

# Stools in Asante Culture

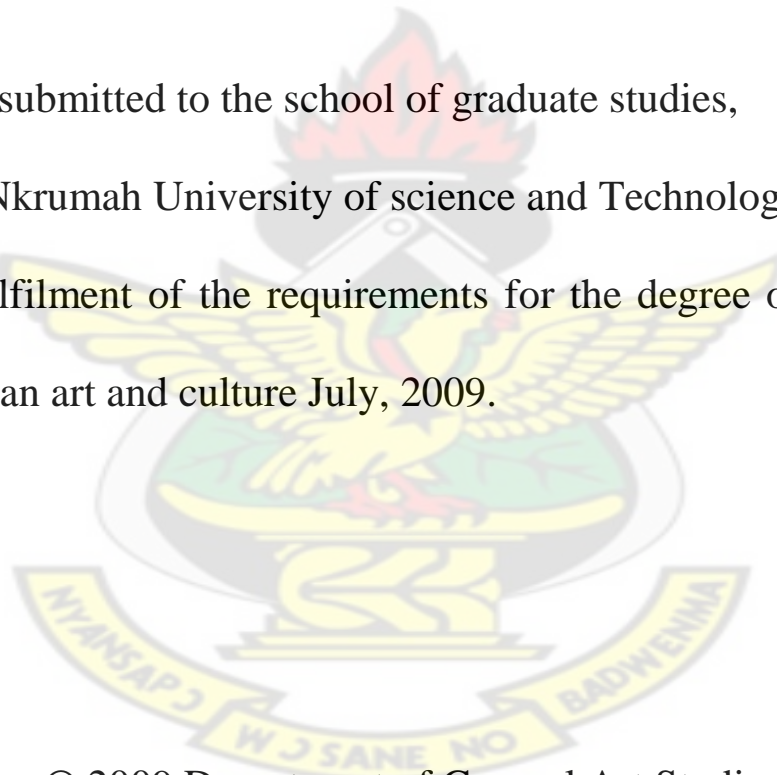
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partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
arts African art and culture July, 2009.



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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the MA (African Art and Culture) and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no materials previously

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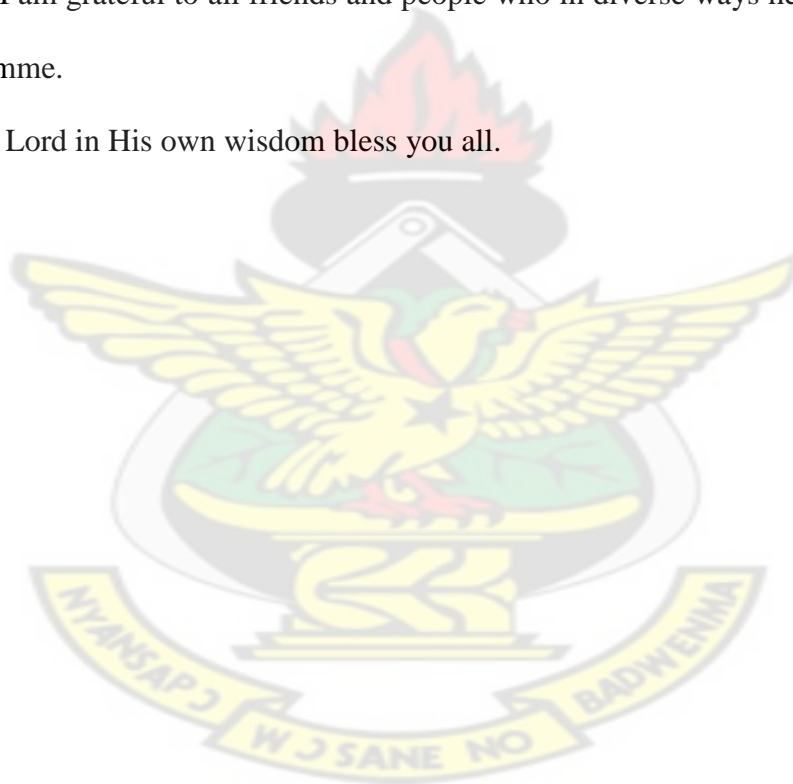
## ii

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May the Lord in His own wisdom bless you all.



## ABSTRACT

The stool is one of the more ubiquitous types of carving in Ghana, and it is especially common in Asante. Among the Asante people, the stool has varied functions. Stools are august emblems of political, judicial, and social leadership – the most important of the

chief's regalia and the 'Sine qua non' of his high office. Among the Asante and all Akans in general, the symbol of the authority of the traditional ruler is a stool. A stool denotes the social status of its owner and as such, it is the principal symbol of a chief's political power and authority. Among the Asantes, stools have cultural significance beyond its domestic and utilitarian functions as a seat, and there are rules and taboos concerning its usage. With the assimilation of foreign culture, many indigenous cultural practices have been adulterated and require that the trend be studied for necessary action and pragmatic decision to be made so as to protect the rich culture of the Asantes. The study focused on stools in Asante culture. The chief's representatives, clan heads, curators at both the Manhyia Museum and Kumasi Cultural Centre, making a sample of 22 were included in the study. The researcher employed interviews and observations in the data collection process. Data were collected from Asante Bekwai, Kokofu, Asokore, Mampong Offinso, Juaben, Nkawie, Ejisu, Kumawu and Manhyia Palaces in addition to Kumasi Cultural Centre and Manhyia Museum. The findings revealed that Asantes are highly religious people who link every facet of life with God, ancestors, deities and divinities as being their "guiding angel". They attribute very fortune and misfortune to the influence of God, ancestors and the gods. This belief is strongly showcased in their paraphernalia, which are art forms. The philosophies regarding Asante stools explain not only the spiritual significance but also every aspect of their life; every part of their objects has a purpose, deep meaning and communicates in no uncertain terms, the status, role and powers of the chiefs. The findings indicate that the highest ranked stool is the Golden stool and that Asantehene is seen as the supreme among the chiefs and kings. The unique authentic golden stool belongs to the King of Asante. He alone possesses the Elephant stool (*sonodwa*) and the Leopard stool (*sebodwa*). Some of the royal stools are exhibited ostentatiously while others are superficial. Cultural beliefs, values and customs change

over time because of fashion, taste, education, entertainment and trade. These influential elements of culture transfer technology coupled with the assimilation of other cultures have reduced the value of some of the cultural practices of the Asantes.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background to the Study

The stool is one of the more ubiquitous types of carving in Ghana, and it is especially common in Asante, although there are many types of Asante stools, most can be classified as being either rectangular or circular, according to the shape of the seat and base. The circular stool is the most common and widely distributed in West Africa, and historically it is the earliest in Asante-Ghana. European records and indigenous oral traditions indicate that it preceded the rectangular stool by about one hundred years. Nonetheless, it is the rectangular stool that is associated with Ghana and identified with its largest ethnic group, the Akan.

Among the Asante people, the stool has varied functions. It is foremost, a utilitarian object found in every household. Anyone, child or adult, may own any number of stools. The stool is an object associated with rites of passage; although it does not necessarily possess sacral qualities, as a gift it has special meaning. For example, when a child begins to crawl, means the child has survived the dangerous period of infancy. The father gives him a stool, in this instance to denote the continuity of life. During the female puberty rite, *bra goro*, when a girl is placed ceremoniously on a stool, it signifies admission to womanhood. When a bridegroom presents a stool to his new wife, it symbolizes marital permanency. The third function of the stool is as a sacred object.

In an everyday context, it is imbued with the being of its owner, as if the person's essence or spirit (*sunsum*) is absorbed into it upon each sitting. Consequently, the sacredness of the stool increases with contact with its owner to prevent another person's *sunsum* from entering it, a stool is placed on its side when not in use. The stool is also a

sacred object when, in association with prestigious persons, it is used in ancestor veneration. Through it, people establish and maintain contact with the ancestors, whose aim is the successful functioning of society.

In Asante, stools are august emblems of political, judicial, and social leadership – “the most important of the chief’s regalia and the ‘Sine qua non’ of his high office” (Kyerematen, 1964). The term “stool” may denote the office of an *Ohene* and also of subordinate officials such as the *okyeama* (spokesperson) or *gyaasehene* (household chief). When a person becomes chief he is ‘enstooled’ in the office; during his rule he is said to ‘sit upon the stool’ and when he dies, the Asante say, “The stool has fallen”. The stool is the most important state regalia, representing power, as well as symbolizing unity of the state and its people. Stools are generally carved or decorated to carry deep symbolic meanings which are powerful vehicles of strong ties with the ancestors, and hence with the spiritual world, as far as the state is concerned.

Among the Asante and all Akans in general, the symbol of the authority of the traditional ruler is a stool. The occupant of the stool is the political, cultural and spiritual (religious) head of his community. The importance of the stool which the chief occupies is that it gives a community its group identity with the land which has nurtured it and provides it with not only its sustenance, but also, its link with its past and future. The stool binds the people together in time and space and supports their belief in their community as a living and organic entity, a family with a continuous past, present and future. It is therefore central in the life of the community, and the stool holder, the traditional ruler, is as once, and in a real sense, a temporal and spiritual leader.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

People have written about Asante stools yet none of them has paid much attention to the study of the political, social economic, communicative, medicinal, moral and religious systems of the stools in the Asante culture. Most writers have not captured the changes that have occurred in the use of stools in the Asante Kingdom and this has created a vacuum regarding the use of the stools in Asante culture.

With the assimilation of foreign culture, many indigenous cultural practices have been adulterated and require that the trend be studied for necessary action and pragmatic decision be made so as to protect the rich culture of Ghana, specifically the Asantes. Hence, this study deems it important to be considered.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this thesis is to study the stools of Asante with the view:

1. to identify the functions and importance of stools among Asantes.
2. to find the changes that have occurred in the use of stools in Asante culture

### **1.4 Hypothesis**

- Stools play a vital role in the Asante societal settings.
- Asante stools have undergone changes in their usage.

It is believed that stools play major roles and are of great importance in the political, economic, social, religious, medicinal, moral and the communicative systems in Asante culture. Moreover, the uses of these artefacts have undergone some changes in the Asante Kingdom. It is assumed that the research will uncover new facts about the functions and importance of stools in Asante culture and will also show that some changes have occurred in the use of stools in the kingdom.

### **1.5 Importance of the Study**

- The results of the study could be used as a source of reference for individuals such as researchers, educators, ethnographers and sociologists.
- The results would broaden the knowledge about Asante stools and their related functions and customs.
- It also provides educational information to facilitate and enhance the teaching of Asante culture.

### **1.6 Delimitation**

The thesis focused on the functions and importance of stools in Asante culture from political, social, economic, moral, medicinal and communicative perspective. Several stools exist but the study emphasized much on stools about Asante culture.

### **1.7 The Geography of the Study Area**

The Asante people are one section of the people known as the Akans in Ghana. They live in the central region of the country some two hundred and ninety kilometers from the coast. The vast territory they occupy in this position is mostly densely forested. And because of the richness of forest lands in soil, mineral and vegetable products, the region is known to be the richest in the country. Consequently the people's occupation is mainly agricultural. That is to say, they live by farming, firstly for food and secondly for cash. They grow cocoa, yam, plantain, cocoyam and cassava.

Rubber and the palm grow wild. In former days, before the advent of cocoa, their main cash crop was cola-nuts which were conveyed by head-loads to the great market at Salaga beyond the Volta in exchange for cowries, the currency of the time. In turn they brought back cotton cloths, domestic animals of the grassland, and sometimes slaves. The

slaves were bought mainly to assist in domestic duties and farming and in some rare cases, to replenish families on the verge of extinction.

Generally, the Asante people are very industrious. Their innate desire to live independent lives makes them a most hard-working people. They are extremely ambitious and determined to succeed in every venture they undertake.



**Plate 1.1:** Map of Ashanti Region-Ghana

## 1.8 The Purpose of Writing

The research intends to broaden the knowledge of the researcher and readers of this thesis about Asante stools and their related usages and customs, provide an educational information to facilitate and promote the teaching of Asante culture, and to advise and recommend on the preservation of the stools. The reporting cases of missing stools and other important stool regalia and ornaments in some paramountcies are increasing. The reason where stools and other paraphernalia are said to have been stolen by unidentified persons in recent times and the disappearance of such important artifacts from palaces were a serious threat to the survival of the spirit and soul of *Asanteman*. The paramount chiefs should take critical measures to safeguard and protect their stools in their paramountcies in order not to bring any calamity to the kingdom. Also the stools were the soul and spirit of their authority and they must be protected at all times.

The reported cases of some stools cast a slur not only on the image of the affected paramountcies but also, the Asante Kingdom in general. Chiefs should therefore be charged to take a collective responsibility to prevent further losses of stools in their palaces in order to preserve and protect the dignity and sanctity of Asante Kingdom.

## 1.9 Limitations of the Study

Certain stools remained sacred and were shrouded in mystery; they were forbidden to the public or not to be questioned. Chiefs swear oath of secrecy that compel them to uphold and defend their customs and punish breakers of customary laws of the kingdom. The study could thus not give detailed explanation to such stools.

Most of the interviewees from the palaces were uncomfortable with the English language. Therefore the researcher was compelled by the circumstance to conduct the

interviews in Twi. This made it tedious and difficult translating it into English for the study.

### 1.10 Organisation of the Study

After the introductory chapter (Chapter One), Chapter Two critically reviews related literature of both theoretical and empirical work done in the areas of chiefs' stools and other stools of philosophical and mystical perspective. Chapter Three is devoted to research methodology of this thesis. Chapter Four deals with findings and discussions on cultural functions of stools under religious, political, social, economic, communicative and medical and moral functions. Chapter Five focuses on summary, conclusions and recommendations.

### 1.11 Definition of Terms

- **Aesthetic** – that branch of philosophy which is concerned with nature of art and the criteria of artistic judgement. Or Appreciation of the beautiful or having good taste in art.
- **Amulet** – A ring-shaped moulding round a column.
- **Artefact** – An object made by a human being, especially one that has archaeological or cultural interest.
- **Bestowing** – To present something to somebody.
- **Brass** – Bright yellow metal made by mixing copper and zinc.
- **Gallery** – This is a place where periodical exhibition of works of art held and also where some permanent collections of contemporary nature are kept writers to see. It is usually a big well-lit hall in a public building.
- **Insignia** – a badge of authority or membership of a group.

- **Motif** – The distinctive and recurrent feature or symbol of theme in a work art.
- **Mundane** – Commonplace, not unusual and often boring or relating to matters of the world.
- **Museum** – A museum generally is an institution, or a place, where antiques and artefacts are kept and displayed. Museums are established for preservation study and exhibition of original objects. Museums also make use of reproductions and other representative devices, restorations, rearrangements, charts, photographs, and the spoken and written word, along with display of the objects themselves.
- **Paraphernalia** – Assorted objects or items of equipment, often things that seem amusing, strange, or irritating.
- **Regalia** – The ceremonial and symbolic objects and clothing used and worn by royalty or other holders of high office on formal occasions.
- **Repository** – A place or certain in which something is stored.
- **Shrine** – A sacred place of worship associated with a holy person or event.
- **Silver** – A shiny greyish-white metallic element that has the highest thermal and electric conductivity of any substance and is used in coins, ornaments, jewellery, dental materials soldiers, photographic chemicals, and conductors.
- **Stool** – A stool is a wooden seat- is used to denote the office of the chief or king.
- **Surrogate** – Somebody/something taking the place of somebody or something else.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Asante Stools

The principal motivation in undertaking this research stems from the fact that no in-depth study has been made of the ‘stools in Asante culture’ which, like all other stools in Ghana, provides the opportunity for the people to dramatize their way of life and reveal their culture through political, religious, social, economic, medicinal and communication values.

Some Akan stools have been documented in books which share certain similarities with Asante stools. In reviewing some of the existing literature, it has become clear that Asante stools permeate all shades of the rest of Asante culture from secular to sacred matters which are inseparable. What is lacking is the fact that most of the writers only made passing comments, hence the need for this research.

The stools are of great importance to the Asante people. They serve as the occasional abodes of the so-called spirits of the departed ancestors. They serve as ancestral shrines through which ceremonies relating to the ancestors are performed. On

special occasions like “*Adae*”, the spirits *sunsum* of the departed ancestors are invoked to enter into them because it is believed that they have now acquired new and greater power and influence which can be used in the interest of the living.

Some stools serve as the symbol of unity, kinship, mutual solidarity and support of the clan members. They provide the people in the clan with a sense of belongingness, sacred obligations, rights, loyalty and obedience. They serve as the embodiment of the communal soul or spirit of the people. On “*Adae*” “*Eguadoto*” and other special occasions, it is believed that the ancestors are offered with meat, food and drinks through the stools. The stools are believed to embody the spirits of their owners. Therefore through the stools gifts of articles which their owners treasured on earth are sacrificed and offered to appease them. They are also subject to the taboos of their owners. On special occasions the people offer libation and sacrifices to the ancestors through the stools to ask favours, such as abundant harvest, sufficient rainfall for their crops, more children to strengthen the clan, prosperity, successful marriage and business, peace, long life, protection against evil spirits like witches and the prevention and removal of sufferings, pain, evil and hardships from the clan and society. The stools help to keep departed ancestors in the memory of their living relatives and relate them to the past.

The stool confers divine leadership on its occupant who derives his right to rule from the position he has come to occupy. He becomes a “*Nana*” a revered person whose status and position is above everyone else in the community. His person becomes sacred. This is emphasized by taboos. He may not strike, or be struck by anyone. He may never walk bare-footed. He should walk with care lest he tumbles. His buttocks may not touch the ground. He should be the custodian of the customs and culture of the kingdom. He should respect his elders as well as his subjects. He should not abandon the stool and stay

away from it for a long period. If the chief goes contrary to any of the rules of the land, the elders would not take it lightly and would prefer destoolment charges against him.

The stool confers on its occupant the glory of the community's past, and symbolizes the Asante belief in the eternity of life, the power of spirit over matter and of the departed or dead over the living. A traditional ruler who dies in harness while still a chief is thought to continue even in the spirit world, to be a chief. He is therefore immortalized, remembered and honoured with a Black Stool *Akonnwa Tuntum*, specially carved for him, into which his departed spirit is invoked. He is always remembered, especially on "*Adae*" and other religious feast days, when departed souls are invoked and propitiated, and asked to bestow blessings on, and ward off disaster from the living.

