

# In Defence of our Cultural Belongings.

Review of "The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana - The Future" by Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, Paramount Chief of Akuapem Traditional Area

(Published with the Support of Konrad Adenauer Foundation.  
Gold Type Ltd. Accra. 2004.)

*Kwesi Kwaa Prah*

In our times, the institution of traditional leadership in Africa is under strain and pressure from different quarters. On the one hand, there are those who regard it as an atavism which needs to be dropped; on the other hand, there are others who argue that we abandon the institutions of traditional authority at our cultural peril, that it is too closely intertwined with all that we have as Africans to be dropped or abandoned. Many other views fall in between the two positions, and the fact that the issue is being currently discussed all over Africa, sometimes with intense passion, makes the significance of this text very timely.

Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III's slim volume represents a robust exercise in advocacy and clarification of the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana. Its relevance, however, extends far beyond the borders of Ghana. Indeed, we can say that it is a defence of the argument in favour of maintaining traditional leadership, in revised forms, in all parts of Africa. It is based on knowledge from direct experience and close familiarity with the institution in Ghana. At the same time, the author draws on other experiences and literature from further afield. The text is written in lucid and uncomplicated language. It therefore reads quickly and easily.

The size of the volume however is misleading because although it is small in size, it packs a lot of information and makes a punchy delivery. The table of contents is thin and sells the text short. The reader is not given a full idea of what is on offer. For example, under Chapter Two, "Who is a Chief?", the author deals with definitional issues; the kingmaking process, general expectations, problems of chieftaincy, solutions and duties of a Chief. Chapter Three, in the table of contents is itemized as "Chieftaincy Administration". In the text, the reader is treated to a variety of issues like the administrative set-up, sub-Chiefs and their functions, Durbar arrangements, traditional councils and the Oman council. All in all, the text is much richer than can be gleaned from the table of contents. It would have been better to have a more structured and detailed table of contents.

Another problem with the text is that referencing is patchy and inconsistent. It is arguable whether this text needs elaborate scholastic referencing. I happen not to think so. However, if we are referencing, then we must be consistent and carry it diligently throughout the text. For example on page 11, Rattray is well referenced and listed in the back of the book, in the Bibliography. J.H. Driberg is elsewhere quoted without reference. I was left guessing if it is from his book called, "At Home with the Savage". Chancellor Williams is cited but not properly referenced. In addition to these shortcomings, there were little slips like the fact that Eva Meyerowitz's name is spelt wrongly on page 58, and on page 59 "shattering microcosm". In spite of these minor discrepancies, the central wisdom which should be emphasized in the message of this text, is what Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III describes in the following words; "In our fast moving society, the chieftaincy institution can only survive if it adapts itself to changing conditions. Some people wrongly believe that the myths surrounding Chieftaincy are what enable the institution to enjoy power and respectability and that any attempts at demystification of the institution will harm its prestige. On the contrary, hanging on to the outmoded myths will, in future, render the institution irrelevant to the society it is supposed to serve. For the institution to be accepted by majority of the members of the present-day society, the many mysticisms bordering on religion must be given a second look." (P. xvii). The message is clear, and Ghanaians can be proud of their learned, eloquent and wise Chief Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III. This text makes educative reading.