

AKAN VISUAL ART AND THE CULT
OF THE ANCESTORS

by

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The Phenomenon of Death and the Ancestors

Death, the final crisis of life, continues to be a puzzle to man but it seems to have been fully accepted in many of the philosophies and religions of the world as a way to a world beyond this physical one. As a result of the mystery surrounding it, we have a number of theories and beliefs about mortuary rites and their significance. In this paper we shall confine ourselves to recent insights we have had from the study of a few of the mortuary figures we have collected for our visual art room at Legon.

According to the material we have, death, it would appear, is basically understood in the societies of our 'finds' as a translation into another phase of life. That life to which death thrusts man's spirit is similar to life on this physical world, except that the 'being' is not space-bound and is nearer the greatest ancestor - God. Natural death is believed to be the true way to a blissful world beyond. Premature death, and death caused through sorcery, or violence of any description except through valour in war or in defence of a good cause, is bad. Consequent upon the belief that natural deaths, though painful to the living, are inevitable openings to another type of more elegant life, they are expressedly accepted in that spirit by the living. In the life and thought therefore, of the Akan from whose area most of the mortuary figures come, this philosophy is expressed in the funeral observances. When a person dies, the corpse must be properly despatched into the other world. The details of specific funerals may be discussed in the subsequent comparative paper. For the present, the rites, as we may note from our

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illustrative material in this paper, suggest that the status of the deceased tended to be reflected in his funeral observances. Indeed, no serious view is taken of people who, in the opinion of the living relatives, would not qualify as good or benevolent ancestors. For the purpose of this paper, we only draw attention to the general atmosphere of life during funerals. The corpse is spoken to and asked to convey messages to particular ancestors who have preceded them into the unseen but live-world. Normal life goes on even as deep mourning proceeds. There is singing, drumming and dancing, drinking and eating. Eating when and if done is always, of course, away from the corpse. Singing or drumming groups from the vicinity of the deceased, may be invited to lighten the heaviness of the atmosphere that tends to surround the event of death. The dead must go joyously into the new situation and give news from the living who are their kith and kin. The conduct of the whole events of the funeral rites is geared to underscore the belief that the dead live. They may even return to this physical world again. Death is therefore simultaneously new life. Death is never an abysmal end of life but the dawn of another life. Hence the ancestor cult we examine here is about the concern that is shown for the dead in visual artistic activity.

Essentially the cult of the ancestors is a function of the belief in the spirits of the dead and their relationship with the living. Some of the so-called major religions in the literature talk of their departed saints.¹ It seems evident from the literature that the

1. In the simple, concise and readable article on the ancestors in his book, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some aspects of Ghanaian culture*, the Rt. Rev. Akwasi Sarpong, Catholic Bishop of Kumasi, suggested from analysis that the ancestors are not necessarily worshipped. He therefore called what has been designated ancestor worship, ancestor veneration. This accords with my own findings and view expressed in a number of places. I have called the act of cult, the cult of ancestral or ancestor reverence. Essentially this is the same idea that is explicitly put by Bishop Sarpong See p.33.

belief in ancestors and the awe they get from the living is not particularly restricted to any period of history or any society. Christians do not worship their saints and it is known that Mohamed is also not worshipped in the religion of Islam.

Our material gives further weight to propositions we have made elsewhere that most ancestors in Akanland are *not* worshipped but certainly given a lot of reverence or veneration as Sarpong chooses to call it.

In the past, only adults, married people who had children, could qualify as ancestors. Recently, many more categories of the dead in Akan Culture have been accepted into the compass of the ancestors. Young men who become leaders or chiefs may after their deaths qualify as ancestors if they do not have sufficiently long lives to have children. People who died ignominious or tragic deaths were disqualified from being ancestors worthy of veneration. There is still belief in the power and significance of names and now as in the past, such unfortunate people did and do not usually have people called after them. Not only 'bad deaths' but people who die from bad diseases like leprosy, epilepsy, or madness may not be remembered as ancestors worthy of mention. The spirits of chiefs and people who end their own lives should not be venerated.

Others who should not be given reverential awe, are, the indolent, the coward, the wicked, sorcerers, the acutely disobedient and trouble makers, men who bring only strife and discord wherever they happen to be. They cannot, it is believed, be among the good dead people. They therefore do not deserve mention nor honour and such treatment may subject them to one of the most dreaded occurrences after physical death in Akan belief which is the *Owuprenu* - the second death.

Art in Ancestor Reverence

In Akan culture, objects of art may be group insignia or objects having politico-social relationships or art for dramatizing values, media for effecting socialization or social control generally, are used in the cult of the ancestors. We record that funerary art are among the most striking forms of Akan art. Such objects of funerary art include stools, terra-cottas, *obusuakuruwa* (family pots), busts in wood or clay of ancestors and other family relics. Associated with such visual art objects are normally specific contextual verbal art, music, dance or drama.

