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MUSIC, DANCE AND LANGUAGE AS THE PRIMARY ELEMENTS OF FUNERARY RITES FOR CHIEFS: A CASE STUDY OF THE CHIEF OF NEW JUABEN

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Abstract

This study examines the crucial role of music, dance, and language in Akan royal funerals, focusing on 'Daasebre' Oti Boateng, the late Omanhene of New Juaben. Oral traditions, performing arts, and rituals honour the deceased, reinforce social hierarchies, and sustain community identity and cultural heritage. This multidisciplinary study used ethnomusicology, semiotics, and linguistic analysis to evaluate funeral music, dance movements, panegyrics, eulogies, and poetry. Drumming and dirges serve as emotional and political tools, while dance maintains rank, authority, and continuity in the chieftaincy system. Oratory and praise songs preserve historical narratives and the deceased's legacy. This study explains African funerary rituals and cultural resilience by recording these traditions, showing how royal funerals preserved Akan tradition, strengthened leadership, and connected humans and ancestors. It presents a paradigm for assessing African performance traditions and their cultural importance. Data gathering included participant observations, interviews with Akan royals and cultural specialists, audio-visual recordings, and archive research on traditional funerals.

Keywords: Royal funerals, semiotics, ethnomusicology, traditional dance, elegiac poetry, panegyrics.

1. Introduction

Funerals are significant social events among the Akan people and common in many West African societies. These occasions typically involve entire communities, reflecting the universality of mortality. This concept of mutual responsibility is captured by the Akan maxim "*owuo ye nkɔgyankɔgya*" (death

necessitates accompanying one another). Asare-Opoku (1997) discussed death and funerals in this regard:

There is widespread belief in Africa that, unless the proper rites and ceremonies are performed, the spirit of the dead person may not be able to join the ancestral spirits. Thus, great satisfaction is derived from the performance of these funerals. (p.135)

Music, dance, and language are cornerstones of Akan funeral ritual performance, especially during chiefs' funerals. Most academic studies on Akan funerals have focused on individual aspects but have paid little attention to how these aspects interact to shape funerals and uphold traditional forms of government. This knowledge gap prevents us from fully grasping how these performance components work together to transmit social meanings, preserve cultural identity, and smooth the passage of the dead. Akan royal funerals are political, social, and spiritual occasions that reinforce communal solidarity, chieftaincy, and ancestry. However, several features of ancient burial traditions are changing due to modernisation and shifting socio-religious influences, raising concerns about the potential loss of cultural legacy. It is prudent to record and examine these burial customs to ensure their continued existence as Akan society adjusts to modern influences. Using a multidisciplinary approach integrating ethnomusicology, semiotics, and linguistic analysis, this study aims to fill these gaps by investigating the roles of dance, music, and language in Akan royal funerals. By using the funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng as a case study, this research attempts to offer fresh perspectives on the function of funerary performances in Akan society and their wider cultural relevance.

This study aims to accomplish four main goals. It first examines the importance of music, dancing, and language in Akan royal funerals, clarifying their distinct roles in the funeral context by examining their performance methods. Second, it examines how music, dance, and language interact to create stories of loss, respect, and ancestry. Third, this study aims to explain the significance and purpose of these components in the Akan burial ritual by applying linguistic, semiotic, and ethnomusicological theories.

Finally, by employing *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's burial as a case study, this study provides a greater understanding of the customs, performances, and cultural expressions connected to a chief's passing.

The Akan People: A Linguistic and Ethnographic Perspective

The Akan people are the most populous ethnic group in Ghana, primarily distributed in the Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Western, Bono, Ahafo, and Oti regions (Agyekum, 2023). Many Ghanaians speak Akan as their native and second language. Akan is a member of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Akan society is matrilineal, tracing lineage and inheritance through the mother's family. The linguistic variations of Akan dialects, including Asante Twi, Akuapem Twi, Fante, Bono, and Akyem, influence funeral oratory and panegyrics (Agyekum, 2023). Akan's cultural identity is shaped by rich oral traditions, including proverbs, appellations, and narratives, prominently displayed during funerals. These traditions maintain historical continuity and strengthen the connection between the living and the deceased (Finnegan, 2012). The Akan worldview, emphasising the cyclical nature of life and the transition to an ancestral realm, is deeply ingrained in their funeral practices. This perspective influences the elaborate nature of Akan funerals, highlighting the importance of music, dance, and language in both ordinary and legal ceremonies.

2. Review of Related Literature

This section explores scholarly research on panegyrics and drum language, two significant aspects of cultural expression and communication. Panegyrics, formal speeches or written compositions of praise, have been studied by academics across literature, rhetoric, and cultural studies. Scholars such as Finnegan (2012) have analysed the historical development, stylistic features, and social functions of panegyrics in different societies and time periods, examining how these laudatory texts reinforce power structures, celebrate achievements, and preserve cultural memory.

2.1 Drum Communication

Drum language, communication using rhythmic patterns produced on percussion instruments, has also attracted academic attention. Researchers in ethnomusicology, linguistics, and anthropology have investigated complex systems of drum communication in various cultures, particularly in Africa and parts of Asia. These studies have examined the linguistic properties of drum languages, their role in traditional ceremonies and social interactions, and their significance in preserving oral traditions and cultural heritage. Oral literature scholars like Nketia (1974) have also explored the relationship between drum language and other forms of non-verbal communication, as well as their adaptation in contemporary contexts.

Agyekum (2008) conducted research on funeral donations among the Akan and observed that "When it comes to funerals and their associated activities, rituals and donations, the Akan emphasise communalism rather than individualism." He referred to the assertion by Laryea (2020) on his comments on communalism:

The value that traditional African societies place on communalism is expressed by sharing a common commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence, and solidarity. Communal life is natural to human beings. (p.175)

One of the communal rituals and activities of Akan society is funerals. It is incumbent for every adult in a village or town to attend funerals, offer condolences, and assist bereaved families by contributing financially or in kind to alleviate expenses. Consequently, Akan can often organise funerals and achieve financial equilibrium or occasionally generate a surplus. Attendees also use words of encouragement to express empathy and commit to the family, mitigating stress and psychological trauma from bereavement.

