

DENKYIRA ODWIRA 1966

A party of various grades of the research and tutorial personnel of the Institute of African Studies, Legon, trekked to Dunkwa-on-Offin, in the Denkyira Traditional Area on the 26th of November, 1966 to see their annual Odwira or Cleansing festival. It is one of the grand occasions on which the ancestors are remembered, honoured and asked to continue to intercede for the living.

Mr. Ameyaw, the Research Assistant (Ethnography), went ahead of the party and was able to line up things in such a way as to make us see a lot within the very short time at our disposal.

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1. The present Denkyira traditional area is located at the south of the River Offin and extends due southwards, 14 miles to Cape Coast. Denkyira was once a great kingdom and had paramountcy over many Akan tribes of today. At the height of its power Abankesleso or Bansa, some 15 miles south of present Gyakobu (Jakobu) and west of Adansi Akyerekere (Akrokeri) territory, was the capital. According to oral tradition, the Denkyiras, like other Akan tribes, had their original home some where in Mande, in the region between the Niger and the Volta. They migrated southward as a result of hostilities and famine. Their ancestress was Ayekraa Adeboe who belonged to the Agona clan. They crossed the Volta and reached the area of Takyiman (Techiman) in Bono (Brong) round about 1570. After a time, the migrants lived for a while with the Nkyiras in the same region. They were at the time known as Adawufo; because they depended upon the Nkyiras hence the name Denkyira a corruption of Da-Nkyirafo. Another tradition suggests that Denkyira is Dan-Nkyirafo, literary, naturalised Nkyiras. The migration continued till the Denkyiras settled at Tutumbe in Adansi which had been established by the Asakyiri clan and others like those of Akyerekere (Akrokeri), Dompasi, Ayaasi, Kokobante and Edubiase. From Tutumbe, they moved to the western border of Adansi and founded their famous capital Abankesieso. It was situated at the northern confluence of

The last day of the festivities connected with the Afahye was characterized by jubilation and a state durbar, at which a lot of symbols on umbrellas, linguist sticks and state swords were displayed.

Rivers Offin and Oda, a little inland near the present village of Abuakwa.

The Denkyiras subdued the indigene settlers, the Adansis, who accepted the conquerors' authority. This was the beginning of the rise of the Denkyira kingdom. Subsequently, there were series of campaigns against the neighbouring states. Many of these states were reduced to the condition of dependencies. Ashanti fell before the Denkyira powerful arms. Denkyira became a rich and potent kingdom. This historical fact is referred to in Akan lore as "Kotoko som Amponsem" literary "The porcupine (Ashanti) serves Amponsem" (Denkyira).

The Denkyira kingdom grew very rich and became known to the Europeans on the Atlantic shores as a people with great quantities of alluvial gold. During the reign of Boa Amponsem I, he could afford to have new gold ornaments cast for every ceremonial occasion; gold used once for anything was never used again. This earned him the epithet: "Boa Amponsem a, odi sika tomprada" (Boa Amponsem who eats fresh gold).

In the time of the proud and arrogant seventh Denkyirahene, Ntim Gyakari, Ashanti and other afflicted subject-states rebelled against Denkyira. Asantehene Osei Tutu led the rebels. In a two years engagement, the Ashanti and allies inflicted a most crushing defeat on Denkyira at Feyiase near Bekwai. However, although they were overrun, the Denkyiras remained at Abankesieso under the surveillance of the Bekwaihene, a clan-brother of the Asantehene.

Kwadwo Otibo, Denkyirahene, returned a conqueror having beheaded the formidable Gyamanhene Kofi Adinkra. The Asantehene, Bonsu Panin, was over impressed with the valour of Kwadwo Otibo. Indeed he began to be afraid of him and instead of words of gratitude,

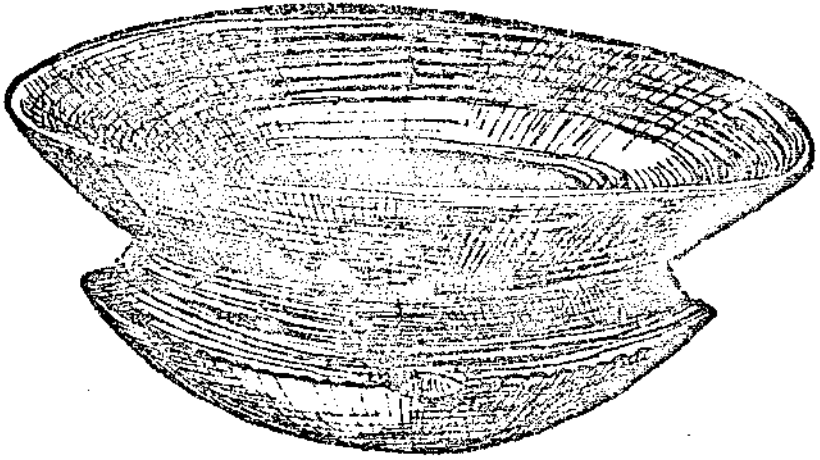
With the industry of Messrs Kwabena Ameyaw our pilot, and A.C. Denteh<sup>2</sup> who was virtually in charge of the group that went to see the festival we were able to bring you a catalogue of a few symbols, with their meaning and significance.

