

Historical Overview of the Traditional Ghanaian Seats

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Received: September 5, 2022 Accepted: September 28, 2022 Published: September 29, 2022

doi:10.5296/ijch.v9i2.20319

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijch.v9i2.20319>

Abstract

Traditional Ghanaian seats have existed for centuries. As of now, there is no complete research material detailing its history, nature, types, functions, appropriate materials for production, and the symbolic designs conveyed in the craft making it incomplete to tell the rich culture of Ghana. The paper aims at providing a more detailed overview of the craft to serve as complete and reliable reference material to learners. This qualitative study employed the narrative research design. The study was conducted at Ahwiaa and Bomani Tyehimba traditional wood carving communities in the Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana respectively. Two historians; one each, and ten traditional stool carvers; five each from the visited carving communities were purposively selected and interviewed. The craft was initiated by the Ashantis and traveled to other regions. The craft has a flat rectangular base, a center section, and a crescent-shaped top. The center section contains distinctive motifs and symbolic meanings that are the source of the numerous stools' names. Some symbolic wisdom conveyed in the craft includes; *Gye Nyame*, *Bi nka bi*, *Akofena*, *Sankofa*, etc. *Ahemmaa dwa*, *Mmarima dwa*, *Mmaa dwa*, *Osram dwa*, *Kotoko dwa*, *Esono dwa*, etc. are some common types of the craft. It functions as practical items in every home, as a connection to rites of passage, as religious artifacts, and as a political allegory. Wood like *Ose* (*Funtumia* sp.), *Nyame dua* (*Alstonia gongensis*), *Cedrela* (*Cedrela odorata*), *Mahogany* (*Swietenia mahagoni*), *teak* (*Tectona grandis*), etc. are used for the production. The study will add up to the Ghanaian citizens, foreigners, and researchers' knowledge to know much about the craft and the cultural heritage of the country.

Keywords: seat, symbolic, traditional

1. Introduction

The traditional Ghanaian seats come in many forms, shapes, and sizes (Inkum *et al.*, 2021) just like the traditional ones made by other countries. They existed before Ghana had its name Gold Coast (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). They were rigidly carved in almost every part of Ghana, later, the craft became a serious business, advanced in style and art to portray the rich culture and philosophies of Ghana (I. Boah, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). As the traditional seats are seen to portray the rich culture and philosophies of Ghana, they give identity to whoever uses them (Appiah-Kubi *et al.*, 2021; Edusei, 2003; Cole & Ross, 1997). They are again famed for their magnificence and gorgeous decorations, but are also profoundly symbolic, with philosophical and sacred connotations (Appiah-Kubi *et al.*, 2021). Symbolizing power and authority (N. Baffour, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021; N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021), the traditional seats are not only aesthetic but also serve as a means of creating an atmosphere of peace and tranquility (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). As of now, there is no complete research material detailing the history of the craft, the nature, types, and functions of the traditional Ghanaian seats, the appropriate materials for production, and the symbolic designs conveyed in them. This makes it incomplete to properly tell the rich culture of Ghana to both the citizens and foreigners. Both the citizens and foreigners need to fall on a well-vested Ghanaian historian or visit some traditional seat carving communities like the Ahwiaa traditional wood carving community and the Bomani wood carving community in the Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana respectively, or better visit any of the Centre for National Culture (CNC) in the country before a piece of detailed information on the traditional Ghanaian seats can be obtained. It is by this that, this paper aims at providing a more detailed overview of the traditional Ghanaian seats as a first of its kind to serve as complete and reliable reference material to the citizens, foreigners, and fellow researchers. The paper again will add up to knowledge especially for the aforementioned beneficiaries to know much about the cultural heritage of the country.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is qualitative under which the narrative research design was employed. This design was appropriately selected for the study because the study aimed at presenting in-depth or detailed information concerning the history of traditional Ghanaian seats, the nature, types of traditional seats, their function, appropriate materials the carvers use for production, and some symbolic wisdom conveyed in the craft directly from the respondents. The study was conducted at Ahwiaa and Bomani Tyehimba traditional wood carving communities in the Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana respectively. These are the right places in the country where traditional artisans carve and exhibit traditional seat products for marketing. Again, one is more likely to find a well-vested historian at the centres to make inquiries about the craftsmanship. Contents of related research materials were also analyzed to source information for the study.

Two (2) historians; one each, and ten (10) carvers; five each from the visited wood carving

communities were purposively selected and interviewed.

The researchers formally made their intent known to the respondents for their consent before conducting the study.

