

Basel Mission Archives

"Zimmermann's Report about a Travel to Gyadam"

Title: "Zimmermann's Report about a Travel to Gyadam"

Ref. number: D-01.09.II..20

Date: Proper date: 31.05.1858

Description: First night at Bewase an Akropong village where the people were not very friendly. Second night Kofridua, the first Akim village, a hunting settlement. On the third day's journey he made a mistake and was going along the path back to Kofridua when he met the third missionary. Zimmermann also says that judging by their faces the people of Osiem are not Akims. (Kromer) and his carriers who had been about ½ hour behind. (Süss was the other missionary on the expedition, it was indeed his idea). Kukurantumi overnight - a friendly little town. Süss next morning conducted a service at which they were 50-60 hearers. First he spoke some twi sentences then he translated John 3vv1-9 into twi from his Greek testament, and repeated the passage. Then he preached in a very practical way, in fact it was mid-way between preaching and catechising. Then they sang a verse, and said a prayer, and the service was over. Zimmermann was obviously impressed by the easy way in which Süss conversed with the listeners in his 'sermon'. Then they went on to Tafo, a pretty little place, and through Osiem. This is a pottery village - and Zimmermann was impressed by the skill of the women without the traditional European aids. They also found in Osiem a carpenter who had made his own tools, with the exception of some saws. His plane blades were fashioned from cutless blades and he was making doors and shutters. From Osiem next day they travelled for five hours, only passing the small hunting village of Odumase before they came to Fankeneko. It was during this trek that they began to come across gold diggings. Gyadam impresses him considerable, he reckons he has not seen such a large town in West Africa, other than British and Dutch Accra, and perhaps Cape Coast. He has also never seen a more beautiful West African town - he is especially impressed by the 60' wide main street, set with shade trees. Perhaps on account of their positions the hilltowns of Krobo and Shai are more beautiful, and perhaps Dofu, Mlamfi, Agrafi and Ada on the Volta are comparable with it. He also thinks Agyeman's house deserves the title "palace", when compared with the other princely dwellings he has seen on the coast. To reach the king he had to go through elegant apartments which would have contained 100 people. At a street preaching which he saw there were 200 present, but scarcely any women. The Berem is wide and deep enough for canoes, there are fine silk cotton trees on the banks of the river for making canoes. The river flows from here to Agyeman's other capital, Swedru. At the conclusion of his account of his homeward journey which he describes briefly, Zimmermann sums up his knowledge and impression of Akim. On the south Akim marches with Ga and Fante, on the east with Akwapim, Krobo and Akwamu, on the north the boundary is the Afram, beyond which is the wilderness before you come to Donko land, west of the Afram Akim marches with Kwahu (described as a state dependent on Asante) and on the west with Fante. He is clearly impressed too by the contrast between his normal

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habitat on the Accra-lower Volta plains, and the forest lands of Akim. On p. 7 he offers the question of the effects on a people's culture and development of always living in the shade of the huge trees (he reckons that in the whole of the journey from the Akwapim border to Gyadam there were only three places where one was free of the trees, Gyadam, Fankenkenko, and a view point on a high hill on the border between Akwapim and Akim). Their diet certainly is almost entirely composed of flesh and plantains. There is no bread other than that made from plantains. Apart from Gyadam he saw only one other village belonging to Agyeman (and he had gone with Baum to one of the cluster of villages around Gyadam) - the 7 others belonging to Atta. The towns and villages are the most orderly (built) that he has ever seen, mostly because the houses are grouped along a highstreet with one or two alleys leading off it. Sheep and hens are plentiful, and there are some pigs, but no other domestic animals. Describing the old mission station in Gyadam (the missionaries had just been able to buy a nearby hill), Zimmermann says it is only a stone's throw from Gyadam town. He offers a map on which (a) is a 'solid' room of mud brick built by Süß and now on account of its smallness used for storage, (b) is a single storey house with two rooms and a veranda equipped with doors but no shutters, (c) three rooms similar, but without doors or shutters, (d) kitchen, washhouse, latrine, (e) Süß' first house, now dilapidated, (f) stall for one pig, (g) goathouse, (h) sawhouse. The roofs made of Daha a type of palm thatching which is not satisfactory since it lasts only 2-3 years, and is difficult to obtain. Zimmermann suggests experimenting with forms of wood roof. They keep a good number of sheep, goats, hens and pigeons. They have only the most necessary furniture made in the local fashion. Provisions are dear, but easy to come by (local provisions clearly - he says the lack of bread is most felt, but they have got used to local substitutes). Zimmermann however thinks the mission should devote all its efforts to transferring to the new station on a 300-400' hill to the South-East of the town because although the present station is all right and well-laid-out, it has proved itself unhealthy. On the hill with the winds to keep the place healthy only single storey houses would be necessary, there is water, and room for the christians to settle, which Abokobi has shown to be a decided advantage for the development of the church. But away from the town Gyadam badly needs craftsmen to raise the level of amenities on the station - at the moment the missionaries live at a lower level than the upper ranks of local people. (There is a map to illustrate this journey and the surrounding geography at Gyadam No 11).

- Subject:** [Archives catalogue]: Guides / Finding aids: Archives: D - Ghana: D-01 - Incoming correspondence from Ghana up to the outbreak of the First World War: D-01.09 - Ghana 1858: D-01.09.II. - Christiansborg
- Type:** Text
- Ordering:** Please contact us by email info@bmarchives.org
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