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Afa Divination Storytelling and Music

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## Abstract

### Afa Divination Stories and Music

By Paul Swanson

The objective of my research was to learn how stories, songs, and drumming were used within the context of the Afa religion. Nearly all of my research was conducted in the village of Klikor, located in Anloland in the Volta Region of Southeast Ghana. After a few days in Klikor, I decided that the best way to learn about the Afa religion was to become initiated as a bokor, a priest, and that 16 day initiation process filled the bulk of my research time. In addition to my experiences as a new initiate, I learned a great deal from interviews with Dale Massiasta, Torbokor Kwaku Gafah Nanenutie, and assistants at the BLAKHUD research center. I also witnessed several divinations, most of which were conducted in Ewe. In this way I incorporated participation, observation, and interviews into my methodology. I found in my research that there are over 4000 stories incorporated into the Afa divination system, and it is these stories that give moral instruction, dietary advise, knowledge of the spiritual world, and even predictions for the future. There is a song associated with each story, and these songs serve as memory aids as well as provide good closure to the stories. Although drumming is not typically a part of the divination ceremony, it is an integral part of celebrations, festivals, initiations, and gatherings. I also discovered that the stories, songs, and possibly even the drumming of Afa have strong connections with non-divinatory traditions in the area. Some people regard this as a sign of the strong influence Afa has had on its community, and some people would argue that Afa has both influenced and been influenced by the other traditions in the area. In either case, every informant and every observation point to the fact that Afa plays an important role either directly or indirectly in the lives of nearly everyone in the Klikor community.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
Acknowledgements.....	5
Introduction.....	7
Methodology.....	8
Map of Klikor in Relation to Ghana.....	12
Origins of Afa and the Ewe of Southeast Ghana.....	13
Afa and the Ewe Divinities.....	15
The Nature of Afa.....	18
Derivation of a Divination Code.....	20
Casting a Code.....	22
Reasons for Consulting Afa.....	24
Divination Consultation.....	25
Instructions, Stories, and Songs.....	29
Gorilla and the Stool.....	30
Snake and the Banana.....	32
Bat and his Ancestors.....	34
Reconciliation.....	36
Songs of Afa.....	37
Afa Drumming.....	39
Conclusions.....	42
References.....	44
Informants.....	45
Appendix A: Photos of Initiation.....	46
Appendix B: The Sixteen Major Codes.....	47
Appendix C: A Complete Listing of Afa Codes.....	48
Appendix D: A Diagram of Afa Drums.....	53
Appendix E: Additional Stories	

Antelope and his Trip.....	54
Race for the Stool.....	56
Elephant and Tortoise.....	58
The Sea and Afa.....	59
Hunter and his Wife.....	60
Husband and his Wife.....	61
The Farmer and the Tapper.....	62

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## Introduction

When I first heard Dr. Tinuoye mention Afa divination, my ears pricked up. I had never heard of Afa before, but I had done some reading about 'I Ching' divination, and knew a bit about African religion, mostly from books. When our group finally got to Klikor and I met Dale Massiasta, I was struck by his warmth, intelligence, and thoughtfulness. Previously, I had wanted to study storytelling and music in a traditional Ghanaian village. As I learned more about Afa, however, I realized that Afa was all of this and more. There was a two week span between when I first came to Klikor and when I returned to begin my research, and during that time I read several books on a related divination system, Ifa from Nigeria, which basically reaffirmed the decision I had already made to come back to Klikor. I also read Christina Wilson's ISP from last year, 'A New Initiate's Guide to Afa Divination System in Klikor, Ghana'. I was amazed by the amount she had learned, and the authority with which she wrote. Her work challenged me to expand on what she had done, focusing on different areas and giving additional insights.

When I first began my research, I knew that there were many, many stories associated with Afa, but I didn't know how they were used, how they related to each other, or how they were learned. I also knew that singing, drumming and dancing were incorporated somehow, but again, I didn't know how. The amount of research done on Afa is pitifully small, and almost none of it is published. I did find an article by GK Nukunya entitled 'Afa Divination in Anlo: A Preliminary Report', but this 17 page article is far from an authoritative work on Afa. Dale Massiasta is preparing a book entitled *Indigenous African Religion* for publication, in which he discusses Afa at length, but he has been unable to obtain funding to do his proposed project of a full book on Afa among the Ewes. These limited sources were essentially all the information available in written form about Afa, at least all that I could find. Everything else I found dealt with Ifa, a related divination system from Nigeria and Benin. This paucity of research in the field of Afa is by itself reason enough to study it, and yet there are many more reasons.

When I was speaking with people at BLAKHUD, the Black Humanities Development Research Institute, I heard from almost everybody that Afa stories and songs were used by other shrines, by other musicians, and by storytellers outside the Afa realm. I was even told once that every story in the world is derived from Afa. Although this claim may seem far fetched, one must remember that there are over 4000 stories

in Afa, and if written sources are accurate, over 150,000 stories in the Nigerian Ifa corpus. This incredibly large body of knowledge has undoubtedly influenced storytelling all over Africa, and most likely all over the world. Even in my own limited research I noticed some similarities between Native American stories and Afa stories. While similarities and unsubstantiated claim are not proof in itself, they fired my imagination, and made me want to learn more about the stories, songs, and drumming of Afa.



## Methodology

The heart of my experience with Afa was my own 16 day initiation into Afa. This initiation gave me invaluable insights into what it meant to be a Afa bokor (priest), knowledge of how bokor divine, and, most importantly in terms of my research, how storytelling and music were incorporated into this divination. Since I had already spoken with Dale Massiasta, it seemed like living with him at the BLAKHUD Research Center would provide the best opportunity and convenience to learn as much as possible. Dale's presence there, the written material he provided me, and the help of his assistants, were some of my greatest resources during my research. Tobokor Kwaku Gafah Nanenutie, a cousin of Dale, also gave me invaluable assistance with my transcriptions of stories.

I found that the best tools to gather information in Klikor were pen and paper. I brought a tape recorder along, and was planning on using it to record songs, drumming and interviews, but after the first three days of my initiation it broke and would neither play nor record. I also had hoped to use a video recorder to document parts of my initiation, but the expense involved in that proved to be too great. I used my camera to document parts of the initiation, but photographs are not a very effective way of documenting stories and music. Instead, I found that if I took notes when I did interviews, and transcribed stories as they were told to me, the resulting information was fairly accurate. In order to try to minimize mistakes, I wrote a significant amount of my paper in Klikor, which was then checked and edited by Dale Massiasta. The corrections and suggestions he gave me have strengthened this work immensely.

I encountered numerous difficulties throughout my research, both avoidable and unavoidable. Perhaps the single greatest difficulty was the language barrier. There was simply no way I could learn enough of the Ewe language to do interviews in Ewe, not in three weeks. This meant that when I was interviewing somebody who didn't speak any English I was forced to use an interpreter. The difficulties generated by using interpreters are incredible. It was fairly common for my informant to speak in Ewe for 10 minutes or more and then the interpreter to say three sentences in English. Also, in nearly every circumstance the interpreters who helped me were not Afa initiates, and much of the deeper meaning of the stories was lost. In addition, the stories lost nearly all of their flow and drama during the translation.

In order to counter these difficulties, I found myself relying very heavily on informants that could speak English. Thus Dale and Torbokor Kwaku became my two primary resources, both of them fully initiated into Afa and also fluent in English. People like Saddam, Odzuku, George, and Freeman also helped to clarify questions and misunderstandings. This language gap also made me rely heavily on my own participation and instruction, most of which was in English. Although I used non-participant observation at times, usually as an onlooker at a divination consultation, I found that not understanding what was being spoken made this sort of observation very challenging.

There were many times when I doubted my own qualifications to do research on this subject. Not only was there a huge language barrier, but being foreign to the Afa system my understanding and conception of Afa was often vague and often different from the Ewe conception. In fact, I am fairly certain that Dale could have done this research in a much more accurate, enlightening, and scholarly manner by himself. And yet the fact of the matter is that Dale has been busy with other projects. Other diviners could write on Afa, except that many of them have little knowledge of English or Western scholarship. I think the most important thing is that people, myself in this case, try to bring attention to Afa so that people like Dale and Foster can get money to write the books that need to be written.

