

WOOD CARVING IN ABURI: ITS GROWTH AND SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

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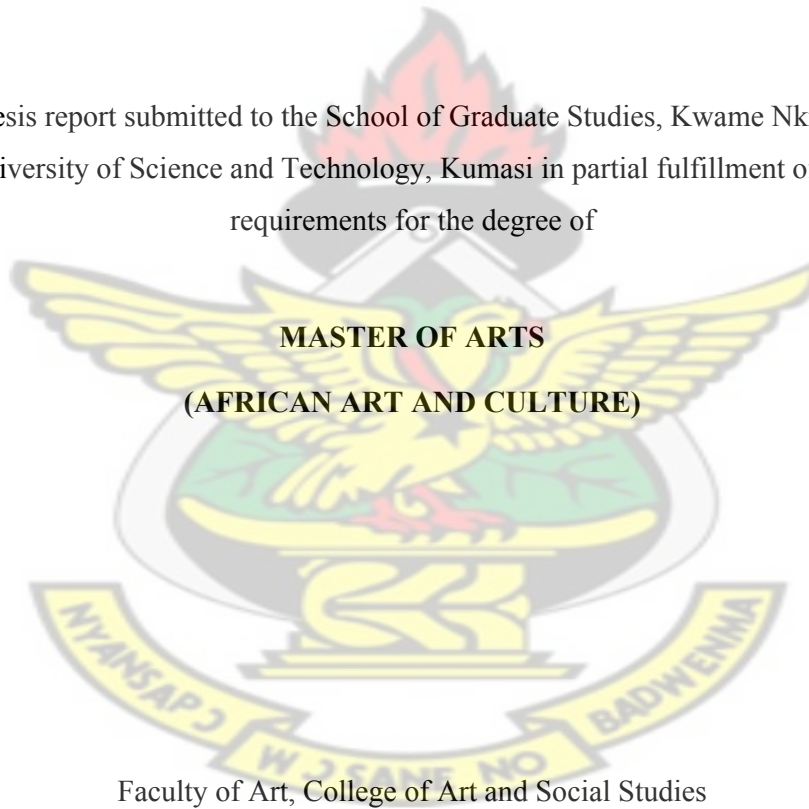
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

African arts were made for a predetermined context, which have particular functions. The uses to which they would be put determined the form in which they were made and the kinds of symbols which would be attached to them. Their inspiration stemmed from a culture with a set pattern of values that were taken into consideration in terms of functions and purposes of the work. Their inspirations today are not stemmed from a culture with a set pattern of values, but values which are alien and make the works mostly marketable outside their culture. This is to say, today most of the works are done to help the artist live and is not based on the traditional reward in terms of food, servants, etc. The works are commonly classified as “for the tourist” and, on the other, to a lesser and lesser extent to traditional values, such as, political, religious, philosophies, social structures for sculptures of a traditional nature, since their functions today are mostly for aesthetics.

The expression of any natural sensibility of the carver of Aburi today in his work is often completely destroyed by the patrons’ demand for certain finish that is usually the antiquity effect that is the natural flair of creativity of the artist is no longer important as he tends to produce what his patrons demand.

Aburi found in the Akwapim South District of Ghana, is noted mostly for its Botanical Gardens which attract tourist to the town. The wood carving industry though also patronized by visitors until recently was very small. There has now been an increasing growth of the industry, but still not noted by many, though having a few documentary on it has not dealt much with its growth and new techniques being employed by the carver.

These new techniques being employed are influenced by other African traditional works which are in high demand by their patrons (tourists). The sculptors are not just the indigenes of Aburi but people from other parts of Ghana especially the Volta and the Northern Regions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

African art by Western writers had declined in the production of works which were traditional in nature due to the influx of western ideas and technology. Yet there is so much artistic production still going on in Africa, and Aburi as a matter of fact in a greater variety than before. The intension of the writer is to investigate the growth and sources of inspiration influencing wood carving in Aburi, and also find out techniques employed which needs to be enhanced and documented for the younger generation to build on.

1.2 Research Questions

- Is the growth of wood carving in Aburi influenced by their patrons for certain finishes, making the carver to ignore his traditional values?
- Is the working techniques being used by the carvers helping in the growth of wood carving in Aburi?

1.3 Objectives

- To investigate the influences and factors that had led to the growth of neo traditional wood carving in Aburi.
- To investigate the techniques and processes of carving in Aburi, and identify how it has helped in the growth of the carving industry.

1.4 Delimitation

The research is intended to be on the growth and sources of inspiration of wood carving in Aburi in recent years.

1.5 Limitations

Some constraints this research had are the unavailability of published literature on Aburi and difficulty in getting information from unpredictable research subjects.

1.6 Importance of the Study

This study would help Ethnographers, Anthropologist, students and social workers and carvers learn about traditional wood carving in Aburi. It is very important to know the state of one of our rural and small scale industry, and to enable as have informed mind about the place, how it started, and the sort of works done there, and agencies which supports them. It would also help to follow up with the recommendations given and help the place expand more.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Souvenir Art: Useful decorative objects for the tourist trade

Mission-Inspired Art: Art works done mostly by Africans with their ideas not from Traditional sources but from Biblical stories.

Profile: Art works treated in the side view.

Frontality: Depicting art works in the front view.

Shadow: Wood carvings treated in the form of silhouette as in two-dimensional but rendered in three-dimensional while's details are not given.

Aboritics: A type of carving in the round in which the carver exploits and retains the natural shape of the wood.

1.8 Abbreviations

KNUST: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

ATAG: Aid to Artisans Ghana

NBSSI: National Board for Small Scale Industries

NVTI: National Vocational Technical Institute

SMC: Supreme Military Council

PNDC: Provisional National Defense Council

1.9 Organization of rest of the text

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the introduction, while Chapter Two reviews literatures that are related to the thesis. Chapter Three covers the

methodology used in the thesis. Chapter Four presents findings and analysis of data collected. The summary, conclusion and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“Guard the national soul of your race and never be tempted to despise your past. Therein I believe lies the sure hope that your sons and daughters will one day make their original contributions to knowledge and progress” (Rattray, 1927: ix).

2.0 Overview

In the previous chapter the researcher in his introduction mentioned the use of African Art works as made and used for a predetermined function. It was also said that their inspiration was stemmed from a culture with a set pattern of values, where the society's value of the work is taken into consideration in terms of the function of the work. The researcher, however, recognized that their inspirations today are not gotten from a culture with a set pattern of values, but values which are alien and make the works mostly marketable outside his culture.

The researcher in his bid to find out the sources of inspiration and growth of the wood carving industry in Aburi intends to investigate earlier studies as related to African Art and culture to be specific in relation to Aburi wood carving and where there are inadequacies this new study would help sharpen. This chapter therefore deals with philosophical structures for art works of traditional nature; African art, trade and collections; Evolution of African Art; Traditional and Modern Art.

2.1 African Philosophy of life and art

Mbiti (1992:2) writing on African Religions and philosophy stated: “African philosophy here refers to the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life.” To the African nothing happens by itself. Anything that happens to the African in life, especially, thought to be evil, must have occurred through an evil power or a malevolent spirit, when good fortunes smiles his way a benevolent spirit might be behind it. The African therefore believes they live in two worlds, which are invisible and visible controlled by these spirits with man at the centre.

Africans believe in security, survival, continuity and spiritual harmony between the visible and invisible worlds. As a result, they use art forms for these spirits to inhibit to protect them. Thus the African Philosophy of life provides the basis for the African religion, politics, economics, medicine, education, social life, and other cultural aspects of life. In all these, the African needs protection so as not to incur the wrath of the powers around him. Awoonor (1976:22) commenting on this wrote that:

Art is as old as the African peoples. Its function, as stated --- was primarily religious, emphasizing the people's need for magic and charm through talismanic objects and amulets and such other carvings that become the media of communication and contact with spiritual world.

Wood Carvings in Aburi such as drums, stools, “akuaba” dolls, staffs were used in the context mentioned earlier but with the coming of the Europeans with their Christian religion and education, such works were seen as idolatry, fetish, etc. coined to suit them,

and those who were producing such works were abused and neglected by their family members who took to the worship of the Christians. Awoonor (1976:24) indicated that:

The assumption that the morals and faith of the Christians were superior and infinitely blessed by God provided the unquestioned justification that any means could be used to change the African, who was possessed of savage instincts and was a victim of degrading fetishism and demonology'. The prohibitions and taboos of Christianity were expected to replace paganism... The Christian in African refused to accept the legitimacy of the African's religious position. He was accused of being a pagan, a devil worshiper, Satan was said to have employed his agency to erase every vestige of religious impression from the African mind, leaving him without a single ray to guide him away from the dark and dread futurity.

The Christians in a bid to save the Africans from Satan brought the church and its liturgy which was different from the African way of worshipping. They set up schools as a means of changing the culture of Africa. Awoonor (1976:27) opined that:

The school was the most important instrument of Christian missionary work in Africa. The idea of formal school had been unknown in Africa, except in the special cases of priests and certain devotees in shrines and cults houses who underwent seminarian training in seclusion before returning to the community. (All this made the African move from his religious way of life which art was incorporated thus abandoning his skill of carving). A child learned every day the wisdom and trade of his father and test scores were based on his ability to accept the authority of elders the discipline of the profession (taboos, rites), the responsibility of manhood or womanhood, the tenets of the society and the laws of the gods and the ancestors.

The acceptance of the Christian mission schools, made the child cut links with his traditional religion and rituals of his family. In Aburi "Salem," a place for the Christians faith, was created by the Presbyterian Church as it was the first to have come to the place.

This created a new African who was denied the importance of the African personality and culture. Awoonor (1976:28) again commenting on this stated that:

The new African intellectual was produced to deny the relevance of the African personality and the culture to the new, aggressively, 'progressive' world. African art and music once aspects of chiefship, religion, and ritual have been relegated to the realm of things that the new African can be legitimately embarrassed by, no viable program of teaching about them exists in African schools. Where they occur, they form part of the so-called extracurricular performances and activities of the school (which the pupils disliked intensely because of the way they are handled), designed to impress Founder's Day visitors.

The coming of the Europeans and Christian missionaries to Aburi therefore made them to relegate all their traditional values, which were stemmed from their culture. Their religion, politics, economics, and social values which incorporated the arts were made on a smaller scale as those seen doing them were conceived to be 'pagans' and 'demonic.' They had to go into hiding to do such works, since their carvings were prohibited by Colonialist, and Christian missionaries in a bid to impose their cultural values on them. However, with these attacks on African traditional arts there is so much production still going on in Africa in greater variety than before.

2.2 African Art Trade and Collections

Steiner (1997) commenting on the trade of African art, stated that

The passing of the old African ways of life have been much regretted by Western writers (though hardly at all by Africans) and the decline in the production of traditional art in particular has been greatly bemoaned. Yet there is so much artistic production still going on in Africa in greater variety than before that seems likely that posterity will judge the second half of the twentieth century to have been a period of artistic renaissance for Africa as a whole.

Aburi and its environs which had been dominated by the Christian missionaries predominantly the Basel missionaries, who were ignorant of indigenous African religion and their culture in totality branded the sculptures which gave expression to their ideas, as devilish and idolatrous and belonging to uncivilized society. They converted the indigenes who were into the arts and led to the reduction of wood sculptures in Aburi. However, there has been a rebirth in the wood carving industry in Aburi from the past three decades. This has come about because of the interest in trade and collections of Europeans in African Art, Steiner (1997) commenting on African art contended that:

The trade in West Africa began during the colonial period in the first two decades of the twentieth century --- The first development was the 'discovery' of African art at the turn of the Century [i.e. the 20th century] by European artists and intellectuals such as Matisse, Picasso, Braque, Ullmann and Apollinaire.

The days when these artists were studying African art for purposes largely related to the Cubists and their immediate entourage are over, yet the trade in the art is growing, and more Europeans and Americans come to Aburi just to buy sculptures produced there. This is because these people have little understanding of African Arts which are viewed as products of strange and uncivilized societies; Grumwald (1988:10) reiterated that:

Yet in spite of this explosion of information, African art works are still met with relatively little understanding by many --- Elements of an attitude formed several hundred years ago when explorers first started encountering Africa's sculpture linger today --- It classified the art made by these cultures as curiosities. More specifically, it viewed these artworks as products of strange and uncivilized societies which needed to be pacified, saved by a Christian God and developed so they could provide Europeans with vast new networks of commerce.

The comments by Grumwald where Africans were still seen to be uncivilized and needed to be pacified by the Christian God no longer holds as most of the carvers found in Aburi are Christians and to their carvings not for ritualistic purpose but for economic reasons. One other reason why trade in African traditional art is still going on in large proportion and in Aburi as subject of study is, the impression the Europeans get from art works found in the Museums which are not to be touched and are viewed from a distance, it makes it difficult for them to appreciate the works so well so they come with pictures and drawings of works to be executed for them to enable them to interact with them. Grumwald (1988:10) again commented that:

Museums are windows through which so many of us gain our impressions of the various works of art. In one sense the museum setting provides an artificial environment for the arts of Africa. It removes artworks from the contexts in which they were intended to be experienced, and it focuses attention on them as objects to be viewed by spectators who bear no responsibility to interact with this art

Art, especially wood sculptures today are exhibited in homes of the African bourgeois to add some aesthetic value to their homes rather than what they were intended for in the past has also increased the trade in wood carvings in Aburi. The African architect incorporates these sculptures to be on walls and corridors when they design and construct building. Grumwald (1988:11) further stated that:

... art is made in Africa today to be sold as mementos to tourist, and some made for urban Africans to exhibit in their homes as objects of nostalgia or ethnic identity” Africans made wooden objects in forms of their totems and place them in front of their homes for people to identify their ethnicity or family of the inhabitants.

