



Visual Metaphors of Ghanaian Festivals: Decoding the Symbolic and Philosophical Meanings of Graphical Symbolism in the Adaekesee Festival

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Abstract: *This study delves into the visual metaphors present in the Adaekesee (Akwasidae Keesee) festival, focusing on the symbolic and philosophical meanings of the graphical symbolism found on the regalia and paraphernalia of the Asantehene and his paramount chiefs. The research sought to uncover the hidden meanings of these symbols and their significance in the festival's celebration. It explores the extensive role of graphical communication in the Asante Kingdom, where symbolic representations transcend language barriers to convey complex meanings. The study utilized the expert purposive sampling technique to select informants knowledgeable about the festival's graphical symbolism, employing a qualitative research approach to gather non-numerical data through observations, interviews, and descriptions. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources, revealing that the graphical symbolism of the Adaekesee festival holds profound, hidden meanings that extend beyond their immediate use. These symbols have the potential to serve as educational tools, imparting the rich cultural values of the Asante Kingdom to Ghanaians and the global community. As a result of the study's findings, museum curators, elders, chiefs, and queen-mothers can use the festival's graphical symbolism as teaching tools to pass on to current and future generations the cultural history and wisdom that the symbols represent.*

Key Words: *Visual metaphors, graphical symbolism, Adaekesee festival, symbolic, philosophical meanings.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the Asante Kingdom, presently Ashanti Region in Ghana, the graphical symbolism displayed and used during Adaekesee festival were the visual perceptible symbols or figures with meanings used to convey beliefs and emotions, including proverbs and wise sayings that express the symbols and philosophy of the Asante people. Therefore, within the domain of graphic design (or visual communication), graphical symbolism serves as the means of conveying a message through visual elements (Jen-Li, 2022). The central objective of this study was to unravel the concealed symbolic and philosophical significance embedded in the graphical symbolism, specifically related to regalia and paraphernalia (Essuman, Amissah, & Gyimah, 2023).

This exploration probes into the rich values of the symbolic and philosophical meanings embedded in the various objects of graphical symbolism displayed and used during the Adaekesee festival. From pre-historic civilizations to the current digital age, graphical symbolism has played a crucial role in swaying cultural accounts, philosophies, and identities among the Asante. This study resolves to unravel the hidden symbolic and philosophical meaning embedded in the graphical symbolism displayed during the Adaekesee festival and study how the graphical symbolism goes beyond simple aesthetics to communicate symbolically and philosophically during the festival.

1.1. Symbolic Meaning

According to Campbell (1969), "concepts and words are symbols, just as visions, rituals, and images are; so too are the manners and customs of daily life, and through all these, an unparalleled reality is represented." Symbols serve as a multifaceted means of communication, often possessing layers of meaning. They form the bedrock of human understanding in our world, influencing the decisions we make.

Individuals use symbols not only to interpret their surroundings but also to connect and collaborate with others in society. Human cultures employ symbols to convey beliefs, ideas, social norms, and cultural characteristics. Importantly, the meaning of a symbol is not inherent in the symbol itself; rather, it is culturally acquired. Thus, symbols



carry significance that varies based on one's cultural background. Three primary forms of symbolic meaning or value exist:

i. Ideological Symbols

Undoubtedly! Ideological symbols, such as religious and state symbols, encapsulate intricate belief systems and ideas that practically delineate the correct course of action. In the context of the Asante Kingdom, consider the symbol of the 'Golden Stool' (known as 'Sikadwa Kofi'). This symbol serves both religious and regal purposes, vividly expressing a web of beliefs and ideas among the indigenous people. According to their understanding, the Golden Stool embodies the very 'soul' of the Asante ethnic group. Its absence would pose a direct threat to the kingdom's existence.

ii. Comparative Symbols

Comparative symbols, such as high-status office addresses, fine art, and prominent awards, provide answers to questions of better or worse and superior or inferior. For instance, in mathematics, the expressions $7 > 4$ and $4 < 7$ are commonly used as comparative symbols to indicate 'greater than' and 'less than' in algebra. Drawing an analogy to the hierarchical arrangement in the Asante Kingdom, we find that the position of the Asantehene (the King) is for life. The Asantehene is ceremoniously crowned on the 'Golden Stool' and holds the esteemed title of 'primus inter pares' over a confederacy of paramount chiefs. These chiefs play a crucial role in important religious ceremonies, which serve to strengthen the political system of the Kingdom.

iii. Isomorphic Symbols

Isomorphic symbols seamlessly blend into their cultural environment, allowing individuals and communities to assimilate into their surroundings and avoid scrutiny. Within this context, a single symbol embedded in isomorphic symbols carries multiple distinct layers of meaning. In the context of the Asante Kingdom during the Adaekese festival, the paramount chiefs, adorned in their finest cloth costumes and royal regalia, exhibit a specific behaviour as they push their clothes down from the shoulder to the waist level. Additionally, they bow in reverence when greeting the Asantehene, who presides in state to receive his subjects. This act symbolizes acknowledgment of the Asantehene's hierarchical position within the Kingdom (Indick, 2012).

Symbolism, by its nature, extends beyond the tangible and calculable. It opens up the realm of wisdom inherent in reality itself. The traditional Asante symbolism reflects the rich cultural heritage of the Asante people. These symbols find use in religious ceremonies, rites of passage, and other significant cultural events, such as festivals. Their socio-cultural significance is widespread, making it essential to delve into the symbolic meanings embedded in the graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival.

