

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4214



# MUSIC FROM AN EQUATORIAL MICROCOSM

FANG BWITI MUSIC  
(with Mbiri Selections)

Recorded and Annotated by James W. Fernandez



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1973

MUSIC LP



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4214

1. Harp (Ngombi)
2. Preparatory music of harp (2 instruments)
3. Mbiri harp song
4. Mbiri harp song
5. Minkin song
6. Njimba song
7. Minkin song
8. 13 songs of entrance (Minkin)
9. First harp song
10. Harp song
11. Harp song
12. Harp song
13. Harp song
14. Obango chants
15. 8 Mwanga songs  
4 Prayer songs
16. Yombo songs
17. 5 Yombo songs
18. Harp song
19. Harp song
20. Obango dance
21. 3 chained harp songs
22. Obango song
23. Obango song
24. Harp song

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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A New Religion of the Equatorial Forest

This music comes from the Gabon Republic (West Africa) (Fig. 1). It is heard in chapels spreading from the seaside to tiny hamlets upon the plateau deep in the interior. Bwiti (and its sister cult Mbiri) has, in recent decades, spread very widely in Gabon. But it is not likely that active membership surpasses 10,000; less than 10% of the Fang people among whom the music was recorded.

The Fang, now well adapted to the lush growth and obscurity of the equatorial forest, have not lived in this milieu more than several hundred years. They are originally a savannah people, predominantly agricultural, of the northern Cameroun. They were forced into migration by the expansions of the Sudanic kingdoms of the 16th, 17th and 18th century. While forced from their original homes, they themselves made fearsome onslaughts upon the autochthonous peoples of the Equatorial Forest. They were much feared and widely reputed in the 19th century. European journals of popular exploration featured them from the 1860's on...when their villages began to arrive at the coast. In many ways their culture contrasts with the other cultures of the Equatorial Forest. For example, the language they speak, Fang-Bulu, in its addiction to homophones and short utterances and in its emphasis upon tone reminds one of such Guinea Coast tongues as Ewe or Fon. It has been classed as a Neo-Bantu language for that reason though it has a Bantu noun

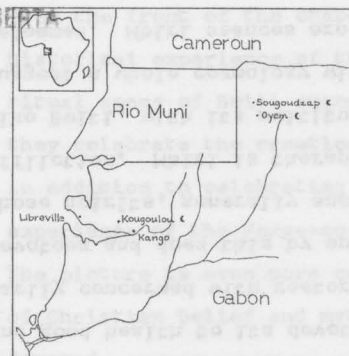


fig. 1

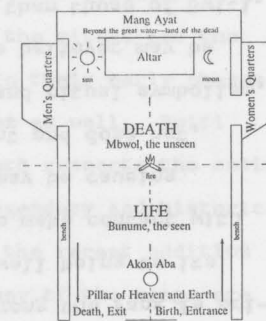


fig. 2

class system. Still the rapid migration of the Fang has made them aware of and adaptive to other lifeways. The Bwiti and Mbiri cults show this adaptation.

The memory of the former savannah home is not lost. Fang migration legends detail the difficulty of entering into the forest from the savannah. They symbolize that difficulty in a tale of being blocked in migration by a giant Adzap tree. The aid of the pygmies was sought and they enabled the Fang to adapt to the forest. Some hunting technology and much hunting lore, practical and magical, has been learned from the pygmies. This symbolic Adzap tree is figured in the central pillar of the Bwiti cult house (the akon aba in Figure 2) and the pygmies often appear in Bwiti origin legends where they are pictured as having brought the eboga plant--tabernenthes eboga--from the forest to the cult founders. In some respects Bwiti ritual is reminiscent of pygmy ceremonies.

Eboga is a psychotropic plant (Fernandez 1971) indigenous to the equatorial forest. It is regularly employed in the religion in small amounts to increase resistance to fatigue. It is taken once or twice in very large amounts in initiation and in order to obtain reunion with the ancestors. In these visionary experiences under high dosages, initiates frequently journey to the land of the dead. This journey is, in effect, a return through the equatorial forests back to savannah uplands. Much of the music on this record is played and sung under

the influence of the eboga plant.

