

# Animistic Practices in the Production of Indigenous Visual Arts in the Bussie Traditional Area, Ghana

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## Abstract

The concept of the supreme deity delegating power to lesser spirits and quasi-mythological deities has been part of the esteemed worldview of the Sissala ethnic society. As such, animistic practices and strict observance of taboo systems permeate in the production of indigenous visual artefacts that served as receptacles and offerings for the deities and spirits believed to rule the cosmos and human affairs among the Sissala of the Bussie traditional area. The indigenous arts were practiced by specialized village guilds and the skills are passed on to the younger generation through hereditary and apprenticeship. This phenomenological study rooted in the qualitative research was conducted within one year from June 2021 to August 2022. Data were garnered via interviews, focus group discussions, and observations from 30 study participants who were selected via purposive and snowballing sampling designs, consisting of 18 master-artists, and 12 non-craft professionals. The study revealed the remarkable history and animistic practices in the acquisition of materials and preparation of tools and equipment for the production of the indigenous visual arts. The study contends that the indigenous arts of the Sissala ethnic society are culture-specific and are inseparable from worldviews of the people.

**Keywords:** *animistic practices, indigenous visual arts, art, Bussie traditional area*

## **Praktik Animistik dalam Produksi Seni Visual Asli di Area Tradisional Bussie, Ghana**

### **Abstrak**

*Konsep tentang dewa tertinggi yang mendelegasikan kekuasaan kepada roh-roh yang lebih rendah dan dewa-dewa semi-mitologis telah menjadi bagian dari pandangan dunia yang dihormati dalam masyarakat etnis Sissala. Oleh karena itu, praktik animisme dan kepatuhan ketat terhadap sistem tabu meresap dalam pembuatan artefak visual tradisional yang berfungsi sebagai wadah dan persembahan untuk dewa-dewa dan roh-roh yang diyakini mengatur kosmos dan urusan manusia di antara masyarakat Sissala di wilayah tradisional Bussie. Seni tradisional ini dipraktikkan oleh kelompok pengrajin desa yang khusus, dan keterampilannya diwariskan kepada generasi muda melalui jalur keturunan dan sistem magang. Studi fenomenologis yang berakar pada penelitian kualitatif ini dilakukan selama satu tahun, dari Juni 2021 hingga Agustus 2022. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, diskusi kelompok terfokus, dan observasi dari 30 partisipan yang dipilih melalui desain sampling purposif dan snowballing. Partisipan terdiri dari 18 seniman ahli dan 12 profesional non-pengrajin. Studi ini mengungkap sejarah yang luar biasa serta praktik animisme dalam pengadaan bahan dan persiapan alat serta peralatan untuk produksi seni visual tradisional. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa seni tradisional masyarakat etnis Sissala bersifat spesifik budaya dan tidak terpisahkan dari pandangan dunia masyarakatnya.*

**Kata kunci:** *praktik animistik, seni visual asli, seni, daerah tradisional Bussie*

## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the many diversely complex cultures across the continent of Sub-Saharan Africa, the pattern and/or concept of God is similar, thereby giving the continent that unique “African-ness.” African Religion is not a book-based religion, but rather a deeply ingrained belief system that is reflected in songs, myths, legends, idioms, wise sayings, arts and symbols (Ezesuokwu, 2022). Animism is perceived as one of the distinctive features of the African traditional religious system and worldview. Animism is the attribution of soul/spirit to the animate, inanimate or natural phenomena. It is the belief that the Supreme Being has given powers to animate and inanimate objects to rule in the affairs of humans (Beyers, 2010). The usage of the term in anthropology can be traced to Edward B. Tylor (1871) and is essential to all religions (Costa & Fausto, 2018). The African cosmology holds that spirits inhabit the animate, inanimate and certain phenomenon (Kimmerle, 2006). To the African, acknowledging the spirits in the environment and honouring them brings about harmony between them and the perceived higher spirits in the environment (Gyekye, 1987). Ensuring this harmony results in the observance of taboos (Mhaka, 2014). This worldview of the African which originates from their forebearers and handed down from generation to generation mostly through oral tradition and concrete practices, permeates all aspects of life (Mbiti, 2015). Kimmerle (2006), postulates that religion and life in Africa are so intertwined that even the African intellectuals and converts of Christian and Islamic religions are not entirely freed from the nuances of the concept of this African religious belief.

