

# Historical Narratives of the Eight Akan Clan Systems Using Museum Theater: The Case of Prempeh II Jubilee Museum, Ghana

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## Abstract

There have been several calls from diverse stakeholders in the museum sector in Ghana for creative programs that enliven the cultural objects in a museum's holding. This study aimed at exploring the use of museum theatre as an intervention to enhance the museum experience of visitors at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum, a popular museum in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. We produced *The Linguist Staff*, an interactive drama to present the historical narratives of the eight Akan clan systems. The study was carried out using arts-based research under the qualitative approach with observer-as-participant and semi-structured interviews as data collection tools. Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Our findings revealed that museum theatre could potentially improve learning while enhancing the understanding of museum objects. The study contends that museum theatre when used tactfully by museum management could be a very useful intervention in increasing visitors' experience and engagement.

**Keywords:** African Art & Culture, Akan Clan Systems, Cultural Objects, Museum Theater, Museum Engagement, Ghana

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## Introduction

This study was carried out to explore the practicality of using museum theatre in re-enacting the historical narratives of the eight Akan clan systems at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum in Ashanti Region. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, cultural institutions such as museums, galleries and heritage sites experienced reductions in public funding (ICOM, 2018) as well as low visitation rates and perceived relevance (Ibope-Inteligência, 2018; Leiva and Meirelles, 2018) in many countries including Ghana. According to scholars, the drivers for the low patronage of museums are attributed to the poor appreciation of culture and snowballing competition from other leisure service providers. However, there is a long tradition of literature in tourism and cultural heritage on the scope and development of museums which nonetheless has a strong resonance with the demands of 21st-century sophisticated museum visitors. Reussner (2003: 102) succinctly proclaims that since the middle of the 19th-century, museums have served as leisure destinations. However, early museum curators and directors were more focused on their *Wunderkammer*, that is, cabinet of curiosities, than the experiences and satisfaction of its consumers.

The museum's primary goal is to educate visitors about the past, promote cross-cultural cohesion among people, and enhance enjoyment (Calinao and Lin, 2017; Trinh and Ryan 2016; Brida et al., 2016; Pennings, 2015). Some scholars have cautioned that museum visitors demand and want more fulfilling experiences (Gheorghilas et al., 2017; Dove, 2010). Because of this, both the role of museums and visitors have changed substantially (Komarac, Ozretic and Skare, 2014). In recent years, there have been several calls from diverse stakeholders in the museum sector in Ghana for creative programmes that enliven the cultural objects in a museum's holding for a much-enhanced museum experience as well as their beneficial role in fostering social and economic development (Lei, 2021, Dika and Agyei Ofori, 2018; Essel, 2017; Essel, Opoku Mensah and Teye, 2016; Kuntaa, 2012). One such call emanated from a longitudinal study that investigated visitor experience and satisfaction with museum education in Ghana. In their study, Amoako-Hene, Nortey and Bodjawah (2022) discovered that 81.9% of museum visitors were extremely unsatisfied with their museum experience due to the interpreting and teaching techniques employed by the museums. Therefore, this comes with the challenge of museum attraction, interpretation approaches, and museum sustainability, which has been extensively discussed in tourism literature (Nielsen, 2017; Pop and Sabou, 2013; Hume and Mills, 2011; Kim and Leec, 2002). The scholars concur that to fight the shifting patterns of the 21st-century museum, there is a need for museum curators to engage or run continuous fresh activities and programmes to help revitalise their cities (Lei, 2021) thereby attracting new visitors or tourists, retain existing visitors and be in good financial standing.

As visitor expectations rise, museums are faced with new obstacles (Wavell et al., 2002). The emergence of new technologies and creative programmes such as podcasts, interactive video booths, virtual reality and watching or practising dance, music and theatre encourages these expectations (Pallud, 2017; Kang and Gretzel, 2012; Bryson and MacKerron, 2017; Wheatley and Bickerton, 2017; Grossi et al., 2012) as they promote greater emotional and cognitive growth for visitors (Newman et al., 2010; Kim and Kim, 2009). Internationally, one major intervention of the new museology is museum theatre (Nikonanou and Venieri, 2017; Jackson, 2010; Bridal, 2004; Faso, 2016). This phenomenon has been created in museums to turn passive visitors into active participants and for tourist appeal. Museum theatre encompasses various forms of theatre or dramatic arts in museums. Upon the establishment of the International Museum Theatre Alliance (ITMAL) in 1990, the term was legally adopted in place of phrases like "interpretive theatre", "living history", and "theatre in museums"

