

## **TRADITIONAL VALUES, MEANINGS AND BELIEFS IN SOME SCULPTURE PRODUCTS IN KPANDO TRADITIONAL AREA IN THE VOLTA REGION, GHANA**

**Adja-Koadade, Mokpokpo**

Industrial Art Department, Ho polytechnic, P. O. Box HP 217, Ho. +233, Ghana.

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**ABSTRACT:** *The world is created in a way that nothing exists without being perceived with the eye. Everything is artistically made: being it physical or abstract, artistic products have forms that can be seen and described with their peculiar meanings. Sculptures cut across all human horizons. An important aspect of them is their cultural values and beliefs, which are legacies laid down by the ancestors to their descendants. The aim of this manuscript is to unveil the values and beliefs of some sculptures used by the traditional authorities in Kpando in the Volta Region, Ghana. The main tools used for the paper were interviews with artists who specialized in making traditional symbols, and personal experiences as a practicing sculptor. This facilitated the acquisition of in-depth knowledge about some traditional values and beliefs through the use of sculpture products, in the spiritual, social, economical and political lives of the people. The outcome of the manuscript will go a long way to promote peoples' comprehension of the values and beliefs of sculpture products used traditionally in the Kpando community.*

**KEYWORDS:** Values, Beliefs, Sculptures, Kpando, Akpini Traditional Area.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Geographical and Artistic Background of Kpando**

Kpando Municipality lies within latitudes 6 °20'N and 7 °0.5'N, and Longitude 0 °17'E. It shares boundaries with Biakoye District in the North, Hohoe Municipality to the East, and South Dayi District in the South. The 2000 population census suggests that the district population increased by 15% over that of 1984 count which brings the total population to 74,595. The district capital, Kpando is 90 km from Ho, the Regional capital and 240 km to 256 km to the Tema Harbour and the Accra Airport. The district covers a total land area of 820 square km. [http://www.ghanaexpeditions.com/regions/region\\_detail.asp?id=5](http://www.ghanaexpeditions.com/regions/region_detail.asp?id=5). It is a culturally homogeneous community whose values and beliefs in art rate high in promoting the cultures of the people. Kpando is the home of art as far as sculpture and pottery are concerned. The traditional carvers and porters design their artifacts using symbols such as stools, umbrella tops, lion, tiger, eagle, hawk, linguist staff, walking sticks, drums, door panels, spoons, bowls, trays or calabashes, dolls, figures, statues, tables, birds, etc. to portray their importance in the society. They also carve or mould totemic animals such as snakes, crocodiles, chameleons, etc. Each of these artifacts is attached with some proverbial meanings of great importance that the citizens admire and respect. The meanings of many of these artifacts are not conversant to many, if no tutorial is made about them. Culturally, some of these artifacts relate to everyday activities such as celebrations, fertility, power, death, commemoration, kingship, announcement; some also relate to mystery etc. One of the greatest disadvantages in understanding the meaning of these artifacts, is the lack of zeal on

the part of the youths in the area to admire their culture, and to acquire knowledge about these historical artifacts.

### **Traditions of Origin**

Vansina, (1985, p. 21) states that peoples' aspirations concerning their place in the world-their worldview-developed out of these conceptions of the past. a worldview, Vansina comments, "is a representation of ultimate reality in all its aspects, visible and invisible." As such it is often intuitive to its proponents but difficult for outsiders to comprehend. He again suggest that one key to understanding a worldview is to study a culture's religious system and its traditions of origin: "how the world began, how people were created, and how they became as they are now." These "mythical charters" complement, and often justify, existing social structures, but they are subject to continual revision over time. Most notable for our purposes, they have been translated into visual forms of expression that rank among the most celebrated monuments in the world history of art.

Vansina, (p. 133), again observes that "every community in the world has a representation of the origin of the world, the creation of mankind, and the appearance of its own particular society and community." Stories of creation, he explains, the product of thought about existing situation-they represent a stage in the elaboration of historical consciousness and are among the main wellsprings of what we often call culture."

LaGamma, (2002, P. 3), -*Wole Soyinka, in Myth, Literature and African World, states that a fortunate blend of myth and history penetrates even deeper into that area of man's cosmogonic hunger, one which leads him to the profounder forms of art as retrieval vehicles for, or assertive links with, a lost sense of origin.*

Sieber, et al, (1987 p. 296). The visual program of a particular mask communicates precepts established by a family's ancestors, such as the myth of the clan's founding, and preserves them from one generation to the next. It also gives expression to moral or historical lessons and to rules of social behaviour that members of a family must follow if they are to receive God's blessings. Each mask's particular combination of motifs has a name known only to initiates that is never used to address the mask during performances; the owner chooses a separate name for use in the public arena.

