AFRICAN TRADITIONAL POTTERY AND ITS USES IN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

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Abstract

African art is closely linked with religious belief. The socio-cultural traditions of the Africans are highly influenced with its belief. This belief is centred on the premise of the existence of a supernatural being whose influence affect the working mechanism of the physical world. African art includes performance art, visual art and so on.African art are objects made for worship of deities who are believed to exist in the spiritual realm. These objects are made with different materials like metal, clay, fabric, shell, and so on works in in Africa are made as object for ancestral and deities' worship. This study is limited to the use of pottery as anartobject for traditional religious practices.This paper focuses on itemising the various pots that are available for traditional religious practices. The source of the data is both primary i.e interviews and participatory and also secondary from online journals and publications. A descriptive survey of relevant data was utilised. Also, during the course of the research, utility theory was employed to ascertain the usefulness of traditional pottery for diverse functions. The essence of the research is to facilitate adequate documentation relevance of pottery in religious practices at this contemporary time.

Keywords: African art, pottery, traditional religious practices, cultural belief.

Introduction

African art does not constitute of a single tradition as seen in some parts of the world, the African continent is quite enormous in its diversity, size, cultural perspectives. Traditional African art is a broad and heterogeneous subjects which includes a variety of objects, events, and acts and is an important part of the culture and daily life.Culture is generally acknowledged to be the total way of people. The cultural values and tradition of the African is highly influenced by the people's core values, belief system and their understanding of their immediate environment. The cultural values of the traditional African people as is transmitted in their concept of religion, social practices and individual interactions is a strong reflection in the kind of art they produce. Artworks made by Africans were not made just for the object's beauty rather each art object is made with a pre-determined function for its use. Art works in the traditional setting are made for the solepurposeto answer a specific socio-cultural role. This social-cultural role have its spiritual activities for which the artworks are made for. An example is the clay pot made for theGoddess Osun's worship during its annual Osun/oshogbo festival as illustrated in Figure i, these particular pot cannot be used for other purposes. The sacred belief associated to such a pot, irrespective of its aesthetic appeal do not allow the pot to be used for other social function that is not directly connected with the Osun worship. African art is bred from a need to produce a functional object the execution of such object naturally evolves with style and designs which is intrinsically embedded in the art object. African beliefs and practices are expressed in art art forms like pottery, sculpture, song, dance, incantation etc. which often time portrays the traditional African religion.

Omatseye, B. O. J, Emeriewen, K. O., (2010) notes: most of these art forms serve as the centre of power, linking the physical world to man's beliefs, his essence and existence. Through these figures as forms of man's beliefs, the African tries to express and explain pertinent issues as reproduction, fertility, continuity of power, authority, sickness and the general African way of life. Many religious practices in Africarelies on products of art as a medium for transmitting messages and knowledge. Art connects religion, social practices, and interactions because it serves as a basis by which the design and execution of these practices are carried out.Art and religion in Africa are inseparable, most especially those produced in wood and mud which are two important element connecting human being to the spiritual world. Africans generally believe that spirit dwell in trees while man of mud will go to mud. Acquah F., (2011), observes, African belief system has led The Africans in search for religious worship satisfaction and in achieving this goal, art (images) was made to stand as intermediaries. At the core of African belief is the strong belief in the existence of spiritual forces which governs the culture and the acceptable societal norm. These art objects are used are intermediaries by which a worshipper can solicit favour from the creator and also represent some of these

spirits. The Yoruba believe that there are several hundreds of these deities called 'orisa' who controls the affairs of human. And overtime, many artworks have been created to venerate and worship of these deities. The artworks that are made serves to connect mystic powers from the deities and helps the worshipper in curative, protective and productive purposes are called ritual objects. Ritual objects are things that are created for incorporating mystic power and at the same time attaches potent forces which influences and mechanism of nature. These ritual objects are water pots, beads, calabashes, dresses and so on. These objects can also be said to be religious objects since their sole purpose is for controlling elements that produce and sustain life, water, soil, air, agricultural produce and cultivation and chiefly serve as object of divinity. Omoniyi O.J (2011) opines that, artworks are produced in the traditional society for religious purposes were created to solve spiritual problems. They serve as symbols of the spiritual and the link between the ancestors and the living. Such an example is seen in the practice of Ere-ibeji among the Yoruba where twin dolls is carved on the order of the priest when twins are done. The twin dolls are to represent the living twins. In a situation where one of the twin is dead, a replica of the dead twin is made to facilitate both spiritual and physical accompaniment.