African art especially sculpture is on the increase because, Christians are now embracing concepts derived from some of the works which are related to their teachings to decorate

the place of worship e.g. The 'Gye Nyame' symbol, which talks much on moral values are used in churches to decorate their doors and pulpits. Also, Christian themes for example the "Lords Supper" and the "Journey to the Cross" are done by commissioned traditional artists who portray them the African way. African drums and other musical instruments which were not used in the past by Christians as they were taken for pagan worship are now used by the Christians. Willet (1989) stated that

In general, Christian missionaries, even up to the present day, have been culpably ignorant of indigenous African religions and in attempting to undermine them have often attached the sculptures which gave expression to their ideas, in the mistaken belief that they were idols and the objects of worship. Gods indeed seen scarcely ever to be represented in African sculpture. Fortunately, ecumenism is beginning to embrace even traditional African religions and attempts are being made to utilize traditional art forms for Christian worship.

Awoonor (1976:31) also commented that:

It is only recently that Christian theologians have talked about the need for the church in Africa to speak to God in Africa's own language... The Roman Catholic Church..., in the 1951 encyclical letter, 'Evangelic praecones' proclaimed the need for Africanization of the church and defined new attitudes towards 'pagan' religions, citing the need to treat their doctrines with respect.

He further stated that: "It was the breakaway churches, prophetist movements, and faith-healing tabernacles that are achieving a kind of desirable synthesis of Christian thought and African religious attitudes. In them the joyous drums have taken over from dull hymnal."

Traders and collectors in search of authentic African art also have led to the growth of wood carving in Aburi. In search of traditional African art, for which they took to be "unconventional" in regards to Western art forms. Arts made by educated Africans are

not appealing to them as they see them to be their form of art, so they tend to traditional antiquities. The carvers create these aged art forms which are the demands of their patrons. Commenting on African Sculpture, Denise (1962:103) stated: “Fascination for antiquity and things from the past runs deep in Western culture... As the supply of antiques dwindles however, some artists... are tempted by economic motivation to stimulate the effects of natural age.”

The carvers in Aburi are good in antiques they tend to be copying works of the past as these were considered to be pristine. Writing on souvenir art, Fosu (1993:36) indicated:

In the 1960's, a new scramble for African art surged all over the world. Sparked by the overthrow of European colonialism, and the gaining of new political freedom, African art once again became an international commodity sought after in Africa, Europe and America ... The continuous demand for the art of the past by collectors, and dealers, encouraged many of the nationalist governments and individual entrepreneurs in Africa to revive the old traditional art. Several arts workshop centres were opened, where old models were copied and distributed to other parts of the world.

Steiner (1997:104) writing on African Art collections by Europeans stated that:

One aspect of the Western image of Africa which resonates throughout the African art collecting world is the notion that authentic Africans, and by extension authentic objects of African art, no longer exists. Like the societies themselves, contemporary art objects produced in Africa are considered inauthentic approximations of traditional form.

This inauthentic African and Africa art came about as Amenuke quoted by Agbo Jonas (1993) says: “Cultural changes have occurred over the process of adapting to assimilating the foreign influences” and Awoonor (1976: 56, 352) commenting on the new Africa stated:

The old royal and chiefly courts that provided support for art have lost their powers. African religious systems are daily undergoing change, the role of the great ritual carvers of masks, figurines and workers in iron will continue to diminish.

However, he said there is the consolation as:

Today there are London-trained lawyers sitting on ancient stools and university men in shrines and temples. Most of the elites are returning to the drums, the music, and the oral traditions. At the same time, a large community of African artists is returning to these earlier pattern in order to forge, through the newly acquired European instruments, new artistic patterns.

Since the collectors were interested in creative products (arts) of the past as that was pristine to them, forgetting there had been an interchange in cultural behaviours, thus there should be changes and developments in African arts as societies grow, yet the African was seen as still in the dark and lived in trees, had to still produce what their forefathers were producing. These factors led to the artificial aging just to make the collectors think they were those kept by their ancestors.

2.3 Evolution of African Arts

African Art has evolved in so many ways as colonialism, Christianity and Islam disrupted African culture in respect of religion, oral traditions, social and political formations which the visual arts lean on for their creation. However, with these disruptions of African culture the arts are still creating stir, as said by Hassan (1992:1-10) “---Africa’s creative impulse is still alive, and continues to contribute great works of literature and masterpieces of visual and performing arts to the world cultural scene.” He went on to explain how African art expression has evolved a certain pattern quoting Jegede and Stanislaus (1990),

... three factor seem to coincide: One is the rise of European and Western patronage and intervention. This was characterized by the establishment of art workshop by European expatriates --- Second and related to the first factor, is the establishment of formal art schools which can be traced to the 1940' or later, mostly fashioned on the Western art educational model. Third, and the most important, is the nationalistic cultural resurgence that swept many newly independent Africa countries and resulted in increased government patronage and interest in the arts as part of efforts of building a national culture.

In response to the fad for traditional art as explained by Fosu (1993:36), “new museums, curio shops, and galleries opened in Africa”.

The type of art practiced by Aburi carvers could be placed under the following as explained by Steiner (1997:4) as:

1. *Useful decorative objects for the tourist trade, bookends, Ash trays, bowls, animal figures, small statements ---,*
2. *Copies of traditional masks and sculptures,*
3. *New creations*

Agbo (1993:76) also classified four major forms of art and artists in Africa which are: “...mainly sculpture, souvenir art, mission-inspired art, and the new form of art being taught in Art schools”. Aburi wood carving industry has aspects of what Steiner and Agbo described above on African Art. Thus, can we describe carving in Aburi be described as traditional art or modern art?

2.4. Traditional or Modern art

Wood carving in Aburi could be described as traditional art as most of the works still consist that of the past used for rituals and other religious activities. Works such as masks, stools, Akuaba dolls and other works used for rituals are those that their European

patrons seek. Their works still depict the characteristics and symbolism of African traditional sculptures. However, one cannot say all the works they do are communal or ethnic in nature as other tribal works and ethnic groups find their way into their industry. Individuals are also creating works, which are self-oriented. Their works are created based on concepts based on popular folktales, myths, legends, proverbs and sayings of Africa. Example, the Akan proverb, “*Wo foro dua pa na ye pia wo.*” Literally meaning, “It is the one who climbs a good tree that is supported to climb.” They also use this traditional concepts and motifs to create bookends, candle stands, napkin holders and other household equipments, which came about by their association with other cultures.

Fosu (1993:4) writing on 20th Century Art of Africa made these observations:

Traditionally, art expressed definite time-honoured ethnic beliefs and ideas. Patterns and designs were based on classical conventions which were not easily subjected to drastic changes. The conventions were cautiously repeated with occasional modifications to allow for new experiences and interpretations. However, since the artists who responded to the new challenge worked outside the confines of the traditional conventions and supervision and produced for a European clientele which only appreciated the aesthetic appeal rather than the ethnic content of the works, the artists resorted to spontaneous application of the classic traditional designs and patterns that did not always carry the same symbolic meanings as those of the traditional works. Also rather than limiting their artistic vision to the standardized themes from ethnic folklore myths, and historic-political events, these artists took a new initiative to broaden the scope of their aesthetic repertoire in order to attract and reach a wider demand for their work.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents information on research design used in acquiring a successful target of this research. The research methods adopted in the study is the qualitative research methodology. It also indicates; types of interviews conducted, libraries visited, population and sampling method used, data collections from primary and secondary sources to get information, and how data was obtained through observations.

3.2 Research Design

The qualitative research methodology was employed to document chronologically data or information of period or life or development of a people, institution or a place. As this research sought to trace the factors that has contributed to the growth of wood carving in Aburi, the origin of the centre and its development has to be documented. This method is being employed by the researcher because the researcher found out that a true history of the place has not been documented and it's not even known to the most people of Aburi. Only a few could give oral information of the place, and even that with different versions. Amenowode, (2001:34), commenting on the European bias in literature on arts suggests that: "... as far as African Art research is concerned the most reliable sources are our folklore and interviews with traditional leaders who are the custodians of the various cultures." As this research is mainly qualitative study, which is characterised by ethnographic and historic studies where findings are more expressed in words rather than

numbers, the descriptive method would be appropriate for documenting data which would trace the origin of wood carving in Aburi today.

Also, the qualitative data is exact and more descriptive, as different opinions would be given in this case but had to be collected and analysed. The descriptive analysis simply helps the researcher to examine the phenomena at hand and describe vividly what the researcher has experienced. The qualitative, which has a phenomenological objective, used case studies, in-depth interviews and participant observation. In effect the observational phase is characterised by recording information by a digital camera, field survey, direct observation and interviews were adopted to support the descriptive method.

3.3 Direct Observation

To successfully get the facts about their styles, techniques and types of work done, the direct observation was employed. It was a useful approach because the perception of wood carving in general was factored into Aburi wood carving since observations made by people was quite different from the researcher's observation. The researcher observed their working styles and techniques and types of work they were producing. Photographs were taken during this section to support the collected data.

3.4 Interview Conducted

The researcher employed an informal means to collect data. Interview schedule questions were made as a guide. The interviewees who included carvers at the centre, opinion leaders and some traditional chiefs willingly gave important information

concerning the carving centre. Some of the interviewees were reluctant to give information. The interview schedule was set ahead of time with the interviewees. To solve the problem of memory loss and not being able to write important facts that were given, a tape recorder was used to support the data collection with the permission from the interviewees. The information given was then transcribed and analysed.

3.5 Library Research

In order to have a better understanding of the concepts of this thesis, topics such as; African Philosophy of life and art, African art, Trade and Collections, Evolution of African art and Traditional or Modern Art which were relevant to the researcher in his bid to find the growth and sources of inspiration of wood carving in Aburi, these libraries visited for books on the above topics were the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) main library, College of Art library, University of Education, Winneba (UEW) library, North Campus. In all these libraries, efforts were made to collect secondary data, which were scanty.

3.6 Population, Sampling and Sample Type

Population as in this research is any group of individuals that are of interest to the researcher. It describes the aggregate or totality of all the subjects/objects or members that confirm to asset of specifications so that the results can be applied to them. The requirement of defining population for research arises from the need to specify the group which the results can be applied.

This research is targeted at people at Aburi industrial centre, who deal mostly in wood carvings. Sampling is the selection of a small section of the general population for research in a way such that the result will reflect the broad characteristics of the general population. After an initial finding the researcher found out that there were two groups of people at Aburi Industrial Centre, the carvers and the traders. However African art involves the whole community, therefore in this case Aburi would be sampled. The appropriate sampling technique the researcher employed in his research is the simple random sampling. During the interview sessions, confidentiality of subjects was considered so as to protect the interest of the subjects.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

This chapter intends to discuss and analyze on the etymology of Aburi, The Aburi Industrial Centre under which the origin of the centre would be traced and discussed, some living pioneers would be discussed, the sources of assistance to the centre. Groups of people who work there and types of work which is being produced there. This is to trace their source of inspiration if being influenced by ideas and thoughts common to the African life or their interaction with other cultures.

4.2 Etymology of Aburi

Aburi is located on the Akwapim Range about 23kilometres north – east of Accra along the Accra – Koforidua road through the Akwapim Range. It is an undulating town with an elevation of about 800 to 1500 feet above sea level and being one of Ghana’s highest habitable towns, (Plate 1). It is also about 14kilometres from Nsawam its district capital.

Aburi is noted largely in Ghana for its Botanical Gardens, (Plate 2) which attracts a lot of tourists and other social groups to the Town. It also has some prominent educational institutions in Ghana which include the Aburi Girls Secondary School, and Presbyterian Women’s Teachers Training College.

The traditional occupation of the people is farming and stone quarrying. The farming life of the people is of the subsistence nature as the soil is poor and rocky, and the damp climate makes farming on a large scale difficult. However some move to the surrounding

villages in the valleys around Aburi to cultivate pineapples and vegetables on a large scale. This makes life in Aburi not a pleasant one since there are no industries and other sources of occupation to sustain the life of the people.



Plate 1: Undulating Townscape of Aburi



Plate 2: Aburi Botanical Gardens

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

The formal occupation in Aburi is in the educational institutions, the Aburi Gardens, and other social works like the social welfare and the police service. In their traditional political set-up, the occupant of the “Osae Stool” is their leader from the Aduana Aberade Royal Family. He is the Omanhene of Akwapim Anafo Traditional Area. And in their traditional rule art came into play, the umbrella tops, the stools and staff of the linguist are some of the wood carving works which plays a role in it as in (Plate 3).

Religiously Aburi is dominantly a Christian community with the Basel Mission taking the biggest chunk. However a clear dichotomy can not be distinguished between the Christian and Traditional religion, since they go hand in hand. The Aburi traditional moral obligation which also becomes a religious obligation is just as the Christian religion where there is the belief that the supernatural beings reward those who do well to their kinfolk and neighbours. The culture of the people is woven into their religious life. Aburi people being dominated by Christian worshippers, there are many traditional doctrines, practices, and rituals, which is common to them all thus the Christians of Aburi part take in the traditional religious life of Aburi who revere about 22 gods, 21 streams and 9 hills which are sacred to the Akwapim Anafo Traditional area. They indirectly take part in these traditional religious activities by abiding by bans attached to their ‘Odwira’ festival, and use its accompanying costume and other traditional items.



