

AFRICAN PROVERBS SERIES 2



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african proverbs series

VOLUME 2

Hearing and Keeping

Akan Proverbs

KOFI ASARE OPOKU

SERIES EDITOR, JOHN S. MBITI

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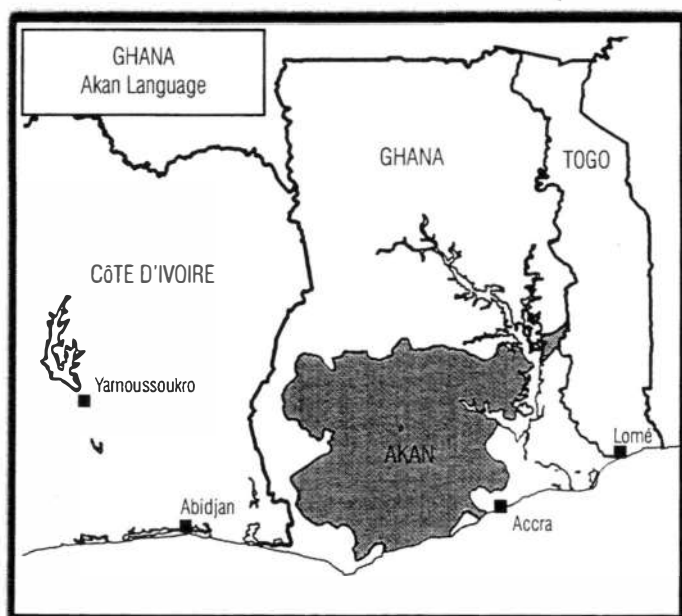
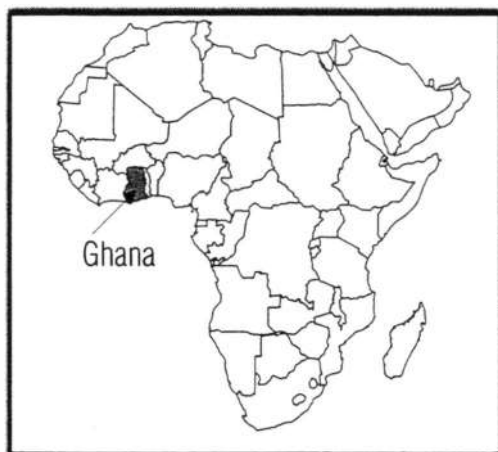
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*Kofi Asare Opoku
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, North Carolina
June 1995*



CHILDREN CONFER GLORY ON A HOME

Introduction to the African Proverbs Series

by John S. Mbiti, Series Editor

In recognition and appreciation of women in society, an Ethiopian proverb affirms, *Where a woman is not, the feast is not tasty*. Another proverb warns everyone, *You can trust neither the sky in the rainy season nor babies' bottoms!* From observing nature, people in South Africa reflect succinctly in a proverb which says, *The strength of the crocodile is the water*. A Kenyan proverb asserts, *The head is best known by the owner*.

Africa is rich in a variety of ways, including natural resources, manpower and culture. Within the framework of culture there is a wide range of heritage including religion, music, dance, art, architecture and oral literature. And in the realm of oral literature we find the immensely rich world of stories, fables, recitations, songs, poetry and proverbs. It is intended in this series of publications to focus attention on the proverbs. They adorn and beautify any language the way that, as the Nigerian proverb tells, *Children confer glory on a home*. This is particularly the case in the oral culture of African peoples, who have cultivated an extremely complicated use of language, audio and oral communication.

Proverbs are deeply rooted in this culture and almost everyone who grows up in a village becomes a living carrier of proverbs. They are interwoven in local languages. At the same time, they constitute a sub-language of their own. This language of proverbs, this way of speaking by employing proverbs, is known by many people who use it with various skills more or else throughout their lives. For example, in the area of Ukambani, Kenya, where I was born and grew up, I know people who hardly utter a few dozen sentences without including a proverb or citing a proverbial phrase. For them, the language of proverbs is a whole way of seeing the world, a way of speaking with other people, a way of feeling the atmosphere in the society in which they live. Similarly some preachers in the Church spice their sermons with proverbs, almost as

if they could not think and speak outside of the world of proverbs. This is admirable.

In this African Proverbs Project and series of books, we wish to enter and explore this fascinating world of proverbs—to listen to their sounds, to capture their flashes, to reflect on their values and message, to open our minds to their almost timeless dimension.

The language of proverbs has a rich vocabulary of words, phrases, combination of words, symbols, pictures, allusions, associations, and comparisons. It is drawn from the whole of society, so that every part of society is captured in the proverbs. It is fascinating, if not imperative, to study, explore and analyse this language, this unique world of proverbs, to critique it and even “exorcise” its unwanted spirits. How has it evolved? How does one learn it? How does it adjust to changing social and historical circumstances?

Symbols belong to proverbs. Indeed proverbs are themselves symbols of communication packed into short sentences or even anecdotes and stories, sometimes carved on wood, stone or other material, or even sung or danced or acted. They are drawn from and refer to all activities of society, natural objects and phenomena. We hear, for example, in a proverb from Kenya, *One finger cannot kill a louse*. (Two fingers are needed to do that.) A similar proverb from Ethiopia says, *One finger does not catch a fly*. On the surface these are simple proverbial statements drawn out of living experiences in which people kill body lice by using fingers or finger nails to squeeze them (until they burst), or two fingers to catch flies. However, the two proverbs are employed to refer to more serious matters of solidarity, working together, joining hands to accomplish tasks or objectives which cannot be done by one person. They point to unity, mutuality, togetherness and helpfulness. Here we see how seemingly trivial terms are used symbolically to handle deeper issues of people's character and working relationships.

Many proverbs act as catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals. They provoke further reflection and call for

deeper thinking. For example, when a South African proverb says, *Marriage roasts (hardens)*, one is challenged to look at marriage seriously, to reflect on it and see how far this proverbial statement is true, false, or both. Similarly, the following proverb from Tanzania calls among other things, for patience and calmness, especially in times of family, social or national strain and provocation: *The water boils but never forgets its home, i.e. that it can get cool again*. Reconciliation is possible even where relations have been damaged or fights have ensued. After being hot, tempers cool down again to a normal state--given patience, calmness and time.

But proverbs also call attention to dangers in human relations. People are not perfect. For that reason, for example, they say in Tanzania, *Your neighbor is a snake, he/she kills you without your knowledge*. This can be true while at the same time neighbors can be friendly and helpful to one another. Yet, enmity can spring up where it is not expected (e.g. in the neighborhood) and this can be dangerously threatening or destructive. Proverbs serve not only to cement relations but also to caution people about their behavior, their character, their relations with others and about the imperfect world in which we live.

Some proverbs appeal more to emotions than just reflection. But then that is a major part of the human constitution--to feel, to laugh, to cry, to be happy, angry or sad, to love and even to hate, to appreciate, to admire, to feel jealous, accepted or rejected, to fear and despair. The proverb is very much represented in these areas of human emotions. For example, in Uganda an easily frightened person might be ridiculed (with the intention of encouraging her/him to be brave) with the following proverb: *The coward fled from his/her shadow!* In the same country, great anger is thought to be damaging to the person concerned, and for that reason an appropriate proverb warns, *Anger killed a mother cow*. That hypocrisy and arrogance are not appreciated comes out in a South African proverb which says, *Horns which are put on do not stick properly*. A further application of the same proverb refers to scolding another person unjustly, without proper grounds. This last proverb is an

example of how some proverbs carry different applicabilities, some are paradoxical or even "contradictory". Likewise, one situation may provoke the application of several proverbs, which shows a degree of flexibility in proverbs and their uses.

Proverbs that deal with ethical and moral issues reach not only to the head but also to the conscience. They stir the conscience, they give assurance, they help in the exercise of deciding between good and evil, justice and injustice, right and wrong. Many are highly pregnant with religious content accumulated over the generations. They address themselves to all parts of society--from the family to the nation, from friends to foes, from rulers sitting on golden stools to beggars squirting by the gutters. They praise and critique; they encourage and ridicule; they set boundaries and draw people together. All activities of society are addressed through proverbs, including working in the fields, herding in the plains, hunting and fishing, cooking and looking after children, medical and health matters, travelling and building homes, childbirth and burials of the dead. Some deal with male-female relations, parents-children relations, kinship and neighborliness. There are those that relate to daily activities like eating, drinking, working, resting and talking. Still others address themselves to unfortunate happenings like crime, war, calamity, catastrophe, suffering and death. Some concern themselves with taboos and secrets, some are used as slogans, hidden language, as rebukes, threats, warnings, songs and promises.

There are proverbs that deal with bodily parts from the hairs on the head to the nails on the toes. Qualities such as hard work, kindness, love, bravery, strength, unity, trust, justice, fairness, friendship and generosity are articulated and encouraged through proverbs. Likewise there are proverbs that discourage and disapprove of unwelcome tendencies in personal and communal life such as laziness, thieving, backbiting, injustice, untrustworthiness, greed, slander, lying and murder, arrogance, selfishness and incest. Proverbs have a measure of power and authority, they are culturally loaded. They can also be misused, in private and in public, to

threaten, deceive and brainwash people. They continue to be created, just as some of them lose their applicability, according to the changing conditions of life. We find many similarities with, and echoes from, proverbs of other societies, peoples and cultures of the world. African proverbs are part of a world-wide phenomenon.

Proverbs are a rich source of African Religion and philosophy. They contain and point to a deep spirituality, as well as theological and philosophical insights. In this case they form a bridge between traditional African religiosity and biblical teaching. This concern is one of the main objectives of the African Proverbs Project, and is taken up in more detail in individual volumes on *Proverbs for Preaching and Teaching Series*, edited by the Reverend Joshua Kudadjie of the University of Ghana, Legon.

In short, proverbs present an opportunity for interdisciplinary exploration and discussion in various fields, including religion and philosophy, sociology and anthropology, linguistics and literature, history, geography, economics, medicine and communication. A comparative study of the proverbs themselves has barely been undertaken. There is a growing literature on African proverbs, numbering at least one thousand items in 1995, of which Professor Wolfgang Mieder's *African Proverb Scholarship* (Colorado Springs, USA, 1994) with 279 items (books, dissertations and articles) is the most comprehensive annotated bibliography to date. Other bibliographical material appears in *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, U.S.A. One purpose of the Project is to assemble an annotated bibliography of proverb collections (paremiography), as well as copies of the publications themselves, which would be deposited in a few academic centres in Africa and abroad. Some of the proverbs in the various publications are put on CD-ROM for computer users. This is, however, a small portion of the over two million African proverbs, whose complete collection in written and electronic form will clearly take many decades, if not centuries, since new ones also continue to be created. Under the Project a few other collections are being made of some proverbs that have not yet

been recorded and may be in *danger* of being lost, if the languages represented die or living conditions change considerably.

A big THANK YOU is due to The Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia in America for financing the African Proverbs Project; and to the Project's coordinator, the Reverend Dr. Stan Nussbaum of Colorado Springs, USA. Meetings and symposia have been held in Accra, Maputo, Nairobi and Pretoria, to discuss various aspects of this Project which have been very informative, inspiring and supportive. My further gratitude goes to the editors of these individual volumes, who collected the proverbs, translated them and put them together to produce the respective volumes in the series. Each volume has its own individuality in content, style and size, but they all belong together in contributing to African (and international) paremiography and paremiology.

We conclude this Introduction with a Ghanaian proverb which reminds us, *Wisdom is like a baobab tree; a single man's hand cannot embrace it*. That can appropriately be applied to the vast treasure of African proverbs: one person cannot collect them all, cannot analyse them all, cannot put them all in their context and cannot use them all. For this reason, we have employed several hands in this Project. They come from different countries and regions of Africa, and from beyond. They are men and women whose arms, hands and fingers are adorned with golden bracelets and diamond rings of--you guess it--African proverbs. But in these books, those hands stretch out towards others--to touch, to embrace, to warm, to give support along the path that leads to the Source of life. Another Ghanaian proverb assures us, *God arranges things so that a leper's sandal breaks under the camel-foot-shrub, which provides the rope to mend it*. We hope that these proverbs, these riches of African heritage, can become pieces of one such rope that mend someone's broken sandals along the way...

John S. Mbiti, Series Editor
CH 3400 Burgdorf, Switzerland
21 October 1995

HEARING AND KEEPING

Introduction to Volume 2

Who Are The Akan?

The Akan people live in modern-day Ghana and in the neighboring country of the Ivory Coast, but it is in Ghana that the majority of them are found. Out of a population of sixteen million people in Ghana, the Akan number slightly less than half and occupy two-thirds of the land area of the country. The Akan language (Twi-Fante), is the most widely spoken language in the country and can be regarded as the lingua franca of Ghana.

The Akan people consist of a number of subgroups but they all speak mutually intelligible languages. The subgroups are: Agona, Ahanta, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Aowin, Asante, Assin, Brong (Bono), Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Nzema, Sehwi, Twifo and Wassa.

Common to the Akan is their matrilineal descent in which a person traces his or her *abusua*, family, through the mother's lineage. It is the mother's blood, which she shares with her children, that determines one's membership of the eight clans which are the basis of Akan social organization.¹ Each Akan identifies himself or herself with one of the clans and the principal Akan clans with their subdivisions (in parentheses) are:

Aduana (Abrade)	Asona	(Dwumina)
Agona (Toa)	Bretuo	(Tena)
Asakyiri (Amoakaade)	Ekoona	(Asokore)
Aseneɛ (Adɔnten)	Qyoko (Dako)	

The clans are exogamous and all the members of a clan, regardless of the spatial distance between them, are regarded as

¹ The Fante have kept the original seven clans, whereas the other groups have eight clans. The seven Fante clans are: Aboradze, Adwenadze, Anona, Konna, Nsona, Ntwea and Twidan.

brothers and sisters and are therefore forbidden to marry. One is expected to go outside of one's matri-clan to marry in order not to break the taboo of *mogyafra*, incest. In addition to the matrilineal clans, the Akan also have an identical system of patrilineal groups, called *Ntoro*, and each child belongs to his or her father's *Ntoro*. There are twelve of these: Bosomafi, Bosomafram, Bosomakom, Bosomayesu, Bosom-Dwerebe, Bosom-Konsi, Bosomkrete, Bosom-muru, Bosompo, Bosompri, Bosomsika and Bosomtwe. The *Ntoro* builds a spiritual bond between the father and his child which balances the relationship between the child and its mother.

Each of the clans has a living emblem, an animal or bird, and an outstanding characteristic of the clan, in a general sense, is found in the living emblem. The clans and their emblems are as follows:

Aduana	Dog	Adroitness, skilful and adept under pressing conditions
Agona	Parrot	Eloquence
Asakyiri	Eagle	Vigilance
Aseneɛ	Bat	Diplomacy, skill in dealing with people
Asona	Crow	Wisdom
Bretuo	Leopard	Tenacity
Ekogna	Buffalo	Conscientiousness, thorough and painstaking, scrupulous
Qyoko	Hawk	Patience

The Akan political structure is characterized by the rule of chiefs and queen mothers in a centralized political order, and each

king or queen mother derives his or her authority from the fact that he or she occupies the stool of the ancestors. Each Akan state is organized on the basis of military formation with the king at the centre, flanked on both sides by right wing and left wing chiefs, below whom are chiefs from smaller towns and villages. There are also chiefs that are scouts and advance guards as well as chiefs of the rear guards. Every Akan state also has a prime minister, or *gyaasehene*, who is in charge of the king's household. In addition to these chiefs, there are a number of functionaries—linguists or spokespersons, through whom the chiefs speak to the people and are, in turn, spoken to by the people; court criers, who keep order at the chiefs' palaces, stool bearers, who are in charge of the stool houses, where ancestral stools are kept. Around each Akan chief are elders who serve as counsellors.

The symbol of office of the Akan chief is the black stool, and each state has a number of black² stools to the memory of past chiefs. The practice, dating from antiquity, is that when a chief has distinguished himself and ruled in accordance with traditional norms of justice, peace, prosperity and general advancement of the state, a stool was blackened for him and kept in the stoolhouse, and twice every forty-two days the stool would be given food and drink in the special festival called *Adae*, and it is through the celebration of the *Adae* that the Akan reckon their calendar; for nine *Adae* bring the year to full circle. And at the end of the year cleansing festivals are held to close the old year and usher in the new. Other common festivals celebrated by the Akan include *Odwira*, *Ohum*, *Fetu Afahye*, *Akwanba*, *Bakatue* and *Apo*.

The land area occupied by the Akan is mostly covered by tropical forests with heavy rainfall averaging 200 cm annually. There are coastal people like the Fante, who live in areas marked by shrubs and grassland.

The Akan are primarily agricultural and cultivate a number of food crops, including plantain, banana, yam, cocoyam, cassava,

² In Akan colour symbolism, black represents age, antiquity, history and dignity.

corn, ground nuts as well as a variety of vegetables. Cocoa and coffee are cultivated for export. Domestic animals are also raised, including chickens, goats, sheep and dogs and cats are raised as pets. Hunting and fishing are also engaged in.

The Akan have a rich artistic tradition and their drums and drum language and music, textile designs and symbolism, wood carving and gold weights are all used as vehicles for expressing social and moral values, quite apart from their utilitarian usage. Best known among the Akan visual arts are stools, linguist staffs, *akuaba* dolls, umbrella tops, *kente* and *adinkra* cloths, swords, hats, sandals and pottery.

The entire world of the Akan is reflected in their proverbs.

Proverbs in the Context of Akan Culture

Proverbs (sing. *bɛ*, pl. *mme*, *abebusem*, *mmebusem*) are encapsulations of the accumulated wisdom and experiences of past generations of the Akan and they constitute an authentic mirror of the mind and philosophy of the Akan people. Proverbs play a major role in Akan oral communication and are a significant element of normal discourse. Proverbs embellish or adorn speech and put “salt into what is said”, meaning that proverbs sweeten or enrich speech. It is regarded as a mark of good breeding and wisdom to be skilful in the use of proverbs. The Akan say, “*Oba nyansafo wobu no bɛ, na wɔnka no asem*,” the wise person is spoken to in proverbs, not in plain talk. This is to show that it takes wisdom to understand and use proverbs, and that the wise person immediately understands the meaning of the proverb. Whereas in the case of a fool, the Akan say, “*Okwasea na wobu no bɛ a, wɔkyere no ase*,” when a fool is told a proverb, the meaning of it has to be explained to him.

The Akan prize wisdom (*nyansa*) above everything else, placing it above strength, beauty, or money, and a clear distinction is made between wisdom and learning. “*Esɔno nyansa, na esono nhoma*”—wisdom is one thing, book knowledge another. The proverbs, which contain wisdom, were bequeathed to succeeding

generations by the ancestors and before a proverb is cited, it is preceded by an acknowledgment in the form of "*Nanonom se*," or "*Mpanyin se*," meaning, "the ancestors say" or "the elders say", to give power or authority to what is being said. The proverbs are the language of the ancestors and elders and their value is expressed in the proverb, "*Wowu gyaw wo mpanyin kasa a, wonnyae nkoka mmofra kasa*,"—If the elders leave you a legacy of dignified language, you do not abandon it to speak childish language.

An incident may be cited from my own experience to illustrate the proverbs as the language of the elders. In the late sixties, I used to do a weekly programme on Radio Ghana on Akan proverbs. One day, I went to a village and was introduced to an old man in his eighties, who expressed surprise at seeing me by saying, "I thought you were an old man," for he had been following the programme and had been under the impression that the presenter was an elderly person. I responded by saying that the language I was using on the radio was not mine and that it belonged to the elders.

To cite proverbs at random is meaningless, for proverbs have meaning only if they are used in a particular context. An Akan story can illustrate this point:

Nana Kwaku Amisa, chief of Abeamzi, in the Central Region of Ghana, was well known as an illustrious master of proverbs and his reputation stretched far and wide.

One day, one of the kings of the Asante Kingdom sent emissaries to Abeamzi to ask Nana Kwaku Amisa to cite seventy proverbs for the emissaries to bring to him. It was quite a challenge, for no one could cite proverbs without seeing anything.

Nana Amisa sat quietly for some time and then told the emissaries to close their eyes. Then, after a while, he told them to open their eyes and asked them to tell him the dreams they had had. Then, one of the emissaries said, "How can a person dream when he has not slept?" Nana Amisa retorted by saying, "When the occasion has not arisen, you do not cite a proverb." He, therefore,

sent the emissaries back to tell the king of Asante that circumstances determine the proverb to be used.³

Proverbs may express some cultural or infinite truth, they bring special meaning to certain situations and point up the kernel of an idea with vivid clarity. They may be a warning against foolish acts or a guide to good conduct. Proverbs are also a reflection on life and how best to live it, underscoring Akan traditional ideas about moral behavior and ethical norms.

The Akan ancestors found wisdom everywhere—in the environment, in the human body, in trees, birds, and animals, in the skies, etc. The originators of the proverbs were very keen observers of nature, and, in a sense, the whole environment was an open book from which they could read lessons to benefit human life, to make it meaningful, understandable, liveable and tolerable. And this tradition has been passed on from generation to generation.

But it is not so much the objects which are mentioned in the proverbs that are important; instead those objects are used as stepping stones, a means to an end, to get to the point the proverb is trying to make. If a proverb talks about a tree, it is not strictly speaking about a tree as such, but rather what is at issue is what lesson does this tree teach us? The lesson from the tree, or any other object mentioned in the proverb, comes from close observation of nature and allusions are made to the well-known attributes of objects in nature in order to reflect on human beings in society and their relations with each other.

Proverbs are not only expressed in words, they are also expressed in the language of the drums and the sounds of the horns that are blown in Akan palaces and on festive occasions and at durbars.

Akan arts express a close relationship between the visual and the verbal and this provides a basis for Akan aesthetics, but one can also find a few types of visual arts that are not associated with

³ Kan Me Hwe (Two Series Akuapem Reader Five) ed. Beveridge, W.M. Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1966. p. 60.

proverbs. Akan linguist staffs, *adinkra* cloth, *kente* cloth, gold weights, umbrella tops, sandals, swords, pillars of stools, headbands, etc., all have their verbal components. These visual images are a powerful and sophisticated form of communication and they remind people of their values, rights, and obligations as citizens, as well as the consequences of certain antisocial behavior. These images can also be considered statements which reflect incontrovertible ancestral wisdom which is visually broadcast to the people. But these images and their verbal components are not limited to proverbs, they may also refer to stories and important events in the history of the people. The relationship between the visual and verbal has even been extended to modern textile prints from the factories and printed cloths have proverbs assigned to them.

Collections of Akan Proverbs

Collections of Akan proverbs began in the nineteenth century. Sir Richard Burton published two hundred and sixty-five Akan proverbs in his book, *Wit and Wisdom from West Africa* in 1865. But the largest collection to appear, fourteen years later, was J.G. Christaller's 3,600 *Twi Proverbs* in 1879. Other collections have been made in the twentieth century and they include R.S. Rattray (1916), J.J. Adaye (1934), Gaddiel R. Acquaaah (1940), J.A. An-nobil (1955), Akrofi (1958), Ofei-Ayisi (1966), and many others.⁴

Only very few of these collections have commentaries on the proverbs and the need for more collections with commentaries cannot be overemphasized. The collections in existence constitute a fraction of the proverbs that are in use among the Akan. Besides, most of the elderly people who have a large stock of proverbs are passing away and taking their vast knowledge with them and it is urgently important that a concerted effort is made to collect more proverbs before it is too late.

This present volume is intended to partially meet this challenge, and it contains proverbs already in print, as well as others I

⁴ See the bibliography for full titles of proverb collections.

have collected on field trips as a Research Fellow in Religion and Ethics at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, from 1967-1994. The last chapter is a collection of some Akan visual arts and the proverbs associated with them.

The proverbs have been arranged according to themes and each proverb is given in the Akan language, followed by a translation which attempts to remain as faithful as possible to the original text. The language is rich in vocabulary and imagery and, needless to say, there are enormous problems in translating Akan into English, for what is a profound statement in the original language may appear rather trite and simplistic in translation. This is the point at which the explanation comes in to expand the reader's knowledge of the culture and the circumstances under which the proverb might be understood.

Merely reading a proverb, however well translated, does not bring the reader to its full force and impact. Accompanying each proverb, when it is cited, are the circumstance, the bodily gestures, and the facial expressions and also the tone the spoken word is uttered in. All this brings the proverb to life by confronting the hearer with the power of the spoken word, which will make him or her say that the person who cited the proverb "has spoken well".

1 GOD (Onyame)

God is essentially a spirit and the Akan make no visual representations of God. The Akan use three common names for God. The first is *Onyame*, which means the Supreme Being or Great Spirit, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This name has also been translated as the Shining One.

The name which reflects the ineffable majesty and exalted dignity of God is *Onyankopon*, which means *Onyame*, who alone is great. And, in referring to the creative aspects of God, the Akan use the name *Odомankoma Oboadee*.

The Akan experience God as good, compassionate and kind, and as a Being who is involved in the daily lives of people by providing them with sun and rain. Hence he has the names *Amowia*, giver of Sun and light, and *Totrobonsu*, giver of rain and water, or the One who causes the rain to fall copiously.

God has unique names and attributes that are not shared by the other spiritual beings in the spirit world. God is placed outside the pantheon as its creator and there is no notion of equality in terms of being or power with the other spirits.

The Akan place no limitation on the power of God and the absence of shrines, temples, priests and priestesses who have a private extension to God all go to show the limitlessness of God. God is everywhere, and the whole universe is the temple of God, who is essentially a spirit, the Great Spirit, below whom are lesser spirits.

1 Nsem nyinaa ne Nyame.

All wisdom is from God. Also, all things rest with God.

Expl: The Akan believe that God is the source of all wisdom. They prize wisdom above money, beauty and strength and regard it as a great possession. (*God, wisdom*)

2 Osasa se: ade a Onyame aye nyinaa ye.

The hawk says: "All that God has created is good."

Expl: The Akan belief in the goodness of creation is put into the mouth of the hawk, which flies in the skies and beholds the earth

below. The Akan attribute creation to *Odomankoma*, a name used for God as the Creator, and a title which goes with the name *Odomankoma* is *Oboadee*, which means “The One who creates.” (*hawk, God, creation*)

3 Onyame ne panyin.

God is the elder.

Expl: The Akan believe that God was here before everything in the sense that everything that exists was brought into being or created by him. The Akan tradition of child rearing emphasizes respect for elders and therefore God as the first and oldest being deserves our respect. (*God, elder, respect, child*)

4 Onyame ne hene.

God is the king.

Expl: The Akan view is that since the king or chief is the head of the society and everybody is under him and must obey him, so is God the Overlord of society and the entire world and therefore commands the respect, obedience and service of all humankind and all creation. (*God, King, humankind, respect, service*)

5 Onyame nnae.

God is not asleep.

Expl: This is an expression of the belief that God sees and knows everything and brings everything to book. God’s justice is therefore unfailing and the Akan name *Brekyirihunuade* (the One who sees all, even that which is behind) supports the belief expressed in this proverb. (*God, sleep, justice*)

6 Onyame mpe bone.

God does not like evil.

Expl: The Akan associate God with good, and evil therefore, whatever its source, is contrary to the wishes of God. (*God, evil, good*)

7 Asase trew na Onyame ne panyin.

The earth is wide, but God is the elder (Creator).

Expl: The earth is wide and expansive and has a lot of things in it, but however big the earth is, God is bigger, as its Creator. (*God, earth, elder, Creator*)

8 Onyame bo pow a, odasani ntumi nsan.

When God ties a knot, a human being cannot untie it.

Expl: The Akan have a wisdom knot which a fool is not supposed to be able to untie. God's wisdom surpasses man's and therefore man cannot untie a knot made by God. It is another way of acknowledging God's immense wisdom and power. (*God, wisdom, knot, person, power*)

9 Ade nsae a, yemmo Onyame soboo.

When the day has not ended, you do not grumble (complain) against God.

Expl: This proverb cautions against being hasty to complain or grumble against God that God has been unfair to you, for God has God's own way of doing things. But, if one exercises patience, one will surely experience God's grace and beneficence. (*God, day, grumbling, patience, grace, beneficence*)

10 Onyame ma wo yare a, oma wo ano aduru.

If God gives you sickness, God gives you its cure.

Expl: The ancient Akan experienced God's providence and mercy and expressed it in this proverb. When cures are found for ailments, when a person learns to overcome a handicap or cope with it so that he or she can get along just like everybody else, that person experiences God as the helper of the suffering and afflicted people. (*God, sickness, cure, providence, mercy*) Akrofi, No. 786

11 Onyame na owow basin fufuu ma no.

It is God who pounds fufuu for the one-armed person.

