



Speaking for the Chief: Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory (African Systems of Thought)

Kwesi Yankah

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...an unprecedented opportunity to understand West African oratory from the point of view of a native Akan speaker who is also a gifted linguist and ethnographer...[Yankah] shows with elegance the connections between verbal strategies and the cultural organization of West African social systems. - "Alessandro Duranti". Among the Akan of Ghana and in other areas of West Africa, royal speech is not articulated with a single voice but is rather a composite of the chief's words and their artistic relay by his orator and principal diplomat, the okyeame. In the royal entourage the okyeame is the most conspicuous personage, functioning as the chief's mouth and ear: the individual through whom the chief speaks and through whom others' words may reach the chief. This little-studied phenomenon receives comprehensive exploration in Kwesi Yankah's engaging "Speaking for the Chief", a theoretically informed work rich with firsthand observations. Yankah shows the art of the okyeame to be not simply a genre of speaking but a set of cultural practices that mediate and reconstitute local notions of power, hegemony, and public discourse.

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