2.1 History of the Traditional Ghanaian Seats

Seats are something designed to support a person in a sitting position (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021; Kisluk-Grosheide et al., 2016; Lin, 2010). Examples include; a stool, chair, pew, bench, or a platform on which one sits. The traditional seats are the more universal types of wood carving in sub-Saharan West Africa, and it is especially common in Ghana (K. Tweneboah, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). According to N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, (19th May 2021), traditional Ghanaian seats existed right from the inception of Gold Coast, the present name of Ghana. They were non-symbolic, simple, and rigidly designed for use in homes, palaces, schools, and churches, and were not observed as an object portraying the Ghanaian culture and heritage.

The first symbolic traditional seat believed to portray the Ghanaian culture and heritage is the “Golden Stool” (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Ewusi, 2018). The first Ashanti king, Nana Osei Tutu I, is said to have received the Golden Stool, or "sika dwa Kofi," in the Akan language in the late 1600s. It is said to have come down from heaven in a cloud of white dust (Ewusi, 2018). The stool was conjured by Okomfo Anokye, the king's high priest, who was also one of the two founders of the Ashanti confederation (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Ewusi, 2018). Made of gold and adorned or embellished with golden bells, the stool measures 12 inches wide, 18 inches high, and 24 inches long (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Brown, 1964). No one was allowed to sit on it, not even the King, for it was conjured from the clouds and hence forbidden from touching the ground (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Ewusi, 2018; Brown, 1964; Smith, 1926). New Ashanti kings are raised and lowered over the golden stool without touching it. (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021).



Fig 1: Golden stool

Source: www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/golden-stool-17th-c/

Following the conjuration, the high priest said that the security of the Golden Stool will henceforth be essential to the power and unity of the Ashanti people. The golden stool is a revered symbol of the Ashanti people, who consider it to contain their collective soul, or “sunsum” (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; K. Tweneboah, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). Drawing on the Akan tradition of a stool symbolizing family leadership or authority (S. Obeng, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021), the golden stool came to represent the Asante people's unity and gave its owner's power legitimacy (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). It is by this that the skilled and creative Ashantis of Ghana began to carve functional but symbolic traditional stools that portray the rich Ghanaian culture and philosophies from wood trunks for Nana Osei Tutu I, Nana Nyarko Kusiamoa, and the sub-chiefs and queens in the Kingdom. Till today, every Chief and Queen in the Ashanti Kingdom as well as those from the other Kingdoms request for a traditional seat from the artisans to be made according to their specifications to enable them properly exercise their authority over the people they rule (I. Boah, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021).

Every chief and queen mother has a stool or set of stools (T. Awuku, personal communication, May 20, 2021; Dagan, 1988), which both signify status and provide political messages about the nature of the leader's rule. These items are so essential to the roles of local authorities that it is referred to as “enstooling” when a chief or queen mother assumes their post. Lineages; either matrilineal or patrilineal also have *asese dwa* (stool) that is identified with their lineages, such as Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenie, Asona, Bretuo, Ekuona, and Oyoko (G. N. Acheampong, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). Historically, all magnificent and gorgeously carved and decorated stools for high-ranking officials were smoked (K. Sackey, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). Since smoking served as a bug deterrent, these stools have a deeper brown tone and hardly ever exhibit signs of infestation. The same smoking procedure, which typically entails setting the stool on the roof of a house above the location of a fire, might take months to complete but is considerably less common in modern usage. In the traditional districts of Ghana, only stools created for the Asantehene, Asantehemaa, and all Chiefs and Queens are now likely to receive this kind of attention. Each stool's level of sophistication might vary depending on the status of the person it is being constructed for and other circumstances, and it might include items of metal plating.

In the Ashanti Kingdom, the Ahwiaa wood carving village is popularly known for carving symbolic traditional Ghanaian seats. Ahwiaa is situated in the Kwabre East Municipality of the Ashanti Region. The creative artisans find themselves in this current location through the Asantehene to carve for him his traditional seat, seats for other traditional rulers in his kingdom, seats for other chiefs and queens in other parts of Ghana, as well as for others from abroad. The carvers have formed an association with leaders but their operations are being supervised by the Otumfoɔ Akonnwahene. Apart from the Ahwiaa wood carving village, other places in Ghana where the craftsmanship is highly practiced are Bomani Tyehimba at Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana, Accra Art Centre, and all the Centre for National Culture (CNC) across the country (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021).

According to N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication* (19th May 2021), the craftsmanship has

traveled to the other major tribes in Ghana; Mole-Dagbons, Fantes, Ewes, Ga-Adangbes, Guans, Dagombas, Hausas, Kusasis, etc. The creative youths of the above-mentioned tribes have ventured into the business, also formed associations, and are producing great wood artifacts that have always generated income for them and the country through tourism.

