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Beads: An Element of Regalia

Elizabeth Shonsey

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**Beads: An Element of Regalia
Amongst the Ewe Royalty**

**By: Elizabeth Shonsey
School for International Training
Ghana: Fall 1995**

**Mr. Yaw Bredwa-Mensah
Department of Archaeology
University of Ghana, Legon**

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Abstract

The use of beads as body adornment has served as a strong non-verbal communicative device within Ghanaian culture. Decorating oneself with beads can depict a person's mood, project a period in life one is going through, and display the social status of the individual. This study focuses on the significance beads have in portraying the prestige, inheritance and duty of responsibility of traditional figures of authority. The research was concentrated on the chiefs and queen mothers of the Ewe cultural group and their particular usage of beads as an item of royal regalia.

Behind the beautiful, aesthetic expression of bead adornment is an underlying principle of reason. This study investigates answers to why certain beads are only associated with royalty; how "pomp and circumstance" are ever present at formal ceremonies and the history that encompasses the reasons from where these practices and beliefs may be derived. Within this work is an outlying historical background of the Ewes of Ghana, including their most recent migration from Togo and the festivals that celebrate this occurrence. Present at the festivals are notable attire and adornment which reveal the important positions which royalty hold as both "symbolic figures" and present day "active figures" in Ewe society. This paper will discuss the special kinds of beads that tell a vital story of the prestige, inheritance, and social status of the chiefs and queen mothers.

Methodology

On the first Saturday of the month of November, I was invited by my home stay mother to attend the Hobetsotso Festival in Anloga. Dressed in a traditional outfit of African cloth and matching beads, I traveled to the Volta Region of Ghana. Once I arrived, I anxiously waited with camera in hand for the ceremonial procession to begin. At this point, I did not know what to expect, nor did I know that my independent study project would relate to the bead adornment worn by the chiefs and queen mothers of the Ewe. I did know that my interest fell within the topic of beads, but because beads are such a broad topic, I had difficulties in finding an angle that would narrow the subject down. My interest in learning about the usage and acquisition of beads was sparked by my home stay mother's role as a queen mother and her own particular fondness for beads.

While at the festival, I was intrigued by the delicate ornamentation and attire worn by the chiefs and Mama, the only queen mother formally recognized at the festival. Throughout the festival, I asked questions and took photographs, particularly of the royalty in their adornment. Through my association with the main queen mother of the Anlo traditional area, I felt much more comfortable taking photographs of the royalty during the festival. After the festival, I was invited to a dinner at the Paramount Chief's house. Unexpectedly, I was asked to sit next to one of the main sub-chiefs who was acting as the Paramount Chief during the festival.¹ He appeared to be very willing to

¹ The actual Paramount Chief was ill during this festival, therefore, one of the sub-chiefs assumed the position for the festival.

speak with me, so I proceeded to ask him unplanned questions about my curiosities concerning a chief's responsibilities and also questions pertaining to the wonderful assortment of beads around his neck, wrist and ankle. Based on the questions I asked, I soon discovered what my area of interest was. After deciding that I wanted to focus on the bead regalia amongst the chiefs and queen mothers of the Ewe group, I was relieved at knowing I had a focus for my study project. Additionally, I thought that by living with an important queen mother I had a great advantage for obtaining relevant information. However, I was still unaware of the forthcoming obstacles I would face and the work that the project would entail.

I began my independent study project by gathering together all of the reference material I had accumulated during the prior weeks. Due to the fact that the material covered a wide range of bead topics, I sifted through the resources and collected the information that I thought best pertained to my topic at that particular point, while keeping in mind that during the ISP period my focus could sway directions. My background reading provided me with some basic information for my own benefit, since beads is a topic I have only admired, never researched. Although I had multiple reference materials on the general topic of beads, none were directly related to the use of certain beads for the adornment of Ewe chiefs and queen mothers.

My next step was to conduct a series of interviews with informants – primarily with Ewe chiefs and queen mothers. I felt it was important for me to gather the majority of my research material through conversations and observations. I strongly believed that because I was immersed in Ghanaian culture, it was crucial to gather data in a more personal manner. This was done by taking advantage of the resources directly around me,

rather than relying solely on textbook materials. In this respect, I set-up interviews with the chiefs using the assistance of my home stay mother. I quickly discovered that when dealing with "royalty," one must work through another person of "royalty" in order to arrange to speak with them. My home stay mother insisted on following this etiquette by making formal introductions for me. Although I greatly appreciated this effort, it could be quite challenging at times. Since I had to rely on another person to make the necessary connections, setting-up interviews could take quite some time. It was evident that I was on a different time-frame. Overcoming this obstacle took a lot of patience and perseverance. However, the Ghanaian etiquette of "formal introductions" proved to be the best method of obtaining contact with the other chiefs and queen mothers. They each set time aside to personally speak with me as a result of having been formally introduced by a respectful contact person.