Expl: *Fufuu* is the staple food of the Akan and it is made from plantain, cassava or yams. In preparing *fufuu*, a person boils the food and puts it into a mortar and pounds it with a pestle. A normal person holds the pestle with both hands, but for the person with only one arm, the proverb suggests that it is God who helps him or her to pound *fufuu*. God, therefore, is the help of the afflicted. (*God, handicapped, person, plantain, cassava, yams, help*) Akrofi, No. 787

12 Onyame amma asomfena biribi a, omaa no ahodannan.

If God did not give the swallow any other gift, God gave it (the gift of) swiftness of movement (agility).

Expl: God is recognized as the giver of talent and the ability of the swallow to dart about in the skies with admirable dexterity is

regarded as a gift from God. Every creature (person) has a special talent or gift from God and no one was left without one. (*God, swallow, gift, agility, talent, dexterity*)

13 Onyame ankum wo a, wunwu.

If God does not kill you, you do not die.

Expl: God is the author of life and death and it is only when God decides to take you away that you die. Human destiny is in God's hands. (*God, death, destiny*) Akrofi, No. 785

14 Onyame nkrabea nni kwatibea.

God's destiny (assigned to you) cannot be changed.

Expl: The Akan belief is that every person enters this world with a destiny or mission appointed by God and that a person's life in the world is an unfoldment of this mission or appointed lot. This destiny, the Akan believe, cannot be changed by man, and to the Akan, this expresses God's power or omnipotence. (*God, destiny, omnipotence*)

15 Onyame na oworow okwabran kaa fa ne mmati.

God removes the ring from the fingers of the giant through his shoulders.

Expl: Normally, we remove the ring on our finger by pulling it down, but God is able to remove the ring from the giant's finger in the opposite direction, by pulling it over his hefty shoulders. God can do what humans cannot do and has greater power than men. (*God, ring, finger, shoulders, giant, power*)

16 Onyame renwene sirikiy kente ama wo, na woansi abotare na wode wo nsa koka a, na adan wo kye^ykyen.

If God is weaving a silk fabric for you and you are not patient and you touch it with your hand, it turns into bark cloth.

Expl: The Akan used to cover themselves with bark cloth, *kyekyen*, by beating the bark of the bark cloth tree (*Antiaris africana*) into cloth. It had a dull light brown colour, not as shiny and colorful as silk kente cloth. The Akan regarded the silk as a superior fabric to the *kye^ykyen*, hence the admonition that if God is preparing something special for you, you should not, out of impatience, interfere or interrupt

God's plan. Patience yields enormous rewards. (*God, silk, fabric, patience, cloth, impatience*) Bannerman, No. 316.

17 Wudwane Nyame a, wohye n'ase.

If you flee from God, you are still under God.

Expl: God is everywhere and one cannot attempt to escape God's attention. There is no hiding place from God. (*God, flight*) Mensah, No. 913

GOD (Onyankopon, Nyankopon)

18 Wope asem aka akyere Onyankopon a, ka kyere mframa.

If you want to speak to God, speak to the winds.

Expl: Like the wind, God is invisible and is everywhere. The Akan concept of God is that God is essentially a spirit. The absence of visual representations and temples and physical images of God in Akan religion reinforces the nature of God as spirit. (*God, wind, speak*) Akrofi, No. 809

19 Onyankopon hye wo nsa kora-ma, na oteasefo ka gu a, ohyia wo so bio.

If God gives you a calabash full of palm wine and a living man kicks it over, God fills it up again.

Expl: When God blesses a person and an evil-minded person or neighbour attempts to thwart it, God continues to bless that person. To the Akan, God's providence is unfailing and mortal men cannot frustrate God's good intentions for humans. (*God, calabash, palm wine, providence*) Christaller, No. 2545

20 Onyankopon mpe asemmone nti na okye din mmiako mmiako (same as 376).

Since God does not like wickedness (fraud), God gave every creature a name.

Expl: To avoid confusion (wickedness), God gave each creature a distinctive name as a necessary mark of individuality. Each person is responsible for his or her own deeds and a person cannot be punished for the wickedness of the others. The Akan also put this idea in another proverb which says: *oketew nni mako na apotro anum nhyehye no* - "the lizard does not eat pepper for the frog to

have a burning mouth.” (*God, wickedness, fraud, creature, name, self-knowledge, right, wrong*) Christaller, No. 2648

21 Onyankopon danseni ne ahonim.

God's witness is conscience.

Expl: The word *ahonim* literally means self-knowledge, profound insight into oneself, or conscience. According to the Akan, it is *ahonim* which tells us when we have done right or wrong, and it is regarded as that which witnesses to God. (*God, witness, conscience*)

22 Wubu okoto kwasea a, Onyankopon hwe wo to.

If you cheat the crab, God sees your buttocks.

Expl: To catch crabs, one has to bend and put one's hand into the crab's hole and as one does this, one's buttocks are exposed. Nothing is hidden from God. All cheating and unkindness that men do to each other are seen by God, who brings them to book. (*God, crab, buttocks*)

23 Asafo so Nyankopon a, obaako nnuru mu afu.

When the whole of humankind is carrying God, one person does not become humpbacked (by bearing the weight alone).

Expl: When the responsibilities of the nation or state or family are shared by everyone, then they do not fall on one person alone so that that person suffers. Responsibility must be shared by all. (*God, humankind, person, responsibility, family*) Akrofi, No. 827.

24 Onyankopon fa ne bo a, ontow no ntem.

When God picks up God's stone, God does not throw it at once.

Expl: The compassionate God does not hurriedly punish, but God's justice will surely come. (*God, stone, punishment, justice*)

25 Nkwa tenten nti na Odomankoma boo oyare no, oboo aduru nso kaa ho.

It is because of long life that when the Creator created disease he also created medicine. (*life, Creator, disease, medicine*) Bannerman, No. 294.

26 Odomankoma kowui no, ode n'akyi gyaw agyina.

When the Creator went to his death, he left the world to counsel (consensus-making).

Expl: The Akan elders always go into consultation at the chief's court before they arrive at a decision. Each member brings his or her mind and it is this that is going to guide and determine the

ultimate decision or judgment. The Akan believe that when God left the world to live in the heavens, God left us with our minds and wisdom to guide us. (*God, death, counsel, wisdom, consultation*)

2 ANCESTORS

The Akan regard their ancestors — both male and female — as elders and predecessors who continue to be members of their families and societies. As elders and predecessors who live in the spirit world, *asamando*, the ancestors are greatly respected. They have power to punish and reward their relatives and the relationship with the ancestors is based on a mutuality of obligation. The living respect, venerate and feed the ancestors; and the ancestors in turn have the obligation to guide and protect the living.

27 *Nsamanfo po pe won dodow, na menne ateasefo?*

Even the dead want an increase in their number, how much more the living?

Expl: Having more and more people is a desire of the Akan and few libation prayers leave out a request for the bearers of children to bear more children. This need for more members, according to this proverb, is not restricted to the living. (*ancestors, increase, the living, the dead*)

28 *Oteasefo na oma osaman kon do oto.*

It is the living person who makes the inhabitant of the spirit world long for the mashed yam.

Expl: The Akan have a ritual food, *oto*, made up of mashed yam (plain or mixed with palm oil) and hard-boiled eggs. The eggs symbolize life, and the ritual food may be given to a person's guardian spirit on special occasions, when the need arises, to feed it, or wash it, as the Akan say. *Oto* is also sprinkled at shrines and their surrounding areas as well as at other sacred places during festivals and other ritualistic occasions.

The offering of *oto* to the ancestors expresses the Akan belief that the dead continue to live and therefore need the same nourishment we need to sustain life on this side of the grave. The dead also

continue to be members of their families and therefore the obligations of sharing fellowship and hospitality still continue to bind them to the living.

The proverb expresses the mutual relationship that exists between the living and the dead. It is the responsibility of the living to revere and feed the dead and the dead long for this invitation to come and partake of a family meal; and the dead also have the responsibility to protect and guide the living (*living person, spirit world, mashed yam*) Brookman Amissah, p. 81

29 Osaman ntwen oteasefo ansa na wadidi.

A departed spirit does not wait for the living before it eats. That is, a departed spirit does not depend on the living for its sustenance.

Expl: The Akan belief is that their departed relatives are spirits and that they have unlimited mobility and unhindered access. Therefore, as spirits, the departed can have access to meals even before their living relatives begin to eat. The proverb shows the power of the departed spirits as well as the basis of the continued relationship between them and the living. (*departed spirit, ghosts, living persons*) Christaller, No. 2764

30 Wunni osaman aduan a, womfa wo nsa nto mu.

If you are not going to partake of the food of the departed spirit, you do not put your hand into it.

Expl: Although the Akan express fellowship with their departed spirits, they nevertheless keep a respectful distance between themselves and their departed ancestors. The reason for this attitude is the fear that the dead might take the living away with them since they are always seeking to increase their number by taking people from among the living to join their ranks. The living therefore try to avoid direct physical contact with them. Food intended for the spirits is, therefore, either put into a separate dish, put on the ground or even scattered.

In the light of this fear of physical contact, it would take a brave person to put his or her hand into food which is set aside for the departed spirits, knowing what the consequences will be.

The proverb therefore urges that one should not try to do what is clearly beyond one's ability. (*departed spirit, ghost, food, hand*)

31 Osaman tee ne nsa kyia wo a, wo pono wo de mu.

When an apparition (ghost) stretches its hand to greet you, you pull yours back.

Expl: Although shaking hands with each other and with strangers is stressed in the Akan tradition, this mark of brotherhood and sisterhood is not extended to the departed spirits because of the fear they may take one away. In its wider connotation, the proverb implies that one should avoid coming into contact with what will bring about harmful or undesirable consequences. (*ghost, hand, greet*)

32 Osaman bubu ba a, na eye hu; obeto wo a, wo nua ne no.

When a ghost is approaching at a distance, it is fearful; but when it gets closer (you discover that) it is a relative.

Expl: The avoidance of direct physical contact with ghosts as a result of the fear of the consequences of such contact is a common Akan behaviour. An approaching ghost is therefore a frightening phenomenon, but when the ghost gets closer, one finds that it is a relative. In a general sense, the proverb suggests that things may be fearful at a distance, but when they get closer they no longer appear to be so. (*ghost, distance, fear, relative*)

33 Osaman pa na odi dwan.

A benevolent spirit eats (the flesh of) sheep.

Expl: The Akan expect a deceased person to go to the land of the departed spirits and become a compassionate spirit who will bless his or her relatives by providing them with their needs. Such a spirit receives sacrifices or offerings from the living relatives. The proverb expresses the reciprocal relationship that exists between the living and the dead. (*benevolent spirit, ancestor, sheep*)

34 Osaman pa hyira ne ba.

A good (benevolent) spirit blesses its child.

Expl: Parental responsibility is believed not to terminate with death, and a good parent continues, after death, to be a benevolent deceased spirit, who cares for his or her children not only by providing for them with their needs to make them happy and content but also by giving them care and protection. (*benevolent spirit, ancestor, child*)

35 Asaman wonko mma.

The spirit world is not a place one can visit and return (as a living person).

Expl: Although the Akan believe in the return of the dead, they also regard death as an end to one's physical life. What returns is the spirit of the deceased, which can be reborn into the descendants. If the person returns to visit, he or she does so as an osaman, ghost. (*spirit world, living person*)

3 HUMAN BEINGS

The Akan prize human beings above money or possessions. Human beings have intrinsic value and the Akan say, onipa ye de, a human being is good to have (sweet). In fact, so valuable is a human being that the Akan prefer a bad person in a house to an empty house.

But this person who is prized is also a member of a community and it is in community that a person realises himself or herself. To be human, according to the Akan, is to be in relation with others, dead, living or by expectation, those yet to be born.

36 Onipa ne asem. Mefre sika a, sika nnye me so; mefre ntama a, ntama nnye me so. Onipa ne asem.

It is the human being that counts. I call on gold, gold does not respond; I call on drapery, but it does not respond. It is the human being that counts.

Expl: The human being has value above all material things. Wealth is not determined by the amount of material things a person has, rather it is measured by the number of people a person has. What makes a person really happy is the amount of attention and love that person receives from others. (*human being, money, gold, drapery, wealth, happiness*)

37 Onipa behwe yiye no, na efi nea wahu.

If a person is going to be careful, it is because of what that person has seen or experienced.

Expl: Experience is the best teacher. (*person, experience, teacher*)

38 Onipa hia mmoa.

A person needs help.

Expl: A human being, as an individual, is not self-sufficient to the extent that all his or her basic needs could be met by him or her alone. The assistance of others is required in order to satisfy one's basic needs. The proverb does not deny individual possibilities; on the contrary, human possibilities are enhanced when they are linked with those of others in the community. Cooperation and mutual help are the *sine qua non* of individual welfare. (*person, help, co-operation, welfare*)

39 Obi dan bi.

One person depends on another.

Expl: Human interdependence contributes to the achievement of individual welfare. This proverb is the same as the one above. Human interdependence contributes to the development, security, and the survival needs of the individual. (*person, dependence, interdependence*)

40 Onipa nnye nwura.

A human being is not weeds.

Expl: This proverb expresses the value of the human being. A human being must be treated with respect and dignity, for he or she is not like weeds to be trampled upon or cut away. (*human being, weeds, respect, dignity*)

41 Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye asase ba.

All human beings are the children of God, none is a child of the earth.

Expl: Every person must be accorded respect and dignity because he or she is a child of God. (*human being, God, child, earth, respect, dignity*)

42 Onipa wu a, ne tekrema mprow.

When a person dies, his or her tongue does not rot.

Expl: What a person says remains even after the death of that person. That is the reason we still remember and quote what our ancestors said in our proverbs. (*person, death, tongue, ancestors*)

43 Onipa nnyae mmobroro ye a, wonnyae no mmoborohunu.

If a person has not stopped needing help, you do not stop helping him or her.

Expl: Each person must help the other person all the time. (*person, help*)

44 Onipa a wode sanyaa mu aduan ayen no no, ohu asanka mu aduan a, ne were how.

The person who has been used to eating from a tin (enamel) plate grieves on seeing food in an earthenware dish.

Expl: The Akan originally used earthenware dishes and when enamel plates were introduced, only the well-to-do could afford them. A person who has enjoyed high status or rank grieves when he or she is demoted. (*person, plate, food, dish*) Akrofi, No. 738.

45 Onipa ye fe sen sika.

A human being is more beautiful than gold (money).

Expl: Although gold is beautiful and precious, a human being's worth surpasses that of gold or money. A human being is worth more than riches. (*human being, gold, money*)

46 Onipa didi wie, na onwie kasa.

A person finishes eating but does not finish talking.

Expl: One can eat only so much food at a time, but talking never stops. Discussion and consultation must go on all the time. (*person, eating, talking, discussion, consultation*)

47 Onipa nnye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho.

A human being is not a palm tree that he or she should be self-sufficient.

Expl: A palm tree is surrounded by its branches, but a human being is not self-sufficient and therefore wisdom dictates that he or she should be open, since a person always needs the assistance of others in order to achieve his or her basic needs. (*human being, palm tree, assistance, needs*)

48 Onipa bone te se fitii.

A bad person is like a piercing rod (for piercing calabashes).

To pierce holes in a calabash to make a sieve, the Akan use a piece of hot iron which sticks out at the back of the calabash. And when that happens, the person knows that the hole has been punched. That is what an evil person is like; he or she is seen or known by all. An evil person's capacity to hurt or inflict pain is like a piercing rod. (*person, piercing rod, calabash*)

49 Daakye nti na onipa gyaw awerew.

For the sake of the future, a person grows nails.

Expl: A person must give thought to the future and prepare himself or herself against future eventualities. (*future, person, nails*)

50 Onipa nsa ka nea ope nyinaa a, anka obebo dam.

If a person were to get all that he or she wanted (in life), he or she would go mad.

Expl: Too many possessions or wealth can get into a person's head to make him or her behave in a foolish way. Too much of everything is bad. A caution against greed. (*person, life, mad*)

51 Onipa gye nkanare a, osen dade.

When a person becomes rusty, he or she is worse than a rusty piece of iron.

Expl: When a person embarks on the path of evil, evil consumes him or her to the extent that that person is no use to society. (*person, iron*)

52 Onipa si bone kwan mu a, afotu ye no se osemode.

When one starts on the road to evil, advice sounds like a joke.

Expl: The moral wreck does not take advice or warning seriously. (*person, road, evil, advice, joke, warning*) Akrofi, No. 756.

53 Wope se egu wo yonko so a, egu wo so.

If you want evil to fall on your neighbour, it falls on you.

Expl: This is a warning against wishing someone ill. It is the Akan way of saying evil to him who evil thinks. (*evil, neighbour*)

54 Obaakofo nkyekyere kurow.

One person alone cannot build a town.

Expl: It takes more than one person to accomplish any great and worthwhile undertaking. The proverb underscores the need for co-operation since it yields greater benefits. (*person, town, cooperation*)

55 Obiakofe di ewo a, etaa ne yam.

If one person alone eats all the honey, it plagues or bloats up his or her stomach.

Expl: A greedy person suffers for his or her greed. (*person, greed, honey, stomach*)

56 Onipa a ompe se ne yonko ye yiye no, ono nso nye yiye.

The person who does not want another person (neighbour) to succeed also does not succeed.

Expl: This is a warning against selfishness, for a selfish person does not prosper. (*person, neighbour, selfishness*) Akrofi, No. 740.

57 Onipa anim te se owia anim; wuhu a, na wo bo adwo.

The face of a human being is like the face of the sun; if you see it, it can dispel your anxiety.

Expl: The proverb stresses the importance of face-to-face encounter or personal contact for it promotes mutual understanding among people. (*human being, face, sun, anxiety*)

58 Onipa a wanyin sen odufo.

An experienced old person knows better than a diviner.

Expl: The experience that comes with old age is greatly prized by the Akan and accounts for the respect accorded to the elderly. This experience is better than the probing into the future that a diviner performs and therefore young people are urged to heed the advice of old people. (*old person, diviner, experience, elderly*)

59 Onipa n'ano na ekum no, na egyaa no.

It is a person's mode of speaking that frees him or puts him into trouble.

Expl: A warning against speaking without reflection in a tradition in which reflection precedes speech. (*speaking, trouble, reflection, speech*)

60 Nnipa nyinaa nse.

All human beings are not alike (equal).

Expl: An acknowledgment of differences among human beings in terms of status, talent or ability. (*human being, inequality, status, talent, ability*)

61 Onipa baako nsa nkata Nyame ani.

A single hand (of a person) cannot cover the sky.

Expl: Although the Akan use the word *Nyame* for God, who is essentially a spirit, they use the same word, on occasion, for the sky. The proverb suggests that one person's hand cannot cover the sky, it will take many hands to accomplish that task. Cooperation and mutual help lead to the accomplishment of difficult tasks. (*hand, sky, God, cooperation, mutual help*)

62 Onipa ho anto no a, na efi ne nneyee.

If a person is unhappy, the cause lies in his or her conduct.

Expl: Unhappiness in life is often caused by a person's own conduct; and the proverb emphasizes the need for taking personal responsibility for some of life's negative experiences, instead of putting the blame on someone else. (*person, conduct, unhappiness, blame, responsibility*)

63 Onipa a wahintiw awu no, wontutu mmirika nko n'ayiase.

One does not run to the funeral of a person who died by stumbling over a stone.

Expl: It is important to learn from the mistakes of others (which led to injury or death) in order not to repeat them. (*funeral, stone, stumbling, mistakes, injury, death*)

64 Nea oforo dua pa, na wopia no.

The person who is climbing a good tree gets a push (support).

Expl: People who endeavour to do good or engage in a great project deserve the support of others, but the contrary is the case for those who do evil, they do not deserve encouragement. (*person, tree, support, evil, encouragement*)

65 Onipa fa adamfo ansa na wanya amane.

It is better for a person to make friends first before he or she gets into trouble.

Expl: In time of trouble, one may or may not know anybody, but if that person had made friends earlier, they would come to help him or her. The proverb advises us not to wait till trouble comes before looking for someone to befriend so that that person can help us. (*person, friends, trouble*)

66 Onipa, wonno no nna nyinaa.

A person is not loved at all times.

Expl: Human presence can easily become boring or tiring, and the proverb cautions against too much dependence on others or overtaxing the generosity or hospitality of others, which causes irritation. (*person, love, times, generosity*) Akrofi, No. 755

67 Onipa anim nye ahina na woapun mu daa.

The human face is not like a water-pot which should be smoked and freshened everyday.

Expl: The Akan use pots to store drinking water; and to keep the water fresh, the pot is cleaned and smoked regularly. This practice led to this proverb; for rebuking or reprimanding a person is like washing and cleaning that person's face. A person should therefore avoid actions which would call for rebuke everyday. (*human, face, water-pot, everyday, rebuke*)

68 Onipa ye wo yiye a, mfa bone nye no.

When someone does good to you, do not return it with evil.

Expl: The proverb stresses the evil of ingratitude. (*good, evil, someone, ingratitude*) Akrofi, No. 759.

69 Onipa beyee bi, na wammeye ne nyinaa.

A person came to do some of the things that needed doing in the world and not everything.

Expl: An individual cannot do everything there is to do and a person should therefore be content with what he or she can do, for there is a limit to human possibility. (*person, world, contentment*) Christaller, No. 2422.

70 Onipa ye yiye a, oye gyaw ne mma.

If a person does good, the children of that person reap the benefits after that person's death.

Expl: The descendants of a good person reap the fruit of the person's goodness and it follows also that the descendants of an evil person reap the fruits of that person's evil deeds. The proverb encourages the pursuit of goodness by pointing out that the survivors of a deceased person are affected by the deceased person's conduct in the world, good or bad. (*person, children, benefits, death, goodness, descendants, conduct*) Akrofi, No. 761.

71 Nnipa nyinaa ye nnipa bone; na wo nko de fi a, na nkurofo se, akoo yi ye onipa bone.

Everybody commits sins, but when one person's sins are exposed, everybody points to that person as the sinful one.

Expl: The proverb is a comment on a common human trait which makes people want to cover their own misdeeds while pointing the accusing finger at others, simply because theirs have been exposed. This proverb is used to advise people to be generous in their judgment of other people's actions since we are all not perfect. (*sins, person, everybody, judgment, misdeeds*)

4 THE PERSON (BODY PARTS)

The human body is likened to a tree and the Akan call it *ni-padua*, human tree, and the parts of the body are called *akwaa*, branches. The relationship between the body, tree, and its parts, branches, provides ample material for philosophical reflection, which is found in Akan proverbs about the human body.

72 Benkum guare nifa, na nifa guare benkum.

The left hand washes the right and the right hand washes the left.

Expl: The left hand cannot wash itself, neither can the right hand wash itself, but when the hands wash each other, they become clean. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are the *sine qua non* of individual welfare and, moreover, they make possible the achievement of undertakings which might appear to be difficult, if not impossible. (*left hand, right hand, co-operation*)

73 Nsa baako nkukuru adeso.

One hand cannot lift a (heavy) load.

Expl: A heavy responsibility must not be borne by one person. Collective action (cooperation) makes for light work. (*hand, load, work, responsibility*)

74 Nsa-dodow kyere banin koro.

Many hands catch a valiant man.

Expl: Confronted by a number of people, the strong man is overcome (powerless). The proverb points out that there is strength in numbers. (*hands, man, strength, numbers*)

75 Obaakofo di ewo a, etaa ne yam.

If one person alone eats honey, it bloats up his stomach.

Expl: The consequence of greed is misery. (*person, honey, stomach, greed, misery*)

76 Nantu so sen sre a, na oyare wo mu.

When the calf (leg) is bigger than the thigh, then there is disease in it.

Expl: The thigh is bigger than the muscular back of the leg below the knee, but when the reverse is the case then there is something wrong. In the same way, a child is expected to show respect to his elders (parents), but if the child is puffed up with pride and arrogance, and does not respect his elders (parents), then there is something wrong with that child. (*thigh, calf, disease, child, respect, elders, arrogance*)

77 Tekrema pa na wode wen ti.

A good tongue watches over the head.

Expl: A prudent person, who watches his words, always stays out of danger. (*tongue, head, prudence*) Akrofi, No. 925

78 Onipa ne tekrema ne ne bodua; eno ara na ode pra ne ho.

Just as an animal uses its tail to drive away flies, even so does a person use his or her tongue to protect (defend) himself or herself. (*animal, tail, tongue, person, flies*) Bannerman, No. 347

79 Tekrema bogya, wofe bi gu na womene bi.

Some of the blood on the tongue is spewed out and the rest is swallowed.

Expl: Not all the blood on a person's tongue can be spat out; some remains on the tongue and the person swallows it. The proverb advises that a person who has been insulted may rebuke the offender (spewing out some of the blood), but he must forgive him (by swallowing some of the blood). The proverb is used in pleading for forgiveness. (*blood, tongue, forgiveness*) Akrofi, No. 922

80 Tekrema twa wo a, ekyen sekan.

The wound inflicted by the tongue is more painful than the wound inflicted by a knife.

Expl: The tongue is sharper than a knife in the sense that an insult can be more painful than a knife wound. (*tongue, wound, knife, insult, wound*)

81 **Eti nye borofere na woapae mu.**

The (human) head is not like the pawpaw (fruit) to be split open (to see what is inside).

Expl: One can cut open a ripe pawpaw to see the seeds inside, but the head of a person cannot be split open to find out what is in it (thoughts). The proverb suggests that without speech (words) it is difficult to know what a person's thoughts are. (*head, pawpaw, seeds, thoughts, speech*)

82 **Ti nyinaa se, na emu nsem nye pe.**

All heads are alike but the thoughts in them are not alike (same).

Expl: Although people are the same, their character and temperaments differ. (*heads, thoughts, temperaments*) Akrofi, No. 931

83 **Wo tiboa bo wo koko na woante a, otee wo.**

If you do not heed the warning of your conscience, it punishes (disciplines) you.

Expl: The Akan regard the head as the seat of conscience (*tiboa*) and moral prompting and lapses are felt in the head. (*conscience, warning, head*) Bannerman, No. 516

84 **Wo ti so a, enye nneema nyinaa na wosoa.**

Even though you have a big head, you do not carry everything (load).

Expl: However capable a person may be, he or she should not undertake every responsibility. Obligations must be shared by all. (*head, load, responsibility, obligations*)

85 **Eti ntewe a, wongyae kyew soa.**

As long as your head is in place, you do not stop wearing a hat.

Expl: To be human means to belong and to do so is to have an obligation to other members of the family or community and it is in the exercise of this obligation that the balance in the family or society is maintained. In other words, society is undergirded by mutual obligations and as long as a person is alive, he or she should never be weary of fulfilling his or her obligations. Even death does not free a person from his or her obligations, for the dead have an obligation to protect and guide members of their family. The other living members of the family show their obligation to the dead by

respecting them, honouring them and offering them food and drink. This mutual obligation undergirds the symbiotic relationship between the living and their ancestors. (*head, hat, family, obligation*)

86 Ti a edi kan ne panyin.

The head which comes first is the elder (senior).

Expl: The first twin among the Akan is called *panyin* (elder) and the second is *kuma* (younger). In a more general sense, those who preceded us here are our elders, and for that reason they command the respect of the younger generation. (*head, elder, twin, elders, respect, generation*)

87 Obi mfa ne nsa benkum nkyere n'agya amanfo so.

One does not point to the ruins of one's father's village (origins) with the left hand.

Expl: The left hand is surrounded by a number of restrictions with respect to usage in the traditions of the Akan, and this is probably due to its use in doing "dirty work" — cleaning the body after moving the bowels. It is therefore impolite to use the left hand to greet or give something to someone. Pointing to your origins, and traditions with your left hand is a sign of disrespect which the proverb speaks against. (*left hand, village, father, disrespect*)

88 Ansa na worebewo bodwese no, na anisoatete te ase.

Before the beard was born, the eyebrow was already living.

Expl: The eyebrow precedes the beard and is older. Children must therefore respect their elders (parents). (*beard, eyebrow, children, elders*)

89 Ano patiriw a, esen nammon.

When the mouth slips, it is worse than when the foot slips.

Expl: A caustic (stinging) word can cause more harm than a fall. (*mouth, foot, word*) Akrofi, No. 775

90 Ano kurokuro twa ne ho adafi.

A loquacious person unmasks his own secrets.

Expl: The proverb warns against talkativeness and upholds the exercise of restraint in speech. (*person, secrets, talkativeness, restraint*)

91 Obi nto ntasu nto fam, na omfa n'ano mfa.

One does not spit on the ground and lick it with one's mouth (tongue).

Expl: The proverb warns against talkativeness and upholds the exercise of restraint in speech. (*person, secrets, talkativeness, restraint*)

91 Obi nto ntasu nto fam, na omfa n'ano mfa.

One does not spit on the ground and lick it with one's mouth (tongue).

Expl: A person must not go back on her/his word. (*ground, mouth, tongue, sputum*)

92 Ano pa ma ade kye owura.

A good mouth gives long life to its owner (master).

Expl: A person who is prudent in speech does not make enemies and therefore avoids trouble. (*mouth, owner, master, prudence, speech, enemies, trouble*) Akrofi, No. 774

93 Wudididi afiduasa mu a, w'ano nye den.

If you eat in many houses, you do not (cannot) speak out.

