

Symbols of Communication: The Case of Àdìṅkrá and Other Symbols of Akan

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Abstract

The Akan people of Ghana have a number of coined symbols that express various forms of information based on socio-cultural knowledge. These symbols of expression are collectively called àdìṅkrá. There are related symbols of oral orientation that seem to play the same role as àdìṅkrá. In this paper, we explore the àdìṅkrá symbols and the related ones, the individual messages they encode and their significance in the Akan society. It is explained that most of these symbols are inspired on creation and man-made objects. Some others are also proverb-based. The àdìṅkrá symbols in particular constitute a medium of objective and deep-seated socio-cultural knowledge of the Akan people. We contend that, like words and actions, the symbols represent and send various distinctive messages that are indisputably accepted by people who know them. The use of àdìṅkrá and the related symbols in modern textiles, language and literature are also discussed.

Keywords: Adinkra, Akan, Communication, Culture, Symbols of expression.

Introduction

A symbol could be defined as a creation that represents a message, a thought, proverb etc. When a set of symbols is attributed to a particular group of people belonging to a particular culture, these symbols become a window to the understanding of aspects of their culture. Thus, symbols express belief, practices, values, etc. One of such sets of symbols (of expression) is àdìṅkrá.¹ Àdìṅkrá symbols, a number of which are presented in section 4 along with their meaning and the message they seek to communicate, are basically archetypal and metaphorically coined patterns of the Akan people of Ghana, particularly the Asante people. The referent term, àdìṅkrá, which means 'bidding farewell/goodbye' in Akan, is composed of two words; *dì* 'to eat' or 'to discuss' and *ṅkrá* 'message'. From the literal meanings of the individual words making àdìṅkrá, it is important to note that each of the symbols involves recognition and acknowledgment of specific message. That is, the purpose of àdìṅkrá is to send particular messages across and so it is important that each message is understood by target recipient(s).

From the meaning of àdìṅkrá, one could immediately reason that the messages that the àdìṅkrá symbols encode relate to advise or information that is given to someone who is about to embark on a certain feat (or passage) of life; for instance, marriage, traveling, adulthood, etc. In other words, we bid farewell in pursuits that involve a change of state or environment.

Indeed, symbols are not unique to the Akan people. Various communities with a common culture or a sort of shared identity (code of practice) could have a set of symbols of expression, the use of each of which invokes the sending of a particular message (e.g., Frutiger, 1991). There are even those we can classify as universals; i.e., their representations have the same or similar connotations across cultures. For instance, the dove is seen as a representation of blessing and/or good fortune while the owl is seen to indicate bad omen across many cultures. Presently, some symbols of expressions are considered as having a universal appeal; their meaning or what they stand for seem to have a universal

¹ The diacritics on the word àdìṅkrá are tone marks, which are given for a better pronunciation of the word and other referent terms and expressions of the various àdìṅkrá symbols (see section 4). Akan is a two-tone language; i.e., high tone (H) and low tone (L). The H and L tones are indicated by an acute (e.g., dá) and the grave (e.g., dà) respectively. One should note however that tones are not normally represented in the orthography of Akan.

recognition and so they are appropriately used as such. As shown in (1), the following are a few of these symbols.