This phenomenon equally affects the creation and usage of indigenous arts of Africa which are by themselves, are very instrumental in the manifestation of the African religious belief. In reference to the work of Ikenga-Metuh and Ezesuokwu (2022), remarked that art forms constitute one of the major sources of African traditional religion. In corroborating this statement, Mbiti (1991), opined that African religion is found in many sources including art, beliefs, customs and all aspects of life. While art forms are indispensable in expressing religious beliefs, the creation of most indigenous artefacts are equally embedded in these beliefs. Certain practices in the indigenous arts production are believed to be sacrosanct thereby characterized by ritual performances and taboos. A violation of the taboos thereof, endangers the life of the culprit – either the artist or the user of the artistic piece. In view of this, Curnow (2021), averred that Traditional African art has restrictions, if broken could bring dire supernatural consequences. In carving a mask among the Dogon of Mali, the Dogon religion holds that various things, including plants and trees, are home to spirits that should be feared and revered thus, once a suitable tree is identified and cut to produce fresh masks required blood sacrifices in order to prevent potential vengeance from the spirits (Bontadi & Bernabei, 2016). Not only in the making of the masks are rituals performed but also in their usage. Richardin

et al (2008), acknowledged the rituals accompanying the usage of these masks during ceremonies result in patina formation on them. The spiritual and ritualistic embodiment of blacksmithing has never been in doubt since the dawn of humanity in African. Every aspect of this ironwork is awash with animistic (ritual and sacrificial) practices from the mining of iron-ore via smelting to the heating and forgery of iron objects (Osuala 2012; Childs & Killick 2016; Nzoiwu & Akhogba, 2019).

The indigenous visual arts of Ghana are not different. A number of rituals or sacrifices accompany the execution of the various indigenous artforms. Johnson (1970), identified libation pouring and other ceremonial rituals associated with the wood carving, pottery, weaving and metal-casting of the Akan of Ghana. Similarly, Boateng conceded to this:

The trees for carving were not felled off hand without passing through certain ritual purification methods. The trees for carving were considered during those days as abodes, dwelling places or receptacles for certain unseen spiritual forces or supernatural spirits and powers. Some of these supernatural spirits, according to Akan mythology were at certain times very violent and malevolent. Others were considered to be very friendly and benevolent. So, in order not to incur the wrath of any malevolent spirit inhabiting any of these wooden species for carving, it was proper to go through certain ritual purification practices to dislodge these supernatural spirits inhabiting the tree to make the wood accessible to the carver. (Boateng 2011, 104).

It is therefore against this backdrop that the study looks at the animistic practices surrounding the creation and usage of selected indigenous visual artforms with special focus on the people bussie Traditional Area. Specifically, it sought to; give a description of the indigenous wood carving, blacksmithing and pottery processes in the traditional area and to identify the animistic processes involved. Having given a conceptual insight into how animism as a belief guides the Africa's way of life including art making, the second part of this write-up describes the etymology of the name Bussie and ethnography of the Sissala of the Bussie Traditional Area. The third part of the study describes the methodology adopted for the study. The fourth section of the study gives a systematic presentation and discussions of the findings. The final part of the study gives a conclusion of the findings discussed.

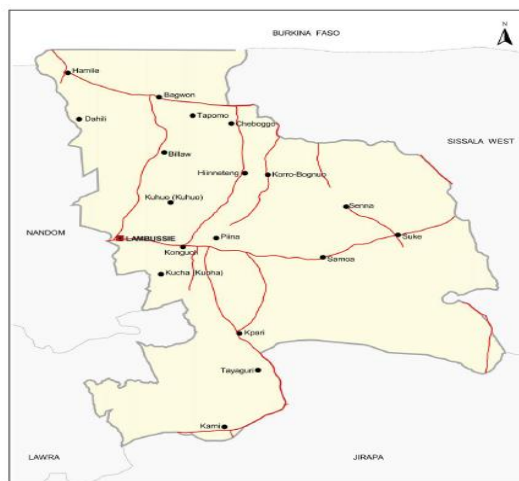
## **METHOD**

The study adopted the qualitative approach with the phenomenology research method. This method allows for a better understanding and experience of a particular phenomenon (Terrell 2016). By adopting this method, the researchers were able to gather very insightful interpretations from both an insider's perspective

