

Zimoń, Henryk

## Earth beliefs and Earth priests among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana

*Religio*. 2003, vol. 11, iss. 1, pp. [77]-100

ISSN 1210-3640 (print); ISSN 2336-4475 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/125039>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

## *Earth Beliefs and Earth Priests among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana*

Henryk Zimoń

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.<sup>1</sup>

As confirmed by numerous ethnological and religiological 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.<sup>2</sup>

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,

---

1 Mircea Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza 1966, 243.

2 William Brede Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1971, 88; M. Eliade, *Traktat...*, 241; Mircea Eliade – Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Earth", in: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion IV*, New York: Macmillan 1987, 534; Henryk Zimoń, *Sakralność ziemi u ludu Konkomba z Afryki Zachodniej*, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL 1998, 28-36; Henryk Zimoń, "Wierzenia o ziemi: Analiza religioznawcza i afrykanistyczna", *Roczniki Teologiczne* 46/2, 1999, 379-387.

the social and religious position of Earth priests and the ritual of introduction to the office of the Earth priest in the village of N-nalog.

The sacredness of the Earth among the Voltaic<sup>3</sup> Konkomba people of northeastern Ghana, which is expressed in their beliefs and rituals, was one of the subjects of two ethnoreligious field studies which I conducted among that people in the region of Saboba, first from July 1984 to January 1985 and next from September 1990 to August 1991. At the time of both cycles studies, which lasted for 19 months altogether, I stayed at a Catholic mission of the Divine Word missionaries at Saboba, which is the centre of the Konkomba people in Ghana. I carried out my studies among five tribes of that people, namely: Bichabob, Nakpantiib, Binalob, Bimonkpom, Bigbem. They inhabit the area lying relatively close to Saboba or just around it. In sum, I participated seven times in the rituals connected with Earth spirits. They were held in the homesteads or Earth shrines by clan priests and the elders.<sup>4</sup> The results of my fieldwork will be supplemented by the publications of a British social anthropologist, David Tait (1912-1956), who conducted stationary research on social and political structure within the region of Saboba from August 1950 to January 1952, and by the work of Jean-Claude Froelich, a French administrator in northern Togo in the years 1940-1948.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. Earth Beliefs

Many of the Voltaic peoples of Western Africa consider the Earth to be Heaven's wife. According to the Konkomba, the Earth Kiting is the god

- 
- 3 The term *Voltaic* is used for the peoples living in Burkina Faso, in the northeastern part of the Ivory Coast, in northern Ghana, northern Togo and northern Benin. They all speak Gur or Voltaic languages. Cf. Jürgen Zwernemann, "Ancestors, Earth and Fertility in the Belief of some Voltaic Peoples", in: Anita Jacobson-Widding – Walter van Beek (eds.), *The Creative Communion: African Folk Models of Fertility and the Regeneration of Life*, Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell International 1990, 107, note 1.
  - 4 I am indebted to the Anthropos Institute and the Society of the Divine Word for financing the research, and to all those who helped me during my studies among the Konkomba, which I conducted twice. More on this subject cf. Henryk Zimoń, "Etnoreligioznawcze badania terenowe wśród ludu Konkomba w północno-wschodniej Ghanie", *Collectanea Theologica* 56/1, 1986, 126-132; Henryk Zimoń, "Refleksje z badań etnoreligioznawczych wśród Konkombów w Ghanie", *Nurt SVD* 27/1, 1993, 103-112.
  - 5 Cf. Daryll Forde, "David Tait 1912-1956", *American Anthropologist* 59, 1957, 325; Jack Goody, "Introduction", in: David Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964, XIV; David Tait, "The Family, Household and Minor Lineage of the Konkomba", *Africa* 26, 1956, 219; Bohumil Holas, "Preface", in: Jean-Claude Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba du Nord Togo*, Dakar: IFAN 1954, 12.

Uwumbor's mother.<sup>6</sup> They are also acquainted with the images concerning the cosmic binomial, namely the couple of Heaven – Earth. Uwumbor is the son of the Earth divinity Kiting and the god Kitalangban, who fertilizes the earth with rain. The heavenly god Kitalangban was probably the Supreme Being, who is now replaced by the god Uwumbor. According to the contemporary beliefs of the Konkomba, Uwumbor is the Supreme Being, creator of the earth, heaven, spirits, people and all things. Uwumbor is the source and giver of life, and the moral lawgiver. Man's soul (*nwiin*) comes from Uwumbor, and after death, it returns to him. The name Uwumbor is etymologically connected with the word *ubor* – ruler. Uwumbor is sometimes identified with heaven and he is considered to be the raingiver. Hence, he clearly takes the functions of his father, the heavenly god Kitalangban.<sup>7</sup>

In the religious meaning, the Earth is the divinity, spirit, the source of life principles, fertility, wellbeing and richness. In the Bichabob dialect, the expression *kiting kee* (“this earth”) stands for a definite area of cultivated and non-cultivated land, the bush, which the inhabitants of a given village have the right to use, cultivating it, hunting in it and gathering, for example, tree fruits or wood. In the material aspect, the word *kiting* also refers to a village, a town, a settlement, land or soil.<sup>8</sup> According to J.-C. Froelich, the Earth divinity Kiting, being personified to a larger or smaller extent, is not a goddess.<sup>9</sup> R. S. Rattray claims that among the peoples of northern Ghana the Earth is a female element and a wife of the heavenly god.<sup>10</sup> This opinion is contradicted by M. Fortes, who believes that

6 One should remember the dialectic differences within the Konkomba language. Froelich uses the following names: Ketink, Wumbor (Woumbor in the French spelling). Here, the names of the Bichabob dialect from the area of Saboba are used: Kiting, Uwumbor. Cf. Margaret A. Langdon – Mary J. Breeze, *Konkomba-English, Likaln-Likpakpaln Dictionary*, Tamale: Ghana Institute of Linguistics, no date, 39, 87.

7 Jean-Claude Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba du Nord Togo*, Dakar: IFAN 1954, 180-181, 184-185, 221-222; Jean-Claude Froelich, “Les Konkomba, les Moba, les Dyé”, in: Jean-Claude Froelich – Pierre Alexandre – Robert Cornevin, *Les populations du Nord-Togo*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1963, 149-150; Jean-Claude Froelich, “Les Konkomba du Nord-Togo”, *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* B 11, 1949, 430, 432. Cf. also Jürgen Zwernemann, “Les notions du dieu-ciel chez quelques tribus voltaïques”, *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Afrique Noire* B 23, 1961, 264-265; Stanisław Piłaszewicz, *Afrykańska księga rodzaju: Mity i legendy ludów Afryki Zachodniej*, Warszawa: Iskry 1978, 179-180; Stanisław Piłaszewicz, *W cieniu krzyża i półksiężycy: Rodzime religie i “filozofia” ludów Afryki Zachodniej*, Warszawa: Iskry 1986, 23, 90.

8 David Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, London: Oxford University Press 1964, 33 (the author uses the spelling *keteng ke*); M. A. Langdon – M. J. Breeze, *Konkomba-English...*, 39, 78.

