

Documentation of Some Identified Functions and Contexts of Traditional Pottery in Northern Ghana

Iddrisu Yussif^{1*}, Kafui Kwesi Agyena² and Vesta E. Adu-Gyamfi²

¹*Department of Industrial Art, School of Applied Arts, Tamale Technical University, P.O.Box 3E/R, Tamale, Ghana.*

²*Department of Integrated Rural Art and Industry, College of Art and Built Environment, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University Post Office, Private Mail Bag, Kumasi, Ghana.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author IY designed the study, performed the collection of data and data analyses, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors KKA and VEAG managed the analyses of the study. Authors IY, KKA and VEAG managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The intent of this research was to observe and document some identified traditional pottery functions and contexts in some parts of northern Ghana.

Study Design: Due to the peculiar nature of the research, the qualitative research methods were adopted for the study with the aiming of assembly necessary details requisite for a good description of the functions and contexts of the pottery.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of the study was to make a field trip to seven selected traditional potting centre in northern Ghana, to collect data in relation to context and functions of the potteries. These centres include Zubulga, Palnaba, Tuggo, Sirigu, Naakpili, Lugshigu and Kukuuo.

Methodology: Out of a total of 41 districts (that is, 20 in the northern region, 11 in the upper west region and 10 in the upper east region), seven were selected as the representative population. The criteria for inclusion were based on: the geographical location and how it affects the decorative

*Corresponding author: E-mail: yidrisu@tatu.edu.gh;

techniques of the traditional pottery; the variety in the use of tools, materials and methods and availability of clay as the main material in the area. This research was designed to identify and document the traditional pottery functions and contexts of the pots. The objectives therefore were: to observe, comparatively analyze and record some purposively selected traditional pottery functions and contexts in some parts of northern Ghana. The descriptive approach of the qualitative research methodology was employed. Interview and observational were used as the data collection methods. They were used to ascertain data that were analyzed to conclude on the traditional pottery functions and contexts by the potters in the selected areas of northern Ghana.

Results: The data analyzes indicated that the potters make interesting patterns of decorative techniques: Specifically, nine functions and contexts were identified and documented by the researchers at the time of their studies. Studies made by the researchers clearly shows that traditional pottery found in northern Ghana are generally produced based on domestic functions, religious functions, and functions related to rites of passage. On the flip side of the coin, contexts of traditional pottery found at potting centres in northern Ghana included the courtyards, bedrooms, bathrooms, graveyards and the kitchens of their owners.

Conclusion: Evidently, it can be concluded that, since not all forty-one districts pottery centres were covered, some of the traditional pottery functions and contexts in northern Ghana has been left undocumented. It is therefore recommended that the study should continue in the rest of the areas.

Keywords: Documentation; traditional pottery; functions; contexts; Northern Ghana.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to observe and document traditional pottery functions and contexts in selected parts of northern Ghana. The study in this respect visited seven selected traditional potting centre in northern Ghana, to collect data in relation to context and functions of the potteries. These centres include Zbulga, Palnaba, Tuggo, Sirigu, Naakpili, Lugshigu and Kukuuo.

Not only has clay been shaped by human hands for thousands of years, but the objects created by those hands also have shaped the daily lives of the people who used them. In addition to objects crafted to fulfil utilitarian needs, artists have formed clay into pots that communicated each era's deepest beliefs, its strongest communal emotions, aesthetic concerns, and most pressing spiritual aspirations in some parts of Ghana and the world at large [1].

In basic Functionalist terms, if an item exists in a context it must have a reason for existing and hence it must serve some kind of function [2]. Prelude efforts made by researchers to define the functions and contexts of traditional pottery often involve quite a lot of concepts that need a widespread rang of explanation [3]. Since every traditional pottery produced has its moment in history – a time when it has existing context and function; and a time when the tide of social activities in their context and function flows in its favour [4].

[5] Made it clear that "the literature on traditional pottery shows a possible method of portraying and documenting the functions and contexts sufficiently, but it is neither straight to the point nor workable enough for a successful description of their functions and contexts. This is because when a traditional pot is not carefully used in time and properly at its defined context their functions disappear". But these are things that the researchers examined, and for which should always seek and find direct and indirect evidence as well as truth. Commonly speaking, "Context and function (with reference to traditional pottery in Ghana) are everything. They shape the meaning of all traditional pottery generally. "Without context, traditional pottery can't function effectively [6]. When traditional pottery is produced and delivered in one particular context but received in another or different context it likely leads to malfunction" [7,5,8].