and the respondents about the kinds of indigenous visual artforms and the animistic practices attached to them by the people of the traditional area. With the aid of an interview guide, face-to-face interviews were conducted on the field supplemented with field observations (Ciesielska, Bostrom & Magnus, 2018). A sample size of thirty (30) participants was recruited using purposive and snowball sampling techniques from eight Sissala communities namely; *bussie*, *Gbingbaala*, *Suke*, *Dindee*, *Koro*, *Bangwon*, *Happaah*, and *Dahille*. The reason for using the purposive and snowball sampling techniques was to allow some specific people who have adequate knowledge about the subject matter to be included in the study. The sample frame included chiefs (3), Elders (3), Blacksmiths (4), Wood carvers (9), Potters (5), Praise-singers (3) and Diviners (3). The empirical data gathered were analyzed thematically and the discussions properly situated in the depth of existing literature. Mollet (2011), argued that research that involves human beings is expected to show respect for ethical issues. Accordingly, ethical considerations were observed in the field of study since the study involved human beings.

**Table 1. Sample size for the study**

<b>Study participants</b>	<b>Number</b>
Paramount chief and sub-chiefs	3
Elders and opinion leaders	3
Blacksmiths	4
Wood Carvers	9
Potters	5
Praise-singers	3
Diviners	3
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>30</b>



**Figure 1. Map of Bussie District.**

Source: Adapted from Ghana Statistical Service, GIS (2010)

## RESULTS

The focus of the study was to highlight the animistic practices and taboos underpinning the creation of indigenous visual arts among the Sissala people in the Bussie traditional area with a specific focus on Woodcarving, Blacksmithing and Pottery Making. The findings of the study revealed that these artforms in the traditional area encompass a wide range of technical processes alongside rituals in order to arrive at finite artefacts. Many of which are not exhaustible in this paper due to space and time. After the interviews of the respondents and the observations made by the researchers, it came to light that from material and preparation search through production to the usage of the artefacts, various animistic practices and taboos are observed per the cosmos view of the people been understudied. The following responses are discussed with some conversation reported verbatim. Before zooming into the taboos and norms of each art form, – wood carving, blacksmithing and pottery, a detailed background of the each has been discussed from the account of respondents.

### *Wood Carving*

Carving generally is a subtractive approach to sculpture-making where the artist takes away chunks of a material during the carving process. Wood, stone, and ivory are among the commonly carved materials particularly in Africa. Wood carving however appears to be the common type of carving in West Africa. Wood carving forms an integral part of the life of the people under the study. One of the respondents said, .... *nowadays, we do not have so many carvers in the society because those who possess the skill are all dead and gone and the young ones are not willing do take over due to modern ways of life and the low incomes associated with the profession in our part of the country.* In fact, it is the only form of carving in the area strictly undertaken by men and its origin according to oral traditions, can be traced independently and indigenously in the various communities. A good number of wooden sculptures are made for the expression of the traditions and the celebration of the daily life events of the people. From utilitarian to agricultural, funeral, festivals, rituals, divination, power and protection, several wood carvings are used. Like many other indigenous artforms in Africa, wood carving in the traditional area is passed on from generation to generation along family lines such as fathers and uncles and could take between five to ten years for one to train and perfect the skill of wood carving. All the wood carvers spoken to, alluded to this fact. In words of a senior carver in the bussie community, *my great grandfather taught my grandfather how to carve, he also taught my father, and I also inherited it from my father. It's like that and I am also teaching my children to takeover after me.*

The carvers in the traditional area could however be categorized into two groups; the general-purpose wood carvers and the special-purpose or sacred wood carvers. The first category is where every wood carver belongs and the items carved under this category include; hoe handles, mortar and pestle, stools etc. The latter is the category where special-purpose items such as twin dolls, funeral stools, diviners' wands, xylophones, and talking drums are carved. Very few carvers belong to this category and are mostly perceived by the populace to be 'spiritually-called men' into the carving profession as such carvers also double as traditional healers and diviners. According to one of such spiritual (special-purpose) carvers, *it is not everyone who can carve objects with spiritual significance, if you are not chosen by the spirits, you cannot try it, there could be consequences*. Whether one is a general-purpose or special-purpose carver, the practice of wood carving in the traditional area is a highly public demand driven venture. The individual skills of the carver or the aesthetic appeal of the carved item is not necessarily hailed but it is rather the purpose the carved item serves that matters. The resultant effect of this probably, is the slow pace of carving activities in the traditional area as there is limited market or low demand for carvings especially the special-purpose items.

