1779

LEADERSHIP ART AT BEKWAI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS (AFRICAN ART)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

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(O. Osei-Agyeman)
Supervisor

P R E F A C E

"Leadership Art at Bekwai" has won its place among the great art traditions of Ashanti and Ghana. This is evidenced through its widespread use in a number of cultural activities. But to the best of the writer's knowledge, no attempt seems to have so far been made to consider this art in terms of design and style. Among the people of Bekwai, the stool paraphernalia have varied functions discussed in the body of the text.

The present author is aware that several writers have come out with ideas in various books which in varied ways have contributed to the success of this thesis. Eva Meyerowitz in her book, Akan Traditions of Origin has provided a historical account of the origin of the Oyoko clan, which the royals of Bekwai form part. This account seems to be confirmed by R.S. Rattray in Ashanti Law and Constitution.

Writers such as H. Cole and D. Ross have extensively written on the arts of Ghana but since their accounts are mostly generalised and do not specifically talk about Bekwai royal art, the approach of these authors differ in several respects from that of the present author.

The work of Bishop P.K. Sarpong on the Sacred Stools of the Akan has contributed greatly to this thesis. In that book, Sarpong makes a comprehensive study on stools in the Akan community whereby he explains the various types of patterns and designs of stools. Their symbolic associations are also set out.

A mention must also be made of African Art and Leadership by D. Fraser and H. Cole; and "A Panoply of Ghana" by A.A.Y. Kyerematen which have been the two most useful references to this thesis. Kyerematen treats chiefly regalia in various areas in Ghana. In the same book, he classifies state swords into six detailed groups which I sparingly lifted as a footnote to buttress a point in my thesis. He goes further to explain the two lines

of sword bearers bordering the approach to the chief when sitting in state or the line of sword bearers when the chief is borne aloft in a palanquin. This was also a useful information to my work. Fraser and Cole on the other hand have made extensive analytical studies of patterns and designs on gold plated objects among the dignitories of the Baule ethnic group of the Ivory Coast.

In another work, that is, in her article, "The Akan Symbolism," which appeared in the November 1979, Vol. XIII No.1 of African Arts, Peggy Appiah wrote about the meanings of the symbols found on Akan art objects. However, her article dwelt very much on the Ashanti symbolism generally without showing a particular reference to Bekwai symbolism.

In addition to the works mentioned above, Charles Appeah's M.A. thesis entitled "The Image of Denkyira Reflected Through its State Regalia" has contributed a great deal to this work. He appears to be the one who has most comprehensively written on Denkyira regalia, having made use of information on Ashanti royal artifacts. In his view, there have not been many documents on Denkyira regalia so a lot of inferences were drawn from Ashanti regal art objects which have received extensive documentation. Appeah resorted to this because he knew that some of the Ashanti regalia take their roots from Denkyira as mentioned in the succeeding chapters of the present work. However, the section earmarked for stools in Appeah's work did not receive elaborate appreciation as accorded to stools in the present author's thesis, even though, in Appeah's work he made an excellent discussion on the "Bankam Dwa" (Precious Beads Stool) of Denkyira.

As alleged by Oti-Akenten, the late Asantehene (king of Ashanti) Prempeh II once said that the system of Ashanti administration was changing and so it could not accept old practices to be binding on the Ashanti people in modern times.1

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1. A. Oti-Akenten; An unpublished B.A. thesis in the College of Art Library, UST, Kumasi, 1971 page 28.

This quotation may apply to some of the changes that are envisaged in the indigenous political system. When this takes place then it is inevitable that chiefly art will no longer enjoy the attention given it in the past. In a similar vein, two other references on chieftaincy which have been useful in this thesis are K. Arhin's publication "The Role of Chieftaincy in Modern Ghana" and K.A. Busia's book The Position of a Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti.

The unpublished B.A. thesis of Ashford Oti-Akenten, entitled "State Swords in the Ashanti Chieftaincy" makes a successful attempt to discuss the Ashanti state swords, the type of wood used for the hilt, the various parts of the swords such as the hilt and the blade, designs on the swords and so forth. The work however, seems to show certain flaws because interpretation and appraisal are mostly based on generalisations on Akan swords, without giving a detailed artistic analysis of a specific sword.

Most of the works which serve as the background knowledge for this thesis consider the historical, and socio-political aspects of Ashanti in general and occasionally mention her material culture; and as hinted in the first paragraph of this preface, no one seems to have specifically considered Bekwai royal artifacts with respect to design and style. It has also been observed that no attempt seems to have been made towards the compilation of a comprehensive account about the regalia of Bekwai.

Therefore, one of the reasons for writing this thesis is to discuss some of these points which the former writers have failed to emphasise. Moreover, since the present government has shown interest in the field of education and culture, this thesis, "Leadership Art at Bekwai" may help the citizens of Ghana to uphold their cultural heritage.

Another reason for writing this thesis is to make an artistic appraisal of some of the most essential regalia of the chief of Bekwai, and examine

the role, importance, and influence of the artifacts on the traditional political system of the town.

As mentioned later in the abstract and the first chapter, under the "Purpose of the Study" it has been the aim of the writer that, ultimately, this work would broaden people's knowledge about the royal art of Bekwai. It may also help the citizens of the country to appreciate the craftsmanship of the court artist. Moreover, through the information given in this thesis, the people of Bekwai may be able to find a sense of pride in their own past which the lack of previous documentation has denied them of.

This thesis regards the Bekwai regalia as beautiful works of art which cannot be treated in isolation and have therefore been linked with chieftaincy and its affiliated culture.

The successful completion of this thesis has been due to some favourable facilities which include my citizenship of the town of Bekwai. Owing to this advantage, some of the regalia which might be out of reach to strangers were made available to me. Moreover, the intercessions made on my behalf by my uncle (Mr. Boadi) and by my friend (Mr. Sarfo-Takyi) before the Bekwai chief, during all my interviews with him, contributed a great deal to my acquisition of information from the ruler. This kind of assistance obtained from the two companions, saved me from some of the usual customary rites which I had to go through before consulting the chief. Furthermore, the writer's grandfather, an ex-court official of Bekwai, helped in providing oral traditions from which meaningful deductions were made.

In spite of these facilities, I encountered a number of problems during my interviews with the court officials of Bekwai. That is, owing to their fear of punishment from the royal ancestors, the officials were very reluctant to release information. In some cases, their answers to

my questions were so deviating and irrelevant that they seemed to prove that those informants did not want further inquiries into the people's social institutions.

In addition, the officials unwillingness to release information resulted in frequent postponement of interviews. This attitude of the court officials caused an unnecessary delay in the completion of this thesis, and my frequent but usually unfruitful travels to Bekwai raised the cost of production of this work.

This thesis has been produced from field research. This formed the primary materials of the thesis which included interviews with the Bekwai Paramount chief, Nana Osei Kwadwo II and his elders, court officials, personal observations, and information from manuscripts. However , this original research combines with information from other secondary sources. Regarding the collection of data from secondary sources, the author made use of both published and unpublished books, articles and monographs of the topic. These were available at the various libraries such as those of the following: University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, University of Ghana,Accra, British Council,Kumasi, Cultural Centre, Kumasi, National Archives,Kumasi and so forth. The writer also depended on cartographic evidence from maps some of which were obtained from the Bekwai Town and Country Planning Office.

Furthermore, the writer has inserted in this work, a number of illustrations, mainly in the form of plates, figures and maps, to throw more light on to the text.

In this thesis the word Bekwai refers to a single town. But when I say Bekwai traditional area or Bekwai paramountcy I mean a district headed by the Bekwai town.

U.S.T. KUMASI
March, 1989.

A. Appiah-Asare

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Osei-Agyeman, my supervisor and a lecturer of College of Art, U.S.T., Kumasi, for his assistance and guidance. My sincere thanks go to Mr. B.G.S. Bull, a senior lecturer and Head of the M.A. (African Art) Section of the Department of Design and General Art Studies, College of Art, U.S.T., Kumasi, who gave me directions and technical advice and also supplied me with valuable books relevant to the topic. I also express a deep sense of gratitude to the Bekwai chief, Nana Osei Kwadwo II and his courtofficials especially, the Krontihene (assistant chief), Nana Asiedu Okofo, for their massive contribution during the field survey.

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ABREVIATIONS

1	G.P.C.	Ghana Publishing Corporation
2	O.U.P.	Oxford University Press
3	L.A.	Local Authority
4	S.D.A.	Seventh-Day Adventist
5	U.C.L.A.	University of California, Los Angeles

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A B S T R A C T

This theis shows the study of regalia of Bekwai with the view to:

(a) identifying and describing some of the important artifacts;

(b) examing their socio-political functions, importance, significance and influence on Bekwai citizens and their culture; and

(c) investigating the changes and development that have occurred in the regalia and whether there has been an introduction of foreign elements into the artifacts or not.

To realise these aims, and for the success of the entire work, the thesis is organised into five chapters, excluding the preface and other preambles. The first chapter is mainly devoted to the ethnographic study of Bekwai. The next three identify and describe the regalia, show their significance and consider their aesthetic quality and the socio-political functions of the artifacts, while the last chapter concerns discussion designed to show the importance and influence of the regalia, some findings, suggestions, recommendations and a conclusion.

The research reveals that the paramount regalia include stools, state swords, palanquins, lingust staffs, necklaces, bracelets, rings and footwear. The insignia are central to the Bekwai culture, and while some of them foster unity, proclaim the grandeur of the chief and influence socio-political gatherings, others lend credence and authority to the messages of the chiefs' envoys and linguists. For example lingust staffs and courier swords.

As noticed in the actual text, the foundation of Bekwai is associated with a lengendary snake which is symbolished and added to the regalia. Moreover, the ancestors are represented by black stools which allegedly assist the people to contact these spirits for supernatural assistance.

The thesis further, shows that the regalia are aesthetically pleasing.

The artifacts are marked by stylistic variations and developments, an introduction of foreign materials into the fabrication and by gifts from Britain.

It is however hoped that this thesis, will be beneficial to the people of Bekwai and of Ghana as a whole.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an attempt is made mainly to explain the title of this thesis, and to show in a nut-shell the historical, social, political, economic, religious, and the artistic backgrounds of Bekwai.

Purpose of the Study

This research intends to broaden the knowledge of the present author and readers of this thesis about Bekwai regalia and their related usages and customs, provide an educational information to facilitate and promote the teaching of the Ghanaian culture, and to advise on the preservation of the artifacts. Moreover, the work seeks to encourage harmonious relationships between Ghanaian chiefs and their subjects and advise that the money wasted in litigations between the chiefs and their subjects be utilised on development projects. For instance building of clinics, schools and community centres.

Importance of the Study

Since this work seeks to deepen knowledge of an aspect of Ghanaian culture to encourage harmony and social interaction, as mentioned above, it may rather be superfluous to state that the thesis is greatly important to the entire nation.

Scope

This work is mainly limited to the description, functions, discussions and suggestions about some of the most important regalia of the Bekwai town. The thesis is therefore limited to the regal stools, chairs, state swords, linguist staffs, umbrellas, palanquins, certain drums and some official adornments of the chief. However, where and when necessary, references have been made to some other artifacts of the Bekwai palace and other areas of Africa.

Hypothesis

That the regalia of Bekwai are cultural artifacts which are not widely known but entail a great deal of useful and interesting information that must be studied and documented for the promotion of knowledge and artistic contribution of Bekwai to Asante and Akan culture with the attendant historical background.

Methodology

As shown in the preface, information for the writing of this thesis was collected from field research and reading from books with relevant materials. In addition, maps, figures, tables and plates were employed to throw more light to the text. Since this work involves a lot of oral traditions, a careful analysis and interpretation of data were adopted through observation and personal deductions to find out what was relevant to this work. These were organised into a comprehensive work. Thus, apart from the preface, abstract, acknowledgement and conclusion, the thesis is divided into five chapters as shown in the abstract.

About the Title

The theme "Leadership Art at Bekwai", used for this thesis, refers to chieftaincy art at Bekwai. The chieftaincy art of this place is also referred to as the chiefs regalia. These include such emblems of royalty as the state swords, linguist staffs and in fact all the stool paraphernelia. Regalia could mean the distinctive symbols of insignia of any society or order or rank, hence clothes and fancy trappings are also included.

However, the word 'regalia', used in this thesis, refers to the entire range of ornaments with which the Bekwai chief and his entourage adorn themselves whenever they appear on state occasions. Thus regalia are the most visible aspects of all the art forms which are designed to publicly proclaim the status, power and grandeur of the chief. In course of time I will use such words as paraphernalia and insignia to mean the same thing.

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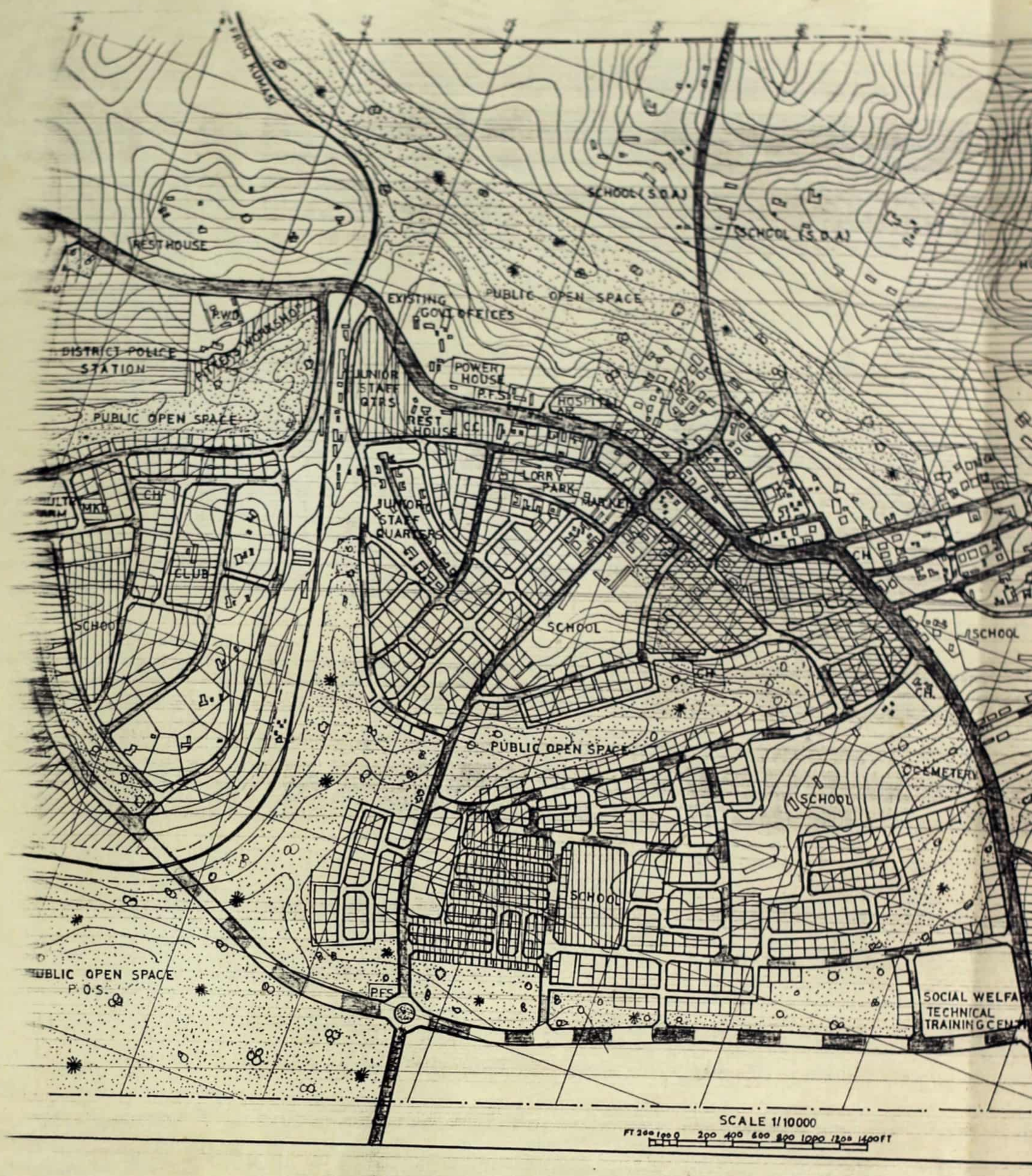
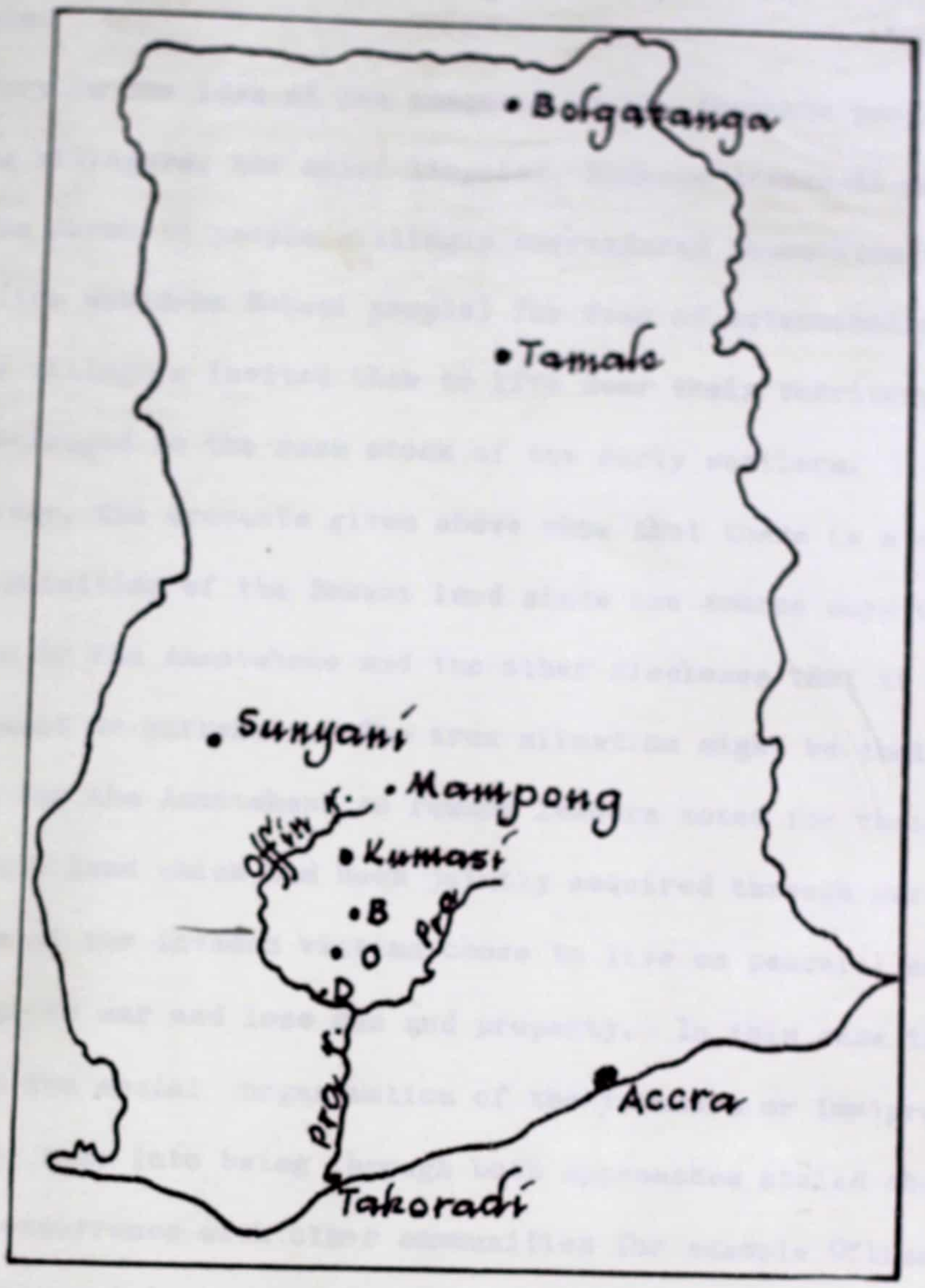


BEKWAI MASTER PLAN — PROGRAMME

MAP 1 BEKWAI TOWNSHIP



MAP 2 THE LOCATION OF BEKWAI ON THE GHANA MAP

KEY

• B Bekwai

• O Obuasi

• D Dunkwa

River

groups which left Juaben before the succeeding immigration of the present Bekwai people.

Contrary to the idea of the conquest of the Akrokoto people and the neighbouring villagers, the chief linguist, Kwabena Asante II gave information that the Akrokoto people willingly surrendered themselves to the immigrants (the would-be Bekwai people) for fear of extermination, and the neighbouring villagers invited them to live near their territory since the immigrants belonged to the same stock of the early settlers.

Obviously, the accounts given above show that there is a controversy about the acquisition of the Bekwai land since one source says the land was given to them by the Asantehene and the other discloses that it was acquired through conquest or surrender. The true situation might be that; it was the practice for the Asantehene to reward leaders noted for their loyalty and valour with land which had been jointly acquired through war or intimidation. Some of the invaded victims chose to live on peaceful co-existence rather than go to war and lose men and property. In this case they were absorbed into the social organisation of the invaders or immigrants. Bekwai state may have come into being through both approaches stated above which was a common occurrence with other communities for example Ofinso State.

Social and Political Background

In this section we shall discuss the social system of the people of Bekwai. The said people are an ethnic group belonging to the matrilineal Akan[3] race. The Bekwais are Twi speaking people. The Twi language is a branch of the Kwa sub-family of the Western Sudanic linguistic stock. The essence of providing this background discussion about the Bekwai society is to give an insight to the social institution which explains why certain

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3 The word Akan represents a culturally homogeneous group of people who share the same culture, matrilineal descent group, and speak the same language. There are slight variations, vis-a-vis dialects but invariably an Akan is understood by another Akan.

art objects in conjuction with Bekwai traditional area are produced.

The cultural life at Bekwai is one of the most essential points in conformity with the cultural systems of the other Akan ethnic group.

The town consists of abrono (Wards) whose inhabitants are the scattered segments of the seven Akan abusua (clans). This includes the Oyoko, Bretuo, Aduana, Asakyiri, Agona, Asona and Ekoona. However, among the other Akan peoples there are now eight principal groups although differences in names are discernible with respect to locality. The eighth group is the Asenee clan.

According to the present Bekwai chief, Nana Osei Kwadwo II, apart from the royal Oyoko lineage, which came from Juaben to settle on the present Bekwai land, the other lineages came later to join the Bekwai paramountcy. The subsequent lineages came from areas such as Denkyira and Akim when the people felt they had to migrate and find a peaceful place after their conquest by the Ashanti.

The Oyoko's form the members of the Bekwai Adehyee (royals), who have the right to political leadership of the town and her traditional area.

The people of Bekwai were known to be war-like and this encouraged the development of a firm and clear military and political administration in the paramountcy. The chief holds the highest religious and political power in the Bekwai traditional area but does not exercise autocratic powers. The power of the chief is limited by a council of chiefs without the consent of which no important decision concerning war and peace could be made. The council of chiefs comprises the heads of lineages, known as abrempon (big men) who form the immediate subordinate group of the chief. They are heads of the wings which form the military organisations of the town. That is each wing is organised on a military basis, taking one part of the field during a war in defence of the paramountcy. For instance,

the Adontonhene (chief of the vanguard), Benkumhene (chief of the left wing), Nifahene (chief of the right wing), Twafohene (head of the scouts) and Kyidomhene (head of the rear guard) take the various positions respectively during a war-fare.

The socio-political system of Bekwai traditional area is a reflection of the entire Ashanti socio-political system. That is the Bekwai paramount chief who governs the Bekwai community is also under the Asantehene, in the Ashanti political system, whose authority is dispensed through to the level of the extended family. As argued by Apter:

> This political structure reveals a logic and a degree of centralisation that is capable of providing a stable government with the consent of the governed. For example, to be eligible for a village chief, the person is selected only from among the members of the royal family. But the final choice, from the number of eligible persons, requires the approval of the constituent commoner groups in the community. A poor selection could be deposed by popular demand. [4]

The political system marked by logic and a degree of centralisation which Apter observes is true to the Bekwai traditional area.

Economic Background

The people of Bekwai according to the population record [5] of 1984, number about 41,086. Apart from its traditional supremacy in the Amansie district, Bekwai is the most accessible town in that province as it was in the pre-colonial days (before 1901). The well established slave trade route which linked the coast with the interior of the country passed through Bekwai which became one of the resting places and night stops along the route.

The people claim - and this is substantiated by oral histories from

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4 P.A. Twumasi; Medical Systems in Ghana, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1975, Page 15-16.

5 "1984 Population Census of Ghana, Preliminary Report", Central Bureau of Statistics, Accra, Ghana, December, 1984, Page 69.

other towns - to be the most peaceful town along the trade route within the Ashanti state by the Europeans. The Europeans were given a warm welcome in this town. This necessitated their settlement in the area. It is generally agreed that Bekwai was the first Ashanti town to accept the whiteman's religion and education. In 1903, the Kumasi-Takoradi railway line passed through Bekwai thereby strengthening its nodal position and thus began the town's preeminence as a place of centrality. (Map 3).

The nodal position of Bekwai is said to explain its commercial activities with the early Westerners. It is commonly known that by the year 1919 the first school had been built and this was followed by other services such as large commercial houses, for example, U.A.C., Agreemont, SCOA and so forth. This opened Bekwai up to other people and soon developed into a large town with modern buildings as early as 1920, when most parts of Ashanti were still remote.

Today, owing to Western influence, that is opening the district to Western Education, Christianity, and modern economic activities the town has attracted a large population of foreigners and has led to acculturation.

According to Dickson:

> Bekwai attracted a large population because it occupied central and nodal positions. As the town grew, the trade boomed and the European firms increased in number. From the town people went to all parts of the district everyday, thus allowing easy flow of people, goods and ideas between Bekwai and neighbouring villages. 6

Because of its large size, the prosperity and importance, the town was provided with amenities like, police station, hospital, post office and telephone in the early part of 1920. Dennis Austin commenting on the prosperity and expansion of the town, had this to state: "Bekwai became prosperous, expanding and confident."7

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6 K.B. Dickson, A Historical Geography of Ghana, Cambridge University Press, London, 1969, Page 279.

7 D. Austin, Politics in Ghana, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, Page 17.

For being the first Ashanti town to accept the whiteman's religion, (mentioned on page 9) and education, Bekwai became the leading educational centre in the district. This is illustrated in tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1a shows that while there were as many as 3 primary schools at Bekwai by 1930, there was only one each in eight other towns in the district. We see from Table 1b that before 1940, all the three middle schools in the district were at Bekwai. Table 2 shows the number of pupils in the Bekwai elementary schools by 1948. It is evident from the table that the total number of Bekwai pupils was almost the same as that of the rest of the district.

Education in the region has experienced a fast rate of growth especially concerning elementary schools, both in the town and the surrounding villages. Almost all the villages in the district have primary and middle schools.

At the moment, there are five second cycle institutions in the district (refer to Table 3). Two of such schools are at Bekwai. These are the SDA Secondary School and the College of Accountancy. The former was established by the Seventh-Day Adventist Mission in 1953 together with a teacher training college. In 1958 the Ghana Government took over these institutions and the training was phased out in 1974. However, the buildings of the training college were annexed to those of the secondary school. The college of accountancy mentioned above, is a private institution which was established in 1960. The institution mainly offers business subjects and turns out an average of a hundred scholars a year. This shows the impact of higher education at Bekwai. In spite of this, there are not enough job opportunities in the town and this has led to the migration of the distressed youth to the cities to seek employment.

With all these facilities already provided in the town, Bekwai was chosen as the district headquarters of Amansie by the colonial govern-

ment in December, 1922. Prior to this date, the Amansie district was administered by the Obuasi district council.[8]

After attaining this administrative status, Bekwai attracted administrative officers and many other types of workers. The influx of officers both foreign and national led to an increase in population as has been pointed out on page 9.

In spite of this large increase in population in the Amansie district, there has not been a proportionate increase in social amenities in the province.

It has been sadly observed that post-independence governments have not made any major moves towards the socio-economic development of the area of study. A popular view point put forward to explain this apparent neglect of the area by some of the governments of Ghana, especially Nkrumah's government is that Bekwai is a notable anti-C.P.P. (Conventional People's Party) stronghold. This was the first ruling party in the country and it was observed that the people of Bekwai were against it. In view of this if the governments which favoured C.P.P. ideologies came into power they felt the citizens of Bekwai were against them, so they never endeavoured to bring any development project to the area.

There is also lack of job opportunities in the district which has led to the migration of the people to urban centres in search of lucrative jobs. The problems affecting the development of the town are therefore likely to magnify the socio-economic problems of the district.

The inhabitants of Bekwai are mainly farmers with more than one-fifth of the male population engaged in cocoa production. By 1948, 22.1% of the male adult population was engaged in the cultivation of cocoa in the district.[9] Other crops grown in the district include coffee, oil palm,

8 Ghana Archives, Kumasi, Adm 465/6 page 160.

9 1948 Population Census (Report on the Census of Population, Gold Coast 1948), 1950, P.21 published on behalf of the Government of Gold Coast by the Crown Agents for the Colonies, 4 Millbank, London, 1950.

plantain, cassava, cocoyam, maize, vegetable and so on. With the exception of cash crop cultivators, most of the farmers practise subsistence agriculture with little left for the local market. This has inevitably affected the standard of living of the people.

Relgious Background

The people of Bekwai, being part of the Akan race of Ghana, more or less shared the same belief in the existence of Onyankopon (the Omnipotent God), long before the advent of the foreign religion such as Christianity and Mohammedanism. The religious life of Bekwai is one of the most essential points in conformity with the religious systems of the other West African people. However, there are local differences with regard to language and environment.

Religion is central to the life of the Bekwai as it pertains to other West African societies. In this regard, Kwabena Amponsah has rightly stated: "To the West African, religion is a way of life, it occupies the whole person and the whole of his life." 10 This therefore makes it extremely difficult to draw a dividing line between what is religious and what is non-religious in the life of people.

An important factor in the religion of the Bekwais is the veneration of the ancestors. The black stools of departed chiefs or lineage heads serve as the main objects of ancestor veneration at Bekwai, as practised in other Akan areas. The ancestors occupy an important place in the Bekwai religious life. They are believed to be the custodians of the community spiritual laws and customs. For effective implementation of societal norms some of the customs are hedged about by taboos which are supposed to be adhered to by every member of the society. Negligence is believed to be punished by a series of misfortunes.

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10 K. Amponsah; Topics on West African Traditional Religion, Vol.1, Adwinsa Publications (Ghana) Ltd., Accra, 1977, Page 13.

On festive days the chief performs an act of communion with the ancestors through rituals connected with the blackened stools. These festivals call for the periodic sharing of meals with ancestors, in exchange for spiritual grace through these rites.

At Bekwai, they participate in observance of the Adae (special festive days) as the period when the people interact with ancestors as an act of communion. There are two types of Adae, Akwasidae and Awukudae. Within a forty-two day period Akwasidae is celebrated twice and Awukudae is observed once. This amounts to nine Akwasidae festive celebrations in the Akan calendar year. The Adae follows a certain cycle which is illustrated below, starting from Akwasidae

15 days after Akwasidae	is Fodwo
4 days after Fodwo	is Afidam
5 days after Afidam	is Awukudae
9 days after Awukudae	is Fofie
4 days after Fofie	is Kwabena
4 days after Kwabena	is Dapaa
1 day after Dapaa	is Akwasidae

The Adae which falls on Sunday called Akwasidae is the biggest occasion, which assumed the form of a public ritual festival, although the most salient part of the festival takes place in the stool-house where unauthorised persons are not allowed to enter.

In the morning of the Akwasidae, the chief stool carrier leads the ruler and some of the court officials, such as the linguist, into the stool-room where the ruler himself offers libations - "the specialised method of communicating with the ancestors." [11] On such an occasion, the

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11 A. Opoku; West African Traditional Religion, F.E.P. International Private Ltd., Jorong, Singapore, 1978, Page 37.

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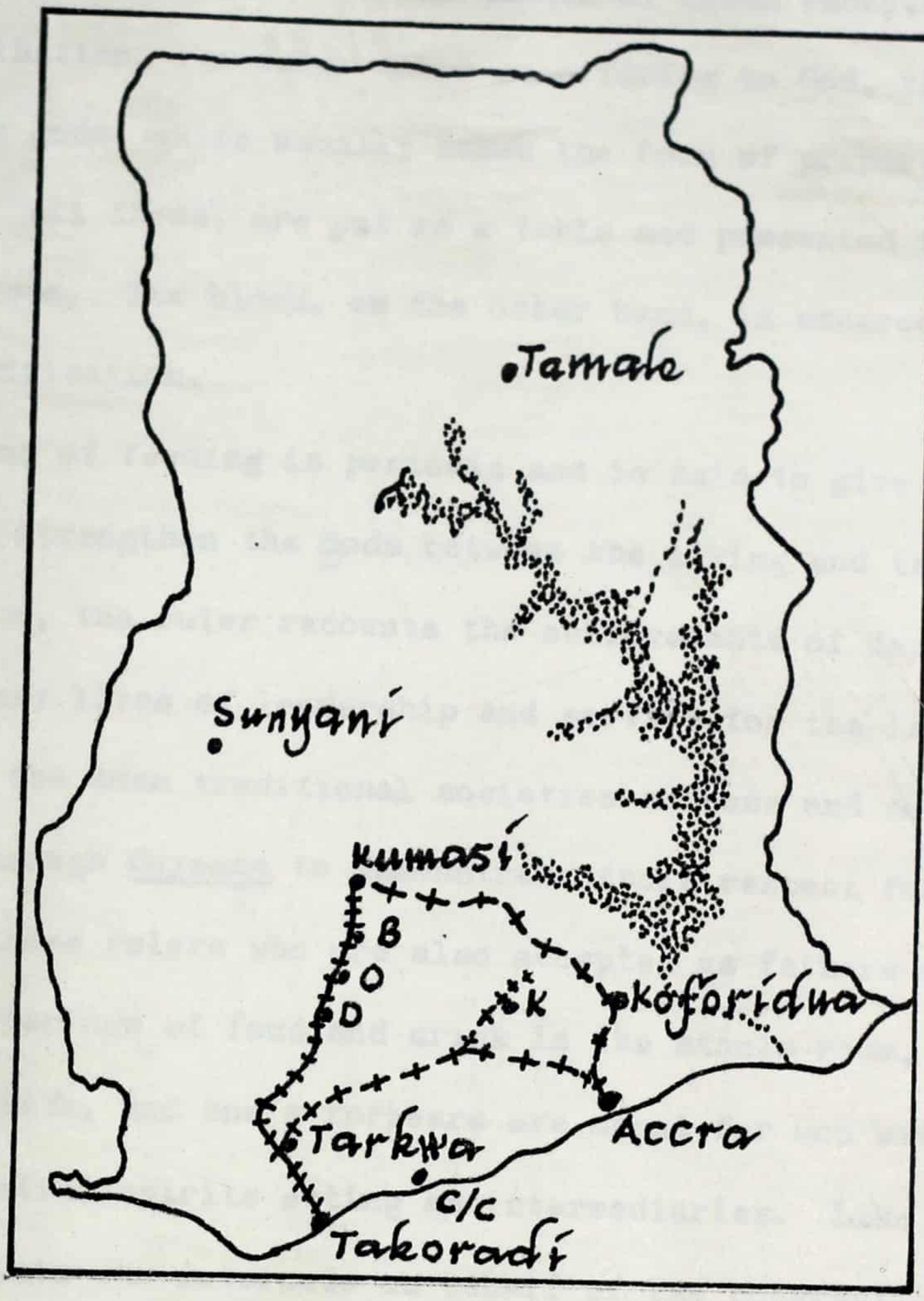

MAP 3 GHANA MAP SHOWING THE RAILWAY LINE FROM KUMASI TO TAKORADI PASSING THROUGH BEKWAI

KEY

• B Bekwai

• O Obuasi

• D Dunkwa

• K Kade

++++ Railway line from Kumasi to Takoradi

+++ Railway line joining other places of the country

chief prays to God, asking the ancestors and the benevolent spirits, to intercede and give assistance in all manner of human endeavours. In addition to the libation, the ruler makes an offering to God, the ancestors and the lesser gods, which usually takes the form of prepared meals, water, and schnapps. All these, are put on a table and presented to the spirits in the stool room. The blood, on the other hand, is smeared on the black stools for purification.

This kind of feeding is periodic and is said to give vitality to the stools and strengthen the gods between the living and the dead. On such an occasion, the ruler recounts the achievements of departed chiefs who led exemplary lives of leadership and service for the living to emulate.

Just as the Akan traditional societies address and communicate with their chiefs through Okyeame to demonstrate their respect for the office and status of these rulers who are also accepted as fathers and spiritual leaders, the offerings of food and drink in the stools room, the address to departed, chiefs, and one's forbears are meant for God with the dead chiefs and ancestral spirits acting as intermediaries. Like the Christian communion of saints who intercede on behalf of the congreation.

This kind of communion with the benevolent spirits, as I have noticed in my research, has persisted to this day and therefore the people of Bekwai have largely clung to their religious beliefs in spite of the many years of contact with Christianity and Islam. However, the interaction between the indigenous and foreign religions has rather resulted in syncretism which Williamson thus describes: most Christians (ie. African Christians), it is suggested live on two levels...."[12]

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12 Williamson, Akan Religion and Christian Faith, quoted in O. Osei-Agyeman "Art, Supernatural forces and superstition in Kwahu Culture", Kumasi; An unpublished M.A. Thesis, U.S.T. Library, 1977, Page XXVI.

Art Background

The Bekwai folk have created excellent works of art in wood, clay and metal. They have also produced art works in such materials as leather and threads. The art of weaving at Bekwai as found in other areas in Ashanti is generally known to have caught on after the adoption of clothing. This called for the employment of an indigenous technique of weaving, by the use of the treadle-looms. From observation, the Bekwai's greatest achievement is the chiefly regalia which exist in large numbers. The regalia reflect the economic, socio -political and religious status of the chief.

The art of Bekwai usually employs a considerable degree of abstraction from reality, but the degree varies from object to object. Most of the art works appear to have been associated with the ancestor veneration, an institution deeply rooted in African tradition.

TABLE 1: PRIMARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN AMANSIE BETWEEN 1900 - 1950

Table 1a Primary Schools

School	Year
Bekwai Methodist	1919
Bekwai Presbyterian	1920
Essuonwin Methodist	1921
Essuonwin Catholic	1925
Bontefufuo Methodist	1925
Agroyesum L/A	1925
Kokofu Presbyterian	1926
Bekwai Anglican	1929
Dompa Catholic	1930
Dominase Methodist	1930
Pakyi No.1 Presbyterian	1930
Apewu Presbyterian	

Table 1b Middle Schools

School	Year
Bekwai Methodist	1922
Bekwai Anglican	1929
Bekwai Catholic	1937
Essuonwin Methodist	1942
Kokofu (United) Methodist	1944
Abodom Methodist	1948
Dominase Methodist	1948

Source: District Education Office, Bekwai

TABLE 2: BEKWAI TOWN AND ITS NATIVE AUTHORITY

Elementary Schools Enrolment

Area	Total Population	Standard III - IV	Standard VII
Bekwai Native Authority	26,660	671	435
Bekwai Town	4,477	598	382

Source: Gold Coast Census Report, 1940
The Crown Agents for the Colonies, London, 1950

TABLE 3: SECOND CYCLE INSTITUTIONS IN AMANSIE DISTRICT

Name of Institution	Town	Year Established
S.D.A. Secondary School	Bekwai	1953
S.D.A. Training College	Bekwai	1953
College of Accountancy	Bekwai	1960
Technical Training College	Amoafo	1964
Oppong Memorial Secondary School	Kokofu	1978
Mansoman Secondary School	Manso-Atwedee	1979

Source: Compiled from personal interview with heads of the institutions

CHAPTER TWO

STOOLS, CHAIRS AND STATE SWORDS

This chapter has been devoted to a discussion of three of the most significant objectsfound among the regalia of Bekwai political leadership namely: stools, chairs and state swords because of their close association of the office of chiefship as symbols of his status and authority.

Stools

Most of the stools found at the palace of Bekwai, as seen in other parts of Ghana are monoxylous, rectangular and range in height from forty-five to fifty-five centimetres.

However, one of the stools found at the palace seems to have unique characteristics. This stool is about twice the height of the ordinary "osese dwa" or "akonwa fufuo" (white stool) and it is patterned after the nyansapo (reef or wisdom knot) motif (plate 1). This type of stool is used by the Bekwai paramount chief when he enters the stool house.

The Bekwai royal stools are the most important and symbolically the most complex of all the regalia of the town. They are elaborately carved and decorated and they possess repousse' metal plating as shown in plate 2. The regal stools observed during my research are categorised into two main types according to their purpose: they are ceremonial stools and chairs.

The ceremonial stools which form the first category of Bekwai political seats include the undermentioned types of 'asese nnwa' which are the kontonkrowi (rainbow) nyansapo (wisdom knot) mmarima (man's) stools and so forth. But for the sake of this thesis I will concentrate on the kontonkrowi stool (Plate 3).

