



Spiritual Ramifications of Water: The Role of Water Divinity in Some Cultures in Northern Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Background: Some creatures appreciate this resource; water, any time they drink it, indicating the importance of local epistemologies that has been overlooked in the Socio-cultural role of water as a natural resource. For example, an Akan proverb says, “When the chicken drinks water, it shows it to God (Akoko nom nsu a, odze kyere Nyame)”. This means God makes it possible for the chicken to drink water – without raising up its head to the sky the chicken cannot drink. It also declares that for the gift of life and what sustains life, all creatures, and human beings in particular, need to lift up their heads to God in gratitude. This iconic expression of a creature’s dependence on God cryptically and directly captures this paper: Spiritual ramifications of water: The role of water divinity in some cultures in northern Ghana It is living by the obligations that this relationship implies that constitutes the foundation of spirituality in the study areas.

Objective: The aim of this paper is to explore the spiritual role of water in some cultures in northern Ghana, among the Dagaaba, Bossi and the Talensi.

Method: This is purely a qualitative research done by regular immersion into the villages and homes of the knowledge owners in order to engage them in conversations, discourses, and observations in order to gather their experiences. This special Case Study approach engendered formal and informal interactions with the people at various levels and stages of iterative encounters. In terms of specific methods, lived-experiences, concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, desk studies were the techniques used to gather data We used discourse analysis and conversational analysis. The study counted and used the numerous conversations and discourse we engaged the elders and the various functionaries in the communities.

Results: Culturally, water is seen as both physical and spiritual in essence due to the fact that it is a life-giving substance. Water is of more spiritual use than physical utility. Water is used to pour libation as a form of communication with the spirits or prayer forms. Rituals, Festivals Purification, Sacralisation, Restoration, and Revitalization are among ceremonial actions that make use of water.

Conclusion: The skills for water divinity or dowsing still exists amongst the three tribes studied (Dagaaba, Boosi, and Talen) albeit marginal. The gradual disappearance of water divinity is due to modernity incorporated in finding ground water which has rendering this practice redundant. Anecdotal findings indicate that Catholic Priest in their advanced ages have this gift of water divinity or dowsing. These individuals are prepared to share this skill to the benefit of local communities.



Unique contribution: This paper is wakeup call on water's spiritual significance which is deeply woven into cultural practices, going beyond its practical use. Unique contribution includes reminding the youth of today on the use of water in rituals for purification, healing, and connecting with ancestors and deities.

Key recommendations: This act of water divinity should be revitalised amongst local communities as early-warning or precursor to water identification (water systemic forces underground) before drilling is done. The current errors in various borehole drilling enterprises that criss-cross the landscape of various local communities that result in digging many holes in a community before water is found results in environmental degradation. Rarely are those holes ever covered up. Because of the uncertainty of water points, the drilling has to go very deep to establish contact with water. Hence the argument that water divinity is for shallow water establishments makes good as a starting point for the geological surveys and subsequent deep into-the-earth drilling of boreholes.

Keywords: Water, Spirituality, Divinity/ Dowsing, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Functionaries.

INTRODUCTION

Water, across much of Africa, is not solely perceived as a life-sustaining natural resource but a divined element blessed with special spiritual ramifications. It goes beyond an ordinary solvent into a codified liquid with spiritual connotation. Whiles scientist will explain the scientific formation of rainfall; African metaphysics has a different lens for it (Bartholomew, 2010).

Among the Dagaaba, Bossi, and Talensi communities in the northern belt of Ghana, water represents a sacred medium for divine interaction and a metaphysical platform used in traditional rituals, fortification and self purification. These ethnic groups have engaged in practices that attribute sacredness to water, including libation and other rituals. The belief in water as a conduit between the physical and spiritual realms persists despite growing shifts towards modernity.

The Dagaaba, primarily located in the Upper West Region and parts of Burkina Faso, have a robust spiritual and cultural system where water plays a central role in their daily rituals. These rituals include human fertility, agricultural cycles, and the celebration of ancestral deities. Their oral traditions, spiritual practices, and social institutions have all emphasized the sacred nature of water and its ability to link the two interconnected worlds. It has been perceived to connect the ancestors and their current generations (Bosire et al., 2022; Strang, 2023).

