

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.

A.K. Quarcoo.

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

home-trained midwives, priests and medicine-men knew exactly the sort of medical treatment and advice which were helpful to both the expectant mother and the baby. Vegetable foods like "abunabunu" and "fanfufuo" and "tokotoko" and special palm-soups such as "abeduro" or "abemuduro" were prepared for the mother. Other medical aids were also prescribed for her.

The other way of looking at the baby is that it is a curious being which will model itself in accordance with the behaviour of the mother. If the mother exhibits any special trait of character, it is certain that the baby too will have the same trait when born. The mother therefore is not to be watchful of her moral obligations only, but she is also to take care of her body, because the Akans contend that if the mother is hurt while pregnant, the scar of such wound will appear on the body of the baby when it is born. It is therefore part of the teachings at home to the young expectant mother to keep her informed of the do's and don'ts of her peculiar state.

In that state, the baby is referred to as mmota, which now means a human form which is more than an embryo but which cannot yet be called by a human name. The belief of the Akans credits the mmota with a soul, a sense of perception and of judgement. For instance, it is believed that at the period of child-birth, the mmota may refuse to be born for one or the other of the following reasons:-

- (i) If the woman is guilty of infidelity and has not confessed it to the husband.
- (ii) If another man has merely made amorous approaches to her, or has held her nose or breast or her feminine parts and she has not made this known to the husband.
- (iii) If the woman has contemplated on divorce after delivery, or
- (iv) If she has taken any other course detrimental to the life and happiness of the husband.

The mmota is credited with the knowledge of any case of the type mentioned above, and it will surely seek a redress in favour of the father. In any of the foregoing circumstances, the mother under the pangs of pain at the travail has no choice but to confess the truth. The man is told this. In his absence, his brother or sister or near kinsman is informed about the confession. An apology from the wife then goes to the husband or his deputy. A pacification fee is promised or even produced; the home-trained midwife then reports the amicable settlement of the offence to the mmota, adding a few words of her own to invite it to arrive. Very often, the result is successful.

One may wonder why so much belief is put in the mmota. The belief originates from a simple biological deduction. The teachings of the Akans show that when the married couple meet, a spirit or "life" from the man combines with the woman's seed in the blood to form the mmota. This 'spirit' does not equate to the semen; it is spirit; the semen is merely vehicular. It is this that manifests the father's attributes and idiosyncrasies in the children. This 'spirit' or Ntoro, as it is called, is virtually part of the man's own spirit. It, being a spirit, can sense the woman's evil deeds and intentions which are noted and acted upon by the mmota when the day of reckoning — the delivery period — comes. What is done to obviate death or any unhappy consequences is the apology and pacification mentioned above.

We assume then that nothing went wrong, and that the baby has arrived. The home-trained midwife, as a rule, attends the mother first before turning to the baby, for they say that this is like "the case of the water-pot:" at a crisis you ignore the water in it and save the pot; because even if the water is spilt, with the pot whole, you can collect another fill of water." We again assume that all is normal with the mother, and that she has been seated with her legs together outstretched. In this situation, she may feel thirsty. The home-trained midwives say that if she is given water to drink, she dies at once. Any such request is therefore ignored. Well now, the mother has been treated. The baby is then attended to. First it is examined to see that it is breathing normally; if not, they massage or fumigate it to make it cry. The whole body together with all the natural apertures is thoroughly checked to ensure normality.

The umbilical cord is then treated.¹ Then "the throat is cleared." The clearing of the throat or the purification of the vocal cord, menewa-bo, is done by causing the baby to swallow a few drops of wine or strong drink. In the absence of any of these, the ordinary orange-juice serves as a good substitute. One significant thing about the clearing of the throat is that if it is done with something like the lime-juice, it exercises a bad effect on the child's voice, they say; and cacophony is the inevitable result. The use of the wine or any of the top class drinks, results in the melodious or sonorous voices of singers and orators. All these are of course deductions made empirically, and are yet to be proved scientifically.

Another rite which is worthy of mention is the "bathing of the new-born baby". There are special ways of doing this. If it is wrongly done, the child becomes addicted for ever to possessing a disagreeable scent emitting from its body whenever it perspires. On the other hand, if it is properly done, traces of any such scent are completely obliterated. To achieve this last result, the midwives apply soap and sponge and sometimes the ripe lime. The home-trained midwives claim that they can apply red-clay or other substances on the body of the few minutes old bathed baby which can act upon the baby's pigments and eventually give its skin a fair colour.

The necessary steps having been taken for both the mother and the child, they are taken into the bedchamber where they are clinically taken care of until the end of the seventh day. The rites of separation, purification and naming occur at dawn of the eighth day.

A.C. Denteh.

-
1. The part of the umbilical cord severed is buried. It is with pride that people refer to the place of their birth: "Eho na wotwaa me funuma," Eho na me funuma hye." These are said to validate one's claim of the citizenship or freedom of the place in question.