Plate 3.1: An umbrella top



Plate 3.2: A traditional stool



Plate 3.3: A Spokes person displaying his staff

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

The annual Akwapim Anafo “Odwira” festival usually referred to as Aburi Odwira with the Omanhene as the leader, is the most colourful event, rich in art and culture which

cleanses, purifies, and unites the people for the changes ahead in the coming year (Plate 4).



Plate 4: A colorful durbar of chiefs and people of Aburi

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

4.3 Aburi Industrial Centre and its Creation

The creation of traditional art was inspired by the ideas and thoughts common to the African life. Consequently, the art gave visual meaning to those ideas. Many of these creative expressions were not controlled by the strict duplication of the exactness of nature. It was the idea rather than the object purely perceived in its natural state which determined the visual meaning and function of the work. Thus a piece of art was issued from deeper motives than the inspiration of the moment. Fosu, (1993:1-2)

Wood-carving in Aburi, like most Akan areas in Ghana, owed its origin largely to religious functions. Here, forms were created to serve as a dwelling place for various spirits, which they worshipped. Stools are also carved for the ancestors as their abode, thus the desire of stools and other art works to be made and later particular designs became specialized and standardized for the use by certain sexes, clans, or individuals.

Social functions also contributed to the creation of wood-carvings in Aburi as the class of a person would define the kind of stool he sits on, his staff, bowls he uses and other items. Throughout the rite-of-passage of the people of Aburi in the past art forms made of wood are used in every stage of these rites.

Most of the things carved out of wood in Aburi were stools, spoons, combs, wood plates and bowls, walking sticks, doors, mortars, *oware* boards, drums and even canoes. It was found out some of them were even carving canoes, and when asked why, since they lived on a highland with no water to cross or fish in using the canoe they said the valleys had water bodies which they had to cross when going to their farms. Though the above explains some wood carvings going on in Aburi in the past, it is not on a large scale as it is today in Aburi. Most of the old folks interviewed said there was just one or two carvers in Aburi in the 1950s who worked for the Aburihene, but commercial carving as it is today was not practiced.

Aburi Industrial Centre, as the wood carving industry in Aburi is called, started on what one would say a daring desire of a few young men of Aburi to survive. There had been several attempts by people to take credit for the establishment of the centre. Some pioneers who are still alive and yet divided had their own versions of its creation but through interviews one-man who unfortunately had joined the ancestors as the originator of the centre.

As mentioned earlier, wood-carving was not known in Aburi though there were a few who did it as a past-time in their private homes. Kwame Donkor was a carver in the 1950s who was carving stools, linguist staffs, *oware* boards, and some household items. He was, however, feared because he was the son of a traditional priestess of Akonadi and his works were for spiritual purposes. He therefore did his work in isolation and never trained people to understudy him.

There was also one Kwabena Abrade who hailed from the Volta Region but was brought up in the Aburihene's palace and he carved mace for the linguist staff and umbrella tops. he also carved wooden combs, spoons, and bowls for the chief. Another man known as Agya Menka was also carving for Botanical Aburi Gardens as a casual worker and his works were exhibited in the 1966 Trade Fair representing Department for Parks and Gardens. He produced works such as emblems, stools, and linguist staffs which were given to foreign personalities as souvenirs.

Carving was therefore going on in Aburi but not on a large scale. However, the picture being created by the young carvers was that there was nothing of that sort until Ghanaians were deported from Nigeria in the early 1980s. The influence of the sojourn of the young men in Nigeria is also a possible factor which helped in the creation of the centre. This is because some of the young men who went to Nigeria were working in art centres. So they had that idea of establishing a place of craftsmen at one particular place.

This centre was unlike the other experimental workshops established mostly by European expatriates in other parts of Africa in the 1940s, whereby students or trainees were selected among less educated youths to train as artists. This centre was created to help curb the unemployment problem of Aburi. It was not like the several workshop centres which were established by governments and individual entrepreneurs to revive old traditional art. Most of the carvers came into carving unconsciously.

Serious wood-carving started in Aburi in early 1970s when one Gyekye from Asiakwa in the Eastern Region and a group of Moslem teachers came to Aburi to do some missionary work. Gyekye who was a carver however stayed on after he found some felled trees on a new Aburi –Koforidua road being constructed, and started carving. He fell sick and an old lady who cured him said she would like her grandchildren to learn carving from him. He therefore trained them without a fee. Nana Asabre Bampo II and Milla were siblings who learnt from Gyekye. According to them they were art inclined as they drew from books. Nana Asabre Bampo II was attending Adonten Secondary School by then. Gyekye later left Aburi and from then his students were carving in a house called Master Quaye's house.

These young carvers were sacked from Mr. Quaye's house because one Papa Tuah convinced Mr. Quaye that what they were doing in the house was fetish and would bring ill-luck to the house and other nearby tenants. They did not understand why young school going boys would engage themselves into that kind of occupation and that they were being possessed. So they were driven out of the house in 1974. This is not to say there

were no other people carving by then but the establishment of the Aburi Industrial Centre is centered on the generation being discussed. Nana Asabre Bampo and his younger siblings went to see T. T. Ofori who was a teacher by then. He understood and gave them a room at Gao Villa in Aburi. They started their carving there and later moved to Asumdwekrom which was near their new house till 1976 when they moved to the roadside when a new road from Accra to Koforidua was being constructed. All this while when they were carving in Aburi their market was in Accra “High street” Art Centre where they were bought by middle-men, hausas and Moshie at Nima who were also their patrons.

In 1976 some of them moved to join some carvers at Ahwerase which was the next town from Aburi. Here there were young carvers who were solely carving drums. They had learnt their craft at Madina near Accra from some Ewe carvers. Their stay at Ahwerase was short-lived as the two groups were incompatible so they moved to the roadside in front of Kayat Leather Works just opposite Aburi Girls Secondary School.

Their new place was also shortlived as the Headmistress of the school said she did not approve of their presence especially being young men who were into souvenir art, and could lure the girls into certain relationship which would not be good for a girl’s school. They had quarrels with the Headmistress for sometime until she brought policemen to arrest them after they had beaten one of their drums one afternoon which disturbed the school. This caused some of them to flee to Nigeria. According to Milla, one Nortei who turned out to be the founder of the Aburi Industrial Centre came to learn the trade under

them, with Nana Asabre Bampo II as their leader in 1976. He also joined them in Lagos in 1979 but left earlier in 1981. Nortei joined some carvers at Ahwerase to brush-up his carving skill.

Ghanaians were repatriated from Nigeria in 1983 and that was the beginning of what is now known as Aburi Industrial Centre. According to Milla when he came from Nigeria, Nortei came to inform him that he had located a place where they could do their work. This was the junction where one road leads to Aburi Township and the other to Koforidua from Accra, later named Aburi ‘Y’ Junction (Plate 5) They went to inspect the place and constructed their shed made of bamboo and palm fronds. Milla said he left again to Nigeria for his items in April 1983. Nortei was left carving alone there.



Plate 5: An aerial view of ‘Y’ Junction

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

Nortei was later joined by Milla, who was his master, to carve (Plate 6). They did their carving there thinking people passing by would stop and buy their works but no one did so. They were determined so they continued working, for a year that they worked there nobody bought a piece from them. They had to send their works to the Art Centre and Nima in Accra for middle-men to buy. Their breakthrough came in 1984 when Nortei's uncle a "Mankrado" (sub-chief) of Amanorkrom Akwapim and a shoemaker at the United Trading Company (UTC) in Accra said they should try their works in their African shop there. Arrangement was made and their works were going fast at U.T.C. After a year Akwesi George who was a messenger at Kingsway, a supermarket in Accra also linked them to their African shop.

All this while other young men who were also returnees from Nigeria who had no work also paid them visits and helped in sanding some of the works. Some who were fast picked the skill of carving and also started something. They were fast in learning since most of them attended what they called "Continuation School," Kemp Methodist Middle school Aburi where they learnt trades such as carpentry, masonry, and weaving.

An unknown man from Akropong who resided in Germany was the first to stop by and bought some of their works worth about ₦3,000.00 on 18th April 1984, that was a year after they started work there. After the Akropong man residing in Germany had left another man from Akropong called Kwame Bofo came and ordered for some works.

Another man from Akropong Nana Offei Nkansah a habitual buyer who always bought his works every two weeks on his return from Accra. Not knowing it was just a ploy to

lure them to Akropong to train the young men there. Nana Offei Nkansah always came to lure them to Akropong but they always refused. He said he wanted the youth of Akropong to learn their trade but they also insisted the youth of Aburi had no work therefore they would rather stay in Aburi, but advised him to be sending his boys from Akropong to learn at Aburi. They also refused because they saw Aburi to be a strategic point for their market than going to Akropong. After luring them from 1984 to 1987 Nana Offei Nkansah gave up, but any time he passed he bought some works. He had a room full of wood carvings after his death.



Plate 6: Nortei and Milla working in their first shop

Source: Courtesy of Mr. Opoku Milla

All this while the other carvers in town who taught they were senior to Nortei refused to join him because of pride. Once in a while they came to work there, but because there were no buyers as they thought, they always left after some few days. Later, Nana Asabre

Bampo II joined them with a group of ten where they constructed a big shed near theirs. But since they were all master craftsmen they parted one after the other to form their own shed.

In 1985, Nana Bediako who was “Osudum Osofo” a priest to a shrine at Atweasin, the place where they were located came to them. He praised them for their courage for working there, for the place was full of haunted spirits and a sacred groove. Both sides of the road at the “Y” junction was a cemetery and one was for those who died unnatural death, that is, through accidents, suicide, child birth etc. and they were known to be malevolent spirits. That was the part where their shed was. The Osofo said with their heart and determination to stay there, he saw a bright future and the youth of the town were going to benefit from their venture. He performed libation and blessed them.

He showed them a piece of land saying it belonged to the traditional council and when they want to work there, they could use it in the future. The blessing of the “Osudum Osofo” was the beginning of greater things to come. In 1989 one Reverend Quansah, a native of Aburi then with the Christian Council of Ghana came to inform them that the Council wanted to rehabilitate returnees especially artisans in terms of structures and tools needed for their work. By then they were about 49 men so their number was encouraging since it was a means through which funds could be released for the project. They told them the “Osudum” priest had offered them a piece of land so the necessary arrangements were made with the traditional council who formally released the land to them. The Christian Council’s main aim was to construct the structures for all artisans,

that is, carpenters, carvers, tailors to work as a unit. They started the building but it seemed the contractors were misusing the funds so the German Volunteers who were sponsoring the project stopped. (Plate 7)

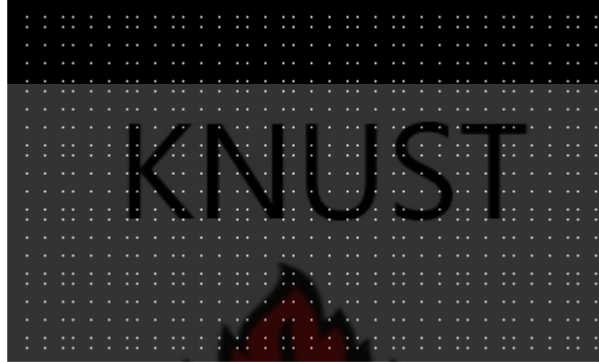


Plate 7: Carvers working in one of the structures of Christian Council

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

In 1990 their number increased to 60 men and that same year the Export Promotion Council gave the group a loan of ₵14 million (GH₵1400.00) to expand their business. From that period a lot of groups came in to assist but they realized they were for their personal interest.

In the year 2003 the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with the National Board for Small Scale Industries also came to construct 400 workshops and offices which would contain a restaurant and recreation ground and an exhibition room. The structures however had been built to a point but the work is not going on. (Plate 8) The coming in of the government and other groups with loan facilities drew people who were not carvers to

open shops for them to have access to the loans. People started buying from carvers and did their sanding and finishing thus expanding the centre.



(Plate 8: Some of the structures being constructed by N.B.S.S.I.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

4.4 Groups of People at the Centre

The Aburi Industrial centre is abounding with people of different cultures, sex, age groups, and craftsmanship. The industry is not made solely of Aburi indigenes but people from other ethnic backgrounds especially West Africa. Though indigenes of Aburi dominated the industry, wood carvers from the Volta Region, especially from Vakpo, and a few Nigerians and Senegalese are found around. people The from various cultures also add some spice of a kind to works produced in Aburi, since their homelands are known for wood carving on a large scale than in Aburi which is of recent origin and with limited styles.

Finding out why people from different cultures found their way into Aburi to do their carving, rather than staying in their homeland to do their trade, Abdul Mbow, a

Senegalese who had traveled the length and breadth of West Africa and collects wood carvings says: he had come to Ghana to trade in wood sculptures because they have variations of African works which his clients are in need of and the exposure the Aburi Artists had with other cultures help them to produce almost all works. Mbow is not a carver but assigns carvers for some specific works which his clients need and does the finishing himself where he is a specialist.