Now, stools have a spiritual significance as well as a purely practical use. The stool was understood to be the seat of its owner's soul. When not in use it was therefore placed at a slant against a wall so that none of the souls passing by could settle on it.

The Asante believed that there are no secrets between a man and his stool. In the past each member of Asante society possessed a stool. Such stools were each carved out of a single piece of light wood. If a king died a natural death during his reign, one of his stools was blackened and would, in future, be regarded as an ancestral seat. Sacrifices would then be made to it.

It is again believed that the soul of the ancestors and the people are supposed to be in the stool. Hence its capture in a war meant defeat; it also meant untold hardship and death among the people afterwards, since the soul and the guiding spirit of the nation had been lost.

In Asante, both chief and subjects attached great importance to the fact that one "sits on the stool." For it is only in that capacity that a chief takes on a sacred and priestly character and is deemed worthy to discharge the religious duties that are of prime

importance. He is chief, first and foremost, to perform the religious duties. Other functions, which may be described as administrative, executive, judicial and military are all part of this holy duty which is so necessary and cannot be neglected. Refusal or neglect to perform this holy duty has many a time led to destoolment.

Since all the duties of the chief flow from his sacred character, which is provided for the stools, we may say that the authority the chief wields is believed to come to him because of his stool. In Asante, the chief's stool is also believed to be the resting place as well as the symbol of the chief's soul. It is therefore an object which inspires, and is accorded, great honour and respect. The origin of stool carvings among Asantes is traceable to religious demands alone does not always stand to test. A critical look at the multiple forms, functions and meanings of stool shows that it is one of the most symbolically complex of all Asante art forms. Apart from its significance as the spiritual centre of an ethnic group or nation it also has important secular functions.

At Begoro, as in most Asante communities, an extraordinary intimacy is believed to exist between a man and his stool. The Begoros say that "there are no secrets between a man and his stool." Toddlers are given stools by their fathers as a first customary gift.

It is customary for a bridegroom to present his newly-wed wife with a stool as a sign of engagement.

Young girls undergoing the puberty rites (bragoro) are placed on stools to signify their attainment of maturity. At death the deceased is bathed on a stool before being laid out in state. The stools perform secular functions from the birth of an individual to his death. These functions are of ritual significance at major segments of his or her life. After death the individual's stool begins to function mainly in the realm of the spiritual. However, it has spiritual connotations to him even during his life time.

When one vacate a stool, it should be tilted on its side to prevent another spirit, particularly an evil one, from occupying it. If someone vacates his seat and it is immediately occupied by another, he asks the occupant “*se me wua, wo na wo be di m’adee?*” “Are you my next of kin?” It is believed that it is possible to inherit the spirit of the stool’s owner by sitting on it as is the practice when chiefs are enstooled. In many ways the stool is synonymous with its owner.

According to Osei (2002), the word STOOL is used to mean the carved wood on which a chief or queen-mother sits. It is also used to denote the office of a chief. Stool land is used to denote the land which belongs to a stool which also means the stool’s property. Stool house is used to mean a house built for the stool by the subjects and which is used by the occupant of the stool or which is hired to people and the money derived from the hiring used by the chief for the stools activities. When the occupant of a stool dies, the term used is “The stool has fallen” (*‘Akonnwa at]*’).

Osei (2002), again, stated that when the Asante states united to form the Asante Nation, it is believed that Okomfo Anokye conjured a Golden Stool descended from the skies and rested on the laps of Nana Osei Tutu 1, declaring him as king of kings of the Asante Nation.

The Golden Stool thus became a higher stool than all other stools. Asantes from that day up to date have recognized the Golden Stool as the symbol of unity of the nation. It is even referred to as the soul of the Asante Nation. Because of the myth surrounding its descent and the faith the people had in it, in the olden days, the Asantes treated the Golden Stool like the ARK of the Israelites. “According Osei (2002: 139)” Asantes went to war carrying the Golden Stool along with them and its presence urged every Asante Soldier to defend it with his blood.

The second stool held in very high esteem is the silver stool. The stool was created by king Osei Tutu I for Mampong chief, Boahen Anantuo, for accepting to lead the Asante Nation to the Denkyera War of liberation. Nana Osei Tutu I was to have led the Asantes to the war but Okomfo Anokye prophesied that the person who would lead as War General would die seven days after victory had been won. He therefore threw the challenge to the paramount chiefs for one of them to volunteer to lead. It was the Mampong Chief who sacrificed to lead and that won him the second position in the Asante Kingdom.

It must be emphasized that the concept of the golden stool is not peculiar to Asante. A few available literature records that, “there are a few other Akan state wooden stools that are completely covered in gold” (Ross, 2002; 47). He cited the golden stool of King Adinkra of Gyaman which was ostensibly the cause of the war of 1818 won by the Asante (Bowdich, 1819; 1966: 244-45). Again, Ross asserts that the paramount chief (*Omanhene*) of Akuropon has a gold covered stool in the shape of an elephant, and the King of the Abron in Cote d’Ivoire has a golden stool with a square knot motif said to be a “wisdom knot” by Akan. However, it is believed that the golden and silver stools are wooden stools plated with gold or silver.

Two words which are very important in the chieftaincy system in Ghana are stool and skin. When somebody from the Southern part of Ghana is being elevated to become a chief or king, the term used is: “He is going to be enstooled,” while when somebody from the Northern part of Ghana is being elevated to become a chief, the term used is: “He is going to be enskinned.” Asantes for instance, enstool their kings and chiefs whereas Dogombas and others in the Northern part of Ghana enskin their chiefs.

According to Osei (2002) stated that an Asante stool is a wooden seat. It has three parts: the base, the middle section and the top. The base is in the form of a rectangle with

the thickness of about one eighth the height of the stool. The middle section is about five eighths of the height and could be shaped in different styles e.g. zigzag form, round form or straight lines form. It is this portion which is carved to show the power of a chief or the status of the chief. The broadness of the top is about one quarter of the height and is carved to make sitting on it comfortable. It is the top which is placed at the back of the neck when it is being carried.

Stools are objects of everyday use and are symbols of status and power within society are a traditional part of the culture of furniture in sub-Saharan Africa. Over the centuries varied forms of seating have evolved among the people of Asante.

Claude Clark's repertoire of woodcarvings of Asante includes ornately rendered stools, masks, human figures, delicately-executed walking sticks and totemic animal boxes. The carved stools in particular express a personal identity and are intimately connected to family history, yet they have antecedents in Africa.

The link is evident in the imagery, the symbolism, the carving techniques, and the tools used- but the function has changed from ritual use in tribal society to family use in Urban America. Claude's wooden stools are products of an African-American worldview, grounded in the present, though their origins are clearly from another time and place. The place is West Africa-Benin formerly (Dahomey), Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon. Though languages and customs differ from country to country, and from village to village, some cultural traits overlap, and many societies within the region share common beliefs and traditions associated with stools.

Generally, among Asantes, a stool has cultural significance beyond its domestic and utilitarian functions as a seat, and there are rules and taboos concerning its usage. Symbolic motifs in the carved decorations determine its ritual or domestic category and who is entitled to own it. (Warren and Andrews, 1977). Certain types denote social rank;

others are designated for children only or for adults. Stools are also gender-specific – there are male stools and female stools. Thus a stool may be a personal rather than a ceremonial possession and there is a close relationship between a stool and its owner (Biebuyck, 1977; Gerbauer, 1979).

The Asante people, a confederation of Akan traditional districts in central Ghana, believe that a person's spirit resides in his/her stool even after death and that there can be no secrets between a man and his stool Kyerematen (1964). Hence, when vacating a stool, the owner must tilt it on its side to prevent someone else's spirit from occupying it. Stools figure prominently in rites of passage and other transitional stages of life in Asante. In Asante society, a stool is a father's first gift to his child when he/she starts to crawl, crawling signifies that the child will probably survive past infancy. One reaching puberty, a young girl is placed on a special stool during nubility rites, and youths on reaching manhood are circumcised sitting on an initiation stool. Circumcision was originally not an Asante custom. (Ross and Cole, 1977) stated that small wooden replicas of initiation stools serve as emblems for those given the authority to perform circumcision rites. Customarily a groom presents his new wife with a "lover's back stool" as a token of his affection and to ensure her fidelity. And it is on a stool that the corpse is bathed before being laid in state.

In Asante society a stool denotes the social status of its owner and as such, is the principal symbol of a chief's political power and authority, along with highly-prized animal skins such as leopard pelts.

The stool is synonymous with the chief's high office and when a ruler dies they say "the stool has fallen"(Sarpong, 1971; 8). Highlighted that in Ghana an incumbent ruler undergoes an "Enstoolment" before taking office (similar to the enthronement of British royalty during a coronation). Among the Akyem and some other Akans, buttocks

of a new chief is lowered three times over the greatest black stool of the chieftdom as part of the enstoolment rituals. Ceremonial stools are distinguished by their shape and symbol i.e. designs, such as the “knot of wisdom” *nyansap*] which signifies the chief’s (Prempeh II) promise to his people, on his accession to the Golden Stool to bind the nation together through prudent administration (Ross and Cole, 1977; Kyerematen 1964).

Among Asantes today, the local people seek identity strongly with their traditional leaders. “Many chiefs enstooled in recent years are University graduates with progressive ideas of community self-help. Continuity with earlier traditions and values thus constantly interacts with change and innovation.” (Cole and Ross, 1977:3).

It is believed among Asantes that a chief’s personal stool is more than royal insignia; it houses his spirit in this world and the next, and must be preserved after the death of its owner. Thus, through the medium of the stool, a deceased ruler can keep in touch with his subjects and continue to provide counsel and protect the community in the afterlife as he did on earth. A chief’s stool therefore functions as a shrine for his spirit, a memorial to the ancestor and a vehicle of communication. Not all West African tribes share the Asante belief that stools house the spirits of the dead. Among the Bamun of Cameroon: “These royal objects receive “life force” from their owners. They died when their owners died. At the death of the stool’s royal master, it could go with him into the grave or be exposed to the tropical elements to hasten its decay” (Gebauer, 1979:89).

To preserve an Asante chief’s stool, the wood is ceremonially blackened, first by smoking and then by smearing it with a mixture of kitchen soot and egg yolk. The greatest honour bestowed on an Asante chief is to have his stool blackened after his death, for only exemplary rulers are privileged in this manner (Kyerematen, 1964). To the living, it becomes a visible and permanent reminder of a beloved ruler.

Asante Blackened stools are guarded in a special stool- house, *nkonwafieso*, where they are placed on animal skins, beds or wooden platforms, never directly on the ground, and shown due respect. Blackened stools become pivotal object in rites associated with ancestor veneration and are offered food and libation on appointed days. They are brought out publicly for festivals that pay homage to the ancestors, such as the ‘*Addae*’ and ‘*Odwira*’ festivals- days set aside for remembrance of late rulers and an occasion to beseech favours, blessings, good health and prosperity for the village. The stools are “offered” mashed yams or plantain and the blood, as well as fat from a sacrificed sheep are smeared over each stool. The cooked meat is also offered to the stools, after which they are returned to their mausoleum in a solemn procession (Sarpong, 1971).

Sarpong (1971:7) The describes Akan stool to be nothing but a wooden seat.

Fosu (1994) on the other hand describes a stool to be the single most important piece of furniture in the royal household and palace. He added that it is unique for its architectonic construction and symbolic decorative design patterns.

Again the ceremonial stools are also the most famous, the most respected and the most elaborately designed, especially the state stools, since these act as the spiritual and political link between the royal ancestors, the reigning monarch, the state and the individual citizens.

Sarpong (1971) believe that before the introduction of Chairs by Europeans, every Akan had many of these seats (stools) for use in his house. The introduction of chairs has not put an end to the importance of stools. For even now by far, the greatest majority of the houses have more stools than chairs, and it would not be easy to find a traditional house without a stool. Other writers like (Kyerematen, 1969), and (Sarpong,

1971) threw more light on the Akan blackened stools. Fosu (1994) also talked about Stool decorations.

Opoku (1970:7) He wrote on the Role of stools in the Aday Festival. Rattray (1959) gave a brief and concise description of a wide variety of stools with thirty supporting photographs (illustrations). “The swivel adjustable and knock down stools” (thesis) written by A. Kofi Adati Reindorf in June 1987, He touched on contemporalising the traditional African stool thereby making it fit to be used even in offices, musical concerts, for playing piano and as ceremonial stools.

In his book, “The sacred stools of the Akans,” Sarpong (1971) states that there is a traditional choice in the species of wood for carving. Only a few trees are considered proper for it. It can also be said that the choice of wood is made on practical grounds, since whatever is carved is expected to last for a long time and should also be light enough to be carried about. But more important in the choice is the religious reason. The wood is chosen because it is believed to have a supernatural character (spirit) of its own. “The chief kinds of wood used by Asante wood-carvers are “*Osese*,” ‘*Nyame Dua*’ from one or other of which stools are made.” The ‘*Osese*’ tree is by far the most frequently used. The ‘*Tweneboa*’ tree is largely used for making drums and the “*Twafo Yeden*” for making umbrella frames. The “*Osese*” tree is white and soft, and so is the “*Nyame Dua*”. Their softness is of great advantage to the artist while the whiteness is important to the customer because he is judge to be neat and clean, or dirty, according as his stool is white or stained.

According to Sarpong (1971) talked about the religious nature of stool making considering the wood used. One must make a careful distinction between the spirit that is supposed to be a free and the free itself,” According to Asante, the spirit dwelling in a tree may either be the tree’s own original spirit or might have entered it from somewhere

else. It is important, therefore, that the Asante Artist, whose lot it is to deal constantly with such dreadful trees, should exercise the great caution. It is the fashion in Asante.

Wood carving is the art which produces the various drums and stools for ceremonies. Through it, images of gods are made, and figures of chiefs, queens, court attendants put into wood. For practical purposes, therefore carving is second to none; without it the Asante would not have their wooden combs, spoons, plates and mortars.

But probably the most important of the carver's products is the stools. Apart from its practical uses as seat, it is a work of art and a religious object. The stool carver therefore is an important person in the community.

The art of stool carving requires exceptional skills and patience. The carver usually has to produce, from a piece of wood, the figure described to him by the customer. His efforts are the more appreciated if it is borne in mind that he does not write down the descriptions, because he cannot. The trade has always been a privileged one and today stool carvers are numbered among those with intricate and honourable jobs. It is intricate because of the demand: foreigners are happy to buy the stool or carving as a souvenir. The honour attached to the craft is due to the fact that it makes the chief dependent, in a sense, on the carver.

From the writer's own point of view; a stool is any of kind of seat for one person, often a stool of authority for a state or office, especially, a royal throne.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research methods used were qualitative research methods because the study process involved description, recording, analyses and interpretation of conditions of stools that existed in the Ashanti Region Cultural Centre, Manhyia Museum and some Palaces in Ashanti region. Qualitative research methods were suitably used to do documentary analysis in order to bring out relevant information that may come out of official reports or organizing durbars and festivals by chiefs. The process involved: location, documentation, evaluation and interpretation of available evidence so that past events would be understood which definitely would lead to more understanding of present and future events. It also helped to prevent repetition of past mistakes and misshaping in the future. Qualitative research methods largely rely on evidence from relics, artefacts, oral accounts and records. This was why the researcher deemed it good enough to apply the above methods to reveal some of the stools that existed from the past and present. Finally, analysis of the variables, considering plates and sketches were used to validate stools as seats of powers.

### **3.2. Library Research**

With regards to the topic, libraries, Museums and palaces played an indispensable role; they served as one of the outstanding sources of information to the researcher especially in compiling relevant related literature. This reduced the researchers' task in seeking information, saving his time and energy that speed up the progress of work. Among the libraries the researcher visited were KNUST Libraries; Ashanti Library; University of Education Winneba-Kumasi; Balme Library of the University of Ghana and the George Padmore Library in Accra. The palaces visited included Manhyia, Mampong, Kokofu, Asorkore, Nkawie and Effiduase palaces.

### **3.3 Population for the study**

The study focused on stools in Asante culture. There were about 54 paramount seats in Asante.

### **3.4 Sampling**

Simple Random Sampling technique was used by the researcher to select 10 out of the 54 paramount seats. For each of the selected seat, the chiefs' representatives and clan heads were included in the study. The curators at both Manhyia Museum and Kumasi Cultural Centre were also included in the study, yielding a sample size of 22.

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure**

#### **3.5.1 Types of Data**

Primary and secondary data were collected for the study. The primary data was the information the researcher obtained from the field while the secondary data was mainly information from existing literature.

#### **3.5.2 Instrument for Data Collection**

The researcher employed interviews and observations in the data collection process. Data were collected from Asante Bekwai, Kokofu, Asokore, Mampong, Offinso, Juaben, Nkawie, Ejisu, Kumawu and Manhyia palaces in addition to Kumasi Cultural Centre and Manhyia Museum.

### **Interviews**

Interviews are oral questionnaire conducted in which the interviewee gave the needed information verbally in the presence of the interviewer about stools in some

palaces in Asante Kingdom. Interviews helped to bring out confidential information than any other data-gathering device. On the part of the interviewer, he had the opportunity to explain further to the interviewees the purpose and kind of information he wanted about the stools in the Manhyia Palace Museum and other palaces.

Interviews were conducted among the chiefs' representatives, clan heads and curators. The researcher used interview guide to conduct face-to-face interview among the respondents.

## **Observation**

The observation deals with grouping, measuring, recording and counting. One important thing in the observation process was to distinguish between what was important and irrelevant of a situation and factors that have little to do in investigations.

The researcher visited the museums and the palaces where the stools were kept and displayed and while examining them recorded his observations with a checklist. In order to give meaningful explanation to the use of some stools, the researcher also attended exhibitions, durbars and festivals and recorded the uses of the stools for the study. The observation was guided by objectivity, carefulness, measuring and good methods that made the investigation successful.

The identity card of the KNUST enabled the researcher to negotiate with the chiefs and their elders for 3 days at each of the selected palace visited. The Researcher was introduced to the whole elders and maximum co-operation was sought from them by the chiefs on behalf of the researcher. In some of the museums curators were instructed to take researcher round the gallery. The researcher notices three main sections of the museum that is ethnography; which has linguist staff, talisman and amulets headgear, stool symbols, stools, drums, Asipim chairs and traditional musical instruments.

