



## Cultural and Traditional Importance of Road Side Graves in the Akumadan Traditional Area of the Offinso North District of Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The study examined the cultural and traditional importance of roadside graves in the Akumadan Traditional Area of the Offinso North District of Ghana. The study used the Ethnological theory approach which takes into consideration the subculture of a group or group that has a common culture, its goal is to create detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the community and then interpret the ingrained patterns. Achieving the aspirational goal of becoming an ancestor after death becomes impossible if one attempts to use advance care directives in Ghana in particular and Africa in general to request an unnatural death. Since roadside cemeteries or burial places have not been previously investigated, the study unravels the mystery surrounding the realities of these roadside cemeteries in Ghana. A survey research approach was used and the approach serves as the driver to the entire research process. Primary and Secondary literature on culture, graves, and traditions were reviewed and the instruments used for data included interviews, observation, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. These were transcribed and analysed in teams. Key amongst the findings was that ancestors should be kept at *Akantifi* (the edge of the city in Akan), a place for easy access. They also believed that the dead are part of them (the living) and they need not throw them away hence must be nearer them or by the roadside. It was also revealed that traditional spiritual protection of the community is in the hands of the dead therefore they should be buried near the community (either at the ‘entrance’ of the town or when leaving the town) and for easy ritual performance. Offinso North and for that matter Akumadan Traditional area of Ghana are rich in cultural and traditional belief systems. The paper recommends as a matter of policy that, these cultural and traditional belief systems must be properly documented as part of the rich culture of the traditional area; and a tourism hub must be created by all stakeholders to take care of the rich culture of the area.

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### INTRODUCTION

Burial grounds are indissolubly connected to the human environment and it has been a common belief that after the death of people, their spirits live on in another form in another world. In most African

contexts, people view death from both religious and cultural perspectives.<sup>1</sup> It is believed that religion can contribute to creating meaning and offering solutions to the issues of uncertainty, helplessness, and shortage that death generates. As a result, funeral customs have developed to recognize this, combining religious significance and assisting those who have lost a loved one in making sense of an incident that is generally unfathomable. Because there are so many different religious and cultural practices among Africans, their funeral rites and mourning customs are diverse. Monuments and graves serve as both physical and metaphorical reminders of the history of bereavement in each person's family, community, and the wider world. The word "cemetery" has its origins in the Greek word for "sleeping place", and is land meant for burial. The term was originally applied to the Roman catacombs. According to Baloyi et al., a graveyard is a term that can be used interchangeably but refers specifically to a churchyard burial ground.<sup>2</sup>

Ancestor worship is another name for the traditional African belief system, which is founded on the knowledge that existence is not linear but rather cyclical.<sup>3</sup> Funeral rituals vary according to institutional and cultural settings.<sup>4</sup> This belief system allows persons who have passed on to still be alive and can reincarnate or return to the world in a new form, such as through birth. For those who pass away at a respectable old age, death is seen as a rite of passage. When someone passes away in Africa, the dead ancestors are consulted for a death cause, which is typically attributed to spiritual causes such as witchcraft, offending one's ancestors, or "gods," rather than medical or physical causes.<sup>5</sup> Baloyi et al. research also reveal an African cultural concept that persons in the hereafter have magical advantages over those still alive, including the power to bless or curse, give or take away life, among other things.<sup>6</sup> In another setting, Onukwugha and Mbiti express the belief that after passing away, a person remains in a spirit realm with a new body that is identical to their previous one but has the ability to move like an ancestor.<sup>7</sup> Thus, being an ancestor after death is a desire shared by all people, and it is thought that this cannot be accomplished if a person did not live a meaningful life or if his or her life was cut short, as in the case of an accident or an unnatural death.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, an African person would prefer a gradual, lingering death that occurs naturally because they would be able to settle many matters, such as making peace and saying goodbye to family, and because they would also be allowed entry into the hereafter. In an African environment, death in any group other than the very old is regarded as unnatural and premature.<sup>9</sup>

A person is given a proper burial after passing away because failure to do so may result in the person becoming a wandering ghost, unable to exist beyond death, and constituting a threat to those who are still alive. In African cultures, the objective of life is to become an ancestor after death.<sup>10</sup> Death denotes the physical separation of the individual from other humans, supporting the African view of death. Funeral rituals and ceremonies serve to highlight this unbreakable separation and special care is taken with funeral rites to prevent unwarranted offense to the deceased.