Funerary art forms part of the complex of behaviour directed towards the activation of the presence of the ancestors and which may be described as the cult of the ancestors. In our context here, cult means care for, activation of, or the presence of, and adoration of the ancestors. It is a system of belief and ritual. This belief and ritual, of course, may be concerned with deification of something. It must be mentioned that the word cult is however defined by other writers as a form of religion and a system of religious observance. This definition tends to be confusing except the fact of religion and religious observance is also defined to make the statement meaningful. Another meaning of cult, is, of course, the concept of extravagant devotion to a person or thing. The extent of the extravagance necessary to convey an exact meaning poses a problem. In the cult of the ancestors the whole funeral rites - the specific observances, the ceremonies after the obsequies, the later feeding and pouring of libation to the dead - may be considered to be more of reverential behaviour, invocation and acknowledgement of the presence, link with, and influence of, the departed on the living, than the care of and regard of them as gods worthy of the worship due to God or even lesser deities. In Akan practice, for example, there appears to be a distinction between the cult of the ancestors and the

worship of deities, although this is not clear cut in the literature. We suggest that in the belief system, the ancestors appear to be in a separate category and not in a place in direct connection or line with God and other deities. They are related to God in so far as God is regarded as the greatest ancestor and father of all.

By reverence of the ancestors we suggest a situation and a feeling which has in it awe and affection or veneration. Great respect, affection and veneration in themselves do not necessarily constitute worship *per se* of God or Gods. Veneration of the ancestors is belief in spiritual beings but belief in these beings may not be regarded, as a matter of course, to be worship of these ancestors as deities. This belief in the continual existence and vigilance of the ancestors is, as we see, very wide spread in West Africa. Being spirits, the ancestors are higher than the physical men who are limited to the earth. These ancestor spirits are believed to be able to intercede for the living relatives for they know the living who are their kith and kin. They continue to form part of the family since the family continues to be composed of the living and the dead. They have a kind of respect which has been usually known as ancestor worship because they are believed to be guardians of the unwritten laws and customs of the communities and so taken very seriously. Busia writes:

"In every Ashanti village stories are always circulating about the ancestors. The ancestors are believed to be the custodians of the laws and customs of the tribe. They punish with sickness or misfortune those who infringe them. Constantly before the Ashanti, and serving to regulate his conduct is the thought that his ancestors are watching, and that one day, when he rejoins them in the world of spirits they will ask him to give an account of his conduct, especially of his conduct towards his kinsmen." (Busia 1958 p. 24-25).

The belief provides great social sanctions on morality. *Asase wo Nananom* - the land belongs to the ancestors. They passed the land on to the living. It is this idea that is often expressed in Akan oral tradition, as the land belongs to a stool. Lands are for lineages or lineage stools and oman lands - national lands are lands vested in the stool of the *Sman*. As a result of the great belief in the world hereafter, the world of the dead, in the mind of the living, is a real but invisible other world for the spirits of the departed. When people put or drop some food on the ground before they eat, they are acknowledging the ever presence of the dead.² The living has continuous relation and interaction with them. This belief is akin to the Christian firm belief in the presence of the saints and hence the communion of saints which include the living and the dead.

Among most ethnic groups in Ghana only a good ancestor, as we have observed, is remembered or at least given reverence and regarded as being a good ambassador to the living in the unseen world of spirits. In addition to the general conditions that qualify the dead for ancestor reverence are natural deaths or deaths met in defending one's own community or state, or death resulting from defence of principles cherished by the society to which one belongs. Some informants suggest that one cannot be ancestor unless one died an adult. If male, he must have married in his life time and have had children. This proviso was thought to be a serious one when it was regarded absolutely necessary for men to have children to extend the lineage. Having qualified as a good ancestor he is constantly an inspiration to

2. Quarcoo, A.K. I.A.S, *Research Review* vol.3 No.2, p. 29 1967.

the living 'Lineage ancestors' among the Akan are, as a rule, honoured by the lineage members through the lineage head. However, the suprême Akan reverence for the ancestors is often seen in the state *Adae*. Sociologically, the royal ancestors who become the embodiment of the collectivity of the other ancestors are honoured by all the people. The philosophy which under-pins this is that the royal ancestors are heads of single units and they represent or embody the other ancestors. For a chief who is destooled is not often remembered by the act of consecration of a stool to his memory after his death. This serves as formidable and serious social sanction on chiefs, for indeed, it may well be expected that all normal chiefs do desire to be remembered as worthy ancestors after their deaths. The word normal may even be regarded as unnecessary, for a chief has to be normal in the estimation of the people to be made a chief at all, and if a chief should by accident become not normal, he must be deposed.

