

ART FORMS IN GHANA: THE STOOL AS A SOCIO-POLITICO-RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to highlight on the traditional carved wooden stool as an excellent art work, and also as the most important single artefact in the traditional Ghanaian Chief's or King's artistic paraphernalia. As an artwork, its design elements and production processes have been discussed. The selection of appropriate woods and design motifs for production and their symbolism have also been considered. The various type of stools available and their significance in the socio-politico-religious milieu of Southern Ghanalans, have been given prominence.

Keywords: Stool, Motif, Art Form, Symbol.

INTRODUCTION

The stool is a carved wooden seat, which has been used in Ghana since time immemorial. It pre-dates the advent of European chairs, whose introduction has not diminished the importance of stools in Ghana.

The stool stands out as the most important single art object of the southern Ghanaian Chief's or King's state regalia which include, the swords, umbrellas, linguist staffs and the Chief's personal ornaments. Northern Ghanaian Chiefs and Kings sit on skins of certain powerful ferocious predators such as the lion and the leopard. The southern Ghanaian Chief is enstooled or destooled to signify his coming into and leaving office as a Chief whereas his northern counterpart is enskinned or deskinning. Without a stool or skin there can be no Chief, therefore over the years there have been struggles between states and different segments of the same state and families over rightful ownership of stools and skins in Ghana.

As an important object, there is a traditional choice in the kind of wood for carving the stool. Since the carved stool should be long lasting and light enough to facilitate being carried about, practical considerations influence the wood choice. Thus,

only a few trees are considered appropriate for carving stools. However, the most important reason for the choice is religious. The selected wood is believed to have supernatural character or spirit of its own and this explains why libation is poured to pacify the spirit in the tree to ensure peace and safety of the carver before the tree is felled. In this regard, the "Osese" (*Holarrhena Wulfsbergii*) and "Nyamedua" (*Alstonia gongensis*) are the principal species used. But the most frequently preferred one is the "Osese". This wood is white and soft. Sarpong (1971) says that "its softness is of great advantage to the carver while the whiteness is important to the customer because he is judged to be neat and clean or dirty according to the degree of whiteness of the stool."

The stool's nature, design and its socio-politico-religious significance in the cultural milieu of Ghana form the subject of discussion in this paper.

Kinds of Stools

Apart from the stool's practical use as a seat, it is a work of art and a religious object.

There are several kinds of stools. Firstly, there are the white stools carved from white woods. There are also silver stools which are white stools entirely plaited with silver.

The third kinds are referred to as golden stools. They are mainly white stools plaited with gold leaf. This group of gold-plaited stools are different from the famous 'Golden Stool' of Asante which is believed to be solid gold. However there are other types of golden stools, which are carved after the model of the 'Golden Stool' but has no gold leaf plaited on them at all. Blackened stools usually called ancestral stools, which are kept in the stool rooms to receive ritual offerings during religious rites, constitute another kind.

According to Sarpong (1971): "stools are also classified according to the sex of the user. There are men's stools, women's stools (generally presented by a bride-groom to his bride), and stools used by both men and women".

Sarpong (1971) states further that:

The social status of the persons who use stools for official purposes, affords still a thirds division of stools. We have the Ahennwa (chief's stool), the Ahemmadwa (queen's stool) and the Adammadwa (literally two-penny stool, ie. the poor man's stool). Priests have their special stools with single centre supports, and so have certain attendants at the Chief's house e.g. -Padlock stool used by the Chief's spokesman.

There are also specially patterned stools with names, which serve as stool-models for carvers, thus providing a further division of stools identified by name. The Porcupine stool, Leopard stool, Moon stool and Elephant stool are examples.

The Stool as an Art Form

The stool is composed of three parts - the top, the middle and the base. The top exceeds the base in width but both have equal lengths (Figure 1). The top is carved smooth, and curved to facilitate safe and comfortable sitting. It is a taboo to carry the Chief's stool on the head. Therefore the curved shape of the top makes it easy to carry the stool on the back of the neck on ceremonial occasions (Figure 2). The middle has no particular shape. However it can be carved into different motifs signifying the status of the owner. The motif or design in the middle section identifies the kind of stool it is, who can own it and its value in terms of money and culture.

