



### **THE KROBO PEOPLE: GHANA'S FAMOUS BEADS PRODUCING TRIBE AND THEIR UNIQUE DIPO INITIATION RITE**

The Krobo people are part of the Ga-Dangme ethnolinguistic group who the largest group of the seven Dangme ethnic groups of Southeastern Ghana. They are mainly farmers. They occupy the Accra, Akuapim Mountains and the Aram Basins. They also produce most of the nation's beads which they also use in dressing particularly when it comes to performing certain traditional rites.



*Krobo people doing their traditional dance*

The historical origins of Krobo people to their present habitation is a subject of great academic and oral debate in Ghana. While Jackson, backed by oral tradition, state that the Krobo migrated from somewhere in Eastern Nigeria, the other documented sources (notably Enock Azu, Reindorf, Huber, Field, Kropp Dakubu, Wilson and S. S. Odonkor) point mainly to Sameh in Dahomey (Benin) as the probable source of origin of the Krobo together with other proto-Dangmes. Others point out the origin of the Krobo as Sameh in Western Nigeria, southwest of the River Ogun.



*Young Krobo girls, The beads around their necks are of great value for the Krobo.*

Presently, most scholars assume that the Krobos (together with the rest of the Dangmes) migrated from around the regions of Nigeria, crossed the Savannah westward through hostile lands and crossed the River Volta, and settled at the Tagologo plains, within the Accra Plains, later to be called Lolovor some where around the fourteenth century. (Lolovor means brotherly love is finished in allusion to community quarrels among the immigrants for control of farming land.) After wandering between the present sites of Ada and Lɔlvɔ Hill, they established their home on the Krobo Hill, where, to this day, may be seen the ruins of their old town, built of solid rock, as well as the remains of their ancient ritual shrines. Here, tradition says the Dangme tribes split up and went their several ways.



*Young Ghanaian Krobo girl in her beautiful Kente dress and her body adorned with beads. Traditionally, Krobo girls from Ghana undergo Dipo initiation during their late teens. But because of modern pressures, some parents put all their daughters through Dipo at the same time, producing a generation of very young initiates. Beads are a vital part of female adornment, reflecting social status and often providing protection. photo Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher.*

The Krobos under the leadership of Madza and Aklo Muase settled in a newly discovered plateau with steep sides and a few entry points, (The Krobo Mountain). On this mountain they lived for more than four hundred years. Once there, additional Dangme and even alien races escaping from tribal wars like the Akan as well as some Ewe groups were ritually admitted between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## **MANYA AND YILO KROBO**

The exact date on which the Krobos divided themselves into Yilo and Manya krobo is still uncertain. According to one account, the Krobos remained a more or less united nation until 1858. It opined that, in 1858 Ologo Patu, the Chief of South Western Krobo led a rebellion against the Government. This owed its origin partly to the strong objection the people of the eastern districts had against the paying of poll tax, and partly to a quarrel with Odonkor Azu, the Chief of Eastern Krobo, whom Patu attacked. (In earlier years the Manya Krobo people were known to Government as the Eastern Krobos, whilst the Yilo were known as the Western Krobos). From that date to this day, the Krobos have been administered as two separate States, named today as Manya and Yilo Krobo. Ologo Patu, or his predecessor that is the Yilo, were said to have arrived on the Krobo Hill a very long time after the main body. He and his followers were said to have come from Denkyera probably after the collapse of that ancient Kingdom in the latter part of 17th century. Whether they were then of true Denkyera blood (ie Akan) and later adopted the customs of the Krobo, notably circumcision, and became absorbed into the main Krobo ethnic group as held by the Manyas, or whether they were remnants of the original migrants who had lost their way coming from Nigeria.



*Manya krobo festival at Odumase krobo*

The two Krobo traditional areas were originally known as 'Nɔ we' that is Manya meaning "ones home" and Nyɛwe (Yilo ). The name Manya came from the words, 'Ma o nya' that is, 'keep your mouth shut' This goes with the saying "nɔ bi nya mɛ tɛɛ" - literally meaning, "one does not need to talk about everything one sees". Yilo on the other hand comes from the expression

"wa yi lo ɔ", meaning "we don't eat that". Some oral traditions have it that, when the Yilo returned from Krobo Denkyera, they lost most of the indigenous Krobo customs. As a result of that, they were taken through series of aculturalisation rites to make them accepted into the society. This process involved orientation for meals that the Krobos tabooed. The Yilos continued to verify the acceptability of various foods they learnt to eat while they were with the Akans, the resident Krobo started calling them the derogatory term, "Wa yi lo ɔ" - 'we told you we don't eat this.'

Huber (1993) also cited a deep valley and other mountain top features as natural geographical division between the two, with Manya to the northeast and Yilo to the South in their former mountain home. These notwithstanding, they all used to be described as Klo-ma (Krobo town).

However, oral tradition describes a kind of co-operation among them which culminated in a kind of Parliament on Totroku. Totroku is said to be a big rock on the Krobo Mountain which was fenced with Sesreku plant and served as a ground for the deliberation of the community's problems.



*Krobo old man performing libation*

The former also holds that there are three patterns of social groupings. These are Wetso, Kasi, and We. According to him, the Wetso has twelve divisions in all (six for Yilo and six for Manya) and constitute the largest social unit in the Krobo society. The Wetso in its broadest term as it stands today could be described as a clan made up of either the original patrilineal kinship family tree that has grown so large that some cannot easily trace their direct root to the one ancestry or the cluster of different ancestral roots that has come together as a division as the case may be. Such divisions were as far back as the days on the mountain, and which have evolved into political units and now headed by divisional chiefs. These are Dzebiam, Akwenɔ, Susui, Dɔ m,

Manya and Piengua for Manya-Krobo, and Bnya, Ogomε, Bunase, Nyεwe, Plau, and Okpe for Yilo-Krobo respectively



The second social group according to him is the Kasi which could be described as people from the same patrilineal ancestry. Literally, the term Kasi means "people belonging to or eating from the same dish". These may be made up of households, all of whom traced their ancestry to one person. The political head of the Kasi is the Asafoatse and functions as a chief; he has a stool and celebrates his yearly stool ritual.

