



## Art and Cultural Elements in Funeral rites of the people of Asante Mampong

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### ABSTRACT

Asante Mampong is one of the municipalities in the Asante Region of Ghana that is endowed with Art and Culture; which are showcased during the rites of passage such as naming ceremonies, Puberty rites and funerals. This study was carried out to highlight the Art and Cultural elements that manifest during funeral rites in Asante Mampong, and also to discuss their significance to the people in the study area as well as categorizing these rites into various Art forms. The main research design considered for this study was qualitative; and for that matter made use of descriptive and survey techniques to undertake the study. The study targeted Chiefs, Undertakers, who are experts in decorating corpses and funeral grounds, Performing Artists and Some family heads in the area. The sampling methods adopted for these target population included Purposive, Convenience as well as Random whilst the data collection instruments consisted of Interview and Participant observation. The study identified some rites that are associated with funerals, such as making of libation, Christian prayers, and pronouncements by individuals as well as wearing of special costumes and also the use of specific musical types. The study has as well categorized all these rites into Art forms as Visual, Verbal as well as Performing Arts.

**KEY WORDS:** Cultural elements, Verbal arts, Visual arts, Performing Arts, Funeral rites

Received 28 April, 2021; Revised: 10 May, 2021; Accepted 12 May, 2021 © The author(s) 2021.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Mampong is one of the Ashanti states in Ghana (formerly Gold Coast) which Nana Osei Tutu united with the help of Okomfo Anokye. Adu-Agyem et al (2013) stated that the people of Mampong migrated from Adansi-Ayaase in Asante to their present location. Mampong is traditionally second in command to Kumasi, for that matter, whilst Otumfuo sits on the golden stool; Mampong Hene (Chief) sits on silver stool to depict his status as such. According to Oduro (2010), Mampong became second in command traditionally to Asantehene during the last war between the Asantes and the Denkyira people, where Okomfo Anokye a friend of the then Asantehene predicted a doom for the Asantes hence called for a human sacrifice to make them win; Mampong

gave away one of their sons to be sacrificed to bring that victory on condition that, when they win, Mampong would be made second in command to Asantehene. Mampong shares boundary with Nsuta at the east, Kofiase at the west, Ejura at the north and Agona at the southern side.

People of Mampong show interest, commitment and solidarity towards social events, such as funeral, where days are set aside and people gather to mourn with the bereaved family and even make donations in support of the bereaved family.

Performance of funerals portray a lot of cultural and artistic features if when well appreciated would continue to give good cultural identity in Mampong and society at large. But unfortunately personal observation has shown that, much attention is not giving to these elements which could also serve as learning situations for the generations to come in the study area. It is therefore the intention of this paper to showcase the various rites and their significance to the people, which could serve as a learning grounds for the younger generation. Also, the paper seeks to classify the various rites into art forms that associate with funeral rites in the study area. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Are there some Art and Cultural elements in funerals rites of people of Mampong?
2. Are these practices having cultural significance in the setting of the people?
2. To what extent should the funeral rites be classify into the various art forms?

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In Ghana, culture portrays itself among the people. In Mampong, for instance, during events such as *Akwasidae*, traditional festival celebrated every forty days on the Asante calendar, naming ceremonies and funerals, artistic elements manifest themselves but which the members of the community do not even take cognizance of. Adgin-Tettey (1998) explains that during funeral rites among the Asante immigrants in Toronto Canada, sound of drums and other musical instruments, as well as songs are heard during funeral rites of a deceased. Adgin-Tettey explains further that, the watchers by a dead person are expected to pour a little water down the throat of the person with these words saying *Receive this water and drink and do not permit any evil thing to come where you are setting out*. He opines that, after the deceased is bathed, the body is dressed and laid in state for relatives and sympathizers to come and see the body and pay their last respect. During this time, the wealth of the dead are artistically arranged and exhibited to demonstrate their wealth. He discuss further that, relatives and sympathizers wail and sing dirges in honour of the deceased. The circumstances surrounding the death are reflected in the dirge. He emphasizes that, Asantes celebrate funerals in the context of singing, drumming and dancing. In addition, he continues that the Widow and the Widowers may wear raffia on their elbows to signify that their partners in marriage are dead as well and that they have become as light as raffia. He opines that during funerals of Akan, one can see some people with leaves in their mouth; and those are the people whose parents have died previously. In addition, mourning bands are fastened round the head of the mourners.

