

Full Length Research Paper

The unwritten historical perspectives of Akan spokespersons staffs

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The Akan of Ghana are one of the 'richest' ethnic groups in the country. They are known to be the first ethnic group that settled in Ghana, hence the reason for the name "kan (e)" which means 'the first'. There are several subgroups that are classified under the eight main clans of the Akan and all of these subgroups are well known for their rich culture. Among the Akan culture the chief is seen as the custodian of the land. To convey the words of the chief to the people, the spokesperson (ɔkyeame), being a repository of the Akan customs, values and language, quotes the words of the chief appropriately, for easy understanding. The spokespersons staffs (ɔkyeame Poma), magnificent gold-covered staffs, are carried by these spokespersons who are high-ranking officials within the court of the Akan chiefs in Ghana, as symbols of authority. The spokespersons staffs are usually classified under Akan symbolism as they are said to serve as a medium of communication. The staff is meant to constitute a principal symbol that defines the spokesperson's office and facilitate his functions in and out of the chief's court. To gain the relevant information about the unwritten perspectives of the Akan spokespersons staffs from experts in the field of Akan history, interview was used as the main form of data collection. From the study, it was evident that all spokespersons staffs (ɔkyeame Poma), carry the philosophy of the group of people it represents. The spokespersons staffs are also respected as an embodiment of the souls of the Akan people. On the unwritten perspectives of the Akan spokespersons staff, it was evident that the ɔkyeame's are not linguists (as they are popularly called) but rather spokespersons.

Key words: Spokesperson, spokespersons staffs, linguist, Akan history, Akan clans.

INTRODUCTION

Spokesperson staffs, (also known as Linguist staffs and in Akan as *ɔkyeame Poma*), magnificent gold – covered staffs, are carried by high – ranking officials within the court of the Akan chiefs in Ghana. The Akan generally place emphasis on their speech hence the spoken word

in the form of axioms, proverbs and strives is known to be the repository of Akan custom and values. A complete mastery of proverbial lore combined with an eloquent and intuitive way of conveying it is considered as the mark of intellect of highly esteemed individuals. Those who

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possess this knowledge and an articulate command of the language may then be appointed as court spokespersons (linguists or *Ɔkyeame*), which is revered as the most important non-royal court office (Figure 1). Staffs were given to linguists (*Ɔkyeame*) by their chiefs to act as translators and advisors for the chief. The *Ɔkyeame* being very knowledgeable in speech would translate the chief's words into a language the people will understand. Due to this, he was expected to speak eloquently and confidently and as such carried the chiefs message through visual means (showing the staff to the people) and non-visual means (the use of proverbs) (Boadi, 1972). The finial of the spokespersons staffs, commonly illustrate proverbs and axioms that asserts the ruler's legitimacy and capabilities or praise the ruler's experience and sagacity (Figure 2).

Ethnology of the Akan

The Akan people of Ghana and Ivory Coast consist of Asante and Fante people and other ethnicities who are identified and classified as people speaking the *Kwa* languages (Chinebuah et al., 1976). The Akan people are made up of several subgroups and these subgroups are classified under eight (8) clans; these are:

- (1) Asante
- (2) Akuapim
- (3) Akyem
- (4) Agona
- (5) Kwahu
- (6) Wassa
- (7) Fante
- (8) Bono

There are other groups that consider themselves as Akan due to the fact that they have similar language patterns. These include and are not limited to Anyin, Baoule, Chakosi (Anufo), Sefwi, Nzema, Ahanta and Jwira-Pepesa. All these groups, according to Chinebuah et al. (1976) have common cultural attributes such as descendancy, chieftaincy, inheritance of property and high political office succession.

Two main schools of thought exist about the origin of native Akan. The first says that the Akan people are believed to have originated from ancient Ghana making them the rightful custodians of modern day Ghana. Whereas the second states that the Akan were the first settlers of Ghana, hence the Twi word "*kan (e)*" which means first or foremost (Kyeremanteng, 2010). Their migration history puts them in Nubia (Sudan) circa 500AD where it was said that due to the pressure from the Axumite Kingdom of Ethiopia, Nubia as a nation and a people got dispersed, the Akan people along with them. The Akan people then moved west and survived by establishing small trading kingdoms and this brought

about the building and strengthening of the empire of Ghana.

