

Documentation of the Socio-Cultural Significance of Artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai Palace in Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Documentation of artefacts is a great avenue for recording the relevance of the works in the lives of the people. This would also help in improving the care and maintenance of artefacts. This study thus aimed at unfolding the philosophical foundations of the traditions and culture of the people of Sefwi Bekwai located at the Sefwi Bekwai palace in the Western North Region of Ghana. The artefacts made in different kinds of materials project the religious, political, social, economic and medicinal roles that these works play in the Sefwi Bekwai culture. The study was ethnographic research under the qualitative research approach. A total of 30 study participants were purposively sampled and interviewed with the help of a semi-structured interview guide. The study participants included chiefs, linguists, and elders of Sefwi Bekwai, art experts and visual art teachers. The study revealed that the artefacts are used as mediums of worship to satisfy religious needs; to bridge the gap between people and their ancestors; to act as dwelling places of the deities, ancestors, and other spiritual powers; to seek protection and good luck; to serve as a bond of unity, kinship, and belongingness; to express beliefs in bad force, death, and the afterlife. The study contends that documentation of artefacts in palaces is crucial for safeguarding and propagating the rich cultural heritage of a people to generations.

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INTRODUCTION

The imperative of documenting the artefacts and other cultural relics of any group of people in these contemporary times is no longer in doubt. Preserving artefacts that showcase a community's cultural heritage is crucial for future generations as it promotes cultural ethics and identity.¹ It has become even more important with UNESCO's declaration to safeguard both the tangible and intangible aspects of every human culture. It is commonly maintained that African art has a great historical, philosophical, and other usefulness in peoples' sociocultural lives mostly passed down orally between generations. Documentation of traditional African artefacts is crucial for preserving and promoting cultural heritage to prevent their

¹ Emmanuel Manu, Steve Kquofi, and Mustapha Issah, "The Impact of Numinosity on the Preservation of Selected Artefacts in the Manhyia Palace Museum, Ghana," *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* 45, no. 3 (2022): 223–35.

historic and philosophical connotations been lost or distorted, due to over-dependence on oral narratives.² This has therefore caught the attention of many researchers both international and local including, Adu-Agyem who used documentation as a process for art education.³ However, a lot more of these artefacts and cultural relics in Ghana are to be documented.

Broadly across Africa and specifically in Ghana, the chieftaincy system is embedded with a rich cultural heritage that is sometimes expressed through art.⁴ Chieftaincy and art are intriguingly interwoven such that most royal palaces are rich in many artefacts which represent their legacy of the past and must be passed on to future generations.⁵ These indigenous art forms represented at the various palaces or chiefdoms, provide a unique way of life, revealing a people's collective identity, aesthetic values, history, religious beliefs, and cultural enhancement.⁶ It has been further asserted that studying the socio-cultural significance of royal art forms can contribute to the development of the society within which they exist. Owing to the connection between art and chieftaincy, Adu-Agyem described the Asantehene of Ghana as a walking museum.⁷

The palace or royal artefacts serve a plethora of socio-cultural significance. They play a pivotal role in the religious ceremonies and spiritual protection of the people. Opuni-Frimpong has noted that 'every twenty-one days, an Ashanti ruler offers libations to his royal ancestors on behalf of his subjects, praying that the soil may be fruitful and the tribe of its increase.'⁸ The spirits of these ancestors are to be inhibiting the blackened stools usually kept in the stool room. The black stool is therefore used as the symbol of mediation during the worship. It bridges the gap between the people and their ancestors. Similarly, the cast brass heads of the Obas of the ancient Benin kingdom, serve as the abode for the spirits of their ancestors and are therefore a significant aspect of the rituals and ceremonies of the Benin people.⁹

Artefacts are also used in the various kingdoms/chiefdoms to define political power and leadership status. Special objects such as flywhisks, staffs, stools, pipes and cloths are used in royal activities as symbols that legitimize political authority.¹⁰ These objects form the basis for the distinction between the kings or chiefs and their subordinates. In the ancient Benin kingdom, the stools on which the kings sit are considered the seats of power that give them legitimate authority as kings.¹¹ Among the Sissala of the Lambussie traditional area in northwestern Ghana, the stool defines the leadership status of the *totina* as the custodian of the land.¹² In the culture of the Luba people of DR Congo, the ranks and titles of leaders are indicated by the progressively patterned seating nature of the leaders. A leader begins by sitting on a woven mat, then on animal skin, followed by sitting on clay thrones and finally on sculpted wooden thrones.¹³

The authority, power and wealth of the kings and chiefs are expressed through these artefacts. The authorities of both the kings/chiefs and queen mothers are vested in these symbolic art forms such as wooden stools and swords for Southern ethnic groups and animal skins and fly whisks for Northern and Upper regions of Ghana.¹⁴ The position of the king's spokesman (*Okyeame*) among the Asante of Ghana is validated by the staff he holds during the sittings of the king in the palace to interact with his subjects.¹⁵

² Arthur, K Diabour, and K A Kofi, "Utility of Skins and Leather in Selected Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area," *Journal of Culture, Society and Development* 39 (2018): 1–9.

³ Joe Adu-Agyem, "Documentation as a Process of Art Education in Contemporary Ghana" (Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 1998).

⁴ Arthur, Diabour, and Kofi, "Utility of Skins and Leather in Selected Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area."

⁵ Kwasi Amoako-Ohene and Bernard Okoampah Otu, "Sustainability of Asante Manhyia Palace Museum: A Collection of Cultural Identity," *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* 3, no. 2 (2014).

