

Stool

20th century

Asante peoples, Ghana

wood

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This stool, called *dwa* in Twi - the spoken language of the Asante peoples in Ghana - serves a multitude of purposes. First, it serves as a simple stool. Any individual may own multiple stools, each with specific style and meaning. Stools also serve as political symbols. They are held in the highest regard and are often used to show wealth and power. The greater the size and sophistication of design and materials, the more important and powerful the individual. Ceremonial stools may be decorated with gold or silver, whereas utilitarian stools are more simplistic. All stools have the same design layout featuring a curved seat, decorated midsection, and wide baseplate.

All such stools are modeled after the “Golden Stool,” or *Sika Dwa Kofi*, which serves as the spiritual center of the Asante people. The Golden Stool, which is inlaid with gold, is believed to have descended from the skies in the late 17th century due to the prayers of Asante chief priest Okomfo Anokye. The stool serves as the physical representation of the unity of the Asante peoples and is passed down throughout the generations of Kings.

In addition to the practical and ceremonial use, stools are closely linked to their owners, both in personality and spirit. Stools are placed aside when not being used and are believed to contain the soul of their owners. Stools used by everyday men and women are called ‘White Stools’. Significant leaders and other such community members with high levels of power generally have their stools blackened and preserved. Stools play a significant role in the chieftaincy of the Asante; an Asante chief may either commission, purchase, or inherit a stool, but will not exchange gifts with others.

written by **Perry Fisher**