Canoe Decoration and Meaning Among the Fante of Cape Coast

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Canoe Decoration and Meaning

Among the Fante of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

Ghanaian culture is composed of an endless number of different aspects, all of which are intertwined to the extent that one can hardly decipher between them. During my studies at my home university, I came to discover that it is often impossible to separate African art and African religion, visual art and performing art, and even religion from politics in Africa.

Upon arriving in Ghana, I found this to be true and realized just how hard it is to separate these entities, in their complex system of overlap. I chose to study the fishing canoes because I wanted to study an artform that was tightly intertwined with other aspects of the culture including religion, politics, social activity, and economics. I knew that there must be something great behind the names and symbols adorning these boats. Little did I know, though, that all of these cultural aspects and the canoe decoration revolve around one central concept: relationships.
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**Abbreviations:**
- ISP- Independent Study Project
- MTFSS- Methods and Techniques of Field Study Seminar
- tr-translation

*Note: the Fante letter "Ø" will be typed "O" and the "£" will be typed "3."*
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to thank my Academic Advisor, Professor James Anquandah, for helping me reassess my research techniques and look at my findings in a different light. I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to Mr. Danquah for taking me as his daughter, giving me three weeks of his time, and being a wonderful translator and informant. I also want to extend gratitude to Mosi for answering all of my questions and for introducing me to an endless number of canoe owners and fishermen. I also want to thank my "brother," Jerry Asumang, for taking me as his sister and helping me with my research in Elmina.

I also want to extend my thanks to all of my informants. Without their help this paper would not exist. I would also like to thank the Lokko family for giving me a home to come home to in Accra. Finally, I want to thank all of my friends for listening to all my thoughts and frustrations throughout the semester, for always supporting me in my ISP endeavors, and of course, for making me laugh.
INTRODUCTION

Decoration is an integral part of Ghanaian culture. This decoration extends from facial scarification to elaborate hairstyles to exquisite clothing. It includes the names and designs which adorn tro-tros, taxis, and even storefronts. Decoration often involves symbolism- using a word, design, or image to represent an idea. Ghanaian decoration is rich in this symbolism from the adinkra symbols to the stools to the linguist staffs, which all employ symbols that represent proverbs.

Struck by these unique forms of symbolic decoration, I began to study the Akan proverbs and adinkra symbols, by reading such books as The Wit of the Akans by Nana Osee Yaw Bonsu and The Language of Adinkra Symbols by Alfred Kofi Quarcoo.

I chose to study the fishing canoes because they embody many different forms of representation. They are decorated with words and actual symbols, both often having elaborate meaning behind them. Knowing this topic is very broad and could merit a year of research, I chose to narrow my focus into one area: Cape Coast.

I went into this study knowing that I would not only be studying the boats themselves, but also all of the aspects of life which are tightly intertwined with this artform, including religion, economics, social activity, and even politics. I also knew that I would have to delve into the carving process itself, as it too is interwoven into an understanding of the decoration. All of these aspects must be looked at in order to find the answers to my central questions: Why are the boats decorated? What do all of the symbols mean? Why are the boats given names? What do the names mean? And, finally, why are names so important in the Fante, Akan, and even Ghanaian culture?
LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Dorma machine- machine similar to chain-saw, used to cut down trees and form the rough shape of the canoes.

Wawa- the type of tree/wood used for the fishing canoes.

Bush- term used by canoe carvers, canoe repairers, and fishermen to describe the deeply forested areas (usually in the Central and Northern parts of Ghana) which the wawa trees come from.

Axe- tool for chopping wood. Used by the canoe carvers in the bush to carve out the center section of the canoe. Flat edge.

Hoe- tool used by the canoe repairers to smooth inside and outside of canoe and to define the shape.
Different from axe in that the blade is rounded.

Iron shovel- tool used to shave and smooth the edges of wawa boards and surface of canoes.

Chisel- tool for chipping wood. Used with wooden mallet to carve out canoe names, designs, and symbols.

Knife- sharp tool used for cutting. Used in addition to chisel to carve names, designs, and symbols.

Fishmonger- women who sell fish, specifically the oven-smoked fish.

Petty trader- someone who sells goods on the street, at a stand or walking around carrying items on the head. For example: groundnuts, sugar, or ice water).

Asafo Company- a traditional military organization. Not used so much for military purposes now. Today the companies perform at funerals and festivals. There are seven such companies in Cape Coast today.

Nyame/Onyame- two of the many Akan names given to God.
METHODOLOGY

I have spent the past three and a half weeks gaining background knowledge and gathering information on my topic. I have gone about my research using most of the techniques I learned in MTFSS, in addition to using some of my usual research techniques.

This search for answers and explanation extends beyond the four week period of ISP. Two months ago I decided to study the fishing canoes. Nate Bowditch referred me to Christine Mullen-Kramer, an anthropologist at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. She, in turn, sent me to Mr. Harry Monney and Mr. Samuel Danquah, both of whom work at Cape Coast Castle. Mr. Danquah, a grade one conservation technician, became my central informant and also my translator. He introduced me to Mr. John Quansah (known by most as "Mosi"), a canoe repairer in Cape Coast. I spent the following three and a half weeks working closely with the two of them to gather the data I needed. They introduced me to everyone I interviewed in Cape Coast.

Before arriving in Cape Coast for ISP, I had met Jerry Asumang, a third-year engineering student at Cape Coast University, who was also willing to help me. He introduced me to all of the canoe repairers and canoe owners that I interviewed on the day I spent in Elmina. He also translated those interviews for me.

