
A Cultural Analysis of Painted Canoe Symbols and Their Significance in the Fishing Acculturations of Axim and Winneba in Ghana

Kennedy Sangban¹

MPhil, Arts and Culture, Lecturer-Takoradi Technical University

Kennedy Asenso²

MPhil, Arts and Culture, Tutor- S.D.A. Collage of Education, Asokore-Koforidua

James Kwashie Agbeko Yormesor³

M-Tech, Assistant Lecturer-Takoradi Technical University

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijvter.15/vol10n12450>

Published January 27, 2024

Citation: Sangban K., Asenso K., and Yormesor J.K.A. (2024) A Cultural Analysis of Painted Canoe Symbols and Their Significance in the Fishing Acculturations of Axim and Winneba in Ghana, *International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education Research*, Vol.10, No.1 pp. 24-50

ABSTRACT; *This study examined the symbols present on canoe paintings in the Axim and Winneba fishing communities located in the Western and Central Region of Ghana. The research approach employed was qualitative, using a descriptive research design. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and document reviews, with 25 participants providing insights into the phenomenon. The study found that the symbols on the canoes represented the owners' personal relationships and incorporated various art forms such as animals, human figures, multinational telecommunication networks, and football clubs. These images served multiple purposes, including physical protection, decoration, identification, sanitation, and conceptual representation. The researchers recommend that the Ghana Museums and Monument Board (GMMB), the Centre for National Culture, the Ministry of Tourism, as well as individuals and businesses in the tourism industry, should focus on the coastal areas and recognize the cultural significance of the canoe symbols present in the fishing communities of Ghana. By doing so, they can tap into the tourism potential of these areas and use them to attract visitors*

KEY WORDS: Axim, Winneba, Canoes, Symbols, Fishing, Painting and Cultural.

INTRODUCTION

The symbols used in Ghana and other African fishing communities are founded on philosophical ideas that are connected to the folklore of the locals. Some of the symbols engraved on the canoes in Ghana were inspired by local culture. As a result, the symbols that residents of Ghana's coastal

regions imitate on their canoes are figurative forms and things that showcase the locals' culture. The Carib term 'Kenu, which means dugout log for transportation, is where the name "canoe" originally came from (Kirk, 2011). According to Johnston (2012), a canoe is an object that has a small, pointed vessel at each end and can be paddled by one or more individuals facing the direction the ship is travelling. In his explanation, Johnston makes the assumption that modern canoes come in a variety of designs and materials that are appropriate for a range of hydric environments as well as for recreational or competitive purposes. He sees it as a portable, slender boat with an open top for fishing, hunting, and enjoyment. Since time immemorial, these canoes have been adorned with symbols for communication. These canoes' insignia stand for concepts held by Ghanaian fishermen, including those related to nature, religion, socialism, economics, clans, and ethics, as well as the aesthetic impression of their communities. The canoes' symbols and inscriptions convey concepts about the universe's structure, political ideologies and institutions, social, economic, and ethical ideals, as well as aesthetics and family-related concepts.

Canoes have been utilised by residents of coastal regions, riverbanks, and lakes all over the world as a mode of transportation and a fishing tool. Although they are still in use today, canoes took thousands of years to develop into the significant watercraft that they are today. Native Americans in North America constructed and utilised canoes as a means of transit between coastlines (Native American Canoe, n.d.). The majority of canoes were painted and embellished with symbols by painters from all over the world. These canoes were also not left unpainted. This demonstrates that the majority of canoe painters were paid to customise their work to the owners' philosophies.

The study was based on the idea that Ghana has a long-standing artistic heritage of using traditional symbols on canoe decorations, particularly among coastal populations like the Nzema in Ghana's Western Region and the Effutu in Ghana's Central Region. Canoes are utilised for short distance travel within coastal settlements as well as for fishing excursions. A tour of Ghana's coastal region reveals that the majority of the fishing villages have their canoes painted and decorated with patterns, symbols, and inscriptions. The decorations on these boats, particularly the emblems, reflect philosophical ideas based on the locals' traditional ideals. In addition, these embellishments make the identification of the canoes easier since the canoe is then named after the image or symbol made on the canoe. Along the Western Regional coastal belt, the fishermen used traditional symbols, images, inscriptions, and flags, as well as proverbs and messages, on the canoes for decoration. These philosophies of traditional symbols such as images, forms, and proverbs are transmitted to successive generations to project the culture of canoe embellishment in Axim and Winneba fishing communities.

Statement of the Problem

Canoes are painted and designed for protection, identification, beautification, and conceptual purposes. The embellishment of the canoe with the symbols has philosophical concepts rooted in the tradition of the people in the fishing communities. This traditional art form has been passed on from one generation to the other, mostly without any significant changes. Despite the abundance

of research on fishing cultures in Ghana, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the symbols on canoes and their cultural significance in Axim and Winneba communities. The lacuna in our knowledge becomes glaring when considering the crucial aspects of protection, identification, beautification, and conceptual symbolism associated with these adorned canoes. The lack of a thorough exploration of these symbols and their nuanced meanings in Axim and Winneba impedes a holistic comprehension of the profound cultural heritage embedded in this traditional art form. By delving into the cultural significance of these symbols, we aim to unravel the philosophical concepts underpinning this age-old tradition. This study aims to fill this gap by identifying and examining the canoe symbols and their meanings in these two fishing communities.

Purpose of the Research

This study seeks to bring clarity and depth to the intricate world of painted canoe symbols in the fishing communities of Axim and Winneba, Ghana. While canoes have long served utilitarian functions, their adornment with symbols transcends mere aesthetics.

Objective of the Research

Identify and examine the symbols on canoes and their cultural significance in Axim and Winneba fishing communities of Ghana.