In Akan society, therefore, there are lineage ancestor cults but the national ancestor cults are the most spectacular and important. Specific objects of art or symbols are utilized in the ceremonies of the cult. Principal among the objects as mentioned, is the stool - the symbol of office. In studying the social and political history of Akan communities through their material culture, the importance of a chief living under the law and not above it becomes apparent. We have observed that they are very much remembered and revered who lived well. The chief who was an excess biber of alcoholic drinks, or took other people's wives from them by virtue of his position, or delighted in disgracing people, even his own servants in public, a cowardly person, a person who did not respect his predecessors was forgotten for he forfeited his right and opportunity to be remembered socially and politically. To concretise this disapproval he got no *black stool* and no terra-cottas were made to commemorate him.

Funeral Art

The fact of ancestor cult begins with funerals which must be such as to make for suitable despatch of a deceased into the world of the ancestors. The ceremony of committal is solemn or frantic depending on the society of the dead or his social standing. The burial of a man who lived well or a man of great substance is grand and really functional to the life he lived. A week after the burial of a deceased adult, he is remembered and arrangements are effected for a forty-day ceremonial and funeral. Those close to him often put on mourning cloths in black or red, or wine or other dark colours, for a whole year before they remove this visual evidence of their reverence to his memory. The colours therefore are symbolic of specific emotional situations of people. So meticulously is this custom followed that it becomes a serious point of the cult of the ancestors.

Normally, the dead are given the grand funeral ceremonies to which we have alluded to despatch them properly into the land of the dead. It was believed that appropriate ceremonies are required if they should be welcome in the world beyond. Later, as in other circumstances like the death of chiefly or priestly ancestors or very influential men, terracottas may be commissioned for their commemoration and these may be displayed during their funeral often celebrated after one year.

In fact, not much funeral art is displayed during the initial celebrations except the colour symbolisms and a few sceptres and drums which may be present in appropriate circumstances. We notice that some funerary art we may expect at final funerals of chiefs and potentates are terracotta heads, funerary pots, wooden effigies and stools and some items of the stool complex.

Funerary Terracottas and Pots

For purposes of visualising the dead whose funeral are being celebrated, terracotta heads may be made. This was a popular practice in such Akan lands as Kwahu,

Nzima and Sefwi Wiaso, Assin, Denkyira and Akwamu. There is evidence of this also in many other places in Ghana. For example, there is the tradition of terracotta heads in Eweland, Dangme and parts of the Northern and Upper regions of the country. Most terracottas we have seen in Akanland are in baked clay but they could also be absolutely unbaked. They range from purely stylised figures to highly naturalistic ones. The Institute of African Studies Visual Art room at Legon has a representative number of such terracottas. Whilst in Assin and Kwahu terracotta heads are usually made for people of chiefly status, in Agona, terracottas may be made for ordinary people above the age of fifteen. These naturalistic, as well as stylised types of terracottas have been found in and on graves and shrines.

The practice of making terracotta heads sometimes together with funerary pots with anthropomorphic figures continues to be an honoured tradition in relation to royal ancestors. These heads are made, as a rule, by specialists. The pieces are usually costly in terms of money. Recently, a chief in the Assin area attempted to persuade his people to use a life-size photograph of his mother's brother for the final funeral rites of this man - whom he succeeded as Omanhene. The disapproval was unequivocal and he had to yield to the tradition of providing an *Nkua* (terracotta head) from an old specialist in Kwahu area. The piece that was made cost not less than \$200.00.

There is still an emotional attachment to these terracotta figures which are displayed and or carried around during the end of final funerals. These are regarded as honoured practices. After funerals, the heads may find their way into stool rooms, or private rooms of the ancestors who have been so honoured.

The process of initial reverence and the consequent libation or remembrance of the dead with the terracotta heads as a visual aid, is part of the phenomenon of ancestor reverence. This, of course, we may remember, includes various rituals, rites, and songs.

The art invokes behaviour patterns which are solemn, serious and often restricted. In the case of public figures and chiefs, part of the ceremonies are restricted whilst part are public and grandiose. Grandeur in ancestor cult has a socialising dimension which may not always be manifest. We present a few examples of funerary terracottas and figures which were used in honouring some specific ancestors.

The figures 1.65.90 a-b represent typical funerary group types that might be used at the final funeral of a chief or queenmother. This group consists of representation of the deceased, his attendants, a stool carrier and an *dbusuakuruwa* (family communal pot). On one of the final obsequies, the main figure was dressed and adorned with rich ornaments befitting the status of the deceased. The objects were placed in a large brass pan or wooden bowl stuffed with rich kente and silk. The figures were carried to the venue of the funeral and placed in view of a decorated bed, or seat on a raised platform.