The interviews I conducted were with three chiefs and two queen mothers. I received more information from the chiefs than from the queen mothers. In addition to using my home stay mother as a resource, I discovered that it was difficult to find other queen mothers to speak with. I learned that Ewe queen mothers have not played as strong of a role in Ewe society as have the chiefs. Therefore, the majority of the information was obtained from the Ewe chiefs. All of the interviews with the chiefs occurred in English, so language did not serve as a major barrier for me. The chiefs were asked the same general questions pertaining to 1) their responsibilities of chieftaincy (i.e., how their roles in the past compare to their roles presently); and 2) the importance of their royal regalia (i.e., why they adorn themselves for formal ceremonies, the significance of the beads they choose, etc.). Each interview led to additional questions, which in turn led to new

directions for me to explore. As a result, I was able to learn new information from different chiefs, yet at the same time cross-check my data. Overall, I discovered that the interviewees were much more comfortable with speaking about their responsibilities for their individual villages towns versus the importance of beads as royal regalia. They attempted to share some personal insight on the reasons behind why they wear beads, but nothing concrete was given concerning bead names, bead types, and the reasons concerning why they are worn on certain parts of the body.

Next, I felt it was important to go into the villages in order to speak with some of the older women. Through my research process I discovered that it is often the old women in the villages who are the most knowledgeable and the most useful in identifying the appropriate beads that adorn the chiefs and queen mothers for formal ceremonies. In addition, I was also interested in hearing if there were any oral traditions pertaining to these beads. Through connections with my home stay mother, I was able to visit the villages of Klikor and Anyoko. As I neither speak nor understand Ewe, it was necessary to find a translator/assistant to accompany me into these villages. The assistant was carefully selected, since it was important to find an individual who would respectfully represent my home stay mother -- the queen mother of the Anlo traditional area -- as well as myself. The situation that was arranged proved to be beneficial. This was because the translator was the cousin of Mama Sallah and grew-up in the village of Anyoko, thereby knowing the area well. The translator was also aware of some of the older "bead women" whom I could speak with, including an additional queen mother who lived in Anyoko. I would have liked to visit other villages besides Anyoko and Klikor, but, due to necessary connections and a restricted time-frame, it was not feasible.

During the month of November, I was invited to two formal Ewe festivals. This was an excellent opportunity to observe the royal regalia and bead usage first-hand. Both the Hogbetsotso and Nordu Festivals honor the same occasion -- the Ewe migration from Togo land. However, the two festivals are celebrated in different areas of the Ewe Volta Region -- the Hogbetsotso in the south-eastern and the Nordu in the central. Interestingly, even though the chiefs and queen mothers at the festivals all come from the same Ewe heritage, their formal royal regalia differs depending on the regional areas in which they live. By attending more than one of these major Ewe festivals, I was able to make many important observations which I later questioned, researched and analyzed.

My methods of recording information were a combination of recording interviews on an audio cassette player and note taking. It was pertinent for me to use my camera as a device for documenting what I observed in the festivals I attended, as well as the private royal bead collections I was shown. I also wrote summaries of my daily project progress in a journal. It was here where I included sketches and short descriptions of beads that I was introduced to throughout my research.

Analyzing my data could be difficult at times. Initially, I was frustrated that the chiefs and queen mothers knew little of what I perceived as "concrete information" about the beads. They could only draw inferences on why: "It could have been done this way because. . ." or, "That's just the way it has always been done. . . ." Later I came to realize that their reasoning was valuable. Ghanaian culture, especially that amongst the Ewe, is heavily reliant upon oral tradition. The input I received from the chiefs and queen mothers may have first appeared speculative, especially amongst those who were somewhat uncertain; but nevertheless, some of their input was helpful in collecting data

and allowing me to draw my own conclusions. I cross-checked the information I received from interview to interview with the royalty and with informants who were knowledgeable of beads. Unfortunately, even though I was hoping to receive a majority of information about the specific names, meanings and origins of the beads from the older women in the village, they were unable to provide me with this information. Perhaps they did not: understand the depth of information I sought or, they simply did not know the answers to my questions.² Also, I used a variety of reference material pertaining to beads in general, Ewe festivals, and writings on Ewe history. Ultimately, I linked the data I collected, with my own observations and conclusions.

² I rephrased my questions multiple times in an attempt to get my questions across to the older women, but I was apparently unsuccessful.

Introduction

There are few written resources of Ewe past history. The majority of the information that is found is obtained through oral tradition. It is important for the reader to have a better understanding of the historical and the geographical background of this particular group. One must understand this before learning about the importance of the festivals they celebrate and the reasoning behind the great emphasis on the appearance of certain "dignified" individuals of the Ewe group.

Ornamentation through the use of beads is an integral aspect of Ghanaian culture. Beads often depict a deeper, more meaningful message than the mere aesthetic beauty they often portray. In comparison to the bold, excessive display of gold amongst the Ashanti of Ghana, the royal regalia belonging to the Ewe has remained relatively unnoticed. This paper focuses on the main item of adornment unique to the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers of Ghana -- the display of valuable beads. The royal beads of the Ewe can signify social values including pride, wealth, status, and dignity. They can also have different values and attributes based on their source of origin, the status of original possessor, and the means by which they were acquired.³ Thus, it is also pertinent to investigate the origins of the so called "royal" beads, including both the information elicited from former bead researchers and the stories collected from the chiefs, queen mothers, and the older women in the village.