Mensah (2020) conducted more research on the role of music in grief processing and sustaining communal identity at Akan funerals. Their research demonstrates how dirges (*adesewa*) assist mourners in expressing their feelings while also reinforcing ancestral connections and social hierarchy. The infusion of Western musical influences, such as the use of Christian hymns, has resulted in the hybridisation of Akan funeral music, mirroring larger cultural and religious transformations in Ghanaian society (Agyekum, 2023).

The idea of mythology of Ross (2000) illustrates how Akan burial traditions produce meaning beyond their immediate purpose, maintaining ancestral continuity, power relations, and cultural resilience. The Adowa and Kete funeral dances, for example, are more than just beautiful expressions; they also transmit coded messages about social rank, bereavement, and the journey to the ancestral realm.

Recent research by Darkwah and Amponsah (2021) has elaborated on this concept, revealing how funerary dancing motions act as nonverbal communication, with gestures such as raised arms representing respect for ancestors and slow feet signifying mourning and solemnity. The parade of chiefs beneath the state umbrellas, as well as the use of gun salutes, add to the semiotic landscape of Akan royal funerals like *Daasebre* Oti Boateng.

Agyekum (2006) discussed Akan semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, and we think the concept offers a valuable framework for understanding the symbolic meanings of Akan funeral performance. The three categories of signs: icons, indices, and symbols, appear in Akan funerals. For example, colour-coded clothing (black and red) serves as a symbol of grief and ancestral reverence, and drumming rhythms serve as an index for relaying messages about the deceased's life and position.

2.2 Oral Traditions and Literary Genres in Akan Funerals

A key aspect of Akan funerals is the prevalence of oral literature genres, notably panegyrics, elegiac poetry, and appellations (*amoma*, *apaee/ayeyie*). These are usually delivered by royal linguists (*akyeame*) or appointed mourners who honour the deceased and their ancestry using proverbs, metaphors, and historical allusions. According to Finnegan (2012) and Okpewho (1992), oral traditions serve as repositories of collective memory, ensuring the generational transmission of Akan history and values.

Panegyric poetry, or *amoma*, features a stylistic pattern of praise, lamentation, and invocation of ancestral spirits. Boadi (2007) highlights the role of phonological, syntactic, and lexical devices in enhancing the aesthetic and emotional depth of these performances. However, Obeng (1996) noted euphemisms and tonal shifts in Akan funeral divisions reflecting cultural attitudes towards death. Aspects of orality in Akan funerals include drum language, where messages about the deceased's legacy are conveyed through rhythmic patterns on the *atumpan* (talking drums). Akuffo (1997) noted that drummers encode historical narratives and praise into drum beats, allowing illiterate people to grasp the social and political messages of the funeral. Agyekum (2023) recently examined the role of digital media in recording and disseminating these performances, ensuring their preservation amid changes in communication practices.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Approaches

The current study uses different theoretical frameworks to examine and understand the complicated Akan funeral customs. The ethnomusicological view outlined by researchers such as Merriam (1964) gives us a place to start looking into the musical parts of funerals. Aspects of semiotics offers ways to figure out what dance movements symbolically mean as means of nonverbal communication as also indicated by Agyekum (2006). Cultural anthropologists such as Geertz (1973) and Turner (1998) put Akan funeral rites in the bigger picture of society's structures and ceremonies. This last part looks at language and style and builds on the work of Finnegan (2012) and Okpewho (1992), showing the importance of oral practices in funerals.

2.4 Ethnomusicological Perspectives on Akan Funeral Music

Ethnomusicology offers a framework for studying the role of music in social and ritual contexts, notably in African societies, where music is deeply rooted in cultural displays of mourning, praise, and identification. Nketia's major work, *The Music of Africa* (1974), emphasises the interaction of vocal and instrumental traditions, highlighting how rhythms and melodies serve as both emotional outlets and communicative instruments. Music is part of our cultural system that facilitates the understanding of the ritualistic roles of Akan funerals. In the anthropological view, music has three interrelated functions: communicative, emotive, and symbolic. Funeral drumming, particularly the usage of the *atumpan* (talking drum), is a type of linguistic expression that expresses praise and historical narratives about departure.

2.5 Cultural Anthropological and Funeral Practices

Anthropologists such as Geertz (1973) and Turner (1998) argue that rituals function as public performances that reaffirm social structures and cultural identity. In Akan society, funerals serve as moments of political and social reaffirmation, particularly in the context of chieftaincy. Turner's theory of liminality is especially relevant for analysing Akan royal funerals. Liminality refers to the transitional phase between life and death, where the deceased chief is no longer among the living, but not yet an ancestor. During this phase, the community engages in structured rituals, performances, and symbolic gestures to ensure a smooth transition into the ancestral world. The study of African rituals by Turner (1998) supports the idea that the funeral of a chief is not only about mourning but also about maintaining governance and societal continuity.

Further research by Spijker (2005) on African funeral rites aligns with the Akan belief that chiefs continue to hold authority in the ancestral realm, which requires elaborate funeral preparation. The funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng, for instance, involved days of mourning, ritualised music and dance performances, and participation from Akan royals across Ghana, reaffirming chieftaincy structures and traditional governance.

2.6. Linguistic and Stylistic Analysis of Funeral

Linguistics is important at Akan funerals, particularly in the delivery of funeral oratory, panegyrics, and elegiac poetry. Finnegan (2012) and Okpewho (1992) argue that African oral traditions serve as both a historical record and a means of maintaining communal norms. Agyekum (2008) cites three major linguistic strategies employed in Akan funeral performances:

- Appellations (Ayeyie): Praise names that reflect the deceased's ancestry, status, and accomplishments.
- Euphemisms and metaphorical terms are used to convey a polite and philosophical tone when discussing death.
- Call-and-response structures engage audiences while fostering communal participation.