One may identify various branches or traditions of the Bwiti religion. The music in this recording is taken from the "Let Life Begin" (Asumege Ening) branch. Within any branch there is some communication between the various chapels. But there is rarely a hierarchy beyond the local chapel. Local chapels understand that they belong to a larger tradition within Bwiti and members will recognize charismatic founders of that tradition who were not part of their own Chapel. But local leaders consider themselves autonomous in practically every matter. This is in accord with traditional Fang social and political life which was openly structured within villages and which only rarely produced leaders able to exert authority beyond them. Except in periods of internecine strife where the weakness of isolation forced many lineage segments together to seek security in numbers Fang villages and lineages were in constant fission. Junior family segments broke off from their elders and moved westward contributing to the flow of Fang migration. Similarly the Chapels of Bwiti and Mbiri are in constant fission with new chapels in adjacent villages arising suddenly from an undercurrent of disgruntlement not effectively resolved. Nor did the economic life bring Fang together. The Fang traded and bartered widely but they had no established markets. Most of life's needs were satisfied by the extended family by its own labor. With such precedents it is natural that most spiritual needs of the members of Bwiti are satisfied within the extended family of his local chapel. This family, however, in contrast to former days, often has multi-clan membership.

#### Bwiti and Mbiri

Bwiti is the major new religion in Gabon. It has its origins in the coming together of tribes in the trading centers of the lower Ogoe and in the Gabon estuary shortly after the turn of the century. By the 1920's Bwiti was a

flourishing movement already spreading up country from the sea-coast. In its origins Bwiti appears to have been a taking up by the Fang of attractive and dynamic elements from the ancestor cults of southern trans-Ogoe Gabon called variously MBwiti or Bwiti. The Fang ancestor cult was called Bieri. Over time and particularly after the Second World War this syncretism added many Christian elements in liturgy. In the late 1950's and early 1960's most branches of Bwiti among Fang followed a Christian calendar of ritual events concentrating on Easter with six day ceremonies. Christian orientations will be quite clear in the songs presented here. Nevertheless in inception and still in good part Fang Bwiti was a reworking of the Fang ancestor cult in syncretism with southern Gabonese cults. One of the principle declared purposes of Bwiti is to restore that revitalizing relationship with the ancestors that had been abandoned under missionary pressure. At the same time Fang Bwiti devotes itself to the greater powers of the universe and in particular to the Sister of God, Nyngwan Mebege, to whose life-giving benevolence the members appeal. The Sister of God is the power of the night. The moon is her symbol. It is appropriate that Bwiti ceremonies be held as they are at night: from 6:00 P.M. to 6:00 A.M.

The Fang Mbiri cult has a later provenience--after the first world war. It originated also on the Gabonese coast and around the estuaries. It was in origin a reworking of a coastal water goddess cult of the same name. This cult promised wealth and good health to its devotees. Mbiri among the Fang is primarily concerned with restoring physical well being to its devotees and does this by enabling them to make contact with those spirits, generally ancestral, that may be causing affliction. Mbiri is therapeutic in intent and does not, like Bwiti, with its multitudinous songs and ritual symbolism, suggest a whole cosmology within which the believer may be redeemed. Mbiri seances are much shorter than those of Bwiti.



Mbiri may more properly be called a "curing cult." Indeed, Fang refer to Mbiri chapels, which in contrast to Bwiti are generally directed by women, as the "hospitals" of the Bwiti religion. Mbiri is also said to be the religion of this world and Bwiti of the next. Chapels do have a similar appearance but ceremonies in Mbiri are shorter and the intentions more specific.

#### The Bwiti Chapel and Its Ritual Cycle

The Bwiti Chapel (aba eboga--council house of eboga) (Figure 2) is much more than a ceremonial shelter. It is a complex structure divided into symbolic arenas within and between which the ritual proceed in their special order. In most general terms Bwiti is a celebration of the ultimate circumstances of life and death, creation and destruction. Birth and creation are celebrated until midnight and death and destruction after midnight. There are various levels of interpretation of these events. The birth and creation celebrated before midnight is the birth of the participants into the supernatural life of the ancestors and hence their "death" in this life. Similarly the death and destruction celebrated after midnight is at once the death of the soul in the after-life and his birth back into this life. The chapel has both a birth entrance and a death exit which are used according to the various phases of the ritual. In general, rituals move towards the rear of the chapel: from the world of the seen to the life beyond, the unseen world of the dead also associated with the other side of the ocean. Other dance sequences particularly at the beginning of cult when cosmic origins are being sung begin well outside the chapel and dance slowly within.

