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COVER: Chiefs and nobles massed for the Odwira festival durbar at Akropong Akuapem in southern Ghana. The king is all but hidden under his double umbrella. In the foreground appears a gold-leafed carved wooden stool, an elephant, symbolic of the strength and power of the Akuapem state. The central figure on the back cover is chief of the state executioners; he has just returned from paying official homage to the king. Photograph by Herbert M. Cole. (See page 12.)

AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER • UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA • LOS ANGELES

The Art of Festival in Ghana

HERBERT M. COLE

Many festivals in Ghana are "total works of art" (*Gesamtkunstwerke*). They commonly involve countless minor artistic forms and actions (i.e., songs, dances, sculptures, etc.) which can be seen as distinct, but whose separate nature is subsumed in such festivals by the impact of the whole, a continuous and unified event often of surpassing beauty and rich cultural significance. This paper is an examination of the artistic principles manifest in such festivals, and will discuss the relationship of parts to one another and to the unified whole.¹ It will conclude with an interpretation of festival art and meaning.

First a definition: a festival is a relatively rare climactic event in the life of any community. It is bounded by a definite beginning and end, and is unified thereby, as well as in being set apart from and above daily life. Its structure is built up on a core or armature of ritual. The

festival brings about a suspension of ordinary time, a transformation of ordinary space, a formalization of ordinary behavior. It is as if a community becomes a stage set and its people actors with a battery of seldom-seen props and costumes. Meals become feasts, and greetings, normally simple, become ceremonies. Although dependent upon life-sustaining rituals, the festival is an elaborated and stylized phenomenon which far surpasses ritual necessity. It often becomes the social, ritual, and political apotheosis of community life in a year. At festival time one level of reality—the common and everyday—gives way to another, a more intense, symbolic, and expressive level of reality.

Many festivals in Ghana occupy five days or a week; others are compressed into one or two days. Whatever the duration, they are events of great complexity, and often confusion, especially for an outsider. They invoke all available artistic media orchestrated to a common purpose at once spiritual and serious, playful and entertaining. It is in their nature to be meaningful on several levels and difficult to understand, though enjoyable even without a full understanding. They are affecting and appealing experiences to a child and a wise local priest or farmer or chief, to an educated accountant returned home for the celebration and to a stranger. The well-staged festival brings everyone into its ambience. These characteristics and others they share with more conventional works of art. Indeed, the same vocabulary used in describing or analyzing a sculpture, musical composition, or drama can be applied with equal validity to festivals. They have boundaries (i.e., "frames"), compositions and rhythms; patterns, textures, tonality, themes, and contrasts. Motifs and variations occur within acts and scenes, tempos and moods are established leading to climax and resolution.

Odwira in Akropong

To amplify these ideas let us turn to a specific festival held annually by the Akuapem peoples in Akropong, seat of the paramount chief of some 55,000 Akuapem (Kwamena-Poh 1973:3). This

is Odwira, and it embraces several related purposes: thanksgiving; eating New Yam; sacrificing to ancestors and other deities; purifying the king and his people for a New Year; mourning the deaths of the past year; reaffirming political loyalties and allegiances, re-establishing the military order and social ties, and proclaiming the unity of a state organization. This rich, multi-levelled content is reflected in the structures and composition of the five-day event, and tends to characterize most festivals. Both artistic forms and their meanings in festivals are often so numerous, layered and overlapping that they are seldom if ever fully intelligible from any single vantage point. At least fourteen distinct ceremonies occur during the five days, some simultaneously; no single participant or observer would or could be present at all times.

To aid in visualizing the shape of the whole festival, I have reduced it to a schematic and interpretive form, a diagram of "energy flow" as I was able to observe or reconstruct from native accounts (Fig. 4). Two complementary types of behavior are graphed: below the center time-line is my view of the flow of ritual intensity in ceremonies either public or private; above the time-line, the intensity and elaboration of public display and spectacle. As may be observed in the diagram, "ritual intensity" and "display elaboration" are sometimes discontinuous, sometimes simultaneous and interdependent. Together they form what may be called an "energy system" which ultimately calls upon virtually all the ritual and artistic resources of the Akuapem state. The development of several Western art forms—ballet or opera, for example—could be charted along a time-line in an analogous manner.

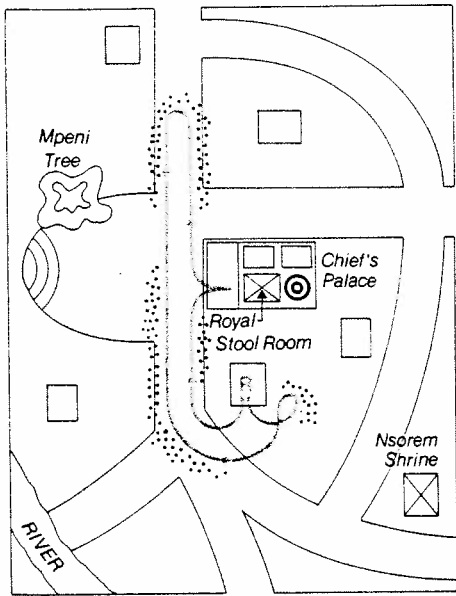
The festival proper begins with the clearing of paths from various points to



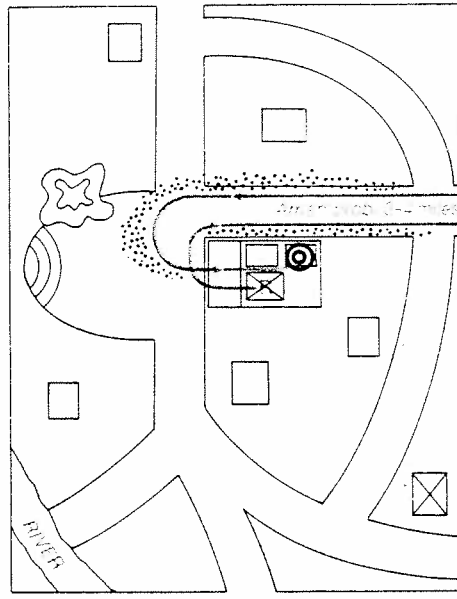
1. ABURUKUWA DRUM OF STATE EXECUTIONERS, AKROPONG.

OPPOSITE PAGE: 2. PARAMOUNT CHIEFS DANCE IN THEIR PALANQUINS, CREATING DRAMATIC PEAKS IN FESTIVAL PROCESSIONS. THE DECORATED CHIEF'S NIECE, HERE PARTIALLY ENVELOPED IN HIS ROBE, ALSO GESTURES AND DANCES, ADDING VISUAL RICHNESS TO THIS SCENE AT ABADZE DOMINASE.

