THE BRIGHT CONTINENT - AFRICAN ART HISTORY



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Licensing

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Introduction

We come to art from various locations. Some are out for a stroll, stumbling upon objects that grab their attention. Others are equipped with guidebooks, methodically approaching and regularly revisiting both actual and virtual works. Still other viewers revel in the familiar, remaining attentive to the details and information that cement life-long friendships.

African art is no different. For some, it may initially hold few clues that help unpack its meaning. Those viewers may have little knowledge of Africa or could actually be African–from a different part of the continent, a totally different culture, or members of a religion that distances them even from a work their own hometown produced.

No art is completely transparent, letting us understand all of an artist's constraints, thoughts, choices, or associations. But if we are not privy to all of an artist's perceptions and interpretations, we can lessen the differences in our understanding–and this is a process that creates human pleasure in both cerebral and sensual ways. By familiarizing ourselves with art, learning its visual vocabulary and grammar, assessing our taste for it, and placing it within the contexts of its makers and users, we expand our world.

You don't have to like every work you see, even when someone labels it a masterpiece. You may develop a love for a piece made for tourists or one that seems flawed. That's fine. The goal for anyone studying art is to develop knowledge and refine your own taste. Art is a window that permits vision within and without, and as such, it allows you to become a seer whose perceptions and comprehension lead to revelations.

This book aims to act as your map through the world of African art. As such, it will help you define the competencies you need to develop–visual analysis, research, noting what information is critical, asking questions, and writing down your observations–and provide opportunities for you to practice these skills until you are proficient. It will also expose you to new art forms and the worlds that produced them, enriching your understanding and appreciation.

This is an ongoing project. Your text will not be complete the day you first click on it, but will be written as we proceed through the course. Because it will be used for other courses beyond your own, you may find that it includes materials beyond those your class demands. Encourage your curiosity–chase after it.



Guardian figure. Mambila male artist, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. Wood and pigment, 8.5 x 3.75 x 3 in. Brooklyn Museum, 73.9.1_SL3. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gerofsky. Creative Commons BY 2.0.

Acknowledgments

I've enjoyed textbook-related conversations since those far-off days when African art history had no dedicated textbooks. I was a member of the textbook committee inaugurated by the Arts Council of the African Studies Association, and thankful I was part of the planning group rather than a designated author. Many thanks to Monica Blackmun Visonà, who edited *The History of Art in Africa* and wrote much of its text, as well as her team of fellow writers, composed of Robin Poynor and Herbert M. Cole. Their efforts to cover the entire continent from the earliest times to the present was a daunting task that they accomplished with grace. A second text, *Visual Arts of Africa* by Judith Perani and Fred T. Smith, was more selective in its coverage, and its less encyclopedic organization emphasized gender and its relationship to the arts, a very useful approach; my appreciation extends to these authors as well.

Unfortunately, publishing costs have risen. Full-page photos, multiple-angle shots, full-color pictures, and comparative images have become prohibitive. While both former texts are useful, neither is a perfect fit for the way I teach. For the past ten years, I've experimented with different approaches to teaching, and I would like to thank my students from my Rewriting the Textbook seminar in Spring 2012 for their creative suggestions and conversations about what an ideal textbook would include. While not all of their ideas can be implemented, we concurred that an interactive textbook is ideal, and this is the result.

Without an institutional shift towards museums and archives allowing Creative Commons usage of their images, as well as the personal generosity of many individual photographers, a book of this type would not be possible. I would particularly like to express appreciation to the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Yale Art Gallery, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Tropenmuseum, the National Archives, UK, the Detroit Institute of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Dallas Museum of Art, ArtStor and many other individuals and institutions for making their collections available for non-commercial use.

Finally, my appreciation is extended to the Cleveland State team that helped me prepare and disseminate this book: our library director Glenda A. Thornton, Heather Caprette, Justin Grogan-Meyers, Marsha A. Miles, Barbara Loomis, Christopher E. Rennison, and Barbara Gauthier.

Dedication

To my friends and colleagues from the Roy Sieber-Patrick McNaughton African art history lineage, especially Diane Pelrine, Barbara Frank, Christine Mullen Kreamer, Mary Jo Arnoldi, Bill Dewey, and Janet Purdy. May our family tree of teaching continue to grow and flourish!

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Orientation to Africa and its Art

1.1: General Introduction

1.2: Gender, Materials, Techniques in Traditional Art

1.3: Training and Patronage in Traditional Art

1.4: Contemporary African Art: Materials, Gender and Training

1.5: Patronage in Contemporary African Art

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1.1: General Introduction



Figure 1. Africa and Europe from space. NASA, 2015. Public domain.

Africa. It's a term that creates a neat box, limited by geographic boundaries. But what attributes does this continent's name conjure? Your personal experience and exposure define your mental pictures of Africa. If you were raised there, your image is unlikely to be continent-wide. You picture the mango tree outside your house, your father and his friends sitting on mats and talking. Your mind is filled with images of city traffic and the cries of hawkers selling soft drinks, newspapers, tissues, plantain chips, peanuts. You're transported to a boarding school as you press your uniform, hurrying to line up before the prefect discovers you're late. If you aren't African, and you've never travelled there, these particular scenes are unlikely to fill your mind. Your thoughts–positive or negative–are shaped by media, your education, and your imagination.

Despite American attempts to make K-12 education broader through multiculturalism, most elementary and high school teachers have studied little about Africa, and are as subject as their students to visual and cultural stereotypes. Why is it so easy to stereotype a whole continent? Partly because our sense of geography is weak. No American–even those who have never travelled–would assume that Icelandic and Greek cultures are identical or even substantially similar. Yet unfamiliarity with African countries and ethnonyms, histories, and cultural distinctions often groups anything from the continent with an adjective no more specific than "African."

A quick look at a photo taken in space demonstrates just how small Europe is in comparison to Africa (Figure 1). Print maps have distorted the size relationships of land masses for centuries in order to conveniently show longitude and latitude. A comparative map further indicates just how vast Africa is (Figure 2). If we can recognize just how different Iceland and Greece are, then why are we so eager to believe that African cultures are similar, or assume that the continent shares a common religion, history, or arts?

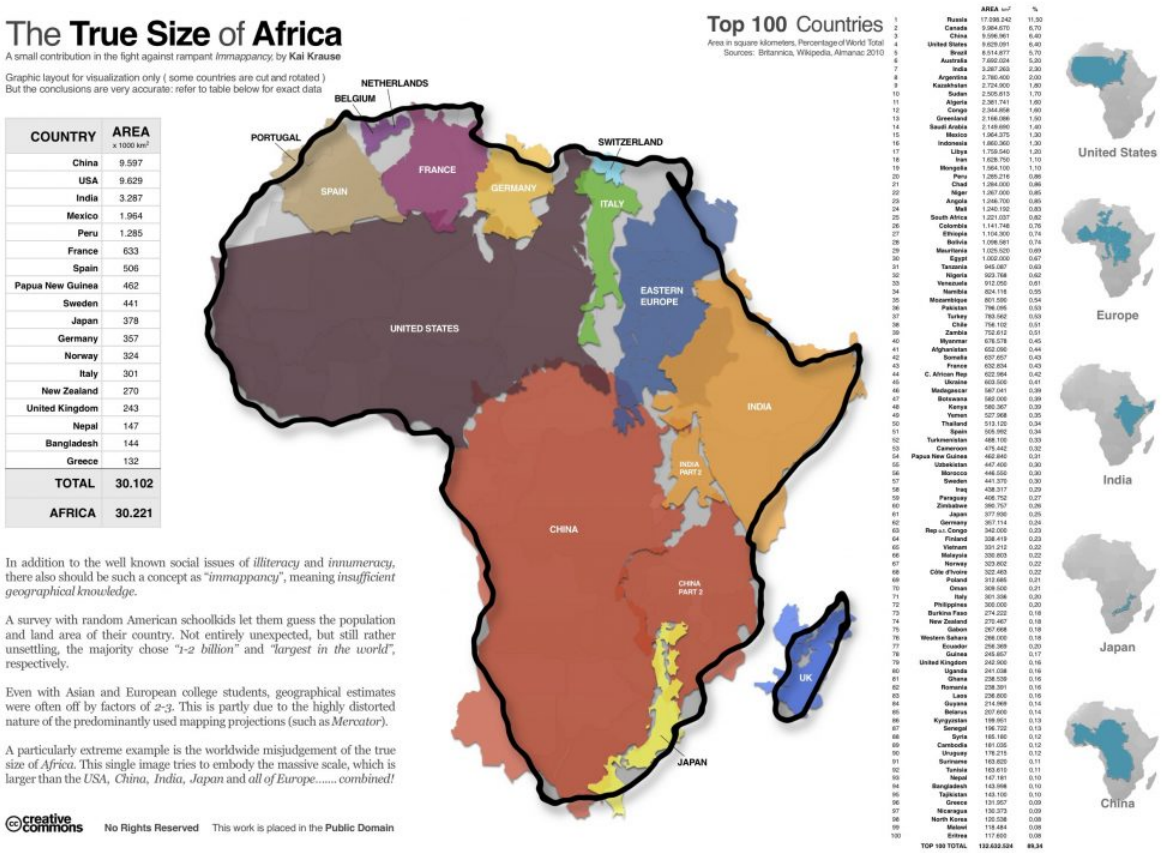
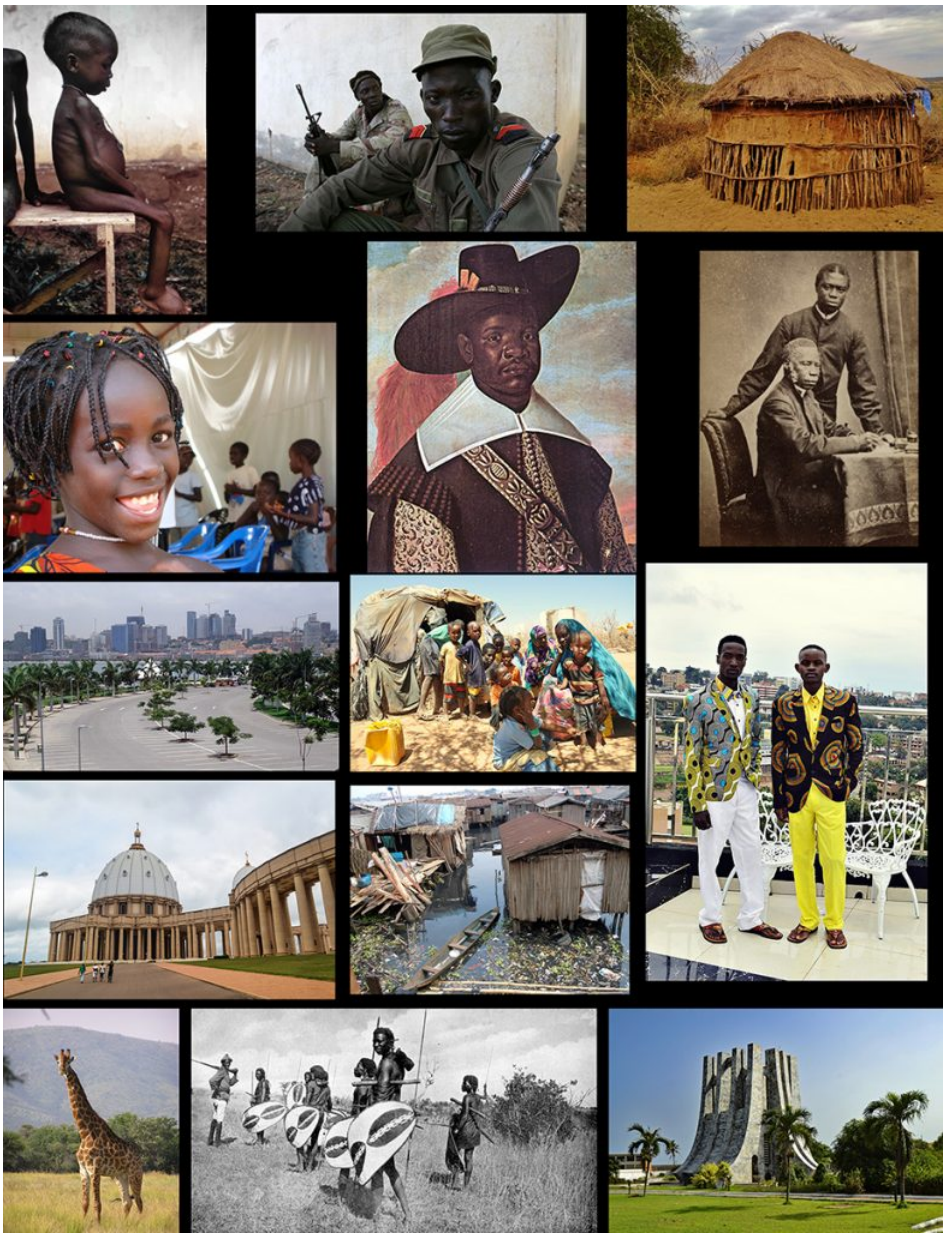


Figure 2. Kai Krause's "The True Size of Africa." .

Media imagery has created a picture of Africa that is often out-of-date, exaggerated, or that magnifies issues of one area as if they apply to the continent. Often perspectives deny complexity or are ahistorical, as if Africa has remained unchanged for centuries or longer.

Exercises



l to r: Starving girl, late 1960s, Dr. Lyle Conrad, public domain; soldiers, Central African Rep., 2007, Martin H, CC BY-SA 2.0; house, public domain; smiling girl, public domain; Jasper Beckx portrait of Miguel de Castro, Nationmuseet, Copenhagen, 1643, Creative Commons 0; Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Son, 1870, public domain; Luanda, Angola, 2013, Fabio Vanin, CC BY-SA 3.0; refugee camp Horn of Africa, 2011, Oxfam, CC 3.0; Models, Uganda, 2014, Eguanokla, CC BY-SA 4.0; Our Lady of Peace, Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, 2013, jbdodane, CC BY-NC 2.0; Maroko, Nigeria, 2010, Heinrich Boll-Stiftung, CC BY-SA 2.0; giraffe, 2005, Miroslav Duchacek,CC BY-SA 3.0; Maasai warriors, 1921, public domain; Nkrumah mausoleum, Accra, Ghana, public domain.

Look at the images here. Which ones do you find unexpected? The higher the number, the more likely you have media-limited preconceptions about Africa.

Archaeology and physical anthropology show us human life originated in East Africa, yet our depth of knowledge relating to the earliest African history is limited either to those regions that had early writing systems (Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia) or to those that have hosted extensive archaeological research. Oral history supplies considerable information, but gaps remain. The dispersal of language families also supplies clues relating to population movements.

Many parts of Africa were in direct or indirect contact with Europe and Asia. Egypt and some other parts of North Africa were incorporated into the Roman Empire and afterward continued to trade with the Mediterranean world. By the 8th century, Arab-speaking chroniclers recorded information about parts of eastern, northern and western Africa. Ethiopians travelled to Byzantium and the Middle East, as well as India, and Persians and Arabs traded with a number of East African coastal communities, as did the Chinese (Figure 3). The 15th century saw the beginning of European direct contact with West, then Central, then South and East Africa, as well as travelers' accounts and documents written by Africans in European languages or Arabic.

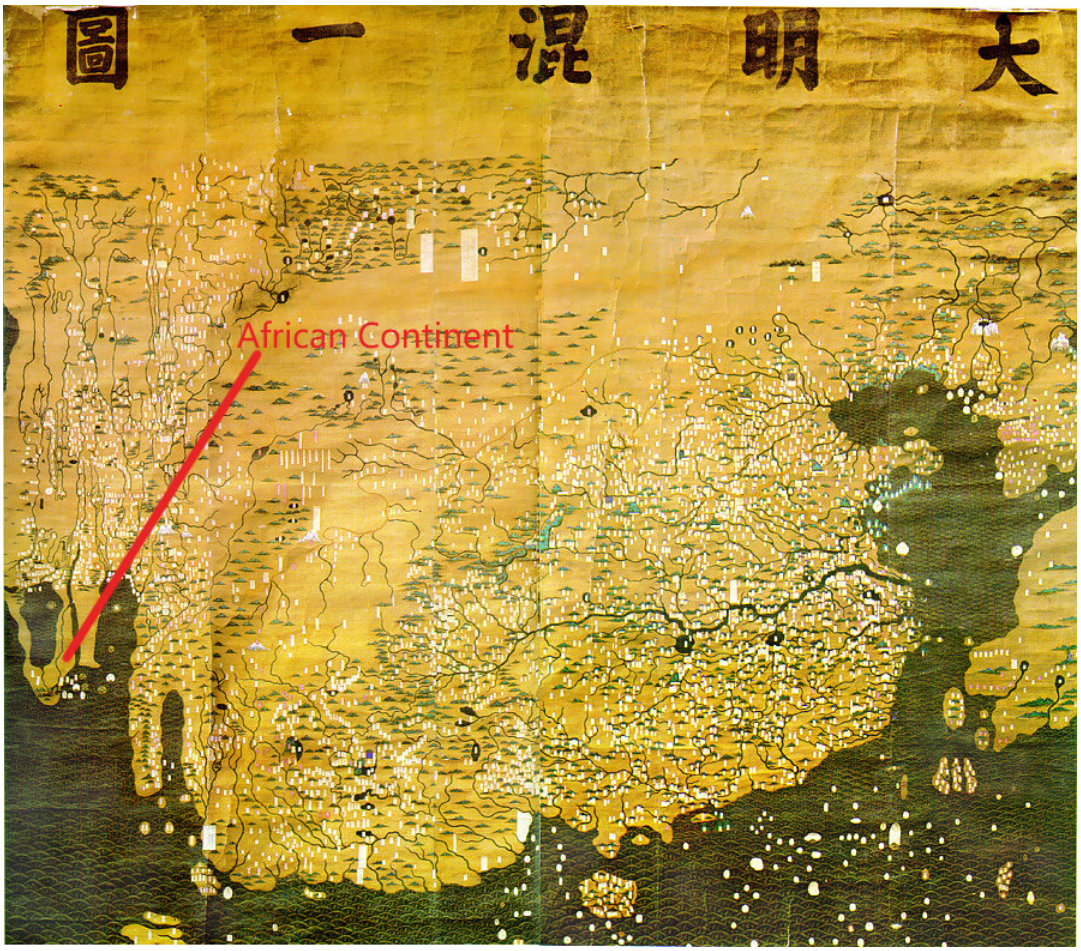


Figure 3. The Da-ming-hun-yi-tu, or Composite Map of the Ming Empire, is the oldest surviving map that shows Africa. Although depicted from an ethnocentric viewpoint (China dwarfs every other known land mass), it demonstrates early Chinese awareness of the continent and even (albeit enlarged) one of its interior lakes, possibly Lake Victoria. Painted on silk, the map is huge, at approximately 12.67 x 6.67 feet. It appears to be a copy of a map from 1389. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain.

Because Europeans were confined primarily to coastal regions, their information about the West and Central African interiors was usually second-hand and often inaccurate. Access restriction until the 19th century prevented them from reaching the hinterland where they could obtain the raw materials they sought: gold, ivory, furs, pepper, and human beings. Coastal merchants, who acted as middlemen, profited from their control of trade. Europeans could not wrest it from them because they were few in number, arrived on floating targets, and were equipped with volatile gunpowder and inaccurate firearms whose reloading time was no match for a well-aimed arrow.

In the 19th century, however, all that changed. The repeating rifle shifted the military advantage, and, as the century wore on, the Maxim mounted machine gun provided even more effective firepower. Two additional shifts earlier in the century provided the military with advance intelligence: missionary and commercial penetration of the interior. Missionaries forged diplomatic alliances, took note of local power structures, and learned new languages. Commercial concerns such as the Royal Niger Company did the same.

While some European powers had gained an earlier foothold in Africa–the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique, the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope, the French at St. Louis along the Senegal River, and the turnover of Portuguese-Dutch-Danish-English

occupants of coastal Ghanaian forts–the late 19th century produced European determination to carve up the continent into defined spheres of influence. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 established European borders for French, English, Belgian, German, Portuguese, Italian, and Spanish interests that soon became colonies (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Map of colonial Africa as in 1913, with modern borders. Eric Gaba, Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0

Colonialism did not actually last long. Most African nations became independent by 1960/61. In some respects, its impact was negligible; in others, it had major political and cultural effects. When Europeans took control, they found a continent with varied political systems. Some areas were empires or kingdoms, run by a single ruler and his counselors. Other areas were more egalitarian city-states, run by all adult men or by a gerontocracy. Some ethnic groups operated as single polities, while others comprised multiple states that warred with one another. The arbitrary nature of the Berlin Conference's borders meant that old states or families might be split into two spheres. It also meant that former rulers might continue as cultural leaders if cooperative, or be dethroned or exiled if resistant. Even those who kept their positions no longer had military or full legal authority, nor did they have the ability to collect taxes. Governments based on the home country's will were established, and independence did not reinstate traditional rulers to the full powers they had held previously.

Besides new political and court systems, foreign religious and educational systems had major lasting influences. Christianity arrived in Egypt, the Sudan, and Ethiopia in the 4th century, the same period it was recognized officially in Europe, and parts of northern and eastern Africa became Muslim immediately after the Prophet Muhammed's death. Islam continued to spread into West Africa slowly via North African trade, but Christian missionization exploded in the 19th century, and since the 1970s both faiths have pushed many older religions aside. Advancement in the civil service–whether colonial or independence era–requires mastery of a foreign language that is usually the "language of instruction" in schools. Curricula are based on European models and extend to university level, which means they vary considerably depending on the former colonial power.

Access to international media and more accessible travel or migration have had their own impact. Foreign films, music videos, and clothing jostle with local products. While none of these features means that African culture has been abandoned, it does signify that values have been adjusted, and cultures often compete for supremacy, some winning because of their status as imported novelties. As we'll see, the visual arts are part of this duality, with retentions of older practices coexisting with new materials, functions, training, and patrons.

There are many different ways of breaking this huge continent into smaller segments for effective discussion. We could look at climate zones: desert, Sahel, savannah, rainforest. We could consider colonial history and examine Anglophone, Francophone, or Lusophone nations. We're going to take an approach that considers a limited number of geographic zones, dividing the continent into seven sectors. These often include areas that were once part of a large kingdom or kingdoms, or had linked trading patterns, or share certain cultural, linguistic, or historic features–but they are somewhat arbitrary just the same. They are as follows: North Africa, Western Sudan, Upper Guinea Coast, Lower Guinea Coast, Central Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa (Figs. 5-11).



Figure 5. North Africa: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Western Sahara. These countries have had long relationships with Europe, the Middle East, and countries south of the Saharan desert. The early spread of Islam limited figurative arts, which are forbidden by religion.

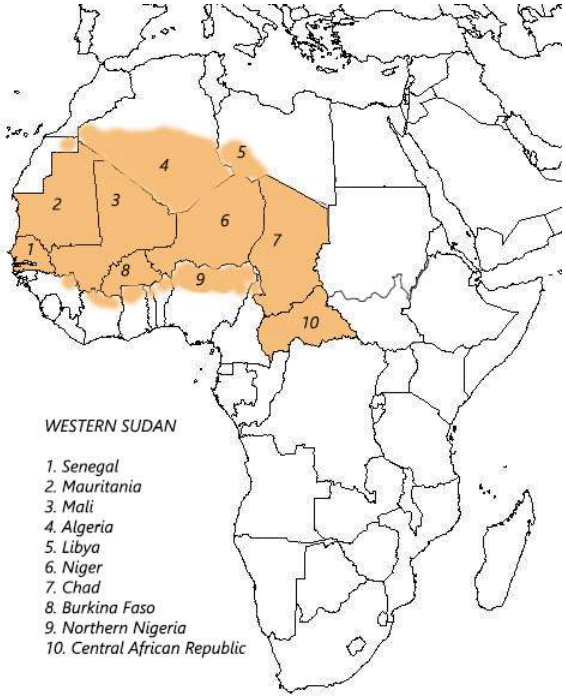


Figure 6. The Western Sudan: Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, southern parts of Algeria and Libya, northern parts of Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin Republic, Nigeria, and Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic. Although this is a huge area, some regions are desert and have very small populations. It has been home to some of the largest African empires because the geography allowed the use of horses. Much of the region has been Muslim for 500 to 1200 years, which limited figurative art, since it is banned by Islam.



Figure 7. Upper Guinea Coast: Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Liberia, southern Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. This region was once fairly heavily forested, and, along with the Lower Guinea Coast and the Western Sudan, constitutes what is usually called West Africa. Some of the ethnic groups create and use masks and figures, while others have neither artistic tradition.



Figure 8 Lower Guinea Coast: southern Togo, Benin Republic, and Nigeria. Although this region does not appear to be physically large, it includes the densest populations in Africa, and is one of two key sculpture-producing regions.

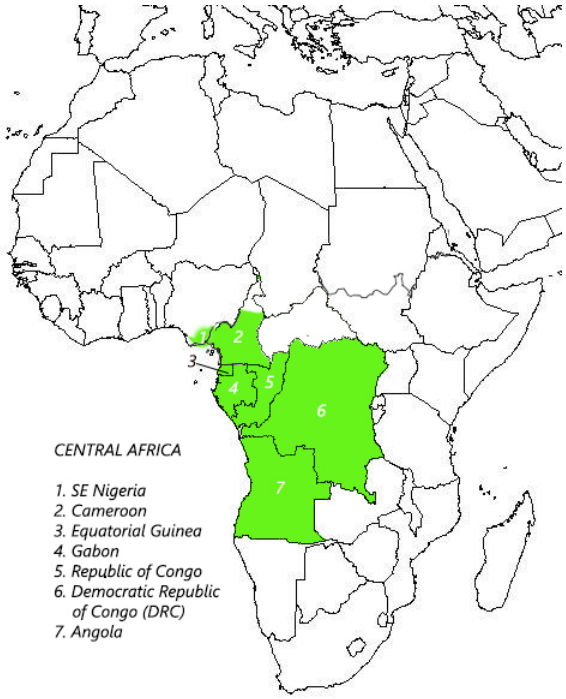


Figure 9. Central Africa: southeastern Nigeria, southern Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo (or Congo-Brazzaville, after its capital), Democratic Republic of Congo (also called DRC or Congo-Kinshasa), Angola. This region is the second largest producer of sculpture in the continent.



Figure 10. Southern Africa: Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Malawi. While this region's contemporary art scene is active, older art forms are mostly confined to dress and body decoration. Masquerades occur in parts of Zambia and in Malawi, but not elsewhere.

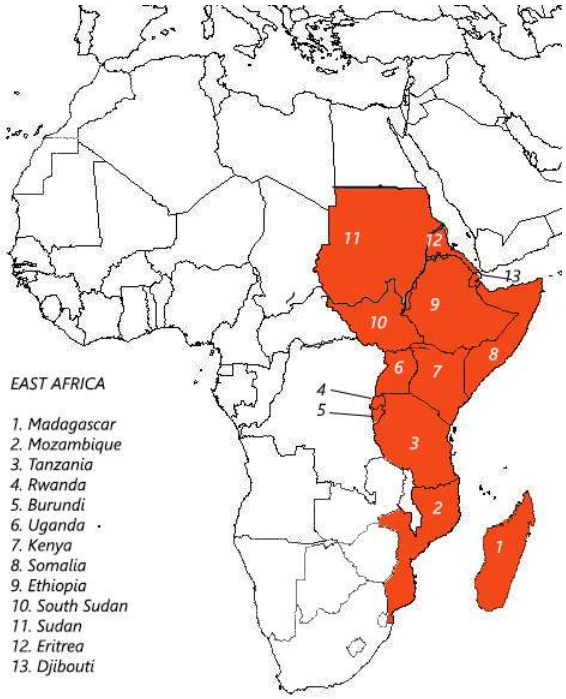


Figure 11. East Africa: Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea. The art forms of this region are very diverse, but masquerades do not exist outside of a section of Mozambique, and figurative sculpture is also limited. Household arts, dress and body arts, and architecture are stressed, though Madagascar and Ethiopia have extensive textile traditions, and the latter also has a many-centuries-old painting tradition.

Contemporary Africa consists of 54 countries, some of which are island nations (Cape Verde Islands, Comoros, Mauritius, Seychelles, São Tomé and Principe). Nations, however, are not synonymous with cultures. Very few countries consist of a homogeneous people. Rather, countries are made up of ethnic groups; some nations are occupied by a handful, while others include over 300 (Figure 12). These groups are only occasionally isolated. Often a given town or city includes multiple ethnic groups in large numbers; at other times, a small cluster of one ethnic group's members live as a minority within the territory of another. Members of one ethnic group may marry members of another, but self-identification is usually dependent on the culture's inheritance system. In a patrilineal society, where inheritance is through the male line (i.e., from father to son), a child carries the ethnicity of its father. In a matrilineal society, where inheritance is through the female line (i.e., from a man to his sister's son), a child carries his mother's ethnicity.

WHAT ABOUT TRIBE? While many Africans use the word “tribe” to describe their ethnicity, it is a term that carries different meanings for Americans and should be avoided because those associations are misleading. We tend to link the word tribe either with nomadic prehistoric people or with Native Americans, and in each case it has picked up connotations of small bands of people who live either on the move or reside in small villages. In the United States, we don’t use the word to discuss large populations or people who live in cities, and therefore it can distort ideas of what Africa is like, and perpetuate inaccurate preconceptions. If we don’t think of the Irish (4.8 million) or the South Koreans (51.25 million) as tribes, even though both nations have fairly homogeneous populations, why would we describe the Yoruba or the Hausa (both in the 38-40 million range) as tribes? “Ethnic group” accurately describes both the Zulu and the Han Chinese, despite differences in numbers and lifestyle.

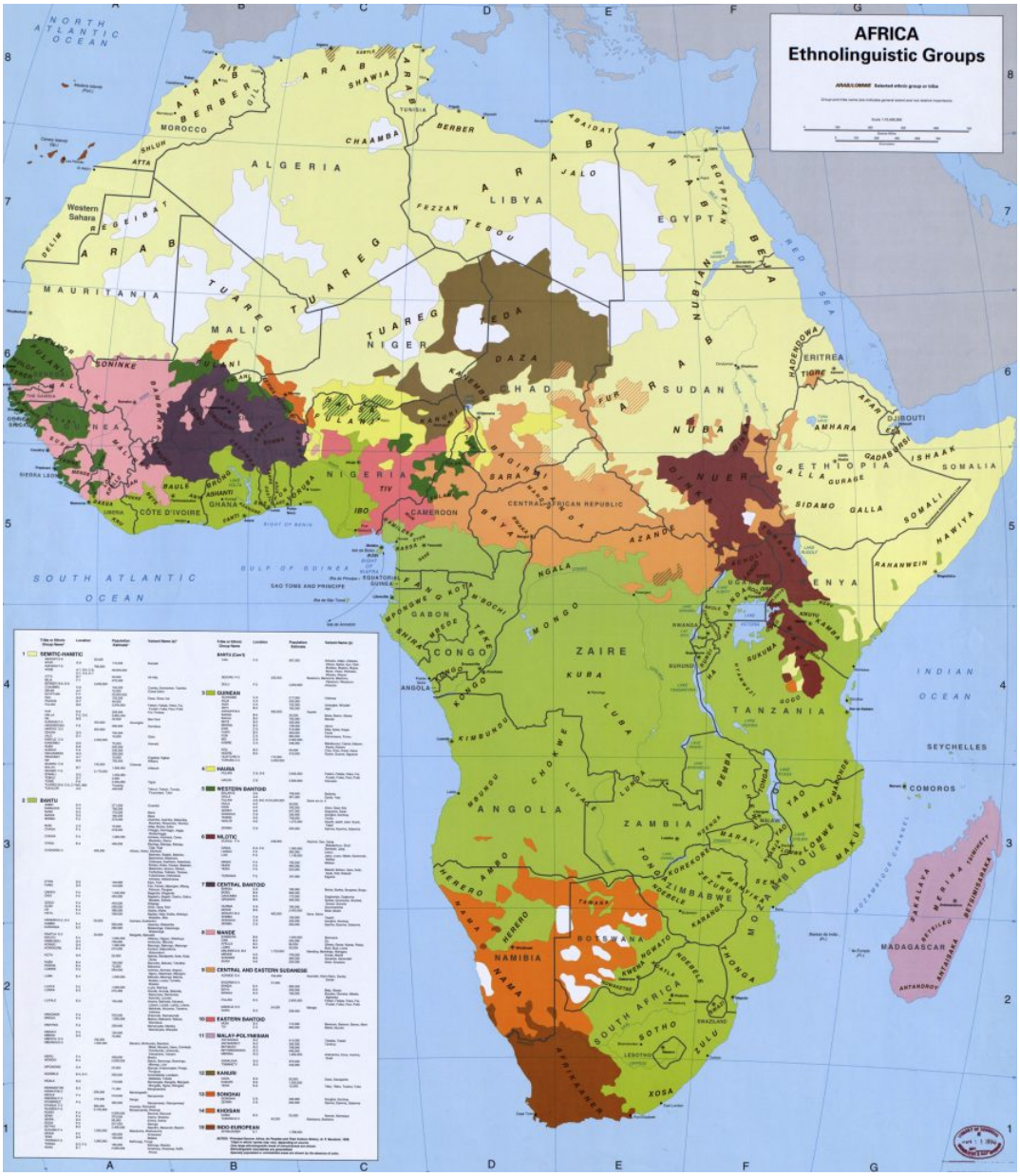


Figure 12. The colors represent language families (comparable to “Romance languages,” “Germanic languages,” “Dravidian languages,” “Sino-Tibetan languages”). Members of such families have a common historical origin. The chart and the map itself mention some of the ethnic groups belonging to each language family, but there are far more ethnic groups that do not appear here. Wikimedia Commons, United States. Central Intelligence Agency, 1996. Public domain.

HOW MUCH HISTORY DOES AFRICAN ART HAVE?

As we'll see, African art is full of variety. We're going to examine art from many different parts of the continent with varied functions, appearances, and meaning.

Outside of North Africa and parts of the Sudan and Ethiopia, our knowledge of African art is severely limited historically. Most older works in museums are from the 19th and 20th century because wood has been a primary medium for sculpture. Unfortunately, both termites and acidic soil do not allow its long survival, even when objects are wrapped in insect-repellent leaves or stored in the rafters where the smoke from cooking fires helps slow insect depredations.

Art is not valued for age, but rather for vitality—a termite-ridden work will be replaced. Some mediums are more resistant—the copper-based alloys **brass** (copper plus zinc) and **bronze** (copper plus tin) will survive burial in damp soil, although oxidation may produce a greenish surface patina. **Terracotta** (fired clay) may break, but it will not deteriorate. **Ivory** will survive above ground, but it can burn in fires like wood and will deteriorate if buried.

Very little archaeological work has been conducted south of the Sahara, but when it has occurred, its style and direction often include startling deviations from what 19th and 20th-century art suggest. There are huge gaps in African art history due to these factors; the Edo people of Nigeria's Benin Kingdom are the only ethnic group to have substantial metal and ivory works from an unbroken period of just over 500 years. This permits gauging stylistic change, the introduction of new motifs and forms, and other aspects that are commonly assessed in art worldwide. Despite the spottiness of our general knowledge of African art history, however, we do know that art on the continent began by at least 10,000 BCE (long before the Egyptian pyramids) and continues until today.

With the exception of the ancient Sahara and the impact of trade relationships across the desert, we will not be looking at the art of North Africa. While it is certainly a part of Africa, the history and art history of Egypt alone cover so many centuries that it would limit what we could examine in the rest of the continent. Likewise, a survey of this type cannot give equal attention to the arts of all parts of Africa.

Even from the relatively little we know about African art in the distant past, we can see that substantial change has occurred in over time. So what constitutes "traditional" African art, if change is consistent? Like many terms, it is imperfect, especially when contrasted with "contemporary" African art. The two words suggest division by time, but both artistic directions can coexist. "Traditional" African art is a response (whether it changes or not) to older patterns of function, such as traditional African religions, or use by traditional governmental institutions in palaces, or forms of protective and/or divinatory equipment. Traditional training is via formal or informal apprenticeship or self-education. Traditional patrons are individuals, male or female societies, priests, aristocrats or rulers.

"Contemporary" African art is distinguished by its diversions from the route of traditional art. The emphasis of its functions differs, emphasizing status display or advertising. Training can be by apprenticeship at some levels, such as sign painting, and can also result from self-education, but it often involves formalized training via a Western model: organized workshops, art school, or university specialization. Materials could be identical to those used by traditional artists, but technologies expand to incorporate acrylic or oil paint, glass, cement, resin, rubber, or other mediums that became available through foreign introduction. Contemporary patrons are usually individuals or corporate bodies—companies, hotels, government buildings—and need not be African at all. In a way, art made for export to tourists or overseas shops is contemporary art, because even if the artists are the same ones who make traditional art for local use, the shift to indirect patronage and accommodation to foreign preferences moves them toward the contemporary end of the spectrum.

In this chapter, we'll look more carefully at both "traditional" and "contemporary" African art, examining their mediums, tools, training methods, patrons, and audiences. We'll also examine issues of style, which apply to both types of art.

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1.2: Gender, Materials, Techniques in Traditional Art

THE PATH WITH ROOTS: TRADITIONAL AFRICAN ART

Traditional African art restricts the use of certain materials to a specific gender—in most cases. Because it's a huge continent, many aspects aren't absolute, but apply to most cultures outside of North Africa. An examination of materials and techniques will elucidate the least and most flexible aspects of artists and fixed gender.

Carving: Wood, Ivory, Stone



Figure 13. This lidded wooden vessel is whitened in areas by "chalk" (kaolin clay), while the light blue is a mixture of chalk and imported laundry blueing. Yoruba male artist, Dahomey Kingdom, Republic of Benin, 19th century. H. 13.19″ x W 16.93″ x D 7.48″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 6294 a,b. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Fotograf/in: Hans-Joachim Radosuboff. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

Carving is a subtractive sculptural approach. Artists remove material when they carve. Worldwide, the most common carving materials have been wood (Figure 13), stone, and ivory. South of the Sahara, stone is the least common of the three, but it stone carving does occur in a few regions. Because of its rarity, its use is worth noting; it has the most durability and longevity of the three materials. Ivory is a luxury material. Although it was readily available in many parts of Africa, its use was usually restricted to rulers, aristocrats, or those recognized for special achievement. Wood was the most common carving material, although it became rarer in arid regions.

Men exclusively carve wood, ivory, bone, and stone, all subtractive substances that require sections to be removed in order to create the desired form. They usually are also responsible for cutting down the tree that yields their material, usually with a prayer or small sacrifice to honor the spirit housed within.



Figure 14. This Samo blacksmith from Burkina Faso is using an adze to shape another tool handle. Photo: Dr. Johan Theodorus Broekhuijse, 1970-71. Tropenmuseum. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0



Figure 15. This basalt figure is one of about 300 similar stone sculptures found in a small part of Ejagham territory in southeastern Nigeria. They date somewhere between the 16th and 19th century. 22.44″. ©Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Sometimes the chosen wood is mandated by the type of object. In general, lightweight woods are used for masquerades to lessen the dancer's burden, while artists select denser, weightier specimens for figures meant to be termite-resistant. The traditional artist's toolkit formerly consisted of a set of differently sized adzes and knives for finishing work. The **adze** (Figure 14). chops into the wood and towards the artist, a motion not unlike that of the African farm hoe, whose shape it mimics. Artists work directly into the wood without preliminary drawings, blocking out the basic forms, then refining them. In nearly all cases, objects made from wood are **monoxyl**, that is, made from a single block of wood, rather than joined by glue, pegs, or nails.

In areas with traditions of carving ivory and/or stone, woodworkers remain the sculptors and continue to use the adze. Soapstone is quite soft and is usually the material of choice, but quartz, granite, and other stones (Figure 15) have also served in some regions.



Figure of St. Anthony by a male Kongo artist, Angola, 18th century. 3/8″ x Diam. 1 3/16″. (11.1 x 3 cm); hippo incisor tooth. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.295.6, Gift of Ernst Anspach. Public domain. CLICK TO ENLARGE.

Wooden sculptures are frequently painted. While traditional artists often employ manufactured paints today, colors made from botanical and mineral sources were standard in centuries past. Even when the wooden surface remains unpainted, handling and the application of oil and pigment may change the surface color; this also can occur with ivories. This result from handling isn't produced by the artist, but by the owner, and is intentional. It is known as a **patina**, and can also develop from sacrificial materials poured on the artwork (Figure 17). Neither worn paint nor insect damage constitutes a patina.



Figure 17. This wooden female figure bears a thick sacrificial patina, its crusty surface the result of multiple applications of millet gruel and blood. Dogon male artist, Mali, 19th century or earlier. H. 13″ x W. 3″ x D. 2 5/8″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.394.21, Gift of Lester Wunderman. Public domain. CLICK TO ENLARGE.

Scientists can approximate the age of both wood and ivory through the **Carbon-14 dating** or **radiocarbon dating** technique. This testing can only be used on substances that were once alive: bone, charcoal, wood, ivory, textiles made from cotton, wool, linen, silk, etc. The method checks the decay rate of carbon-14, a radioisotope, to determine age. While fairly effective for dating items from the distant past, it cannot easily distinguish an object made in 1700 from one carved in 1850; the plus or minus accuracy diminishes as one approaches the present. One exception, however, occurs. Items whose carbon-bearing material was alive after 20th-century nuclear testing and the explosion of fossil fuel use show a different profile, so these recent items have artificially higher radiocarbon levels. Stone objects, being inorganic, cannot be tested with radiocarbon dating, nor any other scientific method to date, although the age of the rock itself can be geologically determined.

Why is carving restricted to men? Most artists don't articulate the reasons, attributing this to custom from time immemorial. However, the practice seems to stem from dual beliefs: women may become infertile if they work with objects used in sacred contexts and their bodies during menstruation have the power to neutralize the supernatural medicines that often activate masks or figures.



Figure 18. Multiple abstract birds ornament this forged iron staff. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 19th to early 20th century. 20″ x 7.5″ x 8″. Yale University Art Gallery, 1995.81.1. Gift of Drs. Ruth and Theodore Lidz. Public domain.

Metalworking

Metal arts are also restricted to male artists. Some artworks are **forged**; that is, metal is heated and then hammered into a given shape. Iron is most often treated in this way, and the method itself limits the complexity of shapes produced. works created this way are usually simplified (Figure 18)



FIg. 19. Kola container. Nupe male artist, Nigeria, late 19th/early 20th century. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 27818 a,b. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz Fotograf/in: Volker Linke, Fotograf/in: Volker Linke. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

Thin sheet metal, such as brass or copper, can be decorated by pressing designs into the surface (**chasing**), creating dots on the surface (**stippling**) or hammering designs outward from the back to create a relief (**repoussé)**. These methods create an embossed effect (Figure 19).

The use of molten metal poured into molds can produce more complex results. Some molds can be reused, resulting in solid metal objects such as coins (Figure 20). Since a solid metal form and a hollow one look identical, a desire to conserve valuable metals led to a one-use mold technique meant to produce hollow sculpture: the **lost wax casting** technique, also known as **cire-perdue**.



Figure 20. Axum coin made from a reusable mold, Ethiopia, 4th century. One of Two Coins Depicting Ousanas and an Anonymous King. Silver with gilt. Walters Art Museum, 59.794. Gift of Joseph and Margaret Knopfelmacher. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

To produce such a casting, the artist begins with a lump of clay, shaped loosely like the desired result. The artist covers that core with a thin layer of malleable beeswax and works details into the wax with a tool. Sometimes the wax is rolled between the palm to form wax "threads," which can then be coiled or hatched, producing a raised texture. **Sprues** and **vents** are then attached to the wax. Both are wax cylinders; the sprue will eventually become the channel where liquefied metal enters the mold, while the vent provides an exit for any gases. The artist then applies a fine, semi-liquid layer of clay to the wax surface, making sure it fills all crevices. He then packs clay around the object, including all but the ends of the sprues and vents. This outer pack of clay is called the **investment**, and it is allowed to air dry. At this point, the object looks like a dry clay lump. Placed in a fire, it is positioned so that the liquefying wax will run out. The wax itself is what is "lost" in the process, although the artist usually collects the liquid run-off for reuse. The lump now has the following three layers: the clay core, a gap where the wax once was (including empty channels were the sprues and vents were), and the outer investment. Metal has been heated in a crucible and is poured into the sprue channels until all empty spaces are filled. The metal is left to cool, and the outer clay mold is cracked off. The sculptor then files down the metal sprue projections and cleans the surface. He may choose to remove the clay core or leave it in place (Figure 21).

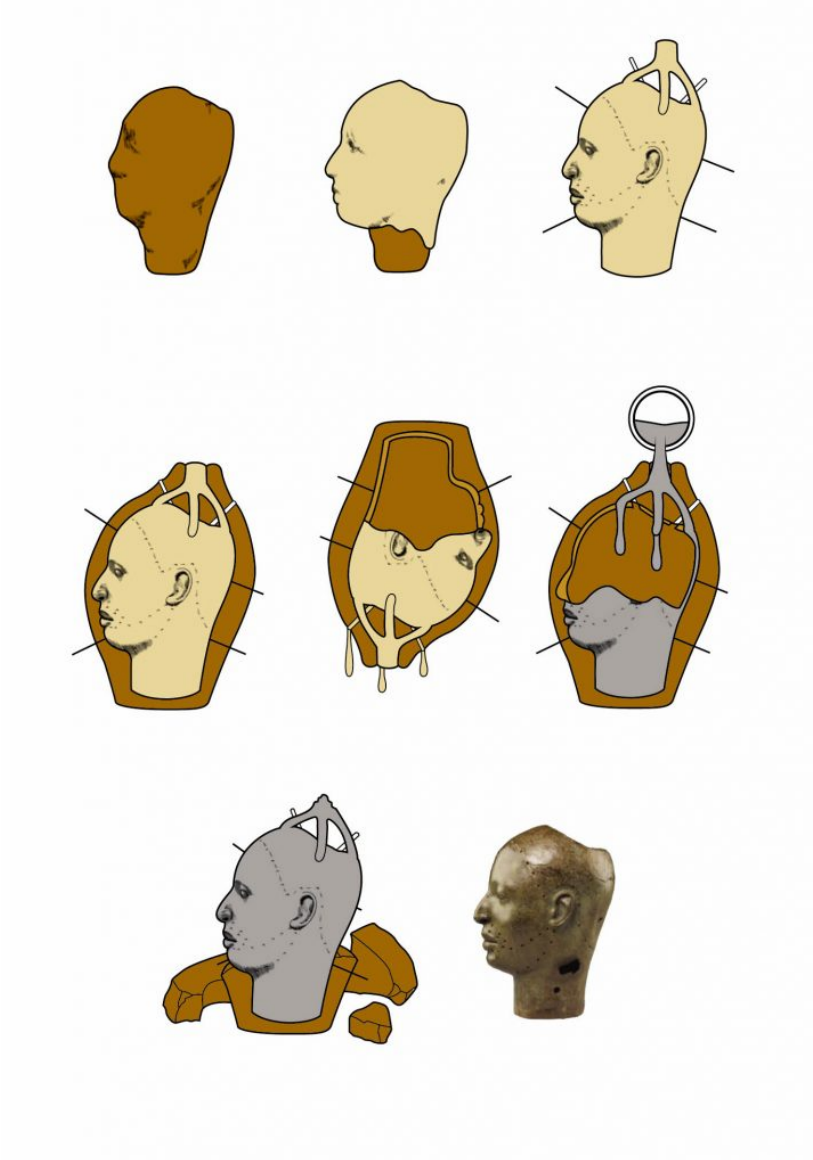


Figure 21.This lost-wax casting diagram (using a 15th-century Yoruba bronze head from Ife, Nigeria as an example) shows the steps of this technique from left to right: 1) roughly-shaped clay head, 2) beeswax applied and details created in wax, 3) wax sprues and vents attached to surface, 4) fine clay and regular clay packed around head, spues and vents extending to surface, 5) head heated, wax runs out, 6) molten metal poured; fills in gaps left by wax, 7) outer terracotta shell broken off, 8) sprues and vents filed down, finishing work complete. © Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 22 This bronze staff top in the form of a double-headed snake was made using the lost-wax casting method. Igbo male artist, Igbo-Ukwu site, Nigeria, 9th-10th century. National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. Ochiwar, Wikimedia Commons, color correction. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

For most of Africa before the 20th century, brass and bronze—both copper-based or cuprous alloys—were the most



Figure 23. These silver armlets with gold ornaments belonged to the last monarch of the Dahomey Kingdom, Behanzin. Fon male artist from Hountondji family, Dahomey Kingdom, Republic of Benin, late 19th century. 7.5″ long. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 5548 a,b. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Fotograf/in: Hendryk Ortlieb. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

valuable metals, for these alloys depended on imported or long-distance trade components. Copper itself does not flow readily, so sculptors usually add other metals to form alloys for smoother castings: copper plus tin makes **bronze** (Figure 22), while copper plus zinc makes **brass**. Gold was exploited in Senegal and what is now Ghana, as well as in parts of southern Africa, and can also be cast through cire-perdue. Relatively little silver occurs in Africa; its use in art (Figure 23) typically derives from imported metal, particularly the European Maria Theresa *thalers*, first minted in the 18th century.

Metal itself cannot be scientifically dated, but if the clay core remains in a sculpture, that core's firing date can be determined through **thermoluminescence** or **TL-dating**. This procedure ascertains when certain materials such as clay were heated, measuring the object's radiation since firing. It permits more accuracy than carbon dating.

Terracotta Sculpture and Pottery

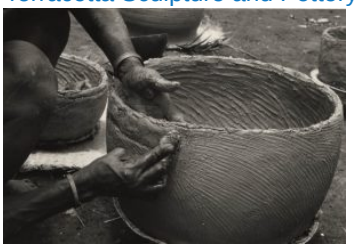


Fig 24. This Gbaya potter from Cameroon has added a coil of clay to the top of the pot, then flattened and smoothed it into the existing clay. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af,CB63.10. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Working with clay is an additive approach to sculpture since forms are built by adding more and more clay and **modeling** the form with fingers and tools (Figure 24). Modeling is a more forgiving art, because corrections can occur until the material hardens. Although unbaked clay can be molded into a variety of forms, heavy rain will turn an unprotected figure back to soil. In order for clay pots or sculpture to become permanent, they must be **fired** or "baked." In Africa, this means they are placed in an outdoor pit after sun-drying, usually with a group of similar pieces. Light brush is positioned around the works, then firewood is stacked over the whole and set alight, burning throughout the night. After firing, works are referred to as **terracotta** pots or sculptures. They retain their earthen color, but this can be altered by swishing them in a variety of hot liquids impregnated with bark or other vegetable matter, by coating them with white **kaolin** clay or paint, or through long exposure to smoke (Figure 25). After firing, a piece may break, but it is permanently fixed.



Figure 25. When the clay is leather-hard, the potter uses a variety of tools to incise lines and dots. The pot has darkened by being in a smoky environment. The artist also added ridges and relief elements at this time. Detail of a pot made by a Nupe woman, Nigeria, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.



Figure 26. This ritual pot made by the Igbo potter Onegi shows greater elaboration than domestic ware, as well as figurative elements. Igbo, Nigeria, probably 1970s. © The Trustees of the British Museum, 2015,2010.7. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

In almost all of Africa, women are the potters. Often this is not just a personal enterprise, but a group endeavor in villages that specialize in this art form. People use domestic containers for water, cooking, and storage, as well as incense burners, pipes, and other objects. Although imported goods and local plastics have intruded on their sales, potters still have a healthy market. Some terracottas are meant for shrine use, and these frequently have more elaborate and sometimes figurative decoration (Figure 26). A few cultures are exceptions to the female potter rule; Hausa men make pots, and there are both male and female potters among the Kongo, Dogon, Mossi, Cameroon Grasslands.

Terracotta sculpture can be made by men or women, depending on the area. Akan women, for example, are known to have created terracotta figures, while Edo men made terracotta heads in the Benin Kingdom.While we cannot be sure which gender made the Nok terracottas from Nigeria—the oldest extant sculpture south of the Sahara—or the much later Bura terracotta figures and heads from Niger, it seems likely that men made terracotta sculptures in those cultures with brasscasters, since they first model in clay and wax before casting their forms (Figs. 27, 28).



Figure 27. This terracotta memorial head represents an Akan royal and was made by a female artist from the Twifo-Heman region of Ghana's Asante Empire, ca. 1800. H. 8.5″ x W. 6″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015.790. Gift of Evelyn Kranes Kossak, The Kronos Collections. Public domain.



Figure 28. This 11th-15th century terracotta head from Ife, Nigeria was probably made by a Yoruba male artist who was also a brasscaster. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 27526. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE

Whether pots or figures, objects made from clay have to dry thoroughly before firing, since any moisture trapped within will expand and cause the object to explode. For this reason, larger clay figures have to be hollow in order to maximize drying. Traditional African pottery is fired in the open at relatively low temperatures, not in a kiln. In sub-Saharan Africa, unlike Asia or the West, the pottery wheel is not used, nor are glazes applied.

Thermoluminescent or TL-dating dates terracotta, just as it does the fired clay core that remains in some metal castings. Dating pottery was the primary reason for its development.

Architecture



Figure 29. Ethiopia is one of the few sub-Saharan countries with stone suitable for building. Emperor Fasilides' castle at Gondar, Ethiopia. 17th century. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.



Figure 30. Zulu families used to live in fiber houses spaced in a circular arrangement, their cattle kept in the middle. Women built the structures, binding fibers and grass over a reed support. South Africa, early 20th century. Public domain.

Traditional African architecture is extremely varied in material, shape, and decoration. Permanent materials like stone (Figure 29) are rarely used. Sun-dried clay bricks or fiber (Figure 30) were the most typical construction mediums. Men are typically the builders, except for nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, where women are responsible for rapid construction. The gender of those who paint the walls or model relief decoration varies according to region.

Sun-dried brick plastered with mud allows near-total construction freedom (Figure 31): round or rectangular buildings, built-in furniture, wall niches, screening elements–all are possible. Thick walls help keep heat out despite the intense sun, and thatch directs rain away from the walls. Maintenance is required, however. If abandoned, the eco-friendly structures will break down.



Figure 31. Tiébélé compound in northern Ghana, 2009. Rita Willaert, Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Free and available, clay can create sculptural structures the same color as the surrounding earth, integrating buildings into their environment in an organic way. Roofing depends on geography. Areas with heavy rainfall have steeply pitched thatched roofs, while those in arid zones can be flat-roofed (Figure 32).



Figure 32. A street in the town of Jenne in Mali, where masons construct the buildings, 1972. Photo by Gilles Mairet. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

In most parts of the sub-Saharan continent, specialized architects were unnecessary; every member of the appropriate gender knew how to build, and families and neighbors cooperated. In those regions dry enough to allow two-story buildings, such as northern Mali or the Hausa regions of Nigeria and Niger, specialized masons developed, since engineering knowledge was needed.



Figure 33. Ndebele women from South Africa use brilliant paint to create designs on their homes. Through the first half of the 20th century, they used various earth tones to do so. 1983. UN Photo/P.
Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Elaborate surface decoration might take the form of mud relief or paint. Natural pigments are still used in many areas, while bright commercial colors have replaced them elsewhere (Figure 33).

Families usually lived collectively in compounds, houses grouped together with both communal and gender-specific spaces. Most activities, including cooking, took place outdoors, so interiors were reserved primarily for sleeping and storage.



Figure 34. This painting of an eland dates to about 1500 BCE. A San artist created it at Game Pass, part of the Drakensberg escarpment in South Africa. Photo by Alandmanson, 2004. Creative Commons CC BY 4.0.

Painting

Although some of Africa's earliest surviving art consist of paintings on rock outcrops in the Sahara Desert and in South Africa, traditional painting is otherwise uncommon–other than coloring sculpture, ornamenting the skin, or decorating house walls.



Figure 35. Frescoes from the 18th century decorate the ceiling and walls of the Church of Debre Berhan Selassie, Gondar, Ethiopia. Photo by Bernard Gagnon, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

There are two exceptions, both of long-standing. One is a Christian painting tradition in Ethiopia, where church frescoes, panel paintings, illuminated manuscripts, and illuminated healing scrolls are part of a monastic tradition. Illuminations are tied to writing traditions; they are the painted illustrations that are part of hand-written documents or books. The other is found throughout Islamic Africa, and consists of abstract geometric illuminations for the Koran and prayer books (Figure 36). This, too, is a specialty of religious scholars.



Figure 36. A Nupe man created this pattern sheet as a reference for illuminations of the Koran. Ink on paper, mounted on cloth. Nigeria, before 1939. H 27.17″ x W 36.22. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1939,07.34. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Textiles



Figure 37. Male weavers with their warps stretched in front of their looms, Senegal, ca. 1913. Public domain.

In many parts of West Africa, men weave textiles in cotton, silk, rayon, or wool after women spin the threads. Weavers then stretch the **warp** (the threads that form the foundation for the **weft** to cross) horizontal to the ground for a distance of many yards (Figure 37). The loom is set up with one or more **heddles**, a mechanism that pulls a particular set of threads out of the way; weavers use their feet to manipulate them. During the weaving process, artists use **shuttles**, canoe-shaped wooden receptacles that hold the weft threads. They toss one or more of these (depending on the amount of colors used) back and forth through the channel(s) the heddles produce.



Figure 38. Individual unsewn *kente* strips. Bonwire, Ghana, 2017. Photo by Kathy Curnow.



Figure 40. This detail from a 20th-century Senegalese cloth known as *manjak* displays highly complex patterns. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1934,0307.193. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The resultant cloth consists of a long narrow strip between one-and-a-half and six inches wide (Figure 38). These strips are eventually cut to a standard length and sewn together side-by-side to form much wider cloths; typically ten strips form a sizable cloth. Referred to generally as narrow-strip cloth or men's weaves, these textiles are worn by both men and women. The weavers are professionals and often set their looms up in a group within public areas. Vendors sell unsewn strips in the market to reassure buyers they are not purchasing second-hand cloth.



Figure 39. Detail of a Yoruba men's weave, Nigeria, 1934. Knoxville Museum of Art. Creative Commons, CC BY-NC 2.0.

Narrow-strip cloth can be a plain, one-color weave. Stripes have historically been popular (Figure 39), frequently made in a combination of undyed white cotton and varying shades of indigo blue. Imported dyes and threads have permitted a broad spectrum of colors. In some areas, weavers produce extremely complex patterns, such as the Senegalese weavers of *manjak* cloth (Figure 40) or the *kente* (Figure 41) produced by the Akan of Ghana and the Ewe of Ghana and Togo.



Figure 42. Nigerian woman with loom, photographed between 1880-1905. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af,A50.24. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 43. This Nupe women's weave only requires three sections to create a full-length wrapper. Nigeria. Photo Kathy Curnow

Women rarely weave in West Africa. All the exceptions are within a contiguous area, suggesting a common origin with a local spread: Yoruba, Nupe, Hausa, Ebira, Northern Edo, and Western and Akwete Igbo women all weave. All of these with the exception of the Igbo region also include male weavers, but until recently female weaving has been an income supplement, rather than a full-time profession.

Women use a completely different type of loom than men (Figure 42), and generally weave individually at home. Their looms are set up vertically and produce a much wider cloth; two or three strips are enough to form a wrapper when sewn side-by-side (Figure 43).

In Central Africa, men weave unspun fibers of the raffia palm to make flexible, lightweight cloth. To do so, they use a vertical loom (Figure 44) and often leave the material undecorated, although dyed fibers can permit a plaid effect. In the past, this kind of raffia weaving was more widely practiced than it is today. Now it is best known among several groups in the Congo, as well as among the Ibibio of southeastern Nigeria.



Figure 44.This Bushoong man from the Kuba Kingdom in the Democratic Republic of Congo is producing a plain raffia cloth on a vertical loom. Photo: Casimir Zagourski, between 1929-37. Tropenmuseum. Creative Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Though the loom technology is not identical to that used by women, it is possible that the men's vertical loom may have been adopted by women when raffia weaving was abandoned. Women's use of a vertical loom is thought to have originated in one of the areas of Nigeria where it is still practiced, and spread to the others when women were enslaved. Linguistic studies of the words associated with parts of women's looms support this idea of the technological expansion of the vertical loom.



Figure 45. This young Kuba woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo holds a raffia plush cloth, the result of cooperation between both genders. Photo: Woody Collins, 2005. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

In the Congo region, women often decorate the plain raffia cloth that men make via pile embroidery (Figure 45). They sew a series of loops with tight spacing onto the surface, later cutting them to produce a plush surface like velvet. The effect can be elaborate, with dyed threads producing multi-colored effects or variations in the surface depth.



Figure 46. Detail of a stamped barkcloth from the Bududa district of Uganda, before 1930. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1930,0507.16. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Another textile variety–barkcloth (Figure 46)–was also formerly more widespread, though it still occurs in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Madagascar. Men remove the inner bark of wild fig trees, boil or steam it, then pound it until the fibers interlock, forming a felt that cannot unravel. Sometimes vigorous pounding produces holes, disguised through decorative patching.



Figure 47. Yoruba tie-dyed cloth, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo Kathy Curnow.

Woven cloth, whether hand-woven or imported, can be further decorated through a variety of techniques. These include tie-dye (Figure 47), stitched (Figure 48), or starch resist, all of which shield part of the cloth from dye to produce a pattern. Cloths can also be stamped with designs.



Figure 48. Detail of an *ukara* cloth made by an Igbo man from Nigeria, late 20th c. The white elements were stitched tightly before dyeing in order to resist the indigo. Afterwards, the cut stitches reveal the pattern. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1991,24.9. Creative Commons, © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1991,24.9. Creative Commons, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 49. Detail of a large circular motif on a Nupe men's robe. The stitching produces openwork eyelets. Nigeria, early 21st century. Photo Kathy Curnow.

Embroidery and Sewing

With the exception of the all-over plush embroidery of raffia cloths in Central Africa, embroidery is traditionally a male art and a full-time profession. Widely practiced in West Africa, it primarily decorates male clothing (Figure 49). In East Africa, Swahili men's caps are usually embroidered, as is women's clothing in Ethiopia.

Before the advent of the sewing machine, the sewing together of strips of cloth or the tailoring of shaped garments was also a strictly male profession.



Figure 50. Special male artists construct the sacred beaded crowns of Yoruba kings. This 19th-century example from the town of Ikerre, Nigeria is made from tiny imported seed beads. 37.75″ x 9.5″. Brooklyn Museum, 70.109.1a-b. Caroline A.L. Pratt Fund, Frederick Loeser Fund, and the Carll H. de Silver Fund. Creative Commons CC BY 3.0.

Many of Africa's earliest archaeological sites include beads, attesting to a long-standing value for beads as both jewelry components and clothing elements. Some of the earliest locally-made beads were made of hand-drilled stone or shell, but glass beads were manufactured at least as early as the 11th-15th century in Ife, Nigeria. Beads were a major import even before direct trade, but European contact created an influx of beads in coral, glass, and later plastic.



Figure 51. This beaded loincloth was made by a Ndebele female artist before 1989. The beads are sewn onto a leather backing. 25 9/16″ x 24″. Tropenmuseum, 6039-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Beadworkers vary in gender according to the area. In many parts of West Africa they are male (Figure 50), while in East and South Africa women produce both beaded jewelry and clothing (Figure 51).

Leatherwork



Figure 52. Detail of a Mandingo sword's sheath decoration, crafted by a male artist. Liberia, 20th c. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.

The gender of leatherworkers depends upon the ethnic group. In most parts of Africa, leatherworkers are men. Their work often involves appliquéing leather cut-outs onto skin backgrounds, weaving leather strips into decorative panels (Figure 52), or creating leather cut-outs that reveal another color below.



Figure 53. Detail of a saddlebag crafted by a female Tuareg artist, probably from Mali or Niger. On long-term loan to the Cleveland State University African Art Collection.

Among the Tuareg of Algeria, Mali, and Niger, however, leatherworkers are women. They belong to the Inaden, the artisans' caste, and create decorated saddles, cushions, sword sheaths, and bags (Figure 53). They sell some of their leatherwork to the neighboring Fulani people, and likewise purchase some leatherwork from the Hausa.

Body Arts



Figure 54. Sectioning and thread wrapping is one of many ways to dress hair. West Africa, ca. 1943. Album owned by John Atherton, Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

In many parts of Africa, the body itself has been an art form, with human creativity altering hair and skin. Though this has taken place in many parts of the continent, it is particularly prominent among nomadic people.

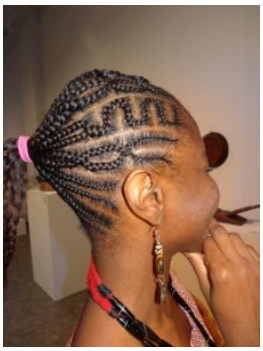


Figure 55. Plaited hairstyle by Liberian stylist on a Nigerian customer, 2014. Photo: Kathy Curnow, Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Hair can become very sculptural (Figure 54) and can communicate not only fashionability but also ethnicity, marital status, particular professions, and achieved status. Normally hairdressers of the same gender (often friends or family members) create coiffures. Sculpture frequently depicts archaic hairstyles that are no longer worn.

Some past hairstyles for brides or wealthy women underlined their special status through crests that made it impossible for them to carry headloads, demonstrating that someone else in the household did the physical labor.

Many styles are plaited against the head, creating complex graphic patterns (Figure 55), sometimes in combination with coiled hair or free-falling braids.



Figure 56. Ethnic scarification, ca. 1943. Northern Nigeria. From an album owned by John Atherton. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 57. Cosmetic scarification popular at the turn of the 20th century among Kongo women, Democratic Republic of Congo. Public domain.

Skin can be altered both permanently and temporarily. **Scarification** (also known as **cicatrization**) is a permanent method and falls into three general categories: ethnic markings, cosmetic scarification, and medical scarification. Ethnic markings were once widespread (Figure 56) but have been outlawed in many regions. Specialists used to mark the face of children in a pattern shared by other members of the ethnic group; herbs were applied either to raise the skin or sink it, as well as to prevent infection. Many artworks bear these facial marks. Cosmetic scarification (Figure 57), which has also died out in most regions, was mostly a female practice and generally took place during the teenage years, as its intent was to invite touch for courtship purposes. Styles changed over time and it too often appears on sculptures. Medical scarification usually occurred during childhood, and was more random than regular in appearance. It marked the insertion of medicines to cure conditions such as convulsions, and was generally performed on the neck and shoulder region.

Another permanent alteration of the skin occurs via tattooing. Tattoos are not multi-colored, but dark due to the insertion of vegetable carbon under the skin. With the exception of West Africa's Fulani (Figure 58) and the Makonde of East Africa–where both genders can have facial tattooing–these marks are usually borne only by women as a cosmetic practice which has gone in and out of fashion. Tattoos usually consist of



Figure 55. Fulani woman with cosmetic facial tattoos, Cameroon, 2011. Photo by Carsten ten Brink. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

geometric patterns on the arms, chest, or back.

Temporary skin decoration for women in some parts of Africa consists of the application of henna (Figure 59). This is derived from a cultivated plant that is dried and powdered, then applied as a paste and left to dry overnight. When washed off, the dark red or black stain remains for about a week; it can be used as a nail stain as well. Other plant extracts are also used to similar effect.

Body paint (Figure 60) allows frequent change and invention, and is made from natural pigments.



Figure 56. Woman with a hennaed hand from the town of Siby in Mali, 2017. Photo by Mark Fischer. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 60. Mursi woman from Ethiopia with painted facial designs, 2017. Photo by Rod Waddington. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

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1.3: Training and Patronage in Traditional Art

Apprenticeship

Artists' training affects the style of their work, as do the demands of their patrons. When consistency is valued over novelty, regional or chronological stamps are apparent, allowing recognition of an art "type". Apprenticeship–the traditional method of African art education, as it was in most of the world for millennia, favors consistency.

Whether or not traditional artists individually choose their vocation or live in a region where art is a family profession, most still undergo an apprenticeship. This training usually commences in childhood; many apprentices relocate to live with their master. If art is a family occupation, another male relative, rather than their fathers, will usually train the boys. This is meant to provide a stricter, more formal environment for learning.



Figure 61. Dogon apprentice removing bark from a tree section as his master carves. Mali, 1975. Single frame from David Attenborough's "The Tribal Eye: Behind The Mask."

Apprentices are expected to carefully watch the work of their master, but initially, their work is menial: sweeping up, bringing lunch, sharpening tools. As the years pass, the complexity of an apprentice's tasks increase, but following the master's methods and style remains critical (Figure 61). In a way, the master and his apprentices constitute a brand; customers want works with the master's distinctive stamp. This is only possible if the advanced apprentices mimic his style so that their individuality remains submerged. Since apprenticeship lasts ten years or more, this kind of patterned training becomes second nature, especially since apprentices are trained as copyists. That is, they are not asked to base the carving of a figure on an actual human being, but rather on an already sculpted piece.

An apprentice usually graduates to an assistant before becoming a master himself. At that time, he is unlikely to abandon his training to strike out in a completely different direction, for that education is internalized and reflexive. He may, however, cultivate individual touches or create new themes or object types, but the degree of novelty he introduces is dependent on the market. Art is his livelihood, not a romantic creation. If his creations are rejected, he loses income. While this may favor a conservative approach to artistic change, it certainly does not prevent creativity within established parameters.



Figure 62. These brasscasters belong to the royal brasscasting guild of Nigeria's Benin Kingdom. They live in the same town ward as their ancestors, who had the same profession. While they still produce objects for the monarch and his chiefs, they have been free to sell to the general public for nearly a century. © D. Anthony Mahone, 1994.

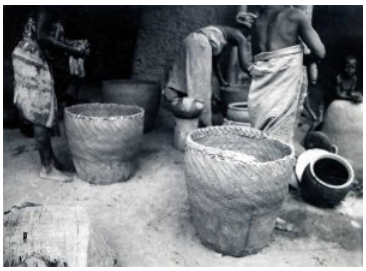


Figure 63. As these Yoruba potters work in southwestern Nigeria, a little girl to the far right observes them. Photo: Hermann Justus Braunholtz, before 1946. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B61.24. Creative Commons © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1991,24.9. Creative Commons, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Most African artists throughout history were in essence part-time professionals, working in the dry season and farming during the rainy season. Some wealthy kingdoms, however, required so many objects that rulers established hereditary royal guilds to supply works to the monarch and his chiefs. Although these may persist (Figure 62), their customer base usually has expanded beyond royal courts alone, and not all family members may pursue the same vocation today.

Female apprenticeship is usually more informally arranged than its male counterpart and is normally family-based, girls learning from their mothers or other women within a compound (Figure 63).

Stylistic Consistency

Many artists have signature ways of working, which are recognizable if one examines them carefully. When they work with assistants and apprentices, some of those features–along with object types–typify the group, which is known as a **workshop**. It may be difficult to distinguish the **hands** of particular artists within a workshop, but that pursuit is part of connoisseurship.

Although there will always be variations, consistent approaches towards works throughout a region–the way eyes are treated, body proportions, the way cloth designs are organized, the shapes of pots–put a stamp on that region. The products of artists in a large ethnic group may have discernable generally joint traits, reveal commonalities that pin down a region or a city, and further exemplify aspects of a workshop or individual hand. Recognizing these varying degrees of consistency requires exposure to many works, careful observation, and good memory skills. There will always be anomalies and outliers, but “typical” works provide handy baselines for recognition.



Figure 64. a) Oniyide of Abeokuta, Yoruba, Nigeria, before 1940. H 15.75″. Yale University Art Gallery, 2006.51.219. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain; b) Yoruba, Ekiti region, possibly Efon Alaiye, early 20th century. H 15.75″. Yale University Art Gallery, 2006.51.542. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933, c) Agbonbiofe Workshop, Abeokuta, Nigeria, first half 20th c. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, d) Yoruba, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 71.177.4a-b. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Abbott A. Lippman. Creative Commons-BY (Photo: Brooklyn Museum).

Let's examine a type of sculpture Yoruba carvers from Nigeria have produced for over a century: a presentation container depicting a kneeling woman holding a chicken that is actually a lidded bowl (Figure 64). Four examples are shown here, all from the first half of the 20th century. Two are from the same workshop but were made by different artists (a, c). One (c) demonstrates lesser skills, if the coiffure is examined; the facial features on each differ, though they are in the same "family," but the fowl's comb is identical as is the treatment of its feathers as a series of flat bands. Another work (b) initially seems to share strong stylistic similarities, although it comes from a different region, but the chicken feathers bear extensive engraving (as do the woman's tattoos), and the baby's proportions are vastly different. The fourth (d) has a bulging forehead and eyes none of the others bear, as well as significantly larger ears. She bears no child, and a large face is carved on the front of her chicken container.

Yet the distinctive object type is the same, as are certain characteristics. That is, there is something discernibly "Yoruba" about the works, although there are stylistic differences even within the same workshop.

Is this true of all areas? No. Some artists are idiosyncratic, others live in multi-ethnic areas and adopt stylistic treatments from outside groups, so much so that the overlapping factor is very strong.

Factors for variants within an ethnic group can also be the result of politics and history. Nigeria's Igbo people lived in independent city-states until the advent of colonialism and were often at war with one another. Although some object types functioned identically, their styles displayed a spectrum of difference from fairly naturalistic to extremely abstract.

The *ikenga* personal men's shrines (Figure 65), all made by Igbo artists from a relatively small sector of southeastern Nigeria, vary significantly in their approach to these figures, and there are many more variations in existence. While *ikenga* from a single community or cluster may share stylistic traits, the radius of a similar set is fairly small.



Figure 65. a) Igbo, Nigeria, early 20th c. H 36″ Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.545. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain, b) Igbo, Nigeria, first half 20th century, Cleveland State University Art Gallery, c) Igbo, Nigeria, c. 1900–1940. H 29 11/16″. Dallas Museum of Art, 1984.58. Gift of Carolyn C. and Dan C. Williams. © Dallas Museum of Art/photo Jerry Reed; d) d) Igbo, Nigeria, early 20th century. H 24.25" Brooklyn Museum, 78.178.2. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Abbott A. Lippman. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 66. Many pots were available for sale to passersby at this early 20th-century market in Mali. Public domain.

In New York, an artist might create a painting, then enter a public exhibition to display and sell it, or establish a relationship with a gallery for the same result. Traditional African artists work very differently, as most artists have throughout history all over the world–they produce most work only when a customer arranges for it and a price is agreed upon. That way they waste neither time nor materials in the hope of finding a customer. Most traditional sculpture was made by **commission**, which necessitated face-to-face preliminary conversation between artist and patron, with discussions about complexity and details worked out in advance. Only "lesser" items with constant sales were made in advance and stockpiled for guaranteed sales at a market: mortars, pottery (Figure 66), cloth, decorated calabashes. Because the makers of these objects are not necessarily the vendors, buyers are only **indirect patrons**, and the artists receive at most only second-hand feedback from vendors about their objects' reception.

Direct patrons typically are either individuals, representatives of a collective such as a masquerade society, or aristocrats and royals. Often they are members of the artist's own community, although an artist's reputation might result in a commission at some distance.



Figure 67. One of a pair of ivory armlets made by an Edo artist at the Benin Kingdom court, Nigeria, 16th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1910,0513.3. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Prices generally vary according to size, complexity, and material. When kingdoms were independent states, certain substances like brass, ivory (Figure 67), or specific bead types were sometimes limited to the ruler or nobility. Regulations of this kind are known as **sumptuary laws**.



Figure 68. The elongated neck and legs of the kneeling female are unusual in Yoruba art. Presentation bowl carved by Olowe of Ise. Yoruba, Nigeria, c. 1910–c. 1938. H 19.5″. Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 2004.16.McD. The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc.

Access to status materials, the cachet of employment by an influential monarch, and rewards that might include women, livestock, or property were attractive aspects of royal commissions. Some artists, like the Yoruba sculptor Olowe of Ise (ca. 1873-ca. 1938), worked primarily for royals throughout their lives, even without the existence of a royal guild system.

Olowe serves as an example of an artist who departed from many of the norms of his society's art (Figure 68). He was unusually adventurous in his approach to form, freeing some of his relief figures almost entirely from the background, creating tour-de-force carvings with elements such as a head trapped within an openwork enclosure (Figure 69). Although many aspects of his style were consistent with those of other Yoruba artists (bulging, enlarged eyes; conical heads), he elongated many of his figures' necks to an extreme degree, left the mouths open and teeth showing on some

figures, and created others with much closer-to-natural head-to-body proportions than most Yoruba work. Lastly, some of his work includes curious cultural ambiguities, with the monarch's wife sometimes shown taller than he is, or the king and a British District Officer depicted as equals. Both instances break the traditional protocol for social hierarchy.



Figure 69. This detail of Olowe's bowl shows the free-moving head locked within the ring of female figures, a signature feature of several works. Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 2004.16.McD. The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc.

Olowe's name is known, unlike that of many traditional African artists working in the past. Although their identities may have been familiar in their community or region, those who took their works out of Africa in times past were uninterested in collecting that information. Some names have been recovered through research and others might still be researched and published, but many are lost forever.

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1.4: Contemporary African Art: Materials, Gender and Training

"Contemporary African art" is a portmanteau term that includes variants that often have little in common. The art that falls into this category may be as recent as yesterday or over a century old. What "contemporary African art" shares is an adherence to at least two of the following: changes in materials, changes in patronage, changes in function, or changes in training, usually all instigated by culture contact via the colonial experience, then developing and adapting according to African interests. Contemporary art began in cities where colonialism first manifested, and spread throughout Africa. This category breaks down into three broad subcategories: export art, urban/vernacular art, and academic art. Issues relating to materials, gender, training, and patronage vary within each subcategory.

Export Art



Figure 70. This Yoruba toy is a contemporary work. A traditional artist from Igbo-Ora, Oyo State carved it as a commission from the British District Commissioner Harold Stewart Gladstone before 1911. H 26.77′. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1942,07.15. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. CLICK TO ENLARGE.

Export art constitutes art produced for foreigners who are not near neighbors. It is often called tourist art, but much of it is not sold to tourists, but to brokers whose sales are overseas–the buyer never even meets the original seller and has no direct contact with the artist. Sometimes actual visitors to Africa or expatriates do directly commission works while on the continent, but most **export/tourist art** is via indirect commission, with sellers providing feedback to the remote artists: "This "x" type of sculpture sold well," "They liked "y" sculpture, but preferred it in black rather than tan," "The extra-large version of "z" type of sculpture sold out almost immediately–make more of that." While some export works were made specifically for foreign patrons in the distant past, such as the late 15th/early 16th century ivories made for the Portuguese in Sierra Leone and Nigeria's Benin Kingdom, their early date will (somewhat arbitrarily) exclude them from the "contemporary" category. The late 19th-century beginning of colonialism will mark the start of our contemporary export art subcategory.



Figure 71. Kamba figures in a Mombasa, Kenya store. Photo: Ali A. Fazal, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY 2.5, color adjustment.

Initially, early pieces were relatively few in number in most places and were made by traditional artists. Although they may have introduced new themes and had a decorative function, their style generally conformed to local traditional practices (Figure 70). As artists assessed the new market and the interests of early colonial civil servants, military men, missionaries, commercial agents, and collectors, they began to adjust their habitual practices more drastically for foreign patrons. They produced different kinds of objects–toys, tables, book-ends, decorative pieces, teapots and dishes)–that foreigners desired. Some of the themes were completely new, references not only to the foreigners themselves, but to Christianity. Most of the materials, however, remained familiar (wood, brass, terracotta), and gender norms associated with materials were consistent with traditional practices. These artists trained traditionally, and simply expanded their market and output while still taking commissions from local patrons.

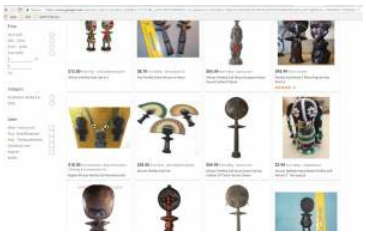


Figure 72. Google shopping search for “African fertility doll”, Jan. 20, 2018 produced pages of export reinterpretations of Asante aku’aba figures.

In areas where there were few traditional arts to inspire foreign commission, new industries sometimes sprang up. The Kamba of Kenya, for example, made relatively few non-domestic wooden objects before colonialism. As the number of British settlers grew, supplemented in post-colonial times by the visits of tourists and military rest and recreation personnel, the Kamba supplied the desire for exotic souvenirs by producing realistic animal figures and other carvings for export sale (Figure 71), an industry that has grown to include buyers like overstock.com and Pier One.

Demand for certain art has outstripped suppliers’ abilities to source carvings. Asante figures meant to induce fertility are turned out in huge numbers, some with major variants in size and proportion, or with painted surfaces, or with fans attached to the head (Figure 72). A good number of these are not made in Ghana, home of the Asante, but are produced in Kenya.

Urban or Vernacular Arts



Figure 73. Alphonso and Lisk-Carew’s photo of Madam Hamonyah, Chief of Kenema, early 20th c. Public domain.

Some contemporary art forms are made purely for local use, and have practical functions. The artists who create them do not emerge from the world of traditional arts, nor did they study art or architecture academically. They may, however, have undergone an apprenticeship. Their mediums tend to have been introduced from outside, usually in the 19th or 20th century. Although their products may be found anywhere, these art forms first developed in cities. There is no agreed-upon term for these objects, but **urban art** or **vernacular art** call to mind contemporary creations such as photography, advertising sign painting, carpentered furniture, cement houses, and some cement sculpture. With the exception of photography, the artists who produce vernacular art are men, and male photographers outnumber female ones.



Figure 74. Photo by Chief S. O. Alonge, Benin City, Nigeria, 1956 of Oba Akenzua II and Queen Elizabeth shaking hands. Courtesy Chief Eduwu Ekhator Obasogie, the Obasogie of Benin Kingdom.

Photography appeared in Africa not long after its creation in France in 1839. By the end of the 19th century, Europeans were not the only photographers on the continent. The African American photographer Augustus Washington (b. ca. 1820 – d. 1875) brought

his daguerreotype skills to Liberia when he settled there in 1853, and to Freetown, Sierra Leone by 1857. Numerous African photographers established studios (Figure 73) and by the turn of the 20th century, photographic portraits had developed into a popular new aspect of wealthy individuals' domestic decor. In the 20th century, affordability spread this art form throughout society (Figure 74).

The late 20th century saw the beginnings of academic and public interest in African studio and photo-journalistic photography, and this continues to grow. Numerous publications and exhibitions concerning African photographers have increased in number and popularity, including a recent Smithsonian Museum of African Art exhibition on Chief S.O. Alonge (2014-2016), a recent book by Martha Anderson and Lisa Aronson (*African Photographer J. A. Green* [2017]), and continuing exhibitions of Malian photographers Seydou Keita **(HERE)** and Malick Sidibe **(HERE)** have enchanted viewers with their bold patterning and both formal and candid shots. Scholars and collectors continue to seek out lesser-known early 20th-century studio photographers' work, as well as those who are still taking portraits.



Figure 76. This Nigerian truck's tailgate is painted with a lion. Other popular scenes depict imagery from kung fu movies, Mecca, Bob Marley portraits, and pop culture imagery. Photo Kris Fricke, Nassarawa, Nigeria, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Sign painting is another vernacular art form that usually begins with apprenticeship. Although the use of signs as a form of advertising has a long history in the West, it did not begin in Africa until the economic system began to shift in colonial times. When open markets were the only economic forum, traders did not usually sell goods in the same place daily; they circulated from place to place, each with its own market day. Those selling the same type of goods clustered together, and customers forged relationships with particular vendors. When colonialism began, foreign commercial agents opened brick-and-mortar stores that might be scattered throughout a town. African shopkeepers soon joined them in an endeavor that coincided with the introduction of Western-style schools and literacy. Signboards on the stores themselves or those that advertised a business's location became a familiar sight (Figure 75). These were usually painted with commercial paint on wood. As the 20th century wore on, large international businesses used photo-mechanically reproduced billboards and banners to advertise, and in urban centers today often use electronic billboards, but many small businesses still employ sign painters. These painters often also paint scenes or emblems on the tailgate of large trucks (Figure 76), as well as motifs and mottos on the side. In the last quarter of the 20th century, some sign painters began to create works that stand alone and are meant to be hung in the home.



Figure 75. Barber's shop sign, Ghana, 1993. 20 1/16 x 24″. Tropenmuseum, Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 77. Painting by Cheri Cherin, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2004. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Most sign painters are literate and frequently include words in their paintings, even those that are not advertisements. Having been influenced by foreign advertisements, they generally incline to either caricatured figures or very photorealistic ones, though some show a shaky sense of anatomy in places or a lack of perspective in depictions of furniture or buildings, as well as people who may be out of scale with one another or some of the objects around them (Figure 77). The works tend to show motion, naturalistic proportions, and a desire to portray correct anatomy and individualized physiognomies–all traits avoided by traditional art and inspired by photography and ads.

Vernacular sculptors usually work in cement, as do some academically-trained artists. They create a metal armature and apply the cement, modeling it almost as if it were clay. Generally, these artists make memorial sculptures to stand on tombs, although sometimes they produce figures for men's meeting houses (Figure 78), drinking establishments, or yard decoration. They are meant to be eye-catching, and are usually painted in life-like colors.



Figure 78. Life-size cement figures decorate the ground and top floors of this posuban, the meeting house for a military-style men's company. Fante, Ghana, 2013. Photo Maarten van der Bent. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 79. Cement sculptures of title-holders by Ibibio artist Sunday Jack Akpan, exhibited in Tokyo rather than at his Nigerian workshop. 1994. Photo Dick Thomas Johnson. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0. CLICK PHOTO.

Vernacular sculptures are also inspired by photographs and can be extremely accurate in terms of physiognomy (Figure 79). Although sometimes head-to-body proportions are not quite naturalistic, efforts to create a realistic, usually life-size,



Figure 81. Metal roofing is the norm in many African cities. Abeokuta, Nigeria, 2012. Photo Go2Net Vaughn. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0..

effect are present. Like traditional sculpture, usually the emphasis is on dignity, with important personages formally positioned, while attendants (if any are present) turn.



Figure 80. This late 19th-century Brazilian returnee-built mosque in Porto Novo, Benin Republic is modeled on Brazilian Baroque-style churches. Intricate plasterwork decorates the facade. Photo Linda DeVolder, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

In Africa, urban architecture–except for skyscrapers–is usually the product of professional builders rather than architects. For most parts of sub-Saharan Africa (the work of Songhai, Hausa, Ethiopian, and Swahili masons being notable exceptions), multi-story buildings were introduced by African returnees or colonial powers. Bricks, sometimes plastered over, were introduced by colonists when they built government structures and their own houses in the late 19th/early 20th century, as well as by Africans who had had professional training and experience in the Brazilian construction trade before returning home after emancipation in 1888 (Figure 80). Their Brazilian-style buildings are mostly in Lagos, Nigeria, Porto Novo and Ouidah in Benin Republic, and in parts of southern Togo and Ghana, and inspired later locally-made story buildings made from cement blocks, often with openwork elements (see Figure 78). Today's standard vernacular building material is cement blocks, with burnt bricks a less frequently used alternative.

In the late 19th century, European traders began to sell corrugated metal sheets as a roofing material to Africans as a replacement for thatched roofs. Despite its heat conductivity, proclivity to rust, and noisiness during rainfall, its cost initially made it a status symbol. The first adopters were monarchs and wealthy individuals, and, as prices dropped over time, this roof type became ubiquitous (Figure 81). Thatch is rarely seen in urban areas today, and many rural areas have abandoned it as well. Roofing has moved forward to new status materials that do not rust, consisting of aluminum panels (Figure 82).



Figure 82. Panel roofing, Abuja, Nigeria, 2012. Photo Bryn Pinzgauer. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0, cropped.

Workshop and Academic Art

Europeans introduced education relating to arts and crafts as early as the late 19th century, when mission schools included new techniques such as carpentry and Western-style embroidery in their curricula. In the first half of the 20th century, some individuals pursued art studies overseas (often in the colonial "mother country") at art schools and universities. At the same time, some foreigners resident in Africa began art workshops in painting and/or sculpture for interested individuals, some of whom had little or no formal schooling. They supplied paint, brushes, and canvases or other Western materials, and–to greater or lesser degrees–suggestions regarding subject matter and style. Because of their international connections, these workshop leaders were able to

arrange for their artists' works to be exhibited outside the continent and achieve international recognition. Although numerous workshops of this type were active (and some still are), particularly prominent examples were the Poto-Poto school of painting in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, instituted by Pierre Lods in 1951; the school of Lumbumbashi in Democratic Republic of Congo, established by Pierre Romain-Desfossés in 1946 (Figure 83); and the Mbari Mbayo clubs at Ibadan (1961) and then Oshogbo (1962), Nigeria, led first by Ulli Beier and Suzanne Wenger, and then by Ulli and Georgina Beier. The artists and sculptors in these enterprises generally painted in an abstract manner in tune with Western sensibilities, but with localized subject matter. Almost all workshop artists were men, with some notable exceptions, such as Nigeria's Ladi Kwali, a ceramicist.



Figure 83. This artwork, "Snake Amid Flowers", is an oil painting by Pili Pili Mulongoya, the star of the Lumbumbashi workshop. Courtesy National Archives, Contemporary African Art Select List number 136.



Figure 84. "Male Ego" (1966), a lithograph by Nigerian artist Solomon Wangboje, a university-trained artist who became an art professor. Courtesy National Archives Contemporary African Art Select List number 243.

Once African universities and polytechnics began proliferating, degree-granting art programs emerged. Expatriates and those Africans who had studied art abroad were the initial instructors, and curricula followed Western models. Painting and drawing, prints (Figure 84) sculpture (with chisels and hammers for stone, as well as the use of welded steel, plaster, fiberglass and cement), ceramics (with glazes, pottery wheels, and kilns), textiles (with Western-style looms), photography, graphic and industrial design, and architecture (using steel, glass, and poured concrete) became standard tracks of study, and no gender restrictions for artists existed. A woman might be a sculptor, a man a potter. Works were divergent in style, but abstraction (at least to a degree) tended to trump realism.



Figure 85. Ceramic vessel (1990) by Kenya-born British sculptor Magdalene Anyango N. Odundo. Odundo's works, which are non-functional, are inspired by African pots and fetch high prices; one sold at Sotheby's auction house in 2015 for over $200,000. 16″ x 10″ x 10″. Brooklyn Museum, 1991.26. Purchased with funds given by Dr. and Mrs. Sidney Clyman and Frank L. Babbott Fund. Creative Commons CC BY3.0.

Some African artists continue to train at overseas art schools or universities. These institutions' training has expanded beyond the curricula of the 20th century, and students are involved in creating installations, performance pieces, and multimedia experiences. The 21st-century trends in overseas schools have pushed identity exploration and politically-charged subject matter, and artists who undergo this education often produce works that are vastly different in spirit and appearance from their Africa-trained colleagues. Because these artists are familiar with the art business in major Western cities, they begin their careers knowing that cultivation of relationships with reviewers, dealers, galleries, and curators can have a major impact on their progress, and are aware of grants, fellowships, residencies, and competitions that will increase their prominence. In order to escape from obscurity in the midst of many other artists, they often parlay their "Africanness" in line with art world trends. Similarly, artists whose parents are African but were themselves brought up overseas (or relocated there in childhood) often find Africa-focused style, subject, or rhetoric to be effective routes to recognition (Figure 85). Departure from this distinction is not always met with a positive response.

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1.5: Patronage in Contemporary African Art

Buyers of African contemporary art fall into multiple categories. First, they may be internal or external. Secondly, they may be public (particularly governmental), institutional, or private. Lastly, they may commission works directly, or purchase already-made pieces. Their sales venues vary as well. Some artists sell directly from their workshops, where the fee is entirely theirs. Others sell to galleries or agents, who add their own profit to the price. As artists grow in fame, their work may return to the secondary art market, where dealers or auction houses who have had no personal dealings with the artist resell their work at even higher prices, without the artist receiving additional gain. This chapter will examine several case studies.

Vernacular Art: Signboards



Figure 86. Barbershop directional sign, Ghana, late 20th century.

As earlier discussed, urban circumstances demanded signboards for advertising purposes, which various businesses commissioned. Barbershops and beauticians were frequent customers. Some signs might hang at the shop, while others stood at intersections to indicate the direction of the salon (Figure 86). These began to catch the eye of Western travelers and researchers, who published articles about them. As they became better known, some museums and collectors bought them. This new secondary market began to expand, and prices outside Africa began to climb. From about $100 in 2007, they have increased considerably; in only a decade, some are now over $600, far from their cost to the original client.



Figure 87. Almighty God Art Works, Kumase, Ghana, 2017. Photo Kathy Curnow. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Some artists who specialize in signs also produce paintings on spec, trusting that they may find a buyer. As their reputation increases, their expectations can be met. One Ghanaian artist, Kwame Akoto (aka “Almighty God”) has a roadside shop frequented by local customers looking for a sign, but also attracts international visitors who have encountered his work in books and exhibitions outside of Africa (Figure 87). The more frequently work is published and publicly displayed, the more its value tends to increase.



Figure 88. Cheri Samba, AIDS poster (lithograph), 1990. The Wellcome Collection, Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0. CLICK TO ENLARGE.

Some urban sign painters have made a complete transition to full-time non-commercial work. This is particularly frequent in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Congolese have long bought work to display in their homes–a fairly uncommon phenomenon elsewhere in West and Central Africa, where interior decoration is dominated by photographs, calendars, and foreign prints or paintings. The Kinshasa urban art scene has proliferated since the 1980s, due in part to two major museum exhibitions: the Paris show "Magiciens de la Terre" (1989) and New York's "Africa Explores" (1991). These exhibitions and their catalogues launched the international careers of a number of African urban artists, including one of the continent's best-known contemporary artists, Cheri Samba, who started life as a sign painter (Figure 88). Despite his works' subsequent presence in international collections and his travels throughout the world, Samba still sells to a local clientele in Kinshasa, but has separate pricing structures for foreign and domestic buyers.

Unusual Success without Formal Training



Figure 89. "Dream", a 2007 installation by Romuald Hazoume. os a large boat made from recycled plastic jerry cans, meant to evoke the economic refugees fleeing Africa for better jobs, risking their lives in the process. Photo by Peter Samis. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Romuald Hazoumé (Figure 89), a Yoruba artist from Benin Republic, creates **installations**, large-scale projects that sometimes take up a whole gallery in a museum or have to be assembled on an outdoors site. In many cases, installations are unsuitable for private buyers because their spatial requirements would displace domestic activities; they are usually purchased by museums. A phenomenon created in the second half of the 20th century, installations are usually created by academically-trained artists from

both the West and Asia. As an art form that is not usually commissioned and may not be bought, creating installations does not normally appeal to African artists who are Africa-based. Hazoumé is a notable exception. He was not formally trained as Fian artist aside from secondary school classes, either as an apprentice, through tertiary-level education, or through workshops. He began using plastic jerry cans (usually used to transport gasoline in West Africa) as a sculptural medium, noting their resemblance to masks and faces, and drew the attention of a foreign curator in the 1980s, with a London debut in the Saatchi Gallery's 1992 "Out of Africa" exhibition. Major exhibitions followed, as did his 2007 prize-winning participation in documenta, one of the world's foremost contemporary art venues, held every five years. Hazoumé remains in his hometown of Porto Novo, his art made almost exclusively for foreign consumption, despite themes with local significance.



A Vimeo element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=122

Workshop-Trained Artist with Foreign and Local Clientele



Figure 90. Jimoh Buraimoh's mosaic for the entrance to the Benin Museum, Nigeria. Photo Starlight's Shadow blog, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Artists whose visual education was limited to an arts workshop may have some local patrons, usually limited to a wealthy, educated client, or to hotels, banks and other businesses, and the government. Jimoh Buraimoh (Figure 90), a Yoruba artist from Nigeria, was part of Ulli Beier's Mbari Mbayo Club in the 1960s in Oshogbo, Nigeria. Through Beier's publications and art world contacts in Germany and elsewhere, Buraimoh's work drew the attention of the Nigerian government, who commissioned him to create a large outdoor mosaic at Lagos's Murtala Mohammed Airport, as well as a more modestly-sized mosaic at the Benin City museum. He is best known for his bead paintings, many of which are in international private and museum collections. Though well-exhibited and published, his worldwide success is less than that of Hazoumé, probably because of timing and the latter's use of recycled materials with a political message.

University and Polytechnic-Trained Artists with Local Clientele



Figure 91. This large non-objective metal sculpture in Benin City commemorates former head-of-state Murtala Muhammed. Like many public sculptures in Nigeria, the name of the artist is absent, but it is the product of an academically-trained individual. Photo Kathy Curnow, 1994. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Most African artists with solely local training at the tertiary level find their sales options limited. They, too, might sell some artworks to wealthy, educated members of their own society, or to the government (Figure 91) or the commercial sector, but they lack the contacts to reach a broader audience. Relatively few attract the attention of researchers and have their artworks published. When they do, it's usually a matter of chance–an encounter with a traveler who's a curator or art historian, an enquiry about one of their works seen on Facebook, a friendship with another artist who is represented abroad, or an opportunity to exhibit at a foreign embassy. Even without a broader audience, they may be able to make a living, but their livelihood is usually improved if they have a teaching position in a university or polytechnic.

Things are changing, since dedicated art galleries that represent local artists are growing in number. In previous decades, a shop in a hotel might sell a painting or two for an artist, but galleries that put on exhibitions that were reviewed and served as social venues were uncommon, with the exception of South Africa, whose art scene mimicked that of Europe.



Figure 92. Installation of El Anatsui retrospective, "A Fateful Journey" at the National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, 2010. These flat wooden sculptures were the artist's standard approach to work in the 1980s and most of the 1990s. Photo muzina_shanghai. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, color corrected.

The Locally-Trained Academic Exception

It has been even more unusual for a locally-trained African academic artist to break into the international art stage than it has been for vernacular artists. A notable exception is the sculptor El Anatsui, an Ewe artist from eastern Ghana who majored in art at KNUST, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology in Kumase. He left the country to take up a teaching position in eastern Nigeria in 1975, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he still works. While he was known for his ceramic and then his wooden sculptures made from recycled market trays (Figure 92), it was as one of a group of academic artists who appeared in the (at the time) very occasional publications about contemporary art.

In 1998, however, at the age of 54, he began a new artistic direction. Collecting the metal tops of liquor bottles, he began to assemble them like the strip cloths of his homeland, creating impactful metal wall hangings that rapidly drew international attention and many sales to institutions and companies. He has been honored with a lifetime achievement award at the Venice Biennale (2015), which only Malian photographer Malick Sidibé had acquired (2007), as well as the Praemium Imperiale, the Japanese international art prize (2017) that no other African visual artist has received.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=122

African Artists with Overseas Training



Figure 93. Yinka Shonibare's "The Confession" is modeled after Fragonard's "The Love Letter," one of four paintings in his 18th-century "The Progress of Love" series. Shonibare's intellectual choices–the use of wax print trade cloth that tied Europe to Africa and figured in both the slave trade and economic colonialism or the headless mannequins prefiguring the guillotining of aristocrats–as well as his art historical references require decoding for both Western and African audiences. Photo Kirsteen, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0. Now in the collection of W. George and Margot Greig. Commissioned by the Musée du Quai Branly for the exhibition "Jardin d'Amour." © Yinka Shonibare MBE. Click to ENLARGE.

Not every African artist who schooled overseas goes on to achieve notable recognition, but their awareness of trends and opportunities can permit a more rapid ascent, particularly when their public narrative features Africa, making them stand out from the pack of other Western-trained artists. When they live overseas as well, their access to residencies and significant exhibitions increases their exposure and ability to make contacts with curators and collectors, and many have strategically maneuvered the art world to increasing success. This is a fairly recent phenomenon, however. Most art cognoscenti had little interest or exposure to contemporary African art until the late 1980s and early 1990s, when several key exhibitions in New York, London, and Paris began to attract attention. Fresh names and approaches (and lower prices) drew the interest of a new market that did not usually include collectors of traditional African art. Contemporary African art's fashionability over the past two decades or so has led numerous exhibitions and publications, as well as to major world collections, including the 2017 establishment of the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary African Art in Capetown, South Africa.

Because of emigration, some African artists have now spent more time outside Africa than inside. One of the contemporary art world's best-known artists is Yinka Shonibare, born in London to Yoruba parents, but a resident of Nigeria between the ages of 3 and 17, when he returned to London for his bachelors and MFA degrees in art. Like many foreign-trained African artists, his student exposure to Western art history and dialogues about the impact of colonialism and racial interaction are reflected in his works, many of which are installations. Shonibare has created photographs that insert his own presence into reworkings of Hogarth's 18th-century "Rake's Progress" series as well as Orson Welles' "The Portrait of Dorian Gray" film, but his constructed mannequins dressed in European styles made from African wax prints are his best-known pieces (Figure 93). The Queen knighted him with a CBE, and he has participated in both documenta and the Venice Biennale, as well as many one-man exhibitions, and has produced numerous public sculptures.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Themes in African Art

3.1: Animals
3.2: Coupling Up
3.3: Motherhood
3.4: Art and Youth Initiation
3.5: Art and Medicine
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3.1: Animals

Why Animals Appear



Figure 145. The equestrian figure dominates his steed on this carving by Maku of Erin, a Yoruba artist who worked in Nigeria from the late 19th–early 20th century. Wood; beads; string; and metal; 32″ x 7 1/16″ x 9 13/16″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.229. Charles B. Benenson; B.A. 1933. Public domain.

Animals frequently appear in traditional African art, but they are rarely chosen randomly as simple representations of the natural world. They can serve as accessories indicating status, such as the **horse**, who is an expensive animal that also elevates his rider above others. Showing a figure atop a horse is a common indicator of a great warrior, even when horses were rare in the area and thus unfamiliar to the artist. Even where horses were known, such as the Oyo Yoruba use of cavalry, the primacy of human beings means that the scale relationship of man to equine is rarely natural–hieratic scale usually ensures man will dwarf animal (Figure 145).



Figure 146. Both works are from the Edo people, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria. The brass plaque at left shows a high-ranking warrior with a leopard skin on his chest; at right, a brass leopard's head hip pendant, worn by a warrior. L) 16th c. 18″ x 12″ x 2.25″. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979.206.97. Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Public domain. R) 19th c. 6.5″. © British Museum, Af1956. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 148. This wooden door, carved by a Nupe male artist named Sakiwa, includes numerous images of animals, hunting tools, a drum, sandals, and a Koranic slate. Nupe, Lapai region, Nigeria, first half of the 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, M-258-14. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 .

Powerful animals can serve as metaphors, such as the **leopard** and elephant who frequently symbolize monarchs or chiefs. These animals often serve as verbal metaphors for powerful figures as well. The Oba of Benin Kingdom, for instance, is referred to as the "leopard of the house," while his animal counterpart is the "leopard of the bush". One 15th-century Benin king's appellation was "the brave ambidextrous leopard who never misses his target." When this monarch is sleeping, his courtiers say, "The leopard is in his shelter"; if ill, "The leopard is sick in the wilderness." Why the leopard? Its beauty and deadliness echo those of the ruler. He was traditionally the only individual permitted to take like, though he might designate that right to certain courtiers, including his chiefs who were generals and their commanders. Soldiers wore tunics either made from leopardskin or from cloth with embroidered leopard features, as well as brass hip pendants in the shape of a leopard's head, confirming the Oba's sanction to kill (Figure 146).



Figure 147. Detail of a brass staff depicting Oba Akenzua I atop an elephant representing his defeated enemy, Iyase n'Ode. 18th c. H. 63.5″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1974.5 Ann and George Blumenthal Fund, 1974. Public domain.

Elephants can symbolize the monarch in some parts of Africa, but in the Benin Kingdom they tend to represent powerful chiefs, sometimes those who attempt to rival the Oba. In the 18th century, the Iyase, the leader of the most elite group of chiefs, rebelled and had a contentious relationship with two successive monarchs. When he was finally defeated, the victorious Oba had his artists create several works that showed him standing atop the elephant, emphasizing his triumph (Figure 147).

As we saw in Chapter Two, some animals represent **praise names** of specific rulers, as they did among the Fon of Dahomey Kingdom.