Expl: The Akan word *aduasa* means thirty, but in polished speech, it is made to stand for many and *afiduasa* therefore means many houses. The proverb suggests that over-dependence on others (benefactors) makes a person lose her/his moral power to speak out or give guidance to (admonish) her/his benefactors. (*houses, mouth, overdependence, moral power, guidance, benefactors*) Bannerman, No. 206

94 Aben no nye de a, efi onipa ano.

Even though the sound of the horn is not sweet, it is coming from the mouth of a human being.

Expl: Human effort must be appreciated in order to give encouragement to people to do better. (*horn, mouth, human being, effort, encouragement*)

95 Nea oreguare asu nhu n'akyi.

The swimmer does not see his or her back.

Expl: It is the person who stands on the bank who can see the swimmer's back. At a deeper level, a person does not normally see his or her own mistakes and it takes others to point them out to him or her. The proverb expresses the need to point out the mistakes of others (leaders), and in order to have a healthy society those who are in positions of leadership must listen to the observations and

comments of others. (*swimmer, back, mistakes, leadership, observations, comments*)

96 Nea otwa sa nnim se n'akyi akyea.

The one who cuts the trail does not know that it is crooked (behind her/him).

Expl: A leader who is leading a nation or group of people is busy leading, but it takes the people (those who are led) to see the rightness or wrongness of the leader's actions. This proverb, like the one above, expresses the need for people in a society or nation to air their views on the conduct of their leaders. (*trail, back, leader, nation, actions, conduct*)

97 Ahoofe ntua ka.

Beauty (physical) does not pay debts.

Expl: Physical attractiveness alone is not enough, a person must have some moral qualities to recommend him or her. This proverb is used as a warning to people, especially young people, to look for something more than pulchritude in choosing a partner in marriage. (*beauty, debts, marriage, attractiveness, marriage*)

98 Se woye opanyin na woammo w'asen hama yiye a, mmofra twetwe.

If you are an elder (grown-up) and you do not tie the girdle around your waist properly, children will pull it (making fun of you).

Expl: A grown-up who does not conduct himself as an adult loses the respect of the children. The proverb expresses the view that adults (leaders) must earn the respect they enjoy. (*elder, girdle, waist, children, adult, respect*) Bannerman, No. 449

99 Ani a ehu tete ho na enni ho, na aso a etee tete ho asem de ewo ho.

The eye which saw the past is not living, but the ear which heard what was said in the past (still) lives.

Expl: Even though there is no one in the present generation who saw the past, we still remember the traditions of the ancestors. The traditions have remained as each generation passed on what it heard to the next. (*eye, the past, ear, traditions, ancestors, generation*)

Mensah, No. 133

100 **Tete ka asom.**

Tradition remains in the ear.

Expl: As the title of this book suggests, tradition remains as each generation keeps what it heard from the past. (*tradition, ear, generation, the past*)

101 **Woton w'aso di a, wode w'anuonyam tew guaha.**

If you sell your ear, you complete the bargain with your honour.

Expl: People who judge cases in court are expected to uphold justice, but if they suppress their sense of justice, but if they suppress their sense of justice (by taking a bribe), they lose the honour due to them. (*ear, bargain, honour, court, justice*) Akrofi, No. 944

102 **Wudi asem na wokyea w'aso bu nten na wudi mu abaguade a, wofe.**

If you are sitting in judgment and you pervert justice (bend your ears to one side instead of keeping them in balance), you ultimately refund (vomit) the court fees.

Expl: If you distort justice, you suffer for it. The proverb is a warning against partiality in judgment. (*judgment, justice, court, fees, partiality*)

103 **Aso te se nsenea: woto mu to mu a, eda.**

The ear is like a pair of scales; if you keep adding to the weight, it goes down.

Expl: The proverb is a reflection on the common human experience that persistent and unrelenting persuasion eventually makes persons yield or change their position on an issue. (*ear, scales, weight*) Akrofi, No. 886

104 **Ohene a owo kurow mu ye abenkum a, ne nkoa nyinaa yare abafan.**

When a chief of a town is left-handed, all his subjects are lame (disabled so that walking is difficult or impossible).

Expl: A ruler or chief is expected to be guided in his rule by the people over whom he exercises leadership, and therefore if the chief misrules, then the people have abandoned their responsibility and have thus become disabled. The proverb stresses the responsibility of members of a community or citizens of a country to

ensure good governance by vigilantly monitoring the conduct of affairs by the leaders. (*chief, town, subjects, ruler, leadership, responsibility, governance, conduct, leaders*) Mensah, No. 730

105 Atwamene suro ayayada.

The person who cuts throats is afraid to lie on his back.

Expl: Evil men are afraid that others will pay them back in their own coin, and are therefore hysterical or needlessly afraid of any action that reminds them of what they have done to others. (*person, throat, back, action, coin*)

106 Wopae wo mpampam a, wohye wo akon-mu-den.

When they strike you on the top of your head, they are strengthening your neck.

Expl: People who carry loads on their heads need strong necks in order to do so. The proverb suggests that adversity strengthens us to be able to face life in the future. In other words, adversity has its positive aspects. (*head, neck, adversity, life, future*)

107 Onipa bewu a ne tekrema mporow no, na efi oteasefo.

It is because of a living man that the tongue of a deceased person does not rot.

Expl: If the words of a deceased person are not to die with him, then someone is there (alive) who remembers them. The human memory keeps tradition alive. (*living man, tongue, person, words, memory, tradition*)

108 Sika te se hwene mu nhwi, wutu a, na woressu (same as 529)

Parting with money is like pulling the hairs in the nose, you cry (out of pain) when they are pulled.

Expl: Parting with hard-earned money is not easy. (*money, hairs, nose*) Mensah, No. 817

109 Wofa abirekyi adamfo a, wonkye bodwese fuw.

When you befriend the he-goat, you quickly grow a beard.

Expl: When you associate with an evil or incorrigible person, you quickly become like him (take on some of his bad habits). The proverb is a warning against keeping bad company. (*goat, beard, person, habits, company*)

**110 Wopere wo man na woanya a, wopere wo kurow;
wopere wo kurow nso na woanya a, wopere wo fi; wopere wo fi
nso na woanya a, wopere wo nkoara wo ti.**

If you strive for your nation without success, strive for your town;
and if you strive for your town without success, strive for your
family; but if you strive for your family without success, then
strive for your own head (self).

Expl: The Akan ideal is for a person to reach beyond himself, to
see to the interest of others and to put himself last. (*nation, town,
family, head, self, person, interest*) Mensah, No. 914

5 MARRIAGE

Marriage to the Akan is not only a union of two individuals, but
a union of families and the two people become the link in the chain.
Marriage is inseparable from procreation. Normal, healthy people
are expected to marry and to add to the number of people in the
family and society. It is in the home that Akan society prepares the
next generation of adults.

The Akan have the idea of marriage as a permanent union and
therefore the negotiations and inquiries made before it are meant to
ensure that the marriage will last and that the union will bring hon-
our and not disgrace. And when the Akan compare marriage with
palm wine, they are saying that whereas palm wine can be tasted
and spewed out if the taste is disagreeable, marriage is not like that;
it cannot be tasted and spewed out.

111 Wiase wotra no baanu baanu.

People live in the world in pairs.

Expl: The proverb expresses a universal truth about human beings -
- that every man or woman needs a partner. (*marriage, people,
world, man, woman, partner*) Akrofi, No. 965

112 Aware nye nsafufu na woaka ahwe.

Marriage is not like palm wine to be tasted (and spewed out).

Expl: Palm wine is tapped from the palm tree and when it is fresh, it is very sweet. But the taste changes with time as the alcoholic content increases. A person who tastes it, therefore, may spew it out as a result of the taste. The proverb suggests that marriage is unlike palm wine, which a person can taste and spew out. Marriage, according to this proverb, is contracted with the assumption of permanent or lasting union and must not be entered into lightly. Hence, the lengthy procedures and the involvement of both families in the marriage process. (*marriage, palm wine, palm tree, taste*)

113 Woko aware a, bisa.

Make enquiries (ask or investigate) before you marry.

Expl: Before a marriage is contracted, Akan custom demands that families on both sides should conduct an investigation into each other's history and satisfy themselves that there is nothing to stand in the way of the intended union. Attention is paid to such incidents as hereditary diseases, murders, suicides, or any other factors which are regarded as undesirable and disgraceful. And, it is only when no such undesirable things are found that the union would be allowed to proceed. The proverb warns against hasty marriages. (*marriage, enquiry, union, diseases*)

114 Aware ntem tetew ntama.

A hasty marriage tears up (destroys) one's cloth.

Expl: A marriage entered into hastily brings problems to both partners. (*marriage, problems, partners, husband, wife*)

115 Aware foforo te se ode.

A new marriage (honeymoon) is like yam.

Expl: The proverb likens the joy and happiness of a new marriage to the sweetness of the yam, a staple food of the Akan. (*marriage, yam, honeymoon*)

116 Aware foforo sa ode.

A new marriage leads to the depletion of (sweet) yam.

Expl: The happiness which a new marriage or honeymoon brings is accompanied by the consumption of good food. And, at a time like this, the stock of yam becomes quickly depleted. This is an allusion to the merriment and bliss experienced at a new marriage. (*marriage, honeymoon, yam*) Christaller, No. 3434

117 **Awaregu ne nkuro.**

Divorce is stating each other's case.

Expl: Marriage is not dissolved without each partner stating his or her case. An attempt is made by both families to resolve conflicts which arise between couples, and it is only when the conflicts are irreconcilable that divorce is allowed to take place. (*marriage, divorce, conflict*)

118 **Awareso ne awaregu, ne fa bi gyina nsewnom so.**

A successful marriage and a marriage that ends in divorce both partly depend on the in-laws.

Expl: The proverb alludes to the crucial role of the in-laws, whose attitude and behaviour can either make or unmake a marriage. (*marriage, divorce, in-laws, attitude, behavior*) Bannerman, No. 75

119 **Awaregyae ngu kurow.**

Divorce does not destroy a town.

Expl: Although marriage is preferable to divorce, it is sometimes better for a marriage to be dissolved instead of carrying on tensions in the home which may end up engulfing a whole community in conflict, since each partner has a family on his or her side. (*marriage, divorce, town, tensions, home, family*) Christaller, No. 3435.

120 **Awardodow ma obarima tekrema ye nta.**

Many marriages (polygamy) make a man's tongue double.

Expl: A man who marries many women has to have a different tongue for each wife in order to keep the wives contented. The proverb alludes to the problems which face a polygamous husband. (*polygamy, tongue, marriage, women, wife, husband*)

121 **Wo yerenom anum a, wo tekrema anum.**

If you have five wives, you have five tongues.

Expl: Having multiple wives makes a man duplicitous. This proverb makes the same point as the one above. (*marriage, polygamy, tongues*) Akrofi, No. 1003

122 **Wo yere apem a, w'sem apem.**

If you have a thousand wives, you have a thousand tongues.

Expl: This proverb makes the same point as the one above. (*marriage, polygamy, tongues*) Akrofi, No. 1004

123 Ayere dodow ye ohia, na enye hwee.

Having many wives (polygamy) is nothing but poverty.

Expl: Although Akan society recognizes polygamy as a legal form of marriage and permits it as well as monogamy, Akan thought always holds the problems and dangers in it in view. In this proverb, the financial strains imposed on a polygamous husband are alluded to. (*marriage, polygamy, poverty, monogamy*)

124 Aware bone na esee obaa pa.

A bad marriage ruins a good woman.

(*marriage, woman*)

6 THE FAMILY (ABUSUA)

The Akan society is matrilineal and descent is traced through the mother's lineage. Each Akan belongs to one of the eight clans. The rights, property and inheritance as well as succession to stools (symbol of chiefship) are also based on the mother's family or *abusua*.

The family is undergirded by reciprocal obligations which the members owe to each other and it is this which provides the foundation for family life. And, since the departed members of the family are still members, the sense of obligation applies to them also.

125 Abusua ye dom.

The family is an army (multitude of people).

Expl: The Akan family is not limited to the father, mother and children, but includes all those related by blood. The family, therefore, is extended and is likened to an army which has a wide range of support systems to make for efficient functioning. Membership is undergirded by a network of obligations. The family is not made up of only the living, but it also includes the dead and the yet-unborn. (*family, army, multitude, father, mother*)

126 Abusua ye dom, na wo na ba ne wo nua.

The family is an army, but it is your mother's child who is your real brother or sister.

Expl: Although the family is made up of a large number of people, the Akan regard the relationship between children who share the same mother's blood as closer; and a person can depend more on his or her own mother's children than on the other members of the larger family. The proverb cautions against too much dependence on family members, and stresses the unity and strength of the relationship that come through the mother's side. (*family, army, mother, child, brother, sister*)

127 Abusua dua, wontwa.

The family tree is not cut.

(*family, tree*)

128 Abusua nyinaa ye abusua, na yehwehwe mmetema so de.

All families are families, but we are looking for the one whose members are clustered like a bunch of palm nuts.

Expl: The Akan ideal of a family is the one which is closely knit together and whose members relate to each other intimately. Clustered together like the palm fruits in a bunch of palm nuts, such family members are inseparable. The proverb draws attention to the need of members of the family or clan to be closer to one another. (*family, members, palm nuts*) Christaller, No. 683

129 Abusua te se nhwiren, egugu akuw-akuw.

The family is like flowers, which bloom (grow) in clusters.

Expl: The Akan regard persons as beings who are intrinsically communal by nature, and therefore families are made up of clusters of people who are not isolated atomic beings, but rather people who are welded together in a web of interrelationships and interpersonal bonds, resulting in the pursuit of shared values, interests and goals. (*family, flowers, shared values, interests, goals*) Christaller, No. 684

130 Abusua do funu.

The family loves a corpse.

Expl: Every person is a member of a family; and in time of death, it is the family that is responsible for the burial of their member. The arrangement of the funeral rites and burial, as well as the periodic mourning that ensues, are all performed by the family of the deceased and if there is a debt it is shared among the members of the family. (*family, death, corpse*)

7 MOTHER AND FATHER

In the matrilineal Akan society, the role of the mother is very special. A close attachment to the mother and her lineage characterises mother-child relationships. But, fathers also play a complementary role, which is equally important for, among other things, a father is believed to provide spiritual guidance and protection for the children.

131 **Wo ni di hia a, wunnyae no nkofa obi nye na.**

If your mother is poor, you do not forsake her and adopt another.

Expl: However poor one's parents may be, one should not despise them but accord them respect. (*mother, poverty*) Akrofi, No. 652

132 **Wo na oba ne wo nua.**

Your mother's child is your (real) brother or sister.

Expl: In matrilineal Akan society, the relationship between children from the same mother is closer than that between children of the same father. Children of the same mother share the same blood and the proverb may be understood as the Akan way of saying that blood is thicker than water. (*mother, child, brother, sister, children, father, blood*)

133 **Wo na wu a, na w'abusua asa.**

When your mother dies, you have no kindred left.

Expl: A child carries its mother's blood and belongs to the mother's family (*abusua*) and therefore the loss of a mother means the loss of a very close family member. (*mother, death, kindred, blood, family, mother*) Rattray, No. 491

134 **Wo na nye a, wo na ara nen.**

Even if your mother is not a good woman, she is your mother nevertheless.

Expl: The proverb expresses the importance of the mother to a person and the need to respect her at all times. (*mother, woman*) Rattray, No. 492

135 **Wunni na na woko obi fi agoru na otu ne mma fo a, wode tu wo ho bi.**

When you have no mother and you go to someone's (neighbor's)

house to play, and she admonishes her children, you profit by some of that advice yourself. (*mother, neighbour, house, children, advice*)

136 “**Agya, gyae na menka!**” **wokyi.**

“Father, let me say it!” is forbidden (bad manners).

Expl: It is unbecoming (improper) for a child (junior person) to say what should be said by the father (his senior). (*father, arrogance*)

Akrofi, No. 455

137 **Wosen w’agya tenten a, enkyere se wo tipen ne no.**

If you are taller than your father, it does not mean that you are his equal.

Expl: Parents should always be respected even though their children may become wealthier or more famous than they. (*father, equal, parents, children*)

138 **Woka wo agya a, woka wo na bi.**

When you swear the oath of your father, you should also swear that of your mother.

Expl: A child belongs to both parents and must respect them both. In the common practice of swearing oaths, where a person swears that he/she is speaking the truth by calling on the name of a divinity, the person should call on divinities on both sides of one's family. (*oath, father, mother, parents, truth, family*) Rattray, No. 496

139 “**Me na dea, memfa! M’agya dea, memfa!**” **na ede awi ba.**

“This belongs to my mother, I will take it! This belongs to my father, I will take it!” makes the child a thief.

Expl: Children should not be allowed to touch things in the house without permission from parents. (*father, mother, thief, permission, parents*)

140 **Agoru a ereba wo na ne w’agya abobow ano no, wompe ntem nkohwe.**

The dance which is being brought to the gates of your mother and father, you do not hurry to go to see.

Expl: If a good thing is surely coming into your hands, do not be anxious to get it. The proverb cautions against impatience in the face of anticipation. (*father, mother, dance, house, impatience, anticipation*) Akrofi, No. 448

8 WOMEN AND WIVES

Women and wives play an important role in the home and society as bearers of children who will continue the society and they stand in place of society to educate the young. Before any child steps into the street, it will already have been taught by the mother the language, values and etiquette of the society.

Women play a complementary role to that of men and husbands. The Akan generally associate women and wives with the qualities of love, care, tenderness and nurturing.

141 Obea ko aware a, ode ne na ko.

When a woman (enters into marriage), she takes her mother along (with her.)

Expl: In the upbringing of Akan children, the mother teaches her daughter what is regarded as the woman's duties in the home. Therefore, a woman who marries puts into practice in her married home the training she received from her mother. And her conduct, good or reprehensible, is the result of her mother's upbringing. The proverb underscores the importance or necessity for mothers not to be lax in the training of their daughters. (*woman, marriage, mother, upbringing, children, daughters*)

142 Obea ansua ade ye na oko aware a, wode ne nkwan gu tumpan mu kyere oman.

A woman who does not learn how to cook in her home will, after marriage, have her soup put into a bottle and exhibited to the general public (as evidence of her incompetence).

Expl: This is a warning to young girls to learn the duties that will be expected of them when they enter into marriage in the future. (*woman, marriage, home, soup, bottle, public, future, marriage*)

143 Obea ton ntorewa, na onton atuduru.

A woman sells garden eggs and not gunpowder.

Expl: Generally, occupations follow sex lines, and women are expected to do the less dangerous ones, such as selling farm produce, and leaving the dangerous ones to the men. But, in spite of this, the

Queen Mother of Ejisu, Nana Yaa Asantewa, led the Asante forces in a war against the British in 1900. (*woman, garden eggs, gun-powder*)

144 Obea twa akyene a, etweri obarima dan mu.

Even though a woman cuts (makes) a drum, it is kept in a man's room.

Expl: Women do not beat drums in Akan society and neither do they carry drums. And, even though a woman may possess a drum (privilege of chiefs in Akan society), she cannot play it herself; she will have to have a man to play it. The proverb suggests the distinction between male and female tasks. (*woman, drum, man, room, occupations*)

145 Obea ko asu anopa a, odom nankasa ho anwummere.

A woman who goes to the river to fetch water in the morning spares herself much labour in the evening.

Expl: Women and children go to fetch water for the house as part of the daily chores of house-keeping and the water that is fetched in the morning lasts throughout the day. A woman who does not fetch water in the morning will have to do so in the evening at the end of the day's work in the fields when she may be too tired to go to fetch water. Tasks must be performed early and at the appropriate time. This is a reference to the fact that by custom an Akan woman must have a bath in the evening. When she fetches water in the morning, it is for her own benefit, because she ends up using it herself. (*woman, river, water, morning, labour, evening*)

146 Obea ye turom mu nhwiren; ne kunu nso ye ne ho ban.

A woman is a flower in the garden; and her husband the fence around it.

Expl: The proverb alludes to the responsibility of men to protect women. In Akan society when going to the farm or traveling through the forest, women and children lead and the men follow behind to protect them. If danger comes in front, the man sees it and if danger attacks from behind, the man turns around to face it. (*woman, flower, garden, husband, fence, men*) Bannerman, No. 83

147 Obea tenten so abe a, onwam di.

When a woman of more than average height (tall) carries palm nuts, the toucan eats them.

Expl: Akan women are generally shorter than men, but this proverb is not about physical stature. The expression "tall" woman, in the sense in which it is implied in this proverb, is a woman who is indecorous and does things that are unbecoming her sex; such a woman runs into trouble. (*woman, palm nuts, toucan*) Rattray, No. 499

148 Obea nya ade pa a, obi nte; ohyia amane a, ose mmari-ma mmra.

When a woman gets a good thing (wealth), no one hears about it; but when she is in trouble, she shouts for men to come to her aid. (*woman, wealth, men, aid, trouble*)

149 Obea rekyew dompe na adan nam a, na n'ani da oba-rima so.

When a woman displays exceptional culinary skill by turning bones into meat, she has a man in mind (to please).

Expl: Good cooking is one of the ways by which a woman (wife) tries to please a man. (*woman, bones, man*)

150 Obea na onim okunu.

It is the woman who knows her husband.

Expl: Only a mother knows the father of her child. (*woman, wife, husband*)

151 Obea ne ne kunu asem, obi nnim mu.

No one knows the confidential matters between a wife and a husband.

Expl: The confidentiality of a husband-wife relationship is stressed by this proverb, which is used as a warning against interference in the affairs of a husband and wife. (*woman, wife, husband*)

152 Obea ho ye fe a, efi ne kunu.

When a woman is beautiful, it is from her husband that she gets her beauty.

Expl: The beautiful things a wife adorns herself with and which make her look attractive and charming are provided by her husband. She

therefore owes her beauty to her husband. (*woman, wife, husband, beauty*) Rattray, No. 504

153 Obea biara te se deeben ara na wugyae aware, gyae aware a, w'anim mma anuonyam.

However beautiful a woman may be, if she is frequently divorced, she loses her respect.

Expl: A succession of divorces makes a person lose his or her honour in the eyes of the community. The proverb is used in advising, especially women who cannot keep to one husband. (*woman, divorce, respect, husband*)

154 Mmea nyinaa ye baako.

All women are alike. (*women*)

155 Mmea pe nea sika wo.

Women enjoy being where there is wealth. (*woman, wealth, money*)

156 Mmea se wo ho ye fe a, ene ka.

If women admire your beauty, you are always in danger of incurring debts. (*woman, debts, beauty*) Akrofi, No. 30

157 Mmea dodow kunu yare a, okom kum no.

When a man with many wives falls ill, he is starved to death (each of the wives thinks that the other will cook for him).

Expl: It is the responsibility of each wife to cook for the husband but it turns out that in time of need he starves. The proverb expresses the idea that everybody's business tends to become nobody's business. (*woman, wives, husband, starvation, responsibility, business*)

158 Mmea-pe mu wo bribi a, anka aponkye da apakan mu.

If chasing after women were profitable, the he-goat would ride in a palanquin (as a king).

Expl: Kings and chiefs, as a mark of their high status in society, are carried in palanquins on festive occasions. Going after women is not regarded as an achievement that should be rewarded with a ride in a palanquin (to be showered with honour). The proverb is a warning to young men and men, in general, not to pursue women lecherously. (*woman, goat, palanquin, men*)

9 WIFE (*Oyere*)

159 *Oyere* pa sen sika.

A virtuous wife is more valuable than money.

(*wife, money*)

160 *Oyere* pa ye ahode.

A good wife is wealth.

(*wife, wealth*)

161 *Oyere* te se kuntu: wode kata wo so a, wo ho keka wo; wuyi gu ho nso a, awow de wo.

A wife is like a woolen blanket: if you cover yourself with it, it irritates you; and yet, if you take it away, you feel cold.

Expl: Marriage has its ups and downs, joys and sorrows and it takes wisdom to maintain the balance between the two. (*wife, blanket*) Akrofi, No. 1005

162 Wope obea aware a, wonto mmea ho pe.

If you want to get married to a woman, (looking for a wife), you do not speak disdainfully about women. (*wife, woman*) Rattray, No. 518

163 Wo yam ye a, mfa wo yere nkye.

However beneficent you may be, you do not give away your wife (as a gift). (*wife, gift, beneficent*)

164 Wo yere ko asu ba na ose "soe me" a, soe no, na da bi wobeko bi anom a, wunnim.

If your wife returns from the water hole and asks you to help her take down the load, help her, for you do not know whether you may have to go yourself to the water hole some day.

Expl: It is the wife's duty to fetch water for the home. This proverb urges husbands to help wives in performing some of the housework in the home. (*wife, water hole, river, load, day, husband, home, housework*) Akrofi, No. 1002

165 *Oyere* nye nam na woakyekyere amena.

A wife is not like meat that she should be parcelled up and sent out.

Expl: A wife is not a disposable thing and must be treated with respect. (*wife*) Rattray, No. 514

10 CHILDREN

Children are highly valued by the Akan and in fact, in spite of all the changes introduced into Akan society by modernity, procreation remains the aim of marriage, for without offspring, marriage is incomplete. The Akan say: *Awoo ye!* Procreation is a virtue.

Although children are adored, Akan tradition insists that they must not be spoiled but disciplined with love. The Akan say that bad upbringing produces bad adults and express this in their proverb, "It is bad upbringing that made the vulture eat faeces."

166 *Abofra ye ya.*

The inexperience of a child is pitiful.

Expl: The inexperience and naiveté of a child make him behave in a way that arouses compassion in an adult who has more experience and therefore knows better. (*child, inexperience*)

167 *Abofra bo nnwaw, na ommo akyekyere.*

A child breaks a snail, but does not break a tortoise.

Expl: It is not beyond the strength of a child to break the shell of a snail which is soft compared to that of a tortoise, which is hard. The proverb does not caution against attempting difficult tasks; it rather urges that one must know one's strength and not attempt to do what is beyond one's capabilities or strength. (*child, snail, tortoise, strength*)

168 *Abofra twa fufuu a, otwa nea ebeko n'ano.*

If a child is eating *fufuu*, he cuts it according to the size of his mouth.

Expl: *Fufuu* is a staple Akan meal and it is made from boiled yams, cassava, yam or plantain which is pounded in a mortar and then eaten with soup. To eat *fufuu*, a person cuts a piece which fits his or her mouth and dips it into soup and swallows it. The proverb is the same as the one above. (*child, mouth, eating, food, cassava, mortar, soup, mouth, plantain, yam*)

169 *Abofra ano ye den a, ode hyen aben, na omfa nhyen waduru.*

Even when a child has a strong mouth (argumentative, disputatious, wordy), he or she uses it to blow a horn, and not to blow a mortar (with a wide opening), in which *fufuu* is pounded.

Expl: The proverb is the same as the one above. (*child, mouth, horn, mortar*) Christaller, No. 571

170 Abofra nserew afu.

A child does not laugh at a hunchback.

Expl: A child is young and is still growing. Since he or she does not know what he or she will grow into, he or she must not make fun of a grown-up who is a hunchback, for the child may grow up to become something worse. This is a warning to young people not to ridicule adults or poke fun at the deformities or handicaps of people. (*child, hunchback*)

171 Abofra nserew akwatia.

A child does not laugh at a short person.

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*child, person, laugh*)

172 Abofra ye nea opanyin ye a, ohu nea opanyin hu.

When a child does what a grown-up person does, the child sees what a grown-up sees.

Expl: An overforward child suffers for his or her misdeeds. (*child, person, misdeeds*) Akrofi, No. 266

173 Abofra yaw opanyin a, onkye ade.

When a child abuses an elder, he or she does not live long.

Expl: Children are brought up to respect their elders but when they fail to do so, they suffer. A child who disobeys the advice and guidance of the elders does not prosper or live long. (*child, elder, abuse, elders, advice, guidance*)

174 Abofra hu ne nsa hohoro a, one mpanyin didi.

When a child knows how to wash his or her hands (before taking a meal), he or she eats with elders.

Expl: A child who conducts himself well is numbered among the elders and can sit with the elders in council. (*child, hands, elders*) Akrofi, No. 260

175 Abofra ani anso panyin a, ofre mpopa se haha.

If a child does not respect his elders, he pronounces the name of the palm branch badly (nasally).

Expl: The Akan word for palm branch is *mpopa*, but when a child does not show respect to his or her elders, he or she learns nothing

from them; he or she cannot even speak well and therefore calls *mpopa, haha*. This is a warning to children to respect their elders and heed their advice and guidance, otherwise they will suffer. (*child, respect, elders, palm branch, advice, guidance*) Akrofi, No. 261

176 Abofra nsam ade nye hye-na.

It is not difficult to find a satisfactory gift for a child.

