

## Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir

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### Abstract

The decoding of the Royal Arts of Aboakyir sought to assess the philosophical symbolism, artistic impression, aesthetics and the socio-cultural impact of the stools and bottom rests used by the Kings and Queens of Efutu land during the recent Aboakyir festival. The study discussed four (4) stools and three (3) bottom rests. The qualitative research approach was adapted and the instruments used for the study were observation, descriptive and interview. The study revealed that, the Royal Arts of Aboakyir has philosophical symbolism, artistic impression, aesthetics and the socio-cultural impact on the people of Efutu land which need to be documented and studied in order to preserve this rich cultural heritage for posterity.

**Keywords:** Efutu People; Stools and Bottom Rests; Socio-Cultural Importance; Royal Arts; Symbolism; Aboakyir.

### 1. Introduction

Oral tradition delivered by the Tufuhene of Winneba Traditional Area has it, that Winneba was one of the independent “Akan” states which were united by Nana Osimpa (the founder of Simpa land) with inspiration from the legendary divinity (Penkye Otu) in 665 to form the Efutu Chiefdom (Siripi, 2016). However, the opinion that they are Akans has been strongly rejected by Bonzie-Micah, (2016), who is native of Winneba. In his view, the Efutus are Guans from Gonja land in the Northern Region of Ghana. In search of fertile land, they initially migrated from Timbuktu: Mali to Gonja in Northern Region, Ghana and thence, Cape Coast, Apam, and then to their present location which is Eastward of Apam, Westward of Gomoa, Southward of Agona, and Northward of the Gulf of Guinea. He further mentioned that the ancestors were very peaceful and did not want to engage in any war with any ethnic group that necessitated their movement. In support, Safo-Ankamah, (2016), corroborated the assertion by Micah (2016), argued that if the people of Efutu are Akan how come they are patrilineal by birth not matrilineal as Akans. He further questioned: on what basis will the Guans (Awutu Senya, Aprade, Gonja, Lartey, Kyerepone, and Sefwi) form their confederacy and at same time have their headquarters situated in Winneba which is about 45km from Accra, the administration capital of Ghana. However, Sarfo-Ankamah (2016) argument stretched further in refute of the position that Akans are literally Matrilineage. Some Akuapims and Tewa from Eastern and North-Western Volta respectively are Akans and yet patrilineage.

The Efutu chiefdom is widely known by its festival Aboakyir, which happens to be one of the acclaimed Ghanaian traditional festivals in the world. Aboakyir is the most adored festive celebration of the paramountcy and it is observed every year to placate the overlord (the chief deity: Penkye Otu) of the land. Prior to the first saturday of May’s activities which is the deer catching by any of the Asafo Company, all divinities in Winneba township were brought out and cleansed with the performance of libation and showcased. The epitome of the artistic spectacle grand durbar was performed on the Saturday. On the day at 08:00hours.gmt., the Traditional Council and the subjects march on the principal street to the durbar grounds and sit to await the arrival of the catch (live antelope seized from the forest). All chiefs, elders, natives, and witnesses gathered at their park observe the successful catch and presentation of the catch to kick start the customary rituals. Firstly, libation performed to the divinities and the ancestors for the safe arrival of the two Asafo companies who have the obligation to undertake such feat to bring a life deer as offering to the chief deity of the land. Identified by their colours, the two (2) companies are Dentsifo represented by red and yellow apparel and Tuafo represented by white and blue apparel. It is worth to note that royal music and dance, fetish dance from trance, and gymnastics are integral part of art exhibited. The Winneba royal art forms of which the stools are believed to be patrilineal in terms of succession are the most powerful and the lead art pieces in the Efutu State and serve as the pivot of religious and political power in the Chiefdom (Tolstoy, 1962).

Rattray, (1923), Wilson, (1971) and Tolstoy, (1962) asserted that royal art forms have socio-cultural significance which when studied can bring development to the society within which they may be. To buttress the assertion of the authors, Chanda, (1993), stated, the Akan royal arts are symbolically multifarious and have manifold art forms, purposes and connotations. They perform functional and ceremonial symbolism of the beliefs and practices of the people.