Similarly, the Bossi people of Bongo Traditional Area in the Upper East Region, who are descendants of Mamprusi, conceptualized water as a peace building object. The Bongo tribe celebrate distinct spiritual festivals such as the Azambene (fire) festival, where water is often symbolized as peace building platform, ancestral approval, and for ritual cleansing. Among the Talensi of Tongo, water is directly linked to the sacred institution of the *Tingane(earth)*, where it is used in rainmaking, child-naming rites, and the transitioning of the dead into the ancestral world.

Despite these rich spiritual engagements with water among the sampled groups, academic literature on this subject remains skeletal. Existing studies on water in Ghana have largely focused on physical access, sanitation, water governance, and climate resilience. This has often omitted indigenous spiritual interpretations and cultural symbolism of water. While past academic works such as Hagan (2020), have explored water spirituality among the Akan in southern Ghana, there is a conspicuous lack of research that investigates the spiritual connotation



of water in northern Ghanaian. The perspectives of the Dagaaba, Bossi, and Talensi, remain under-explored, opening a significant academic gap that needs refill.

This study addresses this gap by documenting and analysing the spiritual effects of water within the cultural and religious settings of the three selected ethnic groups in northern Ghana. Drawing on immersive fieldwork, conversational interviews, and discourse analysis, the study investigates how water is used not only for physical sustenance but also for its secrecy. Water is also seen as a sacred force in healing, fertility rites, purification, blessing, cursing, and community bonding beyond its physical sustenance. The study also sheds light on the dwindling practice of water divination and now on the brink of disappearance due to modern geological technologies.

The paper contributes to emerging discourses on indigenous environmental knowledge by foregrounding how African traditional societies conceptualize and engage with water beyond its physical purposes. By focusing on communities that are often excluded from dominant water governance narratives, this study offers a culturally grounded lens for rethinking water sustainability. It demonstrates how traditional ecological knowledge systems can support modern water development strategies, especially in enhancing local participation, reducing environmental degradation and retooling disappearing rituals that once shaped human-environment relations.

For these tribal groupings, water divinity is an ancient practice in Africa that is beginning to disappear because of modernity and technology. Recent techniques and act of finding water using various geo-sensing techniques such as remote sensing, drone usages, aerial photography, and the much explosive artificial intelligence, have relegated the spiritual components of water. In a few instances where it is still used in combination with finding underground water to drill boreholes or as stand-alone- to sink hand-dug wells, the practice still serves its traditional purpose.

For the African, the ontology and epistemology of locating underground water is critical in water-use and management. It allows for the built-in reverence given to water (spiritual reverence), and maintains the spiritual linkages between mankind and water in rural Africa. Documenting the vestiges of this practice (water divinity) is the focus of this paper by a group of young academics led by Professor David Millar (a 70-year-old veteran researcher in indigenous research and development initiatives). The prime motive of this work finds locus in a grandiose agenda to documenting indigenous African Sciences and Technologies for the present and generations to come.

Water is highly valued in African cultures, and is seen as both physical and spiritual in essence. Throughout Africa, water has played an integral role in the fertility of fields and the fecundity of beings and things. Three common representations of water are found in African traditions: water as a source of life, as an instrument of purification, and as a locus of regeneration. The task this paper sets for itself is to revisit these dimensions of water as constructs of the Dagara, Boosi, and the Talen of Northern Ghana and delve into the aspects of water divinity or dowsing (Altman, 2002; Bartholomew, 2010; Bosire et al., 2022; Strang, 2023).



REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In Africa, the value of water extends far beyond its practical uses. Water isn't merely a life-sustaining resource; it holds deeper meanings. Water in landscapes has aesthetic value, contributing to mental well-being. Scenic beauty, wildlife, and recreation all play a role. Water features prominently in faith-based traditions worldwide. It symbolizes life, purity, renewal, and reconciliation. Some cultures view water as a gift to care for, while others emphasize its importance for the environment and wildlife (www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/water-africa).

Indigenous cultures often have strong connections between water and place. For them, water is more than a resource; it's part of their identity. Water can be a source of conflict, but dialogue can transform conflicts into cooperation. Water holds heritage value, both tangible and intangible. These values, though challenging to compare with economic assessments, are essential for holistic understanding. Lack of clean water affects social and economic well-being of people. In summary, water's value in Africa transcends utility—it encompasses mental health, spirituality, heritage, and peacebuilding. Understanding these cultural perspectives is vital for sustainable water management. In Africa, the value of water extends far beyond its practical uses.