The commonly used tools by the carvers in the area include; an adze, axe, cutlass, blunt-chisel and a sharpening stone. The axe (*saa*) is used for felling trees and cutting logs to required shapes and sizes. The adze (*sa chol-lo*) comes in bigger and smaller sizes. The bigger adze is used for chopping off large particles of wood during carving in order to block-out and define shapes and forms of the object to be carved. The smaller adze is used for giving fine details and smoothing the surfaces of carved objects during finishing. The cutlass is used for cutting sizeable logs of wood to required sizes and also for smoothing. Smoothing is done either with the adze or cutlass by repeatedly making shallow cuts of protruding portions of the surface of the carved objects. This process in sculpting terms is described as *whittling*. The blunt-chisel is used for splitting logs where necessary. The sharpening stone (*sessi dabuiee*) is used for sharpening the tools.

Be it a general or special-purpose carving, the process include; selection or cutting of a log, blocking out of shapes and forms, detailing and finally finishing. The carver without reference to any preliminary sketches begins by selecting and cutting a log into a shape and form of the intended carving. When quizzed by the researchers on the wood selection, the carvers though from different communities, were unanimous in their response. According to them, *it is not every wood that is appropriate for carving, some woods are hard and others are soft.... though hardwood is quite difficult to carve, it's finishing is nice and the carvings last longer than softwood. So, the type of wood to choose depends on the type of carving to be done. And also spiritually induced objects require specific kinds (highly spirited) of wood*. (Personal Communication, Carvers, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).

Once the wood is selected, cut and moved to the carver's shop, the bigger adze together with the cutlas are used to block-out and define the shape and form of the figure by chopping away larger particles from the log. After successfully giving the figure the general shape and form, the carver then uses the smaller adze to create all the necessary details. Unlike the traditional wood carver in the southern part of the country (Ghana), the traditional carvers in the bussie Traditional Area are yet to embrace the use of chisels and gouges. The carver does his finishing by using the smaller adze to smoothen the surface of the figure. In some instances, a broken bottle piece could be used for the smoothening and this job of smoothening could sometimes be done by an apprentice as one of his initial tasks. Unlike other parts of the country and Africa where oils and vanishes are used to give the carvings shiny surfaces, the researchers observed here that most of the carvings are usually left unpolished or unpainted.



**Figure 2. Carving processes as observed in the traditional area.**

Source: Photographed by Researchers.

### ***Animistic Practices and Taboos in Wood Carving***

To the Sissala, the belief that spirits inhabit plants, animals and the inert cannot be over emphasized. As such, trees from which carvings are made are hosts of spirits that need not to be offended. For the carver therefore not to incur the wrath of the spirits, libations are made before cutting such trees for carving. According to the carvers in the traditional area, *prayers are usually said or sacrifices are offered in order to get rid of or pacify the spirits believed to be housed within the tree before felling it.* Two senior carvers who both carve surrogated twin dolls and other utilitarian objects, alluded to this. While one admitted to performing the ritual at the base of the tree, the other carver usually poured libation first at home to his ancestors before heading to the bush. They both however admitted that before cutting the tree, cowries or coin (in recent times) is placed under the tree amidst prayers as an exchange for the misfortune that would have befallen the carver occasioned by the tree-spirit.

Rituals are usually performed before the carving and usage of certain objects such as the landlord (*totina*) stool, traditional funeral bench, the diviners' wand and

the surrogate twin doll. Carvings such as the surrogate twin dolls are done in secrecy. According to one of the carvers of surrogate dolls, *due to the spiritual connotations surrounding the doll, the public must not see the process and because the object will be inhibited by a spirit, the wood off-cuts must not be burnt and if you carve it at home, women will use the off-cuts to set fire.* In the wood carving process (of any object), a carver must not let the sun go down on him while he is still carving. When that happens, the carver must again rise very early the next morning and continue the same carving before sunrise in order to maintain his sight. Failure to do so, brings blindness upon the carver. The believe is that, when the sun sets while the carver is still carving, it carries along with it the sight of the carver. The only way for the carver to regain his sight is to carve before sunrise the next morning. It is also believed that no carver completes the unfinished carving of another carver without due permission. In the case where the original carver is not reachable, a coin is placed on the carving either by the user-to-be of the object or the successive carver. Failure to do that, can result in a misfortune upon the successive carver. In instances where a carved object like the mortar is to be transported in a vehicle across towns, the driver requires a coin is placed in it before it (mortar) is placed in the vehicle. This is to pacify the perceived spirit inhibiting the mortar and to ensure an accident-free journey.