The last resting place for the departed is located in cemeteries or burial grounds, which serve as permanent memorials in most African countries.<sup>11</sup> African societies hold graves in high respect because they value them as practical structures that allow grieving families to visit and speak with the

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<sup>1</sup> Lesiba Baloyi and Molebogeng Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication," 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>3</sup> Frank Eyetsemitan, "Cultural Interpretation of Dying and Death in a Non-Western Society: The Case of Nigeria," *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 3, no. 2 (2002): 1.

<sup>4</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>5</sup> Eyetsemitan, "Cultural Interpretation of Dying and Death in a Non-Western Society: The Case of Nigeria."

<sup>6</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>7</sup> M. C. Onukwuba, "Poverty In Nigeria: The Role Of The Church," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 6, no. 8 (2022): 1253–60; John S Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> G O Onukwugha, "Death and Dying in the African Context," *A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes*, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Adams Sullivan, "May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying, and Spirituality," *A Cross-Cultural Look at Death, Dying, and Religion*, 1995, 160–71.

<sup>10</sup> Sullivan, "May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying, and Spirituality."

<sup>11</sup> Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited* (Vintage, 2011).

deceased.<sup>12</sup> A visit to a loved one's grave or burial place allows the surviving to reflect on the life they once spent with the departed and prepare for life without them.<sup>13</sup> Comparing Africa to the West, it is observed that funerals in Africa are intricate and protracted because the departed is still considered part of the living world. Africans employ funeral rites as a means of overcoming death since, in their traditional mindset, passing away entails going back to the ancestors.

A cemetery is essentially a huge graveyard. The word's Greek roots are linked to the concepts of "dormitory" and "putting to sleep." "Cemeteries come in a variety of designs and sizes, and these variations are strongly reflected in the surrounding population's overall environment. From an observational point, when someone is buried or otherwise interred, their remains are placed in a cemetery, burial ground, gravesite, or graveyard. Mitford, postulated that the phrase "cemetery" originally referred to the Roman catacombs and implies that the area is officially designated as a place of interment.<sup>14</sup> The physical and cultural components of the civilization make up this entire environment. Climate, geology, terrain, rainfall patterns, and other physical factors are included in the physical aspect, whereas the cultural component refers to the manner of life of the locals at any given moment. Graveyards have indeed been discovered on church grounds as well as in lodges, forts, and castles; however, these graves are those of individuals who were deemed to have had a significant impact on their community or society and were deemed worthy of their final resting place in such places.<sup>15</sup> Over time, the cemetery's architecture has undergone changes. In Louisiana, for instance, in the United States of America, persons are interred one on top of the other, creating "multi-storey" graves, due to the swampy and waterlogged condition of the area as well as the competition for land.<sup>16</sup> Since they are beautifully decorated with flowers, bunting, and other whimsical decorations, as well as the sizes of the graves, some areas of Germany have made it quite simple to recognize the children's sections of cemeteries. Contrast this with war veteran cemeteries, which are noticeably plainer and include crosses or pillars that have been placed properly, orderly, and precisely. Cemeteries in Europe and North America share the same standards for orderliness, cleanliness, and high levels of ongoing care.<sup>17</sup> In every case, one may confidently assert that people interred in cemeteries in Europe and North America were actually put to sleep. "Rest in peace" then becomes a very fitting phrase.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The ethnological theory approach by John was used as a guide to the study.<sup>18</sup> The theory takes into consideration the subculture of a group or group that has a common culture, its goal is to create a detailed and comprehensive description of the community and then interpret the ingrained patterns. The primary goal for adapting this theory is to analyze various cultures and cultural expressions, usually in the context of a given community or nation. In reality, the study used a perspective from the individual's point of view when studying culture, with a particular focus on how single or people who are viewed as active cultural beings think and behave in their daily lives. As a result, it may be inferred that in their daily lives, people are influenced and molded by civilizations. It gives the study a clear structure, concepts and guiding principles that are utilized to explain and validate conceptual reality. Many Ghanaian settlements have separate graves for the many religious denominations, as well as "public" cemeteries for those who do not practice any religion. Before, people of various religions would occasionally weed and maintain the cemetery, but recently, for a variety of reasons, the various

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<sup>12</sup> Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited*.

<sup>13</sup> Onukwugha, "Death and Dying in the African Context."

<sup>14</sup> Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited*.

<sup>15</sup> Chatuluka Nhlanhla Mangena, "The Integration of Local Cultural Identity and Tradition into Built Environment: A Case of Cultural Centre in Lobamba, Swaziland." (2010).

<sup>16</sup> Sullivan, "May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying, and Spirituality."