Nyamekye (2023) conducted recent research on the current evolution of funeral oratory, observing that digital recordings and printed funeral brochures are now utilised to archive and share traditional praise songs and speeches, thus ensuring their preservation. This transition illustrates the blending of oral and written traditions that ensures linguistic continuity in a dynamically changing culture. At the funeral of the Chief of New Juaben, griots and royal linguists sang panegyrics and elegiac poetry, recounting the deceased chief's achievements, genealogies, and legacies. The use of praise names, proverbs, and rhetorical devices elevated the chief's stature even after his death, ensuring that his memory was perpetuated within the community's collective consciousness. Thus, linguistic performance during funerals serves as both a sorrow and tool for reinforcing historical and social continuity.

3. Methodology

The interplay between music, dance, and language in Akan royal funerals was studied using a qualitative ethnographic approach, focusing on *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral in May 2022. The ethnographic approach engaged participants, observed cultural manifestations, and analysed ritual performances. The research team employed participant observation from 10 to 14 May 2022, documenting interactions, taking field notes, and observing ritual processions, dances, musical performances, and oral expressions. The ethnographic framework by Spradley (2016) guided the approach, with researchers alternating between 'observers as participants' and 'participants as observers.' Semi-structured interviews with chiefs, elders, linguists, musicians, dancers, and mourners at Koforidua were conducted in Twi and translated into English. We focused on the semiotic significance of dances, rhetorical devices in Akan funeral oratory, and the function of drumming, dancing, and music. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis using NVivo (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). Audio-visual documentation was crucial; we recorded musical performances, choreographic sequences, and speech events. Video recordings underwent multimodal discourse analysis using Social Semiotic methodology by Kress (2020). Digital ethnography examined Facebook livestreams, YouTube broadcasts, and WhatsApp memorial groups (Pink, 2021) to understand how technology alters Akan funeral customs and preserves oral traditions through digital media.

Historical funeral brochures, newspaper archives, and Akan chieftaincy documents were used for archival research from June to August 2022. Materials were sourced from the Balme Library, School of Performing Arts Library, and Institute of African Studies all at the University of Ghana. Newspaper reports from the Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times documented funerals' public significance. This comparison allows researchers to observe continuities and transformations in Akan royal funerals over time.

Thematic analysis, as per Braun and Clarke (2022), was used on the data from interviews, observations, audio-visual recordings, and archival research. This involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, and categorising themes into broader frameworks. The analysis focused on music's role in mourning and transitions, dance's messages of hierarchy and veneration, and linguistic expressions' reinforcement of collective memory and identity. Following the work of Eriksen (2022) on cultural resilience, a comparative analysis contrasted traditional funerary practices with contemporary adaptations.

4. Discussion of Findings

4.1 Akan Funeral Traditions and their Cultural Significance

Funerals in Akan society are social gatherings, ceremonies of passage, and reaffirmations of kinship and leadership. Appropriate funeral rites ensure the deceased's spirit transitions to the ancestral realm, as noted by Opoku (1978). The Akan view funerals as a communal responsibility, aligning with their belief that death requires mutual support (Agyekum, 2008). Two main categories of traditional Akan funerals are the *ɔtɛyie* (burial rituals) and *ayipa* (final funeral celebrations). The *ɔtɛyie*, combining "*ɔtɛ*" (soil) and "*ayie*" (funeral), denotes the initial mourning and burial process (Laryea, 1996). Historically, the deceased were set for viewing and final respect, with burial within three days of death. The *ayipa* is a more elaborate event occurring weeks or months after burial, featuring music, dance, and linguistic performances (Agyekum, 2008). Modern influences, including mortuary services and extended planning, have affected traditional funeral timelines. Currently, funerals can be postponed for months to accommodate family members travelling from abroad. Some communities have implemented scheduled monthly or quarterly funerals to manage costs and encourage communal participation (Agyekum, 2023).

4.2 Royal Funerals (Aheneyie/Adehyeyie) Among the Akan

The funeral of a chief or queen mother is more elaborate and extended, reflecting their status and belief that chieftaincy extends beyond the physical domain. According to Rattray (1923), the Akan people maintained the authority of deceased chiefs in the ancestral world. Thus, their funeral must be conducted with ritual precision, music, dance, and linguistic artistry.

The funeral of the Chief of New Juaben is not only a mourning event but also a moment of political and social reaffirmation. Chiefs play a central role in Akan governance, and their funerals serve as occasions where alliances, succession plans, and community cohesion are publicly negotiated. The rituals performed, including libation pouring, symbolic drumming, and the participation of various social groups, reinforce traditional governance and ensure the continuity of Akan leadership structures. Public mourning, processions, drumming, appellations, and symbolic ceremonies are parts of a chief's funeral, such as the late Omanhene of New Juaben or *Daasebre* Oti Boateng. The interplay between Akan music, dance, and language was the primary focus of this study, which examined the execution of these elements in New Juaben.

4.3 Essential components of Royal funeral

Royal funerals are whole composites with music, dance, drama and this section looks at all these areas.

4.3.1 Music in Akan Funerals: Structure and Function

Music is integral to Akan funerals, serving as an emotional and ritualistic medium. It directs procedures, organises mourning, and strengthens community cohesion. Akan funeral music combines vocal laments, instrumental performances, and percussion to convey grief, transition, and honour to the deceased. Nketia (1974) notes that burial music is a systematic component of mortuary rites,

corresponding to burial stages and providing a platform for social commentary, historical preservation, and reaffirmation of lineage.

Dirges or *adesewa*, mostly by women, are key in Akan funeral music. These laments use melancholy melodies and refrains to convey pain and sorrow, describing the life, contributions, and community impact by the departed. Intense music performances help mourners process suffering collectively. Ampene (2005) notes that dirges link to oral history and cultural identity, preserving memory.

