

THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ART ON AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the M. Arch. and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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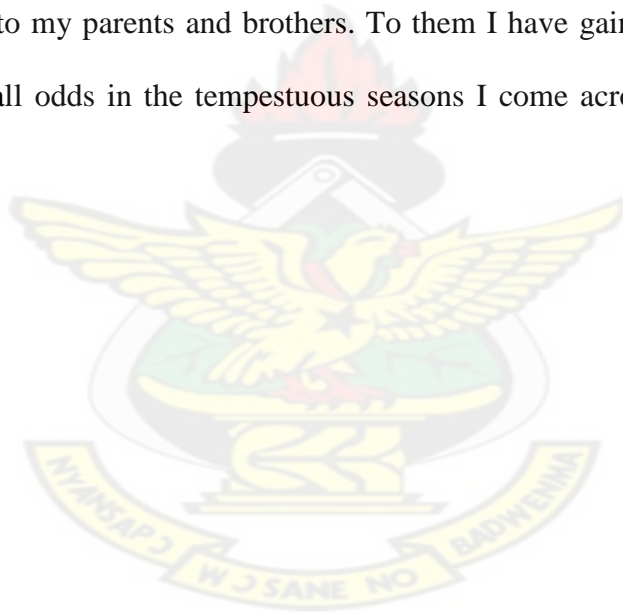


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page no.
Declaration	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Table of contents	iii
List of figures	vi
Abstract	viii

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Traditional African Art	1
1.1.1 Additive Sculpture; Metalworking, Clays	2
1.1.2 Subtractive Sculpture; Wood, Stone	3
1.1.3 Painting and Drawing	3
1.1.4 Art Across the Continent	4
1.1.4.1 Western Africa	4
1.1.4.2 Central Africa	4
1.1.4.3 Ancient Egypt	5
1.1.4.4 Eastern Africa	5
1.1.4.5 Sahel and Savannah	6
1.1.4.6 Southern Africa	7
1.2 African Architecture	7
1.2.1 The Effects of Social Structure on African Architecture	10
1.2.2 Elements of Construction: The Building Process	12

Table of Contents (cont.)	Page no.
1.2.2.1 The Compound	13
1.2.2.2 Sacred, Ceremonial and Community Buildings	14
1.3 Problem Statement	15
1.4 Scope of Study	15
1.5 Objectives	15
 CHAPTER TWO	
2.0 Literature Review	16
2.1 Elements of the African Aesthetics	16
2.2 Ornaments and African Architecture	21
2.3 Art and Architecture in African Communities	24
2.4 The African Artistic Heritage	28
2.5 The Role of Art and Architecture in African Society	32
2.6 Regional Distinctions in African Art and Architecture	35
2.7 Summary and Conclusion	39
 CHAPTER THREE	
3.0 Research Methodology	40
3.1 Aim of the Research	40
3.2 Research Methods	40

Table of Contents (cont.)	Page no.
3.2.1 Consultations	40
3.2.2 Case Studies	41
3.2.3 Photographs	41
3.2.4 Related Literature	42
3.2.5 Computer software / internet sources, books, journals and magazines	42
3.3 Data Collection and Analysis	43
3.3 Limitations	43
 CHAPTER FOUR	
4.0 Research Results and Discussions	44
4.1 Akan Architecture and the Adinkra Symbols	44
4.2 African Art and Architecture in Some African Communities	53
 CHAPTER FIVE	
5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations	58
5.1 Conclusion	58
5.2 Recommendations	58
 REFERENCES	61

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig.	Page no.
2.1 Traditional compound house with its human parts.	17
2.2 Entrance elevation of a traditional house with its human parts.	18
2.3 Emiel Jegen, Nigeria, African architecture.	20
4.1 A wall of an old Akan house showing some of the Akan Adinkra symbols.	44
4.2 Contemporary building at Ejisu depicting some of the Akan Adinkra symbols.	45
4.3 Fihankra (compound house); this signifies safety or security in a home.	45
4.4 The open courtyard of an Akan compound house.	46
4.5 Mframadan (well ventilated house).	47
4.6 The Adinkra symbol and tree stump called ' <i>Nyame dua</i> ' (God's altar).	47
4.7 A hotel entrance with Adinkra symbols.	48
4.8 A contemporary house that incorporates the Adinkra symbol called ' <i>Gye Nyame</i> '	48
4.9 A Church building at Tema Community 3 showing the ' <i>biribi wo soro</i> ' symbol.	49
4.10 ' <i>Anantuo</i> ' – Calf.	50
4.11 An old house at Ejisu-Besease, incorporating some of the Adinkra symbols.	50
4.12 The Nkonnuafieso Temple, Kumasi, showing several Akan Adinkra symbols.	50
4.13 A building column incorporating the ' <i>biribi wo soro</i> ' symbol.	51
4.14 ' <i>Asennua</i> ' – Cross. Symbol of supreme sacrifice, redemption and selflessness.	51
4.15 A wall decoration of an old house at Abetifi, near Nkawkaw.	52
4.16 Adinkra symbols on a ceiling at the International Conference Centre in Accra.	52
4.17 A relief on the entrance wall of the Ghana National Museum, Accra.	53
4.18 Wooden sculptures that adorn the exterior of Bamileke architecture, Cameroon.	53
4.19 Traditional earthen roundhouse of Tamberma (Batammaliba), Togo and Benin.	54

List of Figures (cont.)

Fig.		Page no.
4.20	Examples of Dogon doors with decorative designs in relief form.	55
4.21	A Dogon door for a granary. The stylized images of human figures and animals.	55
4.22	Decorated house facade in Zaria, Nigeria: painted facade and mud relief.	56
4.23	Kariakoo market in Dar es Salaam showing its gigantic funnel-shaped roof.	57



ABSTRACT

Traditional African Art does not simply beautify the environment, but rather transmits laws, moral codes and history; communicates between people and the spirit world; and also signifies wealth and status. It includes all of life – birth, initiation, work, marriage, childbirth, death and afterlife.

African Architecture, like other aspects of the culture of Africa, is exceptionally diverse. Many ethno-linguistic groups throughout the history of Africa have had their own architectural traditions. The architecture of Africa has been subject to numerous external impacts from the earliest periods for which evidence is available.

The traditional arts of Africans have an influence on African Architecture. The art is expressed through architectural elements like doors, walls, columns, fenestration, roofs, finishes, furniture and furnishings, etc. The forms, spaces, materials and architectural features of buildings in Africa can portray the culture, history and art of Africans. The transition in the cultures and arts of Africans over the years has also reflected in their architecture. The construction technology and finishes used for buildings can be related to the works of arts and crafts of Africans.

Architecture and art are interrelated in some ways and they are both affected by the rapid advancement of the world's technology and development. I will be hoping to find the relationship that exists between Traditional African Art and African Architecture through the evaluation of some African buildings which exhibit rich African art and culture.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Africa is diverse both in race and language, and these differences are spread across its millions of inhabitants. Artists existed in almost all traditional African tribes. However the artists of the Niger and Congo river basins produced sculptures which have become famous as “African Art”. These areas, tropical Africa, are where the numerous, primarily wooden sculptures were created. The artistic styles of North Africa have been greatly influenced by Islamic art and are considered as part of the Middle Eastern tradition (Garlake, 2002).

The history of African art and architecture spans a vast period of time, beginning as early as 25,500 BC and continuing to the present. Among the earliest surviving examples of African art are images which were painted on rock slabs found in caves in Namibia. Other examples of early African arts include the terra-cotta sculptures by the Nok artists in northern Nigeria between 500 BC and 200 AD and the decorative bronze works of Igbo Ukwu (9th – 10th century AD). Many surviving examples of African art date from the 14th to the 17th century (Chanda, 2006). However, most of the African art known today is relatively recent, from the 19th century. Very little earlier African art has lasted over the years, primarily because it was made largely of perishable materials like wood, cloth, and plant fibres and also because it typically met with intensive use in ceremonies and every life.

1.1 TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ART

African art is the label usually given to the visual and plastic arts of the people south of the Sahara, especially those of western and central Africa. Not only have students of African art limited themselves to a portion of the continent but, they have been primarily concerned with the aesthetic appeal of sculpture and a description of the uses and functions of the objects in an

ethnographic context. Northern Africa, almost half of the continent size has been excluded from those studies because its arts clearly belong to widely flung traditions centred on the Mediterranean and worlds of Christianity and Islam.

Art deals with form and expresses images or metaphors (Layton; 1981). There exist everywhere a need for the formal expression of values by metaphorical means, an appeal to the senses of sight and touch. The visual and plastic arts are means through which this need can be satisfied. Art historians examine iconography, the meanings and characteristics of pictorial renderings or of symbols whose arrangements and specific location, affect the form of the art or, conversely the form affects the iconography.

African art does not constitute a single tradition since Africa is an enormous continent with hundreds of cultures that have their own languages, religious beliefs and political systems. Each culture produces its own distinctive art and architecture, with variations in materials, intensions and results. Whereas some cultures excel in wood carving, others are also known for casting objects in metal. In one culture, a decorated pot might be used for cooling drinking water, while a similar pot is used for ritual ceremonies in another culture.

1.1.1 ADDITIVE SCULPTURE: Metalworking, Clays

Metals have been used for jewellery and larger sculpture over most of the African continent. The main metals were iron, copper and alloys of copper, gold and silver. Metallurgy requires complex expertise for the reduction of the ores and the preparation of alloys. The metal is worked either by heating and hammering into shape or by heating it beyond the melting point and pouring it into a mould; that is, by casting (Douglas, 1970).

Clay allows the greatest versatility of expression of all the media used in sculpture.

Ceramics could achieve intricate curved volumes as well as blocked angular ones and could provide the finest detail. Mud sculpture requires little technical skill beyond the shaping of the volumes on an armature. It is less versatile than ceramics because it is more fragile and has to be protected from humidity.

1.1.2 SUBTRACTIVE SCULPTURE: Wood, Stone

Techniques for carving wood and the tools used are simple but require great skill. A block is hewn out of a tree trunk, a branch or root. After carving, details are worked out and finally polished with sandpaper-like substances. The carver has to choose his block with great care, visualizing the finished form in the block.