Cultural Values of Water

Reframing the Cultural Values of Water in Africa

The discourse on the cultural value of water requires a shift from its economic and biological benefit towards a cultural and traditional valuation. As Hagan (2020) and the UNESCO World Water Development Report (2021) observe, water has more than just material relevance as it has symbolic and social elements embedded in it beyond the biological usage.

Culturally, water functions as both a physical necessity and a relational platform. In many African settings, especially those with strong indigenous traditions, water is identified with certain places. It is a vital part of communal and ancestral identity, which is framed by some scholars as "relational values." These values challenge dominant frameworks that reduce water to consumption fluids or economic returns. Instead, they conceptualize water as a source of cultural cohesion, spiritual meaning, and environmental friendship.

Moreover, the spiritual significance of water in African cosmologies calls for greater recognition in current policy and planning processes. Such perspectives question the technocratic management of water resources, which often overlooks the intangible components of water. The symbolic functions of water as a conduit for soul purification, spiritual renewal, and reconciliation inform ritual governance systems that predate colonial water laws (Bosire et al., 2022; Strang, 2023; Alifa, 2023).

The aesthetic and psychological dimensions of water are also significant. The presence of water bodies in landscapes contributes to mental health and social cohesion among settlers and natives. This is one area that has been largely marginalized in conventional water policy discourses. Yet,



these water bodies are getting destroyed in search of globalization and human expansion (Hagan 2020; Bosire et al., 2022; Strang, 2023; Alifa, 2023).

Conflict and cooperation around water resources further illustrate the contested nature of water for its value. Rather than framing water scarcity strictly as a resource related problem, the literature points toward governance deficits and rejection of local voices (Odoemelam et al., 2013). Gender-sensitive approaches to water governance, for instance, remain under-implemented despite their proven capacity to maintain diverse cultural values

Finally, while economic arguments about, they should not eclipse other facets of value. The heritage significance of water is often excluded from cost-benefit analyses, despite its powerful implications for conservation and sustainable development. These invisible cultural dimensions cannot be measured but are central to the realities of water use across the continent.

A well document piece on this subject is done by Hagan in his paper *WATER AND SPIRITUALITY IN SOME AFRICAN CULTURES AND TRADITIONS* (George Panyin Hagan, 2020). The findings in this article the authors here can identify with as akin to the cultures of northern Ghana as well; and hence borrow copiously from. In his work, Hagan (2020) established that the Akan of Southern Ghana have proverb says, “When the chicken drinks water, it shows it to God (*Akoko nom nsu a, odze kyere Nyame*)”.

They use this proverb not only to say that it is God that makes it possible for the chicken to drink water – without raising up its head to the sky the chicken cannot drink – but also to declare that for the gift of life and what sustains life, all creatures, and human beings in particular, need to lift up our heads to God in grateful acknowledgement of his power and goodness – to simply say “thank you God”. The place of water in African spirituality, the place of water in the relationship between human beings and the omnipotent God.

He goes further to posit that African spirituality has a number of clearly discernible tenets. African cultures share a common belief that whatever exists, visible and invisible, is spiritual in nature and is endowed by the Supreme Being, the Creator of all things, with intrinsic dignity, special attributes and distinct power. It is also a common African belief that the Creator had a purpose for creating everything; and gave each entity a definite place and mission in creation (Odoemelam et al., 2013). On the myriad entities in creation, Africans also posit that all existents have mutual spiritual relationships and interact according to a principle of cosmic order.

African cultures characterise water, by virtue of its life-giving nature, as both physical and spiritual in essence – but even of greater spiritual utility than physical. Water is used in important prayer forms in various acts of libation. It is used in ritual acts of purification, sacralisation, reparation and revitalisation – and both for blessing and cursing. Water is used in social interactions, and in the making and breaking of social relationships. As in life we cross many rivers to reach various destinations; water and water bodies also play a role in rites of individual and collective transitions from the profane to the sacred state (Altman, 2002; Bartholomew, 2010; Hagan 2020; Alifa, 2023).



Nowhere, however, is the spirituality of water more evident than in the general mind-set and conviction that water connects all living things directly to the Supreme Being making manifest the importance of the divine in human survival. In the African mind, drought, unfavourable patterns of rainfall, famine and the conflicts that result from these are the consequences of the individual and collective moral and spiritual offences that humans commit against nature and the Supreme Being. In all African cultures, droughts and famines bring communities to reflect on their state of spiritual pollution, degradation and weakness due to various acts that offend the Supreme Being (Rigby, 1968; Lienhart, 1969; Hagan, 2015).

