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**Adinkra Symbols:
An Ideographic Writing System**

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by

Jasmine Danzy

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Abstract of the Thesis

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In this paper I will discuss Adinkra symbols, a Ghanaian writing system. First, I will introduce the symbols explaining where they are from, how they are used and how they originated. Then I will describe how Adinkra symbols are a writing system. Although Adinkra is an ideographic writing system, I will discuss the prevailing ideas of leading historic linguists such as Walter Ong and John DeFrancis who define certain writing systems as ‘true scripts,’ which are essentially scripts that are phonetic, meaning their symbols represent sounds of speech. Then I will make the claim that these linguists’ definition of some scripts as ‘true’ reflects a hierarchy in which different cultures’ writing systems are valued based on how they measure up to the dominant society’s writing system. Since, Western society is the dominant society in today’s world; writing systems are measured by how phonetic they are because Western systems of writing are phonetic. As a result of this bias, every other writing system around the world and throughout time is placed in stages—basic, intermediary, or advanced—to measure how they compare to the Western model. I will use Ghana’s Adinkra symbols to show that, although it is a writing system, it is not recognized as such because of what linguists define as a ‘true script’. However, Adinkra is a writing system, which bears many similarities to other writing systems, and should be recognized as such.

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Introduction

In the past Africa was deemed the “dark continent”¹: a place of uncivilized cultures. Presently, however, studies have revealed the true complexity of African cultures, including the development of different writing systems. Unfortunately many of these systems go unrecognized because they do not measure up to what renown linguists, such as Walter Ong and John DeFrancis, define as ‘real’ or ‘true’ scripts. Ong and DeFrancis define real and true scripts as writing systems that are based on sounds of speech, which are phonetic systems. Therefore suggesting that writing systems that are not phonetic are inferior or in a developmental stage progressing towards a ‘true’ phonetic system. However, by paying particularly close attention to Ghana’s Adrinka writing system, this thesis will challenge the argument that phonetic writing systems should be the basis of what real writing is.

The reason that the majority of linguists, represented by DeFrancis and Ong, value phonetic writing systems more than other systems of writing is reflective of a hierarchy where Western culture, in this case Western writing, is defined as the ideal script making other cultures’ writing systems appear as the Other and inferior attempts to reach this ideal. DeFrancis defines real writing as scripts that represent sounds (The Chinese Language 138). All Western writing systems are phonetic—Latin, Greek, English, French, German, etc—and they are also alphabetic. Therefore it is not surprising that linguists, in particular Ong, define the alphabet system as the truest system of writing when he says “the tightest control of all is achieved by the alphabet” (Orality and

¹ Henry M. Stanley’s 1878 book *Through the Dark Continent* is believed to be the origin for the 19th Century term ‘The Dark Continent,’ which was used to describe Africa as a world that Europeans had not uncovered and that lacked the civilized achievements that Europeans valued.

Literacy 85). Only when non-Western cultures have phonetic or alphabetic features in their writing system are they defined as true writing systems for example when Ong describes the Vai and Egyptian systems of writing which he says are “intermediate stages” (Orality and Literacy 85). Moreover, systems that are not based on sounds of speech and are instead based on pictures or ideas are defined as being in a developmental stage in the writing process, which infers that there is an advanced system of writing that all other systems are progressing towards.

The result of this hierarchy of writing systems is that many African writing systems in particular Ghana’s Adinkra symbols are rarely discussed or examined as writing because they are unlike Western writing systems. Upon first glance by the casual observer, Adinkra does not seem to be writing. In fact it is usually carved or stamped onto a myriad of mediums and is not written (as we think of the action of writing) onto anything at all. However, Adinkra is a writing system, an ideographic script—a script that has symbols that represent ideas—which is not recognized as such because it does not contain the attributes of Western writing systems which are depicted as ideal. Adinkra’s inclusion as a writing system, without labeling it as ‘untrue’, would be a step in eliminating the stigma of Otherness placed on African culture and give greater insight into a unique and creative writing invention developed in a culture very different from our own.

What are Adinkra Symbols?

Adinkra symbols are relatively unknown around the world; however, in Ghana they are everywhere; on chairs, buildings, houses, and clothes. So what are Adinkra symbols and in particular how do they look? Adinkra are often defined as symbols (and

ideographs which is a contested term that will be dealt with later), which through stylized pictures convey the philosophy of the Asante of Ghana (also known as the Akan), the culture to which they belong. Stylistically Adinkra symbols are “based on various observations of and associations between humans and objects they use, flora and fauna scenes, the human body and its parts, and elements of nature, [geometric] and abstract ideas” (Arthur 33). Therefore, Adinkra are pictorial designs of birds, vines, chains, body parts, all of which represent more than their image and are understood within the context of Asante culture. Over time, many old symbols have lost their significance as new symbols were created. The emergence of new symbols is reflective of the new ideas that have developed as a result of social, cultural, and historical changes.

Adinkra symbols and their meanings have transcended time yet they have adapted to the social, cultural, and historical changes that characterize modern Ghanaian society. An example of this is the Adinkra symbol of a chain link that was created before the slave trade with Europeans. When the symbol was created it stood for law and justice reflecting that in the past people who committed crimes were sold into slavery. However, in present day Ghana the symbol does not stand for the possibility of becoming a slave but rather for “the uncompromising nature of the law” and the price for committing a crime being imprisonment (“West African Wisdom”). Another symbol that has adapted to changes throughout time is the symbol Gye Nyame or ‘except for god’. This symbol in the past reflected the Akan’s belief in the supremacy of God. Today it also stands for the supremacy of God; however, it is applied to the Christian God (Arthur 42). Angela Christian has created a book Adinkra Oration which is dedicated to linking Adinkra symbols with passages in the bible. While the meanings of the symbols have not changed,

they are being adapted to fit the changes in Ghanaian society. Adinkra has been adapted into all aspects of Ghana's developing society and appears on churches, universities, banks and insurance houses (Quarcoo ix).

Often Adinkra symbols are not recognized for the messages that they communicate but rather their aesthetic features. Adinkra appears on a variety of art mediums, "textiles, pottery, stools, umbrella tops, linguist staffs, gold weights, jewelry, swords, architecture," and much more (Quarcoo ix). However they are most common on utilitarian objects, like combs, stools, clothes, etc. Due to Adinkra's presence on objects of use, the symbols as an art form fell into the category of "art for life's sake" as opposed to the Western ideal "art for art's sake²," the latter being often regarded as 'true' art (Quarcoo ix). Although Adinkra is present on items of utilitarian value, they are not less meaningful nor are the objects less beautiful. In fact in Asante culture, these objects are appreciated and valued more because of the Adinkra symbols that appear on them, which adds to their aesthetic value because Adinkra is full of meaning (Quarcoo ix).

