Abstract— Gold mining is an old industry and dates as far back to the Primitive Period in history (5000BC-600BC). As people united into civilized cultures from the Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic ages, gold took on a sacred quality of immortality. Gold was fashioned into amulets and served as religious objects such as idols. Later, the sacred metal became the symbol of wealth - an established common economic denominator. In Ghana, formerly called the Gold Coast, gold has the attributes of religion, aesthetics and commercial values that find expression in many forms. Gold is not only believed to have something mythical about it but also accepted by many as a sacred metal pregnant with good and evil; the evil often covered by its aesthetic properties. Gold artifacts may convey moral or ethical messages, which have cultural, literary and philosophical significance. This paper documents the cultural, literary and philosophical significance of gold in Ghana as expressed in metaphors and adages. It develops fresh comprehensive symbols that fuse the yellow metal and some Ghanaian metaphors and adages. The new metaphors and adages associated with gold would be found useful for the teaching of literature, and moral education in our schools as well as in other human endeavours.

Index Terms—Adage, aesthetics, artifacts, Ashanti, belief, graphics, money, religion, values.

1 Introduction

Gold, probably the first known metal, is believed to date as far back to the beginning of the formation of civilized cultures, from the Paleolithic through the Neolithic ages with references to its discovery as either legendary or mystical. The principal source of gold, however, in the primitive times was stream placers although there was considerable evidence in certain gold belts that alluvial deposit, auriferous gossans and near surface parts of friable veins were mined (Aitchison, 1960)[1].

The Holy Bible also cites Genesis chapter 2, verses 10 through 12, which describes gold as good (Yancey and Stafford, 1992)[2]. Swiecki (2008)[3] also mentions two important literary references; first, the geology, mining and metallurgy of gold in ancient Egyptian codes, pictograms and inscriptions in the tombs of the Pharaohs and, second, the famous most ancient geological map - la carte des mines d’or - literally meaning the map of gold mines. References to gold and gold mining since the 14th century are numerous and show that gold deposits are in all the five continents of the world, with the largest deposits located in South Africa (Wogan, 2010)[4].

In Ghana, formerly known as Gold Coast, the discovery of gold long before the arrival of the Europeans was mostly from river beds. Gold nuggets from river beds and elsewhere were used as body ornaments by chiefs and the elite. Formal gold mining in Ghana in and around the various gold deposits goes as far back as the 5th century BC when the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians sailed along the coast of Africa and exchanged their goods for gold (Kesse, 1985)[5]. Figure 1 shows gold deposits on the mineral map of Ghana.

Fig. 1 Mineral Map of Ghana showing Gold Deposits. Source: Kesse (1995)
coins, but culturally, only the rich wore gold jewelry. Numerous instances such as the moulding of the golden calf as a lesser god to Yahweh in the Hebrew culture also confirm the importance of the metal to existence.

3 Cultural and Literary Significance of Gold in Ghana

In Ghana, gold is acknowledged in the major local languages - Akan, Ewe and Hausa - as sika, ega, and kudi respectively. It is worth noting that the Ghanaian unit of currency, cedi, derives from seder (the Akan word for cowry shell), which was once valued as gold and used in Ghana as a form of currency. The golden yellow in the Ghana flag represents the mineral wealth of Ghana. Brandished finials of ceremonial maces or linguist staffs with gold are commonplace during state or traditional festivals. The power and the beauty of love that exude from gold can be experienced in the form of jewelry and other ornaments, especially as wedding rings. Indeed, the power of love is forcefully expressed by way of the value of gold use, measured in carats. The worth of gold used to manufacture the jewel, etc., is further enhanced by the sheer beauty of gold.

As already observed of other cultures, gold has not only retained its sacred qualities but also been a powerful symbol of wealth, power and social rank in Ghana to this day. Like the Egyptians, the Ashantis exalt, adore their king as their Supreme God. As a divine person, the king is thus symbolized as the divine son of Nyankopon (Benjamins, 2010). The sacred Golden Stool thus symbolizes the soul of the Ashanti Kingdom resides in it (Mireku-Gyimah, 2010)[9]. The sacred Golden Stool thus symbolizes the Ashantehene’s authority (Anon, 2010)[10]. In Ashanti, gold symbolizes the sun, and the sun symbolizes Nyankopon (their Supreme God). As a divine person, the king is thus thought of as the divine son of Nyankopon (Benjamins, 2010)[11].