### **3.6 Validation of Data Collection Instruments**

The observation guide and interview schedules were given to a cross-section of academicians to read through to determine their validity. (see Appendix 1 to 4).

### **3.7 Administration of the Instruments**

Interview schedules were taken to some palaces at the districts within Ashanti Region where with permission from the chiefs, interviews were conducted. It started from the chief's spokesperson down to the opinion leaders and clan heads.

Questions were asked on when some stool rooms were established, their stools and roles that the rooms play in the society, the need for the stools room, kinds of stools and artifacts, the plan and arrangements for contemporary documentation, source of funding and the perception about stools these days, etc.

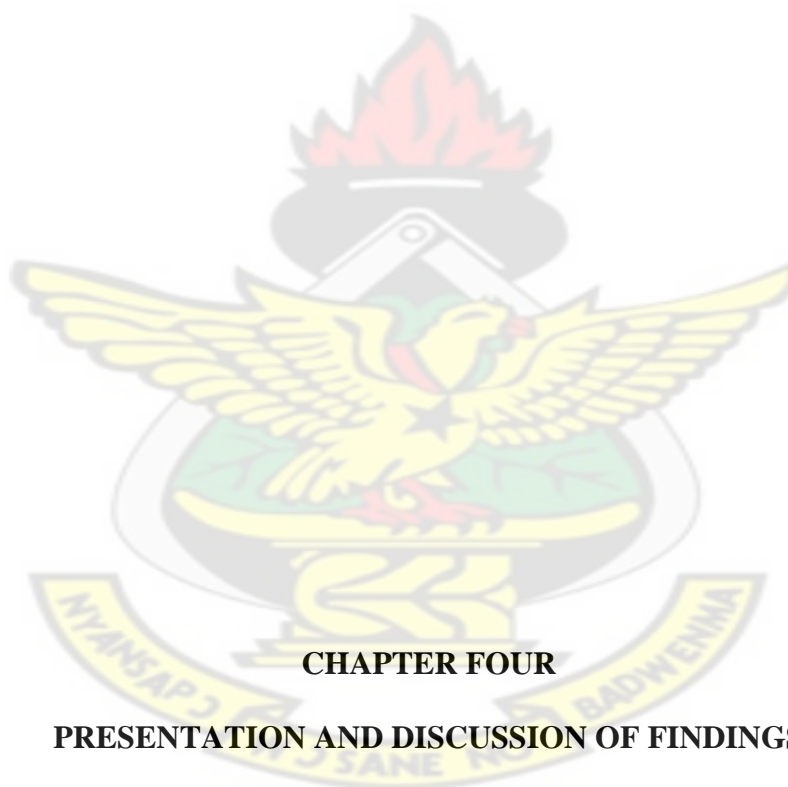
Another interview schedule was used by the researcher. The interview was conducted at the various offices starting at the museum from the Director to the Assistant curators and other staff. There were a lot of verbal exchanges between the various officers of the museums and the researcher.

An observation guide was used. This enabled the curator/care-taker and the subordinate staff to take the researcher round the important paraphernalia in the gallery and the store room to do critical, physical and on the spot observation.

Short discussions on each of the stools regarding their sources, donors, year of donation, usefulness, whether there is any accession number, accession date; whether the stools have bibliography, photographs, audio visual documents, field note books and conservation files. The researcher was in actual fact a participant observer.

Both the observational guide and interview schedule helped the researcher to organize standardized written and photo documentation on the Asante stools that would serve as reference to facilitate further research in future.

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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 THE CULTURAL FUNCTIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF ASANTE STOOLS**

##### **4.1 Introduction**

##### **4.2 Discussion**

Some of the royal stools are exhibited ostentatiously; others, though superficially similar, are so sacred that they are concealed from all but a selected few. It is the context

that gives the object its significance, but regardless of the dominant meaning manifest in the situations, there persist overtones or shadows “resonances” of the object’s other sometimes antithetical qualities. Carved wooden stools, for examples-which can be sacred shrines, symbols of prosperity, or simply seats-are laden with powerful evocative meaning that subtly allude to one another. As symbols embodying abstract ideas concerning the ancestors and the kingship, they condense. In Asante beliefs and social realities, what one sees in a tiny concrete representation of a vast invisible world. All of them partake of the secret in that they involve rationed, controlled disclosure, not free access.

Ordinary stools (*nkondwa*) are used by common people and the king. Chiefs’ stools tend to be large; women’s stools are smaller than men’s; and a spirit-medium stool is covered with white Kaolin. Another means of differentiation is the middle, or ‘neck’ which is carved in many patterns. An elder always sits on his own stool. In the evening, stools are tilted on their side prevent wandering spirits and ancestors from using them.

Ceremonial stools are distinguished by their shape and symbolic design, such as the “knot of wisdom” motif (*nyansapo*) which signifies the chief’s promise to his people, on his accession, but bind the kingdom together through prudent administration, Kyerematen, (1964).

In Asante today, local people still identify strongly with their traditional leaders. “Many chiefs enstooled in recent years are university graduates with prerogative ideas of community self-help. Continuity with earlier traditions and values thus constantly interests with change and innovation. There are many rites in connection with stool carving in Asante because wood is used for a variety of veneration objects, the creation of which is an extremely sacred act. Thus, a chief’s stool begins life with a power and libation to appease the spirit of the tree before felling it and to bless the carvers stool.

Additionally, before beginning work, that woodcarver undergoes some kind of ritual cleansing, refraining from all pleasure, and then devotes himself to his work in seclusion (Sarpong, 1971).

Deprived of its natural home, the soul of the tree is believed to henceforth reside in the stool, and rites must also be performed upon completion of the stool, with an animal sacrifice. The wood of choice in Asante is called */sese* (*Funtumia africana* species, from the family Apocynaceae); its common name is “false rubber tree” because it produces a sticky latex resin. It is a soft, white wood that is durable, light and portable and grows throughout West Africa Kyerematen, (1964).

Asante revere a divine stool called *Sika Dwa Kofi*, “the Golden Stool that was born on a Friday” (Ross and Cole, 1977). They believe it embodies the soul and destiny of the Asante Kingdom and, as such, it is a symbol of the people rather than their ruler. Regarded as a living being and treated with awe, the stool has its own throne, *Hwedomtea*, its own set of regalia, its own bodyguard, and attendants to feed it and clothe it with ornaments. No one sits on the golden stools; it would be an affront to place one’s backside on the destiny of the people. During Ghana’s colonial period. *Sika Dwa Kofi* was the major cause of the last armed conflict between the Asante and the British in 1900 when the governor, Sir Frederick Hodgson, demanded to sit on the Golden Stool, thereby precipitating bloody retaliation and a bitter war. Kyerematen, (1964).

A chief’s personal stool is more than royal insignia; it houses his spirit in this world and the next, and must be preserved after the death of its owner. Thus, through the medium of the stool, a deceased ruler can keep in touch with his subjects and continue to provide counsel and protect the community in the afterlife as he did on Earth. A chief’s

stool therefore functions as a shrine for the soul, memorial to the ancestors and a vehicle of communication.

Not all Ghanaians share the Asante belief that stools house the spirits of the dead. Among some Guan tribes: The royal objects recorded “life force” from their owners. They died when their owners died. At the death of the stool’s royal master, it could go with him into the grave or be exposed to the tropical elements to hasten its decay.

This concluding chapter of the research on the stools in Asante sculpture as objects of glory presents the perception of Asante people of the world around them through their stools. The chapter portrays psychological, spiritual and emotional behaviours of which the people of the Asante kingdom attach to stools. It also tries to bring forth the socio-economic contribution to the paraphernalia to the life of the Asante people. Recommendations on the benefit of stools to society are also enumerated.

The Asante stool is the most important and symbolical complex of all Asante art forms: the stools have multiple forms, functions and meanings. They range, in significance, from everyday furniture to a spiritual centre of this ethnic group. In Asante, as in most Akan communities, an intimacy is believed to exist between the chief and his stool. During the study, the researcher realised that Asante stools perform religious, political, social, economic, medical, moral and communicative roles. This chapter takes an indepth look at them and to highlight the extent to which changes have occurred in the use of these stools in Asante.

## **4.2 Religious Functions**

Asantes of Ghana venerate and offer sacrifices to their ancestors through the blackened stools which are believed to represent the departed ancestors. The formal

expression of the ancestral veneration is centred around the black stools. These stools are believed to embody the spirits of the ancestors and so they are believed to act as intermediaries between the dead and the living. Since the stools represent the ancestors hence sacrifices are made to the stools on behalf of the ancestors. The stools contain the spirit of the ancestors they are regarded as shrines of the dead ancestors. The chief or the lineage head acts as a priest for these shrines.

The stools are made black because it helps to preserve the beauty of the stools. The stools are made black because sacrifices of blood, fat and meat are offered to the stools. If the stools are therefore left in their natural colour, they would be stained and become dirty with regular sacrifices. Danquah (1945) believed that the stools are blackened to prevent them from decomposition. Besides, among the Asantes, black is a sign of mourning. The stools are therefore blackened to remind the living of the death of the ancestors.

The stools to be blackened are deliberately selected. They are usually the ones on which the departed ancestors sat on often while living. According to (Sarpong, 1971) the stool that is preferred most is the one on which he sat on to have his bath. The stools are blackened with a mixture of soot and egg. The soot is collected from the kitchen walls and it is formed in the web of the spider. The collection of the soot from the kitchen is very significant. This is so because the kitchen is the centre and source of life in every house. It is argued that a house without a kitchen is lifeless for the inmate would be starved to death. This gives the idea that the black stool is regarded as the centre of life. Therefore anything in connection with life is sought from the ancestors through the stools. Sarpong (1971) mentions that as the spider is regarded as a symbol of wisdom among Asantes by connecting the stools with the spider.

The Asante are conveying the idea that the stools are embodiment of wisdom. This explains why the chief-elect's buttock is lowered three times on the ancestral stool before he is formally recognised as a chief. By so doing, he is believed to have acquired the wisdom needed for his high office. Sarpong (1971) goes further to state that the egg is regarded as a symbol of delicacy, peace and life. The use of eggs to blacken the stools indicate that the stools so blackened have now become objects to be handled with care and respect.

The black stools are kept in a temple called "*Nkonnwafieso*" (stool house) in the chief's palace. The essence of keeping them in the palace is to provide strong security for them and to enable the chiefs to offer sacrifice to them regularly. The stools are arranged by order of succession because some are regarded as more dignified and honourable than others. The status accorded the stools depends on the achievements of their original owners while on earth. The stools are regarded so important among the Asantes that the sons of the chief are made special attendants to the stools' house. And the attendants are so highly placed that they are allowed to enjoy privileges like freedom from execution no matter the crime they might commit. Others include the right to intercede for the life of one condemned to death. Female stool bearers are responsible for the upkeep of stool house for the queen mothers.

There are few important personalities whose stools are blackened after death. These are clan or lineage heads, chiefs, queen-mothers and kings. The most important stools are those of kings, chiefs and queen-mothers. But it should be noted that those whose stools are blackened are those who died while still ruling. A chief who is destooled for a bad character or for any disgraceful disease such as leprosy or epilepsy would not have his stool blackened and preserved. The blackening and preservation of

stools are regarded as the greatest honour hence the dead chief's reign should be characterised by peace before his stool is blackened and preserved.

The important '*Adae* Festival' of the Asantes is centred on the blackened stools. This festival is celebrated twice every 42 days. Within the 42 days two festivals are organised, one Wednesday and the other one on Sunday. But the '*Adae* festival that is held on Sunday is regarded as the biggest occasion and it is usually celebrated as a public feast. On the day of this festival, the chief accompanied by his elders and led by the chief stool-bearer, enters the stool house. They all remove their footwear except the chief and bare their chest as a sign of reverence. The chief pours libation and calls each of the ancestors by name. A sheep is slaughtered and the blood is used to smear the ancestral stools while a piece of the fat is put on the centre support of each stool. The food that is prepared by the stool-bearers are offered to the ancestral spirits in the stools house. Before the chief sets the food on the table placed before the ancestral stools, he gives the ancestral spirits water to wash their hands also washes his own. He then tastes some of the food and gives some to those present, leaving the rest of the food on the table for the ancestral spirits.

In the view of (Osei, 2002) it is believed by Asantes that the dead are ever-present and receive gifts on many occasions, in-between the annual festivals. The Asantes venerate and sacrifice to the ancestors because their ancestors are believed to be able to help their tribe in time of war and are therefore invoked before battles. The ancestors are besought for benefits, albeit with fear and trembling. They are regarded as the proprietors of the land, as elders of the community. The ancestors are believed to fertilize the earth and promote the growth of crops. The periodic feeding of the ancestral stools gives life to the stools and keeps the memory of the illustrious chiefs, whose noble deeds constitute a model to be followed by succeeding chiefs, in the minds of the people. It is also by the

celebration of the '*Adae*' that the Asante recon their calendar. It is believed that nine '*Adae*' festivals bring the year to a full circle.

### 4.3 Economic Functions

Obeng, (1988) in his book *Ancient Ashanti chieftaincy* wrote that, all revenue collected by a chief and his elders was the property of the stool. It was only in cases where the money was derived from the joint efforts or joint labours of the chief and his elders that the elders were entitled by custodian to a share of the revenue. Thus, court fees and fines were formerly divided equally among the chief and his elders. If, for instance, the total amount collected in fees and fines was Gh¢ 560,000, and the chief and his elders numbered eight, each would receive an amount of Gh¢ 70,000. Then, as now, land was the property. In land cases in which the chief and his elders were involved, any money derived from a litigation on land was divided among the chiefs, his elders and the "cultivating" owner of the land, each taking a third share.

In the olden days, such things as Concession Rents, Cocoa Tribute, Forest Reserve Grants and Sales of land were unknown. As has been said, the chief and the stool were regarded as one; and the chief might distribute a portion of all money and property received amongst his elders and sub-chiefs although they had right or title to it. Any money paid by their subjects of the stool by way of allegiance fees or levies were the property of the stool alone.

In economic circles the importance of wooden stools is acclaimed in Asante. For many wooden stools are produced to earn both local and foreign currencies and therefore good sources of income and employment. Besides these, magico-religious stools (magic stool (**Plate 4:28**)) that are believed to embody benevolent spirits are consulted for success in trading, fishing, farming, hunting and other economic enterprises.

In Ghana, for instance, before the enactment of the Local Government Ordinance, 1951,<sup>1</sup> which channelled revenues from Local (chiefs') courts and lands into Local Council treasuries from which "proportionate" shares were then paid to the chiefs and their elders, a custom grew up in many Divisions whereby all stool revenue was divided between the chief, his elders and the stool. In effect, the chief took two-thirds and one-third went to his elders. There was no authority, according to custom, for such a division or apportionment of such revenue. The distinction between the share of the stool and that of the chief is quite modern and was introduced by the Colonial Government. It was generally understood, and custom accepted it, that the chief's share was intended for his own personal expenses and for which he was not accountable to anyone; and that the stool's share was to be used for stool purposes with the approval of the elders.

The *Sannahene* (chief Treasure) is usually a subject of the *Gyaasehene*. The *Sanaahene's* stool may be a Family stool or may be filled by any person appointed by the chief. When it is a family stools, the appointment is made by the chief from amongst the members of the Family.

The *Sanaahene* (Treasurer) is the sub-chief responsible for the safe custody of all stool money. He has various sub-treasurers (*fotosanfoo*) to assist him. *Fotosanfoo* may, by their duties, be more appropriately referred to as cashiers. The chief treasurer can pay out money only on the authority of the chief and is under the general supervision of the *Gyaasehene*. The chief usually obtained from the chief treasurer such moneys as he required for his ordinary everyday recurrent expenditure; but any extraordinary expenditure required the authority of his elders.

The elders and sub-chiefs of a stool are entitled to their customary share of all revenue accruing to the stool, but they are not entitled as of right to any share of fees paid to the chief by a swearer of the chief's oath.

Levies were collected only for specific purposes such as the funeral expenses of a chief, and the expenses of a chief, and the expenses of a litigation or war. Before a levy was imposed the reason and necessity for it had to be explained to; and approved by, the whole Division. When the amount required had been decided upon, it was apportioned and allotted to the various elders and each was required to raise his quota from amongst his own subjects, no matter where they lived. It was quite legitimate for an elder to collect a larger sum than that for which he was responsible in order to replenish his own coffers.

Even before the advent of cocoa, tribute was collected from all persons other than his own subjects farming on a chief's land. Tribute was paid in kind at the annual *Odwira* or Yam Festival. The tributes were collected by the various sub-chiefs and brought to the Head chief. Tributes consisted, then, of farm produce such as foodstuff, palm-oil, snails most of which was usually used for the entertainment of the people attending the *Odwira* ceremony.

In more recent time cocoa tribute is similarly collected from all non-subjects of a stool, whether they are Asantes or strangers. A person who is liable to pay farming tribute to the Head chief on whose land he lives and farms is liable to be called upon for communal labour such as weeding, construction of roads and public places of convenience and sinking of water wells. He is however, exempted from payment of any levy collected by the chief to whom he pays tribute.

A stranger who grows food solely for his own use is not usually called upon to pay tribute, but will be expected to assist in any communal labour. He pays levy only to the chief to whom he owes allegiance. As a general rule, however, strangers, whether livings in the Zongo or elsewhere were not called upon to pay tribute unless they were farming for profit. They were not called upon to pay levy either, but were expected to do

their share of communal work. A storekeeper, carpenter, blacksmith or similarly employed or self-employed stranger was not called upon to pay tribute or levy except to the chief whom he served.

The art of stool-carving is restricted to the male sex. Stool-carving requires exceptional skills and patience. The carver usually has to produce, from a piece of wood, the figure described to him by the customer. His efforts are the more appreciated if it is born in mind that he does not write down the descriptive, because he cannot. The trade has always been a privileged one and today stool carvers are numbered among those with lucrative and honourable jobs. It is lucrative because of the demand: foreigners are happy to buy the stools as a souvenir. The honour attached to the art is due to the fact that it makes even the chief dependent, in a sense, on the carver. For it is especially in royal circles that the use of stools has been carefully preserved for ceremonial and religious gatherings. There was a time when chiefs relied for their stools on special stool-carvers who had attained a certain standard of proficiency in the art. These, of course, got very high reward for their services.