Africans have been making pottery in Africa for countless thousands of years, with some of the earliest examples ranging back to the Ancient Egyptians that started to create pottery circa 6000 BChttps://vannessstudios.com/facts-about-traditional-african-pottery/. The pottery produced can be classified into two main categories: religious and utilitarian potteries. The religious potteries were made solely for the purpose of worship, Africans belief innately on the concept of a higher supernatural being that coordinate the path of man. They have over the years sought means to connect with this supernatural presence. The religious objects are regarded sacred and serves as a means of connecting with the believed deities. The utilitarian potteries are object or vessels that are produced for domestic uses. These vessel are used daily in the communities for cooking, preservation, etc. Pottery has helped in knowing a lot about the civilization of very many places in Nigeria such as the Nok Culture, Igbo Ukwu and Benin. In Yoruba land of South-Western Nigeria, pottery has being one of the major vocationsof the ancient that survived till date; recent archaeological finds has attest potterypractises at Iwo-Eleru dating back to as early as 8000B.C (Drewal and Schildkrout,2006: 79). Abiodun Segun Oladapo, Akinde Toyin Emmanuel (2013)

suggests that pottery practice is traditionally family or lineage incline; this is a scenario where allinformation concerning the nitty-gritty of the vocation is concealed or sacredly keptand passed on only to members of the lineage from generation to generations and notby apprenticeship; a system of practise that encouraged training an external body, thatis non-member of the lineage particularly those from different background to learnvocation outside their family lineage and are required to master materials, tools,techniques, decoration and finesse.

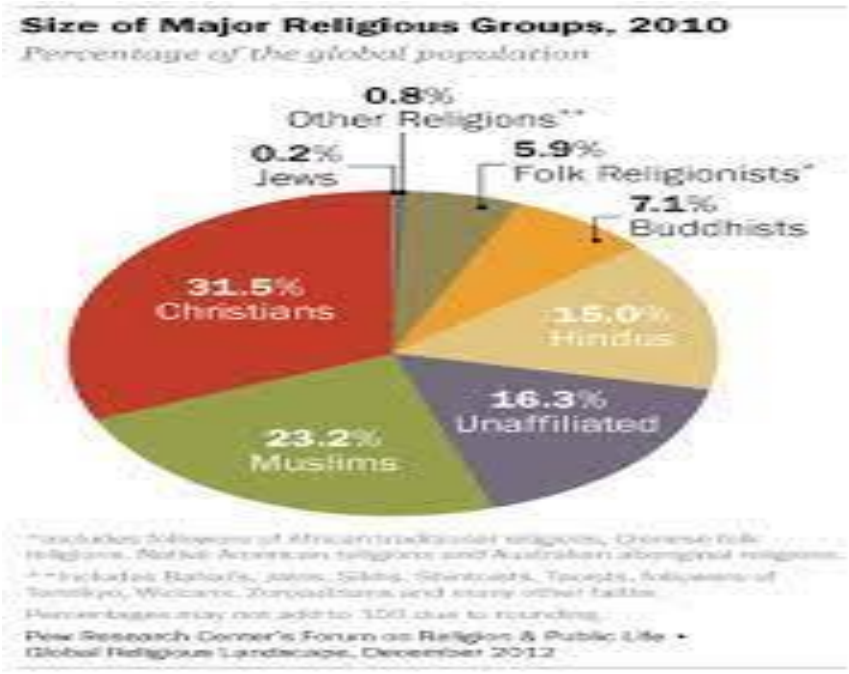


Fig.: showing the percentage of religious practices in Africa.

Sourced from: https://sites.google.com/site/subsaharancountries3b2016/location-1

Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2010-2050

	2010 ESTIMATED POPULATION	% IN 2010	2050 PROJECTED POPULATION	% IN 2050	POPULATION GROWTH 2010-2050	% INCREASE 2010-2050	COMPOUND ANNUAL GROWTH RATE (%)
Christians	517,320,000	62.9%	1,112,390,000	58.5%	595,070,000	115.0%	1.9%
Muslims	248,420,000	30.2	669,710,000	35.2	421,280,000	169.6	2.5
Folk Religions	27,010,000	3.3	61,470,000	3.2	34,470,000	127.6	2.1
Unaffiliated	26,240,000	3.2	50,460,000	2.7	24,220,000	92.3	1.6
Other Religions	1,920,000	0.2	3,740,000	0.2	1,830,000	95.3	1.7
Hindus	1,560,000	0.2	1,900,000	0.1	340,000	21.6	0.5
Buddhists	160,000	< 0.1	220,000	< 0.1	60,000	38.1	0.8
Jews	100,000	< 0.1	70,000	< 0.1	-30,000	-28.9	-0.8
Regional total	**822,730,000**	**100.0**	**1,899,960,000**	**100.0**	**1,077,230,000**	**130.9**	**2.1**

Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. Population estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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Sourced from: https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/sub-saharan-africa/