<sup>17</sup> Sullivan, "May the Circle Be Unbroken: The African-American Experience of Death, Dying, and Spirituality."

<sup>18</sup> Robert W Yarbrough and Robert H Stein, "Walvoord, John F. and Zuck, Roy B., Eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, Jude*, by Edward C. Pentecost. USA, Canada, England: Victor Books, 1983.," *A Research And Ministry Journal Of Temple Baptist Seminary Of Piedmont International University Winston-Salem, North Carolina Spring 2018*, 2018, 12.

denominations have begun employing workers to maintain and clean their cemeteries in specific sections of the country. Baloyi et al. opine that Cemetery space can be regarded as sacred, in that it acts as a focus for the pilgrimage of friends and family and is protected from activities deemed 'disrespectful'.<sup>19</sup> However, cemeteries are principally secular spaces: ownership is almost always by municipal authorities or private sector concerns. Cemeteries in Ghana have not always been in good condition over the years. The Tafo Cemetery is Kumasi's biggest cemetery. A more recent visit to the cemetery reveals a run-down setting with trash all over the place, including plastic bags. One of the authors recently escorted many international scholars and students to the Tafo cemetery, several of them were disappointed and questioned whether Ghanaians valued the location of their ancestors' final resting places.<sup>20</sup> For some time now, there have been allegations of tombs being looted and the surrounds being dirty in Accra's Osu and Awudome cemeteries.

Notwithstanding these issues, the desire for unique and distinctive tomb markers exists throughout Ghana. There is no effort wasted to make sure that some people are perceived as more significant than others, even after they have passed on.<sup>21</sup> Disregard the most recent dinners hosted on Sunday evenings following the Thanksgiving ceremony in churches that the deceased loved ones may not have visited in years prior to their death, as well as the subsequent payments and donations made to the churches for the "Memorial And Thanksgiving" service. In contrast to the traditional cemetery, which is formed of sandcrete blocks covered in slabs and tiles, many tombstones are now made of extremely expensive building materials, such as marble. To compete, storey structures are already being erected over graves in other parts of the country.<sup>22</sup> One such location is Juaben in the Ashanti Region, where the cemetery there may be compared to a "who is who" in terms of the design choices made for the individual graves, Hale opined.<sup>23</sup>

Several towns along the Kuntanase-Bekwai scenic road have unusual and fascinating cemeteries. After all, Ghana is a nation where funeral expenses exceed those for education and where coffins are now made in a variety of shapes and sizes to reflect the profession or career of the dearly departed.<sup>24</sup> Today, there are coffins made to look like cocoa pods for cocoa farmers, canoes for fishermen, houses for builders, buses or trucks for truck drivers, etc.<sup>25</sup> Cohen further opines that, on a recent visit to the mechanical workshop, the apprentices were talking about death and funerals, especially one that had happened over the weekend.<sup>26</sup> One of them described how, if he ever became wealthy, he would stipulate in his will that, upon his passing, he should be buried in a brand-new Range Rover, which would be tucked away beneath a storey-high structure with a 24-hour guard on duty at the cemetery. The apprentices got into a strong debate over this because some thought the "government" would forbid it, but the majority thought he could do it if he ever became wealthy because it was his own money.

Recently, a well-known traditional leader seriously promoted what he dubbed "funeral tourism." He believed that lots of North Americans and Europeans would like to visit Ghana to see how funerals are observed. The American television network Cable News Network (CNN) also covered Ghana in a series titled, "The Glimpses of funeral celebrations, with Men and Women Dressed in black dancing" Should the Ministry of Tourism review this topic and make funeral tourism a mainstay of tourism? So it is not unexpected that private developers have built several funeral homes and pricey private cemeteries like the one in Shiashie (a suburb of the capital city Accra), as well as

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<sup>19</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>20</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>21</sup> Mangena, "The Integration of Local Cultural Identity and Tradition into Built Environment: A Case of Cultural Centre in Lobamba, Swaziland."

<sup>22</sup> Jacob Appel, "The Ultimate Prescription: Make Us Decide How We Want to Die," *Ashford: Elephant Rock Books*, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Hale, "Akan Funeral Practices in Samuel Asare Konadu's "Ordained by the Oracle," *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 1996, 21–40.

<sup>24</sup> Hale, "Akan Funeral Practices in Samuel Asare Konadu's "Ordained by the Oracle.""