Ollawale Able, a Nigerian says he came to Aburi after his brother had worked there for sometime and found conditions there favourable. He said, the market was good and one could easily own a shop, unlike Nigeria where getting a piece of land was hard to come-by for a shop, one could work but would not get a place to display his works since a piece of land was very expensive there. In Aburi the piece of land at the centre was okay and easy to acquire. He also went on to say that their style of carving was different from that of carvers of Aburi making the market good since they were only a few there.

Mr. Owusu from Vakpo in the Kpando District of the Volta Region also said; he was the first from that part of the country to settle in Aburi for such trade. He said, because the carvers of Aburi had works which were peculiar to them and their clients wanted variety, which they could not travel the distance, the carvers from Aburi came to them for their works to create variety in their shops. He later followed to collect his money and found the place to be lucrative for the business and later bought a shop there. He said the people of Vakpo carved smaller works of Ebony, Rosewood and other hard woods which the people of Aburi found difficult to carve.

From all the groups of people who had joined the carvers in Aburi to carve, the indigenes of Aburi were very hospitable and ready to learn from them and gave them all the necessary support making the place a home for them. The population of the people found at the centre is about 1,600 and about 300 shops. These numbers form about 10% of the working class of Aburi. There has been a dramatic increase of Master carvers at the centre within these two decades since its existence. In 1987 – 1990 the master carvers were just 35 and were increased to 120 by 1998.

The master carvers since 2006 are now about 300, with about 250 of them owing shops to display their works. The other 50 shops are owned by traders who were not carvers but commissioned carvers to work for them, even these shops have about 2 to 5 carvers who help the owner. Men dominate the Aburi carving centre with the ages between 50 -60 yrs being about 20 in the group of pioneers, ages 35 – 49yrs are the minority who are about 40, ages 20-34yrs are about 220 and those who fall below 20yrs about 20. These are the registered master carvers at the centre. Though the population of the people who work at the centre is about 1,600, it is only about 20% who are carvers. The rest are apprentices and shop owners who most of the time are seen doing sanding and giving finishing to the works. About half of the shops have a woman as a shop attendant, and out of about 50 women only 3 are known to be carvers, the rest being wives to the carvers who sell the works while the men do the carving. Children of the carvers also earn some money by coming to the centre to sand works with a minimum price of a piece of carving being

GH¢0.20. Apart from carving there are people who specialize in giving finishing touches to works and others who are there just to do the splitting of wood and blocking.

There is division of labour and specialization as some just draw for the carvers to carve, others do just the blocking, others the detailing, those who do the sanding and those who give the work a final finishing.

4.5 Types of works done

Aburi industrial Centre has its own style and techniques of producing their carvings. Early carvers at the centre said in the 1970's to the 80's they were carving combs, bowls, masks, drums, stools and any other works commissioned by their Moshie and Hausa clients. They had no specific style attributed to them.

However from the 1990's a style was developed which is unique to Aburi carving industry. Though all sort of wood carvings are found in Aburi their dominant style which is a relief work normally representing one figure on a panel in the profile; they call such works "profiles" which could be likened to Egyptian paintings which were presented in profiles with the human head in the side view and the torso in frontality. In the case of Aburi, however these were no paintings which were two-dimensional but of wood-carvings which were three-dimensional. Normally the heads are portrayed in profile and all the body parts in that form, but sometimes the torso with the breast in frontality. (Plate 9) They claim this style was introduced to them by one Kofi Ayensu then a student in KNUST offering Ceramics who came on holidays to learn carving. Kofi Ayensu is now teaching at Mfantshipim Secondary School in Cape Coast. Because of his ceramics

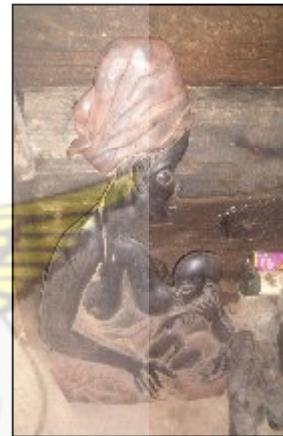
background he modeled forms in profile before carving it into wood. The carvers saw this new technique as innovative and used it to create different subjects. Works which were of this nature are mostly conceptual and they gave those names such as: “Think together” which portrays a man and woman supposedly couples in a thoughtful sitting posture facing each other: “*Wo foro dua pa na ye piawo*” literary meaning, it is one who climbs a good tree that is helped. Others include; “Silence woman”, “Thinking African woman”, “Old man and wife”, “Mother and Child”, “Drummer”, and other household items and folklore tales of the people.



Plate 9.1: Man and wife.



Plate 9.2: The climber.



(Plate 9.3: Mother and Child.

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Another style which is common to Aburi carvers is what is termed as “Shadows”. These works are rendered in the round and in relief. This forms got their name “shadow” from silhouette which is a style in painting or in graphics where forms are represented in black or monochromes without details in the form of a shadow cast by an object. They use this means to create works which are free standing or in relief. The facial details or natural details are not given but just a representation of the form. Some parts of the forms are

exaggerated thus given them some abstraction. Some of the themes given to such works are: “Horn blower”, “Unity”, “Stop Thinking”, “Thinking man shadow”, “Wall shadow”, and “Lover’s shadow” (Plate 10). These themes could be represented both in the round or relief.

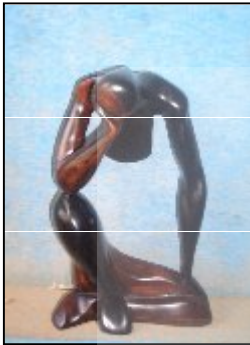


Plate 10.1: “Thinking man shadow.”

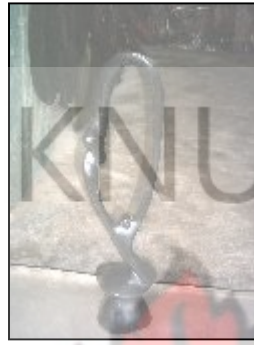


Plate 10.2: “Lover’s shadow



Plate 10.3: “Unity”

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Also they carve what they termed “figures”. These are human figures in-the-round which is near realism, and in various sizes, from figurines to colossal figures. They sometimes do away with a good detail as they say their patrons do not like such works because they are perceived to be untutored to do fine works as those that are found at their place of origin. These figures are mostly everyday African traditional life, to be precise Aburi traditional life and as seen from its surrounding villages. The works are given themes such as; “The farmer and his dog”, “Woman with a Pan”, “Old man and wife”, “Lovers”, “King and Queen” and “The Hunter” (Plate 11) Also human heads and busts are carved but in this case is mostly female heads either wearing headgear or braided hair.

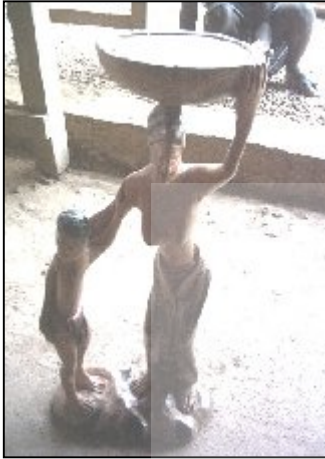


Plate 11.1: Woman and child



Plate 11.2: The Hunter



(Plate 11.3: Lovers

Their works done in the round are abstract works in human form which are exaggerated e.g. Fante sitting doll “Tekua”, “Thinking African Woman”, “Senufu Rider” and Unity”.
(Plate 12)



Plate 12.1: Tekua

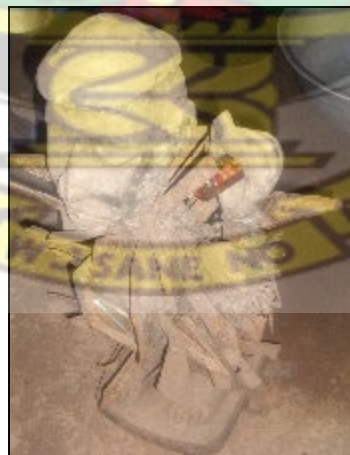


Plate 12.2: Thunder god



Plate 12.3: Senufu Rider

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Their relief carvings are of various forms. There are those that the forms are created from the trunks of trees with various themes and one has to go round the trunk to get the true story the artist is trying to create. These forms are normally done to be used as conference tables, for drums and chest. Another form of relief are those done on woods which normally determine the forms to be created that is, arboritics. The wood normally used for such works are “*Abare*” *Ficus clasticoides* or “nmatam dua” which are parasitic trees which give some interesting forms and movement on their trunks. (Plate 13)



Plate 13.1: An *Abare* plant



Plate 13.2: Working on a tree trunk and root

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

They also do what they term “Board Work” which is done on wood panels or planks. They normally portray village scenes and life in the jungle. These works are also of two groups, one of which the board forms part of the background of the work while the other forms created are just attached to the frame, in that holes are created in the board and the wall, becomes the background. (Plate 14)



Plate 14: A relief work

Apart from the human figures and animal forms created, drums of various forms “fontomfrom”, “tumpane”, and “gimbe” are made with Ghanaian ideograms carved on them. Other household items are also carved, such as trays, jewelry boxes; napkin holders, key holders, candle stands, and furniture are carved. (Plate 15)



Plate 15: Some household items: candle stand, jewelry box, tray, and coffee table from left to right.

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Their finishing has a particular style and technique which they employ. Unlike previously when they were using fire to burn the work to give a brownish black effect before polishing with wax or shoe polish; now inorganic colors such as “Suede” are used.

For wood preservation after carving potassium permanganate which gives a black coloring to the wood and prevents it from decaying is applied. The color black in Akan culture symbolizes age, antiquity, tradition, and history. The works are sometimes dyed or colored with “suede” and others use acrylic which gives a nice plastic effect to the work.

The technique and skill which they employ to give these coloring effects to their works are of various forms. They do this by brushing the work all over with two or three different colors in layers and expose the colors underneath by sanding those areas. They also stipple the dyes on the wood and sometimes pour it onto the surface and blow air on it to give a divergent pattern.

Also stencils and templates are cut and placed on the work. The positive parts are colored or dyed, this technique is largely brought into the industry by those who had a formal education in Art in the secondary schools and had learnt some techniques in printing.

Another form of finishing which their patrons seem to prefer is giving antique effects on their carvings. Patrons of African art see these works to be authentic African Art’ thus the carvers at the centre try to give this old age effect to their carvings by using various materials which makes the work seem old. Some of the materials used by the Aburi

carvers to create this effect are pear seeds, cola-nuts, “Acheampong” plant, (*Chromolaena odorata*) soot, cowries, and sand from tombs. The application of these materials on a work gives it antique effects as they combine to give it a patina which at the same time would show the work as very old. The earth from the graveside also deceives anthropologists who try to find the real age of the object. (Plate 16)

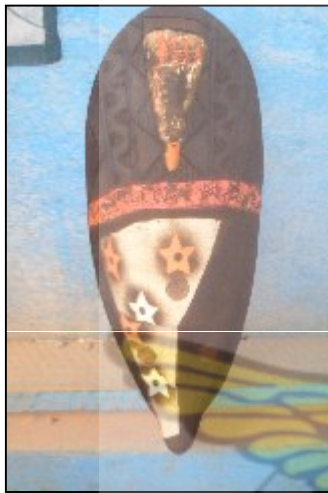


Plate 16: A Finished work painted with “sudi”



Plate 16: A Finished work with beads and brass plate



Plate 16: A Finished work with acrylic



Plate 16: A Finished work painted with poster colour



Plate 16: Aging using coal tar



Plate 16: Aging using white clay

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

4.6 Materials and Tools

Wood which is the primary materials for the carvers at Aburi is not abundant there. They have to travel a distance to get them; they travel to Akim Oda and Nkaw kwa for their wood. There is prohibition in felling trees in Aburi and one has to go through a whole lot of process before one gets one, this is to preserve the forest in Aburi and its environs.

Though nearness to material is a factor for locating an industry, for Aburi nearness of material is not a factor for its location. The commonest wood used are “Sese” or “Osese” (Holarrhena floribunda) “Nyamedua” (Alstonia boonei), “Tweneboa” (Cordia platythyrsa), “Abare” (Ficus clasticoides), other woods are African Walnut, “Odum” (Milicia excelsa), Ebony, Mahogany, and Cedar which are scarcely used. “Sese” is the most used and suitable wood to the carver at Aburi as they find it easy to carve and manipulate in terms of finishing.

There are, however, some bye-laws among of the carvers as to the use of “Nyamedua”. They claim it rots or decay with time and it nearly spoilt their trade. They therefore placed a ban on it being use in the carving industry in Aburi. “Abare” which is also used where by the organic nature of the wood determines what is carved out of it which is mostly imaginary. “Abare” is a parasitic plant which develops from the crown of its host downward thus having an aerial root which descends from the top to the bottom and takes the host which eventually die and decay leaving a hollow in the parasitic plant. Since it is the roots which develop to form the trunk it forms a net like trunk thus giving it an interesting movement and forms which the carver could visualize and bring out these

forms. These works are quite expensive as their patrons think they did a lot of work to create the hollow and the spaces in between the trunks. Hardly could one get an exact or near copy to such works. “*Tweneboa*” is mostly used for drums because of the hollow already existing in the trunk or the easy removal of the wood to create the drum. However, it is now also used for what the carvers call board work (relief). The above are the common woods used at Aburi except by being commissioned to do works with a special wood. They claim woods such as “*Sese*”, “*Nyamedua*”, “*Tweneboa*” and the “*Abare*” are easier to carve and since they are produced based on economic purposes it would be prudent to work with such woods, as a work done in Ebony which takes a week could produce about 15 pieces of the same work using “*Sese*”.