This is because, in the face of globalization and the integration of global economies, which have the potential to derail traditional cultural practices, values, and ideals embedded in the cultural heritage of Asanteman (Asanteman Council, 2006), there is a need to unearth the symbolic meanings of the graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival. So as to preserve, improve, and find new ways of sustaining and enriching what this graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival has for the present and posterity in relation to their rich cultural heritage. It would also give access to deeper, symbolic layers of reality, understanding, and what this graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival offers to individuals in Asante society and beyond.

1.2. Philosophical Meanings

Philosophy seeks clarity in articulating purpose and values, aiming for precise formulations. Without this, human beings may encounter a sense of void, feeling lost without purpose or meaning, and lacking a sense of place or connection to the universe. It involves critical and comprehensive inquiry, a pursuit of wisdom, and an exploration of how our knowledge can be harnessed to achieve what we value (Pecorino, 2012). This aligns with the notion that philosophy is not merely an abstract discipline but a style of life—a life of ideas and reason. It lifts our heads from the clouds, broadening our self-perception and understanding of the world. By doing so, it enables us to break free from prejudices and harmful habits ingrained in our youth or naivety (Solomon, 1997). However, according to Pence (2000), philosophy, science, and art diverge primarily due to their subject matter and the means by which they reflect, transform, and express. Art, akin to philosophy, mirrors reality in its relationship to humanity. It portrays individuals, their spiritual realms, and the intricate interactions between people and the world.

Philosophy, rooted in people's beliefs, involves intellectual exploration where everything is open to questioning and review. At some point in life, it becomes practical to question assumptions, beliefs, contemporary ideas, common sense, and the utility of prevailing practices. Philosophical thought provides the standpoint from which such questioning and review can occur (Dukor, 2014). Culturally, the Asante tradition embodies religious humanism and philosophy. The Adaekese festival, coinciding with the New Year celebration, serves as a collective expression of gratitude to gods and ancestors for the new harvest. All indigenes of the Asante Kingdom participate in this celebration. During the festival, various forms of graphical symbolism, including royal regalia, paraphernalia, appliquéd clothing, and traditional sandals (known as 'Ahenema'), showcase the rich culture and convey themes related to Asante history, beliefs, and philosophy.



The philosophical significance of this Asante tradition lies in its religiosity, emphasizing their unique worldview. Notably, there is little distinction between the sacred and the secular, making the Adaye festivals deeply embedded in a religious spectacle.

In the context of the Asante culture, ontology (which studies the general nature of reality and asks “what?”) and metaphysics (which specifically studies the idea of being and asks “how?”) are closely intertwined with religious beliefs. Within Asante ontology, several entities coexist: God, gods, spirits, humans, animals, plants, phenomena, and objects. God occupies the highest position, serving as the force that creates, controls, and informs all other aspects of existence. Man holds a central place in this ontology, representing the focal point of the interconnected web of beings and forces. According to Mbiti (1969), animals, plants, and material phenomena constitute the environment in which humans live. These elements provide the means of existence, and when necessary, humans establish mystical relationships with them. The interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the divine underscores the Asante worldview. The Adaye festival, celebrated in the Asante Kingdom, upholds the mystical relations between indigenes, gods, and ancestors. This festival marks the New Year and serves as an expression of gratitude for the harvest. During Adaye, various forms of graphical symbolism come to life, reflecting themes related to history, beliefs, and philosophy. The festival embodies a celebration of life, humanism, universalism, symbolism, and transcendentalism, all deeply rooted in the Asante cultural fabric. The Adaye festival of the Ashantis in Ghana is not merely a celebration but a profound cultural event deeply rooted in philosophical significance, particularly through its graphical symbolism. This symbolism embodies two contrasting philosophical perspectives: exclusive and inclusive viewpoints. The former emphasizes critical philosophy, while the latter stresses the importance of both critical and uncritical elements in philosophical discourse (Dukor, 2014). In African philosophy, symbols hold immense importance as they encapsulate cultural values, traditions, and wisdom. Momoh (1989) underscores the idea that philosophy should be an expression of culture, articulating principles by which people can live meaningfully. Symbols, including rituals, rites, and sacred words, play a crucial role in this cultural expression. For instance, the stool symbolizes authority and community identity among the Asante people, serving as a link to their past and future (Asmah, 2009).

Language, too, is revered for its spiritual power in African cultures, reflecting the belief that words are interconnected with the structure of reality. During the Adaye festival, these symbols and language are prominently displayed, signifying gratitude to gods and ancestors, renewing allegiance to leaders, and celebrating common values (Asanteman Council, 2006). As globalization threatens traditional practices, understanding the philosophical meanings behind the graphical symbolism becomes crucial for preserving and educating future generations about the rich cultural heritage of the Asante people. Delving into these meanings not only strengthens cultural identity but also fosters new ways of interpreting and transmitting traditional wisdom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1. Theoretical and Conceptual frameworks

It is widely acknowledged that both theoretical and conceptual frameworks serve as essential structures for research. These frameworks provide clarity by delineating the path of research and anchoring it firmly in theoretical principles or concepts. According to Adom, Hussein, and Agyem (2018), the overarching purpose of these frameworks is to enhance the meaningfulness of research findings, align them with theoretical constructs in the field, ensure generalizability, and stimulate further inquiry. Imenda (2014) concurs, emphasizing that both theoretical and conceptual frameworks breathe life into research endeavours.