The nominal high priest once selected assumes dual position of a spiritual and political leader who takes care of the regalia of the state. Ross, (1982) also supported by Tolstoy, (1962) and Gyekye, (1996) believed that, the state royal arts especially stools are the most important of all regalia for festivals and provide records of

history, measures of wealth, and a state of their collective identities. The traditional stool in Ghana fundamentally is a symbol, as it is regarded as the resting place for the soul of an individual, group, or nation. The stool is basically a seat but it has a very important political symbolism in indigenous and contemporary Ghanaian form of governance. The stool is also a symbol of continuity among groups and generations; between the living and the dead and that is why the Akans see it as the resting place of the soul of the nation; so a Chief is expected to preserve it for posterity. Stool can mean the carved wood made to be sat on or placed at the office of a chief (Wilson, 1971). Chiefs can have various types of stools. There are also domestic stools used for eating (*didi*) and bathing (*adware*). Also, there are ceremonial stools that are beautifully carved and decorated and employed for very special occasions. The symbol of office of the *nkondwasofo* (stool bearers) is the stool.

According to Mbiti, (1997) Africans are notoriously religious and each category of people has peculiar religious system with a specific set of beliefs and practices in accordance with the use of art forms. It is upon this that Chanda, (1993) believed the power and beauty of African artworks can touch even casual viewers, but true appreciation can come only through understanding the cultural and the environmental factors that influenced its creation. Vogel, (1986), describes African art to be inherently aesthetic – beautiful and good as objects are intended not only to please the eye but to uphold moral values. With this in view Tolstoy, (1962), affirmed that, human life is jam-packed with works of art of every kind that gives aesthetic preference. He trusted that, art and aesthetics cannot be separated from one another and from human beings, because humans make their daily routine attractive by surrounding themselves with pretty art forms. In support of the argument, Wilson, (1971) Adu-Agyem, (1990) and Bates, (2000) said to achieve such knowledge involves a special kind of attention during which the perceiver goes beyond himself and the ordinary object to achieve aesthetic vision. The royal arts forms as art encompass pieces of information which can be understood only when they are decoded and the system of symbols known to the users.

As Kyeremateng, (1964) earlier stated in paragraph two of this study, the stools are the most powerful and the lead royal art pieces in the Efutu and serve as the pivot of religious and political power in the Chieftdom. These stools and the bottom rests have philosophical, social, economic, political, educational, historical, and moral values inherent in them which need to be decoded to bring to bear the socio-cultural importance of the arts in the festival of the people of Efutu for them to be accepted by all but not a section of the people as it appears to be the situation as of now.

From the above deliberations, the aim of the study was to provide evidence that royal stools and bottom rests which form part of the arts of Aboakyir festival in Efutu are important in art and culture education, research and preservation of the cultural heritage, whereas the objectives were to examine the socio-cultural significance of the royal art forms (stools and bottom rests) of the Efutu in Aboakyire festival to extrapolate the endowed socio-cultural effect and the contribution therein to the study of Arts and Culture.

## 2. Methodology

This study primarily focused on the description of the aesthetic and the socio-cultural importance of the royal stools and bottom rests paraded by the chiefs and queens of the Efutu chieftdom during the recent Aboakyir festival. The researchers' fieldwork, observations, and face to face interviews served as the primary data, and literary sources from other writers served as the secondary data as proposed by Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, (2002). Predominantly, the spotlight was placed on four (4) stools used during the Aboakyir festival at Winneba. Data concerning the interpretation of the symbols on the stools and the bottom rests and their aesthetic functions and their socio-cultural importance were collected from the custodians of the art forms.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 The Efutu Stool (Male)

Cultural traditions look to the past for their term of office, authority and power and authenticity as cultural persona are regarded and as society's norms are handed down to the generations and generations yet on born. In Asante, the most visible and tangible cultural traits are the stool. Apart from the real function of a stool as a seat, it also represents the status of the occupant.

The Efutu has a number of stools. The most prominent are the male stools (ancestral or blackened stools) that have been used by ancestors of the state and continue to be used by the reigning paramount chief. The Efutu stools represent the soul of the chieftdom and are a symbol of their union and intransience. This is in agreement with the statement made by Fisher, (1984) on African traditional stools being the souls of the users and unites the community within which they are found. The stool is meant for two (2) parties in Winneba the capital of Efutu. (Nana Siripi, 2016).