9 J.-C. Froelich, “Les Konkomba, les Moba...”, 150.

10 Robert Sutherland Rattray, *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland II*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1932, 43.

in that area, or at least among the Tallensi people, the Earth is not a goddess, although it is often identified with the female principle. This view was adopted by M. Manoukian and R. J. H. Pogucki.<sup>11</sup> For linguistic reasons, a German ethnologist, J. Zwernemann expresses his doubts about Fortes' interpretation.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of the analysis of the materials published by Froelich, he does not agree with the former's opinion and he considers the Earth among the Konkomba to be a goddess.<sup>13</sup> The results of my studies point to a female nature of the Earth deity in the universal sense. This is confirmed by the beliefs referring to the cosmic pair (Kiting – Kitalangban) and the ritual called "the funeral of god Uwumbor's mother" (*Uwumbor aana aakpuul*). The Konkomba held this thanksgiving and propitiatory ritual after the harvest of guinea corn (sorghum) and millet. Nowadays, this ritual is not celebrated although old and even middle-aged people remember it. The local Earth spirits, whose presence is manifested in Earth shrines, have male or female character.<sup>14</sup>

Kiting is an individual and universal deity for all the Konkomba. The notion of this deity and its cult in the universal sense is not now clearly manifested in the beliefs and rituals of the Konkomba from the Saboba region. On the other hand, each clan has an Earth shrine, called *litingbalm*, which symbolizes and manifests the presence of the local Earth spirit, the guardian of all the inhabitants of a given clan. The deity Kiting, which has a universal character, is then manifested in the multitude of Earth spirits, protectors of particular Konkomba clans.<sup>15</sup> The Earth spirit is worshipped in the Earth shrines of individual clans.

- 11 Cf. Meyer Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi: Being the First Part of the Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe*, London: Oxford University Press 1969, 107, note 1, p. 175, note 1; Madeline Manoukian, *Tribes of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, London: International African Institute 1951, 83; R. J. H. Pogucki, *A Survey of Land Tenure in Customary Law of the Protectorate of the Northern Territories*, Accra: Government Printer (Lands Department) 1955, 17.
- 12 Jürgen Zwernemann, *Die Erde in Vorstellungswelt und Kulturpraktiken der sudanischen Völker*, Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag 1968, 32.
- 13 Cf. Jean-Claude Froelich, "Le kinan des Konkomba du Nord-Togo", *Notes Africaines* 80, 1958, 104; J.-C. Froelich, "Les Konkomba, les Moba...", 150; J. Zwernemann, *Die Erde...*, 31 and note 1.
- 14 1 The fact that the local Earth spirits among the Konkomba can have male or female character deserves special attention. In some degree, it corresponds to the opinion of religiologists pointing to an indefinite character of the Earth and chthonic deities, which have no individual attributes or functions. Cf. W. B. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion...*, 88.
- 15 On the oneness, universality and multitude of the Earth among the Tallensi people cf. Meyer Fortes, "The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast", in: Meyer Fortes – Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political System*, London: Oxford University Press 1966, 254; M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship...*, 106-107; Meyer Fortes, *Religion, Morality and the Person:*

Among the Voltaic peoples, the Earth is associated with definite commands and prohibitions. For the Konkomba, the Earth spirit guarantees peace and social-moral order. He hates any act of violence and injustice, any instance of breaking the social order and violating specific bans, namely the taboos, which he punishes with shortage of agricultural products, famine, infertility, drought or illness. The punishment executed by the Earth spirit can be inflicted upon particular clan members, the whole family or all the inhabitants of the village. Propitiatory offerings have to be made in order to stop the punishment or to repair the consequences.

It is a sin to shed blood over the soil during a quarrel. This means "Earth defilement" (*kiting bii*). If the Konkomba want to make up a quarrel during which somebody was injured, each of the quarrelling parties brings a sheep, a goat or a chicken to the place where blood was shed. They dig up a ditch, where they pour the blood of the sacrificial animals, saying: "we're burying this blood and these words and we won't speak any more". After the ditch is filled up, the meat is cooked and all the participants eat a piece of the animal offered by the other party.<sup>16</sup>

Among the Konkomba, murder is a serious crime against the Earth. According to Tait, murdering a member of the same clan is such a great crime that the murderer can be neither punished nor protected from the anger of the god Uwumbor. It is believed that the murderer will get sick and die. Murdering a member of another clan is not followed by any legal consequences. The murderer tries to protect himself from the revenge of the dead man's spirit by staying three nights in the hut where there is a horn with medicines (*n-yiin*), the symbol of the minor lineage. Murdering a representative of a neighboring clan results in the revenge of blood and on-going fights between young men of the two clans. The elders of both clans can stop the revenge causing the "defilement of the Earth" by sacrificing

---

*Essays on Tallensi Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987, 22. Cf. also Alma Gottlieb, *Under the Kapok Tree: Identity and Difference in Beng Thought*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1992, 24, 145 and note 11; J. Zwernemann, "Ancestors, Earth...", 97-98.

- 16 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 176. Cf. also Kunz Dittmer, "Die Obervolta-Provinz", in: Hermann Baumann (ed.), *Die Völker Afrikas und ihre traditionellen Kulturen II: Ost-, West- und Nordafrika*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1979, 530. Shedding blood also causes defilement of the Earth among such Voltaic peoples as: Moba, Tallensi, Kasena and Nuna. Jürgen Zwernemann, "Himmel, Erde und Buschgeister im Glauben der Moba (Nord-Togo)", in: Walter Raunig (ed.), *Schwarz-Afrikaner: Lebensraum und Weltbild*, Innsbruck: Prisma Verlag 1980, 46; J. Zwernemann, "Ancestors, Earth...", 105; M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship...*, 188; M. Fortes, "The Political System of the Tallensi...", 254; Kunz Dittmer, *Die sakralen Häuptlinge der Gurunsi im Obervolta-Gebiet (Westafrika)*, Hamburg: Kommissionsverlag Cram – Walter de Gruyter 1961, 16-17.

beer, chickens and a goat in the Earth shrine of the harmed clan. The sacrificial gifts (beer and animals) come from the murderer's clan.<sup>17</sup>

Adultery, and even more, incest in the bush means – according to the Konkomba – “defilement of the Earth”, the stopping of rain, infertility and the gods' anger. The Earth has to be appeased. The Earth priest informs the elders about such an offence, and they punish the guilty ones and prepare the propitiatory offerings. The guilty ones were beaten up, and in the past often killed or banned from the village. The priest has to make an offering of a she-goat or a black he-goat and a black hen, but never a black dog.<sup>18</sup>

It is not only adultery and incest but also any kind of sexual intercourse outside the house, in the bush or on cultivated land offend the supernatural beings and defile the Earth, making it infertile. In such a situation, the god Uwumbor stops the rain. The guilty ones confess their crime, receive the punishment of flogging and have to give a chicken as a propitiatory offering. The old men sprinkle and purify the Earth with an appropriate liquid.<sup>19</sup>