'We' are the next social grouping among the Krobo of Ghana. Literally, 'We' or 'Webihi stands for people of a house. Each Kasi is made up of several 'We'





Krobo people

## DIPO

### KROBO RITE OF PASSAGE.

#### The 'ancient' form of Dipo

The Dipo ceremony used to last a very long time as there was no formal education and it served as vocational training for matured girls. It could last several months and even up to a year. The girls were camped and made to go through several processes, in the form of a “curriculum” for the training. They were taught how to tend a farm, collect firewood for cooking in the home (they had to have a reserve of firewood in their homes as good women because they could have visitors at night), fetching of water, preparing dishes and laundering clothes. They were sent to a riverside and taught how to wash their clothes and learnt personal hygiene in the process. The girls also took turns to do the cooking during the period of seclusion. Pounding of the traditional fufu was taught and also how to serve food to the extended members of their husband’s family when they were married.



*young girl with her mother from the Krobo tribal group wear traditional beads* [anthony pappone photographer](#)

After going through this process, the blessings of the gods were sought for the girls and the 'old lady' gave the consent or approval that the girls have passed the training process and were ready for marriage. Some of the girls may have been betrothed before going through the rite. Their suitors were therefore expected to contribute to the performance of the rite for the girls. They also carried the girls from the shrine after the ultimate test of sitting on the sacred stone to prove their virginity and also as a means of warding off other interested men. This also signified that they would one day carry the girl to their bed. The girls had their bodies exposed during the rite as a form of marketing – to show the members (especially men) of the community that the girls were beautiful and ripe for marriage and therefore attract potential suitors. They were taken to the market place to dance also as a form of exposure to the outside world. It was common in those days, for girls to be married soon after the Dipo was performed for them. As evidence of initiation, marks were made on the back of the palms and wrists.



[Dipo girls](#)

In line with this account, Teyegaga (1985) mentions three aspects of the Dipo custom as was originally performed by Nana Klowε ki – the social, religious and outdooring aspects. The social aspect involved training in home management, housecraft and child-bearing. After this training, they went through three tests. The first was a test of their ability to perform household chores after which marks were made on their wrists. The second was the observation of their naked bodies by Nana Klowε ki to confirm that she was physically matured for marriage and childbirth. Marks were given on their bellies after this test. The last test was a seal which comprised of incisions on the back of the waist which signified that it was only a girl's husband who should be allowed to hold her waist. The religious aspect involved the climbing of the sacred rock, on which the girls were expected to dance amidst drumming and singing. A girl who fell during this activity was suspected to have conceived, which if confirmed, resulted in her expulsion from the tribe. The outdooring aspect involved a great feast which served as a family reunion. The girls were dressed in expensive beads and cloths and made to perform the Klama dance.



### **Dipo Puberty rites**

*Young girls from the Krobo tribal group wear traditional waist beads as they undergo puberty rites - locally called dipo .*

Most girls entered into customary marriages immediately after the Dipo rites and as such, “the real aim of establishing dipo custom..... that is to train and outdoor grown up girls for marriage” was fulfilled (Ibid:30). Teyegaga (1985:30) further states that, “this is the original form of dipo custom in ancient days when Nana Klowε ki was living with the Krobos on the Krobo Mountain..” There is however a difference in the way it is now performed.

#### **(1)The stone and duration of Dipo**

When the Krobos lived on the mountain, Dipo was performed there and when they settled on the plains, it was performed in the various communities. The sacred stone on which the girls sit at the climax of events was located on the mountain. According to Teyegaga (1985), it happened to be one of the sacred rocks which were on the mountain. The girls were expected to climb and dance on the rock.



*Dipo initiates*

Huber (1963) however mentions that there was only one large rock, Totroku or  $T\epsilon\ gkpe\ t\epsilon$ , on the mountain and it was this rock the girls had to climb. He further points out how the number of stones has multiplied since the settlement on the plains but his informants claimed that each stone “contains at least a particle of the original sacred rock on the mountain” (Ibid:178). Girls no longer have to climb a rock during initiation. They are rather made to sit on the sacred stone which is located within a shrine. The period in which the Dipo custom used to be held have been drastically reduced from three years to a year, then six months, three months, three weeks, one week and finally the five days as they do now.



*Krobo girls about to go thru Dipo initiation rite*

**(2) Age of initiates**

Unlike the past when Dipo was performed for matured young women who were of marriageable age, it is now performed for girls as young as two years and even infants. Huber (1963:193) mentions it, even at the time of writing, when he stated “even little infants are nowadays initiated.”



***Dipo Puberty rites, Young girls from the Krobo tribal group are dressed up in white as they undergo puberty rites - locally called dipo***

**(3) Bodily exposure of initiates**



*Dipo initiates being taught how to dance*

Initiates are now allowed to cover their breasts with a wax-print cloth except when a ritual is being performed. This covering is allowed even in the Dipo house which was not the case in the past. Initiates had to be exposed the entire time during the initiation whether in the Dipo house or not.





*Krobo girl in her Dipo beads*

A reason given for this change was the numerous criticisms against the practice. The Queen mothers explained that the bodily exposure served to attract men to the initiates and was a form of temptation for them. They therefore advocate that the girls be covered.



*Krobo girl in her Dipo initiation*

(4) Secret performances



*Krobo girl with a Dipo initiation leaf in her mouth*

Another change has to do with the performance of some rituals outside public view, the goat ritual for instance. The intestines, it was claimed, were placed on the initiates but this was done secretly. It was claimed that such practices made people regard the custom as fetish and so must change.



*Krobo girl in her initiation garb*

**(5) Female carriers**

Gone are the days when it was a reserve of men to carry initiates from the shrine. These days, women also engage in the carrying. It was more practical for men to do the carrying in the past as they were probably potential suitors



The girls were also a lot grown-up than they are now and with the large number of beads on their waists, they were very heavy. It was therefore easier for men to carry them. Women now engage in the carrying because the girls are now much younger. They are no longer betrothed, so there is less motivation for the men to carry them as was the case in the past.



