

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Historical background of Asantes

Asantes have a wealth of funerary arts which portrays certain beliefs in connection with the dead. These people constitute a well-known segment of the people who live in central Ghana one of the coastal countries of the west territory on the African continent.

West Africa lies south of the Sahara Desert, from Dakar in Senegal to the Guinea Coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Facing the Gulf of Guinea of the Atlantic Ocean on the South, Ghana is bordered by Cote d'Ivoire on the west, Burkina Faso on the north-west and north, and Togo on the east.

The modern state of Ghana is named after the ancient Ghana Empire that flourished until the eleventh century in the Western Sudan. The centre of ancient Ghana lay about eight hundred (800) Kilometres northwest of modern Ghana. The Akan people who inhabit most of the forest and coastland of modern Ghana founded their first states about the thirteenth century. Until 6th March, 1957, Ghana was then called the Gold Coast. The country is divided into ten regions of which Ashanti is one. It occupies a central position within the state of Ghana. Most Asantes live in the Ashanti Region which comprises the metropolitan districts of the former independent Ashanti State. Other Asantes can be found in the Eastern and Brong – Ahafo Regions of Ghana.

Asantes speak the Twi language of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family of African languages and constitute a section of the Akan people who are ethnolinguistic grouping of the peoples of the Guinea Coast. Akan include speakers of Akyem, Anyi, Attie, Baule, Bono, Fanti, Akuapem, Nzema, and Guan languages. Most of the Akans who live in Ghana settled

in successive waves of migration while others inhabit the eastern part of Cote d'Ivoire and Togo. Expanding empires and states in the grassland areas of the Sudan to the north forced certain groups to migrate into the forest region where they met more ancient inhabitants. Migrating Southwards, Akans grouped into seven clans namely *Asona, Agona, Aduana, Jyoko, Bretuo, {kuona and Asakyiri}*. They then built Kingdoms such as Bona and Kumbulu in present day Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso respectively. During the second Muslim invasion of the grassland areas, the clans scattered and migrated further south to found settlements in the forest regions. Gradually, the Aduana clan as well as others converged into a promising township at Asantemanso. According to oral history, the Asante emerged out of *Bohy[mmo]so*, a sacred cave at the sacred grove of Asantemanso near Asumingya.

It is known that the Asante Empire began when a small cluster of related, small states started to organise a confederacy, some were incorporated by conquest and others by voluntary agreement. At the peak of its power, the Asante Empire occupied what is now called Ghana, extending from the Konoē River in the west to the Togo mountains in the east and was very active in the slave trade during the eighteenth century. The crimes of the confederacy threatened both the smaller states and the Europeans all the way south to the Atlantic Ocean and only the presence of the British military with its African mercenaries and colonial subjects, prevented the confederacy from becoming an even more powerful West African empire.

In their struggle against the suzerain state of Denkyera and other lesser neighbouring states, the Asante made little headway until the ascension of Osei Tutu I who, after crushing all

opposition, was installed an *Asantehene* or King of the new Asante state with the capital named Kumasi. His authority was symbolized in the Golden Stool which was reputed to have descended from the sky through the magical feats of *Yankpɔn Ankye* and to which all the chiefs acknowledged allegiance.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Asante supplied slaves to the British and Dutch slave traders on the coast in return for fire arms with which to enforce their territorial expansion. After the death of Osei Tutu I, a period of internal chaos and factional strife ended with the ascension of Opoku Ware I under whom Asante reached its fullest extent. Kings Osei Kwadwo, Osei Kwame and Osei Bonsu established a strong and elaborate centralized state with hierarchical and efficient bureaucracy which ensured an effective system of communication.

In 1807, the same year Great Britain outlawed the slave trade, Osei Bonsu occupied the Southern Fanti territory which was an enclave around British headquarters at Cape Coast. Disputes over the Fanti region coupled with declining trade relations caused friction over the following decade and this led to warfare in the 1820s. Asantes defeated a British force in 1824 but made peace in 1831 and avoided conflicts for about the next thirty years. Under King Kwaku Dua, the Asante again challenged the British in 1863 by sending forces to occupy the coastal provinces. The British took possession of Elmina, over which Asante claimed jurisdiction in 1869 and in 1874 marched on Kumasi in an expeditionary force under Sir Garnet Wolseley who managed to occupy the Asante capital for one day. Even though the invasion lasted a day, Asantes were shocked to realize the weak nature of their military and

communications network. As a result, numerous secessionist revolts were sparked off in the Northern provinces. The old southern provinces were formally constituted the Gold Coast Colony by the British later in 1874.

In the same year, 1874, Kofi Karikari, the Asante King by then, was deposed and Mensa Bonsu assumed power. He attempted to adapt the agencies of Asante government to change the situation. Though he organized the army and even appointed some Europeans to senior positions, and increased resources, he was prevented from restoring Asante imperial power by the British political agents, who supported the northern secessionist chiefs and the opponents of the central government in Kumasi. The empire continued to decline under his successor, Prempeh I who acceded in 1888.

Finally, in 1898, the British captured Kumasi, deposed and exiled the *Asantehene* to the Seychelles islands. They were also able to overcome a subsequent rebellion popularly referred to as the Yaa Asantewaa war in 1900 and on January 1, 1902 declared the land to be a colony of the crown. On the same day the former northern provinces were separately constituted the protectorate of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. An Asante Confederacy Council was established under British rule in the 1930s and the Asantehene was restored as a Figurehead Sovereign. In the midst of European intrusions till the early decades of the 20th century, the Asante nation has proudly preserved many cultural practices in their authentic form.

It must however be pointed out that though Asante exists today as a Kingdom, it is not an island with complete autonomy. It forms part of a greater society called Akan, as indicated

earlier. Among the Akan, the Adanse people, who now form part of Asante, were the first to establish a Kingdom and governed most of the Akan states, (Osei Kwadwo, 2002). This Kingdom rose to its peak during the reign of their King Awurade Basa. This however was toppled by the stronger Kingdom of Denkyera. There is a school of thought about the name 'Asante'. It holds that the Denkyeras ruled with iron hands which prompted the Asante to come together to form a much stronger union with the sole aim of fighting the enemy (the Denkyera Kingdom). Oral tradition maintains that people of those days referred to the union as *sa nti fo* (Because of war) and this became the collective name of the states which unified to fight against the tyranny of their over lord. Over time, the name was corrupted to *Asantefo*.

Kumasi, the capital city of the Asante Nation was formally known as Kwaman. This was sited at the area occupied by the present ministries block, the post office, prisons, Adum stretching to the *}k]mfo An]kye Hospital*. Oral tradition asserts that Nana Oti Ak[nt[n who was of the *}yoko* clan and nephew of Twum and Antwi, the rulers of *}yoko* clan at Asumegya travelled to Kwaman and met Nana Kobia Amamfi who was the ruler at the time. Nana Kobia Amamfi introduced himself to Oti Ak[nt[n that he was of the *}yoko* clan and Oti Ak[nt[n also of *}yoko* clan accepted him as his uncle.

Oti Ak[nt[n returned to Asumegya and informed his people that he had met an uncle therefore he migrated to Kwaman and settled with the Uncle Kobia Amamfi. When Kobia Amamfi died, Oti Ak[nt[n became the chief of Kwaman. Other chiefs of the area like Akosa Yiadom rejected the legitimacy of Oti Ak[nt[n and that resulted into a war. These chiefs were

defeated by Oti Akenten. Therefore, he established himself as a powerful chief, who was later succeeded by Obiri Yeboa. The name Kwaman remained until the reign of Nana Osei Tutu I when it was changed to Kumase to become the political name of Kwaman.

After overcoming series of challenges, Kumasi, with its rich culture and splendour, became the seat of the *Asantehene*. The architectural outlook of Kumasi has undergone tremendous changes. Initially, two types of houses imposed themselves on the town: those for nobles and the rich while there were others for the poor. All these were built with a mixture of thin sticks woven over thicker poles and plastered with red clay and swish to form the walls. The roofs were thatched with well prepared palm branches. Houses for the nobles and the rich were large with open verandahs which opened into the street in front. The forces of urbanization have made the city a metropolis embracing people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Transforming into a metropolis brought along adulteration of funeral rites and their associated art forms in Kumasi. Hitherto, when an Asante fell ill, and the sickness did not yield to the ordinary household remedies, which, in most cases, was magic characterised by the use of artifacts such as stringed cowry shells and amulets; and since this practice involved divination with the diviner sat on a woven mat in a posture reminiscent of a Muslim in a prayer mood with accompanying verbal art, it then became necessary to call in a doctor. This may be a general practitioner or a specialist. The Asante word for the former *Sumani* (*Sumankwaafo*] for plural), or sometimes *Oduruy[fo]*, and for the latter *Bonsam Komfo*].

The services of a medicine-man and of a witch-doctor and the propitiation of ancestral spirits and offerings to the gods all having proved equally unavailing, and death about to claim the

victim, the watchers by the death-bed are expected, at the moment the soul leaves the body, to pour a little water down the throat of the dying person, followed by this verbal art:

Asumasi, b[gye nsuo yi nom  
Worek] yi [mma asem biara mma ha  
Na ma mmaa a w]w] fie ha nyinaa nwo mma.

An Asante lives in dread of ‘passing over’ without someone to perform this last pious rite, and it is considered a disgrace to relatives to have omitted to do so. This is the reason why an old Asante of any standing will seldom set out, even on a very short journey, unless accompanied by a child or an attendant, who would be ready to perform this duty should death overtake him. Asantes declare that in order to reach *Asamando* (place of ghosts), ‘a steep hill must be climbed’. They see the dying person panting for breath, and think of his soul struggling up some steep incline, and this draught of water is to speed him or her on the ‘journey’.

The corpse is then set for various forms art. Preparations are made for washing the body. This is done with extremely hot water, a new sponge and a new towel. Custom demands that the chief of the traditional area must be informed immediately before any mourner could commence the funeral wail which was dominated by dirges. The washing and dressing of the corpse were done by a group of elderly woman for a fee, usually a wine. Rum was often poured down the throat, apparently to delay the process of decomposition. A small quantity of the rum is also poured on the ground for the spirit. Various forms of ‘ghost’ or ‘soul’ money (*saman sika* or *kra sika*), in the form of ornaments, are bound round the wrists of corpse. Gold dust was often put into its ears and into the hollow above the zygomatic arch, known as *sika gu ber[*. Gold dust was also bound up in a small packet and tied to the loin cloth; hair was sometimes placed in the mouth. The body, dressed in its best cloth and

adorned, in addition to the 'soul money', with every available gold ornament, was laid on its left side generally with the hands folded against the cheeks, and sometimes with a handkerchief between them to wipe off the sweat that would come upon them in climbing the hill. The blood relations, as well as other mourners, then subject themselves to various forms of art as will be seen in the next chapter of this thesis.

## 1.2 Ethnographic background of Asantes

Asantes are indigenously agriculturalist in spite of the fact that some of them now live in urban centres. Some of the agricultural ventures are the production of crops like yam, plantain, banana, cassava, cocoyam, maize, oil palm, ginger, and rice for local markets, cocoa, coffee and cola nuts for export. They also engage in animal husbandry on a relatively small scale rearing animals such as goats, fowls and sheep. Besides agriculture, Asantes can boast of timber, gold and bauxite dotted at various towns. Apart from Kumasi and a handful of other big towns, most of the people live in small rural settlements.

The environment exerts so much influence on the type of art people produce. In the olden days, tools were constructed of stone, wood or iron and clothing consisted of beaten bark or woven raffia. Regular orderly markets conducted the sale of surplus products where cowry shells, gold dust and salt were used as medium of exchange. Skilful wood carvers, weavers and metal workers in gold, iron and later brass and bronze, created artistic pieces for utilitarian, decorative or religious and magical purposes.

Although most men failed to achieve the ideal, polygamy was universally desired and firmly established codes regulated relationships between the sexes and their families. Several

communities were linked by marriage or by kinship. Rulers were usually selected from royal families and they functioned to maintain social order. The basis of Asante social organization is the matrilineage which is centred primarily on the extended family – a local segment of a clan whose members claim descent from a common ancestress – as well as the local community. Members of the lineage assisted one another in such activities as building houses, farming, clearing paths and funeral rites. It appears that due to modern trends, such assistance has been confined to the latter activity which has been maintained over the years.

Since Asantes believe that every individual is made up of four basic elements – body, soul; blood from the mother and spirit from the father – paternal descent is also recognized and governs membership in exogamous '*ntor*]' divisions that are associated with certain religious and moral obligations. The head of the lineage is chosen by its senior men and women but females are prohibited from holding this position because of menstrual taboos that forbid contact with sacred objects. The head of the lineage is responsible for internal peace and relations with other lineages. Besides, he is the custodian of lineage stools, which embody the spirits of ancestors, as well as acting as the mediator between the lineage's living and dead members. Every important lineage head also has a stool as a symbol of office. The village chief is chosen from a particular lineage which differs from village to village. The main task of the chief, with the advice of his council of elders, is to settle disputes within the community. An act that warrants removal from office is when a chief takes a unilateral decision on an important communal matter; this is seen in Asante as gross disrespect for the authority the chief himself holds.

In the traditional Asante state, towns are grouped into territorial divisions with the chief of the capital town as the paramount chief, and his village council serves as the division's council. At the summit of the confederacy stands the King, the Asantehene. As said earlier, the Golden Stool, believed to be miraculously created and delivered by the gods and ancestors, is the emblem of the King's authority, the evidence of his unique, sacred ordination. At his side stands the Asanteman council comprising the paramount chiefs of the member states of the confederacy, who are near equals to the Asantehene in the direction of Asantes' affairs. With their designated subordinates, each represents his state in the central government while simultaneously holding a position of chiefly power, parallel to that of the Asantehene in his own state.

The paramount chiefs govern with councils consisting of the appropriate representatives of districts within their states, and district chiefs similarly serve their smaller areas with councils composed of town or village chiefs. The town or village head, *Odikro*, serves as a leader in steady consultation with a council made up of the heads of the families, *abusuapanin*, and resident in the community. On each level of hierarchy, the chief is selected among the *members* of the one traditionally designated as a royal family, but choice from this number of eligible persons requires the approval of the constituent commoner groups and a 'bad' selection could be deposed by popular demand.

The queen mother is instrumental in the choice of the chief by nominating candidates to fill a vacant chief's stool. She also advises the chief about his conduct and is regarded as the authority on Kingship relations of the lineage. The chief's primary duties were religious and

military, but in modern times, the position has become increasingly secular, involving the provision of economic, administrative and social services to the community.

At the zenith of its might, lavished courtly dress, etiquette and rituals glorified the chiefs at successive hierarchical levels. Court systems complete with “chief judges” (the chiefs themselves), “lawyers” (linguists and other elders), and formalized legal codes set down in precedents and remembered in proverbs, were used to dispense justice. There were tax systems to collect wealth from tax payers, especially the vassal states, and semi-permanent military organizations were used to extend the boundaries of the state and maintain order.

The influence of the various arts in all spheres of Asante life has maintained its hold probably due to the special attention they are given. The arts flourished and specialists in many crafts created articles of trade for sale over wide areas. As a contribution to the state treasures and the military power necessary for supporting such an empire, was the slave trade with the Europeans, who eagerly exchanged guns and other materials of a higher standard of living for human labourers.

In traditional Asante, a clear distinction is made between the royalty and commoners. Outside the class confines were the slaves, enemies or prisoners of war. As participants in the affairs of men, the ancestors who are the founders of their respective communities, real or mythical, remembered or imaginatively reconstructed, are given a special recognition as seen in Asante art, ritual and religion. The ancestors form a central theological and ritual core although augmented by beliefs in gods who also have a hand in maintaining a proper

relationship between men and their universe. Ancestors and gods provide a sufficient basis for behaviour and fearsome punishments are meted out for being antisocial. They also provide the basis for the development of specially skilful and professional workers in religion and magic who apply their revealed knowledge to the cure of people's illnesses and solving their problems and to reducing the dangers of natural phenomena.

One important feature of Asante ethnography which probably has resisted the impact of westernisation is inheritance. It is believed that every individual is made up of two elements, *mogya* (blood) of the mother and *sunsum* or *ntor*] (spirit) of the father. As it is believed that the biological link between one generation and another is provided by the blood transmitted through the mother, Asantes trace the physical descent through the female line. One is a member of one's mother's matrilineage. This consists of all the descendants of both sexes who trace their genealogy through women to a common ancestress. An individual's succession to office or inheritance of property, rights and obligations are dependent on being a member of that group.

In addition to inheriting the mother's blood, an individual is believed to receive a *sunsum* and *kra*. The latter is a life principle which, in addition to destiny, is given by God to a man when he is about to be born. This *Kra*, which is supposed to be indestructible, returns to God the creator when the individual dies (Rattray 1954: 153). It is best rendered as "soul" and used only by human beings. The *Kra* is believed to exist before the birth of an individual and may be the soul or spirit of a relation or other person already dead. In life, it is considered partly as the soul or spirit of a person and partly as a separate being distinct from the person. It is believed to protect the individual, gives him good or bad advice, causes his undertakings to

prosper or neglects him and therefore, in case of prosperity, it should be given thanks offerings. It is a common belief in Asante that when it is certain that death has come to lay its icy hands on a person, the *Kra* leaves him gradually before he breathes his last.

The *Sunsum* is directly transmitted by the father to his child. It is what is thought to mould the child's individual personality and character. It is believed that the child cannot prosper without the father's *Sunsum*. In some cases, it is also referred to as *honhom*. Two other words that call for attention are *saman* and *sasa*. The word *Saman* (ghost or apparition) is never applied to a living person or to anything inherent in a living person. It is objective and is the form which the dead are sometimes seen to take when they appear visible on earth and also at *Asamando* (place or abode of ghosts).

*Sasa* is also used in connection with the dead but not confined to human beings. It is an invisible spiritual power of a person or animal which disturbs the mind of the living or works a spell or mischief upon them so that they suffer in various ways. Its action is mainly seen among persons who are always taking life such as executioners, hunters, butchers and those who cut down great forest trees. Such persons have to be particularly careful to guard against *sasa* influence. It is seen as the bad, revengeful element in spirit which must at all cost be rendered harmless. It appears that funeral rites are really placating, appeasing and the final speeding of a soul which may contain this very dangerous element in its composition.

In a nutshell, Asantes are probably one of the first groups of Akans to settle in central Ghana within the forest zone. The presence of natural resources and the conducive environment attracted northern migrants who came to trade and settle among the Asante. The result was a

heterogeneous population, especially in Kumasi where northern settlers have exerted some level of influence. This notwithstanding, Asantes have preserved their culture, even though one can observe some traces of external influence in some cases. In their quest for territorial expansion through wars as well as contact with outsiders resulting from trade, Asantes borrowed artistic traditions from other groups in the process, a phenomenon which appears to be taking place even today. This probably explains why the Akan culture has become invariably similar throughout the territory, the only difference being in dialect and the ceremonies of festivals.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

The culture of every society is one of its greatest assets and the basis of its development. It is the soul, spirit and life of that society. Culture portrays the real nature of the people and identifies them as a unique people. This irreplaceable trait of society is mainly expressed through art including that of funeral ceremonies. The pressure exerted on indigenous Ghanaian culture by western ones has greatly undermined the former in almost every dimension, including funeral ceremonies. This development has brought about marked changes in certain funeral practices and the arts that go with them. This is evident in the seeming lack of appreciation for certain traditional funeral practices culminating in the introduction and “wholesale” acceptance of foreign funerary arts on the altar of traditional ones. These have consequently left family members overburdened with debt. In the midst of this situation, two problems have been identified which call for scholarly attention.