(Tzibazi, 2009: 163). According to ITMAL (2012: 1), museum theatre “is a term that has been used to refer both to the performance of theatre (i.e., a play) in or by a museum and also to the use of any of a variety of theatrical techniques by museums” to animate the inanimate histories and objects in museums and heritage sites. Highlighting the relevance of performance at heritage sites, Dove (2011: 119) avers that it provides “an exciting form of education for internal tourists, school children and foreign visitors.” This is because the interpretation of historical narratives via live performance is often seen as a means of filling gaps by giving the visitors a more vivid museum experience. Other scholars who have done a lot of outstanding studies on the subject of creative industries and culture sustainability note that the concept can be far more successful in boosting cultural heritage promotion and tourism (Das and Chhaparia, 2023; Lei, 2021; Meddegoda, 2020; Purwantiasning, Kurniawan and Sri Sunarti, 2019). While museum theatre has many advantages, including capturing visitors’ attention and allowing for multiple interpretations of objects, it also faces criticism. Farmelo (1992) highlights concerns such as cost, disturbance of museum ambience, space limitations, accuracy, and visitor flow. Nonetheless, Farmelo suggests solutions for each issue, such as creating dedicated gallery spaces for performances, evaluating theatre programmes accurately, and fostering collaboration among museums and other funding agencies. From another perspective, Kidd (2007) convincingly argues that the performance at museums and heritage sites positively promotes the museum as a tourism and heritage destination; and simultaneously, has the power to contribute to economic sustainability – through job creation, revenue generation and foreign exchange earnings.

Museum theatre is a growing but understudied practice, according to Anthony Jackson and Jennifer Kidd, research specialists from the Centre of Applied Theatre Research at the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom. In the case of Ghana, and for that matter, in terms of the available literature, the investigation of the museum theatre concept is relatively new. In the context of the current scarcity of research specifically focused on the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum at the Centre for National Culture, Ashanti Region, the study sought to explore this phenomenon, and by implication examine how the museum theatre performance can be effectively introduced at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum to aid the interpretation and understanding of the museum’s historical narratives around the eight Akan clan systems that are embedded in the Linguist Staff artefact to enhance visitor attraction, interactivity and satisfaction.

## Methods

The study was driven by the arts-based research design under the qualitative research approach. Arts-based research is categorized under performing art approaches (i.e., theatre, dance and filmmaking), visual approaches (i.e., photography, murals, carving, and painting), narrative approaches (i.e., poetry, fiction, and novels), sound art and new media (Coemans et al., 2015). The study is primarily focused on theatre since it presents the production of a *Linguist Staff* performance based on the eight Akan Clan Systems at the Prempeh II Jubilee. Thirty stakeholders in the museum enterprise were purposively recruited for the study comprising of museum visitors/tourists (15), museum curators (4), theatre experts (6) and management of the Prempeh II Jubilee museum (5). The choice of the sample size of 30 after the saturation point was reached is consistent with Guetterman (2015) who avers that the ideal sample size for a qualitative study is between 8 to 33 participants. Ethical protocols were highly observed in every phase of the study. All the study participants signed informed consent form after the study’s purpose and requirements were explained to them. Likewise, their consents were sought included using their pictures in the staged museum

theatrical performance in the subsequent publication of the findings of the study. The study participants were very much excited to have their pictures featured in any eventual publication from the work and as such easily consented to it. During the data collection process, pseudo-identity was used. The researchers gave the study participants consent form which were filled and signed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure validity and reliability, the researchers gave copies of the interview guides, observation checklist and drama script to two experts at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Cape Coast (UCC) for their assessment. The researchers also personally visited the study site and the Manhyia Palace Museum for a pre-testimony of the research instruments. Permission was secured from the museum managers by outlining the study's objectives and what is expected from them. The drama display was an interactive theatre—a type of museum theatre—as the researchers decided that it would be intriguing for study participants to engage with the actors/performers while they were performing at the museum. The researchers used the participant observation method in this study because they took part in the museum theatre activities as the script directors and artistic directors although the researchers' primary responsibility in this situation was to collect data by observing the behavior and attitudes of the participants with the aid of an observation checklist. Following the theatre performance and observation were interviews to garner respondents' knowledge of the experiences and beliefs of the museum theatre concept. Subsequently, video recordings and photographs of the museum theatre performance, and audio recordings of the interviews to serve as supplementary data for the study were taken at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum with permission from the study participants. The researchers' fieldwork, observation, and semi-structured interviews involving Focus Group Discussions served as the primary data, while relevant documents from other scholars served as the secondary data for the study. The recorded interviews, observations and field notes were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo data analytical software and interpreted thematically in a descriptive form.