³ van Landewijk, Wilhelmina M.H.B. "The Social Significance of Beads Among the Adangbe-Ewe." Department of Sociology, University of Ghana Legon: March 1977.

Although there has been previous research within the subject of beads, there are extremely limited written accounts or widespread knowledge of the beads that adorn the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers. This research attempts to unfold some of the previously undocumented reasons and meanings behind the bead usage of the Ewe royalty, through a process of interviews, reading, and observation during a three-week time-frame. It is vital to document this area of interest because it is an intriguing aspect of Ewe culture and has been neglected by previous bead and historical researchers. Within the simple beauty of an Ewe royal bead, there is a fascinating story of history and culture.

Geographical Background

The Ewes have traditionally occupied an area known as the Volta Region. A neat rectangle outlines this geographical area. The rivers Mono and Volta surround this area, extending from the Atlantic coast inland. On the Western boundary is the natural Volta River Estuary, while the Eastern boundary is located along the Ghana-Togo border. The Atlantic Ocean forms the Southern boundary, whereas the Northern boundary reaches up to Atakpame and Kpetsi. Ewe land has a coastline of more than one-hundred miles and extends for more than one-hundred miles into the interior of Ghana.⁴

⁴ Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978.

Historical Background

The knowledge and written record of Ewe history has largely depended on the information obtained through oral traditions. The unwritten lore of precolonial times has to be recovered from unlettered persons whose retentive memory must be given place above all other sources of information.⁵ Acquiring new knowledge of these people is eagerly sought by historians, anthropologists, and archeologists of Ewe culture. There is a wealth of information that is gained when one unfolds the mystery and saga behind the origins and migration of the Ewes into present day Ghana.

A collaboration of sources point to the area of Ketu as being the main place of origin of the Ewe peoples. However, there is still discussion as to whether this was the "cradle" of the Ewes, or merely a stop in their journey to the West. Researchers have calculated that the city-state of Ketu, located in the southeastern part of the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), was founded at the end of the tenth century.⁶ It was there that the Ewe, along with the Yoruba, Ga-Adangbe, and Fon lived for some time before they were forced to leave due to constant wars and raids. During the fifteenth century the Ewe dispersed in two sections: one group headed toward the West, known as Adele; the second group occupied south-eastern Togo, most notably known as the Notsie area.⁷

⁵ Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978.

⁶ Asamoah, Ansa K. The Ewe of South-East Ghana and Togo. Ghana Publishing Co. Tema, Ghana: 1986.

⁷ *ibid.*

There is considerable focus on the Ewe settlement of Notsie because it has one of the most developed oral traditions and history. Notsie became home for the Ewes, for it was there where they established their main settlement after a series of moves and sufferings. The Ewe settlement at Notsie was the largest and most organized of the Ewe settlements. Because of this organization, it continued to expand and prosper. Eventually the former, wise kings were succeeded by a tyrant known as Agokoli. His despotic rule led to the disintegration of the Kingdom.⁸ Throughout time, King Agokoli proved to be a harsh, cruel leader who enforced unbearable and impossible tasks amongst his people. One particular oral tradition that relates story of the infeasible tasks he put forth on his people describes the demand he placed on them to construct a rope out of mud for roofing. Another story tells of the King becoming suspicious of the elderly in the town. He believed the older persons were killing the people in the town for ritualistic purposes. As a result of his paranoia, he ordered the death of all the elders.⁹ As the crime rate of Notsie increased and people continued to mysteriously disappear, King Agokoli had the whole city walled in. The more the King persecuted and repressed the community, the more the people became defiant of his rule.

When the people of Notsie felt there was nowhere else to turn for freedom, they devised a plan of action to flee the Kingdom. The women were advised to empty both bath water and water used for household cleaning against the walls to soften the hardened

⁸ Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978.

⁹ Asamoah, Ansa K. The Ewe of South-East Ghana and Togo. Ghana Publishing Co. Tema, Ghana: 1986.

mud substance.¹⁰ When the walls came tumbling down, the people fled. Clever ways of avoiding detection were developed by the escapees. The people walked, danced and ran backwards in order to fool any enemy who attempted to follow. During the migration from Notsie, the Ewes encountered other attacks. In one such occurrence, the men were in battle and ran out of bullets. Not knowing what to do, the women quickly offered their waist beads to the men as a source of ammunition.¹¹ As a result, the Ewe won the battle. The date of the Ewe migration is uncertain. When they settled into new territories, they took on new surnames and clan names and rid themselves of any item which might be used to identify them with the Notsie exodus.¹²

¹⁰ Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978.

¹¹ "Eleventh Annual Nordu Festival." Dodome/Awuiasu: November 25, 1995.

¹² Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978.