The Black Stool of Winneba is revered as a sacred object not to be openly sat on. The stool is kept in the stool house (*nkongyafie*) at the palace of the Paramount Chief (Omanhene). Ancestral stools are kept in commemoration of all chiefs who died in active service of their reign. Regrettably the researchers could not have description of how the stools look like. This is due to its sacred nature and the fact that it is forbidden for

ordinary people to visit and take pictures of such sacred items at the stool house. Again, none of the stools of the Paramount Chief was seen at the durbar grounds. This according to the Tufohene arose as a result of unresolved issue of succession and ascension to the throne which need to be settled that was why neither he (Paramount Chief) nor the stool was at the durbar grounds. Therefore the Tufohene stood in as the caretaker Chief and steered the affairs of the occasion with other sub-chiefs just like when the Asantehene is out of town, the Manponhene is mandated to oversee the smooth running of the Kingdom until Otumfo comes (Rattrey, 1954). (Nana Siripi, 2016). The Tufohene of Winneba like most Akan chiefs therefore publicly uses chairs instead of stools during festivals, durbars, and when settling dispute (Nana Siripi, 2016).

### 3.2 Stool of Tufohene at the Festive Grounds

The meanings of the symbols of octopus like design stools used by the Tufohene is traced to proverbs and beliefs among the people of Simpa. Similarly, the leopard signifies ferocity, aggression, great watcher, courage, freedom, and individuality for survival by the leadership and in lateral sense, the people. This indicates the Efutuo Tufohene likened to the leopard is considered as ferocious, aggressive, great watcher, and courageous and that being under his service or command gives the subject assurance of security (Eku, 2016). Although the Tufohene is feared and respected in the chieftdom, the impression detected is he should rule with kindness and humility since he is there to serve but not be served. This statement is in line with Rattrey's comment on the leadership skill of King of Dwaben in the Asante Region as he being ferocious, and aggressive but very astute person with a lot of humility, kindness and a respecter of his subjects.

#### 3.2.1 Description and Aesthetic Appreciation of the Chair of Tufohene at the Durbar

The Tufohene has a number of chairs as part of the royal regalia but he always comes to occasions with the *Asipim*. The choice is his royal prerogative and is used principally on state occasions. He intimated that the chair is a royal prerogative that is purely ceremonial with spiritual significance with the Europeans who came to settle at Winneba that is how come the chair looks like a prototype of European chair. This confirms information provided by Wilson, (1971) that many Kings have the royal prerogative to select stools for occasions but Chander, (1993) disagreed with the statement and believe that every powerful King should have a specific stool for a specific occasion.

#### 3.2.2 Description of the *Asipim* Chair

The *Asipim* illustrated in the figure 1 is made of wood and structured like a table-chair with a high seat, arm, and inclined backrest. The chair is known as "Black *Asipim*" due to its black embellishments. The back and seat of the chair were composed of wood with intricate designs which bring out variety, asymmetrical balance and harmony. This opinion is supported in Rattrey, (1954). In his view any good design should have intricate designs which come along with variety, asymmetrical balance and harmony for the sake of aesthetics. For example, the chair is decorated with geometric patterns that have moral meanings: box-shaped lines represent the hard path followed by ancestors, while chequered patterns represent paradoxical interaction and collaboration of opposing ends (male – female, night – day, love – hate, among others). This is confirmed in Sieber and Walker (1998), that, Africans produce arts with aesthetics and functional mind sets and those human and daily activities are the major content. Traits representing moral values found in the chair arise from the intricate designs symbolising peaceful attitude, self-control, [humility](#), and patience with the black colour signifying unwillingness to retreat. The chair is dyed black and occasionally sprayed with black paint which has no effect on fabric to give it its unique colour and make it beautiful and conspicuous (Sanahene, 2016).



Figure 1: Chair for Tufohene. (Source: Field Data, 2016)

### 3.2.3 Functions

The chairs and stools among the Efutu is likened to that of the Akans and have four functions. First, it is an all-purpose object found in every home. Secondly, it is linked to rites of passage as gifts. Thirdly, it is a sacred object which it is believed that the spirit (*sunsum*) of the owner enters, when he sits on it, so it is placed on its side in the absence of the owner so that no other person sits on it; Fourthly, it is a political symbol (Sarpong, 1974), whereby whoever sits on such a designated stool is the ruler of the people at that point in time in case of a scenario related to the third function.

### 3.2.4 Significance of the Chair of Tufuhene

According to the Tufohene, (2016) it is the symbol of the soul of the people over whom he rules and it imbues a sacred and priestly function on him as he sits on it, enabling him to carry out administrative, judicial and religious functions rightly. His soul resides in the chair, hence, only he is allowed to sit on it until his demise. It is the symbol that shows his sources of power and authority. The chair is seen as a sacred emblem and is the symbol of office of the Tufohene which represents the community, their solidarity, their performance and their continuity of life. As Kyerematen, (1964, p.11) put it, the stool is “the most important of the regalia of a chief and the sine qua non of his high office”. In Ghana, the stool is the august emblem of political, judicial and social leadership. The importance of the stool in Akan is shown by its use in several phases concerning the Chief. The Chief is “enstooled” in office and when ruling, he sits upon the stool to exercise his majesty, and when he dies it is said that “the stool has fallen” (Chander, 1993).