As a cultural ideology, therefore, African spirituality is total in scope. It is multi-dimensional and holistic, all encompassing, compelling and enduring. Even as modernity and foreign religious beliefs attack it on all sides, African cultural spirituality persists; and water – especially lack of rains, dying rivers and lakes, collapse of eco-systems and spreading desertification due to the impact of human activity on the climate – yearly keeps reminding us that we need to take care of nature so that nature might take care of us.

www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/water-africa.

In all Akan communities, there are taboos regarding rivers, streams and lakes. There are local taboos unique to particular rivers, streams and lakes. Some rivers cannot be fished. Fish from some rivers cannot be fried. Some rivers and lakes are closed to fishing periodically and ritually opened. Lake Bosomtwe in Ashanti hates dugout boats – and so only floating logs are used over it. But there are also general rules about rivers and lakes. It is taboo to cross lakes and rivers with dead bodies – and so at each river crossing, those transporting the dead people must pour libation to the spirits of the rivers to permit the crossing. Women in their menstrual period cannot go near any water body or cross them (Rigby, 1968; Lienhart, 1969; Hagan, 2015).

Comparatively recently, it came to the attention of the public that girls in a certain town in the Central Region of Ghana were restrained by this taboo from crossing a river to go to school during their menstrual period. Fear of unknown mystical sanction has enabled these taboos to persist – and so tradition trumps modernity (Nketia, 1963). The Sea has its Rest Day, observed on Tuesday. When a whale beaches dead, it is taken as an indication that the sea is polluted. A ban would be put on fishing till the funeral and burial rituals are performed for the whale. Like the sea, the Earth too has its rest day - Friday in some communities and Thursday in others (Beidelman, 1961; Hagan, 2015).

The African Perception of the World – the Sky and the Earth are the Poles of Human Spirituality – and Water from the sky supports life on earth. ((Altman, 2002; Bartholomew, 2010; <https://www.unesco.org/reports/wwdr/2021/en/cultural-values-water>).

African myths of creation and the Akan myth on predestination presented above posit that African spirituality has two existential poles. All entities have their beginning in the Creator in the realms above, and all entities come to dwell and realise their destiny on earth in the realms below. The African therefore relies on the relationship between the sky and earth, the spiritual



and the material to explain all events in life. The Akan myth calls water bodies the first born of the Creator clearly to suggest that to create living things God had to create water and water bodies first (Rigby, 1968; Lienhart, 1969; Hagan, 2015).

In conclusion, paraphrasing Llienhardt (1961: 1964), Nketia (1963) and Hagan (2015), water plays an important role in African spirituality for reasons that are not difficult to discern. Water is not only the element uniquely identified with physical existence and the survival of human, plant and animal life, water is also the vital common link between all living things– the element that all living things share – and, as Africans see it, the one thing that reflects the dependency of all living things on the Sky God.

Water also creates awareness of the fundamental qualities or properties – as distinct from substance – that are critical to sustaining human life in the spiritual as in the physical state. Water gives life and well-being only when clean and pure. The purity of water is what assures wellness of human life; and impurity or pollution of water causes illness and compromises life. As water makes evident the need for purity for good physical health, so does it make evident the need for purity, truthfulness, goodness, honesty and transparency as qualities of personal life that cultures make the hallmark of moral discipline and spiritual health and vitality of individuals and communities.

Human settlements are created near water bodies that serve as a lifeline for human survival and also for the flora and fauna in the ecological system. In the celebrating community life, African cultures invariably celebrate water bodies as sources of life and call them divine, indeed, the first offspring of God. When the last water bodies dry up, forests would disappear and no human settlement would survive.

In African cultures water occupies a special place in the hierarchy of existential values. The value of water is only next to the value of life; and so, water is an ever-present element in religious and social celebration of life – in festivals and rites of individual and community transitions. Regular rainfall and proper seasons we take as the sign of God's favour; and we see irregular droughts and famine as a sign of God's displeasure for human offences – a constant reminder that we have obligations to the Creator as well as to nature (Altman, 2002; Bartholomew, 2010).