What then are the word meanings of context and function? The context of a work of art refers to the cultural constraints and expectations that surrounded and influenced the artist's creation [9]. Quite apart from this definition, [1] made it clear that; contexts of traditional pottery usually include religious beliefs of both the artist and the larger community. the political events of the time and the artist's view of those events, the work of contemporary artists, the cultural values and conflicting perspectives of the end users.

On the other side, the function can be defined as the aim of a product and the way it operates [10].

"The function of a product is what you can do with it and what you achieve from it e.g. storing water is the function of a traditional water cooler" [10]. [7] Also mention that "to achieve a function, a product needs to be used in a prescribed way at a given geographical area".

Conclusions drawn from the above definitions indicate that traditional pottery context and function may be separate in time, but they are often equally important to the artifact. The fact is that within milliseconds and before viewers and end users has had a chance to even think about the decorative aspect of a traditional pot; already its context and function sets an atmosphere for everything that follows [11]. Due to poor imprecise documentation regarding these contexts and function, the research sort to identify and document some of the functions and contexts of existing traditional pottery in Northern Ghana.

2. CONCEPTS AND METHODS

2.1 Concept

This paper aims at identification of some traditional pottery functions and contexts in northern Ghana. This is to create worldwide awareness of the functions and contexts of pottery in northern Ghana. In addition, the study was done to contribute to the constructive documentation of these existing traditional pottery functions and contexts in northern Ghana.

2.2 Methods

Due to the nature of this research, the qualitative research design was adopted by personal observation. The researchers also made an analysis of what was found, an analysis based on cognitive and comparative approach. The research occurred in the natural settings (that is, places where the traditional potteries are made). The research was consequently, therefore, descriptive in nature. With reference to [12], it was clear to the researchers that this research was on participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives with traditional pottery. The attempt was therefore to comprehend not one, but many realities. The researchers were particularly interested in understanding how the traditional potteries in northern Ghana are using in a defined location. To underpin this study, library research constituted quite an important part of

the study. Several libraries were visited a couple of times in the pursuit of relevant information to the research. These libraries include the Main Library, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology at Kumasi, Reference Library at the Department of General Art Studies KNUST in Kumasi, the main Library at Tamale Technical University in Tamale and finally Tamale Regional Library.

All through these research visits, great efforts were made to collect the secondary data even though not much was acquired from literary sources such as books, magazines, journals, thesis and brochures. In sum, about hundred (100) articles from the websites, about seventy (70) books, five (5) Journals, magazines, and brochures were read. However, only a few of these documents spoke directly on traditional pottery (functions and contexts) and this information though scanty, were reviewed to guide the study.

The target populations were some traditional pottery, pottery centres and potters in the three northern regions of Ghana. Out of a total of 41 districts (that is, 20 in the northern region, 11 in the upper west region and 10 in the upper east region), seven were selected as the representative population. The criteria for inclusion was based on: the geographical location and how it affects the functions and contexts of traditional pottery; the variety in the use of tools, materials and methods; availability of clay as the main material in the area; nature of domestic activities women particularly engage in; religious practices influencing the functions and contexts of pots; and the variety in the philosophy and culture of the selected groups.

[13] Stated that in a study like this, "a sample consists of the cases (units or elements) that will be examined and are selected from a defined research population". In this research work, the samples are carefully selected according to the needs of the study, commonly referred to as 'purposive sampling' or 'purposeful selection'. "The cases are specifically selected because they can teach the researchers a lot about the issues that are of importance to the research" [13, 14]. In selecting which case to study, an assortment of potentialities for purposeful sampling was obtainable. The researchers preferred in selecting cases/samples that show different perspectives on the research work. This is referred to as "purposeful maximal sampling" [12].