### 3.2.5 Symbolic and Socio-Cultural Importance of the Asipim Chair

The chair symbolises the status of the Tufohene as the acting head of Efutu. The embellishments symbolise the spirituality of the acting chief and the chair due to the important functional role it plays as stool regalia of the community. The symbols as earlier stated signify the authority, strength, care, and protective nature of the chief. The tied knot design that links the forelegs known as (*kontonkurowi*) is a symbol of responsibility. It evokes the Akan proverb “*kontonkurowi da amasan nyinaa kon mu*”, translated as “the rainbow is around the neck of every nation”. It is made as talismans that ward off evil powers and serve as protection when the chief sits in state. Sarpong, (1974) shared in this believe that, occupants of royal stools are protected by the deities, ancestors and God against evils. It also represents the robustness exhibited in his governance. The black surface of the hide symbolizes spiritual potency, maturity, ancestral presence in the incision-like form of the art piece, permanence, and antiquity. The colour of the chair was made to conceal it from marks and stains as a result of aging and regular use. Significance of the use of black in most of the stool regalia discussed in this study are basically the same and would thus apply to the other regalia that incorporate the colour. The chair conveys visual and verbal messages about the status and authority of the acting chief. It also reminds him of his responsibility to the state. (Stool bearer, Tufuhene, and Court Artist, 2016). Gyekye (1996) agreed with this view that “the stools are to regulate the conduct and mannerisms of the chief which are all intended to remind him, his subjects, and others that the position he occupies is sacred” (p.83).

### 3.2.6 Bottom Rest (‘Egua Sondzi’)

Combination of golden woolen upholstery with white lace along the edge, the bottom rest is quasi pillow made with velveteen. The gold colour signifies richness and authority of the Tufohene of the community. White striped fabric combined with white frayed bias edge finishing along the edges indicates how pure its owner is



equated the ancestors, deities and God in terms of adjudicating matters arising concerning the subjects. This is why Mbiti (1977) contended that Religion and Art cannot be separated. Religion gives meaning to life and it is seen as the basis of existence. The Efutu-hene being the true representative of the ancestors in the traditional area, is in a formal sense, the legal representative of the ancestors in who is located the authority to and the power of the ancestors to rule. Even the laws, customs, taboos and codes of ethics initiated by the chief have divine backing since they are believed to have been sanctioned by the deities and ancestors; therefore, they invoke divine sanctions on anyone who disobeys them.

The contents of the bottom rest have tremendous succulence and in the past, kapok was the main material utilised but, now, foam has become useful alternative. It is put on a stool (*Asesegua*) to soften the surface. It signifies the essence of comfortability of occupant of the stool (Tufohene, 2016). According to the Tufohene, he selects the fabric for styling to compose the design to his specification because it is a royal art which has to be done as such. However, this opinion was strongly rejected by the Traditional priest who posited that the ancestors and deities through the priest do the selection of the fabric mainly because it is stuffed with charms for protection and power.

The method applied is generating seams with the fashion fabric and fix he trims within and renders stitches to secure it. Well finished construction complement style and design to make the bottom rest an appreciable work of art.

### 3.3 The *Esuakyire Stool of Ohenmaa*

The Queen mother of *Esuakyire* (*Ohenmaa*) uses a number of seats for her day-to-day activities. The *Asesegua* (see figure 2) is the most significantly used on public occasions as a political symbol of her office like that of the Paramount Chief and the Tufuhene. The stool is finely carved from white wood obtained from the *sese* tree. The status of the *Ohenmaa* is accentuated by a finely carved stool with engraved geometric designs on the middle section of the stool. The stool reflects the essential philosophy of authority, strategic planning, agility, acumen, and good sense of judgment characterised by her status as kingmaker. The symbol of the stool is *Pempamsie* “sew in readiness” which connotes a symbol of preparedness, steadfastness, and resilience. According to the *Ohenmaa* the design of the patterns forming symbols of the stool are links of chain implying strength through unity as well as dignity in service (Nana *Ohenmaa*, 2016).