External factors such as the introduction of Islam caused the collapse of the empire of Ghana which had lasted from 750AD to 1200AD (Akuapem, 2011). Some Akan ancestors were then believed to have gone to present day Ivory Coast which was known as Kong. Later, some of them moved from Kong to Wam and Dormaa, both found in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana formally the Bonoman (Warren, 1975). The Bonoman kingdom was established in the 12th century and between then and the 13th century, there was a major exploration of gold in the area which made numerous Akan people wealthy (Davidson, 1984).

According to Ki-Zerbo et al. (1997), several Akans made excessive use of the rise in the gold industry in addition to the trading of cash crops to improve and increase their wealth. At its height, the Akan polity extended its influence, if not in absolute political control, over a diversity of nearby groups. Currently, these various groups all speaking the language Akan share key cultural traditions; coffins and funerary rites, mortuary vessels, stools, architecture, gold weights, *Adinkra* and *Kente* cloths, just to mention a few (Blier, 1998). Court linguist staffs carved of wood were decorated in gold work, showing their high status and the power of the ruler they served. The Akan people, according to a study conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in 2016, in the World Fact Book sub-heading *People and Society*, currently form 47.5% of the total population of Ghanaians.

The culture of Akan is said to be one of the traditional matrilineal cultures of Africa with their wide range of arts and artefacts and peculiar methods, for example the tradition of crafting bronze gold weights using the lost wax casting methods (Briggs and Rushton, 2007). Grossman et al. (2009) state that as a culturally matrilineal group, the Akan people have basic concepts and philosophies that guide them. Some of which include the bloodline of an individual which is seen to be the framework for one's way of life. For example:

- (1) The *Abusua (mogya)* is what an Akan inherits from his mother and as such should remain an untainted aspect of his or her life due to the fact that the Akan will inherit his or her property from his mother's clan. Also as the *Abusua* is what the Akan inherits from his mother, it is where the Akan also hails from.
- (2) *Ntoro* (or *Nton*) is what an Akan gets from his father but one does not belong to an *ntoro*. The *ntoro* therefore serves as a means of knowing one's father's family.
- (3) *Sunsum* is what an Akan develops from interaction with the world. This could be good or bad depending on the exposure one gets.
- (4) *Kra* is what one gets from *Nyame* (God), the Supreme Being. Negative activities of one's life could end up being a burden to the *kra* therefore there is the need to live a



Figure 1. Akan *Okyeame Poma* (A chief has the support of his people if his intentions are good and fair).



Figure 2. Finial of an Akan *Okyeame Poma* representing a man holding a book.

life free of evil.

The role of the spokesperson and his staff

In the Akan culture, a spokesperson (linguist) is seen as a very intelligible person who is known to have specialized in a variety of speech patterns and speech forms that do not involve many words. Their vast knowledge and superior diplomacy make them essential as counsellors, ambassadors, legal experts and historians (Bartle, 2012). They mostly serve as advisors to the chief, however, they are non-royals. These spokespersons carry tall staffs that are made of wood and are covered with motif-decorated gold leaves. This meant that, the bearers of these staffs carried the mark of authority and wherever they went, acted on the king's behalf.

At public functions, the linguist (*Okyeame*) carries a staff (mace) of authority. The staff is usually carved from wood and may be coated with gold leaf. Usually, the top part of the staff is a symbol designed to communicate specific messages either about the status and authority of the *Okyeame* or the message he as a diplomat is authorized to convey on behalf of the king at specific public functions (Bartle, 2012). The spokesperson's staff is the official symbol of the spokesperson. He carries this staff to perform his spiritual and ritual functions per the chief's orders. While it's spiritual and ritual functions are minor, this is counterbalanced by the richness of staff motif imagery (Yankah, 1985).

