

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The development of literature or documented materials on *Ohum* festival of Akyem Abuakwa traditional area of the Eastern Region of Ghana, has been very slow, although formal education has been introduced to the people for sometime now.

Early missionaries' influence among the indigenous people of Akyem Abuakwa in the field of religion and formal education did not encourage the learning and documenting of traditional events like the *Ohum* festival. These events were referred to as "fetish/pagan". This resulted in the literate people's acceptance of western materialism and way of life, which consequently broke the relationship they had with those traditional events. On the other hand, most traditional authorities refused to allow themselves or their children to be formally educated for fear of being influenced by the western missionaries. As a result, most of the early writings on the people of Akyem Abuakwa and the *Ohum* festival in particular were based on European travel literature which, aside from being hard to come by, were deficient in facts and showed a lack of understanding of the people and their culture.

Another reason for the slow development of documented materials on this subject is that fear was instilled into potential writers by traditional authorities. They were often told that, certain vital information was not to be let out. They also used that opportunity to make certain demands such as items for sacrifices/pacification of

their gods from the potential writers. Being unable to cope with the frustrations, the would-be writers eventually declined.

With the realization of the tourism potential in the economic development of Ghana in recent times and the consequent attempt to introduce (make known) the rich culture of Ghana to the rest of the world through its understanding, Ghanaian writers have started writing on subjects such as these. Consequently, there has been a sudden proliferation of cultural materials in Ghanaian journals and also in many Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian scholarly writings all over the world. Sadly however, Prof. Kwame Botwe-Asamoah of Pittsburgh University, U.S.A who has been following the development of the *Ohum* festival celebration since the 1980s together with Nana Botwe, the *amankrado* (sub-chief) of Tafo agrees with the researcher that compared to other traditional events in Ghana, there is little literature written on this subject, with more than half of them yet to be published.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In times past, the people of Akyem Abuakwa took great pride in the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. Today, the current generation of the people are gradually losing interest in the knowledge and celebration of this festival due to certain factors. The researcher therefore seeks to study this festival and what it entails, how it reflects the people's culture and art, and the factors leading to the gradual loss of interest in the celebration of the festival. This study will undoubtedly enable the researcher to suggest how to resuscitate the knowledge and interest in the celebration of the festival in order to, among other benefits, promote tourism and therefore the economy of Akyem Abuakwa and the whole of the nation of Ghana.

1.3 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research was to study and document the origin and celebration of the *Ohum* festival, its artistic and cultural elements and how it reflects the culture of the Akyem Abuakwa people.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

1. To thoroughly study and document what *Ohum* festival is and how it is celebrated among the people of Akyem Abuakwa with the view to investigating how the festival, as part of the Akyem Abuakwa people, reflects their culture; that is religious beliefs, political life, social life, economic life, health and medical life, education as well as artistic forms and aesthetics.
2. To trace notable changes it has gone through over the years and the factors leading to these changes, and offer pertinent advice on how it will among other benefits, promote tourism to enhance the economy of Akyem Abuakwa and the whole of the nation of Ghana.

1.5 Importance of Study

Studying and documenting the celebration of the *Ohum* festival would help educate the people of Akyem Abuakwa and the general Ghanaian public about it. It will help Ghanaians and other nationals as well, to know how the celebration of the festival reflects and affects the people's religious beliefs, political, social, economic, health and medical lives, and education. It will moreover help beneficiaries of this research to recognize and appreciate the value of this festival as part of the culture of the people of Akyem Abuakwa. This will help inspire and resuscitate the dying knowledge of the festival. The study of the artistic forms and aesthetics associated with the celebration of this festival will inform and also serve as some sort of

inspiration for art lovers and art connoisseurs. This will undoubtedly boost the tourism potential of the region and the country in general.

Furthermore, the study of the transformations it has gone through over the years will help us to discover the factors leading to the changes. This will enable the readers of this thesis to find out the sort of influences these factors have brought on the people and their culture, and may help the people of Akyem Abuakwa to know what measures should be taken to sustain and if possible, improve the positive impact the festival has on them.

1.6 Research Questions

1. Why was the *Ohum* festival instituted?
2. When is it celebrated?
3. Of what importance is the festival to the people?

1.7 Hypothesis

The study of the *Ohum* festival will reveal that it reflects the culture of the people of Akyem Abuakwa, has aesthetic appeal, undergone some changes and these have brought some influences on the people and their culture.

1.8 Delimitation

The researcher sought to study and document the celebration of the *Ohum* festival of the people of Akyem Abuakwa from the sixteenth century to the present time. The research focused on the people of Tafo who are believed to be the custodians of the festival. Where possible, comparisons and contrasts were made between what happens in the *Ohum* festival and what takes place in other festivals of Ghana.

1.9 Limitation(s)

On many occasions, the researcher's efforts were impeded by lack of funds to travel from one place to another to search for vital information for the study. There was general scarcity of reading materials on the topic; therefore the researcher had to rely on oral tradition in many cases. Also, there were situations where the elders and people were unwilling to talk due to suspicion that the researcher might be working for a certain media house.

1.10 Reasons for Writing

1. The researcher wrote on this subject because she was struck by the festival's rich culture and history, its ability to bring people together, and its moral and educational aspects.
2. Also, the researcher wrote on this subject because she wanted to be one of the privileged few to produce a comprehensive documentation on it for the advancement of knowledge.

1.11 Statement of Assumptions

1. Though the artistic and cultural aspects of the *Ohum* festival have evolved over the years to suit the changing times, its main objective has been maintained.
2. There are opportunities for further positive improvement in the artistic and cultural elements of the *Ohum* festival to enhance the socio-economic growth in the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area and the country as a whole.

1.12 Ethnographic Background

Modern Akyem consists of three sub-divisions: Abuakwa, Kotoku and Bosome. The largest sub-division is Akyem Abuakwa which accounts for about two-thirds of modern Akyem territory (Addo-Fening, 2000). Occupying much of the western half of the Eastern Region of modern Ghana, Akyem Abuakwa is bordered on the north and north-east by Kwahu and Asante-Akyem, on the east and south-east by Krobo (Manya and Yilo) and Akuapem, on the south by Agona (Central Region) and in the west by Akyem Kotoku and Akyem Bosome. The modern state of Akyem Abuakwa, also known as *Okyeman* (Akyem Abuakwa) is the largest traditional area in the whole of southern Ghana. It presently consists of five hundred and six (506) towns and villages, according to the 1973 chiefs list. This excludes those villages without Black Stools, which is the Akan symbol of authority. Those villages come under the category of *Cocoa-ase Adikrofo* even though some are fairly large. (Ayim p 7) Figure 1.1 is a map of Ghana showing the Akyem area.

Located deep inside the jungle (*kwaee*), *Okyeman* land is rich and well endowed with gold, diamond, bauxite and other mineral deposits. It is mainly because of its geographical location that, the *Okyehene* (the paramount chief of Akyem) has earned the appellation, *Kwaebibremuhene* (king of the dense forest). The land of Akyem Abuakwa is drained by two rivers –the Birim River, formerly called *Aniabena* and the Densu River. Both have their source from Dokyi Hills near Apapam within the vicinity of Kyebi (Kibi), the capital (Ayim p 8)

The history of *Okyeman* dates back some four centuries ago when the story of the *Asona* clan of Adanse led by the powerful and fearsome leader, Nana Apeanin Kwaframa began to unfold. Nana Apeanin Kwaframa, the celebrated leader of the

Asona clan of the Adanse's able, courageous, shrewd and unconquerable attributes attracted the attention of some of the clans who felt cheated or threatened and looked

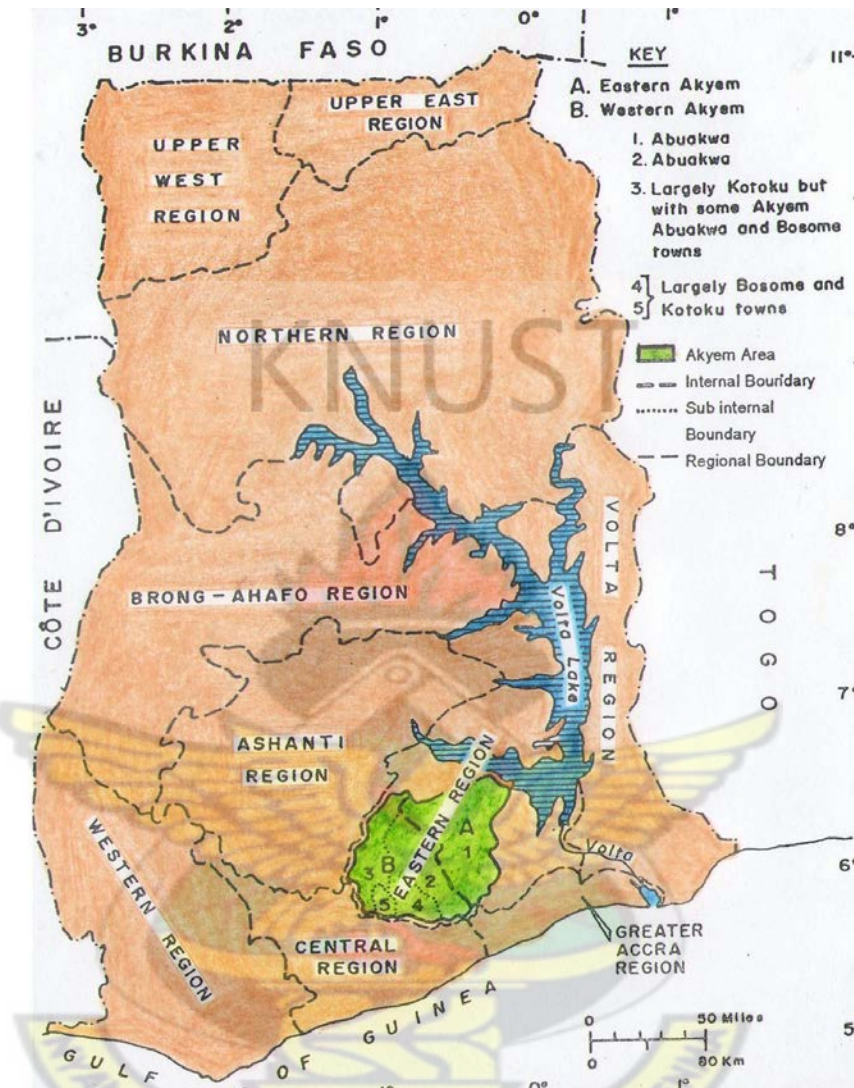


Figure 1.1 Modern Ghana showing the Akyem Area

Source: *The Akyem Factor in Ghana's History 1700-1875*

up to him for succour and protection. This was long before the crystallisation of the Akans who lived in groups such as the *Oyoko*, *Asona*, *Aduana*, *Asakyiri*, *Bretuo*, *Asene*, *Agona* and *Ekuaa*, into states. This leader's reputation was likened to that of a leopard which in Akyem is variously called *Okyem*, *Etwie*, *Kurotwiamansa* or *Osebo* with *Okyem* being the most common name in the olden days. The *Okyem*, a widely

feared wild animal but a good parent, ever-ready to protect its offspring so well that any attempt to steal the cub invites its wrath. With time, Nana Kwaframa's group, as a people came to be known as *Okyemfo*ξ (*Okyem's* people) whom many dreaded to provoke or attack. Thus as the Asona group grew, they were constantly referred to as *Okyemfo*ξ which eventually corrupted into *Akyemfo*□ (Ayim, nd p.14). Akyem has however, now been corrupted to be Akim.

Nana Kuntunkunuku succeeded Nana Apeanin Kwaframa as the *Okyem-hene* (leader of the *Okyem* people). This title eventually became *Okyehene*. Before long, his martial ardour and administrative skills were demonstrated. He proved impregnable at war and found instant antidotes to every military manoeuvre by his enemies. He became regarded as a king who instantly recoiled like a snake to outwit his enemies. His people were referred to as *Abukafo* which was eventually corrupted to *Abuakwafo* (Ayim, nd p.14). The Akyem under Kuntunkunuku did not proceed directly to the present Birem (Birim) valley site. They rather wandered in Adanse for some time. Places associated with their peregrinations include Kotobiante, Dompase, Sesebenso, and Akokyeri. Later under the leadership of Agyekum, Adu Oware and Anim Kwatia, they moved to Asante Akyem where they made Dampong their chief base (Aninfeng, 1970).

With the sudden growth of the Asante nation under Osei Tutu in 1733, they began to ferret out the Akyem people again. The Akyems were therefore compelled to move on. Under the leadership of Ofori Panin, they proceeded to the present Birem valley, where they encountered the people of Tafo. It is believed that the Tafo people told them that they would allow them to settle on the land but on condition that they would only eat yam after the *Tafohene* had eaten the freshly harvested yam.

Probably when the Tafo people under the authority of Duedu Amo, the fighter saw the powerful Akyems advancing in their great numbers, they put up a fierce defence. Upon realizing the overpowering influence of the invading Akyems, they quickly made arrangements for peace. Ofori Panin agreed to observe the *Ohum* festival and all that went with it. In this way, although the Akyems ruled the Tafo people, they were always reminded that they came to find some people on the land on which they had settled. They paid their respect to the Akyem *Manhene* (paramount chief) at Kyebi (Kibi), but he also paid respect to them by celebrating their *Ohum* and refraining from eating the new yam until the *Tafohene* had done so. The *Ohum* festival marks the signing of a peace agreement between the Aduana people of Tafo and the Asona royals of Kyebi (Aninfeng, 1970).

The people of Tafo are said to be the original inhabitants of the Abuakwa land. The story begins with the mythical appearance of the *Tafohene* (chief of Tafo), Okuru Banin I and his Aduana clansmen from the Birem (Birim) River at Afriyɔ, a place near Bunso. Bunso is the corrupted form of the word *bunuso* (the deep pool). It is generally agreed that it was when the Akwamus were at Nyanawase and Ntim Gyakari reigned over the Denkyiras that Okuru Banin I, brandishing a burning *gyentia* (log of firewood) came out of the Birem River with his stool and entourage that was made up of the Aduanas. Accompanying Chief Okuru Banin I was the high priest, Okomfoɔ Asare who wore a pure white gown and carried the *Ohum* shrine. This was about the year 1600AD (Aninfeng, 1970). The myth about the ‘appearance’ further explains that when the people of Tafo emerged from Birem at Bunso, they saw a Guan hunter and submerged into the river. It is said that when the hunter saw them, he exclaimed “Ah anipa nie!” meaning “such a huge crowd of people”. The queen-mother submerged and did not come out again. In actual fact she drowned. In

her honour, the Tafo people did not institute a queen-mother until the reign of Okuru Banin II. Okomfoξ Asare came out of the river with a palm frond and a calico mat. This is how the river came to be known as *Bremu* (out of the palm frond) which was later called *Birem* and has now been corrupted to Birim. It must be noted, however, that as greater importance and prestige are attached to communities/states with exotic origins and cultural influences, traditional court historians quite often distort oral traditional histories to suit their purposes. Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain the emergence of the Aduana clansmen of Tafo from the Birem River by some individuals who find it difficult to believe this story. It is an undisputed fact among Tafo traditional court historians, however, that when Okuru Banin I and his entourage ‘emerged’ from the Birem River, they spoke the Akan dialect and conformed to the general social and political organization of Akan ethnic groups. This means that they had had some connection with Akans before the Birem River incident at Bunso. The people of Tafo are believed to be a branch of Akwamus.