*Dipo initiated girl being carried by a man*

In the old days, after blessing the sacred stone of virginity: if a girl is found not to be a virgin, or, worse still, if she is discovered to be pregnant, she risks to be ostracized and will never attract a husband from their own tribe.

**(6) Elimination of initiation marks and ability to avoid being shaved**

The marks which initiates were given at the back of their hands, on their bellies and their waists are no longer given. It is only done symbolically. The priestesses only passed the blade on the hands without making any marks. Shaving of the hair could easily be avoided by paying money to keep it.



*Krobo girl undergoing dipo initiation by having her hair shaved*

#### **(7) Absence of ostracism**

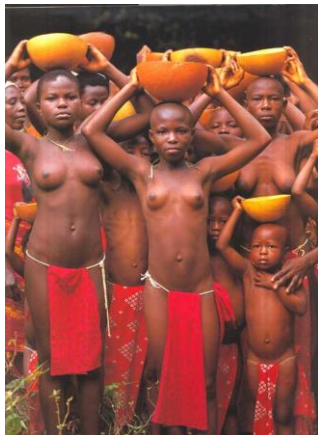
It is common knowledge that a girl who did not pass the litmus test of visiting the sacred stone was ostracized from the Krobo society. She was hooted at, banished and regarded as a shame to her family and the community at large, a bad example of womanhood. Such an occurrence is now virtually non-existent. It is not common to hear of a girl being ostracized. This could be attributed to paying for purification rituals so that girls who had previously conceived can be initiated.



Krobo girls going thru Dipo

## Dipo Today

The girls enter the ritual house where they shed all of their clothes and their ritual mother will dress them anew. The girls are given new ritual mothers. Beckwith and Fisher (2002:16-17) make mention of these ritual mothers and state that "these women are not the actual mothers of the girls but serve as mentors to the initiates. The ritual mothers are empowered to teach the girls to become mothers in their own right." The only thing that the girls will wear, is a single band of carnelian beads. A red piece of cloth will hang from this strand, which symbolizes the blood of menstruation. The color of the stones and fabric is believed to keep away the bad spirits to which the girls are the most vulnerable. The souls of the initiates are called prior to the performance of the rite so they could tell what exactly they wanted to be done for them during the rites. For example, if an initiate's soul demanded she be dressed in a certain way or be given a certain dish, the organizers would grant this request. It is believed that if this is not done and anything is performed contrary to the wish of the initiate's soul, it could have





serious repercussions on her.



*Young girls from the Krobo tribal group eat boiled yam and tomato sauce, .*

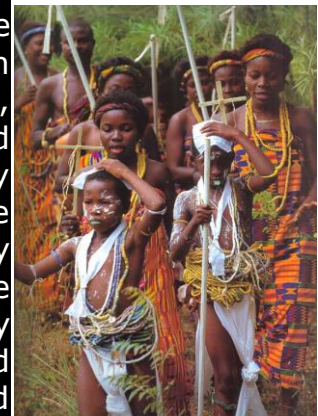
All of the girls will also have their heads shaved except for a little patch on the back of their head (called the Yisi-pomi), marking a new stage in their life. The little patch left on their head, will be shaved off when they are done with the whole initiation process. This is the first stage for the girls. To mark this stage, the girls are stripped naked and a string bead wore in front with a blade. A string of palm fibre called 'soni' was then tied around their necks. The tying of the string (soni) is done by either the old lady of the house called 'yomoyo,'the ritual mother or the priestess. The girls were thus identified as Dipo-yo (which means Dipo girl. The plural of this is Dipo-yi).



*The initiates are shaved their heads by their ritual mother.*

The girls took turns to grind millet on a grinding stone. Two priestesses are in charge of this. One of them placed the girls' hands on the stone three times after which the girls ground a bit of the millet. The younger girls are guided to this. Huber (1963:170) also describes this process and states that, "the old lady in charge holds the hands of each candidate. Three times they perform together the action of grinding, according to the old traditional way i.e. by means of a smaller cylindrical stone, they mash the millet grains upon a larger hollowed stone or a clay base to flour, which another initiate collects into a calabash."

In the first three weeks the girls are secluded from the rest of the community. The morning following the day which their heads were shaved, they follow their ritual mothers to the river to bathe. The girls lined up with big calabashes in which they had a strip of red loin cloth, raffia sponge, soap, waist beads, wax print cloth and towel which were needed for the bath. The girls joined the queue as soon as they were called. They had their breasts exposed but wore the wax print cloth on their waists. The priestesses led the way to the well or a Okwe stream followed by the girls with the younger ones in front, amidst singing by women. The very young girls were carried by their mothers. The girls stand on plantain branches to bathe and first had to wash the red cloth they had been wearing. The very young initiates were



bathed by their mothers. After bathing, they had their necks, chest and shoulders smeared with a brownish substance which served as powder.

The initiates wore new red cloths and covered themselves with a wrapper from their waist downwards. They then walked back to the Dipo house with their calabashes containing the bathing sponge, soap, towel and the washed red cloths. This isn't just a purification ritual, it also teaches the girls the correct way to cleanse themselves. After they are done with the bathing, they receive a special meal of water-yam, porridge and palm oil which their ritual mothers prepared for them. The women also prepare the traditional meal, *hɔ-fufui* (Saturday's fufu made from plantain) and palm nut soup with traditional cooking utensils. This meal is distributed to the girls to eat. According to Huber (1963), if a girl was betrothed, her groom had to contribute to this meal by providing foodstuffs from his farm and some of the food was served to maternal relatives of the girls. Some grooms even had to help in the pounding of the fufu



*Dipo initiates*

When the food was ready, it was served in traditional bowls and once again, placed on the ground for initiates to eat in groups.