Wood carving begun prominently in the forest areas due to the accessibility of raw material (wood) for carving as posited by Boateng (n. d). As it was not practiced by many, the limited number of carvers were seen as endowed with special talents from God. These carvers were given much respect and were termed as "*Ohene Dwumfuor*" literally translated as "chief's carver". These carvers used a variety of tropical species of wood that were available. Carving provided for a wide range of household equipment in ancient Akan. Examples of these are mortars, pestles, wooden bowls, ladles, combs, stools, chairs, walking sticks, spokesperson staffs and a countless array of household items and traditional games.

The Akan create art with verbal and visual inter-connections or symbolic meaning based on oral literature. They make avid use of proverbs and these proverbs are usually associated with the carved symbols on their spokespersons staffs. These symbols are produced to explain social and cultural relevance to members of the society. Not only do they carry messages in these staffs but their stools and state swords as well (Asare, 2011).

Quarcopome (1996) outlines that the Akan chief presides in a court and a bureaucracy composed of officials, royals and non-royals ranked in the hierarchy.

The most revered position in the royal offices is the position of the spokesperson (*Okyeame*). Communication with the Asante king, sub chiefs and traditional priests goes through the *Okyeame* (Beckwith and Fischer, 1999). Asare (2011) reveals that a king could have as many as 13 spokespersons to serve varied purposes in the kingdom. Again, being a knowledgeable person, the *Okyeame* must be a 'sweet talker' who comes out with words, proverbs, parables and metaphors that reflect what a chief or a king intends to say. It is then clear to assert that the *Okyeame* must have adequate information about the culture, particularly the socio-political aspects of his or her culture.

As a symbol of authority for the chief and his kingdom, the *Okyeame* carries a staff (*Okyeame Poma* also known as linguist or spokesperson's staff) that projects so much authority with the finial representing an Akan proverb. Osei (2000) states that the spokesperson is supposed to lead delegations for enquiries from deities, and also to deliver messages from one chief to the other. He or she also has to serve as the bearer of the news of the demise of a chief to another chief.

Due to this, the spokesperson is seen as a channel between the people and their kings and chiefs. In comparison to modern day business world, the spokesperson can be said to serve secretarial duties where one books an appointment with the him or her before seeing a chief or king. On the said date, the individual is led by the spokesperson to the private court of the king. Asare (2011) also states that, the spokespersons tend to be attached to the kings so much so that they are sometimes termed as the kings "wives".

The spokespersons staffs are usually classified under Akan symbolism as they are said to serve as a medium of communication. A spokesperson's staff is meant to constitute a principal symbol that defines the spokesperson's office and facilitate his or her functions in and out of the chief's court. It is a wooden shaft, carved with intricate designs and is in three segments; a finial (figurative), a mid-section (for holding) and a spiked base (Blier, 1998). The finial has on it an animal, a human figure, a plant or an illustration of a proverb or a combination of some or all of the above stated.

Often, the staff is covered with gold leaf as gold is the social prestige and material wealth of the Akan or painted black. The shaft is generally covered with subtle geometric decorations, often has an integrally carved 'wisdom knot' (*nyansa po*; a type of knot that can only be untwined with patience, wisdom and skill which is symbolic of the attributes of the king or chief and his court) and occasionally other representational motifs. As stated earlier, the Akan make use of a lot of proverbial illustrations on their finials. These proverbs depicted certain attributes of the king or chief such as his political authority.

Iconography is an aspect of art that is used most in these spokespersons staffs as their symbolism, like

proverbs, communicate ideas about the rule of law of the king or chief. The Akan is made up of eight clans and each of these clans have totems that represent them, whether in behaviour or in likeness to the particular totem.