Firstly, most people (in Kumasi) do not seem to know the role art plays in the various rites associated with funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. Secondly, funeral ceremonies in Kumasi have undergone acculturation to the detriment of indigenous Asante culture. The study therefore seeks to bring to the fore the role art plays in funerals as well as to discuss the extent of cultural modification in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

- How does art play a role in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi.
- To what extent have funeral ceremonies in Kumasi undergone acculturation?

#### 1.5 Objectives

The objective of this thesis is to study funeral ceremonies in Kumasi with the view to:

- a) examining the role art plays in them; and
- b) investigating the extent of acculturation therein; thereby
- c) discussing the possibility of revisiting the indigenous cultural funerary arts that are beneficial but have been replaced with foreign ones

#### 1.5 Delimitation

The scope of the thesis covers the following: the target population is the people of the Kumasi Metropolis, the concept and meanings of funerary arts, general accounts of the funeral ceremonies for dead Asante Kings and common people of different of categories between 1927 and 2010, the role of funerary arts in funeral ceremonies, how funerary arts have been acculturated in Kumasi and the result of the acculturation.

### 1.7 Limitations

Originally, the study was aimed at the entire Ashanti region but due to transportation and other logistic costs, it was reduced to the Kumasi Metropolis. While on the field, the researcher encountered problems such as financial difficulties, and primary and secondary data gathering constraints. Though the researcher encountered the above challenges, he was able to overcome them and thus did not affect the quality of the study.

### 1.8 Importance of the study

It seems some people are unaware of the important role the various art forms play in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. Besides, under the impact of modernity, many of the traditional funeral practices are responding to the forces of change, almost to the neglect of indigenous ones. It is against this background that the study aims at bringing to the knowledge of people the significant role art plays in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi so that their scope of artistic comprehension in funerals may go beyond aesthetics. Again, findings from the research may help to educate the general public on the effects of acculturation on funeral ceremonies in Kumasi and hence help to prevent cultural alienation in this regard. In addition, the outcome of the study may contribute to draw attention to the vast tourism potentials inherent in Asante traditional funeral ceremonies. The findings may also lend a helping hand to the Kumasi Traditional Council in coming out with measures aimed at reverting to those indigenous funeral practices that are culturally beneficial.

Furthermore, this study aims at contributing to measures which will help to cut down expenditure on funerals emanating from the ostentatious deployment of foreign artefacts, a

phenomenon that bothers the *Asantehene*, Osei Tutu II, who, on countless occasions, has made public statements to this effect. The results of the research are expected to be an important reference material for researchers in related fields, tourists, cultural policy formulators as well as anthropologists. Finally, it is hoped that the research will stimulate further enquiries into the area in order to suggest additional appropriate solutions to the problems identified above.

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### 1.9 Organisation of the chapters

Chapter one is made up of the historical background, ethnographic background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, delimitation, importance of study and the organisation of the chapters. Chapter two is the review of related literature. In chapter three, the researcher dealt with research methodology. The topics treated here include research design, qualitative research, research tools, study area and population and instrumentation. Others are observation, interview, and validation of instruments, administration of instruments, primary data, secondary data and data collection procedures. Chapter four consists of presentation and discussion of findings while chapter five comprises summary, conclusion and recommendations. There are also references and appendix with the references done in alphabetical order according to the names of the authors.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

## 2.1 Overview

In dealing with an area such as funerary art in literary circles, it is appropriate for one to review a selection of what some authors have written about the subject. In most of the literature on funerary art, the authors do not seem to make concerted efforts to artistic appraisal of the art forms; neither do they give comprehensive chronological sequence of the activities for full account of the ceremonies. The art objects used in funeral ceremonies most often do not receive in-depth description, and in most cases, references are made only to bits of such art forms.

## 2.2 Key concepts of art and funeral

It would be most appropriate to throw light on 'art' and 'funeral' in the context of this study. To the writer of this thesis, art is seen as "the work of man, human skill or the creation or expression of what is beautiful". One does not dispute the fact that philosophers do not agree on what is beautiful, the *Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English* defines it as, "A combination of qualities that give pleasure to the sense or to the moral sense of the intellect". Newton (1955) posits that, "Art is a human conception made manifest by the skilful use of a medium".

Funeral is the burial, burning or disposal of a dead body with the usual religious ceremonies. According to Rattray (1927), a funeral is a Rite of passage dominated by the theme or idea of separation. Among Akans, a person's *Abusua* (matrilineage) that was host by birth to the

individual *Kra*, is the body primarily responsible for the funeral of the individual-that is, for the send-off. The oldest female and male of the lineage are thus the key players. In the light of this study, therefore, all the human conceptions made manifest by the skilful use of media that give pleasure to the senses and are associated with the disposal of a dead person's body characterized by the usual religious ceremonies will closely be studied. All these man-made objects as well as actions which are discernible at any particular funeral may be termed funerary art. In this regard, this chapter will explore what others have expressed on environmental art such as painting, sculpture, architecture, graphic design, textiles, pottery, metal work and performing arts including drumming and dancing as well as artistic gestures that characterize libation pouring, verbal art involving singing, poetry recital and dirges. Also to be highlighted is body art comprising costume, ornamentation, coiffure and body painting.

The practice of burying the dead is as old as the culture of mankind and as culture passes through stages of development so its activities concerning burial, and the more sophisticated and diverse the use of art becomes. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, (1972, vol. 9) discoveries of burial grounds on ancient human habitat have exposed some stunning information about artefacts used in burying the dead. Burials have been partly or wholly conditioned by geographical, historical, philosophical, religious beliefs and cultural resources in relationship with the dead. Whatever conditions a burial practice, art exerts its influence. The universal practice of using artefacts or funerary art is in consonance with the belief in life after death which varies slightly in as many as there are beliefs. What seems clear from available literature is that art appears to permeate virtually all burial rites.

Concluding from what several authors have written, it is evident, among others, that the significance of the use of funerary artefacts is to: show respect and honour for the dead, symbolize the provision of a dwelling place the departed, be a means of pacification to prevent the soul of the dead from coming back, show the kind of life to be led after death, be a sign or symbol of religion, show the idea of rebirth; be a means of sustenance; assist in 'resurrection', protect the living from demons or dangers; ensure favourable verdict at the judgment of the dead, continue occupation such as hunting; save the living from the vengeance of the dead and see to the admission of the soul to the land of the dead.

The above imply that the dead would reciprocate such gesture to lead an honest, peaceful, exemplary life, continue his life as when living, as well as guarding the living and finally being accepted in the new world. In the light of this study, coupled with the various roles of funerary art outlined above, one may not be far from right to conclude that art goes beyond the physical.

### 2.3 Art and burial practices

Burial is in the form of rites, or customs, ceremonies or festivals within the socio-cultural as well as socio-religious set up of the society. One school of thought considers death customs as social mechanisms for adjustment and release of tension (Encyclopaedia Britannica, V.9, 1972). It asserts that the rituals with their underlying religious notion provide the most powerful means of reintegration of the group's shaken solidarity and the re-establishment of its morale.

Another school of thought points out that the ritual approach tends to build up tension and not merely provide release. Advocates of this notion contend that socially prescribed demonstration of grief might counteract the actual strength of the individual emotions such as wailing. Many writers such as Rattray (1927), Mbiti (1975), Opoku (1987), and Nketiah (1955) and believe that the real function of ritual is not to release emotion but to create and manifest them and thereby affirm basic values of society. For instance, a widow's wailing does not necessarily provide comfort but publicly reasserts the significance and value of the marital bond at the moment of its dissolution by death. Also, psychological factors such as guilt, desire for expiation, and fear show to what extent death customs, with their accompanying art forms, answer unconscious needs. A closer look at what authors like Forde and Jones (1950), Rattray (1927), Mbiti (1975) have written about the rites intended to assist the deceased in his life after death often implies the generally conceived intention of getting rid of him and to prevent his return either in body or as a ghost. Mbiti (1975:113) opines that in every African society people are very sensitive to what is done when there is a death in the family. Death marks a physical separation of the individual from other human beings. This is radical changes, and the funeral rites and ceremonies are intended to draw attention to that permanent separation. Meticulous care is taken to fulfil the funeral rites, and to avoid causing any offence of the departed. By so doing, the body is subjected to all forms of body art in many ways.

Among traditional Asantes, when everything pointed to the imminent death of a person, there would always be some relatives around and when his condition worsened, they would give him his last gulp of water to quench his death thirst. Right from the preparation of the corpse

to final funeral rites, art is employed. In the event of the death of a husband, the widow is expected to provide sponge, soap, towel, cloth, blanket, pillow and a long piece of cloth called '*Danta*' which was used in the olden days as underwear. These items are used for the bathing and lying in state of the dead husband. Ameyaw Benneh, 1999 (unpublished thesis) posits that:

Upon death the corpse may be washed, shrouded, dressed up, dyed or laid on the ground or in state with ritual objects or funerary artefacts near it.... Religious Obsequies may be observed at the house, at a place of worship or at the place of disposal with funerary arts. The actual disposal of the body may include the provision of the dead person's necessities such as amulets, food, weapons and treasures....

In Asante, depending on the status of the dead person, either killed or live human beings such as a man's (ruler's) wives and slaves 'accompany' him to serve him or they are symbolically represented by funerary artefacts such as paintings or sculptures.

Before the burial there is mourning which varies from different mourners and relatives. Some of the various ways in which this is expressed are funerary banquet, the wearing of distinctive colours, or special hairdo. Libation pouring and its associated artistic performance, offering, abstention from certain aspects of social life, purification and the like form part of mourning activities. Society at large also participates with the immediate mourners through response to graphic arts of obituaries, notices (a relatively modern trend), verbal arts of speeches, as well as visits and attendance at various ceremonies Hagan and Odotei(Ed.) 2001.

Burial practices, the first evident of religious ceremony, occurred as early as 120,000 years ago. (Microsoft student Encarta 2008). This article further states that the stimulus for

religious belief appears to be associated with a quest for meaning, with rites of passage as well as crises in life, and with humanity's reliance on nature for physical sustenance.

The mode of disposal of the body is usually dictated by cultural, religious, economic, political and social differences or factors. It may be determined by membership of a particular social group, totem or clan association, degree of initiation in a secret or ritual society, rank or status, ethno-social status like a criminal, hero, villain, and manner of death such as suicide or accident (Butt-Thompson 1929). It is no gainsaying that the above factors also determine the extent to which art is used. The bottom line, however, remains that funerary art permeates anything associated with death. Historically, the middle of the Paleolithic period is supposed to be the time when the first use of artefacts for funeral started and is still in use today. The use of artefacts greatly increased during the Upper Palaeolithic period and carried on to the Mesolithic period. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.9,1972:1014). Based on the arts associated with the methods of disposal of the dead, it would be ideal to make a passing comment on the six different methods identified by writers as inhumation, cave burial, cremation, preservation, water burial and cannibalism. Inhumation is one of the oldest methods of disposal. The corpse in contracted or extended position, is placed in immediate contact with the earth and protected by such funerary artefacts as mats, stone slabs, pottery jars or urns. Similar to inhumation is cave burial. Natural or man-made caves, burial chambers and shafts with side vaults hewn into the rock are known from prehistoric times. Such funerary arts as memorials, from a simple stone or a wooden board to magnificent mausoleums may be erected over the grave. According to Microsoft Student Encarta 2008, the destruction of the body by fire, known as cremation, began to displace inhumation in Europe towards later Bronze Age. In many societies, it is associated with rank

or status. It may be accorded to chiefs only or to criminals or witches. It is the usual method of disposal among Hindus and frequent among Buddhists. It is believed to liberate the spirit of the deceased. The remains such as bones and ashes may be kept or buried in funerary artefacts such as tombs, chambers, house-shaped sarcophagi and urns conceived as houses for the dead.

Preservation of the full body is known particularly from ancient Egyptian times. It was also practiced among some ethnic groups in Australia but in all cases, it was usually reserved for high ranking persons such as priests and kings. Methods used vary from simple desiccation such as smoke drying or treatment of the body with mineral or vegetable preservatives usually after evisceration to the modern techniques of embalming. Striking examples of artistically embalmed bodies are Egyptian mummies, a practice which was even extended to cats, crocodiles and other sacred animals.

Water burial which involves the corpse being flung into water was often a method applied to slaves, foreigners or people considered to be of no account. It is the usual practice for those who die on board a ship. The corpse is wrapped up in a shroud, a form of body art, to protect it against fishes and weighted with stones to sink to the bottom of the sea. In the Solomon Islands, the corpse is flung into the water. Such a method was believed to be practiced by people who were probably the descendants of immigrant tribes, which was essentially a method of dispatching the deceased to the land of his ancestors. Disposal by launching on water may be symbolically practiced and combined with other methods such as western methods of burial in funerary artefacts like boat-shaped coffins.

Though a less common practice, water burial used to be undertaken by the Parais followers of an ancient Persian religion. Cannibalism is yet another method of disposal that involves eating of human flesh by human beings. The term is derived from *Canibales*, the Spanish name for the reputedly man-eating Carib people who lived in the West Indies when Christopher Columbus arrived on October 12, 1492. The practice of cannibalism has been reported in many parts of the world and dates to Prehistoric times. The Neanderthals in Europe seem to have practiced cannibalism at least occasionally, based on evidence from Fossil bones (Microsoft® Student 2008 [DVD], Redmond, W/A: Microsoft).

It is clearly evident that the most usual method used world-wide is interment. This has been revealed in discoveries of excavated tombs in Egypt and elsewhere. The earliest dynastic tombs yielded clothed dead bodies with ornaments and various artefacts. The funerary art in Egypt underwent rapid elaboration after 3000 B.C. especially in architecture, sculpture, painting and graphic art. The pit tomb was undercut on one side to allow for more furniture and other artefacts. The mound over the tomb became a rectangular stone. Door niches and steps were added and cult offerings were transferred from the tombs to nearby temples. The superimposition of rectangular stone of increasing size finally produced the pyramid tomb. Sarcophagi, which were large and highly polished stone coffins, were introduced. They were usually covered with the history of the deceased in hieroglyphics. Mummy chests shaped in the form of the dead body and the use of effigies, paintings and western writings on papyrus with magical formulas were developed further.

Writing on history of memorial and funerary artefacts, the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1972) Rettray (1927); Mbiti (1975), Opoku (1973) assert that tombs and coffins have undergone similar developments worldwide. A tomb implies the idea of home or house for the dead, although it is loosely applied to all kinds of graves, funerary monuments and memorials. In primitive cultures, the dead were buried in their own houses. This resulted in the production of ornament material primeval house types. Brick and stone tombs appeared with advanced technology. In Europe, tombs of stone structure of different shape and sizes in vaults and passage ways spread throughout the continent. Stone-built and rock-cut tombs appeared together with megaliths in places such as Cyprus, Crete, Malta and Spain. In Greece, circular dome tombs, rectangular chambers, shaft and pit tombs were built. The dead were commemorated with carved slabs of stone known as stele which depicted painted figures of the departed and scenes from his life.

The Romans developed the tumuli into mausoleums and columbarium, the latter of which comprised chambers with niches. In Africa, especially the northern parts, different forms of stone structures were used as funeral ornaments. These were the tumuli, cromlechs and chonchets which are cylindrical in shape. On the East African coast are found stone pillar tombs as well as wooden slabs, stone slabs, logs or pole sculptures planted at the head of the graves(Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol.9, 1975).

According to Tom Philips (1996), in Central Africa, stone sculptures have been used as funerary monuments in a relatively restricted area lying north of Angola. In the neighbouring areas, the tradition of stone funerary monument is replaced by funerary

ceramics of a variety of form. Other carved monoliths occur in eastern Nigeria and the contiguous area of the Western Cameroon Republic. Even though in Ghana many of the terracotta funerary sculptures are labelled as Asante, the majority are Southern Akan with the most Northern concentration coming from Adanse Fomena. In addition were a variety of rich ceramic vessels (Rattray,1927).

#### 2.4 The coffin

Coffins, which are receptacles in which corpses are put, have over the generations, been of diverse form. Primitive wooden coffins were in the form of hollowed out tree trunks. American Indians used wooden coffins but some of the tribes sometimes enclosed the corpse between the shells of turtles. They also used wicker baskets. Australian Aborigines used barks of trees while Greeks used coffins in the form of urns, either hexagonal or triangular in shape with the body in a sitting posture. The material was usually burnt clay and in some cases was moulded round the body and baked. (Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 9, 1972).

In the wake of Christianity, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 9 (1972), stone coffins came into use. Rich Romans had coffins made of limestone which was believed to 'eat' the body, hence the name 'sarcophagus'. Lead coffins have been used in Europe during the middle Ages. They were shaped like the mummy chests in ancient Egypt as pointed out earlier in this chapter. In England and Scotland, iron coffins have been used during the seventeenth century. Their wooden coffins made of oak or elm, were lined with lead. In the United State of America, glass is sometimes used to cover wooden coffins whilst the inside lined with copper or zinc. It is clear from the ongoing discourse on coffins that there is some

form of universality in the use of this funerary artefact. Reasons for using particular materials, however, have not been assigned.

According to Rattray (1927:159),

Coffins nowadays are quite common. They were used in olden times, as we have seen, in the case of kings. They are said to have been fashioned out of the great flat buttress roots of the *onyina*, *Ceiba petandra* (silk cotton tree). When a coffin was used, the body was wrapped in mats.

The use of the coffin in Asante is not a new concept as pointed out by Rattray. It must also be stated that this funerary artefact is used for preservatory purpose within royal circles in Asante. In his own account, Rattray (1927) has this to say,

I had the privilege of being shown the coffins containing the skeletons of two of the Ashanti kings, Karikari and Mensa Bonsu. These are more sacred, perhaps, than the Golden Stool and its regalia, in the pursuit of which our blood and treasure had vainly been poured.

Coffins used for the above purpose seem to be given so much veneration that one begins to feel some awe and reverence the Asante have for these relics. These are, therefore not buried; they are rather kept in royal mausoleums. The sizes of the coffins used for this purpose are quite short, not more than four feet long, and hexagonal in shape; Rattray asserts the material of which they were made was covered with green silk, studded with gold disks or rosettes, with varying designs. Each of the coffins had seven of the disks on it. It is, however, not known whether colour plays an important role or not because earlier on, Rattray posits that the small coffins of hexagonal shape were covered with black velvet. The influence of western culture has given another dimension to the function of the coffin. It is now sometimes used as a substitute bed for laying the body in state. (See figure 6)

## 2.5 Body art of the corpse

Body art is art made on, with or consisting of, the human body. According to Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia (2010), the most common forms of body art are tattoos, and body piercings, but other types include scarification, branding, scalpelling, shaping (for example tight-lacing of corsets), full body tattoo and body painting. More extreme body art can involve things such as mutilation or pushing the body its physical limits.