This stool design, according to my informants was formerly the prerogative of the Asantehene to use to symbolise the Asantehene as a rain-

PLATE 1 "NYANSA DWA" (WISDOM KNOT STOOL)

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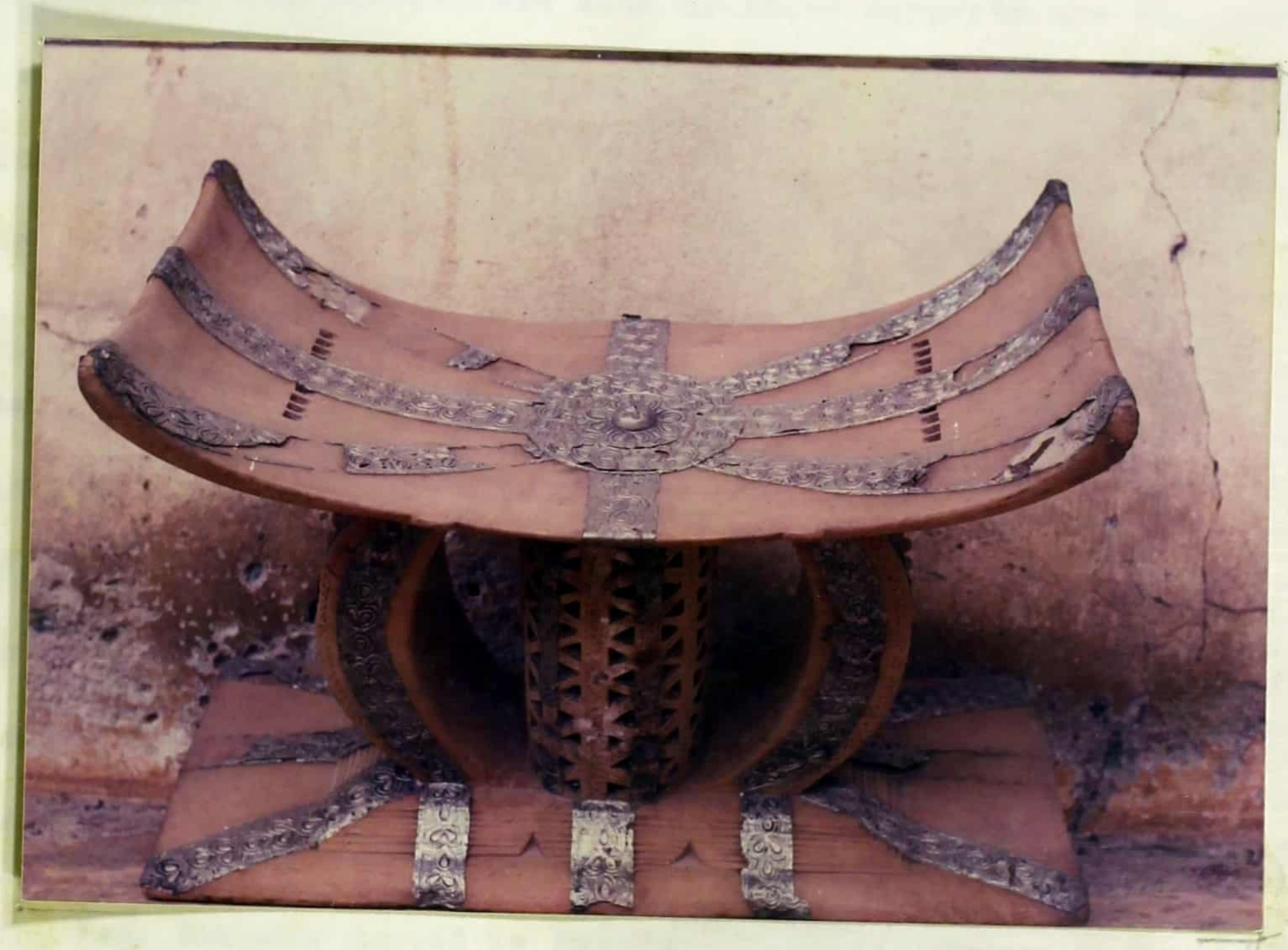

PLATE 2 CEREMONIAL STOOL: DECORATED WITH REPOUSSÉ METAL PLATING

bow over his people. This was confirmed by Sarpong [13] in 1967, and previously by Rattray in his book 'Religion and Art in Ashanti'. But now, according to observation even ordinary people use it.

The kontonkrowi stool like other stools, is composed of three parts - the seat, the support and the stepped base. This stool, however, is more highly decorated than those belonging to the ordinary members of the Bekwai society. The seat which is concave at the top is decorated with repousse' silver bands radiating from a circular design at the centre, and a highly stylised form of the Bekwai Oman (traditional area) symbol of chieftaincy. This symbol of chieftaincy at Bekwai is the 'Amansie Pramire' (Amansie cobra) discussed on page 101. The Amansie pramire motif dominates the centre of the seat and seems to serve the function of a heraldic charm and protective device (Fig. 1).

The next feature found on the same stool is the supporting with two curved, column which is rainbow additional supports found between the seat and the base. At the extreme ends of these supports are delicate designs, of varying depths of relief. In the open work is found the central column which is elaborately designed with holes that are triangular in shape (Fig. 2).

The base of the Kontonkrowi stool of Bekwai paramountcy is simply treated. In addition, the undersurface of the base is furnished with decorative repousse' silver bands or strips. I was surprised at the underneath design of this stool and unhesitantly asked the chief stool carrier, Nana Osom Ababio, why the underpart which is supposed to touch the ground is decorated. The man's answer was in conformity with the information read from an article on Ashanti stools by S.F. Patton in "African Arts" magazine.

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13 P.K. Sarpong quoted in Patton S.F. "The Stool and Ashanti Chieftaincy", African Arts, UCLA, 1979, Vol. XIII No. 1, Page 75.

PLATE 3 KONTONKROWI (RAINBOW) STOOL

PLATE 4A "NYANSAPO ASIPIM"
CHAIR

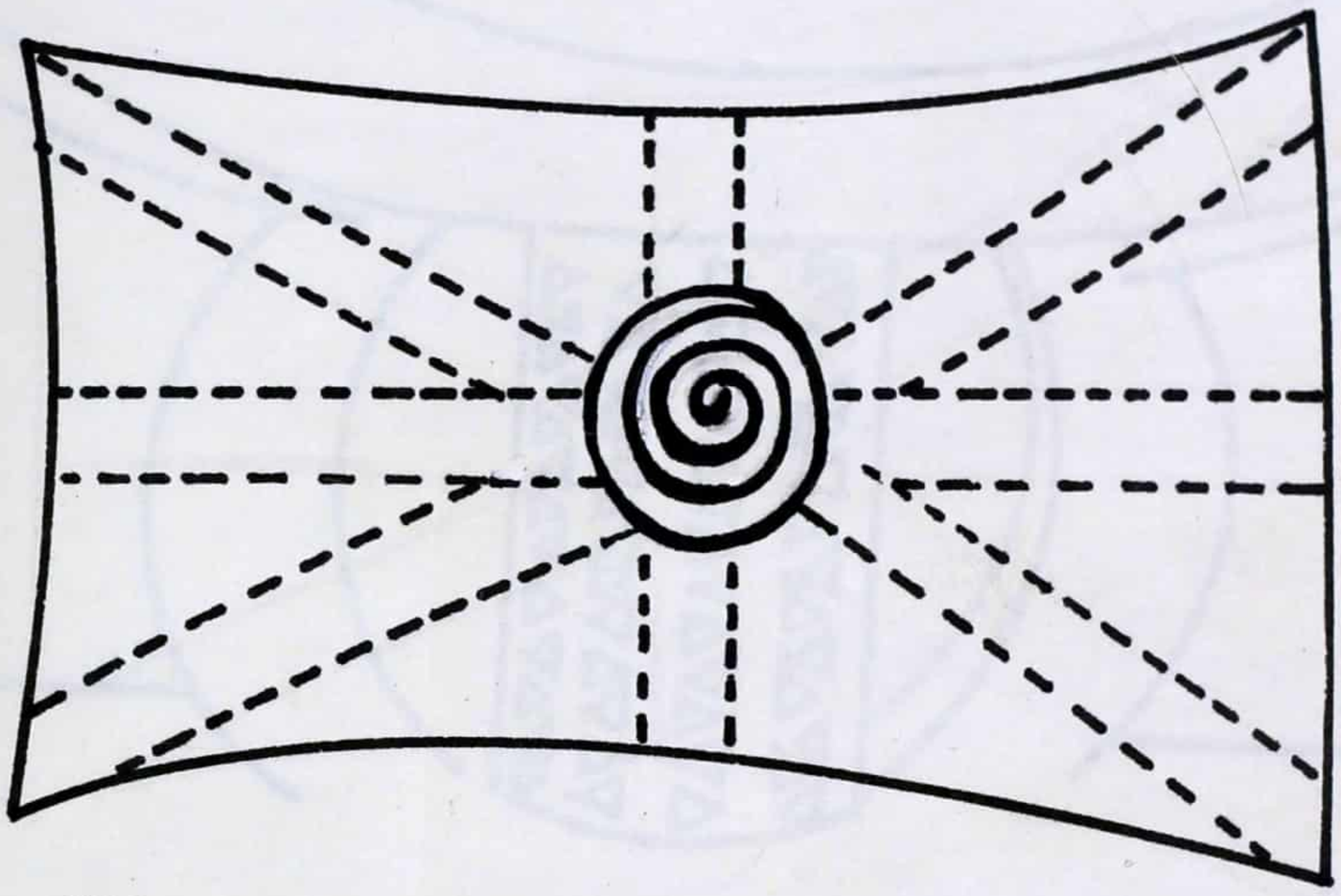

FIG.1 Amansie Pramire found at the centre of the Kontonkrowi Stool

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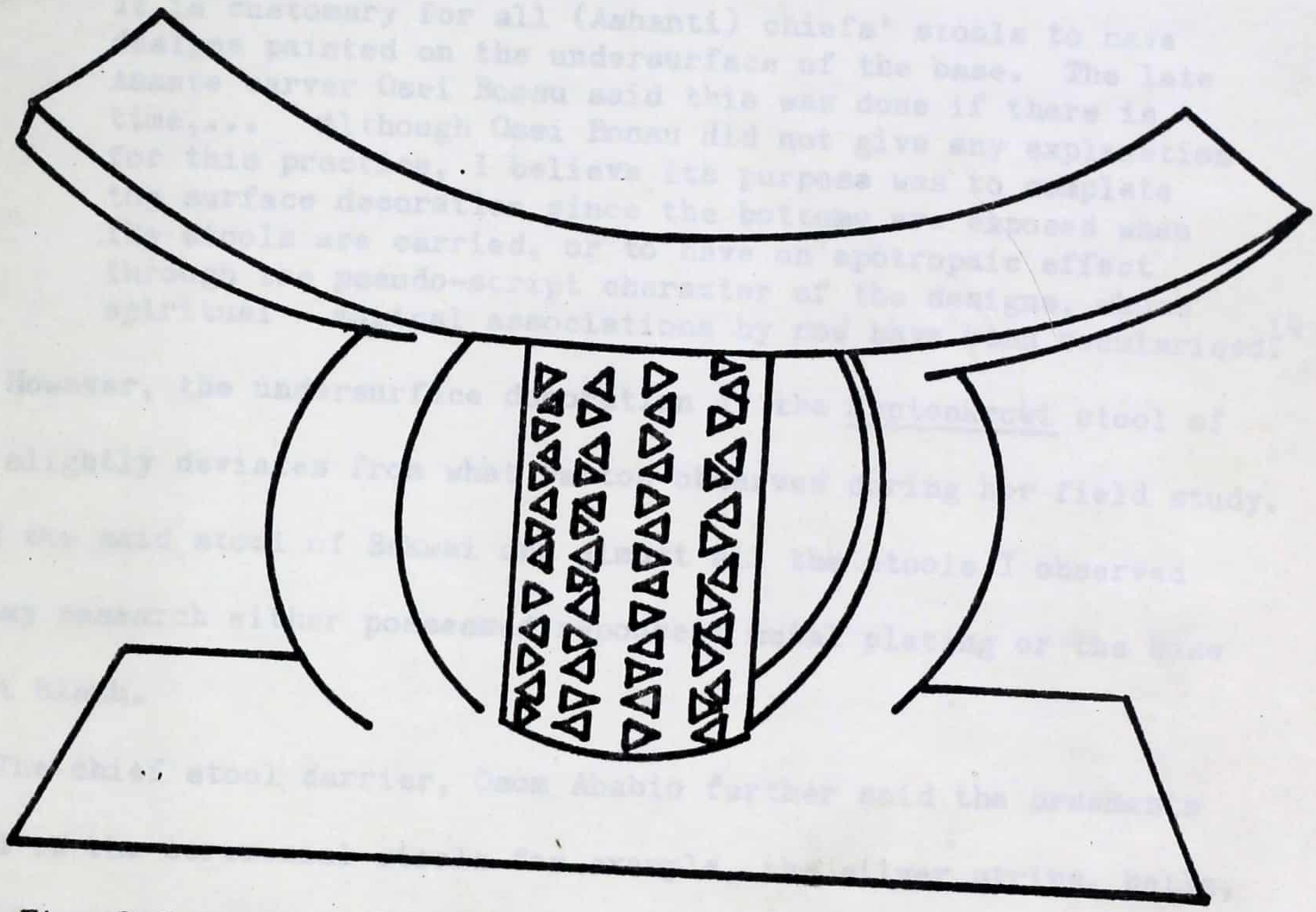

Fig. 2 Column of the Kontonkrowi stool showing holes in triangular shapes.

That is, the stool carrier's reply showed that the design is to enhance the beauty of the underneath part of the stool, which is displayed to the public when the seat is carried in procession. During procession the stool is carried with the seat facing the back of the head and neck of the stool carrier so that the under part faces the backwards making it possible for the bottom to be seen and appreciated. As alluded to, S.F. Patton expressed the same idea in the following words:

> It is customary for all (Ashanti) chiefs' stools to have designs painted on the undersurface of the base. The late Asante carver Osei Bonsu said this was done if there is time,... Although Osei Bonsu did not give any explanation for this practice, I believe its purpose was to complete the surface decoration since the bottoms are exposed when the stools are carried, or to have an apotropaic effect through the pseudo-script character of the designs, whose spiritual - magical associations by now have been secularised.[14]

However, the undersurface decoration of the kontonkrowi stool of Bekwai slightly deviates from what Patton observed during her field study. Instead the said stool of Bekwai and almost all the stools I observed during my research either possessed repousee' metal plating or the base was left blank.

The chief stool carrier, Osom Ababio further said the ornaments attached to the ceremonial stools for example, the silver strips, bells, beads and amulets add to the spiritual power. The bells are rung during procession to announce the arrival of the chief so that the crowd in turn gives way to the stool carriers who lead the chief. According to my observation this manner of 'clearing' the way for the chief to pass, is generally known in almost all the Akan states. Moreover, as I have learnt, bells are also believed to be used in summoning the ghosts of departed chiefs during the Adae (see page 13) ceremonies in the Akan states.

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14 Sharon F. Patton; "African Arts", The Stool and Ashanti Chieftaincy, Vol. 13, University of California, California, November, 1979, No. 1, Page 76.

One of such bells, attached to the golden stool is said to be rung to call the Asante people together during Akwasidae (Sunday Adae). Two others are reportedly used to announce the arrival of this great Asante symbol - the Golden stool. According to Cole and Ross, the bells generally used in Ashanti are European-inspired. [15] But in the case of the Golden Stool, some of these bells which are devoid of clappers and are therefore not rung - are in the form of casts of defeated enemy kings or war leaders. For example, the casts attached to the Golden Stool represent the heads of Ntim Gyakari, Denkyira chief, Kofi Adinkra, the chief of Gyaman, and a British army commander, Sir Charles McCarthy.

Still considering the white stools of the Bekwai traditional area, it is said that some of them were commissioned by the reigning chief, Nana Osei Kwadwo II. However, others were inherited from his predecessors. Generally the white stools are used for ceremonial rituals and festivals and the high backed chairs for assemblies more related to sitting on cases or chairing an important meeting so that the Omanhene has a support for his back during a long sitting. However, it must be pointed out that chiefs who are lower in rank than a paramount chief do not have "dwete dwa" (silver plated stools).

Apart from the above mentioned category of stools, there are other seats, such as, asipim, hwedom and awenade which the chief uses in public ceremonies.

Asipim Chairs

Of the four ceremonial chairs the asipim (firmness and steadfastness) is the commonest (Plate 4a). I could count as many as six asipim chairs in the outer chamber of the Bekwai stool room. These are called 'dwete asipim' (silver-plated asipim) by the stool carriers. The chief stool

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15 Cole and Ross; The Arts of Ghana, The Regents of University of California, California, 1977, Page 136.

carrier explained the name of the asipim chair in terms of the stability of chieftaincy which is always sought for in the paramountcy. Kyeremanten seems to confirm this when he refers the name "asipim" to mean 'I stand firm', and further elaborated that the name may be a reference either to the chairs' sturdy construction or to the stability of chieftaincy itself.[16]

The Bekwai asipim chair like that of other Akan states is an armless chair with a slightly angled backrest. The seat and the backrest are made of sheep skin stretched and held taut with imported brass upholstery tacks. It is elaborately decorated with patterns of brass tacks and locally cast decorative brass finials on the uprights. The chair is moreover decorated with repousse silver strips, stamped and incised patterns. The overall colour of the chair is black and at points where the chair is decorated with the mentioned materials, it takes the respective colour of that material (Plate 4a).

This chair is patterned after the nyansapo (wisdom knot) motif. This is elaborately shown on the cross bars that join the uprights of the chairs (Plate 4a). The austerity of the chair is broken in some examples by the addition of carved stretchers, embossed backs, and seats.

At the mid-points of the lower cross bars are found cuboid metal designs. These cross bars show the nyansapo motif and thus give rise to the name of some specific types called "nyansapo asipim" (asipim patterned after the wisdom knot motif). As seen in the picture to which reference has been made above, the Bekwai asipim is large and high, unlike those belonging to lesser chiefs. It looks like hwedom chair. Regarding this, I was informed that asipim chairs that belong to paramount chiefs in Ashanti are normally of this size. An example is what Eva Meyerowitz observed during her research in the Gold Coast, now Ghana (see plate 4b).

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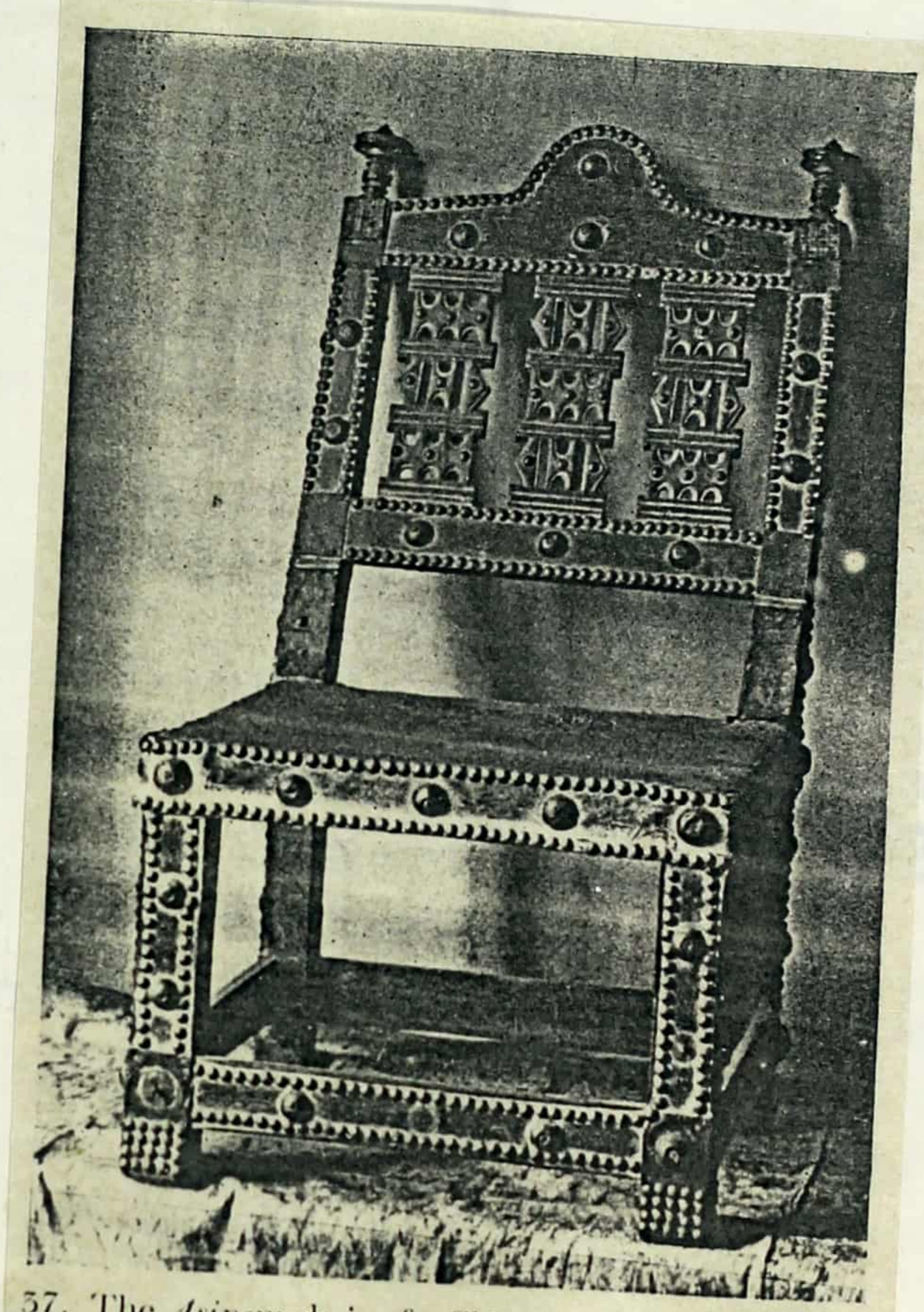
16 A.A.Y. Kyeremanten, Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, 1964, P.26



37. The *Asipem* chair of a Chief, now in the Museum at Achimota, Gold Coast.

PLATE 4b ASIPIM CHAIR

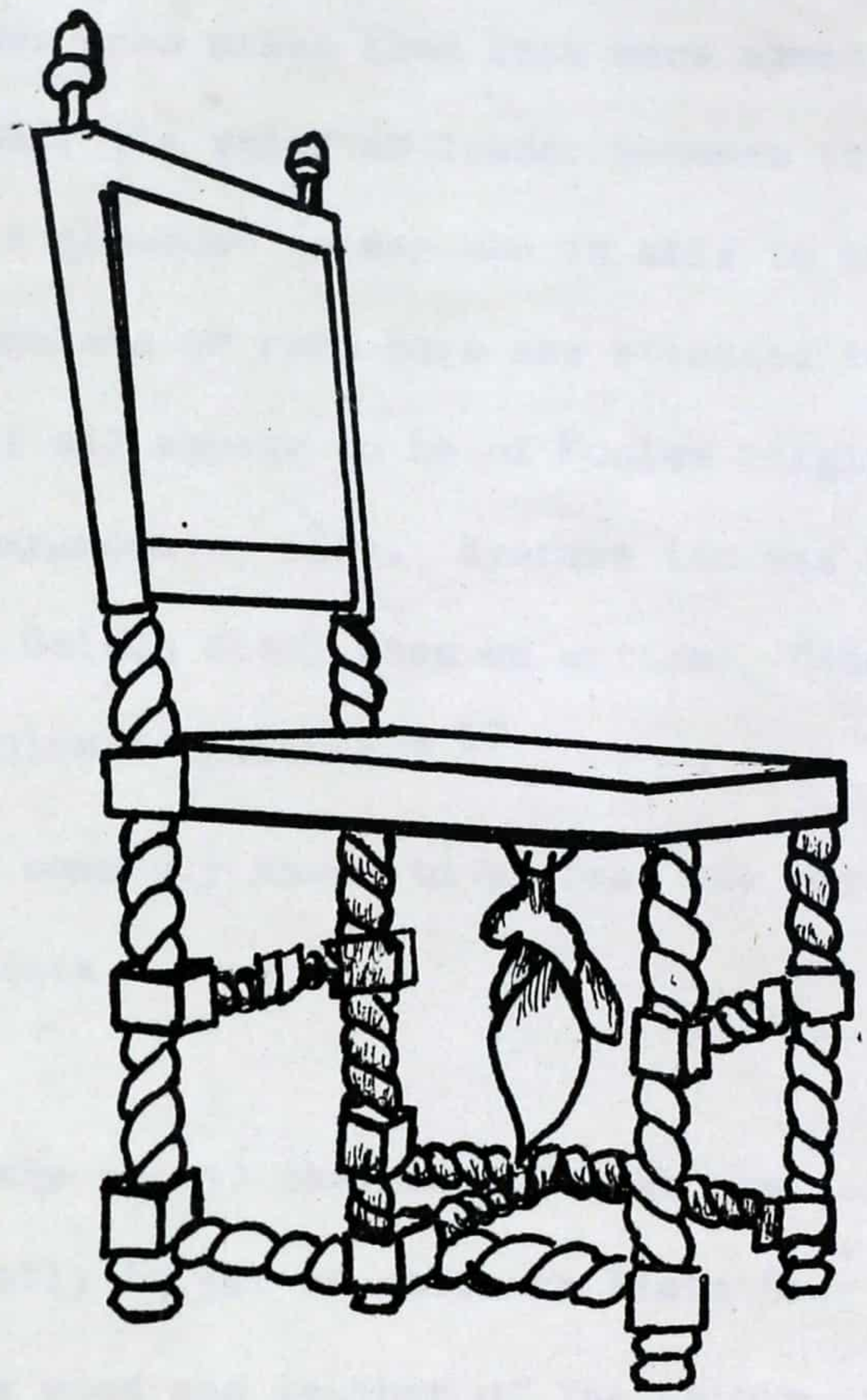


FIG. 3 "Nyansapo Asipim showing the delicate arrangements of components

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What seems to be peculiar to this Bekwai asipim is its delicate nature due to the use of slender stocks that are designed like twisted and inter twined ropes (Fig 3). This asipim is largely diffefent from the ordinary ones that are sturdier and straight-backed. The upright nature of the backrest of the common ones makes them look more symbolically masculine.

When used as a chair the chief or leader becomes the embodiment of Obarima (man) or "okofo a ohwedom" (a man who is able to rout the enemy).

Leather covered amulets or rams horn are attached to the under part of the seat. Most if not all appear to be of Moslem origin. This is not peculiar to the Bekwai paramountcy only. Kyerematen was informed of a similar accessory on the Golden Stool when he writes: "the Golden Stool itself is adorned with Islamic talisman." [17]

These amulets are commonly known to protect the sitter - the Bekwai chief, when he sits in state.

Hwedom Chairs

The hwedom (rout the enemy) chairs of Bekwai are taller in structure than asipim, although slightly larger as shown in Plate 5a. In contrast to the natural colour of the wood and leather of the asipim, the hwedom is painted black and has legs and back rest posts which have a twist turned design motif. The leather seat of this chair is attached to the frame with silver coloured tacks and bosses.

This special hwedom chair is typical and has a circular rotating fretted design device in the middle of the back rest which gives it a unique characteristic (Plate 5b). This device is attached to the back rest by two short horizontal projections which hold the circular plate in place, making it capable of revolving when it is turned by an observer. When the circular object is rotating, its design constitutes interesting shapes and forms in

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17 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, quoted in D.H. Ross and H.M. Cole, Op. Cit, P.136

PLATE 5a <u>IMEDOM</u> CHAIR

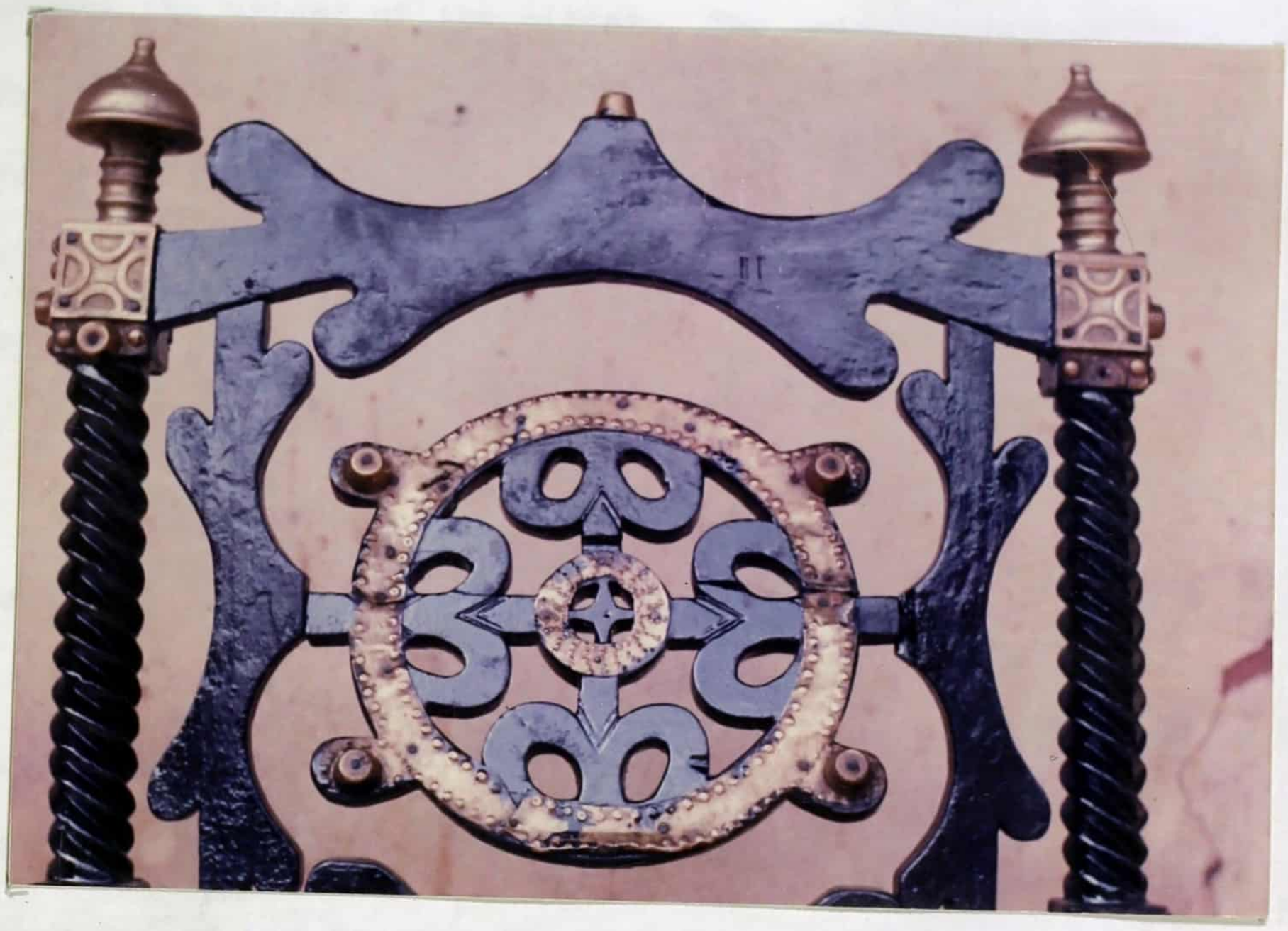

PLATE 5b DETAIL: BACKREST OF HWEDOM CHAIR WITH A CIRCULAR ROTATING DEVICE

motion and the lustrous surface of the plate makes admirable reflections due to the presence of light. Other embellishments include cuboid silver metal objects at the mid-points of the spirally-turned legs. The composition of the spirally-turned cross-bars deviates from that of the asipim of the same palace.

The cross-bars are arranged on two levels (Plate 5a). Although my informant did not give any explanation to this arrangement, I think this was done to increase the strength of the uprights which are thinly carved to be able to support the weight of the sitter. The spirally-turned stretchers were interpreted to be the nyansapo (wisdom knot) motif. It has an amulet which serves the same function as that of the asipim.

The name of this type of chairs is suggestive of its function in the Bekwai traditional area. Hwedom means disperse or rout the enemy. Kyerematen on the other hand translates hwedom generally as "facing the field or the enemy" and says the chair is used during a declaration of war and during judicial sessions.[18]

The word "field" Kyerema ten uses is in conformity with the function of the chair in the Bekwai traditional area. In processions the Hwedom is carried above the head with the design of the backrest facing forward more like a royal standard and denotes the rank of the warrior or military chief in command of the unit or group. Only chiefs holding high rank are entitled to own Hwedom. Its appearance is indirectly intended to intimidate enemies and rebels.

Awenade (lion) Chair (nicknamed "Union Jack").

This is a unique chair in the whole of the Bekwai royal house (Plate 6). It was allegedly among the special gifts given to the Bekwai chief (Nana Yaw Boakye I) for his support of the British during their arrest of

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18 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, A Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, 1964, P. 28

PLATE 6 AWENADE (UNION JACK) CHAIR

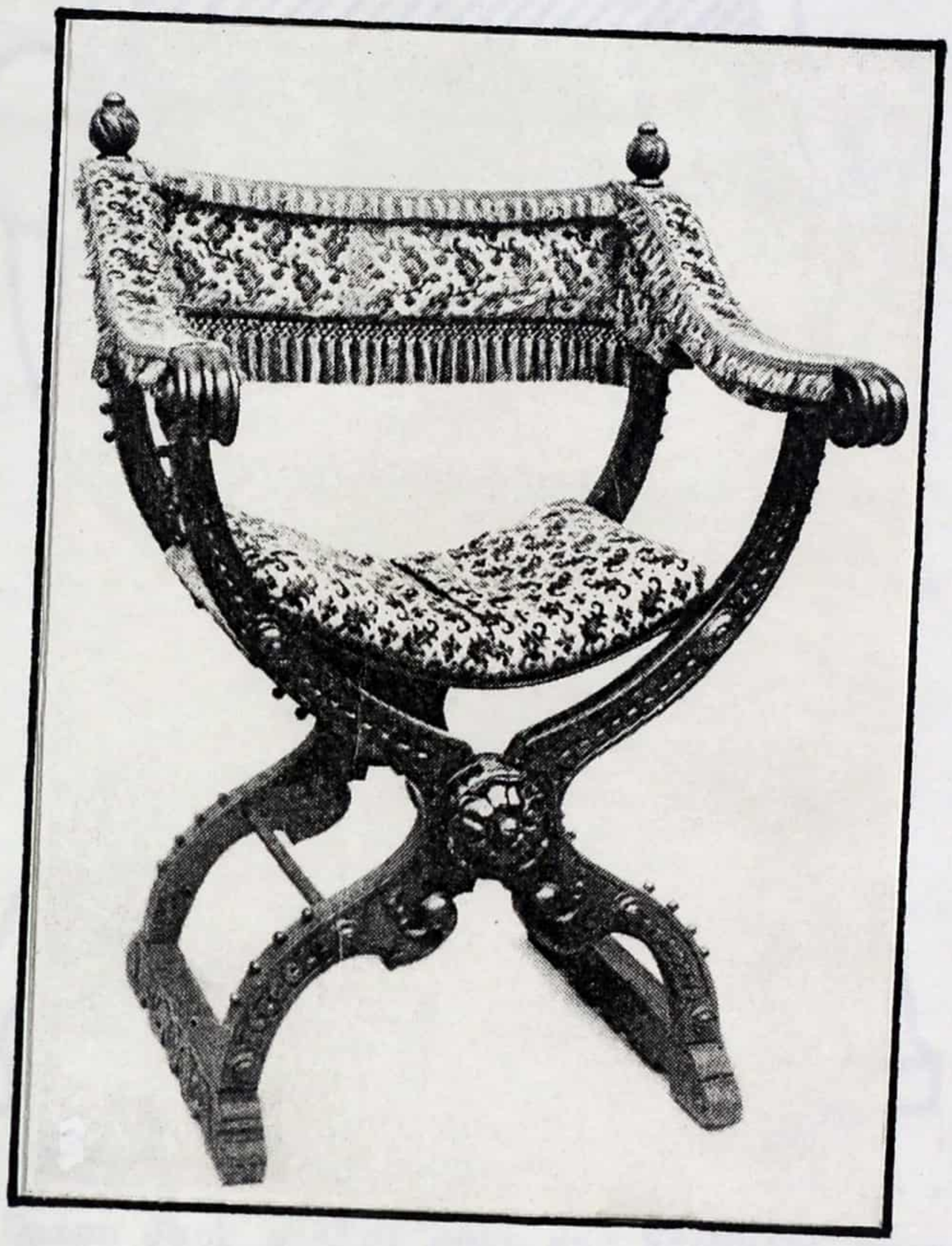

PLATE 7 SAMPLE OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY EUROPEAN CHAIR TYPE

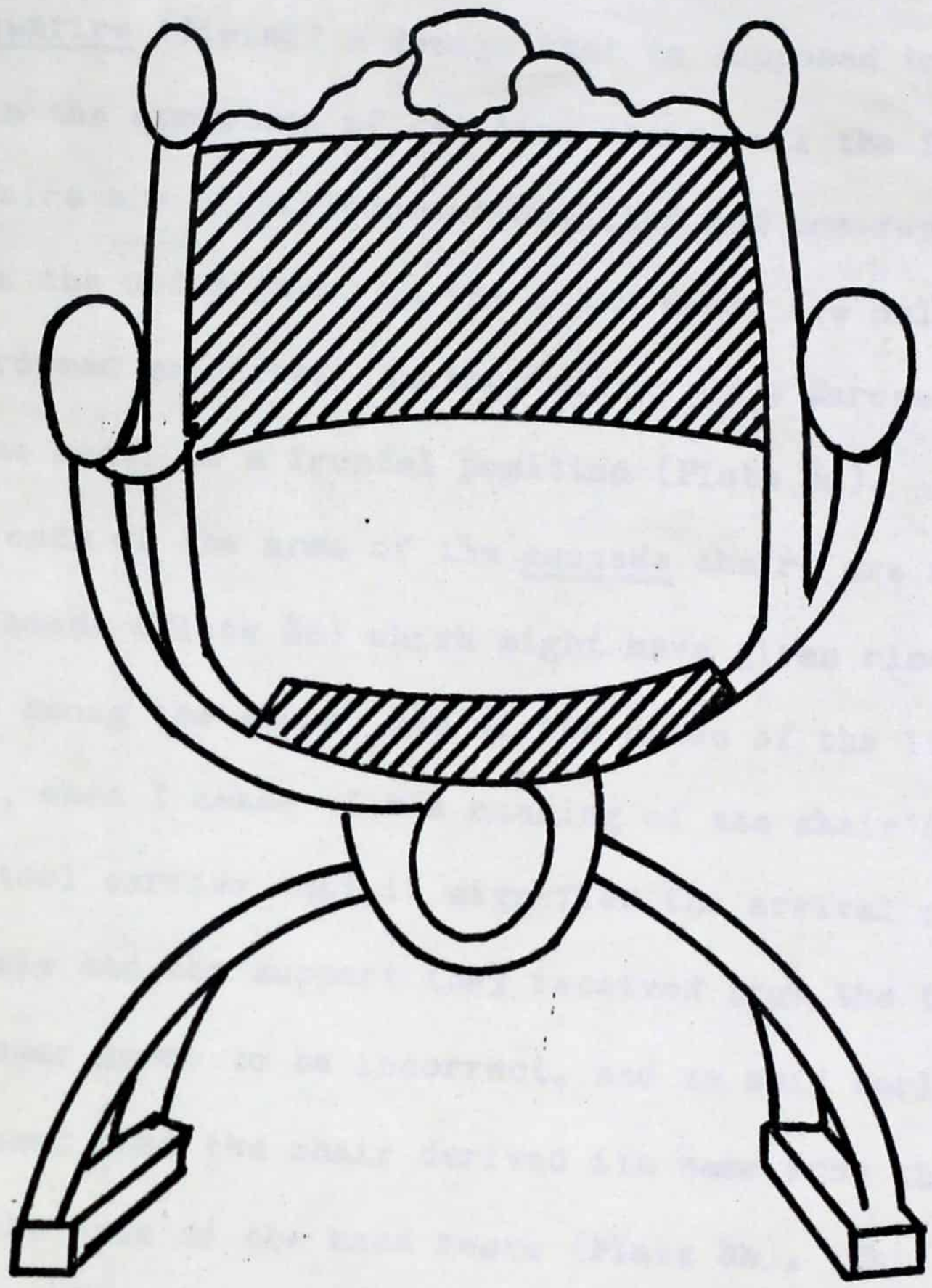

FIG.4 Union Jack chair: seat and backrest apparently based on various degrees of arches.

1900". The awenade [20] has a compliment of a colourful cushion to serve as a foot stool (Plate 8c). It is usually used when the chief sits in state.

The finials on all the three types of ceremonial chairs are (known in Twi as) ntwatire (finial) a design that is supposed to represent eagle's claws.[21] With the exception of the lion chair, all the finials on the ceremonial chairs are highly conventionalised and non-representational. The finials on the union jack, on the other hand, are delicately carved figures of European soldiers. Another effigy of a European soldier is found below the seat, in a frontal position (Plate 8a).

At the ends of the arms of the awanade chair, are realistic treatments of lion heads (Plate 8b) which might have given rise to the name of the chair; for among the Akans, one of the names of the lion is awenade.

However, when I asked of the meaning of the chair's name, I was told by the chief stool carrier that it signified the arrival of the British in the Ashanti state and the support they received from the then Bekwai chief.

This answer seems to be incorrect, and as said earlier, the present author presupposes that the chair derived its name from the lion head effigies found at the ends of the hand rests (Plate 8b). This supposition stems from the fact that one umbrella top which was observed during this research

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20 The other presents given by the British allegedly included a "dwete koraa"(silver calabash) shown in plate 10a, necklace, umbrella, gramaphone, plus £500 to thank the chief.

The name 'dwete koraa' is somehow misleading, for although it is 'dwete koraa', it is in the form of a giant sea shell showing the grooves on it (10b). This is placed on a set of three aquatic snails and the overall composition mounted on a polished wooden stand (Plate 10a). The upper end of this shell is smoothened and bears the same inscription as the one on the awanade chair.

This was used as the chief's palm-wine container and presently it is kept together with the calabashes from which the chief drinks wine. Comparatively, the other calabashes observed are not as aged as the 'dwete koraa' (silver calabash). This suggests that the other ones are replacement of destroyed calabashes.