Arthur (2009) equally discuss that, Performing Arts are present during the funeral rites of the people of Asante. She clarifies that, Performing Arts consist of Music, Dance and Drama. She adds that, there is a dramatic rite which is perform among the Asante people when a pregnant woman dies with the unborn child. She states that, all the pregnant women in the community come round holding cut plantain leaves dramatizing shooting with the sound *Poo, Poo*, pronouncing that, the deceased should send her curse away and should never visit any of the living again. She agrees with Adgin- Tettey ( 1998 ) that, whenever someone is about to die, it is customary for any close relative around to pour a drop of water down the throat and pronounce that, it is from the family to make him or her strong enough for the journey ahead. She continues that, there are dramatic events that are done prior to the burial of Asante King such as swearing of oaths by various Chiefs, presentation of burial items (*adisiadie*) as well as food prepared by the traditional cook. She discuss also that, Kete musical ensemble is perform for only the Asantehene but any sub Chief who wants to perform it during funeral can do so with permission from Asantehene. Arthur discuss further that, Fontomfrom and Adowa musical types can also be perform during funerals of any Akan. She opines that, crying is another rite that is expected to be executed during funeral. She said, it has its implication on both the dead and the living. Ampomah (2014) shares in the opinion of Arthur (2009) on the performing Arts in Asante culture and discuss that one of the indigenous funeral music among the Akan is Adowa. He admits that, even though it is a funeral ensemble, in recent times, it is perform for entertainment purposes and also during other rites of passage events.

According to Gyamerah (2014), there are many funeral rites that are perform from the death of a person to the burial among the Akan in Ghana. He cited an example among the people of Tutu in the Eastern region and discuss that, as soon as one dies, the first rite to be perform is the *Amaneba*, where the family head calls for a meeting, makes libation on behalf of the family to seek permission from the Supreme God and the ancestors to separate the dead person from the living. At the meeting, mourning cloth ranging from black to dark brown is worn by the members of the family to demonstrate their solidarity behind the bereaved family. He explains that, after the family meeting, they visit the Chief to brief him about the death of their beloved; giving his or her

name and a biography as well as cause of death. Gyamerah, explains further that, before the dead is brought home from the mortuary, the family head makes libation and ask for travelling mercies from the gods and ancestors; and amidst drumming and dancing, the corpse is convey home. He shares that, when the body is brought home, another libation is made before the body is brought out. He opines that, it is a rite for the members of the family to cry; and anyone who refuses to cry is perceived to have a hand in the death of the deceased. He again confirms that, the spouse is expected to present items for the bathing of the corpse. In addition, when the body is finally laid in state, music from sound system and other musical groups perform to console and entertain the members gathered.

Dzramado et al (2013) also confirm that, culture manifests in artistic forms such as clothing and fashion. They opine that, rites and ceremonies generally associated with funerals are characterized by rich display of Ghanaian art forms including varieties of mourning cloths and dresses. They add that, the mourners, including the bereaved family, wear Red, and Dark Colours to express their state of mourning. They explain that, an aged person's death is associated with the use of white cloth as means of portraying that, the deceased person has died a natural death and at old age. They continue that, coffins for the dead are equally designed artistically to befit the status of the deceased in society.

According to Martino (2018), Asante people always involve Music and Art in their funeral rites. He cited example of the people of Ntonso in the Asante Region of Ghana and explain that musical performances are seen in the funeral with regard to the religious affiliation of the deceased. He adds that, if the dead happens to be a Christian, then Choirs and Church Bands come to perform whilst the Church members dance around the Coffin. He explains further that, the mourners either dress in Red, Black or Black and White Colours depending on the age of the dead person. He adds that, the immediate family members of the deceased dress with *Densinkran* style to sit in states to take greetings from the general public. He shares that, in recent times, Adinkra is best known as mourning cloth among the Asante people. He shares further that, the motifs in the funeral cloths communicate non-verbally to the general public. Martino acknowledges that, funerals are important events in the lives of the Akan and that the funeral make use of Music, Dance, Photography, Film and other performing Arts.

Commenting on the cultural and art elements in Asante's culture, Osei- Bonsu (2010) substantiates that music and dance are integral part of the Asante's cultural life and tradition. He reveals that, some artistic elements are seen during the mortuary and laying in state rites. In addition, he explains that, making of libation and singing of dirges are vital elements that are always seen in the funeral among the Akan. He equally acknowledges that the traditional musical ensembles such as *Adowa*, *Nnwomkro Adenkum* and *Kete* are performed during funeral periods.