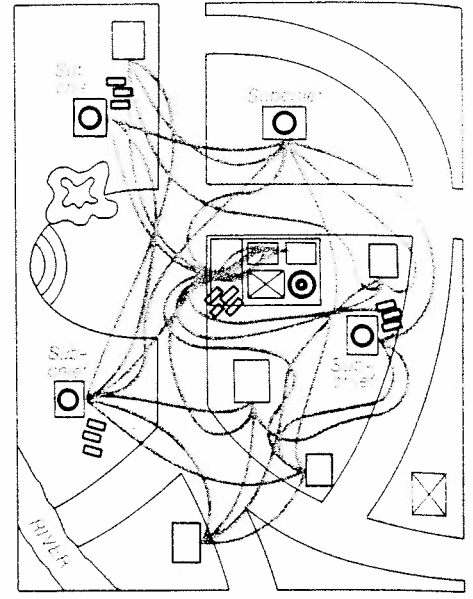




3A. "OUTDOORING" OF NEW YAM



3B. PROCESSION TO AMAMPROBI



3C. DAY OF MOURNING

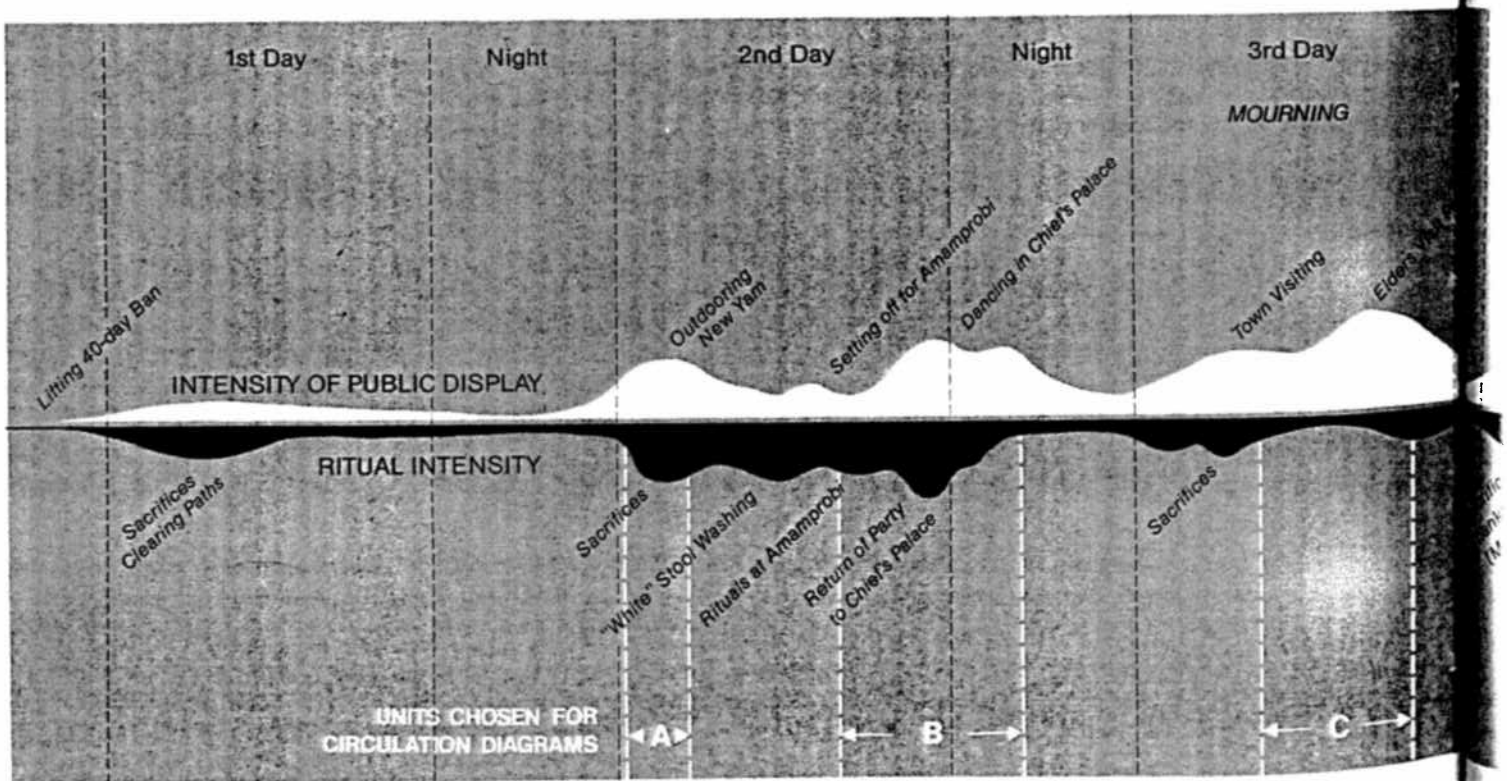
the state capital and festival site, Akropong, so "the gods may come and eat." The event ends five days later, after a magnificent procession, with a grandiose formal gathering during which chiefs revalidate political ties and make final sacrifices. The five-day period is shaped by a rhythmic ebbing and flooding of energy, with a crescendo building to the climax of the final day. This schematic expression of time flow can be supplemented and cross-cut by another type of diagram, shown here in series (Figs. 3A-3G), in which the spaces of the town and circulation through them may be

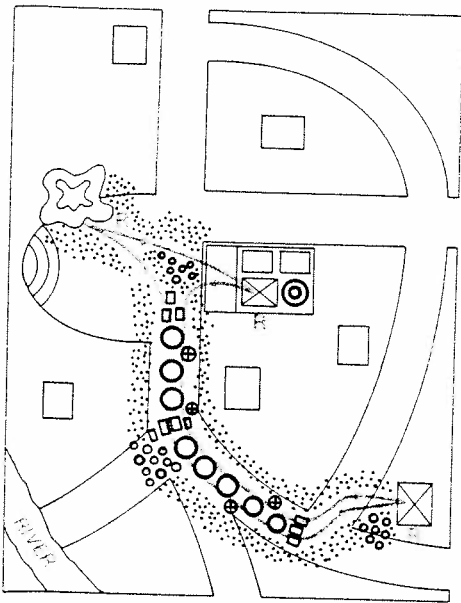
visualized at selected periods of time from a bird's-eye view. Again simplified, these space/circulation patterns make graphic both the *formal* character of different events and the *contrast* of one activity to another. The specific events, somewhat arbitrarily chosen, are several of the more important private and public phases of the festival's development. The symbols on them are explained in the key, and each phase is identified by a letter on the lower part of the time-energy flow chart. It is useful, I think, to give an abbreviated account of the main events of the five-day festival period.

Synopsis of Odwira

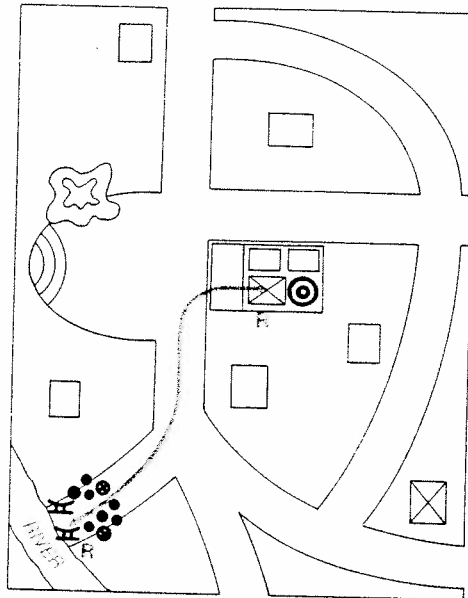
As if to prepare the community for an extraordinary event, priests impose a ban on drumming, dancing, and mourning forty days prior to Odwira. On Sunday before the Monday when the festival truly starts, one of the royal executioners (a clan that now has a largely ceremonial role, with police functions) shoots a gun into the air to lift the ban (Kamena-Poh 1973:150).

Monday. After preparatory sacrifices, pathways are cleared from and within Akropong to shrines, to the royal graveyard some miles distant, and to villages

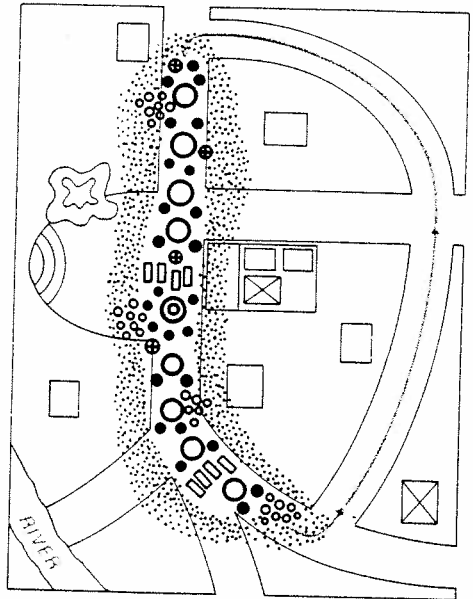




3D. PROCESSION OF SACRIFICIAL FOODS TO NSOREM SHRINE



3E. FEEDING OF BLACK ANCESTRAL STATE STOOLS

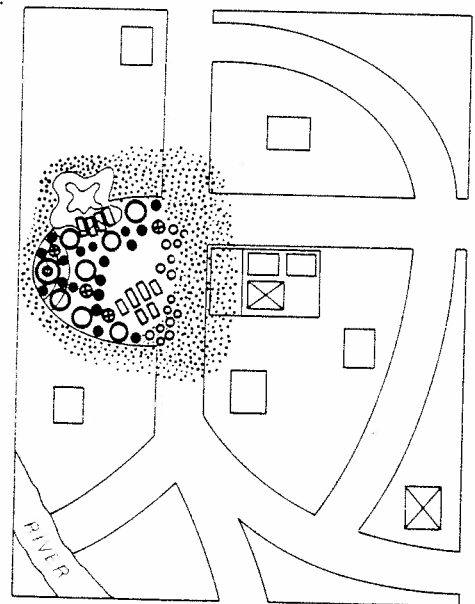


3F. MAJOR STATE PROCESSION

subject to the paramount chief of the Akuapem state. This "path-clearing" has a more symbolic than practical value, especially in these days of greater commerce and mobility; lines of communication to ancestors, gods, and other men are opened that all may reaffirm the integrity of life under their living head of state.