<sup>25</sup> D Cohen, "Britain's Burial Crisis—and How to Solve It," *Financial Times*, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, "Britain's Burial Crisis—and How to Solve It."

other private cemeteries that are now being established across the nation.<sup>27</sup> Cemeteries, after all, are also open places in many towns and around the world, and people spend a lot of time there for a variety of reasons as they are also popular tourist destinations.<sup>28</sup>



Source: Fieldwork 2022, roadside graves

### **Burial Procedures across the Globe**

Most cultures plan for the ceremonial disposition of the body to be destroyed, given a befitting burial, preserved, or put to another use after the last offices have been completed and before serious deterioration begins. In the US, this often refers to either cremation or tomb burial. Depending on one's religious or spiritual beliefs as well as the circumstances, there are many ways to dispose of human remains.<sup>29</sup> Cremation is an extremely ancient and widespread practice. According to Długozima and Kosiacka-Beck, cremation is an example of the Christian idea of "ashes to ashes."<sup>30</sup> Contrarily, cremation and the dumping of the remains in the Ganges River, which is revered by many Hindus in India and around the world, are popular practices in India. Another technique is sky burial, which entails burying the body of the deceased far up on a mountain and letting raptors dispose of it, as is done in Tibet. Długozima and Kosiacka-Beck concurred that, in the theological doctrine, raptors carry the soul to paradise.<sup>31</sup> Such a technique might also have developed as a result of practical environmental concerns, such as terrain that is too stony or difficult to dig in (as in Tibet) or a lack of nearby trees to burn. The indigenous religious rituals and beliefs have persisted in exerting a significant effect on many Ghanaians, including a sizable portion of those who profess the Christian faith and Muslim faith, despite the fast spread and entrenchment of these religions in Ghana over the twentieth century. The belief in ancestor spirits and the need to appease them, sometimes by pouring libations,

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<sup>27</sup> Paula Newton, (CNN). *The long goodbye: Why funerals are big deals in Ghana*. (2014). Published 9:07 PM EDT, Tue March 11, <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/11/world/africa/on-the-road-ghana-funerals/index.html>

<sup>28</sup> Yasminah Beebeejaun et al., "Death in the Peripheries: Planning for Minority Ethnic Groups beyond 'the City,'" *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, September 24, 2021, 0739456X2110432, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X211043275>.

<sup>29</sup> Długozima Anna and Kosiacka-Beck Ewa, "How to Enhance the Environmental Values of Contemporary Cemeteries in an Urban Context," *Sustainability* 12, no. 6 (March 18, 2020): 2374, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12062374>.

<sup>30</sup> Anna and Ewa, "How to Enhance the Environmental Values of Contemporary Cemeteries in an Urban Context."

<sup>31</sup> Anna and Ewa, "How to Enhance the Environmental Values of Contemporary Cemeteries in an Urban Context."

are two of these occurrences that are most prevalent.<sup>32</sup> There are more practical ways to dispose of a body other than burial, such as leaving it for animals to consume, because the indigenous religion of Buddhism in Tibet holds that the body after death is simply an empty shell.<sup>33</sup> In some fishing or coastal towns, the dead person may be buried at sea by the grieving family.<sup>34</sup> Many mountain communities have a custom of hanging the Coffin in the woods.<sup>35</sup> Since the beginning of time, mummification and embalming have been used in some civilizations as ways to significantly slow down or stop the body's natural decaying processes before burial. Before, during, or after a funeral service, this procedure may be carried out. Cemeteries, often known as graveyards, are places where bodies are typically gathered in one area of ground across many cultures. A funeral home, mortuary, undertaker, a religious organization like a church, the community's burial society, or a nonprofit or volunteer organization tasked with organizing burials, can all arrange for cremations and burials. Following that, the body, whether preserved or not, may be buried in a grave, crypt, sepulcher, ossuary, mound or barrow, or a monumental surface building like a mausoleum.<sup>36</sup> In some circumstances, a portion of the remains may be kept. In early ancient Greece, the bones were retained and interred despite the fact that the remains were incinerated.

An ecological burial is a late 20th-century substitute.<sup>37</sup> Following a series of steps that include deep freezing, vibration pulverization, freeze-drying, metal removal, and burying the powdered material, which contains 30% of the body mass. As an alternative, there is a very old method called a "green burial," which entails burying the unpreserved remains in a wooden coffin or casket that will naturally disintegrate and not permanently occupy space as opined by Nordh et al.<sup>38</sup> The cremated remains of a body are launched into orbit using a rocket in a space burial, which is a quite different alternative from that.