#### **4.4 Political Functions**

The importance of wooden stool is greatly realized in the indigenous politics of an Asante. For instance, Asantes used royal wooden stools as the mainstay of Asante chieftaincy. It is the symbol of Asante chiefship sovereignty and political unity. It empowers the Asante ruler to perform administrative, judiciary, military, financial and priestly functions.

For stools, there are special stools for certain people or group of people. At public gatherings the chief is partly identified by the stool he occupies. For instance, a stool by name “*Kotoko dwa*”(Plate 4:15) is made for the exclusive use by the Otumfuo (Asante

king). That is, nobody can use or sit on that stool except the *Asantehene*. “*Kotoko*” which is the porcupine is known to be the Asante kingdom emblem.

Nowadays he normally sits on *Asipim* chairs in public while the Queemother sits on royal wooden stools. When a particular Asantehene who used a particular *Kotokodwa* dies, it is blackened and stored. Asante chiefs possessed blackened stools that are considered to be the shrines of the royal ancestors. With the presence of the blackened stools, the ancestors are regarded as being present as the spiritual rulers of the chiefdom, and the chief ruler in the STEAD of the ancestors. Therefore, any offence committed against the ancestors who may ruthlessly punished the offender.

This belief has immensely contributed to the maintenance of peace, a phenomena which was achieved in the ancient times among the Asante without the existence of the police nor the standing army of the kind introduced in Ghana by the British.

The importance of the wooden stool in Asante Traditional Politics is significant because Enstoolment and Destoolment Rites are performed in the presence of a stool. Without it no one is permitted to rule the Asante chiefdom. Notably capture the great Black Stools representing a founder, an ancestor of an Asante chiefdom, is to bring the sovereignty of chiefdom to an end. The chiefdom whose stool is captured in a war is reduced to vassaldom by the victorious ruler. In the case of the Asante kingdom it is the capture of the Golden Stool that can end the sovereignty of the kingdom.

The stools are a symbol of authority. Amongst the “*Abusua Panyin*” and every Asante ruler owns a stool with special designs on the column; these usually depict the authority the ruler possess. Political wise, when a chief is enstooled, he is given a stool or made to sit on a stool to welcome him and then also to tell him the power he possesses by the designs on the stool. Politically. The type of stool occupied by a chief, a leader or any

ruler depicts the power the fellow possesses. For instance, the Asante chief uses a stool plated with gold, demonstrating how powerful and rich the Asante Kingdom is.

Asantes have a loyalty to the Golden Stool. As a result, all *Amanhene* and *Abrempon* (i.e. Paramount and Divisional Chiefs) in Asante swear the oath of allegiance to the *Otumfuo Asantehene*. Similarly, chiefs outside Asante owing allegiance to the Golden Stool also swear the oath of allegiance to the *Asantehene*. The Golden Stool, it is believed, unites Asantes as a people and serves as the source of their inspiration.

The secret of Asante power lay in their belief in the Golden Stool which, it is alleged, *ɔkomfo Anokye* invoked from the heavens and which was supposed to embody the soul of the nation. The Golden Stool exists to this day in Asante although several attempts were made by the British to capture it.

The Asante Kingdom was one of the few vast and prosperous kingdoms in West Africa (the others were Benin, Bornu, Dahomey, and the Hausa and Yoruba states) which dazzled the Europeans who first visited them. At the height of its power, from about the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Asante kingdom divisions, namely. Metropolitan Asante and provincial Asante and their subdivisions.

The former, a fairly homogeneous cultural and ethnic entity, was made up of Kumasi-the capital directly under the *Asantehene* (Asante king) and the *amanto*, the territorial divisions or states such as *Dwaben*, *Nsuta*, *Kokofu* and others. Each state or *ɔman* was (is) under its own *ɔmanhene*, a “paramount chief” or ‘king’ who retained his largely autonomous and hereditary status. All the *amanhene*, however, recognised the *Asantehene* (that is the Ashanti king) as their political and spiritual leader and regarded the Golden Stool, which is believed to embody the soul of the Asante nation, as the symbol of their unity. In metropolitan Asante, the power of the *Asantehene* was thus

Supreme only in the Kumasi state, enjoying neither autocratic nor despotic power over the other *amanhene* (paramount chiefs) of the Asante confederacy.

As the supreme commander of the Asante army, thus controlling physical force (one of the most important sanctions of the confederacy before colonial rule), the Asantehene exercised enormous power. However. He was (and still is) subject to constitutional checks.

There is an accepted procedure for his election, installation and destoolment. A cardinal principle of the Asante constitution is that those who elect a chief can also depose him. This applied to the *Asantehene* also. Electors insists that the *Asantehene* rule constitutionally. Indeed, the latter half of the nineteenth century supplies a number of examples of an *Asantehene* being deposed for unconstitutional and sacrilegious behaviour. The king remained powerful only so long as he held and deserved the affection and respect of the common people.

Sorel, (1950) pointed out. That behind the Asante political, economic and cultural achievements stood the great Golden Stool. It provided a powerful myth without which “one may go on talking revolt indefinitely without ever provoking any revolutionary movement.” Associated with the Golden Stool was an ingenious set of laws, 77 in all according to tradition, among the most important of which were those of “common citizenship,’ by which every person of the ASANTE Union, at last in public was to place loyalty to the Golden Stool above all else, the ultimate sanction of the laws being the Golden Stool itself (Kyerematen, 1969; Davidson, 1974).

#### **4.5 Communicative Functions**

One of the most effective languages of Asante culture is the stool. The stool often expresses religious ideas of Asante hence they are considered as important source of Asante Traditional Religion.

There are many stools with symbols on them. Such symbols may represent the authority or power of the nation, a chief, a family, a clan or an individual. The stools have their meanings. For example, the “*Obi-te-obi-so-dwa*” (someone-sits-upon-another-stool) (**Plate 4:14**) is carved in such way that one stool stands on top of another. It indicates that in every society there is order of seniority. So authority must be respected.

Some stools have the shapes of such animals as the elephant, the leopard, the lion in their middle parts. These signify the greatness and bravery of chiefs.

#### **4.6 Examples of symbols from some communities**

In Asante when a chief appears in state at a national festival or a durbar, it is customary for all the regalia to be displayed.

Stools are the most important of the chief’s regalia. Stools are found among the Asantes, the Ewes, the Ga-Adangmes and other ethnic groups in the Southern part of Ghana.

The emblem of the *Yilo Krobo* is a stool on a crocodile. This came about when *Krobo* land was attacked and defeated by a powerful Asante army. All the ethnic groups in *Krobo* land sent two messengers to Asante to make peace with them. The Asante asked the *Krobo* to pay war fees before an agreement for peace could be signed. A rich man among the *Krobos*, by name Padi Keteku, agreed to pay the money if only his people would make him their ruler. They were also to consider him as a crocodile whose call they should attend to promptly. When the *Asantehene* learnt that Padi Keteku was his

grandson, he sent a stool to him and asked him to rule the land in his name. This is how the stool and the crocodile became the state emblem.

A stool signified the stately seat of a ruler or leader. It is also a source of his power and authority. From the stool power radiates and diffuses into the society. It is also the point of contact between the ruler and the ruled.

A ruler receives homage from his subjects on the stool, in certain societies, subjects approaching the stool may bow, genuflect, or even lie prostrate as a sign of respect to the stool, and its occupant.

The adornments of general paraphernalia displayed on and around a stool attest to the strength and power of the ruler who occupies the stool.

The display of wild animal motif is a pointer to the dynamism of these attributes, hence the rapacious and ferocity of the zoomorphic predominate in heraldry and other stately decorates as emblems and shields.

Thus, animal analogies and allegories are to be found all around rooms, in graphic representations of the state, as well as appellations, to characterize the personal and the stool itself.

#### **4.7 Medicinal Functions**

According to Hagan and Odotei, (2001), the medical or protective function of the stool cannot be over-emphasized. In Asante, the stool is believed to play an important role in the protection of the people. The golden stool is upheld in an undescribable high esteem because it embodies the soul of Asantes. To the traditional Asante, the Asante state has not suffered any spiritual devastation due to the indispensable role *Sika Dwa Kofi* (**Plate 4:1**) plays in this regard.

The *Asantehene*, it is believed derives his spiritual protection and healing from the *Nsamankwa* stool. The occupant of this stool, apart from ensuring the safety of the king, he also provided curative services to ordinary people. He makes healing interventions for those suffering from curse.

It is believed that some stools may be blackened or adorned with precious stones, beads or cowry shells. Such stools have their usage to be more spiritual than physical. These adornments are believed to enhance the protective powers of the stool against any evil attacks on the occupant. When one visits some shrines, most of the traditional priest use stools as their deity and for the matter venerate them. Seriously sick people, especially, those afflicted with chronic diseases are made to sit on a special stool whilst rituals are being performed for them to get well. In Asante, the traditional priest knows the times when the stool must be used and the conditions attached to the preparation and application of the medicine. The stools are chosen for spiritual reasons. The whole exercise is shrouded in mystery, treatment is not considered to be on a purely materials plane. Some priest use sympathetic or homoeopathic magic to perform their cures. There is a belief that there is a relationship between the stools used and the sickness. Such stools are seen in the houses of medicine men. Priests who are attached to the various shrines in Asante pray for their communities and perform various rituals before stools. The diseases which are considered to be spiritual and need spiritual cured is debatable. Science on the other hand has it that the diseases are as a result of suffering from, germs, virus, organisms and bacterial infections which are easily cured by scientific medicines.

In terms of protective great cognizance is taken of the importance of wooden stools because Asantes utilize stool as salvation instruments to seek security, survival and continuity of their race. Regarding security, the priest employs wooden stools to protect

the people, their crops and other personal properties as well as their towns and villages by sacrificing a sheep and saying of prayers accompanied with pouring of libation.

#### 4.8 Social Functions

The social importance is specially acknowledged in rituals connected with birth, puberty, marriage and death. In Asante, stools are utilised and introduced from mere seats to near gods, stools permeate the social, political and religious life of the Asante.

Stools indicate special times in a person's life. A child beginning to crawl is given a stool to mark the passage through the dangers of infancy. A girl is seated upon a stool when she is leaving puberty to become an adult woman. A groom will present a stool to his bride to honour their marriage. Day to day stools are used for household chores like bathing and eating. Each time a person sits on the stool, it absorbs more of the *sunsum*, or spirit of the owner and becomes linked to the owner's personality and spiritual state. Upon the person's death, the stool becomes a locus for the individual's memory and will be set on its side so that no stray disruption may enter it.

If a leader rises to greatness and is deemed worthy of commemoration, his stool becomes consecrated. After the funeral, the stool is blackened with soot mixed with raw egg, animal blood and fat and then placed in a windowless room that is *kronkron*, holy and pure. In this room, an incumbent leader pays respects to his predecessor, offering prayers and pouring of libations in return for guidance. Not for sitting, the stool contains the soul of a significant individual. One explanation emphasizes the need to remain in contact with those individuals. (Cole and Ross, 1977).

Obeng, (1988) said that the *Asantehene* (Asante king), during his tenure of office he has possession and custody of all stool property, including all the ancestral stools. Upon the death of a chief the *Werempefo*, who are usually *Gyaase* subjects, take

possession of the stool. No person belonging to the stool family can be a member of *Werempe*. If a chief is destooled, the stool, its regalia and paraphernalia are taken away from him and placed under the care and protection of the *Gyaasehene* who, by custom, is the proper custodian of all stool property for as long as the stool remains vacant. In such a case the *Gyaase-pene* usually resides at the Palace. The Queen-Mother or *Jbaahemaa* has nothing to do with custody of the stool property.

When a chief is in occupation of a stool he is, according to ancient custom, incapable of owning any property apart from the stool. He and the stool are inseparable. They are one.

Before he accepts the stool a chief must dispossess himself of his private property in favour of the stool, particularly his farms and other real properties. But any family property in his possession would revert to the family.

Where the chief himself, at the request of his elders, negotiates for a loan on behalf of the stool, thereby becoming the principal debtor, the stool could be said to owe money to its occupant.

If a chief would engage in any business undertaking, he should seek the prior approval of his elders. If he makes profit, it is a gain to the stool. If he makes a loss, it becomes stool debt.

A chief has no right to stand surety or be guarantor for any person without the consent of his elders. If he does so on his own accord and involves the stool in debt, this would be sufficient grounds for his destoolment.

Again, before the electors decide upon a candidate for a stool, discreet enquiries are conducted into his private property as well as his private debts. Even then, the candidate is questioned at the public ceremony of the election as to the extent of his private property and debts. If the candidate declares them and is nevertheless elected to

the stool, his private debts are thereby accepted by the stool and become Stool Debts. If, however, a candidate fails to declare his debts prior to his election and subsequent installation, the stool cannot accept responsibility for them. Such debts become the debts of his family.

A chief is not entitled to incur any debt on behalf of his stool without the prior approval of his elders. Should it become necessary for the stool to borrow money, two, at least, of his elders must be actual parties to the loan. When this is done the elders cannot repudiate any liability on behalf of the stool.

Another aspects of the social functions are that at the child-naming ceremony of a royal baby, the lineage stools are not forgotten in the least. During the puberty rites of a girl of royal blood, ceremonies are performed in the temple of stools on her behalf. When a member of the royal clan marries, libation is poured on the stools to ask for children and happiness for the new couple <sup>1</sup>.

Any offences against the ancestors are sometimes put right by the pouring of wine upon the ancestral stools and the sacrifices of sheep upon them. In the case of incest, where the penalty used to be death or banishment, but is now changed to a fine and several sheep, the blood of the sacrificed animals is poured on the ancestral blackened stools<sup>2</sup>.

To have sexual intercourse with a girl before she had reached puberty used to be termed “murder!” If the girl belongs to “a stool” then the bride-price is given to the linguist for the chief. The chief gives one-half to the parents and uses part of what is left to buy a sheep to be offered to the ancestors.

If, however, it was found out that the girl had in fact had her menses, but had not disclosed the fact, the offence was no more “murder” but a *Mmusuo* (something which brings with it ill-luck). It might then be atoned for, by a sacrifice upon the ancestral

blackened stools and on the shrines of the gods, to placate them. In the olden days, when the chief's wife committed adultery, both she and the man were killed. Nowadays, two sheep are slaughtered on the stools, that is one at Banmu 1 and one at Banmu 2, a third sheep would be offered to River Offin.

If a man wants to mortgage his land, he pours rum over his ancestral stools to inform the ancestors of the arrangement and to solicit their assistance in redeeming it.

A chief never undertakes a long journey without first offering wine and sheep to the stools of his ancestors to ask their permission and guidance. Before engaging in a litigation suit, a chief informs his ancestors, and asks for help through the stools.

On the death of some of the more important chiefs, the most important blackened stool in their stool-house is taken and hidden by the *Werempefo*. It is brought back only after the burial. In the past during the time that these people had possession of the stool, they could loot livestock, as they wished. They have licence to sing insulting songs, abuse members of the royal lineage and go as far as assaulting any of them, whom they meet. Since they are in possession of that most important stool, they have the backing of the greatest ancestor and they have, too, the authority in their hands because nobody can be enstooled without that stool.

Formerly, the stools were offered sacrifices before any war. But when a battle was going against the army, they would rally around the stool that is the most important of the blackened stools, which was always taken to war. Rather than surrender this stool to the enemy, every member of the army, including the aristocracy was expected to lay down his life to defend it. When the battle was going against them, the chief would stand upon the stool- an act of insult to the ancestral protectors-to annoy the spirits and make them fight more vigorously, (*Sarpong, 1971*).

#### 4.9 Moral Functions

In the view of Nat Amoateng a teacher at Offinso Palace, a carved stool of a hen surrounded by young chickens (**Plate 4:10**) conveys the messages that heads of families have a moral duty to protect and care for members of their families. Again, at the roof top of one of the palace is a wooden stool of an elephant which had stepped into a trap. This conveys the message that the occupant of that Palace is the final authority in the town because when an elephant steps into a trap, the trap does not work any more: all other chiefs submit authorities to him. Also a stool at the Manhyia Palace has a symbol that depicts patience *Aboter[ Adwa]*. It is a stool that is still seatable when turned upside down. The stool signifies “calm and soft voice” which refers to, a person who is respectful and prudent, and does not cause any offence. It also refers to a person who has the ability to wait for results.

The background of the Patience Stool (*Aboter[ Adwa]*) had it that in the past, chiefs were very autocratic. It was difficult for the subjects to convince them to change their judgements which were mostly oppressive. It was also difficult to win favour or receive gifts from chiefs. However, some subjects were able to find favour with chiefs, because of their respect, humility and submissiveness towards them. The above brought about carving of the patience stool. The Patience Stool (*Aboter[ Adwa]*) teaches children especially to be obedient and respectful to their parents, because their attitude will be noticed and rewarded. It also stresses the need for patience, tact and skill in dealing with people, especially those in authority.

#### 4.10 Changes that have occurred in the use of Asante Stools

The Vestiges of Asante Kingdom thrive today within the political structure of the modern nation Ghana. Much is known of Asante culture and royal arts. Artisans still

fashion traditional art for the court and the Asante people look to their chiefs for guidance. A stool is a sacred possession associated with the soul of the owner. Stools are bethrothal gifts. When a stool is not in use, it is tilted on its side so that no other spirit can possess it. Stools used in the court are embellished with gold or silver and have ornaments such as bells and amulets to add spiritual powers. But the twins' foreign religions of Christianity and Islam have helped in no small way in de-emphasising the significance of the traditional art forms. Millions of people have been converted to these two religions and these people have been warned not to have anything to do with this art forms which is termed as satanic. However, these are regarded by some people as superstitious and no more trust the powers of the stool that be.

#### **4.10.1 Economic Aspects and Change**

The honour attached to the stool is due to the fact that it makes even the chief dependents, in a sense, on the carver. For it is especially in royal circles that the use of stool has been carefully preserved for ceremonial and religious gatherings. There was a time when chiefs relied for their stools on special stool-carvers who had attained a certain standard of proficiency in the art. These, of course, got very high reward for their services. Asante stool also succumbed to the commercial tourist market for cheap souvenirs, often referred to as “airport art”, and to feign demand from collection and art galleries. In some cases, once-ceremonial carved stools evolved into miniaturized replicas carved in one hour (Dagan, 1988).