21 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, Op Cit pp.14, 22

PLATE 8a EFFIGY OF A EUROPEAN SOLDIER

PLATE 8b DETAIL: HANDREST OF AWENADE CHAIR
DEPICTING A LION HEAD

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PLATE 8c COLOURFUL CUSHION FOOTSTOOL

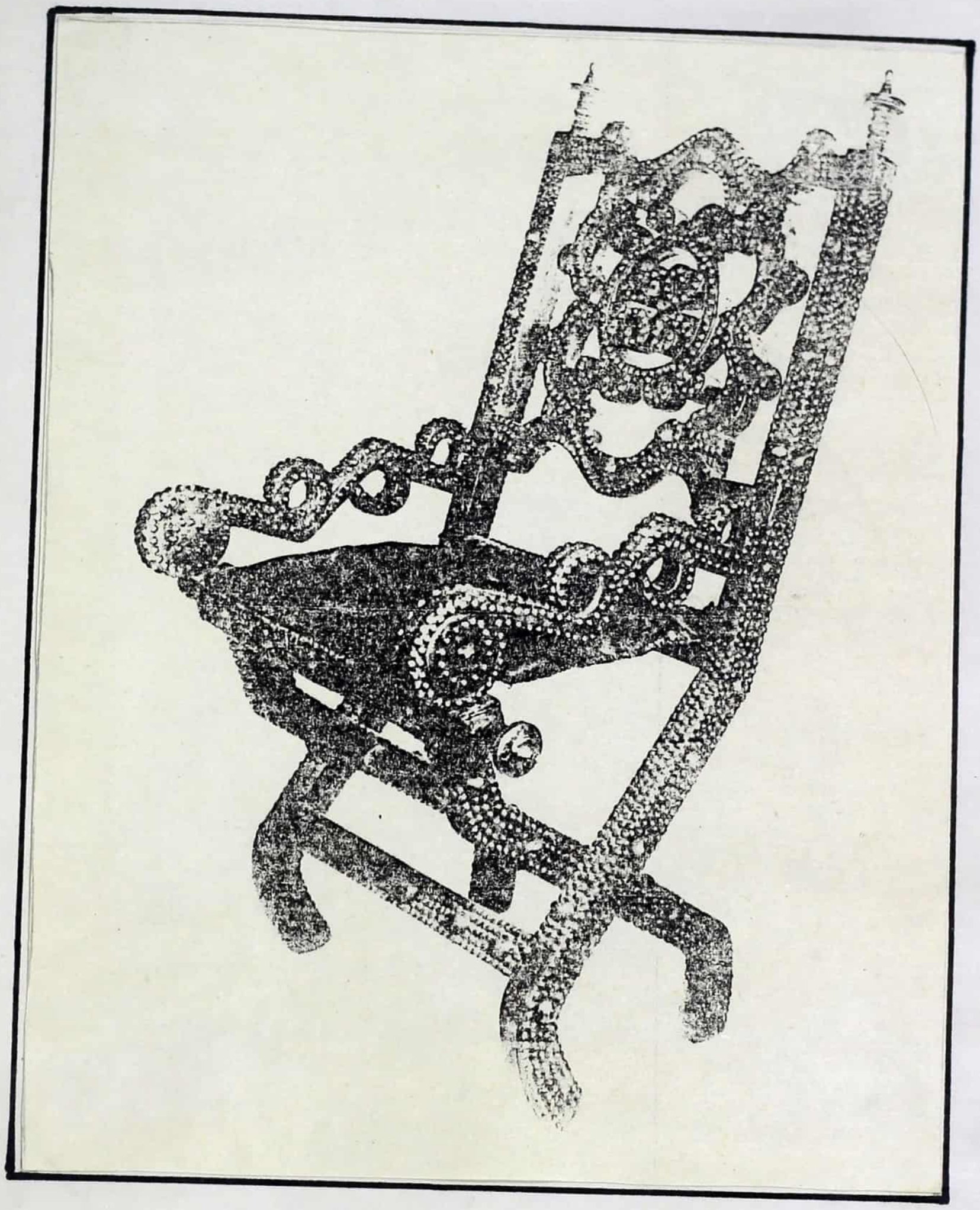

PLATE 9 AKONKROMFI CHAIR (REPRODUCED FROM COLE AND ROSS, THE ARTS OF GHANA)

PLATE 10a "DWETE KORAA" (SILVER CALABASH: FRONT VIEW)

had a lion effigy and was accordingly called awenade (lion). It is also known that the leopard, or lion is a frequent title for the chief, emphasising his courage and power.

Another informant, Opanin Anane (ex-talking drummer of the same royal house), elaborating on the name of the chair, pointed out that the full name of the chair is "awenade - obi ka wo a ka no bi" (which means "lion meet force with force"). That is when any state tries to tamper with the people of Bekwai, they should react fiercely against it.

Lions are used to represent Britain on heraldic shields and the lions may have been meant to state that the chair was presented by Britain in spite of any local interpretations to the contrary.

The awanade chair has greatly been appreciated by the Bekwai royal house to the extent that it has been given traditional interpretations. Apart from interpreting it as awenade; Nana Osom Ababio says: The three human figures found on the chair represent three European soldiers guarding the chair as stool carriers take charge of royal stools in the Ashanti state. The same informant commenting on the effigies, pointed out that the figure found at the bottom of the seat represents the leader (Capt. Armitage) of the British army that made the first expedition to the Ashanti state. The other two figures which serve as the finials are also said to represent the British soldiers guarding the chair.

Even though the informant did not say specifically that the British soldiers guarded the Bekwai chief, it testifies to the information I received later about the security of the Bekwai chief. It was reported that the then chief of Bekwai, Nana Yaw Boakye I was guarded by the British after he was threatened by the other Ashanti chiefs for betrayal - by way of accepting the whites whom the Ashanti had decided not to welcome.

The awenade chair like the asipim is used by the Bekwai chief during grand state occasions. The introduction of the ceremonial chairs in the

paramountcy as observed at other Ashanti towns has generally limited the use of the white stools. 'Osese dwa' is said to be used only during festive occasions for instance, when he enters the stool room. However, in contrast to Bekwai royal stools, as in other Akan communities, the Bekwai chief's ceremonial chairs have no spiritual significance. This came to light during my research.

An interview with some of the indigenous people of Bekwai showed that these seemingly foreign inspired chairs, the asipim and hwedom, seats have their origin to an old chair type called akentennwa. This chair is said to be made of cane material. The framework was composed of canes with a thick diameter while the seat and the other parts were made of narrow diameter canes. Although the people knew that present ceremonial chairs started from a point, they could not give the systematic developmental stages of them. I do not have any idea myself with respect to the history of the ceremonial chairs in the Bekwai traditional area. Kyerematen seems to give a fair historical account of these chairs from his considerable research on Akan ceremonial chairs paraphrased below:

The original form of the asipim chair was the akentennwa, a cane chair. The framework was of wood and the seat of cane woven into chequers. The earliest type of asipim chair is still used, but at present by the ordinary citizens.

The solid pieces of skin for the back rest and the seat of the asipim developed from the basket weave pattern of strips of skin of over and under weaving instead of the original cane woven version which it had displaced. Further development by way of ornamentation followed. Later developments of the asipim were the hwedom and the akonkromfi (praying mantis) chair,in-that order. The akonkromfi chair (Plate 9) developed from a different source. They were based on types of folding chairs with arm rests which were either gifts or were purchased from the trading posts

in the castles or the coast. In some cases these were carried for the use of European emmisaries visiting local traditional leaders. Although modelled after European samples, traditional craftsmen created their versions with the back rest incorporating traditional symbolic heraldic designs.[22]

The tracing of the origin of the awenade chair did not appear in Kyerematen's account, the Bekwaiş admit that it is a foreign gift to the Bekwaihene. Like the other ceremonial chairs such as the hwedom and akonkromfi the awenade is said to be patterned after the seventeeth century European chair type.

Black Stools

In this section an attempt will be made to mention the associational significance of a stool in the Akan traditional societies before writing on black stools. This will help to make the reasons for the making and preservation of black stools meaningful.

Ordinarily the stool symbolises welcome. For example in-laws present an "osese dwa" to a newly wedded bride to mean "we welcome you to dwell among us in love".

The stool which an individual uses often (and one may have one or more stools) is linked up with his aura, personality or sunsum - hence the stool is turned on its side when not being used. Also there are stools which are offered to visitors. Even in the case of the deceased non chief, relatives may put away his stool which was associated with his person during his life time.

It is during the one year anniversary of the death of a chief that the reigning chief or leader stages the funeral of his predecessor. As part of the rites the stools of a favourite design which was often used by

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22 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, A Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, 1964, Page 28.

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PLATE 10b "DWETE KORAA": SIDE VIEW SHOWING THE GROOVES ON THE SHELL

the deceased is chosen for the ritual of evocation to symbolise the wish of his erstwhile subjects that he shall continue to sit with the other deceased chiefs in the stool room and to continue to be concerned in the welfare of the affairs of the particular stool office.

It is not just any stool which is chosen and since the stool room is made up of a counsel of advisers the stool chosen must be one of those used when a reigning chief sits in state or judgement.

Black stools form the third category of stools after the two sets of ceremonial seats. Three black stools were most particularly inspected during my research in the Bekwai stool room. These three are carefully arranged together with the others that are dedicated to other departed chiefs. The arrangement, starting with the black stool of the founder of the town, and ending with that of the last departed chief, has been done on iron bed covered with an nsaa (traditional cloth).

I was allowed to inspect only three of the black stools which are said to belong to the first three chiefs of Bekwai - Eguaye-boafo, Yao Kofo and Santifo.

The black stool of Nana Eguaye-boafo, as already mentioned above, as the founder of the town, is regarded as the principal stool at the Bekwai royal house and stands for kingship - past, present and the future - and for the town as a whole. This stool is regarded as so sacred that unauthorised persons are not allowed to see it. The present chief is said to have seen it once. He reportedly saw it during the time of his enstoolment, and according to the chief stool carrier, Nana Osom Ababio, a 'dwedwiri dwan' (a sheep) is collected from the would-be-chief before he is allowed to enter the stool room for the first time to see the principal black stool.

The Eguaye-boafo stool mentioned above is a typical 'osese dwa' (white stool) which was blackened after his death. On the stool are found

a pair of dawuro (metal gong) which are supposed to identify Eguaye-boafo. It is said that Eguaye-boafo was fond of summoning his people with the use of the gong that is why they are attached to his black stool to identify him. This stool is quite smaller than the ceremonial stools used by the living chiefs. The overall stool is blackened together with its accompanying metal gong.

The blackening according to Osom Ababio, is done by either smoking or colouring the object with soot mixed with egg yolk and subsequent blackening is done by the application of the blood of sheep on the surface of the stool. After this, it is kept in the nkonwafieso (stool house) along with other black stools. At this stage, the stool is believed to be possessed by the spirit of the departed person and is linked not only with the individual, but also the town or state.

Certain reasons are attached to the blackening of such stools. In the first place, they are allegedly blackened to give them an impressive appearance which is supposed to intensify the mystery enshrouding them as ritual objects

Sarpong also believes that the blackening of the stools is done for some particular reasons. In his view, the following reasons are assigned for the blackening of the artifacts:

The blackening is to prevent the stools from becoming nasty and unsightly. That is, since the stools are destined to receive sacrifices, blood and certain other mixtures, at least, on each festive day, they will look unsightly if not blackened.

The second opinion is that the black colour is the symbol of death experienced by the ancestor whose spirits are invoked into the stools. White, according to Sarpong, stands for active life, happiness and rejoicing. It would therefore be improper to leave the stools in their original white colour since that would seem to suggest that the living rejoice over

the loss of their beloved ones.

Usually, a dark colour signifies sadness, pain and bereavement. Therefore, it is the best and proper colour to use on the stools dedicated to those whose deaths have grieved the community.

The third opinion of Sarpong, as pointed out already, stresses the awesome character of black stools. The living approach the royal ancestors with traditional signs of respect. The stools are therefore blackened, partly to induce this feeling. Some chiefs give this as the only reason for blackening the stools. But in the view of Dr. J.B. Danquah the black colour is used to prevent quick decomposition of the stools.

The second black stool observed during my research is said to be dedicated to Nana Yao Kofo. Its characteristics are similar to that of Eguaye-boafo's stool except that it lacks the metal gong and moreover the column motif is different.

The third black stool which is supposed to enshrine the spirit of Santifo is said to be the largest among the fourteen black stools of the Bekwai royal house. This black stool according to the stool carrier is similar in form to the rest of the stools except its massive size and an ornamentation of gold ring in the middle of the seat. This symbol has a long standing history underlying it.

Santifo, who became the third chief of Bekwai was reportedly exiled from Bekwai for immoral behaviour. He then sought refuge at the Asantehene's palace and was admired for his bravery. During his exile, a war ensued between the Gyamans and the Ashantis, and in view of Santifo's bravery, the Asantehene allowed him to join the people of Bekwai to the war. After the victory of the Ashantis, the people of Bekwai loaded the barrels of their guns with gold dust collected as war booty.

Santifo, realising this act of the Bekwai soldiers, decided to wreak vengeance on them. This, he did by reporting their act to the Asantehene

who collected the gold dust from them. Howevever, later on, after the death of Yao Kofo, the then Bekwai chief, Santifo was asked to take the royal seat. After his ascension to the stool he regretted the report he had made to the Asantehene and the consequent loss of gold dust to Bekwai.

Therefore, in his grief, he thus remarked: "Nimsaa kaa akyi" ("had I known is a sign of hind-sight). Thereon, he ordered that musical instruments in the form of drums and metal gongs be made and played to remind him of this plight. The orchestra which was then named: "Nimsaa kaakyi". This is given a detailed treatment in pages 110-119 earmarked for drums. Furthermore, Santifo ordered a stool to be carved for him. That stool which would be blackened after his death, according to his order, should have a gold ring in the centre of the seat to remind the Bekwai royals of his heavy loss of treasure to the paramountcy.

A chief designate is taken into the stools room and blind folded and after an appeal to the spirits of the dead, the chief-to-be reaches out to touch one of the stools being guided by the spirit of the original occupant with the agreement of the others. The new chief then is given the name of the chief whose stool he touched with the added designation - II or III. During his reign, he is supposed to be guided by his name sake and to inherit his wisdom, valour, patiences and love for his subjects.

State Swords

Next in importance to stools at Bekwai traditional area, like that of other Ashanti communities, are the gold hilted state swords. These form part of the visual objects symbolising the office of the chief.

It is generally known that the sword has been associated with the paramountcy as long as one could trace its history - however, having different forms and functions at the various stages of the cultural development of the Bekwais. This is elucidated by several authors who have given a general account on Ashanti state swords.

Functions and General Discussions on swords at Bekwai

The state swords at Bekwai can broadly be categorised into two as Kyerematen has done, even though he has reclassified Ashanti state swords into six detailed forms.

These are keteanofena (sword at the end of a mat), Domfonsan (warrior's sword), Afenatene (long sword), Asomfofena (courier sword), Abrafoofena (bayonet-like sword), Ahoprafofena (tail flywhisks).

The keteanofena is made up of akrafena (sword of my soul) and bosomfena (sacred sword or sword of my spirit). The akrafena is used in the ritual for purifying the soul of the ruler and the black stools of Bekwai. The bosomfena which also comes under the first category of swords is used for the purposes of swearing oath. During state or ceremonial gatherings both the akrafena and bosomfena are carried respectively on the right and left sides of the Bekwai chief as practised at other places in the country. The right and left placements of the two categories of swords mentioned above are said to be based on "The Akan Concept of Man."

The classification is explained in respect of the Akan belief that a person is both a corporeal and a spiritual being. The spiritual being of a man is made up of his aura or his personality (sunsum) and his soul (kra). The soul is derived through transmission from a father to his children which helps to determine their spiritually inherited characteristics. The kra (soul) is regarded as a small bit of the creator that dwells in every living person. At death the kra is believed to depart and return to the creator whence it came from "kra ko n'akyi". But the sunsum of the dead is around so during communion with the ancestors it is the sunsum which is invited to take abode in the black stool. The belief in the kra is used to explain the meaning of akrafena mentioned above.

Another spiritual aspect of man employed in explaining the categories of the Bekwai state swords, is the sunsum (spirit). The state swords that

are associated with the sunsum are known as bosomfena. It is also reported that when a deceased chief is laid in state a similar arrangements of swords on either side of the corpse are observed.

Domfonsan forms part of the normal accoutrement of a traditional soildier. This is the original form of the state sword. It was used on the battlefield for swearing the oath of fidelity and for leading the army.

The third group is the Afenatene. This was used as a compliment to or substitute for keteamofena. Asomfofena is the sword which usually accompanies the Golden Stool and used by couriers sent to distant lands, for example to announce a death in the royal lineage, or sent with a herald to declare war against an enemy.

This is followed by the abrafoofena which looks more like a bayonet than a sword used by the constabulary, abrafoo. It is smaller and without decoration. It is also used in apaye - declaimed recital of the Omanhene's inherited achievement in battles.

Ahoprafofena forms the last category. This is used by the king's followers who carry elephant - horse - or cowtail flywhisks.[23]

Still discussing state swords, this section seeks to make an exposition on the historical aspect of swords. Thus Kyerematen writing on the origin of Ashanti state swords, gave the following account:

> They originated as implements for domestic, hunting, farming, and military purposes; but in time some of them assumed certain social and ritual functions. Principal among these weapons are spears, arrows, clubs, swords and guns. 24

Kyerematen's statement that the sword developed from a domestic implement for farming and hunting cannot be dismissed. There was such a

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23. A.A.Y. Kyerematen, A Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, 1964, Page 36.

24 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, ibid Page 29

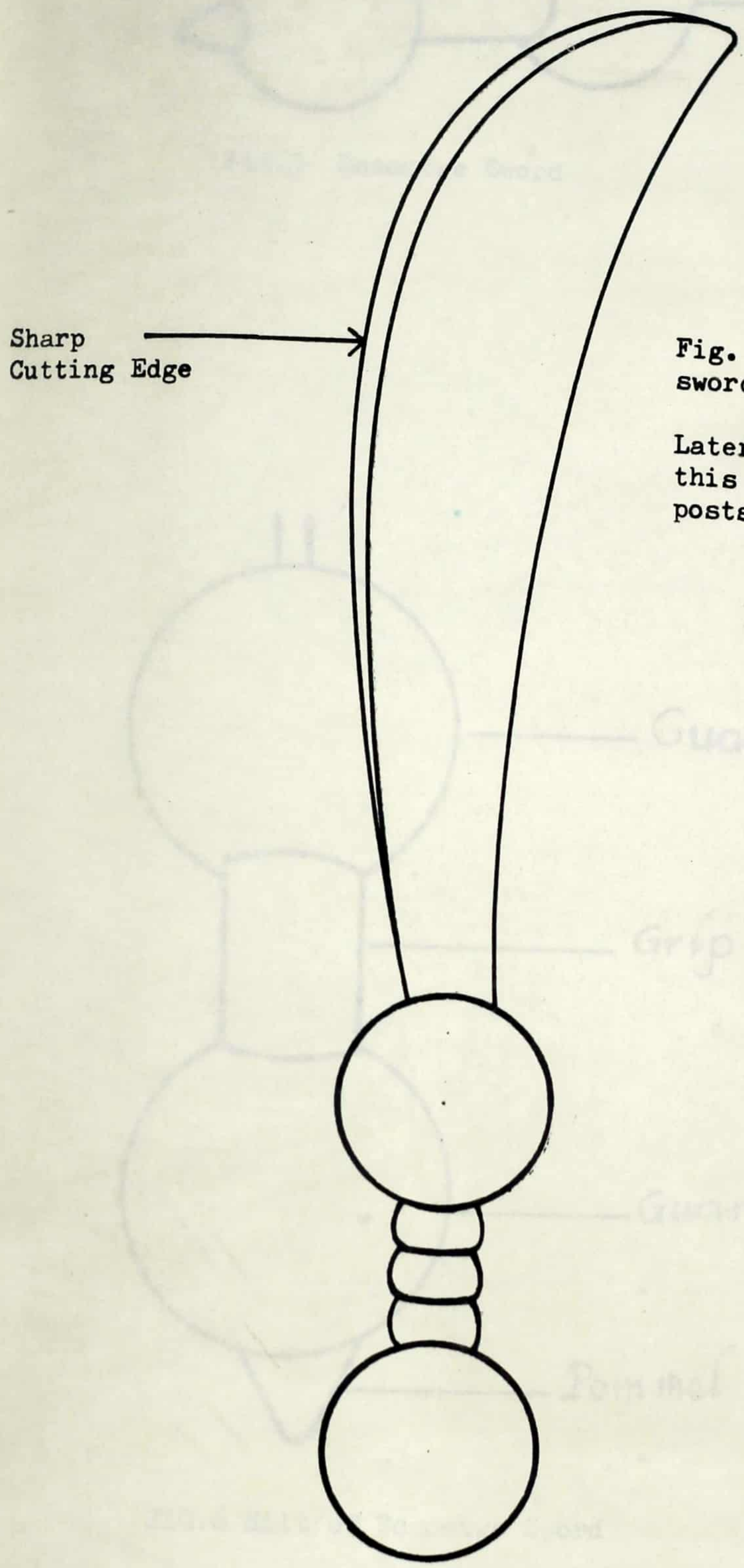

Fig. 5b Krotoo (old form of sword).

Later European traders copied this and sold it at the trading posts.

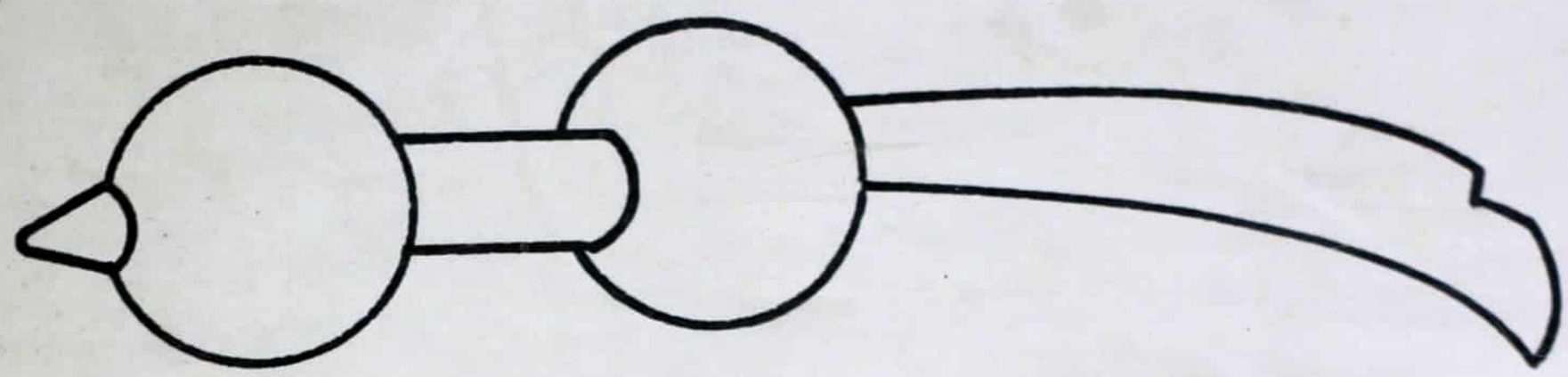

FIG.5 Bosomtwe Sword

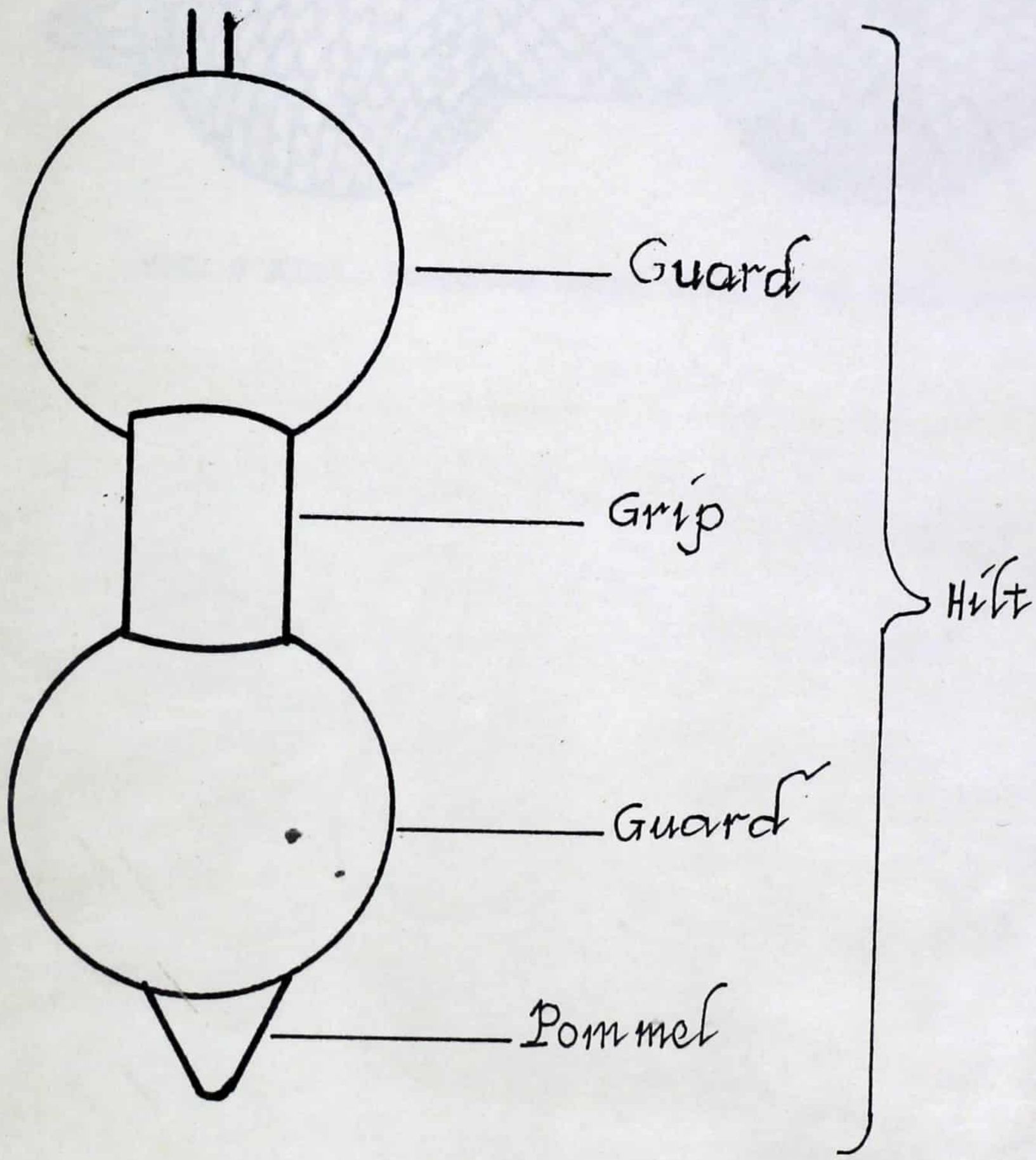

FIG.6 Hilt of Bosomtwe Sword

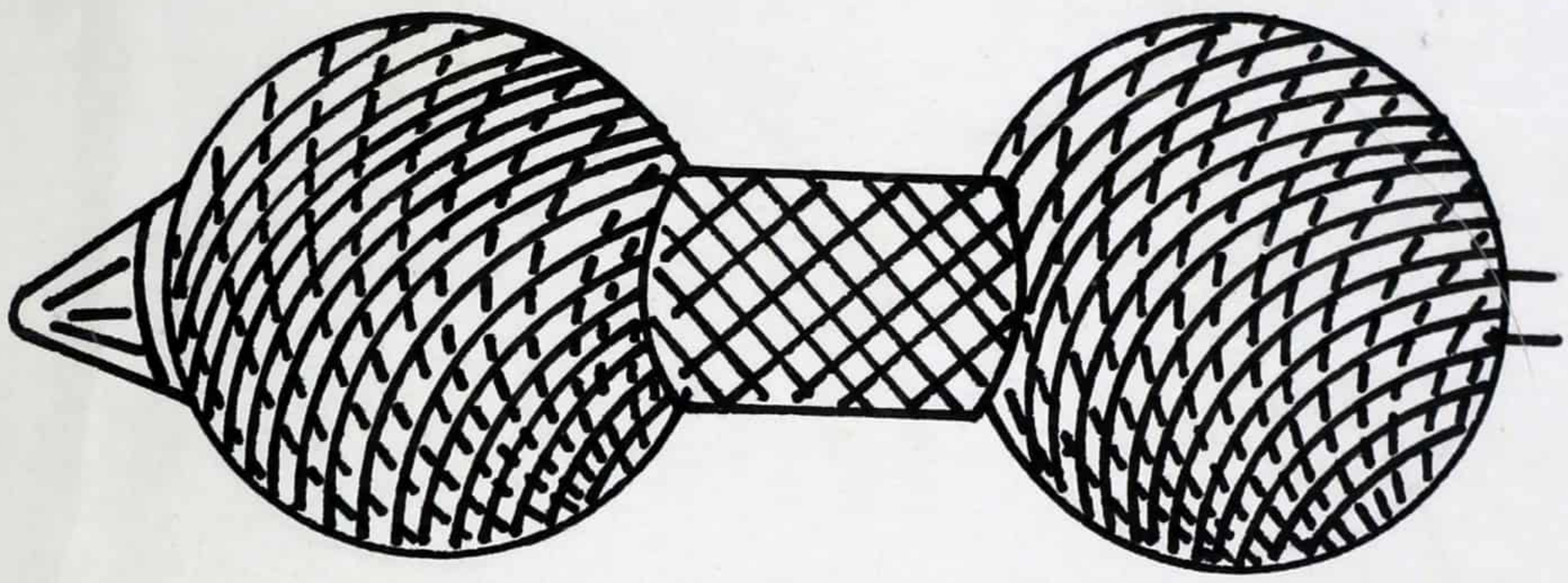

FIG. 7 Hilt: Bosomtwe sword ornamented with patterns

weapon, the krotoo which looked like the example shown in figure 5a

The next stage was that in battle where the Afena (sword) was used as Europeans used the battle axe - as a hacking weapon swung from a raised position downward or swung from right to left. There is reason to believe that the sword used by ordinary soldiers in close combat were of a smaller size and the size which matches the state sword was used by chiefs who were carried to battle in palanquins with sword equipped swordsmen to protect both the chief and the carriers. This was when we used to fight with bows and arrows and spears and used the wicker baskets woven sheild (skysm). The skysm is now used ceremonially since the advent of the gun. In single combat a wrought metal piece shaped thus was held in the left hand to block a sword stroke. The hooked end of the sword dragged the opponent closer to be despatched with a dagger.

The history of the state sword is further traced by Cole and Ross who wrote as follows, and who, like other writers, have confirmed that originally the state sword was an implement of war:

> Historically the earliest of these was the fighting or warrior's sword (domfonsan). It was standard part of the traditional armament of all soldiers and had no ceremonial function other than the swearing of loyalty oath on the battlefield. A second, bayonet-like sword (abrafoofena) was used by traditional police (abrafoo). 25

From the last quotation, it may be deduced that the military sword later became a state sword because of its involvement in oath swearing function on the battlefield. But whether this deduction is really true or not, my informants were unable to prove during my research. It may however, be argued that the citizens of Bekwai, like other Akans of the various parts of this country, turned the military sword into a ceremonial object because of the oath of loyalty that became associated with it.

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25 H.M. Cole & D.H. Ross, The Arts of Ghana, The Regents of the University of California, California, 1977, Page 147.

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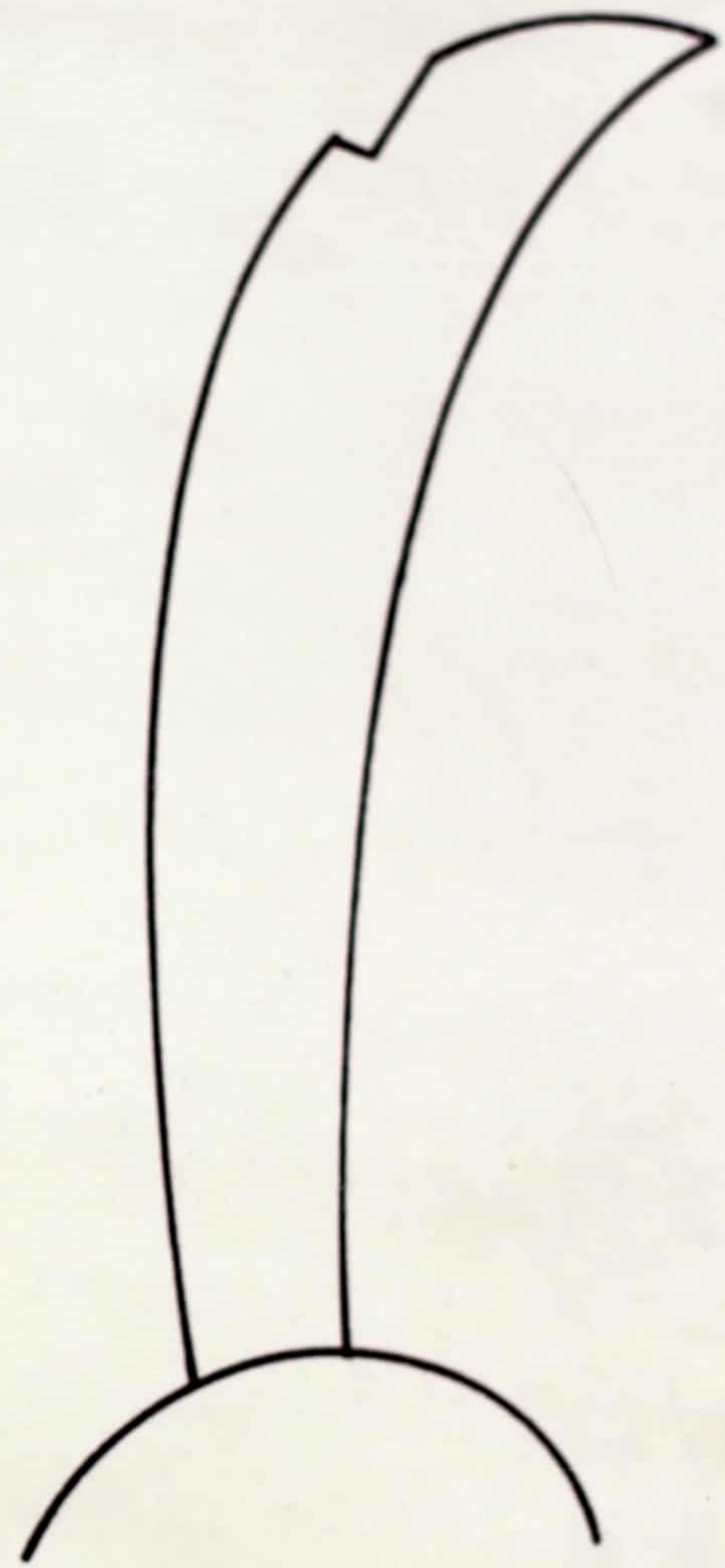

FIG.8 Blade: Bosomtwe sword

There are various types of swords in the Bekwai royal house which possess different characteristics with respect to shape, form, geometric designs and so forth. Kyerematen [26] in his book A Panoply of Ghana gives information on the different types of swords; but his work is apparently based on their use without showing their characteristics by design. He divides the parts into three, namely the hilt, the blade and sheath. An appreciation of the swords at Bekwai, reveals that, the sheaths of the swords are just covers for the blades which do not actually form part of the swords.

Secondly, it has been observed that, not all ceremonial swords are covered with sheaths. Sheaths are usually made of animal skins, for instance, hides from leopards, buffaloes, goats, cattle and so on. In view of the above information, the discussion will consider the various types of Bekwai state swords, before examining the different parts of each of the objects - the hilt and the blade.

The state swords at Bekwai traditional area, which intend to engage our discussion are: the Bosomtwe, Abusua Kuruwa, Mfenasa, and Afenatene swords.

The Bosomtwe Sword

This is one of the principal swords of the royal house of Bekwai. The Bosomtwe sword (Fig 5b) like the other swords has a hilt and a blade. The Hilt: The hilt (Fig. 6) of the said sword can be divided into three parts - (a) a pommel (b) a grip and (c) two rounded guards at each end of the grip. The two rounded guard composition is what Fraser describes as "swords with double-globe handle".[27] Fraser's description however, does not specifically refer to the Bosomtwe sword at Bekwai but it gives a general

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26 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, Op Cit pp. 33-34.

27 D. Fraser & H. Cole, African Art and Leadership, The Wisconsin University Press, London, 1972, pp. 186-187.

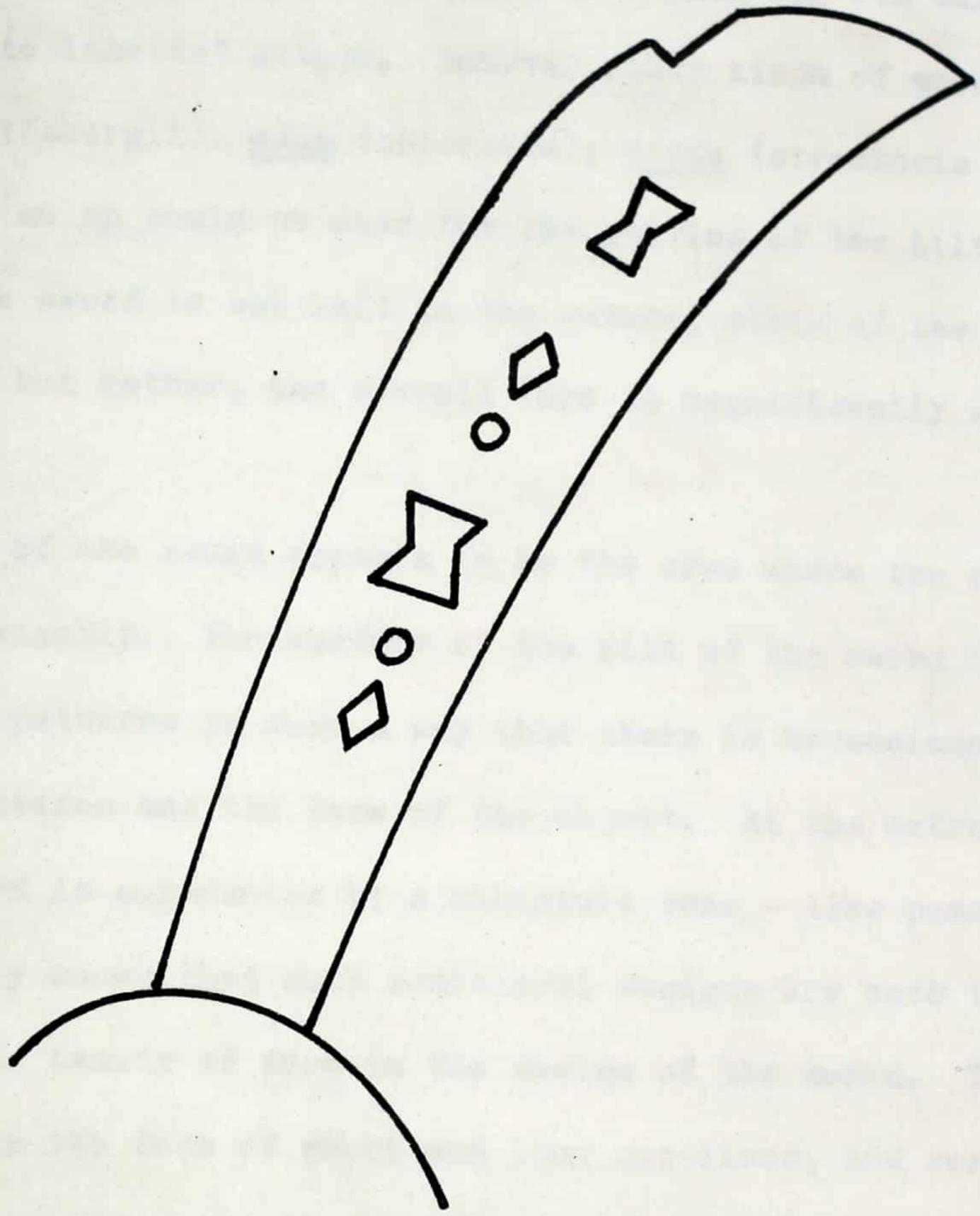

FIG.9 Blade of Bosomtwe sword showing the pattern and cut-out designs on it

visual impression of swords which befit the sword in question and others at the royal house.

The hilt of the Bosomtwe sword at Bekwai as observed in other swords of the same royal house and other paramountcies is normally carved of an ofemma (microdesmis puberla) wood. This wood is chosen for its durability and its resistance to insects' attack. However other kinds of wood such as sese (Holarrhena Wulfsbergii); odum (chloelata); afena (strombosia glancesceus varhicida) and so on could be used for the carving of the hilt. The hilt of the Bosomtwe sword is not left in the natural state of the wood from which it was carved but rather, the overall form is magnificently wrapped in gold leaf.

This portion of the sword appears to be the area where the carver showed great craftsmanship. The surface of the hilt of the sword is densely covered with linear patterns in such a way that there is harmonious relationship between the patterns and the form of the object. At the extreme end of the hilt of the sword is surmounted by a miniature cone - like pommel (fig. 6a). It is generally known that such additional designs are made to enhance the decoration or the beauty of form in the design of the sword. The linear designs are mainly in the form of short and long cut-lines, and curvy cut lines, leaving about a two milimetre length of distance between the patterns. These abstracted patterns echo the curvature of the hilt (Fig. 7).

The harmonious arrangements of patterns found on the hilt intensify the appreciation of the qualities of the form of the hilt. However, at one point this composition is broken, where lines are found to go across the form of the hilt.

The pommel of the Bosomtwe sword is separated from the upper guard by a non-textured disc. The patterns found on the upper guard are repeated on the lower guard. According to many authors, the guard prevents the slippage of the hilt from the hands. This is doubtful in the sense that the way the

hilt of the sword is handled during ceremonial gestures and the swearing of oath can be compared with the handling of a cultlass which has no guard but slips not from the hand of the user. I should therefore think that the guard enhances the decorative aspect of the sword rather than preventing its slippage from the user's hand.

The Blade: The blade of the Bosomtwe sword of Bekwai and her traditional area is made of iron. The blade is dark brown in colour. It broadens slightly, after a short distance from the hilt, and ends in a gentle curve (Fig 8). Since "to every rule there is an exception," Kyerematen informs his readers in his book, A Panoply of Ghana, of a rare example of one of the swords of the chief of Ho, which is made of solid ivory.[28]

Unlike the designs found on the hilt of swords, which mainly serve the purpose of decoration, or preventing slippage of the hilt from the hands, the designs on the blade usually present philosophical, symbolic and socio-political messages.

The blade of the Bosomtwe sword of Bekwai consists of open work geometric incisions which apart from serving as symbols and patterns, also help to reduce the weight of the blade. At the gentle slope of the sword is a cut out pattern which seems to disturb the smooth curvature of the blade (Fig. 9). This therefore gives the sword a unique characteristic from the rest of the swords observed during my research.

To echo the fact that designs found on the blade of swords are generally known to have symbolic meanings Anti writes:

> Items of regalia are characterised by symbols which often convey philosophical or historical messages from the chief and his sub-chiefs to the entire community. Symbolism is a mark or sign that has been agreed upon to suggest something else, with or without natural fitness. The word 'symbol' in its usage here, means, that which points towards shares in, and in some way conforms to a

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28 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, 1964, Page 33

reality which cannot be expressed fully through any description or visual forms already available to us.[29]

Even though in this quotation Anti does not particularly say that the designs on state swords have symbolic messages, the statements are implicit because Anti is generally talking about regalia, which, of course, include state swords. It therefore follows from this premise that the designs on the Bosomtwe sword should have a symbolic meaning. However, my informants were unable to give me the meaning.