Culture is dynamic, and the effect of education has also influenced the activities of the artisans (K. Danso, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). Currently, aside from carving symbolic stools, carving of symbolic chairs, decorative interior design pieces, and traditional talking drums have also emerged in the industry, and designing of the artifacts has also been modified to conform with the contemporary ones.

Below figures 2 to 4 show examples of traditional Ghanaian stools, figures 5 to 7 show examples of traditional Ghanaian chairs, and figures 8 to 15 show examples of traditional decorative pieces made by Ghanaian artisans.



Fig 2: Traditional Ghanaian stool
Source: www.explore-vc.org/en/objects/funtumfunefu.html



Fig 3: Traditional Ghanaian stool
Source: www.amazon.ca/Asante-Royal-Stool-Ghana-African/dp/B0153ULXNY



Fig 4: Traditional Ghanaian stool
Source: www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/akan-ashanti-asante-royal-stool-188038317



Fig 5: Traditional Ghanaian chair
Source: www.pinterest.com/pin/68891069272836505/



Fig 6: Traditional Ghanaian chair
Source: www.hamillgallery.com/ASANTE/AsanteChairs/AsanteAsipim05.html



Fig 7: Traditional Ghanaian chair
Source: www.modernghana.com



Fig 8: Traditional decorative piece
Source: streetmarketafrica.com/akwaba/



Fig 9: Traditional decorative piece
Source: steemkr.com/art/@mcsamm/the-beauty-of-african-craft-work



Fig 10: Fertility doll
Source: www.1stdibs.com/buy/wood-carving-1960s/



Fig 11: decorative carving
Source: steemkr.com/art/@mcsamm/the-beauty-of-african-craft-work



Fig 12: decorative piece
Source: Researchers



Fig 13: decorative piece
Source: steemkr.com/art/
@mcsamm/the-beauty-of-
african-craft-work



Fig 14: Decorative piece
Source: Researchers



Fig 15: Decorative piece
Source: steemkr.com/art/
mcsamm/the-beauty-of-
african-craft-work

2.2 Nature, Types, and Functions of the Traditional Ghanaian Seats

2.2.1 The Nature of the Traditional Ghanaian Seats (Stools)

Traditional stools come in all shapes and sizes, and their meanings range from simple domestic to the spiritual essence of their owner or user (K. Danso, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Cole and Ross, 1977).

The design of the seat and base determines whether a stool is rectangular or circular, while there are many other varieties of Ghanaian stools (G. N. Acheampong, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; T. Awuku, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021; Hale, 2013). In West Africa, circular stools are the most prevalent and commonly used (Lentz, 2008), and it is also the oldest in Ghana historically (Edusei, 2003). It predates the rectangular stool by approximately 100 years, according to European documents and indigenous oral traditions (T. Awuku, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). But the Akan, Ghana's largest ethnic group, are the ones most closely associated with the rectangular stools (Edusei, 2003).

When put into concrete terms, the traditional stool of Ghana is nothing more than a wooden seat with a beautiful design for usage in a seat (Sarpong, 2007). A traditional Ghanaian stool typically has a rectangular base, a center section, and a crescent-shaped top (Cole & Ross, 1977; Arthur, 1998). The loving embrace of a mother is what the crescent-shaped top of traditional Ghanaian rectangular stools is commonly referred to as (baatan awaamu), according to Sarpong (2007). The stool's crescent shape makes it pleasant to sit on and, in the case of chiefs' stools, simple to carry on the back of the neck during ceremonial processions. On the other hand, the queen mother's stools (ahemaa) are carried on the head (Ross, 2002).

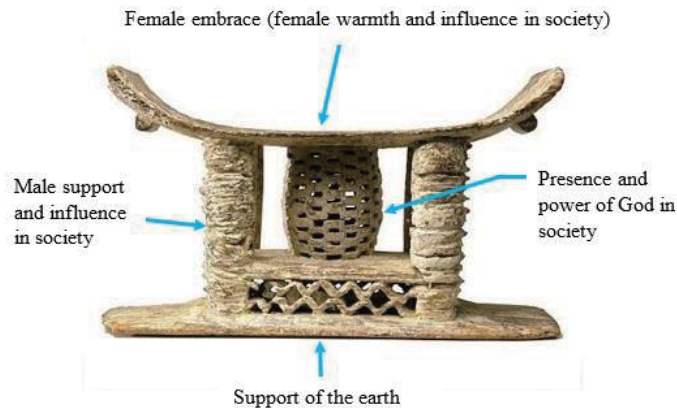


Figure 12. Typical nature of the traditional Ghanaian stool

Source: Permission from Inkum et al., (2021). “The Heritage of Ghanaian Traditional Furniture Culture” Vol. 02, issue 05 (028-036), 2021 DOI: 10.37899/journallamultiapp.v2i5.509

