

# Historical and Socio-Cultural Significance of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in the Asante Royal Regalia

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## To cite this article:

Steve Kquofi, Timolyn Kusi, Dickson Adom, Edwin Bodjawah, Reuben Glover. Historical and Socio-Cultural Significance of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in the Asante Royal Regalia. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. Vol. 7, No. 3, 2022, pp. 119-128.

doi: 10.11648/j.ijecs.20220703.11

Received: April 20, 2022; Accepted: May 5, 2022; Published: May 12, 2022

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**Abstract:** The *Ahenemma Mpaboa* or royal sandals are the second most valuable artifact in the Asante royal regalia that define the authority of a chief in the Asante Kingdom of Ghana. Unfortunately, little is known of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* as an important cultural symbol that defines royalty in the Asante Kingdom. Therefore, this ethnographic study under the qualitative research approach was carried out to investigate the history, philosophy, purpose, types and socio-cultural relevance of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in the Asante community. Semi-structured interviews and observation were the main data collection instruments that were analysed using the qualitative thematic analysis. The data were garnered from *Abrempong*, *Mfekutire*, chiefs, elders, royal attendants, members of the royal households as well as vendors and craftsmen of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. The *Ahenemma Mpaboa*'s origin is tied to a historical event that happened to Nana Nketia Tim Abamoo, Queen mother to the first Asantehene, Nana Osei Tutu I. The types, colours, shapes and designs of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* are symbolic reflections of the accepted cultural values in the Asante Kingdom that play significant socio-cultural roles in the community. The study contends that there is a strong symbolic connection between the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* and the chiefs of the Asante. It is a powerful regalia of the Asantes that exemplifies their philosophy and worldview while projecting their religious, sociocultural and political structure. The study recommends the development of a robust digital archiving system on Asante stool regalia to serve as a hub for cultural education for both domestic and international tourists.

**Keywords:** *Ahenemma Mpaboa*, Asante Royal Regalia, Asante Culture, Historical, Socio-Cultural, Symbolism

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## 1. Introduction

The organization, social structure, and survival of indigenous societies are crafted around traditional art forms that serve as a symbolic language reflecting their conceptions and way of life. Footwear, a constituent of regalia, plays a symbolic role in cultures across the world from keeping an infant's first shoes as mementos, shoe ceremonies associated with La Quinceniera which mark the transition from childhood to adulthood in Latin America to longevity shoes embroidered with lotus flower and a ladder meant to guide the dead to the afterlife in Ancient China [23]. Footwear gives hints about a person's character, social status, cultural place, and sexual preference [6].

### 1.1. Significance of Footwear

The significance attached to footwear permeates regalia where it seems to assume higher connotations. The royal regalia of Thailand, the Quintet of Royalty, includes royal slippers which are held in very high esteem. In East Asian Sanskrit texts, footwear takes up supernatural and mystical connotations and aids communication between mortals and immortals [7]; as well as communicating the spiritual values of harmony and balance in native American regalia.

In Asante culture, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* or *Kyaw Kyaw* (as it is popularly called), the royal sandals of chiefs form a very important aspect of Asante royal regalia. The *Ahenemma Mpaboa* is one of the most distinctive adornments used by the Akan of Ghana. The name *Kyaw Kyaw* is an

onomatopoeia of the sound the sandals make when worn. Whilst in the European tradition, the *crown* is the defining adornment of a monarch, in Asante culture it is the *royal sandals* [12, 2]. Traditionally, as a matter of royal dictum, the people of Asante regard, as taboo, the exposure of the chief's feet in public. This act, they believe, would precipitate a famine [18]. As a result of the importance of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* as a royal regalia, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the types and purposes of *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia?
- 2) What are the historical and socio-cultural significance of *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia?

### 1.2. Footwear in Africa and the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*: A Historical Perspective

Materials for the construction of footwear across the African continent ranged from animal sources as well as plant sources. Varieties of footwear on the African continent from the desert regions to the coastal and forest regions were discovered during the duration of this study. The Acholi of Northern Uganda made oval-shaped pieces of footwear with wet rawhide artfully decorated with red and black pigment. Somalian ceremonial sandals were made of thirteen layers of rawhide stitched with sinew with a heart-shaped back and upturned toe, and with very elaborate and exquisite stitching, made by traditional craftsmen in the coastal Benadir region of Somalia. The Bamum of Cameroon used the lost-wax method to produce cast bronze shoes. A practice credited to the discovery of metal ore made by a king in the village of Mambe. It is worth mentioning that metal casting had been practiced in West Africa for centuries through the *cire perdue* process and the earliest well-known specimen of bronze casting dates to the 10th century in Igbo Ukwu. Significantly, the Luba of Congo made wooden platform sandals with a peg for a toe hold [15].