“The body is not only depicted in art. It is used in making art, or is transformed to become art itself. The human body is material for art making. It can be painted or sculpted, or can be part of a performance or spectacle” (Lazzari & Schlesier 2002: 418). Asantes cannot agree with the above assertions more and have therefore adopted the human body (both dead and living) and incorporated it in their funerary arts to convey ideas and beliefs at the expense of words. As a result, they have a repertoire of funerary body art comprising painting of the skin, coiffure or hairdressing costume including footwear, wearing of amulets, bracelets, necklaces, anklets and general body adornment to portray certain beliefs in connection with death.

Prior to disposal in coffins, the dead body is given a special treatment which may be categorized under body art of the corpse. Before narrowing down the discussion on this to Asante, it would be appropriate to look at the universality of this practice based on available literature. Ethnographers and writers have revealed a variety of ways in which the corpse may be treated in various societies. Among the Swahili speaking people of Eastern Africa, the Amarkokke buried the dead completely nude while the Konso disembowelled it and anointed it with honey (Prins, 1961). These two practices, to a large extent, are some form of

body mutilation or the other. The Tsamani wrapped it in cow hide; the Maji smeared it with the blood of an Ox. In South-West Ethiopia, the Konta tied the hands of the corpse behind it and bandaged his mouth; the Mate exhumed the body after a number of years and did a second burial; Sidamo filled the mouth, nostrils and ears with butter; the Sanguma sewed up the corpse in the hide of a bull leaving a small opening for fluids to drain out and the Surma bored holes in certain parts of the body with red hot iron bars (Cerulli, 1956).

According to Ardener (1956) in central Africa, the Bamileke of Cameroon smeared the body with a mixture of palm oil and camwood powder and also exhumed a corpse buried away from home, brought the skull home and buried it among skulls of deceased members of the family. The Banen posed it in a sitting position with the cheeks in his hands; the Lega of Congo buried the corpse naked in a squatting position and the Ovimbundu of Angola, acc. To McCulloch (1952), bound it in a supine position in the coffin which was carried by two people who were thought to be forced by the spirit of the deceased to stop in front of one of the houses in the village to indicate that an occupant was the cause of death.

Among West Africans, Meek (1931) asserts that the Dakakari of northern Nigeria dusted the corpse with guinea corn flour; the Yungur bound a calabash over the mouth to collect saliva and dropped the corpse every hundred metres or so with the intention of making it “drop” the corn he was thought to be taken away to the underworld, they also fixed a calabash to the head of a dead woman, smeared the corpse with mahogany oil and later removed the calabash to be used as a drinking vessel by patients in her family; the Kadare cut off skin from the forehead, finger and toe nails and wrapped them up for succeeding rites; the Biron broke the limbs at the joints and sewed the body in hide; the Karekare covered the bed for the corpse with charcoal; the Habin exposed the body on a table for a few days until it swelled

and burst after which the skin and intestines were removed and buried separately in a pot; the Hona Chief was buried secretly and represented with an effigy during the rites, a dead Waltande chief's neck was tied with a number of hoes with a string which was pulled on the eighth day to let the head fall off and the hoes make a loud clatter to announce his death. The Kora left the body of a chief to decompose within a week when the teeth, nails and hair were removed and bound in a leather bag and deposited in a royal shrine and the Ibo and Ibibio dried the corpse over fire into which had been placed aromatic herbs.

In Ghana, the Ga, according to Field (19480), dissolved camphor in rum and poured the solution into all openings of the body and painted it thickly with the solution, probably to delay the process of decomposition; the Lowiili sat the corpse in a squatting position for three days against the door where he or she spent his or her last days as an old person. The Nankanni, Builsa and Kassena of northern Ghana buried women naked, Cardinal (1927). In Sierra Leone, according to Little (1967) the Kholifa severed the head of a dead chief from the body and kept it in a sacred box of his successor; and in Burkina Faso, the Yatenga buried the corpse with a live cat or cockerel, which hither to were his wife and a court jester (McCulloch 1950). This practice is reminiscent of ancient Asante royal funerals.

Among Asantes in general, the motive for honouring the dead with funeral rites might have been due to the fear of the harm the ghost of the dead person could do to the living. In the words of Asare Opoku (1978:134),

Funerals are great social occasions in West Africa. They generally involve whole communities who gather at these events to perform appropriate rites which help to strengthen the bond between the living and the dead. There is also a widespread belief in Africa that unless the proper rites and ceremonies are performed, the spirit of the dead

person may not be able to join the ancestral spirits. Thus, great satisfaction is derived from the performance of these funeral rites.

In Asante, there are variations in the body art of the dead. These are dictated by factors such as circumstances of the death, age, social position, and status of the deceased. The (body) arts of a dead child, for instance, are quite different from that of an adult (Rattray 1927) Whatever the considerations, a dead person's body receives some level of attention in Asante with respect to art. To buttress the above assertion, a still-born child's body is mutilated to confirm or otherwise the belief that it is the same child that keeps on coming to same parents. Asare Opoku (1978:135) identifies preparation of the corpse as one of the four stages in the funeral ceremonies of the Akan. He, however, did not give an artistic appreciation of the preparation of the corpse but a brief description as bathing it, dressing it and laying it in state.

Ameyaw-Benneh (1994, unpublished monograph at the College of Art Library of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology) asserts that there seems to be a general agreement among all peoples that the human body which has been fashioned by nature is a crude, unfinished production, distinctly lacking in ornamental qualities and therefore requires certain artificial touches to bring it up to the required standard of beauty in relation to any particular society. As indicated earlier, writers on funeral ceremonies agree on two main factors for the performance of these ceremonies. Firstly, the dead person's spirit is liable to prowl about and harm the living; and secondly, the spirit has to make a journey to the land of the dead and must therefore be provided with what is needful on the way and at its destination, which is thought of as a replica of life on earth.

Rattray (1927) opines that in Asante, the purpose of funeral ceremonies is to enable the dead person to graduate to another stage of continuity of life. Funeral ceremonies usher the dead person into the presence of the ancestral spirits where the lives of the members of the tribe are so closely bound up. Usually, it is the close relatives who engage in the preparation of the body for laying in state. The corpse is taken to the bathroom to be washed by males or females depending on the sex. The finger and toe nails are paved and the hair is cut. The body is washed three times symbolically to give respect to *Onyakop]n* (God Almighty), *Asase Yaa* (the earth goddess) and *Asamando* (underworld). Materials used in this regard are a new towel, new sponge, soap and hot water. In addition, lots of lime juice is applied to serve as deodorant. Gin or rum is poured down the throat ostensibly to delay the process of decomposition (Rattray 1927:149).

Various forms of 'ghost' or 'soul' currency (*Saman Sika* or *Kra Sika*), in the form of ornaments of a certain shape and design, are bound round the wrists of the corpse. Gold dust is often put into its ears and into the hollow above the zygomatic area, known as *sika gu berf* (the place for pouring gold dust). Gold dust is also bound up in a small packet and tied to the loin cloth; hair is sometimes placed in the mouth. In Rattray's account, it is stated in a footnote that he was informed by some Asante that hair is a form of money or has some value in the world of ghosts (Rattray 1927:149, footnote 2). The body, dressed in its best cloth and adorned, in addition to the 'soul money', with every available gold ornament, is laid on its left side (this account of posture appears to be unique to Rattray as contemporary writers do not seem to provide evidence of that), generally with the hands folded against the cheek, and

sometimes with a silk handkerchief between them to wipe off the sweat that comes upon them in climbing the hill.

Sometimes, the head of the corpse is shaved and marked with alternate red, white, and black stripes, made with *sono* (red dye), white clay, and *bidie* (charcoal). Benenneh, 1999 (unpublished thesis at the College of Art Library), however, gives a different interpretation of these colours as follows: “Invariably, the red represented the blood of the living relatives, the black, death and the white the ancestors”.

He, to a higher extent, agrees with Rattray that delaying, the process of decomposition was responsible for these. The motive behind this was also to subject the dead person to easy recognition should he or she walk as a *saman* (ghost). In his presentation of the preparation of the corpse, Rattray further maintains that occasionally a brass pan is placed beneath the head and later is buried in this position, in order to receive the head when it drops off. Instead of the hands being folded, as stated above, they are sometimes allowed to rest with the fingers inside one of the metal vessels called *Kudo]* which contain gold dust.

In discussing the body art of the corpse, one must pass a comment on embalmment which constitutes mutilation of the body. This is what Rattray says,

The idea of embalming appears to be not entirely unknown to the Ashanti. In the case of a great man being killed in war, or dying far away from home, the intestines were removed through the anus and the abdomen stuffed with certain leaves. The corpse was then placed on a rack and smoked over a slow fire. (Rattray 1927:149, footnote 1).

The idea that body art involves the mutilation of the body seems to be agreed upon by Langmuir and Lynton (2000) who describe it as a tendency that became known, and at times notorious, in the 1960's as a development out of conceptual and performance art; involving the use of the artist's body as form and medium. Langmuir and Lynton adds that, "...often as a public enactment, body art often presents the body as humanity oppressed and victimised and has involved mutilation and even death."

The bottom line still remains that the dead body was dressed and adorned far more opulently than it might ever have done when alive. Highly polished brass beds were in common use. These were covered with several layers of blanket and multi-coloured expensive and good quality *Kente* cloths. Generally, the body was laid in a supine position with the hands either folded across the chest or lying parallel to the trunk. It was covered with a very expensive *[funu ntoma]* (shroud) which was usually a *Kente* cloth and adorned with every available form of "ghost or soul currency" in the form of golden or silver ornaments of various shapes, sizes and designs. This appreciation by Benneh (1999) conforms to Rattray's account cited earlier on.

In the case of an Asante chief or King's funeral, ritual and art are stretched to their virtual limits. The following discourse by Hagan and Odotei (Ed.) 2001 sums up the body art of a dead Asante King

Before the body of the king was laid in state, there were various duties performed by the *Gyaase* chiefs. First of all, the body had to be prepared by the *Gyaase* people. The body was washed, and the *Abanasehene* trimmed the nails while the *De[bo]hene* also gave the King a clean shave. The *Nsumankwaahene* is the chief medicine man for the king

and the health of the king is his special responsibility. He was also responsible for the preservation of the king's body.

Hagan and Odotei (2001) state that the important task for the *Nsumankwaahene* at the burial ceremony is to adorn the body of the king with stool regalia. These regalia including gold ornaments, talismans, armbands, *abotire* (head bands), are used to adorn the deceased King. *Annasennase* is one of the talismans put on the King's feet to give him rest on his journey to the ancestral world. Gold, yellow, silver, white, red, green, and other bright colours dominate the different cloths which adorn the body of a dead Asante King. Gold symbolizes the rich wealth of the Asante nation over which *Asantehene* presides. It represents prosperity and joy. It is also linked to the bright sunlight which gives light and energy to both plants and humankind. Silver in Asante tradition means purity, and sometimes refers to female qualities. Silver is also used for peaceful ceremonies such as in child naming and *Odwira* (rituals of purification). Green represents the rich forests in Asante and the ideas of purity, vitality and youthfulness. It is worthy of notice that the colours used to adorn the body of a dead Asante King are the same as those he wore when he sat in full regalia in state durbars and other functions.

Rattray (1927:1040) posits that the difference in the funerary art of dead Asante Kings and ordinary individuals emanates from a desire on the part of his people, not only to accentuate the disparity between the King, *Asantehene*, and the common herd, and even the great chiefs, but also to preserve his remains more carefully and reverently in order that these might serve as a medium or shrine for his spirit when it was summoned to return to his people in times of national reunion or national emergencies. Talismans, cloth and *danta* (loin cloth), native

sandals, gold and other ornaments and regalia would be provided by the *Nsumankwaahene*, *Abanasehene*, *Mpaboabene*, *Sanaahene* and *Mawer[hene* respectively to dress the King. These insignia and other precious materials would be removed from the King's body when he is being put into the coffin. However, one of each item used to adorn the King has to remain on the body for the burial. Hence, each of the chiefs involved with the adornment of the King would have to have one precious item for the King to take with him on his journey to the ancestral world. This narrative of Hagan and Odotei in their book *The King Has Gone to the Village*, seems to agree with Rattray's assertion and indeed, those of many other writers, that Asantes view death as merely a transition, like birth, from one kind of life to another.

The use of gold related artefacts on the bodies of Asante chiefs, queen mothers and Kings calls for an allusion to the Bono people, an Akan group north of Asante, where according to Benneh (1999), early dead Bono chiefs' faces were smeared with gold dust, and all openings of the body were filled with same. Three years after burial, the coffin of a bono King was opened and the skeleton taken out cleaned and oiled. It was then given to a goldsmith to join together with gold wire. The joined skeleton was dressed in fine cloths and adorned with a profusion of gold jewellery. This would then be put in a coffin and moved to its final resting place, the royal mausoleum in a sacred grove outside the town. This is similar to Rattray's account about ancient Asante Kings whose skeletons were put in miniature coffins and kept at their permanent resting places called *Beam* (royal mausoleum).

## 2.6 Body art of mourners

The blood relations of a deceased Asante are requested by custom to shave their hair and place it in the *abusua kuruwa* (family pot) which has a lid with a terra-cotta fashioned in such a manner as to represent the dead person. It must however be emphasised that this practice is not pervasive as it only performed on elderly persons. That is to say a sculpture of his head or portrait of him was made in clay. According to Ameyaw-Benneh, 1994 (unpublished monograph), this was frequently painted with red, white and black stripes. It is important to throw light on the *abusua kuruwa* considering the direct link it has with the body art of the living with regard to its content. In an unpublished monograph at the College of Art Library of KNUST, Eghan (1992:39-40) has the following to say:

Generally, clay figures used in connection with funeral ceremonies have been found mainly in Akan-speaking areas where they are still made to represent the dead: usually chiefs, queenmothers, other members of a royal family and their retinue, and other important people in the community. They are not themselves objects of worship, but are considered the portraits of the deceased.”

An intriguing aspect of these figurines is how artists come out with them. They are made by skilful potters. Some of them say that in order to get a good picture of the dead person, they pray to his or her spirit so that his image appears in a bowl of water or palm oil. Eghan(1992) adds that others of different belief claim that they even go for the deceased’s pillow, sleep on it for a night or more, in order to get a good picturesque representation of him.

In his account, J.S. Mbiti also points out the shaving of the hair by immediate family members, something he claims happens in many parts of Africa. He, however, did not state into what the hair is put as detailed by Ameyaw-Benneh. The former gave the possible symbolism of the shaving of the hair as a mark of separation, showing that one of the family

members has been separated from them. At the same time, it is an indication of people's belief that death does not destroy life.

Various signs and symbols are used to show that death has visited the family. The body of the living members of the deceased person's family is not exempted in this regard. Apart from the shaving of the hair, the people smear their bodies with red clay, a sign of death and mourning. In the same vein, the relatives of dead Asante smear *ntwoma* (red clay) on the forehead, cheeks and arms. Clay symbolizes the dirt or filth which death has brought upon the family and it is dumped on the bodies of only the blood relations and the widow or widower.

Asantes have different names for these patterns of red clay depending on which part of the body they are made. Three stripes of red clay are made from left to right on the forehead which they call *Kotobirigya*. A similar one called *ntwoma mpaemu* (division of red clay) is made from the back of the shaven head to the forehead and the same pattern referred to as *asafe* are made on the upper arms. Ameyaw-Benneh (1994:98), observes that,

These patterns portray the particular mourner as very close or dear to the deceased. The three lines are probably related to the three principles which feature quite prominently in Akan culture: first, *Onyame* (God), the giver of the *Okra* and to whom it returns upon death; second, *Asase Yaa* (mother earth goddess) which would accept the body and third, the ancestors who would welcome (or reject) the *Saman* of the deceased into their fold.

The sons of the deceased wear net caps with miniature ladders, red pepper and egg shells attached to it. The net symbolises the helplessness of the wearer - *Nsuo ayiri me, na -hwan-na ]b[ to atena ayi me?* (I am drowned in flood waters, and who would rescue me with a

net?). The red pepper indicates the seriousness of the occasion, *M'ani abere s[ mako* (My eyes are as red as pepper). Pepper is red as well as hot, therefore, it symbolises grief, sudden calamity, violent pain and an act of war. The egg shells portray the saying, *Ato me ne nkosua hono* (I am left with only egg shells). Had the father or mother been alive, it would not have been egg shells, rather a whole fowl. The miniature ladder on its part indicates the saying, *owuo atwede[, baako mforo* (the ladder of death is not mounted by only one person). This is a clear manifestation of Asantes' belief that death is universal.

This funerary art can be likened to the practices whereby Ngizim women of the Bornu province of northern Nigeria have their heads swathed in strips of cloth and carried miniature axes on the shoulder (Encyclopaedia Britannica vol. 9, 1972).

At a chief's funeral in Kumasi, the *abrafo]* (chief's executioners) may be seen parading the grounds to and fro. Their attire is frighteningly dirty brown smock studded with amulets and talismans. Sometimes, they grid up their cloths and carry in their hands *s[p]* (double-edged knives) which are supposed to be used in carrying out their executions. Their faces are painted black to inspire terror. The dress code given here appear to differ from what other authors portray. Haggan and Odotei (Ed.) 2001, in the book, *The King Has Gone to the Village*, say since the Asantehene was commander in-chief of the Asante army, different traditional military and security organizations display their costume, weapons and regalia to pay their last respects. Among these were the *[ky[mfo]* (shield bearers), *abrafo]* (executioners) and *atumtufo]* (gun bearers or body guards). The *[ky[mfo]* wore black cloth and folded it down around their waist. They painted their faces with a mixture of gunpowder

and charcoal in order to disguise themselves. The *[ky[mfo]* carried and danced with traditional shields made of wood and covered with a variety of textile pieces. *Abrafo]* dressed with their black cloth rolled down to their waist. They also painted their faces black. They wore animal skin caps, and held swords which they repeatedly drew in and out of their sheaths. The *atumtufo]* wore in black cloth rolled down to their waist. They carried guns and wore ammunition pouches made out of animal skin in cross-belts across their chests or around their waists. These pouches contained an assortment of knives and gunpowder.

Chiefs who attend the funeral of a deceased *Asantehene* put on war attire which is a smock with a large quantity of amulets studded in it. They may carry muskets which are intermittently fired into the sky. On her part, the *Asantehemaa* (Queenmother) plays a significant role in the burial of an Asante King. Her position as the female head of the *lyoko]* clan, from which the occupants of the Golden stool hail, makes her the chief mourner. The colour of her costume distinguishes her from other political leaders. In Asante tradition, family members of the bereaved matriclan wear *kobene* (red cloth) at a burial. *Kobene* symbolizes grief, melancholy, and the loss of a close relation. It establishes a relationship with the dead. (Hagan 1970).

## 2.7 Art and widowhood rites Asantes

The matrimonial contract between husband and wife is not terminated entirely on the death of the husband in Asante until a ceremony of separation is performed. In some places, the bereaved wife becomes the wife of the late husband's brother or the property of the heir. This happens after a year from the date of the death. Should the widow marry or have sexual intercourse before the end of the period, it was believed that the dead man would come to

sleep with her causing her to be barren or dead. The man who eventually marries the widow needs to pay a fee before being permitted to pluck the *bofunu* girdle around her waist. The *bofunu* is a waist belt substituted for the *toma* (beads) after the death of the husband. (Rattray 1954:175). A body art appears to find its ways into the remotest parts of body in this regard. This rite is described by Rattray (1927) as the symbolic locking of the widow's vagina.