Expl: Because of the inexperience and lack of sophistication on the part of a child, what an adult may consider trifling and of little consequence may please a child enormously. An elder may throw away a wrapper, but a child eagerly and happily picks it up and plays with it. Little things please children. (*child, gift, elder*)

177 Abofra sua adwini a, enye osebo nhoma na ode sua.

When a child is learning a craft, he or she does not begin with the skin of a leopard.

Expl: A leopard's skin is not only hard to come by, it is also expensive; and an apprentice learning to work with leather should begin with easy-to-get or less expensive hides and, after mastering the craft, he or she can then use expensive hides. The proverb points out that it is advisable to start everything from small beginnings. (*child, craft, skin, leopard*) Akrofi, No. 263

178 Abofra mfa pereguan na ode sua aguadi.

A child does not begin learning to trade with a big capital.

Expl: **Pereguan** (£8 2s) was a lot of money during the colonial times in the Gold Coast (Ghana). The proverb suggests that a learner or apprentice must start with small beginnings. (*child, learning, capital, money*) Akrofi, No. 259

179 Abofra bo mmusu akron a, ofa mu anum.

If a child perpetrates nine crimes, he or she bears the punishment for five (the family bears the rest).

Expl: The Akan family (*abusua*) is undergirded by strong blood ties, mutual obligations and support, and the consequences of a member's transgressions are not borne by the member alone but by the member and his or her family. A family member's misdeeds bring disgrace not only upon the offender, but also upon his or her family. (*child, crime, punish, family, transgressions, misdeeds, disgrace*) Akrofi, No. 257

180 Abofra a oko asu na obo ahina.

The child who goes to the river to fetch water breaks the water-pot.

Expl: The child who goes to the river to fetch water is involved in the performance of a duty or service to his or her parents or family, and it is in the course of this that the child breaks the water-pot. If the child does not discharge that responsibility he or she may not break the water-pot. The proverb suggests that mistakes are made by those who work, and it is used in defending a person who, in the performance of a duty, makes a mistake. (*child, river, water, pot, parents, mistakes*)

181 Abofra antie ne na ne n'agya asem a, odi aduan a nkyene nni mu.

When a child (disobeys) disregards the advice of his or her mother and father, he or she eats food in which there is no salt.

Expl: Disobedience brings misfortune to children. (*child, disobedience, father, mother, food, salt*)

182 Abofra a obeye yie no, wonyen no wo kete pa so.

A child who is to turn out good is not reared (only) on a beautiful mat.

Expl: Children who turn out to be good adults are not necessarily raised in wealthy homes and the enjoyment of finery in childhood is not a guarantee that the child will turn out to be a good adult. What ensures good adulthood is good upbringing. (*child, child rearing, mat, adult, adulthood, upbringing*)

183 Abofra kotow mpanyin nkyen.

A child kneels near an elder.

Expl: To kneel down before or beside another person is to show respect to that person, and the proverb stresses the need for children to respect their elders and learn from their experience. (*child, elder, respect, experience, elders*) Christaller, No. 568

184 Abofra su a, wommo no dua mu.

When a child cries, he is not tied up (fastened) to a log.

Expl: Akan ideas of child-rearing stress the genuine appreciation of the child as a child and these ideas are reflected in this proverb, which lets the punishment fit the wrong acts a child may commit. (*child, log, punishment*)

185 Abirekyi ba, woma no so ko soro a, wogyaa no breoo.

However high you lift the kid, place it gently on the ground.

Expl: Children must not be tortured when they do wrong. The proverb is a warning against cruelty to children. (*child, goat, ground, punishment, cruelty, children*) Akrofi, No. 99

186 Wo ba ko sumina so na owo ka no a , wuntwa ho nkye-ne, na woye ho aduru.

If your child goes to the refuse heap and a snake bites him or her, you do not cut off the affected part of his or her body, but you apply an antidote to it.

Expl: The proverb urges that when a child goes astray, he or she should not be disowned, rather he or she should be disciplined and kept. (*child, refuse heap, snake, discipline*) Akrofi, No. 9

187 Wo ba gyaa n'an^uan gu wo s^ure so a, wode baha na eyi, na womfa osekam ntw^ua.

When your child relieves herself or himself on your lap, remove the dirt with a sponge, but do not cut off the soiled flesh with a knife.

Expl: The meaning of this proverb is the same as above. (*child, lap, sponge, knife*)

188 Abofra ye somako a, odi ade pa.

If a child runs errands willingly (does not grumble), she/he eats good things (food).

Expl: Obedience has its own rewards. (*child, obedience, food, errands*)

189 Abofra ye nea wonye a, ohu nea wonhu.

When a child does what is usually not done, he or she endures what is not usually endured by a child.

Expl: A child who transgresses in a manner befitting an adult is punished as an adult. (*child, punishment*) Christaller, No. 587

190 Abofra yem a, n'ankasa na owo.

A child who becomes pregnant delivers by herself.

(*child, pregnancy*) Christaller, No. 590

191 Abofra se okoforo dunsin a, ma omforo, na okoso anim aba.

When a child says that he/she is going to climb the stump of a tree, let him/her climb it, for when he/she gets to the top he/she will turn back.

Expl: Akan child-rearing practice allows the child to learn from his or her own experiences, as far as possible. That way when a child has learnt his or her lessons, no one will have to teach him or her. But parents also give cautionary reminders to children when necessary. (*child, tree, climbing*) Rattray, No. 369

192 Abofra se obeso gya mu a, ma onso mu, na ehye no a, obedan akyene.

When a child says he will catch hold of fire, let him/her hold it, for when it burns him or her, he or she will (quickly) throw it away.

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*child, fire*) Rattray, No. 370

193 Osekanfua na egye ne ho wo abofra nsam.

A (sharp) cutting tool frees itself from the hands of a child.

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*child, knife, hand*)

194 Oba se ose, nanso owo abusua.

A child resembles his or her father, but he or she belongs to a family.

Expl: Akan society is matrilineal, and a person traces his or her descent through the mother's family. (*child, father, family*)

195 Wo ba saw asaw bone a, se no se: "W'asaw nye fe"; na nse no se: "Okra tete gu mu."

When your child dances clumsily (badly) tell him or her: "You are dancing clumsily"; do not tell him: "Dear one, dance as you please."

Expl: The proverb expresses the need to correct children when they do wrong and not allow parental love for them to stand in the way. (*child, dance*) Akrofi, No. 11

196 Oba nyansafo wobu no be, na wonka no asem (*same as 351*).

A wise child (person) is spoken to in proverbs, not in plain language.

Expl: A wise person is intelligent and perceptive and therefore understands proverbial language without having it explained to him. (*child, wise, proverbs, language*)

197 Obadueduefo nto ne na funu.

The wandering child (vagrant) does not see his or her mother's corpse (before it is buried).

Expl: The relationship between the mother and child (who shares the same blood) is very strong and to miss seeing a mother's body

before it is buried is regarded as a great tragedy. Hence, the warning, contained in the proverb, to travelers to return home. Being present for the burial of a parent also affords a child the opportunity to fulfill filial obligations. (*child, mother, corpse, vagrant, tragedy, obligations*)

198 Oba nsu nti a, womma no nufu?

Will you not feed the baby because it is not crying?

Expl: A mother has the responsibility to feed the baby and must not wait until the baby cries. The proverb suggests that a person must fulfill his or her obligation and not wait to be asked. And, in the case of a debt, the debtor can be asked, "Will you not pay because your creditor has made no claim?" (*baby, feeding, obligations*) Akrofi, No. 8

199 Wo ba sisi wo kora ba a, enye; nanso se wo kora ba sisi wo ba a, enye.

It is wrong for your child to cheat the child of your co-wife (in a polygamous marriage); and it is also wrong for the child of your co-wife to cheat your child.

Expl: Rivalries may abound in a polygamous home and the children often get involved, but the proverb is an exhortation to pursue justice and fair play not only in situations where rivalry prevails but also in human relations generally. (*child, co-wife, fairness, justice*)

200 Oba bone nnim kasakyere.

A bad child does not know (take) correction.

Expl: A terrible child is incorrigible or impervious to discipline. (*child, correction, discipline*)

201 Wudu krow bi kurotia, na mmofra totow abo bobo wo a, tutu mmirika fa dibem koma mpanyin.

When you arrive at the outskirts of a town and children pelt you with stones, run to the elders to ask for pardon (apologize).

Expl: Whatever children know, they have been taught by their elders in their homes and the person who has been stoned at the outskirts of a town or village by children may have offended the elders, who therefore have become angry with him. The children may have heard the elders discussing the matter and so they vent the anger of the elders on the visitor. A quick apology to the elders would result

in a change in the attitude of the children. (*town, children, stones, elders, pardon*)

202 Woko kurow bi mu a, dwom a eho mmofra to no, won mpanyin na eto gyaw won.

When you visit a town and hear children singing (songs), they are songs which the elders sang and passed on to them.

Expl: The younger generation learn not only songs but the entire body of the traditions of the society from the older generation which preceded it. And it is the passing down of the customs and conventions from one generation to the other which ensures the survival and identity of a particular group of people or society. (*town, children, songs, elders, tradition, generation*)

203 Nne-mma se, tete asoe wonsoe ho bio; na den nti na wontu tete mmuka abiesa no biako, na enka abien.

The children of today say that they no longer rest at the old resting place. Why then don't they pull up one of the three stones from the hearth and let but two remain (cook on two stones)?

Expl: Some aspects of tradition will remain in spite of the changes which have occurred in our times. In other words, abandoning old traditions and customs does not mean abandoning all of them. (*children, place, stones, hearth, tradition*) Rattray, No. 805

204 Mmofra nkotu a, woanhu tu; npanyin nkotu a, wotiatia so.

Let the children go to pick (mushrooms which grow close together), they did not know how; let the grown-ups go to pluck them and they too trample on them.

Expl: The proverb alludes to a baffling situation which puts both the young and the old on the horns of a dilemma and it is when a problem proves to be seemingly insoluble that this proverb is cited. (*children, grown-ups, mushrooms*) Rattray, No. 375

205 Mmofra hu okore a osu ahwe no a, wose eye opete.

When children see an eagle beaten by the rain, they mistake it for (call) a vulture.

Expl: An allusion to the inexperience of children. A wet eagle is still an eagle and retains its eagleness in spite of adversity. (*children, eagle, rain, vulture, inexperience*)

206 Wukum wo de a, woto wo yonko de.

If you kill (disown) your own child because he is bad, the child you adopt will be found to be equally bad.

Expl: All children are the same and one should not disown or kill one's own child because he is disobedient. (*child, disobedience, punishment, kill*) Akrofi, No. 599

11 MEN

The Akan associate men with bravery, and hard and dangerous tasks, and a man is expected to face difficulties with equanimity.

But Akan tradition regards the role of men in society as complementary to that of women. On the *atumpane*, talking drums, for example, the drummer must play both (high) female, and low (male) sounds in order to be able to communicate an intelligible message. This example from the talking drums reflects the equal and complementary role which the sexes play in Akan society.

The Akan use the talking drums to communicate messages. Each pair of drums is made up of a male drum, low tone, and a female, high tone, and the combination of low and high tones produces words that can be understood. There are various texts on the drums which a drummer must learn and play on appropriate occasions.

207 Obarima, woye no dom ano, na wonye no fie.

It is on the battlefield that the brave person displays his courage, not in the house.

Expl: The truly courageous person shows his bravery through his deeds when the occasion arises but does not show his courage where it is not needed. (*man, battlefield, courage, house, bravery*)

208 Obarima mfe ntasu nto fam, na omfa n'ano mfa.

A man does not spit on the ground and pick it up with his mouth.

Expl: A person must not lightly go back on his word. (*man, ground, mouth, word, consistency*) Akrofi, No. 47

209 Obarima na onom aduru a eye nwene.

It is a man who drinks medicine that is bitter.

Expl: The courageous person does not buckle under in the face of adversity. The proverb is used as a means of encouragement

to people in the face of difficulty. (*man, medicine, adversity, encouragement*)

210 Obarima nsuro ka.

A man should not be afraid of debt.

Expl: A courageous person is not afraid of challenges, but faces them boldly. (*man, debt, challenges*)

211 Obarima nsuro owuo.

A brave person is not afraid of death (or should not be afraid of death). (*man, person, death, courage*)

212 Obarima bepee din, na wammepe nyinkyē.

The hero came to achieve fame, but not to look for long life.

Expl: It is more noble to seek to achieve fame by doing something that benefits the society rather than to seek to live a long (but uneventful) life. (*hero, fame, life, longevity*)

213 Obarima nsuro ko.

A valiant person is not afraid to fight.

(*person, man, fight*)

214 Mmerante bo ye sika a, anka opanyin biara anya bi pen.

If youthful arrogance were money, every grown-up (old person) would once have been rich.

Expl: Every elderly person has once been a young person and if youthfulness were wealth then every adult could be said to have been rich once. The proverb cautions against putting too much of a premium on youthfulness, and alludes to the wisdom (experience) which comes with age. (*arrogance, money, youth, old person, grown-up*)

12 ELDERS

Old age has a touch of venerability among the Akan and this is largely due to the experience and wisdom which come with age. The elderly are the educators of the young and a person's usefulness does not decrease simply because he or she becomes old and economically unproductive.

But respect for the elderly is not automatic; the elderly person must conduct himself or herself in a particular way which is becoming to an elderly person. Otherwise, he or she forfeits the respect due him or her. Being an elderly person therefore entails a great deal of responsibility.

215 Wunni panyin a, due.

If you do not have an old person (man or woman), pity on you.

Expl: To have an elderly person in your home is to have a source of reference and knowledge based on experience, and the person who does not have this source of reference deserves to be pitied. The elderly have played the role of educators of the young in the Akan tradition and it is to them that the young turn for knowledge about the culture, etiquette, customs, rituals, etc. The elderly therefore have a special place, a place of respect, for the wisdom and experience which guide the young. (*elderly, pity, age, old man, old woman, old age, experience, wisdom*)

216 Opanyin na obi nyee bi da, na abofra de obiara aye bi pen.

Everybody has been a child before but not everybody has been an old (man or woman).

Expl: The proverb underscores the wisdom and experience which come with old age and contrasts them with youthfulness and inexperience. Only a few people have reached old age, which confers respect on persons because of the role the elderly play in society. (*child, old man, old woman, old age*)

217 Abofra huruw tra opanyin a, okosiaw wo ne mmen mu.

When a child jumps over an elder, he gets caught in his or her horns.

Expl: This proverb alludes to the wisdom and experience which come with age and suggests that because of this a child who attempts to jump over the head of an old man or woman or a child who tries to cheat an old man or woman will be caught. In other words, the old person can see through the tricks of a young person. (*child, elder, horns, wisdom, experience*)

218 Opanyin ti mu na wohuan akuma.

It is from the head of an elderly person that you remove an axe head.

Expl: The wisdom and experience of the elderly provide solutions to problems and when young people consult the elderly about their problems they find solutions which will cut through their difficulties. In this sense, the axes (solutions to the problems) are obtained from the head of the elderly. The proverb encourages the need to consult with the elders on issues. (*elderly person, head, axe, wisdom, experience*)

219 Opanyin mee ne nsono.

The old person is satisfied by his or her intestines.

Expl: The responsibility of the old to take care of the young by making sacrifices in time of scarcity is highlighted by this proverb. The responsible parent will give the little food there is in the home to the children while he or she is satisfied by whatever remains in her stomach, even if that is his or her own intestines. (*old person, intestines, parent, children, stomach*)

220 Obi hwe wo ma wo se fifi a, wo nso wohwe no ma ne de fifi.

If someone (a parent) takes care of you up to the time you cut your teeth, you take care of them when they lose theirs.

Expl: The mutual obligation of both parents and children to each other and interdependence, which are the basis of societal life as the Akan understand it, are stressed by this proverb. By fulfilling one's obligation, an equilibrium is maintained in social relations and this is brought about through the fulfillment of parental and filial obligations. (*parent, teeth, parent, filial obligation*)

221 Opanyin kye a, edwo.

When an elder shares (things to children), there is peace.

Expl: The old person because of his or her experience and wisdom is expected to be fair and rise above partisanship. Therefore when a grown-up shares things among children he or she does it to the satisfaction of the parties involved and there is no quarreling afterwards. (*elder, children, peace, justice, fairness*)

222 Opanyin bone na ode namkye bone ba.

A bad elder brings about unequal sharing of meat (which causes dissatisfaction).

Expl: The proverb is the opposite of the previous one, for when an elder shows partiality and unfairness in his or her dealings with the young, he or she brings about quarrels and disaffection instead of bringing about peace and harmony. The proverb warns against injustice by the elderly in their dealings with the young and lifts up the responsibility expected of adults. (*elder, meat, injustice, unfairness*)

223 Opanyin didi adidibone a, oyi n'ankasa asanka.

The elderly person who eats badly (gluttonously) removes his or her own dish.

Expl: The custom among the Akan is for the adult to leave some food in the dish for the child who will remove it to clean it afterwards. But when an adult cleans the dish completely out of sheer gluttony, he or she has eaten badly and has not behaved responsibly as an adult; and therefore the honour due to an adult by having the dish removed by a child to wash it is forfeited and the adult will have to remove it and wash it. Elderhood has its own responsibility, for the elders must set a good example for the young otherwise they forfeit the respect due them. (*elder, person, dish, elderhood, responsibility, respect*)

224 Opanyin ne mmofra hu nantew a, w_osoa n'agua.

When the elder learns how to walk with the young ones, they carry his stool.

Expl: Being an elder does not automatically confer privileges on a person, for the person must behave in a responsible way in order to earn the respect, authority and the services due to elders. This proverb underscores the responsibility of an adult to give respect to the young so that they, in turn, will reciprocate with the honour and service due to elders. (*elder, children, stool*)

225 Opanyin a wammo ne bra yiye no na oda asaso.

The elder who leads a worthless life sleeps in the living room.

Expl: The living room is a public place without privacy and is therefore not a fitting place for an elder, who deserves respect, to sleep. An elder who is deprived of this honour is therefore a person who lived an unworthy or reckless life. The proverb is a warning to the young to lead worthy lives in their youth so that they can reap the benefits in their old age. (*elder, life, room, old age*)

226 Opanyin nto bo-hyew nto abofra nsam.

An elder does not roast a hot stone and put it in the hand of a child.

Expl: The proverb is a reminder to adults not to mistreat children or give them tasks they cannot handle. (*elder, stone, hand, child, reverence* Christaller, No. 2618)

227 Opanyin fere ne mma a, na ne mma suro no.

When an elder respects his/her children, the children also fear (revere) him/her.

Expl: The relationship between adults and children is reciprocal, and when an adult lives up to expectation and, as a result of the wisdom and experience that comes with age, he or she shows respect to the children, they too reciprocate by showing reverence to him. The proverb accentuates the onerous responsibility that comes with adulthood, for the Akan do not spare an adult who acts contrary to what is expected of him/her. (*elder, children, fear*)

228 Opanyin ntra fie na asadua mfow.

The elder does not sit idly at home and let the rain drench the loom.

Expl: The proverb stresses the responsibility of adults since they are expected to know better than the young. (*elder, home, loom*)

229 Opanyin di nsem nyinaa akyi a, oman bo.

When an elder involves herself/himself in (pursues) every petty issue, the community (nation) collapses.

Expl: Not every issue in the community is worth the attention of elders and indeed some issues are better left alone. It is therefore expected of an elder to conduct himself/herself wisely by not involving himself/herself in every issue, for by so doing he/she may exacerbate dissension or altercations between parties, which in the end could bring divisive conflicts which could engulf the entire community and bring it to ruin. (*elder, community*)

230 Opanyin due: mante, mante.

The elder propitiates (worships) a divinity called Mante, "I have not heard it."

Expl: This proverb makes the same point as the one above and suggests that an elder does not take action upon everything he/she hears but is circumspect. (*elder, divinity*) Akrofi, No. 796

231 Opanyin se na wanye a, mmofra nsuro no.

An elder who does not keep his/her word is not respected (feared) by children.

Expl: Elders are expected to set worthy examples for the young and if they are consistent and firm and do what they say, the young ones respect them, otherwise they lose the respect due them. (*elder, word, children*)

232 Opanyin yam wo nguansae aduokron akron, na ne bo fuw a, okum baako de pata ne ho.

An elder has ninety-nine well-fed sheep in his/her stomach, and when he/she gets angry, he/she kills one to pacify himself/herself.

Expl: It is customary among the Akan for the offender to sacrifice an animal, such as a sheep, to make peace with the offended party. Self-control is a quality expected of the elderly and an elder must not show anger frequently. An elder who lives up to this standard is said to sacrifice the sheep in her/his stomach to pacify himself/herself. The proverb alludes to the sacrifice of well-fed sheep, which are a person's prized possession and parting with such a prized possession shows the feeling behind this act. (*elder, sheep, stomach*)

233 Opanyin ntie abansosem.

The elder does not listen to gossip over the fence.

Expl: An elder or anyone in authority should act on concrete evidence and not on gossip or rumors. (*elder, gossip, fence, rumors*)
Akrofi, No. 800.

234 Opanyin ano sen suman.

The word of an elder is more powerful than a talisman.

Expl: The words of an experienced elder are to be trusted more than the predictions or foreknowledge received from a talisman. The proverb stresses the value of the experience of the elders. (*elder, word, talisman*)

235 Opanyin wo nkwa a, onni mfe apem.

An elder may be strong and healthy, but does not live for a thousand years (forever).

Expl: The proverb is a reflection on the inevitability of death in human experience. (*elder, years*)

236 Opanyin wu ye mmusu.

The death of an elder is a calamity.

Expl: To have an elderly person around is to be fortunate because of the wisdom, guidance, and advice that the elderly give to the community. The proverb expresses the loss which is experienced by non-adults when the source of a wealth of knowledge expires. (*death, elder, calamity, wisdom, guidance*) Christaller, No. 2621.

13 THE HUMAN CONDITION

The Akan ancestors' experience in life with its many vicissitudes led them to philosophize about the human condition. Their reflections dealt with illness, hunger, desperation, poverty as well as the uncertainties with which life confronted them. Their response to all this was courage, determination and dauntlessness.

237 Oyare ye ya.

Illness is painful.

Expl: The experience of sickness or ill health is unpleasant. (*illness, pain, ill health*)

238 Oyare nim ba, na ennim ko.

Illness knows how to come but does not know how to go (away).

Expl: Ill health manifests itself quickly, but takes time to disappear. (*illness, arrival, onset, departure*)

239 Oyare renkum wo a, n'aduru nye na.

If a disease will not kill you, its medicine is easy to come by.

Expl: It is easy to cure a disease which will not kill you. (*illness, disease, medicine, death*)

240 Oyare a ebekum wo nnim aduru.

The disease that will kill you does not have a cure or does not recognize (the potency of) any medicine.

(*disease, death, medicine*)

241 Oyare kese ase na wosa nyarewa.

In the course of treating a serious illness, minor ones are also treated.

Expl: In the course of solving major problems, minor ones are (can) also be disposed of. (*illness, serious illness, minor illness*)

242 Oyare to wo mu a, eye anyamesem, na enye w'abusuafo na erekum wo.

If you are afflicted by illness, it is the way of Providence, and not the result of the witchcraft of your relatives.

Expl: The proverb cautions against the tendency to attribute the cause of one's illness (troubles) to one's relatives. And, in a general sense, the proverb supports taking responsibility for our own troubles rather than putting the blame on others. (*illness, providence, witchcraft, relatives, blame*) Akrofi, No. 980

243 Oyare nsae a, wonnye ayaresade.

If the sickness is not over, the medicine man's (doctor's) fee is not paid (to him/her).

Expl: This proverb may be cited when a person wants to collect his fees before the work is done. Work must be done before remuneration is paid. (*sickness, medicine man, fees, remuneration*)

244 Oyare a ebekum wo bo wo a, wonkae oduruyefo.

When the illness that will take you to your death strikes, you forget about the medicine man (who could cure you).

Expl: When the appointed time for a person to die arrives, he or she forgets to consult a physician who can cure him or her of his or her ailment, and the inevitable happens. (*illness, death, medicine man*)

245 Oduruyefo nnom aduru mma oyarefo.

The healer does not drink medicine for the patient.

Expl: If the patient is to recover, he or she must take the medicine, however bitter. The proverb suggests that there are some things (problems) which we must do (solve) ourselves, for no one can do them for us. (*healer, medicine, patient*)

246 Okom de wo a, womfa wo nsa abien nnidi.

Even if you are hungry, you do not eat with both hands.

Expl: A well-bred Akan eats with the right hand, not with the left. To eat with both hands is to incur condemnation and disgrace. The

proverb suggests that a person must not do the wrong thing and that however desperate or pressing the necessity, it must be kept within the bounds of propriety. (*hunger, hands, disgrace*) Akrofi, No. 576

247 Okom ne kaw, na efanyinam kaw.

Hunger and debt, debt is preferable.

Expl: If a person is in debt he or she can defer the payment of the debt or take his time to make proper arrangements to pay it. But when one is hungry one has to satisfy the hunger since it cannot be deferred, as the repayment of a debt can. (*hunger, debt*)

248 Okom de wo a, ede wo nko.

When you feel hunger, you alone feel it (no one else can feel it for you). (*hunger*) Rattray, No. 550

249 Ohia ye mmusu.

Poverty is a curse. (*poverty, curse*)

250 Obi bo wo dua se: "ma onwu!" a, enye yaw se ose: "ma ohia nka no!"

If somebody curses you, saying: "Let this man die!" he is not doing you as much harm as he would if he were to say: "Let poverty lay hold on this man!" (*curse, poverty, death*) Rattray, No. 646

251 Ohia ye animguase.

Poverty is a disgrace.

Expl: Poverty makes a person do things that may bring disgrace (such as begging). (*poverty, disgrace*)

252 Ohia nhye da.

Poverty does not fix its day of visitation.

Expl: Poverty comes without warning and often takes people by surprise. The proverb is a warning against improvidence, for one's circumstances can change without warning. (*poverty, day, visitation, improvidence*) Akrofi, No. 468

253 Ohia pae abusua.

Poverty splits (divides) the family.

Expl: Poverty causes the members of a family to scatter, each in search of his or her own fortune. (*poverty, family, division*)

254 Ohia tua akonnode.

Poverty puts a stop to the enjoyment of one's favorite (sweet) foods.

Expl: A destitute person can no longer enjoy the things (comforts) he or she is used to. (*poverty, enjoyment, foods*)

255 Ohia na ema Okanni ye aboa.

Poverty turns an Akan-born into an animal.

Expl: Poverty makes people behave in the most unusual manner and can reduce humans to the level of animals (in terms of what they eat or where they live). (*poverty, person, animal*)

256 Ohia ye adammo.

Poverty is like madness (in what it makes people do). (*poverty, madness*)

257 Ohia ma adwene.

Poverty makes one think, or causes one to think.

Expl: Poverty creates or stimulates resourcefulness by making people use their wits to do a lot with very little. The proverb is the Akan version of the saying: "Necessity is the mother of invention." (*poverty, inventiveness*)

258 Enye sika nko ne ohia.

Lack of money is not the only kind of poverty. (*money, poverty*)

259 Ohia te se ewo, enno wo faako.

Poverty is like honey, it is not peculiar to one place alone.

Expl: There is poverty everywhere in the world and no area has a monopoly of it. (*poverty, honey, place*) Rattray, No. 624

260 Ohia nni aburokyiri a, anka obroni ammehata ne nta-ma wo Abibrim.

If there was no poverty in Europe, the European would not have sailed across the seas to spread his clothes to dry in Africa.

Expl: See proverb above. (*poverty, Europe, European, seas, clothes, Africa*) Christaller, No. 1347

261 Ohia da na wohu nipa.

You perceive who your true friends are in time of distress.

Expl: Adversity tests the sincerity of your friends, for those who come to a neighbor's aid in time of trouble are true friends. (*friends, distress, time*)

262 Ohia hia wo a, wowe aberekyi were.

When you are in need, you eat a goat's skin.

Expl: Under normal circumstances, the skin of bigger animals such as cows is eaten, but in time of scarcity and desperation, goat or sheepskin may be eaten. The proverb suggests that poverty makes people do what they would not normally do. (*poverty, goat, skin*)

Rattray, No. 616

263 Ehia wo a, nwu.

If you are poor, do not die.

Expl: The proverb is an exhortation not to despair in the face of adversity. (*poverty, death, adversity*) Akrofi, No. 467

264 Ehia wo a, na wowe sumina so adwe.

Poverty makes a person eat palm kernels (discarded food) from the dunghill.

Expl: Poverty makes a person do desperate things in order to survive. (*poverty, person, palm kernels, dunghill*)

265 Ehia osebo a, owe nwura (same as 422)

When the leopard is in want (has no prey to catch), it eats grass.

Expl: Poverty makes us do what we normally do not do. (*poverty, desperation, leopard, grass*)

266 Ehia onipa a, oda nwuram.

When a man is desperate, he sleeps on his farm (so that he can work as long as possible in order to reap a good harvest). (*person, farm, harvest*)

267 Ohiani nni yonko.

The poor person has no friend. (*poverty, friend*)

268 Ohiani funu, yesie no anopa.

The poor man's corpse is buried in the morning.