I collected most of my data from informal interviews. They were informal because most were neither planned nor formal. I used informal interviews almost by default, as most of my informants were very hard to find. On most days I would meet up with Mr. Danquah and Mosi and we would set off in search of canoe owners and repairers. I usually interviewed whoever was available at the time. Sometimes the men were in the middle of repairing nets, other times they were sitting and waiting before heading back out to sea to pull in the nets.

Mr. Danquah and Mosi would translate for me and I would record their translations in my notebook. I usually started each interview with the same question: "Why did you choose the name that you did?" After that, I had no pre-arranged questions as they usually depended on the owners' response to my first question. The interviews were not very focused, as there were a lot of distractions and much
outside input. I was able to get the information I needed, but at times the informal setting frustrated me and I had to wonder if I was missing out on important information.

The fishermen and canoe owners were usually sitting around and talking, and maybe working, as I approached. Mr. Danquah would explain my mission, I would greet everyone, and the interview would begin. The attitude of most of my informants was very relaxed, which set the tone for the interview. As there were often groups of men gathered around watching, listening, even giving input, there was a lot of background noise and laughter. In addition, most of these interviews were conducted on or near the beach, among the confusion of all the fishermen, boats, fishmongers, children, and petty traders. This only added to the degree of distraction.

I realize that some of the responses I got may have been altered, molded, downplayed, or even exaggerated because the interviewees were surrounded by their peers. Perhaps because the setting was so informal, they were not as serious in answering my questions as they could have been. If I was to continue my research, I think I would arrange for more private, formal interviews, so as to avoid the distraction and relaxed tone (33).

I also realize that some facts or ideas could have been altered because I am a woman. For most interviews, I was the only woman in the situation. I also realize that some details and even some raw facts may have been lost in the translation. If I had had more time I would have learned more Fante, as the language barrier was somewhat of a barrier in my research.

I did conduct one formal interview. I interviewed Mr. Monney, a conservation technician at Cape Coast Castle. We were alone in his office so there were no distractions. Also, we did not need a translator. I had a list of prepared questions and the interview flowed very well.

I also used other research techniques including participant and non-participant observations. From the height of Cape Coast Castle I was able to observe all of the activity on the beach without affecting the scene at all. Also, as I walked around Cape Coast every day I was constantly observing the boats, the fishermen coming in from the sea, the pulling in of the nets, the art of selling the fish, and the children's role in all of this activity. I also used participant observation as I walked around on the beach everyday (44). As I walked around, weaving in and out among the boats, the nets, and piles of fish, I was
trying to observe the activities on the beach from within. I spent much of my time gathering a long list of names and their translations (see Appendix D). I also tried to gain an understanding of the culture of Cape Coast by really trying to become immersed in it. I did a lot of walking around, talking to people and trying to get a feel of the atmosphere. All of these methods proved very successful in my research.

I was also able to observe the carving process, as two boats were brought down from the bush during my research. I observed for about thirty minutes, twice a day for 4 days, as the repairers carved, repaired, and decorated the boats.

As I stated before, I spent one day in Elmina. I went to cross-check some of my facts and see if some of my ideas held true there. I conducted a few informal interviews and collected a list of canoe names. I also observed the activity in the lagoon, where the boats come in, and also the activity in the town. The atmosphere there is very similar to that of Cape Coast and I saw no stark differences between the two. What I found in Elmina fit very well with all of the data I was collecting in Cape Coast. Consequently, I was tempted to assume a lot about Elmina from my studies in Cape Coast. I decided against that, though, as I do not think that one day in Elmina is substantial enough to back up those kinds of assumptions. I could only support such assumptions with one day of research, in comparison to at least fifteen days in Cape Coast. In my paper I speak of Cape Coast, the fishing culture, and canoe decoration there. The reader can keep in mind that Elmina is similar and that many of my conclusions may hold true there. I will stick with what I can support, though.

To accompany my research in Cape Coast I did some additional reading, as I do for most of my Art History papers. There is very little published research on canoe decoration, making my research somewhat unique. Consequently I have stepped back and tried to gain an understanding of Ghanaian culture as a whole, by reading such books as Ghana In Retrospect by Peter Sarpong and West African Traditional Religion by Kofi Asare Opoku. I have also tried to get an artistic perspective on the use of proverbs in Ghanaian artwork. For that purpose I read an article titled "The Verbal Art of Akan Linguist Staffs" by Doran Ross. I have also read many articles on African art in general, to remind me of the big picture: the canoes as part of the world of African art.
I have tried to gather as many perspectives as I possibly can, from academics, canoe repairers, Cape Coast residents, fishermen, Art Historians, and average Ghanaian citizens. In my analysis I have weighed all of these perspectives. I have tried to look for the common thread. I have attempted to see the canoes as tools, as that is how most of the people seem to see them, and also as art, as I think they can be seen. In forming my conclusions, I have tried to not get caught up in one particular vantage point. I realize, though, that I have Western biases and Western ways of looking at things. I have tried to counteract them with all that I have learned in Ghana and with my understanding of the way of life and perspective of the people in Cape Coast.

I take full responsibility for all of my conclusions as they are substantial and backed up by all the data which I have collected. I have tried to avoid generalizations, but I have also tried to step back and look at the whole of African art when appropriate. I have also made an effort to distinguish my terms from those used by my informants and my conclusions from the facts.

*Note: All of the quotes in this paper are in English, as they were translated from Fante to English during the interviews.*
CHAPTER ONE: The Context
Cape Coast and It's Fishing Culture

I have examined the fishing canoes both as tools and as art. I am coming from the perspective of Art History, looking at the canoes as an art form and looking at art as a representation of life, culture, and beliefs. It seems to me, though, that the people of Cape Coast see the canoes as tools by which they survive. As stated by Professor James Anquandah, "The art is peripheral" (55). I have taken both of these vantage points into account, and tried to find some commonality between the two.