Earth spirits and ancestors play a very important role in the social and religious life of the Konkomba. According to D. Tait, both of these categories of supernatural beings are united in the notion of the Supreme Being Uwumbor.<sup>20</sup> The Earth is not only the feeder and source of food, but it has a patrimonial character, being closely related to the ancestors who lived there and who are buried there. The importance of ancestors and Earth spirits in the social and religious life of the Konkomba follows from the fact that the ancestors guarantee the continuity of the patrilineal structure and express the unity between the dead and the living members of the

17 David Tait, “The Political System of Konkomba”, *Africa* 23, 1953, 219; D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 63, 145; David Tait, “The Territorial Pattern and Lineage System of Konkomba”, in: John Middleton – David Tait (eds.), *Tribes without Rules: Studies in African Segmentary System*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1970, 189, 194; J.-C. Froelich, “Les Konkomba, les Moba...”, 133. Among the Tallensi people, murder, whether purposeful or accidental, is a sin against the Earth and it has to be repaired with big offerings from the murderer. M. Fortes, *The Dynamics of Clanship...*, 176-177; Meyer Fortes, *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi: The Second Part of an Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe*, London: Oxford University Press 1969, 265-266; M. Fortes, *Religion, Morality and the Person...*, 78, 135, 255.

18 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 113, 137-138, 145, 184, 187-188.

19 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 145-146, 181; J.-C. Froelich, “Les Konkomba, les Moba...”, 148. Cf. also M. Manoukian, *Tribes of the Northern Territories...*, 84, note 4; K. Dittmer, “Die Obervolta-Provinz...”, 530. According to Dittmer (*Die sakralen Häuptlinge...*, 17), among the Kasena people sexual intercourses in the bush on naked ground cause its defilement.

20 D. Tait, “The Territorial Pattern...”, 193.

lineage and the clan community. On the other hand, the Earth spirits link the members of a given clan with a given territory, in this way justifying their heritable right to inhabit and use the land they occupy.

## 2. The Social and Religious Position of the Earth Priest

In the social and religious life of each Konkomba clan, great prestige and importance is attached to the Earth priest, who is at the same time the clan priest and the protector of the Earth spirit's shrine, its "owner" and confidant. Different names are used in the African ethnographic literature to describe an Earth priest and these include the following: *Earth priest, Earth-chief, Custodian of the Earth, Master of the Earth, Owner of the Land, Owner of the Earth, prêtre de la terre, chef religieux, chef de la terre, maître de la terre, Erdpriester, Landesherr, Erdherr or Herr der Erde, Landeigner, Landbesitzer*. In the Konkomba language, the Earth priest is called *utindaan*.

Among the Voltaic peoples living in the upper Volta area, the Earth priest must frequently descend from the first inhabitant of a given territory, or from its proto-owner. That is why he is often referred to as the "owner" of the land.<sup>21</sup> He is not the land's owner in the strict sense of the word (i.e., in the understanding of European law), since he can neither give up nor sell the land. The land belongs to the whole lineage and family group and eventually to the supernatural beings (especially to the Earth spirit and the ancestors).

Each clan usually has one Earth priest and one Earth shrine.<sup>22</sup> It happens very rarely that a major lineage has its own Earth priest and its own Earth shrine. I found it only in the Kukultiib clan from the Binalob tribe inhabiting the village of Kukuln. In the major lineages Paacham and Kaasiini, the function of the Earth priest, who is in charge of the shrine of the Earth spirit called Kpungdo, is performed by the old man, Nsonibi. On the other hand, the major lineage Taab has its own shrine of the Earth spirit called Joon. The function of the priest in that shrine is performed by Mabefam, who replaces the actual priest Tindaan living in the area of Bimbillia.

The question of the origin of the Earth priest is differentiated and related to the social structure of the clans. According to Tait, some clans are divided into two major lineages. The Earth priest always comes from one

---

21 Allan W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern-Territories of the Gold-Coast: Their Customs, Religions and Folklore*, London: George Routledge 1920, 15-16; J. Zwernemann, *Die Erde...*, 100-103.

22 Cf. J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 186-187.



of these, and the head of the clan, that is, the oldest member of the clan (*uninkpel*), comes from the other. The Earth priest descends from the first inhabitant of the land, that is from its proto-owner, while the head of the clan descends from the man who accompanied and assisted the priest.<sup>23</sup> An example of such a contraposed clan (contrapuntal clan according to the terminology applied by Tait) is furnished by the clan of Binangmam from the village of Kiteek or the Bichabob clan from Saboba, Tilangben and Bwagbaln. The Binangmam clan consists of two major lineages, Kotodo and Jachado; and the Bichabob clan is divided into two major lineages, namely Bwagbatiib and Bikumbwam. Members of the major lineages Kotodo and Bwagbatiib, from which the priest comes, are called “the people of the Earth priest” (*utindaananiib* or *utindaanyaab*), while members of the major lineages Yachado and Bikumbwam, from which the clan senior elder (head) comes, are called “people of the head of the clan” (*uninkpeldoaniib* or *uninkpeldoyaab*). These clans are divided into two opposing major lineages whose members come from two different ancestors, which means that each major lineage has another common ancestor. Each of these major lineages is given a definite role in political and religious life.<sup>24</sup> The same refers to the Earth priest and the head of the clan.

The Earth priest is the oldest member of the lineage or the man “chosen” by the Earth spirit (*sent by the Earth* according to the terminology used by Tait). He must be officially installed in the Earth office. In contraposed clans, the Earth priest and the head of the clan must come from two different major lineages. On the other hand, in unitary clans consisting of one major lineage as well as in compound clans, the Earth priest can come from any minor or major lineage of a given clan. After the death of the Earth priest, his function is performed by the oldest member of the clan at that time and this is so until a new priest is appointed. The head of the clan performs the function of the Earth priest when the latter stays or resides outside the area inhabited by the members of his clan.

Among many Voltaic peoples, the power and the ritual functions of the Earth priest follow from the fact of his being a descendant of the first inhabitant of a given territory and from the acceptance of the Earth spirit. The Earth priest is obliged to make offerings to the Earth spirit in order to secure the latter’s favor and blessing for all the members of the community. He is also responsible for the performance of rituals connected with

23 D. Tait, “The Political System...”, 214-215; D. Tait, “The Territorial Pattern...”, 171, 174-175; D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 36.

24 D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 41-42, 45; D. Tait, “The Territorial Pattern...”, 174-175 Cf. also Thomas R. Barker, “Small Bands of Strangers: The Contraposed ‘Lineage’”, *Anthropos* 86, 1991, 7, 13.

the sowing and the harvest, when he asks the Earth for rain and good crops and when he offers thanks for yields and prosperity.<sup>25</sup>

The Earth priest looks after the shrines and the sacred places of the clan. In some of these places the ritual activities are also performed by the head of the clan, who is at the same time the political and ritual leader of the whole clan. Together with the elders of the clan he makes decisions about the celebration date of the given rituals. The Earth priest performs these rituals at the request of the clan leader. Nevertheless, as maintained by Tait, in the ritual aspect, *utindaan* is more important than *uninkpel*.<sup>26</sup> In the segmentary society of the Konkomba there is no place for the institution of political leadership. The elders make all the decisions and the Earth priest together with the head of the major lineage or the clan enjoy the greatest authority among them.<sup>27</sup> In the villages where I did my research only men were Earth priests.