The other difficulties I encountered were not as severe, but still were challenges I had to deal with. For example, doing formal uninterrupted interviews in an Ewe village setting is almost impossible. There are always kids falling down and crying, people who come to join the discussion, people who change the topic, and it was common for the interviewee to get distracted and leave after fifteen or twenty minutes of conversation. Also, the topic I was studying, religion, is not something that people take lightly. Many times people would tell me only part of the information requested, one piece at a time. The reasoning here is that religion deals less with knowledge than it does with wisdom, and wisdom is not something that can be rushed. The complexity within Afa is incredible, and every story, every song has numerous meanings and nuances. This, combined with the fact that there is a great deal of secret information in Afa, known only to initiates, makes Afa research impossible to rush.

In a university setting, there are always things to be done, books to be read, etc. In the village, people will often sleep in the afternoon, relax at night, visit with friends, or just rest. Since Afa is entirely an oral tradition, and since the number of people who spoke English was very small and these people were often

busy, I spent a great deal of time in Klikor reading books unrelated to Afa, talking with friends, and relaxing. Every fieldworker depends on the generosity and openness of his or her informants, and to expect everybody to drop their work and responsibilities to do interviews is unrealistic.

There's an expression I heard in Klikor, that the eye can not see the head. Although there were many times when I felt that research was going slowly or encountering obstacles, I believe it was ultimately successful.

Someday I hope to come back to Eweland, Togo, Benin, and even Yorubaland in Nigeria to do more extensive research into this area. Until then, I hope this work sheds a little light on the essence of Afa.

Map of Klikor in relation to Ghana

## Origins of Afa and the Ewe of Southeast Ghana

The origins of the Ewe point to Nigeria, and beyond Nigeria to the Sudan, Egypt, and possibly even the Jewish nation. Archeologists have found evidence of what is called the Nok culture dating back 65,000 years, presumably a culture originating in East African antiquity. Some time later, estimated between 2000 BC and 500 BC, the Yoruba people emigrated from the Nile River to the Niger and settled at the sacred city of the Nok, Ile Ife. It is thought that the divination system known as Ifa is indigenous to this area west of the Nile now known as Yorubaland, present day Nigeria. The evidence overwhelmingly show that Afa divination migrated from Yorubaland to Benin, Togo, and finally to Ghana and beyond. The original Yoruba culture, originating from Egypt and Sudan, blended with the Nok to produce the people of Nigeria we now know as the Yoruba. (Karade 1994)

Chief Addo VI of Klikor, the grandfather of current chief (Addo VIII), put into writing some of the old oral history of the Ewe. Addo VI wrote that the Ewes came from 'Sudan', or 'the Sudan', to Yorubaland several hundred years ago. This statement is less straight forward than it would seem, since in Addo VI's time the term 'Sudan' referred to the entire savanna belt from Senegal to Mali to present day Sudan. According to Addo VIII, some Ewes believe that they came from the Nile area, and support that claim with old songs lyrics which deal with floods, in theory the annual flooding of the Nile. Others point to Ewe roots in Jewish culture, noting that the Hebrew word for God, YHWH, is remarkably similar to the name for the Ewe thunder divinity, Yewe. Although further archeological work may bring more light to the situation, it is unlikely that the Ewe's East African roots will ever be known for certain. (Chief Addo VIII, personal communication)

In any case, the strong similarities in language, religion, and culture point to long and intimate contact between the Ewe and the Yoruba. For example, the kp and gb syllables are found among the Ga, Ewe, and Yoruba but not among the Akan. [Note: both Ewe and Ga oral tradition speaks of migration from modern day Nigeria] (Chief Addo VIII, personal communication) According to Ewe oral traditions, they lived a time in Ketu, located in present day Benin. With them in Ketu lived the Yoruba, and it was the expansion of the Yoruba that pushed the Ewe westward. The Ewe split into numerous groups, a number of which settled in Notsie, in present day Togo. After a number of kings ruled in Notsie, Agokoli became

king and trouble began. Agokoli's cruelty, wickedness, and harshness drove three large groups from Notsie, one settling in the North around Hohoe, one near Ho, and one in the South in Anlo. It was this last migration to the South that brought the leaders that established the community of Klikor and its neighbors. It is thought by archeologists and historians that Notsie was founded in the 1500's, and that the communities in Anloland were settled by the late 1500's or early 1600's. Although archeology suggests that there were people in the Anlo area of Ghana before the Ewe, the fact that this culture was submerged into Ewe culture implies that the earlier inhabitants were not great in number. (Agbodeka, 1997) For example, the Wli were an indigenous people sacked by the Ewe of Klikor after the Klikors left Notsie (Massiasta, personal communication). Although a great deal happened between the 1600's and the present, most people believe that the Afa divination system was established at the time of the earliest Ewe settlers. In other words, Afa/Ifa divination has been a part of Ewe culture ever since they lived in Yorubaland, and was brought West during their migrations. The reason this must be stressed is because some time after the Ewe were settled in Ghana, several sects of Afa were brought to the Ewe of Ghana from Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. These sects include Anagofa, Dzisafa, Tsake, Gogor, and Kpoligafa. People in the Anagofa sect trace their origin to the Anago, the Ewe word for Yoruba. They believe that Anagofa originated in Sakete, Nigeria, and spread from there to Dahomey, present day Benin. From Dahomey it was brought by a man named Togbe Molukpe to Togo, where Molukpe initiated many people including Togbe Soga. There, in Togo, Anago flourished and also became known as the Soga sect, after Togbe Soga. (Massiasta, personal communication)

From Togo, a man named Togbe Ali brought Anagofa to Anloland. Also from Togo, the Dzisafa sect was brought to Anloland by Tobge Jadu and Togbe Kpoto. The Kpoligofa sect was brought to Anloland by a man named Duvor. It must be emphasized that although these sects were brought to Anloland after the Ewe settled there, it is thought that Afa existed and was practiced by the Ewe throughout their migrations from Ketu. (Massiasta, personal communication)

## Afa and the Ewe Divinities

The Ewe, like almost all African groups, traditionally believe in a supreme being, an omnipotent creator. The Ewe call this supreme being Mawu, although in Afa jargon Mawu is called Ametor Lisa (Ametor=humanity's father, Lisa=chameleon). Other African groups have their own name for the Creator, including Onyame among the Akan and Olodumare among the Yoruba. The Ewe have a story about Mawu's relationship with the rest of the world, recorded by Christina Wilson in the fall of 1999 and told by Dale Massiasta:

God (Mawu) created Man and Wisdom and put them, among with everything else he had created, inside an enclosure. Man and Wisdom did not know what was outside the enclosure, and Wisdom was compelling Man to find out what lies outside. They climbed the wall, landing in the world of poverty, disease, and problems. To lesson their troubles, God (Mawu) put the divinities (\*1) as intermediaries between himself and Man. God used the earth to create man – he is an artist – after creating man he put movement and thought within him – to sustain him he created food and other things which could satisfy his desires. Thought misled man from God. (recorded by Wilson, 1999, edited by Massiasta 2000)

(\*1) Note: Wilson 1999 uses the term 'gods', while Massiasta, her source prefers the term divinity. Since Massiasta was one of Wilson's chief informants, throughout this paper the term divinity will be used instead of god, and divinities instead of gods.

It is important to remember that while shrines exist dedicated to Afa, Thunder, Snake, Sea, etc, these divinities are simply manifestations of Mawu, his helpers. This is why most African religion scholars describe Traditional African Religion as monotheistic.

Afa's role among the divinities is as a spokesman, the voice of the divinities, even though Afa is the youngest. Afa priests and priestesses know hundreds of stories which make up the heart of Afa, and one of these stories (from the code Tulamedzi) describes how Afa became the divinities' spokesman.

Mawu asked all the divinities to make a sacrifice for him. Afa was the youngest of all the divinities, and the only one to fulfill Mawu's request of making a sacrifice. In addition to making the sacrifice, Afa obtained a black and white string and hung it from the ceiling of his bedroom, with the end hanging just above the level of the bed. After Afa made the sacrifice to Mawu, Mawu asked Afa to fix in the thread hanging above his bed two feathers. The first feather, the feather of a parrot, signifies law and respect, whereas the second feather, the feather of a 'klevo', signifies inheritance. After finishing this task, Mawu asked Afa to pull the string softly. When Afa pulled the thread, all of the divinities dropped into the room of Afa one by one. By this act, Afa became the controller of the divinities, or their spokesman. (Wilson, 1999, edited by Massiasta, 2000)

Originally Afa could communicate directly with people, but Afa committed adultery with the wife of Ogun, the divinity of metal and machines. Afa found a way to abort the baby without either Ogun or his wife discovering it, but Mawu saw the act and took away Afa's ability to speak (see Wilson 1999, page 3). Instead, Afa was forced to use codes, which his priests and priestesses interpret. There are 256 codes, and 16 stories for each code, making a total of 4096 stories ( $256 \times 16 = 4096$ ). Some of these stories deal with divinities, some with animals, and some with humans. However, a spiritual element can be found in all the characters, divine or not. These stories serve to instruct, divine, and record the history of the divinities and how things came into being. The story recorded above, from Tulamedzi, is this last type, to show how things came into being.