## Results and Discussion

### *Study Area- Prempeh II Jubilee Museum*

The museum is also one of the leading attraction sites in Ghana with rich artefacts, history and culture. The Prempeh II Jubilee Museum is within the Kumasi City Centre of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The museum is about a 5-minute walk to the Central Business District and a 20-minute drive to the Kumasi International Airport. The museum was established in 1956 by the founder and the first Centre for National Culture Director, Dr. Alexander Atta Yaw Kyerematen. It was named after the late Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, and opened to the public in 1956 – as a living testimony to the revered King's immense contribution and interest in establishing and developing the cultural centre. As one of the topmost tourist attraction sites in Ghana, the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum is a place where tourists and visitors can learn and experience the richness and diversity of the Ashanti Kingdom, what it means to the people's lives and how it helped us profile the Kingdom. Among some of the relics and memorabilia that are on display in the small-size-stuffy museum are the war regalia of Otumfuo Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, brass weights for weighing gold, staffs of the eight clans of the Asantes, cooking utensils, furniture, royal umbrella and palanquin and jewelry. The museum also showcases a replica of the Gold Stool, the Asante Kingdom's actual seat of authority and the object that ultimately led to war between the Asante Empire and the British Imperial government. The museum's construction depicts one of the surviving relics of the Asante Traditional Buildings which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) considered a World Heritage Site in Ghana.



Figure 1. Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. Source: Photographed by the researchers.

#### *The Eight Akan Clan Systems (Linguist Staff) at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum*

The Akan are the largest ethnic group in Ghana with the Ashanti's being the largest among them. The study observed that the Akan clans practice the matrilineal system of inheritance, that is, the family that one's mother comes from is where he or she belongs. The Akan people have eight (8) clans and these clans have names and symbols which identify them. Their symbols are all animals known as *Akyeneboa*. These eight animals represent the eight families of the Asantes and for that matter the Akan people in Ghana (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, 28 May 2023). The eight Akan clans are Aduana, Asene, Asakyiri, Asona, Bretuo, Agona, Oyoko and Ekuona. The clans venerate these animals to the point that killing them is forbidden since they have become their totems (Adom, 2019: 734). It is believed that eating the meat of a totemic animal will bring bad luck to the eater and maybe the entire town. Because of this taboo and others, the indigenous Akan communities fear and appreciate this component of their culture and heritage because of what might happen if they do the opposite. The behavior of people depending on their beliefs may have a logical explanation, even if coincidental or a product of their subconscious mind, even when anecdotes or scenarios like these are not scientifically proven.

As the clans see themselves as one people coming from one great ancestor, they do not intermarry. That is, one clan does not marry within the clan (Nukunya, 2003). One clan can cross to a different clan to marry but cannot marry from the same clan. The Linguist Staff can be used to communicate with people who are not part of a specific clan. It was heavily utilized in the past to inform men who wished to marry into particular households about the personalities of the family members. As a result, marriages lasted longer since men were continuously reminded of the traits of a group of people based on the totemic animal of their wives' families. This was done to persuade men to refrain from leaving their spouses in the face of marital problems (Asante et al., 2019; Nkansa-Kyeremateng, 1996).