⁶ Kenneth Bright Boateng, Fredrick Boakye Yiadom, and Frimpong Kwaku Duku, "Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir," *History* 33 (2017).

⁷ Adu-Agyem, "Documentation as a Process of Art Education in Contemporary Ghana."

⁸ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "The Significance of the Black Stool as an Educational Resource in Akan Traditional Patterns of Learning," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 7, no. 10 (2021).

⁹ Daniel Iboror, "The Art of the Benin People," *Journal of Advances in Social Sciences and Humanities, JASSH* 5, no. 8 (2019): 949–74.

¹⁰ Christa Clarke and Rebecca Arkenberg, *The Art of Africa: A Resource for Educators*, vol. 1 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).

¹¹ K. Ezra, *Royal Art of Benin: The Perls Collection* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

¹² Kombui Babaaradio et al., "The Socio-Cultural Significance of Selected Indigenous Visual Artefacts in the Lambussie Traditional Area, Ghana," *ASEAN Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 12 (2022).

¹³ Prestige Stools with Female Figure, 2024. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metkids/explore/314034>

¹⁴ Arthur, Diabour, and Kofi, "Utility of Skins and Leather in Selected Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area."

¹⁵ Nana Ama Pokuaa Arthur, Eric Appau Asante, and Nana Afia Opoku-Asare, "The Educational Role of Performing and Visual Arts in Asante Traditional Politics," *International Journal of Education through Art* 11, no. 1 (2015): 117–35.

According to Essel, *sika mpaboa* (literary translated as ‘golden footwear/sandals’) for example, is the highest status-defining type of *ahenema* (footwear) amongst the chieftdom and is the preserve of the Asante King. He wears it during durbars to display his prestige and wealth.¹⁶

Beyond the use of the artefacts to communicate with ancestral spirits or mediate between the world of the living and the spiritual world, these arts are also used in communicating all kinds of messages daily between kings and their subjects and other kingdoms. In the ancient Benin kingdom, symbols of authority were used by the Oba (king) to communicate his authority in settling supremacy disputes between sub-rulers of vassal communities. Where two sub-rulers contended for supremacy, the dispute was settled by the receipt of a gift from the Oba by one of the claimants which had been interpreted by the receivers as symbolizing his superiority over the other claimants.¹⁷ Arthur, et al., said in the culture of the Akans, swords are the symbols of royal messages; they lend royal authority and credence to the messages delivered by the sword-bearing messengers.¹⁸ In addition to the swords, Quarcoopome noted that motifs of animals and plants on rings, spokesperson staffs and pendants also carry metaphorical messages appropriately to the subjects and adversaries of the kings and chiefs.¹⁹ The Golden Axe of the pre-colonial Asante kingdom was a symbol of peace and was used extensively by King Kwaku Dua I in the past to invite warring parties to the king for an amicable resolution.²⁰

The royal arts equally serve as the major driving force behind the celebrations of occasions such as festivals, funerals and special occasions.²¹ Identified the *Asipim* chair, the queen mother’s stool and the bottom rest as an integral part of the artefacts used by the Efutu people of the Winneba Traditional Area in celebrating the annual *Aboakyir* festival. Art forms such as cloth (Ewe Kete or *Adanuvor*), jumper, a hat (*Fiakuku*), chiefs’ sandals (*Fiafokpa*), a walking stick and *Dzonu* (beads) form significant regalia for occasions like festivals, installation, confinement and coronation of the chiefs among the Anlo State in the Volta Region of Ghana.²²

The artefacts in the Sefwi Bekwai Palace in the Bibiani Anhwiaso Bekwai Municipality of Ghana's Western North Region are an embodiment of the people’s collective identity and can be utilized as viable cultural instruments to impart cultural education to the youth. The artefacts possess inherent philosophical, social, economic, political, educational, historical, and moral values, that require interpretations to emphasize their socio-cultural importance in the life of the people. However, not much effort has been made to properly document these artefacts to the appreciation of all and sundry. It is this research gap on the subject of palace artefacts that this study seeks to investigate. The study hinges on these research questions:

1. What type of artefacts are in Sefwi Bekwai palace in the Bibiani Anhwiaso Bekwai Municipality - Western North region of Ghana?
2. What is the socio-cultural relevance of artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai palace in the Bibiani Anhwiaso Bekwai Municipality?

The History of Sefwi Bekwai

Sefwi means ‘Esahie’ from two Akan words: *Esa* which means war or fighting and *wie* meaning finish, thus fighting has come to an end. The Sefwis mainly consist of three groups; Sefwi Anhwiaso, Sefwi Bekwai and Sefwi Wiawso. They are Akans who came to the south from the old Ghana empire in northern Africa. During migration, they dispersed in groups to various locations.²³ The ancestors of Sefwi Bekwai originally lived at Dwira near Axim. Some historians believe they are from Agona Ahanta on the Western Coast of Ghana. Their chief at the time was Nana Boko. Owing to a lack of land to farm, they migrated to settle at Asumangya in Wassa Amenfi. They also migrated because of iron technology. A few years

¹⁶ Osuanyi Quaicoo Essel, “Historical and Sociocultural Relevance of Royal ‘Ahenema’ Sandals in Asante Culture,” *IOSR J Human Soc Sci (IOSR-JHSS)* 26, no. 04 (2021): 27–34.

¹⁷ Joseph I Osagie and Frank Ikonmwo, “Craft Guilds and the Sustenance of Pre-Colonial Benin Monarchy,” *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 1 (2015): 1–17.

¹⁸ Arthur, Asante, and Opoku-Asare, “The Educational Role of Performing and Visual Arts in Asante Traditional Politics.”