Research Question

What are the symbols on canoes and their cultural significance within the Axim and Winneba fishing communities?

Scope of Research

This research is limited to the cultural analysis of painted canoe symbols and their significance in the fishing acculturations of Axim and Winneba in Ghana

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on semiotic anthropological ontology and examines the meanings and authenticity of specific canoe symbols in the Axim and Winneba fishing communities. The framework draws on the work of scholars such as Peirce, Barthes, Saussure, Jakobsen, Morris, and Eco to define semiotics as the study of signs and their meaning (Eco, 1979; Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993; Panuti & Zoest, 1996; Chandler, 2002). Related theories from Geertz, Ortner, Turner, and Gottlieb on semiotic anthropological ontology were also used to formulate the framework (Amoaten, 2018; & Ntarangwi, 2010). The framework views the symbols of canoe painting in Axim and Winneba Fishing Communities as a system of meanings that attribute to the phenomenon, helping the study examine the perspective of images and symbols on

canoes and their cultural significance. The framework emphasises the symbolic and interpretive anthropology of symbols on canoe paintings in the Axim Fishing Community in Ghana.

Cultural Concept

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Oswell (2010) also argues that the object of cultural theory is specify as opposed, for example, to social theory, literary theory or political theory is itself a problem which raises question of whether cultural theory is a theory of culture insofar as ‘culture’ might be said to designate the object of its study in the same way that politics (and the political) and literature (and literariness) are seen to be the objects of political theory and literary theory. However, Cultural concept is on the cognitive level of theoretical thinking and scientific perceptive where one decide that any procedures in the world around each of us are worthy of being recognized as objects of study and that these objects are then deliberate from a ‘culture point of view’, he further stated that most concepts of culture have been developed within the traditional limits of individual scientific disciplines. Therefore, for the key concept in cultural theory that was edited by Edgar and Sedgwick (2005), they were of the view that ‘culture’ is immanent to human experience, yet this very immanence makes the term difficult to define in a univocal sense. According to them, cultural theorists have generally held the word ‘culture’ to have a polyvocal sense, either a plurality of meanings (a view that has, in recent years, frequently taken its point of departure from some of the central tenets associated with postmodernism). This plurality has, in turn, often been cited as the distinctive feature of cultural theory. They argue, in short, that naturalised concepts are in fact social constructions that can be questioned in the wake of a growing information of the pluralism of social forms.

Theory of Canoes

The word canoe originated from the Caribbean word “kenu,” literally meaning dugout. Constructed between 8200 and 7600 BC, and found in the Netherlands, the Pesse canoe may be the oldest known canoe (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Popescu, 2015). Excavations in Denmark reveal the use of dugouts and paddles during the Ertebølle period, (c. 5300–3950 BC). They were ideal for individual transport and were used primarily for hunting and fishing. The Canoe, on the other hand, was utilised on a much wider scale. From the Native American tribes to the Polynesians, the canoe enjoyed a variety of scales and uses, primarily transport, trade and warfare. Athletes paddle from a sitting position with a double-blade paddle (Slayton, 2018).

Canoe sailing has certainly remained practised since the start of the original canoe by the aborigines. According to Volmar (2018), the indigenous people discovered the first canoe which was developed from the floating log, burned out or hollowed out by crude tools, and sharpened at both ends. Then frames were covered with skin and tree bark, leading to the better types of easy

riding kayaks of the Eskimo and the beautiful lightweight birch-bark canoes of the Indians. However, the wooden canoe built of cedar with basswood or mahogany became the first modern canvas covered canoe. However, history tells us that sails, too, have developed from skin bark and woven reeds which followed later by crude square sail and lug rigs made from Hudson Bay "Point" blankets, ponchos, and odd pieces of cast-off canvas. Then today, we discovered a light, carefully woven sailcloth accurately cut to well-fitting lateen, jib-headed and sloop rigs (Tyson, 1935). According to oral tradition the Fanti's were the first group who introduced fishing to the Ga in Ga Mashie (Central Accra) La (Brown, 1947), and Teshie and even to the Ewe of the Volta Region in the eighteenth century, cited by Verrips in his study. Today, Fanti, Ga and Ewe fishermen can be seen working together along the coast in Ghana and also the coasts of neighbouring countries, for migration abroad is an often-happening phenomenon (Jorion, 1988; Odotei, 1992).

Understanding Canoe

Canoeing holds different meanings for people around the world. According to Sayour (2010), a canoe is a boat where individuals sit with legs underneath them, using a single-bladed paddle for propulsion. Johnston (2012) defines it as an aquatic activity using a small, sharp-ended boat, paddle-propelled by one or more persons facing the craft's direction. Canoes come in various shapes and materials for different water conditions and purposes, with open canoes being popular for recreation, hunting, and fishing. Early canoes and kayaks were used for transportation, survival, and trade, likely made through carving and burning trees into dugouts. Native Americans in the northern region created birch-bark canoes. Walden (2012) cites Sayour, describing canoes as open boats paddled with a single-bladed paddle. Canoes are lightweight, durable, suitable for various water conditions, and can be paddled, poled, rowed, or sailed.

Dartey (1984) focused on Ga ethnic embellishments on fishing canoes, detailing the process from felling trees to smoking the canoe. Old materials for decoration included vegetable colours, animal fats, clay, plant dyes, lime, and bitumen, while modern materials included enamel paint. Dadzie (1994) notes that in Akan language, a canoe is called "Hemba" or "Hyemba," derived from "ehyen" (vehicle) and "ba" (small), referring to any means of transportation. The tradition of canoe decoration in coastal areas predates European presence, passed down through generations via oral tradition (Walden, 2012, citing Dadzie, 1994).