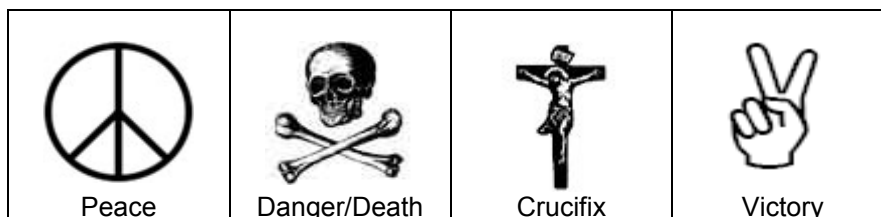


Figure 1: Symbols

The origin of Àdìṅkrá

It has been suggested that the *àdìṅkrá* symbols were developed by the Asante people of Ghana, West Africa, and can be traced back to the seventeenth (17th) century (Mato 1986). In other words, *àdìṅkrá* was originally evolved by the Akan people. As we also gathered through personal communication with some elderly Asante men of high traditional and cultural knowledge, it is also believed that the symbols trace back to a war of cultural and or spiritual belief that was fought between the Asante people of Ghana and the Gyaaman people of Côte d'Ivoire in the nineteenth (19th) century. This is also corroborated by several internet sites. Britwum (1974), however, claims that Gyaaman (as a town or group of people) was located in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana.

In brief, history (on the basis of oral literature) has it that the symbols were invented and adorned on clothing by the Gyaaman people and that the Asante people felt insulted when the king of Gyaaman, *Àdìṅkrá*, wore a cloth that was adorned with the spiritual symbol that signifies the unity of the Asante people, the Golden Stool, which is traditionally known as *Sikàdwá Kòfi*. Having felt insulted, the Asante people went to war against the Gyaaman people and defeated them. As a trophy, the Asante people took a number of things from the Gyaaman people, including the ownership of the *àdìṅkrá* symbols and, for that matter, the use of *àdìṅkrá* -adorned. This position about the origin of the *àdìṅkrá* symbols has been passed on to the present generation of the Asante people and, as noted by McCaskie (1986), it is believed among the Akan people that the Golden Stool was conjured from the heavens by a mystical priest of the Asante people, *Ōkòmfó Ànókyé*, during a time of divisions among the Asante people. The stool was/is meant to symbolize the unity of the Asante people; a symbolic effort to bring the Asante people under one kingdom, the Asante Kingdom.

Interesting as it may be to look into what may be the true origin of the symbols, we will not go into it any further in this paper. We only assume in general that the *àdìṅkrá* symbols are part of the rich culture of the Asante people (or perhaps the Akan people in general, since presently the symbols are recognized and used among all people belonging to the Akan group of languages). It is important to note that, like any cultural representation of a growing or a dynamic society, the number of the *àdìṅkrá* symbols continues to increase in reflection to current happenings in society. That is to say, others are continuously being coined to represent and to communicate unique and significant thoughts and information.

Information gathered suggests that the *àdìṅkrá* symbols were only adorned on cloth in the early days of their creation into Asante (Akan) cultural representations. This was significant in the sense that the wearing of such clothing was to communicate one's thoughts, needs, state (of mind), etc. and this is corroborated by Davis (1992) observation that fashion may endorse one's cultural identity. Kent (1971) also notes that tradition-based West African clothing could speak louder than words. Presently, however, the symbols are also carved or put on wooden wares, walls and pillars of buildings, greeting cards, etc. Apparently, in most cases of the present uses of the symbols, they are merely for the purpose of decorative designs and aesthetic. This goes a long way to suggest the beauty of the symbols to people, including non-natives of Akan.

One may ask whether the *àdìṅkrá* symbols are rudiments of an alphabet. Indeed, this is claimed by Ki-Zerbo (1980) that *àdìṅkrá* symbols mark a definite stage in the search for an Akan alphabet. We might as well call it a passage from orality to writing, a very important landmark on the road map to development. It is the encounter with Europe that forcibly stopped this nascent alphabet of *àdìṅkrá* as a whole. This technique had to be sacrificed for the European alphabet, an indispensable tool for the

imposition of western education which, in turn, was a necessary tool for conquering the minds of the indigenous people. Needless to say, *àdìhkrá* had to be 'chased out' of the market by imported western textiles, which were in dire of market to keep European industries in business. There were similar developments in many parts of Africa – the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, the Nsibidi of South-eastern Nigeria, the 'Aka Uku' of the Bamouns of Cameroon at the time of King Njoya (19th century). In particular, the 'Aka Uku' started with four hundred and eighty-eight symbols and was later reduced to eighty-eight and would hopefully have been further pruned down. Outside Africa, we have examples of pictographs in the Chinese, Korean and Japanese characters which are, in effect, no more than an assembly of symbols. The difference is that whereas African alphabets succumbed to foreign invasion, those of Asia have managed to survive. Surprisingly, *àdìhkrá* has shown a fair degree of resilience and dynamism as new symbols keep coming. However, this is not in any way to effect alphabetic change or a return to the use of *àdìhkrá* as an alphabetic system.