Expl: People who have status and wealth are laid in state and dressed in a fitting manner so that mourners would come and pay their respects. Such people are not buried hurriedly, but in the case of a poor man or woman there is no elaborate funeral and the corpse is quickly disposed of. (*poor person, corpse, morning, poverty*)

269 Ohiani funu, yesie no kwankyen.

The corpse of a poor person is buried by the side of the road.

Expl: Poor people often get shoddy treatment. (*corpse, poor person, road, poverty*)

270 Ohiani fura kyeme a, eye se ofura dunsin.

If a poor person wears a costly cloth, it is like cloth on the stump of a tree.

Expl: However precious a possession a poor person has, it is not regarded as worth anything. If he or she wears gold, it is regarded as brass and he or she is despised even when he or she wears precious clothes. (*poverty, poor person, cloth, tree stump*)

Akrofi, No. 471

271 Ohiani bo mfuw.

The poor person does not get angry.

Expl: The poor person is at the mercy of benefactors to whom he or she looks for help. He or she therefore, has to sport a smiling face and conduct himself or herself with humility, for any sign of arrogance, such as anger, will deprive him or her of his or her support. (*poverty, anger, help, humility*)

272 Ohiani bu be a, enhye.

When a poor person utters a proverb, it does not spread.

Expl: People pay attention to the utterances of important people and they therefore travel far and are quoted by others, but the utterances of the poor or insignificant people are not heard. (*poor person, proverb, poverty*) Christaller, No. 1361

273 Ohiani nya ne kaw a, wode dan ono ara.

When a poor person incurs a debt, he/she is made to pay for it.

Expl: People must bear the responsibility for their actions. (*poor person, debt, poverty, responsibility*)

274 Ohiani mpaw dabere.

The poor person does not choose his/her sleeping place.

Expl: The poor have no choice and must take or accept whatever comes to them. (*poor person, sleeping place, poverty*)

275 Ohiani nni hwee a, owo tekrema a ode tutu ne ka.

If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a (sweet) tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts.

Expl: No one is bereft of ability, and to be poor or handicapped does not mean to be poor in everything. Every person, whatever his/her condition, has at least some talent which he/she can put to good use. (*poor person, tongue, debts, poverty*) Christaller, No. 1368

276 Ohiani asommen ne batafose.

The poor person's ivory is the tooth of the warthog.

Expl: Everyone has something within his/her means which he/she regards as priceless. A poor person cannot afford ivory but can afford a warthog's tusk, which to him/her can serve the same purpose as ivory would serve a rich person. (*poor person, ivory, tooth, warthog, poverty*)

277 Ohiani asem, "yedi no ntiantiam."

The poor person's grievances are dealt with hastily (briefly).

Expl: Poor people's complaints are often given little attention as matters of little or no consequence. (*poor person, grievance, poverty*) Rattray, No. 674

278 Ohiani ne odefo ngoru.

The poor person and the rich person do not play together.

Expl: Friendship is made between equals. (*poor person, rich person, poverty*)

279 Osikani ne hiani goru a, enso.

If a wealthy person befriends a poor person, the friendship does not last.

Expl: There is an element of inappropriateness (incongruity) in a friendship between the poor and the rich because what the rich can do, the poor cannot do. (*poor person, rich person, friendship, poverty*)

280 Ohiani nni hia daa.

The poor person does not experience poverty all the time.

Expl: Fortunes change and a poor person's condition could change for the better. The proverb is used as an encouragement to the needy and the destitute not to give up in their effort to improve their lot. (*poor person, time, poverty*)

14 DEATH

Death, to the Akan, was created by the Creator and is part of the rhythm of life. It is not the negation of life, for those who die continue to live in the land of the spirits, which is a replica of the world in which we live. Death and birth are opposites, for just as death takes away people from the community, birth replaces those who have been taken away, and there is constant traffic between the land of the spirits and our world.

Death is often personified as a wicked destroyer who pays no regard for status, age or beauty, and takes away those whose time has come. Nevertheless, the dead remain members of their families and societies. The many rituals performed for the dead express the unbroken family relationship between the living and the dead.

281 **Obra twa wu.**

Life must needs end in death.

Expl: The end of life is death, and once life is given it must necessarily end in death. This proverb is a reflection on the inevitability of death. (*life, death*)

282 **Wunnim owu a, hwe nna.**

If you do not know death, look at sleep.

Expl: The phenomenon of sleep is likened to death, for when a person sleeps he or she is not aware of what is going on, and so it is with the person who dies. (*death, sleep*)

283 **Owu adare nnow faako**

The hoe of death does not weed in one place.

Expl: The hoe is an important farm implement that farmers use in weeding their farms. When the farmer weeds, he or she does not weed in one place alone, he or she weeds everywhere. In like manner, the hoe of death weeds everywhere. (*Death, hoe, place*)

284 **Owu bekum wo na wofre no agya a, obekum wo, wofre no ena a, obekum wo.**

If death (personified) comes to kill you and you call him father, he will kill you, and if you call him mother, he will kill you. Death is inexorable, for no matter what you call it, it will take you away.

Expl: The Akan often personify death as a wicked destroyer who shows no mercy and has no respect for persons. (*death, father, mother*)

285 Momono tew, na guanguan nso tew.

The green leaf falls (off the tree), and the dried leaf also falls.

Expl: This is used as a warning to young people who may be thoughtless and may think that they have all the time in the world, that death comes both to the young and old and that a person must be prepared for death at any time. (*leaf, death*)

286 Owuo kura ade a, nkwa ntumi ngye.

When death holds something (in its grip), life cannot take it away.

Expl: When death strikes, it takes away life finally. (*death, life*)

287 Owu nye pia, na woadi mu ahyemfiri.

Death is not a private chamber into which one goes and comes out as he pleases.

Expl: Unlike our bedrooms into which we come and go, no one returns from death. (*death, chamber*) Akrofi, No. 976

288 Owu ne yen reko, opatafo ne hena?

Death is fighting with us, who can play the role of a peace maker?

Expl: In humankind's or humanity's fight with death, there is no one to separate them (or be a peace maker.) When two people are fighting, Akan tradition demands that someone goes to separate the fighters and try to bring about peace and reconciliation. But in humankind's or humanity's fight with death, there is no one to step in to bring about reconciliation. Death cannot be placated. (*death, peace maker, reconciliation, fight*)

289 Owu nkum oyarefo, okum onipa a ne wu adu so.

Death does not kill the sick person, it kills the one whose time of death is due.

Expl: The Akan believe that every person has an appointed time to die and that only God knows it. And until the time comes, however sick a person may be, he or she may recover, whereas a perfectly

healthy person could die because that person's time is up. (*death, person, time, sickness*)

290 Owu, wowu no awufo, na wonwu no ayarefo.

It is those whose time to die has come, and not those who are ill, who die. (*death, time, illness*)

Expl: A person who may be very ill is normally regarded as the one who is near death, but as it often happens, a healthy person may die, leaving the sick person behind. The proverb expresses the belief that everybody has an appointed time to die and until that time has come, the person does not die no matter how sick he/she may be. A person dies only when it is time for that person to die.

291 Owu ba a, na oyare ani awu.

When death arrives, illness is put to shame.

Expl: Illness and disease can torment us for a long time, bringing seemingly endless suffering and pain, but death comes to put an end to all that. Death puts illness or disease to shame by curtailing pain and suffering. (*death, illness, shame, pain, suffering*)

292 Odomankoma owu sesa nnipa dabew.

The (Creator's) death changes person's sleeping place.

Expl: The Akan belief is that God created life as well as death, a belief which is found in drum texts as well as in oral communication. Those who die leave the world of the living for **asamando**, the world of the dead. Death therefore gives us a new dwelling place by changing us from citizens of this world into denizens of the spirit world. (*Creator, death, sleeping place, life, spirit world*)

293 Akatakyisem bebree ne owu na enam.

Excessive bravery goes with death.

Expl: Too much bravery leads to death. A warning against foolhardiness. (*death, bravery, foolhardiness*)

294 Barima nsuro owuo.

The brave person does not fear death.

Expl: The fear of death (danger) often prevents people from undertaking daring or courageous tasks. But the proverb affirms the fact that a brave person has no fear and that it is only through courage

that we can accomplish the tasks we face in life. (*death, fear, person, courage*)

295 Yebewu nti yenna?

Are we going to stop sleeping just because we shall die?

Expl: The Akan compare death to sleep, but the fear of death does not prevent us from sleeping. This proverb is cited when a person undertakes a task or venture, knowing very well the dangers inherent in its undertaking. (*sleep, death*)

296 Bewu kra nkyi dabone.

The soul of the person who will die does not abhor a festive day (sacred day).

Expl: The Akan traditional calendar is based on a 42-day cycle which they call **adaduanan** (literally, forty days). Within this period two festivals are celebrated. One falls on a Wednesday and is called **Awukudae**; and the other falls on a Sunday and is called **Akwasidae**. Such festive days are called **dabone** (literally, bad days), and normal activities such as farming, fishing, hunting or burials and funerals are forbidden. These festivals are for remembering and feeding of the stool ancestors of the society. The Akan calendar year is made up of nine 42-day cycles at the end of which a major festival, **Odwira**, is celebrated to cleanse the society of the stains of the past year in order to begin the new year afresh. (*soul, death, day*) Mensah, No. 253

297 Nea onipa pe na owu nso pe

What man likes, death also likes.

Expl: This proverb is cited when loved ones and relatives pass away. People would want their loved ones to stay with them but death also loves them and carries them away. (*death, person*)

298 Ehia Okanni a, odi awu

Poverty and desperation make an Akan commit murder.

Expl: Poverty and desperation lead people to commit such forbidden crimes as murder. In a general sense, want and deprivation often force people into doing things they would ordinarily not do. (*poverty, Akan-born, murder, desperation*)

299 Fere ne wu, fanyinam wu.

Death is preferable to disgrace, or better to die than to live in disgrace.

Expl: Akan moral teaching states that disgrace does not benefit an Akan-born and that, given a choice between disgrace and death, the Akan would choose the latter. Better dead than alive in disgrace. (*death, disgrace*)

300 Ofuntum wuo sane mmatatwene.

The death of the tree (*Funtumia elastica*), affects the vines that grow on it.

Expl: The vines depend on the tree to grow and when the tree dies, the vines also wither. The proverb asserts that what happens to the one on whom we depend also affects us. (*death, tree, vine*)

301 Owu mpe sika.

Death does not like money, or death cannot be bribed with money.

Expl: Death cannot be bought with money or with worldly possessions. It is inexorable. (*death, money*)

302 Odomankoma owu de ne mpasua besi wo fi a, odunsini aduru dan usu.

When (the Creator's) death camps in your house, the medicine man's/woman's medicine turns into water (becomes ineffective).

(*Creator, death, house, medicine man/woman, medicine, water*)

303 Agya bi awu a, agya bi te ase.

When a father dies, a father is alive (to carry on his responsibilities).

Expl: Death does not necessarily deprive us of support, for there is always someone to take over the responsibilities of a deceased person. This proverb is cited when children lose their parents or when a person upon whom others depend passes away. (*death, father*)

304 Nne wubewu, na okyena wubewu, nyinaa ye owu koro no ara.

Whether you die today or tomorrow is the same experience of death.

Expl: Death is the same whether it comes early or late. (*death, today, tomorrow*)

305 Woye sikanibere a, wuwu awusin.

If you love money, you die a premature death.

Expl: A warning against excessive greed, which often leads to death. (*money, premature death, greed*) Akrofi, No. 989

306 Odanseni owu n'afuru.

A witness dies because of his/her belly.

Expl: In the traditional Akan court, a witness would swear an oath to speak the truth by calling on the name of a divinity, but if the witness takes a bribe and commits perjury, then the divinity, on whom he/she swore, would kill him/her. (*witness, belly, greed, divinity, perjury*)

307 Owu ne kwan ye tiaa, nanso emu ye hu.

The road of death is short, but it is a fearful one.

Expl: The act of dying is a matter of seconds, but it is a fearful experience. The proverb expresses the human fear of death. (*death, road*) Bannerman, No. 408

308 Owu to wo a, wonse se: "Hwe aberewa."

If death comes to you, you do not say (to death): "Here is an old woman (take her)."

Expl: Death takes away whoever it will and it may take a young person, leaving an old person behind. Death can strike at any time. (*death, old woman*)

309 Wudidi afanu a, wuwu awusin.

If you indulge in double dealing, you die a premature death.

Expl: (*premature death, double dealing*) Akrofi, No. 376

310 Odomankoma na oma owu di akane.

It was none but the Creator (Odomankoma) who made death eat poison.

Expl: The proverb affirms the Akan belief that only the Creator has control over death. (*Creator, death, poison*)

311 Owu ne w'ase hye wo adwumaye a, owu de na wudi kan ye.

When death and your in-law ask you to do a piece of work, you do death's first.

Expl: Death has more power than any human being and therefore one can do nothing but obey death's call. (*death, in-law, work*)

312 Owu wonnwu no mprenu.

A person does not die twice.

Expl: A person dies only once. (*death, person*)

15 AKAN IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS OF DEATH

The Akan have many ways of stating that a person is dead. A cultivated Akan would not simply say: “**Onipa no awu**,” the person is dead. But, he or she would say the same thing in a euphemistic fashion:

313 **Odae a, wansore.**

The person did not wake up from sleep. (*death, sleep*)

314 **Waka nkyene agu.**

The person has spilled the salt.

Expl: The idea is that living people eat salt and those who die stop eating salt and for that reason, the Akan always give saltless food to the departed. (*death, person, salt*)

315 **Waka baabi.**

The person has got stuck somewhere. (*death, person*)

316 **Wadan ne ho.**

The person has turned around.

Expl: The Akan used to turn corpses on their left side when they laid them in state. No one dies lying on his or her side. A person in that position turns (lies flat) before he or she gives up the ghost. (*death, person*)

317 **Oko ne kra nkyi.**

The person has gone back to where his or her **okra** came from.

Expl: The Akan believe that what makes a person a living human being is the part of God which the Akan call **okra**. And when the **okra** leaves the body it returns to where it came from. Death therefore, to the Akan, is a return, a going back, to the source of life. (*death, soul, return*)

318 **Wanya ko.**

The person is gone. (*person, death*)

319 **Wanya ne baabi ko.**

The person has got a place to go. (*death, person, place*)

320 **Waye Onyame de .**

The person has become God's property.

Expl: God has taken the deceased person back to himself. (*person, death, God, property*)

321 Ohene ko n'akuraa.

The chief has gone to his village

Expl: To say that the chief has died is to say that he has gone to his village. For the Akan have a saying that “**ohene nwu na woabo owu abata ne din ho**,” the chief does not die and so you do not associate his name with death. The idea is that the office of the chief, as the ruler of the society, always remains even though a ruling chief passes away. (*death, village, chief*)

322 Odupon atutu.

A mighty tree has fallen.

Expl: This proverb is spoken when a chief dies. (*death, tree*)

16 VALUES, VIRTUES AND VICES

In their values, virtues and vices, one learns what qualities the Akan consider worthy of pursuit and those they consider to be reprehensible. A well-bred Akan is expected to conduct him or herself in such a way that he or she does not incur disgrace; for, as the Akan say: “Disgrace does not befit an Akan-born.” The Akan praise generosity while decrying selfishness in no uncertain terms.

323 Papa asusuw de reko no, na kontonkye kura di n'akyi de rebebo mu.

While goodness is planning and taking it (goodness) along, crookedness (dishonesty) follows and seeks to frustrate it.

Expl: The word **papa** covers all the virtues in Akan moral thought and the proverb is a reflection on the constant effort of evil to frustrate what is good. (*goodness, crookedness, dishonesty, evil*) Akrofi, No. 802

324 Woye adepa a, wunya ho mfaso.

If you do good, you reap its benefits.

Expl: Goodness is its own reward. (*good, benefits, reward*)

325 Wusua asempa a, wunya anuonyam.

If you learn to do what is good (good conduct), you attain the esteem of others.

Expl: Good character ennobles a person. (*good, esteem, character*)

326 Papa nyera da.

Goodness is never lost.

Expl: Goodness always stands out and is never hidden. (*goodness*)

327 Wudi asempa a, wunyin kye.

If you are in the habit of doing what is just (good), you live long.

Expl: This is a drum text that is played at the chief's court when cases are being tried. The drummer plays this piece intermittently as a reminder (warning) to all assembled in the courtroom — the chief, elders, plaintiff, defence, and the crowd of on-lookers — that the pursuit of justice brings long life and peace of mind. (*good, habit, just, life*)

328 Wo koko ye duru a, na wukum esono.

It is only when you are brave that you kill the elephant.

Expl: It takes (*akokoduru*) courage to accomplish a great feat. Courage in this sense refers to bravery in the face of danger, but it is also used in the sense of moral courage that would be required to point out the faults of an important personality, such as a chief, elder or a political leader. (*elephant, courage*)

329 Ayame woye sie, na wonye nkye.

Kindliness is like a loan, it is not a gift.

Expl: Kindliness is reciprocal, and a recipient of a good turn is expected to return it some day when his/her benefactor is in need. (*kindness, loan, gift, benefactor*) Akrofi, No. 978

330 Yeredi adi bio, na emaa ohoho serewee.

It is, "We are eating and we shall eat again", which made the stranger happy.

Expl: Hospitality to strangers is a highly prized virtue and the proverb expresses the extent of the hospitality a stranger should enjoy. (*eating, stranger, happy*)

331 "Ohoho-nni-nko", ye omani-fonee.

"Let the stranger eat (all the good things), and go back to his or her place of origin" makes the relative grow lean (starve).

Expl: While strangers must enjoy hospitality, this must not, of course, be at the expense of the members of the family or citizens of the state. Charity must begin at home. (*stranger, place, relative, hospitality, charity, home*) Akrofi, No. 479

332 Se woreguare wo aguaree, na obodamfo befafa wo ntama a, fa ntama foforo fura ansa na woataa no wo abonten; anye saa a, obiara beka se mo baanu nyinaa ye abodamfo.

If you are taking your bath and a mad person comes to take your cloth away, put on another cloth before you chase him or her out on the street, otherwise, everybody will say that both of you are mad.

Expl: No one can tell which of the two naked people running on the street is the mad person, unless the sane person is wearing his or her cloth. And that is the reason the proverb advises the sane person to put on another cloth in the face of the temptation to act at once. The proverb counsels patience in the face of provocation and advises that if someone tempts you, do not behave as he or she does. (*bath, mad man, cloth, street, patience, provocation*)

333 Nsu anso aguare a, eso nom.

If a quantity of water does not suffice for a bath, it will at least be sufficient for drinking.

Expl: A person should be content with what he or she has, for he or she can always put the little he or she thinks he or she has to good use. (*water, bath, drinking, contentment*)

334 "Kae da bi", wode se bonniaye

It is to the ungrateful person that we say, "Remember the past."

Expl: Ingratitude is one of the vices which is constantly decried and the proverb advises the ungrateful person to remember what has been done for him or her or given to him or her by another person so that he or she may show gratitude. (*ungrateful person, past, ingratitude, gratitude*)

335 Omansofo tam nhyia no da.

The litigant's cloth is always small.

Expl: Litigation is a costly business and the litigant spends so much money that he or she eventually becomes poor and is unable to buy cloth big enough to fit him or her (cover himself or herself). The

proverb is a warning to people given to litigation. (*litigation, cloth, litigant*) Akrofi, No. 640

336 Omanyefo nye anem.

A person who is a leader in a nation should not be vindictive.

Expl: A leader must pay heed to criticism people make about him/her but must not try to victimize those opposed to him/her by seeking revenge. The proverb encourages good statesmanship. (*leader, criticism, nation, statesmanship, revenge*)

17 WISDOM AND FOLLY

Wisdom is highly prized above strength, beauty and wealth, and the tiny royal antelope is said to have more wisdom than the huge elephant. The Akan also contrast wisdom with book learning, and the wise person receives the approbation of society whereas a fool may be ridiculed; but not always, for the Akan say that, "The deed of wisdom may be found in the head of a fool," which suggests that one is not always a fool.

337 Nyansa nye sika na woakyekyere asie.

Wisdom is not like gold that it should be tied up and kept (in a safe place).

Expl: As one of the most cherished in the Akan value system, wisdom is expected to be applied to daily life in the solution of problems. Those endowed with it should use it and not hide it and behave foolishly. Wisdom is practical in the sense that it is seen in what a person does and says. (*wisdom, gold*)

338 Nyansa nni obaakofo tirim.

Wisdom is not in the head of only one person.

Expl: Wisdom is not the exclusive possession of one person or race of human beings. For this reason, it is necessary for many heads to come together to make decisions. (*wisdom, head, person*)

339 Ti koro nko agyina (same as 580).

One head does not go into council.

Expl: Wisdom is not confined to one person's head and therefore it is better to bring many heads together to deliberate before embarking on any enterprise. This proverb is the name of a **kente** (hand-woven cloth from Ghana) design. The government of Ghana presented a piece of this particular **kente** to the United Nations when it was admitted into the membership of the world body and visitors to the United Nations headquarters can see it hanging on one of the walls in the lounge of the General Assembly. (*head, council, consultation*)

340 Nyansa dodow gyaa aboa.

Too much wisdom lets the animal escape (from the trap).

Expl: Claims to too much wisdom or cleverness, accompanied by the rejection of other people's suggestions, lead to costly mistakes. (*wisdom, animal, trap*)

341 Nyansa kasa tiaa.

Wisdom speaks with brevity.

Expl: Brevity is the soul of wit. (*wisdom, brevity*)

342 Nyansa dodow nti na okoto annya ti.

Too much wisdom cost the crab its head.

Expl: The person who claims to know too much ends up paying dearly for his/her actions. (*wisdom, crab, head*)

343 Nim nim, nnim.

"Know-all" knows nothing, or the person who knows (*nim*) knows that he/she does not know everything.

Expl: He who claims to know everything knows nothing and however much one knows, one is not all-knowing. The proverb is a play on words, for the verb *nim* means to know, and the proverb encourages the cultivation of an attitude of intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness. (*knowledge, person, open-mindedness*)

344 Obi nkyekyere nyansa kotoku mfa nkoto adaka mu, mmegyina adiho nse se, "Kyerẽ me asem".

One does not collect wisdom in a bag and put it in a box and come out to say (to another person) "teach me wisdom."

Expl: A person must always use his knowledge and not do what is unbecoming. (*wisdom, bag, box, knowledge*) Akrofi, No. 190

345 Wunim nyansa be bree a, woma abirekyi (oguan) akye.

If you claim to be too clever or wise, you greet (say good morning to) the goat (sheep).

Expl: People who think they are sharper or more intelligent than everybody else end up doing some of the most foolish things. (*wisdom, cleverness, goat, sheep, folly*)

346 Nyansa kyen ahooden.

Wisdom outweighs strength.

(*wisdom, strength*)

347 Nyansa nyinaa ne osuahu.

All wisdom (knowledge) is acquired by learning.

(*wisdom, knowledge, learning*)

348 Bese hahan ne konini hahan; yetase no banyansafo.

The wise person can distinguish between the cola leaf and the *konini* leaf (which are very much alike).

Expl: The inexperienced person sent to pick a cola leaf may pick the *konini* leaf without noticing the difference between the two leaves. The wise person, with discernment, can distinguish between similar but not identical things. (*wise person, cola leaf, wisdom, discernment*)

349 Ebeto da no na nyansa da okwasea tiri mu.

It may be that wisdom may be found in the head of the fool.

Expl: A person is not a fool all the time, and the person considered to be a fool has some wisdom in his or her head, which he or she can use to benefit himself or herself or his or her fellow men. (*wisdom, head, fool*)

350 Wosoma oba nyansafo, na wonsoma onammon tenten.

You send a wise person (on an important mission), not a long-legged person. (*wise person, long-legged person*)

351 Oba nyansafo, wobu no be, na wonka no asem (*same as 196*).

The wise person (child) is spoken to in proverbs, not in plain words.

Expl: The wise child (person) has wisdom to understand proverbial language which comes from the wisdom heritage of the society. (*wise person, proverbs, words, wisdom*)

352 **Nea woressi okwasea no, na onyansafo te ho hwe wo.**
 When you take advantage of a fool, there is a wise person looking at you. (*fool, advantage, wise person*) Rattray, No. 594

353 **Anyansafo baanu di agoru a, ntoto ba.**
 When two clever people play together, disagreement arises. (*wisdom, disagreement*) Christaller, No. 2558

354 **Okwasea na wotew ne ntorewa ton ma no.**
 It is the fool whose own garden eggs are picked and sold to him or her. (*fool, garden eggs*)

355 **Okwasea na wotia ne nan so mprennu.**
 It is a fool whose feet are stepped on twice. (*fool, feet*)

356 **Okwasea redi ne sika a, ose ne nsenia nye.**
 When a fool is frittering away his or her gold, he or she says his or her scale is malfunctioning.
Expl: A foolish person blames others for his or her mistakes and does not accept responsibility for his or her own actions. (*fool, gold, scale, responsibility, mistakes*)

357 **Okwasea ani tew a, agoru no agu.**
 When a foolish person learns to be clever, the game is over.
Expl: When a person breaks his or her foolish habits, he or she can no longer be taken advantage of by others. (*fool, game, habits*)

358 **Okwasea na ose: "Wode me yonko, na wonne me."**
 It is the fool who says, "They mean my neighbor, not me." (What is being said is meant for my neighbor, but not for me.)
Expl: The experiences of other people are (must be) lessons for everybody. (*fool, neighbor, experiences*)

18 TRUTH AND FALSEHOOD

The first moral instruction given to newly born Akan children when they are brought outdoors — on the eighth day to be made members of their families and to be given names in the ceremony called *abadinto*, or outdoorings — is to be truthful. A newly born child remains nameless until the time for giving him or her a name comes, and during this time the child is referred to as an *ohoho*, visitor or guest.

The belief is that the visitor has come from the spirit world and after remaining for seven days, he or she becomes the responsibility of the family, standing in the place of society, to remake the visitor into a member of the family or society, by giving a name to the child to identify him or her and to make the child one of them. It is while the child is being made a member of the family that the child receives the ground rules for membership of the family. The child is told to be truthful because truth is the basis of the society. This admonition to the newest member of the family shows the extent to which moral uprightness is held to be a primary consideration for membership of the family and society, and the extent to which a human being is regarded as an essentially moral being in Akan thought.

Confidence in the ultimate victory of truth over error and falsehood is the cornerstone of Akan moral education.

359 Pae-mu-se ye fere, nso ema ahodwo.

An honest confession (or frank speech) is difficult to make, but it brings peace of mind.

Expl: Telling the truth and easing one's conscience is better than lying and having a bad conscience which oppresses. (*confession, peace of mind, truth, conscience, lying*) Akrofi, No. 794

360 Wode nnabraba tu kwan a wudu; na mmom wonsan w'akyi bio.

If you travel with fraud, you may reach your destination, but (you) will be unable to retrace your steps.

Expl: What a person achieves by means of deceit and trickery is short-lived, for sooner or later the fraudulent means become exposed, and the person becomes disgraced. In other words, a person who achieves his/her goal by false pretences cannot exonerate himself/herself when he/she is exposed. (*fraud, destination, deceit*) Ackah, p. 50

361 Nea w'ano aka no gyina ho retwen wo.

What your mouth has uttered stands and waits for you.

Expl: A promise is a debt which has to be repaid (fulfilled). We have a moral obligation to do what we say. (*mouth, promise, debt, moral obligation*) Bannerman, No. 119

362 Otorofo de mfe apem tu kwan a, onokwafo de da koro tiw no to no.

Whereas a liar takes one thousand years to go on a journey, the one who speaks the truth follows and overtakes the liar in a day.

Expl: Falsehood may stand (crystallized) for centuries, but a single truth can undo it in a moment. The proverb shows the power of truth over falsehood. (*liar, journey, truthful person, truth, day, years, destination, falsehood*) Christaller, No. 3338

363 Wudua nkontompo a, wutu abra.

If you sow falsehood, you reap deceit.

Expl: Dishonesty always brings disappointment in the end. (*falsehood, deceit, dishonesty, disappointment*) Akrofi, No. 403

364 Wode nkontompo pe ade mfe apem a, onokwafo de nokware gye wo nsa mu da koro.

If you accumulate (wealth) property for a thousand years with fraud, a truthful person with truth takes it away from you in a day.

Expl: Falsehood comes to an end, however long it may last. (*property, fraud, cheating, truthful person, truth, day*) Christaller, No. 755

365 Atokoro see nokwapem.

One falsehood destroys a thousand truths.

Expl: It is necessary for a truthful person to maintain his integrity and uphold the truth at all times, for a single lie can ruin his/her reputation and destroy all that he/she has taken years to build. (*falsehood, truths, integrity, reputation*) Rattray, No. 609

366 Nokware nye ahe na woatwa mu nkontompo.

Truth is not so much that you can cut out falsehood from it.