First, though, one must consider the context in which these boats exist: Cape Coast, Ghana, where fishing is the mainstay of the people (66). Fishing not only provides the main source of protein in the people's diet, but also provides a large percentage of jobs. Fishing is the second largest occupation in Cape Coast, after government jobs (77). In addition to supporting the fishermen, fishing also yields an income for fishmongers and even unemployed men who may be paid to carry the nets for the fishermen (88).

The majority of my field research has taken place during the month of April. The peak fishing season is not until June. From what I observed, even out of season, most activity on and near the waterfront is related to fishing. The beach is crowded with boats that have just arrived and boats of fishermen preparing to leave. The beach is strewn with various kinds of fish and there are women and children selling fish, crabs, prawns, snails, and many other foods. There are children running around and playing in the water. There are groups of fishermen sorting the fish and repairing the nets and groups of canoe repairers fixing and decorating the boats. The beach seems to be one of the central places of activity, one of the hubs of Cape Coast social and economic life (see Appendix A for photos).

In the town of Cape Coast, back from the waterfront, the atmosphere is also dominated by fishing. From my observations, the majority of the vendors are selling some sort of fish. The area around Kotokraba Market and the streets of the town are strewn with women selling fish and with areas where the women smoke the fish in the clay ovens (99)(see Appendix A for photos). From what I have seen, life in Cape Coast is
centered around fishing. Apparently, though, the atmosphere changes greatly during the fishing season.

I am told that everyone is very busy \(^{10^{16}}\) and that there is not nearly as much free time as I have seen. Because more fish are caught and there are excess amounts of fish, there are many more jobs available. I have heard that everyone is very happy because there is more money in the community and people can afford food more easily \(^{11^{11}}\). The fish are much cheaper during the season. According to Mosi, out of season one will pay 1000 cedis for ten herring, but during the season one will pay 100 cedis for the same amount of fish \(^{12A^{12}}\). Fishing is such an integral part in the life of Cape Coast that one cannot even separate the two. It seems so deeply ingrained in the daily life that the people don’t even seem to stop and think about it.

**Historical Context**

We must also consider the historical context from which these canoes come. Unfortunately, though, I have not been able to find any research on the fishing canoes to explain the history of this artform. According to Mr. Monney, though, the Fante of Cape Coast have been fishing in this way since before the Cape Coast Castle was built in 1662 \(^{12B}\). The earliest artistic representation of such a canoe that I was able to find dates back to 1602 (see Appendix A). We can deduce that canoes similar to those used today, probably carved by a similar process and decorated in a similar way, have been around for at least 400 years. This partly explains why fishing and canoe decoration are so tightly interwoven with the other aspects of the Fante culture.

**The Fishermen as Their Own Community**

Fishing is so important in the Cape Coast community that it seems to have become its own entity. There is a large, yet close community of fishermen which acts as a microcosm of Ghanaian society. This community echoes most of the ways which life flows in different societies throughout Ghana.

There is a chief fisherman, know as the *Apofo hene*, who is accompanied by his court, just like a chief in most or all Ghanaian societies. He and the elders resolve
conflicts that arise among the fishermen. Only when these issues cannot be resolved by the chief and his court, they are sent outside the fishing community to the court system.

The *Apofo hene* also has a linguist. Similar to the linguist staff, the chief fishermen uses a small wooden paddle to summon people (see Appendix A for photo). If the chief needs to talk to someone, his linguist takes the paddle and shows it to the person. He or she must report to the chief or be arrested (13).

In addition to the institution of chieftaincy, the fishing community also echoes such divisions of society as the Asafo companies. The fishermen are grouped by companies (14) and often times the canoes are painted with colors that connote the specific companies (15). I believe the colors act as a language, speaking of the different groups among this particular community within a community.

**The Sea as Sacred**

As fishing is the lifeblood of Cape Coast, it seems logical that the sea would be regarded as sacred and the fishermen regarded as powerful. I believe this is the case.

In Akan culture the sea has been accorded its own god, Bosombo, who is one of the main divinities of Ghanaian traditional religion (16). There is no fishing on Tuesdays in his honor. According to Opoku, in Akan culture, "Nature is believed to be capable of having its own power and even spirits" (18). He also proposes that there is an African view of nature, "that nature [and aspects of it like the sea] has power which may be revered as well as used for man's benefit" (19). I believe that not fishing on Tuesdays is the Fante (even Akan) way of appeasing Bosombo, so that this power will be on their side. Similar to the power given to the god of the sea, a certain amount of power is also given to the fishermen.

The fishermen are responsible for catching the fish, the people's main staple and main source of income. This belief is well illustrated by the name of a particular canoe and the story that goes with it. I interviewed Mr. Owura Kwamena Awotwi, the owner of the boat "ODURO ODURO." He chose this name because fifty years ago when the boat was made, the children used to yell "Oduro Oduro men are coming!" as the boats were coming into shore (20). Sometimes they still yell this today. Oduro Oduro is the same as Ju-Ju, the magic practiced by fetish priests and priestesses. As Mr. Danquah explained
to me during this interview, it is like the children are saying that the men are coming with the medicine (21^21). They are associating the fish with medicine and the power of the fishermen with the power of Ju-Ju. We must not forget, though, that the canoe repairers are also an integral part of the fishing industry, and consequently of the Cape Coast community.