According to Braimah (2018), *Adowa* music and dance is customarily the funeral ensemble of the Akan. She discusses that *Adowa* can be performed to precede the funeral and can also be performed during the post burial section. Kquofi et al (2015) as well discuss that among a section of the Ewe people of Ghana, *Akpi* musical ensemble is performed during funeral of chiefs and other important personalities. They again discuss that appellations and proverbs are played on the *Atumpan* (Talking drums) in the first instance to announce the death if it involves a chief or very important person. They share that, music and dance have become an integral part of the people of Logba in the Volta Region of Ghana; and that during funerals, the members of the community express togetherness through music and dance to console the bereaved family. Ndah (2014) also notes that certain pronouncements are made to the deceased when laid in state for the dead to revenge his/her death when the community suspects the death as not natural.

Adu- Gyamfi (2010) in discussing the artistic elements in funerals of the Asante people explains that, art and culture cannot be left out during funerals in Asante. He cited an example of the people of Adanse in the Ashanti Region of Ghana and share that, all the items that are involve in adorning the body of the dead are referred to as the Visual Arts. He adds that, the prayers, libations that are said in addition to the appellations that are said stand for the Verbal Arts whilst the performance from the *Kete*, *Adowa*, *Adenkum* and *Nnwomkro* as well as any other musical performance with their accompanying movements and gestures represent the Performing Arts.

From the above discussion, it could be observed that during funerals among the people of Asante, there are various rites and customs, representing the various Art forms; which are of cultural significance to the people.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The research design adopted for this study is qualitative method. Qualitative research involves collecting, analyzing and interpreting data by observing what people do or say. It also refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things (Anderson 2006). This

design was chosen because the study sought to identify the Art and Cultural elements in funerals, as well as classify them into various art forms; a phenomenon which falls under the domain of qualitative Research design.

### **Population of the study**

The target population for the study consisted of Chiefs, Undertakers, Performing Artistes and Family heads. The accessible population was made up of 2 Chiefs, 6 Undertakers, 8 Performing Artistes and 4 Family heads ( **AbusuaPanyin** ), hence bringing the total population for the study to 20.

### **Sampling Technique**

According to Arthur (2009), sampling is the act of choosing a small group of people from a larger group to respond to questions. With regard to the assertion of Arthur, Purposive sampling technique was used to sample the 2 Chiefs for the study. This technique was employed because the researchers used their discretion to select those respondents they think could give them useful information regarding the focus of the study. Convenience sampling method was used to sample the 6 Undertakers. This method was equally used as the researchers took advantage of them whenever they were seen decorating corpses and funeral grounds for events hence sought information from them. Purposive technique was also employed in sampling the 8 Performing Artistes whilst the 4 family heads were selected using the simple random sampling method.

Some of the research instruments used to gather data for the study were interviews which were structured formally and informally to solicit views from the target population. Data was collected from all the 20 respondents through an interview, with the help of an interview guide. Observation was as well carried out in the Mampong municipality where the researchers had the opportunity to observe closely how funerals are organized. Two funerals from **Daho**, 3 from **Presbyterian Mission** and 1 from **Worakese** all communities within the municipality; were actively observed and conclusions drawn appropriately.

According to Adjei (2015) data analysis is the method through which data gathered is put together to make an informed decision on their outcome. With regard to the above assertion, all the data collected from both Primary and Secondary sources were put together, interpreted, and analyzed manually and conclusions drawn on them. Some digital devices such as Camera, Recorders and Tablets were used to store the responses of the respondents. This devices were then played severally to retrieve the needed information for the study.

## **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The focus of the study was to highlight the Art and Cultural elements and their significance among the people of Asante Mampong, as well as classifying these rites among the various Art forms. After the responses of the respondents interviewed and the observations made by the researchers, the following is hereby discussed:

Prior to the organization of the main funeral, there is observation of one week where many activities take place with a poster of the deceased on a display as can be seen on Fig. 1 below:



Figure 1: A mounted Picture of a Deceased  
Photograph: Authors field Data

It is during the one week celebration that the date is announced for the observance of the main funeral. Greetings are exchanged amidst singing and dancing during this stage. The study established that, funerals in the study area are done in two sections. The first one being when the Corpse is bathed and laid in state. This section is known as *Dote yie*. The second section begins when the corpse has been buried. This section is referred to as *Sika- Nsa* (receiving of donations).