Afa stories also illustrate bit by bit how Afa, the divinity, relates to his brothers and sisters. Consider a story from the code Gbewoli.

Now when the Thunder divinity has people initiated, the initiate is taught a secret esoteric language. Originally the initiates were only allowed to speak this language, even after initiation, and were forbidden to communicate with non-initiates in their mother tongue. Afa cautioned his brother about this, telling him that if his initiates didn't speak a common language, no one would be able to help them in times of need. Thunder rejected the suggestion, and told him not to interfere. One day, when Thunder was at his farm, Thunder's shrine caught on fire. Afa was home that day, and could hear the inmates shouting in their



secret language. Although he knew the shrine was burning, he did nothing. When Thunder returned from the shrine, he saw his shrine burnt and razed. He went to Afa, and asked why he did not help. Afa replied that he heard the initiates shouting in a strange language, but he didn't know there was a fire. That's why Thunder divinity initiates are now allowed to use their mother tongue once they are initiated. (Massiasta, personal communication)

Afa codes and Afa diviners are an integral part of nearly every shrine in Eweland. Many priests and priestesses of the Sea, Thunder, and Brekete divinities are also Afa initiates, and use their knowledge of Afa divination and stories to guide their own shrines' prayers, make offerings, or in solving spiritual problems. It is in this way that Afa is the spokesman for the divinities, especially between people and the spiritual world.

## The Nature of Afa

Afa, like most of the Ewe divinities, has a physical representation as well as a spiritual being. When a man or woman becomes initiated, they acquire their 'own' Afa. During the initiation ceremony, the initiate receives two calabash gourds, each containing around 16 palm nut seeds or huku (hu=divinity, ku=seed). Although it is not thought that these huku are Afa itself, they are a very powerful representation. In some important instances, like initiations, diviners manipulate Afa through the seeds in order to divine (see page 22). The actual concept of Afa was quite difficult for me to grasp. In some ways Afa is an independent entity, a divinity. In other ways people talk about each initiate receiving their own Afa. During the process of initiation, each initiate receives a code, called the initiate's star, which will guide his or her life, and a second code to support it. This star is also known as an initiate's personal Afa. One description Dale Massiasta gave to me was that there was a sort of trinity, beginning with Afa the divinity, leading to a person's code and personal Afa, which then through the stories leads back to the divinity of Afa. The complexity of the whole conception is likely the reason that foreign writers have described African religion as pantheistic, idolatry, fetish, animism, etc. Even after spending three weeks studying and talking with priests my own conception of Afa is a bit confused.

Another important element in Afa, as well as with the Thunder divinity, Sea divinity, and others, is that it has both a male component and a female component. This is why Massiasta, in his book *Indigenous African Religion*, calls it a sort of 'bisexual' conception. As mentioned above, the huku seeds, the representation of Afa, are stored in two calabash gourds. One of these gourds stores the male Afa, and the other stores the female. Both are used in ceremonies and important divinations. As another example, in the Sea and Thunder divinity shrines, initiates 'marry' their divinity, with male initiates marrying the female aspect and female initiates marrying the male aspect. This duality is remarkable, especially because it forces a simple anthropomorphic conception to be reevaluated. Although in some of the stories, like that of Afa's affair with Ogun's wife, the divinities have clear sexual identities, the lack of rigidity for these sexual identities seems to be a striking difference between Ewe religion and the way most scholars understand other 'polytheistic' religions, such as the Greek or Egyptian religions. It seems possible that if

Greek or Egyptian practitioners were numerous today, their own conception of their religion might be very different from the conception commonly heard from academicians.

## Derivation of a Divination code

In order to have even a basic understanding of Afa, it is necessary to know how divination codes are derived. The coding system is essentially binary, in some ways similar to the way computers count. The basic unit, or root, is four vertical marks of either one (I) or two (II). Each of these roots is then given a name, for example:      refers to Gbe, and      refers to Tse. These roots are then either doubled or combined with other roots to form a code of eight marks in two columns of four. Reference tables of both the roots and the doubled roots, are shown below.

Table 1. The 16 Roots, Half of a Code

Gbe=	Yeku=	Woli=	Di=	Loso=	Anloe=	Abla=	Akla=
Guda=	Sa=	Ka=	Trukpe=	Tula=	Lete=	Tse=	Fa=

Table 2. The 16 Major Codes, Complete Codes

Gbe	Yeku	Woli	Di=	Loso	Anloe	Abla	Akla
medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=
Guda	Sa	Ka	Trukpe	Tula	Lete	Tse	Fa
Medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=	medzi=

Note: For a code to have meaning, it must have two columns. A root by itself is not a code.

The sixteen codes listed in Table 2 are the sixteen Major Codes. There are 240 Minor Codes in addition, all of which are derived from combining two different roots. These minor codes are read from right to left, usually by saying the names of the two roots. For example,      is Gbeyeku, derived from the roots Gbe and Yeku, or the two major codes Gbemedzi and Yekumedzi. The code for Futula is      , derived from the roots Fu and Tula, or the two major codes Fumedzi and Tulamedzi.

Table 3: Simple Minor Codes

Gbemedzi	combined with Yekumedzi	gives you Gbeyeku
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Fumedzi	combined with Tulamedzi	gives you Futula
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It is often the case that the minor code names are slightly different from the roots from which it is derived.

Several examples are

Table 4: Altered Minor Codes

Letemedzi	combined with Tsemedzi	gives you Bokorteteh (Lete-Tse)
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Trukpedezi	combined with Letemedzi	gives you Trukpeymite (Trukpe-Lete)
------------	-------------------------	-------------------------------------

Tulamedzi	combined with Gudamedzi	gives you Tulakpaguda (Tula-Guda)
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It is thought that if the name is not altered in these circumstances, the wrong spirit will be invoked when the code is called. For a complete listing of all 256 codes, see Appendix C, page 48.

## Casting a Code

There are two principle ways to cast a code: with a kpele and with the huku seeds. The process with a kpele is fairly simple, fast, and is used for most occasions. A kpele is a string about 3 feet long which is held in the middle, with each end dangling down. Hanging on each side are four half-palm-nuts spaced from each other by small beads. The diviner casts the kpele so that it falls in two columns, with four half-palm-nuts in each column, each nut either face up or face down. If the nut is face up, it represents a one, or (I). If it is face down, a two or (II). See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Reading a Kpele

I I  
II II  
= I II = Ablakotsey (a combination of Ablamedzi and Tseymedzi )  
II II

The other method for divining involves the use of Afa itself. In this method, Afa, as represented by 16-32 huku (palm nut seeds), held in one hand while the other hand scoops as many of them as possible, usually leaving one or two remaining. If two huku is remaining, then the diviner marks one stroke (I) in a tray with aye [powder] spread in it. If one huku remains, the diviner marks two strokes (II) in the tray. When I first read about this I thought it was a misprint, but every diviner I observed used this method, with (I) marked for two seeds and (II) marked for one seed. This process is repeated eight times, beginning in the top right corner and finishing with the bottom left. The order in which the marks are made is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.

It must be noted at this time that it is entirely possible to know how to cast a code and call its name, but still have no knowledge of the meaning of that code. The process of interpreting the codes and using them correctly is an art which requires years of training to master, and will be examined shortly.

## Reasons for Consulting Afa

When I discussed with Dale Massiasta the reasons why people came to consult with a diviner, he stated that the reasons could be categorized as either personal or communal. Personal reasons include lack of children, a failing business, unexplainable sickness, a hostile employer, or possibly having one's farm lands taken away. I personally know several people who came to ask Afa for help with a severe and persistent sickness and ended up becoming initiated into Afa to cure themselves (Massiasta, Hussey, personal communications). One priest suggested to me that his health problems as a child were related to foods which were bad for him, (allergies perhaps?), and once he found his specific dietary restrictions through his Afa initiation and personal code his illness disappeared. Many people believe that the divinities sometimes use sickness to give a sign that the patient must undergo initiation. Others believe that there are certain foods which disagree with each person's spiritual constitution, and once this spiritual constitution is discovered through initiation the appropriate foods can be avoided.