Types or Forms of Canoes

There are three basic types of paddling: sea, flat water, and whitewater. Generally, Iowa's waters are flat water (lakes/ponds or slower rivers and streams). Moreover, there are four types of canoes for flat-water paddling: recreational, touring, racing, and freestyle. The flat-water kayaks can be split into three types: recreational, touring, and racing (Iowa Department of Natural Resource, 2004).

Sayour (2017) corroborated with the Iowa Department of Natural Resource that those different possibilities suggest types of canoes. Sayour (2017) emphasises a list and description of different types of canoes to help one navigate the different options one has when choosing a canoe. He

points out the following as types of canoe due to its purposes: recreational canoe, intermediate and advanced canoes, whitewater canoes, racing canoes, other specialised canoes, solo canoes and tandem canoes. He therefore argues his views on each of the points raised, why the purpose of the canoes determine the type of canoes.

Structure of Canoe Design

Iowa Department of Natural Resource (2004) illustrated the part of canoe as a teaching module to the student. According to them, the following are the parts of canoe, especially kayak canoe:

Canoe

Deck: panels at the front and back of the canoe

Freeboard: distance between surface of water and gunwale at the middle of the canoe

Gunwale: (pronounced “gunnel”) - top edge/outside rim

Keel: reinforcing fin that runs along the centerline of the bottom; may be inside or outside

Thwarts: (pronounced “thorts”) - braces that reach across top

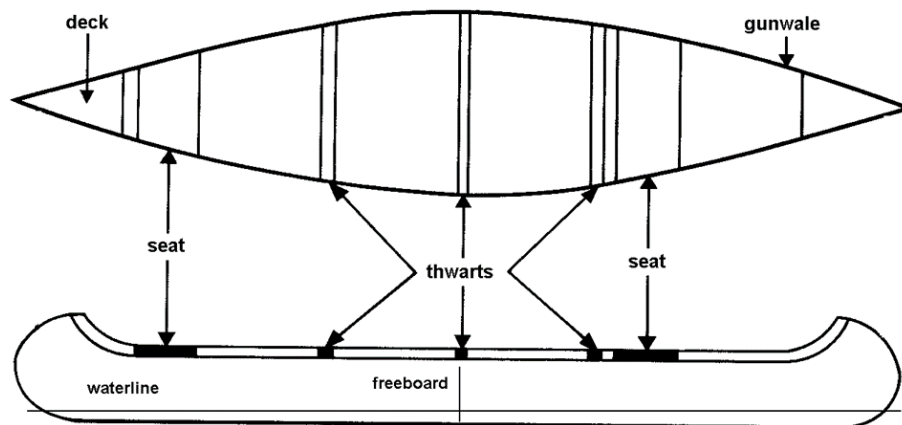


Figure 1: Parts of Canoe

Source: Iowa Natural Resources Department (2004).

Kayak Canoe

Braces/support walls: made of waterproof foam; keeps deck from collapsing onto legs from pressure

Floatation bag: buoyant material that prevents kayak from filling with water

Foam knee pads: protect your knees and keep them from sliding around

Foot peg: used to place feet; may be adjusted to brace knees under side of the deck.

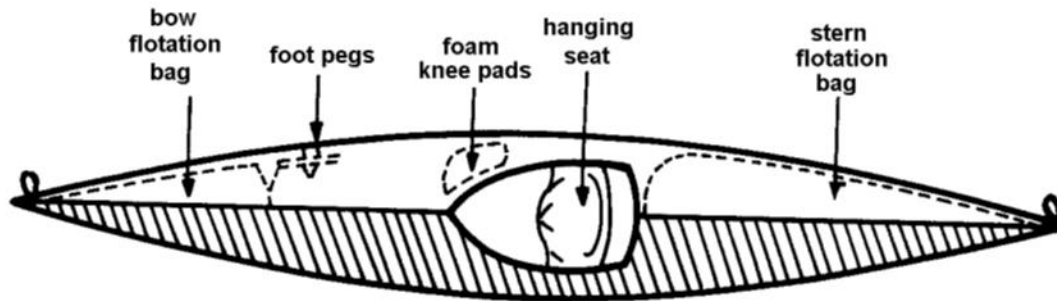


Figure 2: Parts of Canoe

Source: Iowa Natural Resources Department (2004).

Iowa Department of Natural Resource (2004) opines that canoe paddles are single bladed made of wood, aluminium, plastic, fiberglass. The blade ranges from five to eight inches wide, and from eighteen to twenty-four inches long. These canoe paddles should be light and strong to paddle a canoe in water. They further discussed in their document that the paddle has two types of shafts known as looms, which are straight and bent. These straight shafts are easy to manipulate. Bent shafts are more efficient and powerful due to the built-in angle. Iowa Department of Natural Resource, believe that the grip of the paddle should fit smoothly and comfortably in your hand. To them, there are two types of grips: T-grip and palm grip. The T-grip allows a firm grasp with precise control that can be used in all waters. The palm grip creates a better platform for hands and typically is used only on flat water. They describe the end of the blade as the tip of the paddle. Tips sometimes are made of a stronger material than the rest of the paddle because it is exposed to rocks, stream bottoms, snags, etc. They also said in their document that the throat is where the blade attaches to the shaft of the paddle.

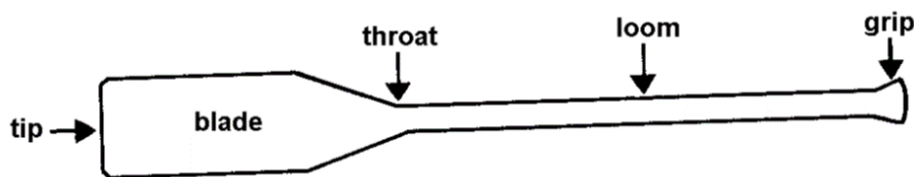


Figure 3: Parts of Canoe paddle

Source: Iowa Natural Resources Department (2004).