Liminal animals, previously discussed, often refer to persons of power who straddle this human world and the spiritual world. Kings, priests, and witches have these abilities, which are often executed at night. Bats, birds, crocodiles, tortoises, mudfish, and pythons often appear in African art with such meanings.



Figure 149. Wooden neckrest. Zulu, South Africa, 19th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1934,0712.6. W: 25″. Donated by Maj-Gen Sir Reginald Thomas Thynne. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 150. The elevators of the Mutual Heights building in Cape Town, opened in 1940 and designed by Frederick McIntosh Glennie and the firm Louw & Louw.. Photo AndyB, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Sometimes a bird is simply a bird, especially when it appears in a context with a mix of other animals, such as on a Nupe door (Figure 148). However, even when animals reflect creatures from the natural world, they may have contextual layers of meaning. The Zulu, for example, attach high importance to cattle. In the past, cattle represented not only their everyday way of life as pastoral herders, they represented bridewealth, the number of cows a husband had to pay to his new wife's family. Houses were organized in a ring around the cattle enclosure, and ancestors were buried in the enclosure, with cattle sacrificed at their funerals. Zulu neckrests, used to support the head at night, often included references to cattle horns, since ancestral spirits often spoke to sleepers through dreams (Figure 149).

In contemporary art, animals may be featured as signifiers of Africa and its exotic elements. An early 20th-century corporate headquarters in Cape Town, South Africa, for example, included African animals on its exterior and interior, distinguishing markers that showed local affiliation rather than extra-continental ownership (Figure 150). Likewise, contemporary export art often includes images of antelopes, fish, snakes, and other animals as reminders of wilderness and nature.

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Saharan Petroglyphs and Paintings

Some of Africa’s oldest art forms feature animals, often clearly in motion, unlike later renditions. The exact meaning of these renditions cannot always be unpacked, but they clearly show keen observations on the part of the artists involved, as well as considerable preliminary practice, possibly through drawing in the dirt first. While we can’t, perhaps, speak of “professional artists” from this period, it seems



Figure 151. Engraving of an antelope at Tin Taghirt, Tassili n’Ajjer region, Algeria, 10,000-8000 BCE. Photo Linus Wolf, 2011. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

likely that specialist artists emerged, since certain works betray a sense of ease and confidence in line and form that are the result of consistent trials and refinement.

A huge expanse of the northern third of the continent is occupied by the Sahara desert, yet it has not always been barren land. While most of it was sand, apparently for millennia, about 12,000 years ago monsoons swept over the area repeatedly, changing it to savannah grasslands that supported giraffes, elephants, lions, hippos, rhinos, ostriches, and a large, now-extinct variety of wild buffalo (*Bubalus antiquus*). The Africans who lived in the area now part of Niger, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco commemorated these animals’ presence through **petroglyphs**, or rock engravings, that they ground into rock outcrops with stone tools (Figure 151). These petroglyphs are the only remaining art form from the period, which ranges from about 10,000-6000 BCE, when the climate shifted and became less moist, no longer able to support these animals.



Figure 152. These giraffe images are about 18 feet high, located on a high, curving slope at Dabous, Niger in the Aïr Mountains. They were made ca. 7000 BCE. More than 800 smaller rock engravings are nearby. Photo Matthew Paulson, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; cropped at left.

The smooth, fluid lines of many of these incised drawings belie the tedious nature of the task. The creation of each line would have been a time-consuming procedure. Some images, such as the Dabous giraffe petroglyph (Figure 152), are life-sized and include interior lines indicating the animal's markings. They were incised in sandstone, the same material used for the Mt. Rushmore presidential heads, the Great Sphinx, and many other world monuments. Sandstone's hardness is measured as 6-7 on the Mohs scale (a diamond is 10), so creating these lines was no mean feat. Even the hairs on the spinal ridge are indicated.



Figure 153. So-called "Roundhead" figures walking in procession. Unknown people, Tassili n'Ajjer near Illizi, Algeria, 8000-6000 BCE. Photo by Patrick Graban, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0 cropped.

From about 8000-6000 BCE, petroglyph production overlapped with paintings made from natural pigments. The weather pattern had changed; whether the population did as well, or whether their art forms merely took a different direction is unclear, but animals no longer were the center of their depictions. Instead, in this so-called Roundhead Period (Figure 153), human forms began to dominate. Although their bodies are physically recognizable, they are less skillfully-wrought and naturalistic than the earlier petroglyph animals, and with far less variety in pose. Their heads are featureless and helmet-like, their bulky bodies sometimes

showing dotted lines of body paintings. Particular works may show greater sophistication in depicting depth–overlapping and diminution as distance increases–but tend to lack grace.



Figure 154. The animals in this herd of cattle are distinctively marked by color and pattern, and may be portraits of specific cows. Artist of unknown gender and ethnicity working in Tassili n'Ajjer region, Algeria, ca. 5500-2000 BCE. Photo Patrick Gruban, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

As the climate continued to shift, so too did the populations and their lifestyle. Reduction in the lush landscape sent



Figure 155. Painting with bovine and human images from the Tassili n'Ajjer region, Algeria. Photo Fondazione Passaré. Ca. 5500-2000 BCE. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

drove certain animals southward, and the emerging savannah grasslands became home to peoples who herded cattle, rather than following a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. They too produced paintings rather than petroglyphs, documenting not only their herds but themselves (Figure 154). These skilled works also seem to have been the work of specialists, and they gathered earthen pigments, combining them with milk and egg yolk to bind the paint onto rocky surfaces. This period is variously known as the Pastoral, Bovine, or Bovidean Period, dating from about 5500-2000 BCE.

Depictions of people in these images show them in elegant silhouette form (Figure 155), their heads and other extremities small in proportion. They are situated in informal poses, conversing, relaxing, playing with their children, hunting, and herding. These paintings seem to be neither iconic images nor religious works, yet–like the petroglyphs–we have no absolute knowledge of the motivations behind them. Both the makers of rock engravings and the paintings of the cattle herding period appear to have been nomadic, so they did not mark permanent settlements (although they may have been revisited). Nomadic peoples have periods of idle time between hunts or while the cattle are grazing–did they create these for sheer pleasure? That remains unknown.



Figure 156. Drawing of one of the camel-and-rider representations from the Tassili n'Ajjer, Algeria. Work by José-Manuel Benito Álvarez/Locutus Borg, 2006. Public domain.

That the cattle are depicted on the paintings in specific ways–that is, their marking individualizes them in a portrait-like manner–yet the people remain featureless silhouettes may indicate beliefs that recognizable human images could potentially harm the living.

However, cattle are so important to herders that it seems unlikely that, with such a belief in mind, the artists would expose cattle to a similar vulnerability through visual representation. Both people and animals are treated with sophisticated conceptual approaches. They are frequently shown in motion, and depth is suggested both through overlapping and positioning on the surface (i.e., things further away are placed towards the top of the composition).

When the climate continued to dry out, the cattle and their owners also apparently moved south. Paintings of people with horse-drawn chariots (1000 BCE-1 CE), followed by camels and riders (beginning ca. 200 BCE) followed (Figure 156) as desertification intensified. While animals continued to be somewhat naturalistic, the incoming Berber populations generally distorted images of people or constructed them geometrically.

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South African Rock Paintings: Game Pass Shelter

South Africa and its neighbors are also the site of numerous examples of rock art. These are primarily paintings, but their dating range is more encompassing than those of the Sahara. Created by the San peoples, the region's original inhabitants, they were first made as early or earlier than some of the desert artworks and continued into the 19th century. Until recently, their dating was difficult–it involved flaking off large pigment sections for carbon-dating, which destroyed the works. In 2017, a variation of carbon dating was used. This method–accelerator mass spectrometry radiocarbon dating (AMS)–uses very small sample sizes. Tested at 14 sites, the oldest of these (in Botswana) yielded dates circa 3700-2400 BCE.



Figure 157. One of several scenes at Game Pass Shelter, Drakensberg mountains. San artist, South Africa, ca. 1500 BCE. Single frame of "3D scanning of Drakensberg rock art" by ACTsprojectafrica, 2014.

Most southern African rock paintings depict animals and/or peoples, and were interpreted for a long time as descriptive, recording scenes the San artists–who were hunter-gatherers–were familiar with. Not all paintings, however, seemed to depict solely natural scenes. One particular set of paintings, located in the Game Pass Shelter of the Drakensberg mountains (Figure 157)–a region with

the highest concentration of rock art in southern Africa–provided clues that led to a new interpretation of the artworks there and elsewhere.



Figure 158. Eland antelope. Photo by Prabhu, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The San no longer live in this area. White settlers pushed them further west in the 19th century, although they still inhabit Namibia, Botswana, and bordering areas of South Africa. When documented regional San religious traditions recorded in the 19th century were considered in respect to one of this rock outcrop's paintings (Figure 157), a new hypothesis



Figure 158. The "Dying Eland" scene provided clues that San paintings often depicted trance states, rather than simply acting as images from the natural world. San artist, Game Pass Shelter, Kamberg, South Africa, ca. 1500 BCE. Photo by Doertheh, 2018, courtesy Trip Advisor.

emerged, and this was strengthened by knowledge of the current healing practices of Western San ritual specialists. The latter are able to bring supernatural forces into play by either going into trance during group dances or dreaming in a trance state. Trances are induced by elements that focus on the notion of spiritual potency (*n/um*)–this could be certain songs, the sacrifice of a particular animal, a particular place. The healer, when participating in a group dance, becomes more and more attuned to the spiritual world and begins to quiver, stagger, sweat, lower their head, and bleed from the nose as they fall into a trance, a process referred to as "dying". In that state, they touch those with disorders and heal them, or may experience hallucinations that provide insight. Nineteenth-century accounts from the southern San report ritual specialists similarly quivering when apparently asleep, their

powers exercising. Besides healers, ritual specialists might have expertise in controlling rain or game, or choose a malevolent path as a sorceror.

Asleep or awake, in trance they are believed to achieve out-of-body experiences involving transformation into a variety of animal forms, some of which are considered more spiritually potent than others. Although San artists painted many types of animals, the eland, the largest variety of antelope (Figure 158), appears with greatest frequency. Artists painted eland in a surprising variety of poses, including views from the hindquarters, and gave its anatomy more attention than that of other animals, even including modeling through shading and highlights. It is associated with extreme potency, its fat is used in numerous San rites.



Figure 159. As the ritual specialist holds the dying eland's tail, its potency helps send him into a trance and transformation. San, Game Pass Shelter, Kamberg, South Africa, ca. 1500 BCE. Photo by Alandmanson, 2004. Creative Commons, CC BY 4.0.

One of the Game Pass Shelter's painted passages–sometimes called the "Rosetta Stone" of San rock art because its interpretation helped decode paintings throughout southern Africa–concentrates on a dying eland with nearby humans (Figure 158). The San use poisoned arrows to hunt eland; the poison acts on their system by making them lower their heads and turn them from side to side. They sweat, their bodies tremble, the hair along their spine erects, they stagger, and finally collapse in death. This depiction shows the death throes, white dots representing sweat, one front leg bent while the back legs cross in a stagger, the head lowered and turning, and spinal hairs standing straight up. The figures behind the eland, however, demonstrate that this is no simple hunting scene.



Figure 160. Details of two figures in the “Dying Eland” scene: at left is one clad in animal skin, at right, another has already transformed, with an animal head, sweat, and raised hair. Single frame from the documentary”‘Cave Gallery Route” by Tekweni TV Productions (tekweni@iafrica.com), 2001 extracted by Tekweni in “The Holy Grail of San Rock Art.”

One elongated figure (Figure 159) stands immediately behind the animal, gripping its tail. Its head is antelope-like, not human, and white dots of sweat surround it. Tellingly, its legs are crossed in a staggering position, and white-tipped hooves replace its feet. The spiritual potency of the dying animal has been transferred to the ritual specialist, who is transforming into an eland in his trance state. Behind him are additional figures in various stages of transformation. One bends forward at the waist, another is covered with a tented skin garment (kaross), while a third (Figure 160) also bears an eland head, sheds sweat, has upright body hair rendered identically to that of the eland, with both hands and feet transformed into hooves. They are therianthropes, metamorphosed shape-shifters who can cross the borders into the spiritual world.



Figure 161. A scene showing other eland and humans on the rock outcrops at Game Pass Shelter in the Drakensberg mountains. San, Kamberg, South Africa, ca. 1500 BCE. Photo by David Cramer, Google Earth, 2017.

Other paintings in Game Pass Shelter depict multiple elands accompanied by human beings enveloped in skin garments (Figure 161). These cloaks’ shape mimics the hump of the antelopes, and their heads have already transformed to animal forms, their feet to hooves. Other locations may depict figures who are human and merely wearing skins with the head attached, or even masks (though the San are not known to have ever used wooden masks). The hooves of these figures preclude the notion of a disguise in this case, but there are other San paintings that suggest that even the act of kaross-wearing may have been intended to facilitate trance and transformation.



Figure 161. San, Kamberg, South Africa, ca. 1500 BCE.Single frame from the documentary"'Cave Gallery Route" by Tekweni TV Productions (tekweni@iafrica.com), 2001 extracted by Tekweni in "The Holy Grail of San Rock Art."

Game Pass Shelter and the Drakensberg's other rock art have become a UNESCO World Heritage site when the entire uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park was so declared in 2000. Although the San were said to no longer live in the area, both government agencies and UNESCO recognize the presence of a local clan that intermarried and assimilated among neighboring peoples in the 19th century in order to survive. Their self-recognition as San–as well as their neighbors' awareness of their origins–continued. One man recalled coming to one of the Drakensberg caves in the 1920s, his initiator using painting as an instructional aid. Since 2002, a growing number of this "hidden" clan's members has been using the Game Pass Shelter site in an annual attempt to communicate with their ancestors, limited in part because of site restrictions on fire and the enforced presence of outsiders at a private rite.

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The Ciwara of Mali's Bamana People

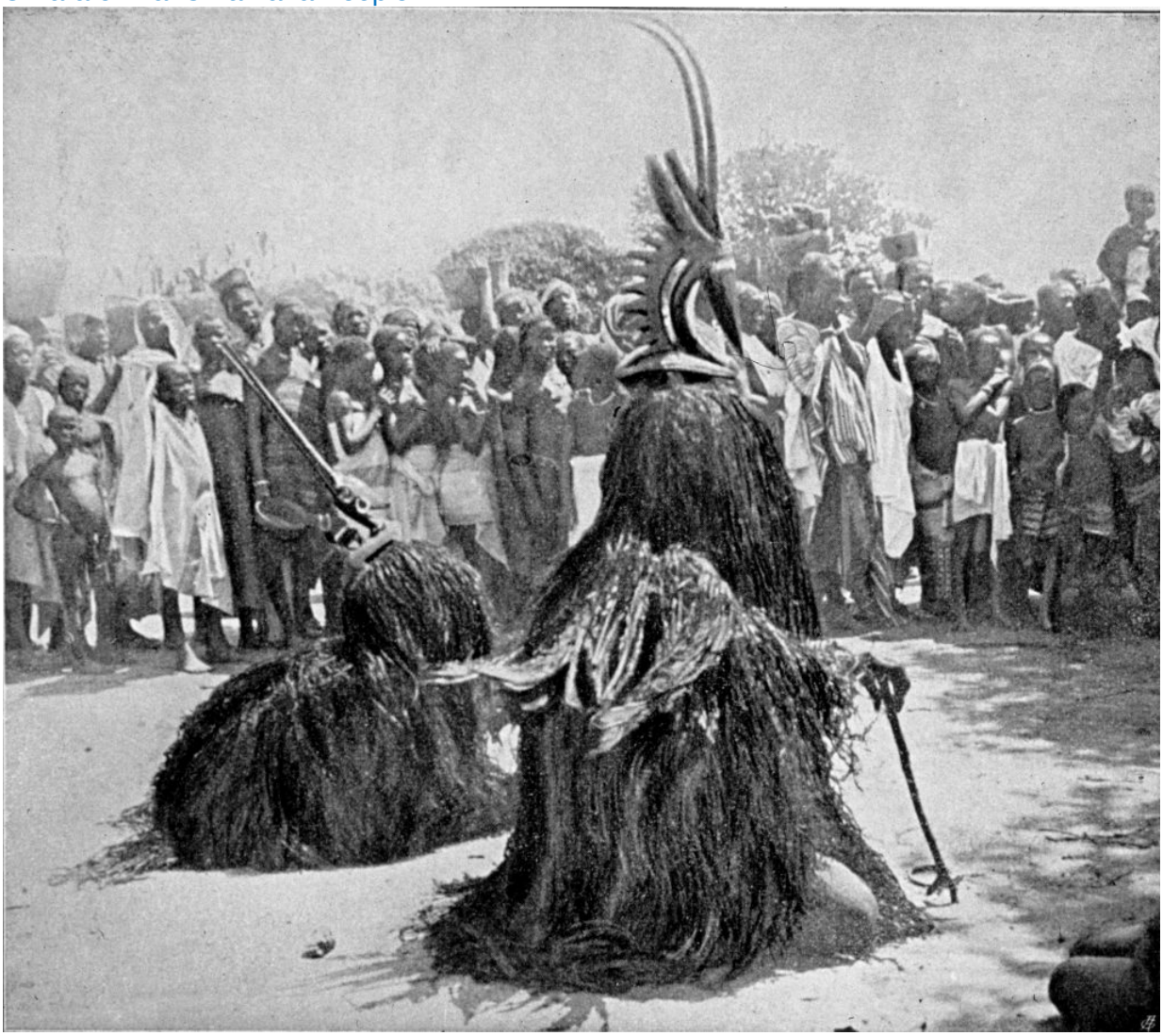


Figure 163. Ciwara masqueraders before 1910. The French observer noted that participants risked death if they passed between the male and female while they performed. Photo in Joseph Henry, *L'âme d'unpeupleafricain: Les Bambara* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1910), opposite p. 144.

The Bamana people of Mali are one of the Mande-speaking peoples, many of whom were part of a succession of empires and kingdoms that persisted until the 19th century. Although the majority of Bamana are Muslim today, as recently as the 1970s a substantial number of Bamana practiced traditional religion, even though Islam and lifestyle changes had already had a significant impact on culture. The Bamana and many of their rural neighbors live in a casted society; that is, to a great extent birth determines occupation and marriage patterns. Farmers–landowners–constitute the nobility; other groups consist of artists/artisans (*nyamakalaw*, or "power handlers"), while slaves once constituted a third societal category. Daily rural life used to be organized around initiation societies with varied specialized purposes. One, the Ciwara Society, was organized around young farmers and a spiritual connection to the land.

During the planting season, then and now (see video below), young men from their late teens to early 30s clear the fields in communal efforts, drummers and women's song spurring them on. Up until the early 20th century, male masqueraders danced in the fields, usually in pairs representing a male/female (often with a baby) antelope or in threes–their fertility and the fertility of the fields were linked. Antelope imagery alluded to the supernatural being Ci Wara, a half-human, half-animal spirit that generally adopted an antelope form. He taught agriculture to the Bamana during primordial times until, disappointed with mankind's behavior, he disappeared into the ground. The masquerade headpieces made in his memory–also called *chi wara* or *tjiwara*–bear his name, which is also accorded to champion farmers to praise them as they work hard in the fields.



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Figure 165. This pair of *ciwara* masquerade crests shows the male antelope (with mane) at left, the female with a baby at right. A tiny antelope head is carved in the middle of the male's forehead; the female's forehead includes a metal strip, and earrings hang from her pierced ears. Dominique Zahan associates the male with the sun, the female with the earth, and the baby with human beings. Bamana male artist, Mali, late 19th-early 20th century. H 36 3/8″. Brooklyn Museum, 77.245.1. Gift of Rosemary and George Lois. Creative Commons-BY.

A community's Ciwara society kept a shrine containing a *boli* power object that acted as an altar for the spirit of Ci Wara, receiving periodic sacrifices. Masquerades took place before the rainy season, a time when fields were cleared in preparation for planting, as well as during the rains, and at harvest time. Performers danced with their bodies bent forward, holding sticks that represented front legs. The animal carvings were not true masks–that is, they did not cover the face. Instead, they were attached to basketry caps secured to the head, with a fiber costume made from wilderness materials covering both the upper body and face of the masqueraders (Figure 163); in the Mande Plateau area of south-central Mali, birds' feathers are added to the costume. When not in use, these masquerade crests were stored in the shrine near the *boli*, soaking up some of its spiritual power. A small piece of the *boli* would be buried along the masqueraders' route and turn the first female crossing it into the champion of the women; the male antelope masquerader would eat her food. Another *boli* piece was attached to one of the male antelope dancer's sticks or in the basketry cap on his head, while the masquerader portraying Ci Wara's wife had a piece of the *boli* in a leather bag at the back of his waist. These empowered the dancers and probably the community's farming as well.



Figure 164. This large *cheko* masquerade has a cloth animal's body and the wooden head of an antelope, a female figure between its horns. Single frame from the video "La fête des masques bamana à Kirango (Mali)" by Elizabeth den Otter, 2011.



Figure 166. At left, a male roan antelope. Photo by Bernard Dupont, Northern Cape, South Africa, 2016. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0. At right, two white oryx. Photo by NJR ZA, Johannesburg Zoo, South Africa. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0, cropped from bottom.

By the turn of the 20th century, some communities danced in the village square rather than in the fields, and by the mid-20th century, growing Islamicization and Bamana migration to cities continued to impact the initiation society. Some ritual performances were now solely entertainment, danced in front of the mosque on Muslim holidays. As the initiation society transformed, other farming organizations–both paid and charitable–emerged. Some of these also commissioned antelope masks to perform in the fields just before the rainy season, while others danced in town. Many of these crests looked like the *ciwara*, since the same artists were responsible for making both. Those sculptors were *nyamakalaw* blacksmiths, who are the carvers among the Baule, in addition to forging metal objects and acting as ritual specialists (see Chapter 3.5). As the 20th century progressed, field performances of any kind diminished and even disappeared in most areas, although both ritual and entertainment *ciwara* persisted in the Mande Plateau region into the 1990s and may still exist. Brightly-painted antelopes (Figure 164) became standard subjects in secular *cheko* performances by youths that employ masquerades and puppets to entertain young women and the community as a whole. The association of antelope with grace and farming continued, even as its spiritual and specific mythological associations faded.



Figure 167. This male *ciwara* crest's mane has a different mane treatment, abjuring the triangular negative spaces in favor of two parallel curves. Its horns curve smoothly and its mouth is open as well; a fine textural pattern is applied to the head and neck. Bamana male artist, Segou region, Mali. before 1963. H 36.22. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1963.0.194.



Figure 168. This female *ciwara* crest is a sleek, spare example; only the horns are textured. Bamana male artist, Mali, mid-19th-early 20th century. H 29.72″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1963.0.60.

Older Bamana antelope masquerade crests vary in form and style a great deal, not only from one Bamana region to another, but among artists. Formal typological studies place the vertically-oriented crests (Figure 165) in the northern Bamana region around the town of Segou. This style has come to typify foreign expectations of *ciwara*, which have become iconic examples of African art. The male crest is larger, and indeed the performer who wears it is the star performer of the masquerade; the female appears to be present to ensure his recognition as a complete male. Both male and female (and infant male, carried on his mother's back as a human child would be carried) a human-like nose, much like those found on other Bamana sculptures; the female wears earrings, as many *ciwara* (but no wild animals) do; some researchers describe the muzzle as bird-like rather than mammalian. The two genders are clearly differentiated, as the penis is prominent. Their upright horns differ slightly, and indeed they are said to represent two separate antelope types (Figure 166), the male a roan antelope, the female an oryx. Neither image is species-specific nor naturalistic. The heads dwarf the bodies, the legs are short and hoofless, the necks take on a geometric character. Although male roans do indeed have long ears, they have been exaggerated in the carved versions, and the gracefully arching neck is the artist's creation. They do have manes, but the triangular cut-outs that lighten the mass are pure fancy; while some researchers have stated the resulting zig-zags represent either the antelope's fits-and-starts path or the passage of the sun, these are no longer general Bamana interpretations, if they ever were. Whereas the actual roan has horns with a clearly backward curve, the carved version's horns are straight, bending backward at an angle at the top. although this is not inevitable (Figure 167). While the wooden female crest does have the straight horns of the oryx, she does not otherwise follow its anatomy, and backs her young like a human mother (Figure 168). Prayers at the outset of the old ritual performances ask Ci Wara the spirit for a bountiful harvest and plenty of new babies, attesting to the association of crop and human fertility.

Horizontal *ciwara* crests (Figure 169) originate from the Beledougou region of the western Bamana, who live north of Bamako and the Niger River in Mali. Their construction is very different from the monoxyl carvings of the vertical crests, for they represent a rarity in traditional African sculpture–a carpentered piece that does not come from a coastal area potentially impacted by European approaches. The joint between two pieces of wood always occurs at the neck, where metal staples (or occasionally a metal "collar") connect them. This is apparently a conceptual rather than a practical choice, for area trees could easily accommodate this size of sculpture. These crests also have diminutive bodies



Figure 169. This ciwara horizontal masquerade crest is still lashed to the original basketry cap that was tied to the performer's head. Its eyes are metal studs, and yarn attachments encircle the ears and are inserted in the nostrils. Although the head and double set of horns are animal-like, the tail is that of a chameleon, and the dynamic zig-zagging legs seem to belong to another creature. Western Bamana male artist, Mali, late 19th or early 20th century. 22″ x 23″ x 7″. Courtesy Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, 2007.12. Museum purchase, funds provided by the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Fund.

dominated by head and horns, and are also said to be modeled after roan antelopes. The impressive sweep of the horns, however, turns slightly upward, unlike those of an actual roan. The animal's tongue is frequently shown, and fine, varied geometric patterns usually cover both head and body. Eyes may be only partially carved, represented instead by inserts of metal studs or beads, and yarn tassels often add textural interest to ears and snout, as do metal, beaded, or shell earrings.



Figure 170. This *ciwara* masquerade crest has the rounded back of an aardvark or pangolin, the horns of an antelope, and a head that combines some human features with a crocodile's maw. Its original basketry cap is still attached. Western Bamana, Mali, before 1969. H 18.9″ x L 35.04″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1969.9.26.



Figure 171. Aardvark. Photo by Stephanie, Royal Oak, MI, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Figure 172. Pangolin. Photo by Adam Tusk, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.



Figure 173. A female figure stands between this *ciwara* crest's second set of horns. Its pair would have supported a male figure; some carried rifles. Bamana male artist, Mali, before 1957. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1957.87.11.

Many horizontal crests incorporate features of other animals, such as a chameleon's curling tail. Although their tails actually curve downward, artists throughout the continent often portray them this way. Chameleons are often associated with transformation because of their color shifts. Some of these composite animals have curved backs (Figure 170) that refer to the aardvark (Figure 171), a clawed animal whose digging abilities mirror those of a champion farmer; the long ears also bear a strong resemblance to those of aardvarks. The textured body may refer to a stylization of the pangolin (Figure 172),



Figure 174. On this *ciwara* crest, a double-horned antelope head rises from a neck that stops on the back of another quadruped's body–perhaps a goat or a dog. Bamana male artist, Mali, mid-20th century. H 13 5/8″ x L 23″. Cincinnati Art Museum, 1988.151. Museum Purchase: Gift of Mrs. Alfred Anson, Mrs. Albert Strauss, and James H. Stone, by exchange. http://www.cincinnatiartmuseum.org

a scaled mammal that also uses its claws to dig for ants and termites. Other examples may include multiple sets of horns and/or add a human figure (Figure 173), or stack the head of one species over a second animal (Figure 174).

The most curious aspect of these horizontal examples is their intentional joinery. Why two pieces of wood? A complex farming/mythological explanation is offered by the Romanian researcher Dominique Zahan: these crests represent an inverted world inspired by plants that flower underground, namely the legumes peanuts and Bambara groundnuts (*Vigna subterranea).* The border of above and below is marked by the joint, and animals represented above–such as the roan antelope or the goat–are associated with the sun. Those below the join represent the underground realm, and nocturnal digging animals like aardvarks and pangolins. Inverted curling tails and horns? They represent "that one hopes and expects to be able to harvest [groundnuts] easily" (Zahan and Roberts: 2000, p. 42). The point of attachment? Not only does it symbolize the upper and lower aspects of groundnut and peanut growth, it is interpreted as maintaining the balance between paternal and maternal kin in a Bamana region that places greater-



Figure 175. This *sogoni–kun* was collected in the Bamako region. Bamana male artist, Mali, before 1930. H 19.8″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1930.26.3. Gift of Henri Labouret .

A third set of crests is far more abstract. Its origins may lay in a neighboring group that has influenced the Bamana, in a masquerade similar to *ciwara* but with separate origins, or to different stylistic choices. Based in the Wassalu region of southern Mali, which borders Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, this multi-ethnic area composed of Fulani, Malinke, and Bamana mixes apparently impacted the neighboring southern and western Bamana. These crests are called *sogoni-kun*, and, although they sometimes performed in the fields, their choreography and cloth costumes differentiate them from *ciwara*. Confusing the matter, however, is the fact that some crests that appear to be *ciwara* crests are also used in *sogoni-kun* and bear that name.



Figure 176. This crest is surmounted by a seated female figure, indicating this example represents the female principle. It bears antelope horns on a stylized head, the whole resting on a horse. Bamana artist, Mali, 20th century, H 22.13″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-17-1152. Gift of the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA.

These crests often include only a highly schematized indication of an antelope head, often surmounted by multiple sets of horns (Figure 175). The head often rests on the back of an anteater, and a male or female figure may indicate the “gender” of the paired dancer (Figure 176).

Additional crest variations are known, some visually aligned to one of the three major forms, others combining horns, figures and animal differences in increasingly abstract modes (Figure 177).



Figure 177. Top, left to right: 1) This masquerade crest was made by a Bamana male artist, Bougouni region, Mali, 20th century. H 25 7/8. Photo by Paul Hester. © Menil Collection, X 3005. www.menil.org; 2) Masquerade crest made by a Bamana male artist, before 1964. H 22.44″. Musée du Quai Branly, 1964.18.6; 3) The recorded name for this variant is *warakun*, and it includes ram hair and cowrie shells. It was made by a Bamana male artist in the Sikasso region, Mali, before 1931. H 22.44″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1931.74.1581. Bottom, left to right: 1) Masquerade crest made by a Bamana male artist, Mali, before 1964. H 15.98″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1964.14.9; 2) This masquerade crest is referred to in museum records as *warakun*, danced "at all celebrations." It includes double sets of forms and the unusual inclusion of a couple. Bamana male artist, Sikasso region, Mali, before 1931. H 17.32″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1931.74.1596; 3) This masquerade crest bears a veritable forest of horns and has a resinous coating. Bamana male artist, Mali, before 1962. H 18.5″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1962.1.20.



Figure 178. The male-female antelope pair shown here is labeled as part of a Minianka celebration; the Minianka are not a Mande people; they are related to the Senufo and neighbor them, as well as the Bamana. The photo appears in Maurice Delafosse and M. Le Gouverneur Clozel's book *Le pays, les Peuples, les Langues, l'Histoire, les Civilisations*, Vol. III. (Paris : E. Larose, 1912, opposite p. 32). Public domain.

As is the case for some other Bamana masks and practices, antelope crests associated with farming are not necessarily limited to the Bamana. Their neighbors–Mande and non-Mande–use similar crests, examples being found among the Marka, Wassalu, Minianka, the bordering Senufo, and the Maninka of Fouladougou. Even a single image can confuse the issue (Figure 178), as in the case of this postcard published as Minianka, yet referred to in a 1912 book by a local French official as illustrating an agricultural festival of the Senufo of the Koutiala region. Later publications have used it to illustrate Bamana practices. Many forms of cultural expression cannot neatly be confined by ethnic designations, but they do provide a handy reference point in the absence of

artist's names and specific provenance, which explains their persistence.



Figure 179. The tail of this Air Mali plane depicts two nose-to-nose ciwara, effectively making the Bamana stateholders. In this case, however, both ciwara are male. Photo by Gerry Stegmeier at Barcelona airport, Spain, 2010. **GNU Free Documentation License**, Version 1.2.



Figure 180. Though out of focus, a vertical *ciwara* can be seen on a pedestal in the palace of Wakanda, an invented African nation in the Marvel Universe. Other sculptures seen so far consist of sleek naturalistic panther casts. Single frame from *The Avengers: Infinity War* (2018) in "Avengers: Infinity War – Shuri Helps Vision Clip (New HD Promo)" by PostCrisp.com, 2018.

Since the early 20th century, the graceful forms of Bamana *ciwara*–particular those with vertical orientations–have attracted the attention of Western collectors and artists. Although their use diminished or ceased, outside demand increased, and carvers–both Bamana and other–have matched the export market appetite with tourist art crests that have never seen a field or a performer's head. For the Bamana, they have become a badge, marking not only their own territory through public sculpture at the gardens of Bamako's City Hall or locally-produced clothing motifs, but nationally emblazoned as an airline logo (Figure 179). For those outside the continent, the *ciwara* have become one of the premier symbols of Africa, one of the few actual African sculptures to grace the Marvel Comics world of Wakanda, a mythical nation (Figure 180).

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Animals of the Present: Willie Bester's The Dogs of War and The Trojan Horse

Willie Bester's *Dogs of War* (Figure 181) is a menacing figure who has torn his lead from any controlling hand. He lopes forward, snarling through his muzzle, his body a conglomeration of metal machine parts, a tin cup, batteries (or dynamite), with a battered but serviceable machine gun mounted on the back. The common steel prevents distractions, urging an examination of the multiple textures that provide the uncared-for look of a true junkyard dog. He is all diagonals, their power and implied activity creating a Terminator-like futuristic effect that spawns anxiety.

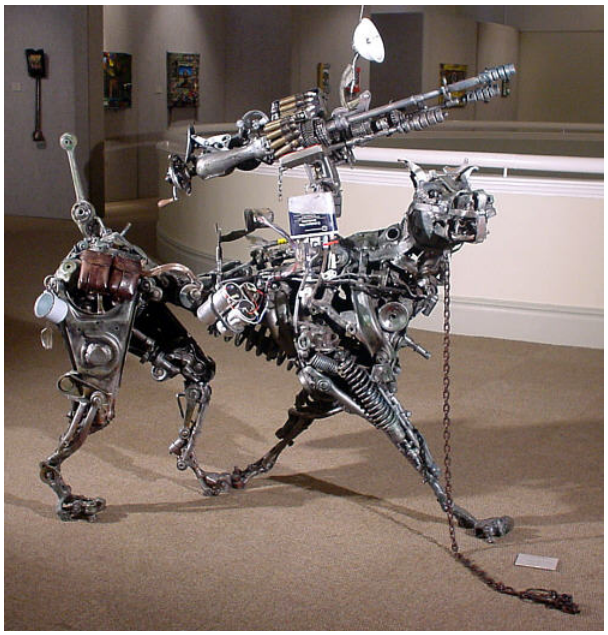


Figure 181. Willie Bester, *The Dogs of War*, 2001. © Willie Bester; with the gracious permission of the artist.



Figure 182. Scene of police with dogs in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Jan. 1, 1982. United Nations photo/DB. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The artwork's name originates from Marc Anthony's line in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Cry 'Havoc!', and let slip the dogs of war." "Havoc" was an actual military order, one that called for complete annihilation. While actual military dogs were used by the Romans, the term also applies to mechanical devices that hold or fasten; "dogs of war" has also come to mean mercenaries. The title does not refer to a declared war; although South Africa had some involvement in the World Wars, the Korean War, and the Namibian War for Independence, its last major military involvement took place internally with the Boer Wars that ended in the early 20th century.

If not a reference to an actual war, is the piece then a commentary on general havoc in South African society? While that layer of meaning may be present, this work is actually an image drawn from an actual event, and the installation this work was a part of scrutinizes the event in multiple ways. In 1998, four years after Nelson Mandela was elected president, some white South African police in a canine training unit set their dogs on illegal immigrants from neighboring countries–and videoed themselves. An investigative television program obtained the tape two years later, showing it to key politicians and broadcasting it; one year later, those involved were sentenced. Bester's work, produced the year of the convictions, was part of an installation that explored the event in multiple rooms. Its central ensemble, called *Who let the dogs out?* included a barricaded section through which viewers could become voyeurs of the violent original footage of intent German shepherds, detached police, and terrified immigrants (see the video below; WARNING, it is extremely graphic). The accompanying sculptural group included life-size scrap metal policeman, a dog attacking the victim, and a second policeman with a video camera replacing his head.

The image of the dog took on a great deal of prominence in the apartheid world of South African artists. A potent symbol of police brutality and the will to control, these German shepherds not only appeared in many journalistic photos (Figure 1820, but also featured in the art of David Koloane–feral, without leashes or handlers–and Norman Catherine–where they were anthropomorphized with human features and police caps. When apartheid ended and Mandela was elected to office a few years later in 1994, South Africa attempted to address its violent past history with a tribunal known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1996-1998) chaired by Bishop Desmond Tutu. Its investigation of incidents that took place from 1960-1994 was purgative, and many chose to believe that its confrontations–many broadcast–could be put away. Bester's *Dogs of War* and a number of subsequent works continue to rip the scabs off a past that has not vanished. As reviewer Brenda Atkinson wrote in her positive view of the exhibition: "Detractors of Willie Bester's work are often bewildered by his relentless revisiting of the theme of racial injustice. It's as if, by refusing to conspire with the soothing discourses of rainbowism and renaissance, he is committing some kind of horrible social faux pas, like revealing an operation scar over dinner party hors d'oeuvres."



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Bester (b. 1956), who grew up under apartheid, neither forgets the ugly past nor its repercussions. He created three versions of another work entitled *Trojan Horse*. The first two versions were assembled from partially painted recycled materials, stiffly posed and mounted on wheels like pull-toys. These colorful examples were made by 1994, but the third (Figure 183), created some thirteen years later, has a grimmer, post-industrial look similar to that of *Dogs of War*, with an automatic weapon again mounted on the animal. Here, too, the animal is more than it seems. Its name does not refer to the Homerian account of Odysseus's "gift" to the Trojans, but rather to a 1985 police operation in one of Cape Town's black neighborhoods. There had been anti-apartheid demonstrations there, and the Security and Railway police mounted an operation whereby a truck laden with boxes entered the area, only to have men with automatic weapons appear behind the cartons and fire into the crowd in an incident called the Trojan Horse Massacre. Two children and a young man died, with others wounded. Once more, videotape captured the incident. The perpetrators were investigated years later, in 1988, and thirteen were charged and turned over to the Attorney General of the region, who refused to prosecute. Other efforts at a civil case ended in acquittal. Bester, however, continues to dig up memories of these atrocities from the not-so-distant past. Here he transforms a horse with one leg raised from the typical Western portrayal of a victorious warlord into a vicious reminder of heartless brutality. Other works by Bester can be viewed on the artist's website, and interviews with the artist can be viewed HERE and HERE.



Figure 183. Willie Bester's *Trojan Horse III* (2007) at the exhibition "The Rainbow Nation" at the Museum Beelden aan Zee. Image courtesy of TripAdvisor. Photo by anthonyholland.

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3.2: Coupling Up



Figure 184. These four combs were intended as love gifts. Clockwise, upper left: Fante or Asante male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. H 9.25″. Dallas Museum of Art, 1981.174. Gift of Henry H. Hawley III. Public domain. Upper right: Akan male artist, Ghana, early 20th century. H 17 3/8″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2016.139. Gift of Dr. Nii and Martina Y. Quarcoopome. Public domain. Lower right: Akan male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. H 7.87″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1986,17.141. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Lower left: Asante male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. H 12.25″. Brooklyn Museum, 74.217.6. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Willi Riese to the Jennie Simpson Educational Collection of African Art. Creative Commons-BY.

The image of the male-female couple is fairly common in African art. Some couple images represent twins rather than mates, but this chapter explores the former. These do not usually depict specific individuals, but represent a basic adult social unit, a foundation of community. In life, courtship or arranged marriage produces couples.



Figure 185. This necklace, made by a young woman for a man, has four beaded “love letters” as well as a larger flap. Blue is often associated with fidelity and an inverted triangle usually signifies a bachelor. Zulu, South Africa, late 19th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2014.7.1.

While these events are not depicted in traditional art, there are traditional art forms that support both processes. Among the Akan of Ghana, for

example, until recently an elaborate decorative comb served as a typical courtship gift (Figure 184). Its imagery might be generic or pointed–sometimes referring to a defeated suitor, for instance, or including visual notes that signified the would-be husband would be a good provider. Even after marriage, a woman might keep her gifts from old admirers, most of which were meant for display rather than practical use, for they tend to be too large for a comfortable fit in the hand. Wives might additionally receive combs from their husbands after marriage to mark special occasions such as the birth of a child.



Figure 186. This *mange*, made by a Nupe woman, was afterward taken to a brass smith who added metal repoussé plating. Nigeria, mid-20th century. H 15.75″. Courtesy Cincinnati Museum of Art, 1990.18. Gift of the Ellis H. and Doris B. Robinson Foundation



Figure 187. This Nupe *mange* was made by a Nupe woman but painted by a Nupe man in a way that ignores the incised geometric patterns with which the potter decorated its surface. H 15.55. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-422-9. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0; photo trimmed.

Young Zulu women, as well as their counterparts in neighboring ethnic groups, create courtship gifts for young men they fancy. With these they indicate their interest without conversation. These beaded rectangles, usually called “love letters” in English are fairly small, although they may be duplicated to form a necklace (Figure 185). Although the colors and symbols used by the potential girlfriends and brides have meanings, they are generational and also vary from area to area. Young men may have to have

their sisters or mothers help them interpret the meaning and can wear as much beadwork as their female admirers can supply until they make an arrangement to marry.

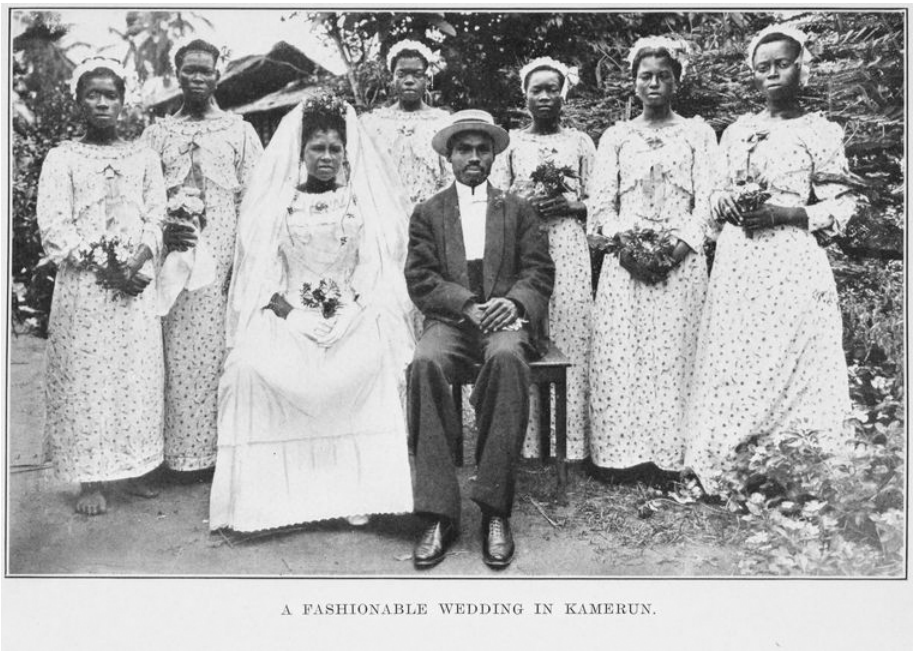


Figure 188. A Christian wedding party before 1912. In Robert H. Milligan, Fetish Folk of West Africa. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1912, facing p. 283. Public domain.

Wedding gifts related to a new household were popular. In the past, one such standard gift for Nupe brides were terracotta pots. Often these, too, were kept unused, but for a different reason. Bowls, cooking pots, and water containers for daily use were one thing, but wedding gifts were kept aside. Not only did their display constitute a formidable statement about bridal popularity, but the unused pottery could be sold in future if immediate cash was needed. One popular wedding gift was the *mange*, a smallish, narrow-necked pot for water or palm wine (Figure 186). In the early part of the 20th century, gifts to princesses or other wealthy women might include flat brass ornamentation on the outside. By the 1960s, wedding guests would buy them from a potter, then take them to a male specialist who would paint them (Figure 187). By the late 20th century, such gifts were considered hopelessly old-fashioned, replaced by imported Chinese enamel lidded bowls and casseroles.



Figure 189. Princess Theresa first married at a Catholic ceremony at Holy Cross Cathedral (above), then came to the palace, cut an elaborate architectural cake, and changed her clothes for her traditional ceremony (below). Photos by D. Anthony Mahone, Benin City, Nigeria, 1994.



Figure 190. This Igbo woman's elaborate hairstyle would have prevented her from carrying loads on the head. Awka, Nigeria, early 20th c. From *The Secret Museum of Mankind*. New York: Manhattan House, n.d., n.p. [p. 119].

Weddings themselves were and are major family occasions, open to all regardless of invitation. While in the past such celebrations followed traditional law and custom (which usually required "bride price"–a requisite gift that varied from one region to another, but might include livestock, alcoholic drinks, foodstuffs, or cash), contemporary couples often have both a traditional ceremony and a "white wedding"–that is, a wedding with a Western-style wedding gown for the bride, and a suit and white



Figure 191. This wedding cape was beaded by a Zulu bride. South Africa, ca. 1970s. Cotton trade cloth, glass beads, fiber. 38 × 33.5″. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2013.731. Gift of William D. Roth and Norma Canelas Roth. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.

gloves for the groom. Although this adoption of custom began with Christian converts in the late 19th/early 20th century (Figure 186), it has become very widespread even among non-Christians. Even brides from the most traditional of families may stagger a church ceremony with a traditional one, as occurred in Nigeria's Benin Kingdom in 1994, when the Oba's eldest daughter Princess Theresa wed in the Catholic



Figure 192. Zulu man in marriage attire made by his bride. South Africa, early 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, PP0150914.

Holy Cross Cathedral, then shed her gown for traditional attire in a palace celebration (Figure 189). The Oba of Benin's two oldest daughters have special weddings, receiving many gifts of beads from their father on the palace dais. Although many Benin brides wear their hair in a beehive-like wedding style imitation of the queens, the Princess could not do so because one of her privileges as the eldest daughter was a coral-beaded headband. This is normally part of chiefly regalia; she, her next youngest sister, and her grandmother (the Oba's mother) are the only Edo women allowed to wear it.



Figure 193. Zulu bride and groom. South Africa, 2017. Single frame from MzansiMagicOfficial "Our Perfect Wedding: 26 March 2017."

Although high-status versions of traditional wear constitute wedding wear among many African couples, sometimes specific hairstyles or clothing are worn only at the wedding, or during the period immediately following it. Wedding coiffures are usually a

female practice, and often used to involve a crest (Figure 190), since this precluded carrying loads on the head. Avoidance of carrying water or firewood was acceptable and encouraged only for the wedding and labor-free honeymoon periods; sometimes it was reprised during a first pregnancy as well. Certain attire is worn specifically for a wedding in some regions, although this is a fluid tradition that follows its own stylistic changes.



Figure 195. This door, carved by a Yoruba male sculptor from Iseyin, Nigeria, features a couple having sex as its central motif. H 51.18″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-555-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Zulu brides of the late 20th century, for example, transformed cotton blankets with imported glass seed beads, creating splendid (if heavy) multi-colored garments (Figure 191). In the early 20th century, Zulu grooms wore complex beaded attire created by their brides, dance shields in hand (Figure 192), and today what appears “traditional” follows neither of these patterns (Figure 193). Instead, what was once a red-ochred flared hairstyle for married women–not brides–became a wig and then a red hat is transformed for a wedding into a leopard copy of the same form, in line with the groom’s attire, but with an attached beaded veil. Earlier in this 2017 ceremony, the bride wore a white, Western-style gown before changing. Beadwork, however, did not form a major part of either newlywed’s attire.



Figure 194. This mirror case (its cover is closed) was probably made as a wedding gift by a Yoruba male artist. Nigeria, early 20th century. H 9.84″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-535-7. Formerly Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 196. This door lock, made by a Bamana male sculptor, takes the form of a woman. Mali, 20th century. H 17.32″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-41-20. Formerly in the collection of the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

The sanctioned union created by a wedding is meant to produce children, and occasionally the act of procreation is depicted. Yoruba mirrors with carved frames and covers–a common gift in the early 20th century–occasionally featured the image of a copulating couple (Figure 194). This was not meant to be a particularly erotic image, but instead a type of visual encouragement to

fruitfulness. The motif can show up outside the context of weddings, appearing as one of the carvings on the border of a divination tray or even on a high-status door (Figure 195), speaking to issues of fertility and sexual health, but also to the matter-of-fact truth that sex is a part of daily life and the continuance of life requires both genders' cooperation. It can be both licit and illicit, the latter potentially creating problems of some magnitude. *Magun*, for example, is a well-known type of Yoruba medicine intended to punish unfaithful women and their lovers; secretly applied to a woman by her husband, it makes adulterers unable to disengage after coitus. A diviner or a ritual specialist may have to find a solution for the kinds of frictions and quarrels produced by extramarital sexual activity.



Figure 197. This mask, made by an Ejagham artist in southeastern Nigeria before 1911, further differentiates the male-female Janus faces. Not only are they distinguished by skin color, their browlines are contrasted–a sharp, angular, keeled brow for the male, a smooth rounded curve for the female. Their temple scarifications differ–hers are round, his are square, his squinting, hers open. In addition, the male has a beard made from actual human hair–a very rare occurrence in African art. H 15.35″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1911,1016.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

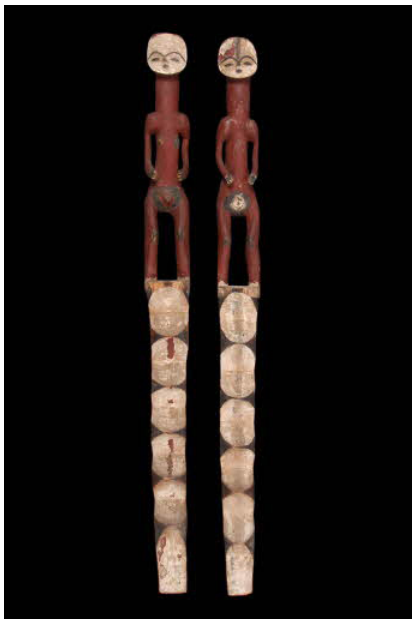


Figure 198. Two architectural post by a Tsogho male artist, Gabon, 20th century. H 5.45′. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1961.120.147.1-2. Gift of Jacques Millot.

Although erotic subject matter is fairly rare in traditional African art (though not uncommon in 20th-century neotraditional art made for foreigners), recognition of sexuality and its place in marriage certainly exists. Door locks for the Bamana of Mali (Figure 196) acted as common wedding gifts–the brides' parents often provided her with a figurative male lock and a door, while a wife often gave her husband a lock in the form of a female figure. no matter the gender of the figure, the lock itself was considered feminine, while the horizontal bar was masculine, and sometimes took a phallic form. The movement of the bar's slide action during locking and unlocking was conceived of as intercourse, evidence of the created "couple."

The appearance of a male-female couple can stress the complementarity of the sexes, rather than a husband-wife pairing. While the dual appearances of genders speak to an equivalency of existential value, it does not necessarily translate into societal equality.

Some skin-covered helmet masks or crests from southeastern Nigeria's Cross Rivers region depict Janus heads or four heads, splitting the genders represented. Although facial features are often styled similarly, the female is usually shown with light skin, while the male has considerably darker skin (see example at Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford). Some examples have different hairstyles that further clarify whether they are male and female, while others do not. Sometimes the facial scarification differentiates them. Information regarding their meaning is scarce. Different men's societies wore them for a variety of functions, including funerals. Are they, in essence, the ideal man–a warrior–and the ideal woman–a nubile graduate of the fattening house? It's impossible to say with any certainty. Occasionally one will include two females with one man or other idiosyncratic features (Figure 197), but dual faced normally speak to the male-female pair as the basis of society.



Figure 199. This unusually asymmetrical mask bears a couple. Eastern Pende male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 19th century. H 15.75″. Brooklyn Museum, Museum Expedition 1922, Robert B. Woodward Memorial Fund, 22.1690. Creative Commons-BY.

That the concept of the pair shows completeness is visible in many of the continent's art forms. Architectural features may refer to the couple (Figure 198), masquerades may contain images of complementary genders (Figure 199), or figurative sculpture may represent the pair. Marriage is considered one of the benchmarks of adulthood. Even today, it is nearly unthinkable for a person of prominence seeking a government or corporate appointment to be unmarried. This often occurs in art as well, with deities and ancestors frequently shown with spouses. The southern Bamana of the region around Banan and Baninko, for example, have a fertility cult known as Gwan. Its shrine includes a multitude of figures that revolve around a seated female with a child, known as Gwandusu. Her male consort Gwanjaraba, however, must also be present, even though he,



Figure 200. Although both of these figures were made by Bamana male sculptors and were displayed in Gwan fertility shrines, they were neither made by the same artist nor part of the same shrine. Left, H 51″. Mali, early 20th century. The Detroit Institute of Arts, 2003.66. Museum Purchase, African Oceanic and New World Cultures Art General Fund, Ralph H. Booth Bequest Fund, Mary Martin Semmes Fund, Joseph H. Parsons Fund and partial gift of Dr. Werner Muensterberger. Public domain. Right, Mali, 16th-19th century. H 35 3/8″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983.600a, b. Gift of John and Evelyn Kossak, The Kronos Collections, in honor of Martin Lerner, 1983. Public domain.

like the baby, is there only to show she is a “completed woman” (Figure 200). Women seeking a child promise to name the outcome of a successful offering after the figures. In works made for the same shrine by the same artist, he can be smaller than his “wife,” and is sometimes not frontal nor seated, both indications he has less status and dignity.



Figure 201. These two town ancestral figures carved by an Igbo male artist have prominent navels, indicative of lineage ties, and cosmetic *uli* body paint decorates their torsos and necks. The male figure wears a loincloth, the female wears waist beads. Nigeria, photo taken before 1939, perhaps by J. Stöcker. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B54.12. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, town shrines contained significantly large sculptures of town founders. These community ancestors were remembered more as mythical than as historical figures. They, too, are represented in pairs, accompanied by supporters. Males and females are counterparts of one another, their relative heights reflecting common gender height disparities, rather than a hierarchical relationship (Figure 201).



Figure 202. Work by the Chamba male artist Soompa (active 1920s – 1940s), Nigeria. H 21.25″. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2005.77. Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.



Figure 203. This *edan* Ogboni pair shows the titled female Erelu with her symbolic spoon, her male partner holding another pair of linked *edan* Ogboni. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Courtesy of Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, 2002.39.3. Gift of Rod McGalliard.

Marriage's creation of a unit is sometimes explicit. A Nigerian sculpture by the Chamba male artist Soompa depicts husband and wife sharing a common lower garment and one pair of legs (Figure 202). Equivalent in size, the shape of their crested hairstyles is one of their clearest differences. Primary and secondary sexual traits are alluded to, but not emphasized. Instead, their similarities are stressed: elongated cylindrical torsos and necks, as well as identical geometricized facial features.



Figure 204. This is a fairly rare example of a complex wood sculpture from the hands of an Asante male artist. Ghana, 19th or 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-125-2. Formerly part of the collection of the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 205a. Male Dogon artist, Mali, late 18th or 20th century. 18th–early 19th century. H 28.75″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.394.15. Gift of Lester Wunderman; 1977. Public domain.

Similarly, Yoruba *edan*, metal figures that act as the emblem of the Ogboni (also known as Oshugbo) Society, a group that used to perform judicial and punitive activities in each Yoruba kingdom, equated male and female forms in key ways (Figure 203). While their primary and secondary sexual characteristics are designated, they are played down–the figures have similar body contours, facial features, and hairstyles. They are literally joined by a metal chain; Ogboni members place the figures on their chest, chain at the back of the neck, when carrying out official duties. Although women cannot take an active role in Ogboni until they are post-menopausal, their importance and powers at that age are seen as equivalent to those of men, and their visual complementarity is sometimes even more extreme–a jawline border often acts as a stylized beard on both figures, a reminder that some post-menopausal women have (albeit limited) facial hair. Scholars may dispute the identity of the figures–Ogboni founders? representatives of the androgynous duality of the deified female Earth?–but suggest that efficaciousness of any significance necessitates the complementary and interdependent principles represented by a male-female pairing. In a sense, the *edan* Ogboni is a symbolic equivalent of the Taoist *taijitu* emblem representing the principles of *yin* and *yang*.



Figure 205a. Male Dogon artist, Mali, late 18th or 20th century. 18th–early 19th century. H 28.75″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1977.394.15. Gift of Lester Wunderman; 1977. Public domain.

The visual expression of male-female interdependence transcends any particular couple to become a philosophical construct of gender complementarity. It is expressed in many representations of the couple as a kind of archetype, rather than merely individuals

who physically interact. Symbolic unity can be achieved by sharing the same seat, a practice that does not occur in everyday life. In an Asante sculpture (Figure 204), two figures share a stool–a physical impossibility given the size of these seats. Unfortunately, the object was collected without information. Is this a representation of a married couple, demonstrating their unity? While that might be a logical assumption in some parts of the continent, it is unlikely for the Asante. Most stools are extremely personal, and no one except the owner would ever use a given example. There are, however, state stools that act as thrones, and the Asante and other Akan peoples speak of the enstooling of a ruler or of inheriting the stool. To show a couple sharing a stool may indicate that we are seeing a ruler and a Queen Mother, either the ruler's actual mother or a designated female relative who acts as a stand-in if she is deceased. Queen Mothers are influential, not only dispensing advice but instrumental in the selection of a new ruler. Perhaps this couple–the female shown slightly taller than the male–represents mother and son, but it is impossible to verify without further information.

A Dogon male artist from Mali produced one of the best-known African representations of the couple (Figure 205a,b). Like the Asante couple in Figure 204, the male and female figures share a stool. Their hairstyles differentiate them, but otherwise their genders are played down for a more androgynous effect. While the woman has breasts, they are not overlarge, and the male's chest protrudes as a solid form in a complementary fashion. Some facial features–arrow-like nose, eyes with metal inserts–are identical. While the male's mouth is larger, the female's has a similar amorphous shape. The verticality of her labret is a counterpart to his beard. While their genitalia varies, and the male's gesture draws attention to the concept of procreation, their body silhouettes replicate one another–his shoulders are no wider, her figure does not nip in at the waist nor flare



Figure 206. This couple, carved by a Dogon male carver now called the Barnes Foundation Master, was produced in Mali in the late 19th–early 20th century. H (sculpture without the base made by Inagaki) 27 3/8″. Courtesy the Barnes Foundation A197.



Figure 207. A Dogon male artist carved this stool in Mali at some point in the first half of the 20th century. H 14.25″. Photo by Paul Hester. Courtesy The Menil Collection, X 2071.

out at the hips. A symphony of repeated cylinders, they neither mirror actual human forms nor are distinguished from one another. In this, they are similar to the Igbo, Chamba, Yoruba, and Asante pairs already examined. The essence of their message remains complementarity, which is borne out by the vocational symbols on their backs: man as provider, indicated by his quiver, woman as nurturer, symbolized by her child.

The link between these figures is made manifest not only by the stool, but by physical touch–the man's arm rests across the woman's shoulders, creating a strong horizontal that echoes those of the stool's base and seat. Traditional African art rarely portrays eye contact or touch, even in depictions of husband and wife. Is this an ordinary husband and wife? We do not know the function of this object or similar Dogon pairs–for this is not a unique object (See Figure 206)–because they have not been made or used since the early 20th century. While these examples are similar in many respects, there are other analogous pieces whose facial style is vastly different or that lack the caryatid stool.



Figure 208. This terracotta sculpture, made by an Igbo female artist from the Western Igbo village of Osisa, depicts a successful titled man surrounded by household members. A brazier rests in front of the male, yams roasting inside; roasted yams are a focus of the Igbo New Yam festival. Nigeria, before 1880. H 18.5″. A work by the same hand is in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1951,01.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Were they personal objects owned by individuals, sculptures belonging to the extended family's shrine, works on the shrine of the *hogon*, the village priestly leader? Were they displayed at the funerals of prominent men or used in a completely different context? Both pairs illustrated here show the couple seated on a stool with figurative caryatids; this refers to the kind of stool only the *hogon* owned (Figure 207). Scholars have often referred to the supporting figures as *nommo*, primordial ancestral beings who brought agriculture to the Dogon and create rainfall. According to a group of French scholars headed by the late Marcel Griaule, such stools are models of the cosmos, the seat representing the sky connected by a central tree (a post) to the base, the earth. That the couple sits upon such a stool both conveys leadership associations and suggests an identity out of the ordinary–that of the primordial couple, or first human beings. Is that indeed their identity? Religious discontinuities since the early 20th century prevent any certainty concerning the exact meaning and function of these and similar works. Despite our ignorance regarding this key information, the object's imagery does convey key cultural ideas regarding male and female interdependence, equivalent value, and divergent social roles.

Although polygamy is not uncommon in Africa–particularly among the wealthy–it has rarely been the subject of traditional art. The couple alone can represent the complementarity of the sexes and convey information about roles. A few traditional pieces do address multiple wives, however, as do some contemporary works.



Figure 209. This 19″ Ifijioku terracotta sculpture, made by an Igbo woman from Osisa, Nigeria, is part of a group collected in the 1880s. It includes a man and his two wives–one pregnant, the other holding a toddler. 1892. From Harry Alis and Edouard Charton, eds., "Voyage dans l'Adamaoua; par le Lieutenant de Vaisseau L. Mizon." *Le Tour du Monde: Nouveau Journal des Voyages* 64 (No. 1657-1659, 1892): 232. Now in the National Museum, Lagos. Public domain.



Figure 210. This puppet ensemble, made by a Bamana male sculptor, could be made to move through the action of now-missing strings. The "theater" for this open-air *cheko* perfomance was a huge cloth animal that hid the performers; puppet vignettes were located on its back and sides. Mali,1994. H 29.52″.Tropenmuseum TM-5566-5. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

A small group of late 19th-century Igbo terracotta sculptures places the male head of household at the center of a dense figurative cluster. With their masterful handling of surface patterning, these sculptures attest to the skills of a single village, for they were all collected from Osisa, an Ndokwa Igbo community on the west bank of the Niger River. The family head is (Figure 208) usually flanked by two wives with a carved ivory tusk in his left hand–a reference to his high status as a titleholder–while a member of his entourage beats out a rhythm on an iron gong. He and his wives hold fans; his imported hat also attests to his high position, as do their elaborate hairstyles. Fecundity is underscored; one wife holds a baby to her breast, while some other examples (Figure 209) show one wife pregnant, the other with a child. The chickens in these works await their fate as sacrificial offerings; the objects were apparently altars dedicated to Ifejioku, the god of yams, the Igbo farming and culinary specialty. Today shrines to Ifejioku ("Ifijioku" in other Igbo areas; a male deity in the Ndokwa region) are small marked-off areas of the ground that support a wooden stake. Human and plant fertility are inextricably linked, and wives, children, and retainers are testaments to the success of a wealthy farmer.



Figure 211. This photo probably represents a man with two wives; their identical dress is meant to demonstrate he treats both wives identically, as the Koran commands. Photo by. H. Danel. Djenne, Mali, ca. 1904. Public domain.

Some artworks refer to polygamy without the physical presence of the husband (Figure 210). While the image of two women pounding food in a mortar together might depict any two women–mother and daughter, sisters, mother and daughter-in-law–it is usually interpreted as an image of co-wives. A metaphor for smooth cooperation, since a rhythmic alternation of strokes is necessary, such images can speak to the ideal polygamous family, where all members coexist in harmony. When sculptures are part of a performance, however, as these puppets are, the pestles sometimes become weapons as the women's rivalry is made manifest. Jealousy among co-wives is common.



Figure 212. In this compound, a man and his wife or wives each dwell in a separate house. Senufo, near Banfora, Burkina Faso, 2009. Photo by Rita Willaert. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Among West African Muslim families, men are supposed to avert it as much as possible by purchasing their wives the same items, and when these are worn at the same time, the ideal is achieved, if only for a moment (Figure 211).



Figure 214. This figural group shows two European couples at the table, one of many works Ona made that note non-Yoruba behavior on the part of British spouses. The figures, chairs, and table are all carved from one piece of wood, but the supports, plates, dish, jug and pith helmets are separately carved and attached. Thomas Ona Odulate. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, ca. 1940. H 8.25″. Tropenmuseum, TM-3441-8. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 213. Neckrests were once more widespread as sleeping supports, but are still found in some parts of southern and eastern Africa. Double neckrests like this are far less common. Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1920. MAS (Museum aan de Stroom), Antwerp, AE.3726. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

In actual domestic settings, household arrangements for husband and wife tend to follow patterns of gender separation. Traditional housing–except for very poor urban dwellers–usually ensures husband and wife or wives have their own houses within a compound (Figure 212). While a double neckrest (Figure 213) attests to the incomplete nature of domestic separation, double beds in most women's houses or rooms are usually meant to be shared with their children, not their spouses. Urban homes in traditional forms, such as those in Djenne, Mali or in Nigeria's Hausa cities, usually site the women's quarters in the compound interior, so that the husband's room has a street or entry view, and passage into the interior of the household is restricted to family or close friends. This has even carried over to modern styles of houses and apartments–as long as it is affordable, a husband and wife/wives will each have their own room. Wealthy men may provide separate dwellings–sometimes in different towns–for their wives.

Observations of modernity and its impact on couplehood have impacted some artists. Each region has its own standards for one gender's behavior toward the other, but a degree of separation is common, as is avoidance of affection in public. Early in the 20th-century sculptors began to record the odd couple behavior of foreign colonials, who ate together at a table (Figure 214), walked with their arms around each other, or even kissed in public, all evidence of unmannerly behavior. Later responses to modern couplehood–African and foreign alike–attracted artists' eyes (Figure 215) as the impact of European influence–through direct observation, film and television productions–appeared.



Figure 215. This mural by Cheri Samba decorates Matonge, Brussels' considerable expatriate Congolese community. Samba (his self-portrait is centrally located, wearing a striped shirt; his wife Philda is at right having her hair coiffed) takes note of casual male-female interactions among Belgians and Congolese, stressing interracial romance and public displays of affection via the two couples that flank him: a European man and an African woman kissing, and an African man and a European woman kissing. Both women are dressed in revealing clothing and seem unconcerned about public groping. Photo by Finne Boonen, Brussels, Belgium, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.5, cropped and color-adjusted.

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Rites of Courtship, Ceremonial Displays of Wedded Bliss: The Nomadic Fulani of Northern Nigeria, Niger, and Neighboring Regions



Figure 216. Two Fulani cattleherders. Photo by Thomas Arthur Manly Nash, Nigeria, 1940s. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.304.5. 005. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

While the Fulani people are spread out among many West African countries and are comprised of both settled and nomadic populations, two contiguous sub-groups of the latter engage in complex but contrasting courtship rituals. The cattle-herding Fulani who live in Nigeria, Benin Republic, and Cameroon, as well as those who live just north in Niger and Chad share a nomadic lifestyle and an interest in personal adornment through hairstyles, jewelry, makeup, and dress, but are segregated by oral history pertaining to clan origins, and by self-perceived differences.

Some aspects of their lifestyle are visually distinguishable, and are particularly apparent during the courtship rituals when the personal beauty of both sexes is the subject of intense effort. As people who are often on the move when new grazing lands are required, their personal possessions tend to be lightweight–the matrimonial bed, mats, calabashes, and personal goods. Their creative efforts therefore become self-directed; individuals themselves periodically become works of art, subject to critique.

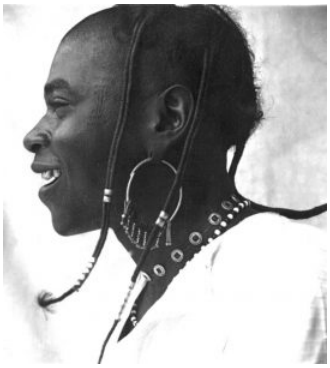


Figure 217. Fulani youth with one large earring and metal-wrapped braids, West Africa, ca. 1943. From a U.S. serviceman's WWII album, courtesy John Atherton. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Nomadic Fulani in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Cameroon

Among those nomadic Fulani who tend to move across a belt that includes northern and central Nigeria,



Figure 218. This Fulani youth from the Kano area wears a simple Hausa-made tunic designed for the Fulani over an imported shirt, his metal wrapped braids and single earring echoing the fashionable styles of 20 years before. Necklace styles had changed, however, Nigeria, 1963-1964. Photo by Jenny Griffin. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2016.17.3. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

as well as parts of Benin Republic and Cameroon, male fashions for those who are of courting age have varied considerably over time. Their everyday clothes are usually woven and tailored by the Hausa or are imported. They often wear the straw hats of older men–domed, with a curly or straight brim (meant to accommodate a cylindrical cap and/or turban underneath) or conical (though most conical examples are wide-brimmed) (Figure 216).



Figure 219. This Sharo participant, laden with medicinal packets at the hips, over his leather apron, holds his mirror in his right hand as he awaits his blows. Fulani, Nigeria, 1944-1946. Photo by Dr. Joseph Denfield. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B47.17. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

These Fulani youth are subject to changing concepts of the fashionable. Male accessories have included large single earrings (Figure 217) that had some longevity (Figure 218), but have long since been out of style, as well as changing jewelry at the neck, arms, and wrists made from beads, leather with brass accents, or imaginative repurposing of imports such as buttons or safety pins. Some males bear facial tattooing (Figure 216 right), but it is a cosmetic elective rather than an ethnic marker, and is now predominantly a female practice in most regions. On market days, when the often isolated youths visit towns in the hope of encountering Fulani girls, their dressing tends to be more elaborate than when they spend long periods with the cattle, sleeping in the rough.



Figure 220. Cowrie shells decorate the hair of this Sharo participant, as well as the apron of one of the waiting spectators. He extends his leather-framed mirror in his right hand to demonstrate his unconcern at being beaten. Fulani, Nigeria, 1944-1946. Photo by Dr. Joseph Denfield. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B47.16. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

Dressing is at its peak, however, at celebratory times. The biggest occasion for more formal dress is the annual celebration known variously as Sharo, Soro, Goja, or Shadi. Unmarried youths called *suka*, usually in their mid to



Figure 221. This photo is inscribed “The flogger and the flogged.” Fulani, Nigeria, 1944-1946. Photo by Dr. Joseph Denfield. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B47.18. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

late teens (although this stage can extend until the mid-twenties), meet in paired ritual combat with their counterparts from another community (Figure 219). Insults are traded by the participants, as well as by female spectators towards rival groups. One youth stands and is whipped by his opponents, often after some feints designed to provoke a reaction. Then, after a recovery period, the initial subject returns the favor. The whips are not leather, but supple tree branches, often with sharpened off-shoots meant to inflict greater damage, the whole prepared with medicine.

The most admired Sharo participants are those who not only show no pain–that is a given; revealing pain will alienate young women seeking husbands–but whose bodies even withstand flinching. The stars of the performance are those who admire themselves in a mirror while receiving blows (Figure 220), especially if the mirror is held by one of their female admirers. Welts and cuts are



Figure 222. This Fulani Sharo participant is sitting in a chair, unconcerned about the impending blow. Leather aprons–sometimes decorated with cowries, were still worn. Photo by Jenny Griffin, Kano region of Nigeria, 1963-1964. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2016.17.4. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

badges of honor (Figure 221). Willingness to participate, ability to endure with grace even when taunted by girls of the opposing community, and the appearance of diffidence at both the infliction and reception of pain is a key element of Fulani *pulaaku*, or "Fulaniness." Endurance is a necessity for the hard life of a nomad, and Sharo underlines the way men face the blows of life.

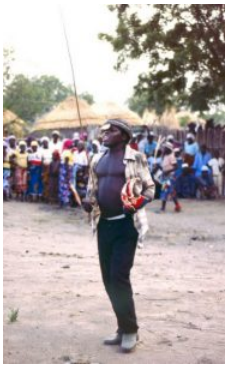


Figure 223. This Sharo participant wears an imported hat, shirt, trousers, and shoes. Fulani, Nigeria. Photo by Roger Blench. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

Sharo dressing has changed considerably in the past century. The 1940s saw *suka* wearing leather aprons over knee-length shorts, their braids clamped with metal; this remained standard until the 1960s, when they began slipping an abundance of white beads onto their multiple braids (Figure 222). In the 1990s, copper wire acted like a second coiffure, haloing their heads. More recently headbands or imported hats of various types are a key feature, along with Western shoes and other attire (Figure 223).



Figure 224. Fulani girls watching a performance outside of Kano, Nigeria, 1963-1964. These Fulani do not weave; all garments and accessories are bought from neighboring peoples or are imported market goods, though these may be further embellished or recombined in highly creative ways. Photo by Jenny Grffin. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2016.17.7. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 225. These 21st-century Sharo participants wear a variety of Western hats and attire. Sharo frequently takes place twice a year; this performance is during a Muslim holiday. Bauchi, Nigeria, 2006. Photo by Munir Shields. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Gaining the favor of girls is intrinsic to Fulani play, even long before the *suka* stage is reached (Figure 224). At this stage of life, braids–alien to most of the Fulani's male African neighbors–are a must. Young women taunted a nomadic youth who had settled in town by saying, "Are you not ashamed to walk around with this head of a farmer?" The youth–Ndudi Umaru, a Jafun Fulani from Cameroon who narrated his autobiography–spoke of *suka* preparations for the festival:

"A young *suka* is completely preoccupied with his braids and with girls. He's never separated from his mirror and his bottles of perfume. He puts salves on his face. He drinks sour milk to which he has added certain powders which are supposed to make him attractive. From his magic belt, he hangs many flasks full of liquid ointments. And he certainly does not forget to obtain 'the medicine of courage' from his elders" (Bocquené, [1986] 2002, 120).

Rewards for successful participants include the admiration of peers, elders, and younger boys. The most sought-after result is female willingness to pledge love–innocent for young girls (though perhaps leading to marriage), conclusive for married women.



Figure 226. This Sharo participant wears a boxing helmet and chest gear in a government-supervised Sharo display. Illéla district, Niger, 2014. Single frame from "Sharo 2014" by Boubacar Moustapha, 2015.

This endurance contest has been banned off and on in Nigeria, but it is unevenly enforced (Figure 225). Occasionally rivalries flare up and floggers strike the head instead of the chest, resulting in death and front-page news. Stylized versions without actual blows are a part of some Nigerian state and national cultural festivals. In some parts of Niger, government intervention resulted not in a

total ban of Sharo, but an adaption that introduced protective head and chest gear (Figure 226). This is a considerable departure from remembered practices, but has introduced novel costume elements that may have their own appeal.



A Vimeo element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=307

Nomadic Fulani in Niger and Chad



Figure 228. Left: This pendant mirror at left, mounted in green leather with tassels, was made by a Tuareg female leatherworker for the Wodaabe. Niger, 20th century, private collection. Right: This mirror's back is decorated with cowrie shells, beads, buttons, zippers, and imported brass earrings. Wodaabe Fulani, Chad, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1973.45.65. :



Figure 227. Young Wodaabe Fulani man applying makeup for Gerewol festival. Agadez region, Niger, 1989. Photo by Véronique Scott.Musée du Quai Branly, PF0176002.

The nomadic Wodaabe Fulani live primarily in Niger, and also have a courtship ordeal of sorts. Known as Gerewol, it involves no physical blows, but puts male pride at stake. Endurance also plays a part in this festival, but in a different manner. Rather than the receipt and administration of physical blows, participants endure exposure to direct sun for most daylight hours during a week of continuous, repetitive dancing. Gerewol takes place far from towns at the end of the rainy season and involves large meetings of two clans. Like Sharo, Gerewol provides opportunities for courtship and marriage, as well as divorce and remarriage. Like all Fulani, the Wodaabe favor first cousin arranged marriages for their initial pairing, but subsequent spouses can be love matches. Polygamy is common and divorce carries no stigma for either spouse. During Gerewol, women may choose to dally with a handsome participant or elope with him.

Fulani appreciation for good looks is socialized at an early age, and small boys are encouraged to admire themselves in the mirror. Gerewol showcases the good looks and charms of young men, but takes these traits much further than those Fulani who practice Sharo. Most nomadic Fulani males and females use *tozali* eyeliner (ground from antimony, or, more dangerously, galena) on a daily basis–it not only darkens the eyes strikingly, it is said to cut glare and clear the eyes. At Gerewol, however, male participants use additional cosmetics to create an ideal appearance, and also pay careful attention to their clothing and accessories (Figure 227).

Despite rivalry, they assist each other in dressing and making aesthetic decisions. Adult mirrors are constantly at hand and checked regularly (Figure 228).



Figure 229. Wodaabe Fulani men performing a *yaake* dance. Niger, 1997. Photo by Dan Lundberg. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Once Gerewol commences, young men begin a series of daily preliminary dances called *yaake*. Their preparations involve hair neatly braided by female relatives, the polishing of any brass ornaments, a careful choice of attire and accessories, and the application of facial makeup (Figure 229). The Wodaabe favor a bright complexion, a long narrow face, a long nose, and bright whites of teeth and eyes.

To enhance their natural features and approach the ideal, men create a foundation from clays imported from Nigeria and one region of Niger. Not



Figure 230. Two Wodaabe dressed for yaake dances at Gerewol. Niger, 2006. Photo by NGR-2006-D020 Peace Corps. Public domain.

only do these yellows (*makkara*) and reds (*kooya*) allow them to paint an elongated face within a face–narrow and light–the clays themselves are believed to have inherent medicinal qualities that charm the opposite sex. After applying the base coat, a narrow white or yellow (or white on yellow) stripe is often added from the hairline down the nose, resuming again on the chin. This creates an optical illusion that further lengthens the face, sometimes enhanced by the plucking or shaving of the hairline, as well as the verticality of an ostrich feather stuck in the turban (Figure 230). Small flowers or dots can be added to the cheeks as an additional embellishment. The eyes are then lined with a dark color, which is also applied to the brows and lips. This substance, which enhances contrast with white teeth and eyes, is also considered to be a medicine. Made from burnt cattle egret bones mixed with butter, this mystical preparation is meant to increase allure. Some Wodaabe use black pigments made from the inside of burnt batteries, and those in Chad have introduced a bright blue as a lipstick color.



Figure 231. Wodaabe dancers of the Sudosukai clan. Chad, 2016. © Oliver Lee, with permission.



Figure 232. This nomadic Fulani amulet includes medicines that may be for protection, seduction, or aggression towards rivals. West Africa, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1990.11.14.

Instead of their relatively plain tunics and short pants–or Western attire–young Wodaabe men drastically change their attire for Gerewol. During the *yaake* dances they wear long open-sided tunics over pants, often with a leather apron visible at the side. In Niger, this attire consists of dark cloths woven by the Hausa and sometimes embroidered with colorful lines, while in Chad tunics

are now frequently brighter, embellished with long sequinned or mirrored flaps, the pants with extensively embroidered panels added to the bottom. Chadian Wodaable fashion in recent years has also favored tall multi-colored caps with an abundance of sparkling elements, decorative braid, and yarn pom-poms (Figure 231). In all regions, amulets are worn around the neck (Figure 232) or attached to headgear, since rivals from within and without the lineage may try to sabotage a dancer. Medicines directed toward particular dancers are openly buried under the dancing ground in advance; a Wodaabe participant told Ndudi Umaru about other subterfuges, including iron suspended from a cord at one's back, which would flare out during a twirling step to hit a rival in the genitals, or ostrich plumes dipped in dry hot pepper that could be shaken before a rival, falling into his eyes.

Yaake is danced in a line. While it may not seem strenuous, as it involves stepping in place, spinning,



Figure 233. These young Wodaabe men, here wearing less makeup and wearing Hausa-style caftans, are backed by their turbanned sponsors. Gerewol ceremony at the Cure Salee festival near In-Gall, Niger, 2014. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

rising on the toes, and assuming a shivering shoulder movement, it involves constant motion and song. Stylized grimaces show off the whites of the teeth, while eye widening and rolling likewise highlight the brightness and size of the eyes. Participants may break away from the line occasionally for a drink or to arrange a liaison, but they quickly return. They are critiqued for days and often subjected to the insults of old women from the opposing lineage, which they pretend not to hear.

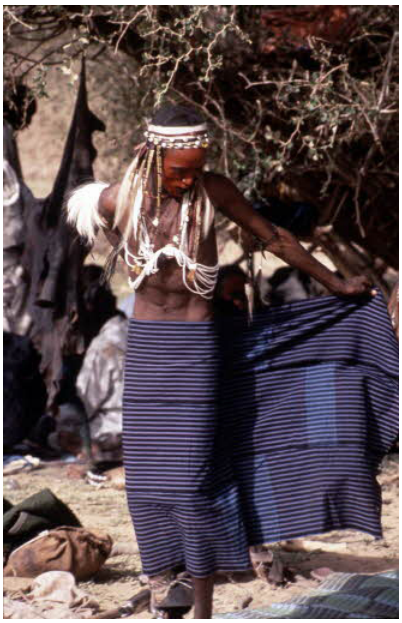


Figure 234. A young Wodaabe man dresses for the final performance in a Hausa-woven wrapper. Agadez region of Niger, 1989. Photo by Véronique Scott. Musée du Quai Branly, PF0176003.

Most Gerewol participants retire from the dance in their late 20s, although some may continue into their 30s. They then assume the role of a sponsor, coaching, grooming, and supervising their favorite, exhorting him to excellence (Figure 233). The



Figure 235. The tall Wodaabe man with the red sash was decided the winner at this Gerewol final performance. Photo by Dan Lundberg. Niger, June 1997. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

excitement of the ceremony is so extreme that small boys incorporate it in their daily play, rising on their toes and practicing the facial gestures to the encouragement of the elders.

After days of dancing for hours in the heat, some men excuse themselves from the final performance, since only one man will be acclaimed the most perfect specimen, and the potential humiliation may be too much for some to bear. Older men consider body proportions, beauty, charm, and dancing skill, their selection made somewhat easier since much of the individuality of attire is stripped away. All dancers are now bare-chested except for beads, their turbans bearing identical animal tails or feathers, their



Figure 236. A teenage Wodaabe girl walks in measured fashion to the Gerewol performers, averting her face. She designates the most perfect example of Wodaabe manhood. Niger. Single frame from David Maybury-Lewis's 1992 series *Millennium*.

lower body swathed in a woman's wrapper that restricts movement (Figure 234), each wearing an identical apron topped by beaded strands (Figure 235). When a consensus is made as to the winner, the elders send a young maiden with attendants forward to announce the winner. She walks in a stylized manner, her right arm languidly rising and falling (Figure 236), her eyes avoiding the dancers' eagerness. She approaches, gestures toward the winner, and goes on her way. The selected youth is celebrated, his reputation enhanced.



Figure 237. While this blouse and wrapper are made from Hausa cloth, they were tailored and decorated to Wodaabe taste. Blouse: Wodaabe,

Niger, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1990.11.1.2. Wrapper: Wodaabe, Niger, 20th Century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1990.11.1.1.

During the performance, many young and married women alike watch, assessing the performers and deciding if they will marry for the first time or leave their husbands. They too are dressed in their finest (Figure 237), made from cloths woven by neighboring ethnic groups or imported textiles purchased in the market.

Married women have an aesthetic competition of their own, although it does not involve personal appearance. Instead, it is a curated display of their most precious possessions, calabashes arranged atop their Tuareg-constructed beds. These are not the calabashes women regularly use to transport milk, butter, fried cottage cheese and other specialties to regional markets, nor are they the ones used domestically to store or prepare foods. They are a combination of purchased examples and heirlooms, along with symbolic wedding gifts from mother and mother-in-law.



Figure 238. From left, Nomadic Fulani calabash in the style of Bamenda or Adamawa, northwest Cameroon, before 1972, collected by René Dognin. Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2012.31.6; Nomadic Fulani calabash. Mayo-Kébbi region, Chad. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1973.45.5; Nomadic Fulani calabash in the style of Bamenda or Adamawa, northwest Cameroon, before 1972, collected by René Dognin. Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2012.31.2; Nomadic Fulani calabash. Mayo-Kébbi region, Chad. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1973.45.4.



Figure 239. Wodaabe women display their calabashes publicly at Gerewol. Foudouk, Ingalls region, Niger, 2014. Single frame from Syydehaas Basel's "Niger Foudouk Geerewol der Wodaabe Sept. 05." vimeo.com/97345287

While some Wodaabe women decorate their own calabashes–often with delicate linear patterns that resemble their facial tattoos–they also buy calabashes from the Hausa and other peoples whose markets they visit (Figure 238). These lightweight gourd containers are carefully wrapped in fiber pads to prevent damage when the women pack up their household for donkey transport to a new camp.



Figure 240. Preparations for a calabash display. Wodaabe Fulani near Zinder, Niger, 1989. Photo by Véronique Scott. Musée du Quai Branly, PF0175995.



Figure 241. *Kaakol* and other calabashes on display at Gerewol. Wodaabe Fulani at Foudouk, Ingalls region, Niger, 2014. Single frame from Syydehaas Basel's "Niger Foudouk Geerewol der Wodaabe Sept. 05."

Wodaabe women are not truly considered married until they bear a child. As soon as they are pregnant, they leave their husbands to return to their mother's house, where they deliver and remain until the child is weaned. They are not allowed to see their husband until the time of their return to set up a household, and that is when they receive a decorated calabash bundle (*elletel*) from their mothers, and an even more grandiose one (*kaakol*) from their mothers-in-law. Amulets are concealed within, and the kaakol is hung over the wife's bed; men are forbidden to touch *elletel* or *kaakol*. These calabash bundles mark a successful accession into approved adulthood, while the individual bowls speak to an individual's popularity (many were gifts) and taste.

Both bundled and gifted calabashes are displayed at Gerewol for the eyes of other women (Figs. 239, 240, 241), admiration directed not only to the number and exquisiteness of the objects themselves, but to the care in arranging them, often with cloth, dippers, spoons, and basketry covers. No winner is declared, nor does the opposite sex take an interest. They are for the eyes of their peers, a quieter statement of pride in appearance.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=307

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Baule Spirit Spouses of Côte d’Ivoire



Figure 243. This wooden figure was carved by a Baule male sculptor in Côte d’Ivoire, probably in the early 20th century. H. 16.93″. Photo by Michel Wuyts. Collectie Stad Antwerpen, MAS, AE.1994.0003.0002. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 242. This wooden male figure was carved by a Baule male artist from Côte d'Ivoire, and collected by the Brooklyn Museum's 1922 expedition. H 14 15/16. Brooklyn Museum, 22.1091. Robert B. Woodward Memorial Fund. Creative Commons-BY.

While the male-female relationship as represented in art and life usually refers to a human pairing, this is not always the case. the Baule people of Côte d'Ivoire believe that before anyone is born into this world, they experienced life in the spirit world. There they had a family–spouse and children–but, once born into the physical realm, they forget about this prior existence. Male or female, they grow up and marry. Some have contented adult lives, but others may show a tendency to have fertility problems or be otherwise troubled, often by a contentious human spouse. After a consultation, a diviner may inform the client that his or her problem is the result of their jealous, neglected spirit spouse. The usual solution is to have this spouse made manifest through a carving, keeping it privately in one's bedroom and offering sacrifices such as coins, perfume, eggs, or chalk to mollify it. Dreams–those of the human spouse, the diviner, or the carver–allow the spirit spouse to dictate his or her appearance through details of scarification, hairstyle, or stance. One night a week is dedicated to the spirit spouse, with the expectation that erotic dreams will result.

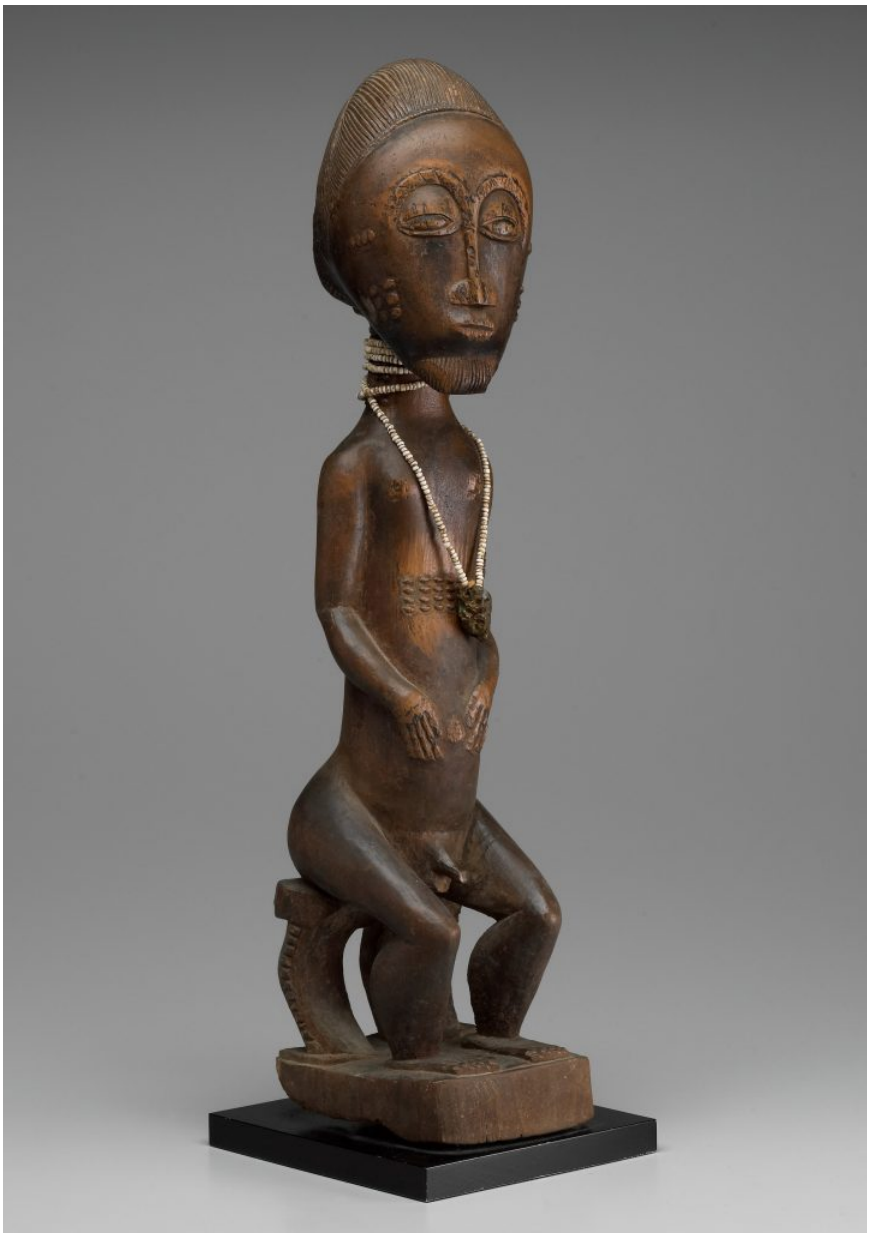


Figure 244. Wooden male figure carved by a Baule male sculptor, Côte d'Ivoire, late 19th/early 20th century. H 19.75″ Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2003.21.7. Gift of Julie and Babe Davis. Public domain.



Figure 245. This spirit husband (*blolo bian*) wears a cartridge band across his chest, and is attired in the shorts, shirt, long socks, and cap of tropical French forces. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 15″. Brooklyn Museum, 1991.229.3. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gerofsky. Creative Commons-BY.

A man's spirit spouse figure (*blolo bla*) or a woman's (*blolo bian*) can serve as a source of comfort in the setting of a problematic human marriage, and as such have tended to depict the otherworld husband or wife as an idealized spouse. Within the 20th century, Baule ideas of what constituted an ideal husband or wife changed considerably, as the impact of French colonization and post-colonial shifts in the country impacted daily life.

In the late 19th century and first decade of the 20th, the ideal husband was an older, successful farmer. He was an established provider and might be indulgent if wealthy. *Blolobian* from this period indicate age through a beard (Figure 242), here carefully plaited. This particular example has facial features that echo those of some Baule masks: large, half-closed eyes, pronounced brows that join with the narrow line of an elongated nose, and a small mouth. The lower body probably would have been partially covered by an actual loincloth. Although from approximately the same time period, a second male spirit spouse (Figure 243) is clearly by a different artist. Because of ephebism, the face remains wrinkle-free and the well-developed calf muscles indicate vigor, yet it too depicts an elder, recognizable only by his neatly tied-off beard. The hair is carefully incised and dressed, and scarifications at the

temple, neck, and torso beautify the body. A loincloth probably covered this figure as well. Head-to-body proportions are similar in both figures, as are their balance of rounded calves and buttocks.

Some other early spirit husbands showed greater status by taking a seated pose (Figure 244). Again, dignity and serenity are stressed, the powerful calves belying an incipient belly that demonstrates wealth. Like the other examples, the engraved lines that constitute the hair speak to careful grooming, and conjoined brows and nose demonstrate a tie to the art of other Akan peoples to the east.



Figure 246. Spirit spouse (or nature spirit) dressed in flip-flops, shorts, and tank top. He wears a camera or amulet around his neck, which has the ringed effect common to Akan artwork further east. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 18.9″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-427-1. Formerly in the collection of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0; photo trimmed.



Figure 247. This spirit spouse is fashionably dressed, with the creased neck of attractiveness. She has already proved her fertility twice over, with one baby on the lap, the other on her back. H 16″. Baule ,male artist, Cote d'Ivoire, 20th century. Courtesy of Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, 1990.14.118. Gift of Rod McGalliard.

After the French colonized the Baule area, many changes transpired, not least of which was a new economy. While farmers certainly remained good providers of nourishment, new desires arose as novelty goods from overseas appeared in the markets and shops. These were part of a new economy, an economy that required French currency for both acquisition of new types of imported goods and the payment of taxes. How to gain French currency? Trading with or working for the French. Interaction with these foreigners required knowledge of their language; the greatest financial opportunities came to those who could join their civil service, a profession that required education in foreign schools and subsequent literacy. One might not marry a civil servant with all of his accomplishments and benefits, but one's spirit spouse could be a man of such achievements.



Figure 248. These three views of a spirit wife (or nature spirit) emphasize her body scarifications and rounded muscles. Baule male sculptor, Côte d'Ivoire. H 14.17″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1963.0.115.



Figure 249. *Blolo bla* or *asie usu* figure, made by a Baule male artist from Côte d'Ivoire, late 19th or early 20th century. H 17″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1994.7.1. Once in the collection of Maurice Vlaminck; gift of Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller.

By the 1920s and 1930s, many male *blolobian* were representations of beardless younger men. Some wore elements of Western clothing, such as a pith helmet and suit, along with Baule facial scarifications. Forced conscription into the French military system In WWI and WWII also became a source of foreign exchange, and uniformed spirit spouses (Figure 245) continued the trend toward spirit husbands with carved clothing. This continued into the 1950s and 1960s, expanding to include depictions of sportsmen (Figure 246). Despite dramatic shifts in the ideal man, his grooming continued to be a critical factor. His earlier long hair and intricate beard might be shorn, but the sharp cut-in part and stylish pompadour reflect updated desirability in a new era.



Figure 250. This Baule spirit spouse (or nature spirit) is seated on a stool, according her additional respect. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 9.8″. Photo and source: Raccolte Extraeuropee del Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Female spirit spouses display far less variation over time. Although there are some examples from the 1960s on that show women with fashionable dresses or permed styles (Figure 247), most female representations continued to show a nude woman, sometimes pregnant or breastfeeding, or simply alluding to her fertility by placing her hands on her abdomen (Figure 248). Her hair is carefully dressed, her facial, neck, and torso scarifications precisely handled, and real beads sometimes ornament her (Figure 249). The *blolo bla*'s adherence to less-changing standards may speak to men's gender expectations from their wives, spirit or human (Figure 250). Occasionally, however, a spirit female has appeared with a typewriter, speaking to her literacy, worldliness, and earning power.

More women have recourse to a spirit spouse than men, perhaps because fertility issues are most often attributed to them, or because polygamous homes present rivalry issues that can exacerbate spousal conflicts. Figures are intimately associated with their owners; they can become unimportant if they have not aided in solving the owner's problem, or if the owner dies.

Baule sculptors also create figures that begin as virtually indistinguishable from spirit spouses, yet represent a completely different type of being from the supernatural world: nature spirits (*asieusu*). These are conceived of as extremely ugly beings from the bush, carved in an ideal form in order to flatter and placate them. These spirits dwell in the wild, but may maliciously attack those who interact (albeit unintentionally) with them–often hunters or farmers. They inflict illness or other problems and can even possess their human host. A diviner may pinpoint a client's problems to a nature spirit, and advise a "portrait" of the figure be created and honored. Analogous to spirit spouse figures, the nature spirit will communicate through dreams with artist, patron, or diviner what his or her desired appearance should be. It variously occupies its figure or its owner, who may become a diviner because of their accommodation of one another.



Figure 251. This nature spirit pair shares a Baule chair, attesting to their unity and prestige. Painted figures became popular in the mid-to-late 20th century. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. Photo by Amyas Naegele. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Spirit spouses are caressed, washed, and handled, their food offerings contained by plates or bowls. Nature spirits have sacrifices poured over them, and are rarely touched. Despite these different interactions and the resulting differences in patinas, without collection histories, it is virtually impossible to distinguish the figures of nature spirits and spirit spouses because of their treatment after collection. Early 20th-century French collectors preferred gleaming surfaces, and often removed–not just from Baule works–sacrificial patinas, polishing the cleaned items and making it difficult to reconstruct their usage. Some nature spirits are represented by couples (Figure 251), which alleviates the puzzle,

while others still have something of their original sacrificial patina. Without these clues or information about a specific object's use at the time it left Côte d'Ivoire, a Baule figure's function remains uncertain.

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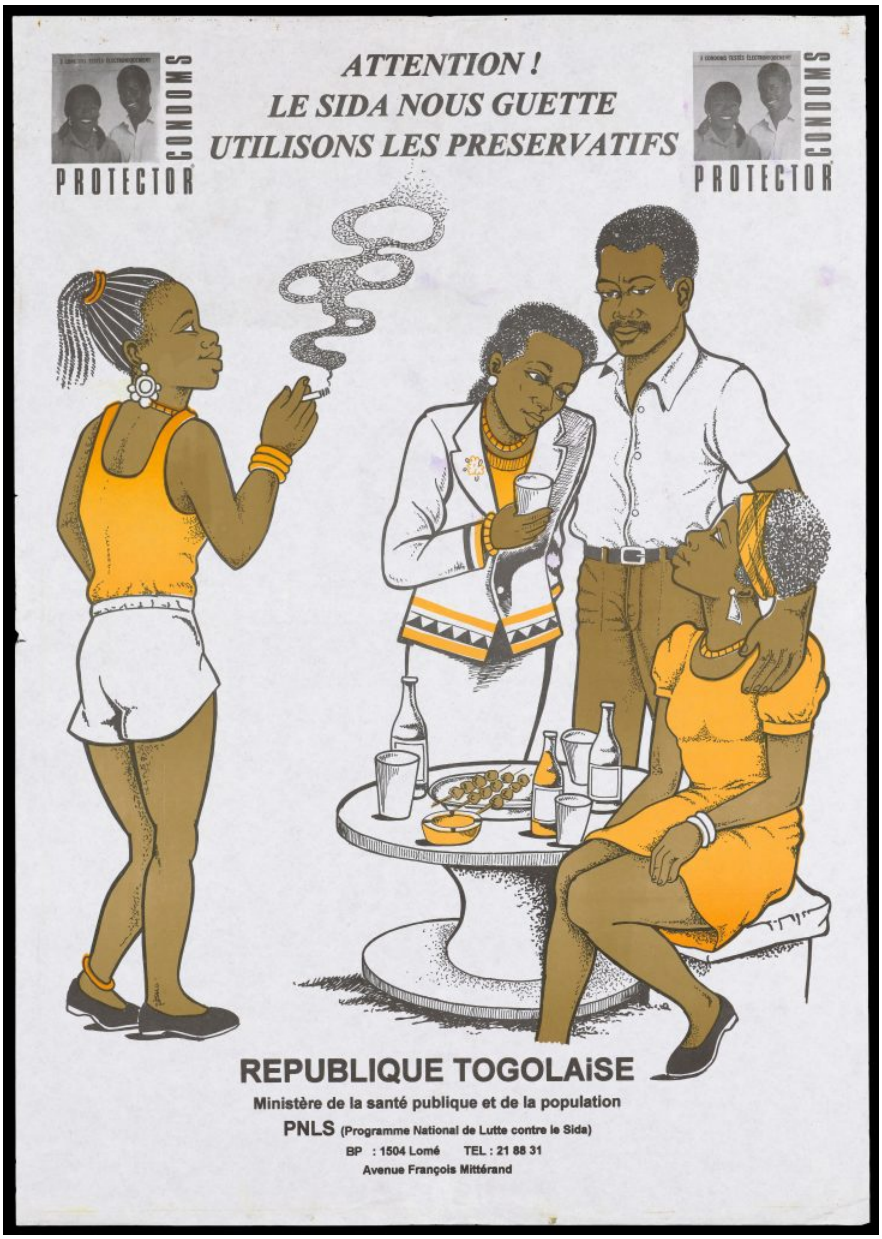


Figure 252. This poster reads “AIDS is watching us–use condoms.” Togo Ministry of Public Health and Population, color lithograph; ca. 1996. Wellcome Collection, London. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0.

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS in English; SIDA in French) and its HIV-positive predecessor were first recognized in Africa in the early 1980s, quickly becoming a pandemic that affected all parts of the continent, but became particularly prevalent in southern African nations. Public health management was a necessity in order to change behavior, prevent its spread, avert isolation of those affected, and draw attention to medication and other management procedures. Many different educational initiatives arose, from banners in Lagos’ international airport that read “Stay protected–wear a raincoat” (a euphemism for a condom) to illustrated leaflets and posters. The latter were particularly encouraged, as they attracted attention and could be “read” by non-literate individuals (Figure 252). This continuing effort has helped encourage and support African graphic designers.



Figure 253. Color lithograph by Chéri Samba,1990. Wellcome Collection, London. Creative Commons CC BY-NC.



Figure 254. Zimbabwe national colors border this AIDS-prevention graphic produced by the AIDS Counselling Trust (ACT) of Zimbabwe. Colour lithograph; ca. 1995. Wellcome Collection, London. Creative Commons CC BY-NC.

Numerous popular urban painters in the Democratic Republic of Congo have addressed both AIDS itself as well as issues of infidelity that cause its spread. Chéri Samba and his younger brother Cheik Lédy (who died of AIDS in 1997) both addressed these

issues in their paintings, amidst other themes that deplore corruption, winks at sexual matters, and salient observations about urban lives. Samba created a poster for an exhibition on AIDS-related art in 1990 (Figure 253). The inscriptions–a familiar inclusion in Samba's paintings–refer to the argument between European and Congolese officials. Where did AIDS come from? The Westerner in the print states that the disease came from Africa: "all the Western media say so." The poster's African counterargument: "Are you joking? Why is Africa always scapegoated? No, it's been proven to be from the West, an error of genetic manipulation." The painting is set up like a dartboard with two dials, one bearing condoms, the other syringes. In the board's lower half, two emaciated AIDS patients, their complexions the inverse of the men in suits, wonder: "But . . . why all the polemics? What are the researchers doing? Don't we have a right to life?" Samba's style, on the border of realism and caricature, often illuminates social issues dealing with issues of male/female behavior, or–in this case–their consequences.



Figure 255. Anti-AIDS billboard, Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, 2004. Photo by Laura. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Concerns about the effects of infidelity are reflected in both commercial and personal art forms. Numerous works stress family responsibilities or a loving relationship as a form of protection (Figure 254). A professional designer created this example, and it is meant to be eye-catching through its use of bright, saturated colors and clear message.