As already mentioned, this event happened around 1600AD, a time that Ntim Gyakari reigned over the Denkyira. According to written literature on the pre-colonial era of Ghana, the gold trade in particular stimulated the process of urbanization and state formation especially in gold mining areas of Akanland along the trade routes leading northward and southward. The rise of the Denkyira at that time and the Asante later on illustrates this. Denkyira, under the reign of Ntim Gyakari developed a militarised state and carried out wars of territorial expansion against Assin, Adanse, Twifo, Sefwi and all of south-west Ghana up to the Axim coast. Denkyira’s economic power which facilitated this imperial expansion was derived from profits of the gold trade. Denkyira and Adanse settled along this trade route and populous market centres like Bono Manso and Fomase. (Aquandah) With

this, it is easy to deduce that Okuru Banin and his entourage probably ended up in the Birem valley as a result of seeking refuge from a war against a bigger opponent like the Denkyira.

After Chief Okuru Banin had emerged from the river, he settled at Afiriyɔ and organized his kingdom. He set up three pieces of logs and kindled them with the fire brand he brought. He then set his stool near the fire. It must be noted also that in Akan, the land on which one kindles fire becomes one's property. Okuru Banin I then sent his hunters/farmers led by Nyano all over the hinterland to explore it. Nyano and his colleagues made a large yam plantation at the present site of Asiakwa. From there, they roamed the vast forest along the entire bank of the Birem River. They brought meat and food stuffs to Okuru Banin's court and confirmed that no other ethnic group existed anywhere near them. Okuru Banin and his Aduana people therefore became the first occupants and the owners of the vast Akyem Abuakwa land.

Okuru Banin I and his people realised that Afiriyɔ, their abode was not a congenial site. They felt a strange site hanging around Afiriyɔ, and on sacred days they heard mysterious voices speaking with flute-like softness. They believed then that the place was a haunted site. They therefore moved to Saaman, a place near Osino. This is why the people of Saaman agree that their land belongs to the Tafo stool. Custom does not permit the *Tafohene* or any of his royals to set foot at Afiriyɔ. All the rituals are performed on behalf of the *Tafohene* whenever he is due to pay homage to Okuru Banin I and Okomfoɔ Asare at Afiriyɔ. From Saaman Chief Okuru Banin and his men left for Awansa, a site between Osiem and Anyinasin junction. For this reason, the *Tafohene* is sometimes given the title, *Awansahene* (chief of

Awansa). After a few years stay at Awansa, they moved again to Bomposo and finally to their present Tafo town (Aninfeng, 1970), where the *Ohum* festival was instituted.

With Bansa, initially as its capital, Abuakwa people attained fame in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a major source of gold supply to the coast. The struggles between Abuakwa and Akwamu to control the gold resources of the Birem valley led to a series of wars between the two states from 1659 to 1730. This ended up with the relocation of Akwamu beyond the Volta River. As result, there was subsequent integration of the abandoned Akwamu territory with Akyem Abuakwa endowed people, having in their possession enormous expanse of territory stretching from Jejeti and Sekyere in the north to Adeiso in the south-west and from Begoro in the east to Akyease in the west (Ayim nd p.8).

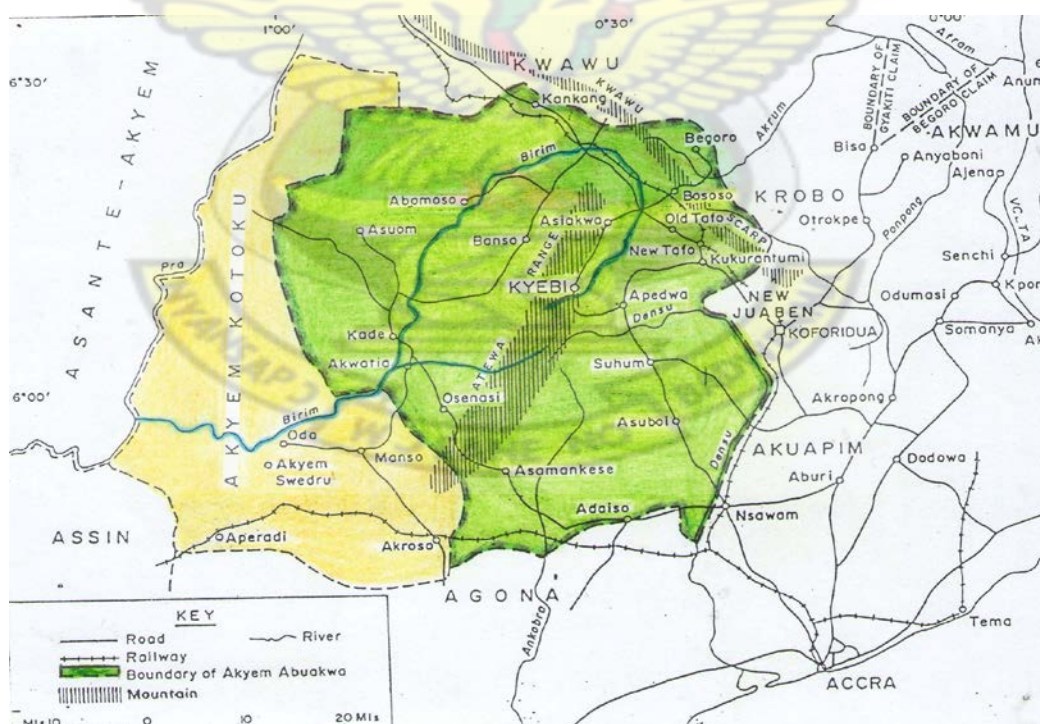
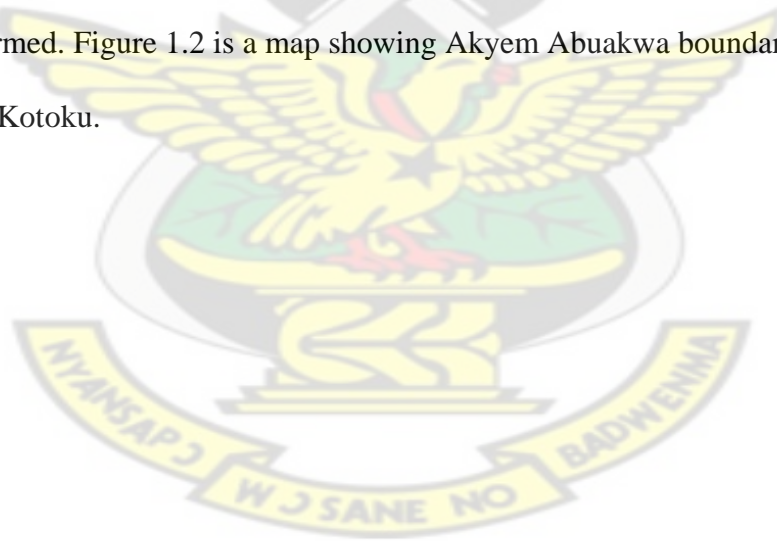


Figure 1.2 Akyem Abuakwa boundaries in relation to Akyem Kotoku

Source: *Akyem Abuakwa 1700-1943; from Ofori Panin to Sir Ofori Atta*

Though emphasis is on Akyem Abuakwa, it is deemed right to make mention of the other two Akyem states; Akyem Kotoku and Akyem Bosome. In 1824, Akyem Abuakwa during the reign of the versatile Amason, Queen Dokua, she provided a place of refuge for the Kotokus who had in times past provided immense assistance to Abuakwa in some of its wars with Asante. They were provided with a new home at Gyadam (near Osino) from 1824 to 1860 when they also founded their modern capital at Oda on a land that originally belonged to the Ofori Panin Stool, as the stool of the chiefs of Akyem Abuakwa is called. The Adinkra war in 1818 had earlier on led to the immigration of the Bosomes under their leader, Koragye from the Amansa area. These immigrants entered Akyem territory where they settled and eventually established Swedru as their capital. Akyem Abuakwa is therefore the single state around which the other two Akyem states (Akyem Kotoku and Akyem Bosome) were formed. Figure 1.2 is a map showing Akyem Abuakwa boundaries in relation to Akyem Kotoku.



CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Rationale for the Review of Related Literature

The writing of the literature review has helped the present researcher to examine the course of direction or development of written literature on the subject of this thesis. The review has informed her about past written records which have in turn influenced or helped her determine the direction of this thesis. For it is said that the present grows from the past and conditions the future. With a clear view of what others had written so far on the subject, the writer has adequately made intelligent decisions regarding exactly what to write on the subject. In fact, while the present researcher was writing this thesis, the review of related literature enabled her to know the vacuum left to be filled by her. This has of course enabled her to contribute significantly and substantially to the growth of knowledge on the subject.

The literature review has also helped the writer to know certain information provided by some previous authors which were incorrect. The researcher got the opportunity to point out the incorrect information while providing the correct ones through comparison with other sources of literature and field research for her own benefit and that of readers. This review has also enabled the researcher to compare and contrast her own research findings with those whose literature has been reviewed.

The reader of this review gets the opportunity to have some background knowledge on the subject and also some ideas on what to expect in the research paper. If the reader is a potential writer on a similar topic or subject, it is a good opportunity for him/her to decide on how to approach it. He or she, through the

literature review, is assisted in choosing books and other documented information related to the subject for further studies.

2.2 The Types of Festivals in Ghana and their Importance

Ohum is one of the most important festivals celebrated in Ghana and various reasons have been given for the celebration of festivals in this country. Some of the most common ones are, in memory of the dead, to celebrate a time of harvest, to remember dramatic episodes in the past and also for cleansing or purification purposes. Opoku (1970) indicates that the people of Ghana have evolved various rites and rituals for all the important events in life. There are the rites of child naming, of puberty and initiation, and of marriage and death. But far more important than these rituals, which are performed only by the little family or clan circle, are annual and seasonal festivals which bring together a whole people of a town or community. He gives a vivid description of some of the festivals in Ghana. He goes ahead to reveal some of the common features and beliefs such as the belief in life after death and the nearness of ancestors to the living descendants, the fact that through festivals, the people remember their divinities and past leaders and ask for their help and protection, and lastly the use of these festivals to purify the whole state so that the people can enter the new year with confidence and hope. Opoku has grouped annual festivals in Ghana into two. He mentions the harvest festivals like the *Homowo* of the Ga and the *Bakatue* of the Edena as examples. The second group he says are the ones which mark the period of remembering the dead, and gives the *Adae* of the Akan as a typical example.

Unlike Opoku however, Bame (1991), classifies African or Ghanaian festivals into three closely related types. The first category he says are those which

are associated with primary agricultural occupation and harvest known as harvest festivals. The second group of festivals, he termed commemorative festivals. This group of festivals, he says are festivals whose central focus is characterised by the activities aimed at honouring the memory of the dead and giving offering to the gods and ancestor spirits for their protection as well as the future well-being of the participants. The ones he placed in the third category comprise festivals which may simply be called “the festivals of the gods.” These he says are special festivals celebrated annually in honour of specific tutelary gods. He gave the *Apoξ* festival celebrated in Wenchi and other towns of Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana in honour of *Ntoa*, a tutelary god of the ethnic groups in the area as an example. He goes ahead to state that the categories are, however, interrelated and interlocked, so much so that very often the dividing line between one type and another becomes very thin indeed. He adds that often, the only distinguishing criterion is the focus of emphasis of essential elements, and some instances, the elements seem to be so equally emphasized that their classification into one or other category depends on the observer’s fancy.

Bame (1991) classifies the numerous inter-related activities which give traditional festivals their structure into two broad components, which he says cannot escape the notice of an observer. They are the religious component, comprising rites and rituals, and the recreational aspect, comprising singing, dancing and general merry-making. He goes ahead to explain that the religious component and recreational aspects are carefully arranged so that they do not interfere with one another, although two or more can take place simultaneously. This he indicated is because some of them do not only take place in different locations, but also involve different individuals and groups. Thus, the different groups can and do perform their

diverse activities in distant places at the same time. He says various rites and rituals which are performed by select groups and individuals in special locations such as homes, stool-houses, sacred groves, the shrines of gods and the banks of rivers, and singing and dancing can take place concurrently without interfering with each other.

Amoako-Atta (2001) writes that festivals are seen as very important in the lives of the people of Ghana. In view of this, festivals are celebrated all over the country. He adds that festival celebration is necessary to the Ghanaian in that, it is during this period of time that the indigenes or people from a particular geographical area come from all walks of life to their hometown to contribute their quota to the village/town's development. He also points out the fact that the people believe in the closeness of the ancestors to the living beings, so it is this time that libation and other prayers are said for the protection and help of the living souls. During this period the people ask the ancestral spirits to prevent and protect them from epidemics, famine and to help them ensure bumper harvest in the subsequent years.

2.3 *Ohum* Festival and the people of Tafo

The present researcher did not find the task of reviewing existing records on *Ohum* festival and the people of Akyem Abuakwa easy. It was an exercise filled with some difficulties. Most authors who wrote on festivals in Ghana did not make it their priority. In cases where they did, information was often scanty. Neither Opoku (1970) nor Bame (1991) made mention of the *Ohum* festival and the people of Akyem Abuakwa in their books. Amoako-Attah (2001) however, states in one sentence that *Ohumkan* festival is celebrated by the chiefs and people of New and Old Tafo in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

A news article by the Ghana News Agency on Friday 22nd July, 2005 titled “*Ohum* to become major festival for Akyem Abuakwa” stated:

As part of efforts to by the Akyem Abuakwa Traditional council to improve tourism in the area, the council has decided that the *Ohum* festival will be celebrated annually as a major festival. Consequently, the *Okyeman* council will hold a grand durbar of chiefs and people at Kyebi, the capital town of the traditional area, on August 6, this year as part of the festival to bring families together and ensure unity in *Okyeman*.

Osabarima Adusei Peasah V, *Tafohene* and Senior Divisional Chief of *Okyeman*, who announced these at a press conference at Kyebi on Thursday, said the council would exploit all resources at its disposal for the benefit of the people. He said the festival aside its sociological significance, would also serve as a mode of transmitting traditional knowledge to successive generations; and as a means of generating resources to improve infrastructure in the area. Osabarima Peasah said the council would use the festival to appraise the development strategies and objectives on education and health among others. He said the council would repackage the festival to give it an international dimension so that it could be added to the festivals in Ghanaian tourist calendar.

Highlight on the festival would include a durbar of chiefs and people of the area at Tafo on July 29, a clean-up campaign throughout *Okyeman* and a charity football match. The *Ohum* festival until these innovations was being celebrated only by individual towns along the Birim River.

At this point, the present researcher began to realise that Tafo has a special connection with the celebration of this festival. This is because Amoako-Atta emphatically stated in his book that *Ohum* is celebrated by the people of Old and New Tafo. Also, the article by the GNA indicated that it was the *Tafohene*, Osabarima Adusei Peasah who announced at the press conference that the festival was to become a major festival for Akyem Abuakwa. Agyei Aninfinf deepened the researcher’s realisation after she had reviewed his unpublished thesis titled, *Ohum* among the Abuakwas, 1970. He tries to state briefly the origin, kinds and reckoning of the Adaes and how they affect the *Ohum* festival. He gives a short history of the Abuakwa people from their original home in Adanse, tracing it up to their annexation of the Tafo people of the Birem valley. He talks of the mythical appearance of the

Tafo people from the Birem River and the institution of *Ohum*. He gives a description of the *Ohum* festival celebration at Tafo and points out the differences in its celebration at Kyebi, the Abuakwa capital. He also tries to cover the background of the Abuakwa oaths and how they are reflected in the *Ohum* taboos. He pays attention to the significance of the rituals, the symbols and to some artistic aspects of the festival and finally gives some suggestions which are meant to improve and enhance the *Ohum* festival and to render it more enjoyable in our developing society.