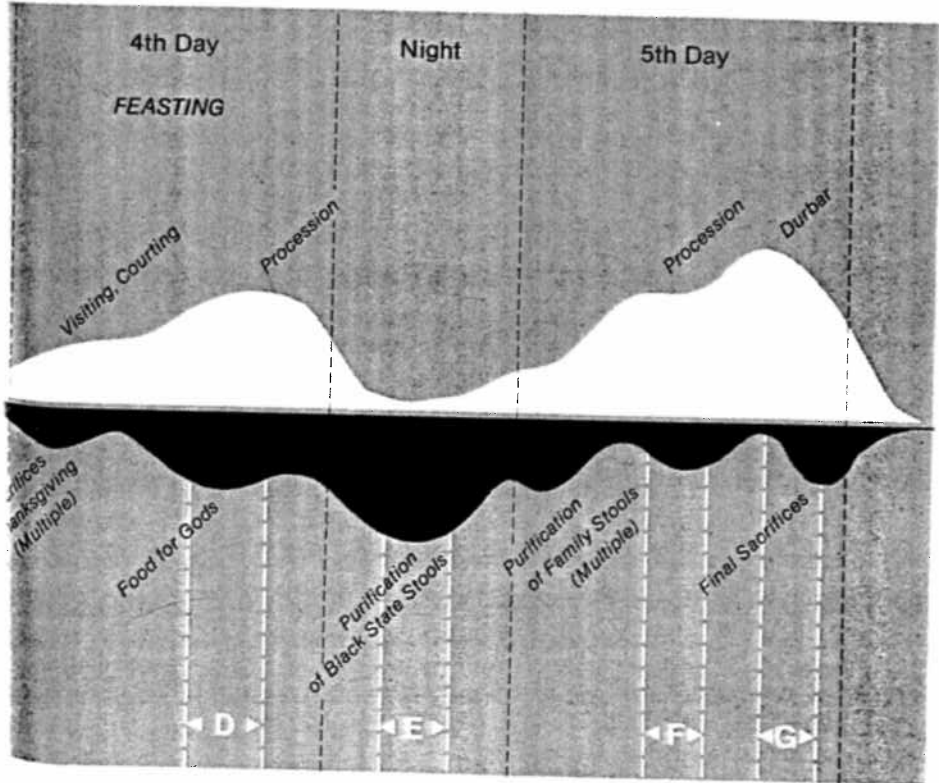
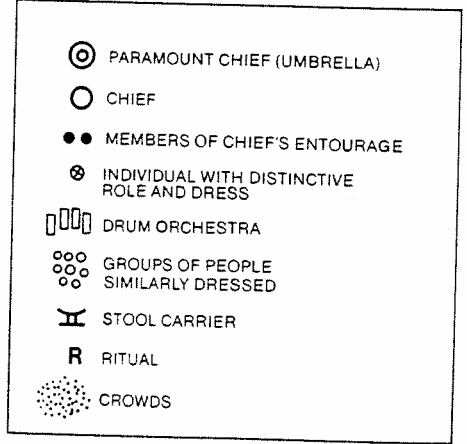
Tuesday. After paths are cleared, the new agricultural year is officially opened. The yam crop, the yield of ancestral lands, is introduced to the gods and people by the town's senior elder. The "outdoring" of New Yam (Fig. 3A)

involves both non-public sacrifices and public display, the latter being a community-wide announcement of the former, including a kind of mock battle or race, when young men compete in kicking pieces of New Yam through the main street of Akropong. Little music and no dancing attend this unusual "procession," and its general tone is more athletic and martial than artistic or stately. At most, two or three hundred people are involved as participants and audience, and the spatial foci are first the house of the oldest living man in Akropong, and then a several-hundred-yard-long section



3G. FINAL DURBAR

3A-3G. SPACE/CIRCULATION DIAGRAMS OF ODWIRA PHASES. BELOW, KEY TO SYMBOLS USED.



4. SCHEMATIC ENERGY-FLOW OF ODWIRA AT AKROPONG



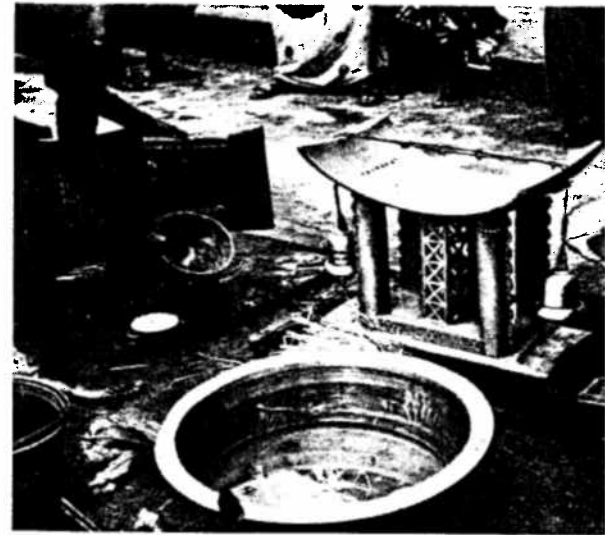
of the town's main street. Clothing is for the most part non-distinctive.

Later the same morning an essentially private ceremony is held in one of the palace courtyards. This is the "washing of 'white' state stools" (Fig. 7). It should be mentioned that for Akan peoples, stools mean far more than mere supports for the body; a person's soul is identified with his stool, and stools thus serve varied ceremonial functions. Those of particularly important dead leaders are ritually blackened, then enshrined, whereupon they serve as ancestral symbols. Five finely carved old stools, some made around 1850 or before,² are carried out by attendants and literally washed and cleaned in large brass basins with certain leaves and medicines mixed with water. Libations are poured, and clearly the stools are purified, although since they are domestic royal heirlooms rather than ancestral symbols (i.e. "black stools"), the rite is neither secret nor as ritually intense as later stool ceremonies. Nevertheless, few observers were present.

The next event (Fig. 3B)—the procession of priests to the royal mausoleum at Amamprobi, three or four miles distant—begins quietly but distinctively (Fig. 8). A solemn tone is set by mournful, measured beats on the executioner's drum (Fig. 1). (This drum, incidentally, is a remarkable piece, carved in relief and covered with intricate brass repoussé.)³ A group of twelve to fifteen people, carrying sacrificial materials and leading a sheep (also for sacrifice), walk to the mausoleum. The group is led by the chief of the state executioners and includes the more important priests of the state (and town). I was barred from the rite itself (though not from the departure or return of the party), but was told that offerings were made at the graves of royal ancestors, and that a purifying, strengthening mixture was prepared from perpetual medicines at this site. This medicine and other paraphernalia, called "Odwira," recalls state history because Amamprobi was the original Akuapem capital (ca. 1731) where sacred state symbols are kept. Brought to the current capital and king, these items and their corresponding rituals represent the purification and perpetuation of the state.

The rather triumphant return of this party draws crowds into the streets. Drumming and some spontaneous dancing converge on the small group as it brings the sacred Odwira medicine to the chief in his palace. In mourning costume the chief receives the party, and aided by the majestic state *frontomfrom* drums, much dancing ensues (Fig. 5). The distinctive reds and blacks of mourning (Fig. 6) are appropriate dress for all in attendance at this crowded reception in the largest of palace courtyards.

Wednesday. The third day is devoted to public and private mourning. As the diagram (Fig. 3C) shows, there is much visiting throughout the town, with circulation patterns diffuse and random rather than strongly focussed. The activities of this day are repeated by all family heads and involve countless libations, prayers, and speeches remembering those who have died during the previous year. The mood is serious but festive, for Akan mourning involves much drumming, dancing, and drinking. Important elders, still in mourning costume, visit the paramount chief in the afternoon to pay him homage and to honor deceased members of the royal family.



7. CEREMONIAL WASHING OF "WHITE" STATE STOOLS. AKROPO

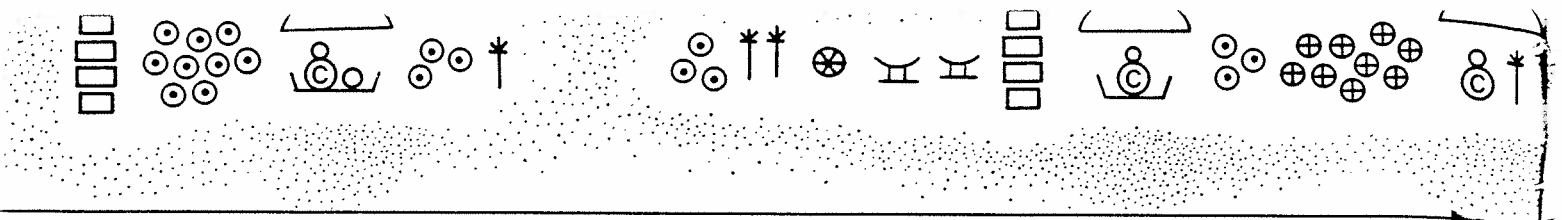


8. PROCESSION TO AMAMPROBI, TUESDAY, AKROPONG.

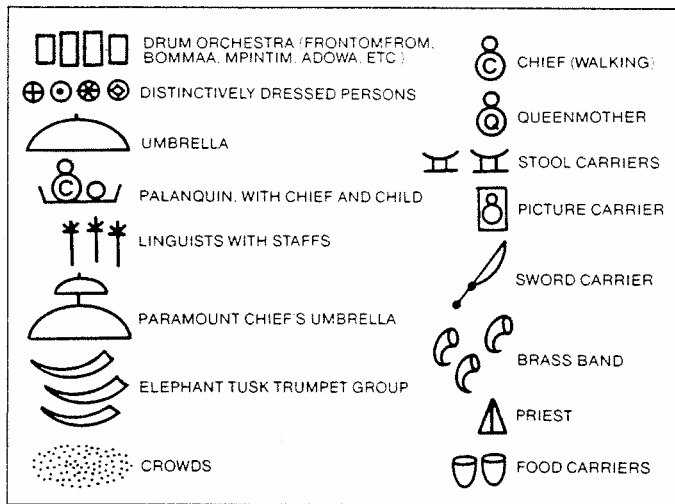


9. SCULPTURED HEARTHES FOR FEASTS. ABODOM.

TOP: 5. AN ELDER DANCING IN PALACE, TUESDAY AFTERNOON, AKROPONG.
 BOTTOM: 6. WOMEN DANCING BEFORE CHIEF, IN MOURNING DRESS, CAPE COAST.