The canoe repairers are highly respected and well known (22^22). According to Mr. Danquah, Mosi is very popular and everyone knows him (23^23). His status in the community is well illustrated by his two nicknames. He is often called "Moses," which raises him in a sense to Biblical status. He is also called "Acomfo," which means "great man" (24^24). This power associated with the canoe repairers is similar to that connected with the fishermen. They are both responsible, in different ways, for feeding the community, in the literal and figurative sense.

This understanding of the overall atmosphere and arrangement of Cape Coast paves the way for an understanding of the meaning behind canoe decoration. In addition to this, one must also have insight into the carving process itself, as it is yet another step on the way to this understanding.
CHAPTER TWO: THE PROCESS

The canoes are usually made of wood from wawa trees, which are found mostly in the Brong Ahafo and Western regions of Ghana (25\textsuperscript{25}). The trees are cut down in the bush using the dorma machine and then cut in half. The center is then chopped into sections with an axe and then removed by the dorma machine (27\textsuperscript{26}) (see Appendix B for diagram). The carvers also use the machine to shape the exterior into the general shape of a canoe (28\textsuperscript{27}). Next a tractor drags the boat to the roadside and it is transported to the coast by an articulator truck (29\textsuperscript{28}).

It was at this point that I was able to observe the process, as two boats arrived from the bush during my time in the field. First, the inside of the boat is carved out even more and then smoothed using a hoe (see Appendix B for photos). The exterior and the top edge of the boat are then smoothed with an iron shovel. Next any areas where the wood is weak are cut out and replaced with strong wawa boards. At this point, for the bigger canoes, wawa boards are added (usually two levels) on top to increase the height of the boat. Once again the final surface of the boat is smoothed with the iron shovel. The decoration, including names, designs, and symbols are then added. Finally, the seats (planks of wawa board) are added and the whole boat is painted.

The whole process, from start to finish, can take from two to three weeks (30\textsuperscript{29}). The canoe itself usually costs between one million cedis (31\textsuperscript{30}) and six million cedis (32\textsuperscript{31}). The transportation of the boat; from the bush to the coast usually costs at least six hundred thousand cedis (33\textsuperscript{32}) and the work done by the repairers usually costs around two hundred thousand cedis (34\textsuperscript{33}). Since the costs involved with acquiring one of these boats are so high, many owners save their money for years before being able to buy one.

The size of the boat, and therefore the cost of the boat, depends on the size of the net to be used. Boats can be made bigger today because of the introduction of the dorma machine (35\textsuperscript{34}). There are six kinds of canoes: Adihen, Nyakyehen, Tangahen, Asusohen, Ahweana, and Dukuwa. Adihen is the largest and Dukuwa is the smallest (36\textsuperscript{35}). Today all of the large boats and some of the smaller ones use outboard motors. Each large boat
has paddles and a sail, though, for use close to shore, on windy days, or when the motor is broken (37^16). In addition to studying the large canoes, I was able to observe the making of a small model canoe.

Watching Mosi carve the model canoe allowed me some insight into how he sees the canoes. I realize that this process is small scale in comparison to the creation of the larger boat, but I was able to see the amount of thought and work that goes into the decoration (which I did not get to observe on the large boats). The fine details of the small boat almost exactly mimic those of the large canoes. As I watched Mosi, I could see that he was paying attention to the smallest details. He paid attention to his use of line and proportion. He was also aware of the texture and the overall form of the boat. He was scrutinizing over all of these aspects in such a methodical way that I can only imagine the intricacy of the process of decorating the large canoes. I can say, though, that I could see that Mosi was looking at the canoe as something more than just a tool.
CHAPTER THREE: THE DECORATION

All of the boats that I have seen are decorated in one way or another. They are decorated with names, Bible verses, proverbs, group names, mottoes, flags, abstract designs, and even various small symbols from animals to swords. If the people see the boats more as tools rather than art (rightly so, considering the integral role that fishing plays in their lives) then why, one must ask, are they decorated?

For the purposes of my research during this short period of time and for the purposes of finding the answer to this question, I have examined what I see to be the two central forms of representation on the canoes: the symbols and the words.

Symbols

When studying symbols and symbolism, we must be aware of the concepts of iconography and iconology. Iconography is concerned with the shape, the design, the "graph" of the actual image. Iconology is concerned with the meaning behind the image. As an Art Historian who believes that art represents the culture, I am more concerned with iconology. I see the symbols on the canoes as representing the life and culture of the Fante people.

I collected both a set of sketches of some of the symbols I saw and a list of symbols which Mosi gave me. In most of my interviews I tried to find out the meaning behind these symbols, but as far as I could find, there is little connection between the symbol and fishing and between the symbol and the name. The symbols do, though, seem to paint a vivid picture of the life of the people, past and present (see Appendix B for illustrations).

Certain symbols represent the history of Akan culture, others represent items that have been associated with Akan culture for a long time (38). These symbols include the stool and the cutlass. The stool symbolizes the Golden Stool of the Ashanti (39), another group of people in addition to the Fante, belonging to the larger Akan culture. It also represents the myth behind the Stool (40), which is one of the most well known myths in Ghana (41). In this instance the stool speaks of the mythological past of a group of people. The stool itself also embodies tremendous meaning in broader Akan
culture. All chiefs and queen mothers sit on them, making the stools symbolic of their roles and the power associated with them. The stools also represent the institution of chieftaincy. Anyone can own a stool, though, and most Ghanaian homes seem to have them. Therefore the symbol of the stool on the canoes also represents the stool as a common household object. The cutlass is yet another symbol that embodies the history of the people and that works as a symbol of cultural practices.