In addition to Amoako Attah's and Aninfeng's claim that Tafo is the seat of *Ohum*, is an article titled, Great Day at Tafo, written by the *Drum* Editor, Cameron Duodu. He travelled to Old Tafo, in Akyem Abuakwa to watch the *Tafohene* and his people celebrate their *Ohum* festival and to find out the meaning of it all. This article also states emphatically that the *Ohum* is celebrated by all the Abuakwa people but the Tafo people are its custodians. It further explains that the *Ohum* festival takes place in all Abuakwa towns and villages on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and that for a child in Abuakwa, it means getting up early in the morning of Tuesday to go and wash 'chairs and stools'. On that day, he adds, nobody is allowed to eat before bathing for the festival is aimed at washing away evils of the past year and there is neither drumming nor dancing. Also, to make it impossible for any kind of defilement to take place, dead people are not allowed to be carried across the streets. They have to arrive at the cemetery by the 'back door'.

The article points out another peculiar trait of the *Ohum* Tuesday. That is, nobody is allowed to pound *fufu*. Currently, the older generation of Akyem people take it as a fast when they do not eat *fufu* for a whole day, so *Ohum* Tuesday is not a very popular day among such people. He says most housewives therefore try to make the best of the day by preparing extraordinary delicious stew usually with palm nuts.

But everybody looks forward to Wednesday, when fowls are slain by the hundreds in celebration of the end of the previous day's 'fast'.

Cameron Duodu further states that the ancestors (who in Ghana have so much to do with cultural rites) are responsible for the ban imposed on all noise making. They are said to prefer a lot of quietness and that if they are coming and they hear drumming and noise made by the pounding of *fufu* they will go back and withhold their blessings. Food is strewn around the streets for them. This food is usually mashed yam or plantain (ƷτƷ), with lots of fish and eggs in it. Every house in the village or town which has an ancestral stool puts some food in the 'stool house'. This practice, he says is very popular with the kids, for they are allowed to eat the 'ghost' of the food after sunset.

The article states that the Tafo people claim to be the original inhabitants of Akyem Abuakwa, and that their stool was brought from Birem River by their chief, Nana Okuru Banning the first. He brought it out of the Birem River at Bunso and every year, the Tafo people have to go there and offer sacrifices to him. Later, when the bulk of the Akyem people came from Adanse, the Tafo people told them they would be allowed to settle on their land on condition that they would only eat yam after the *Tafohene* had eaten it; that is freshly harvested yam. In this way, though the Akyem people ruled the Tafos, Akyems were always reminded that they came to find some people on the land on which they had settled. Tafo people pay their respect to the *Okyehene* at Kyebi, but he also in return, pays his respect to them by celebrating their *Ohum* festival refraining from eating yam until the *Tafohene* has done so. The festival thus marks the signing of a peace pact; the writer adds.

2.4 The Social, Economic and Political Dimensions of *Ohum*

Another article, this time by the Graphic Showbiz dated Thursday 11th August 2005, gave an account of a grand durbar organized by the chiefs and people of Akyem Abuakwa at Kyebi, the traditional headquarters to mark the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. This article is believed to be a feedback of the *Tafohene's* press conference as reported by the GNA. The article stated:

The Akyem Abuakwa kingdom, last Saturday celebrated its *Ohum* festival with a grand durbar at Kyebi, the traditional headquarters. The durbar which was attended by all the divisional chiefs, sub-chiefs and *adikrofo* was the first of its kind to be organized with the *Okyehene*, Osagyefo Amoatia Ofori Panin, sitting in state to receive homage from his people. Previously, all Akyem areas performed their *Ohum* durbars separately. Some of the divisional chiefs who were splendidly dressed in their traditional costumes were Osabarima Awa Kotoko, *Begorohene* who is also *Benkumhene*; Osabarima Agyeman, chief of Asiakwa and *Nifahene*; Osabarima Atwere Bediako, *Osiewuo* of Akyem Abuakwa; Osabarima Dakwa Woe, *Kwabenhene* and *Gyasehene*; Osabarima Edusei Peasah, *Tafohene* as well as countless number of chiefs, all escorted by large retinues.

By 10am, the forecourt of Oforipaninfie, the venue for the event was filled to capacity waiting for the arrival of the divisional chiefs and the owner of the land Osagyefo Amoatia Ofori Panin. At about 11:30am, the sound of the *fontomfrom* was at its crescendo when the *Okyehene* appeared from Oforipaninfie, followed by a large retinue including the *Abontendomhene*, Osabarima Tweitwire. The *Okyehene* then went round to exchange greetings with the chiefs, dignitaries and those who were fortunate to be in the front seat, before majestically taking his seat. That was followed by a procession of dignitaries who carried firewood to the *Okyehene*. The group which included Mr Freddie Blay, the First Deputy Speaker of Parliament; Mr Gordon Witherell, the British High Commissioner to Ghana; Mr Bob Hensen, the Second Secretary of the Royal Netherlands Embassy and Mr Jerry P. Lainier, the Deputy Chief of Missions of the United States Embassy was led by Messrs Emmanuel Victor Asihene, Yaw Yiadom Boakye and Ebenezer Ofoe Caesar, District Chief Executives respectively of East Akyem, Kwaebibirem and Fanteakwa, all of which form part of Akyem Abuakwa.

In his address, the *Okyehene* called for the setting up of scholarship schemes in all communities to cater for the education of bright but needy children up to the tertiary level to become professionals to advance the country's development.

This article gives a clear and vivid picture of the social, economic and political roles that the *Ohum* and other festivals in Ghana and around the world play in the lives of

the people who celebrate them. As the article stated, the durbar being the first of its kind by the people of Akyem Abuakwa was a time for the chiefs and people to meet as members of the state. It was also an opportunity for them to deliberate on issues that will bring socio-economic development to the Akyem chiefdom such as the scholarship for brilliant but needy students.

Political icons and government officials use opportunities such as this to announce developmental projects and government policies to the people. In a nutshell, the durbar organized to climax the festival, was a time for the chiefs and people to see themselves as one people and so focus on the development of the Akyem chiefdom. Social change and religion are the two most important factors upon whose reactions the future of documentation on this subject is hinged.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

In this chapter, the researcher makes known the different methods employed in gathering relevant data for the completion of this thesis. The methods employed were of quantitative and qualitative elements. The qualitative approach involved collecting and processing the data by using words to describe and evaluate situations. The quantitative approach, however, consists of numerical factors employed to analyse the data, especially in the case of testing the hypothesis. See pages 26, 28, 29 and 88.

3.2 Research Design

It must be pointed out however, that by the nature of this research, methods used were mostly based on qualitative data collection methods. Such methods included historical method, narrative method, observation and face-to-face interviews as well as telephone interviews. Primary data collection was gathered from face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and observation. Secondary information was mostly from books, articles, unpublished theses and newspapers. Data collected from these two categories were assembled, evaluated and conclusions drawn from them.

3.2.1 Historical Method

Historical research has got to do with searching to find out facts, of events that happened sometime ago. It is therefore an analysis and description of past events to ascertain as much truth as possible. Historical research helps to arrive at an

accurate account of the past. This assists to gain clearer perspective of the present, which forms a base for building the future. In this thesis, historical research gives a picture of the origin of the Akyem Abuakwa people, their encounter with the people of Tafo and the institution of the *Ohum* festival. This was necessary in order to give a clear presentation of the origin of the people and their festival. Most of the sources of information in this method of research came from documented sources and oral tradition.

3.2.2 Descriptive Method

Descriptive research portrays accurate profiles of persons, situations and events after careful and deliberate observation. This method was used to elaborate on the chronological occurrence of events at the festival celebration. It helped the researcher to bring out the procedures and meaning of activities as they unfolded during the festival. The descriptive method was for example, used to make known to readers how the *Ohum* bed is laid.

3.2.3 Narrative Method

The narrative method was used to show how things were done. This helped to bring out some relevant information. For instance, the researcher used this method to let readers know how the Friday visit to Agyempremo grove is organised.

3.2.4 Interpretative Method

Some poetic sayings, drum languages, dances and rituals were explained through the use of the interpretative method. Again this method was used to state the meaning of some art objects and symbols involved in the festival celebration.

3.2.5 Observation Method

Some information was obtained through observation. As festival celebration is a major way by which a group of people belonging to one ideology can express themselves, observation became one of the important survey instruments used to solicit for data by the researcher.

Observation of royal regalia, priestly outfits, that of religious groups and the members of the community were carried out by the researcher, especially at the durbar grounds. This method was used to access the authenticity of some of the data that the researcher gathered through other methods.

3.3 Library Research Conducted

Every Scholarly Writing necessitates the review of other documented materials related to the topic. Library research therefore formed the bulk of this aspect of the study. In Kumasi, the researcher sought information from the College of Art Library, the Department of General Art Studies Library, The KNUST Main Library and the Ashanti Library. Other libraries visited were the Koforidua Library, the Bunso Community Library and other private collections in the Eastern Region. Documented sources of information were from books, publications, newsletters, unpublished theses and articles on the Internet.

As has already been pointed out in the literature review, documented literature on this subject matter were scanty. Literature based on the history of the people of Akyem Abuakwa and the origin of the *Ohum* festival were found at the Ghana Collection section of the KNUST Main Library, the College of Art and Social Science Library, the Ashanti Library and other private collections.

3.4 Other Available Facilities

The palace, shrine, durbar grounds and churches in Tafo and other Akyem Abuakwa traditional societies are the other facilities that were used by the researcher to collect data. Individual homes belonging to experts on the *Ohum* festival celebration were also visited for consultations.

3.5 Targeted Population for the Study

Since the research focuses on the origin of the *Ohum* festival, its celebration and the cultural significance to the people of Akyem Abuakwa, the population for the study comprised chiefs, elders of towns, priests and priestesses, teachers, farmers, old men and old women, tailors and dressmakers, youth and students. The population was then divided into two categories for easy classification –traditional leaders and members of the general public.

Category A: Traditional leaders (chiefs, queen-mothers, priests and priestesses and elders who are knowledgeable about the culture and tradition of Tafo and Akyem Abuakwa.)

Category B: Members of the general public (parents, the youth and students, farmers, tailors and dressmakers, etc)

The categories are as follows:

Category A = 150

Category B = 350

Total = 500

The potential population for the research was 500 respondents.

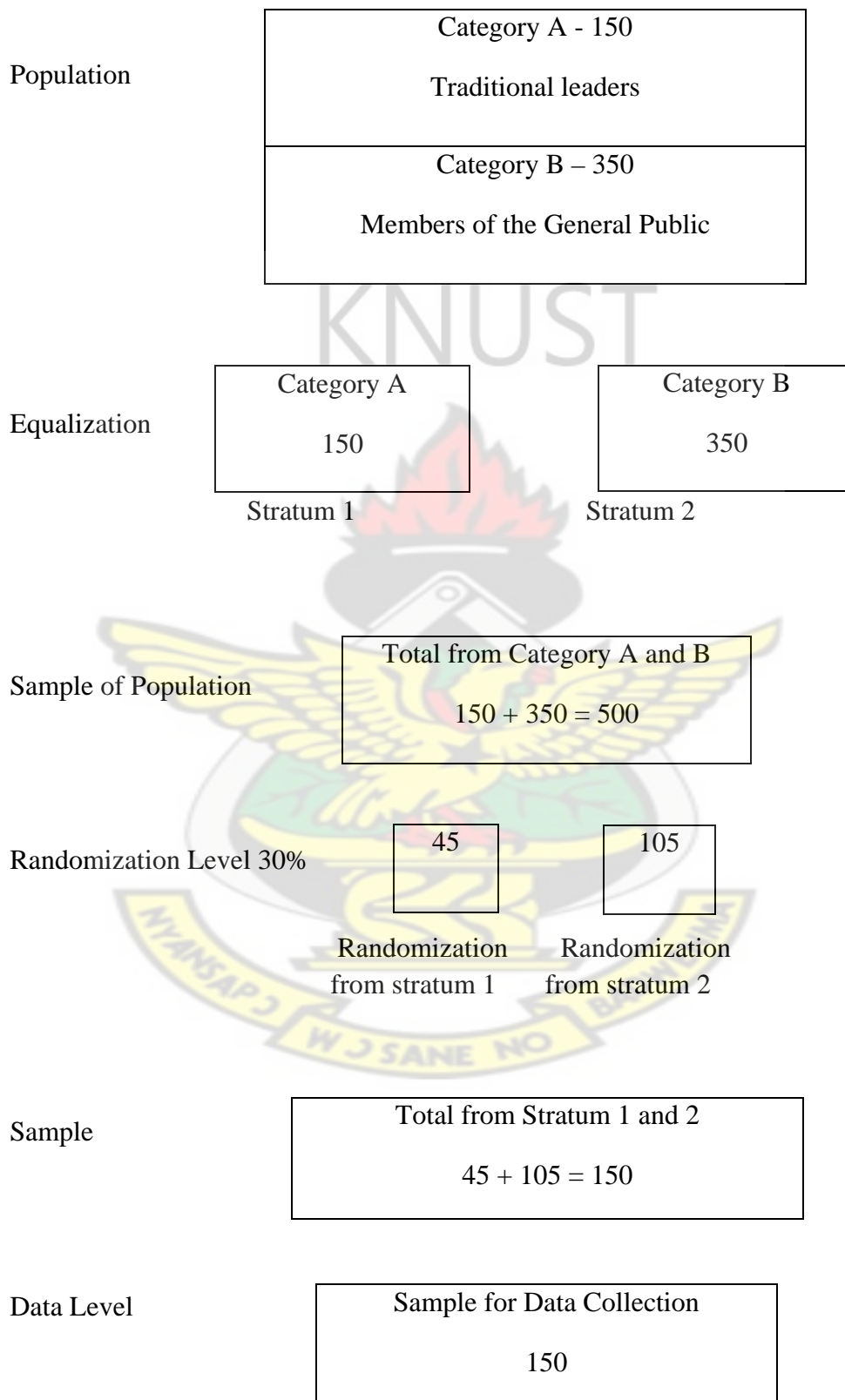
3.6 Population Sampling

The scope of this thesis coupled with time and financial constraints justified the need to use 30% of the targeted population using the stratified random selecting method. 30% of the targeted population was used because it is considered the acceptable percentage of any major research work. Therefore, 150 samples out of the total population of 500 respondents became the accessible population.

The two categories differ from each other in terms of knowledge and commitment to Akyem Abuakwa traditional events. This categorization therefore is to help gather the views of people knowledgeable about the cultural aspect of the *Ohum* festival as compared with the changing lifestyle of the people. As has already been stated, stratified random sampling technique was used for better representation of the population. This method enabled the researcher to divide further the targeted population to a smaller group of two for the purpose of accuracy. 30% of the population (150 respondents) were sampled out of the potential total of 500. Table I shows an overview of the stratified random sampling method used.

TABLE I

Schematic Overview of the Stratified Random Sampling Method



The technique was used to select the sample of 150 (30%) of the total population. The total sample was therefore shared among the two selected strata of the total population. Category A had a total of 150 accounting for 30% of the population and category B which is 350 accounted for 70%. This is presented in table II.

Details of Categories Selected:

Category A: 150 respondents; 30% = 45

This comprises traditional leaders

Category B: 350 respondents; 70% = 105

This comprises the general public

Table II
Percentages of Each Stratum Selected Sample

Status	No. in Sample	% of Total
Category A	45	30%
Category B	105	70%

(Stratum 1)
Category A; $150 \times 100/500 = 30\%$
(Stratum 2)
Category B; $350 \times 100/500 = 70\%$

3.7 Interviews Conducted

The researcher was convinced that the nature of her research required the use of interviews as the main technique of survey instrument. This is because most of the respondents were illiterates and semi-literates, and therefore would find the use of questionnaire quite uncomfortable. Also, she thought that most of the respondents would have more to offer by way of talking than writing. There was also the opportunity to ask questions whenever it was necessary. She therefore interviewed all 150 respondents through “face-to-face” and telephone interviews. This was done both at home and at work places of respondents.