2.2. Theoretical framework

In the realm of symbolism, various theories exist. However, for this study, we adopted symbolic interactionism (also known as symbolic interaction theory) as our theoretical framework. Symbolic interactionism operates at the micro-level within sociology, focusing on how society emerges and persists through repeated interactions among individuals. A central tenet of this theory is that individuals employ language and significant symbols in their communication with others (Carter & Fuller, 2015). In confirmation of this, Prus (1996) states that symbolic interactionism is a theoretical tool that examines human experience through their interaction based on the fact that individuals are social beings and are formed through interaction with others; thus, certain groups of people embrace certain realities through community interaction and shared linguistic realities and then create a consensus of meanings that are attached to specific social phenomena.

2.2.1. Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism theorises that the actions of human beings in reaction to symbols, which in general are subjective, often quite abstract, representations of unseen phenomena, are facilitated mainly by those same symbols (Blumer, 1969). Therefore, the meanings an individual's gives to symbols define him/her and the realities he/she



experiences, and as individuals socialize, culturally-agreed upon meanings assume control over their interactions with their environment. Put another way, social roles and many aspects of culture are learned through interaction and through experiences in daily life situations. Over time, individuals internalise the rules inherent in various situations and structure individuals' actions accordingly (Baran & Davis, 2012). An example can be deduced from the meaning attached to the 'akuaba doll' that constitutes a symbol of fertility in the Asante setting. An 'akuaba doll' in reality is a carved sculpture piece, i.e., an artefact, until an individual attaches symbolic meaning to it. Though each individual experiences the 'akuaba doll' differently, the cardinal point here is that there is shared meaning among individuals in the Asante Kingdom.

Charon (2004) highlights that language serves as a unique type of symbol, while perceptions constitute a set of symbols. Language encompasses words, and these words transform into symbols that describe all social objects. In this way, fluid and dynamic words and symbols replace physical and material reality. Human reliance on symbols for social reality and social life underscores the classification of language as the vehicle for human interaction (Baghdadi, 2009). The very fabric of human society hinges on ongoing symbolic communication. In the context of the Asante Kingdom, which is part of the larger Akan ethnic group in Ghana, Asante Twi serves as their symbolic communication or language. During traditional festivals, particularly the Adaekese festival, graphical symbolism plays a significant role. These symbols depict a wealth of knowledge from the past, dating back to the fifteenth century. Within Asante history and culture, the graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival shapes both social life and social reality for the indigenes. Objects we encounter in society can take various forms, from stools and chiefs to ideologies. Although a general description of an object exists, the underlying idea is that objects emerge from symbolic interactions. These objects can be classified into three types: physical objects (like stools or linguist staffs), social objects (such as kings or linguists), and abstract objects (including values, norms, and manipulation). Each object carries meaning for the individual who interacts with it.

The meaning of objects is intrinsically tied to the way they are delineated through interactions. Indications and shared understanding contribute to objects acquiring common meanings. For example, in the Asante Kingdom, the Golden Stool holds sacred significance, and only the Asantehene is crowned upon it. Blumer (1969) emphasizes that mutual indications lead to the emergence of common objects, which a specific group of people perceives as having similar meaning. Individuals then act towards these objects based on the meanings they carry. Given these factors, the theoretical framework of this study posits that the graphical symbolism displayed during the Adaekese festival in the Asante Kingdom—significant for promoting its rich cultural heritage—contains hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings. The researcher employed this framework during the discussion stage to unravel these meanings for educational purposes and development.

2.3. Conceptual framework

In practical terms, developing a conceptual framework is akin to an inductive process where concepts interconnect to form a larger diagram representing likely relationships between interconnected ideas. Simply put, a conceptual framework emerges from these concepts (Liehr & Smith, 1999). It serves as the researcher's straightforward way of presenting their proposed answers or solutions to the defined problem (Liehr & Smith, 1999; Imenda, 2014). For instance, in this study, the conceptual framework was used to unveil the hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings within the explored graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival. This framework highlights why studying the topic—the graphical symbolism of Adaekese festival—is worthwhile. Additionally, it reveals the researcher's assumptions, the scholars they agree or disagree with, and how they conceptually anchor their approach. In essence, the conceptual framework provides a rationale for the study and grounds the research process.

Interconnected concepts play a crucial role in understanding the conceptual framework. They allow individuals to appreciate the values associated with traditional symbols and grasp their meanings. In this study, the conceptual framework is anchored in the representation of knowledge, specifically symbolic meaning and philosophical meaning, as well as other significant meanings inherent in the graphical symbolism showcased during the Adaekese festival. To ensure clarity, a good conceptual framework must be expressed in writing. The researcher created a diagrammatic representation of the main variables—namely, the hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings within the graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival. This diagram shown in Figure 1 helped explain the relationships among these variables and provided insights into addressing the major research problem defined in the study. Since the conceptual framework for this study is rooted in the representation of knowledge, i.e., the hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings inherent in the graphical symbolism, the researcher used it in the study to give access to deeper layers of reality, understanding, and what the graphical symbolism offers to individuals. In other words, the researcher used the conceptual framework to systematically present the variables of the study.