Clan	Totem	Meaning
Oyoko	Falcon	Patience
Bretuo	Leopard	Aggressiveness
Asona	Crow	Wisdom
Asenie	Bat	Diplomacy
Aduana	Dog	Skill
Ekoonna	Buffalo	Uprightness
Agona	Parrot	Eloquence
Asakyiri	Vulture	Endurance

These totems serve as a symbol that directs the lives of people in the clan. The animals depicted on the totems then become sacred to members of clans and are not to be consumed by clan members. Carrying a linguist or spokesperson's staff can be found in several cultures; Egypt being one, where factions (clans or ethnic groups) have their own staffs that serve as symbols of authority. An example is given of the Egyptian deity '*Ptah*' (who is also believed to be one of the Akan deities), who was referred to as the 'noble deity' or a 'noble Djed' because of the staff he carried. As a deity, there were linguists who translated *Neteru Ptah's* words to the people and these linguists had staffs that classified them as holders of office in their tradition. Among the Egyptians however, when a king or a Pharaoh passes away, his linguist is buried with him as the linguist is supposed to continue his service to the Pharaoh in the other world.

Purpose of the study

This study is imperative to the culture of the Akan people of Ghana. It is an undisputed fact that most indigenous ethnic groups in Ghana, and for that matter Africa, do not document their practices, which include their verbal and non-verbal art forms. This study, as the title suggests, seeks to chronicle the hitherto unwritten historical perspectives of the philosophies of the Akan people in relation to their spokespersons staffs. This study points out the fact that, the Akan people projected some of their moral lessons and their doctrines through the appropriate use of their spokespersons staffs. The Akan people more or less personified their spokespersons staffs and gave them the adequate respect as per their beliefs, the spokespersons staffs were an embodiment of their ancestors and relatives that had passed on to the other world. The study also explains that, the common use of the term 'linguist' for spokespersons in the Akan parlance is inappropriate as they are spokespersons for the chiefs and kings and not necessarily individuals skilled in foreign languages.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use, mainly, of the qualitative approach; with interviews to gather data on the unwritten perspectives of the Akan linguist staffs. As the qualitative research is an approach that allows a researcher to study a particular group of people and understand the meanings people have attached to various phenomena (Merriam, 2009), it proves to be the best option in outlining and explaining the Akan spokespersons staffs. Sandel (1989) states that qualitative research is a type of research providing detailed narrative descriptions and explanations of phenomena investigated with lesser emphasis given to numerical qualifications. The method used was an ethnographic practice; interviewing. In this case, information about the spokesperson and the spokespersons staffs of the Akan were described in detail and the meanings were expatiated with less prominence on the statistical aspect of data collection.

Sampling technique

Since it is nearly impossible to study every single individual in the population of a study, Farmer et al. (1996) state that, sampling is a method that allows researchers to infer information about issues from a subset of a population without having to investigate every individual. The data collected for this research were from interviews through personal communications with three main resource persons from the Centre for National Culture (CNC), Kumasi.

Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning an individual are taken by a researcher. The criteria for this may be due to the specialist knowledge of the individual or the willingness on the individual's part to partake in the research (Oliver, 2006). Also known as judgemental sampling, in purposive sampling, the subjects are selected based on their knowledge, a particular characteristic or the purpose of the study (Crossman, 2014). The resource persons from the Centre for National Culture (CNC), Kumasi, were purposively selected due to the fact that they had detailed information about the Akan spokespersons staffs and the various explanations for its usage to throw more light on the unwritten perspectives of the linguist staffs.

Data collection

Hawe et al. (1990) assert that data are usually collected through qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative approaches as used in this study aims to address the "why" and "how" of the problem. The qualitative approach also uses unstructured methods of data collection to fully explore the topic under study. Nalzar (2012) states that data collection is the process by which a researcher collects the information needed to answer the research problem. For this particular study, the data were collected using mainly interviews to gather information about the aspects of the spokespersons staffs that had yet to be tackled based on existing information and this proved relevant in providing possible answers to the question of unwritten perspectives of the Akan spokespersons staffs.