According to Mr. Danquah, the cutlass was used in the past by kings, to protect themselves, but it is now used in festivals. Today two cutlass' are carried in an x-like fashion, in front of the chief in a procession, as an expression of respect and honor. Consequently the cutlass symbol acts as a representation of the military history, of the honor associated with the chief, and also as a symbol of ceremonial role the cutlass plays in the culture today.

Many symbols represent modern-day Ghana and the various ways in which the life and culture are being influenced. Many of the boats have flags painted on them, including Ghana, U.S.A., Spain, and Canada. I asked the owner of "NTOBO ASE" (tr. "Patience") why he has the American flag painted on his boat. He responded that he likes the word, likes the place, and wishes that Ghana were more like the United States. I think this use of the flag represents Western influence and the seemingly national move to become more like the U.S. The owner of “LIFE IS WAR," Ato Kwamena, told me that he has the Spanish flag painted on his boat because he supports the Spanish football team, since he saw their performance in the World Cup a few years back. One boat also exhibited a symbol that was a cup, like one won in a football tournament. To me, this appearance of football in canoe decoration not only shows the influence of Western culture and European sports, but also the influence of modern technology, as most football games are either watched on television or heard on the radio.

There are other symbols on the canoes which represent divisions in the society of Cape Coast, such as Asafo companies, which are yet another aspect of the culture which is deeply embedded in the history. The number one company is always represented by a design of a snake beating a fish. The eagle always represents the number two company. According to Mr. Danquah, boats belonging to members of company number three, will exhibit a ship or canoe motif. Number four company is always represented by an elephant, number five by a clock number six by a sword or tiger, and
number seven by a whale (48⁴⁷). These symbols not only represent modern day divisions, but also represent the military past of Ghana, as Asafo companies were traditionally created for military purposes.

Finally, some of the symbols represent the life of the fishermen. Such symbols include the canoe, the whale, the "andrus"(49⁴⁸), and the paddle. Just as the stool is an object common to the Akan, these objects are common to the life of the fishermen and consequently to the life of people in fishing communities like Cape Coast. I see the representation of the paddle as symbolic of a tool common to the fishermen. I also see it as a symbol of the power of the fishing community, the power invested in the paddle as the equivalent of a linguist staff, and the power of the Apofo hene.

While I see all of these symbols as representative of the culture, I realize that it is not due to a conscious effort on the part of the people. The boats seem to be decorated for the sake of embellishment, and the people are naturally drawn to depict everyday objects and objects embedded in their history. Dissanayake states, "The presumably very ancient practice by humans of applying ornamental designs to their bodies can be interpreted... as a way of adding or imparting refinement to what is by nature plain and uncultivated, of imposing human civilizing order upon nature" (50⁴⁹). I think this holds true in the case of the fishing canoes, as the carvers and repairers take something plain and uncultivated and embellish it to a state of beauty and meaning. While the concept of embellishing and decorating something that is seen as a tool seems contradictory to me, it is not an issue in the eye of the Ghanaian. It seems like decoration is a natural instinct in the culture here and that there are no lines drawn between the realm of art and the rest of the world.

Words
There is great emphasis put on words in Akan culture. This premium put on vocabulary is best illustrated by the extensive use of proverbs in daily conversation and in artwork. Certain proverbs epitomize this power given to words:

"A wise man is admonished in proverbs not in pedestrian language." (51⁵⁰)
"If you do not use your vocabulary, you fall into a ditch." (52⁵¹)
"A man dies but his tongue does not rot." (53⁵²)
"A good mouth blesses itself." (54⁵³)
It seems that in Akan culture one's ability to use words well represents his/her intelligence and wit.

As I stated earlier, the proverbs are represented in numerous Akan artforms such as the linguist staffs, the stools, and the variety of adinkra symbols. This practice seems to extend far into the past of the Akan people. Professor James Anquandah states,

"The ancient Akan used their arts and crafts as a medium for expressing their deepest philosophical and religious thinking...proverbial speech, the philosopher's language, was used to express the most profound thoughts of the Akan. Since the 17th century pottery, proverbial pictographs are already developed, it is probable that their earliest antecedents may go back to the Middle Iron Age (AD 500-1500). They represent the traditional indigenous Akan equivalent of modern conventional writing." (5554)

Similarly, Robbins states (on a broad scale) that, "Africans often preserved their beliefs and values and conveyed them from generation to generation through their art" (5655). The importance of proverbs, and consequently words, in Akan culture, and the use of artwork as cultural and historical language, are both employed in the fishing canoes of Cape Coast. When we look more closely, though, we can see that there is even more depth to these names (5756).

While most canoe owners told me that the boats are named for identification purposes, I believe that the names give the canoe owners the chance to make a personal statement to the world, to the community, thereby establishing an expression of various types of relationships. I have collected photographs and a long list of canoe names (see Appendices C&D) and have divided the names into groups to support my argument.

Some of the canoe names speak of how the boat was acquired. As I stated earlier, the canoes cost extreme sums of money and many owners must work hard and save for years before being able to afford one. Many names express the hard work the waiting, and the pride associated with finally owning a boat. Such names include "ME AND YOU," "ADOM AUA KWA" (tr. "By the grace of God"), "AFTER ALL," and "LAMB OF GOD." "ME AND YOU," speaks of the joint effort and hard work of Kofi Park and his brother, that went into the acquisition of their boat (5857). This name not only represents their character as hard workers, but also represents the strong relationships between family members in Fante and Akan culture. Mr. Park said that he loves his brother and that everything comes down to family (5958).
To me the name "AFTER ALL" also connotes similar hard work and makes the boat sound like a hard earned prize, as does the name "LAMB OF GOD." Names like these send a strong message to the community: that the owner is self-disciplined and hardworking and that he or she may have gone through some hard times to get a canoe. This establishes the owner in relation to the rest of the community, as one of the diligent members, set apart from those who don't work hard and grouped together with those who do work hard. Such names also illustrate the owner's relationship to his or her boat, with the boat treated as a sort of trophy. Similarly, some boat names speak of the owner's relationship with a Higher Power.