The blade of the Bosomtwe sword at Bekwai is encased in an old animal skin. I observed that the sword lacks an abosodee (gold cast). The absence of abosodee enstranges the Bosomtwe sword since it is commonly known that state swords have it, because generally, according to Kyerematen, the abosodee expresses the philosophy of the chief in a symbolic form. It also helps to distinguish one sword from the other.

Since the Bosomtwe sword lacks abosodee, a discussion on such a symbol is seen under the 'Abusua kuruwaa' sword which possesses one.

It is by the Bosomtwe sword of the town that the Bekwai chief swears the oath of office to the Asantehene. The elders (court officials) in turn use the same sword when taking the oath of allegiance to the chief.

The Abusua Kuruwa Sword

This sword (Plate 11b) is like the Bosomtwe sword of Bekwai in form, colour, and size, It is also similar to the Abusua Kuruwa sword found at Offinso, Ejisu, Mampong and Nsuta.[30]

The striking differences are the designs on the hilts, the blades and the gold cast ornament fastened to the sheath of the sword.

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29 K.K.A. Anti, Aspects of African Ritual Symbolism and Christian Education, paper for discussion at a conference of West African Association of Theological Institutions, Gbarnya, Liberia, August 1-8, 1981.

30 H.M. Cole & D.H. Ross, The Arts of Ghana, The Regents of University of California, California, 1977, Page 152.

(a) (b)

PLATE 11a MFENASA (THREE BLADED) SWORD OF THE BEKWAI ROYAL HOUSE

11b ABUSUA KURUWA (FAMILY POT) SWORD OF BEKWAI

The Hilt: The hilt is patterned after the Bosomtwe sword, however, the difference arises from the delicate designs found on the Abusua Kuruwa sword. The hilt of the 'Abusua Kuruwa' sword like that of the Bosomtwe one, has guards ornamented with linear geometric designs with the grip having criss-cross patterns (Fig. 10). The overall form of the hilt of this sword is similar to the hilt of the swords found in Denkyira.[31]

The Blade: The blade of the 'Abusua Kuruwa' sword conforms to the general form of that of the Bosomtwe sword.

The blade of this sword is encased in an animal's skin like that of the Bosomtwe sword. This forms the sheath or scabbard of the sword. The sheath of the Abusua Kuruwa sword, unlike that of the Bosomtwe sword or the scabbard of a fighting sword cannot be removed. It can only be detached when the sewn edge is torn out.

The Abosodee: Attached to the sheath of the 'Abusua Kuruwa' sword of the town and her traditional area is found a free standing motif cast in gold (Fig. 11). This is called 'Abusua Kuruwa' (family pot) which has an accompanying proverbial meaning shown on the next page. This ornament gives rise to the name of the sword.

The abosodee is a solid gold cast about the size of a human fist fixed to the sheath of the sword with the help of strings. The wall of the pot has vertical slits which are suggestive of its purpose as purely ceremonial. At the edges of these slits are delicately carved designs (Fig. 12). On both sides of the cast pot or cup are provided with handles. At the top, one sees a conical lid bearing relief designs. It was observed that part of the base of the abosodee was broken and therefore renders the present cup incomplete. I was then struck by the patinated surface because it is often

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31 Information & photographs collected from Appeah, an unpublished thesis on Denkyira regalia, U.S.T. Library, 1984 Pages 22-59.

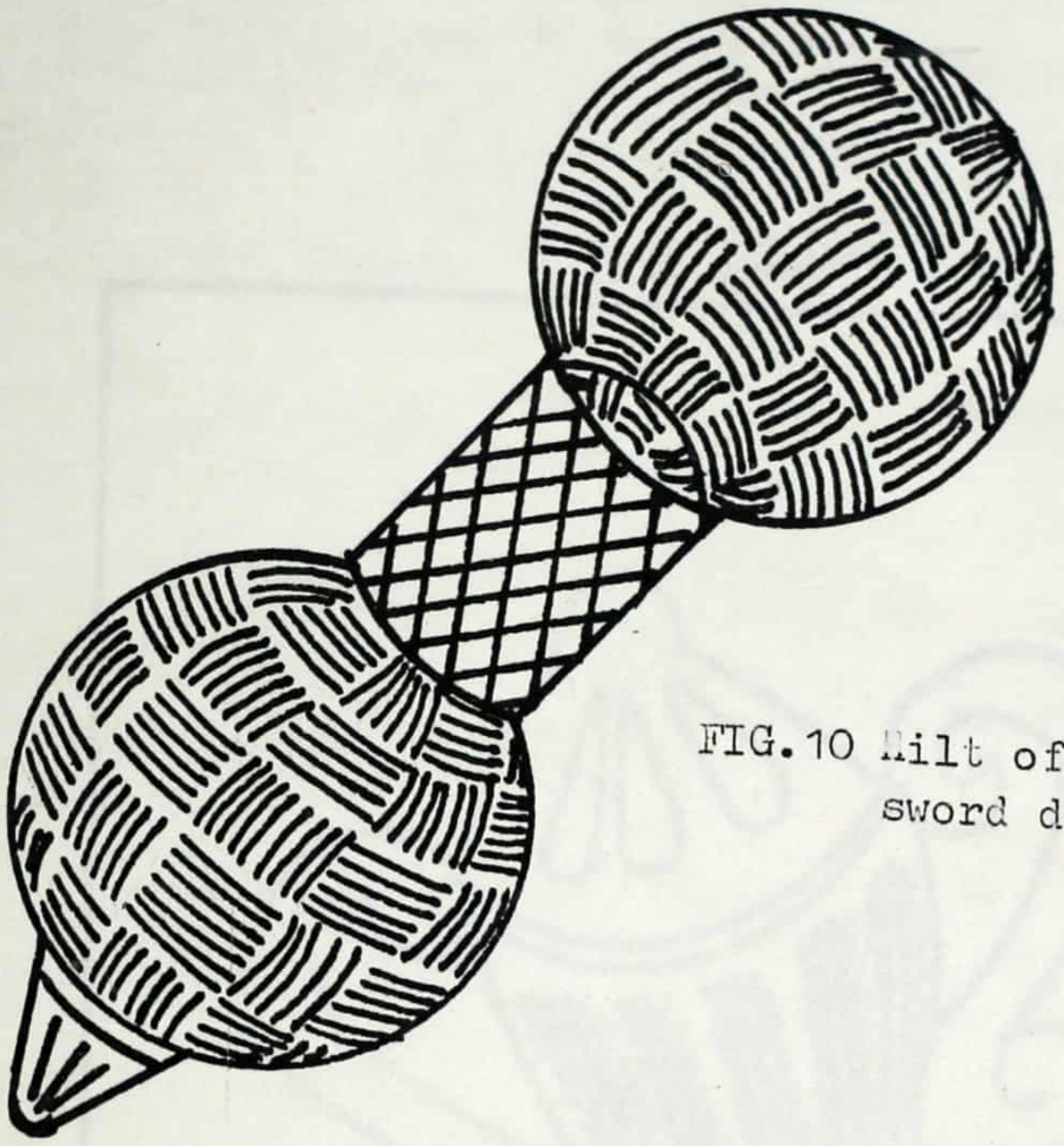

FIG.10 Hilt of "Abusua Kuruwa" sword decorated with designs

FIG.11 "Abusua Kuruwa" motif

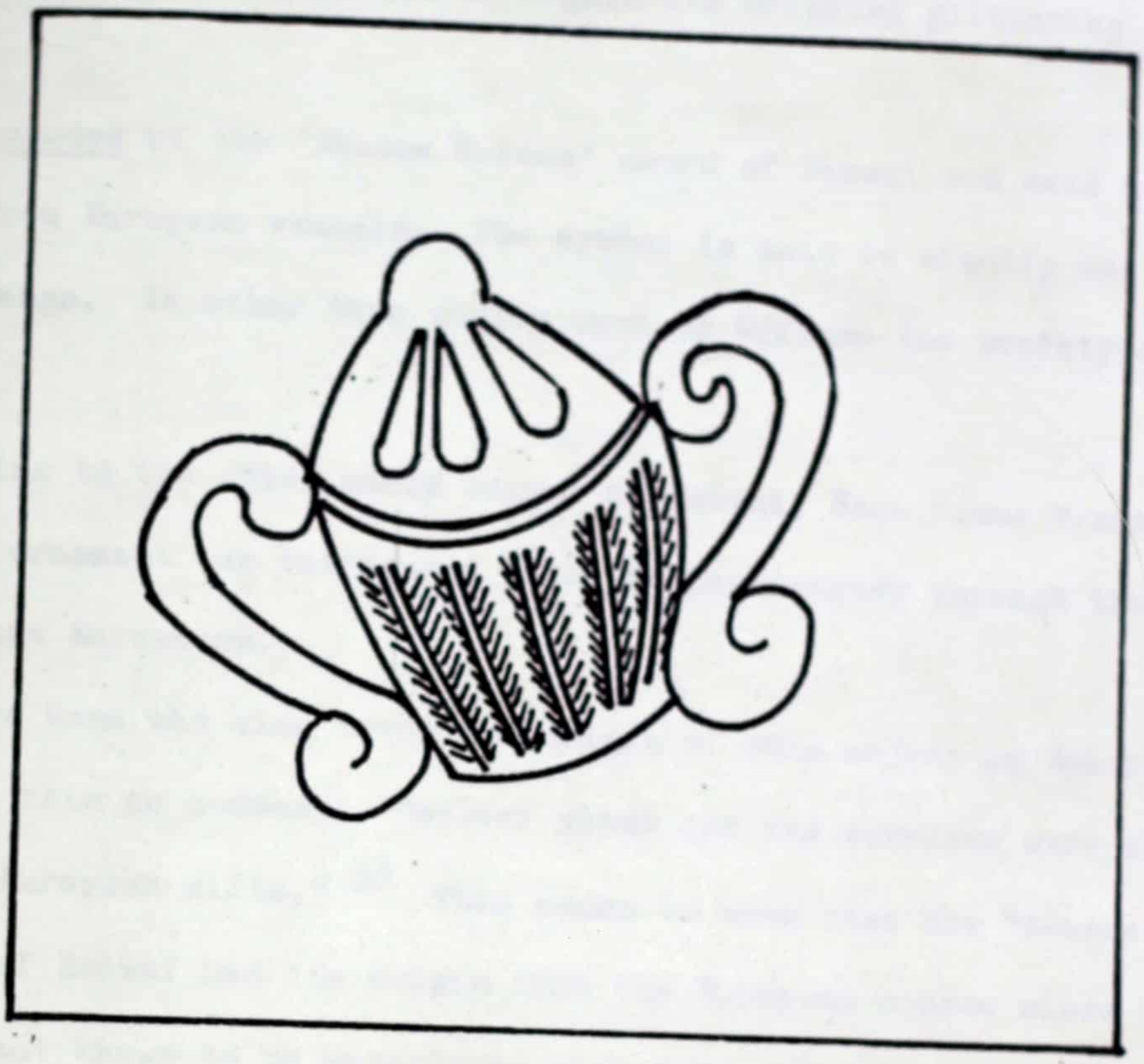

FIG. 12 Abusua kuruwa cast showing delicate designs at the edges of the slits

said that the court officials of Bekwai usually keep the regalia cleaned and polished. But when I inquired about the patinated surface of the said abosodee, I was told that it was due to the fact that this particular sword is so revered that it does not 'see' light regularly, but when the need arises, it will be nicely polished to regain its original glittering gold colour.

The abosodee of the 'Abusua Kuruwa' sword of Bekwai was said to have been copied from European vessels. The symbol is said to signify unity in the royal lineage. In other Akan states such as Offinso the prototype is a teapot.[32]

According to the chief sword bearer of Bekwai, Nana Kwame Nyame, the Abusua Kuruwa ornament was introduced into the paramountcy through the contact with the Europeans.

Cole and Ross who also trace the origin of this object in Ashanti generally have this to comment: "silver plate and tea services were apparently common European gifts." [33] This seems to show that the "Abusua Kuruwa" motif of Bekwai had its origin from the European source since the Ashantis were not known to be associated with this object before the arrival of the whites. Even though tea cup is not mentioned in the above quotation, it is implied that tea cups are used in tea services.

The "Abusua Kuruwa" abosodee motif proclaims the titles of the chief and also refers to the character and responsibilities of the ruler as the one who provides the material needs of his people. At Bekwai, the sword that bears this motif - Abusua Kuruwa represents the royal clan of the town and her traditional area. This is the Oyoko clan at Bekwai. It is used during state gatherings and it is usually sent on errand to any of

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32 H.M. Cole, & D.H. Ross, The Arts of Ghana, The Reagents of the University of California, California, 1977, Page 152.

33 Ibid.

the Oyoko paramountcy eg. Juaben, Nsuta and Kokofu.

Another fascinating abosodee found at Bekwai is the 'Koto (crab) abosodee'. I was not given adequate information about the meaning of this symbol but this might have been adopted to liken its natural qualities of bravery and self-defence to those of the Bekwaihene, who was said to have shown this quality in the time of the Ashanti wars. Cole and Ross commenting on the use of animal motifs by chiefs have pointed out that certain animal motifs are used, whose natural qualities are compared to the chief.[34]

Thus the effigy of the crab may symbolise the strength of the Bekwai chief because according to one Akan tradition, the crab is the only creature which the elephant - king of the animal kingdom - fears. It is alleged that the crab is able to kill this mighty animal by grasping its trunk by the nose when the elephant drinks from a stream. Secondly, due to the crab's exoskeleton nature, the snake which is feared as being a dangerous animal can be killed by the crab whereas the snake cannot sting it because of its hard shell.

Sword ornaments apart from proclaiming the symbolic power and authority of the chief, generally illustrate certain maxims, a message from the ruler who uses it or an incident in the history of the paramountcy. Most of them are linked with traditional sayings or proverbs, but some, such as gyata (lion) are direct heraldic motifs. Cases in point are those found at Ejisu, Juaben and Nsuta which are reportedly emblems of courage of the chief.

The Mfenasa Sword

The third category of swords of the Bekwai state swords is the mfenasa sword (Plate 11a). This sword at Bekwai is radically different from those already described in this thesis and from the mfenasa sword in

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34 H.M. Cole & D.H. Ross, Op Cit Page 149.

the Denkyira paramountcy (see footnote 35) because unlike the others, it has a set of three blades arranged in a parallel order (Plate 11a).

The Hilt: The hilt of the mfenasa is different from those of Bosomtwe and the 'Abusua Kuruwa' swords, and is made up of elaborately carved semi-circular designs. The grip is carefully covered with criss-cross designs which serve to break the monotony of the pattern on the two bulbous guards at each side of the grip. (Plate 12). The hilt is gold laiden like the other type of swords in the royal house.

The Blades: The blades of the sword are worked into pierces of geometric patterns which conform to those of other swords at Bekwai and her traditional area. There is a clear manifestation of craftsmanship over here. The identical set of blades are carefully welded into a common circular base which in turn is attached to the hilt of the sword. I think this technique was applied by the craftsman to reinforce the strength of the joint of the three blades which would otherwise have been susceptible to unnecessary breakages. The overall parallel arrangement of the blades gives an impression of kinetic movement (Fig. 13). This is one of the phenomena that the modern artists employs to suggest movement.

The mfenasa is quite heavier than the rest of the swords of Bekwai due to the greater number of blades used for it. The extreme ends of these blades, unlike the others in the royal house, are not curved, but angular.

The mfenasa of Bekwai is devoid of an abosodee (gold cast) and a sheath. From the following account given by Appeah, the manufacture of this mfenasa might have been influenced by that of Denkyira.

> Among the paraphernalia of Denkyira royal house is a sword about 1.5 metre long, known as 'mfenasa' (Plate 13a) which has three blades and three hilts welded to its long twisted shaft. This sword is principally for display. The elaborately worked blades are short compared to the overall length. Each blade is made from a large flat sheet, pierced and fretted with geometric patterns to indicate a crocodile symbol, a

PLATE 12 DETAIL: HILT OF THE MFENASA SWORD
SHOWING GEOMETRIC DESIGNS

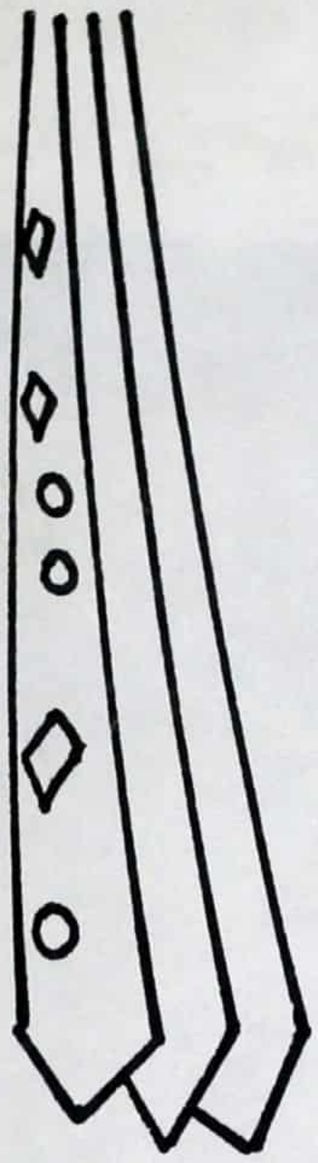

FIG.13 Arrangement of mfenosa blades suggesting kinetic movement

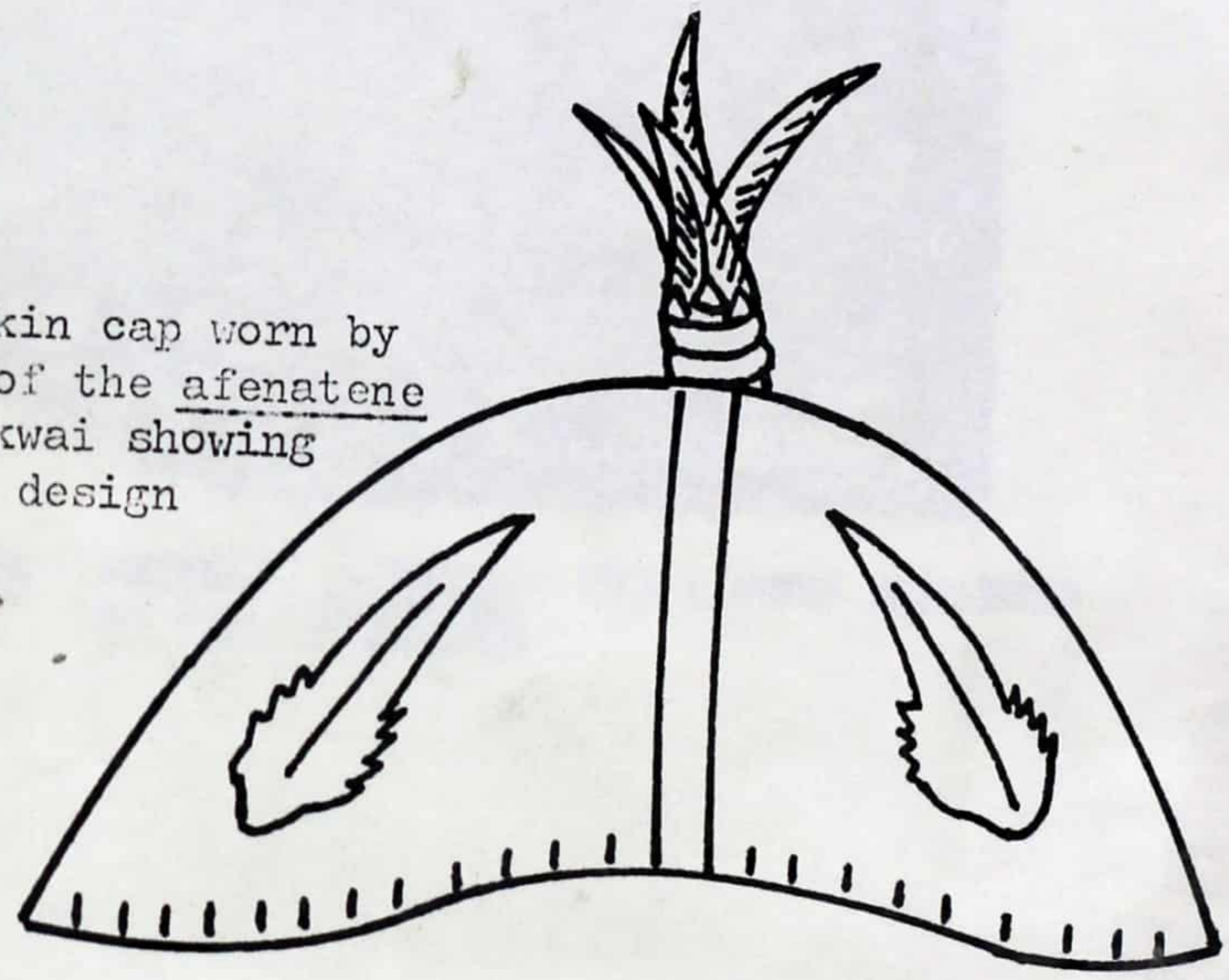

FIG.14 Elaborate skin cap worn by the bearer of the afenatene sword of Bekwai showing symmetrical design

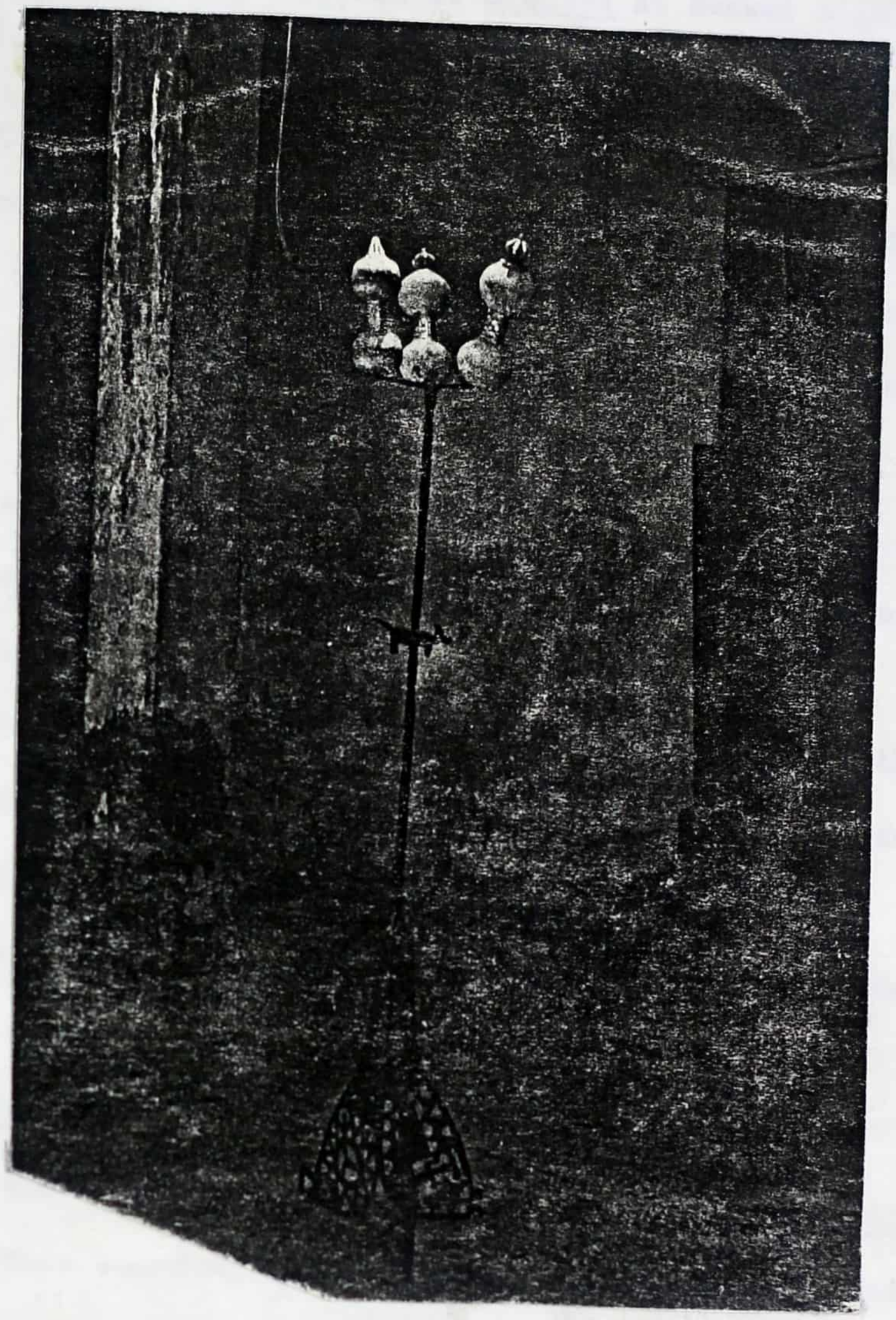

PLATE 13a DENKYIRA MFENASA: THE BLADES ARRANGED TO FORM A TRIPOD

legendary bird symbol, and a crescent moon (Plate 13b-13d). The three bladed sword stands on its tripod of blades near the chief when he sits in state. The three hilts of the mfenasa are gilt or whitewashed with kaolin.[35]

Even though the construction of mfenasa at Bekwai might have been influenced by that of Denkyira, the dissimilarity observed here is that the Bekwai mfenasa, unlike that of Denkyira, does not have a shaft and its blades as noted earlier are not arranged in the form of a tripod. The model at Bekwai may be a deliberate attempt to introduce a variation. It could also be that, the Bekwais just had the concept of the Denkyira mfenasa and tried to carve one to suit the taste of the Bekwai palace.

The three bladed sword of Bekwai is called "Tikoro nko agyina" (one head does not make a decision). This emphasises the chief's need to consult his elders on important matters.

Although the mfenasa of Bekwai is smaller and shorter than the one curfently owned by the Denkyira chief, Boa Amponsem II, its sculptural qualities compare favourably with that of the Denkyira state. This comparison is based on the information given by Appeah and recorded by me on pages 70-74 of this thesis.

The Afenatene Sword

Another sword found at Bekwai traditional area is the Afenatene (long sword). This sword at Bekwai like those described is made up of two parts - the hilt and the blade.

The Hilt: The hilt is carved out of special wood like the examples used for the rest of the swords in the same paramountcy. In conformity with the rest of the swords, the hilt is heavily ornamented with patterns and the overall form is gilded.

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35 C.A. Appeah, "The Image of Denkyira Projected Through its state Regalia", (an unpublished Thesis, U.S.T. Library, 1984), Page 33.

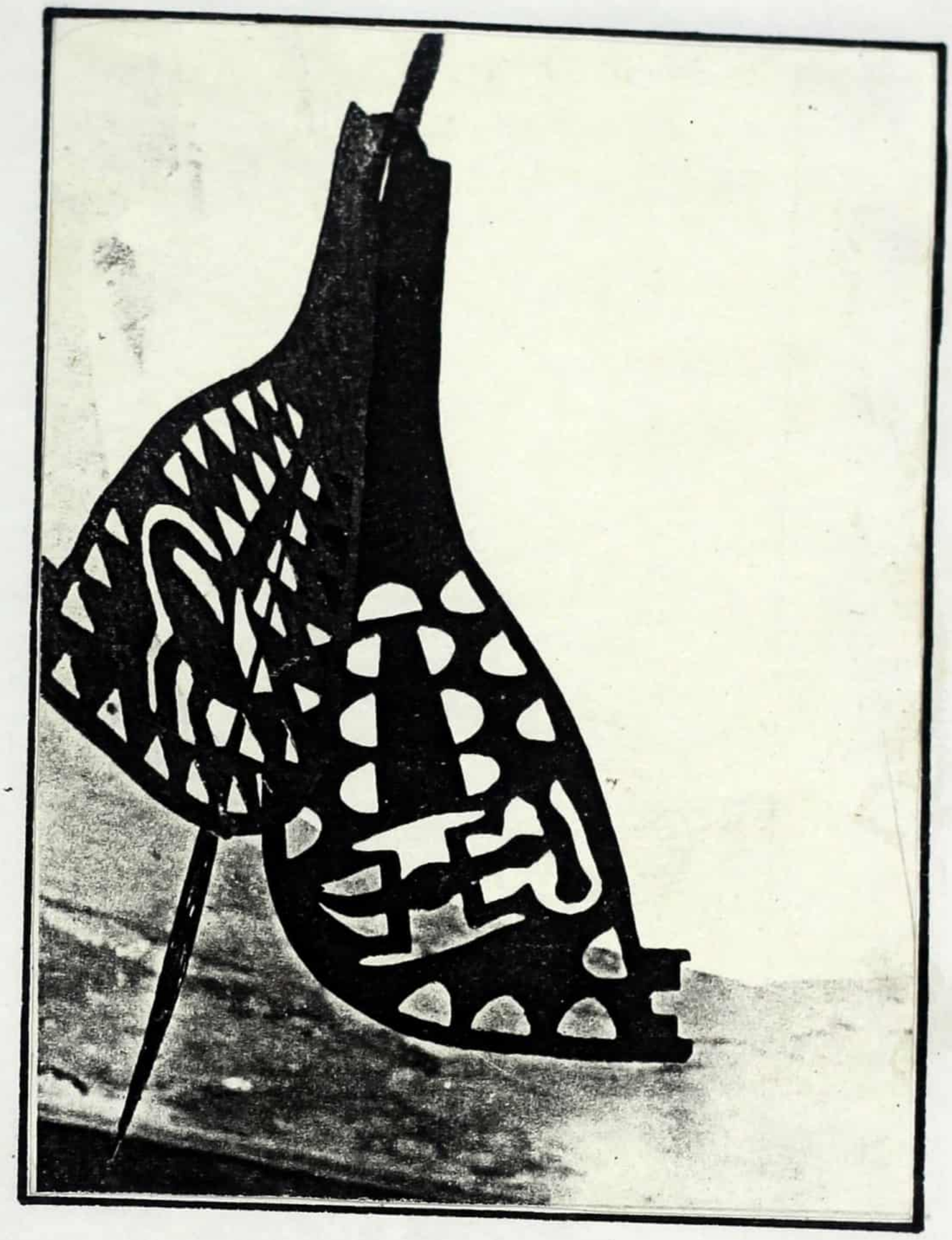

PLATE 13b A BLADE OF MFENASA INDICATING A CROCODILE SYMBOL

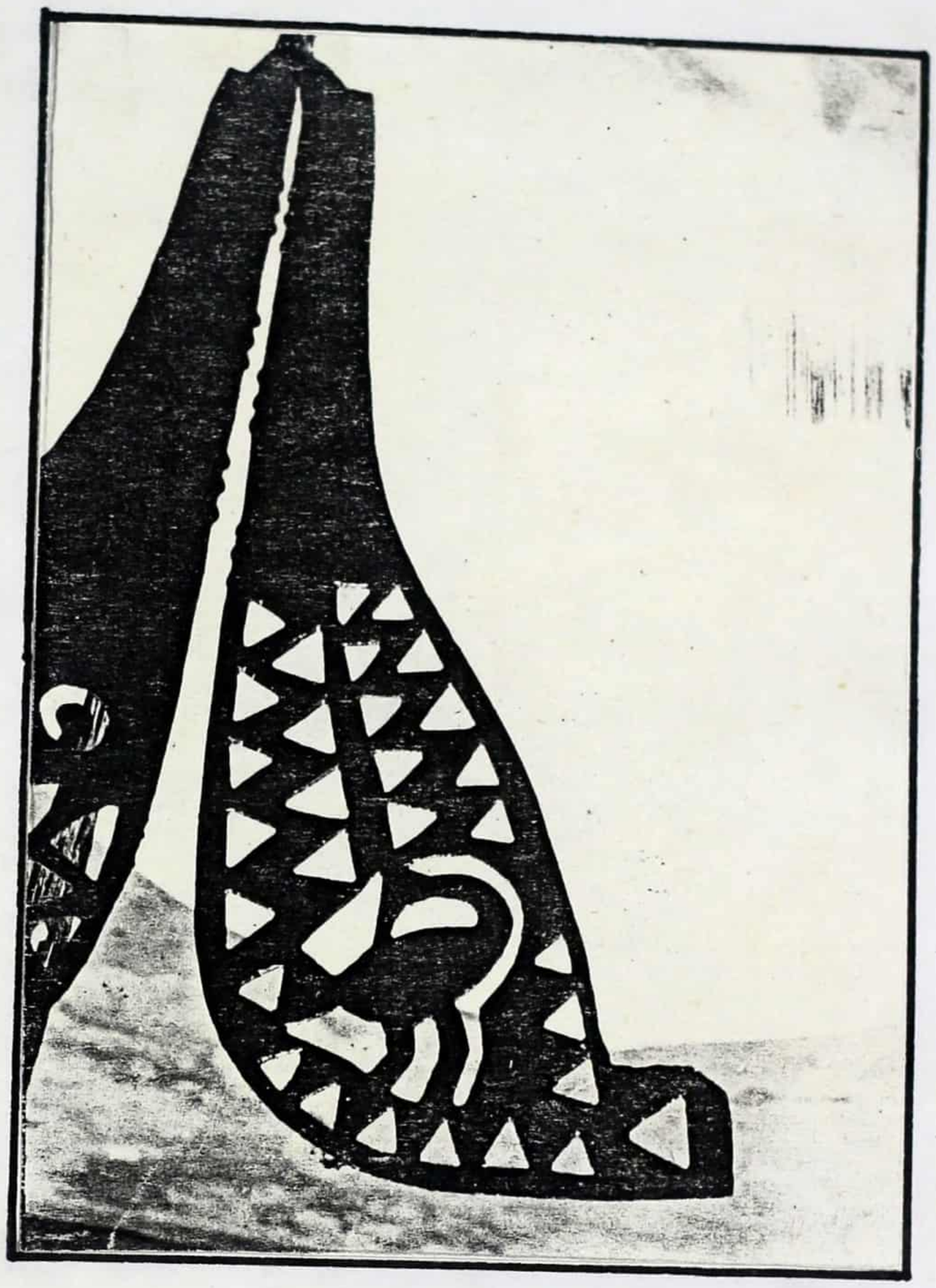

PLATE 13c A BLADE OF MFENASA INDICATING A SANKOFA SYMBOL

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PLATE 13d A THIRD BLADE, INDICATES A CRESCENT MOON

The Blade: There is no structurally distinct feature found on the blade. Like the others in the paramountcy, the blade is made of an iron which is fretted with the usual geometric designs. The blade takes the form, shape, size and length of the Bosomtwe sword. Unlike the "Abusua Kuruwa" sword, the Afenatene has no abosodee and a sheath.

The overall form and size of the Bekwai Afenatene is in direct opposition to what Kyerematen refers to as afenatene in other areas of Ashanti.

He writes:

> The afenatene swords are structually distinct. Larger than the others, they are characterised by blunt open works, wrought iron blades (Plate 14) that negate their use as weapons. The shaft of the blade is frequently worked into a knot or a snake while the open work blade itself often features familiar proverbial motifs. Afenatene serves primarily as ceremonial substitutes for more important swords being employed elsewhere. Their purely ceremonial role is especially evident in the multiple hilts and or blade found on many examples.[36]

From the above account of Kyerematen, a sword is called afenatene when it is purposely designed to conform to that category. But contrary to the view of my Bekwai informants, any sword without an abosodee is called afenatene.

However, I was not convinced in the sense that a sword such as the mfenasa of the same royal house is without an abosodee but it cannot be simply called an afenatene (long sword). Secondly, the abosodee is just attached to the sheath which is outside the actual form of the sword. I would have become convinced if I had been informed that a sword is called afenatene if it is longer than the ordinary one. Probably the absence of an abosodee alone cannot put it under the category of afenatene because Kyerematen has further stated that two of the Asantehene's afenatene have

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36 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, quoted in D. Ross and H. Cole, Op. Cit. Page 148

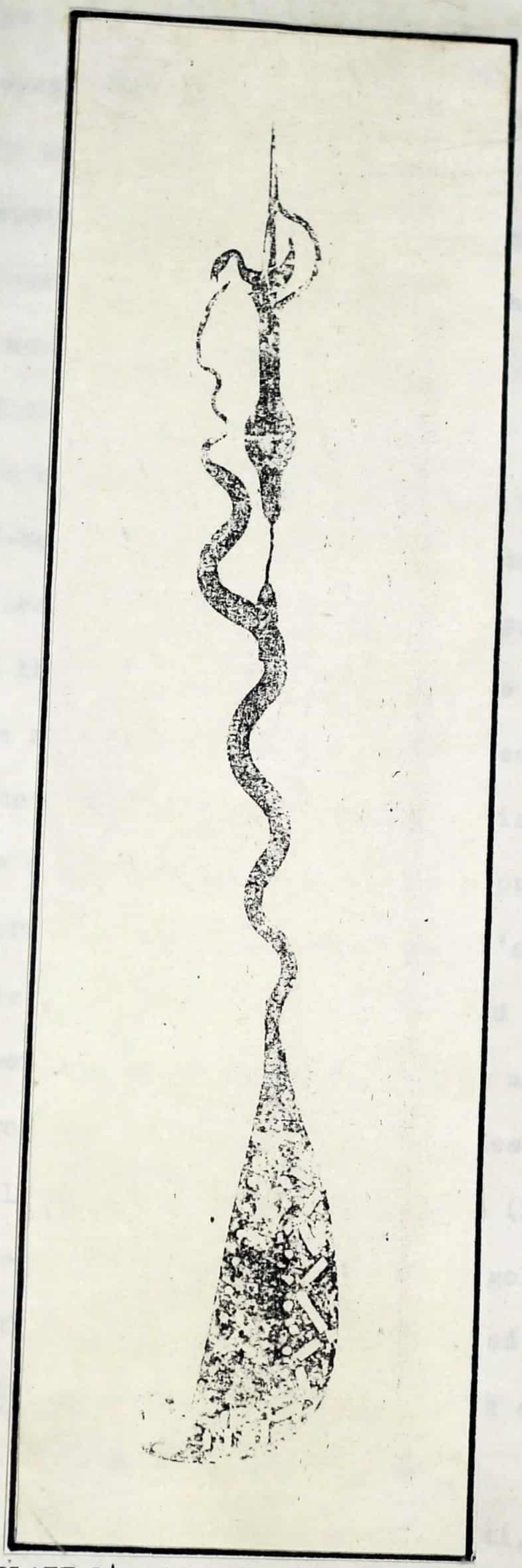

PLATE 14 AFENATENE (LONG) SWORD

gold cast ornaments - groundnut shells and a bottle tied to the sheath.[37] The afenatene is used during ordinary gatherings when and where the prominent ones cannot be used.

Having discussed at length some of the principal swords of Bekwai this section will consider the persons who bear the state swords, their dresses and other accoutrements which help in the proper execution of the duties of this office.

The carriers of the state swords at Bekwai and her traditional area are known as sword-bearers. The office of the sword-bearer is one of the highly revered duties at Bekwai and elsewhere. Apart from their duties as forming part of the chief's entourage, they are responsible for the purification of the souls of the chief and his predecessors.

In accordance with the respect given to this office, a special kit is provided for the sword-bearers of Bekwai, as applied to most parts of Ashanti. This comprises a close-fitting antelope's skin, a skull cap which bears some geometric openwork patterns, and a gold applique'. The holder of the Afenatene sword at Bekwai is provided with a more elaborate cap which bears small gold-leafed carvings on the sides as well as gold cast of abe dua' (oil palm tree) surmounted on the cap (Fig. 14). Running through the centre of the cap from the back is a gold leaf line which stands out clearly from the black colour background of the cap. The lower end of the cap is given a unique characteristic of an inward curvature of the rim.

At Bekwai as found at most places in Ashanti, the bearer of the most important state sword, the "Abusua Kuruwa", wears an elaborate skull-cap made of an agglomeration of a pair of gold leafed ram's horns, of various shapes and talismans (Plate 15). Also associated with the bearer of the

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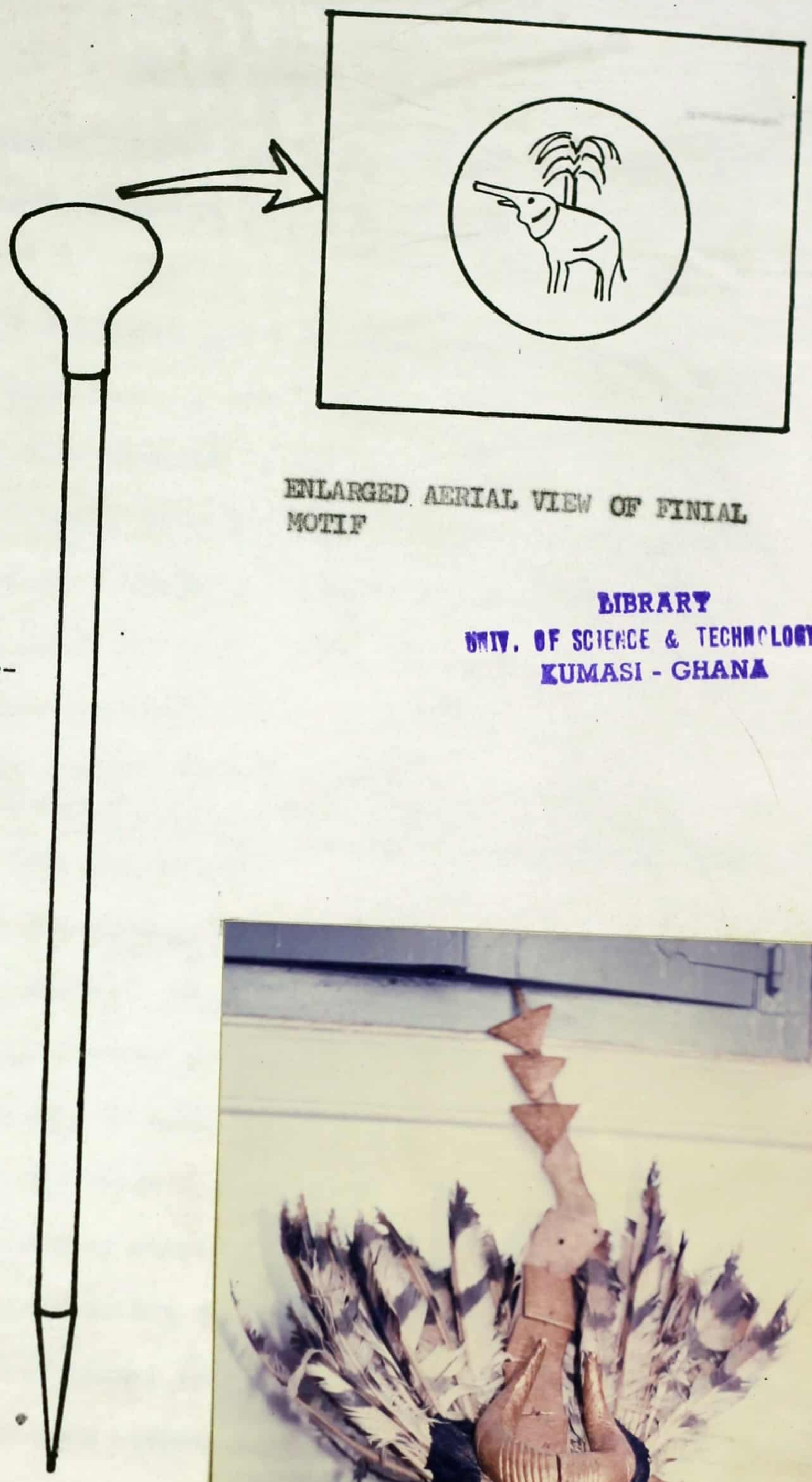
37 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, "Regalia for An Ashanti Durbar", U.S.T., Kumasi 1961, Page 10.