The pillar at the entrance to the chapel, the akon aba, simulates the adzap tree which blocked entrance into the equatorial forest. The rear of the chapel is associated to the sea. Thus ritual movement reiterates, as it proceeds

from the front of the chapel to the rear, the legendary historical experience of the Fang. But the ritual and the ritual songs of Bwiti encompass more. In their early phases they celebrate the creation of the cosmos as well. Bwiti in addition to celebrating birth and death reenacts the entire experience of the Fang--cosmological, legendary and historical. The picture is even more complicated by the recent addition of Christian belief and myth to which many of the songs are devoted.

There is both a male and a female side to the chapel as well as chambers reserved for each sex. In contrast to traditional cults which were exclusively either male or female Bwiti gives equal place to the two sexes. A men's team dances before midnight and a women's team after. There are thus songs which are sung by women alone, others by men, and still others by the sexes together.

The arrangement of ritual scenes in Bwiti from the brief 3:00 P.M. entrance is the following:

#### Introduction

1. Minkin: dances of entrance into the chapel and invitation to the ancestors. Intermittent, beginning at 3:00 P.M.
2. Njinba: ceremonies of personal prayer, preparation, and foregathering. Held en masse in a hut outside the chapel, 6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

#### Zen Ngombi: Part I (Road of the Cult Harp: Birth and Creation)

3. Zen Abiale: the dances of the birth of the spirit into the after life (syncretized to the birth of the child of man). From early evening until midnight. Interspersed with Obangō--vertiginous dances in which the spirit is shaken free from the body.
4. Nkōbo Akyunge: "Evangile," the ceremonies of final reunion with the ancestors. Final and most direct and powerful prayer to the supernatural. Direction of the "miraculous word" to the membership from the cult leader --nima na kōmbō. Includes a small minkin in which the membership exits to go out into the forest on narrow pre-cut trails in order to invite in any lingering ancestor spirits. Midnight. Songs of the women's quarters, Yōmbō songs, are heard at this time.

#### Zen Ngombi: Part II (Road of the Cult Harp: Death and Destruction)



5. Zen Awu: or the dances of the death of the spirit from the afterlife into this life (syncretized to the death of the child of man who becomes the Child of God). From midnight to first light, interspersed with Obangō.

Conclusion:

6. Minkin: ceremonies of exit from the chapel and farewell to the ancestors. First light until sunrise.
7. Njimba: ceremonies of euphoric after-gathering of the membership for ritual food and relaxed conversation. 8:00 A.M.

This scenario which is characteristic of Asumege Ening, "Begin the Life" branch of Bwiti, is not absolutely fixed in any cult house. Scene development and the use of the song repertoire (over 200 songs) tends to vary with season and with leaders responsible for the cult. But there are always four major categories of scene:

1. Minkin: ceremonies (songs and dances) of exit and entrance.
2. Njimba: ceremonies (songs and prayers) of group cohesion, intercommunication and appeal to the powers.
3. Zen Ngōmbi: ceremonies (songs and dances) particularly celebrating the primordial experiences of the individual (at the level of body tissue, events of satisfaction and depletion) and of his culture (at the level of the mythological events of creation and dispersion). Generally divided into two sub-scenes as life processes or death processes are being celebrated (zen abiale, zen awu), and according as to whether the key instrument is the soft cult harp, ngōmbi, or the intense drums, Obangō. The bamboo sounding board, Obaka, may be played either softly or with resounding beat and hence is an instrument suitable to all kinds of dance.
4. Evangile: ceremonies of communication of the "word" from the powers, and confirmation of the bonds of the spiritual community.

The Instruments, The Music and the Musicians

There are four instruments basic to Bwiti: the 8 string (Egyptian) harp, (ngōmbi); the chest high barrel drum (ngeme), the gong drum (nku), the bamboo sounding stave (Obaka) and the one string musical bow (heng). Occasional use is made of an antelope horn (nlak mvu), of various bells (alena) and of a

merliten (abengy) but these instruments are not central to the rituals. Characteristically the Bwiti members give elaborate symbolic explanations for all these instruments. By far the most important instrument is the cult harp. The sound of the harp is understood to be the voice of the Sister of God. Its power is evident in the fact that harp music is used to "clean out" the chapel before the rituals and its music drives away evil spirits. Its music also lofts the common prayers of the membership to heaven. The sounding box of the harp is associated to the womb and is understood as a spiritual source of life. Its cover of antelope skin is painted half red and half white on the left and right side respectively. It stands thus for the female and the male side of the cult house as well as of every ceremonial event. The eight strings of the harp are the sinews and tendons of the body of the Sister of God (Nyingwan Mebege). They represent her endurance and flexibility. The four highest pitched strings are feminine and the lower four are masculine. When the harp is played these tones intermingle in harmonious ways exactly as male and female intermingle in harmonious ways in the ceremonies. The head of the harp is carved to represent the features of the Sister of God herself.