According to Froelich, the Earth priest and the diviner are the most important ritual experts among the Konkomba.<sup>28</sup> The Earth priest represents the clan members and mediates between the people and the supernatural beings. His power comes from the god Uwumbor, who consigned the Earth to his care. His duties include making offerings to the Earth divinity Kiting personified in the Earth shrines located in the areas inhabited by members of each clan. Some of the oldest Earth priests are at the same time the priests of the cult of the clan's protective spirits.

The Earth priest, together with the elders, settles the questions of punishment, of religion and of matters connected with the land and its crops, hunting and fishery. When a public misfortune happens, he, assisted by the diviner, identifies the perpetrator, determines the punishment and decides upon the supernatural sanctions.

Among the Konkomba, the Earth priest not only has power and religious and social prestige, but he also enjoys certain privileges. Generally, he receives no payment for settling religious and social matters. Nevertheless, the homestead owners annually give him a certain amount of guinea corn from which beer is prepared for the cult needs. He can keep the rest for himself.<sup>29</sup> The people help the Earth priest in land cultivation and as-

25 Cf. J. Zwernemann, *Die Erde...*, 112-113; M. Manoukian, *Tribes of the Northern Territories...*, 84-86; A. W. Cardinall, *The Natives of the Northern-Territories...*, 24-26.

26 D. Tait, "The Political System...", 214; D. Tait, *The Konkomba of northern Ghana...*, 40. Cf. also Th. B. Barker, "Small Bands of Strangers...", 8, 13.

27 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 106, 113; J.-C. Froelich, *Les Konkomba du Nord-Togo...*, 425.

28 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 185.

29 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 114; J.-C. Froelich, "Les Konkomba, les Moba...", 144.

sist him in building his homestead. The Konkomba believe that the wild animals are the “herd” belonging to the god Uwumbor, and the Earth priest is its shepherd. That is why each large animal which is hunted belongs to the Earth priest and he can freely dispose of the meat of this animal. If the animal is large, the Earth priest gives a piece of the meat to the hunter and to the head of the clan. A small animal belongs to the hunter.<sup>30</sup>

Even a young Earth priest is held in respect and he may not be beaten or tortured in any way, since he can present his complaints to the Earth shrine and then the Earth becomes bad and defiled. If this should happen, the priest must be asked for forgiveness.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The Ritual of Introducing the Earth Priest to His Office in the Village of N-nalog

I took part in the installation ritual of the Earth priest N-yebe in the village of N-nalog on the 13th March, 1991. This village and the villages of Bwakpalb and Kabombu are inhabited by the members of the Binalob clan from the Binalob tribe. The clan of Binalob is a compound clan and it is made up of three major lineages: Kamuirdo, Bwakpalb and Kabombu. It is likely that those lineages come from three different ancestors. The lineage Bwakpalb consists of three homesteads, while the lineage Kabombu is made up of six. The original ancestor (the progenitor) of the major lineage Kamuirdo is Kamuir, who settled in the village of N-nalog as the first one, near the place where the chapel of a Catholic community is now situated. Kamuir had two sons: Chakpab and N-ngam. Chakpab stayed in N-nalog with his father, and he is the ancestor of the minor lineage of Chakpabdo, which consists of nine homesteads. N-ngam’s younger brother moved to a hamlet located about 1 km west of N-nalog, where the inhabitants of the minor lineage N-ngamdo live to the present day. Six homesteads are situated in that hamlet. Members of the minor lineages Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo are obliged to exogamy, while members of major lineages of the Binalob clan may get married to each other.

Members of the Binalob clan have one Earth priest and one Earth shrine, which is a grove situated close to the homesteads of the N-ngamdo hamlet. The Earth priest always has to come from the minor lineage Chakpabdo of N-nalog. Analogously to the structure of the contraposed clans, the members of this lineage can be called “the people of the Earth priest” (*utindaananiib* or *utindaanyaab*). Dawon of N-nalog was the last Earth priest. After his death in 1984, the function of the Earth priest was

30 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 50, 185-186.

31 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 186.

performed by the oldest member of the Chakpabdo lineage: first, Faban, and after his death in 1985, Yangmar. The oldest member of the major lineage Kamuirdo in 1991 was Bilichiir, who was descended from the minor lineage of N-ngamdo.

### 3.1. The Course of the Ritual

Like many other rituals connected with the Earth, the ritual of introducing the Earth priest to his office took place in the dry season. After supper on the day before the celebration, the dance of kinaachong began, which was to continue throughout the night. However, because of rain, it was interrupted before midnight.

The ritual of introducing the Earth priest into his office (*kaan utinda-an*) is made up of the following parts:

- (1) rites in the shrine of the female protective spirit Pubwak;
- (2) rites in front of Yangmar's homestead;
- (3) procession to the Earth shrine;
- (4) rites in the Earth shrine;
- (5) return from the Earth shrine to the homestead of a new Earth priest;
- (6) rites in the shrine of spirit Pubwak.

We will give up a description of the whole ritual,<sup>32</sup> and present some of the most important rites which were performed in front of Yangmar's homestead and in the Earth shrine.

#### *In front of Yangmar's homestead*

Out of the group of the elders, the following successively arrived at Yangmar's homestead: Gan, Yamba and N-yebi (from N-nalog),<sup>33</sup> N-dinn, Bilichiir, Yeso, Nakpansan (from the hamlet of N-ngamdo).<sup>34</sup> Manambi, Danaa's son, came from the major lineage of Kabombu, and a few inhabitants arrived from the major lineage Bwakpalb. Gan, N-dinn and Tibwarwo brought one chicken each and they gave them to Yangmar. The elders were treated to beer in the exit hut. More and more young men, women, teenagers and children gathered outside the homestead.

The second part of the ritual took place outside Yangmar's homestead. In the minor lineages Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo and in the major lineage

---

32 Cf. the description of the whole ritual in: H. Zimoń, *Sakralność ziemi...*, 55-67.

33 In 1991 the oldest inhabitants of the N-nalog village were Yangmar, Gan, N-yebi and Yamba.

34 Considering the age, the owners of homesteads from the minor lineage N-ngamdo appear in the following sequence: Bilichiir, Yeso, Mwanyandan, N-dinn, Nakpansan, Tibwarwo.