Expl: Truth is bare and has no embellishment or excess flesh on its body and for that reason one cannot cut off anything from it. A lie always has flesh on its body in terms of the embellishment one will have to put on it to make it fleshy in the attempt to make it sound true. The proverb expresses the simplicity of truth. (*truth, falsehood*)

367 Nokware mu nni abra.

There is no fraud in truth. (*fraud, truth*)

368 Wutwa nkontompo a, wusuro Kumase.

If you tell a lie, you fear to go to Kumase.

Expl: The King of the Asante, the *Asantehene*, lives in Kumase, the capital city of the Asante Kingdom. All major cases in the kingdom were settled in Kumase and there judgments of various kinds were administered. The proverb refers to the fear which offenders against the law have for the city of Kumase, where they would receive judgment. Civil courts have been introduced since the imposition of colonial rule on the Asante and capital punishment is administered by government courts. (*lie, Kumase*) Christaller, No. 3403

369 Wode nkontompo ka asem a, wobre.

When you base what you say (state) on falsehood, you become tired (or wear yourself out). (*falsehood, speech*) Rattray, No. 754

370 Wusum nkontompo afiri a, wuyi kasabre.

If you set a trap for lies, you catch endless talk.

Expl: When you tell a lie, you end up talking interminably in the attempt to cover it up, and in the end you become weary of talking. (*trap, lies, talk*)

371 Wode nokware ka asem a, ewu.

If you speak with truth (tell the truth), the matter dies.

Expl: To tell a lie is to prolong matters, but truth cuts matters short. (*truth, matter*)

372 Asempa ye tia (same as 576).

Truth is brief.

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*truth*)

373 Aso mu nni nkwanta.

There are no crossroads in the ear.

Expl: One cannot accept truth and falsehood at the same time. (*ear, crossroads*) Akrofi, No. 885

374 Aso nam mmieniu, nso etie asem baako.

We have two ears, but they hear only one thing.

Expl: Although we have two ears, they cannot hear truth and falsehood at the same time. (*ears, truth, falsehood*)

375 Wonoa osa na nkontompo gya hye ase a, emmen.

If you are cooking the war medicine and there is the fire of untruth under it, it is never well cooked.

Expl: In the past, before our forbears went into battle, they would prepare a war medicine in the centre of the town or village. The war medicine was a mixture of various herbs and roots mixed with water and put on the fire. When it was well cooked, all the men (warriors) would come to bathe themselves with it before going to battle. The belief was that this medicine could strengthen them and make the men bold and fearless. If the reason for going to war was just the medicine would be efficacious, but if the reason for going to war was unjust, then the medicine would cook and cook to no avail. The proverb says that any enterprise based on fraud does not succeed. (*war medicine, fire, untruth*) Akrofi, No. 772

376 Onyankopon mpe asemmone nti na okye din mmiako mmiako (same as 20).

Since God does not like fraud, God gave each creature a name.

Expl: In order that the innocent person may not suffer for the sins or misdeeds of another person, God gave each person (creature) a name. It is therefore possible to identify offenders and restrain evil. (*God, fraud, name, creature*)

377 Onokwafo mo ne tam a, omo no akwan-akwan.

When the truthful person is dressing for the court, he/she dresses along the way (road).

Expl: The truthful witness is ever ready to tell the truth and so when he/she is called (summoned), he/she responds immediately and without hesitation. He/she does not wait to dress at home but even dresses along the road, because of the eagerness he/she feels to tell the truth. The proverb expresses the strength of truth. (*truthful person, court, dressing, road*) Akrofi, No. 778

378 Nokware di tuo.

Truth eats (is not afraid of) the gun.

Expl: Truth is stronger than the gun and cannot be silenced by it. The proverb expresses the power or invincibility of truth. (*truth, gun, invincibility*)

19 FEELINGS

Feelings provide opportunity for the Akan to reflect on human nature. Love, hate, motherly love, anger and fear receive thoughtful attention.

379 Odo senee, bribiara ansen bio.

When love passed by, nothing else passed.

Expl: Love is the greatest moral principle. (*love, principle*)

380 Odo ye owu.

Love is death.

Expl: Love is a powerful emotion and it is only death which can separate those who love each other. This proverb is cited when lovers, such as a man and his wife, are completely devoted to each other. (*love, death*)

381 Obi do wo a, wo nso do no bi.

If someone loves you, love him in return.

Expl: Love is reciprocal. (*love, reciprocity*)

382 Odo biara a wode sika to no sika tumi see no.

Love that can be bought with money can also be destroyed by money.

(*love, money*) Bannerman, No. 363

383 Asu a edo wo na eko w'ahina mu.

It is the river (water) that loves you that enters your drinking pot.

Expl: The Akan say that when a person goes to the river to fetch water, it is only the water that loves him/her that he/she is able to scoop with his/her calabash into his/her drinking pot. The water that is not scooped into the calabash flows downstream. This proverb is quoted when people visit each other in their homes, for to visit each other is a sign of love. (*river, water, drinking pot, love, calabash*)

384 Odo, wonni no sika.

True love is not based on riches (wealth).

Expl: Genuine love, which is being upheld by this proverb, is for the sake of the loved one and not for his or her wealth. Such is the love that lasts. (*love, wealth, riches*) Akrofi, No. 379

385 Odo nti na Esiamma kaw nam mono mu.

It is out of love that the tightfisted Esi (Sunday-born female), bit a raw fish into two.

Expl: The proverb is based on the example of Esi the miser, who, during a time of great scarcity, bit a fresh fish into two and uncharacteristically gave half to the one she loved (a friend or a child). Genuine love impels a person to make sacrifices for the sake of the loved one. (*love, fish*) Ackah, No. 29

386 Otan a owoo ne ba na onim abadae.

It is the mother who bore the child who knows what it is to yearn for him/her.

Expl: The proverb expresses the genuine compassion which only a mother can feel for her child. (*compassion, mother, love*) Akrofi, No. 916

387 Obaatan na onim nea ne ba bedi.

It is the mother who knows what (food) her child will eat.

Expl: Motherly love is a virtue which the matrilineal Akan prize very highly and which makes the bond between mother and child particularly strong. Even in times of scarcity a mother will strive to give food to her children or sacrifice the little that she has in order that her children will survive. (*mother, food, child, love*)

388 Tintimme se obewe obo a, one Sekyere Amprofiri.

If *Tintimme* (the mother locust) says she will eat a stone, she eats (shares) it with her little one (*Sekyere Amprofiri*).

Expl: A mother will go to any lengths to feed her children in time of scarcity and this is an expression of the depth of motherly love. (*locust, mother, stone, love*)

389 Adiama ne adiama ne agoru.

Sharing (what one has got to eat) and sharing (what the other has got to eat) is friendship.

Expl: The hallmark of (good) friendship is the willingness to share good things with each other. Friendship is based on reciprocity and generosity, not on selfishness. (*sharing, friendship, reciprocity, generosity, selfishness*)

390 Agohia sen hia pa.

Not having people (friends) with whom to play is worse than not having money (poverty). (*people, poverty, money*) Akrofi, No. 444

391 Otan nni aduru.

There is no medicine for hatred.

Expl: Hatred is incurable. (*medicine, hatred*)

392 Otan hunu ye ya.

Hatred without cause is painful. (*hatred, cause*)

393 Wotan onipa a, woma oye nneema nyinaa.

If you hate someone, you attribute everything (that goes wrong) to him or her.

Expl: Every kind of bad motive is imputed to the enemy and the enemy becomes the cause of everything (wrong) that happens, giving the impression that the hated one can do everything. (*hate, someone, everything, enemy*) Akrofi, No. 915

394 Obi tan wo a, ma onnya wo atanye.

If someone hates you, let him have (good) cause to hate you.

Expl: When someone hates you, she/he is always setting traps for you to fall into so that she/he can take revenge. But, if you are on your guard and do not fall into his/her trap, or if you keep out of her/his way, he/she cannot get you and she/he hates you all the more. (*someone, cause, hate, revenge, trap*)

395 Wotan wo yonko ba a, wo ba wu awusin.

If you think evil of your neighbor's child, your own child dies a premature death.

Expl: Evil befalls the person who thinks evil. (*evil, neighbor, child, death*)

396 Wotan wo ni a, womfa no mma dom.

Even if you hate your mother, you do not hand her over to the enemy.

Expl: The proverb reflects the strength of the bond between mother and child, which is able to prevent a child from attempting to get rid of his or her mother. (*mother, enemy, child*) Rattray, No. 581

397 Wo tamfo nya amane a, di ma no; na oda w'ase a, na nnye so.

If your enemy is in trouble, help him/her; but if he/she thanks you, do not reply.

Expl: The proverb's advice is: Help your enemy when he/she needs your help, but always be on your guard against him/her. (*enemy, trouble, help*) Rattray, No. 581

398 Wo tamfo saw w'asaw a, opupuw ne to.

When your enemy dances your dance, he/she (merely) pushes his/her buttocks.

Expl: To the enemy, the hated one never does anything right. (*enemy, hatred, dance*)

399 Wo tamfo ka wo kasa a, obo ne hwene.

When the one who hates you imitates your speech, he/she speaks through his/her nose (nasalizes your speech).

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*enemy, speech, nose*)

400 Wodi wo ni a, di wo ho ni bi.

When you are respected, respect yourself.

Expl: The person who is honoured by others must not do what is dishonourable. The proverb suggests that respect is not automatic and that those who are respected must earn or merit the respect they enjoy by conducting themselves accordingly. (*respect, dishonour*)

401 Odehye wodi no apataa, na wonni no esono.

Freedom (being born free) must be enjoyed in the manner of eating fish and not in the manner of eating an elephant.

Expl: When a person is eating a fish, she/he has to eat it with care so that the bones do not choke him/her. But, when a person is eating the meat of an elephant, she/he can eat it voraciously because there are no bones in it. The proverb suggests that freedom must be enjoyed with responsibility (care) as if one were eating a fish, and not recklessly, as if one were eating the meat of an elephant. Freedom always goes with responsibility. (*freedom, fish, elephant, responsibility*)

402 Koma bone kum ne wura.

A bad heart (given to excessive fits of anger), kills its owner.

Expl: A warning against bad-temperedness. (*heart, anger, owner*)

403 Wudi wo koma akyi a, woyera.

If you are arrogant, you get lost (go to a place you do not know).

Expl: Pride and arrogance ruin a person's prospects in life. (*arrogance, pride*) Akrofi, No. 366

404 Abufuw te se ohoho, ontra obiako fi.

Anger is like a wandering traveler, it does not stay in one person's house.

Expl: Anger or wrath is a common human failing found everywhere. (*anger, traveler, house, wrath*) Akrofi, No. 286

405 Womfa ehu mmene kasee.

One does not swallow a bone out of fear.

Expl: A person should not act out of fear, for the consequences of such behavior are disastrous. (*fear, bone*)

406 Wusuro nimo a, wode wo sekan gua onanka

If you are afraid (to speak up) for fear of incurring unpopularity, they (others) will use your knife to strip off the skin of a (poisonous) snake.

Expl: The proverb suggests that a spineless person (leader), who panders to cheap popularity, is soon imposed on. Sometimes, in the life of a nation, an unpopular decision, in the national interest, will have to be taken by the chief (leader), but a weak leader may be tempted to give in to popular sentiment, and win cheap popularity. But such a leader will soon find that in the long run the people will question his/her leadership and wisdom and blame him/her or even ridicule him/her. The proverb urges firmness tempered by justice and fairplay on the part of a good leader. (*unpopularity, knife, snake, leadership, wisdom, firmness, justice*) Rattray, No. 567

20 TREES AND PLANTS

The Akan live in the forest belt and are very conversant with the myriad varieties of trees and plants which provide them with food and medicine, as well as sources of philosophical reflection on life. The Akan tropical world is very luxuriant and abounds in innumerable species of trees and plants. But careful observation over the centuries enabled the Akan ancestors to identify each plant and its uses and bequeathed to posterity not only a vast store of knowledge of plants and their uses, but also a number of proverbial sayings dealing with plants and trees.

407 Hama behu soro a, efiri dua.

If the vine (climber) can see the sky, it is because (it climbs on the trunk) of the tree.

Expl: It is with the support of others that one can accomplish something. The proverb acknowledges the contribution of others in the course of our achievements and is used to stress our indebtedness to others. (*vine, sky, tree, indebtedness, support, achievements*)

408 Dua a esi koko so nkye tenten ye.

A tree that stands on a hill very quickly becomes tall.

Expl: With the advantage of the hill, a tree which stands on it soon becomes tall. In like manner, a person who inherits property (wealth) soon becomes wealthy. But, in a deeper sense, the proverb suggests that good foundations (which can be compared to a hill) make for success and upright life. (*tree, hill, foundations, success*)

409 Dua baako nye kwae.

One tree does not make a forest.

Expl: One tree does not constitute a forest, and in the same way, one individual does not make a family (community). It takes a number of individuals to bring a family (community) into being. The proverb shows the importance of the individual in the creation of the family but does not seek to place the individual above the family (community); for while a tree can stand alone and grow, no individual can stand alone and grow. In the Akan view of things, the individual is born into a family (community), which is the context of human existence and it is within this context that the individual can grow and actualize his or her potential. (*tree, forest, family, individual*)

410 Odoto, hama koro mmua.

One creeper does not make a thicket.

Expl: The meaning is the same as above. (*creeper, thicket*)

411 Dua baako gye mframa a, ebu.

If one tree alone faces the windstorm, it breaks.

Expl: Collective action overcomes obstacles and strength comes from united effort (numbers). (*tree, windstorm, collective action*)

412 Dua kontonkye na ema yehu dwumfo.

It is the twisted piece of wood that makes us see the ingenious craftsman (carver).

Expl: In the hands of a skillful craftsman, a crooked piece of wood can be turned into a beautiful work of art. In the same way, a good parent or a good teacher can shape a child into an upright (good) person. (*wood, craftsman, carver*)

413 Dua a ebebere na yeatew bi adi no, wonso ogya ngu ase.
You do not light a fire under a fruit-bearing tree.

Expl: One does not destroy what will eventually yield to one's benefit. (*fruit, tree, benefit*)

414 Dua mfa mfe aduasa nkyea, na womfa da koro ntee no.
A tree which has taken thirty years to become crooked (bent) cannot be straightened in a day.

Expl: Good upbringing and correction (of children) should begin in infancy, not when the child is already grown up, for then it will be too late. The proverb is a warning to parents who are lax in bringing up their children. (*tree, day, discipline, children, parents*) Akrofi, No. 398

415 Odupon tutu a, borofere na esi anan mu.
When a mighty tree falls, a soft tree (pawpaw) grows in its place.
Expl: It is a common experience that often when a great leader, capable or worthy person, chief, head of the family, or parent leaves the scene, he/she is succeeded by a less capable person. (*tree, paw-paw*) Akrofi, No. 398

416 Nnipa baanu so dua a, emmia.
When two people carry a log, it does not feel heavy.
Expl: When responsibility is shared, it is less oppressive and one person alone does not suffer from it. The proverb suggests that many hands make work light. (*people, log, responsibility*) Akrofi, No. 763

417 Abaa a wode bo wuram aboa no, womfa mmo fie aboa.
You do not hit the wild animal with the same stick with which you hit a domestic animal.
Expl: A domestic animal lives with its owner and therefore receives a different treatment from a strange, wild animal. There is a tendency for people to treat those close or known to them better than others. (*stick, animal, treatment*)

418 Abe bere a, nnomaa di bi.

When the palm fruit ripens, birds eat some (of it).

Expl: As it is natural for the hungry birds which fly about in the skies to eat some of the ripened palm fruits in a farmer's farm, so should a person make it possible for others to benefit from his/her property. The proverb encourages generosity and beneficence as a moral duty. (*palm fruit, birds, generosity, beneficence*)

419 Abe baako na esee nsa.

One palm nut spoils the taste of the palm wine.

Expl: Palm wine is tapped from the palm tree but when a ripe palm fruit falls into a pot of palm wine it changes its taste. The proverb means that one bad person in a family or community ruins the reputation of the entire group. This is a warning to individuals to conduct themselves properly in order not to bring disgrace upon their relatives or communities. (*palm nut, palm wine, taste, disgrace*)

420 Wusum borode a, sum kwaadu bi, na obi nnim nea obegu kom.

If you support the plantain tree, prop up the banana tree also, for you do not know which of them will help (save) you in time of famine.

Expl: Both the plantain and banana trees bear similar fruit, but whereas the plantain fruit is eaten as a staple food, the banana is only a snack and a farmer may therefore be tempted to pay more attention to the former than to the latter. Again, both trees are weak, with very threadlike trunks, which require reinforcement with sticks against strong winds. An unwise farmer may prop up the plantain and ignore the banana tree. But the proverb suggests that it is wise to give both trees equal attention, for in hard times one can live on bananas. The proverb is often used as a warning to parents with many children to give them all equal attention, for no one knows which of them will provide support for the parents in their old age. (*plantain, banana, famine, parents, children*)

421 Kwaē a agye wo no, womfre no kwaewa.

You do not call the forest which has saved you (provided you shelter) a small forest.

Expl: The proverb emphasizes the need for gratitude and appreciation to benefactors. (*forest, gratitude, appreciation, benefactors*)

21 ANIMALS

The variety of animals in the forest belt gave the Akan the opportunity to study animal life and behavior and incorporate this knowledge in their proverbs. Some Akan clans use such animals as the dog, (*Aduana*), buffalo, (*Ekoona*), leopard, (*Bretuo*) and bat, (*Asenee*) as their living symbols.

422 *Ehia osebo a, owe nwura* (same as 265).

When the leopard is desperate it eats weeds.

Expl: Desperation and want often drive a person to do what he/she is not used to or what he/she normally would not accept. The proverb expresses the need to adapt himself/herself to changing circumstances. (*leopard, desperation, weeds, animal*)

423 *Obi nkyere osebo ba atow.*

No one teaches the leopard's cub how to spring (to catch its prey).

Expl: Children take after their parents. (*leopard, cub, animal, children*)

424 *Osebo de ne ho hu na ewen n'afuw.*

The leopard protects its farm through the fear which people have for it.

Expl: Fear of the consequences prevents people from trespassing or breaking the rules set by authority. (*leopard, farm, fear, people, animal, trespassing, rules, authority*)

425 *Akuntunakuntun mu wo bribi a, anka osebo afuw mmen.*

If arrogance were profitable, it would have given the leopard horns (which it has not).

Expl: Overbearing pride is not a moral quality; it is also a weakness. (*arrogance, leopard, horns, animal, pride*)

426 *Hama, hama kyere ketebo.*

One string joined to another can bind the leopard.

Expl: Strong though the leopard may be, when strings are joined together they can overpower him. The proverb expresses the idea that unity is strength and united effort and persistent exertion can accomplish great things. (*string, leopard, animal, unity*)

427 "Huw m'ani so na me," nti na atwe abien nam.

"Blow the dust from my eyes for me", — that is why two antelopes walk together.

Expl: It is because one antelope will blow dust from the other's eyes that two antelopes walk together. This proverb expresses the moral basis of Akan social relations. Each person has an obligation to another and the fulfillment of this obligation brings about an equilibrium which makes life in community liveable and tolerable. Each person is limited, for the antelope into whose eyes the dust has fallen cannot remove it by himself, the other antelope will remove it for him. We, therefore, have mutual obligations to each other in society. (*dust, eyes, antelopes, interdependence, animal, obligation*)

428 Atwe abien boro ewi.

Two small antelopes beat a big antelope.

Expl: There is strength in unity. (*antelopes, unity, animal*)

429 Otwe dua ye tiaa a, eno ara na ode pra ne ho.

Short though the antelope's tail may be, it can flick away flies (pests) with it.

Expl: A short tail is a handicap, but in spite of that the antelope is able to protect itself. The proverb suggests that handicaps or impediments are no excuse for lack of effort. (*antelope, tail, animal, handicaps, impediments*)

430 Atwe abien boro ewi no, na ne mma nyinii e.

When two small antelopes beat the big antelope, the latter's children were young (too small to help their mother).

Expl: The proverb shows the responsibility of children to help their parents in time of need. (*antelopes, animals, children, responsibility, parents*)

431 Otwe ne otwe ko, na wohu gyahene a, woko afa na woguan.

When two antelopes are fighting and a lion approaches, they run off together (forgetting their squabbles). (*antelopes, lion, animal*)
Rattray, No. 130

432 Otwe nya anantu a, wokyi.

When an antelope has big legs, it must be shunned.

Expl: Antelopes have thin legs and therefore big legs on an antelope are a sign of disease, and a hunter must refrain from shooting it and look for healthier ones. The proverb means that pride or swollen-headedness is unbecoming of a person who is well bred. (*antelopes, legs, animal, pride*) Christaller, No. 3417

433 Ade hia odenkyem a, odidi asum, na onnidi kwaem.

However poor the crocodile becomes, it hunts in the river, not in the forest.

Expl: However poor a person becomes, she/he must not go beyond the bounds of propriety. The proverb advises that a person must not do what is improper or undignified however poor or desperate he/she becomes. (*crocodile, river, forest, animal, propriety*)

434 Ohurii si akyekyere akyi kwa.

The tsetse fly (looking for blood to suck) stands at the back of the tortoise in vain.

Expl: The proverb is used to advise people not to allow problems, or anything else that may be done to hurt them, to penetrate their skins. An exhortation for steadfastness in the face of adversity. (*tsetse fly, insect, tortoise, adversity, steadfastness*)

435 Akyekyere se: ntem ye, ogom nso ye.

The tortoise says to go fast (speed) is good, and to go slowly (slowness) is also good.

Expl: Both speed and slowness have their proper time and place, depending on the circumstances. The proverb lifts up wisdom or good judgment as a guide to conduct. (*tortoise, speed, slowness, animal, wisdom*)

436 Akyekyere se: nsa ko, na nsa ba.

The tortoise says: the hand (of kindness) goes, and the hand (of kindness) comes.

Expl: Goodness must be repaid with goodness. (*tortoise, hand, animal, goodness*)

437 Woko awuru kurom na owe dote a, wowe bi.

When you visit the town of the tortoise and it eats earth (dust), you eat some too.

Expl: The proverb expresses the need for adaptability. (*tortoise, town, earth, animal, adaptability*) Christaller, No. 1584

438 Woben asu a, na wote se okoto bo waw.

When you get close (near) to the river, you hear the crab coughing.

Expl: When you get to know a person well, you have knowledge of his/her strengths and weaknesses or character. (*river, crab, cough*)

439 Okoto nwo anomaa.

A crab does not beget a bird. Like begets like and children resemble their parents.

(*crab, bird, children, parents*)

440 Woko ahayo na woankm nam nti wo bo afuw, na se wutia akyekyere so a, woremfa?

If you are angry because you did not kill any game, and you step on a tortoise, are you not going to take it home?

Expl: The proverb advises that a person should be content with what he/she has (gets). (*game, tortoise, home, anger, animal, contentment*) Bannerman, No. 150

441 "Gye akyekyere koma agya," nnye ahayo.

"Take this tortoise to father" is no hunting.

Expl: A hunter who returns from the forest with a tortoise obviously shows his lack of success in killing game. (*animal, tortoise, father, hunting*)

442 Okoto po di sukom, na menne okwaku a oda soro?

Even the crab (which lives near water) becomes thirsty (sometimes), how much more the monkey, which lives in trees?

Expl: All people experience adversity or want (sometimes), regardless of their circumstances or condition of life. (*crab, thirst, monkey, trees, animal, adversity, condition, life*) Christaller, No. 1747

443 Oketew nkowe mako, na fifiri mfi atweroro.

The lizard does not eat pepper and make the frog (who has not tasted it) suffer the burning (heat of the pepper).

Expl: A person does not commit a crime and let someone else take the punishment. The proverb suggests that each person must bear the responsibility for his/her own actions. (*lizard, pepper, frog, heat, animal, crime, punishment, responsibility*) Akrofi, No. 532

444 Okoto a oda sika ho po twere abe.

Even the crab that lives near gold eats palm nuts.

Expl: Gold panning along river banks, where crabs live, has been carried on by the Akan for many centuries. And, although crabs live near gold, they do not feed on it, but instead they are baited out of their holes with palm nuts. The way to catch a crab in its hole without putting your hand into the hole (which is often dangerous) is to tie a palm nut at the tip of a young palm branch with all the leaves removed except the ones at the tip with which the palm nut is tied. The person then lets the palm branch slowly into the hole and when he senses that the crab has got hold of the palm nut, he pulls it out gradually, with the crab hanging on to the bait. As the palm branch nears the top of the hole, he pulls it out very quickly and catches the crab, still holding on to the palm nut with its claws. The proverb suggests that money or wealth alone is not everything, and warns against too much attachment to riches. (*crab, gold, palm nuts, animal*) Christaller, No. 1739

445 Nea owo aka no, suro osunson.

The person who has been bitten by a snake is afraid of the worm.

Expl: We learn from our experiences so that we do not repeat them. This proverb is the Akan version of "once bitten, twice shy". (*person, snake, animal, experience*)

446 Owo nka onipa kwa.

The snake does not bite without cause.

Expl: Provocation elicits violence. (*snake, animal, person, cause, provocation*)

447 Owo de ahoyeraw na eka.

The snake bites out of provocation.

Expl: Ordinarily, a snake will not bite a person, but it does so only when the person steps on it or hurts it. The proverb is a warning against provoking each other, which is the cause of quarrels and disunity in the family. (*snake, animal, provocation*)

448 Wuso owo ti a, nea aka nyinaa ye hama.

If you get hold of the snake's head, the rest of its body is a (mere) string.

Expl: The snake's head controls its body and, however poisonous a snake may be, being able to get hold of its head renders it powerless. The proverb shows the power and importance of the human mind, for once it is controlled or brought into subjection, the person becomes weak and ineffective. Controlling a person's mind is the most effective way to control him or her totally. (*snake, animal, head, string, mind, control*)

449 Wonhuu owo ti a, wommo no abaa.

You do not hit the snake with a stick until you see its head.

Expl: The right thing must be done at the right time in order to achieve success. (*snake, animal, head, success*)

450 Se okyerefo baakuma da bamma so a, wonnyae nkodi nsemma nsemma.

When a dangerous snake is lying on the wall, you do not leave it to attend to minor, insignificant matters.

Expl: *Okyerefo baakuma* is the appellation of the snake. A snake near the house poses a great threat to the inmates of the house and must be killed or dealt with quickly. The proverb suggests that danger must be eliminated quickly, and must not be left to linger while inconsequential matters take up attention. (*snake, animal, wall, matters*)

451 Woye foo foo a, wode wo sekan gua onanka.

If you are silent (do not speak up), they will skin a snake with your knife.

Expl: People must speak up, otherwise their rights will be trampled upon by others. (*snake, animal, knife, rights*)

452 Woso onanka, wuntumi; na wokofa oprammiri abo kahiri?

You are carrying a puff adder and you find it difficult (because of its weight), do you now go and take a (big) black snake and make it into a pad to carry it?

Expl: When you have a problem you do not worsen it. (*puff adder, snake, animal, pad*)

453 Esono kokuroo, adowa ne panyin.

The elephant is big, but the (little) royal antelope is the elder (smarter).

Expl: Quick-wittedness is better (superior) than sheer size. The proverb is an emblem mounted on a linguist staff. (*elephant, royal antelope, elder, animal*)

454 Esono nni ha mu a, anka okoo ye obopon.

If the elephant were not in the forest, the roan antelope would be considered a very large animal.

Expl: This proverb is used in a political sense to compare the power of the king, in the case of the Ansate nation, with that of the other paramount chiefs. It is also used in a general sense to compare the power of the chief to that of the elders or heads of households in towns or villages. In Akan political culture, the king is compared to the elephant, as the person with the mightiest power in the nation. (*elephant, roan antelope, animal*)

455 Esono afon se den ara a, wongua no wo berew so.

However thin the elephant becomes, it is not skinned on a palm leaf.

Expl: After killing an animal, a hunter would put it on a skin or pad to skin it; and usually the hunter would select a skin or pad on which the animal would fit. The elephant is the biggest animal in the forest, and it would be inconceivable to imagine that it can be laid on a palm leaf to be skinned, however thin it has become. If this happened, it would be a disgrace to the elephant. The proverb suggests that a person must be accorded the dignity and respect attached to his/her position, notwithstanding adverse changes in his/her personal circumstances. (*elephant, animal, palm leaf, dignity, respect*) Christaller, No. 3025

456 Wonnyae esono akyi di nkototo abo mmo aseredowa.

One does not leave (ignore) an elephant and throw stones at a small bird.

Expl: When there is the opportunity for important matters to be dealt with, one does not abandon it to pursue minor or insignificant matters. (*elephant, stones, bird, animal, opportunity, matters*)

457 Wode kokuroko na edi amim a, anka esono beba fie.

If size ensured superiority, the elephant would come home (to rule).