The base is rectangular in shape and receives some linear decorations.

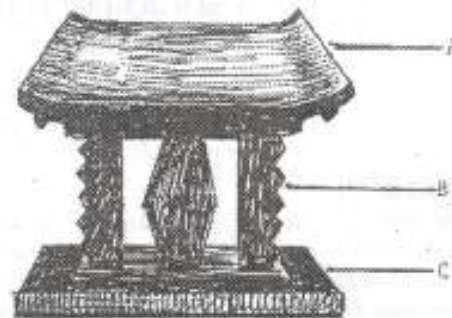


Fig. 1. Agronahene Gwa (Stool)

Represents a typical stool design.

A-The top (seat)

B-The middle section that carries the distinctive motif or design.

C-The base



Fig. 2. A ceremonial stool being carried on the back of the neck

Most stools are designed to balance horizontally or symmetrically. This implies that if the stool were equally and vertically divided into two, a reverse image of one half would replicate the other (Figure 3). However, there are a few stools whose designs are asymmetrical. These usually have animal motifs. The elephant, porcupine and crocodile

stools are examples. (Figure 4). It is clear that a vertical and equal division of any of these into two halves will not produce a replicated design of the opposite side.

The middle section of the stool, which carries the main motif or pattern from which the name of the stool is derived, is artistically the most expressive and impressive part of the whole stool composition. It is this part that receives the carver's greatest attention and draws heavily on his imaginative and creative sensibilities. Here all the elements of design such as dot, line, shape and texture are brought into play, and superbly and meticulously organised in accordance with the design principles such as balance, rhythm, repetition, contrast, unity, variety and dominance to produce an exquisite masterpiece of a stool that can attract buyers.

The top and the base are neither neglected in artistic decoration. Both receive their fair share of embellishment with delicate and meaningful symbolic, linear and geometric decorative patterns, such as zigzag, wavy and disk-like lines and crescent shapes. The patterns transform the top and the base from their basic functions as the seat and the ground support respectively to heights of artistic creation worthy of attention and admiration.

The sheer variety and complexity of the design motifs available in the stool carver's repertoire from which he draws to execute his work is amazing. The sources of inspiration for his design range from local proverbs and wise-sayings, plant and animal life, to human and geometric forms.



Fig. 3. Mamponghe Gwa (Stool)
A symmetrically designed stool. A reverse image of one half replicates the other.

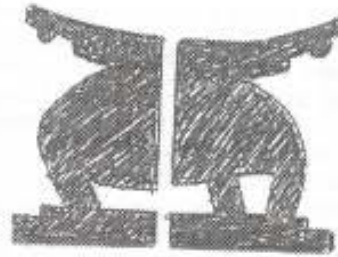


Fig. 4. Exana Gwa (Elephant Stool)
A asymmetrically designed stool. When vertically divided, a replicated design is not possible on the opposite side.

Expressing admiration of the carver's creative sense, Degan (1988) writes thus;

When an Asante carver is commissioned by a chief, priest or other high-ranking member of society to carve a stool, it means the patron believes the carver meets a set of rigorous qualifications. He must not only be highly skilled technically, but have creative talent and imagination. Most significantly, he must conscientiously observe the religious and moral codes and be a devout practitioner. For the Asante, this adherence to moral precepts is important because the stool has much more than practical attributes. The use of symbols in the carving means that the stool will convey messages, and these must be expressed with artistry. More importantly, the stool will eventually house the spirit of its owner.