The majority of canoes that I saw were decorated with names which praise God, express His power, or make some sort of statement about the owners' religious beliefs. Such names as "I BELIEVE IN GOD," "NYAME NDAE" (tr. "God never sleeps"), "GOD IS KING," "WONDERFUL JESUS," and "NYAME YIE" (tr. "God is good") have various functions. First and foremost, they express the owners' religious beliefs, their Christianity. This places them in relationship to the rest of the community, whether it is in the same group with other Christians or set apart from people with other religious beliefs. These names also say something about the owners' character, as being Christian may connote certain moral standards and practices. When one sees a canoe name such as "2nd Samuel 22:7," he or she can deduce that the owner is Christian and consequently know if the two will connect on religious issues. One can also deduce that the owner plays an honest, ethical role in the community (as these are some standards of Christianity). Within such a name, both the owner and the viewer may immediately be placed in relationship to one another and the owner can be placed in relationship to the rest of the community.

Names which praise God also seem to speak of the canoe owners' relationship with God, as subjects at the mercy of a Powerful Being. According to Opoku, "All the power in nature is subordinate to Onyame, from whom it is ultimately derived" (6059). Francis Atta, owner of "WONDERFUL JESUS," says that by praising God through this name, he and his fishermen will get what they want (6160). It seems that God is praised and feared at the same time and that is hoped that by good behavior and praise to God, one will be fortunate enough to have God's omnipotence on his or her side.
Other boats are named with statements on life in general or with statements directed at the community as a whole. Such names include "LIFE IS WAR," "SIKA ASEMM" (tr. "Money matters"), "HAND GO HAND COME," and "_BRA WOMMPER HO" (tr. "Life is not rushed"). These particular names seem to embody the owner's philosophy on life, expressing what he or she finds to be most important. This small amount of self expression describes the owner as a human being capable of some sort of relationship. Names such as "DZI WO FIE ASEMM" (tr. "Deal with your own trouble in your own house"), "DEN NAA DAMA" (tr. "Think of your future"), and "ASEMPA Y3 ETSIA" (tr. "If you say something good to someone do not prolong it") also speak of relationships. They illustrate almost a parent/child relationship between the owner and the community, with the owner telling the people what to do. In this instance the owner gets the opportunity to be the expert.

Some boats are named for the group of people that owns the boat, such as 'P.W.D.' (Public Works Department), "C.P. ROADMASTERS," "TEMA BOYS," and "DEEPER LIFE" (Deeper Life Ministries). These names speak of relationships, specifically that between the owner and the particular group. They place the owner as a part of the group and connect him or her and the other fishermen with the qualities, stereotypes, or beliefs associated with the group. Such names also speak of the relationship between the group and the rest of the community, as the title alone sets the members apart from the rest of the community. In contrast to these group names, other names are more personal.

Some of the names make a statement about the owner as an individual, such as "MASAKRAH" (tr. "I have changed") and "BONE B3N?" (tr. "What have I done?"). These names give the community insight into the canoe owner as a real person, rather than simply a canoe owner or fisherman, making the owner someone open to interaction or establishing some sort of relationship. Other names are statements directed at an individual, such as "AYE AFER" (tr. "You have shamed yourself"), "JEALOUS," and "3KAA METSE" (tr. "What you say I hear"). The owner of "LET THEM SAY," Nana Tobi, told me that he chose that name in response to people that were talking badly about him and his family. He wanted to let them know that he did not care (6261). Such names touch on human relationship in that they illustrate how the owner is related to another person, whether it is through jealousy, hearsay, or shame.
Finally, we must look at the canoe names in the manner that the canoe owners and fishermen do: as a means of identification. Most owners told me that the boats are named so that people can tell them apart or so that the owner of the boat can be found if the fishermen do something wrong. I see this idea of identification as also being about relationships. The owner becomes identified with the boat and the boat becomes identified with the owner.

All of these canoe names seem to either express relationships or express something of the owner's character, opening him/her up for relationships. Relationships and human interaction seem to be of utmost importance to the Akan. In the marketplace and on the streets people make the time to stop and talk and interact with one another. Greetings exchanged, even among strangers, are an integral part of daily life. Similar to the canoe names, extending a greeting seems to say something about a person's character. The responses to such greetings often speak of the relationship between the people interacting. Greetings in Twi (62) of ten evoke such responses as "Ya, egya," which means "Yes, I acknowledge you, father" and "Ya, nua" which means "Yes, I acknowledge you as my peer, my brother, or my sister."

The canoe names seem to serve a similar function as these responses. They seem to say "This is who I am and I am acknowledging my relationship to you in particular, you as a whole community, or you as my God."
CONCLUSION

In one of my many talks with my Academic Director, Olayemi Tinuoye, he mentioned his idea of the African philosophy on business (64⁶³). He proposes that business in Africa is not so much about profit, but more as a means of establishing relationships and being recognized as a dealer (65⁶⁴). I believe this concept extends into all aspects of Ghanaian culture, where life seems to revolve around relationships.