Hagan and Odotei [(Ed.) 2001:60] explain these rites as ceremonies performed for a person on the death of his or her spouse. The observance of the rites is meant symbolically to express the new status of the living spouse and also to ensure the smooth transition of the spirit of the deceased spouse. There are various art forms associated with the three stages of Asante widowhood rites identified by the above editors. These are separations, liminal or transition and integration.

Three days after the widow had received the news of the death of her husband, she wore *kuntunkuni* (a black cloth) up and *k]bene* (red cloth) down, *dansinkran* hairstyle and she carries *sensempu* in her left hand. The *dansinkran* is the traditional ceremonial Asante hairdo in which the hair is either shaved or pressed backwards and then smeared with black soot mixed with shea butter. The *sensempu* is a *kuna suman* (widow's amulet) made of a bundle comprising *pr[p[k[s]* (a kind of dried seeded fruit, *aburoohye]* (burnt corn), *emi* and *nunum* (fine scented herbs) bound together with *[doa* (raffia). The dominant colour symbolism of the dress code, which is black and red generally worn by all mourners, including the widows, denotes mourning, and expression of intense sorrow. The colour black is a sign of loss of a loved one while red expresses extreme sorrow and the danger felt in the crisis of transition

(Hagan 1970:8-13). However, the *sensempu* is the most striking art symbol that distinguishes the widow from the other mourners. Every widow, including a king's wife, observes the widowhood rites. In her article *Kunay[: Observance of Widowhood Rites by the Wives of the Otumfo]* (2001), Sackey asserts that these rites in Asante for the kingly consorts are almost the same as those for ordinary widows. The only difference that exists in the rites is in how the widows of the different clans are decorated on the day of spousal burial. Thus, the differences in widowhood rites determine clan identification rather than class or social status. For example, widows of *[koo]na* use gold ornaments and *yawa* leaves in addition to precious beads, *[yoko]* and other widows do not use ornate adornment but may use *nyanya* leaves on this day. (Hagan and Odotei 2001:65).

## 2.8 Ad]soa (In-law Donations)

Another work of art that needs mentioning is the *Ad]soa*. This is where the in-laws of a deceased and their sisters sometimes parade up and down during the funeral ceremony, carrying bundles of artefacts such as pillow, a piece of cloth, a stool, and sandals called, in the case of a male *Foto]*, in the case of a female *Ad]soa* (see plates 13 & 14). According to Rattray (1927:174), the in-laws sing songs in honour of the deceased, known as *Ad]soa* songs. Literature available to the researcher, however, does not state whether there are *Foto]* songs or not. The *Ad]soa* is symbolic in the sense that as the carriers walk while carrying these articles, it is believed that the spirit of the dead man comes into them and causes the bearers to sway about and rock from side to side; thereby convincing themselves that the deceased is pleased with them and wishes them no ill. Osei Kwadwo (2002) has the following to say about the *Ad]soa*.

“At the peak of the ceremonies, the wives of the sons and nephews of the deceased would mount exhibitions to show the cordial relationship between the deceased and the in-laws. Each of the women would mount something called *Ad/soa* which would be made with items like *Kente* cloth, beads, necklaces, a flat plate, handkerchiefs, and silk materials. All the items would be arranged in a brass pan and made to look like a human being sitting in the brass pan.

Rattray’s list of items in the *Ad/soa* seems to fall short of that of Osei Kwadwo. This could probably be attributed to the impact of modernity. Another type of *Ad/soa* identified by Osei Kwadwo is *Basahya* which is made by a chief’s wives to differentiate them from *Ad/soa* of ordinary people.

## 2.9 Music and dance

In Akan states, there are occasions on which music draws their members together and reminds them of their unity. Public functions such as festivals, religious worship, installation of chiefs and funerals are some of such occasions. These occasions provide opportunities for assembling a vast range of musical instruments and ensembles with specific functions and messages.

The grandeur of an Akan chief’s court is reflected in the range of musical instruments and the variety and size of the ensembles maintained. The possession of a wealth of drums commands the same high evaluation as the ownership of gold instruments, stools, rich traditional clothing and other palace paraphernalia. The instruments are considered the prized possession of the group, held in trust by the chief. Rattray (1927:281-282) states, among others, that drums, in Asante, though sometimes classed under the general name of *twene*,

have each their special names, taboos, and in many cases, their special dress. Various drums are grouped together to form drum orchestras. On the occasion of a royal funeral, all the ‘talking’ instruments especially the *atumpan* and *nkuadwo* (drums), and *mm[ntia* and *ntahera* (horns) are expected to give condolences to the bereaved ruler, the royal lineage and to the deceased. Drums communicate particular sentiments and moods through their sounds. This is referred to as *Asantes[m* (Asante values). For instance, the horns, trumpets and flutes comment on the pathos of the occasion by playing eulogies and texts that allude to historical events, traditional philosophy and lamentations. After the usual drum introduction announcing the death, the drummer might convey a message of sympathy as follows:

Noble Ruler  
Condolences!  
Condolence!  
Noble Ruler, we share your grief  
We sympathise with you in your bereavement  
We have, since we arose from ancient times,  
Been exposed to incessant suffering  
The *Ogyapam* tree and its ants are from antiquity  
The creator created death and death killed him  
Thou deceased  
Condolences!  
Condolences! (Nketia 1955:125).

Even though this study focuses on funerary art in Kumasi (Asante), existing literature so far does not seem to point out any death drums among the Akan to be sounded soon after death. Herskovits (1938) seems to agree to this assertion and makes allusion to Benin where such are found.

Music and dance productions and the associated pageantry also provide opportunities for the display of other forms of Asante art. This calls for a revisit of the *Ad]soa* discussed earlier on. In the *Ad]soa* procession, girls selected for their beauty, poise, and proficiency as dancers

are adorned with precious beads and delicately crafted gold jewellery, and are arranged in two lines. Bearing fine examples of Asante textiles, pottery, jewellery and leather craft, they precede the *Ad]soahemaa* (*Ad]soa* queen) who dances to *kete* drums, played by drummers borrowed from a chief for the occasion. Opoku, (1987) in his article, *Asante Dance Art and the Court* gives a further description of the *Ad]soahemaa* and the *Ad]soa* procession as follows:

“She is surrounded by attendants and has the use of stage swords and other court regalia borrowed for the event. In addition to her rich and colourful hand-woven cloth wrapped just above her breasts she wears jewellery at the knees, ankles, wrists, and upper arms, as well as several necklaces; including a special one from which highly decorative, stylized gold breasts are suspended.”

Asante dance is characterized by a complex of basic walking steps of varying length and strength, with expressive and meaningful changes of direction accompanied by appropriate pelvic shifts or swings and quarter turns of the trunk. Also important are changes of levels in the whole body, and the raising and lowering of the shoulders-a gesture symbolizing affirmation of status bearing a resemblance to a Dagomba Damba royal dance movement. The distinguishing characteristics of Asante dance are the intricate and subtle manipulation of hands, arms and legs, body swaying and tilting in polyrhythmic combinations-oppressive miming with rich symbolic undertones.

Even though the bereaved relations are usually not the makers of music in Asante funerals, it is their duty to initiate music making by inviting or hiring music makers. The musical instruments employed include idiophones and membranophones. The first are naturally resonant materials which vibrate through percussion such as clappers, gongs and rattles. The

second comprise all types of drums such as *atumpan*, *donno*, *impintin* and *f]nt]mfr]m* which are made from hollowed wood and covered with the skin of animals like antelope, sheep, goat, or monkey. They are beaten with sticks or the hand. Aerophones which are wind instruments such as horns or *at]nt]b]n* (flute) played by blowing wind into them from the mouth. Chordophones or stringed instruments, on the other hand, like the guitar, do not feature in traditional music. However, clapping of the hands plays a very important role in the music.

As already mentioned, the important role of music in the acclamation of status and power in the traditional political organization of African societies puts generally accepted social arrangements in place regarding ownership and use. These arrangements are strictly adhered to. In states with centralised authority, there may be a hierarchical structure of power and authority vested in chiefs or village heads. These chiefs may be permitted to have some but not all of the musical instruments owned by the central head of state. Thus, in the Asante state, only paramount chiefs can own *f]nt]mfr]m* (heavy drum), and *ntahera* and *mmentia* (trumpet ensembles). It will be realized, however, that the musical types performed at the court of the *Asantehene* who is the head of the Asante traditional state are much more diversified. The ensembles and the music they play are symbols of prestige, rank, authority, royalty and power.

Among the Asante, the *f]nt]mfr]m* drums are a symbol of kingly command and they are reserved for *Amanhene* or chiefs of high rank. The *Kete* (a funeral orchestra) ensemble, whose ownership is restricted to the king of Asante and some paramount chiefs, performs at a variety of royal functions “at the command of the chiefs.” Asiama (2001) also observes that

These drums and horns are mystically linked with the life of the King. No one plays them for his own delectation. Played at appropriate moments in the course of a ceremony, they are symbolic of the King's presence and they heighten the level of his and other people's awareness of his status and role.

Personification of Asante musical instruments crystalises into many forms, one of which is that the instrument 'transforms' into living social objects. Flute duets, for instance, are often seen as a symbolic representation of a couple, and the music that they produce is considered symbolic of the fruit of their union. Consequently, there are 'male' and 'female' flutes, the latter generally being smaller in size. The same applies to the *atumpan* drums. The twin drums are usually referred to as 'male' and 'female', the latter having a higher tone than the former. When they stand to be played, the 'male' is on the left to face the king and the 'female' on the right.

Musical instruments as social objects have specified positions in the group when the ensemble is playing together. When in movement or at rest, the position of each instrument is also determined by tradition.

Royal instruments often bear the sign of prestige. They are richly decorated. The *atumpan* drums of the *Asantehene* are covered with ornamental brass. The *f]nt]mfr]m* drums are decorated with the crania of vanquished enemies or important captains of war. Others are decorated with the horns of animals, which are usually symbolic of the chief's power or majesty. These drums receive libations and carry prohibitions because they are believed to be the repositories of the spirits of ancestor drummers. They must be decorated, not only for

their aesthetic value, but also for their symbolic meaning consistent with certain religious and social ideas associated with the instruments.

The artistic role of drums in funerals among the Asante is even more magnified when it comes to royal funeral ceremonies. All drums that can be used as vehicles of language give condolences from time to time the deceased, the Queen mother and the particular lineage of the dead. The repertoire of the drum language of the Akan people is principally chief-centered. Its form and content are indications of its social importance and the aesthetic merits it holds for the people. It is also to be noted that at royal funerals, there are both drumming as linguistic communication and drumming to which people dance. The atumpan, the principal talking drums, are never silent on such occasions; they herald them (the occasions) with messages of condolences and of farewell. Asiama's discourse on the funeral of the late Otumfo] Opoku Ware II provides an example:

*Asante k]t]k] hene  
Opoku Tenten  
Wofi Kumasi Aduampon  
K]t]k] hene wok]] baabi a, bra  
Asanteman se  
Y[ma wo dammirifa  
Dammirifa due*

Translation;  
King of Asante  
Opoku Tenten  
You hail from Kumasi Aduampon  
King of Asante, if you have been away, come back  
The Asante nation says  
Condolences  
Condolences.

Special mention needs to be made of the *Kete* orchestra which is specially associated with funerals. It is played in a grand style at the *Asantehene's* court, interspersed with a

remembrance of the dead kings of Asante. The orchestra comprising four drums, *Kwadum* (master drum), *akukuadwo*, *apentemma*, and *bakoma*, is combined with cane flutes and choral accompaniment referred to as *kete kwadwom*. The orchestra communicates what is described as *asantes[m* (Asante values). This orchestra also plays texts emphasizing heroic deeds of the Asante king whose funeral is being celebrated on a particular occasion as well as other departed kings of Asante.

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The review of Asante funerary art cannot be exhausted without a word on *apirede* ensemble. This is usually near the body of the dead and is described as *nsamanfo] agor]* (the music and dance of the departed). It is supposed to produce music which the spirits of the departed enjoy. One drum in the orchestra, *akukuadwo*, ‘broods over death’ and gives condolences throughout each process. Accordingly, *apirede* is considered most suitable for the funerals of chiefs, festivals of dead potentates and rituals connected with the stool house and similar abodes of ancestor chiefs. These, coupled with the old custom of the display of human skulls by people of royal birth while they dance to the music of *apirede*, have given *apirede* the attribute of ‘fearful’ (Nketia 1963:128). The ensemble comprises four drums: *twenenini* (male and principal drum), *apentemma*, *atetewa* and *akukuadwo*. The other name for the last drum is *dammirifa* because it is supposed to play rhythms of condolences that correspond to the expression *]biremp]n dammirifa* (condolences, noble ruler). Bamboo stick clappers are used as the time line in the orchestra. In the past, skulls were used as time line in *apirede*. Nketia (1955:155) posits that the oral traditions of Asante Ayaase, an old village in Adanse, claim that Apea Bosompem Bo]ba, created the *apirade* orchestra.

From the foregoing discourse, it could be deciphered that even though many writers have made extensive studies on the individual funerary art forms, there have not been any serious attempts to bring the various arts together from the perspective of funerary arts. The Akan concepts of beauty and appropriate customs and practices seen from western perspective are revealed in some of the early writings. Writing as far back as 1887, A.B. Ellis describes the funeral ceremonies he witnessed at the time as:

Wealthy persons are buried with expensive silk cloths, handkerchief, gold ornamented pipes, gold studded sandals, arms adorned with strings of nuggets and aggrey beads and the entire body powdered with gold dust...guns fired, rum distributed and the day terminates with drunkenness and debauchery and the saturation lasts for weeks in wealthy families.

Such a description is based on the presumption that the funeral ceremonies were joyous occasions when a lot of wealth was displayed and even wasted. Other western writers describe the spectacle objectively and sometimes with a tone of admiration. For instance, Freeman (1967:83) opines that the African, whether Moslem or pagan, in his native dress is a dignified and picturesque figure; whereas in the costume of the European, he is a mere travesty of the white man. Freeman goes on to describe in some detail how the native attire is worn in glowing language. This attempt at describing the arts of Africa and for that matter Asante does not seem to go beyond aesthetics.

R.S. Rattray, known for his prolific writing on religion and art in Asante made wonderful and outstanding contributions to literature on the funerary art of Asante. His observations mark a turning point in the study of the funerary arts. Rattray's work is actually based mostly on incidental information on some common artefacts, drumming, law and customs. In his work,

the social implications of the artefacts and the importance which the people attach to the interpretation of their usage have remained largely unexplored. Several writers share his opinion that the funerary arts and the actions that accompany their usage are dependent on the religious beliefs of the people.

Later writers such as J.H Nketia (1955) have gone further and unveiled the actual meanings of most of the artefacts and practices that go with them. They have been able to establish and illustrate the meanings which the Akan attach to the numerous arts. The knowledge revealed has greatly increased the enjoyment of the arts by those who are familiar with them and whetted the appetite of others for further investigation. In the book, “The King Has Gone to the Village,” edited by George P. Hagan and Irene K. Odotei, the Institute of African Studies provides a catalogue of activities marking the burial and final funeral rites of the late Asantehene, }tumfo] Opoku Ware II. Even though this study was on funeral ceremonies, it did not broaden its scope to the artistic appreciation of ordinary funerals in Kumasi. This thesis is therefore justifiably researchable since it aims at delving into the role art plays in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi in the wake of fast changing trends in fashion, thereby highlighting the extent of acculturation and its impact on indigenous Asante culture and the economic well-being of the people.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview**

In gathering data for this thesis, combined research approaches have been adopted. This chapter takes a look at such approaches which include research design, research tools, study area, and population and sampling. The rest are instrumentation, validation of instruments, and administration of the instruments, primary data, secondary data, data collection procedures and the data analysis plan.

### 3.2 Research design

The investigator opted for the qualitative research method for this study. This approach was chosen because it offers both the ethnographic and case study traditions which are of immense benefit in a research of this nature. The researcher has a long period of ethnographic experience in the setting under study. This method will therefore, help to achieve the set objectives.

#### 3.2.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative studies are ones in which the observations made in a research are subjected to vivid and picturesque descriptions; and not merely expressed in quantitative terms where numerical analysis dominates the discourse (Best, 1981). The qualitative researcher endeavours to give a rich description of people, objects, events, places, conversations, and so on. The aim of this type of research is to paint a holistic picture in order to have an in-depth understanding, but not to render a numeric analysis of data.

The descriptive method of qualitative research was very much used for this research as it helped to describe specific funeral scenes vis-à-vis the use of art.

### 3.2.2 Facilities available for the Study

The researcher employed the following tools in the study: libraries and their resources, the computer and its software and a digital camera as well as the internet. The tools enumerated above were used in the following ways. A number of library facilities were visited especially in the search for related literature for review. Some of the libraries visited include:

University Library, KNUST, Kumasi, College of Art and Social Sciences library, KNUST, Kumasi and Ashanti Library, Kumasi.

Visits to these libraries provided access to books, theses, monographs, journals and encyclopaedia from which vital secondary data was obtained for the study. The researcher used the personal computer and its software largely in the research in the areas of typesetting and editing of the text. The use of the computer was also paramount in the arrangement of the photographs used in this thesis. The internet was not left out in this study. The researcher browsed the internet to obtain important information from articles, journals and official documents. The digital camera was used to take photographs of important scenes at funeral grounds.