Drums at Akan funerals are structured, linguistic, and symbolic. *Atumpan* communicate through rhythmic and tonal patterns, calling elders, announcing a chief's passing, and providing ancestry background. Akuffo (1997) states that drumming serves as a tool for social organisation and political affirmation. At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral, drummers included eulogies, instructions, and praise as part of the repertoire.

Funeral music is linked to dance, with specific compositions for ritual movements. The Adowa dance, a distinctive Akan funeral dance, features deliberate movements conveying reverence and melancholy. The music is slow-paced, with call-and-response vocals and polyrhythmic percussion. Chernoff (1981) posits that this music preserves ritual cohesion and elicits profound emotional resonance.

In urban settings, Akan funeral music has evolved to integrate modern forms with traditional instrumentation and vocal performance. This hybridisation results from Western musical influences, such as choral groups, brass ensembles, and Christian hymns. Agyekum (2023) notes that religious diversity in Ghanaian communities is reflected in the incorporation of Christian elements into Akan funerals. At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral, church choirs performed choral music and Christian hymns interwoven with traditional Akan funeral music, illustrating the coexistence of modern and indigenous influences.

Funeral music also serves a therapeutic purpose by offering a platform for expressing mourning and promoting communal healing. Mensah (2020) contends that funeral music in Ghana serves as an emotional stabiliser, enabling mourners to process loss through rhythmic and melodic engagement. The structured nature of musical performances guides mourners through various phases of the mourning process, providing a sense of order amidst grief.

Another development altering traditional Akan funeral musical practice is the use of digital recordings and social media for funeral music dissemination. Funeral performances are recorded and disseminated via digital platforms, and funerals are livestreamed more frequently. This enables diaspora family members to participate virtually in the mourning process. Pink (2021) investigated this phenomenon, signifying the emergence of digital ethnography in examining funerary African traditions.

Daasebre Oti Boateng's funeral illustrates diverse aspects of music in Akan funerals, including vocal lamentation, ritual percussion, and contemporary musical adaptations. The Akan belief that death was a transition into the ancestral domain was reaffirmed by musical pieces reflecting the deceased's social status, lineage, and contributions. Akan funeral music ensures that the deceased's legacy is incorporated into the collective memory of the living through drumming, chanting, and instrumental performances.

4.3.2 The Role of Dance in Akan Funerals

Dance plays an important role in Akan funerals, functioning as a form of nonverbal communication. For the Akan, dance is deeply significant, strengthening social order, honouring the deceased, and enabling transfer to the ancestral realm. Funeral dances are accompanied by traditional drumming and vocals, creating a coordinated performative act that emphasises sadness, reverence, and continuity. The Adowa dance, a well-known funeral dance, is distinguished by slow, methodical gestures representing grief and reverence. Performed mostly by women, it uses sophisticated hand gestures and calculated steps that match the drum group's rhythms.

Kete dance, another traditional Akan funeral dance, is performed during royal funerals and state occasions by chiefs, elders, and courtiers. Unlike Adowa, Kete is associated with chieftaincy and represents hierarchical order and political authority. Asiedu (2016) observed that Kete movement patterns reflect Akan society's stratification, with distinct movements for chiefs, warriors, and the elderly. This performance reinforces traditional government and chieftaincy continuity. *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's royal funeral exemplified this practice, with processional dances conducted according to traditional rules.

Anthropologist Victor Turner (1998) described ritual performances as transitional times, reinforcing and momentarily changing social systems. Dance serves as a transitional performance at Akan funerals; it accompanies the transportation of the deceased to the spiritual world. Dancers' motions, timed to talking drums, perform symbolic narratives of departure and remembrance. They uphold the deceased's legacy in the ancestral lineage.

Dance plays an important role beyond traditional tasks, expressing emotions and psychological suffering. Darkwah and Amponsah (2021) suggest that funeral dances provide a physical outlet for processing loss, serving as a communal catharsis and channelling collective grief into structured representation. The organised nature of funeral dance allows everyone to join the mourning process, which strengthens communal relationships.

Modernisation has influenced Akan funeral dance customs, with some urban funerals featuring contemporary styles. However, in traditional and royal burial settings, Adowa and Kete continue to play an important role, symbolising the survival of Akan cultural traditions. Their continued use in royal funerals demonstrates their significance in Akan society and the intertwining of rites, performances, and historical continuity.

4.3.3 Language and Funeral Oratory: The Role of Panegyrics and Elegiac Poetry

Language is a crucial component of Akan funeral rites, with oral performances featuring prominently during grieving. Funeral oratory is a highly stylised expression performed by trained *ɔkyeame*, mourners, and family elders. Akan values spoken words in burial and funeral ceremonies to respect the deceased, recount their history, and secure their journey to the ancestral world. Funeral speeches, *ayeyie* (panegyrics), function as eulogies and historical tales, weaving appellations, proverbs, and genealogical references to reinforce the deceased's status.

Oral traditions, particularly praise poetry/panegyrics (*amoma*), are delivered in a structured rhetorical manner, invoking ancestors and reciting the deceased's achievements. Boadi (2007) notes that Akan panegyrics combine parallelism, repetition, and alliteration to generate rhythms and increase word impact and perlocutionary effects on mourners. At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral, royal linguists and traditional elders delivered poetic eulogies accompanied by talking drums, serving as grieving and reinforcing the deceased's socio-political status.

Akan funeral oratory uses proverbs and metaphors to convey complex ideas about life, death, and continuity. Proverbs like "*Owuo atwedee ɔbaako mforo* (lit. death's rather is not climbed by single people)" reflect the Akan view that death is inevitable yet does not sever bonds between living and dead. Obeng (1996) notes that linguistic expressions in Akan funerals often use euphemisms, referring to the deceased as having "gone to the village" rather than stating they have died, reflecting belief in existence beyond the physical realm. Agyekum (2010) provides a lot of euphemisms for ordinary death and the death of royals and chiefs.

