

101 uses for a dead bat.

No 11 The Mouse Oracle of Baule



If you are a fan of the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, it will come as no surprise to you that the mice know a lot more about Life, the Universe and Everything than we might suppose – but did you know that they can communicate this information to us via a dead bat?



Many African cultures use divination in their day to day lives. The Baule of Ivory Coast use a *Ghekbre* (mouse oracle) like the one shown on the left. Both the Yaure and the Guro use mouse divination, for they believe that once, long long ago, mice could speak. Living on the ground they are in very close contact with the *asye uru*, the all knowing forest spirits, (who, in turn and in close contact with the ancestors. Though mice can no longer speak they can still communicate and act as messengers between the forest spirits ,ancestors and local people

A carving of a forest spirit

Individuals train for years so that they can learn to make appropriate offerings to the spirits, in order that they remain co-operative They also learn interpret what they have to say via their mouse messengers.

The terracotta *Ghekbre* on the left is about 16" tall. It has two chambers. A question is asked and then the mice are placed in the lower chamber and pass through a hole to the upper chamber. This upper chamber contains bat bones. The spirits' message is interpreted through examining the way in which the bones are displaced as the mice move around. Specific patterns have specific meanings such as "sickness" or " a woman will die" or "good fortune" and the trained interpreter can translate these for the querant.



To encourage the mice to move freely, corn or other food may be placed in the chamber or the bones may be coated in flour. The expert learns what are the most appropriate offering to make.

A variant of this involves leaving corn kernels inside the upper chamber and a yes or no answer is given on the basis of how much corn the mice eat in a set time. If they eat what is judged sufficient food the answer is "yes" if not the answer is "no"

Ref:

<http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/oracle/figures17.html>