People also consult Afa priests and priestesses for communal reasons, such as draught, epidemic sickness, to find the chances of their team winning a sports game, to establish a shrine, etc. Afa is utilized in so many ways, and plays a major role in shaping the social structure of the entire Ewe community. In my own experience, I divined during my own initiation to discover my star, my secret guiding code, and my second supporting code. I also divined several times during the course of the initiation to gain practice and experience. The questions put to Afa were usually along the lines of, what does the day have in store for me?, and the like. Through the stories and other divinatory procedures, Afa can answer question ranging from the very general to 'yes' or 'no'.



## The Divination Consultation

There are many steps to an Afa divination, and for most occasions these steps are constant from one divination to the next. Important divinations, or those using the huku (divinity seeds), are often quite different, depending on the context of the situation (For a good account of a initiation divination involving huku, see Wilson 1999). However, I feel that the best way a fairly representative look at Afa stories and music can be presented is through the context of a typical divination, taking a hypothetical case of a woman who has been unable to bear children.

The divination process begins when the supplicant, or seeker, informs the diviner of the request for a divination. This request can come at almost any time; the diviner could be walking down the street, in his/her house, or even visiting a friend. It is the responsibility of a practicing diviner to always keep their divining tools nearby in case they are asked to divine (Abimbola 1975). Unfortunately, due to my almost complete lack of understanding of the Ewe language, I was unable to passively observe any divination consultations and know what was going on. Because of this I will be relying on information gathered in interviews with Dale Massiasta and on my own experience in learning to divine.

Our hypothetical divination begins with a young woman coming to a diviner and asking him for a divination (although both men and women can be diviners, it just so happened that most of the diviners I worked with were men, so I will use the male pronoun for the diviner). The diviner unrolls his reed mat, takes off his sandals, and brings out his vodzi bag made of kente cloth. Vodzi are ritual objects that symbolize various things during the divination. The diviner spills the vodzi onto the mat, objects like bottle caps, seeds, shells, cowries, beads, bones, etc. The seeker takes out a token gift of money, maybe 2000 cedis (US 15 cents), and whispers her request to the money so that the diviner can not hear. She then places the money on the mat next to the diviner and sits in a chair nearby. The diviner takes out his kpele, his divining chain, and places it on the mat on top of the money. The diviner also takes out his kpoli, his staff, a piece of carved wood about 7 inches long, and begins tapping his vodzi (ritual objects) and saying the following words:

I call Afa, Lomila

Aluwe dze agbo

Kpolomatsi Klilogoma

Toku vi matsoka

Zigede zina ameto

Zina ameno

Adzonu matsi gbe

Kaka divre bo...

I call Mami Water

Nyonu do kpanya

Ebe yegble asime na nyonu

Yegble agbleme na nutsu

Ebe yewoadu azakokoe

Ainlo anyi kokoe...

I call Afa.

The first part of this invokes all of the various praise names of Afa. The second part invokes all of the other divinities, the Sea divinity, etc. After invoking Afa, the diviner asks the question: "Has Afa gone to the spiritual world and back?" He then answers his own question, "If you have gone there, tell me the truth."

Next the diviner picks up his kpele and holds it in his hands to the East, saying 'I show my power to the morning.' He holds it to the West, saying 'I show my power to the evening.' He holds them up in the air, saying 'I show my power to the heavens.' He then brings the kpele down low and says 'I show my power to the earth.' The diviner repeats this process three times.

The diviner cries, 'Afa, say it!' Then he casts the chain, swinging it back and forth three times before letting it fall to the mat. He then calls the code, invoking the spirit for that code, and possibly even

writes the code on his wall in chalk or on a piece of paper. The code in this example is Gbelete, which is

The diviner takes a second kpele and puts it on the mat, turns the palm nuts so that it shows the same code, Gbelete. At this point the diviner must learn if the code Gbelete signifies a good omen or a bad omen. To do this he must use his vodzi, ritual objects that are used to represent different things. He takes a cowrie shell, representing a good omen, out of his vodzi bag and places it on the right. He takes a black seed, representing a bad omen, and places on the left of the mat. The diviner then picks up the first kpele, which is slightly bigger and more ornate, and casts it twice more, first Saabla and then Tseyloso. Here the diviner is using a technique involving the seniority of the codes. Among the sixteen major codes there is a strict seniority, as shown in Appendix B. Thus, Samedzi is senior to Tseymedzi. When considering seniority of the minor codes, only the right column is taken into consideration. Thus, Saabla is senior to Tseyloso. If there had been a tie, for example Saable and Sakla, whichever code was cast first would have seniority. Usually the code cast first corresponds to the right hand vodzi, and the code cast second to the left hand vodzi. Since in this case the code cast first, Saabla, has seniority, it means that the omen points to the cowrie shell, a good omen.

Now the diviner must determine what kind of good omen is found. He puts vodzi representing money, health, and love on the right, and on the left he puts vodzi representing a divinity and an unknown good omen. The exact objects used and the side that they are placed on is left up to the diviner, and there are no hard and fast rules for the process involved. Much is left up to the diviner's discretion. Also remember that even at this stage, the diviner has not been told the reason the seeker has come to him, although it's possible he will have ideas about it. Often the vodzi used and the details of this process are influenced by the code divined, Gbelete in this case. The diviner will probably know between 2 and 7 stories for the code, and the stories in the code help him decide which vodzi are most likely to be needed.

So now that the diviner has objects representing money, health, and love on the right with a divinity and the unknown on the left, he casts twice more, first Ablakpafu and then Losofu. Here Ablakpafu has seniority, and the divination points to the right. The diviner puts the vodzi on the left, representing a divinity and the unknown, back in his bag, and divides the right hand vodzi, representing money, health, and love, between the right and the left. At this point there is a vodzi representing money

and a vodzi representing love on the right. On the left is a vodzi representing health. The diviner casts twice more, the codes pointing to the stone representing health. Thus the diviner finds that Gbelete points to an omen of good health.

Next the diviner must find out if a sacrifice is required to ensure the good omen. He places a vodzi representing 'yes' on the right, and 'no' on the left. He casts twice more, and it points to 'yes'. The diviner puts a vodzi representing an animal sacrifice on the right, and 'no' on the left. The next two castings point to 'no'. He puts a vodzi representing a non-animal food sacrifice on the right, and 'no' on the left. The two castings which follow point to a non-animal food. Since one of the stories of Gbelete involves a banana, the diviner puts a vodzi representing a banana sacrifice on the right, and 'no' on the left. The two castings which follow point to the banana sacrifice. The diviner put a vodzi on the right to see if it requires the whole banana, or just a part of the banana on the left. The next two castings point to the whole banana.

At this point the body of the actual divining is over, and the diviner must check to see if Afa has anything else to say. He puts a stone representing finality on the right, and nothing on the left. He casts twice more, and it points to the right. The divining is finished. If the castings had pointed to the left, he would have continued divining to find what else Afa was trying to say, usually basing his questions on either the stories of the central code, Gbelete, or on knowledge he has of the seekers own projects and life.

## Instructions, Stories, and Songs

At this point in the divination process, the diviner usually gives instructions about what the seeker must do. While some of these instructions are based on the stories the diviner knows, some are not. When I went to diviners and was given instructions, often the instructions were unrelated to the stories associated with the code. According to Dale Massiasta, there are other factors involved, including the actual arrangement of ones and twos in the code itself. He also mentioned that each of the 16 roots has instructions associated with it, for example the root Fu from Fumedzi, when it is part of the code divined (ex Fupakla, Anlekpafu, etc) is associated with an instruction not to drink beverages which foam, especially beer. Other roots have other instructions, but since my time was so short in Klikor I was not able to gain a good grasp of this aspect of the divination.

At this point, after the instructions are given, the divination may end depending on the seeker. Some seekers are only interested in what they must do in terms of a sacrifice and various instructions. Thus it is entirely possible for the entire divination to complete without any stories, any songs, or even without the seeker telling the diviner why she came. However, it is more common for the diviner to tell the seeker one or more stories based on the code divined, Gbelete in this case. The actual number of stories told is often based upon how many stories the diviner knows, for every diviner knows some codes better than others. The diviner may also decide that only one or two of the stories is relevant, and ignore the rest. In Afa, it is said that there are 16 stories for every code, but most diviners will not know all 16. In Ifa in Nigeria, it is said that there are over 600 stories for every code. In any case, in our sample divination I will present three stories, along with their songs and interpretations, in the hopes that it clarifies their role in divination.

