AKAN AND EGYPTIAN SYMBOL COMPARISONS: PART 1

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The MOCHA-Versity Institute of Philosophy and Research

luntu/lumtu/muntu

In an ongoing effort to demonstrate the viability of the Philosophic Cognancy Method (PCM) for African cultural comparative studies, I will be conducting an ongoing series of short blogs that will highlight ways that we can demonstrate either parallels, interactions with or migrations from the ancient Nile Valley civilizations with that of the rest of Black Africa. In this brief discourse we are going to compare some royal insignia from the Akan of Ghana with that of the royal insignia from ancient Egypt.

Conceptual Assumptions of the Study

Based on linguistic studies from the likes of Chiekh Anta Diop, Rkhty Amen Wimby, Um Ndigi, Mubabinge Bilolo, Alain Anselin, Theophilus Obenga, GJK Campbell-Dunn, Modupe Oduyoye, Aboubacry Moussa Lam and countless others in the field of Africana linguistics, the establishment of the relationship between the ancient Egyptian and Black African languages (mainly of Kongo-Saharan) is well established. The linguistic studies over the past 5 decades had provided enough information to seriously challenge the current classification of African languages in general and the ancient Egyptian language in particular. This job Dr. Theophile Obenga has taken head-on in his publication *Origine commune de l’egyptien ancien, du copte et des langues negro-africaines modernes: Introduction a la linguistique historique africaine* (Common Origin of the Ancient Egyptian, Coptic and Modern Negro African Languages: Introduction to African Historical Linguistics). To demonstrate why African linguists compare Ancient Egyptian to the Kongo-Saharan languages is beyond the scope of this blog post.
Sufficient to say that their works speak for themselves and anyone can consult them on their own time. I will demonstrate the viability of the African school of linguistics in the upcoming publication *Ogun, African Fire Philosophy and the Meaning of KMT* (2011).

Secondly, archeological data from the likes of Felix Chami, GJK Campbell-Dunn, Aboubacry Moussa Lam and S.O.Y. Keita have already demonstrated that the ancient Egyptian civilization was an amalgamation of various ethnic groups in ancient times who created a federation of nomes after the desiccation of North Central Africa now called the Sahara (Kayinga by the ancient Kongo-Bantu who migrated from there in ancient times). Not only that, but that the Egyptians were involved in trade with central and South Africa since predynastic times (see Chami 2006). As a result of many factors including droughts, internal wars and invasions throughout ancient Egypt’s 3000+ years of political history, small waves of migrations of its citizens found their way throughout central and west Africa. Some of these known migrants are the Wolof, Fulani and Lebu of Senegal, the Akan, Dogon and Dagara of Ghana/Mali/Burkina Faso, the Yoruba and Igbo of Nigeria, the Bassa of Cameroon/Sierra Leone/Mozambique/Kongo, the Baluba of central Kongo and the Zulu/Nguni tribes of eastern and southern Africa.

Many authors who have studied their oral traditions, religious rites and languages have concluded that these groups (and others unnamed) lived in what was then referred to as “upper Egypt” and the Sudan (with the Bassa and Nguni deriving from Ethiopia). It is because of these histories and more that allow us to do cross comparative studies with the ancient Egyptian civilizations and those of Black Africa in general. One way to confirm the oral traditions of the people is to compare the iconography of the people and see how similar are the signs and to see if they stand on two legs: form and meaning. Our assumption here is that Egypt was a Black African society, whose language belongs to the Kongo-Saharan language family (Obenga 1992, Carruthers and Karenga 1986, Diop 1954, Bilolo 2010), for which there were migrations into and from places like Central Sahara, Ghana, Nigeria, Kongo, Uganda, Chad, etc., into Egyptian society. With these facts, we contend that comparing cultures from areas from which scholarship has demonstrated migrations from and into Egyptian society, can therefore provide us with meaningful content which can be used to directly interpret ancient Egyptian phenomena.

**Method**

The method is simple. We first inspect two or more signs from our cultures under examination and we look for similarities in *form, function and meaning* (the holy triad in comparative studies). If we get a match in all three areas, we have a “Philosophical Cognate.” If a match is found, the question now becomes, “is this a result of diffusion, common origin or coincidence? The criteria of *form, function and meaning* makes coincidence, statistically, highly improbable. That’s like saying that the Khoisan in the Kalahari Desert could somehow think of the *Transformers* Autobots logo on their own without any interaction with someone from the United States. If we see a Khoisan elder with an Autobot tattoo on his arm, we know there was some kind of interaction between the U.S. and the Kalahari.