Figure 2: Stool of *Ohenmaa* (Source: Field Data, 2016)

#### 3.3.1 Description and Aesthetic Appreciation of the Stool of *Ohenmaa*

The stool of *Esuakyirehenmaa* (figure 2) has significant aesthetic qualities and values. The top, middle, and bottom parts are well crafted with a great sense of proportion. The stool is traditionally known as *Pempamsie* – named after the structured pattern in the middle part. The centre part and the crescent top have skillfully made geometric patterns bringing about symmetry in the art form. The designs are patterned after a game known as *oware*. The four crafted holes of the stool have triangular and pyramidal shaped designs indicating strength and power coming from the creator through the deities and the ancestors with the base having two rectangular linear designs to enhance the aesthetic appeal and stability of the stool. The rectangular blocks underneath both the crescent shape and the symbols are clear admission of the fact that women regardless of their position in the society still need the support of men in their dealings. Again the holes were made to remove excess material during carving and to lighten the overall weight of the stool for easy carrying. The colours of the stool: white, curry, beige, and brown which represent the young, the old, dead that are believed to have a common agenda and that connotes continuity of life. The overall finish of the master piece is excellent and aesthetically pleasing. The

stool befits the occasion because of what it stands for in the chieftdom (Ohenmaa, 2016). The *Asesegua* (stool) has attendants from the court of the Esuakyirehemaa tasked to restore, conserve, and preserve the stool to keep it neat and maintain its sheen and grace to continually keep it attractive. Apart from the aesthetic qualities of the stool, the aesthetic value is equally expressed in its functionality as a traditional art form.

### 3.3.2 Symbolic and Socio-Cultural Importance of Asesegua of the Efutuhemaa

The stool is regarded as an effective object of prestige and a traditional representation of influence of the *Efutuhemaa*. The crescent shape atop is a symbol of reception. The geometric patterns symbolize her various philosophies already stated. The whiteness of the stool symbolizes purity and youthfulness and again depicts spirituality. This agrees with the assertion of Hackett, (1996) on the significance of whiteness of stools as representing spirituality. By and large, the use of the stool represents ancestral presence. The stool *Efutuhemaa*, like that of the Paramount Chief, symbolises a long relationship between the people of Efutu and the stool. It is a symbol of the solidarity and continuity of the community. The stool portrays hospitality and a place where wisdom can be sought. It depicts the true Efutu culture as well as the importance of stools as everyday objects and sources of livelihood of the people. When used during the festive occasion it presents visual and verbal messages of the political status, authority, wisdom, and good sense of judgment of the *Ohenmaa*. The stool is used on almost all state festivals and other important occasions, and features prominently when a new chief is crowned. The continuous use of stool by the queen mother reinforces the culture and helps preserve and transmit the cultural values of the state in general to the present and the next generation (Personal conversation with Acquah, May, 2016).

### 3.3.3 Symbolism of the Bottom Rest

The multi-coloured bottom rest is made of ivory, beige, brown, and coffee with draped yarns loosely organized at the edges. Similarly this bottom rest is placed on the surface of the stool of a queen mother at the occasion and other solemn moments. Yellow-gold velveteen material was used to make the bottom rest. It was showcased during grand durbar to portray the riches and royalty of the community. The methods which were used to produce that of the Tufohene are also applicable in this context as well.

## 3.4 Stool of Lead Gyahagze Chief

Cultural traditions look to the past for their mandate, authority, and authenticity as cultural traits are regarded and as norm of society are handed down to generations. In Efutu, the most visible and tangible cultural traits are the stool. Apart from the real meaning of a stool as a seat, it also represents the status of the occupant (Hackett, 1996). According to the Court Artist and the *Okyeame* of *Gyahagze*, the artist had God in mind when creating the stool and take into consideration artistic creativity and expressive individualism (Hackett, 1996). In West African art, there is a widespread emphasis on artistic creativity while simultaneously being influenced by the work of predecessors, inspired by dreams from deities and God. With such an impression, the artist initially considered the medium used in the production of the stool. The stool was made of 'sese' wood hence the name 'asesegua' (Court Artist, 2016).

### 3.4.1 Significance and Symbolism

"Gye Nyame" symbol was identified to have been used in the design. The phrase interpreted as the omnipotence of God is one of the foremost figurative expressions of traditional Ghana engaged for daily communication and reverence of physical and spiritual life. The *okyeame* intimated that God was likened to a hen with its chicks which symbolizes that the occupant of the stool should be as dependable as God and the hen. The hen symbolizes mothers who are seen in the eyes of the community as protectors. The hen with its chicks typifies a mother who protects and takes care of her children or a Queen Mother who cater for the citizens of her community. It again implies peace or peaceful co-existence.