Akan funerary culture features interaction between funeral oratory and drum language. Atumpan drums recite the deceased's praise in a rhythmic, percussion-based language that is understandable to Akan speakers (Akuffo, 1997). At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's burial, drummers played sequences of imitated linguistic patterns of verbal panegyrics, allowing distant people to hear the praise. This combination of

verbal oratory and drumming demonstrates Akan's intricately woven expressive culture, reinforcing honour.

The linguistic expressions of Akan funerals are enhanced by ritualised wailing, elegiac poetry and mourning choruses. In call-and-response laments, female mourners emotionally mimic the funeral orator's thoughts. These vocal performances function as group manifestations of loss, enabling collective grieving. According to Finnegan (2012), the performative character of oral traditions in African communities ensures that cultural knowledge is dynamically transmitted across generations. The rich-language artistry of Akan funerals exemplifies this process.

Modernisation has impacted funeral oratory; some Akan funerals now include social media posts, video tributes, and printed brochures to record eulogies and commendations (Nyamekye 2023). Despite these technical advancements, the fundamental custom of oral panegyric and elegiac poetry performance persists, especially during royal funerals. The eulogies at *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng's funeral demonstrate the enduring value of oral tradition in Akan funerary rites, reinforcing its role in preserving history, strengthening social ties, and ensuring the departed's legacy endures in collective memory.

5. *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng

5.1 The Funeral of *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng, Omanhene of New Juaben

This section will discuss the key Stages of the Funeral: Procession, Rituals, and Cultural Expressions

The funeral of *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng, the Omanhene of New Juaben, was a celebration that emphasised the deceased's royal status and Akan cultural traditions. As a paramount chief, his funeral followed traditional procedures, spanning multiple days with thousands of mourners, including royal family members, traditional rulers, state dignitaries, and local community members. Each part of the funeral process was critical in honouring and moving the deceased into the ancestral realm.

The ceremony began with public mourning and a laying in state, where mourners paid their final respects. *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng's body, adorned in full royal regalia, was placed in a beautifully constructed catafalque, representing his authority as an Omanhene. This ritual affirmed that chiefs never "die" but transition into the ancestral world, where they continue to wield power. Female mourners and palace staff performed traditional funeral dirges called *adesewa*, recounting the deceased chief's life, accomplishments, and leadership skills.

A spectacular parade followed, bringing the body to its royal mausoleum (final resting place), accompanied by drumming, dance, and oratory. Fontomfrom and atumpan drummers performed rhythms communicating the late chief's authority and power, accomplishments and rank. Drumming served as a surrogate language (speech substitute), signalling to both living and spiritual realms that an important leader was transitioning. Royal linguists/ griots/bards (*ɔkyeame*) enhanced this with praise poetry and appellations describing *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng's heritage and merits.

Adowa and Kete funeral dances were performed throughout the procession. The Adowa dance, notable for slow, measured motions and expressive hand gestures, conveyed grief and adoration. The Kete dance, for chiefs and royal courtiers, represented the continuous presence of authority, even in death. Each movement contained encoded messages, reinforcing the Akan idea that burial performances are a means of communication between the living and the dead.

The gun salutes and the firing of muskets were important parts of the funeral ceremony. This custom goes back a long way in Akan royal funerals. The shooting was a sign of both bidding farewell, saying goodbye to the dead, and asking for help from ancestors. This tradition, rooted in Asante Warfare and Leadership, honoured *Daasebrɛ* Oti Boateng as a warrior and leader. Libations were poured at important

spots in the palace and New Juaben's holy places. Traditional priests and elders led libation prayers calling on ancestral spirits to greet the dead Omanhene and ensure his safe journey. The prayers, full of metaphors, proverbs, and historical references, stressed government continuity and supporting the late chief's values. The night vigil and ancestral talks were highly anticipated. Traditional priests and spiritual leaders communicated with the dead person's spirit to ensure proper transition to the ancient world among other Amanhene of New Juaben. This custom reflected the Akan belief that chiefs continued leading their people after death.

The final parts were burial and thanksgiving rituals. As per royal Akan customs, *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's burial place was kept confidential to protect the chief's spirit and ensure respect as an ancestor guardian. An official event thanked the community for helping give their leader a proper send-off.

Representatives from the Asante Kingdom, Old Juaben and chiefs of the Oyoko clan, and other traditional Akan areas attended, showing New Juaben's connections to the larger Akan chieftaincy network. Akan royal funerals strengthen identity, continuity, and tradition through structured linguistic eulogies, drumming sequences, ritualised dance performances, and gun salutes.

Contemporary Akan funerals have been influenced by modernisation and technology, with digital tributes and live streams enabling remote participation. However, *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral adhered to old traditions, ensuring rites aligned with time-honoured customs marking changes in Akan royal families. The set funeral order, from public mourning to final burial, demonstrated respect for the deceased and Akan cultural philosophy that values duty, honour and continuation of leadership.

5.2 Role of Chiefs, Dignitaries, and Community Members in the Funeral

The funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng was a traditional state-level ceremony that united chiefs, dignitaries, and people from across Ghana. His death was significant to the Akan chieftaincy system as he was an Omanhene (paramount chief). Important figures from the Asante Kingdom, the Ghanaian government, and the local community were involved. The event was traditional, political, social, and historical due to the presence of these groups. It was a time of mourning and reaffirming leadership structures.

Traditional leaders, especially from the Asanteman Council, Old Juaben, and other Akan paramountcies, heavily influenced the funeral ceremonies. Chiefs from several Akan states arrived in full regalia, bringing their traditional chairs and office symbols. Royal linguists, drummers, and attendants enhanced the ceremonial aspect. Drum announcements, appellations, and customary processions commemorated each chief's entrance, signifying the unity of the Akan chieftaincy system.

Chiefs actively participated in funeral eulogies, libation pouring, and final burial planning. They performed traditional ceremonies, symbolically presenting food, linen, and gold ornaments as offerings for the Omanhene's journey to the ancestral world. Each paramount chief honoured the deceased by presenting a ceremonial gift, either an elephant tusk or a white sheep.