The significance of *Àdìhkrá*

As noted in the previous section, presently, *àdìhkrá* symbols are mostly used aesthetically. However, it is important to observe that they are meant for a higher use; Following Joel (1985), Christian (1976), Frutiger (1991), etc., we suggest that they serve as a medium of information dissemination. Proverbs, events of history, philosophical thoughts and other pieces of traditional information and knowledge are encoded by *àdìhkrá*. In this regard, *àdìhkrá* symbols depict some deep-seated socio-cultural knowledge of the Akan people. So, with *àdìhkrá*, proverbial, metaphorical, historical and other pieces of information are conventionalized; i.e., 'symbol-specific information' reflection or correspondence is established. Accordingly, the information each *àdìhkrá* symbol encodes is generally comprehensible among people (who have knowledge of them) and, so, the employment of an *àdìhkrá* symbol actually conveys the encoded information.

Following an earlier observation that the *àdìhkrá* symbols were used for adorning clothes only, we assume that having them on clothes is the normal usage of them. Accordingly, each *àdìhkrá*-adorned cloth constitutes a vehicle that conveys the thought(s) of the person who is wearing it. If this is the case, then, one does not or is not supposed to wear a particular *àdìhkrá*-adorned cloth if he/she does not intend to communicate the thought that is encoded in that *àdìhkrá* symbol.

It has also been noted consistently in the literature that, originally, *àdìhkrá*-adorned clothes were only worn during funerals to honor the dead and that the symbols printed on mourners' clothes express the qualities that were attributed to the deceased (see Kent (1971); Mato (1986) for example). While this observation is in line with the idea that (most) *àdìhkrá* symbols carry farewell messages, it is important to note that the information they convey are not restricted to the dead. So, they do not particularly and necessarily relate to death. Indeed, as will become evident in the course of identifying the meaning of some of the symbols and the purpose for which they are used in section 4, most of the information that the symbols express have nothing to do with the dead, but have everything to do with the living. Furthermore, some of the pieces of information that are expressed by the symbols do not indicate qualities of an individual. Rather, they express some general socio-cultural pieces of information that counsel, caution, persuade, etc. As will also become evident, the symbols that are proverb-based are particularly employed as 'alleviative' communication tool in the delivery of information that could be demeaning to authority for instance.

Some *Àdìhkrá* symbols and their meanings

There is an Akan proverb which says that 'if one forgets the talking drum of his/her hometown (or background), he/she misses his/her way to his/her village. That is to say, one needs to identify with one's people by knowing the significance or meaning of each socio-cultural archetypical modes of communication. Otherwise, one could be excluded from a communicative context, which may in turn lead one into a catastrophic situation. This is why knowing the meaning of each of the *àdìhkrá* symbols was so important for the Asante people and, indeed, in most Akan societies.

It is suggested that, with the knowledge of the *àdìhkrá* symbols and particularly the information each of them encodes, one is socio-culturally well-informed (i.e., being informatively resourced) and well-placed to take appropriate steps where necessary; e.g., to guard against disaster. For instance, *ànáhsèsérh* (a mythical story) is told of an Asante chief who was removed from power by his subjects

when he failed to acknowledge and act upon a message the aggrieved had sent to him through *àdìhkrá* symbols. Information gathered suggests that, presently, not many people know the *àdìhkrá* symbols, let alone their meanings and significance. Also, people do not strive to know them or use them in the way people of old (Akan communities) did. Perhaps, this is due to the difficulty involved in learning them or the consideration of them as old fashioned. The evolution of other tools/symbols of communication may also be a factor; e.g., the use of emoticons among the present generation. The fact however remains that *àdìhkrá* symbols constitute an effective tool of metaphysical and matured communication as noted in a 1997 documentation by the National Museum of African Art, Washington D.C.