Further, research revealed that the Hausa of the Sahel region of Africa were noted for their extensive knowledge in leathercraft. They produced riding boots and thong sandals which were often decorated with strips of leather dyed with natural pigments such as henna to create intricate geometric designs. The Hausa thong sandals were comparatively similar to the Asante *Ahenemma mpaboa* in its form, and stitching on the in-sole which is similar to those found on some *Ahenemma mpaboa*.



Figure 1. Hausa thong sandal.

Similarly, an uncanny resemblance to the *Ahenemma mpaboa* is the hieroglyphics of sandals in the tomb of the vizier Rekhmire depicts a sandal maker engaged in his craft [14]. Worthy of mention is the shape of the sandals that suggests cross-cultural influence from Egypt and the Hausa ethnic group of the Sahel region of Africa. In addition, African cultures never existed in isolation. There was always trade and exchange of ideas with accounts of the military might, organization, degree of centralization, and the efficacy of the Egyptian empire and its administration [10]. The resemblance in the make and construction of some footwear in different parts of the world with archeological evidence from some parts of Africa attests to this fact. A case in point is the wooden sandals of the Luba of the Republic of Congo that bears a resemblance to the *Paduka* of India with slight variation in stylization. The Luba sandal features a sole with a post and knob, which is engaged between the big and second toe. This same sandal, known in Asante as *Nkronua*, is found among the footwear of the Asantehene as sandals worn during wet seasons. It has a wooden sole with woven raffia straps.



Source: Louise and Ward (1997)

Figure 2. Hausa thong sandals.

Moreover, archeological and anthropological findings of excavations in the valley of the kings in Egypt by Howard Carter on February 16, 1923, provide evidence that nobles were buried with crafted slippers often adorned with gold and semi-precious stones (CGN Documentary 2015). Further inquiry on the study discovered a similarity of stylization and make of footwear in ancient Egypt and footwear of the Asante before European contact. Hassan revealed that Footwear in Egypt which was known as 'tabteb' after the city of Thebes, was made of wood, leather, plant fibre: halfa grass (*desmostachya bipinnata*), papyrus (*cyperus papyrus*), date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), doum palm (*hyphaene thebaica*) leaves and gold or a combination of two or more of the aforementioned materials [14].



Source: Hassan [14]

Figure 3. Scene in the tomb of Vizier Rekhmire.

### 1.3. Blummer's Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

The study was situated in Blummer's theory of Symbolic Interactionism [5]. Blummer postulates that symbolic interactionism rests on three premises that human action toward things is based on the meanings they have for them. The meanings of such things derive from the social interaction one has with one's fellows and that these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process. *Ahenemma mpaboa* is a constituent of Asante culture and in Asante culture, every object and action have a symbolic meaning and through their language serves as a means for people to represent their philosophies and communicate their interpretations. This theory was employed for this study for the reason that societies are full of symbolic interactionism and experiences of the collective or individuals which add meanings to symbols. These are either subjective or concrete and generate meanings that may be positive or negative. These meanings are generated as a result of interactions between people and these lead to the creation of the facts, folk, and lore that are assigned to them [22].

## 2. Methodology

Ethnography, as a qualitative research design, was used for this inquiry, from January 2019 to September 2021. This enabled the researchers to assume an interactive social role with respondents to describe, interpret and analyze the cultural relevance and functions of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante stool regalia. This ethnographic study was conducted within some palaces and residences in the Asante kingdom. They are the Manhyia Palace, Asokore Mampong palace, *Sanaahene* palace, *Apagyafie*, *Mpaboahene* palace, *Nsumankwaahene* palace, residences of the elders and royal attendants of the various *fekutire* within the Kumasi State in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The target population for the study comprised of *Abrempong* (Lords of particular communities in the Asante Kingdom), divisional chiefs, *Mfekutire* (Heads of royal agencies), royal attendants, vendors, and craftsmen of *Ahenemma mpaboa* in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ashanti Region of Ghana. The criteria for the selection of respondents were based on the respondent's knowledge of Asante culture and its associated rituals and matters relating to the form, function and context of *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia. Furthermore, craftsmen with intrinsic knowledge of the form and philosophical underpinnings of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia were recruited for the study.

