions. Opoku views African Traditional Religion as one that:

Hardly needs pointing out, [it] is part of the religious heritage of humankind. Born out of the experience and deep reflection of our forebearers, it provides answers to the deep stirring of the human spirit and elaborates on the profundity of experiences of divine-human encounter based on the resources of Africa's own cultural heritage and insight. It also provides answers to the ultimate question posed by men and women in Africa, gives meaning and significance to human life. Explains the origin a destiny of human beings, how everything in the world came into being and the

⁵⁴ *Anɛ we aloo Boso we*; this means *Anɛ's home or Boso's home*. This rhetorical question is asked by mourner and sympathizer when someone dies, as to where the person soul will spend eternity? It is not too clear which place represents punishment and which is for reward.

relationship that should exist between them. In short, it is Africa's own way of coming to terms with reality.⁵⁵

In the excerpt, Opoku tries to describe what African Traditional Religion meant to the African. He writes as an apologetic of African traditional religion calling it an ending heritage. In this regard, it is believed that there can be no African traditional religion but rather, African traditional religious life. This is to say that every tribe in Africa has its own religious beliefs and cultures which define the tribe's being. The fact remains that no single tribe's religion can stand to represent the whole of the African continent. Africa practices traditional religion rather than it being just a doctrine, is expressed well as Ojike adduces "if religion consists of deifying one character and crusading around the world to make him acceptable to all mankind, then the African has no religion. But if religion means doing rather than talking, then the African has a religion."⁵⁶ It could be deduced that Africa's religions are more ritualistic than ceremonial and that is what Dangme traditional religious life stands to represent.

The Idea of the Creator God

The Dangme like many African societies had the idea of a Supreme Being whose name is well known among them before the coming of the Basel missionaries in 1829.⁵⁷ It is just that they lack the idea that this Supreme Being revealed the Self in Christ Jesus the Son. Huber explains this point by referring to the earliest missionaries. In view of the early date (1867) of the following excerpt from a report of J. Zimmermann, who together with Aldinger were missionaries in the Krobo area, it is hardly possible to doubt that the name and concept of a Supreme Being, go back to the days before Christian missionaries arrived among the Krobo (one of the Dangme tribes). Zimmermann writes:

Both are written in their pagan hearts, viz. that is a God, and that God is one. I have never become acquainted with any pagan who would have denied the existence of the one God, except perhaps in the case of an apostate Christian. In the language of this tribe as well as the two neighbouring idioms Twi and Ewe there exist no plural form of the term for "God"; for a deity, fetish, idol; a quite different term is used. Of God, they say that he himself, being eternal and not created, is the creator of heaven and earth. His name is often used and even thanks are rendered to him. In general way people believe themselves to be protected by him; he is called "Father", "Father of all" etc. This is however, the entire service and worship, which the Negroes render to this one God. Their fears and trust have no direct relation to him, but rather to other beings.⁵⁸

In the write-up, Zimmermann did not give the name of this one God though his name is often used. This name is revered among them; hence the people prefer to call their God *Mau*⁵⁹ or *Laosiada*.⁶⁰ However, *Nyingmo*⁶¹ could be the aboriginal name that Zimmerman failed to mention in his writings⁶². When the Bible was being translated into Dangme, the Hebrew name *YHWH* has been transliterated *Yawε* to mean the Creator God in the *Ngmami Klɔuklɔu* ♂. This may be because the Hebrew word *~yhiêlʾa/ Elohim* has been translated sometimes as *mawuhi*, a plural form of *Mawu*.

⁵⁵ K. A. Opoku, *African Traditional Religion: An Ending Heritage in Religious Plurality in Africa* in Jacob K. Olupona, and Sulayman S. Nyang (eds) *Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*, New York: Mouton De Gruyter, 1993, p. 67.

⁵⁶ M. Ojike, *My Africa*. New York: John Day, 1946, p.18.

⁵⁷ The first set of Basel missionaries that berth on December 18, 1828, three of them died in Ningo.....

⁵⁸ Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, p. 234. Huber translated this piece from German. "Der Evang. Heidenbote", 1867, p. 42.