As noted earlier, the *àdìhkrá* symbols continue to increase in number and this increase explains the dynamism and creativity of the Akan people. It also explains the importance the Akan people attach to communication through *àdìhkrá*. In this section, we present some of the symbols, their individual referent names, their literal translations and the symbolic messages they convey. As would be observed, some of the *àdìhkrá* symbols appear to be simple and easy to recognize at first sight. For instance, consider *fùntùmfunáfú* (the Siamese crocodiles or lizards with a common belly), *dwènihéméh* (the locked horns of the two warring rams) and *òwúó átwédédé* (the ladder of death) as presented in (vii), (iix) and (ix) respectively. However, it will become evident that this is only a tourist impression. Some of the interpretations could be very obscure and would need a well-trained (native) mind to capture it in its entirety.

Gyé Nyámé



Figure 2: Gyé Nyámé

Gyé Nyámé, meaning 'except God', signifies the omnipotence and immortality of God. Traditionally, the Akan people are known to be idol worshippers. They worship several gods some of which are inhabited in rivers, forests, etc. But, it is also believed that the Akan people (of old) knew and believed in the 'heavenly' God and the *àdìhkrá* symbol, *Gyé Nyámé*, establishes this fact. One could therefore say that the Akan people worshipped God through the gods just as believers of most present day religions worship God through a medium; e.g., statues of various saints and the cross for Christians. *Gyé Nyámé* also explains that the Akan people recognized the supremacy of God, such that they believed that the several gods they worshipped were not ends to ultimate redemption, but God; i.e., except God comes in, nothing works out. So, for instance, to express one's invincibility to weapons of man and even in the dark world that could kill or harm him or her, one often uses the expression *Gyé Nyámé* to mean that 'no one or no power could harm him or her with the exception of that of God'.

Nyámé ñwú nà màwù



Figure 3: Nyámé ñwú nà màwù

Nyámé ñwú nà màwù, meaning 'as long as God lives, I shall not die', explains the immortality and/or perpetual existence of God. It also signifies the dependence of the Akan people on God and the fact that one resides in (the bosom of) God for life; i.e., for spiritual and physical well-being. Thus, if God is immortal, one is immortal as well. Specifically, the cosmological thought here is that the Akan people believe in the perpetual existence of the soul (as God's creation) and that, when one dies, the soul stays alive eternally.

Nyàmé dúá



Figure 4: Nyàmé dúá

Nyàmé dúá means 'altar of God'. It is literally translates as 'God's tree' and, indeed, it is the name of a particular tree in Akan, which could grow structurally tall and wide. This *àdìhkrá* indicates a place of worship and, with the use of it, we are called to give reverence to God by respecting places where He is worshipped and keep it sacred. Presently, even, some churches inscribe this *àdìhkrá* at particular places in their premises as a reminder to congregants (who understand it) about the need to respect the house of God.

Ñsórómá



Figure 5: Ñsórómá

Ñsórómá, translated as 'children of the heavens', is fully expressed as *Òbá nyàhkrá ñsórómá tè Nyàmé nà òh̄tè nè hó só*; i.e., 'a child of the supreme God does not depend on himself/herself, but on God'. This *àdìhkrá* is also a manifestation of the Akan people's belief in the supremacy of God, their reliance on Him as a source of strength and their expectations of His will. In this regard, *Ñsórómá* expresses the belief that God is all involving and the ultimate power and that, without His prompt directions, one could do nothing worthwhile.