Two sampling techniques were used for selecting the sample for the study, namely, purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed to select knowledgeable respondents who possess in-depth knowledge about the phenomenon being studied by their expertise, power, profession, network access, or experience [8, 9]. The snowball sampling technique was used to recruit subjects with unique information who had been referred by other respondents selected for the study [16]. They assisted the researchers in identifying other participants within the target group who equally divulged pertinent data for the study.

Table 1. Sample Description and Size.

Category A	No.	Category B	No.	Category C	Category D
Chiefs	4	Elders	4	Craftsmen for the	Vendors of the <i>Ahenemma</i>
<i>Abrempong</i>	5	Royal Attendants	3	<i>Ahenemma mpaboa</i>	<i>mpaboa</i>
<i>Mfekutire</i>	5	Members of the royal households	6	4	4
	14		13		
Total Sample	35				

Study participants were informed that the information that they provided would not be altered in any way. Also, they were not coerced to provide any information pertinent to the study. Trust was achieved by assuring respondents that their desire to remain anonymous would be respected. Their anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by not revealing their names and identity in the data collection and analysis.

The research is rigorously interrogated through ethnographic methods which draw on interactions and interpretation, participation, observations, and analysis of people and their culture to understand the shared beliefs,

values, and attitudes of the participants towards *Ahenemma mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia. The researchers conducted one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview guide designed based on the theoretical propositions on the *Ahenemma mpaboa* as espoused in the literature as well as the research questions that underpinned the study. The semi-structured interview guide was shown to three ethnography researchers for their perusal. Their suggestions were factored into the final interview guide that was pre-tested on one study participant in all the sample categories. Further, few corrections were made to the interview guide after the pre-

testing and the final version was agreed for field administration by all the researchers. Field observation guided by a well-designed observation checklist with clearly defined attributes and angle of observation coupled with photography assisted in the garnering of the data for the study. Observations of Asante court activities in the palaces visited for fieldwork were non-participant. The protocol and regimen of the Asante court only allowed for the researchers to assume the role as non-participant observers especially in ceremonies such as '*Kra dwareɔ*', where the researchers were not deemed qualified by lineage to participate. The researchers were present during court activities such as swearing-in of chiefs, naming ceremonies and funeral rites to collect data on the use of various *Ahenemma mpaboa* in socio-cultural activities within the study area.

Qualitative thematic analysis was used for the analysis of the data garnered. Data from field notes and interviews were carefully transcribed from the local Asante Twi language to the English language. Two language experts were consulted to play an oversight role as the researchers engaged in this exercise for two weeks. Member checking with a key member in each of the sample categories was used in verifying the transcribed data for credibility. After this exercise, diverse themes in the interview transcripts were extracted from the general patterns in the data garnered based on the research questions for the study were drawn. Finally, the data were interpreted and analysed comprehensively.

### 3. Findings of the Study

#### 3.1. Historical Significance of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*

The *Ahenemma mpaboa* are historically nicknamed *Kyaw Kyaw*, an onomatopoeia of the sound it makes when they are worn. The shape of the sole of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* comes in two specific styles: *asansatoɔ*, an inference to the backside of a bird of the hawk family and *atinnie* (straight). The name *Ahenemma mpaboa* is the name given to royal sandals for the nobles of the Asante kingdom. The motive behind the crafting of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* was indeed to serve a purpose for the nobles of the kingdom. In Asante culture, the divinity of the king is unquestionable, hence the accolade *Otumfuɔ Nyame Kesie*. Reverence accorded to the Asante kings allowed them to wear *Ahenemma mpaboa*. Queens were not accorded the same 'privilege'. As oral history indicates, in the remote past, queens in the Asante kingdom went barefoot. This was as a result of their role as custodians of the stools and the sacredness of the rites associated with the office did not allow for footwear. Oral literature and myths further suggest that the privilege of wearing *Ahenemma mpaboa* by queens and queenmothers began as a preventative measure and subsequently became one of the greatest oaths of summons, *Ntam Kesie* known as *Asantehemaa Konkonnua* and pride of ownership within the Asante states. Legend has it that during the reign of the first Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu I, (1693-1719), the queenmother

of Asanteman, Nana Nketia Tim Abamoo resided at Kokofu and was summoned by the king. In haste to answer the summons of her king, she scraped her foot on a rock. The wound on her foot did not heal and consequently led to her death. Subsequently, during the reign of Nana Osei Kwadwo (1764-1777), the fourth Asantehene, allowed the queenmother to wear *Ahenemma mpaboa* in order to prevent future occurrences (Abrempong 1, personal communication February 21, 2020).