The middle sections of traditional Ghanaian rectangular stools are regarded as the most significant component because they have distinctive motifs and symbolic meanings that are the source of the stools' names (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). Animal and human motifs, as well as numerous geometric and abstract designs, are the main sources of the motifs and symbolic wisdom (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021). They represent a variety of metaphorical or symbolic meanings and hint at or support the status, legitimacy, and convictions of the owner or user as well as the value and type of the stool. The names of some of the stools help to recall, document, and convey specific elements of Ghanaian beliefs, philosophies, history, social values, and cultural standards (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Sarpong, 2007; Rattray, 1927). Stools with geometric patterns and symbolic knowledge in the center are made to produce a horizontal or symmetrical balance when cut in half. However, those with animal themes could have an unbalanced balance (Edusei, 2003).

In recent times, due to foreign influence, the dynamic culture, and the impact of education on the Ghanaian citizens, traditional carvers have learned to apply the nature of traditional stools and the symbolic wisdom they convey in the designing of high raised chairs with backrest. Products of these kinds are used alongside the typical traditional stools for important durbars that require a long duration.

2.2.2 Types of Traditional Ghanaian Seats (Stools)

Considering the materials the traditional carvers of Ghana used and are still using for stools production, they can be broadly grouped into two (2); wood and metal-gold or silver (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; N. Baffour, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). So, we can say we have wooden stools and metal (gold or silver) stools.

Under the wooden stools, they are sub-grouped into three (3); the ordinary white stools carved from wood and left as it is without any treatment other than the customary recurring washing and white-washing, the smoked stools, and the wooden stools with an all-over gold or silver plating, or a combination of both. The golden and silver stools are not very common.

Considering the general shape, design, and symbolic wisdom conveyed in traditional seats, there are numerous types of traditional seats. Each type has a meaning, influences the user, and easily helps identify the status of the owner or the user.

Below are some types of traditional Ghanaian seats according to materials for production and the general shape, design, and symbolic wisdom.



Fig 13: ordinary white stool
Source: researchers



Fig 14: smoked stool
Source: researchers

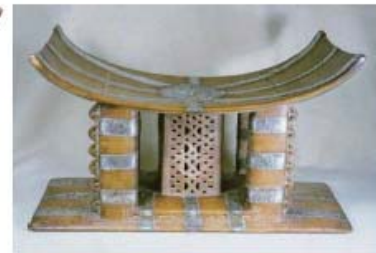


Fig 15: Gold- and silver-plated stool
Source: researchers

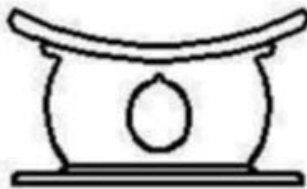


Fig 16: Ashanti Stool

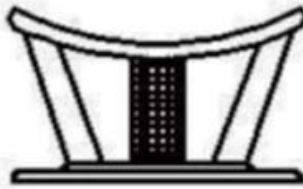
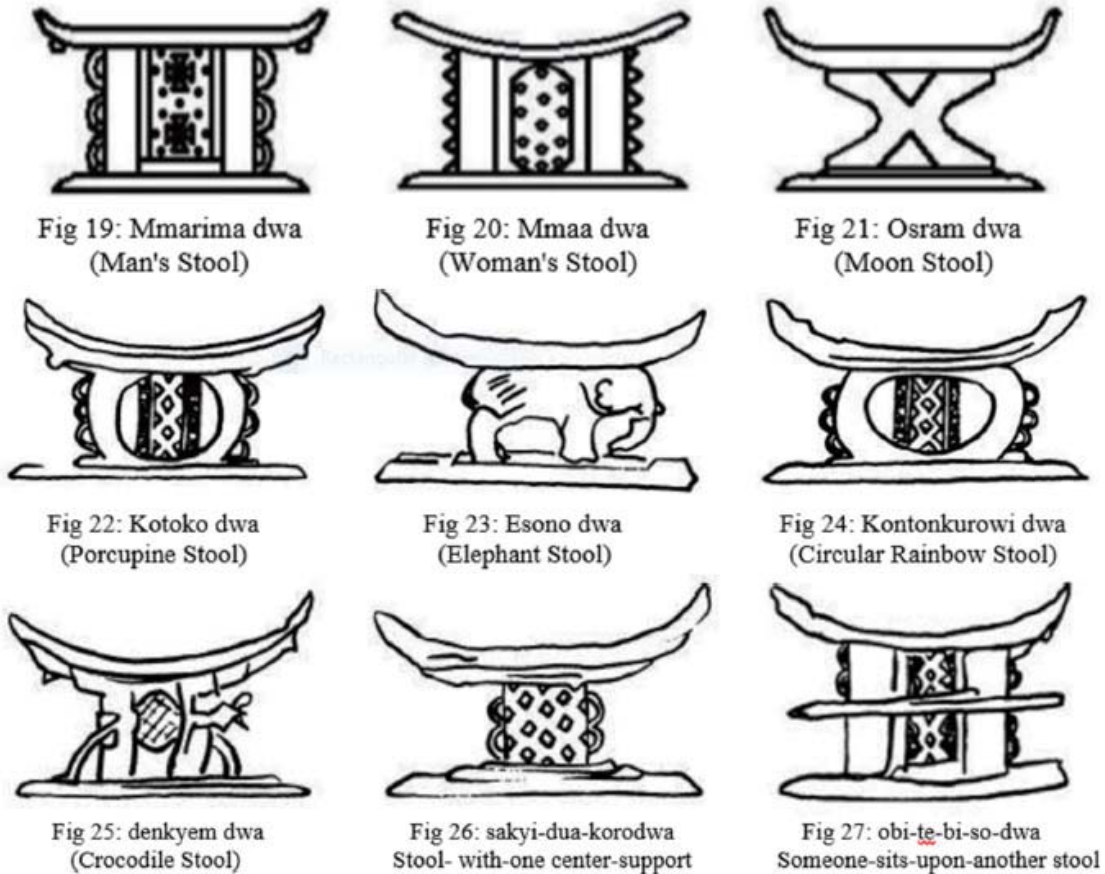