Due to monetary gain a lot of people who are not associated with the trade have rushed into the stool business just to carve stools for a living. This has led to different

kinds of designs which do not depict the actual features of Asante stools –fake stools which are prototypes of chiefs, and these lead to litigations and sometimes conflicts among chiefs.

#### **4.10.2 Religious Aspects and Change**

Traditional Asante Religion, then and now were based on the belief that spirits dwell in natural forms such as trees or the earth, in created objects, such as stool carvings, and attention has to be paid to them. To assure the proximity of protective sprits, families often used wooden stools. Every village has its own ancestral shrines where community-wide ceremonies were performed. With the advent of Western civilization, changes have been brought to bear on the simplicity of traditional art and practices, and branded some of the artifacts as festishism and primitive, results from inadequate data, ignorance or prejudice made them thought so. These have made the sacred nature of the stools lose their importance because the practice is fading away because of rural-urban migration and its impact on the society.

#### **4.10.3 Medical Aspects and Change**

Most probably, some stools are believed to possess some spiritual powers and sick people sit on them and become healed. However, western civilization held the view that the practice is a thing of the past and outmoded and this has brought the decline of spiritual significance of the stools. Decline of this system under the assault of modern communications and economic, social and political change. The growth and importance of Asante stools owned much to integration into one state of various pre-existing chiefdoms in the area around the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century.

With the rise of Asante Empire in the eighteenth century the arts had reached their peak. To ensure the continuance of cosmic order, the supernatural power contemporary artist also carves stools, but they are products of a different age and society. The context and function have changed: they are no longer ceremonial, no longer memorials to deceased ethnic chiefs, not venerated as divine personification of a kingdom. However, Lockhart Clark's stools relate to Asante prototypes in their association with ancestors, his stools, like those of his Asante forbears, are carved as memorials to family members, though lacking a ritual purpose.

#### **4.10.4 Political Aspects and Change**

The stools were also carved for the chiefs to depict royal-hood and prestige. The fate of an Asante chief's stool is a good index of his authority. If the chief is not equal to his duties, his stool will be taken away from him, and his prestige with it, if, however, he distinguishes himself in his functions, then upon his death his stool will be "blackened:" and enshrined in a special room reserved for stools; these are venerated like ancestral idols in other ethnic groups. In some Asante societies, the people no more observe the protocol that is associated with the nomination of candidates to vacant stools who are supposed to become chiefs i.e. some wealthy men in the society manovure their way to the stool by bribing the kingmakers. Again, becoming a king/chief in some Asante traditional areas these days has become a lucrative venture for people to compete for stools even to the extend of engaging in succession disputes, litigations and conflicts. From the events raised about stools, it is worth noting that stools used as souvenirs was only recognized in a definite cultural set-up. To other people from a different cultural background (especially to the whites) this belief associated with the use of ceremonial stools as souvenirs was seen as satanic. In spite of this notion about the stools, the stools

are still winning prominence in Asante and Ghana as a whole, fortunately, people's conceptions about stools have changed. Today, some buyers from both far and wide do everything possible to acquire the various symbolic stools for themselves. But for their size, ceremonial stools would have been a great source of foreign exchange for the country.

#### **4.10.5 Moral Aspects and Change**

Asante stool carvers observe certain well defined rules, regulations or guidance that controls their moral behaviour called Taboo. Breaches of these customary procedures purification rites, made up of offerings, pouring of libation, invocations, incantations, etc referred to as Ritual. All these ritualistic approach to carvings of stools are designed to appease the deities associated with the art. Because the carvers are many in the trade they no more practised and observed the rites associated with the trade. Trees like *Osesese*, *Nyame dua* and others used as stools are felled indiscriminately without attaching their spiritual importance to them. Stools which are supposed to be tilted for fear that ghost spirit may enter them are no more tilted because they are believed to be superstitious in these recent times.

#### **4.10.6 Communicative Aspects and Change**

Bocola, (1995) stated that the depletion of the forest has let to different species of trees which are not good for the stool trade in terms of quality and its durability is used i.e. inferior one. Lastly, the aforementioned points cannot be raised without their shortcomings like the bribery, litigations among family members and conflicts among clans and towns. Archaeological evidence, early reports and more recent descriptions have established that stools play an important role in leadership regalia. It must be assumed

that there were more mundane forms of seating (made out of leaves, or consisting of mats, wooden billets or tripods) and more ordinary stools but that these were not considered worthy of note. Almost any object can come to signify status and it is reasonable to suppose that the well-tended stool might have been treasured by the owner and been recognized by his or her peers not only as private and personal, but as an object of prestige, an indicator of the status of the owners.

Stools vary a good deal. They may be simple, but ingenious adaptations of natural, branch-like forms that serve as stools or as backrest or more elaborate carved tip-stools that double as stool or backrest. They may be constructed, as are some beds, out of stacked palm-leaf ribs in the manner of a log cabin, or out of pieces of bark, carved into cylindrical form and attached to tops and base made from wooden discs.

A great number of stools are monoxylous – that is to say, carved from a single block of wood. Such stools fall into two categories: One predominantly, cubic in form and the other cylindrical. Examples of the first type have a deeply carved seat and appear rectangular when viewed from above. They are found in three regions of West Africa: Firstly, in the Arquipélago dos Bijagós, off the Coast of Guinea-Bissau:

Secondly, among the Akan of the Ivory Coast and Ghana as far as the old Kingdom of Dahomey; and thirdly, on the Cameroon Coast, near the modern city of Duala. If there are historical ties to account for this unconnected distribution, they are not clear. Particularly tantalizing is the resemblance of the Golden Stool of the Asante to the style found among the Bidjogo.

Here again we have to be satisfied with only a handful of examples to illustrate the wealth of symbolic meaning that lies beneath to ocean of the art of Asante stool-carving. The designs are many and artistic. Several have definite explanations. But the

significance of others is a matter of conjecture and opinion, while that of quite a few is so obscure as to amount to ignorance of what the designs stands for.

Sarpong, (1977) indicated that how the enstoolment of a girl who attained the age of puberty is initiated to show that she is of age and has now been fading away fast. This is because the white stools used for the puberty rites are no more practised and observed in the society. This is because the twin foreign religions of Christianity and Islam have helped in no small way in de-emphasising the significance of the Nubility Rites. The societies these days see it to be primitive, archaic and satanic acts and no more practiced or observed it.

In a nutshell, it can be said without mincing words that in respect of Asante stools the names primitive, satanic, archaic, fetishism are most unsuitable, and in fact a very obnoxious misnomer. It has nothing to do with those names given to the stools basically. It is the worst of all the labels and their uses are most objectionable.

#### **4.11 Asante Stools Today**

Since 1957, when Ghana became independent, the central government has emphasized the importance of national identity and pride, using every educational and communication institution. This is an attempt to foster a sense of national unity among ethnic groups-contrary to traditional tribal identities, which emphasize differences.

The Asante people don't see any contradiction between the two. They naturally accept both their traditional heritage and their national identity with pride-just as they use the modern plastic and aluminum chair along with the traditional wooden stool. The national festivals, such as *Adae* and *Odwira*, which are celebrated once a year, often begin with the chiefs visiting their local stool shrines and performing the traditional ceremonies. This illustrates how the traditional stool still has widespread use, although

traditional restrictions and taboos connected with them are losing force. For example, the *Mmarima* stools (**Plate 4.3**), once used only by men, are now also used by women. Stools which at one time were restricted to kings, chiefs or dignitaries are available today to anyone who can afford to commission them. Festivals of worship for the stools are still celebrated but not to the same extent or with the traditional intent. Customs connected to the stools are changing; traditional motifs and themes are being replaced with newer ones. Some stools with older themes have disappeared from use and are only seen in museums and private collections.

Again, some of the old patterns are copied and used, but the messages and forms are contemporary. A good example of these changes is the stool of (**Plate 4.32**), carved in 1957 and symbolizing modern Ghana. The theme is national unity and the emblem of the new nation is featured. The words “freedom” and “justice”, with two birds symbolizing this freedom, are the prominent motifs. Today, because of high demand in both local and tourist markets, carvers who specialize in stool carving work at full speed to complete their commissions. In addition, they occasionally sell stools at local markets.

Lastly, when carpenters joined the race, they started with the making of modest stools called “Adamadwa”. The Adamadwa was a very cheap wooden stool and was used by the women at the kitchen. Children also used Adamadwa when they meet or when working at the home or telling Ananse stories. Chief’s attendants too sit on Adamadwa in front of the chief whenever the chief sits in state. Research reveals that stools can be classified according to the course they followed in evolution of Ghanaian stools designing. Asante tradition maintains that they appears in the following order. 1) Amandwa (state stools). 2) Abusuadwa (clan stools) 3) Abebudwa (proverbial stools) and Ahwinihunu (abstract stools)

## 4.5 Some Traditional Asante Stools

**Plate 4.1.** Artefact: Golden stool (*Sika Dwa Kofi*)

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace.

**Description:** The Golden stool, the revered and Shrine Throne of the Asante Kingdom, also known as *Sika Dwa Kofi*, because it came “Down” on FRIDAY. The highest ranked stool in Asante culture. The secret of Asante power lies in this stool.

**Plate 4.2:** Artefact: *Esono Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Museum

**Description:** The elephant stool may be used by the *Asantehene*. The elephant indicates the king's power and authority. In the past only the *Asantehene* was permitted to use a stool with its seating surface supported by the figure of an elephant. Only certain kings (*Omanhene*) and the queen mother on the *Asantehene*'s side are allowed to use silver in any form.

**Plate 4.3:** Artefact: *Mmarima Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: Only the male, head of the family may sit on this stool. Male stools are usually made up of five pillars: four at the corners and circular one in the centre. It is this central part that is carved to distinguish between a male and female stool.

**Plate 4.4:** Artefact: *Mframadan Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: The wind house stool. The engraved designs appear also on temples. It may be used by either sex.

**Plate 4.5:** Artefact: *Nyansapo Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: Each piece is hand-carved of strong and durable ebony wood by skilled Ghanaian craftsmen. These stools are symbols of royal and sacred stools used by the Ashanti kings of Ghana. Each stool is adorned with a sacred symbol. (*Nyansapo* – the wisdom knot). Only a wise man can untie the knot), and polished with bees wax. It is the perfect accessory for the home, office or the special place.

**Plate 4.6:** Artefact: *Nkonta Adwa*

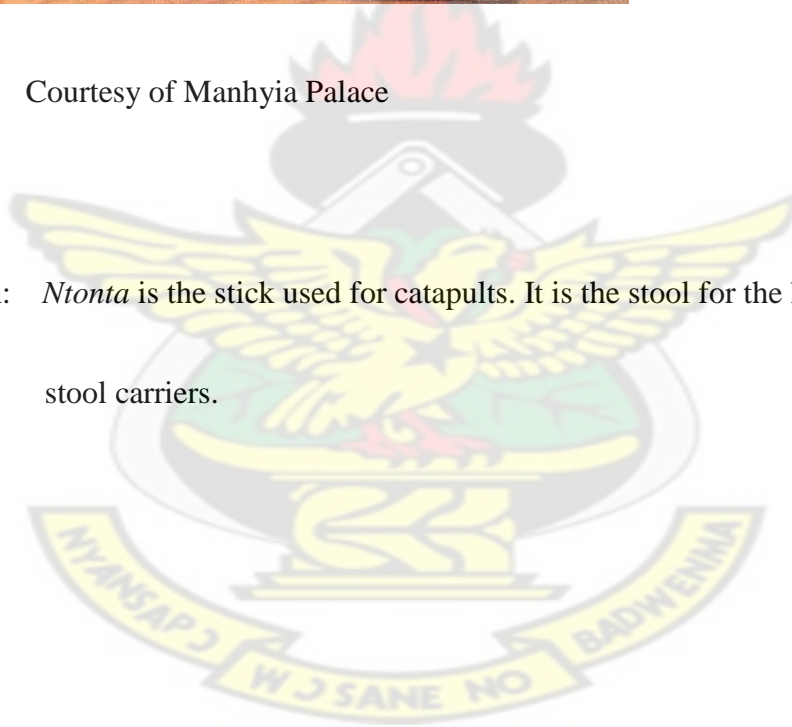
Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

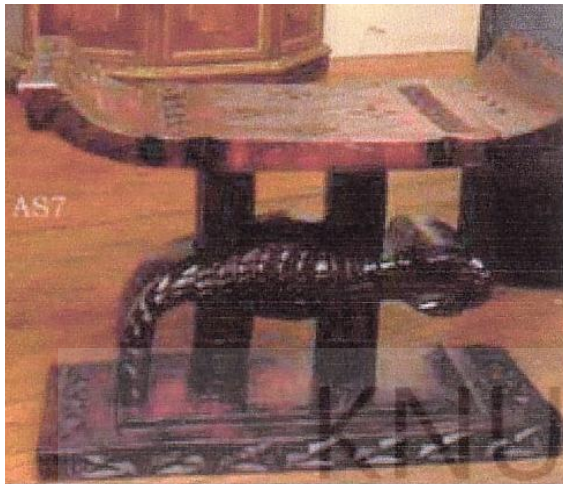
Description: *Ntonta* is the stick used for catapults. It is the stool for the head of the stool carriers.



**Plate 4.7:** Artefact: *Adenkyem Adwa* (Crocodile Stool)

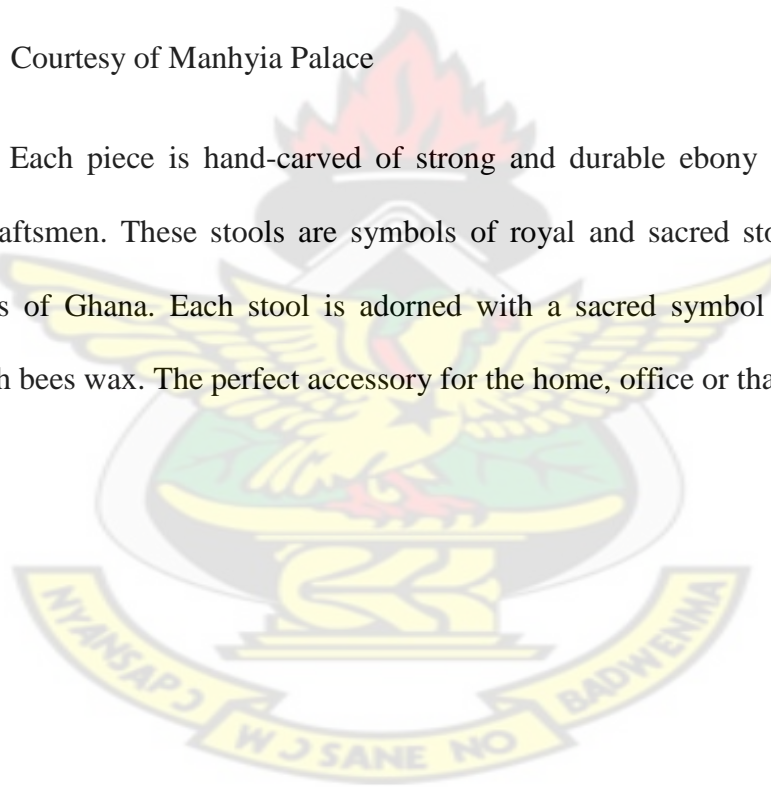
Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: Each piece is hand-carved of strong and durable ebony wood by skilled Ghanaian craftsmen. These stools are symbols of royal and sacred stools used by the Asante kings of Ghana. Each stool is adorned with a sacred symbol (crocodile), and polished with bees wax. The perfect accessory for the home, office or that special place.



**Plate 4.8:** Artefact: *Gye Nyame Adwa*

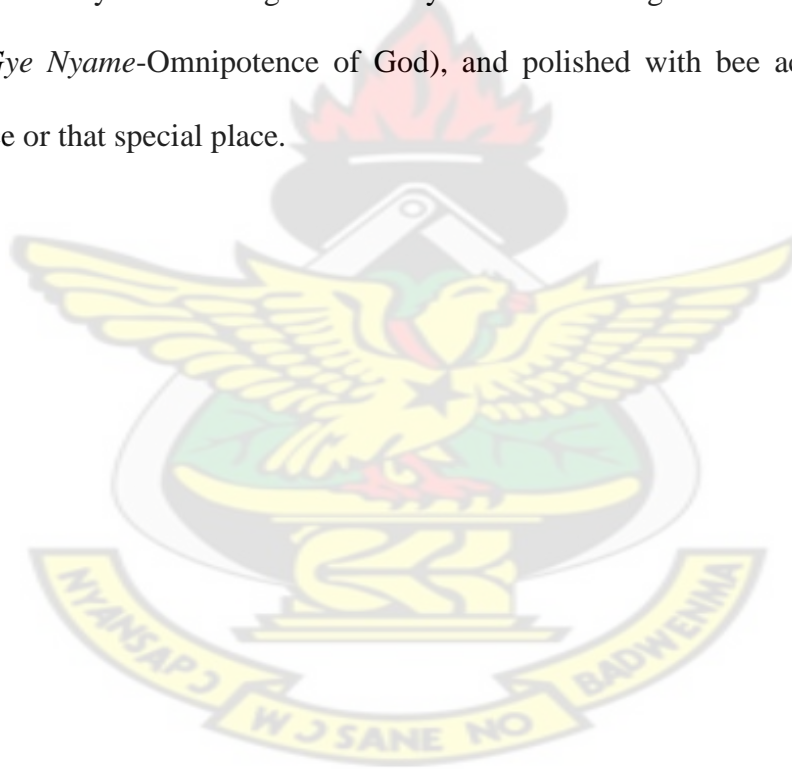
Locations: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: Each piece is hand-carved of strong and durable skilled Ghanaian craftsmen. These stools are symbols of regalia used by the Asante kings of Ghana. Each stool is adorned (*Gye Nyame*-Omnipotence of God), and polished with bee accessory for the home, office or that special place.



