Divine Che Neba, Aïcha Saïd Larissa, "Entry on: Origin of Ancestral Worship by Brey Houzibe", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Katarzyna Marciniak and Karolina Anna Kulpa. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1015. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Brey Houzibe

Origin of Ancestral Worship

Chad

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Origin of Ancestral Worship
Country of the First Edition	Chad
Country/countries of popularity	Chad
Original Language	Ngambays
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Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	December 30, 2019
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Abeche, North of N'djamena
Genre	Myths
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Creators



Brey Houzibe (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 53 (in 2019)

Social status: Notable

Profession: Teaching

Language of narration: Ngambays

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Background: See here (accessed: May 4, 2020).

Summary

In the olden days, there lived a patriarch by the name Akoa among the Garap people of Abeche in the Northern part of Chad. He was a member of the council of elders of the village. In this village there were certain hours of the afternoon which were believed to be dangerous for any person to be out in the farm or near a certain river. This hour was the time that the inhabitants of the underworld would come out to take a rest in the human world. Akoa, the patriarch violated this tradition by going to the river to fetch water during this "dangerous" hours of one afternoon. He entered right to the middle of the river with the help of a raft. When he was about to deep his jar into the middle of the river, a container suddenly emerged from beneath the river. He caught the container as if he has been waiting for it, and out of curiosity, he opened the mysterious container. To his greatest surprise, he found in it human hair, human finger nails, and toe nails. At this junction, he hurriedly closed the container and flung it far into the river. The container came back to him, and "climbed" into his raft. Akao flung it out again for the second time. The container came back to him again. Defeated, Akao decided to take it back home. When he got home, he assembled the village elders and explained things to them what had just happened to him. Together, they decided to wait to see if the container would disappear before the next day. At mid-night, a spirit from the underworld appeared to Akao and gave this long account:

"I am dead. I have killed four generations of people at Balay-nom* because of the evil perpetrated by their forefathers. Desirous to safe the future generation from this same fate, one of the elders cut the hair, toe nails, and finger nails of my last victim. And that is what you saw in the mysterious container. [He noted again that 'hairs and finger nails are human parts that regenerate after they are cut off, and even when the soul leaves the body, hairs and nails still grow']. For this reason, he who comes across this mysterious container and opens will serve me, together with his descendants, by executing my instructions and worshipping me. Therefore, you! Akao, once a year, in the beginning of the month of harvesting**, you will hence forth

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carry offerings to the other side of the river, along the right flank to the Koadoak*** side, on the left side of the Logone river. These offerings would come from the people in the neighboring village, and would be destined for the ancestors of Garap**** as a means of pacifying them to accept their prayers and incantations. Prior to this activity, you, Akao, would desist from all sexual activities for three days, so that you can be sanctified enough for the world of the ancestors to accept you and your services. In addition, you will have to formally forbid anyone from going out in the middle of the night for fear that the wrath of dead will strike at them. And when everybody will be asleep, and at the first crow of the cock at midnight, your journey will begin. You will come out of your home naked because nakedness is a symbol of innocence and purity. Equipped with a paddle and a pole, you will ride your way by the side of the raft designed for the celebration of the offering to the ancestors; then you would slight out of the shore with the raft. Before you arrive at the other side of the river, you will see the ancestors' sacrifices that you have just offered, appear in flames. A mild wind will blow, followed by flames that would enter into the raft, and the raft would become weighty. You will feel as if the flame will sink the raft. Do not be afraid! The raft will not sink; it will only take you to the Koadoak side. After a second wave of gentle and light breeze, the offerings will descend from the raft and will converge to the northern direction, which is the path of the ancestors. Finally, you will submerge the raft inside the water until the next session of the offering ritual in the following year. The raft must not be used for any other activity. The night of the offering is dedicated to the dead, and this event has to continue for all time".

The spirit disappeared after this and the next morning Akao narrated the event of this mysterious encounter with the spirit to the elders and from that time, this ancestral offering ritual has been a yearly routine in the village of the people of the Garap people.

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* Name of a village.

** It was estimated to be the month of August.

*** A shrine.

**** Name of a place and also of an ethnic group in Chad.

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Analysis	The superstitious nature of most African societies brings a lot of insecurity to its inhabitants. Many, especially women, find it difficult to operate in such environments as they are caught each time between and betwixt mysticism and taboos. This complexity has pushed them to believe that only people with supernatural strength can access certain things or cross certain frontiers. The case of the Garap people of Abéché in the Northern part of Chad is different because mythic figures like Akoa are present to dismantle the existing status quo in order to establish a new order, which to date, has strengthened the bond between the living and the living dead. Akoa's contact with the spirit world later crowns him Priest and liberator. He institutes a new order to bridge the rift between the living and the living dead through pacification rituals, which continue to be part and parcel of the Garap people's lives.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Death Religious beliefs Superstition Tradition
Further Reading	Mbiti, J. S., *African Religion and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969. Quaroopome, T. N. O., *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: African University Press, 1987.
Addenda	Researchers: Divine Che Neba and Aïcha Saïd Larissa

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Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke

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