The decoration of the fishing canoes seems to be all about relationships -from the symbols' expression of the relationship between Ghana and the rest of the world to the to the expression of the relationship between the fishermen and their world. The names given to the boats express relationships between individuals and their families, individuals and their community, and individuals and their religion.

I believe that Mr. Tinuoye's proposal that business is about being recognized as a dealer, can also be extended into the realm of the fishing canoes. The names given to the canoes often seem to involve an expression or recognition of the owner as a real person with problems, triumphs, and enemies. The names also express the owner as a dealer in the community, a dealer in beliefs and advice.

The atmosphere and the culture of Cape Coast seem to be centered around the establishment of relationships and gaining recognition. The petty traders, fishmongers, and women in the markets spend their days interacting with people, constantly establishing new relationships and maintaining old ones. It seems that this interaction, rather than making money, is their priority. Down on the beach, human interaction also seems to be the dominant force behind all of the activity. This activity seems to revolve around relationships, like those between the fishermen and the fishmongers, the children and their peers, and the petty traders and their customers. This notion about relationships holds true even when we step back and look at the bigger picture.

When looking at the relationship between canoes and the culture, it is apparent that the canoes themselves become symbols. Often times the canoe owner's family becomes associated with the name of the boat, making the boat a symbol of the family, almost like a family crest. The boats also act as the owners' legacy, what the owner leaves behind after death. They act a symbols of who the owner was and what was important to him or her. The canoes also become symbolic tools, not so much for economic
gain, but tools for fostering and expressing relationships. The canoes ultimately become symbols of the history, culture, and life of the people. As Wolford states, "Throughout the continent [of Africa], the j) artists. . .all have this in common: they reveal old forms translated, old idioms transformed, and testify that African art is still a metaphor for life that speaks loudly and clearly for itself” (6665).
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APPENDIX A

Top: aerial view of beach from Cape Coast Castle
Bottom: view of beach from base of Cape Coast
Top: fishermen sorting fish
Bottom: fishermen repairing nets
Top: view of interior of canoes
Bottom: view of beach, facing Cape Coast Castle
Top: view of large fishing canoe on water
Bottom: view of the clay ovens used to smoke the fish
Top: the Apofo hene’s paddle, during the carving process
Bottom: the earliest image of a fishing canoe.
APPENDIX B
1 Top: copy of Mosi’s diagram depicting half of a wawa log, with center chopped into sections by axe, to be removed by dorma machine
2. Mosi’s aerial diagram of canoe shape
3. Golden Stools and cutlass symbols
4. Bottom: cup won in football symbol
Top: snake beating fish symbol
Center: snake killed by sword symbol
Bottom: eagle symbol
Top: paddle symbol
Bottom: Andrus symbol

List of other symbols
Ship
Canoe
Elephant
Watch/clock
Sword
Tiger
Whale
Cooking pots
Top: repairer carving out interior of boat with hoe
Bottom: raw exterior of boat before smoothing
Top: repairer smoothing out surface after fresh wood has been added to replace weak wood
Bottom: repairer surface of two boards, using hoe
Top: view of boat with left side repaired, right side unrepaired
Bottom: view of boat. Far side (left side in above picture) has been extended by two planks on top. Near side has been repaired, but not yet extended
Top: Beginning of process of carving model boat. Shaving down log with hoe.
Bottom: Mosi carving lines in surface before carving out center
Top: Mosi carving name and symbols into surface with knife.
Bottom: Mosi and Mr. Danquah painting small boat.
APPENDIX C
Top: “ME AND YOU”
Bottom: “TAND BY”
Top: “NTOBO ASE”
Bottom: “C. P. ROADMASTERS”
Top: “WATCH”
Bottom: “AKOSOMBO BOYS”
Top: “GOOD GOD” and “TAKE A LOOK”
Bottom: boat depicting Ghanaian flag
APPENDIX D- Canoe names: Cape Coast and Elmina

NAMES THAT ARE STATEMENTS ABOUT HOW BOAT WAS ACQUIRED:

-ME AND YOU
-ADOM AUA KWA.................BY THE GRACE OF GOD
-AFTER ALL
-LAMB OF GOD

NAMES THAT PRAISIE GOD, MAKE STATEMENT ABOUT RELIGION:

-NYAME NYE BOAFO.............GOD IS MY HELPER
-JESUS MBOFRA NY3NK0........ CHILDREN OF CHRIST
-WONDERFUL JESUS
-AYE EWIE NYAME...............GOD HAS FINISHED EVERYTHING
-NYAME YIEGOD IS GOOD
-EGYA PAYE........................GOOD FATHER IS GOOD
-GOD IS KING
-ADOM WOWIM....................THERE IS GRACE IN THE HIGH
-NYAME BEKYERE...............GOD WILL PROVIDE
-YESU EDI NKUNIM.............CHRIST HAS CONQUERED
-ENSO NYAME Y3.................GOD CAN DO IT JUST LIKE THAT
-NYAME NA QSE..................GOD SAVES
-GREAT GOD OF WONDERS
-YESU EDI NKONHM..............GOD HAS WON THE VICTORY
-JESUS
-OBONSAM AHWE ASE.............SATAN HAS FALLEN DOWN
-IN GOD WE TRUST
-3GYA FAKYE H3N...............GOD FORGIVE US
-NYAME WOTUMI..................GOD HAS POWER
-I BELIEVE IN GOD
-GOD'S TIME IS THE BEST
-IN JESUS' NAME
-OBAA'TAN PA NYAME............GOD IS THE CREATOR
-OY3 TSETSE BOTAN NYAME………….THE GREAT GOD OF ROCK/ WONDERS
-YESU ADINKONIM……………………..JESUS HAS WON
-NYAME NDAE…………………………. GOD NEVER SLEEPS
-ODZIMAFO JESUS……………………..JESUS IS MY REDEEMER
-NYAME B3 Y3…………………………..GOD WILL DO IT