Màkó ñnyínáá ñmòh̄ ñmèré



Figure 6: Màkó ñnyínáá ñmòh̄ ñmèré

Màkó ñnyínáá ñmòh̄ ñmèré, meaning 'a stock of pepper does not ripe in union', explains that all of us cannot attain equal height or the same level of development at the same time. Life is not a race but, if it is, some will the race before others. There is therefore no cause for envy and unnecessary competition. Another school of thought also explains that this *àdìhkrá* underscores the need for circumspection in one's spending and other financial commitments since we will not have all at a time to meet all pressing needs. It suggests therefore that one should manage available resources well for our needs and wants surpass our earnings (in whatever endeavor) in most cases. It logically follows then that it also advises us to save or make provisions for contingencies.

Bí ñká bì



Figure 7: Bí ñká bì

Bí ñká bì, meaning 'bite not one another', immediately advocates for peaceful co-existence among people. A traditional curator, Osei Kwadwo, however adds another dimension to this *àdìhkrá*. Of what seems like a contradiction to what *Bí ñká bì* immediately advocates, he suggests that this *àdìhkrá* calls for a tit-for-tat; i.e., we must not bite one another but, if somebody bites you, you too should also bite him. In other words, it does not make sense to preach peace in impossible circumstances; even the worm will turn, when the going gets tough.

Fùntùmfúnàfú (dèhkyèh fúnàfú)



Figure 8: Fùntùmfúnàfú (dèhkyèh fúnàfú)

Fùntùmfúnàfú (dèhkyèh fúnàfú) 'the Siamese crocodiles or lizards sharing a common stomach, yet fighting over food', symbolizes democracy, unity and (peaceful) co-existence. It preaches the message that infighting is injurious to a society. Further, it reminds us that, having a common stomach, we share common goals and aspiration. Thus, all should strive to live for one and one should also strive to live for all. Exploring further, *fùntùmfúnàfú* may look as ridiculous as two brothers, sisters or rivals in an internecine fight. It could also explain the case of a newly independent country engulfed in religious, political or tribal wars to the detriment of national development whilst the common enemy looks on and jubilates. The West Indian writer, Aimé Césaire, in *The Tragedy of King Christopher*, uses these powerful symbols to portray the futility of such an in-fighting; i) cocks fighting in the arena to please their masters, ii) dogs fighting ferociously over a bone, iii) the battle of lice who should be hiding quietly in someone's hair. This interpretation however is only half the truth. The other half is that, despite our common interest, there is nothing wrong with one or few persons wanting to distinguish themselves by standing taller than others.

Dwènihnhmèh



Figure 9: Dwènihnhmèh

Dwènihnhmèh, which means 'horns of rams', symbolizes strength and humility; better still, strength in humility. We observe that the horns of the rams are so twisted and crooked as to strike terror in the heart of the spectator. The rams will fight fiercely against each other. However, terrifying as the horns may be and high as they could be raised, they are ultimately lowered peacefully. Indeed, in reality, rams or he-goats rarely fight to kill and, when they do, it may not be over women as it is generally believed. They may only be exchanging pleasantries or greetings. In this wise, the entangled horns symbolize both war and peace at the same time. An informant also explains that the ram will fight an adversary, but it also submits humbly to slaughter; the message being that even the strong needs to humble himself/herself or he/she will be humbled.

Òwúó átwédéé



Figure 10: Òwúó átwédéé

Òwúó átwédéé, meaning 'the ladder of death', which is commonly expressed as *òwúó átwédéé, òbààkó nhfóro* (everybody will climb the ladder of death), symbolizes the mortality of man. It is a reminder of the transitory nature of existence of living things and human beings in particular. Ultimately, it explains how essential it is to live a good life in order to be a worthy soul in the after-life/underworld/heaven, if there is indeed a place like that. This *àdìhkrá* may appear the simplest of them all as the ladder is pictorially very easy to identify. It portrays the relationship between an ordinary ladder (which is normally used to climb or descend) and death which is not easy to picture. The popular interpretation of it is that everybody is doomed to climb this ladder to the domain of death. Yet, in Akan belief, *àsámándó*, the abode of the dead, is supposed to be underground. The ancient Greeks had a similar belief. Christians also believe that, on doomsday, the dead shall arise and ascend to heaven. The implication is that the Christian dead, until further notice, are and will remain underground. So then, why do we say everybody will climb that ladder one day or another? We believe that the proper interpretation of it should be *òwúó átwédéé, òbààkó nhìàné*, meaning 'everybody will de-

