

RECONSTRUCTING SUBSISTENCE OF THE PROTO-DOGON

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The Issues I

- **Dogon-speaking region of Mali is beginning to be well-known archaeologically**
- **Although Dogon is famous to anthropologists, as well as controversial, it is little-known linguistically except for a single dialect**
- **To explore the possible links with other tools for reconstructing prehistory, a convincing language survey was required**



The Issues II

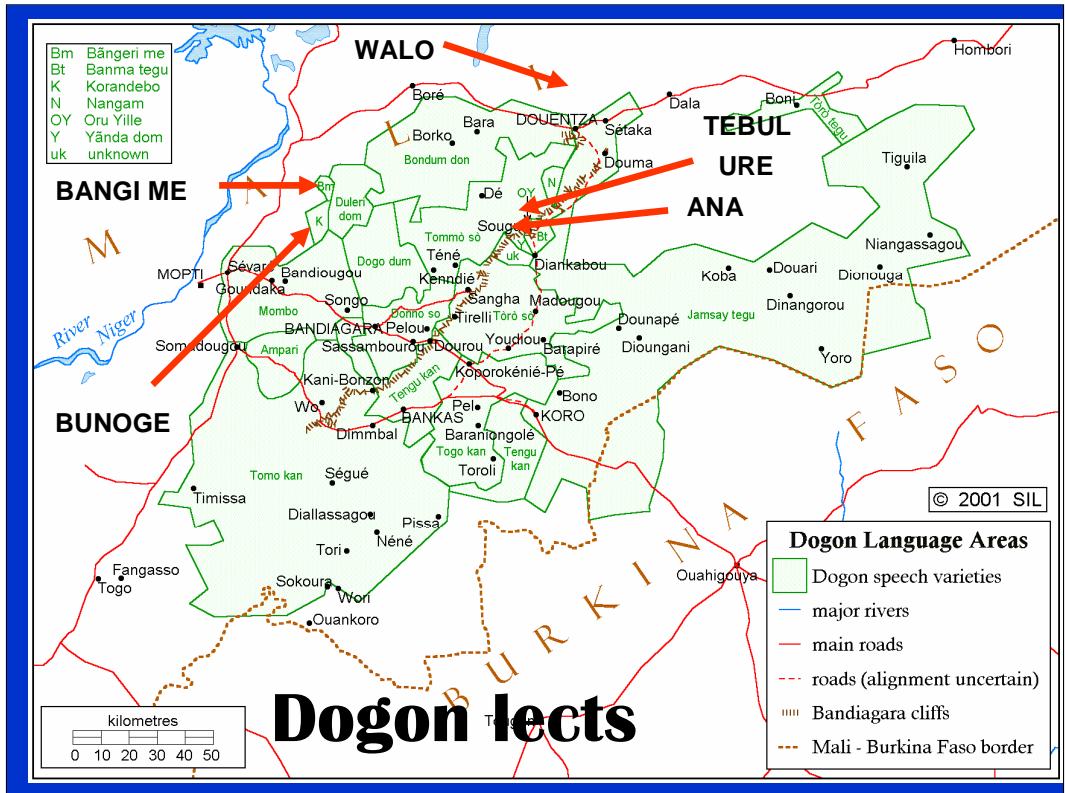
- **A synthesis of existing unpublished data was made by Hochstetler (2004) which concluded there were at least 17 languages, but left queries over certain unsurveyed areas**
- **A strategy was thus to take wordlists in all regions where doubts remained, concentrating particularly on items of subsistence and agricultural tools.**



The Issues III

- **Further outstanding problems were;**
- **The existence of a possible language isolate**
- **The diversity of Dogon and hence its likely time-depth**
- **The broader question of the classification of the Dogon family**





Niana



Uluban: Tebul Ure language



Walo: langue inconnue



Fieldwork

- **Team was Roger Blench (MAESA0) and Denis Douyon (FLASH)**
- **Fieldwork, February-March 2005, likely return visit this November**
- **Main tool: list of ca. 600 words plus sociolinguistic questionnaire**



Preliminary results I

- **New material on:**

Ampari Pa, Ana, Bangime, Bunoge, Dogul Dom. Ampari Kema. Nyambeenge. Tebul Ure, Tommo So Pirõ, Walo, Yanda

- **The Ana, Bunoge, Tebul Ure et Walo languages were recorded for the first time**

- **Also discovered was an unknown sign language for the deaf among the Tebul Ure (already an unknown language)**