### 3.3 Population

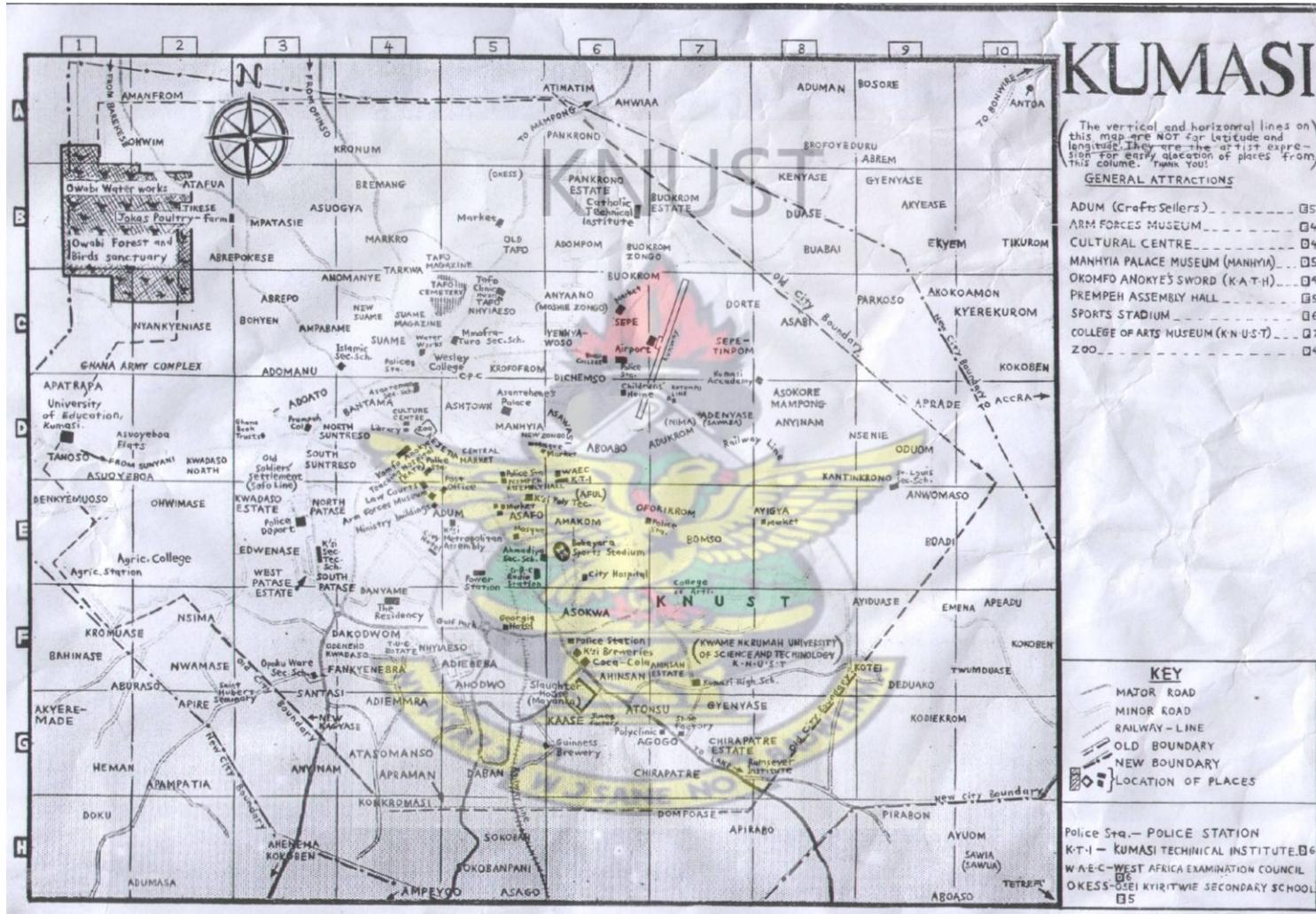
The research centred on the Kumasi Metropolis which is the focal area. The funerals studied were carefully selected to depict the influence of multiple factors such as geographical location, the economic status of the people in the locality (suburb), religious dominance, among others.

Best (1981: 8) asserts that a population is a set of individuals with a similar or more characteristics that interest the researcher. The population targeted was the inhabitants of the Kumasi Metropolis in general and scholars as well as opinion leaders. Operators of funerary art businesses also form part of the target population.

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Map 1: Map of Kumasi



Source: Ghana Tourist Board

### 3.4 Sampling of population

The entire target population of the study could not be accessed as a result of time constraints, and inadequacy of financial resources for the research. It thus became extremely necessary to be selective with regards to the entire target population. The homogenous sampling method of the purposive sampling approach was used by the researcher to select the accessible population. This helped him to handpick and divide the population into homogenous groups with each having subjects with similar characteristics.

In the first category, the population was close relatives of the deceased. The researcher had the opportunity to interview fifteen respondents forming part of this category. The total accessible population was thirty-six.

### 3.5 Instrumentation

Out of the data-gathering tools available, the researcher selected observation and interview in gathering data.

#### 3.5.1 Observation

Observation is the most common method of acquiring data in qualitative research. Certain cultural practices, beliefs, values and social phenomena cannot be easily studied by survey, experiment or document analysis (Opoku-Amankwa (2002), as a result, the researcher had to observe the population during the period of the study. The two kinds of observation were employed intermittently. These are participant and non-participant observation. Through

participant observation, the researcher was able to gather data on some pre-burial practices on the corpse which would otherwise be difficult to obtain, if not impossible.

### 3.5.2 Interview

Agyedu et al (1999: 58, unpublished) define interview as a face-to-face meeting between a questioner and a respondent, or an oral presentation of an opinionaire or attitude scale. Cannel and Kahn (1963) as cited by Cohen and Manion (1994 : 271) define an interview as” as two-person conversation ‘ initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant data, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation.” Both the structured and unstructured interviews were used to obtain the data.

### 3.6 Validation of Instruments

In order to direct the observation to the desired objectives and make it beneficial, the researcher had to validate it. When assessing content validity, the question is “to what degree does the content of the instrument measure the objectives of the instrument?” (Sproul, 1988) as cited by Agyedu et al (1999: 66). Best and Khan (1993) advise that the validity of the content is usually assessed by experts in the field who judge its adequacy. As a result, an observation guide was prepared to guide the researcher in the observation. To ensure validity, the guide was discussed with lecturers for the necessary expert advice. The same approach was adopted for the interview guide.

### 3.7 Administration of Instruments

Before the interviews were administered, the researcher made advance arrangements with his prospective respondents to alert them of the intended interviews. In some instances like the funeral grounds, the interviews immediately followed the arrangements. In most cases, however, these sessions took place in the houses and or offices of the interviewers during which the interviewer sat down with them and administered the questions on the interview guide. On such occasions, the development of rapport is extremely crucial; the researcher did not relegate this to the background. By so doing, the required data was obtained from them.

The researcher had to become an observer in gathering primary data. This was made possible by paying numerous visits to bereaved families, funeral grounds and hospitals mortuaries.

### 3.8 Primary data

This is the data collected first hand or from primary sources such as original documents, relics, remains or artefacts through surveys, interviews, or participant observation. Primary data are the direct results of events or the records of eyewitnesses (McNeil, 1990 and Ary, et al, 2002). These data were collected through observation of some funeral practices and rituals. They were gathered in the form of notes, audio recordings, photographs and sketches.

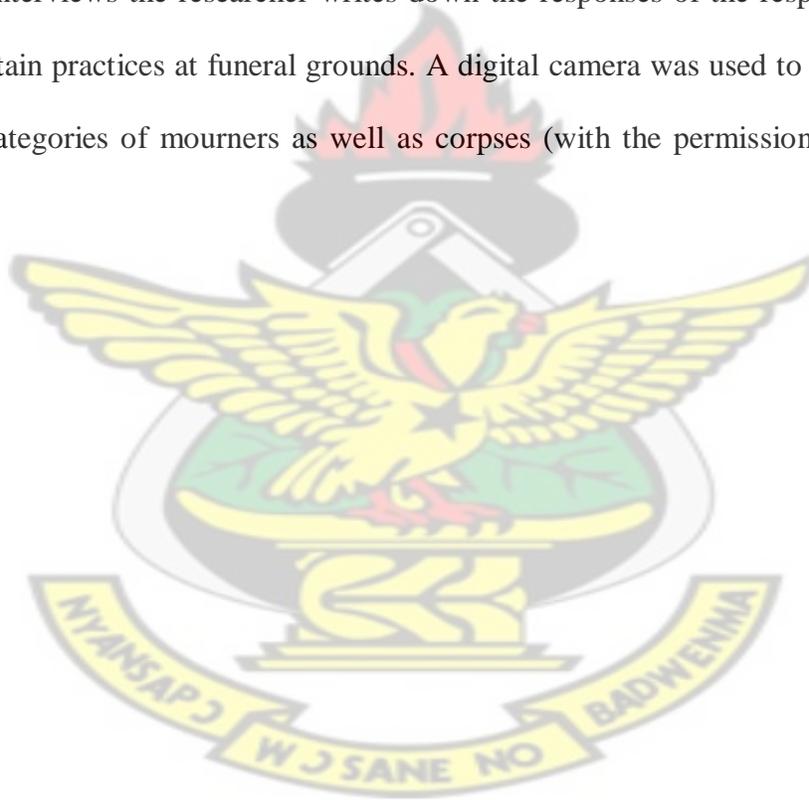
### 3.9 Secondary data

McNeill (1990) posits that secondary data is obtainable from other sources, and comes in several forms. It has been produced and processed before receiving the attention of the researcher. In secondary sources, data is passed from a non-observer to the user or researcher (Ary, et al, 2002: 450). History books, articles in encyclopaedias, and reviews of research are

common examples of sources of secondary data. The researcher gathered secondary data from books, journals and thesis books. Other sources secondary data obtained for this study were opinion leaders, the curator of the Manhyia Palace Museum as well as scholars of Asante Culture. The review of related literature was made possible due to the accessibility of these sources to the writer.

### 3.10 Data collection procedures

During the interviews the researcher writes down the responses of the respondents. He also recorded certain practices at funeral grounds. A digital camera was used to take photographs of various categories of mourners as well as corpses (with the permission of the bereaved family).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Overview

In this chapter, general accounts of the respective funerals for Asante kings and people of varied categories; the impact of westernization, Christianity and modernization have been explored. So is the extent to which their infiltration into Asante culture has adulterated Asante funerary art especially in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi.

#### 4.2 General accounts of funeral ceremonies for a deceased Asante King

For purposes of time and space, this narrative will cover the period between 1927 and 2010. The researcher believes that the account, even as brief as it might seem, will contain the necessary details adequate for the discussions in this chapter.

The Asante believe that their King does not die. He only goes through a transition from the community of the living to the world of ancestors (Hagan and Odotei, 2001). Hence, the saying, “The King has gone to the village.” Therefore, while they consider death as destructive and painful, they celebrate it as a grand journey which the king undertakes to his own benefit and the benefit of the society. As stated in chapter two of this study, the king has to travel with a retinue of wives, servants and slaves in the olden days. On this journey, therefore, he must be dressed in full regalia showing his wealth and beauty of it. Consequently, there is a distinction between his costume and those of the mourners. It must also be emphasised that the differences in ceremonial rites for a dead Asantehene (Asante

King) and those of ordinary people, according to Nana Boakye Ansah Debra (Asokore Mampong Chief), emanate from a desire by the Asante to accentuate the disparity between the dead King and the common people. It is also a common belief among Asantes that it is to preserve his mortal remains more carefully and reverently in order for them to serve as a medium or shrine for his spirit when it is summoned to return to his people in times of national reunion or emergencies.

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The practice of sacrificing human beings at funerals of Asante Kings which has waned over the years, if not completely abandoned, might have arisen from a feeling of affection, respect and awe, really due to an exaggerated regard for the dead king. In the past, the favourite wives, trusted slaves, the company of “akra” (believed by the Asante to be the “souls” of the king), as well as other people, were killed and buried as sacrifice with the king. In addition to human sacrifice, gold, cloths and a variety of artefacts were buried with the king. This practice is comparable to the ancient Egyptian practice of burying similar items with dead Pharaohs. Osei Kwadwo points out those artefacts were meant to be used by the departing King both on his journey and at his destination in his capacity as king.

The first stage of the king’s funeral starts from the moment of death. The queen mother is at the bedside of the king, as it were, to certify the departure of the king. The second event or scene is the laying in state. The main actions of this phase are intended to bring about “mpaemudie” (separation) between the living and the dead to avoid the dead disturbing the activities of the living. The laying in state can last as long as five days. Wake is kept each evening with various groups and societies, including Christian groups, participating. All the

chiefs who owe allegiance to the *Asantehene* swear their oaths on the last day of laying ins state.

The next important scene is the procession from the palace to the village: the transport of the physical movement of the dead from the human habitation to “*Asamando*” (the place of the dead). This is done after nightfall. This kings travels in the manner of a living king with a retinue of wives, servants, retainers, drummers, and paraphernalia among others. In the olden days, those selected to accompany the king would join him in crossing over either by voluntary suicide or by execution. At various sacred and ancestral spots, at river crossings and important cross roads libation would be performed. This is done too ensure that no mishap occurred during the journey. Often, libation would be poured to the dead to get them to move – as some dead often prove reluctant to leave their human relations and place of domicile, and show their reluctance by turning back. The last libation is poured at the graveside and, for the king, at the house of repose at Breman.

Since the conversion of Asante kings to Christianity in the nineteenth century, instead of the direct crossing over from the palace to the village, royal funerals now include two further significant additional events in accordance with new beliefs about life after death. The two events are a church service held to climax the funeral rituals and the rites of committal and wreath laying. But tradition is still left to enact the final event: the ritual; of the mausoleum. The following extract is how Hagan and Odotei (2001), in their discourse on the final funeral rites of the late Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, highlight the infusion of Christianity into Asante king’s funeral:

“In his final journey, therefore, King Opoku Ware II thus left his palace, but did not ride directly to the home of the ancestors. He went to the Anglican Cathedral Church and house of God where he took leave of the community of Christian worshippers. The church service was the church’s way of giving a testimonial to the departed to enter the celestial realms. It is, significantly, also a final place for remission of sins. The next stage of the royal funeral took the cortege to Breman mausoleum where the coffin came to rest for wreath laying. Here modernity and Christianity ended. The royal journey from Bantama to the village of Breman was held at night in great secrecy.”

The various anniversaries – one week, forty (40) days, one year and ten (10) years are characterised by numerous rituals involving almost all forms of art such as verbal and visual. It is the big funeral that is a joyful event as it marks the incorporation of the deceased into the ancestral world. Throughout the year following the election and enstoolment of a new king, various rituals take place. It is during the anniversary that all other rites of transition are concluded. The climax of these is the blackening of the stool of the king.

#### 4.2.1 The Secret Farewell

At the moment of the death of the king, the Queen mother should perform the sacred rite of offering a drink to the departing “*kra*” (soul). She touches the lips of the dying king three times with a gold or silver mug containing a mixture of water, rum and gold dust. Symbolically, the water is offered to the *Sunsum* (spirit) to give it fortitude; and the gold is a token of the royal status of the departing *Kra*. As she offers the drink, she prays; and the libation prayer clearly shows the fundamental religious significance of death, the obligation of those left behind. She prays entreating the king to close the door to death and give support and blessings for the entire people to give him a successful burial (Hagan & Odotei, 2001).

By tradition, the dying king must rest in the arms of his son, the *Akyempemhene*. In a matrilineal system where nephews might represent danger to an incumbent king, the sons and grandsons of the golden stool must be around the king to protect him all the time.

#### 4.2.2 The Communion Rite

Another sacred rite centres on the bond between the king and his *Gyaase* (servants). A bowl of mashed yam is put at the foot end of the bed on which lies the king. The *Gyaase* must eat this meal in the place of exposition, as the final communion meal between the soul of the king and members of the *Gyaase*.

These, among others, are the sacred rites that constitute the essential event of the funeral rites of an Asante King. The departure of the king creates tension and anxieties in many corporate domains. So for the many corporate groups or categories of people intimately affected by the death, the funeral acts as a means of meeting the shock and adjusting to a new state of affairs.

#### 4.2.3 Laying the King in state

Before the body of the king is laid in state, there are various duties performed by the *Gyaase* chiefs. First of all, the body has to be prepared by the *Gyaase* people. It is washed, and the *Abanasehene* trims the nails while the *De[bo]sohene* gives the king a clean shave. The *Nsumankwaahene* is the chief medicine-man for the king and the health of the king is his special responsibility. He is also responsible for the preservation of the dead body of the king.

“My duties as the king lives are similar as the king die. They roles I play at the king’s durbar when he is alive are similar to roles I play when he dies.”

The researcher was told the above by the *Nsumankwaahene*, one of the most important chiefly positions of the *Gyaase* Division of the *Asantehene’s* palace. One of the most important tasks for the *Nsumankwahene* at the burial ceremony of the king of Asante is to adorn the body of the king with stool regalia. These regalia including gold ornaments, talismans, armbands, *abotire* (head bands), are used to adorn the deceased king. One of the talismans which Asantes call *Annasennase* is put on king’s feet to give him rest on his journey to the ancestral world.

While the *Nsumankwaahene* hold the king’s talismans, the *Abanasehene* brings his (the king’s) cloth and *danta* (under garment), the *Mpaboahene* (chief in charge of the king’s sandals), brings his sandals, the *Sanaahene* brings his gold and other ornaments. These materials together with other regalia from the *Sanaahene* and *Mawerehene* are used to dress the king. These insignia and other precious materials, the researcher was told, would however be removed from the king’s body when he is being put into the coffin. However, one of each item used to adorn the king has to remain on the body for the burial. Hence, each of the chiefs involved with the adornment of the king would have to leave one precious artefact for the king to take with him on his journey to the ancestral world.

While the *Nsumankwaahene* holds his talismans, the *Abanasehene* provides his cloth and *danta* (under garment), the *Mpaboahene* (chief in charge of the king’s sandals) brings his

sandals, the *Sanaahene* brings his gold and other ornaments. These materials together with other regalia from The *Sanaahene* and *Mawerehene* are used to dress the king.

According to Mr. Osei Kwadwo at the Manhyia Palace Museum, these insignia and other precious materials would be removed from the king's body when he is being put into the coffin. However, one of each item used to adorn the king must remain on the body for the burial. Hence, each of the chiefs involved with the adornment of the king would have to leave one precious item for the king to take with him on his journey to the ancestral world. My respondent added that it is the next king who replaces such items left on the king.

Just as the security of the king is paramount whilst he is alive, so it is when he is laid in state. *Nana Kr]nk]hene* told the researcher that for the number of days that the king is laid in state at the Manhyia palace, the *Gyaase* chiefs and their kinsfolk guarded the body of the king and the palace day and night until the burial. The following words from *Nana Kr]nk]hene* reveals how the *Gyaase* people guard the palace on such occasion:

“Since the king's palace is for the *Gyaase* people we have to guard the palace. We do it in shifts. A person goes out for a while and another comes in, especially during the night. During the daytime we sit down for people to come and greet us. The *ayie* (funeral) is ‘on our laps’ (si y[n nan so). Therefore we sit at the palace for people to express to us their *yak]* (condolence). Some of our sympathisers bring us drinks and some also bring money.”

#### 4.2.4 *Kra Duane*(Soul Food)

The provision of food for the travelling king is a major burial practice of the Asante. According to the *Sodo]hene* of the *Gyaasehene* group, before the journey the king must have his last supper with his children, the whole *Gyaase* contingent. This last meal is important to

climax the rites of separation. While the king was alive, he fed his children and therefore the children must honour their father with a farewell dinner, and since it is a long and difficult journey, the king must have his last support meal. This meal strengthens the body and helps him to get ancestral world; the king cannot being the trip to the ancestral world on an empty stomach. The food generally was prepared with a fowl, eggs, [t] (mashed plantain or yam), which comes in two colours, white and red. The white portion has no oil while the red portion is prepared with red palm oil. Another traditional meal presented to the king is *fufuo* (pounded yam) and light soup with mutton. Together with water, the food is placed beside the body. The meal is prepared by the *Gyaase Sodo[fo]* royal cooks), supervised by the *Sodo]hene* (the head cook).

#### 4.2.5 *]hene Akwank]gyafo]* (the king's attendants to the ancestral world).

One of the most rituals performed to aid the king to the ancestral world is the custom of 'sending off' attendants with the king. This extremely sacred ritual is performed only when a great king of exceptional standing goes to the ancestral world. The king must enter the ancestral world with dignity as a king and must be accompanied by his attendants.