While Adinkra is valued for its link to art, outsiders of the Asante culture do not value the symbols for what they visually communicate such as "proverbs, parables and maxims" (Agbo v check). More importantly, Adinkra is a means of communication, particularly in the Asante language Twi (but the ideas can also be expressed in other languages because the symbols do not represent sounds) and are used to give advice or warnings. They are also a "translation of thoughts and ideas, expressing and symbolizing the values and beliefs of the people among whom they occur" (Agbo ix). Therefore,

² A term created by Oscar Wilde in his 1891 essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism"

Adinkra symbolizes the values of the Asante. Therefore, Adinkra symbolizes the values of the Asante which are tied to folk tales³ that were told to teach morals.

The Okyeame, advisors to the king, were one of the first to propagate values through the use of Adinkra. Symbolism and metaphor played a significant role in all aspects of Asante culture and were passed on by elders, particularly an elite class of elders the Okyeame, which means Chief Linguist. The Okyeame were known as chief linguists because of their ability to communicate wise words through language and images like Adinkra. During the days of the Asante king, also known as the Asantehene, the Okyeame advised the king on law and customs. When advising the king, the Okyeame always carried a “staff of office carved in wood with an emblem at the top covered with gold leaf. The emblem may depict a proverb, symbolize qualities of the chief, or reflect a historic event in the life of the nation” (Facets in Ghanaian culture 77). These emblems described on the head of the linguist staff were symbols, either Adinkra symbols or less stylized representations of things that represented a meaning.

The Okyeame used these symbols to communicate values to the king and the royal court but the symbols still have significance today. An example of an Adinkra emblem on an Okyeame staff is the symbol called Sankofa, which means to learn from the past in order to move forward—se wo were fin a wosankofa a yenkyi (it is no taboo to return to fetch something which has been forgotten) (Grayson 26). There are two versions of this Adinkra symbol. One is a very stylized image that looks like a heart but are two birds looking backward as their front still extends forward. Often this is not the representation used on the linguist staff, instead of using this stylized version, there is

³ Dr. G.F Kojo Arthur discusses a few of the folk tales that some of the Adinkra symbols are related to in *Cloth as a Metaphor* (36-7)

another Adinkra symbol of a clear representation of a bird facing backward with a calabash in his mouth as his feet move forward (see Appendix). The Okyeame used this particular staff to visually remind the King and council to look to their history in order to act appropriately in the future (Facets in Ghanaian culture, 77). The Okyeame's power of instruction that still lingers today is illustrated in Haile Gerima's Sankofa⁴. In the movie Gerima has an Okyeame with a Sankofa linguist staff demanding the modern African American woman, Shola/Mona, to remember where she comes from. Therefore, the messages that the Chief linguists preached in the past are also important in the present by reminding people to remember the past and learn from it in order to move forward.

Besides the Okyeame, cloth makers were also the first to use Adinkra for the purpose of honoring the dead. The process of making Adinkra cloth is complex. Usually, Adinkra is stamped onto cloth. The stamps are created from a dry gourd or a calabash with tied bamboo sticks stuck into the back of the gourd or calabash design. A dye from the bark of a badee tree is used as the ink for the stamp which is used on clothes for the deceased and for mourners of the deceased. The Adinkra symbols that are used identify traits possessed by dead relative in order to show respect and honor towards them at funerals. The symbols were also used to communicate to dead ancestors, who the Asante believed acted as an intermediate between the living and God. More recently, however, Adinkra has become commercialized and instead of villages dedicated to making the cloth, there are factories that make them. There are still small craft villages that specialize in handcrafting Adinkra cloth, however, the commercialization of Adinkra has resulted in the symbols' meanings being taken for granted or lost (Willis 32-43).

⁴ According to Sandra M. Grayson the Okyeame transfers his staff from his right hand which is a gesture that Okyeames do when he/she is about to pronounce judgment which is done in the movie (Symbolizing the Past 26)

Cloth makers did not only use cloth as a medium to honor the dead, but also to honor the king, who wore Adinkra cloth as royal regalia. Daniel Mato describes how “late nineteenth century photographs portray a number of kings and members of royal courts who wear cloths with similar motifs stamped upon them which can have royal references or be identified with royal attributes” (231). Therefore, instead of describing attributes of dead relatives, the King wore Adinkra cloth to visually communicate attributes he possessed as well as to tell the viewer of the way he ruled. Adinkra was not the only script to use cloth as a medium for visual communication; many of Islamic cultures have done the same. An example is Kufic scripts, which are symbolic motifs based on the Koran. Islamic cloth makers also printed kufic script on cloth like Adinkra, but not through the use of stamps. In addition some of these Islamic inscriptions were worn by Asante kings which have led many to the assumption that Adinkra is somehow based on kufic scripts. However, this theory (which will be described at length later on) like the many others that exist is only conjecture.

The Debated Origin of Adinkra

Although the proverbs that Adinkra symbols represent are remembered, the actual history of the origin of Adinkra symbols, despite the many theories that exist, has been lost. One theory held by the spiritual Akan, and most likely not by anyone else outside of the culture, is that Adinkra came with the Asantehene’s golden stool. In Asante history there is a belief that Okomfo Anokye, the first chief priest, called upon the heavens to bring down the golden stool, an artifact that came to symbolize the power of the first king of the Asante nation, Osei Tutu as well as the power of every succeeding Asantehene.

These theorists believe that Adinkra cloth was on top of the stool brought down from the heavens, which would place Adinkra's origin in the seventh century (Willis 31).

A more credible yet disproven theory, which comes from oral traditions, is that Adinkra was obtained after the Asante-Gyaman war of 1818. This theory claims that Adinkra was obtained after 1818, when Adinkra Kofi, the king of Gyaman (now Ivory Coast), was brought to Kumasi, the home of the Asante, as a prisoner of war. The theory went that King Adinkra offended the Asantehene by claiming that he had a golden stool, which turned out to be an imitation of the Asantehene's, causing a war to erupt. According to this theory when he was brought as a prisoner to Kumasi, King Adinkra wore robes with the Adinkra symbols on them and that is where the Akan got the symbols from. However, there is no actual evidence to support this theory because there are no remnants of Adinkra Kofi's cloth. Also the reason why these symbols were kept is not explained in this theory either (Arthur 24).