Cryopreserved bodies are frozen at liquid nitrogen temperatures to impede the body's usual post-mortem breakdown processes, or "cryonics." Cryonicists believe that, if science is able to eradicate all sickness, restore people to a youthful state, and heal harm from the cryopreservation procedure itself, it will be possible to bring back to life the person who is considered to be legally dead.<sup>39</sup>

Some Medical schools in various countries have promoted entire body donations for use in research, medical teaching, and similar training. The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act governs these gifts and organ donations in the United States.<sup>40</sup> In addition to wanting to help others, some people donate their bodies to avoid paying for funeral expenses; nonetheless, willed body programs frequently advise families to make other plans for burial in the event that the corpse is rejected. While many fundamental behaviors vary throughout cultures and change with time, there are some universal customs. Many nations follow the custom of dressing somberly, however, other styles of attire are also prevalent. When a loved one passes away, those who are most affected frequently go through a grieving period characterized by social retreat and quiet, polite behaviour. Religious customs may also be observed by people on such occasions.

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<sup>32</sup> Hale, "Akan Funeral Practices in Samuel Asare Konadu's" Ordained by the Oracle."

<sup>33</sup> Beebeejaun et al., "Death in the Peripheries: Planning for Minority Ethnic Groups beyond 'the City.'"

<sup>34</sup> Zaheer Allam, "The City of the Living or the Dead: On the Ethics and Morality of Land Use for Graveyards in a Rapidly Urbanised World," *Land Use Policy* 87 (September 2019): 104037, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.104037>.

<sup>35</sup> Allam, "The City of the Living or the Dead: On the Ethics and Morality of Land Use for Graveyards in a Rapidly Urbanised World."

<sup>36</sup> Kate Woodthorpe, "Sustaining the Contemporary Cemetery: Implementing Policy alongside Conflicting Perspectives and Purpose," *Mortality* 16, no. 3 (August 2011): 259–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2011.586125>.

<sup>37</sup> Appel, "The Ultimate Prescription: Make Us Decide How We Want to Die."

<sup>38</sup> Helena Nordh and Katinka H. Evensen, "Qualities and Functions Ascribed to Urban Cemeteries across the Capital Cities of Scandinavia," *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 33 (June 2018): 80–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2018.01.026>.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Cocke, *The Churchyards Handbook* (Church House Publishing, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited*.

A deity of death has been included in the mythology or religion of numerous nations.<sup>41</sup> Deities that symbolize these occurrences or passages are frequently considered to be the most significant deities in religion because death and birth are two of the most significant aspects of human life. The death deity is an opposing deity with whom the major deity contends in various religions in which a single potent deity is the object of worship.

In mythology and popular culture, death has been personified as a figure or fictitious character since the dawn of the narrative.<sup>42</sup> The personification of Death as a living, sentient creature has been a concept in many societies from before the beginning of recorded history due to the fact that the reality of death has had a significant impact on the human psyche and the development of civilization as a whole.<sup>43</sup> Psyche pomp is a spirit, deity, or other being that, in Greek, Roman, and other civilizations, has the duty of leading the souls of the recently deceased into the here-afterlife. The pronunciation of the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean phrases for four and death are similar, hence in mainland China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea, the number four is frequently connected with death.<sup>44</sup> Despite efforts to portray death and many connected concepts without splendor, they have become glorified in modern society. The way that different group members view glory in death is subjective and can vary greatly.

### METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in Ghana's Offinso North District, encompassing the Akumadan traditional area of the Ashanti Region. The shape, colours, design, location, and styles of graves or burial grounds or places in the region vary and have their symbolical connotations. Akumadan was purposively chosen for this study because of variations in views among the traditional and religious groups in the area which the study sought to unravel.

A survey research approach was adapted and used for the study. The approach also serves as the driver of the entire research process. The approach allowed for the use of methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions, giving an advantage of getting closer to the phenomenon being studied and having an in-depth insight and exposure to its deep structure. The approach also allows for easy adaptation of collecting large data both quantitative and qualitative data and the use of a variety of questions.

Purposive sampling dominated the study. All individuals and groups involved in the traditional and customary issues of the area formed part of the target population. These include chiefs, sub-chiefs, elders, traditional opinion leaders, and ordinary men and women above 40 years. The study also accidentally sampled some ordinary individuals who are below 40 years in the traditional area. A qualitative descriptive design approach was used to describe the phenomenon in the data by generating summaries of data samples for analysis. This will allow questions and answers for Who, What, Why, When, and Where in the interviews.