The most notable contrast in Bwiti music is between the gentle sound of the harp--it can be played, it is true, in a driving rhythm--and the powerful beating of the drums in the periodic dances known as Obangō. The gentle and harmonious dances of the harp, the so-called "roads" of the harp, are thus punctuated throughout the night by the vertiginous dances of the Obangō. The bamboo sounding stave provides rhythmic background for both types of dance. The purpose of the Obangō dance is to free the soul from the body so that it can mingle sociably with the ancestor spirits who have returned to the Chapel from the deep forest. The music of the harp is said to be the music played by the dead in the afterworld. In the more



Christian cults it is said to be the music played by the angels in heaven. Dreams and visions of heaven frequently bring new lyrics and music to the members.

Generalizations about Bwiti music are not easy to make. There is a variety of rhythm and melodic line. No doubt this variety is due to influences from Christian mission music, not easy to detect withall, and perhaps from North African music heard in the seaside cities. The vocal music is antiphonal and in that sense typically sub-saharan. But the calls are given variously by men or women to a mixed choir or to a male or a female choir. The particular call and response groupings depend upon the section of the liturgy and the appropriateness to either males or females of the cosmic events being recounted. In these examples there is more solo singing than actually takes place in the ceremonies. Most of the melodic materials fall within the range of a fifth and more occasionally encompass the minor sixth. In one song (No. 19) the range is a tenth descending from the upper third down to the lowest tone; the tonic. In most of the harp music the player touches the upper octave as the last note of a piece. But the melodic lines in the songs tend to descend, typically ending in a lower tone.

In the majority of songs the initial statement is repeated three or four times although in the lyrics there may be some re-working or interpolation of the original statement. Songs run in sequences. When the sequence, from three to fifteen songs, is completed an incantation is pronounced evoking "the members of the cult, their leaders, and their powers over the suffering of this world; Banzie, Nima Na Kōmbō, Benganga, Bokayé."

The musicians in these selections are all cult members or cult leaders. Bwiti does not purposefully recruit its musicians outside the membership. On the other hand, the pleasures of Bwiti music and dance are well recognized on the outside and probably serve to attract men and women of

musical inclination to the membership. Bwiti harp players are reknowned. It is not an instrument taken up, by those who play it, only during the weekend ceremonies. Harp players frequently go everywhere accompanied by a smaller and more easily portable version of the harp they play during the ten to 12 hours of the Saturday cult. And they can be heard strumming on that smaller harp on every occasion and in any situation. Frequently enough the "beti ngōmbi" is a young man or an older unmarried man. On the one hand it is said that a man devoted to the harp cannot also devote himself to women. And on the other hand, it is said that men who are "sinning" with women are not pure enough to play the harp which, after all, is the voice and the presence of the Sister of God.

#### A Language Note

In keeping with the strong influence of southern Ganonese culture and ancestor cults, particularly those of the Mitsogo, Baloumbo, Etshira and Mpongwe, the songs in Fang Bwiti incorporate words and phrases from these languages. Many of the songs, particularly the prayer songs and the songs of the minkin and njimba are sung, supposedly, entirely in these languages. The Fang Bwitist calls this language "Popi Fang" or "our Latin." It is a language not understood by the majority of the membership and in many Chapels only key words are understood even by leaders. Many of these songs are learned entirely by rote and thus, also, the explanations of them. Naturally where there is no point of reference to a spoken language, these rote lyrics tend to drift and change as they are passed from one chapel to another. Speakers of the original languages are often amused at the result. Because of this often spurious variability, full translations will be provided only for those songs sung entirely or mainly in Fang. These will be, predominantly, the harp songs of the roads of birth and death.

## The Recordings

1. Preparatory music of the Harp (ngõmbi). Early in the evening before and during the Njimba the harp is played softly in the cult house in order to "clean" it. Evil spirits are driven away and the ancestor spirits are, at the same time, alerted to the coming ceremonies. Often

songs may be murmured in a muffled and unintelligible fashion over the harp. Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, November 1959. Performer: Mvõmõ Asumu André.