Symbolism of the Stool

In the traditional life of the Akan ethnic group of Ghana, a stool is believed to symbolise the soul of the society. This view is shared by Twumasi, (1975) in a discussion on the Golden Stool of Asante with a statement that "its significance was seen in the unity it gave to the nation, for it was believed to contain the soul of the nation". The top part of the stool carved smooth and shaped in the form of a crescent symbolises the warmth of the mother's embrace. The middle portion—the most artistically creative and expressive part of the stool, is embellished with various patterns and symbols from which the stool's name is derived.

Every design used in a stool has connotation and thus functions as a verbal as well as visual message. The language of these symbols is known and has been integrated and accepted by the society. The patron who has commissioned a stool usually has a particular status in his society. Accordingly, themes or symbols are chosen by the patron from the larger inventory that the carver possesses. Some themes might feature animals, birds, human figures or abstract geometrical forms; some of these themes can be interpreted in a number of ways.

(Degan, 1988).

The *obi-te-obi-so dwa* meaning (someone sits-upon-another stool) carved in the form of two stools with one on top of the other (Fig. 5) is a typical example. According to Sarpong (1971) this design connotes the fact that there is a hierarchical order in society. Even among chiefs, priests, elders and the like, there is an order of precedence to be observed for the good governance of the community.

A powerful Paramount Chief may have the rainbow stool which is a reproduction of the Akan proverb "*Kontonkurowi eda amansan kon mu*" meaning (the rainbow is around the neck of every nation), (Fig. 6). The symbolism is two-fold. It reminds the powerful chief that death is the lot of everybody including his powerful self therefore he should not be proud and egotistic. Secondly it depicts the authority of the Chief over all the citizens of the state.

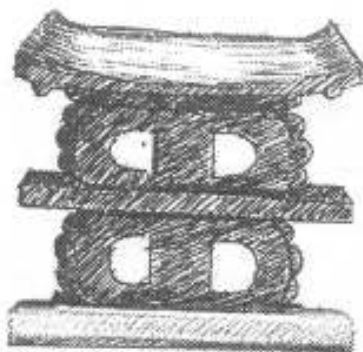


Fig. 5. *Obi-te-Obi-So Gwa*
"Someone sits upon another" stool. A symbol of hierarchical order in society

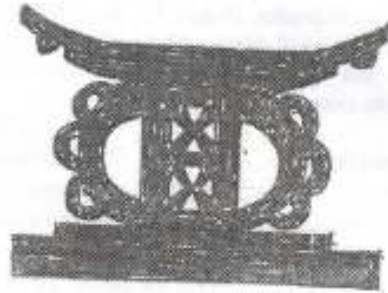


Fig. 6. *Kontonkurowi Gwa*
The Rainbow Stool. Symbolises the fact that death is the lot of everybody or the Chief's authority is over all the citizens of the state.

- The panther and elephant represent the great power and authority of the king.
- The crocodile is a symbol of holiness and sacredness
- The 'stool of quills' tells the king's advisor that he must be, like the quill, aggressive in his protection of the king and his society.
- The 'lover back stool' symbolises the love and affection of a man for his beloved (usually given to the woman he will marry).
- The 'good fortune stool' is usually given by a friend or family member when they want to wish someone good luck.

Significance of the Stool

The meaning and importance of the stool in southern Ghana can be seen in the social, political and religious roles it plays in the life of the people.

Social Significance of the Stool

The symbolic message carved in the middle portion of the stool reflects the owners prestige and authority. The stool is therefore a status symbol.

There are stools of every type for every status: common ones for the ordinary man or woman, the more elaborate for the king. "There are stools for the council of the king, the king's speaker, chiefs, sub-chiefs, priests, respected elders and other people of note and hierarchy.

There are stools for secular, public and royal functions. All of these functions and hierarchies are reflected in the design and decoration of the stool". (Degan, 1988).

Every Ghanaian can purchase as many stools as possible to his/her heart's desire on condition that the type or model of the stool compares with his/her status. The greater the respect and the higher the status, the larger the stool and the more elaborate its artistry.