The names of *Ahenemma mpaboa* are often derived from the ornaments on the straps and apex of the sandals interspersed with aphorisms of the Asante. Consequently, *Ahenemma mpaboa* are festooned with abstractions of the cosmos, animal, and geometric forms that are visual representations of the philosophy and cultural values of the Asante. These philosophies of the Akan are represented in part as the Adinkra, archetypal and metaphorically coined symbols of the Akan, notably the Asante [1]. They pervade every aspect of their culture and represent beliefs as well as echo some philosophies of the Asante people. These are utilized on *Ahenemma mpaboa* to serve as a means of communication of religious ideology, political philosophy, social norms and sanctions, morals, educative standards, and military prowess.

Elephants, lions, eagles, leopards, scorpions by their animal attributes are consequently used as abstract projections of ethical values, and it is believed that persons accorded this is imbued with the traits of the said animal [4]. As McCaskie, observed in his study on Asante animals within Asante culture, animals are phenomenological living entities like people and they projected a tangled web of similarities to animals often of a predictable anthropomorphic kind [17]. Representations of an elephant known as *ɔsono* can be traced to the proverb *ɔsono nni wuram a anka ɔkoɔ ye bɔpen* which is translated as to wit *but for the presence of the elephant in the bush, the buffalo would be king*, an interpretation of the exalted position and prominence of the king that overshadows all.

It is widely accepted in Asante culture that the sandal, being the preserve of the monarch, was not only a signifier of class but it is known that it had spiritual and religious implications. The *Ahenemma mpaboa* is so revered that during festivals and occasions, they are carried by court officials known as *Mpaboakuraɔuo* or sandal carriers who are included in the entourage of the chief. According to respondents, theirs is to saunter majestically in a procession through selected public streets holding the *Ahenemma mpaboa* in the right arms. Additionally, the Asantehene court employs a designated court official, the *Mpaboahene* (king of royal sandals) whose sole responsibility is to ensure the security and care of the king's footwear. In other paramountcy within the Asante confederacy, the keeper of the stool regalia guards the *Ahenemma mpaboa* of the chief. The *Ahenemma mpaboa* included in Asante stool regalia, are *sika mpaboa*, *dwetɔ mpaboa*, *ekunini mpaboa*, *nsebe mpaboa*, and *brekyere mpaboa*.



### 3.2. Types and Purpose of Ahenemma Mpaboa

#### 3.2.1. Sika Mpaboa

*Sika mpaboa* refers to a sandal with gold (*sika*) ornaments at the apex or on the straps. Some of the *Ahenemma mpaboa* in this category have the insole of the sandals covered with gold leaf. Figure 4 displays *Ahenemma mpaboa* with its leather straps enclosed in red velvet. A gold representation of a leopard (*etwie*) and scorpion (*nyanyankyere*) is fastened to the apex and the straps on either side of these sandals.

*Sika Mpaboa* is conspicuously present in stool regalia of the Asantehene. The intention for the prevalence of *Sika Mpaboa* in the stool regalia of the Asantehene is a prerogative enjoyed by Nana Otumfuo. The sheen of gold is regarded as an earthly embodiment of the sun and, thus the force of life itself [11]. Some *sika mpaboa* depict the distinct shape with a noticeable deviation from the rounded shape at the front which is a common characteristic of most *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. The leather straps are enclosed in black velvet encrusted with oblong forms depicting the cocoon of an insect, presumably a beetle. A floral representation of the *adinkra fofoo* adorns the apex, of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*.



Source: Photographed by Researchers

Figure 4. *Sika Mpaboa* Nserewa.

#### 3.2.2. Dwete Mpaboa

*Dwete mpaboa* (Figure 5) include *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in Asante stool regalia with silver ornamentation on the straps and raised apex of the sandal. Custodians of Asante culture recount the legendary and exemplary act of patriotism and bravery before and during the Asante Denkyira war of 1641 by the Mamponghe Boahen Anantuo as the precursor to the creation of the silver stool by the Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu I. This act placed the Mampong stool as second in authority to the golden stool of the Asantehene (Nana Yaw Owusu, Mpaboahene, personal communication, September

2020 and corroborated by Hassan-Asamoah [13]. Consequently, customarily, *dwete Mpaboa* is synonymous with the Mampong stool. Respondents indicated that *dwete Mpaboa* are used by all paramount chiefs and lords, *abrempong* of the Asantehene as the occasion demands.



Source: Photographed by researchers

Figure 5. *Dwete Mpaboa*.