**Table 1: Summary of sample size**

<b>Response Units</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>
Traditional opinion leaders	12	12
Accidental sampled individual below 40yrs (Youth)	20	20
Religious groups	15	15
Traditional Leaders (Chiefs and Sub-chiefs)	10	10
Accidental sampled individual above 40yrs (adults)	20	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>77</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

<sup>41</sup> Ali Akbar Dareini. *Iranian activists fight child executions*, Associated Press (2008), accessed September 22, 2008. Archived September 25, 2008, at the Wayback Machine

<sup>42</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>43</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>44</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

## Study Setting

Akumadan is the capital of the District of Offinso North in Ghana's Ashanti Region. It has a population of around 20,000 people. Agriculture contributes significantly to the Akumadan Township economy. A variety of food crops can be produced on its soil, although tomatoes are the principal product. Tomato farmers employ 90% of the residents over the age of 18. There are more tomatoes grown there than in any other Ghanaian town. It has a dam, which helps irrigate adjacent farmlands during dry seasons. Cassava, pepper, onions, garden eggs, plantains, maize, and other crops are also abundant. A large tract of land near a river that can irrigate it has been purchased by a company called Fomghana with the intention of planting trees. Akumadan Senior High School is the town's most well-known secondary school. The Akumadan EduSpots not only hold STEM and literacy clubs, but they also include a library for children and adults.

Asubima Forest Reserve is about 9 kilometers (5.6 miles) East of Akumadan. All Akumadan investors can select from a wide range of investment opportunities, particularly in the real estate and agricultural sectors.<sup>45</sup> The chiefs are culturally and traditionally loyal to the Offinso-hene. The "Kojosherine" provides sacrifice to the "gods" during the harvesting of yam. Individuals and clans, however, have their own "gods" and shrines. The region commemorates the Mmoaniko festival, which is usually launched by the Offinso-hene. Catholics, Protestants, Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians, and other Christians are estimated to make up 67.4% of the population, with Muslims accounting for 19.4% and Traditionalists accounting for 2.8%. 9.4% claim to have no religious affiliation. The bulk of Christians (22.9%) are Catholics.<sup>46</sup>

## FINDINGS

This section presents the cultural and traditional importance of roadside graves in the study area. The data was collected from an accidental sampling of individual respondents below 40 years (youth), above 40 years (adults), Traditional rulers (Chiefs, sub-chiefs), Traditional opinion leaders, and Religious groups in the study area. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the methods used in gathering the data. The majority of the (young) aged 40 and under are unaware of the reasons, but others feel that the deceased will visit the living back home and hence there is no need to send them far away from home. They also stated that certain elderly who are unable to go long distances to perform ceremonies will desire the graves to be along the roadway for ease of access. Passers-by are also encouraged to pray for them. These were the topics that attracted the most attention. The respondents' reactions are mixed as a result of this result. Majority of those who did not know the reasons were either too young or did not know the location's history. The results also attest to Garlen that youth is often retrospectively viewed as a time of innocence.<sup>47</sup> According to this view, youth have yet to be negatively influenced by society and are naive, rather than ignorant. A "loss of innocence" is a common concept, and is often seen as an integral part of coming of age.

For the Chiefs, sub-chiefs, and opinion leaders, the method used to gather the data on the cultural and traditional importance of roadside graves in the study area, interviews were used. This was later transcribed and analyzed to tease out the facts. Some functions of chiefs in any traditional area include dispute settlement, codification of customary law, arrangement of ceremonies and festivals, organization of communal labour and promotion of socioeconomic development.

The chiefs, opinion leaders and sub-chiefs had this say: Ancestors should be kept at a place for easy access ('*Akantifi*' meaning the edge of the city in Akan) and also it serves as a resting place for the deceased. They also believe that the deceased is a part of them (the living) and that they do not need to throw them away, thus they must be near them or by the roadside. They also stated that this is for the community's traditional spiritual protection. (either at the 'entrance' of the town or when leaving the town) and for easy ritual performance. The departed, whose fate or rank was unknown in the area,

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<sup>45</sup> Population and Housing Census. *District Analytical report. Offinso North District.* Ghana Statistical report 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Population and Housing Census. *District Analytical report. Offinso North District.*

<sup>47</sup> Julie C Garlen, "Interrogating Innocence: 'Childhood' as Exclusionary Social Practice," *Childhood* 26, no. 1 (February 22, 2019): 54–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568218811484>.