The following rites, *amamre* have being observed in both the *Dote yie* and *Sika- Nsa* sections. During Friday evening when the Corpse is brought home (in most cases), it is welcome by the family head or any member of the family designate for that purpose who makes libation or verbally welcomes the deceased home. (This is in consonance of the assertion of Gyamerah 2014). The significance of this is the soul of the deceased to feel accepted by his own people which would facilitate peaceful rest in the other world. After that, the family sits in state (as seen on Fig 2) to receive greetings from the general public, amidst sing of dirges and other musical types.



Figure 2: Bereaved Family in state receiving greeting from the public

Source: from the researchers field note

The study revealed that, funeral rites are considered communal events (confirming the assertion of Kquofi et al 2005) and for that matter sympathizers come round to express their condolences through singing of dirges as well as Verbal expressions such as *ye ma wo ya ko* ( have our condolence ) and also shaking of hands of the family members. At this point, a lot of verbal arts and singing and dancing take place. During the *Dote yie*, individuals are permitted to make pronounces to the dead; such as if the death is natural, the deceased should rest peacefully but if it is orchestrated by someone, then the dead should avenge the death. (This observation equally confirms the assertion of Ndah 2014). Individuals who are willing to give things to the deceased are also allow to do so during this period. It was observed that, individuals put items such as White handkerchiefs and monies on the bedside of the deceased. The significance of the handkerchiefs were to help the dead cleans the sweat on the way and the monies as well were to be used to pay the ferry which was to cross him or her to the other world.

The spouse is obliged to present some basic items (*adesiadie*) to be used to dress the corpse. It is so significant because, the beauty of the partner lies on the other spouse. So those things are presented to show love and to dress the partner for the journey to the spirit world. See Photograph of *Adesiadie* on Fig 3 below:



Figure 3: *Adisiadie* being giving to the bereaved family  
Photograph: from the Authors

Another artistic feature that the study revealed was the costume that the sympathizers put on during the observance of the funeral rites. The costumes were made up of Red, Black and black and white. With their interpretation as follows: Red for the immediate family members, Black for any other sympathizer. (This finding equally confirms the stance of Dzramado et al 2013 and Martino 2018). It came out also that, when the deceased happens to die young, Red colour is also worn to show the sadness. In addition, black and white is used for the elderly who have died naturally and at old age. Such colours are put on to celebrate their achievement in life. The black and white dress is also used for the thanksgiving service on Sunday. See the pictures of the costume for the burial day and that of thanksgiving on Fig 4 and 5 respectively.



Figure 4: immediate family in Red whilst other sympathizers in Black and white for thanksgiving service

Source of Photographs on Figures 4 and 5: Authors field Data

The widow is dressed in a special way with a particular haircut known as dancing crown which has been corrupted as *Densinkran*, with a black bathroom slippers, seen on Fig 6below, to match,



Figure 6: Footwear that is worn by bereaved Spouse and Children during funeral rites  
Source: Researchers Field Data

signifying sadness. As part of custom, the widower or widow sitting in state is not expected to shake hands with people. Because of that, his or her hands are covered. The significance of that according to the study was, to avoid possible suitors of making advances at them through the hand shake since is forbidden for the surviving partner to accept suitors without mourning the spouse for at least a period of one year.

Other artistic features were seen through the decorations at the funeral grounds with flowers, lighting systems, canopies and wreaths that were laid on the casket as well as Posters. The study revealed fascinating styles in which coffins were made. They were shaped in different objects such as Bible, Car and Cocoa pod among others. It was revealed that, the designs were made to depict the status or profession of the deceased. For instance, if the dead was a Reverend Minister, the coffin could be shaped like a Bible whilst cocoa pod could be designed for a Cocoa farmer.

The Burial service section begins when the casket is closed and the burial service starts (in the case of Christians). Various musical groups perform in honour of the Deceased. There are reading of biographies and tributes from the family and loved ones. These are done to showcase the life and behavior of the dead, to serve as a source of motivation and lesson for the general public. There are musical renditions by various musical groups as well as bands.