Urban artists create some of the public signage meant to reduce AIDS, and they often stress avoidance of prostitutes and the use of condoms. The ways in which these artists characterize males and females tend to concentrate on transactional couples (Figure 255). This billboard's fairly naturalistic imagery dwells on the woman's exposed breast, transparent skirt, and makeup, although the man remains fully dressed. Salacious imagery is meant to draw the male viewer's attention, but the cautionary message takes up most of the composition, perhaps out of concern the viewer might miss the overall import in favor of a seductive focus.



Figure 256. Nature and wildlife scenes flank this anti-HIV/AIDS message, which exhorts "Together we fight against HIV AIDS." Franceville Ndzaki-Ville, Gabon, 2013. Photo by jbdodane. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

The "original couple" of Adam and Eve may be the reference for the central motif on a wall in Gabon (Figure 256). Bucolic nature scenes with wild animal signifiers flank what appears to be a foreign couple gazing at each other longingly under a tree. They seem to be a tropical, updated (and more discreetly clothed) version of Adam and Eve, the white dove hovering over them suggesting the presence of the Christian Holy Spirit. Their presence is distinctly tied to the concept of temptation–though mangos, rather than apples, are the forbidden fruit–since the inscription above them states "Conscience controls desire."

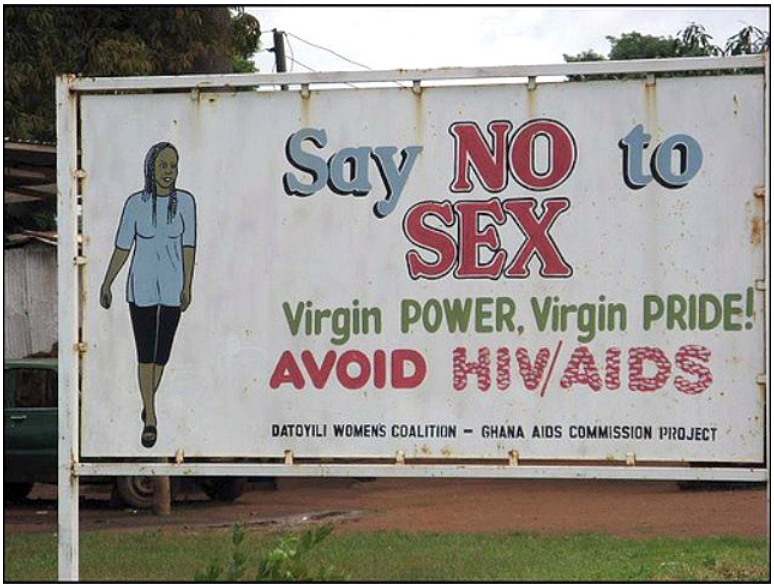


Figure 257. Billboard in Tamale, Ghana, 2008. Photo © Tim Little, with gracious permission.

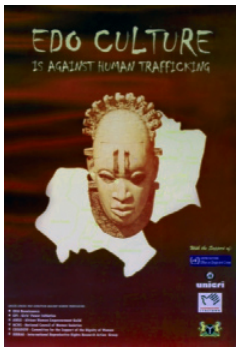


Figure 258. Poster meant to discourage Edo girls from engaging in schemes designed to lure them into prostitution in Europe. Poster used in United Nations campaign in Edo State, Nigeria, before 2008. Photo courtesy UNICRI.

Visual efforts to curb the disease often encourage girls to remain chaste (Figure 257), often harking back to regional social mores of the past, which may have since become antiquated within their respective cultures. The artist who painted this billboard has clothed his virgin in attire that would have been considered scandalous not long ago–tight bicycle shorts might prove a deterrent to access, but long or short pants were considered provocative in many regions through the 1990s. The power of past traditions is even put to use to discourage young women from being lured into the European sex trade (Figure 258), with the 16th-century face of Queen Mother Idia directing a stern look at any young women who might be contemplated departures from traditional moral codes.



Figure 259. Beaded wall hanging by Jane Makhubele in Shangaan Tsonga style. South Africa, made before 2002. Image courtesy of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.



Figure 260. Doll representing a married woman, as indicated by her dress. Zulu female artist, South Africa, before 2002. H 45.28″. Image courtesy of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University.

More personal is a beaded wall hanging by Jane Makhubele, which speaks to a chaste young woman who is protecting herself from potential disease (Figure 259). The central image is bordered not only by beaded versions of the red HIV/AIDS ribbon, but by turquoise, yellow, and white versions as well. These integrate the work's colors, although the red ribbon is the symbol meant to promote awareness of the disease and solidarity with those affected. Many South African female producers of beaded souvenirs include the red ribbon on dolls that depict married Zulu women (Figure 260). Here the ribbon appears on the doll's beadwork, a message perhaps exhorting all couples to remain faithful.

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3.3: Motherhood



Figure 261. Young Afenmai woman with a rudimentarily-carved doll. Agbede, Nigeria, early 20th century. Photo by Northcote W. Thomas. From J. A. Hammerton, ed. *Peoples of all Nations*, vol. 1 (London: Fleetway House, 1922): 163. Public domain.



Figure 262. This featureless *mwana hiti* female figure wears the split-lobed hairstyle, a style popular in the late 19th century. Zaramo male artist, Tanzania, 20th century. 6.75″. Private collection.



Figure 263. This doll has raffia hair worn in a style popular for unmarried girls at the turn of the 20th century. Zulu female artist, South Africa, late 19th/early 20th century. H 7″. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 75-9-2. Gift of Ernst Anspach.

To be a mother marks female social completion in Africa. Without it, one is not quite an adult, or certainly not an adult who receives full respect. As Chapter 3.7 indicates, without children one cannot have a traditional funeral nor become an ancestor. While these issues relate to men as well as women, infertile men can acquire children through cooperative wives who ensure they become pregnant; women do not have that option. In practical terms, women who are not mothers may be divorced or have to accept a co-wife. They have no support in their old age, for that is the duty of children, and–if their husband dies–they even may not have a place to live. Even those who are wealthy and self-sufficient suffer if childless. Even those who are unconcerned about financial support or ancestorhood have to endure the pity or mockery of family members, friends, and acquaintances. Babies born after a longed-for conception often bear names that reflect their mothers' anxiety. These Edo names from Nigeria's Benin Kingdom are among many examples that reflect joy, triumph, and satisfaction in a successful delivery after the pain of barrenness. They pointedly refer to previous distress and are meant as retorts to those who might have tried to block their pregnancy or had made fun of them: Oghiomwanghaghomwan ("When one's enemy looks at one"), Omoigiate ("Child protects one from shame"), or Aganmwonyi ("A childless person has no glory").



Figure 264. The prominent star and crescent, as well as the title “Alhaji” (one who has been a pilgrim to Mecca), and the mention of the Koran reassure clients that this specialist’s solutions (including barrenness) are in line with Islam. Abeokuta, Nigeria, 2006. Photo by Melvin “Buddy” Baker. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

In many parts of the continent, girls have received doll-like figures to care for–not as playthings when they are children, but as teenagers preparing for marriage (Figure 261). This sometimes occurs during initiation practices, when their attentiveness may be assessed. Several related matrilineal groups from Tanzania share the tradition of *mwana hiti* (Figure 262), a figure a girl receives from a female relative in her father’s family before her initiation seclusion. Alone in a small structure, it serves as her sole companion, and she “feeds” it, washes and oils it, decorates it with seed beads at neck or hips, and otherwise tends it like the infants she hopes to have. All *mwana hiti* are female, as their breasts indicate, since female children are especially desirable in order to increase the size of the matrilineage. Upon completion of initiation, she emerges



Figure 265. This chief’s stool is carved with many multiple images of frogs, symbol of fertility and growth. Bamileke male sculptor, Cameroon. H 11.02″. Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, AM-68-20. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

to dance, the figure tied around her neck. In the early 20th century, teenage Zulu girls used to carry dolls (Figure 263), often attached to a cord worn over their shoulder. They initiated romantic relationships by gifting a favored boy with the doll; when apartheid formally began in 1948 and many sweethearts were separated because of migrant labor, young women in the countryside would have studio portraits of themselves holding their dolls, which they would then send to their boyfriends in the city–an effort that created a fictive family for him to concentrate on concerning future marriage plans.

Searching for Motherhood



Figure 266. This large wooden masquerade headpiece rests on four “legs” that straddle the wearer’s shoulder. Male Baga artist, Guinea-Bissau, 20th century. H 48.82″. Purchased from Charles Ratton in 1957, © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1957,07.1.a-b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Women with conception problems frequently seek help from Western physicians, diviners, and ritual specialists (Figure 264) or through intercessions with ancestors, deities, or other entities. Sometimes general visual exhortations to fertility exist; rulers' stools in the Cameroon Grassfields region usually include animal references, and the frog–symbol of fertility and general increase–is a common motif (Figure 265), since the royal household must grow as well as those of his subjects.

This huge Baga masquerade, known as D'mba (Figure 266), depicts an older woman who has suckled many children, her breasts now fallen and flattened. Not considered a denizen of the spiritual world, she epitomizes womanhood. Although she appears at the deaths of the prominent and at important secular occasions, D'mba appears in conjunction with agricultural activities and weddings, which suggests general fertility associations. Women throw rice (the chief crop) at her, and men and women alike slap her breasts, a gesture said to enhance fruitfulness.

They might travel to shrines of great repute in order to redress the issue. A particular Kongo *nkisi* figure (Figure 267), its activating medicines (see Chapter 3.5) originally sealed off with a mirror, was probably meant to aid those seeking pregnancy. These figures, which may take male, female, or animal forms, are carved to house a spirit of the dead who will do the bidding of the living; medicines placed in a torso cavity and sealed with a mirror or a shell activate the work, and are prepared to specific recipes that match the power figure's specific intended purpose. Unless the information about function was recorded at the time of collection, we don't normally know a figure's goal. However, in this example, the mirror seems to have lost its silver backing and we can see into the cavity. The medicines within the female figure (her hairstyle indicates gender) include kaolin chalk carved into the form of a mother with a baby, among other ingredients, suggesting fulfillment through maternity.



Figure 267. This *nkisi* in female form seems to have been created to encourage conception and healthy delivery. Kongo male artist from Lower Congo River area, Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th century. H 9.84″. Collectie Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, WM-4075. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

In southern Ghana, Akan women (including the Asante and Fante) who had difficulty



Figure 268. This figure was meant to enable conception and thus increase the matrilineage. Akan male sculptor, Ghana, 1880-1930. Science Museum, London. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

conceiving went to priests who might suggest they have an



Figure 269. This *aku'aba* figure was dressed by her "mother." Akan male artist, Ghana, 1850-1920. © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum, London, A655908. Loan: Wellcome Trust. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

aku'aba figure (Figure 268) carved and blessed They then carried it tied onto their backs like a real baby. The figures were female, since Akan society is matrilineal, and the family grew and thrived with the birth of girls. They are stained dark, with heads that are usually oversized, circular, and extremely flat, dominated by a forehead that takes up at least half of the face. Most have abstract features consisting of an arching unibrow that unites with a small nose, little or no mouth being indicated. Eyes generally take a coffee-bean form. These features are similar to many of the terracottas used to represent the deceased at funerals (see Chapter 3.7). The flat, large forehead is considered a desirable physical trait, and mothers gently massage infant's skulls to achieve this. Many *aku'aba* have long necks bearing a series of parallel, raised ridges; these are the artists' interpretation of a natural phenomenon seen elsewhere in West Africa–natural creases at the front of the neck (though shown as encircling it) that are considered especially appealing. The oldest figures appear to have been heads and necks attached to a cylinder with tiny breasts. Later, stubby side-stretched arms became standard and then legs became a common feature (Figure 269).

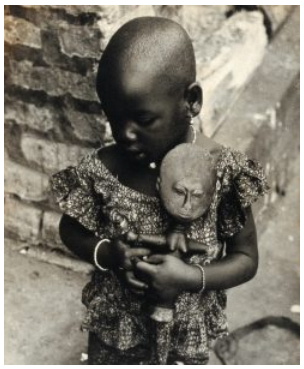


Figure 270. A child holding an *aku'aba* that may have been used to conceive her. Photo by Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz, 1936-1945. Wellcome Collection. London. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

When pregnancy occurred, the prospective mother continued to carry the *aku'aba* in order to ensure her child would be healthy and beautiful, just like the figure. After a successful delivery, the mother might take the figure to the shrine where it was dedicated. An

accumulation of such figures indicated the shrine solved infertility problems, and ensured other clients would feel reassured by its success rate. Some mothers, however, kept their figures and might give them to children as playthings. Although they did not begin their lives as dolls, that could be the end result (Figure 270).



Figure 271. St. Anthony holding Christ. This example is more naturalistic than some, both in the face and the folds of the robes. Kongo male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 18th century. H 18.5″. Wereld-Museum, Rotterdam, RV-3147-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Figurative Christian aids to conception also existed. Catholicism has had a periodic impact on the Kongo since the late 15th century (see Chapter 4.2). Associated artworks include numerous crucifixes as well as Madonna images, but depictions of saints are clearly dominated by a particular individual: St. Anthony of Padua. While St. Anthony was born in Portugal, and it was the Portuguese who first brought Catholicism to the area, this does not explain his dominance, particularly since missionaries from many other countries came to the region. Although known in the United States as the saint who is entreated to find lost objects, his associations in Europe are quite different. He is implored by maidens who seek a husband, and–probably his chief attraction for the Kongo–his intercession will bring children to the barren. A church at the Kongo capital was named for him, as was a brotherhood of laypersons, and he appeared on pendants and other art objects. Usually depicted in his Franciscan robes, holding the infant Christ and a book (for Christ would appear to him while reading), his image would have stood in Kongo churches or homes as a focal point for prayers for pregnancy. The museum that owns one example (Figure 271) recorded that it was handed down within a family and used “in fertility rituals.” St. Anthony was so venerated that a Kongo female royal, Dona Beatriz, claimed she was his reincarnation when she made a bid to reunite all the Kongo kingdoms under her leadership in the 18th century.

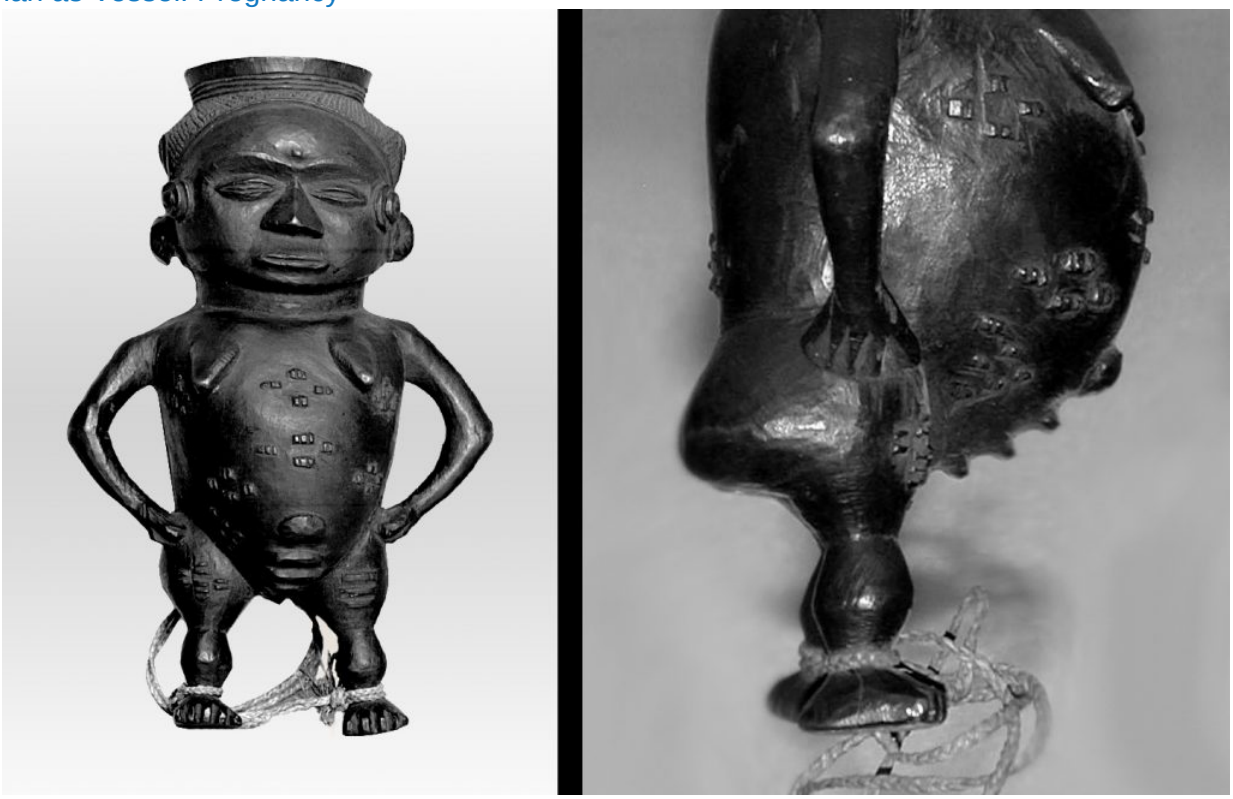


Figure 272. The capacity of this palm wine cup is increased significantly by the fullness of the belly. Wongo male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th/early 20th century. H 9.75″. Purchased from Emil Torday. Courtesy University of Pennsylvania Museum of Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, AF1943.



Figure 273. Series of carved pregnant women on a doorframe in a palace interior. Bamileke male artist, Cameroon. Photo by Pierre Harter, taken between 1956 and 1991. Musée du Quai Branly, PP0136715.



Figure 274. This wooden sculpture's shoulders are swollen, complementing its belly. Bamileke male artist, Cameroon, before 1934. Henri Labouret Mission. H 32.38″. Musée du Quai Branly, 1.1934.171.609.

If numerous art forms to encourage pregnancy exist, images of pregnancy itself are less common. Sometimes sculptures allude to gravidity by showing a woman's hands on her gently swelling stomach, but late pregnancy is occasionally depicted. This Wongo palm wine cup (Figure 272) is likely a visual pun linking the concept of woman as a container to an actual vessel.

The one area where unambiguous pregnancy is actually unexceptional is the Grassfields region of Cameroon, home to numerous related ethnic groups. Here a palace door surround's imagery might solely consist of pregnant women (Figure 273) and freestanding figures often represent the same condition (Figure 274).



Figure 275. This male performer at a Gelede masquerade performance is dressed as a pregnant woman. Her head sits on his in cap-like fashion, while cloth covers his face. The color of the wooden breast-and-belly plate matches the cloth that covers his forearms. Yoruba male artist, Togo. Single frame of "Gelede mask Togo Africa" by voodooalpaca, 2008.

Two far-flung ethnic groups, the Yoruba and the Makonde, perform masquerades by male dancers performing as pregnant women. These are not the focus of either performance, but represent one human type among many roles. The dancers from both cultures accomplish this by wearing not only a headpiece, but a body plate that includes both breasts and belly (Figure 275). Both are lifelike in proportion, offering a smooth expanse that can be enlivened by tattoos or scarification, depending on the origin (Figure 276). Makonde examples occasionally even include the *linea nigra*, or pregnancy line, for greater verisimilitude.



Figure 276. Left, Gelede masquerade “tattooed” breast-and-belly plate. H 16.34″. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-555-2. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. Right, wooden torso plate of a pregnant woman bearing scarifications or tattoos. H. 23″. Makonde male artist, Tanzania, 20th century. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2001.413. Gift of Thomas D. Slater in memory of Professor Roy Sieber. Public domain.



Figure 277. This figure may have been used protectively to ensure a safe delivery. Zombo, Angola, 19th century. © The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum, A642971. Loan from Wellcome Trust. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

Parturition

Depictions of imminent or actual childbirth are fairly rare throughout the world, and have been so throughout history, although exceptions certainly occur. In Africa, these can show the partial emergence of the child, whether in the

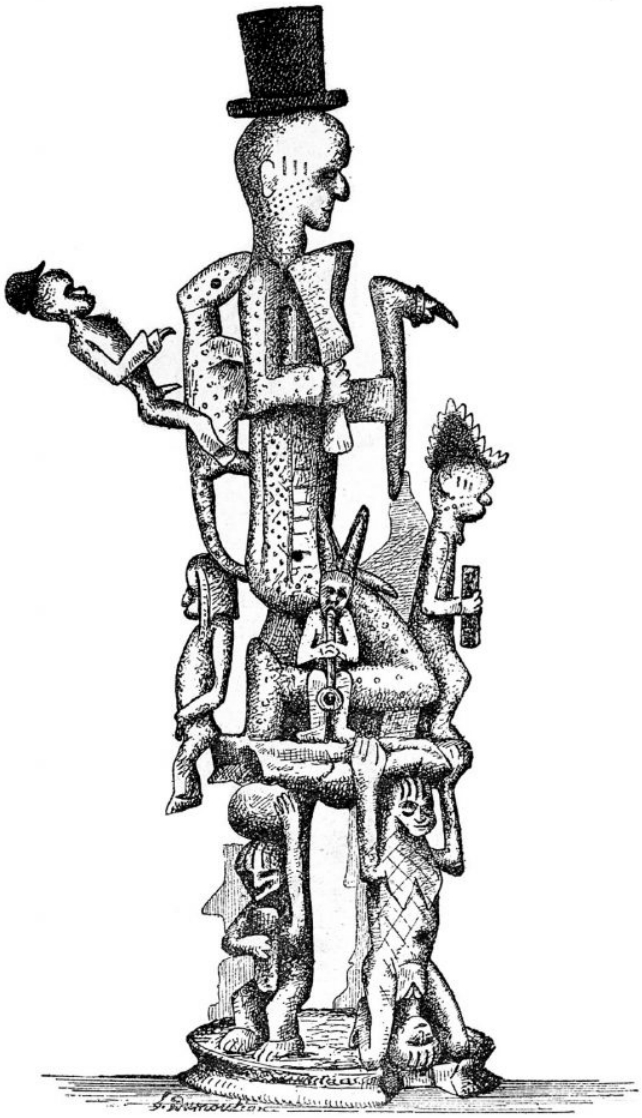


Figure 278. At the lower right, a woman in the act of delivering serves as one of this carving's caryatid figures. The vertical scarifications on her forehead and that of some other figures, as well as the top hat, suggest a Urhobo male artist made this in 19th-century Nigeria, though other aspects link the work to peoples living further north along the Niger River. From G.-J. Witkowski's *Histoire des accouchements chez touslespeuples* (Paris: G. Steinheil,1887). Wellcome Collection, London. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

constructed setting of a maternity clinic, as in some Igbo *mbari* houses, or as stand-alone figures such as this Zombo sculpture (Figure 277). The latter realistically shows the remaining swollen belly, the facial expression stylizing the pain of the moment in a gesture the neighboring Chokwe use to indicate surprise. Sometimes delivery is merely part of the panoply of life a multi-figure work includes (Figure 278).



Figure 279. Two views of a terracotta made by an artist whose gender and ethnicity are unknown, examined through medical imaging. Jenne-Jeno, Mali, 13th-14th century. H 14.17″; L 12.6″. The original is in the Barbier-Mueller Museum, INV 1004-95. This image is a single frame of "Scrofulous Sogolon; Scanning the Sunjata Epic," a video by Anne-Marie Bouttiaux and Marc Ghysels, 2015. The figure can be virtually rotated here.

Some of the most unusual childbirth scenes have been found at the deserted city of Jenne-Jeno in Mali, unfortunately without context since they were excavated illegally. One shows a woman delivering a snake (Figure 279), her mouth in an atypically stretched rictus of pain. Another snake emerges from one ear, and breakage suggests an additional serpent exited the other ear as well.

Snakes appear with great frequency in the terracotta sculpture of Jenne-Jeno. Sometimes they appear to attack individuals, squiggling aggressively over their bodies and heads. At other times, an individual has a snake or snakes resting on them, yet their posture shows only co-existence and indifference. The snakes suggest the powers of a ritual specialist that may be sent out after a victim or stay at hand, waiting for a task. That a woman is giving birth to a snake, however, seems outside this interpretation unless we are witnessing a mythological occurrence or a snake as the representation of a person of power. There has been a suggestion that certain Jenne-Jeno images, this included, relate to the Sunjata epic and the founding of the Mali Empire. If so, the snake may represent Sunjata's birth.

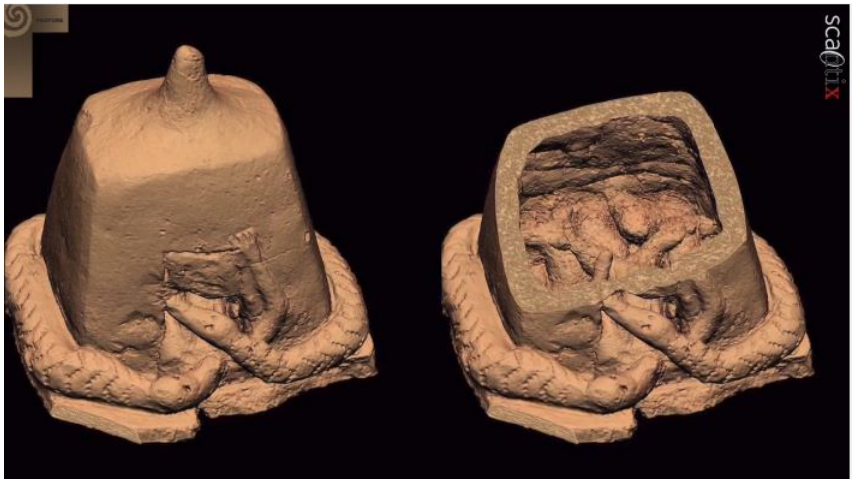


Figure 280. Two views of a terracotta sculpture examined through medical imaging; the view at right reveals the figures inside.Artist's gender and ethnicity unknown, Jenne-Jeno, Mali, 13th-14th century. H 9″. The original is in the New Orleans Museum of Art, 90.196. Museum purchase, Robert P. Gordy Fund. This image is a single frame from "Scrofulous Sogolon; Scanning the Sunjata Epic," a video by Anne-Marie Bouttiaux and Marc Ghysels, 2015. The object can be virtually rotated here.

Certainly mystical snakes appear in other Jenne-Jeno terracottas in connection with human sacrifice. One snake is shown with human feet sticking out of its mouth before a final swallow–the size ratio indicating an unnatural occurrence. Another depicts a shrine or other structure encircled by giant serpents who are about to enter; a human arm reaches out from the sealed door (Figure

280). Medical imaging revealed that the interior of the building is neither solid nor hollow. Instead, it is filled with seven small decapitated clay female figures, several of whom are pregnant.



Figure 281. Terracotta figure pair. Artist's gender and ethnicity unknown, Jenne-Jeno, Mali, 13th-14th century. H 8.25″ x W 9 5/8″ x D 6 3/8″. With the gracious permission of the Saint Louis Art Museum, 1668:1983. Funds given in memory of Morton D. May and Friends Fund.

Yet another Djenne sculpture depicts one of the most unusual subjects in African art (Figure 281). Not only do we see a woman about to give birth, stretched out horizontally, we see her in the company of her husband, who supports her shoulder and bends solicitously over her; he is non-frontal. In most African cultures before the advent of Western doctors, it has been traditional to exclude men from the birth process. Either a midwife or experienced woman assists in birth; some women have given birth on their own, particularly if away from others at a farm. If these features were not enough to make the work distinctive, when at a New York auction house to be put up for sale it was discovered that the tiny figure of a baby was placed inside the "womb," suggesting the work may have had a mystical purpose related to childbirth–invisible aspects of African artwork are often related to ritual practices.



Figure 282. This reddened wooden figure holds a baby whose drawn-up limbs emphasize action. Eastern Pende male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, early 20th century. H: 35.5″. Detroit Institute of Art, 2011.130. Gift of Margaret H. Demant. Public domain.



Figure 283. This figure is used in rituals relating to newborn twins. Bamileke male artist, Cameroon, 19th century. H 30.7″. Formerly in the collection of Pierre Harter. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1994.11.1.

Maternity figures are among the most common sculptural types found in Africa, attesting to the critical importance of motherhood. Their various functions may differ, but there are relatively few variations in pose and activity.

Many depictions show breastfeeding, the child held in the arms (Figure 282) or on the lap (Figure 283). These two figures have distinct uses: the Eastern Pende example was probably flanked one of the doors of a high chief's *kibulu* ritual structure, a place of great secrecy that was inaccessible to most. She (along with a second figure, probably male) was attached to a panel and served as a spirit sentry to protect the ruler from malevolent rivals. The presence of the child shows she is a complete, mature woman. Slightly larger sculptures can decorate the *kibulu* roof peak; these can take many forms, but since the mid-20th century the maternity figure has been the most popular. The Bamileke figure served a different purpose. Although some similar figures commemorate important individual women in the royal family, those works normally include more jewelry to emphasize their status. This figure appears to have been brought out at court whenever twins were born. Their presentation before the sculpture was accompanied by a sacrifice. Twins are viewed as having special powers of good fortune and healing, and, after infancy, one was sent to the palace to serve the ruler (among the neighboring Bamum, both were sent). There twins had multiple roles, including special participation in a ruler's installation of a ruler and as guardians of the royal burial sites. Their parents took on a special title, operating as priests or diviners.

Despite the physical bond of breastfeeding, most sculptures that depict it show figures who are not looking at one another, a feature shared with most other maternity images. This does not imply any actual lack of interaction or affection, but is merely a convention to convey dignity and self-control. The rarity of mother and child eye-contact makes its occasional appearance startling (Figure 284). This dynamic sculpture does portray a seated royal



Figure 284. This sculpture shows Fon N'Jiké's wife with his first child. Kwayep of Bamane was the Bamileke sculptor who created it in Cameroon at some point between the late 19th century and 1912. H 24″. Henri Labouret Mission. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1934.171.607.

woman nursing, yet she turns her body towards the baby and looks directly at him, creating a sight line that unites them even more than her encircling arm and breast milk. Like many Bamileke works, it is infused with vigor, here created by the non-frontal posture, asymmetry, and the series of



Figure 285. This dynamic figure, its emphasis on repeating diagonal thrusts, probably represents the Great Mother, a spiritual entity, suckling an initiate with the milk of knowledge. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, late 19th/early 20th century. H 25 1/16″.Cleveland Museum of Art 1961.198. James Albert and Mary Gardiner Ford Memorial Fund. Public domain; Creative Commons 0.

diagonals created by the thighs and lower legs, the lifted foot, and the bent arms. The energy created by the lines can be seen from every angle, and the not fully smoothed surface adds to the work's vitality. This sculpture was created by a known artist–Kwayep–on the ruler's commission. It depicts one



Figure 286. This figure was probably carried by members of the female Tyekpa society during their funerary celebrations. The child's head is featureless, his body rigid. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 19th or 20th century. H. 29.92″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-43-9. Formerly Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0..

of the royal wives first child for the monarch, and would have been commissioned not just because of any affection he may have felt, but because Bamileke rulers were not fully recognized and allowed to use their title of "Fon" until they had had a son and a daughter while in office. Statues of royal wives and mothers were exhibited outside the palace during major court ceremonies, and possession of sculptures and other art objects added to the status of the Fon.

Sometimes the identities of mothers are ambiguous. While the nursing mother in a Senufo sculpture may appear to represent a human mother, some Central Senufo maternity figures represent Katyeleeo or Maleeo (Figure 285). This Great Mother/Ancient Woman is the female aspect of deity whom the Poro men's society honors during initiation (including a passage through a tunnel likened to her birth canal). As members of the Poro, they may state that they are "about their Mother's business." In works from this tradition, the "child" is the initiate, drinking in the Great Mother's wisdom.

That is not, however, the meaning of all Senufo maternity images. The Fodonon Senufo (for the Senufo, spread out over three countries, incorporate many distinct populations such as the Fodonon) have a female secret society known as Tyekpa that acts as a counterpart to Poro. Like Poro, Tyekpa plays a significant role in its members' funerals, a time when sculpture enhances the prestige of the deceased and the women's society to which she belonged, just as it does for male funerals where Poro officiates. Tyekpa figures, which are comparable in size to Poro sculptures, are carried aloft by members and displayed; multiple figure types

are not restricted to a nursing mother, but these are a common category. It is unclear whether the Tyekpa nursing figure (Figure 286) represents the Great Mother or not; some other Tyekpa figures represent champion farmers, young women, and other members of the citizenry, and she may be a human mother.

Incomplete information hinders understanding of some maternity figures. Although many may be indications of the value placed on fertility, others, such as Senufo Poro figures, do not refer to human mothers at all. While the Jenne-Jeno terracotta figure of a woman bearing a snake may be human–albeit with a supernaturally-charged "child"–another Jenne-Jeno figure seems likely to be an otherworld being (Figure 287). Initially, this sculpture may appear to be an ordinary kneeling mother with two slightly older children scrambling over her, but one of the children has a beard and wears trousers–they are clearly adults, despite their juvenile behavior. The mother remains impassive, despite the snake crawling over her shoulder–her nonchalance seems to speak to her familiarity with spiritual forces. Her hold on dignity is challenged by the fact that she is not frontal; her head inclines slightly to one side, for each son grabs the handle of a forked implement that grasps her ear. The instrument is a blacksmith's pincers, the tool he uses to grip and draw red-hot metal.



Figure 287. Two views of an illicitly-excavated terracotta depicting a woman with two miniature male adults on her lap. The artist's gender and ethnicity are unknown. Jenne-Jeno, Mali, 13th-14th century. H 15 1/8″. Formerly in the collection of Count Baudouin de Grunne.



Figure 288. This child is decorously sitting on its mother's knee, its long body and small head belying the proportions of infancy. Dogon male artist, Bandiagara Circle, Mali, 17th-20th century (likely 19th c.). H; 21 7/8″. Photo by Paul Hester. Courtesy The Menil Collection, Houston, X873.



Figure 289. This serene mother is perfectly groomed, with torso scarifications, knee bands that draw the eye to her calves, a loincloth , and neatly dressed hair. Her child was not the sculptor's focus. Anyi male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, late 19th/early 20th century. H 19″. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2000.3. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC..

The identity of this huge woman who towers over men, enfolds them in her protective embrace, and suffers their antics is uncertain. Because of its location along the Niger River, Jenne-Jeno was an important walled trade city that drew multiple ethnic groups and was part of both the Ghana and Mali Empires. Occupied by at least 200 BCE, it was deserted ca. 1400 for reasons that remain unclear, and a new town of Jenne arose less than two miles away. We don't know the ethnicity or gender of the terracotta artists, nor if they departed from the immediate area or converted to Islam and stopped making figures as a result.

Some scholars see stylistic links between the terracottas of Jenne Jenne and works by Dogon artists (Figure 288), who live about 128 miles away. Although oral history states the Dogon migrated to their present home centuries ago, their linguistic relationship is with the Senufo and other Gur language group members to their south. Jenne today is home to Songhai, Bozo, Bamana, Fulani and other peoples; the Bozo and Bamana are Mande peoples, and blacksmithing has special associations to them, as well as to their Gur and Senufo neighbors. All these regional ethnicities are casted societies. Smithing is a hereditary, casted profession with associated social roles involving spiritual powers and supernatural manipulation, and seems to have been in place by the 13th century, perhaps

coalescing at the beginning of the Mali Empire. Mande blacksmiths state they have an origin that differs from that of other Mande, and, although they speak Mande, they retain their own vocabulary in a distinctly different tongue.

Could this Jenne-Jeno sculpture refer to mythical beginnings for blacksmiths? Bamana and other belief systems about foundational myths vary from region to region, and deepen as one advances within men's societies, but some of the many stories about primordial beings refer to Muso Kuroni, the original woman, a creator who also embodies chaos, and who is identified with sorcery. Ndomajiri, the first blacksmith, is also the stuff of myths, the stable counterpart of chaos and master of ritual medicine. While we cannot be certain that this female figure is somehow the "Mother of the Blacksmiths", that she is a spiritual entity with some kind of blacksmith connection is supported by evidence within the piece itself. Knowledge of its original placement–a shrine? a blacksmith's forge?–would have provided further context, but unfortunately is unretrievable.



Figure 290. This maternity figure, with its asymmetrical mouth, supports her child with an elongated but loving arm. It would have belonged to the ruler. Mbala male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th–early 20th century. H 10 1/8″. Dallas Museum of Art, 1969.S.149. The Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture; gift of Eugene and Margaret McDermott. Public domain.



Figure 291. This woman and her backed child probably represent a spirit spouse, the baby–unintentionally or not–taunting the human wife; it could also represent a nature spirit. The otherworld woman has beautifully arranged hair, careful facial and torso scarifications, and a rounded body with glowing "skin." Baule male artist, Cote d'Ivoire, last quarter 19th century. H 17.52″. Courtesy University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 29-12-68.

Most maternity images, even when they represent otherworld entities such as Baule spirit spouses, are more generic in appearance. Women are shown with children as evidence of their completion of adult responsibilities and their assured place in the world.



Figure 292. While his mother–her breasts flattened by the carrying cloth–pounds food in a mortar, this baby looks curiously around him. This Epa helmet mask would have been one of a series used in an annual festival to honor town founders, both male and female. Yoruba male artist, Ekiti region, Nigeria, 1870-1920. Exhibited at the British Empire Exhibition 1924. Science Museum, London, A37289. Loan from Wellcome Collection. Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0.

The appearance of their children is an accessory that proves their worth and reinforces their status; the child is a necessary but minor player in the visual world. Children may be held laterally (Figure 289), sit on the lap, be on a hip (Figure 290), or be carried on the back (Figure 291). Most children find backing soothing, as they can hear their mother's heartbeat clearly. While many babies are silent accessories, artists assign others greater prominence. Carved Yoruba babies seem interested in the world around them, frequently straining against their carrying cloth in order to obtain a better view (Figure 292).



Figure 293. Four adults relax while four children of varying ages run, play or interact with their mothers. Children are rendered here as miniature adults, without the large heads that mark actual toddlers. Drawing of a rock painting by an unknown artist of unknown ethnicity and gender in the Ozaneare area of the Tassili n'Ajjer region, Algeria, Pastoralist Period, ca. 5500-2000 BCE.

Most images of mothers with their children show them either as infants or toddlers, and are formal in their poses. Some of the earliest depictions of mothers, however, depict a range of children's ages, as well as clearly playful behavior and interaction. A Sahara rock painting, for example, shows a crawling child as well as his older companions. Despite the silhouette approach, their body language conveys actions and interactions still visible in every family (Figure 293). Other Sahara images from the same era show a mother laying on her back, raising her child up in an exuberant gesture, or two juveniles standing next to an adult and holding hands.

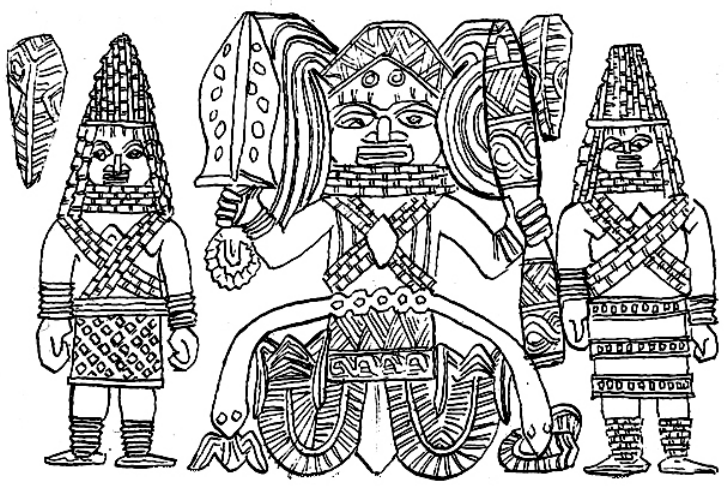


Figure 294. Section of a drawing of an ivory tusk from a Benin royal altar, depicting two images of a Queen Mother protectively flanking Oba Ewuakpe in divine fish-legged form. Tusk created by an Edo male artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 19th century. Courtesy University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, AF5067.



Figure 295. This mother and child figure are modeled in clay as part of a large tableau of figures centered around Olokun, god of the sea and wealth. They represent one of his queens and her child. Edo female artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1994.

Another notable exception to maternity imagery is found in Nigeria's Benin Kingdom. While its Edo royal court artists did represent the Iyoba, or Queen Mother, in ivory and brass, she was usually sculpted either alone or with her girl pages. She appears with her son only on the ivory tusks that decorated royal ancestral altars (see Chapter 3.7), but he is depicted as a reigning adult, not as a baby or child. She flanks her son, her image duplicated to preserve symmetry (Figure 294). Her presence is protective; on some other tusks, she holds mystical mirrors that deflect harm directed at her son. Other kinds of maternity images did not occur in Benin court art, although the large unfired clay images that form altars to Olokun, the deity of the sea and riches, often represent one or more of his wives holding a baby (Figure 295), a more conventional way of showing the maternal bond and continuity of the lineage, whether human or supernatural.

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3.4: Art and Youth Initiation

Youth Initiation and Associated Practices

Many parts of Africa have no youth initiation. Zones that include it are concentrated in Central Africa, South Africa, parts of Africa, and far more limited sections of West Africa. Some areas that do include youth initiation involve associated art forms that are limited to body decoration and special dress. Others, however, involve masquerades, initiation objects, or decorated lodges.

Youth initiation marks a transition from childhood to adulthood, and typically began by removing children from familiar surroundings where they slept with their mothers, their close playmates limited mostly to relatives. They are frequently plucked from this environment abruptly, often under circumstances they find mysterious and frightening, and swept away to an initiation camp situated in the wilderness or "bush", a place they have always been warned to avoid due to wild animals and frightening spirit inhabitants. Although each gender encounters initiation in its own camp, usually during a different time period, they share an abrupt, painful beginning to the experience: circumcision for boys and excision (sometimes referred to as female circumcision) for girls. These operations signalled a symbolic death of participants' childhood.



Figure 296. Initiates' mask, Yaka male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, before 1954. 17 11/16″ x 22 13/16″. Tropenmuseum, 2364-9. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Though performed by experts, these operations are completed without anesthesia or painkillers, a traumatic event that serves to bond those who undergo it. Many members of the cohort may have been virtual strangers before initiation, but this first exposure to the wider world of community introduces the participants to the citizenship that will be part of adulthood.

Some areas where female initiation was once common have abandoned it due to international pressure regarding excision, often called female genital mutilation (FGM), a procedure involving the removal of some (part of the clitoris), most (clitoris and labia minora and/or majora), or all of the external genitalia. By 2016, the United Nations reported that excision was illegal in twenty-eight of Africa's 54 countries. Illegality is not always been enforced, however, and social and marital pressures in favor of excision are particularly strong in some parts of the continent, and immaterial or never applicable to others. Circumcision is legal everywhere, and practiced nearly universally, whether in infancy or during initiation.

Male initiation does not necessarily occur annually, so the ages involved vary. Generally, initiation takes place between the ages of 8 and 18, though circumstances may extend these bracketing ages. Time spent in the camp now takes several weeks; in former times, it extended over a period of months or years of isolation from the larger community. After healing, boys' education began. Training incorporated oratorical prowess in the use of proverbs, vocational education in carving, farming, weaving, fishing, or boys' education began. Training incorporated oratorical prowess in the use of proverbs, vocational education in carving, farming, weaving, fishing, or other skills, sex education, the creation and use of supernatural and practical medicines, local history, psychological management of the opposite sex, and instruction in esoteric matters. Upon completion of their education, the initiates were reintroduced to society, their orientation now directed toward the world of men and fellow initiates.

One of the major male initiation zones cuts across a large swath of Central Africa, sweeping across many ethnicities in the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola and Zambia. Masquerades are a major feature of initiation in this area, and performers were involved



Figure 297. This panel was created as part of a boys' initiation display structure. Nkanu male artist, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the first half of the 20th century. 29 1/8″ x 39″. Tropenmuseum, 3118-2. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

in snatching the boys from their homes to the camps, training them, fetching food from the initiates' mothers, and reintroduction of the boys to the community. Among some groups, such as the DRC's Yaka (Figure 296), the initiates themselves wear masks upon their graduation. They, too, often include references to sexuality or to proverbs.

At this stage, some ethnic groups such as the Nkanu (Figure 297) created stall-like display elements near the camps; these are no longer made. Their elaborate background graphics have symbolic meanings, acting as a mnemonic device for initiates that include references to virility and fertility. Other motifs are leadership symbols or refer to daily life.

Chokwe Male Initiation in Angola, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo



Figure 298. *Chikunza* masquerader. Chokwe male artist, Angola, 20th century. Photo Dr. Rocha Afonso, DIAMANG. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 PT.

The Chokwe are one of a number of peoples that once formed part of the Lunda Empire, and, like many of their neighbors, they practice male youth initiation that incorporates masquerade performances. Male initiation requires that boys, whose orientation has been strictly towards their mothers and family members, be snatched from their familiar environs and taken to the bush, a fearful place they have always been warned against. This is not usually an annual event; the initiation process (*mukanda*) depends on the local demographics, economic circumstances, and the decisions of elders. When the catchment of boys of the appropriate age (about 8-15 years old) from neighboring villages is deemed adequate, male society members will prepare the initiation camp. The removal of the initiates is not immediate; their families will recognize the advance signals, although the children will not. Masquerades enter the villages and perform, then leave. Some time later, certain masqueraders will return and carry the boys away to their symbolic "death".



Figure 299. Two *chihongo* masks stand in front of a Western-style house. Chokwe male artists, Angola, 20th century. Photo Dr. Rocha Afonso, DIAMANG. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 PT.

These initiation masquerades (*mukishi*) (see video below) include numerous stock characters that are described as ancestors. Some have human traits (the chief, the beautiful maiden), while others represent protective and sometimes aggressive spirits whose human qualities are less evident. For example, Figure 298 (known as *chikuza*) bears a tall, phallic-shaped projection and is compared to a particular kind of grasshopper of the same name with a similarly extended head. It functions as the camp leader, protecting the camp and the boys, and it has further associations with successful hunting and fertility. Miniatures of this mask often appear in divination baskets.

Before boys are initiated, they believe these figures are spirits; one of the secrets their initiation makes them privy to is the fact that men make and perform the masquerades, and they too will learn how to do so. Before this and other layers of knowledge are revealed, however, the newly-arrived boys go through a painful introduction to manhood: circumcision. Their first few weeks at the *mukanda* camp are quiet, for the boys are believed to be vulnerable to malevolent forces, as well as health risks. They sleep in pens bound tightly by upright sticks so they cannot turn in their sleep and injure their healing penises. Their ordeal bonds them to fellow initiates, some of whom had been complete strangers. As the weeks go on, older men begin to train them in occupational tasks, as well as verbal abilities, sex education, psychological management techniques, and other skills they will need to be adult males and useful citizens. In addition, they learn complex dances, a secret pictograph system, and other esoteric knowledge. They are subject to absolute discipline. They do not leave the camp, which is regarded as a living being whose



Figure 300. *Chihongo* initiation mask made from barkcloth and resin. Chokwe male artist, Angola, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1971.6.1.

body is its wooden retaining wall, with “eyes” made of shaped vegetation that project upwards, and “ribs” made from additional projections. The circular enclosure’s one entrance is closed off at night, and the boys are circumscribed by multiple rules, including a single place for urination. The masqueraders go back and forth to the village to collect food for the boys from their mothers, an act that not only provides sustenance but reassures the women that their sons are alive and well.



Figure 301. Wooden *chihongo* mask. Male Chokwe artist, late 19th/early 20th century. 15″ x 18″ x 9″. Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, African Collection Fund, 2008.38.1. Public domain.

A designated circle within the camp is the area where the masquerades are made and kept. The netted costumes are crocheted from bush fibers, and the masks themselves are made by stretching barkcloth (felted by beating the bark of a particular tree) over a reed framework, sealing it with resin, then painting it, typically in black, red, and white. Some of the masks are extremely large, but the materials keep them lightweight. Because these masks are not carved, however, their facial features are not crisp, nor can they always attain complete symmetry.

The *chihongo* mask (Figure 299) represents a Chokwe chief. Although the performer's arms and chest are encased in a tight crocheted shirt,



Figure 302. High-ranking Chokwe chief N'Dumba Tembo from Angola, 1881. Engraving from Capello and Ivens, *From Benguella to the Territory of Yacca* (London: 1882), p. 176. Public domain.

a cloth wrapper (a sign of towns and civilization) covers their lower limbs. In contrast, many non-humanoid *mukishi* wear full raffia skirts at the waist. Two prominent features of the *chihongo* mask are the large semi-circular projection from the jaw and the large curving headdress (Figure 300). These can also be seen in wooden masks that depict the chief (Figure 301). In wooden versions, the semi-circular section is cantilevered from the chin, jutting out horizontally. Despite its rigidity, this form indicates the beard of an elder in both wooden and bark/resin examples. The curving headpiece, here made from feathers, imitates the curving form of the crowns Chokwe chiefs once wore (Figure 302). The masks's eyes typically are conceived of as coffee bean forms set into deep eye sockets that connote age. Wooden masks were once worn by the chief himself or a designated male family member; along with a "female" masquerader (performed by a male), it went from village to village collecting taxes. After the respective colonial governments banned the practice, since they wanted the taxes themselves, wooden masks switched functions and were used for entertainment dances. Some *mukanda*



Figure 303. A group of Chokwe initiates preparing to leave their camp and be welcomed back into society. Photo courtesy DIAMANG, Angola. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 PT.

camps employ a few wooden examples now, but resin/barkcloth versions are still more typical.

When training is complete, the initiates are reintroduced to their communities. They enter in initial silence, escorted by the masqueraders, dressed in uniform style with hats and decorative patterns on their faces, arms, and torsos (Figure 303). They sit in state, bowls in front of them to collect appreciation money from well-wishers. They later dance and interact with the townspeople, accepted as those who have put childhood behind and are now oriented to adulthood and the world of men. They will no longer sleep in their mothers' houses.

After the initiation season has concluded, senior men set the camp alight, burning it and the barkcloth masks; wooden examples, if in use, are taken away and stored until the next initiation.



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Female Initiation among Cross River Peoples, Nigeria

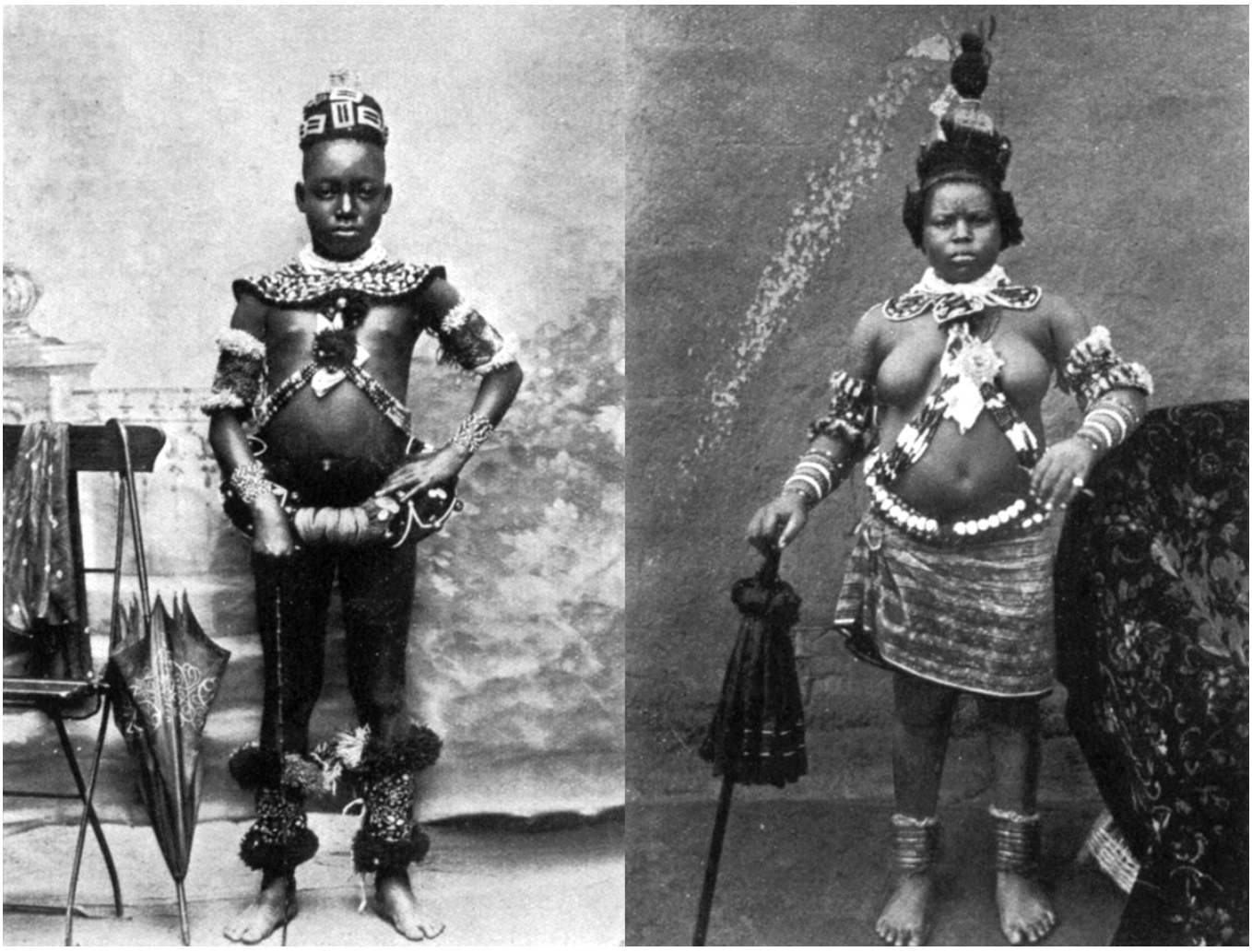


Figure 304. Efik girls from Calabar, Nigeria, the first decade of the 20th century. At left, a girl entering the fattening house; several years later, she graduates, as seen at right. Public domain.In southeastern Nigeria and neighboring border areas of southwestern Cameroon, girls underwent initiation, albeit in their own homes, rather than a bush camp. The main peoples who held this tradition were the Ejagham, Efik, Efut, Boki, and Ibibio, although some of the easternmost Ijo and southeastern Igbo who bordered the Ibibio practiced it as well. Although this initiation practice has not entirely disappeared, its occurrence has been severely impacted

by both the impact of Christianity and state laws in Cross Rivers State (though not in Akwa Ibom state, home of the Ibibio, nor the Igbo states) and a 2015 federal law that have banned excision. Virginity tests at the outset of seclusion are an affront to some participants, and initiation's coming-out ceremony requires bared breasts. Christians frown on body exposure; girls have also been convinced this is a backwards practice. Excision marked the beginning of initiation, and enforcement of the laws is somewhat spotty–nearly half the Ejagham aged 15-49 are said to have undergone the procedure. Because it is illegal, however, and initiation is so closely identified with it, the public face of initiation has been sharply diminished or even vanished in some areas. In others, however, it continues without including the now-controversial operation.



Figure 305. Studio portrait of an Efik girl, her attendants holding cloth and a fan. The banner over her chest bears English letters, and she wears brass ornaments in her hair and multiple bells on each leg that would have accompanied her movements and drawn further attention. Nigeria, early 20th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,A51.88. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

In the early 20th century through the 1970s, however, Cross River female initiation was common (Figs. 304, 305). A special room in the initiate's household was prepared for her seclusion; if she had a sister or cousin also being initiated, they might share a room to alleviate boredom. This room was referred to in English as the fattening house. Although girls in the same area might begin the process simultaneously, they did so in their own compounds, usually acting as a group only at the outset and conclusion. Initiation usually began when a girl was about 12 or 13 years old (although it could take place later), and might continue from for several weeks or several years–even up to seven–depending on the family or fiancé's wealth. Among some groups, fiancés were permitted to visit initiates, who might give birth while in seclusion, but other ethnicities insisted on virginity until seclusion ended. Sometimes a particularly well-loved bride might be returned to the fattening house after the birth of her first child, to return her to robust health. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, it was usually abbreviated to a period of about five weeks.



Figure 306. The *nsibidi* sign for love/marriage is inscribed on the left cheek, while that meaning congress is on the right cheek of this drawing of an Ejagham girl, Nigeria. From Percy Amaury Talbot, *In the Shadow of the Bush*, 1912, after p. 318. Public domain.

During the fattening house period, girls' lives changed abruptly. From a very active life that required them to perform multiple chores–including fetching water for the household repeatedly on a daily basis–they were encouraged to sleep and rest, their only exercise the dances they were taught to perform. Meals that had been reasonable but light on meat became rich feasts that were served throughout the day, with herbal medicines administered to aid digestion. If a girl had not yet reached menarche, this lifestyle shift often prompted it. Daily life became a combination of instruction from elderly women who went from house to house to visit the initiates, feeding, sleeping, practicing dancing, and being pampered through massage, the application of white cosmetic kaolin clay or black vegetable dye in patterns, red camwood powder, hairdressing, and other traditional cosmetics. Instruction focused on

child care, nutrition, and how to manage a husband, but also included some esoteric knowledge, folklore, and medicines. The regional practice of *nsibidi*, a pictographic system of communication, was sometimes inscribed on their skin–particularly the symbol for love and marriage (Figure 306).

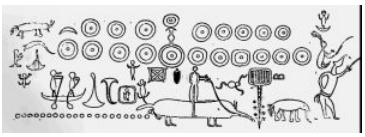


Figure 307. Sometimes Ejagham girls would pass the time in seclusion by decorating their walls. This series of images includes masqueraders, canoemen, animals, and circles representing months of confinement (nearly two years when the drawing was copied by Percy Amaury Talbot [*In the Shadow of the Bush*, 1912, p. 107]). Public domain.

The vanished maidens not only grew physically and educationally, they underwent a period of rest and pampering unknown to small children and married women. Their skin grew pale from the absence of the sun, and they became mysterious objects of speculation. Dory Amaury Talbot wrote that Ibibio villages at the turn of the 20th century erected “bundles of frames” at the entrance to the marketplace, each one marking an initiate, so that strangers would know how many marriageable girls would be emerging. When the girls finally ended seclusion, they walked through the market, coiffed, made-up, and wearing jewelry and other adornments. Younger female relatives accompanied them as maids, fanning them and running errands. They held a new parasol to guard them from the now-unfamiliar sun’s glare, and received admiration and suitors. Many Efik women–even in the first decades of the 20th century–had studio photographs taken, since Calabar was a cosmopolitan enough city to support this trade.

Girls who had passed successfully through the fattening room were the pride of their families and the symbol of incomparable beauty and ideal



Figure 308. Female doll. Anang Ibibio male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. 24″ x 5.25″ x 5″. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Bryce Holcombe, 81.270. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 309. Pieced and appliqued cloth intended for an Ibibio funeral shrine, showing an initiate with umbrella at left. Nigeria, 20th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1978,18.49. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

womanhood. While their rites were not usually accompanied by any arts other than body painting, jewelry, and hair designs–with occasional idiosyncratic drawings by the maidens themselves (Figure 307) –they were the subject of numerous artists' work in a variety of contexts. Ibibio girls carried dolls that represented initiates (Figure 308) While their wide hips and thick thighs were emphasized, they do not actually represent corpulent women. Rather, the emphasis is on their youth and beauty, as well as their perfect coiffure. Ibibio puppets, used for adult entertainment, include the fattening house maiden as a stock character, often the subject of satyr-like pursuit in morality plays. Even Ibibio cloths that form part of funerary shrines can feature the initiates–whether to represent the deceased's daughter, or just to beautify the textiles with her presence (Figure 309).

The Ejagham and Efut peoples made some of the most elaborate and beautiful representations of fattening house girls. The former represented them in multiple forms: skin-covered helmet masks, often Janus or four-faced, that usually represented both males and females–the latter always with much fairer skin; skin-covered crests that could represent initiates at the peak of beauty (Figure 310); and elaborate carved and painted headpieces that women supported on their heads during female society performances, their faces exposed. The crests were multi-media structures, the skin stretched over a wooden carving, and bone or cane depicting teeth that had been chipped, a fashion in the early 20th century. Multiple men's societies used crests such as these, so without case

histories, it is difficult to know exactly how a particular mask functioned, except to recognize the admiration initiates were held in, even in non-initiation contexts. Although the knack of making skin-covered masks died out in the late 20th century, some men's societies still own old examples or make similarly carved and painted masks. In general, crest masqueraders dance in male-female pairs.



Figure 310. This skin-covered masquerade crest from early 20th-century Nigeria features a girl with elaborately bound hair sections, circular beauty scarifications near the eyes, and bone teeth that show filed spaces. The back of the head shows a shaved style. Male artist, likely Ejagham but labeled Efik. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.900. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.



Figure 311. Masquerade crest by an Efut male artist, Cross River region, Nigeria, late 19th–early 20th century, H 22″ Princeton University Art Museum, 1997-6. Gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum on the occasion of the 250th Anniversary of Princeton University. Public domain.

Efut crests can often be extremely naturalistic (Figure 311), their skin gleaming like that of the oiled initiates. This work, in particular, adheres to human anatomy, the eyes fitting into a socket, the cheekbones rounded, and the mouth curving in a slight smile. The rows of holes along the hairline originally had inserted pegs representing hair wisps that had been rolled into balls. The

elaborate hairstyles on skin-covered crests depicting initiates certainly seem exaggerated, yet the actual hairstyles worn by some Cross River women in the early 20th century make the inspiration clear. Horn-like coiffures could stand nearly a foot high, held upright by porcupine quills; sections of the hair were shaved to produced varied designs (Figure 312).



Figure 312. **Left**: Photo of an Ejagham woman, Awakande, Obubura Hill District, Nigeria, 1904, by Charles Partridge. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,A155.64. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Right**: Ejagham girls' hairstyles as recorded by Percy Amaury Talbot's wife and sister-in-law in Nigeria (*In the Shadow of the Bush*, 1912, after p. 320). Public domain.



Figure 313. Left: This early 20th-century Efik graduate from the fattening house wears brass combs in her hair, a decoration that continues today for traditional bridal costumes. Nigeria, public domain. Right: Nigeria, 21st century. Photo Jibofoto–Nathan Ajibola. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Even among those who no longer retain the fattening house custom, some costume elements, such as the Efik use of elaborate brass comb ornaments, have been retained as traditional marriage attire (Figure 313) or as part of folkloric costume for cultural dance

troupes. Adaptations of the dances the maidens once learned for their coming-out now appear in cultural performances and music videos as expressions of heritage, as seen in the clip below.

Contemporary artists such as Victor Ekpuk, himself Ibibio, can still be inspired by the image of the lovely young woman. Like earlier artists, he has featured the silhouetted head of the *mbobo* initiate, recognizable by her distinctive hairstyles, in a series of paintings.



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Male and Female Initiation in the Guinea/Sierra Leone/Liberia Region

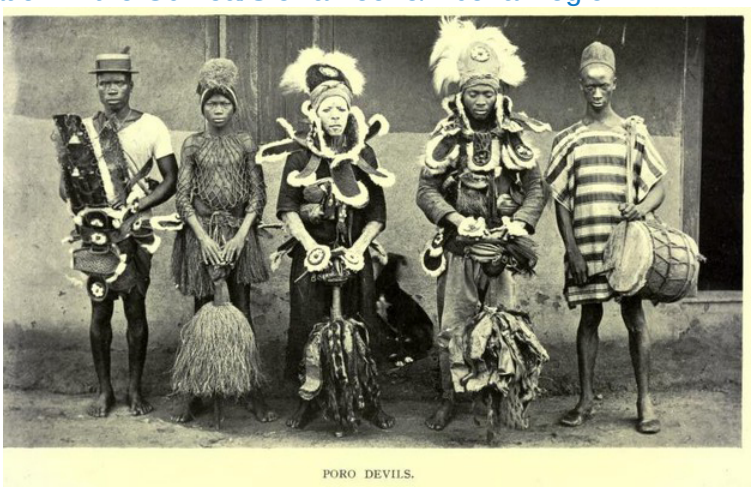


Figure 314. Despite the caption (the English word “devil” is used for “masquerader” in Sierra Leone, a legacy of colonial missionaries), this photo portrays Poro initiates from Sierra Leone dressed for dancing. Photo Kenneth James Beatty, *Human Leopards*. London: Hugh Rees, 1915. Public domain.



Figure 315. *Gbini* mask, Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, early 20th century. Wood, leopard skin, sheepskin, antelope skin, raffia fiber, raffia fiber twine, cotton cloth, cotton string, cowrie shells., H 17″. Brooklyn Museum, 2004.77a-d. Gift of William C. Siegmann. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 316. A Mende chief whose crown includes numerous leather packets of protective medicine. The *gbini* masquerade recalls this mark of status. Photo Thomas J. Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony: Sierra Leone as it Was, and as it is*. London: Seeley & Co., 1910. Public domain.

Initiation for both boys and girls is still very prevalent in a band of ethnic groups in Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as a corner of Guinea. The initiation societies continue long past youth, for a majority of adults belong to the men's and women's societies, and those who do not belong have something of an outsider status. Initiates to Poro, the men's society, tend to be between 8 and 14, while those initiating to the women's society–called Sande by the Mende and many other groups and Bondo or Bundu by the Temne–are usually closer to puberty. Initiations are not held annually, however, so some outlier initiates may be younger or older than the bulk of the group. Both groups are removed from their homes and taken to a bush camp, but initiations for both sexes don't occur at the same time, and the camps are distinct from one another, with warnings along paths to members of the opposite sex to stay away.

Poro of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea

Like other male youth initiations, Poro begins with circumcision and a period of healing when boys are considered vulnerable to evil intentions, as well as possible infection (Figure 314). Protective chalk (kaolin) is often applied to their faces and bodies, and instruction in verbal ability, professions, medicine, family management, esoteric knowledge, dance, and other subjects commences afterward. Multiple masquerades are associated with Poro, but they differ in appearance from one ethnicity to another. For the most part, these do not include wooden masks, but involve some kind of cloth and/or leather headpiece and a voluminous undyed raffia costume. They represent the spirits who embody the medicinal power of the society.

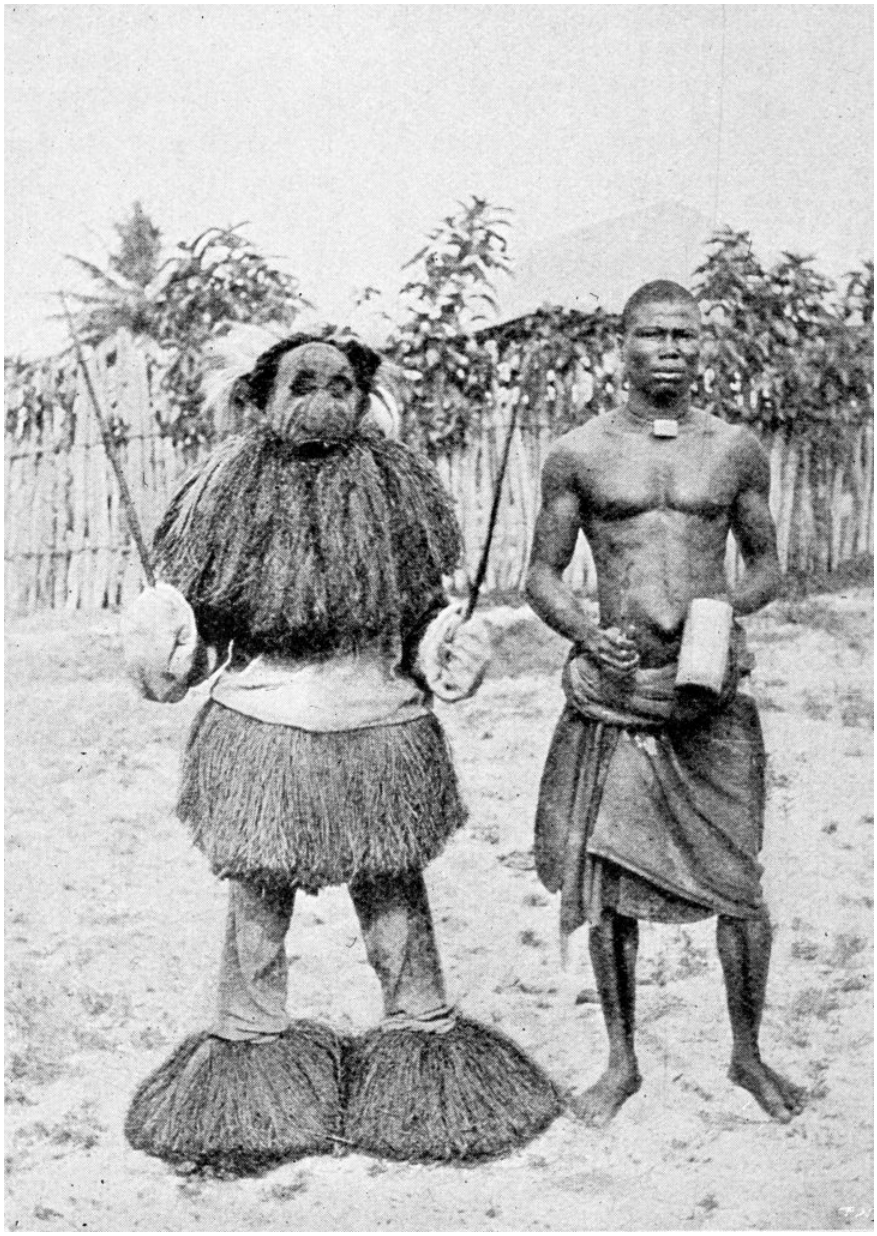


Figure 317. A *nafali* masquerade in Sierra Leone, Mende male artist, 1900. From T. E. Leslie Alldridge, "Life in Mende-Land." *The Wide World Magazine* 6 (32, 1900): 193 (original caption transposed). Public domain.

For the Mende, one of Sierra Leone's biggest ethnic groups, *gbini* (Figure 315) is the most highly-ranked of the masquerades. It appears at Poro initiations when the son of a paramount chief enters Poro, and it also dances at a paramount chief's funeral. Its headpiece is modeled after a chief's crown, a cloth and leather cap covered with talismanic amulets (Figure 316). Its costume includes an apron-like section of leopardskin, and other pieces of leopardskin may form additional sections; like many parts of West and Central Africa, the leopard is particularly associated with rulership. Mirrors and cowries–the precolonial currency–often decorate the cloth further, the latter affirming its high status.



Figure 318. The falui masquerade. Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, 1935/36. Photo Sjoerd Hofstra. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Goboi, another high-ranking masquerade, is similarly structured with a headpiece that imitates a chiefly crown, but it has a leather, rather than a leopardskin, apron. Wooden amulets bearing protective prayers in Arabic (for the Mende are predominantly Muslim) are hung on its back. While it also appears at paramount chiefs' funerals, it participates in all Poro intakes and often also performs at cultural events (see 2017 video by Ngombu-Kabu below).

A number of lesser masks are also critical parts of the Poro system, such as *nafali* (Figure 317), the messenger of *goboi*, whose headpiece is now made from cloth and yarn. Its quick dance steps are a particularly notable part of its performance.



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Figure 319. *Gongoli* mask. Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, early to mid-20th century. H 24″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.331. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain.



Figure 321. *Gbetu* helmet mask with raffia costume. Gola male artist, Liberia, early to mid-20th century. Wood, pigment, metal, raffia, 93″ x 48″. Brooklyn Museum, 2011.53.1a-b. Gift of William C. Siegmann. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 320. *Gela* mask, Bassa male artist, Liberia. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2011.70.11. Gift of William Siegmann. Public domain.

The *falui*, a warrior spirit who sold one arm to further empower his medicine, wears a feather-topped conical cloth headpiece and a cloth costume embellished by raffia ruffs (Figure 318), while the *gongoli* (Figure 319), the only Mende Poro mask made from wood, is oversized and misshapen, often with swollen features. Considered ugly, it plays the role of a comedian, interacting with members of a crowd.

Other ethnicities with Poro include a variety of masqueraders. Those with wooden masks generally represent minor entertainment spirits, like the *gela* masks of the Bassa (Figure 320) or the *gbetu* masks of the Gola (Figure 321), which grow in a telescoping way when dancing. Both of these depict genderless spirits, yet the carved components are “female” with women’s hairstyles and delicate features, as are certain minor Poro masks worn by the Vai and other regional groups.



Figure 322. *Landai* masquerade. Male artist from the Loma people, Liberia or the Toma people, Guinea, 20th century. Wood, pigment, feathers, fiber, cloth, fur, hair, skin. 65″ x 32″ x 24″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.396. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.

The only Poro wooden mask that represents a major spirit can be found among the Toma of Guinea (known over the border as the Loma in Liberia). This *landai* mask (Figure 322) takes the shape of a composite animal, its ears, eyes, and nose taking human form, while its open maw is that of a crocodile, although fringed with fur, and its head is crowned with a tight bundle of feathers. This duality of animals and man represents the “great bush spirit” and a mythical founding ancestor, their combined wisdom and power guiding and protecting the society. The *landai* masquerader chews kola nuts that turn his saliva red; as this dribbles out from the mouth, it resembles blood. The masquerade snatches up boys when the time for initiation camp has come, sweeping them under the raffia and dancing them away to attendants, much to the boys’ alarm. Their menacing jaws and actions are referred to as “eating the initiates” who are said to die, only to be reborn after the completion of their initiation, their new scarifications said to have been created by *landai*‘s teeth.



Figure 323. *Angbai* mask made by a Loma male artist, Liberia, 20th c. 18 5/16″ x 8 15/16″ x 6 3/16″. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2011.70.12. Gift of William Siegmann. Public domain.

The *angbai* (Figure 323), another Loma mask, is also worn almost horizontally on the performer's head. It similarly acts as an escort to initiates, although Neil Carey suggests it was used primarily for the second level of initiation that adult men participated in. This example's extreme abstraction and simplification are typical. The mask required many rituals for consecration and originally may have been encrusted with a sacrificial patina.

During the 2014 peak of the ebola outbreak in the region, Poro and Sande initiations were suspended so that disease communication in the relatively close quarters of the sacred groves of the societies, as well as blood exposure due to circumcision, excision, and scarification, might be arrested. This suspension has since been lifted.



Figure 324. Sande officials and two *sowei* masqueraders. Mask performed by women but made by a Mende male artist, Sierra Leone. Photo Thomas J. Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony: Sierra Leone as it Was, and as it is*. London: Seeley & Co., 1910. Public domain.

Sande and Bondo/Bundu of Sierra Leone and Liberia

The women's secret society, known as Sande to the Mende and Bondo or Bundu to the Temne and Bullom and some other ethnicities, is Poro's female counterpart. Although originally initiation took place at puberty, since 2007 Sierra Leonean laws have

required participants be at least 18 years old. This not only encourages completion of secondary school, it permits acquiesence or rejection of the excision that remains the standard beginning of initiation. Unlike the disappearing practices of the Efik of Nigeria's Cross River region, the Sande/Bondo groups are still very active. In 2016, UNESCO estimated that 89.6% of females between ages 15 and 49 were Sande/Poro members and had undergone excision, while the continuation of the practice was supported by 69.2% of women and 46.3% of men. Liberia's situation is similar; 44.4% of the female population are from areas that practice Sande, and they have been excised.



Figure 325.*Sowei* mask, Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, 20th century. H 16 ⅞". Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.387. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.

The regional women's society is unique in Africa, in that its tutelary female deity, a water spirit, is personified by a masquerader who is also female. Not fearful like the Poro masquerader, she (or they; an initiation camp can include several such masquerades, performed by exceptional dancers; see video below) escorts the initiates to their bush camp, keeps them company during their months of excision and training, and brings them back into town at the completion of their studies. These performers may also dance at civic or community occasions.



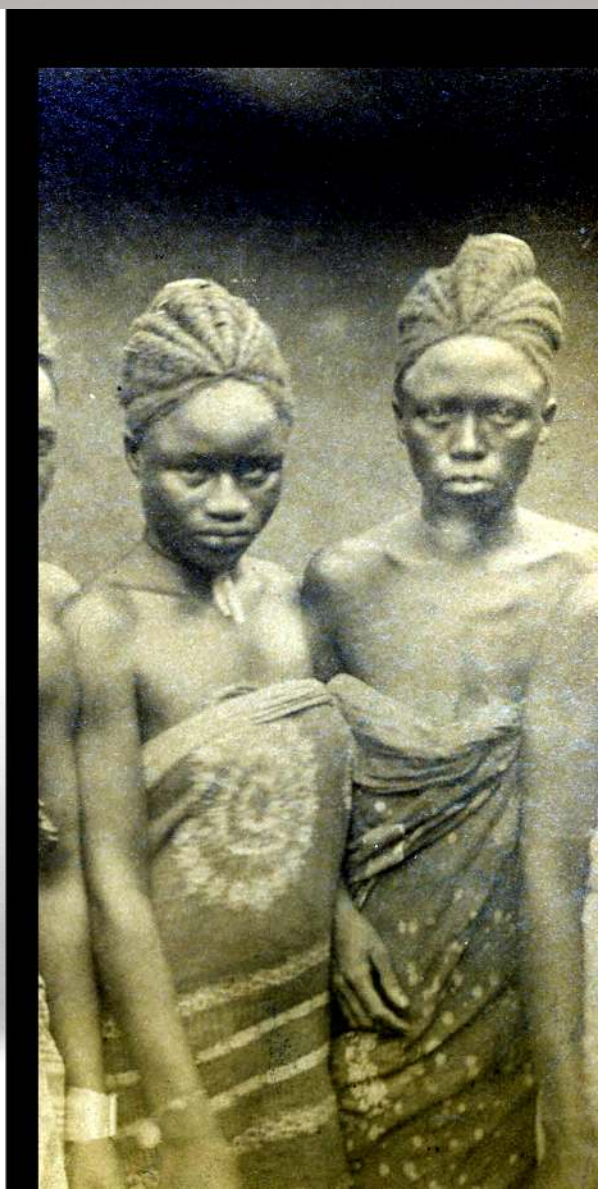


Figure 326. The lobed style of this Mende mask reflects the padded, inverted braid lobed style popular ca. 1901. **Left**: Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, late 19th-early 20th century. H 17″. Brooklyn Museum, 56.6.29. Gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos. Creative Commons-BY. **Right**: Detail of a photo, presumably by Alldridge, since it appeared in his 1901 book, *The Sherbro and Its Hinterland*. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Although regional variations occur, the masks worn by performers are generally helmet masks (Figure 324) that fit completely over the dancers' heads. The wood is usually darkened with vegetable dye and polished to a sheen with palm oil or shoe polish, indicating well-cared for dark skin. Necks–thick, so the performer's head can wear the mask–are creased, lines on the neck being considered particularly appealing (Figure 325), much like Americans consider a dimple to be. Intricate hairstyles (sometimes archaic) are a hallmark of these masks (Figure 326), inevitably reflecting the beauty of an ideal initiate.

Beauty is considered less of the happy accident of the features one is born with than it is the care and good grooming that any woman can employ to maximize attractiveness. Beauty is also exemplified by behavior. Researcher Sylvia Boone noted that the masks can be a teaching tool: ears are larger than mouths so that graduates might listen more than they speak; foreheads denote honesty and generosity, so they are portrayed as large and broad; modesty requires downcast eyes.



Figure 327. *Sowei* mask, Mende male artist, Sierra Leone, 20th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1943; 02.14.a-b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Like the Poro Society, Sande employs a special mask in its repertoire when a chief's daughter is being initiated (Figure 327). This example includes a European-style crown like those introduced by the British in 1896 as regalia for high-level Sierra Leonean chiefs; its projections also bear a resemblance to the flaps on the dancing costumes of Poro boys (Figure 314). A parasol emerges from the top of its head; while Sierra Leonean chiefs do not generally use these, they are particularly popular among the Asante, whose paramount ruler the Asantehene lived in exile in Sierra Leone from 1896-1900, when he was transported to the Seychelles Islands. These large state umbrellas may have impressed Mende artists with a second royal symbol.

Sande also has a comic relief masquerader, just as Poro does. Called *gonde*, humor is associated with its performance, for it clowns with spectators and dances gracelessly, inverting the dignity, beauty, and the ideal image of the *sowei*. The *gonde* mask is usually an old *sowei* mask that has suffered termite or other damage and has been retired from its original function. It can be unevenly painted,

negating its aesthetic qualities, or wear a multi-colored raffia costume, rather than the dark fiber of a true *sowei*. It can also be newly carved with deliberate asymmetry or other grotesque qualities (see a *gonde* image HERE).



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Other Aspects of Youth

While traditional art may include babies or backed toddlers to indicate motherhood, represent



Figure 328. Element in *Champagne Kids* installation using a Bellerby globe. Yinka Shonibare, British/Yoruba, Great Britain, 2013. Photo posted Peter Bellerby, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

mourned infants or show marriageable youths as evidence of an ideal, children depicted on their own are exceedingly rare. Some contemporary artists, however, feature them as elements in a crowd or as the main subjects, whether as ordinary youngsters or in special roles, such as child soldiers. At times they bear the weight of metaphor, as in some of Yinka Shonibare's art (Figure 328). His *Champagne Kids* installation featured a party of revelers, many clutching champagne bottles with globes as heads, who frolic while they precipitate a global financial crisis without a care in the world.



Figure 329. *Flying Girls*. Peju Alatise, Yoruba female artist, Nigeria, 2016. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of Peju Alatise.



Figure 330. *High Horses*. Peju Alatise, Yoruba female artist, Nigeria, 2016. Wood, cloth, resin, fiberglass, and acrylic. H 8.86″. Courtesy of Peju Alatise.

Peju Alatise is no less metaphorical in her work “Flying Girls,” an installation that formed part of Nigeria’s first pavilion at the 2017 Venice Biennale (Figure 329). Here, however, the metaphor is less global in impetus, though sadly just as universal in application. The life-size group of eight naturalistically rendered winged girls, surrounded by a swirl of birds, stand in a second swirl of leaves. Based on a novel Alatise wrote, it speaks to the plight of housegirls. Such children work as childminders and maids, either in the homes of wealthier relatives for the price of their feeding, or brought by brokers to strangers’ homes, their meager salaries sent to their parents with the broker collecting their own fees. Subject to long hours, beatings, and sexual assault, their hard lives lead to dreams of a life of freedom and possibilities where they can soar above their drudgery and abuse, joining the birds who may only be other winged teachers or stand in for powerful women who straddle the boundary between this world and the supernatural realm.



Figure 331. *Orange Scarf Goes to Heaven.* Peju Alatise, Yoruba female artist, Nigeria, 2012. Cloth fixed and draped in resin and mounted on canvas and acrylic. H 47.25″. Courtesy of Peju Alatise.

Many of Alatise's works explore the multiple difficulties that face young girls whose lives are circumscribed by family, culture, and religion. Social roles that compel marriage and motherhood as the only acceptable female destiny are referred to in *High Horses* (Figure 330), the girls' hidden faces speaking to their sublimation of personal dreams and expression. *Orange Scarf Goes to Heaven* (Figure 331) speaks to Alatise's own experience as a 16-year-old. As they arrived at the Musli prayer ground, the bright headscarf she wore barred her from entry, and she was informed that drawing attention to oneself through attractive clothing and accessories was a punishable offense for females, both in this world and the afterlife. In the triptych, Orange Scarf is the cynosure of her peers' attention, their body language conveying their surprise, aversion, and condemnation–not only because she has avoided the "purity" of their white attire, but because she dares to be a non-conformist. In this work, Alatise demonstrates that female independence and self-determination must battle not only males, but other females. Her Orange Scarf's rejection of the norm may have been without premeditation, but her heterodoxy sets her in opposition to those girls in other African cultures who participate in initiation.



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3.5: Art and Medicine



Figure 332. Edo medicine from Benin City, Nigeria, meant to transport the wearer to a safe place in case of a car accident. 20th century.



https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/24189

Figure 333. The triangular object at the upper chest of this twin figure depicts an aggrandized leather amulet. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.

"Medicine" means multiple things in Africa. There are Western medicines, administered through injections and pills, meant to cure diseases and manage chronic conditions. There are African medicines that do the same thing–decoctions from roots and leaves meant to treat yellow fever, poultices from leaves that draw out materials from wounds, and other treatments that involve efficacious herbs and other substances. That, however, is only one type of medicine. Medicine is the English term also used for substances, made to recipes, that use supernatural powers to effect change–not necessarily changes that involve health. There are innumerable types of medicine, each created to a specific formula and activated through incantations, usually by a ritual specialist: medicines for love, exam success, disposing of an enemy, making someone impervious to bullets, becoming invisible to your lover's spouse, becoming pregnant, preventing a specific disease, becoming a witch, fighting witchcraft, punishing errant wives, and countless others. While there are specifically Christian and Muslim medicines (covered later in this book), traditional medicines are usually made from natural substances and include botanical matter, crystals, metal, particular animal skins, claws, teeth, quills, horns–aggressive and protective parts–and objects whose names are homonyms for a desired result.

Medicines can be used in a variety of ways. One can bathe in an herbal preparation, for example, then go to sleep without rinsing or drying. One can drink a preparation, or wear a garment or ring that has been literally cooked in a boiling decoction. The skin can be cut and a powder rubbed in, or, in the case of one Edo medicine from Nigeria, it can be rubbed with leopard fur to make those encountered respond with respect and fear. It can be ground finely and blown at a rival, heated to produce invisible barriers, or placed over a door to "tie up" prospective thieves. Most commonly, it can be encased in a leather packet as an amulet and worn, either under the clothing, around the neck, or attached to clothing (Figure 332) or headgear. Medicines can become polluted by certain practices or encounters, but can usually be "woken up" by certain prayers and other preparations. While none of these medicines necessarily constitutes an art form, art objects can encase medicines or depict them (Figure 333), as well as represent the medicine owned by an individual or group, such as the Poro or Sande societies' description of their masquerades as the physical manifestation of their *hale*, or medicine.

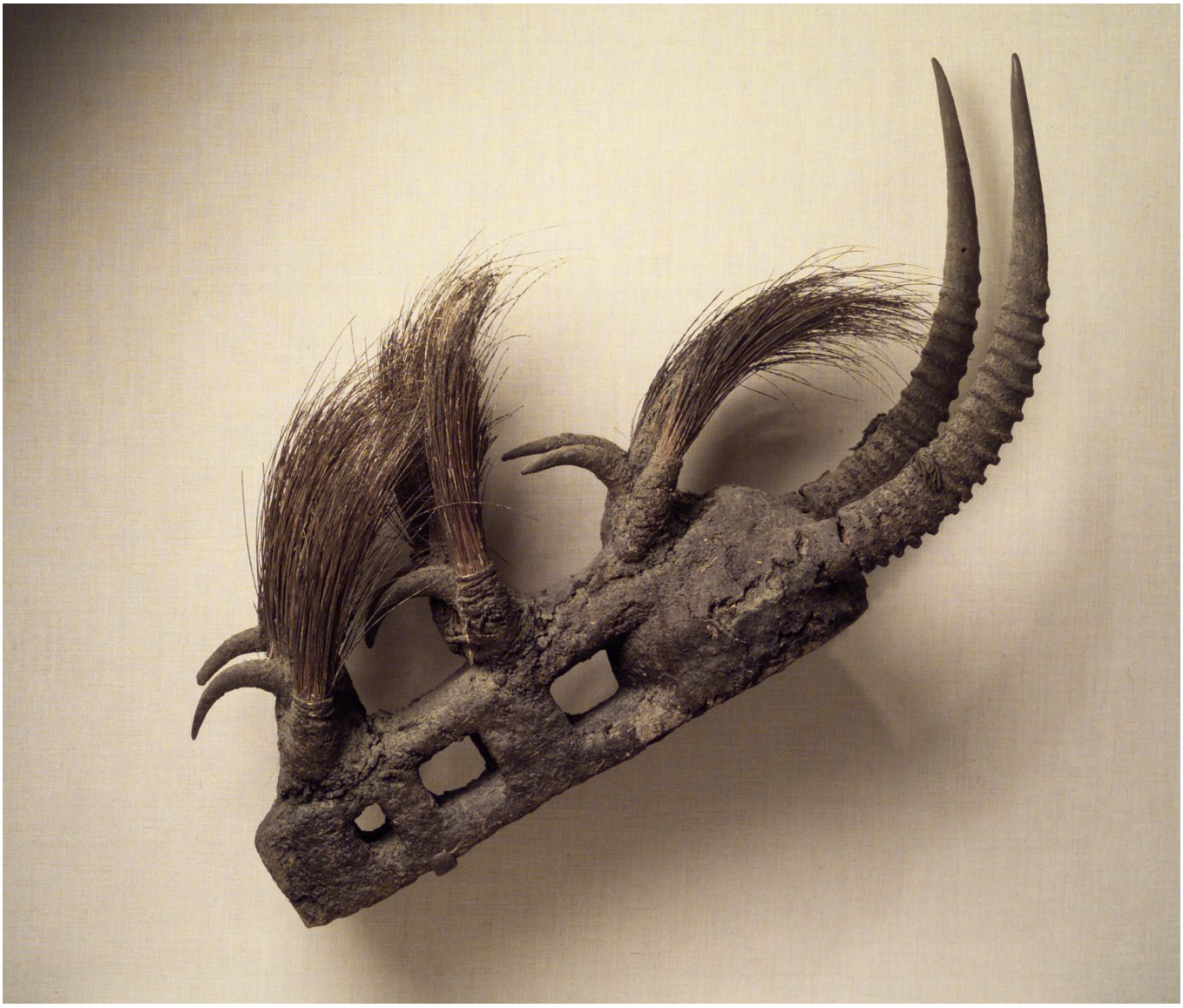


Figure 334. This mask was made and worn by a member of the Komo Society, a men's group that is led by blacksmiths. Male Bamana artist, Mali, late 19th/early 20th century. 14″ x 8″ x 33.5″. Brooklyn Museum; By exchange; 69.39.3. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 335. *Komo* costume without mask and cylindrical framework. Bamana male artist, Ségou region, Mali, early 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, PV0061012.



Figure 336. these four Komo masks differ in the amount, type, and placement of their components, but are similarly ambiguously animal-like. The example at lower right appears to be missing the actual horns that were probably once part of its ensemble. Top left: Bamana male artist, Mali. L 42.13″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-210-2. Coll. Congregation of the Holy Spirit. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. Upper right: Bamana male artist, Mali. L 42.13″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-485-2. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. Lower right: Bamana male artist, Mali. L 20.47″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1885.121.3. Gift of Dr. Bellamy. Lower left: Bamana male artist, Mali. L 27.56″ Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1963.81.1.

This Bamana Komo headpiece (Figure 334) is vastly different from the smooth, polished, graceful forms of Bamana *chi wara* antelope crests. Its surface is crusty and irregular, its cracks revealing nothing of the wood underneath. Although animal-like, it cannot be identified with any particular creature. While the antelope horns, wild boar tusks, and porcupine quills suggest land associations, the performer's costume is made from hand-woven cloth covered with (depending on the region) vulture, chicken, hornbill and/or guinea fowl feathers (Figure 335), the whole spread over a cylindrical reed framework that disguises the body. This inclusion of the realm of the air makes the identity of the "animal" represented even more ambiguous, and some headpieces include additional bundles of feathers. Its open maw threatens to devour observers, yet no eyes are visible. Its multiple textures are one of its chief characteristics, yet they do not invite touch. These masks are empowered by the sacrifices that have obscured the headpiece's original wooden structure, and by the medicines that provide its textures. Their forms are fairly consistent (Figure 336), differing mostly in the presence or absence of ears and teeth, as well as the number and type of attached medicines. The works fit on the upper part of a wearer's head, much like a hat. It remains unclear whether the feathered costume covered the face or not. The face remained visible in the few photos of Komo performances that exist, but most of these were staged; there are reports that both headpiece and costume were periodically raised on a pole during the dance.

The process of carving requires ritual sexual abstinence on the part of the artist as an essential preparation for work, as well as communion with a nature spirit they have a personal relationship with. The initial wooden carving has somewhat stubby horns, as these are only meant to act as supports for the attachment of real horns. Repeated sacrifices add *nyama*, the power in all living (and some inanimate) things, that empowers the mask. The blacksmiths must obtain the horns, tusks, quills, and other medicinal defensive/aggressive animal parts to add to the wooden core; these animals' deaths release *nyama*, a powerful, unpredictable force

that blacksmiths can control and direct. Medical imaging of certain Komo headpieces has revealed that the horns can even have additional medicines inserted before attachment–both visible and hidden dangerous forces are in operation. Porcupine quills are associated both with protecting wisdom and with piercing weapons such as arrows. Birds, the source of feathers, considered communicative partners in divination and be capable intermediaries between prepared individuals and spiritual knowledge. The extended maw may depict an exaggerated hyena's jaws, dually alluding to hyenas' perceived ability to consume sorcerors and the senior Komo members' ability to transform into hyenas to this end.

The blacksmiths who make and use these headpieces play important roles in Bamana society, although non-blacksmiths sometimes prefer to keep a social distance from them. Like other Mande peoples, the Bamana are a caste society, with farmers forming the landed aristocracy and other occupational groups (*nyamakalaw*) having distinctive social positions. Blacksmiths, whose wives are potters, are not only metal workers, but also wood sculptors. Besides these artistic roles they are medical experts, diviners, circumcisors, and ritual specialists who produce and administer medicines, and for that reason, they are considered both powerful and potentially threatening. Having consumed and bathed in medicine most of their lives, they literally embody medicine.

Since the mid-20th century, Islam has had a profound effect on many of the various Bamana men's societies and their associated arts (see *chi wara* in Chapter 3.1). Nonetheless, the blacksmith-led men's society known as Komo is still active today. Its purpose is to protect members and society as a whole, and one of its chief goals is to detect and destroy malevolent sorcerors, including rival Komo who might test a performer's own supernatural abilities during the dance. The Bamana are not the only makers and users of Komo–the Tagwa Senufo of western Burkina Faso obtained the right to Komo, still performing songs in the Bamana language, so the source of any given headpiece is ambiguous without collection data.



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The Komo members who wear masks do so only in the presence of men who have paid for the simplest Komo initiation level, the one that allows viewing of a performance. The masquerade is anathema to all but a few special women; other women must not view it, although they may hear the sounds and songs of the performance (see video above). Divination takes place when the masquerader is dancing; he answers members' questions through songs in an instrument-distorted voice, which are then interpreted by an associate.



Figure 337. *Boli* Altar. Bamana male artist, Mali, 20th century. H 26″. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.90.7. Gift of the Gerard Junior Foundation. Public domain.

When not in use, the mask is kept in a dedicated Komo structure, and it will usually be buried there after its owner's death. Some, however, are hidden before that point, the owner's expectation being that a relative or other Komo member may advance to a state that will make them capable of using the mask. Its location will then be revealed in a dream. The Komo structure holds other power objects, including the portable altars known as *boli* (Figure 337). Like the Komo masks, *boli* have encrusted surfaces, built from layers of sacrificial blood, food, herbs, kola chewings, honey, and



Figure 338. Hunter's shirt (and detail) prepared and worn by a Bamana male, Mali, 20th century. Cotton cloth, leather, lion's teeth, animal claws, crocodile skin, horns, hyena skin. ex Charles Ratton collection. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1969.23.1.



alcoholic drinks. While their core may be wooden, medical imaging has revealed that some include cloth, nails, bones, and vegetable matter. They serve as portable altars, and high-ranking members can direct their concentrated *nyama* towards a situation or an individual. Their vague form–here somewhat bovine, sometimes hippo-like or anthropomorphic–recalls the ambiguous, mysterious identity of the masks. Their very lack of clarity suggests the secrecy in which they, as well as Komo's activities in general, are held.



Figure 339. The amulets on this Bamana hunter's shirt from Mali obscure the patterns of the *bogolanfini* underneath. Although people from all walks of life wear *bogolanfini*, the patterns its female designers use on hunting tunics themselves have protective functions. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1964.0.32 X.

In their role as ritual specialists, blacksmiths make medicines for themselves and others. Some of the most visible Bamana medicines are in the form of leather covered amulets that are sewn to the tunics of hunters. Male hunting associations can include members of any caste, so farmers and blacksmiths can each be hunters. They still rid the region of threatening animals, but they are prepared before facing the natural and spiritual danger to be found in the bush, a place of *nyama*; in the past hunters were also warriors, since they were trained to use guns and other weapons, move stealthily, be observant, and be medicinally prepared. Their distinctive amulet-laden garments were worn primarily at gatherings of their society, when hunters' bards would sing the praises

and biographies of great hunters, living and dead. The tunics are laden with a variety of visible and invisible medicines, many in leather-wrapped duiker antelope horns. The underlying garment can be plain cotton that began as white, but was washed in a mordant; the color is associated with blood (Figure 338). The rawhide strands that hang on the surface are also medicine. They have been soaked in the saliva of healers, their words carrying *nyama*. Other tunics begin as *bogolonfini*, or mudcloth–cotton that was woven by men, then pattern-dyed by women (Figure 339).



Figure 340. These two details of Abdoulaye Konate's large wall hanging, *Homage to Mande Hunters* (1994), shows the care in the construction of each amulet, the whole producing a richly textured surface with subtle color variations. Still image from *Brilliant Ideas* (2016), ep. 31.

Abdoulaye Konate (born 1953), an academically-trained artist from the Bamana region, used hunters' shirts and their talismans as inspiration for his huge *Homage to Mande Hunters* wall hanging (Figure 340), an early creation. It magnifies the standard tunic until it takes up a whole wall. Its brown color echoes that of the "cooked" in medicine, and its surface picks out abstract forms in cowrie shells, the whole covered with spaced amulets and rawhide strands. Konate, educated first at the Institut National des Arts de Bamako, and later at Havana's Instituto Superior de Arte, works predominantly in cloth, his creations sometimes covering a whole floor. Many of his works from the 1990s and 2000s included amulets (*gris-gris* in his French titles), as **this video** of one of his exhibitions shows.

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Figure 342. *Nkisi* created by a Kongo male artist. His upraised arm still holds a spear; some held knives. These are missing on many examples that show a raised clenched fist in the same pose. Democratic Republic of Congo, 20th century. Wood, metal, feathers, mirror, cotton, horns, resin, shells, seeds. H 24″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1968.7.2.



Figure 341. This Kongo medicinal bundle, collected before 1892, includes ingredients meant to counter witchcraft; these include bamboo “night guns” (*nduda*). Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1892.62.27.1.

Belief in the powers of the dead, as well as in the powers of the living to exercise some control over them, have led to the production of many impactful Kongo sculptures. Their appearance demonstrates collaboration between sculptors, ritual specialists (here called *nganga*), and clients. Many Kongo medicines (*nkisi*) are non-figurative, composed of ingredients connected together, or hidden within cloth bundles, bottles, or pots (Figure 341). Figurative nkisi often incorporate these same types of ingredients or are hung with them; they address similar goals.

These power figures (Figure 342) or *nkisi* most commonly take the form of male or female figures, as well as single or Janus-headed dogs; occasional simians also exist. When the sculptor created a figurative *nkisi*, he carved a cavity in its torso, with additional cavities sometimes placed on the head, elbow or back, and medicine packets or attachments connected to it on the surface level. The *nganga*, after determining the work’s specific purpose, would gather the appropriate ingredients to lure the spirit of a dead person to take up residence in the sculpture and carry out the appropriate tasks.

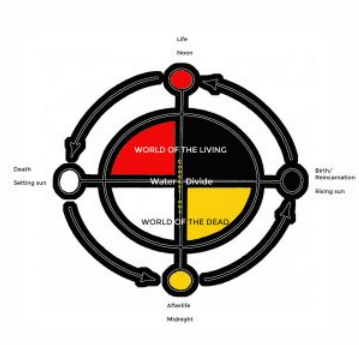


Figure 343. The Kongo cosmogram, a circular or diamond-shaped device that indicates the divisions of this world and the world of the dead, separated by water, but interconnected by the interactions of the dead and the living. It also marks the cyclical nature of life, moving through birth, life, death, afterlife, and reincarnation.

These ingredients varied according to function, but one consistent inclusion was earth from a powerful person's grave or another gathering place of spirits of the dead, such as a stream bottom. These substances lured the spirit and made it feel at home. Such spirits were not ancestors with family connections to the makers or users of the *nkisi*, but those who were effective in life and could use their abilities to new ends.

Other ingredients included objects whose names were puns associated with characteristics that reinforced the *nkisi*'s capability and metaphors for desired qualities or actions. Once the substances were inserted, they were sealed from view with resin and, usually, a mirror. The mirror was synonymous with water, for the dead were housed in a world under the water. The *nganga* could use the mirror as a divination device, peering into the spiritual world to discover the causes and cures for specific situations.

Kongo philosophy posits a spiraling trajectory of life that is graphically represented as a cosmogram (Figure 343). In it, this world and the spiritual world are divided by a horizontal line that represents a permeable barrier of water, while a vertical line marks the interconnectivity of the living and the dead through individuals such as the *nganga* and beings such as those inhabiting *nkisi*. The cosmogram appears on burial mats, marked the ground for oathtaking, White, the color particularly associated with the dead, and red, the color of violence, transition, and the power of the prime of life, often mark *nkisi* faces or the edges of their mirrors.

Like most Kongo figurative art, *nkisi* are fairly naturalistic (some examples extremely so), although their head-to-body proportions are unnatural, often set at 1:3 or 1:4. Although they can look somewhat ominous, particularly when their medicinal attachments remain, They assumed different poses, accoutrements, and accessories because their purposes differed. While some were healers, devoted to curing specific maladies, others hunted down thieves and miscreants or inflicted disease on enemies.



Figure 344. This *nkisi* in female form seems to have been created to encourage conception and healthy delivery. Kongo male artist from Lower Congo River area, Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th century. H 9.84″. Collectie Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, WM-4075. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Numerous works share traits that provide partial symbolic meanings and clues to their functions. The medicine pack of a female *nkisi* in the Wereldmuseum Rotterdam lacks silvering and allows observation of its ingredients (Figure 344). Chief among them is a miniature figure of a mother with child, painted white with kaolin, as well as white spiraling shells and stones. These elements suggest the *nkisi* was dedicated to conception, for the fetus is compared to a snail in its shell. This work is considered to be associated with "the below," the world of water, coolness, the color white, healing, and afflictions of the lower body.

Another *nkisi* in Liverpool's World Museum suffered some damage to a medicine pack on the head that revealed its contents; the figure's torso cavity was also x-rayed. Ingredients attached to the head included magnetite crystals, a small snake, charcoal, and a bird of prey's egg; the torso pack also seemed to include crystals. Information supplied by the collector suggests this *nkisi*'s resident spirit was associated with "the above" and violence. Some of its medicinal ingredients alluding to aggressive animals who attack with great swiftness. Named "Chcôca"–those *nkisi* with known abilities were known by personal names–its attacks were said to cause swelling, sores, and rheumatism.



Figure 345. Both the royal ivory scepter at left and the power object at right show the figures chewing *munkwiza*. **Left**: Male Kongo-Yombe artist, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 20th century. H 11.5″. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, AC1994.203.2. Gift of Lee and Bob Bronson. Public domain. **Right**: Kongo-Vili male artist, Loango, Republic of Kongo, 19th century. Glass, feathers, wood, cloth. H 13″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 531 © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

Many examples include or once included feathered headdresses. These indicate associations with "the above", the realm of both raptors and violent lightning strikes, suggesting an *nkisi* inhabitant capable of swooping down on victims and exercising retribution. A number of power objects show the figure chewing on a root. This is an action that appears on numerous depictions of monarchs (Figure 345), and indicates a form of impartial justice aided by the *munkwiza* (*Costus lucanusianus*) root or vine that could detect witches and defy death. It was an insignia of rule, indicating continuous growth and revival, and was included as an ingredient in the ruler's *nkisi* of investiture. When he pointed it at someone, they would swell up and die, so this *nkisi*'s use *munkwiza* is likely linked to his powers to harm and the ability to identify witchcraft. Some *nkisi* have bamboo attachments–the gunpowder-stuffed "night guns" of Figure 341 above–that similarly attack witches and sorcerers. Hunting nets are components of still other *nkisi*. On one level, they suggest the binding of unseen forces, but they also indicate a spirit who can track down individuals and visit them with retribution.