Fig 17: Sika dwa Kofi
(Golden stool)



Fig 18: Ahemmaa dwa
(Queen's stool)



Figures 16-27. Some types of traditional Ghanaian stools

Source: Permission from Inkum et al., (2021). “The Heritage of Ghanaian Traditional Furniture Culture” Vol. 02, issue 05 (028-036), 2021 DOI: 10.37899/journallamultiapp.v2i5.509

No of their gender, age, marital status, social standing, or economic standing, every Ghanaian is entitled to a customary seat. For their young children, typical Ghanaian parents frequently purchase little stools. Every respectable person in society has multiple stools in their residence to welcome visitors. However, not everyone can buy any stool (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). Many of the stools shown in the figures above are owned by the Asante king and some paramount chiefs and queens in the country and might be offered for sale on the open market, for whatever reason. Aside from the sacred golden stool the Asantehene own, other traditional stools that only he can hold are; the elephant stool “esono dwa” as illustrated in figure 23 above, and the Leopard stool “osebo dwa”. The Asantehene once received other stools as a sign of respect and presented them as gifts to other chiefs who were under him or those who ruled in distant territory, and he was pleased by their services. Aside from the golden stool that the Asantehene is the primary owner of, there is a silver stool (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021).

This is owned by the Asantehemaa and the paramount chief of Asante Mampong. According to custom, the chief of Asante Mampong takes traditional and administrative responsibilities in the absence or illness of the royal majesty and even presides during the period over the national royal council. The Techiman Chief is a great chief who also makes use of a silver stool.

Only the Ashanti king and the higher amanhene of the state are permitted to utilize the cross stool, or "mmaremudwa" (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). The monarch and his council are the rightful owners of the porcupine "kotokodwa" seat. Sub-chiefs sit on a stool that has two sides that support "mmomiwa" (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). On the crocodile stool "denkyemdwa" as illustrated in figure 25 are the gods' sanctuaries during public gatherings (S. Obeng, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). The chief Priests use the stool with a single central support "sakyi-dua-korodwa" as illustrated in figure 26 above (Appiah, 1979). The fair sex also utilizes the "me-fa- asa-dwa," which translates to "my half is finished stool," in addition to the women's stool (K. Tweneboah, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021) signifies that 50% of my family has passed away. Other types of stools are the "mframa-dan-dwa" indicating that both men and women are permitted to utilize the house of the wind stool, the "owo-foro-adobe-dwa" which translate as "snake-climbing-the-raffia-tree seat", and the "osram dwa", which is seen in figure 21 and translate to "moon stool" (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). This demonstrates that Ghanaians were extremely picky about how their traditional stools were used, at least in the past. It would be hard to list every imaginable office and the several types of stools that go with it. With silver stools, it is rumored that many chiefs in the nation, aside from those mentioned, possess them. However, this information is not widely known because those who do possess them to make every effort to conceal it for fear of facing harsh punishment for exceeding their legal authority. Perhaps it should also be noted that the Ashanti is no longer as strict about who should have what stools, especially when it comes to the disparities between the stools of men and women. No one could now contest the type of stool that was provided for him to sit on. We should also note that, rather than the other way around, the lower castes were restricted in their ability to have stools reserved or assigned to management. Any stool that his subjects were eligible for could be obtained by the king. The Ashanti king had the same options for a stool as the greater kings of the other ethnic groups. For this reason, one encounters numerous stools on royal occasions.