may likewise appear in the dreams of the living they added. In agreeing with the results of the chiefs, opinion leaders and sub-chiefs, Baloyi et. al., concur that the personification of Death as a living, sentient creature has been a concept in many societies from before the beginning of recorded history due to the fact that the reality of death has had a significant impact on the human psyche and the development of civilization as a whole.<sup>48</sup> They also believe that interring a loved one by the side of the road assures that the ancestor will rest in peace and guard the family rather than continue to torment and control the living. If the deceased is not buried "properly," by the roadside, or if a person lived a life of dishonour. In this way, they are denied the honour of being part of the community of ancestors, a place highly valued in African beliefs. The findings also confirm Mitford, who opined that the last resting place for the departed is located in cemeteries or burial grounds, which serve as permanent memorials in most African countries.<sup>49</sup>

One of the sub-chiefs indicated: *"If your enemies are to attack you, your Ancestors will protect you first both in and out of the town. For those who enter the town with bad intentions the dead (ancestor) will deal with them first."*

One of the main traditional chiefs opined that: *to solve problems that are related to culture when looking for solutions to their problems they normally will "sweep" the town to the roadside graves or cemetery for solutions and also for passersby to see their ancestors and to pray for them as they passed by.*

One of the queen mothers (chief) posited: *"the graves are built with styles depending on the status of the person, some are in the form of a single room, some in the form of a storey block, and some apartments so that others who will come later can still share their traditional and cultural values together."*

In a focus group discussion, an opinion was expressed by the chief of the opinion leaders which was later agreed to by the majority of the elders. The leader indicated that "Culturally and traditionally the deceased legs should face or be pointed to the roadside and not the head pointing to the Roadside during burial." The team therefore tried to find out the reason for this practice but the elders declined to provide answers.



*Source: fieldwork 2022, showing the direction of graves*

<sup>48</sup> Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata, "The African Conception of Death: A Cultural Implication."

<sup>49</sup> Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited*.

Judging from the results, most chiefs in the area understand how human beings are influenced by their social surroundings as they age and that the ancestors are largely responsible for creating the environment in which one was raised. This is in line with the views of Gire.<sup>50</sup> He posits that “many of the traditions and cultures we have in our families could have been passed down from our ancestors to us. We may connect with the past while simultaneously looking to the future by visiting a cemetery or graveyard. The cemetery plays a significant role in final arrangements, and choosing your own burial space is a very private matter. Ground burials are the most popular and traditional way of being buried, despite the fact that they are not very environmentally friendly. In a local cemetery, bodies are often buried six feet underground in caskets or coffins.”<sup>51</sup>

The respondents were interviewed on the types of grave sites (space) in that traditional area. Their views were later transcribed and analyzed. The results show that the traditional area has six (6) main types of roadside graves (space). This includes traditional graves, lawn graves, family burial grounds, burial grounds for chiefs and opinion leaders, cultural graves, and religious sector graves. They also explained the differences as follows:

- *Traditional/cultural roadside graves:* These graves are available for those who desire more control over the memorial's design or don't want visitors to step on their graves. A memorial stone can be erected at the head of the grave, which can be completely enclosed by kerbs, edging, or mounding. Plants and trees are not allowed. Memorials must not exceed 3' 6" high by 36" wide by 6' 6" deep (including foundations). The owner of the grave is responsible for the placement and upkeep of the memorial and grave space as the results indicate.
- They asserted that the *Lawn roadside grave* is for people who merely want to erect a memorial headstone on a cemetery site. Any kerbs, fences, or other surroundings placed on the burial will be removed without warning. On the grave, no trees or plants may be placed. The memorial may not be more than 3' 6" high by 36" wide by 18" deep (including foundations). A small kerb set can also be installed. The footprint of the entire memorial cannot be wider than 36 inches by deeper than 30 inches. The grave owner is in charge of memorial placement and upkeep, however, cemetery groundskeepers will take care of the lawn area.
- *Family roadside burial grounds* are graves structures purposely for family clans. This can be acquired privately even before death. Some even buy their caskets or coffins before their death. They usually will erect a monument to honour the dead.
- *Burial grounds for chiefs and opinion leaders*, are graves that are mainly for high-class chiefs and high glass class opinion leaders. No ordinary person can be buried there. Even in some cases, it is a taboo to bury someone in and around the place.
- *Cultural graves:* These graves or burial sites by the roadside are strictly for cultural ritual burial purposes. People, who go against taboos, people who died unnatural death e.g. from thunder strikes are buried there. Each culture has rituals and practices related to death that aid in the grieving process. People can process and express their grief through rituals. They also offer suggestions on how the neighborhood may help the grieving family. After a loss, the bereaved have a period allocated to mourning. Similar to this, some cultures see death as a transition to other forms of existence, while others advocate an ongoing dialogue between the living and the dead, while still, others envision a cycle of repeated deaths and rebirths. Other cultures see death as the absolute end, with nothing coming after. This result confirms the views of Gire that many religions, whether they believe in the soul's existence in another world like Christianity, Islam, and many pagan belief systems, or reincarnation like many forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, believe that one's status in the afterlife is a consequence of one's conduct during life.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> James Gire, “How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Conceptions of Death and Dying,” *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 6, no. 2 (December 1, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1120>.