Given *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's contributions as a former Government Statistician to Ghana's national development, his funeral was attended by high-profile dignitaries, including presidential representatives, state ministers, and Members of Parliament (MPs). The participation of government officials showed respect and reflected the relationship between traditional leadership and modern state governance. It also illustrated how Akan royal funerals continue to impact national political and cultural discourse.

Community members of New Juaben and neighbouring areas played important roles, providing logistical support, performing rituals, and participating in mourning ceremonies. The locals ensured that the town was decked in symbolic mourning colours, black and red, and arranged food, water, and seating for thousands of mourners. The funeral unified the community, bringing together youth

organisations, women's groups, and traditional craftspeople to commemorate their paramount chief's life and accomplishments.

The participation of many social and professional organisations gives distinct vibrancy to the event. Traditional storytellers, poets, and historians provided oral histories of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's reign, preserving his legacy for future generations. Drumming ensembles and dancers contributed to the funeral's cultural texture, reaffirming the Akan concept that music and movements are necessary for a leader's dignified send-off.

The burial was also an economic event, with vendors selling funeral cloth, traditional beads, food, and commemorative products. Such activities during contemporary Akan funerals demonstrate how mourning intertwines with trade and commerce, allowing local businesses to thrive even during loss. With many dignitaries attending, security and crowd control were critical. Traditional security staff were present to maintain order on palace grounds. The Ghana Police Service and other security agencies worked with traditional leaders to ensure funeral activities ran well and visitors were properly escorted during the rites.

5.3 Analysis of Music, Dance, and Language at the Funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng

Daasebre Oti Boateng's burial was shaped by music, reinforcing traditional expressions of sadness, veneration, and continuity while organising the mourning period. This study analyses funeral music using ethnomusicological theories by J.H. Kwabena. Nketia (1974) and Merriam (1964) highlight music's utilitarian importance in African communities. Findings indicate Akan funeral music serves three primary functions: emotional expression, social organisation, and historical narratives.

A notable feature was the use of talking drums (*atumpan*) to announce the chief's death and convey messages. The *atumpan* drums played rhythms resembling spoken Twi sentences, describing the late chiefs' ancestry, accomplishments, and virtues. This aligns with the hypothesis of drum language as a speech substitute by Nketia (1974), strengthening the notion that drumming at Akan funerals extends beyond entertainment. Drummers delivered successive phrases detailing *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's rules and contributions to New Juaben, ensuring his legacy was remembered musically and linguistically.

Another feature is the playing of dirges (*adesewa*) by female mourners, reflecting how Merriam (1964) theorises music as an emotional release and social reinforcement mechanism. Dirges used a call-and-response structure, with lead singers introducing grieving refrains repeated by mourners. These songs were lyrical, metaphorical, and contemplative, employing historical and philosophical themes. One dirge referenced the Akan proverb "*Wɔreko ɔkra amena mu*" (He is going to the land of the spirits), symbolising the deceased's final transfer into their ancestral domain. This supports Merriam's belief that music provides an organised mechanism for communities to collectively process sorrow.

The funeral featured Kete and Adowa music, emphasising music's function in reaffirming societal order and hierarchy. Kete, traditionally performed for royalty, indicated the presence of high-ranking authority, whilst Adowa was performed by women and the general public. This distribution supports Nketia's view that music in African countries is hierarchical and serves certain social responsibilities. The planned employment of various music forms ensured royal traditions were followed while allowing community participation.

The use of new musical elements, such as Christian hymns and brass band music, demonstrates Akan funeral music's resilience to contemporary influences. While traditional drums and vocal performances dominated, choral groups sang religious songs combining Christian mourning practices with indigenous traditions. This aligns with a research by Mensah (2020) on the hybridisation of Akan funeral music, where modern religious influences merge with indigenous traditions. The use of brass band music in urban Akan funerals exemplifies how global musical trends have been incorporated into local traditions, reflecting Merriam's concept of musical acculturation, which involves absorbing and reinterpreting external influences within an existing cultural framework.

From an ethnomusicological standpoint, the burial of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng demonstrates how music serves ritualistic and communicative roles. The interplay of drum language, vocal dirges, and instrumental performances creates a layered soundscape of grief, with each genre contributing to the narrative of loss, reverence, and heritage preservation. Nketia and Merriam's theoretical frameworks show that Akan funeral music actively shapes social order, collective sorrow, and historical memory.

At the funeral of the Chief of New Juaben, dances performed by specific groups, such as royal court dancers, convey messages of homage, transition, and leadership continuity. The planned, and typically slow, dignified motions of these dancers represent the methodical succession of power and respect shown to a deceased chief. Furthermore, the dancers' regalia, which includes black and crimson garments, gold decorations, and symbolic props, contributes to the dance's communicative function within the larger funeral ritual.

This investigation reveals that music in Akan funerals expresses sadness, structures ceremonial procedures, reinforces chieftaincy order, and preserves historical narratives. These findings imply that Akan royal funerals have multimodal sound events where musical layers interact to create an immersive cultural experience, ensuring the deceased's legacy is carried on through rhythmic and poetic expressions.

6. Linguistic and Stylistic Analysis of Funeral Oratory

Language was crucial to *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral, as seen in the oratory, panegyrics, appellations, and eulogies delivered by chiefs' spokespersons, griots, elders, and mourners. In Akan funerals, the spoken word conveys sadness, preserves history, asserts leadership, and invokes ancestor spirits. Using discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, and stylistics analysis, this part examines how linguistic elements in funeral oratory serve as cultural tools for identity reaffirmation and communal memory.