In Kwahu and Assin, such figures are later conveyed to the cemetery and placed on the grave of the dead. Alternatively, such figures of art may be kept in the stool room of the community. The figure 1.67.18 for example, was retrieved from a royal stool room in Kusa Adansi near Fomena. It was used during the funeral of Nana Amoaben who was the sixth on the ancestral stool. Nana Amoaben is believed to have lived around the period 1824-1838.

The heads 1.64.228 a-b were collected from the royal mausoleum in Twenedurase, in Kwahu. The heads were used in 1926 for the funeral of Nana Kwabena Kumnipah II (1902-1926). The heads continued to receive honour but we got them since the lineage head replaced them with others.

The figure 1.66.38 is the most classical naturalistic terracotta head that we have in the Institute of African Studies. This came to us from Assin Nyankumasi near Foso,



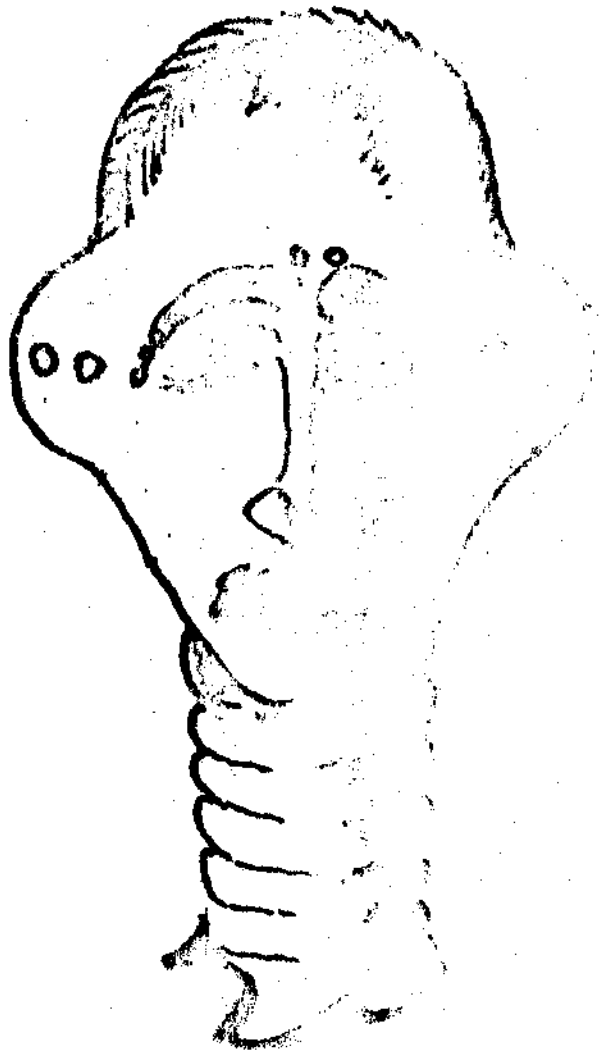
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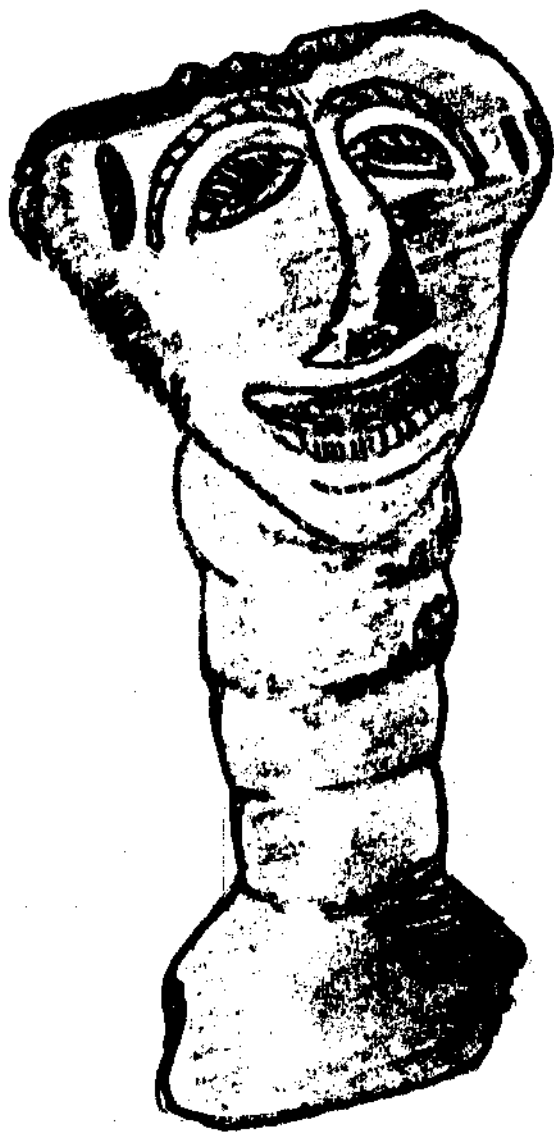
I. 65.90 b



I. 67-18



I. 64. 228 a



I. 64. 228 b



I. 66-38

in the Central Region of Ghana. It was used in the funeral observance of Nana Kusi Boadum of Assin Nyankumasi, 1807-1866.