<sup>51</sup> Gire, “How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Conceptions of Death and Dying.”

<sup>52</sup> Gire, “How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Conceptions of Death and Dying.”

- **Religious graves:** Majority of people who visit these graves are Christians and Muslims, and these religious groups have separate sections in the roadside cemeteries. The service typically includes prayers, a sermon, readings, hymns, and occasionally music or poetry. It may be held in a church, mosque, or cemetery. Additionally, as a memorial to the deceased, a friend or family member may decide to give the eulogy.

This notion is derived from the widespread African belief that life and death are two different states of being that exist simultaneously. The aforementioned makes it simple to place roadside graves or cemeteries within the realm of culture and traditions. As a result of traditions and practices in various cultures, this common folkway of passage is preserved because it is symbolic.

In order to understand behaviour and societies by getting to know the people involved, the study adopted the observational method to collect data from only the traditional opinion leaders and the accidentally sampled individuals, both above and below 40 years of age. This was done in an effort to understand the values, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and directness of the people as well as their non-verbal communication styles and how they express their emotions. A walk around a roadside cemetery or burial ground with some of the respondents was a very lovely and introspective event. Roadside graves are frequently adorned with symbols, images and icons. The data revealed that the symbols, images and icons communicate non-verbally. Some represent independence, power and prosperity. In addition, names, dates of birth, and dates of death were also written on the roadside graves. Most burials by the roadside in the area include information on the deceased's life expectancy during his or her active years. A brief inscription containing the deceased's birth and death dates is placed on the grave by the roadside.

The respondents explained that even decades after a person's passing, the symbolic markings of graves help to keep their name and individuality alive. People have a sense of continuity as a result, and their legacy is preserved. The graves at the cemetery are accessible to the current generation, who can use them to locate their ancestors. Depending on the kind of life that the deceased led and the kind of death that followed, a person will receive a particular type of burial. In most cases, roadside graves will show the direction in which the deceased's head was turned. The head side of the grave is typically raised higher than the leg side (in most cases).

Moving around the cemetery with some of the opinion leaders, the most non-verbal communication symbols that were visible on the roadside graves or burial grounds included:

**Angels** = meaning God's messengers and guardians.

**A sign of a Cross** = meaning the deceased was either a Christian, minister; possibly a pastor or a catholic.

**Anvil and/or hammer** = meaning the deceased was a blacksmith.

**Pillar (Broken)** = meaning a sudden death or a life cut short.

**Key** = meaning an entrance to heaven

These signs/symbols and their meanings confirm the views of Ba-an et al.<sup>53</sup> They posit that the knowledge that everyone will pass on at some point in their lives unites people from all civilizations, regardless of how or where they were born. The findings are also in line with Carey's hypothesis that people who experience afterlife communication would perceive, hear, or feel the presence of a deceased friend or relative in their own environment.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Maxwell Tengolzor Ba-an et al., "Examining the Factors Influencing Changes in Traditional Funeral Rituals among Frafra Subgroupings in Northern Ghana," *International Journal of Research and Scholarly Communication* 5, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hale, *On Being a Missionary* (William Carey Library, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the cultural and traditional importance of roadside graves in the Akumadan Traditional Area of the Offinso North District of Ghana. Burial sites in the Akumadan Traditional Area are inextricably tied to the human environment. The dead, whose fate or rank was unknown in the area, may also appear in the living's nightmares. Roadside graves thus serve as a sobering reminder of mortal life's transience and frailty. The shapes of cultural and traditional roadside cemeteries or burial grounds represent the concept that life continues after death. Every traditional location has its own particular culture and custom that communicates to others who they are and what they believe in. These gravesides should be protected and their histories preserved to uphold the values of the community. For Policy Implication, Offinso North and by extension the Akumadan Traditional Area of Ghana is rich in cultural and traditional belief systems. These traditional belief systems and cultural systems must be adequately documented as part of the rich culture of the traditional area, and chiefs must be authorized to do so. To protect the area's unique culture, stakeholders must establish a tourism center in that traditional area to help conserve the rich culture and traditions of the area.

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