⁵⁹ *Mawu* is the name of the Supreme Being among the Ewe speaking tribes. *Mawu* has an Ewe origin which means 'the one who surpasses all, in wisdom, strength, might, glory, honour etc. *Mawu* is different from *etr4*, *vodu* etc. *Mawu* etymologically does not make any meaning in Dangme, the mother dialect of Krobo.

⁶⁰ J. Abedi-Boafo, *Dangme Nyaii: Classical and Idiomatic Dangme*. Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1980, p. 85. *Laosiada* has been spelt as 'Lao Siada and translated as 'The Gracious Father; the Bountiful Giver' *Laosiada* is an appellation used to qualify the name of the Supreme Being such as *Laosiada Nyingmo*, or *Laosenyingmo*.

⁶¹ *Nyingmo* is found among the Dangme as the original name of God and *Nyingmo* is similar to the Ga name of God; Ny4 m4.

⁶² J. Zimmermann, *A Grammatical Sketch of the Akra or Ga-Language and Some Specimens of it from the mouth of the Natives with Adan'me Appendix*. Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, 1858. In this book *Mawu* is found as the name of God, may be because the Ga people also have *Mawu* in their vocabulary.

The above establishes the fact that the Dangme have a worldview of a Supreme Being called by a sacred name, Nyingmo the creator God. Nyingmo may be so sacred to the people that they prefer to call the Supreme Being by the Ewe adopted name, Mawu, but spelt Mau. To the Dangme, this one God is expressed in their daily occurrences such as *Mau ngɛ* (God exists), *Mau lɛ ha a nɔ* (it is God who gives), *Mau ji wa tsɛ* (God is our Father) and many expressions of such nature are given as names to people to show how active God is in their lives. Mau has no temple, shrine, sanctuary nor a place of worship among the people.

Again, Mau has no priests, priestesses, prophets, prophetess nor its own servants. But this Mau is prominently commemorated and officially invoked during public worship and prayers. When the Dangme are offering public prayers, which is done by a priest of a deity, or a family head they mention the names of the objects of worship according to their supremacy.

The typical Dangme prayer pattern is hierarchical as shown below:

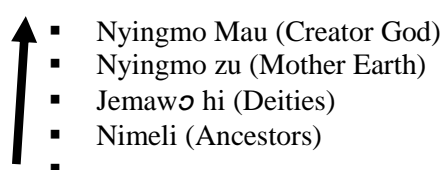


Figure 3.2 Hierarchical arrangement of prayer

After this address, then nibimi (that is supplication, petition, protection) follows.

Jemawɔhi

Another religious phenomenon that is unique to the Dangme is the worship of Jemaw⁴. These cannot be called fetish rather they are gods so to speak. Jemaw⁴ (singular) and Jemawɔhi (plural) can be described as supernatural forces. Field described them as powerful type of intelligent w⁴,⁶³ not specialized in his activities but practically omnipotent and omniscient. He comes and goes like the wind.⁶⁴ Etymologically, it may be 'jemɛ a wɔ, which may mean the deities of this world. Huber explains the etymology as djemi (in the world) and wɔ (deity) as the meaning of guardian hence he concluded that jemawɔ can be translated as 'guardians in the world.' From the translations, deity or deities of this world sounds more appropriate compared to 'guardians in the world as translated by Huber. The question about the origin of the jemawɔ hi, almost always receives one response as God gave them to the Dangme to worship.

One prominent jemaw⁴ among the Dangme is the Nadu cult. Huber's comment on its origin will prove meaningful in this discussion;

According to M.J. Field⁶⁵ Nadu was introduced to the Krobo from the neighbouring Osu, where he was worshipped not as a war god, but a peaceful agricultural deity. N.A.A. Azu, maintains that the Accra Gbese people left it to the Krobo when separating from them.⁶⁶ Personally, we found the Osu origin confirmed by my informants. Nadu is worshipped among S1, Osu, Krobo and also among the Ada'me emigrants at Adangbe, Gati, S1-Zogbedji in Togoland, which suggests that this cult dates back to ancient times.⁶⁷

⁶³ Wɔ` and dʒemawɔ` are after the Ga spellings among whom the study was conducted. It is written wɔ and jemawɔ with modern Dangme orthography. Hugo Huber, however spelt it dʒemawɔi (plural) and dʒemawɔ (singular) with old Dangme orthography.

⁶⁴ M.J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*. London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 4.

⁶⁵ M. J. Field, Report on the Osudoku State, Ms 1939, p.9.