Stones for sculpture in the round relief or architectural sculpturing such as on capitals had been used to perfection in North Africa, where perhaps the highest technical achievements date from predynastic Egypt with its sculptures (Vansina, 1984). Working with mostly stone was a matter of chiselling first, polishing later, except for soft stones such as soapstone.

1.1.3 CREATIVE ART: Painting and Drawing

Since the graphic arts are two-dimensional, they require the feigning of greater illusion than is required for three-dimensional arts. Basically, the technology required first the making or preparation of a surface to carry the design; rock, wood, plastered, wall, paper, leather and even the skin of the human body. The degree of absorption and the way in which pigments or stains lay on the grain are crucial factors. The lines, paint or dots can be applied with reed, pen, brush or finger. The techniques of graphic art are more varied than is usual in sculpture because of the special constraints of two- dimensionality (Layton; 1981).

1.1.4 ART ACROSS THE CONTINENT

1.1.4.1 Western Africa

Western Africa is rich in archaeological finds. Metalworking and ceramics appeared in this area about two thousand years ago. Iron facilitated the carving of sculpture in wood. Clayworking led to the efficient storage and cooking vessels and allowed for the development of ceramic statuary. Many sculptural traditions in wood (a medium that does not survive archaeologically) developed in western Africa. Some were associated with leadership: the royal arts of the Akan of Ghana, the kingdoms and chieftaincies of the grasslands in Cameroon, and the richly diverse artistic traditions of the Yoruba of Nigeria (Thompson, 1989). Works of art were produced to celebrate chiefly prestige, to decorate shrines, for divination, and to control supernatural forces.

1.1.4.2 Central Africa

Central Africa has seen the rise of many kingdoms, mostly in the period before European contact. Some, such as the Chokwe and Kongo kingdoms, seem not to have lasted long after the arrival of Europeans. Others, such as the Luba, Kuba, and Lunda, also pre-colonial in origin, have lasted well into this century. All developed royal arts related to the political and religious sources of leadership. Among many groups, rites of passage became a significant focus for the arts. Masking was associated with an intensive period during which boys were initiated into the knowledge and responsibilities of adulthood (Sieber and Walker, 1987). Analogous ceremonies existed for girls, although the use of sculpture was far rarer in their case. Among some groups, special induction ceremonies were held for healers, diviners, ritual experts, blacksmiths,

sculptors, singers, and dancers. Belief in the efficacy of spirit ancestors to aid the living gave rise to sculptures of various types, ranging from portraits to figures that protected the relics of the dead.

1.1.4.3 Ancient Egypt

Egypt's part of the Nile Valley was far more fertile for agriculture; moreover, its location at the northeast corner of Africa gave it access, in addition to contacts with the south, to the rest of northern Africa and the Near East, and to goods and ideas that helped to stimulate its rise as one of the earliest great civilizations. By about 4500 B.C., the inhabitants of that part of the Nile Valley had begun to develop, by continuous and gradually accelerating stages, a complex society based on the efficient management of land and other resources, sophisticated technical skills, and the beginnings of hieroglyphic writing. Shortly before 3000 B.C., this process culminated in the unification of the entire land under a single ruler, an event that the Egyptians considered the beginning of their dynastic history (Garlake, 2002). For the next three thousand years, Egypt was to remain a major cultural-and often military-power. Today, we are still impressed by the rich legacy of this extraordinary civilization: huge structures, extensive written records, diverse artistic achievements, such as portraits carved in stone, and spectacular goldwork.

1.1.4.4 Eastern Africa

In 1884 at the Berlin Conference, Africa was partitioned among the European powers. The colonial period ended in the mid-twentieth century with the independence of most states not only in eastern Africa but throughout the continent. This complex past is reflected in the arts of eastern Africa. These include the manuscripts and processional crosses of Ethiopian Christianity,

as well as objects associated with Islam. Farther south, along the coast, are architectural forms influenced by Arabic sources via the Indian Ocean trade and adapted for local uses; the unique blend of art forms and ideas that resulted is called Swahili (Vansina, 1984). In southern Sudan, in Kenya, and as far south as the island of Madagascar are found memorial statues dedicated to the distinguished dead, ranging in style from extremely abstract renditions of the human body to detailed tomb sculptures. Many works relate to changes of status, from initiation into adulthood for young women and men to induction into leadership roles.

1.1.4.5 Sahel and Savannah

Between the Sahara desert and the rain forests near the western African coast lie the Sahel and the Savannah. The term Sahel is Arabic for "shore"-it is the southern boundary of the Sahara desert, which was likened to a sea. The term Savannah refers to a treeless or sparsely forested plain. However, the desert was not an impermeable barrier. A number of trade routes crossed it from early times, giving impetus to many empires, including those of ancient Ghana, medieval Mali, and Songhai. The Niger River flows from west to east through much of the area, turning south through Nigeria to empty by way of a large delta into the Gulf of Guinea. In Mali, the river separates into a number of streams that later reunite in an area called the inland delta. Here, an early civilization flourished, named Djenné after a nearby city renowned as a centre of commerce and learning (Chanda, 2006). A host of brilliant terra-cottas and metal sculptures known from this area have for the most part been illicitly excavated. Masks and figures associated with initiation and funerary practices are widespread among these groups, although the impact of both Islam and Christianity has been felt.

1.1.4.6 Southern Africa

The best-known arts of southern Africa are the rock paintings and engravings that were produced by the San peoples and are found mostly in the eastern mountainous regions. With the exception of rock painting and engraving, the arts of southern Africa have tended to be underrated and underreported outside the area. The region's impressive stone ruins, especially those of Great Zimbabwe, were long attributed to outsiders on the assumption that Africans were incapable of producing such imposing architecture (Clarke, 2006). The relative absence in southern Africa of the practice of using masks and the rarity of figurative sculpture of the sort prized by Europeans led to the region's many rich utilitarian arts being neglected by outsiders.

1.2 AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

African traditional architecture which sometimes referred to as vernacular architecture, has demonstrated how architecture is designed to respond to society's needs and at the same time to be sensitive to its environment. To the same degree that the continent boosts diversity in climatic conditions, regions, peoples and traditions, these differences are accommodated in its architecture. The designs of buildings that were found across Africa ranged from the windbreakers used as shelters by the Bushmen; the simple round beehive huts made of flexible branches and covered with leaves, made by the Pygmies, to the circular huts with conical roofs called home by the agricultural peoples that live on the grasslands (Andersen, 1977).

African architecture was also defined by the religious and social order of the people. This was evident in the temporary nature of the buildings. Permanent housing would have been an embarrassment for many people, for example the bushman; the migrant pastoralist, such as the Fulani and the Masni; or the people who practiced land rotation and moved from place to place

every four years. The lifestyles and the social customs necessitated that the houses changed to suite the social arrangements of the people. Another factor that affected the architecture is the climatic conditions of the area, the lack of or the abundance of rainfall, the desert, semi- desert, the high forests, and the grasslands. Houses were made to protect from the scorching sun, the range in temperature between day and night, and areas where houses had to withstand heavy rainfall.

The architectural designs were also distinctive, and this distinction was decided by the location of the major rivers. Each river basin had several distinctive building characteristics. There were no evidence of specially trained architects, much of the information and building designs were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The building of the houses was a community affair where everyone gave their assistance, and the only remuneration was a feast. The architecture was adapted to suit the needs of the groups. The houses that were erected reflected the style worked out by the community, and perfected over many generations (Eglash, 1999). As a result of this there did not exist any homogeneous material culture, or house plan throughout Africa.

The sampling of African architecture produced many technologies, from the shape and method of construction, to the ornaments used to distinguish the roles in construction between men and women.

The influence of other cultures in the building of African indigenous houses has certainly not always been for the good. This is mainly because change has been introduced so rapidly that essential qualities in traditional architecture have been lost in the technical execution of the houses. This in turn has altered home life to a considerable degree. The desire for modern materials and technology is understandable and is in line with the principle of development in

other areas, as developing countries try to catch up with developed ones. The framework of traditional houses is normally held together by tying with fibres. The components (poles for walls and rafters) are nearly always used when still green, which provides no problems when they are bound together with fibres.

The use of corrugated iron sheets has its advantages and disadvantages. It is time-saving, but the sheets tend to rust easily unless painted, which adds to the total costs. They are more durable than thatch but less pleasing to the eye. The use of such sheeting has altered the shape of the traditional house from circular to rectangular, so that more skill is needed to evenly distribute the weight of the materials used. The round type of houses in Africa did not develop accidentally, but for functional purposes with man adapting to the environment (Balogun, 1979). The courtyards in compound houses also have some functional purposes such as drying of clothes, recreations and receiving of visitors, cooking etc.

The housing typology can be divided into three types:

1. Those composed of rigid elements
2. Those with flexible elements which are planted into the ground at one end and
3. Those whose flexible elements are planted into the ground at both ends.

In the first group, the materials used for thatching are either grass or reeds. The walls differ from area to area in height and thickness and are made of upright posts dug into the ground, tied in parallel pairs and the spaces between are either filled with brushwood or mud. Mud is in some parts left untreated but in most areas it is plastered both on the inside and outside with a mixture of cow dung and ashes. Sun-dried bricks have been used successfully in the construction of this type of house.

In the second group, the walls and roof are one. Thinner saplings and grass or dung are

used to cover the structure. The quality of the construction is high.

In the third type, thin branches are tied together to form a framework which is then covered with mats, skins, grass or leaves.

The dome structure is probably one of the oldest forms of construction for shelter and the conical roof of type 1 houses can be seen as a refinement of this basic form. Climate also affects the type of opening incorporated in the design. The doorway might simply be a rectangular opening with ropes hung to provide privacy, but still allow for ventilation and light. The internal organization of the houses varies from an open space with special areas for different functions, such as sleeping, cooking and storing utensils, to partitioning using materials such as cloth or permanent walls (Newman et al., 2006).

African Architecture incorporates African Art in designs of traditional buildings for decorative purposes, medium to ward off evil spirits, and as means of communication to other people, e.g. lions at entrances, stools etc., to show status in society.