Bekwai "Abusua Kuruwa" is a balderic in the form of the "Amansie Pramire" (Amansie cobra) - the symbol of Bekwai and her paramountcy. This is said to be employed when the sword is not in use. Attached to the lower end of this balderic is a pair of long metal gongs (about 45 cm long) which is alleged to ring to announce the arrival of the sword-bearer during procession.

Like the abosodee of swords, the accessories associated with the headresses have proverbial meanings. For instance, the ram's horns found on the feathered headdress or skullcap refer to the saying "a ram fights with its heart, not its horns" (ogwenin sisi a ode ne krona enye ne mmen) suggesting that the "strength" of commitment is more important than a warrior's weapon.

Other accessories associated with the sword-bearers include an item of neckwear consisting of a white cord supporting a pendant breast plate, a bag of snuff, herbs and so on.



ENLARGED AERIAL VIEW OF FINIAL MOTIF

FIG.15 "Aban poma": finial depicting elephant and oil-palm motif

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PLATE 15 SKULL CAP MADE OF FEATHERS, WORN BY THE BEARER OF THE MOST PRINCIPAL SWORD OF BEKWAI

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter considers linguist staffs, umbrellas, palanquins and drums. The first item to be discussed hereafter is the:

Linguist staff

This kind of staff which will later be discussed in more detail is used by the Okyeame (linguist) who is the highest in the hierarchy of non-royal court officials in Akan communities including Bekwai. Cole and Ross point out that the word linguist is misleading;[38] it suggests a translator or spokesman. But according to these two writers, the word Okyeame (which the English translate as linguist) rarely means "translator" and far more than "spokeman". They refer to Wilks and write as follows:

> The nineteenth century Ashanti Okyeame was a counsellar, judicial advocate, military attache, ambassador, foreign minister and political trouble shooter with emphasis on legal work (Wilks 1975: 470-74).[39]

To these duties of the Okyeame should be added the offering of prayers and libation on public occasions. He is also a historian of tribal lore. He employes oratory and appropriate proverbs, mataphors, similies and imagery with strong visual impact to embellish his oration when delivering judgements and expressing the ruler's address in a more courtly manner. The office of the linguist is highly respected since the chief communicates to the masses through this intermediary and vice versa. This prevails in most Ashanti chiefdoms since traditional practice does not permit one to address the ruler directly during state and open occasions.

W.E.F. Ward is said to have traced the position of the linguist from the time of Ewurade Basa, the second chief of Adansi, who was alleged to have been responsible for the political rise of this state.[40]

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38 Cole, H.M. and Ross, D.H., The Arts of Ghana, Regents of the University of California, 1977, Page 158.

39 Cole, H.M. and Ross, D.H., Ibid, Page 158

40 The date of the institution of the office of the first linguist was however not stated by Ward.

The linguist staff referred to above, symbolises the office of the linguist; he holds it while executing his duties. Even though the institution of the office of the linguist is traced from the time of Ewurade Basa, the use of the linguist staff is not associated with his name.

The date as well as the manner of the origin of the staff seems to be obscure. However, divergent opinions have been expressed about how it came to be used by the linguist. For instance, Cole and Ross give information that Nana Osei Bonsu of Kumasi, traces the history of the origin of linguist staffs from the time of Oti Akenten, the third king of Ashanti (about 1630-1660).[41]

Nana Bonsu is alleged to have pointed out that initially the staffs were two walking sticks used by an old woman, Nana Amoah, as supports while pleading on behalf of wrong doers during the reign of Oti Akenten. Her son Adoku allegedly succeeded her with one of her sticks in honour of his late mother. Adoku was quite successful. Therefore Oti Akenten appointed him officially to argue state cases at official conferences.[42]

Other informants such as Kyerematen and Sieber are referred to as stating that the linguist staff was derived from decorated war clubs found in Northern Ghana and the Mameluk Maces from Egypt respectively. Preston compares the form to fetish sticks found in the courtyard of the king of Fetu. Some Ashanti elders also say that the first linguist staffs were called "asempa ye tia" (meaning truth is brief" or "a good judgement is short"). They were said to be simple cylindrical canes, about 1½ metres (about 5 feet). They were decorated with gold or silver applique and a monitor lizard (omanpam) skin. But they never had finials. The old Nana

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41 Cole, H.M. and Ross, D.H., The Arts of Ghana, Regents of the University of California, 1977, Page 160.

42 Cole, H.M. and Ross, D.H., Ibid, Page 160.

Amoah's walking sticks were also called "Asempa ye tia". The omanpam skin on the "asempa ye tia" had a symbolic meaning. The reptile was previously called "bo oman" and was later called omanpam (peace maker). Since the act of peace making was one of the jobs of the linguist and thus the Omanpam skin on the linguist staff signified the duty of the linguist.[43]

In the succeeding section, I wish to reiterate that the lingust staff takes different forms by way of the finial motif. The finial which usually held a conspicuous position helped to distinguish one staff from the other and secondly, gave rise to the respective staff names. The staffs that were shown to me during the research could be categorised into two:

(a) those that mainly depict symbolic animal figures and

(b) those that mainly depict symbolic human figures.

Staffs Depicting mainly symbolic Animal Figures

One of the staffs to be discussed in this section is the 'Aban Poma' "Aban Poma" (Aban came to mean government but originally meant the Fort and Castle authorities - British government. Thus the "Aban Poma" represented governmental power or authority). A single Aban Poma (Fig. 15) was seen by me which was under the custody of the akyeamehene (chief linguist) of Bekwai. This staff was said to be among the gifts given to the Bekwaihene for his meritorious services to the British government during the 1900 British Campaign mentioned earlier on page 34. The 'Aban Poma' is a carved wooden staff, whose finial shows the symbol of an elephant and an oil-palm tree cast in silver. The palm and the elephant were the symbols used to represent British sovereighty in British West Africa before independence (Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Nigeria).

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43 Cole, H.M. and Ross, D.H., Op Cit, Page 160.

As far as my research is concerned, the said staff at Bekwai does not have much traditional recognition. It is known to have been made in England and given to the Bekwai chief, as seen in other British protectorates, to designate the British official representative in any dealings with the British government. The staff is carried by the chief linguist to designate his high office among the non-royals.

As usual the staff is divided into three parts - the bulbous top which bears the motif, the lower part which tapers to a point, and the middle part which is cylindrical. This portion is about one inch in diameter and has no surface decoration. However, the surface is slightly patinated by the frequent handling of the staff. The motif, shown in low relief on the finial, is cast in the profile view as seen from above.

During state gatherings and processions, the "Aban Poma" is held by akyeamehene to identify him as the chief linguist of the Bekwai chief.

The second type of linguist staff (Plate 16) called "apese ye kese a, oye ma dufokyee" (if the hedgehog becomes fat it does so for the decayed log). This means any good thing that is done by the Okyeame (linguist) is ultimately to the interest of the ruler. This staff also comes under the above category. Like the "Aban Poma" the staff under discussion can be divided into three parts namely: the finial, the stem, and the down part.

The finial consists of a group of three animal figures and two logs of wood, all carved in wood. This composition represents an apese (hedgehog), its offspring, and two logs of dufokyee (rotten log), arranged with the mother standing in between the two offspring. The mother naturally towers above the offspring. This ensemble of figures is provided with a rectangular base unlike most freestanding figures of African art. It apparently was provided only to prevent damage to the thin, fragile limbs and to give the figure additional stability (Fig. 16).

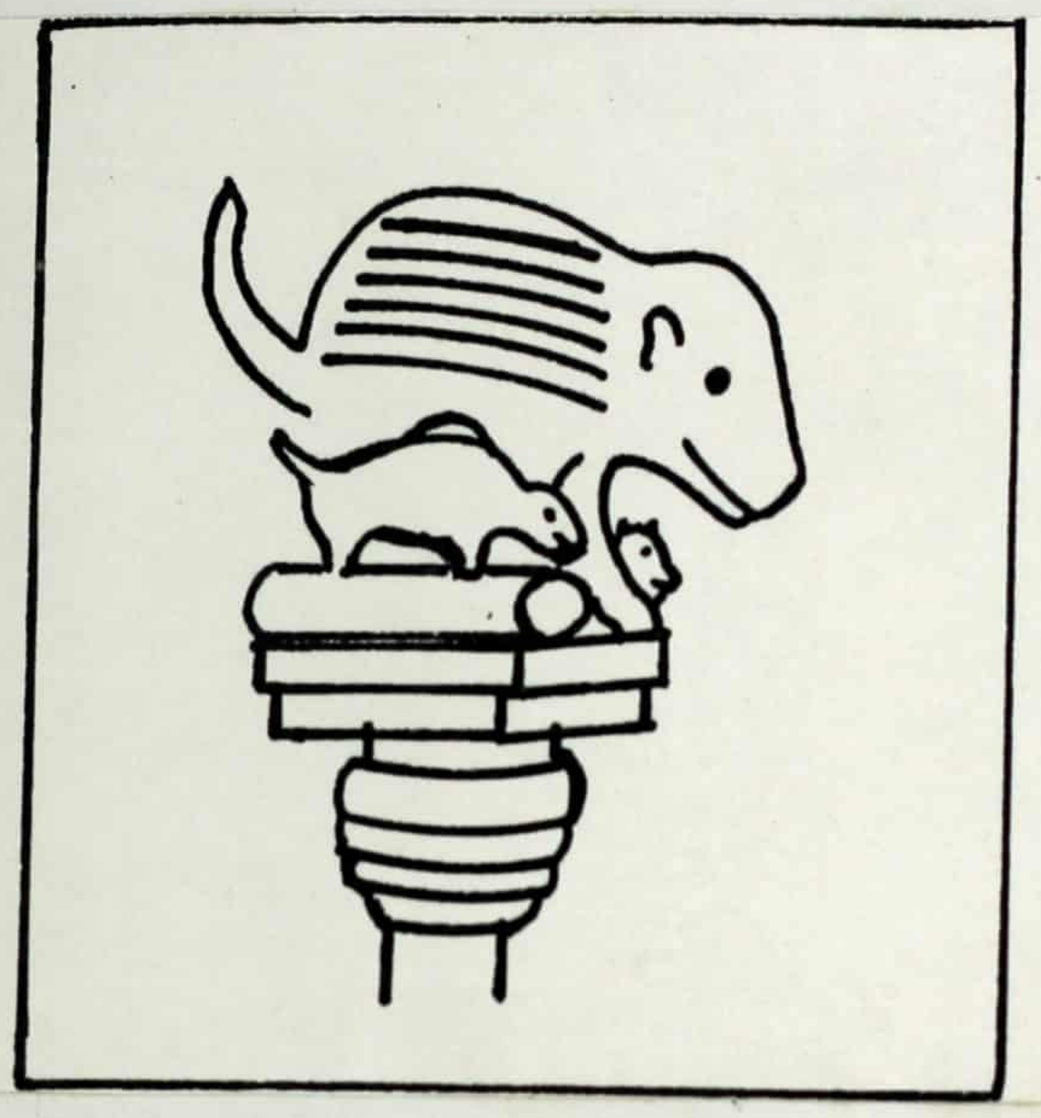

FIG.16 "Apese ye kese a, oye ma dufomotwee" finial provided with a rectangular base

The figures are given naturalistic treatments. The body of the animals is predominantly covered all over with parallel horizontal lines representing the quills. The configuration of these lines gives the illusion of kinetic movement (see Fig. 17). The composition is characterised by an openwork which gives lightness "space and time"[44] to the object when the eye surveys it (Fig. 18).

The strong horizontal lines running across the body are broken by the arched legs' posture. This breakage may also lead the eye down the stem of the staff. The offspring are also carved in upright positions. The cylindrical objects which depict the rotten log are simply treated. A curiousity which arouses my interest is the small size of the cylindrical objects ("rotten" logs) which are supposed to be larger enough to be capable of serving as the abode of the animals are comparatively smaller.

The African carver unlike his European counterpart does not pay much attention to the qualities such as the classic proportion and aesthetics. The African sculptor is usually interested in fulfilling the symbolic aspect of his sculpture regardless of other qualities such as those mentioned above. To the African when the symbolic aspect is achieved, then the work is accepted by his community as good and beautiful.

The finial motif is mounted on a rectangular block of wood, which is in turn supported by a circular platform. The platform slightly narrows down to a cylinder. Midway between the circular platform and the end of the cylinder is a circular knob decorated with geometric patterns. Such patterns are not uncommon in Bekwai leadership art as Faure has observed in the arts of developing cultures and has therefore written:

> Geometric figures are dear to all primitive (indigenous) peoples, whether they paint their pots, decorate their

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44 When the eye surveys the figure it moves from one point to the other and as it crosses a negative area to a positive area, it involves a movement through space and time, which is inevitable in such an activity.

> huts, weave their clothing, or strip the skin of their bodies; and cutting into the African jewelry in every direction we find again these geometric forms - short, fat, dense and pressed closely together.[45]

In fact, with the exception of the art of stripping the skin which Faure has observed in developing communities, his description is well applicable to the patterns in Bekwai leadership art.

Referring once again to the "apese ye kese a oye ma dufokyee" staff, it is noticed that the cylinder is socketed to another wooden bar which is angular as shown in Figure 19. The stem of the same linguistic staff, unlike that of the "aban poma" described above, is densely ornamented with abstracted patterns. The abstracted patterns with symbolic meanings also serve to distinguish one linguist stick from the other - thus the plain linguist stick means "asempa ye tia" - truth is precise and unadorned. The patterns range from zig-zags, long, short, and curvy lines of various degrees of thickness, a pattern of deep cuts crossing at right angles, leaving tiny pyramidal and triangular shapes between them (Plate 17). These ornamentations are executed on the surface of a rectangular bar of approximately one-and-a-half metres long and about one-and-a-half centimetres in cross-section.

The third section, that is the lower end of the staff, is also rich in geometric patterns. Actually, the richness of the design testifies to the high artistic acumen of most Ghanaian carvers.

It is used by one of the linguists of the Bekwai paramountcy to identify him as one of the officials of the royal house.

Staffs depicting mainly symbolic human figures

Another linguist staff I observed at the Bekwai palace is a staff bearing a finial of two men sitting at food (Plate 18). The message this

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45 E. Faure, History of Art, Translated from French by Walter Pach, London, 1922, Page 170.

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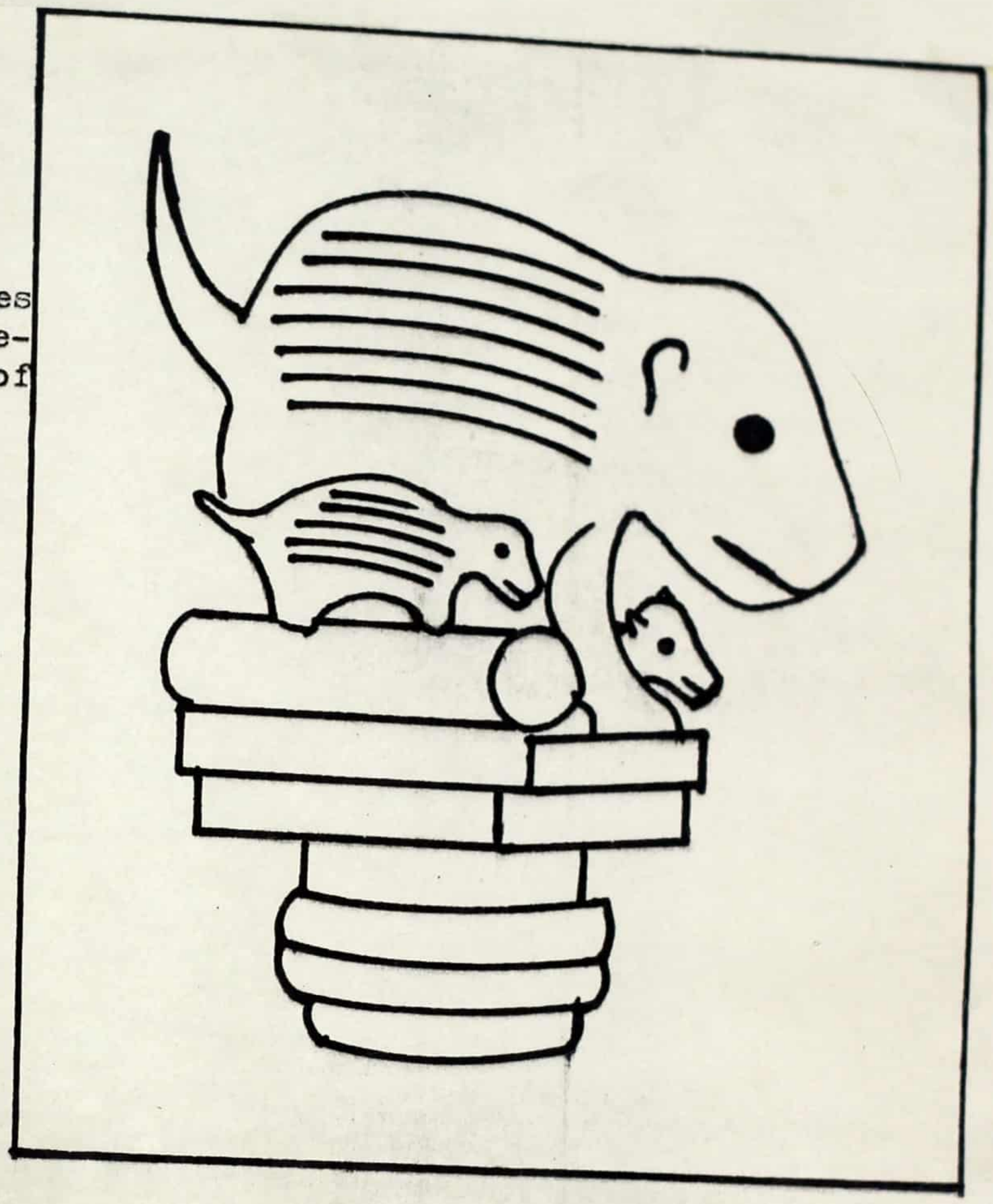

FIG.17 Characteristic lines at the back of the hedgehog giving an illusion of kinetic movement

PLATE 16 "APESE YE KESE A OYE MA DUFOKYEE
LINGUIST STAFF

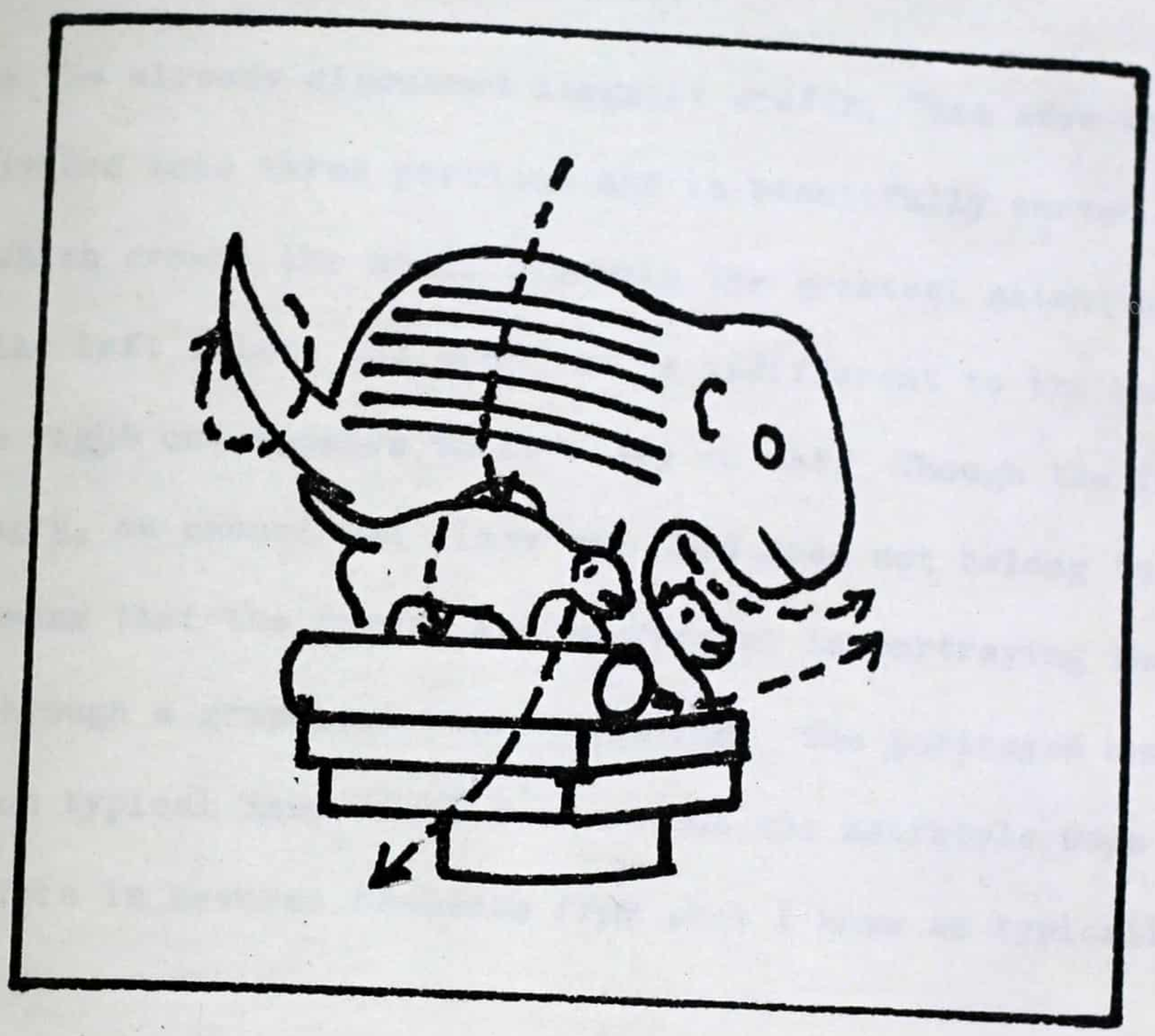

FIG.18 Apese ye kese a oye ma dufomotwee"
motif showing open-work design

the eye surveying the interstices of the
sculpture

motif presents is "nea adee wo no na odie nye dee ekom de no" (chieftaincy belongs to the rightful heir and not those who hunger for it). Apparently, it is from the motif which the artifact derives its proverbial name: "nea adee wo no na odie nye dee ekom de no staff."

This proverb, as Cole and Ross have rightly observed, is inevitably applied to the office of chieftaincy, that is the stool belongs to the rightful descendant and not to those who hunger for it, however, the saying has general social applicability as well. [46]

Like the already discussed linguist staffs, "nea adee wo no na odie" staff is divided into three portions and is beautifully carved in wood. The motif which crowns the staff attracts the greatest attention. The human figure on the left (Plate 18) seems to be indifferent to the food set before him but the right one appears to be ready to eat. Though the figure on the left is hungry, he cannot eat since the food does not belong to him. This therefore means that the carver was successful in portraying the message of the staff through a graphical representation. The portrayed human figures are seated on typical Akan stool forms. But the hairstyle worn by these figures differs in several respects from what I know as typically Akan coiffure.

The entire finial composition is simple, but a combination of angularity and roundness. However, it is very attractive and pleasing. The work therefore shows a high order of artistic achievement. The eyes, mouth set, and the hair (line) above the forehead, all portray a rudimentary treatment.

Ladislas Segy commenting on the attractive nature of a combination of angular and round forms in African art has stated:

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46 H.M. Cole, & D.H. Ross: The Arts of Ghana, The Regents of the University of California, California, 1977, page 9.

FIG.19 The upper cylindrical stem of the apese ye kese a oye ma dufomotwee socketed to an angular wooden bar

A - End of socket

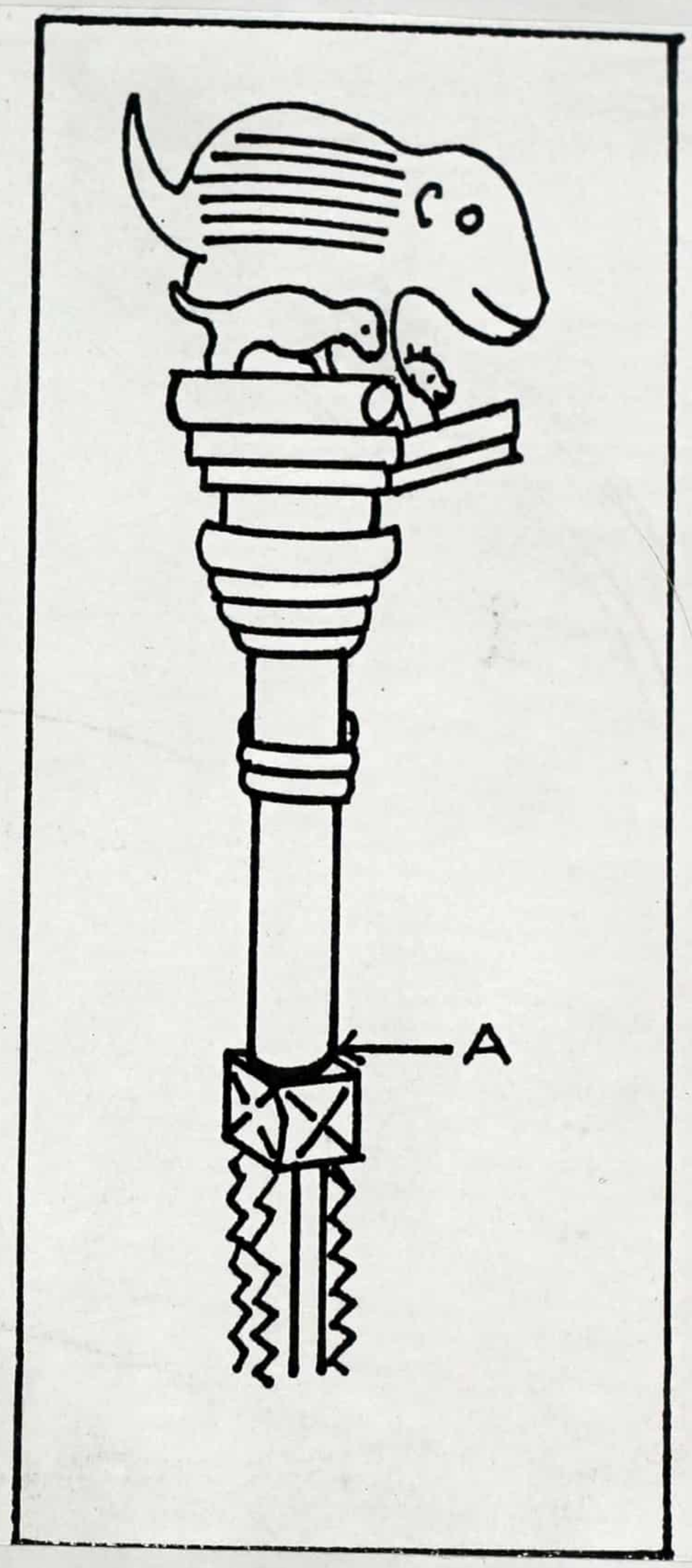

PLATE 17 DETAIL: STEM OF THE "APESE YE KESE A OYE MA DUFOKYEE" SHOWING TINY PYRAMIDAL AND TRIANGULAR SHAPES

PLATE 18 "NEA ADEE WO NO NA ODIE NYE NEA EKUM DE NO" LINGUIST STAFF (DETAIL OF THE FINIAL)

> Angularity and roundness are the recurrent motifs (SIC) of African art. And the union of these opposites result in a rather pleasing effect.[47]

The phrase "angularity and roundness" which Segy has mentioned is two sculptural styles which as observed above can create a pleasing whole when the two styles are brought together.

Now, reconsidering the motif of the "dee adee wo no na odie" staff, I wish to point out that the finial is supported by a wooden base and therefore conforms to the rest of the linguist staffs found at the palace.

Finally, the stem and the lower part like the above mentioned examples follow the order of abstracted pattern-ornamentation and summarily treatment respectively. Like the decorations on the hilts of state swords, the abstractions which form the poma or stick serve to designate the type of staff and its functions. Apart from serving on state gatherings, the said staff is alleged to be involved in the introduction of a newly enstooled chief to the palace. Its accompaniment in this ceremony signifies that the stool belongs to the rightful descendant and not those who hunger for it.

A common feature which was realised at the end of my research was that all the staffs possessed the 'tripartite' divisions - the finial, the stem and the lower part. An interview with Nana Owusu Ansah[48] revealed that the three divisions of linguist staffs in Ashanti have some cosmological significance. In his view, the finial symbolises the Omnipotent God, the middle portion, mankind and the lower end, the ancestors. In fact, Nana Owusu Ansah's information is quite interesting. However, his view has not been substantiated by any other informant. I would therefore suggest that future researchers should delve into the meanings associated with the

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47 Ladislas Segy, African Sculpture, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1958, Page 27.

48 A knowledgeable royal in the Asantehene's palace.

'tripartite' divisions of Akan linguist staffs.

Umbrellas

This section is devoted to the discussion of umbrellas as some of the important attributes of Bekwai chieftaincy. Kyerematen informs us that the use of umbrella as canopies or sunshades by chiefs in all parts of Ghana could be traced as far to the history of man. They naturally originated from the use of some broad leaves of certain kinds of plants such as anworomo, nkonkuro, borodee, and mankani, sometimes hoisted on a stick, to cover the head. But through space and time this practice has taken on a different form; now almost everything used for the manufacture of umbrellas in Ghana is imported. [49]

Since Kyerematen does not limit himself to a particular town of this nation, the account could as well apply to the origin of the umbrella in Bekwai royal house.

That royal house possesses varied types of state umbrellas which could be differentiated by the finial and the materials used for their manufacture. Moreover, the umbrellas derive their names from the type of cloth, and the finials, which in addition, determine the occasions of their use.

One of the umbrellas is called Oyokoman (Plate 19a). It is the principal umbrella of the Bekwai paramountcy. It is covered with a richly coloured kente cloth - Oyokoman - which gives rise to the name. This is a cloth design which is supposed to belong to or represent the Oyoko clan. The Asantehene being a member of the Oyoko clan, has that type of cloth on his umbrella which is quite larger than that of the other Oyoko chiefs who rule at such places as Bekwai, Nsuta, and Juaben.

In addition to the actual Oyokoman cloth, one finds a blue textile material at the summit of the umbrella. Moreover, there is a red felt

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49 A.A.Y. Kyerematen, A Panoply of Ghana, Longmans, London, Page 89.

with a white strip at the rim. These combinations of colours enhance the decorative aspect of the state umbrella of Bekwai. When opened, the textile part serves the purpose of shielding the chief against the heat of the sun. However, considering its immense size and the finials, the umbrella suggests more to its function than being a mere sunshade. Fraser, throwing light upon its additional purpose, had this to write:

> .....These huge objects are both practical sunshades and symbolic, quasi-architectural, space defining forms that help express the chief's role as a ruler.[50]

The 'symbolic' he sets his eyes on justifies his opinion in the same book when he thus indicates:

> State umbrellas, like other regalia, are often topped with wood carvings sheathed in gold leaf and intended to communicate a meaning. On one belonging to the Asantehene, there appears a representation of a certain fruit called prekese, which has a very strong smell. This signifies that the Asantehene is Omnipresent: like the prekese, he is to be sensed even where he is not seen; in other words no gossip or plotting can evade his hearing. [51]

Similarly, the Bekwai state umbrella has a symbolic aspect discussed below.

The huge textile mass which forms the canopy of the oyokoman umbrella of Bekwai traditional area is supported vertically by a long wooden pole.

This is a special hard termite resistant wood. It is known to have a fair degree of permanence and can be worked to a high finish by a skilled craftsman. The wood allows a considerable freedom in the carrying out of all kinds of design. It is generally accepted to be the best medium available over the greater part of the area of study. Secondly, it is natural that a very large number of the artifacts used in the court be made of it. The frequent handling of this stem has resulted in a dark shining patina, its beauty which is increased even more by its use in religious activities

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50 D. Fraser and H.M. Cole, African Art and Leadership, The University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1972, Page 145.

51 D. Fraser and H.M. Cole, Ibid, pp. 145 and 146.

(a) (b) (c)

PLATE 19 A SET OF STATE UMBRELLAS

(a) Oyokoman
(b) Nyankonton
(c) Katamanso

or cults.

The symbolic aspect of the Bekwai "state" umbrella, hinted above, is a representation of a cobra (Plate 20a). This symbol, being the nsiakyire (finial) of the umbrella, is called "Amansie pramire" by the indigenous people. Amansie, in the view of my informants, means the beginning of states and pramire, cobra; and the symbol is said to signify the military strength of the Bekwai chief. For according to the information given me, the chief is capable of moving round to destroy his enemies. His military prowess is therefore said to be as deadly as the cobra's.

This elaborately carved sculpture was reputedly introduced by Eguaye-boafo alongside the mmedie drums - discussed in pages 118 and 119.

One tradition shows that during the foundation of the Bekwai town, a pramire (cobra) suddenly dashed down from within the bloomy thickets. A pandemonium allegedly ensued and the people dispersed for a while. The pramire was said to have visited this new town at regular intervals. In view of this, Otutu Akate, the first chief of the then Bekwai people, who had migrated from Juaben, consulted the oracle. The gods reportedly attributed the reptiles' visits to the notion that the new settlement was Amansie (the origin of states) and the cobra was a 'totem' of the 'origin of nations,' that is "Amansie pramire" (Amansie cobra). The oracle then advised the townfolk to worship the spirit of the reptile if they desired to overcome their enemies in times of war.

The people were allegedly instructed by the oracle to offer mashed yam and eggs to the Amansie cobra on every festive day. In addition, the Bekwai chief was told to put the cast of the cobra on top of his umbrella and to worship the spirit of the reptile with his subjects. Finally, in view of the Bekwaihene's association with the cobra, the oracle reportedly pronounced him to be the paramount chief of Amansie.

The odotobiri (thick forest), which the cobra was said to inhabit has ever since been preserved as sacred, and consequently, as tradition alleged Bekwai has grown rapidly and become a strong military headquarters in the Ashanti region. Owing to her military strength, her district has expanded as far as to the Offin river which is about sixty kilometres from Bekwai (Map 2).

The Krontihene of Bekwai, Nana Asiedu Okofo accounts for the origin of the "Amansie pramire" in a slightly different manner. In his view, the royal symbol was introduced into Bekwai paramountcy by Nana Eguaye-boafo. This took place at the time when the Ashanti declared war against the Denkyira in 1698/1699. Prior to the war, as the Krontihene stated, the then Bekwai chief Eguaye-boafo, consulted his gods concerning their fate in the impending war. The oracle informed the chief to offer live chickens, a meal of mashed yam, and eggs to the spirit of odotobiri (bloomy forest), the present day Abesoa area. As usual, the chief ordered his subjects to present the items to the spirit.

When this was accomplished, the people observed that a very large cobra arrived. It consumed the food, the eggs and the live chickens. As soon as this was over, they heard the kokokyinaka (the blue plantain eater) singing in the forest - "kro, kro, kro, kyee, kro, kyee, kro, kro, kro, kyee, kro, kyee..." The group went home and reported the incident to the chief who in turn consulted his gods. He was told that the incident was a sign of victory in the impending Ashanti-Denkyira war, so they should place the effigy of the cobra on top of the chief's umbrella and produce some kind of drums to be played on the battlefield to imitate the sound of the blue-plantain eater. The drums produced are called mmedie, and the note they emit will be discussed under "drums," (Page 119).

The outcome of the oracle, according to Nana Asiedu Okofo, was made known to the Asantehene, Osei Tutu who granted permission to the Bekwaihene

to use the mentioned art objects during the battle as a sort of 'banner' and at social gatherings. Eventually, as well known, the Ashanti won the battle and the Bekwai chief was congratulated by the Asantehene for his military strength in the war. The king of Ashanti had conferred on Bekwai Omanhene the use of the cobra cast as his umbrella top in honour of the victory. At present the drums, for instance, are played to announce the approach of the Bekwai chief during a grand ceremony. It must be noted however, that the Asantehene being supreme over all Ashanti chiefs, has replicas of the mmedie drums which originated from Bekwai.

There are two divergent views given about the introduction of the 'Amansie pramire' to the Bekwai traditional area. The probable situation was that the object was really introduced to the paramountcy. But as the information is told over and over again, the very person who introduced it, or the circumstance regarding its introduction has become distorted over the years.

Amansie Pramire Umbrella Top

The oyokoman umbrella top of Bekwai, the 'Amansie pramire' is a coiled wooden snake (cobra) of a naturalistic treatment (Plate 20a). Although the figure represents a cobra which is naturally black in colour, the overall motif is wrapped in gold leaf. The coiled snake is provided with a cylindrical wooden base which serves as a support. This wooden form is decorated with a series of 'X' pattern. (Fig. 20). I was informed these patterns serve decorative purposes. The writer does not have any idea about the meaning of the 'X' patterns on the umbrella top. But according to Louis E. Jefferson, discussing some symbolic Ashanti gold-weights motif says the symbol signifies mberam, the female counterpart of Nyame, the creator.[52] I do not know whether the 'X' patterns on

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52 L.E. Jefferson; The Decorative Arts of Africa, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, London, 1974, page 134.

(a) (b)

PLATE 20 UMBRELLA TOPS

(a) Amansie pramire (cobra)
(b) Akoben

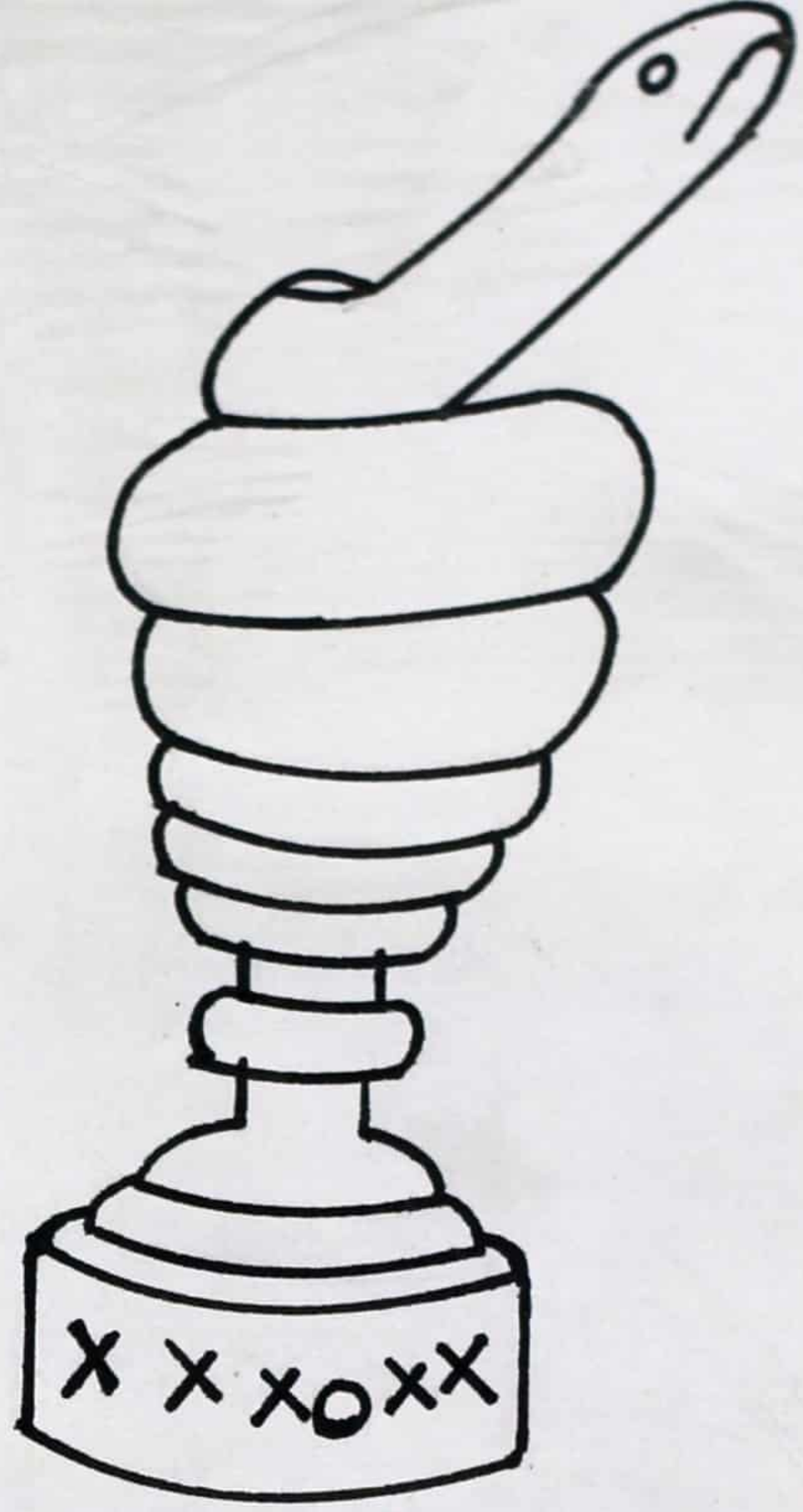

FIG. 20 Cylindrical base of Amansie pramire umbrella top decorated with 'x'-patterns

FIG.21 Alternating design on the surface of the apentima drum resembling the adinkra cloth patterns.