We also operate under the African priestly proverb which states, “Speak in your own name, never in mine.” What this means is that on one’s travels along the *Superhighway of Wisdom*, you will no doubt nourish your mind with teachings that have been enriched by countless generations of sages, but they insist that you must remain truthful to the voice that brought you into life or the voice of your destiny (Imhotep 2009, Kajangu 2005). In other words, although you have been given teachings from various sources, it is only when you internalize them and adapt the symbolism or teachings to one’s own cultural perspective and social environment will you benefit from your study. Africans shun whole-sale copying. They encourage adaptation, modification and enhancement. Many who belong to an indigenous priestly tradition can attest to this fact (see Imhotep 2009 appendix B “Simultaneous
Validity”). Africans in ancient times and the present travelled across the continent in search for wisdom. Ideas are bound to be shared as Africa is all about intellectual exchange.

With this said, signs and symbols are not going to be exact replicas across the content. There will be aspects of the iconography that will match exactly, while there are other modifications that will be unique to the respective cultures. So one has to have a “priestly eye” that can see through the hidden layers of reality to see the underlying spirit that is visible through the signs under comparison. With that said, we now begin our discussion.

**Ancient Egypt Royal Insignia**

![Ancient Egyptian Royal Insignia](image)

The image above is called a $\text{Snw}$ in the ancient Egyptian language (cartouche by the Greeks). A $\text{Snw}$ is an oblong enclosure with a horizontal line at one end, indicating that the text enclosed is a royal name. The $\text{Snw}$ is an expanded $\text{Sn}$ ring (Gardiner signs N37-N35-V9) which is a symbol for eternity and also a sign for “protection.” This insignia came into prominent use during the Fourth Dynasty under King Sneferu. The name enclosed in the above image is that of Tutankhamen (Tutuankoma among the Akan).

**Akan Royal Insignia**

![Akan Royal Insignia](image)

The above image is of an Ashanti/Akan throne (mislabeled a stool) called Ahennwa. The Ahennwa is a symbol of national identity, cultural integrity and rightful governance (Karenza 2008: 50). According to Peter Sarpong in *The Sacred Stools of the Akan* (pg26) he states, "We have just seen that the stool, in general symbolizes the soul of the nation. This is more so in the case of the chief's stool. When we talk of aheenwa we mean the state because
the *ahennwa* is the spirit or soul of the nation." The famous Akan stools also mark a territory. The Akan say, “Where there is no stool, there is no state.”

**CROSS COMPARISONS**

For the person not trained in African symbology, the similarities between the two symbols may not be obvious. But to those who are symbolically literate, the two icons are speaking loudly at us in the same language. Remember that the $Snw$ is an elongated form of the $Sn$ sign. Maybe a side-by-side comparison will help bring things together for us here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akan/Ashanti Ahennwa Throne</th>
<th>Ancient Egyptian $Sn$</th>
<th>Ancient Egyptian $Snw$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Akan/Ashanti Ahennwa Throne" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ancient Egyptian $Sn$" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ancient Egyptian $Snw$" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We will now go through our stated criteria to see if we have a match using our *Philosophic Cognancy Method* (PCM).

**FORM:** All three symbols utilize a closed loop standing on a flat base foundation on the circle’s tangent. The difference between the Akan throne and the ancient Egyptian $Snw$ is that the *Ahennwa* has a downward curved seat that rest on the top of the closed loop and the Egyptian royal insignia has nothing on the top. However, the Egyptians had their own thrones as well that are very similar to the Akan thrones—the difference between them being the Egyptian thrones had a back-rest to them, while the Akan/Ashanti thrones do not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutankhamen Throne</th>
<th>Ashanti Throne</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Tutankhamen Throne" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Ashanti Throne" /></td>
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</table>

**FUNCTION:** Both the *Ahennwa* and the $Snw$ serve as royal insignia. This means they are both icons for kings and queens. The difference, however, between the two is that in ancient Egypt the $Snw$ enclosed the name of the King or Queen, while the *Ahennwa* doesn’t enclose the name of the King or Queen. They are also both signs of national unity and the state.