1.2.1 The Effects of Social Structure on African Architecture

The landscape of early Africa was made up of small societies, with one commonality that their livelihood was dependent on their farms, or herds of cattle, and with almost no specialization of labor. The societal constraints dictated the distribution of wealth, and the conformity of each member to a set of norms. For example no great social privileges were attached to wealth and its accumulation was frowned on. Religion was often emphasized in the communities, there was little distinction made between the living and the dead.

The plan (pattern) of layout of the buildings was influenced by many different forces.

- The nature of the crops: those that required a long growing season and maturity; those that were short term cash crops; or slow maturing crops, tied the owners to one plot for a longer time.
- The seasonal nature of the activity, for example pastoral people followed specific routes, and was adapted to the climatic conditions. The needed buildings that were easily moved. They sometimes erected permanent dwellings in a location and then made temporary ones made as they moved to new sites.
- Kinships were also important in determining the layout of the village. Members of one clan would live in a defined territory, with family units close by. These kinships were defined by the physical nearness of the buildings (Prussin, 1974).

The composition of the village depended on the birth, death, and divorce rate. The impermanent nature of the buildings meant that there was a quick response to changes in the family structure. The orientation of the village was dependent on the location of the chief's house, thus, the death of a chief brought about a new orientation of the village as new houses were built to face the chief's residence. The physical layout was also based on religious reasons. The decision on whether or not to build villages on hills rested in part on the presence of the omnipresent spirit; houses were not built near grave sites, battle fields, or places connected with an ancestral taboo. Imaginary lines separated relations. For example, in some villages son-in-laws and mother-in-laws lived in separate sections of the village, in other villages the division was made along generational lines. Proximate generations built separately, and alternate generations built together.

1.2.2 Elements of Construction: The Building Process

The process of building was a cooperative venture, and a major special occasion. In this process males and females had clearly defined roles. Women were not allowed to mark out the ground plans. It was believed that they would make it too small. Their responsibility was to do the thatching for the roof. Construction skills were passed down from one generation to the other. One of the chief elements (materials) used for construction was the material found in the environment. The mud used had the consistency of clay, consisting of varying proportions of sand and clay. Because clay is pliable any basic shape can be expressed, and various shapes of roofs can be designed. The preparation of clay for construction took many forms. In the Sudan, sun-dried mud bricks were made. In the building process the bricks were cemented in place with more mud, and the walls smoothed over with a mud mixture. Pear-shaped bricks were made using a mixture of mud and straw by the tribes of Hausa land. These bricks were laid horizontally then cemented into place with more mud. The wet regions bricks were not used. After the mud was moistened by the rain, it was pounded and left to mature, then used for building in the dry season. In the other parts mud was used with a combination of stakes (wattle and daub). The stakes formed the frame of the house. The walls were then filled in with mud (Schreckenbach, 1983).

Because of the nature of mud, the outer surface of the buildings must be treated to make it durable to withstand the weather. Plastering was done often, and potash, the locus bean pod, or for the wealthy, mimosa imported from Egypt, was added to the base mud mixture. The walls were maintained by scrubbing them smooth with various liquid mixtures. The internal walls of sleeping rooms were often plastered with a mixture of mud and cow dung. This was done to eliminate or prevent the infestation of jiggers. The mud floors were specially prepared. They

were hard as cement and very smooth. The roofs were made of a combination of mud and timber beams. The roofs were either flat (terraced), domed or vaulted. These types were created through different techniques. Vegetable materials were used as the major element of construction by the pastoralist. They needed a house that could be dismantled and transported easily. The plan of these houses was a basic framework of hoops caused with either mats, thatch, skin, or a combination of all. These fall into the category of a tent, and many configurations of tent construction were identified. Other houses built above the ground had thatched roofs. Reeds, grass, banana and bamboo beams were used to do the thatching. The basic framework of these houses was angular, dome having the shape of a beehive. Houses with thatched roofs above the walls had great variation in shape, materials, and construction technique. Stone was also used for construction and was found in four areas: East Africa, Abyssinia, Upper Niger, and the Upland areas. In some buildings a combination of stone and mud was used; in some, the stone walls were completely covered in mud.

1.2.2.1 The Compound

In general the African architecture incorporates the mythical and cultural aspects, such as animist and Islamic, as well as the individual's own concepts of form and space. This is reflected in the culture of both sedentary and nomadic people. The settlements, often isolated, did consist of a male head of the household and his wives, their offspring, and the sons with their families. Within the settlement could be found a number of compounds, one for each male and for each of his wives and her children. These compounds were connected by walls creating a secure and compact plan. Within the compound were a building for sleeping, covered storage areas, and a detached or semi-detached dry and wet season kitchen. The compound was the focus of social organization (Arthur and Rowe, 2001). This responded to the needs of the group. It could be

altered to accommodate the fluctuation in family size, extending for a growing family or reducing when someone dies. In the settlement was a place for keeping animals, and for housing tall mud granaries for storing surplus production. Often in the compound were found ancestral shrines. These were erected at the entrance of the compound.

1.2.2.2 Sacred, Ceremonial and Community Buildings

Because of the year-round warmth and sunshine, and the predictability of the wet weather, many religious and community activities took place outside. Therefore pieces of land were set aside for these activities. These areas were kept sacred and were embellished with ritual objects. However, in some cases the shrines were altars inside ordinary houses. In some cultures, Ibo for example, constructed buildings that were considered shrines, but once built they were ignored. The Asante temples were built in the courtyard pattern with four buildings joined in a square. Three of the buildings were used by participants in the worship, while the other housed the shrine and was used only by the high priest (Prussin, 1974).

The Christian churches were of two designs and building techniques. Most of the churches had between three and five aisles, and were either Basilican in plan with a western aerated porch and an eastern sanctuary, or they had a cross-in-square plan with a well marked transverse axis. These early churches were made of either stone or wood. In the rural areas the churches were more modest. They were rectangular in plan and made of stone with flat roofs.

With the influence of Islam there was also the dedicated space for the purpose of worship. There were the open air spaces, and the mosques. One of the few mosques remaining is found in East Africa. It is built on a square plan divided into square bays, each roofed with a dome resting on pillars edged with coral. In contrast, the mosque in West Africa consists of a full

tower on a square base. The mosque building is rectangular and divided into square bays. The roof is supported in the center on square pillars, with very low roofs.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Art is the product of creative human activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey an idea, emotion, or visually interesting form. Art can refer to visual arts like painting, sculpture, architecture, photography and other visual works that combine materials or forms. The skill and creativity in doing any activity can also be described as art. Architecture is the art of creating structures in which we can live, work, worship, and play. Architects are concerned with the function of their buildings as well as with the visual appearance, structural solidity and the way in which a building fits into the landscape. Architecture adopts certain essential qualities in Art in order to achieve its aesthetic appeal. Art and architecture are closely related, so it will be appropriate to establish, the influence of Traditional African Art on African Architecture.

1.4 SCOPE OF STUDY

Evaluate and reveal the clear relationship which exists between Traditional African Art and African Architecture.

1.5 OBJECTIVES

My objectives for this thesis are to bring to light, the influence of Traditional African Art on African Architecture. To help reveal the components and importance of the rich African culture, identity and history. To evaluate how African art can be achieved from the architectural design features of African Architecture.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ELEMENTS OF THE AFRICAN AESTHETICS

Traditional African arts have certain qualities which contribute to their aesthetics and these qualities also influence the aesthetics of African architecture. These qualities are mostly expressed abstractly in good African works of art and architecture. They often form the basis for judging a good African work from a bad one. The elements of the African aesthetics are resemblance to a human being, luminosity, self-composure, youthfulness and (clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish). These elements of the African aesthetics are outlined and explained as follows.

Resemblance to a human being:

African artists praise a carved figure by saying that it "looks like a human being." Artists seldom portray particular people, actual animals, or the actual form of invisible spirits. Rather, they aim to portray ideas about reality, spiritual or human, and express these ideas through human or animal images (Vogel, 1986). This abstract element also reflects in African architecture. Most important traditional buildings are designed in order to achieve this element. The architectural features of African traditional buildings are often designed to incorporate this artistic element which adds to the building's aesthetics. According to Ezra (1986), the resemblance of traditional African architecture to a human being is often expressed in the layouts, plans and facades of these buildings. African art and architecture possess more abstract and metaphorical qualities, thereby making this element of African aesthetics very important to the African artists and builders.

Egash (1999) advocated that the human figure has always been the primary subject matter for most African art, and this emphasis even influenced the architecture of African towns

and villages. The human figure may symbolize the living or the dead, may reference chiefs, dancers, or various trades such as drummers or hunters, or even may be an anthropomorphic representation of a god or have other votive function. African figurative sculpture usually departs from natural proportions. There is often a conceptual basis behind artistic conventions such as the simplification and exaggeration of the human features (Clarke, 2006). For example, in many African artworks, the head appears proportionately larger than the body. According to Clarke (2006), this formal emphasis has symbolic meaning, as the head is believed to have a special role in guiding one's destiny and success in many African societies. African artists also employ scale for symbolic effect in multifigure compositions, a practice known as hierarchical representation. In these cases, the most important individual is depicted as the largest figure, while those of lesser importance decrease in size exponentially. This also reflects in the layouts and sizes of rooms to facilitate activities in traditional African buildings.