Other examples are: (a) 1.65.106). This is an Agona figure usually used for the funerals of elderly women who are often stool occupants. Its local name is *ahode*. On a Friday preceding the final Saturday of a funeral, the *Ahode* specially made for the occasion was dressed and carried about in the town, but deposited in the cemetery the following Saturday. Together with the *Ahode* was often food in earthenware pots. This particular funerary figure was used in the rites of Nana Yamfo Asuoko III.

Figure 1.65.107 is another mortuary figure of a chief. It was commissioned for his last funeral. We obtained it from Adwoa Nkroma and the potter of this piece was Adwoa Owuayam of Agona Asafo.

Pots, as objects of art are also used in the cult of ancestors. Figure 1.65.87 was obtained from Abusua-panyin Asare of Akumenin royal lineage. It was originally used for the funeral rites of Nana OpoKu Ware, Kwabenhene. After the funeral, food was served in it and placed on the grave. The mudfish figure on the pot signifies the feeling of the people. They wish their chief were with them in flesh because of his industry and leadership, but they were helpless in the matter. (*enye nea adwene pe ne se oho egya so*. (It is not a particular wish of the mudfish to hang on live-coal.)

The Abusuakuruwa, IE.33.69 from Mampong Asante, was used in the time of Owusu Sekyere in the last century.

Our final example of pots is from Atwides of Asante Akim, Figure 1.65.92. It is a pot which was kept in the family stool room. Wine for libation was poured into it on festival days when the dead chiefs were remembered. The tortoise and snail signify peace which is an emblem of the royal lineage.