2 Cultural and Literary Significance of Gold

According to scholars and philologists, the term gold has a curious history and derives from the Greek word aurora meaning the golden goddess of the dawn, and the Hebrew aor meaning light (Kollerstrom, 2008)[8]. Gold also derives its chemical symbol, Au, from the Latin derivative aurum. From the three associated meanings, gold is synonymous to light and purity which explains its association with gods and royalty. Wogan (2010) observes that this belief made the people of Egypt to consider gold to be worthy of their supreme god, Ra. Indeed, because the Pharaohs of Egypt were seen as the representatives of the gods, they had the honour of owning gold artifacts including the funerary masks made of gold. The aborigines of North and South America on the other hand, placed little emphasis on gold beyond its use in ornaments, jewelry, sacrificial knives and the like. As an attribute of wealth, the Romans used gold as

![Fig. 2 The Top 10 Gold Producers in the World for 2010. Source: Perge (2010)](image)

Stewart (2005)[7] attests to the fact that gold has long been at the heart of several cultures in Ghana, especially the Akan culture and that Ashanti is rich in gold deposits and goldworkings. The rare qualities of the yellow metal combine with its powerful symbolic meanings to make it highly valued not only in the Akan culture of Ghana but also in many other cultures around the world and this has been so throughout the ages. This paper explores the cultural, literary and philosophical dimensions of gold in Ghana and evolves fresh comprehensive symbolisms that fuse the yellow metal and some Ghanaian adages. It is posited that the new graphic representations and symbolisms depicting power, wealth, authority and love will be useful in the teaching of literature and moral education in schools as well as in other human interactions.

![Fig. 3 The Golden Stool](image)

Addei and Amankwah (2010)[12] note that Ghanaians in general believe that gold belongs to the gods, and that it has...
According to the writers, artisanal and small-scale miners believe that gold actually belongs to the spirits. The findings of their study further reveal that small-scale miners often pay homage to the gods by offering them delights such as toffees and gin as shown in Figure 4 at specific locations in the mining pit. The offering is made to the gods ostensibly to cajole them to release the gold for mining. These beliefs and practices probably explain why nearly every lesser god is made of gold. Thus, it would be presupposed that had the Golden Stool not been of gold, it would not have been potent enough, spiritually, to protect and unite the Ashanti people as it is purported to have done.

The same spirit link belief holds for the production of goldweights in Ghana. There are a number of documentations on symbolism of Akan goldweights. A thorough analysis of the historical, cultural and economic significance of gold shows that oral literature and visual objects are linked to serve as a powerful expressive medium for direct or indirect communication apart from being used as a measure for the value of gold dust. Akan goldweights are miniature representations of cultural images like plants, animals and people and they are on certain occasions offered as gifts. Many also see goldweights as repositories of Akan culture that would otherwise have been lost. The weights symbolize significant and well-known stories and adages expressing personal behaviour codes, beliefs and values.

A typical example of Akan goldweight and related proverb is sankofa. Sankofa literally meaning “go back and retrieve", derives from the aphorism se wo fi(ri) na wosankofa a, yrkyi, literally translated as “there is nothing wrong with learning from hindsight”. Sankofa is a symbol of wisdom, knowledge, and the people's heritage based on critical examination and investigation. The philosophy of this symbol is traceable to the mythical bird that flies forwards with its head turned backwards as shown in Figure 5. The sankofa symbol reflects the Akan belief that the past serves as a useful guide for planning or working into the future, a deduction that is very relevant in the academia as far as the review of related literature is a sine qua non for research projects.

There are instances where the verbal and visual symbolisms come from different domains. In other words, the adages and symbolic mediums are not ‘symbiotic'; while the oral literature or philosophy remains relevant and potent, the conveying medium is a variant: gold, brass, or wood, particularly in the case of linguist staffs. The sankofa symbol, for example, could double as a finial on a linguist staff carved from wood, which has rather low aesthetic value. The finials convey a wide range of moral teachings in life to the audience at a durbar of chiefs or similar ceremonies in Ghana. It is therefore essential to transfigure the wooden properties by the application of gold leaf to the wooden staffs and accompanying finial, which would resolve the golden essence and eliminate the perceived dichotomy between the philosophical content of the adages and the medium of wood. This paper posits that because of the lack of direct symbiosis, or absence of the golden essence for total appreciation, children in particular may find it difficult to decipher and appreciate the moral values and teachings imbibed in cultural artifacts and adages. A possible solution to resolve this is to evolve simple powerful graphic representations that incorporate the standard icon for gold as shown in Figure 6 and related adages. The evolved graphic representations within the philosophical dimensions of greed and defence, indispensability and watchfulness, and wealth are presented.
Communication Design methods are used to create visual representation of ideas and messages. Swiecki (2008) observes that in the literature of nearly all cultures the word gold and its derivatives appear more often than any other word in terms of metaphor, simile, parables, analogies and proverbs: golden ages, golden rule, heart of gold, all that glitters is not gold are but a few. The gold symbol is used concurrently with adages, analogies, metaphors and similes to project various dimensions of gold as far as power, wealth, authority and love are concerned in order to enhance their understanding in our culture as Ghanaians.

4.1 Greed and Defence

The might of gold is symbolized in Figure 7. The circular symmetrical position of gold demonstrates how far its power can stretch; north, east, south and west and beyond. The gun signifies power, strength and protection. The European slave traders introduced this model of a gun to Ghana. Traditional chiefs who acquired guns for protection and defence against enemy attacks highly adored and valued them. According to Agbo (2006)[13], the chief’s personal guns were richly adorned with gold decorations. The guns, in contemporary Ghana, are used for game and gracing of funerals and festivals.