Degan (1988) expresses the view that "the status represented by the stool is significant. Chiefs who do not perform as expected and fail in their duty can be destooled. This strips them of their duties, authority and prestige and consequently, of their status." On the other hand if a chief fulfils his traditional duties and roles as expected by his community, he is honoured after his demise with a blackened stool. His soul would thus be immortalised and his descendants can then rely on his continued spiritual help and counsel when required.

The possession of a stool is considered as a necessity. Kyerematen (1964) opines that "it was on a stool that a deceased person was bathed before being laid in state". He continues further that it was customary for a husband to present his newly named wife a stool to make sure of keeping her. Elaborating on the significance of the stool, Kyerematen (1964) indicates that 'a young girl undergoing the rite to mark her attainment of puberty was placed on a stool.' He also emphasises that "the first gift to be made by a father to his child when the latter began to crawl was a stool". It is this close association between a person and his/her stool that has brought about the saying "there is no secret between a person and his/her stool". A person's spirit is believed to continue to inhabit even after his death the stool he regularly used. This is why traditionally a person is advised to tilt his/her stool whenever leaving it to prevent some other spirit from occupying it. This implies that the stool is thus imbued with the owner's personality.

To this day, one can see traditional stools in daily use. Although they are mixed with contemporary chairs, their function is still more significant. "To me, our respect and honour is measured by the quality and quantity of the stools in our possession. Although we use modern chairs, we will never give up our traditional stools." (Degan, 1988) quoting a teacher in Kumasi.

Political Significance of the Stool

The stool's political significance in southern Ghana cannot be over emphasised. It is the traditional symbol of the authority of the king or chief. It is a unifying force which binds the state together as an entity composed of individuals, families, clans and ethnic groups. It represents the soul of the state whose safety and honour must be religiously guarded. It symbolises the state, and features prominently in most state emblems in southern Ghana. Parcels of Land under the custody of chief's are referred to as 'stool lands' which are held in trust for the state or the people. This implies that the destiny and history of traditional states of southern Ghana ruled by the various Amanhene (Paramount Chiefs) is bound up with the various stools of state. The magnitude of this assertion can perhaps be best illustrated with the story of the "Golden Stool" in the traditions of the Asante Kingdom without prejudice to other equally important stools of state in Ghana.

According to Degan (1988), a teacher in Kumasi said "The history of the Asante without the Golden Stool is like the history of Christianity without Jesus Christ." Degan is of the view that in their tradition, the Asante have hundreds of variations on the story of the Golden Stool. It is woven into their history and legends and is often more elaborate than the follow paraphrase:

There was a time when the Asante people suffered under the domination of the Denkyira people and their king, Ntim Gyakari. Every year they had to pay him tribute in large quantities of gold dust and the best of their women. The Asante king, Osei Tutu resolved to lead his people in revolt.

First, he persuaded the chiefs and rulers in his area to create a confederation and unify their armies. Then, for annual tribute, he sent Ntim Gyakari not gold dust, but bags of stone.

War broke out. In 1701, with the help of his friend, the great priest, magician and law-maker, Anokye, Osei Tutu was able to lead his people to victory over the Denkyira. Upon capturing Ntim Gyakari, they beheaded him. After the victory, some of the chiefs and rulers wanted to leave the alliance, but Anokye was determined to keep them united. On a chosen Friday he invited all the kings, chiefs and other rulers to a

a celebration of their victory. Suddenly, dark clouds gathered over the celebrants. Thunder roared, lightning split the sky as dust rose from the ground. Then, from above, they saw descending a beautiful white stool, covered with gold.

It moved down among them and settled on Osei Tutu's knee.

The miracle of its appearance forged a new unity among the Asante leaders. In it abided the nation's soul and it must be their common goal to protect it. This stool is called Sika Dwa Kofi – The Gold Stool on Friday. (Degan, 1988)

From that time, the Golden Stool was concealed, well guarded and only displayed on important occasions. No one – not even the king – is allowed to sit on it, nor is it ever allowed to touch the ground. When outdoors, it sits atop another stool. If the Asante felt that the Golden Stool might be in danger, threatened with seizure or discovered, they sacrificed animals and made sacred offerings.