The study revealed that the eight Akan Clan Systems are embedded in Linguist Staff which is one medium through which the current generation can learn about their ancestry and cultural history at the museum. The Linguist Staff is a decorated sceptres carried by linguists as a symbol of power or office (Anane-Frimpong, 2023). In the Akan setting, it is called *Akyeame Poma*. Whenever the *Okyeame* (linguist) conducts official business, attends public events, or addresses the chief, they carry it. The Linguist Staff (*Akyeame Poma*) housed at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum epitomizes philosophies and the origin of the eight clans or the families of the Akan families in the Southern part of Ghana. The study revealed that the *Akyeame Poma* comes in three forms. There is the Linguist Staff for the king or chief, the family as well as the family head who is the *Abusuapanin* (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, 28 May 2023). Totems on the Linguist Staff that family heads (*Abusuapanin*), traditional chiefs or subchiefs frequently use characteristically carries metaphorical representations of what their families or clans stand for or the clans and families they belong to. For example, anyone who sees a linguist with a staff bearing the parrot as their totemic animal on the finial carries the philosophy that he or she belongs to the Agona clan symbolizing their eloquence and expressiveness. Descriptively, the study identified that the eight (8) Linguist Staff comes in different design and shapes. They are all depicted in animal form. The shafts of the *Akyeame Poma* are covered in geometric decorations. Made of wood, the shafts of the staffs are also carved in a different segment that makes them collapsible. They are plated with gold, silver, white and black colors. The Linguist Staff signifies the status and historical and cultural significance of the eight Akan clan systems. The clans and their respective Linguist Staff are presented and discussed in the following section. The study revealed that the Aduana clan led by a dog with a fire in its mouth originally came from Asumanya. During the migration, the Aduana people continued their journey to Domaa where they believe the fire is still kept alight; making them commonly referred to as *Ogyasefu* meaning descendants of fire (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, 1 June 2023). The clan is identified by their totem dog (*Okraman*) with fire in the mouth.



Figure 2. Aduana Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

The clan symbolizes industriousness, cleverness and braveness. When they are greeted by someone from the same clan, they reply *Yaa Aberade* or *Yaa Ogyaba*. Some of the major

towns of the Aduana clan in Ashanti are Kumawu, Kaase, Agogo, Asumanya, and Bompata, equally representing the stools they occupy in the Ashanti chieftaincy tradition.

The study observed that the Oyoko clan (Figure 3) was created out of the Ekuona clan. The Oyoko clan is the most powerful clan among the eight clans because they produce kings for the Ashanti Kingdom (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, 1 June 2023). The occupant of the Golden Stool, Asantehene belongs to this clan. The Oyoko families are identified by their totem the eagle (*Okodee*) which symbolizes statesmanship, patience and bravery.



Figure 3. Oyoko Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

When a member from the Oyoko clan or family is greeted, they respond *Yaa Eburu, Yaa Oyokuoba* or *Yaa Adohyie Nana*. The Adakos are the uncles of the Oyoko clan. They are located in towns including Kumasi, Bekwae, Dwaben, Mamponten, Nsuta, Kokofu, Dadieso, Obogu, Asaaman, Adubiase, Kenyase, Ntonso, Adako-Jachie, Kontanase. Some of the stools they occupy include Asantehene and Dwabenhene. The Bretuo clan (Figure 4) is the oldest among all the eight clans. The totem of the Bretuo clan is the leopard (*Etwie*). Their distinguishing features or qualities are bravery and aggressiveness.



Figure 4. Bretuo Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

It is worth mentioning that when the Asantes fought against the Denkyiras in the Battle of Feyiase, the Commander-in-Chief was the Mamponhene. In the olden days, matters of war in the Asante Kingdom were the domain of the Mamponhene. The Bretuo's main towns are Mampon, Agogo, Domeabra, Amofo, Adanse, Abuotem, Gyamaase, Hwidiem, and Afigyaase. When they are greeted, the Bretuo's respond *Yaa Twidan* or *Yaa Tana*. Among the Asantes, the Agona Clan (Figure 5) is commonly found in Nkawie. Their totem is the parrot (*Ako*). The Agona's represent eloquence and flawless management skills. Because of their articulateness, expressiveness and eloquence, most of their people easily become linguists serving chiefs and kings in Ashanti.



Figure 5. Agona Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

When the Agona's greet themselves, they respond, *Yaa Adome* or *Yaa Otwidan*. Some of the principal towns where the Agona clan is commonly found are Nkawie, Bodwesango, Fomesua, Tafo, Gyinase, Trede and Ahwaa. The Agona families occupy stools in these aforementioned towns and communities. The Asakyiri's are predominantly located in the Adanse precinct in Ashanti Region. Asakyiri is the smallest clan among the eight clans. The Asakyiri clan (Figure 6) is identified by their totemic animal the vulture (*Pete*), which metaphorically represent cleanliness, endurance, calmness and patience.



Figure 6. Asakyiri Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.