Anlo Hogbetsotso and Nordu Festival

Two of the main occasions that commemorate the successful Ewe migration from Notsie are the Hogbetsotso Festival and the Nordu Festival. The Hogbetsotso Festival is celebrated amongst the Anlo Ewes in the southeastern part of the Volta Region in the town of Anloga. People arrive from different parts of Ghana, including those from Anlo, Dzodze, Wheta, Ave, Fenyi, Klikor and all others that compromise the Anlo traditional area. The occasion is meant to foster a sense of belonging and unity among the Anlos and the country as a whole. It also serves as a point of reunification for the people with a common heritage.¹³ The Nordu Festival occurs in the central part of the Volta Region and is celebrated by the towns of Avee, Atikpui, Hodzo, Hoe, Klave, Lume, Nyive, Shia, Tanyigbe, Tokokoe and Awuiasu / Dogblome. These towns mainly comprise the central area although some are located in the northern Volta Region areas. This is a time when they too, honor their ancestry and oneness as a community.

The Nordu Festival occurs during November, usually toward the end of the month. Each year the festival location changes sites amongst the eleven towns and villages. The Hogbetsotso is celebrated on the first Saturday of November every year. Both festivals honor the yam crop; hence these festivals are also known as the Yam

¹³ Kodzo-Vordoagu, J.G. "Anlo Hogbetsotso Festival," monograph. Domak Press Limited. Accra, Ghana: 1994.

Festival. The yam is an important part of the Ewe heritage, because during the time of the Notsie Kingdom, the Ewes main cultivation was yam, which is believed to have grown wild in Notsie.¹⁴ Ancestors of present day Ewes harvested the crop annually and each harvest season opened with a great Yam Festival. This event is still greatly anticipated. This is shown through a presentation which displays the local farmers' largest and most impressive yams, which are later auctioned to the crowd. The festivals herald the coming of new yams, and also give thanks to the gods for providing an abundant harvest.¹⁵

At midnight on the Friday before the Hogbetsotso Festival, a dramatization of the exodus from Notsie is performed. A group known as "Misego" dress in that appropriate traditional attire with beads and perform the re-enactment of the Ewe migration. They dramatize all the activities that took place on the memorable night at Notsie culminating in the breaking down of the wall.¹⁶ On the Saturday morning of both festival grand durbars, the crowds of people from all of the representative towns, villages, and additional areas of Ghana, come together at the festival ground. As the crowd gathers around the rectangular shaped grounds, the sounds of drumming and singing can be heard in the distance, as the festival procession draws nearer.

A huge, colorful entourage of individuals file into the festival grounds. Dancers, drummers, and other well-wishers usually take the lead and tail-end of the procession. Between the performers in the procession are the chiefs and queen mothers of the various Ewe areas. One could easily not know this, for one has to have a sharp, quick eye to be able to catch a glimpse of such individuals. There is an abundance of people surrounding

¹⁴ Mamattah, Charles M.K. The Ewes of West Africa. The Advent Press. Accra, Ghana: 1978

¹⁵ "Eleventh Annual Nordu Festival." Dodome/Awuiasu: November 25, 1995.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

the chiefs and queen mothers including their linguists, staff holders, sub-chiefs, escorting children, umbrella holders, and other various individuals. The higher the ranking of a chief, for example the Paramount Chief, the harder it is to see their appearance. A person is often clued into the presence of a chief or queen mother simply by their large, vibrantly colored state umbrella that is clearly visible from a distance. Underneath the state umbrella are lavishly dressed royalty who are adorned from head to toe in beautiful, traditional cloth and an abundance of beads. To a regular festival participant the occasion may just be regarded as a special event that is celebrated annually. As a visiting observer, one is overcome by the spectacular sight of the display of dignified members dressed in attire that is later discovered to hold both cultural value and meaning.

Ewe Ceremonial Regalia

According to Togbui Tamekloe IV, Head Left-Wing Chief of Anlo, festivals are a time in which royalty must, "dress to kill."¹⁷ Formal ceremonies are regarded as the special moment by which chiefs and queen mothers are more or less put on a pedestal for all to view, including spectators, participants, and fellow royalty. In this respect, the occasion is highly regarded and a tremendous is placed on appearance. It is the time in which these dignified individuals display their wealth, inheritance, and prestige. In traditional times, it showed that the individual had power and was working hard because they were able to acquire those objects that possessed a premium of wealth.¹⁸ Nowadays, the presentation of royal regalia can be viewed more for symbolic purposes. However, the majority of chiefs and queen mothers still hold much esteem on their appearance at such formal festivals. An individual of this social ranking is proud to represent his/her particular peoples of the Ewe community as well as to exhibit his/her acquired position. Of the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers who were interviewed, the overall consensus indicated that the most essential aspects of the Ewe royal regalia consists of the traditional cloth and, more importantly, the display of valuable beads.

¹⁷ information from interview by the author with Togbui Tamekloe IV on 20 November, 1995 in Accra.

¹⁸ information from interview by the author with Togbui Addo VIII on 28 November, 1995 in Klikor.