Figure 346. This *nkisinkonde*, carved by a male Kongo-Vili artist from Loango, Republic of Congo before 1892, still holds the knife that indicates aggression towards transgressors. His head originally held additional medicinal ingredients; these and those in the torso have since been removed. Wood, metal, cloth, glass, vegetable matter, pigment, resin. H 24.8″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1892.70.6.

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Figure 347. This *nkisi*, its piercing glare emphasized by the insertion of porcelain, was not yet well-used at the time of its collection, since the back shows little evidence of metal piercing. It would have originally worn a raffia fiber skirt, now missing. It leans forward slightly, as if in anticipation, its arms akimbo posture signifying a call to action. Male Kongo-Yombe artist, Chiloango River region of Republic of Congo or Cabinda, 19th century. Wood, iron, resin, ceramic, plant fiber, textile, pigment. H. 46.5″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008.30. Purchase by Lila Acheson Wallace, Drs. Daniel and Marian Malcolm, Laura G. and James J. Ross, Jeffrey B. Soref, The Robert T. Wall Family, Dr. and Mrs. Sidney G. Clyman, and Steven Kossak Gifts, 2008. Public domain.



Figure 349. Male Kongo-Yombe artist, the Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th or early 20th century. Wood, cloth, glass, metal, shells, Holz; Textil; Glas; Metall; mussel shells, snail shells, bone, plant matter. L 26.77″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 18905. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo by Martin Franken. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.



Figure 348. Image from anonymously-authored Kijkjes in Belgisch Kongo (Antwerp: J. E. Buschmann, 1920), final plate. This publication about the expedition by J. Maes includes this image from the Chiloango River region that had been photographed as early as 1897.

Some of the most visually striking power figures are known as *nkisi nkondi*, or hunting *nkisi* (Figs. 346, 347, 348). These can bristle with nails, each indicating a contract with a client seeking to punish someone who has committed a crime, broken an oath, or otherwise offended. The insertion of iron is meant to awaken the in-dwelling spirit to track the offender and inflict pain, disease, or death, unless restitution is made. The varied textures and altered silhouettes of these figures attest to the role of clients' in the figures' appearance: they no longer look as they did when they left the artists' hands or even the *nganga*'s hands, but demonstrate the results of many transactions.

Male *nkisi* were often paired with female *nkisi*, or with dog representations, since the latter are said to live in a village at the border of this world and that of the spirits, their hunting skills particularly suited to tracking the guilty (Figure 349). A better understanding of any specific *nkisi* requires its case history and knowledge of its medicines; fortunately, some were collected with this information, although the vast majority were not (see hotspot images below for individual biographies). Those whose powers were particularly potent were known by their personal names

Small *nkisi* might be owned by individuals, such as warriors who traveled with them for their divinatory abilities. Others were owned by *nganga*, or by communities, those considered particularly efficacious drawing pilgrims from hundreds of miles away who were eager for their cures or punishing abilities. Wary about the power the Kongo invested in *nkisi*, the Portuguese began seizing them in their territories in the last decade of the 19th century, while the Belgian and French officials (as well as missionaries, both European and Kongo) similarly stripped Kongo *nkisi* from their shrines. Although this pattern was not new–both written and visual allusions to the destruction of Kongo "idols" occurred in the 16th through 18th centuries, conducted by both Christian Kongo kings and foreign missionaries–the depredations during the colonial period have now reduced medicine to non-figurative forms.

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3.6: Art and Divination



Figure 350. Stones outline these Dogon divination grids, which are inscribed at dusk and read by diviners at dawn. The disarrangements made by foxes will provide them with key information to discover and interpret the causes of human problems. Photo by Martijn Munneke, Mali, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.



Figure 351. Three *itombwa* made by male Kuba artists from the Democratic Republic of Congo. **Top**: Elephant form, L 10.25″, 19th-20th century. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 92.122a; b. The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund.. Public domain.; **Middle**: Wild pig form, L 10.5″, 19th–20th century. Dallas Museum of Art; 1969.S.76.A-B. The Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture; gift of Eugene and Margaret McDermott. Public domain; **Bottom**: Dog form, L 8.86″, Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-120-17. Congregatie van de Heilige Geest. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

People throughout the globe try to make sense of their world through a variety of methods meant to tap into an unseen sphere, whether through the Chinese I Ching, European tarot cards or Inca spider divination. African divination frequently has the same recourse: using a random method to tap into the order of the spiritual world in order to determine problems' causes and cures. Specialist diviners are apprenticed, trained and then become masters. Their clients are often from areas some distance away, for local diviners might employ intelligence relating to the client's family or work situation, while a stranger is truly dependent on their methods of accessing the spirit world. Many different divination methods exist; some African peoples themselves have multiple methods. Not all, however, employ art objects. Dogon diviners from Mali, for example, draw boxed diagrams into the sandy soil, arranging sticks, symbols, depressions, and food within its cells (Figure 350). They activate their process through words, calling upon a fox to manifest answers to clients' questions. When the fox comes to feed, he disarranges elements in the diagram, and the diviner reads these traces to interpret the problem at hand.

Some African divination methods use objects to access the other world. Diviners among the Kuba of the Democratic Republic of Congo employ friction oracles *(itombwa)* that artists carve in the shape of animals, often dogs , but also crocodiles, wild pigs, and elephants (Figure 351); rarely a human figure (often placed horizontally and mounted on four animal legs) forms the instrument. Diviners use them to commune with nature spirits to diagnose illnesses' causes and cures, catch malefactors, or isolate other issues troubling the community. Although wild animals are associated with the bush, and thus with the realm of nature



Figure 352. Chokwe divination container and contents, Angola, 19th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1912.15.67.1-32.

spirits, the common appearance of the domesticated dog relates to his hunting abilities, in this case through supernatural means. When a session begins, the diviner applies oil or water to the animal's smooth back, then rubs the back with a utensil while asking a series of questions, Because of the moisture, the utensil moves smoothly; when the diviner chances on the appropriate issue, however, it will stop abruptly, a revelation from the other world. Extensive use creates a depression and a patina resulting from the oil and red pigment. Geometric patterns, which commonly decorate Kuba boxes, cups, pipes, and non-figurative objects, frequently ornament the animal's body. The animal is usually abstracted. Although its legs usually lack definition, the position of head and tail convey a sense of alertness. Many of the Kuba's immediate neighbors use similar divination forms, and other types of friction oracles are known further east in Central Africa.

Chokwe diviners from Angola, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo employ baskets or other containers filled with small objects when they perform divination *(ngombo yacisuka*). Some of the objects are natural–twigs, claws, teeth, stones, seeds–but others are carved in the form of human beings, masqueraders, or are manufactured articles (Figure 352). Together they constitute a miniature replica of human social life through symbolism and allusion. The diviner tosses the basket and reads the resulting configurations. Although objects have independent meaning, the ways in which they touch, overlap, or otherwise interact are essential to his interpretation. The diviner calls upon a specific ancestor to aid him in his endeavors, invoking him by shaking a rattle, as the video below shows. In the course of the divination, additional ancestral and nature spirits may intervene.



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Senufo Divination in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso

The Senufo have several different forms of divination. The most common type, however, may be that practiced by female specialists. Known as *sandobele*, they are a sub-set of the Sandogo women's society. Each matrilineage designates one or two members to become diviners, but others can be driven to take up that occupation because they have annoyed a nature spirit who then makes them fall ill. This sends them



Figure 353. Brass bracelet with snake imagery. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire or Burkina Faso, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.

to a diviner who advises the client to form a working partnership with the nature spirit by learning to be a diviner herself. Occasionally men become diviners through this same route. Nature spirits (*madebele*) live in an invisible society similar to that of human beings, inhabiting the bush outside towns and farms. This can bring them into conflict with humans, but they can also form alliances with individual *sandobele*, and mediate between them and the other world to detect the causes of problems and return the latter's clients' to equilibrium. Many of the problems result from unsanctioned sexual contact of members of the matrilineage, which can lead to ancestral annoyance. Managing the human and spiritual consequences of these kinds of fractious transactions requires standby family specialists from Sandogo. Working with *madebele* in challenging. They are capricious, quick to anger, swift to punish, but trained *sandobele* know how to mollify them via proper care and respect, and persuade them to assist in a kind of friendly partnership.



Figure 354. Brass twin representation. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, H 2.4″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1963.4.113.

Sandobele work with their clients in a specialized small office; these may be part of their own home or erected next to the house where twins were born. Male-female twins are valued by the Senufo and appear as the mythological children of the progenitors of

the human race. More importantly, Senufo diviners seek to work through them because, since they share a womb, they are considered the conduits of perfect communication that does not require speech; likewise, twins can communicate with spirits. Diviners rely upon both the spirits of deceased twins in their own families and those of their clients to relay messages from the other world, and attempt to mirror both their client and relevant spirits as they work, thus becoming pseudo-twins themselves. They sit on the ground, legs stretched out, facing a similarly-posed client, and hold one of the client's hands during the divination process. Their shifting twin-like behavior (cycling between reflections of the client and the spirit) creates an atmosphere of affinity and accord that smoothes communication and facilitates answers to the clients' problems. During divination, *sandobele* wear brass rings and bracelets (Figure 353), usually paired and often bearing images of pairs, adding to the twin theme.



Figure 355. Diviner's decorative figure. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire. H 13.25″. Late 19th or early 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 67.209.2. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wiesenberger, Creative Commons-BY.

Twinned images are a basic part of *sandobele* divination. All diviners work in the presence of a figural pair (*tugubele*), an example of which can be seen HERE. These represent idealized *madebele* twin spirits (for nature spirits are believed to actually have feet that face backward; some are hairy or have oversized heads or other odd features) that take up temporary residence in the figures as they interact with the diviner. A musical invocation–the *madebele* cannot resist music–lures the nature spirits to the divining site and puts them in a receptive state.

During the course of her session, she takes out a group of small, jewelry-like brass objects, as well as various objects such as cowrie shells, nail polish containers, pens, and dried kola nuts. She casts these from a container, then interprets their fall with the guidance of spirits. Although many of the tiny brass elements are figurative, one of the key inclusions is a miniature bracelet decorated with a python, the messenger of spirits–an object frequently worn in multiples by a diviner, herself a messenger, or by those Senufo troubled by nature spirits.



Figure 356. This small brass turtle has an eyelet on the back so it could be tied to the patient. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire or Burkina Faso, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.



Figure 357. This chameleon-ornamented ring would only have been worn by a man, frequently in response to a divination session. Senufo male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.2012.0.225.

The nature spirits are attracted by beauty–music and aesthetic objects pull them magnetically. Diviners upgrade their objects as they become more successful, and twinned figures are among commonly depicted objects. Though small, they are carefully modeled, their appearance seen in the diviner's dream and communicated to a brasscaster who uses the lost wax casting technique. This pair (Figure 354) has the long torsos of the much larger Senufo wooden sculptures used by the men's Poro Society (though it shares a name with the men's society of the Poro/Sande complex in Sierra Leone/Guinea/Liberia, it is a completely separate entity). In an effort to attract more spirits and ensure their cooperation, *sandobele* also commission decorative wooden carvings that play no role in divination, but simply upgrade the work environment for all concerned. Frequently these status sculptures are equestrian images (Figure 355) that both attest to the diviner's reputation and skill and speak as references to power. This example stresses more rounded forms than many Senufo carvings, but its rider clearly dominates the horse through hieratic scale; his steed merely reflects his own elevated position and is said to represent the bush spirits' mobility as they move from their invisible homes to the diviner's human world.

Once divination provides a diagnosis of the source of a client's problems, a cure is presented. This commonly takes the form of a prescription that is worn: a painted cloth garment, brass amulets tied at a child's ankle or waist (Figure 356), or brass jewelry–

particularly rings (Figure 357) or bracelets–worn by adults. Through their attractiveness, these appease irritated bush spirits, and are meant to ensure the client and spirit troubling her remain on amicable terms.

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Ifa Divination Arts among the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin Republic



Figure 358. This divination chain must have belonged to a very successful diviner, since it is made from ivory carved in the form of faces, and also includes many beads. Yoruba male artist, early 20th century, Nigeria. L 43″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002.179. Museum Purchase; Friends of African and African American Art Fund. Public domain.



Figure 359. This Yoruba Ifa diviner, Chief Fayemi Fatunde Fakayode in Ibadan, Nigeria, is marking the sawdust on the carved wooden board before him to reveal the pattern that he will interpret. Single frame from "Dida Ifa – Ifa Divination; 2" by Apena Fagbemijo Amosun Fakayode, 2013.



Figure 360. This divination tray (*opon Ifa*) was carved by a Yoruba male artist in 19th century Nigeria. Adventurer Leo Frobenius collected it in Offa, in what is now Kwara State. It includes two heads of Eshu, positioned opposite one another, as well as interlace motifs alternating with overhead views of birds. D 22″. Yale University Art Gallery, 1954.28.34. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James M. Osborn for the Linton Collection of African Art. Public domain.

The Yoruba have many different divination practices, but value Ifa divination as their most complex and accurate practice. This form of divination is mathematically-related, relying on an extensive body of oral poems and narratives. These correspond to a numerical combination the diviner produces either by using a divination chain (*opele*) with eight "seeds"–these may be actual

seedpods or cast brass or ivory pieces (Figure 358)–or by using a more complex set of equipment that employs numerous art objects. The latter method allows the diviner to display more costly equipment that underscores his success and is upgraded as recognition of his skills becomes widespread. With the *opele* method, the diviner casts his chain numerous times, noting whether the positions of its eight markers are “open” or “closed”. In the second method (Figure 359 and video below), the diviner passes 16 palm nuts from one hand to the other, noting whether he is left with an odd or even number of nuts in his hand, making corresponding binary marks in sawdust or sand on a carved wooden board in front of him. Both methods produce one of 256 possible configurations, which in turn allow them to recite an associated poem and draw upon related oral literature to interpret the throw. As such, both methods use randomness to access a cosmic order that will define the root cause of a client’s problem and offer a spiritual solution. The Yoruba, whose traditional religion includes both a High God (Oludumare) and uncountable lesser deities (*orisha*), associate Ifa divination with the *orisha* Orunmila (or Ifa), who epitomizes wisdom, purity, and moral order.



Figure 361. A Yoruba male artist carved this ivory head of Eshu which is placed beside the divination tray. Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. H 4 1/8″. Brooklyn Museum, 1996.114. Gift of The Udo Horstmann Collection, Zug, Switzerland. Creative Commons-BY.

In the more complex Ifa divination method shown in Figure 359, associated art objects include a wooden tray *(opon* Ifa) (Figure 360) and a tapper (*iroke* Ifa), as well as a container to hold the sacred palm nuts (*agere* Ifa) and, usually, a free-standing representation of what appears to be a human head (Figure 361). The trays are most commonly rectangular or circular, although there are lunette or half-circular versions as well (Figure 362). The reverse side of the trays is plain, except for a centrally located carved depression that mimics the board’s shape–this allows the sound of tapping the board at the center to be magnified. For the Yoruba, the trays always have a raised border that typically includes at least one carved face as well as either geometric motifs, segmented sections with figural or animal representations, or a combination of the two. The face that appears on most boards may only be represented once (positioned across from the diviner), or can appear in multiples (usually multiples of four). It represents not Orunmila, but another *orisha* known as Eshu. Although the *orisha* are usually personified, Eshu is the only one who is typically represented in art. A friend to Orunmila, he represents chaos in opposition to Ifa’s order. With chaos, however, comes opportunity, and with divination and the sacrifices it prescribes is a chance to change outcomes. Eshu is considered the gatekeeper to the other world, guardian of the crossroads that mark the division of our world and the spiritual world, and the small head that many diviners own also represents him. Before any sacrifice or interaction with the other world, Eshu must be invoked.

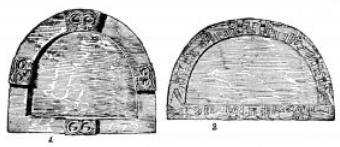


Figure 362. These two divination trays take a semi-circular form. If only one Eshu face is present, it is carved on the curved side. Yoruba, Nigeria, early 20th century. From Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, vol. 1, p. 249. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1913.

The diviner (*babalawo*) begins his session by spreading the sawdust on the surface, marking a crossroads on it, and tapping the center with his *iroke* (Figure 363). His invocations to Eshu and Orunmila are followed by references to other deities and to deified diviners of the past; some of the carvings on the trays’ borders are touched during the references to now-deceased diviners. Depending on the complexity of the tray, the carvings may be arranged symmetrically or asymmetrically.



Figure 363. **Left**: This wooden *iroke* includes paint, a characteristic trait of the Yoruba male artists from the Benin Republic, 20th century. H 11.61″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1964.5.2. **Center**: This ivory tapper has a rich reddish patina from the repeated application of palm oil. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 1850-1920. H 14.5″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1995.25. Martha Delzell Memorial Fund. Public domain. **Right**: A bird further ornaments this tapper, which includes the standard female kneeling figure. Yoruba male artist from Owo, Nigeria, before 1897. H 16.54″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1897.4.1.

A tray in the Musée du Quai Branly (Figure 364) has a rare double border. The outer section is composed solely of abstracted birds shown in a birds'-eye view. Birds appear frequently in Yoruba art; as a liminal animal, they often portray those with powers to cross between the boundaries of our world and those of the spiritual world–these include diviners and other priests as well as the monarch and witches. They may be portraying how all people of power prostrate to Orunmila, or they could also (and simultaneously) refer to the birds that ultimately consume the sacrifices clients make in order to placate the spiritual or human causes of their problems.

The inner ring prominently features one representation of Eshu's face, his oversized, bulging eyes conforming to general Yoruba style. The rest of the inner border is separated into discrete segments that function independently. The representation of a pipe-smoking profile figure with a long hairstyle is another reference to Eshu, who appears often sucking his thumb, smoking, or playing a flute, all phallic references that allude to his preoccupation with sex. He completely fills his mall section of the tray, as do the other motifs. There are numerous animal references: a mudfish (another liminal animal), a python devouring a four-legged, long-tailed animal of uncertain species (animals attacking or devouring one another are common tray sights, and may allude to human behavior); a crab, crocodile with mudfish, and a quadruped. An interlace motif completes the border.



Figure 364. A Yoruba male artist from the Owo region carved this divination board, his skill evident in the relief details. Nigeria, second half of the 19th century. D 20″, Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2014.46.1.

Divination trays can vary significantly in their degree of decoration and the type of motifs they bear. Painted decoration is usually a feature of trays from the Benin Republic, although many of those remain unpainted as well. Eshu heads can range stylistically from the fairly naturalistic to considerable abstraction, and whether or not the head protrudes onto the board itself can be a regional indicator.

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Figure 365. Divination bowl collected by Leo Frobenius in 1910-12. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 19th or early 20th century. H 8.46″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 27201. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo Martin Franken. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

When diviners begin to use the trays, they may only be able to afford tappers (*iroke* Ifa) made from wood (Figure 363, left). Nonetheless, this is carved in the shape of the tip of an elephant's tusk, to imitate the upgraded ivory version. While some *iroke* only display small patterned bands at the base, while a few are conglomerations of multiple stacked figures. The overwhelming majority of tappers incorporate a nude kneeling woman. Sometimes her head is elongated so that it fills the implement's tip (Figure 363, middle), while at other times the plain tip appears to emerge from her head. In either case, its conical form mimics the supposed shape of the invisible inner head, the seat of destiny–a distortion that can frequently be seen in other Yoruba sculptures. The kneeling posture is one of reverence; Yoruba women greet in this position, and its supplication aspect can soften hard hearts, making it an effective position for begging favors from the *orisha*. Women's nudity–here a reference to purity rather than with erotic overtones–is considered particularly efficacious for prayer and curses, a reference to the particular power women hold because of their life-giving abilities. The figure may embody humanity pleading the *orisha* for a "good head," one that will guide them to a successful life; it simultaneously recalls women's beauty and ability to please the deities, useful when one wishes to placate them and steer the course of events. Certain *iroke* position the figure in mid-implement, the tip being carved into the form of a somewhat abstracted bird (Figure 363, right). Here the message references some women's mystical "bird power" (*ẹyẹ*)–prophetic ability owned by witches who can transform themselves at night to accomplish both malevolent and benevolent deeds. Such women are considered to have power that equals that of the deities, and they may also have to be placated through sacrifice if found to cause a client's problems.

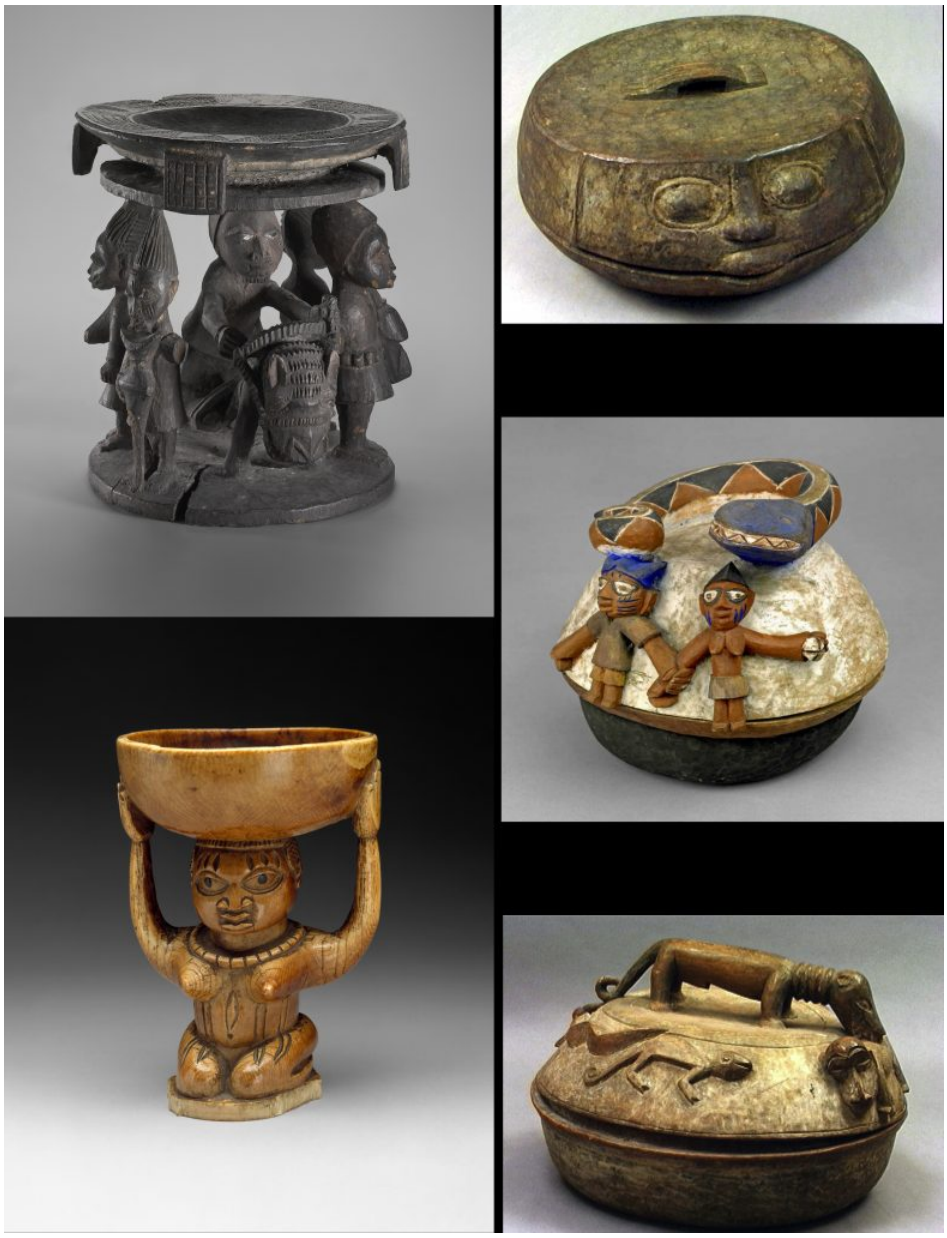


Figure 366. Clockwise from **top left**: *Agere* Ifa. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. H 8″. Yale University Art Gallery, 2006.51.536. Charles B. Benenson; B.A. 1933. Public domain. **Top right**: Ifa divination storage bowl. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria or Benin Republic. D 16.54″. Wereld Museum Rotterdam, RV-4637-1a/b. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Middle right**: divination storage bowl. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. D 10.3″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1959; 19.143.a, b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Lower right**: Ifa divination storage bowl. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. D 13.39. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-3615-3. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Lower left:** Ivory *agere* Ifa. Yoruba male artist, Owo region, Nigeria, 17th–19th century. H. 6 3/8″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.17.127. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls; 1991. Public domain.

Kneeling women also often beautify *agere* Ifa, often acting as caryatid figures for the containers that hold the sacred palm nuts (Figure 365). These bowls are not always supported, and their decoration can encompass any feature of daily life, as well as references to animals with proverbial or symbolic associations (Figure 366). *Agere* may portray weavers, birds, a copulating couple, or even the *babalawo* himself in the act of divination. As the most elevated of the *babalawo*'s implements, an *agere* commands visual attention, and may be commissioned by the diviner himself or be a gift from a grateful client.

The equestrian is a popular *agere* caryatid figure. When he wears a shirt or tunic, he represents the northern Yoruba warriors of bygone days, and is a symbol of power, victory, and dominance. Bare-chested, he represents the diviner himself, willing to travel

long distances in the pursuit of knowledge. He is the visual embodiment of one of the Ifa divination verses, in which Orunmila himself declares that diviners will ride horses.



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Figure 367. This diviner's necklace incorporates the colors associated with all the *orisha*. Some examples include flat beaded badge attachments. Male Yoruba artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection.



Figure 369. Diviner's beaded storage bag. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Textile; paper; leather; glass beads; 12″ x 11″ x 2″. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, AC1997.198.8. Gift of Diane R. Wedner and Ronald M. Ziskin. Public domain.



Figure 368. Ifa diviner's skirt. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century; Glass beads and cotton. 29 15/16″ x 85 3/16″. Princeton University Museum of Art, 1998-735. Bequest of John B. Elliott Class of 1951. Public domain.

A *babalawo* might also own a complex beaded necklace (Figure 367), beaded attire to wear at a festival occasion (Figure 368) and a beaded bag for equipment storage (Figure 369). These items often favor asymmetry and considerable abstraction, traits not

usually part of Yoruba sculptural arts. Those who have received royal recognition are more likely to own beaded accessories, since beaded attire (beyond a necklace or bracelet) are usually restricted to the monarch and those he favors. Yoruba rulers normally have a group of royal diviners who consult Orunmila regularly on their behalf.



Figure 370. Fa divination board. Fon male artist, Abomey, Benin Republic. 8.54″ x 14.45″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1936.21.43.



Figure 371. Wooden divination tappers. Fon, Benin Republic. 10.43″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1935.116.74.1-2.

Ifa divination systems and their close cognates can be found among many neighboring peoples, including the Nupe, Edo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Igbo, Igala, Fon, and Ewe. Most, however, employ the *opele* divination chain rather than art objects, or use a very simplified board with no or minimal decoration. The Fon of Benin Republic are an exception, but since many Fon objects seem to have been made by Yoruba artists, their pedigree is complicated (Figs. 370 and 371).

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3.7: Art and Death



Figure 372. Nigerian coffin. Detail of a single frame from the video "A Nigerian Funeral Service" by MUM080, 2013.

Most traditional African religions do not believe death is the end of being. The deceased will typically be reincarnated into his or her own family as a member of the same gender experienced when living, or, if all goes well, will become an ancestor. But what does becoming an ancestor mean? Not everyone is eligible, for one has to be an adult with children. Those who die in infancy or as youths, those who die childless–none will become ancestors, for the entryway to ancestorhood is through the proper rites performed by one's children at a funeral. Ancestors are tasked with ensuring their descendants behave according to long-established behavioral precepts. Breaking those regulations incurs ancestral wrath, which can be manifested individually through sickness, misfortune, infertility, or even death, or focused more broadly on a community through farm failures, droughts, or other disasters. Atonement through sacrifice can return life to equilibrium, and divination is usually the force that reveals the specifics of ancestors' anger and the solution for their forgiveness. Blessings are sought from ancestors as well, and they are invoked and praised when good things happen within the family. In societies that have ancestral altars, these are usually the focus of interaction; otherwise, known gravesites attract sacrifice or alcoholic libations (palm wine, gin or schnapps) may more generally be made to the earth, the site of burials.



Figure 373. Two wooden figures, the larger of which is just over 7 feet tal. Made by an Ngata male artist, they were photographed as early as 1893 in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, and are now in the Royal Museum for Central Africa–Tervuren. Photo in Charles François Alexandre Lemaire's *Voyage au Congo* (Brussels: Bulen, 1895, n.p). Public domain.

Coffins



Figure 375. A chicken, wood plane and fish coffin await pickup. Kofi Kwei branch workshop south of Kumase, Ga male artists, Ghana, 2017. Photo Kathy Curnow.



Figure 374. Coffin for an “important man.” Mongo male artist(s), Democratic Republic of Congo, 19th century. Photo by H. M. Whiteside. In Walter Hutchinson, *Customs of the World*, vol. 2. London: Hutchinson, 1926.

Most burials (which should not be confused with funerals) were hasty in the past, because bodies rapidly decay in the heat. This initial step used to be a relatively basic affair, except for monarchs or extremely powerful individuals. Burials can still be fairly simple in many cases, with the body wrapped in a shroud or mat. In pre-15th century Jenne, however, corpses were arranged in a fetal position within giant pots; in some parts of Central Africa, they were bundled into giant baskets. After preparation, all were interred, accompanied by prayer.

For the most part, the use of coffins for burials was introduced by Christian missions, and they generally follow a Western format–a wooden box with metallic trim (Figure 372). Some notable exceptions occur, however. Among the Ngata of northwestern Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as their Nkundu and Toba neighbors, important individuals once had large anthropomorphic coffins (Figure 373). These occurred in both male and female forms, and were hollowed at the back. The space for the corpse is fairly narrow, but apparently the body was desiccated before being placed within, so these coffins began with skeletal remains. Their coloration of red and white recalling the passage from life to death in the art of the Kongo, members of a fellow Bantu-language group. The practice had ceased by the 1940s.

Early in the 20th century, a nearby ethnic group, the Mongo of the Democratic Republic of Congo, also constructed coffins for their great men, though these were not figurative (Figure 374). The corpse was dried during the period it took for the coffin’s creation, then placed inside. This large wooden structure. said to have been made for a hunter, was patterned and ornamented with abstract allusions to animals, as well as sticks meant to represent spears.



Figure 376. A ballpoint pen may be the final resting place of a teacher or civil servant, while the house may represent the deceased's property, complete with rooftop water tank. Kane Kwei satellite workshop, just south of Kumase. Ga male artists, Ghana, 2017. Photo Kathy Curnow.

In the Ga region of Ghana, in Accra's suburbs, a new direction in coffin-making began in the mid-20th century. Seth Kane Kwei carved palanquins for chiefs; they were carried in them at festivals. In 1957, one client requested a palanquin in the shape of a cocoa pod–a whimsical departure from the standard cloth-covered wooden boxes. The palanquin was converted to a coffin when he died before taking possession of it, and Kane Kwei slowly turned his hand to other fancifully-shaped coffin models. By the time of his death in 1992, his products had become world-renowned, the subject of many photo essays and books. His former apprentice, Paa Joe, had established his own workshop, Kane Kwei's shop continued under the leadership of two of his sons in succession, and about eight other workshops also took up the mantle. Their coffins often reflect the deceased's profession (Figure 375), either literally or metaphorically–a huge fish for a fisherman, a hen for a mother , an onion for a farmer, a soft drink or beer bottle for a woman who sells cold drinks. Their use is very limited–almost all Ghanaian clients are also Ga people, although a branch of Kane Kwei's workshop is now on the main road just south of Kumase (Figure 376). Certain Christian sects ban their use within their churches, although exceptions are made for coffins in the shape of a Bible. The coffins are borne aloft by pallbearers in procession, a focal point for lavish funerals, and then are buried. Since the 1970s, some Westerners have purchased coffins for themselves or for museum displays; growing interest after considerable international publicity in the 1990s has led to Internet sales, as well as to tabletop models that require less space for shipping and display. Prices are high, but are on a sliding scale; Ga buyers who actually will use their coffins are charged less. The introduction of this new form and its subsequent growth mirror earlier practices on the continent–an artist introduces a new form or a substantial variation of an established form, gains clients, and imitators emerge.

Whether any given innovation will have a long lifespan with centuries of permutations is unknown at the time of its introduction; some new forms vanish within a generation.

Funerals



Figure 377. Obituary announcement in a major Nigerian newspaper, 2004. The deceased's all-night wake-keeping is a feature of many Christian funerals.



Figure 378. Obituary announcement on a billboard in Kumase, Ghana. Photo Kathy Curnow, 2017.

As occasions that can necessitate great expense, funerals do not always take place immediately after death. In the past, bodies might be buried quickly, but funerals could be delayed for months or years until the resources for the ceremony were gathered. With the advent of mortuaries, corpses can remain resident there until the family is prepared for public celebration. Funerals traditionally are held only for adults who have borne children; others are buried but not celebrated. For those who lived a full life and had many children, funerals can be a rollicking party, complete with musicians, dancing, food and drink, and, in some regions, masquerade involvement. The properly-conducted funerals that ensure ancestorhood also allow the deceased's property to be distributed according to traditional law; otherwise it may be locked up, ensuring rites are carried out.



Fig 379. Family members wear the same lace cloth in the funeral for Mrs. Faremi, a Yoruba lady from Oshogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. Photo SUPREME LACE, 2004. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Obituary announcements can occasion great expense. These are made not only by the immediate family members, but by business associates of the deceased or their spouse and can occur in the newspapers (Figure 377), as videos on television, or, as occurs in Ghana, on billboards (Figure 378). These not only accord respect to the deceased and their families, but are meant to publicize the funeral so that attendance (even by strangers) will be high and satisfaction with the occasion will spread, enhancing the family's reputation. Funerary celebrations can often last for several days, particularly if the deceased was a well-known individual.



Figure 380. This Asante leader wears a black-on-black stamped adinkra funerary cloth for the late Queen Mother's funeral rites. Single frame from CGTN Africa's "Ghana's Ashanti queen honouredwith elaborate four-day funeral," 2017.

Funerals can demand special attire. The Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin Republic, among other groups, often decide on a common cloth to be worn by family during a funeral (Figure 379), or by those belonging to a social club in attendance. This is an example of *aso ebi*, a group cloth or uniform that can be styled to the wearer's taste, a practice that extends to weddings as well. Among the Asante of Ghana, funerary cloths made from *adinkra*, a stamped textile, are worn in mourning colors of red, brown, and black (Figure 380), women often wearing a headband as well. In some other regions, the family and friends of the deceased may commission a commemorative cloth with the deceased's photo and birth and death dates (Figure 381).

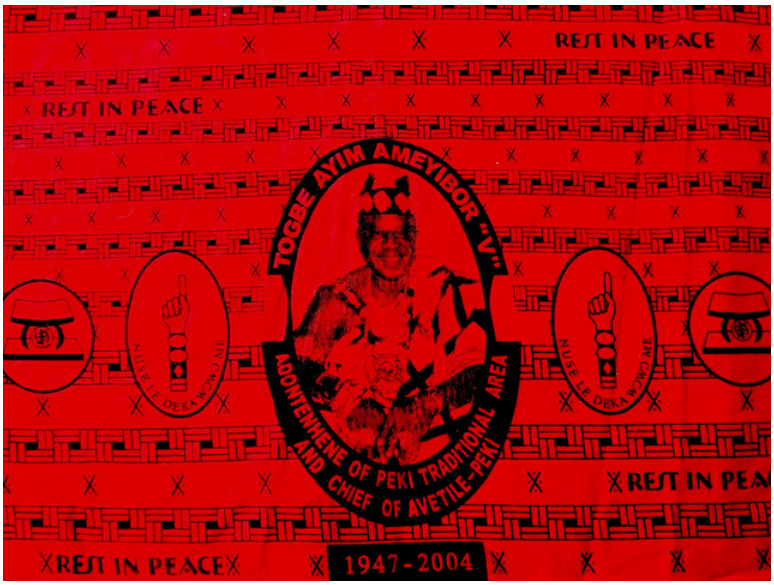


Figure 381. Detail of a men's shirt tailored from a 2004 printed commemorative cloth that honors an Ewe chief from eastern Ghana. The English phrase "Rest in Peace" is paired with the Ewe aphorism "*Nuse le dekawowo me*"–"Strength in Unity." Photo by Tommy Miles. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Cemeteries and Grave Sculptures



Figure 382. Cemetery on the outskirts of Kumase, Ghana; photos are on many headstones. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

In many parts of Africa, burials take or took place in the home, with distinguished family members often interred in their bedroom. In some places, such as southern Ghanaian cities, public health regulations now outlaw this practice, and cemeteries have become common (Figure 382), their contents ranging from simple graves to marble slabs with carving. The many British cemeteries along the coast influenced later sites, some of which were created by the British for their own citizens, others for the Ghanaian forces who fought in WWII and other European conflicts (Figure 383).



Figure 383. Christian headstone for a Ghanaian Signal corpsman who died in 1943 and was buried in Accra's WWII cemetery. Photo by Sweggs, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

In other regions, cemeteries sited outside the community have long existed, fixing the dead away from the living to avoid unsanctioned interference. In southwestern Niger, near the Burkina Faso border, numerous cemeteries were created from the 3rd-11th century CE. The largest one found so far is the so-called Bura-Asinda-Sikka necropolis,



Figure 384. **Left**: Terracotta grave marker, gender and ethnicity of artist unknown. Bura culture, Burkina Faso, 3rd-11th century. H 21″. © High Museum of Art, 2004.231. Anonymous gift. https://high.org/ **Right**: Terracotta human head broken from a full or partial figure. Artist's gender and ethnicity unknown, Bura, Niger, ca. 300–1200. H. 11.5″. Yale University Art Gallery, 2010.6.35. Gift of SusAnna and Joel B. Grae. Public domain.

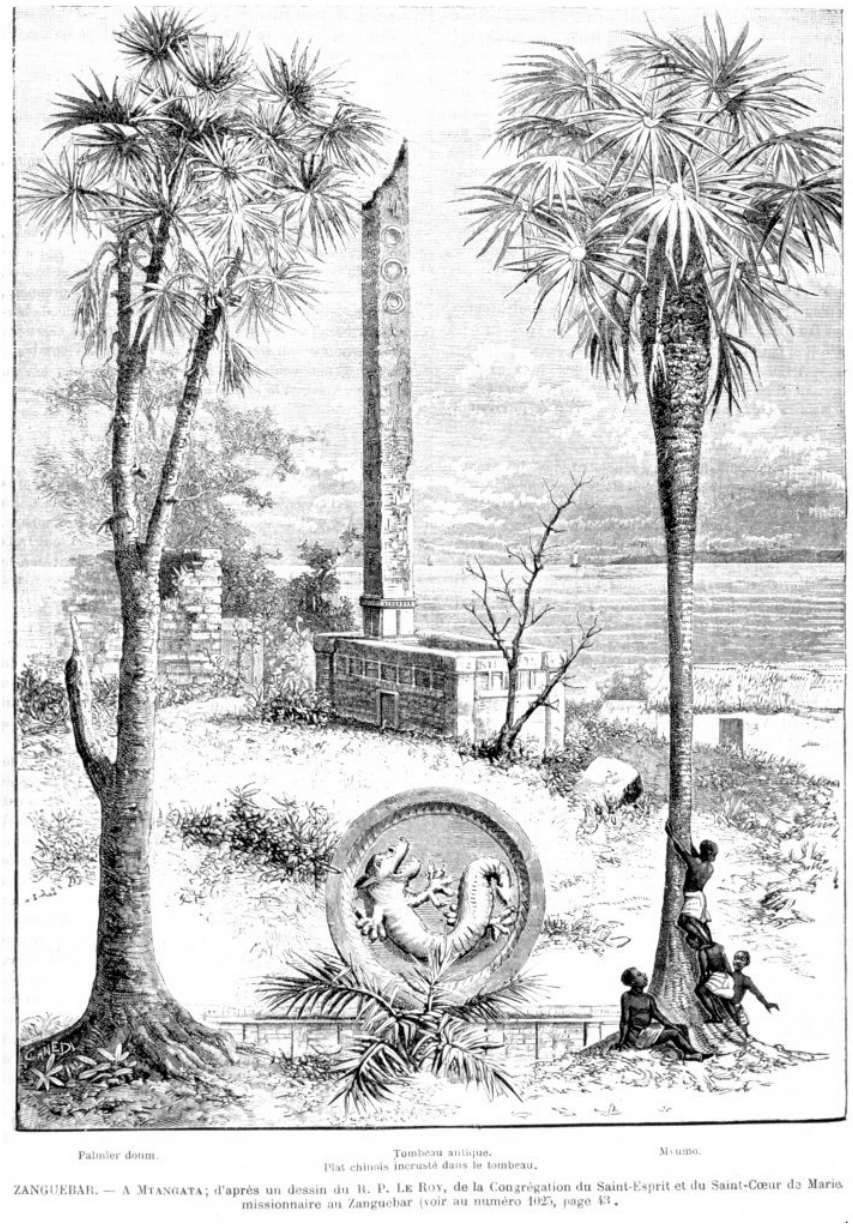


Figure 385. This Swahili pillar tomb included several Asian porcelains, some made of celadon with dragon reliefs. Swahili male construction, Mtangata, Tanzania, 14th-18th century. About 40 tombs were in the cemetery of this trading center that was abandoned in the 18th century. Image from the missionary R. P. Le Roy's article "De Zanzibar à Lamo. (suite)." *Les Missions Catholiques: Bulletin Hebdomadaire Illustré de l'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi* 21 (1027, 1889): 67.

which contains over 600 decorated graves within a circular area only a little over a half mile in diameter. These were decorated with tubular or hemispherical terracotta vessels, their surfaces often richly patterned, which were surmounted by human heads or figures, including equestrian images (Figure 384). The faces are abstract and flattened, taking either a rectangular or round form. The phallic vessels sometimes have navel-like protrusions. They were placed with their open side down, and included some grave goods. Excavations have yielded copper-alloy jewelry, beads, weapons, and pottery associated with the burials, the whole suggesting a society of considerable wealth, perhaps due to gold fields in the vicinity.



Figure 386. Several stone stelae with a broken example in the foreground. Aksumite men (proto-Tigraya?), Ethiopia, 3rd-4th century CE. Photo by Martijn Munneke, 2012. Creative Commons CC-BY2.0.

The Swahili of the East African coast have buried their dead in cemeteries for centuries, using rag coral to erect pillars (Figure 385) or domed tombs for important traders. These were plastered over, the plaster often then carved in geometric patterns. From at least the 13th century, these often had imported porcelain from China or Vietnam pressed into the surface, decorative additions that often spoke to the wealth of the interred and put him in competition with his neighboring traders. In wealthy Swahili homes, similar porcelain was placed in niches, acting not only as exotica, but meant to absorb the malevolence of evil spirits.



Figure 387. Entrance to a ruler's tomb chamber at the base of a stone stele. At Axum, Ethiopia, 3rd-4th century CE. Photo by Adam Jones, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 388. Extensive stone underground burial chamber for a ruler at Axum, Ethiopia, 3rd-4th century CE. At Axum, Ethiopia, 3rd-4th century CE. Photo by Adam Jones, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

A number of East African groups in Ethiopia and Kenya marked graves with both abstract and figurative structures. From the 2nd to the 4th century CE, stelae were erected over the burial places of important individuals as well as the rulers of Axum (also spelled Aksum) in present-day northern Ethiopia (Figure 386). This state was a regional trading power from about the first century BCE to the 8th century CE, with marine trade featuring ivory that reached into Byzantium, other parts of the eastern Mediterranean, and across the Red Sea; in the 4th century CE, the ruler became a Christian and Christianity was established as the state religion. Although the stelae are often referred to as "obelisks," they are not; Egyptian obelisks flanked temple entrances and were made in pairs, covered with hieroglyphics, and were topped by a pyramidal shape. Like the obelisks, however, the Axum stelae are monoliths, and have similar heights, ranging from only about three feet high to a soaring 97 feet–the taller ones marked royal tombs. While older examples exist, the large royal markers date from the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, and the carving on their surface replicates the exterior of elite stone buildings, such as

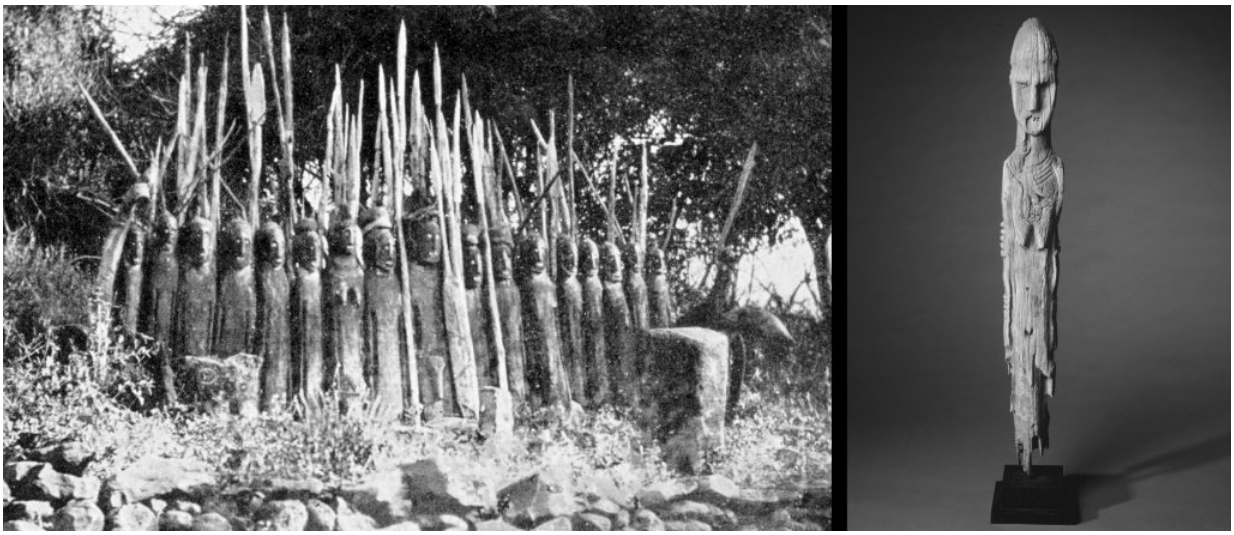


Figure 389. **Left**: A group of wooden figures surrounds the figure of the hero (in the middle) who is buried here. His spears become a veritable forest. Konso male artist, Ethiopia, 19th century. Photo in Arnold Hodson's article "Southern Abyssinia." *The Geographical Journal* 53 (2, 1919): facing p. 76. Public domain. **Right**: This wooden figure representing a hero's wife would have stood on his grave amidst other representations; her necklaces mark her high status. Konso male artist, Ethiopia, 19th century. H 39.25″. Brooklyn Museum, 1998.124.1. Gift of Serge and Jodie Becker-Patterson. Creative Commons CC-BY3.0.

the palaces, including imitations of wooden beams, doors, and windows. Their tops are curved, with nail holes indicating former attachments. Tomb entrances are at the foot of the stelae (fig. 387), but the tombs themselves are empty, having been stripped of valuables long ago (Figure 388). The use of stone for these tombs, like its use in Nubia to the north, speaks to a consciousness of history and a desire for permanence.

Stone is an uncommon building and sculptural material in most of sub-Saharan Africa. Some places further south in Ethiopia have short stone markers, but use wood for their main burial sculptures. The Konso of Ethiopia's southwestern highlands live in high, rock-terraced communities surrounded by multiple rock walls. Their culture stresses male egalitarianism, but within their forests they have created burial sites for societal heroes. These are marked by narrow figures (*wa'kka*) (Figure 389) of the commemorated individual surrounded by other carvings that represent their wives and the enemies they killed. Meant to be inspirational to their descendants, they are the pride of family members. The nude central figure (Figure 390) depicts the hero,



Figure 390. This more recent hero depiction wears a *kalacha* ornament on his forehead, as well as a series of graduated beaded necklaces. Konso male artist, Ethiopia, late 20th or 21st century. Public domain.



Figure 391. This metal forehead ornament, known as *kalacha*, rests on an ivory disk; some examples are attached to a ground white shell. Konso male artist, Ethiopia, 20th century. L 2.67″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1972,39.150.a. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

who was ceremonially recognized as such when alive. He wears a carved forehead ornament that imitates a metal phallic form (*kalacha*) worn by heroes, priests, and notables of other nearby people (Figure 391); these are said to have originated from the severed penises of enemies, stuffed and worn as more temporary trophies. Ostrich shells mark the eyes, while animal bones are used to create teeth. His masculinity is emphasized in multiple ways beyond the *kallasha*; his weapons are by his side, and statues of his wives flank him. Killed and castrated enemies are shown at the ends of the lined-up figures or in front of them, and an animal from one of the hero's successful hunts lays before him, as do pebbles that mark fields he owned. The family's respect is demonstrated by the *wa'kka*, but the town's recognition is marked by a cylindrical stone placed in front of the wooden row, which will outlast them. At the time of their erection, the statues are painted red with black eyebrows, but weathering wears away most of the color over time. Protestant missionization, begun in 1954, has greatly impacted the creation of new *wa'kka* and other customs, despite the fact

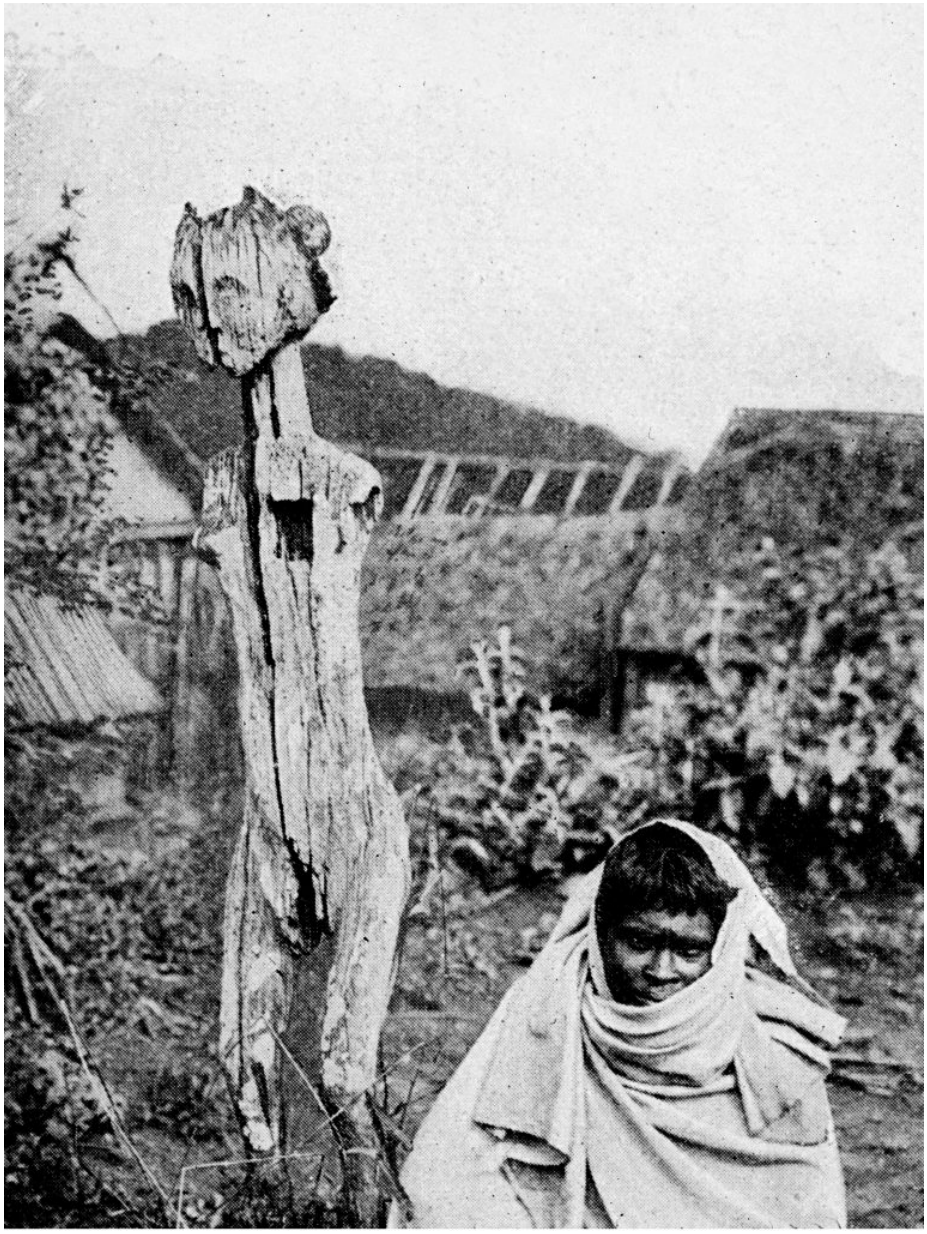


Figure 392. This wooden tomb sculpture's cracks and worn surface reflect its exposure to the elements. Male Sihanaka sculptor, Madagascar, 19th century. Photo in Marius-Ary Leblond's book, *La Grande île de Madagascar*, p, 198. Paris: Librairie Ch. Delagrave, 1907. Public domain.

that the graves do not conflict with Christian belief. The region, its landscape, generational transition stone stele markers, and the *wa'kka* themselves constitute one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

On the large island of Madagascar, numerous ethnic groups bury the dead in cemeteries that are marked with stone tombs or wooden sculptures. Some of the sculptures, such as figures by the Sihanaka (Figure 392). are extremely large. The tombs of the sea-oriented Vezo on the western



Figure 393. Wooden fencing surrounds these tombs which are decorated with human figures and abstract birds, the latter said to represent sea-going birds sacred to the Vezo people. Vezo or Sakalava male carvers, Morondava, Madagascar, 19th century. From an image in General Gallieni's "Voyage du Général Gallieni. Cinq mois autour de Madagascar." *Le Tour du Monde: Journal des Voyages et des Voyageurs*., n.s. 6 (liv. 11, 1900): 128. Public domain.

part of the island, as well as those of the Sakalava who are the region's larger population, are individually palisaded and kept away from settlements (Figure 393). Figurative grave markers are also known among the inland Bara.

The Mahafaly, who live in the southwestern part of Madagascar, have a tradition of cemeteries outside settlements, but their decoration has changed substantially over time. Early in the



Figure 394. These two *aloalo* grave posts represent the most typical finials: an ox/bull and a pair of birds. Relatively little substantive research has provided explanations for the geometric motifs. The Vezo/Sakalava also carve openwork graveposts, but their forms differ. Mahafaly male sculptors, Madagascar, 20th century Left: H 7.05′. Musée du Quai Branly, 75.15220.1. Right: H 7.12′. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1974.47.73.

20th century, highly-decorated graves were reserved for royals. Their burials were marked large stone plots, and groups of carved wooden posts (*aloalo*) often over seven

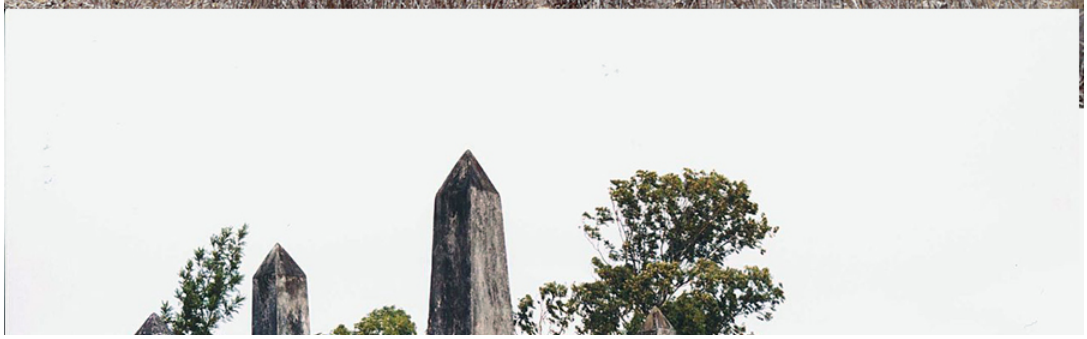


Figure 395. This *aloalo* grave post was made before 1974 and may represent a Peugeot from the 1950s. Mahafaly male sculptor, Madagascar, 20th century. H 6.86′. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1974.47.72.

feet high were inserted into them. On the platform's surface were the horns of zebu cattle, the humpbacked breed raised in the area; these were from the zebu slain for the funeral feast. Cattle numbering 1000 were destined for the burial of a ruler who died in 1912; his grave and the 40 *aloalo* that were erected required six months of preparation. As the century advanced, wealthy individuals were permitted burials made in the same vein. The *aloalo* are often about six feet tall. Their stems are usually flattened openwork forms carved in geometric shapes that stress crescents and circles, perhaps references to the moon. The finial section often takes a figurative form. Earlier examples mostly depicted cattle, the livelihood of the Mahafaly, or birds (Figure 394). Later posts include representations of the deceased performing a significant action that took place in his lifetime, or refer to noteworthy objects they encountered, such as an airplane or vehicle (Figure 395).







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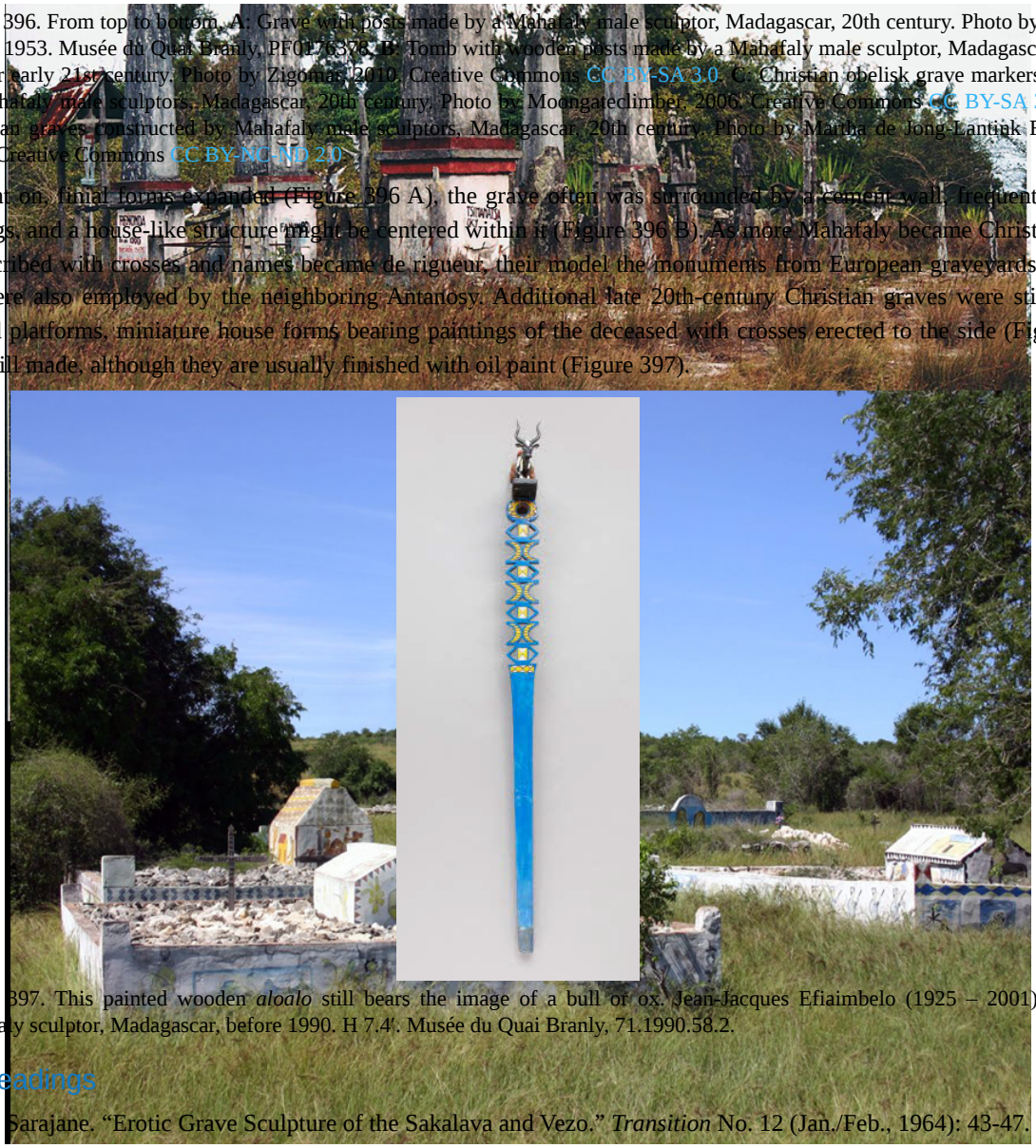


Figure 396. From top to bottom. **A**: Grave with posts made by a Mahafaly male sculptor, Madagascar, 20th century. Photo by Louis Molet, 1953. Musée du Quai Branly, PF0176378. **B**: Tomb with wooden posts made by a Mahafaly male sculptor, Madagascar, late 20th or early 21st century. Photo by Zigomar, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0. **C**: Christian obelisk grave markers made by Mahafaly male sculptors, Madagascar, 20th century. Photo by Moongateclimber, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0. **D**: Christian graves constructed by Mahafaly male sculptors, Madagascar, 20th century. Photo by Martha de Jong-Lantink Follow, 2004. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

As time went on, finial forms expanded (Figure 396 A), the grave often was surrounded by a cement wall, frequently decorated with paintings, and a house-like structure might be centered within it (Figure 396 B). As more Mahafaly became Christians, cement obelisks inscribed with crosses and names became de rigueur, their model the monuments from European graveyards (Figure 396 C); these were also employed by the neighboring Antanosy. Additional late 20th-century Christian graves were still created as stone-topped platforms, miniature house forms bearing paintings of the deceased with crosses erected to the side (Figure 396 D). *Aloalo* are still made, although they are usually finished with oil paint (Figure 397).

Figure 397. This painted wooden *aloalo* still bears the image of a bull or ox. Jean-Jacques Efiaimbelo (1925 – 2001). male Mahafaly sculptor, Madagascar, before 1990. H 7.4'. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1990.58.2.

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Effigies, Reliquaries, and Reliquary Guardians



Figure 398. This royal funerary effigy represented Oba Ovaramnwen during his 1914 funeral. Edo artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo in W. B. Rumann, "Funeral Ceremonies for the Late Ex-Oba of Benin." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 14, No. 53 (Oct., 1914): opp. p. 38. Public domain.

Aside from tombs, there are other objects associated with the dead, some of which begin with the funeral. As mentioned, in the past many funerals took place after burial, since resources needed to be mustered and mortuaries did not yet exist. Some societies employed effigies of the deceased to serve as a focal point for the funeral, since the corpse itself had already been interred.

The Edo from Benin Kingdom would take some hair and nail clippings from the deceased to prepare for a post-burial funeral. Typically, they would then take kaolin "chalk" and mix these with it, modeling a simple human form, piercing the effigy for a

woman, adding a penis for a man. At the funeral, the effigy would be “dressed” in cloth and placed on a draped bed for a lying-in-state. Prominent chiefs might have their effigy carved from wood and dressed in pure white cloth. These measures were taken only if the funeral were delayed; the ruler’s corpse, however, was never shown in state. Instead, the monarch’s effigy was prepared as a more carefully carved standing figure dressed with actual beads and cloth (Figure 398). It was accompanied by courtiers and protected by a parasol during the final day of the commemorative ceremonies.



Figure 399. Family funerary pot (*abusuakuruwa*). Asante male or female artist, Ghana, early 20th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1917,1103.11. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Most of the Akan peoples of southern Ghana and southeastern Côte d’Ivoire (including the Fante, Kwahu, some Asante and others) prepared terracotta pots (often with figurative elements) for funerals until the first half of the 20th century. These vessels–blackened or painted with red, white, and black stripes–held the hair from the family members’ shaved heads, evidence of mourning and cohesiveness; others held specially prepared foods to be shared with the deceased. The objects were left at the family’s “place of pots” (*asensie*) outside the community, not placed on the grave, with the following prayer:

> Here is food.
> Here are (hairs from) our heads.
> Accept them and go and keep them for us (Rattray, 1927: 165).

Simple shapes were used by ordinary people, while the elite often had pots with relief elements that referred to proverbs or symbolic animals (Figure 399). Frogs seem to have been a reference to the earth, the resting place of the deceased; pythons, whose colorful patterns are frequently associated with the rainbow, are alluded to in the proverb, “death’s rainbow encircles everyone’s neck.”



Figure 400. These memorial terracottas come in a variety of styles, dependent on region. All have the lined neck that signifies an attractive feature in the region. Left to right. **Upper Left**: Queen Mother funerary terracotta head. Akan female or male artist (Adansi or Asante), Ghana, 18th century. H 15″. Detroit Institute of Art, 2006.148. Museum purchase; Ernest and Rosemarie Kanzler Foundation Fund. Public domain. **Upper Middle**: Funerary royal terracotta portrait head. Akan female or male artist, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. H 12″. Brooklyn Museum, 72.49.4. Gift of David R. Markin. Creative Commons CC-BY 3.0 US. **Upper Right**: Royal funerary terracotta head. Akan female or male artist, Ghana, 16th–18th century. H 12″. Yale Art Gallery, 2010.6.166. Gift of SusAnna and Joel B. Grae. Public domain. Lower row, left to right. **Lower Left**: Royal terracotta funerary head. Akan female or male artist, Ghana, before 1931. H 6.69″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1931,1118.51. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Lower Middle**: Terracotta head originally attached to a body. Anyi female or male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 18th-19th century. 6 1/8″. Brooklyn Museum, 69.56. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Abbott A. Lippman. Creative Commons CC-BY 3.0 US. **Lower Right**: Royal funerary terracotta head. Asante female or male artist, Fomena, Ghana, 19th century. H 10.63″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1933; 1202.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 401. "Place of the pots" with both pots and terracotta figurative sculpture. Akan female or male artists from the Lagoons community of Assinie-Mafia, Côte d'Ivoire, 19th century or earlier. Public domain.

Akan royals formerly also used terracotta funerary effigies that date back to at least the 17th century, centering on those Akan groups south of the Asante. Both male and female artists constructed these heads (Figure 400)–the most common form, ranging from a few inches high to life-size–or full figures. These abstracted portraits often included clues to gender and position through hairstyle, but were not usually individualized facially, other than through facial scarification marks. While some had flattened disc-shaped heads akin to those of the *aku'aba* figures (see Chapter 3.3), others were more naturalistically modeled.

With Christianization, the practice has sharply diminished, but the royal terracotta heads and figures might be carried on palanquins, displayed on thrones at funerals, and wrapped with *kente* cloth. They were usually accompanied by terracottas representing spouses, servants, and other family members; these not only provided an entourage such as that which surrounded a living royal, but may have replaced sacrificed slaves and favored courtiers who, in centuries past, chose or were chosen to accompany the deceased to the afterworld. After completion of the ceremonies, these heads or figures also usually were taken to the *asensie* and left there (Figure 401). Many of these terracotta-filled spots since have been raided by those supplying art objects to collectors.



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pushed out of their homelands due to wars or other pressures. In Gabon, a number of ethnic groups are fairly recent



Figure 403. Two bark box reliquaries bearing wooden guardian figures. Fang male artist, southern Cameroon or northern Gabon, late 19th century. Photo by Hans Gehnen in Johannes Abel's "Das Südgebiet von der Monda-Bai bis zum Iwindo," plate 5, fig. 20. This is the third part of Chapter Two of H. Marquardsen's *Die Grenzgebiete Kameruns im Süden und Osten. Mitteilungen aus den* deutschen *Schutzgebieten. Ergänzungsheft*, No. 9a. Berlin: Ernst Sigfried Mittler und Sohn, 1914.

arrivals, having moved into their present territories in the 19th century from original settlements in Chad and the Central African Republic. When faced with migration, they created an ingenious solution–they disinterred the skulls and other bones of important ancestors and transported them to their new home, placing them in basketry, bark, or cloth containers watched over by a wooden or metal figure (Figure 402). These reliquaries–the same word is used for medieval European containers that housed saints' bones–thus are considered to have a guardian, for the figure does not represent the deceased. Missionaries and the French colonial government pressured the peoples involved to abandon the practice in the first decades of the 20th century. Although this is no longer a living tradition, the relevant art forms indeed live on–they are among some of the most faked objects in Africa, due to their appeal to collectors.

The Fang, who live in southern Cameroon and parts of Equatorial Guinea, as well as Gabon, honored both male and female ancestors with bark box reliquaries (*byeri*) topped either by heads in the center of their lids or by male or female figures perched on the lids' edges (Figure 403). Both had spike-like extensions that were inserted to keep them stable, but some of these were removed in Europe, for the container itself–the vital part of the ensemble



Figure 404. Multiple guardian figures guard this reliquary, an uncommon though not unique occurrence, as is its unblackened surface. The male figure facing front still retains his feathered headdress and jewelry, usually stripped by early European collectors. Fang-Ngumba male artist, southern Cameroon, 19th. century. Collected by Georg Zenker, 19th century. H 44.09″. Photo by Jürgen Liepe. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 6689 a-c. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.



Figure 405. Seated reliquary guardian. Fang male artist, southern Cameroon or Gabon, 19th or early 20th century. H 18.25″. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 83.101.

for the Fang–was usually discarded by collectors, as were feathered headdresses and jewelry (Figure 404). The figures are bulbously muscular, with thick necks, rounded limbs, and short legs (Figure 405). Their abstract faces frequently



Figure 406. Reliquary head. Fang male artist, Gabon, 19th or early 20th century. H 12.4″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1942.1.3. Gift of Mme. Bluyssen.

including a heart-shaped depression, the mouth either a simple line on its lower edge or opened to show bared teeth (Figure 406). The eyes were marked by brass disks that were originally kept polished. The ensembles were kept in dark areas of lineage leaders' quarters and were sacrosanct–their gleaming eyes served as warnings to women and children to stay away. During initiation, newly-circumcised boys saw the exposed bones for the first time and watched a kind of puppet mime acted out by elders with the sculptures that had been temporarily removed from their sockets. Their curiosity about the forbidden once led new initiates or children told about the custom to create their own imitation *byeri* filled with monkey skulls, meant to bring luck. Actual ancestral reliquaries were a way of contacting these deceased family members and asking for their protection and blessings, consulting them on questions of importance, and discovering the causes of current problems.



Figure 407. Reliquary guardian figure made from wood covered with sheet metal and flattened metal wire. Kota male artist, Gabon or Congo-Brazzaville, before 1919. Photo by Ferenc Schwetz. Collected by the missionary Gustaf Arvid Jacobsson. Stockholm Världskulturmuseet, 1919.03.0005. Creative Commons CC BY2.5.

Offerings were periodically made to the ancestors, their bones repainted red, with palm or resinous oil applied to wooden figures and heads that had originally been blackened with charcoal, oil from the seed of the tree *Ongokea gor,* and copal resin. Some of these sculptures appear to sweat, their surface having a sticky appearance.



Figure 408. One side of a Janus-faced reliquary guardian, made from wood with brass and copper sheet metal added. Kota male artist, Gabon, 19th century. H 28.54″. Formerly in the collection of Paul Guillaume. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1941.13.1.

Other groups from Gabon similarly protected their reliquaries with even more abstract figures. Although these were first made from wood, their bodies were armored with flattened brass and copper wire and sheet metal, expensive and sheet metal, expensive materials that honored the ancestors. The examples made by the Kota people are among the best-known of these works (Figure 407). These pieces (*mbulu ngulu*) were made with both convex and concave faces (apparently by artists operating in the same region) and some were Janus-faced. Both abstract and more naturalistic figures were created (Figure 408). The neck connected to a lozenge shape which was partially hidden when inserted into the relic basket; the upper part of the lozenge may have represented shoulders while the basket acted as “body.”

These ancestral reliquaries were stored in a communal shrine outside the community, meant to be accessed only by male initiates (Figs. 409 and 410).

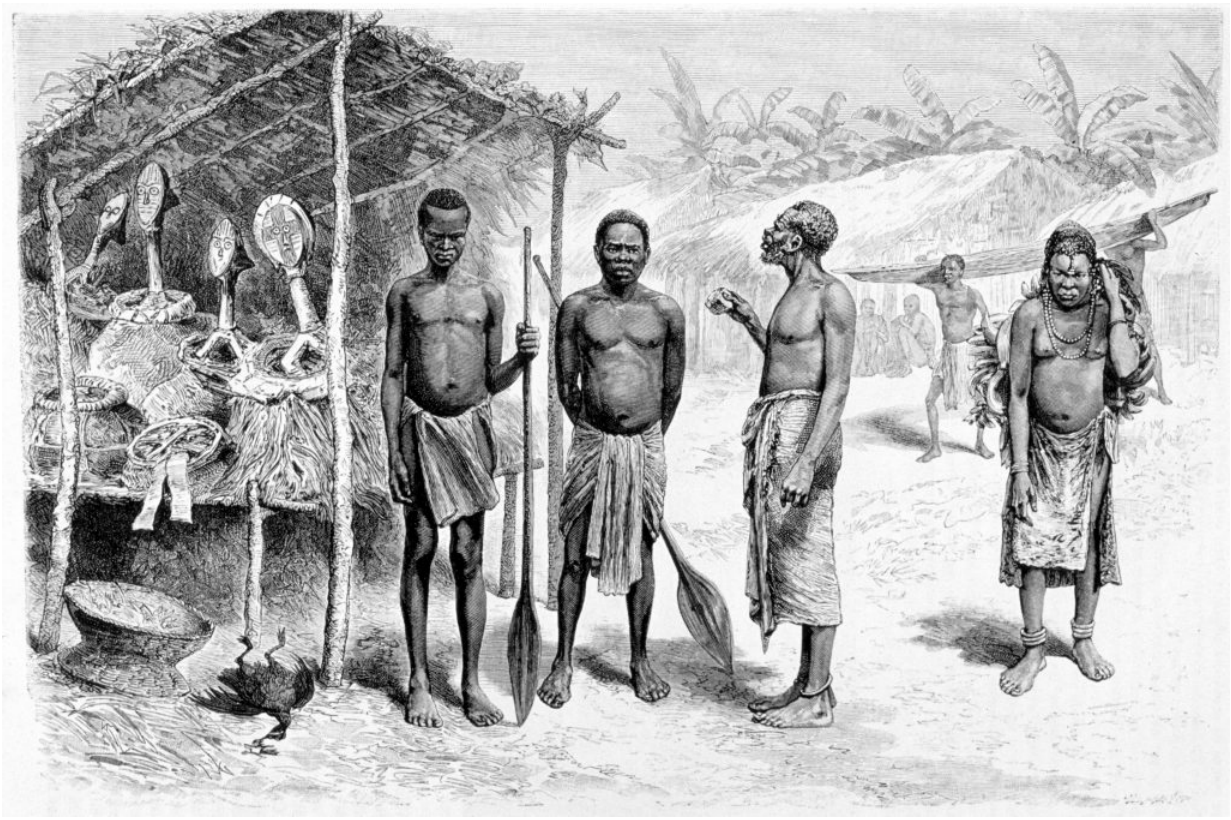


Figure 409. Reliquaries shown at the time of an offering and consultation. Kota male artists, Gabon, 19th century. Drawing by Riou based on documents of Jacques de Brazza. In Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza and Edouard Charton, ed. “Voyages dans l’Ouest Africain.” *Le Tour du Monde: Nouveau journal des voyages* 54 (No. 1402, 1887): 329. Public domain.

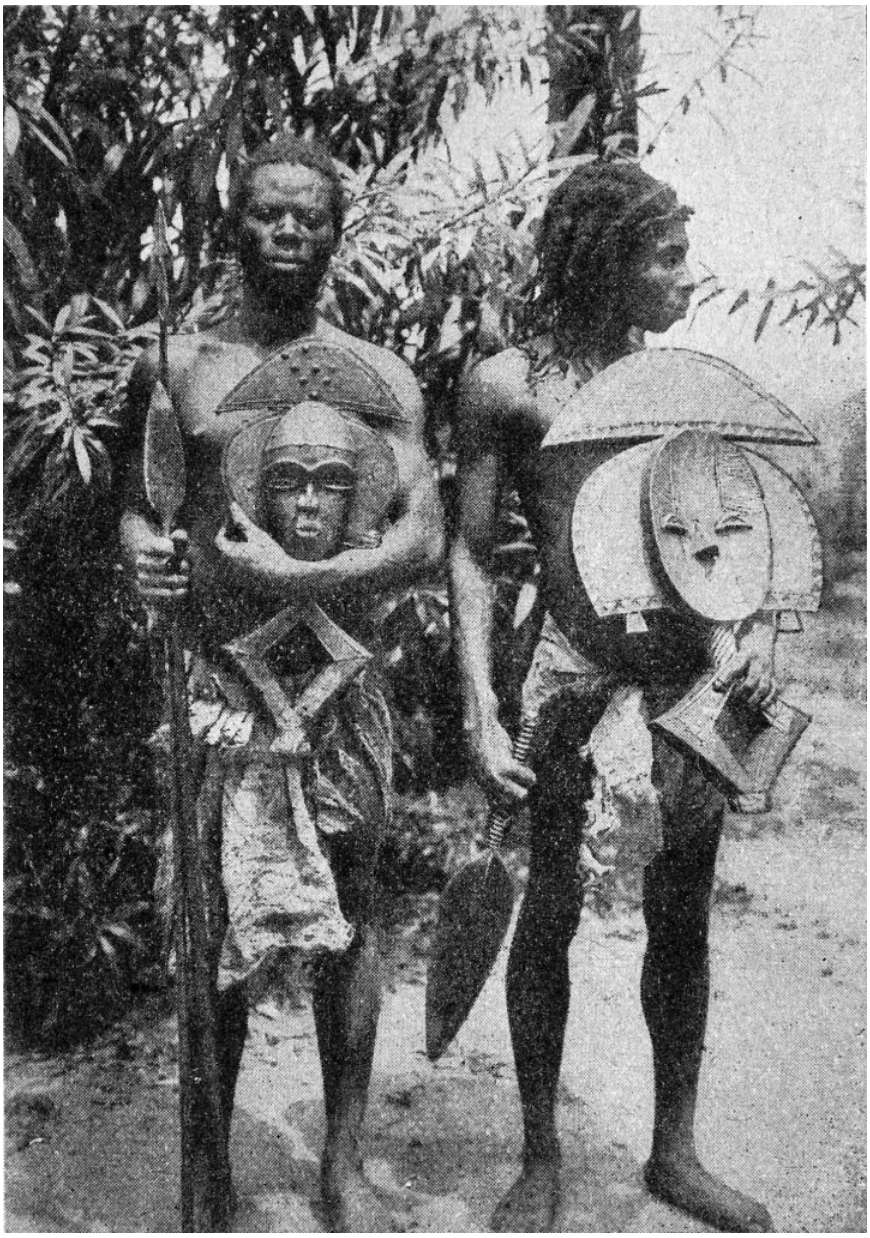


Figure 410. Reliquary guardians removed from their baskets and carried. Kota male artists, Gabon, 19th or early 20th century. Photo by G. Jacobsson. “På undersökningsresa.” *Missionsförbundet / Illustrerad Tidning för Svenska Missionsförbundets* 36 (No. 9, May 1, 1918): 137. Public domain.

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Demanding Twins of the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin Republic



Figure 411. Male *ere ibeji*. Yoruba male artist, Oyo, Nigeria, late 19th or 20th century. H 11.42″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-259-13. From the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 412. Female *ibeji* figure with rounded stomach. Yoruba male artist, Igbomina region, Nigeria, 20th century. H 95/8″. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 83.1.4. Gift of Dr. Jeffrey S. and Deborah Hammer.

Twins strain their mother's biological system, and are usually born prematurely, placing their own survival at risk. While Western hospitals and incubators have vastly improved their odds of successfully evading infant death, that jeopardy remained strong throughout much of the 20th century. This was a particular problem for the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and the Benin Republic, for not only do they have the

highest fraternal twinning rate in the world, their value for twins extends beyond affection to the supernatural blessings and maledictions twins are able to exert. In many parts of West Africa, twins are valued and considered to have a spiritual dimension unshared by other children. The Yoruba associate them with the ability to bring wealth and other blessings to the family if they are satisfied, and to visit misfortune upon family members if they are not. For living twins, this often means twins receive little treats to keep them content, and are cajoled more than their siblings when upset. However, efforts to keep twins happy are not restricted to living twins, for their powers do not diminish in the afterlife. If Taiwo (the first-born, but considered the junior child, sent by its twin to test the world's sweetness) and/or Kehinde (the second, but senior, twin) die, their mother will seek a diviner's advice as to what steps she should take next (see Chapter 3.6). This often led to the prescription of a carved



Figure 413. This well-loved male *ibeji* figure's facial features were worn away by care in washing his face and rugging it. Traces of laundry blueing color his conical hairstyle. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, first quarter 20th century. H 11.5″. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2015.62.3. Gift of Raymond A. and Ruth A. Reister. Public domain.

wooden statue (*ere ibeji*) to stand in for the deceased twin or twins (Figure 411).



Figure 414. Male ibeji figure wearing an Islamic protective charm at the neck. Yoruba male artist, Oyo, Nigeria, first half 20th century. H 10″. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 83.1.1. Gift of Dr. Jeffrey S. and Deborah Hammer.

If one twin lives and wears metal or beaded ornaments that link it to the family deity, its twin's figure bears these adornments as well. If the mother feeds the living baby, she lightly smears food on the lips of the *ibeji* figure. When she bathes the living twin, she bathes the statue, and afterward applying oil to both. In the past, red camwood powder was applied to keep babies dry, and many *ibeji* figures show its presence in unhandled crevices (Figure 412). When the baby is put to bed, the figure is placed in a horizontal position. When the mother backs the living twin, the figure is tucked into the front of the carrier cloth. Constant handling may erode the carvings' crisp details; well-loved twin figures begin to lose their facial features (Figure 413).

Ibeji figures constitute the largest body of Yoruba art. While not as common as they once were, they are still made and used, especially in rural areas. Non-traditional religions have gradually altered *ibeji* practices; Muslim Yoruba used to freely have *ibeji* carved, the figures including triangular Islamic amulets at the neck (Figure 414). Today, in cities where Islam or Christianity



Figure 415. Female *ibeji* figure with close-cropped hair. Yoruba male artist, Benin Republic, 20th century. H 11.02″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1960.109.3.

dominate social life, traditional objects are sometimes seen as countrified. Some mothers now substitute plastic dolls for carved wood, or have a living twin photographed and duplicated in a single print so that some surreptitious care can still take place.



Figure 416. *Ibeji* male figure with tall cap colored by laundry blueing. Ogunwuyi of Ore compound, Oke Ede quarter of Ila Orangun, Igbomina Yoruba region, Nigeria, 20th century. H 11 5/8″ tall. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 83.1.2. Gift of Jeffrey S. and Deborah Hammer.

These practices continue as long as the deceased twin or twins deem it necessary; they communicate their wishes through the diviner and may be satisfied within a few years of care–or continue to insist on

loving treatment even after the mother dies, passing the obligation to another family member. Once twins accept an honorable retirement, their depictions may be kept at home or taken to a shrine for the deity Shango, the father of twins (see Chapter 4.1).

Ibeji figures are fairly small and depict standing figures on a base, their arms at their sides (Figs. 415). Frontal, the head dominates their proportions, which is stylistically consistent with other Yoruba art. Similarly, the eyes are large within the face, the pupil sometimes marked with a nail or drilled hole. The lips normally are carved as two rectangles or curving rectangles that do not meet at the corner. Facial marks of the specific community are clearly marked on the cheeks, and the hair–often



Figure 417. Male ibeji figure with carved loincloth. Yoruba, Abeokuta, Nigeria, 20th century. H 9.84″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1969,20.2. Donated by Mrs. G. Lloyd-Davis. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 418. Male *ibeji* figure. Yoruba male artist, Oyo, Nigeria, 20th century. H 13.39″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-77-13 . From Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 419. Royal twin with indigo-stained hair dressed in a beaded garment. Yoruba, Nigeria, 20th century. H 12.99″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal AM-472-10. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

dressed in a high conical form that alludes to the inner head, site of destiny, is darkened with indigo or the brighter blue of imported laundry blueing (Figure 416). An occasional figure will wear a carved loincloth (Figure 417), but normally *ibeji* are depicted nude, although they sometimes are covered with actual cloth. Their nudity clearly shows that these are adult figures: the male has fully formed genitals, the female has breasts. Yet *ibeji* are never carved for adult twins who die–they are made strictly for infants or small children. Their adult appearance is an inverted example of ephebism–the child is shown as a full adult, an exercise in idealism, represented as the adults they never became.

Honoring *ibeji* with garments pleases them because it enhances their status. Tunics with rows of sewn-on cowrie shells (Figure 418), the old currency, are a sign of wealth. Some twins wear beaded garments and caps (Figure 419), a sign they are royal family members, for only the monarch and those he favors can wear beaded attire.

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Funerary Masquerades and Ancestors of the Dogon of Mali

Masquerades are essential to the funerary rites of some of the Dogon of Mali–eligible adult men. The Dogon live in small communities where all residents know each other and death impacts everyone in a personal, interconnected way. Death produces amorphous, dangerous energy that can



Figure 420. This Tellem structure is close to the cliff face, while corpses were deposited further into the cave's interior. Bandiagara Escarpment of Mali. Photo Geri Follow, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

harm the living and their crops. Bodies are not buried within the community, but wrapped in a blanket and transported to ancient caves in the cliff face of the steep Bandiagara Escarpment. These caves were earlier

used by the Tellem, "little people" who lived in the region from the 11th-16th centuries, their presence



Figure 421. Mortuary blankets hang from the roof of a deceased Dogon man from the Malian village of Temde in 2014. Masqueraders perform below, their forms and coloration differing from those in some of the more-photographed Dogon villages. The mask at left, for example, has a *kanaga*-style form, but it topped with two figures and painted in spots, features atypical of other areas. Single frame from Huib Blom's video "Dogon country: funeral at Temde2014 bySerou Dolo."

overlapping with the arrival of the migrating Dogon for about a century. The Tellem apparently lived at the foot of the escarpment, but stored their grain up on the cliff face. They used old granaries (Figure 420) or the caves as a depository for cloth-wrapped

corpses and their personal goods such as headdrests, clothing, tools, and kitchen goods, as well as ritual pottery, sealing these off afterward. Centuries of use in some caves yielded skeletal remains of up to 3000 people. The Dogon similarly use the caves for their unburied dead, hoisting them with ropes up the nearly vertical cliff.



Figure 422. Pieces of a now broken Great Mask, carved by a Dogon male artist from the Sanga region. It had entered France by 1931, its original length nearly 33.5′ long, with a weight of nearly 84 pounds. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1931.74.2002. Misson Dakar-Djibouti.

Not all Dogon avail themselves of traditional funerary rites, for many converted to Christianity or Islam in the later decades of the 20th century, and follow the burial traditions of those faiths. For those men who still celebrate a traditional path, however, the actual death is not marked with great ceremony, except for particularly venerable people (Figure 421). In decades past, the huge Great Mask (Figure 422)–carried but never worn–was removed from its hiding niche in the cliff and leaned against the house of the deceased. A performer then danced with it, holding it in his hands. This practice, however, seems to be defunct in most villages. The Great Mask itself represents a mystical snake; once, the Dogon say, humans did not die, but transformed into snakes when they reached an advanced age. One elder was interrupted during the process, however, and, startled, spoke–a forbidden act during transformation. Thus death came to the Dogon. The Great Mask (and, subsequently, all other masks) commemorated the event and acted as a sort of lightning rod to gather any negative energy surrounding death, taking it away from the community. The Great Mask also provided a sense of historicity; a new one is carved every 60



Figure 423. This *sirige* mask was carved by a Dogon male artist from Sanga village before 1930. It is just over 17′ high. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1930.31.21. Mission Henri Labouret.

years when the *sigi* festival takes place, marking a change of generations. Old and new Great Masks are kept in a cliffside sanctuary.

Even when the Great Mask remains in its sanctuary, the funerals of notables are marked. The blanket that transported their body to the cliffs is placed near a broken calabash and the deceased's personal implements, becoming the focal point of a one-day ceremony that brings masked performers into the village. Few individuals enjoy this immediate ceremony. Most deaths share a joint funeral called *dama*, which is only held every few years for about six days–a collective practice that differentiates Dogon traditional funerals from those of most African groups. The *dama* celebrates all those who have died since the last *dama* took place, and shares thus sharing expenses among several families. It is meant to escort the spirits of the dead from the village–partially accomplished through mock battles and rifle fire that suggest the spirits are not eager for the transition. Masqueraders are instrumental in this process, for they accompany the spirits to the other world, dancing on the roofs of those who have lost a relative–mortuary cloths are hung from those roofs–then moving into the village plaza and eventually dancing out of the community's sight with their invisible companions, now translated into full ancestors.

Perhaps only men are honored by masqueraders because all circumcised, initiated men typically belonged to the *awa* masquerade society that existed in each village. The *awa* owns and performs the masquerades. The types any village owns vary, but certain popular ones consistently appear out of the 78 different masquerade types that were recorded in the 1930s. Some are non-objective, while others have human or animal appearances. The number that appear at any given *dama* vary according to the importance of those who have died, the degree to which Islam or Christianity have displaced traditional religion, and the relative wealth of the inhabitants. Women, concerned with becoming barren, watch the male *dama* from rooftops or promontories at a safe distance. There are *dama* for deceased females as well, but they occur without masquerades.

One tall, plank-like mask called *sirige* (Figure 423)–which is made from one piece of wood–only appears at the immediate funeral and *dama* celebrating a man who participated in the *sigi* rite, an event involving the *awa* society that only occurs every 60 years. It is the tallest of the masks, made from one tree, and dancing with it requires great dexterity and strength, since the performer touches its tip to the ground in a gesture of respect to the deceased, then must right it again, making circular movements. Although it is attached to the back of his head, he also bites down on a stick within the mask to aid control. *Sirige*'s meaning varies



Figure 424. This wooden *kanaga* mask, carved by a male Dogon sculptor from Mali, dates from the 1920s. H 34″. Detroit Institute of Art, 2003.202. Gift of Catherine Carter Blackwell. Public domain.

according to the Western scholars who researched it–or according to the Dogon villagers who interpreted it for them. For the French school of scholars, who depended on a specific Dogon man from the Sanga region for most of their information, the mask's stacked layers represent multitudes of stars–of galaxies–*ad infinitum*, as well as journeys between the heavens and earth. At the same time, the same individual stated the repeated divisions represent the multi-storied *ginna* houses that mark each lineage, and some scholar's interpretations are more likely to limit its meaning to a lineage's many generations. Structurally it bears some resemblance to the Great Mask, as well as to masks worn by some of the Mossi of Burkina Faso, who belong to the same Gur language group, and may share a common (if distant) origin.

The most numerous mask type at a typical *dama* is that of the *kanaga* (Figure 424), whose performers dramatically sweep their headpiece against the ground as they dance in unison. It is atypical of most African masks in that it is made from more than one piece of wood. While the face covering and vertical strip constitute a single carving, the crossbars are carved separately and attached, as are their short "arms" and "legs", which are sewn onto the main structure. At least in the well-studied Sanga region, these are typically painted black and white. While the mask's superstructure resembles the abstract arrangement of lizard or crocodile legs common in West African depictions, French researchers were first told it represented a black and white bird, then

that it represented the Supreme Deity Amma, the upper bar simultaneously his arms and an allusion to the sky, while the lower bar dually was the earth and Amma's legs. Each Dogon mask has a myth of origin and similarly probably has several interpretations, based on the levels of knowledge that are developed from entry into the masquerade society to elderhood within it. Variations in meaning and execution from one village or region to another are also probable.

Some young Dogon men who belong to the *awa* society dress in costumes and masks that transform them into the nomadic Fulani women that traverse the region with their cattle and family. Others wear masks that represent other human characters, such as hunters, members of additional ethnic groups and more. One of the most significant is the mask called *satimbe*, which bears a female figure as its superstructure (see Figure 425) and is the only wooden mask that includes a female depiction. She represents both a particular woman from the distant past and a set of contemporary women born during the *sigi* celebration who are distinguished by being called the "sisters of the mask". They are the only women to red fiber costumes in post-death preparations, have masks danced at their brief funeral, and later have masqueraders appear at their *dama*. The commemorated woman on the mask, Yasagine, was the first Dogon woman to see masking, then performed by another ethnic group. She stole the secret of masquerading from them, and created red fiber costumes for herself and fellow women performers, but was later tricked out of the secret by the males of her community. Her representations range from older, very geometric works to more naturalistic versions.









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Figure 425. These four *satimbe* masks, all made by Dogon male artists in Mali, show a stylistic range that includes both fairly naturalistic and geometric representations of a singular woman. **Upper left**: Mask from Sanga region. Photo by BluesyPete — Travail personnel, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0 . **Upper right**: Sanga, before 1931. H 54.33″. Musee du Quai Branly, 71.1931.74.1948. Mission Dakar-Djibouti. **Lower Right:** Late 19th or early 20th century. H 44″. Brooklyn Museum, 77.246.1. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Milton F. Rosenthal. Creative Commons-BY.**Lower left**: Sanga region. H 44.49″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1935.60.369. Mission Marcel Griaule.

Animal masks abound: hares (Figure 426), antelopes (Figure 427), monkeys of various types, birds, lions, hyenas, baboons, and more. Most have similar sections that cover the dancer's face, geometric constructions with deep channels marking the eye sockets, the eyes themselves carved through as rectangles or triangles. Like most Dogon maskers, the performers wear fiber skirts and attachments, the sides and backs of their heads concealed by a striped fabric hood. Animal mask origin myths refer to the ways hunters tried to placate the spirits of the animals they had killed, and the dancers often mime their movements and attempts to escape. The *walu* antelope dancer lowers his horns and charges other maskers, then limps and falls as if shot, while the hare performers hide from the hunter and collapse at the end of their performance. At the same, French researchers suggest, these animals are part of the cosmic mythology relating to creation's beginnings, the antelope tasked with guarding the sun's path, while the hare was one of three animals (each symbolizing the peoples of three geographic subregions with ritual alliances) who ate an early impure grain harvest.



Figure 427. This *walu* mask depicts an antelope, and was carved by a Dogon male artist before 1931, and was used by Dogon dancers performing at the 1935 Paris colonial exposition. H. 22.05″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1931.49.26. Gift of Georges Henri Rivière.



Figure 426. This *dyommo* mask represents a hare, and was carved by a Dogon male artist. A tiny hare's head atop the face portion makes the ears shift so they become enormous. It was worn during the 1935 Paris colonial exposition. H 21.26″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1931.49.28. Gift of Georges Henri Rivière.

Dama performed in the 1930s varied in number from 74 to several hundred masqueraders per

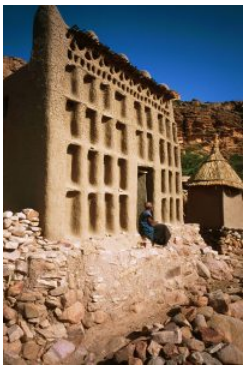


Figure 428. This *ginna*, or lineage head's house, is marked by distinctive niches on its facade. Not all *ginna*, however, have this architectural trait. Photo by John Spooner, 2002. Creative Commons CC BY2.0.

village, but numbers had decreased by the 1980s, where villages might have four to seven masked dancers. Some communities, such as the Muslim community of Songo, last held a *dama* in the late 1950s. Those masquerade appearances persisting today, however, do not occur wholly as periodic efforts to send the deceased to an ancestral afterlife. Limited but growing adventure tourism has brought outsiders into the previously remote Dogon regions, and abbreviated *dama*-like displays are now paid theatrical performances, with a significant number of dancers in fresh costumes providing photo opportunities.

Once a non-theatrical *dama* transforms the dead into ancestors, they join their predecessors to receive sacrifices at altars in the *ginna*, the home of the lineage head (Figure 428). There they are represented by a pot, and sacrificed to in the hope that they will assist their living descendants, particularly to ensure a good harvest. Figurative sculpture can also be kept at these altars.



A Vimeo element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=514

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Figure 429. A group of *egungun* in Imota, a town in Lagos State. Yoruba male tailors, Nigeria, 2005. Photo by Roger Blench.



Figure 430. *Egungun* covered with empowering medicines. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, 2016. Single frame from Ojopagogo TV's "Egungun Festival," 2016.

If the Dogon have masquerades performed to escort the ancestors to the other world, Yoruba *egungun* masquerades bring the ancestors back to this world.

Young men of a lineage don costumes and allow the ancestors to take them over, incarnating them in a concrete form so they can dance with their families, listen to their pleas, and offer their blessings. Family *egungun* appear at family funerals, but the *egungun* from the entire town participate in an annual festival, an opportunity to show family solidarity and compete with a show of splendor, expensive cloth, and vigorous dancing. They also appear when an important visitor comes to town, or for community project launchings.

Although the Yoruba, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, have many masquerade varieties, *egungun* is the only universal type–it can be found throughout Yorubaland, albeit in differing visual guises (Figure 429). Nonetheless, its origin is agreed to have been the kingdom of Oyo, to the north of Yoruba territory, There the 19th-century Yoruba historian and missionary Samuel Johnson, himself from Oyo, stated the tradition had been adopted from the Nupe, their neighbors to the north. While the Nupe have cloth masquerades, they do not represent ancestors. Rather, they are witchfinders, as the most important of the royal *egungun* in Oyo still are. Witchfinding *egungun* lack the luxury ingredients and colorful juxtapositions of other masqueraders; instead, they tend to be loaded with medicine (Figure 430) and speak to power rather than aesthetics.



Figure 431. Giant “snake” performance, like that viewed by Clapperton. Yoruba male tailor, Isara Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, 2015. Single frame from KennyJoker TV’s “Masqurade [sic] (egungun) Dance Part 2- Afotamodi Day ISAA 2015.”

At some point, ancestral incarnations became the focus of the performance and the masquerade spread to other kingdoms through war, trade, or the desire to emulate Oyo’s power and wealth. While we don’t know when this happened, British traveler Hugh Clapperton visited Oyo nearly 200 years ago in 1826 and saw a performance for the monarch that involved a multitude of ancestral *egungun*, “dressed in large sacks,



Figure 432. Male dancer with sewn cloth face performing as a female. Yoruba male tailor, Isara Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria, 2015. Single frame from KennyJoker TV’s “Masqurade [sic] (egungun) Dance Part 2- Afotamodi Day ISAA 2015.”

covering every part of the body; the head most fantastically decorated with strips of rags, damask silk, and cotton, of as many glaring colours as it was possible.” He stressed the acrobatic nature of the dancing, and also observed a second aspect of the masquerade: the appearance of non-ancestral costumed entertainers known as *idan egungun*, or miracles. These side attractions are meant to both entertain spectators and impress them with the power of the ancestors. Clapperton viewed performers occupying a giant snake, having mysteriously exited other costumes; he also viewed the performance of a European, who mimed taking snuff and walked around the performance area gingerly. *Idanegungun* today still include the snake (Figure 431), as well as a variety of other performances, including dancing mats, Europeans kissing, dancers dressed as women (Figure 432), or caricatures of non-Yoruba.



Figure 433. This triple-headed *egungun* masquerade is an unusual example; its significance is unknown. Yoruba male artist, Gbongbon, Oyo State, Nigeria, 20th century. W 24.5″. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 84.1.1. Gift of Clayre and Jay Haft.

Only a few *egungun* have wooden masks (Figure 433).



Figure 434. Egungun hunter's headdress, with animals and one human head arranged on the base. Yoruba, Nigeria, early to mid-20th century. H 12″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.271. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain.

Most of these are associated with witchcraft or those representing deceased hunters. The latter usually show hunters with a hairstyle typical of their past–a loose transverse plait, often with medicinal calabashes tied along the hairline (Figure 434). Others, from the city of Abeokuta, are more fanciful, depicting the hunter with extended hare-like ears, his forehead again covered with tiny calabashes full of medicines to protect him from animals and the potential spiritual attacks of the forest (Figure 435). This masquerade headpiece type seems to have originated in the workshop of Oniyide Adugbologe (ca. 1875–1949). On these headdresses, the hunter usually bears a double-headed drum between his ears–the type played by praise singers who might have followed him during his lifetime, since hunters were culture heroes who supplied communities with meat. Behind the drum is a hare or other wild animal, a reminder of the hunter's prey.



Figure 435. Hunter's *egungun* headpiece, with a detail of the hare crouching behind. Yoruba male sculptor, Abeokuta, Nigeria, first half 20th century. H 18.5″. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 85.1.1.

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Figure 436. *Egungun* with patchwork panel and colobus monkey fur. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, 1950s. Photo Wendy Kaveney. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, 87.309.3. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 437. This egungun costume includes multiple textiles, as well as cowrie shells and beading on the face panel. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, 20th century. Penn State African Art Exhibit 006, 2008. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Most *egungun*, however, are made entirely from cloth, ranging from tight-fitting costumes that cover the head to sack-like configurations to large ensembles with layers of hanging flaps. Some are displays of conspicuous consumption, employing 20 or more yards of expensive fabric such as damask or velvet, dragging it through muddy or dusty streets to show disdain for the expense. Others are of more common fabrics, but often arranged in surprising color combinations or employing a patchwork section on the torso (Figure 436), a juxtaposition never seen in everyday clothing. The cloth is often contributed by women–although male tailors created the costume–and includes hand-woven Yoruba fabrics as well as imported cotton prints, brocades, cotton laces, and velvets.



Figure 438. *Egungun* with layers of cloth panels. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, 20th century. H 5.35′. Musee du Quai Branly, 73.1997.4.128.

A crocheted panel allows the performer to see out while keeping his identity concealed, which is critical–hands are either gloved or, like feet, enveloped in cloth; the latter may also be shod. Cowries–indicative of wealth–or beads may further decorate the viewing panel (Figure 437), and colobus monkey fur may be attached, since numerous legends attribute the first *egungun* to this primate, who was advised to create it by a diviner. The most imposing *egungun* (Figure 438) are covered with lappets of cloth. Since new layers are added to keep their appearance fresh, they are veritable textile museums, each layer revealing older cloths. These can be box-like in structure, the cloth supported by a hidden tray-like headpiece (Figure 439). Many of the lappets have sawtooth edging, its meaning ambiguous–although the pattern even appears on the hare-like ears of many of the wooden hunters' *egungun* headpieces. Others are hung with metallic bits–sometimes reflective cut-outs, sometimes coins, occasionally Catholic saints' medals, from a family who had been enslaved in Brazil, then returned to Nigeria after emancipation and incorporated *egungun* and their adopted religion. The ability to "shine" in performances–which take place in daylight–is shared by many of these masquerades, whether through metal additions, the sequins that characterize *egungun* from Benin Republic (Figure 440), or varied types of high-contrast juxtapositions of color (Figure 441).



Figure 439. **Upper left**: *Egungun* costume. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, made between 1930-1970. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1992.68. Costume Fund. Public domain. **Upper right**: *Egungun* costume. Yoruba male tailor, Oyo region, Nigeria, 20th century. H 5.83′. Birmingham Museum of Art, 1990.174. Gift of Sol and Josephine Levitt. http://artsbma.org **Lower left**: *Egungun* costume. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, made between 1930-1950. H 5.625′. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2011.31. The Simmons Family Endowment for Textiles and gift of funds from Jim Harris. Public domain. Lower right: *Egungun* costume. Yoruba male tailor, Nigeria, 20th century. H 5.25′. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 92.133. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Hammer; © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.



Figure 440. This *egungun* is typical of the Yoruba male tailors of Benin Republic in its use of sequins, applique figures, and seriate patterning. 20th century. Velvet, leather, cotton,sequins, beads, metallic threads, and cowrie shells are all components. H 5.67′. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1992.67. Gift of the Alliance of the Indianapolis Museum of Art. Public domain.