Traditionally, African pottery is made using hand-building technique. Their resistance to heat and its easy and cheap mode of production makes it widely spread across the different African communities. Pottery is chiefly made with clay, water and fire. Clay deposit is found in all areas around Africa which facilitated pottery development in different part of the continent. Pottery is mostly made by digging appropriate clay body, soaking the dug clay, pounding, kneading, and finally shaping into desired shape by pressing a part in a broken pot that serves as a mold and completing the form with coiling technique. The molded is then dried and fired with fuel which could be cow dung, fire wood etc. examples of these pottery object are water pots, plates, kettles, lamps. Clay pots are important items in traditional Nigerian worship, Oluwaseye A., 2021, observes, clay pots are important items in traditional Nigerian worship. They are characteristically decorated with reliefs of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic (use of animal) symbols. In the use of clay pots for traditional worship, the design often reflects some of the attributes of the divinity the pot is used to venerate. They are used in various ways, such as containers for storing sacred water and pebbles, medicinal or magical preparations, and other items of worship or as pot drums. Traditionally, clay pots are used in various ways. Which are highlighted as follows: A special pot called bridal pot stool is given to a newly wedded bride on the night of her wedding to sit on. This pot stool acts as a 'detective' of the virginity state of the bride.

Ajere: this is a type of perforated pots that are used in burning incense during traditional worship. This pot are usually hung on the wall with the use of strings attached through the holes in its rim.

The clay lamp: the clay lamp is also known as Fitilaolojumerindinlogun. It is used for illumination at night during traditional ceremonies. They are also used to light the various fire that are used during the rite to empower the community warriors before they embark on a special assignment. On significant thing about the clay lamp is that, the fire that is lit must not go off until the warriors have returned from their set expenditure.

IkokoOruka; this is a type of medicinal pot made solely as a receptacle for keeping medicinal rings. Thi rings contain mystical powers that sometimes requires that the ring must not touch the ground. The rings are used for family planning, spiritual power against attacks at war, cure for dizziness etc.

IsaasunAgbebi: this pot is used immediately after a woman is delivered of a baby, the placenta birthed is placed in the IsaasunAgbebi. The placenta of a child is considered sacred and is seen as a mythical connection between the child and his mother. A special prayer is made for the child for a long and prosperous life. After this, the pot containing the placenta is then buried with its location ket a secret

Ikokoagbo: this is also known as concoction pot. This pot is primarily used in preparing herbal mixtures. The pots is usually filled with known herbs and roots of various kinds and fluid for its cooking. The mixture boiled as required. The prepared herb is then taken for bath, drinking etc. Sometimes, ritual birth is taken by warriors, hunters, herbalists, etc. for mystical empowerment. The concoction pot and its content is a source of spiritual power and is kept securedly to avoid damage to the pot. Destruction of the pot could sometimes lead trouble for the person, the concoction is prepared. The custody of the pot is usually entrusted to a dependable person in the absence of the warrior. Dakakari: some part of Nigeria have the tradition of marking the grave spot of notable persons in the community with pottery which could be designed pots or sculpture of numerous animals. The graves of these iconic people are marked in recognition of their notable deeds The graves of chiefs and important personalities including hunters and priests are decorated with figures called Dakakari (sculpture of animals such as camel, mounted on a clay pot with a base) symbolising the greatness of the dead man especially if the dead lived a good and acceptable life in the community. Also, cooking pots are placed on their women's grave to demarcate the female's graves from that of male. Lidded burial clay pots are used to contain the corpses of "special people"; such as hunched back, children, and those who died of inflicted diseases in their community as a coffin which is then buried in the ground.

Banglu: these are pottery vessels that are made as retainer for the spirit of past chiefs. Banglu are kept in enclosed grass shrines and sacred grooves in a bid to appease the ancestors and seek for favor. **Wandipa'taBaxanda**: these are hung pots which are made solely for curing diseases like small pox, chicken pox etc. The pots are filled with medicinal mixture and is hung in the patient's sleeping room. The content of the pot is meant for cleansing routine for the patient, they are sometimes applied to the body parts of the patient as required until the full recovery of the patient.

Ikoko Omi: this is a sacred water pot that is used during worship to appease the various deities. Water is a significant item of worship that is widely used by most traditional worshippers like Osun, Oronna, Ogun etc. during the Oronna festival of the Ilaro people in Ogun State, Nigeria, the deity, Oronna who angrily went under and left a little bit of his mystical chain on the surface is annually worshipped during the Oronna festival. When water from the pot is continually poured and accolade and praises of the deity is rendered, the chain which links the deity to its people becomes enlonged and gradually extends in metres. The extention of this chain connote the blessings of the deity Oronna.
Awo Obi**: this is a clay pot for keeping and serving cola nuts to the initiates during ritual rites at the** shrine.

Isa Opo; this is a storage water pot specially made for a widow. The pot serves as a regular reminder for the widow of her husband who has passed away.

Conclusion

African art areseldonly created for decorative puposes alone, rather they are inspired from a theme of socio-cultural themes that are generated from a need to link the physical practices with the spiritual being. Religion evolved from the belief in the existence of a supreme being whose power influences the natural mechanism of the earth and the daily activities of. The art works produced are made for worship which connect the African man with the deities and the super-natural power in existence. These arts are primarily made for their pre-determined functions: and are rendered elaborately with exotic designs. Pottery is an example of these artwork that popularly used in religion.

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