⁶⁶ Azu, *Adangbe History*, p.23.

⁶⁷ Huber, *The Krobo: Traditional Social and Religious Life of a West African People*, p. 236-footnote 2.

From the above sources, the origin of the nadu deity is not certain but may be as old as the people's origin. Its status changed with the passage of time from a fertility deity to war god. Nadu and other jemawɔhi have now given way to Christianity.

The Ancestral Cult

Prominent to the religious life of the Dangme is the ancestral cult (the veneration of the dead). Dangme as an African society is made up of the unborn, the living and the dead; however spiritual power rests upon the dead –Ancestors. “They exercise control over the living; all life exists under their surveillance. They are treated with awe, fear, reverence, respect, veneration, occasionally worship.”⁶⁸ The Dangme believe that in the passage to death, God the Almighty grants special power to the living-dead (ancestors) for the sake of their families on earth. With this power, the ancestors can mediate between God and the people of their families; thus, the living and the unborn. They are believed to possess the power to bless and curse and they are the unseen hosts in every African home. Gyekye adduces that to be an ancestor one must qualify as a “moral paragon”⁶⁹ and not necessarily having children as some writers suggested.

In the public prayer of the Dangme, ancestors are the third in the hierarchy of prayer and are immortalized by giving their names to new born family members. They believe that once a child is given an ancestor's name, the child possessed the spirit of the person. Therefore, family members who have been corrupt, lazy, immoral, wicked and involved in other social vices die with their names.

Dangme Priesthood

Priesthood has the most enduring influence on the Dangme culture and tradition because it engrains religion into social institutions. The priest or the priestess is the servant of the deity, sometimes as the one who has the power to ascertain the wishes of the divine. They are the servants of the gods and the interpreters of the will of the gods to the people.⁷⁰ The priest or priestess in his or her capacity as the bridge builder between the deity and the community can claim to have power to open and to shut the channels of divine power. Finally, the priest or the priestesses share in the power and privileges of divinity because of their roles as those whose sacrifices, maintain social and cosmic order. Sometimes, the power that this role confers can be constructed as independent source of priestly power in the form of mystical power that resides in the priest.⁷¹

The Priestly Office

The Dangme priesthood is a divine calling by the jemawɔ and the candidate is subjected through holistic training by the Laabia,⁷² who knows all about the religious institution of that jemawɔ. The position can be vacant for years until the jemawɔ finds someone suitable to be the priest or priestess. The marks of the priestly office carry both ritual and symbolic authority. The priest or the priestess is the custodian of the sacred traditions and the master of the religious activities such as rituals, sacred laws, taboos and social sanity. It is the priestly office that creates the rules of social organisation, which regulates society. Their duties include; offering sacrifices, communal prayers, transmits votive, binds the society to the jemawɔ. The Wɔnɔ⁷³ functions as the intermediaries between their communities and the deities into whose service

⁶⁸ D. B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 119.

⁶⁹ K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*. Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, p. 36.

⁷⁰ Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, p. 4.

⁷¹ A. A. Akropong, ‘Religion and Traditional Leadership in Ghana’ in Irene K. Odotei and Albert K. Awedoba (Eds.) *Chieftaincy in Ghana: Culture, Governance and Development*, p. 195.

⁷² The Laabia is the shrine assistant who knows well the rudiments of the jemawɔ.

⁷³ Wɔnɔ – the priest, and Wɔ yo – the priestess. Etymologically, it is wɔ nɔ hyɛ lɔ, which is translated, the overseer of the deity. This must not be confused with wɔtsɛ, a person who owns and service his personal fetish for his own socio-economic gains.

they have been called.⁷⁴ The Dangme priests and priestess identify themselves by wearing black and white beads on strings on their wrists and ankles, and mystic cord lalakpa, made from bindweed nyinyila, around their neck. The bindweed has powerful sanctification and protective powers against uncleanness and epidemic diseases.

The black and white on the wrists and ankles of the priests and priestesses is not simply an ornament but also a symbol cautioning the priests and priestesses that there are good and bad people in every state, the wearer must be patient in dealing with the individual members in the state. The white symbolizes good and kind people and the black, just the opposite.⁷⁵ The priests, priestesses and Laabia are collectively called Jemeli and they also wear la⁷⁶ around their wrist. They do not involve themselves in witchcraft practices, sorcery, soothsaying, divination, or magic. They are the standard of morality, ethically balanced, and religiously upright.