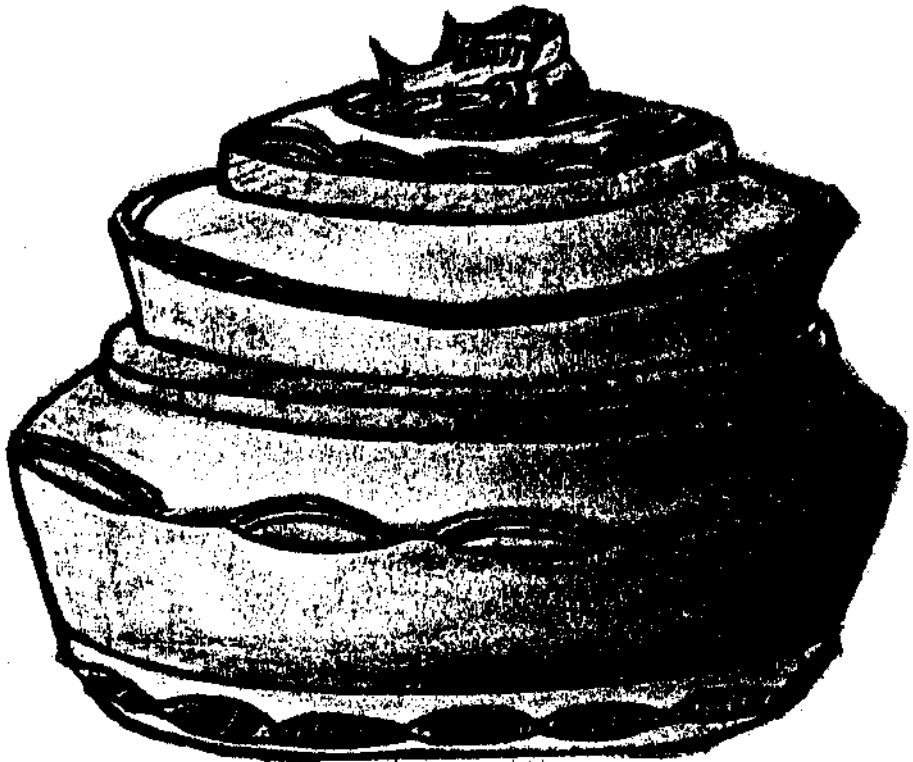


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I. 65-107

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I-65-87



IE·33·69



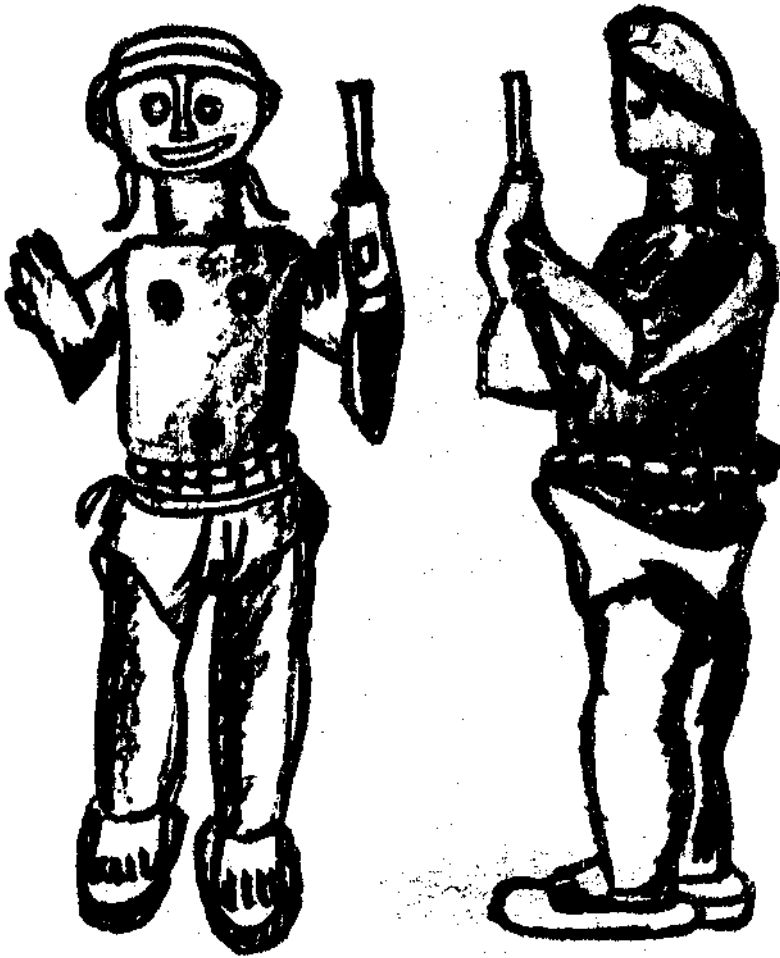
1 65.92

Wooden Effigies As Funerary Figures

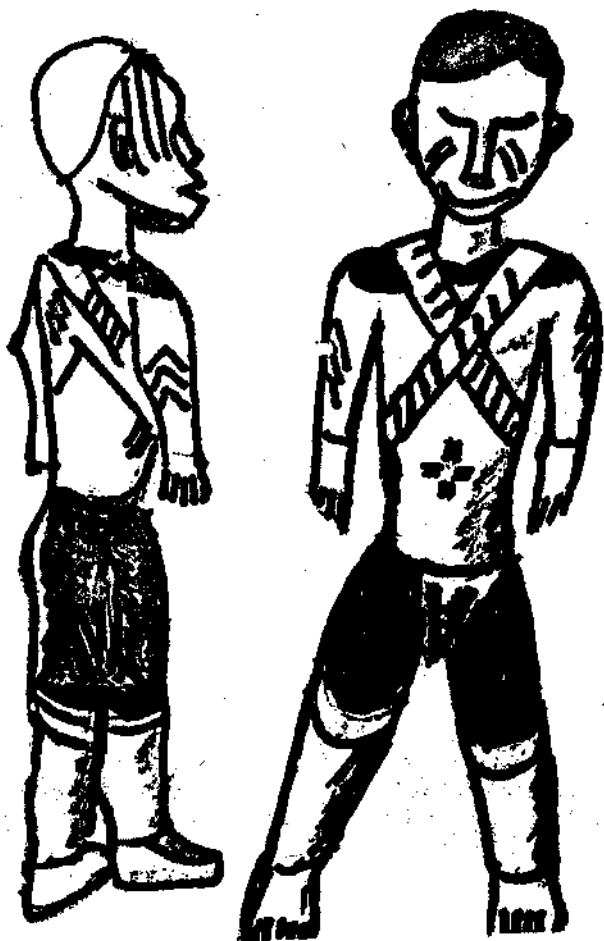
Two examples may serve the purpose of illustrating how wooden figures may also be used in the cult of the ancestors. Figure 1.65.65 was collected from Begoro. It was a piece commissioned by Osommongyawa Ababio for the funeral rites of his predecessor, Kwabena Asiedu who died in 1965. The figure was half buried on the eastern side of the grave after the funeral obsequies. To begin with, the warrior status of the dead was signified in the warrior figure and posture. The objects of 'war' which he carried on him of course, are complementary to the idea the figure was meant to portray. Usually such a figure may be kept to the memory of the ancestor and periodically, libations and other rituals performed to invoke his presence and activate the inspiration the spirit the figure represents.