The Asakyiri clan members are principally found in the towns of Akrokerri, Abofuo, Aman-sie, and Asokore where they occupy stools in the Ashanti traditional system. When the people of the Asakyiri clan are greeted by a fellow Asakyiri clan member, they proudly respond, *Yaa Amoakaade Nana*. The study revealed that among the eight clans, the Asona clan (Figure 7) has the largest membership or population (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, June 5, 2023). Their totem is the crow (*Kwaakwaadebi*). With the crow as their totemic animal, the Asona's are known for their statesmanship and patriotism qualities. When members of this family are greeted by their fellows, they respond *Yaa Asonaa* or *Yaa Oforina*.



Figure 7. Asona Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

Some of their prominent towns include Ejisu, Offinso and Adansi Akrofuom. Others royals of the Asona clan hails from Ejura, Feyiase, Manso-Nkwanta, Bonwire, Atwima-Agogo, Taabuom, Beposo, Toase, and Odumase. The study observed that members of the Ekuona family are not many. Nevertheless, they care for the people around them (Personal Interview with Museum Curator, 5 June 2023). The Ekuona clan (Figure 8) is identified by their totemic animal the buffalo (*Ɛko*) symbolizing their strength, honesty and uprightness.



Figure 8. Ekuona Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

Their principal town is Adanse Fomena. Other family members are also found in towns like Heman, Asokore-Mampon, Kokofu-Abuoso, Banko, Kona and Duayaw-Nkwanta. Mem-

bers of this clan proudly respond *Yaa Kuona* or *Yaa Obatanpa* when they are greeted by their fellow members. The Asene clan like most of the other clans originated from Adanse. The totem of the Asene clan (Figure 9) is the bat (*Apan*) which philosophically represent peace-loving, faithfulness and diplomacy.



Figure 9. Asene Clan Linguist Staff. Source: Photographed by researchers.

Because of their diplomatic and peace-loving attributes, it is believed that people from the Asene clan who rise to the echelon of leadership in society possesses superior leadership skills and qualities which are handed down to them by their great ancestors. Some of the principal towns of the Asenie clan in Ashanti are Amakom, Dompoase, Antoa and Agona. When members of this clan are greeted by their own, they respond *Yaa Abrawo*.

#### ***Existing Methods of Interpretation at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum***

The effectiveness with which information about the meanings of museum collections, artefacts or historical narratives is conveyed and interpreted at heritage sites determines how satisfied visitors are with their participation in tourist attractions (Tilden, 1977). Against this backdrop, the researchers sought to explore the various existing techniques employed in the interpretation of the museum objects at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. Strangely, all four respondents (museum curators) representing a 100% response rate, admitted that they employ oral and label interpretation techniques. All the respondents were of firm conviction that the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum needed other innovative interpretation techniques to enhance the interpretation of the museum objects and to improve visitor engagement and satisfaction. One of the key informants at the museum revealed that:

‘It is mainly oral translation that is used in interpreting the exhibits to our visitors. Unfortunately, we do not employ any audiovisual method whatsoever. We do not have audio devices to be playing the sounds of the items as well as interpretation panels containing texts, pictures maps or illustrations to guide visitors who visit the museum to make them have an improved understanding of the collections that we have here. The museum is yet to incorporate any audiovisual or performance display due to a lack of technical know-how and resource persons in those areas (Personal Communication, May 23, 2023).’

During the data collection, it was identified that the interpretation methods at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum are oral or verbal presentations and labels. Strangely, The museum

labels lack physical descriptions such as color, size, and to a larger extent dates to guide visitors. Professionally, museum labels are to have the museum number, the date the objects are made, who used the item or who made them. All this vital information is missing on the museum labels. What the artefacts have are the names of the object and the short histories on them that the researchers observed are insufficient in achieving visitor engagement and satisfaction. The available interpretation methods at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum affirm the researchers' assertion that the museum does not currently employ the museum theatre interpretive technique. The finding supports the study by Tilden (1977) as well as Jackson and Kidd (2007) who argue that the method of interpretation in museums should be created by the many social functions that they are intended to play to meet the demands of the 21st-century visitor. Tilden, one of the founding fathers of interpretation, has called for the introduction of historical re-enactments, interpretation panels, written materials, and other audiovisual devices in museums for enhanced visitor engagement and satisfaction.