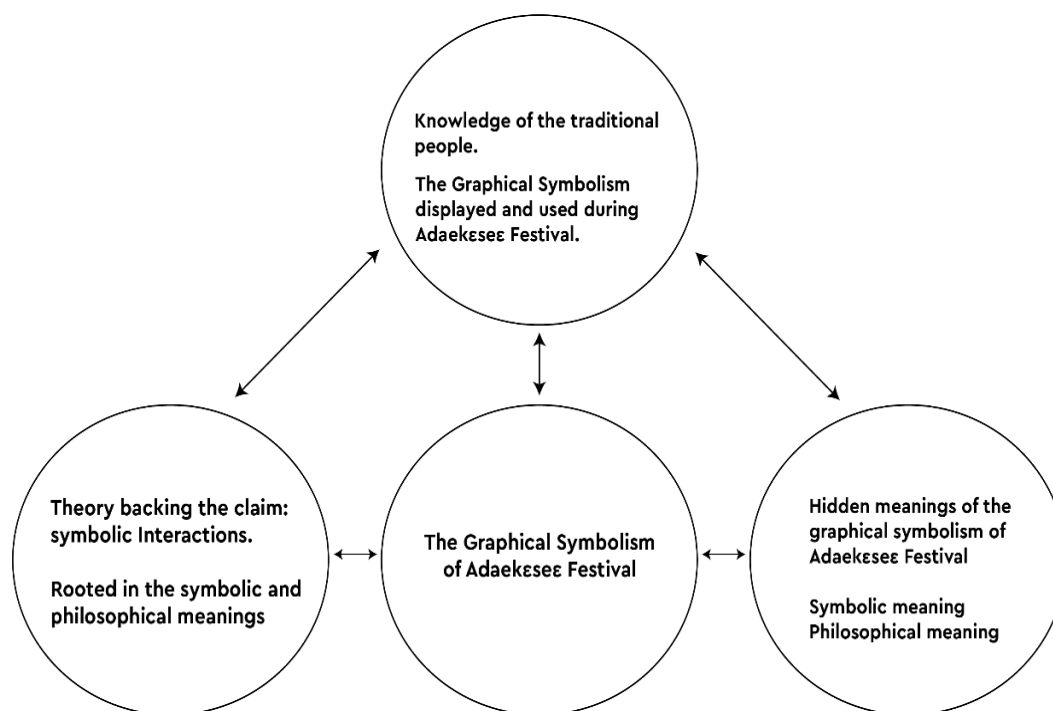


Figure 1: Schematic overview of conceptual framework (Author’s construct, 2019)

3. MATERIALS & METHOD:

3.1. Method

The researcher adopted the qualitative research method for this study, principally because it largely relies on evidence from relics, artefacts, or graphical symbols, oral accounts, and records. The researcher deemed it appropriate to adopt it in order to unravel the hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings inherent in the graphical symbolism (Best & Kahn, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Creswell, 2009). The research paradigm (or model) the researcher adopted for this study was interpretivism. This paradigm was adopted in order to tackle the objectives of the study, since it made use of a qualitative approach tuned to bring out the components of reality about the study objectively (Morgan, 1993). In addition, it was considered that there are multiple realities that made measurement difficult in this study, for which people can only seek to understand real world phenomena by studying them in detail within the context in which they occur, hence the adoption of the interpretivism stance to discover the truth or reality based on individuals’ perceptions and experiences (Mertens, 2012; Freshwater & Cahill, 2012; Saunders, Lewis & Thornbill, 2009). The data for this study was sourced from two distinct channels: primary and secondary sources. With primary data, the researcher, being a native speaker of the Asante language (both official and unofficial), contributed his insights. Intellectuals well-versed in the Asante language also provided valuable information. Additionally, elderly members of the Asante Kingdom shared their knowledge. Most of the information gathered from these primary sources has been rigorously tested and verified as authentic. The researcher visited significant locations, including the Manhyia Palace Museum, the Manhyia Palace, and various palaces of Nananom (chiefs) and Ahemaaa (queens). During these visits, the graphical symbolism associated with the Adaekese festival was observed. Detailed observations were meticulously recorded on a worksheet. Objectivity, care, and precision guided the observation process, contributing to the study’s success.

This study drew upon secondary sources consisting of library materials from various institutions, including the University of Education, Winneba (UEW); Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi, with a particular focus on the Department of General Arts Studies library, College of Art and Social Sciences library, and the main library; University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, notably the Balme library and the Institute of African Studies library; the George Padmore Research library on African Affairs; Ashanti Library; Centre for National Culture, Kumasi; British Council Library, Kumasi; Manhyia Palace, Manhyia, Kumasi; and Manhyia Museum, Kumasi. Significant resources utilized in this study included "Asante in the twenty-first century (2nd)" by Ampene, K., and Nyantakyi III (2016); "Manhyia palace art symbols as a medium for education and information dissemination" by Asamoah-Hassan, H. R. (2011); "Akan symbolism" by Appiah, P. (1979); "Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method" by Blumer, H. (1969); and "Theoretical and conceptual framework: mandatory ingredients of a quality research" by Adom, D., Hussein, E. K., & Agyem, J. A. (2018). Additionally, information was gathered from personnel

at various palaces, royalty, elders, traditional graphic designers and goldsmiths, and knowledgeable members of the public to validate the reliability of the data.

3.2 Materials and Tools

Materials and tools were employed in this study to record the interviews conducted and take photographs of the graphical symbolism of Adaekese festival displayed to visually explain and shed additionally light on the text. These research materials and tools included a digital camera, tape recorder, papers, a laptop computer, and a printer to visually explain and shed light on the text. It should be noted here that not all the graphical symbolism were observed by the researcher since the first rites of the Adaekese festival performed early in the morning were witnessed only by the inner core of the royal family of the Asante Kingdom.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Under this section, the study examined the graphical symbolism of the Adaekese festival and uncovered the concealed symbolic and philosophical meanings within them.