A custom is performed before the initiates eat their fufu. The names of the initiates were called by the priest from a register. Upon hearing their names, the girls went to the priestess who first put pieces of the food in their mouth three times and they swallowed the third time. The initiates are allowed to eat the hɔ-fufui in groups after this. Later, the girls had their bodies marked by the priestesses with charcoal, on the sides of their faces, chests and stomachs. The triple libation is performed by the priest and his assistant after which, water from a well is placed in a big calabash with some leaves in it. The assistant priest then pour this water over the priest's head and also on his feet. The girls are then made to line up and take turns to wash with this water. They had to scoop the water with their palms and pour it over their heads so that it flows down their bodies. This is done three times.

The climax of the Dipo ritual is when the girls are brought to the scared rock to test their virginity. During this ritual, they replace the red cloth with a pure white one. They also have a piece of calico around their head and across their chest. During this whole ritual the girls must remain silent. They have a leaf in their mouth which is supposed to help them remain silent and bring their thoughts inward. Their ritual mothers follow the girls to the sacred rock, all of them are carrying a special stick called *dimanchu*. Dimanchu means "to make you a woman." Before they start their way to the stone, the girls are splashed with chalky water to ward off the evil spirits that they could encounter on their way to the rock.



*Each initiate has been splashed with chalky water to ward off any evil forces that may overcome her.*

Once the girls arrive at the rock the priestesses will inspect them to see if they are pregnant. The priestesses splash the girls with a blessed chalky water; if the young girl is pregnant the unborn child would tremble within which the priestesses would see and therefore be able to tell that the young girl is pregnant.. If a young girl would start to menstruate right there when she is splashed with this holy water, the rock will get even more power. The girls are tested in the rock one by one. When an initiate passes the test she is run out by her guardian mother. This represents the chaos that used to exist. In the past there would be men from other tribes waiting to kidnap a newly initiated young

girl. Preventing this, the guardian mother had to run the girl home as fast as she could so that she could be protected by their families.

Girls arrive home excited; they have completed their initiation process. Now they will be able to demonstrate to their family, friends, and future husbands what they have all learned in the three weeks that they were gone. For the celebration the girls dress up; they wear many different color beads, a headdress called *cheia*, and beautiful cloths. Mothers beam with pride that their daughters passed the initiation. The girls are now accepted into the Krobo society as women.



*The initiates are now ready for their Outdooring Ceremony, during which they will be presented to the community of family, friends and potential suitors.*

## Pregnancy

A woman's actions during pregnancy will determine many characteristics of the unborn child. There are many different practices to protect and help the unborn child. The most important thing is to protect an unborn child from

the evil spirits. A future mother will make sure to avoid any place with these types of spirits.



Evil spirits have many different places and times where they are the most active. The times during the day such as late at night, when the sun is the hottest, or while the sun is setting are when the spirits are most active. Being near the cemetery is another typical place where one could encounter many evil spirits.

While the mother is sleeping at night she will make sure to lay with her stomach facing away from the moon , the light of the moon gives off too many nyama (bad energy). Additionally, she will not allow anyone to touch her stomach so that no bad energy is transferred to the baby. Another way to try and keep the bad nyamas and spirits away was by wearing amulets and talismans.



There is a typical drink pregnant mothers will drink to help insure a healthy and peaceful pregnancy. This drink consists of different herbs, roots of ntoro and other plants. Drinking kolobe without sugar will help reduce the risk of diabetes during pregnancy. The mother of the unborn child isn't the only one that needs to make sure to protect the unborn baby, the father does as well.





Just as the mother isn't allowed to observe any violence or blood shed, the father isn't allowed to kill or partake in the killing of an animal. He must also stay away from the cemetery and cemetery path because of the high levels of nyama. Neither the mother nor the father is allowed to eat the meat of an animal that might have been pregnant. The parents are also not allowed to pre-name their child or even think of names for the child, it would display a lack of respect to the spirit world. If a baby stays in its mother's womb for more than nine months it would be considered an extraordinary being. This child would be considered to have great potential in its life.



## **FERTILITY**

Reproduction is one of the most important jobs for women. Women who are fertile are celebrated, whereas women who are infertile are looked upon badly. They suffer from the burdens which their community put upon them. There are different rituals though which women can do to help them conceive. Different animals represent feminine power, so women might use these in their rituals to increase their chances of conceiving.

The animals that they might use in their rituals are fish, tortoises, snakes, panthers and leopards. There is also a ritual involving the tree of fertility which is called baobab.



Many times a couple will also visit a diviner to seek help. It could be that either the man or the woman is possessed by a spirit causing the infertility. There are people who would be capable of putting spells on women to lessen their chances of having a child. A diviner would be able to remove these spells as well. Some women though aren't fertile because they have other callings. They are considered special women because they help the rest of the community through the mystical gifts and insights which they provide.

## **BIRTH**

The birth of a child is a very special moment for African communities. They believe that it is a reintroduction of an honored spirit who has re-entered the world. During the first few years the child will wear a talisman to help protect it in its fragile time. Many times the babies will not be named until later when the parents know that it will survive. They believe that if parents call the child by name, the spirit of death will have an easier way of taking it back. The Krobos will name their children depending on their sex and when they were born. For example Afi Dede means "Friday Firstborn Girl"; the baby will receive her first beads at her naming ceremony. After the first week of having worn these wrist beads, she will receive new beads which she will wear around her waist. As she grows it will be extended or replaced. Men will call it "a man's rosary."



During the actual process of giving birth no man is allowed to enter the birthing room. The process of bringing another life into the world is a special act reserved for women. The to-be mother who is in labor will be surrounded by her female relatives. They will try and make the laboring process easier for her. Bringing the laboring female to the balanza tree is an option so that they can make offerings and ask for assistance in the labor.



Dipo girl

Since there are many nyamas during labor the midwife will have many herbs, amulets, and talismans on her while incantations are recited. Once the child is born, the midwife will cleanse it and then proceed to unite it with its mother.