¹⁹ Nii O Quarcoopome, “Akan Leadership and Status Objects,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 91, no. 14 (2017): 28–53.

²⁰ Amoako-Ohene and Otu, “Sustainability of Asante Manhyia Palace Museum: A Collection of Cultural Identity.”

²¹ Boateng, Yiadom, and Duku, “Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir.”

²² Kafui Kumatia, “The Symbolic Meaning of Clothing Regalia of Chiefs in Anlo State in the Volta Region of Ghana” (University of Cape Coast, 2018).

²³ S. Boni, “A Precolonial, Political History of the Sefwi Wiaso Oman.” *Ghana Studies*, no. 4(2010): 139-168.

after they had settled down at Asumangya, their number grew. Seeing the numbers as a threat, the people of Asumangya drove them away to a place called Bekwai in the same district.²⁴

At Bekwai in Wassa, they did mining. The speed at which they destroyed the land made the landowners drive them to another location, Awumaso, near Sefwi Wiawso. During their migration, they grouped themselves into three (3). One group migrated to Anyinabirem near Elmina. Their chief was Kwasi Gyenin. The second group went to Wassa Dwopireman while the third group remained at Awumaso. The following are chiefs who succeeded Nana Bɔɔko after his death; Nana Kotobiri Ameyaw who was a wealthy man, succeeded Nana Bɔɔko, the first chief after his death.²⁵ When Nana Ameyaw also died, Nana Kwame ɛpo succeeded him. Nana Kwame Epo after a period as a chief, died of cancer (*kokoram*). Before his death, his brother Buadi Kyeiwa seduced his wife ɛpɔin which made him so angry that he threw away all the paraphernalia attached to the stool into a stream after he cursed his brother. A week after Nana Opo's death, Buadi Kyeiwa also died. This was confirmed by Nana Kwaku Appiah III, *ebusuapanyin* (head of the family) of Sefwi Bekwai Traditional Council.²⁶

Aka Kogyaen, a very wise man succeeded Nana Kwame Opo as the next chief. He was able to replace all the lost paraphernalia. He was succeeded by Nana Kwaku Ameyaw Kotabiri from Sukusuku. He pawned all the stool properties. He was destooled. Consequently, a state council of all the chiefs and elders was held. In their meeting, the council made a law and swore a fetish that whether alive or dead, no one should allow any member of the Ahwini family from the Sukusuku house or line to inherit the big stool (*Bia Piri*).²⁷ On that day a loaded gun with a valuable bead, *buta*, was fired into the air notifying the Amanfos of the Ahwini family's disinheritance to the big stool.

Asienim Kotoku became the new chief but died of cancer after a few months. Consequently, Nana Kwame Gyapong, the great, became the paramount chief in 1782. During his reign at Awumaso, there was a war between him and the paramount chief, Ngoa of Sefwi Wiawso. The cause of the war was that Asaim of Ayiem house gambled with a nephew of the Paramount chief of Denkyira, Amoako Atta. Asaim's debt of seven (*predwan*) (C300.00) was paid by Nana Gyapong. This occurred in 1800. Asaim gambled again with *ɛlɔin*, chief of Ngakaen which was about a mile from Wiawso. Asaim again owed three *predwan* (C150.00) which was also paid by Nana Gyapong. Nana Gyapong then decided with his elders, forbidding his subjects to gamble. He ordered for a gong to be beaten to that effect backed by Asantehene's oath that no subject of his should gamble.²⁸

Notwithstanding, Asaim scorned Nana Gyapong's oath and gambled with *ɛlɔin* again. As usual, Asaim refused to pay the debt of (C1,500,024) he incurred. When *ɛlɔin* came to ask Nana Gyapong to pay, he refused. This brought about the war between the people of Wiawso and Bekwai. It is believed that the people of Wiawso drove the people of Bekwai from Awumasoto to their present place during the war. Esua Kwabena, Yaw Angra, Adu Kwasi and Yaw Bosombim were taken captives and became subjects of Sefwi Wiawso. Nana Kwame Gyapong, a brave and wealthy chief had only thirty (30) armed men who fought and protected the other subjects. Nana Kwame Gyapong made all sorts of paraphernalia for the stool. He later died in Kumasi and was buried there. The next successor was Nana Kwame Yamo. He also owed one hundred (100) *predwan*, on three different occasions. His total debt was three hundred (300) *predwan*. The people paid all the debt; however, he continued to contract debts to (*Awasohene*) and (*Mframandwohene*). It is not known why he owed that much whether through gambling or borrowing. Eventually, he died with his debts. Kwadwo Nkrumah succeeded him and also contracted a debt of sixty (60) *predawn* which was equivalent to four hundred and eighty pounds (£2,500) in those days. He sold all the stool paraphernalia to pay his debts; he reigned for three years and died. Succeeded by Nana Kwabina Kwateng, who tried to improve the situation, found himself in prison in Elmina with two of his sub-chiefs, Appia and Kwadwo Biri because he was mitigating a fight between Kwasi Mensa of Manso Nkwanta and Aduampong, the *Omanhene* of Sefwi Anhwiaso. He was jailed for three years. After his release, he reigned for a few years and died.

²⁴ Field interview with an elder, Nana Kwabena Ennin, 22nd February, 2022.

²⁵ Field interview with an elder, Nana Kwabena Ennin, 22nd February, 2022.

²⁶ Field interview with an elder, Nana Kwabena Ennin, 22nd February, 2022.

²⁷ Boni, "A Precolonial, Political History of the Sefwi Wiaso Oman."

²⁸ Field interview with, oyaadieyie Basape Kojo Armah III, 22nd February, 2022.