Data collection instruments

Interview

Interview is a conversation between two or more people where

questions are asked by the interviewer to stimulate facts and statements from the person being interviewed. According to Seidman (1998), qualitative research interviews seek to describe the meanings of central themes and the main task of interviewing is to understand the meanings of what the interviewee says. The central themes in this study are the information about the spokespersons staffs which has remained an unspoken aspect of the culture of the Akan, rendering it unwritten. Weiss (1994) also stated that compared to something like a written survey, interview allows for a significantly higher degree of intimacy with the participants often revealing personal information to their interviewers in a real-time, face-to-face setting. This aided immensely in making data collection from the respondents easier as they were at liberty to provide information which otherwise would have been impossible to obtain.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On the unwritten perspectives

This section is a collection of personal communications with Mustapha Issah (Public Relations Officer for the Centre for National Culture (CNC), Kumasi), Mensah (a participant of the World Wood Day, 2014) and Francis Boadi, the head of the carvers' association in Ghana on 26th October, 2016. Throughout these interviews, there was the persistent need to not classify *Okyeame*'s as linguists. In the study of language, a linguist is an individual skilled in foreign languages, one who does a scientific study of languages and or one who studies different languages (Olawsky, 2014). The *Okyeame* however, is very eloquent and intuitive in his own language and as such tapping from the role he plays, they are to be termed as spokespersons and not linguists.

The Spokesperson and His Staff (*Okyeame ene ne Poma*)

There are different staffs that can be seen among the Akan and the most important fact is that all these staffs play the same role; they serve as symbols of authority. There are three main categories of spokesperson staffs. The three main categories of *Okyeame Poma* are:

The *Okyeame Poma* for the spokesperson of the king or chief

The *Okyeame Poma* for the family

The *Okyeame Poma* for the family head (*Abusua panyin*)

The word *Okyeame* as is known today was actually a phrase used to describe the role of the spokesperson played. This was used for a long time in the history of the Akans before its adulterated version '*Okyeame*', as is known today. When the chief needed someone to be a mediator between him and his people, he asked for someone who 'would not twist his words', that is, someone who will say exactly what the king meant to his

people. When said person is found the chiefs are always delighted and term them as 'the one who does not twist my words' in Akan "*Onkyea ma no asem*". With time, the phrase became adulterated arriving at what is now known as the *Okyeame*. In indigenous societies, all *Okyeame*'s play similar roles. In traditional marriages, when a man is going to ask the hand of a young lady in marriage, the *Okyeame* has to be present to play his or her intermediary role. Also, when visiting the chief's palace, the *Okyeame* is always present to play his or her role as an interpreter and adviser. The *Okyeame* is always present when and where he or she is needed to play the befitting role for the occasion.

The philosophy of the Akan in their spokespersons staffs

Totems on the *Okyeame Poma* used by chiefs and sub chiefs normally employ the proverbial illustrations of what their people stand for together with the totem of the clans or families they belong to. This can be found in most Akan speaking communities, for example the Aduana, who have dogs as their totemic animals along with other animals that bear similar characteristics as the dogs. The *Okyeame Poma* differs from community to community; though they may all be under one ruling kingdom such as the current *Asantehene*. The various sub chiefs may come from different clans which would mean different spokesperson staffs. The *Krontihene* may have a different staff and so will the *Gyasehene*, the *Sanaahene*, *Nifahene* and *Benkumhene*.

Every single *Okyeame Poma*, has a philosophy it carries, that is, the philosophy of the group of people it represents. It carries not just their philosophies, but their concepts, beliefs and behavioural patterns. For example, the *Okyeame Poma* always has a figure, be it an animal, a human being or a combination as seen on the finial. Hence if the figure on the finial of a particular group's *Okyeame Poma* is the *Gye Nyame* symbol (literally translates as 'except God'), then it carries on the philosophy of the group and their belief in the *Gye Nyame* symbol, their cognitive pattern and the way the people react to the symbol. The reverence given to the *Okyeame Poma* can easily be likened to the reverence given to flags of nations. The flag contains the philosophies, the blood and the toil of the people of the nation hence there is the need to always protect and preserve it.

The *Okyeame Poma* also serves as a means of communicating to individuals who are not members of a particular clan. It was used greatly in the past to communicate the character of members of families to men who wanted to marry from those families. This was done to convince men to desist from leaving their wives in the wake of marital issues and this caused marriages to last longer as men were often reminded constantly of the character of a group of people based on the totemic animal of their wives' families.

