

GBÈKRÈ

Moneky Spirit
of the Baoulé

GBÈKRÈ: MONKEY SPIRIT OF THE BAOLÉ

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Gbèkrè

I came across “Gbekre” while doing research on animal symbolism in Africa. Interested in learning more about the spirit, I decided to do a little research.

According to the general view, the apes keep the spirit of the deceased away from the village of the living. The statue depicted in the drawing derives from the Baule, an Akan-speaking people on the Ivory Coast. It portrays the ape god Gbekre who is a brother of the buffalo spirit Guli. Both are sons of the god of the heaven, Nyame. Gbekre is responsible for the punishment of the evil souls in the beyond. Since he is also revered as the god of the field, his image is often presented with offerings. - Heike Owusu

Among the Baule people of the Ivory Coast, “Guli”, the son of the supreme God, “Nyame”, is a spirit of joy and benevolence. - African Heritage Curriculum Materials

In Baulé mythology, the primordial god Odoudoua created the sky, Nyamé, and the earth, Assié. With Ago, his second wife, Nyamé fathered two sons, Gouli and Gbékré. - Art D’Afrique

The Baoulé are an Akan people residing in Côte d’Ivoire (originally from Ghana). The founder of the Baoulé people was Queen Pokou/Abla Pokou (1730-1750).

Two forms of idols which are very often seen among the Baoulé are, one in the form of a chimpanzee, carved from wood called “Waka-Akatya,” which literally translated means, wooden chimpanzee. The other is in the form of a dog-faced monkey, known as “Waka-Gbekre”. - Journal of the Royal African Society

I came across an interesting [site](#) on the use of the term “gbekre”. The site states the term gbèkrè first appeared in 1897 to describe “animals indigenous to the Baule region”, notably the baboon. Another term (spelled the same but with different pronunciation - gbékré) means mouse (also written without the diacritics - gbekre).



The gbekre or baboon figures are popular among the Baule people of the Ivory Coast, an Akan group, speaking a Twi language of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family. The function of the gbekre figures is understood in terms of the centrality of agriculture in Baule life demonstrated in the annual harvest festival in rural areas, in which the first yam, the major staple food, is symbolically offered to the ancestors. Gbekre are placed as guardians at the gates of villages, but they are also considered the patron of the farmers. According to Baule mythology, the baboon and other ape figures symbolize the son of the god of heaven. It receives the offerings for this deity to ensure the protection and fertility of the farmers' crops. The Baule use of the baboon figure can be attributed to the apes' closeness to humankind, alluding to a higher, spiritual being. - Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art

Among the Baule people, the Gbekre, a figure that was half-man and halfmonkey, was a spirit that protected good people in the AFTERLIFE and punished the wicked ones. The Gbekre was often represented in the carved sculptures made by the Baule. - Willie F. Page

Another term I came across was Mbotumbo. Some places have this term as another name for Gbekre, while others don't use the name Gbekre at all. According to Michael Jordan, Mbotumbo is an ape-headed, benevolent guardian and river spirit. According to Manfred Lurker, he's an ape-headed protective spirit.

The Baule possess a figure with the head of a monkey representing one of the humbler gods. It is called Gbekre or Mbotumbo, a god with several tasks, for he is both judge of hell and helper of those in need, protector of the living against their enemies. - Vera Raskin

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