Boadi has stated that, after his death, Nana Kwame Ngoa from Sucusuku became the next Omanhene. He also incurred a debt of thirty (30) predwan and he died after two years of his reign in 1907 and was succeeded by Nana Kwabina Gyapong. After Nana Gyapong, Nana Kwaku Dua from Ayiem succeeded him. After a few years, Kwaku Dua also died. Nana Kwadwo Arma of Sucusuku succeeded Nana Kwaku Dua. He died in 1937 and was succeeded by Nana Kofi Anyansu from Bankromisa. He also died and was succeeded by Nana Ata Agyemang of Ayiem. He formed the Sefwi Confederacy in 1944 consisting of the people of Sefwi Bekwai and Sefwi Wiawso. Stool taxes that the people of Sefwi Bekwai who lived on the land of Sefwi Wiawso paid, were then abolished.²⁹

Nana Ata Agyemang was destooled for an unknown reason. Nana Kwaku Gyabeng of Sucusuku became the next chief. He renovated the palace and erected the state council building. The building consisted of the tribunal court, the offices of the court registrar and the clerk of council. Besides, there were the following: the old postal agency, the state treasurer's office, prisons and the native police charge office. Nana Kwaku Gyabeng reigned peacefully and died in 1948. Nana Kwasi Amankwaa of Bankromisaa became the next chief who did well to complete the palace and the state administrative building. The destooled chief, Nana Ata Agyemang, destooled Nana Kwasi Amankwaa and became the chief once again with the stool name Nana Ata Agyemang Sanwuabra. After about twenty years of his reign, he was destooled again as a result of maladministration. Thereafter, Nana Kojo Arma II of Sucusuku became the next chief. He travelled to London a few years after his reign for further studies and visited home twice from London.

Nana Ata Agyemang took advantage of Nana Kojo Arma's absence and caused the latter's destoolment. Nana Ata Agyemang became the Paramount chief for the third time. This time the natives were tired of his maladministration and attempted to destool him. When the malcontents went to his house to present destoolment charges against him to him, a riot erupted. In the riot, Kwaku Anin, an ex-serviceman was wounded by a gunshot from the chief's house. In retaliation, one of the malcontents shot and killed the chief, Nana Ata Agyemang. This incident took place on 3rd April 1976. Many suspects were arrested and dealt with according to the law. The chief of Ampenkrom at the time was among the culprits. He died in prison and the body was sent home for burial.

A few years later, after the death of Nana Ata Agyemang, Acheampong's government granted the permission to choose a new paramount chief. There were two contestants. One was Nana Kofi Nyinka (Abakomahene) of Akaasu. The other one was Mr. J. W. Somiah of Bankromisa. Mr. J. W. Somiah of Bankromisa was elected on 9th October 1978 as the paramount chief (President of the National House of Chiefs). He chose the stool name, Odenho Kwame Gyapong Ababio II. He was President of the Western Regional House of Chiefs for two terms and the President of the National House of Chiefs for eight years. He died on 10th November 2014. Basape Kojo Armah III from Sucusuku succeeded him and has since been the Paramount Chief of Sefwi Bekwai.³⁰ Sefwi Bekwai is situated where four crossroads from Ashanti, Dunkwa, Asankragua and Ivory Coast meet. The people of Sefwi are noted for their rich culture (Figure 1).

METHODOLOGY

This is an ethnographic study under the qualitative approach³¹ aimed at collecting detailed verbal data through personal interviews, focus group discussions, and personal observations on the artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai palace and how they could be documented. This study approach was seen as important because it allowed the researchers to effectively engage with study participants through in situ observations and immersion in the social setting of local communities. To have a rich understanding of their artefacts, their philosophical interpretations and how they could be presented and understood using the principles in the iconography theory.³² The study was conducted between the period of 10th of January, 2021 and 30th of the November, 2023. The semi-structured interview guide that was designed was based on the survey of the artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai, their interpretation and representations. The interview guide was revised

²⁹ Boadi, *Inside Sefwi then and now*.

³⁰ Boadi, *Inside Sefwi then and now*.

³¹ Scott Reeves et al., "Ethnography in Qualitative Educational Research: AMEE Guide No. 80," *Medical Teacher* 35,no.8(2013): e1365–79.

³² Hemant Lata Sharma, Chiranjit Sarkar, and A H Behavior, "Ethnography Research: An Overview" (July, 2019).

based on expert suggestions. Each personal interview lasted for over an hour with each of the focus group discussions lasting for not less than two hours. A total of ten (10) interviews were conducted. While the personal interviews were audio-recorded, the focus group discussions were video-recorded. They were all carefully transcribed from the local languages to the English language by two of the researchers with the help of three study participants. The views expressed by the study participants were tagged with their identities since all of them wanted to be a part of this important work by documenting artefacts in the Sefwi Bekwai palace and finding their socio-cultural relevance.

Sample Selection Procedure and Sample Size

The study participants were selected purposefully from Sefwi Bekwai. The study’s total sample size of thirty (30) consisted of some Art teachers of Sefwi Bekwai SHS constituting the Art Experts, Sefwi Bekwai's paramount chief, sub-chiefs, queen mothers, elders and opinion leaders of Sefwi Bekwai. The researchers selected one (1) paramount chief, three (3) sub-chiefs and two (2) queen mothers, two (2) linguists, nine (9) elders and opinion leaders and five (5) art experts who are Visual Art teachers in Sefwi Bekwai SHS. These participants were selected because they have witnessed and participated in the enstoolment of about two (2) successive paramount chiefs. They know the artefacts in the palace as well as the history of the town. The Art experts were also selected because there was the need for an expert’s opinion on the subject. The sample size was calculated using a little over one-third of the target population.