Silver in Asante is synonymous with *fufuo/fitaa* (white). The triad of traditional colours of the Akan includes *fufuo* which comprises all shades of white including grey, which is associated with the sacred. It explains the use of white chalk in the religious rituals of the Akan. The sandal in figure 5, displays *Dwete Mpaboa* in leather straps enclosed with silver. The straps display a stencil of three tufts of hair, and a raised mound encased in tartan pattern of black and silver affixed on the apex.

#### 3.2.3. Brekyere Mpaboa

These come in two specific colours, red (*kobene*) which refers to all shades of red and black (*tuntum*) which similarly includes all shades of black. Among the Asante, the symbolism of colour originates within the context in which it is used. The colours red and black symbolize death of a relation, sudden calamity, anger, an act of war, boisterousness, violence and/or a show of dissatisfaction.

*Brekyere Mpaboa* are used in different contexts. The context in which it is used determines its function. Amongst the various contexts in which the *Brekyere mpaboa* is used is that they are significantly utilized by members of the royal household and attendants as sandals for everyday service and rituals. This is attributable to the duality of the symbolism of black (Elder 4, personal communication July 23, 2020). The colour black (*tuntum*) conversely assumes a somewhat different symbolism when it comes to rituals associated with the ancestors, late kings, and chiefs. Revered objects such as *Ahenemma Mpaboa* and items dedicated to the ancestors are blackened thus in this context. Black symbolizes spirituality, respect, and age (Mfekutire 1, personal communication July 22, 2020).





Source: Photographed by Researchers

**Figure 6.** *Brekyere Mpaboa*.

The straps of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in figure 6 have circular perforations and protrusions which meet at the apex. A three-dimensional mound is attached to two flat circular forms of differing sizes to form a base that is positioned on the apex of this sandal. The researchers noted that *brekyere mpaboa* does not require any gold or silver embellishments. Some are quite plain with a substantial amount featuring *Adinkra* symbols at the raised knob and straps.

#### 3.2.4. *Nsebe Mpaboa*

These are *Ahenemma Mpaboa* with charms, *Nsebe*. Originally, they were commissioned by the *Nsumankwaafuo*. The *Nsumankwaafuo* is made up of priests, medical corps, physicians, and spiritual advisors. *Nsebe mpaboa* are predominantly used as means of protection and fortification. The *Nsumankwaahene* wears *Ahenemma Mpaboa* with charms or *Suman* to identify him as the head of the *Nsumankwaa Fekuo* and protect him from the evil charms of his opponents and adversaries of Asanteman. The researchers discovered that the functional and ritual role of *nsebe mpaboa* is to safeguard the Asantehene from evil and warrants its inclusion in stool regalia. Additionally, they are utilized by monarchs of the Asanteman during adjudication of cases, funeral rites, and rituals at the *nkondwafie* (stool house) where stools of deceased monarchs are housed (Royal Attendants 2, September 11, 2020).

The straps of the pair of sandals in figure 7 are coated with black pigment and festooned with geometric forms which are meant to contain and represent charms. Three mounds arranged close to each other and banded with stick-like projections are positioned at the apex of this *Nsebe Mpaboa*.



Source: Photographed by Researchers

**Figure 7.** *Nsebe Mpaboa*.

#### 3.2.5. *Ekunini Mpaboa*

*Ekunini Mpaboa* is the name given to the modern derivatives of some *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. The craftsmen are at liberty to innovate but their innovation must be consistent with the beliefs and practices of the Asante. Names for *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in this category are not automatically dictated by symbols on the straps and apex. Varieties of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in this category are made from colourful thread, embroidered fabric, or *kente* fabric. Figure 8 displays *ekunini mpaboa* in the riot of colour associated with the *kente* fabric. The straps are enclosed in *kente* fabric and the apex displays a tuft of vibrant silk yarn.



Source: Photographed by Researchers

**Figure 8.** *Ekunini Mpaboa*.

### 3.2.6. *Adwetaty Anomaa Ɔwɔmfɔɔ Mpaboa*

Legend has it that in the heat of one of the wars the Asantes fought, a bird mysteriously appeared with ammunitions (pellets), *atuo aboba*, in its wings which were supplied to the Asante warriors to win the battle. This bird is represented on the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* surrounded by pellets on the straps or a stationary bird with pellets on its wings complemented by other symbols.



Source: Photographed by the researchers

**Figure 9.** *Adwetaty anomaa Ɔwɔmfɔɔ.*

## 4. Socio-Cultural Significance of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*

The exceptionally rich and sophisticated verbal culture of the Asante enabled the development of proverbs and aphorisms as a means to discuss subjects without referring to them directly thereby giving the speaker a protective level of ambiguity [1]. All respondents upheld that these traditional art symbols found on the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* are used to communicate ideas of religious ideology, political philosophy, social norms and sanctions, morals, educative standards, and military prowess. *Sika Mpaboa* with the leopards (*etwie*) is often used in Asante to signify leadership, bravery, the fighting spirit of the king, and the ability to adapt to any situation.