### 3.4.2 Symbolic and Socio-Cultural Implications of the Stool

The *Mpasaatia* stool was carved from *sese* wood which signifies ancestral presence because it was designed with the acceptance of God in their lives. The ancestral presence in the art form is a clear indication of the link between man and God (Tufohene, 2016). The crescent nature of the top of the stool denotes welcome to the owner and the colour white signifies purity. The star like designs on the four (4) borders of the *Gye Nyame* portrays the sanctity, good fortune, and endurance. *Nsoroma* which is known as deity of bad omen in Efutu literally means an agent used to remove bad luck and curse, and it is derived from the Akan proverb "*okra papa tse de egyinamboa; okyiri fi*" (the good soul is like the cat, it dislikes dirt). It is largely believed that the use of this symbol drives away bad omen in favour for the good from the Almighty God. The four (4) crescent designs of the struts of the stool reveals ingenuity, dynamism, strength, and modesty but toughness in character. It is derived from the proverb "*oguan n' ahoozen ne bere, se obu a, nna wo aye mbrew*" literally translated as "the strength of the ram lies in its horns, once they are plucked off, then it is caught in a trap". The use of the stool at various state functions conveys visual and verbal messages on the symbols used for each stool. Culturally, their use project the beauty of royalty and power associated with Efutu monarchical administrative rule.

### 3.4.3 Description

The *Mpatasia* stool (see figure 3) has three parts as any normal stool and it is used for sitting at festive occasions. The base, which is flat and rectangle in shape, gives it a good firm stability on the ground. It is about one-eighth ( $\frac{1}{8}^{\text{th}}$ ) of the height of the stool. The middle part comes in different shapes and patterns including other symbols like the great *Gye Nyame*. The middle is about five eighths ( $\frac{5}{8}^{\text{th}}$ ) of the height of the stool and bears the design of the stool (Wilson, 1971). It is in this part of the stool bearing the symbol *Gye Nyame* that conveys the verbal or visual message with its designs in abstract carved out of wood and preserved for cultural purposes. The design in the middle also indicated who owns and occupies the stool. The top part is where a person sits and it is about a quarter of the height of the stool which was carved to make sitting easy. When carried it is usually the top which is placed at the back of the neck (Wilson, 1971). The outer membrane is smooth and carved in the shape of a crescent, curved upwards at the edges to support a comfortable sitting and enable carrying behind the neck, as that is how the stools of chiefs are conveyed. This part of the stool is known as the “*ɔbaatan n'awaa mu*” (embrace)

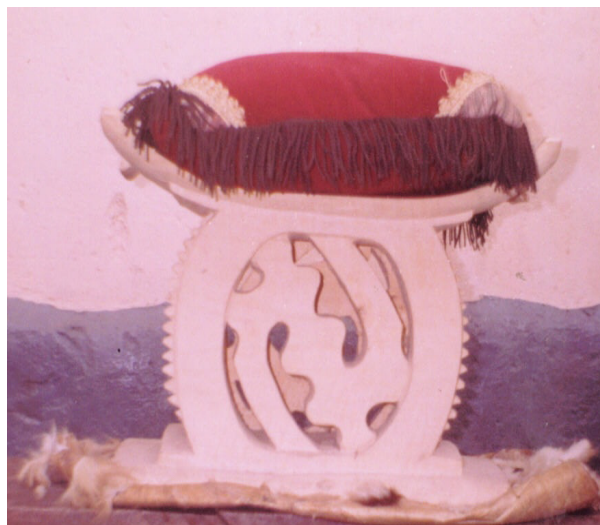


Figure 3: Stool of Gyahagze Chief (Source: Field Data, 2016)

### 3.4.4 Bottom Rest

Brown and cream stripes with white draped trims along the edges is the visible styling of the bottom rest. Similarly this bottom rest is placed on the surface of the stool for the chief during the ceremony. Velvetten materials in matching colours of gold and crimson formed the main styling with trimmings in dark maroon and white lace serving as edge finishing. The white lace has been used seal the seams of the main fashion fabrics of the gold and crimson. The maroon drapery yarns has been engaged to trim the top and under of the bottom rest to secure and finish. It was used during the grand durbar to portray the riches, presence of the fallen heroes, and royalty of the traditional head of the people as indicated earlier. Colour combination in the styling of the bottom rest demonstrate representation of the richness of knowledge and wisdom of the chief and engenders comfort during those long hours that he remains enthroned.