10. AWUBIA FESTIVAL PROCESSION AT AWUTU.



Thursday. A similar pattern of intercompound visiting occurs during the fourth day, given over to feasting. This is a time of thanksgiving for life and health, a day on which townspeople promenade throughout Akropong in their best attire to show off the blessings they have received. Traditionally, too, this is a day of courting and making engagements. Family meetings are held to decide upon issues involving all its scattered members, whose attendance is all but mandatory. In many Ghanaian festivals such feasts are dramatized in two particular ways. The first is the construction of special cooking hearths in public spaces adjacent to family compounds (Fig. 9), in contrast to everyday sites inside. Such hearths are often artistically constructed at the beginning of a festival and ceremonially destroyed at its end.⁴ The second, logically, is the preparation, ceremonious eating and distribution, to ancestors, passersby and the entire extended family, of distinctive and especially rich

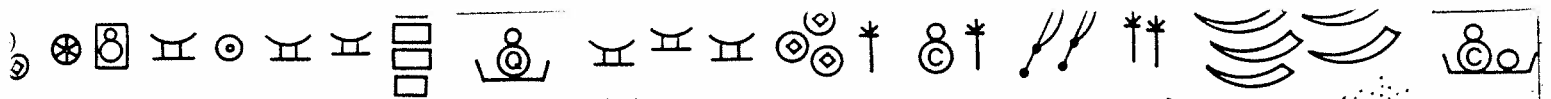
foods that are commonly not eaten during the rest of the year. Such a focus on feasts, reiterated often during the festival period, is a universal aspect of such events, as the etymology of the English word "festival" suggests.

By now the town is full of returned sons and daughters working and living elsewhere, and the atmosphere is buoyant and festive. The first of the week's two major processions occurs that afternoon, when young female representatives of all the chiefs carry sacrificial foods to a major shrine, Nsorem, on the outskirts of the town (Figs. 3D, 15). The gods are honored and thanked and placated with these offerings, made by priests with a restricted audience inside the walled shrine. Crowds of people attracted by the colorful procession wait outside the enclosure; many dance and sing spontaneously to pass the time before the procession returns over its original route to the main plaza of Akropong opposite the king's palace. Further sacrifices are made at the impressive sacred tree there, *mpeni* (Fig. 11), and still others are performed later and privately in the palace stool room.

This large procession included the "sacrificial entourages" of some fifteen chiefs, each party made visible by its sheltering umbrella (Figs. 14, 15). Seven or eight musical groups took part (Fig. 12) and hundreds of people both lined the streets and followed entourages of their choice, the women often fanning with their "covercloths" and thereby cooling and praising the heavily-laden food carriers, who occasionally stumbled, possessed by the spirits they were chosen to serve. Adding complexity and textural richness to the prescribed processional order and its core of essential participants, the "audience"—now onlookers, now active participants—lent an air of informality and bustling interaction with the main actors. A considerable amount of unexpected, unprogrammed action—dance, gesture, song, and other random activity⁵—marked this procession, a contrast to the more formalized and larger procession of chiefs the next day.



11. MPENI TREE AND PUBLIC PLAZA IN AKROPONG. (LEFT) QUITE EMPTY, PRIOR TO DURBAR; (RIGHT) CROWDED, AT DURBAR.



Thursday night. The dramatic peak of ritual intensity followed this procession in the darkness of late evening, night and early morning, when the highly sacred state and royal “black” ancestral stools were washed in the waters of the local stream (Fig. 3E). As I was not present during this time I will quote a colleague, Patricia Crane, who recorded her impressions of the event though she also was barred from the ritual itself: “. . . The brilliance of display, the boisterousness [of previous events] were suddenly held in check by total silence, lack of movement, and non-visibility. For one evening out of the year there was an actual physical separation of the living and the dead, a spatial reversal. When the ancestral spirits are taken out of their shrine [the royal stool room], living inhabitants of Akropong must remain inside their homes. The noise of daily living ceased, giving way to the silence of the spirit.” At 9 p.m. a gong player moved through the town warning people to return home and extinguish lights. By ten o’clock it was eerily still and dark and the only sounds were executioners running and bombing rocks on the tin roofs of houses where occasional lights still burned. After half an hour, total silence and total darkness. Some hours later, perhaps 3 a.m., the blackened ancestral stools were taken by a priestly delegation to the stream, ceremonially washed, thereby purified, then “fed” with the blood of a sacrificial sheep. About 4 a.m. the paramount chief greeted the returning stools and their entourage. Two shots were fired to announce that individual family stools should then be purified, and the royal ancestors—black stools—returned to their sanctuary.⁶

Friday. Begun with solemn and exclusively private rites, the fifth day blossoms later with a crescendo of dramatic public display and political panoply. The week’s most majestic procession is mounted about noon (Fig. 3F). Colorful, gold-bedecked chiefs parade through the major town streets, hedged about by richly embellished members of their entourages. This procession was not held at Akropong



A



B



C

12. VARIATIONS IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE GROUPS. (A) FRONTOMFROM; (B) KETE BAND; (C) MANESHON TRUMPETS; (D) TENSION DRUM BAND.

D



during the Odwira I witnessed (1972) because the paramount chief was sick, but doubtless it would have been similar to others I have witnessed. Participants dress according to office or rank, in multiple variations on the theme of ceremonial finery (Fig. 13). The procession reveals the splendor of displayed political power and wealth in stately movement. A thunderous drum or horn orchestra follows nearly every chief, while each entourage vies with the next in grandeur, elegance, and the size of its following. Scores of gold-leafed swords, staffs, flywhisks, and umbrella tops compete with sumptuous cloths, patterned bodies, elegant hairstyles, and luxurious gold and bead jewelry (Fig. 2). Swaying, twirling umbrellas mark chiefs, linguists and swordbearers, and some chiefs are borne aloft in stately palanquins, expressing their superiority (Fig. 2). Royalty and common people are bound together, however, by ex-

altation and common purpose. The display—activated by drum rhythms, horn blasts and song, made expressive by gesture and dance—captivates, entertains and dazzles; all townspeople, commoner and chief, old and young, are swept into its aura, caught by its majesty. But its multiple meanings are by no means lost. The social order is manifest in the dress and behavior of all participants, whether onlookers or actors.

The procession is in turn measured and orderly or wildly active, transported by vibrant dances, as commanded by drummers. The parade ends at the main town plaza, opposite the chief's palace, where chiefs and nobles sit in state, their king and paramount centered at the highest position under his double umbrella, with lesser chiefs and officials carefully placed according to tradition and rank (Fig. 3G, Cover).

If the procession is the active, *popular* event which maximizes the public visibility of royalty and allied groups (i.e., priests, warriors, executioner clan, voluntary associations, musical bands and so forth) and which stimulates the "audience" to become participants, then the hierarchically disposed and sedentary *darbar* is the cool and formal *political* event which binds the state into a cohesive unit. Socio-political display (the procession) terminates in real but nonetheless symbolic transactions between chiefs on behalf of their people (the *darbar*). Oaths are sworn, speeches given, and drinks are distributed to important people. Formal behavior prevails. Being spatially focussed (Cover) rather than circulating through a mile or more of town streets amid thousands of people, the *darbar* reaches a smaller public—despite the large size of the plaza and the attendant crowds—and energy focusses on reciprocal expressions of loyalty and allegiance among the chiefs in the state organization. Yet these interchanges—expressed in speeches, prayers, dances, gestures and drummed proverbs—represent the solidarity of the renewed, purified state and its leaders, supported on the one hand by ancestral and other spiritual sanctions and on the other by the people at large. "The edges of the years have met," runs a local New Year's maxim, and the cosmos, embracing all Akuapem people, is renewed and thus ready for the trials and triumphs of the year now beginning.