## Gorilla and the Stool

This story speaks of the Gorilla and other animals in the kingdom. The ancestral stool (throne) was vacant, and hands were pointing at the Gorilla as a qualified and the most appropriate person to occupy the stool. As it was in the spiritual world, everything was governed by rules and observances. There were austerities to observe if one should become a king. The most important was that one should refrain from drinking alcohol. There was another animal contending for the same stool, which was the deer. But since the Gorilla had the support of everybody, the deer's contention for the throne was less regarded. But the Gorilla's wife was to change everything. On the day of the installation, she ill advised her husband to celebrate for a possible victory. Gorilla got drunk in the celebration. The king makers waited for the Gorilla to come for his installation, but in vain. When they could no longer wait, they sandaled the deer as the king. Gorilla lost the throne. Then he swore that now that he had lost the throne, he could not lose the morals of a good walk. That he will continue to walk with the gait of a king. And he sang a song to confirm it:

Kabli kadza, nukata meyia ameo

Fia yim'a

Zolinyo mayim o

Gorilla says one never loses everything

If I lose the throne

I'll never lose morals (Massiasta, personal communication)

The most important implication of this story is that if the seeker does not refrain from drinking alcohol and other taboos, she will fail in her mission. This mission could be a political position, a leadership role, a career goal, or even, as in our example divination, the goal of bearing children. One must ask oneself, why did Gorilla fail to attain the stool? It was both because he broke the taboo for a king and because his drunkenness made him miss his moment of opportunity. The reason he did these things was because he

fell to temptation from his spouse. Typical instructions based on this story would be to not drink alcohol for some period of time, and especially not to get drunk. The seeker must not let her husband control her, and must obey the rules, observances, and austerities of her position. Since there was a good omen, the prospects look good, but it is absolutely critical that the seeker refrain from overindulgence until this goal has been realized. When the goal is very near, the temptation to celebrate early will be great, but it must be controlled.

## The Snakes and the Banana

God put all the snakes, the cobra, the python, and a certain green snake to a test. They were put in a hut in which a banana was hung in the air. There was a hole in the wall which was a prohibited passage, and they were to stay in the hut for 16 days without food, until the banana dropped. After the 16 days the person who will endure the hunger will be blessed and made king. After a few days, the cobra and the other snake were so hungry they could not endure the starvation. So when they could no longer endure, they went through the prohibited passage. Not knowing that God placed Elegba as his informant. Elegba was lying underground, so the offending snakes would not notice him. So they went through the passage and back to the hut, back and forth, during the 16 days. On the 16th day, the banana dropped for the python to eat, and the verdict of who won was announced by Elegba to God. And the python was declared as the royal of the snakes. To depict his royal status, God blessed him with gold dust which he sprinkled on his skin. The python became a royal, with so many temples dedicated to his worship. Then he sang this song:

Gbelete le husakae

Husaka nye akpo fe nu

Gbelete le husakae

Husaka nye akpo fe nu

Akpo fe nue

Akpo fe nue

Husaka akpo fe nue

Akpo fe nue

Akpo fe nue

Husaka akpo fe nue

Gbelete le husakae

Husaka nyeakpofe nu



Gbelete is creating a divinity

A divinity is a thing of protection (armor)

It's a thing of protection

A divinity is a thing of protection... (Massiasta, personal communication)

This story also deals with the concept of enduring austerities before the kingdom, or goal, is attained. Here the hardship is hunger. Although the snake was sorely tempted by hunger to disobey Mawu, he refrained, and thus was proclaimed king of the snakes. This story tells the seeker that even when she doesn't think anyone is watching, God will see her actions, and therefore she must not disobey Mawu's commands. Most diviner would also caution the seeker about eating fruit, but since everyone must eat fruit to stay healthy, it is usually enough for the seeker to avoid only a few fruits, like mangos or blackberries. This story also deals with the idea that the seeker must be patient, and during that patience perform God's will, and if this is done greatness will be attained.

## Bat and his Ancestors

In the old days of the animal kingdom, bat used to live with the other birds, and considered them part of the same family, for bat had wings, and the other birds had wings. However, the other birds saw that bat had teeth, like the animals of the ground, and they didn't want to share the sour sap tree with bat. So they began a dispute. The other birds said that bat was not a part of their family, and that he had no right to the sour sap. This contention was taken to court, where Mawu, the supreme god, was the judge. The day before the trial, bat went to consult Afa. Afa cast Gbelete. Afa told Bat to perform a favor for Hawk, to gain Hawk's attention. Now one of Hawk's duties was to bring sacrifices and spiritual objects to the realm of the ancestors. So after gaining Hawk's attention, he placed a reed bag with spiritual objects in it on his roof for Hawk to take. But unknown to Hawk, Bat hid in the bag himself, and when Hawk arrived at the land of the ancestors with the bag, Bat came out to everyone's amazement. Bat's ancestors, both birds and land animals, came to him, for his ancestors knew that all animals are a part of the same family. The ancestors asked Bat why he was there, and Bat explained about the dispute. The ancestors took sympathy on Bat, and told him that many years ago, they were blacksmiths near the sour sap tree, and had buried their blacksmith tools near that tree. This would prove that Bat's ancestors had claim to the sour sap tree, and that Bat was a part of the family. Then Hawk took Bat back to the land of the living, and the next day Bat went to court. Bat challenged the other birds, saying 'Do you have any evidence that your ancestors have claim to that tree?' The other birds replied, 'We have no evidence, but we have always lived there, and our fathers and mothers lived there.' The judge, Mawu, then asked Bat if he had any evidence that Bat's ancestors lived there. Bat replied that his ancestors did live there, and were blacksmiths there, and that if the court dug in the ground at a certain place they would find his ancestors' blacksmithing tools. So the court dug at that spot, found the tools, and the judge ruled that the sour sap tree belonged to the bat. The judge then sang a song:

Votia nye toke to

Lomilla

Votia nye toke to

Lomilla

Votia nye toke to

Lomilla

Votia nye toke to

Lomilla

Votie, evo xeawovli

Votia nye toke to

Lomilla

The sour sap belongs to the Bat

Lomilla

The sour sap belongs to the Bat

Lomilla

The sour sap, the sour sap the birds vie for

The sour sap belongs to the Bat

Lomilla (Massiasta, personal communication)

This story is quite different from the first two, and deals specifically with the need to study one's own history and learn about where one's family has come from. It suggests that there might be litigation or a dispute sometime in the future. It also suggests that the seekers ancestors may have been blacksmiths, or been connected to Ogun, the divinity of metal and mechanical things. It should be evident that these stories are interpreted on both literal and symbolic levels, and both levels have great importance in the eyes of both the diviner and the seeker. For example, when I was told this story, I saw it relating directly to my experience in Africa, and especially with Afa. I can easily see how some people might tell me that Afa and African culture is not for me since I am not an African, and neither were my recent ancestors, but this code

shows that all people spring from the same source. Since we are all brothers and sisters no one should be told what they can or can not do simply because of their recent ancestors.

## Reconciliation

The final step in the divination process is if and when the seeker tells the diviner why she has come. After this usually comes a focusing of all of the instructions, and an interpretation based on her specific need. Sometimes the diviner will tell only one story, and then when the seeker states her problem the diviner will be reminded of another story which is particularly suited for that problem, and will tell that. In this case, the female seeker came to the diviner because she was unable to bear a child. I decided upon this problem specifically because it is not directly addressed in the stories, and I wanted to demonstrate how the stories can be used to deal with a very wide range of problems. Due to various reasons, I was not able to ask Dale or the other diviners how they would specifically interpret Gbelete for a woman who could not birth children, but over the course of my research I became familiar enough with the manner in which stories were interpreted to feel fairly confident offering my own interpretations.

The diviner would first remind the woman that the code showed a good omen, so prospects are hopeful. At this point she must be patient and not indulge in excesses. Above all, she must not drink alcohol, at least not until she gives birth. If she does become pregnant, and drinks alcohol before she gives birth, disaster could happen, possibly a miscarriage. She must also refrain from over excessive behavior: excessive eating, excessive working, even excessive sexual contact. She must be like the snake, and patiently wait for God's will to work itself out. If she does all these things, and performs the sacrifice (a banana), everything should turn out well.

## The Songs of Afa

Although every Afa song is associated with a specific story from a specific code, the songs are also used outside the storytelling context. Afa songs are sung with drumming, bells, and shakers at initiation ceremonies, at Afa festivals, and even in shrines dedicated to other divinities. Many of the Yewe shrine songs, for example, are also Afa songs from Afa codes. At one point in time there was even a litigation dispute between the Afa and Yewe shrines, because Yewe priests said that Afa was stealing their songs. The judge, however, ruled that the songs belonged to Afa at least as much as they belonged to Yewe. (Massiasta, personal communication) It is often the case that people sing Afa songs with the words slightly changed and don't even realize that the songs are from Afa.