Most of the interviews were conducted in *Twi* language. Responses for the interviews were recorded on a tape recorder or on a notepad where applicable. Names of notable respondents who gave relevant information have been mentioned in Chapter Four of this thesis.

The methodology has enabled the researcher to arrive at some important findings. This has helped her to make significant assumptions and adequate recommendations. It offered the researcher the necessary experience for collecting, analysing and presenting the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Overview

This chapter gives an account of the institution and celebration of *Ohum*, and then goes ahead to discuss the cultural elements of Akyem Abuakwa in its celebration. It is therefore partly historical, narrative and descriptive. As noted in the ethnographic account of this thesis, Aninfeng (1970) claims that the *Ohum* festival started in about 1600 AD, during the reign of Okuru Banin I, the first chief of Tafo. That was the period when Akwamu people were at Nyanawase, and Ntim Gyakari ruled the people of Denkyira.

4.2 Okomfoɛ Asare and the Institution of *Ohum*

As noticed in the ethnographic background of this thesis, and according to Nana Kwadwo, the current high priest of Agyempremo shrine of Akyem Tafo, the institution of the *Ohum* festival originated with Okomfoɛ Asare who was brandishing a burning *gyentia* (firewood) when he emerged from the River Birim at Bunso with his entourage. As Nana Kwadwo recounted, every year, during *Ohum*, Okomfoɛ Asare returned from Tafo to the Birim River at Bunso to perform the necessary rites. The people met the celebrated priest at a large open ground at the *Agyempremo* grove. The excitement that came along with his reappearance usually attracted a large number of spectators. The warriors and dancers jumped and danced around amid drumming and great jubilation. This continued until evening came. It is said that the priest used to bring with him, a large brass basin containing three huge fishes from the Birim River. The *Obaapanin* (leader of the women) used the fish for preparing *ɛtɛ* (mashed yam) for the departed spirits during the *Ohum* ceremonies.

The penetrating scent and the picturesque decorations of the *Okomfo*ξ (priest) on his return from the deep pool and his animated appearance were an expression of the coming joy or the impending doom of each succeeding year. The people had the belief that if he appeared with his body smeared with *hyire* (white clay) and held *mmerenkensono* (fresh palm leaf) in his mouth, it signified peace and prosperity. On the other hand if he came covered with *ntwoma* (red clay) and held a flint to his mouth, the people knew there would be clear acts of aggression and they would encounter great difficulties in the coming year.

According to Nana Kwadwo, when the time came for the priest to finally leave the people (die), he dived into the Birem River and when he came out after some hours, he brought with him three palm seedlings. He asked the chief to plant the seedlings because he might not always be around to go under the water to obtain the *mmerenkensono*. He then taught the worthy successors of Okuru Banin and the elders all the secrets of *Ohum* and how the *mmerenkensono* was to be obtained. There is some sort of secrecy surrounding the pulling out of the *mmerenkensono* up till now. For the trick of pulling out the *mmerenkensono* marks the beginning of the whole ceremony of *Ohum*. The *Okomfo*ξ then urged the *Tafohene* to celebrate the *Ohum* to ensure for himself and the state long life, prosperity and victory over his enemies. *Ohum*, he said would mark the anniversary of the birth of the state and be an occasion for the veneration of the ancestral stool and the spirits of those who formerly occupied them. It was also to mark the blessing of the departed ancestors on the harvest (especially the new yam) of the year. It has already been stated in the ethnographic background that the staple food of Okuru Banin and his *Aduana* clansmen was the yam, hence the big yam plantation of Nyano and his colleagues at Asiakwa.

According to oral tradition, when the priest had finished with his sacred teachings, he went to Afiriyɛ-Bunso, followed by a large retinue of drummers and dancers. On the banks of the river, he poured libation and caused the drummers to play louder and louder as he went into an unusual state of uncontrolled emotion. He cried aloud discordantly. The people became afraid of this uncommon occurrence. For three times, he plunged himself into the deep pool and was never seen again. Following Okomfoɛ Asare's departure, the Tafo people became the custodians of the Ohum festival; the Tafohene having the prime responsibility for the celebrations.

4.3 Preparatory Rites for the Celebration of *Ohumkan*

The *Ohumkan* starts on Tuesday; that is fifteen days to *Kru-Dapa-Wukuo* which is the great *Awukudae* in Akyem Abuakwa and in the other Akan ethnic groups in Ghana. About noon on this day, the *Tafohene*, the *Ohum* priest who represents Okomfoɛ Asare of old, the sons of the Tafo royal house and several others who are the custodians of the *Ohum* rites go to pull out the *mmerenkensono* from a palm tree. According to Nana Kwadwo (high priest of *Agyempremo*), formerly they proceeded to where the elders of the town planted the three palm seedlings given to them by Okomfoɛ Asare centuries back. Today, obtaining the *mmerenkensono* can be done in any nearby forest. A successful pull out of the *mmerenkensono* signifies that the time is ripe for the celebration of the *Ohum* festival and that the departed ones are ready to come home to eat and to bless the living.

Nana Kwame, a chief's son and one of the custodians of the *Ohum* rites said that they (the custodians of the *Ohum* rites) take along to the grove, two bottles of schnapps and a ladder. They carry no cutting implements. When they reach the grove, the people look around for an *atwerebɛ* (a fully grown palm tree that has

never been pruned). The *Tafohene* then divests his chest of all articles of clothing and puts off his sandals and pours libation. What is left in the bottle is poured out and shared among the gathering by the chief's eldest son. They place the ladder against the palm tree and the prince climbs up. He bends down the light-green blades of the palm. The *Ohumkomfo*^ξ (head of custodians of the *Ohum* rites) and the chief hold the middle and the tip of the *mmerenkensono* respectively. The chief pours libation again after which the three people in a meditative spirit give the *mmerenkensono* a gentle pull. This act is repeated three times and the *mmerenkensono* comes out. If it does not come out after the third pull, it is taken that the gods and the spirits of the departed ones are not ready and that the *Ohum* festival is to be put off until a later time. It must be pointed out that, the celebration of the *Ohum* festival calls for heavy spending by the chiefs; and so they give the chief ample time to prepare financially. He manipulates the *mmerenkensono* in such a way that it withstands the pressure of the pull. The *Ohum* is therefore postponed to a later time when adequate funding has been gathered.



Plate 4.1 Men bringing the *mmerenkensono* from the forest

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

When the *mmerenkensono* comes out, it is held up and never allowed to touch the ground. The makers drink the remaining bottle of schnapps. They then carry the *mmerenkensono* which may be 18fts long home. See fig. 4.1. On their return, the town becomes noisy with laughter and gossip. Scattered groups of people are seen on the streets discussing the marvellous and supernatural origin of the *Ohum*. They also gossip about the compassion and equity of the gods and the spirits of the departed ones on the people as a whole. Children are driven from the street to make way for the men carrying the *mmerenkensono*.



Plate 4.2 Men placing the *mmerenkensono* on the *Ohumdua*

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

The *Ohum* makers put the *mmerenkensono* on the *Ohumdua*, a tree which is at the centre of the town; and wait until sunset. See fig. 4.2. Meanwhile, the daughters of the *Tafohene* (past or present) go out to sweep the streets, especially around the *Ohumdua* where the people usually gather to hear the proclamation of the day of *Ohum*. This sweeping exercise has a symbolic than practical value; it clears the paths for the ancestors to come in and dine with their people without hindrances.

In the evening, the *Ohumkomfo*^ξ and the other custodians of the rites go to the *nkonguafieso* (the stool house) to collect the necessary materials for setting up the *Ohum* bed. This bed is provided as a sign of giving an honourable sleeping place (*Adayζ*) to all the spirits who will be guests of the chief and the people for the next fortnight. The materials are neatly arranged in a brass basin and brought to the site where the bed is to be laid under the shade of a state umbrella. This rite is officiated by the *Gyasehene* (head of the chief's lineage).

When making the *Ohum* bed, the custodians of the rites first lay on the ground *boadekana* (a fine light-ochre straw mat). Next, a heavy and costly blanket of most brilliant colours and the boldest designs is put on. A narrow border is left all around the *boadekana*. This unique and beautiful blanket, which is said to come from central Africa, is called *Nsaa*. Paramount chiefs use pieces of this beautiful blanket to decorate their palanquins.



Plate 1.3 Laying the *nsaa* blanket

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

Next to the *nsaa* blanket they adorn the bed with rich and valuable *Bommo* bedspread. This is followed by *Nwera* (sheer-white calico cloth). After the *Nwera* has been laid, they neatly place four pillows at the upper part of the bed.



Plate 4.4 Laying of the *Nwera*

Source: photograph taken by researcher

Then comes the most precious gold silken *Kyime kyerewe* (seize and devour me) *kente* cloth. It is said the loin cloth of the Kings and Queen-mothers of Asante were made of this pattern. The two pieces of the golden *Kyemetam* are spread out in a form of a cross. The second piece is folded into two to give a narrow band.



Plate 4.5 sheep skin being placed at the lower end of the bed

Source: photograph taken by researcher

A sheep's skin is placed at the lower end of the bed with the four pillows, all draped in rich velvet, one on top of the other, at the opposite end. Silk kerchiefs are used to tie the corners of the pillows. Every phase of this art is witnessed by the people of the town.



Plate 4.6 The people of the town witnessing the laying of the bed

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 4.7 The *Ohum* bed

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

At this point, they send to call the *Tafohene* in to declare the two-week silence which, heralds the *Ohumkan*. The *nsamanfo* (spirits) of the departed ones or the ancestors are supposed to come home during the two-week silence. They are therefore believed to be responsible for the ban imposed on noise making. They are thought to like a lot of quietness. The belief is that in *asamando* (the place of ghosts), there is absolute silence. The ancestors are used to this, and any undue noise makes them very uneasy. If they hear drumming and any commotion, they will go back and withhold their much needed blessings. The living must provide this quiet atmosphere if they are to benefit from the home-coming of the ancestors.



Plate 4.8 The *Tafohene* arriving at the gathering

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

The *Tafohene* arrives under the cool canopy of a multicoloured state umbrella. He is accompanied by his elders and spokesman. The chief and his elders stand on the left side of the *Ohum* bed after he has placed his state swords and his spokesman's staffs at the centre of the bed. He requests through the chief spokesman

(wrongly called linguist), that the *mmerenkensono* be brought down from the *Ohumdua*.



Plate 4.9 State swords and spokesman's staffs neatly placed on the *Ohum* bed

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

The *Ohumtufohene* (chief custodian of the *Ohum* rites) and his members bring the *mmerenkensono* down from the *Ohumdua* (*Ohum* tree), one holding the end and the other the middle. The chief puts off his sandals and brings his cloth down to his waist as a sign of respect for the ancestors. He holds the tip of the *mmerenkensono* with the two men still holding the end and the middle of it. The *Tafohene* then commences the *Ohum* invocation thus:

Twi version

Okomfoξ Asare bra O! (3x)

Ɛbrempa, Otokotaka; kξ na obema wo

Nana Banin, Ɛprapraku Santan

Adawuruwa Yampupu

Odiasibe ee, Akwaa ne Kwaagyebi ee

Boamporifaa ee! Mommra

Afe ano ahyia; ɛnnɛ na yɛde mmerenkensono rehwe fam

Tafoman nkwa so

English version

Traditional priest Asare come! (3x)

The he-man; go and he will give you

Nana Banin, Oprapraku Santan (ancestors)

Adawuruwa Yampupu (river)

Odiasibe, Akwaa and Kwaagyebi (rivers)

Boamporifaa! All should come

The years have come to an end

We are casting the *mmerenkensono* on the ground

Long live Tafo people

The chief then touches the bed with the tip of the *mmerenkensono* and then add these words:

Twi version

Ɛkyeman nkwa so

Ghanaman nkwa so

English version

Long live the Akyem Chiefdom

Long live Ghana

He touches the bed with the *mmerenkensono* for a second time and then say:

Twi version

Ɔzɔpɔz nkwa ne akwahosan ne siade

Ɛbarima a ɛnwo ba no nwo

Ɛbaa bonin nso ma ɛnwo ɛba

Ɔzɔpɔz bribiara a ma ɛnyɔz yie

Afrinhyia pa oo!

Mfie ngu yen mfie so!!

English version

We ask for strength and prosperity

Let the male impotent be fruitful

Let the barren woman bear children

Let our toils be fruitful

Happy new-year

May many years be added to our age

He touches the bed the third time and then turns to the people. With a cheerful look, he greets them:

Twi version

Afrinhyia pa oooo!

English version

Happy new-year!

The people then respond:

Twi version

Afrinhyia pa! Mfie ngu yen mfie so!

English version

Happy new-year! May many years be added to our age!

The Tafohene then ends the invocation by saying:

Twi version

Yentu ee!

English version

Let us begin!

The crowd then responds with great joy. This marks the beginning of the new-year. The *Tafohene* pulls the *mmerenkensono* to pieces, and shares it out to the people standing by. Some noise is generated as a result of the sharing. Fig 4.10 shows the *Tafohene* sharing out the strands of *mmerenkensono* to his people. After a little

agitation, the place becomes calm again. The chief spokesman then informs the people that the activity on that day has marked the beginning of the two-week silence preceding *Ohumkan*.



Plate 4.10 The *Tafohene* sharing out pieces of the *mmerenkensono* to his people

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

The *Tafohene* leaves the scene, followed by the queen-mother and the sub-chiefs of the town; each of them carrying a strand of the *mmerenkensono*. The people also disperse into their homes with each person who received the *mmerenkensono*, carrying his or her strand home. Plate 4.11 shows the sub-chiefs of the town leaving the site with their *mmerenkensono* strands. At home, they hang the strand on their door posts and on frames supporting the roofs of their buildings. See Plate 4.12. The remaining *mmerenkensono* is placed back onto the *Ohum* tree. The custodians of the rites collect the items used to lay the *Ohum* bed back to the stool-house to await the next year's celebration. The hanging up of the *mmerenkensono* strand on their door

posts is of great importance to the people. They believe that, it serves as a guide to the incoming ancestors. It also wards off evil.



Plate 4.11 Some sub-chiefs of the town leaving the gathering with their *mmerenkensono* strands.

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

4.4 Taboos Associated with the Two weeks of Silence.

There are certain taboos associated with the two weeks silence. Nobody is allowed to make any loud noise during this period to scare away the ancestors. *Fufu* pounding after 6:00 p.m. is prohibited. Singing and playing of drums or any musical instruments at social gatherings (even churches) are also not allowed. When death occurs, there must be no wailing nor should the body be laid in state. Burial must be done quietly. All debtors are free from the people they owe until the festivities are over. The people are urged to abide by the rules to avoid getting into trouble with the authorities. Anyone who violates any of these rules is forced to sacrifice a sheep in order to make peace with the ancestors.



Plate 4.12 Strands of *mmerenkensono* hung in a house over some years

Source: photograph taken by researcher

4.5 The *Mfukra* Ritual

The passion with which Akyem Abuakwa people work to cultivate their farm is well known. Throughout the Eastern Region of Ghana, the bulk of the cocoyam and plantain is raised by them especially in the forests of Begoro. There are farm names such as *Fankyeneko* (take salt along), *Kɛdɛβɛda* (have some sleep after weeding) and *Bereporɛ* (foodstuffs ripe and rot) go to show how fertile the land is. The people attribute the fertility of the land to their humane and considerate ancestors who they think came to bless the land during *Ohum*. It is on account of this, that Akyem Abuakwa people therefore have special rituals which they perform during *Ohum* festivities on their farms. They believe that these special sacrifices promote good work on the farms and render the new year one of peace and plenty. When we look at it this way, the *Ohum* festival marks the blessings of the departed ancestors on the harvest of the year. The rituals on the farms have wrongly given the impression in certain quarters that *Ohum* is mainly a yam festival. This is not

principally so although it is during the festival that the Tafohene, first eats of the freshly harvested yam to give formal permission to everybody in the Akyem Abuakwa chieftdom to also partake of the new yam.

