

African Symbols: Adinkra

The Adinkra symbols were originally designed by "Asante" Craftsmen of Ghana, West Africa. The symbols embody non-verbal communicative and aesthetic values, as well as the way of life of the people who designed them. The symbols are usually printed on cotton fabric to produce "Adinkra cloths," which may be worn on such celebrative occasions as child naming, community durbars and funerary rituals. Each of the symbols has its Asante name and an accompanying literal English translation.



Ako-ben symbolizes the call to arms; a willingness to take action. It is a version of the war horn.



Akoma symbolizes the heart and asks for patience and endurance. "Nya-akoma", or "take heart."



Aya symbolizes the fern. It also means "I am not afraid of you." A symbol of defiance.



Nkonsonkonso symbolizes human relations. We are linked in both life and death; those who share blood relations never break apart.



Nosoroma symbolizes a star; a child of the heavens. "A child of the Supreme Being, I do not depend on myself. My illumination is only a reflection of His."



Ntesi-Matemasi symbolizes wisdom and knowledge. "Nyasa bun mu nne mate masie masie."



Pa-gya symbolizes war. To strike fire or make fire.



Penpamsie symbolizes strength in unity; that which will not be crushed. "Penpamisse see bebirebe ahocden ne koroye."



Sank ofa symbolizes the wisdom in learning from the past in building for the future. (It is not a taboo to go back and retrieve what you have forgotten.)

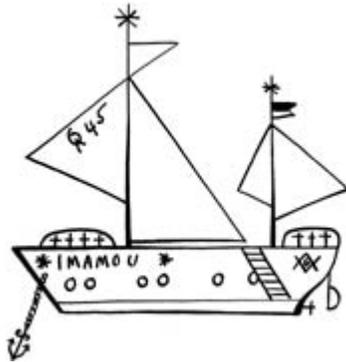


Gye Nyame is the symbol of the omnipotence and immortality of God.

African Symbols: VèVè

There are hundreds of "Lwa" (Haitian deities) who hail from West and Central Africa. They are spirits that inhabit the cosmos; they are cosmic, energetic forces representing or represented by natural forces, emotions or values that are important to the Haitian people. The "vèvè" are esoteric drawings of corn meal, flour or gunpowder that "concentrate" energies of a particular spirit so that he/she might be inclined to reveal him/herself by materializing in the body of one of the devotees. The vèvè are the signature of the Gods. The Lwa are spiritual forces in the national religion of Haiti, Vodou. It is similar to Native American religions, Shinto in Japan and Hinduism in India. It is a close cousin of other African religions in the Americas, Cuban Regla de Ocha, Brazilian Candomblè and Trinidadian Shango.

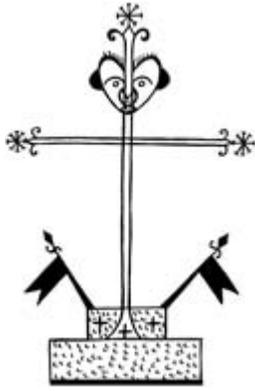
The genesis and foundation for the Haitian Lwa are in the religions of the Fon, Ewe, Yoruba, Igbo and Bakongo peoples of West and Central Africa to which were added a "flavor" from the French variant of Roman Catholicism, since Africans were not allowed to practice their religions in the French Caribbean colony.



Agoueh Aroyo (AGWE) represents the depths of the oceans, where perhaps millions perished in the TransAtlantic passage. Described as "a ready strength," his female equivalent is the water deity Lasirenn. The Yoruba equivalents are Olokun and Yemoja.

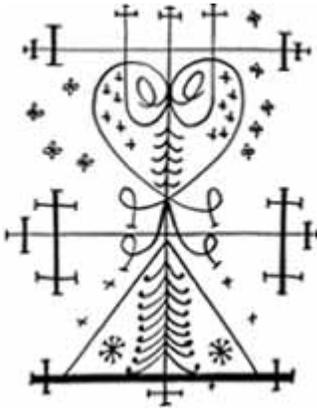


Aizan Velekhete (Ayizan Avlekete) represents the "female principle." She sits in the Haitian Vodou temple, and becomes essential in the initiation of new male and female priests of Vodou. She is represented as the frond of the royal palm tree, the West African symbol of freedom and of the interaction between worlds. She is the main spirit of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haiti's first head of state and a national hero. The palm tree is centrally located on the Haitian national flag.