It was revealed that, the Widow or Widower carries a pot on the head and follow the corpse to the Cemetery and break it with the following words *kukuro wie a yabubu no no, ama y'a yonkofa aba awie* . Meaning by the breaking of this pot, our relationship has come to an end. Thus, the breaking of the pot culturally signifies the end to the marriage. If the deceased is a wedded person, the partner alive removes the ring with the verbal pronouncements that, the marriage is over as a result of death, the ring is den thrown into the coffin. This is done to signify breaking every covenant (which would make the spirit of the late to visit the living) with the dead.

Another phenomenon identified was that, a cloth of the deceased was divided and tied around the arm and the head of the children and the immediate relatives. This according to the study was done to prevent the spirit of the dead from revisiting them for negative purposes. (This observation also confirmed the assertion of Adjin – Tettey (1998) that, during funerals in Asante, clothes of the deceased is fastened around the arm and head of the family members).

Another element identified was at the grave yard, the Rev. Minister fetched Sand with the words **woyii wo firii dote mu na dote mu na wobeko** which literally means, you were made out of dust and through dust you shall return. This is done to console the bereaved family that, death is a stage every man must go through.

After burial when the family gathered again, at 2.00pm for the last section, the Nnwonkro, Adowa, Kete and the popular musical types operated by a Disc Joker are performed to entertain the crowd especially the bereaved family to put a smile back to their faces. When the deceased doesn't fellowship with any religious organization, there is a special music and dance called *Soloku* which the youth play to entertain the audience, whilst announcements of donations (*Nsaa*) continues. Find various musical renditions during the funeral rites on Fig 7 – 10 below:



Figure 7: Disc Joker Playing music during funeral    Figure 8: Speakers, transmitting music during funeral

Photograph on Figures 7 and 8 by the Authors



Figure 9: Adowa ensemble performing at funeral    Figure 10: Mourners dancing to Adowa at funeral

Photographs on Figures 9 and 10: Authors field work

Another practice observed during this section of the funeral is that, whenever people donate, there are people who are designated to go and thank the donors. A gesture that signifies that, the bereaved family has acknowledged the support of the donors.

The study therefore revealed three types of art forms that are associated with funerals in the study area. These are, the Visual, Verbal as well as Performing Arts. The Colours of the Costumes, Posters, and decorations at the grounds, Wreaths and the Coffins or Caskets display the Visual arts. The verbal arts manifest through the making of libation, Christian Prayers, Reading of tributes and biographies. The rest are announcements of the



donations (Nsaa), pronouncements by individuals as well as the surviving partner. All the singing and Dancing, performance of various musical instruments are classified under the performing Arts.

## V. CONCLUSION

Funerals in Asante Mampong is involved with many cultural and arts practices that have become part and parcel of the people. These practices and their significance are associated with art forms in the study area which are seen through the Visual, Verbal as well as the Performing Arts. The study revealed that, from death to burial of a deceased, Visual arts are seen in the form of the Posters of the dead that are mounted for the celebration of the one week. On the day of the funeral as well, the decorations at the funeral Palour, Canopies, Coffin, Wreaths are some of the elements that portray the Visual arts; not forgetting the choice of colours for Costumes. It was established that, Costume of Red colour is worn by the close relatives, and black is put on by any sympathizer, whilst black and white is worn for the thanksgiving service. In addition, a funeral of an old person who died naturally could be celebrated with black and white costume to signify life well lived. Also, Red Costume could be used for a young person who has died, to express an emotion of sadness.

Other practices such as making of libation (in traditional burial mostly), Christian Prayers, Pronouncements during the *Dote yie*, reading of tributes and biographies and announcements of the donations (*Nsaa*) all constitute the Verbal Arts; whilst performance of traditional musical types such as Adowa, Nnwomkro, Kete and other Popular and Art musical types which are involved in the funeral are classified as Performing Arts.

Other cultural practices that the study revealed are the children of the deceased and the surviving partner wear a special black bathroosslippers (*Agyanka mpaboa* on fig 6) to register to the general public that they are now orphans, and in confused state respectively. Breaking of pot by the surviving spouse to signify the end of the marriage, and also forming of *Asedafɔ* responsible for thanking those who make donations.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Creative Art instructors and practitioners in various institutions in Asante Mampong Municipality should consider funerals as a source of knowledge since the various rites that are embedded in the funerals portray all the various Art forms. Also traditional authorities should protect original practices in funerals that showcase the culture of the people hence protect them from any form of Western acculturation.

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