(a) (b) (c)

PLATE 21 THREE UMBRELLA TOPS

(a) Adwetakyi anomaa wiremfoo (a bird carrying a keg of gun-powder

(b) Akoben (fighting horn)

(c) Amansie pramire mounted on the katamanso, nyankonton and oyokoman respectively

'Amansie pramire' finial are the extension of the same pattern found on goldweights in Ashanti or they are just mere coincidence. If the said patterns are the extensions of what decorate some goldweights, then I am sure the carver was not conscious of the meanings as put forward by Jefferson since, it would not have been applicable to the Bekwai chief's umbrella finial because he is not regarded as the female counterpart of Nyame. If on the other hand the design was just a mere coincidence, then there is no disagreement with its usage by the Bekwaihene.

However, the meaning Jefferson gives to the 'X' pattern in Ashanti goldweights is disputable in the sense that the word "mberam" he uses to denote the 'X' symbol apparently does not exist in the Akan language. Secondly, in the Akan traditional religion we do not have the female counterpart of Nyame, the Creator. Jefferson is therefore wrong in using that word.

The 'Amansie pramire' effigy is believed to be one of the earliest surviving works of art at the Bekwai royal house, which dates as far back as the time of Eguaye-boafo in eighteenth century. This object stands for the symbol of Bekwai royalty.

The Oyokoman umbrella is used during grand state occasions.

The Katamanso Umbrella

This is the largest state umbrella (Plate 19c) observed during my research in the Bekwai palace. Made of elegantly coloured materials, it fulfils the purpose of state umbrellas like the example just discussed above. The katamanso is similar in form to the oyokoman. The differences are evidenced in the textile materials used in its manufacture, and the finial motif. The textile material - katamanso cloth (Plate 19c), gives rise to the name of the umbrella. The katamanso umbrella is also designed in such a way that when opened, unlike the one described above, gives a flat-topped canopy - thus increasing its area of coverage symbolic of royal

power and outreach.

The katamanso does not have a particular finial. Apart from the 'Amansie pramire' finial, which is solely reserved for the oyokoman umbrella, any motif can be mounted on it for a particular occasion. The umbrella tops include awenade (lion), afunukatakyei, (a special bird), akoben (fighting horn), babadua (a special plant) etc. (Plate 21).

This does not exhaust the discussion of umbrellas in the Bekwai palace. Others include the serekye umbrella, which has the following materials for its canopy. On the top-most part of it is found a brown cloth; a silk band in the middle, and nkrawoo (red felt) and a black band of cloth rim, 'nsaa kyinie' (umbrella mounted on the state stool during grand ceremonies); and nyankonton (rainbow) umbrella - which depicts the following colours. The top part is occupied by a yellow silk material, a green band of cloth in the middle and an nkrawoo (red cloth) rim (Plate 19b). Although the umbrella is called nyankonton, it does not depict the actual colours of the rainbow. Perhaps the Bekwai people were interested in only those three colours of the rainbow regardless of other shades such as orange, violet and blue.

The katamanso umbrella is used during state gatherings.

Palanquins

The two kinds of palanquins which attracted the writer's attention during his field study in the Bekwai paramountcy are the epie (chief's palanquin) and the sako (sedan chair). The sako is used by the queenmother and is less elaborate as compared to the chief's epie.

The chief's palanquin is roughly a 'long basket' woven receptacle. The outside wall of this palanquin is embellished with skins of animals (Plate 22) and measures about one-and-a-half metres long. The same palanquin when considered in context takes an additional dimension - the splendour and the remarkable skill of the great artist is manifest.

In procession, the Bekwaihene is carried on the heads of four persons in his gorgeously decorated palanquin. The inside of the palanquin is covered with nsaa (a traditional blanket made of camel's hair and wool). In addition, there are two cushions, one for a seat and the other serves as a backrest. While riding in the palanquin, flanked by sword bearers, the chief of Bekwai visually and physically dominates his subjects, canopied under one or two of the state umbrellas of Bekwai. Furthermore, the chief is preceded and followed by his entourage of court officials, each with his symbol of office. The chief dances to the tune of the musicians who also form part of the procession; and he is paraded through the principal streets of the town.

Swordbearers who walk alongside the chief's palanquin, lay the hilts of their swords on the edges of it. During the procession the crowd dances and jubilates, carrying emblems which seem to be dominated by the art forms. A number of objects, heavily adorned people, participating in rites transform a once - quiet atmosphere into a "living museum", exhibiting colours, sound and motion and national treasures.

The procession is so colourful and impressive that no words can adequately describe the scene. In the procession, the artifacts are no more static, they become kinetic. The state umbrellas are moved up and down to the rhythm of the music of drums and horns and sword bearers flutter their swords to the tune of the music. Stools, linguist staffs, jewels and so on respond to the rhythmic movements of the people. Drums recount history, and praises, and beat out proverbs.

A fascinating aspect about the Bekwai palanquin is that four carved human heads are attached to the bars on which the palanquin is suspended. (Plate 22). According to tradition, it was fashionable in the past for Bekwaihene to send a set of cut human heads to Kumasi. These were supposed to accompany a deceased Asantehene to the spiritual world.

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The actual Ashanti practice of ritual murder in conjunction with the funeral of kings has been noted by Rattray, who writes:

> The first intimation that the king (Asantehene) had breathed his last would be, so I am informed, was associated with a series of human killings with the belief that the king was to be followed to the grave by attendants who would resume after death their various duties under the royal master.53

At Bekwai, it is reported that the heads of people who fell victims to ritual killing in connection with the Asantehene's funeral were in the olden days hung on the sides of the chief's palanquin. Thus the carved heads now portrayed on the bars are reportedly, an artistic illustration of the former practice of Bekwai.

In the writer's opinion, the carved sculptures are probably an artistic elaboration and a symbolic gesture of the custom of Bekwai. The relationship of these carved figures to a symbolic gesture might be correct in that, it seems the carved sculptres are more than merely an artistic elaboration of an element of the mentioned Bekwai custom. Furthermore, the carved images are part of the mataphorical symbol identifying the Bekwai chief as one of the chiefs who offered human heads for the burial of a deceased Asantehene.

The practice of ritual killing at Bekwai as noticed in other parts of the country, seems to be an important part of the complex background of the carved human image. One of the peculiar features of the Bekwai palanquin finials is that, they show no facial expression depicting a deceased person they are supposed to represent. The figures (Plate 23) rather show a serene countenance and effortless grace which infer that perhaps they are to be interpreted primarily as symbolic representations.

D r u m s

We come next to a series of different drums possessed by the Bekwai

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53 R.S. Rattray: Religion and Art in Ashanti; Oxford University Press, London, 1954, pp. 105-106.

PLATE 22 PALANQUIN UNADORNED: SHOWING THE BODY DECORATED WITH SKINS OF ANIMALS AND ALSO A CARVED HUMAN HEAD ATTACHED TO THE END OF THE PALANQUIN BAR

PLATE 23 DETAIL: ONE OF THE CARVED HUMAN HEADS USUALLY ATTACHED TO THE END OF PALANQUIN BARS. THE FIGURE DEPICTS A SERENE COUNTENANCE AND EFFORTLESS GRACE

paramountcy. Among the Akan, drums are generally termed as ntwene. But a careful study shows that each can be identified by a special name, special taboos, and in many cases the decorations (that is the attachment of human parts and dresses) that go with it. Examples of drums at Bekwai include, atumpan, fontomfrom, mpintin, etwie, apentima nimsaakaakyi, and mmedie. When these are grouped according to the various drum 'families' they form different drum ensembles.

According to the purpose of this thesis, I wish to consider the nimsaakaakyi and the mmedie drums due to their uniqueness. They are also known to be owned by only the Bekwai chief although replicas [54] are kept in the Asantehene's palace in Kumasi.

Nimsaakaakyi Drums

Nimsaakaakyi (regrets are vain) drums are reportedly introduced to the Bekwai royal house by the third chief of Bekwai - Nana Santifo. This took place in the 18th century. The history underlying these musical instruments is discussed in page 51. These drums are generally used in a set of four drums (Plate 24) plus a pair of long metal gongs which are struck with a stick.

The four drums are: dawuro [55] (gong), apentima, 'apentima nyesoo' and egu (the bass drum which is the principal of the set-named after Eguaye-boafo). This set forms the nimsaakaakyi ensemble. The first to be discussed in the set is the dawuro.

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54 It is a tradition that the regalia kept in every Ashanti paramountcy should have copies in Asantehene's palace unless probably they are gifts from abroad in which case copies are not made - such as the British government's gift to the Bekwai chief after his support for the British campaign to Ashanti state (See page 34).

55 Although called dawuro (gong) it is a slender wooden drum. It is identified as dawuro because it is by this drum that the other drums of the nimsaakaakyi esemble are "called" as a gong does by calling people.

Dawuro Drum

It is a single-headed drum covered with a pattern of shallow cuts resulting in a pleasing surface texture (Plate 25a). The said drum which is hallowed out of a single block of wood is slender in form, about nine centimentres in diameter at the largest portion and about forty-six centimetres high. The cylinder of the dawuro narrows down to a point where it curves gently to form a smaller cylinder which serves as the base.

Apentima Drum

Unlike the dawuro just described, the apentima (Plate 25b) is quite large in size and is also carved out of a single block of wood. This drum is said to be held between the drummer's knees while he sits on a stool, it is beaten with the palms of the hands.

Like other art objects in the Bekwai palace, the body of the apentima is decorated. The decoration on this drum resembles the patterns in an adinkra cloth (Plate 27). In this case, the surface of the drum (the lower half) is subdivided into several square areas and each portion is occupied by a particular pattern in an alternating manner (Fig. 21). Below its pegs, are incised patterns arranged in two rows, with the upper part devoid of any design. At the lower end of the cylinder of the drum is a sweeping curve which joins to a narrow cylinder serving as the base. On this cylinder are vertical engravings which complete the surface decorations.

Apentima Nyesoo drum

Nyesoo means chorus. Thus "apentima nyesoo" was almost fashioned in the manner of the apentima. The only difference is evidenced in the curvature of the body of the drums. The "apentima nyesoo" unlike the former bulges in the middle portion and slightly narrows on either end as seen in Plate 26a.

Considering the surface decoration of these two drums, I believe

(a)

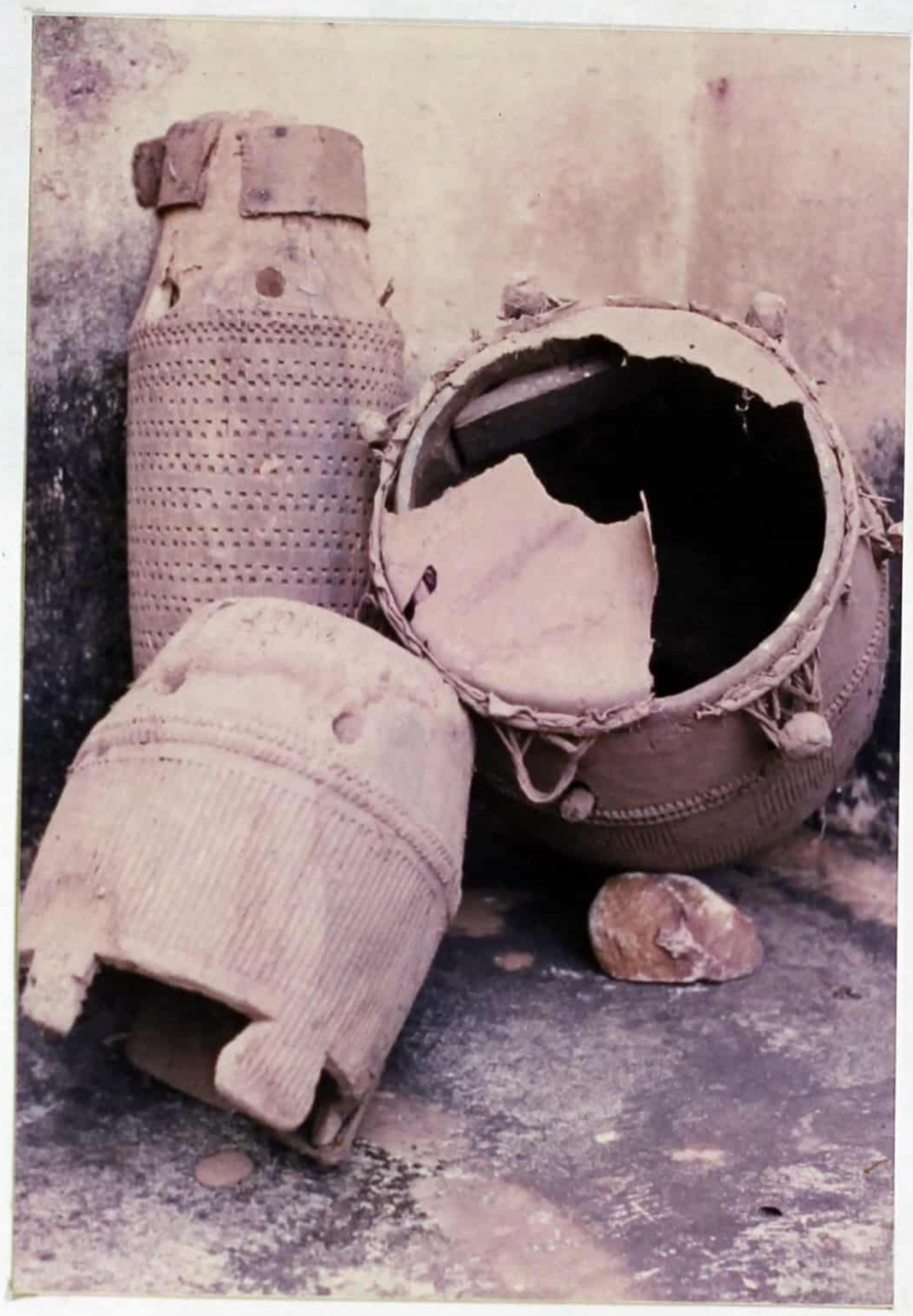
(b)

(d)

(c)

PLATE 24 A SET OF FOUR NIMSAAKAAKYI
(REGRETS ARE ALWAYS AT LAST)
DRUMS

(a) (b)



(c)

PLATE 25 THREE OF THE NIMSAAKAAKYI DRUMS

(a) (b)

PLATE 26 TWO OF THE NIMSAAKAAKYI DRUMS: THE PATTERNS ON THE BODY OF THE APENTIMA DRUM RESEMBLE THE ADINKRA CLOTH DESIGNS

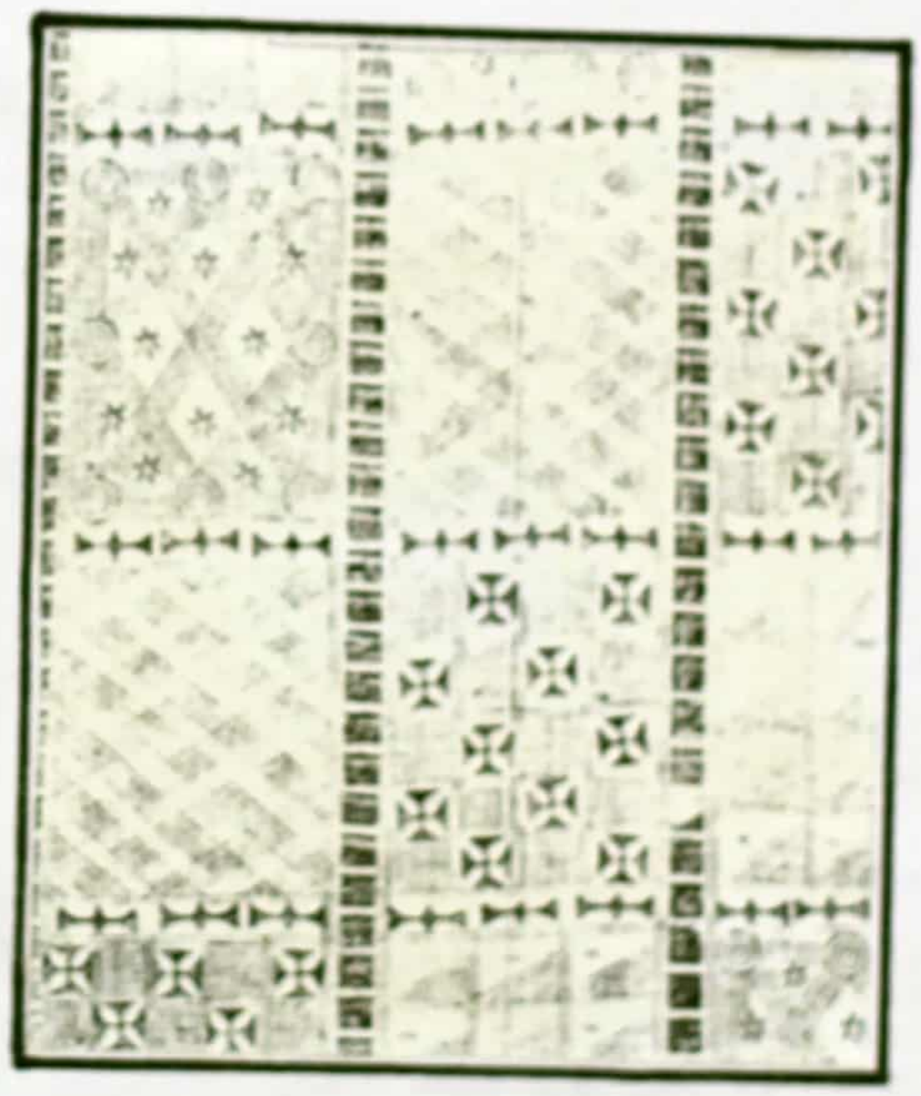


PLATE 27 ADINKRA CLOTH DESIGN: EACH SQUARE AREA IS OCCUPIED BY A DIFFERENT SET OF PATTERNS

that they were carved by a single sculptor. The skill of the carver is clearly manifested. The treatment of the surfaces of both drums is more beautiful than the dawuro (described above) and the egu drum, the latter, which is yet to be discussed.

The Egu Drum

Standing in sharp contrast with the large and slender forms of the two apentimas and the dawuro respectively, is a 'dwarf-like' drum. This is known as Egu (the bassdrum) shown in Plate 25b. The body of the drum has a diameter of about fourteen centimetres and is sixteen centimetres high.

But unlike the two apentima drums, the design on the egu is quite simple. The upper half consists of engraved designs arranged in two rows while the lower portion bears vertical engravings (Plate 25b). Radically different, is the shape of the body of the drum. It broadens from the upper half region to the base which is carved into a series of stands (Plate 25b).

The tense membranes of all the discussed drums are either worn out, or completely absent, and heavily patinated due to age coupled with their frequent use. Apparently this is unfortunate, however, their tattered condition could be an indication of authenticity - a quality cherished by connoisseurs. This does not mean that any object which has old and tattered conditions is authentic because there have been cases where artificial ageing is practised in Africa to attract connoisseurs. [56]

Mmedie Drums

Plate 28 illustrates some of the mmedie drums of Bekwai. The said

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56 Wooden artifacts are sometimes buried for a few weeks in earth mixed with a little manure to allow termites to have a go at them. When unearthed they are found with parts attacked by termites, and white raw interiors convincingly darkened.

Apart from this, the saleability of art objects can be enhanced in the very process of transportation if they are allowed to age and mellow while stacked unwrapped in a vehicle. On arrival, the handling of the artifacts with sweaty and oily hands by people who help to unload them can bring up a nice surface. These works are eventually passed on to collectors as genuinely aged works of art.

drums are small in size, about twenty-four centimetres high and eighteen centimetres wide. However, one of the drums which is said to be the bass is much larger and taller than the rest (Plate 28a). Like all drums, they are covered with animals' skins. When they are beaten by a skilful drummer, they sound:

nkunim, nkunim;
mmra, mmra, mmra, mmra
(victory, victory;
should come,should come, should come, should come)

The mmedie drums are played with two straight drumsticks. This is an unusual shape for Ashanti drumsticks and Rattray has also observed this during his field study on Ashanti drums generally. [57]

The mmedie group of drums is basically simple. They are covered with nsaa (cloth woven from wool and camel's hair) as shown in Plate 28. However, some of them have their cloth torn out.

The mmedie ensemble, according to the Krontihene, Nana Okofo Asiedu of Bekwai, consists of a set of 300 mmedie drums. This huge number of drums seems speculative in that the mmedie drums observed during my research were about 50 in number. However, to substantiate his point, the Krontihene quoted the following words which according to his information, are known in the Bekwai palace: "Nana Eguaye-boafo a ye gu no mmedie ahaasa" (Nana Eguaye-boafo who is identified with 300 mmedie drums). Even though the informant emphatically maintained his view on this matter, I still doubt the veracity of his assertion since the mmedie drums shown to me, were far less than the number he mentioned.

In view of the quotation regarding the number of the drums played in honour of Eguaye-boafo, it may be conveniently argued that in the olden days, the drums were 300 but not so at present.

The mmedie drums are played during grand ceremonies to signify the arrival of the Bekwaihene.

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57 R.S. Rattray; Religion and Art in Ashanti, Oxford University Press, London, 1954, Page 283.

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(a) (b) (c) (d)

PLATE 28 SOME OF THE MMEDIE DRUMS
(a) The bass of the set of mmedie drums

PLATE 29 DMETE NNWOROKO (SILVER NECKLACE)

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSONAL ADORNMENTS

I propose to consider some of the personal adornments of the Bekwai chief in this chapter. When asked why the people of Bekwai attempt to make the personal adornments of their ruler, the answer is simply, just to decorate him to attain the required dignity and glory of a chief.

Leiris and Delange, in their book African Art, have in the following manner commented on people's love of body decoration:

> Of all the various people's of this world, none leaves the human body in the simple state of nature in which it is born. Everywhere man attempts, in greater or lesser degree, to modify or add to his natural appearance ..... it would almost seem that man is frightened of displaying himself in his pristine form.[58]

Similarly, the people of Bekwai apparently do not want their ruler to appear unadorned during official gatherings. This explains the reason why the ruler uses the status symbols of adornment for state and official occasion. At other times he is clad in simple styles.

The personal adornments relating to regalia cover a wide range of items which the chief adds to give a visual impression of his status and authority as a ruler. These include the following: textiles, headgears, crowns, hats, fillets, necklaces, bracelets, armlets, rings, anklets, sandals and so forth. But in this thesis, I wish to concentrate on necklaces, headgears, crowns, rings, bracelets and sandals. Nevertheless, at certain points in the discussion, some accessories associated with the selected art objects will be casually mentioned.

Necklaces

The people of Bekwai have created excellent works of art in the field of jewelry. Some of these are figurative, others are abstracted and

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58 M. Leiris and J. Delange: African Art, Thames & Hudson, London, 1968, Page 117.

purely ornamental and geometrical as discussed below.

Plate 29 is one of the few examples of jewels of silver known to exist in the Bekwai paramountcy. This "necklace" is called "dwete nworoko" (silver "necklace"). Its composition is based on a series of silver strands running parallel to one another, and as seen in the picture, the necklace has an interlocking device constructed of three rings to enable it to be worn on the right side of the neck across the chest and the back and below the chief's left ampit as shown in Figure 22. Unlike most necklaces found in the Bekwai royal house, the "dwete nworoko" has no pendant or a symbolic motif.

A characteristic feature of the "dwete nworoko" is the marked attempt at concentration and simplification of design. As a consequent of the nature of manufacture, the said object appears to be either a foreign inspired or foreign object among the regalia at Bekwai.

It is said to be used when the chief wishes to appear in "white". Thus during such occasions, the silver "necklace" goes with one of the white clothings of the Bekwai chief; for example he may wear a cloth called nkatewasa or anyawoho.

The "dwete nworoko" has its counterpart in gold which is called "sika akoo nworoko" (gold necklace). This is also used when the chief desires to appear in "gold".

Another type of necklace is the kanta (black necklace). This is made of a metallic wire core arranged to give a very pleasing pattern (Plate 30b). It is like a large ring with clusters of bent and woven wire. It has some portions which are left blank, thus exposing the wire frame of the object. The overall object is painted black and is worn during solemn funeral ceremonies. The kanta is said to be worn with a kuntumkuni (black) mourning cloth during such funeral ceremonies and solemn rites of remembrance.

FIG.22 How the "dwete nnworoko" is worn by the chief

(a) (b)

PLATE 30a KROBONKYE (LEOPARD SKIN CAP) SHOWING ASSYMETRICAL COMPOSITION OF MOTIFS

30b KANTA (BLACK NECKLACE)

Some other necklaces discussed below, are the British government's medals (see page 128). These are said to comprise a set of four medal necklaces but only three of them were shown to me during my research.

Plate 31b shows the first of the three, which is the largest. It has a diameter of about 7 centimetres. The front view contrasting to the back view, has a composite design. The motif comprises a lion, the rising sun, two spears resting on a shield and bears the inscription "ASHANTI". The back view bears the portrait of King Edwards VII in his military attire (Plate 32b). At the top of the medal is found a decorative design which appears to tower above King Edwards. The back is provided with a nice border ornamentation which echoes the circular form of the medal.

The next medal necklace conforms to the circular form of the one just described above. This medal has the elephant and oil-palm tree motif in relief (Plate 31c) as found on the Bekwai chief linguist's staff, which was mentioned earlier. Unlike the motif on the chief linguist's staff, the present motif is quite large and bears the inscription "ASHANTI FOR LOYALTY". The design of the medal motif, unlike the former, has a line portraying the horizon which differentiates the sky from the ground.

The back view of this circular medal bears the portrait of King George (Plate 32c). The edge of this medal, like the one just discussed above, is seen a border decoration.

The third medal is also similar in shape to the ones described above. The only difference is evidenced in its smaller size. The front view of the third medal bears the British coat-of-arms. (plate 31a). Like the ones discussed already, the back view of this medal necklace has a human motif - the portrait of Queen Victoria in relief. The top portion of the medal is surmounted by decorative design which is similar to the type of design towering above the first medal.

All the necklaces described above have chains which enable the medals

(a) (b) (c)

PLATE 31a MEDAL NECKLACE DEPICTING THE BRITISH COAT-OF-ARMS

31b MEDAL NECKLACE DEPICTING A COMPOSITE DESIGN

31c MEDAL NECKLACE DEPICTING OIL-PALM AND ELEPHANT MOTIF

(a) (b) (c)

PLATE 32a BACK VIEW OF NECKLACE SHOWING QUEEN VICTORIA

32b BACK VIEW OF NECKLACE BEARING THE PORTRAIT OF KING EDWARDS VII

32c BACK VIEW OF MEDAL NECKLACE PORTRAYING KING GEORGE

to be worn - for the medals to rest on the bossom of the Bekwai chief. The chains of the first and third necklaces are based on a simple chain pattern but the second necklace has a different chain pattern. The chain of the second one is based on the composition of lion motifs interspersed with some rings and decorative objects (Plate 32b).

The three medal necklaces like a number of the fine regalia found at Bekwai are different in style and motif from the generally accepted Bekwai art objects. Apart from the motif showing the oil-palm tree and the elephant, the symbols of the medals seem to have no traditional interpretations. And I personally do not know their interpretations given by the British. The craftsmanship of these medals is highly refined. They all seem to be modelled on the same style and thus suggest that they were manufactured in the same workshop.

These medals are said to be peculiar to only the Bekwai royal house. It is alleged that the first time some of the British gifts[59] were used by the then Bekwaihene, Nana Yaw Boakye I, to welcome Nana Osei Agyeman Prempeh I from exile, it nearly resulted in a civil war.

The reason being that, Nana Prempeh was exiled by the British so if the Bekwaihene of that time should welcome him with gifts from the British government then it suggested his support for the colonial government. This was regarded as an act of betrayal that is why the Bekwai chief was nearly treated as an enemy.

The medal necklaces are used during grand state ceremonies. It is reported that in the past when these objects were used, they went with the other complements mentioned in footnote 59.

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59 These included the union jack chair and its cushion footstool, the various medals, "dwete koraa", and the "aban poma".

Headgear/Crowns

The Bekwai chief has a number of headgears or crowns which he uses to adorn himself on specific occasions. One of such adornments is the Krobonkye (leopard skin cap). This is a composite object - making use of various motifs such as the Amansie pramire (cobra), fern leaves, a gun, and state swords arranged assymetrically on the skin cap shown in plates 30a and 33a (fig. 23 is the graphical representation of Plate 30a).

The motifs on the cap were carved separately and attached to the surface of the objects. The portrayal of Amansie pramire is not uncommon in the Bekwai paramountcy. It is almost associated with all the sets of regalia such as umbrellas, stools, caps, and sandals;

The krobonkye cap is painted black. It is said that during solemn funeral ceremonies, and times of tribulation when this cap is usually used, it is adorned with read pepper.[60] Some of the complements of this outfit are the wearing of kanta necklace, a black funeral cloth, the Amansie pramire sandals, "kanta bansere" (bracelet) worn on the left hand wrist, and bufa (special red earth) used to paint designs across the chest of the ruler to signify a sad occasion.

The "Asempa etia (truth statement given at court, is brief) headgear is the next item to be examined here. This is composed of a black band of cloth and an agglomeration of gold and silver leafed pieces of rectangular wood. These are placed at regular intervals to give a variety of colours (Plate 33b). The rectangular pieces of wood are ornamented with linear decorations which conform to the shape of the wood (Fig. 24).

The "asempa etia" headband is worn around the chief's head during a state gathering.

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60 At Bekwai as observed in other Akan towns, pepper used in such situations is a sign of trouble. The "hot" taste of the pepper is likened to the seriousness of the event. It means mmako aka m'ani. Pepper has got into my eyes to make us cry.

(a)

(b)

PLATE 33a KROBONKYE (SIDE VIEW)

33b "ASEMPA ETIA" HEADGEAR ORNAMENTED WITH GOLD AND SILVER LEAFED RECTANGULAR DESIGNS

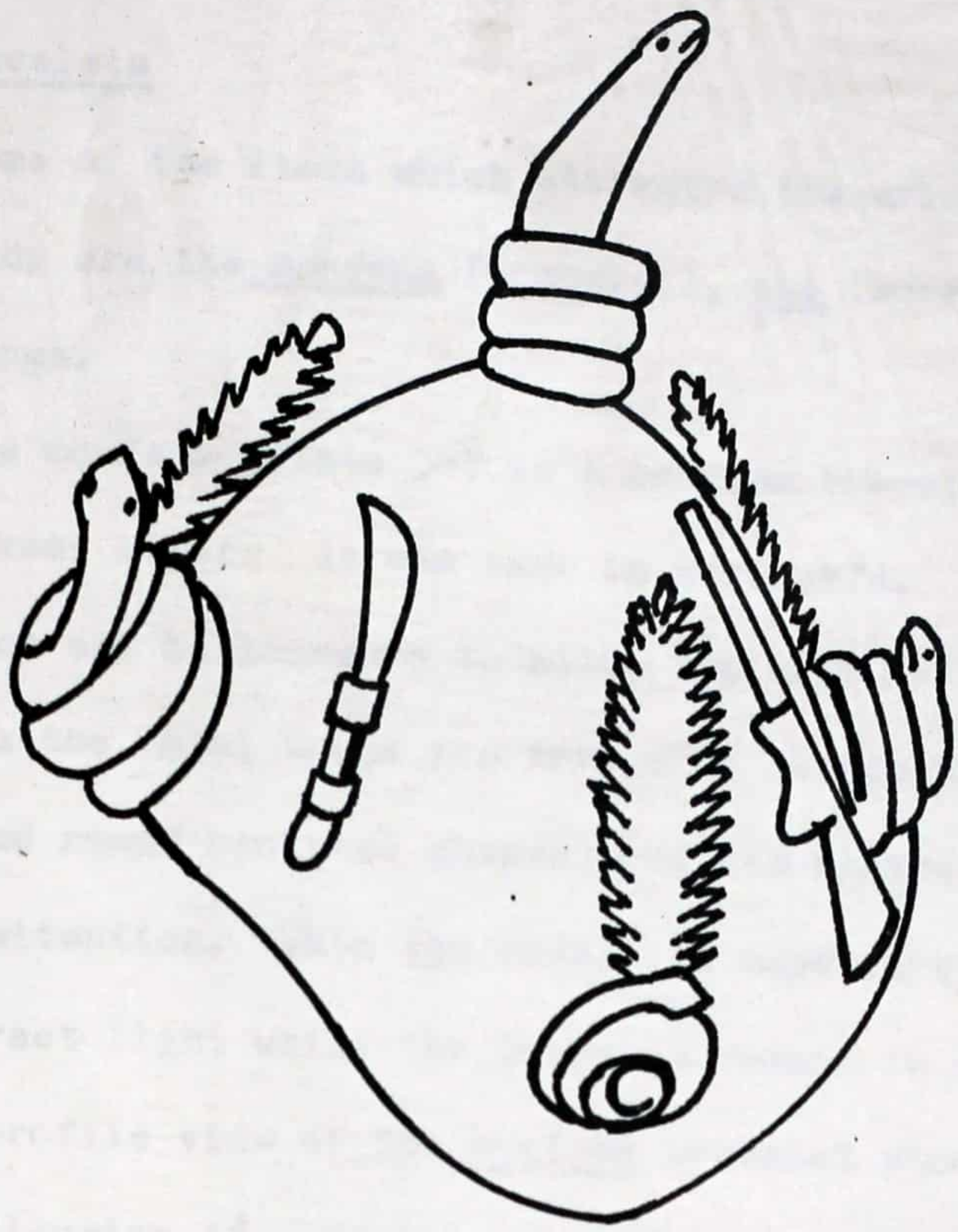

FIG.23 Graphical representation of krobonkye skull cap

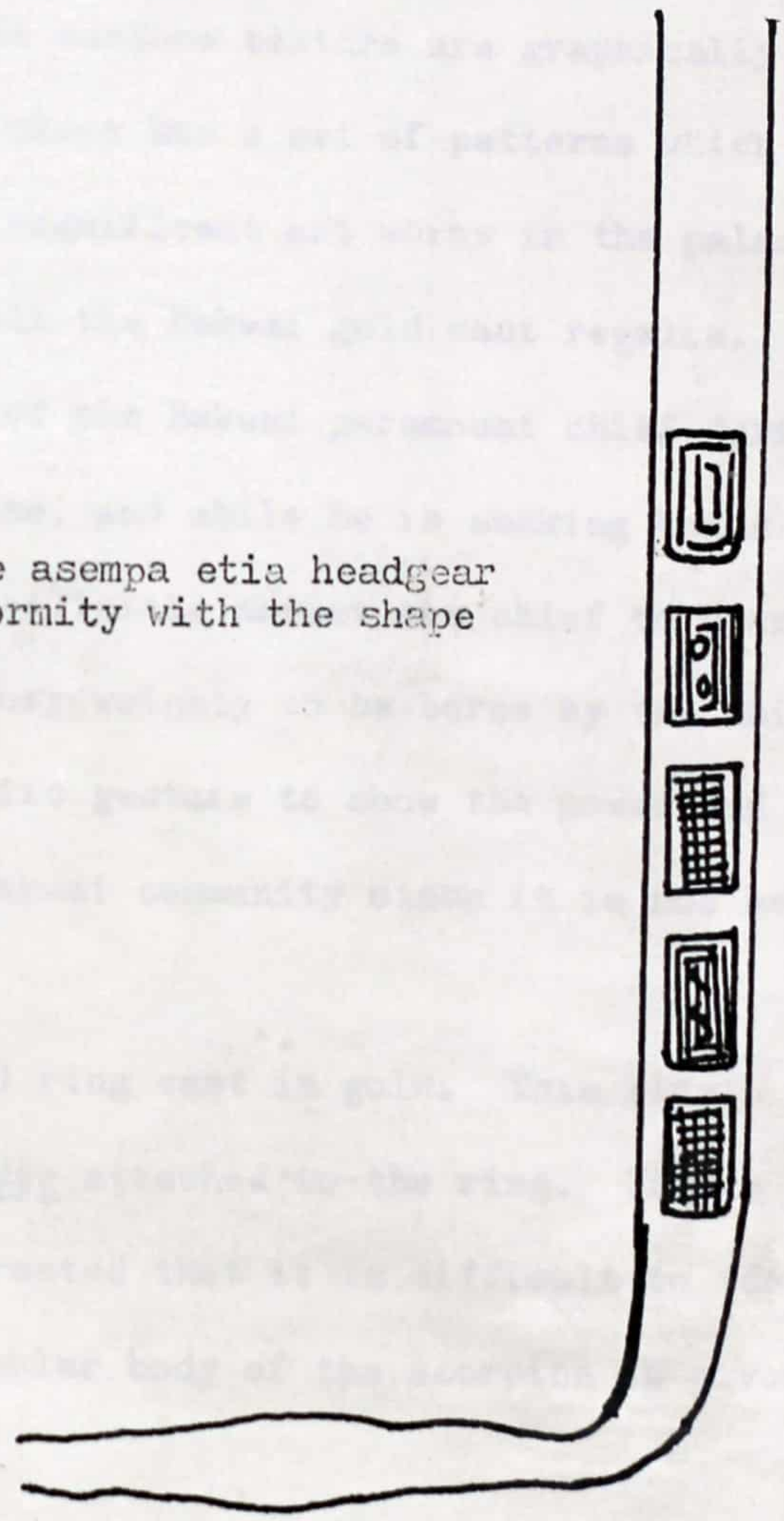

FIG.24 Linear designs of the asempa etia headgear are arranged in conformity with the shape of the wood

Rings/Bracelets

Some of the items which attracted the writers attention during the field study are the menfena (bracelet), ana (scorpion), and the pataku (wolf) rings.

The menfena (Plate 34) is a complex bracelet worn on the right wrist of the Bekwai chief. It was cast in pure gold. The said bracelet has a hinge which can be loosened to allow the user to wear. Like many other objects in the royal house its irregular components (in the form of conical, angular and round sculpted shapes) and its abstract patterns attract the greatest attention. When the object is exposed to light, the convex portions attract light while the concaves remain in dark shades (Fig. 25).

A profile view of the menfena bracelet showing the zig-zag arrangement gives an illusion of a "falling leaf" with varying degrees of the fall (fig. 26). Some of the patterns which form the surface texture are graphically shown in figures 27 a-c. It seems each place has a set of patterns which combines effectively to form one of the magnificent art works in the palace. In addition it is one of the finest of all the Bekwai gold cast regalia.

The menfena is worn on the wrist of the Bekwai paramount chief during grand state gatherings. When it is in use, and while he is shaking hands with the dignitories, some of the court officials assist the chief to bear it. This creates the impression that it is very weighty to be borne by the chief alone. But I think this is just a symbolic gesture to show the power and reverence accorded the bracelet in the Bekwai community since it is not heavy to that extent.