Kabombu of the Binalob clan, the left side of the exit hut is identified with the ancestors and it is connected with their cult. That is why all the libations of beer or water or the offerings of blood are made outside, on the left side of the exit hut.<sup>35</sup>

The ritual was performed by Bilichiir accompanied by Yangmar and other men. Holding a calabash with beer and occasionally sprinkling it over the left wall of the hut, Bilichiir says:

What shall I say? Oh, the Earth [*kiting kee*] of N-nalog, N-nalog; in the past we were united and now we are separated. Following the diviner's command, we are to offer chickens to our ancestors so that we can be united again. None should get separated. I don't know what it was like at the beginning. Our ancestors know and then they were united. Lamuir, Chakpab, Kupaar [N-dinn's grandfather], Tabaajin,<sup>36</sup> Binam,<sup>37</sup> rise and make us a unity. May unity reign among us. May nobody harm another man.

Next, Bilichiir offered two chickens. He poured the blood of each chicken over the wall of the hut. The chicken's feathers were stuck to the blood flowing down the wall. Making the second offering, he asked for harmony and unity of all the members of the Nalatiib clan. That request, frequently repeated during the rites held in front of Yangmar's homestead, has a primary importance. It points to the disagreements and quarrels existing among the members of minor and major lineages of the Binalob clan. Taking advantage of the opportunity of performing the ritual of introducing a young priest to his office, the elders emphasize the gravity of the problem and they aim at overcoming the discord and restoring the social harmony. It is believed that disagreement and divisions can be the cause of infertility among the people and in the crops. Here, the ritual is like a catalyst for purifying the clan community. It integrates and unites the clan members.

After finishing the rites, the elders enjoyed the beer. In front of the homesteads the teenagers and the children danced the dance of *kinaachong*. Accompanied by the music from the drums, the male and female dancers tapped their feet and moved counter-clockwise along the line of a circle, singing different short songs. During the dance, the boys used small bells.

At some moment, an old man called Yeso began to sing the following words: "I apologize to the Earth priest for any unworthy things and mistakes, because he is responsible for the Earth." Suddenly, Nakpansan and

35 It should be remembered that in the major lineage Bwakpalb of the Binalob clan and in all the other clans of the Binalob tribe the right side of the exit hut is connected with ancestors.

36 Tabaajin is the original ancestor of the major lineage Bwakpalb.

37 Binam is the son of Naagkpen, whose father was Chakpab. Binam emigrated to the region of Salaga with his family.

other men grabbed N-yebi and raised him from the ground. In this way they publicly announced the appointment of N-yebi to be the Earth priest. Until the installation ritual was finished, he could not touch the ground. N-yebi was astonished at that choice and he tried to get himself free from the men who carried him, but in vain. Held up there, he asked: "If the Earth spirit chose me to be the priest, why didn't you let me know before?" The elders responded that the appointed Earth priest is not informed about the choice since this is the Earth custom (*kiting aakal*). It is only when he is raised from the ground that this choice is announced.



N-yebi is lifted from the ground

One of the men raised a 10-year-old girl, Amma,<sup>38</sup> the daughter of Mwanyanda from the N-ngamdo hamlet and placed her on his shoulders. She would accompany the priest in the installation ritual as "the wife" of the priest (*utindaan aapuu*) and she would be connected with him by means of mystic bonds.<sup>39</sup>

All the participants gathered in front of Yangmar's homestead started to move in a procession to the Earth shrine, about 1 km to the west of N-nalog village. N-yebi and Amma were carried by the men on their shoulders.

---

38 In the Twi language, Amma is the name of a female born on Saturday.

39 Considering the kinship classificatory system, Amma, who comes from the minor lineage N-ngamdo, is N-yebi's sister and as such she can never be his real wife. Regarding the age, N-yebi is the third oldest man in N-nalog and he is married.

N-yebi and Amma held brushes made from a horse's tail, which were the symbols of the priest's power and dignity. Heavy N-yebi was carried in turns by the men from N-nalog and N-ngamdo: Tibwarmo, Namwe and Kagba (all from N-nalog) and Kibwa (from N-ngamdo).



N-yebi and Amma are carried on to the Earth shrine

The procession was led by the men who carried the priest and the girl, and they were followed by men with drums and the other participants: men, women, teenagers and children. In all, 150 to 200 people might have taken part in the celebration. The boys and the men played the drums and rang the bells. Everybody was singing loudly, repeating the same lines, for example “Earth priest, forgive! Let me enter the grove.”

### *In the Earth shrine*

On approaching the Earth shrine, the participants went round it again, going counter-clockwise, that is from right to left. Next, a group of them with N-yebi, Amma and the elders in front came to the grove and stopped inside, in front of the sacrificial stones. N-yebi and Amma were seated on the stones before the center of the shrine. Amma was sitting on N-yebi's left. Next to them, the elders, Bilichiir, Yeso, Yangmar and Gan, sat down. Other men and women who brought beer in a smaller pot and in a big one stayed at a certain distance. Most of the women, teenagers and children remained outside the grove, dancing *kinaachong* and singing to the accompaniment of the drums.

The Earth shrine rites were begun by Yangmar with the following words:

I, Yangmar, my grandfather was an Earth priest, my father was an Earth priest, and Dawon, my father's younger brother, was an Earth priest. Spirit of the Earth from N-nalog [N-nalogtingbann], you've chosen a cowboy<sup>40</sup> and you've got him in your hand. Since I've given the cowboy into your hands, heal him [literally: "let him sleep well"]. Spirit of the Earth from N-nalog, give him health and let him feel well. Don't let us treat him. If he remains the Earth priest now and he is ill, please, spirit of the Earth from N-nalog, cure him and make him healthy. Spirit of the Earth, may his illness end. He's the one whom I introduced to the office.

The words of Yangmar, who performed the function of an Earth priest, clearly confirm the fact of introducing N-yebi to the office of an Earth priest. The function is confirmed by the oldest member of the minor lineage Chakpabdo in the presence of all its members and Bilichiir, the oldest member of the major lineage Kamuirdo and the minor lineage N-ngamdo. The fact that only a member of the minor lineage Chakpabdo can be an Earth priest is legitimized in a solemn and ritual way. Since N-yebi did not feel well and had pain in his chest, they begged for his health. A few weeks after the installation he even stayed at Yendi hospital for some time.

In the next part of the ritual, the main role was played by Bilichiir. While pouring beer over five sacrificial stones placed around a big tree, he says:

Kamuir, N-gam, Kupaar, Tabaajin, you were all of one mind and you made offerings here. Today, this man has been chosen to be the Earth priest. That's the reason why members of the Kamuirdo lineage perform his installation. When he was in the bush, I learnt that he had been chosen an Earth priest but I couldn't carry out this ritual. I fixed its date for today. Kamuir, N-ngam, Tabajin, be of one mind and accept this cool water and make N-yebi healthy. If he's ill because the date of the ritual has been shifted, let him get up and feel well. Let him work in the field. Spirit of the Earth from N-nalog, rise and accept this Earth priest.

After the libation of beer, a chicken, a guinea-fowl and a ram were successively offered. While making the first offering, Bilichiir says:

Accept this black chicken I'm offering to you. Let me be happy, let the Earth priest enjoy prosperity. Let all the members of the Binalob clan enjoy welfare and let them have enough food. If – because of the changed date of the ritual – we don't have enough food, let us cultivate the fields successfully and let us buy a truck for the surplus. Rise and accept this offering.