The *mfukra* ritual, which is the first of the preparatory rites that draws the two weeks silence to a close, takes place on Monday; that is two days to the great *Kru-Dapa-Wukuo*. Formerly, at dawn on this Monday, the whole town became agitated with men and women making feverish preparations before they set out to visit their farms and to perform rituals there. By 8:00 a.m. the whole town was abandoned to the very young, the old and the sick. On the farms, the farmers went round tending and visiting their crops. At Kyebi and some neighbouring towns, the farmers harvested the yam which was eaten the next day, *Benada-Dapaa*. At Tafo however, the harvest of the new yam was postponed until Thursday, a day after the great *Kru-Dapa-Wukuo*. Later in the day, the farmers prepared and collected sufficient foodstuffs to be taken home to last for the *Ohum* week. They also carried home some firewood which was presented to the *Ohene* (chief) during the ceremonies on Tuesday. The farmers then prepared three small bundles of firewood at the *adehyehyɛ* (the place on the farm where loads to be taken home are packed). They added to the three bundles of firewood some okra, pepper, garden eggs, corn, plantain and small quantities of all the other items cultivated on the farm. The most elderly farmer then invoked the spirits of the ancestors and that of Birem Abena, the goddess of the Birem River, to partake of the first fruit of the farm. He did this by saying:

Twi version

Pirempesuperempe ee!

Aniabena ee! Afihyiapa

Mfie ngu yen mfie so

Meyere nkwa so ('kunu' if woman)

Me mma nkwa so

M'abusuafo nkwa so

Me ara me nkwa so

English version

Come Pirempesuperempe! (gods)

Come Aniabena! (Birem River goddess) Happy new year

Long may we live

Long life to my wife/husband

Long life to my children

Long life to my family/clan

Long life to me also

This short ceremony was an offering in which the farmers brought their first fruits of the ground to the ancestors and the gods. After this ritual, the farmer and his children carried home their luggage, leaving behind the articles of the offering. The children are warned on their way home not to look back in order not to incur the wrath of the gods. Hunters and farmers who live in the neighbouring villages performed similar *mfukra* rituals and then got to the towns for the *Ohum* celebrations. Nobody was

expected to stay behind in his hut on his farm on these sacred days. Alien labourers on the farm who felt the *Ohum* had nothing to do with them and so chose to stay in the villages often confessed experiencing some unusual natural phenomena on those days. Some reported of hearing strange and exotic music and noise in the nearby forests. They therefore hardly stayed behind. Today, social change and the introduction of other forms of religion (especially Christianity), has made this ritual unpopular among most inhabitants of Tafo and the rest of Akyem Abwakwa. There are however, some traditionalists who carry on with this ritual presently.

Also formally on that Monday, all travels from one part of the region to another through the town ended. For no travelling was permitted into or through the towns in Abuakwa during the next day –*Benada-Dapaa*. It is said that in the olden days, people who tried to journey across Tafo on *Benada-Dapaa* were hooted at. Strangers and visitors who arrived on this day were refused entry into the town. Since no other town in Abuakwa allowed them to come in, they had to stay in the bush and face all the consequences which included death. Monday became a day of great happiness, reunion, goodwill and toleration as it was a day that all visitors arrived. Again, social change has reduced this practice to the barest minimum.

4.6 *Benada-Dapaa*

The day marking the end of the two-week ban on noise making is a Tuesday (*Benada-Dapaa*). It is a day of general cleaning. Aside from the fact that it is a day of holiness, it is a day set aside for the preparation towards the great *Kru-Dapaa-Wukuo* (*Ohum* day). Both men and materials are purified and ennobled for the next day's *Ohum*. The *nkonguafieso* stool bearers spend time to wash and scrub all the white stools, chairs and wooden artefacts at the palace. The state swords and other

paraphernalia are given thorough cleaning. The whole palace, the stool houses together with the “fetish” houses are all given a thorough sweeping. In the individual homes, women and children carry household utensils and all dirty linen outside for thorough washing and cleaning early in the morning. The day is regarded as one on which the dirt and sins of the entire year are eradicated from the people. This event is one of the first things that come into the mind of an Akyem Abuakwa child whenever the word *Ohum* is mentioned. On that day, as pointed out before, nobody is allowed to eat before bathing, for the festival is aimed at washing away the evils of the past year.



Plate 4.13 The scene of the town on the morning of Benada-Dapaa

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

Benada-Dapaa is mainly a day for remembering the dead and mourning quietly for them. Men and women move about in traditional mourning cloths of black, blue and brown. The serene look of the town on the morning of *Benada-Dapaa* is seen in Plate 4.13.

In the afternoon, $\zeta\tau\xi$ and foods with lots of bush meat are prepared in many homes and sent to *nsamanpom* (cemetery) and placed on the graves of the newly deceased relatives. The *Tafohene*, the *ahenemma* (offspring of chiefs) and the royals also go to weed the mausoleum. They light fire and prepare many kinds of foods and $\zeta\tau\xi$ (mashed yam). They add water and wine and present them to the dead. This presentation of food for all the deceased royals must not be confused with the foods given out at the stool house on Wednesday (*Awukudae*). The Akyems in general, place unsalted, pepper-free foods, water and wine on the graves of their newly deceased relatives. This is usually done a week after the person's death.

Late in the evening, at about 6:30 p.m. the *atumpan* drums dispel the silence. The people shout for joy. Everywhere, one hears the greeting:

Twi version

Afihyiapa oo! Mfie ngu $\psi\zeta\nu$ mfie so

Afida $\sigma\zeta\sigma\zeta\varepsilon$ na $\psi\zeta\tau\varepsilon$ ase

English version

Happy new year! Long may we live

May we live to see the next year

After a while, the *atumpan* drums remind the people of their duty to the gods and the spirits. The people then retire to their homes for the night. The researcher further elaborates this event later in this chapter.

4.7 Ohum Day

At dawn, the *atumpan* drums inform the people of the *Adae* and send poetic messages to both the dead and the living. The drums trace the origin of the people and praise the warriors and kings who helped to make the state great. The reigning chief is also not left out. The message of the drum is as follows:

Twi version

Okofu Duodu Amoa

Ohene kyere ahene

Damirifa! Damirifa due!

Ofosu Siakwan

Okuru Banin nana! Okuru Banin a Ofiri Aniabena muo

Damirifa due! Damirifa due!

English version

Duodu Amoa the fighter

The king who arrests kings

Condolences!

Ofosu the man who blocks roads

Grandson of Okuru Banin! Okuru Banin who came from
Aniabena

Condolences! Condolences!

It has already been pointed out that Okuru Banin I and his retinue allegedly emerged from the Birem River on a Tuesday. The Tafo people and the Akyems in general including the Kotoku and the Bosome, regard the spirit of the River Birem as a woman born on a Tuesday, hence the name Birem Abena. Tuesday is therefore a sacred day for Birem. No washing or fishing is done on this day.

In the morning, men and women gather at their *abusuafie* (lineage head's house) to drink schnapps and wish one another well. Before they depart, the family head pours libation inviting their departed ancestors to come and dine with them and also bless them with prosperity and happiness. The people wear their best dresses and the women spend money to prepare for their husbands and loved ones delicious meals, mostly *fufu*. Fowls, goats and sheep are mainly killed for the meals.

The *Tafohene* (chief of Tafo) sits in state at the palace and his elders come to give him *adaekye* (morning) greetings. He then entertains them with more drinks. The young men come to play drums until they get exhausted. The women also come and entertain the chief and his elders with *adowa* (a traditional dance) after which they are served with drinks. All the musical groups –*bɛmmafo*, *fɛntɛmfrɛm* and *mpintin* come to play and entertain the chiefs and their guests. The men and women as well as children of the town and nearby villages go to the palace to greet the chief and enjoy the drumming and dancing that go on. While some are absorbed in the drumming and dancing, others could be seen indulging in long chats with old and new friends and relatives some of whom have travelled from distant towns and villages solely for the *Ohumkan* celebrations. This gives a feeling of happy reunion on both the streets and the homes.

4.8 Rituals at the Stool House on *Ohum* Day.

At about 10:00 a.m., the *Tafohene* and his elders go to the stool house to venerate the ancestors for the *Ohum* is an occasion for the veneration of the ancestral stool and the spirits of those who formerly occupied them. In reverence for the ancestors, the *Tafohene* and his elders which include his chief spokesman slip their sandals off their feet and bare their shoulders as they enter the stool room. This is to indicate that they are mere servants of the Tafo community and that they have come to wait on the ancestors. The *abentia* (horn) player follows them with such messages as:

Twi version

Meesom! Meesom!

Na Oman yi βζκαα me?

English version

I am serving devotedly

But will the people remember me?

The chief provides a sacrifice of sheep which is offered to the ancestors. The *Ɛkyeame* (chief's spokesman) pours libation and with the help of the stool carriers and sons of the chief, they slaughter the sheep. The black stools are then purified with the blood of the slaughtered sheep. In doing this, the *Ɛkyeame* calls the names of all the chiefs who have blackened stools in the room one by one. He urges them to accept the sacrifice of sheep and of the drink and in return, grant the people of Tafo, health and prosperity.



Plate 4.14: The chief and elders coming out of the stool room after performing rituals

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

In the past, the women who wished to take seed came to have the blood of the sheep smeared on their bellies. It was strongly believed among the people that, any request made on that day at the stool house will be honoured. If any elder wishes to have a special blessing from the ancestors, he presented his rum or schnapps to the chief who acted as a spokesman and poured libation to the gods and ancestors on his behalf. His problem was then communicated to the ancestors and gods and help was solicited.

Drinks are also offered to the state swords and linguist staffs. The *Ekyeame* performs this ritual by sipping some of the drink and then blowing it onto them. It is believed that after these rituals are performed, the blessings of the ancestors of the land are invoked for the people throughout the year.

4.9 Presentation of Gifts to the *Tafohene*.

After the rituals at the stool house, the *Tafohene*, now in his beautiful costume, sits in state and the people come to pay homage and to present to him pieces of

firewood. Plate 4.15 shows some senior citizens of the town paying homage to the chief. This presentation ceremony commemorates the *gyentia* Okuru Banin I brought from Birem River and the three pieces of burning log he kindled perpetually around the Tafo stool. The presentation also serves to replenish the stock of the fuel for the state fire which is kept burning always at *gyaase* (fire place). See Plate 4.16. Furthermore, it portrays the humility of the people and the reverence they have for their chief, for the piece of firewood is carried on their heads as they are presented to the chief. This ceremony is very interesting to watch. In the crowd are men of high status, teachers and school pupils, Christians and Moslems as well as traditionalists. The *Tafohene* on his part gives out to the subjects who do the presentation, gifts such as money and drinks. He sometimes organises a reception for heads of institutions and teachers.



Plate 4.15 Senior citizens of the town come to pay homage to the *Tafohene*.

Source: Photograph taken by researcher



Plate 4.16 The three pieces of burning logs

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

4.10 *Ohum Eme-eme*

In the late afternoon, the *Tafohemaa* (queen-mother of Tafo) prepares $\zeta\tau\xi$ with plantain and goes into the streets with some of the *ohum* makers and throws the food in small bits on the streets. As they go along the streets, she calls the gods to come to partake of the $\zeta\tau\xi$.

Twi version

Pirempesupirempe ee!

Y ζ mm ζ gye oo!

Y ζ mm ζ gye aduane nni oo!

English version

All ye gods

Come and partake

Come and partake of this food

Formerly, if they happen to meet any impotent man as they went round the streets, the men seize him and carried him shoulder high. They put white clay on him to signify sanctification and wholeness. He was then forced to proclaim that his wife could be taken away from him if there is no issue between them by the next *Ohum*. Many people have testified that very often, these unfortunate men became fruitful.

Afrihyia aduane (yearly food) consisting of $\zeta t\zeta$ with lots of fish and eggs, and yam *fufu* with unsalted soup prepared with meat is put on the stool hovels in the homes that have ancestral stools.

The next day which is Thursday, is regarded as farmers day at Tafo. The farmers go to their farms to harvest their new yams which are eaten on Friday.

4.11 Agyempremoso Rituals

Friday is the sacred day for the worship of Agyempremo Kofi, the protective god of the people of Tafo and its surrounding communities. Early in the morning, the sons of the chief together with other palace attendants go to clear the path leading to the grove of the river god, Agyempremo Kofi. Later in the morning, the *Tafohene* adorns himself in white to signify his purity before he approaches the Agyempremoso grove. He wears a silver crown or a white turban, a silver *atweaban* (chain), silver amulets and *kona* (a string with precious beads) around his neck. His elders also put on white cloths. He is met at the entrance of the palace by a sizable number of the people. The chief being carried in his palanquin follows the queen-mother of the town who also sits in her palanquin. They are then followed by a file of his sub-chiefs, elders of the town and their retinue of followers with the drummers and horn blowers playing their instruments. The chiefs and people of Etukrom and

Osiem (surrounding towns of Tafo) come to join the Tafo people and they all carry the *Tafohene* in his palanquin to the grove.



Plate 4.17 The *Tafohene* is carried in his palanquin to the grove

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

Leading the procession is the *Agyempremo* $\sigma\xi\phi o\xi$ (high priest of Agyempremo) who is also attired in a white cloth, a white head-kerchief, and holds a cow's tail and in the company of other priests and priestesses. See fig. 4.18. On their way to the grove, the procession stops near the *Ohumdua* (*Ohum* tree). Here, drinks are poured as offering onto the tree. The sounds of the *mpintin*, *apirede* and *f\xi nt\xi mfr\xi m* drums are heard everywhere.

The procession is met by groups of people with most of them clothed in white. The women especially, engage themselves in singing, dancing and rhythmic jumps and the waving of white handkerchief and cloths; creating an atmosphere of intense activity with a noisy background, all in praise to their god.



Plate 4.18 The procession is led by the high priest of Agyempremoso

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

At the grove, women come to present the chief with food stuffs, pepper, garden eggs and firewood for cooking. Libation is poured to Agyempremo. A sheep is slaughtered and the blood used to smear the stomach of unproductive women. Part of the meat is cut into small bits and thrown out as a sacrifice into the small river called Taakɛ which skirts the grove. Freshly harvested yam is then cooked with the rest of the meat which the *Tafohene* eats. This is the first time he eats the newly harvested yam. The rest of the food is eaten by his sub-chefs and court attendants. From that point permission is officially granted for everyone to eat the newly harvested yam.

4.12 The Friday Grand Durbar

After the general feasting at the grove, the *Tafohene* and all the people return home in the afternoon. He holds a durbar until sun down. This is really a great day

and the climax of the festivities. At the durbar, the mournful *abentia* is heard giving poetic messages as:

Twi version

Sɛ̃re ha!

Kuro yi wɛ wo?

English version

Get away from here!

Is this town yours?

This is directed at the aliens and chiefs from other towns in the state who may be jealous of the power and pomp of the *Tafohene*.



Plate 4.19 The *Tafohene* arriving at the grand durbar

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

4.13 *Ohumkyire*

Among the Akans, the second thanksgiving is a custom. Then after he has got a gift goes to thank the donor. To show the recipient's real indebtedness, he goes a second time the next day or some days after to say another thank you. *Ohumkyire* follows this pattern. The second thanksgiving (*Ohumkyire*) falls eighty days after *Ohumkan*. This is the second *Awukudae* after the *Kru-Dapa-Wukuo*. The *Ohumkyire* ceremonies are, in many respects, similar to those of *Ohumkan*. The only difference is as follows:

There is no presentation of firewood at either Tafo or Kyebi. At Kyebi, the golden stool used during the *Ohumkan* ceremonies is replaced by a silver one. The other occasion on which the golden stool is used is *Odwira*. At Tafo, there is no visit to the *Agyempremoso* grove.