Enquiring about the people who accompany the deceased king to the ancestral world, the *Saamanhene* declined to give the researcher such information. With a smile he said, '*ns[m sei y] asumas[m, mentumi nka,*' meaning, 'I cannot talk about these mysteries.' In retrospect, besides his favourite wives, several attendants some of whom were slaves, royals and high palace court officials should accompany the king. Some of the attendants voluntarily requested to join the king to the ancestral world. Rattray reflects on the kinds of people who accompanies the king to the ancestral world as follows:

Among the scores killed at royal funerals were some of the highest of the land, high court officials, relatives and wives of the dead monarch, who no longer having any desire to live once ‘the great tree had fallen’, compelled their relatives to slay them by swearing the great oath that they must do so, thus not leaving them any option except to carry out their wishes (Rattray 1927: 107).

Besides voluntary ‘self contribution’, some of the *Amanhene* (the paramount chiefs) and *Asafohene* (captains in the king’s army) were also expected to supply their quota of attendants; and they in turn collected bodies from lesser and sub-chief for the king’s burial.

#### 4.2.6 The Apunnuro

*Apunnuro* is a mixture of leaves burnt by the *Nsumankwaahene* during burial of Asante kings and also during ceremonial occasions. The *Nsumankwaahene* provides *apunnuro*, medicines that emit smoke- producing pleasant fragrance when the king is laid in state and also when the *Gyaase* carry him away to be buried at *Banmu* (the royal *museleum*). The public does not know the plants that form the *apunnuro*. These are secret plants that are deemed to be very powerful; they are known only by the *Nsumankwaahene* and men who are in touch with the great medicines of mother Earth, the informant told the researcher. As the *Nsumankwaahene* is required to provide these plants, his people grow some of them on their respective farms. Ware II, he the *Nsumankwaahene* provided seven kilo-bag of *apunnuro* for the occasion. All these ingredients put together is called *Sasaduro*, from lexeme *Sasa* meaning ‘spirit’ and *duro* from *aduro* meaning medicine. The purpose of *Sasaduro* is to ward of bad spirits; it is intended to neutralise any spell that might be cast on the king’s journey to the ancestral world.

#### 4.2.7 Oath Swearing

As Asante chief swear to the king of Asante when he is installed, so shall they swear to him when he goes to his village. Swearing an oath to the departed king is of special significance to the *Gyaase* and for this reason every *Gyaase* chief must attend. Refusal to attend such a great ceremony is tantamount to rebelling against the Golden Stool and must be followed with sanctions. Swearing to the departed king does not mean owing allegiance to the dead, rather it is a leave-taking from the king. With the *Busummuru* Sword, the *Gyaase* chiefs swear: Had it been a war, we could have fought to protect and bring back the king but no one could fight mighty death.’ This swearing is breaking the bond between the chiefs and the deceased king; it also releases them from previous oaths sworn (when the king was alive) so that they could be free to swear and serve the next king. Here the *Gyaase* chiefs render ultimate homage to their great king’s heroism. They express expiation, adoration and gratitude in order to establish a spiritual bond between the living and the dead. Swearing the oath also serves to establish and to strengthen a covenant between the deceased king and the *Gyaase* chiefs, a sense of hope for the Golden Stool and the Asante nation.

#### 4.2.8 Some general information about the Asantehene’s funeral

There are other important activities that characterise the funeral rites of a deceased Asante king, especially when he is laid in state. These are in the hands of the minor *Gyaase* chiefs. The *Safiasohene* and his group, *Safiesofol*, the king’s palm wine tappers, have to supply palm wine for the burial ceremony. The *Atenehene*, although belonging to the *Ank]bea* Division, also provides *t[ne* (torch) made out of palm branches to provide light to lead the

deceased king to his village. *Atumfo]* (gunmen) headed by the *Atumfo]hene* throughout the burial cycle display musketry at certain sports in time.

In sum, the Asante Manhyia *Gyaase* is a powerful organised institution made up of numerous chiefs belonging to various clans. The most important pillars of the *Gyaase* service units are, *Saamanhene, Buabasa, Dade[-soabahene, Mawer[hene, Anantehene, Nk]so]hen*, and their subordinate chiefs. One can easily observe from the above general account that it is the *Gyaase* that is mainly responsible for the arrangements for the burial of a deceased Asante king. The *Gyaase* control most of the activities of the burial and it is functional roles played by various *Gyaase* service units that bring the burial of a dead Asante to a successful end.

#### 4.2.9 *Kunay]*: observance of widowhood rites by the wives of the deceased Asante king

*Kuna*, or widowhood rites are ceremonies performed for a person on the death of his or her spouse (Hagan and Odotei, 2001). These rites constitute one of the most important rites of passage. In many African cultures, while widowers go through the required ritual processes over a short period, and with little public attention, widows customarily go through a protracted period of isolation in the midst of invectives and conflicts. Some widows undergo untold hardship (Goody 1962; Nukunya 1969; Ahiskpor 1975; Kirwen 1979 cited in Hagan and Odotei 2001:69).

Among the Asante the rites are observed by any person, high or low, upon the death of a spouse and are less rigorous. Asante *Kunay]* has three stages: separation, liminal or transition and integration. The ceremonies to mark these different stages include observances

and taboos meant symbolically to express, among others, the new status of the giving spouse and to ensure the safe transition of the spirit of the deceased into the world of the dead. The *Kunay* is over when *ayik[se]* (final rite) has been performed one year after the death of the husband.

The data for the field research for this chapter has been mainly the contribution of six enthusiastic, cooperative elderly women, among others. They include two of the six widows of the king, namely. Nana Ama Serwaa, Hiahene (most senior royal wife and chief of all the wives), and Nana Akua Afriyie, Anantahemaa, as well as Nana Serwaa Ababio II, Pampasohemaa, whose duty is to hand over the king-elect for installation, Nana Adwoa Praman, {ser[sohemaa and caretaker of the widows, Nana Afua Pokuaa a widow of a subchief, and her daughter Ama Pokuaa who is also a widow.

#### 4.2.10 Marriage with the Asantehene

In Asante, there are certain traditionally designated families, houses or areas like *ayigya* and *Ananta* that owe wives to the *Asantehene*. That is, they are obliged to give women in marriage to the king. This system is called *ay[t]*. According to Wilks (1993:333), and substantiated during my field research by Nana Antwi-Bosiako, an *okyeame* to the late Otumfo] Opoku Ware II. The *Asantehene* is legally allowed 3,333 wives. However women who fall under the *ay[t]* could be married by the king or given into marriage to men of his choice. This means that the designation ‘wife’ is not the appropriate term for these women since not all the 3,333 women become wives of the king. Presumably, the *ay[t]* institution

was a means through which the Golden Stool could symbolically exercise control over all the women.

Some of these women who are marriage off by the king to other men are still subject to the *ay[t]* system, and they can be called upon into the service of the king to perform duties (excluding sexual intercourse) for him, or on his behalf, when the need arises. Therefore, it could be argued that an *ay[t]* or a ‘wife’ to the *Asantehene* does not necessarily establish a sexual relationship with the king. This explains why even though *Otumfo]* did not leave a widow as such there were still wives/widows to perform the *kuna* rites.

The *ay[t]* have some benefits. For example, when a king marries a woman from an *ay[t]* family. He apportions to her a parcel of land and a stool whose *Jhemaa* she also becomes. That is the *Anantehemaa* and *Hiahene*. At this juncture, it must be explained that the designation for the most senior wife of the king is *Hiahene* rather than *Hiahemaa*. This does not only denote that she is the chief of all the wives but also underscores a historical fact. According to Agyeman Duah (1965:1,10), *Okoon ‘mfo Anokye*, the great high priest of Asante, buried all black stools and created new ones with the exception of two. This two ancient stools were that of the ‘*Obaapanin* (female occupant) to the ‘*Hia* stool’ and on ‘*Aryiten*’ (*ay[t]*) stool. It is emphasised that when a king has married a woman and given her a stool, the stool remains in her family and when she dies her family must give the king’s family a replacement. The family remains married to the king’s stool and thus to subsequent kings forever. This again underscores the reason why there were widows for the late king even though the ‘real widow’ was missing.

As Akan custom prescribes, marriage is an institution between two families rather than two individuals, and generally the family with whom one enters into marriage may, under a *sororate* marriage, replace any wife who dies. Just as the king never dies, neither does the marriage he contracts. This is also the case in the marriage between the *Asantehene's* family and the marriage bounded families (*ay[t/]*) that provide the royal wives. A pertinent question that arises then is why the late wife of the *Otumfo]* was not replaced? In her case, was the marriage dissolved by the death or could it be premised that the *Otumfu]*'s strong religious affiliation with Christianity was made to override Asante custom?

The wives with whom the king cohabits are few, and they are women of child bearing age who are secluded in a quarter within the palace called *Hia* where no man is allowed entry. According to Wilks (1993). The king himself does not keep more than six wives with him in the palace. This numerical symbolism is very significant because it also explains why there were six women who went through the widowhood rites for the late king.

Regardless of his marital status prior to his ascendancy to the Golden Stool, the *Asantehene* is obliged to take an *akonwa yere* (stool wife) with whom he will beget his first *ahenkan* (royal prince). Children produced prior to his ascendancy to the throne are not classified as such.

The *Ahenkan* is important because he assumes the position of *Akyempemhene* (chief of the king's sons) secondly, the *Ahenkan* is important because the *Asanteman* (Asante state) is build upon such royal off springs. However, the *Otumfo]* made an exception to this rule. He

did not take any stool wife but maintained Victoria, the only wife he had, prior to and after his ascendancy to the throne.

Despite the fact that the *Otumfo*] did not expressly divorce or marry the stool wives, he was financially sustaining 46 women, as would a husband. The number 46 represents the 46 households that give wives to the Golden Stool. According to the *Hiahene*:

We have been set apart as wives for the king, and it is when your husband dies that a woman has to undergo such rituals. If we were not his wives we would not have been expected to go through the rites. We are the senior wives of the king. The king did not divorce us. In fact, he was maintaining us, as a husband should, the only exception being the absence of sexual relations. If I were a young woman, the new king could have married me in the sexual series. Presently, we are nominally his wives.

The above supports the popular view that the *Otumfo*] did not marry the widows because they were too old. This further conflicts with the idea that the king has no sexual obligation towards an *ay[t]* once she has been given into marriage.

Also, there were complicating views regarding the king's right to divorce. One opinion is that the king is married to the stool and therefore cannot divorce the stool wives. The *Hiahene* refutes this view stating that the king has the right to divorce his wife, though the divorce does not really end the marriage. She revealed:

Long ago my grandmother, whose position I have inherited now, married Prempeh I but they had no children before the British sent him into exile in the Seychelles. After waiting for seven years her family had her remarried. Two children came out of this marriage. On the return of Prempeh I, my grandmother gave him her own daughter (my auntie) into marriage. They had two children of whom one died. When Prempeh II succeeded Prempeh I, he also married this same aunt, and they had four children but he later divorced her. When my auntie died my mother succeeded her as the new *Hiahene*. Therefore when Prempeh II died my mother performed widowhood rites on behalf of my deceased auntie even though Prempeh II had divorced her. Then my mother automatically became the senior wife of the next king, *Otumfo*] Opoku Ware

II. Thus marriage between *Hia* stool and the *Asantehene* is continuous; it is forever, an unending part, we never cease marrying.

The current *Hiahene*, Nana Ama Serwaa, is from Ayigya, the home town of the senior wives of the Asante kings. We are called *Hiahene* and are the senior wives of the king (not in age but in terms of the stool they occupy). This function is vested in us. ‘She narrates how she became the ‘wife’ of the *Asantehene*:

My mother was not well when Otumfo] Opoku Ware died. I had to surrogate for my sick and aging mother (80 years) as *Hiahene* and perform the rites on her behalf. As a result, I have become the new *Hiahene*. Legally, under our custom, the king can marry me but because I am old I will not marry but will keep my position as *Hiahene* and touch wood, should anything happen, I will undergo all the rituals that behave a wife.

The fore going again illustrates the permanency of marriage between the Golden Stool and the *ay[tl*. Even though there is a bond of marriage between the *Hia* stool I and the Golden stool, the king can divorce the individual but not the family when still owe the latter a replacement. Conceivably, the idea of indissolubility of marriage could refer to the link between the king’s stool and the particular *ay[tl* stool rather than the individuals as it is with African marriage generally. Thus, the stool wife, whether divorced or dead is supposed to perform widowhood rites on the death of the king.

#### 4.2.11 Funerals for common people

An elderly person aware of imminent death, usually summon his relatives and instructs them as to the disposition of his property. He recounts the amount he owes and what is due him. The Asante believe that in order to reach ‘*asamando*’ (place of ghosts), a steep hill must be climbed. They therefore see the dying person as panting for breath, and think of his soul as

struggling up some steep incline. A draught of water is therefore given to speed him up on his journey.

Death was announced by loud wailing and women rushed into streets with disordered cloths and dislevelled hair. Hot water, new sponge and new towel were used to wash the corpse and rum or gin was poured down the throat with the idea of delaying the process of decomposition. The body was then dressed in richest cloths and adorned with gold ornament and beads. Then it was laid in state which means it was laid down as if asleep or propped up on a stool as if sitting, to receive visitors. All most valuable articles of the deceased were placed around the corpse and a dish that was most preferred in life was prepared and placed before it. The body was sometimes placed on its left side to leave the right free for eating '*kra duane*' (food for the soul) which usually consisted of a fowl, eggs, mashed plantains or yam and water.

The house was filled with females and neighbours who joined in lamentations and addressed the corpse either reproaching him for having left them or beseeching his '*saman*' (ghost) to watch over and protect them. The wailing was interrupted every hour and then to allow the widows to entreat the deceased to eat and drink. Men sat outside to receive condolences and presents in the form of money and drinks.

From the moment of death relatives abstained from food as long as their strength permitted and people drank large quantities of spirits and palm wine. If the death was that of a chief, his successor proclaimed a fast for about two to three days of all inhabitants during which he

supplied them with drink. This practice has changed over the years and even now food is prepared and served to those who actually travelled from various places in order to attend the funeral. These days the body is normally buried before the funeral rites are performed.

Asantes appear to credit the spirits of the dead with what is considered to be a somewhat inferior intelligence. In the past the corpse was passed through a hole made in the wall as it was not supposed to pass through any door. This hole was filled or blocked later so that the spirit would find it difficult to return into the house if it wished to do so. Bodies are buried in coffins and when wooden coffins were not in use. The body was wrapped in mats. The coffin was placed on the ground after being made to set down twice to give *Asase Yaa* (earth goddess) due notice and warning and finally settled down. The head of the family stepped forward, holding in either hand a branch of '*summe*' (a kind of shrub) touching the coffin with each branch alternately saying '*Asamasi, me pae wo 'kra ne y[n atam*' meaning 'so-and-so, I separate your soul from us'.

The coffin was made large enough on purpose to contain the corpse as well as considerable valuable property. Wealthy persons were buried with expensive silk cloths, hand kerchiefs, gold ornamented pipes, gold studded sandals, arms adorned with strings of nuggets and aggrey beads. This practice has stopped recently due to the activities of grave robbers who exhume coffins and steal their contents including some human parts.

On the way to the cemetery, the wife of the deceased preceded carrying a pot '*Kuna kukuo*' (widow's or widower's pot) upon the head, containing three stones and '*mme*' and '*nunum*' leaves. Food was placed in basins and together with the sponge and towel and water pots

used in bathing the corpse was taken with the body to the burial ground. Only the family and clansmen of the deceased actually went to the graveyard. All others turned back at the cross-roads leading to it. Now, it appears that anybody who wishes to do so can go to eh graveyard except perhaps children. The family of the deceased, that is the blood or clan relations (*'abusuafo'*) consist among others of the mother, brothers, sisters, mother's sister's children and in cases where the deceased is a woman, her own children. It appears as if now the children of the deceased, whether a male or female, are part of the family.

Before sending the corpse to the cemetery, gifts were presented to the dead body. The theme of presentation is 'let your family have long life and health'. May one get money to pay for your funeral; do not let any of us fall sick; may the women bear children'. When the spouse of the deceased presented his or her gift, he or she almost invariably added 'Do not let me become impotent' or let me bear children 'according to whether it was a male or female'.

After depositing the articles in the coffin and covering it, sacrifices of fowls, sheep or bullocks were made, guns were fired, rum and other drinks distributed and the day terminated with drunkenness and debauchery. This could last for weeks in wealthy families. It was repeated a week later (*nnawohoe*), two weeks (*dadunnum*), fortieth day (*adaduannan*), eightieth day (*adaduow]twe*) and finally the first anniversary (*afe*).

People who touch the corpse were considered unclean and needed to proceed in procession to the nearest well or brook and sprinkled themselves with water for purification. These days water is placed in front of the house for the same purpose. Not only do people wash their hands and feet but all the tools used at the graveside are also washed.

As indicated earlier, all the blood relations of the deceased shaved their heads on the '*sova da*' set for the final funeral rites. Nowadays those who do not wish to do so have to 'buy' it at a price so that they are allowed to keep their hair intact.

#### 4.2.12 Widows

Customary laws seem to demand the treatment of widows by the blood relations of their late husband harshly. The matrimonial contact is not entirely dissolved on the death of the husband. Under a system where levirate is in vogue they become after a year, the wives of the late husband's brother or the property of the late husband's heir. 'The vagina is locked' for a year from the date of death. Should they marry or indeed have sexual intercourse before the end of that period, 'the dead man will come to sleep with them and cause them either to be barren or die'.

During the nights they were compelled to sleep or sit beside the corpse until it was buried. The man whom the widow eventually married needed to pay her a fee before he was permitted 'to pluck the *bofunu* gridle', ('*k]te bofunu or kyekye n'aba so*') which were waist belts substituted for the '*toma*' beads after the death of the husband.

On the '*Sora*' day the widow was taken by the womenfolk belonging to the deceased to the local stream and was made to pay a fee for the privilege of having her head washed. Her hair was shaved and she was made to bathe stark naked. After this she ran away as fast as she could to a friend's house to escape from the late husband's '*Sasa*' (ghost). During the funeral

rites, a widow did not even use chewing stick or tooth-brush without paying a fee to the women of the clan of the deceased, nor may even drink palm-wine without paying another fee. She remained unclean for eight day.

#### 4.2.13 Funerals of Priests and Priestesses

As far as priest and priestesses are concerned, death and mourning and sorrow do not exist. The visible signs of mourning are taboo to them. It is feared that on the death of a priest or priestess, the deceased may carry away forever the powers he or she had learned to control. It is believed that the gods manifest themselves to their 'servants' by using them as the media through which their influence acts.

It seems that by death the 'servant' of the god as defiled the shrine of the particular deity and so rendered it unacceptable to the spirit which is expected to enter it. This interpretation is given for their funeral ceremony which is discussed later.

#### 4.2.14 Children's funeral

A still-born child and a children who dies before a period of one week is referred to as '*Kukuba*' (Post child). This is because they are put in pots for burial. Such a child is mishandled to impress upon it that such behaviour is unacceptable in the world and that it has done wrong and should therefore not repeat it (because of the belief in reincarnation). A mat is spread on the ground, sometimes outside the house and the child placed on it. A coffin is made out of cheap boards, sometimes from empty crates, as burial takes place as soon as possible. The mother is no expected to weep else she may not bear any more children. The

parents are made to have a bath and sit on a mat where they are offered marched yams and eggs to eat together from the same dish.

