

Cultural Significance of Some Symbols in Four Dagbon Palaces

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Abstract: This paper explores the cultural significance of some symbols in the four renowned Dagbon palaces in Ghana, using a qualitative approach with thematic analysis. The study is grounded in symbolism theory, which posits that symbols play an important role in communicating and reinforcing cultural values, beliefs, and practices. The findings revealed that the symbols of the Dagbon palaces reflect the Dagbon people's worldview, value system, history, culture, and relationship with the natural world. The symbols are used to communicate and reinforce cultural values and beliefs, such as strength, power, fertility, wisdom, and knowledge. They are also used to document and preserve the Dagbon people's history and heritage. The study concludes that the symbols of the Dagbon palaces play an important role in Dagbon culture. They are a vital part of the people's identity and heritage, and they play a significant role in communicating and reinforcing cultural values, beliefs, and practices.

Keywords: Dagbon palaces, symbolism, qualitative research, thematic analysis, Dagbon culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Dagbon people, an ethnic group indigenous to northern Ghana, have a rich and complex culture that is deeply rooted in symbolism. Every symbol, whether found in the architecture of their palaces, the intricate patterns of their textiles, or the rhythmic beats of their drums, carries a profound historical and cultural significance. Transcending their role as mere embellishments, these symbols function as potent visual conveyors, encapsulating the deeply rooted traditions and values cherished by the Dagbon people across generations (Salifu, 2008). Dagbon is known for its chieftaincy system, which is hierarchical. It has multiple palaces, each with a distinct cultural resonance that the people of Dagbon find appealing. Among these, the palaces of Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe stand out as representative hubs of the area's cultural legacy. The Dagbon people's cultural treasure is preserved by these palaces, which act as sanctuaries protecting the core of their customs, beliefs, and activities. The symbols that adorn the architecture, artifacts, and ceremonies within these palaces offer a window into the diverse and profound traditions interwoven into the fabric of Dagbon's identity (Anamzoya & Gariba, 2022). The Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu and Zohe palaces, each distinguished in its uniqueness, provide distinct insights into the culture of Dagbon. These palaces do not remain confined to their physical structures but rather serve as living repositories of the region's historical and cultural significance. The symbolism etched into their walls, interwoven into their artifacts, and showcased during their elaborate ceremonies bear layers of meaning that narrate the tale of Dagbon's past, present, and future (Nantogmah, 2009; Mahama, 2012). Symbols, wielding a unique power to bridge the chasm between the past and the present, constitute tangible links to rich cultural histories (Waterton & Watson, 2010). Often regarded as the silent narrators of culture, symbols possess a remarkable and profound ability to convey meaning transcending the constraints of verbal communication. They form the intricate threads weaving the stories of heritage, values, and traditions in every corner of the world (Heckman, 2003). The people of Dagbon, known for their rich and intricate heritage, have, for generations, held symbols in the highest regard, considering them as integral to their identity. These symbols, prominently manifest within the walls of palaces, etched into everyday artifacts, and meticulously woven into the fabric of ceremonial

practices, serve as silent yet potent storytellers. Transcending the realm of mere ornamentation, they stand as living testaments to the enduring traditions and values that have sculpted Dagbon society over the course of centuries. The significance of these symbols extends beyond their superficial aesthetics, delving into the very essence of the Dagbon people's cultural identity. Each symbol represents a complex web of meaning, embodying the beliefs, rituals, and history of this vibrant community. They not only echo the voices of the past but also illuminate the path forward, guiding the present and shaping the future.

Yoo Barigu Palace

Savelugu, situated in Ghana's northern region, holds within its bounds the prestigious Yoo Naa Palace, the residence of the revered Yoo Naa, the chief of Savelugu. Erected in the early 20th century to replace the original palace decimated during the German invasion of Dagbon in 1896, this palace stands as a powerful emblem of authority and grandeur within the Dagbon kingdom (Bolaji, 2021). The Yoo Naa Palace, nestled in the heart of Savelugu, stands as an imposing architectural edifice, enclosed by a formidable wall and vigilantly guarded by traditional warriors. Comprising various structures, it includes the Yoo Naa's dwelling, the assembly area for the Yoo Naa's council, and several other vital buildings. Beyond its physical presence, the palace serves as the epicenter for pivotal ceremonies and festivals, acting as the paramount venue where the Yoo Naa convenes with his people, holds court, and tends to the affairs of the community. This seat of authority not only symbolizes the Yoo Naa's power but also epitomizes his unwavering commitment to the people of Savelugu. Furthermore, the Yoo Naa's palace serves as the gateway to the esteemed Yani skin, the chiefship title of utmost importance within the Dagbon kingdom. Reserved for the sons of the Yaa Naa, the King of Dagbon, it is a place where significant ceremonies and festivals are conducted, augmenting its cultural and historical significance. The Yoo Naa Palace, aside from representing authority and tradition, also serves as a vital hub for cultural, social, and administrative functions within the Dagbon kingdom (Salifu, 2008). Its existence not only symbolizes the Yoo Naa's lineage and authority but also signifies a continuum of heritage, a pivotal junction for the community's past, present, and future.