Canoes Construction and Design

In ancient times, large trees like Wawa or Triplichiton scleroxylon were commonly used for building canoes in the coastal forests of Ghana (Brown, 1947). However, these trees became scarce

near the coast, requiring people to travel deep into the forest to find suitable trees with at least a 165 cm diameter for canoe construction. The Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia (2003) notes that canoes were developed by various cultures worldwide, each with variations in shape, size, and construction methods based on their place of origin. The oldest form of canoes was likely created by hollowing out tree trunks using tools or fire. Walden (2012) suggests that due to the lack of suitable road systems, canoe production sites were typically near rivers, as transportation of the dugouts to the coast was necessary. Historical accounts, such as Bowditch in 1819, point to Shama at the mouth of the Pra River being an important canoe production centre in the 18th century. By the beginning of the 19th century, one had to travel six hours upstream to find a similar production site on an island in the middle of the river.

Sheves (1991) mentions that the right wawa trees for canoe construction are found in various vegetation zones in the western Ashanti Region, southern Brong Ahafo Region, and to the north of the Western Region in Ghana. Asare (1982) provides insights into the cultural significance of canoe construction. Trees are personified, and rituals are performed to pacify them before being felled. The process reflects the suffering and trauma the trees undergo, with the carvers making their friends and relatives disappear one after the other. However, the trees are said to appreciate their new forms as canoes after carving, highlighting the traditional carvers' connection with the natural materials. Asare also describes the transportation of canoes from the forest to the beach, involving pouring libation at the beach upon arrival. Final touches on the canoe, including carving designs, adding embellishments, making seats (thwarts), and smoking, are completed after this ritual.

Odotei (2002) also cited de Marees (1602) who described canoe making in Ghana (possibly among the Fantis) as follows:

The canoes were first hewn in an oblong form with machetes. The upper part of the sides are made a little narrower and flat at the bottom, then the upper part is made open; both ends, front and back taper narrowly like a hand-bow so that the front and rear ends are made in virtually the same fashion and there is a little difference in them except that the front is lower. At both ends they make a bow like the cut water and bow spit of a ship, one foot long and as thick as the palm of a hand which they use to carry the canoes to and fro. They hallow it (the canoe) and with an iron chisel of the kind used by makers of bailers, they make the sides only one finger thick and the bottom two: when they have finished hallowing (the canoe) out, they fire it with straw to prevent it from being eaten by worms and by the sun. They support the boards or sides with props so that they will not shrink but become even and smooth.... Thus, they make their canoe and little barges quite pretty and artistic (p.119).

Trees Felling for Canoe Construction

Agbenu (2011) described in his research of canoe culture in Ga and Adangbe about how the trees fell from the forest for canoe construction in Ghana. Agbenu is of the view that chainsaw operators of the timber companies are contracted to do the felling of the tree. Trees within 10 to 50 metres radius of the wawa tree to be cut down depending on the size of the tree.

When Agbenu was discussing canoe construction, he was of the view that “Tetrewa” and “Tinii” tools are used to give the vessel its basic contours. The dug-out section is extra hollowed to smoothen the hull's interior and to decrease extreme thickness of the side (gunwale).” (p.xcvii).

The researcher therefore discovered that Agbenu (2011) and Walden (2012) were in agreement with the intention that the canoe's construction or carving process start from the forest and end at the shore of the beach. The artist which comprises sculptors, painters, carpenters, and so on do the detailed work in the shore to put uncompleted canoe from the forest to the right shape of canoes we see today.



Figure 4 A, B, C & D: Images of canoe construction:

Source: Agbenu (2011), Ga and Adangbe Canoe Culture

Painting

Recent research indicates that paint is composed of pigment, binder, solvent, and other additives. Pigment provides colour, substrate coverage, opacity, and strengthens the paint film. The binder transforms liquid paint into a solid, glossy, and elastic film, enhancing adhesion and resistance to

water, chemicals, and abrasion. Solvent thins the paint components, aiding in application without adding colour to the pigment. Additional additives contribute specific characteristics to the paint.

Painting, as defined by Amenuke et al. (1991), is a major method of creating pictures in contemporary art, involving applying coloured substances to surfaces like wood, canvas, or walls. Artists often use painting to document historical events, places, or individuals, preserving significant aspects of the past. Throughout history, painting has evolved from prehistoric cave drawings to diverse forms, mediums, techniques, styles, sizes, and philosophies. For this study, painting is seen as the expressive application of paint, pigment, or other mediums to convey a message, as well as the act of applying paint to surfaces like canoes for protection, preservation, sanitation, or decoration. Various tools such as brushes, rollers, spray guns, and painting knives are employed for this purpose.

Importance of Painting Canoe

Contemporary painters communicate their expressions through the interaction of paint and brush, using embellishments to convey intended messages to the public. Gorman and Feist (1989) highlight the Forest Products Laboratory's extensive research on wood finishing for outdoor use, emphasising the protection of wood from moisture. Prestemon (1999) notes that exterior finish durability is influenced by wood characteristics, with hardwoods requiring more care than softwoods. Paints offer the most protection against weathering. The durability of paint coatings on exterior wood is affected by factors such as species, density, texture, moisture content, and the presence of defects. Frequent painting depends on wood characteristics, treatment before embellishment, paint quality, and exposure severity. Dresdner (2002) stresses the importance of good surface preparation for long-lasting paint jobs, preventing common problems like peeling.