The Dangme Language

Language can be described as a means of social communication between human beings, through conventional but arbitrary associations linking meaning with sounds and tone groups to form speech on the one hand, and on the other hand, linking meaning with signs, letters, words, phrases, sentences in writing and eventually printing.⁷⁷ Language is the first index of a people's culture, and the first sign to inform a person that he/she is a stranger, when the immediate linguistic environment changes and he/she becomes handicapped. The more a people's language spreads, the more their culture spreads. People learn languages so that they can interact with a culture and be accepted by that culture. This implies that language is a system of words and speech that people of a particular culture use to communicate meaningfully among themselves.

There are many languages in the world, but out of these, there is only one very important language in the life of a person that is significant to the growth and development of a people. It is noteworthy that language, spoken or written, in conjunction with other means of human communication, is crucial for human developments.⁷⁸ This all-important language is the Mother-tongue⁷⁹ and so is the issue of the Dangme language to the development of Dangme people. Amonoo opines that "the very first language we master, the mother tongue, is of capital importance; often it is the language we know and love best, the medium of our inmost feelings and thoughts. The mother tongue thus constitutes the deepest and most pervasive linguistic layer."⁸⁰ It may be that due to this reason, people who speak the same dialect and the same accent, have a strong force of kindred linguistic traits.

The Dangme language is part of the Kwa group of languages. Dangme language is closely related to the Ga.⁶⁵⁸¹ Reindorf, on his part sees the Dangme language as the mother of the Ga language. He writes "...thence to the Volta where were situated the districts of the Les, speaking Adangme, the mother dialect of the Ga."⁸² Ga and Dangme are sometimes seen as one single language. There are many similarities in the rudiment vocabularies, yet they differ in grammar, particularly verb phrases. Dangme is the aboriginal

⁷⁴ J.D.Ekem, *Priesthood in Context: A Study of Priesthood in Some Christian and Pimal Communities of Ghana and its Relevance for Mother-Tongue Biblical Interpretation*. Accra: SonLife Press, 2008, p. 53.

⁷⁵ M.E. Kropp-Dakubu, ed. *Dangme and Klama Proverbs Part I*. Collected and Translated by T.N.N Accam. Legon: Institute of African Studies, 1972, p. i.

⁷⁶ La is a symbol of three beads (*tovi*, *nyoli* and *koli*) put together on a raffia palm string (*hlɔwe kpa*) that is put on the wrist of infants to identify them as Dangme during the exodus and even to this present day. It is also by priests and priestesses to identify themselves as La li.

⁷⁷ R. F. Amonoo, 'Language and Nationhood: Reflection on Language Situations with Particular Reference to Ghana'. *The J.B.Danquah Memorial Lectures Series 19.February 1986*. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1989, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Amonoo, 'Language and Nationhood', p. 4.

⁷⁹ The issue of the Mother-tongue has been mentioned in the earlier chapters.

⁸⁰ Amonoo, 'Language and Nationhood', p. 6.

⁸¹ Kropp-Dakubu, 'A Survey of Borrowed Words in Dangme'. in *Transactions of the Linguistic Circle of Accra: Papers in Ghanaian Linguistics. Research Review Supplement No. 4*. Legon: I.A.S. University of Ghana. March 1973, p. 81.

⁸² Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante 3rd Ed.*, p. 23.

language spoken by the people called the Dangme⁸³ or the La li. The Dangme language like most African languages has three tones; low, mid and high and meanings to words are derived from these tones.