First three spoonfuls are brought successively close to the mouth and withdrawn and thrown to the ground. These are supposed to be offered to God the Father, the mother earth goddess and the ancestors respectively. The rest is then eaten by husband and wife, both dipping their hands into the food simultaneously to encourage child birth. This accompanied with a boiled egg each which is eaten whole. For one week they keep eating good meal together from the same dish. During the week, they are not expected to handle money, farm implements or anything considered valuable.

At the end of the week they are taken to the outskirts of the town or village along a path leading to the riverside for a ritual which is supposed to provide them with more children. An antelope's hide is spread on the ground and a few seeds of 'wisa' (black pepper) thrown upon it. The seeds are supposed to represent the future children. First the man wails across and back three times and the woman follows suit. On returning home, all such articles they were denied to handle during the past week are symbolically given back to them. They are 'put' into the hand and immediately withdrawn on three occasions. On the fourth, he and later she holds them briefly and gives them back. Later, they have a ceremonial bath to purify themselves and start living together as usual.

#### 4.2.15 Suicides

In Ashanti suicide is recognised as a very disgraceful type of death and as such if the body is found it must be disgraced. If the deceased committed the suicide by hanging, it is expected that the finder should cut the rope used in order to release the '*sumsum*' (personality soul). The cutting of the rope is not supposed to be done gently otherwise the '*sasa*' (ghost) of the deceased would follow him (the cutter) home and harass him. Before cutting, the finder should slap the body either on the face or bottom and flog him as well. Abusive words should also be showered on him and leaves should be cut and put on the body to cover it. The finder may say 'you are disgraced'. 'I am going home to report you'. The finder is also expected to leave the knife or cutlass used in cutting the rope at the spot and spit on it.

In the olden days the body was buried under the tree together with whatever clothes the deceased was wearing at the time of death and the particular branch on which the rope was tied was cut and either buried with the corpse or put on the grave. The reason is that the tree is thought to have been contaminated with filth and therefore unclean. It is believed that the branch would be carried along by the '*sasa*' wherever is travelled. Now the body is not put in a coffin and no '*adesiede*' (burial articles) accompany the deceased person.

Rather a hollowed palm kernel is given him to use as a whistle to announce his own death and arrival into the spirit world since drumming, singing and wailing has not been performed to serve this purpose. The deceased is not mourned and all libations for him are given with the left hand because such as death is detestable and in Ashanti, everything regarded as such is held with the left hand.

If somebody committed suicide with any weapon like say, a cutlass, it is buried with him so that he would be armed to be able kill whoever worried him to the extent of making him commit suicide.

#### 4.2.16 Modern funerals

The introduction of Christianity and Islam in Ghana and Ashanti for that matter, has greatly influenced funeral celebrations in general to such an extent that most of the practices described above have greatly been modified or abandoned altogether and innovations have also been introduced. The following is a brief account of modern day funerals in Ashanti and as the body arts that go with it are dealt with under a separate chapter, these have been eliminated.

With the introduction of mortuaries, it is now the practice to keep the corpse frozen while the relatives make preparations towards the funeral. Within this period, sometimes lasting more than a month, the '*abusuafie*' (family house) is renovated. At the same time relatives who happen to be far away, especially those in foreign lands, are informed so that they might bring home some money or send it if they cannot attend themselves to assist in the funeral ceremony. A funeral committee comprising of closest relatives as well as some influential personalities is formed to plan and fix dates for a wake-keeping, final funeral rites and a thanksgiving service. Advertisements are made on radio and obituary notices are posted on walls as well as in newspapers.

It is believed that the idea of keeping wake ‘{p[sire’ originated from the fact that as wild animals were rampant in the olden days and used to harass the people in their settlements in the thick forest, to prevent the body from being carried away or consumed by these animals, bonfires were set in the middle of a gathering about the corpse to scare off the animals as well as keep the mourners warm. This was originally done in the midst of drumming, dancing, singing weeping and waiting but as time went on the drinking of alcoholic beverages, the chewing of kola nuts, ginger, toffees and coffee drinking have emerged to enabled the mourners to be kept awake for the night’s vigil. Of late a group of musicians may be hired to play or in the absence of such a group, an electronic sound system may be employed to provide music concerning death and its associated consequences.

In place of the hollowed tree trunk or bark of tree within which the body was placed wrapped up in cotton wool, what prevails now is the expensive locally made coffins and even, with regards to some wealthy individuals, coffins of silver, brass or glass and like media are sometimes imported from abroad to befit the position and status of the deceased or to display the wealth of the living relatives. Normally, it is the children of the deceased who purchase coffins. Sometimes, too it is some organization to which the deceased belonged which provides the coffin.

As the result of the use of cotton wool for burial practices, it tended to become scarce at times and consequently became quite treasured. It was not always possible for relatives to provide the required quantity and due to this they called on sympathizers, friends and well-wishers to donate some cotton for wrapping around the corpse. This practice brought about

what is termed '*nsaab]de]*' literally meaning 'cotton help' from '*asaawa*' (cotton) '*aboade]*' (helper). It has also been put forward that the term has been derived from the practice of offering small quantities of '*nsafufuo*' (palm wine) as donations to assist the bereaved family to enable them offer drinks to the sympathizers at the funeral. That's '*nsa abode]*' literally meaning wine helpings or wine assistance. Whatever the case might be all contributions made either directly to the bereaved family or indirectly to the deceased were termed thus.

The traditional requirements of money and the other numerous items which used to accompany the dead to the spirit would have been reduced considerably due to the introduction of Christianity which regards such practices as idol worshipping. It can also be attributed partly to the activities of grave robbers who, it is said, spy and loot graves containing such wealth.

Traditionally, in Asante funeral days are Mondays and Thursdays if they happen not to be '*da b]ne*' bad days, days especially reserved for the deities to descend and partake of men's affairs. This situation has changed over the years and nowadays most funeral celebrations are on Saturdays when government and other workers are free to attend.

It used to be sheds constructed of sticks and covered with palm fronds that provided shade for funeral ceremonies but now, hired canopies are the order of the day (except in typical villages). Close relatives of the deceased sit upon mats provided for that purpose in front of the sheds or canopies while he rest, that is well wishers, sympathizers and friends, are provided with forms and foldable chairs. Some made relatives take their positions at strategic points behind tables to receive donations for which receipts are issued. Formerly only drinks

were provided but not food is given to participants in the family house. After drinks have been accepted and taken, people send their donations in the form of money or drink and this contribution is announced to the general public through a public address system if this is available. Usually the contributions are proportionately commensurate with the quantity of and more importantly the quality of the drinks provided. This differs from village to village according to the local laws enacted to govern the performance of funerals in the locality. Meanwhile, a band or too would be playing traditional or modern music to the rhythm of which those interested dance. Donations may continue for about a week or more and the clansmen settle down after this period and calculate their expenditure and income. If a debt is incurred it is borne by the clansmen who distribute it according to one's standing with the greater portion usually taken by the successor.

At certain funerals, especially of elderly people, one may notice that a procession of women and girls, preceded by one carrying a bundle, would suddenly appear at a corner and proceed to go round the funeral grounds. These bundles are called '*adosowa*'. They have their origins from funerals of kings. As said earlier, the wives of a dead *Asantehene* were killed to accompany the dead king to the spirit world. To console the dead king's married sons, whose mothers were going to be killed the night before the burial of the royal body therefore, their wives prepared these and carried them to the funeral grounds.

One may also notice at certain funerals that all the grand children of the deceased person who are below the age of puberty are grouped together wearing a prescribed cloth, usually white. These children who are not expected to fast, move from one end of the village to the other, stamping on the ground with old pestles and chanting '*Nana awu oo! Yenmua nna oo!*' it is

said that they are insisting on a demand for money to purchase food, implying that if the demand was not met they would disrupt proceedings at the funerals. This type of performance takes place mainly in the rural areas these days.

On the Sunday following the immediate Saturday on which the funeral proper is performed, memorial and thank signing service are held in the church of which the deceased was a member. They are usually accompanied with refreshments and grand parties after the church service. Some families which are particularly fond of the deceased, may observe the first anniversary in a grand style as if the death was fresh.

#### 4.2.17 Funerary arts in Kumasi: the extent of acculturation

The introduction of Christianity and Islam in Ghana and Asante for that matter has greatly influenced funeral ceremonies in general to such an extent that most of the practices described above have greatly been modified or abandoned altogether and innovations have also been introduced. The following is a brief account of modern day funerals in Kumasi.

The concept of mortuaries, which is a result of the westernization of the Ghanaian culture, has established a common practice of keeping the corpse frozen while the relatives make preparations towards the funeral. Within this period, sometimes, lasting more than a month, the *abusua* (family house) is renovated. Thus, the death of a relative appears to have direct influence on the environmental art (creative art, usually on a grand scale, that is meant to invite the viewer to participate by interacting with the art work: Microsoft Encarta Dictionaries 2010) of the vicinity. On arrival in Kumasi, a stranger who is conversant with

this practice of giving family houses a facelift upon the death of relatives may easily identify bereaved families by virtue of house painting. This, however, is not to imply that all newly painted houses in Kumasi marks of bereavement. Keeping the corpse at the mortuary paves the way to inform relatives who happen to be far away, especially those in foreign lands so that they might bring home some money or send it, if they cannot attend themselves, to assist in the funeral ceremony. A funeral committee comprising the closest relatives as well as some influential personalities is formed to plan and fix dates for a wake-keeping (this is gradually disappearing in recent times), final funeral rites and a thanksgiving service. Advertisements are made on radio and obituary notices are pasted on walls as well as in newspapers.

It is believed that the idea of keeping wake, *apesire*, originated from the fact that as wild animals were rampant in the olden days and used to harass the people in their settlements surrounded by thick forests, to prevent the body from being carried away or consumed by these animals, bon fires were set in the middle of a gathering about the corpse to scare off the animals as well as keep the mourners warm. This was originally done in the midst of drumming, dancing, singing, weeping and wailing but as time went on, the drinking of alcoholic beverages, the chewing of nuts, ginger, toffees and coffee drinking have emerged to enable the mourners to stay awake for the vigil. Of late, the services of a group of musicians (both traditional and contemporary) may be hired, or in the absence of such a group, an electronic sound system may be employed to provide hi-life music, usually relating to death and its associated consequences.

#### 4.2.18 The use of coffins

Coffins are works of art comprising long oblong containers, usually made of wood, in which dead bodies are placed for burial or cremation. It is worthy of notice that modernisation has influenced, to a greater extent, the arts associated with funerals in Kumasi. Oral tradition posits that in ancient times, hollowed-out tree trunks or barks of trees were the commonest objects within which dead bodies, wrapped up cotton wool, were placed before burial. The current practice is that expensive-looking locally made coffin, and even in the case of wealthy individuals, coffins of silver, brass or glass and like media are sometimes imported to befit the position and status of the deceased or to display the wealth of the living relatives. Customarily, it is the children of the deceased who purchase coffins in Asante. Sometimes, too, it is some organisation to which the deceased belonged which provides the coffin. A most recently emerging trend in Kumasi is that neighbourhood welfare groups *Koroye-kuo*, as part of members' show of love and unity to a departed colleague; offer to provide the coffin for the burial, among other things. The underlying fact remains that the ornamentation of the coffin in recent times has come to stay with Ghanaians (see plates 1 &2) with the exception of the Muslim community.



Plate 1. Carrying a corpse to the cemetery

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio



Plate 2. Burying the corpse

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio

#### 4.3 Body art of the corpse and burial goods

These seeming incompatible phenomena of Asante funeral ceremonies are jointly discussed here due to the closer link as well as the manner in which they are portrayed in Kumasi funeral rites. Most of the goods presented are meant to be put in the coffin apparently to accompany the deceased person to the underworld. As a result of using cotton wool for burial practices, it became scarce and consequently treasured. Relatives then began to experience difficulty in getting the required quantity and due to this; they called on sympathizers, friends and well-wishers to donate some cotton for wrapping the corpse. This practice brought about the concept of *nsaabode* a corrupted form of *asaawa* (cotton) and *aboade* (something presented to help). This also brings into focus the concept of *asiede* (funeral goods). This is a practice where a widow or widower of a deceased as well as his or her loved ones give items ranging from mats, pillows, pieces of cloth to handkerchiefs and rings. A western dimension of wreath presentation has also become a common practice. (See figure. 19) Another school of thought among Asantes opines that the term *nsaabode* has been derived from the practice of offering small quantities of palm-wine *nsafufuo* as donations to assist the bereaved family to enable it offer drinks to the sympathizers during the funeral. Thus, *nsa aboade*, literally means wine assistance. Whatever the etymology of *nsaabode*, all contributions in this regard either directly to the bereaved family or indirectly to the deceased were termed thus.



Plate 3. A dead chief of Asante in a sitting posture  
Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 4. A corpse lying in state  
Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 5. Mourners wailing a dead relative  
Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 6. A dual- purpose coffin with decorations

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio



Plate 7. Church members leading a procession to the cemetery

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio

Foreign religion (plate 8) and westernisation have suppressed the use of certain traditional requirements of money and the other numerous items which used to accompany the dead to the spirit world. The dress code of the corpse, apart from traditional rulers, is also yielding to pressure from westernisation (see plate 5). This is partly attributed to the scorn with which Christianity, Islam and western culture look at this practice, as it is considered idol worship. The marginalization of these traditional requirements is also blamed on the activities of grave looters, who, it is alleged, spy on the proceedings at funeral grounds and later loot graves containing such wealth. This second assertion is buttressed by the fact that grave looting is prevalent in urban centres where extravagance is displayed during funeral ceremonies. The application of art in the funeral ceremonies of Kumasi has brought about some cultural conflicts. There were situations when the researcher came across a dead Asante chief adorned in typical Asante regalia but was mounted in a sitting posture (see plate 4). Such a posture, the researcher was informed by some respondents, is attributed to some non-Akan ethnic groups.

Traditionally, Asante funeral days are Mondays and Thursdays if they happen not to be *nna b]ne* (bad days), days especially reserved for the deities to descend and partake of men's affairs. This situation has changed over the years and nowadays most funeral ceremonies in Kumasi are held on Saturdays when government and other workers are free to attend. Thus, the complexity of modernisation has influenced all facets of life including funeral ceremonies.

It used to be sheds constructed of sticks and covered with palm fronds that provided shade for funeral ceremonies. Socio-technological advancement has however brought in its wake a more convenient environmental art piece for funeral ceremonies in Kumasi as well as in many other parts of the country. Hired canopies are the order of the day. It must be stated that this new practice has led to the proliferation of canopy-hiring commercial ventures in Kumasi; prominent among which is Owner Services. Close relatives of the deceased sit upon mats provided for that purpose in front of the sheds or canopies while the rest, well wishers, sympathizers and friends, are provided with benches and or foldable wooden chairs. Plastic chairs are now largely in use at funeral grounds in Kumasi.

Opportunities are provided for well-wishers, sympathisers and friends to express their sympathy in monetary terms. In this regard, male relatives take their positions at strategic points behind tables to receive donations for which receipts are issued. It is an almost obligatory practice to announce such donations at the funeral grounds for all present to hear. No tangible reasons have been assigned to these announcements as the donor is given a receipt to show acknowledgement of the donation. It is now a common phenomenon in Kumasi to see donors crowding at public address systems at funeral grounds waiting impatiently for their donations to be announced. Formerly, only drinks were provided but now food is served to participants in the family house, or in cases where there are huge numbers of people to be served, other places, apart from the family houses, are sought within the vicinity to accommodate them. Sometimes, a catering service enterprise is contracted to prepare and serve the food.

Usually, the sympathisers' donations are proportionately commensurate (in relative terms) with the quantity and more importantly the quality of drinks served. Whereas some traditional authorities have enacted some traditional laws in recent times to the effect that drinks and food must not be served especially to natives (apparently to cut down funeral costs), it is not clear whether this can apply in Kumasi as it is difficult to decipher residents from non-residents due to the cosmopolitan nature of the city. That is not to say that there are no laws governing the performance of funerals in Kumasi. The Asantehene, [Osei Tutu II, in recent times issues decrees aimed at reducing the costs of funerals.

Music and dance continue to play vital roles in modern funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. The change, however, is that there is an interplay of traditional and 'modern' (computerized) music to the rhythm of which those who are interested dance. There seems to be some form of competition for dominance between traditional music and modern one. In situations where the organizers of a funeral do not exercise care to limit the number of musical groups; some may end up not getting the chance to perform at all. It has been observed that acculturation has not completely marginalized traditional music and dance. (See Plates 12 & 15) Rather, there has been an infusion of modern technology into this type of music to enhance its performance.

The *Ad/soa* procession in Kumasi has not given way to modernity. Instead, this has been magnified to reflect a show of wealth. At certain funerals in Kumasi, especially those of elderly people, one may notice that a procession of women and girls dressed in *Dansinkran* outfits led by a group of others carrying well-polished brass bowls containing well-arranged items depicting an almost infinite aesthetic appeal. This procession would suddenly appear at

a corner amidst chanting of appellations by onlookers. They will then proceed in a retinue, characterised by an un compelling majestic walk, round the funeral grounds. Thus, *Ad/soa* appears to exhibit almost all the art forms in the funeral rites of Kumasi (see plates 13 & 14). The *Ad/soa* bundles trace their origins to the funerals of kings. As stated earlier in this thesis, the wives of a dead Asantehene were killed to accompany the dead king to the ancestral world. To console the dead king's married sons, whose mothers were going to be killed the night before the burial of the royal body therefore; their wives prepared these and carried them to the funeral grounds.

Traditionally, the grand children of the deceased are not left out in the body art as well as the performing art associated with funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. One may notice that at certain funerals these grand children below the age of puberty are grouped together, all clad in a prescribed black and white cloth, which hitherto was white. These children, who are not expected to fast, move from one end of the community to the other stamping the ground with old pestles and chanting, "*Nana awuoo!*", "*Y[mmua nna oo!*" It is said that by so doing, they are insisting on a demand for money to purchase food, implying that if the demand was not met, they would disrupt proceedings at the funeral grounds. This performance has however ceased in Kumasi due to acculturation. The grand children are no longer identified by this performance, rather by the prescribed black and white cloth they wear. Where the deceased was a Christian, memorial and thanksgiving service is held in the church where he or she used to worship on the Sunday following the Saturday on which the funeral is performed. The service is usually followed with refreshment and sometimes a grand party. Some, families fond of the deceased, may observe the first anniversary in a grand style as if the death has just occurred. For instance, affluent families erect magnificent memorial billboards

bearing maximized photographs of those deceased relatives. This phenomenon has become a common scene when one takes a drive through Kumasi.

Widowhood rites are still observed today in Kumasi. One must however be quick to state that aspects of these rites considered to be idol worship by foreign religions are left out. The widow contributes to the *adesiedi* (funeral goods) that are used to wash and prepare the corpse. It is important to wash off the earthly pollution of the body so that the spirit can be transmitted into the spirit world. Nowadays, the items constituting a widow's funeral goods may include a blanket, bed sheet, pillow, mat, *ahenemma* (native sandals), bucket, assorted soaps, sponge, cloth, perfume and power, *danta* (loin cloth). The smearing of the widow with *ntwima* (red clay) on the face and shoulders on the day of burial is no longer a common practice except in the case of a dead chief. Again, at the funeral grounds, instead of traditional leaves held by the widow, specially designed synthetic flowers are used. The dress code of the widow still remains *kuntunkuni* (black) and *k]bene* (red). However, the red cloth is now worn over the black, a reversal of her dressing when the death occurs initially. Even in the face of modernity, a widow cannot put on any form of jewellery until after a year.