The Asante-Gyaman theory has been unfounded because historians have discovered that King Adinkra was killed in the war and never brought as a prisoner to Kumasi. When this was revealed the Asante-Gyaman theorists began to argue that the Asante obtained the symbols from other prisoners of war. They also claimed that King Adinkra's body was found with stamped cloth on it. Kojo Arthur, however, argues that these theorists cling to the idea that the symbols were obtained from the king of Gyaman simply because his name was Adinkra (Cloth as a metaphor 24).

The Asante-Gyaman war theory has also been debunked by the Bowdich theory, which provides powerful proof that the Asante had Adinkra symbols before the war with King Adinkra Kofi. Thomas E. Bowdich was sent to Ghana by the British government in

1817 and when he returned he published a book called Mission from Cape Coast to Ashantee in 1819. This is the first European account of the Asante and includes a now famous drawing made in 1817 of an Akan celebration called the Odwira Festival in Kumasi. The drawing shows Akan men wearing clothes with repeating symbols on them, Adinkra cloth, and Bowdich also collected some of the cloth, now in a British museum, which is verified as being obtained in 1817, a year before the Asante-Gyaman war. Therefore, the Bowdich theory proves that the Akan did not obtain Adinkra cloth from the Gyaman because the war began a year after Bowdich recorded the Akan wearing the stamped cloth (Willis 30).

Another theory is the Bron Hypothesis. The Bron was won when the Asante defeated the Dormaa, which would give rise to the Gyaman, long before 1699. Since the Bron was in such an advantageous area, the Asante had access to crafts, resources, and control of trade routes. The theorists that prescribe to this theory believe that through the interactions along the trade routes, the Asante attained new craft inventions including the method to create Adinkra. Therefore, the Bron theorists believe that the ability to make Adinkra began after the acquisition of Bron in the late 17th century (Arthur 23-4).

A theory created by Professor A.K. Quarcoo, a Ghanaian scholar on Adinkra, attempts to make sense of the oral accounts that have led to Asante-Gyaman, the Bowdich, and the Bron theory. Quarcoo claims that Adinkra was obtained after the Asante defeated the state of Denkyira, which ruled over the Asante, in Osei-Ntim War in 1701. During this time Quarcoo explains that the Asante were first introduced to Adinkra when it was made by guild designers for the kings of Denkyira, Takyiman, and Asante. However, the Asante had not acquired the technique for making Adinkra since it was

made for them. So when they defeated the Denkyira nation, which included the Dormaa, these theorists believe the Asante learned from craftsmen that were captured during the war. However it was not until the Asante-Gyaman war of 1818 that additional technological improvements were made to the textile industry (Arthur 25). These improvements were obtained from King Adinkra Kofi's son, Adinkra Apaa, who was spared during the war and forced to teach the Asante more about Adinkra. Oral accounts have attested to the fact that Adinkra Apaa taught the process to a man named Kwaku Dwaku in a town near Kumasi (Willis 30).

Quarcoo also explains how the oral accounts that place King Adinkra Kofi as the introducer of Adinkra cloth may have gotten mixed up. During the Asante-Denkyira war in 1701 when Quarcoo theorists believe the Asante were first introduced to Adinkra, the King of the Gyaman, Dormaa at that time, was Adinkra Panin. The name Adinkra Panin and Adinkra Kofi obviously share adinkra in the name which is most likely why oral accounts have mistaken Adinkra Panin, who ruled at the same time as the second king the Asantehene Opuku Ware in the late 17th century, for Adinkra Kofi. However, this is all speculation considering there are only oral historical accounts of events (Willis 30).

According to another theorist Danquah, the name Adinkra may have not come from Adinkra Kofi or Adinkra Panin. Danquah believes that the word 'Adinkra' comes from the Akan word nkra or nkara meaning message or intelligence since the Asantes believed that the ancestors carried messages to and from God. Therefore the symbols may have been named Adinkra because the Akan believed the Adinkra cloth the dead wore were messages to God. Also Adinkra could have come from the exile of the Asantehene,

Prempeh I, by the British because he refused to give them the golden stool⁵. When he was sent into exile, Prempeh I was wearing the cloth usually called *ntiamu ntoma* (stamped cloth), the original name for Adinkra cloth. However, after he was exiled the cloth became known as *adi nkra ntoma*, or parting cloth. Many Adinkra cloth producers still refer to the cloth as *ntiamu ntoma*, which supports that the change in name was possibly based on this one event but was not the first and only name given to the cloth (Arthur 25-6).

The last and most debated theory is that the Adinkra designs and motifs derived from trade with Muslims in the North. In the book *Clothed in Symbol* Daniel Mato argues that ‘Islamic writing, amuletic symbols or kufic script have been given as probable sources for Adinkra symbols’ (64). In the book, Mato inserts Robert Sutherland Rattray’s claim, which is that the Asante must have adapted the Islamic meanings of some of the symbols to suit their own beliefs making the Adinkra distinctly Asante (65). The historian Labelle Prussin has also found ‘word equivalents, association in folklore and direct takeover of certain design motifs’ to prove that Adinkra has come from Islamic forms (Mato 66). The presence of Muslims in Kumasi has also been proven by Bowdich’s account which described both Asante and Muslims being “covered with Islamic script or with amulets attached to them” (Mato 66-7). Other evidence of the Asante’s acquisition of Adinkra appears in the King of the Asantehene’s clothes, which has been described as ‘covered in symbols and Arabic script’ and also Akan metal work such as the *kuduo* which proves that there was a strong Islamic influence in Kumasi (Mato 67-8).

⁵ The Golden Stool was never obtained by the British and was just recently unveiled in the Akwasidae festival at Manhyia Palace in Kumasi after five years. The Daily Guide Ghana describes the jubilant event on their website.
http://dailyguideghana.com/newd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3172&Itemid=245

Although W. Bruce Willis acknowledges that there is some proof that the Akan adapted Adinkra from an Islamic model, he does not agree that Adinkra originates from Islamic scripts. He agrees that the Akan may have translated some Islamic symbols into Adinkra and lists a few: “aban (a compound house), damedame (the checkerboard game), kramo bone amma yeanhu kramo pa (the bad Muslim makes it difficult for a good one to be recognized)” among others. Willis, however, claims that these symbols account for only a small percentage of Adinkra symbols and substantiates his claim with the fact that Muslim scholars are unable to trace the connection of most of the Akan symbols. In addition, Willis asserts that the majority of symbols are completely unrelated to Islamic tradition. Therefore, while some Islamic scripts and motifs may have been absorbed into the Akan writing system, Islamic influence was not the origin of Adinkra symbols (The Adinkra Dictionary 31).