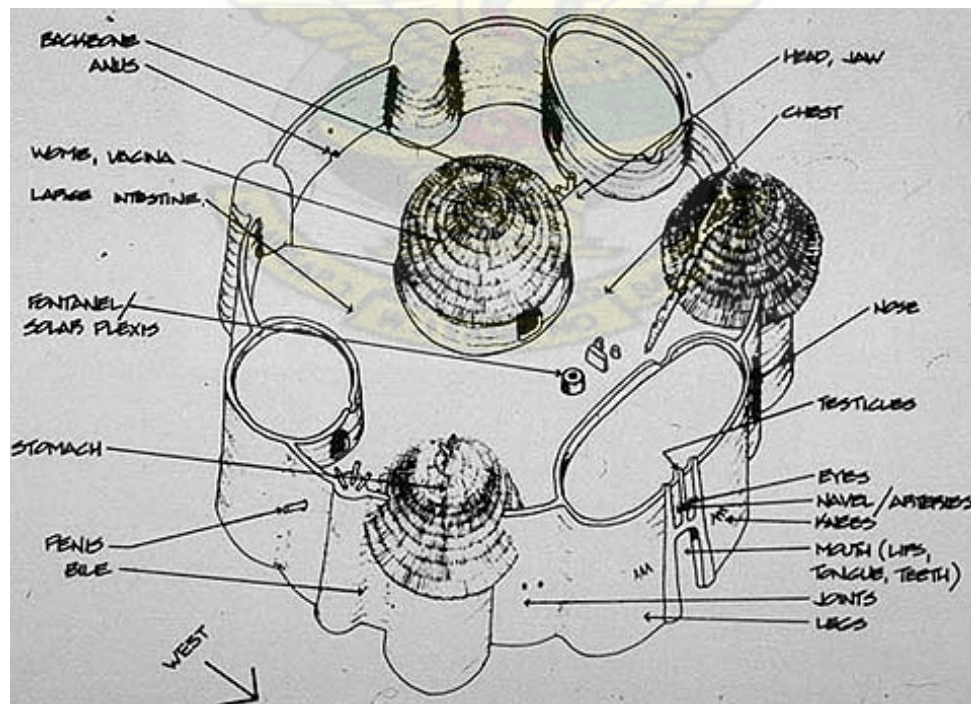


Fig. 2.1 Traditional compound house with its human parts.
<http://pitt.edu/tokerism> (accessed May,2008)

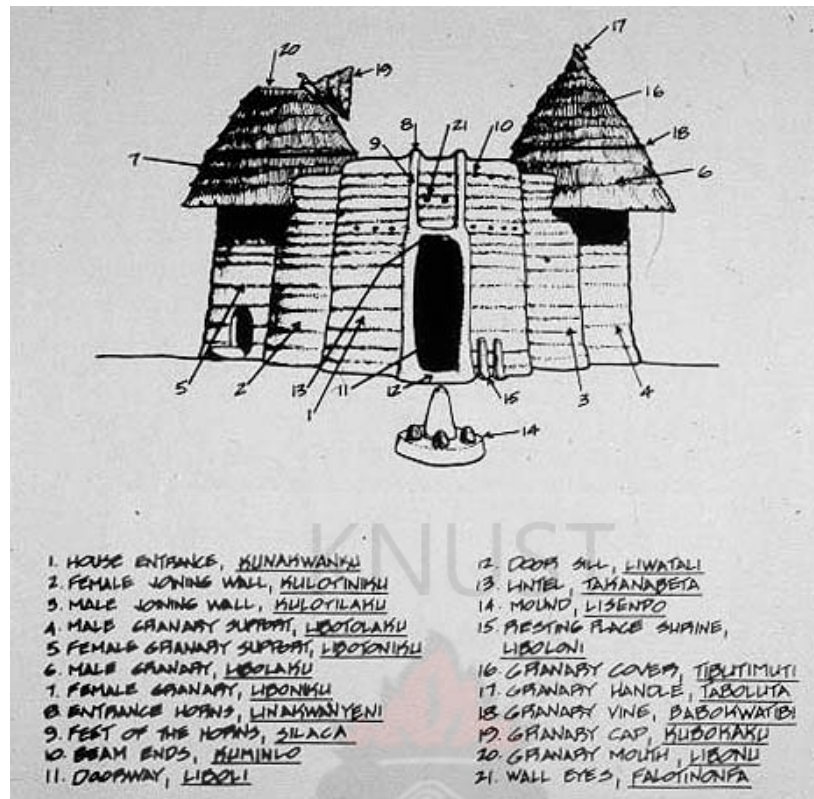


Fig. 2.2 Entrance elevation of a traditional house with its human parts.
<http://pitt.edu/tokerism> (accessed May,2008)

Luminosity:

The lustrously smooth surface of most African figural sculpture, often embellished with decorative scarification, indicates beautifully shining, healthy skin. Figures with rough surfaces and deformities are intended to appear ugly and morally flawed (Vogel, 1986). The author was trying to portray the aesthetic quality of smooth and shiny African works of art. Luminous objects are easily observed and appreciated with the naked eye. This element also manifests in African architecture. Smooth and lustrous finishes in architecture make the buildings aesthetically pleasing. According to Blier (2006), the colour and texture of finishes in African art and architecture are very important and the right choice must be made in order to obtain a good

work of art. Important buildings like palaces and places of worship often incorporate this element of the African aesthetics.

Clarke (2006) clarified that once an artifact leaves its creator's hands, its visual appearance may be altered through use in ritual or performance contexts. Repeated handling of an artifact during ceremonies can create a smoothly worn surface, while ritual applications of palm oil may result in a lustrous sheen. During ceremonies, decorative elements, such as beads, metal jewelry, and fabric, can be added to a work. Applications of sacrificial substances and organic materials create an encrusted surface that literally and figuratively empowers an object. This finishes given to Traditional African buildings signifies certain beliefs and hierarchy thereby depicting the importance of the building.

Self-composure:

African artists use their works of art to compose people. The person who is composed behaves in a measured and rational way; he or she is controlled, proud, dignified, and cool (Egash, 1999). According to the author, the form and beauty of some African artworks and architecture are used to compose the emotions of people. The designs of certain African buildings and their facilitation of activities make the occupants calm and relaxed.

Youthfulness:

According to Ezra (1986), a youthful appearance connotes vigour, productiveness, fertility, and an ability to labour. Illness and deformity are rarely depicted because they are signs of evil. The aesthetics of African artworks and architecture creates a youthful appearance to their observers. This element of the African aesthetics makes the works of art and architecture more pleasing and appreciated.

Clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish:

African artists place a high value on fine workmanship and mastery of the medium (Blier, 2006). The form and detail of African artworks and architecture are very crucial in their designs. Balance and symmetry are also prominent in most African artworks and architecture. The textures of their finishes are taken into greater consideration in order to make the works appreciated in their community. Smooth finishes are mostly given to the end products of most traditional African artworks and architecture. This element of African aesthetics is very conspicuous in African art and architecture.

Cole (1985) made it known that African artworks and buildings can also have different meanings for different individuals or groups. A sculpture owned by an elite association holds deeper levels of meaning for its members than for the general public, who may understand only its basic meaning. The painted designs on an Ejagham headdress, for example, represent an indigenous form of writing, the meanings of which are restricted to individuals of the highest status and rank. Understanding the cultural contexts and symbolic meanings of African art and architecture therefore enhances the appreciation of its form and detail.



Fig. 2.3 Emiel Jegen, Nigeria, African architecture showing most of the elements of the African art aesthetics.

2.2 ORNAMENTS AND AFRICAN ARCHITECTURE

The architecture form can be considered a product of environment and social circumstances, but ornaments and decorations are bounded up in the social values. It is established to assert personal and community identity, and can signal different messages to those who are able to read them.

According to Smikle (2008), if architecture expresses the public face of a society, then ornaments provide the opportunity for impressing the outsider, promoting morals, pride, and the solidarity of a people. The use of decoration was not a function of the climate conditions, population changes, or the size and composition of the family unit as did architecture. It was more flexible and adaptable, and was more influenced by contacts with other cultures. The author tried to clarify the functions of ornaments to architecture and gave a good understanding to ornamentation. African architecture incorporates the use of ornaments to enhance its aesthetics. Decoration implies the conscious effort of the creator to order his or her materials into a kind of design that will be pleasing to the eye, and at the same time have some magisterial or religious significance. Garlake (2002) clarified that decoration was not the product of one person's imagination. The designs had become standardized through generations of use. Some architectural features were more decorated than others. These include the compound and homestead entrances; granaries and grinding sheds; the wives rooms; sacred, ceremonial, and community buildings; doorways; inner walls; and roof pinnacles. Decoration is considered of psychological significance and occurs at points of potential social stress: the chief's house, temples, shrines, and clubhouses were more highly decorated. Decoration was also used to indicate changes in the life span of individuals; for example rites of passage for birth, initiation, marriage, and death.

Smikle (2008) also made it clear that, unlike the building methods carried out by men, the women engaged in wall painting where individual style was shown. Therefore wall art was the domain of the women. Wall decorating was usually done during the dry season after the crops have been stored, and it is the time for restoring the walls. The decoration was not only pleasing to the eye but also had utilitarian functions. Both external and internal walls benefited from a protective layer of paint, and the sculptured mud decoration of the Hausa doorways served to reinforce the edges of the walls. The techniques used varied across tribes and regions. Mural paintings were found in the Upper Guinea coast. Relief mud decorations were used by the Fulani of the Guinea, the Asante, and Ibo. Incised mud decorations were confined to the Upper Volta but the practice of pressing natural objects into the wet clay was quite widespread and used by many African societies. The decoration also had symbolic meaning. According to LaGamma (2002), the meanings of several of these decorations have been passed down, but in many cases the significance has been forgotten. Evidence of meanings are demonstrated in the decoration of sanctuary facades cornered with small niches containing skulls and bones of animals, or in entrances surrounded by conical ornaments. In Ibo houses dedicated to the gods can be found clay statues and mural paintings depicting both religious and profane subjects. The Dogons had similar sanctuaries with facades ornamented with paintings in white that symbolically represent the elements of life; the sun, moon, stars, men, animals, and man-made objects (Garlake, 2002). The chief's house was heavily ornamented. The doors and door posts were decorated with beautiful carvings. The doors and wooden locks were important because they protected the entrance, the most important part of the house where communication was made with the within and the outside, and they are exposed to the eye of the people. In the Sudan the Palmers had facades, and the interior walls and ceilings were decorated with geometric sculpted motifs.

The research article by LaGamma (2002), made it also known that, some of these figurative representations have particular meanings to the clans. Pythons are considered sacred among the Kassena women. It is used as a symbol of protection. The criss-cross bohimbore used around the door is said to protect the inhabitants. The crocodile and lizard were sometimes used in a more complex three-dimensional form. The Boasi's representation of the dove is to send a message to the god when the woman is worried. No special meaning is attached to the criss-crosses and figurative designs used by the Kusasi woman. These designs are used only for their beauty. In the Ibo culture the motif designs are developed through the complex process of the mind and have nothing to do with mysticism. The women derived the names of the motif patterns from things in their domestic world. These motifs enabled them to respond to their world, communicate information, and adorn their home.