### ***Challenges Faced with the Interpretation of the Linguist Staff Historical Narratives at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum***

The museum curators were asked about some of the specific challenges faced with the employment of the existing interpretation methods at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. The respondents rated a lack of creative methodology or technique to support the interpretation of the museum collections, a lack of effective interactive experience, insufficient visitor engagement and satisfaction and a lack of museum facility expansion and renovation. During data collection, one of the respondents noted concerns about the lack of these creative techniques to strengthen the interpretation of the museum artefacts and historical narratives challenges that The museum is one of the popular tourist sites in the Ashanti Region and Ghana as a whole serving as a historic place of learning and enjoyment for domestic and foreign tourists. He added that one of the many concerns that usually emerges after the museum tour is the question of when are we going to provide a meaningful or creative interpretive experience for the tourists who desire to explore the museum collections and the histories in an entertaining manner. The respondent pointed out clearly that the demands are something that the management members of the Centre for National Culture, Kumasi, which manages the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum facility would have to look into it.

Furthermore, in responding to the challenges faced with the interpretation of the museum objects, one of the key informants painted a clear picture of the challenge of insufficient visitor engagement and satisfaction as well as the lack of expansion and renovation of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum facility. A museum curator buttressed that the lack of expansion and renovation is badly "*affecting the preservation and maintenance of the artefacts. Because the museum has no roofing, the collections are highly exposed to the scorching sun and other unfavourable weather conditions such as rainfall*" (MUCU-PI, Personal Communication, 3 June, 2023). Admittedly, all four key informants indicated these challenges affect the patronage of the museum despite its popularity and regular visits by tourists from around the world. The findings relating to the expectation of the museum curators and visitors at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum are in line with earlier studies conducted by Gheorghilas et al. (2017), Nikonanou and Venieri (2017) as well as Mencarelli and Pulh (2012) who concluded that artefacts and stories interpretive challenges of heritage sites in developing countries must be addressed to provide tourists with entertaining and distinctive experience and encour-

age repeat visits. In museology, museum theatre has been praised for its optimum creative intervention in promoting cultural tourism as one of the most important factors supporting the expansion and development of various economies (Das and Chhaparia, 2023; Saleh et al., 2022 and Yoopetch, 2022) visitor engagement and satisfaction. A study by Jackson (2010) highlighted that museum theatre – a technique of employing theatre and drama to interpret museum objects and historical narratives – helps visitors to enliven the past. For instance, in a theatrical performance on the “Battle of Feyiase” between the Asantes and Denkyiras in which the *Etwie* war drum is employed as an interpretive tool, the play will transport the visitors to 1701, thereby creating a deeper engagement and satisfaction for them.

The results on the museum expansion and renovation emphasise the need for the management members of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum to invest in expanding the facility and implementing more sustainable architecture to obtain additional galleries or chambers, improve visitor access, and improve the whole museum’s experiential learning experience. The reasons provided by the museum curators confirms the observation made by Poulin (2010) and McClellan (2012) that administrators of heritage sites and museum must regularly undertake museum expansions and renovations to ensure their sustainability in this 21st century as visitors have now become sophisticated.

#### ***The Museum Theater Performance: Linguist Staff***

The researchers developed script and produced *The Linguist Staff*, an interactive theatrical performance to re-narrate the historical narratives and worldviews of the eight Akan clan systems embedded in the Linguist Staff artefacts at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. The production took place on Thursday 25 May, 2023 at the premises of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum at exactly 1:00pm. The script was written in English and improvised in Asante Twi. The production style of the performance was *realism* to portray reality and actuality in terms of props, dialogue, costume, music and characterisation for the appreciation of the museum visitors. The actors and actresses were sourced from two cultural ensembles at the Centre for National Culture Ashanti Region, namely, Anokye Players and a Resident Dance Company, *Amammereso Agofomma*. The actors were all type-cast to portray reality and actuality. Being a relatively new museum intervention, marketing and publicity campaign was embarked upon to promote the museum theatre performance. The target audience were museum visitors which comprised students and adults. It is important to highlight that school children visit museums more than adults in Ghana (Amoako-Hene, Nortey and Bodjawah, 2022). That is why there is a need for the incorporation of creative educational programmes to reinforce museum education and for visitor satisfaction.