**Plate 4.9:** Artefact: Ceremonial stool

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



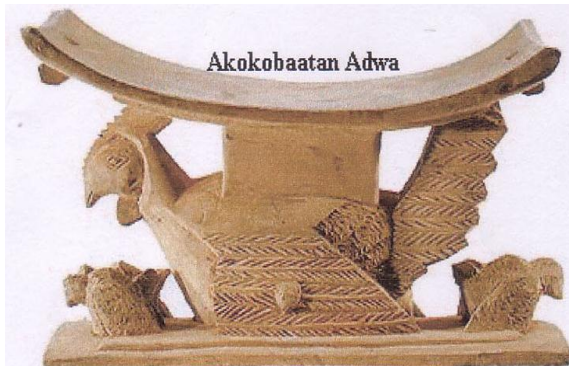
Courtesy of internet

**Description:** This design is of a bird attacking a snake. Stools indicate status, power and succession of chiefs and kings. Carved from single blocks, Asante (or Ashanti) stools traditionally have crescent-shaped seats, flat bases and complex support structures, which exist in many designs with symbolic meaning. Asante stools are spiritual as well as practical. They were understood to be the seat of the owner's soul and when not in use was leaned against a wall so that other souls passing by would not settle on it.

**Plate 4.10:** Artefact: *Akokobaatan Adwa*

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: This stool symbol-*akokobaatan* (mother hen) depicts the role of the kings as a parent that provides sustenance, care and protection and security of his children. The stools of kings who proved to be great leaders are blackened as a method of preserving the stools. These blackened stools are kept in the temple of stools (*nkonnuaafieso*-Twi or *nkonguadan* – Fantse) as symbolic memorial and shrine of the great ancestors.

**Plate 4.11:** Artefact: *Isese adwa or dua* (Whitened Stool – Shrine Piece)

Location: Ahwiaa - Ashanti

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Ahwiaa-Ashanti

Description: Among the Asante a well-carved stool such as this early example serves spiritual purposes in addition to its original purpose as a well-designed seat to sit upon. Among the Asante, stools take their general identifying name *ɛ Dwa* or *Duai* meaning literally carved from the wood. Stools start out as light coloured wood taken from the tree identified by the Asante as *ɛ osesei* that through time and use takes on a burnished and well-worn honey-coloured hue. However this old stool is so covered with the remains of white pigment over its surface that at times it fills in the details of the carving. Among the Asante of Ghana the colour white is important for it conveys a number of ideas addressing spirituality and the ancestors. Known as *ɛHyirei*, it was in the past made from clay mixed with bird lime that is now replaced by the use of various forms of white powder. Priests and priestesses during rituals associated with their shrine will cover their bodies in white powder to celebrate the spirit of the local shrine and will often throw powder into the crowd or into the air. Stools and often sculpture figures placed in shrines will also be covered with white clay to indicate their spiritually.

This stool most likely came from a shrine where it served as the *ɛseati* of the shrine spirit known stools indicate status, power and succession of chiefs and kings. Carved from

single blocks, Asante (or Ashanti) stools traditionally have crescent-shaped seats, flat bases and complex support structures, which exist in many designs with symbolic meaning. Most had specific names and designated users. Asante stools are spiritual as well as practical. They were understood to be the seat of the owner's soul and when not in use was leaned against a wall so that other souls passing by would not settle on it.



**Plate 4.12:** Artefact: *Ɔsebo Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

**Description:** This design of an leopard or jaguar, an *Osebo Dwa*, symbolizes the power of the *Asantehene*. Stools indicate status, power and succession of chiefs and kings. Carved from single blocks, Asante (or Ashanti) stools traditionally have crescent-shaped seats, flat bases and complex support structures, which exist in many designs with symbolic meaning. Asante stools are spiritual as well as practical. They were understood to be the seat of the owner's soul and when not in use were leaned against a wall so that other souls passing by would not settle on it.

**Plate 4.13:** Artefact: *jbosomi Adwa*

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



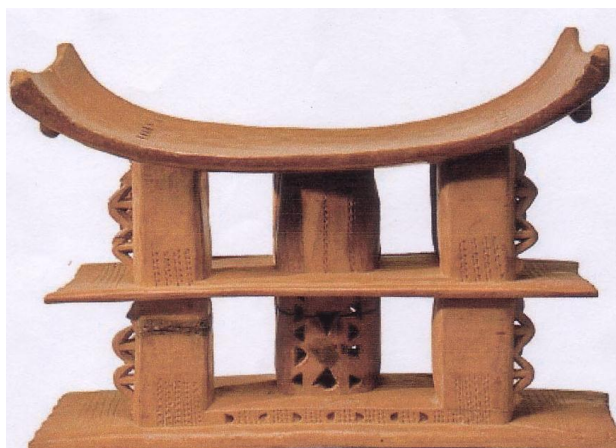
Courtesy of internet

Description: As an *Obosomi* where it received offerings of white clay or powder that gives it its white coloring. It is most likely not an ancestors stool in that ancestral stools were *eblackenedi* to honor the ancestor with a mixture of soot, blood and other dark materials. This finely carved stool falls into a class of stool identified as *Pantu Dwai* and despite the wear of one surface where it had lain on its side in the shrine the details and openwork carving make this a classic example of an Asante stool.

**Plate 4.14:** Artefact: *Obiteobiso Adwa*

Location: Ahwiaa

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Ahwiaa-Ashanti

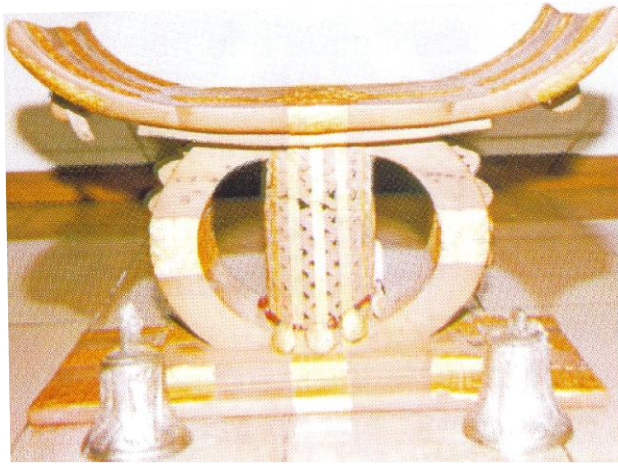
Description: This design, known as a *Obi-Te-Obi-So Dwa*, one man sits on another's stool. This is a stool used only by the highest ruler on festive occasions.

PLEASE NOTE: The damage/repair reports describe the worst damage even if it cannot be seen in the photos and details are included of any major problems. In spite of their damage all are stable enough to be used as stools. This stool has cracks on both the front and back, one of which has been repaired with metal strips.

**Plate 4.15:** Artefact: *Kotoko Adwa*

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: For stools, there are special ones for certain people or group of people. For instance; the porcupine stools. The porcupine is a symbol of the Asante nation: If one is killed, there are hundreds following. It embodies the notion of readiness to defend one's nation. The stool by name *Kotoko Dwa* is made for the exclusive use by *Otumfuo* (Asante King). That is, nobody can use or sit on that stool except the *Asantehene*. *Kotoko* which is the porcupine is known to be the Asante state emblem. When a particular *Asantehene* who used a particular *Kotoko dwa* dies, it is blackened and stored.

**Plate 4.16:** Artefact: *Sankofa Adwa*

Location: Ahwiaa - Ashanti

Origin: Ashanti Region



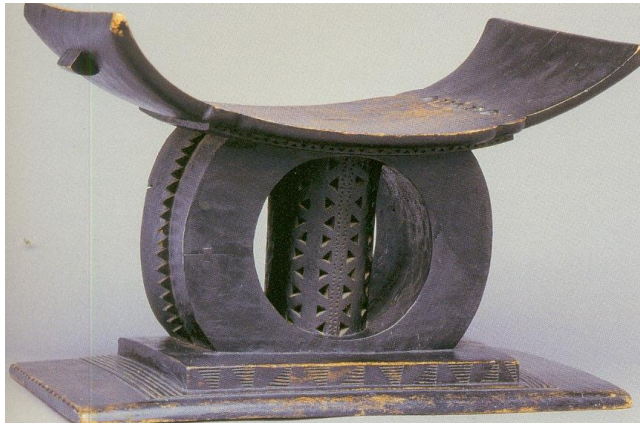
Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: ‘Return to take it’. One of the few proverbial stools. *San k] fa* is the short form of this proverb. *San* means ‘return’, *k]* means ‘go’ and *fa* means ‘take’. *Sank]fa* therefore means, ‘Return and take’. The proverb seeks to dwell on the wisdom in acquiring knowledge from the past and improving on them.

**Plate 4.17:** Artefact: *Kontonkurowi Adwa*

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: The circular rainbow stool of the stool shown above, two stand out as examples of the range in form these objects can take. A circular form is featured on the first example. A proverb “The halo of the moon circles even human being” (*Kuntonkonkurowi eda amansan kon mu*), is visually apparent in this design. It can be seen as a reminder that the Asante Confederacy has the power to control and unite all the people. Or it may signify, as the curving sides frame the central core that the head of any one person is always surrounded by higher powers. Arch-Bishop Peter Sarpong also sees circle as a reminder to a leader that death comes to everyone, even the most powerful king. In response, he should remain humble even though he may have achieved high status.

**Plate 4.18:** Artefact: *Gyata Adwa* (Lion Stool)

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: A roaring lion with a key in its side is featured contrary to Western misconceptions; lions do not roam most of the African continent. They are more common to a savannah than the forest of the Asante environment. Akan proverbs and prayers often refer to the leopard as the “king of the forest”, but rarely mention the lion. The sources of the image on this stool thus require investigation. The profile head, the posture, and S-curving tail suggest a non-African source for the depiction. A rampant lion convention comes from the heraldic designs employed by European monarchies. This motif was among the most prominent visual metaphors the Europeans offered. Asante carvers were likely to have noticed the lion on Dutch, Danes and British sailing ships plying the coast during the gold and slave trades. In addition, to designate alliances, the British and Dutch gave chiefs messengers canes on which the lion could appear. Another, more common source still seen today is the lion, used as cooperative emblem for a commercial trading company. Heraldic crests and trademarks served as symbols to identify the companies selling goods such as cloth and tea.

**Plate 4.19:** Artefact: *Mamponghemaa Adwa* (Silver Stool of Mamponghemaa)

Location: Mampong Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Mampong Palace

Description: The stool of the *Mamponghemaa*, who deputises in the absence of the *Asanehemaa*. Her ancestors featured well in the Asante wars. The stool of the queen mother of Mampong is also covered with silver strips and central bosses on the seat. It is similarly adorned with silver repoussé bands and prominent die forms.

**Plate 4.20:** Artefact: *Asantehemaa Adwa* (Silver Stool of Asantehene)

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: These designs, known as a *Ahemaa Dwa*, designates this as a queen mother's stool. They are similar to the porcupine stool or the *Asantehene*, and shows how close they are, both politically and socially. The *ohene adwa* is the *akonnua panin*, the senior stool in relation to the *ohemaa adwa* (queen mother's stool). When the *ohemaa* and *ohene* sit in state together, the latter is seated to the right of the former. The stool of the queen mother of Asante is also covered with silver strips and bosses on the seat. It is similarly adorned with silver repoussé bands and prominent disc forms.

**Plate 4.21:** Artefact: *Mamponghe Adwa* (Silver Stool of *Mamponghe*)

Location: Mampong Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Mampong Palace

Description: The stool of the *Mamponghene*, who deputises in the absence of the *Asantehene*. His ancestors featured well in the Asante wars. The second most powerful stool among the Asante is the silver stool of Mamponghene. Like the Golden stool, it is never sat upon and in public it is placed on its side on its own *hwedom dwa*. Although not completely encased in silver, it is largely covered with bands of silver with the exception of a dramatic silver repoussé discs centered on the seat of the stool.

**Plate 4.22:** Artefact: *Ahemmaa Adwa* (Ceremonial stools)

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: These designs, known as a *Ahema Dwa*, designates these as queen mother's stool. These are similar to the porcupine stool of the *Asantehene*, and show how close they are both politically and socially. Another queen mother stool. There may be many since every queen mother adopts her own stool design.



**Plate 4.23:** Artefact: *Offinsohene Adwa* (the chief of *Offinso* stool)

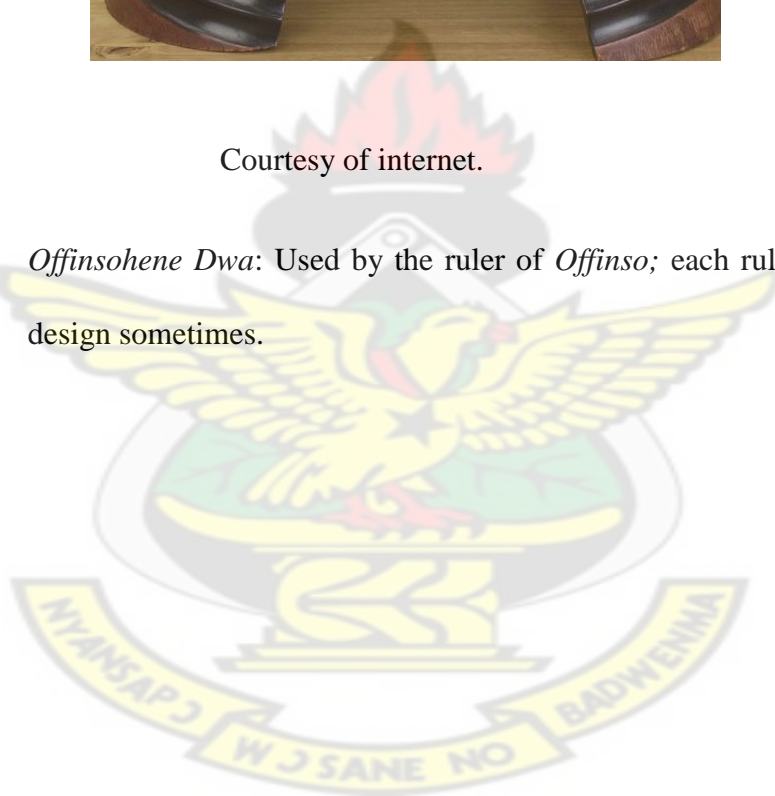
Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet.

Description: *Offinsohene Dwa*: Used by the ruler of *Offinso*; each ruler adopts a new design sometimes.



**Plate 4.24:** Artefact: *Owuo Atwere Adwa*

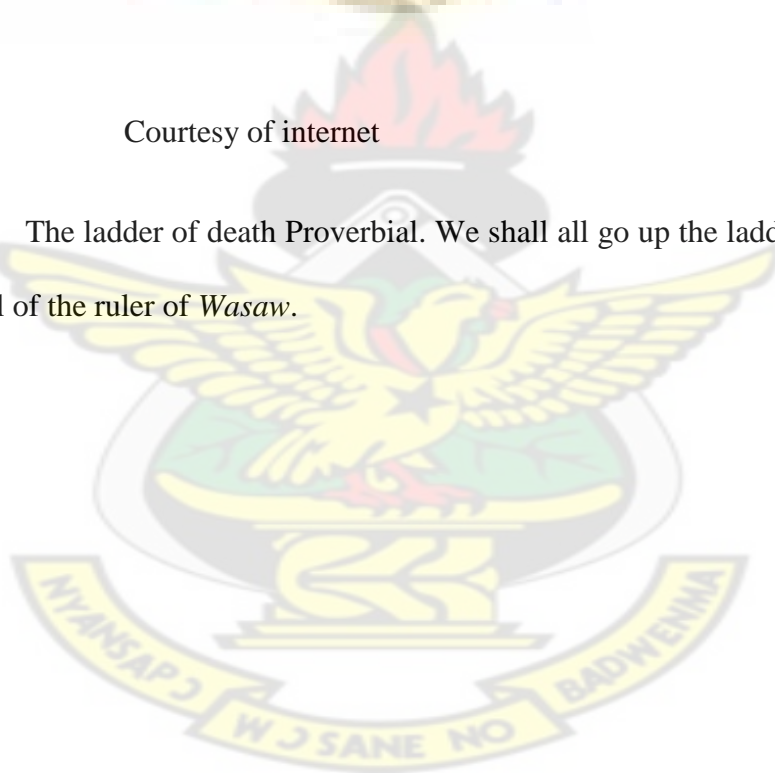
Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: The ladder of death Proverbial. We shall all go up the ladder of death. It is also the stool of the ruler of *Wasaw*.



**Plate 4.25:** Artefact: *Adinkra Dwa*

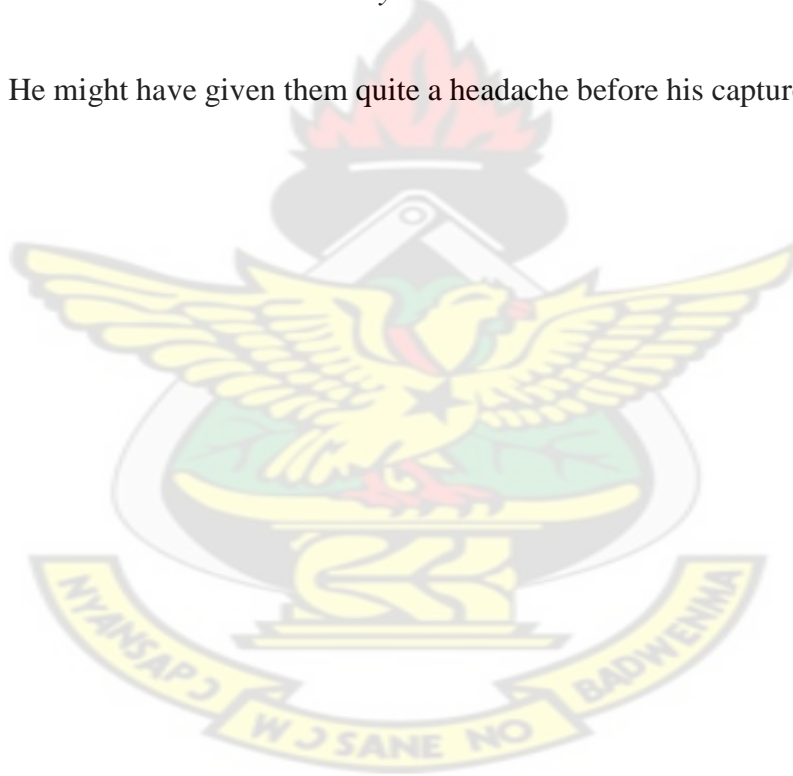
Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

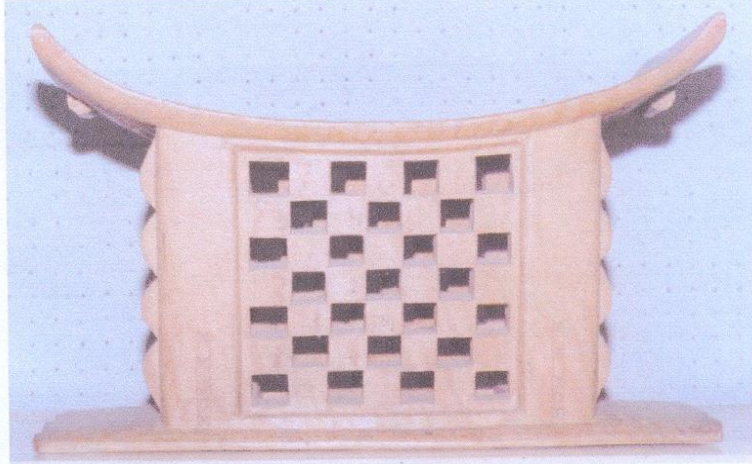
Description: The stool of the ruler of *Gyaman*. *Adinkra* features a lot in Asante mythology. He might have given them quite a headache before his capture.