1.164.296 is a figure which comes from the Upper Region of Ghana. It was owned by Lure Kanton III. This particular one was meant to represent the dead half pair of twin brothers or sisters. This practice is common in Eweland and the Western region of Ghana. This continues to be a form of the cult of the dead which is common in other parts of Ghana.

In all the cases, we have illustrated the figures were never objects of religion or worship. In other words, they were normally never intended to be deities to be given the regard due to gods. They were objects to which reverence was given ordinarily, and such were the practical issues of that reverence that was seen as worship by some observers who have written about them. The exercise involved in the process of producing the object and the behaviour patterns that they activate, constitute what we designate as ancestor cult. Our experience is that any time the people were confronted with the objects of art, a feeling of deep reverence was aroused in them, and a disposition and attitude of thankfulness and worship to God who gave them their lives. We record that on many occasions a



1. 65. 65



I. 64-296

number of those who engage in the cult suggest that they are led, in communion with the living by the message of the objects to adore God.

Ancestral Stools

The evidence we now have reveals, we think, that among the Akan, the most revered object in the 'cult' of the ancestors is the ancestral stool. We know that in the past, every Akan was traditionally expected to possess a stool. Children, women and men had their own *asedwa* type of stool. They form part of the household furniture. Stools of lineage heads were important. Accounts have been given about how lineage stools become *oman* stools by Danquah,³ Rattray,⁴ W.G. Sekyi,⁵ and a host of others who have studied the Akan Stool Polity.⁶ The important thing to note in the points they made about stools include the fact of the elaborate cult that exists around the object of the stool which is the principal symbol of a chief's office. Successive blackened stools of chiefs are normally added to an original stool or 'gudwa' in a stool room. Stools that qualify to be kept are, of course, those of good chiefs, and good chiefs in this context, are those who respected their oath of office. I have suggested

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3. Danquah, J.B. Dr. 1928. *Akan Laws and Customs and the Abukwa Constitutional Law*. p. 144 Routledge & Kegan Paul.
 4. Rattray, R.S. Cap. 1923. *Ashanti*. Oxford University Press, 2nd Impression, 1955.
 5. Sekyi, W.E.G. ed. argued the handing down of political, religious and general authority may be compared with the case of the Oly Some of Hungary. To him it was similar to the idea of apostolic succession. It is believed or rather supposed that the ancestors eat their part of the food in spirit. Living men being part of the family could communicate with them by eating the rest.
 6. Busia, K.A. 1958. *Position of the Chief in Modern Political Systems of Ashanti*. p. 2 Oxford University Press.

elsewhere that such stools become charters of history. Periodically, these stools are revisited by those to whom tradition has assigned that privilege and duty. These officials pour libation to the stools and symbolically 'feed' them.

The feeding takes the form of sprinkling before, or on, the stools, some mashed yam or plantain or simply placing the food in earthenware pots before the stools. After a stipulated period the food could be removed and eaten by the living. The food is therefore always eaten after the ancestors have had their 'fill'. The essence of placing the food before the stools is to acknowledge the presence of the ancestors and to remember them. It is also an act of invocation of their presence which presence has a socialising influence.

This cult is also a serious means of promoting social solidarity and cohesion. The period of *som* or *nananom som* (service or service of the ancestors) is one of cleansing and renewal of vital social relationships. It is time for regeneration of the being in men. There is cleansing which involved putting right social relationships. The comparatively simple cult of the ancestors in this particular way tends to activate a number of psychological and social feelings. We have suggested that the cult does not raise religious feelings toward gods or GOD because the ancestors are spiritual beings. The stools are not deities but they may inspire the feeling which has been seen as religious, by some observers.

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7. Quarcoo, A.K. 1975. *Socio-political Relevance of chiefship in contemporary Ghana*. A paper read at the Sociological Conference held in Kumasi.

Quarcoo, A.K. 1970. *Akan Stools and their Social Context* in unpublished thesis, Edinburgh University.

We do not apologise to repeat that most of the festivities help the release of spontaneous fraternal feelings and foster social solidarity and a sense of oneness. The sense and the importance of upholding the values of the society are also reactivated. Through the public gatherings often referred to in the literature as *durbars*, and group interactions, definite enfoldment of history and culture is transmitted from one generation to another.