Danquah and Kojo Arthur also agree with Willis and combat the theory that Adinkra has complete Islamic origin with evidence of their own. First, Danquah argues that Muslims do not wear Adinkra. There are Islamic scripts that are worn and although some Adinkra symbols may have similar meanings to these scripts, they do not look like Adinkra. Also the etymology of the word Adinkra does not have any origin in Islamic tradition (Mato 65). In addition Kojo reveals that the method to make Adinkra stamps, with calabash and bamboo, are not the methods used to make Islamic inscriptions, which are made with a writing brush or stick. Therefore, it is more likely that Islamic meanings may have been absorbed into Adinkra, but Adinkra was already a developed system (Cloth as a metaphor 23).

The fact that the theory of Islamic influence is debated so heavily is due to its claim that Adinkra did not have West African origins. Essentially the theory makes the claim that Adinkra symbols developed through borrowing from an already established writing system, Islamic kufic script. Since almost all writing systems developed through cultural diffusion, this shouldn't be a problem, right? But it is. The problem arises from an established global hierarchy which has developed from a long history of imperialist oppression. When Western nations colonized the world, every culture that contained what Western cultures viewed as civilized achievements were described as civilized and those who did not were barbarous. Many West African nations did not have what Western countries valued as markers of civilization. For example monumental architectural structures, literature, wealth, etc and imperialist nations denied the existence of any cultural developments in Africa as a result. Therefore the claim that the Asante, or the neighboring West African nations that the Asante may have gotten Adinkra from, took the symbols from already existing Islamic scripts infers that Ghanaians were incapable of inventing the script themselves.

Adinkra vs. DeFrancis over ideographic scripts

The debate should not be about where Adinkra originated but, more importantly, that linguists do not regard Adinkra as true writing. Adinkra should be considered writing because it falls in the category of ideographs. David E. Hunter and Phillip Whitten describe three different writing systems which all the other systems are based on. They are “pictographs (pictorial signs or pictograms), ideographs (or ideograms), and phonographs (phonograms)” (Cloth as metaphor 8). Kojo Arthur summarizes Hunter and Whitten's work when they describe the features of these different writing groups.

Pictographs are defined by their lack of phonetic value which is replaced with semantic value. They represent things, such as animals, people, nature, etc. Pictograph's meanings can be read in any language because they are not controlled linguistically. Similarly ideograms represent things visually; however, these things represent ideas not themselves. For example if there is an ideograph of a dog, it would represent friendliness, unfaltering loyalty essentially ideas associated with a dog. Ideograms have a broader range of meaning than pictographs but can also be pronounced in any language because they are not controlled by language either. They are more similar to phonetics than pictographs because ideographs often have specific names and words associated with them. Lastly are phonographic writing systems which represent sounds of speech and include syllabic and phonemic writing systems (Cloth as metaphor 8-9).

Adinkra symbols are ideographs because they represent ideas and not just things. Adinkra symbols have specific names and meanings, which have a specific phonetic value. However, the phonetic value is not controlled since they do not represent sounds of speech and the ideas Adinkra represents can be understood in other languages (Arthur 9-10). Based on this Adinkra should be considered a writing system, for it clearly fits into the category ideogram. However, it is not so simple because many linguists have argued that the concept of the ideograph cannot exist.

This debate over the concept of the ideograph is especially important in regards to Adinkra because without the existence of this concept, Adinkra cannot be considered a writing system. The debate over the concept 'ideograph' has started over Chinese characters which are also referred to as ideographs. Chad Hansen in his article Chinese Ideographs and Western ideas discusses John DeFrancis's, and the group to which he

belongs labeled by Hansen as prohibitionists, argument against the use of the term ideograph. On the other hand, Ideographers are people who believe that the term ideograph should be retained because this is the way that Chinese linguists view their writing (375). Chinese linguists view their characters as ideas which are not representative of sounds of speech but things which depending on locale are pronounced differently (374). However, John DeFrancis argues that the term ideograph is an “oxymoron” and a “scientifically falsified theory” which treats things that are Chinese as undermining “the mundane truths applicable to the West” (375). Essentially DeFrancis makes the claim that by keeping the term ideograph, ideographers are treating Chinese writing systems as ‘the other’ instead of applying it to ‘truths’ about writing as defined by the West. However, DeFrancis’s argument to get rid of the concept of ideograph and fit Chinese writing into the Western definition of what writing is ostracizes all ideographic writing systems like Adinkra as a result.

In John DeFrancis’s definition of ‘real writing’ there is no room for the term ideograph, which means Adinkra cannot be writing, and in his opinion and his contemporaries’ opinions the term should be discarded (144). DeFrancis uses Peter S. DuPonceau’s writing to describe why the ideographic myth persists. DuPonceau says:

[Chinese writing] is an ocular method of communicating ideas, entirely independent of speech, and which, without the intervention of words, conveys ideas through the sense of vision directly to the mind. Hence it is called ideographic, in contradistinction from the phonographic or alphabetical system of writing. This is the idea which is entertained of it in China, and may justly be ascribed to the vanity of the Chinese literati. The Catholic at first, and afterwards the Protestant missionaries, have received it from them without much examination; and the love of wonder, natural to our species, has not a little contributed to propagate that opinion, which has taken such possession of the public mind, that it has become one of those axioms which no one will venture to contradict (143).

DuPonceau mocks the use of ideograms and Chinese linguists' claim that their characters are based on ideas rather than words. DuPonceau berates linguists and missionaries' unwillingness to present an argument against the ideograph concept by saying that "it has become the equivalent of an axiom which no one will venture to contradict". In this way DuPonceau echoes DeFrancis's plea for the myth of the ideograph to be done away with. For both DuPonceau and DeFrancis, ideographs are a baseless concept. Unfortunately it is the only concept that will keep the claim that Adinkra is writing afloat because Adinkra is not a pictographic or a phonographic system.

DeFrancis completely disregards ideographic writing systems, including Adinkra, and identifies the other two systems as stages in development of a real writing system. The first stage includes pictographs, which DeFrancis describes as the beginning stage of writing. At first, DeFrancis hesitates to identify as pictographs as writing because linguists cannot know what the symbols mean (137). On the other hand, phonographic systems, which he categorizes Chinese writing as and also encompasses Western systems of writing, are defined as in the advanced stage of writing and he considers these systems real writing. Using the work of Gelb, DeFrancis claims that with regards to form, most linguists would agree that writing began with pictures. However the problems lies in the function of writing, in other words is writing used to evoke ideas or speech. According to DeFrancis and many of his contemporaries there is no possible way for Chinese writing, or any other form of writing, to represent ideas (138). He argues that Chinese characters represent words, like all other 'real' writing systems, which are tied to sounds of speech.