Form and Content

Clearly one cannot separate the significance and content of such a festival from the complex orchestration of artistic media marshalled to express and reinforce such meanings. Indeed the multiplicity of art forms and processes supports the many levels and types of content. Such intricate interweavings of artistic patterns emphasize the importance and depth of the event, as well as present the onlooker/analyst with a profusion of elements and structures. In short, the festival is a complicated and often subtle art form. The fact that a festival may occupy several days rather than a few

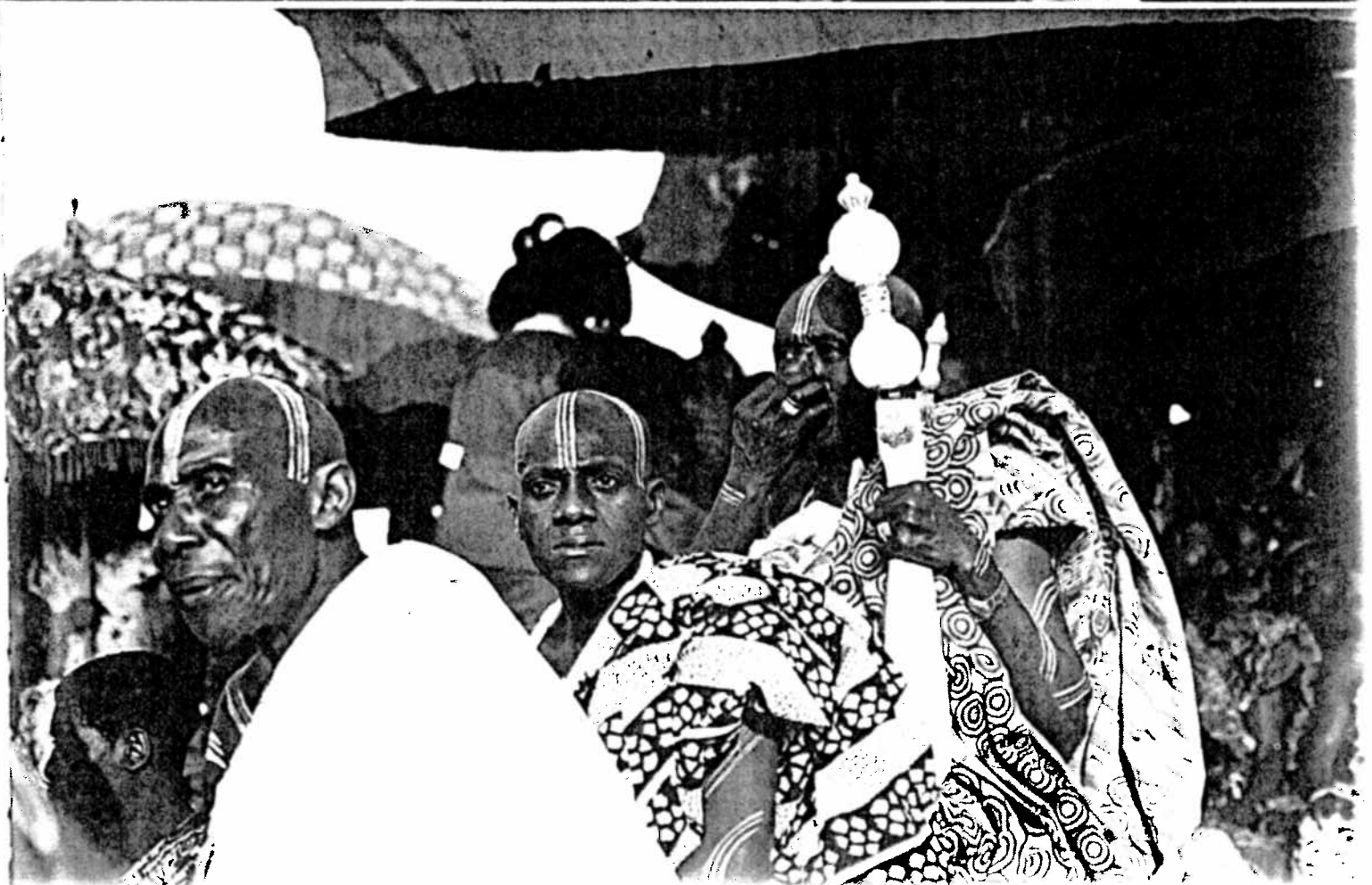


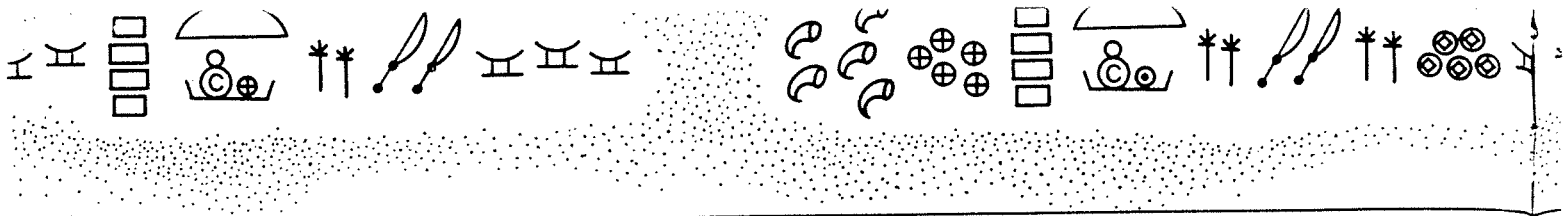
13. SIMILARLY DECORATED PRIESTESSES IN FESTIVAL PROCESSION. CAPE COAST.



14. A CLOSER VIEW OF FOOD-CARRYING PROCESSION SHOWN IN FIGURE 15. ADMIRING WOMEN FAN AND COOL FOOD-BEARERS.

TOP: 15. MAJOR PROCESSION OF SACRIFICIAL FOOD, TO NSOREM ON THURSDAY AT AKROPONG. BOTTOM: 16. THREE SIMILARLY-DRESSED STATE PRIESTS, HOLDING STATE SWORDS.

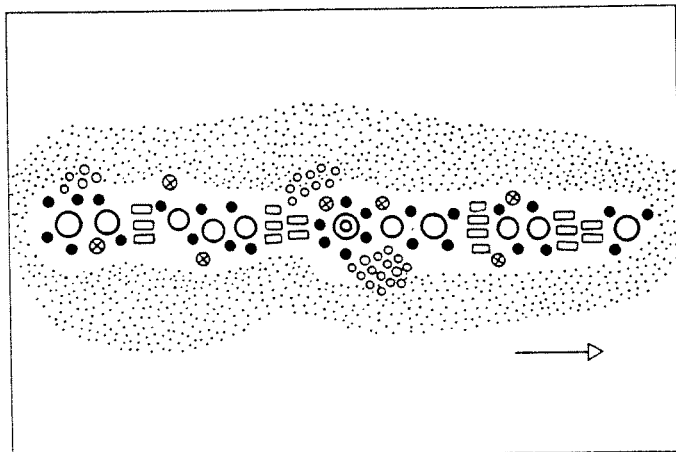
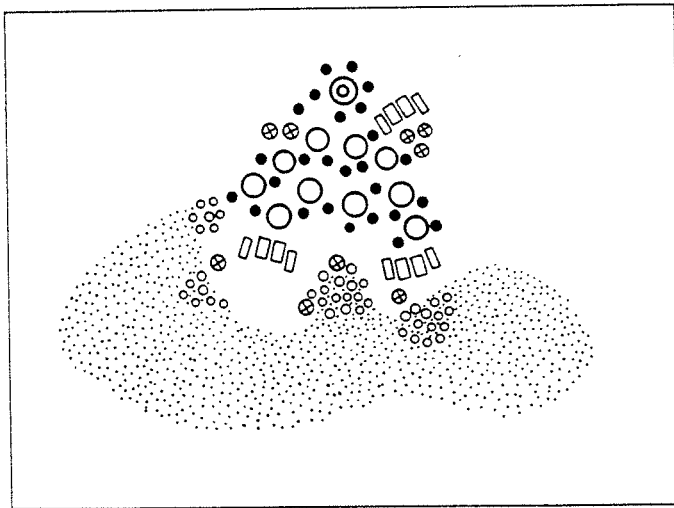




hours, like the performed arts in our culture, detracts not at all from its flow and unity in the minds of local people. In African ideas of time, events can be interrupted (e.g. by sleep) and discontinuous but still linked in purpose and therefore whole. The very length of such a work of art indeed serves to underscore its uniqueness in the ceremonial calendar and thus its centrality in the life of the community.