2. Preparatory music of the Harp (two instruments). Frequently in this cleaning of the chapel, two instruments will be played together. Every Chapel has a number of harp players to spell each other during the long night. This selection shows the driving and lifting quality that can be obtained by the ngõmbi. Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, December 1959. Performers: Mvõmõ Asumu André and Essõnõ Ona † Pastor.

3. Mbiri Harp Song. This is a narrative lament by the leader of a local Mbiri cult house. He laments that men who wish for well being in this world do not listen to the council of the people of Mbiri who can bring it to them. "A kumana me ndele," he sings, which in the Miene language means, "as it has enabled me to easily prosper." Such people ignore the land beyond this one, ekõngi or ebõngi, to which Mbiri can make contact. Such people, not listening to the words of the singer, are condemned to suffer while others prosper. Recorded at Assok Ngoum chapel, Oyem District, Performer Ele Amana Michel.

4. Mbiri Harp Song. Of the same genre as #3, but rather than a lament the song celebrates the power of the harp to carry men into contact with the powers of the hereafter. Recorded at Assok Ngoum Chapel, Oyem District, February 1959. Performer Ele Amana Michel.

5. Minkin song. Song of first entrance into the chapel. (Sung in Popi Fang) The song recorded here follows the group of men and women as, starting from far outside the chapel, they dance their way slowly within. Given the subject matter

it is appropriate the song be led by a woman.

Call: Ezigo zame wondo ya tená tená.  
Response: Yo wé, ezigo zame wondo  
ya tená tená.

This is translated by the members of this Chapel as "The blood, Eve has seen her first menstrual blood." Ezigo wood of the redwood tree is used metaphorically for the menstrual blood. Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, December 1959.

6. Njimba Chants (sung in Popi Fang). These chants take place in a hut accessory to the cult chapel either before or after personal prayers. They seek to prepare the cosmos and the chapel for ensuing ceremony. In this particular selection the ebõka plant is hailed as opening men to the discovery that God is ready to make contact with them in the cult house. The pillar of heaven and earth, mõvanga, is placed ready to mediate that contact. All the authorities of the cult, named in order, also stand ready. There are three stanzas to this selection each ended with the customary incantation: "Banzie, Nima na kombo, Benganga, Bokaye." Recorded at Kougoulou Chapel, Kango District. February 1960.

7. Minkin song of the first entrance into the chapel (sung in Popi Fang).

Soya, soya biga miwõ...God's afterbirth, the egg  
of the spider descends to the sea.

Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, December 1959.

8. Thirteen songs of entrance (minkin) into the chapel. (Sung in Popi Fang) These songs, as all songs of the minkin, recount the creation of the cosmos, the earth and the first men.

a. Engadi na duma...Male and female like lightning  
and thunder come together to  
create the first man.

b. Zambí avanga....God who has created has finished  
with the first Creation. His  
presence is in the water.

c. Soya biga miwo...The afterbirth of the Creator God  
is an Egg floating on the ocean out  
of which the three first beings  
appear.

d. Dido Nzame ye  
bokenge.....The first man is created.

e. Ngomendan eso  
wo ya.....The creation of woman. (Women  
sing, men respond)



- f. Repeat of song a.
- g. Nzambe eyima.....Water and earth are created.  
Water floods the land.
- h. Tiō ah, Tiō di  
mongabenda....In the deluge even Noah loses his  
fire. (This is the end of the  
second series of entrance songs,  
hence the benediction).
- i. Kombi na sō,  
kombi ye.....(This is a song of the third  
minkin celebrating aspects of the  
life of Eyen Zame, "He who sees  
God.") He who sees God, the Child  
of God, is betrayed for money.
- j. Njima me Kakō, ne  
tōngo mwan  
Nzambe.....The gentiles conspire against the  
Child of God.
- k. Ma biga mōtina  
mwan nima.....The Child of God is mocked.
- l. Ko taba nima, mō  
tele mo.....The Child of God is pursued by  
his enemies.
- m. Dissoumba bendembe  
ye monganga.... The Child of God is killed.

Recorded at Sougoudzapville Chapel, February 1959, Oyem  
District. Performer: Mvomo Asumu André.

9. First Harp songs of the Road of Birth and Creation (in  
Fang). After the minkin the members, both male and female, have  
entered into the chapel. This song led by the chapel leader,  
announces the commencement of the song cycle of the ngōmbi  
harp. (It is this song that gives to this particular branch  
of Bwiti its name: Asumege Ening or the "Let Life Begin" branch.)