4.1. Banwoma



Figure 2: *Banwoma* – *gyata nwoma* on the left and *esono aso* on the right (Photo credit: The curator at the half-buried *Okomfoɔ Anokye* sword at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH), 2019)

Literal Meaning

All types of animal skin.

Background

The *banwoma* generally refers to all types of animal skin that are placed on the floor as carpet for ceremonial chairs and stools to be placed on. In the Asante Kingdom, the specific skins used as *banwoma*, as illustrated in Figure 2, are made only from two types of animals: *gyata nwoma* (lion skin) and *esono aso* (ear of elephant). In gatherings such as *durbar* or *Adaekese*, the Asantehene's *akonwa* is placed on the *gyata nwoma*, with Asantehene's feet just below the protruding head of the *gyata* while the sacred and soul of Asanteman, the Golden Stool, is placed on the *hwedomtea akonwa*. It should be noted that in the absence of the Golden Stool during gatherings, 'Kɔtɔkɔdwa', which replaces the Golden Stool, is placed on the *esono aso*.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises floor carpets on which ceremonial chairs and stools are placed during festivals or important ceremonies.

Philosophical Meaning

This symbolism stresses reverence and honour for objects that embody the soul and authority of a community and encourages citizens to revere and honour the authority vested in leaders and sacred relics of society.

4.2. Clenched Fist *Ntuatire* (*Krɔnpɔn*) *Kyinye*



Figure 3: The clenched fist *ntuatire* (*krɔnpɔn*) *kyinye* (Source: Ampene & Nyantakyi III, 2016)

Background

This *kyinye* (an umbrella) is one of the collections of *kyinye* called *akrɔnpɔn kyinye* or sometimes referred to as *patom kyinye* as shown in Figure 3. It has a carved clenched fist as *intuatire*

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises power, defiance, strength and unity.

Philosophical Meaning

This encourages defiance, strength and unity among the community and people and believes in the power of a leader. It also stresses the need for clenching the people's fists as a sign of arming themselves in the face of adversity in order to confront adversity in unison or with one person under one leader.

4.3. *Esonodua*



Figure 4: *Esonodua* placed on a stool (Source: Ampene and Nyantakyi III, 2016)

Background

The *esonodua* (i.e., the elephant tail whisk), as indicated in Figure 4, is part of the regalia of the Golden Stool, and in some cases, the *Kɔtɔkɔdwa* is used during *Adaekese* festival instead of the Golden Stool. *Ɔkɔmfɔ Anɔkye* gave the *esonodua* to the chief sweeper to perform three critical tasks: first, to clean the Golden Stool and prepare it for *nkonwafieso* rituals, and during these rituals, it is his duty to wipe any dust deposits on the Golden Stool with the *esonodua*. Secondly, during public ceremonies involving the Golden Stool, the chief sweeper employs the *esonodua* to fend off flies and bugs. Thirdly, a similar duty is performed when the Golden Stool is placed on the Golden Stool's *hwedom* as part of the *Adaekese* celebration.

Symbolic Meaning

This graphical symbolism symbolises cleaning, preparing, wiping, and warding off dust deposits, flies, and bugs on, from, or on the Golden Stool.

Philosophical Meaning

The Golden Stool is highly revered, sacred and portrays the physical symbol of Asante power and unity. This graphical symbolism urges people to acknowledge, revere and venerate relics that bind them together as one people with one common destiny by protecting them and not allowing dirt or unholy material to come into contact with them.

4. 4. *Ɔsrane ne Nsoromma Abɔtire*



Figure 5: *Ɔsrane ne nsoromma abɔtire* (Photo credit: The curator at the half-buried *Ɔkomfoɔ Anɔkye* sword at KATH, 2019)

Literal Meaning

The moon and star.

Background

The Adinkra symbol employed in designing the *abɔtire* as shown in Figure 5, which is a headband, reflects the unwavering belief of the Akans. It symbolizes the femininity of the *Ɔsrane* (representing the moon) and the masculinity of the *nsoromma* (symbolizing the star). The *nsoromma* is revered as the son of God. Among the Akans, it is firmly held that these two celestial entities exist as a harmonious couple in the celestial heavens.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises marriage between the moon and the star hence the Asante saying ‘*kyekye pe aware*’ translated, as ‘the star likes marriage,’ but principally it symbolises faithfulness, fondness and cooperation.

Philosophical Meaning

This symbolism touches on the fact that Asantehene likes Asanteman and vice versa, his faithfulness as the sovereign of Asanteman, his fondness for his people and the cooperation he has established over the years with his paramount chiefs, queen mothers, and the people of Asanteman and beyond.

4. 5. *Aya Abɔtire*



Figure 6: *Aya abɔtire* (Photo credit: The curator at the half-buried *Ɔkomfoɔ Anɔkye* sword at KATH, 2019)

Literal Meaning

'Fern' is a resilient plant with thin evergreen leaves with the capability to endure virtually year-round situations and soil types.

Background

This Adinkra symbol indicated in Figure 6 talks about the difficulties of life with a practical lesson that the existence of humankind entails strong determination to face trials and fluctuations in life. Understanding the meaning of this symbolism equips a person with the power to overcome the fluctuating challenges and rigorous conditions that confront him/her or the country in which he/she lives.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises endurance and defiance.