Structural Elements

Certain structural elements that cross-cut both phases of the festival and its component arts (i.e., music, sculpture, dance, etc.) can be seen as devices which unify the entire event. Hierarchy, repetition, and variation are among the more important. Each of these, too, can be visualized both synchronically and diachronically. Thus a visible *hierarchy* of participants is clearly expressed in the formal seating of chiefs and others at the final durbar (Fig. 17, Cover). The double umbrella of the paramount chief is the apex of a pyramid comprised of lesser chiefs and their entourages; this entire structure in turn rests upon the broad foundation provided by the people at large, the "supporting audience."



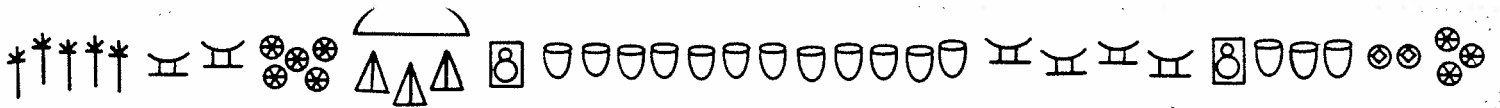
17. HIERARCHY DIAGRAMS. (TOP) SEDENTARY (DURBAR); (BOTTOM) IN MOTION (PROCESSION). SEE KEY PAGE 15.

To this synchronic view, however, must be added the "hierarchy of activities" during the five-day period, the apex being the final procession and durbar, the crowning events in a mounting flood of energy and intensity—both of artistry and of meaning. The "energy flow" diagram can thus be taken as a diachronic view of hierarchy.

Many other hieratic structures are present, too, as might be expected in a socio-political organization such as that of the Akuapem in which a strong centralized leader is supported by varied levels of more or less specialized roles and groups. Thus the majestic spatial hierarchy of the durbar scene is echoed, in miniature, by that of a single chief seated or walking under his umbrella with his linguist and other members of his small entourage (Inside Back Cover). The larger, "linear" hierarchy of a state procession is made up of a linked series of smaller hieratic groups, individual chiefs and their parties, with varied ancillary individuals and groups forming the "sub-base" and the vast audience the base itself. The identities and distribution of main actors in an analogous New Year's festival procession (in Awutu) was accurately recorded (Fig. 10).

The principle of *repetition* follows logically, since each layer in a hierarchy, save the top, is composed of repeated or similar elements of varied character. Repetition, moreover, may be a still more fundamental component of festival structure than hierarchy. Virtually everything is repeated on different levels: rituals, including prayers, libations, sacrifices, and honorific gestures; musical performances; dance; isolable sculptures such as golden staffs, stools, swords and other items; processions; feasting; assemblies and speeches; ceremonial dress, jewelry, body painting and hairstyling. Public events are repetitious, as are private ones; spatial and temporal patterns recur throughout the week and a good many events are repeated simultaneously in scores of family compounds throughout the town (Fig. 3C). Clearly, too, repetitions in visual patterns and artistic processes are expressions of content, that is, they reflect the socio-political and spiritual realities of a complex state and social organization, including the needs of ordinary people to act out their support of the power structure.

All such repetitions, moreover, involve the principle of *variation* to greater or lesser degrees. No two chiefs or priests dress or embellish themselves identically nor do their entourages include exactly the same numbers of people or the same decorations (Figs. 13, 16). Chiefs and many other participants wear different "costumes" for as many different occasions (Fig. 18). No two orchestras among the twelve or more present are the same either in make-up or in the musical pieces played (Fig. 12). A number of men may dance in series to praise the king, but each dancing style is of course individual. Examples could be multiplied. Spatial and temporal variations and contrasts are of greater importance still in establishing the rhythmic progress of festival development. A plaza is now empty, then filled (Fig. 11); one procession is small (Fig. 8) and another large (Fig. 15); circulation is now random, later focussed



along a prescribed route; one day is for mourning, the next for feasting. And in any one event, especially a major public one, there are dozens of individuals or groups whose personal ornamentations and actions are distinctive, thereby providing a visible means of distinguishing among roles (Figs. 13, 16). Visual, auditory, and kinetic variations are nearly impossible to count and document at a major event such as a state procession. The onlooker would have to be in a dozen places at once with eyes in the back of his head. If slides or videotape recordings are made from a distance, then of course individual variations are lost, though the textural richness and artistic depth and multiplicity of the whole are recorded fairly well, and its unity is apparent.

When repetitions and variations are multiplied, as they so often are in a festival, the principle of *elaboration* comes into play. Sights and sounds and motions, nearly all of which are stylized and thus removed from their daily counterparts, proliferate and thereby give an impression of enormous wealth and diversity. Like much of the music heard, the festival itself is polymelodic and polyrhythmic. The fabric of the whole comes from the complex interweaving of liter-

ally hundreds of disparate threads—elements that overlap, change, merge, move, and rest. The *ensemble* principle—a whole comprised of interrelating parts—is present in nearly all festivals.

Pars pro toto

Yet our interest in the whole should not obscure the significance of each element, however small, for it is often a microcosm, as well as being necessary to the existence of the whole. In this regard we may briefly consider what Allegra Fuller Snyder (1972) calls “the dance symbol.” Whether a single dance gesture made by one person or an entire performance by many, dance often symbolizes and supports a people’s world view. Akuapem (and much African) dancing does just that. A dancer who rolls his arms inward, then stretches his right arm out to the end beats of the music, is saying: “If you bind me with cords, I shall break them to pieces” (Nketia 1963:160n). Dozens of similarly meaningful gestures are made by both performers and their audience during the course of a dance (Fig. 5). Festival dancing to state orchestras can refer to

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18. LINGUIST FOR VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION OF ORANGE SELLERS. (LEFT) IN MOURNING DRESS; (RIGHT) IN FESTIVE DRESS. CAPE COAST.

The Art of Festival in Ghana

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historical events, reinforce ritual actions, express the subservience of a sub-chief, the grief of mourners or the ferocity of a warrior. There would, of course, be no dance without music, and with neither of those arts present it is difficult to conceive of a festival at all. Professor Snyder believes that the dancer, internally, experiences "transformation," through which he "experientially builds a bridge between physical reality and conceptual reality" (1972:221). The dancer becomes something more, or "other" than his ordinary self. Though his actions are of course real, he has created an illusion. Many other minor acts and arts could be cited to reinforce this point. A chief's linguist with his sculptured staff serves both to separate that chief from his audience and link him to it. The chief understands very well the voice of the visitor; the linguist is thus an essential (ideological) but unnecessary (practical) intermediary. He is at once minor in any transaction but most significant in expressing the *nature* of the transaction. He is somehow real but at the same time illusory.

Illusion and Transformation

The festival too is simultaneously real and illusionistic: a transformation of the lives and spaces of a town for the brief duration of the ceremonial period. With ordinary life suspended, the community acts out its ultimate concerns. Yet the actors play *themselves*, validating and communicating their own traditional and up-dated ideas of what is

important in the world. The people are also their own patrons, ordering a work of art necessary to their existence, a work that is executed communally by the very same "artists," that is the patrons! The shrines, and the foods fed to gods and ancestors, too, are real. We can ask if the gods really *eat* only if we ask if a Catholic priest really changes wine to the blood of Christ.

The "play element" is very much present, as it is in all ritual, contributing to the transformation and the illusion embodied in the festival (Huizinga 1950). Both *recreation* and *display* are important characteristics of such events, and those words, broken down, reinforce ideas of both play and illusion, a central aspect of play; "re-creation" suggests the cosmic renewal of the New Year, while "display" emphasizes the special, conventionalized character of festival activity, which stands apart from normal behavior. "Representation" stresses the creation, again, of a particular cosmic event, "when the edges of the years meet," when New Yam, a kind of eucharist, is presented to the gods and the people. Despite the varied non-spiritual embellishments of the festival, it remains a sacred performance rooted in and dependent upon ritual. Thus the festival, a *holiday*, is also a "holy day," when gods and ancestors are invited to partake in this blessing which people may enjoy only through their beneficence. And, as Huizinga says, "... with the end of play [festival/ritual] its effect is not lost; rather it continues to shed its radiance on the ordinary world outside, a wholesome influence working security, order and prosperity for the whole community until the sacred play-season comes round again" (1950:14).