Traditional African architecture cannot be examined without examining African decorative arts since both are closely related in African societies. Some of the decorative arts of Africa include symbols, patterns, motifs, dress, fabrics, hairstyles, body decoration, metal work, carving, pottery, basketry, beadwork, and wall decoration. Balogun (1979) noted "African artistic genius was strongly asserted in the decorative embellishment of the built environment. Varying decorative patterns could be found sculpted or painted on walls and wooden doors, which ranged from figurative designs to complex abstract patterns which revealed an exquisite balance of form, color, and shading. Painting was carried out as an extension of architecture than an independent medium." Calvin Douglas of the Brooklyn Museum of Arts also noted "Artistic expression is not the luxury to African peoples that it has become to the west. It is considered a natural and necessary way of giving meaning to phases of a person's life and enhancing his work."

Ornaments and their use in African architecture have really formed part of the culture of Africans. The meanings and aesthetic enhancement of these ornaments are very important to African architecture.

2.3 ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

The architecture of sub-Saharan Africa is just as diverse as the art. Traditional architecture can be divided into two categories: buildings in rural settlements and buildings in larger, self-ruling urban centres called city-states.

Rural Settlements:

The way of life in Africa's rural settlements determines the types of dwellings built. Settled farming societies have different requirements than herding societies, which are usually nomadic. Other rural societies in Africa are based on farming, hunting, and gathering in various combinations (Chanda, 2006). Of the many types of traditional rural dwellings, relatively permanent houses grouped in villages are found only in agricultural settlements. According to the author, a typical farming village consists of a number of family compounds along with structures that serve the larger community. Each family compound may have separate structures for cooking, eating, sleeping, storing food, and protecting animals at night. Structures may be round, rectangular, or semicircular. Communal structures, for holding meetings and teaching children, are located in a prominent place in the village.

Ezra (1988) found out that, the Dogon people of southern Mali cultivate grain on a plateau at the top of the Bandiagara cliffs near the Niger River. They construct villages on the steep sides of the cliffs. Their rectangular houses are built of sun-dried mud brick and stone. The roofs are thatched, and the dwellings rest on ledges along the cliffs. The Dogon store and protect

their harvest in granaries that have beautifully carved wooden doors and decorative locks. Figures carved on many granary doors represent sets of male and female twins, which symbolize fertility and agricultural abundance.

According to Chanda (2006), the Zulu of southern Africa, who cultivate grain and raise livestock, have traditionally built houses shaped like beehives. They arrange these houses in a circular, fenced compound, and they keep their cattle in the middle of the compound. Zulu houses are made of thatch that covers a framework of wooden strips and is bound together with a rope lattice. Nomadic herders need homes that they can easily build and take apart when they move their herds to different ground. The Masai of eastern Africa, for example, construct homes using a framework of sticks that they seal with cattle dung (Clarke, 2006).

Jacqueline Chanda also realized that many rural societies in Africa adorn the outsides of houses with painted designs or with relief (raised) patterns worked into a soft clay surface. The job of decorating houses generally belongs to the women. Frafra women of northern Ghana decorate the walls of houses and other buildings with geometric patterns that communicate information about the social status of a building's owner. Ndebele women in Zimbabwe and the northeastern part of South Africa paint the mud walls of their houses with geometric patterns based on the shapes of windows, steps, and other building features and everyday objects. Traditionally, Africans have used natural clays as paints, but today brightly colored acrylic paints are popular.

Towns and City-States:

Towns and city-states may have buildings that are larger and more elaborate than those in rural settlements. These buildings serve the purposes of government, trade, or organized religion. In general, towns and city-states have developed where trade has brought people together or

where conquest has merged neighboring ethnic groups. Consequently, these settlements were built for diverse groups of people rather than for family units (Ezra, 1988). A good example of a diverse community is Whydah (Ouidah), a coastal city in the former Kingdom of Dahomey (now southern Benin). In the 17th and 18th centuries slave trade with the Americas turned this city into a major trading and commercial center. The presence of foreign traders greatly influenced the architecture in Whydah, where indigenous mud-brick buildings stand next to buildings in South American styles. These styles were transported from Brazil to Africa in the 19th century by returning slaves of African ancestry.

As a result of trade across the Sahara, many towns developed along the southern edge of the desert, especially in Mali. Mosques, palaces, and houses met the needs of the inhabitants: Arab traders, rulers, and common people. Tombouctou (Timbuktu) in Mali is one of the best-known settlements in this area, but the city of Djenné was even more important. Djenné served as a center of Islamic learning and as a commercial center for the trade of gold, slaves, and salt. It boasts one of the oldest mosques in the region.

Kate Ezra found out that, the Great Mosque of Djenné was built in the 13th and 14th centuries to provide Islamic traders with a center for prayer. The Djenné mosque consists of a main structure of baked mud with vertical buttresses (wall supports) that rise to pinnacles; on the roof is a flat terrace lined with palm fronds and wooden or ceramic spouts that drain water from the terrace. The eastern facade of the structure has three hollow minarets (towers from which worshipers are called to prayer) rhythmically interspersed between 18 buttresses. The Djenné mosque has come to represent Islamic style in this region and has been imitated in many of the mosques along the Niger River valley in Mali.

Palaces:

Palaces to house the king and his court were often built out of the same materials and in the same basic forms as ordinary houses, although palaces had thicker walls, more elaborate designs, and larger spaces. Some palaces were so large they resembled towns inside of towns. In what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the palaces of Kuba kings were mazelike in their complexity. They were typically situated on a mound in the center of town so that the king could see the entire town from the palace. A palace had two main sections: one for the king and one for his wives and children. Mats woven with beautiful designs formed the palace walls. Because of their fragility and impermanence, these mats required constant maintenance. Architects kept plans and records of palace and town layouts so that public buildings, streets, plazas, private compounds, and the palace itself could be re-created if the capital had to move (Garlake, 2002).

In Nigeria, the Yoruba built more permanent palaces of sun-dried mud bricks. These palaces consisted of a series of courtyards, with each courtyard flanked by four rectangular units. Mud bricks formed the outer walls of each unit, and an overhanging roof shaded a veranda on the courtyard side. At the entrance to every Yoruba palace was a set of double wooden doors, intricately carved with abstract designs and images of human and animal figures. According to Chanda (2006), the Olowo Palace in Owo, southeastern Nigeria, had as many as 100 courtyards. Each courtyard had a specific function and was dedicated to a particular deity. The largest, said to have been twice the size of an American football field, was used for public assemblies and festivals. Some courtyards were paved with quartz pebbles or broken pottery. Pillars supporting the veranda roofs were carved with statues of the king mounted on a horse or shown with his senior wife.

Peter Garlake also found out that, in 17th-century Ghana, art and architectural traditions of the Ashanti Kingdom proclaimed the godlike powers of the king. For example, much of the art associated with the king was made of gold, a symbol of endurance, the soul, and the giving and safeguarding of life. The king represented the soul and vitality of the nation, and gold reinforced this image of him. The Ashanti king's palace had several oblong courtyards surrounded by rectangular buildings. The walls of the palace compound and the shrines included inside were decorated with curving, abstract designs modeled out of mud and painted. Although the Ashanti never converted to Islam, Muslims living nearby probably influenced these decorations. Indeed, the patterns recall those of Hausa houses in northern Nigeria, where Islam is strong.

2.4 THE AFRICAN ARTISTIC HERITAGE

African artists have developed diverse traditions of sculpture (figures and masks), architecture (principally domestic structures), furniture, pottery, textiles, and jewelry. In addition, body decoration (or decorative scarring), and painting (on building and textile surfaces and human skin) are also part of the African artistic heritage (Blier, 2006).

Materials:

The most commonly employed materials include wood, fiber, metal (especially bronze, iron, and gold), ivory, clay, earth, and stone. The forms of representation within each medium vary from relative naturalism to general abstraction, with art styles conforming to the aesthetic tradition established within a particular cultural area. In African art, considerable concern is given both to the maintenance of traditional artistic forms within a culture and to the encouragement of creativity and innovation within the parameters of each artistic tradition.

Artists:

According to Vogel (1997), African artists generally work as specialists, receiving their training from established artists living in the community or wider area. In some old kingdoms, such as that of Benin, active guild systems controlled the training of young artists. Among the nearby Yoruba, important schools of artists were developed at local family compound centers. Often the artistic profession was seen as hereditary, with talent being passed from generation to generation, and with creativity and success often linked to a divine ancestral endowment. Among the Dogon and Bambara (or Bamana) of Mali, for this reason, sculptors were all selected from an ancient endogamous (intermarried by custom) group of blacksmiths. The place of work and the materials employed were also important to the artist during the creative process. Often these were controlled by religious proscriptions.

Aesthetics:

Community criticism was an essential part of artistic traditions in many African cultures. Studies of the aesthetic canons followed by artists and critics in Africa indicate a deliberate concern for abstraction in the design process. Thus, for example, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, the criteria for sculptural beauty consist of a number of specifically nonrepresentational elements. These include visibility, even if this necessitates proportional distortion; straightness, which implies youth and good health; symmetry, to the exclusion of more natural poses or postures; the depiction of each person at an idealized youthful age; smoothness, again suggesting youth and health without natural body imperfections; and hyper mimesis, an emphasis on general resemblance rather than on exact representation (Egash, 1999).

In some African cultures correct aesthetic canons were intentionally distorted in order to portray characters whose behavior was antisocial. The author explained that, the Ibo and Ibibio of Nigeria, for example, carve masks with diseased, horrific, monstrous, or asymmetrical features to represent characters who were unruly, evil, or dangerous. In Ibo and Ibibio masquerade performances, such masks are often contrasted with other, more beautifully featured and aesthetically pleasing masks that are worn to portray persons who were orderly, good, or peaceful.