The traditions of origin as asserted by various writers, every society in the world has some peculiar identity and beliefs that separate her from others. However, some may share common identities, beliefs and interpretations. The traditions of origin help the people to know who they are in terms of origin and culture. Culture in its real sense, is like the light that guides the people as far as the passage of life is concerned. These include birth, adolescence, marriage, old age, death and burial, in addition to all beliefs, through all rites and customs they perform. These are not observed without the use of various sculptures, believed to house the spirits of a particular cultural event.

### **The Nature of Art in Kpando**

Pottery and sculpture are the main artworks in Kpando. The potters produce different types of pots and design them with totem animals such as chameleons, tortoises snails, lizards, lions, snakes, birds of different kinds, etc. They also produce well designed ceramics wares depicting the culture

of the people. These potters and sculptors portray their totem animals mostly in realistic forms. However, abstraction dominates human figure carvings in the forms of figurine, used to design umbrellas, palanquins, walking sticks, ceremonial objects among others. Doors are also carved, depicting the totem animals and everyday's scenes in relief, either in realistic or abstract.

### **Sub-Saharan African Art**

Although Sub-Saharan African art is very diverse, there are some common themes. One is the use of the human figure. Second, there is preference for sculpture. Sub-Saharan African art is meant to be experienced in three dimensions, not two. A house is meant to be experienced from all angles. Third, art is meant to be performed. Sub-Saharan Africans have specific names for masks. The name incorporates the sculpture, the dance, and the spirit that incorporate the mask. The name denotes all three elements. Fourth, art that serves as practical function, utilitarian. The artist and craftsman are not separate. A sculpture shaped like a hand can be used as a stool. Fifth, the use of fractals or non-linear scaling. The shape of the whole is the shape of the parts at different scales. Before the discovery of fractal geometry, Louis Senghor, Senegal's first president, referred to this as "dynamic symmetry." William Fagg, the British art historian, compared it to the logarithmic mapping of natural growth by biologist D'Arcy Thomson. Lastly, Sub-Saharan African art is visually abstract, instead of naturalistic. Sub-Saharan Art represents spiritual notion, social norms, ideas, values, etc. An artist might exaggerate the head of a sculpture in relation to the body or because he does not know anatomy but because he wants to illustrate that the head is the site of knowledge and wisdom. The visual abstraction of African art was very influential in the work of modernist artist like Pablo Picasso, Henry Matisse, and Jacques Lipchitz. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Saharan\\_Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sub-Saharan_Africa).

The traditional society of the Akpini Traditional Area, strongly believes that "African mythology is filled with spirits, invisible beings with powers for good or evil. Spirits are less grand; less powerful, and less like humans than the gods, who often have weaknesses and emotions. Many spirits are associated with physical features such as mountains, rivers, wells and trees, and springs. Nations, peoples, and even small communities may honour local spirits unknown outside their borders". <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/A-Am/African-Mythology>.

### **METHODOLOGY**

From January-June 2015, five areas of Kpando including Aloryi, Gabi, Tsakpe, Abanu and Fesi, were used as the population of the study. Random sampling was used, based on age and experience of the respondents on Traditional Values, meanings and Beliefs of the people. Categories of people interviewed were the youth, the middle aged and the aged respectively, to find out the meanings of some traditional symbols and their representations in the form of sculptures, demonstrated especially during festivals. Qualitative research approach was adopted of which a descriptive method was employed to describe the meanings of some Traditional Symbols. The Internet was also used as secondary source to ascertain some facts about the study. The research has documented some hidden meanings of some traditional symbols, which for quite a long time, eluded the citizens, especially the youth of Kpando and its environs.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

It is rather unfortunate that through the author's interviews with many of Kpando citizens, the knowledge about art as far as its values and beliefs are concerned, does not go down well with them. Beliefs of traditional symbols or totems cut across almost all the African horizons, and many parts of the world. The meaning a group of people has for a traditional symbol relates to the other, similarly or with a little difference. Some artists who produce these sculptures, revealed that some of the symbols are subjects of good or bad omen, which are believed to be the guides that direct the affairs in one's life, if he/she believes in them. The symbols are either sculpted in realistic or abstract forms.