In this connection as droughts and famine pose serious existential threat to life and engender restlessness, confusion, conflict and war, the protection of the environment and of water sources becomes an imperative of governance – indeed a priority. The culture of spirituality of life creates an ideology that unifies the quest for material and social prosperity with the need to preserve and protect the harmony of nature and the integrity of the seas, rivers, lakes, plants and animals in nature. This makes the conservation of nature an imperative of good governance and peace among peoples.

Africa cannot ask the world to come back to the affirmation of the spirituality of nature or the spirituality of water in particular. However, the world has reached a critical point where it can



and must assist Africa to find ways of using the belief in the spirituality of nature to preserve the seas, rivers, lakes and forests in Africa as a lifeline for humanity into the future.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic case study approach, characterized by sustained immersion in the villages and homes of knowledge holders. The researchers engaged participants through in-depth conversations, discursive interactions, and direct observations to understand their experiences. This ethnographic orientation allowed for both formal and informal engagements across various stages of the fieldwork, enabling iterative and reflexive data collection. Specifically, the study utilized participant observation, unstructured interviews, and thematic analysis to gather and interpret the data.

Lived-Experiences: We relied on our own lived experiences, our previous investigations and documentations, desk studies, with a few discourses analysis, phased assertions, and critical arena analysis to triangulate positions so established. We used the experiential learning theory, which works in four stages.

Concrete Learning: We used our new experiences, we interpret our past experience in a new way in terms of our local value system, socio-cultural practices, etc.

Reflective Observation: We then reflected on our experience individually and merge them for collective reflection. Use the lenses of our experience and understanding to reflect on what we have been observing for the past years as adults, formed part of our findings and discussions.

Abstract Conceptualization: We then formed new ideas and adjusts our thinking based on the experience and their reflection we had about the topic.

Desk Studies: We used desk studies in analysing and synthesizing existing data. We did a lot of scouting through published reports, articles, studies, and other publicly available materials to extract valuable knowledge and make informed decisions.

Discourse Analysis and Conversational Analysis: Lastly, we counted and used the numerous conversations and discourse we engaged the elders and the various functionaries in the communities in to analysis to obtain data on indigenous spiritual knowledge practices.

All community level dialogue interactions were directly in the local languages. The various methods allowed for *triangulation* of findings. Despite all efforts, the groups that provide key information were all male (elders and youth); 56 of them in total – women were reluctant and/or unable to provide information when contacted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Feminization of Water

In Northern Ghana women play a key role in water discourses. The burden of collecting water primarily falls on women and girls. About three-quarters of households in fetch water from sources away from their homes and over 80% of this function is by women. A single fetch might also take up to one hour. Hence there is rooted inequalities in the distribution of domestic labour as regards water collection.

The time invested in water collection is considerable, including travel to the water source, queuing, filling containers, and the return journey. These statistics reflect the disproportionate impact on women and indicate broader implications for:

- Time diverted from other productive activities affects overall well-being.
- Women's time spent collecting water limits their participation in income-generating activities.
- Girls' education may suffer due to water-fetching responsibilities.
- This disproportionately affects women and girls living in slums and informal settlements.

Hence, addressing the feminization of water collection in Africa involves recognizing the gender disparities, promoting equitable access to water, and alleviating the burden on women and girls (Genevieve et al., 2023; UN Report, 2021).

African spirituality is deeply intertwined with the natural world, and water holds a special place within it. It means that water has a spiritual significance in African cultures (Sivapalan et al., 2012; Infield et al., 2021). Water as spiritual essence includes:

- African cultures characterize water as both physical and spiritual.
- Water's life-giving nature makes it essential for survival, but its spiritual utility is even greater.
- Water is a bridge between the physical and spiritual realms, connecting humans to the omnipotent God.
- Water plays a crucial role in African religious practices.
- Water is used in important prayer forms during acts of libation.
- Water symbolizes a fresh start and the washing away of impurities.

The Boosi say Water births life—from the womb's amniotic fluid to the big rivers that criss-cross Africa. Baptism rituals use water to cleanse and initiate. Rain, falling from the heavens, purifies and rejuvenates the earth. Tears, both sorrowful and joyful, cleanse the soul.

Among the Dagaaba tradition, water honors the Kpeme - deities and spiritual ancestors governing various aspects of life. For the Dagaaba these life forms are largely feminine – the earth, her babies, and her properties. Hence spiritual water, often associated with feminine



energy, flows through existence, weaving connections between realms. Across the three cultures studied and spiritual traditions, the feminization embodies nurturing, intuition, creativity, and receptivity. Water, with its fluidity and life-giving properties, resonates deeply with these qualities. In ancient mythologies of the Dagaaba, Boosi, and Talen, water bodies often have goddesses and these invariably are feminine.