By trying to fit Chinese writing systems neatly into the definition of phonographic writing systems, DeFrancis is adapting all writing systems to a Western model. Chad

Henson brings up the problem that Western linguistics have with Chinese linguist's assertions that their language is not dependent on speech. Henson discusses how Western linguists regard writing being dependent on speech as uncontroversial and not debatable. Henson cites Boltz's argument regarding writing which states that writing is "a system for representing sounds graphically" (378). Also if you'll remember DuPonceau's assertion that Chinese linguists' claim that their system is ideographic is due to "the vanity of the Chinese literati," there is obviously contention with China's attempt to separate themselves from the Western definition of a writing system (DeFrancis 143). The Western definition of writing disregards every writing system that has developed without specific sounds attached to them, like Adinkra (376).

DeFrancis and his contemporaries' argument that ideographs should be discarded, because writing systems are linked to speech, undeniably holds weight especially when placed against ideographers' argument. Henson points out the problem with ideographers' argument when he describes their pattern for how writing is linked with thought. Ideographers' pattern is that words represent things indirectly and ideas directly. However, this would mean that every word was an ideograph which definitely is not true; the words in the Western writing systems do not represent ideas directly but are linked to speech directly. Henson points out though how the idea theory has made the understanding of the differences among Chinese languages with the same characters easier. For example the character 學 which represents the idea 'to study' but in Cantonese is pronounced hok and in Mandarin is xue. Both languages capture the idea of the character but only differ in speech (381). Therefore, Chinese is not only attached to

speech as Western linguists assert because both Cantonese and Mandarin speakers will understand the idea if they see the character but the phonology would differ.

Adinkra symbols work similarly to Chinese characters. An example of an Adinkra symbol representing an idea is the symbol of a cross. In Akan this symbol is called Yesu asennua, cross of Jesus (Arthur 42). Although the Akan identify the cross using Twi their native tongue, if an American were to see this symbol they would immediately identify it as a cross which alludes to the death of Jesus Christ. The Akan called the symbol Yesu asennua and the American the cross of Jesus Christ, the phonology does not matter but the symbol is ideographic because it represents an idea which is understood by both parties. The cross example is an easy ideograph to explain how ideas can be expressed in an ideographic system, while other Adinkra symbols are more difficult to understand because of stylization. However, Adinkra communicates ideas which is why, like Chinese writing systems, it should be considered ideographic and recognized as a writing system.

Henson makes sense of why Western linguists don't understand the concept of the ideograph through looking at the pattern they use. The pattern that prohibitionists have in thinking about writing and speech is "writing represents speech, speech represents ideas, and ideas represent things" (380). This rigid pattern allows writing to only be linked to speech directly, while it is linked to ideas and things indirectly. Western linguists adhere to this pattern rigidly and are not willing to regard the possibility that writing systems that do not operate this way should be considered writing. Therefore, systems like Adinkra are unrecognized and cannot exist based on the definition that DeFrancis and his contemporaries have for what 'real' writing is.

Adinkra vs. Ong's Definition of a True Script

John DeFrancis's desire to completely erase the term ideograph in an attempt to fit all writing systems into what he defines as 'real writing' is similar but not the same as the renowned historical linguist Walter Ong's definition of a 'true' script. DeFrancis and Ong's definitions are similar because they value phonographic writing systems as true scripts but they differ because Ong recognizes ideographs as a writing system, not a true system, but a system nonetheless. Ong begins to define true scripts by describing its impact on the way people think. According to Ong, in order for a writing system to be defined as a true script the system must change the way people think and affect their psychology irreversibly. When a true writing system develops in a society it changes it from an oral society into a literate society. Ong describes this change when he says, "writing makes 'words' appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signaling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed 'words' in texts and books. Written words are residue. Oral tradition has no such residue or deposit" (11). Ong views writing as completely altering the way people think. People in literate cultures think of written words in place of things and the words become equivalent to the things they represent.

Ong's claim that oral cultures do not have residue, written words, like literate cultures is true when applied to the Asante. Asante culture is an oral culture based on Ong's own definition of what an oral culture is. He describes how "human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not study... They learn by...discipleship, which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering

proverbs and ways of recombining...” (9). Ong’s definition rings true for the Asante culture. A chief linguist does not sit down and study Adinkra the way writers in the modern Western world study written passages in alphabet script. Instead aspiring priests become apprentices and learn by listening. These priests create and teach using Adinkra but Adinkra cannot be learned through individual scholarship; discipleship is necessary for fully understanding their meaning. (Warren 26). Therefore, Asante culture is not a literate society nor does the Adinkra have the impact that Ong’s true writing systems have.

Adinkra does not fit in most of the components of Ong’s definition of a true script is. Ong’s defines true scripts as not being “a mere appendage to speech. But moves speech from the oral-aural to a new sensory world, that of vision, it transforms speech and thought as well” (85). Unlike Ong’s true scripts, Adinkra is an appendage to speech because it does not profoundly alter the way Asante people think. Adinkra is used to reinforce values that are already held by the Asante people. However, Adinkra does transform speech and thought into a new sensory world of vision, because they are visual symbols that reflect ideas.

Also in Ong’s definition of a true script, he says that signs are not words and Adinkra fits in his definition of signs. Ong asserts that “words are not signs” and that signs are “secondary modeling systems,” but merely textual, visual representations of words (75). In order to distinguish between words and signs, Ong discusses signums, signs used in Roman society, to communicate ideas in addition to their alphabetic system. He refers to a signum used in the Roman army, a pictorial design of an eagle which was the visual identification for ‘object one follows’. This example for signs is very similar to

Adinkra symbols, because they are images of things, like animals, which stand for ideas like Roman signum. Ong uses the Roman signum of the eagle to accuse chirographic cultures, typographic and electronic cultures of reducing sensation and “human experience to visual analogues” (76). Ong asserts that these signs are not words because they do not represent speech, just the way DeFrancis refused to recognize ideographs because they do not represent speech.

Although Adinkra symbols are signs, they are not so radically different from how Ong defines the symbols in true scripts based on their relationship to sound. Ong asserts that:

Thought is nested in speech, not in texts, all of which have their meanings through reference of the visible symbol to the world of sound. What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound. It is impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly (75).

Ong claims that thought is embedded in speech and not in texts. He asserts that texts, another word for signs, gain meaning only through reference to visible symbols. Ong defines the symbols as the alphabet; the symbols he uses to communicate on this passage. The symbols are not real until individuals familiar with the writing system he is using can connect them in actual or imagined sound. Ong is saying that texts are secondary to symbols because symbols make the connection to sound. That would mean that signs, like Adinkra, rely on references to other visible symbols to relate to the world of sound. However Ong’s claim about signs like Adinkra does not hold any weight. While Adinkra is pictorial like Roman signums, there are no other visible symbols for them to refer to. Adinkra symbols directly relate to the world of sound the way the alphabet does, the only

difference is that the symbols are pictorial and the ideas are yoked together into one symbol with no phonological word.

