



The Sacredness of the Earth among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana

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Abstract. – The Earth plays an important role in the economic, social, and religious life of the Konkomba and other peoples of West Africa. The universal Earth goddess Kiting of all Konkomba is manifested in the multitude of Earth spirits, protectors of particular clans. Each clan has an Earth priest who performs strictly defined religious and social functions and enjoys great esteem and certain privileges. The Earth shrine is the main center of the Earth cult in the clan's territory and a symbol of the unity and autonomy of the clan. The analyzed ritual of introducing the Earth priest to his office in the village of N-nalog and the ritual in the Bwagbala Earth shrine have both social and religious dimensions. [*West Africa, northeastern Ghana, religion, Earth beliefs, Earth priests, rituals*]

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The Earth, as one of nature's elements, occupies an exceptional place in beliefs and cult. The primordial intuition of peoples shows the Earth as the basis of a number of hierophanies and revelations. It is a resource of power and of sacred forces, which are manifested in such forms as soil, stones, mountains, trees, woods, water, vegetation, landscape, and environment. All these hierophanic

manifestations existing on the Earth create a whole and constitute a large, living cosmic unity whose synthesis and expression is seen in the Earth (Eliade 1966: 243).

As confirmed by numerous ethnological and religious studies, the peoples and nations of all times have considered the Earth to be the foundation of life and an inexhaustible source of different kinds of existence. These studies emphasize the unlimited capacity of creation and the vital power of the Earth, which is manifested in fertility and abundance. The Earth is the mother, feeding everything. As mother and feeder it was surrounded with cult and respect. The cyclically revived nature and the very mystery of life contributed to the sacralization and mythologization of the Earth and its vital force, which is shown in the beliefs and rituals of many peoples and nations.¹

The Earth plays an exceptionally important role in the economic, social, and religious life of the Konkomba and many of the peoples inhabiting the basin of the Upper Volta and other areas of Western Africa. We distinguish the material aspect of the earth in the sense of the cultivated and inherited land, and the religious and mystic dimension. The present article will consider such aspects of the Earth's sacred dimension among the Konkomba people from northern Ghana as images and beliefs concerning the Earth, the social and religious position of Earth priests, the ritual of

¹ Kristensen 1971: 88; Eliade 1966: 241; Eliade and Sullivan 1987: 534; Zimoń 1998: 28–36; 1999: 379–387.