

GHANA: WHERE THE BEAD SPEAKS

By Esi Sutherland-Addy, Kati Torda Dagadu and Ama Ata Aidoo

Available at all leading bookshops and Art galleries

Reviewed by Frances Ademola

The Akan saying that 'good beads do not speak' comes to mind the moment One sets eyes on this book, and one wonders what has finally loosened the tongue of the good beads of Ghana! Eminent scholar Esi Sutherland-Addy, Kati Torda Dagadu, acclaimed lover and promoter of beads world-wide and Ama Ata Aidoo, Ghana's celebrated writer, came together to deliver the message of beads. They do so in one hundred and five pages containing informative essays, beautiful photographs and evocative poetry that delight and heighten our appreciation of beads.

Esi Sutherland-Addy, in her introduction, declares that the book is about understanding the bead, which she describes as 'one of the most intriguing phenomena of Ghanaian symbolic culture'. She goes on to affirm that the bead 'embedded in the very fabric (of this culture) speaks as much about the past as the present and future-----it announces pain, joy and pride'. Each of her four essays deals with a role which beads have played in history, in trading and continue to play in our contemporary life.

These essays are full of facts, they are well researched and sometimes academic, but they are easy to read and contain a wealth of information for both the scholar and the merely curious. They are buttressed by exquisite photographs of beads clearly defined in shape, colour and even texture. The book offers a photographic tour of bead markets where we meet new and old traders and their products from many different parts of our continent.

Section three of the book deals with the current manufacture of beads from an astonishing variety of raw materials, glass being the most commonly used. Vivid photographs showing the scope of the creativity of 'local' bead makers will take your breath away! We have Patric Brown Egue and Kati Torda Dagadu to thank for most of these wonderful photographs.

If you are as ardent a fan of Ama Ata Aidoo's writings as I am, then GHANA: WHERE THE BEAD SPEAKS is the book for you, offering over 25 of her poems specially written for beads. 'Give me bead that's wrapped in joy / Find me a bead to carry my grief / We sing of beads and sing with beads / Just see how well they show on us.' In celebrating the bead Ama Ata acts as the Chorus in the drama in the beads. Highlighting the significance of the role of beads she appears in a variety of moods: whimsical and playful ' And there are beads around my waist / For my own and my dot-dot's eyes'. Angry and indignant at the role chevron beads played in the barter of human life she burst out with words echoing a quarrel: 'So don't talk to me of the chevron / Don't break my ears!!!' With each poem Ama Ata Aidoo affirms the attitude of near-reverence with which beads are held in our culture.

UNESCO must be given full credit for being a catalyst in the creation of this book which is a landmark in the recording of valuable facets of our culture in writing.

Kati Torda Dagadu came to Ghana from Hungary as a bride 32 years ago. She fell in love with beads at first sight. During three decades of living here she collected, researched and designed beads, and has shared her findings and their fascination freely with people in this country and abroad. She and the late Mrs. Victoria Baeta and a few others were active in the formation of the Ghana Bead Society which has encouraged the making and marketing of beads, and the use of beads in contemporary fashion. Kati both edited and designed this book with her knowledge and acclaimed skill, and the result is that GHANA: WHERE THE BEAD SPEAKS is the most definitive book on our bead culture. Its appeal is manifold, connecting mind, sight, Heart and touch, and like the bead, not bound by time. This is one book which will never gather dust on a coffee table.