In 1900, the British governor deeply insulted the sanctity of the Golden Stool when he demanded to sit on it. The Asante people were enraged: it was not a throne, but their most sacred object. To save it they declared war against the British. Even though they were defeated they saw victory in the fact that the stool remained with them.

In 1920, road workers near Kumasi discovered the Golden Stool and stole its gold. When the Asante people discovered this, national mourning was declared. The British at last understood the seriousness of the situation. The culprits were imprisoned by the British; the Asante traditional court had demanded the death penalty.

The central role of the Golden Stool in the political life of the Asante is perhaps captured more vividly with the following account of the story of the Golden Stool by E.W. Smith.

Early in the eighteenth century there came to the court of Osei Tutu, the fourth King of Ashanti, a celebrated magician named Anotchi, who announced that he was commissioned by Onyame, the god of the sky, to make Ashanti a great and powerful

nation. In the presence of the King and a great multitude he drew down from heaven a black cloud from which issued the rumblings of thunder and a wooden stool. The stool sank slowly through the air till it rested upon the King's knees without touching the earth. Except for the gold which partially covered it, the stool was such as Africans commonly use. Anotchi proclaimed that it contained the *nsoro* (the soul) of the Ashanti people, that with it was bound up their power, their honour, their welfare, and that if ever it were captured or destroyed the nation would perish. (Smith, 1930)

Smith (1930) is of the view that the Stool is cherished as the most sacred possession of the Asante Kingdom which is never allowed to touch the ground. When it is brought out, it is placed on an elephant skin spread upon the ground and is covered with a cloth of a special kind. Not even the king ever sits upon it. In solemn procession, it is carried under its own umbrella and accompanied by its own attendants who in pomp and number exceed the attendants of the King who walks behind it.

Apart from its real meaning as a wooden seat, the word 'stool' is used to imply the office of the Chief or King. When the actual ruler dies, the situation is referred to as 'the stool has fallen'. The word therefore connotes the actual seat and state or office of Chiefs. It is by reason of the stool that one becomes a chief and enjoys 'personal sacredness'. The expression 'to sit on the stool' is frequently used to signify to be a Chief. Both the Chief and his subjects attach great importance, to the fact that one 'sits on the stool', for it is only in that capacity that a Chief takes on a sacred and priestly character and is deemed worthy to discharge the religious, administrative, executive, judiciary and military functions that are of prime importance and part of his holy duty, which is so necessary that it may never be neglected. It may be said that the authority and power the Chief wields emanate from the stool, which provides his sacred character. Writing about the authority and sacred character of the Asantehene who 'sits' on the Golden Stool, Twumasi (1975) expresses the view that 'the Golden Stool still symbolises the emblem of the authority of the Asantehene, the evidence of his unique, sacred ordination'.

Giving an account of the enstoolment ceremony of the Asantehene, A.A.Y. Kyerematen (1970) writes as follows:

Then follows the climax of the Asantehene-elect being placed on the Golden Stool and proclaimed as Asantehene. For this the Mamponhene supported by the right Wing Amanhene, holds the right arm of the King-elect, the Assumengyahene supported by the Left Wing Amanhene holds the left arm; the Kyidomhene with the support of the Kyidom Chiefs, the Kronti and Akwamu chiefs, and the Gyaase, Ankobea and Manwere Chiefs hold his waist, right foot and left foot, respectively, and place him three consecutive times on the Golden Stool with the Mamponhene saying as follows:-

*Osei ne Poku Nana ne wo;
Mekura wo nsa nifa na mede wo si wo
nananom akondwoa soo
Omanhupa na yepe
Nyame nhyira wo.*

Translated as:

*You are a descendant of Osei and Poku
It is your right hand that I hold to place
you on the Stool of your ancestors
It is good government that we expect
from you
May God bless you.*

The Queenmothers of Ashanti and Kokofu and the women around raise shouts of praise and thanksgiving.