Figure 441. This *egungun* costume is mostly constructed from odd lengths of high-contrast colored cloth, but the headpiece consists of sequinned lappets. Yoruba male tailor, Porto Novo, Benin Republic, 21st century. Photo by Linda De Volder, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Another key aspect many *egungun* share is their transformative nature. Sack-like costumes are manipulated into different shapes (Figure 442), while cape-like additions may be removed and twirled



Figure 442. Transformation of shape can take place when egungun dance or pose. Yoruba male tailor, royal palace, Ouidah, Benin Republic. Photo by Linda De Volder, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Figure 443. An *egungun* manipulates his cape during performance. Yoruba male tailor, royal palace, Ouidah, Benin Republic. Photo by Linda De Volder, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

independently (Figure 443), and some outfits are turned inside out and thus change color (Figure 444), among other shifts. These are again evidence that the ancestors' powers have grown to surpass any abilities they had when living. Their family members dance with them, praise them, and make requests or ask questions, demonstrating their belief that more than human agency is at work.



Figure 444. This *egungun* performer's costume can be inverted to reveal a pastel cotton check print or embroidered applique motifs. Yoruba male tailor, Ouidah royal palace, Benin Republic, 2017. Photo by Linda De Volder. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. Right image cropped.



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Funerary Practices and Burials of the Kongo Peoples



Figure 445. Burial mat. Kongo, Republic of Congo, late 19th/early 20th century. Collected by the Swedish Mission Church. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 1994.11.0637. Creative Commons CC BY2.5.

Although traditional Kongo religion places an all-powerful High God above everyone, he was not worshipped at temples or through a dedicated priesthood. Instead, grassroots beliefs in the supernatural centered around the dead: the *nkisi* that use spirits of the deceased to do human bidding (discussed in Chapter 3.5), and family ancestors. Elaborate funeral practices

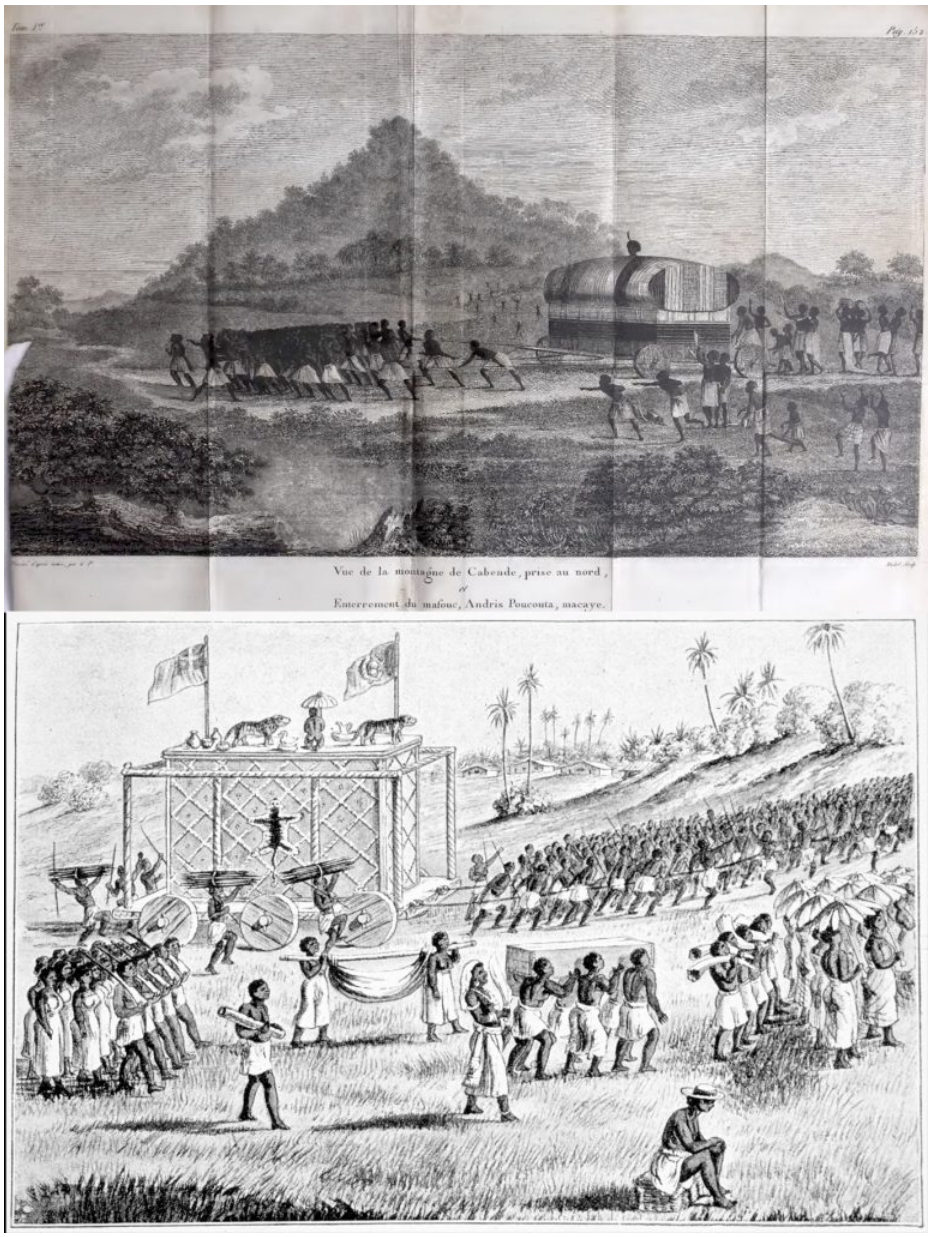


Figure 446. **Above**: A funeral procession at Cabinda before 1786 for the Ma-Fuka, a royal official of high rank. In L. Degrandpre's *Voyage à la Côte Occidentale d'Afrique fait dans les Années 1786 et 1787* (Paris: Dentu, 1801): facing p. 152. Public domain. **Below**: A Kongo-Vili funeral procession before 1887. R. E. Dennett, *Seven Years among the Fjort, Being an English Trader's Experience in the Congo District* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Seale, & Rivington, 1887): facing page 104. Public domain.

and burials past and present mark the ancestral passageway, one step on the Kongo cycle of birth-life-death-afterlife-reincarnation, a cosmogram often expressed as a crossed circle or a diamond. Not every Kongo sub-group has identical funerary arts, nor have some practices remained unchanged over the centuries. Still, certain ideas about the cycle of life and how high status requires special funerary preparations and post-funerary treatments persist.

Mats made to wrap corpses often included depictions of the Kongo cosmogram (Figure 445), a matter-of-fact symbol that accepts death's inevitability but optimistically includes reincarnation/rebirth. In a display of conspicuous consumption, the bodies of important individuals were often wrapped in many layers of cloth as well as mats, a practice that continued over time but is no longer active (Figure 446, above). In images from the southern Kongo coastal region–created about a century apart–the corpses of high-ranking leaders were taken to the grave in huge carts constructed by European carpenters and wheelwrights, accompanied by musicians and mourners. The cost was born by their successors (often a maternal nephew since the Kongo are matrilineal) and might require years of preparation, during which time the body was desiccated over a low fire to prevent rotting. The 18th-century

version bore a representation of the chief's head at the top, the cloths decorating the huge bundle having previously been displayed at his funerary bier. The whole structure was taken to the grave and buried, the site marked by two ivory tusks. Andrew Battell, an English trader who visited the royal cemetery just outside the Kongo capital of Mbanza Kongo somewhere between 1590–1610, noted the whole of the burial site "is compassed round about with elephants' teeth pitched in the ground, as it were a Pale [picketed enclosure], and it is ten roods in compass [14 to 20 yards in circumference]." By the 1870s, even royal graves were marked by a single tusk.

The late 19th-century cortege (Figure 446 below) similarly required a huge number of men to pull the funerary cart, which was two years in the making. It included two stuffed leopards at the top, as well as a civet skin affixed to the side–symbols of royalty. Like the other cart, a representation of the deceased's head protruded above, but was shaded by a parasol, surrounded by vessels and utensils. The empty palanquin that once carried the chief was borne by his former attendants, and his wives walked in front of musicians with ivory sideblown trumpets. An honor guard with rifles and other mourner followed.



Figure 447. This early 20th-century photograph shows a *niombo* and his escorts (one of whom has chalk-outlined eyes like the *niombo*) demonstrating the power to see into both this world and the spiritual world. Kongo male artist, Democratic Republic of Kongo, early 20th century. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, photo 1906.58.0001-4. Creative Commons CC BY2.5.

The Kongo-Bwende, a northern Kongo people who live along the border between Republic of Congo and Democratic Republic of Congo, also formerly desiccated the bodies of important men and women. They too swathed the corpses in cloth and mats–sometimes over a hundred of the former–but within a cane framework in human form



Figure 448. This *niombo*, just over 9 feet tall, was constructed with a red felted "skin" in 1906 and brought back to Sweden by missionaries. Kongo male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, early 20th century. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 1906.58.0001. Creative Commons CC-BY.

rather than a cart. The encased corpse, enveloped in a gigantic stocky figure, had a red blanket as its final "skin". The resultant construction, known as *niombo*, towered over its human escorts (Figure 447). The *niombo* had one arm gesturing up, the other down, refers respectively to the fullness of life and the transition to ancestorhood; the cosmogram was sometimes inscribed on its chest. Placed on a kind of litter, it was escorted to its grave by mourners and musicians, then buried. Some examples without corpses–both full size and in miniature–were made for Swedish missionaries stationed at Kingoyi in the early 20th century (Figure 448), but this burial practice appears to have died out by mid-century. Cemeteries have been a norm for most Kongo peoples for centuries, unlike many parts of Africa. Locating burials outside the community seems to have had its basis in beliefs that the dead should be kept at a safe distance from the living so they translate to ancestorhood rather than linger in the human

world. In the 19th century, burial sites often were decorated with grave goods, particularly utensils, bottles, and vessels used by the deceased in their lifetime (Figure 449).



Figure 449. This Kongo-Yombe grave includes bowls and other vessels belonging to the deceased, the gravesite partially bordered by overturned glass bottles with broken bottoms. Photo by Edgar Aubert de la Rüe, 1930-1937. Musée du Quai Branly, PV0070755.



Figure 450. These three Kongo graves were photographed by a member of the Svenska Missionsförbundet. Democratic Republic of Congo, early 20th century. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 0561.0004.f. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5.

These were felt to have absorbed some of the deceased's spirit, and alluded to the watery world of the dead in multiple ways: glass, white porcelain, and white shells have shiny, reflective surfaces that act as synonyms for water, and the whiteness of the last two object types is the color of mourning and the dead, shared with white kaolin/chalk. Some of the vessels on the grave have broken bottoms, a reference to the breaking of life. Grave goods tended to be enclosed by a border, marking what would have been the horizontal placement of the body. This was intended to both protect the living from the power of the dead–the grave is considered a form of *nkisi*–and to shield the spirit of the deceased from negative forces. These old grave forms usually were accompanied by tree planting. Ordinary citizens were directed to the other world by the trees' burrowing roots. Rulers' graves were marked by a specific tree type (Figure 450) whose name punned on the Kongo words for "king" and "power", assurances they would live again.



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Figure 451. This soapstone figure, carved by a male Kongo-Boma sculptor from either Angola or the Democratic Republic of Congo sometime between the late 19th to early 20th century, rested on a ruler's grave. He wears the royal pineapple fiber cap with proportions that approach natural head-to-body relationships, his pose indicating contemplation. H 21.5″ © High Museum of Art, 2010.5. Purchase through funds provided by patrons of the First Annual Collectors Evening, 2010.



Figure 452. This wooden female non-royal figure with child, made by a Kongo-Yombe male artist in the late 19th or early 20th century, is painted white with kaolin "chalk", the color of mourners and the world of the dead. H 21.5″. Image courtesy the Dallas Museum of Art, 1969.S.22. The Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture, gift of Eugene and Margaret McDermott.

The Kongo-Boma had a gravesite practice operating from about 1850-1930 that varied substantially from that of other Kongo peoples, using a medium that was extremely rare in sub-Saharan Africa: stone. Men and women of importance–and many gained importance in this area along the Zaire River, which was a major trade region during the period–had graves marked with soft soapstone figures. Though often called *ntadi*, they are more accurately known as *tumba*(from the Portuguese word for tomb) or *kinyongo*, both terms also referring to ceramics or other items placed on a grave. While those who commissioned them presumably felt they would serve as permanent markers, over 500 were carted away to European and Democratic Republic of Congo museum collections by the 1970s. If this isolated tradition indeed had its origins in the elaborate tombstone sculptures of 19th-century Europe, the results were acclimatized by local taste and regional concepts of status. Regular categories existed: the mother-with-child, the crosslegged male with head in hand (Figure 451), the hunter, the drummer. However, some are very idiosyncratic, including inscriptions with names and death dates (indications of literacy), figures praying before a crucifix, execution scenes, or figures in exotic European dress.

While other Kongo peoples had no tradition of stone grave sculpture, the Kongo-Yombe did mark the burial spots of notables with wooden sculpture (Figure 452). While the date this custom began is unknown, the practice was ongoing in the late 19th and early 20th century. Miniature palisaded thatched houses, open on one side, were erected over the grave and offerings of food and drink were left for the deceased.

Figures of men and women, their skin painted white, the color associated with the watery world of the dead (Figs. 453 and 454) were within. Many featured men wearing Western pith helmets, trousers, or jackets–"new men" with access to the colonialist cash economy.

Both the Kongo-Yombe and Kongo-Boma often marked graves of the wealthy and renowned with a terracotta funerary vessel known as a *diboondo*, made by male artists (Figure 455). These hollow columns, divided into patterned registers, often included openings on their sides that indicated they served no practical purpose, yet these were references to the void of death and often took the lozenge form of the Kongo cosmogram. Small free-standing or relief figures suggest the presence of mourners or the deceased, depending on their pose, further ornamented these ribbed grave markers, which stand between 12 and 23 inches tall.

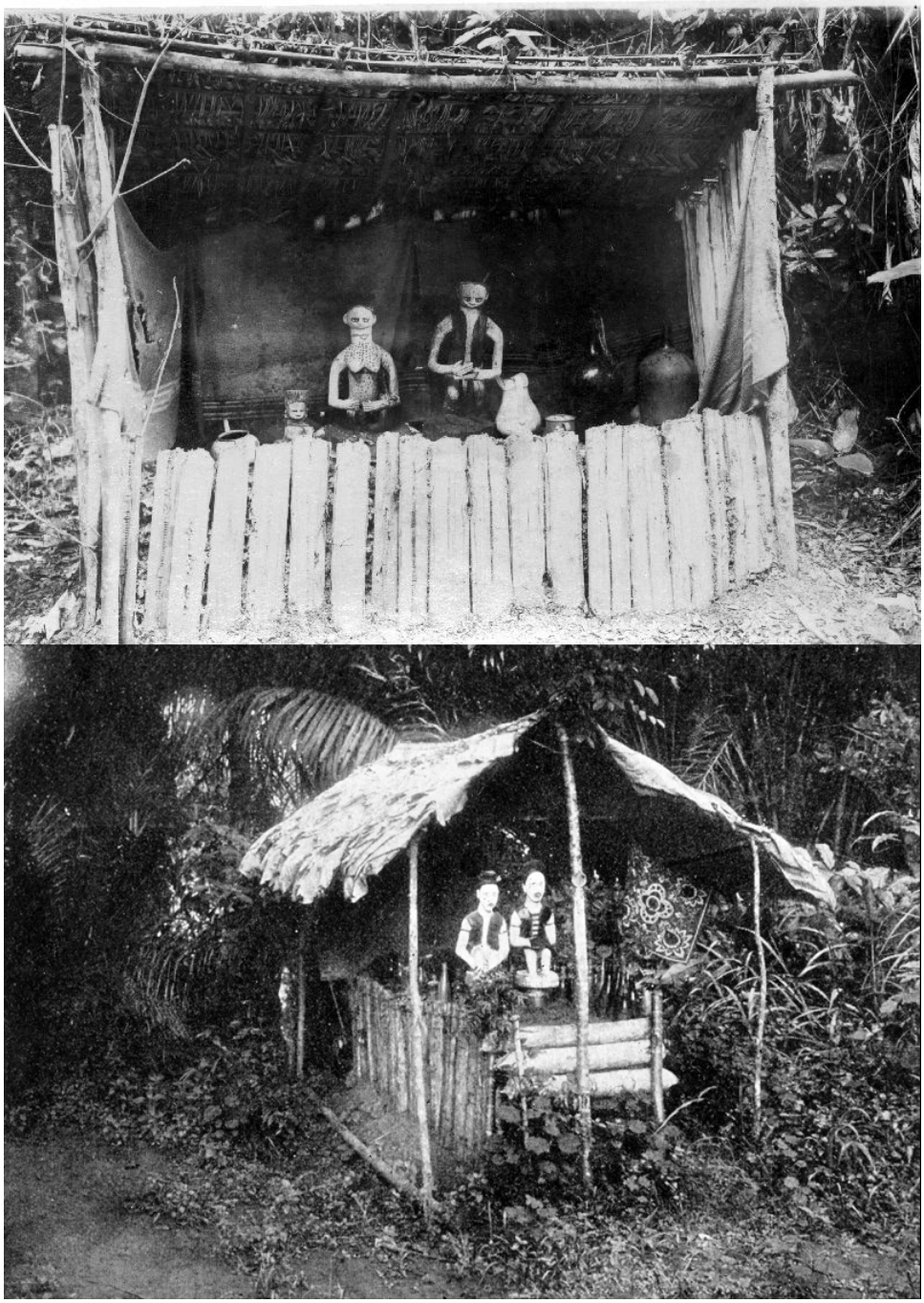


Figure 453. **Above**: A chief's grave with wooden sculptures made by Kongo-Yombe male sculptors, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo by Edvard Karlman, 1928. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 0177.0038. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5. **Below**: Tomb for a Kongo-Yombe chief, surrounded by a palisade. Bottles are visible to the right of the male and female figures. Photo by Hector Deleval, 1908. Lubuzi River region, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Public domain.



Figure 454. Grave figures made by Kongo-Yombe male artists, Democratic Republic of Congo. Photo by Johan Hammar, 1906. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 015966. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5.



Figure 455. This drawing is an early 20th-century reconstruction of a funerary column; the fact that it does not include the pierced openings may reflect a misunderstanding that they were intended. From Baron A. de Haulleville and Emile de Coart, “Notes Analytiques sur les Collections Ethnographiques du Musée du Congo: La Religion.” *Annales du Musée du Congo. Ethnographie et Anthropologie* 1 (2, 1906): 237. Public domain.

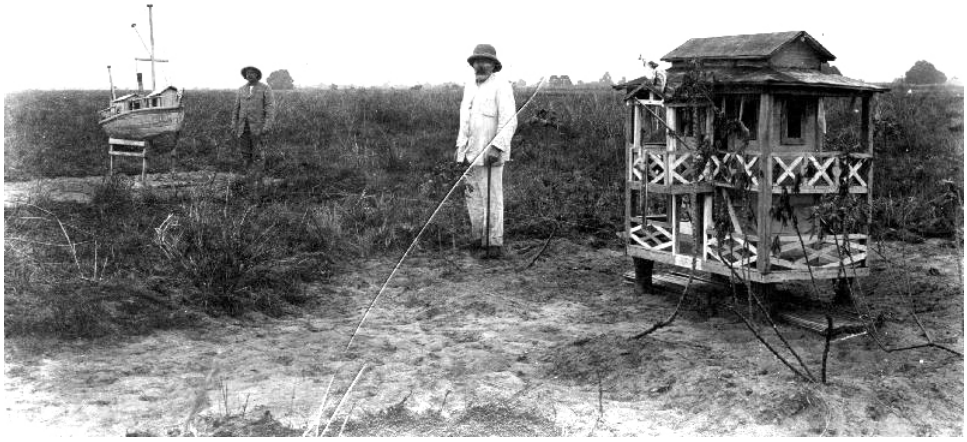


Figure 456. A Western-style house created by a Kongo-Yombe artist decorates a chief's grave, while a boat decorates another grave in the background. Photo by Edvard Karlman, 1920, Democratic Republic of Congo. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 0177.0039. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5.

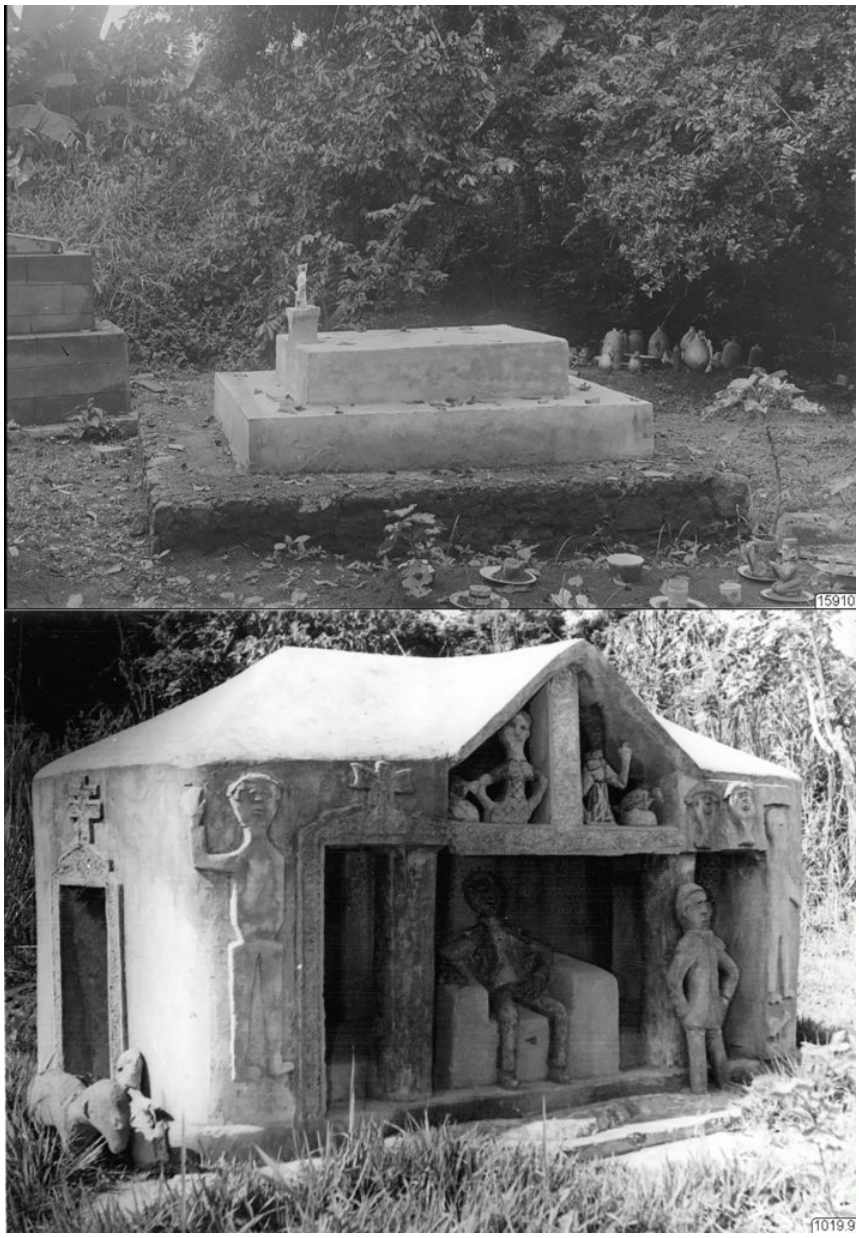


Figure 457. **Above**: This simple, three-tiered chiefly Kongo-Yombe cement grave is surrounded by older-style burial sites decorated with bottles and utensils. Its material alone would have been expensive at the time. Photo by Johan Hammar near Matadi, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1915. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 015910. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5. **Below**: This grave house includes both relief and in-the-round cement sculptures. Photo by Roland Einebrant, area between Tschela and the border with Cabinda, 1954. Etnografiska museet Stockholm, 1019.0009. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5.

As the second decade of the 20th century approached, Kongo trendsetters began to erect grave monuments in the form of Western storied buildings or boats (Figure 456), and by 1920 the cement that colonialists were using to construct their own tropical houses was also co-opted by Kongo grave artists, who constructed both simple cement tombs as well as elaborate cement structures that could include figures, houses, and other imagery (Figure 457).

As the century wore on, planes and other motifs appeared, alongside simpler graves faced with reflective white ceramic tiles, their character recalling the white porcelain plates and bowls of earlier graves.

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3.8: Portraiture

What Constitutes a Portrait?

“Portrait” seems a straightforward word that is easily categorized, but it is a more flexible category than one might first imagine. Many people would

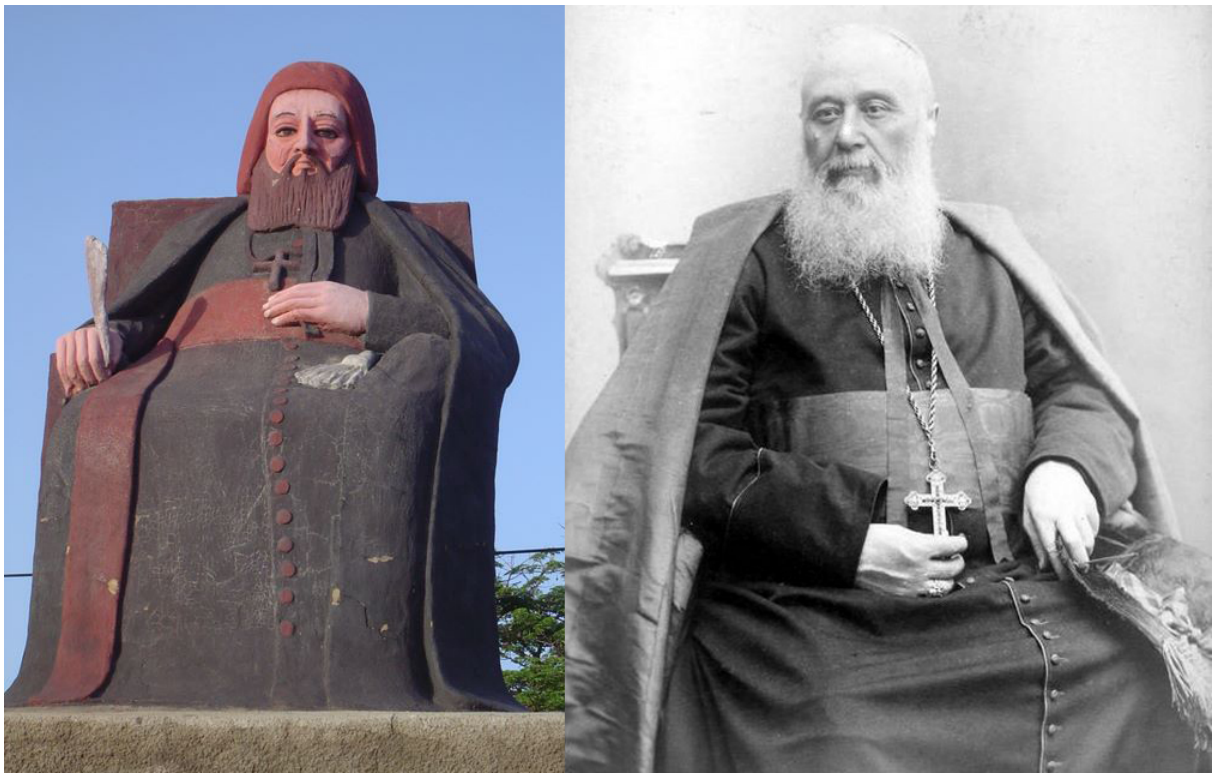


Figure 458. **Left**: This cement sculpture depicts Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the Catholic order of the White Fathers, who work throughout West Africa. Lavigerie himself was based in North Africa and the Western Sudan from 1868-1892. Ghanaian male artist, Bolgatanga, Northern Ghana, 20th century. Photo courtesy Roger Blench. **Right**: Photo of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, taken by Albert Capelle in Paris in 1882. Public domain.

define the term as a likeness, whether in two or three dimensions: something that captures a person’s face, in particular, in a recognizable form, that can serve as a physical surrogate to fix them in memory. While there certainly are African portraits that fit this criterion, most are contemporary works: photographs, paintings, or sculpture. Even these works may not be exact portraits, for photo retouching, generalization, or idealization can mask signs of age or other flaws and details visible in person, as occurred in a Ghanaian statue of Cardinal Lavigerie, founder of the Catholic order of the White Fathers (Figure 458). The sculptor regrew and colored the subject’s hair, shifting his position in the source photograph to a frontal placement that affords more dignity.

If we consider “portrait” more broadly as an aide-memoire, something that we recognize as a stand-in for a particular person, the image does not need to replicate an individual’s appearance in full–it is enough that the viewer conjures them up when viewing the work. Numerous traditional artworks do this through a variety of techniques: the naming (whether verbal or not) of an object; a concentration on certain traits evoking the individual that do not include the facial features, such as hairstyle, facial marks, or clothing associated with a particular social role; an object or emblem that is so closely identified with an individual that it can stand in for them; or a generic-looking abstraction that, through physical proximity to grave or ancestral altar, assumes the role of the “face” of the deceased.

Other possibilities exist. Even in contemporary terms, the photo of an empty room may convey the personality of an individual, as can a non-objective combination of color, line, and shape. However, even when a work is figurative, it is not necessarily a portrait. It may instead be a general image of male or female with no intention to be identifiable with a specific person. With that in mind, let’s consider a range of portrait types–some traditional, some contemporary–both briefly and as case studies.

A Range of Traditional Portrait Variations



Figure 459. **Left**: Terracotta memorial head. Asante female artist, Sekyere Afram Plains district near Kumawu,1740–1820. H 12″. St. Louis Art Museum 285:1982. Gift of Morton D. May. Public domain. **Center**: Terracotta memorial head. Akan female artist, Ghana, late 17th or early 18th century. H 7.5″. Cleveland Museum of Art 1990.22. Edwin R. and Harriet Pelton Perkins Memorial Fund. Creative Commons CC 0. **Right**: Terracotta memorial head. Asante female artist, Ahinsan, Ghana, 18th century. H: 12.25″. Brooklyn Museum 73.107.6. Gift of Marcia and John Friede. Public domain.

We've encountered certain portrait types earlier in this book, many related to commemoration. Both Akan terracotta memorial heads (*mma*) and figures, for example, and Yoruba *ibeji* figures, memorialize specific individuals, yet their physical resemblance to the individual may be extremely limited. In the case of the Akan, only royals were represented in this way (Figure 459), their portraits displayed at their funeral. The works themselves ranged from extremely flat, very stylized heads to more rounded and fairly naturalistic examples, often from the same places and even archaeologically found at the same level. Though the best portrayals were attributed to artists who knew the deceased, observed them on their deathbed, and summoned their image when gazing into a bowl filled with liquid, they were neither intended to fully resemble an individual or simply idealized them. Resemblance might be confined to a hairstyle, and idealism not only resulted in ephebism, but in the broad flattened forehead, pronounced eye sockets, lined neck, and gleaming skin (attained by the use of mica dust or burnishing) that the Akan favor in life. However, another practice–that of deception–demonstrates that, for the Akan, nothing could be more of a portrait. Deception of harmful spirits is conducted among newborns, and also occurs with the memorial heads–misleading facial marks might be temporarily applied to trick spiritual malefactors from recognizing the individual and deflecting evil.



Figure 460. *Ibeji* twin figures. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Wellcome Collection, London. Creative Commons CC-BY[1].

Despite Yoruba disinterest in the specific physiognomies or body types of deceased twins, close identification between an *ibeji* figure (Figure 460) and the individual it represents remain. Research among the Yoruba, for example, found that Yoruba mothers of deceased twins were unable to dispassionately discuss the appearance of the figures that represented them. They so closely identified the figures with their children–even years after their death–that an objective evaluation of the works as carvings was impossible for them. The figures idealize the infants, not only in terms of hairstyles and facial features, but by turning them into full adults, something that never occurred in their worldly lives.



Figure 461. Two wooden royal portraits (*ndop*) by Bushoong male artists, Kuba Kingdom, Democratic Republic of Congo, possibly 18th century. **Left**: *Ndop* representing the 17th-century ruler Shyaam aMbul aNgoong H 21.65″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1909,1210.1. Creative Commons CCBY-NC-SA 4.0. **Right**: Ndop representing the 18th-century ruler Misha Pelyeeng aNtshey Che. H 21.06″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1909; 0513.2. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Many African portraits bear generic visages, but bear other markers that indicate they are portraits of a specific individual, as well as supernatural markers that do the same. The Bushoong rulers of the Kuba Kingdom, for example, had themselves commemorated by large wooden figures (Figure 461) that were normally kept in a royal shrine with powerful medicines, and were rubbed with oil to keep them revitalized. Considered his double, it offered both protection and fertility, and was kept in his wives' quarter, placed near a wife about to give birth. After a ruler's death, a new monarch would sleep in its presence during his ascent to the throne; former wives would take charge of the sculpture afterward. The *ndops*' facial features and hairlines were consistent and impassively expressionless, as a monarch was expected to demonstrate complete self-control in public. The figures are fleshy, speaking to the king's prosperity, good living, and health. Each portrait sits on the low box throne and wears the projecting beaded crown, the shoulder rings, the crossed cowrie bands that form key components of the far more complex royal attire; all bear a ceremonial knife in the right hand. What individualized these portraits was the key symbol *(ibol)* placed in front of the ruler and associated with him. For example, the mancala game introduced by the first monarch appears on his statue and exemplifies the life of ease and leisure time his reign produced.

Similarly, the leaders of Kalabari Ijo trading houses are remembered in portraits not by their life-like facial features, but through the masquerade



Figure 462. Two Kalabari Ijo funerary shrine screens (*duein fubara*) dedicated to the heads of international trading houses and made with carpentry techniques uncommon in West Africa. Wood, split reed, pigment. Kalabari Ijo male artists, Nigeria, late 19th century. **Left**: H 37.5″. The Minneapolis Institute of Art, 74.22. The John R. Van Derlip Fund. Public domain. **Right**: H 44.88″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1950,45.334. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

associated with their house. Two of the surviving examples (Figure 462) depict the heads of rival firms; these screens served as shrines in trading company meeting houses, where these important corporate ancestors were sacrificed to weekly for the firm's continued success. These shrines both left the region in the early 20th century when a zealous local Christian threatened their destruction; others continued to be made in the region and stand a century later. Both of these examples are shown in the seated pose of a dignitary, flanked by a hieratically-scaled entourage that reinforces their importance. Their facial features are simplified and generic, the bared teeth a sign of male aggression.



Figure 463. **Left**: Ancestral screen for a trading house. Kalabari Ijo male artist, Nigeria, 19th century. Wood, split reed, cloth. H 44.88″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1950,45.334. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Right**: "Big Masquerade with boat and household on his head" by Sokari Douglas Camp. Kalabari Ijo female artist, UK, 1995. Steel, wood, feathers. H 6.56′. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1996; 08.2.a-b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

All were probably dressed originally, as the figures in the right-hand example are, and emblems of power and attached heads probably decorated both as well. It is, however, the headdress of the leader that symbolically identified him, for it represents the masquerade figure he danced when alive. The masqueraders themselves covered their faces and chests with cloth; women and children were meant to believe they were otherworldly water spirits. Because the meeting houses were off-limits to the uninitiated, the screens could reveal the human identities of those trading house leaders who wore them, their secrets ensured. At left, the business leader wears the feathered and tasseled headpiece of the *alagba* masquerade, which several houses perform. He probably originally bore the *alagba* masquerade's knife in his left hand, holding a carved ivory tusk in his right. At right, the leader wears the European ship headdress for the masquerade known as *bekinarusibi* ("white man's ship on head"), and holds a staff and decorated tusk. Both of these masquerades are still performed and are even commemorated by contemporary artists.

Sokari Douglas Camp, a British-trained Kalabari artist, has created a series of welded-steel water spirit figures, including that of *bekinarusibi* (Figure 463) and *alagba*. Although both works are abstractly treated, Camp's work is far more naturalistic in its head-to-body proportions, while the ancestral screen emphasizes the figures' heads. The Kalabari Ijo name for these pieces, *duein fubara*, is translated as "foreheads of the dead," the foreheads of the living being associated with their guiding spiritual force. Carved masks and ancestral screens both are both intended to give the living some control over powerful spiritual forces, compelling or persuading them to favor those who honor them through sacrifice and entreaties, serving as communicative tools.



Figure 464. Photograph of a clay relief from Agadja's palace, taken in 1920. This particular representation includes carefully observed details such as the rigging, anchors, crow's nest and seated missionary. © Musée du Quai Branly, PV0063689.

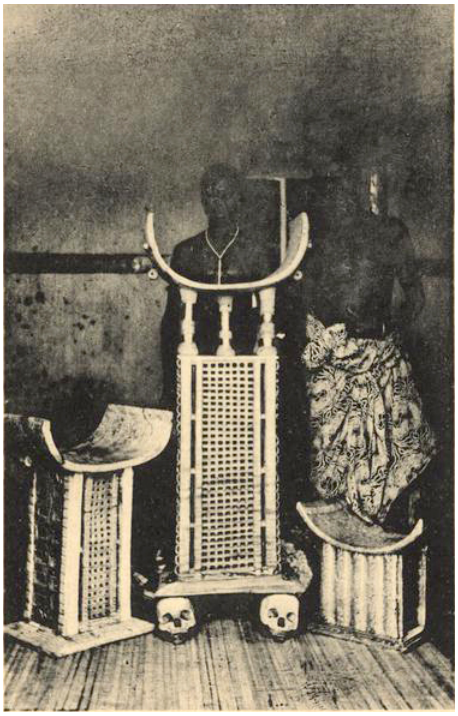


Figure 465. Three royal thrones of the monarchs of Dahomey: at center is that of Ghezo (reigned 1818-1858), resting on human skulls. French postcard, public domain.

Symbolic portraits can go much further than representations of symbolic masks on the head of abstracted figures. For the Fon of Dahomey Kingdom in today's Benin Republic, each king had multiple visual badges that represented him on banners, parasols, or even architecture. These might not even include human figures; rather, they represented powerful proverbial names he acquired during divination early in life or specific events that occurred in their reign. The monarch Agadja (reigned 1718-1740, for example, was represented by a foreign ship (Figure 464). Due to his conquests of the coastal states, he became the first Fon ruler to maintain direct trade with



Figure 466. UNESCO-sponsored replicas of the original clay reliefs on the royal palaces of Abomey, Benin Republic, made by Fon male artists in the 1990s; the 19th-century originals made by Fon male artists are in the palace museum after conservation work by UNESCO. The upper relief represents the monarch Ghezo through his throne; below, a detail shows it resting on decapitated heads, rather than on the skulls it sits on today. **Above**: Photo by Karalyn Monteil for UNESCO. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO. **Below**: Detail of one frame of "Royal Palaces of Abomey (UNESCO/NHK)" by UNESCO, 2013.

Europeans. While some 19th-century monarchs were represented by large anthropomorphic sculptures that referred to their emblems (see Chapter 2.5), non-figurative objects also served as conceptual portraits–namely, their actual thrones (Figure 465). These had attendant priests who held parasols over them when they were periodically on public display, and some were depicted on buildings within the royal palace compound. Although Ghezo's actual throne rested on the skulls of his enemies, their modeled clay portrayals showed it on freshly-severed heads (Figure 466), a reminder of his power and prowess.



Figure 467. This portrait mask represents a male, his beard neatly tied. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, early 20th century. Wood. H 12 3/8″. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2007.1572. Museum purchase with funds provided by the Alice Pratt Brown Museum Fund. Public domain.



Figure 468. Although Baule portrait masks depict ephebism and other types of idealism, they often have proportions or individual features that resemble their human subjects. Their facial scarifications mirror those represented. Baule male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, early 20th century. Wood. H 11.02″. Berg en Dal Afrika Museum, AM-25-4. Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Some traditional portraits are less symbolic. While not naturalistic, they include scarifications and other features that can be personally identified with the subject. Baule masquerades, for example, include several types of sacred performances, as well as some whose expression is directed toward entertainment. These feature portrait masks (*mblo*) of both males (Figure 467) and females (Figure 468)–often acclaimed dancers–though both are danced by men. Women's portraits are more common, and are usually commissioned by spouses or male relatives. Such masks are usually danced by a family member with the portrait's subject participating as well. Even after infirmity or death make the latter impossible, other family members may step in to continue the performance across generations. The performance is an occasion of a dramatic reveal; the *mblo* step out concealed by a cloth enclosure, revealed briefly in an entrancing blitz of beautiful cloth, graceful features, and superior dancing before being wrapped and stored in the dancers' room until another occasion warrants their appearance. While these Baule masks are not spiritual in nature, their performance when important visitors arrive, on holidays, and at (mostly

female) funerals contributes to the social cement holding members of the community together.



Figure 469. Female portrait figure. Dan male sculptor, Côte d'Ivoire, late 19th or early 20th century. H 31.3″. Wood with braided raffia "hair." © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1984.7.2.

Among the Dan of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, carved portrait figures were prestigious representations of a favored wife of a wealthy man, and were named after her. Upon receiving the commissioned sculptures, the patron would host a party to display the work to friends and family, for it further enhanced his reputation and status within society. At subsequent parties, the work would be displayed or shown to selected guests privately for a small fee. They are no longer being made for this purpose, and seem to have been a phenomenon of the late 19th/early 20th century.

The works (Figure 469) are considered portraits because they replicate the cosmetic scarification patterns of an individual's body, as well as ethnic facial markings, but Dan idealization of female beauty means they all usually have finely braided hair, a long creased neck, a high forehead, full lips, kaolin makeup in the eye area, a sharp chin, lowered lids, and the sharpened teeth that were once fashionable, their appearance very like the masks that represent the graceful *deangle* masks. Many have full breasts–their shapes meant to be personally identifiable as well as a sign of fecundity; others bear proof of fertility through a child tied to the back. The figures are shown standing; although many are now nude, they originally wore loincloths made from hand-woven textiles (Figure 470). Occasionally male figures or male-female couples were commissioned.



Figure 470. The glossy dark finish of this portrait figure imitates the ideal woman's beautifully cared-for skin. Dan male artist, Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire, ca. 1920. H 19.5″. © Dallas Museum of Art, 2015.48.10. Bequest of Dorace M. Fichtenbaum.

One of the most acclaimed Dan sculptors of the early 20th century–Zlan/Sra–was actually from the neighboring ethnic group, but was sought out for his portrait figures (Figure 471) and other carvings by Dan, Wee, and Mano clients in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. One of his numerous wives, Sonzlanwon, accompanied him when he traveled for commissions. She is remembered for not only plaiting the intricate raffia coiffures for his figures, but for actually blocking out his carvings for him or completing the whole figure herself. This was a stunning exception to the general rule against African women carving; the artist had many male apprentices during his lifetime, and the Dan, in general, prohibit women from carving, stating infertility will be the result. Zlan himself is said to have appeared in a dream to one of his nieces who had taken up wood sculpting, warning her of the consequences. She ceased, resuming only after she had borne all the children she intended to have, though her work is now done clandestinely.



Figure 471. A portrait figure for a Dan client from the Touba region, Côte d'Ivoire by the artist Zlan/Sra, Wee male artist, Liberia, 20th century before 1931. H 25″. Wood, aluminum, fiber, pigment. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1963.0.163.



Figure 472. This oversized ladle was owned by a *wunkirle*, recognized as the most industrious and generous woman of her quarter. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, first half of the 20th century. H 26.46″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1964.3.41.

Dan women sometimes commissioned their own portraits, though as finials of oversized spoons (Figure 472) rather than standing figures. Again, only a wealthy woman would do so–and only upon public acclamation as a woman of outstanding generosity, the recipient of a village ward's title (*wunkirle*–"woman that acts at feasts") that recognizes her superior actions. As one who feeds initiates, farmers preparing the fields, those attending major events, and guests, she is identified at public celebrations by carrying her large spoon, accompanied by an entourage. Together they distribute rice, coins, or candies to the gathered crowd. Her spoon, however, is not a mere prestige object like the portraits men commission. Instead, it–like Dan masks–is considered the abode of a

spirit who cooperates with the woman to help her achieve, and thus sacrifices are made to dedicate the object. It has its own name; it is not named after the owner. Such spoons do not always bear facial portraits, however; they may instead show muscular, capable legs, ram or other animal heads, hands, or abstract elements. Most common are the portraits of the spoons' original owner, whom the activating spirit sought out as a favored associate. When a *wunkirle* decides to retire, she chooses her successor and passes the ladle to her, so a *wunkirle* may actually be using a ladle that bears her predecessor's portrait, rather than her own.

Photographs and their Impact



Figure 473. The living room of this Ghanaian academic contains numerous studio portraits that rest atop the curtain pelmets. Kumase, Ghana, 2017. Photo by Kathy Curnow.

The impact of African exposure to photography–which in some parts of the continent was felt within a decade of its invention–has been extensive. Large framed portraits are a mainstay of interiors in many countries (Figure 473), and are the products of photo studios that continue to grow in number. They are the focus of contemporary obituaries, and often carried in funerary processions or displayed at funerals. As Western collectors and scholars grow increasingly interested in the history of African photography, the work of photographers who once had humble neighborhood operations, such as Malian Seydou Keita, has been promoted to international status (see HERE). As such, most African studio photographs follow many of the precepts of traditional art: they focus on human beings rather than, for example, landscapes and they



Figure 475. Wooden figure depicting Queen Victoria, with a detail showing her carved boots. Saro/Yoruba male sculptor, Nigeria, late 19th century. H 14.57″. © Trustees of the British Museum, 1988.AF12.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

generally are formal in pose and facial expression.



Figure 474. Detail of a printed cotton cloth depicting Liberia's then-president Tubman and his vice-president Tolbert against crossed Liberian flags. Liberia, 1960s. Photo by Tommy Miles. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

Photographs are printed on materials other than paper. Factory-made commercial cotton textiles, often wax prints that employ resist techniques often employ portraits of individuals within medallions, as well as drawn motifs and patterns (Figure 474). These usually commemorate anniversaries of various kinds, birthdays, or funerals, but can also mark state visits. Although special commissions, they are reasonably priced and often purchased for groups to sew as "uniforms" for specific occasions where they wish to express visual solidarity.



Figure 476. Queen Victoria was frequently photographed, those photos sometimes transformed into paintings in Britain, or widely circulated during her Silver (1887) and Diamond (1897) Jubilees. **Left**: Souvenir plate, 1887. **Middle**: Photograph by Alexander Bassano, 1882. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG x95819. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 3.0. **Right**: Photo by W. & D. Downey, 1897.

Photographs have also impacted other mediums. At the turn of the 20th century, the British had colonized Nigeria, and both military and civil service offices in Lagos included photographs of the queen–much as such offices today include framed photos of state governors and the head-of-state. They also included newspapers from Britain, many of which published photos and illustrations that included her. In southwest Nigeria, particularly in Lagos and in Abeokuta (49 miles away) some artists began producing portable wooden sculptures of the monarch (Figure 475). While these tended to end up in European hands and were later disseminated to museum collections, their original patrons and artists may have been a specialized group of Sierra Leoneans resident in Nigeria, there known as Saros. These individuals were the offspring of enslaved Yoruba that had been intercepted by the British during the 19th-century slave trade before trans-Atlantic shipment. After the British rescued Yoruba, Kongo, and individuals from other African groups stowed upon slave ships, they deposited them in their West African colony of Sierra Leone, already the new “homeland” of poor blacks rounded up in London, Jamaican rebels who had been exiled to Nova Scotia, and black Loyalists who had fought with the British during the American Revolution. Those Sierra Leoneans with Yoruba origins were educated in British schools, many became Christians (even as prominent missionaries), and their lifestyle was frequently



Figure 477. Painted wooden figure of Queen Victoria by Thomas Onajeje Odulate (aka Thomas Ona), a Yoruba male carver from Ikorodu, Nigeria, ca. 1943 (?). Collected in Lagos. H 12.6″. Collected by William Bascom. Phoebe A. Hearst Museum, University of California, Berkeley, 5-16238a; b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Europeanized, to greater and lesser degrees. Some of these individuals remembered their families' origins, and, as British colonization spread and steamships permitted easy travel between colonies, many moved back to those parts of Nigeria under British control.

Familiarity with British images of the monarch (Figure 476), whether on souvenirs or in printed form, inspired numerous images based more on photographic likeness than on generic physiognomy. Victoria's full cheeks and heavy lids are personalized, even as her body type ranges from slim to thick in various examples, and her head-to-body proportions retain an emphasis on the head. Details of her clothing are carefully delineated, from her hanging sleeve to folded fan to drop earrings. Although numerous depictions focus on the queen's small coronet and Honiton bobbin lace veil, this artist provided her with a larger crown and concentrated on the rosette furbelows of her bodice. Familiar with European female dress because many church-going Saro women had adopted it, this artist and others provided Victoria with shoes, unseen unless the sculpture is upended. Such figures confirmed the owners' identity as members of the overseas British Empire and under its monarch's protection. The scholarly suggestion that

these sculptures may have particularly resonated with female patrons seems sound; they were often independently wealthy traders who valued the freedom of movement British overlordship provided.



Figure 478. Part of a series of paintings depicting Patrice Lumumba's life by Tshibumba Kanda Matulu, Tetela male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1973/74. H 15 9/16″ x W 21 5/8. © Tropenmuseum TM-5867-36. Aankoopfonds Volkenkundige Collectie/Mondriaan Stichting. With permission.

A later colonial work (Figure 477), carved some decades after the monarch's 1901 death, shows more of an awareness of earlier sculptures than the photographic model. The Yoruba sculptor Thomas Onajeje Odulate has used employed his consistent style to create a generic figure, individualized only by her carved name and certain costume details–her lace veil, high-status headgear that is neither coronet nor standard crown, and fan. Inventive departures, such as the sculpture's bust-length, the high collar, and application of officer's epaulets, marry with certain Yoruba stylistic traits, such as oversized eyes. Odulate's works were sold as souvenirs to Britons living in Lagos, and usually depict the colonialists, along with some of their African employees. This prolific artist was already working in Lagos as an



Figure 479. Detail of a photo of Patrice Lumumba's arrival in New York on July 24, 1960, to speak to the United Nations. Photo by Anefo Auteursrechthebbende. Nationaal Archief, Belgium, 2.24.01.09. Public domain; Creative Commons CC0 1.0.

artist by the early 20th century, and this may have been part of a personal revival of foreign figurative types he had seen at the beginning of his career.

Many vernacular or urban painters have been heavily influenced by photographs, particularly those seen in billboards and other print advertisements. The visible use of light and shadow to make a flat photograph look three-dimensional could be copied in pencil or with paint, acting as a kind of portable instruction in realism. This particular importance of the face in capturing a likeness could be taken from readily available newspaper images, even when the artist never met the subject. Likeness can be essential; depending on the meaning of the work, identifiability of the subject can be critical, and may be reinforced by text.



Figure 480. This painting depicting Lumumba's assassination was the last of a series of paintings narrating his life. Tshibumba Kanda Matulu, Tetela male artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1973/74. H 15.75″ x 19.5″. © Tropenmuseum TM-5867-69. Foundation. With permission.

The artist Tshibumba Kanda Matulu, who was based in Lubumbashi (then Élisabethville), Democratic Republic of Congo, created a series of 18 paintings that examined Patrice Lumumba's place in the history of his country. The narrative of these works, made in the 1970s, begins before Lumumba's political career took off. One shows Lumumba in 1957-1958 as a brewery director after an earlier stint as a salesman and postal service employee (Figure 478). Despite the painting's reference to Stanleyville, the brewery was actually in Léopoldville.

Of greater importance is the recognizable depiction of Lumumba (Figure 479), and the environment that underlines his prosperity, education, and modernity, portraiture techniques with a long history in Europe, but absent in older African art. Aspects of Lumumba's traits are generated by the window view of the factory itself, his stylish suit, the telephone and letters that indicate his constant communication with other important figures, and the ledgers and books (one in a foreign language, demonstrating his cosmopolitanism) that cover his desk. He first became an independence leader and then the DRC's first prime minister–in office for a little over two months before an army rebellion

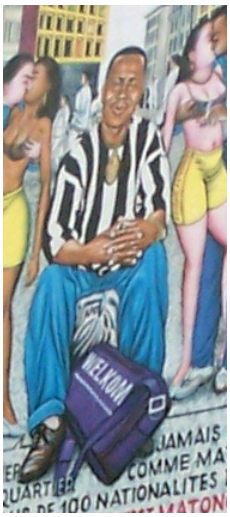


Figure 215. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.5, cropped and color-adjusted.

and a secessionist movement involving natural resources caused the country's president to dismiss him and six of his ministers. With foreign involvement and support, Lumumba's former chief-of-staff, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, engineered Lumumba's death as the latter planned to create a new government, and became head-of-state himself from 1965 to 1997. Tshibumba Kanda Matulu was not present at the execution, nor were there any photos Lumumba's secret death by military firing squad alongside Maurice Mpolo, who was to be his Minister of Defence, and his former Senate Vice-President Joseph Okito. The artist turns Lumumba's face to the viewer to verify his identity (Figure 480), including his trademark razor part, glasses, and facial hair. Through the crosses in the background and the wound in Lumumba's side, the artist expressed widely-held views that Lumumba was a martyr to the cause of his country's unity, underlined by the word itself, spelled out in blood. The painter's political convictions and visual documentation are thought to have led to his own demise; under Mobutu's rule, he was last seen in 1981, believed to be the victim of Mobutu's ruthless silencing of verbal and visual criticism. Each of the images draws attention to a particular incident in Lumumba's life, and each is a portrait of the man at a specific moment, reimagined by the artist.



Figure 482. Two nearly life-sized contemporary paintings of prior Asante paramount rulers. The work at right depicts a 21st-century ruler whose appearance is recorded in both photographs and videos, as well as visible in public. At left, an equally realistic painting depicts an Asantehene who lived in the late 17th/early 18th century, and whose physiognomy had to be invented for this image. Photo by Kathy Curnow. Kumase, Ghana, 2017.

Contemporary portraiture includes a variation whose origins in Western art represent a radical change of direction in Africa: the self-portrait. No patron would have paid for an artist's image in the past; even now, that cost is likely borne by a Western collector or museum. Still, the self-portrait permits not only an intimate capture of physical appearance (Figure 481), but also allows a psychological self-study. Even when wry or confessional, these revelatory images expose their subject. One of the most consistent producers of the self-portrait is the vernacular painter Chéri Samba, whose earliest works include examples in fashionable sportswear surrounded by an autobiographical text, in a stylish sitting room (here), or caught between rival who want his paintings (here). He has explored infidelity and questions of love (here), interrogated his own



Figure 483. A portrait by the artist Mbeudjang of Queen Yugang or Nana, wife to the monarch Metang of the Batufam Kingdom. Bamileke male artist, Cameroon, ca. 1912-1914. The figure is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. H 40 9/16″. Photo by Pierre Harter between 1956-1991. © Musée du Quai Branly, PP0136546.



Figure 484. A photographic portrait of Sultan Ibrahim Ngoya, ruler of the Bamum kingdom of Fumban, Cameroon. Photo by German photographer Bernhard Ankermann, early 20th c. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; © Photo: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, VIII A 5431. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

place in the world of African and modern art (here), depicted himself consulting a ritual specialist after experiencing difficulties, and tracked his appearance after six decades without airbrushing his growing wrinkles and receding hairline (here). Together, his self-portraits create a fuller picture of the man than any other African artist.

Sometimes images can appear to be realistic likenesses, yet they remain imaginative recreations of historical figures whose facial features are unknown. Two contemporary paintings depict two Asantehenes, the monarch who ruled Ghana's Asante Kingdom (Figure 482). One is currently ruling, having ascended the throne in 1999. The artist may have seen him at a public event, and most certainly has viewed him on television and/or newspapers. As his physiognomy is well-known, a likeness in this contemporary mode is both expected and attainable. His earlier namesake, the first ruler of a unified state that incorporated other Akan, ruled long before photography and his facial features are unknown. Using an unknown model, the painter has given him a plausible face, the portrait made complete by the addition of jewelry, prestige cloth, footrest and crown suitable to the monarch. In both cases, the name of the monarch is added to remove any doubt about the subject being depicted.

In the Cameroon Grassfields, carved figures represented monarchs and their wives, and were kept in the treasury to be brought out and admired on state occasions (Figure 483). These were fairly abstract works, identified with their subject through naming rather than facial recognition. But colonizers and missionaries brought cameras to the area, and



Figure 485. This portrait–completed in black and colored inks, crayon, and colored and black pencil on paper–depicts the early 19th-century Bamum ruler Mbuembue/Mbuombuo. Bamum male artist Ibrahim Njoya (cousin to the ruler of the same name), Fumban, Cameroon, mid-20th century. H 15.75″ x W 11.81″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2008.70.3. Gift of Corinne and Renaud Jouslin de Noray.

both rulers and citizens became the objects of their gaze and documentation. In the Bamum kingdom of Fumban, Sultan Njoya (ruled ca. 1886-1933)–himself the subject of numerous photographs (Figure 484)–encouraged a new direction in portraiture, which his cousin Ibrahim Njoya led. These portraits on paper documented past rulers and famous courtiers. Like the Asante rulers, recent ones could be likenesses, but rulers who lived in the more distant past were only verbally described, required the artist to construct an appearance. Ibrahim Njoya's half-length portrait of one of his ancestors, the monarch Mbuembue (Figure 485), shows him with a slightly-tilted head, looking away from the viewer. Many of the markers of his rank are like those found on



Figure 486. Drawing of the warrior Ndam Mandu, brother of the Bamum monarch Mbuembue/Mbouombuo, who ruled in the early 19th century. According to Loumpet-Galitzine, the artist was either Ismael Tita Mbohou or Christophe Njingountane. Mbohou's father, trained by the artist Ibrahim Njoya, originated the subject. Bamum male artist, Fumban, Cameroon, second half of the 20th century. H 25.39″ x W 19.69″. Black and colored inks, black and colored pencils, white correction fluid. © Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2008.70.4. Gift of Corinne and Renaud Jouslin de Noray.



Figure 487. This folded *ndop* cotton cloth bears a multitude of patterns, each with a symbolic meaning. The base cloth consists of over 70 narrow male-woven strips. Patterns were then stitched on its surface, the thread then pulled tight to resist the indigo dye bath. Afterward, the stitches were removed, their paths indicated by the lighter color. Male Bamum artist, Cameroon, late 19th/early 20th century. L 15.94′ x W 6.36′. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1935.28.1. Gift of Louis Carré.



Figure 488. In times past, celebrated warriors owned calabashes whose exteriors were decorated with defeated enemy jaws; this example bears five. Bamum male artist, Cameroon, 19th century. H 17.32″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1992.0.30.



Figure 489. This wall across from Sultan Njoya's German-style palace bears the numbered portraits of former Foumban rulers. Bamum male artist, Cameroon, late 20th or early 21st century. Photo by Tlongacre, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

older carvings that replicate actual objects, such as his beaded "beard" and crown, as well as his jewelry, but his head-to-body proportions are natural, unlike earlier figures. His facial features are fairly naturalistic, but there is no interest in shading in order to increase a three-dimensional effect, like that of a photograph. Instead, flatness is emphasized through the screen-like devices that surround the monarch. Their strong graphic patterns mimic designs and symbols found on royal cloths (*ndop*) and woodcarvings; one, the double-headed snake, is particularly associated with Mbuembue. While these framing devices have been compared to European photograph frames, the latter generally bear one consistent pattern rather than an assortment, and they do not intrude on the image itself. Instead,



Figure 490. Drawings of Foumban's rulers made into a print on cardboard for mass distribution. Bamum male artist, Cameroon, late 20th c. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III Z 146. Photo by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff. Creative Commons CC BYNC SA.

here it seems almost as if the ruler is peering out from a screened window frame.



Figure 491. Factory-produced cloth showing Fumban's rulers; made before 2008. W 47.25″ x L 70 11/16″. Tropen Museum, TM-6325-27. Aankoopfonds Volkenkundige Collectie/Mondriaan Stichting. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

The popularity of Ibrahim Njoya's drawings led to a school of followers and copyists, extending into the second half of the twentieth century. Many of these have expanded their repertoire of subjects and included action scenes (Figure 486). This work contains environmental references, something not found in traditional work. Though proportion and anatomy may not be completely accurate, realistic representation is again attempted, even though both of these portraits depict a long-dead ruler whose appearance is known only through verbal description. Multiple diagonals reinforce a sense of action, the warrior filling a composition that is edged with a frame-like border. Symbols reinforce the figure's identity; the *ndop* cloth (Figure 487) shows he belongs to the royal family, while the calabash bottle decorated with enemies' jaws (Figure 488) emphasizes his expertise and valor as a warrior.

The local popularity of historical figures' representations has continued, though not always in identical forms. Foumban's palace complex includes an outer cement wall that bears the rulers' images bordered by painted *ndop* motifs (Figure 489). Mass-produced posters that depict of all of Foumban's rulers (Figure 490) also boost citizen's pride and promote a unified historical record. Similar serial portraits offer a more public way for individuals to show their pride. They can wear a printed cloth bearing former monarchs' portraits (Figure 491), against a mechanically-reproduced *ndop* cloth background that also includes motifs of Njoya's throne, lettering in the alphabet he created, and other symbols.

At times what seems to be clearly a portrait is not really a portrait at all, and may instead constitute a complex examination of history and identity. The



Figure 492. Left: Omar Victor Diop, Senegalese male artist, “Ayuba Suleiman Diallo; Project Diaspora,” 2014. Inkjet on paper. H 23.62 x W 15.75. © Omar Victor Diop, courtesy Galerie MAGNIN-A, Paris. Right: William Hoare, England. “Portrait of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo,” 1733. H 30″ x W 25.25″. Property of Qatar Museums Authority. Public domain.

artist Omar Victor Diop, a Senegalese photographer who began his career in fashion photography, has created a series of such works entitled “Project Diaspora.” Its individual components show Diop himself in historical attire, mimicking the composition and poses of African figures in European painted portraits, but he acts as a consistent everyman, rather than showcasing his own appearance or personality. In a dozen-and-a-half works, he considers displaced Africans past and present, the former including figures from the 16th-19th centuries, such as St. Benedict, Juan de Pareja, Frederick Douglass, and others. While some were born in the Americas, most were from Africa but transported to Europe, the New World, or India, then commemorated by artists there. One of the works puts him in the guise of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, a Fulani prince from present-day Senegal who was captured while traveling, shipped to the United States and enslaved in Maryland (Figure 492). His literacy in Arabic and a series of letters written on his behalf saw him released from bondage, taken to Britain, and formally given his freedom. He dictated his autobiography, interacted with members of London’s aristocracy, worked with the British Museum on their Arabic manuscript collection, and returned first to Gambia and then home. Rather than merely drawing attention to the historical figure and his life through a reenaction, Diop shows Ayuba holding a soccer ball, an accessory consistent with other photos in the series, their subjects clad in goalies’ gloves, clutching a referee’s whistle, or carrying soccer boots, trophies, or duffle bags. By connecting these historical figures to contemporary soccer players working for clubs throughout the west, he highlights the dual worlds for Africans and their descendants in all periods: while some may be adulated for their skills and accomplishments, racism can snake out and overturn any sense of security or comfort they might feel in adoptive lands in the blink of an eye.

A video element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can watch it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=576

Interview with Omar Victor Diop.

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Heads from Ile-Ife: Portraits to Symbols



Figure 493. The so-called "Olokun" head, a leaded brass; its status as an original Ife work or a 20th-century replica is still unclear. Possibly a Yoruba male artist, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, late 14th/early 15th century. H 13 5/8″. Photo by Karl Zetterström for the Etnografiska museet, Stockholm, 1114.0517. In the collection of the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 38.1.2. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5, cropped.

Does naturalism in human representations always indicate the portrait of a particular individual? This is not a frequent question when dealing with older African art, where generic faces are the norm. When we consider



Figure 494. Five of the bronze heads recovered from one site in Ife. Three are damaged in the jaw, cheek, and/or chin areas. Yoruba male artists, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 14th-early 15th centuries. Photo by William Bascom, Ife, Nigeria, 1951. The Phoebe A. Hearst Museum, 15-31246. Gift of Berta Bascom. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. White border cropped.

the 15th-century brass, bronze, and copper heads of the Yoruba city of Ile-Ife, however, it is apropos. One crowned head was uncovered in 1910, ostensibly from a sacred grove (Figure 493). In 1938-39, however, additional larger heads were recovered from one location, the Wunmonije Compound, during an emergency archaeological rescue prompted by the digging of a house foundation (Figure 494). Altogether there are three smaller, crowned examples (Figure 495), while 16 are life-sized and uncrowned (one was found in Ado-Ekiti, about 47 miles away). Scholars have suggested the small holes at their hairline indicate a real crown was once attached to these larger heads, however.



Figure 495. This leaded brass head also has a punched hole in the neck, suggesting it was once attached to a wooden support. Traces of red and black paint remain on the metal. Yoruba male artist, Ile-Ife, 14th-early 15th century. H 13.78. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1939,34.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

These heads are far more realistic than most African artworks from the pre-colonial period; their modeling faithfully recording the hollows and projections of the face in natural proportion. Similar naturalism can be found in the many terracotta heads and figures found throughout the city, some dating to a few centuries earlier. Idealism is likely present–for it is unlikely all the subjects would have been about the same age when they were depicted–yet a high degree of individuality manifests in most heads



Figure 496. This Ife head is made from copper alone. Yoruba male artist, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, late 14th-early 16th century. H 13″. Photo by Karl Zetterström for the Etnografiska museet, Stockholm, 1114.0532. In the collection of the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments, 38.1.4. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5, cropped.

(Figure 496). This does not, however, guarantee that the heads replicate the physiognomy of the specific men they were intended to represent, particularly when the age factor is considered.

Whom do the heads represent? The general scholarly and palace consensus is that they represent historical monarchs whose official title was the Ooni of Ife. The land on which they were found is remembered as once having belonged to the palace grounds, the palace's structure and boundaries having shifted through centuries that periodically saw it abandoned due to war, then rebuilt. Copper or copper alloys–an expensive metal that was the privilege of monarchs during this period–was used. The smaller heads bear beaded crowns of a type that appears on select male figures in metal and terracotta, as well as on metaphorical animal heads that mark a partially-excavated royal grave. Not all scholars agree; art historian Rowland Abiodun believes that representations of the ruler, considered a semi-divine being, would have been an instance of lèse-majesté before the 20th century.



Figure 497. This cement sculpture of an aggrandized “Olokun” head graces a roundabout on the Ibadan Road, Ile, Ife, Nigeria. Still from a video by Batta Box entitled “BattaBox Presenters Explore Important Places In Ile-Ife,” 2017.



Figure 498. This large hand-printed banner used the Ife “Olokun” head as a logo for the All-Africa Games held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1973.



Figure 499. This carved Ife-style head ornaments the park of the city of São José dos Campos in Brazil’s São Paulo region. Photo by Halley Pacheco de Oliveira, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

What purpose did the heads originally serve? This remains open to argument. One theory suggests they were used in funeral rites as an effigy of the deceased, nailed to wooden bodies that were then dressed, with actual crowns temporarily attached to the larger heads. While no such effigies are used today, the Yoruba kingdom of Owo has documented the use of life-size wooden figures for the funerals of prominent persons, though not for their monarch. In the Benin Kingdom of the Edo, which has a historical relationship with Benin, such effigies have been documented for the ruler, his mother, and certain prominent chiefs. However

logical this possibility at Ife might seem, contemporaneous full figures all show Ife male dress consisted of wrappers that left the chest bare (except, in some cases, for beaded necklaces); robes in the region seem to represent fashion changes from later centuries. Nails did punch through the necks of the figures–some remained in a few cases–so they do seem to have been attached to something made from wood, whether a body or another type of support. Most tellingly, the style of the heads remains too consistent to document a period covering sixteen reigns; they seem to have been made in a single generation. Another theory suggests they served as temporary supports for the royal crowns of the Yoruba states founded by Ife. Up until the early 20th century, when an interregnum occurred in these kingdoms, selection and preparation of a new ruler could take up to three years. His ascension to the throne had to be approved by Ife and, in the past, this could have resulted in those state crowns being kept at Ife from the time one ruler's death occurred and the next monarch was approved. An additional scholarly interpretation is that the heads represent powerful chiefs, lineage heads from two dynasties whom a particular monarch integrated under his rule.

We cannot be sure these heads were ever portraits in the sense of individualized, accurate images representing a particular person, regardless of their naturalism. However, their imagery has come to represent a kind of portrait of Ife (Figure 497), of Yoruba history, of Nigeria, and of Africa as a whole (Figure 498), as Ife's imagery has spread internationally in everything from Romare Bearden works to Brazilian park ornamentation (Figure 499). They variously represent Ile-Ife as the place the Yoruba style as the place the world began in primordial times, or the birthplace of a complex artistic and religious culture that can match that any existing elsewhere.

They have not been without their controversies. Rotimi Fani-Kayode, a Yoruba-born photographer whose career blossomed in London, featured an Ife-

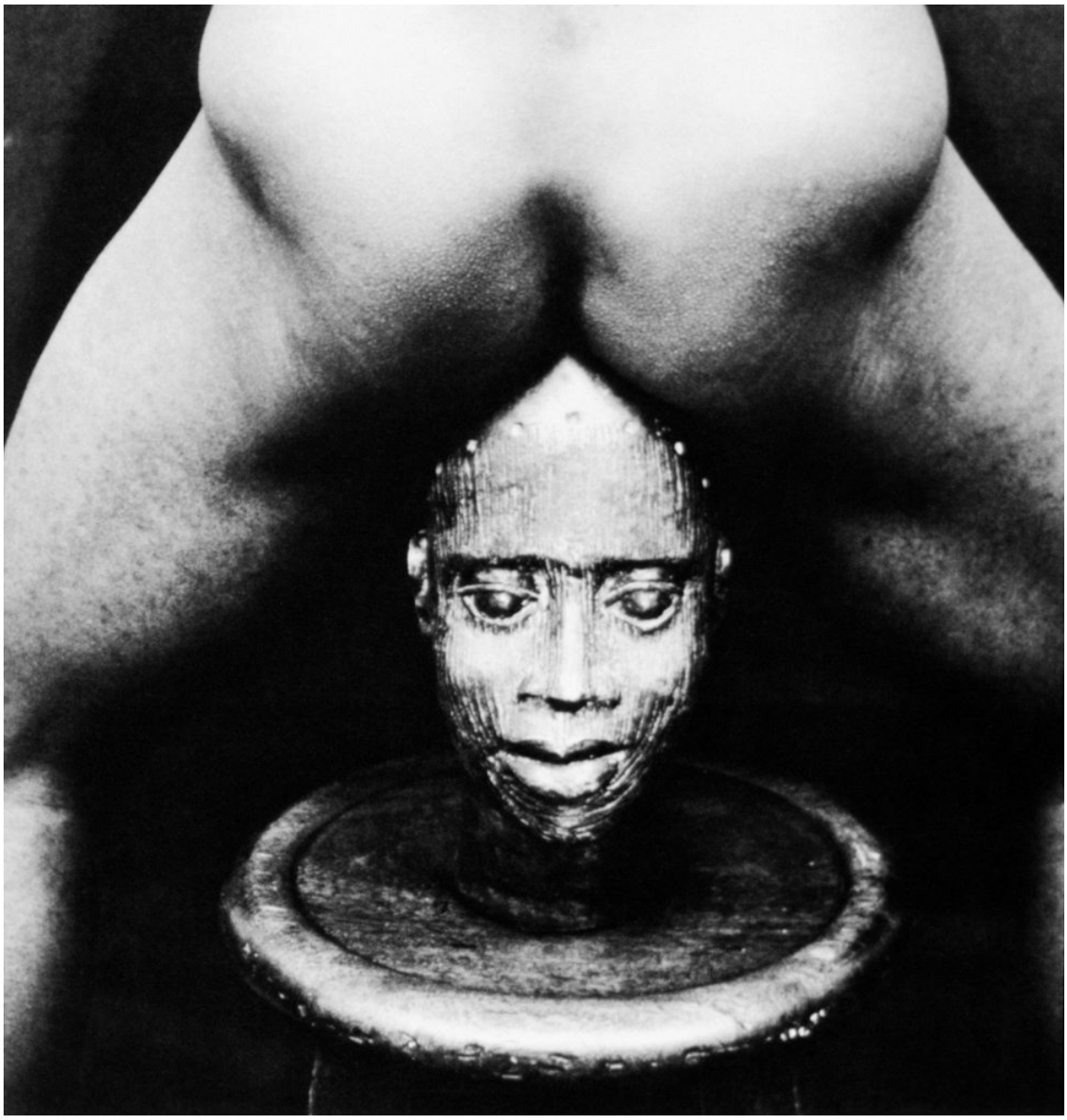


Figure 500. Rotimi Fani-Kayode, a Yoruba male photographer based in Britain, created “Bronze Head” in 1989. Gelatin silver print. Support 15.87″ x 15.28″. © Rotimi Fani-Kayode/Autograph ABP; courtesy Autograph ABP.

style metal head in his image “Bronze Head” (Figure 500). This work’s subject matter has an autobiographical aspect, for Fani-Kayode’s family, which fled with him to London when he was a child, was from Ile-Ife. His father, Chief Victor Remilekun Fani-Kayode, was a prominent lawyer involved with Nigeria’s independence movement. He was Deputy Premier of Nigeria’s Western Region when a coup ousted him from office, followed by a counter-coup and the beginning of the Nigerian Civil War. In addition to a prominent political career, he was a traditional Ife chief; Rotimi Fani-Kayode stated his family was in charge of Ife’s Ifa shrine, though his familiarity with it was limited, due to his upbringing in Britain. As a gay man, he was rejected by his family; diagnosed with AIDS, he faced other bigotry in London. This work, one of few that explicitly reference Yoruba art, shows a nude male torso, its head, torso, and lower legs cropped, in close conjunction with a reproduction of an Ife head. Various scholars–as well as Fani-Kayode’s partner, artist Alex Hirst–have suggested the figure is either being penetrated by the head or giving birth to it, interpretations that consider complex interweavings of spirituality and gender fluidity. They usually note that the display of bare buttocks is a deliberately rude gesture; might not the figure equally be excreting the head, since its orifices are deliberately shadowed and

vague? If so, is Fani-Kayode relegating the restrictions and proscriptions of culture to toxins that need to be expelled? Below the head is a round form that likely is a Cameroon Grassfields stool, everything but its seat shrouded in shadow. Its form and its raised border recall Yoruba Ifa divination trays (see Chapter 3.6), the site of priestly interpretation of one's problems, one's past, and the sacrificial acts needed to return life to equilibrium. Whatever its correct interpretation may be, "Bronze Head" is ambiguous in its relationship with the Yoruba past. It does not embrace received culture.



Figure 501. This golden head, clearly modeled after an Ife head, was part of English artist Damien Hirst's 2017 Venice mega-exhibition, "Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable." **Left**: still from Eric Wayne's video "Damien Hirst's: Treasures of the Wreck of the Unbelievable," 2017. **Right**: still from Al-Jazeera English, "Damien Hirst accused of cultural appropriation at Venice Biennale," 2017.

Another replica of an Ife head (Figure 501) drew international attention as one of the "archaeological artifacts" that English artist Damien Hirst included in his panned 2017 exhibition "Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable." Among the "ancient" objects purportedly recovered from the fictive shipwreck of a first-century vessel filled with treasures, it is an anachronism, as are the coral-incrusted inclusions of the Aztec calendar, Mickey Mouse, and Optimus Prime. The Ife work, however, was singled out by Nigerian artist Victor Ehikhamenor, who was exhibiting at the nearby Venice Biennale. In a series of tweets that went viral in the art world, he suggested future Nigerians would be told the work originated with Hirst, and that it was unattributed cultural appropriation, despite references to Ife in the catalogue and exhibition panels. Perhaps worthy of greater comment is Hirst's (or his team of creators) laziness in examining actual Ife heads, whose "hair" treatment and profile crania are very different. Nonetheless, Ehikhamenor's reclamation of a head Hirst labeled as "Golden Heads (Female)" drew attention to the ever-evolving notions of portraiture.

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Bringing Photos to Life: J. A. Green as Inspiration in Benin City and Buguma

Many African portraits are less an individualized representation than they are projections of a



Figure 502. Brass head of an *oba* for the royal ancestral altars. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 17th century. H 11.75″. Cleveland Museum of Art, 1938.6. Dudley P. Allen Fund. Public domain.



Figure 503. Calendar for 2017 featuring Oba Ewuare II. Benin City, Nigeria, 2016. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 45604. Photo by Laura Haendel. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE, color bar strip removed.

particular position or status. In the Benin Kingdom, for example, brass casters produced heads representing kings for royal ancestral altars (Figure 502). For any given era, these were produced in fairly identical pairs or sets of pairs. When placed on a ruler's altar, they were intended to portray glorified kingship, rather than represent a particular monarch. The coral netted crown had to be an accurate portrayal (the design varied over time), but during any given time period, the ruler's facial features were idealized and generic, indistinguishable from those on any other figurative depictions. This had changed by the late 20th century, when photography's popularity began to affect the casting guild's art (see Figure xxx). Photos themselves had been popular for many decades, and homes of both royals and commoners were filled with large framed photographs of family members. Like photos, calendars depicting the Oba (Figure 503) or members of clubs and other organizations are still a staple of interior decoration.



Figure 504. Photograph of Oba Ovonramwen, the Oba of Benin Kingdom, being transported into exile in Calabar. Jonathan A. Green, Ijo male photographer, Nigeria, 1897. H 8.2″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af; A47.70. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Since the British invasion of 1897, all Benin monarchs have been photographed. Oba Ovonramwen was the first to undergo this process, and did so through a series of images taken as he was being transported to Calabar, exiled by the British. Although J. A. Green, an Ijo photographer, captured him in multiple poses and outfits, the best-known photo today is the one that depicts him

seated on the deck of the *S. S. Ivy*, a British steam yacht, backed by three soldiers of the British-run Niger Coast Protectorate Force (Figure 504). While these men were ostensibly the Oba's guards, they are posed like the courtiers and pages who would have stood in his presence at court. Although his seated frontal position, expensive embroidered robes, and sober demeanor mark him with dignity, his bare head and the absence of all coral beads would have been unthinkable just a year before. The photograph commemorates the solemnity and extreme sorrow of this moment in Benin history, particularly the sight of the chains at his feet.



Figure xxx. One of several versions by members of the Omodamwen family, it was a museum commission that cost $2100. Uyi Omodamwen, Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 2009. H 23.23″. Etnografiska museet, Stockholm, 2009.03. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.5, straightened with inventory number cropped.

Despite its commemoration of a low point in Benin history, this photo has provided source material for several bronze sculptures in the form of relief tablets (Figure 505). The artist who made this example, Uyi Omodamwen, is a member of the Omodamwen family, well-known brassworkers based in Benin City. Although the family constitutes part of the hereditary royal brass casting lineages, its members live outside Igun Street, where guild members traditionally work and stay, and own their own foundry. This work was commissioned by Stockholm's Etnografiska Museet, but additional examples of this same subject were produced by other family members. They take the form of 16th-century plaques, although they are in much higher relief. The naturalistically treated Oba shows signs of age and specificity, unlike examples from centuries ago. His proportions, however, are compressed, probably due to the visual confusion generated by the photographic combination of his frontal gown and seated pose. Omodamwen's interpretation included other shifts. He standardized the height of the guards and removed the background, but retained the shackles on the Oba's ankles.



Figure 506. A recent sculpture of Oba Ovonramwen in King's Square, Benin City, with detail and the photo that inspired the work. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 21st century. **Left** and **Center**, two single frames from Independent Television and Radio's video, "A visit to some tourist site in Benin City," 2018. **Right**: Photograph of Oba Ovonramwen aboard the S. S. Ivy. Jonathan A. Green, Ijo male artist, Nigeria, 1897.

Those shackles vanish in a public sculpture of Oba Ovonramwen that stands in Benin City's King's Square, just outside the palace. This naturalistic work was modelled after



Figure 507. This brass canoe recasts Oba Ovonramwen's exile to Calabar in terms that do not compromise the monarch. Edo male artist, Omodamwen Family Workship, Benin City, Nigeria, 2006. ©KHM-Museumsverband. Weltmuseum Wien, 185018. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

a different Green photo of the Oba bound for exile (Figure 506). The artist aged the monarch and trimmed his hair. More tellingly, he placed the oba on a throne instead of a deck chair, removed his smile, and added a coral bracelet. Although the artist's name is unlisted, he seems to have been academically trained, the work's conservatism suggesting his training took place in Nigeria. This same photograph served as a jumping-off point for artist Osaretin Ighile, who created a life-size reinterpretation of the photo made from found objects. The Oba here is assembled from wood,



Figure 508. This cement sculpture depicts Oba Ovonramwen seated on his throne. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 21st century. Photo courtesy Ose Schalz, 2018.

metal, and plastic, the open-worked crates reminiscent of the original deck chair's wickerwork. Detritus forms his wrapper and spills over into the environment—is it a comment on Westernization and the negative effects of consumerism, a process introduced with the colonialism that followed Ovonramwen?



Figure 509. Leo Asemota's "Behold The Great Head," part of The Ens Project. Orhue (kaolin) and coal on photograph in artist's frame. H 13.3″. © 2005. Courtesy Leo Asemota/EoTLA.

Not all contemporary portraits of this historic monarch are based on Green's photographs. A brass sculpture by the Omodamwen workshop plucks the Oba from the *S. S. Ivy* and places him in a canoe, accompanied by one of his wives and her attendant, a chief, four Britons, and two Ijo or Itsekiri paddlers (Figure 507). Ignoring the British confiscation of the royal corals, the artist depicts the Oba as the central figure, his dignity upheld by his full beaded regalia and his stoic, unmoving frontal position. A more recent public sculpture in King's Square (Figure 508) shows the monarch before the British invasion, accompanied by two leopards (one now damaged), along with a chief and a page bearing ceremonial weapons. In a nod to contemporary prudishness, the once-nude page wears a loincloth.

A simmering brew of nostalgia, indignation, and veneration activates the work of another



Figure 510. This brass plaque depicts the fish-legged Oba flanked by two kneeling supporters–Chiefs Osa and Osuan–as well as two reclining leopards. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 18.19″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898,0115.29. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

expatriate Edo artist, Leo Asemota, a photographer, performance and installation artist, and videographer. As part of *The Ens Project*, a performance/installation/series project, the London-based artist encased a reproduction of Green's photo in a red shadowbox, forefronting the color associated with power, war, and death, naming it *Behold the Great Head* (Figure 509), a reference to the sacred head of the Oba, which is honored in the annual Igue ceremony. In a semi-ritualistic practice, Asemota used two substances–coal and imported "chalk" (white kaolin)–to alter the image. The guards' faces are erased by the coal, a material the artist associates with Britain's 19th-century industrialization and subsequent drive for colonization. "Chalk"–a substance used in ceremonies to signify joy, peace, and all things good–is used to add mudfish to the oba's feet, aligning the photo to some 16th-century plaques and later bronzes (Figure 510) that return the monarch to his status as a semi-divine being (for more concerning this association, see Chapter 4.6).



Figure 511. Painted versions of old photographs of prominent chiefs and merchants decorate family halls of the various trading houses. Single frame from DLB Recommended's video,"THE DUMO LULU-BRIGGS EFFECT IN ABONNEMA," 2018.

Green, who appears to be the first Nigerian professional photographer, has continued to influence artists, not only in Benin City, but in his hometown of Bonny. There his photographs of prominent turn-of-the-century Ijo chiefs have been transformed into life-sized paintings and public sculptures, examples of the impact of portrait photography on contemporary African art. He is not alone; other painted portraits based on photographers' work–whose impact is increased by colorization and aggrandizement–decorate private and semi-public spheres as well (Figure 511).

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The Most-Recognizable African: Nelson Mandela

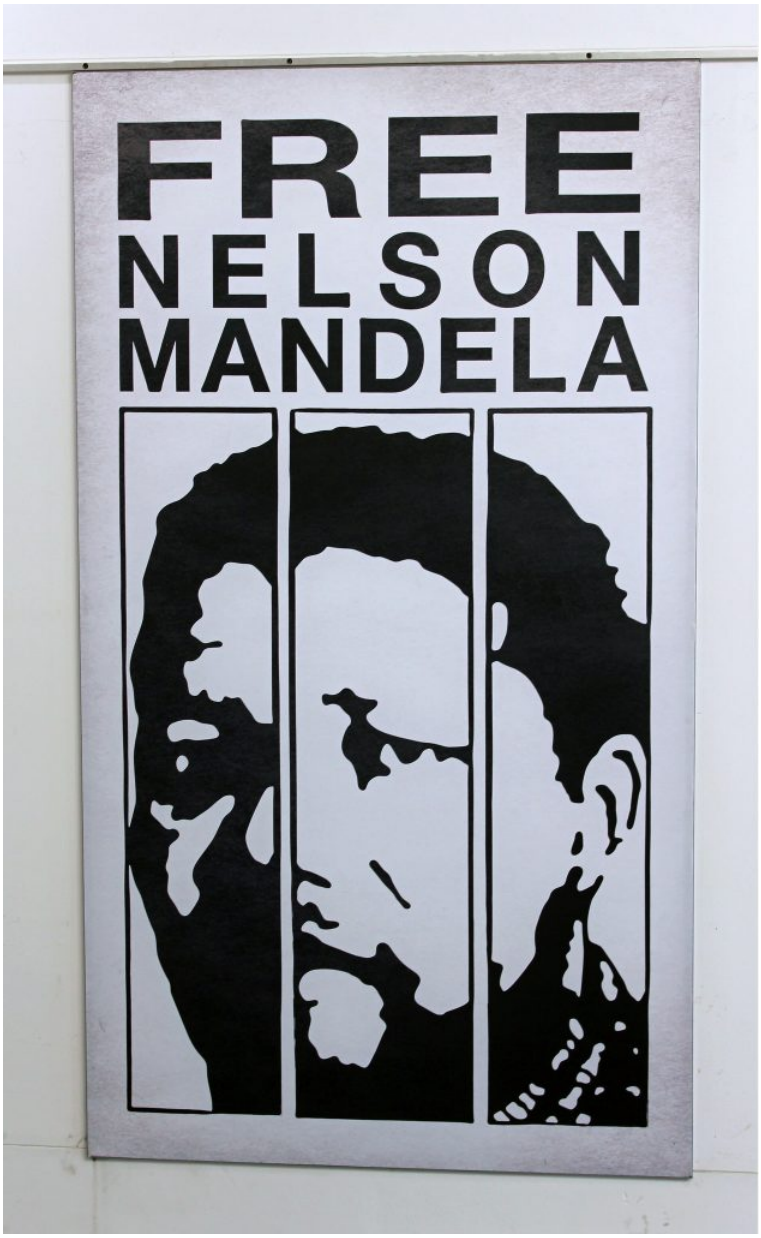


Figure 512. Poster of Nelson Mandela during his nearly thirty years of incarceration. Photo by HelenSTB, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

The late Nelson Mandela, spearhead to apartheid’s end and a new inclusive South Africa, probably had and has Africa’s most identifiable face. From the t-shirts and posters (Figure 512) bought by supporters worldwide during his prison years to the work of international photojournalists during his presidential tenure decades later (Figure 513).



Figure 513. Photograph of Nelson Mandela, 1918-1913. Photo by lasanta.com.ec, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

Sculptures and paintings of him abound, in and out of his homeland. Of those in South Africa, both formal and informal examples memorialize him.



Figure 514. This somewhat stocky interpretation of Nelson Mandela was the first erected in the country, five years after his presidency ended. Kobus Hattingh and Jacob Maponyane, Sandton/Johannesburg, South Africa, 2004. H 20′. Photo by Anagoria, 2014. GNU Free Documentation License.

While his grave includes no statuary, several naturalistic public sculptures stand in major South African cities. The Johannesburg statue was the first erected, located in Mandela Square, a plaza in the upscale Sandton region, adjacent to an elite shopping complex (Figure 514). Unveiled in 2004 when the square was renamed after ten years of democracy, it shows Mandela dancing in a casual shirt–an unusual pose for a former head of state.



https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/24192

Figure 515. Mandela's bronze statue by Kobus Hattingh at Naval Hill, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 2012. H 26.25′. Top: Photo by Diether, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. Bottom: Photo by South African Tourism, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0..

Eight years later, one of the same artists created a large Mandela sculpture at Naval Hill in Bloemfontein (Figure 515). Erected on a platform, it stands in a game reserve in the middle of a city, and was commissioned by a black millionaire as part of a plan for future tourist development. This work frames Mandela more politically. Facing the site where his African National Congress party was founded, he looms over the city from its highest point. Dressed in a suit,



Figure 516. Nelson Mandela's multi-colored bronze sculpture stands outside the Union Buildings that house South Africa's presidential and other governmental offices., André Prinsloo and Ruhan Janse van Vuuren, Pretoria, South Africa, 2013. H 29.53′. Photo by Bernard Gagnon, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

his left hand is raised in the anti-apartheid salute of solidarity, pumped to the word "*amandla*" ("power"), to which crowds responded with "*awethu*" ("to the people"). Both dress and gesture were recorded by countless cameras upon Mandela's 1990 release from Victor Verster Prison.

Mandela's publicly-funded sculpture (Figure 516) on the grounds of Pretoria's Union Buildings–the seat of the South African government–was dedicated at the end of his mourning period, which coincided with South Africa's Day of Reconciliation. The

tallest of his naturalistic statues, its smiling mien and open-armed gesture are meant to show his embrace of the entire population. Its prominent position required the displacement of an earlier monument to a prime minister.



Figure 517. Only slightly larger than life-size, this multi-colored bronze sculpture of Mandela appears to wave to the crowd below. Xhanti Mpakama and Barry Jackson, City Hall, Cape Town, South Africa, 2018. H 6.4′. Photo by Barry Ne, 2018. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

The most recent of the realistic Mandela sculptures (Figure 517) stands on the balcony of Cape Town's City Hall, on the very spot where he made his historic speech after his prison relief. His clothing and accessories of the day were reproduced, and he holds a page bearing the first paragraph of his talk in both print letters and braille. Jointly funded by the city and the Western Cape government, it was dedicated the year of his centenary.

While all three of these sculptures mark sites of post-apartheid triumph, one of the most poignant Mandela sculptures is erected along the roadside just out of Howick in KwaZulu-Natal province (Figure 518). Composed of 50 irregular pieces laser cut from steel sheets, the verticals



Figure 518. *Release* was erected fifty years after Mandela's arrest. Marco Cianfanelli, Howick, South Africa 2012. Landscaped approach by Jeremy Rose and Gilbert Balinda. H 31.17′. The work was jointly commissioned by uMngeni Municipality, Department of Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), the Apartheid Museum, the KwaZulu Natal Heritage Council (AMAFA) and the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory. **Top**: Photo by Darren Glanville, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0. **Bottom**: Photo by Maureen Barlin, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

align and transform into a representation of Mandela's face when they are approached via a landscaped path. The work, entitled *Release*, was erected across from the very spot where Mandela was arrested in 1962 after 17 months of evading capture via disguise and relocation. Viewed from some angles, the rods are reminiscent of prison bars; the artist remarked that the "fifty columns represent the fifty years since his capture, but they also suggest the idea of many making the whole; of solidarity." Interestingly enough, the focused image shows Mandela not as he was at the time of his arrest, but as the Nobel Peace Prize winner and elder statesman of his later years. The face was composited from numerous Internet photos and a film frame of Mandela, fleetingly manifested–much like the fugitive's brief moment here before disappearing into confinement for 27 years.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=576

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3.9: African Art as Inspiration

African art has inspired Western artists since the early 20th century, when Paris- and Berlin-based avant-garde artists first admired what they perceived was the carvers' "freedom" from naturalism. They, of course, were unaware that African artists were operating under the stylistic constraints of their various cultures, their abstract stylizations taught to apprentices just as naturalism was taught in European academies. Nonetheless, their fascination with African sculptural forms (accompanied by a lack of understanding and interest in their meaning) shifted the direction of Western art history (Figure 519). Artists such as Picasso (click here) bought masks and figures from French second-hand shops, where the families of colonial officers discarded them, or visited the ethnographic galleries of the Trocadero Museum, where the Dahomean war booty was deposited. While such early 20th-century European works were not exact replicas of African art, they adopted certain formal principles of stylization without direct interest in the cultures that produced them.



Figure 519. Two Fang masks from the former French colony of Gabon flank a sculpture by the Paris-based artist Amadeus Modigliani who was inspired by these or similar African sculptures. **Left**: Fang mask *ngil*, Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1965.104.1; M) Amadeo Modigliani, Italy. Head, 1911–1912, limestone. 25.75″ x 6.75″ x 8 3/8″ Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 62.73.1. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles, public domain; **Right**: Fang mask, Gabon. Musée du Quai Branly, 75.14393. Ca. 1906.

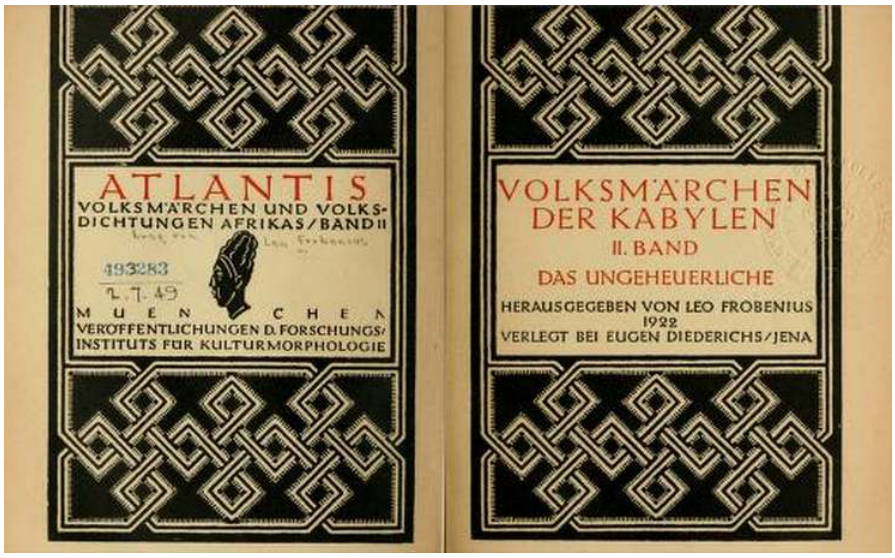


Figure 520. This book by Leo Frobenius employed patterns from African textiles and woodworking. 1922. Public domain.



Figure 5213. Pierre Legrain (French; 1889-1929). Stool (Tabouret); ca. 1923. Wood; lacquer; sharkskin; 22 1/8″ x 21″ x 14″. Brooklyn Museum,73.142. Purchased with funds given by an anonymous donor. Creative Commons-BY.

The interest generated by African art in the early 20th century extended to furniture and graphic arts as the Art Deco movement became more popular. Books with African subject matter used modified African designs for their endpapers (Figure 520), and designers such as Pierre Legrain adapted African seats and headrests for high-end customers (Figure 521) who may have been unaware of their inspiration, but were drawn to their sleek lines and luxurious materials.



Figure 522. *Muses*, one of six murals painted by Hale Woodruff from 1950-51 (and unveiled in 1952) in the atrium of the library of Clark Atlanta University. Its African female muse mixes characteristics of Luba sculpture and a famous Bena Lulua male figure. Single frame from Felipe Barral's "IN THE EYE OF THE MUSES at Clark Atlanta University Art Galleries," 2012, IGNI productions & the G channel.



Figure 523. This *Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine* ad of 1923 includes clothing inspired by the Brooklyn Museum's huge African exhibition of the same year. The model's blouse is based on Kuba textiles from the then-Belgian Congo. Public domain.

A concurrent meaning was not always missing from this kind of stylistic mimicry and adaptation, however. African American artists, in particular, have often married African style with their own content, ranging from the self-referential to the didactic. Hale

Woodruff, for example, was inspired to produce a set of murals–*The Art of the Negro*–at Clark Atlanta University's library that examined parallels, convergences, and the history of the intertwining of African and European art to produce African American art. One of the murals–*Muses* (Figure 522)–depicts two titular figures hovering over artists ranging from a San rock painter from South Africa to Woodruff himself. One muse is a marble-like Greco-Roman male, the other a wooden African female sculpture of ambiguous style.



Figure 524. Howard University graduate at an intern's luncheon with Senator Kamala Harris. Washington, DC, 2017. Office of Senator Harris. Public domain.

Contemporary artist Willie Cole uses found objects to recreate famous African artworks, benefitting from improvements in scholarship and publication numbers in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Using bicycle parts, he channels Picasso's 1942 assemblage of bike seat and handlebars to form a bull's head, instead turning his attention to the African antelope in his Tyi Wara series that mimics the forms of Bamana masquerade crests. Some employ chairs to the same effect. Cole uses women's high heels for additional assemblages, some of which also call to mind African sculptures.



Figure 525. This coat made from Senufo mudcloth was sold in the United States in the early 21st century.



Figure 526. These *Lion King* costumes include several references to the Democratic Republic of Congo's Kuba textiles, as well as to *bogolanfini* mudcloth from the Bamana of Mali and hunter/warriors' shirts worn by the Bamana and other Mende peoples. Single frame from Disney UK's "THE LION KING MUSICAL" | London West End. Published on Jan 3, 2017.

Some American dress designers evidenced an interest in African cloth and styles in the 1920s, inspired by the first major exhibitions of African art in the United States (Figure 523), although their impact was limited. Since the 1960s, however, inspired by publicity about the clothing of the representatives of the newly-independent Africans at the United Nations, the rise of the Black Power Movement, and youthful Peace Corps workers returning from Africa, American fashion has seen periodic trending of actual or adapted African textiles and fashion styles. These have included Asante *kente* cloth, which swept through a range of products in the 1990s and left its legacy in the graduation stoles of many African American students (Figure 524), as well as Bamana *bogolanfini* and Senufo mudcloth (Figure 525) styles that became popular in the early 2000s.



Figure 527. A single frame of a Maasai woman in the 1994 Disney film *The Air Up There*.

Films, stage shows, and videos set in Africa have also stimulated the imagination of working on Western productions, and by the late 20th-century scholarship had enabled art directors to access a wealth of imagery from the Continent. Disney's Broadway production of *The Lion King* (1997) won director Julie Taymor the Tony for both Best Direction of a Musical and Best Costume Design. Her costumes included references to multiple cultures' textiles, clothing, and body arts (Figure 526). Many films set in Africa relied on generic military gear for films about warfare. A few, such as the British epic *Zulu* (1964), carefully reproduced African period costume, or, in the case of *Out of Africa* (1985), Maasai dress providing a backdrop for early colonial 20th century. Kenya's Maasai and South Africa's Zulu have frequently added exoticism to movies (Figure 527); they are semi-familiar tropes that have become semi-recognizable to Western viewers via their colorful beads and herdsmen's rural lifestyles.



Figure 528. In this single frame from *Coming to America*, the extra in the back wears the large torqued gold earrings of the Malian Fulani, while James Earl Jones, the king, wears a suit with the gold amulet necklaces of the Akan, as well as their talisman crown ornaments–but worn on a hat inspired by those worn by the late Guinean head-of-state Sekou Touré. Designer Deborah Landis, wife of the film's director.



Figure 529. **Left:** Single frame from the film *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (1995), set in the fictitious country of "Nibia." The man wears the bottle-cap hairstyle that is actually only worn by Dassanech women from Ethiopia. **Right**: Dassanech woman, Ethiopia. Photo by Rod Waddington, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

When filmmakers attempt the creation of imaginary African countries, their source material often veers off into lesser-known regions or becomes a potpourri of cultural elements. *Coming to America* (1988) was a box office hit, and its fictional Zamunda mixed elements of West, South, and East African costumes and architectures for their contemporary fantasy royal court (Figure 528).

The considerably and justifiably less popular *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (1995) included outrageously inaccurate scenes that would not have been out of place in earlier, racist 20th-century movies like Abbott and Costello's *Africa Screams*. Some of the costumes and makeup were based on the peoples of Ethiopia's Omo River Valley near the Kenyan border–however, they were jumbled together with the body paint of the Surma worn with the bottle-cap coiffures of Dassenech women and feathered headdresses from another region altogether (Figure 529). The intention of this combination is to create a "primitive" appearance without dignity in order to produce in the viewer a sense of alienation that firmly places Africans on the other side of a self-Other divide, with admiration ruled out.



Figure 530. **Left**: Councilwoman from the film *Black Panther*, who wears the hairstyle associated with young Himba mothers along with the copal amber coiffure beads worn in Mali and parts of North Africa. Single frame from Movie Clip – Capture Klaue (2018) Marvel Superhero Movie HD, 2018. **Center**: Young Himba woman from Namibia with leather-wrapped ochre hairstyle worn by young wives after bearing their first child. Photo Julien Lagarde, 2011. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. **Right**: Fulani woman with copal amber bead ornaments in her hair, Mali, early 20th c. Public domain.



Figure 531. **LeftL** Ruth Carter's costume for the councilman from the "River Tribe" in the movie *Black Panther* (2018) wears a lip plate worn by Mursi women from Ethiopia, a sword in a beaded sheath modeled after Owo Yoruba sheaths, beaded ornaments on his clothing derived from Yoruba diviners' sashes, and a horned headdress of unknown origins. Single frame taken from Flicks and the City, "Black Panther DELETED SCENES, Alternate Ending + Post Credits & Missing Characters," 2018. **Center:** Not all Mursi women wear these clay lip plates–but men never do. Photo Rod Waddington, Ethiopia, 2016. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0. **Right**: Owo Yoruba sword with ivory handle and beaded sheath, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th c. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 91.1551. Museum purchase funded by Dr. Jules H. Bohnn, Louis Tenenbaum, H. Brock Hudson, Matthew R. Simmons, and Dr. Byron Bohnn in honor of William J. Hill, the founder of "One Great Night in November" at "One Great Night in November, 1991."



Figure 532. The Wakanda capitol's cityscape references futuristic architecture of various types. Some building types are imaginative, others are based on actual structures. **Top**: Single frame from *Black Panther* (2018). **Lower Left**: Traditional house, Lalibela, Ethiopia. Photo by Julien Demade, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0. **Lower Right**: Sankore mosque, Timbuktu, Mali. Photo by Senani P, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Black Panther (2018) is the first major film set in Africa to have an African American design team, and their research took them on pre-production trips to South Africa and Kenya, as well as library and museum forays into dress, makeup, and architectural sourcing from Mali, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Ghana, Nigeria, Namibia, Uganda and elsewhere. According to the comic book the film is based on, the fictional country of Wakanda is located at the juncture of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda, but sets and costumes reference many parts of the continent, the designers taking a mix and match approach (Figs. 530, 531, 532). Their intention, like that of Deborah Landis, the *Coming to America* designer mentioned above, is to emphasize the beauty and diversity of African dress. In this, they were heavily influenced by a number of sources unavailable when in 1988 when Landis worked. The collaborative, full-color, large format photo books by Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith, such as *African Ark* (1990), *African Ceremonies* (1999), *Faces of Africa* (2004), *Dinka* (2010), and *Painted Bodies* (2012) provided plentiful material for visual mining, as have numerous art history exhibitions and publications.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: The Impact of Religion and Hierarchy on African Art

4.1: Traditional Religion and Art

4.2: Christianity and Art

4.3: Islam and Art

4.4: Art in Nomadic Societies

4.5: Art in Small-Scale Communities

4.6: Kingdom-based art

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Figure 533. Male performer in a *sauli*/*zaouli* masquerade, meant solely for entertainment. His shoulder cloth is a local indigo hand-woven male-made cloth. Guro male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 2016. Photo by Emmanuel Dabo. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Much of traditional African art is secular. It may relate to personal adornment for reasons of status, age, or ethnic identity, or consist of pottery used for domestic water use. It could be associated with a secret society's instruction or served as a sculpted door for a home. It might be sculpture or architecture that reinforces the prestige of a ruler or his courtiers, or a masquerade whose sole purpose is community entertainment (Figure 533), perhaps with a satirical component meant to



Figure 534. Wooden weaver's heddle pulley decorated with a female head. Guro male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 19th century. H 9.06″. Gift of Florence Marinot. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1975.1.1.

reinforce moral values. It can manifest as a domestic or work utensil (Figure 534) part of a game, a musical instrument, or even a gambling chip (Figure 535). Sometimes lack of information and context makes it impossible to identify its original function (Figure 536). While such secular items are numerous, traditional sacred art, however, probably constitutes the better-known direction of African art.