2.2.3 The Functions of Traditional Ghanaian Seats (Stools)

The traditional stool serves several purposes in Ghanaian society. It is first and foremost a practical item that is present in every home (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021). Anyone may own any number of stools, whether they are children or adults of whatever gender (K. Tweneboah, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021).

Second, although it does not necessarily have sacred qualities, Ghanaians view the traditional stool as a gift that has a unique significance and is connected to rites of passage (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). For instance, the father gives the infant a stool

when the child starts to crawl, indicating that the child has survived the risky stage of infancy and represents the continuation of life. When a girl is ceremoniously seated on a stool during the female puberty ritual known as “bra goro”, it denotes acceptance into womanhood. To symbolize the permanence of the marriage, the bridegroom gives his new wife a stool.

The stool’s third use is as a religious artifact (N. Baffour, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). It is imbued with the existence of its owner in a practical sense as if their “sunsum” (spiritual essence) is absorbed into it with each use. Given this, it is assumed that each stool used by the actual owner has an impact on them and that this impact is probably correlated with their behaviour. A stool is put on its side while not in use to prevent someone else’s sunsum from entering it. As a result, the sacredness of the stool grows with interaction with its owner. The stool becomes a sacred item when it is used to venerate ancestors in the presence of notable people.

The stool's fourth use is viewed as a political allegory (K. Tweneboah, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021; N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021). The chiefs, or “ahenfo,” are the most important political units in Ghanaian society. They make decisions and, if they are seen as the offspring of the office's founding ancestor, they may also serve as a symbol of clan or lineage unity and continuity. Each chief has one or more stools that serve as a symbol of his rank and a means of identification. The most significant of the chief's regalia and a requirement for his high office in Ghana, stools are an honorable symbol of political, judicial, and social leadership (Kyerematen 1964). This artifact is given so significant value in no other West African culture. The term “stool” can refer to the position of the hene as well as subordinate authorities like the linguist “okyeame” or the household leader “gyaasehene”, demonstrating its significant political connotations. Akans refer to a person's position as chief as being “enstooled” in the position; they refer to him as “sitting upon the stool” during his rule, and they refer to his death as “the stool has fallen”.

2.3 Materials Used for Producing Traditional Ghanaian Seats

Many are the raw materials an artist can use to produce traditional seats. Apart from wood which is a very common raw material, metal, clay, stone, plastics, etc. can also be used. However, wood stands tall and appears to be the most preferred raw material because of its ability to be easily carved into any form an artist desires (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). Only a few trees are thought to be suitable for the workmanship when carving stools from certain types of wood (T. Awuku, *Personal Communication*, 20th May 2021). It is also true that wood is chosen for practical purposes (K. Danso, personal communication, 19 May 2021; G. N. Acheampong, *Personal Communication*, 19 May 2021), as anything carved from it is expected to last for a very long time and should be light enough to be carried or transported from one location to another without much difficulty. To the traditional wood carvers of Ghana, although they consider the practical reason in selecting wood, the most important factor they consider in choosing the raw material is based on religious reasons (N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). In the Ghanaian society, wood is believed to possess supernatural powers; that is, it is seen to contain a

non-physical entity such as spirits that connects the soul “sunsum” of an owner to the produced traditional seat item, hence the primary reason traditional wood carvers use the material to produce traditional seats.

The main types of wood used by the traditional wood carvers of Ghana include; *Osese* (*Funtumia* sp.), “*Nyame dua*” (*Alstonia gongensis*), *Cedrela* (*Cedrela odorata*), *Mahogany* (*Swietenia mahagoni*), *teak* (*Tectona grandis*), etc. (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021; N. F. Boadu, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021). However, “osese” wood is the most preferred (Y. Antwi, *Personal Communication*, 19th May 2021) for the production of traditional seats, and the reason is because of its ability to last for a very long period.

Below are images of wood, some Ghanaian traditional wood carvers at work, and some of their products.



Fig 28: osese wood
Source: researchers



Fig 29: osese wood cut into measurement for work
Source: researchers



Fig 30: osese wood left in the open space to naturally preserve
Source: researchers



Fig 31: traditional wood carvers at work
Source: researchers



Fig 32: an artist carving stool for a child
Source: researchers



Fig 33: an artist carving traditional decorative table
Source: researchers



Fig 34: unfinished carved seat
Source: researchers



Fig 35: carved stool
Source: researchers



Fig 36: unfinished carved traditional talking drum
Source: researchers



Fig 37: an artist carving traditional decorative table
Source: researchers



Fig 38: traditional carved stool displayed in a showroom to be sold
Source: researchers

2.4 Symbolic Wisdom Conveyed in the Traditional Ghanaian Seats

Symbolic wisdom; distinguished but communicative wisdom in the form of imagery (designs or symbols) by which a country, tribe, or ethnic group uses to convey its rich culture and philosophies, have since been used in many mediums to communicate to people (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021).