A.K. Quarcoo.

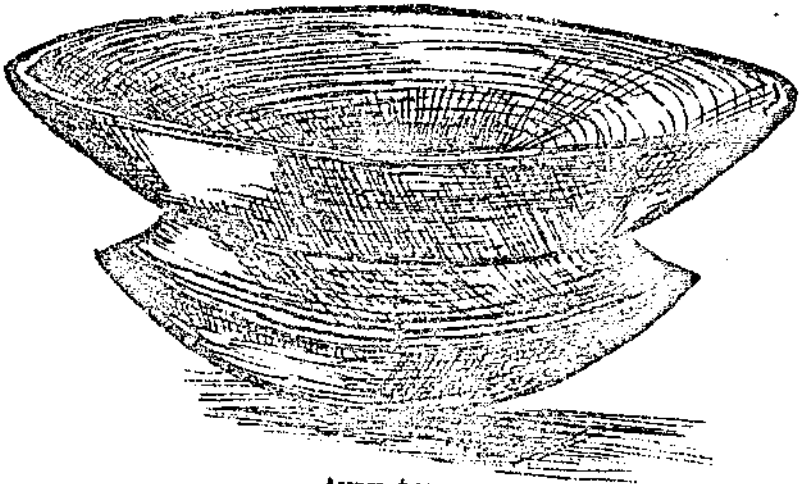
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Kwadwo Otibo was greeted with words of ingratitude. This disappointed Kwadwo Otibo so much that he and his people migrated and crossing the Offin settled in Jukwa which has since become the capital of Denkyira. It was in the course of the move that Dunkwa was built by some of the Denkyiras. (Oral traditional history: Collected by K. Ameyaw).

2. This catalogue has been made available for further study through Mr. Ameyaw who meticulously documented the text and Mr. Denteh who helped to give remarks (Related proverbs). The photographs of these were taken by Mr. K. Andoh. The catalogue with pictures is available in the library of the Institute of African Studies, Legon.



Mpayienim

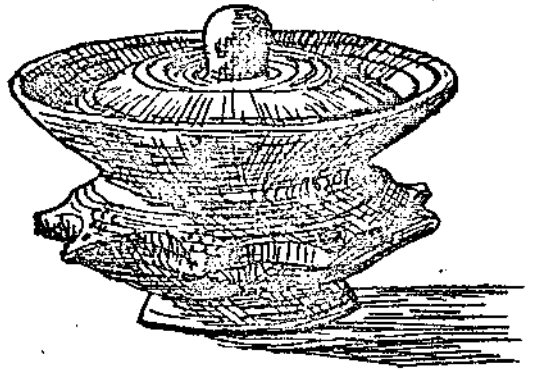


Ayewatoro

Fig. 1 Aduano-Kesee nsanka.

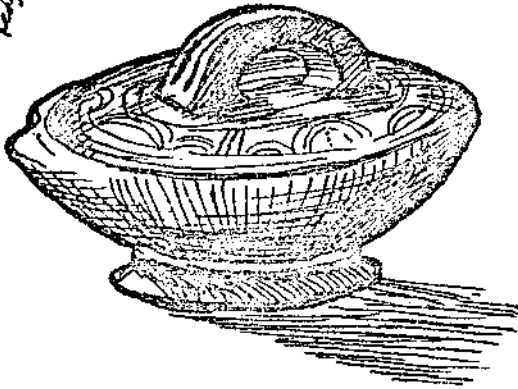


Akyekyeresa



Ketekye

*Keganyi*



Komiti



Komiti

Fig. 2

DESCRIPTION	MAXIM OF THE SYMBOL AND LITERATURE TRANSLATION	MEANING	DESCRIPTION
<p>1. A young man attempting to swallow a small bird wholly is restrained by a chief.</p>	<p>Anoma sua a, ye mpatu nwe no ne ne ntakra, yetutu ne ho ansa. (No matter how small a bird may be, it is not eaten hurriedly with the feathers. The feathers have to be taken off first.</p>	<p>Gently does it, must be the motto. Order is heavens first law.</p>	<p>The man who own this staff may seem small, yet he occupies a significant post in the state which must not be ignored; he must be dealt with in a constitutional manner. A stress on justice and fair play.</p>
<p>2. A man is trying laboriously to scrape the back of a tree into a receptacle.</p>	<p>Ḷbaako were aduru a egu. (If one person attempts to scrape back-medicine from a tree by himself, the shavings fall out of the receptacle)</p>	<p>Many hands make light work.</p>	<p>By this, the chief is seeking the co-operation of his subjects in the running of the state. i.e. A symbol reminding all that every one in the community is important and has a part to play to make for success.</p>