In Africa and Aburi to be precise, there are factors which determine the choice of wood for a work. These are sacred and secular factors. The choice of wood is determined by what it would be used for. It is believed that some trees are more powerful than others and the sort of function determines which tree is to be used. Thus when doing works for religious reasons such wood which are taken to be sacred are use. For secular works the durability, beauty and the toxicity of the wood determines which wood to be used for example works such as household items like mortars, pestles, spoons, and bowls. In Aburi their choice of wood has no religious determinants unless commissioned by someone to use a particular wood. Their works today are for decorative and in few cases utilitarian purposes so they do not factor any reason for a particular wood used but the durability and beauty of the wood determines its use.

For tools used in carving, carvers in Aburi have no difficulty in acquiring them. From Mr. Kofi Appaih most of them started carving using cutlasses and knives to create their forms since they had no money to buy foreign wood carving tools which were in the market and expensive. However, with the industry growing, blacksmiths in Aburi who were manufacturing hoes, cutlasses and hunting implements began to manufacture carving tools. They manufactured chisels, gouges, adzes, and axes for the carvers.

The chisels which come in many sizes are basically for cutting (Plate 17). They are mostly used for cutting flat surfaces. They have a wooden handle and metal blades. The gouges are also of various shapes and sizes (Plate 18). The most common shapes are the “C”, “U”, and “V” gouges. The carvers use the gouges in creating deep cuts to bring out their forms. The “C” is used for blocking, that is bringing out the form of the object to be carved, the “U” for making grooves and decorations and the “V” for detailing, making deep indentations and marking or straightening the edges of figures.



Plate 17: Chisels of different sizes



Plate 18: Gouges

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

The Adze which they call “aso” is the traditional tool which is common or mainly used for carving large works. They are either flat blades like that of chisels or curved blades like that of gouges (Plate 19). They are fixed on wooden handles either straight or forked. They are best used for blocking larger works.



Plate 19.1: A flat blade adze.



Plate 19.2: A “u” shaped adze

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Axes are used in felling, cutting, splitting and blocking of wood. Cutlasses are also used for felling and blocking wood. But for felling of trees, the carvers of Aburi are now into the use of power tools like chain saw, knives are used for whittling and for detailing and finishing. The above mentioned tools which are mainly the traditional tools used by Aburi carvers, are acquired quite cheap as compared to those imported outside the country which are expensive but quite durable than those constructed in Aburi. However the nature of the woods carved in Aburi makes the tools durable as they are not very hard wood which would break the blades.

Aside traditional tools used by the carvers, some of them use power tools such as, chain saw, sanding tools and drills for certain works (Plate 20). Certain carpentry tools are also

used by some of the carvers, planes, spokes shave tools etc. are now used to make their work easier and faster. (Plate 21)



Plate 20.1: A carver using a sander



Plate 20.2: A power drill

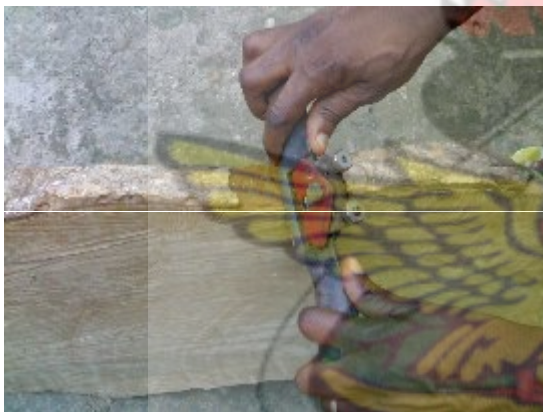


Plate 21.1: A carver using a spokes
shave tool



(Plate 21.2: A spokes shave tool

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher



Plate 21.3: A rasp



Plate 21.4: A carver using a drill.



Plate 21.5: A drill

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher

Carvers from the Volta Region also apart from using the tools mentioned above in Aburi, also use bench vice to hold works when carving. Aburi carvers however, do not use the vice, they claim they do not do small works but quite bigger works which they can control using their legs and hands to hold when carving, moreover the type of wood they used in carving are also soft. (Plate 22)



Plate 22: A carver using his legs as vice

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

4.7 Wood Seasoning

In Aburi wood seasoning is not seriously than in their industry. This is because the wood used mostly is the soft woods e.g. “Sese” (*Holarrhena floribunda*). This wood when left to dry tends to crack when working with and the grains do not give a nice look. They therefore do their carving with the semi dry wood before drying. The carvers cut their woods during the dry season. They claim during this period the growth in the wood ceases and the rings are already formed, this reduces the tendency of the wood from cracking. However because of the commercial nature of their work these days, they do not season most of their woods, thus creating problems as the woods warp or crack.

Since seasoning is mostly done after carving in Aburi, the Air seasoning method is used, not just because of the process but they cannot afford kilns for seasoning. They leave their carved works in the sun for it to dehydrate for a short while and remove them at

short intervals. The reason why they do this is because the atmospheric humidity of Aburi is very high. So just allowing the wood to dry under normal atmospheric conditions is not that favorable. Because of their commercial conditions and the desire to meet demands of customers, some of the carver's force-dry the wood by setting fire and putting the work around it for them to dry quickly. This however has been giving problems to them as their works are rejected in most cases when sent abroad and shipped back to them. This is because the wood dries only on the surface while the inside still harbors some moisture, which makes the finished works go moldy after sometime.

4.8 Training and Apprenticeship

Carvers in Aburi do not have any rule in training young ones into their folk. Unlike the past and in many local industries in Africa today where active guild systems controlled the training of young artists, Aburi has no such controlled system.

There are two types of people who are trained in the industry, there is the close relationship type and, that which the parent or guardian commissions the carver to train his or her ward.

The close relationship type is where the art is seen as hereditary, with talent being passed from generation to generation, and with creativity and success linked to a divine ancestral endowment. Here the learners learn by helping at the centre and with time pick the skill of the art without really being trained, but by watching and trying things on their own. They are not commissioned by any body to be trained but being in the system they become masters of the trade.

The other type of training where parents or guardians of trainees commissioned master carvers to train their wards is quite formal. The trainee is enrolled guided by some rules and regulations which he has to abide to. The fee for the training period is not determined by any constitution of the carving industry. Masters at the centre request some items from the trainees family as a sign of commitment since there is no fixed fee at the industry the masters decide on what to take, which quite minimal, they take a bottle or two of schnapps (gin) a crate of mineral to usher the trainee into the industry. The schnapps is used to pray for the wellbeing of the trainee and for those who take alcoholic drinks. The minerals (soft drinks) are for those who do not take alcohol.

There are no specific periods for the trainees to learn but, it depends on one's ability to learn fast. The learner becomes part of the masters family, apart from learning from the master he is supposed to take active part in any other work the master gives him, going on errands, the farm and any other work the master needs. The trainee begins work by observing his master, and also learns to sand works. With time the master then draws the outline and asks the trainee to block, he then observes the master work on the details and finishing.

With time the learner starts carving miniature works with the help of the master carver. In Aburi their area of specialty is carving in profile, as such, it is quite easy for them, since they just need the outline of what they intend to carve on a flat surface and carve it out. This makes the trainees not stay long with their masters but leave after they have learnt to carve one or two profiles which they produce for the traders to buy at very low prices.

The influence of money makes the learners not stay to learn more, and just after learning to carve one piece, he leaves to get his own shop.

The master carvers however, said, since their aim from the beginning was to keep the youth in Aburi and not for them to go the big towns for work, most of them train people without any fee, but the good ones who stay with them after learning to help and that is the only compensation they get from training the young ones. They claim the close relationship type of apprentices favours them as they are able to control the trainees better because of their family ties.

4.9 Sources of Ideas

The carvers of Aburi get their ideas from a vast resource of proverbs, myths, riddles, traditional stories, samples from past works, from books, designs created by their clients, from Bible stories and daily life activities that surround them. The carvers said during the past they were getting their ideas from samples of works commissioned by their Hausa and Mossi traders. However with time they started creating their own ideas from traditional proverbs and myths which gave a rich flavor to works for example the proverb of the snail and tortoise, etc. They also used Adinkra symbols or ideograms which were mainly used for Akan traditional funeral cloths into wood as these symbols are proverbial.

Another source of their idea is got from traditional sayings which they carve into wood e.g. “Only mothers know”, etc. Apart from them getting their sources of ideas from their

traditional proverbs and sayings, they also get their ideas from old works from all over Africa, ranging from the Masks, and other forms created for traditional rituals in the past e.g. The Akuaba from Asante, Chiwara Masks from Mali, Senufu from La Cote d' Ivoire etc. These forms are got from pictures from books and samples brought to them by their clients. They also carve from designs which their clients create and when others see them they also start carving the same. They also get their ideas from Bible stories which they carve in real or abstract forms e.g. "The Last Supper", David and Goliath, Noah's Arch, "The Good Shepherd" etc.

Apart from their sources of ideas mentioned above, the daily life activities and hazards of life also acts as their sources of ideas e.g. "The Hunter and his dog", "Village scenes", "The Struggle", "Durbar of Chiefs" etc. Other sources of ideas are got from foreign cultures in which other media which are used are created using wood e.g. candle stands, lamp holders, center tables, napkin holders etc. which was not traditional. But using traditional motives and ideas are used to create these contemporary forms making them look traditional.

4.10 Functions of works Produced

African Art in general is made for a purpose or function. The roles art plays in Africa are diverse and these contribute to its high patronage. The role it plays in Africa traditional society includes; religious, social, political, economic, historical and therapeutic functions as some roles they pay. Aburi, as a case study also produced art works to perform these roles.

With the steady decline of traditional religious practice in Aburi and Africa in general, there is less demand for wood sculptures for traditional religions activities. The carvers in Aburi are mostly Christians who are against creating forms for traditional worship. However, some commissioned works are used by the commissioners for traditional worship, which are in few cases.

However certain traditional motifs and ideograms are carved and hanged in Church premises, because of their high thought of God's supremacy and power e.g. "Gye Nyame" "Nya koma" and "Obi Nkabi". Stories from the Bible are also carved and hanged on the walls of churches and these are Africanized. Traditional drums which were banned by the early church in Aburi and its environs are now used for their praise and worship.

Socially, Aburi wood carvings are distinct in portraying the social role of people of Aburi who are on the country side. It depicts men as hunters with their dogs, men with their wives from farm, nursing mothers cradling their babies and durbar of chiefs. Africans who patronize these works are of a social class which is regarded as high as they use them to decorate the homes. To the ordinary man there is no need to have such works.

The works also performs moral rolls, the Akan riddles, proverbs and symbols which talks on morality a lot are put into solid form and help in a long way to shape the moral life of the people, e.g. *Wo foro dua pa na ye piawo* meaning he who takes a good course is helped or supported.

4.11 Factors leading to the growth of wood carving in Aburi:

Aburi wood carving industry's growth could be attributed to political, social, economic, and psychological factors. These factors though seem few are quite broad and had been with the industry for the past two decades.

Politically, the Government of Ghana from the PNDC (People's National Defense Council) to the present regime had helped immensely to the growth of the wood carving industry in Aburi. The PNDC, wanting to promote small scale industries, located small scale industries all over the country and about seven villages created Aburi was one of the selected villages. Through, the creation of these village industries and workshops were organized for the carvers so as to increase production and scales of their work – workshops on quality control, wood season, exporting and purchasing were some of the workshops held for the carvers of Aburi.

Also, the Government of the PNDC involved Cubans who helped to organize Art bazaar for artist and artisans in the 1980's and also sent some artists and artisans to Cuba to be trained. Also the government through the Export Promotion Council was able to give ₵14 million (GH₵ 1400.00) to some carvers which encourage other young men loitering in to be attracted to the centre.

The coming in of the Christian Council which also promised to sponsor the carvers with soft loans, structures, and tools for their works also contributed to the growth of the industry in Aburi. The New Patriotic Party led government also, through its Ministry of

local government and private sector initiative, planned to put up structures to house the carvers. These structures had been constructed and yet to be commissioned.

Economically, Aburi has no particular trade to sustain its people. Indigenes of Aburi are spread all over Ghana especially in the Central and Western regions of Ghana where they are into cocoa farming. They have no jobs in Aburi to do. With the coming of its citizens from Nigeria with no work to do the few who started carving attracted the idle hands who also earned money.

Another factor economically which had led to the growth of the industry is the traders made up of many different ethnic groups. These groups of traders who represent individuals from a whole range of social backgrounds and from various levels of economic success contributes a lot to the growth of the industry.

The traders who buy and sell defined, classified good which is associated with western concepts such as “art” and authenticity, exchange information, mediating, modifying, and commenting on a broad spectrum of cultural knowledge. They are able to link either village-level objects owners, to Western collectors, dealers and tourists.

Barter trade was also a factor which has led to the growth of Aburi Carving Centre. The tourist in the 1980’s when things were difficult in Ghana brought small electronic gadgets, clothes and other basic necessities which were had to get in Ghana and

exchanged it for the artifacts (Plate 23). These attracted lots of young men to the centre since those were the items they desired to have.



Plate 23: Some tourists and carvers trading by barter

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

More Cedis and a few Dollars were also a factor which led to the growth of the Aburi carving industry. Devaluation of the cedi in the 1980's made the carvers get more money as their tourist clients were using dollars to pay for the goods purchased. Changing the dollar into Cedis gave them more money. With this experience the young men and women saw that the carvers were getting much money which also attracted them to the spot.