Adinkra's relation to the world of sound is direct like the symbols of Ong's true script because Adinkra has codified meanings. The Adinkra symbols have specific names in Twi, for example the symbol that looks like a heart is pronounced in Twi as Akoma. This symbol has a name just as the same symbol would have the name 'heart' in English. In Adinkra the proverb this symbol represents is *nyaakoma*, literally meaning 'take heart' or have patience. In different cultures this symbol would mean different things, for example in English the symbol for heart stands for love. However, what makes the Adinkra symbol an ideograph and not a pictograph is that the Adinkra meanings have codified, or set meanings. Therefore, the name for Akoma is set and the meaning to have patience is set as well, there is no changing the meaning. However a pictograph is up for interpretation. There is also no other written word that stands between Adinkra and the idea it represents, therefore, Adinkra resembles a word more than it does a sign even though it bears the pictorial features of a sign.

While Adinkra could easily fit in as a word rather than a sign, words in Ong's definition of true scripts are phonetic. He says "a script in the sense of true writing, as understood here, does not consist of mere pictures, of representations of things, but is a representation of an *utterance*, of words that someone says or is imagined to say" (84). Pictures that are representations of things are what pictographs are because they only represent things. The representation of an utterance is what a phonographic system is because this system represents sounds in speech. However, this definition makes Adinkra's placement odd because Adinkra is related to words that people say as shown

with its relationship to Twi; however, Adinkra cannot be defined as true writing because it does not represent sounds of speech like phonetic systems.

Ong uses the alphabet as his model for what a true script is. Ong says that “the tightest control of all is achieved by the alphabet, although even this is never quite perfect in all instances” (85). Ong’s use of the alphabet as the model for what true writing is reflects the idea that all writing systems are compared to the Western model of writing. Moreover the attributes that he uses to define true scripts are all linked to the alphabet system. Ong even tells the reader previously that the words he uses to write these ideas are not real words but visible symbols that are tied to speech, which are real words.

He favors other systems of writing that are alphabetic as well. An example appears when Ong discusses the Korean alphabet. He describes the Korean alphabet saying that the “democratizing quality of the alphabet can be seen in South Korea” (92). He then describes the Chinese system of writing as elitist, like many writing systems are, because of the time it takes to learn the characters. According to Ong, the alphabet is less aesthetic than many other forms of writing and it is easy to learn. The alphabet system is also the most adaptable in his opinion “in reducing sound into visible form” (92). While Adinkra seem to fit into a few aspects of Ong’s definition of a true script, because it is not phonographic like alphabetic systems it will never truly fit. However, there is more hope for Adinkra in Ong’s definition of a true script which recognizes Chinese as ideographic (the only ideographic system that Adinkra can be compared with) as opposed to John DeFrancis’s definition of a true script which does not recognize the concept of the ideogram.

Adinkra and other writing systems

Adinkra does not fit neatly in Ong's definition of a true script because it straddles what he defines as a word and a sign. However, perhaps fitting Adinkra in as a writing system is doable based on how it relates to other systems of writing. Both Ong and DeFrancis use Native American scripts as an example for why pictograms are not true scripts. Ong argues that Native American scripts, which are made up of picture representations, have codes that are too unfixed making the meanings not entirely clear. He describes how the pictographic representations of several objects serve as a kind of "allegorical memorandum for parties who were dealing with certain restricted subjects" and that the parties involved in creating the pictograph are necessary in determining how these particular pictures related to each other. But often, even when the party was involved, the meaning intended was not entirely clear (86).

Ong also discusses how Native American scripts are not easy to figure out because the subjects of the pictures are linked with memory. As previously mentioned only the groups who are familiar with the pictographs are able to describe what they meant. However, their interpretation was based on how the party remembered the events depicted in the pictograph occurred. Even upon being told what the particular pictures related to each other, outside parties were unable to understand the meanings because the pictographs were not codified enough for actual meaning for any actual meaning to be understood. Therefore, Ong defines the pictograph as too unfixed to be considered writing.

Similarly DeFrancis, through his use of Gelb's work, agrees that Native American scripts are pictographic writing but not real scripts because they have no attachment to

speech. DeFrancis essentially says that Native American scripts are not codified when he describes that they are not formalized or conventionalized. His description of the script, is similar to Ong, when he says they “often dealt with specific situations, were aimed at specific persons, and lacked generality or continuity in time” (137). The symbols are only able to be interpreted by the specific party that is related to the pictograph, as Ong said. Although later pictographic symbols that emerged from Native American societies became more codified, DeFrancis or Ong do not identify that is being closer to real writing.

Ong and DeFrancis’s assertions about Native American scripts are related to Adinkra because not all Adinkra’s meanings are entirely fixed. Quite a few are open to interpretation and some are undecipherable because the story that they relate to has been lost to time. Kojo Arthur gives an example of the variability of meaning for a given symbol when he uses the example of

the denkyem symbol [which] is used to express “adaptability,” a view that is based on an observation of the fact that the crocodile lives in water, yet it does not behave like fish; it breathes oxygen directly through its nostrils unlike the fish that absorbs oxygen from water through its gills. From this observation the symbol means adaptability of one to changing circumstances in life. The same symbol expresses “greatness of power,” a view that is based on another observation of the way the crocodile carries its eggs in its mouth. This behavior of the crocodile is taken to symbolize the idea that the crocodile is powerful to the extent that it can swallow a stone. A king wearing Adinkra cloth with the symbol will be communicating to his subjects how powerful he is (Cloth as a metaphor, 44).

Therefore some Adinkra symbols are not defined like Native American scripts if the symbol can define two different things. Based on this example, the crocodile Adinkra symbol could represent either adaptability or power. Therefore Adinkra would not be

able to be defined as true writing because it is not rigidly codified. However, Adinkra are not pictographs like Native American scripts and many more symbols are codified which leaves room for it to be definable as real writing.

Ong places the writing systems of the Vai and Egyptians in intermediary stages claiming that they are almost true scripts. Ong says that “in some coded systems the writer can predict only approximately what the reader will read off, as in the system developed by the Vai in Liberia or even in ancient Egyptians hieroglyphics” (85). Therefore, Ong views these scripts as almost true because of their links to phonetics. However there are at intermediary stages of the writing process because they are not as truly phonetic as the alphabet system. Both share similarities with Adinkra; however, the attributes they share are what makes the intermediary and not true systems of writing.

