

IV.—THE AO NAGA LANGUAGE OF SOUTHERN ASSAM.

The numerous tribes of the widely-extended Naga people are distributed over the irregular ranges of mountains which lie south of the Brahmaputra valley. Roughly speaking, their country extends between 93° and 97° E. long. and between 25° and $27^{\circ} 30'$ N. lat.

The Ao Nagas, whose language forms the subject of this paper, correspond to the Central Naga group in Capt. Damant's classification, and may be more exactly defined as lying on the southern edge of the Sibsagor District, having as their eastern boundary the western branch of the Dikho River, and thence following westward the curve of the hills to about $26^{\circ} 20'$ N. lat.

The name Ao, by which they call themselves, will not be found on any of the older maps or in publications on the hill tribes of Assam, but, instead, are used certain Assamese designations—as Hatigorias, Dupdorias, Assiringias, and a few others—given them in the time of the old Assamese kings. They have more than forty villages, and their number is estimated at about one hundred thousand.

No grammar or considerable vocabulary of the Ao Naga has hitherto been published—a fact true, indeed, of the speech of all the Naga tribes, up to the present time.

The language of this tribe is spoken in two dialects, called, respectively, Zwingi or Zungi and Mungsen.^x Tradition relates, in explanation of these two varieties of their speech, that when the section of the tribe calling themselves Zwingi occupied only a single village, they conquered the neighboring village of the Mungsen, and that thenceforth the two became one people. Though both dialects are current in most Ao villages, the Zwingi is the dominant one, and the one represented in these pages.

None of the brief lists of words published in Mr. Hodgson's works, and purporting to represent Naga speech, exactly corresponds to the Zwingi Ao. What he calls "Khari Naga" is mainly the Mungsen dialect, and "Tengsa Naga" is a mixture of Ao and the language of the tribe lying next east.

It may be said, in passing, that these vocabularies were collected many years ago, before the relations of the tribes were well under-

stood, and from natives whose only mode of communication with their questioners was through imperfectly understood Assamese; hence confusion of dialects and other inaccuracies were almost sure to occur.

In Sir George Campbell's *Specimens of the Languages of India*, the dialect which he calls *Deka Haimong*, the Assamese name of a prominent village, appears to be identical with the *Ao Naga*, making some allowance for difference in mode of phonetic representation.

Probably no foreigner has a better acquaintance with the language of the *Ao* tribe than the Rev. E. W. Clark, who for ten years has resided among this people, in the service of the American Baptist Missionary Union. In the year 1879 there was obtained from Mr. Clark, and published in the *Jour. Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XI, Part II, a brief vocabulary of what he called the *Zungī* or *Zwingī* dialect of *Naga*, which is clearly the language under consideration, though the spelling of words is, in some instances, not accordant with later usage. To the same missionary belongs the honor of reducing this language to writing, and translating into it portions of the Scriptures, thus bringing it within reach of scientific investigation.

In the year 1884 he printed at *Molung*, his mission station at that time among this people, *John's Gospel*, and the life of *Joseph* as contained in eleven chapters of *Genesis*. To these was added, in the following year, a revised edition of *Matthew's Gospel*, which had before been issued by the same press in a tentative form. It is from these considerable specimens, supplemented by the explanations which Mr. Clark has had the kindness to communicate to me privately, that I have been able to prepare this paper, which contains, so far as I can learn, the first extended and systematic account of the structure of the *Zwingi Ao* language that has anywhere been published.