**Plate 4.26:** Artefact: *Damedama Adwa* (Draught board stool)

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

Description: Carved stool with 25 square holes on each part of the middle portion of the stool. The draught board stool. This may also have a European influence. The draught is a popular game but foreign to Ghanaian Traditions.



**Plate 4.27:** Artefact: Asante 'Magic' stool

Location: [www.ashantestools.com](http://www.ashantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: The stool represent the ancestors, hence sacrifices are made to the stool on behalf of the ancestors. It is believed the stool contain the spirit of the ancestors, they are regarded as shrines of the dead ancestors. The chief or the lineage head acts as a priest for this shrine.

**Plate 4.28:** Artefact: *Kontonkorowi Mpaemu adwa*

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: The divided circular rainbow stool. It reminds the king that the central portion besides determining the name of the stool is the object of divers motifs. In the circular rainbow stool used by the king of Asante alone. It is the reproduction in wood of the well known proverb *kontonkuro, eda amanson ko mu*, “the rainbow is around the neck of every nation”. The symbolism is in two fold. One informant said that it reminds the king that death is the lot of everybody, including himself; though powerful as he is and that he should not be puffed up with pride by reason of his high position on earth. It also depicts the power the king has over everybody in Asante.

**Plate 4.29:** Artefact: *Asantehene Adwa* (Ashante King’s Stool)

Location: [www.asantestools.com](http://www.asantestools.com)

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of internet

Description: This design is very important stool of a Chief of the Asante tribe. This stool belonged to Chief Nana-*Otumfuo Osei Tutu*. The stool is designed with a human figures of a king seated on Asipim chair and at both sides two body guards holding swords to offer the king protection. The figure symbolises how the king should live an extraordinary which is worthy of emulation, and it is believed the same service and respect accorded him on earth would still be extended to him life hereafter. The stool serves as a sacred object during certain functions and ceremonies. The most important function the stool plays is political. It shows strong connections that exist between the spirits, soul, body and the stool. It reflects one's thoughts, behaviour, status and wealth.

**Plate 4.30:** Artefact: The Hog and Elephant stools

Location: Manhyia Museum

Origin: Ashanti Region



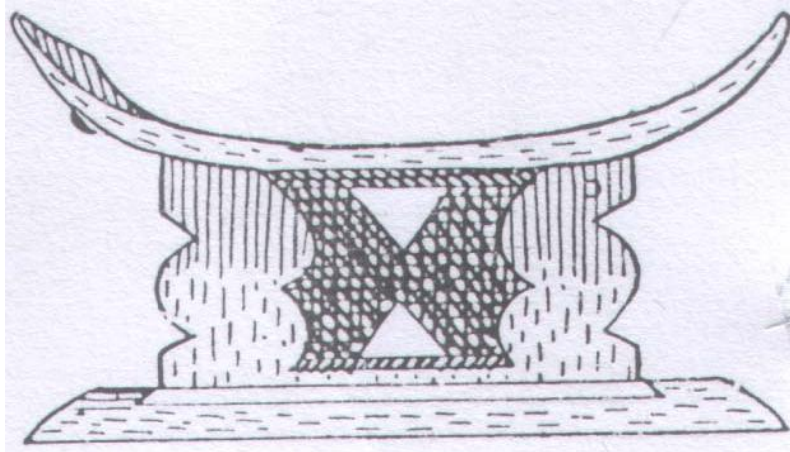
Courtesy of Manhyia Museum

Description: Carved stool with oval middle with an elephant and hog on each side with black circular sports. The edge of the middle is decorated with series of triangles. Elephant symbolises authority and strength.

**Plate 4.31:** Artefact: }w]k]foro Ad]b[ Adwa “Snake-Climbs the raffia tree”

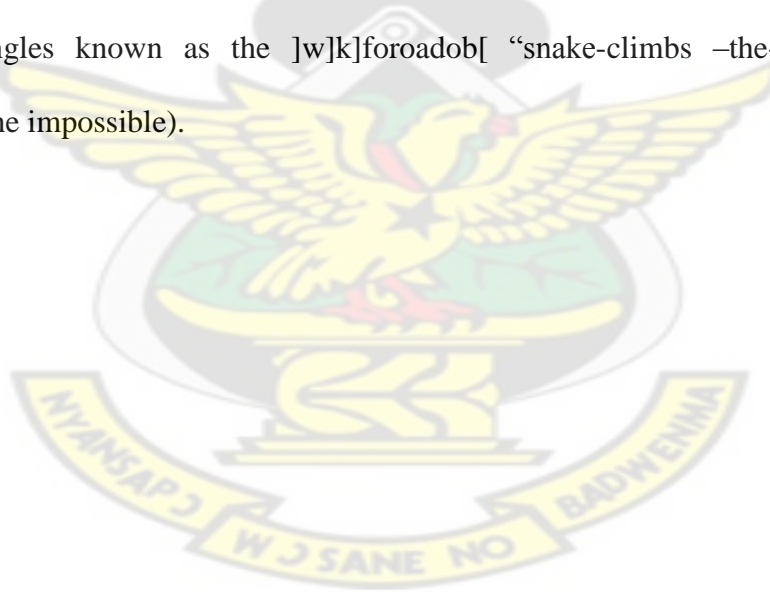
Location: Cultural Centre

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Cultural Centre

Description: }w]k]foro ad]b[ dwa “Snake – climbs-the-raffia-tree” (a rather difficult thing to do) motif, which is a symbol of the exercise of prudence in human matters and relations. A frieze of motif made up of zig-zag lines of equal length forming a succession of equal angles known as the ]w]k]foroadob[ “snake-climbs –the-raffia-tree (that attempting the impossible).



**Plate 4.32:** Artefact: Modern Ghana stool

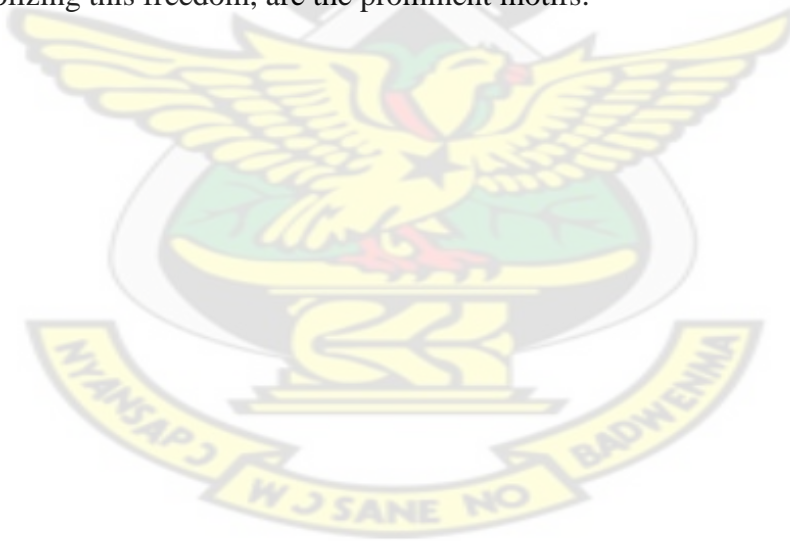
Location: Ghana National Archives

Origin: Ghana



Courtesy of Ghana National Archives

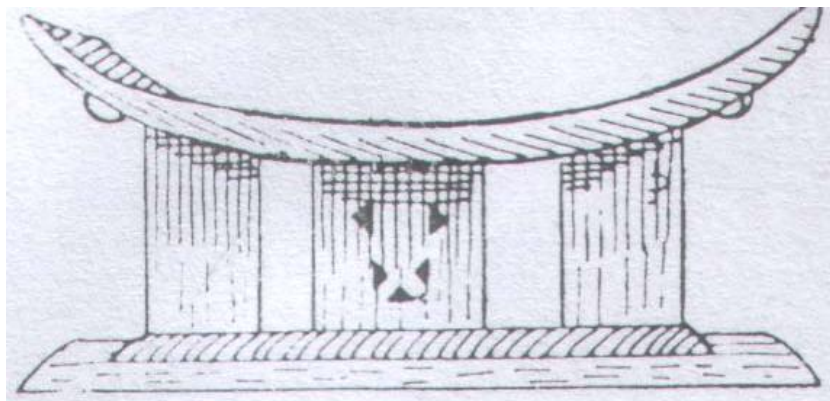
Description: The stool above symbolizes modern Ghana. The theme is national unity and the emblem of the new nation is featured. The words “freedom and justice” with two birds symbolizing this freedom, are the prominent motifs.



**Plate 4.33:** Artefact: Me-Fa-Asa dwa: Half of me is finished

Location: Ahwiaa

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Ahwiaa-Ashanti

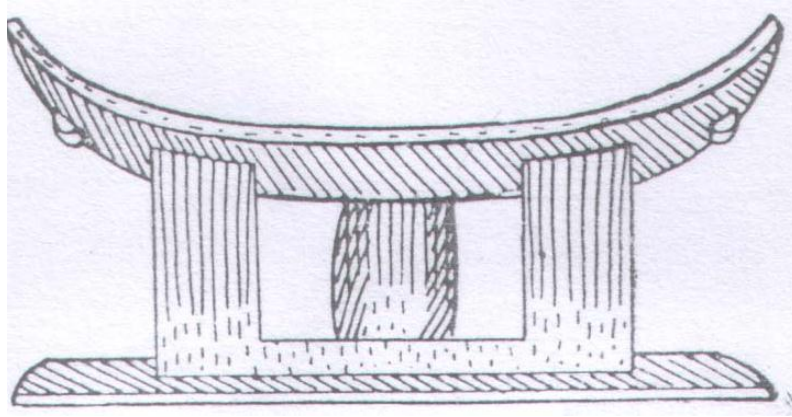
Description: Me-Fa-Asa dwa “half of me is finished” (half of my clan is dead). This is a stool used exclusively by females.



**Plate 4.34:** Artefact: *Adammadwa*

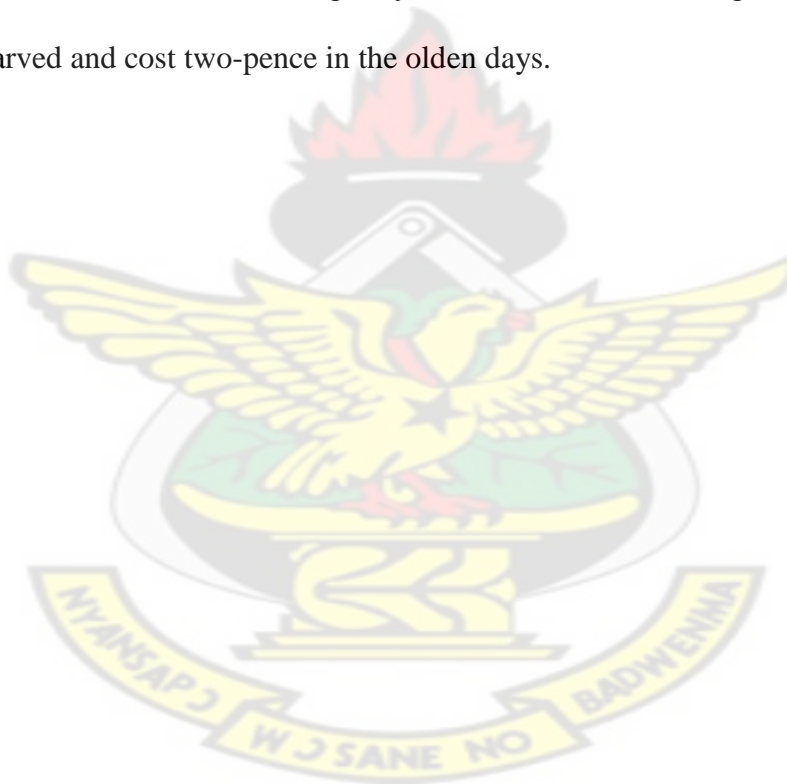
Location: Ahwiaa-Ashanti

Origin: Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Ahwiaa-Ashanti

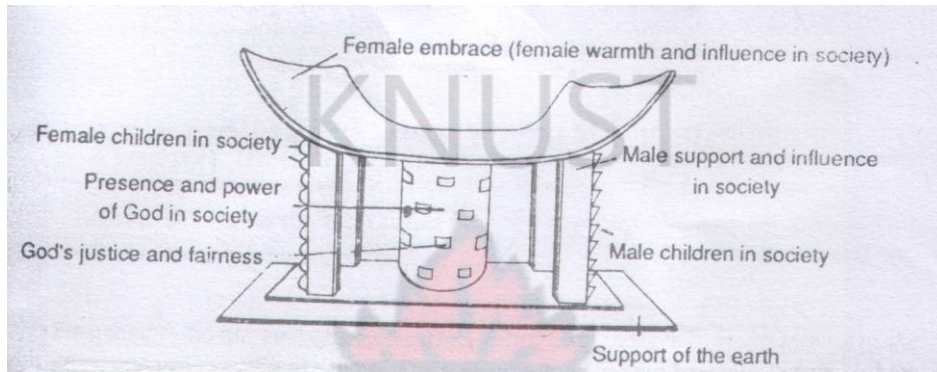
Description: Adammadwa, the two penny stool; also known as the poor man's stool. It is simply carved and cost two-pence in the olden days.



**Plate 4.35:** Artefact: *Mmaadwa* (Female stool)

Location: Manhyia Palace

Origin: Ashanti Region



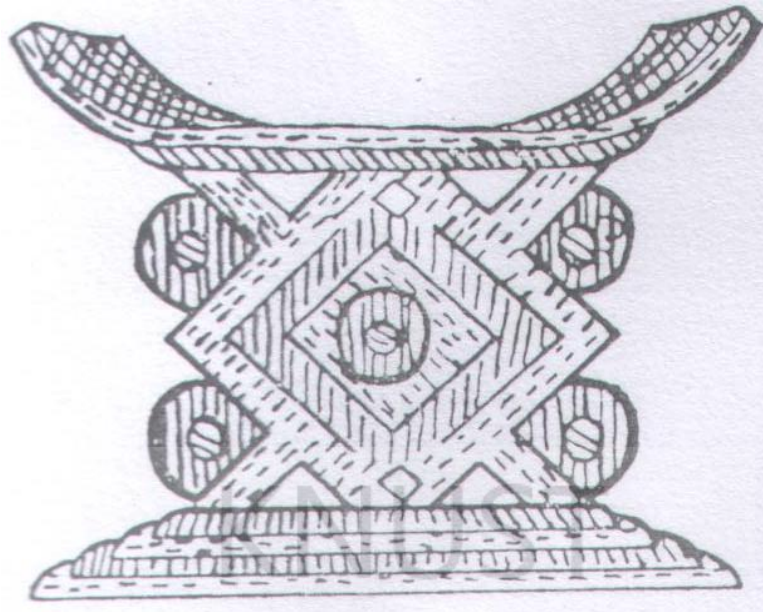
Courtesy of Manhyia Palace

**Description:** Mmaadwa (Female stool) The stool symbolizes the soul of society. It serves as the symbolic link between the common people in society and their head. (i.e. the chief of a village or town, or the head of state). Every component part of the design of the stool represents one of the main ideas that make a perfect society.

**Plate 4.36:** Artefact: *Baako-Ntena Adwa* (One Man does not stay)

**Location:** Manhyia Palace

**Origin:** Ashanti Region



Courtesy of Ahwiaa -Ashanti

Description: Baako-Ntena Adwa (One Man does not stay) A stool showing the form of a crescent moons the “one-man-does-not-stay” motif, and the three-stepped. The stool is made up of an equilateral parallelogram, in the centre of which is a smaller parallelogram, also with equal sides. The four sides of the smaller are prolonged beyond the sides of the wider one; and the ends of the lengthened side are made into circles, each with the top and base of the stool as tangents.

Some of the royal stools are exhibited ostentatiously; others, though superficially similar, are so sacred that they are concealed from all but a selected few. It is the context that gives the object its significance, but regardless of the dominant meaning manifest in the situations, there persist overtones or shadows “resonances” of the object’s other sometimes antithetical qualities. Carved wooden stools, for examples-which can be sacred shrines, symbols of prosperity, or simply seats-are laden with powerful evocative meaning that subtly allude to one another. As symbols embodying abstract ideas concerning the ancestors and the kingship, they condense. In Asante beliefs and social

realities, what one sees in a tiny concrete representation of a vast invisible world. All of them partake of the secret in that they involve rationed, controlled disclosure, not free access.

Ordinary stools (*nkondwa*) are used by common and the king. Chiefs' stools tend to be large; women's stools are smaller than men's; and a spirit-medium stool is covered with white Kaolin. Another means of differentiation is the middle, or 'neck' which is carved in many patterns. An elder always sits on his own stool. In the evening, stools are tilted on their side prevent wandering spirits and ancestors from using them. Ceremonial stools are distinguished by their shape and symbolic design, such as the "knot of wisdom" motif (*nyansapo*) which signifies the chief's promise to his people, on his accession, but bind the kingdom together through prudent administration (Kyerematen, 1964).