Another shrine into which Afa songs have been incorporated is the Flimani Koku shrine. At some point worshipers of Flimanu Koku altered the words to the Afa songs, changes lyrics of codes and Afa into lyrics of 'Flimanu Koku'. Here is an example:

Afa song recorded in Ablamedzi

Gbo fa fa nam'a

Ablamedzi negbo fa fa nam'a

Afi yi metso metso o

Negbo fa fa nam

Gbo fa fa nam

Ablamedzi negbo fa fa nam...

Fan me

Ablamedzi should fan me

For where I came from is far

Let it fan me

Fan me

Ablamedzi should fan me

Flimani Koku song

Gbo fa fa nam'a

Koku nye negbo fa fa nam'a

Afi yi metso metso o

Negbo fa fa nam

Gbo fa fa nam

Koku nye negbo fa fa nam

Fan me

My Koku should fan me

For where I came from is far

Let it fan me

My Koku should fan me

(Massiasta, personal communication)

Whenever these songs are heard by an Afa initiate, or are heard in the context of an Afa divination consultation, they immediately invoke their accompanying story. Thus, the songs can serve as memory aids in case the diviner has difficulty remembering the story, but knows the song. The songs also serve as a way to bring closure to the story, in some ways the European equivalent of 'and the all lived happily ever after...', or 'the moral of the story is...'

Finally, the use of multiple modes of delivery is very common in almost all African performing arts. It is a way of including everyone present in a very active way, and it also helps to maintain audience interest.

Many Ghanaians I've talked to reminisce about when they were young and would gather with the rest of the community around the campfire; the old men would tell stories, and between stories the whole village would sing songs, musicians would drum, and everyone would dance. Although drumming and dancing are not a part of most consultations, storytelling and singing are, and drumming and dancing are used at festivals and group occasions. In this way Afa is both personal and communal.





## Afa Drumming

As noted above, drumming is not a regular part of a divination consultation, but it is usually included in festivals, initiations, and large gatherings. The selection of drums used is similar to the much of the drumming in Anloland. There are three drums, which are pitched high, medium, and low. There is also a bell, beating an 'Ewe bell' pattern, as well as an external bead shaker. Most people outside the Afa community refer to the drums as the Kagan, Kidi, and Sogo, the bell as Gankogui, and the shaker as Axatsie. For the purposes of clarity, these common names will be used, although there are other names for these drums used in Afa circles.

The heartbeat of the drumming is the bell, the gankogui, and the timeline that it beats out. The timbre of the bell pierces through the other drums, and one of the bells primary functions is to keep everyone together. Note that like much African music, the bell pattern can be felt as a 6 beat cycle, a 4 beat cycle, a 3 beat cycle, or even in 2 beats. The strongest of these, however, is the 4 beat cycle, since this is the pulse that is emphasized by both the Axatsie and the dancers.

The Kagan and Kidi, pitched high and medium, respectively, form interlocking parts that provide a steady rhythmic framework. In many ways these drums play the same function as the piano player and bass player in a jazz ensemble: they are the rhythm section. For the most part, the drum parts for Kagan and Kidi are very repetitive, but expert Afa drummers will introduce variations at times (Hussey, personal communication). The Sogo, on the other hand, plays the master drum part, and the drummer's improvisations emphasize different supporting rhythms or play off of them.

In general Afa music is either played at a medium tempo or at a fast tempo. The drum parts and axatsie part are slightly different depending on the tempo being played. See Figure 3 for a transcription of the supporting parts.

Figure 3: Afa Drum Parts

Slow Afa Drumming                    1 + a   2 + a   3 + a   4 + a

Bell (gankogui)

Rattle (Axatsie)

High Drum (Kagan

Med. Drum (Kidi)

Fast Afa Drumming                    1 + a 2 + a 3 + a 4 + a

Bell (gankogui)

Rattle (Axatsie)

High Drum (Kagan)

Med. Drum (Kidi)

The Gankogui, Kidi, and Kagan are always played with sticks. The Sogo is sometimes played with two sticks, sometimes with one stick and one palm, sometimes with two palms. The variations used to play the Sogo are unique to Afa music. Thus, variations used in Agbadza, Agbekor, or even Yewe music would not have a place in Afa drumming, although they may sound similar.

I was able to play the Gankogui and the Kagan acceptably by the time I finished my research, and I was learning the Kidi, but African drumming is not something that can be mastered in three weeks. Usually boys who want to learn to play would play the bell for months, even years, before they ‘graduate’ to the other drums. As they work their way up the hierarchy of drums, from Kagan to Kidi to Sogo, they become so familiar with the parts that they don’t even have to think about them, and can listen to what the master drummer is playing, sing the songs, etc. Although I could have asked for one of the drummers to teach me some of the variations to the Sogo, I felt it would be more worthwhile for me to begin at the bottom, with the bell and the Kagan, and master the basics first.

I feel obligated to mention here that although I practiced with the BLAKHUD drumming group, I did not play in an actual performance. However, I did attend an Afa gathering on December 3rd, in which I danced and listened to the drumming. One of the things that I noticed was that the drumming for the festival was slightly different than the drumming I had been practicing. This seems a fairly common experience for people researching African music, especially when the research time is short. What must be kept in mind is that drumming is a language: there is vocabulary and grammar and everybody plays differently. Since it was impossible for me to learn the entire language of drumming in three weeks, what I have presented here are some phrases and patterns I was taught.

Two other features of note in Afa drumming are that the dancing to it is very similar to the dance to Agbadza, which places strong emphasis on the four beat sub-division of the patterns. The other characteristic is that there is no possession in Afa music. The most common explanation I was given as to why people did not become possessed was that Afa was not a possession divinity, unlike Brekete, for example.

## Conclusions

My folklore teacher at Oberlin College in Ohio, USA, once told me that if you come out of field work research having found exactly what you expected to find, then you've wasted your time. It is common, perhaps even important, for the focus of field research to grow and change in the field. When I began my research, I had thought that Afa was a synthesis of storytelling, interpretations of those stories, singing, and drumming. What I found is that Afa is all that and more. Afa is a divinity, a profession, and a religion. It is a divination process. It is even the huku that diviners store in their calabashes. And although I've learned a tremendous amount this past month, both about Afa and about myself, I've only taken one step along a long journey.

One of the aspects of Afa that I find beautiful is how God is seen everywhere. When Afa initiates look at the sea, they see God. When they look at the sky, they see God. When they see people and animals, they see God. When they look into themselves, they see God. This omnipresence of God is mentioned in Judeo-Christian religion, but in my experience is not put into practice. Most Christians I know think of their relationship with God as a very personal one, involving only the two of them. Afa initiates see everything around them in terms of God, manifestations of God, and God's spiritual helpers. I can't help but wonder this is the reason that in the past Native Americans, Africans, and other practitioners of traditional religion were able to live in harmony with their environment, while worshipers of the Judeo-Christian God sought to control nature, and in the process began destroying it. And yet I've also heard that some Ewes and other Africans are turning to Christianity because through Jesus a Christian is able to have a personal relationship with God himself, and not have to worry about intermediaries. It seems to me that both religions could learn a tremendous amount from each other, provided they are able to respect their differences.

One of the most important elements of Afa, and one that has not been stressed in this work, is that Afa places huge importance on morality. In Afa, if an initiate steals, or lies, or kills, it is thought that he will be punished in this lifetime, not in any afterlife. In fact, many people I've spoken with in Ghana have attributed issues like corruption, teenage pregnancy, and other social ills to the breakdown of traditional

religion. One must seriously consider, especially in light of Christianity's colonial history, if the missionaries here were directly or indirectly responsible for many of the problems plaguing Ghana now.

There are two concepts from my own background in Christianity that I've spent a great amount of time thinking about while doing this research. First concept is something my pastor told me during a confirmation class, that a person's god is whatever he or she holds as most important. Thus, money could be a god, or power, or fame, or even one's family or children. One of the points that I've tried to make clear is that the Afa priests I worked with saw God and spirituality in nearly everything. Therefore, as I see it, they are worshipping God in a much more authentic sense than most people I know in the US, for whom religion is a once a week occasion.