*The Linguist Staff* performance took place in the exterior of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. The available expansive space within the museum’s precinct became the setting (Found or Created Space) for the performance. The found or created space is one of the main types of theatre spaces in theatrical setting (Gillette and Dionne, 2020; Wilson, 2015). In terms of acting, the actors’ performance was believable and realistic as they were able to convey messages and emotions which enlightened the museum visitors, and gave them a better appreciation of the ‘Linguist Staff’ museum object. The Paramount Chief role, played by Nana Sefa Boakye, for instance, brilliantly portrayed kingship traits to the delight of the museum visitors. He exuded leadership and charisma and was able to craftily drive home

the themes in the play as it was expressly stated by the sub-chiefs in the play. His interpretation of the role was brilliant. This is in line with Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), a Russian actor, director, and developer of Method Acting who intimated that the outward behaviors of actors onstage must be convincing, natural and believable. The centre of attraction was the roles played by the Representatives of the eight Akan Clan system – Ad-uana, Oyoko, Asene, Asakyiri, Ekuona, Agona, Bretuo and Asona.



Figure 10. Linguist Staff, Museum Theatre Performance. Source: Photographed by researchers

For instance, the Oyoko representative provided accurate historical information about the Oyoko Clan. She remarked: *“I am a proud Oyoko. I am one of the eight clans of the Akans. When greeted, I reply “Yaa Eburu, Yaa Oyokuoba or Yaa Adehyee Nana.” I epitomise a culture so weighty in history. My totem is the falcon. It symbolises our unique attributes – statesmanship, patience and bravery.”* The actors dramatically brought live to the ‘Linguist Staff’ museum objects. They creatively interpreted the historical narratives, origins, totems, and symbolism associated with the ‘Linguist Staff’ artefacts to the excitement of the museum visitors. The diction was excellent making the visitors understand every word the actors delivered on stage. The onstage believability was achieved due to the extensive training in vocal work, physical movement and character development of the actors during rehearsals.

As a means to make the audience have a satisfying listening experience, PA system was acquired to make the museum visitors effectively hear the actors’ dialogues. Besides, the researchers commissioned a composer at the Kumasi CNC to compose a *Nnwomkoro* song based on the eight Akan Clan system.

The sound and musical performance effectively conveyed the theme of the production concept. It also contributed to the overall atmosphere and the mood of the museum theatre performance. The costume and make-up for the actors and dance performers were rich and flamboyant – *Kente* fabrics and traditional cloth – which helped set the tone and the style of the production by showcasing the personality and the social status of each of the characters or actors in the play. It also underscored the style of the play – realism. In

the performance, *Linguist Staff*, the ‘Linguist Staff’ artefacts at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum were used as props to portray actuality and reality. The artefacts were brought out of the museum to the performance space with the consent of the museum’s Management Body. Additionally, the researchers rented other props such as stools, footstool, umbrella, and swords to establish the mood and style of the performance. The props also enhanced the personality status of the Chief in the play. Stage light was not used in the production because the performance took place in the afternoon. The *Linguist Staff* performance was recorded live for archival preservation and later broadcast.



Figure 11. Linguist Staff Performance (Nnwomkoro Ensemble). Source: Photographed by researchers.



Figure 12. Cross section of the Study Participants. Source: Photographed by researchers.

### ***Participants Knowledge of the Museum Theatre Concept***

In an attempt to find out if the participants (museum visitors category) have previously experienced museum theatre or living history performance at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum before, only 6.7% of the total number indicated to have visited the museum before but did not experience the museum theatre performance as part of the museum's collections interpretive interventions. Additionally, the remaining 93.3% who visited the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum for the first time and participated in the *Linguist Staff* performance indicated that they have not experience museum theatre performance as an interpretive tool at any of the museums they have so far visited in Ghana. The observable findings revealed that until the *Linguist Staff* production staged by the researchers at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum, the visitors who participated in the programme did not have firsthand experience or knowledge of the museum theatre concept. Five (5) management members of the Centre for National Culture, Kumasi, that manages the museum facility were interviewed. During the interview process, all the respondents representing a 100% response rate indicated that the museum theatre concept is not part of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum's interpretive techniques nor has it been introduced at the museum before. All the four (4) museum curators interviewed also shared the same viewpoint of the management members of the Kumasi CNC by confirming that the museum theatre concept is not incorporated at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum. This indicates the novelty of this research as the first in Ghana to explore the use of museum theatrical performances in explaining museum holdings. The findings from the study have confirmed that the museum theatre concept is largely an unexplored field by administrators of heritage sites such as museums and monuments across the world, most especially, in developing countries like Ghana. It was identified that the technique of employing theatrical performance to aid the interpretation of the museum objects was unknown to the research key informants. The findings confirm earlier studies done by Jackson and Kidd (2007), scholars at the Centre for Applied Theatre Research, University of Manchester, UK. In their three- and half-year UK Government sponsored project, *Performance, Learning and Heritage*, the study discovered that the museum theatre concept remains an understudied practice. Similar results were highlighted by Wang (2014), a scholar with the Department of Drama Creation and Application at the National University of Tainan, Taiwan. Wan-jung Wang conducted a study as an attempt to reinvent post-colonial cultural identities in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan through museum theatre educational programmes. In his study, Wang identified that the museum theatre concept has still been novel in eastern and south-eastern Asian nations. These results affirm that the museum theatre concept is not only relatively new to Ghana but the world all over.