According to Clarke (2006), artists and patrons in many African societies express well-defined aesthetic preferences and value skillful work. Studies of aesthetics in some African societies have led to the identification of certain artistic criteria for evaluating visual arts. Among the Baule in Côte d'Ivoire, for example, a sculpture of the human figure should emphasize a strong muscular body, refined facial features, and elaborate hairstyle and scarification patterns, all of which reflect cultural ideals of civilized beauty. Scholars of aesthetics in Yoruba (Nigeria) visual expression have identified criteria based on both formal elements, such as a smooth surface, symmetrical composition, and a moderate resemblance to the subject, as well as abstract cultural concepts, such as *ase* (inner power or life force) and *iwa* (character or essential nature). Sieber and Walker (1987) observed that many African societies associate such smooth, finished surfaces with cultivated refinement. African aesthetics generally have an ethical or religious basis. An artwork considered "beautiful" is often also believed to be "good," in the sense that it exemplifies and upholds moral values. The fact that, in many societies, the words for beautiful and good are the same suggests a strong correspondence between these two ideas. The ability of an artifact to work effectively, whether that means connecting with the spiritual realm or imparting a lesson to initiates, may also be a standard for determining the "beauty" of an artifact.

Although in the Western world, aesthetics is often equated with beauty, artists in some African cultures create works that are not intended to be beautiful. Such works are deliberately horrific in order to convey their fearsome powers and thereby elicit a strong reaction in the viewer.

Patronage:

Patronage, like aesthetics, plays an important role in the creation of African artworks. Kings and their courts are of particular significance in this regard because of their artistic requirements for the mounting of state pageants, the performance of religious ceremonies, and the manufacture of charismatic personal displays. In architecture, the palaces of kings such as those who lived in present-day Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo rank among the most elaborate and richly decorated structures in Africa (Blier, 2006). The expensive materials available to these rulers—ivory, bronze, gold, glass beads, and plush raffia velours are amply displayed in the arts produced at these royal courts. Important types of art made for such regal patronage include staffs of office, thrones, state swords, crowns, royal memorial sculptures, drinking vessels, and serving containers.

Suzanne Preston Blier clarified that, other important sources of art patronage in Africa included the various associations of men and women formed within many communities for social and political, as well as religious control. The still-active Poro men's associations of the Dan and their neighbors in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire are characteristic examples of this type of patronage association. Poro members commissioned many of the masks and figural sculptures found in this region.

Associations that united community members by age and occupation were also important African art patrons. Examples of artworks commissioned by such associations are found among the Bambara (Mali), the Ibo and Ejagham (Nigeria), and other communities. Often each age

group or occupationally linked section of the association had its own distinctive representations or masquerade themes. Among the Ejagham, animal forms characterized the masks of hunting societies, and themes of human deformity were often found in conjunction with warfare masks; images of women were commonly employed for the headdresses of the women's clubs or ancestral associations (Cole, 1885).

Traditional religious and cult organizations were also important as sources of art patronage in Africa. According to the author, artworks were not only a central component of many traditional shrines and chapels but also played a critical role in the diverse religious pageants. Herbert Cole also stated that, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, cults linked with the principal deities; Shango (thunder), Obatala (creativity), Oshun (water), Ifa (knowledge), Yemoja (sorcery), Eshu (examination), and Odudua (earth) had a vast array of associated art forms, including figures, masks, pottery, textiles, and jewelry. Here, as elsewhere in Africa, the artworks used in conjunction with each particular cult were often identifiable through their iconography, materials, styles, and modes of manufacture.

2.5 THE ROLE OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN AFRICAN SOCIETY

The multiple roles that art and architecture play in African communities are as diverse as their forms of patronage. These include social, political, economic, historical, and therapeutic functions. These functions are very important in African communities since they express the various aspects of African culture.

Social role:

One of the most important functions of African art and architecture is distinctly social. In fulfilling this role, African art frequently depicts women as mothers, usually nursing or cradling their young. Men, on the other hand, are often presented both as elders; the traditional community leaders, and as successful warriors; appearing on horseback or with armaments (Blier, 2006). Social themes are prevalent in many African masquerade performances as well. In these masquerades, animal and human characters, in appropriate masks and garb, assume a variety of roles in demonstrating proper and improper forms of societal behavior. In performances of the Ijo and southern Ibo of Nigeria are found such diverse antisocial characters as the miser, the greedy person, the prostitute, the incompetent physician, and the unscrupulous lawyer. In the Egungun performances of the nearby Yoruba, the gossip, the glutton, and the strange-mannered foreigner have key parts as negative social models.

Political role:

Political control is another major concern displayed through art and architecture in Africa. Among the Dan (Liberia), Kota (Gabon), Pende (Congo), and others, special masks are worn by persons acting as community judges and policemen. The Kwele Gon maskers of Gabon are a particularly good example of this type of masked community official (Clarke, 2006). Because of their anonymity and special powers, these Gon masked figures are able to break normal societal codes and proscriptions as a means of redistributing scarce food and animals at times of great community need. A different type of social control is achieved by certain African figures and architectural motifs. The reliquary figures of the Kota, Sogo, and Fang of Gabon, for example, are used as guardian images to protect the sacred ancestral relics of the community

from theft or harm. The Dogon of Mali and the Senufo of Côte d'Ivoire carve elaborate doors that ritually protect the community food supplies and sacred objects in the same way.

Economic role:

According to Clarke (2006), art and architecture in Africa also fulfills an important economic role. The elegant wooden Chi Wara antelope headdresses of the Bambara of Mali are worn in planting and harvest ceremonies. Chi Wara, the mythical Bambara inventor of agriculture, is said to have buried himself in the earth as an act of self-sacrifice. The author further explained that, the dance of the Chi Wara maskers on the agricultural fields (Chi Wara's grave) serves both to honor this great being and to remind the young Bambara farmers of the arduous sacrifice that they in turn must make each year. Among the Senufo of Côte d'Ivoire, delicately carved figures are used in a similar way to encourage farmers in their difficult work. Here 'daleu' staffs, with bird or female imagery, are secured in the ground at the end of cultivation rows. These staffs serve as goals, markers, and trophies for the field-planting competitions.

Historical role:

An important historical role is also fulfilled in African art and architecture through its memorialization of important persons and events of the past. With this in mind, the Dogon of Mali have carved numerous images of their legendary ancestors, the Nommo, who descended from the sky at the beginning of time. Such Nommo figures (some of which have upraised hands pointing to the sky and their village of origin) find important places on granary doors, cave paintings, and sacred architectural supports (Egash, 1999). In the powerful kingdom of Benin in Nigeria, elaborate relief plaques cast (lost-wax process) in bronze similarly carried images of

important persons and events of the past, including the meetings of foreign dignitaries, battle scenes, court pageants, nobles in state dress, religious ceremonies, and musicians.

Therapeutic role:

Traditional African therapies have also required special forms of art. Divination, the supernatural means by which problems and their potential resolutions could be determined, was particularly important in the production of African artworks. Yoruba (Nigeria) Ifa diviners, for example, used elaborately sculpted divination boards, bowls, and tappers as an essential part of their ritual equipment. Similarly, the Baule of Côte d'Ivoire used elaborately sculptured divination vessels for oracular purposes. Among the Kongo of Congo, powerful wooden fetish figures (stuck through with iron nails) were employed therapeutically as a means of repelling personal danger and trauma (Andersen, 1977).

2.6 REGIONAL DISTINCTIONS IN AFRICAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

The widely differing cultures of sub-Saharan Africa are more readily comprehended if they are grouped by geographic regions, in view of the diversity in climate, topography, and social organization within this vast area. Although some of these cultures have vanished, fortunately much of their art and architecture remains; other cultures of this region have survived and continue to the present day to produce their traditional art and architecture.

Art and Architecture of the Western Savanna:

Balogun (1979) made it known that, among the best known of the traditional western savanna arts and architecture are those of the Dogon, Bambara, Mossi, Bobo, and Tamberma living in the dry, grassy plains of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo. The arts and architecture of the Dogon, one of the most isolated of these peoples, have been especially well researched. The

Dogon have a rich and complex philosophical foundation on which their arts and architecture are based. The author further clarified that, the Dogon village plan, for example, is seen to have the form of a human, representing the Nommo, the first humans created by the Dogon sun and creator god. Important parts of the Dogon village physiognomy include its head (the smithy and men's house), chest (the houses of lineage leaders), hands (women's houses), genitals (a mortar and altar), and feet (shrines). Dogon masks, carved for the men's association, Awa, represent in their totality the Dogon image of the world with the animals and people that inhabit it. The antelope, the bird, the hare, Fulani women, and Samana men are some of the characters who appear in the funerary performances of this association.

Farther east, among the linguistically related Tamberma of Togo, house architecture has reached an apex of beauty and symbolic complexity. The two-story earthen “castles” of these people serve not only as their domiciles but also as their fortresses, cathedrals, theaters, and cosmological diagrams. The name that these people call themselves, Batammariba, or the “people who are the architects,” bears out the importance of architecture among this group. Like the Dogon village, each Tamberma house is said to be distinctly human. Accordingly, its outer surfaces are scarified with the same patterns incised on women. Appropriate body parts are also found in the house, for example, the door “mouth,” the window “eyes,” the grinding stone “teeth,” and so on (Ezra, 1988).

The western forests:

The great forested Atlantic coast, often called the Guinea Coast, incorporates the diverse cultures, arts and architecture of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire on the west and Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria on the east. Suzanne Preston Blier found out that, in the western coastal forests, the dominant art patrons are associations of women and men such as

Sandé and Poro, respectively. The women's Sandé society of the Mende (Sierra Leone) has a particularly important masquerade tradition. Sandé masks, which are polished a deep black to reflect the richness and beauty of the sea, are worn by female association leaders during the initiation ceremonies of young women in the community. The most beautiful of these masks reflect, in their form, the features that the Mende admire in themselves: a high, smooth forehead, an elaborate coiffure, and an elegant strong neck.

Poro, the parallel men's association, has elaborate masking traditions as well. Dan, Kran, and Guere Poro members from Liberia and nearby Côte d'Ivoire present in their association performances a diverse cast of players. These include, among others, the judge, the singer, and the runner. Elegance of form, shiny black facial surfaces, and complex woven coiffures are featured in these masks. When not being worn, the masks are secured in a special sacred *go* (ge) house under the guardianship of the *go*-master (Blier, 2006). The wife of this important man has her own special art form, a decorated spoon that she displays in feasts for the community.