Formal education has also been a factor to the growth and development of Aburi carving industry. The creation of "Continuation School" by the supreme Military Council government in the mid 1970's led to a lot of pupils learning trades such as tailoring, masonry, and carpentry. Carpentry helped a lot of them in acquiring the skill of

craftsmanship. Those who took to carpentry used their skills and handling of carpentry tools in the carving industry. Most of the master carvers passed through this system thus making them accustomed to the craft very well.

The introduction of visual Arts in the Senior Secondary School curriculum from the 1990's to date has also been a contributing factor to the growth and development of the centre. The students who offer the Visual Arts courses are seen most of the time sketching for the carvers. Those who found themselves offer their secondary education put the skills they acquired to use at the centre. For example most of the finishing techniques were acrylic and other colourings are fixed on works, stencils got from formal education. Also these students help create forums which are more proportional than those of their superiors. Also works which are not traditional in nature which are commissioned by departments and other stakeholders are sketched and designed by these students.

Unity has also been a contributing factor to the growth of the carving industry. The carvers from Aburi are very hospitable to other carvers of different ethnic background. They accommodate and are ready to learn from them. The carvers though not having any strong union binding them together do not give way to people to cheat any of them. They rally behind any carver who is being cheated and even fight when necessary.

The philosophy of the early carvers who started this centre also played a major role in the development of Aburi industrial centre. These men found that there was not enough work in Aburi and the youth were roaming in town stealing and just giving birth to babies. To

save this situation they encouraged the youth to do some minor works and with time they picked the skill which turned them into carvers.

Infrastructural developments in terms of road network to the place and structures being put up for the carvers had helped immensely to the growth of the wood carving industry in Aburi. The road from Accra to Aburi and from Koforidua to Aburi, are so well laid that traveling on that street is smooth and fast. The structures being constructed had also made the place to look more like a serious business centre and have also helped to house those who do not have enough money to construct sheds to work under.

Another factor which had led to the growth of the industry is the support got from Non-governmental bodies such as Aid to Artisans Ghana (ATAG), National Board for Small scale Industries NBSSI, and NOVICA. These bodies though non-profit making organizations, have helped a lot to the growth of the wood carving centre. Studying their mission and vision for artists and artisans all these groups have similar goals. ATAG for example has in its mission statement that, ATAG is a non-governmental organization that seeks to enhance income levels and employment generation in the craft industry in Ghana through product design and development, business training, market development, advocacy and advisory services from this and that of what NOVICA offers artists and artisans which is to market the Artist outside the country, they have helped in training the carvers in a lot of ways. The carvers of whom majority are not well educated or trained in various ways to promote their business.

They train the carvers on topics such as: “The Business Cycle” in which basic financial concepts, record keeping are learnt by the carvers, Wood seasoning is also taught them, exporting, packaging and they also train them on new ideas for product development.

These services have been able to project the Aburi wood carving industry to how it is recognized internationally.

4.12 Some individual who had helped to promote the wood carving industry in Aburi:

The growth of wood carving in Aburi cannot be complete without mentioning some individual carvers who had helped to sustain the industry to this day. Those individuals who turn out to be the master carvers are worth mentioning. The first apprentice, first woman carver, and the first from the Volta Region to work at the centre contributed in their small way to the development of the centre. These artists would be broken into two groups, the first generation of modern carvers in Aburi, and the second generation of carvers. The first generation would be carvers who were into the business in the 1970's and the second generations are those from the 1980's and those of the 1990's.

1st Generation of Carvers



Nana Asabere Bampo (Mr. Akuffo-Ankrah) is one of the first generation carvers in Aburi. He started carving as a first year student of Adonten Secondary School in Aburi. He learnt the art of carving from Opanin Gyenkye who was staying in their house and had been carving. Within a week they sold their works to Mossi and Hausa middlemen in Accra. He has led

to the growth of the wood carving industry as he trained a lot of boys for free and was the first to train a woman carver at the centre. His ideas he said are often got from his environment and his own creative instinct. As a royal of and chief of Adamrobe combines his traditional folklore and stories to create his works. On his thought about the future of the centre, he is of the belief that it was going to expand if leaders of the community support them and certain rules straightened. He believes the young one would create more interesting works if the older generation fades away, since they are shadowing them to come with new ideas.



Mr Andrews Osei was born 1948 and a citizen of Ahwia in Kumasi. He offered Art in Apam Secondary School in the 1960's. He became a pupil teacher in 1970 at Aburi and was teaching in the classroom till the Acheampong S.M.C.I regime introduced what was known as the continuation school where pupils were trained in handiworks such as tailoring, carpentry, catering, and craft. He then started teaching craft at the Kemp Methodist Middle School in Aburi. He is known to have been one of the people to make the growth of the wood carving centre in Aburi expand. He thought most of the lads in wood carving and drawing when he was teaching and he helped his students to sell most of their works making them understand the trade. As an Asante from Ahwia, he brought the Asante style of carving to Aburi. He mostly carved Abstract works. He said he stay in Aburi during his early days were not pleasant as the citizens were rooted in the Base (Missionary) activities and saw him to be an obstacle from the works he produced. He was sent to the chief's palace on several occasions and his works and tools seized but he persisted. He also said he was not

respected and he and his boys were given names such as “Dua monkey” “Wood Monkey” in relations to their carving and no family allowed their daughters to marry them. But with time with awareness from other educated citizens of Aburi they have been now accepted and are highly placed members of the society because of the money they generate.

Mr. Benney Offei did not learn carving but had been drawing since infancy. He went into painting and sign-writing and was painting drinking spots and “chop bars” canteens. He was also a musician and leader of Black beats. In 1966 he left Ghana to Liberia and was painting and repairing pianos. He was later commissioned to draw portrait of Presidents Tubman and his vice Tolbert and through that secured a scholarship as a Liberian citizen to train in American Art School and was a member of Art Students league. He came back to Ghana in 1972 and formed his band and painted as well. He started serious carving when the trade was booming in Aburi. His works are real as his works are very proportional to the human form. He claims his works are not much patronized by foreigners but when they do the price is higher than the other carvers. He always does his works in isolation. He says he wants his works to be his, since people have been stealing his ideas and selling them at lower prices. Some of his works are “Mandigo Woman”, “Oboadeka village scene”, “The xylophone player”. He has trained a lot of carvers.



William Nortei Yeboah is known as the “Odikro” of the ‘Y’ Junction Wood carving centre after his uncles Mr. Ankrah (Nana Asabre) and Milla left for Nigeria. Milla later came to support him

at their “God’s Time is The Best” shed. Nortei was able to sell his works at the U.T.C. and Kingsway shops in Accra which made their works attracted to other buyers and sellers. His life was short lived as he died at the age of 42 in 2003.



Mr. Milla born in the late 1950’s started carving when he under studied Mr. Gyekye who was carving in their house not as an apprentice but through observation for a few weeks. He acquired the skill quickly because of his ability to draw and his good craftsmanship. He attended the Kemp Methodist School where craft was taken seriously and he had been helping his craft teacher to produce works for sale in Accra. This made him enjoy the trade as he got some money to fend for himself and friends. He left Ghana for Lagos, Nigeria in 1976 and worked as a steel-bender and plumber as well as carved. He finally came back in 1983 and started working with “Asudum Mask”. He does any work he is commission to do. His Nigeria influence is shown in his furniture he produces.



Mr. Mark Quaye was born on 28th April 1948. He completed his Elementary school at Kemp Methodist Middle school in 1967. He proceeded to the Adonten Secondary School but withdrew when he got to the third year. He was doing sign writing and paintings in “chop bar” as well as carving on a few occasions. He left for Nigeria and was into interior decorations as well as landscaping for hotels in Nigeria. On his return from Nigeria he went into repairing of electronic gadgets. He said he learnt the act of carving with one

Hanson Affum Dotsi who was working in the Botanical Gardens in the 1960's. On his return to Aburi he joined Mr. Benny Offei at his shop in the 80's and had decided not to create any yet since those who copy turn to spoil his princes. He is accredited to unity Senufu Rider, Tekua and others.

The 2nd generation carvers

Mr. Kofi Appiah (Kofi Sally) was born in the late 1950's attended the Kemp Methodist Middle school. He came into the vocation of wood carving in the 1980s after he had returned from Nigeria. He was a son of a carpenter but learnt the trade of tailoring in Aburi. Since he had been helping his father in his carpentering work and something block laying with his tailoring he had the ability to create and to manipulate objects to create forms. He started carving as a challenge to the carvers.

One day on his way from farm, he carved what they were carving at the 'Y' junction. With his cutlass he managed to carve one doll within a short time and sold it. Since then he has been carving and sending his works to furniture shops in Accra who turn them into "exotic" furniture sets. He is accredited to several art forms carved at the place, such as "Thinking Man Shadow", and "Let's think together".

He is always philosophical; some of his contemporary works are the "Struggle" and Noah's Arch.

Mr. Stephen Balb was the first apprentice to be trained at the "Y" junction. His Masters were Nortei and Milla. He attended Aburi Anglican Middle school and completed in

1985. During his school days he had been running errands for Nortei and Milla who were the only carvers on the junction then. Through this he had been doing sanding and polishing their works. He said they were later joined by other carvers from whom he learnt from as well. His apprenticeship was free and he worked with his masters for over 10 years before they set him up.



Janet Osei-Jackson born on 28th September 1963 also known as “First Lady” not because she is the wife of the Chief of Aburi, but being the first woman to learn and take carving as a career in Aburi.

There have been many myths and stories about African art, that some are solely for male and others for men. In Wood carving, men are supposed to be in these trade because of its nature. Janet attended Aburi Anglican Schools for her elementary education. Upon completion in 1983, she enrolled in Calvary Girls Vocational Institute in Accra and completed in 1987 for her NVTI Certificate in catering. Her intention of being a caterer was suspended as she started making portraits which after selling in Aburi town the carvers were her last customers. Any time she got there she did not just sell but does some sanding for others. She saw there was money in the trade. Mr. Akuffo-Ankrah encouraged her and she became the first woman apprentice at the centre. She was discouraged by family members and friends, that, that was no work for a lady. She was determined and through that other women followed in stead. She has been able to give birth to two healthy children and gets most of the contracts as she has links.

Mr. Owusu from Vakpo in the Volta Region says he was the first from that part of the country to settle in Aburi to trade in wood carving. To him they were carving in the Volta Region (Kpando District), but people from Aburi were visiting them to carve and to buy their works. In chasing them for his money, he saw the market was good thus he came to settle in Aburi to carve in ebony, teak and rosewood which he got from the Volta Region. This led to others from that part of Ghana follow him.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the whole thesis. In a summary form, the development of the previous chapters is stated, important findings discussed, conclusions and recommendations drawn on Wood Carving in Aburi.

5.1 Summary

African art works were made for a predetermined context in which it serves a particular function. These functions determine the form in which it would be made, the culture of the people inspires them, with the society's value of the work taken into force in terms of its function.

However, their inspirations today are not from his culture and values, but, values which were alien and make the works marketable outside his culture. The works are classified as "for the tourist" than to any African traditional values.

Aburi traditional wood carvers today, in his works is completely destroyed by the patrons demand for certain finish and not from the carvers inspiration or thought.

Aburi wood carving industry was of a smaller scale some two decades ago but now there has been and increasing growth of the industry, which has given some recognition to the town other than the National Botanical Garden there.

The research which was limited to Aburi investigated the influences and factors which had led to the growth of the wood carving industry there and also the techniques and processes of wood carving there.

The African philosophy of life and art, which refers to understanding, attitude of mind, logic and any thing which makes them act in different ways is seen in their Art as well. Wood carvings in Aburi such as drums, stools, dolls and staffs were used mainly for religious and medicinal purposes as a means of protecting oneself. They were also used in their political life, economic, education and social life. But with the coming of Europeans and Christianity the function of African Art was abused and rejected as they were seen as pagan. The Europeans and Christians set-up schools to destroy the culture and arts of the African and in Aburi, “Salem” were created for the Christian devotees those who did not join them were seen as “demons” and seen as outcast and their works were prohibited and done in hiding.

With these happenings, by rejecting African culture and art, Aburi and its environs that had fallen to this new culture and colonialism had a reduction in wood carvings and other arts. However, wood carving in Aburi has seen a rebirth for the past 30years. This has come about because of the desire and crave of the very people who limited them out of the system, wanting to have them as those seen in their museum settings provides artificial environment for the arts of Africa. Today, the African Christian, is however, embracing concepts derived from some of the works which are related to their teachings to decorate the place of worship. African stools and swords are used in the churches as

symbol of office when installing people into offices in churches. The homes of African bourgeois are also filled with African arts.

With African countries attaining independence in the 1960's, the fighters of independence saw the need to Africanize or to revive the old traditional forms of Africa especially art, thus the opening of art workshop centers and the use of African art as souvenirs and symbol of office and authority.

African art collectors considered contemporary art objects produced in Africa as inauthentic in relation to traditional form. In a bid to satisfy the interest of collectors who had forgotten there had been an interchange in cultural behaviors, thus new ideas, the carvers tend to produce or copy work of the past and try to artificially age them since this was preferred by their patrons.