Observation and interview were used as methods for the data collection process. Primary data were collected through the use of direct observation and a face-face interview. In doing this, all the selected traditional pottery centres in the three northern regions of Ghana were contacted. Traditional potters and pottery from different levels of the pottery centres were directly observed and interviewed. The researchers chose to use direct observation and face to face interview as their primary source of data collection because they provided a resourceful way of recording data from a huge sample, and was also quite simple to use [15]. Secondary sources of data related to encyclopedias, catalogues, magazines, textbooks, journals, artifacts, pictures, videos, websites, articles and existing data.

The topic and method of the study were explained to the traditional potters when they were first approached. No specific kind of information was mentioned as being of particular importance for the study, nor was any information about the study concealed from them. They were assured that the study required them to spend very little extra time, although any additional time or information that they might be willing to volunteer would be more than welcome [16,14].

The data were collected by observation and interview with no attempt to control or influence the potters' processes. The traditional pots were observed, one by one. An average of ten to twenty-five kinds of traditional pottery was observed at each individual traditional potting centre visited. In this respect, potters were asked to describe some of the philosophies behind some traditional pottery functions and contexts. In many instances, potters and end users of traditional pottery were asked why they had chosen a certain pottery for a particular defined context. The data was then triangulated with the situation in their homes and market sites. The resulting information from the data analysis was tabulated for easy accessibility and comprehension.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment contains the various studies made by the researchers on the oblivious traditional pottery functions and contexts in the northern part of Ghana. Clearly speaking, before the researchers could determine the functions and contexts of the traditional pottery, the concentration of the study was entirely based on

their local names. This is simply because; the local name of a traditional pot perfectly defines its functions and context within the locality. The table below is a setup of the functions and contexts of the indigenous pottery identified by the researchers. Generally, the table is divided into three columns; that is, the local name/location of the pot, its function and lastly its context.

Studies made at the selected traditional potting centres show that pottery heavily used for domestic purposes and rituals. In addition, some potteries found at Kukuo were used for specific agricultural purposes (bee keeping). In a justified statement, the functions of traditional pottery found at the selected pottery centres can be put into three classes. These include domestic purposes, rituals purposes and agricultural purposes.

Conclusive evidence shows that the courtyard, bedroom, and the kitchen were the major contexts of some traditional pottery at the selected potting centres. Interestingly, the graveyard was also a context of some traditional pottery located at, Zbulga, and Palnaba. Finally, the hencoop was also another context design for some traditional pottery at Zbulga potting centre. Generally speaking, six contexts of some indigenous pottery were found at the selected potting centres in the three northern regions of Ghana. These included for use: in courtyards, bedrooms, at graveyards, kitchens, on trees and in hencoops.




The study made by the researchers show that the demand for traditional pottery is declining to lead to the entombment of some functions and contexts of traditional pottery in northern Ghana. The reason is that people that live in both rural and urban areas turn to demand for our modern day domestic utilitarian plastic and metal products. Even though, all efforts are being made by the traditional potters to prolong the existence of some functions and contexts of our pottery; advance science and technology are not giving them the survival breath.

In reality, some of our traditional pottery at the three northern regions of Ghana when documented for further studies can also bring to light a modern way of using them heavily as compared to the utilitarian plastic and metal products. This will give it a brighter chance to rub equal shoulders with other modern masterpieces that have enjoyed longer fame and patronage in our own local markets. This documentation will

also provide spin-offs and create backward and forward linkages between the traditional and the contemporary utilitarian industry. Finally, since the literature on traditional pottery as an industry and a course of study is very scanty in Ghana,

this project report being an embodiment of knowledge will serve as a vital reference material for students, researchers, teachers, potters, government and people who are interested in northern Ghanaian pottery in general.

Table 1. Studies on some traditional pottery functions and contexts in northern Ghana

Local Name/ Location	Function	Context
	<p>It is produced purposely for feeding poultry with water.</p>	<p>It is located in the hencoop or within the courtyard of the rightful owner.</p>
<p>Plate 1: Nosel (poultry water trough) Location: Zubulga (Pusiga District) <i>(Source: Field photograph, May 5, 2016)</i></p>	<hr/>	
	<p>For the purpose of containing their clothing and other valuable belongings.</p>	<p>Located in the bedroom of the rightful owners.</p>
<p>Plate 2: Kpanjuadugri (chest of drawers) Location: Lugshigu (Kumbungu District) <i>(Source: Field photograph, June 11, 2014)</i></p>	<hr/>	
	<p>Purposely it is produced for marking graves by burying it half way in the grave.</p>	<p>It can be located in the graveyard.</p>
<p>Plate 3: YaugSiong (grave making pot) Location: Palnaba (Pusiga District) <i>(Source: Field photograph, August 7, 2014)</i></p>	<hr/>	



It is generally used for the cooking of all kinds of indigenous food and also for the boiling of herbs

Located in the kitchen or the courtyard of its rightful owner.