Spiritual Significance of Water

The presentations on this sub-chapter are similar as in (Fillmore et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Chief et al., 2016: 2019 and Kozich et al., 2018;)

Use of water during rituals, festivals among the Talensi

In Talensi culture, water is seen as both physical and spiritual in essence due to the fact that it is a life-giving substance. However, the Talensi culture considers water to be of more spiritual use than physical utility. There are many different actions of libation that involve the use of water in key communication with the spirits or prayer forms. Rituals, Festivals Purification, Sacralization, Restoration, and Revitalization are among ceremonial actions that make use of it.

Additionally, it is utilized for both blessing and cursing purposes. Interactions with other people, as well as the formation and dissolution of social ties, all include the usage of water. At the same time as we travel over a multitude of rivers (scared groove etc.). In order to get our ancestors at different destinations, water and bodies of water also play an important part in the rituals that are performed to mark the shift from the profane to the holy condition. So, instance, a Talensi man will say to the smaller gods in Taleni as; *Nbani bawu'osuo wooi nsee kagna hikikiank ndetaak kowuo paatiyamaais kaa baa nee maipaa naayin koo so mti.*

Literarily meaning I pray that you, my ancestor, will come to me wherever you are, whether you are on earth or above it, and carry this water to God. This simple means every Talensi man knows that our ancestor or other spirits need water to perform whatever they are doing.

Rites after Harvest (Thanksgiving Sacrifice)

The narratives that are included in this research are of the opinion that, following the harvest, the people perform a sacrifice to the "*Tingane*" and the family gods. At the beginning of the dry season, which is actually known as the "*Sapelego – gunorege*" literally meaning between November and January. As a result of their pleading for rain, which has been given, they have had a satisfactory harvest.

This event was related with the words "*Daa*," "*Boaram*," which literally imply a sacrifice of gratitude. It is frequently regarded to be a traditional festival of the Talensi subgroupings of the Frafra. When it comes to the celebration of festivals among the Talensi, the spiritual leaders, known as *Tindan* or *chief*, would meet with the soothsayer, who will prescribe spirits for the event. Water is used in the brewing of *pito* from guinea flow, which early millet (also known as "*Naarega*").



The procedure for the rituals or rites for sacrifice

The Tindan first sends the message to the elders of his clan about the date of the ceremony. Every household owner ("*Yirdan*") will also brew their pito by using water for the ceremony. On the day fixed for the ceremony, the elders or their representatives would take fowls, guinea – corn, or early millet flour with them in calabashes. They will all gather at the community "*Tingane*" and sit on the ground.

The Tindan receives the items and proceed as follows;

He would take flour from each clan elder and mix it with water from a calabash (a "bagere-wula"). He then kneels before the "Tingana" and pours water upon the stone that is said to hold the collective energy of the neighborhood. Some of these stones, usually surrounded by a cluster of trees, may appear cone or flat shaped. In the pouring of the libation, we proceeded by killing the fowls and animals. He will cut their throats and pour the blood onto the stone while cutting the throats of the fowls the "*Tindan*" chants or prays as follows:

You have provided us with food per your request, and now we are here to give you a gift of animals, birds, pito, and guinea - corn water (or "Zoom-Koom"). "*Toe la fo zom paa yinne la fo belem*", literally meaning take this up to God and beg, is the standard pattern for chanting to the "Tingana" and after the sacrifice, the pito is drunk in celebration. This is similar to the reports given by Hagan (2020), Bosire et al. C2022) and Alifa (2023).

The "Golob" festival among the Talensi is the pre-harvest festival where we celebrate for good rains to season the sowing of crops. During this festival a Tindan made a sacrifice and pour libation to the ancestor and said it in Taleni as: *Tii Wai Golobu sea'ina sommah yaa 'naa tediti kowu katii' saayi saayikabotii*.

This literally means that after the rituals and sacrifice of this Golob festival with water and flour, we expect our ancestors to give us one rain fall for sowing of our crops.