Ening a kōbe ve a sumeya	Life takes flame it begins already
Tara Zame a sumeya we, wa sumeya.	Father God it has begun there. You begin already.
Beng be sumeya, wa sumeya	The musical bow begins. You begin already.
Ane a kōbe atvia, wa sengye.	It begins as a globule. You are changed.
Ngombi za kwiang, wa sengye.	The Harp arrives already. You are changed.
A sumeya, a kōmoya, a sumeya.	It begins already, it is already formed, it begins already.

Chorus:

Oh, a sumeya	Oh it begins already
Tara Zame a kōbō a sumeya	Father God speaks, it begins already.
Zame ye Mebege, a sumeya	The Father of God, it begins already.

The references in the song are to the beginnings of worship  
brought about by the various instruments and the transforma-  
tions brought about in the members through worship. The  
globule is the female principle of creation which has been  
sent down from the Sister of God as the Spider's egg was sent  
down from God himself. Recorded at Kougoulou Chapel, Kango  
District. February 1960.

10. Harp song of the Road of Birth and Creation (in Fang). An  
early song of this cycle. Here it is sung in solo although in  
cult it is sung by the entire membership.

Nyama, Nyama, Nyama	God, God, God
A lak aki, banganga nyamo.	The egg bursts, adepts of God.
Nzame a kobe ening.	God kindles life
Tara Nzame da ye kire, banganga nyamo	Father God, it finds its place adepts of God.
Nyamo Tara Nzame, da ye kire, banganga nyamo	God Father God, it finds its place, adepts of God.
Banganga myamo oy, Banganga ah etc.	
Banganga ka, Tumengi gi, Mbomayeke, yeke. (Popi Fang)	

The song celebrates the breaking open of the cosmic egg  
sent down by sky spider--dibōbia, carrying out God's will.

The egg is the first point of reference in the endless  
inchoate ocean. The final line in Popi Fang is the beginning  
of an Obangō--the rapid often vertiginous dance to drums.

Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, February 1959.

Performer Mvōmo Asumu Andre.

11. Harp song of the road of birth and creation (in Fang).

An early Harp song of Creation. Customarily sung by the  
entire membership.

Ndende a kobo ening oh, Tara oh.	
Ndende a kobo ening oh, a sighle mbembe.	
A kobo endama, ba ghe kobo	
A kobo ening betara Zame.	
Ndende a kobo ening oh, a sighle mbembe.	
That which is suspended speaks to (kindles) life, Oh Father	
That which is suspended speaks to (kindles) life, it	
descends definitively.	
It speaks to the bat, they speak together.	
It speaks of life, fathers God.	
The suspended thing it speaks of life, oh it forever	
descends.	

The song celebrates the descent of the sky spider's egg which  
brings life down with it and also light to the dark inchoate  
ocean. It chases away the bat, the creature of darkness.



Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel. Oyem District, February 1959.

Performer Mvomo Asumu Andre.

12. Harp song of the Road of Birth and Creation (in Fang).

An early Harp song celebrating the arcane secrets and practices known to God and to the members of Bwiti.

Bwiti mendongo	Secret arcane practices of Bwiti
Mendongo	Oh,Oh,Oh
Oh,Oh,Oh	
Bwiti Mendongo	
Oh,Oh,Oh etc.	

Recorded at Ekwakum, Oyem District, February 1959. Performer Mvomo Asumu Andre.

13. Harp song of the road of birth and creation (in Fang).

This is a song from the midpoint of the creation cycle in which the coming of the great flood has covered over and drowned all the clans.

Meyong me nga dziba	The clans have been covered over
Tara, oh, me dziba	Father they are covered over
Zame, oh, me dziba	God they are covered over
Nyamō me dziba	Old one they are covered over.
Ye me dziba	And they are covered over
Dimamo mikodia,	The waters covered by the rainbow
Mikodia atsenge,	The rainbow by the heavens
Atsenge dibobia.	The heavens by the spider.
Zambe a pōngō	God who prepares all
Mwangabenda, me dziba	God who announced all, they are covered over.
Tara oh, me dziba	Father, oh, covered over.

Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, November 1959.

14. Obango Chants (in Popi Fang). These short chants characteristic of the vertiginous dancing of the obango drumming (see selections 20, 22 and 23) are interspersed between the Harp songs. These chants, here given in solo, come midway along in the second cycle of Harp songs, the Zen Awu or Road of death and destruction.

a) Nzame a дума	The Child of God is struck down by the spear.
b) Nganga ma дума	The Divine One is struck down.
c) Monganga ma дума	The Child of God is struck down and remains a cadaver.
d) Bokayé wo boka oh.	Secret power of the unseen, oh, eboka.
e) Malula, malula, ngōmbi nya wé.	The cadaver of the Child of God is swung over his shoulder.