4.14 A Brief Account of the *Ohum* Festival at Kyebi

Celebrating *Ohum* at Kyebi, the Akyem Abuakwa capital, is similar to that of Tafo. There are however a few differences. On Monday during the *mfukra* rituals, the Kyebi (Kibi) people harvest their new yam and bring them home. The yams are eaten on Tuesday after the $\zeta t \xi$ has been presented to the gods and ancestors. Early in the morning of Tuesday, the *Okyehene* sits in state and the elders come to greet him and to receive drinks from the chief. This is followed by *akwamb* ξ (weeding of the paths). The *akwamb* ξ is of great significance to the people of Kyebi. The importance attached to it is similar to the laying of the *Ohum* bed at Tafo. The weeding of the path leading to the town, they say is a sign of their preparedness to receive the ancestors or an august visitor. It opens the gates so that the ancestors could come in

and bless the land. This activity was keenly adhered to during the colonial days when high government officials visited the town.

The *Okyehene*, *Ankobiahene*, and some elders and the youth of the town go to weed the Pano road up to Buruku River. At the river side the *Okyehene* and the *Ankobeahene* pour libation. The *Okyehene* (chief of Akyem Abuakwa) is then carried shoulder high to the Ahohomfra stream where he pours a similar libation. While the *Ankobeahene* and his men go to weed the Pano road, the *Apesemakahene* and his men go to weed the Adadeζntam road up to the Poturo stream. The *Kyidomhene* and his men, too go to the Birem River on the Kyebi-Apedwa road. From the Ahohomfra stream the *Okyehene* is carried to the Birem River for another libation. He is then carried to the *ahemfie* (palace) also known as Ofori Panin Fie where the path clearers come to receive drinks from him. Absolute silence is maintained throughout the town until sunset. In the evening the Birem priest, the equivalent of Okomfoζ Asare, gives out ζtξ. After this, there could be loud mourning, merry making or drumming.

On Wednesday, the *Akyemhema* prepares ζτξ for all rich and poor people. The *Okyehene* visits the stool house and performs the *Adae* rituals as done at Tafo. In the evening, the *Okyehene* holds a grand durbar and receives the homage of his chiefs and nobles. Everybody who comes to greet the *Okyehene* brings a piece of firewood as a present. He in turn presents certain items to them. There is great jubilation until night falls.



Plate 4.20 The *Okyehene* addressing his people at an *Ohum* durbar

Source: Picture taken by researcher

4.15 Cultural Elements of Akyem Abuakwa in *Ohum* Festival

As it may have been realised by now, the *Ohum* festival is celebrated by Akyem Abuakwa people with great pomp and pageantry to remind them of the great exodus of their ancestors. Like many African societies, this festival reflects the social, economic, religious and political lives of the citizenry. Without the festival, it would have been impossible for the people and their culture to function totally. The *Ohum* festival, being a social and collective activity, reflects some aspects of the people's beliefs and other aspects of the culture of the Akyem Abuakwa citizens. Like other festivals in many Ghanaian societies, the *Ohum* festival ushers the people into a new year with the hope that their objectives will be achieved.

The well-being and continuity of the Akyem Abuakwa society is always of great importance to them, and that gives rise to their desire for good health, increase in procreation of children, the fertility of the land and animals, and the availability of material means to sustain their society. These needs they believe, can partly be

satisfied through the celebration of the *Ohum* festival, which is done to honour the Supreme Being, the other divinities, the ancestors and all other benevolent spirits in Akyem Abuakwa. This ceremony serves as a means by which the people propitiate the spirits of their dead rulers and their protective gods, by giving them offerings and thanks for both the present and future sustenance.

The *Ohum* festival is an occasion for the people to renew their loyalty and allegiance to their chiefs, honouring them with gifts and services. Many of the people make it a point to go to the chief's palace to participate in the drumming and dancing and other activities of the festival. The presentation of gifts is not confined to chiefs. Exchange of gifts such as clothing, drinks, meat, food items such as yam and pieces of logs used as firewood is one of the anticipated and welcomed features of this festival. It takes place between parents and children, between friends as well as between supervisors and their subordinates. Recreational activities being a need which the people of Akyem Abuakwa share with other people in Ghana and the rest of the world are not left out during timing and planning of the ceremonies. Today, aside the singing, drumming and dancing which form an essential part of the festival, sports activities, health walks, clean ups and beauty pageants are organized to make the celebration more enjoyable.

4.16 Religious Aspects of the Festival

Religious aspects assume a significant place as one of the two major cultural components of this festival. Religious beliefs, rites, rituals and other ceremonies constitute the religious aspect of the festival. As in many other African societies, the people of Akyem Abuakwa believe in life after death and the existence of the spirits of their past rulers and ancestors in the spirit world, their nearness to and influence

on the living and the influence of the lesser gods created by the supreme being, God, upon whom the well-being of their society depends. The festival provides occasions during which the people collectively, by means of sacrifice and offerings, re-emphasise their dependence on God, ancestral spirits and the gods. In doing so, the festival reinforces and reaffirms their religious values that underlie Akyem Abuakwa people's way of life.

The same rites and rituals embodied in the festival give the participants some psychological reassurance of the blessings and protection of the gods and ancestral spirits, and thus the feeling of security as they enter a new year. When by means of the rites, they propitiate the gods and the spirits by giving them food and drinks and soliciting for blessings and protection, their feeling of security is heightened. Having done this to please the ancestral spirits and protective gods, they entertain the hope that these beings will take care of them. The rights and ceremonies relieve them of any anxiety of a possible famine resulting from poor harvest, diseases, death and lack of children. The festivals thus arm members of the community psychologically to face the future with a feeling of security.

4.17 Social Dimensions of *Ohum*

The generation of group solidarity or social cohesion is an example of the effect the *Ohum* festival has on the people of Akyem Abuakwa. Collective participation of members of the community in public ceremonies such as religious rites, plays a significant role in social solidarity. This occurs through various elements. The custom of exchanging gifts or gift presentation is featured in this festival. In addition to making physical objects available to people, this custom

unfailingly strengthens group solidarity as a whole. There is also the reunion of families and the settling of disputes between families during this period.

Apart from strengthening the relationship between members of the community, this festival offers the people an opportunity to display some of their cultural expertise before onlookers, thus inflating their ego as members of one community. Their self esteem is enhanced because by exhibiting their rich cultural activities such as drumming and dancing skills, clothing, etc; they gain the admiration of people. This feeling of being an object of admiration and approbation by other people naturally increases their sense of worth. The people sharing such intense pleasure in the sight of admirers naturally increase the feeling of belonging to their society. This engenders solidarity or a feeling of unity among the entire community.

It offers chiefs and their subjects the opportunity to interact freely with one another. In the absence of the festival, one might find it difficult to see or interact with his chief. Also, socially, the festival paves a way for the people to interact with heads of states, ministers and other people from all walks of life since such personalities often attend the festival. Thus, the festival creates a chance for the society to obtain favours from their superiors. Moreover, during the festival, children have the opportunity to mingle with adults from various families, something that rarely occurs. An important social event is the opportunity the people get to meet their priests who are believed to be the intermediaries between the visible and the invisible worlds, and through whom the favours of the spirits are thought to be obtained. Also some Akyem Abuakwa people believe that, during *Ohum*, their tutelary spirits (mainly, the gods and ancestors) mingle and interact invisibly with the people.

4.18 Economic Aspect of the Festival

The celebration of the *Ohum* festival provides opportunities for economic activities to be carried out by certain individuals and groups. One major area where people get the opportunity to earn income and improve their economic status during the celebration of the *Ohum* festival is the catering or hospitality industry. During this period, traditional catering services, way-side food vendors, cooked food hawkers, drinking bars and fast food joints spring up in areas which are likely to receive a huge number of people.

Transportation services are also usually at its peak during the *Ohum* festive season. Bus and taxi drivers use this opportunity to increase their income. This is because a large number of travellers from far and wide come to witness or take part in the various events. In recent times, activities lined up for the festival are widely advertised on the electronic and print media. Banners and posters are produced and placed at vantage points for people to read and be informed. Operators of these avenues take this opportunity to earn some income for themselves.

The festival is also a time for photographers and video camera persons to ply their trade. Individuals and groups of people may want to be photographed or captured on video when they are involved in an activity during the festival. Tailors and dress-makers as well as hair stylists get very busy around the *Ohum* festive season. The number of clients who go for their services usually doubles or even triples, thereby enhancing the economic well being of owners of these businesses.

The organizers of activities lined up for the festival employ the services of brass band musicians to complement the musical activities of traditional drummers. They are employed to play music during processions and durbars at the festival.

Football matches are organized to raise money, and fund raising activities take place for economic developments. Exchange of monetary and other gifts also tends to increase the incomes of the recipients who may thus obtain seed money for starting small scale businesses. This may eventually boost up banking activities.

4.19 Political Matters of the Festival

In the Akyem Abuakwa traditional setting, the *Ohum* festival has political undertones. The festival is instituted upon chieftaincy. This festival as has been seen revolves around chiefs and their elders, who play vital roles in them. As noted earlier, the chiefs and their elders sit in state and receive homage from their subjects. Also as pointed out earlier, the subjects offer gifts of firewood to the chiefs. The rulers being the central figures in the celebration dance to the *fɛntɛmfrɛm* and other musical ensembles. During the dance, some of the chiefs' subjects hail and praise them with verbal encomiums and with raised hands in which two fingers on each hand are pointed to the sky to show the highness of the chiefs. During the dance, the chiefs take the opportunity, through gestures, to express that their areas of jurisdiction belong to them.

This traditional political role of the festival has taken on a national outlook. Nowadays, the celebration of the *Ohum* festival provides occasions and opportunities for exchange of messages of goodwill between chiefs whose people are celebrating the festival and the government of the day. The head of government or his representative attends the festival to express his best wishes to the chiefs and people, and unobtrusively solicit political support. The chiefs in turn use the occasion to express their loyalty and support for themselves and those of their people to the

government, and sometimes seize the opportunity to make the needs of the people known to the head of state of Ghana.

On the festive days, the hierarchy of Akyem Abuakwa chieftaincy is re-emphasised through the hierarchical arrangement of chiefs. Subjects re-enact their subordinate statuses by paying homage to their chiefs. Even the offspring of chiefs are given the due respect in regard to the roles they play during the festival. Furthermore, the spirits of the royal ancestors are repeatedly reminded that they are still the spiritual chiefs of the Akyem Abuakwa chiefdom.

4.20 Health and Medical Dimensions of *Ohum*

One element of Akyem Abuakwa culture which provides opportunities and occasions to develop an individual's physical and mental health is the *Ohum* festival. The *Ohum* festival provides an avenue for the fulfilment of certain psychological needs of individuals. This therefore encourages them to participate in it. Emotional tension and stresses are always present in human life and festival-goers have their share of them. When the tensions and stresses are not released, the person who has them becomes withdrawn, aggressive and irritable. The *Ohum* festival enables participants to actively respond to the activities such as laughing, cheering, participating in processions and walking onto stage to offer money or praise to dancers and singers in appreciation of their performances. These release their emotional tensions and stresses and lower the incidence of mental derangement, hypertension, diabetes and other sicknesses.

One distinct feature of the festival is that on Tuesday –the day that marks the end of the two weeks ban on noise making, the people wake up early in the morning to clean their homes and surroundings, wash their dirty utensils, tables and stools,

mortars and pestles, and other items aside of the ultimate rule of bathing before eating as preparatory rites to welcome their ancestors into their homes. This undoubtedly has some positive influence on the health of the people. It reminds them of the need to be clean in order to have a good relationship with their ancestors.

4.21 Educational Aspects of the Festival

Ohum, being a commemorative festival, invariably reminds the people of Akyem Abuakwa of significant past events in their social life. The recital of ethnic histories during the festival in addition serves as an incidental educational function. In traditional African societies where in the past there were scarce written records, the seasonal recital of ethnic histories helped in the transmission of such oral traditions and love of African Ethnic groups from generation to generation. In this regard, the festival offers some historical lessons about Akyem Abuakwa. In fact, the *Ohum* festival in itself can be viewed as an annual dramatization of important elements in the cultures of people who celebrate them. Probably, there cannot be any better means of educating younger generations of the community, researchers and admirers in the dynamic processes of their culture than their active involvement in such dramatizations. The festival has offered many researchers, such as the present writer, the opportunity to study and report on it. Today, many students, teachers and lecturers study to teach about the *Ohum* festival. Even some books, newspapers and other writings have become sources of learning about the *Ohum* festival.

Obviously, the festival teaches about Akyem traditional religion since it informs the people of the need to worship and honour their gods and ancestors and since the priests and chiefs insist on the performance of religious rituals. The festival also has social lessons to offer since it facilitates social interaction, settling of

disputes and family re-union. Again, it offers health education in view of the general cleansing done on the Tuesday of the festive period. The festival also offers economic education. Those who trade during the festival gain experience in trading activities.

4.22 Artistic Forms and Aesthetics Reflected in the Festival

The art of a particular ethnic group can reveal the ever changing human images and attitudes; so awareness of a people's indigenous art, visual and cultural symbols can become an important medium for cross-cultural understanding. Just as written documents materialize history in literate communities, so in most traditional societies, art forms make the intangible past more real, make sentiments run high and reduce the stress of using mental imagery to attempt to paint word pictures. Some of the forms utilize pictograms and ideograms and are pregnant with text/symbols that symbolize ideas and several levels of discourse.

Art forms, like any other African cultural phenomena, play a great role in the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. It is simply impossible to talk about the festival and other aspects of the culture of the people of Akyem Abuakwa without making special reference to the artistic and aesthetic aspect of the festival. It is necessary to identify and analyse the art forms to highlight the roles they play in the festival and life of the people. This subject, although very broad can be dealt with at a very rudimentary level in the few pages available within the limits of this thesis paper. An endeavour has been made to group the arts associated with this festival into the various categories of art, outlining the work of art under each category and elucidating the meaning of these art forms.

4.23 Environmental Arts

This kind of art can be described as the type created as a necessary part of everyday life. To another, environmental art may be seen as any visual object found in an environmental setting made by man in his own ingenuity consciously or unconsciously, which has aesthetic appeal and functional qualities as opposed to nature. These artefacts are seen in homes, palaces, shrines, traditional courts and other places. Architectural structures, sculpture pieces, furniture, utensils, farming and hunting implements can be cited as examples. Farming and hunting implements, however, may be regarded as applied arts as well.

The Palace at Tafo is not really an imposing structure. It is a simple mansion built by Nana Okuru Banin II in 1959. Though the structure covers a wide area, it does not completely outclass the structures in its vicinity. The palace, however, has the essential facilities the chief and people require for good governance. This includes a wide open area which serves as the durbar ground during the presentation of firewood and other gifts to the chief on the *Ohum* day. When there is no activity in the palace, the place exists in perfect peace as against its surrounding structures.

When not in use, the durbar ground is a simple flat rectangular arena with sheds erected along its edges. The grand durbar to climax the *Ohum* festival celebration is held here. When packed to capacity, the forms and colours define the ground in magnificent style. The ground brings about similarities and differences in spectators –some seated, some standing and others leaning against the poles used to erect the sheds. The royal quarter has its seat arranged along one wing of the rectangular ground. Viewed with a bird's eye view, the durbar ground is a panoramic sight. The scene at the royal quarter is a golden and silvery collaboration, while that

of the invited guests, artistes and spectators exhibit a multicolour scheme of colours around the arena. At the end of the event, the previously orderly arrangement which seems static becomes alive with sudden explosion of people with colours moving in all directions.