The eastern land that the Ewes occupied within Ghana, did not have gold like that of the central Ashanti region. Thus, beads took over as a precious object of adornment, particularly amongst the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers. The royal beads are invaluable possessions that are extremely coveted by their owner. They are properties that are passed down from generation to generation and inherited stool to stool. Traditionally speaking, the chief is supposed to acquire more of a stock of expensive beads than an ordinary person. Each time a bead seller came to town, the individual visited the chief before all others. This way, the chief had the first selection and could choose the most desired beads. The majority of the royal beads are rare and greatly aged, which places an even higher value on the bead. Ewe chiefs and queen mothers have obtained a vastly assorted bead collection through years of inheritance.

It remains a challenge to trace the paths from where these particular beads were derived and how they entered Ewe land. The most direct answer points to the path of exodus the Ewe made from Dahomey (Republic of Benin), to Togo, and then to Ghana. Throughout their years of constant travel and re-settlement, it could be assumed that the migrators were not able to bring along many of their possessions, except those that were small enough for one to carry. It is probable that many of the older beads came into the Volta Region in this manner. One must still delve beyond this likely source and address the derivations that historical research has suggested, along with the oral traditions that some of the Ewes themselves use as reasoning.

Collections of Ewe royal beads indicate that the majority of beads that are considered as "precious" are those that have been altered in some way or other from their natural form. In other words, the beads have undergone some type of bead making

process. Although a few of the valuable beads have remained in their natural form, including certain types of shells. At one time the beads were ground, shaped and cut, in order to create a particular desired form. Indeed, the most abundant kind of bead that underwent this type of production was the glass bead.

Origin of the Royal Beads

Glass beads were one of the main types of beads that were brought into Africa by foreign traders. The art of making glass beads was intended to imitate semiprecious stones. This particular kind of bead was first developed by the Ancient Egyptians and later brought to Africa around 200 B.C. by Arab traders and were given the name "trade" beads.¹⁹ The Trans Sahara Caravan Trade obtained glass beads from European countries, which were eventually brought down from Northern African countries into Western Africa. However, the glass bead did not make nearly as much of an emphasis in Africa, particularly West Africa, until it was re-introduced by the Europeans as an item of trade. Between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, explorers, traders, and missionaries carried the glass beads with them as gifts or objects of barter.²⁰ European beads were exchanged for gold, ivory, palm oil, spices, and slaves. Within an elaborate trading cycle, known as "The Triangular Trade System," beads along with rum, cloth, and guns were sent from Europe to Africa; slaves were taken to the New World from Africa; and items including tobacco, silver bullion, and gold bullion were sent from the New World to

¹⁹ Coles, Janet and Budwig, Robert. The Complete Book of Beads. Dorling Kindersley Ltd. London: 1990. p.16..

²⁰ Dubin, Lois Sherr. The History of Beads. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York: 1987. p.106

Europe.²¹ Using beads as an item of exchange soon proved to be extremely beneficial for the Europeans. The glass beads could be mass-produced with minimal economic and physical burden.

Based on the physical appearance of the glass beads that were observed during this research, the majority were of Venetian origin. This is not surprising, for the earliest glass bead making areas were in Venice, Holland, Moravia, and Bohemia.

Other European countries produced glass beads as well, including Spain, France, England, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, and the Baltic, but it was the Venetians who controlled the glassmaking industry up until the twentieth century.²² The beginnings of Venice's "booming" glass bead-industry is dated sometime between 1200 and 1400. Around 1300, the glass factories were re-located to the island of Murano, which was situated directly across the lagoon from Venice.²³ The intention behind this strategic placement, was to protect the city from any possible fires that could occur during the glassmaking process. In addition, it was a way by which the Venetian glassmakers could keep their special style of art form a secret. Interestingly, in order to maintain their success of monopoly, laws were established under the highest governing body of the Venetian Republic. These laws forbade any and all divulsons of glassmaking secrets.²⁴ Those who challenged this law were faced with the penalty of death!

An immense quantity and variety of glass beads were produced during the height of the Venetian glass bead-industry. Many of the valuable beads that have been acquired through Ewe royal inheritance were created during this time. One of the most notable beads worn by Ewe chiefs, and in some cases queen mothers, is the chevron bead. Also

²¹ *ibid.* p. 105.

²² *ibid.* p.107..

²³ *ibid.* p.107

²⁴ *ibid.*

known as the star, cane, and rosetta, it has attained the name, "the aristocrats of beads."²⁵ There is controversy about the age, place of origin of the earliest examples. Most of the chevron beads in Africa are of Venetian origin, although some are known to also be of Dutch manufacture.²⁶ To the Ewes, the bead is known as *aglobo*, or *kpeku*, meaning a big "stone."²⁷ It can be described as containing three solid, primary colors consisting of a deep, blue base with white stripes and brick-red lining at the ends (*Fig. 1*). The shape of the chevron is a distinct tubular rectangle. Interestingly, the symbolic motif of the bead is known to signify the vitality of fresh growth or "growing anew."²⁸ The refinement of the chevron also makes the bead treasured. A complex manufacturing process created the chevron, by rolling a narrow rod of softened white glass over a corrugated table, impressing deep "V" ridges into the length of the rod.²⁹ Over this white core, other layers of color were added, usually ending with blue, although some appear in green and even red. After the bead was cut and smoothed, the ends revealed a six-layered starburst pattern, a distinguishing feature at both ends.³⁰ As far back as one can remember, the Ewes have always directly associated the chevron with the royalty.³¹ Perhaps it is because of its bold, strong form with accompaniment of striking colors and complex way of production.