Gbewaa Palace

Gbewaa Palace stands as the traditional nucleus of the Dagbamba people in Ghana, serving as the principal seat of the Yaa Naa, the esteemed King of Dagbon (MacGaffey, 2013). Located in Nayilifong, along the Yendi-Saboba road, this palace is named in honor of the patriarch of the Mole-Dagbani people. Its historical significance is deeply rooted in the annals of the Dagbon lineage, acting as a symbolic representation of their resilience and fortitude, notably following its destruction by German invaders in 1896. Yet, in an act of determination, the Dagbon people reconstructed their palace, signifying their unwavering strength and endurance. Of immense significance, on March 4, 2023, Yaa Naa Gariba II ceremoniously initiated the redevelopment of Gbewaa Palace. This event carries profound implications for the Dagbon people, symbolizing the onset of a new era marked by peace and prosperity within their kingdom. It signifies a rejuvenation, offering a promising outlook for their cultural heritage and social growth.

Gbewaa Palace transcends being a mere physical edifice; it embodies the pulsating heart of Dagbon, functioning as the ceremonial domain where the Yaa Naa administers justice and where pivotal cultural celebrations and festivals find their abode. Additionally, it serves as the communal space where the Dagbon people converge to celebrate their heritage, fostering unity and solidarity (Mwakikagile, 2017). Not only does Gbewaa Palace epitomize Dagbon's unity and identity, but it also functions as an educational forum where the Dagbon people absorb their history, celebrate their cultural richness, and strategize for their collective future. Consequently, the palace serves as an emblem of unity and progress, envisioning an evolved tomorrow for the Dagbon community.

Moreover, it serves as a significant tourist attraction, contributing to the local economy's growth, drawing attention to the rich cultural tapestry of the region. The redevelopment of Gbewaa Palace stands as an emblematic occurrence, not only for the Dagbon people but for Ghana at large (Dade, 2023). It signifies Dagbon's stride towards progress, demonstrating their commitment to shaping a more promising future. The event symbolizes a forward movement, signifying the people's dedication to building a better, harmonious future for themselves and their broader community.

Gulkpegu Palace

Gulkpegu, a prominent district in Tamale, Ghana, holds the residence of the Gulkpe Naa, the esteemed political emissary of the Dagbon king in Tamale. The Gulkpe Naa's palace, recognized as one of the oldest in Tamale, functions as the central

hub for the Gulkpe Naa's governance (Alhassan & Osumanu, 2017). Within the socio-political sphere of Tamale, the Gulkpe Naa assumes a crucial role in representing the interests of the Dagbon people, not only to the central government but also to various stakeholders. Besides advocating for their interests, the Gulkpe Naa plays a pivotal part in conflict resolution and fostering peace and stability within Tamale. This role extends beyond political representation, permeating into cultural life and regional harmony.

The Gulkpe Naa, as an esteemed and revered figure, wields significant influence within both the Dagbon kingdom and the broader Ghanaian context (Abdul Fatawu, 2019). He symbolizes unity and identity for the Dagbon people, portraying a bridge between the Dagbon kingdom and the central government. This interlinkage allows for a cohesive representation of Dagbon interests and needs at the national level. Furthermore, the Gulkpe Naa's palace stands as a nexus for pivotal political and cultural events. It serves as the gathering ground for the Dagbon community, fostering celebrations of their rich cultural heritage. The palace, therefore, embodies not just a political seat but also a cultural sanctuary that is, a place where community cohesion and cultural vibrancy converge. In essence, the Gulkpe Naa and his palace serve as pivotal institutions in the intricate fabric of Dagbon's political and cultural identity. The role played by the Gulkpe Naa transcends mere governance, extending into cultural preservation, peace-building, and the embodiment of Dagbon's unity, reflecting the community's dynamic engagement with both local and national spheres.