---

40 It seems striking that the future priest is called a cowboy of the Earth that is a herdsman of cattle (*unaakpaal*). Etymologically, the word *unaakpaal* comes from *unaa* – a cow, and *kpaal* – to look after. Cf. M. A. Langdon – M. J. Breeze, *Konkomba-English...*, 41, 83. In Yangmar's interpretation, the Earth priest should care about the spirit and the shrine like a cowboy cares about his cattle.





Bilichiir offers a guinea-fowl

Before the ram was slaughtered, Bilichiir said:

Now, I'm making an offering of a ram and I want happiness and prosperity. May we escape any kind of evil. You [Earth spirit], please, rescue us from all trouble. This ram is from him.<sup>41</sup>

Next, Nakpansan cut the throat of the ram held by the young men and he poured some of its blood into a special calabash and some onto the sacrificial stones. Appointing the date of the ritual is the task of the oldest member of the major lineage. He does this after consulting the elders. The moment an Earth priest is chosen by the diviner, the oldest member of the major lineage and the clan as well as the elders have the duty of preparing and carrying out the ritual of installation. If the duty is not fulfilled, it can mean unpleasant consequences. For example, N-yebi's illness was considered to be an effect of the date of the introduction ritual being shifted. This is shown in Bilichiir's prayer.

Another symbolic activity was shaving the Earth priest, which was done by Nakpansan, an old man from N-ngamdo hamlet. In many rituals held by the Konkomba and other African peoples, shaving off the hair is a frequently encountered symbol of cleaning off contamination and ritual impurity (*tijon*), and preparing the priest for his office. Amma, the Earth priest's "wife" was not shaved because she was a little girl.<sup>41</sup>

41 Among the Konkomba, shaving off the hair purifies widows and widowers during the second funeral, sorcerers accused of sorcery during the ritual of purification, or young diviners during the introduction ritual to their office.

An important ritual act was the offering made by Bilichiir of roasted meat pieces: legs of a guinea-fowl and a chicken, and the ram's intestines, its liver and a piece of the stomach. While offering these pieces of meat on the sacrificial stones, he said:

Spirit of the Earth from N-nalog, today this is your meat. I introduced your Earth priest to the office. Accept this meat for other Earth spirits, too. This is your food.

Through the mediation of the Earth spirit from N-nalog, the meat was also offered to the Earth spirits of the neighboring clans from the Binalob tribe, for example Chakpotiib, Wayuutiib, Jakpotiib, Nasotiib and Kukultiib.

Then, Bilichiir put a piece of the roasted poultry meat onto the palms of Amma's hands, saying:

This little girl is the Earth priest's wife. You [Earth spirit], please, accept this meat and make her and her husband united and one person. Let this girl enjoy happiness.

The rite of *bi gbee* in the Earth shrine symbolizes the offering of food to the Earth spirit and it means purification. Just as the rite of shaving off the hair signifies purifying the Earth priest, the rite of *bi gbee* purifies his wife.<sup>42</sup>

At the final stage of the ritual in the Earth shrine, the participants ate the rest of the cooked meat and intestines of the ram. At one point, the Earth priest, saying nothing, poured some beer onto the sacrificial stone. The rest of the beer from the big pot was poured onto the ground. This was accompanied by Bilichiir's words:

Spirit of the Earth from N-nalog, this is the beer offered on the occasion of us eating the food and making the noise. Let us consume it with joy and may troubles escape from us.

Yangmar added:

May we have a lot of children. This is what I want.

After the rites were performed, the group left the Earth shrine. The Earth priest and Amma were carried on the men's shoulders. On the way to the village of N-nalog, they sang short verses accompanied by the drums and the bells. The participants in the procession went to the homestead of the Earth priest, N-yebi. Here, the Earth priest and Amma

---

42 The rite (called *bi gbee* in the Konkomba language) of putting pieces of poultry meat on the palms of the hands, is also practised in the evening of the third or fourth day of the first funeral (*likpuul*). This rite, called *lisaachong*, is meant to bid farewell to the deceased one.

could touch the ground. Next, they sat on the chairs, with Amma on the left side of the Earth priest. Young men and women, teenagers and children danced *kinaachong*. After a while, the old men invited the Earth priest to his exit hut. There, after some time, Yeso greeted N-yebi, officially calling him the Earth priest for the first time. The same was done by Bilichiir. From that time on, N-yebi would be commonly known as Tindaan.<sup>43</sup>



The procession from the Earth shrine to the village of N-nalog

### 3.2. Interpretation of the Ritual

The ritual of installing the Earth priest N-yebi in the village of N-nalog was one ritual of this type in which I participated during my stay among the Konkomba. The office of the Earth priest can be held by the oldest member of the clan or by the Earth priest “chosen” by the spirit of the Earth. It is only in the latter case that a ritual installation to the office of the Earth priest is performed. He is chosen by a diviner consulted by the elders. According to tradition, the choice is kept secret and it is publicly revealed only when the chosen candidate is taken and raised from the ground. In the introduction ritual, the Earth priest is accompanied by a girl called Amma, who is considered to be his “wife” in the spiritual sense.<sup>44</sup>

43 Tindaan is a proper name from the noun *utindaan* – Earth priest.

44 Her “choice” by the Earth priest is also revealed by the diviner to the elders who consult him.

She comes from the same major lineage (Kamuirdo) and, being a relative, she cannot really be married to the Earth priest. In the installation ritual, the girl Amma did not play any active part. However, in the future she would participate in the rituals performed by the Earth priest in the Earth shrine. The Earth priest and his “wife” emphasize the special relation existing between the minor lineages Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo of the Binalob clan.

The decisive role in the ritual of introducing the Earth priest was played by the elders of two minor lineages: Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo. The Chakpabdo lineage was represented by Yangmar, the oldest inhabitant of the village of N-nalog, while Bilichiir, the oldest member of both minor lineages, represented the lineage of N-ngamdo. Bilichiir presides over most rites. In the Earth shrine, the rites were begun by Yangmar from the Chakpabdo lineage since the Earth priest can come only from there. The other rites were performed by Bilichiir.

The Konkomba are a community of a unilinear, agnatic system of kinship, where the patriline, i.e., the male line of descent, is decisive. The analyzed ritual sanctions and solidifies the social system based on kinship and gerontocracy. The rites support the stability of the social order and the elders’ authority. The ritual activities are one of the sources of the social authority and prestige, and an expression of the possession of power.<sup>45</sup>

The participation of the whole community (men, women, teenagers and children) emphasizes group solidarity. As opposed to a number of traditional rituals (e.g. agrarian ones), where an active role is played by the elders from particular homesteads and lineages, a large number of young people took part in the ritual of introducing the Earth priest to his office. The boys played the drums, while the men, women, teenagers and children danced, sang and took an active part in the procession to the Earth shrine and back. The atmosphere of excitement and joy reigned and it spread to all the participants. On this occasion, many young people and women could enter the Earth shrine, which is not traditionally allowed. Usually, only the old men and some young people – with the consent of the former – can participate in the rituals held in the Earth shrine.