DESCRIPTION	MAXIM OF THE SYMBOL AND LITERATURE TRANSLATION	MEANING	REMARKS
3. A hen looking at the beak of a cockerel	Akoko bedes nim adekyes nanso ohwe onini ano. (The hen knows the approach of day, but she leaves it to the cockerel to announce).	Only appropriate authority can effectively deal with what 'it must deal with.' Propriety is a vital canon of life.	The office-bearer who possesses this may know the way to go about things, but he should not usurp his master's rights. This is a warning against impertinence and impetuosity. i.e. Propriety is a vital canon of life.
4. The head of an animal is a pot of soup.	Aboa tiri nyera nkwan mu. (One cannot mistake the head of an animal in the soup even if the other parts of the animal are unrecognizable).	It is an easy thing to make a prominent person out in a crowd. Or a giant is always a giant even if he stands in a valley.	The chief who has this claims that it is impossible for his state to be ignored in the affairs of the country. The position due to a person is always recognizable.

DESCRIPTION	MAXIM OF THE SYMBOL AND LITERATURE TRANSLATION	MEANING	REMARKS
5. Three people seated have brought their heads together	Etire ne tire hyia a, nterɔ mma. (When heads come together, quarrels or factions do not arise).	Misunderstandings are resolved more quickly at a round table conference.	A chief displays this as an appeal for unity and mutual understanding.
6. A "have-not" looking on hopelessly as the "have" enjoys his plenty.	Deɛ adeɛ wɔ no na odie, na ɛnye deɛ s kɔ m de no. (It is the owner of the food who has the right to eat it and not the person who is hungry).	It is he who has a right to a thing who enjoys it and not just any one who wants it or thinks he should have it.	This is a symbol to signify one's authority to one's inherited rights.
7. A man holding a box of matches and standing by a lantern.	Deɛ okura kanea anadwoɔ na ɛnim kwan mu asem. (He who holds the lamp at night knows best the situation of the road).	On the path, especially at night, it is the light-bearer who leads the people; they should therefore take his wise counsel. It is prudent to pay heed to the knowledgeable.	This is the sign of the Abuakwa Twafoɔhene. He leads before any one else can follow. He is the man who is knowledgeable of what is ahead on the war-path.



DESCRIPTION	MAXIM OF THE SYMBOL AND LITERATURE TRANSLATION	MEANING	REMARKS
8. A nest, a weaver-bird and an eagle.	Akyem anwono ne pitebuo na Okoropon agye afiri ne nsam. (The weaver-bird has made its nest and the mighty eagle has seized it).	Humble people make achievements and then powerful people wrench them from their hands.	This is paradoxically a refutation of the idea that "Might is power".
9. A seated man with his right hand covering up one eye, and with the left hand pointing to the ear.	W'ani na anhunu a, w'aso nso ante? (If it is your eye that didn't see, didn't your ear hear?).	If you do not hear, you may see.	This is a symbol indicating that no one can claim exoneration from common responsibility on the plea of ignorance.
10. Two spiders sitting on their web; there are two men standing at each side of the web.	Obi nkyekyere nyansa mfa nkwa Kwaku Ananse kurom. (Nobody ties up wisdom to convey to the home of great spider).	If the place abounds in a particular commodity, there is no need for any one to carry the same type of thing to the place as if though there was none. (Carrying coal to Newcastle or one cannot be too wise).	By this staff, the chief is warning that there is enough wisdom in his state, and that no one can come and tell a tall story without his people seeing through it. This is the type of symbol to warn an intriguing politician.

DESCRIPTION	MAXIM OF THE SYMBOL AND LITERATURE TRANSLATION	MEANING	REMARKS
<p>11. (Left) A plantain with some young shoots</p> <p>(Middle) A man holding a gun in his right hand, and a human head in his left hand.</p> <p>(Right) A rat, a snake and a squirrel by a cluster of palm nuts.</p>	<p>Borodee ase nhye da. (The plantain will never become destitute of suckers).</p> <p>Twafoe ne tire! (The commander of the Advance-Guard and a human head.)</p> <p>Mmoa nyinaa di abe, opuro nko nkedi bi a, na yereye no. (All creatures eat the palm-nut; but when the squirrel goes to eat it, it is abused).</p>	<p>This is to say that the plantain will ever remain prolific</p> <p>He always encounters the enemy first, strikes first, brings heads before any one else brings one</p> <p>Some people become the unfortunate victims of attack when they do what is a common practice in the society.</p>	<p>The chief who owns this is boasting of the antiquity of his line.</p> <p>This would be the staff of the Twafoehene to show his prowess.</p> <p>The chief owning this would through it be announcing that his actions are of the familiar type; comments on them therefore should be sympathetic and not acrimonious.</p>
<p>12. The pine apple with some suckers.</p>	<p>Aborobe ase ntu da. (The pine apple will never become extinct).</p>	<p>There will always be a "sucker" - successor to perpetuate the lineage.</p>	<p>The graces which this chief is endowed with will never run dry.</p>