Additionally, the characteristics of a scorpion (*nyanyankyere*), as a deadly predator which does not usually attack but upon the perception of a threat coupled with its ability to immobilize and kill prey with their venomous sting are perceived by the Asante as an embodiment of evil and paradoxically a protective force. *Ahenemma Mpaboa* with depictions of the scorpion subtly conveys the chief's authority, deadliness and power. The Asante controlled the trade in kola nuts with the tribes in the territories north of the Asante Kingdom and Hausa of the Sahel region. The trade in kola nuts largely accounted for the economic prosperity of the Asante and the symbol *bese saka*, thus signified affluence. The combination of the three symbols, that of affluence (*bese saka*), scorpion, (*nyanyankyere*) and sanctity

(*musuyidee*) shows how powerful the wearer is. It was noted by the researchers that enigmas and riddles are represented on *Ahenemma Mpaboa*.

Floral representations are not left out of the lexicon of symbols of Asante philosophy. A yellowish plant indigenous to the forest belt of Ghana, *fofoɔ*, is a metaphor for jealousy. On *Ahenemma Mpaboa*, it is a reference to the proverb '*se nea fofoɔ pe ne se gyinantwi aba bidie*'. To wit the *fofoɔ* plant wishes the '*gyinantwi*' seeds turn black. This symbol cautions against covetousness and greed (Nana Sarfo Kantanka, personal communication October 10, 2020). The proverb '*nkaa akyekyedeɛ eni nwa nkoa anka etuo rento wo kwaye ase da*'. To wit, left to the snail and tortoise no one would ever hear sounds of gunshots in the forest. The tortoise, *akyekyedeɛ*, a metaphor for patience (*abotere*), is depicted on *Ahenemma Mpaboa* as a tortoise or snail. Respondents upheld that they represent the monarch as a mediator and peaceful person not easily provoked. On the other hand, the strong shell of the tortoise signifies the mental dexterity of the monarch. Sarpong opines that the tortoise and the snail symbolize peace because they are encased in their shells and do not offer any resistance to those who capture them [21]. The elephant (*Ɔsono*) is regarded by the Asante as a sacred animal and the strongest in the forest. Rattray suggests that in Asante culture, the elephant connotes wisdom, and protection and is also regarded as a symbol of power, kingship and authority of a monarch [20]. Representations of the elephant are set aside for the Asantehene and it is found on his umbrella finials. The symbol of the elephant expresses the preeminence of the monarch as a protector and formidable entity.

The proverb *Tikoro nko agyina* literally translated as one head does not constitute a council, is represented by three mounds and an abstraction of three human heads, often mounted on the apex of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. The stick-like projections that hem the heads are a ready accompaniment of this design, as observed by the researchers seem to propose that there is strength in numbers, a related reference to the proverb *praye wo ho yi woyi baako na ebu woka bomu a ɔnɔbu*. To wit, a single stick of a broom is easy to break but with a bunch of brooms, it is impossible to break. The respondents explained this to be a good example of collective collaboration in taking decisions.

The proverb *mpusaa ntiamoa wo nya asem papa nka nkyere wo yere* is represented among *Ahenemma Mpaboa* as '*mpuasaa*', three tufts of hair. This is translated as 'if you have good news keep it from your wife'. It is believed that women are effortlessly excitable and are unable to keep secrets. It suggests that a prudent man knows how to handle affairs concerning close relations. It advises people to be discreet, and show astuteness in their dealings with others (Chief 3, personal communication October 10, 2020). The adage *Asaase tokuro gye Nyame*, an allegory of death serves as a gentle reminder that death befalls all. It admonishes circumspection in relations with people. It is represented as a series of protrusions and depressions on the straps of *Ahenemma Mpaboa*.



An illustration of the proverb *apupuo a ebɔ nasuo da asukakye* literally translated as the animal who built his den has been evicted. It instructs people to nurture the habit of appreciation for the contributions and good efforts of people. It further cautions society to avoid denigrating such persons. The proverb *abɔtan kɔtɔ, mewɔ adayɛ triakyiri were boo, me yam fan eban* which means. To wit, “I the rock crab have the advantage, my back leans against a stone and my stomach clings to a house” is included in the designs of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. It communicates that a man who has powerful or influential friends is protected. It portrays the unique position of the monarch as an individual with powerful protectors. In this case, it refers to the ancestors and deities. Also, *Ahenemma Mpaboa* which has the proverb *ekyem a emu atwitwa no yen wan no bio*, literally translated as a shield that has been cut ceases to be of use, refers to *ekyem* or local shields made of fabric or leather stretched onto a bamboo frame. This proverb implies that a ruined reputation cannot be repaired.