The other concept is something from the New Testament, from Matthew 7:15-20. 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.' The Afa initiates who introduced me to their religion were some of the kindest, most beautiful, most sincere people I've ever met. These 'good fruits' are the most powerful testimony to the importance of the religion of Afa.

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## Appendix A: Photographs of Initiation



## Appendix B: The Sixteen Major Codes

Gbemedzi

Yekumedzi

Wolimedzi

Dimedzi

Losomedzi

Anloemedzi

Ablamedzi

Aklamedzi

Gudamedzi

Samedzi

Kamedzi

Trukpemedzi

Tulamedzi

Letemedzi

Tsemedzi

Fumedzi

Appendix C : Complete list of Afa Codes

Gbemedzi	Gbeyeku
Yekudogbe	Gbewoli
Wolibogbe	Gbedi
Digbe	Gbeloso
Loso'ogbe	Gbenloe
Anloetsogbe	Gbeabla
Ablabogbe	Gbeakla
Aklatsogbe	Gbeguda
Gudaflugbe	Gbesa
Saogbe	Gbeka
Kaogbe	Gbetrukpey
Trukpeytsogbe	Gbetumila
Tuladogbe	Gbeleteh
Letehe'ogbe	Gbetsey
Tsey'ogbe	Gbefu
Fuogbe	Yekumedzi
Yekudewoli	Wolifayeku
Yekubledi	Dibleyeku
Yekuloso	Losoyeku
Yekusinloe	Anloefayeku
Yekuabla	Ablawoyeku
Yekudakla	Aklayeku
Yekudeguda	Gudayeku
Yekudosa	Sayeku
Yekusika	Kayeku
Yekufutrukpey	Trukpeyeku

Yekusitula	Tulayeku
Yekugboleteh	Leteyeku
Yekusitsey	Tseyeku
Yekudefu	Fuyeku
Wolimedzi	Wolixodi
Diwoli	Woliwoloso
Losowoli	Woliwonloe
Bokormadoe (Anloeduwoli)	Wolidabla
Abladuwoli	Wolidakla
Akladuwoli	Woliogodo
Gudavoyi	Wolixosa
Sawoli	Wolixoka
Kawoli (Kadoafegbo)	Wolifatrukpey
Trukpeywoli	Woli'otula
Tuladuwoli	Woliwoleteh
Letehwoli	Wolikotsey
Tseywoli	Woliwofu
Fuwoli	Di Medzi
Diloso	Losodi
Dinloe	Anloexodi
Diabla	Ablaxodi
Diakla	Aklaxodi
Diguda	Gudadi
Disa	Sadi
Dika	Kadi
Ditrukpey	Trukpeydi
Ditula	Tuladi
Dileteh	Letehdi

Ditse	Tseydi
Difu	Fudi
Losomedzi	Losonloe
Anloegboloso	Losoabla
Ablaloso	Losoakla
Aklaloso	Losoguda
Gudagboloso	Lososa
Saloso	Losoka
Kaloso	Losofatrukpey
Trukpeytsoso	Losokoya (Losotula)
Tuladeso	Losoleteh
Letehloso	Losotsey
Tseyloso	Losofu
Fuloso	Anloemedzi
Anloedabla (Anloebaba)	Ablanloe
Anloedaaakla	Adlanloe
Anloewoguda	Gudanloe
Anloedosa	Sanloe
Anloexoka	Kanloe
Anloefatrukpey	Trukpeynloe (Trukpeynogba)
Anloesitula	Tulanloe
Anloegboleteh	Letehnloe
Anloekotsey	Tseylnloe
Anloekpafu	Fukpanloe (Fukpaya)
Ablamedzi	Abladakla
Akladabla	Ablaguda
Gudabla	Ablaxosa
Saabla	Ablaxoka

Kabla	Ablafatrukpey
Trukpeyabla	Ablaotuli (Ablaotula)
Tulaxova	Ablagboleleh
Leteabla	Ablakotsey
Tseyabla	Ablakpafu
Fukpabla	Aklamedzi
Aklaguda	Gudakla
Aklaxosa	Sakla
Aklaxoka	Kakla
Aklafatrukpey	Trukpeyakla
Aklawotula	Tuladakla
Aklaleleh	Letehakla
Aklakotsey	Tseyakla
Aklakpafu	Fukpakla
Gudamedzi	Gudasa
Saguda	Gudaka
Kaguda	Gudafatrukpey
Trukpeyguda	Gudakpeto
Tulakpaguda	Gudagboketeh
Dekpeykuto	Gudatsey
Tseyguda	Gudafu
Fuguda	Samedzi
Saka	Kasa
Satrukpey (Safatrukpey)	Trukpeysa
Savitula	Tulasa
Sakplakpo (Sakpolety)	Letehsa
Satsey	Tseysa
Safu	Fuyisa

Kamedzi

Trukpeyka

Tulabaka

Letehka

Tseyka

Fuka

Trukpeykoya (Trukpeytula)

Trukpeymite (Trukpeleteh)

Trukpeytsey

Trukpeyfu

Tulamedzi

Letehgboyisa

Tseytula

Futula

Bokorteteh

Letehfu

Tseymedzi

Futsey

Katrukpey

Katula

Kaleteh

Katsey

Kafu

Trukpemedzi

Tulabatutso

Letehtotri

Tseytrukpey

Futrukpey

Tulagbogey

Tulatso

Tulafu

Letehmedzi

Tseybidey

Fuleteh

Tseyfu

Fumedzi

Appendix D : Diagram of Afa Drums

## Appendix E : Additional Afa Stories

### Sanwoli --- Antelope and his Trip

There was once an antelope who was an initiate in Afa. One morning he cast his kpele, and found the code Sawule. His initiator told him this meant his enemies were all around him. Therefore, if trouble besets him, if rain falls on him, he should not stop to seek shelter but persevere to his destination. Antelope was told to roast some nuts and corn, to eat on his journeys in case he was hungry, and he hung the nuts and corn in a bag around his neck.

Now Antelope was traveling along, and rain began to fall on him. He ignored the advise given to him, and began to look for shelter. Now it just so happened that hyena, python, and lion were also caught in this rain, and had entered a hut for shelter. The three predators were wary of each other, but did not fight. Then Antelope entered the hut, seeking shelter. Hyena said to the others, 'Here we are, getting hungry, and a meal comes to us. Let us share the antelope together.' Now Antelope, very scared, opened the bag around his neck, and began eating the corn and nuts. Python asked him, 'What is that you're eating?' Antelope told him 'They are special nuts and corn, which are very good to eat before a large meal.' Python asked, 'May we have some?' Antelope replied, 'Yes, but for them to work very well, you must close your eyes when you eat them.' So Antelope gave some nuts and corn to Hyena, Python, and Lion, and when they closed their eyes, Antelope fled. When Antelope arrived home, he apologized to the Afa priest for not heeding the advice given him. Then Antelope offered thanks to his Afa, for saving him and he prayed to his kpoli (staff), and sang this song:

San Wolie gbloe na wo

Be kele afina megayio

San wolie gbloe na wo

Kele afina megayi o

Kele afina, kexoxoe

Kele afina mega yi o

Kele afina ke xoxoe

Kele afina megayi o



San wolie gbloe na voo

Be kele afina megayi o

San wolie gbloe na wo

Kele afina megayi o

Sanwoli told you

That there was danger there, don't go

San woli told you

There was danger there, don't go

There was danger there, an old danger

There was danger there, don't go

There was danger there, an old danger

There was danger there, don't go

Sanwoli told you

That there was danger there, don't go

Sanwoli told you

There was danger there, don't go

If a seeker were to cast this code, the information given him would be based on this story. If the seeker is big, they might be likened to the lion. If the seeker is small, they might be the antelope. This story can also be interpreted in many different ways. On the literal level, it tells people to continue on their journey in case of danger. In times of rain, hot sun, fatigue, etc, the person should continue, for if they stop they will be in danger. The person should also remember to pack enough food and supplies, so stopping isn't needed.

On a more symbolic level, the rain symbolizes danger and hardship. Once a person sets a goal in life, they should endure hardships required to attain that goal. After setting that goal, they should make all necessary preparations to reach the goal. Then, even if surrounded by enemies, they can adapt the preparations to fit the situation and escape. Character qualities emphasized are endurance above all,

followed by foresight in preparations, adaptability and wits, and constant vigilance. The seeker should seek advice when needed, and follow that advice always. Thanks must be given to God for his protection and guidance.