²⁵ author unknown. "The Bead Journal." vol. 1, no. 1. Summer 1974.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ information from interview by author with Mrs. Mary Tamekloe, wife of Togbui Tamekloe, 20 November 1995, in Accra.

²⁸ Antubam, Kofi. Ghana's Heritage of Culture. Koehler and Amelang. Leipzig: 1963. p. 107.

²⁹ Gordon, Albert F. and Kahan, Leonard. The Tribal Bead: A Handbook of African Trade Beads Tribal Arts Gallery, Inc. New York: 1976. p. 21.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ collective information through interviews by author. 10 November - 4 December 1995.

Another glass bead that is associated with royal regalia is most commonly known as the mosaic bead, or *millefiore* meaning in Italian, "a thousand flowers." It was re-invented by the Venetians by the 1800s, from original Roman methods. But, it is also suggested that it was first made by an ancient technique invented in western Asia during the first millennium B.C..³² In Ewe, the bead is known as *dzinyagba*. The bead is illuminated by an array of brilliant colors that form a fine, detailed pattern that resembles flowers, hence its name (*Fig II*). Like the chevron, this bead also entails great expertise and technical skill. The process involved laying many preformed, colored glass rods in rows so that the outer form of the bundle had an exposed pattern. The heating process softened and stretched the canes together, causing the design to get smaller.³³ In addition to being used as barter, large quantities of *millefiore* beads were used as ballast. When ships came to port, messengers would be sent to have first selection, which they later brought back to their paramount chiefs.³⁴

The semi-precious stone of agate, has expressed wealth and affluence amongst the African wearer. Perhaps it is for this aged, cultural belief that Ewe chiefs have been noted to wear large pieces of strung agate. Most of the agate beads within Africa are of Indian origin, or are imitations that were made in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by German manufacturers at Idar-Oberstein.³⁵ Agate that is owned by Ewe chiefs are usually of a red, red-brown hue. They can take on a variety of forms that are often well polished,

³² Dubin, Lois Sherr. The History of Beads. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York: 1987. p. 111.

³³ *ibid*.

³⁴ Gordon, Albert F. and Kahan, Leonard. The Tribal Bead: A Handbook of African Trade Beads. Tribal Arts Gallery, Inc. New York: 1976. p. 20.

³⁵ Dubin, Lois Sherr. The History of Beads. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York: 1987. p. 111.

causing them to be extremely shiny (*Fig III*). They are formed when mineral deposits accumulate over hundreds of years inside hollow pockets of porous volcanic rock. The range of colors, tones, and transparencies of the stone depends on the amount of iron that



[*Fig. I*]



[Fig. II]



[Fig. III]

is produced as the layers of volcanic rock build-up.³⁶

Amber was most likely the first gemlike material ever used for personal adornment.³⁷ Known to the Ewes by the same name, amber is deemed to hold significant worth. However, only bead researchers may know the true value behind the bead -- due to its scarcity. Amber comes from the fossilized sap of extinct trees that lived in temperate and subtropical forests during the Eocene period, sixty million to forty million years ago.³⁸ The appearance of amber ranges from a bright yellow to a warm honey hue, although some types can even exist in blacks, reds and browns. The shiny, round surface

³⁶ Gordon, Albert F. and Kahan, Leonard. The Tribal Bead: A Handbook of African Trade Beads. Tribal Arts Gallery, Inc. New York: 1976. p. 12.

³⁷ Dubin, Lois Sherr. The History of Beads. Harry N; Abrams, Inc. New York: 1987. p. 291.

³⁸ *ibid.*

possesses a subtle, translucent quality (*Fig. IV*). Perhaps one could suggest that because the amber bead is formed in an oval, it may symbolize what has long been culturally associated with the oval shape -- bearing an element of "cleansing power over life."³⁹ Its symbolism and meaning amongst the Ewe is not specifically determined, it is just known that the bead is regarded as a precious stone.