*Brekɔyere Mpaboa* has a proverb aptly named *asamampɔ mu Kwaku wo nni ni a wo nwe nwa kɔbi*. To wit ‘if you have no mother, you don’t eat the snail’s liver’ which is in reference to bereavement and isolation. This is a literal translation of a lament by Kwaku who has experienced the death of a loved one. A similar interpretation of this proverb is that the death of a mother leads to neglect by family members. This design on *Ahenemma Mpaboa* expresses the pain of bereavement. A design named *sekan kura Aboagye* is in reference to the proverb *sekan kura Aboagye manim anye nam a ɔtese odwannini mmen*, which means “even if my blade is not sharp, it is like the horns of a ram”. The emphasis here is on the ram which signifies strength and persistence. This proverb is said about people who bring out innovative and creative solutions to complex issues through unconventional means.

Among the plethora of animal symbols on the various *Ahenemma Mpaboa*, geometric and abstract images are featured prominently on the straps and the apex. These serve as nonverbal means of communication developed by the Asante and they pervade every aspect of their culture. They additionally create a link between concepts as well as experiences and are inspired by proverbs and nature. These are referred to as the *Adinkra*. *Adinkra* is translated as farewell or *di nkra*. Thus, the *adinkra* serves as a means of communication of thoughts, needs, proverbs, and historical events that are understood by the culture-sharing group. Inferences made in earlier literature on *adinkra* suggest that it was purposely made for funerals to extol the qualities of the deceased [19]. However, the messages they convey are not restricted to Asante funerary custom. These symbols are geometric and abstract representations of the cosmos, nature, ideologies, and ethics. The *nsebe* charms found on *Nsebe Mpaboa* in Asante stool regalia are encased in geometric forms that enforce Asante religious and moral beliefs [1]. The triangle represents the omnipotence of the ruler of the universe and an abstraction of the aphorism, *ebididi ebi akyi*, which admonishes people to respect social order in society. On *nsebe mpaboa*, it represents the superiority or potency of

charms placed on *Ahenemma Mpaboa* and places it at a higher level compared to other *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in the same category.

Three concentric circles of varying circumferences arranged from the smallest to the biggest, for example the *adinkrahene*, symbolize the sanctity of the male in society. Also, squares and rectangles as surmised by the researchers symbolize the virtues wisdom, honesty, fairness, courage, incarnation, often associated with divinity and used as representations of God and depicted in the symbols *nsaa* and *eban*. The semi-circle is represented as the crescent, *osrane* and it symbolizes serenity, kindness, grace, and fertility. The cuboid shapes signify wisdom, fairness, and divinity and they represent positive virtues portrayed as symbols, divinity, incarnation, wisdom, and honesty. The circular form signifies sanctity. Two diagonal lines with rounded edges which intersect in the middle portray the proverb, *Nyame nwuye na mawu* (God is not dead so I cannot die).

## 5. Discussion

According to (Craftsman 4, personal communication, August 11, 2020), and some participants of the study, which comprised custodians of Asante history, the provenance of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* emerged with the construct of Asante society which placed a very high premium in the belief of the existence of the Supreme Being, divinities and the ancestors. Their advice was sought in all matters about life and the hereafter. Subsequently, the kingmakers believed that the King, Otumfuo, and other high-ranking chiefs had to be protected from charms and potions which might be put in their way to harm them and hence to protect the feet of the king, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* was crafted. Additionally, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in Asante royal regalia were worn by powerful predecessors who are counted as ancestors.

*Ahenemma Mpaboa* in Asante stool regalia functions as a symbol of the authority of the monarch. In Akan societies, such as in the case of the Asantehene, the king is not only the pontifex Maximus but has achieved the level of apotheosis. He is deified as god, the accolade *Otumfuo Onyame Kesie*. Hence, a chief’s authority is portrayed by the number of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* he possesses (Vendor 3, personal communication September 16, 2020).