6.1 The Role of Praise Poetry and Funeral Panegyrics (*Ayeyie*)

The funeral oratory followed the traditional Akan *ayeyie* (praise poetry) structure, where trained chiefs' spokespersons (*akyeame*) delivered elaborate eulogies and historical narratives of the deceased chief. Praise poetry is a stylised, formulaic genre marked by repetition, parallelism, metaphor, and rhetorical devices that enhance the performative and mnemonic impact of the spoken word (Boadi, 2007). The eulogies were structured into three main phases:

1. Invocation of ancestors: Chiefs' spokespersons (linguists) began by calling on past rulers and spirits, creating a spiritual and historical continuum between the deceased and previous Omanhene of New Juaben.
2. Recitation of the deceased's titles and achievements – This section highlights *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's governance, wisdom, and contributions to chieftaincy and national development.
3. Final farewell and community exhortation – The linguists concluded with a call for unity, continuity, and preservation of traditional values, reinforcing the collective responsibility of living to uphold the deceased's legacy.

The rhetorical style of these eulogies was highly poetic, using proverbs, appellations, and historical allegories to stress the deceased's leadership role and place in Akan cultural memory. The Akan saying "*Opanin wu a, na ne nsem ka no*" (When a great leader dies, his words remain) is commonly cited, indicating the concept that the chief's wisdom and leadership outlast his physical presence.

6.2. The Use of Appellations and Stylistic Devices in Funeral Speech

A central feature of Akan funeral oratory is the use of appellations (*amoma*), honorific titles given to chiefs highlighting their lineage, bravery, and contributions. These titles, often inherited, function as verbal insignia reinforcing the chief's identity within the Akan chieftaincy system. At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral, griots/bards (linguists) recited appellations in structured rhythmic patterns, pausing for drummers to echo praises using drum language (*atumpan*). This synchronisation of verbal and percussive expressions illustrates how Akan oral traditions function as multimodal communication systems, where spoken words and drum rhythms interact to create a holistic linguistic performance (Nketia, 1974).

In addition to appellations, the funeral oratory was rich in stylistic devices, in particular:

- Parallelism – The repetition of phrases to reinforce key messages, such as

Daasebre, the great elephant,

Daasebre, the warrior of New Juaben.

- Metaphors – Symbolic comparisons used to elevate the status of the deceased, such as

“A mighty tree has fallen, but its shade still covers us”, which metaphorically conveys the enduring influence of the late chief.

The mighty tree is the chief, the falling is the death, and the prevalent shade is his influence.

- Alliteration and association – The use of rhythmic sound patterns to enhance the musicality of speech, ensuring that it is memorable and impactful.
- Personification, giving human attributes to abstract concepts, as in “The stool of New Juaben weeps for its leader”, reinforcing the idea that the chieftaincy institution itself mourns his loss.

These linguistic devices not only amplify the emotional depth of funeral rites but also serve as mnemonic tools that ensure the oral preservation of historical narratives.

6.3 The Pragmatics of Funeral Language: Euphemism and Indirect Expressions

The Akan funeral oratory avoids direct references to death, using euphemisms and metaphorical phrases. This aligns with African linguistic traditions viewing death as a transition (Obeng, 1996). At funerals, expressions like *Daasebre atu bata* (*Daasebre* has embarked on a journey) or ‘he has gone to join the ancestors’ convey the concept that royalty transfers to another place rather than dying, as Agyekum (2010) intimates.

This linguistic pattern is a culturally rooted practice maintaining the Akan worldview of cyclical existence and ancestral continuity. Funeral speeches manage difficult topics using oblique phrasing, ensuring discussions about death are civil and spiritually appropriate. This aligns with politeness theory in pragmatics, which posits euphemism as a face-saving tactic to reduce the emotional and social impact of loss (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

6.4. The Interplay Between Drum Language and Spoken Oratory

One of the most striking aspects of funerals is the interaction between verbal speech and drum communication. Talking drums (*atumpan*) played an active role in repeating, responding to, and reinforcing spoken praise, creating interplay between language and percussion. This interaction is rooted in ethnomusicological traditions where Akan drum messages serve as a parallel form of linguistic

expression (Akuffo, 1997). At the funeral, each major point in the chief's eulogy was echoed by corresponding drum sequences, ensuring praise was transmitted to both the living and the spiritual realm.

7. Modernisation and Digital Archiving of Funeral Oratory

Though Akan funeral oratory is rooted in traditional forms, modern influences have introduced new documentation and distribution techniques. At *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's burial, parts of the eulogies and praise poetry were digitally filmed and broadcast on social media and television, preserving spoken traditions for future generations. Transcriptions into printed funeral brochures and online tributes are gaining popularity, showing the adaptation of oral traditions to digital platforms (Nyamekye, 2023).

However, there is ongoing disagreement within Akan communities about how much oral tradition should be documented in writing or digital form. Some elders believe that verbal transmission is sacrosanct and should remain with expert linguists, while others see digital preservation as vital for protecting indigenous knowledge in an age of globalisation. The coexistence of oral, written, and digital forms of funeral oratory reflects a larger transition in Akan funerary traditions, where tradition and technology interact in complex ways.

7.1. The Impact of Modernisation on Akan Funerals

Akan funerals have changed due to urbanisation, Christianity, and economic concerns. Boateng and Anngela-Cole (2012) examine the increased expenses of funerals, noting that ceremonies now include event organisers, catering services, and digital invitations. The marketing of funerals has sparked debates on whether these additions preserve or weaken ancient customs. Christianity has modified burial traditions and musical representations. Thurston (2022) analyses how Akan Christians blend hymns and biblical readings while preserving indigenous practices, including drumming, libation pouring, and traditional attire. Mensah and Osei (2020) explore how Christianity has reshaped Akan beliefs about the afterlife, resulting in hybrid funeral rites combining Christian eschatology and ancestor devotion. Technological improvements have impacted funeral recording and participation. Agyekum (2023) notes that online funeral broadcasting and digital obituary platforms enable Akan diaspora communities to participate remotely in traditional death customs. Some researchers claim that digitisation undermines the community nature of funerals, while others see it as an adaptive mechanism maintaining cultural continuity and inclusivity. Despite modernisation, Akan royal funerals remain highly traditional, as shown by *Daasebre* Oti Boateng's funeral. The preservation of appellations, structured mourning dances, and drum languages indicates that Akan funerary practices are important representations of cultural identity and political authority.

