



African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship among the Akan

By Anthony Ephirim-Donkor



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African religion is ancestor worship; it revolves around the dead, now thought to be alive and well in heaven (the Samanadzie) and propitiated by the living on earth. For the Akan, the ancestors' stool is the emblem of the ancestors (Nananom Nsamanfo). Led by their kings and queen mothers as living ancestors, the Akan periodically propitiate the ancestors' stools housing their ancestors. In return, the ancestors and deities influence the affairs of living descendants, making ancestor worship as tenably viable as any other religion. This second edition updates the scholarship on ancestor worship by demonstrating the centrality of the ancestors' stool as the ultimate religious symbol. In addition, all chapters have been expanded. A new chapter has been added to show how ancestor worship is pragmatically integrative, theologically sound, teleological as well as soteriological, with a highly trained clerical body and elders as mediators.

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- Rank: #1175752 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-12-07
- Released on: 2013-10-09
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor's *African Religion Defined* is a masterfully written and insightful study of African religious experience. He offers a richly detailed examination of Akan cosmology and practices laced with engaging personal accounts. The book represents a major contribution to the field of Akan studies and to discussions about the nature and meaning of African religion. . . . The work will be useful in both undergraduate and graduate school courses and will challenge students and scholars to reexamine categories and assumptions about African religions. (Samuel I. Britt, Gordon Poteat Professor of Asian Studies and Religion, Furman University, South Carolina)

Challenging the notion in some quarters that equate African religions with animism, Ephirim-Donkor examines the religious and cultural practices of the Akan . . . and argues that ancestor worship as practiced by the people is quite similar to other world religions. Influenced by the works of Clifford Geertz and Wallis Budge, Ephirim-Donkor maintains that the souls of the Akan dead are symbolically housed in the ancestors' stool, the very seat and embodiment of temporal and spiritual power among the Akan. . . . This exciting volume, which includes a completely new chapter written for this edition, is a must-have for those interested in African religions. (Baffour K. Takyi, professor of sociology, the University of Akron, Ohio)

About the Author

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor is chair of the Department of Africana Studies and associate professor of religion at Binghamton University, State University of New York. He is the author of three other books on African spirituality.

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