The researchers noted that *Ahenemma Mpaboa* serve as a leadership art to maintain the positions of rulers in that, all of the adornments included in stool regalia were commissioned by past monarchs. These were often crafted with lavish materials rendered in elaborate styles and they were not only visually spectacular but reinforced the chief’s status as superior to his subjects. Additionally, it reminded the society of the chief’s wealth and power, as it contributes to their social status, their governing activities and defined their personality, body language, and behaviour. Furthermore, to enhance the uniqueness of chiefs as gods, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* were used in ceremonial contexts that mark and legitimize political authority.

The inclusion of the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in Asante stool



regalia is one of a religious function. The researchers noted that the religious dynamics is twofold. On one hand, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in Asante stool regalia possess resonances in the realm of the spirits, and on the other hand, they demonstrate the belief of the Asante in a Supreme Being, in a creative force or deity whose supremacy is insurmountable and is the originator of life. This Supreme Being popularly referred to as *Onyame* is placed at the apex in the hierarchy of divinities. Respondents upheld this fact and revealed that the symbol, *Gye Nyame*, except God, *Nyame nwuye na mewu*, to wit 'God is not dead so I cannot die' on *Ahenemma Mpaboa* demonstrates this belief in the cult of the ancestors and life after death. *Nyamedua*, which is usually found on the straps and apex of some *Ahenemma Mpaboa* translated as God's tree acknowledges the presence and protection of God.

The researchers noted that synchronic to the rituals of a chosen regent is one where the nominee's feet are placed on specific *Ahenemma Mpaboa*, the *Mpaboakesie* (Great Sandals), believed to be an heirloom of great significance, the possession of the first Asantehene Nana Osei Tutu who is credited with the formation, hegemony, military superiority, and prowess of the Asante Kingdom. This, according to the respondents, serve as one of the vessels for the entrapment of the soul of the departed monarch as such positive virtues were handed down from the ancestors, in this case, deceased monarchs. Culturally, personal items of clothing are regarded as having been imbued with the virtues and power of the possessor. Hence, their inclusion in Asante stool regalia to serve as repositories of ancient virtue and power [3].

*Ahenemma Mpaboa* function as an indicator of the rank and position of monarchs within the Asante confederacy and the political hierarchy of the Asante kingdom. Monarchs of the Asante kingdom wear any of the designated types of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* albeit in strict accordance to the hierarchical order ascribed to them. *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in the regalia of a paramount chief is markedly different from that of a divisional chief. Furthermore, *Ahenemma Mpaboa* included in stool regalia serve as protection from malevolent forces. As an embodiment of supernatural powers, they are 'to function as a part of an apotropaic unit to shield the monarch from any potential danger, terrestrial or otherwise'. As indicated by the respondents, the main purpose for the crafting of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* was to safeguard the feet of the monarch from necromancy and bewitchment from adversaries.

The further inquiry turned up by the researchers disclosed that the prominence of a chief is indicated by the quantity of *Ahenemma Mpaboa* he has acquired. The wealth associated with the stool is further enhanced by the number of gold adornments on the *Ahenemma Mpaboa*. Therefore, the prominence of a stool dictates the amount of gold studded *Ahenemma Mpaboa* in its stool regalia. Additionally, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* functions as a social critique of society. To quote Nana Owusu Akorsah, *adiebiara ohene dibe ye nihi biara kasa*, to wit, all adornment of the king or chief is meant to communicate. In this wise, the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* as a

medium of communication, transfers and represents the cultural values of the Asante. They communicate complete knowledge, abstract truths, and ideas about life and its meanings. Virtues such as tenacity are represented by the hard seed of the Wawa tree (*triplochiton scleroxylon*). It is depicted in *adinkra* symbol as *Wawa aba*, the seed of the Wawa tree. It promotes and teaches perseverance and resilience in the light of difficulties.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has revealed a strong symbiotic connection between the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* and the chiefs of the Asante. Hence, it is evidently clear that it is a revered item of Asante stool regalia whose functions transcend the utilitarian role. The research proved further that the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* enhance the religious, socio-cultural, political structure of the Asante and accentuates the philosophies of the people. Based on the conclusions drawn from the results of the research, it is recommended that open days must be held periodically at the Manhyia Palace, and other palaces located within communities to educate the public on the meaning and significance of cultural items held by the respective stools. Secondly, traditional rulers must ensure that research that is centered on various aspects of Asante culture are co-published under the auspices of the palace and put on a dedicated website where accurate information on cultural artifacts such as the *Ahenemma Mpaboa* can be sourced and updated regularly. This will serve as a very important resource for any student of cultural and anthropological studies. Future studies could explore how to develop a digital archiving system for the Asante stool regalia and demonstrate how it could be accessed. Such studies would fill the void in the absence of a robust digital repository for the Asante stool regalia.

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