Figure 1. Map of Ghana showing Sefwi
 Source: Sefwi Bekwai (Ghana) map- nona.net

Data Analytical Procedure

The data generated from the personal interviews and focus group discussions with the study participants were analyzed by meticulously following the principles in the ethnography thematic analysis which involves three major processes, description, analysis, and interpretation.³³ All the data collected were critically analyzed, categorized, and summarized and conclusions were drawn from them.

³³ Reeves et al., “Ethnography in Qualitative Educational Research: AMEE Guide No. 80.”

Table 1. Sample size for the study	
Study participants	Number
The paramount chief, Sub-Chiefs and Queen mothers	9
Elders and opinion leaders	14
Linguist	2
Art Experts	5
Total Sample	30

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Types of artefacts found in Sefwi Bekwai Palace

This section concentrates on the documented artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai palace, as well as their socio-cultural functions and significance. It analyzes the socio-cultural significance of treasures in Sefwi Bekwai Palace based on conversations with art specialists and traditional authorities. The data was gathered using the research questions outlined for the study to develop emerging themes that reflected the study's key aims.

Sefwi Bekwai Palace

The Sefwi Bekwai Palace is located opposite Upper Amenfi Rural Bank. It is painted salmon colour and brown. It was built in the 19th century and has gone through various renovations.³⁴ It is a fenced palace with its name (Sefwi Bekwai Palace and *Ekoona* Ahenfie) boldly written in front. It also has a big forecourt.

Statues of Two Lions

The Statues of two lions are located at the entrance of the palace symbolizing the great security of the palace. They are located on both sides of the entrance. These are well-sculpted and nicely painted lions on their pedestals. The palace is also decorated with Adinkra symbols. The entrance has various Adinkra symbols such as *Gye nyame* (Except God), *Akokɔnan* (Hen's leg), and *Ananse Ntentan* (Spider Web), among others painted on the wall.



Figure 2. Sefwi Bekwai palace
Source: Photographed by the researchers

³⁴ Field interview with Nana Kwabena Ennin, 15th June, 2022.



Figure 3. Statues of two lions
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Spot for the Performance of Libation

Figure 4 is the spot where libations are performed in the palace. Blood stains are seen around this spot. This was built many years ago. Prayers are said as libations are also performed to call on the ancestors to cure, support, judge, and curse. According to Nana Kwabena Ennin, the spot has been there since the reign of Nana Booko.³⁵ He added that it has only gone through renovations.



Figure 4. Spot for libation
Source: Photographed by the researchers

The Chief's Sceptre

This is an artefact that measures 124cm. It is a wooden sceptre painted black with a red piece of cloth wrapped around the neck. The head is a conical and carries a smaller form like an umbrella top.³⁶ The sceptre signifies the power and authority of the chief. It is used to summon individuals in the community to the palace or to inform indigenes of sad news. It is also used to banish or ask a culprit to pay a fine.

³⁵ Field interview with Nana Kwabena Ennin, 15th June, 2022.

³⁶ Source: Field Observation, 15th June, 2022.



Figure 5. The Chief's Sceptre
Source: Photographed by the researchers

The Spokesperson's Staff (*Okyeame Poma*)

The spokesperson staff is in the palace of Sefwi Bekwai. It measures 112cm and represents the Ekoona family (*Ebusua*) of which the royals are from. This artefact is a buffalo signifying the power, safety, strength, life's sacredness and durability. The people from the Ekoona family are referred to as *Ekuo ne Asimpi. Ahweneedayawa mu*, others also say they *Ekuo Nana* that is, grandchildren of *Ekuo*. From the chief's palace, this work of art is intended to convey highly important messages to individuals and elders in the Sefwi Bekwai traditional set-up. Because it denotes the linguist's power as the king's speaker, the staff can be carried everywhere in the Sefwi Bekwai community and even beyond. The king's spokesman, *Okyeame*, or a diplomat, has the ability to deliver statements on behalf of the king at certain official functions via the staff.



Figure 6. The spokesperson staff (*Okyeame Poma*)
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Atumpan and Fontonfrom Drums

Drums are another type of artefact found among the people of Sefwi Bekwai. Figure 7 depicts a collection of *Atumpan* drums, which the people of Sefwi Bekwai frequently utilize during important ceremonies. These drums, each with its own distinct sound come in a variety of sizes. The Sefwi Bekwai carve drums out of wood, leather, and ropes that are frequently decorated with ash oil paint to serve socio-cultural and religious objectives. These drums are found in chiefs' palaces as a result of their functions. The drums are normally kept in a safe spot in the chiefs' palaces where they can be quickly used during the durbars because they are mostly used to sound appellations of the chief. Aside from their religious function, they are also used to gather people for significant meetings, invocations of spirits, and for entertainment. Furthermore, some drums are revered as deities in the Sefwi Bekwai community, and these varieties are commonly found at shrines in the Sefwi Bekwai traditional area. These drums have a physical, emotional, and spiritual impact as the community's heartbeat. They are used to communicate, commemorate, lament, and inspire. Drums are played in times of peace and conflict, planting and harvesting, birth and death. Drums with carved vertical lines symbolize authority, power and fertility.