Rain Rites (During Drought Time)

Rain rites in case of severe drought are performed at the "*Tingane*" as follows; usually, if there seems to be drought within the sowing season or there is delayed rain, the elders will go to the "*Tindan*" and ask for an explanation. The "*Tindan*" (the spiritual leader) will approach the soothsayer for the cause of the drought or delayed rain. The Soothsayer approach will prescribe some sacrifice or the appropriate atonement to avert the misfortune. Upon this, the "*Tindaana*" or the "*Tindan*" will inform the community elders of the outcome of his consultation. He will then fix a date for the sacrifice.

The elders and sectional headmen or "*kanbana duuma*" would each take some flour (ground by a woman or wife of the landlord) with them in calabashes. They would all gather at the "*Tingane*" and sit on the floor. The "*Tindaana*" or "*Tindan*" will take flour from each clan elders and throw it onto the "*Tingane*".



The *Tindan* will say this in *Talen as*; *Till yaana baa dei – naa da zoee ka – koowu kginaa nykue naa’ zone’ nee’ aarhi saapunee’*

Literarily means telling the “*Tingane*” that there is no water to mix with the flour that should be poured on the shrine dedicated to the rain deity to indicate that due to the drought, they do not have water to mix the flour. Hence the (“*Zoom – puuguro*”) in *Talen* mean raw flour.

The outing ceremony Ritual of a child

Among *Talensi*, there is a believe that the ancestor’s play a role in creating children. Before carrying out the outing ceremony of a child the father will first of all consult a diviner or soothsayer on the future events of the child. During this consultation, it might be revealed to the father by the soothsayer that the child will either like to crawl out by itself or to be sent out by a pre – puberty girl within the household or may be a sister of the child’s father who is married in a different clan known as the “*Pogeyabiliga*”.

After consultation with the soothsayer, the child ‘s father will proceed with the sacrifice of a fowl to his ancestors by adding water for guidance and protection through -out the period of the woman’s pregnancy in *Talen* language as; *Nmarib noowu – nezone’kobu’ tii’rii’ya nee’ yam – sommne ka – pua duusumma’ nee’ billkaa*.

Worship of the ancestors

The *Talensi* believe that the worship of the ancestors is a central element of their religion. In explanation, they mentioned that these ancestors were once people who lived on earth and who have now moved into the spiritual world through death. They claimed that the ancestors, although dead and have disappeared from the physical world of the living, are invisible but effective and through the special medium of religious rituals are accessibl as indicated by Hagan (2015).

They believe that the ancestors are called upon in many places, for example before a trip, before sowing after the first rain, before harvest, before eating freshly harvested grain, at birth, marriage and death and before a man enters his house of love. In *Talensi* language as; *Tiimeeyiinmba’ nanenuue pei’nee’ ka baa kapbenetiima’ ka wutie*

On such occasions, “*zomkom*” in *Talensi* language which mean (millet flour mixed with water) can be poured over the ancestors. In times of crisis or when the ancestors demand a special sacrifice, people can offer chickens or guinea fowl with or without *Pito* (locally brewed beer).

It is an acknowledgment of the ancestors and an invitation to them to be part of the living descendants and bring prosperity. According to one participant and key informant in this study, they often said this in offering libation *Talen* text: “...*Mba on be teng, duog na ne edie kuom ne nuo, kabah te sasong ni, ka gosom gwih. Da bah ka te wom buo be kaheg ga...*”

This is translated as —my father (ancestor) who is in the earth, arise and receive water (libation) and chicken and cause good rains to fall and grant sound sleep for families. Do not let us hear of



any disaster or wailing in the land or community. Their people to come from different places to consult these people.

The Ritual of Shaving and Bathing

Among the Talensi, a dead person must take a bathing and shaving because they believe that a dead person is traveling to the ancestry world. During the shaving and the bathing of the dead they use water in the processes. This what they say in Talen language as; *Tinagakulii' zoonia kuuwline naarhi buzurri zuubaari zo putaaa kabupoa ka buzurri zo punoaaahii*

This literally means, the deceased's hand is used to retrieve a part of the water and wet their hair three times for a man and four times for a woman from an earthenware jar placed close to the body. After that, the undertaker soaks the entire head of hair and shaves it with a sharp razor as usual. Because it is against our traditional beliefs to pour or drop water on another person's head, the deceased's hand collects water from washing his /her hair before the undertaker does so.

Water Divinity or Dowsing Process among the African Tradition

In African traditional practices, Water Divinity is believed to be a spiritual connection to water bodies and their guardians, often revered through ancestral worship and rituals. It is generally considered a divine gift one is born with, though in some cultures, it may be awakened or nurtured through initiation and mentorship by elders or spiritual custodians. These findings in line with the findings of Altman (2002) and Bartholomew (2010).