With the interpretation of different cultures in Africa from other continents, African arts have gone through a lot of changes; that is, the rise of European and Western patronage with their intervention established art workshop; the establishment of formal schools which fashioned on the Western art educational model; and the increased patronage and interest of the newly formed African government in arts, as part of effort of building a national culture are some of the stages African Art went through. Thus through this stages and changes the carving of Aburi could also be said to have passed through these changes and had been influenced to produce souvenir, mission inspired art and a blend of the new form of Art being taught in schools.

The works of Aburi carving centre which are mostly termed traditional art has some modernity as well. They could be taken as traditional as most of the works still consist of those used in the past for rituals and other religious activities, works such as; mark, stools, Akuaba dolls are still produced as a copy of the past. However the works using these forms to create other functions for the works apart from their aesthetic function, works such as, book-ends, candle stands, napkins holders which were not traditional were being done.

The research methods used in achieving this research are the qualitative research methodology. As the research intended to seek factors that contributed to the growth of wood carving in Aburi, a chronology of the industry has to be researched into as a true history of the place has not been documented but only true oral information. The descriptive method was used for the purpose of describing and interpreting present conditions, prevailing practices attitudes and on going processes from the data collected from this method the researcher would be able to learn why the wood carving industry in Aburi is assuming a rapid growth in the past two decades.

The group of individuals who were of interest to the researcher was mostly people who dealt in wood carving at the Aburi Industrial Centre. The sampling technique the researcher employed was the simple random sampling. And among those sampled were Aburi indigenous carvers, carves from other ethnic backgrounds, traditional leaders and the District pastor of the Aburi Presbyterian Church. This the researcher used to analyze information as some subjects were likely to give bias information.

Some libraries were also visited to make better the understanding of the concepts of the write up. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi's main library and that of the College of Art of the same institution was used. The University of education, Winneba; North campus library and personal collections of the researcher were used as a secondary source of data collections.

For Primary sources of data collections the researcher used direct observation during the interview sessions to observe their styles and techniques used from their works. The interview was scheduled before time with the subjects, with the permission of the subjects to use records and cameras to collect and transcribe them.

In analyzing the data the location of Aburi, its culture and traditional occupation were mentioned. Aburi has a rich culture and celebrates Akwapim Anafo Odwira festival. Here art works are displayed in the observance of its rites and rituals. The culture of the people has been so much influenced by the Presbyterian Missionaries that they always mention the Presbyterian Discipline as their Hallmark of growth.

Formal occupation in Aburi is few, with people working in educational institutions, social welfare, and the Police service with no industry at the place.

From the research wood carving in Aburi was largely on traditional functions. Religion and political reasons were the main purpose of producing art works with social and economic functions playing a minimal role. Wood carvers in Aburi were not much during the 1950's because the value of wood art was diminished during those times and the

perception of the people towards such works and people who made them were very appalling.

However in the 1980's a few returnees from Nigeria in order to survive took to carving for tourists, leading to the growth of the industry. Though all was not rosy at the initial stages, things began to improve as they had the blessing of the traditional council and the coming of the certain organizations to help improve their products and other infrastructure of the place. This enabled a lot more young men to come into the trade and the acceptance of people from other ethnic backgrounds into their mist.

Their initial works were mostly copies of pieces commissioned by Mossi and Hausa clients. They however developed a style which is unique to them. This is seen in the relief works called "profiles". This was introduced to them by a ceramist trained at KNUST. Another style is the "shadow", which were silhouettes of forms rendered in the round and relief. The carved human figures in-the-round which they term "figures", which are usually in realism and in various sizes, from figures to colonial figures. Carvers who were good in such works are considered to be master carvers. However not all three dimensional work are done in realism, some works are exaggerated figures depending on the nature of materials used and the purpose for which the work is being created. They get their themes from such works from everyday life of things that happen whether it being work, love, or any activity that goes on in their day-to-day lives is managed into forms in wood they carve.

They also do relief carvings in various forms. These are done on wood trunks with various themes. Apart from normal wood trunks used, (Ficus clasticoides) which is a parasitic plant also used for relief works. The organic nature of the wood determines the sort of work to be done, but this requires another eye which belongs only to the artist.

"Board work", which is done on wood panel or plant normally, portrays village scenes and life in the jungle. They are of two groups, one of which the board becomes part of the background of the piece and the other forms created are just attached to the frame. Apart from the human figures and animal forms created, drums are cut as well as household items ranging from jewelry boxes, trays, napkin holders, and furniture.

Their finishing is mainly in black giving it an antique effect. They make use of organic and inorganic materials to create such finishing. However today's carvers at Aburi are using colorful things such as beads, silver and brass plates to decorate their finished work.

The material used primarily by the Aburi carvers is wood. They travel distance to get them. Felling of wood in Aburi is quite tedious and controlled, as bye-laws are there to control such activities. They use all sort of local wood depending on its durability in terms of withstanding environmental conditions, insects and decaying. There is a bye-law among the carvers not to use *Nyamedua*. They claim it not fast with time and nearly spoilt their trade. Though any wood could be used save, *Nyamedua*, *Tweneboa*, and *Abare* are used since they are softer and easy to work with. The choice of wood is not

determined by the purpose the work is to do today, as in the past it is the purpose which determines to wood. As the work is today for mainly decorative purposes any wood could be used. Tools used for carving in Aburi are done by blacksmiths in Aburi. They come in various sizes from chisel, gouges and the Adze and sometimes axes, which are the traditional wood carving tools in Aburi. However traditional tools such as power tools, such as, chain saw sanding tools and drills are used. Also, planes, spokes shave and other wood work tools are used.

Seasoning of wood in Aburi is not that important to the carvers. *Sese* which is the commonest wood carved in Aburi is soft and tends to crack when in the dry state. They work with wood in its wet state and air dries it. They sundry it for a while and remove it at short intervals. The atmospheric humidity of Aburi is very high, so just allowing the wood to dry under normal atmospheric conditions does not work with them. And because of commercial purposes and the desire to meet the demands of clients, some force dry the wood by putting the works around fire. This however gives them problems as their works are rejected in most cases when sent abroad.

In training and apprenticeship, no rule guides the masters in training the young ones. No guild system controls them. There are two groups of trainers at the industry, “the close relationship type, and, that which the parent or guardian commissions the carver to train his or her ward”.

While the close relationship type is passed on from the family tree with success linked to a divine ancestral endowment, where the learners learn by helping a relation, the parent or the guardian can commission a carve to train their wards which is quite formal. Some few items are collected and the trainee is given some rules and regulations to follow. No specific period is given for the trainees to learn, but his ability to learn fast determines his period of stay. The influence of money makes learners to abandon their training as learning to carve the easiest work could earn one a fortune. The good ones however stay to help their masters and also help them in other errands.

The carvers acquire their ideas from diverse source such as: proverbs, myths, riddles, traditional stories, ideograms, sample from words, from books, design created by the clans, Bible stories, and daily life activities that surrounds them. Though they use the above mentioned sources in creating their works, traditional motives, styles and ideas are not left out which make them traditional works.

The function of works produced in the past was for a particular function. The role Art plays in African traditional society includes: Religions, Social, Political, economical, historical, and therapeutic functions.

Though traditional religion practiced in Aburi and Africa in general has fallen some of the works commissioned are for religious purposes, both traditional African worship and the Christian worshippers use them for their activities.

Socially, the stature of a person in the society depicts what he uses as Art forms in his house. Works are used to show the social status of a person, he being a chief, farmer, hunter, or drummer. Africans who are of social class regarded as high use them to beautify their homes. During marriage, stools are given to the bride symbolizing her stay in the grooms' house. Politically, some of the works are used to symbolize authority. Stools and linguist staffs show the political status of the person. Economically, some carves apart from getting money for their works; their patrons also use them for their economic purposes. Some belief certain works bring them wealth and protects their farms and properties. They are also used to portray ones history as some of the works tells stories of the past. Also for therapeutic functions as they belief it is able to cure them from certain ailment.

5.2 Conclusions

There are a lot of factors that have contributed to the growth of wood carving in Aburi, both internal and external factors. These factors are some of the internal factors which contributed to its growth; the constitution of Aburi industrial centre which has spelt out clearly a well growth programme; location of the industry which is at the junction on the busy road; the culture of the people which is the main source of the idea for the work: the liberation of the people from traditional religions beliefs which formally gave restrictions to the works, e.g. women not to work as carvers and taboos related to the work in general are no longer observed; societal acceptance and assimilation of other ethnic groups into their mist are some of the industrial factors that has lead to the growth of the industry.

The external factors are loan schemes given by some banks to the carvers; workshops organized regularly by non governmental organizations, such as ATAG, NOVICA, and that of the government the NBSSI on topics such as, seasoning, labeling and packaging, quality control, and export procedures. Political influence and the stability of governments have also led to the growth of the Industry. Economic factors such as more Cedis chasing Dollar made the carvers rich as they were paid in Dollars most of the time. It was also found out that wood carving in Aburi is influenced by their patrons for certain finishes. The traditional values of the carvers still play a pivotal role in their works. Also the Aburi industrial centre though having a lot of support from government and non-governmental organizations it is not recognized as an official tourist centre. Felling of trees far and near for wood as a material for their works helps create environmental problems. The wood carving centre does not have a united front making the pricing of product difficult and always leads to patrons fighting with traders over prices and the traders also fighting among themselves.

5.3 Recommendations

The Aburi Industrial Centre has affiliation with a lot of groups, such as, ATAG, NOVICA, NBSSI, and Centre for National Culture. These groups with their aim as to help the small scale artists and artisans through marketing, bazaars, exporting and pricing management skills as a few to achieve a maximum requirement in the international market, seems not to be helping the carvers to achieve a maximum growth. According to the carvers these groups come with prospects, but later deceive them for their own gains.

They come seeking to find out their problems, but after getting such problems, when donors send funds to solve them, they select only a few carvers and send them to their offices to work for them. After noting their problems they also set-up their own workshops and employ the young carvers who work for them at a cheap prices. Also because they do not have license to copyright their creative pieces they give to such groups are reproduced by their commissioned workers. This makes the creator of the work a loser.

Also fairs and bazaars organized by Centre for National Culture tend to give them problems. The Centre for National Culture which has its offices in Koforidua, when organizing fairs, does not support them in any way in terms of transportation and handling of their works. Their market is not good when they organize these fairs in the Eastern Region. The market is good in Accra where they are nearer to. Traveling to Koforidua to exhibit, to them is tiresome, their product is not bought, and handling of their goods is also not good. They pay for their stand which they claim does not help them. It is better to exhibit at their shops where their clients know of than to be touring the region with their wares at their own expense. These makes their relations with the centre not to be cordial as it should be.

The carvers craving for money tend not to use the right wood which later rot when the final work gets to the client. They also tend to do shoddy work without having time to polish and treat them well. The younger ones who are under training also when they learn to carve the simplest form leave and would just be carving that as many as they can

depend on it. Apart from the talented ones these young men are able to carve these simple forms, when given more tedious work or an unfamiliar work they are not able to execute them.

They do not have a fix price for the works produced and because their shops are close, one could eavesdrop and signal the client to come for a reduced price of the same product being bargained at the other shop. This sometimes create confusion among the carvers and the clients, which sometimes result in fights, a good example is one of a buyers who collected some pieces, but did not pay them, went to a different shop and had a reduced price for the same products. He was nearly lynched by the first carver and his supporters. This sends a wrong signal as the client in question came with foreigners for them to buy, they left without picking anything.

Some master carvers also claim they are not going to create anything new, because when they come out with a fine piece they do not enjoy from it as others who have clients more than they do sell the work which they have copied at lower prices, making the creative ability of the carvers reduced. Some even tend to hide their works for a long time and only sell them to clients who are the only people who see such works. This researcher had a problem with one of the carvers as he was taken as an informant sent by some carvers to take picture of his work for them to reproduce. He has works which were distinct from those produced there but never allowed the researcher to take a snap of them. Laws on copyright are needed here to give creativity to the works produced.

The moral lives of the workers are quite good. Generally speaking the people of Aburi are known to be hospitable and cultured but most of the young carvers who are the money handlers in town seem to be on top of the world. They are into drugs which they claim helping them to work more but this rather affects them as they grow. They seem to be older than their actual age and die young.

Wood in Aburi is scarce, this makes the carvers travel distances for them. Others are also now not carving in Aburi, but carve at other towns in the Eastern Region in the Suhum Kraboa Coaltar and the West Akim districts. They only bring in their left over pieces after they have sold them to their clients in the bush. Most of the young ones who are not yet having families of their own also move out of town to do their carving thus, young carvers of Aburi are now scattered all over the Eastern Region.

Though their constitution claims they have an association, this seems not to exist as they are disintegrated. It took the researcher sometime to get some executive members who were even reluctant to give information. The actual carvers at the centre claim others who are not carvers have infiltrated the centre and taken up the place. They claim because they do not have money, the rich had taken over the executive positions which are leading to the collapse of the industry. The executive members are mostly traders who control their clients and other people who come there. They take the lion's share and leave the actual workers with just a little to handle; this is disrupting law and order at the place. To sustain the wood carving in Aburi which shot up during the 1990's, the following recommendations have to be considered to solve the problem stated:

The groups that have working relations with centre should be transparent to the carvers though these groups activities seems to improve work at the centre they are also there to make their own gains, they should be fair to the carvers and not seek their ideas just to make such gains as this is leading to a decline of the industry.