Expl: Mere bulk or size does not guarantee superiority or the right to do what one likes. A warning to persons in authority not to abuse their power. (*elephant, size, superiority, home, animal, power*)

458 Obaakofo na okum esono, na amansan nyinaa di.

It takes one person to kill an elephant, but the whole community (people) consume its meat.

Expl: One person's efforts benefit a whole community of people. The proverb is an exhortation for dedicated service to one's nation or people. (*person, community, elephant, meat, animal, effort, service*)

459 Wudi esono akyi a, wontoa.

When you follow an elephant, you do not get tangled up with creepers.

Expl: An elephant going through the forest clears its path of all creepers and entanglements, and a follower walks with ease in the elephant's path. The king is compared to an elephant, for his wise counsel and able leadership, if followed, will ensure a conflict-free state. The elders with their wisdom and experience also blaze a trail through the thickets of life and the younger generation will avoid so many trials if they follow the advice of elders and parents. (*elephant, creepers, animal, wisdom, experience, leadership, elders, parents*) Rattray, No. 105

460 Sono ntumi ne se a, anka omfa nnantew.

The elephant would not be able to walk if it could not carry its own tusks (teeth).

Expl: Each person should endeavour to bear his or her own burden. (*elephant, teeth, animal, burden*)

461 Obommofo din bata sonnam ho.

The hunter's name is always associated with the meat (flesh) of the elephant.

Expl: Killing an elephant is an act of bravery which benefits a large number of people, who consume the meat, while the good name of the hunter goes with what he has done. The proverb suggests that a person's good name (reputation) goes with his/her deeds. (*elephant, hunter, name, meat, animal*) Akrofi, No. 271

462 Esono wu a, wonto nam.

One does not buy meat when an elephant is killed.

Expl: At a time of plenitude, things are easy to come by without effort or cost. (*elephant, death, meat, animal, plenitude*)

463 Wo koko ye duru a, wotow esono tuo.

If you have courage, you can kill an elephant.

Expl: Great things require great courage, or it takes daring to do a great thing. (*elephant, courage, gun, animal*)

464 Nea wakum ne sono biara nsua.

Whoever has killed an elephant cannot be regarded as an ordinary person.

Expl: It takes exceptional courage and determination to accomplish a great feat, and people who achieve such distinction must be recognized as having attained a status above that of ordinary men or women. (*elephant, person, courage, determination*)

465 Yenim se konturomfi wo kon, nso yede hama to n'asen mu.

We know that the monkey has a neck (like other animals), and yet, we tie a string around its waist (when we want to put it on a leash).

Expl: Animals are normally tethered by tying a rope around their necks but in the case of the monkey, it is different. The proverb expresses the idea that there are exceptions to general rules. (*monkey, neck, waist, animal*) Christaller, No. 2343

466 Nkonturomfi nkwakoraa na woware nkontromfi mmerewa.

Old monkeys (males) marry old monkeys (females).

Expl: This proverb is a warning against disparity in the age of married couples, but in a larger sense the proverb means that equals marry equals. Such marriages have a better chance of succeeding than unequal matches. (*monkeys, marriage, animal*)

467 Konturomfi se, "obran wu ne koko."

The monkey says, "The valiant man dies because of his bravery."

Expl: The Akan language locates feelings such as anger and bravery in the chest, *koko* or *bo*. To say that a person is brave, the Akan would say, "*ne koko ye duru*" — literally, his chest is heavy. Thus, the brave man dies because of his heavy heart (nothing to do with sorrow in Akan language) means the brave man dies because of his courage or bravery. The Akan say the warrior fights with courage, not with excessive anger. (*monkey, valiant person, bravery, anger*) Rattray, No. 78

468 **Konturomfi se, "Wohye m'afonom a, na meyi asempa maka makyere wo."**

The monkey says, "If you fill up my cheeks (with food), then I shall say good things to you."

Expl: Kindness must be reciprocated. (*monkey, cheeks, animal, kindness*) Akrofi, No. 582

469 **Kwasi Ahwehwe nnya nkodow Boaboa no, na eho nkonson didi.**

The monkeys at Boaboa (name of a place) had something to eat before Kwasi Ahwehwe (name of a man) went there to make his farm.

Expl: Benefactors who are often fussy or nit-picking are told this proverb to show that the people they are helping were living (not starving) before they came and that they could well do without the assistance of the benefactors. A warning to benefactors not to be excessively demanding or boastful. (*monkey, farm, food, animal, benefactors*) Akrofi, No. 611

470 **Worewe efoo nsa no, na worehwe wo de.**

As you eat the monkey's hand, look at yours.

Expl: The monkey's hand resembles the human hand and as a person eats it she/he should be reminded of her/his own hand. The proverb is a reminder not to mistreat or cheat other persons, for after all, the persons being abused or treated unjustly are also human, just like ourselves. (*monkey, hand, animal*)

471 **Oguan ho baabi de brebo.**

There is an internal organ of a sheep, called *brebo* (liver), which means "bring your heart under".

Expl: The word *brebo* is a play on words and it is a whole sentence compressed into one word, *bre - wo - bo - ase*, meaning "bring your chest (heart) under" or, lower your chest, which has risen (with anger or pride). The idea is that a person's chest rises above normal when he/she is proud or angry and such a person is advised to lower or bring down his/her chest. The proverb is used to underscore the idea that calm endurance and modesty are more worthwhile than vanity and overbearing pride. (*sheep, liver, animal, modesty, endurance, vanity, pride*) Akrofi, No. 453

472 Abirekyi se: "Nea ebeba aba dedaw."

The goat says: "What will come has already come."

Expl: There is nothing new under the sun and what has happened recurs again in the course of time. (*goat, animal*)

473 Okwasea na ne guan tew mprennu.

It is a fool whose sheep (which has been tethered) breaks loose twice.

Expl: The wise person and the foolish person both have the same experiences, but the distinction between them lies in the fact that whereas the wise person does not make the same mistake twice (learns from experiences), the foolish person does not learn from his/her experiences. The proverb suggests that we have only ourselves to blame if we do not learn from experiences, especially bitter ones. (*sheep, animal, experience*)

474 Obi apede ne odompo nsono.

Someone's favorite meat is the intestines of the wild dog.

Expl: Human tastes and preferences differ from person to person. (*meat, intestines, wild dog, animal, tastes, preferences*)

475 Bommomu, yenhaw.

A whole animal (that has been killed) is not smoked on fire.

Expl: The Akan word *bommomu* (*aboa* - animal, *mu* - whole) means a whole animal and normally an animal is cut up into pieces before it is smoked. The proverb is a reference to the need to cut up or analyze (carefully) cases before coming to a conclusion. Without careful analysis one cannot see how the pieces fit together in order to make the right judgment or decision. (*animal, fire, judgment, decision*)

476 Mmoa nyinaa tu mmirika, nantwi nko nkotu bi a, wose wabo dam.

All animals run, but when the cow runs, they (people) say it is mad.

Expl: All human beings have frailties, but when one person's weak point becomes public (exposed), people point accusing fingers at that person. The proverb alludes to the injustice which arises when people are very forgiving of their own flaws but are unforgiving or excessively censorious of the faults of others. (*animal, cow, injustice, faults*)

477 Apotoro wu a, na wuhu ne tenten.

The full length of a frog is seen (appreciated) only when it dies.

Expl: A living frog has a body which is all cramped together, making it a short and small creature; but when it dies its body dries up and stretches to its full length. And, in like manner, the full worth of a person becomes more evident after his/her death. (*animal, frog, death*)

478 Otabiraa wo ne fafo.

Even the gray snail has its picker.

Expl: The Akan do not pick the gray snail in the forest when they go hunting for snails, because it is not eaten. But other ethnic groups eat them. The proverb shows how human tastes and preferences differ. (*snail, animal*) Akrofi, No. 910

479 Okyekyefo ade, nkura na edi.

The miser's goods are eaten by mice.

Expl: A warning against miserliness. (*animal, miser, goods, mice*) Akrofi, No. 615

480 Agyinamoa wu a, nkura yam.

When the cat dies, the mice rejoice.

Expl: People are happy when their enemies are put out of their way. (*cat, death, mice, animal*) Akrofi, No. 460

481 Akura kwasea na se otu agyinamoa ba ahu a, ode no koye n'abaawa.

It is a foolish mouse which finds a kitten and takes it to its house as his/her maidservant.

Expl: It is folly to nurture evil (an enemy) and let it overwhelm you in the future. Evil must be stopped at its earliest stages. (*mouse, kitten, house, maidservant, animal*) Bannerman, No. 394

482 Wode boaseto gua ntatea a, wuhu ne mmerebo.

If you skin an ant with patience, you can see its liver.

Expl: With patience and persistence one can accomplish the impossible and overcome great difficulties. (*ant, insect, patience, liver, persistence*)

483 Minim, minim, na amma kotokrodu anhu ewo ye.

"I know (already), I know (already)" prevented the wasp from learning how to make honey.

Expl: Pretension to knowledge, when one does not really have it, makes a person ignorant. A warning against pride or arrogance which stands in the way of the acquisition of knowledge. (*insect, wasp, honey, knowledge, pride, arrogance*)

484 Ohurii nni gyamfo.

The tsetse fly has no one to mourn it (when it dies).

Expl: The tsetse fly sucks the blood of other animals for food and therefore the victims of its bite shed no tears when it dies. In like manner, the suffering of a wicked person is no cause for sorrow. (*insect, tsetse-fly, death, sorrow*) Akrofi, No. 499

485 Mogya mpa oten tirim da.

Blood is never absent from the head of the tsetse fly.

Expl: The wicked person is always inclined to evil. (*blood, insect, head, tsetse fly*)

486 Mfote pam, ansa na woaye yaa.

Even the white ants confer before they scatter.

Expl: The proverb expresses the need to deliberate together or seek advice before embarking on any venture. (*insect, white ants, advice, venture*)

487 Adifudepe na emaa odowa kaa nsa tumpan mu.

It was gluttony that caused the bee to get stuck in a palm wine bottle.

Expl: Palm wine, tapped from the palm tree, is often stored in a bottle and because of its taste it attracts a lot of bees. The pursuit of the sweet taste often leads the bees to their death. The proverb is a warning against inordinate appetite which leads to trouble. (*insect, bee, gluttony, palm wine, bottle, appetite*) Bannerman, No. 132

488 Wofa nwansena ho abufuw a, wobore wo kurum.

If you become angry with the housefly on your sore (and hit it), you injure yourself.

Expl: If you allow a tempter to irritate you, you injure yourself. The proverb encourages calmness in the face of provocation. (*insect, fly, sore, calmness, provocation*)

489 Obi mpo ne ti mma dwiw.

One does not give up one's head to lice.

Expl: When evil begins to manifest itself, it must be removed (rooted out) and not allowed to fester and grow. (*insect, head, lice*) Akrofi, No. 211

490 Akukomfi ani soso kyen no a, oye omumo.

If the eyes of the preying mantis become bigger than its body, it looks ugly.

Expl: The Akan associate pride with the eyes, and a person whose eyes are said to go beyond his/her eyelashes is a proud person. The protruding eyes of the preying mantis (a small insect) make the insect look ugly or unattractive. Pride and arrogance are demeaning. (*insect, preying mantis, body, pride, arrogance*)

491 Aketekre bo fa a, ebi ka n'ani.

If the cricket breaks the earth (soil), dust gets into its eyes.

Expl: A wicked person also suffers for his/her misdeeds. (*insect, cricket, dust, eyes, misdeeds*) Akrofi, No. 560

492 Nwansena ye sisi a, onsi gya mu.

A fly may alight wherever it pleases, but it does not alight on a fire.

Expl: The proverb expresses the wisdom in avoiding danger. (*insect, fire, wisdom, danger*) Rattray, No. 188

493 Nwansena ampa funu ho a, wode no sie.

When a fly does not get off a dead body, it (the fly) is buried with it.

Expl: Stubbornness leads to harm or injury. (*insect, dead body, stubbornness, harm, injury*) Rattray, No. 185

494 Obi nkoto ohahini wo ne bon ano na onse se, "Wo ho bon!"

One does not go to find the black ant (sitting) at the mouth of its hole and tell him, "You stink!"

Expl: One does not go to another person's house or country to insult him/her. (*insect, black ants, mouth, hole, insult*)

495 Ananse anton kasa.

The spider (Creator) did not sell speech.

Expl: Ananse, the spider, is the hero of Akan folktales which are called *Anansesem*, or Ananse stories. In telling stories generally, the Akan use the name *Ananse Kokuroko* (Big Spider) for the Creator, instead of the common names *Onyame* or *Onyankopon*, which are used in the context of religious discourse or rituals. The

proverb means that the Creator did not decree that speech should be sold, and that everyone is free to speak as he or she likes. In other words, everybody has the right to free speech. (*insect, spider, speech*) Akrofi, No. 664

496 Obi nto anasesem nkyere Ntikuma.

One does not tell Ananse stories to Ntikuma.

Expl: Ntikuma is the son of Ananse and is therefore knowledgeable about his father's stories. The proverb means that one does not tell a person what that person already knows. The proverb may be compared to the English proverb, carrying coal to Newcastle. (*person, stories*)

497 Dua a Ananse adi awuo, Ntikuma ntra ase nto nkom.

The tree (whose fruit) Ananse has eaten and died, his son, Ntikuma, does not sit under and nod.

Expl: Lessons must be learned from the sufferings of others. (*tree, death, lessons, sufferings*)

22 BIRDS

Observation of birds, their characteristics and calls provided many insights, which are reflected in Akan proverbs. Some Akan clans use such birds as the hawk (*Oyoko*), eagle (*Asakyiri*), crow (*Asona*), and parrot (*Agona*) as their living symbols.

498 Hae! Hae! na amma akoroma annye kese.

The shout of hae! hae! did not let the hawk grow big.

Expl: The Akan use the interjection *hae* to drive away or frighten off domestic animals (sheep) and birds of prey. And if the hawks are not driven away they would catch more chickens to eat and grow big and powerful and cause more harm. The proverb stresses the need to contain evil so that it does not become overpowering. (*hawk, evil, overpowering*)

499 Obi ntwa akoko ano mma akye.

One does not pass the mouth of the cock (who announces the break of day) to say good morning.

Expl: The cock is the first to announce the approach of dawn for people to wake up to begin their daily activities, which include going to say good morning to relatives and friends. The proverb suggests that things must be done in their own time. (*cock, mouth, morning, greeting*)

500 Akoko bere nin adekyee, nso ohwe onini ano.

The hen knows when it is dawn, but she looks at the mouth of the cock (and leaves the crowing to the cock).

Expl: Although the hen sees the approach of daylight, it is the cock who announces it. Responsibilities must be left for those whose duty it is to perform them. (*hen, dawn, mouth, cock, responsibilities*)

501 Akoko bow nsa a, na ne were afi akoroma.

When the hen becomes intoxicated, she forgets about the hawk.

Expl: A drunken hen disregards the hawk which would snatch its chicks. A warning against the pursuit of excessive pleasure which makes people forget about danger. (*hen, drink, hawk, danger, pleasure*)

502 Aberewa hwe akoko, na akoko hwe aberewa.

The old woman takes care of (feeds) the chicken and the chicken also takes care of (feeds) the old woman.

Expl: The proverb expresses the necessity for both parental and filial obligations, which lead to an equilibrium in parent-child relationships. This reciprocal obligation is the ideal foundation of the family (society). (*old woman, chicken, parental obligation, filial obligation*)

503 Akokonini bow nsa a, na ne were afi se ofi nkesua mu (same as 553).

When the cock becomes intoxicated, it forgets it came from an egg.

Expl: Power, wealth or influence can blur our perspective and make us forget that we are, after all, human like everybody else. (*cock, intoxication, egg, power, wealth, influence*)

504 Akoko sa kyee a, enye akroma fe.

However exquisitely the hen dances, the hawk is not delighted.

Expl: The most exquisite performance or conduct does not please one's enemy. An enemy hates you whatever you do. This is a

warning not to expect praise or recognition from our adversaries.
(*hen, dance, hawk, praise, recognition, adversaries*)

505 **Akoko di wo yonko aburaw a, pam no, na da bi obedi wo de.**

When a fowl is eating your neighbor's corn, drive it away or some day it will eat yours. (*fowl, neighbor, corn*)

506 **Wode wo di nkoko hene a, di na wubenya nkesua adi.**
If you are enstooled (enthroned) as chief of chickens, accept it, for you will (at least) have eggs to eat.

Expl: Every responsibility, however humble, has its perks. (*chief, chickens, eggs, responsibility, perks*)

507 **Woko obi krom na okum akoko ma wo di a, enye ne de na woadi, na wo de a owo fie no na woadi.**

If you visit someone's town and that person kills a fowl to prepare a meal for you to eat, it is not his/her fowl that you have eaten, rather it is your own fowl back home.

Expl: Kindness begets kindness, and the hospitality received in a neighbor's home, must be reciprocated. (*town, fowl, meal, home, kindness, hospitality*)

508 **Anomaa de ako ne aba na enwene ne brebuw.**

A bird, by coming and going, weaves its nest.

Expl: A worthwhile enterprise is not accomplished at once; it is only by persistent toil and effort that it can be brought to fruition. (*bird, nest, toil, effort, fruition*)

509 **Anomaa kye wo dua so a, ogye obo.**

When a bird sits for too long on a tree, it has a stone thrown at it.

Expl: If a person occupies a position for too long, he/she is removed (forcibly). A warning to people who want to treat the positions they hold as if it were their birthright; in the end they become targeted and are removed. (*bird, tree, stone*)

510 **Anomaa kye wo soro a, ogye obo.**

When a bird stays too long in the skies, it has a stone thrown at it.

Expl: The meaning is the same as the one above. (*bird, skies, stone*)

511 **Anomaa niferefo, wode mposae na eyi no.**

The crafty bird is trapped with parched plantain fiber.

Expl: A clever person is often caught by a very simple trick. There is a limit to knowledge or cunning. (*bird, plantain, fiber, limit, knowledge, cunning*)

512 Anomaa ano ye den a, aboa bi nkyere no nwe.

A bird which can cry out cannot be caught by a wild animal.

Expl: When people speak up or defend their rights, they cannot be trampled upon or threatened with extinction. The proverb underscores the necessity to defend our rights. (*bird, cry, animal, rights*)

513 Asem te se anomaa, enkye tu.

News is like a bird, it flies quickly.

Expl: News, especially scandal, spreads quickly. (*news, bird*) Akrofi, No. 859

514 Tadua kyenkyen gyaa anomaa.

If a trap is too strong, it lets the bird break free (escape).

Expl: A person who is too strong(or strict) loses some good things in life. The proverb is a warning against uncompromising rigidity. For example, too much discipline spoils a child. (*trap, bird, rigidity, discipline, child*) Akrofi, No. 911

515 Anomaa ano ware a, ode didi asuogya, na omfa ntwā asu.

A bird with a long beak uses it to feed itself on the bank side of the river (where it stands), but it does not stretch its beak across the river.

Expl: Only a greedy bird would feed on both sides of the river just because it has a long bill. The proverb cautions against greed and avarice. (*bird, beak, bank, river, greed, avarice*) Rattray, No. 249

516 Kwae mu anomaa nnim se awi ye aduan.

The bird from the forest does not know that millet is suitable for eating.

Expl: The bird from the forest is familiar with the food which grows in the forest but is ignorant of edible foods in the grassland. Out of ignorance and lack of familiarity, it flies past millet, which is also food. The proverb is a reflection on ignorance, which is the result of unfamiliarity or lack of knowledge. (*bird, forest, millet, food, ignorance, unfamiliarity*)

517 Osansa fi ahunu mu reba se, "Mekokyere nipa madi",
na afei de wakowia akoko.

The hawk sweeps down from the skies saying, "I am going to catch a human being and eat him," and he takes off, having stolen a chicken.

Expl: A warning against empty boasting. (*hawk, skies, human being, chicken, boasting*)

518 Abayen bone na emaa opete dii bini.

Bad upbringing made the vulture eat faeces.

Expl: The scavenging habit of the vulture is attributed to bad upbringing, and the proverb is a warning to parents to be diligent in raising their children. (*upbringing, vulture, faeces, parents, children*)

519 Aburuburu na obuu ne be se: "Ade a ebeye ye nsee."

The wild (brown) dove says: "That which has come to live can never be destroyed."

Expl: What is destined to succeed will never fail. (*dove, bird, destiny*) Akrofi, No. 289

520 Aburuburu nkesua, ade a ebeye ye nsee.

The eggs of the wild dove are said to be able to hatch even in water, hence the proverb is used when a thing or person lives through (survives) a crisis or anything that could have led to death.

(*bird, dove, water, death*)

521 Obireku nam, wodi no hyew.

The meat of the obireku (a red, black and white bird which sings hourly) is eaten while it is hot.

Expl: The obireku is taboo, and an Akan is forbidden to eat its flesh. The proverb, however, suggests that a bad or untoward case, should not be allowed to cool down (linger) but must be settled quickly and put out of mind. (*bird, meat*) Akrofi, No. 93

522 Akoo didi a, onwam nso di bi.

When the parrot eats, the toucan also eats (some of the food).

Expl: The proverb is an expression of Akan egalitarianism — all people have equal political, economic and social rights. (*bird, parrot, toucan, egalitarianism*)

523 Yenim se nnomaa dooso na anomaa weremfo na yerepe no.

We know that there is an infinite variety of birds, but we want the smartest (of them all).

Expl: There are countless varieties of good things in the world, but everybody wants the best of everything. (*birds, variety*)

524 Apatiprew se: "obi nnim a, obi kyere."

The forest bird, Apatiprew says: "If one does not know, someone teaches."

Expl: No one knows everything, and a person can pass on knowledge to the one who has little or no knowledge, or a person may also go to seek knowledge and guidance from a more experienced person. (*forest, bird, knowledge, guidance*)

23 MONEY

The Akan recognize the value of money as well as the dangers which accompany its acquisition. Their proverbs reflect insights into money, its uses and its value. But, above all, Akan tradition places the human being above money or possessions.

525 Sika ben wo a, ehoa.

When gold is close to you, it is pale.

Expl: The proverb alludes to the tendency to despise or look down on what is close to us. It is the same as the saying, familiarity breeds contempt. (*gold, money, familiarity, contempt*)

526 Sika wo ntaban.

Money has wings.

Expl: A warning against improvidence. (*money, wings, improvidence*)

527 Sika ntra faako.

Money does not stay in one place.

Expl: Same as proverb above. (*money, place*)

528 Sika di ntomu, na enni ntewso.

Money (capital) requires saving, not withdrawal.

Expl: It is better to save than to spend (frivolously). The proverb is a warning against extravagance. (*money, savings, withdrawal*)

529 **Sika te se hwene mu nhwi wutu a, na woressu** (*same as 108*).

Money is like hair in the nostril, when you pull it out, you cry.

Expl: It is painful to part with your money. (*money, hair, nostril*)

530 **Sika nye owu aduru.**

Money is not the medicine against death.

Expl: Death has no cure (remedy). (*money, medicine, death, cure*)

531 **Sika te se nkrante a eye nnam; wode gyina asem mmirikisi anim a, enkye na aka no ato fam femm.**

Money is like a sharp cutlass; if you place it in front of a thicket of a problem, it soon levels it to the ground (as a cutlass razes a thicket).

Expl: The proverb alludes to the efficacy of money in the face of difficult situations. (*money, cutlass, problem*) Bannerman, No. 480

532 **Sika te se akoo, woanhu so hwe a, oguan.**

Money is like a servant, if you do not take care of it, it runs away.

Expl: The proverb is an admonition against careless spending. (*money, servant, care*)

533 **Sika ne akoo, emu biara se woanhu so hwe a, efi wo nsa.**

Money and a servant; if you do not take care of them, you lose them.

Expl: Same as above (*money, servant*) Bannerman, No. 478

534 **Sika a enni adagyew no, womfa mmo bosea.**

Money which has no leisure (already committed to a project or purpose) is not given out as a loan.

Expl: The proverb suggests that money that is needed must not be loaned to another person. (*money, leisure, loan*)

535 **Sikamono kyen nkrante nnam.**

Ready cash (cash in hand) is sharper than the sharpness of a knife.

Expl: Having money can take a person out of a difficult situation. (*money, knife, sharpness*)

536 **Sika kyen nkrante nnam.**

Money is sharper than a cutlass.

Expl: Same as above. (*money, cutlass, knife*)

537 Su nkwa, na nsu sika.

Pray for life, and not for money.

Expl: Life is more precious than money (wealth). (*life, money, wealth*)

538 Su nkwa, na nsu ade.

Pray for life, and not for possessions.

Expl: Same as above. (*life, prayer, possessions*)

539 Sika pereguan da kurom a, ewo amansan.

If there is a **pereguan** (the equivalent of £8.2s in gold) in a town, it belongs to the whole people. (British currency was used during colonial times in Ghana up to 1957.)

Expl: The wealth of the state is the property of its citizens, and cannot therefore be individually owned as one person's (or groups of person's) property. In the traditional communalistic Akan society, the land is communally owned as property from the ancestors to the present generation, whose duty is to preserve it for the on-coming progeny. (*money, town, people*) Rattray, No. 654

540 Sikanibere na ede bone nyinaa ba.

The love of money brings forth all evil.

Expl: A strong liking for money is the root of all evil. (*money, greed, evil*)

541 Wo sika ye wo yaw na woko a, wunyi dom.

If spending your money gives you pain and you go to war, you do not win.

Expl: When money must be spent in order to accomplish certain tasks, then stinginess must be avoided, otherwise the task will remain unaccomplished. The proverb is a warning against miserliness. (*money, pain, war, miserliness*) Rattray, No. 660

542 Sika nko adidi nsan mma kwa.

Money does not go a-feeding and come back empty-handed.

Expl: Money that is given out on loan should be repaid with interest. The proverb justifies the taking of interest on monies loaned. (*money, loan, interest*) Akrofi, No. 874

543 Osikafo nom nsa bow a, wofre no oyare.

When a rich person is drunk, he/she is merely said to be unwell.

Expl: The shortcomings of the powerful in society are often passed off lightly or excused, whereas the weaknesses of the poor or not-

so-powerful are decried. The proverb reflects the influence which the rich and powerful wield in society. (*rich person, sickness, influence*) Christaller, No. 2954

544 Osikani ne panyin.

The rich person is the elder.

Expl: Wealth confers power and influence and in the course of deliberations the words of the rich and powerful tend to carry weight. (*rich person, elder, power, influence*) Christaller, No. 2960

24 GOLD WEIGHTS

The Akan people have used various forms of currency in their history, and before the introduction of European currency in the form of coins and notes, during the colonial period, iron, brass, cowry shells and gold dust or nuggets were used as a means of exchange of goods and services. It was especially in the Asante Kingdom that gold attained its highest regard as a foundation metal of sacred significance. Gold is the symbol of the King, the Golden Stool is the symbol of the unity of the Asante nation and the symbol of the most primary and fundamental part of the human being, and the part that links every human being directly with *Onyame* (Supreme Being) and the part of a person that survives death, called okra, is gold.

The Akan traded in gold with outsiders and counterweights for measuring gold and gold dust, cast in brass, were used. In most cases ordinary people used brass weights, but the King and some real dignitaries also had weights which were cast in gold or silver.

The weights were cast by goldsmiths whose profession has an aura of sacredness about it. The oldest weights were geometric in form, but there were other weights shaped in the form of people, trees, animals and objects which represented proverbs, maxims, stories, legends or historical events.

The brass weights were cast by the lost-wax method. Using this method, the desired figure to be made by the goldsmith was first shaped in beeswax and covered with clay. Then, the figure was

heated till the wax melted and thereafter molten brass was poured into the opening of the clay figure. Later, when the brass hardened, the clay mould was broken and the figure was removed.

The weights were of two kinds — there were those which were intended to assist the memory to recall proverbs or events without actually representing them; and then there were those which represented proverbs or stories from which proverbs were derived. But the important thing about the gold weights was that they represented some particular proverb cast in metal and for that reason the proverbs have survived from generation to generation because of the form in which they have been represented.

The gold weights are no longer in use, but they represent a source of invaluable knowledge about Akan cultural traditions and proverbial wisdom. It must be pointed out, however, that not all weights represented proverbs. The geometrical weights were not related to proverbs but there were others which were related to proverbs and some examples of such proverbs, cast in brass are given below.



545: *Siamese crocodile — two crocodiles with a common stomach*

545 Funtummireku, denkyem funafu, won yafunu ye biako, nso wodidi a, wofom.

Although the two crocodiles have a common stomach, they tend to fight over food (as if the food were going into different stomachs).