Stool Complex and the Cult of Ancestors

The stool as an object of art and a symbol of chiefly office is central to other art objects and even personnel in relation to the stool offices. Functionally, these objects and insignia of royalty help not only to legitimize and enhance a chief's authority but they help to inculcate in him political and social values of the ancestors. Within the complex of which the stool is central, are all the court regalia. Stool carriers and other court officials related to the stool ceremonies may be included in this complex. Hence, some state swords or state sceptres, treasure boxes, drums, horns or linguist staffs, may be objects of ancestor cult. In Kwahu and Old Tafo the ceremonial pots we have, seem to have been part of the complex. When on a ceremonial day a chief radiantly clad in his regalia, the ancestors are in a definite way invoked. The Mamponghene on a private ceremonial day had the following on him. He wore a particular *adwenease* kente called *tikoro nko agyina*. *Adwenease* is of course a style of the Asante kente which is complicated. In it, the weft and waft occur in complicated weaves. *Adweneasa* literary meaning is, I have exhausted myself. So it represents the 'master' of designs. *Tikoro nko agyina* reminds both the weaver and his people of a social value of the ancestors who are being remembered. The *sika futuro* (gold dust) background of the cloth was symbolic of the traditional affluence and greatness of Mampong. On his head he wore a fillet studded with gilded motifs - the stars and the

moon. They were meant to tell of the peace and the harmony that existed in Mampong. Over his neck was a gold pendant attached to a combination of necklace of gold, red and green cord - the *ayanes*. The *asades* another gold chain, lay across his breast. Gold bangles and gilded *bansere* (talisman) ornament decorated his arms. Priceless beads were part of his adornments. In his left hand he held a horse tail whisk - symbolic of the bravery of his ancestors. His legs were covered with gold ornaments and his sandals were large. His fingers had big rings - one signifying the radiant sun, the source of the king's vitality and vigour. He was sitting on the silver ceremonial stool of Mampong and behind him stood the *hwedom tea* (narrow *hwedom*: chair). On the ceremonial *asesedwa* were the big silver bells of Mampong.

Each time the chief bedecks himself this way or even when he changes into the battle smocks of the state, he is in actual fact, engaged in a form of the cult of his ancestors with the people under him. He is not only dressed in a particular way but he is actually re-living the presence of his ancestors by reviving the social personality of those he has inherited.

Since stool complex here refers to all the court regalia and treasures of the court, the stool houses, linguist staffs may also be used in the cult of the ancestors. Hence the linguist staff 1.66.03 from Akim Oda was an item in their ancestor cult until we got it. It is called *asempa ye tia* (truth is short). It is supposed to have been made during the time of the aboriginal leader, Nana Frimpong at Denkyira-Mmrayen, and consecrated for Okyeame Sakyi. The linguist staff was used in running diplomatic errands especially in time of wars. Tradition has it that this staff was used by Okyeame Adu Korkor in negotiating an alliance with Assin Attandansu in the invasion of the Akwamu who lived on the Nyanawa hill. This staff was replaced by a gilded one by Nana Attafua I but the *asempa ye tia* was left in the stool room as part of the relics and libation was poured to everything there including this staff as part of the cult.

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I.66.03

Libation and other Visual Acts in the Cult of The Ancestors

A rite present in the useages of any of the few objects of art we have presented in this paper is libation. Libation in this context is a rite in which a kind of liquid is poured on the ground or object and incantations, prayer or a spell said. The pouring of the liquid does not entail the worship of a creature as God. Writing, maybe, with Christianity at the back of his mind, Sarpong the Roman Catholic Bishop of Kumasi observed that:

"Libation cannot be idolatry in any of its ramifications because in it no creature is worshipped as God. Neither the ancestors nor the deities are divinized. In the case of the ancestors the same respect is accorded them as the Ghanaian gives to his elders. Again libation cannot be divination as it is not poured with a view to knowing the future or the occult. However it seems to be tainted with vain observance as from the prayers it appears as though favours are often expected from the ancestors and gods, when objectively such have no power of granting them. But this cannot be a reason why libation should be proscribed. Its significance, as explained already is manifold, and if in one respect it is found to be faulty, all that need be done is to transform it, give it a new dimension, and thus make it acceptable all and sundry...." (Sarpong P. Bishop, 1971.)

Admittedly, the definition of what constitutes religion has been, rather unwieldy. This is to be expected as the fact of religion has been approached from different angles by different disciplines. Psychologists, philosophers, theologians and sociologists, see religion through their own glasses and what they all say, we suggest, are only parts of the whole truth. It is in view of the various interpretations of religion that, the particular cult of the dead

which we have attempted to discuss has been called worship of the ancestors by some scholars who have studied the phenomenon.

We are in a dilemma and the dilemma derives from our philosophy, psychology or sociology of religion or merely from linguistic twists. The ethnographic material that is presented in this paper, however, is an attempt at a reappraisal of the concept of ancestor worship with particular reference to the societies from which the exhibits referred to originate. For the present we suggest, that although the practice may in certain circumstances be manifestly deification and worship of the objects, what is factually involved in the practices is more reverential awe to, and veneration of the ancestors who continue to be part of the community of their 'saints'. The dead are asked to be benevolent. But they are expected to be so not through their own power but through their intercession for the living. Their effigies and the monuments raised to them are in their remembrance and glorification. They inspire the living and act as sanctions on their social behaviour.

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