*Figure 7. Atumpan and Fontonfrom drums
Source: Photographed by the researchers*

Ceremonial Swords

Ceremonial swords are prized possessions among Ghana's ethnic groupings, and the Sefwi Bekwai people are no exception. This important work of art was once displayed at the chief's palace gate, but it is now kept in the palace storeroom by the Sefwi Bekwai people. The swords' blades are black to represent strength, seriousness, power, and authority, while the grips are gold to represent courage, passion, worth, and knowledge. Triangular perforations run the length of the blade, symbolizing the people of Sefwi Bekwai's power and stability. The ceremonial swords are used to swear the new chief into office, as is a Sefwi Bekwai tradition. The use of the state sword to swear in new chiefs indicates that both the traditional system of governance and the political administration of a country share certain rules and regulations. Blades come in a variety of shapes and sizes, with varied complex designs on them to minimize the weight of the swords. A sword is made up of three parts: the blade, the hilt, and the sheath. The blade is usually made of steel and has etched lines, and symbolic or geometric motifs on it. It can be used for cutting, piercing, or both. Some have two or three blades that come together at the top and fit into the hilt. The grip and pommel make up the hilt, which keeps it from slipping through the hand. This is further crowned by another knob or cone.



Figure 8. Ceremonial sword
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Chief's *Asipim*

Asipim means 'I stand firm' in Asanti twi is a royal chair in Asante society. It is a sign of power and prestige exclusively used by chiefs. It dates between 1875-1925. There are two types of *asipim* chairs. *Asipimtenten* and *Asipimtia*. The *Asipimtia* chairs are low, armless chairs but *Asipimtenten* chairs have armrests and stretch longer than *Asipimtia*.

The chief's *asipim* is a special chair made of wood, metal, and leather. The chairs are elegantly and elaborately decorated with studs used during state occasions. The smaller rounded-headed nails in bands of several horizontal and vertical lines and elaborate repousse metalwork are employed to adorn or decorate the main body (frame) of the chair. These are mostly in brass but silver is also used by those entitled to do so. Unlike stools, *asipim* is designed with a leather-covered seat, backrest, and sometimes armrest. Examples are seen in the plates below. There are different types of *asipim* chairs in Sefwi Bekwai. Figure 9, *Akonkomfi* (Royal Chair) *asipim* for special occasions. Figure 10 is an *Asipimtia* chair usually used by the paramount chief and other sub-chiefs during meetings. Figure 11 is an *Asipimtenten* chair which belongs only to the paramount chief. It has a red woollen fabric sewn on the seat, arms and beautifully stencilled ceremonial swords (*Akonfena*) against a black woollen fabric. He uses it during special occasions like festivals and durbars. All the chairs are made of a hardwood like *Odum*, this is because of the spiritual connection possessed by the wood against evil people.³⁷

Stools (*Asesedwa*)

Sefwi Bekwai Palace has stools (*Asesedwa*) that belong to the queen mother. The stool, Figure 12 is known as '*Makoma so adee*' meaning my heart desire. A wooden stool carved from '*nyame dua*' (*alstonia boonei*) it is made of three parts. The base, the middle part and the top. There are triangular holes in the middle part of the stool. These triangular holes stand for the fairness and justice of God and the round projections at the edges of the stool represent the female in the society while the strong pillar in the middle represents the existence of God. God's supremacy, protection and guidance.³⁸ Similarly, it is the repository of all ancient traditions and the spirits of the ancestors.³⁹ The four rectangular-shaped pillars of the stools represent male power, strength, good fortunes and dependence on men in society. The crescent or half-moon shape of a stool represents female embrace in society while the base represents support of the earth.

³⁷ Field interview with Nana Kwabena Annin II, 9th June, 2021.

³⁸ Field interview with Nana Kwabena Annin II, 18th June, 2021.

³⁹ Dickson Adom, *General Knowledge in Art for Senior High Schools* (Kumasi: Adom Series Publications, 2014).



Figure 9. Akonkomfi



Figure 10. Asipimtia
Photographed by the researchers



Figure 11. Asipimtenten chair



Figure 12. Stool (Makoma so adee Asesedwa)
Photographed by the researchers

The Headgear

The headgear in Figure 13 is black and has several golden symbols on it. This is made with leather. The symbols which are like the shape of leaves are broad and have veins in the middle. It also has a symbol of a buffalo at the apex around *Gye Nyame* symbols. The chain around the border of the headgear makes it look very beautiful and lovely. The arrangement of the symbols, textures, and shapes on the headgear suggests that there is unity, harmony and stability. This is worn by the paramount chief when he is in state. The use of this headgear is to show wealth and project the clan the chief belongs to. This is why there is a gold cat's buffalo at the top.



Figure 13. Headgear
Source: Photographed by the researchers

Necklaces and Pendants

Necklaces and pendants are very relevant so far as chieftaincy is concerned. The chief's necklace represents the royalty, wealth, status and magical powers of the chief. It also talks about the treasure Sefwi Bekwai has. Some of them are magical totems thought to bring long life, prosperity and protection against evil spirits. There are different kinds of necklaces in Sefwi Bekwai Palace. They are worn by the paramount chief and queen mothers depending on the occasion. However, all of them are worn during festivals and funerals. There are pendants on the necklaces with special designs which make them look distinctive, magical, and pretty. The shapes of the pendants indicate the preparedness and supremacy of the chief in the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in the area.

The designs and shapes on the pendants also show that the chief is brave, and courageous and has power over his people. The colour and shapes of the necklaces make them attain their aesthetic values and show that Sefwi is rich in gold. The designs on the necklaces and pendants express emotions such as gracefulness, cheerfulness, and joyfulness.⁴⁰⁴¹ Examples of the designs can be found in Figure 14 *ɔbaatan abedee*, the warmth of a woman.⁴² This shows how the chief and the community welcome strangers. Also, figure 15 has a pendant called *Ɔkofoɔ* (warrior). This means even though they are for peace when it is about war, they are warriors and can fight to the latter. The names of other necklaces available at the Bekwai include; *Asɛsɛdwa kɔnmuadee*, *Ananse ntenten*, *Nkawa*, and *Daakye nti* which all represent royalty and are worn for decoration.