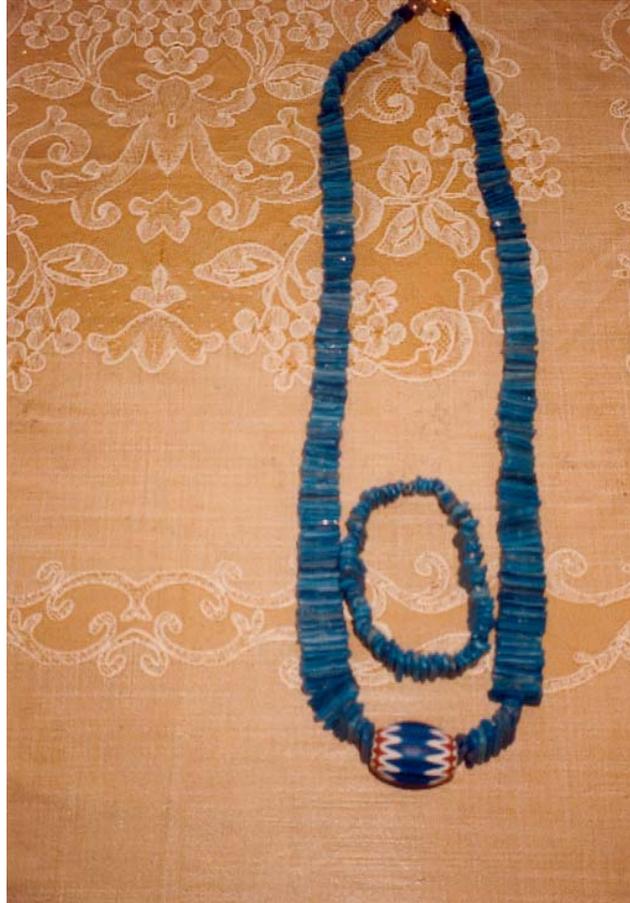
One of the distinct types of royal beads that were shown by both a chief and a queen mother was the series of beads known in Ewe as *blotsi*. The specific kinds of *blotsi* that were observed were the general *blotsi*, the *tomeblotsi*, and the *aflablotsi*.^{*} According to Ewe oral tradition, these beads were all believed to have come from the river. Their translucent material and cylindrical shape suggest that they are synonymous to the glass



[*Fig. IV*]
(3rd from left)

³⁹ Antubam, Kofi. Ghana's Heritage of Culture. Koehler and Amelang. Leipzig: 1963. p. 107.

* note: spellings may vary on the former listed bead names



[Fig. V]

bead. However, the owners of the valuable, aged beads say that they are found within the waters of the river and are later slightly ground in order to fit onto the string.⁴⁰ The *blotsi* bead is a light, blue color that is tubular in shape; it is more round and full in its "natural" state, and flatter and smaller when it has been ground into form (Fig V). *Tomeblotsi* resembles *blotsi*, with the exception that it is green in color (Fig VI). One of the variations within the *blotsi* bead grouping is the *aflablotsi*. This type of bead is cobalt blue in color and the form is said to look like bamboo, which is where it gets its name

⁴⁰ information from interview by author with Mama Sallah, 12 November 1995, and Mrs. Tamekloe 20 November 1995, in Accra.

afla, meaning "bamboo" (*Fig VII*). However, even though the *blotsi* and *tomeblotsi* are said to come from the river, the *aflablotsi* is said to be man-made from Italy.⁴¹

Ewe oral tradition has played a meaningful part in describing the origin of the *korsu*, also known as *akosu* bead.* Informants told the story of how the *akosu / korsu* was believed to be found. After the rain stopped, a person would look into the sky to see if a rainbow had formed. If one were visible, the person would immediately go to the rainbow in order to collect the little treasures of *akosu / korsu* beads that were said to be deposited at the end of the rainbow.⁴² The coloration and form of the bead consists of rounded and oblong yellow bodies, with a variation of thin red, blue, green, and black stripes (*Fig VIII*). Colors from the rainbow were believed to have colored the beads. Although Ewes are said to not possess a distinctive style of "eye bead," like the Akans, the *akosu / korsu*

⁴¹ information from interview by author with Mama Sallah, 12 November 1995, in Accra.

* both names and spellings were given by different informants. Although the spelling is different, pronunciation and description indicate that they are indeed the same bead.

⁴² information from interview by author with Mrs. Mary Tamekloe, 20 November 1995, and with Mama Sallah, 11 November 1995, in Accra.



[Fig. VI]



[Fig. VII]



[Fig. VIII]

bead reveals loose patterns of the "eye" symbol.⁴³ The eye bead was initially created to protect people from the dangers of evil.⁴⁴ Some sources say that the *akosu* / *korsu* beads still come from the rainbow, others say that this is merely a myth. An older woman in the village of *Anyoko* replied that nowadays, God has given only a select number of persons the foresight to design these beads.⁴⁵ Only these individuals, along with the rainbow, can produce such beads.

The coral beads, known as *esui*, are worn by Ewe royalty because they are considered to be one of the rarest and most expensive kinds of beads. It has been suggested that this is due to the amount of skill and risk that is involved when an expert diver goes to the bottom of the seabed in order to collect coral.⁴⁶ Coral was brought over from the Portuguese sometime during the 1500s. It was one of the items along with amber, and glass beads, that was exchanged for palm oil, gold and foodstuffs.⁴⁷ *Esui* is generally of a red or sometimes pink hue. The consistency of the coral sometimes depends on the area from which it is collected on the seaweed. The *esui* beads that adorn Ewe royalty are usually of a thicker, tubular form which are often slightly ground in order to be strung on a necklace (*Fig IX*). When coral is worn with the *blotsi* bead, the combination is believed to hold natural powers of protecting one from evil eyes.⁴⁸

⁴³ Gordon, Albert F. and Kahan, Leonard. The Tribal Bead: A Handbook of African Trade Beads. Tribal Arts Gallery, Inc. New York: 1976. p. 16.