In the eastern Atlantic coast region are found some of the most important aristocratic arts and architecture of Africa. Perhaps the most famous of the kingships is the Benin dynasty in Nigeria. According to Suzanne Blier, the royal city of Benin (not to be confused with the recently named neighboring country of Benin) was at its height in the 17th and 18th centuries and was compared by travelers to the great contemporaneous cities of the Netherlands. The palace of the king, or 'oba' as he was called, was especially impressive. At one time its walls were covered with beautifully cast bronze plaques that were said to shimmer like gold. The three main buildings at the palace were each surmounted by immense turrets supporting giant bronze birds and pythons. On the royal palace altars, bronze memorial heads and sculptures were displayed for private and state festivities.

Central, South, and East Africa:

In the thick equatorial forests and drier savanna regions running from Gabon through the Congo Republic, Congo, and various countries to the east and south, still other artistic forms are emphasized. In the matrilineal cultures of southern Congo, female figures are particularly important. The Pende chief's house, for example, often bears a full-scale image of a woman at the apex of the roof. This figure sometimes holds a child (the symbol of the family line and future heirs), as well as an ax (the symbol of power), (Heldman, 1993).

Among the remote Gato, Bongo, and Konso of Sudan and Ethiopia, memorial figures of wood were set up in prominent positions in the village to survey its entrance and the tombs of its important ancestors. In most other East African cultures monumental sculpture was rare. Instead, body decoration became an important focus of the arts. The Masai of Kenya and the Zulu of South Africa are particularly noted for their beaded jewelry. According to Suzanne Blier, circular forms such as one finds in the jewelry of the Masai are also emphasized in Bantu village planning in this area. The great elliptical stone building (c. 1200) of the ancient Monomotapa culture near Fort Victoria in Zimbabwe is conceptually part of this circular design and architectural tradition.

Contemporary African Art and Architecture:

Many of the so-called traditional arts and architecture of Africa are still being commissioned and used in active traditional contexts. As in all art periods, important innovations as well as significant retentions of established styles and modes of expression coexist. In recent years, with the changes in transportation and mass communications within the continent, a number of art forms have been disseminated widely among diverse African cultures. Today, for

example, some Nigerian-style masks are being used in Ghanaian and other coastal centers on the eastern Guinea Coast.

Garlake (2002) made it clear that, in addition to distinctly African influences, a number of changes also have originated from the outside. For example, Islamic architecture and design motifs can be seen in many of the arts and architecture of the northern regions of Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. East Indian print motifs have similarly found their way into sculptures and masks of the Ibibio and Efik artists living along the southern coast of Nigeria. Christian themes have also been taken up by some contemporary artists in their designs for panels, doors, and baptismal fonts for Africa's Christian churches and cathedrals. In recent years artists have also found important sources of patronage for various art forms in the banks, commercial establishments, government offices, and courts of the new nations. Tourists have been responsible for still other art demands, particularly for decorative masks and ornamental African sculptures that are made of ebony or ivory.

2.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the literature available as to the influence that traditional African art has on African architecture. Art and architecture are interrelated and this is clearly obvious in our everyday environment. All of the above literature studied, points out the importance of continued research into this subject matter.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research strategy and the empirical techniques applied in order to evaluate and reveal the influence of Traditional African Art on African Architecture. The interpretative research approach was adopted for this thesis due to the social nature of Traditional African Art and Architecture. This research strategy was executed through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were consultations (personal interviews), case study observations, discussions and photographs. The secondary sources were related literature, computer software / internet sources, books, journals and magazines.

3.1 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to establish the essential qualities of Traditional African Art and their influence on African Architecture. Evaluate how these qualities portray the clear relationship existing between Traditional African Art and Architecture.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODS

3.2.1 Consultations

The Institute of African Studies and the Archaeology Department of the University of Ghana, Legon were consulted for more information about traditional African art and architecture. Some knowledgeable people about the subject matter from The National Museum, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board and The Centre for National Culture, Accra Art Centre were interviewed in order to acquire more knowledge and understanding for the thesis. The information gathered from these interviews helped in the collection of relevant data for the thesis. Issues concerning the history and cultural significance of Traditional African Art and African Architecture were

clarified through these consultations with experts on the subject matter.

3.2.2 Case Studies

Some case studies were undertaken on existing buildings with their design and architectural features relating to the subject matter. The data collected from these case studies were analyzed critically before documenting. The Adinkra Symbols of the Akan people and their influence on Akan architecture were established through the evaluation of certain traditional Akan buildings in Ejisu-Besease. The Ghana National Cultural Centre in Kumasi, the Ghana National Museum and the International Conference Centre in Accra were also taken into consideration to examine how Traditional African Art is being incorporated in the design of these buildings. The facilitation of activities (layout and spatial configuration), modification of climate, utilization of resources (materials like mud, bamboo etc. and the construction technology employed) and meaning & delight (cultural significance of the Adinkra Symbols and other African art and symbols) were carefully evaluated through these case studies. Some other African case studies like the Bamileke architecture in Cameroon, Dogon architecture in Mali, Tamberma architecture in Togo and Benin, Zaria architecture in Nigeria and the Kariakoo market in Dar es Salaam were also considered.

3.2.3 Photographs

A number of photographs were taken from the case studies. The pictures were grouped according to the relevant topics which were tackled during the personal observations on the subject matter. The pictures provided documented visual information which helped in clarifying the subject matter of the research. A digital camera was used in taking the pictures and that made it easier

during data collection and documentation.

3.2.4 Related Literature

The observations and data collected from the interviews, and case studies were crosschecked from books and the literature review of this thesis in order to make sure that the right information was documented. Some of the literature used for this research focused on the elements of the African aesthetics which are: resemblance to a human being, luminosity, self-composure, youthfulness and (clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish). Ornaments and their influence on African architecture, art and architecture in African communities: rural settlements, towns and city-states, and palaces were also considered. Other literature studied include the African Artistic Heritage: materials, artists, aesthetics, patronage and the role of art and architecture in African societies which are: social role, political role, economic role, historical role and therapeutic role. These related literature provided adequate information in evaluating the influence of Traditional African Art on African Architecture.

3.2.5 Computer software / internet sources, books, journals and magazines

Some relevant data were gathered from the internet and computer software. The computer was very helpful in the editing of pictures and typing of this document. Books, journals and magazines were also useful in the collection of data for this thesis. The data collected from these sources critically analyzed before documenting in order to provide relevant information for the subject matter. The research was conducted successfully through the help and information gathered from these sources.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The main data techniques used in this research study were personal interviews, case study observations, discussions and secondary source analysis. Personal interviews constituted one of the most important and valuable sources of information for the research. The social nature of Traditional African Art and Architecture made me adopt research approaches that focus primarily on human interpretations and meanings. Interpretative research advocates a relativistic understanding of the phenomena being studied. This research approach sees the pursuit of meaning and understanding as subjective and knowledge as a social construction. They examine the social reality and subjective meanings held by people by eliciting and observing what is significant and important to them.

3.4 LIMITATIONS

Availability of adequate documented information on traditional African art and architecture was a problem since not much research had been conducted on them as compared to that on other foreign arts and architecture. More research needs to be conducted on African art and architecture.

Knowledgeable people about the subject matter didn't really provide enough information for the research when interviewed. They had more knowledge about African art than African architecture and this made the acquisition of relevant information for the thesis more difficult.

Searching for pertinent information from the internet was not easy since most of the web sites did not provide free research information to the general public and this also made the gathering of information more difficult.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 AKAN ARCHITECTURE AND THE ADINKRA SYMBOLS

Akan architecture is not only elaborate in terms of function and building technology. It also presents, as a reflection of the people and their spirit of independence, a variety of forms and design principles that encode expressive messages which continue to astonish foreign observers. Various Adinkra symbols are used as base reliefs or plinths, banisters, and wall decorations in Akan architecture. These symbols have meanings attached to them so their functions in Akan architecture are for aesthetics and also to convey a certain message to their observers. The Adinkra symbols portray the clear relationship existing between Akan Art and Architecture. The Adinkra symbols have a culturally significant influence on Akan Architecture.



Fig. 4.1 A wall of an old Akan house showing in relief form some of the Akan Adinkra symbols.



Fig. 4.2 Contemporary building at Ejisu Besese depicting in relief form some of the Akan traditional symbols on the wall.

The *fihankra* (compound house) style of building consists of a central quadrangle which is enclosed on all four sides with rooms. The multi-room rectangular building with an open courtyard found in Akan houses, as captured by the *fihankra* symbol, marks the Akan concept of private and public space. The Akan *fihankra* building used as a home demarcates between the *fie* (inside, private) and *abonten* (outside, public).



Fig. 4.3 Fihankra (compound house); this signifies safety or security in a home.

The *fihankra* symbolizes protection, security and spirituality. In front of the house is placed a stump called the *Nyame dua* - God's altar which represents God's presence and protection. When one enters the house, the open courtyard (*adiwo* in Twi; Fantse call it *paado*)

represents the public space within the house. This open courtyard has multiple uses. It is usually surrounded by a verandah where guests may be received. A bigger group of guests will usually be received in the *dampan*. The *dampan* (literally, empty room) is semi-private and has multiple uses: from receiving guests, and holding court to laying the dead in state during funerals. Then, there are the private rooms: living room, bed rooms, bathrooms, etc. There is also the kitchen, which very often extends into the open courtyard. In a big Akan house, there are the women's quarters (*mmaa mu*) which will have its own open courtyard and a number of private rooms. The kitchen and the bathrooms will usually be in these quarters. In the Asantehene's Palace the women's quarters is called *Hia* or *Hyia*. The concept of *fihankra* reinforces the idea of close family ties and unity.



Fig. 4.4 The open courtyard of an Akan compound house.

The Akan house is well ventilated, resilient and can withstand the hazards of storms, rainfall and the tropical hot weather. This is encoded in the symbol *mframadan* - well ventilated or breezy house shown below.



Fig. 4.5 Mframadan (well ventilated house).

The *Nyame dua* (God's altar) is a tree stump that may be found in front of houses or in the open courtyard of the *fihankra* (compound house). The symbol signifies God's presence and God's protection. The tree stump may hold a pot to catch direct rain water considered as holy water for religious ceremonies.



Fig. 4.6 The Adinkra symbol and tree stump called '*Nyame dua*' (God's altar).