A special bath is used to cleanse the newborn. A unique water, called calabash water, is used to remove the large amounts of energy that the baby carries. For the next month a women in the family is responsible for bathing the child. This includes blowing into its ear, quickly sucking either the nose or mouth and navel and spitting the bad nyama out onto the floor. The mother, like the baby, receives a special bath after the birth. Her sisters, along with other elderly

women, will bathe her with warm water, containing balanza bark, in an effort to help the healing process. During this process the women will also sing her a song..

Thank you to our children's mother  
Thank you to our children's mother  
Thank you to all of our mothers  
Thank you to all of our mothers  
They are those who are blessed  
They are those who are blessed  
It is not easy  
It is not easy to give life

### **DEATH OF A CHILD**

A child dying at a young age is a powerful message from the spirit world. One must observe the people and their actions around them, to see who has harmful attitudes or behaviors that could have caused the death. Observing ones relationship with nature to see if one had offended the spirits is also important to observe. If a spirit gets the impression that the family is too connected to the child, it would be reason enough to take the child back to the spirit world.



Spirits are supposed to teach gratitude, humility, and detachment. To demonstrate that they aren't attached to their future newly born children, a family will give them names as "ragged clothes" or "garbage" . Families will also look at the new born for a familiar marking that they made on their previous child. If their new child has this mark it means that this child has the spirit of their dead child. The markings would have been made before the burial. There would have been special arrangements made to bury the child with potent charms, to try and increase the chance of the mother having more children and for the chance to have the spirit return.

## **AFTER LIVE BIRTH**



After the baby's first bath, mother and daughter are united. The first week is a critical week for mother and child. It is the most important bonding time for the two; the mother must also protect the baby from the evil spirit world. To help strengthen and protect her child the mother will give it herbs and medicines. She herself will also drink special herbs to recover from labor more quickly.

Tying a piece of twig around the wrist of the child will also help protect it from harmful spirits and forces. The umbilical cord at this point isn't completely off yet. Mixing shea butter and clay and placing it on the child's stomach, will help the umbilical cord fall off. Once it falls off, the family keeps it for medicine. For example, if a child would have a stomachache the umbilical cord will be dipped (three times for boys and four times for girls) into water which the child will then drink, to make it feel better.

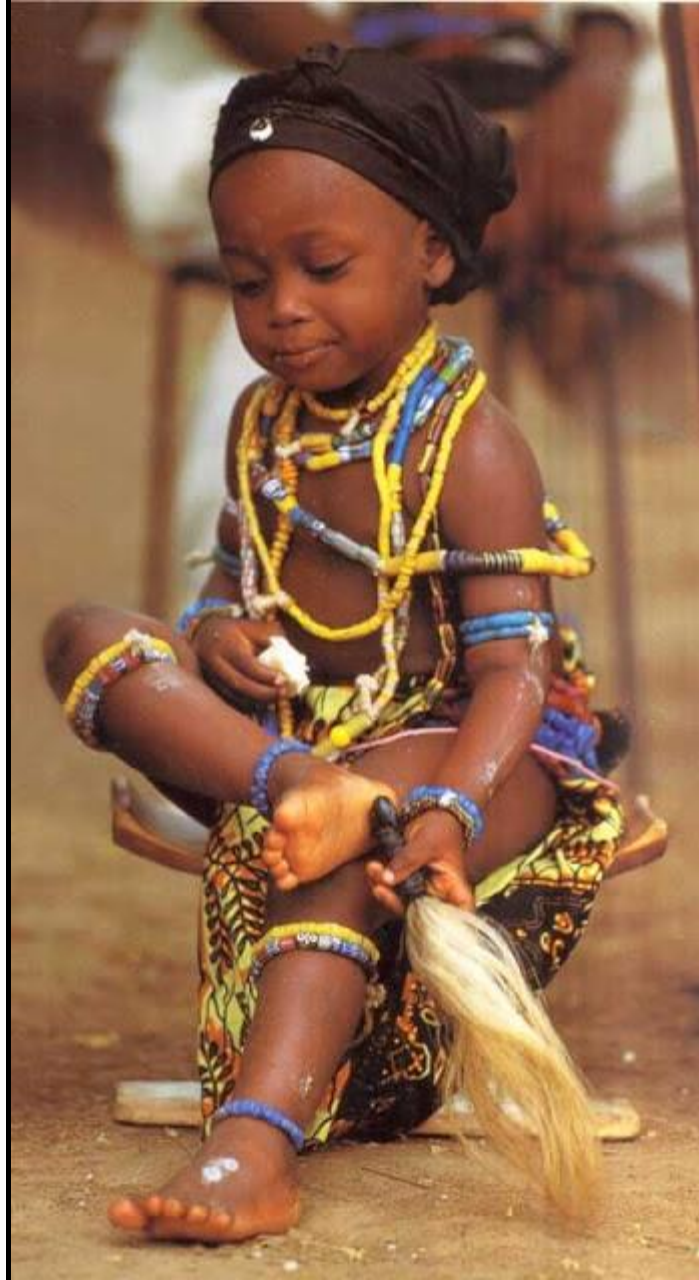
## **KROBO BEADS**

### **Mystic Origins**

The beginning of bead history in Kroboland and in Ghana at large can be found in an interconnection of mythological and archeological accounts. The most commonly known place of bead origin is at the end of a rainbow, after a heavy rainfall; yet this claim has been academically attributed to the erosion of old burial grounds, where the beads of the deceased resurfaced after a storm (Kumekpor 1995: 15). Indeed, the earliest evidence of beads in Ghana trace back to the Late Stone Age, after archeologists discovered a man and woman adorned with stone beads at their burial site.

Even with an academic explanation of when beads were first used, the source of their creation is still a mystery, described only by fantastical lore. Stone beads found after a heavy rainstorm were said to be produced from thunder, while some heirloom beads were considered vectors of witchcraft (Sutherland Addy 2011: 17). Powdered-glass bodom beads were said to have grown from the ground itself, and were historically thought of as a living entity, with the ability to breathe, reproduce, and bark at the approach of danger (Kpabitey: 27Apr 12).