In conclusion, the use of funerary art in Kumasi has assumed commercial proportions. Whereas it took the communal spirit of family members to mount sheds for a funeral in the past, a family head nowadays must hire canopies and plastic chairs for a funeral. The obvious reason being that in a city like Kumasi, one cannot imagine where enough bamboo sticks and palm fronds can be obtained for such a purpose. Again, there is the general perception that a family may be subjected to public ridicule should any such thing be done considering the extent of modernization.

The preparation of the corpse which used to be the sole preserve of elderly female relatives is now done by professional undertakers whose gender and age cut across. These are full time practitioners who have their own materials for decorations. These undertakers exert a considerable level of influence with regard to how a corpse is dressed as well as the environmental art of where the deceased is laid in state. It must be emphasised that while a corpse would be dressed and adorned completely in a traditional manner in the past, the use of suits has become the order of the day for male dead bodies. In the case of female dead bodies, the dressing remains traditional interspersed with western adornments. The performance associated with carrying the body in a coffin no longer exists in Kumasi as commercial funerary entities such as Owner Services have imported specially-designed ambulances for this purpose. The operators charge between two hundred (200) and eight hundred (800) Ghana cedis. This depends on the condition of the ambulance and the distance to be covered.



Plate 8. Brass band music leading a procession to the cemetery

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio



Plate 9. Sympathisers wearing *kuntunkuni* at a funeral

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 10. Women wearing *kjbene* at a funeral

Source: 'Mr. Six' Photo Studio



Plate 11. Traditional dancers performing at a funeral

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 12. *Ad/soa* group at a funeral

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio



Plate 13. In-laws carrying *ad/soa*  
Source: Darling Photo Studio



Plate 14. *Kete* ensemble performing at a funeral

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 15. A procession of chiefs to a funeral grounds

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 16. A chief and a queen mother in full regalia at a funeral

Source: photograph taken by researcher



Plate 17. Children of the deceased at a typical Asante funeral

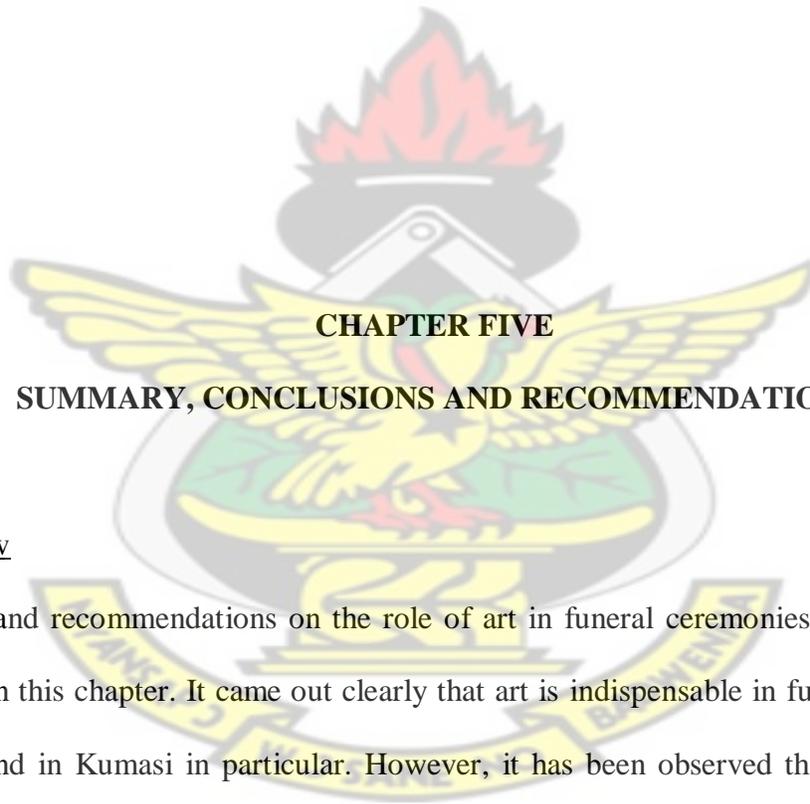
Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio



Plate 18. An expensive-looking tombstone

Source: 'Mr. Six' photo studio

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Overview

Conclusion and recommendations on the role of art in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi have been made in this chapter. It came out clearly that art is indispensable in funeral ceremonies in general and in Kumasi in particular. However, it has been observed that certain factors have vastly influenced indigenous funerary art. Recommendations have also been made to forestall the acculturation of Asante funerary art.

#### 5.2 Summary

The results of the study show that the following funerary arts have been largely discontinued in Kumasi. As indicated earlier on in this study, the burial of a dead Asante was characterized by the use of gold ornaments put in the coffin. However, it was found out that this no longer happens; even most of *adesiede*] (funeral goods) are not put in the coffin nowadays. Again, *danta* (loin cloth), and the *bofunu* girdle are not in use any more. The *Kunakukuo* (widowhood pot), *abusuakuruwa* and *kudo*] or prestige vessel are rarely seen.

Those funerary arts which have undergone some modification or are occasionally seen, are aggrey beads, the carrying of the *Ad]soa* bundle(s), the wearing of *awisiado abotire*, the shaving of the heads of close relations and some of the body decorations like painting with ochre and white clay. (see plate 18)

Most people interviewed are of the view that coffins are really necessary and their use cannot be discarded in the disposal of dead bodies. Respondents were, however, quick to add that it is a waste of “unavailable” funds to purchase very expensive coffins and that it is quite unimaginable to import coffins from other countries just to dispose of a dead body. They assert that Ghana abounds in enough forests that can provide more than enough wood for burying the dead. A few people, some of whom are Muslims, suggested that each sizeable community or suburb can have a reasonable number of coffins in its possession always in readiness for use. This, they claim, will curtail avoidable expenditure. This contention loses sight of the environmental health hazard that will be posed by such as practice. In the event of a resultant outbreak of a disease in the community, the cost would be too much to bear. They further explained that such communal coffins could be given to bereaved families on hiring basis to convey dead bodies to the cemetery and buried in a manner reminiscent of the

Islamic practice. It must, however, be stressed that culture cannot be sacrificed on the altar of cutting down costs. What could be minimized is ostentation. The environmental benefit, according to this school of thought, is that our fast depleting forests would be spared that agony. Some people were of the view that it will be unfair to lay down hard and fast rules on the issue of coffins irrespective of expenses incurred in acquiring them. They justify this line of argument with the thought that the type of coffin a family buys to bury a dead relative is a reflection of the person's contribution to the welfare of that family. This stance is stretched further to the extent that someone who has made philanthropic contributions to society is not expected to be buried ordinarily.

Apart from some few respondents who argued along religious lines, majority of the people agree that funeral costume is extremely crucial since it portrays the mood of the people. What a lot of people, most of whom are men, despise is the prescription of a cloth for every member of the bereaved family during the final funeral rites. They opine that such a practice is a digressive manipulation of Asante culture and must be treated with the contempt it deserves. Some elderly people who were interviewed expressed outrage about the issue of prescribing a funeral cloth since the age old cloths for Asante funerals are *birisie*, *k]bene* and *kuntunkuni*, the dominant colours of which are black, red and black respectively, an idea which Ratray and his contemporaries have stressed. Despite these protests, some women who appear to be affluent view this practice not as a show of ostentation but rather as deeds of generosity. They argue that with many different types of funeral attire in their possession, people who are less fortunate can borrow from them when the need arises. Thus, costume

prescription cannot be wastage when less privileged members of the community benefit from it.

Respondents agree on the hiring and erection of canopies and the provision of chairs for funeral performance. However, some Muslim respondents assert that the relatively seeming comfort that accompanies these facilities encourage sympathizers to stay longer at the funeral grounds. Besides, it is apparent display of avoidable expenditure.

The role of music is acknowledged as the lifeblood of most social functions including funeral ceremonies by most respondents. The only objection is when music makers feed the public / gathering with music that has immoral or erotic connotations. Such music tends to render the whole funeral as a form of entertainment, thus, making it lose the other aspects such as the sorrow and portrayal of certain aspects of the culture. Music has no substitute in funeral ceremonies, but it must be provided in a manner that will serve the purpose for which it was hired. Unlike the olden days, computerized contemporary music now dominates most funerals in Kumasi. The only exception is Muslim funerals where virtually no music is provided.

It is the perception of many respondents that if only members of a family can afford the cost, the erection of tombstones is quite acceptable. This is because as marker or identification objects, tombstones help families to remember their dead relatives. All those interviewed on this subject were of the opinion that tombstones should however be simple but of quality materials.

What seemed to be a general agreement was that new artefacts will be welcome to replace what are considered to be outdated; the nature of such a change was however left to time to determine. The dominant colours that are used during funeral are still in use. However, the young among the sympathizers do not seem to be bothered so much about costume as their appearance does not depict that of typical Asante mourners. In the course of this research, an elderly man retorted at the shabby dressing of a young man.

Apart from traditional rulers, the deceased is dressed in a suit, usually black, instead of the traditional multi-coloured *kente* cloth. Female corpses are dressed to look like even more gorgeous than a bride.

### 5.3 Conclusions

The culture of a people is one of the important vehicles for development. Funerary arts are therefore of paramount importance in the socio-economic development of the people.

The most intense periods of westernization of Asante culture, at an accelerated pace, coincided with the reign of Otumfo] Opoku Ware II(1970-1999). Part of this westernization was the spread of Christianity and its influence on Asante culture and institutions, and the conversion of the majority of Asantes to Christianity. (Hagan, et al, 2001).

Conversely, on the intellectual level, the researcher cannot agree more with Christian leaders like Bishop Kwasi Sarpong in championing enculturation of Christianity in the form of

contextualised liturgy and worship to ensure that Christian faith does not alienate African believers from their culture.

During the study, it came out that the residents of Kumasi, especially Asantes, are struggling to come to terms with various forms of accommodation between Christianity and traditional culture in their lives with respect to funeral practices. Indeed, many chiefs in Kumasi today are Christians who are trying to find ways in which they can relate Christianity to Asante culture. The most visible expression of this trend is the founding of the Christian chiefs and Queen mothers' Association, which seeks to bring Christian influence to bear on Asante culture.

Even though acculturation has brought about certain changes in the funerary arts of Asante in particular, and Ghana in general, they have not been completely annihilated. With this in view, some of the indigenous and socio-economically beneficial funerary arts should be retained while at the same time paving ways for change to suit modern conditions. It is therefore hoped that other researchers will make further investigations into the subject and bring out new findings appropriate for the improvement of funeral ceremonies in Kumasi in the midst of a fast changing world.

Westernisation has disturbed the equilibrium of the old life and introduced all kinds of tension which have contributed to the marginalization of some of the funeral practices and their associated artefacts. The advent of western civilization has led to urbanization and industrialisation which in effect have disrupted and transformed the hitherto tension-free and

stable atmosphere in Kumasi. Many people, especially the youth, leave the family home and travel to other cities with different cultural settings as well as western countries in Europe and North America in search of greener pastures. Their long association with these alien cultures disorients their minds to look down on their own indigenous Asante Culture. The result is that they no longer inevitably appreciate traditional life and disregard traditional values, taboos and sanctions. Apart from relegating certain funeral practices to the background, westernisation has influenced the use of art in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. It is a common practice to mount an enlarged photograph of the deceased at the centre of his or her final funeral grounds. Close relatives hang on their necks pendants laced with the photographs of the deceased.

Christianity and Islam, the dominant foreign religions in Ghana, appear to have caused a lot of cultural practices to be stopped since converts are indoctrinated against such practices to designate them as idolatrous or fetish. Thus, in an attempt to take on western, supposedly universal outlook, most residents in Kumasi deliberately imitate western standards to the detriment of indigenous culture. The majority of the people seem to have no choice but to turn their backs on their inherited time-tested traditions whilst adopting certain artistic practices which offer no clue to their ethnicity. The reality, therefore, is that current funerary practices and their related arts in Kumasi are an infusion of tradition and modernity to meet contemporary demands, retaining some of the original, positive elements while at the same time incorporating western ideas and practices.

#### 5.4 Recommendations

In order to revive and improve upon the neglected funerary arts of Kumasi, and device new ones that are compatible with the culture, which will at the same time cut down funeral expenditure, the following have been suggested.

It is believed that real development is by improving the past and not abandoning it altogether. In Ghana it appears the older generation would have liked to preserve the artistic tradition, the younger ones, on the other hand, believe that the traditions are not consistent with modern lifestyle. It is therefore prudent that funeral practices which are all-embracing must be established. Art has always been used to build and enhance the environment as well as people's physical outlook since it helps us to understand the visual qualities in order to improve upon them. The arts demonstrate the wonderful achievements of man. They express the beliefs and values of a people. In fact, without art, these elements of culture cannot be expressed. It will therefore only be fair to conclude that the usefulness of all aspects of art in society cannot be over-emphasised. It is, therefore, appropriate that the positive aspects of Kumasi funerary arts are preserved, improved upon, promoted and transmitted to posterity. In this regard, the Kumasi Traditional Council should institute measures to check the over westernisation of Asante culture.

It came out that funerals promote tourism both internally and externally. A clear example of this was the final funeral rites of the late *Asantehene*, Otumfoo Opoku Ware II in March, 1999. Hagan and Odotei (2001) posit that while the drama of the funeral brought to light the ritual, social and political bonds that made the nation a living entity, it also played up and revealed the strains, contradictions and conflicts between the forces of continuity and change.

It attracted an unprecedented number of both domestic and foreign tourists in the history of Asante. It is a common sight at funeral grounds in Kumasi where people become so attracted to the skillful display of artistic performances, especially when it comes to traditional music.

The Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture must collaborate with the Kumasi Traditional Council to re-invigorate Asante funerary arts since it is the entire society that stands to benefit from them.

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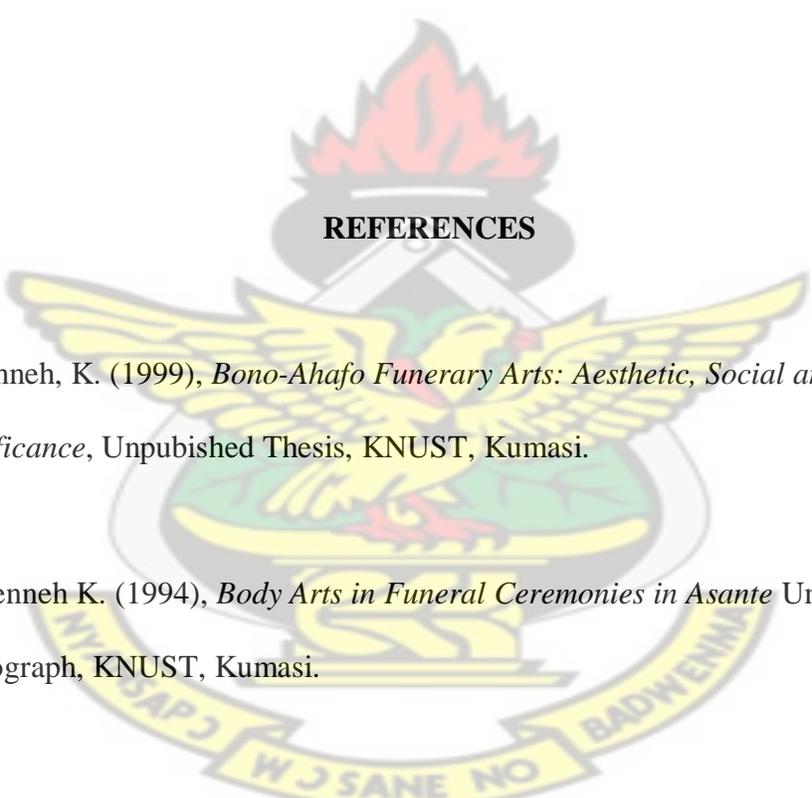
To help the present and future generations come to terms with their true identity, every effort ought to be made to restore the use of discarded indigenous funerary arts (that are beneficial) in funeral ceremonies in Kumasi. In this regard, the younger generation must be educated by family heads, chiefs, religious organizations and all other stake holders to appreciate the socio-religious functions of funerary arts.

Furthermore, it is recommended that Asante art renaissance activities such as art exhibitions ought to be organized from time to time by the Kumasi Traditional Council in collaboration with the Centre for National Culture. This, it is believed, will go a long way to educate the people to come to terms with tradition.

To effectively curtail excessive expenditure that emanates from the use of funerary arts, family heads and traditional authorities in Kumasi must put in place measures that will deter bereaved families from going beyond certain reasonable expenditure levels. It is observed that some people have aversion for funerary arts partly due to the debt that their inclusion leaves behind for poor members of the bereaved family to settle. For instance, the purchase of very expensive coffins should be regulated by traditional authorities considering the short

period of time within which it serves its aesthetic functions. However, families capable of displaying these are not discouraged.

Funeral ceremonies in Kumasi though are occasions for relatives to express their respects to departed ones, these ceremonies are sometimes platforms for promiscuity and the resultant spread of sexually transmitted diseases(STDs).Families should therefore be circumspect during such occasions. Art remains an indispensable element in Kumasi funeral ceremonies.

The logo of Kwame Ninsin University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is centered on the page. It features a stylized yellow bird with its wings spread, perched on a green base. Above the bird is a red flame. The entire emblem is set within a circular border containing the university's name in Akan: 'KWAME NINSIN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY' and 'WƆSANE NO BADWENMA'.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – An interview guide

#### SECTION A: ORGANISATION OF FUNERALS IN KUMASI

1. What do you know about the organisation of funerals?
2. Briefly tell how funerals are organised in Kumasi.
3. What do you think about how funerals are organised in Kumasi these days?
4. Why are funerals so important to the people of Kumasi?

#### SECTION B: ART FORMS USED IN FUNERALS

1. Mention some art forms used in funerals.
2. What are the uses of the art forms?
3. Have the art forms changed over the years or not?

#### SECTION C: THE EXTENT OF ACCULTURATION IN MODERN DAY FUNERAL CEREMONIES

1. What are some of the foreign art forms introduced into funeral ceremonies today?
2. How have they influenced funeral ceremonies today?
3. Do you think they are necessary?
4. Do they impact positively or negatively on funerals in economic terms
5. Why do you think people organise lavish funerals?
6. What can be done to reduce foreign influence on funerals in Kumasi?

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**Appendix 2 – An observation guide**

Funeral grounds

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

People present at the funeral

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

The number of cars present

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

The number and type of chairs and canopies at the funeral grounds

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

The type of coffin used to bury the dead

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

The costume of the relatives and sympathisers

Found ( )                      Not Found ( )

The *adesiedee* (burial items)

Found ( )

Not Found ( )

The decorations

Found ( )

Not Found ( )

The food and drinks served

Found ( )

Not Found ( )

The donations

Found ( )

Not Found ( )

The musical groups

Found ( )

Not Found ( )