- **All the raw data available on my website**



Informants for Bangi Me at Niana



Informants at Pa



Provisional lexical similarity percentages

Yanda-dom from Yanda

49	Bondum-dom (Kindyim) from Tintam																	
42	49	Dogolu-dom from Songoudonou																
36	31	44	Donno-sə from Bandiagara															
38	31	35	69	Tɔmmɔ-sə from Ningari														
42	31	33	73	87	Tɔmmɔ-sə from Pirō													
42	31	35	64	82	87	Tɔmmɔ-sə (Wazouba) from Kani-Goguna												
33	25	40	65	64	60	62	Tɔrɔ-sɔɔ from "Sangha de la mission"											
38	31	29	53	45	47	45	47	Tomo-kan from Ségué										
33	27	33	49	42	44	40	40	84	Tomo-kan from Timissa									
29	29	33	45	38	44	40	38	42	40	Toro-tegu from Iwra								
31	29	33	45	38	42	40	40	42	40	85	Toro-tegu from Piringua							
35	31	31	42	35	38	40	38	40	38	60	71	Toro-tegu from Nemguene						
44	36	36	35	33	33	33	29	31	33	29	29	29	Mombo from Bandiougou					
33	33	31	27	25	25	24	24	27	25	24	25	20	75	Mombo from Makou				
31	29	24	25	25	25	24	24	27	33	27	31	24	53	47	Ampari-kora P			
29	35	31	29	27	27	25	24	25	31	27	29	22	51	47	87	Ampari-kora B		
27	33	31	31	27	27	25	22	24	29	25	27	20	51	51	78	85	Ampari-kora D	
9	7	5	7	11	9	13	9	11	9	11	9	5	9	13	9	13	11	Bangerime



Preliminary results I

- **There are at least 21 distinct languages falling under the rubric Dogon**
- **The internal diversification of Dogon is approximately that of Mande**
- **Bangi Me is a language isolate**



Preliminary results 2

- **The diversity of Dogon is entirely in the west and north of its range; expansion onto the plains is thus quite recent**
- **Most curious is that the diversity is almost entirely lexical: all Dogon languages have virtually identical phonology, morphology and syntax**



Preliminary results 3

○ **Dogon languages do not closely resemble other Niger-Congo languages. Most particularly;**

oWord order

oAbsence of traces of noun-classes

oAgreement between verb endings and pronouns

○ **Is it possible we have simply been wrong?
That Dogon is not after all Niger-Congo?**



Preliminary results 4

- **Bangi Me is certainly not Dogon and perhaps not Niger-Congo. It may be a language isolate like Hadza, Jalaa, Laal etc. and a relic of Africa prior to the expansion of the great language phyla.**
- **Interestingly, Bangi Me has its own vocabulary for agriculture, cereals and the like, suggesting that these are not residual foragers**



Results from reconstructions: livestock 1

- **The only species reconstructible for Proto-Dogon is cattle**
- **Goats, sheep and dogs appear to have come into the Dogon area from two directions**
- **The source of pigs in the Dogon area is an interesting question: they do not appear to have borrowed names**



Results from reconstructions: livestock 2

- **The name of the horse (#som-) is widespread in Dogon, but cognate with other savannah languages and probably reflects the early transmission of the pony across the Sahara**
- **Names for donkey show great diversity and are borrowed from Songhai, Mande and Gur. Donkeys are probably quite recent in this region**
- **Chickens have two distinct names suggesting they came into the region from different directions**



Results from reconstructions: crops 1

- The three cereals grown by the proto-Dogon were almost certainly fonio, bulrush millet and sorghum. The names of millet and sorghum have a tendency to interchange but we can tentatively put forward #emba for sorghum and #yuu for millet. Fonio is #pono which is similar to most surrounding languages
- The PD grew at least two pulses, cowpea (#nuune) and Bambara nut (#εγεε) and perhaps Kersting's groundnut



Results from reconstructions: crops 2

- Evidence for other crops is limited by the fact that there is only my survey data. However, the case for tiger nuts (*Cyperus esculentus*) and garden eggs (*Solanum* spp.) is reasonable
- It is clear the PD did *not* have okra or roselle or any types of tubers



Results from reconstructions: trees

○ **Reconstructions of tree names suffer from inadequate data but it is likely the PD exploited the baobab, fan-palm, shea and locust trees, to judge by reconstructible forms.**



Results from reconstructions: iron

- **Dogon vocabulary for blacksmiths' iron tools, forge parts etc. seems to come from three distinct directions onto the Plateau, from Songhai, Mande and Gur**



Conclusions

- The Dogon cluster has been established in the region > 3000 years to account for its diversity
- However, agriculture and cattle-keeping were clearly part of the culture of the PD, so its diversification must be post about 3500 BP
- There were other agricultural peoples in the region prior to the Dogon expansion, of which Bangi Me is the last trace



Conclusions

- But, rather puzzlingly, we do not yet have any convincing archaeological correlate of the Dogon expansion

