

Right, this gold weight features a chief seated on a stool, holding a ceremonial sword, with musicians by his side.



A crocodile, with two heads and tails but only a single stomach, represents a proverb concerning the "futility of struggle within a group."



Replicas of gold weights are still popular and available, and gold weight designs are often reproduced on bracelets and pendants. The proverb for this mythological, backward-facing Sankofa bird bracelet encourages one to learn from and correct the mistakes of the past.



Gold Weights illustrate African Proverbs

On two trips to Ghana, West Africa, Wilhelmina Banks, director/curator of Nyumba Ya Tausi/Peacock Museum in Bristol, Virginia, collected replicas of gold weights in the Kumasi area.

Present day Ghana was once known as the Gold Coast at the time Africa was called the "Dark Continent." Kumasi was referred to as the "Land of Ashanti Gold" in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Kingdom of Ashanti dominated the gold mining industry. The region controlled and regulated the distribution of the gold dust that was used as currency until the introduction of modern coinage. They also controlled all gold-related transactions and accessories such as gold weights. Gold weights and scales were made to weigh and determine the value of gold dust. The original weights were made of bronze, copper, brass, and sometimes gold, utilizing the ancient "lost wax" process of casting.

Banks' gold weights are brass copies of the originals that are in various European museums. The replicas vary in size from one-inch tall to larger figures. The forms range from animals such as the antelope, bird and crocodile to musical instruments and humans. Each illustrates a proverb or oral expression relating to the mores of the culture.

A native of Bristol, Banks lived in New York City for 44 years and in Africa for five years. She spent time in Tanzania and Kenya, East Africa, as well as Ghana, Nigeria, and the Ivory Coast in West Africa. She is a storyteller, poet, performer and writer whose presentations are often enhanced by African musical instruments, artifacts, family heirlooms and African-American memorabilia.

The gold weights may be seen by appointment at the Nyumba Ya Tausi/Peacock Museum, where permanent exhibits include African art and artifacts, handmade African toys and musical instruments, as well as historical and genealogical resources. 276-669-4596. *A!*



The horned antelope proverb, "had I known," speaks to the uselessness of regret after-the-fact.



These gold weight replicas depict four musicians: from left, a harpist whose instrument is mounted on a large gourd, a royal harpist wearing a suman (charm), a xylophonist, and a drummer. Each piece is approximately five inches tall and weighs about 1.5 pounds.