

KING LIST

	Number of titled offspring recorded
17. Ziblim Nasa	7
18. Ziblim Bandamda	16
19. Andani Djangbarga	21
20. Mahame	5
21. Ziblim Kulunku	8
22. Sumane	4
23. Yakubu	38
24. Abudulai I	16
25. Andani	17
26. Alhassan	11
27. Abudulai II	5
28. Mahama	3
29. Mahama bla	1
30. Abudulai III	

Note: more offspring are recorded for the kings whose own sons succeeded to the office than for those whose sons did not. Two of the main links in the royal chain, the forebears of all subsequent kings - Naa Gariba and Naa Yakubu, have the largest numbers of recorded children.

C. Opong (Mrs.)

A NOTE ON ANCESTOR CULT IN GHANA

Looking at the belief of life after death and plastic art among the Ga-Adangmes and part of the Akan 'tribes' I have been led into re-assessing the real essence of what has been called ancestor worship in the literature concerned.

That man is dual in composition - body and spirit is a firm and universal belief among the tribes mentioned who hold that their dead ancestors live and are very close to the living kin. This belief is not a monopoly of the Ga-Adangmes or Akan or the Northern tribes of Ghana. It is a wide spread belief as far as West Africa is concerned. Of course, the fact that physical death is not the end of life is the core of many religious beliefs.

In Ghana, the belief is so deep and steadfast that next to God - in the heavens - people tend to think of the spirit of their ancestors as the other spirit that is the most potent agent controlling them socially. This does not seem to mean that in the hierarchy of the deities the ancestors come next after God. In Labadi, a Ga town; Korbiade, Odumasi Krobo, and Ada - Adangme towns - spirits associated with rivers or unusual natural phenomena are regarded as next to God. They are called Dzemawodzi or Adebowodzi or Adebowoi, meaning God created gods. This designation for this category of spirits is, I think more meaningful than the term Abosom as used by Rattray. Abo means stone and som worship. So that abosom means the worship of stones. The actual practice of people does not justify the terminology, as in fact the symbolic objects in the worship of these spirits are not the "spirits" being worshipped. The ancestors are not considered as gods as such but very potent spirit forces. As observed earlier, they form a powerful mechanism of social control.

Not all ancestral spirits are of significance. Hence not all stools of past lineage heads or chiefs are set aside as worthy of reverence. In Akim Abuakwa, Akwamu, Akropong-Akwapim, Ati near Tafo, the stools that are blackened¹ are those belonging to people who merit being remembered.

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1. Besmeared with a mixture of egg yolk and soot to make it look black. The stools of bad lineage heads and chiefs are not accorded this special respect which raises the stool to a level where it received reverential awe periodically.

The Adangme indicate right from the type of burial they give any particular person, the place they assign him in the spirit world. The type of burial - grand or poor - that is given is always a function of how the man lived while he was physically alive.²

Among the Adangme ancestor shrines are marked by ritual pots and sometimes, but rarely, by terra-cotta figures. Terra-cotta heads and figures are more popular among the Akans. So that the art figures one is likely to see marking graves or 'remembrance pots' are not gods but objects which represent, or help focus people's minds on, the ancestors.

What exactly is the point in the rites and ritual which have been called ancestor worship? Material is still being collected and something more definite may be said later. For the present, the evidence from Ga, and Adangme lands, the Akan areas of Akim Abuakwa, Akropong, Akim Tafo, and Akwamu, seem to suggest that what is involved is reverence more than worship. One will have to define what one means, anyway, by worship and again by reverence to make any sensible submission.

That a behaviour pattern is magical or religious will be dependent upon the state of mind of the believer. Fundamentally, we may say spiritualism is common to both. In which category do we place what has been called all along ancestor worship?

Adanson Hoebel and of course many other anthropologists seem to think there is a definite line of demarcation between ancestor cult and ancestor worship. Others like Crooke (1908) suggest that the Cult of the dead as seen in the custom of giving attention to graves shade off "imperceptibly" into the actual worship of the dead.

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2. Funerals in Adangme are great ceremonies which cost a lot of money. People are particular about the sort of burial they get and while alive they have a rough idea about the type of funeral they should get.
 3. Death Property and the Ancestor.

"By worship", Goody³ says,

"I understand the sorts of activity to which Frazer referred when he defined religion as a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life" (1935).

The acts of propitiation alluded to here include sacrifice of food items, sacrifice of blood, and those of drinks as in libation, offering of other material gifts and of verbal prayer and giving of reverence by divers gestures depicting reverence.

In a paper on the Social function of ancestor worship among the people of the Gold Coast — (Readings for Comparative Religions — Busia says:

"What is called ancestor worship consists of rites carried out by members of a lineage or clan. Such rites include offerings, usually of food and drink, and prayers for the things which the community regard as essential for its well being. Such rites are widespread in Ghana as represented by the "Aday" or "Odwira" or "Kuntum" of the Akan tribes, the "Homowo" of the Gas and the "Mmayem" of the Krobos. He continues to say that "The function of these rituals is to "recreate" the society of social order by re-affirming and strengthening the sentiments on which social solidarity and therefore the social order itself depends. The coming together of the tribe to offer prayers for food, health, fecundity, the objects of their common interests, and to participate in dancing and festivities renew their sense of cohesion and continuity".

Again there is the belief that the ancestors are not only near the living but desire that the living must live properly and according to the norms and values laid down for the society. A sanction on morality is provided by the fear for, or awareness of, the ancestors.

Going by these and other suggestions in the literature, it would appear that many tribes in Ghana indeed literally worship their ancestors, but this is what is being denied by most of our informants. It is early yet to submit that what we see in rites and rituals which we call ancestor worship is worship per se, or principally reverential behaviour for the ancestors who are believed to intercede for the living and make it easy for them to get the good things of life from God.

Although it is true that when the ancestors are addressed for the good things of life during libation, for instance they are not asked to pass on the request to any other superior spirits, it is being suggested that the fact that God is always mentioned first and invited to bless whatever is going to be done point to the fact that the ancestors ultimately derive their power from God; and that they are at best, intermediaries. Granted that the ancestors are intermediaries, contrarily to what it appears many believe, the question which poses itself is whether they are worshipped? Opinion collected so far suggest that the ancestors are remembered and served but not worshipped as gods.

It is not easy at the moment from the field material at hand to dismiss this alternative idea as unworthy of consideration. Cultural and social change may be responsible for this seemingly new view but this cannot be established yet. The problem posed and which is being looked at is whether ancestor worship as known through anthropological literature on Ghana has another interpretation which we have not closely examined.

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BIRTH RITES OF THE AKANS

Any description of the childhood rites of the Akans of Ghana cannot be considered complete without a mention of the pre-natal status of the baby. The unborn child is viewed from two angles, first as a growing being requiring medical attention, maternal care and nurture. In those days when there were no educated or certificated midwives, the