scend the ladder of death (into the underworld). *Òwúó átwédéé* also symbolizes death as the incorruptible judge who does not discriminate between the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong/powerful, the black or the white, the exploiter and the exploited. By this interpretation, *òwúó* 'death' appears to have some positive qualities after all; he/she gives consolation to the wretched while reminding the powerful that we are all equal.

Sáńkófá



Figure 11: Sáńkófá

Sáńkófá: The last, but not the least, we observe in this paper is *sáńkófá*, which literally means 'return and get it'. It reminds us to go back into the past, acknowledge its good practices and pursue them. It urges us to learn from the past and that there is nothing wrong in acknowledging what the past has to offer (in the present) and going back to take the good aspects of what we used to have in the past.

Symbols in oral literature

We discover in the folktales of the Akan people a whole host of symbols in the form of animals, trees, rivers, rocks, etc. which transmit messages to humans. The chief protagonist is Kwaku Ananse, the archetype of greed, selfishness, trickery and indeed all the social vices we can think of. Ananse is at the same time found to be the embodiment of wisdom and dexterity, as illustrated by the intricate web of which he is the undisputable inventor. Now, the question is, is Ananse a human being or the ordinary fragile insect we know, the spider? The only plausible answer is that Ananse is no more than a symbol embodying all the vices capable of destroying society. Ananse stories are therefore designed to warn us against imposters, tricksters, the hyenas dressed in the clothes of lambs, etc. Besides folktales, proverbs also inspire symbols (as we have seen in the *àdìńkrá* symbols) and, indeed, they provide the most fertile grounds for symbols. We provide and look into a few of them as follows.

- *Ábúbúró kósùá* (*àdée à èbéyé yíé òsèé*), meaning 'the egg of the dove', symbolizes the wheel of destiny, which cannot be changed by man no matter how he tries. The eggs of the dove manage to survive in the face of hostile weather, rapacious birds and snakes. In other words, whatever is destined to succeed cannot fail.
- Also, *Fúńtúrń wúó sane òmàtátwèné* (the death of one might call for another's) is a good illustration of the need for tolerance and cooperation. To those who think they are self sufficient and totally independent, the proverb invites us to see what happens to *òmàtátwèné* (the climbing plant) when its host, *fúńtúrń* (a king of tree), dies. Thus this symbol illustrates the need for peaceful coexistence. But, beyond this lesson, it invites us to rise above selfish interests for whatever happens to a neighbor could have unexpected effects on other members of the community.
- Last, but not the least, is what the little bird called *àsáńtrófié* symbolizes. If you take it home, hell will break loose in your home, but if you let it fly away, you miss fortune. By what stretch of imagination, we may ask, do we associate this little bird with good or bad fortune. The answer is that the bird is only a symbol; we need not therefore look for any physical resemblance or relationship between the object and the idea it suggests.

Poetics of Àdìńkrá

Like the folktale, proverbs and other literary genres, poetry was oral before the introduction of writing. But, whether oral or written, poetry has certain distinctive qualities – hermetism (which appeal to the five senses, i.e. sight, sound, smell, taste and touch), musicality, etc. In *àdìńkrá*, we recognize the recurrence of some of the features mentioned above; more particularly, the tendency to be obscure. As a result, its message needs to be decoded by people who are initiated. We have already mentioned some such as *Nyámé ñwu ná màwù*, *Nyámé dúá*, *Gyé Nyámé*, and *Bí ñká bí* in section 4. None of

these symbols has anything in it that suggests the interpretation given to it and this is hermetism at its best.