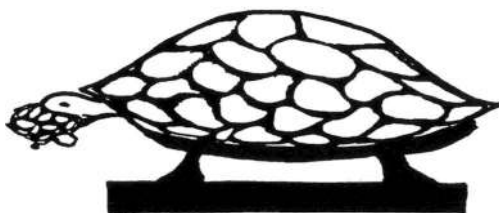
Expl: This is the Akan symbol for society and it suggests that society is made up of individuals with different tastes and desires, hence the two heads and two tails of the crocodiles, which can be easily identified. Common observation shows that the conflicts which arise in society are largely due to the individuality of its members. But the symbol takes the observer beyond the individuality of members of society to point out the common stomach of the crocodiles. Members of society have something in common and it is that which they have in common that sustains them all. The interest of the members of society is convergent rather than divergent and the cooperation of each member of society ensures the prosperity of all. (*crocodiles, stomach, food*)

546 **Anomaa ne nua ne nea one no da.**

The bird sleeps (perches) with its kind.

Corresponding gold weight: Birds on a tree.

Expl: Birds of the same feathers flock together. (*bird, feather*)



547: *A tortoise holding a baby tortoise in its mouth*

547 **Akyekyere nni nufu, nso owo a, onim nea oye yen ne ba.**

The tortoise does not have breast milk, but it knows how to take care of its child when it gives birth.

Expl: A mother will endeavour to feed her children under any circumstances. (*tortoise, breast milk, child, birth, mother, children*)

548 **Nhwi nye na a, anka akyekyere nni bi?**

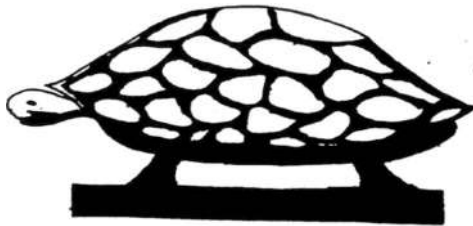
If hair were not difficult to grow, why doesn't the tortoise have any? (*hair, tortoise*)

Corresponding gold weight: A tortoise

549 Aboa a osebo antumi anwe no, agyinamoa mfa no afo.

Corresponding gold weight: A leopard with a porcupine in its mouth. The animal that the leopard has not been able to eat (catch), its carcass will not be eaten by the cat. (*animal, leopard, carcass, cat, strength, power, weakness*)

Expl: The leopard and the cat belong to the same family, but the leopard is a bigger and stronger creature. The animal that the leopard cannot catch can in no way be caught by the cat which is a smaller creature. Tasks which call for strength or power cannot be accomplished by those who do not have it.



548: A tortoise

550 Meda asase anya nwam.

Though I crawl on the ground, I have got a toucan in my mouth.

Corresponding gold weight: A snake with a bird in its mouth.

Expl: An expression of singular good fortune. (*ground, toucan, mouth, fortune*)

551 Akoko se obemene apotoro a, wongyaa no, na orefa bre ama ne ho.

When the hen says it is going to swallow a frog, let her, for she is only attracting trouble for herself.

Corresponding gold weight: A hen.

Expl: It is foolish to attempt to do the impossible. (*hen, frog, trouble*).

552 "Nim saa," ka akyiri.

"Had I known," is always late.

Corresponding gold weight: An antelope with its horns sloping far to the back.

Expl: One is always wiser after a bitter experience. (*hindsight, experience*)

553 Akokoni**n**i bow nsa a, na ne were afi se ofi nkesua mu (*same as 503*).

When the rooster becomes intoxicated, he forgets that he came from an egg.

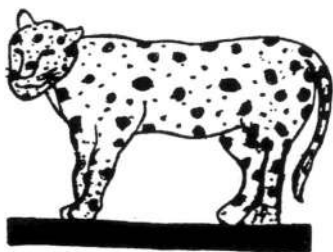
Corresponding gold weight: Rooster.

Expl: Wealth, power, influence and status often get into people's heads and make them behave as if they were not human beings like other people. (*rooster, egg*)

554 Se osu hwe osebo a, ne ho nhwi na efow, na ne nworonworan no de, empopa.

When the rain beats the leopard, his fur becomes wet, but his spots do not wash away.

Expl: A person of valour may be overwhelmed by adversity, but his/her spirit (character) remains undaunted (unchanged). (*rain, leopard, fur, spots, adversity, spirit*)



554: A leopard

555 Esono dua ye tiaa, nso eno ara na ode pra ne ho.

Although the elephant's tail is short, she/he brushes off the flies with it, nevertheless.

Corresponding gold weight: An elephant-tail whisk.

Expl: Limitations or handicaps are no excuse on the part of a person not to make an effort to make do with what one has. In other words, however limited a person's resources or endowments are, one can still do something with them. (*elephant, tail, flies, limitations*)

556 Wo tiri ntewe a, wunnyae adesoa soa.

As long as your head is in place, you do not stop carrying a load.

Corresponding gold weight: A man with a load of firewood on his head.

Expl: As long as a person is alive she/he does not stop fulfilling her/his responsibilities. (*head, load, responsibilities*)

557 Akyene anim da ho a, wonnyan nkyen.

When a drum has a head, you do not beat the (wooden) sides.

Corresponding gold weight: A man playing a drum.

Expl: One must not beat about the bush. (*drum, sides, head*)

558 Dua a ebewo w'ani no, wotu ase, na wommu so.

The stump that can prick your eye is uprooted, not shortened.

Corresponding gold weight: A man digging up a stump.

Expl: Danger must be rooted out at its base, for half-measures still prolong the danger. (*stump, eye, danger*)

559 Atuduru asa a, na enye Akowua ntoa mu.

If all gunpowder has been exhausted, there is at least a bit left in Akowua's pouch.

Corresponding gold weight: A cartridge belt.

Expl: Akowua was a legendary Asante warrior whose extraordinary resourcefulness and ingenuity enabled him to overcome one crisis after another. This symbol, which recalls a historical event, refers to the ability of an enterprising person to overcome difficulties. (*gunpowder, pouch, Akowua, difficulties*)

560 Yeso atuduru a, yenom taa.

Even though we carry gunpowder, we may smoke a pipe.

Corresponding gold weight: A man carrying a keg of gunpowder on his head and smoking a pipe.

Expl: A person is entitled to a little pleasure even in times of exigency. (*gunpowder, pipe, pleasure, exigencies*)

561 Se obommofo fi wuram na okura mmere a, wommisa no ahayo mu asem.

When a hunter returns from the bush carrying mushrooms, you do not ask him news about his hunting.

Corresponding gold weight: A hunter carrying mushrooms.

Expl: It is quite obvious that if the hunter had fared well he would have brought an animal instead of mushrooms. The meaning of the symbol is that one should not ask about the obvious. (*hunter, bush, mushroom, hunting*)

25 ADINKRA SYMBOLS

The Akan use the *Adinkra* symbols to convey knowledge and intangible truths and ideas about life and its meaning. And it is very clear that the symbols have religious and philosophical underpinnings. But they also convey ideas about some aspects of the history, social norms and cultural values of the people.

The word *Adinkra* comes from the Akan words *di nkra*, which means to say goodbye or to bid farewell. And, traditionally, the *adinkra* cloth has been used as a mourning cloth, worn to funerals and anniversaries of deaths, to bid farewell to the dead and to commiserate with the bereaved family.

The symbols are carved out of the calabash or dry gourd, and handles, made up of strong pieces of palm leaf ribs, are attached to the back and tied together. The symbols are then dipped into a dye made from the bark of a tree (*badie*), and stamped on a piece of cloth spread on the ground.

A person wearing a cloth with symbols in it is communicating ideas, beliefs and values without opening his or her mouth, for the symbols call forth mental images in the mind of the beholder. A person who wears an *adinkra* cloth is not only dressed appropriately for a specific occasion, but that person also, through his or her attire is wearing a whole philosophy of life, which is the result of centuries of experience and mature reflection on life and its meaning.

There are symbols which date from the past but new ones¹ are being created as each generation brings its own experiences to bear upon the inherited traditions.

¹ See, for example, *New Versions of the Traditional Motifs*, Nana J. V. Owusu-Ansah, Kumasi: deGraft Graphics and Publications, 1992.

The *adinkra* cloth has over the years become one of the national cloths of Ghana and its usage has extended beyond funerals and mournful occasions to include formal occasions. And because the *adinkra* cloth is less expensive than *kente* cloth, it is within the reach of many people. Besides, factory-made *adinkra* cloth has also contributed to its easy accessibility.

The *adinkra* symbols have become widely used symbols in Ghana since the period immediately preceding independence and after and the trend has continued to the present. *Adinkra* symbols are found in the logos of institutions of higher learning such as the University of Ghana, Legon, and the University of Cape Coast, as well as some secondary schools, social clubs, commercial vehicles, private and public buildings, churches, such as the Methodist Church in Labadi, a suburb of Accra, and even some government institutions also make use of *adinkra* symbols. The Ghana Standards Board, which tests all products manufactured in Ghana, stamps the *Hwemdua*, symbol of perfection and excellence, on products which meet its high standard of quality. *Adinkra* symbols are also found in jewelry and carved stools.

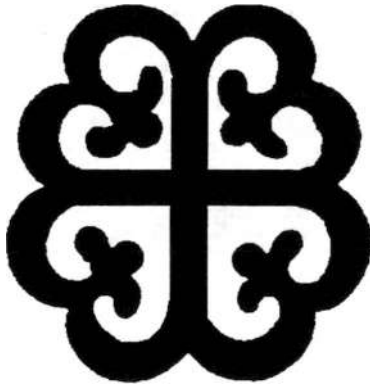
Below are some *adinkra* symbols and their meanings:



562 Gye Nyame

Except God, Only God.

Expl: This is an abstract symbol which represents the omnipotence of God (*God, omnipotence*)



563 Onyamedua

God's tree.

Expl: The symbol represents the dependability of God. (*God, tree, dependability*)



564 Nyame bribi wo soro, na ma me nsa nka.

God, there are blessings above, let them reach me.

Expl: This prayer symbol was, in the past, stamped on sheepskin and hung on the lintel of the King of the Asante and each morning he would touch it three times to invoke the blessings of God on him and his people. (*God, people, blessings*)



565 Nyame bewu na mawu.

I will only die if God dies.

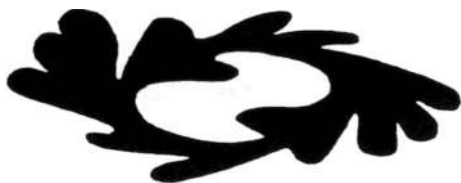
Expl: This symbol represents the okra, the undying part of the human being and the part that links him/her directly with *Onyame* (God). The Akan belief is that the okra is that which makes a person a living, human being, and death occurs when the okra returns to its source. Since *Onyame* does not die, the okra which is part of *Onyme* in a person does not die. The symbol therefore reflects the immortality of the okra hence the Akan proverb: *onipa wu a, na onwui e*, when a person dies, he or she is not really dead. (*God, death, immortality*)



566 Owuo atwedee, o_{ba}ako mfo.

The ladder of death is not climbed by one person alone.

Expl: All persons, or human beings must die, or death is an experience every living person will have at one time or another. (*ladder, death, person*)



567 Obi nka bi.

One must not bite another.

Expl: This symbol expresses the value of peaceful and harmonious living among people in society. The symbol is sometimes made up of three fishes, each with the tail in the other's mouth, and it suggests that people in society are all intimately connected with each other and every person must be respected as an individual and protected from harm. Individual integrity, respect for the individual person and his/her limb are an important cornerstone for societal living and no one should be used as a means for the satisfaction of the appetite of others. (*person, bite, peaceful, another person*)



568 Ese ne tekrema

The teeth and the tongue.

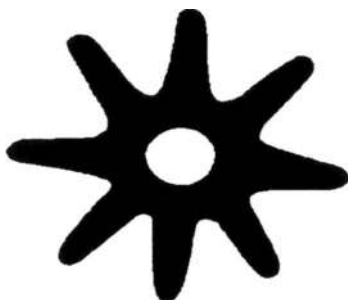
Expl: The teeth, which are sharp, are able to live peacefully with the tongue, which is very soft. How often does a person bite his/her tongue? The symbol is a reminder of the need to learn to live with each other in society in spite of our differences. (*teeth, tongue*)



569 **Kyēkyē pe awadee (Osrane ne nsoromma).**

Kyēkyē loves (is fond of) marriage.

Expl: Seeing the moon and the stars always going together, the Akan ancestors considered them as an example worthy of emulation by humans in society. The symbol is therefore an encouragement to learn from the togetherness of the moon and the stars which, like marriage, is based on trust, love and kindness and compassion. The cultivation of these values will lead to the creation of a harmonious society. This symbol has wrongly been taken by observers as evidence of Muslim influence on Akan culture. But, this is a false conclusion, since the original name of the symbol and its association has to do with marriage and the values of faithfulness, fondness and benevolence. Besides, the Akan ancestors saw the moon and stars centuries before the rise of Islam and it did not take Muslim evangelists to point them out to them. (*moon, stars, marriage, togetherness*)



570 **Nsoromma - Star. Oba Nyankonsoromma te Nyame so, na onte ne ho so.**

The star, the child of *Nyame* (God), depends on God and not on itself.

Expl: The Akan belief is that the stars are the children of *Onyame* (God) and that they depend on God for their existence. In like manner, the symbol compares the individual to a star and concludes that the individual person is a child of *Onyame* and depends on Him. Hence, the Akan proverb, "*Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nye asase ba.*" All human beings are the children of God, none is a child of the earth. (*child, God, star*)



571 Akoko nan tia ba, na enkum ba.

The mother hen steps on her chicks, but does not kill them.

Expl: Children must be disciplined when they do wrong but they must not be harmed while they are being corrected. Parental discipline must be tempered with love and mercy, not cruelty, for it should be born out of a deep concern for their good. (*mother, hen, chicks*)



572 Akoben.

The war horn.

Expl: A horn blown in time of war or in an emergency, symbolizes preparedness to go into action. To be prepared is to place oneself in a position so that nothing can take you unawares. Hence, the proverb: *Ahodaso nye hu* — readiness has no fears. (*war, horn, preparedness, emergency*)



573 Aya — Fern

Expl: *Aya* is a hardy plant which grows at the most unusual places and is very difficult to destroy, for it shoots up again after any attempt to destroy it. It has therefore come to symbolize stamina, fortitude, staying power, defiance and the ability to endure in the face of problems and difficulties. It communicates a powerful message to people facing problems and challenges in life. The University of Ghana has three *aya* symbols in its crest to symbolize its determination to pursue its mission with untrammelled courage and unrelenting determination. (*fern, courage, determination*)



574 Nkyinkyimmie — Twistings.

Expl: This contorted figure stands on four legs in spite of its shape and it symbolizes the strength and ability to stand erect and firm in

spite of the twists and turns which life inflicts on us. The boldness, resilience and resourcefulness needed for a successful journey through life are represented by this symbol. (*twisting, resilience, resourcefulness, boldness, resilience*)



575 Hwemdua

Measuring rod.

Expl: The Akan have a critical criterion of aesthetic values which they apply to their own productions, and there are general terms which indicate aesthetic pleasure and acceptance of items produced in Akan society.² But, in addition, each product has its own specific criteria of evaluation and with these critical values carvings, textiles, pottery, drums, music, jewelry, etc., are accepted as pleasing or rejected as displeasing. The *hwemdua* motif stands for the standard of excellence that an artist should strive for so that his/her product is described as incomparable (*enni mfatoho*); the real thing (*mapa*), or without blemish (*eho nto kyim*). This symbol of excellence has been adopted by the Ghana Standards Board, which tests all manufactured products in Ghana and stamps those which qualify as good products with the *hwemdua* symbol. (*measuring rod, excellence*).

² For more information on Akan aesthetic evaluation, see D.M. Warren and J. Kweku Andrews, *An Ethnoscience Approach to Akan Arts and Aesthetics, Working Papers in the Traditional Arts* (Nos. 2 & 3), Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977.

26 LINGUISTS' STAFFS

At the court of Ghanaian chiefs, there is an important official called *okyeame*, spokesman, through whom the chief speaks to his people and is in turn spoken to on both private and public occasions. The *okyeame* has been called linguist by many writers, but he is not necessarily a person who speaks several languages fluently. He is rather a person who speaks his own language fluently with ease and confidence, displaying remarkable wisdom and breathtaking eloquence. In addition to this, the *okyeame* is steeped in the traditions and customary laws of the society as well as in diplomacy. And with his vast experience and knowledge of traditional matters, the *okyeame* serves as one of the closest advisers to the chief.

So close is the relationship between the *okyeame* and the chief that he is often referred to as *ohene yere*, wife of the chief; and to show how close his relationship with the chief is, the *okyeame* is the only non-family member, besides the chief's wife, who can enter the chief's chamber to wake him up from sleep.

The *okyeame* advises on traditional law and custom, pronounces judgment at the court of law on behalf of the chief and generally deals with all matters of protocol. On account of his wisdom and eloquence, the *okyeame* also serves as an ambassador to the chief and goes on diplomatic missions to other traditional areas in the country. He also represents the chief at funerals.

On public occasions when the chief sits in state, or at any function where the chief is present, the *okyeame* sits on the right hand side of the chief. And when prayers and libations are to be offered, it is the duty of the *okyeame* to do so on behalf of the chief and people. The crucial role which the *okyeame* plays in Akan society is found in the proverb: *Oman bo a efi okyeame; egyina nso a efi okyeame* — a nation falls or stands because of the *okyeame*.

The intermediary role of the *okyeame* is important for a number of reasons. Words coming from or going to the chief pass through the chamber of the *okyeame's* mind and are therefore properly

distilled or transformed into words that are acceptable and pleasant to the ears and filled with pearls of wisdom. The main issue here is not the hearing of nice words, but the effective communication of ideas, using the vast arsenal of cultural resources at the disposal of the *okyeame*.

The words which come from the chief through the *okyeame* are not entirely the chief's own, they are words from two heads, which, the Akan say, are better than one. If the chief omits something important, the *okyeame* adds it to what he says; and, if the chief says something he should not say, the *okyeame* omits it, and in the end both the form and content of the chief's words are immeasurably improved upon.

The *okyeame* does not only use words, he also makes the proper gestures in conformity with Akan court etiquette, and all this adds to the effectiveness of the *okyeame's* communicative skills.

Each *okyeame* has a staff of office, *akyeame poma*, which is carved in wood and topped with a symbolic emblem which is also covered with silver or gold leaf. The emblem often depicts a proverb or expresses a highly cherished value in the society; it may also represent a historic event in the life of the nation or even symbolize some qualities of the chief. An emblem may also refer to a folktale. And on public occasions, such as festivals and durbars, one can see a forest of linguist staffs and read proverbs, and messages, dealing with civic and social responsibilities, the role of the chief, virtues to be upheld and vices to be decried — all carved in wood and plaited with gold leaf or silver.

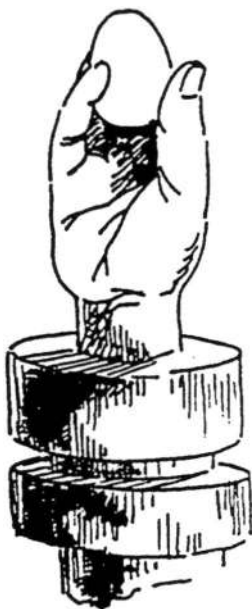
Below are some linguist staff tops and the values they express:

576 *Asempa ye tia* (same as 372).

Truth is brief.

Expl: This is the principal linguist staff of the Akan and if a King has many linguists it is the principal one among them who holds it. The proverb means that truth is straightforward, without any turns and twists in it, for it is only when a person tells a lie that his/her

speech becomes long and winding. The importance of truth in the Akan moral system may also be found in the fact that in the outdooring ceremony, when a new-born baby is being given a name and joined to the family, the first lesson taught to the child through the use of the elements of water and palm wine (or schnapps) is "Be truthful", for truth is the basis of the society's existence. (*truth*)



577: *A hand holding an egg*

577 Nsa a ekura nkesua

A hand holding an egg.

Expl: Power must be handled in the manner of holding an egg in the hand; if you hold it too firmly, it breaks; if you hold it too loosely, it drops. Power must therefore be handled as delicately as you handle an egg in the hand. (*hand, egg, power*)

578 Akoko nom nsu a, ode kyere Nyame.

When the hen drinks water, it shows it to God (by raising its head).

Corresponding linguist staff (below): A chicken drinking

Expl: The Akan regard the action of the chicken, which raises its head in order to be able to swallow water, as a sign of gratitude, for the chicken is expressing gratitude (thanks) to God before it swallows water. The Akan ancestors argued that if chickens (animals) show gratitude to the Creator how much more should humans not do the same? The symbol expresses the need to show gratitude, for ingratitude is regarded as a vice. (*hen, water, God, gratitude*)



578: *A chicken standing by its water basin
with its head raised skyward*

579 Obiakofu were aduru a, egu

When one person attempts to scrape bark medicine from a tree by himself/herself, he/she finds that the shavings fall out of her/his receptacle.

Corresponding linguist staff: A man scraping bark medicine.

Expl: This symbol expresses the need for cooperation, for if someone held the receptacle for the person scraping the bark of the tree, the medicine would not spill to the ground. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness make possible the achievement of objectives which we cannot accomplish single-handedly. (*person, tree, medicine, receptacle, cooperation*)

580 Ti koro nko agyina (same as 339).

One head does not go into council.

Corresponding linguist staff: Two heads (*tinta*).

Expl: It takes more than one head to arrive at a decision at the chief's court or anywhere else, especially in matters affecting human destiny. The figure suggests that consultation and discussion help to bring people to mature decisions. And to underscore this value the Akan say: *Nyansa nni obaakofo tirim* — wisdom is not in one person's head. (*head, council*)



581: *A bird in motion with its head turned backwards to pick something up from behind*

581 Sankofa

The name *Sankofa* is a combination of three verbs, *san* — return or go back; *ko* — go or return; *fa* — pick up.

Expl: The word therefore literally means: go back and pick it or return and pick (it) up. The symbol is also called *To akyiri a, fa*; which literally means, if it falls behind (you) pick it up. There is also the proverb: *wo were fi na wosan kofa a, wonkyi* — it is not forbidden to return to pick up something you have left behind. As the present generation advances forward into the future, they need to turn back to pick up some of the good ideas from the past to help them in their present existence.

The symbol does not suggest a complete return to the past as some writers have erroneously suggested. A critical look at the motif makes the meaning clear. The feet of the bird are pointed in the forward direction, and this means that it is going forward. But, at the same time, its head is turned backwards for the purpose of

picking up something. The symbol suggests that the past still has relevance for us today, for what is past is not necessarily useless or irrelevant and, in fact, the present generation can build a proud and confident society on the basis of some of the resources of the past. And to show the relevance of the past to the present, the Akan ancestors said: "The children of the modern generation say they no longer rest at the old resting place. Why don't they remove one of the three stones in the hearth and cook on two?" (*bird, tradition*)

582 Woforo dua pa a, na wopia wo.

If you climb a good tree, you get a push.

Corresponding linguist staff: A man helping another man to climb a tree.

Expl: If a person has good intentions and endeavours to do what is upright or honorable, others will help him. The motif is an exhortation to pursue what is exemplary or praiseworthy, for when a person climbs a bad tree, he will get no support. (*tree, push, support*)

583 Nea ade wo no na odi, na enye nea okom de no.

The one who owns a thing (food) should eat it, not the hungry person.

Corresponding linguist staff: Two men sitting at a table; one is eating while the other looks on.

Expl: However hungry or destitute a person may be, he has no excuse to misappropriate what does not belong to him. (*food, hunger, person*)



584: A canoe

584 Okorow, wohare no afanu

A canoe must be paddled on both sides.

Expl: Cooperation makes for success. (*canoe, sides*)

585 Ahahrata mmienu ka b_o mu a, eye pepe

When two leaves are put together they become thick.

Corresponding linguist staff: Two leaves laid upon each other.

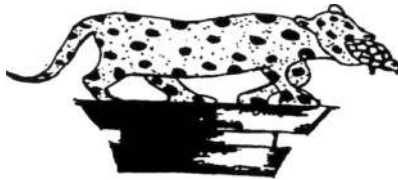
Expl: Cooperation makes for strength. (*leaves, cooperation*)

586 Kobia nnim gyata.

Kobia (the small child), does not know the lion.

Corresponding linguist staff: A child with his hand on a lion.

Expl: The symbol represents the story of a child who took a lion to be a sheep and stroked it. Her/his naiveté saved him, for the lion did not hurt her/him. The child's action was the result of her/his youth and inexperience and the linguist staff is used to stress the importance of educating the young and uninitiated in the traditions and customs of the society. In a larger sense, the symbol emphasises the need for knowledge which will dispel ignorance and enable us to avoid courting danger. (*child, lion*)



587: A leopard with a tortoise in its mouth

587 Krotwiamansa fa awuru a, obua da.

When a leopard picks up a tortoise (to eat), it starves.

Expl: The tortoise is not the leopard's natural prey and it is therefore foolish on the part of the leopard to catch it. The symbol is a warning against foolish acts. To show how independent the tortoise is of the leopard, a proverb says: *Krotwiamansa nam ha mu kwa, akyekyere na ode ne ha* — the leopard prowls through the forest in vain, (for) the tortoise is the owner of the forest (because it walks

freely through the forest without fear of the leopard of whom many animals are terror-stricken). This proverb is cited when an otherwise weak or powerless person cannot be harmed by a powerful person. (*leopard, tortoise*)



588: *A pineapple*

588 Wopere wo ho di aborobe a, wudi ne bun.

If you are in a hurry to eat a pineapple, you end up eating it green (a green one).

Expl: However anxious or impatient one may be, the right thing must be done at the right time. (*pineapple, hurry, impatience*)

589 Nsono mmoa yafunu.

Intestines do not help (fill) the stomach.

Corresponding linguist staff: A man holding his belly.

Expl: Despite the fact that the intestines fill the belly, we still feel hunger and have to satisfy it with food. (*intestines, stomach*)

590 Basafawa nni bribi a, owo abonsam.

Even though the cripple has nothing else, he/she has clapping.

Expl: The cripple may not be able to do what people without any physical disability can do, but he/she can at least clap hands. In other words, however disabled a person may be, he/she can still do something useful. (*talent, ability, cripple*)

591 Obi mfa ne nan abien nsusuw asu.

One does not measure the depth of a river with both feet.

Expl: A person risks drowning if he/she attempts to measure the depth of a river with both feet. The proverb advises that a person must undertake every venture with caution. In a commercial venture, for instance, one must not put all of one's capital into one single business venture. (*river, feet, depth, prudence*)

592 Wubu me kumaa a, mibu wo kumaa.

If you think me inferior, I also think you inferior.

Expl: A person who despises others is also despised by those whom he/she despises. The treatment we give to others comes back to us. Respect and disrespect are reciprocal. (*respect, disrespect, reciprocity*)

593 Wo ho ye den a, wonye baanu adwuma.

However strong you may be, you do not do the work of two people.

Expl: There is a limit to a person's capacity for work, however strong or able that person may be. It is unwise to assume responsibility beyond one's capacity. (*capacity, strength, responsibility, work*)

594 Abew nhye da.

Distressing or unfortunate incidents come without notice.

Expl: Misfortunes come to us unawares (without notice). The proverb is a warning to persons enjoying good fortune and who may be tempted to be incautious, wasteful or lavish that their situation can suddenly change without notice or warning. One must always be on one's guard in order not to be overtaken by events. (*change, misfortune, warning, notice*)

595 Mmere di adannan.

Time changes.

Expl: A person must always be prepared to accept the changes that come and accommodate himself/herself to them. Or one must always be prepared to adapt to changing conditions. (*time, change, new conditions*)

596 Obi nsuma mmo waw.

One does not hide and cough.

Expl: a person who hides is betrayed by his or her cough, for the noise immediately draws attention to his/her whereabouts; in the same way, the person who does evil will be found out. The proverb

is a warning against evil, for evil can never hide, it will always be found out. (*evil, cough*)

597 Mfomso kyere nnipa nyansa, eno nti nea ose onyee mfomso da no, ahwere ade.

Mistakes teach us wisdom, and the person who has not made mistakes has indeed lost something (an opportunity to learn).

Expl: Experience is the best teacher and when we learn from our mistakes, we can apply the wisdom from those experiences to our lives in the future. (*experience, mistakes, wisdom*)

598 Obi mfa amane a wahu ntutu kaw.

One should not make one's suffering an excuse for not paying a debt.

Expl: Responsibilities must be fulfilled without any excuses. (*responsibility, suffering, excuse*)

599 Obi mfa ohia nsi apempem.

A person should not in his/her need deceive others.

Expl: However poor a person may be, he/she should not do a shameful (disgraceful) thing. (*poverty, need, disgrace, honor*)

600 Wote asu ho reguare no obodamfo befafa wo ntama a, hwehwe bi ansa na woatiw no; na wumfura bi a, obi besusuw se mo baanu ye abodamfo.

If you are taking your bath and madman comes to take away your cloth, put on another cloth before pursuing him, for if you are naked, others will think that both of you are lunatics.

Expl: If an evil person tempts you, do not behave as he/she does. The proverb encourages the exercise of self-restraint in the face of provocation. (*madness, restraint, bath*)

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