Plate 35b shows the ana (scorpion) ring cast in gold. This ring derives its name from the scorpion abosodee attached to the ring. Unlike most abosodee, scorpion motif is so abstracted that it is difficult to identify it unless one is informed. The granular body of the scorpion is given

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PLATE 34 MENTHIA BRACELET OF THE BIRMAN CHIEF

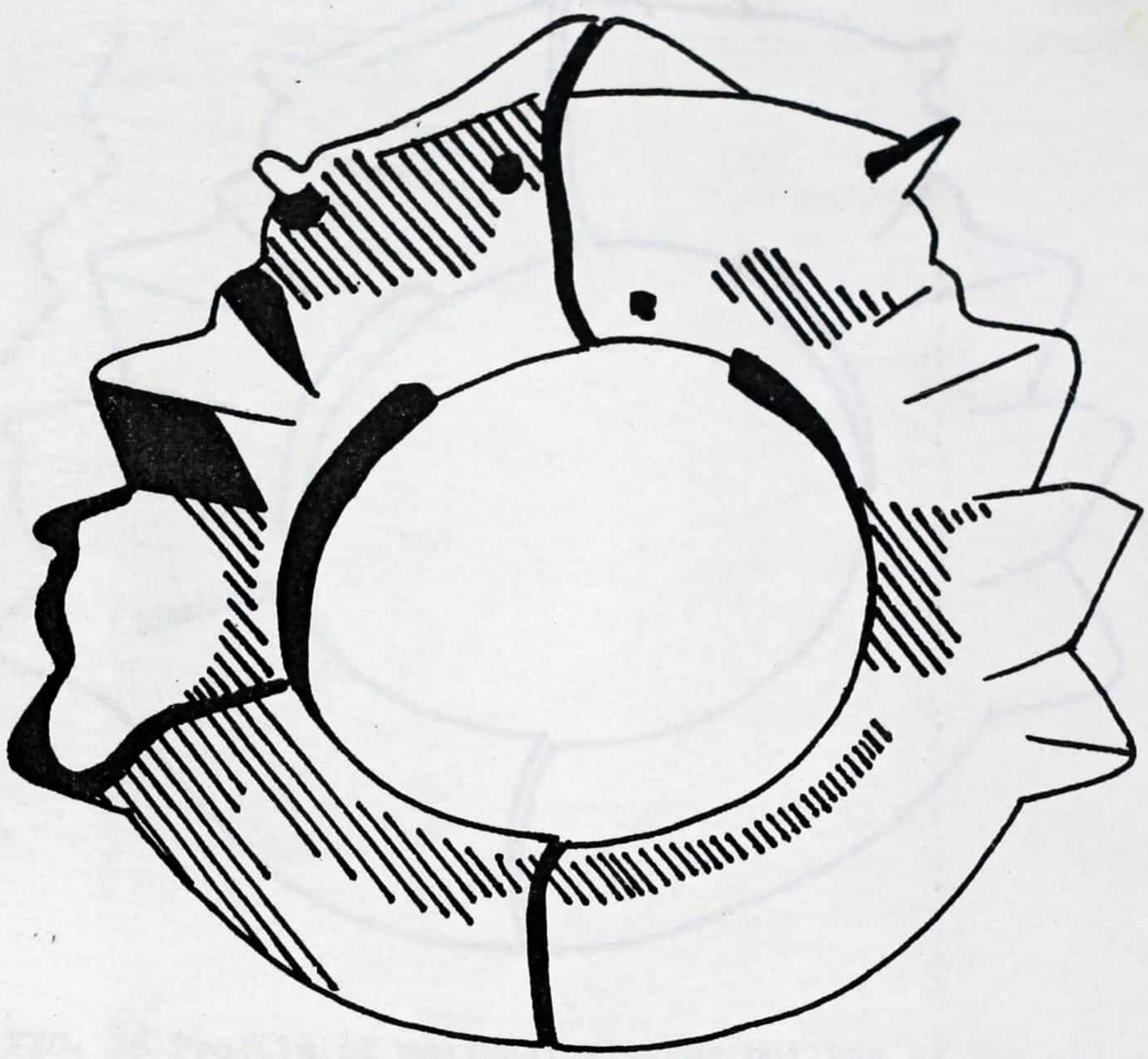


FIG.25 Convex and concave surfaces of menfena bracelet giving light and dark shades of colours

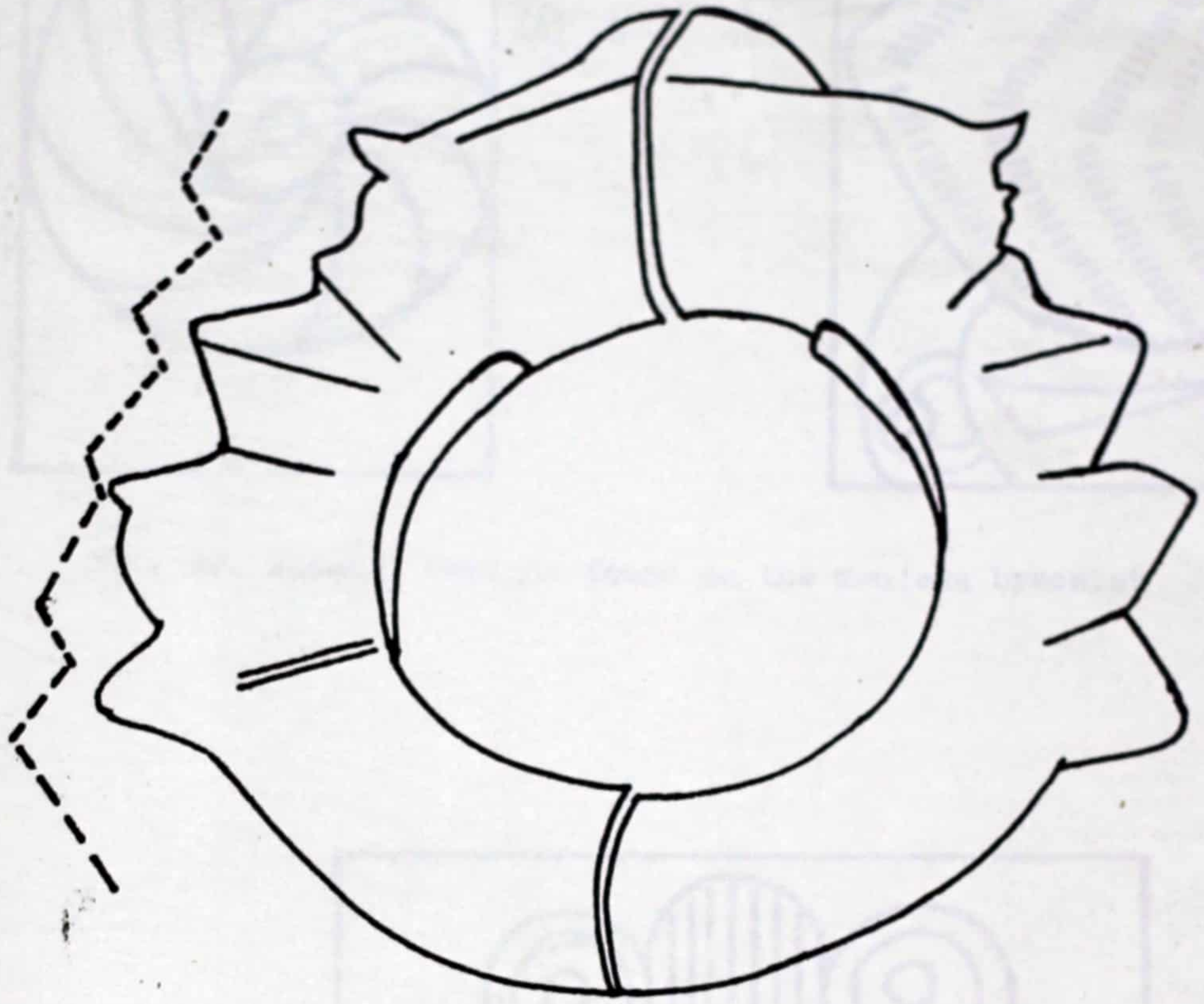
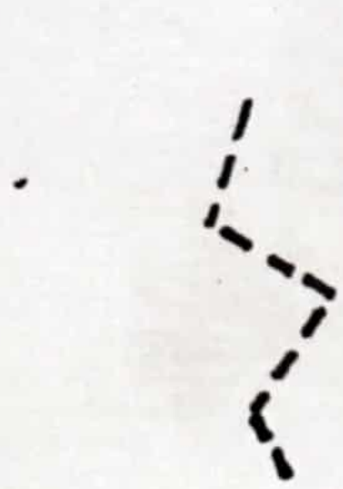
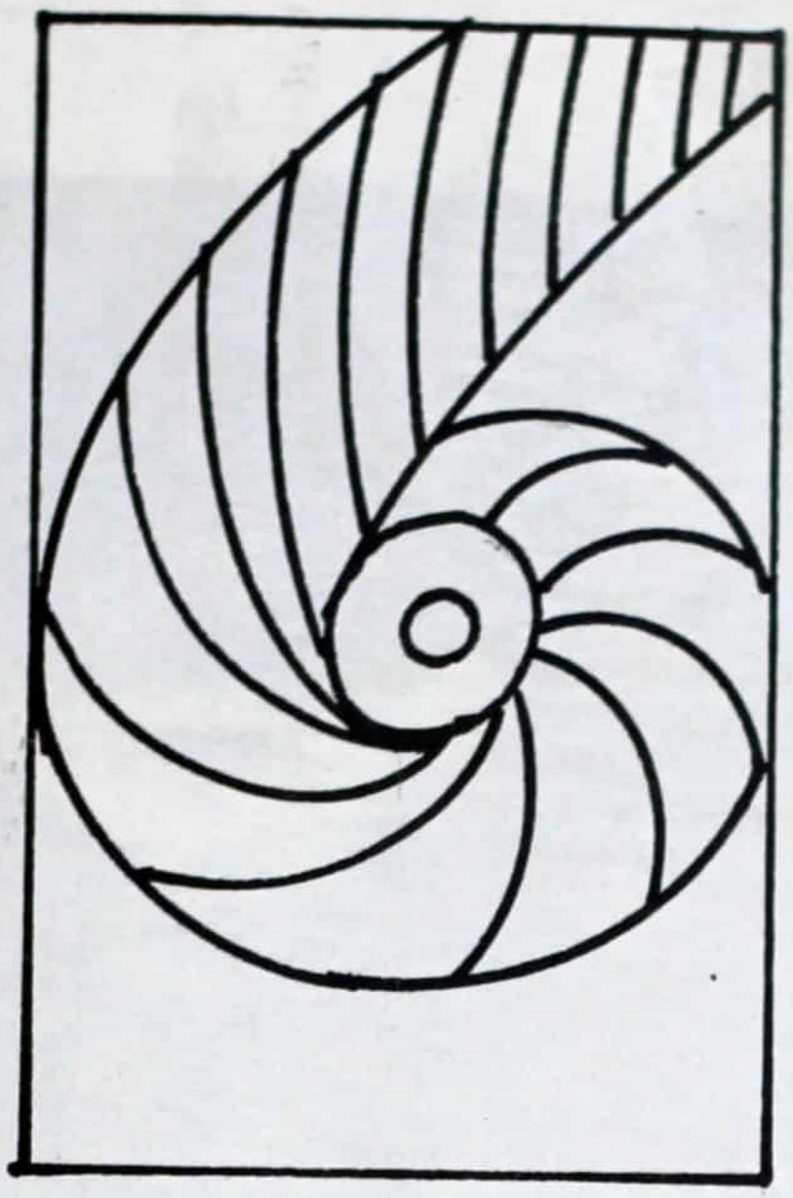


FIG. 26 Profile of menfena; zig-zag outline of the object likened to a "leaf-fall"



Suggestion line indicating a leaf-fall



(A) & (B)

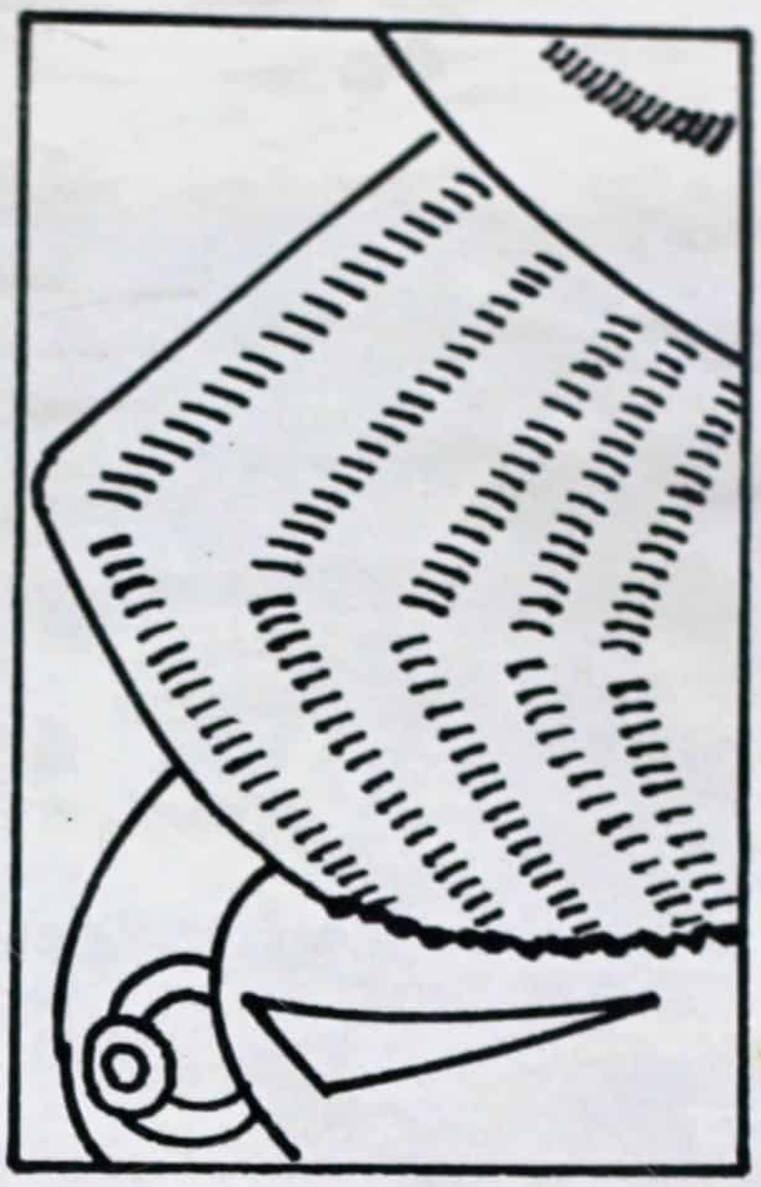
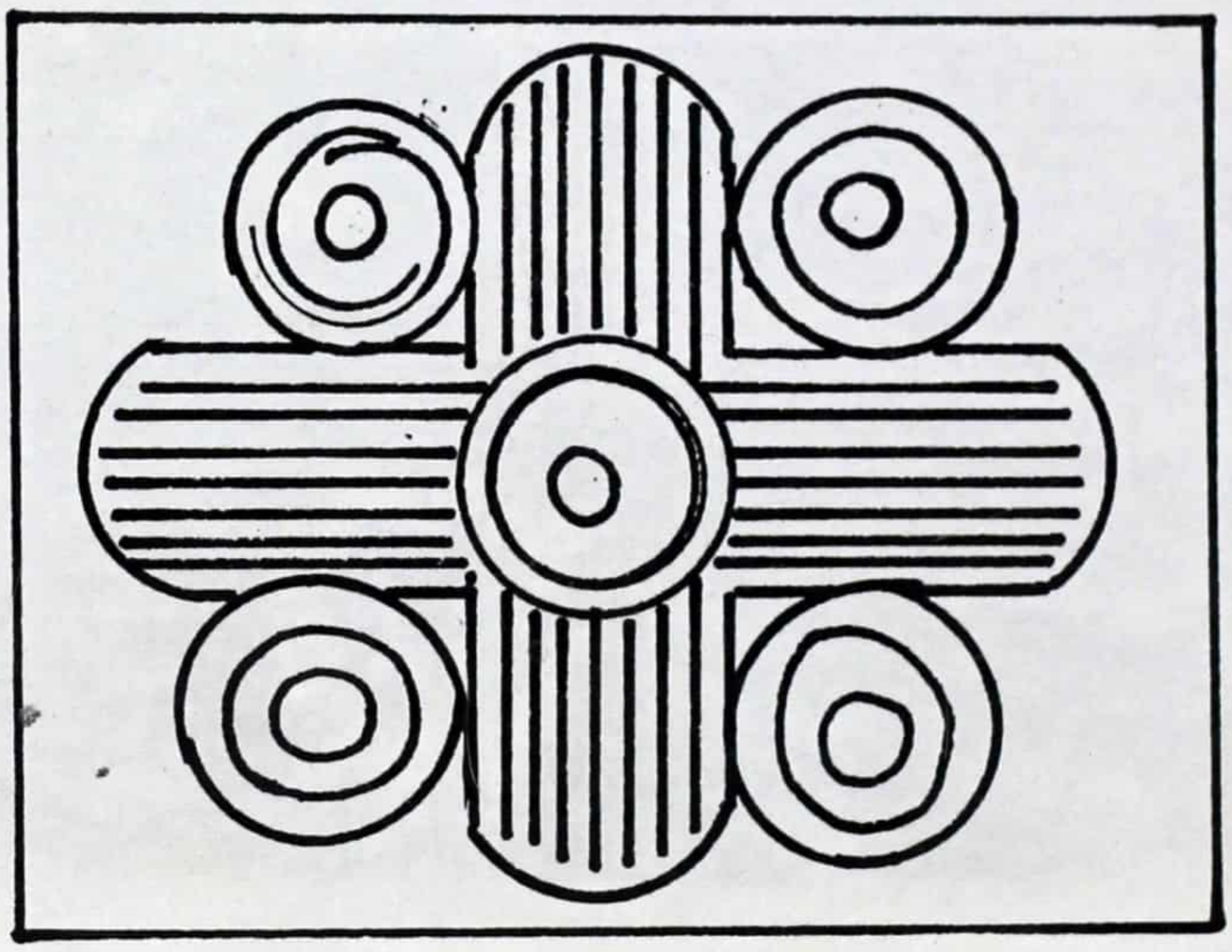
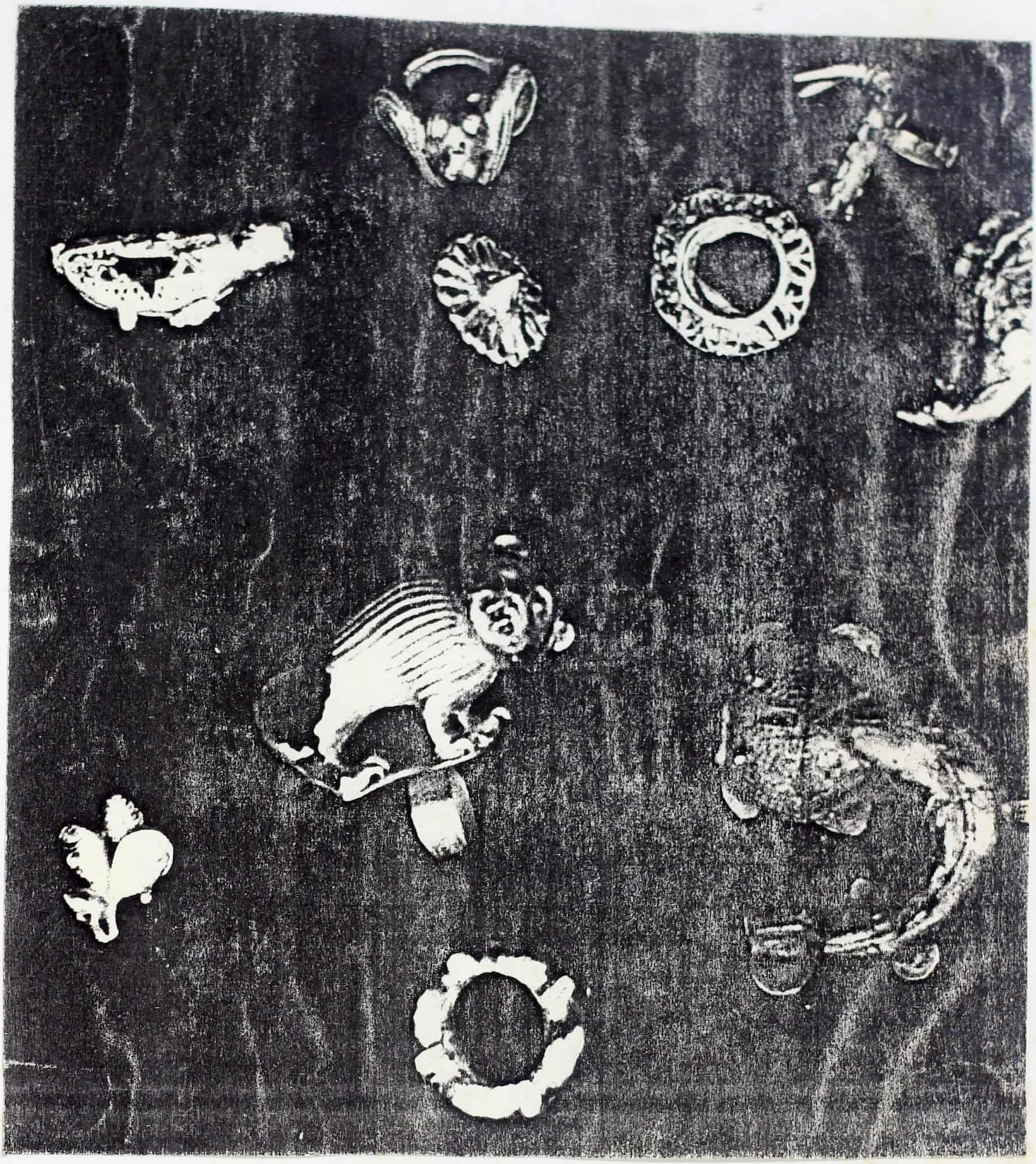


FIG. 27. Detail: Designs found on the menfena bracelet



(C)
Designs found on the menfena bracelet

(a)



(b)

PLATE 35a PATAKU (WOLF) RING

35b ANA (SCORPION) RING

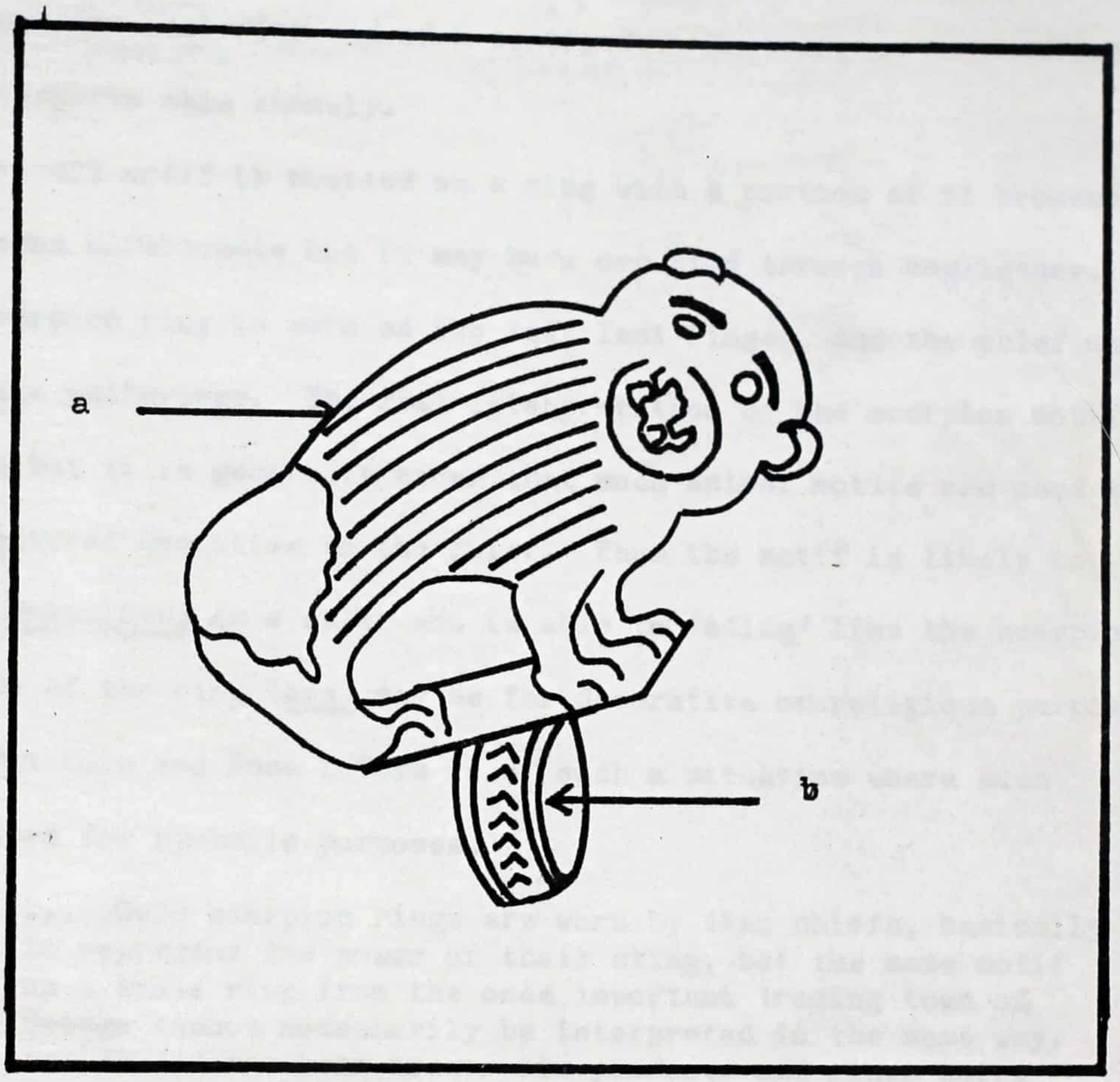


FIG.28 Pataku ring: the patterns on the ring seem to direct the eye movement to the ring motif(pataku)

a rudimentary treatment of convex lines on a cylindrical shape. The claws which give an idea of a scorpion are sturdily and compactly constructed to prevent unnecessary breakages. Although the claws are cursory treated, they suit the practical purpose of the ring.

Even though the ring motif is said to represent a scorpion the pincer-shaped posterior end of it is not typical of that creature. It rather portrays the posterior end of a centipede. However, no information was given to explain this anomaly.

The overall motif is mounted on a ring with a portion of it broken off. This seems unfortunate but it may have occurred through negligence.

The scorpion ring is worn on the left last finger, and the chief uses it during state gatherings. The real interpretation of the scorpion motif was not given but it is generally known that such animal motifs are used to liken their natural qualities to the ruler. Thus the motif is likely to identify the Bekwaihene as a ruler who is able to 'sting' like the scorpion.

The use of the ring (ana) may be for decorative or religious purposes at Bekwai. But Cole and Ross inform us of such a situation where such objects are used for symbolic purposes.

> .....Gold scorpion rings are worn by Akan chiefs, basically to represent the power of their sting, but the same motif on a brass ring from the once important trading town of Salaga cannot necessarily be interpreted in the same way. Documented northern zoomorphic pendants and rings carry spiritual rather than secular means. 61

The next ring is called pataku (wolf). This symbolic gold cast ring (Plate 35a) expresses the following idea: "pataku kwabrafo" (the fearsome wolf). Like other abosodee in the Bekwai paramountcy, the qualities of this animal is associated with the fearful nature of the Bekwai Chief. It is therefore believed that, like the wolf, he can strike and kill.

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61 H.M. Cole and D.H. Ross; The Arts of Ghana, The Regents of the University of California, California, 1977, page 36.

Apart from the linear decorations on the motif, the interest of the beholder is concentrated on the pataku mounted on a plate which is welded to the actual ring. The treatment of the overall animal motif shows simultaneity. Thus the body of the animal is shown in profile view while at the same time the head is depicted in a frontal view. This has rather resulted in an awkward joint of the head to the rest of the body. I do not know why the artist adopted this style. But presumably, he did this to enable him to give prominence to the fearful teeth of the wolf. The whiskers are also depicted in the form of incisions near the mouth of the 'animal'. The tail of the 'animal' was omitted by the artist, and unfortunately a portion of the animal motif, as shown in plate 35a is broken.

One of the distinctive features about all the discussed animal motifs is that usually the delicate parts, such as the limb, tails, claws, and so forth, are either omitted or reduced. Perhaps this is done to minimise the problem of breakages during use. The two sets of patterns found on the pataku (wolf) ring are shown in figures 28 a & b. One of these patterns (Fig. 28b) seems to direct the eye movement to the ring abosodee which is predominantly covered with horizontal lines (Fig. 28a). These horizontally arranged lines give an illusion of kinetic movement.

Sandals

The next items of regalia to be examined among the personal adornments of the Bekwai chief are a variety of sandals. These footwear at Bekwai, are normally differentiated by their abosodee or adornments on the leather straps.

The first to engage our discussion is the Amansie pramire pair of sandals (Fig. 29). This footwear bears the cobra motif in a coiled form. In this figure, the head of the reptile points forward in one direction. Thus, the manner in which the artist executed this abosodee is slightly

different from the way the same motif was wrought for use as an umbrella top (Plate 20a). In the case of the umbrella top, the cobra effigy is shown in a spiral form with the head pointing upwards - showing aggressiveness.

The coiled form of the cobra gives an idea of growth - an irreversible increase in size. The motif is gold leafed and the overall design is very simple - showing only some suggestions of scales, mouth and eyes. The length of the cobra is comparatively shorter than the reptile that it symbolises. On either side of the cobra motif are linear patterns contrasted by the coiled arrangement of the motif to make it a splendid piece of work (Fig. 29).

The Amansie pramire sandals are used during state occasions like all other gold decorated sandals.

Another type of footwear that deserves attention is the sedee (cowries) pair of sandals (Plate 36). This sedee footwear is crowned with a circular gold leafed object with a serrated edge. This is surmounted by a semi-circular object. The leather straps of this pair of sandals, unlike the Amansie pramire one, are a series of gold cast cowry-like motifs arranged in three rolls on either side of the circular object crowning the footwear. The "cowries" which adorn the sandals have perforations on them which appear to add texture to the general gold colour.

The "cowries" lead the eye to the central point which bears the crown of the sandals. The circular crown appears to break the linear order of the cowries. Like the Amansie pramire sandals, the sedee one is black in colour. The sedee which gives rise to the name of the sandals conveys the message "sedee wo ne tirim" (joyous mode) hence the use of the sandals during joyous occasions of the chief.

The mfofo (a kind of plant) sandals are another type of footwear

found in the palace (Fig. 30). Like the sedee sandals, the mfofo symbols which seem to repeat the mfofo abosodee on a smaller scale are arranged in a set of three rolls on either side of the abosodee. The abosodee and the mfofo adornments on the sandal's straps are characterised by some dots which depict the natural features of the mfofo plant. The abosodee and mfofo which adorn the strap of the sandals were cast in gold. The overall composition of the various sizes of the gold cast motifs on the black leather background of the sandals gives a harmonious colour scheme.

The mfofo pair of sandals is used during grand state functions.

The footwear is not unusual among other Akan communities, but the uniqueness of royal sandals lies not only in the artistry of its manufacture but also in the manner in which it is worn and the regal dignity it confers on the Bekwai chief.

It was observed that all the adornments have essentially functional purposes. Either they are for immediate self-defence[62], or socio-political significance. Personal adornments also help to indicate one's status, ethnic group, sex, religious background and so on. This is why great care must be taken on whatever is used to adorn the chief when he appears in public. Improper adornment of the chief could lead to an embarrassment or a disgrace. To avoid this, the people of Bekwai and their counterparts in the entire Akan community, have a custom whereby spies are sent to watch the outfits of subordinate chiefs before the superior chief appears in public. According to their tradition, a subject should not appear more gorgeously attired than the ruler. And in the same order a lesser chief should not appear more sumptuously dressed than a superior chief. It is

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62 An example is the "sebe-dontwon" (amulet) which was observed at the palace but did not appear in this thesis. At Bekwai it is believed to be used by the chief to control the crowd and for protection.

known even that it used to be improper (and punishable) for a lesser chief to attempt to surpass a higher one in dressing.

Although the objects the chief adorns himself with are fundamentally symbolic, they also have an aesthetic purpose. This is very clearly noticeable among the people of Bekwai where the sanaahene (the chief over the royal treasury) is placed in authority to see to it that the chief appears sumptuously dressed. Elsy Leuzinger generally commenting on the aesthetic aspect of a chief's personal adornments has stated:

> In the areas where the king sits, god-like upon a throne, surrounding himself with all power and worldly pomp, art ceases to be based on religion. It is no longer sacral, but decorative, instead of fulfilling a higher spiritual purpose, it serves practical needs. The monarch monopolises it to glorify his own person and deeds. [63]

To add to what Leuzinger has said, I have observed that the manner in which people want their ruler to appear in state shows their love of personal display but not only as a means of something to provide personal protection.

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63 Elsy Leuzinger, Africa, The Art of the Negro Peoples, Methuen, London, 1962 page 34.

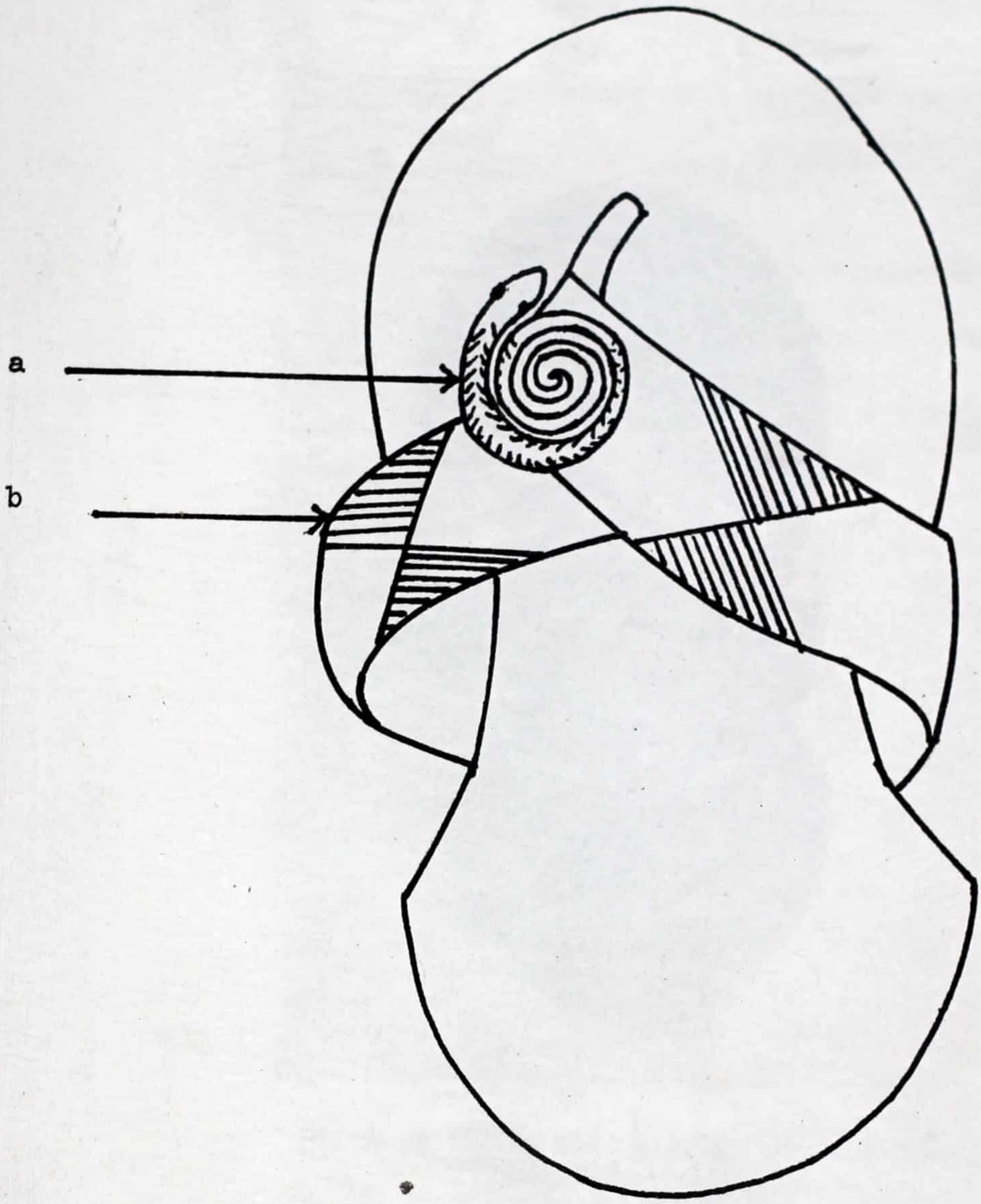

FIG. 29 Amansie pramire sandal

(a) Cobra motif

(b) Linear patterns

PLATE 36 SEDEE SANDALS: ELABORATELY ORNAMENTED WITH COWRY-LIKE MOTIFS

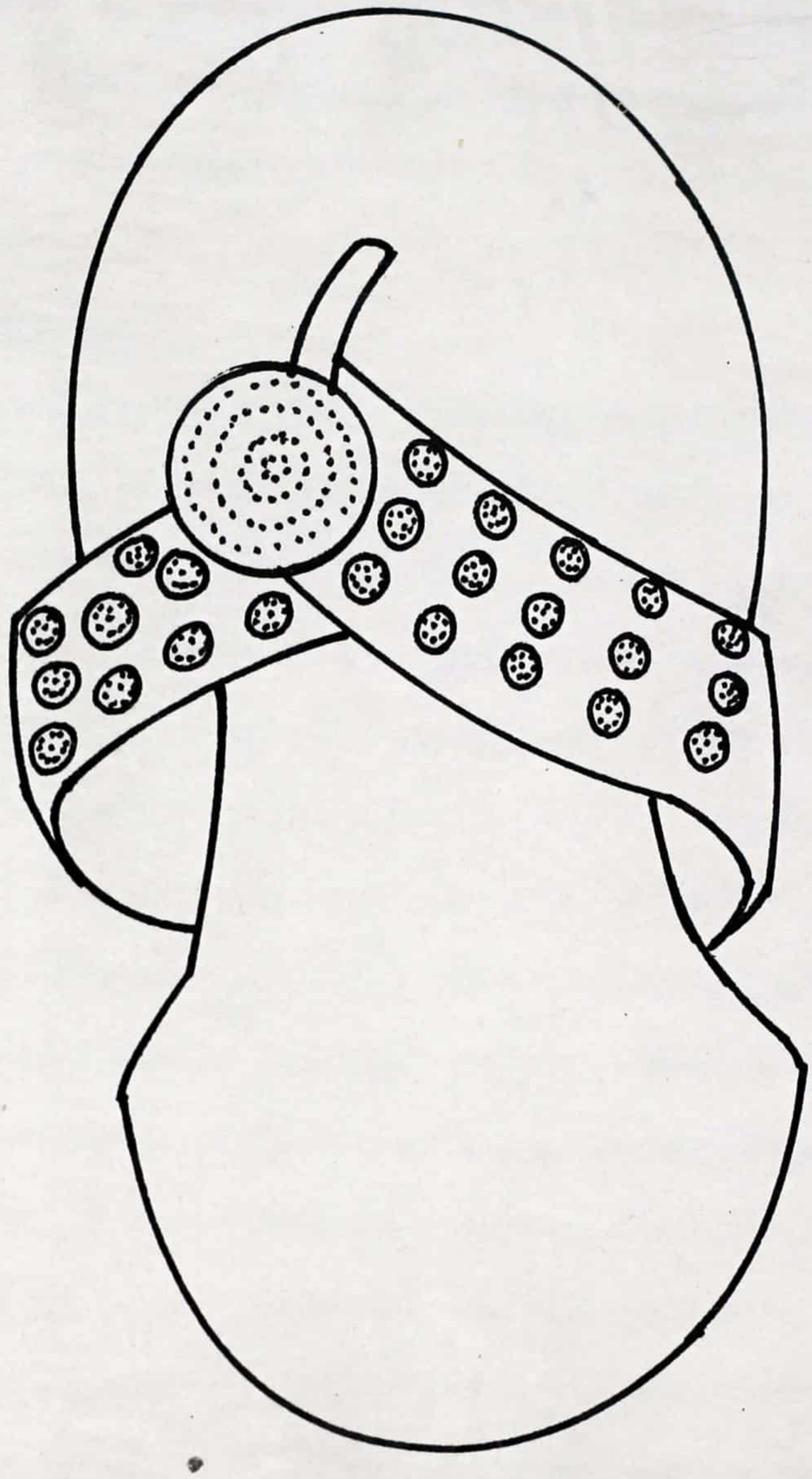

FIG. 30 Mfofo sandal: mfofo motifs arranged in three rolls on either side of the large "mfofo abosodee"

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is devoted to the general discussions and findings of my field study. These will include the general characteristics of Bekwai leadership art, significance, functions, changes in modern times and the future of the art.

General Characteristics

The most noticeable general characteristics of the "Leadership Art at Bekwai" are their extreme refinement and delicacy as compared with other types of art in the same town and at some places in Africa. The sense of refinement is often produced by the small size of the art objects, with their glaring features. However, certain art objects such as drums, the stools and chairs are monumental. The art objects in the Bekwai palace are often ornamented with gold and bear the usual geometric designs or patterns. This is what Elle Faure[64] says it is prevalent on the African continent which includes Ghana and by extension Bekwai. This is mostly created in the various paramountcies to proclaim the power and authority of the ruler. In addition, some of the art objects are said to represent the philosophic, political, and sociological experience of the people.

A few controlling and pervasive structural principles discussed below seem to be characteristic of all the art associated with the Bekwai paramount chief. This is by no means limited to only the Bekwai chief; from observation, regardless of the type of socio-political system in which a ruler is found this quality may be present. One of such principles is contrast.[65] That is the designs of the chiefly regalia are more elaborate

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64 Ellie Faure, History of Art, Translated from French by Walter Pach, London, 1922, page 166.

65 The degree to which leaders' arts stand apart from those of lesser leaders or of common people.

than those of the ordinary art works at Bekwai. Moreover, the regalia are characterised by greater size, in the case of say umbrellas, drums, stools and the like, and by more attention to detail. Another structural property may be examined with respect to technique of fabrication. This borders on the "naturalistic" attention to detail.

A careful study of such objects however, reveals that the naturalistic treatment is not a "photocopy" of nature. In fact, I do not really know why the regalia were thus executed, however, Fraser and Cole seem to have resolved this issue in the paraphrase below:

> In most cases the African artist never attempts 'mimesis', the exact imitation of life forms, as seen in certain Hellenistic, Roman and Renaissance works. There is 'some' correlation, however, between the extent of naturalism favoured in a given culture and its degree of socio-political differentiation.[66]

The word 'some' used in the above quotation perhaps refers to the idea of the degree of naturalism which the African artist usually practises. This seems to have been substantiated by Fraser and Cole in their discussion about naturalism in African art in which they thus point out:

> Granting that some of the Africa's most naturalistic images stem from highly centralised societies such as Ife, Benin, Ashanti, Cameroons Grasslands and Kuba, the fact remains that in this realistic courtly styles, naturalism is always blended with idealism.[67]

Naturalism blended with symbolism reaches its climax at Bekwai when the most sensitive naturalistic imitation of the hedgehogs and rotten log finial motif (see plate 16), is analysed.

Regarding the sensitive naturalism, this figure from the Bekwai court may be one of the most striking exceptions to the general rule of African stylisation. Even the lines on the body, which, from a sculptural point of view so effectively emphasise the flowing curves of the body may have been

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66 D. Fraser and H.M. Cole, African Art and Leadership, The University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1972, page 306.

67. Ibid.

realistic representations of quills. The artist portrayed the animals' body as composed of head, trunk, covered with curvy lines depicting the quills, limbs and the tail. Yet still, the animals never show any physical action either by way of body movement or facial expressions. This is rather a living testimony to the highly conventionalised style of Bekwai art, which is of course part of African art. In the olden days, a deviation from this style might result in the rejection of an artist's work because new forms might not be understood by the society - likewise the gods. Even though the same form could be retained, there could be renovations in them.

Leadership Art and the Culture of Bekwai (Art Consciousness)

The creation of the regal artifacts of Bekwai does not stem from imagination of the ruler or the subjects. Each object is introduced into the royal house to mark an event or interpret their philosophies and culture. In many cases also it distinguishes the clan, social status, or even sex of the wearer, or it may refer to some proverbial saying. Thus the Bekwai royal artifacts, with the exception of the foreign ones mentioned earlier are cultural objects; and since they were not forged out of imagination, they seem to prove that the people are art conscious.

In this instance, there is no 'art for art's sake' at Bekwai. However, the designs on some of the regalia are said to be more decorations which seem to over rule the concept of "no art for art's sake" at Bekwai. However, now many scholars of art agree that if a design (a form of art) is intentionally created to enhance the decorative aspect of a sculpture or object, it becomes the intended function of the design so even in this instance there is no art for art's sake.

There are illuminating examples of chiefly objects which are associated with Bekwai traditional area. These include the Amansie pramire, mmedie drums and nimsaakaakyi drums, which have already been discussed.

An interest in the regalia as art objects must inevitably turn towards their ethnological aspects, for on them is represented a wealth of cultural data. Before I proceed along this line, I wish to discuss regalia in general terms and as used in this thesis.