Three people enjoying the greatest authority in the clan, namely the oldest member of the clan (*uninkpel*), the Earth priest (*utindaan*), and the diviner (*ubwa*), also perform important functions in the ritual. Sacred rites legitimize the position of the Earth priest, his religious status and his social rank. The religious and social status is the basis of his rights and du-

---

45 Cf. D. Tait, “The Political System...”, 216; Eugene L. Mendonsa, *The Politics of Divination: A Processual View of Reactions to Illness and Deviance among the Sisala of Northern Ghana*, Berkeley: University of California 1982, 12, 166, 198, 203-204.

ties as well as the source of his authority in the traditional clan community. Changing the social status of the Earth priest is connected with changing his ontic status. After being installed to his office, the Earth priest is a different person, who is initiated and introduced into the religious truths and the principles of the social life. This ritual can be regarded as professional initiation, which means that the Earth priest reached a special social and religious status. The main accent is placed here on practicing the power and the privileges connected with the new status.<sup>46</sup>

Because of a limited range of social and political relations among the segmentary society of the Konkomba, the ritual of installing the Earth priest to his office has a limited lineage and clan range. The greatest number of participants came from the minor lineages Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo. Representatives of the major lineages Bwakpalb and Kabombu were also present. It is worthwhile to emphasize the presence of an old man, Yakpa, from Nasom, a member of the neighboring clan Nasotiib from the Binalob tribe.

Apart from the social importance, the analyzed ritual also has a religious dimension. This is manifested in the addressees of prayers and offerings as well as the content of the prayers and offerings.

The ritual of installing the Earth priest consists of groups of rites performed in front of Yangmar's homestead, in the Earth shrine and in the shrine of the protective spirit Pubwak. Three stages are distinguished in each of these groups:

- (a) prayers accompanying an offering of beer;
- (b) prayers accompanying the offerings of poultry (chickens, guinea-fowls), a ram, roasted pieces of poultry meat, cooked intestines and pieces of liver and stomach of a ram;
- (c) offering of beer and pouring it on the ground and on the sacrificial stones.

46 Three types of initiation are distinguished: puberty initiation, exoteric initiation (initiation into secret societies) and professional initiation (initiation into a religious vocation). Although there are similar elements in all the three types of initiation, they are accented in different ways. In puberty initiation, initiative tests are emphasized. They are caused by transition from the period of childhood or adolescence to maturity. Acquaintance with secret truths is important in exoteric initiation. Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Das Mysterium der Wiedergeburt: Initiationsriten, ihre kulturelle und religiöse Bedeutung*, Zürich: Rascher Verlag 1961, 20-21; Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1969, 112-113; Mircea Eliade, "Initiation: An Overview", in: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* VII, New York: Macmillan 1987, 225; Tadeusz Dajczer, "Religijny charakter inicjacji plemiennej", *Studia Theologica Varsoviensia* 17/1, 1979, 144-146; Walter O. Kaelber, "Men's Initiation", in: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* VII, New York: Macmillan 1987, 229, 232-233.

Making offerings on the left side of the hut at the exit of Yangmar's homestead was not concluded with the third stage, which is a repeated offering of beer. In the harvest rituals the rite of the third stage is not practiced in many Konkomba homesteads, which testifies to the disappearance of this stage and modification of the very structure of harvest rituals in recent decades. D. Tait confirms the existence of the rite of the third stage at the beginning of the 1950's.<sup>47</sup> According to A. van Gennep's terminology and Tait's suggestion, the first stage can be considered to be the stage of separation (*rites de séparation*) from the secular world, where the first contact with the supernatural world is established, and the second stage is regarded as a marginal stage (*période de marge*), in which the participants remain in contact with the sacred world. The third stage as the stage of return (*rites d'agrégation*) from the sacred world to the secular reality consists in the final offering and in pouring beer on the ground and on the sacrificial stones.

Prayers are always uttered aloud. During the prayers and offerings all the direct participants stand (in front of Yangmar's homestead) or squat down (in the Earth shrine and in the shrine of spirit Pubwak). The addressees of the prayers are the Earth spirit, the clan's protective spirits, and the ancestors.

The god Uwumbor was not mentioned at all in the ritual of introduction to the office of the Earth priest.<sup>48</sup> Contrary to the statements made by the Konkomba, according to which the god Uwumbor should be appealed to at the very beginning of all religious celebrations, they actually turn almost exclusively to the beings of a lower order, which are closer to them, and these are Earth spirits, protective spirits of the clan and ancestor spirits.

The universal deity Kiting is manifested in the multitude of local spirits of the Earth, protectors of particular clans. The Earth spirits, both male and female, are worshipped in Earth shrines. Each clan has its Earth spirit, which is worshipped by members of only one clan. In the ritual, the male Earth spirit from N-nalog is called N-nalogtingbann, which stands for "the spirit of the Earth shrine from N-nalog."

In the prayers said while making offerings, three protective spirits of the Binalob clan, namely Pubwak, Kukpul and Gongoln, were called on. Pubwak is a female spirit and she is considered to be the wife of the ma-

---

47 David Tait, "The Place of Libation in Konkomba Ritual", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* B 17, 1955, 169, 172.

48 Uwumbor was rarely mentioned in the harvest rituals in which I took part during my first studies in the years 1984-1985. If he was, it was always with other supernatural beings (once during the traditional yam feasts, and four times during the guinea corn harvest rituals). Henryk Zimoń, *Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne na przykładzie ludu Konkomba*, Warszawa: Verbinum 1992, 121-122.

le Earth spirit from N-nalog. As far as the range is concerned, the local character of the cult of the Earth spirit corresponds to the cult of the protective spirits of particular clans (*liwaal*, pl. *ngiwaaw*).

Considering the origin, one can distinguish two categories of spirits among the Konkomba and other peoples of northern Ghana. These are spirits as personifications of the powers of nature and spirits that appear as a result of deification of ancestors. Kunang and Lomok are examples of the latter category. They are protective spirits of the Nalongni village inhabitants and they gave the beginning to the members of the minor lineages Bwarado and Kotiendo. The earliest ancestors of the Nalatiib clan were raised to the dignity of protective spirits.<sup>49</sup> This category of clan protective spirits, originating as a result of attributing divine character to the ancestors, is also discussed by Froelich.<sup>50</sup>

The prayers also mentioned ancestor spirits (*yajatiib*, pl. *yaja*). Ancestors are considered to be ever present and alive members of the community, who take an active part in the life of the community and who influence the fate of the living. The worship that they receive results from the position that they have both in this and the other worlds. The ancestors are the links joining people with the spiritual world.<sup>51</sup>

The prayers accompanying the offerings sometimes mention only the closest dead relatives and the earliest ancestors of the minor and major lineages. The closest dead relatives are asked to pass the offerings over to the further ancestors, whom the living do not remember any longer. In the segmentary community, genealogies of the Konkomba have a limited character. Memory of the ancestors does not usually go beyond five generations.<sup>52</sup> The ritual mentioned only male ancestors. The exit door of the homestead is a sacred place determining the safe and sacred space. The clans of the Binalob tribe make offerings for their ancestors on the left or on the right side of the exit from the homestead.<sup>53</sup>

49 Cf. H. Zimoń, *Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne...*, 61; Henryk Zimoń, "Kapłani ziemi u ludu Konkomba w północnej Ghanie", in: Walerian Słomka – Jerzy Misiurek (eds.), *Kapłan wśród ludu kapitańskiego*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL 1993, 175.