### Dimedzi : Race for the Stool

Once there was a vacancy in the chieftancy among the ancestors. All of the animals wanted to be chief, and there was a dispute. The animals, wishing to settle it, took the matter to God, or Mawu (Ametor Lisa in Afa jargon). Ametor-Lisa declared that he would bring out a chief's stool, and that whichever animal raced to the stool first would be chief. All of the fast animals, antelope, deer, were happy because they thought they would win. Tortoise also wanted to win, but since he was so slow he needed a plan. He went to an Afa priest, who cast Dimedzi for him. The priest told him to hide a talking drum under his armpit, and when he was far behind in the race to play a certain song:

Din din din din din

Klo lo go Tortoise

Towoyi daa

Klo lo go

Hawo yi daa

Klo lo go

Din

Klo lo go

Din din din din din

Tortoise is tight

Buffaloes have gone far

Tortoise is tight

Pigs have gone far

Tortoise is tight

Din

Tortoise is tight

So tortoise went out to the starting place, and soon the race began! After a very short time Tortoise was far behind the others. At that point he took out his drum and played, Din din din din din! The other animals

heard his drumming and began dancing, backwards! When the others had come back to where Tortoise was, Tortoise hid the drum under his arm. They asked him, 'Where was the music coming from?' He told them it was a great distance behind them. The animals raced backwards, but couldn't find the music. The fast animals, frustrated, joined the race again, passed Tortoise, and came within sight of the stool, when they heard the music again. They began dancing backwards, looking for the music, when they ran into Tortoise again. Once more they asked him, 'Where is the music coming from?' and once more he told them it was far behind him. They went back, searched, but found no one. So they began racing again, towards the stool. But when they got there they found Tortoise sitting on the stool, waiting for them. So it was that Tortoise became king of the animals.

The central themes of this story are patience and determination. Literally, it can be taken to mean that whether fast or slow, one's destination will be met when one shows great patience. The fast animals were impatient in reaching their goal, and they were also easily distracted and impatiently sought the source of the music. The tortoise, on the other hand, was patient in continuing towards the stool, and was also patient in drumming whenever the other animals would have won. The story shows that the winner is not necessarily the fastest or strongest, but with cunning, determination, and patience even the slowest can win.

## Letemedzi : Elephant and Tortoise

In the kingdom of animals, Elephant and Tortoise were best friends, and did everything together. They danced together, at together, went visiting together... They lived in the same forest, had one land for farming, and had one wife with many children. They had one blacksmith, who made cutlasses and hoes for them and for their family. Now when Elephant went to sleep, he slept very deeply, and had difficulty waking up when needed. So Elephant went to the blacksmith, and asked him to make an ezu, a sledgehammer. Elephant gave the ezu to his children, so they could hit him with it and wake him up when he was needed. Now one day Tortoise came to visit Elephant, but Elephant was sleeping. Elephant's children said 'Wait here,' and went to get the ezu to wake elephant. Tortoise saw Elephant's children hitting Elephant, and the Elephant woke up and spoke with Tortoise about their plans for the day. After Tortoise left, Tortoise went to the blacksmith to make himself an ezu. Tortoise gave the ezu to his children, and told them to hit him with it when he was needed but sleeping. The next day Elephant came to visit while Tortoise was sleeping. Tortoise's children ran to get the ezu, and began hitting Tortoise with it. Tortoise cried out in pain, and Elephant rushed in the room. The children continued hitting Tortoise until his shell broke and he died. Elephant asked the children why they were hitting their father, and they said it was in order to wake him up. Then Elephant realized that he was indirectly the cause of Tortoise's death, since Tortoise was simply copying Elephant. Then Elephant sang a song:

Klorikpe medinuo,

Ebe ezu neyo de,

Ne ezu yee ekliga

(Tobokor Kwaku, personal communication)

## Gbemedzi : The Sea and Afa

When the sea also came to this world, it regarded itself as one of the waters of the world. But in a world in which people need certain things, they also need the sea. The sea was then created, soft water and drinkable. Its children spread into so many lands, but the sea was over exploited, drunk by so many animals, by man, and even by the sun. Soon, there was very little of what was a world of waters. As usual, Afa was the pathway, or the way, so the sea went to consult him, to find out what she could do to save her children and herself from extinction. Afa devined for her Gbemedzi, and she was asked to perform a sacrifice. One requirement of the sacrifice was a bag of salt. Afa performed the sacrifice in which he used the salt, and after 16 days, the sea became salty. Meanwhile the animals, humans, and other creatures had been eagerly waiting for the sea to come from the consultation world. When she returned they all went to her to quench their thirst. They could not. All that they did was to go to the sea's left over children, the rivers, ponds, and lakes to quench their thirst, the children who had not taken part in the original sacrifice. The sea was thus saved from extinction. (Massiasta, personal communication. He could not remember the song the sea sang at the end of this story)

## Gudamedzi : Hunter and his Wife

Now Hunter has a shrine called Ade, so anytime he goes to the bush to hunt he shows the gun to Ade. One day Hunter slept and he woke up, and he was feeling a bit sick, so he went to Ade, and used the water in the shrine of Ade, called Adetsi. So he bathed in it in the morning, afternoon, and evening. So that day he didn't go to the bush. That night he dreamed that his wife would become pregnant and bear twins.

Now it was the custom of the hunter for him to bring his wife with him when he went to the bush. And the wife was stealing some of the hunter's animals and selling them in secret. One day when the hunter went out, both the hunter and his wife put all the animals they hunted under one tree. Hunter didn't know she was the one stealing animals. That night the two went away from the bush and animals, and he left his wife to hunt another animal. Immediately the wife returned to steal the animals. Hunter also came to the tree with the animals, but by a different path, in order to guard it. He saw somebody taking the animals. So he shot the person, and the person fell and died. When he reached the person, he saw that it was his wife. And two children came out from her stomach, alive. The man was crying, because he hadn't known it was his wife, so he put his children on his back and brought the children to Ade, and buried his wife there. So when he came to Ade, he sang, and his family came to Ade. He told them what happened in the bush. He sang:

Golo me wo dada megbo o

Atsu kple etse wole goloame

Wo dada megbo o e!!!

In my golo,

The two children are in

But their mother didn't come back

## Leteogbe : A Husband and his Wife

Now once there was a man, the husband, and his wife. The husband was a mud house builder, and the wife was a porridge maker. One day the husband said, 'Today I'm going to build a house, so you, my wife, should not do your work but should help me.' And the woman helped him build a house that day. The next day the woman asked her husband to help her with porridge making. And the husband helped her, and things were good.

One day, the woman ate her porridge, which was forbidden, and the man slept in his mud house, which was also forbidden, and troubles began. The next day, the man asked his wife for help, and the woman said no. The man said, 'If you don't help me today, your porridge will spoil and no one will buy it.' The woman said, 'And you, the house you will build today, it'll all fall down.' So the two of them went to their work alone. In the market, under the tree where the woman was selling, people were drinking her porridge, and a bird shit in the porridge. The people didn't see the bird, but tasted the shit, and the whole day no one bought the porridge, so the woman sent the porridge back to the house. So the man came to the house and saw her crying, and the man was laughing. But that night a heavy rain fell on the man's house and it collapsed, and when he found it he sang a song:

Tsa ba le afea

Tsa ba le agblea

Minya bolu letewogbe

Awuno daxo letewogbe

Minya bolu letewogbe



## Gudaflugbe : The Farmer and the Tapper

There once was a woman, who was farmer, and her husband was a palm wine tapper. One day the man went to make the palm wine, and the woman went out to the farm. Now some hunter can to the woman at the farm, asking her 'Why is it that you are here alone, without your husband? I want to help you with your farm, and you must leave your husband and marry me.' And the woman agreed. SO the man asked the woman to have sex with him right there, and she agreed. The woman removed the leaves of cassava trees to make a bed for the hunter to enjoy. After sex, the man took the woman to his house, and afterwards whenever they went to the farm the man carried a gun, to shoot the woman's husband if he tried to take her back. Even when she went to the market, the hunter came with her with his gun. Now the husband couldn't find his wife in his house, so the man became crazy, left all his palm wine things in the bush, and went to look for her. The man also drunk his palm wine, and became drunk. The man came to Afa, to ask 'Where is my wife?' Afa said, 'Your wife should not plant cassava, but because she did somebody took her. And you also, should not take palm wine, because it makes you a drunkard.' From that day on the man stopped drinking and took a new wife. Then he sang:

Guda dogbe guda dogbe

Hakpala guda dogbe

Kakatsia ha bi ala

Aha te fu yozea

Guda dogbe guda dogbe

Hakpala guda dogbe