**MEANING:** The modern Egyptian dictionaries give the definition for $Snw$ “protection” or “ring.” The symbol was also used to represent eternity in some insignia. It should be noted that a common sound shift in world languages is from the $sh$ sound into /s/ or the /h/ sound. We have the following consonantal matches:
Ahennwa (with –w being a semi-consonant)

It should be kept in mind that the Hene/Ohene/Ohin (from which ahennwa derives) among the Akan is the leader of the military (Asante and Abarry, 1996: 188); so an association between $nw “protection” and Ohene “Chief Military Officer” may be a valid comparison as the military protects the nation. The $n symbol is often depicted in the claws of the avian vulture (mw.t, CiMawu) or the hawk of $rw in Egyptian iconography. Both of these symbols, in Egypt and in Ghana/Nigeria, are symbols of royalty. As a matter of fact, the Egyptian word $rw corresponds to the Bantu word Kulu which is a term that can mean “elder, chief, god, or ancestors.” All of these associations are charged with the protection of the community in African societies. The following comparisons are noteworthy and help to validate our linguistic comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twi</th>
<th>Egyptian</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ho</em> “exterior, self”;</td>
<td><em>s3</em> “exterior, surface”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>hu</em> “fear”;</td>
<td><em>s3</em> “frightening (king with crown), arousing fear”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>home</em> “inhale”;</td>
<td><em>snsn</em> “inhale, smell” (reduplication)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>huru</em> “to boil”;</td>
<td><em>snw-</em>$ “cook, boil,” *snw-$ “boil, overcook” (r/l/n common sound shift)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>huruw</em> “jump, skip, leap”;</td>
<td><em>s3</em> “jump”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(keep in mind the <em>i</em> could be an /l/ or /r/ sound, see Bernal 2006:194-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hinhim</em> “shake, tremble”;</td>
<td><em>n-hm</em> “tremble, shake,” <em>nhmhm</em> “roar, thunder”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*<em>home</em> “rest, recreation”;</td>
<td><em>n-hn</em> “rest,” <em>hni</em> “to rest”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correspondences between the Akan /h/ and Egyptian /s/ phoneme in initial position are regular. (Upon further investigation, the correspondences between the /h/ in Twi and Egyptian /h/ are a lot stronger however). Therefore our comparison between the Akan Aheenwa and Egyptian $nw is sound.

CONCLUSION

I think we have met our comparative standard to demonstrate that the Ahennwa and the $nw are in fact Philosophic Cognates and “ideialectical” versions of each other. By deductive reasoning, we could logically postulate that the pronunciation of $nw was something closer to Ashenwa or Oshenwa. The question now would be, “What could be the possible reason for the similarities between the two royal icons?” Could it be diffusion from ancient Egypt to Ghana? Could this be just cultural fossils from a more ancient predialectical ancestral culture; with one branch becoming the Akan/Asante and the other branch becoming the ancient Egyptians? If this is so, then why are the “Akan” stools mainly common to Ghana/Mali? Why not with any of the cultures between Egypt and Ghana? Could the symbol have derived from the ancestors of the Akan in Proto-Saharan times and diffused to the ancient Egyptians? Often when researchers find similarities between Egyptian and other African cultural motifs, they often assume that the diffusion was from Egypt outward. It can be demonstrated that many of the well known ideas come from Central, West and East Africa being brought up the Nile in predynastic AND pharaonic times.

The African Superhighway of Wisdom and the archeological evidence of trade routes from West, Central and the East Coast of Africa no longer make the assumption of ideas exclusively coming from Egypt into inner Africa tenable. Whatever the outcome, the evidence provided above gives us enough grounds in which to investigate along the lines of an Akan – Egyptian relationship, either by trade or by migration from the Nile Valley as the Akan oral traditions attests. Many African terms for “king” are built off a root which means “to command, authority, etc.” The Egyptian terms *shn* (with causative s- prefix) means “command, Commander, to regulate, to be in charge,
to order, to employ;” ḫn “to command, to regulate, provide, equip, govern, control (oneself)’’ are words that describe the nature of a chief or king. The term ḫn can also mean “an attack.” Remember that the Ohin/Ohene is a military leader, put in charge to protect the kingdom. The Egyptian word ḫnw means “(military) Commanders.” Our term Ohin/Ohene is built off a root hw “to observe/look/watch/behold/tend/take care of/survey/peep”: Akan ḥyɛ/ ḥyɛ “force, command, obligation, to ordain”; ḥwɛfo “guardian, keeper”; ḫsohwɛfo “administrator, supervisor;” ḥwɛ so “to manage, to oversee, to supervise.” In Egyptian we have hw “authoritative utterance, (royal) ordinance, command, dictum, proclaim, announce;” Hnty “to govern, to rule, to control.” Our Akan and Egyptian terms are in fact cognates. A matter of fact, in Egyptian hw also means “soldier, combatant;” hw ny “beat, hit;” hw ny r hr “combat” and it would confirm the association of the Ohene as being a chief military leader. For in Akan we have ḥyɛ yaw “afflict;” ehu “panic, terror, fear;” ḥwe “to lash, flog.”