Dresdner (2002) emphasises that most paint problems can be avoided with proper preparation, advocating for clean surfaces, well-caulked seams, and the absence of loose material. He suggests using primers designed to prevent bleeding for woods prone to bleeding into paint. Moisture is identified as a cause of peeling, especially with oil-based paint. The researchers recommend regular painting and decorating of canoes due to their constant exposure to water. In cases of peeling, blistering, or cracking, the advice is not to paint over it, as it won't stop the issue. Instead, the best approach is to remove old or thick paint, use scrapers or a heat gun, and sand the surface before priming for decoration or embellishment.

The Culture of Canoe Embellishment in Ghana

According to Agbenu (2011), canoe decoration serves a dual purpose of protecting the wood from water absorption and transforming the canoes into colourful art pieces. Bitumen is commonly used as a primer, with enamel paint of various colours applied flatly and in sections. The choice of colours follows a systematic pattern, with lighter and brighter colours at the top and darker colours at the base. The style and colour choices often depend on the community or tradition. Verrips (1991) adds that canoe painting involves instructions from the owner, who may consult a fetish priest for advice on treating the canoe, observing taboos, and using fetishes for good catches.

Feeding rituals, such as feeding the canoe with mashed yam mixed with palm oil, onions, and eggs, are common. In the 1930s, canoe decorations embodied animal motifs representing Akan sayings, with white, blue, and red being popular colours for designs on the gunwales. Walden (2012) observes that non-Christian fishermen sometimes incorporate shrines or juju in their canoes for protection and a bountiful catch. These are often hidden inside the canoe, and rituals may be performed before actual painting. Small bottles with coloured liquids covered with egg and fowl's blood are sometimes found concealed in the canoes. Overall, the practice of canoe painting in Ghana is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, incorporating both aesthetic and spiritual elements.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to answer the research problem. This involved using a descriptive research design to observe study limitations and record observations made in the field. The researchers used photography of canoe symbols in both Axim and Winneba to uncover their respective philosophies. The population for the study consisted of chief-fishermen, fishermen, canoe owners, canoe designers, and painters who had comprehensive knowledge of the philosophical concepts behind canoe symbols in these communities. To select a representative sample, the researchers used purposive sampling techniques based on homogeneous type. The sample size comprised twenty-five people from the six main accessible population groups. The study employed a descriptive procedure to present the ideas and evidence in a coherent and vibrant manner. The study employed participant observation, review of documents, unstructured interviews, and visual data collection instruments to gather data from Axim and Winneba fishing communities. Thematic and visual analysis was used to interpret the information gathered from the field, which was organised into themes based on the research questions. To ensure trustworthiness, the study focused on transferability, which refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other contexts. The researchers sought permission from the authorities in the two communities and ensured anonymity and confidentiality of all participants. The names and addresses of the participants were replaced with codes, and participants were encouraged to participate voluntarily and withdraw from the study at any time.

Table 1: Groups of Respondents

Groups	Respondents
Chief-fishermen	5
Canoe owners	4
Fishermen	8
Canoe makers	3
Canoe painters	4
GMMB	1
Total	25

Source: Researcher Fieldwork, 2020

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

What are the symbols on canoes and their cultural significance within the Axim and Winneba fishing communities?

Painted symbols established on canoe and their cultural significance in Axim fishing community

The Axim fishing community is a popular group of fishing expeditions in Ghana. The researchers visited this fishing community to establish painted symbols on canoes and their cultural significance that influence the people in the area.

Painted canoe symbols established on canoes in Axim

“Axim fishing community is one of the biggest fishing communities in Ghana” (Esuah, personal communication, February, 2020). It was not easy for the researchers to walk through the whole fishing community. Nevertheless, by the use of two cameras on the field, the researchers were able to identify numerous canoes painted with symbols, which has relation to the study. According to the chief fisherman Esuah (2020), the settlement of fishermen had four hundred and twenty-five (425) canoes. To him, the community has divided into four (4) sub groups with one fisherman as a head to the group. He was of the view that each canoe owner has its own peculiar idea behind the symbols painted on their canoes. Therefore, the researchers randomly selected some of the canoes, which symbols speak to the study.

The following are some of the symbols established in the Axim fishing community, with their symbolic names and cultural significance:



Figure 5: Showing pictorial of a painted image on canoe, entitled: “Agya pa” (Good Father)

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2020

The figure 5 depicts a scene of a canoe with various symbols and letterings that hold significant meaning for the people living in the Axim fishing community. The human figure painted on the canoe was inspired by the Holy Bible and represents the owner's father, whom he fondly calls "Agya pa" or "Good Father." The owner inherited the canoe from his father's property, but he decided to name it after his father and add the image to honour his memory. Since then, the owner has expanded his fleet to 15 canoes in Axim, and the community believes that the spirit of the owner's father is still with them. Moreover, the owner explained that the paint on their canoes protects the wood, and the human figure serves as a protective symbol for their fishing expeditions. Overall, the canoe and its symbols hold great cultural and personal significance for the owner and the Axim fishing community, showcasing the deep connection between art, spirituality, and daily life.



Figure 6: Showing pictorial of a painted bird with a fish in the mouth, entitled: “Obaatanpa” (Good Mother)

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2020



Figure 7: Showing a pictorial of a painted lion image on canoe, entitled: “Twidan”

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2020



Figure 8: Showing a painted tiger image on a canoe entitled: “Sebo” (Tiger)

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2020

Figures 6, 7, and 8 showcase various painted animated symbols, including the eagle entitled "Obaatan pa," the lion "Twidan," and the tiger "Sebo." These symbols represent bravery to the community and hold deep cultural significance, as they are an old symbol that has influenced the people for generations. According to some fishermen, these symbols not only serve as a visual representation of bravery but also provide spiritual and physical protection for the workers. Moreover, the symbols are beautifully painted, making them a source of admiration and appreciation for many. The owner of the "Obaatan pa" bird symbol notes that people in the area enjoy watching his canoe symbol due to its unique painting style. These symbols, along with the human figure in Figure 1, represent a deep connection between art and spirituality, with each symbol carrying its own significance and cultural meaning. The painted animated symbols on the canoes in Axim are not only beautiful to look at but also represent a rich cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations. They serve as a reminder of the community's bravery and the spiritual and physical protection they provide to the fishermen.