⁴⁰ Armah, Adu-Agyem, and Osei. "Akwantukese Festival of the New Juaben People," *Journal of Arts and Design Studies* 80 (2020).

⁴¹ Linda Armah, Joe Adu-Agyem and Mavis Osei, "Akwantukese Festival of the New Juaben People: The Artforms and Their Aesthetics," 2020.

⁴² Field interview with Nana Kwabena Annin, 18th June, 2021.



Figure 14. *Obaatan abedee*



Figure 15. *Okofoo*

Source: Photographed by the researchers

Native Sandals (*Ahenema Mpaboa*)

One of the most prominent symbols of chiefs and queen mothers is the native sandals (*ahenema*). The sort of native sandals worn by a chief or queen mother reveals their position in the traditional area. Native sandals were composed of leather and worn-out lorry tyres, according to observations. Different motifs, colours and meanings can be found on native sandals. The plates below are examples. Figure 16 and Figure 17 are *Sika mpaboa* meaning golden native sandals which are worn during joyous occasions like festivals and other important occasions. The kind of motif on the apex of the native sandals identifies the clan, authority and power the chief possesses. *Sika mpaboa* with dorsal surface covered in embroidered goat skin with leather straps enclosed in red velvet. *Kente* cloths are fastened at either side of the straps with nylon thread. A gold scorpion is mounted at the apex of these native sandals. The shapes of the golden insignia attached at the top of the native sandals, as well as the shape of the sole, symbolize the chief's power and wealth.



Figure 16. *Sika mpaboa* with *kente* designs



Figure 17. *Sika mpaboa* with geometrical symbols

Source: Photographed by the researchers

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the data presented about Sefwi Bekwai palace artefacts revealed that the artefacts comprise visual art forms such as sculpture, textiles, leatherwork and jewellery or beadwork and can be categorized into ceremonial and body items as recorded by Arthur, Diabour, and Kofi about the artefacts from the Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area.⁴³ The ceremonial items included; statues of lions (Fig. 3), the spot of libation (Fig. 4), the chief's Sceptre (Fig. 5), the spokesperson staff (Fig. 6), the drum (Fig. 7),

⁴³ Arthur, Diabour, and Kofi, "Utility of Skins and Leather in Selected Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area."

ceremonial swords (Fig. 8), chief's *Asipim* (Fig. 9) and stools (*Asessedwa* – Fig. 12). The body items discovered were the headgear (Fig. 13), necklaces and pendants (Fig. 14 & 15), and the native sandals (*ahenema* – Fig. 16 & 17). A collective analysis of the artefacts further revealed that they serve various socio-cultural functions as reflected in the literature above. They include; religious and spiritual purposes, defining traditional political power, might and leadership status, communicating traditional leaders' authority, power, wealth, and prestige proverbial and for the celebrations of occasions such as festivals, funerals, coronations, installations etc.

It is a common phenomenon to have symbols or skin of wild animals used by the various kingdoms and chiefdoms in Ghana to represent the power and might of their chiefdoms. The loins representation at the Sefwi Bekwai palace (Fig. 3) is in tandem with the role of lion and leopard images in Akan art where they evoke qualities such as strength, courage, wisdom and regal beauty.⁴⁴ Though the two lions of Bekwai palace are sculpturally represented against the use of skins of wild animals by chiefs in Northern Ghana, the intended purpose of these lion statues is the same – a display of might and power.⁴⁵

According to Mbiti as cited by Boateng, Yiadom, and Duku Africans are known for their unique religious systems, each with distinct beliefs and practices influenced by art forms.⁴⁶ The artefacts of Sefwi Bekwai are no exception. In religious terms, the spot of libation (Fig. 4) and the Stools (*Asessedwa*-Fig. 12) are of high religious significance. The spot of libation could be best described as the point where the living and dead (ancestors) meet amidst prayers, and libations to call on the ancestors to cure, support, judge, and curse. The stools of Sefwi Bekwai palace similar to all Akan or Asante societies serve as important religious tools to the people. Various sections of the stools (*Asessedwa*-Fig. 12) in the palace are designated to the presence and influence of God among the people. *these triangular holes stand for the fairness and justice of God and the round projections at the edges of the stool represent the female in the society while the strong pillar in the middle represents the existence of God, His supremacy, protection and guidance.*⁴⁷ The Akan/Asante generally see the stools as the repository of all ancient traditions and the spirits of the ancestors.⁴⁸

The use of swords, stools and chairs is of high political significance in both indigenous and contemporary governance in the Ghanaian context. This is evidently seen during the inaugural ceremonies of democratically elected presidents in Ghana. The Sefwi Bekwai palace stools (*Asessedwa* -Fig. 12), apart from their religious significance are also seen as a symbol of the office of the traditional ruler as recorded by many writers of the Akan art and culture. The stools and the chairs (*asipim* – Fig. 9) are viewed as the repository of the soul(s) of an individual (kings, queen mothers and subjects) and that of the entire society.⁴⁹ The *asipim* chair is however said to be produced under the influence of a European chair due to colonization.⁵⁰

The artefacts of Sefwi Bekwai palace that communicate power and authority include; the chief's sceptre (Fig. 5) and the spokesperson staff (*Okeamepoma* – Fig. 6). The chief's sceptre is used to summon his subjects to the palace, banish or fine culprits. This communicative role of the chief's sceptre is similar to the use of gifts by the Obas (kings) of ancient Benin to settle disputes between sub-chiefs.⁵¹ In corroboration to this, Amoako-Ohene, Kwasi, and Otu noted that the Golden Axe of the pre-colonial Asante kingdom was used as a symbol of peace for amicable resolutions.⁵² The communicative role of the spokesperson staff of Sefwi Bekwai palace as the power of the King's spokesperson is in tandem with the assertion by.⁵³ The buffalo figure of the staff which symbolizes power, safety, strength and durability resonates well with the assertion by Quarcoopome that the motifs of animals and plants on rings,

⁴⁴ Doran H Ross, "The Heraldic Lion in Akan Art: A Study of Motif Assimilation in Southern Ghana," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 16 (1981): 165–80.