The incorporation of Adinkra symbols in Akan architecture was traditionally limited to public buildings such as the king's palace (*ahemfie*) and shrine building (*abosom dan*), and, in some cases, the homes of high ranking community leaders. In contemporary times the symbols

are incorporated in both private and public buildings in order to emphasize Akan aesthetics as well as the social significance of the buildings.



Fig. 4.7 A hotel entrance with Adinkra symbols.

Different symbols are used as base relief or plinths and walls. They may be used to give a honeycomb effect or serve as screen walls providing openings for ventilation while at the same time serving as protection against visual intrusion.



Fig. 4.8 A contemporary house that incorporates the Adinkra symbol called 'Gye Nyame' (except God; symbol of the omnipotence and immortality of God).



Fig. 4.9 A Catholic Church building at Tema Community 3 showing the '*biribi wo soro*' symbol (meaning; God, there is something in the heavens, let it reach me).

In recent years, architects have utilized some of the Adinkra symbols to resolve design problems associated with fenestration, balustrading, fencing and finishing in both private and public buildings. For example, the Children's Library Complex in Accra incorporates the symbol called *mmabunu benyini* (the young shall grow). The medical students' hostel at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has a honeycomb wall that incorporates the *yenyedie* (our well being) symbol.

The Catholic Holy Spirit Cathedral in Accra, the Emmanuel Methodist Church at Labadi, Accra, Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church at Community One, Tema, and the walls at the front gate, as well as the columns of the Nkonnuafieso Temple of the Kumasi National Cultural Centre are other examples of public buildings that have incorporated several of the Akan Adinkra symbols.



Fig. 4.10 'Anantuo' – Calf. From the proverb: *Se anantuo kosene sere a, na yadee wo mu.* (When the calf is bigger than the thigh, then there is a problem).

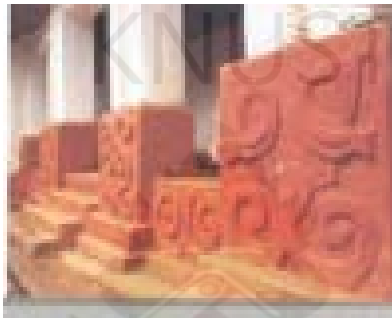


Fig. 4.11 Base of an old house at Ejisu-Besease, incorporating some of the Adinkra symbols.



Fig. 4.12 The columns and walls of the Nkonnuafieso Temple at the Ghana National Cultural Centre, Kumasi, incorporate several Akan Adinkra symbols.



Fig. 4.13 A building column incorporating the '*biribi wo soro*' (there is something in the heavens) symbol.



Fig. 4.14 '*Asennua*' – Cross. Symbol of supreme sacrifice, redemption and selflessness.



Fig. 4.15 A wall decoration of an old house at Abetifi, near Nkawkaw.



Fig. 4.16 A collage of Adinkra symbols on a ceiling at the International Conference Centre in Accra.



Fig. 4.17 A relief on the entrance wall of the Ghana National Museum, Accra, enhancing the aesthetics of the building.

4.2 AFRICAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN SOME AFRICAN COMMUNITIES

African architecture is a direct evocation of its physical environment, and takes its style and it is extremely stylish, not from abstract aesthetic notions but from the basic need and image the building has to serve. The climate of Africa is extremely varied, from forests to grasslands to desert. Thus the available building materials are also varied, from mud to stone to thatch, and they change region by region.



Fig. 4.18 Wood used to create wooden sculptures that adorn the exterior of Bamileke architecture, Cameroon.
<http://hum.lss.wisc.edu/hjdrewal.html> (accessed May, 2008)

Sub-Saharan Africa produced some large-scale works, such as the Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, but on the whole we do not find "architects" in traditional African building: what we find instead are traditional builders, who combined a certain priestly function as well. One is impressed above all by the symbolic imagery of traditional African building.

Mud is one of the common traditional African building materials. Using mud may have certain technical disadvantages, but it is probably the most expressive of all materials. It not only lends itself brilliantly to surface decoration, but the very shapes of the buildings express their functions and their ideology. The facades of Dogon houses, for example, have many similarities to their masks. Most of their village housing is marked by anthropomorphism: the house not only houses its owner (and maker), it expresses his or her stage in life, and is closed down at his or her death.



Fig. 4.19 Traditional earthen roundhouse of Tamberma (Batammaliba) region of Togo and Benin, portraying the anthropomorphism of African art and architecture.
<http://pitt.edu/tokerism> (accessed May, 2008)

As many other African peoples, Dogon are very creative and like to be surrounded by art. Skilled artisans make carefully the objects of daily use. Dogon doors are good examples of their talent. They contain essential characteristics of the Dogon mythology, according with that the first inhabitants of Bandiagara zone crossed a river over the back of a crocodile. An outstanding part of the door is the lock, in which sometimes a couple of ancestors are represented.

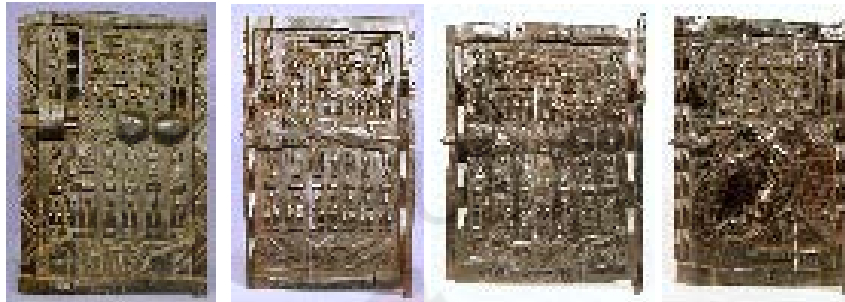


Fig. 4.20 Examples of Dogon doors with decorative designs in relief form.
<http://www.africaclub.com> (accessed May, 2008)

The Dogon of Mali are well known for their elaborate wood carving. They perform the act of carving as a ritual.



Fig. 4.21 A Dogon door for a granary. The stylized images of human figures and animals are symbols that protect the stored grain.



Fig. 4.22 Decorated house facade in Zaria, Nigeria: painted facade and mud relief.
<http://pitt.edu/tokerism> (accessed May, 2008)

African architecture is mostly associated with vernacular architecture. Because of the great impact colonists have had on urban Africa (most of the cities did not even exist before colonization), the veritable African identity is expected to be found in the villages, untouched by western influences, or in the architectural wonders created by the African ancestors: the mysterious mosques in Djenne, Mali, the rock churches in Lalibela, Ethiopia and of course the pyramids in Egypt.

However, there is much more to be discovered. African architecture definitely did not die when western influences touched the African architects and builders. On the contrary, African architecture continued to develop and came to produce its own contemporary style.

The Kariakoo market in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is such an example. Built in 1974 by the architect B.J. Amuli, the building offers three layers of market area and forms the centre of the Kariakoo market which is spread out in the neighbourhood. The building is perfectly adapted to its function, but also to its environment. It provides for the necessary air circulation and the

roof exists of a series of gigantic funnels to harvest the rain, to be stored in underground collection tanks.



Fig. 4.23 Kariakoo market in Dar es Salaam showing its gigantic funnel-shaped roof to harvest rain.

There are many more beautiful examples like the Kariakoo market and presumably even more to come. African architecture forms its own important part in the world's architectural history, which should not be overlooked.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSION

From the findings and analysis of this research, it is evidently clear that traditional African art has a great influence on African architecture. They both share certain qualities which are the elements of the African aesthetics: resemblance to a human being, luminosity, self-composure, youthfulness and (clarity of form and detail, complexity of composition, balance and symmetry, smoothness of finish). The geographic location and climate of Africa makes tropical architecture, the dominant type of architecture practiced in Africa. These affect the types of materials used for African art and architecture. The construction technology employed is also been affected by these factors. Traditional African Art influences the form, layout, spatial configuration, facade and aesthetics of African Architecture and this has been clarified in this thesis through the review of related literature and the evaluation of the case studies.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The observations made from the results and discussions obviously lead to the understanding that the incorporation of traditional African art in African architecture, gives more cultural significance to African architecture. The elements of the African aesthetics must be abstractly represented in African art and architecture. Ornamentation in African architecture enhances the aesthetic qualities of the buildings in Africa.

The materials, finishes and construction technology employed in the design of African buildings must portray the rich culture and history of Africans. The arts of Africans must reflect in their architecture. This can be achieved through the design of the form and spaces, thereby taking care of the facilitation of activities in African buildings.

African architecture is a direct evocation of its physical environment, and takes its style and it is extremely stylish, not from abstract aesthetic notions but from the basic need and image the building has to serve. African Architecture must incorporate African Art in designs of traditional buildings for decorative purposes, medium to ward off evil spirits, and as means of communication to other people, e.g. lions at entrances, stools etc., to show status in society. The architecture form can be considered a product of environment and social circumstances, but ornaments and decorations are bounded up in the social values. It is established to assert personal and community identity, and can signal different messages to those who are able to read them.

Artists and builders in many African societies express well-defined aesthetic preferences and value skillful work. Aesthetics in some African societies have led to the identification of certain artistic criteria for evaluating visual arts. A sculpture of the human figure should emphasize a strong muscular body, refined facial features, and elaborate hairstyle and scarification patterns, all of which reflect cultural ideals of civilized beauty. Scholars of aesthetics in visual expression have identified criteria based on both formal elements, such as a smooth surface, symmetrical composition, and a moderate resemblance to the subject, as well as abstract cultural concepts, such as the inner power or life force and character or essential nature. Many African societies associate such smooth, finished surfaces with cultivated refinement. African aesthetics generally have an ethical or religious basis. An artwork or building considered “beautiful” is often also believed to be “good,” in the sense that it exemplifies and upholds moral values.

The fact that, in many societies, the words for beautiful and good are the same suggests a strong correspondence between these two ideas. The ability of an artifact to work effectively, whether that means connecting with the spiritual realm or imparting a lesson to initiates, may

also be a standard for determining the “beauty” of an artifact. Although in the Western world, aesthetics is often equated with beauty, artists and builders in some African cultures create works that are not intended to be beautiful. Such works are deliberately horrific in order to convey their fearsome powers and thereby elicit a strong reaction in the viewer.



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