A1



A2

Figure 9 A 1 & 2: Showing pictorial of a painted network symbol on canoe in Axim fishing community, entitled: One touch (VODA).

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2020

The symbols painted on canoes in the Axim fishing community hold significant influence over the lives of the people, based on their belief systems. One of the canoe owners, K. Nketsiah (2020), notes that people in Axim identify him and his workers by the name of their canoe, "ONE TOUCH" as shown in figure 9 A1&2 above. All of their canoes are painted with the design and colours of Vodafone's mother network, "one-touch." Nketsiah further explains that his group also owns a football club in the fishing community named "one touch." They wear jerseys with the one-touch symbol and colours, which makes them easily identifiable and popular when they return from fishing expeditions. Even when they are not wearing the jerseys, people recognize them as the "one-touch brothers." The symbols painted on the canoes in the Axim fishing community hold great cultural and personal significance, representing not just the individual canoe owners but also their larger community. They serve as a visual representation of beliefs and values, uniting the people and helping them feel a sense of pride and belonging.



A1



A2

Figure 10



Figure 11

Figure 10-11 A & B: Showing pictorial of a painted multinational football club's symbols on canoes in Axim, entitled:, Barcelona and Chelsea.

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2020

The influence of multinational football clubs is becoming increasingly prevalent in the canoe symbols of the Axim fishing community, leading to a decline in traditional canoe symbols. Many canoe owners have begun painting their canoes with the symbols of popular football clubs from around the world. E. Amoonu (2020), a canoe owner in the community, is an avid fan of the Barcelona football club. As a result, he has painted the club's symbol and colours on all of his properties, including his canoe as shown in Figure 10. According to Amoonu, people often compliment him on the beauty of his canoe, citing the use of Barcelona's colours and symbol. In fact, he is now better known and identified by the Barcelona symbol rather than his actual name. This shift towards using football club symbols on canoes is indicative of the growing influence of global culture on local communities. While traditional symbols may be declining, these new symbols reflect the changing interests and values of the community members. However, it is important to note that these symbols still hold great cultural significance and are reflective of the community's beliefs and values.

The influence of football clubs on the canoe symbols in the Axim fishing community is evident in Figure 11, which displays a canoe painted with the Chelsea football symbol and colours. The owner of this canoe explained that his interest in football led him to paint the Chelsea symbol on his canoe, and that the football club has become an integral part of his life in the community. According to the owner, the use of the Chelsea symbol and colours has even changed his name in Axim, as he is now known as "The Blues" (Chelsea) in the area. He believes that the striking colours and symbol of his canoe have made it stand out and become more popular than other canoes in Axim. It is clear that football clubs and their symbols have a significant impact on the culture and identity of the Axim fishing community. While traditional symbols may be declining in popularity, these new symbols reflect the changing interests and values of the community members, and serve as a reflection of their cultural evolution over time.



Figure 12: Showing two hands painted on a canoe, entitle: “Mpaebo” (Prayers)

Source: Researcher’s fieldwork, 2020

Opayin Essoun's canoe, named "Mpaebo", is adorned with a unique symbol of two hands facing upside down. According to Essoun (2020), the name and symbol have brought about significant changes in the community's way of life. The people in the Axim area believe that the workers on this canoe are prayerful, and this has earned them a reputation as prayer warriors in the fishing community. Customers are attracted to them, and they often join in prayer before business transactions commence. This unique symbol has made it easy for customers to locate them at the shore, and they are known for their spiritual strength and dedication. The Mpaebo canoe is a clear example of how symbols can influence people's beliefs and perception in a community.

Symbols established on canoe painting and their cultural significance in the Winneba fishing community

As the Winneba fishing community happens to be one of the study areas for this research, the researchers visited the community to conduct the investigation on the symbols painted on the canoes. When the investigation team toured around the community, they identified some painted symbols on canoes and their cultural significance that influence the people in the fishing community.

Painted canoe symbols established on canoes in Winneba

Winneba fishing community is also one of the oldest fishing communities in the Central Region of Ghana. The researchers visited this fishing community with the same team used to investigate Axim. The researchers identified some of the symbols painted on canoes and established that the symbols painted on the canoes have their own meaning per the owner’s idea. In addition, the owners are of the view that the names given to the canoes and the symbols designed on them are from the owners’ concept. However, by the use of two cameras on the field, the researchers were able to identify different canoes painted with symbols that are relational to the study.

The following are some of the symbols established on Winneba fishing community with their symbolic names:



Figure 13: Showing pictorial of a painted bird with fish symbol on canoe in Winneba, entitled: “Anoma antu a obuada”

Source: Researchers’ fieldwork, 2020



Figure 14: Showing pictorial of a painted Human figure (Jesus with a lamb) symbol on canoe in Winneba, entitled: “Anyinda”

Source: Researchers’ fieldwork, 2020



Figure 15: Showing pictorial of a painted of a folded hand symbol on canoe in Winneba, entitled: "ONE GOD"

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2020



Figure 16: Showing pictorial of a painted folded hand with two fingers-up symbol on canoe in Winneba, entitled: "Two Heads are Better than One"

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2020



Figure 17: Showing pictorial of a painted cross symbol on canoe in Winneba, entitled: “Jesus Cross”

Source: Researchers’ fieldwork, 2020



Figure 18: Showing pictorial of a painted local food company symbol in Ghana on canoe in Winneba fishing community, entitled: GINO

Source: Researchers’ fieldwork, 2020



Figure 19: Showing pictorial of a painted network symbol on a canoe in Winneba fishing community, entitled: MTN.