⁴⁵ Arthur, Diabour, and Kofi, "Utility of Skins and Leather in Selected Chiefs' Palaces in the Ahanta Traditional Area."

⁴⁶ Boateng, Yiadom, and Duku, "Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir."

⁴⁷ Field interview with Nana Kwabena Annin II, 18th June, 2021.

⁴⁸ Adom, *General Knowledge in Art for Senior High Schools*.

⁴⁹ Boateng, Yiadom, and Duku, "Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir."

⁵⁰ Quarcoopome, "Akan Leadership and Status Objects."

⁵¹ Osagie and Ikponmwosa, "Craft Guilds and the Sustenance of Pre-Colonial Benin Monarchy."

⁵² Amoako-Ohene and Otu, "Sustainability of Asante Manhyia Palace Museum: A Collection of Cultural Identity."

⁵³ Arthur, Asante, and Opoku-Asare, "The Educational Role of Performing and Visual Arts in Asante Traditional Politics."

spokesperson staffs and pendants also carry metaphorical messages appropriately to the subjects and adversaries of the kings and chiefs.⁵⁴

Most of the body items of the Bekwai palace are usually worn on occasion as a way of displaying the chief's power, status and riches. The gold cast and printed motifs accompanying these artefacts (body items) directly communicate the power, supremacy and wealth of the chief and or chiefdom of Sefwi Bekwai. The explanation given about the *Sika mpaboa* at the Bekwai palace is not at variance with what Essel said about the historical and sociocultural relevance of royal *Ahenema* sandals in Asante culture.⁵⁵ As asserted by Quarcoopome, cloths are among those regarded as the prerogative of traditional political rulers. The necklaces and pendants and the headgear which among other accessories accompany the kings' dress are believed to possess the spiritual powers of the chief.⁵⁶ During special occasions such as festivals, royal funerals and the installation of traditional leaders, palace arts play very significant roles. Boateng, Yiadom and Duku opined that royal arts, are crucial regalia for festivals, serving as historical records, wealth measurements, and a reflection of the collective identities of the people.⁵⁷ Almost all the artefacts of Sefwi Bekwai palace from ceremonial swords, spokesperson staffs, drums, stools and chairs to headgear, clothes, necklaces and native sandals form a special part of these occasions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the significant findings from this ethnographic study of the artefacts in Sefwi Bekwai palace as key vehicles for educating the people and the general public on the cultural values of the people of Sefwi Bekwai, the study recommends that the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board (GMMB) in collaboration with the National Commission on Culture should assist all traditional palaces across the country with rich cultural heritage regalia to set up palace museums. The architectural structure, administrative setup and management, and curating of the cultural objects and artefacts identified in the palaces must be extensively discussed and planned with the traditional authorities and people in the areas where the palaces have been cited. More so, the local community members must be actively involved in all provenance, research that details the place's identity history, cultural iconography, etc. This will consequently beef up the cultural tolerance, integration and education agenda of the country. Future research must investigate possible community participatory strategies for engaging in provenance research on the cultural objects and artefacts in the palace museums to accurately establish the authenticity of their history, iconography and functions in their host and migrant communities.

CONCLUSION

This study thus aimed at unfolding the philosophical foundations of the traditions and culture of the people of Sefwi Bekwai located at the Sefwi Bekwai palace in the Western North Region of Ghana. The roles and significance of artefacts in Sefwi culture are critical in revealing Ghana's rich cultural values and the functions they provide for the country, as well as promoting tourist appeal. These works of art are used for a variety of reasons, including economic, political, religious, aesthetic, and social ones. Archaeological discoveries in the Sefwi Bekwai traditional territory have shown the lifestyle of Sefwi Bekwai's indigenous people from the 16th century. This has greatly enriched the reader's cultural heritage by adding to the stock of information. The chieftaincy, funeral, religious, shrine, socio-economic, and cultural objects discovered revealed the people's customs and traditions. They depict major aspects of other ethnic groups in Ghana. Perhaps the culture of other ethnic groups in Ghana impacted the creators of these masterpieces. The artefacts are used as little gods for worship to satisfy religious needs; to bridge the gap between people and their ancestors; to act as dwelling places of the gods, ancestral and other spiritual powers and to seek protection and good luck. Artefacts are the home of gods, ancestors and other supernatural beings. Traditional priests and healers use these artefacts for oracles and omens. They are deities and objects of worship.

⁵⁴ Quarcoopome, "Akan Leadership and Status Objects."

⁵⁵ Essel, "Historical and Sociocultural Relevance of Royal 'Ahenema' Sandals in Asante Culture."

⁵⁶ Quarcoopome, "Akan Leadership and Status Objects."

⁵⁷ Boateng, Yiadom, and Duku, "Decoding the Royal Arts of Aboakyir."

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