### ***Blacksmithing***

Among the Sissala people of the Bussie traditional area, blacksmithing or metalwork is strictly the reserve of men. According to the elders in bussie, *no women ever tried it and will not. It will never happen because it is not ordinary.*” The generic term for blacksmithing is *luuk-kuu* (smithing) and the local name for a blacksmith is *baluk-ko*. “*Blacksmithing has been an age-long practice handed down to them by the forbearers* – says an elder. Like many other African societies, the communities in the traditional area largely depend on the services of a blacksmith. Almost every aspect of the peoples’ lives depended heavily on an array of objects made from smithing. From simple domestic chores to farming, hunting, war expeditions, cultural or ritual ceremonies, healing to community or individual spiritual protection and authority and status definition, several smithing objects are used. In the worlds of one of the elders, *a farmer cannot do without a hoe either can a warrior do without his spear or gun, likewise, the hunter.*

With charcoal, fire, forging stones (now iron anvils), pincers, hammers and leather bellows, the blacksmith is able to forge metal into valuable tools and weaponry. Some of such forged objects include; hoes blades, knives, daggers, axes, machetes, spears, arrows, sickles, adzes, swords, bells of all kinds, rings, armlets etc. It takes the blacksmith to make all these happen. The blacksmith is therefore extremely revered among the indigenes and seen as one who wields and possesses



supernatural power. One of the respondents (a blacksmith) admitted that, *the objects that we produce are based upon the request of individual or a guild or secret society*. Owing to this perceived massive power at the disposal of the blacksmiths, many of them also practice as traditional medical doctors and makers of amulets. Respondents posited at the back of oral tradition that, the knowledge and skills of blacksmithing have always been transferred from one generation to another through an endogamous system with many years of apprenticeship since time immemorial. Respondents told the researchers that during pre-colonial and the colonial era, their forefathers extracted metal from a special stone or ironstone (locally called *Jig-ho*) under very extreme temperatures. The chain of smelting mainly included; scouted for the iron ore, preparation of the iron ore, building of appropriate clay furnaces and the actual smelting operation amidst rituals. After a successful prospect and preparation of the iron ore, the furnace was then built and filled with the iron ore (*Jig-ho*), hard charcoal and coarse dry clay-balls and the air pumped manually from the bellows into the furnace. According to an informant's account, *it took very strong men to do the pumping in turns with the charcoal constantly supplied in order to provide the required intensity of heat and the entire smelting process could last from dawn to dusk (averagely 12 hours) before blasting could be heard signaling the extraction of molten metal from the rocks*. Once the smelting process was completed, the molten mass of metal gathered and settled at the bottom of the furnace. It was then removed and hammered into sizable bars for onward forging into objects or for storage.

After the metal is extracted, the remains of the Iron ore termed locally as *hobin-na* (literally means the *faeces* of metal) was then left behind. Deposits of *hobine* (ore remains) can easily be found across the communities under the study area and also in other Sissala jurisdictions. The present-day blacksmiths say the presence of these remains anywhere in the traditional area is an indication that blacksmiths ever settled there. The availability of these deposits across the traditional area is held as a confirmation of land ownership by the Sissala people as the elders and the current paramount chief of the traditional area assertively indicated that, their ethnicity (Sissala) was the fore-runner of this metallurgy in the area during the pre-colonial and colonial times apart. In the opinion of the current researchers, this assertion by the paramount chief and elders could only be validated by archaeological archival researches as there are other ethnic groups today engaged in the same trade in the area. The today's blacksmith in the bussie traditional area, does not smelt metal from iron ore due to the introduction of salvage iron and the proliferation of African markets with European iron products. For this reason, there seem also to be a disappearance of the indigenously designed furnaces which were most often in open spaces.