In Asante today, local people still identify strongly with their traditional leaders. "Many chiefs enstooled in recent years are university graduates with prerogative ideas of community self-help. Continuity with earlier traditions and values thus constantly interests with change and innovation. There are many rites in connection with stool carving in Asante because wood is used for a variety of veneration objects, the creation of which is an extremely sacred act. Thus, a chief's stool begins life with a power and libation to appease the spirit of the tree before felling and to bless the carvers stool. Additionally, before beginning work, that woodcarver undergoes some kind of ritual cleansing, refraining from all pleasure, and then devotes himself to his work in seclusion (Chase 1971).

Deprived of its natural home, the soul of the tree will henceforth reside in the stool, and rites must also be performed upon completion of the stool, with an animal sacrifice. The wood of choice in Asante is called *O sese* (Funtumin Africana Species, from the

family Aporynace); its common name is “false rubber tree” because it produces a sticky latex resin. It is a soft, white wood that is durable, light and portable and grows throughout West Africa (Kyerematen, 1964).

Asante revere a divine stool called *Sika Dwa Kofi*, “the Golden Stool that was born on a Friday” (Ross and Cole, 1977). They believe it embodies the soul and destiny of the Asante Kingdom and, as such, it is a symbol of the people rather than their ruler. Regarded as a living being and treated with awe, the stool has its own throne, *Hwedomtea*, its own set of regalia, its own bodyguard, and attendants to feed it and clothe it with ornaments. No one sits on the golden stools; it would be an affront to place one’s backside on the destiny of the people. During Ghana’s colonial period, *Sika Dwa Kofi* was the major cause of the last armed conflict between the Asante and the British in 1900 when the governor, Sir Frederick Hodgson, demanded to sit on the Golden Stool, thereby precipitating bloody retaliation and a bitter war (Kyerematen, 1964).

A chief’s personal stool is more than royal insignia; it houses his spirit in this world and the next, and must be preserved after the death of its owner. Thus, through the medium of the stool, a deceased ruler can keep in touch with his subjects and continue to provide counsel and protect the community in the afterlife as he did on Earth. A chief’s stool therefore functions as a shrine for the soul, memorial to the ancestors and a vehicle of communication.

Not all Ghanaians share the Asante belief that stools house the spirits of the dead. Among some Guan tribes: The royal objects recorded “life force” from their owners. They died when their owners died. At the death of the stool’s royal master, it could go with him into the grave or be exposed to the tropical elements to hasten its decay.

#### **4.12 Summary of Discussion**

This chapter discussed the importance and functions of stools held for all categories of people in the Asante traditional area. It also talked about some of the rites performed on stools in the Asante traditional area and other ethnic groups and the reasons why these rites are performed.

It also discussed the various categories and forms of stools in Asante. The stools help in the organization of maintaining peace and order in the Asante traditional set ups; politically, socially, medically, morally, religiously, economically and communicatively.

Without these stool forms there would not have been much to say or it may be said that much attention is not given to the stools as done in other ethnic groups. The relative security and viability of Asante kingship and chieftaincy today have come about because of the symbolic and ideological role of sacred stools. Through ceremonies and festivals (eg. Aday, Odwira, Durbars, etc), the symbolism of the stool has contributed towards the consolidation of the otherwise weakening position of the chief and the enhancement of chieftaincy as a moral force in local communities throughout Asante, (Cohen, 1976). Stools in Asante culture have won their place among the great art traditions of Asante and Ghana. This is evident through their widespread use in a number of cultural activities. But to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no serious attempts seem to have so far and widely been made to consider these artefacts in terms of their functions and importance. Among the people of Asante, the stool paraphernalia have varied functions discussed in the body of the text. The researcher is aware that several writers have come out with ideas in various books which in varied ways have contributed to the success of this thesis, (Osei, 2002) has provided a historical account of the origin of Asante stools which have become power and seat of authority in Asante. This account seems to be confirmed by (Rattray, 1959).

The stool is a sacred object when, in association with prestigious person, it is used in ancestor veneration; through it, people establish and maintain contact with the ancestors, whose aim is the successful functioning of society. The stool is a political symbol. The chief is the crucial political unit in Asante society: he is the decision marker, and is regarded as a descendant of the founding ancestor of his office. He may also be the symbol of clan or lineage unity and continuity. Every chief has one or more stools which he uses to identify and legitimate his rank. In Asante, stools are august emblems of political, judicial and social leadership - “the most important of the chief’s regalia and the sine qua non of his high office” (Kyerematen, 1964).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Summary**

The Asante are highly religious people who link every facet of life with God, ancestors, deities and divinities as being their “guiding angel”. They attribute every fortune and misfortune to the influence of God, ancestors and the gods. This belief is strongly showcased in their paraphernalia, which are art forms, discussed in chapter four. The strong belief explains why security and the general desire for protection are paramount in Asante life.

The philosophies regarding Asante stools, explain not only the spiritual significance but also every aspect of their life, every part of their object has a purpose, deep meaning and communicates in no uncertain terms, the status, role and powers of the chief. The entire stool of Asante, the role-played in the traditional set-up, influences the socio-

cultural environment as well as its political neighbours, to a greater extent, essentially entrenched cultural heritage.

A chief stools are not automatically transferable to the next inheritor of the reigns. The spiritual bond between the person and the stools discourage the inheritance of such stool(s). However, some of these stools are occasionally observed as the living spirit of the departed soul. That is why Asantes selects, of all things, the stools of their royal ancestors for consecration and preservation. The privilege of blackening one's stool is not granted to every dead chief or queen mother without conditions. The honour is merited only on the fulfilment of certain conditions on the part of the occupant of a stool. The blackening of a king's stool is regarded as the greatest honour that could be conferred on a ruler; thus in many Asante towns only the stools of kings who proved to be true leaders are blackened. This brings to mind the traditional museums of Asante where valuable things are kept as a cultural heritage. This is to educate posterity on their right to participate and define their stake in the kingdom. Relics are also kept as a pride of Asante royal family's contribution to the sustenance of the entire royal set-up of the kingdom. The above reasons of individual royal family keeping paraphernalia to themselves stem from the fact that property acquisition of the chiefs is personal. The traditional system of museum, stores, preserve and shows of wealth of the royal clan to only the royal and a section of the people of the kingdom without a fee which is in contrast to the western museum system, which is open to tourists and other travellers for a fee. This culture of Asante has been well adopted by the Asante people, probably in a modified manner.

From the point of view of the sex of the person who may possess certain types of stools, we categorize them into men's stool, women's stool (generally presented by a new bridegroom to his bride), and mixed stools, used by persons of both sexes. The social

status of the person who use stools for official purposes, affords still a third division of stools. We have the *ahennwa* “chief’s stool”, the *ahemmaadwa* “queen’s stool” and the *adammadwa* (literally the “two-penny stool”, i.e. the poor man’s stool). Priests have their social stools with single centre supports, and so have certain attendants at the chief’s house, e.g. the padlock stool is used by the chief’s spokesman.

A further division of stools is provided by the names given to them. There are special types of stools which more or less serves as the patterns for the carver. There may be slight modifications or elaborations on the set and acknowledge types, but these latter are so varied that to invent a completely original model would require a prodigy of a craftsman to do. Rattray (1959) has enumerated some 31 of these types; but they are certainly not comprehensive of the types as he himself admits, “These may not exhaust all designs known in Asante stools, but they are sufficient to show their graceful lines, and the technique and beauty of their designs”.

Suffice it to make mention of five of these stool models; The Porcupine stool upon which sit the members of the chief’s council; the Moon stool, used by ordinary people of either sex; the Draught-board stool, the Amulet stool and the Leopard stool. Every Asante person can possess a stool, irrespective of his sex, age, position in society, economic situation and marital ties. Many parents are wont to buy little stools for their small children. In fact, any self-respecting person has several stools in his house so as to be able to provide seating facilities for visitors. For it is not everybody who may buy any stool. Rattray (1959) observes that “many of the stools shown here were the ‘copyright’ of the Asante king, and might not, on any account, be sold in the open market”.

The unique authentic golden stool, of course, belongs to the King of Asante. He alone may possess the Elephant stool (*Esonodwa*) and the Leopard stool (*Osebodwa*). The circular Rainbow stool (*Kontonkurowidwa*) was once used by him alone. As an act

of honour, in the past, he received other stools which he gave out as presents to chiefs whose services pleased him. Those who own silver stools are the queen mother of Asante and the paramount chief of Mampong State. The latter is the chief who takes over the traditional administration of the nation during the king's absence or when he is indisposed, and presides over the national council of chiefs. The chief of Techiman too has a silver stool which he uses on special and specified occasions. The cross stool (*mmaramadwa*) is used only by the king of Asante and the greater *amanhene* (paramount of state chiefs), with his permission. The Porcupine stool (*kotokodwa*), is for the king and his council. A sub-chief uses a *mmamdwa* (is stool with two side supports). The shrines of the gods rest on the crocodile stool (*denkyemdwa*) during public performances. Priests use the *sakyi-dwa-korodwa* (the stool with only a single central support).

Apart from the women's stool, those of the fair sex utilize also the *me-fa-ase-a-dwa* "my-half-is-finished stool", i.e. half of my family is dead. But, like the *owo-foro-adobe-dwa* "snake-climbs-the raffia-tree stool", the Moon stool (*osram dwa*) and *mframa-dan-dwa* "House-of-the-wind stool" may be used by both men and women. This shows that – in the past at least – the Asante were particular about the use of their stools. As regards silver stools, many more chiefs are rumoured to possess them than I have mentioned, or are in a position to know about, for those who possess them do their best to conceal the fact for fear of being severely reprimanded for going beyond their rightful limits. Perhaps it ought also to be pointed out that the rigidity with which the Asante once regarded the question as to who should possess what stool, has these days given way to a great deal of elasticity, especially in regard to the distinction between men's and women's stools. Nobody would make any fuss about what sort of stool is offered him to sit on. We ought to explain too that it was inferior who were restricted in the right to possess stools designated to or appropriated by superiors and not vice versa. A chief could acquire any

stool his subjects were allowed to have. The king of Asante could have any stool he chooses to have. For this reason it is in royal circles that one encounters a whole array of stools.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

The study of Asante stools has revealed not only beliefs affecting Asante behaviour and choice of living strategies but the thinking of the people which directly affects how stools function in chieftaincy. This means, strong connections exist between the spirits, soul, body and the stool. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that stools reflect one's thoughts, behaviour, status and wealth. It may also suggest how responsible or irresponsible one may be.

Cultural beliefs, values and customs change over time because of fashion, taste, education, entertainment and trade. These influential elements of culture transfer technology, assimilation of other cultures as the need may be. The wide use of modern umbrellas and thrones for instance, demonstrates that culture is dynamic and it changes, as it shares its components and that of other values. Arguably, there is no culture in perfectly pure state, once it has contacted and exchanged an idea of a sort.

Art as an element of culture is transformed or modified with the introduction of new materials and technology that it finds suitable and adaptable. For instance, the architecture of Ghana has gone through several transformations that is extremely difficult to see pure traditional cities. To Asante the basic needs are religious, security, health, food, shelter and clothing, which are linked to the supernatural, considered in every facet of their life as a people as demonstrated by their stools.

- Asante's stools reveal not only beliefs affecting Asante's behaviour but also symbolize power and authority in chieftaincy.
- The assimilation of foreign culture has brought about changes in the stools design which tend to take away the cultural identity of the people.
- Although the stools are predominantly carved for the royalty, it also engenders income to the artist.
- Asante's stools are the most significant artifact in the people's culture and without them the chieftaincy system may not achieve its main objective.
- The Asantes venerate and offer sacrifice to their ancestors because their ancestors are believed to be able to help their tribe in time of war and are therefore invoked during battles.
- The ancestral stools are besought for benefits, albeit with fear and trembling. They are regarded as the proprietor of the land and as elders of the community.
- The ancestors are believed to fertilize the earth and promote the growth of crops.
- The periodic feeding of the ancestral stools gives life to the stools and keeps the memory of the illustrious chiefs, whose noble deeds constitute minds of the people. The stools are made black because it helps to preserve the beauty of the stools. The stools are sacrificed with blood, fat and meat are offered to the stools. So the stools if left in their natural colour, they would be stained and become dirty with regular sacrifices. Danquah (1945) suggested that the stools are blackened to prevent them from decomposition.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

In view of discussions in the research report, the following recommendations were arrived at. It is strongly recommended that:

- There should be transparency in the succession plan for stools in all traditional areas so that no royal lineage is sidelined. This would help to avoid a lot of litigations in the society.
- Funds should be made available by Government to enable the museums and traditional councils' staff to buy artefact, inventory books, registers, preservatives that will upgrade documentations of artefacts in museums in Asante.
- Research staff should be motivated to travel and collect a number of stools and information periodically for continuity and growth of the museums and traditional councils.
- Specialists in various subject areas should have a hand in the documentation process so as to use the right technical terms, vocabulary and appropriate descriptions for the artefact. (Stools).
- For a short term measure, CRDD should adopt a proposed handbook of stools contained in this research report and review it for use as an introduction to SHS Art to serve as a stop gap measure.
- In the medium term measure professionals and teachers of the course should be encouraged and supported to write and develop the students' part of the Art forms syllabus to be further reviewed and compiled by CRDD into a course book. This should be made in large quantities and easily accessible to all teachers and students of the course.
- As a long term measure, experts in curriculum development, professionals and teachers of Art should be put together to totally review the course syllabus and to write a well researched Ghanaian based textbook for students at all levels of Art. These recommendations should be spearheaded by CRDD under GES and Ministry of Education in Collaboration with WAEC.

- Although the modern stools are of stupendous artistic designs, features portraying the cultural heritage of the Asante should be vividly seen.
- Asantes should be cautious in adopting foreign cultures, since it can have adverse effect on their rich culture.
- With the advent of foreign cultures, Asante culture should be inculcated in the upbringing of the youth so as to appreciate indigenous cultural practices and acceptable behaviours.

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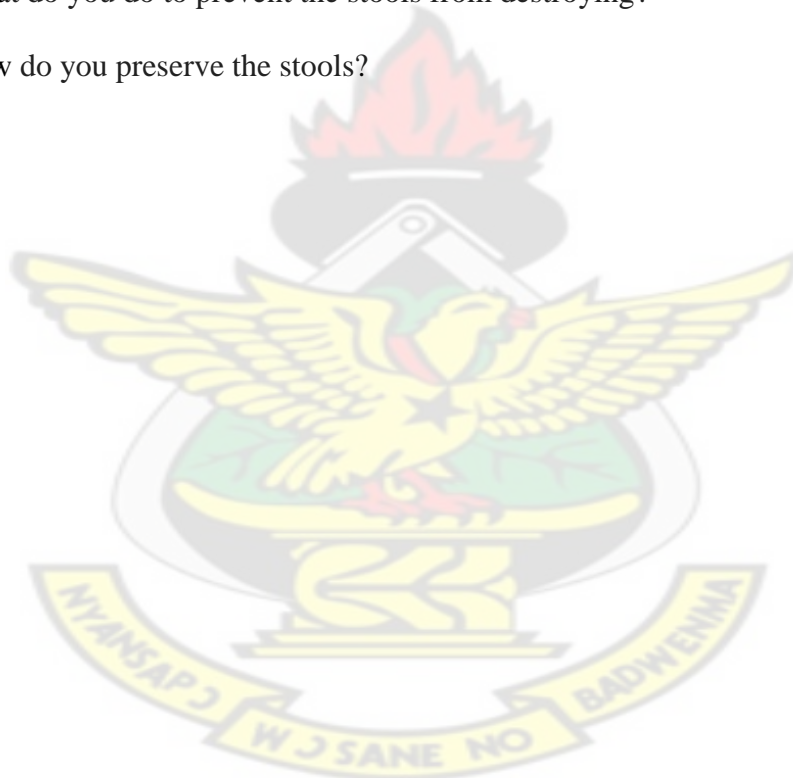


## APPENDIX I

Interview guide for the chief's spokesperson of the palace

1. What type of stools do you have here?
2. What are the themes of the stools here?
3. What are the stools stand for?

4. What do the stools symbolize?
5. Where were the source of those stools?
6. Who carved the stools?
7. How old are the stools?
8. Who owns the stools?
9. Who commissioned who to carve stools?
10. Where can we find similar stools?
11. Where are the stools kept?
12. What do you do to prevent the stools from destroying?
13. How do you preserve the stools?



## APPENDIX II

### Interview Guide for the clan head of the palace

1. Are all the stools accorded the same respect and dignity?
2. Why some stools are regarded as more important than others?
3. Who takes care of the stools?
4. Where can these stools be found?

5. If some of the stools get destroyed what do you do to them?
6. Why are some stools lying on their side?
7. Why are some stools big and others small?
8. Is the Golden Stool a real gold?
9. Is the Silver Stool also made of real silver?
10. Why is that women are not involved in stool carving?
11. Why some stools are called Mmaa-Adwa?
12. Why some stools are also called Mmarima Adwa?
13. Why some stools are called Aman Adwa?



### APPENDIX III

#### Interview Guide for the curators

1. Are you actively involved in the cleaning and safe keeping of stools?
2. Does someone guide you on how to deal with stools in the palaces?
3. Are you allowed to enter the stool room?
4. Do you handle the stools?
5. What role do you play when a group of visitors visit the palace?
6. Do you attend workshops and seminars periodically?

7. How many stools do you have in the Museum or palace?
8. What are the uses of the stools?
9. Name the types of stools you have in the Museum or palace.
10. What function does each stool perform?
11. Are the stools expose to the public
12. Do you carve new stools?
13. How many stools are still in use?



## APPENDIX IV

### Observation Checklist

1. Acquisition and accession method or the method by which the stool entered the stool room or come to the public.
2. Acquisition and accession data
3. Acquisition source – that is name of the previous owner (person or institution) from whom object was acquired
4. Permanent location of stools – either inside or outside the palace where the stool is normally located.
5. Showcase or store room or gallery
6. Stool description in terms of physical characteristics.
7. The function of the stool
8. An evaluation of the physical condition of the stools.
9. Materials for carving and decoration
10. Examination of the design of the stools
11. Readings on the stools from recordings and books.