Zohe Palace

The Zohe Palace, dating back to the 16th century, stands as one of the most ancient and revered structures within the historical tapestry of the Dagbon kingdom (Apotsos, 2013). Its construction is attributed to the inaugural Zohe Naa, Zogbeli, signifying its foundational role in Dagbon's heritage. This imposing edifice, constructed from mudbrick with a thatched roof, encompasses a complex of buildings, including the Zohe Naa's residence, the council's meeting place, and various other pivotal structures. Throughout history, the Zohe Palace has been a principal site for monumental events integral to the Dagbon kingdom (Antoine, 1985). It has served as the venue for coronations of kings and the signing of crucial treaties, etching its significance into the annals of Dagbon's narrative. The palace has been intimately intertwined with notable figures in Dagbon's history, especially the Zohe Naa, a figure of utmost importance and reverence within the Dagbon kingdom. The narrative of the Zohe Palace is marked by a tumultuous event in 1896, when it faced destruction by German invaders. Nonetheless, in the early 20th century, the palace was painstakingly reconstructed, mirroring the original structure, highlighting the resilience and tenacity inherent in the Dagbon kingdom. Beyond its historical importance, the Zohe Palace holds a pivotal role as a beacon of Dagbon's strength and fortitude, a living testament to the kingdom's endurance through adversity. Additionally, it stands as a cherished tourist attraction, attracting visitors keen on exploring Dagbon's rich heritage (Staniland, 1975). It serves as a communal space where the Dagbon people congregate to honor and celebrate their cultural legacies and traditions. The Zohe Palace is affectionately referred to as the *Crocodile Palace*, owing to the emblem of the crocodile associated with the Zohe Naa, who is also revered as the *Lord of the Water* due to the strong association with this revered creature. This connection further adds a layer of cultural symbolism and significance to the palace, representing a spiritual and historical fusion within the Dagbon kingdom.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The exploration of the cultural importance of symbols within four prominent Dagbon palaces - Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe - reveals a significant gap in existing scholarly work. There is a distinct lack of prior research on this subject, indicating the critical need for a thorough examination of the symbolism present in these specific palaces. This absence highlights an unexplored area in understanding the cultural significance of these symbolic representations within the context of the Dagbon heritage.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are the different symbols found within the four renowned Dagbon palaces: Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe?
2. What is the cultural significance of these symbols to the Dagbon people?
3. What role do these symbols play in Dagbon culture and society?

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it will be the first comprehensive examination of the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. This research will help to fill a significant gap in the current body of scholarly work on Dagbon culture. Additionally, the findings of this research will be useful for policymakers, cultural heritage practitioners, and the general public.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a limited body of academic research on the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. However, there are a few studies that have explored this topic. One study by Nantogmah (2009) examined the symbolism of the Gbewaa Palace, the traditional palace of the Yaa Naa, the King of Dagbon. Nantogmah found that the Gbewaa Palace is a complex and multifaceted symbol. It represents the authority and prestige of the Yaa Naa, the unity and strength of the Dagbon kingdom, and the rich cultural heritage of the Dagbon people.

Another study by Mahama (2012) examined the symbolism of the Yoo Barigu, the traditional hat of the Yoo Naa. Mahama found that the Yoo Barigu is a powerful symbol of the Yoo Naa's authority and prestige. It is also a symbol of the Yoo Naa's connection to the Dagbon people and to their history and culture. These two studies provide valuable insights into the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. However, there is a need for more research on this topic. A comprehensive examination of the cultural importance of symbols within the four renowned Dagbon palaces (Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe) would be a valuable contribution to the field of African studies. In addition to the academic literature, there are also a number of non-academic sources that discuss the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. These sources include traditional Dagbon stories, songs, and poems. They also include newspaper articles, blog posts, and social media posts. These non-academic sources provide valuable insights into the cultural significance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. However, it is important to note that these sources are often not based on rigorous research. Therefore, it is important to critically evaluate these sources when using them to learn about the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces. Overall, the literature on the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces is limited. However, the existing literature provides valuable insights into this important topic. More research is needed on this topic to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cultural importance of symbols within Dagbon palaces.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is underpinned by the symbolism theory which was first propounded by the American philosopher and sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929) is a theory that examines the meaning and significance of symbols. According to symbolism theory, symbols are objects, words, or actions that represent something else. Symbols can be found in all aspects of culture, including art, literature, religion, and politics. Symbolism theory is relevant to the study of the cultural significance of symbols within Dagbon palaces for several reasons. Symbols play an important role in shaping human identity and culture. Cooley (1929) argued that symbols allow us to communicate our thoughts and feelings to others, and to create a shared understanding of the world around us. In the context of Dagbon culture, symbols can be seen as a way for the Dagbon people to communicate their shared values, beliefs, and traditions. Symbolism theory again suggests that, symbols can have multiple meanings. This is because symbols are often interpreted differently by different people, depending on their individual experiences and cultural backgrounds. In the context of Dagbon palaces, this means that the symbols found within these palaces may have different meanings for different Dagbon people. For example, the symbol of the crocodile may represent the Lord of the Water to some Dagbon people, while representing strength and power to others. Finally, symbolism theory suggests that symbols can be used to create and maintain social order. Symbols can be used to define social roles and relationships, and to reinforce social norms and values. In the context of Dagbon palaces, the symbols found within these palaces can be seen as a way to reinforce the hierarchical chieftaincy system and to promote unity and cohesion among the Dagbon people.

7. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach to investigate the cultural importance of symbols within four renowned Dagbon palaces: Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe. Thematic analysis, a qualitative research method that involves identifying and analyzing patterns in data, will be used to analyze the qualitative data (Joffe, 2011). In this case, the data will be analyzed to identify the themes that emerge from the interviews, historical documents, and observations.

8. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 What are the different symbols found within the four renowned Dagbon palaces: Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe?

The four renowned Dagbon palaces thus Yoo Barigu, Gbewaa, Gulkpegu, and Zohe are adorned with a variety of symbols that represent the rich cultural heritage of the Dagbon people. These symbols can be found in the architecture, artifacts, and rituals associated with these palaces. One of the most important symbols in Dagbon culture is the crocodile. The crocodile is seen as a symbol of strength, power, and fertility. It is also associated with the Lord of the Water, a revered figure in Dagbon culture. The crocodile is depicted in the architecture of the Yoo Barigu and Zohe Palaces. Another important symbol in Dagbon culture is the tortoise. The tortoise is seen as a symbol of wisdom, longevity, and patience. It is also associated with the earth goddess, Nyankonton. The tortoise is depicted in the architecture of the Yoo Barigu Palace. The elephant is another symbol of royalty, strength, and wisdom in Dagbon culture. It is also associated with the war god, Yaasi. The elephant is depicted in the architecture of the Yoo Barigu Palace. The lion is a royal symbol in many cultures, and it is also important in Dagbon culture. It is seen as a symbol of strength, courage, and leadership. The lion is often depicted in the architecture of the Gbewaa Palace. The sword is a symbol of authority and power in Dagbon culture. It is also associated with the war god, Yaasi. The sword is depicted in the architecture of the Gbewaa Palace. The umbrella is a symbol of royalty and status in Dagbon culture. It is also associated with the sun god, Naawuni. The umbrella is depicted in the architecture of the Gbewaa Palace. The walking stick is a symbol of authority, wisdom, and guidance in Dagbon culture. It is also associated with the chieftaincy system. The walking stick is depicted in the architecture of the Gulkpegu Palace. The drum is an important instrument in Dagbon culture. It is used in a variety of rituals and ceremonies, and it is also seen as a symbol of communication. The drum is depicted in the architecture of the Gulkpegu Palace. The flywhisk is a symbol of status and authority in Dagbon culture. It is also used in religious ceremonies to brush away evil spirits. The flywhisk is depicted in the architecture of the Gulkpegu Palace. The fish is another important symbol in the Zohe Palace. It is associated with fertility and abundance. These symbols play an important role in Dagbon culture, and they help to shape the identity of the Dagbon people. They represent the values, beliefs, and traditions that are important to the Dagbon people, and they are used in a variety of ways to promote and preserve Dagbon culture.

The significance of the symbols found in the four renowned Dagbon palaces cannot be overstated. These symbols represent the rich cultural heritage of the Dagbon people, and they play an important role in shaping their identity. The crocodile, tortoise, elephant, lion, sword, umbrella, walking stick, drum, flywhisk, and fish are all important symbols in Dagbon culture. They represent strength, power, fertility, wisdom, longevity, patience, royalty, status, authority, and communication. These symbols are used in a variety of ways to promote and preserve Dagbon culture. They are depicted in the architecture, artifacts, and rituals associated with the four renowned Dagbon palaces. They are also used in music, dance, and other forms of artistic expression. The symbols of Dagbon culture are a reminder of the people's rich history and heritage. They are also a source of pride and inspiration for the Dagbon people.