Young Krobo child adorned with beads



The Krobo are among the oldest and most famous makers of ground-glass beads in Africa. many of the beads, known as AKORI, or AGGREY, are made locally; others have been traded from Venice since the seventeenth century, as well as from Holland.

The Krobo bead makers are best known for their wonderfully colorful powdered glass beads. Made from recycled glass, the beads are still produced in open-sided, thatch-roofed huts, using traditional, labor-intensive methods.

Using a large mortar and pestle, the bead maker first pounds the sheets and shards of glass into a fine powder. After sifting the powder to remove any chunks, he (or, less often, she) adds small amounts of ceramic powder

or "mason stain" to intensify the base color of the beads. The powder is then carefully poured into (usually) cylinder-shaped holes that have been carved into homemade clay molds. A stick from the casava plant is inserted into the center to form a bead hole.

Meanwhile, the bead maker has been firing up the clay oven, also homemade. He feeds it using brush and small logs which, if he lives in a town, must be obtained at great expense from outlying areas and hauled home in a rented truck. Now, using a long-handled spatula-like tool, he inserts the molds into the fiery oven.



Dipo girl wearing beads

As the beads fire, the casava sticks burn out, leaving holes in the centers of the beads. Once the beads have reached a putty consistency, the bead maker removes them from the oven and uses a tool much like an ice pick to loosen them in their molds. If they are done, he takes them out one at a time and presses down on one side to give the bead the slight curve that allows it to nestle comfortably up against its counterparts when strung into a circlet for market.



After the beads have been cooled and washed, the bead maker begins the painstaking process of painting his highly individualized designs on the beads. After each color is applied, the bead must be re-fired. The beads often have as many as five or six different colors on them.

The beads are then strung on cotton string into double circlets a little bit larger than an average-sized bracelet. They are tied off with triple knots and sent to market to find their way into the world.



Krobo woman adorned with beads dancing at a Dipo ceremony



Copyright  
Africa Direct, Inc.  
2006











Krobo beads







### **THE ADAS (PART OF THE DANGMES) AND THEIR SETTLEMENT**

The Adas at their present abode came as a result of a migration of an ethnic group of people believed to be part of great African Negro race from the Western Sudan. They comprised the Ada and others known today as the Krobos, Osudokus, Shais, Kpones, Prampram and Ningos, all formed the great ethnic group of Dangme.

From “Seme” they came to Oyo and then to Abeokuta, then to Dahomey, now Benin. In Dahomey, the Adas were forced by hostilities in that land from establishing an exclusive settlement, so they merge with the Ewes from Ketu. Then with the Ewes, they travelled to a place called Tade and accompanied them again up to Ngotsie in Togo. It was at Ngotsie that King Agorkoli Appellated the Adas as “ADAWOLAWO” meaning a wild, furious, brace and warlike people who are easily provoked. A name which has remained as a characteristics of the Adas as a tribe.



The part of the Adas that were among this great migration were four (4) Okor Clan led by a priest King known as Adi. These Clans are Adibiawe, Lomobiawe, Tekperbiawe and Dangmebiawe. They together with Krobos, Osudukus and the Shais travelled by the overland route and crossed the Volta River at several points such as Aprade, Fodjoku near Akuse, Dorfor, Asutsuare and Vume.

The four(4) Okor tribes have a common taboo. The priest established a theocratic political institution which forbade them from seeing human blood. However, to sanctify the priesthood, they must be circumcised. The crossing of the river at Asutsuare was said to have come about as a result mystic, Tsiatey Avegbe, who was said to have jumped into the Volta River and emerged as crocodile, with Odum board and spread across the Volta River for crossing. Adi and followers were the first to cross. Lomo and Lomobiawe crossed second followed by Terkperbiawe, Dangmebiawe, who crossed last as the gate sealers or rearguards, was led by Okumo. They were followed by the other Dangme groups.

After crossing, all the Dangme tribes settled in Togologo now called Lolorvor which is now known as Accra plains, for many years. Later events at Lolorvor served as their confederacy. It was said that there arose a misunderstanding between them and Manya leaders.

The other members of the group tried to persuade Adi to bury the differences but the Adas told the Krobos in the Ewe language that “Lolorvor” which means the cord binding us together is broken or severed; there is no more love to unite us. This saw the Krobos heading to the Shai Hills, leaving the Adas (Okor Clan) behind on the Accra Plains at Lolorvor near the present day Afiinya hills.

The Akan war raids especially by the Ashanti forced the search for a place of safety. A survey team of famed hunters drawn from the four(4) clans set from “Lolorvor” to explore new lands for settlement. It was said that, Adibiawe group one hunter named Buete Kpakpaku Lomobiawe also gave one hunter by name Lomo. The Terkperbiawe group also gave one named Korley, Dangmebiawe-Okumo.

Their exploration took them as far as to Sege forest and the stream. At this place, Korley climbed a tree and surveyed all the land beyond and beheld a white sheet of land in the distance and all the four(4) famed hunters moved out to see what it was. Adi took the lead followed by Lomo,

followed by Korley with Okomo at the rear. This brought about the discovery of Songor Salt Lagoon.



It was said that, Adi and Lomo went by the North of the lagoon and came as far as Togbloku. Korley and Okumo also took the south and came across the Okor forest by the sea where they walked up to the Volta estuary, near the present day Lolonyakope. It was alleged that one day, Korley went out on a hunting expedition and reached as far as Wokumagbe near Ningo.

There he shot at and wounded a beast but it run away. Korley decided to follow the footprints of the beast until he reached a thick forest. In pursuit of the beast into the forest, he discovered a secret hamlet and met an old lady in it. The old lady was seated on a stool, adored with gold. Around her Korley saw crowded people, which to him, were apparitions and turned to retrace his steps to give up the pursuit of the wounded beast.

The crowd instantly beckoned him to return, begging him not to run away. Korley was said to have mastered courage and moved towards them. He told the crowd that he was a hunter who was in pursuit of the wounded beast and fell upon them in error. Korley was then told by the old lady that she was the beast he shot and wounded and that she charmed him to follow her to her secret hide out. She then asked Korley where he came from and he pointed out the direction of Afienya hills at Lolorvor.