The Centre for National Culture should also educate the carvers on reasons for organizing fairs and bazaars, in that it is only there to promote them and not to give them money instantly. They should also set up a unit at Aburi where their works could be exhibited, or to integrate them to the Centre for National Culture in Accra which is nearer to them.

Though Aburi is having a Botanical Garden which is a tourist destination, the wood carving centre is not as they are not registered with the tourist board since they can't afford the registration. This makes a lot of tourist seem not to be protected when they visit the centre. Tourist board should try to accommodate them into their folk so as to regulate their activities.

The carvers should be educated on the rights of the clients as the use of cheap wood and rush in making work done does not help the client in the long run. This action gives the place a bad name as people will shun away from them. To carve a good a name with good works is better than making quick money name in a day and never getting any in the near future.

The young ones should be encouraged to be good apprentices and not to be moved by money to learn for a short period. Certificates should be awarded trainees who are trained there as done by the hair dressers, tailors and seamstress associations for their apprentices through the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI). Attaining these certificates will encourage them to stay longer and help them go places.

Pricing of works should be controlled in a way that the price of wood and the number of working hours used to produce a particular work factored into the pricing of the works. This will regulate the price of work and not create confusion at the centre. People seen to be selling works at lower or higher prices to clients are to be checked and sanctioned by the association.

Copyright laws should be made by the carvers to protect new works produced. This will help in a long way to bring in more creative works into the industry. Artist who had had formal training should be employed by the association to train the carvers on idea development and principles of designing. Social workers should be used to educate the carvers on their social life and the use of drugs. their social life if not checked will lead to the collapse of the centre as the young ones get money and use them for all sort of vices and disrespect elders

To sustain the centre other sculptural materials should be introduced to the carvers. Clay and soft stone is abundant around Aburi. Only one man has tried carving of soap stone (Plate 24) which he claims is available in large quantities in Adamrobe but says he is not

into carving stone because the work is tedious and not patronized, people compare it with wood as it is the dominating material over there and cheaper. Experts in stone carving from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology should come to the aid of these carvers with their techniques and skills to give a new dimension to the centre.

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Plate 24: Some carved stones

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher

Their association should be revamped and not to be that of organizing funerals for dead members. Carvers should be encouraged to pay dues which should in turn be put in effective use to promote the lives of the carver and not some individuals. The carvers should be involved in any project that the government intends to set up at the centre. Some examples given are that in building some structures by the government through N.B.S.S.I. to serve as workshops and showrooms did not achieve very good results as the

structures constructed would not serve the purpose for which they were constructed. Since the carvers were not consulted before putting up these structures which are just small cubicles without windows to even ventilate the works considering the moist nature of Aburi.

A special week should be set during summer annually as a festival or durbar by the carvers to showcase their works as done by the people of Kpetoe in the Volta Region during their (*Agbamevor za*) Kente festival. This would go a long way in marketing the place on a wider range.



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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

1. Where do you get your materials (wood) for carving?
 - (i) Do you perform any rituals for the acquisition of these materials? If yes how? If why?
 - (ii) Does the nature of the material determine how the work looks like?
 - (iii) What would happen to your industry if a ban is laid on wood in Ivory Coast?
 - (iv) Have you been planting trees in replacement for what you cut?
 - (v) What alternative would you have for wood?
2. What obligates you to carve, is it religious, social, political, economic, entertainment or what?
3. How do you get your ideas for carving, is it always copying from past works or an imagination mechanism of creation aids you?
4. What processes do you use in making the art form?
 - (i) Do you draw in a sketch book?
 - (ii) Do you draw directly on the media?
 - (iii) Do you hire people to do the drawing for you?
 - (iv) Do you practice division of labour?
5. How do you get your themes?

- (i) Are they from traditional symbols, sayings or concepts you create yourself?
6. Do your works depicts the style of your tribe (Akuapim) or that of other tribes are incorporated?
7. How do your people see you as sculptors, i.e. do they fear you and take you to be idol worshippers and juju men?
8. Do you share in the religious feelings of your tribal ancestors, as that motivated them to sculpt those days?
9. Do you have a predetermined context which would give a particular function before you work?
10. Do your people have authority in what you produce in terms of your culture?
11. Who are normally patrons of our work?
12. Do your patrons determine the kind of finish they want?
13. Which tools do you use?
- (i) Are they manufactured locally or imported?
14. What is the ethnic identity of the carvers in the industry?
- (i) If some are from other ethnic groups why are they here?
- (ii) Has their assimilation been cordial?
15. What has been the number one motivation for the growth of the industry in recent years?

16. Where your people carving long before now? If Yes what were they carving and where? If No what made you start carving?

(i) Why did you choose this location /place for carving?

17. What prompted your carvers to choose here?

18. Do you have an association?

(i) When was it formed?

(ii) Is it functional

(iii) What are some of the aims and aspirations of the group?

19. Do you have any affiliation with any recognized national organization? Example

N.C.C., Tourist Board or Export Promotion Council, Small-Scale Business etc.

20. What is your system of craftsmanship? Is it through formal education or apprenticeship?

(i) If through apprenticeship what is the requirement and mode of training?

(ii) What is the cost of apprenticeship?

(iii) Do learners take inspiration from all adults who work within the industry?

21. Does your religious affiliation have some effect on your work?

22. Does the Christian community patronize your works?

23. Do natives take much delight in your work? If Yes for what? In No why?

24. Do people come to order works for ritual purposes (religious /ceremonial)?

25. Do you have an agreed price for each work you produce? Do you have a price range?

26. What are some discipline measures you practice here?

(i) Do you observe traditional norms related to your work?

(ii) Do you devote much time on work and not for rush of money?

27. What makes you not to create unique works?

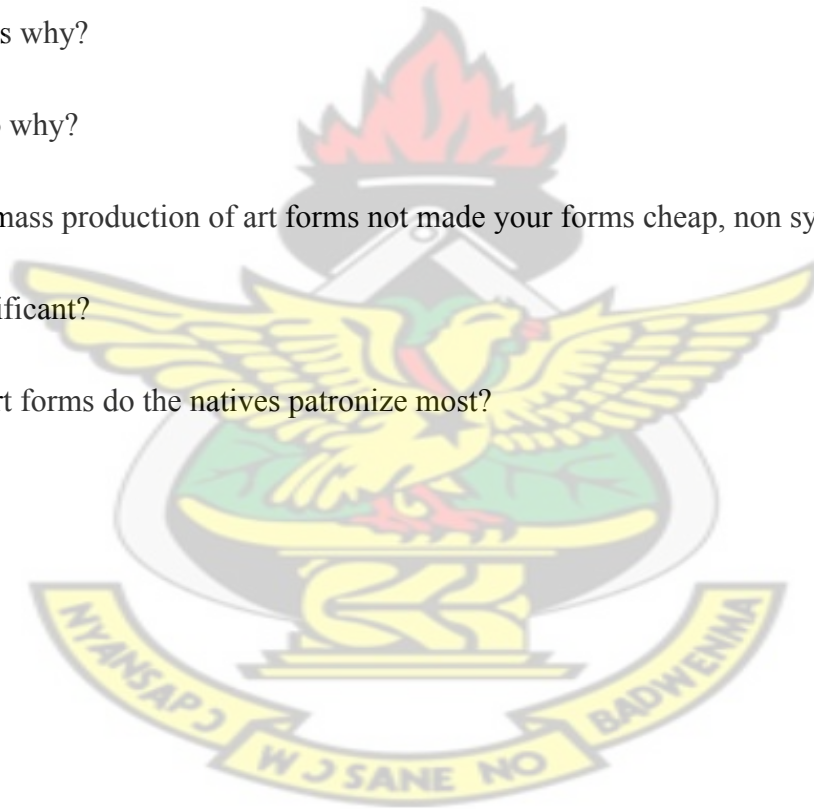
28. Do women also carve here? Yes..... No.....

(i) If Yes why?

(ii) If No why?

29. Has the mass production of art forms not made your forms cheap, non symbolic and non significant?

30. Which art forms do the natives patronize most?



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the award of Master of Arts in African Art and Culture and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains neither material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any degree at the University, except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

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Date



ABSTRACT

In the 1940s experimental workshop centers began in Africa as a means to creating a new synthesis of African modern art. Aburi Wood Carving centre which is the spotlight for this research however began in the early 1980s. Whereas the experimental workshops were established mostly by European expatriates, in the 1940s, that of Aburi Wood Carving Center was not, though it bore similarities with the workshops created by the Europeans, where primary schools leavers and local illiterate youth were those found there. Even though Aburi Wood Carving centre has been established for some decades now, it has still not attracted the needed attention it deserves. The researcher has unveiled the early beginnings of the center and its growth, tried to deal with techniques employed and influences the carvers have through other cultures in producing their works. The study investigated the growth and sources of inspiration influencing the industry linking it with their culture in terms of their religion, politics as well as their social structure. The study adopted the qualitative research methodology to collect and synthesize the data. With the methods and procedures adopted the researcher was able to trace a detailed history of Wood Carving in Aburi and its development through the last two decades. The findings revealed that returnees from Nigeria took to carving for tourists resulting into the growth of the industry, with other groups coming from the Volta and the Northern Regions to increase the productions there. The researcher recommended that stakeholders and policy makers should get involved in developing the centre to attract the needed popularity it deserves in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of Ghana.

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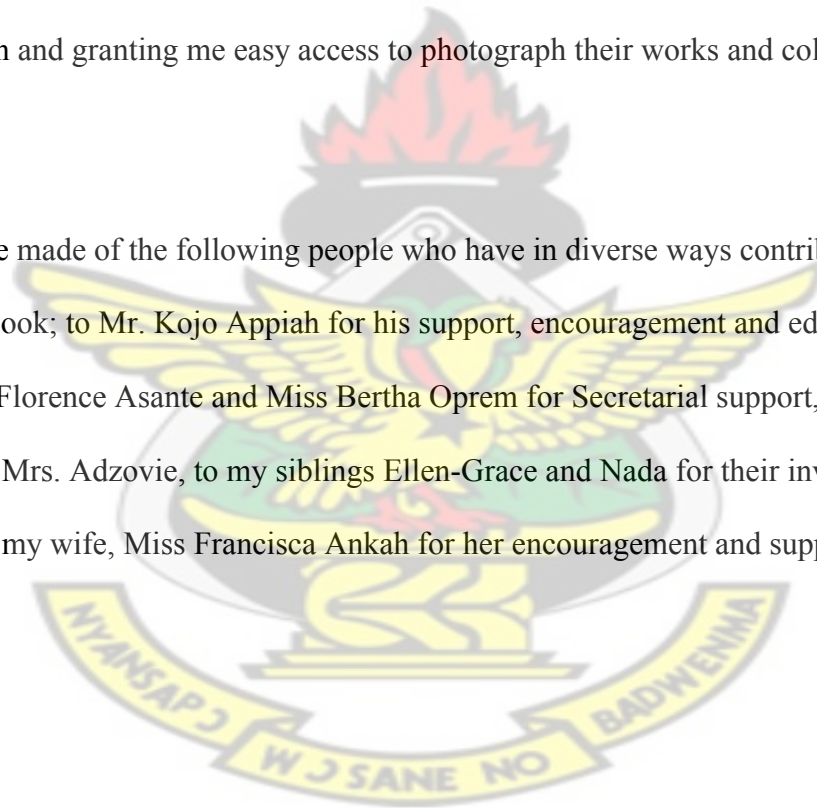


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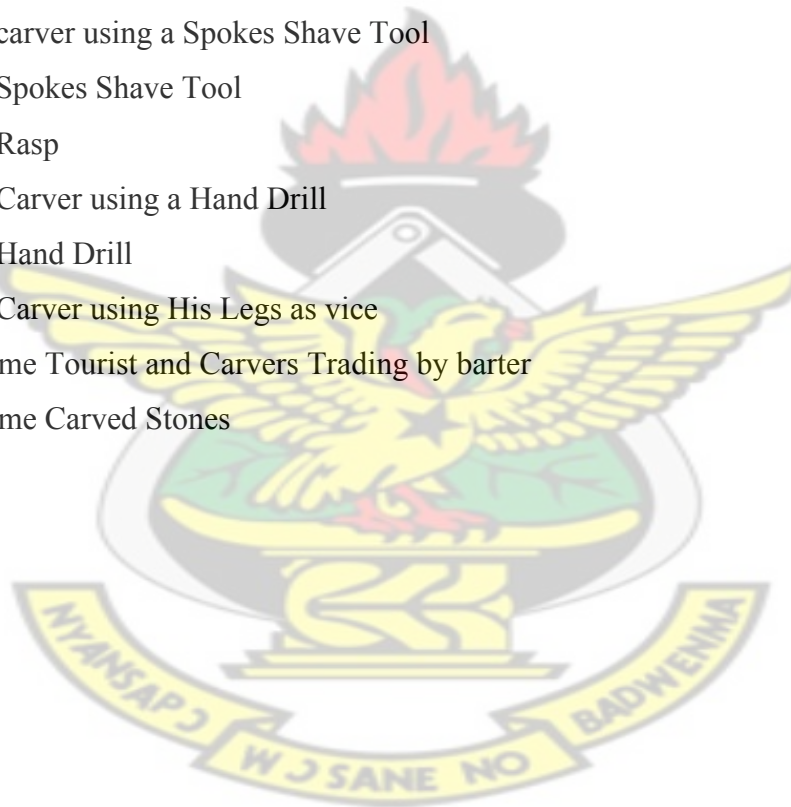
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