

Notes and News

A Note on the Asoɲú Cult in Nzima, Ghana

PROFESSOR VINIGI L. GROTTANELLI published an interesting article about the *asoɲú* cult in Western Nzima, Ghana, in *Africa*, xxxi, no. 1, January 1961. This supplemented my own findings, published in *Notes Africaines*, no. 60, Dakar, October 1953. In view of the fact that the *asoɲú* cult has been largely destroyed by the activities of 'Prophet' Jean-Baptiste Mabio alias Dix-sept (Deazet), the following notes should be of some interest.

In January 1955 I spent some time in Nzima, accompanied by the Rev. Sam K. Akesson, who comes from Esiamia in Eastern Nzima and was then working with the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development. He is now in America studying ethnology. We had planned to do further research into the *asoɲú* cult, but our plans were forestalled by the activity of 'Prophet' Mabio. (Mabio's home is 17 km. from Abidjan in the Ivory Coast.) He claimed to have been called by God to destroy charms and magic and to free people from the evil activity of witches. I have described in detail the charm-burning and witch-hunting of Mabio in chap. 21 of my book *Witchcraft in Ghana* (Accra, Presbyterian Book Depot, 2nd edition, 1961; first published 1959). Photographs of Mabio may be found on Plates 59 and 60. I did not, however, mention his name.

Mabio destroyed many of the objects of the *asoɲú* cult, especially in the coastal villages such as Half-Assini and Atuabo. In the interior, however, the *asoɲú* cult still lingers on and Mr. Akesson was able to interview an *asoɲú* priest, who wishes to remain anonymous. This priest affirmed that *asoɲú* was the *bósonle* (tutelary spirit) of the Tano lagoon, Ivory Coast. His original shrine is on a sacred island near Mgbáleti, an Nzima village on the shores of this lagoon. The priests of the *asoɲú* cult stayed at Mgbáleti, going to the island only on special occasions. Every adherent of the cult has to have an *asoɲú* figurine or simply a lump of white clay. The white clay should be kept in a brass basin covered with a white cloth. The fish of the Tano lagoon were considered sacred to *asoɲú*. From Mgbáleti the cult has been introduced into Nzima villages in Ghana.

These findings confirm Professor Grottanelli's information, that the cult was introduced from the west. It is interesting to note that *asoɲú* figurines have been found even further west, outside the regions inhabited by the Nzima people. On planche 5 of *Cultures matérielles de la Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), Monsieur B. Holas has published a photograph of 'quatre œuvres de la potière, figurines votives de Grand Bassam et Bonoua'. In the text on page 40 he describes these as 'quelques produits plutôt naïfs des villages côtiers de la région de Grand Bassam'. In my opinion these figures are identical in style and details with the *asoɲú* figurines of Nzima. Research in the region of Grand Bassam, however, would be difficult, since the Harris movement has destroyed most traces of the old traditional religion.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Akesson will himself publish his findings about the *asoɲú* cult shortly.

(Contributed by the Rev. Dr. Hans W. Debrunner)

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LE Docteur Louis Massé effectue des dépouillements de registres (état civil et registres hospitaliers) en vue d'une analyse de la mortalité dans plusieurs centres urbains d'Afrique

¹ Complément à la note consacrée à la section (département depuis 1961) de Sociologie de l'IFAN (*Africa*, xxxii, no. 2, p. 174).