### Meanings and Beliefs of Some Traditional Symbols in Kpando

**Stool:** It is locally called (*tɔgbui zikpui*). It is a simple seat with three or four legs and no back or armrest. It is usually made of wood and used by the traditional authorities as the spiritual seat, believed to house the powers of the community. The stool is to protect the entire community from the hands of the enemies in times of war, and also prevents sicknesses and fights against witchcraft. There are other stools, called (*kpukpo*) in Kpando dialect, which are used in the kitchen as seats for food preparation. It is also used to sit in front of royals during important occasions as a sign of dignity to the Kings.

**Ornament:** It is locally called "*sikanuwo* or *dzonufufuiwo*" also known as regalia, used as decorative objects for Kings and Queens. Such objects include umbrella tops, staffs, figurines, among others. They are intensively used by women for adoration. Ornaments also command respect and power at chiefs' durbars across the sub-Saharan African regions.

**Umbrella Tops:** They are locally called "*sowietamenuwo*" These are figurines of totem animals such as lions, panthers, crocodiles, eagles, among others, made of gold and fixed on top of large umbrellas, used as symbols of traditional authority. Scenes of warriors, welcome, victories, worships, are also depicted. The umbrella is used as canopy, carried by any subordinate, to shadow the authorities whenever they are in motion for any traditional assignments. They are usually installed on chiefs' palaces or on festivals' grounds. They are used as signs of respect for kingdoms and societies at large.

**Linguist Staff:** called "*Tyāmeti*" symbolizing the office of the *okyeame* or "linguist" in the state bureaucracy of both the Ewes and Ashantis of Ghana. Other tribes and societies may also have different names for this office and may vary from place to place. Kings and chiefs do not speak directly to the people but through an intermediary, the "linguist", who is a man extremely skilled in the art of words. His authority is the linguist stick or staff. It is believed in Kpando tradition and in other surrounding areas that linguist staffs represent the power of all authorities of the land, , trusted in the power of the linguist, who liaises with the king and the elders in carrying out his duties and no one undermines his office. It is a powerful tool for summoning an offender to appear before the local judges. It is also a sign of respect to a dignified person to announce to him an important assignment he/she should undergo for the benefit of the society in which he/she lives.

**Walking stick:** called "*Atizoti*", could be a stick made of wood, metal, plastic, among others. It is made to support the elderly in walking. In another meaning, life cannot be without a support. A person having two legs, and the third, which is the walking stick, demonstrates stability, maturity, boldness and carefulness. It is also used as a guide to the blind. Apart from its use by the royals for majestic movements, it is a vital tool of movement for the disabled and the sick.

**Drum:** called "*vu*" is a musical instrument usually consisting of a membrane stretched across a hollow frame and played by striking the stretched membrane. Other hollow objects are also used as drums, provided they can sound well. Its roles in the local front are enormous. It is beaten by the gong gong beaters, first to create attention before any verbal announcements are made. They are also vital instrument for entertainment. Of late, many religious and social groups are using drums in worshipping and have become sources of livelihood to many musicians.

**Door panels:** called "*votrutu*" is a board *designed and carved* in relief with beautiful designs, fixed into structures for making doors. Door panels show scenes of traditional stories, totem birds and animals. Sometimes they exhibit the crucifixion, resurrection, and other important scenes that educate many on social issues. Nowadays, there are numerous modern materials such as metals, plastics, resin etc. for the manufacture of door panels.

**Spoons/ladle:** called "*gatsyi*" a utensil used for eating or preparing food, consisting of a shallow oval bowl attached to a handle. Wooden spoons/ladle which were formerly used traditionally by the women for cooking, are gradually diminishing from the society, given way to the metal ones. Spoons represent the beauty of the woman as far as food preparation is concerned. Kpando women demonstrate this by carrying cooking utensils through processions during festivals.

**Terra Cotta Bowl,** called "*ezege*" a baked clay open container, usually round in shape wider than its depth. It is used for storing drinks, especially palm wine and locally prepared drink called "solum" for serving people during cultural festivals. It is traditionally believed in Kpando and its environs that "united we stand and divided we fall" and according to tradition, drinks stored in a big bowl and used by all, signifies oneness which brings the people together in love and to fight for a common goal for the advancement of the society.

**Calabash,** called "*etre*" a rounded natural fruit, shaped as a portable container, normally used traditionally for drinking water, palm wine, and pouring libation. It is also used extensively in the kitchen for food preparation. It is believed that the ancestors are connected through the use of calabash as an object of pouring libation.