Now, let us look at the sounds emitted in the pronunciation of the *àdìhkrá* symbols. We realize that most *àdìhkrá* symbols exhibit a beautiful and ear-soothing interplay between vowels and consonants (i.e. speech sounds). Take a look at, for instance, *fùntùmfunàfú*, *dèhkyèm funàfú*; *fù-ñ-tù-m-fù-nà-fú*, *dè-ñ-kyè-m fù-nà-fú*, and the melodic distribution of the vowels /u, a, ε/ and the consonants /f, n, t, d/. Some of these sounds have identical phonetic features and, indeed, these features are reflected in various syllables the speech sounds appear. However, this interplay between sounds in the name of this *àdìhkrá* does not help us to explain it. Its pictorial nature rather makes it easy to decipher.

The usefulness of the interplay between sounds in the names of the *àdìhkrá* symbols however lies in their musicality (for they evolve melodic orderings of syllables) which in turn add value to the imagery to the symbol, as the 'appellation' *fùntùmfunàfú*, *dèhkyèm funàfú* elucidates. *Óbá nyànkòhnsóromá* (*tè Nyàmé nà òhnté nè hó só*) is no different to *fùntùmfunàfú*. We cannot help admiring the impressive distribution of vowels and consonants and the assonance they bring to bear in the 'appellation'. As has been explained, this does not however explain the symbol but musically adorns the symbol.

We must not forget to highlight the imagery of some of these symbols. Taking *sáhkófá*, for example, the long neck of the bird in a spectacular U-turn reaches as far as its tail is an eloquent pointer to the meaning of the symbol. Like *sáhkófá*, *òwúó átwédéé* appeals to the eye. As noted earlier in section 4, however, we must stress that the picture that catches the eye is very often only the surface meaning. Many might be hiding behind it. Indeed, from the exploration made in this section in particular, *àdìhkrá* must be cherished for its linguistic, literacy, as well as artistic values.

Conclusion

As a symbol, we have noted *àdìhkrá* and some other symbols of oral orientation as objects (visible, audible or tangible) which evoke abstract notions that may be remote or a mere aspiration. We have given and recounted some information about *àdìhkrá* and the other oral symbols and, in a way of argument, we have analyzed the messages that are encoded in some of them. Particularly, we have explained in our analysis that, in addition to its artistic qualities, *àdìhkrá* must be appreciated in terms of language and literature. We have observed that it is the sounds, the imagery and the highly metaphorical nature of it that give added quality and value to it. Further, we have opined that *àdìhkrá* is to be seen as a code of ethics, embracing every facet of life such as philosophy, governance, and human relations. They could be looked at as laws meant to ensure stability and inculcate socio-political values. Undoubtedly, World history is full of such codes – the Ten Commandments given to Moses on a parchment, the laws handed down by Hammurabi several years before the coming of Christ, etc. Considering its closeness to the Ten Commandments for instance, the interpretation of most *àdìhkrá* symbols must be preceded by "Thou/Ye shall not"; for example,

- Ye shall not bite one another (*Bí òká bì*);
- Ye shall not indulge in in-fighting (*Fùntùmfunàfú*);
- Thou shall respect thy God's place of worship and keep it sacred (*Nyàmé dúá*);
- Thou shall search for the truth in past (*Sáhkófá*);
- Thou shall not envy /covet thy neighbor (*Màkó ònyínáá òmòrò òmèrè*).

Two observations could be made by way of closing remarks: Firstly, if we accept the description of *àtùmpáh* as 'talking drums', we should have no difficulty in recognizing *àdìhkrá* as talking (symbols in) textiles for both have a common function. Secondly, *àdìhkrá* marks an undisputable departure from oratory, an evolutionary trend which would hopefully have developed into a system of writing if Africa had not encountered Europe.

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