Source: Researches' fieldwork,



A



Figure 20 A, B & C: Showing pictorial of a painted multinational football clubs symbols on canoes in Winneba, entitled: Chelsea, British and Brazilian national football clubs

Source: Researchers' fieldwork, 2020

Cultural significance of canoe symbols in Winneba fishing community

The practice of painting symbols on canoes in Winneba, Ghana is an interesting cultural tradition that has been passed down through generations. It is believed that these symbols serve as a form of protection for the canoe and the fishermen who will be using it. The belief is that by painting the symbols on the canoe, it will prevent evil spirits from attacking them while they are out fishing. The process of outdoorizing a newly carved canoe is a significant event in the fishing community, and it is considered a tradition for the whole community. The canoe owner usually performs a ritual after painting the preferred symbol on the canoe, and Christian owners may also pray to Almighty God for protection. The involvement of the chief fisherman in the outdoorizing process is crucial, as he serves as the community leader and ensures that the event is well-organised and communicated to all the fisher folks in the area. This occasion brings people in the community together and strengthens their bond as they come together to celebrate the new addition to their fishing fleet. It is essential to note that this tradition is deeply rooted in the culture and beliefs of the people of Winneba, and it is an important aspect of their identity. As such, it is crucial to preserve and respect these cultural traditions, as they serve as a link to the past and help to maintain the community's identity and heritage. The practice of painting symbols on canoes in Winneba, Ghana, is a fascinating cultural tradition that has been passed down through generations. It serves as a form of protection for the canoe and the fishermen who will be using it and is an important aspect of the community's identity and heritage. The outdoorizing of newly carved canoes is a significant event that brings the people in the community together and strengthens their bond.

The researchers have found that during the outdoorizing of a canoe in Winneba, Ghana, the owner of the canoe has the opportunity to explain the meaning and philosophy behind the symbols painted on the canoe. This tradition has also resulted in many fishermen being known by the nicknames

derived from the symbols painted on their canoes. Examples of these nicknames derived from the symbols are “Anoma antua obuada”, “Anyinda”, “One God”. Jesus Cross” and many more. According to the fishermen in the area, these symbols serve as a form of identification for the owners of the canoes. This has made it easier for people to recognize the owners of the canoes based on the symbols painted on them. The symbols have both spiritual and physical protection significance, and they are also used for decoration purposes. This cultural tradition in Winneba highlights the importance of preserving and celebrating cultural practices that are unique to different communities. The tradition serves as a link to the past and helps to maintain the identity and heritage of the people of Winneba. It also promotes unity and a sense of community as people come together to celebrate the outdooing of a newly carved canoe and learn about the symbols painted on it. In a broader context, this tradition is a reminder of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and promoting cultural diversity. It is essential to recognize and appreciate the unique cultural practices of different communities and to promote intercultural understanding and respect. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and harmonious society that celebrates the richness and diversity of our world. Therefore, symbols painted on canoes are normally influenced by religious, social and economic values of the owners of the fishing community. Some of the canoes found on the field were painted with symbols such as celestial bodies, Bible images, symbols of football clubs, symbols and colours of telecommunication networks companies, symbols of animal images, symbols of human images etc. Therefore, almost all the owners said that the symbols on their canoes are commission work. They were painted and designed by painters in the fishing community through the interest and concept of canoe owners. The following are some of the conceived ideas that end up to be symbols on the owners in Winneba canoes: experience in life, spiritual emotions, proverbs and many more.

It has been discovered that the symbols painted on canoes in the fishing communities of Axim and Winneba are often inspired by the everyday experiences and beliefs of the canoe owners. These symbols may represent spiritual and physical emotions, traditional proverbs, or the personal philosophies of the owner. This cultural tradition has become deeply ingrained in the fishing communities of Axim and Winneba, and it reflects the unique cultural identity of these communities. The symbols serve as a form of artistic expression and creativity, as well as a means of communication and cultural transmission. By preserving and celebrating these cultural traditions, we can promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity and richness of human culture. It is important to recognize that cultural practices and beliefs are not static, but are constantly evolving and adapting to changing circumstances and contexts. As such, it is crucial to respect and preserve these cultural traditions, while also recognizing that they are not fixed or unchanging. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and diverse society that celebrates the unique cultural practices and identities of all people.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, elements of the cultural significance that constitutes canoe symbols in Axim and Winneba fishing communities include the owners' personal relationship and art forms such as animals, human figures, geometric shapes, multinational communication networks, football clubs etc. They are the symbols that are used to embellish canoes in the Axim and Winneba fishing community. Some of these painted images are on the canoes for physical protection, decoration, identification, sanitation and conceptual purposes. Contrary to existing studies, this research uncovered a fascinating convergence of symbols that extend beyond traditional motifs. The symbols on the canoes were found to intricately represent the personal relationships of the owners, incorporating a diverse array of art forms such as animals, human figures, multinational telecommunication networks, and even football clubs. This unique amalgamation of symbols serves a multifaceted purpose, ranging from physical protection and decoration to identification, sanitation, and conceptual representation. The novelty of this study lies in its revelation of the dynamic and contemporary elements woven into the traditional fabric of canoe symbolism. The inclusion of multinational telecommunication networks and football clubs adds a layer of modernity to an age-old practice, showcasing the evolution and adaptability of this cultural tradition.