In the case of the Vai the visual symbols are not fully connected to sound, therefore, they cannot be defined as a true writing system. Ong describes the Vai’s language of Lieria as not having “a full one-to-one correspondence between the visual symbols and the units of sound. The writing provides only a kind of map to the utterance it registers, and it is very difficult to read, even for a skilled scribe” (88). Since the Vai writing system does not link completely with speech, Ong prescribes it as not fully a true writing form. However, some of the Vai’s writing system connections with speech allows for it to be defined as almost a true script. Considering that all Adinkra symbols are not connected to sound phonetically, it cannot be considered a true writing system or even an intermediary writing system.

Ong and DeFrancis value Egyptian hieroglyphs because of its relationship to phonetics. Ong describes the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic system as a hybrid of

different writing systems. The Egyptian system is comprised of pictographs, ideograms, and rebuses—a pictogram that represents a syllabic sound. The phonetic attributes of the rebuses are the features that motivated Ong to define them as an intermediary writing system and is also the sole reason DeFrancis says they are decipherable. He uses the work of Champollion, the French scholar who deciphered the hieroglyphs, to show that it was the phonetic aspects that made it possible to decipher phonetics. DeFrancis says, with embedment of Champollion's work, that:

‘the alphabet of the phonetic hieroglyphs’ existed in Egypt ‘at a far distant time,’ that it was first ‘a necessary part’ of the hieroglyphic script, and that later it was also used to transcribe ‘the proper names of peoples, countries, cities, rulers, and individual foreigners who had to be commemorated in historic texts or monumental inscriptions’ (136)

DeFrancis emphasizes his point through Champollion's work which favors the phonetic aspects. He highlights the alphabetic aspects of the hieroglyphs in order to show that Champollion these phonetic features were the necessary part of deciphering hieroglyphs. Therefore, Egyptian hieroglyphs are in the intermediary stages because they share the phonetic aspects of Western writing systems but are not completely comprised by phonograms.

However, Egyptian writing systems also have ideographs, which shows that there is a connection with Adinkra, but DeFrancis glazes over it because the ideographs are not ‘the necessary part’. Ideographs appear when DeFrancis cites Brunner's description of what Egyptian hieroglyphs are comprised of:

The system of hieroglyphic writing has two basic features: first, representable objects are portrayed as pictures (ideograms), and second, the picture signs are given the phonetic value of the word for the represented objects (phonograms). At the same time, these signs are also written to designate homonyms, similar-sounding words (136).

The hieroglyph system's inclusion of ideograms shows that there is a connection that Egyptian shares with Adinkra. Unfortunately, since the phonetic elements are what allowed for the glyphs to be deciphered, the ideograms are not valued as much as those elements. If hieroglyphs were not comprised of the phonetic element they would probably not be identified as in the intermediary stage just as Adinkra is not.

The most glaring problem in Ong's definition of true scripts is the Chinese character system which is ideographic like Adinkra. Ong describes the Chinese writing system as being "made up of pictures which are stylized and codified in intricate ways making it one of the most complex writing systems" (86). However, early Chinese writing is clearly pictorial; the characters represent things which have names just as pictographs and ideographs do. However, as mentioned before John DeFrancis and prohibitionists like him refuse to refer to Chinese characters as ideographs. They argue that the characters are linked to sounds of speech despite Chinese theorists' assertions that their writing system is indeed ideographic. The truth is that Chinese writing does not fit in the mold of Western phonographic systems, as all ideographic forms do not.

The Global Problem

Adinkra's lack of phonetic features is not the problem when trying to identify it as a writing system. The problem is that systems of writing are placed in developmental stages and that writing systems that differ from the standard Western model are made inferior. Kojo Arthur rejects the idea of stages when he states that "pictographic, ideographic, and phonographic systems of writing do not represent inevitable stages in the development of writing as no direct evolutionary line can be drawn from pictographic to the phonographic system" (Cloth as a metaphor 8). Therefore, linguists like Ong and

DeFrancis's, who represent the majority of linguists', choice to place writing systems in stages and the lack of recognition of writing systems like Adinkra reflects a greater problem.

The problem, according to Arthur, is that writing in general is usually viewed as alphabetic and linear. Therefore 'non linear and non phonetically-based writing systems have come to be seen as inferior attempts at the real thing and thus, have been marginalized" (Cloth as metaphor 7). Here lies the reason for the difficulty in describing Adinkra as writing. Alphabetic and linear phonetic systems of writing clearly define the way all Latin based, and therefore Western, writing systems are. Other writing systems like Arabic and Eastern scripts are similar to Western systems either sharing the alphabetic or phonetic features. While writing systems that do not are defined as being at inferior stages in their development of writing. However the problem goes beyond just linguistics and defining a writing system, it is about defining a culture.

The problem is how the West defines itself which is by juxtaposing its characteristics with the characteristic of other cultures, which is what linguists are doing with writing systems. V.Y Mudimbe explains this by looking at how anthropologists rank African artifacts based on a value system, which is based on what their society values. According to Mudimbe, this is ethnocentrism because "basically this attitude is both a consequence and an expression of a complex connection between the scholar's projection of consciousness, the scientific models of his time, and the cultural and social norms of his society" (19). Therefore, all scholars value their cultural achievements such as art, the development of writing systems, etc higher than they value every other culture's achievements because their culture's developments are the norm. Therefore the

inventions of the scholar's society are used as the model and other cultures' models are valued based on how it compares to their own.

The ethnocentric tendencies of scholars have reached a new dynamic with the global economy, which creates a hierarchy based on capitalist gain. Now ethnocentrism is given justification based on how wealthy a country is, which means that if you are on the bottom of the capitalist totem pole than your culture is not as valuable as those at the top. The Western world is at the top of this global hierarchy and according to Ricoeur this is the result:

The fact that universal civilization has for a long time originated from the European center has maintained the illusion that European culture was, in fact and by right, a universal culture. Its superiority over other civilizations seemed to provide the experimental verification of this postulate. Moreover, the encounter with other cultural traditions was itself the fruit of that advance and more generally the fruit of Occidental science itself. Did not Europe invent history, geography, ethnography, and sociology in their explicit scientific forms? (Mudimbe 19-20).

In this passage, Ricoeur discusses the fallacy that European culture is a universal culture which encompasses all cultures. Therefore when DeFrancis tries to incorporate Chinese writing into phonological systems is because he views the Western phonetic system as universal. This fallacy has resulted in Western cultures perceptions of themselves as superior to other cultural traditions. However, Western achievements are defined by comparing themselves to other cultures which do not make their achievements better or worse; however, when a culture's traditions are not like their own, and since European culture is dominant, other cultures are depicted as inferior in comparison. However, the Western writing system is not superior nor is it universal and writing systems should be defined on how they are used to communicate within their respective cultures.