Regalia

Regalia in the Bekwai paramountcy, as noted on page 2 serve as concrete forms of historical records as well as objects which identify the chief. These help in the education of the younger generation, making them know and understand the culture of Bekwai. For, as it is evident in this thesis, some of the regalia, for instance, the one associated with the Amansie pramire (cobra) have mythological connections and I would add that the artifacts point to, and maintain the hierarchical order at Bekwai. They distinguish the chief and his court officials as a social unit and preserve the people's traditional religion.[68]

When the chief and his court officials adorn themselves in the regal ornaments, the wealth of the Bekwai culture is portrayed. The adornments attract the masses who appreciate the art objects.

Most information about the regalia of Bekwai is obtained through oral tradition because not much has been written about the objects. However, the oral information is quite important because it does not only tell us that the regalia of Bekwai are symbols of kingly office, but also it shows that the objects are "chronicles" and symbols of her social organisation.

Unlike the Western historians who have recorded historical facts,

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68 The art forms, for example, the stools serve as the fulcrum of the traditional religion at Bekwai. There, the spirits of the departed chiefs are believed to be invoked to reside in these art objects which are consulted on festive days through propitiation. It is believed that through the contact of the black stools the ancestors bestow their blessings on the Bekwai community. This is said to have become a way of life which help the people of Bekwai to unite under their ruler for prosperity and fertility in the society.

non-literate cultures, such as that of Bekwai have preserved their histories by art and oral tradition which are subject to distortions and therefore pose problems for researchers. In view of this, it may for instance be difficult for one to accept the general allegation that Ashanti copied some of their regalia from Denkyira. Even though the difficulty to accept the allegation may prevail, I do not suggest that the idea should be totally discarded since it is known that the rejection of oral traditions due to distortions has resulted in the loss of many important data. This fact having been observed by Appeah C.A., promted him to quote the following from Philips:

> .....in the case of sub-Saharan Africa, such total rejection has allowed a vast and rich wealth of material culture as well as historical data, to go unrecorded. 69

The expression "vast and rich wealth of material culture" which Philips employed perhaps refers to the extent to which he cherished such oral traditions which were allowed to go unrecorded.

The foregoing criticism by Philips is again confirmed by Fraser and Cole who have testified that in the non-literate cultures information on structure and function are almost always available from the art form itself in a given context. 70 This view, put forward by Fraser and Cole, is perfectly applicable to Bekwai; and I testify strongly that my informants who were mostly illiterates, gave me information by holding and pointing to the regalia.

At Bekwai, like many other Akan towns, as alluded to, regal artifacts serve as symbols signifying the culture of the people in various ways discussed later in this passage. Culture mentioned here consists of a people's

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69 Philips, quoted in Appeah C.A. "The Image of Denkyira Chieftaincy projected through its state Regalia", UST Library, 1984, Page 11.

70 D. Fraser and H.M. Cole, African Art and Leadership, The University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1972, page 302.

manners, customs, notably their social ideas, beliefs, values, techniques, practices and behaviour, their music, dancing, visual arts, language and costume. Firstly, the symbols found at Bekwai palace denote the philosophy of the people. That is, the symbols, in the form of art objects, concern what give solutions to all of life's problems and answer the question as to what really gives meaning to life and the culture of Bekwai.

In the town, a symbol of royal artifact may indicate the values of the people. This involves what is 'good' and beneficial; and shows what the Bekwais are seeking for and ask such questions as, why certain deeds are performed? An illuminating example is the worship connected with the black stools, as practised in other areas.

Black stools in Ancestor Veneration

Black stools are believed to be the focus of the Bekwai citizens and the entire Akan ancestral cult. They foster unity among them because in the Bekwai traditional life, the black stools of the town-founding ancestor is said to symbolise the soul of the society. In the opinion of the people therefore, the entire society has a common soul which they should unite to defend.

Moreover, the Bekwai black stools, as in the case of other Akan communities, are symbols of authority.[71] This therefore means, to occupy the royal stool [72] is to receive authority from the people. This is said to be followed by the occupant's ascension to a sacred realm, thus enabling him to be worthy of direct communication with the ancestors, regarding the welfare of the entire society. In this position the Bekwai chief also takes on the priestly character and whatever qualities he radiates are supposed to be from the ancestors. In this capacity as a priest, he discharges the reli-

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71 P.K. Sarpong, The Sacred Stools of the Akan, Ghana Publishing Corportaion, 1971 page 53.

72 P.K. Sarpong, Ibid. page 26.

gious duties that are of prime importance in the society before performing other functions termed as administrative, executive, judicial and military.

The ancestral veneration partly centres on the chief together with some of the court officials who serve as custodians of the black stools which somehow represent the ancestors. This art object is believed to be the temporary abode of the spirit ancestors to whom it is dedicated. Why stools are used instead of actual human sculptures for the ancestor veneration seems to be unresolved. But Leuzinger informs us that:

> The Ashanti do not believe in ancestor figures, but in the divine power of the 'golden stool'; which in or about the year 1700, according to legend was commanded from the heavens and rested on the lap of Osei Tutu. It is not simply a symbol of this miracle, but of the soul of the people given concrete form in the state. In the course of time the basic form of the sacred stool has been frequently copied, modified and ornamented with silver and gold covering, supporting figures and pillars in open - work with the same function.[73]

Considering this observation of Leuzinger, I may be right to state from the concept of the golden stool, that Bekwai derived the idea of representing her ancestors with black stools. And as generally known, on festive days, the Bekwai chief and his court officials, like their counterparts in the other Akan communities, offer meat, blood, wine, water, eggs and other sacrificial matter to the forebears. The offerings made before or on the black stools, are believed to maintain and enhance the vitality of the ancestors and to solicit their help in the welfare of the community. This is one way through which the people claim to communicate with the spirits to 'exploit' them to their advantage. For instance, during the offerings, the citizens pray for fertility, both in man and fields, victory in wars and so forth.

The stool therefore serves as the common heritage which the people of Bekwai must always unite to preserve. The black stools are regarded

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73 E. Leuzinger, Africa, The Art of the Negro Peoples, Methuen, London, 1962, page 112.

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as supernatural objects, enshrining the essence of the town, protecting the people in time of danger, and furthermore, safeguarding the moral values or societal norms. For effective implementation of moral values, certain customs of Bekwai are hedged about by taboos. These customs are known to be mainly pronounced by the chief, whose sacred status makes him capable of communicating with the forebears to radiate qualities which are supposed to come from the ancestors. A deviant of a norm, apparently becomes odd in the society. An individual is also said to be punished with illness when he offends the spirits directly. In serious cases of deviation from the maxims of the society, death sentence could be passed on culprits by the chief.

The beliefs about the black stools could be true or false. However, in my opinion, the black stools at Bekwai and other Ashanti towns are created for the three reasons extracted from Sarpong and recorded on page 49 of this thesis. The reasons as recalled are to inspire fear and increase the belief of the unknown; therefore they encourage reverence with the assurances of solidarity, growth and increase at Bekwai.

The black stools at the Bekwai royal court, like the golden stool of Ashanti and other stools of the rest of the Akan states (such as the precious Beads Stools of Denkyira mentioned by Appeah)[74] are viewed as 'supernatural beings' that house the souls and spirits of the people concerned. In other words these stools serve as the hub from which some activities of a society radiate. However, the concept of the black stool as a temporary abode of a royal ancestor and the resultant veneration of the departed forebears according to some critics, seem to bring the Bekwai people in line with the primitive races. This kind of critism has already appeared in the writing of Ellie Faure who has thus stated:

> It is in the tropics or near the polar regions that

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74 C.A. Appeah, "The Image of Denkyira Projected through its State Regalia", An unpublished Thesis, 1972, in College of Art Library, UST, Kumasi.

man, in the heart of modern times, have preserved practically intact the spirits of their most distant ancestors. It is only there that they have not passed beyond the stage of naturistic fetishism and grouping by tribes.....The black race is perhaps among the backward peoples which have manifested the least aptitude for raising itself above the elementary human instincts that result in the formation of language, the first social crystallizations, and the industries indispensable to them.75.

The above criticism by Ellie Faure may be correct or incorrect. Since this is a supernatural phenomenon, no one seems to know the true situation of it.

Appreciation of the Stool

When the eye is attracted to the stool, for example, the one shown in Figure 31a, it surveys the positive and negative spaces of the sculpture. The hollows are suggestive of space and time-growth, an idea which the African always looks up to. The curvature of the seat of the stool leads the eye into space on either side (Fig. 31b).

The portrayal of masses, interlocking forms and interstices, and interlacing lines on the object (Fig. 31a) are suggestive of an extra-dimension which is expressed in many traditional African sculptures. This is what William Fagg refers to as the 'mathematical record of growth and expansion - exponential curve.76

Importance and Influence of the Regalia on the Citizens of Bekwai

The importance and influence of the regalia as indicated hereunder, cannot be overemphasised. For instance, the black stool of Nana Eguaye-boafo to which reference was made in the second chapter, affords unity and influences the citizens to defend their town and fight for a common goal. It is to be pointed out in addition that the enstoolment of the chief of

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75 Ellie Faure, History of Art, translated from French by Walter Pach, London, 1922, pages166 and 167.

76 W. Fagg, and M. Plass; African Sculpture, Studio Vista Ltd., London, 1964, page 153.

Bekwai is accomplished on the replica of Nana Kguaye-boafo's black stool. It is thus apparent here that it is the regal artifact which ratifies chieftaincy. Moreover, it is the chief's "removal" from the stool which causes his destoolment. It could therefore be argued that without the stool, the people might find it difficult to make a chief; it might also be contended that without the stool, there would be no chief and socio-political organisation at Bekwai; if there would, it might be more complex and therefore invite greater problems into the socio-political scene of the people.

Apart from the black stools whose importance lies in social cohesion, peace and progress,[77] the ceremonial stools and chairs, mentioned in chapter two, afford an opportunity for peaceful socio-political gatherings which allow the chief to have mutual communications with his subjects to achieve solidarity and economic progress in the community.

That is, apart from their practical use as seats, the stools and chairs infuse peace into the assembly because their presence are said to radiate the essence of political authority. This is especially so with the stools which are thought to radiate the powers of the ancestors of Bekwai. These artifacts, especially the black stools, are therefore instruments of good government and social control, in fact a check against rebellion.[78] This, in effect, shows the sort of influence royal stools and chairs wield on the Bekwai community.

The importance of state swords could also be evident from the point already raised in chapter two, which, as shown in that chapter, indicates that the Bosomtwe sword is used to swear the oaths of office and allegiance. Certainly, this aids the people in the installation of chiefs and purports to ensure good government. Thus, probably, without the sword, the

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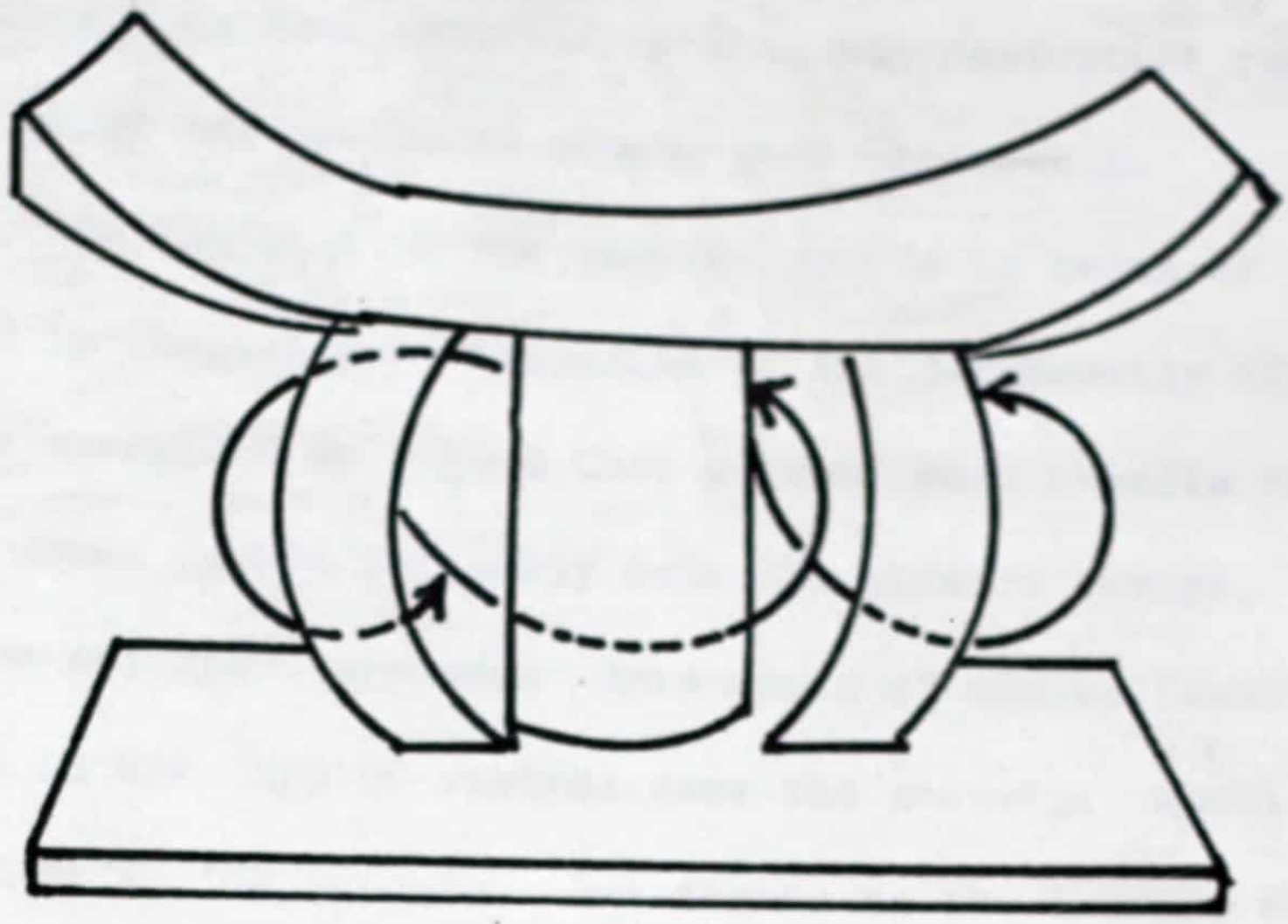
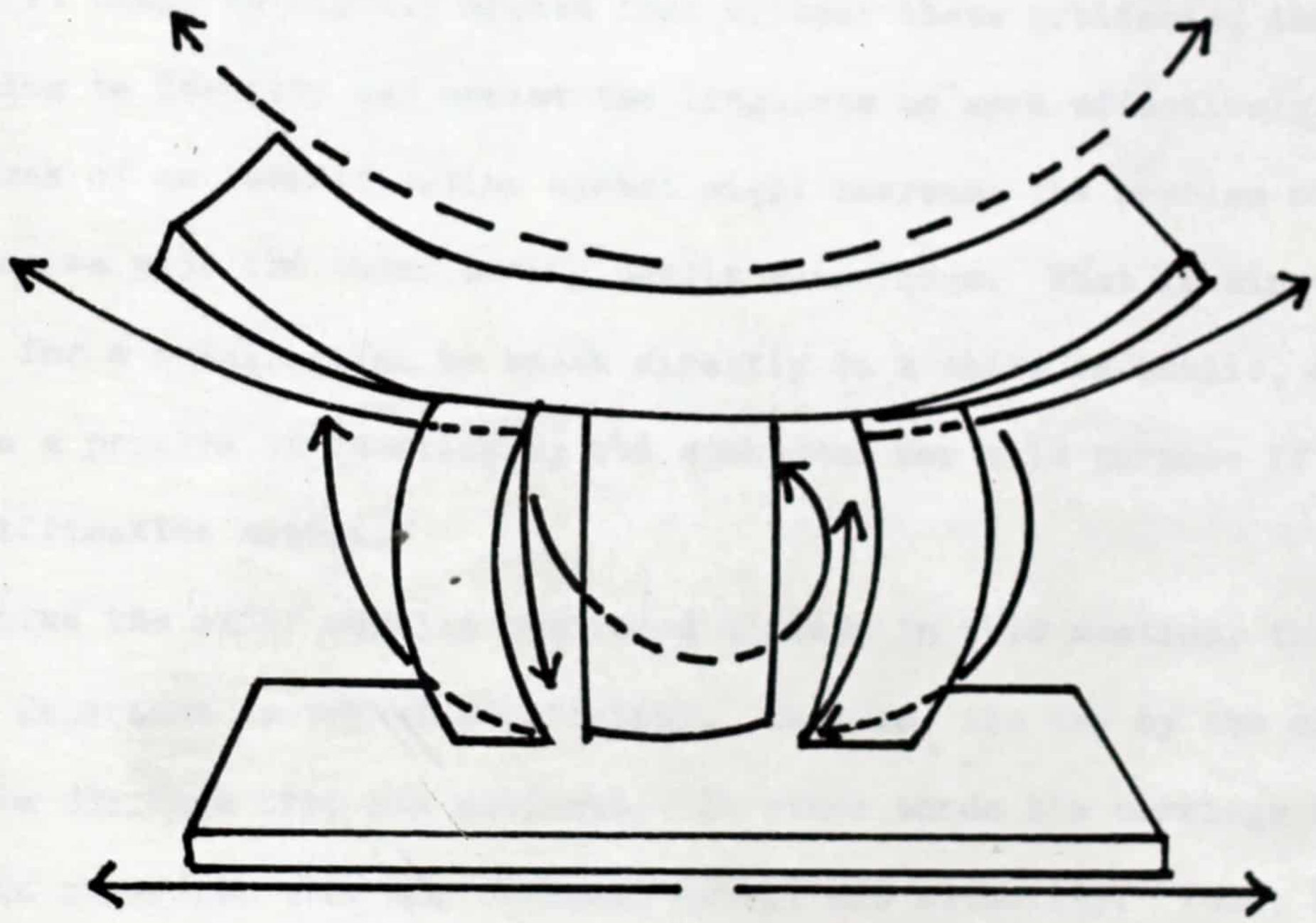
77 It is also applicable to other Akan areas.

78 This is not peculiar to Bekwai, it is observed in other Akan towns in Ghana.

FIG.31 Appreciation of a Stool



(a) the movement of the eye on the stool



(b) the eye led into space

portrayal of an extra dimension

installation would not be possible and the Bekwai chief and his subordinate rulers would not have a means to express their allegience. Whether a substitute means could have been obtained or not, the fact still remains that the state sword helps the people to obtain good leadership.

Moreover, the function of the courier swords in terms of communication, as noticed in chapter two, testifies to the paramountcy of the Bekwai regalia. It may therefore be argued that without such regalia and other courier objects which infuse authority into the chief's envoys, the ruler might run his own political errands. This would of course lower the dignity and might result in his loss of control over the society. Should this happen, chaos might be the outcome. But thanks to the courier regalia, this state of affairs has been avoided.

As may be recalled, the functions of linguist staffs also, recounted in chapter three, add their quota to the importance of the Bekwai regalia. That is referring to the information given in that chapter about linguist staffs, it could be rightly argued that without these artifacts, there might be nothing to identify and assist the linguists to work effectively. Moreover, lack of an identification symbol might increase the problem of one's consultation with the chief during public gatherings. That is since it is a taboo for a non-linguist to speak directly to a chief in public, there might be a problem in identifying the spokesman for this purpose if he had no identification symbol.

Like the other regalia mentioned already in this section, the palanquin is important in Bekwai chieftaincy. That is, its use by the chief shows his dominion over his subjects. In other words his carriage in a palanquin signifies that the citizens accept his authority. Thus, he is likely to have confidence to rule his subjects.

The mmedie drums also have an important role to play among the

regalia of Bekwai; for as hinted in chapter three, they are used when the Bekwaihene visits the stool house. The importance of this is the favourable conditions which the drums create for the chief and some of the court officials to contact the supernatural world to intercede on behalf of the society. This done, the citizens are likely to have an inner feeling of peace and satisfaction which may prevent psychosomatic and mental ailments. Moreover, the mmedie drums remind the chief and his subjects to be loyal to their town. That is, they are reminded that they should not follow the bad example of Santifo (see the story in chapter two, page 50) to bring financial loss to the town. No doubt, these drums thus teach a moral lesson which is necessary for the development of the town.

As could be recalled, it is indicated in the fourth chapter that personal adornments are used by the chief during public occasions. These regalia implicitly reflect and uphold the high-ranked social status of the ruler. They also help to distinguish the Bekwaihene from his subordinate chiefs and subjects. This is likely to help the chief in the governing of his people. The importance of the personal adornments may therefore be evidenced in the notion that probably without the chief's use of such artifacts, the people might dress more gorgeously than he; and psychologically the ruler would become inferior and ultimately lose his control over his people. In another sphere, the importance of the chief's royal adornments may be acknowledged by the fact that his destoolment is partly accomplished by the removal of his regal sandals - a point which shows that the royal adornments are of no mean importance in the chieftaincy of Bekwai and other Akan communities.

Change and Permanence in Leadership Art of Bekwai

Bascoms informs us that:

> Change is nothing new to the African arts, which have been quick to adapt imported brass tacks, glass beads, mirrors, cotton cloth, silk, threads

paints, dyes and other materials to their own purpose.79

Change is as important as permanence in chiefly regalia - as in tradition generally. Bekwai, one of the first towns to be founded in Ashanti, affords an opportunity to compare changes in the past and present, and to project indications against the future.

The chiefly objects at Bekwai have momentously been subject to changes that have affected Bekwai, and by extension Ashanti, especially since the dawn of this century, as a result of contact with the western culture. As it is generally known the Ashanti became an English protectorate in 1901. The early connection has inevitably resulted in acculturation in Ashanti which Bekwai forms part.

This has become pronounced in a few instances, especially in the field of drums at the Bekwai royal court. Originally the body of some of the mpintin drums of Bekwai were covered with a python skin and the head of the said instrument covered with the hide of a quadruped. Later on different kinds of materials came into use, for instance, imported upholstery material, depicting the designs of the skin of a python, as well as synthetic strings, are now used to cover some of the mpintin drums at Bekwai (Plate 37). In this instance, the drums are devoid of almost all their traditional characteristics.

Furthermore, the mmentia horns of the Bekwai palace were previously said to have been decorated with the mandibles of conquered generals or soldiers. But today they are left bare. In another instance, the ends of the horizontal bars which serve as the supports for the chief's palanquin now bear carved human heads instead of real ones which were used in the olden days.

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79 W. Bascoms, "African Arts", The Reagents of the University of California, U.S.A., 1967, page 8.

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PLATE 37 THE BODY OF SOME OF THE MPINTIN DRUMS NOW COVERED WITH MODERN UPHOLSTERY MATERIAL INSTEAD OF THE OLD PYTHON SKIN

A deduction made from the sculptures at the ends of the bars of the palanquin (Plate 22) is that they illustrate the former practice of attaching real human heads to Bekwaihene's palanquin. But with the introduction of western culture the act of attaching actual human heads to the palanquin has been substituted for carved human heads to remind them of their past deeds. In such instances, the awe which the former practice was intended to inspire among believers and non-believers is no more felt. The spiritual powers which are supposed to be associated with such practices may then be absent.

The regalia of Bekwai have been subject to further transformation. In the first place almost all the art objects - particularly, seats have been subject to change and replacements. The partial replacement of the old "osese dwa" by the foreign inspired asipim chair, hwedom and the Union Jack chair is a modern innovation, which may be regarded as development because owing to the harder wood used for the manufacture of these foreign furniture, their life span is far longer than the "osese dwa" which they have come to oust. Except the use of the "asese dwa" in the stool room during adae days, this particular artifact is not employed. Rather the asipim and hwedom are used on ceremonial occasions.

Through space and time, however, the executive hall of the palace of Bekwai has been furnished with modern stuffed set of highly decorative furniture instead of the old "asese dwa". These also, on account of their beauty show in a way a remarkable development in the artifacts of the palace. The modern furniture shows two stages of changes - first from stools to chairs and presently to the modern stuffed seats and it is envisaged that in the course of time, there will be a further change. These newly acquired seats lack the original symbolic designs found on either the "osese dwa" or the foreign inspired chairs. There is one "osese dwa"

found in this hall which the chief normally uses. With this stool, an attempt is made to copy the old "osese dwa" pattern but the end result falls short of the meaningful design of the old because the present carvers are either influenced by the western culture, or the old fashioned carving profession has almost given way to the carpentary work.

Bascom confirming this, has written:

> Today, however, there is the reason to fear that the rapid changes which have been taking place in Africa in recent decades may bring about the end of many arts. In many fields in the chiefdom, locally made regalia are giving way to modern western objects.[80]

Still, regarding the change in Bekwai regal art, I wish to point out that one of the umbrella tops shows a decline in surface quality (Fig. 32) compared with one of the old ones still found in the palace (Plate 20a). The drums and their designs are also giving way to cultural assimilation. For instance, in connection with the mmedie and kete drums, brass tacks, instead of vegetable strings, are now used to hold firmly the velvet material to the drum cylinder. In certain cases too the drums, contrary to old tradition, are painted with modern synthetic black oil paints instead of leaving them unpainted as was the case in the past. The paint is likely to protect the drum from the harshness of the weather and therefore prolong the life of the artifact. In addition, the brass tacks are likely to increase the life span of the drums. No doubt these two techniques show an improvement in the artifact.

Moreover, instead of using bow supports and vegetable strings called "obofowa apesekyi" for making the atumpan (talking drums) a board of wood hollowed out to keep the drum in a required angle (Fig. 33), and synthetic strings are used to hold taut the animal skin cover of the drum.

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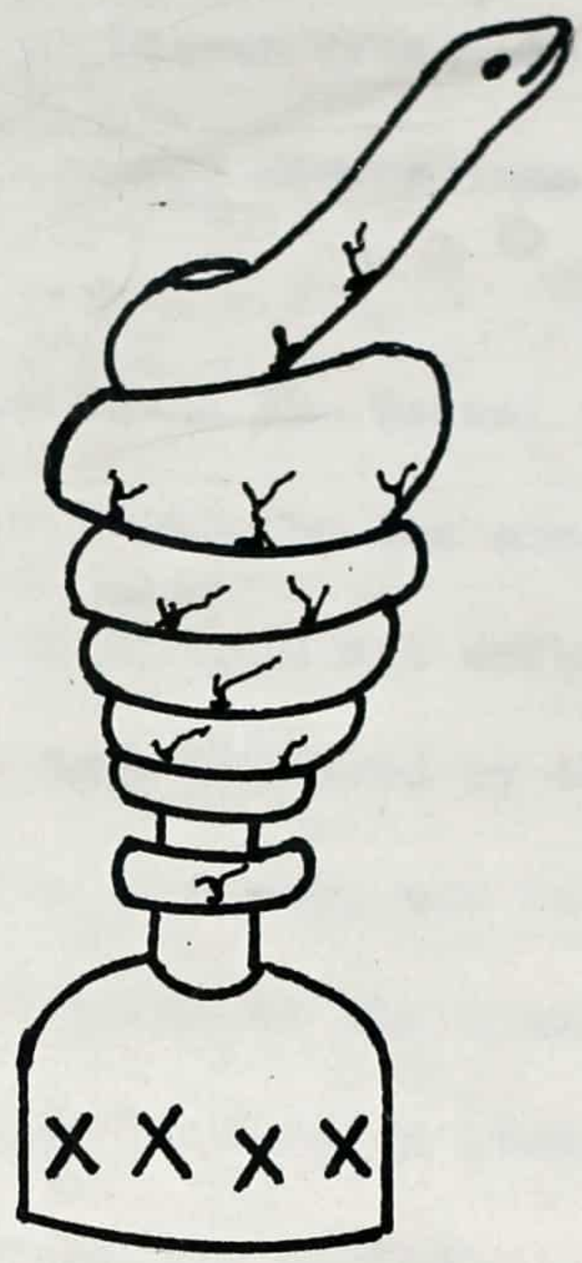
80 W. Bascom, "African Arts", The Reagents of the University of California U.S.A., 1967, Page 8.

FIG.32 Umbrella top showing a decline in surface quality as compared to that of some of the old ones (see plate 20a) by way of surface cracks.



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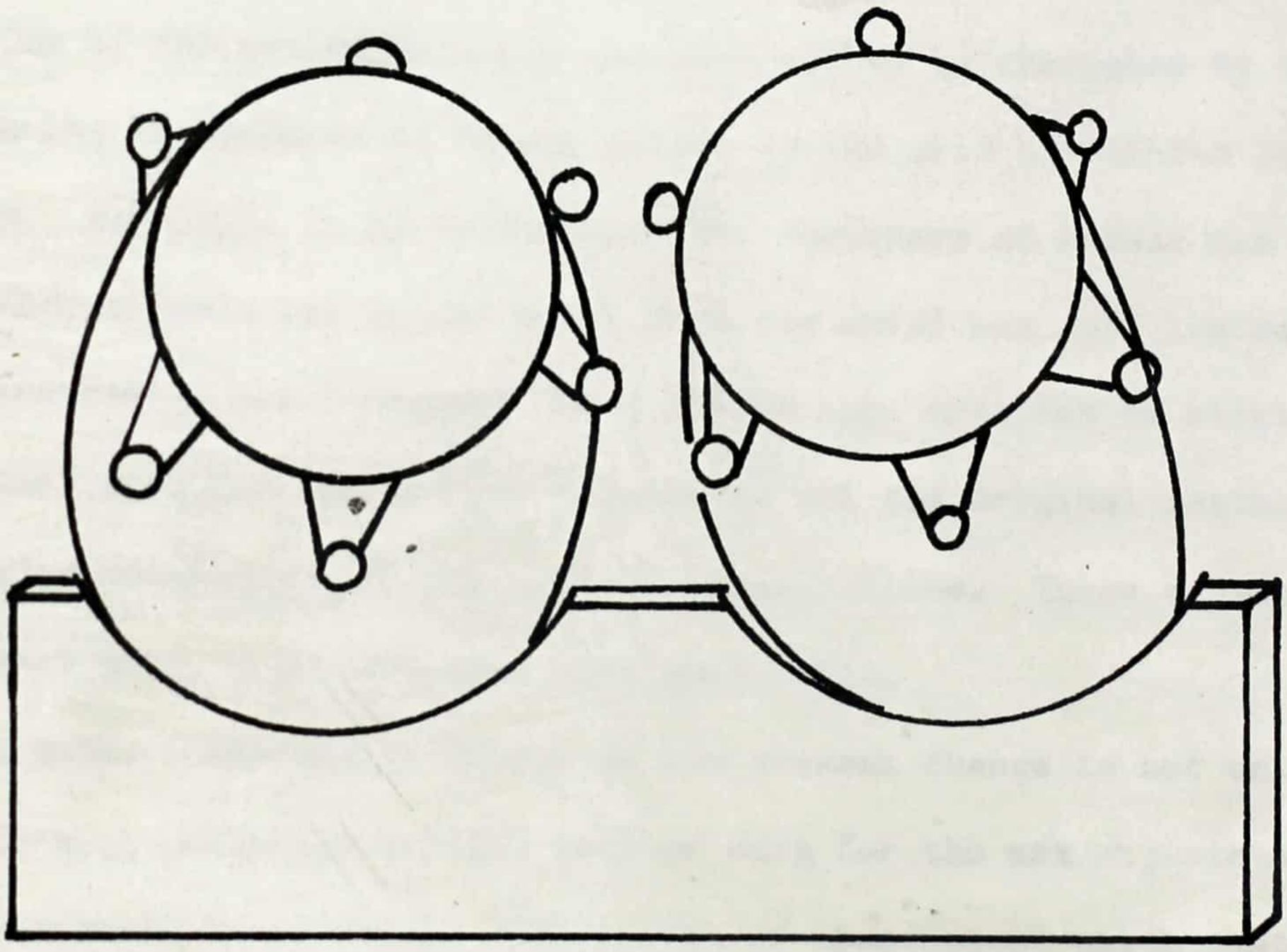

FIG.33 A hollowed out board of wood which now supports the talking drums of Bekwai

It was found out that the parts of the Bekwai drums which formerly had human head, limbs, blood and appropriate cloth decorations have not been properly preserved.

Today, it becomes inappropriate to describe the Bekwai palace as a "natural museum" as it used to be in the past owing to the modern changes in the art objects. The craftsmen who produced these art works in accordance with the dictates of the society, have been replaced by their modern counterparts who, apart from being interested in money, are influenced by a foreign sense of artistic values. As a response to the changes, the Bekwai chiefs themselves now show more delight in foreign items such as the use of Dutch Wax textiles instead of the indigenous cloths.

However, this may not be condemned because that is the order of the day. The chiefs like the other members of the town should be able to move abreast with time and to cope up with the modern economic trend. In my opinion, the change is in the right direction, only that care must be taken to preserve the rapidly dying out traditions.

One of the artifacts which was observed to be cherished by the chief during my research at Bekwai palace is the gold ornamented leather footwear. According to my observation the commoners at Bekwai can possess the leather sandals but no one apart from the chief has gold leafed ornaments attached to his footwear. Even though this artifact is maintained, the leather used for the modern footwear is not the original leather with gold leafed ornaments - having symbolic associations. These ornaments in the distant past, I presume were pure gold casts.

A major contributing factor to the present change is not only due to the foreign influence but the lack of care for the art objects and their consequent destruction. The spirit of abandonment which most of the regalia have suffered, or the sort of treatment given to some sections of

some of the art objects have resulted from radical changes in the taste of the society. In the modern governmental system the Bekwai chief and all rulers in the country have almost completely lost their full control on their chiefdoms and people.

This could be attributed to the declaration of "independence" by many of the formerly subordinate towns to the principal seat of the paramountcy. The chiefs of such towns often do what please them with the introduction of the modern system of government. This has curtailed the aid which the ruler used to obtain from his paramountcy. This has now loosened the grip of the Bekwai chief who, in the olden days, could compel people to render free services to the paramountcy or help to build the art stock.

At Bekwai, as known in other Ashanti towns, some of the regalia seem to have ceased to be the main focus of the religious activities of the town. This has mainly stemmed from the influence of foreign culture - Christianity and Islam - which has greatly diverted the people's attention from cherishing their own art objects.

During my research, it came to light that the regalia no longer enjoy the same amount of caretaking which they previously experienced. This has resulted from the fact that the lives of the present caretakers are no longer gripped by the same degree of cultural restraints which in the past, characterised the movements of the palace officials. It was even observed that many of the previous caretakers had travelled to other parts of the country to seek fortune. Consequently, the sort of apathy now corroding the traditional culture of the urban centres of this nation has begun its "destructive" reign in the palace of Bekwai.

The modern society has also deprived the Bekwai chief of several forms of royalties and tributes which were paid to him to enable the paramountcy run its affairs. The curtailment of these services in the form of resources,

human or otherwise, which were formerly mobilised to support the paramountcy led to the decline in the quantity of the regalia in the palace.

With respect to this, the regalia left in the palace are now maintained from the meagre incomes of the paramountcy and the scanty allowances from the Bekwai district council. This handicap in financial support for the unkeep of the paramountcy has affected the Bekwai chiefly regalia.

Even though the wind of change has blown over Bekwai regalia, the people of this town may be given a credit for the preservation of some of their traditional regal art objects. This reaches its climax in the field of state swords probably the 'Abusua kuruwa' sword (see page 63) and 'koto kesee' (large crab) sword of Bekwai. Part of the base of the cast motif - Abusua kuruwa' of the said royal house is at present broken off, making the object incomplete. But still the whole object (cast) is in its original form in spite of modern change in the society. It could be given fine and detailed surface texture but the old form is maintained. This object has become one of the inalienable objects in the Bekwai palace. Though the breakage in the base of the cast of the 'Abusua kuruwa' sword, due to damage, is unfortunate, they give some indication of the delicacy of the carving.

In spite of the changes, however, the regalia as a whole have not totally lost their unique cultural importance in the Bekwai royal house. It is believed to form the pivot of the traditional culture of the people. Furthermore, the said regal art still forms part of the living manifestations of the culture that produced it.

Different stylistic traditions seem to adapt themselves in varying ways to changing circumstances. Thus some of the art of Bekwai which are reported to have been copied from Denkyira show slight deviations. An example is the mfenasa sword, mentioned in page 69. This as said earlier shows significant differences in motif and style. In the case of the mfenasa of

Bekwai, the set of three blades of the sword are arranged in a parallel order and the ends are welded together to form a circular object. This is in turn joined to the double-bulbous hilt of the sword. The designs on the blades of the Bekwai mfenasa are quite different from that of Denkyira. Appeah has again described the designs on the Denkyira mfenasa to represent the crescent moon, the crocodile and the legendary bird. (Sankofa bird).[81] Those of Bekwai are just geometric designs whose symbolic associations are not yet resolved.

Fraser and Cole have illuminated on the changes in connection with art objects by stating that:

> In spite of the many uncertainties surrounding the evolution of African art, some generalizations may be put forward. Art traditions, it is evident, change at different rates, and the art of leaders probably evolves more rapidly than that of the common people, for the former are exposed more often to alien ideas and values, being as it were, the cosmopolities of Africa.[82]

To the African, change and permanence are accepted as a way of life thus keeping the society dynamic.

William Bascom has also observed:

> Ironically this (change) is happening just when African sculpture is so rapidly gaining public recognition. .....Because of their pronounced stylisation, African arts were not appreciated outside Africa - except by very few explorers, anthropologists, and museum employees - until early in this century; for the departure from the realistic portrayal of nature, which is taken so much for granted today, was in direct opposition to the western aesthetic canons of the nineteenth century. Yet it was this very departure from naturalism that appealed to the artists of Europe, who were already seeking to escape from the stereotyped standards of the naturalism of the Academy of France.[83]

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81 C.A. Appeah, "The Image of Denkyira Projected through its State Regalia", an unpublished thesis, 1984, in College of Art Library, UST, Kumasi page 53.

82 D. Fraser and H.M. Cole; African Art & Leadership, The Wisconsin University Press, London, 1972, page 323.

83 W. Bascom, "African Arts" The Reagents of the University of California, California, 1967, P P. 1 & 8.

This refers to the sympathy which William Bascom shows for African art which has now been adulterated.

The acculturation in Ashanti as alluded to has led to the creation of lucrative jobs which have attracted a greater proportion of the people and consequently declining the patronage of art object, perhaps regal art.

With the rapid political changes that have taken place, the rigid rule which formerly "gripped" artists has been relaxed, and most artists have now engaged themselves in the more profitable trade such as carpentary, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, and so forth to serve the entire public. This has resulted in the decline of the chief's monopoly over certain art objects. For example, it is alleged that the Bekwai chief like other chiefs, used to have monopoly over the use of the "adwene asa" (the exhaustion of design) cloth, but from observation, even the ordinary members of the town may now own one. This has also happened in the case of Scottish tartans. They were distinguishing colours and designs for each clan and some for common use. Now even non Scots also use these clothes indiscriminately. However in the case of Bekwai and other Akan Communities in line with continuing progress new patterns have been created for chiefs as replacements. Also a really cultured Bekwai citizen does not attend an Adae festival in Kente to avoid making the mistake of wearing the same pattern as his over lord.

At this stage, it becomes increasingly difficult to predict rates of changes in the future. What will happen to the Bekwai regalia as art objects will be dependent on the position which the traditional political system will assume in the transformed future.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The research has revealed that there must be gradual modernisation of the traditions and customs associated with the Bekwai regalia. Concerning this, intensive education of the chief and the court officials is to be

encouraged to enable them to discard outmoded customs and to open their minds to new ideas about the use of regalia. For instance, some of the royal symbols could be painted on the chief's car or printed on a flat and mounted on the automobile. This will doubtlessly influence the masses to learn the meanings and moral lessons of the symbols - a phenomenon which is likely to encourage rectitude and brotherly love.

Because of the moral lessons which the symbols radiate, it is my humble suggestion that thousands of books be published on regalia. Moreover, television as well as radio programmes on regal arts be greatly intensified and school syllabuses for the study of regalia be revised. Apart from these educational methods, photographs of the artifacts should be taken and displayed in schools. Slide and slide-projectors should be supplied to educational institutions and replicas of the regalia be made for the schools. By the aid of the replicas, some aspects of chieftaincy should be dramatized in schools to facilitate this kind of learning. Furthermore, pupils and students should be encouraged to visit the palace and attend festivals. In addition, symposiums and seminars on, regalia must be organised in schools and other places to promote this kind of education.

This aspect of learning, through festivals, is to be intensified by the use of T-shirts, scarfs and cloths that bear the symbols or motifs copied from the regalia found at Bekwai and other places of this country.

Generally, education about the regalia of Ghana should be geared towards the promotion of harmony between rulers and the ruled to minimize, and if possible avoid chieftaincy disputes that sometimes culminate in treason and destoolment. This kind of education should also touch on customary laws and procedures to minimize offences against the society and promote social harmony. It is therefore my advice that the forty-day orientation course organised for the Akan chiefs be better developed for

the education of the chief, court officials and the rest of the public. This will of course reverse the situation in which the officials of the palace withhold information from researchers.

The court officials of Bekwai and other places are also advised to employ some of the modern techniques such as the application of paints and preservative chemicals such as solignum, and the use of durable materials to prolong the life span of the artifacts.

Palaces in general are known to be "museums" themselves but the Museums and Monument Board of Ghana are advised to modernise the activities of the Bekwai palatial "museum". This would of course result in the improvement of the "museum" in the various palaces of Ghana. The palace "museums" should be opened to the public to enable the masses to learn about the cultural values of the artifacts.

Finally, the public are requested to preserve the customs and traditions of chieftaincy in terms of "modernity" to raise its image. Some of these functions include the practice of traditional court to bring about order in the society; carrying out government policies to the grassroot level by way of disseminating information through state gatherings and house to house announcement and so on. When this is implemented it is hoped that the duties entrusted to the chieftaincy system would be fulfilled and its associate benefits of social development would be reaped.

Conclusion

As already noticed, this research has apparently identified some of the Bekwai regalia and has unearthed their socio-political and religious functions. It has moreover pointed out that not only have foreign materials been used in the construction of some of the artifacts but also, some British regalia have infiltrated into the Bekwai royal art works. This, as shown already, has contributed to the few changes and developments which have

occurred among the regalia. It is however believed that further changes and developments will in the course of time occur in the artifacts. In this regard, it is conjectured that the production of Bekwai regalia will either increase or decrease in concomitant with the socio-political and religious trends of the town.

In addition, this thesis has highlighted on the significance, importance and influence of the regalia and has made an artistic appraisal of the regal insignia. The research has further shown the ethnographic aspects of Bekwai and has finally put forward some suggestions and recommendations which will hopefully promote caretaking of the artifacts at Bekwai and other areas and enhance the teaching of art and culture in this nation.

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