### ***Participants' Perception of the Linguist Staff Museum Theatre Performance's ability in aiding the Interpretation, Understanding and Engagement of the Artefacts***

In an attempt to gather deeper insight into the perception of the visitors after the theatre performance at the museum, there was also a museum tour for the visitors to complement their visit. The strategy was aimed at having a comparative analysis based on the museum theatre display and the existing interpretation techniques, that is, oral presentation and museum labels at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum the visitors experienced. All 15 respondents representing 100% indicated that they enjoyed the museum theatre performance as it kept them engaged and connected with the *Linguist Staff* artefact better than the museum label and verbal methods. In terms of the interpretive methods, the participants revealed that the theatre performance made them understand the *Linguist Staff* object

better. They again indicated that the museum administrators must introduce the concept to help complement the existing methods for an enhanced interpretation and better comprehension of the museum objects.

Likewise, the museum visitors interviewed during the Focus Group Discussion unanimously affirmed that the drama was helpful in aiding them to appreciate and understand the complex historical narrative surrounding the Linguist Staff better. Although the theatre display, *Linguist Staff* received good reviews, two recommendations were made for future events that bothered on increasing the publicity of the museum theatre and the introduction of lighting and acoustic effects. Interestingly, when it came to the preferred interpretation types, there was a huge significant disparity among them. All 15 respondents rated the museum theatre display over the museum labels and verbal interpretation. This is because they found the museum theatre more engaging, lively and interactive as compared to the label and verbal interpretations which usually appears to be monotonous. This is in tandem with Nikonanou and Venieri (2017) who emphasized that museum theatre programmes significantly enhance visitors' engagement and learning efficacy at heritage sites and museums. Their project on *Voices of the City* in 2012 at the Thessaloniki History Centre in Greece in which 1030 participants encompassing 700 students and 330 adult visitors showed that the museum theatre performance enabled the visitors to become more engaged and involved in history, further learning about the site, assisting them in better understanding the richness of the heritage, and by overcoming the drawbacks of conventional interpretation methods, which are mostly restricted to a unilateral information transmission. This clearly shows that the museum theatre practice is a powerful museum interpretation tool.

### Conclusion

The focus of this study was to explore the practicality of bringing life to the historical narratives of the eight Akan Clan systems which are embedded in the Linguist Staff artefacts using museum theatre at the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum in Ashanti Region. The findings indicate that the museum theatre intervention is not incorporated at the museum as part of its interpretation and educational techniques. It further revealed that museum theatre is an effective tool or technique in interpreting museum objects and artefacts. The staging of the *Linguist Staff* performance helped enliven the artefacts, drew visitors to the historical narratives surrounding the Akan clan system, and aided the visitors' meaning-making of the artefacts comparatively to the curatorial labels and oral interpretive methods at the museum. The study revealed that there are positive connections between museum theatre and visitors' interactivity which leads to improved museum discourse, visitors' engagement and satisfaction.

In spite of the significant role that museum theatre plays in the museum world, the concept is relatively new, understudied and practised in Ghanaian museums. The study therefore recommends that the management of the Prempeh II Jubilee Museum set up a dedicated museum education office to develop high-quality educational programmes such as tours, workshops, school programmes, family events, lectures and classes for museum visitors to improve museum learning, interactivity and visitor satisfaction. The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture and the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board should put in organise a consultative workshop comprising museum stakeholders, educators and per-



forming artists aimed at developing a policy document towards the implementation of museum theatre at heritage sites such as museums and monuments in Ghana. By so doing, it will help the museum theatre intervention gained momentum in Ghana and also offer edutainment events for their sophisticated visitors.

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