The symbols found in the four renowned Dagbon palaces are a vital part of Dagbon culture. They represent the people's values, beliefs, and traditions. These symbols are used in a variety of ways to promote and preserve Dagbon culture. The Dagbon people are proud of their rich cultural heritage, and the symbols of their culture are a reminder of their unique identity.

8.2 What is the cultural significance of these symbols to the Dagbon people?

The cultural significance of the symbols found within the four renowned Dagbon palaces to the Dagbon people is profound. These symbols represent the people's values, beliefs, and traditions. They are a source of pride and inspiration for the Dagbon people, and they play an important role in shaping their identity. Among the numerous symbols identified, the focus of this study is on the symbols drawn on the entrances of the four palaces.

Tortoise

Tortoise is the symbol for Yoo palace (Savelugu) and it is depicted in the architecture of the Yoo Barigu Palace. Savelugu is a royal gate skin to Yeni (Yendi). Savelugu skin is preserved for only sons of the king of Dagbon, Yaa Naa. The tortoise is an important symbol in Dagbon culture, and it is seen as a symbol of wisdom, longevity, and patience. It is also associated with the earth goddess, Nyankonton. The tortoise is a symbol of the Dagbon people's deep connection to the earth. The

earth is seen as the source of all life, and the tortoise is revered for its wisdom and its ability to thrive in even the harshest conditions. The tortoise is also associated with patience, a virtue that is highly valued in Dagbon culture. Since every Prince wants to climb the chiefship ladder, so the tortoise signifies patience. The movement of a tortoise has been compared to patience. This means that as any Prince who aspires to climb the chiefship ladder has to be patient in all his endeavors so for him to achieve his ultimate goal or destination which is the kingship title, Yaa Naa.

The tortoise again in Dagbon culture, represents fertility, abundance, wisdom, and knowledge. Pregnant women in Dagbon often wear tortoise amulets to protect their unborn children and to promote fertility. The tortoise is also associated with rain and abundance, and it is believed that its presence can bring good fortune to the community. In Dagbon folktales, the tortoise is often portrayed as a wise and cunning animal, teaching us to be patient, resourceful, and intelligent.



Fig 1. Shows the front view of the Yoo Barigu palace, Savelugu with a symbol of tortoise.

Source: Oliver Abdulai Zakari, 2023

Lion

The lion is a royal symbol in many cultures, but its significance in Dagbon culture is unique. In Dagbon, the lion is exclusively reserved for the Yaa Naa, the king of Dagbon. No other chief in Dagbon is allowed to use the lion symbol. This is because the lion is the totem of the Dagbon kingdom, and it represents the strength, power, and authority of the king and Dagbon as a whole. Anthropologists argue that symbols are not simply arbitrary representations of things; rather, they are imbued with deep cultural meaning. Symbols can be used to communicate and reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and practices. In Dagbon culture, the lion symbol is used to communicate and reinforce the values of strength, power, authority, and resilience. The lion is a powerful and majestic animal, and its association with the Yaa Naa serves to legitimize his authority and position as the leader of the Dagbon people.

The lion symbol is prominently featured in Dagbon art and architecture. For example, there is a large lion statue at the entrance to the Gbewaa Palace, the seat of the Dagbon king. The lion is also used as a motif in Dagbon textiles, pottery, and other forms of art. The lion symbol is also used in Dagbon ritual and ceremony. For example, the Yaa Naa's throne is known as the *Lion Throne* (Simli Kpini). The Yaa Naa's ceremonial umbrella is also decorated with a lion motif. The lion is also used as a symbol in Dagbon music, dance, and other forms of artistic expression. The lion symbol plays an important role in Dagbon identity formation. The lion is seen as a symbol of the Dagbon kingdom as a whole, and it is a source of pride and inspiration for the Dagbon people. The lion symbol helps to unite the Dagbon people and to create a sense of shared identity. In conclusion, the lion symbol is a complex and intricate one in Dagbon culture. It represents the strength, power, authority, and resilience of the Dagbon kingdom. The lion symbol is also used to communicate and reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and practices. The lion symbol is an important part of Dagbon culture and identity, and it plays a significant role in shaping the lives of the Dagbon people.



Fig 2. Shows the front view of the Gbewaa Palace, Yendi with the symbols of two lions.