### 3.5 Stool of Osubonpanyin Chief

The traditional stool in Ghana itself is a symbol, as it is regarded as the resting place for the soul of an individual, a group or a nation. The stool is basically a seat but it has a very important political symbolism in indigenous Akan form of governance. The stool is also a symbol of continuity among groups and generations; between the living and the dead and that is why the Akans see it as the resting place of the soul of the nation, so a Chief is expected to preserve it for posterity. Stool can mean the carved wood made to be sat on or the office of a chief (Wilson, 1971).

#### 3.5.1 Description

The stool has three (3) parts and it is used by the chief of Osubonpanyin, one of the sub-chiefs of the traditional areas in Winneba. The base, which is as usual flat and rectangle in shape, gives it a firm stability on the ground for seating. The middle part has human figures of which one lies at the back of the other generating rhythmic connection. As usual, a crescent shape scooped should enhance comfort for sitting by the occupant. This type of stool often carved out of the *Osese*, *Funtumia Africana*, and *Nyamedua* (*Altsonia Boonei*) trees because they are white and soft, and therefore, makes the carvers work easier for producing cleaner results. Royal stool carvers particularly are men assigned to construct all related works of art in the palace since he does not menstruate to contaminate or make discharge pollutant at the palace (Osubonpanyin, 2016). To guarantee sanctity and reverence, the tools employed for the execution of such artistic mystery have to be purified by sacrifices and

prayers (Rattray, 1954). Sarpong, (1974) added that, it is believed, especially by wood carvers, that the good wood for carving has a spirit which has to be pacified before the tree is felled. For this, the carver needs to observe some taboos and always have to cleanse the tools utilised. The colouring of mauve and beige appear to be wearing off indicative of the fact that the stool lacks conservation and restoration and due to that some parts are even broken. See figure 4 below.



Figure 4: Stool of Osubonpanyin Chief (Source: Field Data, 2016)

### 3.5.2 Significance of the Stool

It is a symbol of the soul of a people whom the chief rules over and it imbues a sacred and priestly function on the person who sits on it, enabling him to carry out administrative, judicial, and religious functions over the people he rules. The soul of the chief resides in the stool, hence, he is the only fellow allowed to sit on it until his demise, after which the stool is blackened and kept in a room which contains those of his predecessors. It is the symbol that shows the source of inherent power and authority of the chief. The stool is seen as a sacred emblem and is the symbol of office of an Osubonpanyin chief which represents the community, their solidarity, their performance and their continuity. As Kyerematen (1964, p.11) reported that the stool is “the most important of the chief’s regalia and the sine qua non of his high office”. In Ghana the stool is the august emblem of political, judicial and social leadership. The importance of the stool in Akan is shown by its use in several phases concerning the Chief. The Chief is “enstooled” in office, when he is ruling “sits upon the stool”, and when he dies it is said that “the stool has fallen” (Gyekye, 1996)

With this particular stool depicted in figure 4, the Chief Stool-bearer sits behind the chief in public clad in white cloth. He is supposed to be inhabited by the strength of all the departed Osubonpanyin and so transfers such strength to the current chief when needed. This kind of action can be found in Asante stool bearers. An interview with the chief and okyeame of Osubonpanyin revealed that the Asante’s learnt from them (Personal conversation with the chief, Okyeame and stool bearer, 2016). At the centre of the stool are two figures, one lying at the back of the other. This according to the chief is an indication of dependency. Everyone in the community depends on each other for survival. It is upon this reason that the community has never ever seen war, social conflict and chieftaincy dispute. The community has developed in such a way that most of its members are occupying very enviable positions in the country and abroad. The colours of the stool are a representation of the young, old and the dead who make up the entirety of the community. The chief did not use bottom rest because he believes the people he serves must be seen to be comfortable before he becomes comfortable. This goes with the biblical saying that Christ came to serve not to be served therefore he must serve the people.

### 3.6 Analyses on Observation and Photography

Practically, the inquest was broadly undertaken during the 2016 edition of the Aboakyir Festival where all the key events that matter were well attended and directly observed and recorded. Documentations taken spanned from audio, visual, and audio-visual recording by the research team using digital cameras, camcorder, and tablets. Graphic descriptions through scribbling and inscriptions were equally paramount during the data collation. Direct observation enabled better understanding of the various proceedings of events and gather vital information on some stools and bottom rests that were not obtained during the survey using interviews. These observable facts were compared with information gathered through interviews for reliability and credibility. Other stool regalia that were not permitted to be photographed were obtained from literary sources. Personal observation facilitated close contact with selected stools and bottom rests that were brought out with the permission of the Tufohene allowing shots of photographs and critical scrutiny of the art pieces. The first hand



data extracted were analysed in conjunction with literature elicited from documented data by authorities on the subject of Aboakyir festival and stools in general. The synthesized findings assisted in unearthing the philosophical and socio-cultural values of the Efutu Chiefdom stools and bottom rests. The analyses also brought to the fore the aesthetic values.