A number of forge workshops, (*luuwo*) are still operational across the traditional area where the extracted metal is converted into finished objects. The local name of the forge workshop - *luuwo* denotes the iron deity. In the very words of a senior blacksmith at the Gbingbaala community, *the establishment of the forge is normally accompanied with the building of an altar for the iron god/deity either inside or outside of the forge workshop. Period sacrifices are made at the altar to ensure successful operations in the forge.* In a standard forge workshop one can find two skin bellows, a hearth and an anvil/massive stone (top of which the heated metal is hammered and shaped). Other tools and materials include; tongs, hammers, charcoal and fire.

Connected to the hearth are two air pipes from two bigger pots covered with skins (bellows). While the pumping of the skin bellows is done by the apprentices in turns, the master smiths are in charge of the heating and forging of the metals into metallic objects. By the side of hearth are the tools used by the smiths most of which forged by blacksmiths themselves. The researchers also discovered that there are basically two techniques of working the metals into useful implements in the traditional area. The first is the heating and forging; metals are heated and beaten into differently shaped useful objects and the second is the lost wax casting technique which is also referred to as *cire-perdue* that is pouring molten metal into moulds to produce the desired metal objects. The former method does not allow for complexities in the forms and details of finished forged objects compared to the later.



**Figure 3 (a-d). The Forging processes as observed in the traditional area.**  
Source: Photographed by Researchers.

### ***Taboos and Norms in Blacksmithing***

Though blacksmithing in Africa is often times described as a ubiquitous practice, it takes the calling of the iron-deity for one to become a blacksmith in the bussie traditional area. One does not simply wake up to become a blacksmith except chosen by the god of iron and before one is chosen, there is always the evidence of an earlier blacksmith in the family lineage or generation, it could be inherited from a father, uncle or any close relative (personal conversation, elders, bussie, 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2022). Evidence of a call by the god of iron to become a blacksmith could manifest in a form of insanity, intermitted ailments or bad-lucks in the life of the chosen person. It takes divination to unravel and then the necessary sacrifices are made before a forge is constructed for blacksmithing operations to commence. Such individuals are believed to be supernaturally empowered and for that matter very revered in the society. Participants however, admitted that one may choose to learn blacksmithing through apprenticeship.

Among the tools and equipment used by the blacksmiths in the past, was a very big rock best described as forging or shaping stone (now replaced with iron anvil). The elders posited that this rock was not an ordinary stone but a living (spiritual) stone and for that matter could not easily be carried from the bush to the blacksmiths' forge no matter how small it may be. According to them (elders), it took divination to decipher where in the bush such a spiritual rock could be located. Once located, praise-singers were mobilized to the site of the rock to sing praises onto it to bring it to the forge. While the praises range on, a little push or pull of the rock by the blacksmiths, gets it in motion towards the expected direction. This continues until it gets to the forge where it is half-way buried in the ground amidst rituals. This phenomenon in the view of the current researchers accounts for the periodic sacrifices made at the blacksmiths' forge. An Observation made at the Gbingbaala community revealed that, an altar is placed inside the forge workshop and very close to the hearth. According to the smiths at the Gbingbaala community, dog is the sacrificial animal for the deity. The researchers also witnessed the pouring of libation to the ancestors before the commencement of the daily activities in the forge.

In blacksmithing, certain items such as the praise singers hoe-blade (*gok-pitil-lo*) and the bell used by the *tiwa* - a secret society, are never forged until requested by the users. They are never forged to be sold or kept for any reason other than upon the request of the users. The praise singers hoe-blade is only forged upon the death of a member or a xylophone player. The *tiwa* bell (*bimbil-la*) is only forged when requested for initiates or a new baby believed to be a member of the secret society by birth. A blacksmith is not supposed to hit somebody with his bare hands. They are believed to be possessors of power and might. At the funeral celebration of a blacksmith and likewise that of the practitioners of other artforms

or crafts, the blacksmiths gather to do what can best be described as corporate blacksmithing. It is believed that failure to part-take in such a corporate artistic activity in the funeral, will result in losing your skill to the deceased. By so doing, they believe every member will retain his or her skill.