At this juncture, the old lady disclosed her ownership of the Songor salt lagoon to him. She told Korley that, if he could faithfully observe the taboos and the preclusion on the usage of the lagoon and be faithful to this oath of fidelity to her, she will turn over the ownership of the Songor to him. In effect, the old lady listed the hidden wealth in the Songor lagoon as SALT & GOLD underneath the rock bed. The old lady asked Korley to assure her that when she gives the ownership of the Songor Lagoon, neither he nor his children after him, shall ever use GOLD as an Ornament.

#### **The other Ada Clans**

The ethnic groups discussed above are the four pure Dangme clans or Wetso popularly referred to as or namely, **Adibiawe, Lomobiawe, Tekperbiawe and Dangmebiawe.**

### *Other Ada Clans*

Has two other ethnic group divided into six main clans (or wetso) namely the clans of Akans ethnic origin and those of Ewe ethnic origin.

### *The Akans*

They are people who joined the Dangmes (Adas) in the Okor forest and were assimilated into the Dangme group after they had undergone the main Dangme rituals of circumcision. Thus became one of the Okor Clans. This is the Kabiawe Group which eventually assumed the Paramountcy of the Ada State. Kabiawe was gradually divided into three clans namely: Kabiawetsu, Kabiaweyumu, Kabiawekpono.

### *The Ewes*

The clans of Ewe Ethnic origin are Kudzragbe, Korgbor and Ohuwem. The Kudzragbe Clan is the acclaimed allodial Landlord of the Big Ada Township and the surrounding areas. On the Historic migration from Ngortsie, the Ewe group moved along the great River Volta basins, some families settling on the way as others forged on for better security. One group settled at Agorta, just across the Volta from the present day Ada. In search of better safety they ventured on to the Gravedo island (now Tuanikope inland) from Agavedo. The then leader/hunter/adventurer (Havitse or Ahavitse) hit the main land of Ada at Agorkpo. Havitse explored the main land until he met the Dangmeli (Adas) at the Okorgrove.

The Okor forest dwellers agreed to move down to join Havitse at the Volta side here. Havitse crossed back home to Agavedo and advised his people to cross over to this main land for better safety. Some rejected the idea saying the day they travel would be the day of marketing themselves to death. This in Ewe translates briefly into Kudzram-Gbe (day of selling to death). Those who agreed to leave Agarvedo island to the “Newfoundland” adopted this expression as a bold appellation to identify themselves hence the name Kudzragbe people.

### *The Korgbor Clan*

Is believed to have crossed the Volta earlier and hit the land area of Vume and Tefle. Then they ventured inland to a spot near the Okor forest. The place is now historically known as Korgbor-magbenor( Korgbor Park). From here they also moved to join others to make the present day Ada. It is said that allocating them a place in Big Ada, the Kudzragbe landlords told them in Ewe “wo a no kor hea gbor” meaning “You also stay near this ant hill” hence the name Korgbor meaning “at the anthill”. Ohuwem is believed to have arrived from Penyi in Ewe land which Adas called “Ohue”. Why all the Ewe tribes mentioned above speak Dangme today is because of the influence of or dominance of the four Dangme speaking (early) settlers who hosted them.

## **THE ADA ASAFOTUFIAMI FESTIVAL**

### **Background**

Each Traditional Area of Ghana is identified with a special cultural festival which distinguishes her people from the other areas.



The Asafotufiami festival of the people of the Ada Traditional Area in the Ada East and Ada West Districts of the Greater Accra Region is a rich cultural heritage celebrated annually around the first week of August. It is mainly in remembrance of the invaluable achievements of the Founding Fathers and Ancestors, especially in the many wars of survival and development of Ada. The Dangme expression of Asafotufiami simply means company or Divisional

### **Firing of musketry.**

Therefore Asafotufiami is essentially a war Festival that commemorate the heroic achievements of our ancestors, some of whom bravely spilt their blood to save Ada from being overrun and destroyed by the various enemies of those days.

It is pertinent here to mention a few of those ancient wars and battles.

(i)1750: The battle of Nonobe – Ada-Anglo war, Adas supported by Akwapim, Akim Abuakua Krobo and Agave Anglo was defeated.

(ii)1769: Again Ada defeated Anglo.

(iii)1770: Unsuccessful invasion of Anglo by joint forces of Ada Akim Abuakua, Akwapim, Krobo and part of Mafi while Akwamu supported Anglo.

(iv)1776: Anglo attacked Ada and burnt down the Township.

(v)1826: Kantamanso War near Dodowa against Asanti attack of Accra and coastal all areas. Ada was invited by King Taxis of Accra, marched up to Kantamanso village near Dodowa to join Gas, Danes and other allies Asanti defeated.

(vi)1876: Glover war Adidome Captain Glover led the allied forces from Ga, Ada, Krobo, Krepi, Akwapim, against Anglo supported by Avenos, Mafi defeated Anglo and allies defeated in battles of Adidome Avenor and wheta.

### **Welcome of Surviving Warriors**

At the end of end of each war surviving warriors who returned home were met at the outskirts of the outskirts of the town by joyous townsmen and relatives and carrying them shoulder high to their respective homes amidst various merry making activities. A day was appointed for a State welcome ceremony featuring returnee warriors gorgeously dressed and decorated in beads etc, drumming and dancing merry making climaxed by a march through the town to the Volta Riverside for a ritual of musketry firing into the river and general feet and hand washing to send away evils of war and suffering. The day end with companies or divisions returning home amidst general jubilation of course warriors who fell at the battle had their due share of Honourable mention in libation and prayers and other mourning activities especially by relations.

### **The Military Organization of Adas**

Adas was always battle ready in view of the state of constant insecurity of those days. Each of the clans/divisions or companies military position for action at the battle field.