NAMES THAT ARE STATEMENTS ABOUT LIFE OR STATEMENTS TO COMMUNITY:
-STAND BY
-T3T3KUAMUA…….IF YOU HELP SOMEONE HE HITS YOUR HEAD AGAINST A STICK
-KAKRA YEBEDZI NTSI… THE LITTLE WE EAT IS WHY WE ARE SUFFERING
-EBADAN EGYA………………. YOU LEAVE IT AND GO
-DEN NAA DAMA……………….. THINK OF YOUR FUTURE
-HAND GO HAND COME
-DZI WO FIE ASEMM…………DEAL WITH YOUR OWN TROUBLES IN YOUR OWN HOUSE
-HELP THE POOR
-OHIA MA ADWEN……………… POOR GIVES THINKING
-OBRA WOMMPER HO………….. LIFE IS NOT RUSHED
-SUUKWA…………………………CRY FOR LIFE
-SIKA ASEMM…………………….MONEY MATTERS
-YESUMPO WO JANFO EVEN CHRIST HAS ENEMIES
LIFE IS WAR
ONYAME EHUN.................. GOD SEES YOU
ASEMPA Y3 ETSIA.......... IF YOU SAY SOMETHING GOOD, DON'T PROLONG IT
ONTUA DA...................... IF YOUR TIME IS NOT UP, SLEEP
NHYIRA NKA BOAFO......... BLESSED SHOULD BE THE HELPER

NAMES THAT ARE STATEMENTS TO AN INDIVIDUAL OR ARE ABOUT OWNER:
-LET THEM SAY
-AYE AFER.................... YOU HAVE SHAMED YOURSELF
-SAY WHAT YOU LIKE
-SKIN PAIN
-JEALOUS
-MASAKRAH................... I HAVE CHANGED
-OY3 ABOTAR.................. BE PATIENT
-3KAA METSE............... WHAT YOU SAY I HEAR
-BONE B3N?.................... WHAT HAVE I DONE?
-ODO BEDZIDZI............. LOVER COME AND EAT

NAMES OF GROUPS OF PEOPLE:
-AKOSOMBO BOYS
-P.W.D.
-DEEPER LIFE
-C.P. ROADMASTERS
-POTOLICO
-TEMA BOYS

NAMES THAT ARE VIRTUES OR CONCEPTS:
-OPPORTUNITY
-NTOBO ASE......... PATIENCE
Canoe repairer is the title given to those who work on the canoes once they are brought to the coast. Canoe carver is the title given to those who work on the canoes in the bush. At the same time, though, I use the term "carving" occasionally to refer to the work done by the repairers.

There seemed to be a lot of sitting around, waiting and socializing among the fishermen. I was told that this is due to the fact that the fishing season is not yet at its peak and there isn't as much work to do.

This relaxed tone may have been the best approach, though, as I was able to get input from many people at once. Perhaps the fishermen and canoe owners would have felt uncomfortable in a formal setting. I caught them in their element, where they seemed most comfortable. Perhaps this was to my benefit.

I say participant observation because I believe that my being there changed the situation, if only slightly.

Fishing in Cape Coast seems to be divided by the sexes. The men do the fishing and the carving. The women smoke the fish and sell them. Occasionally women will own boats.

One's company is determined by which company his or her father belonged or belongs to.

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According to Danquah, 15 Apr 96, the majority of people in Cape Coast are Christians, yet traditional religion is still ingrained in the culture.
The process is now much quicker, since the introduction of the dorma machine in the last year or two.

The Fante are part of a larger culture, the Akan culture, which also includes the Ashanti.

The myth tells the story of the origins of the Ashanti nation. According to Cole and Ross,

"One Friday a great gathering was held at Kumasi, and there Anokye brought down from the sky, with darkness and thunder, and in a thick cloud of white dust, a wooden stool adorned with gold, which floated to earth and alighted gently on Osei Tutu's knees. This stool, Anokye announced, contained the spirit of the whole Ashanti nation, and all its strength and bravery depended on the safety of the stool. To emphasize this he caused Osei Tutu and every distinguished chief and queen mother present to give him a clipping from their nails and from their hair; all these were mixed into a paste with 'medicine' and smeared on the stool, and the remainder was drunk by the contributors as a Sacramental drink." (The Arts of Ghana, p.6. UCLA: 1977)
According to Mosi (J. Quansah), 23 Apr 96, the andrus is a bird found on (?) or near the sea. Possibly similar to the seagull.

Dissanayake, E. Date unknown: p. 97.


Ibid

Ibid


I must clarify that most boats are known by one specific name, which can be a single word, a proverb, a statement or a saying. In addition to a boat's name, there are often one or two additional statements, proverbs, or sayings which seem to be seen as equally important as the name by the owners and fishermen. In my analysis I have categorized the boats by what seem to be the names by which they are known. I use the term "names," though, to refer to any of the verbal decoration on the boats as there seems to be no particular rationale behind choosing which words become the "name." I am looking at verbal decoration as a whole.

Park,K. 15 Apr 96.

Ibid.

Opoku, K. Date unknown: p. 65.

Atta, F. 17 Apr 96.

Tobi, N. 13 Apr 96

Twi is an Akan dialect, which is spoken by the Ashanti.

Tinuoye, O. 2 May 96.