The Dangme's thoughts and emotions are best expressed in the Dangme language since it is part of his/her personality and physical appearance. The Dangme language is the culture of the Dangme and since God accepts all cultures, God accepts the Dangme language. It is comforting for the Dangme to read "that God speaks all languages, gives all languages a theological significance. Hebrew and Aramaic are not God's "linguistic favourites". God could have chosen any of the languages of the world to communicate the Christ-event. God would have chosen Dangme if Jesus were born in the Dangme culture."⁸⁴

The Development of Dangme into Biblical and Instructional language

The earliest literary work to be done in the Dangme language was after orthography was developed for the Ga language. The Basel missionaries also did some translation works and other literary productions; an example is the book of the Prophet Jonah. But those materials were not made available to the education of the Dangme; hence such materials were only mentioned in later materials.⁸⁵ For obvious reasons, the Ga orthography was modified by Carl C. Reindorf in 1857 to write the following hymn in the Dangme language:

1. <i>Kpakpa be zugba ne no;</i>	2. <i>Xyom waya, he xyom waya ne wabloo no;</i>
<i>dsahe ne waho ne wagu xyom bloo no;</i>	<i>nih ne wane xara he, ledse ke ene, pi</i>
<i>lolo ne wana hedsom tseo!</i>	<i>Xieme! Xieme wana no da;</i>
<i>Wane nona he ne xie, xyom dsi watseo-mao:</i>	<i>nyeha watso waya xyom</i>
<i>Nyeha waho</i>	<i>ledse dsom ne!</i> ⁸⁶

Later in the 1920s onwards, the Dangme produced many manuscripts for the development of the language. Some of these manuscripts were later published into books, while others remained as manuscripts. It is even said that Enoch Azu translated the whole Bible into Dangme and B. B. Pupilampu also translated the Liturgy of the Presbyterian Ga Hymn Book, as well as several original religious poems which were written to be sung to popular hymn tunes into Dangme. It is worthy of note that these earlier writers used the Ga and other orthographies to suit their own ideologies of translating and the writing of the language. For instance people were writing Adangme as Adangbe, Adan'e, and Adanme. To bring sanity into the Dangme orthography, D. A. Pupilampu in the 1940s suggested an orthography which included the use of c, j, ng, to replace tɔ, dz, and ʼ in the Ga characters. His proposal was not agreed upon. Fortunately, Dangme was among the eleven government-sponsored national languages, hence the Institute of African Studies; Legon was invited to advice on Ga and Dangme orthography. Amonoo writes that the Dangme orthography was devised in 1952⁸⁷ and the representatives of Institute of African Studies Legon, the Bureau of Ghana Languages and the Dangme Bible Translation Committee met in 1969 and decided on the set rules of spellings.⁸⁸

A standardization Committee was appointed by the Bureau of Ghana Languages in 1974 to review the existing orthography, and to prepare an instructional and biblical Dangme that will be understandable

⁸³ The Dangme tribes are Shai, Kpone, Krobo (Manye and Yilo), Osudoku, Ada, Prampram and Ningo. The people of Kpone speak Ga more than their aboriginal language, Dangme. This abnormality is being resolved as Dangme is now being taught in schools as a subject. The people of Agotime in the Volta Region are Dangme speaking people who live in the Volta region.

⁸⁴ J. E.T.Kuwornu-Adjaator, 'Patronage and Usage of the Mother-Tongue Bibles in Kumasi, Ghana'. *Prime Journal of Social Science (PJSS)*. Vol.2 (6) November 2012, p. 126.

⁸⁵ Preface' in *Dangme Ngmami Bɔ: The Writing of Dangme*. Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1990, p. v

⁸⁶ *Lala Wolo ha Kristofoi Asafo ni yo Ga ke Adanme sikpon le no le*. Accra: Presbyterian Book Depot, 1965, p. 241-242.

⁸⁷ Amonoo, 'Language and Nationhood: Reflection on Language Situations with Particular Reference to Ghana'. *The J.B.Danquah Memorial Lectures Series 19.February 1986*. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1989, p. 51.

⁸⁸ 'Preface' in *Dangme Ngmami Bɔ: The Writing of Dangme*. Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1990, p. vi

to all people from the eight Dangme speaking areas. The Committee's work brought uniformity in the teaching of Dangme as an approved Ghanaian language for schools in the Dangme speaking areas in Ghana.

Dangme Writing System

The standardization committee came up with a writing format, putting into consideration the dialectal differences in the Dangme language. They proposed thirty single and combined letters forming the Dangme alphabet and written in the Latin script. Tones and nasalisation are normally not written. The Dangme alphabets use upper case and lower case and they are:

Upper case:

A B D E I F G GB H I J K KP L M N NG NGM NY O ɔ P S T TS U V W Y Z

Lower case:

a b d e l f g gb h i j k kp l m n ng ngm ny o ɔ p s t ts u v w y z

It is worthy of note that words with Rr⁸⁹, SH sh and Xx sounds are foreign to Dangme.