Appiah-Kubi et al (2021) argue that, to the traditional wood carvers of Ghana, the popular symbolic wisdom conveyed in the traditional seat items is the “Adinkra symbols”. Symbols known as "Adinkra symbols" are thought to have come from Gyaman, a former state of what is now known as the Ivory Coast or Côte D'Ivoire (Agbo, 2011; Appiah, 1979; Antubam,

1963). The Ghanaians have also adapted them to communicate their rich culture and ideologies. They are a completely defined set of symbols in the form of visuals or images (Appiah-Kubi et al., 2021). The symbols are derived from various observations and interactions between individuals and items, animal and animal situations, the human body and its organs, and natural objects, as well as geometrical and abstract concepts (Inkum et al., 2021; Arthur, 2001).

According to Appiah-Kubi et al (2021), the most common symbols conveyed in the traditional seats include; “Gye Nyame” which translates as except God, symbolizes the supremacy of God, “Akoma” which translates as Heart, which symbolizes patience and tolerance, “Bi nka bi” which translates as no one should bite the other, symbolizing peace and harmony, “Akofena” which translates as a war sword, symbolizes authority and gallantry, “Sankofa” which translates as go back and get it, symbolizes learning from the past to make self-improvement, “Odo nnyew fie kwan” means love doesn’t get lost on the road home, “Hye Wonhye”, literally translates to “that which does not burn”. The symbol means imperishability and endurance. “Nyansapo” is another symbolic wisdom Traditional Ghanaian Furniture artisans use. The symbol means wisdom knot. It is a symbol of wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence, and patience.