The Uniqueness of Festivals

Any work of art—and a festival—is its own lowest common denominator. It cannot be reduced or compressed without being changed into something else. The festival is therefore an irreducible unity with an elaborate temporal and spatial composition and practically infinite numbers of component parts. As in a pointillist painting, each minor unit, each act and object contributes to the impact of the whole. To emphasize the visual arts, such as sculptured staffs or personal adornment, at the expense of verbal, kinetic, and musical arts is to misunderstand the complex but unified orchestration of all art forms which constitute the festival itself. Indeed the relationships among these varied forms give a particular festival its special character, just as components vary. Each festival is unique by virtue of the way in which its "ensemble" is composed and what particular elements and meanings are stressed. Some Nigerian and Cameroon festivals emphasize masquerades, others architecture. In still others, for example Kalabari festivals analyzed by Horton in several publications, dance and music may be emphasized locally more than verbal or sculptured forms, though the latter are certainly present.

In Ghana, too, there are many local variations. The Homowo festival of Ga peoples in and near Accra lacks the conscious visual emphasis of most Akan festivals. In the parts of two Homowo I have witnessed, too, far less spatial and temporal order was perceptible than in Akuapem or Ashanti counterparts. Among the Ga, the ritual process seems to receive greater stress than formalized display, and much activity seems random and spontaneous. Ga processions, for example, lay less stress on measured pace, rhythmic repetition, and hierarchy than Akuapem, Ashanti or Fanti processions. Fanti festivals, in general, seem to fall

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between the Ga and Akuapem examples cited here in precision of spatial and temporal organization, as well as in self-conscious visual display of such things as ceremonial dress. Such variations can perhaps be attributed to differences in the socio-political organizations of the three peoples, though this suggestion must remain tentative pending further research.⁷ In any case, there is much to be learned from a cross-cultural structural comparison of festivals, though it is too early to draw any definite conclusions.

Festival Variation in a Single Town

The four or more annual festivals in any one community can also be usefully compared to one another, for each has its special character and artistic emphasis. Those of Anomabu, a coastal Fanti town, may serve as a brief example. Some are indeed "less artistic" than others, laying greater stress on family rituals with repeated but localized celebrations, or on social interaction and recreation, than on display. This latter is true of the Ahoba festival in which amorphous crowds of people follow drummers and singers throughout the town. Intended to rid the community of all evil, the "energy system" of this two-day event has a random spontaneous quality in contrast to the more self-conscious displays of state and military (Asafo) festivals held in Anomabu at different times of the year. An analogy in poetry is the contrast between blank verse and the more controlled sonnet form. While Anomabu royal festivals are analogous to Odwira—hieratic, highly formalized spatially and well-organized temporally—its Asafo ceremonies are far more democratic displays of large, distinctively dressed military groups which compete with one another in dancing, singing, flag twirling, and performing various skits. While gold and sumptuous multicolored *kente* cloths are the visual magnets in state events, those of Asafo emphasize masses of contrasting, bright uniforms. While the elitist gold-covered staff can be seen as a symbolic leitmotif at royal events, the colorful, embroidered flag, of cheaper, more common materials, is the Asafo counterpart. It is possible, then, to see variations and even a kind of "structural hierarchy"⁸ of festivals in a single community, each festival distinct not only in content but in artistic expression.

Conclusion

The artistic impact of a festival stems not from isolated artistic forms or actions but from the formally orchestrated interaction of all the aesthetic resources of a community. A varied and rhythmic interplay of smaller and larger events establishes a directed flow of energy which engulfs the people and transports them—through the mystery of ritual, the majesty of power and the magnificence of display—to a transcendent plane. Serious play builds an illusion of the world more controlled and more perfect than men actually find it. The festival is thus relief and catharsis and hope, a spatial and temporal pocket in workaday lives; people in the richest of clothes eat the richest of foods and turn talking into prayer and song, walking into dance. The stylized artistry of transient festival life points up the essentially non-artistic character of constant daily behavior. With work and other normal activities suspended, people transform their community into an intensified idealized world of communion among gods and men. Peace and order prevail, and the atmosphere is charged with promise.

Life and art interpenetrate, creating a dynamic interplay, a dialogue between reality and illusion, man and god, form and meaning. Returning to Odwira in Akropong, we can



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visualize these tensions through the metaphor of "call and response":

- dancers respond to the urgent call of drumming;
- food-carrying messengers respond, swaying and bending to the calls of spirits possessing them;
- women, cooling and praising with fanning cloths, respond to the call of these spiritually-laden messengers;
- sub-chiefs respond to the political call of their paramount;
- the festival itself is a response to the call of spiritual and social renewal.

Life itself, throughout the year, is a spacious 360-day round of meaningful social and spiritual activities. But humdrum and ordinary daily life needs to be recharged and renewed. The formalized and charged atmosphere of the five festival days works this revitalization, isolating and dramatizing life's meanings in artistic form. Expressive acts, in the festival, *become* symbols of life and beget still more artistry, and multiple works of art cascade together through the week, climaxing at the durbar.

The artistic energy system of the unified whole stems from man's need to construct a symbolic and idealized world, a model capable of crystalizing and dramatizing those aspects of life which, in any given community, are so crucial to its health and continuity. It is clear that no work of art, other than a festival, is equal to the task of projecting all these meanings in virtually simultaneous form. Festivals, then, are the most important and complex and beautiful works of art in southern Ghana. □

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An Urban Way of Death

Continued from page 47

could not possibly dance well, for neither the *griots* nor the audience would respond to and encourage an ancestor whose appearance was not appreciated. He was certain that they would dance poorly, *animi tyega*, for their feet would become mixed just like their costumes.¹⁷

By late afternoon two *kodugo* (priests who present sacrifices to the various shrines of the quartier), had already made their offerings to the little altar of *Doduma* located to the side of the Rue Setou Fofana, the tarred road which connects Kounima with the heart of the city. They moved on to the *Boro*, the shrine in the compound of the *Yele-vo* which consists of two large forked branches which hold the clay pots of the ancestors, who require the blood of a guinea fowl and the residue of millet beer to sustain them during the *Sakon Kwyie*.¹⁸ From the compound of the *Yele-vo* they proceeded to the *San Ouyaga*, the shrine of two large slab-like stones set upright in the hard laterite soil and located in front of the forge of Moussa Sanou, the most active forge in the quartier. Again the residue of millet beer was poured on the shrine and the blessings of the blacksmiths were asked to insure that the *Sakon Kwyie* be successful. Having completed their tasks, the *kodugo* returned to the compound of the chief and observed while the *Kire-vo* made his final offering to the *Kuru*, the umbilicus of the ward. A five foot high conical shrine given permanence with a coat of concrete wash, *Kuru* insures success in any venture and no important event is embarked upon without enlisting the aid of this mother of all shrines among the Bobo of Kounima.

Two other rituals took place on *Pirisinye*. At dusk young boys between the ages of seven and ten were led by the *Yele-vo* to the edge of the ward and into a grove of palm trees where they were to experience the *sabe*, the introduction of the young to the humanity of the mask. It is during *sabe* that boys learn that masked ancestors are in fact carried by men, and they must take a vow of secrecy not to reveal what they have learned. The boys come back to the quartier bruised, but wiser for their experience, for the lone masquerader that revealed himself in the grove thrashed the boys wildly to impress upon them the importance of secrecy. Between nine and ten o'clock at night the second ritual occurred when infants, strapped to their grandmothers' backs, were carried to the entryway of the *Do-vo's* house to be named and introduced to *Do*. The *Do-vo* blesses each child, whispers into its right ear the name selected by the family, and then twirls the *Fagama*, the bullroarer whose sound is said to be the voice of *Do*, above the heads of the babies and grandmothers who lie huddled on mats on the ground. The Bobo say that one hears the *Fagama* only twice: once shortly after birth when one is named, and at death, when the majesty of the *Fagama* can be appreciated only by the spirit. *Pirisinye*, the white fiber masks after which the second day of the *Sakon Kwyie* is named, will roam about the ward throughout the night. The elders and ritual experts will sleep little, as will the artisans involved in putting the final touches upon the various ancestors that are nearly complete.

At dawn on *Gwentene*, the third day when the "ancestors are unearthed" by the *sinikye* in the fields outside of the city, artists and dancers leave for the bush in order to dress

ekpo society mask/ibibio, nigeria
wood, 18½" high



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42. Cf. William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses* (New York: The Modern Library, 1942), p. 191: "the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document: —of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it. . ."

TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS, *Notes, from page 51.*

1. This is the slightly modified text of a paper presented at the symposium "African Perspective—New Directions" (23-24, February, 1974), organized by the Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles, the Museum of Cultural History and the African Studies Center, UCLA.

2. Since 1971 I have been working with a grant provided by NEH on a synthesis of the Central African arts. Working on the published and unpublished materials available in a score of European languages, and on the art objects in European and American museums, I am truly impressed by the huge amount of scattered, as yet largely unused information, and the difficulty of gathering it together and synthesizing it in a comprehensive manner.

3. For many details on these aspects, see Dieterlen, *Essai sur la religion Bambara*, 1951, 164-165; and Dieterlen, G. and Y. Cissé, *Les fondements de la société d'initiation du Komo*, 1972, *passim*.