Recommendations

Based on the result drawn to research question, the researchers commend that The Ghana Museums and Monument Board (GMMB), Centre for National Culture, Ministry of Tourism, individuals and businesses in the tourism industry should turn their attention to the coastal areas and identify the canoe symbols and its cultural significance in the fishing Communities within Ghana in order to explore their tourism potentials.

Again, the Board (GMMB) should make meaningful efforts to encourage the spread of the rich meanings of the canoe symbols in order to help improve its culture in the country.

REFERENCES

- Agbenu (2011). *Ga and Adangbe Canoe Culture*. College of Art and Social Sciences. Faculty of Art, KNUST, Kumasi.
- Amenuke, S.K. et al. (1991). *General Knowledge in Art (G.K.A.)* Evans brothers Ltd (p.169)
- Amoateng, K. (2018). *The Creedal Symbols of my Great Grandparents: The Adinkra Symbols Reveal the Theology of the Akans People of Ghana*, Faculty of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary.
- Asare, M. (1982). *The Canoe's Story*. Sweden, 3 B C Publications Ltd.
- Brown, A.P. (1947) The Fishing Industry of the Labadi District. In: F.R. Irvine (Ed.), *The Fish and the Fisheries of the Gold Coast*. London. Pp. 23-45.

- Chandler, D. (2002). *Semiotics: The basics*. Publisher London; New York: Routledge Collection inlibrary; printdisabled; internetarchivebooks Contributor Internet Archive Language English, <https://archive.org/details/semioticsbasics0000chan>
- Dartey, M. K. (1984). *Canoe Decorations of the Contemporary Ga people*, B.A. (Art), Thesis, KNUST, Kumasi.
- Dresdner M. (2002) *Build Like a Pro: Embellishment and Finishing* Copyright 2002 by The Taunton Press www.taunton.com
- Edgar, A. & Sedgwick, P. (2005), *Key Concepts in Cultural Theory*. Francis e-Library. Routledge, https://www.academia.edu/33376690/Key_Concepts_in_Cultural_Theory_Ke_BookZZ_org_1_1_
- Fulcher A., Rhodes B., Stewart W., Tickle D., Windsor J. (2023). *Painting and Decorating: An Information Manual*, 3rd and 4th Edition. Accra: EEP BOOKS SERVICES. Copyright © 2023 Kumasi Technical University (KsTu)
- Gorman, M. & Feist, C. (1989) *Chronicle of 65 Years of Wood Finishing Research at the Forest Products Laboratory*, U.S Government Printing Office: 1989-644-244
- Iowa Department of Natural Resource, (2004), *An Introduction to Canoeing/Kayaking*, A Teaching Module. <http://publications.iowa.gov/33735/>
- Johnston, C. F. (2012) "Canoeing" In the *Canadian Encyclopedia*. www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/article/canoeing.
- Jorion, P. (1988) Going Out or Staying Home: Migration Strategies among Xwla and Anlo-Ewe Fishermen MAST 1(2):129-156.
- Kirk D. (2011), *Human power drives ancient crafts in Charlotte waters*, <https://charlottecounty.floridaweekly.com/articles/human-power-drives-ancient-crafts-in-charlotte-waters/>, Retrieved: 22/05/2023
- Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (1993). *Semiotics and communication: Sign, codes, cultures*. Lawrence Erlbaum associates, Publishers.
- Ntarangwi, M. (2010) *Reversed Gaze: An African Ethnography of American Anthropology*, https://books.google.com.gh/books/about/Reversed_Gaze.html?id=eip4pVRBBo8C&redir_esc=y
- Nunoo, R. B. (1974). Canoe Decoration in Ghana. *African Arts*, 7(3), pp 32-36 .
- Odotei, I. (2002). *The Artisanal Marine Fishing Industry in Ghana*, A Historic. https://books.google.com.gh/books/about/The_Artisanal_Marine_Fishing_Industry.html?id
- Odotei, I. (1992), The Migration of Ghanaian Women in the Canoe Fishing Industry. MAST 5(2):88-96.
- Oswell D. (2010), *Cultural Theory*, Sage Publications LTD 1 Oliver's Yard 55 City Road London Ec1y 1SP, https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/4151/1/Cultural_Theory_Intro_etc.pdf
- Panuti, S. & Van Zoest, A. (1996). *Serba-serbi semiotika*. PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama.

- Popescu, M. D. (2015) BY Canoe – Definition and History, <https://theyachtowner.net/2015/04/canoe-definition-and-history/>
- Prestemon D. (1999) Finishing Exterior Wood Surfaces Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Eco, U. (1979). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.
- Sayour, G. (2017) *The Different Types of Canoes*, <https://www.liveabout.com/different-types-of-canoes-2555997>
- Sheves, G.T. (1991). *The Ghanaian Dug-Out Canoe and the Canoe Carving Industry in Ghana*. IDAF/WP/35. FAO/Danida/Norway.
- Slayton E. R. (2018), *Modeling Routes to Connect Communities Across the Caribbean Sea*, Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden, www.sidestone.com
- Stelmok, J. (1979). *Rebuilding the Wood & Canvas Canoe*. WoodenBoat Publication, Inc.
- Tyson, O. S. (1935). *Sailing Canoe. Brief History, Design Specification and Rule* http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~fassitt/genealogy/canoe_mirror/canoe_sailing.html
- Verrips, J. (1991). *Ghanaian Canoe Decorations* https://www.academia.edu/14507085/Ghanaian_Canoe_Decorations
- Volmar M. (2018), *The Dugout Canoe Project*, <https://www.lakeroland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Dugout-Canoe-2.pdf> Retrieved date 10/10/2019
- Walden (2012). *The socio-cultural significance of canoe decoration among the people of the Efutu Traditional Area in the Central Region of Ghana*. Faculty of Art, Collage of Art and Social Sciences.