Fig 39: Symbol of Supremacy of God

Fig 40: Symbol of positive reversion and revival

Fig 41: Symbol of greatness, charisma, and leadership

Fig 42: Symbol of patience and tolerance



Fig 43: Symbol of peace and harmony

Fig 44: Symbol of authority and gallantry

Fig 45: Symbol of imperishability and endurance

Fig 46: Symbol of initiative, dynamism, and versatility



Fig 47: Symbol of inequality and uneven development



Fig 48: Symbol of temporariness of any particular state of affairs



Fig 49: Symbol of arrogance and extravagance



Fig 50: Symbol of beauty and cleanliness



Fig 51: Symbol of democracy and unity in diversity

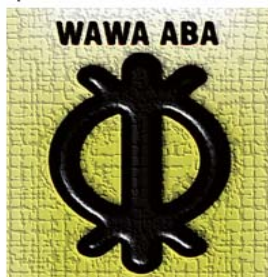


Fig 52: Symbol of hardness

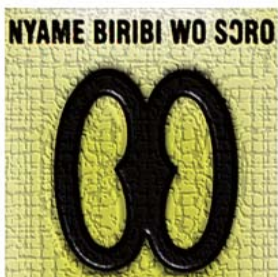


Fig 53: Symbol of hope

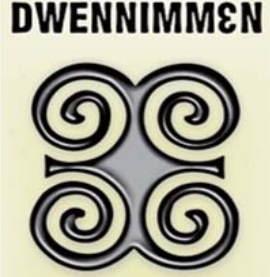


Fig 54: Symbol of humility and strength

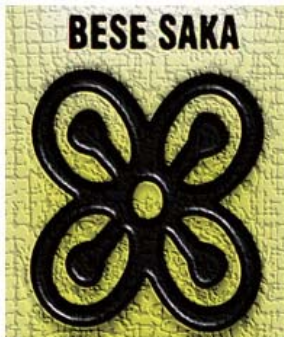


Fig 55: Symbol of power and affluence



Fig 56: Symbol of good fortune and sanctity

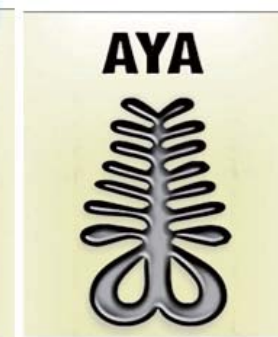


Fig 57: Symbol of defiance and endurance

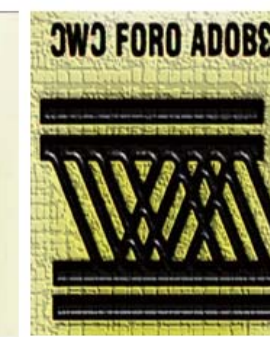


Fig 58: Symbol of steadfastness, prudence, and diligence



Fig 59: Symbol of mercy and nurturing



Fig 60: Symbol of freedom of speech

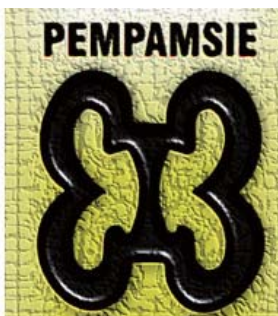


Fig 61: Symbol of precaution and readiness



Fig 62: Symbol of unity and human relation

Figures 39-62: Some common symbolic designs conveyed in the traditional Ghanaian stool
Source: Permission from Appiah-Kubi et al., (2021). "Symbolic Wisdom Conveyed in the Traditional Ghanaian and Chinese Furniture Culture". American Journal of Art and Design. Vol. 6, No. 4, 2021, pp. 127-133. DOI: 10.11648/j.ajad.20210604.13

There are more symbolic wisdom the Ghanaian traditional seat artisans use in conveying a message in the craft. Some of the patterns that have been employed have animal shapes or pictures that remind us of the person who used them. These symbols are mostly embossed or carved on stools found in palaces and homes, decorative pieces, and tables for both indoor and outdoor use.

3. Conclusion

The Traditional Ghanaian seats, the stools to be precise comes in many forms, shapes, and sizes, and portray the philosophies, the rich culture, and the heritage of Ghana. They were in existence before Ghana had its name Gold Coast just that they were not symbolic then. The craft which later became symbolic, a serious business, and advanced in style and art to portray the rich Ghanaian culture and philosophies was initiated by the Ashantis of Ghana, but as of today, the craft has traveled to all the regions of the country.

The traditional stools; a symbol of power and authority to whoever uses them typically has a flat rectangular base, a center section, and a crescent-shaped top. It is concluded that the center section or the middle sections of the stools are regarded as the most significant component since they have distinctive motifs and symbolic meanings that are the source of the stools' names. Some Adinkra symbols or motifs like “*Gye Nyame*”, “*Bi nka bi*”, “*Akofena*”, “*Sankofa*”, “*Odo nnyew fie kwan*”, “*Hye Wonhye*”, “*Nyansapo*”, “*Adinkrahene*”, “*Akoma*”, “*Nkyinkyim*”, “*Mako*”, “*Mmere dane*”, “*Duafe*”, “*Wawa aba*”, “*Aya*”, “*Fihankra*”, “*Dame dame*”, “*Bese saka*”, etc. are mostly conveyed in the middle section or the center sections of traditional stools to convey messages.

The traditional Ghanaian stools are made in either wood or metal (gold or silver). Those made in wood are either; left undecorated, smoked, or plated with gold or silver or a combination of the two substances. It is also concluded that considering the general shape, design, and symbolic wisdom or designs conveyed in the middle sections of the traditional seats, there are numerous types of seats. The Ashanti stool, Sika dwa Kofi, Ahemmaa dwa, Mmarima dwa, Mmaa dwa, Osram dwa, Kotoko dwa, Esono dwa, Kontonkurowi dwa, Denkyem dwa, Sakyi-dua-korodwa, Obi-te-bi-so-dwa, mmaremudwa, me-fa- asa-dwa, mframa-dan-dwa, owo-foro-adobe-dwa, etc. are some types of traditional Ghanaian seats (stools). Each type has a meaning, influences the user, and easily helps identify the status of the owner or the user.

It is also concluded that the artisans of the traditional Ghanaian stools make use of wood like *Ose* (*Funtumia* sp.), “*Nyame dua*” (*Alstonia gongensis*), *Cedrela* (*Cedrela odorata*), *Mahogany* (*Swietenia mahagoni*), *teak* (*Tectona grandis*), etc. in producing the symbolic stools, and aside from carving the stools, artisans have learned to inculcate the shape and symbols in modifying the stools into symbolic chairs due to the dynamic culture. The stool products function as practical items that are present in every home, function as gifts that have unique significance and are connected to rites of passage, function as religious artifacts, and as a political allegory.

4. Recommendation

Adinkra symbols as known by the majority of Ghanaians are the motifs the Traditional Ghanaian stool artisans largely convey in their seat products due to their communicative functions. Although known in every tribe or ethnic group, during the study the researchers identified that the traditional stools produced by the traditional stool artisans in the three Northern Regions of Ghana have different symbolic wisdom or motifs conveyed in them as compared to what the artisans of the other regions convey in the middle sections of the stools. It is by this that the authors of this paper recommend to fellow researchers to extensively research that symbolic wisdom or motifs and the types of traditional stools they have as the researchers believe they are likely to have types of traditional stools that are different from general ones already known by the majority of Ghanaians.

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