### **Pottery**

The Koro community in the bussie Traditional Area, is well noted for the production of a variety of impressive pots that serve the people in various capacities; socio-cultural, political and economic. The women of the predominantly farming community (Koro), engage in the art of pottery as a second occupation after farming. Over the years, it has served as a great source of livelihood to the women and their households during the dry season spanning from November to May every year. According to the pottery women, this artform is passed on from generation to generation either by birth or marriage. The true origin of this art is in dispute. Whiles some claim their fore fathers brought the art from somewhere, others say all they know is that it has been passed on from great, great, grandmothers to their daughters and daughters-in-law. Though the art of potting is predominantly by the women, they are however forbidden from modelling secret objects such as the granary which are strictly done by men and other types of ritual pots.

The human fingers have been widely known as the primary tools for working clay. There are however a number of improvised tools by the locals. Accordingly, the Koro potters have improvised their own tolls for the potting art. The tools for clay work in the community include but not limited to; Hoe (*pitil-lo*) is used for digging clay form the pit. Head pan (*taa-se*) - for carrying and mixing clay, Mortar (*tuo*) and Pestle (*tun-no*) - for pounding died clay particles. Net/Sieve (*chess-se*) - for sieving powered clay. Leaf (*paa*) - for smoothing the edges or rim of pots whiles modelling. Smoothing stones (*sol-li dabui-ee*) – for smoothing leather-hard pots to make them shiny inside-out. Metal rings (*horro*) – for scooping, scrapping and incision. Broken pieces of old pots (*chin-chel-le*) – to serve as a support (improvised potter’s wheel) upon which modelling is done. Wooden board as a support etc.

The art of potting in Koro (like anywhere else) consists of a number of interconnected activities; clay mining or extraction, clay preparation, pot building or formation, drying, firing, packaging and transportation. Pit extraction is the only means by which clay is collected by the Koro women potters. With a small hoe, the clay is dug after the second layer of the earth. After the coarse clay particles are collected from the clay pit, it is dried and then pounded into powder. The powdered clay is then mixed with temper is per the discretion of the potter based the nature of the clay. The mixture is then wedged and kneaded on a board or a large tree-bark to make the clay free from debris and also achieve an even consistency in softness.

The most commonly used modelling technique for pot building by the potters is the coiling and pulling method. Another technique of modelling which the potters say is not commonly practiced is the combination of slabbing and coiling method. This method according to the potters, is rarely used by some potters when modelling medium to large size pots. According to one of the senior potters, *with this method, a slab is formed over an old existing pot which is turned upside down, it is then removed and then coils are added to form the upper part of the pot.*

Finishing of the pots precedes the firing process of pottery wares. With the potters in Koro, burnishing of the pots begins at the leather-hard stage. The smooth-stone (*sol-ly dabui-ee*) is used to continuously rub both the inside and outside of the pot to give it a very smooth and shiny surface. After the burnishing, incised linear patterns or designs are made usually on the upper body of the pots with the help of a thin ring. One of the senior potters said; *the designs are individually and ingeniously generated with inspirations from objects that are seen in the environment and they are done to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the pots in order to attract buyers and also for identification purposes as the different designs also serve as signatures of the individual potters.*

After all the finishing processes are done, the wares are then dried and fired. In Koro, the potters use the open-air or traditional method of firing. For a successful firing exercise, the following are required; fuel (combustible materials e.g. sawdust, firewood, stokes, chaff, wood-shavings, dry grass, dried tree-barks etc.), extracted solution (from tree-barks, *dawadawa* pulse or leaves of specific plants - boiled) and the clay vessels themselves. In Koro, the combustible materials used for firing include; dry tree-barks, *dawadawa* pulse, chaff, shea-nut shells and stokes. The clay wares which are already dried, are again on the day of firing to preheat in order to avoid breakages during firing. Starting usually late afternoons, the clay vessels are carried to the firing centre, arranged in layers, interlacing with layers of the combustible materials to finally form a big circular heap. The entire heap is then covered with dry stokes or grasses and set ablaze. More firewood is added per the discretion of the potter while the pots are tended as and when necessary, until the whole heap burns into ashes. With clubs or long sticks, the potter(s) removes the hot pots one after the other and buries it in a heap of chaff, for about a minute in order to blacken the pots where necessary. From the smoking chaff, the pot is further immersed in the boiled solution extracted from freshly cut tree-barks to further render it black and shiny. As observed by researchers in the Koro community, the entire firing process may last 2 to 3 hours, depending on the number of pots to be fired.