50 J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 192; J.-C. Froelich, "Les Konkomba, les Moba...", 152.

51 H. Zimoń, *Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne...*, 124-125.

52 D. Tait, "The Political System...", 222.

53 In the minor lineages Chakpabdo and N-ngamdo as well as in the major lineage Kabombu of the Binalob clan, libations of beer or water and offerings of blood are made on the left side of the exit from the homestead. In the major lineage Bwakpalb of the Binalob clan and in all the other clans of the Binalob tribe the right side of the exit hut is associated with ancestors. To make a comparison, I will add that among the Bichabob offerings to ancestors are made on the right side of the exit from the homestead, while in the Bigbem tribe and most clans of the Nakpantiib tribe, on the left. Cf. J.-C. Froelich, *La tribu Konkomba...*, 224; D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern*

The content of prayers embraces all spheres of individual and community life as well as the needs of the participants in the ritual. The prayers accompanying the libation of beer and the offering of animal blood ask for social concord and harmony between the members of the Binalob clan; the health of the Earth priest; fertility; abundance of food; welfare; rain; freedom from illnesses, evil and troubles; the possibility of acquiring the goods of contemporary civilization such as trucks, wells and buildings. One can see then that the Konkomba include all the matters of everyday life, as well as those that testify to modernization of life, in the religious sphere. Although the main purpose of the ritual is introducing the priest to the office, the prayers tell about all the needs worrying the clan members. In the rites in front of Yangmar's homestead, the request for concord and social harmony had a crucial importance since the quarrels and divisions were considered to be the cause of lack of fertility, food and well-being.<sup>54</sup>

During the ritual of introducing the Earth priest to his office, an offering was made of beer.<sup>55</sup> Besides beer, they also offer beer mixed with water, cool water and blood as substitutes for poultry and a ram.<sup>56</sup> At the final stage of the shrine ritual, pieces of roasted poultry meat and some cooked intestines, liver and stomach of a ram were offered. Intestines, liver and stomach are of symbolic value as the center of life, and of utility value since the Konkomba consider them to be delicacies. Beer, blood and pieces of cooked meat have the function of a gift in the form of drink or food given to supernatural beings by the participants in the ritual. They take part in this gift during a ritual feast when they establish a communion and a spiritual bond with the Earth spirit, the clan's protective spirits and the deceased ancestors. Enjoying the beer in front of Yangmar's homestead and in the Earth shrine was an integral part of the ritual. The rest of the cooked meat and ram's intestines were also consumed there.

---

*Ghana...*, 124. Among the Tallensi people, the exit door is also a place of ancestor cult. M. Fortes, *The Web of Kinship...*, 50.

54 H. Zimoń, "Kaptani ziemi u ludu Konkomba...", 176-177.

55 Besides beer, offerings are also made of beer mixed with water and cool water.

56 Here is a typical sacrificial rite of the Konkomba: poultry and other animals are killed by cutting their throat; blood is offered and it is poured over the wall, sacrificial stones, ground, clay stool, pots and other objects. The meat is cooked and consumed during a feast, which is an integral part of the festival.



## RESUMÉ

**Uctívání Země a kněží Země u Konkombů v severní Ghaně**

Země hraje u Konkombů a jiných kmenů západní Afriky mimořádně důležitou roli v ekonomickém, sociálním i náboženském životě. Konkombové věří, že božstvo Země, Kiting, je matkou boha Uwumbora. V personifikované podobě se Kiting vyskytuje u všech Konkombů. Manifestuje se prostřednictvím mnoha duchů Země, kteří vystupují jako ochránci klanů. Duchové Země, kteří se zpřítomňují ve svatyních Země, jsou mužského nebo ženského pohlaví. Jsou zdrojem a principem života; poskytují plodnost a potravu; garantují bezpečí a sociální a morální řád. Svým původem a aktivitou jsou závislí na bohu Uwumborovi. Spojují členy klanu s daným územím a ospravedlňují zděděné právo klanu obývat a užívat zemi.

Označení „kněz Země“ nebo „vlastník Země“ odkazuje k náboženským a sociálně-právním funkcím rituálních specialistů, kteří u Konkombů a dalších kmenů na Horní Voltě používají značné úcty a prestiže. Každý klan má obvykle jednoho kněze Země, který pečuje o klanovou svatyni Země. Moc a rituální funkce kněží Země vyplývají z toho, že jsou považováni za potomky prvního obyvatele daného klanového území a „vyvolené“ skrze duchy Země. V segmentární společnosti Konkombů drží politickou a náboženskou moc nejstarší člen klanu a kněz Země. Kněz Země je prostředníkem mezi lidmi a nadpřirozenými bytostmi, je správcem svatyně a posvátných míst klanu. Vykonává přesně vymezené náboženské a sociální funkce a dostává se mu jistých výsad.

N-nalogský rituál instalace kněze Země do úřadu zahrnuje sociální i náboženskou dimenzi. Rozhodující roli v tomto obřadu rodové posloupnosti a soudržnosti klanu hrají starší dvou menších rodových linií Chakpabdo a N-ngamdo z klanu Binalob. Obřad posvěcuje a integruje sociální systém založený na příbuzenství a vládě starších. Sociální autorita a moc starších je vyjádřena rituální činností, kterou provádějí nejstarší obyvatelé vesnice N-nalog. Účast žen na rituálu je omezena.

N-nalogský obřad jako symbolický systém významů a komunikace má jasnou náboženskou dimenzi. Umožňuje kontakt s transcendentní skutečností. Prostřednictvím dvojnásobných symbolů rituál nastoluje náboženskou pravdu, normy a hodnoty určující lidské chování, stejně jako emoční stavy, pocity a očekávání jednotlivců i komunity. Náboženská povaha obřadu se projevuje v zaměření modliteb a obětí (duchové Země, ochranní duchové klanů, duchové předků), v obsahu modliteb týkajících se různých potřeb a v náplni obětí (pivo, krev drůbeže a berana, kousky pečeného drůbežního masa, vařená střeva, játra a žaludek berana).

*Z angličtiny přeložil Dalibor Papoušek*

Katedra Historii i Etnologii Religii

Wydział Teologii

Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski

Al. Raławickie 14

20-950 Lublin

Polska

HENRYK ZIMOŃ

e-mail: zimonh@lublin.cc