⁴⁴ Erikson, Joan Mowat. The Universal Bead. W. W. Norton. New York: 1969. p. 19.

⁴⁵ information from interview by author with Aku Ahadzie, 28 November 1995, in Anyoko.

⁴⁶ Gazari, Joe. "Beads: A Living Tradition." Around Ghana. Christmas / New Year Bumper Issue. p. 6.

⁴⁷ Dubin, Lois Sherr. The History of Beads. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York: 1987. p. 140.

⁴⁸ information from interview by author with Mama Sallah, 19 November 1995, in Accra.



[Fig. IX]

Beads as a Means of Social Status

The styles and kinds of beads within private, royal bead collections possess a considerable amount of wealth and admiration. Beads that are owned by chiefs and queen mothers are primarily obtained through inheritance. In the past, the chiefs were able to select the best choice of beads the traders had to offer, due to their first choice in selection and their premium of wealth. As a result, present day chiefs and queen mothers have accumulated a unique array of beads that have both historical and monetary value. After learning about the vast assortment of beads that were acquired by Ewe royalty throughout the generations, one is curious to know the occasion in which these beads are displayed.

Due to the rarity and beauty of the royal beads, Ewe chiefs and queen mothers are usually more than willing to appear in their coveted belongings. This is a way for them to display their wealth and items of inheritance. As Togbui Kporku III expressed, "The whole idea of dressing up for an occasion these days is more of your own exhibition of economic power."⁴⁹ It is for this reason that Ewe chiefs and queen mothers choose to dress their best at highly visible functions, such as festivals and formal ceremonies (*Fig. X*)

Most royalty would agree that in present days, a chief or queen mother will dress for a formal festival according to personal choice. They may choose to adorn themselves with beads from their own collection, or they may ask for the assistance of relatives and older women. At festival times, relatives will lend their stock of beads in order to adorn the chief. Presents of beads are also occasionally given to the chief.

⁴⁹ information from interview by author with Togbui Kporku III, 18 November 1995, in Accra.



[Fig. X]



Sometimes the assortment of the acquired beads is too excessive, and the chief will become extremely selective.⁵⁰

There is an emphasis that is placed on the social status of a person of royalty. Although a chief or queen mother must dress as best as they can, one thing remains certain -- a chief must not upscale the dress of the Paramount Chief, or a chief of a higher rank. In the past, if a chief happened to overdress a higher standing chief, the result could get a person into serious trouble -- sometimes even death. However in present times, the whole idea is still there, but the consequence is not as serious. The gesture is regarded as more of an insult. This action may be regarded as trivial, but it remains to be taken seriously by many of the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers at formal ceremonies and festivals. One particular chief expressed how he gets nervous when he dresses for a durbar, because he is concerned about overdressing the Awarmifia, the War Chief, who stands above all other ranks.⁵¹ He continued to explain that luckily, the Awarmifia does not dress before he and the other chiefs are dressed. The chief feels that the Awarmifia waits to see how he dresses, and then dresses above him!

The majority of chiefs and queen mothers choose to wear two or three strands of beads around their neck or wrists. However, those individuals of royalty who are of a higher rank, must show their elevated status by displaying more strands of beads than the other chiefs and queen mothers. Based on the quantity, and types of beads that a person of royalty wears, the community is able to determine the importance of that individual. This concept has remained an integral part of the Ewe culture.

⁵⁰ information from interview by author with Togbui Tamekloe IV, 20 November 1995, in Accra.

⁵¹ information from interview by author, name withheld.

Conclusion

It is important to delve into the reasons behind why particular beads are used as items of royal regalia amongst the Ewe. Beads can project an understanding of a particular group's history and culture. They can also reveal a person's origin, travels, and social status. Such qualities are evident within the particular beads that are worn by Ewe chiefs and queen mothers. Through the use of the more rare, aged, and refined glass beads, Ewe royalty have expressed their position as important and dignified individuals.

An individual's social status is often portrayed through the use of beads at formal ceremonies and festivals. For example, the Ewe royalty place a significant emphasis on the display of their beads at both the Hogbetsotso and Nordu Festivals. This is a time in which the Ewe celebrate their migration from Notsie, which is held with much regard by the Ewe. As a result, the Ewe royalty place a great deal of emphasis on their appearance. This is because the Ewe chiefs and queen mothers are representing the pride, historical wealth, and cultural importance of the community.

By obtaining a combination of historical references, oral traditions, and observations, one is able to gain a partial understanding of the reasons behind the wearing of beads by the Ewe royalty. However, one will never completely comprehend the underlying meanings of why certain beads are displayed in particular circumstances. Often people can not associate a meaning behind the reasons for why certain things are believed, done, or acquired. Nevertheless, one must continue to investigate the unknown.

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