Philosophical Meaning

This symbolism teaches that in the Asante Kingdom, the Asantehene, the chiefs, and the people will accept and endure all challenges in every aspect of their endeavours and commitments because they know that despite the challenges, there is always light at the end of the tunnel for Asanteman.

4. 6. *Ebi Deda Ebi Akyi Kyinye*



Figure 7: *Ebi deda ebi akyi kyinye* (Source: Ampene & Nyantakyi III, 2016)

Literal Meaning

All men are not equal; some are more equal than others.

Background

The *Ebi deda ebi akyi kyinye* as illustrated in Figure 7 was commissioned by Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II, who currently holds the esteemed position as the sixteenth (16th) occupant of the Golden Stool (Essuman, Amissah & Gyimah, 2023), and it is a two-tiered *kyinye* and it denotes the superiority of the Asantehene. It is also a reminder for him to always be vigilant, which is encapsulated in the *ntuatire* made of *babadua*, the knotted stem of a cane plant. On the other hand, *babadua* is able to neutralise *nsuman* of adversaries when they are stuck with it. The text around the edge of the large *kyinye* reads: *Asanteman wura, mo ne adwuma pa* (i.e., Asante King, congratulations for doing an excellent job).

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises superiority and vigilance.

Philosophical Meaning

This symbolism represents the superiority of individuals in relation to positions they held or entrusted to them and also teaches people the importance of being constantly careful or vigilant in all their commitments and endeavours. This is a symbol of superiority and Asantehene's constant vigilance in his activities.

4. 7. Bosomuru Afena



Figure 8: Bosomuru afena (Photo credit: The curator at the Manhyia palace museum, 2019)

Background

The *Bosomuru afena*, as illustrated in Figure 8 (i.e., sword), is one of the regalia the first occupant of the Golden Stool, Opemsuo Osei Tutu I (1697–1717), seized from Onoo Adu Gyamfi after defeating him in a war. With the help of Okomfoɔ Anokye, the *afena* was consecrated for Asanteman and incorporated into the spiritual rituals that authenticated *Kumasehene* as Asantehene.

Symbolic Meaning

This graphical symbolism symbolises power and sacred *afena* used to swear the Great Oath of Asanteman by a newly enstooled Asantehene.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophy derived from this graphical symbolism is that, in the kingship setup of Asante Kingdom, for the Asantehene-elect to be accepted and acknowledged traditionally, culturally, and spiritually as a true King of Asante, he had to use this sacred graphical symbolism to swear the Great Oath of Asanteman as part of the *Pampaso* Stool House rituals. This swearing is done in spite of the fact that he had earlier sworn with *Mponponson afena*.

4. 8. Esie Afena



Figure 9: Esie afena (Photo credit: The curator at the Manhyia palace museum, 2019)

Proverb

Esie n'animuonyam ne mmire

Literal Meaning

The value of a mound is based on the quality of mushrooms it produces or that grow on it.

Meaning of the *Abɔsodeɛ*

Based on the interpretation assigned to the *abɔsodeɛ* embossed on the *Afena*, *Esie* as shown in Figure 9 (i.e., ‘mound’) refers to Asanteman while the ‘mmire’ (i.e., mushrooms) refers to Asantehene.

Background

It was Otumfoɔ Opoku Ware II (1970–1999), (15th) occupant of the Golden Stool who commissioned the royal goldsmiths of Asanteman to cast this graphical symbolism, i.e., *esie n’animuonyam ne mmire* in gold and embossed it on this *afena as abɔsodeɛ*. Traditionally, the ‘esie’ was in reference to Asanteman as a whole and its value, and the ‘mmire’ i.e., was in reference to the Asantehene, presently, Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II.

Symbolic Meaning

This graphical symbolism symbolises the value of Asantehene to Asanteman in comparison to all sixteen regions in Ghana.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophy derived from this graphical symbolism is that what comes out of a well-organised and structured community founded with a great purpose for the present posterity is the products it produces and their value at the helm of affairs. It also stresses a leader’s value as a community’s leader in comparison with other communities’ leaders.

4.9. *Nsaa Kyinyɛ*



Figure 10: *Nsaa kyinyɛ* (Source: Ampene & Nyantakyi III, 2016)

Background

The *Nsaa Kyinyɛ* as indicated in Figure 10 (commonly known as an umbrella), holds a significant role among the Asantehene’s *kyinyɛ*. During the *Adaekɛsɛɛ* festival and when the King is in a state of authority, this umbrella provides a protective canopy for the Asantehene’s *akonwa*. The *Nsaa* cloth, crafted from camel hair, serves as its covering. Notably, the *Nsaa Kyinyɛ* bears design elements reminiscent of the original stool form, with *ntuatire* (similar to the traditional stool’s shape) and *foa* (resembling the circular *forowa* stool, which predates the rectangular stool). Interestingly, it is also used interchangeably with the *Katamansi kyinyɛ*, which covers the National Umbrella during processions.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises a canopy and respect for the *akonwa* (i.e., a stool) of the Asantehene.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophical meaning behind this graphical symbolism is linked with the traditional belief that, since Asantehene’s *akonwa* is sacred due to his position as the King of the Asante Kingdom, there is a need to physically accord it with respect, protection and shelter it from the heat of the sun during processions to durbars or celebratory grounds. It encourages people to respect, protect, and shield their leaders’ seat of power from all forms of adversity in state activities at all times.