Aesthetic values of the Efutu Chiefdom Stools and bottom rests are beautiful art forms with outstanding aesthetic character. These art forms show purely aesthetic qualities of beauty through the use of both elements and principles of design such as lines, textures, geometric shapes, form, colour, balance, and rhythm among others, to bring out their expressive qualities. The rough or crude nature of most stools enhances the aesthetic demand. In a discussion held with some of the craftsmen, sub-chiefs and *Akyeame*, attested to artistic spectacles alluded to emphasising that the coarseness of most of the stools created from wood add up to their aesthetic quality as it is not a norm to give such works of art a mirror finished. This fact was discovered from the personal observations and photographs. Beauty is therefore an essential factor a consumer, inventor or an observer of a cultural art form considers.

There were also other qualities that go beyond physical beauty in appreciating the stools and bottom rests. These qualities are criteria for judging cultural art forms, and cover beliefs, thought processes of a people, history, and even materials used in creating the art form. Such criteria must be measured in appreciating the aesthetics of cultural art forms such as the stools and bottom rests of Efutu Chiefdom. As illustrated earlier in the study, indigenous art forms of various ethnic groups are both functional and symbolic. The aesthetics is thus established in the totality of the art form taking into consideration the chief, objects appearance, symbolic manifestations, and greatly, the use which are the main principles of indigenous aesthetics (Mbiti, 1997). Thus, the fact that an object is able to successfully function and achieve its symbolic essence makes the art form aesthetically pleasing. Sometimes the antique appearance of indigenous art forms particularly those directly used in the veneration of deities of a state, community, or people adds to their aesthetics due to their constant use.

Stools and the bottom rests used by the royals of Efutu have a lot of educational significance. These are articulated in their aesthetic qualities, symbolisms, beliefs, practices, ideals, proverbs and myths associated with the works. This affirms Rattray's (1954) accession that, stools regularly convey significant philosophical and socio-cultural values for a better understanding of these societies. They also lead to the discovery of how traditional societies use their arts forms and symbols to communicate important philosophical concepts about the society. Stools and other indigenous art forms enable one to compare indigenous knowledge of the past with the present in order to know how to modify them for the future, notwithstanding being heedful not to lose their cultural spirit.

#### 4. Conclusion

Indigenous art forms serve as a medium for exploring the collective identity of a people as well as gaining access to their way of life. They are a means of gaining insight into the unique aesthetic values and expressions of the history, religious beliefs, and practices, and cultural enhancement of a people. The following were the conclusions derived from the study on the Efutu Chiefdom stools and bottom rests.

Royal Efutu stools and bottom rests accentuate the status, power and authority of the *Tufohene* and his sub-chiefs. These art forms are functional and ritual objects with symbolic meanings that help them relate better with their ancestors and deities. The royal artistic regalia possess outstanding aesthetic qualities with important cultural symbols that convey essential philosophical and socio-cultural communication. The stools and the rests serve as the basis of unity and continuity of a community.

Modern societies are not well informed about the symbolic language encoded in royal and other indigenous art forms of traditional societies in Ghana. Documenting their intrinsic and extrinsic values would help preserve such knowledge. It would also help to uphold and project the unadulterated culture of indigenous societies and chieftaincy as an important institution.

The findings from the study showed that a lot of people are aware of the presence of the stools and the bottom rests but, lacked knowledge on them in general. The philosophical and other aesthetic values of these royal art forms would therefore provide a good source for aesthetic education to the people of the state and beyond. The state stools are a documentary evidence of the cultural values of the people. The cultural knowledge obtained from the study could serve as additional means of recording and preserving the cultural heritage of the people.

The creations of royal art forms by craftsmen help meet the artistic needs of traditional societies. Their contributions help in the preservation of the various cultures of indigenous societies for posterity. Their creations help in projecting and promoting activities of chieftaincy. Many of the craftsmen of stool regalia or royal art forms received indigenous education through apprenticeship. These craftsmen are either illiterates or semi-literate. There is the need to transmit their accumulated wisdom, knowledge, and values which they convey in their works of art to the wider society through the gathering and publication of such endowment.

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