Regalia are objects that mark of royalty seen during the *Ohum* festival and other special occasions. “An Akan ruler shows through the exhibition of regalia that he has not only preserved state property handed over to him in his installation but that, he has also added to it.” (Andoh, 2004 : 12). Exhibition of regalia during the *Ohum* festival is of special significance because they are symbols of power and authority and they serve as the log book of early history. They are the tangible indications of the traditional religious beliefs and social organizations of the Akyem Abuakwa traditional area. “As symbolic statements, they supplement the bards’ recitation of praise poems and minstrels’ songs in reaffirming the legitimacy of a ruler.” (Andoh 2004 : 12).

Regalia for the *Ohum* festival celebration include *hwɛdom akonnwa*. This is a chair on which the *Tafohene* sits during the grand durbar of the festival. Its frame is decorated with gold and silver studs. The *ohemaadwa* (queen-mother’s stool) is the seat on which the queen-mother of Tafo sits during the festival. *Asomfofena* (courier swords) are used by state couriers to lead the *Tafohene* on every procession he makes during the festival. The handles of these swords are gold plated while their blades are made of iron. State umbrellas are meant to provide shelter for the *Tafohene* during the festival. On his way to *Gyempremoso*, and on his return, the chief has an umbrella over his head. When he parades through the principal streets of Tafo, he does this under the shade of a giant multicoloured state umbrella. One other occasion

on which the state umbrella is used is during the laying of the *Ohum* bed. The items used are carried under the shade of a state umbrella from the palace to the spot where the bed is to be laid. Throughout the weeklong celebration, a giant state umbrella is mounted at the entrance of the palace to announce the *Ohum* festival proceedings. From the top to the bottom of these umbrellas are symbolic messages exhibited in form and colour. A palanquin is one of the most essential regalia used by the *Tafohene* during the *Ohum* festival. The *Tafohene* mounts the palanquin on his way to *Agyempremo* grove and when parading through the principal streets of Tafo. Among the regalia also, is a brass pan which contains the items for laying the *Ohum* bed. *Mentia* (elephant tusk horns) which are elaborately covered with leather are blown to announce the arrival of the *Tafohene* during the grand durbar. Drums such as the *fɛntɛmfrɛm*, *atumpɛn* and *mpintin* are usually used for dancing; but they also have the function of retelling history. They are played to mark the end of the two-week state silence and during a procession by the *Tafohene*.

4.24 Body Arts

Arts of the body include things that are worn and symbolic paintings or printings of designs on the body. It also includes scarification which may be for ethnic, medicinal, decorative and religious purposes. It extends to holes created in the nose, ears and mouth, which may be for either decorative or for ethnic purposes. Jewellery, amulets and talismans, hairstyles and headgears of varied designs also fall under body art.

It is during events such as the *Ohum* festival that the *Tafohene* and *Tafohemaa* are seen elaborately dressed. Among their apparel are *kente* cloths and other good quality African textile products. Beautiful robes are seen not only on the

chief and queen-mother but on his sub-chiefs, priests and priestesses, sword bearers, stool bearers and other members of his court. This is most evident at the grand durbar organised on Friday to climax the celebration of the festival.

Adornments for other parts of the body are equally of importance to them here. The chief and other members of his court complement their outfit with headdresses (crowns and turbans), gold and silver necklaces, beads, finger rings and arm bangles. The *Tafohene's* footwear is a pair of sandals with gold studded straps. According to Akyem Abuakwa tradition, a chief's foot must never touch the ground. For this reason, his footwear is of great importance.

The rest of the citizens are not left out here. Special costumes and clothes of choice are worn on that day. Among the young women, great attention is given to hairstyles and facial treatments in order to look attractive for the event.

4.25 Performing Art

Performing art can be effectively described as art made by skilful display of body gestures. Some are publicly done while others are done in secret. During the *Ohum* festival, drumming and dances are two collaborative modes in which the Akyem Abuakwa people express their mood. That is whether they are joyful or sorrowful, or whether they love or hate. Drumming and dances begin on the day the ban on noise making is lifted. It is usually on this event that the Abuakwa child begins to learn the art of drumming and dancing. After two long weeks of being denied the freedom of expressing himself through all forms of noise making, he certainly refuses to miss this event for anything. By 5:30 p.m., the children begin to fill up the palace with their "drums" (empty tins and plastic gallons) and sticks. The chief drummer signifies the lifting of the ban by being the first to drum. The children

then join immediately as the drums are played for close to an hour. During this period, experts in the traditional dances step onto the arena and in their subtle flexions of hands and figure, in their stamps and pauses, in their bows and leaps, and in their turn, expresses certain ideas to the admiration of spectators who may themselves be potential active performers. “In learning how to dance, the children trail behind the adults, not as unthinking mimics but as conscious learners. As a result, they grow to become proficient dancers,” (Bame, 1991).



Plate 4.21 A group of children gathered at the chief's palace to witness the lifting of the ban on noise making

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

Cameron Duodu, the editor of the *Drum* magazine, clearly articulates how during the *Ohum* festival, drums send the prayers and thanksgiving of the people to the gods and ancestors when he writes:

Early in the morning on *Ohum* Wednesday, the drums send poetic messages to all ancestral warriors and ends up with the praises of the present chief. The very names are full of imagery and they sound as if they were coined with full knowledge that they were going to be played on drums. If you have heard a drummer roll off these with his sticks, while his lips are forming the words, which the drums are saying, you will appreciate the saying that “poetry does not cross frontiers”; for the rhythm of the whole thing is even more exciting than the meaning of the words. They can be heard from any

where up to three miles and such artistry comes into playing them that, a man from the palace who is three miles away can tell which drummer it is who is at work.

On his return from *Agyempremoso*, while drumming is still on going, the *Tafohene* who is supposed to be thoroughly proficient in all the important dances of his community and most especially the royal court dances, occasionally stands in his palanquin and dances with grace, poise and majestic movements that is expected of a chief. He does this to the admiration of onlookers from the community. See Plate 4.22. At the grand durbar, while the drums are played, traditional court dancers take the centre stage to perform dances to the admiration of onlookers.



Plate 4.22 the *Tafohene* dancing in his palanquin

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

4.26 Verbal Arts Involved in the Festival

This is the talking. It includes all forms of speech-making that have aesthetic qualities, recitation of poems and proverbs, story-telling, swearing of oaths, prayers said during the pouring of libation. Verbal activity is an essential part of social life. It gives knowledge about the values of social and cultural life through the above mentioned activities.

Prayers in the form of poems are the means by which the people of Akyem Abuakwa communicate with their protective gods and ancestors. The prayers usually consist of invocations, petitions and concluding remarks. The celebration of the *Ohum* festival requires a series of prayers which are often said in collaboration with the pouring of liquids (wine) as libation. As part of the invocations, praise names, attributes and proverbs of the ancestors and deities are mentioned. Appropriate words designed to yield desirable results are artistically employed in composing appellations and singing of praise names which, together with verbal arts are known as oral arts, used to flatter the gods and ancestors during the festival, for these spirits to protect the people and supply their needs.

4.27 Commercial Arts Associated with the *Ohum* Festival

Announcements for the celebration of the *Ohum* festival are made on the radio and in newspapers. Signboards and posters are also made to direct people to the durbar ground and palace. Banners with inscriptions of events lined up for the celebration are placed at vantage points for the public to see. See Plate 4.23.



Plate 4.23 A banner showing the events lined up for the 2008 *Ohumkan* festival

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

4.28 Liberal or Literary Art and the *Ohum* Festival

This is the type of art connected with writings or recording of information. Records are kept of events organized during the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. This is done by the palace secretary. See Plate 4.24.



Plate 4.24 The palace secretary taking record of events at the palace

Source: Photograph taken by researcher

Though the researcher may have made specific reference to the people of Tafo while discussing the artistic values of the *Ohum* festival, similar arts are practised among the people of Kyebi, the Abuakwa capital and other Akyem Abuakwa societies.

4.29 New Developments in the *Ohum* Festival Celebration

Since growth is the ultimate goal of any dynamic establishment, many of the activities within the festival have consequently received considerable improvement. Formerly, events lined up for the celebration of the festival took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Later, Friday was included as a day to honour their protective god. Today, the festival has almost become a week-long celebration. Football matches,

beauty contests and other entertainment activities that are more entertaining are now organized among the youth of the area. Non-denominational services in thanksgiving to the Almighty God are conducted on Sundays as the final event for the festival. Preachers, during these services, normally use the opportunity to speak on chieftaincy and culture. They use the occasion to advise their fellow pastors and church members to submit to the traditional authorities and discard the idea that those institutions were fetish and not of God. The chief in return, uses the occasion to address the congregation on issues such as education of young people in the community and healthy living practices. He also touches on social vices and crimes such as gambling, robbery and the use of illicit drugs especially among the youth and cautions against them. Harvest proceeds from the services are used for developmental projects in the area. The idea of planning it as part of the final activities of the *Ohum* festivities is to help rededicate the up-and-coming generation of Akyem Abuakwa to new and higher standards of physical and moral excellence. Despite these changes however, the age old traditions must not be sacrificed in the name of innovations. Since embracing modernity is unavoidably beneficial, it is expedient to accommodate certain standards so as to ensure that our traditional beliefs and practices do not fall out of place in today's world.

4.30 The Influences of the Festival on the People and their Culture

Today, festivals are considered to contribute significantly to cultural and economic developments all over the world. Festival organisers now use historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract visitors and create cultural images in host communities. Apart from addressing the needs of a group, the hosting of events is often developed because of the tourism and economic opportunities in addition to social and cultural benefits. There is a growing influence on the

behaviour of government and business in general in the developments of event and tourism industries. This suggests that festivals impact on the host population and stakeholders in a number of ways. These factors are primarily concerned with social and cultural, political and economic impacts. There is a revolution in festivals which has been stimulated through commercial aspect to meet the changing demand of the local community groups and increasing business opportunities for the event organisations and local businesses. Festivals help to develop local pride and identity for the local people.

4.31 Advantages and Disadvantages of the *Ohum* Festival

Advantages

The *Ohum* festival, like many other African traditional festivals has certain advantages. In fact, these advantages which may as well be noted as its functions or objectives, motivates the people to celebrate the festival in the first place.

1. Celebration of the *Ohum* festival gives the people the opportunity to make requests for the satisfaction of their needs and also, give thanks for both past and future sustenance. This ensures a cordial relationship between the people and their ancestors and gods.
2. The rites and rituals involved in the celebration of the festival give the people of Akyem Abuakwa some psychological reassurance of the blessings and protection of the gods and ancestral spirits and thus a feeling of security as they enter a new year.
3. The celebration of the *Ohum* festival offers the opportunity for the people to renew their loyalty and allegiance to their chiefs. They do this in the form of

presentation of gifts and services. Such gifts include sheep, food items especially yam and logs of firewood.

4. The generation of group solidarity or social cohesion is one other advantage that the *Ohum* festival offers the people of Akyem Abuakwa. This is exhibited through the making of gifts available to people and the reunion of family members during the occasion.
5. Being a commemorative festival, it reminds the people of significant past events in the social lives of the people and the recital of oral or ethnic histories also generate the feeling of oneness among them.
6. The festival offers chiefs and their subjects the opportunity to meet and interact with one another. It is during the festival that most of the people see or interact with their chiefs and other important personalities in the society.
7. The festival provides the opportunity for certain individuals and groups to do business. Businesses such as catering services, drinking bars, transportation services, tailoring and dress-making, hairstyling and photography thrive during the festival. Operators of these businesses take this opportunity to earn some income.
8. The general cleansing exercise on Tuesday –the day that marks the end of the two weeks ban on noise making, has some positive influence on the health of the people. It reminds them of the need to be clean in order to have a good relationship with their ancestors.

9. The *Ohum* festival enables participants through their active responses to drumming and dances, songs and showering of praises to release their emotional tensions and stresses.
10. Apart from singing, drumming and dances which form an essential part of the festival, health walks, sports activities and clean-up campaigns are organized to enhance the physical and mental well being of the people today.

It is clear from this study that the *Ohum* festival, in all its descriptive form, plays an essential role in the lives of the people of Akyem Abuakwa. Its institution has favoured a lot of social bond especially among the people of Tafo and other Akyem Abuakwa communities.

Disadvantages

Only one major disadvantage can be cited here. The two weeks period of silence and its associated taboos are totally at variance with modern day development. Many of these taboos have outlived their effectiveness due to urbanization and the trend of modern day development. There is the mushrooming of all kinds of religious groups whose mode of worship involves drumming, dancing and shouting. There are also businesses whose mode of operation generates some kind of noise such as the playing of loud music or the operation of sound generating machines. To these groups of people, this two-week period of silence therefore is a hindrance to freedom of worship and economic growth. Thus, though the festival is celebrated mainly by the traditionalists of Akyem Abuakwa, it negatively affects the lives of people who have different religious and ethnic affiliations.

4.32 Similarities and Differences *Ohum* has with other Ghanaian festivals

A careful look at the *Ohum* festival reveals some common features and beliefs it has with other Ghanaian traditional festivals. Generally, *Ohum* and other Ghanaian festivals reveal the people's belief in life after death and the nearness of dead ancestors to their living descendants. Secondly, the *Ohum* festival, like many other Ghanaian traditional festivals provide the platform for the people to remember their past leaders and ask them for protection. Thirdly, the *Ohum* festival like other festivals is used as a medium for purification of the whole Akyem Abuakwa community so that the people can enter the new year with confidence and hope. Apart from these general similarities, there are some specific features of this festival which may also be noted in some others in Ghana.

The two-week period of silence imposed on the people by the chiefs and elders as a period to welcome home the ancestors can be compared with the month ban on noise making by the Ga traditional leaders of Greater Accra Region when preparing to celebrate the *Homowo* festival, as well as the six weeks ban on drumming, singing, weeping and all forms of noise for by the Akuapem, during the *Odwira* festival.

In preparation to welcome the ancestors, the daughters of the *Tafohene* go out to sweep the streets. At Kyebi (Kibi), the Akyem Abuakwa capital, there is *akwambɛ* (weeding or clearing of paths). The *Odwira* and *Akwambɛ* festivals of the Akuapems and Fantes respectively also have the characteristic of clearing of paths leading to the royal mausoleum. Although these rituals are expressed in different ways, they all seem to have a common goal. That is, they all believe that it clears the way for the ancestors to come in and dine with their people without any obstacles.

Like the *Odwira* of the Akuapem and *Adae* of the Asante, the *Ohum* festival has a day for general mourning in remembrance of dead relatives which take place in every home.

4.33 The Myth about the Origin of *Ohum*; is it really true?

The origin of the *Ohum* festival is associated with the mythical appearance of Chief Okuru Banin I and his *Aduana* clansmen from the Birem River. The details of the myth, has been elaborated in the ethnographic background. The question is, is the myth really true?

While some may argue that the myths are “fictions”, “inventions” or “fables” others see myths as stories that may have truly happened and are told under special conditions to give certain meaning to them. To the people of Akyem Abuakwa and other Ghanaian societies, myths are sacred stories which are told to explain phenomenal happenings in the past. Although myths and history may give important clues about the past, the events myths describe are difficult to believe as true.

The researcher has already pointed out in the ethnographic background that as greater importance and prestige are attached to communities with exotic origin, traditional court historians quite often distort histories to suit these purposes. The fact that when Okuru Banin I and his entourage “emerged” from the Birem River, they spoke the Akan dialect and conformed to the general social and political organization of other Akan ethnic groups means that they were part of a larger group before the incident at Bunso. This myth, as well as many others, should however not be dismissed as wholly untrue for they are at most times exaggerated history which may contain historical truths.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The people of Akyem Abuakwa formerly took great pride in the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. However, growing indications are that the current generation is gradually losing interest in the knowledge and celebration of this festival. This research was therefore carried out to study and document the origin and celebration of the *Ohum* festival, its artistic and cultural elements and how the culture of Akyem Abuakwa is reflected through its celebration.