**Doll:** called "*ametsikpakpe*" a wooden statuette carved with a wrinkle neck, used as fertility object and kept by barren married women. It is believed that by keeping the doll, the barren women would give birth. The citizens of Kpando highly regard a wrinkle neck as a sign of beauty. Therefore, a pregnant woman who keeps the doll, and constantly looking at it, would give birth to a beautiful baby.

**Eagle.** called "*kromponi*" a large bird of prey with a hooked beak and broad wingspan that hunts by day. Naturally, an eagle is a powerful bird which can fly high and to far distances and sees more clearly from afar. Traditionally, it is used as a symbol of power. carved and fixed on the palanquin and other important objects found in the palaces. A Stool carved with an Eagle in-between the base

and top of it is to demonstrate the authority of the society, where the king seats during some important occasions. Birds are also used as messengers, and are believed to possess messengers' spirits which spiritually reveals ideas to the king for good governance. Again, birds are believed to possess the spirit of intelligence and fluency of speech, therefore the King who seats on the stool made of a bird, is automatically influenced by these powers in them.

**Right Hand with a finger up:** locally called "*do nuḍusikuibɔ de dzi*" The right hand of a person, raised up signifies power. One finger up denotes power belongs to the Almighty God. It is carved or moulded in diverse materials, raised on a designed stick, exhibited in palaces and at durbar grounds to demonstrate God's supremacy among his people.

**Egg;** is locally called "*koklozi*", a hard-shelled oval object laid by hens and other birds for reproduction, which easily breaks if carelessly handled. The shape of the egg is carved in wood or cast in gold. It is used to decorate traditional umbrella tops, Linguist staffs etc. for ceremonies. According to custom and tradition of the Akpini, an egg represents life and it should be handled with care. Little mistake or forgetfulness would make it fall and break.

**A hand holding an egg:** It is locally called "*asi lé koklozi*" "The hand is part of the human arm below the wrist, consisting of a thumb, four fingers, and a palm and capable of holding and manipulating things" Microsoft® Encarta® 2009. Egg is cast, carved or moulded in the hand, protecting it wisely and not to allow it break. Symbolically, it concerns life being taken care of, since an egg cannot be held hard, else it would break. Egg can also not resist a rough state of movements. This means that man's cordial and peaceful co-existence with each other in a society is essential.

**Sphere:** is locally called "*numligo*" It is an object similar in shape to a ball. Traditionally, it denotes completeness in knowledge, protection, governance, among others, and all that the society needs for advancement. Diverse materials are used to carve or mould this object and fixed on a design piece of wood or metal and exhibited on royal grounds and during chiefs' durbars.

**Three Heads,** called "*ta eton*" The head of a person traditionally, represents wisdom and knowledge. This means that three heads are better than one or two heads, in the sense that three minds put together, result in better reasoning. These three heads are carved or cast together, facing three sides which are fixed on a designed pole, demonstrated during festivals.

**Swords** called "*atamkahε*" These are used extensively by many nations and tribes to authenticate presidents and rulers during installation. The installed is given the sword which he/she uses to swear the oath of allegiance; to be loyal to his/her subjects. It is cast in gold, kept and brought out on a day of installation. The Akpinis believe it is a powerful tool for governance.

**Two hands up,** called "*abɔ eve le dzi*": This is a sign of helplessness, and the people need assistance from God whom they believe can help them to solve their problems or defend them from any external forces. The hands are cast or carved, raised above where they believe God exists.

Together with these sculpture symbols, as exhibited during Chiefs' durbars and many other important gatherings, demonstrates the completeness of authority that rules the people.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has pointed out some traditional values, meanings and beliefs in some sculpture products used in Kpando and its environs. It has also projected their importance in terms of social, religious and political lives of the people. Every sculpture item mentioned in the research, used traditionally at different places and occasions, has its peculiar structure and meaning/s; physically or spiritually, used to defend some beliefs and faith of Kpando citizenry. Some artworks are also believed to be the embodiments of the spirits of the ancestors, who, unconsciously co-exist with of the people and take care of their spiritual matters. It is important that the Akpini citizens, especially the youths, who are not familiar with some of their Traditional Values, Meanings and Beliefs, would make use of the research as a source of information leading to the inside of their beliefs. Others of various ethnic backgrounds, would also be informed about the meanings of some sculpture products as far as some traditional values, meanings and beliefs of the people of Kpando are concerned, through the use of the manuscript.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Also, since African cultures are inter related in terms of symbols and meanings, the research could also be studied throughout Africa and the world at large to compare and contrast between cultures whose knowledge could spearhead some important developmental issues in the life of people. This research could be a stepping ground for further research on the topic.

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