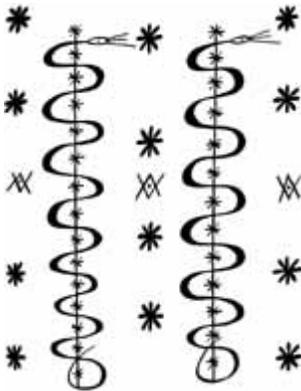


Baron Cimetiere and Manman Brigitte (Bawon & Brijit)

All cemeteries have a family of spirits that control the "other" crossroads, the passage from life to a different life, "death." That function resides in the Gede family of spirits. Baron Cimetière is the male principle; Manman Brigitte, the female principle. As is the case in the spirit world, who says "death" also says "life." The end of physical existence represents a new beginning. Old people are joined to babies and infants: The Gede love children. (See next symbol.)

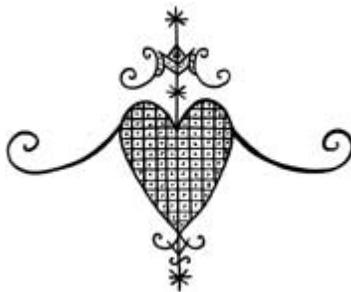


Manman Brigitte (see Baron Cimetiere and Manman Brigitte, above, for description.)



Danbhalah and Aida Hwedo (Danbala and Ayida Wèdo)

The divine serpent and the rainbow-- "male and female" respectively. They are wisdom "incarnate", if they were flesh and bones. Their powers reside in the domain of knowledge. They are healers represented in the Egyptian and Western (European) caduceus, the symbol of medicine.

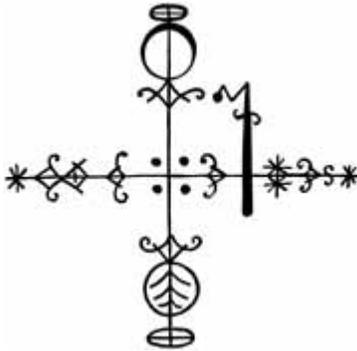


Erzulie Freda Dahoumin (Ezili) is a female principle who "defines" Love in all its sensual attributes. Her sister Erzulie Dantor is motherly love. Freda is a beautiful seductress, difficult and demanding. She loves luxurious items such as perfume and champagne and gold. To man, she is "mistress," rather than spouse.

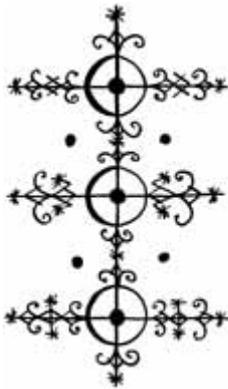


Grand Bois (Gran Bwa)

Haiti lacks a hunting tradition, but has a deity that represents the power of all vegetation and all forests in Grand Bois. This deity is a paramount healer since much of our pharmacopeia is anchored in the vegetal kingdom.



Legba Ati-bon is the first Spirit called at all ceremonies. He stands at the "Crossroads," he is a master linguist, a trickster. He appears as a very old and crippled man, but appearances are deceiving. He is powerful: He allows for the interaction between the physical world and the metaphysical world, hence the crossroads. In some traditions, he would also be called "the gatekeeper."



Maraca Dosou/Dosa (Marasa)

The Children, the Primordial Couple, the Twins. Their representation is found throughout the African continent. In Yorubaland in Nigeria, they are the "Ibeji." The name Maraca derives from the peoples of the Kongo basin, where the name is "Mapasa." The Twins are "completed" by the next child, the dosou (male) or dosa (female) whose powers are conflated with the original pair, 1+1=3.