4. 10. *Mpintin Ensemble*



Figure 11: *Mpintin* ensemble (Photo credit: Manhyia palace photo album, 2019)

Background

The ‘*mpintin* ensemble’ a large round gourd that provides music for royal procession, did not originate from the Asante Kingdom, but from the Dagombaland, which is a large round gourd, and it was the Asantehene Kwaku Duah (1843–1867) who created a similar ensemble after hearing the drummers of the King of Dagomba, who was on a royal visit to *Kumase* (i.e., Kumasi).

The *mpintin* ensemble, as shown in Figure 11, is performed basically to praise Asantehene and to urge him to take care when he is not being carried in an *apakan* (i.e., palanquin) so as not to stumble, since it is believed that any reigning Asantehene has more knowledge about the meaning of the *mpintin* drums; thus, he is able to understand and interpret the sounds that emanate from the beating of the ensemble. In addition, the ensemble is also limited to and accompanies the Asantehene on celebratory occasions such as *Adaekesee* or during a state visit by a dignitary. There are two pieces of processional music that emanate from the *mpintin* ensemble. The first piece, known as *efom* (i.e., ground), is played when Asantehene is walking in a procession, while the second one, known as *esoro* (i.e., up), is played when Asantehene is being carried in *apakan*.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises praise, honour, caution, and taking care of oneself.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophy of the *mpintin* ensemble dwells on the wisdom of understanding and interpreting the communication embedded in the sounds emanating from the drums. Thus, although the ensemble is used to accompany the Asantehene on celebratory occasions or during a state visit of a dignitary, it is mostly used to provide rhythm for the Asantehene when he is walking in a procession to be cautious of his steps and to sound his appellations or praises when he is being carried in *apakan*. In the language of drums, the ensemble is also used to honour him for his achievements and job well done as the King of the Asante Kingdom.

4. 11. *Gyapetia Afena*

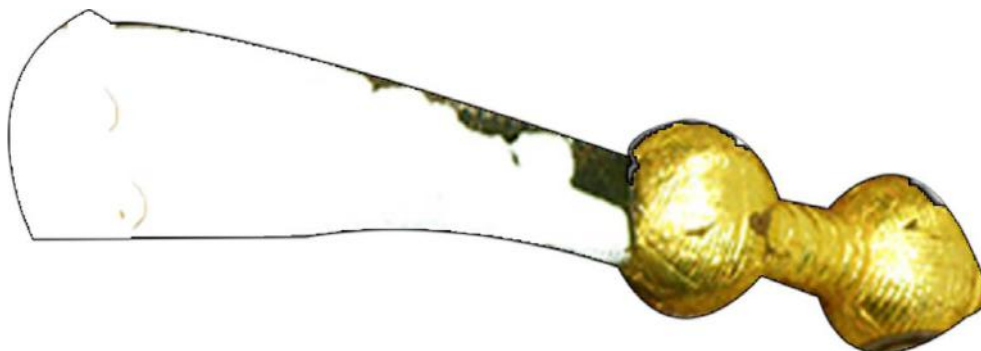


Figure 12: The *Gyapetia Afena* (Photo credit: The curator at the Manhyia palace museum, 2019)

Background

This *afena*, as shown in Figure 12, is specifically used by *adikrofoɔ*, i.e., heads of towns, to swear the great oath to their *Amanhene* before the *Amanhene* in turn swear that great oath to the Asantehene, their sovereign. *Ɔkɔmfɔɔ Anɔkye* made a pronouncement that since the *Amanhene* were using the *ahwebaa* to swear the great oath, their elders who preceded them should use a *gyapetia* sword. The Asantehene, Otumfoɔ Osei Bonsu (1800–1824) on his return from the Asante – Fante war, introduced the *etwom*, i.e., *apurukusu* or the electric fish skin for the scabbard for the *afena*, but the custodian does not possess a hat, *akrafokonmu* and *abɔsodeɛ*.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises swearing, *afena* (sword), loyalty, and compliance.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophy behind this graphical symbolism stresses the importance of abiding by and implementing laid down rules and regulations as to how things must be done in order to bring rationality to all activities in communities. In addition, it teaches about differences in terms of status in communities and serves as a check on orderly participation in all spheres of life.

4. 12. *Bosompra Kumaa Afena*



Figure 13: The *Bosompra Kumaa Afena* (Photo credit: The curator at the Manhyia palace museum, 2019)

Literal Meaning

A benefactor who is highly dependable for providing sustenance.

Meaning of the *Abɔsodeɛ*

With a hen and her chicken as *abɔsodeɛ*, Otumfoɔ Agyeman Prempeh I, signified that he was protective of his children just as the hen protects her chicks.

Background

It was the thirteenth (13th) occupant of the Golden Stool, Otumfoɔ Agyeman Prempeh I (1888–1931), who commissioned the royal goldsmiths of Asanteman to cast this graphical symbolism, i.e., *the hen and her chicks* in gold and embossed it on this *afena* as *abɔsodeɛ* for the royal family upon his return from exile in Seychelles in 1896. The *afena* as illustrated in Figure 13, was named *Bosompra kumaa* due to the fact that, there was also a *Bosompra panin* in existence that was also created for the royal family. But, unlike the *bosompra panin* this sword is not used in purification rites for the soul. In rare cases, it replaces the *Bosompra panin* when the custodian is not available. However, the Asantehene can send the custodian on several errands related to the royal family.”