Figure 535. Counter for the *abbia* gambling game carved from a fruit pit. L 1.77″. Male Fang artist, Cameroon, 20th century.



Figure 536. Because these ancient terracottas were not found in their original context, any conclusions about their function are guesswork. They were washed out by alluvial streams, so their original “skin” is missing in many places, revealing the pebbly grog material. Large pierced triangular eyes with brow are a fairly consistent feature. H 8.86. Unknown male or female artist, “Nok” culture of central Nigeria, 500 BCE-200 CE. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1992.0.65.

Traditional religion itself manifests nearly as many forms as there are ethnicities. Most peoples believed in a High God, but felt he or she was too distant from humanity to take much interest in peoples’ affairs. Instead, they focused on ancestors and/or spirits or deities as beings to plead with, asking for favor or apologizing for shortcomings. While these efforts did not always involve art forms, they frequently did. Artistic objects might be personal, family-owned, or community-based. In the past century, however, traditional religion has felt the increasing squeeze of Christianity and Islam. While both of these religions have had an African presence for centuries, they are increasingly attracting followers who ignored, actively avoided pressure, or were unaware of them before. In some areas, individuals are

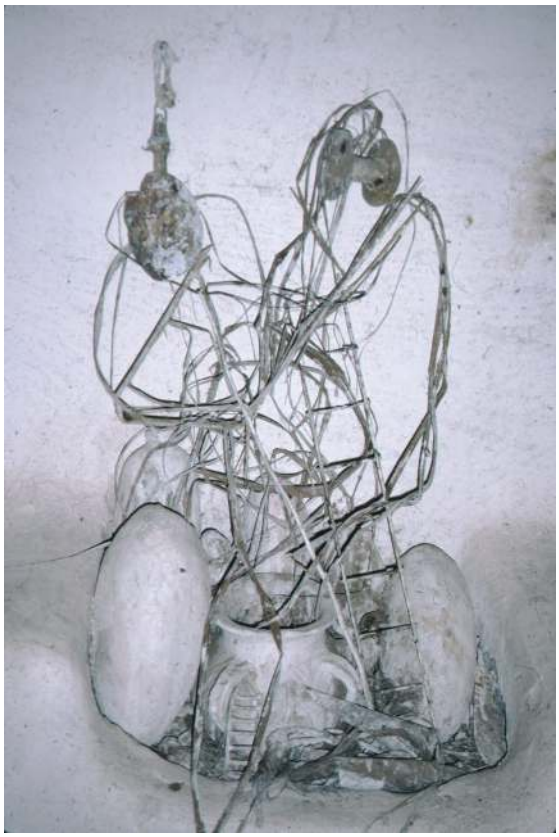


Figure 537. Many traditional households still contain individual Olokun altars for each wife and daughter. These may be held in wall niches or separated by a low clay divider. They contain a pot, kaolin chalk, miniature leather boxes and fans, and miniature brass ladders, ceremonial swords, and other objects. Photo by D. Anthony Mahone, Benin City, Nigeria, 1994.

comfortable straddling the worlds of their traditional religion and that of an adopted religion, adhering to one or the other as the occasion demands. Some, however, completely reject traditional religion. This has led to a depletion of associated art forms, or, in some cases, their complete abandonment.

The Edo of Nigeria’s Benin Kingdom, for example, believe in a High God known as Osanobua; Christian churches there use this name to also refer to the Christian High God. Although frequently called upon in daily speech–in the order of “Oh, my God!”–few shrines or priests were or are dedicated to him. Instead, his three children were once the subjects of extensive worship. The eldest, a female named Obienmwen, was associated with farming (particularly of yams) and childbirth. The youngest, Ogiuwu, was the Lord of Death, and once had a major shrine near the palace entrance, the site of sacrifice. Both of these deities have essentially fallen by the wayside. A few Obienmwen priestesses persist, but without large-scale community temples or support. The



Figure 538. The life-size figure of an enthroned Olokun, arms supported by retainers and surrounded by wives and courtiers, in a chief's private Olokun shrine. The clay altar to wealth is on the figure's lap. Edo female artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1994.

British suppressed the worship of Ogiuwu at the time of their 1897 invasion, and he is referred to historically rather than visibly honored. The middle child of the High God, however, retains some of his former glory. Olokun, lord of the sea, is the deity of the sea and wealth, as well as the supplier of children. He lives in an underwater palace filled with coral beads, brassware, and other riches.

Formerly almost every Edo female had a small altar to Olokun to ensure her fertility (Figure 537), and went through at least the first stage of initiation if there were any concerns about her well-being. These are covered with layers of kaolin chalk, which is found by riversides and is the Edo symbol of joy, peace, and purity. Great men also have Olokun altars to ensure their wealth. Their core is a clay construction embedded with cowrie shells, the region's pre-colonial currency. This may be placed in the midst of an ensemble of large unfired clay figures that depict Olokun, his wives, and his court (Figure 538). Their poses and dress are like those found at the Benin ruler's palace, for the latter is said to be a reflection of Olokun's realm. These sculptural tableaux are also the focus of state Olokun shrines and those belonging to priestesses; they are normally made by women. Despite the continuance of this tradition, it is shrinking as Christianity continues to grow. The semi-accommodation granted by Catholicism, the Anglican/Church of Nigeria, and other Christian denominations has been rejected by those belonging to the rapidly-adopted Pentecostal/evangelical sects, and Olokun participation by young girls has dropped off considerably.



Figure 539. These water spirit masks are worn horizontally on the performers' heads, so they look upward, as if they were floating on the water's surface. Some are highly geometric, combining features of fish, animals, and humans. Ijo male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. L 26″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.323. Gift of Charles B. Benenson; B.A. 1933. Public domain.



Figure 540. This sawfish masquerade (*oki*) is naturalistic in both form and painting; it imitates an Ijo prototype but is a social club masquerade. The club sought and paid for permission rights from the Itsekiri village aligned with this water spirit to carve the image and use its music and dance. Itsekiri male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo by D. Anthony Mahone, 1994.

When traditional religion is wrapped up with cultural identity, it tends to persist, at least in part. Although Christianity is a large part of the life of many of the Ijo/Izon of coastal Nigeria, masquerades that honor the water spirits have not vanished. Ijo life in the Niger Delta, riddled with rivers and creeks, has long been wrapped up with fishing, trade, and now offshore oil reserves–all enriched and made possible by water. Their masquerades enter the village from the shores, and perform in the guises of highly abstract composite creatures (Figure 539) or more identifiable ones. Even when they take human form, they represent spirits from the watery realm (*ekine*) who interact periodically with their admirers and grant favors when satisfied with them. Each has its own music and dance, as well as a priest who sacrifices to them from a waterside shrine. The Delta neighbors of the Ijo have adopted and adapted these water deities over time; Itsekiri, Igbo, Urhobo and riverine Yoruba masquerades reflect their impact. In some non-Ijo areas where Christianity is particularly prevalent, the masquerades have dropped their spiritual aspects and have been adopted by social clubs who perform with them at either Christmas, New Year's, or Easter; they have no priests nor shrines and are considered forms of cultural expression (Figure 540).

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The Bwa of Burkina Faso and Southeastern Mali



Figure 541. The *bieni* masquerade that is a key aspect of the worship of Do, the Nature god. Bwa male artists, Bansie village, Burkina Faso, 2006. Single frame from Christopher Roy's video, "Bwa Masks of Leaves and of Wood."



Figure 542. Wooden mask in the form of a snake. Bwa male artist, Burkina Faso, first half of the 20th century. H. 14.6′. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1962.6.1.

Ancestors, deities, and spirits make up critical aspects of many traditional African religions, although art may relate only to certain of these aspects–or none at all. The majority of the Bwa people of Burkina Faso still practice traditional religion. They believe in a High God known as Difini or Dobweni, who created the world and mankind, then withdrew from contact. He left behind his son, Do, embodied by a masquerade that represents the life force and is meant to mediate between men and the bush, the uncultivated wilderness that provides meat via animals, as well as some other foodstuffs and plants and other materials used for supernatural medicines. He is the Nature god, and also the power behind successful farming. The Bwa actually adopted the Do masquerade (*bieni*) centuries ago from their neighbors the Bobo, an ethnic group that is part of the Mande world. Its construction is from bush materials–leaves, vines, wild stalks, grasses, porcupine quills, and white feathers from hornbills and hawks–and it is not meant to have a human-like appearance (Figure 541). The performer is wrapped in vines before the costume is created around him; he becomes nearly invisible inside a constructed forest enclosure, although his hands and feet can be seen. The dance of the *bieni*–several perform at the same time–involves rapid quivering that impresses viewers with godly creativity. Both male and female initiates interact with the dancers, the elders praising them by raising their arms during their frequent appearances at initiations and community purification ceremonies, as well as their



Figure 543. Wooden mask in the form of an abstract butterfly, associated with new growth at the beginning of the rainy season since they appear in a cluster around puddles of water. Bwa male artist, Burkina Faso, before 1975. W 8.05′. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1975.7.1.

performance at Do worshippers' funerals. These leaf masks occur among all Bwa sub-groups and are ephemeral, destroyed after the day's performance (except for the feathers) only to be reconstructed in future, just as the growth cycle incorporates sprouting, full growth, death, and resprouting.

The Bwa of Burkina Faso, however, also have a second type of masquerade that includes carved wooden masks. These are a fairly recent adoption from several of their eastern neighbors, including the Nunuma, Winiama, and Nuna, just about 120 years ago. They never perform at the same occasions as Do worshippers and are often in conflict with

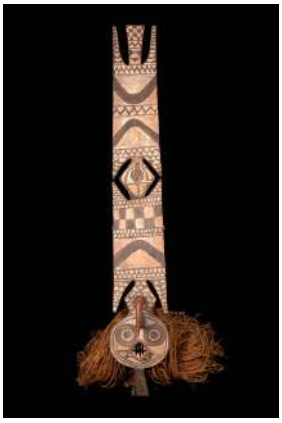


Figure 544. The colors on this Bwa plank mask have faded over time. Its symbols include a painted crocodile. Male Bwa artist, Burkina Faso, late 19th or early 20th century. H 7.68′. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1930.26.12. Gift of Henri Labouret.

them. These wooden masks represent protective nature spirits, not gods, and are family-owned, performing at initiations, burials, funerals, and public civic and market occasions. A family's masks relate to their stories of particular supernatural beings that intervened on behalf of specific ancestors, helping them escape danger or leading them to prosperity. The masks honor these spirits and commemorate the encounters.

Bwa monoxyl masks often soar high in the air, the plank-like forms recalling some Dogon masks as well as certain other nearby peoples who, like the Bwa, belong to the larger category of Gur-speaking peoples. Nature spirits are supernatural beings, but they often choose forms that are familiar–animals like the snake (Figure 542), the antelope, the buffalo, the crocodile, butterflies (Figure 543), the rarer bat and fish, or abstract masks that represent "human" or supernatural characters (Figure 544). Performers' costumes are made from wild raffia fibers, but are now frequently dyed. Their dances and musical accompaniment vary according to their nature, but require considerable athleticism and endurance.

The masks usually have graphic elements–concentric circles, triangles, checkerboards, and zig-zag lines–carved in relief on their surfaces, which are conventionally painted in red, black, and white. Red, a color of danger and power, is associated with the spirits. The symbols carry meaning to initiates; zig-zag lines represent the difficult but desirable path of following the ancestors, while the checkerboard indicates that greater knowledge comes with age–white squares represent the ignorance of the newly-initiated, black squares the wisdom of elders. Chevrons allude to a sacred serpent,

and the “X” form represents an archaic kind of scarification once worn on the foreheads of both male and female initiates, who go through initiation (and its accompanying circumcision and excision) together. These masks continue to evolve; carved inscriptions and figurative images now appear on some examples.

Whether fiber or wooden masks, performance shows a close relationship between initiated citizens of both sexes and the spirit world.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=642

Further Reading

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Roy, Christopher D. “The laws of man and the laws of God: graphic patterns in Voltaic art.” *Baessler Archiv*, n.s. 47 (1, 1999): 223-258.

Roy, Christopher D. “Leaf masks among the Bobo and the Bwa.” In Frank Herreman, ed. *Material differences: art and identity in Africa*, pp. 122-127. New York: Museum for African Art/Ghent, Belgium: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 2003.

Roy, Christopher D. “Nature, Spirits and Arts in Burkina Faso.” Art and Life in Africa website, University of Iowa.



Figure 545. This *ibori* is nestled within its "house," normally hidden by the container's lid. Yoruba male leatherworker, Nigeria, 20th century. H of lidded container 14″. © Photo by Richard Goodbody. © High Museum of Art, 2008.282 a-b. Gift of Bernard and Patricia Wagner.

One of the most complex traditional religions is that of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria and its western neighbor, Benin Republic. The Yoruba believe in a High God known as Oludumare, who, like the High God in many African religions, is somewhat withdrawn from humanity but exclaimed to during periods of distress. Although the ancestors play an important role in their belief system, as do certain lesser spirits, religion concentrates on a pantheon of deities known as *orisha*. These are countless and vary considerably from area to area. A natural feature–hill, rock outcrop, stream–may be anthropomorphized and known by name in one community, and unheard-of five miles away. There are, however, *orisha* with a greater geographic spread and impact whose personalities and exploits are well-known (see some of them here: orisha chart). The *orisha*, though deities often associated with nature or natural forces, are conceptualized in human terms, and quarrel, love, and compete with one another. Their interest in human affairs is periodic, but they respond to sacrifice and request, and their devotees and priesthoods have been major patrons of Yoruba art.

We have already touched on certain major Yoruba religious concepts and related art forms in this book: divination (Chapter 3.6), witchcraft and its associated *gelede* masquerade (Chapter 3.3), the importance of twins even after death (Chapter 3.7), and *egungun* ancestral masquerades (Chapter 3.7). We've also examined other Yoruba art forms, including the Ife bronzes and terracottas (Chapter 3.8), kola nut presentation bowls (Chapter 1.3), Osugbo Society brasses (Chapter 3.2), and other sculptures and textiles. This section will concentrate on certain underlying religious concepts that manifest in traditional art and interactions with it, as well as take a closer look at artworks related to a single *orisha* in order to better understand the complexity of the interaction of religion, art, and life.



Figure 546. While the key *ibori* component is similar to other known examples, this *ile ori* is considerably grander, with more cowries, as well as mirrors and triangular protective amulets. Yoruba male leatherworker, Nigeria or Benin Republic, 19th or 20th century. H 24″. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 97.110. Art Purchase Fund. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.

The Inner Head

According to Yoruba religion, we live cyclical lives. We await birth in the other world, the spirit world (*orun*), are born and become adults in this world (*aiye*), grow old and close to the ancestors, die and–if we have children who properly perform our funerals–become ancestors ourselves, only to face reincarnation back in our own family as the same gender. Our success in life is dependent on our head, an entity with two parts: the outer head (*oriode*), supplied with a face for recognition, and our inner head (*oriinu*), the site of destiny and spirituality. Although



Figure 547. This twin figure displays the 1:3.5 head-to-body proportion (excluding the conical hairstyle) that gives prominence to the head. Yoruba male artist, Ekiti region, Efon-Alaiye, Nigeria, before 1949. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1949,05.5.b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

our inner head is invisible, the Yoruba conceptualize it as having a conical shape. Our good fortune and destiny in life come from our inner head, and our fortunes devolve on having a "good head" or a "bad head." Our fate is our choice, however, for it is said we collect our head from the workshop of Obatala, *orisha* of creation (or, in some versions, the *orisha* Ajala Alamo, molder of *ori inu*), when we are still in the other world, about to be born. It is, however, a blind choice, for the exteriors of the conical inner heads look identical.

Personal shrines are prepared for individuals so they can honor their inner heads and sacrifice to them. Why? Even destiny is not completely fixed, but is more of a potential. Even a mediocre fate can be maximized through sacrifice, while the possibility of a splendid one can be achieved. Although fewer such shrines are created today, they are the sites of daily morning prayer. These shrines for the inner head are known as *ibori*, and are stored in larger, cowrie-covered leather containers known as *ile ori* ("house of the head") (Figure 545). The *ibori* is a small leather object that is also covered with overlapping cowries. These shells, imported from the Indian Ocean were the pre-colonial currency of most of Africa, so their presence honors the head with the personal sacrifice of money. The more socially significant the owner, the more elaborate the *ile ori* (Figure 546). That of the Oba (the ruler) is beaded; the use of bead for clothing or accessories (other than necklaces and bracelets), is a practice reserved for the ruler or those to whom he grants the privilege.



Figure 548. This horned *gelede* mask features five equestrians, their caps extended to remind viewers of the inner head. H 16.34″. Yoruba male artist, Lagos Region, Nigeria, 19th century. Photo by Martin Franken. Sammlung: Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 6443. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA.

Inside the conical *ibori* is fine sawdust or sand taken from a divination tray; it is all that remains of the sign the diviner marked when he marked the linear symbol for the Ifa divination verse that cites Ori, and absorbs the essence of prayers and incantations that dedicate the object and entwine it with its owner. The *ibori* is thus the visualization of the verbal, the *ashe* or power-to-make-things-happen of the object. *Ashe* is a key Yoruba religious concept; it is an empowering force found not only in life forms, but in certain inanimate objects, such as special stones. *Ashe* can be transferred from one being–human to human, human to



Figure 549. This bird-topped conical crown's white glass beads suggest an association with the deity Obatala, the creator. H 45″. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 19th or 20th century. High Museum of Art, 2006.230. Gift of Bernard and Patricia Wagner in memory of Erintunde Orisayomi Ogunseye Thurmon. www.high.org

orisha or vice versa) through prayer and sacrifice. Sacrifices to one's head can be simple–a kola nut, coconut water, sugar cane–or more expensive (a rooster or duck), the choice dependent on the situation and, perhaps, a diviner's advice. The *ibori* in its *ile ori* is displayed next to the deceased, and carried in procession around town during a funeral, after which it is meant to be torn asunder, its pieces scattered on its owner's grave, so close was their association.



Figure 550. The Olugbo of Ugbo here wears a conical crown with an unusual finial composed of beaded figures. Photo by Edward Harland Duckworth, 1947. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.194.16. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

The concept of the inner head or *ori inu* is evident in many traditional Yoruba sculptures in two key ways. First, the head is given more prominence than other parts of the body, resulting in a head-to-body proportion that usually ranges from about 1:3 to 1:5 (Figure 547) that honors the inner head, acknowledging its critical importance. Secondly, The hairstyle of many figures is elongated into a conical shape, acknowledging the inner, invisible engine that drives a person's path through life (Figure 548). This conical allusion also appears on formal royal beaded crowns (Figs. 549 and 550), dating back to the 19th century, and some metal crowns that are even older. While the age of the concept of the inner head is impossible to determine, it was in place in Ile-Ife (11th-15th centuries CE), for it shows as stand-alone cones with rudimentary linear indications of eyes and mouth–objects made at the same time as the highly naturalistic terracotta and bronze heads. One pot includes a relief of an altar with two conical representations flanking a naturalistic head, apparently a reference to the outer head, the inner head, and the absolute essence of an individual's life made from primordial matter, known as *oke ipori*.

Yoruba art often alludes to sacrifice and transformation, both spiritually-linked practices. Sacrifice may be a personal practice to honor ancestors, deities, or other entities, or it may result from a divination consultation recommendation. Sacrifices usually consist of food or drink. The latter may be vegetable-based, such as palm oil for the *orisha* Eshu, or cooked white maize for the orisha Obatala. Others prefer meat, with chickens and goats being amongst the most common sacrifices; the colors and gender of these animals are usually prescribed by the diviner through the divination verses. While some sacrifices are left for vultures to consume, most are prepared as meals and shared with human attendees. In short, "animal sacrifice" is normally part of usual food preparation in agricultural surroundings, when having chicken for dinner means going



Figure 551. A domestic kola nut container, probably made by Adugbologe. Yoruba male artist, Abeokuta, Nigeria, 1880-1920. Science Museum, London. CC BY

outside and choosing the chicken to be killed and prepared. The foods offered in sacrifice, however, are consecrated to their purpose through prayer and incantation, even when shared. A very common theme in Yoruba art, as we have already seen, is a woman holding or offering a chicken, and in these images (Figure 551) we see a gesture of sacrifice, not one of simple hospitality.

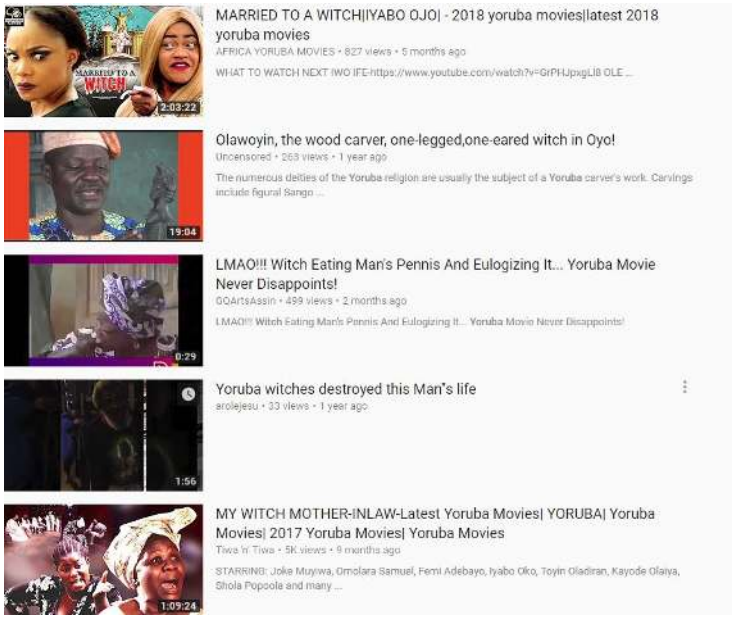


Figure 552. A selection of many Yoruba video titles that deal with witchcraft. YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/results?sear...y=yoruba+witch Retrieved July 14, 2018.



Figure 554. This wooden Gelede headdress depicts a hornbill with a huge striped beak. Its human eye and striped woman's headtie belie its animal identity, however. Yoruba male artist, probably Igbo-Ora, Oyo State, Nigeria, 20th century. L 20.02″. Collected in Warri before 1911 by District Commissioner Harold Stewart Gladstone from traveling performers. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1942; 07.11. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Witches

Yoruba beliefs encompass the ability to transform, a skill limited to those with powerful supernatural abilities, such as rulers, priests, and witches. Although transformation can include other animals, these "night people"–for that is the time they accomplish their work–are said to remain in bed but send their spirit out in the (usually) guise of a bird or bat. Witches are particularly known for this phenomenon; although a male witch must be part of a group, most of a circle's members are female. They meet at night in particular trees and consider their actions. Witches are considered in the main to be particularly wicked individuals, for they usually harm those they are related to, particularly their favorites. While an ordinary person may conceive of a wicked deed and execute it for reasons of greed, lust, or rage, these are understandable (if not condoned) actions. A witch, on the other hand, inflicts harm or death for anti-social reasons. They become witches either in the womb, because of their mother's membership, or because they have eaten–intentionally or inadvertently–witchcraft medicine. They are considered particularly powerful beings, close or equivalent to the *orisha* in their abilities, and they are a stock component in Yoruba films and television shows (Figure 552).



Figure 553. Four smithed iron Osanyin staffs with heights ranging from 19.5 to 23″. Yoruba male blacksmiths, Nigeria, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection. Left to right: 83.1.7; 83.1.8; 74.3.8; and 82.1.6.

In much of Yorubaland, witch-inflicted matters are counteracted by the priests of Osanyin, *orisha* of healing and forest medicines. While these priests can "fight" the witches in the spiritual plane, they more often work for their clients by buying off the witches through sacrifices left at crossroads. In their diagnoses, they use small puppets within a darkened room, using ventriloquist skills to speak in Osanyin's squeaky voice. Their consultation buildings are marked with short iron staffs that depict clusters of birds (Figure 553). These represent covens of witches, the bird in the superior position indicating the Osanyin priests who share their skills to triumph over them.



Figure 555. This Gelede headpiece shows a carefully braided female hairstyle. The pierced eyes are intended only to make the work more life-like; the performer sees through a cloth that covers his face and neck. Yoruba male artist, Awori subgroup, Nigeria, 19th century. H 13″. Dallas Museum of Art, 2011.23. General Acquisitions Fund and The Roberta Coke Camp Fund. Public domain.



Figure 557. This male Gelede headpiece probably represents a palace messenger; messengers used to shave half their head for identification purposes, a tuft of hair covering the site of a medicine implantation. It might also represent a priest of Shopona, the orisha of smallpox. H 10.63″. Yoruba, Nigeria, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-160-99. Gift of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

In southwestern Yorubaland, in both Nigeria and the Benin Republic, a secular masquerade known as Gelede is meant to entertain and amuse the witches so that they will leave the community in peace. A particular



Figure 556. Two teenage boys perform female Gelede characters. Yoruba male artist, Ketu, Benin Republic, late 2015/early 2016. Single frame from Líroko Benin's "Gèlèdè dance in Ketou," 2016.



Figure 558. Three views of two hunters catching a pangolin, a scaly anteater. Their friendship is demonstrated through their locked limbs as they rise to a challenge. The pair to this work is in the Art Institute of Chicago. H 16 1/8″. Fagbite Asamu (d. ca. 1970) or Falola Edun (b. 1900), Yoruba, Ketu region, Benin Republic, early–mid 20th century. Yale Art Gallery, 2004.60.1. Gift of Ellen and Stephen Susman; B.A. 1962. Public domain.

fear is that witches will "close the womb," preventing procreation and village survival, so placating "our mothers" (witches are known by this flattering honorific) is essential. The performance has a sacred aspect in that divination is employed to select a propitious date, and sacrifices are offered to Iyanla, the Great Mother, but the performance itself does not incarnate spirits. Instead, teenage boys play the roles of community members, occasionally individualized but usually generic. They do so by wearing headpieces on the top of their heads, their faces and necks covered by cloth they can see through. The headpieces take human form and often have elaborate superstructure, some with metaphoric meaning, others observable actions, people, or objects. The Gelede festival begins at night with the Efe masquerade, who chief appeal lays in its satirical verses that ridicule problematic individuals or actions. Representations of the Great Mother follow, her representations occasionally that of a post-menopausal woman with a "beard" representing the scant hairs such women's chins can sprout, or a representation that alludes to transformations of witch into bird (Figure 554).



Figure 559. The red-and-white disk on this *gelede* mask may indicate an Orisha Oko worshipper. W 7 1/8″. Anago Yoruba, Nigeria, 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 82.1.8.

The following day sees groups of performers, usually danced in identical pairs. Those performing females wear women's clothes in Nigeria, usually over a stick tied around the buttocks in an attempt to round out their adolescent skinniness; carved breasts sometimes are added as well. The teenage boys imitate women's dancing styles that emphasize hip and shoulder movements, to the often visible amusement of older women. The characters often depict market women bearing trays or bowls of food for sale, or carefully carved braided hairstyles that emphasize women's beauty (Figure 555), although motifs can veer into imaginative areas that, in the Benin Republic, can even include puppets (Figure 556). Performers who act as men have a more vigorous stamping dress style, their costumes usually consisting of lappets not unlike narrower versions of *egungun* costumes; in the Benin Republic, Gelede "females" sometimes wear these as well. Their masks can represent "types" (Figure 557), and can also encompass a full range of superstructures, including hunters (Figure 558), *orisha* priests and worshippers (Figure 559), musicians, and others.

Interaction with the *Orisha*

Orisha worship might include hundreds of deities, but religious actions did not mean interacting with all of them. Historically, families had a relationship with a particular *orisha*, and many family names reflect this: Ogunremi (Ogun–god of war and iron–consoles me), Fagboye (Ifa–god of divination–has taken a title), Oshundara (Oshun–goddess of the Oshun River–is good), or Shaningobiyi (Shango–god of thunder and lightning–gave birth to this). Having a family association with a deity did not necessarily mean regular worship sessions for all members. The head of the family might

have made weekly prayers on behalf of its members, but otherwise family members might have attended their deity's annual festival or sought out the priestess or priest at the town's shrine to the deity in order to seek a particular favor.

Each deity had its own priesthood and separate shrine. While individuals knew of other deities and some of the stories involving them, they were not expected to have a comprehensive knowledge of all the deities, except for Ifa diviners who interpreted messages from the spiritual world. In turn, they did not necessarily know the details of every aspect of a given *orisha*–that was the responsibility of the priesthood.

Some individuals received a call to participate more closely in *orisha* worship and initiate into that deity. This vocation generally began with an illness that sent the afflicted one to a diviner who indicated the sickness was inflicted by an *orisha* (not necessarily the family deity) in order to send a message–a command–that the individual needed to be initiated. If this order was resisted, the illness would intensify until initiation commenced. Under the guidance of the priestess or priest of a particular *orisha*, the trainee would learn the praise songs and dances associated with the deity, the food taboos they would need to follow, the favorite delicacies and other sacrifices the deity demanded, and all necessary esoteric knowledge. At the completion of training, the actual initiation would take place: the head was shaved, an incision made at the crown, and powdered medicine inserted. This medicine allowed for the safe possession of the initiate by the deity under controlled



Figure 560. An initiate settling into trance, supported by others. Yoruba women from Ode Remo, Nigeria, 2009. Single frame from Iya Fayemisi Shangobukola's video "Obatala and Oshun Festival 2009 Part III of III Final."

conditions. With the priesthood supervising, drummers would beat the rhythms of the particular *orisha*, the initiates would dance his or her rhythms, and the *orisha* would descend and "ride" the initiation, entering at the incision point and swelling the inner head. At this point, the initiate would settle into a trance and continue to dance, but in a transformed state as temporary host to the deity (Figure 560). Those in attendance might ask for favors or clarifications of problems they were undergoing; the initiate would answer with the *orisha*'s voice. After completion of the ceremony, the initiate would emerge from the trance and be led away to sleep. As living–albeit temporary–vessels of divinity, initiates allow followers of a deity to be in personal communion with their *orisha*.

In Nigeria, initiates do not need to wear special attire for ceremonies beyond metal or beaded bracelets and necklaces. They do, however, often carry implements during their dance. Priests and priestesses, however, may wear more elaborate dress during a festival for their deity.

In the past, when *orisha* worship was ubiquitous, temples to various *orisha* might be seen scattered throughout a given town. They were usually structures arranged around a courtyard, the shallow altars meant solely for storage of objects belonging to the deity. Minor rituals might take place inside the temple, but major ceremonies took place in the streets in order to accommodate crowds. Sacred objects included containers with the sacred, hidden objects (often specific stones) at the shrine's core, as well as carved figures representing priestesses and priests or petitioners presented as gifts or thanksgiving offerings. *Orisha* themselves were rarely represented, with the exception of Eshu, who appeared on Ifa divination trays as well as in marketplaces and shrine sculpture.

Shango and Art

The kinds of objects associated with each *orisha* include both generic maternity figures and items specific only to that deity. To provide a sense of the spectrum of Yoruba shrine art, this section will explore visual aspects associated with the worship of Shango, *orisha* of thunder and lightning, the deified third monarch or Alaafin of the city of Oyo, who had been a great warrior.

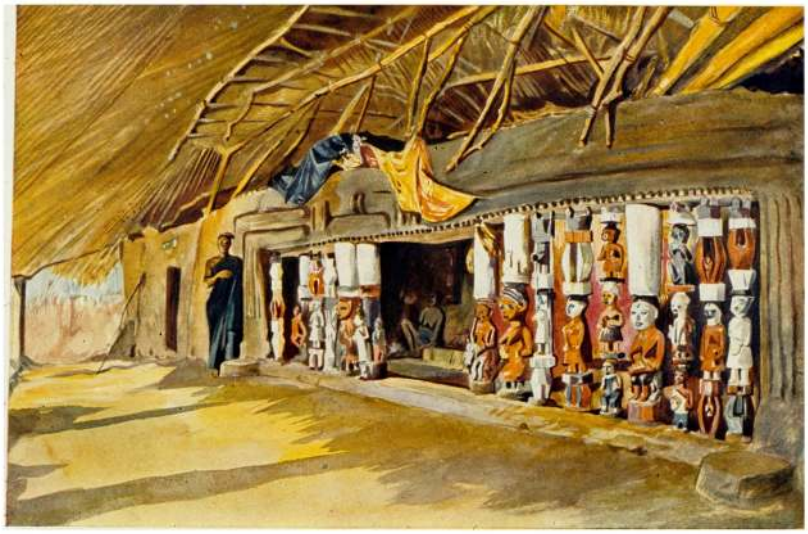


Figure 561. This Shango shrine still stands today, although the space has been truncated and many of its elements have been replaced. Yoruba male artists, Ibadan, Nigeria, probably late 19th century. Watercolor by Carl Arriens, 1910. From Leo Frobenius, The Voice of Africa, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1913), frontispiece. Public domain.



Figure 562. This particular Shango shrine door is not from the Ibadan shrine. It features animals at top and bottom, as well as priests and initiates holding dance rattles, dancewands, and the laba Shango bag. At the middle are two self-dompting fish-legged forms who flank four thunderstones. Door from shrine for deity Shango. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 19th century. Wood and metal, 52 x 19 3/8 x 1 5/8 inches. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, 98-11. Purchased by the William Rockhill Nelson Trust through the Esther Clark Garnett Fund and the George H. and Elizabeth O. Davis Fund. Photo courtesy Nelson-Atkins Media Services/Robert Newcombe.

A Shango shrine like that of the city of Ibadan (Figure 561) provides a sense of what these *orisha* centers once looked like. Originally its street facade included a relief-carved door (Figure 562), similar to those found in palaces. Its interior held a roofed courtyard with the shallow space that served as the shrine's core. Its contents were partially screened from view by a series of figurative wooden posts (Figure 563), most of which have since been replaced by copies.



Figure 563. These three pillars originally stood in the Ibadan Shango shrine and likely represent a Muslim mallam (because of the turban encircling his jaw), a mother, and a female devotee of Shango, painted with the dots worn during initiation and some ceremonies. Between 1963 and 1971, many of the original pillars were removed and replaced with new supports that imitated them. L to R, H 49.5″, 64.25″, 60.5″. Yoruba male artists, Nigeria, late 19th century. Detroit Institute of Arts, 1991.215.1, 1991.215.6, and 1991.215.3. Gifts of Helen and William Mazer, 1984. Public domain.



Figure 564. This leather bag held “thunderstones” that Shango priests collected at the sites of lightning strikes. Yoruba male leatherworker, Nigeria, 20th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1965,02.2.b. Purchased from David Crownover in 1965. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 565. A “thunderbolt”–actually a prehistoric stone axe head–that is Shango’s premier symbol, and the leather bag it was kept in. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1962,17.36.a. Purchased from the Church Missionary Society, 1962. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 566. *Arugba* typically depict a kneeling nude woman–a pose taken for particularly powerful prayers. The faces on the bowl probably represent Eshu. H 36.75″. Fakeye Akobi Ogun, Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, late 19th to early 20th century. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 70.39A-B. Daniel P. Erwin Fund.

Appliqued leather bags (*laba* Shango) (Figure 564) were hung from the lintel. These are carried by Shango priests during public ceremonies, as well as when they visit spots that Shango’s punitive lightning has struck. Such strikes are believed to be marked by “thunderbolts,” prehistoric stone axe-heads (*edunara*) (Figure 565). These constitute the key symbolic identity of Shango, the secret stones kept in the shrine; a water deity such as Erinle, for example, would have smooth river pebbles in his shrine containers. When Shango priests dig and discover thunderbolts, they can demand propitiatory gifts from the householder. The leather decoration of the *laba* Shango is abstract and consistent, full of energetic diagonals; the image may represent Eshu with his tailed headdress. The leather zig-zags at the bag’s bottom are said to represent lightning, and linear zig-zags appear in some other Shango objects.



Figure 567. This view of an *odo* Shango, a ritual overturned mortar used as a seat, shows a kneeling female figure, her body's ridges repeated throughout the relief. H 15.5″. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. Detroit Institute of Art, 2013.95. Gift of Hon. Jack Faxon. Public domain.

Shrines include multiple types of works exclusive to Shango, such as the *arugba* Shango, a large female caryatid figure that supports a bowl that holds thunderbolts (Figure 566). The *odo* Shango takes the form of a mortar–women pounding in a mortar create a thunderous sound–but it is always overturned, serving as a throne for



Figure 568. This now-lidless *arugba* features a figure whose body, bowl and *odo* are covered with the spots that link Shango to his leopard praise names. H 39 7/8″. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, 1850-1950. Detroit Institute of Art, F78.18.A. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter B. Ford. Public domain.

Shango to seat himself (Figure 567); relief carvings on its surface are positioned to be upright when it is upended.

One unusual *arugba* (Figure 568) shows the supporting female figure seated on an *odo* Shango.





Figure 569. These two terracotta vessels are dedicated to Shango. The work at left includes abstract human figures, and both include dancewand representations. **Left**: H 22″. Yoruba female artist, Nigeria, late 19th/early 20th century. Detroit Insititute of Art, 2005.27. Museum Purchase with funds from Friends of African and African-American Art and Africa, Oceania and the Indigenous Americas General Art Fund. Public domain. **Right**: Yoruba female artist, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. Drawing by Carl Arriens, 1910. Image from Leo Frobenius, The Voice of Africa, Vol. 1 (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1913): 214. Public domain.



Figure 570. This Shango dancewand features a priestess, but includes a representation of a monkey eating a corn cob–the colobus monkey is identified with the capricious of twins. In her left hand, the priestess grips an object whose pierced pot references Sopona, the orisha of smallpox. H 25.59″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-160-21. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Various terracotta vessels are also placed on Shango's altars (Figure 569). Their iconography includes simple *oshe* Shango, the wooden dancewands used by priests and initiates when in trance, and returned to the shrine when not in use.

Actual *oshe* Shango can take simple forms or be figurative, the thunderstones emerging from the head indicating Shango has taken possession of an initiate or priest. The personification of the stones makes this clear; they often bear either ethnic marks (Figure 570) or indications of eyes.



Figure 571. Selection of *oshe* Shango. Yoruba, Nigeria, 20th century. **Top Row, left to right**: 1) H 14.39″. Courtesy of The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. 2) H 20.47 Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-495-1. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 3) H 16.5. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-160-23. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 4) H 16.5″. Ketu Yoruba. Courtesy Birmingham Museum of Art, 1986.721. Gift of Jay and Clayre Haft; **Bottom Row, left to right**. 5) H 16.25″. Courtesy Birmingham Museum of Art, 1985.55. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Lewis Phillips. 5) H 9″. Courtesy Birmingham Museum of Art, 1993.59. Gift of Herbert F. Weiss in memory of Alfred L. Scheinberg. Bottom Row, left to right: 1) H 15.35″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-160-72; From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 2) H 24.8″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-171-48; Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 3) H 16.14″. Ohori or Ketu Yoruba. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-160-148. From the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 4) H 15.75. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-603-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. 5) H 20″. Courtesy Smith College Museum of Art, SC 2013:14. Purchased in honor of John Pemberton III, Consulting Curator of African Art.



Figure 572. Rear view of a Shango shrine sculpture in the form of an *ibeji* figure. H 26″. Yoruba male artist, Nigeria, late 19th/early 20th century. Detroit Institute of Art, 2007.148. Museum Purchase; Friends of African and African American Art. Public domain.

Dancewands carried in ceremony vary significantly in both style



Figure 573. Shango priest's tunic; made from cotton and leather with the addition of cowrie shells; bells; and coins. Yoruba male tailor; Nigeria; 20th century. Minneapolis Institute of Art; 91.175.48A-D. Gift of Richard and Roberta Simmons. Public domain.

and complexity (Figure 571). They always include a doubled thunderstone, a pairing that may refer to the twins Shango engendered. *Ibeji* twin figures are frequently retired to his altars, and an unusual shrine figure combines the standard twin figure pose with the doubled thunderstones of dancewands, as well as additional thunderstones and doubled heads (Figure 572).



Figure 574. This Shango priest's tunic is more elaborate than most; its beading showing both royal support and referring to Shango's royal origins. L 41″. Yoruba male artist; Nigeria; first half of 20th century. Indianapolis Museum of Art; 1989.809. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.

During trance performances, initiates and members of the priesthood move the wands violently, then return to equilibrium, referencing the unpredictable strikes of lightning itself. Priests can also display startling feats that Shango enables: walk through or sit on an open fire without harm, eat or spit fire, carry fire on the head, or pierce their tongues or cheeks with a sharp stick. Male priests plait their hair like women, since they are considered brides of the deity, and their ceremonial dress can be elaborate, including cowrie-bedecked tunics and paneled skirts (Figs. 573 and 574).



Figure 575. Red and white beads drape one of several containers for Shango; St. Barbara's castle serves as the handle for one. Casa Africa, Havana, Cuba. Photo 2018.

Traditional religion has been steadily decreasing in Yorubaland, with both Christianity and Islam pushing it into the background. Belief in witchcraft, ritual medicine, and divination may not have diminished, but fewer people publicly identify with *orisha* workship.

Elsewhere in the world, however, the religion continues to grow. Like other Yoruba deities, Shango came to the Americas as a result of the slave trade. His devotees in Brazil, Trinidad, and Cuba had to hide their religious practices but continued them nonetheless, sometimes disguising them behind a veil of Catholicism. In Cuba, for example, Shango is identified with St. Barbara, the 3rd century Greek virgin whose father locked her in a tower, and was struck by lightning



Figure 576. This sculpture is a naturalistic depiction that retains the color red and oshe Shango, but depicts the Europe-derived full skirts and saint's crown of Brazilian candomble initiates, as well as a Western action pose. Photo by Jorge C, 2015. Dique do Itororó, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. Photo courtesy Trip Advisor.

when he beheaded her for flouting his will and becoming a Christian. Containers for thunderstone are painted rather than carved in relief, and dancewands are no longer figurative, but red and white remain his sacred colors (Figure 575). From Cuba, the religion spread to Puerto Rico and the United States, and the *orisha*–no longer hidden–have seen a growth in devotion throughout the Americas. In Brazil, even non-worshippers are familiar with Shango and the other deities, erecting public sculptures that honor their folkloric appeal (Figure 576) in multiple cities.



Figure 577. Ben Enwonwu's bronze sculpture of Sango, 1964. National Power Holding Company, Lagos, Nigeria, 1964. Photo from Google Maps, 2016.

In Nigeria itself, a prominent public sculpture also features Shango (Figure 577). Created by an Igbo artist in 1964, it stands in front of the Lagos head office of the National Power Holding Company of Nigeria (formerly NEPA). The sculptor, Ben Enwonwu (1917-1994), was the son of a traditional artist and became Nigeria's first contemporary art star. His training began under a British artist in Nigeria, and in 1944 he continued his training and education at multiple art schools and university, eventually receiving major commissions from Queen Elizabeth and the Nigerian state. Equally comfortable in realistic and abstract modes, he favored the former in his work *Sango*, which shows the muscular god holding his dancewand aloft, the crown that marks his kingship following the pattern of early crowns known at Ife.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=642

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4.2: Christianity and Art

Christianity's introduction to African occurred at wildly varying points in time, depending on the region, and its impact on the arts has been equally



Figure 578. The chapel of Our Lady of Baluarte, built by the Portuguese on Mozambique Island in 1522, is the oldest standing Christian church south of the equator. Its simplified stone structure–much less elaborate than contemporaneous churches in Portugal–includes a vaulted interior, arched porch, and a rain catchment roofing system. Photos by Spielkind at English Wikipedia, 2006. Public domain.



Figure 579. The late Olu of Warri, Ogiame Atuwatse II, wearing the rosaries and cross-topped crown (one of two) his ancestor brought back from a ten-year sojourn in Portugal ca. 1600. Photo by D. Anthony Mahone, 1994.

varied. It became important in Egypt, the Sudan, and Ethiopia very early, just as it did in Europe. The rest of Africa, however, remained unaffected. When the Portuguese began to venture down the West African coast in the 15th century, they began a second wave of missionization (Figure 578), which the French continued in the 18th century. These and other Catholic efforts were, however, geographically disjointed—although West, Central, and southeast Africa were involved, high priestly death rates meant that Christianity ebbed periodically in selected coastal states until African clerics were ordained. Those states where it had the strongest impact had monarchs who had converted (Figure 579), such as many of the Kongo states, or were areas where the Portuguese or the Dutch created satellite communities.

More intense missionization waited until the 19th century, when Protestants joined Catholics in concerted efforts to convert Africans through both churches and schools. With trade expansion and colonization, evangelization moved inland and resulted in a widespread establishment of Christianity in many regions. African Catholic priests from multiple regions have themselves become missionaries to the United States and other international destinations, while Pentecostal denominations have established megachurch branches in European and American cities.



Figure 580. Cement statues of the Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart of Christ join Michelangelo's David and a golfer at an urban artist's workshop outside Kumase, Ghana. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

In general, Christianity has had a negative effect on traditional religious art, although household goods and other secular arts may have remained unaffected. Missionaries often encouraged the destruction of objects relating to ritual practices, or collected such objects themselves to display in Europe when fund-raising for their efforts to convert the "heathens." In Ethiopia, however, Christianity led to the establishment of key art forms that have been central to the art history of the Tigray and Amhara peoples. With a few key exceptions, Christian art elsewhere in Africa has been fairly limited.



Figure 581. This type of plaque is popular throughout West Africa. Photo by Babak Fakhamzadeh, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-2.0.

Sometimes it involves statuary produced for churches or devout individuals (Figure 580), public statements of faith by the latter, or banners, plaques, or paintings made for interior use (Figure 581). Occasionally, religious references have cropped up in traditional art forms, such as crucifixion scenes as superstructures for Igbo maiden spirit masks. Christian forms and motifs have not, however, replaced older art forms in number and types.

The most visible expression of Christian art is church architecture. Colonists built structures in familiar styles (Figure 582), often in the stone that was standard in their metropoles, although a novel building material

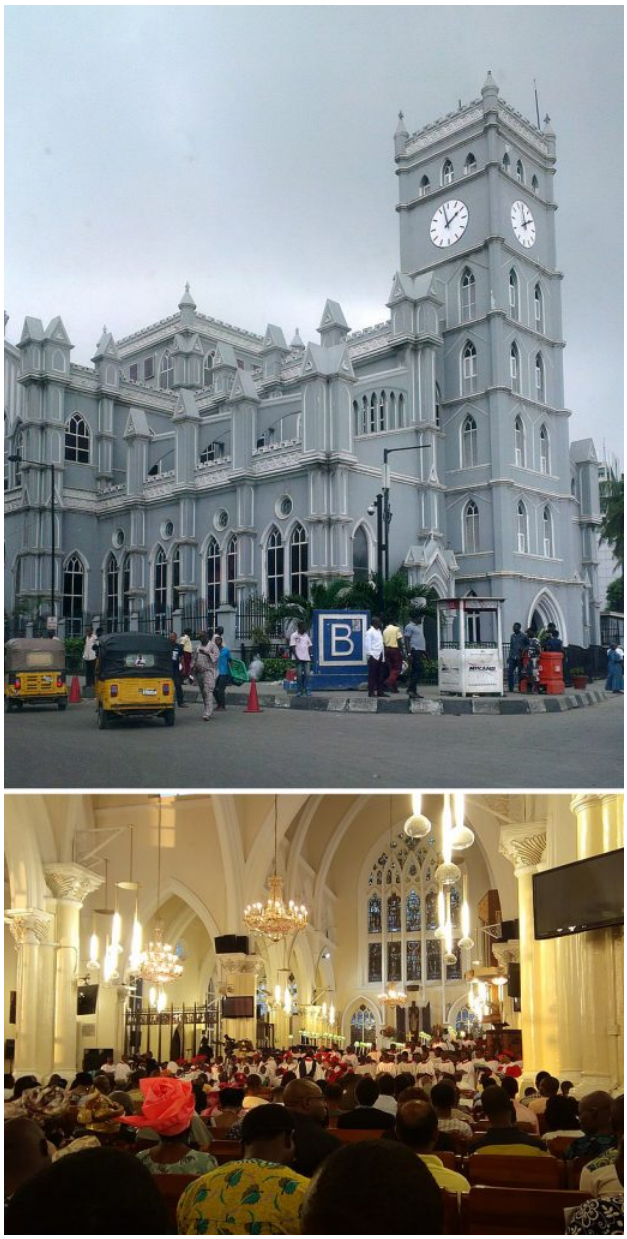


Figure 589. The Church of Christ (Marina) is the Anglican cathedral of Lagos, Nigeria, **Top**: Ayodele Yusuf, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Bottom**: Yellowcrunchy, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

in most of Africa. Most were designed by Europeans or Americans, but the Anglican Cathedral Church of Christ (Marina) in Lagos was designed by architect and engineer Bagan Benjamin, a “Saro” (a Liberated African who came to Nigeria from Sierra Leone), albeit after a European model. Begun in 1925 and completed in 1956, its simplified neo-Gothic style includes flying buttresses and pointed arches, but lacks the spires that would relieve its visual heaviness. Penned in today by high-rises, it once served as a waterfront focus, soaring above nearby buildings in a statement of colonial Christian dominance.

Catholic churches continued the decorative programs–sculpture, painting, textiles–that it had long commissioned, while Protestants continued to abjure most figurative ornamentation. As the 20th century advanced, locally designed churches became more internationally modern in style, usually abandoning stone in favor of reinforced concrete or cement. Pentecostal Protestant churches range from the modest to the enormous (Figure 590), the latter stressing streamlined design over decoration.



Figure 590. The Faith Tabernacle, headquarters of the Pentecostal Living Faith Church Worldwide International, holds 50,000 people in a structure with industrial leanings, somewhat like a trade show exposition center. It covers approximately 70 acres, set within a much larger complex. An expanded structure that will hold twice as many is planned. Lagos, Nigeria, 1998-1999. Single frames from Moses Ntam's 2016 video, "Living Faith Church, Faith Tabernacle: A City Without Walls."

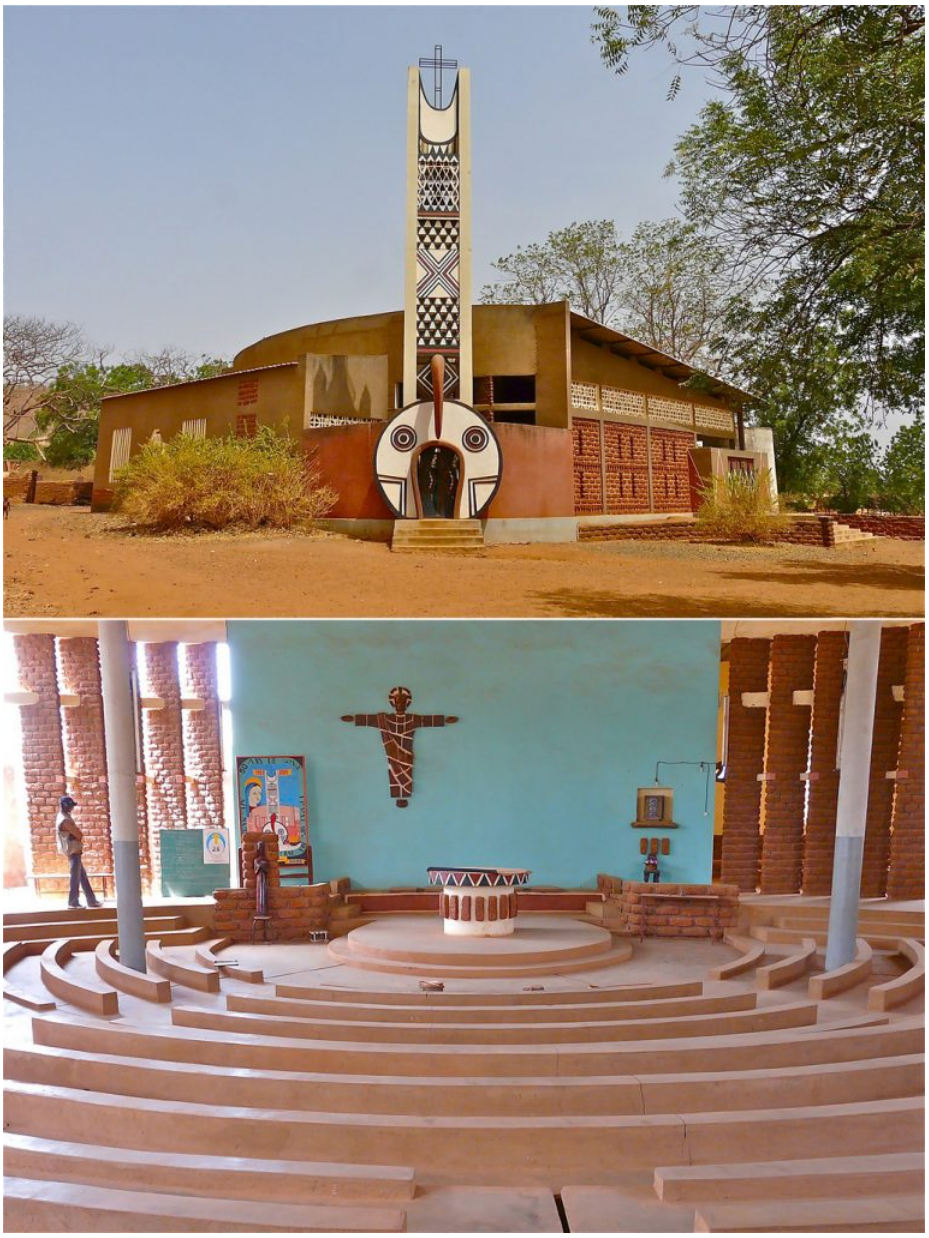


Figure 591. The interior and exterior of the Roman Catholic church at Boni, Burkina Faso, reflect local Bwa aesthetics in patterning. It was built between 1977-79, its interior configuration reflecting the most modern of Western layouts. Photos by Rita Willaert, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-2.0.



Figure 592. These wooden posts at the entrance of a Catholic hospital's chapel are the forms traditionally used only by Nupe monarchs for their entrance structure. The emir of Tsaragi granted permission for them to be used. Nupe male artist, Tsaragi, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1994.

The second half of the 20th century saw foreign missions erect a number of Catholic churches that departed from Western designs. Instead, they co-opted traditional symbols and materials in an effort to indigenize the physical Church (Figure 591), often involving

traditional artists in their construction and decoration (Figure 592).

Subsequent post-independence architecture tended to adhere to the International Style of sleek concrete architecture, but some artists took directions that were out of the mainstream. Beginning in the 1960s, Demas Nwoko designed and supervised the erection of St. Thomas Aquinas Priory, a chapel complemented by a lounge, school, and refectory for the Dominican order in Ibadan, Nigeria (Figure 593). Hailed for its originality, its use of cross-shaped lighting is reminiscent of Le Corbusier, but a partial moat, exterior screening elements, and carved wooden interior posts combine to create a distinctly African variety of Modernism, an achievement matched by few other buildings.

Individual missionaries sometimes took the initiative to become more sustained patrons, such as Father Kevin Carroll, a Society of African Missions priest who worked in the Oye-Ekiti region of Western Nigeria. From 1947–54, Carroll led a



Figure 593. The Dominican chapel, its moat and the exterior and interior of one of its church hall. Demas Nwoko, Igbo artist, designer, and architect, Ibadan, Nigeria. 1960s and 70s. Photos by Andrew Moore, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

workshop that enlisted traditional Yoruba sculptors–many of whom were Muslim–to carve doors with Christian themes that followed the organization and style of Yoruba palace doors, as well as diverse objects such as baptismal fonts, Stations of the Cross, and Nativity scenes. These cast Biblical characters in familiar Yoruba modes: the Annunciation shows the angel appearing to Mary as she pounds in a mortar, one of the Magi brings his gifts in a kola nut container.



Figure 594. This cement saint's sculpture outside St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, Pakrono, takes a naturalistic approach but places the saint under a traditional Asante chief's umbrella. Photo by Kathy Curnow, Kumase, Ghana, 2017.

As the century wore on and most Catholic missionaries were replaced by African missionaries, additional churches both incorporated elements that reflected local culture (Figure 594) and, in an effort to show their international outlook, replicated famous European religious sculpture.



Figure 595. This ivory saltcellar's lid shows Mary holding a Christ who appears to be over half her size. Despite the work's Biblical references and the inverted Portuguese royal arms, snakes and dogs are indigenous references that demonstrate the hybridity of export art. H 12.2″. Temne or Bullom male artist, Sierra Leone, late 15th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1981,35.1.a-b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 596. Detail of a kneeling Daniel in the lion's den. Despite the country's name, residents of Sierra Leone's coastal region would not have seen lions; these are taken from European imagery. © Trustees of the British Museum. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Extant Christian sculpture in Africa dates back to Lalibela reliefs (see below). In West Africa, Christian references first appeared on a number of ivories from Sierra Leone carved for the Portuguese. These delicate objects included several pyxes meant for

ecclesiastical use, covered



Figure 597. **Top left**: Wooden image of Our Lady of Fatima. H 34.25″. Makonde male artist, Tanzania, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-598-7. Gift of Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Top right**: Wooden image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. H 15.55″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1998. Gift of Claude Meunier. **Lower left**: Wooden statue of the Virgin Mary. Makonde male artist, Tanzania. H 13.4″. Private collection. **Lower right**: Kneeling figure. H 16.54″. Chokwe male artist, Angola or Democratic Republic of Congo. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-709-75. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

with scenes from the lives of Christ or the Virgin Mary, but even secular items such as saltcellars meant for an aristocratic table might include Christian motifs to demonstrate either a family's devotion or that of a high-ranking cleric (Figs. 595 and 596). The forms of the objects frequently mimicked European cups, and in some cases–like this–foreign prints were apparently shown to the artists.

Once colonization and intensive missionization began, more sculptors and painters began incorporating Christian missionaries and Biblical subjects in their work, either as local observations or commissioned work (Figure 597). Sometimes these were totally new inventions that adhered to European representational modes, but at other times interpretations referenced traditional art. Amongst

the Ibibio of Nigeria, for example, the form of the traditional girl's doll was adapted to become that of Christ on the cross (Figure 598).

As time went on, both Christian urban and academic artists included religious themes in their repertoire. Some of the former, such as Chéri Samba, have critiqued money-mongering preachers in their work. Others, like Almighty God (Kwame Akoto), had personal religious revelations and



Figure 599. In this painting by Almighty God, Christ is shown in Asante dress, decorated with the adinkra symbol for strength. Photo by Kathy Curnow, Kumase, Ghana, 2017.

refer to Christianity in paintings that range from depictions of Christ (Figure 599) to admonitions to stop smoking.



Figure 598. Anang Ibibio figures were mostly restricted to dolls and puppets. Approximately 75% of the Ibibio are now Catholics; rather than this crucifixion's Christ being modeled on foreign imagery, it adapts the thick-limbed figures of young women's dolls. **Left**: Ibibio male artist, Nigeria, before 1945. H 11.85″. Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, Acc.4739. Donated by Berta and William Russell Bascom. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0, label cropped. **Right**: Doll made by an Anang Ibibio artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. H 24″. Brooklyn Museum, 81.270, Gift of Bryce Holcombe. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

Academic artists such as Bruce Onabrakpeya, who also examines cultural and historical themes, have also addressed Biblical subjects. Onobrakpeya's linocut 14-print series, *Stations of the Cross*, creates a sense of immediacy to his Nigerian audience by incorporating local references, as European artists have done for centuries. When Christ meets his mother, she wears the *ikele* coral circlet and *okuku* beehive hairstyle of the Benin Kingdom court. Some members of the crowd along the crucifixion's procession are dressed in Yoruba patterned indigo *adire* cloth, and the Roman soldiers wear the uniforms of Hausa members of the colonial British police force (Figure 600), an indictment of both the former oppressors and their agents and a possible coded reference to Nigeria's divisive legacy during the contemporaneous civil war.



Figure 600. "Pilate condemns Jesus to Death," the first in Urhobo artist Bruce Onobrakpeya's Stations of the Cross linocut print series, Nigeria, 1969. 24″ x 34″. © Bruce Onobrakpeya. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2006.228.1; Gift of Mr. George A. Naifeh. http://www.high.org

Coptic Christian Art

Egyptian traditions state that St. Mark brought Christianity to Alexandria in the first century CE, and it spread southward in the second century. It became Nubia's official religion in 580 CE, and was heavily influenced by the Byzantine Empire. Ethiopia, which had had a long-standing relationship with Israel and already had a Jewish segment of the population, apparently housed some Christians by the first and second centuries, and, by the 4th century Frumentius, a Syrian-Greek who was enslaved in Ethiopia's Axum Kingdom, began to make converts, including the king. Frumentius traveled between Alexandria and Axum, and from the latter, the religion spread quickly as the state faith. Byzantium and the Mediterranean world more generally traded and interacted with both Nubia and Axum, and later with other Ethiopian capitals, and the Christian art of Ethiopia shows the influence of successive trading partners: the Greeks and others from Byzantium, the Italians and Portuguese of the 15th-17th centuries, and even the Indians of the 18th century. Coptic Christianity is distinct from both Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox religions, although it has considerable affinities with both. Ethiopia's official liturgical tongue is Ge'ez, a Semitic language that is no longer spoken outside church services.

The advent of Islam eventually brought an end to Nubia's Christian faith with invasions from Egypt that lasted from the 7th century to 1504. At its



Figure 601. This model by Zbigniew Doliński partially reconstructs Faras Cathedral, a Nubian church built in what is now Sudan. First built in the 7th century, the structure saw various alterations and painting additions until the 14th. Photo by Piotr Ligier, Muzeum Narodowe, Galeria Faras, Warsaw, Poland, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0 PL.

height, however, numerous churches and monasteries were clustered near the Nile in the kingdoms of Alwah, Makuria, and Nobatia. After the Islamic conquest, most fell to ruins, and some were covered by earth and forgotten. While Egypt was planning to build the Aswan Dam along the Nile, archaeologists came to the area to perform emergency excavations, since the resultant dam would produce a lake that would cover a huge area–and did, upon the dam's 1970 completion. Some structures were relocated, others submerged; still others were unknown until the archeological teams explored the area. One of the surprises occurred in the rich trading town of Faras, a medieval Nubian city now in Sudan and once Nobatia's capital. Preliminary observation suggested a large mound might be a temple site, but excavations revealed it was the Cathedral of Faras. Built in the early 7th century, subsequent versions were erected on its foundations. The



Figure 602. Fragment of a fresco of St. Anne. Tempera on plaster. H 27.17″. Nubian artist at Faras Cathedral, Sudan, 8th century to the first half of 9th century CE. National Museum in Warsaw, 234058. http://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/dmuseion/d...tadata?id=3242. Public domain.

building's foundation was stone, with its upper levels made of fired brick; its interior included several refurbishments that closed in some of the spaces spanned by vaulting (Figure 601).

Its frescoed walls were added to until the 14th century and include numerous paintings of Biblical and saints'



Figure 603. Three frescoes with very large figures from Faras Cathedral. **Left**: Bishop Petros with Saint Peter the Apostle, originally part of a larger fresco showing the investiture of King Georgios II. H 7.87′. Nubian artist, Faras Cathedral, Sudan, 10th century. National Museum in Warsaw, 234031. Public domain. **Middle**: Bishop Marianus protected by Christ and the Virgin Mary. H. 8.1″. Nubian artist, Faras Cathedral, Sudan, early 11th century. National Museum in Warsaw, 234036. Public domain. **Right**: St. Stephen. H 7.41′. Nubian artist, Faras Cathedral, Sudan, 2nd half of 10th c. CE. National Museum in Warsaw, 34030. Public domain.

scenes. These follow the style of Byzantine art: backgrounds are plain or simplified, naturalistic anatomy is discarded in favor of flat, elongated robed figures that stress patterning, figures are usually frontal with stylized linear features that emphasize the eyes, long narrow noses, expressive hands, and stylized drapery folds (Figure 602). Several images show Nubian high-ranking clerics and royals in the protective presence of saints, their tunic textiles following Byzantine fashions; saints are themselves

often dressed more modestly (Figure 603).

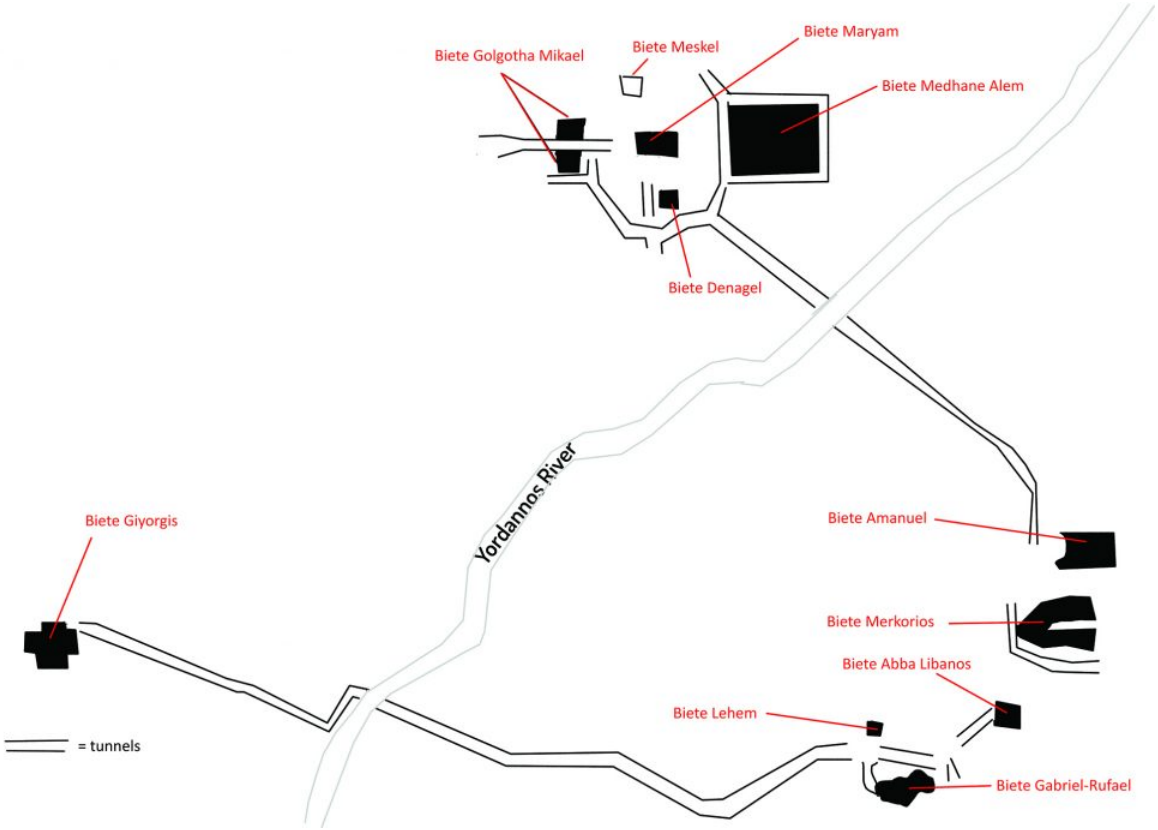


Figure 604. Diagram of churches and connecting tunnels, Lalibela, Ethiopia. Diagram by Kathy Curnow.



Figure 605. This view of the rock face surrounding Biete Maryam shows the tunnels that interconnect many of the churches. Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th-13th century. Photo by MarcD, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

By the 4th century, the ruler of the Axum kingdom in Ethiopia became a Christian convert, and it became a state religion. Additional missionaries spread the religion into the Tigray region, and numerous churches and remote monasteries were built, some in caves and partially cut into the rock. The most spectacular structures are a series of 11 churches said to have been built by Emperor Lalibela in the town now named for him (Figure 604); angels are said to have worked on the buildings at night, after human workers slept. While some scholars believe the timespan for their construction may have begun several centuries earlier,

there is no firm evidence as to how long it continued. A few structures may have first been used as fortresses or palaces, their purpose changing over time, while other areas show abandoned attempts at construction.

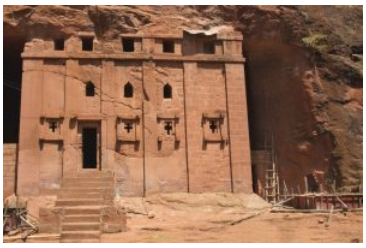


Figure 606. The Biete Abba Libanos church has dressed blocks on its right side; these seem to be an early repair or structural choice. Male builders, Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th-13th century. Photo by A. Davey, 2007. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

Lalibela, whose reign is encircled in myth-like tales, is said to have had a dream in which he envisioned the churches, which he conceived of as a pilgrimage alternative to Muslim-occupied sites in Jerusalem. His New Jerusalem is divided by a river referred to as the Jordan (Yordannos), and most of the churches on either side are interconnected by underground tunnels (Figure 605). They are among very few **monolithic** buildings worldwide; that



Figure 607. Biete Maryam, Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th-13th century. Photo Bernard Gagnon, 2012. Creative Commons CC-BY2.0.

is, each is made of a single huge stone that had to be hollowed out to form an interior. First the surrounding stone had to be gradually removed; when a window was created, it opened the opportunity to tunnel inwards and carve out the interior.

Although all but one church has a rectangular exterior, only some interiors take that shape, while others are cruciform. Imitative architectural forms demonstrate awareness of other buildings. One imitates Axum construction (as the Axum stele did themselves), with projecting mock beams supporting recessed layers of rock and mortar, while others incorporate fake arches and even a dome–neither of which actually performs the function of distributing the thrust of the stone as true arches and domes are able to do. The engineering knowledge to create these massive structures is remarkable, for, while some show repairs, none collapsed upon themselves. Earthquakes and water damage have necessitated a program of restoration, aided by the churches' status as a UNESCO World Heritage site. They remain the focus of pilgrimages, particularly full at Orthodox Christmas and at Timkat, the Epiphany celebration.



Figure 608. This stone relief is full of action, as the two equestrians hunt the small dragon. it is unclear whether their facelessness was the result of destruction, erosion, or choice. Male artist, Biete Maryam, Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th-13th century. Photo by Bluesy Pete, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

No two churches have identical forms. Many are partially built into the surrounding stone, such as Bete Abba Libanos (House of Abbot Libanos) (Figure 606), which is attached to the living rock at the roof and floor level. Others, however, are free-standing, such as Biete Maryam, or the House of Mary (Figure 607).



Figure 609. Geometric low-relief painted carvings enliven Biete Maryam's interior. Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th-13th century. Photo by Alan Johnston, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.



Figure 610. Larger-than-lifesize image of a turbanned saint. Biete Golgotha, Lalibela, 12th-13th century. Photo by Bluesy Pete, 2008. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Over its main entrance stands the image of two horsemen hunting a dragon (Figure 608), a scene that may relate to St. George the dragon killer, for he is the patron saint of Ethiopia and appears frequently in its art. It has three thrusting porch entrances, and, like most of the Lalibela structures, few windows, which produces a dim interior, formerly lit only by candles. Biete Maryam's interior boasts intricate painted geometric relief carving on its walls and arching openings (Figure 609). A courtyard pool is meant to help infertile women conceive.



Figure 611. Biete Gyiorgis from ground level. Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th/13th century. Photo by G. S. Matthews, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

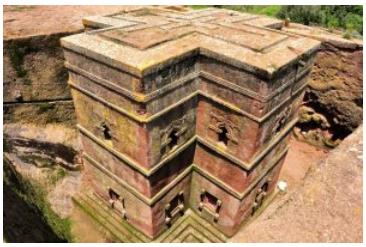


Figure 612. Alternative view of Biete Gyiorgis, Lalibela, Ethiopia, 12th/13th century. Photo by Rod Waddington, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Biete Golgotha, the only Lalibela church barred to women, includes seven large figurative reliefs of saints set within rounded, arched niches (Figure 610); a panoramic view of its interior can be viewed here. Some of the saints bear halos, while others wear the turbans still seen on priests locally. The rigidly engraved lines that mark the folds of their dress follow Byzantine conventions.

Biete Gyorgis (St. George's House) is the only isolated church at Lalibela, and can only be accessed through tunnels and inclines. Its distinctive cross-shaped exterior (Figs. 611 and 612) has a flat roof inscribed with concentric crosses, but on its inside, a false dome has been hollowed into the ceiling, again indicating awareness of stone architecture from other parts of the world.



Figure 613. Bronze finial for a wooden processional staff. H 10″. Lalibela region, Ethiopia, 13th-14th century. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.2015.18.1. Purchased with funds provided by the Ancient Art Deaccession Fund and the Decorative Arts and Design Deaccession Fund in honor of the museum's 50th anniversary. Public domain.



Figure 614. This brass finial would have topped a wooden staff for use in religious processions. H 9 5/8″. Male artist; Ethiopia; 15th-16th century. Courtesy Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art; University of Florida; 2003.10.9. Partial gift of Richard Faletti and Museum purchase; funds provided by the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Endowment; Michael A. Singer; and the David A. Cofrin Art Acquisition Endowment.

Highland Ethiopia's adherence to Christianity and its position as a state religion continued among the Amhara who ruled from a series of capitals. A seemingly infinite variety of cross shapes were used liturgically in both wood and metal, many as cast processional crosses mounted on wooden poles. Certain examples display radial symmetry (Figure 613), while others (Figure 614) include engraved designs influenced by 15th-century Italian imagery, despite their compressed proportions and simplified linear style. Missionary travel brought numerous Italians to the imperial court at that time, a period when Marian imagery became part of court devotion. At least one Venetian painter, Niccolò Brancaleone, settled in Ethiopia, working ca. 1480-1520, and trained students.



Figure 615. **Left**: Engraving made before 1600 by the Netherlandish artist Hieronymus Wierix representing the Greek icon "Salus Populi Romani" from the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The © Trustees of the British Museum, F,1.237. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Right**: Virgin and Child Triptych, tempera on gessoed wood. Open: 14.5 x 15.5″. Ethiopian male painter, second half of 17th or early 18th century. Courtesy Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida, 2003.10.10. Partial gift of Richard Faletti and museum purchase. Funds provided by the Caroline Julier and James G. Richardson Acquisition Endowment; Michael A. Singer and the David A. Cofrin Art Acquisition Endowment.

Even without direct contact, prints exposed Ethiopian artists to European religious works, although their influence was primarily compositional an iconographic, rather than stylistic. Early 17th-century Jesuit missionaries circulated prints of the Madonna based on a 6th-century icon from a Roman church felt to have miraculous properties; the painting's composition had already been copied in many Roman churches. Ethiopian painters added their own touches (Figure 615), taking a single image and transforming it into a **triptych**, adding angels and the apostles (shown in hieratic scale) to the main scene, and including St. George, as well as Biblical scenes, on the side panels. This became a stock image for portable devotional imagery–albeit with considerable variation, such as patterned textiles or the occasional inclusion of a cowrie-shell necklace around Christ's neck. Most noticeably, however, Ethiopian artists rejected the naturalism of the print, changing the head-to-body proportions and favoring unrealistic linear depictions without the shading that provides the illusion of three-dimensionality.



Figure 617. Saint John from a Book of the Gospels. Ethiopian male artist, ca. 1504-1505. Tempera on parchment. H of leaf 13 9/16″. Digital image courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum's Open Content Program, Ms. 102, fol. 215v.

https://human.libretexts.org/@go/page/24195



Figure 616. Detail of the interior of the church of Debre Berhan Selassie in Gondar, Ethiopia. Ethiopian male artists, late 18th century. Photo by Alan, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

Fresco painting on church and monastery walls and ceilings (Figure 616), as well as illuminated manuscripts (Figure 617), provided monk-artists with scope for images that continued to stress decorative borders and patterning with stylized figurative representations.

Subject matter in Ethiopian art remained wholly Christian-oriented until the 1ate 19th century, when some battle scenes were produced; although genre images have entered popular imagery and academically-trained artists create abstract works (Figure xxx), Christian subject matter still dominates.



Figure 618. Parchment healing scroll. H 6.29′. Tigrinya male artist, Tigray region, Ethiopia, 18th–19th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.5. Marie Sussek Gift; 2012. Public domain.



Figure 619. Detail of a parchment healing scroll. Ethiopian male artist, date uncertain. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2012.313. From the Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund.

One continuing tradition involves a magico-religious use of art in the form of talismanic scrolls. If an individual falls ill, the family may call in a *debtera*, an unordained cleric who specializes in curative rituals, despite the fact the official



Figure 620. Silver and copper alloy pendant. H 2 5/8″. Ethiopian artist, late 18th-20th century. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2012.371. From the Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.

Church frowns on these practices. Beliefs attribute many illnesses to evil spirits, and art is used to help exorcize them by calling on the secret names of God, asking for saints' intercessions, and compelling demons to obey. The *debtera* takes a goat or sheep and rubs it against the patient. The animal is then sacrificed, its skin treated until it becomes a parchment scroll that matches the patient's height (Figure 618). It is then inscribed with prayers and illuminations specific to the illness. Angels with raised swords populate many scrolls, as do abstract configurations reminiscent of magic

squares (Chapter 4.3) meant to activate divine powers of protection. Some of these emphasize eyes



Figure 621. Silver ear cleaner. H 2 7/16″. Ethiopian male artist, late 18th to early 20th century. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2012.383. From the Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection, Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.



Figure 622. Woman with cross tattooed on her forehead, silver cross on a cross at her throat. Photo by Rod Waddington, 2014. Tigrinya woman, Tigray region, Ethiopia. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

(Figure 619); the patient and demon look at each other until the latter is entrapped and expelled. After healing, the scroll is rolled up and placed in a leather container, worn around the former patient's neck.

The many varieties of crosses still show up on Ethiopian jewelry, worn as necklaces by women (Figure 620), but also appearing on mundane articles, such as implements to clean ear wax (Figure 621). This Christian symbol acts not only as a symbol of piety, but a motif that offers protection. It appears on the embroidery of women's white gowns, and even as facial tattoos (Figure 622).



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Figure 624. Four crucifixion variations from Kongo male artists. **Upper left**: Crucifixion from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, or the Republic of the Congo, 16th-17th century with later additions. Cast brass and copper on wood. H 18″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.295.8. Gift of Ernst Anspach. Public domain. **Upper right**: Wooden crucifix with copper attachments from the Solongo Kongo people, Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola. H 7.87″. Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, AM-29-381. Gift of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Lower left:** Brass crucifix that the museum states is from the 19th or early 20th century. H 11″. Dallas Museum of Art, 2016.39.8. African Collection Fund. **Lower right**: Cast brass crucifix from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, or the Republic of the Congo, 16th-17th century. H 10.75″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.295.7. Gift of Ernst Anspach. Public domain.



Figure 623. The remains of the Cathedral of São Salvador do Congo stand in the original kingdom's capital, Mbanza Kongo, Angola. By the mid-17th century, it was one of three stone churches in the capital. After a series of wars, the structure was abandoned in the late 17th century. Stone is an unusual building medium in West and Central Africa, but the Portuguese brought masons and carpenters to the Kongo Kingdom in the early contact years, when they cooperated with the monarchy. Photo by Madjey Fernandes, 2013. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Kongo region in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo felt the impact of European missionizing in the late 15th century, eight years after the Portuguese first reached the coast of Central Africa. Quickly, the Kongo ruler and many members of the royal family and court were baptized, and later the name of the capital city, Mbanza Kongo, was recast as São Salvador.

The Portuguese built a small church dedicated to the "Holy Saviour of Congo" in 1591, which was later rebuilt and expanded into a white-washed stone cathedral (Figure 623). Many churches were erected over royal cemeteries, although Christian burials in and outside churches remained elite privileges. Royal chapels within churches became sites that allowed ancestral cults within an approved context.

In 1509, the first Christian monarch's son, Affonso I, ascended the throne after a fierce battle with a rival half-brother–a battle in which he stated that St. James led his troops to victory. After his installation, adherence to Christianity intensified for all those who sought his favor. He quickly commanded provincial rulers to erect a church and a monumental cross in their local capital's public plaza, overt statements of a state religion. Affonso had been mission-trained and corresponded with the Pope, and sent one of his sons to Portugal, where he entered the priesthood and became the first Catholic bishop from sub-Saharan Africa. Affonso ordered *nkisi* and other traditional religious items in the capital destroyed, but the church he championed included syncretic elements that overlapped traditional religious belief and seem to have made Christianity more acceptable. Kongo religion's High God, Nzambi a Mpungo, is considered the Creator and was conflated with the Christian God. The shape of the cross itself had strong internal meaning (see Chapter 3.5). Strong beliefs in the powers of ancestors and the spirits of the dead transferred to those of saints. While various orders of European missionaries continued to visit the Kongo kingdoms over the centuries, they were supplemented by local clergy and, more frequently, by elite lay teacher-ministers known as *mestres* ("masters"). While everyone in the kingdom was certainly not a Christian, and many Christians also practiced elements of traditional religion, Christianity had a broad impact, particularly among the aristocracy.



Figure 625. The makers of this Kongo crucifix attached figures made in different eras to a wooden cross. The central figure was cast in the 16th–17th century, while the other two date from the 18th–19th centuries. H 10.25″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.295.15. Gift of Ernst Anspach. Public domain.



Figure 626. These two representations of St. Anthony both show him in his Franciscan robes, but his tonsure seems to have been misunderstood. **Left**: This image made by Kongo male artist from the Democratic Republic of Congo, 18th century, was said to have long been in the possession of a Kongo family that attributed significant fertility powers to it. H 18.78″. Wereld Museum Rotterdam, RV-3147-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Right**: Wooden figure by a Kongo male artist from Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo or the Republic of Congo, 18th-19th century. H 12.25″. Photo by Paul Hester. © High Museum of Art, 1972-20 DJ. https://www.high.org/

Over the centuries, missionaries imported many crucifixes, but Kongo artists supplemented these with local cast-brass or brass-on-wood examples (Figure 624). Although museums date these works, it is difficult to distinguish their dates of origin with certainty. Some are closer to European models than others, with more naturalistic head-to-body proportions and accurate anatomy (upper left, Figure 624). Others enlarge the head, depict Christ's eyes through a coffee-bean abstraction, transform His projecting ribs into a kind of scarification, and enlarge and flatten His hands and feet. Even those figures, however, almost always tilt the head of Christ in the fashion of European imagery. Additional figures–saints? angels? supplicants?–often occupy extensions of the crucifix, its base often bearing an abstracted figure of the mourning Virgin. One example (Figure 625) includes the additional crucifixes of the thieves executed next to Christ by stacking them above and below his portrayal, rather than flanking him. He remains considerably larger than them, an instance of local hieratic scale trumping naturalism.



Figure 627. This stone cross, carved by an Mbamba Kongo male artist from Angola, marked the grave of an important man. H 39.37″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-29-25. Gift of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 628. Solongo Kongo male artist, Angola. H 43.34″. Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, AM-29-82. Gift of the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Statues of saints and the Madonna also appeared in Kongo art, with the Portuguese Saint Anthony of Padua prominently featured (Figure 626). Born in Portugal, the saint's appeal was probably boosted by those missionaries who were themselves Portuguese. A royal church named after the saint stood in the Kongo capital, and an aristocratic religious confraternity–a non-clerical organization that organized members' burials, participated in saints' day processions, staged devotional performances, and promoted charitable

acts–also bore his name; it was one of six confraternities in the late 16th-century capital. St. Anthony's popularity in the Kongo Kingdom was probably less due to his association with finding lost objects and securing husbands for maidens than it was with his power to bring children to barren women, relating as it does to a critical cultural desire. In European art, St. Anthony is often depicted with a lily that represents purity, with a Bible, or with the Christ Child seated on a Bible he holds. In Kongo art, this last-mentioned motif sometimes depicts Christ sitting or standing on a Kongo box throne, holding a flywhisk as a mark of kingship. In the 18th century, St. Anthony took on additional political meaning. The unified Kongo Kingdom had broken down in the 17th century, with civil wars resulting in independent states. A royal woman, known by her baptismal name as Dona Beatriz (ca. 1684-

1706), joined a Kongo group who went to settle in the old royal capital, which had been abandoned. Subject to visions, she referred to herself as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ and created a variation of Catholicism called Antonianism, whose goal was to recreate a unified and Christian Kongo Kingdom under her leadership. As her followers grew, established regional monarchs grew uneasy. She was captured, tried, and convicted of witchcraft, followed by execution.

The association of Christian symbols with political and healing powers continued, even in those



Figure 629. Pedro Bambi, a Kongo chief, holds a crucifix that serves as a ritual healing object. Photo by Fr. Jan Vissers in Lengo, Democratic Republic of Congo, first half 20th century. MAS Antwerp, AE.1959.0051.0001D. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.



Figure 630. Bambi Graça, a Kongo chief, holds his crucifix, its function no longer that of a Catholic devotional object. Photo by Fr. Jan Vissers, first half 20th century. MAS Antwerp, AE.1959.0051.0002.D. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

eras where Catholic influence waned. Some aristocrats were buried with cross-shaped markers (Figure 627). In other areas, rulers or distinguished chiefs held staffs of office that might include a cross or a saint's figure (Figure 628). These originated as a badge of office for the *mestres*, and were called *santu-spilitu*, a localized term for the Latin phrase for the Holy Spirit. Topped by a cross, they could be inserted into the ground



Figure 631. Kongo hunter with two hunting charms. Photo by Johan Hammar, village of Mpete between Thysville and Ngombo Lutete, Democratic Republic of Congo, 1917. Världskulturmuseet Stockholm, 001364. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

during judicial proceedings, act as an envoy's badge of identification, or mark the site of ritual activity.

Both civil authorities and ritual specialists might own crucifixes as badges of power or

healing (Figs. 629 and 630), alongside more traditional forms of *nkisi* (see Chapter 3.5). Other cross forms, sometimes known as *santu*, became associated with good fortune in hunting (Figs. 631). These are sometimes attached to *nkisi* bundles filled with additional medicines. Their forms are not identical to that of a common Christian cross; they often have cut-outs, notches, or additional



Figure 632. This wooden cross was associated with hunting and was collected in the town of Songololo, Democratic Republic of Congo, in the early 20th century. Världskulturmuseet Stockholm, 1907.27.0001. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.5, cropped.

projections (see Figs. 632 and 633). In the early 20th century, they were said to have been blessed by a priest before a hunting expedition, then a few drops of the prey's blood would be dripped onto the hole in its middle.



Figure 633. Wooden cross from Mbanza Kongo, Angola, 19th century. H 18 7/8″. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 999.3.30470. Purchased through the William B. Jaffe and Evelyn A. Jaffe Hall Fund.

Although the 19th century and colonialism saw the conclusion or alteration of many centuries-old Kongo Christian practices, new missionary orders emerged from the Catholic "motherlands" of Belgium, Portugal, and France, as did Protestant denominations that abjured statuary and crucifixes. Many churches of varied origins stand in the Kongo territories of the Republic of Congo, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo today, including Mormon temples and both small and gigantic Pentecostal structures, Catholicism remains the dominant sect, professed by at least half of the population of the three countries. While some earlier churches are still in use, others are contemporary buildings that reflect changing tastes (Figure 634).

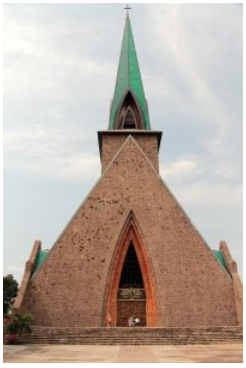


Figure 634. Basilica of Sainte-Anne of the Congo, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo. Begun in 1943, completed 2010. Architect Roger Erell. Photo by Blandaucongo, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

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4.3: Islam and Art



Figure 635. This city mural depicts Bamba (in white, posed like the only photograph of him that survives), as well as other Mouride Sufi leaders–Ibrahima Fall (right, blue), and El Hadj Malick Sy (left). as well as the Kaaba at Mecca Goree Island's House of Slaves. Photo by Erica Kowal, 2006, Dakar, Senegal. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 636. This image of Al-Buraq, a reverse-glass painting by Gora M'Beingue in 1975, shows the steed as a Wolof woman with gold jewelry sewn into her hair. Mbengue was a member of a Sufi brotherhood that followed the teachings of al-Hajj Malick Sy, a local Sufi saint. 13.5″ x 19.25″. Brooklyn Museum, 2004.52.21. Gift of Blake Robinson. Creative Commons CC BY 3.0.

Islam arose in the 7th century in what is now Saudi Arabia, the result of the monotheistic teachings of the Prophet Muhammed. It quickly spread across the Red Sea to North Africa, where it was already established later in that same century in Egypt, reaching the westernmost regions in the 8th-12th centuries. It rapidly spread southward in East Africa, displacing Christianity in the Sudan's Nubian states, and attempting unsuccessfully to do so in Ethiopia. In West Africa, its expansion was linked to traveling merchants from North Africa plying the trans-Saharan trade, Islam becoming the dominant religion from the 8th to 15th centuries across much of the Western Sudan–at least in its cities and royal courts. It now prevails in much of the continent

While the Koran–like the Torah and the Bible–condemns idolatry, it does not explicitly forbid the creation of figurative art. There are, however, numerous references in the Hadith, or the collection of statements by the Prophet Muhammed, that proscribe images of Allah, the Prophet Muhammed, and other prophets. Over time, this has generally meant that figurative art itself has been banned by many Muslim societies. Although Turkish, Persian, and Mughal Indians, in particular, have historically produced paintings of human beings, these were uncommon in Africa.

In Senegal, however, popular urban paintings often depict the local Sufi Muslim saint, Amadou Bamba Mbacke (1853-1927). Known as Bamba, he founded the Mourides Brotherhood, which supported equality, peace, and work in an atmosphere of fraternity; Sufi practices emphasize mysticism, spiritual discipline, and meditation. Initially arrested and exiled by the French, they later awarded him the Legion of Honor. Stories about his miraculous works and piety still inspire painters of both murals (Figure 635)

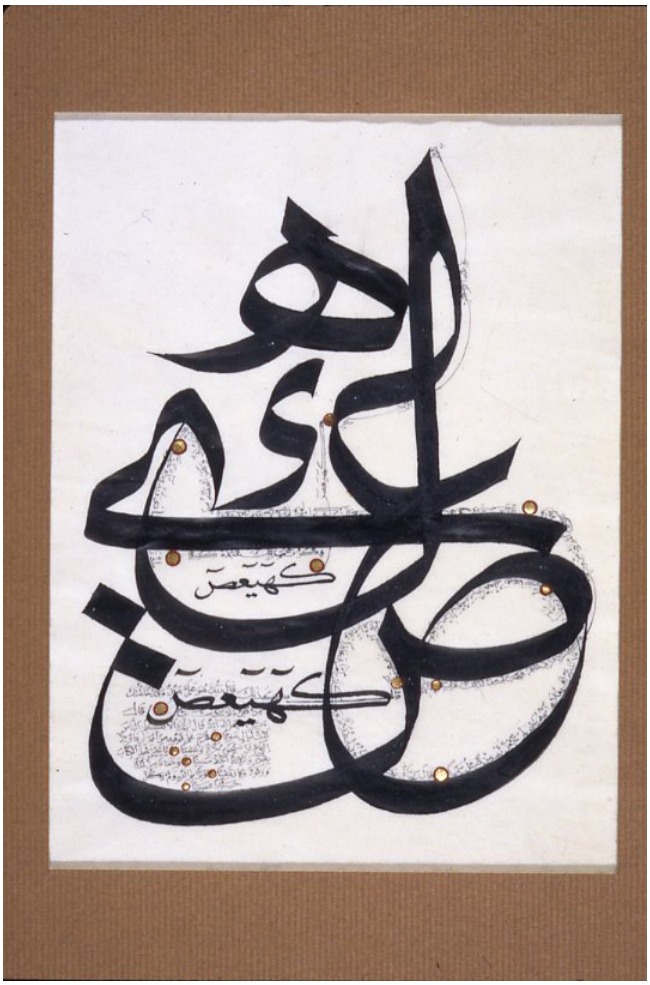


Figure 637. This 1980 calligraphic painting by Osman Waqialla, entitled “Kaf ha ya ayn sad,” is consists of ink and gold on vellum. A prayer from the Koran is written within and around five letters that begin the chapter it is taken from; they are considered to have mystical protective powers. The artist is from Sudan but has lived in London since the 1960s. H 6.89″. © Trustees of the British Museum, 1998,0716,0.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 638. Koranic slate. Hausa male artist, Nigeria, late 19th/20th century. H 26″. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 95.83. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.

and glass panels; his Senegalese followers today number over three million–more than a third of the country. Popular painters in Senegal, as well as other parts of West Africa, frequently create images of Al-Buraq, the mythical winged white steed that carried the Prophet Muhammed from Mecca to Jerusalem and the heavens and back again (Figure 636).

Beginning in the 20th century, Senegal and many other predominantly Muslim countries developed art schools where figurative art was taught and spread; urban and academically-trained photographers also produce many figurative images. Nonetheless, the arts of African Muslim regions has traditionally



Figure 639. Koranic board. H 34 7/8″. Possibly a Hausa artist, Nigeria, 1966. Courtesy Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art; University of Florida, 1997.25. Museum purchase, funds provided by museum visitors.



Figure 640. Koranic slate with geometric camel illustration. H 26.5″. Hausa male artist, Nigeria, late 20th century. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2014.44.1. The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund. Public domain.



Figure 642. House wall decoration in mud relief. Fali artist, Mubi, Nigeria. Photo by Roger Blench, 2007. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.



Figure 641. Detail of a Koranic slate on a milk transport calabash. Fulani artist, Bamenda, Cameroon, before 1972. Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2012.31.5.

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abjured figurative art in favor of architecture and two-dimensional works that stress calligraphy, pattern, and geometry. Even some academic art movements, such as the Khartoum School in Sudan (Figure 637), have stressed creative ways to employ calligraphic references in non-objective paintings. Calligraphy (“beautiful writing,” from the Greek) has long been a critical art form for Muslims throughout the world. Being literate is an essential part of becoming a scholar, and prayers remain in Arabic no matter where the Muslims concerned are based.



Figure 643. This wooden house door includes the motif of a Koranic slate midway on its right side. Probably Sakiwa, Nupe male artist, Lapai town, Nigeria, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-258-14. Gift of the Congregatie van de Heilige Geest. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

In Africa, Muslim children often attend Koranic schools, frequently in addition to other kinds of Western education. They initially learn to recite prayers and then to write them, often in vegetable-based ink that can be washed off their wooden Koranic slates at the end of the school day, making them fresh for further use (Figure 638). In the hands of mallams or marabouts (the English and French terms, respectively), experts in the use of prayers as medicines or amulets, prayers written on slates in vegetable ink are rinsed off and the water collected for patients to drink. In Nigeria and some other West African countries, some Koranic slates by those who have completed their studies become advertisements for the calligraphic skills of the teacher who created them (Figs. 639 and 640), the slate itself becoming a motif visible in architecture, textiles, and other mediums as a reminder of the piety of maker and user (Figs. 641, 642, 643).



Figure 645. This Koran, written in magribi/maghrebi script, includes geometric illuminations that enliven its careful calligraphy. Nupe male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Private collection.

As Muslim students' scholarship progresses, they learn to recite the entire Koran by heart, and those who wish to become teachers perfect both their calligraphy and the kinds of geometric motifs (Figure 644) that form a part of the marginalia of manuscripts, for a "graduation" project for advanced students is a handwritten and decorated copy of the Koran (Figure 645). These are usually loose sheets kept between two covers, the whole protected by a leather bag. Old centers of Islamic learning, such as the mosque-oriented medieval universities at



Figure 644. Detail of a Koran with text and illumination. Male artist, possibly Nigeria, 19th or 20th century. H: 4 5/16″. Walters Art Museum, W.853. Museum purchase with funds provided by Islamic Acquisition Fund, 2000. Public domain.

Timbuktu, Mali, had libraries filled not only with Korans and Koranic commentaries, but hand-copied books that were treatises on science, medicine, geography, and mathematics.

17	24	1	8	15
23	5	7	14	16
4	6	13	20	22
10	12	19	21	3
11	18	25	2	9

Figure 646. This is an example of a magic square; its digits add up to 65, no matter the direction of the computation.

Some Muslim scholars pursue esoteric studies that seek to extract particular medicinal forms of protection from the Koran and the 99 names of God. These date back to early times and come from a common pool shared by Jewish kabbalists and Ethiopian Coptic *debtera*, and employ a geometric convention known as a magic square inscribed with numbers that add up to the same sum whether examined vertically, horizontally, or diagonally (Figure 646). Even if the maker is not literate nor mathematically-versed, imitation of the square and associated writing are considered to be efficacious.



Figure 647. Amulet for the neck composed of 23 leather packets. Unknown artist and ethnic group, Togo. L 23.62″. Etnografiska museet, Stockholm. 1907.44.0158. Obtained from Hans Meyers. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.5.



Figure 648. Leather-wrapped amulet for a horse. Hausa artist, Nigeria, 1860-1889. L 3.5″. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam. RV-739-1005. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0; museum number trimmed.



Figure 649. Paper mounted on cardboard to form a fan; covered with Arabic prayers and magic squares to protect the noble being fanned with prayers. Hausa male artist, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. H 31.5″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1913,1208.1. Donated by Colonel Beddoes in 1913. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

By invoking God, using sacred geometry, and employing written prayer, talismans' configurations vary according to situation–protection against enemies? illness? hunger? They are inscribed, folded, and sewn into leather packets to be worn as amulets (Figure 647). While such amulets are frequently worn by children and adults alike, they can also hang around the necks of horses,

valuable animals whose welfare directly affects their owners (Figure 648). Prayers and magic squares can also be written on fans (Figure 649), cloths, or other items that might afford protection. Even non-Muslims, such as the Asante, might purchase and wear these amulets or talismanic items (Figure 650)–not because they believed in Islam, but because they saw writing as a magic element.

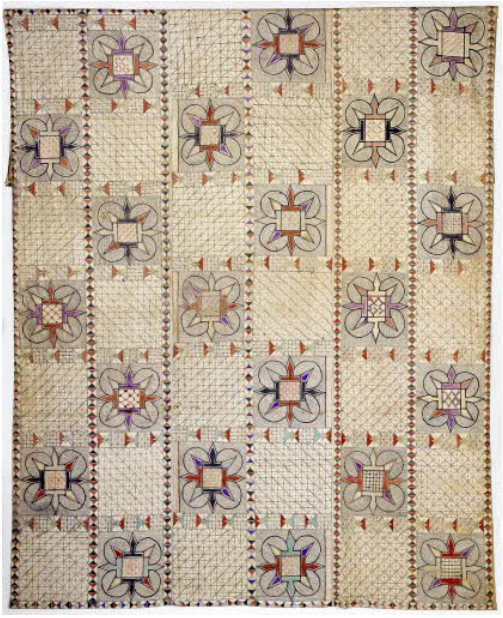


Figure 650. Hand-painted cotton cloth made for the non-Muslim Asante. Probably Hausa male artist, Ghana, first half of the 20th century. L 125.2″ x W 83.46″. Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2014.18.2.

Because the power of the written word was believed to be so compelling, it appears that some of the curvilinear patterns seen in some West African men's embroidery and even in certain architectural reliefs, particularly around doors, may derive from Arabic letters, even though they are illegible and no longer considered protective devices. Just as some illiterate mallams might "write" prayers in an unreadable script to create amulets, it seems that masons and embroiderers similarly attempted to protect the body or the entrance to homes, even though



Figure 651. Detail of the embroidery on a male gown made from 93 woven narrow strips of cotton. Hausa male embroiderer and male weaver, Nigeria, late 1960s or early 1970s. © Trustees of the British Museum. Purchased from David Heathcote. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

this impetus is no longer remembered.



Figure 652. The Dinguiraye mosque was the largest of the 18th and 19th-century Fulani mosques in Guinea. Its square earthen interior was completely masked by the great roof, which was 164′ in circumference. Fulani male builders, Dinguiraye, Guinea, 19th century. Photo from Lucien Marie Francois Famechon's book, *Notice sur la Guinée* francaise (Paris: L'Exposition, 1900). Public domain.

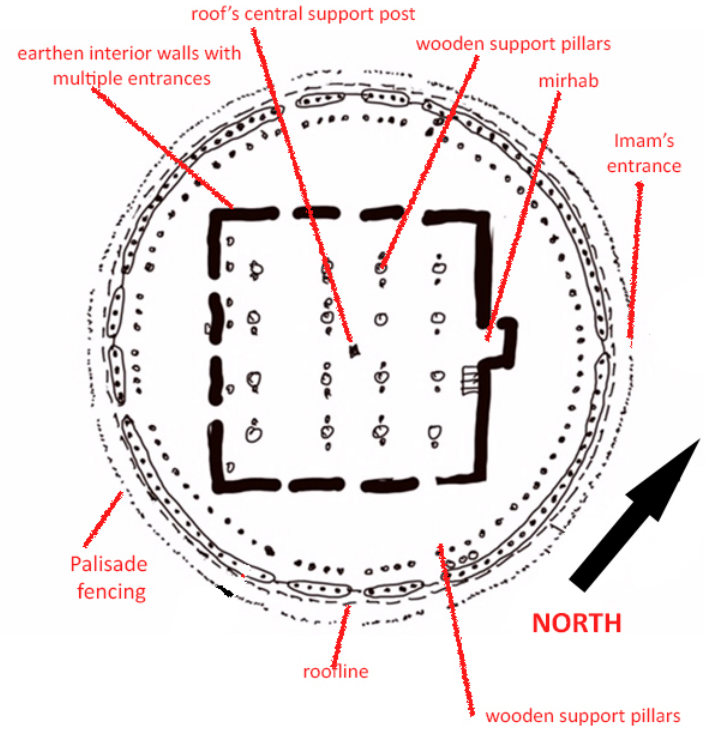


Figure 653. Floorplan of the former Dinguiraye mosque in Guinea, built in the 19th century. After a diagram by Labelle Prussin in Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986): p. 229.

Hausa and Nupe embroidery, in particular, both include a motif which is prominent on both the front and back of men's gowns: the square within a circle (Figure 651 at left). This geometric form is one that not only shows up in amulets, but it also became the

basis for numerous 18th and 19th-century Fulani mosques in Guinea. Initially, Fulani mosques in the Futa Djalon region were modeled after the thatched round earthen houses of the settled Fulani, which in turn mimicked the temporary fiber structures of nomadic cattle-herding Fulani. These round structures were atypical of mosques worldwide–although the only feature a mosque requires is an indication of the direction of Mecca, where congregants face when saying their prayers. This is typically marked by a niche known as the *mihrab*, which Fulani mosques share.

In the mid-19th century, El-Hadj Umar Tall, the Sufi scholar and jihadist leader who created the Toucouleur Empire, designed a mosque in Dinguiraye (Figure 651), conceiving of it as a magic square in a talismanic drawing. While it was rebuilt after fires in both 1862 and 1904, it is presumed to have kept to the same plan when reconstructed. Its step-thatched roof descended nearly to the ground, surrounded by a circular palisade–both features that emphasized its similarities to nomadic dwellings–with these two concentric circles hiding the square earthen building within (Figure 652).