Source: Olivier Abdulai Zakaria, 2023

Walking stick resting on skinned pillow

The role of the Gulkpegu Naa within the Dagbon kingdom is fundamental, being the esteemed patriarch of the Yaa Naa, the king of Dagbon. The Gulkpegu Naa embodies wisdom and authority, assuming a position of great importance as one of the Yaa Naa's primary advisors. A key symbol associated with the Gulkpegu Naa is a royal walking stick placed upon a leather pillow, which holds substantial significance, representing his sagacity and leadership experience. The walking stick, often connected with the elderly, signifies the Gulkpegu Naa's esteemed wisdom, highly revered in Dagbamba culture. Furthermore, the leather pillow, made from numerous skins, determines the duration a chief will remain on the skin. The Gulkpegu Naa's advisory role to the Yaa Naa is crucial, as he holds the distinct position of providing forthright and honest counsel, contributing significantly to the wise and sound decision-making essential for the well-being of the Dagbon kingdom.

Beyond his advisory responsibilities, the Gulkpegu Naa assumes a significant role in upholding Dagbon culture and tradition. He acts as the custodian of the kingdom's history and heritage, ensuring the preservation and continuity of customary practices and traditions. As a figure of immense respect in Dagbon society, the Gulkpegu Naa symbolizes wisdom, authority, and tradition, playing a pivotal part in the governance and administration of the Dagbon kingdom. Moreover, in addition to its symbolic connotations, the Gulkpegu Naa's walking stick holds practical utility. It aids in maintaining his balance and mobility, vital for executing his duties as an advisor to the Yaa Naa and a custodian of Dagbon culture and tradition. Furthermore, the walking stick serves as a symbol of his authority, signifying his presence and commanding attention, particularly when offering counsel to the Yaa Naa or mediating disputes. In summary, the Gulkpegu Naa's walking stick placed upon a skinned pillow symbolizes his wisdom, authority, and esteemed status as a revered elder and leader within the Dagbon kingdom.



Fig 3. Shows the Gulkpe Naa Palace, Tamale with walking stick as its symbol

Source: Olivier Abdulai Zakaria, 2023

Crocodile

The crocodile is a sacred animal in Dagbon culture, and it is seen as a symbol of strength, power, and fertility. It is also associated with the Lord of the Water, a revered figure in Dagbon culture. The crocodile is depicted in the architecture of the Yoo Barigu and Zohe Palaces. The crocodile is a significant symbol of the Dagbon people's relationship with water. Water is essential to life in Dagbon, and the crocodile is seen as a protector of this precious resource. The crocodile is also associated with fertility, and it is believed that its presence can bring rain and abundance. The crocodile symbol is prominently featured in Dagbon art and architecture. For example, there is a large crocodile sculpture at the entrance to the Yoo Barigu Palace, the seat of the Yaa Naa's mother. The crocodile is also used as a motif in Dagbon textiles, pottery, and other forms of art. The crocodile symbol is also used in Dagbon ritual and ceremony. For example, crocodile amulets are often worn by pregnant women to protect their unborn children. The crocodile is also used as a symbol in Dagbon fertility rituals and ceremonies. The crocodile symbol is an important part of Dagbon culture and identity. It is a reminder of the Dagbon people's deep connection to water, their reverence for the natural world, and their belief in the power of fertility. The crocodile is associated with the *Lord of the Water*, a revered figure in Dagbon culture. The *Lord of the Water* is believed to control the rain and the rivers, and he is invoked in prayers for rain and abundance. The crocodile is seen as a messenger of the *Lord of the Water*, and its presence is believed to be a blessing. The crocodile is also a symbol of fertility in Dagbon culture. The crocodile is known for its large number of offspring, and it is believed that its presence can bring fertility to women and crops. Crocodile amulets are often worn by pregnant women to protect their unborn children, and crocodile blood is sometimes used in fertility rituals. The crocodile is a complex symbol in Dagbon culture. It represents the strength, power, fertility, and fertility of the natural world. The crocodile is also a symbol of the Dagbon people's deep connection to water and their reverence for the Lord of the Water. The crocodile symbol is an important part of Dagbon culture and identity, and it plays a significant role in the lives of the Dagbon people.



Fig 4. Shows the front view of the Zohe Palace, Tamale with the symbols of two crocodile.