This may also provide evidence that there is an interchange in Egyptian between the s/S and ḫ sounds in ḫnw and ḫn. If our correspondences are sound (which we think they are), this evidence may inform us on the role of the ḫsw Bjt “king” and what the ḫnw really meant in regards to the king. My preliminary interpretation is that the ḫnw is a military symbol that signifies that the person whose name is inscribed on the inside of it is charged with the protection of the community as their Chief Executive Military Officer. The symbol of the ḫnw was primarily depicted as a looped rope tied in a knot. Across Africa the rope is a symbol for the bio-genetic “community” which includes the ancestors. If this interpretation applies to ancient Egypt, we could also postulate that the person whose name is inscribed inside the rope is charged with maintaining the balance between all of the members “inside” the community (the state boundaries) and maintaining the relationship between the ancestors, spirits and the community. This is exactly the function of kings across Africa as their role as high priests. Dr. Fu-Kiau in his work Mbongi: An African Traditional Political Institution (2007) provides an excellent treaty on this subject.

We may also have another correspondence not obvious to the reader who may be unfamiliar with African priestly concepts in relation to the make-up of the human being. The Akan rendering may also inform us of characteristics not apparent to the student of Egyptology. In my studies of African spirituality, the unanimous conceptualization of the “soul” is that it is seen as a “circle” (see Ogun, African Fire Philosophy and the Meaning of KMT, forthcoming by the author). I have found this conceptualization in West, Central, South and East Africa. A few examples should demonstrate what I mean.

Malidoma Somé reports the following reflections from his initiatory teachers about the duality or twinness of life:

All human beings are circles. Our setting part represents the coolness of water. It provides the peace of the body and the soul and bridges the gap between how we look on the outside and how we are on the inside. It brings us to our family, the village, and the community. It makes us many. The god of the setting side is the god of the water, the water we drink, and the water that quenches our thirst.

Its opponent is the rising part, the fire, the god that makes us do, feel, see, love, and hate. The fire has power, a great power of motion both within us and without. Outside of us, it drives us towards one another, toward the execution of our respective duties, toward the planning of our lives. We act and react because this rising power is in us and with us. Inside us, the fire pulls the spiritual forces beyond us toward us. The fire within us is what causes our real family—those we are always drawn to when we see them—to identify us. From the realm where the ancestors dwell this fire can be seen in each and every one of us, shining like the stars that you see above your heads. Imagine what would happen if you did not have this fire. You would be a dead star, invisible, wild, and dangerous (Somé 1994: 199). (emphasis mine)
The Dagara people of Burkina Faso are also related to the Akan of Ghana. They are in close proximity. In a similar line of reasoning, Credo Mutwa, an Amazulu Shaman from South Africa, reports a comment by one of his initiatory masters that reinforce the conceptualizations expressed by Somé:

My son, you have seen with your own eyes what a soul looks like. **You saw a sphere of the purest transparency and perfect roundness,** and you saw that some of these had wings like those of a mosquito. You also saw inside each one of these spheres were two worm-like creatures that constantly moved and were never still. These spheres you saw with the wings were the souls of females and those you saw with no wings were male souls. The two “worm-like” creatures you saw inside each soul were Good and Evil. But let me explain this in greater detail. The red “worm” stands for all the bad things in a man or woman—dishonesty, cruelty, pride, low cunning, spiritual and corporal perversity, cowardice and low morality. The royal blue worm stands for all the good in a human being or an animal—loyalty, courage, honest, love and charity. These worm-like components help to balance the soul [for] a combination of good and evil, equally balanced, is essential—for all souls that exist, like all living creatures, must have perfect balance between Life and Death (Mutwa 1964: 460). (emphasis mine)

We noted earlier that according to the Akan, the Ahennwa was the “soul of the state.” The Akan thrones/stools are primarily depicted with circles, although other elaborate shapes and iconography is used. If our correspondences are correct (and we think they are) we could speculate that the circle/oval shape of the Ḡn could also represent the “soul of the nation” and the actual “soul of the king/queen” tied to the community and the ancestral realm by the Bio-Genetic Rope. Remember that kings are mediators between the spiritual realm, the forces of nature and the living community.