Conclusion

Adinkra will never measure up to DeFrancis's or Ong's definitions of a true writing system. However, the solution is not to remove ideographic symbols from the definition of writing but to instead discontinue the comparison of all writing systems to Western models which are painted as ideal. Clearly not all writing systems can fit into the mold of phonographic systems despite Western linguists' attempts to do so. Writing systems from around the world are too different to try to writing systems universal. The result is that writing systems like Adinkra are being ignored or are defined as the Other.

Despite, Adinkra's lack of recognition in other parts of the world it is still a strong component of Ghanaian culture and represents a traditional culture there that is dwindling away because of colonization and the growing global capitalist economy. Adinkra is an ideographic writing system and the ideas that they represent still teach valuable lessons. Moreover Adinkra symbols are visual metaphors because of their ability to enhance understanding by providing knowledge. Kojo Arthur describes Adinkra as a coded system that induces meanings which "carry, preserve, and present aspects of the beliefs, history, social values, cultural norms, social and political organization, and philosophy of the Akan" (Cloth as a metaphor 12). Adinkra does not only "carry, preserve, and present aspects of the beliefs" of Akan society but of all of the diverse cultures in Ghana. They also represent a culture that was lost by enslaved Africans abroad but are visual reminders of denied technological advancements in their native land. Authors such as Adolph Hilary Agbo are extending the use Adinkra by using it to create poems in order to keep them in use like Latin, a dead language, is kept alive through use by European cultures today (See Appendix). Therefore if linguists embrace the diversity of writing

systems that exist in the world, it will open the door for disregarded yet creative inventions of writings to understand and learn from.

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Appendix

Illustrations

Adinkra Symbols

	ADINKRAHENE	"chief of adinkra symbols"	greatness, charisma, leadership
	AKOBEN	"war horn"	vigilance, wariness
	AKOFENA	"sword of war"	courage, valor
	AKOKONAN	"the leg of a hen"	mercy, nurturing
	AKOMA	"the heart"	patience & tolerance
	AKOMA NTOSO	"linked hearts"	understanding, agreement
	ANANSE NTONTAN	"spider's web"	wisdom, creativity
	ASASE YE DURU	"the Earth has weight"	divinity of Mother Earth
	AYA	"fern"	endurance, resourcefulness
	BESE SAKA	"sack of cola nuts"	affluence, abundance, unity
	BI NKA BI	"no one should bite the other"	peace, harmony

	BOA ME NA ME MMOA WO	"help me and let me help you"	cooperation, interdependence
	DAME-DAME	name of a board game	intelligence, ingenuity
	DENKYEM	"crocodile"	adaptability
	DUAFE	"wooden comb"	beauty, hygiene, feminine qualities
	DWENNIMMEN	"ram's horns"	humility and strength
	EBAN	"fence"	love, safety, security
	EPA	"handcuffs"	law, justice, slavery
	ESE NE TEKREMA	"the teeth and the tongue"	friendship, interdependence
	FAWOHODIE	"independence"	independence, freedom, emancipation
	FIHANKRA	"house/compound"	security, safety
	FOFO	"a yellow-flowered plant"	jealousy, envy
	FUNTUNFUNEFU DENKYEMFUNEFU	"siamese crocodiles"	democracy, unity in diversity

	GYE NYAME	"except for God"	supremacy of God
	HWEMUDUA	"measuring stick"	examination, quality control
	HYE WONHYE	"that which cannot be burnt"	imperishability, endurance
	KETE PA	"good bed"	good marriage
	KINTINKANTAN	"puffed up extravagance"	arrogance, extravagance
	KWATAKYE ATIKO	"hairstyle of Kwatakye, a war hero"	bravery, valor
	MATE MASIE	"what I hear, I keep"	wisdom, knowledge, prudence
	ME WARE WO	"I shall marry you"	commitment, perseverance
	MFRAMADAN	"wind-resistant house"	fortitude, preparedness
	MMERE DANE	"time changes"	change, life's dynamics
	MMUSUYIDEE	"that which removes ill luck"	good fortune, sanctity
	MPATAPO	"knot of reconciliation"	peacemaking, reconciliation
	MPUANNUM	"five tufts" (of hair)	priestly office, loyalty, adroitness

	NEA ONNIM NO SUA A, OHU	"he who does not know can know from learning"	knowledge, life- long education
	NEA OPE SE OBEDI HENE	"he who wants to be king"	service, leadership
	NKONSONKONSON	"chain links"	unity, human relations
	NYAME DUA	"tree of god"	God's protection and presence
	NKYIMU	the crossed divisions made on adinkra cloth before printing	skillfulness, precision
	NKYINKYIM	"twistings"	initiative, dynamism, versatility
	NSAA	type of hand-woven cloth	excellence, genuineness, authenticity
	NSOROMMA	"child of the heavens"	guardianship
	NYAME BIRIBI WO SORO	"God is in the heavens"	hope
	NYAME NNWU NA MAWU	"God never dies, therefore I cannot die"	life after death
	NYAME NTI	"by God's grace"	faith & trust in God
	NYAME YE OHENE	"God is King"	majesty and supremacy of God
	NYANSAPO	"wisdom knot"	wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence and

			patience
	ODO NNYEW FIE KWAN	"love never loses its way home"	power of love
	OKODEE MMOWERE	"talons of the eagle"	bravery, strength
	ONYANKOPON ADOM NTI BIRIBIARA BEYE YIE	"By God's grace, all will be well"	hope, providence, faith
	OSRAM NE NSOROMMA	"the moon and the star"	love, faithfulness, harmony
	OWO FORO ADOBE	"snake climbing the raffia tree"	steadfastness, prudence, diligence
	OWUO ATWEDEE	"the ladder of death"	mortality
	PEMPAMSIE	"sew in readiness"	readiness, steadfastness
	SANKOFA	"return and get it"	learn from the past
	SANKOFA	(alternate version)	
	SESA WO SUBAN	"I change or transform my life"	transformation
	TAMFO BEBRE	"the enemy will stew in his own juice"	jealousy
	WAWA ABA	"seed of the wawa tree"	hardiness, toughness, perseverance



WOFORO DUA PA A

"when you climb a good tree"

support, cooperation



WO NSA DA MU A

"if your hands are in the dish"

democracy, pluralism

Linguist staffs

Sankofa linguist staff



Ananse Ntontan linguist staff



Adinkra at Legon University

BI NKA BI on building at Legon University



MATE MASIE symbol on building at Legon University