The institution of the *Ohum* festival originated by Okomfo Asare during the reign of Chief Okuru Banin I of Tafo to first of all, mark the mythical appearance of the people of Tafo from the River Birem; to their past chiefs and elders of the land; to give thanks to the river god Agyempremo Kofi who is believed to be responsible for the protection of the people of Tafo and its environs and lastly, to usher in a new year and launch the eating of new yam.

Preparatory rites for the festival celebration begin on a Tuesday which is 15 days to *Kru-Dapa-Wukuo* (the great Wednesday in Akyem Abuakwa and other Akan ethnic groups of Ghana. These rites are mainly the pulling out of the *mmerekensono* from a palm tree, the setting up of the *Ohum* bed as a sign of giving honourable sleeping place to all spirits who will be guests of the chief and people and finally, the declaration of a two-week ban on noise making. The day marking the end of the two-week period of silence is a day of holiness. It is a day for general cleaning of the palace and individual homes, mourning of the dead and the day for preparation towards the great *Ohum* Day which is the next day.

The morning of *Ohum* Day is a time for well-wishing. The Tafohene sits in state together with his sub-chiefs and elders and are greeted by the well wishers. Following soon afterwards is a visit to the stool house by the chief and elders to venerate the ancestors. Upon their return from the stool house, the Tafohene and his sub-chiefs dress up and sit in state for the people to come and pay homage and present their gifts to the him. Visiting the shrine of the protective god, Agyempremo Kofi the following day which is a Friday to give thanks and seek his blessings for the coming year is the next major event lined up for the festival celebration. This event is later followed by a grand durbar to climax the festival.

The *Ohum* festival reflects the social, economic, religious and political lives of the citizenry. The social dimensions of *Ohum* are exhibited through the collective participation of members of the community in public ceremonies such as durbars of the chiefs and family gatherings. It provides opportunities for economic activities to be carried out by individuals and groups. Such economic activities include catering services, transportation services, video and photography services, dress making and hair styling. The festival revolves around chiefs and their elders who play vital roles in its celebrations. They sit in state and receive homage from their subjects. Apart from that, it provides occasions and opportunities to exchange messages of goodwill between chiefs whose people are celebrating the festival and the government of the day.

The *Ohum* festival further provides avenues for the fulfilment of physical and mental health of the people. Recital of ethnic histories during the festival serves an educational function. It offers historical lessons about the people of Tafo and Akyem Abuakwa as a whole.

Art plays a great role in the celebration of the festival. It is during the festival that the various art forms and aesthetics of the people are reflected. The arts and artefacts are seen in homes, palaces, shrines and traditional courts. They include architectural structures, sculpture pieces, furniture, regalia, clothes, jewellery, headdresses and others. The art also includes drumming and dances, prayers, invocations and the recitation of praise names. Commercial and liberal arts are also exhibited during the festival through the use of the mass media (radio, television and news papers), signboards, posters and records keeping.

The *Ohum* festival has over the years evolved. Many of the activities within the festival have consequently received considerable improvement. Football matches, beauty pageants and non-denominational church services are now organised in addition to the traditional events.

Besides contributing significantly to cultural and economic development, the festival has advantages that motivate its celebration in the first place. In a whole, its institution has favoured a lot of social bonds, especially among the people of Tafo and Akyem Abuakwa.

5.2 Conclusion

The study started with a cursory look at the origins and history of Tafo and the remaining Akyem Abuakwa community about four centuries ago. It has revealed the various places the people traversed and the encounters they had with other ethnic groups, which compelled them to move camps until they found a suitable settlement at their present location. It further explains how the *Ohum* festival was instituted among the people of Tafo and how they were later joined by the remaining Akyem Abuakwa communities to celebrate it. It talks about the events in the festival and the

activities which take place on each day. The study, in identifying the artistic and cultural forms under the various aspects of their culture has revealed valuable facts about them. The system of worship by the citizenry show the unyielding faith they have in God and ancestors. The study of the traditional art forms reveals the various kinds and the role they play in the festival.

“*Ohum*” is an Akan word which according to Nana Botwe, the *Amankrado* of Tafo, means “to find out” or “to enquire”; embraces purposes such as remembering of dead relatives, thanksgiving to ancestors and protective gods and eating of new yam which is considered to the beginning of the new year. As the study has revealed, the ancestral stools and their occupants together with the gods are deemed to be the source of the people’s solidarity, spiritual protection and prosperity. Therefore, the propitiation of the gods is expressed in the celebration of the *Ohum* festival. It is clear from this study that the *Ohum* festival in all its descriptive form plays an essential role in the lives of the people of Akyem Abuakwa. Its institution has favoured a lot of social bond especially among the people of Tafo and the other Akyem Abuakwa communities.

Testing of the Hypothesis

The researcher needed to test her hypothesis as part of her effort to substantiate her assertion that, after studying the *Ohum* festival, it will reveal that it reflects the culture of the people of Akyem Abuakwa, has aesthetic appeal, undergone some changes and has brought some influences on the people and their culture. On each of the interviews conducted by the researcher, the respondents were asked if he or she agreed with the statement. The table below shows the outcome of the interviews conducted.

Table III
Statistics of the Interview Outcome

Population	Number	Those who agree with the hypothesis.	Those who do not agree with the hypothesis.	Percentage of those who agree.	Percentage of those who do not agree.
Chiefs	7	6	1	85.7%	14.3%
Queen-mothers	5	5	0	100%	0%
Priests & Priestesses	5	4	1	80%	20%
Elders	13	11	2	84.6%	15.4%
Senior Citizens	15	14	1	93.3%	6.7%
Farmers	20	17	3	85%	15%
Tailors & Dressmakers	15	13	2	86.7%	13.3%
Teachers	20	16	4	80%	20%
Youth & Students	50	45	5	90%	10%
TOTAL	150	131	19	87.3%	12.7%

Percentage of those who agree with the hypothesis:

$$131/150 \times 100 = 87.3\%$$

Percentage of those who do not agree with the hypothesis:

$$19/150 \times 100 = 12.7\%$$

Table III indicates that out of the 150 respondents interviewed, 131 of them which forms 87.3% agreed with the researcher on the assertion that the *Ohum* festival reflects the culture of the people of Akyem Abuakwa; it has aesthetic appeal, undergone some changes or modifications which has brought some influences on the people and culture. The remaining 19 who form 12.7%, however, did not agree. Based on the outcome of her study as well as the interviews conducted, the researcher draws the conclusion that her hypothesis is true.

5.7 Recommendations

It has already been stated in the introduction to this thesis that the current generation of the people are gradually losing interest in the knowledge and celebration of the festival. On this issue, the researcher recommends that there is a need to give thorough cultural education to the younger generation so as to remind them of the value of the legacy of *Ohum* bequeathed to them. This statement is against the blind influence of Western lifestyle to the detriment of the culture which serves as a source of their identity. To successfully tackle the issue of increasing ignorance among the current generation, the researcher recommends that all about the festival as well as the history of the people of Akyem Abuakwa with special reference to Tafo town and other important places should be written in simple language and taught in schools in the traditional area. The children should be made to have practical experiences in the forms of plays and games to help achieve this result. Stories on popular and famous ancestors as well as the festival itself should be published and given out to school children and youth clubs to help curb the ignorance level.

Church services which are organised for the people of the town on Sundays to mark the end of the festival celebration are a step in the right direction. It is high time Christian leaders were told to stop negative pronouncements made on all traditional festivals. Our traditional festivals are forms where common interests of the people are addressed. It is therefore not fetish but rather a tradition that has been evolved over the years and has today contributed to the good morals, spiritual and social responsibility of the people. Churches should therefore not condemn the African way of worship. Christians should understand that traditional festive seasons are occasions or periods during which every indigenous citizen is required to visit home, commune with the people, receive blessings and pay homage to their traditional leaders.

The researcher therefore urges the government of Ghana to support and promote festival events as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and cultural tourism; as this is an important tool for attracting visitors and building image within different communities.

To promote tourism in the traditional area, there is a need for more investment to be made towards the promotion of this festival. To begin with, an imposing palace complex, superior to the present one which must be incorporated with traditional concepts common to all should be built at Tafo, the custodian of the *Ohum* festival. Some of the facilities which should be available in the palace are a museum which will house artefacts of famous leaders and paintings and photographs of recent and past leaders; and a library containing books and articles on the *Ohum* festival and the people of Akyem Abuakwa. It is imperative for all to join hands in improving the traditional festival.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sacred Days in Akyem Abuakwa

Since the origin and method of calculating the *Ohum* calendar is largely dependent on the *Adae*, there is a need to expatiate on what the *Adae* is and how it affects the Akan calendar. The sacred days on which the dead are supposed to come home are known in Akyem Abuakwa and the other Akan traditional areas as *Dapa* (a good or lucky day) and *Dabɛne* (an evil or unlucky day). For in their belief, the days could bring blessings as well as curses. The belief in ancestral visits on sacred days of the year, and its corresponding preparation for welcoming the ancestors have given rise to the *Adae* festivals around which all the Akan festivals revolve. The principal festivals of the Akan include *Odwira*, *Ohum* and *Adae*. As already stated, the *Odwira* and *Ohum* depend on and are shades of *Adae*. *Odwira* is enjoyed by all the Twi speaking peoples. *Odwira* is principally a festival on which the supposed spirits of the black stools are honoured. The *saman* (spirits) of the departed rulers are invoked into the black stool of the “state” and it is during the *Odwira* that these departed spirits are also venerated. The word *odwira* means to purify or cleanse. *Odwira* therefore, means purification or cleansing of the stools and those who occupy them. *Odwira* falls on the ninth *Akwasi*. As has already been noted, *Ohum* is an occasion for the veneration of the ancestral stool and the spirits of those who formerly occupied them. It falls on the fifth *Awukuda* and is usually between June and July.

Akan societies are noted for their indigenous calendar system which provides guidance for agricultural pursuits, social, religious and political activities. The institution of an indigenous calendar in which every day of the year was named and listed and was used as a guide for the agricultural cycle of ground preparation,

sowing and harvesting and also for observing local traditional festivals and other social customs, was likely to have been based on observation of the constellations. This seems to provide evidence of the local initiation of 'science' in prehistoric times though serious cognizance has not been taken of it because it was not generally executed in conventional writing. The Akan calendar is divided into nine cycles of forty days called *Adae*. The name *Adae* however does not merely mark a period in time, but is also observed as a special day for worship and veneration. *Adae* (*Ada yɛ*) means sleeping place or a place of rest. As tradition demands, the remains of the dead paramount chiefs of Kyebi (Kibi) are put at rest at *Banso*, a special cemetery for royalty. The place is often called *Ahen da yɛ*. The spirits of the departed chiefs are then invoked into blackened stools which are kept for them after their death.

Among Akans, the symbol of authority of a traditional ruler is a stool. The occupant of the stool is the political, cultural and spiritual head of his community. The stool which he occupies gives a community an identity with the land which has nurtured it and provided it with not only its sustenance, but also, its link with the past and the future. It is a belief among Akans that a traditional ruler who dies, continues to be chief even in the spirit world. He is therefore immortalised, remembered and honoured with a black stool. These stools are blackened with soot and the yoke of eggs to preserve them. The state stools into which have been invoked the *saman* or spirits of the deceased chiefs, are kept in a dark room called the stool house (*nkonguafieso*). The stool house has therefore become also, an accepted resting place or sleeping place of the ancestors. Because of the belief of the visit of the *saman* to their former homes, it has become necessary to make provision of victuals for the visits of the dead at *Ada-yɛ* (sleeping place of the dead). This place may also be regarded as the royal mausoleum. Here offerings are made to the spirits. Offering

which usually consists of mashed yam or plantain – $\zeta\tau\xi$, a sheep or rum and gin. The dead are then invited to continue assisting those over whom they rule. The day on which the *Adae* falls is maintained as holy and all the citizens of the state refrain from all sorts of hard labour. People are urged to remain calm. If anybody dies during this period, he or she is given a quiet burial. On the other hand, if the status of the deceased person demands an ostentatious burial, it is postponed till the *Adae* festival period is over.

There are two *Adaes* observed in every one of the nine cycles within a year. One falls on a Sunday; this is what is known as *Akwasidae*. The other falls on Wednesday. It is called *Awukudae*. The period between one *Akwasidae* and the other is forty days. The *Awukudae*s are also separated from each other by the same period. History has it that the Akan *Adae* originally fell on Wednesday. The *Akwasidae* festival which came to be celebrated in addition to the *Awukudae* was a later origin. There are twenty-three days between a Sunday *Adae* and a Wednesday *Adae* that comes after it, but the gap between an *Awukudae* and the *Akwasidae* following it is seventeen days.

Any day preceding the *Adae* is known as *Dapaa*. They therefore have two *Dapaas* namely, *Memeneda Dapaa* (Saturday *Dapaa*) which precedes *Akwasidae* and *Benada Dapaa* (Tuesday *Dapaa*) which precedes *Awukudae*. In Akyem Abuakwa, the *Awukudae* is known as *Kuru-Dapa-Wukuo*, which suggests the Wednesday following the Tuesday on which Okuru Banin I and the original inhabitants of Akyem Abuakwa came out of the Birim River at Afriyɔ. Hence the name *Okuru-Dapa-Wukuo* for the Wednesday that follows Okuru's lucky day. The *Dapaa* days are regarded as propitious for, on these days, preparations towards the

Adae are made. Food and firewood which are to be used for the great *Adae* are brought home. All dirty clothes are brought out and washed at the river side and the women spend the afternoons to decorate their hair in very fashionable manners. Children who are born on *Dapaa* days are regarded as lucky babies and are named *Dapaa*. The *Dapaa* days are also days for sweeping and cleaning the incommensurable stool and fetish hovels which are free from decorations as the interior is of cart sheds.

The other special days in the Akan calendar are *Fodwoξ*, *Fofie* and *Benada Kwabena*. *Fodwoξ* falls on the 3rd Monday after *Akwasidae*; that is the 15th day after *Akwasidae*. *Fodwoξ* is therefore the herald of *Awukudae*. Children born on this day are respected and admired. They are named Kwadwo (male) or Adwoa (female). *Fodwoξ*, *Fofie* falls on the 2nd Friday after *Awukudae*; that is nine days after *Awukudae* and nine days to the next *Akwasidae*. This day is the day on which *Abam*, the “fetish” for twins all over the Akan land is venerated. *Benada Kwabena* falls 15 days to the great *Kuru-Dapa-Wukuo*. It is the day on which *Ohumtu* (preparatory rites of *Ohum* are performed). The two week state silence also begins from this day.

Appendix B: The Agyempremoso Grove

Agyempremoso grove is a thick leafy sacred grove surrounded by a vast expanse of grass hidden bog. The grove is regarded as the stronghold and the abode of Agyempremo Kofi, the river god. Agyempremo Kofi is believed to be the protector of the people from all kinds of evils which the people liken to *Ɛprem* (hail shots). The god is also credited with the death of thieves, murderers and all who perpetrate pernicious acts against the Tafo people. One factor which was crucial in the era of

militarization and economic aggrandisement was the introduction of guns and ammunition through the European trade. Fire arms were at once instrumental in territorial expansion and protection, state building and the maintenance of trade routes. It is also said that in times of war, the inhabitants often took shelter in this grove and as the treacherous bog made it difficult for the enemy to run after them, they named the grove as *Agyempremo* (receiver of gunshots or cannonballs).

Appendix C



Nana Kwadwo; the high priest of Agyempremoso

Source: photograph taken by researcher