The finial of the spokespersons staffs always bears a figure, be it a proverbial illustration or an animal that influences the behaviour of the members of a group. The totemic animal of a group is not to be consumed by members of the group. For example, if a buffalo is the totem of clan X, then members of clan X are not to consume the meat of a buffalo. Consumption of the meat of a totemic animal (in one's group) is said to bring ill luck in the life of the individual and possibly the whole community.

Sometimes, coming into contact with a close relative who has consumed the meat of the totemic animal also has some ramifications. An example was given of a clan whose totem was a deer. A daughter of one of the members of that clan married a hunter from another clan, and on one of his expeditions, the hunter killed a deer. He brought the deer home and used his wife's utensils to prepare a meal with the meat of the deer without his wife's concern since she was away.

From that moment on, she lost her vision. Upon consultation with a traditional priest about her blindness, it was revealed that her use of the utensils after they were used for the preparation of the meal (using the deer) meant she had consumed her totemic animal thereby causing the blindness. She stayed blind till her death. These examples among others have made indigenous Akans fear and revere this aspect of their culture and tradition due to what might happen when they go contrary. Although anecdotes or situations like these are not scientifically proven, there may be a logical explanation for the behaviour of the people based on their beliefs even if coincidental or a part of their subconscious mind. These may also be tied to the philosophical ideas that was passed on to them by their forebears and their need to keep them intact.

The soul bearer

The *Okyeame Poma*, aside its main uses as being a symbol of authority and bearing the philosophy of the people it represents also serves as an embodiment of the entire soul of the family. Among certain families that have firm undiluted traditional patterns, when a family member is lost (that is, dies or passes on to the other world), a piece from the clothe that is used to bury the family member is tied around the *Okyeame Poma* to show, first of all the weight of the loss on the family. If the pieces are more than one, they are said to represent the number of family members that have been lost. In other words, they carry the souls of their dead relatives around and hold them dear. By tying the piece from the clothe used to bury the deceased family member on the spokespersons staff, it is their belief that the dead person(s)'(s) soul(s) is/are welcome whenever and wherever the staff is carried. The staff then serves as a bridge and an abode for the departed souls of the family. This is done to show the respect they had for the dead and the need of the

presence of the dead among the living. Belief in spirituality among the Akan is a phenomenon that has not dwindled over time. They believe in the spiritual world and also believe that the spirits of the dead and the ancestors play a vital role in their daily lives. For example, during general family meetings, the *Okyeame Poma* is usually brought to the meeting grounds, as stated earlier, with the pieces of cloth from the clothing of their dead tied around it. This is done to represent the presence of the dead in the meeting. As the *Okyeame Poma* plays its major role as a symbol of authority, it also fosters togetherness among members of the society and members of families as well by bridging the gap between the living and the dead.

Materials used for the *Okyeame Poma*

To build a bridge, one needs to use strong wood, such that, hypothetically, when people are crossing the bridge day in and day out it does not easily get weak. This influences the choice of wood used in the carving of the *Okyeame Poma*. Examples of such wood choices are the Afromosia or Kokrodua (*Pericopsis elata*), Mahogany (*Khaya ivorensis*), Iroko or Odum (*Chlorophora Excelsa*), Kyenkyen or Chenchen (*Antiaris Africana*), and Sese (*Holarrhena floribunda*). No matter how old or how weak the *Okyeame Poma* gets, it is never discarded. The same personification given to it makes it almost a taboo to drop the *Okyeame Poma*. Wherever it finds itself, the *Okyeame Poma* is NEVER to be placed horizontally on the ground, either mistakenly or intentionally. For example, Figure 3 shows a *Denkyira Okyeame Poma* that has been placed on the armrest of a chair in a palace. This has been done to avoid putting the *Okyeame Poma* on the ground. In the chief's palace, when the day is over, there are bases with holes in them for the *Okyeame Poma* to be placed vertically to prevent it from falling. The respect given to the *Okyeame Poma* is not only observed in palaces and families. Other venues such as museums and galleries, where some of these cultural arts are kept have also produced special bases for the spiked ends of the *Okyeame Poma* to be placed in, to avoid putting them on the ground. The Centre for National Culture in Kumasi and the Manhyia Palace Museum are two of such places.