Recorded at Ekwakum, Oyem District, January 1959. Performer Mvomo Asumu Andre.

15. Eight mwanga songs and four prayers to the Sister of God

(in Popi Fang). The mwanga songs are sung at the funeral of a member of Bwiti and occasionally during cult at the moment in which the Child of God is killed. The prayer songs, there are ten in all, usually take place at midnight but may also occur along with the mwanga songs.

#### I Mwanga songs:

- Nanga keko.....Death has taken the Child of Man.
- Mabiga na membewō...The Child of Man falls into obscurity.
- Ngakō, ngakō.....The Child of Man is revived for his journey to God.
- Ye kōngkōlengō katina luba.....The dead is shown the way to God.
- Oh kwia mbare ye....The dead now makes its way to God.
- Mwangō a ntō mwanga.The dead arrives at the land of the dead beyond the sea.
- Ezige Zama wōndō....Two pygmy girls make their way to the land of the dead.
- Ye mwanga ma bō kameye.....The land of the dead receives the newly dead.

#### II Prayer Songs:

- Ahh kasa ne numé yé.The evocation of the Sister of God.
- Eyame womé, eya yōbe.....The milk of the sister of God is of the sweet water of the vine.
- Menzōgō bigé tame manga.....The spirit of the Sister of God arrives in the water of the Sacred Pool.
- Metongo nos wo metongo nya méwo.....A child is born through intervention of the Sister of God.

Recorded at Sougoudzapville, Oyem District, February 1959.

Performer Metōgō Zōgō Vincent.

16. Yōmbō song of the women's chamber (in Popi Fang). This song though here performed by a male singer is, in cult, exclusively performed by women. This is the second song of a 22 song cycle and is sung just after midnight.

Bōngō oh, me zabe zabe bongo...I proclaim my witness.

The women are proclaiming the various powers that make them fertile. Recorded at Sougoudzapville, Oyem District, February 1959. Performer Metōgō Zōgō Vincent.

17. Five Yombo songs of the women's chamber (in Popi Fang). These songs are mainly devoted to women's fertile powers of creation and sexuality.

- Ah dzige Nzambewo oh Zambewo..the woman is ready to give birth.
- Inanga oh.....the woman gives birth.



- c. Inanga me kwiang oh.....The Sister of God blesses  
the birth lest it be  
stolen.
- d. Ndangeme mikodia, mikodia  
ndangeme.....A glass of eboka (Taber-  
nethes eboka) is brought  
to the Child of Man that  
he may sip of it.
- e. Diveyo, diveya enganga a  
sumena diveya.....the Child of Man takes up  
his powers in this world.

Recorded at Kougoulou Chapel, Kango District, February 1960.

18. Harp (ngombi) song of the road of death and destruction  
(Zen Awu). (Sung in Fang.) A song occurring relatively early  
in the Death Cycle. The explanation; though a good man like  
the Child of God should die yet his soul will go to heaven  
as a star. Shining there it inspires men enabling them to  
constantly renew themselves.

Call: Monanga da kobe ening oh The star speaks to (kindles)  
Response: Ah Zame oh life  
Oh God

Call: Monanga da bele ening oh The star holds life  
Response: e sumeya mbembe. It forever renews itself.

Recorded at Kougouleu Chapel, Kango District, February 1960.

19. Harp song of the Road of Death (in Fang). This song is  
sung towards the end of the second Harp cycle when the Child  
of Man becomes the Child of God.

Mwan a Zambe Kanga a The Child of God vanishes  
king bekombō. following the trail to the  
creators.

A ntō Mwan Zambe vanga He becomes the Child of God,  
Oni Bot. the pacifier, the Savior  
of Men.

Recorded at Ekwakum Chapel, Oyem District, January 1959.

Performer Mvōmō Asumu André.

20. Obangō. One of the vertiginous dances for loosening up  
the soul within the body in preparation for its ecstatic reunion  
with the ancestors.

21. Three chained Harp songs of the Road of Death (in Fang).

These songs are part of those celebrating the death of the  
Child of Man. Very similar songs are sung in the Road of  
Birth (Zen Abialo).