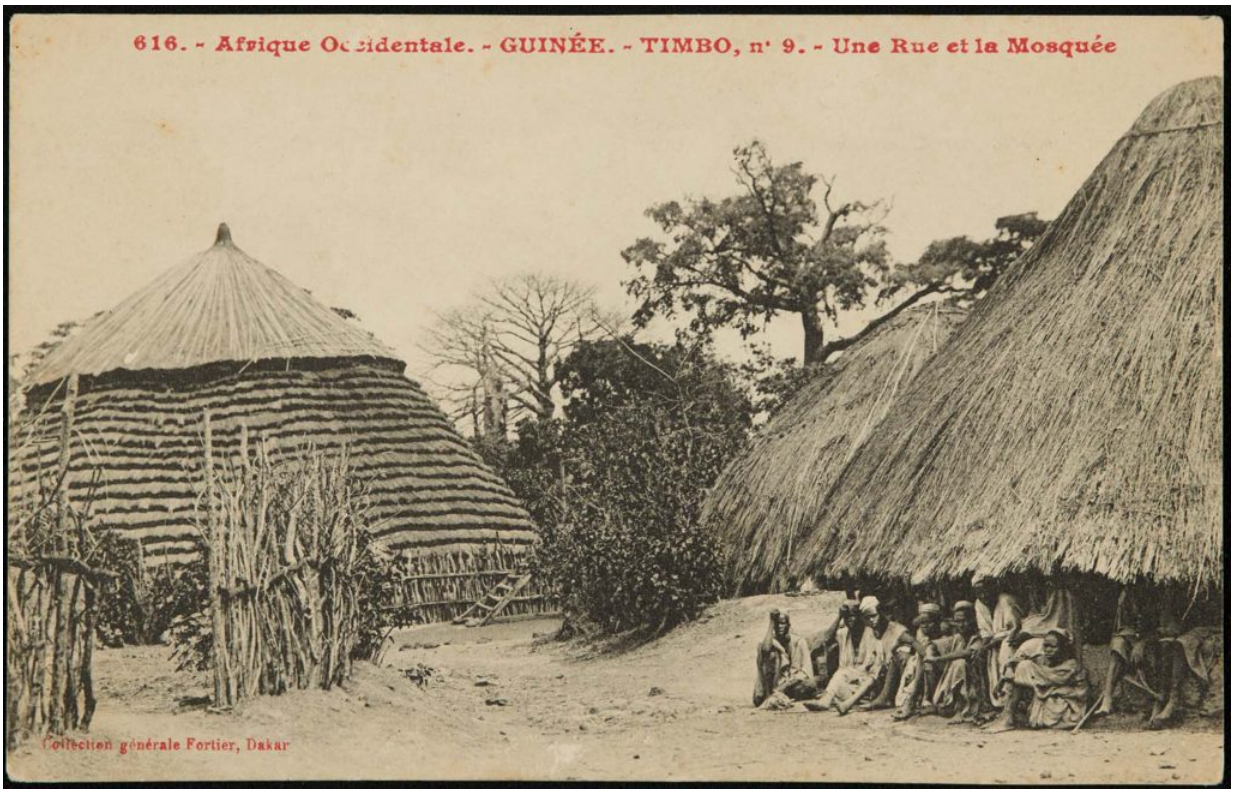


Figure 654. The former main mosque at Timbo, Guinea, built on the same model as the Dinguiraye mosque, though considerably smaller. Fulani male builders, early 20th century. Postcard by Edmond Fortier. Courtesy Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Public domain.

Many mosques in the region adopted this form of the circled square, such as the main mosque at Timbo, the capital of the Fulani state of Futa Djalon in the 18th and 19th centuries (Figure 654). The town marks one of the major dispersions of Islam in West Africa, and is still an important religious center. Begun in about 1727, its original earthen and thatch mosque consisted of multiple round buildings whose stepped thatch roofs and earthen walls were similar to those of the homes of the region's settled Fulani. The earth and thatch materials of the later structure at Timbo were constantly renewed until 1949, when stone walls replaced earth. The roof kept its shape but was tiled until 1978, when sheet metal replaced it. In 2016, the venerable building itself was replaced by a mosque whose form imitates those of the Middle East and was apparently financed by the Nigerian Embassy in Guinea. Similar progressions have marked other large regional mosques, such as those at Kébaly, Labé, Lélouma, and elsewhere–to the degree that few of the older mosques now survive outside those in villages. Even the Dinguiraye mosque has been demolished. Although the current building (Figure 655) retains a round form (unlike other Guinea examples), it bears no real resemblance to the original with its two slender minarets, glass windows, and arched portico. The square interior–meant to reference the Ka'aba at Mecca–has vanished.



Figure 655. The main mosque at Dinguiraye gives a vague nod to the past through its rounded structure, yet it significantly departs from both the older building's shape and its materials. Single frame from Elijah Shabazz's 2014 video "Legacy of Cheik Umar Tall 3: Inside the Masjid of El Hadj Umar Tall."

That square within a circle that appears so prominently on Hausa and Nupe embroidered robes may ultimately tie the motif back to Guinea and the earlier circled square mosques. Despite the distance between Nigeria and Guinea, the late 18th/early 19th century saw Fulani scholars from Guinea take over the leadership of both Nupe and Hausa kingdoms in a series of coups and palace machinations (see below).



Figure 656. The blue curbing delineates a small open-air mosque, with plastic containers of water allowing ritual ablutions. Nigerian soldiers who are part of the United Nations-African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) preparing for prayer in East Darfur, South Sudan. Photo by Albert González Farran – UNAMID, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

African mosques do not have to be enclosed structures. Many workplaces, for example, include dedicated spaces delineated by cement curbs (Figure 656), with a notch or bump-out serving as their *mirhab*, the required indicator of the direction of Mecca.

African mosques can vary considerably in their forms, and have done so in the past as well. Some continue their former appearance, while others have adopted foreign forms or struck out in new directions. A now-abandoned Swahili structure, the Kilwa mosque at Tanzania's off-shore island of Kilwa Kisiwani is a fairly rare example of a sub-Saharan precolonial stone building, and the oldest extant mosque in East Africa (Figure 657). From the 13th-16th century, this small island was a center of Indian Ocean trade, its wealthy merchants dealing in precious metals, jewels, scent, ceramics from Persia,



Figure 657. The Great Mosque at Kilwa, built by Swahili men on Kilwa Kisiwani island, Tanzania, 11th-18th centuries. Photo by Richard Mortel from Riyadh; Saudi Arabia, 2016. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

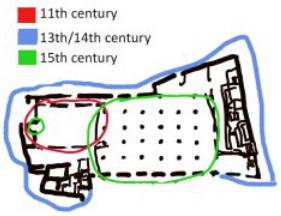


Figure 658. The Great Mosque at Kilwa, Tanzania. Major periods of construction are noted. Floorplan drawn after an original diagram at the site.

China, and the Middle East, ivory and slaves. Made from fossilized coral and originally plastered, the mosque went through several phases of construction (Figure 658) for expansion. Unlike many mosques, it has no courtyard; the building was meant to accommodate all worshippers, and did so through the use of true arches



Figure 659. Section of the remains of the Great Mosque of Kilwa, Tanzania. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1930s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2005.113.1550. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 660. The vaulted interior of the 15th-century section of the Kilwa mosque. Swahili male architect(s), Kilwa Kisiwani island, Tanzania. Photo by David Stanley, 2017. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

and vaults that allowed for fairly large open spaces, albeit with pillars (Figs. 659 and 660). The original mosque, built in the 11th century, was fairly small, but the vaulted portion and other additions were made in the 14th century under the rule of a wealthy sultan, including East Africa's first true dome that retained its preeminence in size for centuries. Partial collapse of sections of the addition led to its reconstruction in the 15th century, which made it the largest mosque in East Africa; minor additions occurred in the 18th century. Ablutions (*wudu*)–the sacred cleansing of hands, feet, forearms, head, mouth, ears and nose–often require fountains (or today, taps), and at Kilwa water storage tanks supplied the ablutions areas, with rough stone flooring allowing the feet to be pumiced. In the 19th century, the island was essentially abandoned due to trade shifts, but its mosque and elaborate palace fortress have become UNESCO World Heritage sites, and further sites are being excavated.



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Although earth was the favored mosque building material throughout much of West Africa, resulting in structures that appear to grow from the



Figure 661. Great Mosque of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, 19th century. Photo by Maarten van der Bent, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0



Figure 662. Great Mosque of Porto Novo, Benin Republic, 1923-25. Photo by Babylas, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 663. The upper section of the rear facade of Porto-Novo's Great Mosque includes numerous floral plaster surface reliefs. Photo by Annabelle Bennetier for Google Earth, 2018.



Figure 664. The Central Mosque of Ilorin, the northernmost Yoruba city, is based upon Constantinople's Hagia Sophia. Photo by Braimah Abdulrasak; 2016. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0; cropped.

surrounding earth and have a commanding sculptural presence (Figure 661), many of these structures have since been replaced by stone or concrete. Some have forms inspired by foreign models. A number of mosques in coastal southwest Nigeria and the Republic of Benin were built in the late 19th/early 20th century by African returnees from Brazil. Born in these regions, they were transported by the slave trade and some left the Americas for Africa after Brazil finally ended slavery and manumitted all laborers. A good number of the returnees were trained builders, masons, and carpenters, and built plastered stone homes in the Brazilian mode of two or more stories in Lagos, Porto Novo, and other coastal cities. Some were Muslims, and participated in the creation of mosques that followed the pattern of Brazilian Baroque churches (Figure 662), which they had also built: two towers–now for the

call to prayer rather than bells; a basilica floorplan with a *mihrab* where the altar would have been, a central peaked roof usually decorated with curving roofline volute, pilasters and engaged columns, plasterwork relief decoration (Figure 663), and, frequently, the use of pastel colors.



Figure 665. The Turkish government erected this replica of Hagia Sophia as Ghana's National Mosque. Accra, Ghana, 2012-2016. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.



Figure 666. Two Nupe brass containers made for ablutions before prayer. **Left**: Ewer. Nupe male artist, Nigeria, late 19th or early 20th century. Trustees of the British Museum, Af1931,0323.2. Purchased from: Arthur G Madan; formerly in the collection of Sir Henry Hesketh Joudou Bell. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Right**: Teapot for ablutions. Nupe male artist, Nigeria, mid-20th century. Private collection.

International travel and other considerations have also resulted in mosques based on foreign models, general or specific. Istanbul's Hagia Sophia (originally built as a Byzantine church) has served as the prototype for at least two mosques. One, the central mosque of the Nigerian city of Ilorin (Figure 664), is built on the historic site of the city's first mosque, built in the early 18th century. It has had its current form since the late 20th century, with its formerly bright blue domes changed to gold in a 2009 refurbishment which saw the addition of a portico and additional peripheral domes. A second, more recent reworking of the Hagia Sophia was constructed in Accra as Ghana's National Mosque (Figure 665), and was built by the Turkish



Figure 667. Plastic "teapot" manufactured in West Africa and used for Muslim ablutions. Photo courtesy Roger Blench.

government. Other historic mosques in Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere have also served as models for more recent structures in Africa.

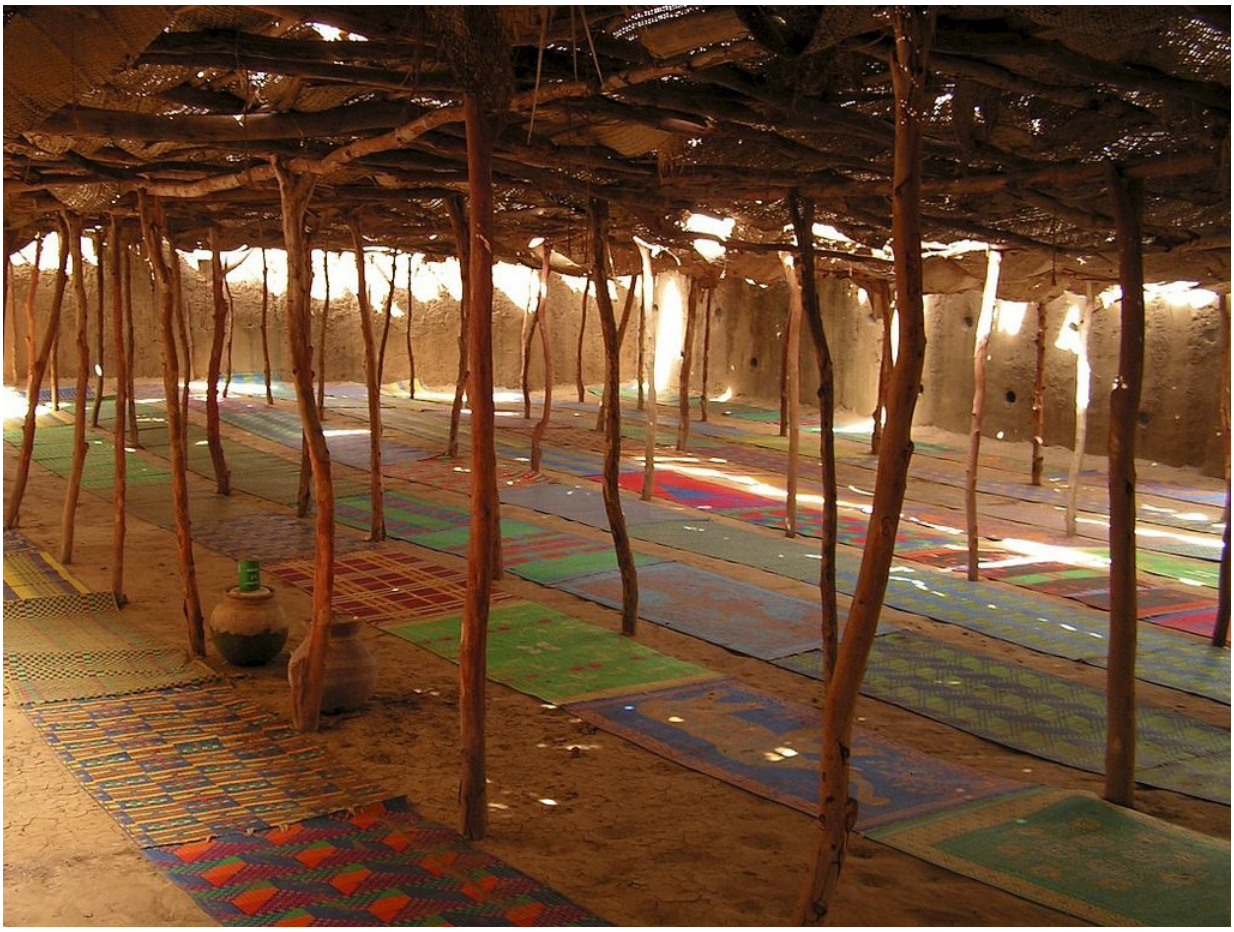


Figure 668. Plastic prayer mats laid down on the ground at the Great Mosque at Timbuktu, Mali, 21st century. Large pots of water for ablutions are placed in the sand “aisle.” Photo by Yves Merckx, 2005. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.



Figure 668. Mat seller, Sudan, 2003. Photo by USAID.

A mosque can be created merely by tracing a cement outline on the ground with an indication of Mecca's direction. Two other features necessary for prayer are associated with cleanliness: water for ablutions and mats for the standing, kneeling, prostration, and seating prayer postures. While these don't always have aesthetic value (some are public taps or manufactured goods made from plastic), they certainly can have. Nigeria's Nupe brassworkers, for example, have made repoussé containers meant to be used when cleansing oneself for prayer (Figure 666). Today these are often replaced–not just by the Nupe but in many parts of West Africa–by a plastic teapot that performs the same function more inexpensively (Figure 667). While mats are used both domestically by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, commercial prayer mats or rugs may be solely geometric (Figure 668) or include images of Mecca or mosques. Traditionally-made prayer mats often can be differentiated from household examples only through their smaller size, for they are meant to be rolled up and carried to the mosque or used for prayer at home (Figure 668). Occasionally, prayers or pseudo-Arabic motifs may be woven into their surface (Figure 669).

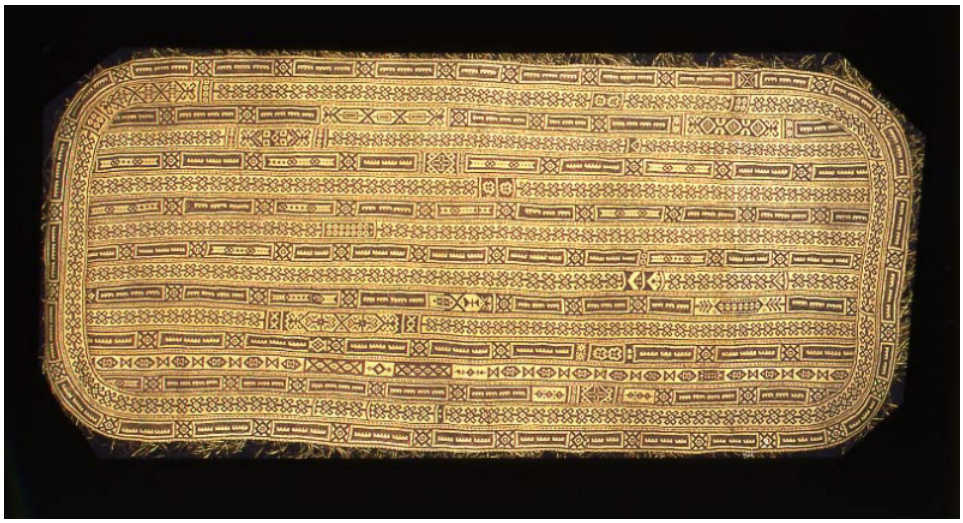


Figure 669. Prayer mat with pseudo-Arabic script. Moa, Tanzania late 19th/early 20th century? L 7.55′. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III E 4829. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

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Zaria Friday Mosque (Masallaci Juma’a Zaria), Nigeria

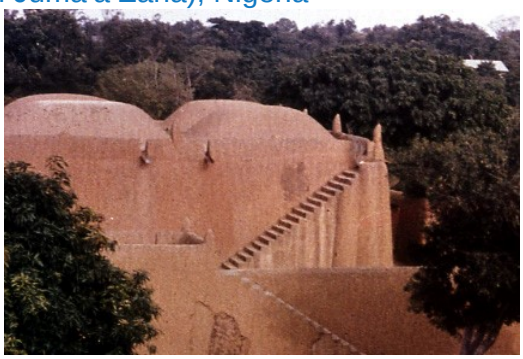


Figure 670. This full-scale reproduction of the early 19th-century Zaria Friday Mosque built by Mallam Mikaila stands in the Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture, Jos. The stairs lead up to the roofline for the muezzin to chant the public call to prayer; the roof’s six low “domes” are visible. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 1987.

In the 1830s or early 1840s, the Hausa architect Mallam (teacher/master) Muhammed Mikaila Dugura (known as Mallam Mikaia or Babban Gwani) was commissioned to build a new mosque in Zaria City, capital of one of the Hausa emirates (Figure 670). A British traveler in the 1820s described an 18th-century earthen mosque in central Zaria as having a minaret for the calls to prayer that was 40 or 50 feet high, but the new mosque was to take its place. The idea for the mosque apparently came not from Emir Abdukarim of Zaria, who was installed in 1834 or 1835, but from the Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammed Bello (reigned 1817-1837). The Sultan–the overlord of the entire caliphate–and the Emir of Zaria, like all other emirs of Hausa kingdoms, were not Hausa themselves, but Fulani. Although most had been born, raised, and educated (for the majority were Islamic scholars) in the region, their forebears came from Futa Toro and Futa Djallon in Guinea. They had trickled into the Hausa states since the previous century, accompanied by their non-Muslim, cattle herding brethren.

In 1804, the Sultan’s father, Usman dan Fodio, precipitated a jihad that swept through the area, displacing and supplanting the Hausa monarchs. Although these rulers had been Muslim since the 15th century–and had been in touch with Muslims for at least two centuries before that, the Fulani had found their practice of Islam lax. They also resented Hausa tolerance for non-believers in both rural areas and in the cities. These were two of the main factors that prompted the jihad. After their religious reformation was established, the Fulani rebuilt urban centers damaged after the wars. Among their new constructions were mosques and homes for the new nobility, examples of the former found in Sokoto, Zaria, and elsewhere.

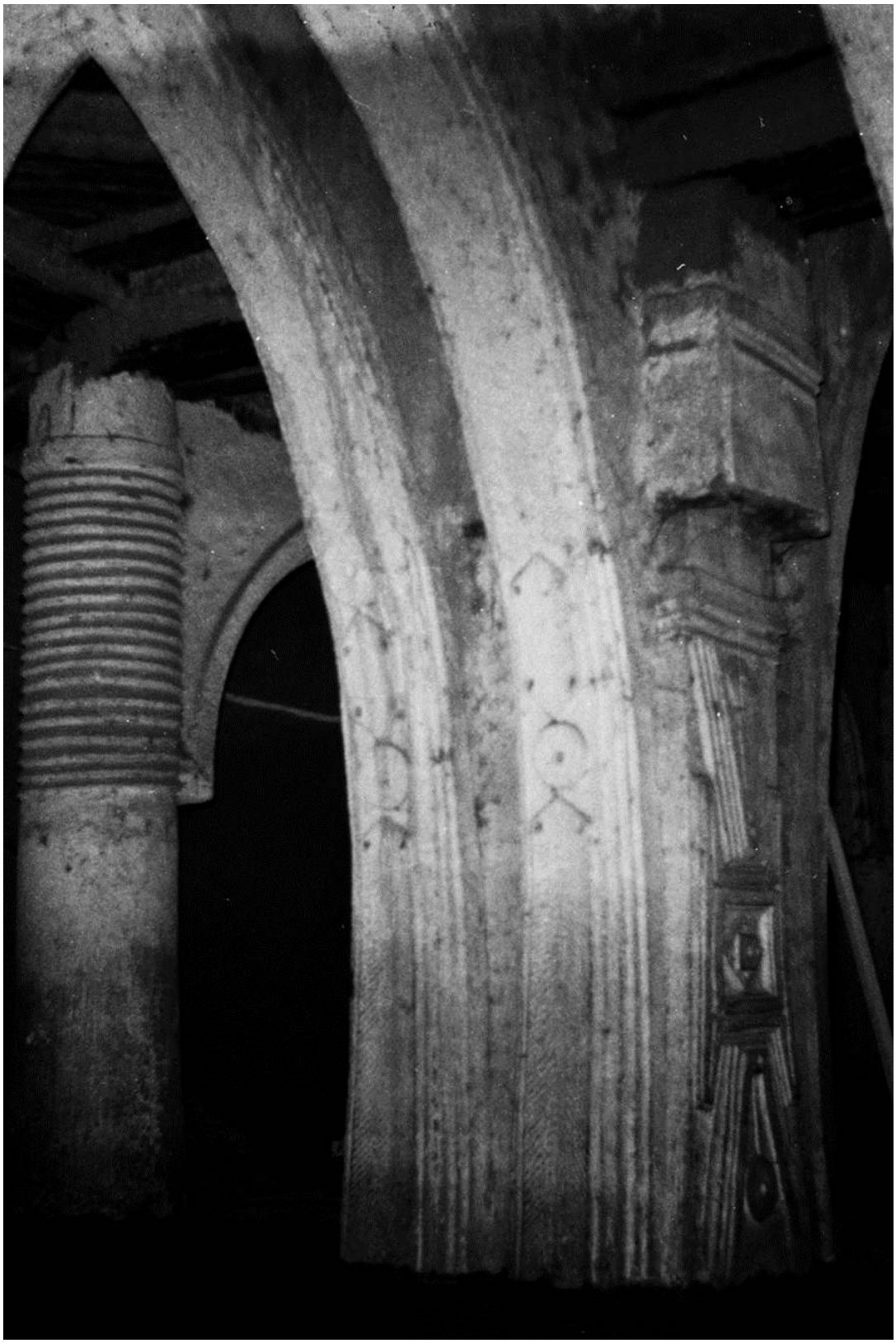


Figure 671. Interior of the Zaria Friday Mosque, with relief ornamentation and a double arch. Mallam Mikaila, Hausa male architect, Zaria, Nigeria, 1830s-40s. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1930s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, 2005.113.935. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

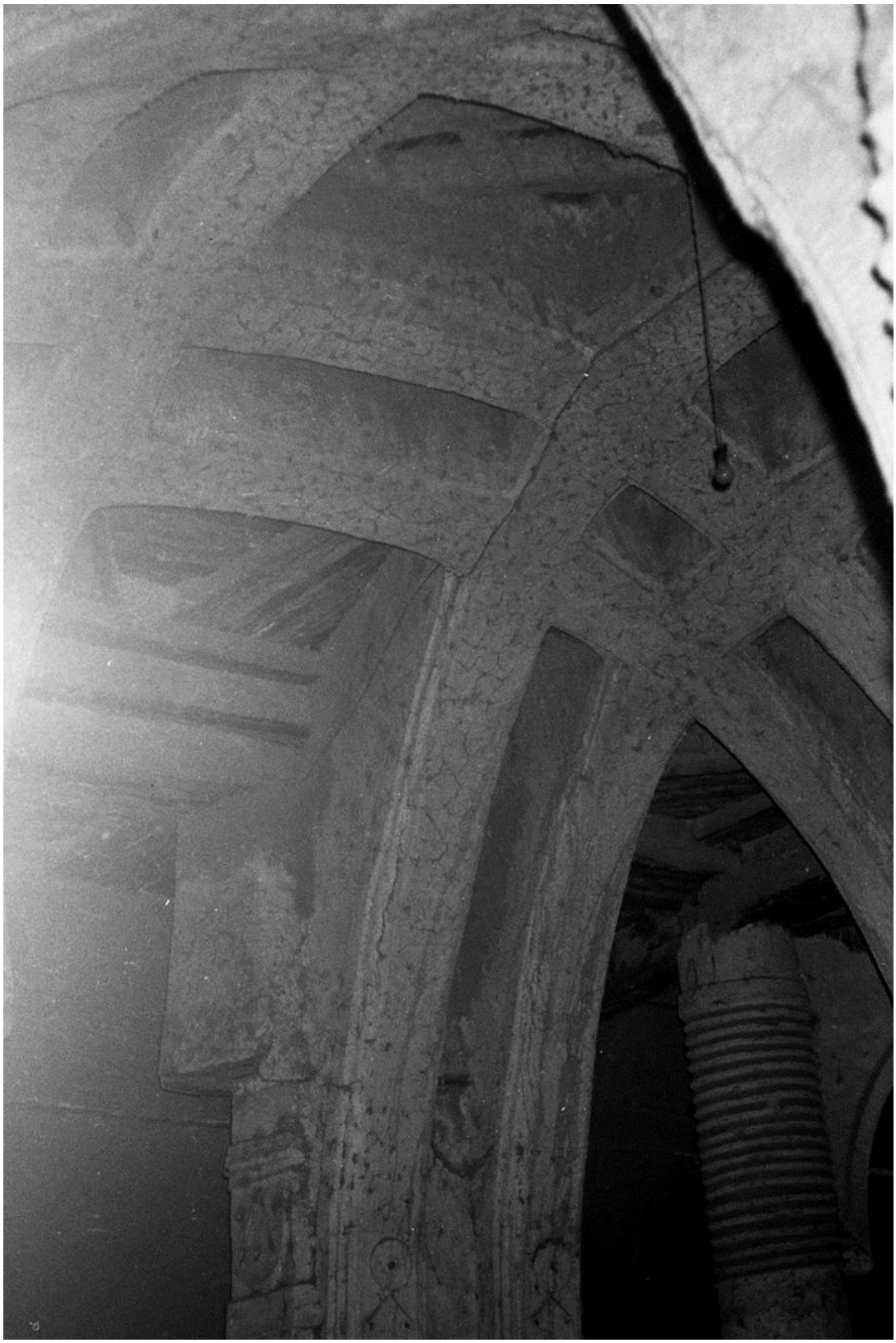


Figure 672. Interior of the Zaria Friday Mosque showing how the double arches meet to form an imitative vault. Palm wood is laid in patterns to fill the interstices. Mallam Mikaila, Hausa male architect, Zaria, Nigeria, 1830s-40s. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1930s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, 2005.113.937. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Knowledge of Hausa urban architectural history in centuries past is limited. Written descriptions from the early 19th century refer to buildings owned or commissioned by Fulani aristocrats, though created by Hausa builders, in a style that still survives in

Northern Nigeria and Niger. An 1824 description of a nobleman's walled home speaks to the travelers waiting for their host in "the porch of a square tower," the entry portal, "in which some of the slaves or body-guard lounge during the day, and sleep at night." A description of a Zaria compound in 1826 referred to a walled surround and a mixture of round, ostrich shell-topped thatched structures and other rectangular buildings with flat roofs, a pattern that still exists although the ostrich eggs are now rarely seen. However, the Sokoto nobleman's house described in the same account had distinctive status features that can also still be found today: earthen, the multi-storied structure had a domed roof supported by "arches." Neither these arches nor the domes share the construction methods of stonework. Instead, bundles of saplings are secured in arcing positions that overlap and reinforce one another, then mud is packed around to envelop them, the whole then smoothed into an apparent arch (Figs. 671 and 672). The areas spanned are limited by the lengths of the type of wood used; a room's dome is supported by a series of arches meeting at the center, while larger spaces are spanned in a modular fashion with a series of domed units.

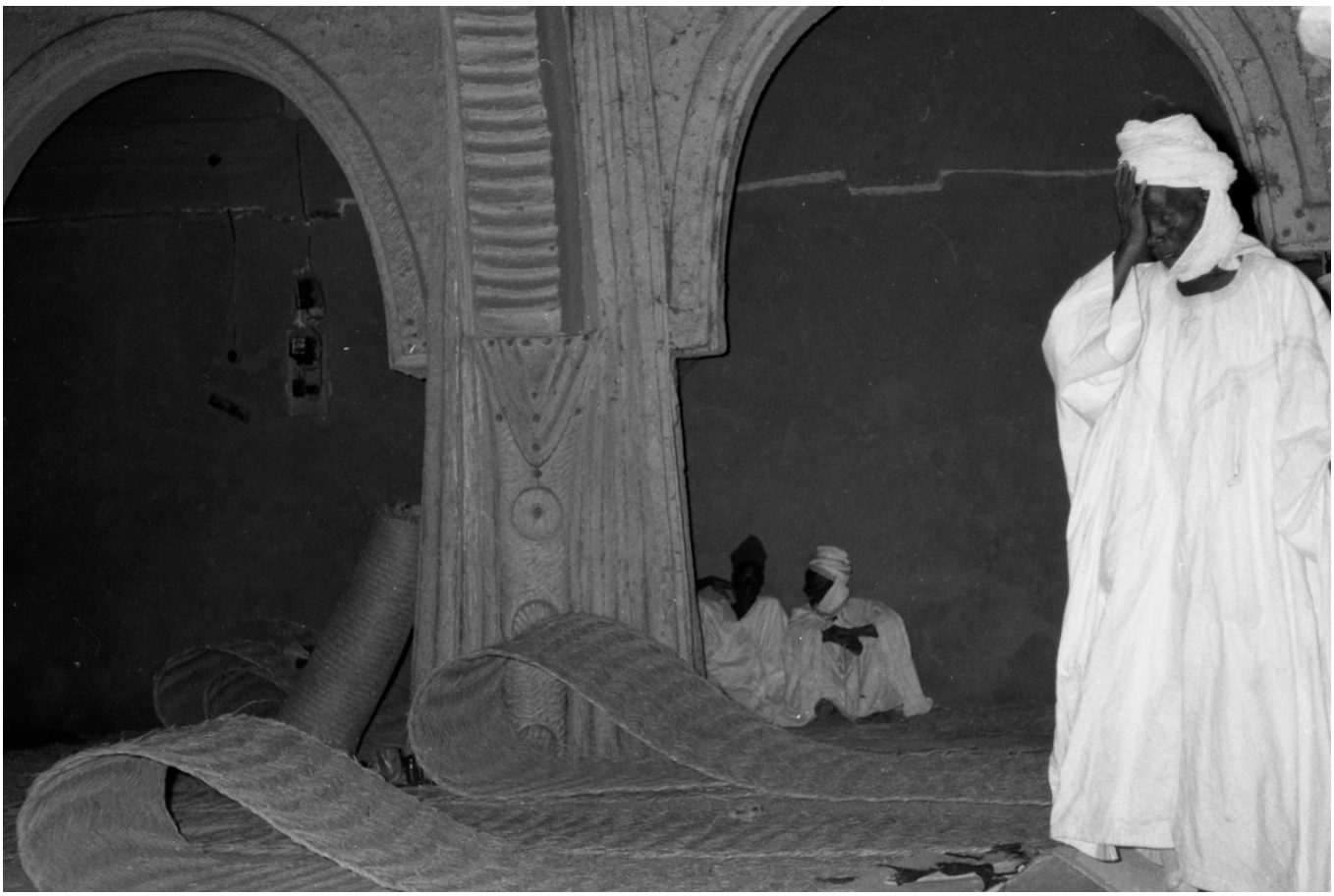


Figure 673. Interior of the Zaria Friday Mosque, with relief ornamentation and a double arch. Mallam Mikaila, Hausa male architect, Zaria, Nigeria, 1830s-40s. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1930s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, 2005.113.942. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

In 1824, the caliphate's Sokoto capital was the site of a third major rectangular mosque's construction, paid for by the Sultan's vizier. Its interior included both a small room dedicated to ablutions, and an area for the sole use of the Sultan. A British visitor observed:

"The roof of the mosque was perfectly flat, and formed of joists laid from wall to wall, the interstices being filled up with slender spars placed obliquely from joist to joist, and the whole covered outside with a thick stratum of indurated clay. The roof rested on arches, which were supported by seven rows of pillars, seven in each row. The pillars were of wood, plastered over with clay, and highly ornamented. . . Some workmen were employed in ornamenting the pillars, others in completing the roof; and all appeared particularly busy."

The mosque's architect was from Zaria, and may or may not have been Mallam Mikaila himself; that would explain why the Sultan was familiar with his work and sent him south to construct a mosque in his home town. The Sokoto mosque's designer told the British traveler that his "his father having been in Egypt, had there acquired a smattering of Moorish architecture, and had left him

at his death all his papers, from which he derived his only architectural knowledge." He requested a Gunter's scale, the precursor to the slide rule, which could calculate logarithms and trigonometric equations, which the traveler sent him later.

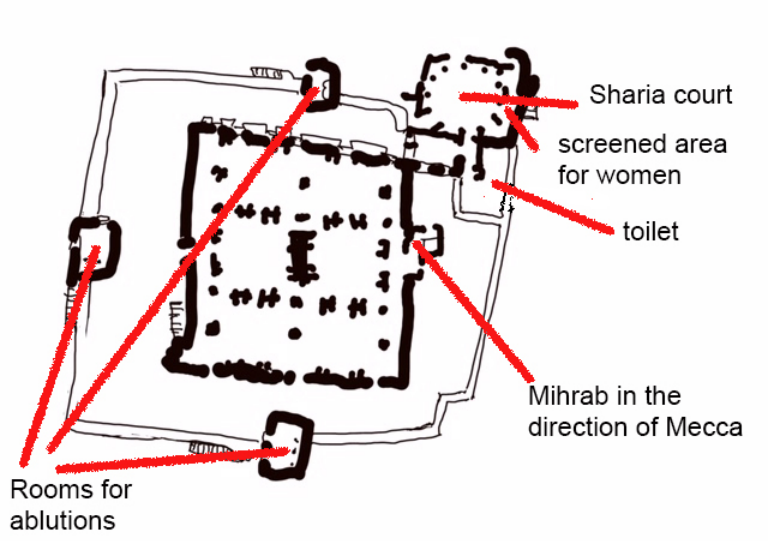


Figure 674. Floorplan of the Zaria Friday Mosque. Mallam Mikaila, Hausa male architect, Zaria, Nigeria, 1830s-40s. Floorplan drawn after Z. R. Dmochowski. *An introduction to Nigerian traditional architecture, Vol. 1: Northern Nigeria*. London: Ethnographica, 1990.

Nearly a decade later, Mallam Mikaila used six domes to create a sizable interior for the main Zaria mosque, referred to as the Friday mosque because the sermons delivered on the Friday holy day drew more than the usual number of male attendees. While the exterior walls were treated plainly, the interior's 21 piers included relief geometric designs of the type the Sokoto mosque (which had collapsed by 1853) had (Figure 673), an ornamental feature shared by aristocratic homes. The 1826 traveler's account mentioned the latter, saying: "The clay serves to keep the white ants [termites] from destroying the wood; they are ornamented in their fashion while the clay is wet, an operation performed with the fingers and a small square stick." Instead of the pillar-supported arches of Sokoto, Mikaila's doubled arches on doubled piers at Zaria created both an elegant appearance and greater structural stability (Figure 671 and 672), though, as occurs in most larger earthen buildings, they prevented open interiors. It contained both a prayer hall and a Sharia court with a screened section for women; the emir entered the mosque through the court (Figure 674). The finished whitewashed surface originally glittered with the addition of mica, a treatment not accorded normal architecture. The designer "signed" his creation by leaving his handprint by the upper part of an arch



Figure 675. Sections of the original Zaria Friday Mosque are encased by this contemporary concrete or cement structure, built in a Middle Eastern style with minarets near each corner. Zaria, Nigeria. Photo by Ishaq Abdul-Hadi Bashir, courtesy Google Maps.

Mallam Mikaila was himself Hausa, both the son of a master builder and the founder of a dynasty–one of his descendants is always appointed Zaria's chief mason. He is remembered for having built extant sections of the Emir of Kano's palace, as well as a mosque in Birnin Gwani, part of the Emir of Bauchi's palace, and numerous other structures. However, was his arch and imitative dome structure already a Hausa invention that the Fulani aristocrats simply adopted? Or did the Fulani suggest stylistic and structural changes that Mallam Mikaila adapted and perfected? Certainly, the thatched, square-within-a-circle structure that made Fulani mosques in Guinea so distinctive (see above) were not reestablished in Hausaland. However, the absence of Guinea minarets may have led to the abandonment of those structures at Zaria, where they were already in use on earlier Hausa mosques. Architectural historians disagree regarding Hausa traditions, Mikaila's inventiveness, and Fulani influence. Concerning the latter, the pastoral Fulani "tents" consist of a sapling armature lashed into a hemispheric form, then covered with thatch, matting, or other fiber. In some respects, the Zaria dome and other Fulani-Hausa examples have a similar beginning. The armature is then embedded in clay, affording more permanence to a familiar form.

With regular maintenance, the Zaria Friday Mosque survived to the 20th century, though damage to some sections was significant, and the Sharia Court was lost. By the 1970s, it was decided it should be preserved not through restoration, but by encasing it inside another structure to protect it from the elements. A new Friday mosque was constructed on site, the remnants of the old building hidden from public view (Figure 675).

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The Jenne Main Mosque, Mali

One of West Africa’s best-known mosques is the Friday mosque at Jenne, Mali (Figure 676), which is the largest earthen building in the world. Although



Figure 676. The Great Mosque of Jenne is the world’s largest earthen structure, and is faced by the city’s open market, which was once a pond drained by the French. Erected 1906-1907, Ismaila Traoré, chief mason and designer. Jenne, Mali. Photo by Marco Dormino for MINUSMA, United Nations Photo 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

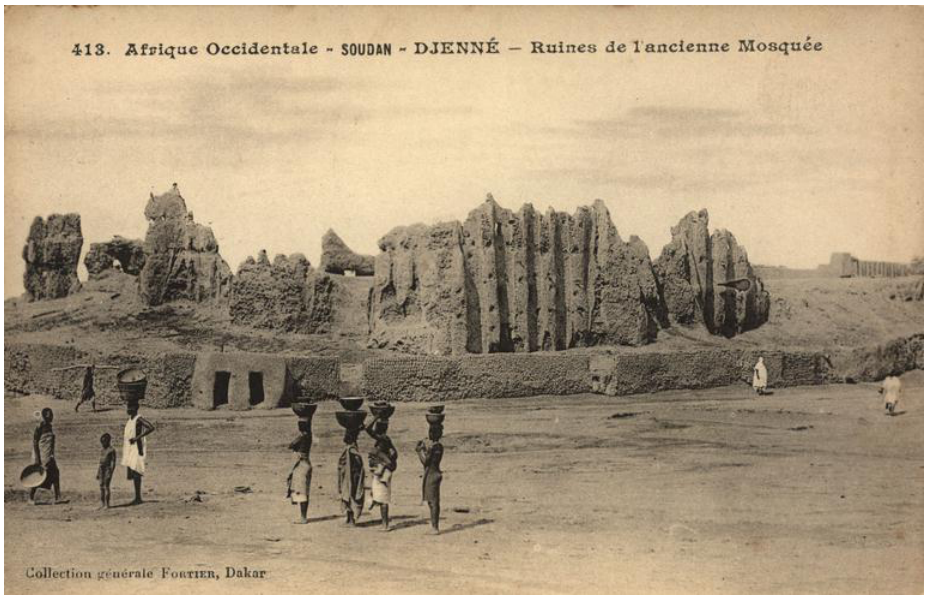


Figure 677. Some remains of the original mosque still stood at the turn of the 20th century until the French cleared them for the creation of the newest version of the structure. Postcard photo by François-Edmond Fortier, ca. 1900. Public domain.

it was built in 1906-1907, it stands in generally the same urban spot where its two predecessors were located since approximately the 13th century, when the city's ruler first converted and leveled his palace into a mosque. His immediate successors added minarets and surrounded it with a wall, but its precise original appearance is unknown (Figure 677). In the early 19th century, the Fulani scholar Sekou Amadou grew disgusted at what he felt was the moral laxity of Jenne, a multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan trade city. Like a number of his fellow Fulani, his reforming zeal had a political aspect–he launched a jihad in 1818 which led to his establishment of the Empire of Masina, a state within present-day Mali that stretched from Timbuktu to Ségou, and included Jenne, which attempted several rebellions. In his efforts to subdue those conquered, he ordered Jenne's mosques closed, but Islam forbade him from actively destroying them. Instead, he stopped up the gutters of the main mosque. During the rainy season, the dammed water ate at its walls and caused the roof to cave in. By 1828, a French visitor noted it was deserted and in ruins, prayers being said in an outer courtyard. Sometime between 1834 and 1836, Sekou Amadou erected a new mosque adjacent to the old one's ruins (Figure 678). Bigger than the former building, it was lower and plainer, lacking minarets. By 1861, Jenne became part of the Toucouleur state, and Sekou



Figure 678. The 19th-century Jenne mosque built by Sekou Amadou as it appeared in 1895. From Félix Dubois, *Timbuctoo: the mysterious* (New York: Longmans, 1896): 164, cropped.

Amadou's empire was destroyed.

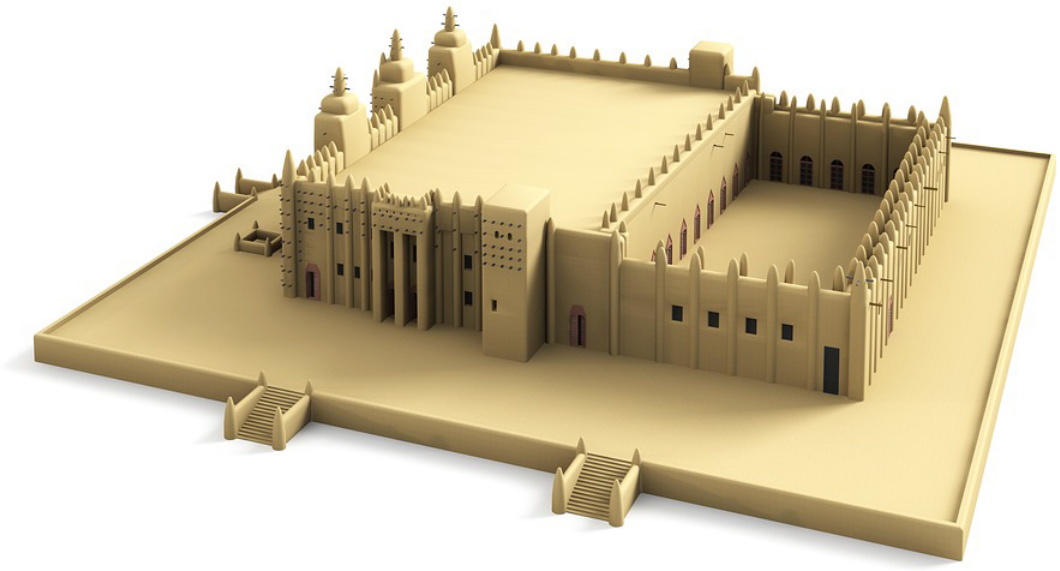


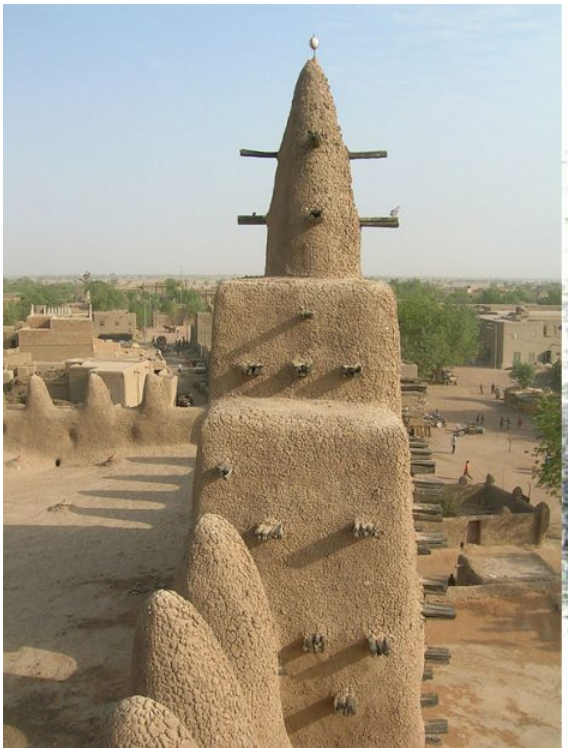
Figure 679: A digital model of the Jenne Main Mosque from the north side. Photo by Peggy and Marco Lachmann-Ank/3dman_eu. Pixabay. Public domain.

By 1893, the French occupied the city. When the French colonialists offered to pay for a new Islamic school and mosque in Jenne, the local authorities decided Sekou Amadou's mosque should be destroyed in a kind of reclamation of their ownership of the city. Forbidden by Islamic law to do so themselves, they invited the French to raze the site, and had the school built on its land. The mosque rose next to it, where the first mosque had once stood. Towers returned to the new structure, as



Figure 680. Interior of the courtyard of Jenne's main mosque. Photo by Marcel Griaule, 1931. © Musée du Quai Branly, PP0030547.

did a high ceiling, and a shorter women's gallery was built, allowing women to worship at the mosque, albeit in a segregated facility.



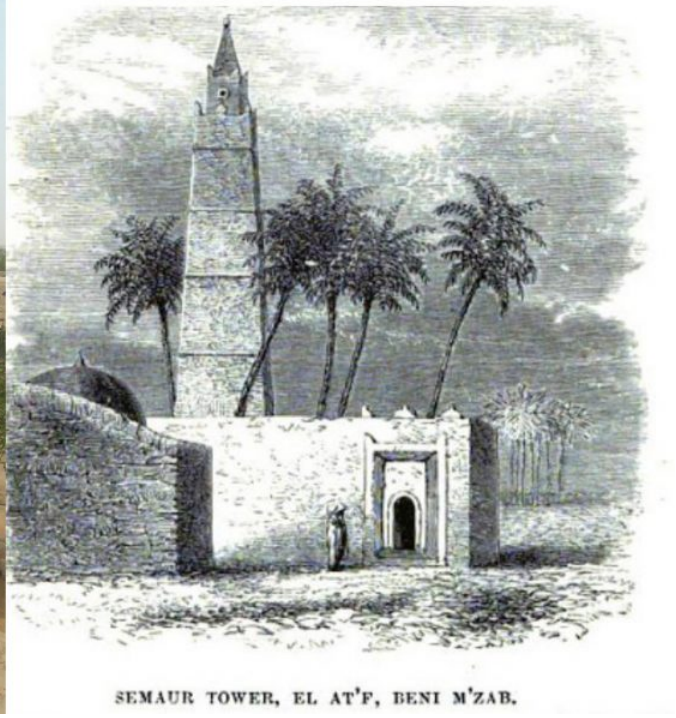


Figure 681. Ostrich eggs top the phallic forms of the mosque towers' *sarafar*, which suggests fertility associations. The eggs are considered to be protective devices, and can be found in mosques and saints' tombs throughout the Western Sudan, as well as across the Sahara. **Left**: One of the towers of Jenne's Main Mosque. Photo by Francesco Bandarin, 2005, © UNESCO. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO
Right: The minaret of a northern Algerian mosque formerly in El-Attaf, also topped by an ostrich egg. Image from H. B. Tristram, *The Great Sahara: Wanderings south of the Atlas Mountains*. London: Murray, 1860, opp. p. 170. Public domain.

The building complex (Figure 679) consists of a low wall surrounding two Muslim saints' tombs, as well as the main structure–a flat-roofed prayer

hall supported by 90 pillars–and an adjacent courtyard (Figure 680), all elevated on a platform. The exterior entrance facade has three towers, its apparent symmetry incorporating the pleasing irregularities that mark much of traditional African art and architecture. Its wall is not flat, but has shallow projections that mimic the forward thrust of the towers and create changing shadow patterns.

Phallic-like protrusions (*sarafar*) along the roofline echo the larger examples on the towers; they are topped with ostrich shells, a symbol of fertility. These shells are often described as having protective purposes to ward off the evil eye. It is hard to say how

long the association of phallic projection and ostrich shell on mosques has existed, but it is common throughout the Western Sudan, and can also be found in parts of Algeria on both mosques and tombs (Figure 681).



Figure 683. The flat roof of Jenne's Main Mosque allows venting of hot air when the pot lids are removed. Photo by Marco Dormino, United Nations, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The facade's towers face east, and each of the three towers has a hollowed niche on the inside that acts as a *mirhab*, directing the participants to face towards Mecca as they pray. Besides the pillars, the interior is fairly plain, with little natural light (Figure 682). Each congregation member brings his own mat, and the floor is sandy, the community having rejected external offers of tiling and other materials. The

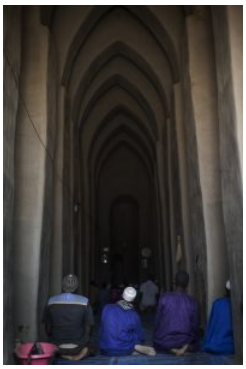


Figure 682. Pointed arches break up the mosque's interior space. The interior cannot hold all worshippers, so they spill over into the courtyard and the exterior platform. Photo by Marco Dormino, United Nations, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

shaded interior and the cooling insulation provided by the mosque's thick walls contrast with the heat and sun outdoors. The flat ceiling is punctuated by a series of small lidded ceramic projections (Figure 683). When hot air rises within the building, the lids can be removed and the air is vented, a further cooling device that also permits additional light to filter into the dim environment.

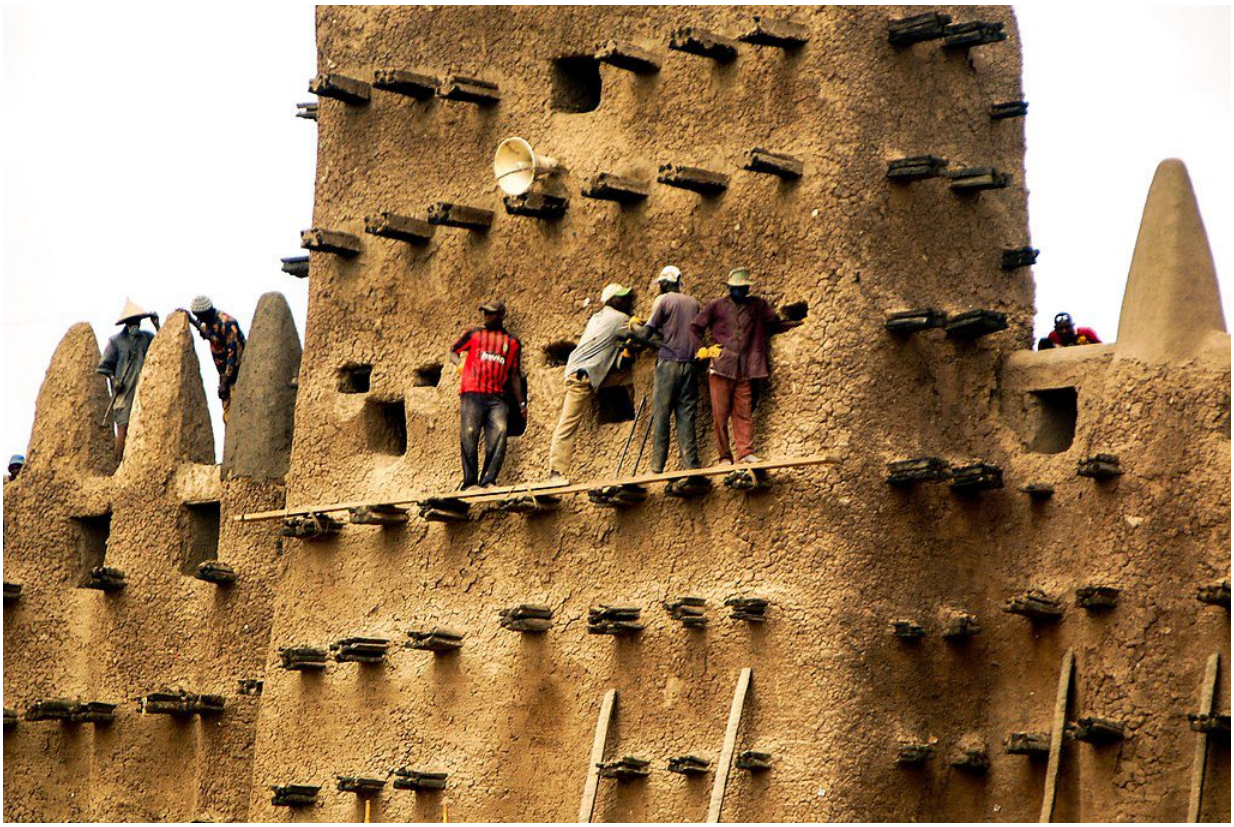


Figure 64. The annual resurfacing of the mosque began in this section with the *sarafar*. Photo by Ralf Steinberger, 2009. Creative Commons CC-BY 2.0.

Master mason Ismaila Traoré directed other masons and numerous conscripted laborers in the mosque's construction. Most of Jenne's masons belong to the Bozo ethnic group and are part of a hereditary guild. Because many of Jenne's houses are multi-storied, the skills of trained builders are necessary to avoid collapse; single-story traditional houses in Africa pose less engineering issues, enabling most men to build houses with the help of family and neighbors.



Figure 685. This *bogolonfini* mudcloth hanging abjures the technique's traditional geometric patterning in favor of a realistic, perspectival view of the mosque on market day. It is one of many such touristic products featuring the building. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-5588-1, 1990. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Annually, the mosque is resurfaced during the dry season in a festival atmosphere. This takes place rapidly and involves much of the population: musicians play and sing as small boys bring prepared mud from the riverside, unmarried girls fetch water, masons and their apprentices climb precarious ladders and stand on the mosque's *toron*, projecting bundles of sticks that act as a permanent scaffolding (Figure 684). Two quarters of the town compete to see who can complete the resurfacing of their half of the exterior most rapidly, adding to the frenetic activities (see video below). This was formerly done with a week's interval in between; since 2005, it is completed in a single day.

The United Nations' agency UNESCO marked the mosque, archaeological sites at Jenne-Jeno, and an entire old city section of more than 82 acres as a World Heritage site in 1988. Since then UNESCO, the Malian government, and external agencies such as the



Figure 686. In 1973, architect/mason Lassine Minta completed the expansion and reconstruction of the Niono Main Mosque in Mali's Segu region with a team of masons from Jenne. It won the Aga Khan award for architecture a decade later. It mimics the Jenne main mosque in numerous respects, but its stepped minarets depart in form from Jenne's towers, and it displays greater regularity and symmetry. Image courtesy of Nasser Rabbat of the Aga Khan Program at MIT, 2002. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Aga Khan Trust for Culture have become increasingly involved with the mosque and efforts to boost tourism. This has included consolidating the two days of resurfacing into one, shifting the date of the resurfacing, investigating potential damage (an Aga Khan Trust action involving the roof that prompted a riot in 2006), and stripping previous layers of exterior mudding, which suspended resurfacing for three years. Tensions and struggles over cultural heritage and Jenne's "ownership" have proved periodically contentious. However, the mosque's fame has made it a national emblem, appearing on everything from stamps to



Figure 687. Missiri Mosque, Cais military camp, Frejus, southeastern France. This mosque, built in 1930 is no longer in use, having been replaced elsewhere in the town by a new mosque in 2016. Photo by Pipicacadodo, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

hand-made tourist items (Figure 685).

The building has generated considerable interest since French colonial days. It has influenced mosque design in Mali itself, including the main mosque at Niono to the south of Jenne, whose facade owes debts to both the Jenne mosque and French colonial architecture (Figure 686). It was visually transplanted to France itself–albeit in abridged form–in 1930 as a military camp's mosque for troops from the colonies (Figure 687).



Figure 688. The Museum of African Art on South Korea's Jeju Island is an abbreviated version of the Jenne mosque. Multiple liberties beyond size have been taken with the original. Among these changes are the insertion of glass windows, the angling of the facade, which was also made more symmetrical, the ribbing of the *sarafar*, and the inclusion of a parking lot. Photo Canis Han, 2016. Courtesy Trip Advisor.

Initiated by Captain Abdel Kader Madenba and built by Senegalese riflemen, it was made from cement its main space being an open-air courtyard. Its relatively small size, military location, and figurative imagery on courtyard medallions made it unsuitable for contemporary Muslim residents of the town, and it was decommissioned in favor of a new building. Further afield, in South Korea's vacation destination of Jeju Island, a replica of the Jenne Mosque opened in 2004 as the Museum of African Art (Figure 688). Though scaled down from the original, it matches its height and is constructed from a recipe that includes clay, as well as concrete and fiberglass. World aesthetic attention and a growing curiosity about eco-friendly building techniques have sent many of Jenne's masons on international tours. In 2007, six masons traveled from Jenne to Gimhae, South Korea for a "mosque building performance," a demonstration at the Clayarch Gimhae museum dedicated to adobe/ceramic architectural structures. Additional demonstration trips to the Netherlands, France, and the U.S. followed, spreading awareness concerning techniques and the architectural beauty of Jenne's mosque and other buildings internationally.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=748

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4.4: Art in Nomadic Societies



Figure 689. This geometric patterns on this ostrich egg were scratched into its surface, then rubbed with charcoal or ash. San (probably !Kung subgroup) male artist, Namibia or Botswana, before 1910. H 5.9″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1910,-.363. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Nomadic and semi-nomadic herders of cattle and/or camels normally have few sculptural traditions, since constant packing and moving provide practical limitations on heavy goods that require transport. They are not without art, however. Sometimes these are confined primarily to body arts, as among the pastoral Fulani (see Chapter 3.2). In other cases, painting rock outcrops that formed part of the natural landscape provided an outlet, as it did for the San or the various successive peoples of the pre-desertified Sahara (see Chapter 3.1 for both). Architecture–usually made in less permanent materials than clay–can be an additional form of artistic expression, especially in semi-nomadic communities where women, the elderly, and young children operate from a fairly permanent base.

Because of desertification and drought, members of some nomadic groups have been forced to settle by



Figure 690. This Himba woman's hair is wrapped with leather, and its crest is made from the skin of a sheep or goat. This indicates that she has either given birth to her first child or has been married for 12-18 months. Women create these crests themselves. Photo by Julien Lagarde, Oase Village, Namibia, 2011. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

circumstance, rather than through choice. This can have major repercussions on the arts. Some artists may be separated from their standard patrons and forced to seek new markets. Choices in housing types may be changed in urban environments. Some object types become unnecessary to survival. The San, for example, formerly decorated emptied ostrich eggs, filled them with water,

plugged them and buried them along their routes as personal reservoirs (Figure 689). With growing settlement sites, these are unneeded. Even those San who still trek in the desert find plastic containers to be less fragile and hold more liquids.



Figure 691. This standing Herero woman wears a 19th-century European middle-class dress style: long skirt, high neck, elaborate sleeves, apron, and four to eight petticoats. Her headdress, however, is a local innovation called *otjikalva* that references cattle horns. Photo by Andrea, Namibia, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Political persecution, missionization, and national drives toward education may alter some individuals' choice of profession and lifestyle, while others are able to retain their traditions because of little interference. Two "ethnicities" with the same ethnic background show the effects of outside impact. Both the Himba and the Herero of Namibia (spilling into Angola and part of Botswana) have a shared language and customs, but their experience of colonialism split them into two groups, one rural, the other town-based, a split that remains visible through their dress and other body arts. The Himba are rural, herding cattle, sheep and goats in a desert environment. Their clothing mostly consists of leather, and their body arts stress a scented red ochre that is used on skin and hair. Female hairstyles distinguish age groups and marital status (Figure 690). The Herero, on the other hand, were missionized and progressively dispossessed of land and cattle by German settlers in Namibia. After war and decimation by the Germans from 1903-07, they retained European uniform styles for men and Victorian-era full, long skirts for women, though applying their own twists and stylistic shifts to both. These remain dress wear; the women's headwear consists of cloth stiffened from the inside with newspaper into a shape of two cow horns, a reference to their source of wealth, even though many are town dwellers (Figure 691).

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The Tuareg: From Tent to Cement



Figure 692. Tuareg tent, Hoggar region, southern Algeria. Detail of a photo by Robert Perret, 1934. © Musée du Quai Branly, PP0067460.

The Tuareg are a far-flung Berber group that roam an increasingly large area, as desertification and strife push them into new areas. Once the prime Sahara-crossers, mounted on horse and camel backs, their lifestyle has changed considerably in the past fifty years, forcing many out of the nomadic lifestyle into settlements. Formerly, their casted society was led by the nobility (*imajeren*), who coupled a warrior ethos with camel-breeding. Their vassals and slaves supplied them with tribute food and labor in exchange for protection, and a separate class of artists (*inadan*) acted as their mediators and managers, also supplying them with the jewelry, household items and decorations that reinforced their aristocratic status. While none of these elements have completely vanished, Tuareg men with machine guns also patrol in four-wheel-drives, or live settled lives in cement block buildings. Their slaves are—at least officially—liberated, and the *inadan*, who saw their traditional patrons' dominance slip away, have gone global. Today they actively create new outlets for their products and often outstrip their former leaders in terms of wealth. The 1950s through the 1970s were a key transitional era, before items regularly made for personal use were abandoned–or persisted and shifted with an expanded international market.

Although some Tuareg have always had residences in towns and cities, especially in Niger and Mali, several severe droughts and other economic hardships drove many more to a sedentary lifestyle. Some Tuareg nomads inhabited fiber structures, but most once lived in a tent, the shelter some Tuareg still use and the norm in the living memory of many others. The word for tent—*ehen*—is also the word for marriage and womb. A woman's family gives her this dwelling when she weds, and all its goods belong to her as well. The western Tuareg generally use goat skins (Figure 692), while those to the east favor matting. The skin versions are a woman's permanent link to her mother and family, for mothers of the essentially



Figure 693. This woolen textile was made by a sedentary Berber group, but purchased and used by the Tuareg in Ghardaia, Niger. Berber female weaver, Algeria, early 20th century. L 74″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1934.129.3. Donor Emile-Louis-Bruno Bruneau de Laborie.

matrilineal Tuareg begin the preparation of a bride's tent by cutting off a section of their own. Friends and relations supplement this piece with leather additions, the whole sewn together at a party. Weddings include several tent-related rituals that culminate in the erection of tent poles.

Once the new couple is established, the wife creates an inward-looking environment, transforming the inhospitable desert with their tents. Although tent exteriors are generally plain, the interiors can be a flowerbed of color. While the Tuareg do not weave, they purchase rugs and other textiles from sedentary peoples (Figure 693), decorating tent interiors with

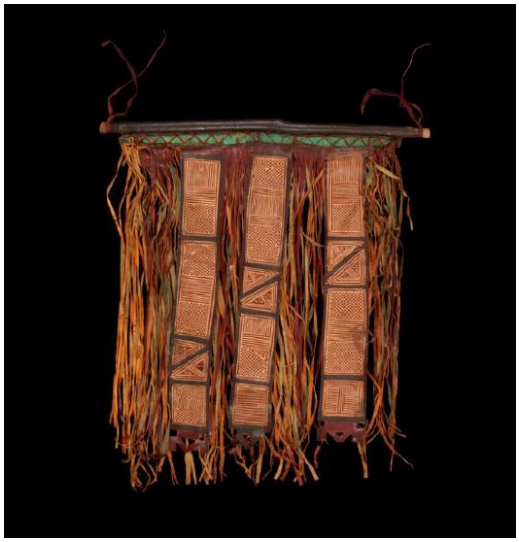


Figure 694. Leather decoration for a tent interior. Tuareg *tinadan* female artist, Niger, mid-20th century. H 26.38″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 70.2004.27.1.69. Donor Jacques Chirac.

Berber hangings from Morocco or Fulani hangings from Mali. Women also inject color and pattern into their tents with fringed leather decorative panels (Figure 694) made by the *tinadan*, the female members of *inadan* craftsmen families, as well as utilitarian leather goods.



Figure 695. Detail of an *igem* tent entrance post; wood, metal repair. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, probably Niger, 20th century. H 58". Cleveland State University, 2002.56. Gift of William B. Simmons.

Tents are synonymous with the ideal of monogamy, and even though some men have multiple wives, no two women's tents occupy the same compound. The tent is the daily domain of women, children, and elderly men, as most males spend their day outside the domestic sphere. If a couple divorces, the man becomes homeless, at least temporarily. At a woman's death, her tent is demolished and her matting given away, the space it occupied left delineated for a year. After that, only memories remain.



Figure 696. *Ihel* wooden mat supports, Tuareg *inadan* male artist, probably Niger, 20th century. From left, H 51.5”; H 58.5”; H 52”. Cleveland State University, from left: 2002.60, 2002.58, 2002.59. Gift of William B. Simmons.

Skin-spanned tents can be supported by posts and guy-line pegs made from available wood, but wood’s scarcity in the desert region makes that practice risky. Carved posts and pegs used to be the norm, and were carried from camp to camp on pack animals. The southern Tuareg of Mali and Niger made matched sculptural poles (*igem*) that flanked the tent’s entrance (Figure 695), although these are uncommon today. Those from Algeria were simpler and decorated with pyro-engraved lines. Elaborately open-worked additional wooden supports (*ihel*) (Figure 696) propped up long leather-trimmed leather and reed mats (*esaber*) that sectioned off the conjugal couple’s bed or edged the tent’s perimeter (Figure 697).



Figure 697. Leather strip mat used to edge tents or cordon off the conjugal bed. Tuareg *tinadan* female artist. L 11.98′. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1934.196.1.2. Donor Maurice Reygasse.

These mats can easily be rolled out of the way for a breeze, but when down, they act as a windbreak and shield the interior from sand and observers.

All household items belong to Tuareg woman, and precious objects are stowed away in boxes or kept in leather bags (Figure 698) that could be protected by a large lock (*tanast*) (Figure 699). Not all possessions were so carefully guarded. Some were kept in an acorn-shaped *bata* lidded box (Figure 700). *Tinadan* women

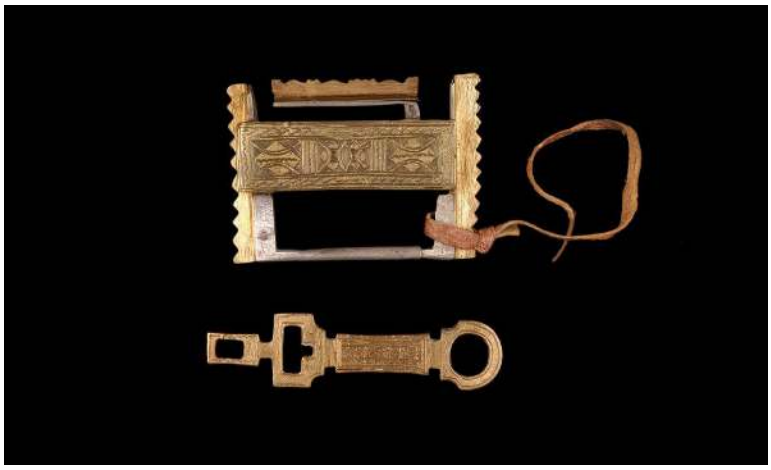


Figure 699. This type of elaborate lock and key is usually used to lock leather bags. Keys can double as weights for women's long head coverings. Copper and iron. L (lock) 3.23″. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, Niger, beginning of 20th century. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1934.166.38.1-2. Donor Yves Urvoy.



Figure 698. Painted leather saddle bag. Tuareg tinadan female artist, Timbuktu, Mali, beginning of 20th century. H 65.75″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1934.42.18. Donor Jean Lebaudy,

from Niger craft these containers from pieces of animal skin that are soaked until they can be molded over a clay form. The designs are made by rolling wax into threads, applying them to the surface, then dyeing the outside with a red derived from millet stalks. The wax protects the



Figure 700. Box (*bata*) made from resist-dyed goatskin. Tuareg female *tinadan* artist, Agadez, Niger, beginning of 20th century. H 7.28″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1930.61.829.1-2. Donor Frantz de Zeltner.

original color of the leather, leaving a two-tone geometric-patterned surface when it is removed. Although this example was made in the mid-twentieth century, it differs little from those published in 1900. While *bata* hold often contain jewelry, coins, makeup or pomade, they can also hold granulated incense (*tefarchit*). More elaborate containers (Figure 701) can also hold scent, which the Tuareg value highly, whether in the form of perfume, incense or aromatic powders, and are



Figure 701. Container made from silver, copper, stag horn, and brass to hold scented powder. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, possibly Niger, late 19th or early 20th century. H 2.25″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 1994.25.A. Founders Society Purchase with funds from the Friends of African and African American Art, the African, Oceanic and New World Cultures General Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Allan Shelden III Fund, and the Henry and Consuelo W. Wenger Foundation Fund.

expected to share it with visitors. Beyond its creation of a pleasant environment, scent is used in curative and diagnostic practices by dispelling evil, harmful spirits and disease, and reinforcing friendship, love and a sense of communion.

Inadan men carve wooden items such as the posts, bed, mortars and bowls for the nobles, and also work metal for jewelry and accessories. An endogamous group, the *inadan* are analogous in many ways to the Mande *nyamakala* (see Bamana section of Chapter 3.1), although they compress many of the varied *nyamakala* groups' duties into one. Their mastery of mystical powers and satirical song combine to check the nobility's behavior toward them. In the past, they were indispensable not only for their creativity but for their positions as noblemen's managers, go-betweens and marriage brokers. Their extroverted behavior is meant to be a strong contrast to the nobles' reserve, and it is often employed as a diplomatic stratagem.



Figure 702. Necklace and bracelet made from a silver alloy, hung on leather strands. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, Niger, collected 1985. H pendant 4.5"; D bracelet 2.75" at widest section. Private collection.

In the past, nobles had both the resources and the power to commission exquisite metal

objects from the smiths. Silver is still the most common metal of choice, and is associated with the aristocracy and virtue, with brass and copper included in small amounts for color contrast. The silver was melted down rather than mined, much of it formerly from Austrian Maria Teresa thaler coins, which circulated worldwide from their mid-eighteenth century inception through the early1960s, when trade coin minting in other countries finally ceased. Although the Koran itself does not prohibit the use of gold, various Muslim traditions as recorded in the hadith particularly warn men against wearing it, and perhaps reinforced a Tuareg preference for silver. Although uncommon in decades past, *inadan* smiths now produce some gold jewelry, for it has become fashionable, particularly among urbanized



Figure 703. Silver talisman container. Tuareg male inadan artist from the Kel Eway group, Agadez, Niger, 20th century. L including necklace 22″. © Dallas Museum of Art, 2016.18.1.FA. Foundation for the Arts Collection; anonymous gift.

women who see their Hausa and Malian counterparts favor it. Copper is believed to have healing and protective properties, and was derived from discarded cartridges, while old cans formed the primary source for aluminum and tin. Battery oxide emphasizes designs engraved in metal by blackening the submerged areas.



Figure 704. *Inadan*-decorated Moroccan teapot made from tin with copper and brass elements added. Tuareg male *inadan* additions to Moroccan pot, Niger, mid-20th century. H 6.29". Private collection.

Smiths also produce metal items related to tea drinking, a semi-ritualized Tuareg practice that takes place at least four times a day —once immediately upon rising and after each meal, as well as when guests arrive. Men are the arbiters of its preparation, usually preparing and consuming it outside the tent, while women make and drink it within. The tea itself involves a mixture of strong Chinese gunpowder or green tea, spearmint, and sometimes other spices or flowers, heavily sugared and boiled over a charcoal fire. Its preparation, if not as stylized as that of the Japanese, still involves specific steps meant to achieve not only the perfect taste, but a perfectly foamed glass. The performative aspect is strong, tea being poured and repoured from a height. Three rounds are expected: the first glass is strong and bitter, the second, somewhat diluted and heavily sugared, and the final is light, sweet and minty or spiced. The length of time necessary for these rounds—their boiling, aerating and drinking—is no hasty affair, and the beauty of the utensils is meant not only to demonstrate status, but to civilize the harsh environment with hospitality and refinement. At an average of 15.24 lbs. of tea a year, the Tuareg outconsume the English nearly three times over, drinking it every three to five hours. The process is so engrained with identity they nickname themselves "the sons of tea" (*Ag al-Tay*).



Figure 705. Brass container with silver and copper ornaments, meant to hold tea glasses. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, probably Niger, late 19th/early 20th century. H 3.75″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 1994.24, Founders Society Purchase with funds from the Friends of African and African American Art, the African, Oceanic and New World Cultures General Fund, Mr. and Mrs. Allan Shelden III Fund, and the Henry and Consuelo W. Wenger Foundation Fund.



Figure 706. Brass sugar hammer. Tuareg male *inadan* artist, probably Niger, 20th century. L 8”. Private collection.

Tea accessories are thus amongst the most regularly handled possessions a person owns. While the *inadan* do not make teapots (*albirade*)—these these have always been imported or market purchases—they regularly embellish and “Tuaregize” them. On the formerly popular tin Moroccan pots, this often included additions of copper or brass surface motifs, modifications of the handle or spout, replacement of the lid finial, or even the addition of a copper ring base (Figure 704). By the 1950s, nobles preferred multi-metal contrasts and small sections of patterning. Currently, imported blue enamel Chinese teapots are most common; their color matches that of typical Tuareg robes, which may add to their appeal. Some teapots are carried in specialized leather bags (*tekabawt*), along with other related supplies. Tea is drunk from small North African glasses (*enfenjars*) that may be stored in fitted wooden boxes, sometimes leather-covered. In the past, extraordinary metal containers (Figure 705) might protect an aristocrat’s glasses from a camel’s jostling gait. Cubed sugar is now common, but decades ago it was imported in cone form, cut with special shears (*temoda ton essukor*) and pulverized by cast sugar hammers (*tefidist*) (Figure 706). The Tuareg add considerable amounts of sugar to tea, which helps assuage hunger as well as thirst.

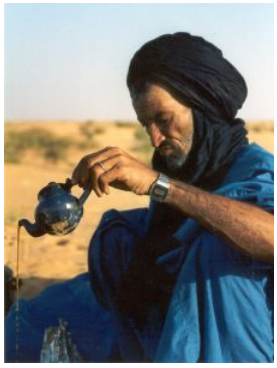


Figure 707. Tuareg man with lowered veil pouring tea from an imported enamel pot in Mali. Photo Steve Monty, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The performance of shared tea is dramatized by Tuareg clothing. Men must lower their turban's mouth veil (*tagelmust*) in order to drink (Figure 707). Formerly this meant one was highly selective about whom one drank with, for the mouth veil—which is the first part of the turban that is wrapped—is a customary protection against evil. The "evil mouth" and "evil eye" can supernaturally cause misfortune due to jealousy. The latter is sometimes expressed in honeyed fashion—one of the reasons nobles customarily distanced themselves from the *inadan*, who are professional wordsmiths as well as artists. Tea drinking is less caste-isolated today, perhaps because numerous *inadan* have become wealthier than many nobles, even employing some as salesmen.

Tagelmust were customarily made from fine dark indigo cotton, and worn over white, blue or indigo gowns with very loose trousers (Figure 708). The Tuareg prefer a particular kind of indigo-dyed cloth, one which is over-



Figure 708. Tuareg man with *tagelmust*, his neck draped with leather amulets. Kano, Nigeria, Photo by Jenny Griffin, 1963-64. Pitt-River, 2016.17.6.

dyed, then further pounded with powdered dye until it acquires a prized and costly sheen. Both Hausa and Nupe once made these cloths, called *aleshu*, primarily for sale to the Tuareg. Only a few Hausa dyers still make them and they have grown even more expensive. The indigo often stains the face, hands, and nails, giving rise to another Tuareg nickname, "the blue people." Tuareg today wear a greater variety of colors, and, in urban and foreign settings, sometimes dress in Western clothing, with or without the turban, a practice once inconceivable. More conservative men wear their hair dressed into a few braids under the turban, but urban youth are more likely to have close-cropped styles.

Clothing is still a major identity statement for most men, however. Customary dress is by no means standardized, for over 200 ways of draping the *tagulmust* are known, varying in meanings that indicate mourning, reserve, flirtatiousness, relaxation and more. The *tagulmust*, though identified with the Tuareg who created it, spread to the nomadic Wodaabe Fulani in northern Niger and, by at least the 1830s, to the settled Fulani who took over Hausa and Nupe rule in the nineteenth century. Neither group has assumed its universality, nor all of its proscriptions and subtleties, but its wrapped shape persists, with mouth veiling still practiced by numerous northern Nigerian and Cameroonian emirs and some chiefs in modified form.



Figure 709. A Tuareg refugee camp built in the early 1990s and later flooded and evacuated. Mopti region, Mali, 2005. Photo by upyernoz. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

The displacement of Tuareg has led to some being housed in refugee camps (Figure 709). Others have headed for cement houses in cities such as Agadez, where gender roles reverse–men own the permanent houses, although women still own any tents in use.



Figure 710. Cement sculpture in Tahoua, Niger. Photo by Cpl. Enrique Saenz, U.S. Marines. Public domain.

Still others are the dominant presence in towns that have been majority Tuareg for a long time, such as Tahoua in Niger, where a public sculpture even references the “Agadez cross” pendants made by *inadan* silversmiths (Figure 710).

Jewelry has been one of the prime catalysts for change in the lives of those *inadan* who cast silver and work other metals. In the space of a generation, the disasters of drought, famine, and rebellion that particularly marked the 1970s and 80s saw the enterprising *inadan* expand foreign patronage substantially. Many settled in towns and travel internationally to sell. Some even

entered into long-term relationships with foreign firms; one set of *inadan* created silver clasps for purses made by high-end French leatherworking firm Hermès. Suggestions, perusal of fashion magazines and jewelry catalogues, and observations of the ornaments of nearby peoples have led to the production of key rings, bottle openers, lighter cases, and other innovations, as well as thinner, smaller versions of customary forms (Figure 711). At first, only smiths themselves sold the works to



Figure 711. Tuareg vendor selling jewelry in the market of Niamey, Niger. Photo by LenDog64, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY-ND 2.0.

foreign visitors, but by 2004, nearly one-third of the vendors in one town with 62 sellers belonged to the nobility, one of many shifts in the old customary relationships between castes.

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The Zulu formerly had a rural, cattle-rearing nomadic culture (Figure 712) and many older household objects reflect these ties, incorporating abstracted cattle legs, tails, and other bovine references. However, today the Zulu form the largest ethnic component of Johannesburg, South Africa's



Figure 712. This lithograph by George French Angas shows the cattle-oriented life of the Zulu in the 1840s. From *The Kafirs illustrated in a series of drawings taken among the Amazulu, Amaponda and Amakosa tribes*. London: J. Hogarth, 1849. Public domain.

most sizable city, as well as Durban, its third largest city and busiest port. The shift to urbanism began over a century ago; the Zulu are by no means newcomers to metropolitan life. The British 1879 victory in the Anglo-Zulu war disrupted the Zulu kingdom structure shared by many—though not all—Zulu and their tributaries. The British and Boers increased control over land, and, by the close of the century, had instituted mandatory poll taxes for men and hut taxes on each structure. Payment had to be in government currency, which meant at least temporary shifts in money-earning, since the Zulu were cattle raisers unused to coinage and banknotes.



Figure 713. One of Zwelethu Mthethwa's series of photos of urban dwellers and their homes. Single frame from Tim Noakes' video, "Zwelethu Mthethwa Interview," 2010.

This change prodded many men to periodically migrate in order to work in European-established settlements, providing access to a new cash economy, trade goods, and completely different forms of employment. In the many intervening decades, some stayed in the cities. Household separations were frequent due to one-gender mining camps as did apartheid's domestic worker arrangements, which allowed women and their children to be housed in a small outbuilding on their employers' property, but banned adult men from staying there. An ever-increasing movement to the cities continues in post-apartheid times, overcrowding both the former segregated "suburbs" like Johannesburg's Soweto and other city regions. Although those Zulu who have acquired wealth through politics, law, entertainment, sports, and other professions have luxurious homes, overcrowded urban living is the norm for most, as

depicted in the photographs of Zulu artist Zwelethu Mthethwa (Figure 713). Single rooms or rooms-and-parlors are rental spaces whose walls are papered in newspapers, posters, and ads, and whose cleanliness showcases often sparse possessions (see other Mthethwa photos HERE).

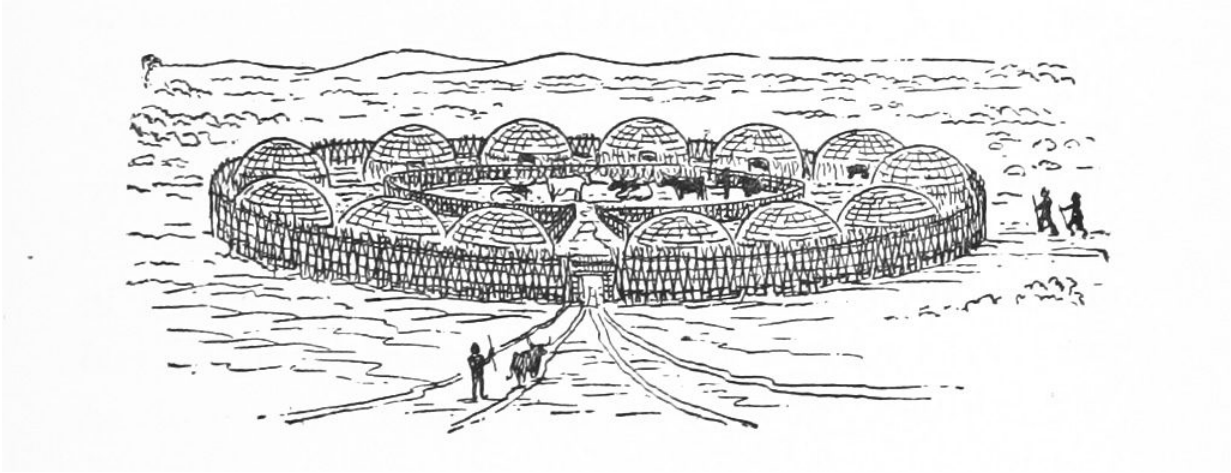


Figure 714. Drawing of an *isiBaya* in Walter Robert Ludlow's *Zululand and Cetewayo, containing an account of Zulu customs, manners and habits* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1882, p. 157. Public domain.

Other Zulu—particularly women, children and old men—still remain in the countryside of KwaZuluNatal, their lives tied to cattle and the semi-nomadic lifestyle of their forebears. Many city dwellers plan to retire to the countryside for a less frantic existence, but rural Zulu certainly do not live in isolation from metropolitan culture. Family members live and work in urban areas, visits to the city are made, local stores stock city goods, and locally-made items are sold to city galleries or tourist vendors. In the nineteenth century, those Zulu under the ruler Shaka's (c. 1787-1828) royal descendants also lived in towns such as Umgungundlovu, which had about 1500 homes and many more inhabitants. These settlements were circular in design, the ruler's home placed furthest from the entrance. Subjects lived in several layers of round houses around the circumference of the community—which could reach two miles—with cattle holding areas (known as *kraal* in Afrikaans and English and *isiBaya* in Zulu) between them. The military used the huge kraal at the center as a parade ground. After the British broke the royal system, smaller household settlements replaced this arrangement, taking a similar formation (Figure 714). The *isiBaya* was quite literally the core of the homestead. Households initially had one wooden stockade surrounding the central kraal, while a second, outer stockade encircled the dwellings. The *isiBaya* centralized the household's wealth



Figure 715. A Zulu man preparing the armature for a house, 1894. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.160.13.4. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

through cattle, which served as a bride price for legitimate marriages and also provided food, hides for clothing, and dung for fuel. Deceased members were buried there, and thus ancestors and cattle remained interlinked at the heart of the home. Houses were distributed around its edge in the area between fencing according to hierarchy: the Great House (*iNdlunkulu*) stood on that point of the circle opposite the stockade entrance, and households derived from the senior wife's line occupied the space known as the right-hand-side, while those of lesser wives and their offspring occupied the left side of the arc. Each wife had her own home that also housed her young children, and sons who married built new houses in the household for their own wives and children. Men had no particular house of their own, but visited their wives' houses successively.

Like the homes of most other African pastoralists, older-style Zulu houses (*indlu*) were made

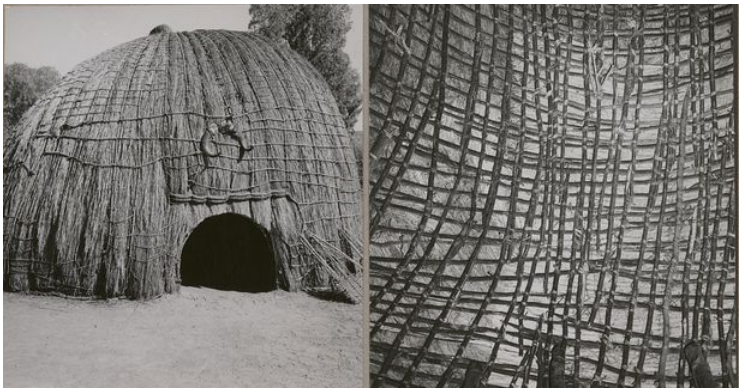


Figure 716. Exterior and inner roof of a Zulu *indlu*. Photo by Jean-Erick Pasquier, Orange Free State, South Africa, 1969. © Musée du Quai Branly, PP0075781.2.

of readily available, lightweight materials, even after the adoption of farming made settlements more permanent. Males dug a trench as a foundation, sinking long saplings into it to act as an armature. Bending these saplings, they created arcs, tying on other crosspieces to produce a latticed dome (Figure 715). Thatching was applied in fairly short layers (Figure 716), and, if the inhabitant were elderly, additional grass ornaments might be added. If the home were large or heavy thatch covered its frame, pairs of interior supports with crossbeams ensured its shape would remain fairly hemispherical and avoid collapse. At the top, some homes had a finial bound off that incorporated a medicine against lightning. In the colder Zulu regions, woven mats were layered over the exterior thatch for extra insulation.



Figure 717. Interior of a Zulu *indlu*, South Africa, ca. 1920-1935. © Musée du Quai Branly, PF0043025. Donor South African Railways.

A circumference of nearly 16.5 feet was common, a span large enough to house several inhabitants in comfort (Figure 717). Although regional daytime temperatures often stay in the 70s ˚F, or above, they can fall to the 50s ˚F in winter, or drop at the higher altitudes of this often mountainous region. Interiors, therefore, had a central hearth to provide warmth, as well as to cook. Smoke could escape through the thatching. In the past, when someone died, their home was torched, and neighboring structures were either moved in their entirety, or the underlying framework was freed of its thatching and shifted, even if a short distance.

These kinds of homes were still common through the 1950s, but changes occurred. Decades before, maize had become a crop, encouraging settlement. Goats joined cattle in the livestock realm, and the *kraal* space shrank. The outer stockade was abandoned, and granaries were placed near household entrances. Once many householders became one-wife Christians, moving from house to house no longer was a male option. These effects cumulated in smaller households.

Less thatch was available as grassy expanses turned to farmland. In subsequent decades, earth or cement replaced fiber in the creation of still-



Figure 718. Zulu home with thatched roof. Photo by Steve Slater, 2011. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.



Figure 719. Zulu whitewashed house with corrugated metal roof. Photo by Steve McNicholas, 2006. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

round homes topped by thatching (Figure 718). These were usually whitewashed or painted in solid colors, unlike contemporary creations of Sotho, Ndebele, and other South African groups. Some took rectangular forms, which made the inclusion of Western-style furniture easier. Zinc roofing's adoption has since become almost ubiquitous (Figure 719), as it has throughout the continent for reasons of status.



Figure 720. The Zulu section of Lesedi Cultural Village includes *indlu* built on a past model. The Cultural Village also includes Ndebele, Pedi, Sotho, and Xhosa architectural quarters. Sterkfontein, South Africa, Photo by Good Free Photos“>sharonang, 2017. Public domain.

Rural Zulu life and its older manifestations have not totally vanished, however; they have become tourist draws. Several villages have been erected to recreate a historic lifestyle for visitors, à la Williamsburg. At least two are partial reconstructions of the historic royal capitals of Shaka's successors King Dingane and King Cetshwayo. Others have been constructed near popular scenic sites. A recent Internet tour promotion touts one spot as follows: "Our first stop is an authentic cultural village where dancers perform an ancient dance to the beating of African drums. Sample traditionally brewed Zulu beer and watch women craft clay pots and intricate Zulu beadwork." PheZulu Safari Park offers a village tour with "traditional beehive shaped thatched huts," as well as Zulu dancing, wildlife encounters, a restaurant, and gift shop, while Shakaland is billed as "the oldest 'Zulu Cultural Village,'" erected as a set for the South African television mini-series *Shaka Zulu* (1986) and also used in the 1990 film *John Ross*. Numerous other travelers' destinations also keep the past visible (Figure 720).



Figure 721. *Isithebe* eating mat. M. Azulina, Zulu female artist, South Africa, 20th century. Reeds, raffia fiber, and cotton string. L 15 7/16″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.238.166. Gift of Laura and James J. Ross, B.A. 1960. Public domain.

Interiors were spare. Different types of mats were used for sleeping, as plates for eating (*isithebe*) (Figure 721), or for sitting. Other furnishings were usually limited to headrests, wooden milk pails and meat platters, and other containers and implements. Goods were usually stored around the perimeter (Figure 722), making active use of the space where the building's arc made adult use impossible. Beaded garments and jewelry, as well as snuff holders and other personal goods, were often tucked into the sapling

grid, out of children's reach. Because those with bad intent could use a man's most intimate possessions to cause him harm—headrest, attire, eating utensils, mat—only his senior-most wife could touch these objects. The great house



Figure 722. View of a Zulu interior showing cooking utensils, shield, and various household goods. Natal, South Africa. Photo by F. W. Ensor?, 1901/02. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.54.72. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

within a compound had a curving earthen ledge that served as an altar. This part of the home was farthest from the entrance, providing a dark place that the ancestors found appealing. Ritual items were kept there, and it served as a place for communion with ancestral spirits. Urban Zulu choose a room for this purpose and still store specialized items there, such as the spear used for daughters' coming-of-age ceremonies.



Figure 723. A few examples of the wide variety of Zulu coiffures that passed in and out of fashion in the past century. **Top left**: Zulu married woman, ca. 1900. Wereld Museum, Rotterdam, RV-A293-6. CC BY-SA 4.0.**Top center**: Zulu married woman. Lake St Lucia area, South Africa, late 19th century. The Wellcome Collection. Creative Commons CC BY. **Top right**: Zulu woman, South Africa, 1894. Wereld Museum, Rotterdam, RV-A15-41. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Bottom left**: Zulu woman, Durban, South Africa, first half of 20th century. Photo by Lynn Acutt. © Musée du Quai Branly, PP0150819; cropped at bottom. **Bottom center**: Zulu man, South Africa, 1894-1896. Photo by Trappistenmission Mariannhill. Bestand Berliner Anthropologische Gesellschaft, im Besitz SMB-PK, Ethnologisches Museum. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, VIII A 20528. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA. **Bottom right**: Zulu man, South Africa, ca. 1900. Wereld Museum, Rotterdam, RV-A293-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

The formerly elaborate Zulu hairstyles (Figure 723) made headrests (*izigqiki*) imperative, although they are seldom used today. Brides usually brought these to the marriage, although some authors state the groom was to provide one for himself and one for the new wife, while she would instruct the carver to include specific motifs. The designs often mirrored designs on her engagement beadwork, which was treasured. When the 19th-century Zulu kingdom was active, headrests were highly prized. They might be buried with the owner or be handed down as revered–but no longer used–heirlooms. Daughters could inherit them and carry them to their husband's house; they remained a concrete tie to their own lineage and ancestors.

Those who lived in the core kingdom areas often had



Figure 724. Wooden headdress with amasumpa, ornamentation associated with the core Zulu kingdom. Zulu male artist, South Africa, 19th century. L 15.75″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1999.29.2.

headrests sparely decorated with *amasumpa*, wooden bumps or “warts” (Figure 724), although this ornament was not used in other Zulu regions. Numerous styles of headrests exist, including many double examples that were used when a husband shared his



Figure 725. Wooden double headrest. Zulu male artist, South Africa, 1850-1919. L 18 7/8″. Tropenmuseum, TM-4010-29. Creative CommonsCC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 726. Zulu headrests that directly allude to cattle. **Top**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1870. L 20.08". long. From Yngvar Nielsen, *Universitetets Ethnografiske Samlinger 1857-1907* (Christiana/Oslo: W.C. Fabritius & Sonner A/S, 1907): 138. Public domain. **Bottom**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, 19th century. W 25″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1934,0712.6. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

wife's house (Figure 725). The rounded uprights on some *izigqiki* (Figure 726) are meant to evoke cattle legs, and thus the herd and cattle's ability to connect with the ancestors. Other headrests have tails or legs that also suggest cows (Figure 727). These cattle allusions may also refer to ancestral-inspired dreams produced when sleeping. The intensive trade and tribute that took place within the nineteenth century resulted in a variety of styles (Figure

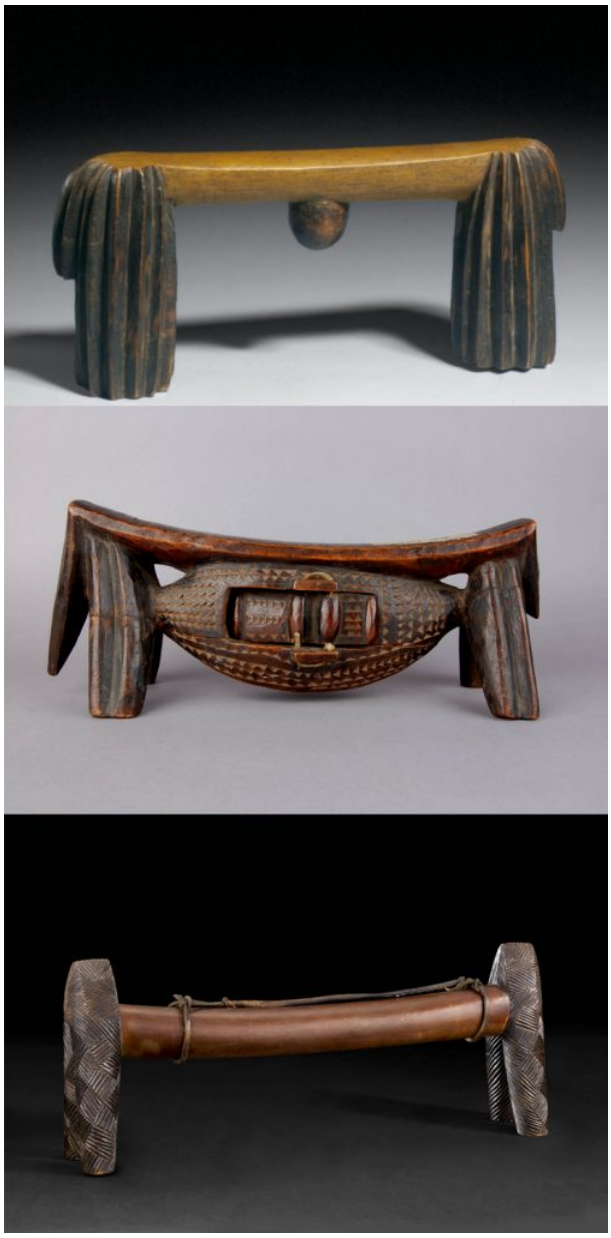


Figure 727. Three wooden headrests. **Top**: Zulu or Swazi male artist, South Africa, 19th century. W 12.99″. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. Sammlung: Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III D 1366. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA. **Middle**: Headrest with built-in compartment. Zulu male artist, South Africa, 19th century. W 12.2″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954,+23.1845. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Bottom**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, 1860-1869. W 23.82″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af.2183. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

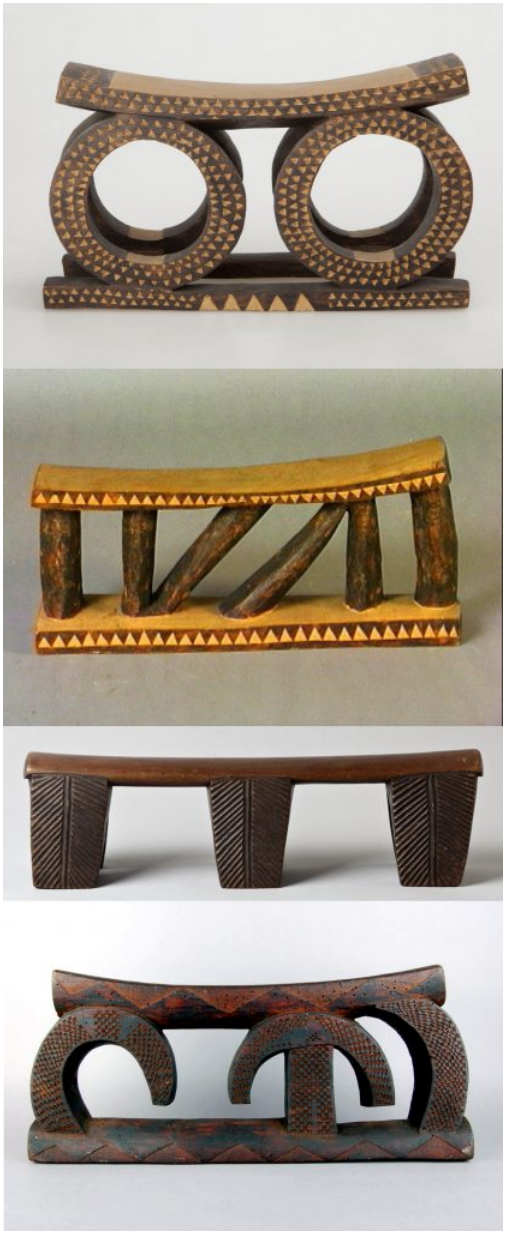


Figure 728. Wooden headrests. **Top**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1890. W 11.22″. Wereld Museum Rotterdam, RV-803-20. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. **Top middle**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1890. W 13.39″. Wereld Museum Rotterdam, RV-803-24. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. **Bottom middle**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, probably 19th century. W 18,11″. Etnografiska museet 1907.14.0188. Creative Commons CC BY. **Bottom**: Zulu male artist, South Africa, probably 19th century. W 18.19″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954; +23.1843. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

728), some created by subject peoples.



Figure 729. Three *ithunga* milk containers. Zulu male artists, South Africa. **Left**: Late 19th/early 20th century. H 17.05″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1934,1201.2. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Middle**: 20th century. H 16.75”. Cleveland State University, 2002.10. Gift of William B. Simmons. **Right**: Wood with metal stand. Late 19th/early 20th century. H 19.29″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954,+23.606. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 730. Wooden spoon. Zulu male artist, South Africa, 20th century. L 14". Brooklyn Museum, John W. James Fund, 1996.113.9. Creative Commons CC-BY. Brooklyn Museum photograph, 2013.

Many other household objects also have connections to cattle, for milk products are an essential part of the Zulu diet, as they are for many pastoralists. Raw milk is usually avoided, however. Cattle handling is a male activity, since married women are most closely associated with a polluted ritual state that makes cattle, people and plants vulnerable to illness and death. Girls may interact with family cattle, as long as they are not menstruating, but boys do the milking, using wooden milk containers (*ithunga*) (Figure 729) as temporary receptacles. These are ordered by the male heads of households. Some are footed; others bear *amasumpa* or even breasts. The *ithunga* is symbolically female, but women are not allowed to touch them; girls singing at coming-of-age ceremonies compare it to the vagina. The extrusions at the side allow a better grip between the knees during the process. After milking, the boys then transfer the liquid to calabashes or hide containers to ferment, overturning the wooden pail to dry. Subsequently, the milk separates into thin and clotted liquids—whey and curds. The latter are known as *amasi*, curdled sour milk, similar to cottage cheese or yogurt. The word *amasi* is incorporated into the descriptive names of certain whitish Nguni cattle: *inkomo engamasi evutshiwe*, or "ripe milk". *Amasi* still can only be shared with those who are blood relatives of the householder, thus excluding women who have married into the family. Ritual prohibitions also disallow *amasi* consumption during menstruation or mourning, as well as

during the girls' seclusion period for coming-of-age ceremonies. *Amasi* is popular among many South African groups, and commercial dairies produce pasteurized versions today.



Figure 731. Wooden spoon. Zulu male artist, South Africa, 19th century. L 21.46″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1977.52.14.

Commercial goods have displaced most wooden and terracotta cooking and serving vessels, with imported iron cooking pots already staple goods in the late nineteenth century. The basic Zulu diet consisted of milk products, boiled porridge, and cooked greens. Ladies were used for cooking and serving. Long-handled spoons for eating *amasi* from a communal terracotta bowl were once essential, but *amasi* is now more often drunk directly or poured over corn meal ("mealie-meal") pap. Spoons were valued, carefully kept in a dedicated bag, personal to their owner. Most eating spoons have a bowl that meets the stem at a sharp angle, with very small sections of decoration on the latter (Figure 730). A few are figurative, with an elongated female figure acting as the handle (Figure 731). Even non-figurative spoons may allude to a woman's body, their pointed bowls like a head with a desirable pointed chin, inclined in the respectful pose women take with their inlaws.



Figure 732. Wooden meat tray. Zulu male artist, South Africa, late 19th/early 20th century. W 19.69″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954; +23.608. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Beef was a fairly infrequent addition to the Zulu diet, but cattle and goats were slaughtered for feasts honoring the ancestors. Pouring beer over the goats' backs in advance signified their dedication to the dead, as beer had ancestral associations. Men roasted the meat, which was served on wooden platters. Those platters from the core Zulu areas once ruled by Shaka often included *amasumpa* projections (Figure 732), as did some headrests and milk pails. The platters stand on low legs, and sometimes the *amasumpa* were placed on the underside, where they would have been almost invisible to diners. Their decoration, however, would become evident when the platters were hung by their usual lugs, or when one platter was inverted over another to keep meat warm or ward off flies. Fat is often applied to the wood, as well as draining onto it, so dull examples were probably never used.



Figure 733. Beer-skimming ladle made from the leaves of the wild date palm. Zulu, South Africa, 1960-1969. L 12.6″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af.3127. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

If meat was most commonly consumed during ancestral festivities, traditional beer made from sorghum was even more closely associated with them. Homemade beer is still a vital part of Zulu culture. Women are typically brewers, and legend states that Nomkhubulwane, the Zulu goddess in charge of women's farming and growth, first taught them the technique. Women also use clay from her earth to create the pottery necessary for proper preparation and serving of this nutritious, grain-based drink, which is only about 2% alcohol. Large natural-colored pots rubbed on the outside with cattle dung serve as vats, and are placed in a family brewery, a small dedicated building kept warm to promote fermentation. Brewing takes from three to seven days, and basketry caps cover the vats during the process in order to keep out dust and insects. Afterward, the beer is strained through fiber bags and woven skimmers remove any flotsam from the grain (Figure 733). Though most Zulu women know how to make beer, those considered to have "tasteful hands" are sought to produce the drink for special celebrations. Beer is linked to hospitality, and drinking is tightly tied to social and ceremonial life—it is brewed for babies' naming ceremonies, coming-of-age ceremonies, dispute settlements, weddings, and funerals. Beer is also sacred. Women who are not ritually pure—pregnant, menstruating or breast-feeding—cannot prepare it. At the end of the brewing process, the vat is placed on a raised altar to the ancestors in the dark recesses dedicated to them at the back of the main compound home. Ancestors also have a pot that always contains a small amount of beer at their disposal. Drinking takes place at ground level and serving vessels stay there as well, to honor the ancestors buried there by dropping fresh beer's skimmed foam to the ground next to the pot as an offering. Ancestors are themselves sociable, and grow annoyed if the household doesn't hold feasts with beer and meat, for those occasions are held in their honor and enhance their posthumous reputation.