/l/ has allophones [l] and [r] and /j/ has an allophone [ɲ]

Orthographic and phonemic correspondences are as follows:

j - /dʒ/, ng - /ŋ/, ngm - /ŋm/, ny - /ɲ/, ts - /tʃ/, y - /j/, ε - /ɛ/, ɔ - /ɔ/

Consonantal sounds: Dangme has seventeen single consonants and six clusters.

Single: B b, D d, F f, G g, H h, J j, K k, L l, M m, N n, P p, S s, T t, V v, W w, Y y, Z z

Cluster: GB gb, KP kp, NG ng, NGM ngm, NY ny, TS ts

Vowel sounds: Dangme has seven oral vowel sounds and five nasal vowel sounds.

Oral vowel sounds: a, e, ε, i, o, ɔ, u,

Nasal vowel sounds: ã, ẽ, ĩ, õ, ù

This the current state of Dangme orthography.⁹⁰

Emergence of Christianity

Dangmeland as early as the arrival of the first batch Basel missionaries in December 1828, also prepared and received them. The three Germans and a Swiss, after staying at Osu for some months, relocated to Ningo. Unfortunately, three of them died at Ningo within five months leaving only one who sought refuge in the Castle but he did not live beyond 1832.⁹¹ In 1832, a second batch of three was fortunate to have one survivor, Andreas Riis, who in 1835, moved out of Accra coast to settle in Akropong-Akwapim.⁹²

The Krobo first encounter with Andreas Riis, the Basel missionary was during the time of Akwapim-Krobo war in 1835. The Danish Governor F. S. Morck,⁹³ alarmed at the spread of English influence in the eastern area of the Gold Coast, sought to enforce Danish hegemony over the Akwapim and Krobo states.⁹⁴ His interference in the tribal affairs of Krobo and Akwapim antagonized both tribes and occasioned great turmoil and bloody civil strife in Akwapim.⁹⁵ Viet Arlt writes that “the Basel missionaries first visited Krobo region in December 1835 and twenty years later made Odumase-Krobo an outpost run by two catechists; before establishing a fully-fledged mission station in 1857.”⁹⁶ Smith states that around “December 1837, Riis and Murdter, undeterred, made two extensive exploratory journeys to the Shai hills

⁸⁹ Kuwornu-Adjaottor has questioned the translation of the Greek *Kristos* as *Kristo* in the Dangme New Testament. For a discussion see J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, The Translation of *Kristos* as *Kristo* in the Dangme Mothe Tongue Translations of the New Testament Visited. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, 5(8) (2014):203-208.

⁹⁰ Dangme Ngmami Bɔ, Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1990, p. 9.

⁹¹ F. Agyemang, *Our Presbyterian Heritage*. Accra: Presbyterian Press, 2006, p. 9. See also N. Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835 – 1960: A Younger Church in a Changing Society*, p. 29.

⁹² D.N.A. Kpobi, *Mission in Ghana: The Ecumenical Heritage*. Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2008, p. 75.

⁹³ Frederick Sigfred Morck, was the Danish Governor who took charge of the Gold Coast between January 1835. He died on March 18, 1839.

⁹⁴ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835 – 1960: A Younger Church in a Changing Society*, p. 31.

⁹⁵ H. Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*. Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967, p. 100.

⁹⁶ V. Arlt, *Christianity, Imperialism, and Culture: The Expulsion of the Two Krobo States C.1830-1930*. Basel: Copy Quick, 2005, p. 14.

through Krobo'. Yilo Krobo had been visited by Andreas Riis in 1838, after the chief of Yilo had given a son to the Methodist school at Accra. When this son died, the chief became distrustful of Christianity."⁹⁷ It was in 1859, when the Odumase (Many Krobo) opened an outstation at Sra (Yilo Krobo), the chief's village. The Krobo were the first among the Dangme to have a missionary station established by the Basel missionaries.

The Methodist, moving along the coastal areas of Dangmeland, had a school established in Prampram and in 1847, wanted to hand it over to the Basel Mission. 'But in 1851, the Basel Mission declined, leaving the Coast to the Methodist, which maintained schools at Prampram, Ningo and Pony'. Ada on the other hand had Danish influence since 1780 and therefore became Port for Krobo trade. In 1867, a combined mission and mission-trading station was opened at Ada Foah.