URBAN WAY OF DEATH, *Notes, from page 64.*

1. The author wishes to acknowledge the generous support received from various sources for research in Bobo-Dioulasso. My deepest thanks to the Social Science Research Council for making possible a year of initial fieldwork in 1972-73. Thanks are also due the American Philosophical Society for enabling me to return to Bobo-Dioulasso last spring for six weeks of additional work and to the Graduate School and the Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Study at the University of Washington for their supplemental support on both of these occasions.

2. The most comprehensive study to date of the colonial history of Bobo-Dioulasso is to be found in Lucy Quimby's unpublished doctoral dissertation *Transformations of Belief—Islam among the Dyula of Kongbouougou from 1880-1970*, University of Wisconsin, 1972.

3. Several works have been helpful in looking at the 20th century setting of Bobo-Dioulasso. Vedrenne's *Etude Socio-Economic sur Bobo Dioulasso*, SEDES, 1961; Soullat and Varnier, unpublished thesis, *Bobo-Dioulasso—Etudes Urbaine*, Rheims, 1971; the unpublished *Histoire de Tounouma* generously lent to me by the Fathers of Tounouma. My thanks also to Mon. Leopold Ouadraogo, Adjoint de Bobo-Dioulasso, for sharing his knowledge of the city with me.

4. L. G. Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée*, Vol. 1, pp. 370-379.

5. R. A. Bravmann, *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, pp. 49-51. For a well argued assessment of Manding influence in the Voltaic region, see Nehemiah Levzion's *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa*, pp. 145-152.

6. The last reliable census for Bobo-Dioulasso was carried out by the Mayor's Office in 1961 when a population of 55,083 was recorded for the city. The 1969 figures for Bobo-Dioulasso may be low given the relatively high percentage of tax evasion.

7. My figures are based on a compound survey conducted in Kounima during the months of January and February, 1973.

8. The typical funerary cycle will consist of a number of *Sakon* held in honor of those who have lived a worthy and full life. It is still customary to hold a *Sakon* principally for elders. *Sakon Kwyie* occurs at the very end of the series of *Sakon* in order to appease the *Meleke* of all who have died—children, young adults, and even strangers who have inserted themselves fully into the life of a Bobo community.

9. The ritual and symbolic richness concerning the concept and figuration of *Do* is remarkable. I plan to treat this element in full in a forthcoming volume on Bobo art and the city.

10. An historical look at the urban morphology of Bobo-Dioulasso is in progress and should reveal the complexity of the city's growth.

11. *Bolo* are white cloth masks appearing only

during the full moon. The tradition, found widely among the Bobo in and around Bobo-Dioulasso, has been borrowed totally from the Zara or Bobo-Dyula, a culture long resident in Bobo country.

12. This incident was related to me by Moussa Sanou, carver extraordinaire and friend, in February, 1973. He died in March, and his death was honored in the finest Bobo fashion. Much of what I have been privileged to learn about Bobo art and life came from the wit and wisdom of this remarkable man.

13. I have here had to gloss my description of this important event, but hope to detail Bobo burial procedures more fully in a forthcoming paper.

14. The contextual and iconological depths of each of these *sinye* comprise the Sibylline Books of the southern Bobo. I plan to do them justice in a future publication.

15. *Kare*, along with the blacksmiths and farmers, are the essential social components of Bobo culture. Manding in origin, they have been absorbed into Bobo villages over a period of generations. The Jabagate of Dingasso have been musically allied to Kounima since the mid-19th century when they moved from Koutiala in the eastern Bamana country of Mali to Lorhofosso, southwest of Bobo-Dioulasso and from there to Dingasso. Interview with Bakari Jabagate, master musician of the *den den sa*, the pressure drum, regarded as the "mother of instruments," at Dingasso, April, 1973.

16. To excuse oneself, to forgive, is critical during the *Sakon Kwyie*. People set aside their differences and in the presence of the *sinye* they clap their hands three times calling *Sabare, Sabare, Sabare*.

17. The conceptual vocabulary relating to the inter-relationships of the arts in the Bobo language is particularly lively and points to the importance of more embracing research. Visual, choreographic, musical, and gestural elements all call for consideration in the context of any Bobo *Sakoma*.

18. Millet and millet beer in the western Sudan are crucial to the living and to the dead. It is the food and drink of the spirit among the Bobo and one could devote a volume to its importance in this and other Sudanese cultures.

FESTIVAL IN GHANA, *Notes, from page 62.*

1. The research on which this paper is based was carried out under a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship in 1972-73. I am grateful for its financial support, as well as to the University of California, Santa Barbara, for a Summer Faculty Fellowship, an Academic Senate Research Grant, and on my two-months' re-visit to Ghana in the summer of 1974, a Creative Arts Fellowship.

I am of course very grateful to countless people in southern Ghana for their cordial hospitality, as well as for their cooperation and information. Although in communal works of art such as festivals it may be unfair to single out individuals, I would nevertheless especially like to thank Nana Kwame Fori II, the Omanhene of Akropong in 1972; Nana Amonu X, Omanhene of Anomabu; the Awutu Odefoy; the Omanhene of Abeamde Dominase, Nana Kwabu Ewusi VI. Other Ghanians to whom I am grateful: Mr. Ohene-Asante, Senior, Mr. Kofi Ohene-Asanti, and Mr. Adi Darko, all of Akropong Akuapem, and Mr. George Osign of Awutu.

The Los Angeles Ethnic Arts Council's symposium, "African Perspective—New Directions" (Spring 1974) enabled me to work up many of the ideas in this paper. My symposium talk included ten minutes of videotape which I believe made many arguments more clear than still photographs are able to do. I gave another version of this paper to Professor Allegra Fuller Snyder's seminar on dance in the spring of 1974, and I would like to thank her and the students present for their helpful comments.

My own students at UCSB have been instrumental in my thinking on the subject beginning with a seminar on "festivals as works of art" in 1970 and continuing through fieldwork in the summer of 1974. Three students read earlier versions of this paper and made important suggestions for its improvement: Patricia Crane, Michael Coronel, and Doran Ross. My ideas, too, have been influenced

by a UCSB art history M.A. thesis (unpublished) by Patricia Crane, "Odwira, a Drama of the Ashanti" (1971), and an as yet incomplete but important doctoral dissertation on Northern Edo (Nigeria) festivals by Jean Borgatti of UCLA.

2. One stool had two brass bells of European manufacture attached, and one of these has the cast-in legend, "Amor vincit omnia, A.D. 1650." There is, of course, no reason to assume that the date on the bell and that of the stool are coeval.

3. This one unusual drum is illustrated on the one hand for its intrinsic value, and on the other as a symbol for the varied sorts of fine carvings found in such festivals. These individual works of art are manifestly not the focus of this paper.

4. Such hearths may have been present in Akropong, but were not actually observed by the author until 1974, when they were very much evident in closely analogous festivals among Awutu and Fanti peoples. Artistic motivations are evident in the sculptural motifs rendered: varied three-dimensional letters of the alphabet or numerals, stools, hearts, and numerous other carefully finished and apparently abstract shapes which are entirely different from the normal household three-stone hearth, which cannot in any way be called artistic.

5. "Unprogrammed" actions may actually be "expected" in a festival, for as an essential part of its nature, it is a popular event involving the whole community. Because "core" events are necessarily visible and thus meaningful to a fairly limited audience, numerous supplementary "events" are provided by the people themselves both to entertain them and to weld them to the main event, which at once causes this activity and is enriched by it. In this light we can see food and trinket sellers as actually "necessary" elements in a festival's overall design.

6. I gratefully acknowledge Patricia Crane's sensitive observations of these and several other events in the Odwira at Akropong in 1972.

7. Ga peoples are traditionally far more democratic or egalitarian than Akuapem (and Ashanti), while Fanti combine hieratic socio-political structures on the Ashanti model with the egalitarian tendencies of power vested in military organizations (Asafo), and thus fall somewhere between.

8. I am indebted to Doran Ross, who has done valuable fieldwork among the Fanti, for pointing out the hieratic nature of festivals in a single town.

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WOMAN POWER, *Notes, from page 68.*

1. Field research was made possible by the support of the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, the cooperation of the Department of Ethnology, University of Abidjan, and the patience and generosity of the Kufuru elders. I should like to dedicate this article to the memory of a remarkable Senufo/Fodonon woman elder, Solo Soro (deceased July 1970), former head and "Mother" of the *Tyekpa* society which courageously chose to adopt me.

2. Happily, in recent years there have been some notable exceptions to this general tendency. To mention but a few specific examples: Warren d'Azevedo's pioneer studies of the women's Sande groups and the institutionalization of male-female