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Guinea: Pointers to the Origin of this Word

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, under Guinea, records the word as the "European name of a portion of the West Coast of Africa, extending from Sierra Leone to Benin . . ." A note adds that the origin of the word is unknown and that the geographical name first appears in Portuguese as *Guine*, hence Spanish *Guiné* and French *Guinée*.

As the French, trading as Dieppe merchants, are supposed to have reached the Gold Coast in the fourteenth century and as the Castilian Spaniards were trading on the West Coast at the same time as the Portuguese, it is unlikely that the Portuguese are the sponsors of the word 'Guinea' for both the French and the Spaniards but rather that all derive from a common African source. Because Portuguese records provide more historical testimony, I have concentrated on them in my researches.

Bovill (1958: 119) in a footnote disagreed with those who hold that Guinea is "a corrupt form of the name Ghana, picked up by the Portuguese in the Maghreb." His reason is that "the name Guinea has been in use both in the Maghreb and in Europe long before Prince Henry's time. For example, on a map dated 1320 by the Genoese cartographer, Giovanni di Corignano, who got his information about Africa from a fellow-countryman in Sijilmasa, we find Gunuia, and in the Catalan atlas of 1375, Ginyia."

However, Grant (1968: 1) gives a variant spelling; he, commenting on the *Catalan Atlas*, remarked that the blank spaces were filled with two figures: "Below the Atlas Mountains and inland from Cape Bojador [. . .] is a Moor [. . .]. Facing him is a king enthroned, a Negro king, [. . .] he is, the legend informs us, 'Musse Melly, senyor dels negres de Gineua'."

Beazley and Prestage (1899, II: iii) noted that "it is practically certain that before 1434, no Portuguese ship had passed beyond Cape Bojador."

Bovill connects the name Guinea with the old inland town of Jenne, but, as will be seen, there are objections to the connection of the name of an inland town with a coastal area or kingdom.

Smith (1969: 7) has recently suggested a further derivation: he holds that "the word Guinea itself almost certainly derives from the Berber word for negro, as in, for example, the name Bab Aginaou (Gate of the Negro) in Marrakesh." There are also objections here, mainly founded upon indications that this word has its derivation elsewhere than in the Berber language, even though the word may have been adopted by the Berbers.

The word is found circa A.D. 1350 in a geography published by a Spanish Franciscan as describing a Negro kingdom on the Atlantic coast of Africa. Accord-

ing to Markham's (1912: 28) translation, the passage runs as follows: "I went along the coast for a very great distance, traversing the uninhabited sandy beaches until I arrived at the Land of the Negroes, at a Cape they called Buyder, where is the King of Guynoa near the sea."

At the time of the Franciscan's alleged voyage the Negroes appear to have inhabited Cape Bojador and to have been pushed southwards by the Berber. The Franciscan certainly connected Guynoa with the land of the Negroes and with the coast.

Ibn Battuta in his fourteenth century travels, as translated by Gibb (1962, II: 379-380), noted while at Kilwa on the east African coast that the "inhabitants are Zinj, jet-black in colour" and that they "have tattoo marks on their faces, just as [there are] on the faces of the Limis of Janawa." Gibb in a footnote added: "*Limi* is a variant from *Lamlam* applied by the Arab geographers to the (supposedly cannibal) tribes of the interior." Gibb goes on to say: "Janawa (the reading is supported by two Mss against *Janada* and *Janara*) was the name given to the country of the pagan tribes south of the Muslim lands in West Africa which passed into Portuguese and thence into English as Guinea (cf. Yaqut, *Geogr. Dict.*, s.v. 'Kanawa')."

An investigation into what Janawa may stand for is useful. *-awa* is a widespread Negro suffix in the Sudan, meaning "people of" as in Arabawa, Hausawa, Adamawa. This usage indicates that Janawa means the people of Jana, i.e. of Ghana.