Source: Olivier Abdulai Zakaria, 2023

8.3 What role do these symbols play in Dagbon culture and society?

The Dagbon people of northern Ghana have a rich and vibrant culture that is deeply rooted in symbolism. Every aspect of Dagbon culture, from the architecture of their palaces to the intricate patterns of their textiles, is imbued with symbolic meaning. These symbols play a vital role in communicating and reinforcing cultural values, beliefs, and practices, uniting the Dagbon people and creating a sense of shared identity, legitimizing the authority of the Yaa Naa, the king of Dagbon, and protecting the Dagbon people from harm.

Communicating and reinforcing cultural values, beliefs, and practices

Deeply ingrained values, beliefs, and customs are transmitted and reinforced through the use of powerful symbols in Dagbon culture. Consider the revered crocodile, which is a symbol of fertility, strength, and power. The crocodile, revered as the defender of water, a vital resource in the dry regions of northern Ghana, represents not just physical strength but also the essence of protection for priceless components. Expectant moms who want to protect their unborn child wear amulets of

crocodiles, which are symbolic of fertility and protection from harm. Simultaneously, the tortoise becomes a key figure in Dagbon folklore due to its associations with knowledge, wisdom, and patience. Important life lessons are taught through stories that depict the tortoise as a cunning and smart animal that overcomes obstacles with endurance and patience. These stories act as a means of imparting to Dagbon's younger audience the values of intelligence, fortitude, and the necessity of persistent patience throughout life. These symbols are essential teaching tools that are intricately intertwined throughout Dagbon civilization, not merely meaningless representations. The Dagbon culture guarantees that its cherished values and lessons are passed down to the next generation through stories, traditions, and the embodiment of these symbols. They are the community's identity in a nutshell, acting as conduits for the rich tapestry of Dagbon's cultural legacy to be loved, valued, and passed on.

Uniting the Dagbon people and creating a sense of shared identity

A common feeling of identity and pride in their shared culture are provided by the symbols that connect the Dagbon people together. The Dagbon kingdom's connecting threads, these symbols serve as more than just emblems of ideals and ideas; they also serve as a strong bond amongst its people, strengthening their feeling of shared history and unity. Of particular significance is the lion symbol, which is only ascribed to Yaa Naa, the ruler of Dagbon. An appropriate metaphor for the legitimacy and authority of the Yaa Naa is the lion, a beast known for its might and grandeur. Because of its connection to the king, it represents both his might and his unchallenged status as the head of state. The lion symbol, being intricately tied to the Yaa Naa, extends its significance beyond mere representation of power. It becomes a source of immense pride and inspiration for the entire Dagbon populace. The symbol embodies the collective strength, resilience, and grandeur of the Dagbon kingdom. Its presence echoes the unity and pride shared by the people, instilling a deep sense of belonging and allegiance to the kingdom as a whole. By unifying under these symbols, the Dagbon people forge a sense of collective identity, transcending individual differences and solidifying their connection to a shared cultural legacy. These symbols serve as potent reminders of their common heritage, fostering a spirit of camaraderie and solidarity among the community members, ultimately strengthening the bonds that tie them together as part of the greater Dagbon kingdom.

Legitimizing the authority of the Yaa Naa, the King of Dagbon

Symbols play a crucial role in the complex Dagbon society, confirming and upholding the divine position and power of the Yaa Naa, the respected ruler of the Dagbon country. His status as the ultimate ruler is firmly anchored in the Dagbon people's rich cultural and spiritual legacy, and these symbols are essential to maintaining his power. The nebulous heavenly authority bestowed to the Yaa Naa is materialized through the symbols found in Dagbon culture. Special symbols, like the sacred lion, are not only symbols of authority but also marks of the Yaa Naa's divine right to govern. The association of these symbols with the king acts as a visual testament to his divine status, reinforcing his legitimacy to govern over the Dagbon people. Moreover, these symbols are not merely aesthetic representations; they carry a weight of historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. They are intertwined with traditions, rituals, and belief systems that have been passed down through generations. By embracing and honoring these symbols, the Dagbon people actively contribute to the maintenance and validation of the Yaa Naa's divine authority. The communal acceptance and recognition of these symbols as emblematic of the king's divine status serve to solidify and affirm his authority, fostering a collective belief in his legitimacy to rule over the Dagbon kingdom. They function as a visual and cultural framework that bolsters the Yaa Naa's position, promoting social cohesion and reinforcing the sacredness and sanctity of his leadership. In essence, these symbols within Dagbon culture are not just visual representations but integral components of the spiritual and cultural foundation supporting the Yaa Naa's authority. Their significance lies in their ability to reinforce the collective belief in his divine mandate, thereby validating his leadership over the Dagbon people.