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises protection.

Philosophical Meaning

This graphical symbolism encourages people to face difficult challenges or problems that confront them and will confront them, and overcome them by constraining their selfish desires, crucifying their personal ambitions and acting in the greater interest of their people and community, i.e., to put others first and themselves – last. It also encourages people to take on bad situations and make them better.

4. 13. *Sikadwa Hwedɔm (Hwedɔmtea) Akonnwa*



Figure 14a: *Sikadwa hwedɔm akonnwa*
(Source: Ampene and Nyantakyi III, 2016)

Figure 14b: *Sikadwa hwedɔm akonnwa* with
the *Sikadwa Kofi* enthroned on it
(Photo credit: The curator at the Manhyia
palace museum, 2019)

Background

Since the *Sikadwa* (the Golden Stool) is never allowed to touch the ground due to its sacredness and the belief that it embodies the soul of Asanteman, it is placed on this *Sikadwa hwedɔm akonnwa*, as indicated in Figures 14 a and b, also known as *Hwedɔmtea*, which is also placed on *esonɔ aso* known in as *banwoma* during gatherings or ceremonies, such as *Adaekesee*. The big circular ornament on the backrest of the *akonnwa*, i.e., the chair is *tadee*, i.e., a lake, and *funumatu*, i.e., navel, is placed on the topsides with small and large *ankaa dwea*, i.e., orange seed studs decorating the edges. All the ornaments on the *akonnwa* are plated with gold.

Symbolic Meaning

This symbolises a throne (*akonnwa*) upon which the sacred Golden Stool (that represents the authority of the Asantehene and enshrines the soul and unity of the Asante Kingdom) is enthroned during gatherings or important ceremonies.

Philosophical Meaning

The philosophy derived from this symbol is that the people of Asante regard the Golden Stool as a living being, since it was born on Friday (hence the name *Sikadwa Kofi*), and treat it with awe; hence, there is a need to have a throne for it to be enthroned upon in public, just as Asantehene is enthroned.

5. CONCLUSIONS:

Symbolism forms an important aspect of the Asante culture; thus, through observation, it was concluded that all the graphical symbolism identified and displayed during the celebration of the *Adaekesee* festival on Sunday, April 21, 2019 had hidden symbolic meanings behind their use. The discussions have brought to the fore that, the explored graphical symbolism, such as *banwoma*, clenched fist *ntuatire* (κρῶνον) *kyinye*, *esonodua*, *ɔsrane ne nsoromma abɔtire*, *aya abɔtire*, *akuma*, *ebi deda ebi akyi kyinye*, *bosomuru afena*, *esie afena*. *Funtunfunefu denkyemfunefu abɔtire*, *nsaa kyinye*, *mpintin* ensemble, and *mpaboakurafɔ* have hidden symbolic meanings. They convey symbolic messages in the



areas of floor carpets, power, swearing, defiance, strength, unity, cleaning, preparing, wiping off, faithfulness, fondness, cooperation, endurance, peace, hacking through, superiority, vigilance, power, sacred, value, democracy, oneness, canopy, respect, praises, honour, caution, taking care of oneself, a pair of sika *mpaboa*, and readiness. Additionally, through the exploration of the graphical symbols displayed during the celebration of the Adaekesee festival, it was concluded that out of the exploration came the fact that there are philosophical meanings behind the graphical symbolism used. These philosophical meanings, which are intrinsically linked with the graphical symbolism, are used to convey proverbial messages, reverence, honour, encouraging defiance, strength, unity, sacredness, veneration, acceptance, endurance, peace, superiority, vigilance, acknowledgement, value, togetherness, democracy, canopy, respect, protection, shelter and caution. In addition, for praising, applauding, faithfulness in one's dealings, fondness for one another, and cooperation among people in all their undertakings.

IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:

The conclusion underscored the role of the graphical symbolism displayed during the celebration, and it came out clearly that the Adaekesee festival celebration begins with identifiable graphical symbolism and closes with them because they have hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings behind their use in relation to specific functions they perform during the celebration. These were seen in the form of visual, verbal, and performing arts seen, communicated, and displayed during the celebration of the festival. Based on this, the following recommendations are stated:

1. The unknotted hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings inherent in the graphical symbolism of Adaekesee festival are educational materials; thus, the *Amanhene*, *Nananom*, *Abrempon*, *Ahenmaa*, royals, curators, staff of the various palaces, and elders of Asante Kingdom must use them to educate the current generation of Asante on the importance of the graphical symbolism displayed during the Adaekesee festival, their culture, history, and traditions.
2. The Asante Traditional Council must be made available to the indigenes of the Asante Kingdom through the various traditional councils, *Amanhene*, and chiefs of the documented graphical symbolism of Adaekesee festival in both soft and hard copies (CD/pen drives and books) in order to teach and train Asantes of the rich cultural heritage and for unadulterated Asante cultural studies.
3. All Asante Societies/Associations under the auspices of the Asante Kotoko Society of the Asante Kingdom, with objectives for the spread of Asantesem and Asante cultural studies, must research and shed further, factual light on the numerous graphical symbolisms of Adaekesee festival for the people of the Asante Kingdom and posterity.
4. Future research must be conducted comprehensively on other graphical symbolism of the Adaekesee festival to unravel their hidden symbolic and philosophical meanings, moral, political, educational, religious, ideological, and social values embedded in them, and document them in book form for educational and development purposes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST:

The researcher has not declared any conflict of interest

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