The enstooled King is taken away in a palanquin by the Asoamfoo to the Mmeda Room at the Palace, there to rest until break of day. Jubilation and merriment continues.

Osei Kwadwo (2000) supports the above account on the enstoolment of the Asantehene with a general description of the installation of a chief when he succinctly states;

After the oath the elders escort him to his seat. In the night, the elders send the new chief to the Stool room and place his buttocks three times on the black stool of the state.

Sarpong (1971) states that; "During the installation of a candidate as a Chief, he is suspended three consecutive times on either a blackened stool or a ceremonial stool (in states where there is no blackened stool) as a sign of his enstoolment. The

Chief's stool is also believed to be the resting place as well as the symbol of the Chief's soul. It is therefore an object, which inspires and is accorded great honour and respect.

Warren (1986) confirms the foregoing when he opines that "apart from being a ruler, the Chief is also a symbol of ethnic identity and the embodiment of values." Warren is of the view that the political symbol of Chieftancy is the blackened stool. He continues that:

Chiefs are sacred because of the link they have with the ancestors and gods by way of the stool. While enstooled, the Chief's blood is sacred; in case of injury or loss of blood, a sheep must be sacrificed to prevent danger befalling the chief's subjects. Respect is more for the office represented by the stool, less for the actual incumbent; should a chief be destooled he may be shown much disrespect, abused, and may be banished.

The Chief is thus careful to respect the decentralization of his power because those who select him can just as easily destool him. Warren [1986] also describes the situation thus; "Democracy is again triumphant, though ready to allow Autocracy to boast the semblance of power"

Warren (1986) states further that;

The fact that the stool is always greater than the one who occupies it is in itself a check on despotism. After the death or destoolment of a chief certain subchiefs (werempefo) seize and carry off the blackened stools without which a new Chief cannot be enstooled; this counters the ambitions of contenders for the stool.

Warren's account on the seizure of the blackened stool by the Werempefo for safe keeping when it becomes vacant is further buttressed by the narrative of Obeng (1988) as follows:

During his tenure of office the chief has possession and custody of all stool property, including all the ancestral stools. Upon the death of a chief the 'Werempefo' who are usually 'Gyaase' subjects, take possession of the stool. No person belonging to the Stool Family can be a member of the "Werempefo". If a chief is

destooled, the stool, its regalia and paraphernalia are taken away from him and placed under the care and protection of the Gyaasehene, who by custom, is the proper custodian of all stool property for as long as the stool remains vacant. In such a case the Gyaasehene usually resides at the Palace. The queen-mother or Obaahimaa has nothing to do with the custody of stool property.

It is clear from the above that the stool can become vacant through death or destoolment of the occupant. Abdication is another means of creating a vacant stool, but it is rather rare. The most dramatic way of making a stool vacant however is by destoolment as a consequence of a misconduct on the part of the occupant. A misconduct covers a wide range of misbehaviour which in the view of the community and its elders brings the name and honour of the stool, the chieftaincy institution or the state into disrepute. Any of the following: excessive drunkenness, covetousness, stealing, being disrespectful, displaying cowardice in front of the enemy during battle, breaking the oath of allegiance or being a pugnacious character, could be the basis for preferring destoolment charges against the incumbent chief.

When the misbehaviour was established, The Paramount chief would order his men To remove the sandals of the chief, and A sheep slaughtered to serve as a stamp on the destoolment. (Osei-Kwadwo, 2000).

A chief's foot is not to touch the bare ground or floor. This is considered a taboo due to his sacred nature assumed upon ascension to the stool. By removing his pair of sandals, he is forced to step on the ground bare-footed thus breaking the taboo indicating his destoolment.

The destoolment strips the ex-chief of his duties, authority and prestige and consequently his status.