In Egyptian iconography, you will often see Hrw with wings spread open, holding the Ḡn in his feet while the sun rests on his head. Could Ḡrw be an alternate rendering of Ḡnw (a doublet in linguistics)? As we mentioned before, there may be an s<>h/ḏ interchange in Egyptian and r/l/n is a common sound shift in African languages.

The notion that the sun (depicted as a circle) represents the “soul” of the human being is ubiquitous across Africa. For a good break down of this concept, I also recommend Dr. Fu-Kiau’s *African Cosmology of the Bantu*
Kongo (2001). I note that the bird is also a symbol of the soul across Africa. A matter of fact, the same word for bird is the same word for soul in African languages (i.e., PWS *ku “soul, spirit”; *ku “bird, hawk”). It is this *ku root that makes up the word kulu “bird, hawk” in Kongo-Saharan/Bantu languages and hrw “hawk” in the Egyptian (k >h). In Egyptian, as well as Black African societies, the stars are believed to be perfected souls (Obenga 2004, Mutwa 1964, Somé 1994, Kajangu 2005). The objective of Egyptian life, to an extent, was to become a star or light being; an ḥrw (<*ku “soul”) (Obenga 2004, Imhotep 2011). Hrw is the highest aspiration for Egyptian spiritual practitioners in their ontological pursuit for perfection. The sun is the emblem par excellence across Africa for perfection (and why it is often depicted as a perfect circle). The sun is a physical representation of the Divine who is perfection itself. The sun is simply the closest star to us in our galaxy. So the “sun-god” Ra/Hrw is simply one of the oldest ancestors who reached perfection. Ra/ia in Niger-Congo languages also means “old” and so does Kulu/Ku (Campbell-Dunn 2009). The Amazulu God Unkulukulu simply means “the oldest of the old” and is often referred to us as “our primary ancestor.” The oldest ancestor would be the Creator itself which is the totality of existence in African societies. The sun, scientifically and theologically speaking, would be the oldest object in our galaxy, and just like the Creator (our oldest ancestor) all known life as we know it derives from it (the sun) or a previous sun that died out. Notice in our image of hrw, that in the Shaun of his feet that the sun is encased in the loop. What we have above are all of the African concepts that are used to represent the human soul: the sun, the circle, and a bird. In the image above also are depicted two ḥn symbols. A few comparisons here are noteworthy. Just like the Shaun and Sn symbols, the ḥn is also depicted as a “tied rope symbol.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ankh / ḥn</th>
<th>Sn</th>
<th>Snw</th>
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Could the ḥn symbol simply be an elaborate Sn? The ḥn symbol is an emblem that carries the meaning of “life, living, and a person/human being” (nkwa in Bantu and Akan, nga, nganga and ga in Bantu as well). The soul in Egyptian, as well as the rest of Black Africa, is the power source of the human being (Imhotep 2009/2011, Obenga 2004, Kajangu 2005). It is therefore our internal sun and our body is the surrounding galaxy. The body is just a microcosm of the greater macro-universe (as above so below, so below as above). The very life-force of man is the soul: his fuel source. Again, essentially everything attached to the ḥn in the image to the left is associated with the soul: the sun, the raised arms (ka = soul) and, as we speculate here, the very ḥn symbol itself. I don’t think this is a coincidence that the Ahennwa circle emblem of the Akan with the associations of “royalty, kingship and the soul,” and the Egyptian Sn/Snw are used in the same manner to represent the soul of the nation (the king). If we can associate the ḥn symbol and the Snw to be one and the same, then it would reinforce our interpretation of the Snw (cartouche) to be an ideogram that reads “the life and soul of the king/queen” (who
is a representative of the state par excellence) “the knot that binds the community of the living and the deceased.”

I think we have presented a strong case that eliminates chance or coincidence as the reason for the similarities of these symbols, which also implies an intimate relationship between the Akan and the ancient Egyptians. I think the results of these observations lend support to the oral traditions among the Akan, Ga-Adangbe that state they migrated from the Nile Valley (Upper Egypt/Sudan/Ethiopia). This investigation demonstrates the vitality of cross comparing ancient Egyptian ideas, rituals and iconography with that of Black Africa, for when matches are found, they often reinforce each other in meaningful ways and the Black African reality often provides clues for richer interpretations of Egyptian philosophy and life. I hope this essay stimulated some thoughts for you the reader and I look forward to your feedback.

Ancestrally,

Mujilu CiTapa

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