7.2. The Funeral as a Reaffirmation of Social Structure and Governance

The funeral of the Omanhene of New Juaben reaffirmed Akan chieftaincy and traditional governance, showcasing how Akan funerals serve as political rituals that reinforce hierarchy and continuity. The event brought together paramount chiefs, sub-chiefs, and elders from various Akan states, underscoring the interconnected nature of chieftaincy in traditional areas. The participation of traditional rulers—each accompanied by linguists, drummers, sword bearers, and attendants—symbolised the legitimacy and authority of the chieftaincy system, reminding us that although one ruler departed, the system of governance remained intact.

This aligns with the theory of ritual process by Turner (1998), which posits that rites of passage serve as liminal events that both dissolve and reaffirm social order. During the mourning period, normal daily activities were halted, shops were closed, and farmers did not work on their farms. The community thus operated under a ceremonial framework where traditional authorities took charge of funeral arrangements, rituals, and public announcements. Chiefs and elders led processions, while linguists delivered historical eulogies reconnecting the present with the past. The funeral acted as a public display

of governance, where traditional leaders demonstrated their role in decision-making, cultural preservation, and conflict mediation.

The presence of high-ranking chiefs from Asanteman, Old Juaben, and other Akan states reaffirmed unity and political alliances within the larger Akan chieftaincy network. Chiefs paid homage to the late Omanhene through symbolic gestures, such as presenting gold ornaments, livestock (especially sheep), and sacred gifts. These acts reinforced diplomatic ties among Akan polities, illustrating that chieftaincy remains a powerful institution in Ghanaian society, despite modern governance structures.

Furthermore, royal funerals marked a formal transition in leadership. While mourning honoured the late Omanhene, it also set the stage for introducing a new ruler, following Akan succession practices. During the funeral, deliberations began among the royal family and elders regarding the selection of a successor. This process follows the Akan matrilineal inheritance system, where eligibility is determined by maternal lineage descent. Thus, the funeral functioned as a preparatory space for political transition, ensuring leadership continuity.

7.3 Interdependence of Music, Dance, and Language in Akan Funerals

The interconnection between music, dance, and language in Akan funerals was a significant theme emerging from this study. These components operate as a cohesive system of communication, identity reaffirmation, and ritual significance.

Music, particularly drum language, functions as both a ritual and a narrative instrument. The *atumpan* and *fontomfrom* drums proclaim the death, recount the deceased's accomplishments, and direct the funeral procession. These rhythms correspond to spoken phrases, substantiating that drumming in Akan society serves as a mnemonic and linguistic tool (Nketia, 1974). Dances, particularly Adowa and Kete, serve as non-verbal communication: visual and kinetic manifestations of reverence and mourning. The themes of farewell, social order, and leadership transition were reflected in the movements, coded with meanings. Funeral routines involve the community, enabling mourners to engage in collective physical expression of grief and remembrance (Asiedu 2016). Language, particularly laudatory poetry and appellations, is the primary method of preserving oral history and honouring the deceased. Royal spokespersons (*akyeame*) deliver structured eulogies incorporating historical references, allusions, and traditional proverbs, ensuring the deceased's legacy is ingrained in the collective cultural memory (Obeng, 1996).

The collaboration and the mutual interdependency of music, dance, and language generate a multi-layered performative experience. Each element reinforces the ritual purpose of the funeral, ensuring the deceased is honoured, the community is united in mourning, and Akan heritage principles are preserved.

8. Conclusion

The funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng examined Akan royal funerary traditions, showing these events as cultural, political, and social institutions beyond mourning. This research highlights the structured nature of Akan burials, where each component, such as music, dance, oral performances, and ritual processions, preserves heritage, reinforces community solidarity, and affirms chieftaincy. The analysis revealed that Akan funerals address spiritual, historical, and socio-political concerns while facilitating the deceased's transition into the ancestral domain.

The research demonstrated that Akan funeral practices withstand the impact of modernisation, Christianity, and digital media. While traditional elements like drumming, libation pouring, regal processions, and mourning dances remain central, modern adaptations such as digital broadcasts, funeral brochures, and economic commercialisation have added complexity. This shows that Akan culture is adaptable and dynamic, incorporating external influences without compromising its fundamental identity.

The results also highlight the significance of oral traditions in Akan burials. The preservation of leadership legacies across generations is ensured through panegyrics, drum languages, panegyric/ laud poetry, and historical narratives. These performances by royal linguists, drummers, and the elderly are crucial for maintaining communal memory, historical accuracy, and cultural continuity. The results of this investigation have substantial implications for academic research and cultural preservation. Akan royal funerals function as public cultural archives that record community values, governance, and leadership. There is increasing apprehension that aspects of oral traditions, indigenous performances, and ritualistic manifestations may be compromised as Ghana and other African societies undergo rapid modernisation and influenced by globalisation.

This study underscores the significance of actively documenting and preserving the Akan funerary tradition. The incorporation of digital media, video recordings, and transcribed eulogies indicates that contemporary technology can protect indigenous knowledge. Nevertheless, Nyamekye (2023) emphasises that preserving sacred, performative aspects of these traditions depends on balancing digital documentation and preservation.

The funeral of *Daasebre* Oti Boateng demonstrated that Akan funerary customs are dynamic, ever-evolving traditions. They ensure Akan communities remain rooted in their heritage while navigating contemporary challenges, serving as pillars of identity, governance, and historical continuity. This investigation emphasises the necessity of continuous interaction with academics, cultural practitioners, and traditional leaders to safeguard and advance these traditions for future generations. This research contributes to the ongoing academic discourse on cultural anthropology, ritual performances, and African oral traditions. Future research could investigate the impact of contemporary influences on Akan funerary practices and conduct comparative studies with other African societies to offer a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous rituals' continuity and evolution.

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