The loss of status deprives him of the honour of having a blackened stool made in his name which is the preserve of chiefs who performed their duties with honour and respect. The blackened stool is the pivot of the ancestral cult prevalent among southern Ghanaians.

Religious Significance of the Stool

The Blackened Stool as a sacred object plays a central role in the religious life of southern Ghanaians especially among the Akan speaking peoples. Its roles are deeply woven in a complex set of relationships that is unique in the world. Sarpong (1971) expresses the view that many civilizations and ancient societies worship the dead and communicate with their spirits in numerous ways, "but none of them communicates with their ancestors through the medium of a stool. The veneration of stools is a special peculiarity of the Akan-speaking peoples of Ghana".

Degan (1988), writing about the religious role of Blackened stools in Asante expresses the view that;

Other people of Africa do carve and use stools in ceremonies, but for the Asante the stool is the central object in their spiritual lives. They house the 'blackened' stool – those that once belonged to esteemed priest and respected chiefs. The stools are, for the Asante, sacred objects. The soul of the most revered and immortalized ancestors abide within them.

The stools that were frequently used by elders who led good lives worthy of emulation, and those of Chief's who had very successful reigns are preserved by being blackened. The blackening process involves the application of a mixture of eggs and soot on the stools.

The Blackened Stools are kept in stool rooms, and are regarded as altars or shrines to receive sacrificial offerings on festive occasions, and during the performance of religious rites. The ancestral spirits believed to inhabit such blackened stools are revered, venerated and asked for their protection and blessing. The existence of the Ancestral Cult among the Akans especially, is woven around the Blackened Stools.

The religious significance of Blackened or Ancestral stools which gains prominence during festivals is emphasised thus;

Festivals usually go with traditional rituals passed down from past generations to the present. They are characterized by a corporate worship of the ancestral spirits who, it is believed, abide in the ancestral stools.

Among the Akans, these royal stools have become the symbol of the spiritual existence of the people. Festivals generally call for propitiation

and solicitation of favours and mercy of the ancestral spirits.

The exercise is undertaken on behalf of the community by the chief who is the symbol of the state and the mediator between the living and the dead. On such occasions, he purifies the nation from past blemishes, prays for intercession on behalf of his people of the Supreme Being (God) and for blessings and a better life. His use of blood on the black-stools at festivals in either the Royal Mausoleum or at the sacred riverside is therefore quite significant. According to Akan belief, the blood revitalizes the ancestral spirits in the stools.

Food in the form of mashed yams as well as strong drinks are also offered to give new life to the stools of the dead kings. (Asihene, 1980).

The Akan's belief and faith in the spiritual potency of the blackened or ancestral stool is the reason why many ritual ceremonies are performed around it. The celebration of the various annual festivals revolve around the blackened or ancestral stool, as well as simple rituals as naming of a new-born, the seeking of forgiveness for contravention of moral behaviour, the prayer of a man who mortgaged his land (he prays to the spirit so that he can quickly recover complete ownership), the prayer of the chief before he leaves on a long journey (he asks for the protection of his ancestors that dwell in the black stools). In olden times, the blackened stools were carried by warriors into battle so that the ancestral spirits would protect them.

CONCLUSION

The stool is first and foremost a sculptured artwork carved out of wood. Its functions in the social, religious and political arenas in southern Ghana have been raised dramatically to a prominent status that transcends its domestic use as a seat. It has thus become an elevated symbol of political and spiritual eminence.

All Chiefs and Kings of southern Ghana owe their positions and dignity as traditional rulers with social,

religious and political authority to the Ancestral Blackened Stools or Ceremonial Stools upon which they were invested as rulers and would be divested of their authority when the need arises.

Without the stool then there could be no chiefs, no symbol of the soul of state, no altars or shrines for ancestral veneration for spiritual support or backing for the people.

By virtue of its close relationship with its users and its associated roles in the religious and political life of southern Ghanaians, the stool, an ordinary piece of furniture, has become a social, religious and political symbol par excellence.

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