The eight clans and their staffs

Oyoko

Clan totem: The falcon (*Okodee*), symbol of the Oyoko clan

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi

The Oyoko clan is sometimes said to have the Falcon as



Figure 3. A *Denkyira* spokesperson's staff (with an animal symbol on the finial).

its totem, due to their link with Egypt. However, the most prominent and most widely used totem is the eagle (*Ɔkodeε*). They tap from how mighty the eagle is to define their character. In the hierarchy of the Akan, the monarchy is said to be of Oyoko descent and they can be found mainly in Kumasi, Kokofu, Juaben, Bekwai and Nsuta.

Bretuo

Clan totem: The leopard (*Ɛtswie*), symbol of the *Bretuo* clan

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi

The Bretuo were one of the major clans who helped build the Akan empire. They are identified by their totem the leopard (*Ɛtswie*) which symbolizes bravery. Members of the Bretuo clan can be found mainly in Mampong and Effiduase as they were believed to have founded the Bretuo clan.

Asona

Clan totem: The crow (*Kwakwadebi*), symbol of the *Asona* clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi.

Their totem is termed by some simply as the crow and by others as the pie crow (*Kwakwadebi*). They believe sturdily in its symbol of peace and unity and are usually classified as such. Some royals also hail from this clan. Royals of Offinso, Akyem, Abuakwa and Ejisu are of *Asona* descent.

Asenie

Clan totem: The bat (*Apan*), symbol of the *Asenie* clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi

The bat (*Apan*) is the totem of the *Asenie* clan which is believed to symbolise adjudication and peace-loving people. There have also been debates about their migration history, however, it is accepted that they founded Amakom.

Aduana

Clan totem: The dog (*Ɔkraman*), symbol of the *Aduana*

clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi.

Being a clan who service and support humankind, the totem of the Aduana is no other than man's best friend, the dog (*Okraman*). They founded the Essumeja, Dormaa and Kumawu towns.

Ekoonna

Clan totem: The Buffalo (*Ekoo*), symbol of the *Ekoonna* clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi.

The strong and powerful Buffalo (*Ekoo*) is the totem of this clan as they are classified and identified by their massive strength. The *Ekoonna* founded the Asokore, Adansi and the Berekum townships.

Agona

Clan totem: The parrot (*Ako*), symbol of the *Agona* clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi.

There is the unspoken belief that most members of the *Agona* clan tend to be *Okyeame*'s because of their eloquence and their knowledge of their culture and tradition. The parrot (*Ako*) is the totem of the *Agona* and it signifies eloquence, multitude and unity. They founded the Tafo, Nkawie and Denkyira towns.

Asakyiri

Clan totem: The vulture (*Pete*), symbol of the *Asakyiri* clan.

Location of sample staff: Prempeh II Museum, CNC, Kumasi.

The ever-patient people of *Asakyiri* have their totemic animal being the vulture (*Pete*) due to the patience exhibited by the vulture. Their totem symbolises patience, endurance and cleanliness. They are known to have founded Akokeri and Akufuo towns.

Conclusion

The *Okyeame poma*, from this study bears great value to the Akans irrespective of the fact that it may be just a

staff or a mace. They tend to give it the respect it deserves as it embodies the spirit of their dead relatives and serves as a bond between the land of the living and the land of the dead. Just as value is placed on most of the cultural artefacts of the Akan, the *Okyeame poma* also receives the same or even a much higher kind of reverence. The *Okyeame poma* aside its main use as a symbol of authority communicates in two ways; it communicates to the people through the totem that is seen on the finial and it communicates about the people to outsiders of their values and philosophies and what they thrive upon as a people. The *Okyeame poma* is also seen to foster togetherness among members of a particular family, clan and or ethnic group and this is very essential as there is the need for the realization of the self and ethnic identity. Its personification justifies the respect it is accorded due to its extreme relevance to each and every Akan in Ghana, Togo and the diaspora.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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