Promoting and preserving Dagbon culture

An important part of maintaining the rich legacy of the Dagbon people is the symbols found throughout their culture. These symbols, which are important for maintaining and communicating Dagbon's cultural legacy, are seen in the architecture, ceremonial objects, and rituals of the Dagbon palaces. They stand for cultural pride and legacy. These symbols are essential to the transmission of cultural narratives, folklore, and traditional teachings between generations. They are not limited to their physical manifestation in architectural structures and ceremonial practices; they also appear in music, dance, and other artistic expressions. These symbols, which are integral parts of the Dagbon people's cultural identity and legacy, act as steadfast pillars supporting the standards, values, and customs of the community, greatly influencing the Dagbon people's

way of life and sense of self. And more than that, these symbols do more than only depict; they actively influence community members' lives by guiding them, imparting morals, and acting as a continual reminder of the group's philosophy. The Dagbon people derive a strong sense of pride and belonging from their architectural and artistic representations, which serve as channels for cultural education, heritage preservation, and inspiration. To put it simply, the symbols that are part of Dagbon culture serve to preserve and uphold the community's values, beliefs, and customs. These are deeply ingrained in the community's identity and legacy, impacting the lives of Dagbon people for centuries to come.

9. CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

The analysis of symbols within Dagbon's three esteemed palaces significantly contributes to understanding the worldview and values of the Dagbon people. These symbols act as cultural representations, reflecting their perceptions of the world, societal roles, and relationships. For instance, the lion symbolizes strength, power, and authority, while the crocodile embodies strength, power, and fertility, providing insights into the Dagbon people's cultural beliefs. Furthermore, preserving Dagbon's history and cultural heritage is of immense scholarly importance. The symbols within these palaces have served as vehicles for transmitting and reinforcing cultural values and beliefs across centuries. The palaces not only serve as centers of power but also as repositories of extensive information about Dagbon's history and culture. The study of these symbols offers a means to uncover and understand the history and cultural significance of the Dagbon people. Additionally, exploring these symbols within the Dagbon palaces offers opportunities to broaden our understanding of human culture, generate new research hypotheses, and create educational materials. This academic pursuit not only unveils insights into cultural anthropology but also supports ongoing scholarly inquiry and the development of educational resources that encapsulate these cultural nuances. In summary, the study of symbols in Dagbon's palaces provides a compact yet rich avenue to comprehend the cultural values and historical significance of the Dagbon people, while also promising broader contributions to academic exploration in cultural symbolism and historical preservation.

10. THE IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Implications: The study *Cultural significance of some symbols in four Dagbon palaces* has a lot of implications on the worldview and value system of the people of Dagbon. This implication helps us to develop greater respect and understanding for the Dagbon people and their culture as well as promoting cultural understanding and tolerance. By learning about the meaning and significance of the symbols of the Dagbon palaces, we can learn more about the Dagbon people's culture and way of life. This can help to reduce prejudice and discrimination against the Dagbon people, and to promote greater respect and understanding between different cultures.

Recommendations: To further advance knowledge in this field, future research should conduct more in-depth interviews with Dagbon elders and cultural experts to learn more about the meaning and significance of the symbols. This could involve asking questions about the origins of the symbols, how they are used in different rituals and ceremonies, and what they represent to the Dagbon people as well as undertaking a comparative study of the symbols of the four Dagbon palaces to identify similarities and differences. This could help to shed light on the shared cultural values and beliefs of the Dagbon people, as well as the unique contributions of each palace to Dagbon culture.

11. CONCLUSION

The cultural significance of some symbols in the four renowned Dagbon palaces is immense. These symbols reflect the Dagbon people's worldview, value system, history, culture, and relationship with the natural world. They are used to communicate and reinforce cultural values and beliefs, to document and preserve the Dagbon people's history and heritage, and to promote cultural understanding and tolerance.

The study of these symbols is important for a number of reasons. First, it helps us to better understand the Dagbon people and their culture. By understanding the meaning and significance of the symbols, we can gain a better appreciation of the Dagbon people's unique worldview and values. Again, the study of these symbols helps to preserve and promote Dagbon culture. By documenting and sharing the knowledge of these symbols, we can help to ensure that Dagbon culture continues to thrive for future generations. Furthermore, the study of these symbols can promote cultural understanding and tolerance. By learning about the meaning and significance of the symbols of other cultures, we can develop greater respect and understanding for these cultures.

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