Dangme and Bible Translations

Bible translation is the process of converting literary text from an original source through a medium into a targeted source. It involves trans-mediation; thus the transfer from one medium to another. That is from oral text to a written text, from written text to a painted text, from a painted text to an audio-visual text, from one script to another. The Bible was originally recorded in Hebrew and Aramaic for the First Testament and Greek for the second Testament. 'Any translation art involves a lesser or greater quantity of deletion, distortion, generalization, specification or equivalence between the source text and the target text'. Bible translation is a bridge between two cultures; the sending culture and the receiving culture. Christianity is unknowingly founded on the foundation of Bible translation into cultures though not wholly recognized. Christianity exists as a translation of a culture into a culture and this makes Christianity to be indebted to Translations.⁹⁸ Since translation bridges a source culture and a recipient culture, it is appropriate that the two cultures are identified with each other in principle and practice. This then is the essence of importing one culture into another meaningfully. In translating the Bible into Dangme, the Hebrew culture and the Greco-Roman cultures must be identified with Dangme culture.

The history of translation of the Bible into Dangme cannot be started without mentioning the indefatigable effort of J. Zimmermann and the indigenous translators. They produced the first full Ga Bible, published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1866.⁹⁹ Since Dangme and Ga are closely related, there has not been much effort in translating the books of the Bible into Dangme. The earliest record on Bible translation into Dangme was the work of Enoch Azu. It is on record that he translated the whole Bible into the Dangme language, but the work remained in the manuscript form and has not been exposed to the public.¹⁰⁰ Many other single books of the Bible were published in Dangme until 1977, when the United Bible Societies published the New Testament in Dangme called *Somi He 4*. The *Somi He 4*, has been the only Bible for the Dangme for twenty years until in 1997, when the *Wami Munyu ɔ kɛ La amɛ* (Dangme New Testament and Psalms) were translated and published by international Bible Society. These herald the translation of the whole Bible into the Dangme language in 1999 and it is called *Ngmami Klɔuklɔu ɔ* - The Holy Writing. The question is, has the Dangme been identified with the translation? Bible translation and publishing is a laborious and meticulous process which takes between twelve to fifteen years by a team of three full time translators. The services of a review team between ten to twelve people are engaged to review the work. The translation is normally done from the source languages – Hebrew and Greek languages. The

⁹⁷ Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, p. 125.

⁹⁸ J. C. Loba-Mkole, 'History and Theory of Scripture Translations' in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. Herv. teol.stud. vol.64 no.1 Pretoria Jan.-Mar. 2008. P 9-22. He adduces that translation is whatever a society recognises as such, to the extent that everything can be called translation, p. 10.

⁹⁹ J. C. Loba-Mkole, 'History and Theory of Scripture Translations' in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. Herv. teol.stud. vol.64 no.1 Pretoria Jan.-Mar. 2008. P 9-22. He adduces that translation is whatever a society recognises as such, to the extent that everything can be called translation, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ In the course of this study, we were told that the translation work done by Enoch Azu is still with the Azu family of Odumase-Krobo. When we approached the family, we were told the work has been sent to the Bible House, Accra. We are yet to go and find out from the Bible House.

translation is supervised by a Translation Consultant and goes through the process of keyboarding and thorough manuscript examination.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

The Danites invasion of the people of Laish/Leshem (Judges 18:27-29 and Joshua 19:47) in the Ancient Palestine region and their exodus southwards is the genesis of the Dangme tribes. The paper attempted to trace the history of the Dangme from their Palestine root to West Africa. Their name, La li or Le li is one of the visible signs by which they preserved the cultural traditions for posterity. Their God, Laosiada Nyigmo is not mentioned in daily parlance (Exodus 20:7) but under high cultic invocations. They later choose to address their God as Mawu, which they sometimes use as prefix to human names (Mawungɛ, Mawuhi Mawukle etc). Their children are identified with la, a stripe of raffia palm leaf to present them unique among the nations. These are overt signs of the Dangme remains of their Palestine identity.

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¹⁰¹ 'The Bible Society of Ghana: Making the Holy Scriptures Available in a Language you can understand and at a Price You can afford.' Accra: Wadso, p. 5.

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