The line-up of the clan/companies is as follows:

i.Hlam-ta (frontier forces) are made up of Adibawe Lomobiawe and Tekperbawe clans.

ii.Se-Ta (or Rear Guard) is Dangmebiawe Clan.

iii.Kpeti-Ta (or middle force) is Ohuwem.

iv.Dzase-Hem (front guard of Dzase is Korgbor).

v.Dzase-Se (Afufu) Rear guard of Dzase are Kudzrage, Kabiawetsu, Kabiaweyumu and Kabiawekpono.

### **Conduct of the Asafotufiami Festival**

With the fortunate cessation of these inter-tribal/ethnic wars and hostilities thanks to Europeans intervention, especially British Colonial Administration. Adas now have occasion to welcome back home warriors returning from battle. But those who fell at battle must live in everlasting memory for having sacrificed themselves for the survival of their native Ada. Not must Ada forget the wars that cost us the lives of such eminent people. All these and those who returned alive from the war must have a mention of honour at least occasionally in the life of Ada. For these and other laudable reasons, Adas decided from the beginning of the 20th century to adopt and adapt the practice of ceremonial welcome of the Returnee warriors of old into yearly festival for all sons and daughters of the Ada state. The main activity would be musketry firing by the Divisions or companies led by their respective Asafoatseme (war captains) in line with our traditional military organization. This ceremony was embraced and christened “Asafotufiami Festival” meaning Divisional musketry firing festival in commemoration of the war, the fallen warriors and the survivors.

### **Asafotu Planning Committee**

The Paramount Chief in council (Dzetse of Ada) appoints a festival planning committee well ahead of August for tentative planning of the main activities of the festival including details of finance, programme, Publicity, Special invitees, participating bodies/Associations.

### **Main Activities ceremonial Arrivals**

On the first Thursday in August (as decided) all Adas start arriving from their various places of stay to their respective homes in Ada. Elders at home perform purification and rituals of various sorts in the main family houses. Feast of cow, sheep, goat, fowls, etc, welcome the arrivals on Thursday.

### **Announcement by main war drums.**

At early dawn on Friday, the two main Asafo war dances of Akofode and Asorkor parade through town drumming, yelling and singing the war songs. They visit the residence of the war captains and stage the war dances.

### **Display at old battlefield “Aplenever”.**

In the morning on Friday all the divisional clans in an orderly procession on the principal street amidst musketry firing, drumming, singing of war songs and dancing to cheer the leadership of their respective Asafoatseme (war captains) onto an old field called Applenayer at luhuese, a little way from the main township. Here young men display musketry firing on serious war fashion (against imaginary enemies) amidst continued drumming, yelling and dancing, till early afternoon when the priests pour libation and the companies return to greet the Paramount Chief seated at Lenobinya to welcome his people from the battlefield ritual at Kpomkpombanya. From Lenobinya the company continues the procession to Kpomkpompanya (the riverside were the main ancient warriors departed to war by boat and landed on their return from war). At this riverside libation is poured, musketry is fired over the water of the river Volta and ritual of feet/hand washing is done to wash away all evil of war etc. for the Volta River to carry into the vast Gulf of Guinea of the endless Atlantic Ocean: the evils to go, never to return to Ada any more. After this ritual the clans return home in the evening to prepare for the main festival Durbar on the following day.

Main Asafotufiami Festival Durbar Saturday is the climax of the Asafotufiami Festival. All road lead to the main Durbar ground at the Presby Middle School Park. Everybody comes out in the

best attire affordable. The Asafoatseme and the Divisional Chiefs or Wetsoyihi also are carried high in palanquins riding in the middle of the Groups gorgeously dressed, usually in native Kente or native war attire (Asafoatseme) raising wearing their usually glittering hands in response to the waving and cheering. The long procession of the ten clans move slowly with drumming and dancing and musketry firing to the Durbar ground.

### **Ada Youth Organization**

Each Traditional clan group is led by one of the many Adaa youth groups formed in big Ada and other towns in Ghana.

### **Paramount Chiefs Group**

Last to arrive at the Durbar Ground is the Paramount Chief and his group whose arrival signals the commencement of the Durbar activities.

### **Exchange of Greetings**

The invited Guest of Honour usually a representative of Government exchange greetings with the Paramount chief and participating Association and group around the Durbar Ground. The Paramount Chief returns the greetings. Then follow Traditional libation and Christian prayers, procession, welcome addresses, etc.

### **Oath Swearing**

The most important function at the Durbar Ground is Annual oath swearing by Asafoatsenguame to the Paramount Chief renewing their allegiance to serve the state and the Paramount Chief whenever he called upon them to do so. The oath is by the ancient wars of Katamanso, Adidome Hogba and Tordzenya.

### **Nondenominational Church Service**

Sunday is marked by nondenominational thanksgiving service at the Durbar venue conducted by participating Christian Churches.

### **Riverside Sports**

Main activities close with riverside sporting activities at Kpomkpo-panya featuring.

1. Tug of peace competition among the women of the Associations.
  2. A canoe race The festival games are usually sponsored by various companies.
- Free activities

### **Free Activities**

After Monday sports, the festival opens into free activities of Dances Beach Party, Excursions on the river Volta, Football Competition, Music cordial greetings, family meetings and departures.

### **Participating Groups:**

1. The main participating groups are Asafoatseme, Wetsoyihi and the Paramount Chief.
2. The Ancient war Dances called (a) Akomfode and (b) Asorkor.
3. Asafo companies leading each clan.
4. Association of Fetish Priest and Priestesses crying their yell Leader, Awe, Awe, Awe, Mass Response, Aweeee, Aweee, Agbae, Blekutsoo Nsu ooo nsu, enamoo enam Manye ooo manyeaa Adubani Kpotooo. This simply means prayer for rain, fish, abundant food and blessing (in the

year).

5. Ada Youth Association and group Awa Brands formed in various towns of Ghana.

### **Interruption**

The Asafotufiami Festival was stopped twice during the first and second world war (1914 – 1918) and (1939 – 1945) because of the gun firing as part of it.