Ibn Khaldun (1967, III: 185), who died in A.D. 1406, according to Rosenthal's translation, mentioned: "Rulers of Kanawah." A footnote states: "According to Yaqut, *Mu'jam al-buldan* IV, 307, Kinawah is a Berber tribe and country adjacent to the Ghanah Negroes, which is identical with Qanawah, Janawah = Gnawah 'Sudan Negroes'." Ibn Khaldun (II: 118) refers to a river Nile which "is called the Sudanese Nile. It flows towards the Surrounding Sea and into it at the island of Awlil. The city of Sila, Takrur, and Ghanah are situated along this Nile. At this time, all of them belong to the Mali people, or Negro nation."

It is unlikely that Ghanah is anything but a Negro word, and that Ghanawa means the Ghana people.

Bovill (1933: 48) stated that when "Arab merchants first began to visit the Western Sudan they found that no negro king was more powerful than the ruler of Ghana whose dominion extended to the Atlantic."

Leo Africanus, who reached Timbuktu from the north in the sixteenth century, noted the extent of this kingdom. In his account, published in Italian in 1526, according to Moore's (1740: 66) translation, he recorded that Guinea is bounded on the north by Gualata, by Tombuto on the east and by the kingdom of Melli on the south: that it was 500 miles long and extended 250 miles along the Niger (Senegal)¹ and borders on the ocean in the same place where the Niger falls into it.

There was a marked division between the desert peoples and the Negroes south of them. The Senegal river was noted by Cadamosto, according to Crone's (1937: 18) translation of his voyages that began in A.D. 1455, as "a great river dividing a race which is called Azanaghi from the first Kingdom of the Blacks."

The Portuguese discovered the coast in 1445. According to de Castro Almeida's edition (1936: 180) of the *Chronicles of Azurara* as translated by Miall, one reads: "Diniz Dias, having set forth with his ship's company, was not willing to stop until he had passed the Country of the Moon and came in sight of the *Land of the Negroes* which is called Guinea."

Diogo Gomes, whose first voyage was in 1456, according to the French translation by Monod, Mauny and Duval (1959: 17), used the spellings Guinee and Guinea, referring in the first instance to a fight when in A.D. 1416 the blood of Christians stained the soil of Guinee: further on Gomes writes Guinea. The map that accom-

1. The present Senegal was then known as the Niger, following Ptolemy.

panies this translation shows the kingdom of Guinea to encompass the Gambia river.

About A.D. 1506 Valentim Fernandes published his detailed guide to the trading ports along the Atlantic. The country on the coast immediately south of the Senegal river was known as Guynee as shown on the map included in the translation by Monod, Teixeira da Mota and Mauny (1951: 26). In 1552 de Barros noted in his *First Decade* (Bk. I, C: ii) according to Beazley and Prestage (1896: 317): "the countries which the Azanegues inhabit border on the Negroes of Jaloff, where begins the region of Guinea." This extract points to Guinea as a Negro region and connects it with the Negro Jaloffs or Woolofs who still inhabit the country south of the Senegal.

In Hondius's map of 1606, as reproduced by Tooley (1969, Plate 40) bordering on the Senegal and indeed extending north of it, is a region marked "Genehoa Regjo." In other maps of the like period, the Jaloffs are noted as situated in this kingdom; indeed the name may be taken to indicate a Jalof Negro kingdom.

There is an indication that the word was in use among the Negroes themselves. Leo spoke of "this Kingdom which the merchants of our Nation call *Gheneoa*, the Natives themselves *Genni* and the Portuguese and other People *Ghinea*." This evidence indicates that the word was in use among the indigenous population and tends to exclude finding its origin in the Berber language.

Other attempts to derive the word Guinea from the names of inland towns such as Ghana, Jenne, fail for the simple reason that these were the names of inland towns with which the Portuguese had no contacts.

Hence one can now supply the *Oxford English Dictionary* with a probable derivation of the word Guinea: it derives from the name Gunowa, written Guneé by the Portuguese, which was the native name of the nearest Negro kingdom with which the Portuguese and the Castilians of Spain first made contact on the Atlantic coasts of Africa. The name was then applied to the African coasts from the Gambia river to the Benguella in Portuguese Angola.

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