

admiration. It is unique in its unwritten poetry and pageantry; but what fascinates foreigners most is its religion, which contains some baffling practices.

As all the rites seem to be based on the veneration of the ancestral spirits, our intention is to examine one of them – that is the cult of the stool – with the hope that our efforts may be a directive for anyone in need of something to consult regarding a cultural practice of that nature.

The lack of specific literature on Ashanti stools compels me to rely on my personal knowledge as a member of the ruling clan of my village, in which the veneration of stools is carried out faithfully, and also on the answers to questionnaires I sent out to Ashanti who are traditional authorities on ancestors and their stools. My third source of information will be authorities who in their general works on Ashanti or Akan customs make useful references to the stool.

I. The Religious Beliefs of the Ashanti

The Ashanti believe in a triple group of suprahuman entities, and venerate them. First of all, they acknowledge a Supreme Being for whom they have specific names and attributes. Secondly, they believe in lesser gods, who, they think, have certain powers quite beyond those of any human being. And thirdly, they believe in the spirits of the dead and in their influence over the living ¹.

1. The Supreme Being

a) Existence

The Ashanti belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is evident from several facts. In the everyday language of the people, he is mentioned and implored. Statements like *Nyame ma ade pa kye me a* "if God gives me a good morning tomorrow" are very frequently heard.

Allusions to him are found in the ordinary wise sayings and proverbs. *Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame* "nobody need show God to a child" is one such maxim which clearly shows how the Ashanti consider the knowledge of God to be an innate quality of every person.

Stories and popular tales in which God is one of the characters, abound. In these stories he does not play second fiddle, but is now the hero, now the just judge condemning the malicious hero or rewarding the good. In some of these tales, we find the Ashanti solution to the problems concerning God, as for example his invisibility.

Ashanti songs and verses heard frequently on talking drums are full of praises of God and of his names; so also is the unwritten poetry of the nation. The following is an example of a drum verse:

¹ Some authors divide the second category into belief in greater gods (*abosom*) and belief in minor gods (*asuman*). I prefer to put them in one group, as I consider the latter as the lowest form of the former.