Gold (money), catalyzed by greed, selfishness and the like has powered the gun beyond acceptable moral boundaries defeating its essence to defend when necessary. The gun then assumes metaphorical status with its association with gold. The design is capable of explaining many of adages and aphorisms like the Chinese proverb “Use power to curb power”, “Gold does civil wars create” (Cowley, 2010)[14] or “curst greed of Gold, what crimes thy tyrant power has caused”. Therefore, the symbolic representation teaches circumspection. In homes and schools, both children and adults would be reminded by it of the power of money to bring life but also death. Hopefully, it will thereby teach ethical values such as temperance, while advising against unsocial behaviours such as covetousness, jealousy and other related social vices.

Human beings cannot live without blood, for without blood, the body's organs would not get the oxygen and nutrients they need to survive, fight infections, or get rid of our own waste products. Without enough blood, the body would be weak and may die. It is in fact, considered the life force in man. In the Holy Bible, the Blood of Jesus Christ was used for the atonement of sin. In the Ghanaian traditional culture, the blood of animals and at times humans is sacrificed to some gods for specific demands. This is commonplace in small-scale gold mining (galamsey), where it is believed this must be done for the release of gold because the gods are the custodians (Addei and Amankwa, 2010). The graphic representation evolved for the adage, sika ye mogya, uses the mathematical equality symbol to illustrate the relationship between gold and blood. The green colour emphasizes restored life when the equation becomes true (Figure 8). The death of many people owing to lack of money (gold) for blood infusion is further illustrated by a similar adage; womni sika a wose aduro nye literally meaning the sick who has no money says medicine is bad. The graphic representation is symbolic of the essence of money for the sustenance of the physical, emotional and social vitality of our culture and teaches us to be compassionate to one another because we need the services of one another to survive.

Figure 9 illustrates watchfulness. In mining, for example, the mineral pyrite is an iron sulphide with metallic lustre and pale-to-normal brass-yellow hue. This hue has earned it the nickname fool's gold because of its resemblance to gold. Despite being nicknamed fool's gold, pyrite is sometimes found in association with small quantities of gold (Eagan, 2010)[15]. In essence, one should be able to distinguish between the fake and the genuine in all situations because not every shiny thing is glorious. The proverb all that glitters is not gold probably derives from fool's gold. Again, the reddish spot in the graphic representation, symbolizes vicious, destructive personalities whose appearance is golden but are tricksters like Kwetu Ananse of Ghanaian Akan folktales. Many false prophets are also golden on the outside. The dispositions of such dubious characters are not equal to the values or rich worth of pure gold. The graphic representation also epitomizes the proverb a mask of gold hides all deformities thus, one is cautioned about the likelihood of evil parading as goodness, a sort of wolves in sheep clothing. Significantly, therefore, the symbolism...
confirms and teaches watchfulness, critical analysis and intuitive judgment in all issues and interactions.

4.3 Wealth

Figure 10 illustrates the Ewe proverb Gator fे tave enye ganuti worwor literally meaning “the rich man’s headache is how to spend money”. A simplified parallel of this proverb in Akan is Kookoo yr sika nanso kookoo see abusua, paepae mogya mu, literally meaning, “Cocoa, referred to as the golden pod, is money; yet cocoa ruins the family, and divides blood relations”.

The graphic representation shows how gold could make the rich to become poor or how gold could split wealth depending on the circumstances. In the graphic presentation, the cowries and Kente cloth symbolize wealth or resources whereas the void or black empty space represents poverty or nothingness. The symbolism therefore means that gross mismanagement of wealth or resources by individuals or nations may turn into abject poverty or nothingness. The graphic illustration, which symbolizes wealth, prosperity and conspicuous consumption, teaches prudent money farming.

5 Conclusion

Gold has been part of many cultures and civilizations including those of the Egyptian, Roman, Hebrew, South American and Ghanaian. Like the others, Ghanaian culture has equally been influenced appreciably by gold since its discovery. The precious metal has been of great cultural significance in body adornment, spirituality, festivities, and commerce. Perhaps, the greatest value has been the goldweights with their accompanying adages as guides to existence. Gold has an inexplicable power that manifests power, wealth, authority, love and healing, propagates the arts and culture and contributes to innovative technology in industry. All these notwithstanding, it is ironical that gold has also wrought terrible acts of slavery, war, death, rancour between brothers, sisters, friends, fathers and sons from one generation to another. This paper has introduced a contemporary iconographic concept, with new dimensions, to the literary representation of the symbiotic symbolism of gold-related proverbs in order to enhance their interpretation without sacrificing the essential positive messages of balance, order and continuity. These new graphic concepts have been utilized in illustrating some cultural, literary and philosophical attributes of the metal such as wealth, defence and indispensability.

6 References

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