Esama a yime awuaa The group understands death.  
Tara a kōbō awuaa Father speaks of death  
A kobo awu mbembe He speaks of death forever.  
Awu a ne mbembe ah Death is forever Nana Nyepe  
Nana Nyepe

Chorus - Eh Nana Nyepe  
Me Wua Nana  
Nyepe

Chorus: Oh Nana Nyepe  
I die Nana Nyepe

Me wua, enyi a wu fwo,  
Nana Nyepe  
Me wua, Oh, Oh Nana  
Nganga a tua wonga  
mesenge.

I die, he has truly died, Nana  
Nyepe  
I die oh, Nana Nyepe  
The Divine (Adept) has truly  
disappeared from the earth.

It will be noted that the "death" of the singer, as well as the  
individual member is celebrated along with that of the Child  
of God. The death referred to is the ecstatic release of the  
soul from the body. Nana Nyepe is another name for Nyngwan  
Mebege, the Sister of God. The name is from the Tsogo word,  
nyepa, which means "to know how to live, to beautify, to make  
better, hence "she who makes life better." Recorded at  
Kougouleu Chapel, Kango District, February 1960. Principle  
Performer: Ngema Amana Ivindja.

22. Obangō of the Road of Death (in Popi Fang).

Nganga ma dumeya...The Divine One cries out.

Recorded at Kougouleu Chapel, Kango District, February 1960.

23. Obangō of the Road of Death (without song). Recorded  
at Kougouleu Chapel Kango District, February 1960.

24. Harp Song of the Road of Death (in Fang). This is the  
penultimate song of the Death Road and one of the final  
songs of the night long rituals.

Oh Tara, Oh Nana Nyepe  
Ah Nyngwan Mebege

Oh Father, O Beneficent Mother  
Oh Sister of God

Chorus: Ah Oh Zame Mbembe

God is forever

Ngombi a ntō mbamba etō,  
a nto.

The Harp has arrived in its  
good place.

Chorus: A ntō mbembe  
Zame Mbembe

It is surely there, it begins!

Chorus: It is forever there  
God forever

Ngombi a so wa yala etc.

The Harp has come to bring  
order to you.

Chorus: Ngombi Mbembe

Chorus: The Harp forever.

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Suggested Reading:

Balandier, Georges.

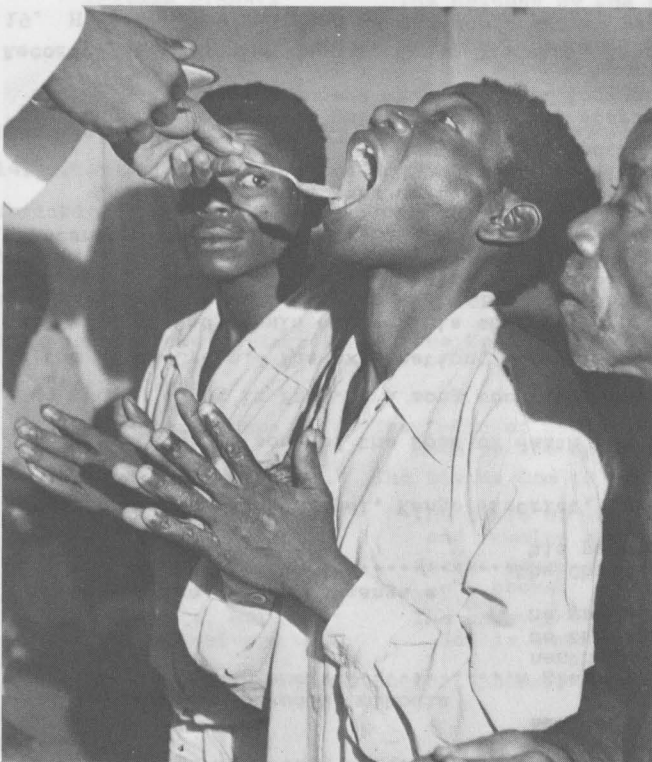
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Communion:  
The members  
take the al-  
kaloid eboga  
(Taberneuth  
eboga) in  
powdered form.  
Ekwakum Chap-  
el Oyem Dis-  
trict.



Beti Ngombi:  
the player  
of the cult  
harp, Ngombi,  
Dissoumbu  
Bwiti Chapel,  
Efulan, Medou-  
neu District.





Midnight:  
Preparation  
for the Yombo  
songs in the  
women's chamb-  
ers. Ayol Chap-  
el, Mitzik  
District.



Women dancers  
replacing the  
men. Ayol  
Chapel, Mit-  
zik District.