**Figure 4. Pottery processes in the traditional area from Clay extraction firing and finishing.**

Source: Photographed by Researchers.

### ***Taboos and Norms in Pottery***

Pottery in the bussie traditional area is the reserve of the women. However, certain objects such as clay barns and ritual pots are made by men. A participant conceded that *...because of the spiritual underpinnings to these pottery wares, women don't model them.* A group of women potters during an FGD interview further added that, A woman in her menstrual periods is not supposed to visit or enter the clay pit. If she does, it desecrates the earth-goddess and consequently all the clay wares of such a potter will be broken during firing. Whiles in the clay pit, one must not fart as it is regarded as a sign of disrespect to the gods. When that happens, the victim must confess to a by-stander so as to have a pebble pelted at

her in the pit to avoid breakages of clay wares during firing. During the observation of a firing exercise, the potter observed, remarked; *A woman who is engaged in the firing activities of clay wares must not respond to greetings from passers-by. If she does, all her wares will be broken in the fire.* It is a taboo for woman who still bears children, with the husband still alive to model the smoking pot (*chul-la*). If she does, she will become barren and also lose the husband to either death or a misfortune. For this reason, only widows in their menopausal ages model this type of pot. A clay ware is never priced until it is finished.

## DISCUSSION

The results revealed that wood carving is also a common art practice in the Bussie Traditional area in Northern Ghana, though not in large-scale. This is contrary to the popular assertion that this art practice is much prevalent in Southern Ghana (Adu-Agyem, Gordon & Mensah, 2014). The personal and societal usage of artefacts in the Bussie Traditional area is similar to the popular view on African art noted by Curnow (2021). The client dictate to the carver the form of the artefact, as evident in other African indigenous societies (Coleman, 2016). Also, similar to most African indigenous societies, the function of the artefact is prioritized by the carver over the aesthetic features (Adi-Dako & Antwi, 2014). As noted in the results, this same function dictates the choice of the type of material for the production (Coleman, 2016; Osuala, 2012). Thus, if it is for a spiritual purpose, wood believed to possess a spiritual potent is often used, similar to other African indigenous societies such as the Bamana of Mali as well as the Nkwerre people in Igboland, Nigeria (Bontadi & Bernabei, 2016; Osuala, 2012). Animistic practices such as the performance of prayers and sacrifices observed by indigenous wood carvers in the Bussie traditional area, are required to pacify the spirits believed to be residing in the tree before it is cut down, a similar practice noted by Boateng (2011) among the Akans of Ghana. This is a mandatory requirement in other African traditional societies such as the Dogons of Mali, failure of which can result in sickness and even death of the carver (Bontadi & Bernabei, 2016; Curnow, 2021).

The local name of the forge workshop where indigenous products in blacksmithing are produced in the Bussie traditional area is called *luuwo* which denotes an iron deity. This is contrary to the conically thatched roof shed and circular-shaped blacksmith's workshop at Bulkiemdé in Burkina Faso (Kienon-Kabore *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, art of potting in the Bussie traditional area (like anywhere else) consists of a number of interconnected activities (Kusimi *et al.*, 2020); clay mining or extraction, clay preparation, pot building or formation, drying, firing, packaging and transportation. As noted in the Bussie traditional area and is evident in sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous pottery is in the preserve of women (Curnow, 2021). Yet, there were notable exceptions where certain clay objects

meant for ritual purposes in connection with the deities are made by men, a similar observation made by Johnson (1970) and Gijanto (2014) of the Akans of Ghana.

## CONCLUSION

The study set out to bring to light the animistic practices associated with the production of indigenous visual artforms among the Sissala people in the Bussie traditional area. Findings revealed that among other indigenous arts, wood carving, blacksmithing and pottery are an integral part of the people's daily socio-cultural life. In line with the notion of the African cosmology, the study unearthed some animistic practices unique to the people understudied regarding their production of these indigenous arts. The religious and spiritual nuances of the Sissala people's worldview have as well imbued their indigenous art production. It is in the observance of these animistic practices and taboos that the sanctity of the artforms is maintained. The paper also highlighted the need for a proper documentation of the historical path of the Bussie community particularly its naming to ensure a coherent history of it for future generations. Future research must aim at finding proactive ways of documenting the indigenous knowledge in the animistic practices of the indigenous visual artists the Bussie Traditional Area.

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