Is it a Gift or Acquired?

Water Divinity is typically seen as an innate gift, inherited through ancestral lineage or spiritual calling. However, some traditions allow its cultivation through spiritual discipline, training, and rituals under the guidance of a diviner or priest.

Can It Be Passed On, and How?

Yes, the knowledge or spiritual mantle of Water Divinity can be passed on, often through ceremonial rites, blessings, and the symbolic transfer of sacred objects. This inheritance usually occurs from elder to apprentice or within family bloodlines recognized by the community.

Dowsing (Water Divining)

Dowsing, also known as divining or water witching, is an ancient method used in African rural communities to detect underground water sources using natural tools and intuition. The practice is deeply rooted in tradition and is often guided by spiritual sensitivity to the earth's energy.

Prepare Your Rods

The dowser typically uses a Y-shaped stick or two separate rods held in each hand across one another to act as conductors for detecting water beneath the earth. Holding the rods with palms upward allows for natural movement when the rods respond to underground water.



Clear Your Mind

Before beginning, the dowser clears their mind through deep breathing and concentration, focusing their energy and intention on finding water. This mental clarity is believed to enhance the dowser's sensitivity to subtle natural cues.

Begin Dowsing

The dowser walks slowly across the land, sweeping the rods steadily over the surface while maintaining concentration. In larger fields, they move in straight paths; in smaller spaces, they pause frequently to observe any rod activity.

Watch for Movements

When the Y-rod or crossed rods detect water, they may twitch, dip, or cross in a distinct motion that signals the presence of a water vein or source. This reaction is interpreted as guidance to dig or mark the spot for further investigation.

Diagnostics presented to the researchers by local experts

- I. Looking out for spots where anthills and shea trees coincide.
- II. Common feeding grounds for water birds (*"Bankaru, Telantoe and Ti-goe"* - Pepee Ducks).
- III. Spots where livestock feed around or stay around when not feeding
- IV. Late evening you see vapour emerging from very limited specific spots on the land.
- V. **Seismic** feeling of bobbling/ boiling beneath your feet when you stand on a spot.
- VI. Valleys that are stone free and rock free and wedged as canyons.
- VII. Semi-permanent wet spots (**aquifers**) with some green even during the dry season.

Additional diagnostics presented to the researchers by local experts

- I. Coincidence of shea and anthill further confirmed by the presence of an Ebony Trees (the Ebony Tree is the tree of the water spirit), are a sign of underground water availability.
- II. Growing of water-indicative plants even during dry season (such as *"Bollo"* – Euphebia / and *"Saliem"* Wild Yam), are critical to water point determination.
- III. Life-forms in the earth (*"Bong Vur"* – earthworms and termites) are also used in combination to determine water points.
- IV. When digging (a grave or well) when the sides start peeling off; this is indicative presence of water in the area.



CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that the skill for water divinity or dowsing still exists amongst the three tribes studied (Dagaaba, Boosi, and Talen) albeit marginal.

The gradual disappearance of water divinity is due to modernity incorporated in finding ground water which has rendering this practice redundant.

However, such modernity has come along with it, severe pollution and environmental degradation. Just visit a village community that is receiving a borehole the first time, the mounting of dust and debris left behind, coupled with the number of dry holes left uncovered is becoming a nuisance to ground water acquisition.

Anecdotal findings indicate that Catholic Prest in their advance ages have this gift of water divinity or dowsing. These individuals are prepared to share this skill to the benefit of local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that this act of water divinity should be revitalised amongst local communities as early-warning or precursor to water identification (water systemic forces underground) before drilling is done. The current errors in various borehole drilling enterprises that criss-cross the landscape of various local communities that result in digging many holes in a community before water is found results in environmental degradation. Rarely are those holes ever covered up.

Because of the uncertainty of water points, the drilling has to go very deep to establish contact with water. Hence the argument that water divinity is for shallow water establishments makes good as a starting point for the geological surveys and subsequent deep into-the-earth drilling of boreholes.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions.

Thomas A. Agana and Maxwell T. Ba-an conceived the study, including the design, Maxwell T. Ba-an and Katherine K Millar collated the data, and Thomas A. Agana and Maxwell T. Ba-an handled the analysis and interpretation as well as the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials.

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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