Plate 4. Laaleng (cooking pot)

Location: Tuggo (Lawra District)

(Source: Field photograph, March19, 2014)



The first pot from the top is called *Pilico*, *lamulgah* (red pot) refers to the second two and the bottom pot is called *kalinga*. These are generally arranged together to serve the purpose of preserving food in its raw form ranging from cereals to spices. Inclusively are; fish, pepper, okro, maize, dry meat, etc.

Basically, It is located in some rooms of elderly women within Sirigu community and beyond.

Plate 5: A set of storage system

Location: Sirigu(Kasina/Nankana West District)

(Source: Field photograph, January 24, 2016)



Plate 6: Danveak (hearth pots)

Location: Zubulga (Pusiga District)

(Source: Field photograph, May 5, 2016)

These are pots used to create the hearth at the fireplace/kitchen. It is usually done to uplift the cooking pot away from the firewood at a reasonable distance for an easy spread of fire.

Basically, it is located in the kitchen or the courtyard of its rightful owner.



Plate 7: Damtuak/somtuak (pito filter pots)

Location: Zubulga (Pusiga District)

(Source: Field photograph, May 5, 2016)

Generally, it is used for filtering pito (local wine) from which impurities have been removed.

It is usually located in the kitchen or the courtyard of its rightful owner.



Plate 8: Siong (water reservoir)
Location: Tuggo (Lawra District)

(Source: Field photograph, March 19, 2014)

Basically, used for household water storage at our indigenous homes.

Located in the kitchen or the courtyard of its rightful owner.



Plate 9: Shiyugu (beehive)
Location: Kukuvo (Tamale Metropolitan)

(Source: Field photograph, April 10, 2017)

Purposely produced for the housing of a colony of bees.

It is usually found hanging on trees.



Plate 10: Lijaabul (the fetish pot)
Location: Naakpili (Saboba District)

(Source: Field photograph, May 23, 2016)

For the purpose of containing the spirit of their ancestors in the form of "pito".

It is located in the bedroom of a priest or at the shrine.



Plate 11. LubusahkPELLI (washbasin)
Location: Naakpili (Saboba District)

(Source: Field photograph, May 23, 2016)

It is generally used in containing water purposely for bathing and washing clothing.

Located in the bathroom of its rightful owner.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Evidently, it can be concluded that some functions and contexts of traditional pottery in northern Ghana have been documented for further studies. Generally, the research made show that some traditional potteries found in northern Ghana has no specific contexts and functions. Basically, the function and context of some pots are dictated by their end users. But specifically, the researcher was able to discover some functions and contexts of the traditional pottery which were put into some groups. On the first hand, the researcher classified the functions into five sections. These included: domestic purposes, religious purposes, agricultural purposes, rites of passage purposes and traditional herbal medicinal purposes. On the other hand, eight groups of contexts were also discovered at the time of the studies made by the researcher. These included: courtyards, bedrooms, bathrooms, graveyards, kitchens, trees, shrines, and hencoops.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made by the researchers show that some associated functions and contexts of traditional pottery in northern Ghana have been also grown into extinction (due to the higher demand of domestic metallic and plastic utilitarian goods). It is therefore recommended that research should be done on these potteries in other to understand and document their functions and contexts further studies.

Even though studies have been made on the identification and documentation of the decorative techniques in some traditional potting centres in northern Ghana, the researchers recommend that this type of study should be conducted in the remaining thirty-seven potting centres in northern Ghana.

The researchers recommended that studies should also be done on the documentation of the forming and firing techniques of traditional pottery in northern Ghana.

Finally, the researcher recommends that studies should be done on the influence of African aesthetics on traditional pottery in northern Ghana.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before interviews and observations

were made. They were assured of secrecy and were told that any information given was strictly for academic purpose. Assurance of confidentiality was also given to respondents in order to encourage participation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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