Figure 734. Incised decoration on a beer pot. Zulu female artist, South Africa, 20th century. Cleveland State University, 2002.12. Gift of William B. Simmons.



Figure 735. Terracotta beer transport pot (uphiso). Zulu female artist, South Africa, early 20th century. H 14.5". Cleveland State University, 2002.12. Gift of William B. Simmons.

The decorative raised bumps (*amasumpa*) that occur on wooden containers appear even more frequently on pots, sparingly placed in asymmetric clusters that often conform to geometric shapes, such as triangles, circles or six-pointed stars. Some scholars associate their patterns with long-abandoned young women's abdominal scarifications, whose location intentionally conjures thoughts of fecundity. Others link them to cows' teats or to herds, symbols of nourishment and wealth respectively. Incised decoration on pottery is also common, and both approaches generally appear on a pot's "shoulder" (Figure 734). The dark color of most serving vessels further associates them with family forebears, who are said to prefer darkness, and only black vessels are used at ritual ceremonies for the ancestral protection they suggest. These pots' distinctive finish is achieved by first burnishing them with a pebble, reducing oxidation during the open pit firing (which employs cattle dung as well as wood) by using leaves or grass, then applying soot, ash, and cattle fat to the completed terracotta and refiring it. Both dung and fat call the ancestors to mind as well, since all cattle products are linked to the family dead. Zulu pottery is known for its extremely thin walls and graceful form. Pots with necks (*uphiso*) (Figure 735) are used to transport beer for celebrations to minimize spillage (Figure 736), and leaves are sometimes stuffed into the neck as a further preventative.



Figure 736. Two women carrying beer containers on heads at a wedding ceremony. Zulu, near Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 1905. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1999.11.14. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 737. Terracotta *ukhamba* beer container with woven fiber lid (*imbenge*). Zulu female artist, South Africa, early 20th century. H 8.75”. Cleveland State University, 2002.04 and 2002.05. Gift of William B. Simmons.

Depending on the gathering, a fairly large pot may be placed inside a ring of guests, who are then served with a ladle, or individual vessels may be distributed. People use neckless pots (*ukhamba*) to drink from, and basketry caps (*imbenge*) protect their contents (Figure 737). Once drinking begins, an upturned cap indicates a refill is requested. These vessels are not changeless. Excavations suggest that blackened beer vessels emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, and were preceded by tightly-woven beer baskets—also still manufactured. In more recent times, *amasumpa* decorations spell out words or form recognizable motifs, and are not individually attached as they once were. Instead, in order to save time, a raised band is applied to the pot and sliced with a knife for a similar, but time-saving, effect. Although most Zulu pot types once used for cooking and serving food have long been replaced by manufactured goods, those linked to beer are still crafted, underlining the ritual aspects of the traditional brew. Production has also expanded to fill the demands of non-brewing patrons, who buy works for display purposes and internationally promote the work of select master potters.



Figure 738. Tightly-woven basket. Zulu, South Africa, 20th century. H 16.93″. Etnografiska museet 1981.21.0002. Creative Commons CC-BY.

Zulu pottery constitutes one art form that has continued into the twentieth century, but not only because of continued home brewing with its social and ritual aspects. Recognition from the South African art world has led to an elevation for potters. Their works are now displayed in galleries and museums, and the potters' names are now recorded, their work discussed and emulated, inspiring academically-trained artists who did not grow up with this tradition, such as Ian Garrett. On a smaller scale, similar accolades are now showered on basketmakers. Men used to produce baskets and mats, but missionary influence shifted fiber crafts to women, following European patterns. By the 1970s, production of intricate beer baskets (Figure 738) had nearly ceased, but a revival and expansion have since taken place. As in Botswana, the new baskets are rarely used, although they are functional. They have become display pieces for non-Zulu, rather than household objects, and artists vie with one another to create patterns far more intricate than anything made a century ago.



Figure 739. Four women's calabash snuff containers with brass or copper wire decoration. **Top left**: Zulu, South Africa, late 19th/early 20th century. H 2.36″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954; +23.1470. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Top right**: Zulu or Sotho, South Africa, before 1890. H 2.48″. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-803-39l. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. **Bottom right**: Zulu, South Africa, before 1891. H 2.95″. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-837-1. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. **Bottom left**: Zulu, South Africa, before 1891. H 1.97″. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-837-5. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0.

Most other household and personal items have gone through a lot of changes, unsurprising considering the multiple political and social upheavals of the past century and a half. Although Zulu snuff-taking is still prevalent, the intricate and varied containers and implements associated with its past use have vanished. The Zulu state that snuff heightens awareness. Non-tobacco snuffs can be used for medicinal purposes—the powdered bark of the *umkwangu* tree and the powdered root of *iyeza* (*Anemone caffra*) both cure headaches. Most snuff-taking did employ tobacco, however, in the form of a fine, dry powder meant to be inhaled with a subsequent sneeze. A common offering to the ancestors, it had a ritual dimension as well as a secular one. Snuff-taking was most often a social activity, and the public use of implements provided opportunities to display taste and wealth. Both men and women kept snuff on their person. Women used small bead or wire-decorated gourds Figure 739), while men tended to use horn containers that were often made to be tucked into a gauged earlobe or perform double duty as hair



Figure 740. Bone snuff spoons. Zulu male artists, South Africa. **Top**: Bone or horn snuff-spoon/comb with red sealing wax fill. Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1909. L 5.71″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1953,25.50. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Middle**: Bone snuff spoon. Zulu artist, South Africa, probably 20th century. L 6 9/16″. © Princeton University Art Museum, 1998-678. Bequest of John B. Elliott, Class of 1951. **Bottom**: Double horn snuff spoon on a glass-beaded necklace. 1880-1915. Science Museum Group Collection, A658314. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.



Figure 742. This wooden container’s lid is missing. Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1865. H 15.35″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af.1559.a. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

ornaments. These were not necessarily singular objects—several nearly identical, delicately-carved versions have survived the past century. Men and women’s hair was also the site of snuff spoons, carved from bone in an extensive



Figure 741. Zulu man holding horn snuff spoon, South Africa, ca. 1865. Photo by Benjamin William Caney, Durban. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.67.8. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

assortment of shapes (Figure 740), some with C-shaped bowls, others with zig-zagging stems. Although these were used to convey snuff to the nostrils (Figure 741), many were comb-shaped in order to fix them more securely in the hair. Some larger wooden containers, formerly thought to be milk vessels, may have held snuff at gatherings, or were commissioned by Europeans (Figure 742). None of these items are made any longer, since commercial snuff containers easily fit in the purses or pockets that formerly didn't exist.

Zulu dolls were also often carried, but by young women as meaningful display pieces, rather than toys. Over a core of wood or cloth, early 20th century dolls were cylindrical, covered with beaded patterns except for their featureless faces (Figure 743). Hair was represented by fiber or beaded strands in a style once popular with unmarried girls, similar to that now worn by female ritual specialists. Although childless women sometimes carried them, hoping to induce pregnancy, these were usually the property of teenagers. The dolls were frequently attached to cording that allowed them to hang over the shoulder. Young women offered their dolls



Figure 743. Zulu doll made from beads, a calabash, and raffia, South Africa, 1900-1950. H 9 5/8″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 76.81. Founders Society Purchase, Eleanor Clay Ford Fund for African Art. Public domain.

to boys to initiate romantic relationships, but this token of affection only bound the giver, not the receiver. Over the course of the twentieth century, the dolls grew much larger, gaining beaded facial features and hats. After apartheid was instituted in 1948, travel restrictions prevented young women from visiting sweethearts working in the cities. Instead, they often had studio photographs taken of themselves with their dolls, sending the photographs instead, a practice that continued until apartheid's end in 1994. Zulu doll use is part of a widespread southern African practice that includes the Sotho, Xhosa, Tsonga, and others.



Figure 744. Two wooden prepuce covers. Zulu; South Africa, before 1883. L 2.76″. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-389-110. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0.

In the nineteenth century, clothing varied according to age, marital status, and social rank. Despite the frequently chilly weather, many Zulu men and women at this time wore dress that frequently left them with bare chests, arms, and legs. Standards of modesty required maidens to bare their breasts, while all males who had reached puberty wore prepuce covers over the glans of their penis. These varied in shape and material, made of basketry, banana leaves, calabash, leather or wood; fiber examples usually belonged to married men. They usually took either a cup-like or globular shape (Figure 744), but were usually hidden by a loincloth of animal tails or pelts. While exposure of the penis as a whole was not considered an embarrassment—indeed, younger men occasionally wore naught but the penis cover—an exposed glans and prepuce were tantamount to vulgarity. The monarch Shaka required two European men resident in his domain to wear these covers, even though they wore trousers. Absence of a prepuce cover left the wearer vulnerable to evil intentions and supernatural tampering, which could also occur if the cover were handled by another. Normally, they were destroyed at the owner's death.

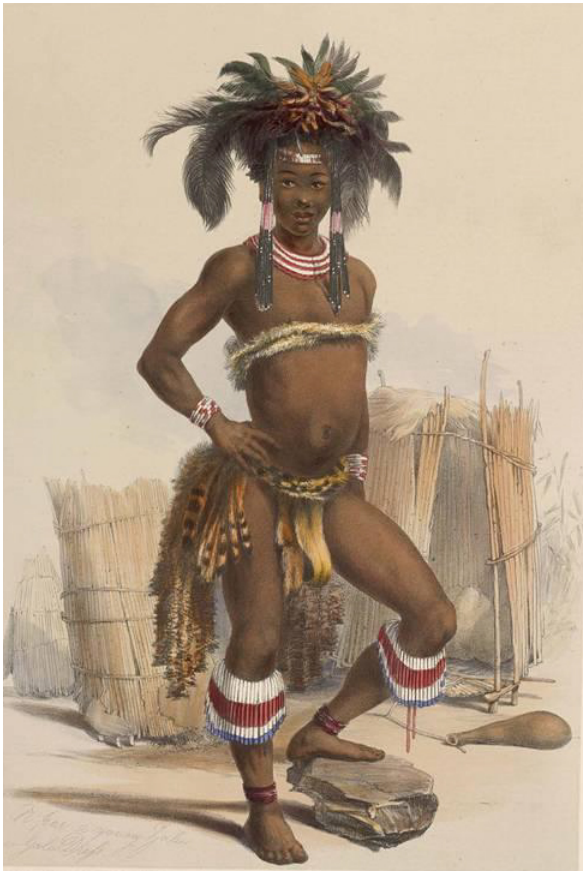


Figure 745. Zulu warrior, South Africa, 1840s. In George French Angas, from *The Kafirs illustrated in a series of drawings taken among the Amazulu, Amaponda and Amakosa tribes* (London: J. Hogarth, 1849). Public domain.

Daily dress contrasted sharply with a warrior's formal attire, which included feathers that added height (Figure 745). In the late nineteenth century, men's rural styles were relatively independent of European directions. They wore a variety of hairstyles when young, replacing them as married men with a beeswax and sinew-coated fiber ring sewn into the hair (Figure



Figure 746. Necklace made from carved bone, glass beads, and sinew. Zulu or Northern Nguni, South Africa, 19th century. L 15″. Cleveland Museum of Art, 2010.231. Gift of Dori and Daniel Rootenberg in memory of Estelle Rosenberg. Public domain.

741). After the 1879 defeat of the Zulu kingdom, all important adult men could wear necklaces made from imitation lion's claws (Figure 746). These had also been worn by other Nguni groups, but were formerly restricted to royal use, then to regional chiefs and counselors. Like other South African men in the nineteenth century, Zulu males carried knobkerries (Figure 747), wooden clubs that served as close-quarters weapons for fighting or hunting game. The British banned large examples, insisting in the Cape area that the knob must be small enough for the owner's mouth to contain it, while in Natal their numbers were restricted. They continued to be male accessories, even as the warrior ethos was restricted. Handed down from father to son, and became heirlooms that had a ritual focus. Under twentieth-century apartheid, urban migrants risked arrest for carrying them, but members of urban ethnic associations did so anyway when carrying them to Sunday boxing matches. Night watchmen were permitted to use them, and employed more colorful telephone wire to braid patterns onto the sticks and knobs.

Change has greatly affected Zulu dress. Urban migrants adopted Western dress, although ethnic affiliations continued to appear in twentieth-century



Figure 747. Ritual specialists with a knobkerrie. Zulu, South Africa, ca. 1865. Photo by Fry & Co., Durban. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.67.4. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.



Figure 748. This Western-style vest with plastic buttons was covered with seed beads in geometric patterns. Zulu female artist, South Africa, 20th century? © Trustees of the British Museum, 2011,2045.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

photographs via accessories or beaded attire, which might include a band added by a wife or girlfriend to purchased clothing, or completely beaded vests (Figure 748). Today, most Zulu men and women wear sweaters, trousers, skirts, knit caps, and other manufactured clothing, though ceremonial occasions and events encouraging ethnic pride require dress based on earlier fashions. In general, however, Christianity and the expectations of former white rulers imposed absolute shifts from exposure to a more covered body in the city, and influenced rural areas as well. Under apartheid, however, oppositional use of traditional dress became a form of political subversion, and studio portraits often showed girls in traditional beadwork and uncovered breasts up until the early 1990s (Figure 749). Younger men wore (and continue to wear) beadwork made by admiring females. These love gifts could not be presented to prospective boyfriends until a girl had gained permission from her seniors to enter into courtship relations. Girls made them themselves, using glass imported glass beads. The popular rectangular-tabbed “love letters” include coded messages, although their use is idiosyncratic and colors are uncodified (Figure 750). Locally-made beads from ostrich shells, bone, and other organic materials had decorated clothing and persons for several millennia.

European bead importation increased significantly in the mid-19th century, transforming Zulu



Figure 749. "Woman with umbrella and handkerchief," 1960-early 1980s. Zulu photographer Richard Ndimande's studio photograph, collected by Frank Jolles. Special and Area Studies Collections, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida.

clothing and ornamentation as beads became more readily available. These seed beads—the same time used by Native Americans —

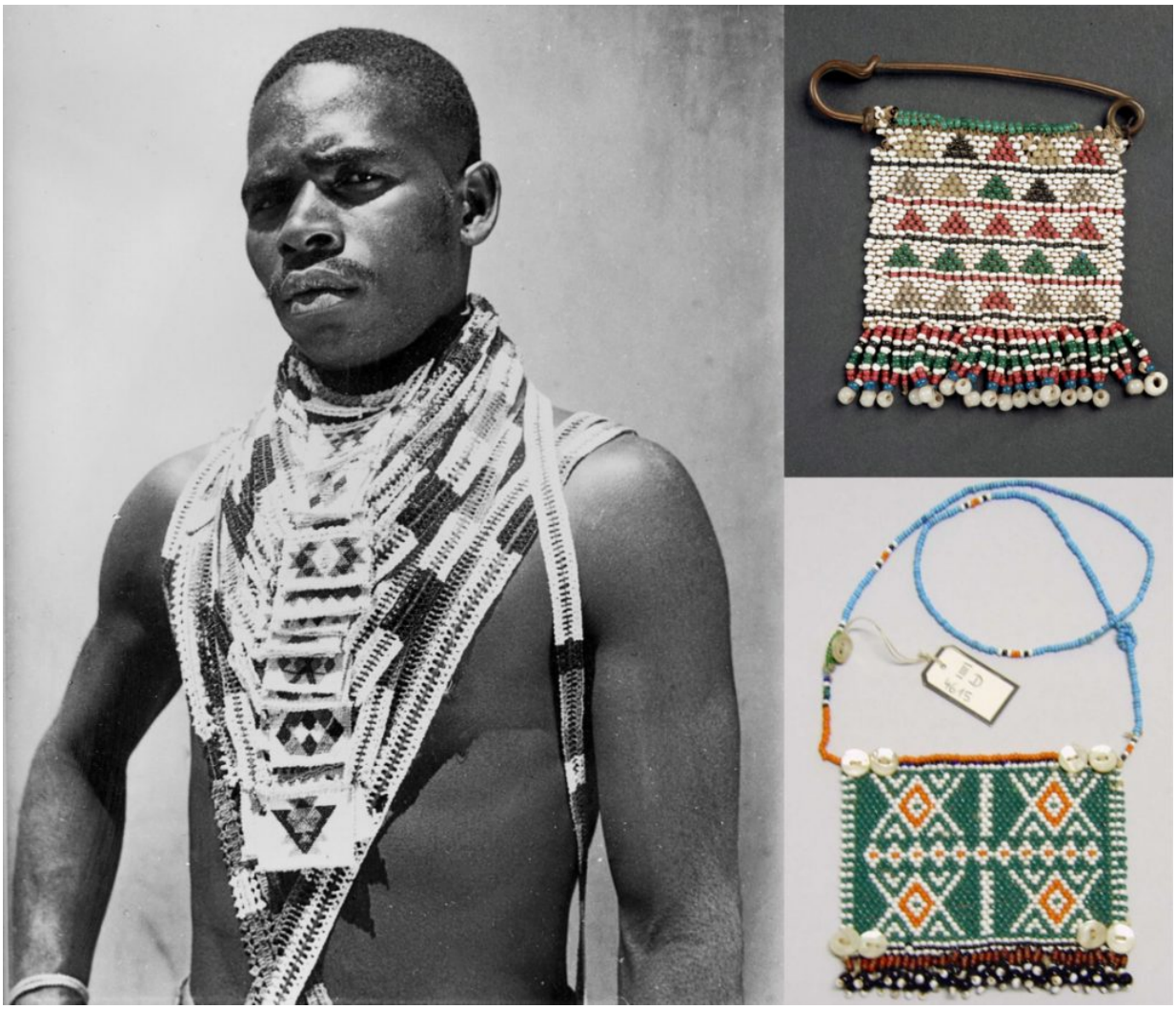


Figure 750. **Left**: Zulu man wearing beaded “love letters,” South Africa, ca. 1951. Tropenmuseum, TM-10004293. Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. **Right top**: Zulu, South Africa, 20th century. H 2.76″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-1-223. Donor Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY SA 4.0. Right bottom: Zulu, South Africa, 20th century. W 4.12″. Collected by H.K. Wagner. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika. © Foto: Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III D 4615. Creative Commons BY-NC-SA.

intensified color in the dress of many southern Africa groups, and were a staple of women’s art. In the mid-nineteenth century, women’s dress was made primarily from cow leather or goatskin (Figure 751), or even from fiber (Figure 752). Betrothal accorded young women the right to wear hide skirts; longer versions were scented and restricted to married women. Beaded accessories indicated wealth in the 19th century, since imported beads were still expensive at that time. Early beadwork was striking but limited in scope; beaded headbands and necklaces, flowers, and even porcupine quills drew attention to the face. As beads became increasingly available, female dress grew



Figure 751. Zulu women wearing hide skirts and brewing beer near the Tugala River, South Africa, 1840s. From George French Angas, *The Kafirs illustrated in a series of drawings taken among the Amazulu, Amaponda and Amakosa tribes* (London: J. Hogarth, 1849). Public domain.



Figure 752. Fiber apron. Zulu, South Africa, 1860-1869. W 18.35″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af.3087. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

increasingly complex. Varying according to region, a series of decorated aprons or caches-sexe (Figure 753) became de rigueur, as did leg decorations, belts, and other ornamentation. Girls also made necklaces of the “love letter” type for their own use, and wore other kinds of jewelry as well, such as necklaces from scented strips of wood, separated by spacer beads (Figure 754).

Over time, both Zulu accessories and dress continued to change. Plugs for gauged ears grew popular ca. 1950, then dropped out of fashion by about 1990 (Figure 755). Dark manufactured cloths with minor



Figure 753. Beaded apron. Zulu female artist, South Africa, early 20th century. W 38.2″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1954; +23.197. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 754. Necklaces like this made from scented wood are in numerous collections. Zulu woman, South Africa, ca. 1896. Photo by Otto Witt. Ethnografiska Museet, 0010.0016. Public domain.

beaded motifs became de rigeur for married women (Figure 756) and are still worn. Festival and daily dress often also include printed *shweshwe* cloths, formerly imported from Europe and now manufactured in South Africa.

Women's hairstyles reflected marital status. By the late nineteenth century, wives' coiffures



Figure 755. Ear plugs made from two wooden pieces with plastic and leather additions. Zulu, South Africa, 1960s-1970s. D for most 2.2″ © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1999,05.7.a-b. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

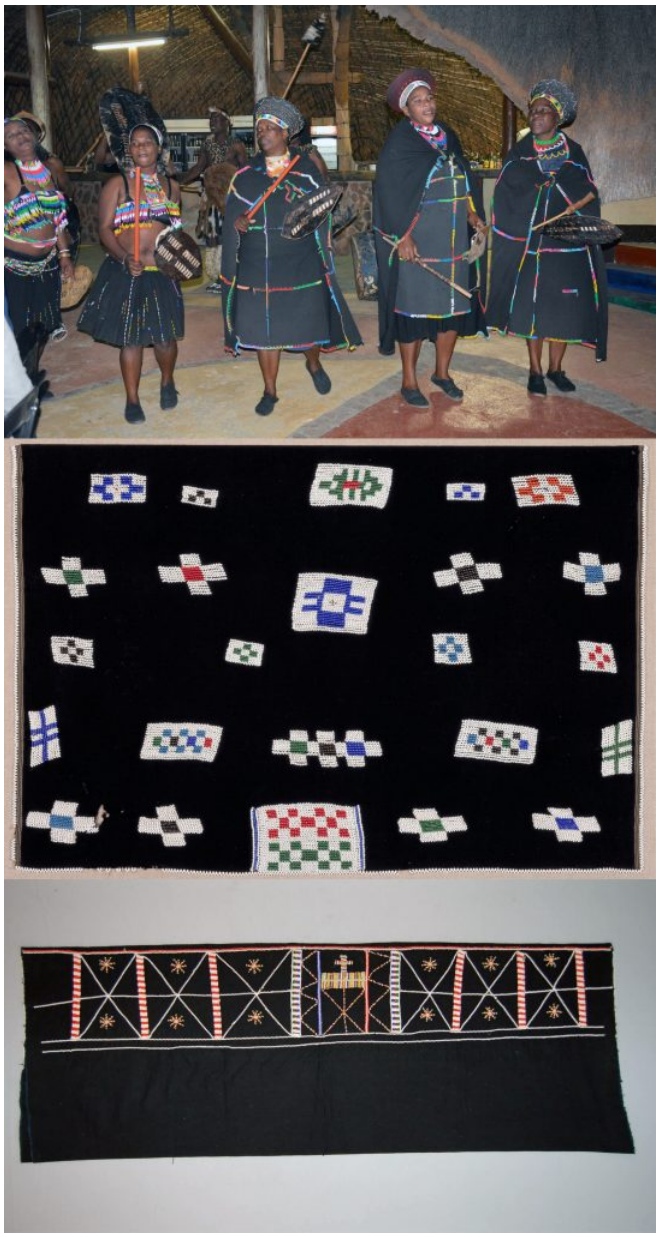
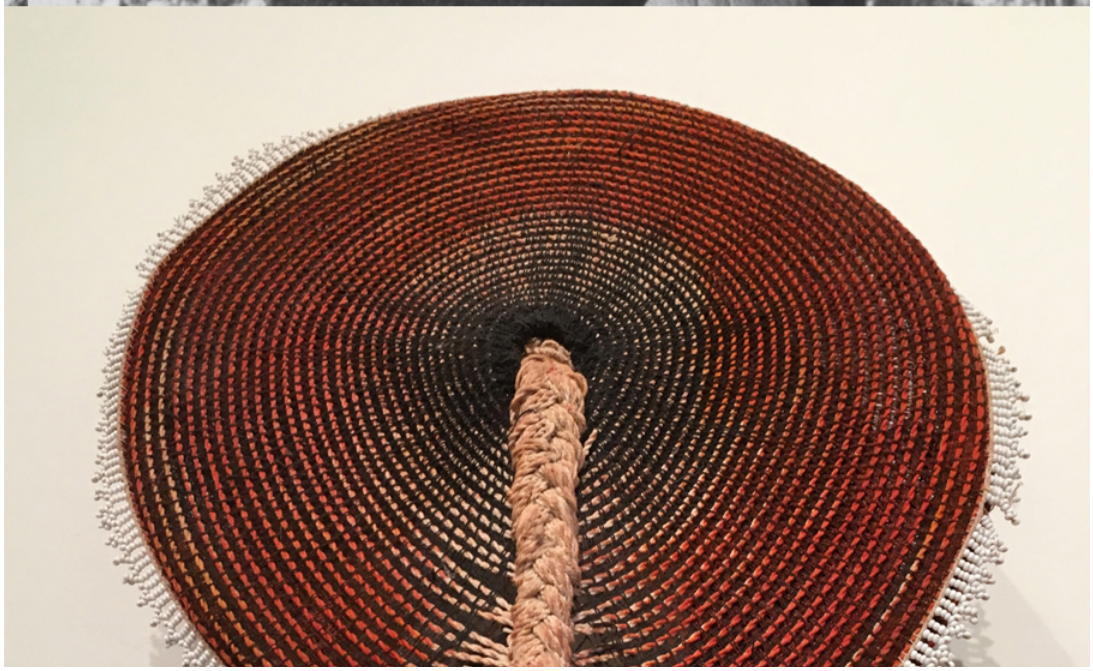


Figure 756. More recent “traditional” clothing employs dark manufactured cloth with limited beading. **Top**: Touristic performance at Zulu Nyala outside Johannesburg, South Africa, 2014. Photo by triciahealey. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. **Middle**: Woman’s cloak with beaded motifs. Zulu female artist, South Africa, late 20th century. W 33.25″. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 91.84. The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund. Public domain. **Bottom**: Apron with beaded motifs worn the back. Zulu female artist, South Africa, ca. 1974. W 50″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1997; 06.231. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

(*isicholo*) were vertically extended with the addition of woven grasses or false hair into a conical shape with a basketry armature, held by a mix of pomade and red ochre, with headbands at the sometimes shaved hairline. The turn of the century saw a gradual transformation of this hairstyle into a hat/wig of the same name, its shape varying according to district. In the Tugela Ferry area, its shape was shallow and broadly flared, while in some regions it became cylindrical. At first it had a basketry base overlaid with a hair and string netting, covered with the red ochre pomade; red yarn was used subsequently as well. In order to maintain their shape, leaves were often stuffed into the edges of the *isicholo* (Figure 757). Initially fairly plain, sometimes beaded bands were added in the twentieth century, and color range expanded. Today these are no longer daily wear for most women, but may appear for festive occasions, accompanied by beaded headbands (Figure 756 top).





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Figure 757. From a 19th-century flared hairstyle, the *isicholo* transformed into a married woman's hat–first with real hair, then with fiber and wool, all covered with red ochre. It now comes in a variety of colors. **Top**: Zulu woman between Greytown and Dundee, South Africa, 1970. Tropenmuseum TM-20014801. Creative Commons. **Second from top**: Zulu hat, South Africa, early 20th century. D 12″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2019.8. Gift of Dede and Oscar Feldman. Public domain. **Third from top**: Zulu hat with metal additions, Msinga region, South Africa, ca. 1940. D 15.75″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 70.1999.11.180. **Bottom**: Zulu hat, South Africa, 20th century. Hair, raffia, pigment. D 16″. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 97.7.1. Gift of Funds from the Regis Foundation. Public domain.

Zulu arts were originally sleek and geometric, permeated all phases of daily life. In part, this was possible because cattle herders have a substantial amount of free time to make objects. A shift to urban life and salaried jobs robbed many Zulu of that leisure, and changes in lifestyle made many prestige objects used by aristocrats unnecessary.

New arts aro rting Durban citizens, with pearance was plain. Compe his created a need to stand At first, these were fairly si ditional Zulu male headgea e was invented.



Figure by their rickshaws. One has white feet in imitatio frica, 1890-1923. Libra Frances Carpen

As car owne llers, usually stationed at h he rickshaws and puller attire led to a collaborative project between Durban's Rickshaw Pullers Association and the staff and students of Workspace, part of the Department of Visual Communication Design at Durban University of Technology, with the support of municipal authorities. This was intended to both provide a facelift for the rickshaws and their position as a unique aspect of local artistry, and to familiarize graphic designers with Zulu design.





Figure 759. Rickshaw pullers' headpieces. Zulu, Durban, South Africa. **Top**: Headpiece has a metal and wooden framework and is made of cotton-covered leather with beadwork, pompoms, mirrored cardboard ornaments, ostrich feathers, and painted wooden horns. Worn with tunic with beaded panels, waist garment, and apron; cloth, mirrors, beadwork, plastic, pompoms, fringe, cotton tape. H of headdress 44.88″. Before 1996. Af1996,20.1.a-d. **Bottom**: Headdress made from feathers, beads, fiber, horn; worn with cape. Zulu, Durban, South Africa, 20th century. H 64″. Minneapolis Institute of Art. 73.14a,b. The Christina N. and Swan J. Turnblad Memorial Fund. Public domain.

Another new direction for traditional arts has opened up with an international interest in Zulu basketry. In the 19th century, plain woven grass baskets gave way to examples with wire ornamentation in brass and copper. Versions decorated with beads, buttons, keys and other materials emerged in the early 20th century, followed by examples made solely from colorful telephone wire. Men make many sizes and shapes of wire baskets, but one of the most popular forms consists of an enlarged and inverted wire *imbenge*, which has become

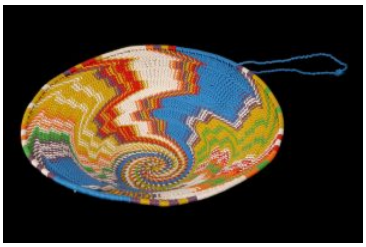


Figure 760. Shallow basket made of telephone wire. Zulu male artist, South Africa, before 1991. D 8.86″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1991.189.2.

a shallow basket, rather than a beer pot lid (Figure 760).

Beading has provided Zulu women with new economic and artistic opportunities. High-end necklaces that mimic the shapes of some traditional jewelry are sold in fashionable shops, their colors and patterns departing from older ornaments. Beaded bands and necklaces for tourists are a frequent market sight (Figure 761), as are dolls and "love letters." Some of the latter incorporate the red ribbon symbol that signifies HIV/AIDS awareness, since South Africa has the highest HIV rate in the world,



Figure 761. Touristic beadwork includes representations of the South African flag. Zulu female artists, Essenwood Market, Durban, South Africa 2007. Photo by ethekwinigirl. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.



Figure 762. Cloth-covered wooden crucifix with beaded Christ, his body bearing 8 AIDS ribbons. Zulu female artist, South Africa, 2002. H 19.76. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af2002,07.4. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

affecting 7.1 million people. The ribbon even shows up in some three-dimensional work, including a commissioned crucifix (Figure 762).

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4.5: Art in Small-Scale Communities

Small-scale communities might have a ruler, but they generally operated as city-states without considerable resources, since their populations were limited. Any taxes would not have been sufficient to import large quantities of the luxury materials that larger societies had, so wood, terracotta, and textiles were thus the standard mediums for artists. The absence of a wealthy court also would have limited the number of artists–they might make household goods for citizens and the occasional mask or figure for individuals or men's or women's societies, but a lesser demand for artworks meant that fewer specialists were needed, and those who did exist were often part-time specialists. These artists generally reserved their artistry for the dry season, since they needed to farm to support a family. This sub-chapter will examine the arts of two small-scale groups: the Dan of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria. Both of these groups used masking to bind the community, even though many other art forms existed as well.

The Dan of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire



Figure 763. Most Dan still live in rural villages, with the city of Man their only sizable settlement. **Above**: Dan village, Côte d'Ivoire, 2019. From a single frame of Joy Sima's video, "A look at traditional Gio/Man ethnic tribe in Côte d'Ivoire." **Below**: The city of Man, Côte d'Ivoire, 2018. From a single frame of africanews' video, "Ivory Coast 'Richest city of man'".

The Dan–also known as the Gio or Yakuba/Yakouba–stretch from southwestern Côte d'Ivoire into northeastern Liberia. A Mande-speaking group, they moved into this mountainous region centuries ago, and the difficult terrain has helped to keep most of their agriculturally-based settlements small and independent of federation. A council of elders assists the local ruler, but art is less in the service of courts than it is an expression of spiritual affiliation and resultant personal boosts. Prominence in society emerges from excellence in accomplishment–whether as a farmer, weaver, singer, dancer, or hospitable individual.



Figure 764. A group of Dan notables in conversation. Single frame from Planet Doc Full Documentaries' video, "Dan Village. Ivory Coast," posted 2016.

The wealthy man dresses well (Figure 764), in hand-woven cotton robes that today are more likely to bear machine rather than the hand embroidery of the past. In the past, he and his favorites wore brass jewelry cast by a blacksmith (Figure 765)–but its use was banned in Liberia in the 1930s, ostensibly due to health issues related to chafing, bone damage due to weight, and infections–perhaps excuses to remove impediments to labor. In the past and now, his stature demanded that he host lavish parties. These gatherings might serve as the occasions to

display a wooden portrait of his favorite wife to guests (see Chapter 3.8), or show them a brass figure that demonstrated his largesse as a patron.



Figure 766. The path to the sacred training grove is curtained by palm fronds, which are said to smell and repel evil. Single frame from Joy Sima's video, "A look at traditional Gio/Man ethnic tribe in Côte d'Ivoire," 2019.



Figure 765. Woman's brass bracelet. Dan male artist, Man, Côte d'Ivoire, before 1938. D 3.74″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1938.18.222.

Dan culture concentrates on rice farming and the kola nut trade, but spiritual interactions were once the basis for daily and ceremonial life, as well as societal advancement, beginning with initiation into male and female secret societies. Girls' initiation into Kong begins with excision; they learn childbirth, household affairs, and the spirits (Ge or Gle; plural Genu) as adolescents. Secret training for boys begins with circumcision in the forest (Figs. 766, 767), and a lengthy subsequent stay independent of their families as they learn the ways of adults and forest spirits. Both genders bond to their agemates through initiation processes that inculcate them through verbal education, esoteric training, spousal management, a trade, and more. teach them about



Figure 767. Wooden stool for boys who have just been circumcised, made by a blacksmith. Carvings of small animal horns suggest the protective medicine necessary for this vulnerable transition. Dan male artist, Man region, Côte d'Ivoire, before 1938. 10.24″. © Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1938.18.145.

the Ge. That this education is forest-based is meaningful. Children are warned about the dangers of the forest; it is only through initiation that individuals awaken to the forest's opportunities: game for the hunter, herbs, roots, and other ingredients for the ritual specialist, and, most of all, the opportunity to meet a forest spirit whose friendship can attract the social spotlight.

While traditional Dan religion honors a High God, he is a distant figure without active worship. Instead, interactions with the supernatural realm are directed toward the Genu forest spirits, who act as intermediaries between this world and the next. Associated with natural landscape features like the mountains that dominate the region, the rainforest, or running water, they will appear in the dreams of the humans they encounter, pleading for corporeality through representation as masquerades. Each Ge has a distinctive personality, and its masquerade will



Figure 768. A standard wooden Dean Gle mask. Dan male artist, Liberia or Côte d'Ivoire, early 20th century. H 10.5″. Brooklyn Museum, 1989.51.24. The Adolph and Esther D. Gottlieb Collection. Creative Commons-BY.

bear a personal name and an associated dance, music, and lyrics that distinguish it from others–even others in the same classification. The man who enters into such an agreement will commission a wooden mask, assemble the costume elements, and instruct musicians and a dancer regarding the Ge's performances. Through the admiration and renown the masquerader attracts, both Ge and its "master" are satisfied. Their relationship brings fame and a

The masquerades perform community roles within society; they may function as entertainers, cautionary examples of bad

behavior, fire marshals, or have other responsibilities. These are not necessarily fixed. Through dream conversations with their masters, the Genu may alter their roles and request physical changes to mask or costume to facilitate these shifts.

Some of the most common masqueraders are entertainers who dance, take a jokester role, or are singers. Those named Dean Ge/Gle (Figure 768) perform at public functions, but also participate in the initiation camp's activities, bringing the isolated boys food from their mothers, thus assuming a comforting, encouraging, maternal role. Although spirits are genderless, this type of masquerade has a feminine appearance, emphasizing ideal traits of beauty, such as narrow slitted eyes, a pointed chin, and an overall delicacy (Figure 769).



Figure 769. Dean Gle mask. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 9.2″. Raccolte Extraeuropee del Castello Sforzesco, 00012. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 770. A masquerader wears a raffia skirt and cloth upper garments, exemplifying how its costume unites the worlds of the wild and civilization. Single frame from Roger D. Arnold 2014 video, "Dan masquerade in Booni, Cote d'Ivoire."



Figure 771. Dan masquerader from Côte d'Ivoire, between 1960-1979. Photo by L. Normand. Musée du Quai Branly, PF0122895.



Figure 772. This mask was most likely a running mask, its athleticism held up as a social ideal. These masks take a handicap to give their human competitors an opportunity to succeed. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 8.86. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1976.3.1.

Those named Dean Ge/Gle (Figure 768) perform at public functions, but also participate in the initiation camp's activities, bringing the isolated boys food from their mothers, thus assuming a comforting, encouraging, maternal role. Although spirits are genderless, masquerades like this have a feminine appearance, emphasizing ideal traits of beauty, such as narrow slitted eyes, a pointed chin, and an overall delicacy. They usually have a glossy black surface that recalls healthy, well-groomed skin, a nose that fits within triangular parameters, and an oversized mouth that is frequently downturned. Many examples include a raised vertical line that bisects the forehead–this refers to a former type of regional facial scarification for women. The face is often keeled at the eyes, with both forehead and chin projecting forward (Figure 769). The performer's attire includes a voluminous raffia skirt, as most Dan masqueraders wear, recalling the wilderness where the spirits originally manifested (Figure 770). Some examples



Figure 773. This mask is meant to ensure cooking fires are extinguished in the windy dry season, but its importance has diminished with the increasingly common use of metal roofing. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire or Liberia, early 20th century. H 9 9/16″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.357. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.



Figure 774. This skit-performing mask (*bagle*) has aluminum teeth and eye surrounds. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, 20th century. H 9.84″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-220-21. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

have cowrie shells added to the headdress, a reference to pre-colonial currency that honors the spirit through monetary gifts, as do beads. Female singing spirits often wear tall hats (Figure 771), and many feminine-style masks originally had elaborate hairstyles made from fiber or actual hair, as well as carved or aluminum teeth, references to archaic female cosmetic modifications.

Masks with round eyes, whether projecting or not, are considered manifestations of "male" spirits. Less significant–but no less popular–examples include runners, who participate in races with human competitors (Figure 772), as well as the similar-looking firewatchers (Figure 773), who ensure cooking fires are extinguished during the dry season, when a spark might set a roof ablaze.

Jokesters, skit performers/dancers (Figure 774), war leaders, dancers, and singers constitute other examples of excellence from the spirit world, as do stiltwalking *ge* (video below). While most of these take abstracted human forms, two common types incorporate animal features. "Male" singing masks often incorporate bird-like beaks (Figure 775), while *kagle*–a mask whose antisocial behavior teaches good behavior by aggressively breaking its rules–is meant to represent a chimpanzee (Figure 776). The masquerader throws sticks at observers, chases livestock, and incites crowd members by trying to interfere with their clothing.



Figure 775. A singing spirit's mask, the monkey fur attachment concealing lips covered with red cloth, as well as metal teeth. Dan male artist, Côte d'Ivoire, early 20th century. H 9.84″. Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1964.18.8.



Figure 776. Wooden *kagle* mask representing the wildness of a chimpanzee in its antisocial behavior.. Dan male artist, Liberia, 20th century. H 8.46″. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-88-2. Gift of Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Any mask can be promoted to a different function, however, so its appearance might only indicate its initial usage. A powerful mask may remain unused in a family until the spirit feels a kinship with a male that enables a partnership to reinstate it. The supreme masqueraders are those who represent town quarters or are judges and peacemakers. Their costumes often change upon promotion or medicinal materials may be added to their headpieces and dress.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=875

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The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria

The Igbo are a densely-populated group of southeastern Nigerian peoples who, before colonization, did not regard themselves as belonging to a single ethnicity. Most lived in republican communities where all freeborn adult men could partake in decision-making, although some–titleholders whose



Figure 777. Nortex Guaranteed Super Print wax print cloth made to commemorate Pope John Paul for the beatification of Blessed Cyprian Michael Tansi, an Igbo priest. Photo by Tommy Miles, 2011. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

wealth and achievements had advanced them–had more sway than others. A relatively small number of Igbo lived in kingdoms based on the Benin model. Most of these were west of the Niger River and had been part of the Benin Empire at one point or another, adopting its regalia and hierarchy. Most Igbo were farmers in the past, and many still are. The fractiousness of Igboland in past centuries meant that one community's contact with another was limited, and in some cases restricted to the frequent raids and skirmishes rival communities had with one another. Allies and trading partners existed, and the arts of those Igbo living near other ethnicities were often more impacted by these foreign traditions than by those of other Igbos whose territories might be off-limits. These divisions led to arts that are less cohesive than those of comparably-sized ethnic groups. While certain art forms–men's personal shrines (*ikenga*), spirit masquerades, and community ancestor figures are found throughout most of Igboland, their style varies considerably from place to place. Some object types occur only in a distinctly limited area.

British occupation and subsequent independence provided the Igbo with a more nationalistic bond as they grew aware of the strength to be had in numbers. In 1967 the Igbo seceded from Nigeria, declaring the independent nation of Biafra and prompting the Nigerian Civil War, which ended with their defeat and reunification in early 1970. The war had a significant impact on area infrastructure, social mores, and many aspects of culture, including art. While it raged, many shrines and households were stripped

of sculpture by both invading soldiers and those Igbo who were trying to survive by selling sculpture to buyers who took the pieces overseas. Afterward, their replacement was not an economic priority. This depredation coincided with the continued blossoming of Christianity, particularly Catholicism (Figure 777); in 1965, Francis Arinze became the world's youngest Catholic bishop, rising to the rank of Cardinal in 1985. While traditional religion and associated arts have not disappeared completely in Igbo territory, these practices have certainly diminished. Many masquerades that used to be sacred in their orientation are now directed toward entertainment, particularly during the celebration of Christmas holidays.

Igbo-Ukwu



Figure 778. This bronze bowl–a metal imitation of a decorated calabash, was discovered on his property by Isaiah Anozie in 1938; he used it to water goats until 1954. Igbo male artist, Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. D 10.39″. Photo by Ochiwar at English Wikipedia, 2013. Presently located in the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Out knowledge of Igbo art before the late 19th century is spotty. Oral histories collected from the bulk of Igbo communities reiterate their political independence and sense of male egalitarianism. Everyday culture still stresses a drive toward male achievement and aggression culminating in titles that involve status display. How old are these concepts and expression? Like most parts of Africa, we're uncertain because of a lack of tangible evidence. However, an accidental discovery in 1938 by a farmer in the small village of Igbo-Ukwu led to a series of archaeological discoveries that both reinforced the longevity of certain cultural practices and seemed to counter them (Figure 778).

The farmer found a number of bronze items, keeping some and giving others to his neighbors. When the British District Commissioner heard about the finds, he retrieved many of the pieces, but it took two decades (World War II having intervened) before the British archaeologist Thurstan Shaw was sent to excavate, just before Nigeria's independence. Except for the farmer's initial accidental finds, Igbo-Ukwu is one of the relatively few African excavations that was not conducted on an emergency basis or with looting as a major concern.



Figure 779. Watercolor reconstruction of Igbo Isaiah, Nigeria, the shrine storage site. Painting by Caroline Sassoon. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1960s. © Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2005.113.893. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

The finds were astounding. Three sub-sites were located, named for the three brothers who occupied the land. Igbo Isaiah (Figure 779) was a true treasure trove. Its contents suggest it was a shrine storage area, one filled with ritual vessels of terracotta and bronze (Figure 780), as well as hip pendants, jewelry, and staff ornaments. It appeared to have been an open-sided roofed structure that had been abandoned and undisturbed, probably due to abandonment.

Igbo Jonah was a pit that included broken items as well as some bronze pot stands and staff heads. It seemed to have been made intentionally for disposal.



Figure 780. Cast bronze shell (one of three) covered with intricate relief patterns and depictions of flies. Igbo male artist, presumed to be from Igbo Isaiah, Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. L 12″. Photo by Ochiwar at English Wikipedia, 2013. Presently located in the National Museum, Onikan, Lagos, Nigeria. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Igbo Richard was an archaeologist's high point–the burial site of a high-status individual. The grave had been dug deep, presumably lined with carved wood, and the corpse was



Figure 781. Reconstruction of the grave found at the Igbo Richard sub-site, Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria. Painting by Caroline Sassoon. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1960s. © Pitt-Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2005.113.898. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

placed in a seated, upright position (Figure 781). The remains of three ivory tusks were found, as well as a copper tiara crown and pectoral, a cast bronze leopard skull, a copper fan handle, jewelry, the cast bronze handle of what may have been a flywhisk, wrought in the shape of a horse



Figure 782. This bronze skeuomorph of a calabash includes a reproduction of the metal handle sometimes added to the gourds. W 5.9″. Igbo male artist, presumed to be from Igbo Isaiah at Igbo Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1956,15.3. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

and rider, and pottery. The grave had then been roofed with wooden planks, and the remains of at least five sacrificial victims (human sacrifice in Africa was uncommon, reserved only for those of high rank), were found over it.



Figure 783. This stylized elephant head has a small downturned tusk and a trunk that tucks under the pendant. Its edges, like all of the pendants, are ringed for the attachment of jangling metal. H 3.19″. Igbo male artist, Igbo Isaiah at Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. Photo by Hamo Sassoon; Date of Photo: 1960s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2005.113.757. Presently located in the Nigerian museum system. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

The finds in all three sub-sites were significant for multiple reasons. Technologically speaking, they are the oldest examples of lost-wax (although some researchers believe rubber may have been used instead of wax) bronzecasting known in West, Central, and South Africa; only some works in northeast and north Africa are older. They certainly do not mark the earliest stages of casting, for their ornament and technique speak to skills that are highly developed. They display an astonishing interest in decorating surfaces–even small ones–with a variety of geometric patterns, resulting in ornate surfaces marked with concentric circles, spirals, triangles, granulated lines, and many other designs. A variety of interlace patterns, many known in the Benin Kingdom and among the Yoruba in later centuries, also occur. These are often thought to have been derived from the Muslim Hausa, but Igbo-Ukwu predates the Islamicization of the Hausa.

Many of the items in the shrine storage area are **skeuomorphs**, imitations of objects normally made of other materials, such as bronze versions of bound terracotta pots, bronze snail shells (there are at least three; they may have served to sprinkle palm wine or were used as vessels), and bronze calabashes (Figs. 778 and 782). Metal pendants–worn at the hip in later societies



Figure 784. This bronze pendant of a human face with forehead and cheek scarification bears, like all the Igbo-Ukwu pendants, a large ring at the back. Its pair is Nigeria. H 2.99″. Igbo male artist, Igbo Isaiah at Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1956,15.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

at Ife and Benin–appear here to have been made in pairs, and include a variety of animal forms, including birds, rams, leopards, and elephants, of which four were found (Figure 783). Though many of these were small, one of a pair of bird-with-eggs pendants was found with long attached beaded chains and crotals (small clapperless bells or jangling bits). These suggest placement at the hip, where the hanging elements could both swing and announce the presence of the wearer through sound.

Insect representations are rare in African art, but beetles, spiders, grasshoppers, and flies occur in



Figure 784 shows its attachment ring. Next to it is a bronze pendant of a ram's head, two grasshoppers perched on its surface.Igbo male artist, Igbo Isaiah at Igbo Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. H 3.5″. British Museum, Af1956,15.2. Photo by Modestusonyeke, 2008. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0. Photo cropped; tags removed.

Igbo-Ukwu art. Animal representations besides those on the pendants and equestrian hilt include numerous depictions of snakes, many with eggs in their mouths, monkeys, mudfish, frogs, and a pangolin. There are, however, very few representations of human beings. These are restricted to the male equestrian bronze, a standing male and female on a bronze pot stand, a Janus-headed ornament, and the heads of men on two matching bronze pendants (Figs 784, 785), as well as relief images of heads on a series of bronze staff ornaments.

These heads–as well as that of the equestrian, the female figure on the potstand, and the heads on staffs–include a series of diagonal marks on the forehead and cheeks. These correspond to *ichi* marks, a special body modification that persisted into the 20th century as a badge of distinction for those men who had taken the highest title possible (Figure 786).



Figure 786. Young man with *ichi* marks on his face, and *uli* body paint on his shoulder. Igbo, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. Photo from J. Stöcker, 1880-1939? © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B54.22. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 787. Bronze staff ornament representing a double-headed snake, each with an egg in its mouth. Its granulated surface was originally covered with beaded strands attached to the half rings along its surface. The Igbo still consider pythons a sacred animal, and killing one is forbidden by custom. Igbo male artist, presumed to be from Igbo Isaiah at Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. H 5.87″. Photo by Ochiwar at English Wikipedia, 2013. Presently located in the National Museum, Onikan in Lagos, Nigeria. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Two particularly surprising and related aspects emerged at Igbo-Ukwu: the apparent existence of a significant ruler in an area without a history of monarchs and the accrued wealth evident in the numerous objects made from precious metals and decorated with imported beads–over 100,000 glass and stone beads were found at Igbo Richard alone, while more than 63,000 others ornamented pendants and staff heads at Igbo Isaiah (Figure 787). Looking at the more recent history of this Igbo region, the general conclusion is that the entombed figure was the Eze Nri, a priest-leader rather than a secular king. The Nri priesthood that he headed had the power to remove spiritual pollution that affected land and crops, and Nri priests moved freely through warring Igbo communities to perform these ritual duties into the early 20th century, and staffs served as one of their badges of authority. The numerous staff heads and shaft ornaments found at Igbo-Ukwu may have been used in this way (Figure 788).



Figure 788. Bronze staff ornament originally covered with beaded strands. Its relief elements include representations of snake. Igbo male artist, presumably from Igbo Isaiah at Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria, 8th-10th century CE. H 6.9″. Photo by Ochiwar at English Wikipedia, 2013. Presently located in the National Museum, in Onikan in Lagos, Nigeria. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

The priestly purification was a transaction that required payment, and the accrued tribute apparently allowed for the purchase of beads through a long-distance trade network, perhaps in exchange for ivory or for the kola nuts Saharan travelers desired. The metals used were initially thought to have been imported from across the Sahara as well, but worked copper pits and lead sources have been located in Igboland about 62 miles east of Igbo-Ukwu, with tin extraction possible in central Nigeria at a far greater distance. As for the location of the site, the Eze Nri headship split centuries ago; that is, one Eze Nri is located at Nri, just over ten miles from Igbo-Ukwu, while another was based at Oreri, to the immediate north of Igbo-Ukwu. Elders at Oreri stated that Igbo-Ukwu had formerly been part of their territory, and Igbo-Ukwu elders concurred, saying they had seized the land through battle. As to why Igbo-Ukwu, if it was the burial place of an Eze Nri and site of his sacred regalia, may have been abandoned and forgotten, we cannot be certain.

The pieces unearthed at Igbo-Ukwu demonstrate how tentative our knowledge about pre-19th-century art remains in the absence of more archaeology. It also raises as yet unanswerable questions that are both technical and historical: where did West African lost

wax casting originate? How old is the tradition? Was it independently developed? What relationship did Igbo-Ukwu have with neighboring states known for their later casting, such as the relatively nearby Benin Kingdom?

Many centuries of unknown art intervened between the time of Igbo-Ukwu and the colonial presence of the late 19th century, but because the bulk of it was made from wood–subject to attack by termites–we do not know what it looked like. Likewise, we cannot be sure that the Igbo of the 8th-10th centuries made masks or other wooden object types known from more recent times, because they too would not have survived. Iron and other metalworking traditions are still strong in the Awka area, not far from Igbo-Ukwu, which is also a major carving center.

The Ikenga

Until recent decades, many ambitious Igbo men owned personal altars to accomplishment known as *ikenga* (Figure 789). The *ikenga* was a major art form throughout much of Igbo territory, particularly in the area once under Nri's sway, with the exclusion of some of the eastern and southeastern areas. Few if any seem to be made now because of Christianity's impact. This object is a wooden shrine made to honor a man's right arm (*ike*=power; right hand = "*aka ikenga*" or "the *ikenga* hand") and was usually a male personal possession, kept in the bedroom and sacrificed to, the



Figure 790. This *ikenga* has abstracted features, with little attention to musculature. 20 7/8″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, before 1987. Tropenmuseum, TM-5112-1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure 789. This seated *ikenga* bears the whitened face and other features of the maiden spirit mask. Although his right hand grasps a weapon, in his left he holds an ivory tusk. the privilege of a titletaker, as well as a titleholder's ivory anklets and stool. He bears two sets of ram's tusks, their curves echoed throughout the work. H 26.38″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 19th century. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1996.1.69.

altar's intent being a maximization of success through one's own efforts. The *ikenga* focuses on an important Igbo concept–personal achievement rather than fate. Its association with the right arm/hand has to do with the thought that it is one's right arm than expends all the effort needed for success, whether it be in wielding a hoe or a weapon or even a pen–children whose natural inclination is to be left-handed are forced to change their usage because the left hand is considered negative and associated with pollution. Since in the past young men had to constantly be alert for war raids or ready to carry them out, success and advancement were often linked to battle valor (Figure 790). Typical of warrior examples, this figure holds a weapon in one hand and a severed enemy head in the other, speaking to his success. Large horns represent those of a ram, whether semi-straight, as they are in this example, or curved, for the ram's horns are allusions to male aggression,



Figure 791. These two stools both represent titleholder's prestige seats. **Left**: Igbo male artist, Onitsha region, Nigeria, before 1972. H 16 5/16″. Tropenmuseum, TM-3978-98. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.**Right**: Igbo male artist, northern Igbo, Nigeria, 20th century. H 10.5″. Private collection.

determination, and power. He wears a loincloth that reveals his penis, for the link between successful manhood in cultural and physical terms are alluded to in the male joking exchange, "Is your *ikenga* standing straight today?" a phrase that can also refer to good fortune. Depending on the region they were from, their faces could be more or less naturalistic, sometimes stylized in the form of the maiden spirit masks (Figs. 804, 806), since young men served as the masqueraders.

The figure is seated on a chieftaincy stool (Figure 791), for achievements in battle were linked to advancement in the title-taking system. Despite Igbo egalitarianism, men of wealth and/or achievement can socially advance by assuming different levels of titles, each with attached fees and privileges. The highest title is that of *ọzọ*, which commands widespread respect: "*Ichi ọzọbu maka ndi ogadagidi*" ("Taking the *ọzọ* title is something meant for the rich"). Women also take titles, the highest marked by wide, plain ivory anklets and bracelets (*odu*), and artwork indicates titled men once wore these as well. The *ọzọ* title's practical functions are as a gateway to influence, political activities, and societal respect, but in its essence it is a kind of ancestral priesthood, and personal purification is a requirement. As such, whiteness (of clothing, for example, or ivory anklets and armlets) is a hallmark of participants.

Other personal *ikenga* stressed the titleholder basking in the fullness of achievement by stressing one or another form of title stool, as well as the staff and/or elephant's tusk that served as badges of office; a pipe can sometimes be seen in the figure's mouth. These *ikenga* frequently bear the



Figure 792. Three abstract *ikenga* variations. **Left**: *Ikenga* with a spindle representing the ancestors' seat. H 23.25″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 78.178.2. Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Abbott A. Lippman. Creative Commons-BY. **Middle**: *Ikenga* with titled man's stool. H 12.2. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-284-5. Gift of Congregatie van de Heilige Geest (CSSp.). Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Right**: *Ikenga* with pipe and ancestral spindle stool. H 16″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, first half 20th century. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 74.8.2.

ichi marks of the highest title to reinforce the owner's aspirations. Although *ikenga* were often figurative, they had considerable formal variety. Even the more abstract examples (Figure 792) usually included a stool form and horns, the former a reference to either the abovementioned titled man's stool or, if spindle-shaped, to the *okposi*, a wooden object that "seats" the ancestors.



Figure 793. This *ikenga* was probably made for an age grade society. The curving elements on the chest may refer to “armored” jackets made from nuts, examples of which G. I. Jones photographed in the 1930s. A similar work is in the Indiana University Art Museum. Igbo male artist, Nteje village, Umuleri/Aguleri region northeast of Onitsha, Nigeria, first half 20th century. H 45 11/16″. Photo by Bruce White.© Princeton University Art Museum, 2010-129. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund.

Some *ikenga* are larger than most, suggesting a male age-grade commissioned it for joint use, an exclamation of the members’ solidarity and united drive for legendary success (Figure 793). This example served as both altar and display piece. Its superstructure includes references to humans, leopards, and other horned animals, but this complexity is atypical of *ikenga*. Its forceful, bristling character is more akin to male spirit masks (*mgbedike;* see Figs. 800, 801), which embody the assertive, powerful, and dangerous forces of mystical and physical strength. More characteristic are the leadership traits the figure itself displays; while many *ikenga* depict warriors with weapon and enemy head or men smoking a pipe, this sculpture emphasizes the status of the titled men as an aspiration for an age set. Markers include a backed stool (the back a colonial innovation in imitation of European chairs), *ichi* forehead scarifications, the titleholder’s iron staff in his right hand, used to serve the ancestors in sacrifice, and an ivory trumpet in his left. The trumpet was a key piece of *ọzọ* regalia, and some



Figure 795. Wooden *alusi* sculpture of a female founder wearing actual ivory bangles and carved anklets; *ichi* marks are inscribed on the forehead. Igbo male sculptor, Nigeria, 19th or 20th century. H 5.28′. Formerly in the collection of Bohumil Holas. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1996.11.47.



Figure 794. This male *alusi* with *ichi* marks wears a pith helmet, a signifier of the power of British officialdom. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, first half 20th century. B H 5.12′. Brooklyn Museum, 1993.179.1. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Lorenz . Creative Commons-BY.

titleholders own multiple examples. Their ivory signals expense and respect, but their whiteness also underlines the concept of purity so critical to the title. The figure's chest and upper arm markings may indicate a kind of armor fashioned from nutshells that certain warriors once wore.

Alusi Figures

Igbo traditional religion has a High God, known as Chukwu or Chineke, as well as lesser deities who are closer to human beings, such as Ala, goddess of the earth, Amadioha, god of thunder and lightning,



Figure 796. Two life-sized male and female *alusi* with *uli* body painting. Igbo male artist, Nigeria. Photo by J. Stöcker, 1880-1939?
© Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B54.12. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 798. These four *alusi* figures, their sizes indicating hieratic scale, were identified (from right to left) by name as Ogugu, his wife Lolomwai, his eldest son Oukpara, and his daughter Adego. Igbo male artists, Nigeria, before 1946. Photo by William B. Fagg in the village of Enyiogugu near Owerri. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af; B59.10. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 797. This *alusi* bears *ichi* marks and wears its original cowrie-trimmed wrapper. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, late 19th/early 20th century. H 52.5″. Courtesy The Harn Museum, University of Florida, 1990.14.108. Gift of Rod McGalliard.

and others. Ancestors play an important spiritual role as well. More localized deities known as *alusi* are the personified founders of communities, their shrines having priesthoods and acting as the site of offerings and celebrations. Many *alusi* are manifested by large–sometimes life-size–columnar wooden sculptural ensembles that are amongst the tallest of carved African figures (Figs. 794, 795). They featurie the tutelary deity, his wives, children, and followers; up to twenty figures have been documented in some cases.

Many *alusi* bear *uli* body painting created and renewed by women annually (Figure 796), while some bear *ichi* titleholders' forehead scarification (Figure 797). Real cloth wrappers are sometimes tied to the works (Figure 798). *Alusi* bodies tend to have more natural proportions than those of the *ikenga*, though usually with thick columnar necks. Their standard pose shows standing figures, arms bent at the elbow, hands extended, a gesture of receiving, blessing, and beneficence.

The figures were usually kept in centralized shrines and brought out for annual festival display, but many such shrines were raided during the Nigerian Civil War, dispersing their sculptures throughout the world. Some shrines, however, do remain active.

Masquerades: Beautiful Maidens and Bestial Males



Figure 799. *Mgbedike* masquerader and attendants, 1946. Photo by William B. Fagg. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af,B55.26. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 801. This *mgbedike* mask includes numerous real horns, many placed asymmetrically, references to its supernatural potency. It bristles with additional projections, some weapon-like, some phallic, and has prominent snaggle teeth that add to its aggressive, bestial appearance. Much of its wooden surface is covered with gum and other elements that roughen the surface. H 28 1/16″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. materials; wood; gum; basketry; metal; cloth; Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.891. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.

Masquerades of various types occur throughout Igboland, but the northern Igbo masquerades of maiden spirits and fierce males are among the best known. In the areas where these are performed, boys are initiated into the masking society when they are between 8 and 10 years old, and learn its secrets. Women are complicit in expressing their ignorance of such secrets, professing belief that masqueraders come from the spirit world to interact with human beings. Within this area are a slew of mask types, but this discussion will center on two–light-colored female spirit masks and darkened, animal-like male spirit masks–because this gender opposition can be found in other Igbo masquerades as well as among



Figure 800. *Mgbadike*-type mask with complex superstructure. H 36″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, early 20th century. Yale University Art Gallery, 2006.51.486. Gift of
Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain.

some of their neighbors, and recalls gender stereotypes and how these are promulgated within a society. All who dance these are male.



Figure 802. Male masquerader performing a maiden spirit, flanked by attendants. Igbo male sculptor and tailor, Nigeria, early 20th century. Photo from George Thomas Basden's *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1921), opp. p. 224. Public domain.

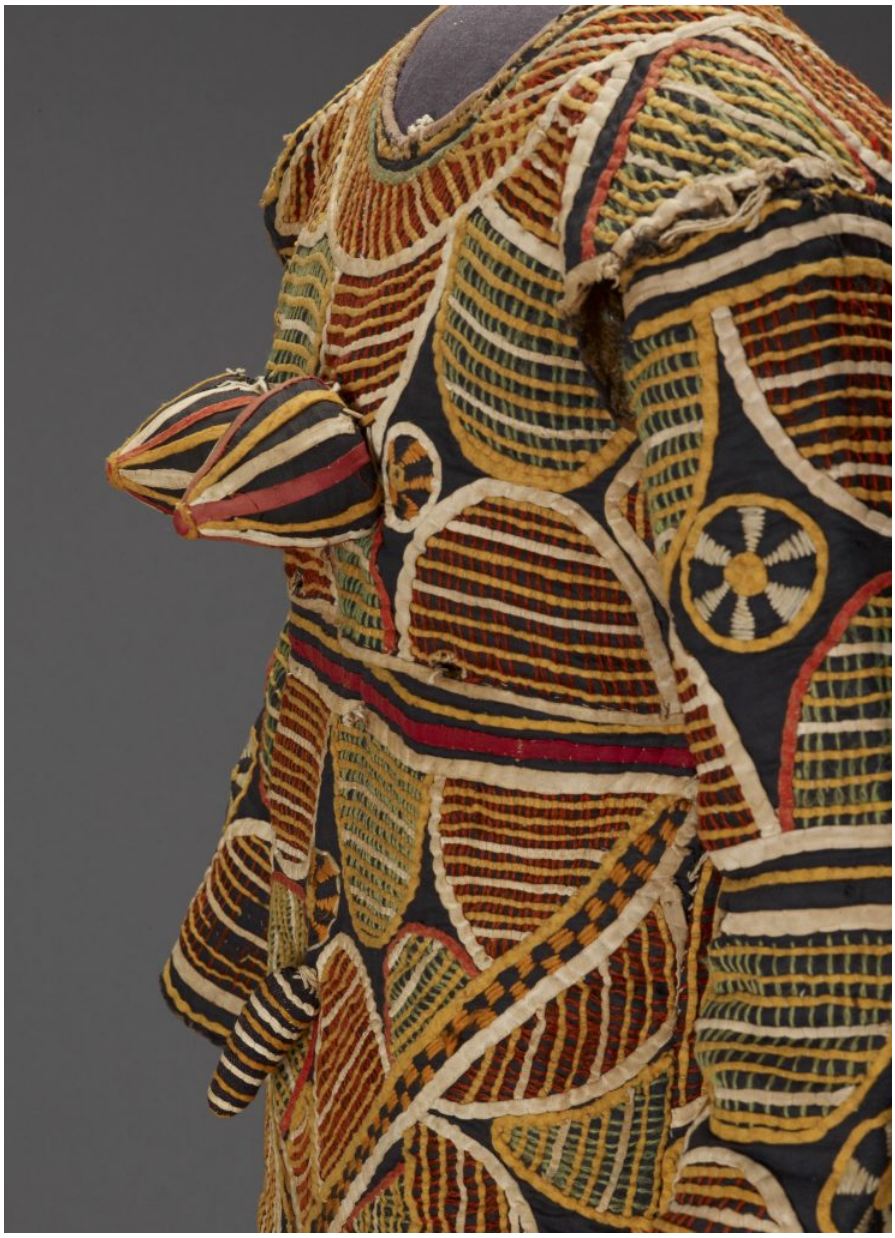


Figure 803. Detail of the wool and cotton cloth costume of an Igbo maiden spirit masquerader. Both breast and herniated navel are indicated, as is common. Igbo male tailor, Nigeria, 1930-1970. H of costume 56″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.925. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.



Figure 804. Both the exaggerated crest and the face itself show a repetition of curves echoed within the coiffure. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 1865–1935. H 26″. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 90.401. Purchase funded by the Museum Collectors. Public domain.

Male spirit masquerades (often called *mgbedike*) are performed by middle-aged or elder men (Figs. 799, 800, 801). While they bear some human features, their emphasis is on power–both physical and mystical–and they reference the world of the bush and medicines through costumes that incorporate or imitate bush materials. Their masks are blackened, often encrusted with sacrificial materials or mysterious excrescences. Facial features may be symmetrical, but frequently include mismatched eyes, a twisted mouth, or a nose turned awry. Horns and other jagged materials often protrude from the surface, and the oversized mouth is filled with huge canine teeth. These masks bear personal names that translate to descriptors like “Tough” or “Bucket of Blood,” names meant to inspire fear. Their dance involves stamping and rushing at the audience; they sometimes carry weapons and have to be restrained from lashing out at spectators. Generally speaking, few of these perform at a given celebration, the power evidenced by their anti-aesthetic requiring little reinforcement.



Figure 806. This maiden spirit mask bears *ichi* marks; they also appear on a female figure on a bronze Igbo-Ukwu potstand. H 12″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 19th or early 20th century. © Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Indiana University, 59.39. Gift of Frederick Stafford. artmuseum.iu.edu.



Figure 805. Female style at the turn of the 20th century. Igbo female hairdresser, Nigeria, early 20th century. Image from *The Secret Museum of Mankind* (New York: Manhattan House, n.d.): 119.

Female spirit masks (*agboghommuo*), however, evidence cultural values associated with their sex. If men are powerful forces of nature, women are civilizers. Their costumes, meant to signify nude female bodies (Figure 802) covered with *uli* patterns (Figure 803), are made from cloth, a cultural product. Maiden spirit masks emerge in a bevy, and are popular for their graceful movements and the power of their beauty. Their faces tend to be long with similarly long, narrow, sharp noses. Their faces are whitened–an association with the positive aspects of the spirit world–but their features are human, their hair or headdresses ornate in the style of the fashionable girl seeking a marriage partner. These hairstyles often mimic the elaborate coiffures popular at the turn of the 20th century (Figure 804) that encompassed coils of hair fixed with oil, charcoal, and clay (Figure 805), crests that incorporated mirrors and combs, or other variations. Some examples include *ichi* marks (Figure 806). Although some examples are straightforward masks (perhaps ornamented with cloth and yarn superstructures), many are a combination of a face and helmet mask (Figure 807), allowing them to be more firmly anchored to the performer.

Both maiden spirit masquerades and *mgbedike* usually appear in the dry season, when agricultural labors are at their nadir. although they also perform at the funerals of prominent elders. Traditionally, the two masquerades never perform at the same time, since their appeal is oppositional. In that, they mimic what was standard social behavior through most of the 20th century, where males and females led separate social lives. Even in decades past, much of their dance was considered entertaining to both the living and the ancestors, but they also reinforced cultural values relating to gender norms for desirable behavior, even if in exaggerated form.



Figure 807. Three views of a maiden spirit mask with laundry blueing used as coloration. H 21.77″ Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 20th century. Courtesy of The Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000.13.0008. Richard and Barbara Faletti Family Collection.



Figure 808. Maiden spirit mask made in 2007 by Anayo Nwobodo. H 41.34″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 21st century. Photo by Hans-Joachim Radosuboff . © Sammlung: Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 45570 a-g. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.



Figure 810. Male masquerade. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 2005. Photo by Ukabia. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 809. Male spirit masquerade. Igbo artist, Igbo Ukwu, Anambra State, Nigeria, 2014. Single frame from KPAKPANDO TV's "Igbo Ukwu Cultural Day: Ogene Masquerade Parade."

While these masquerades still dance, their context is even more entertainment-oriented than it once was. Scheduling now takes place according to a liturgical rather than an agricultural calendar, and venues such as stadiums and parade grounds provide another conceptual shift. Nonetheless, the occasions provide a visceral sense of excitement paired with age grade unity and male solidarity.

Some more recent masks remain fairly close to older models (Figure 808), but others conform to new forms of beauty that do not relate to archaic hairstyles, facial scarifications, or *uli*-painted bodies. *Mgbedike* have also adapted, sometimes with shifts that seem drawn from Nigerian horror programs (Figs. 809; 810).

Maiden and male spirit masks on the northern Igbo model make up only a fraction of Igbo masquerades, past and present. Some have wooden face masks, others are entirely made from cloth or fiber, many have accoutrements created with yarn, tassels, stuffed animals, and other animals. This variety is due in part to the historic system of semi-isolated independent city-states that kept nationalism local. Even a cursory look at other Igbo masquerades (Figure xxx) reveals a dizzying assortment of masquerade types.



Figure 811. Some contemporary maiden spirit masqueraders, now favoring tiny braids and headties. **Top Left**: Igbo male artist, Ukwulu, Anambra State, Nigeria, 2017. Single frame from Gbooza!'s "Ijele masquerade dance at 2017 Ukwulu new yam festival." **Top Right**: Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 2014. Single frame from 디나카's "Masquerade Festival Compilation, Nigeria." **Bottom Left**: Igbo male artist, Igbo-Ukwu, Anambra State, Nigeria, 2014. Single frame from KPAKPANDO TV's "Culture at its best at Igbo Ukwu Cultural Day."

Maiden and male spirit masks on the northern Igbo model make up only a fraction of Igbo masquerades, past and present. Some have wooden face masks, others are entirely made from cloth or fiber (Figure 811), many have accoutrements created with yarn, tassels, stuffed animals, and other animals. This variety is due in part to the historic system of semi-isolated independent city-states that kept nationalism local. Even a cursory look at other Igbo masquerades (Figure 812) reveals a dizzying assortment of masquerade types.

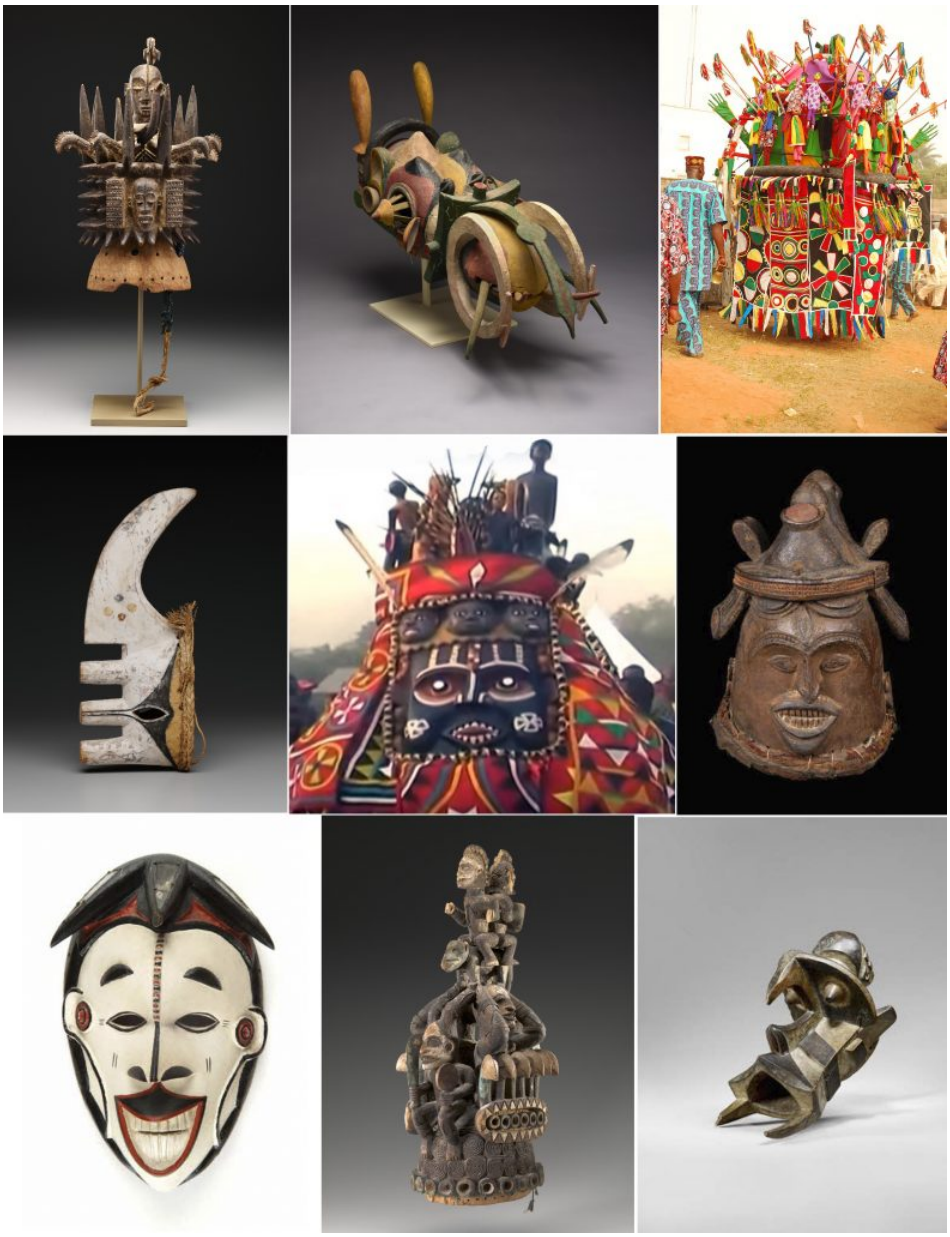


Figure 812. **Top Row**: **Left**) Masquerade headpiece. H 18 3/8″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, mid–20th century. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 1975.27.McD. The Eugene and Margaret McDermott Art Fund, Inc. **Middle**) Egbukele masquerade headdress. L 50″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, mid-20th century. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 1997.87. General Acquisitions Fund. **Right**) Ijele masquerade. Igbo male tailors/artists, Nimo, Anambra State, Nigeria. Photo by Devoice2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. **Middle Row: Left**) Maa Ji mask. H 14.5″. Igbo male artist, Afikpo, Nigeria, mid-20th century. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 2006.57.4. Gift of John Lunsford in gratitude for Margaret McDermott's great devotion to traditional African Art. **Middle**) Uvudike masquerade. Igbo male artist and tailor, Ogbeke, Nigeria, 2016. Single frame from Kpakpando TV's "Respected Uvudike Masquerade of Ogbeke; Agbani; Enugu." **Right**) Possibly Nwanza Mask. H 10.43″. Igbo male artist, Inyi, Enugu State, Nigeria. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1996.1.59. **Bottom Row: Left**) Okoroshi mask. H 9.69″. Igbo male artist, Agwa region, Nigeria, 20th century. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1999.23.8. Gift of Françoise Longhurst. **Middle**) Masquerade headpiece.H 27.75″. Igbo male artist, Nigeria, 19th-20th century. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2004.35a-b. Gift of Robert and Nancy Nooter. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC. **Right**) Ogbodi Enyi masquerade headpiece. L 13.39″. Igbo male artist, Izzi region, Nigeria, 20th century. © Musée du Quai Branly, 73.1979.2.1.



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4.6: Kingdom-based art



Figure 813. The large palace complex that once served as the center of the Dahomey Kingdom is now a state-owned property, and the descendant of former monarchs is not allowed to live on its grounds. The royal compound is now a tourist attraction, and includes a museum. King Glele's palace. Fon male builders, Abomey, Dahomey Kingdom, 19th century. Photo by Ji-Elle, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Larger states generally gained their territories through the exercise of power, and kept it through enforced taxation. A broad tax base enabled the central power to accumulate wealth, often expending it in ways that reinforced the members' elevated status–dress, architecture, and large public ritual events. Wealth was accrued through agriculture and trade, or control of the latter with taxes or surcharges added.

The largest African states were in the savannahs on the desert fringe–areas that could feed themselves and support horses, enabling the central authority to collect taxes and keep borders secure. Many of these states, such as Mali, Bornu, or the Hausa kingdoms, were Muslim, but hierarchy still distinguished the nobility from commoners through architecture, household goods, and personal dress. Forest kingdoms, such as the two covered in this chapter, tended to be smaller because tsetse flies prevented horses from living long, and both trade and war required more strenuous passage through the forest, as well as the risk of foliage serving as enemy cover. Forest kingdoms, however, were fertile suppliers of foodstuffs and also often stockpiled valuable goods such as ivory, kola nuts, or other items in high demand. Social hierarchy was expressed artistically in additional ways that included hieratic scale in sculpture, extensive use of figurative sculpture in wood, terracotta, and more luxurious materials, and the adoption of motifs, object types, or fabrics that reflect novelties resulting from long-distance trade.

Kingdoms may appear to be led by a single individual, but courts also consist of advisors and attendants with positions that run from minor to very major indeed. Art has often been used to reinforce such hierarchies, distinguishing the monarch from even his highest chiefs through ranked levels in architecture, jewelry, textiles, and particular materials. Many kingdoms had or have sumptuary laws that outline who is permitted to wear what (or build what), with consequences for those who attempt to flout regulations.

With the advent of European colonialism, rulers were stripped of their powers to tax their own people, wage war, carry out capital punishment, and enforce laws relating to major crime disputes. In some polities, such as the old kingdom of Dahomey, monarchs had their titles taken away, and were permanently dispossessed of their palaces (Figure xxx). In other states–particularly those colonized by the British–monarchs retained their titles, palaces, and the right to settle land disputes and minor cases. They were paid like formal civil servants, a practice that continued after independence. In Nigeria, monarchs are ranked as first, second, or third-class traditional rulers, receiving stipends from the government as well as overseas medical check-ups, vehicles, and other gifts that vary according to their status. Although their civic powers are sharply diminished, they retain a great deal of spiritual and royal authority, and are still major patrons of the arts, receiving additional income through land distribution, arrangements with corporations within their domain, and appointments to various companies' boards-of-directors.

The Asante State



Figure xxx. The Golden Stool with its immediate caretaker. Asante, Kumase, Ghana, 1935. The National Archives UK, part of CO 1069/44. No known copyright restrictions.

The Asante had one of the best-known empires in West Africa, with art that was primarily made to support the state and an individual's status within its hierarchy. No masquerading occurs, and figurative sculpture was limited, consisting primarily of wooden fertility figures (Chapter 3.3), combs (Chapter 3.2), and occasional maternity images, as well as funerary terracotta portraits (Chapter 3.7).

Birth of Asanteman (the Asante State)

In the year 1600, southern and central Ghana was occupied by numerous ethnic groups, as it is today. Many of these peoples–especially those living in the central or western areas of the coast



Figure xxx. Contemporary cement sculpture of Okomfo Anokye holding the Golden Stool at the roundabout of Bantama and Okomfo Anokye Roads; it was erected in the 1990s. Although it was erected as a commemorative sculpture, some see it as a ritual site of power, causing a Bible-gripping evangelist to damage it in 2001. Photo by Kathy Curnow, Kumase, Ghana, 2017.

and inland, shared a common language, and many traditions. Although all of them are Akan peoples who speak Twi, they were subdivided into independent small states that were frequently in conflict with one another. One state might vanquish another and force them to pay tribute until one day the tables would turn. One such group of Akan peoples were the Asante, who had been forcibly brought under the control of the Denkyira state to their southwest. The various Asante clans each had a head, as did the clans of their neighbors under Denkyira hegemony. In the late 1600s, one of the Asante leaders, Osei Tutu, had the close support of a powerful ritual specialist, Okomfo (priest) Anokye, who is said to have come from another region. All the Asante clans and those of neighboring groups met to decide on a leader and plan how they might defeat the Denkyira. To avoid internal discord, Okomfo Anokye announced that leadership would come from the heavens, and that a Golden Stool would descend onto the lap of the destined paramount ruler. It appeared and settled on Osei Tutu's lap, confirming divine will, and he became the first Asantehene, or monarch.

To empower the stool and ensure that it represented the united state, Okomfo Anokye is said to have sacrificed a man and seven pythons who disappeared into the stool, then applied a concoction made from the attendant chiefs' hair and nail clippings, binding their vows of loyalty to it. Stools are felt to absorb part of their owners' souls; the Golden Stool represents the soul of the Asante nation, and is its most sacred symbol. No one sits on it; it has its own throne and is rarely seen, creating a powerful mystique (Figure xxx). Its symbolic supremacy is still expressed through textiles, paintings, and sculpture (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. Only the hilt indicates the continued presence of the state sword Okomfo Anokye inserted into the ground. The site is now inside a building in the parking lot of the hospital named after the ritual specialist. It is both a museum and an active shrine site visited by the Asantehene for purposes of sacrifice. Photo by Kathy Curnow, Kumase, Ghana, 2017.

Okomfo Anokye insisted those under him bury their state swords–a symbolic gesture that acknowledged their fealty–and inserted a state sword in the spot where it happened, stating that as long as the sword remained there, Asante would prosper (Figure xxx). In 1701, Osei Tutu I and Okomfo Anokye defeated the Denkyira, wresting their control over the coastal town of Elmina, one of the Akan kingdoms settled by the Fante. Elmina had become a major overseas trading state, for the Portuguese–who had reached the region in 1471–had erected a stone fort there in 1482. By Osei Tutu's time, the Dutch had taken it over. With Denkyira's defeat, the Asante had an international trade outlet and expansion of the state through acquiescence and conquest quickly expanded the kingdom's borders beyond those of the Asante until they controlled much of inland Ghana and part of its coast. The byproduct of expansion was the enslavement of those who fought the kingdom, a factor that saw many 18th-century Akan sent to Brazil, Surinam, Jamaica, the United States, and other destinations in the Americas. Some populations, such as the Baule, fled in advance of Asante growth, migrating into what is now Côte d'Ivoire.

Foreign interest in the region was centered on gold, and the Asante controlled its alluvial extraction, preventing European penetration from the coast for centuries. While considerable raw gold was exported to Europe, the Asante retained and worked gold in the form of cast jewelry and gold foil-covered wooden objects, its possession and display governed by rank. Because of European thirst for gold, they had traded arms to obtain it, and the Asante were well equipped with guns and gunpowder.



FIg. xxx. This watercolor from Bowditch's book shows the state umbrellas, chiefs in palanquins, courtiers with guns, musical instruments, and other state regalia at an annual festival. In Thomas Edward (London: John Murray, 1819), across from p. 274.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the English were the key stakeholders along the coast and at Accra, with the exception of Elmina. In an effort to collect intelligence and manipulate the Asantehene into creating a road to Cape Coast and signing a treaty with the British, they sent Thomas Bowdich to Kumase. In 1817, he became the first European to enter the Asante capital. His first impression of the royal quarter's splendor was as follows:

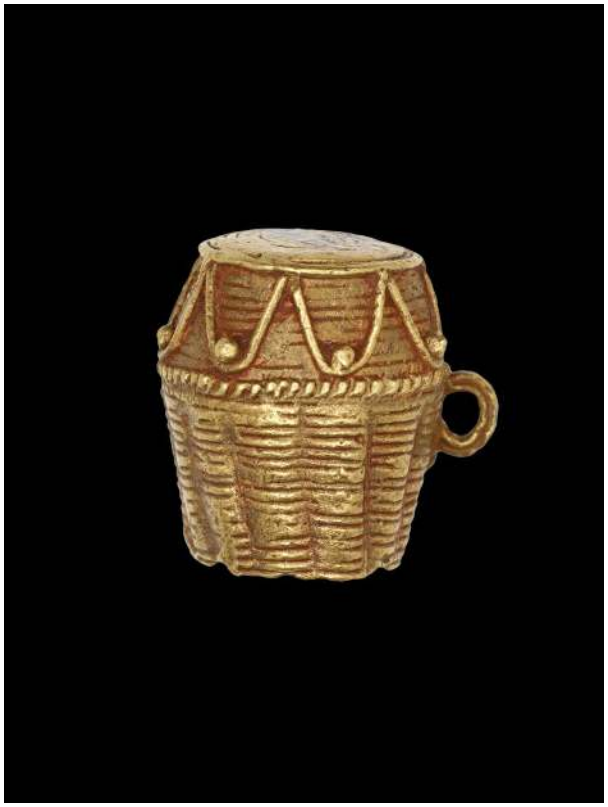


Figure xxx. Bowdich brought back this small (just a half-inch long) drum-shaped bead that would have joined stone and or glass beads as an aristocratic wristlet or anklet. Asante male goldsmith, Ghana, before 1817. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1818,1114.7. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Bowdich, 1855. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Two hundred years after Bowdich's visit, large parasols still mark the presence of high-ranking rulers in Kumase on public occasions. Single frame from Kumasi Krofrom tv's video "Otumfour Osei Tutu II, Asantehene display the stools of Ashanti Culture Day 9 of Asantehemaa's funeral," 2017.

"an area of nearly a mile in circumference was crowded with magnificence and novelty. The king, his tributaries, and captains, were resplendent in the distance, surrounded by attendants of every description, fronted by a mass of warriors which seemed to make our approach impervious. The sun was reflected, with a glare scarcely more supportable than the heat, from the massy gold ornaments, which glistened in every direction . . . At least a hundred large umbrellas (Figure xxx), or canopies, which could shelter thirty persons, were sprung up and down by the bearers with brilliant effect, being made of scarlet, yellow, and the most shewy [sic] cloths and silks, and crowned on the top with crescents, pelicans,
elephants, barrels, and arms and swords of gold; they were of various shapes, but mostly dome; and the valances (in some of which small looking glasses were inserted) fantastically scalloped and fringed; from the fronts of some, the proboscis and small teeth of elephants projected, and a few were roofed with leopard skins, and crowned with



Figure xxx. This state sword (*afena*) lacks a sharpened edge and is a ceremonial authority symbol, as well as a ritual one, for its rayfish sheath has been coated with chalk, a sign of spiritual protection shared by objects and individuals. Rayfish sheaths for Akan weapons were known as early as the 17th century, as were the double ball hilts, here made from wood covered with sheet gold. The sword has its own cast gold jewelry known as *abosodee*; these are physical representations of appropriate proverbs. This one, difficult to see in this photo, features a bird with cannon on its wings and a gunpowder keg in its mouth. It illustrates an aphorism about leadership abilities. L 28″, Asante male artists, Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2005.2. Museum Purchase; Joseph H. Parsons Fund; Gilbert B. and Lila Silverman; Stanford C. Stoddard; Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Eisenberg; Ralph H. Booth Bequest Fund; Abraham Borman Family Fund and Africa; Oceania and Indigenous Americas General Art Fund. Public domain.

various animals naturally stuffed . . . The caboceers [officials], as did their superior captains and attendants, wore Ashantee cloths, of extravagant price from the costly foreign silks which had been unravelled to weave them in all the varieties of colour, as well as pattern; they were of an incredible size and weight, and thrown over the shoulder exactly like the Roman toga; a small silk fillet generally encircled their temples, and massy gold necklaces, intricately wrought; suspended Moorish charms (Figure xxx), dearly purchased, and enclosed in small square cases of gold, silver, and curious embroidery. Some wore necklaces reaching to the navel entirely of aggry beads [expensive glass beads made in West Africa]; a band of gold and beads encircled the knee, from which several strings of the same depended; small circles of gold like guineas, rings, and casts of animals, were strung round their ancles [sic]; their sandals were of green, red, and delicate white leather; manillas, and rude lumps of rock gold, hung from their left wrists, which were so heavily laden as to be supported on the head of one of their handsomest boys. Gold and silver pipes, and canes dazzled the eye in every direction. Wolves and rams heads as large as life, cast in gold, were suspended from their gold handled swords, which were held around them in great numbers; the blades were shaped like round bills, and rusted in blood; the sheaths were of leopard skin, or the shell of a fish like shagreen (Figure xxx) . . . [the king] wore a fillet of aggry beads round his temples, a necklace of gold cockspur shells strung by their largest ends, and over his right shoulder a red silk cord, suspending three saphies [Islamic charms, purchased from peoples to the north] (Figure xxx) cased in gold; his bracelets were the richest mixtures of beads and gold (Figure xxx), and his fingers covered with rings; his cloth was of



Figure xxx. This case for a Muslim amulet ("saphie" or *tsafi*) is made from sheet gold that is worked in repoussé. The whole was then sewn to garments or other objects, making the aristocratic wearer invulnerable. L 2.44″. Asante male goldsmith, Kumase, Ghana, before 1874. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1874,0518.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. This shrine follows the form of traditional Asante domestic architecture, the high-pitched thatched roofs designed to shed rain. Photo of Besease shrine by Carsten ten Brink, Ghana, 2012. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND.

a dark green silk; a pointed diadem was elegantly painted in white on his forehead; also a pattern resembling an epaulette on each shoulder, and an ornament like a full blown rose, one leaf rising above another until it covered his whole breast; his knee-bands were of aggrey beads, and his ancle strings of gold ornaments of the most delicate workmanship, small drums, sankos, stools, swords, guns, and birds, clustered together; his sandals, of a soft white leather, were embossed across the instep band with small gold and silver cases of saphie ; he was seated in a low chair, richly ornamented with gold; he wore a pair of gold castanets on his finger and thumb, which he clapped to enforce silence. The belts of the guards behind his chair, were cased in gold, and covered with small jaw bones of the same metal; the elephants tails, waving like a small cloud before him, were spangled with gold, and large plumes of feathers were flourished amid them. His eunuch presided over these attendants, wearing only one massy piece of gold about his neck: the royal stool, entirely cased in gold, was displayed under a splendid umbrella, with drums, sankos, horns, and various musical instruments, cased in gold, about the thickness of cartridge paper: large circles of gold hung by scarlet cloth from the swords of state, the sheaths as well as the handles of which were also cased; hatchets of the same were intermixed with them: the breasts of the Ocrahs [young male attendants who purified the monarch's soul], and various attendants, were adorned with large stars, stools, crescents, and gossamer wings of solid gold" (Bowdich, 1819, pp. 84-89).



Figure xxx. View of Adum Street, near the palace. Relief decorations decorate the surfaces of the buildings; the base is left the natural red of the clay, so splashing in the rainy season won't change its color, while the rest of the house is painted with "chalk"–white kaolin clay. Watercolor from Thomas Edward Bowdich's *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: John Murray, 1819), plate 9. Public domain.

The Architecture of the Past

The Kumase Bowdich saw was an elegant city. Made from earth-filled and finished reed constructions, houses were white-washed with chalk, composed of courts without windows on their outward exteriors, which provided privacy (Figure xxx). Many aristocrats occupied two-story homes, which were unusual in pre-colonial Africa, requiring reinforcement through interior pillars. Only the nobility had open rooms on the street side of their houses (Figure xxx). These semi-public spaces allowed them to be accessible to clients and observe the activities of the neighborhood. Wealthy homes included relief decoration on their surface, formed by packing reeds into the mud of the wall when it was wet, then using more clay to plaster over the form.

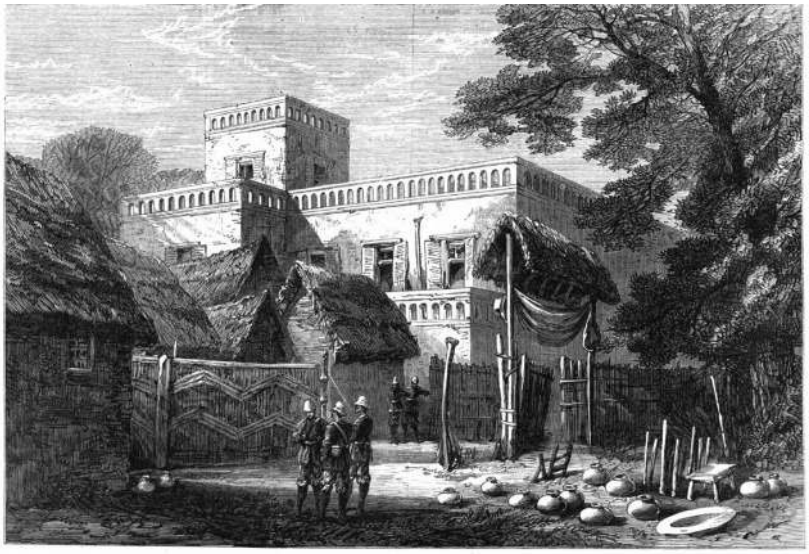
The palace covered five acres, consisting of multiple courts composed of the standard four rooms placed around a central courtyard. It differed from ordinary homes by its scope, functions, and decoration, not its design. Some palace courtyards could hold 300 people, and Bowdich noted the presence of the "King's garden, an area equal to one of the large squares in London."

The Asantehene discussed ambitious building plans with Bowdich, mentioning a proposed new residence with a brass roof, ivory pillars, and gold window and door trim. After looking at prints and drawings of European buildings, he finally decided to add a two-story European-style stone structure that acted as museum and storehouse (Figure xxx), rather than living quarters. Elmina craftsmen, used to constructing such buildings,



Figure xxx. Private royal audience hall at Adum Palace, Kumase, between 1888-1896. The
The pillar supports display multiple symbols, some of which still appear on *adinkra* stamped cloth and contemporary architecture. The leafy form at the extreme left is known as *asaya* or fern, and is variously interpreted as a symbol of endurance or defiance. National Archive, UK. CO 1069-34-122. Public domain.

carried the stones from the coast to Kumase, about 140 miles away.



THE KING OF ASHANTEE'S PALACE AT COOMASSIE, VIEWED FROM THE EAST.

Figure xxx. The Asantehene's stone structure, completed in 1822, stood in the midst of traditional buildings within the vast palace complex. Like traditional Akan structures, it was built around a courtyard, but its other architectural features are solely European in impulse. Fante male builders, Ghana, 1822. Image from *Illustrated London News*, Apr. 25, 1874.



Figure xxx. The British-built stone palace constructed for Asantehene Prempeh I at Manhyia , now a museum. British male builders, Kumase, Ghana, 1925. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.



Figure xxx. The current royal palace of the Asante, as it was in the 1970s Brutalist style (above), and as it was expanded and renovated in the later 20th century. Asante male builders, Ghana, 20th century. Single frames from Mponponsuo TV's "The Kingdom of Gold I," 2017.

The British, eager to have exclusive trading rights with the Asante and get access to the direct source of gold, tried to enforce the treaty Bowdich had persuaded the Asantehene to sign. This led to a string of five wars between the British and the Asante in the 19th century; there had been several earlier conflicts regarding coastal settlements. The Asante vanquished the British at several key battles, but when the latter invaded Kumase in 1874, they looted the Asantehene's stone structure of its gold artifacts, then leveled it with dynamite, also destroying many of the palace's older clay structures. The rebuilding of the latter took place immediately (Figure xxx), but struggles over the monarchy had returned both the palace and Kumase to a state of disarray within a decade. Continued conflict with the British led the Asantehene Prempeh I to be deposed and exiled in 1896, the palace left in disrepair. In 1901, an ill-advised visiting British Governor of the Gold Coast demanded the Golden Stool be brought out for him to sit on, precipitating the Queen Mother of one of the Asante towns to rally troops and hold the British in a two-month siege. When it ended with the arrival of troops from the coast, the British had finally established colonial rule after a long period of resistance.

When they finally felt comfortable in their control, they allowed Prempeh I to return to Ghana, then to Kumase. Initially, they referred to him as a private city. They then refused to acknowledge him with his actual title, referring to him as Kumasihene, or ruler of Kumase. Finally, they accepted the public insistence on his position as Asantehene. The year after they built a two-story stone house for the British Governor in Kumase, the same foreign construction company erected a new palace for the Asantehene (Figure xxx), but they had to locate it in a former suburb, since the old palace site had been built up as a commercial district in the intervening years. The new palace had a two-storied symmetrical style like that of the governor's house, though the British consciously made the palace slightly smaller in an attempt to impose their own hierarchy and authority and supplied a columned portico instead of the governor's arched entryway. The Asante footed the bill, which amounted to 3000 pounds (the equivalent of about $250,000 today). In the early 1970s, soon after Asantehene Opoku Ware II came to the throne, he built a new palace next door in the then internationally-popular concrete Brutalist style. The current monarch, Anantehene Osei Tutu II, renovated it after he came to the throne in 1999 (Figure xxx), changing its facade to an arched exterior similar to the old colonial governor's house.



Figure xxx. Brass gold dust box and two brass spoons to transfer dust surrounded by goldweights in the shape of a stool, hammer, axe, pipe, dagger, adze, padlock, and fan. Akan casters, Ghana, date uncertain. Cleveland State University African Art Collection, 82.1.2.



Figure xxx. A geometric brass goldweight. W 1.13″. Asante male caster, Ghana, date uncertain. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-586-74. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

The foundation of Asante wealth was the gold whose extraction they controlled. Gold dust was common currency, and even at the beginning of the 20th century, young men who were getting married were given a set of brass goldweights, scales, spoons, and storage boxes to countercheck those of merchants. Goldweights were in existence throughout Akan territory since at least the 15th century. They were made to set measurements, and encompassed a greater range of subject matter than most African traditional art, ranging from the strictly geometric patterns that seem to have been the earliest type (Figure xxx) to objects from daily or palace life to complex, almost anecdotal depictions of individuals or animals in action (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. Brass forowa used mostly for skin pomade, but also for gold dust and other valuables. H 4.75″. Asante male goldsmith, Ghana, 19th century. Brooklyn Museum 1990.221.4a-b. Gift of Shirley B. Williams. Creative Commons-BY.

One type of brass vessel served as larger containers for gold dust. The *forowa*, usually a round lidded object made from sheet brass, was more often used to hold shea butter, a cosmetic pomade, but it could be used to store medicinal substances, currency, or beads.



Figure xxx. Brass goldweight showing birds in a palm tree. H 3.7″. Asante male caster, Ghana, undetermined date. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-544-5. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

Gold served as foreign exchange, but much of it was used for regalia at the royal courts of both smaller Asante states and at Kumase. Goldsmiths were expert at working the soft metal, flattening it into thin sheets that could be applied over



Figure xxx. This calabash has been “embroidered” with thin gold strips into a repeat pattern and four representations of stools. Attendants of the Asantehene used this kind of calabash to catch palm wine he allowed to run down his chin during public ceremonies. D 7.28″. Asante male artist, Ghana, probably 19th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1979,01.4665. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

wood or casting it in the lost wax method.



Figure xxx. Finial of a linguist staff, carved from wood and covered with gold leaf. H 12.5″. Akan (probably Asante), Ghana, late 19th or early 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 1993.182.3. Gift of Bill and Gale Simmons. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure xxx. This abstracted porcupine was the finial (topper) of a royal parasol, used not only to shade a royal, but also mark their progress and position within a crowd. L 8″. Akan male artist (possibly Asante), Ghana, first half of the 2oth century. Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 97.1417. Gift of Alfred C. Glassell; Jr. Public domain.

Its prestige enhanced a multitude of items. Bowditch referred to some of the windowframes of Kumase aristocrats being rimmed with gold, while even the humble calabash could become ennobled by flattened gold wire decoration (Figure xxx). State objects either included gold ornaments–rifles often had gold additions on their stocks–or were made of wood covered with sheet metal. These included both objects assigned to key courtiers or those used for the ruler. Often these decorations were visual versions of proverbs meant to remind rulers or the public of certain realities, admonitions, or desired behavior.

Sheet gold-covered finials decorate the huge parasols of state umbrellas belonging to paramount chiefs (Figure xxx). This depiction of a porcupine encapsulates two proverbs symbolic of the Asante state, which was formulated as a warrior state–the very word “Asante” is said to mean “because of war.” Both proverbs refer to the porcupine’s quills as innumerable, like warriors: “Kill a thousand, a thousand will come” and “The porcupine fights from all angles.”



Figure xxx. A linguist staff at the enstoolment durbar of Nana Osei Darkwa III of Patiensa. Asante, Ghana, 2015. Single frame from Nana Osei Darwa III's video "Enstoolment Durbar."

A set of officials (*okyeame*) found at both the Asantehene's court and lesser Asante courts are responsible for both the implementation of proper protocol and the diplomatic relaying of messages between the ruler and supplicants. Wooden staffs topped by proverbial imagery–again, carved from wood and usually covered with sheet gold–act as their badge of office at public ceremonies (Figure xxx). This example, once attached to a long wooden rod, includes a common image still found on many staffs. It depicts two men seated on Akan stools seated at a table that bears a bowl of food; one reaches to eat, the other looks at him thoughtfully. This illustrates the aphorism "Food is for the owner, not the hungry man." This is an admonition to those who coveted the kingship. The Asante do not inherit from father to son; as a matrilineal society, titles pass from uncle to a maternal nephew, but there is no automatic choice through seniority. The Queen Mother–who may



Figure xxx. Royal swordbearers holding state swords. Asante, Kumase, Ghana, 2017. Single frame from Poleeno Multimedia's video "Asante Kings dressed with gold at Asantehemaa's funeral day."

be the actual mother of the late ruler, or a relative on his mother's side that he appoints to that position after his actual mother's death–plays a vital role in the choice of the next ruler, and plays a vital advisory role during her reign. The finial's figures show head-to-body proportions that are close to 1:7, but still elongate the neck to an unrealistic length. The neck is creased–an attractive trait here, as it is in Sierra Leone and many parts of West Africa–and the men in suits have faces that are far less flat than those of the *aku'aba* fertility figures or terracotta heads. The okyeame usually have a group of staffs at hand, the property of their matrilineage, and the select whichever one they feel is most appropriate to a given occasion. Today some of these proverbial finials are painted rather than gold-covered (Figure xxx), and their staffs may likewise be painted with metallic paint.

As previously mentioned, state swords–which are both carried in processions before a ruler and rested against his palanquin or litter–have their own proverbial cast gold ornaments (Figure xxx). These can be exquisite in execution (Figure xxx); this spider example alludes to Ananse, the Asante trickster hero of folk tales. Many proverbs refer to Ananse; a different but popular depiction of a spider in a web (that is, an expert spinner/weaver) equates to



Figure xxx. Cast gold sword ornament in the form of a spider, with scarlet cloth tucked inside the hollow of the lost wax cast.. L 4″. Asante male artist, Ghana, late 19th century. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 2014.26.1. McDermott African Art Acquisition Fund

the English saying, “Don’t try to teach your grandmother to suck eggs,” scolding someone for



Figure xxx. Gold covers the fingers and wrists of a provincial ruler. Asante, Kumase, Ghana, 2010. Single frame from Athena Studio’s video, “The Lost Kingdoms of Africa,” ep. 5.

presuming to offer advice to someone with more experience.



Figure xxx. This antelope-fur helmet would have been worn at court ceremonies by a high-ranking swordbearer or perhaps by the Asantehene; it was looted during the British 1874 campaign. Its gold decoration includes twenty symbolic ornaments made of wooden forms covered with sheet gold. They include representations of enemy heads and jawbones, horns, lions, shells, and a finial representing a pineapple. Amulets and cast bells further adorn it. H 22″. Asante male artists, Kumase, Ghana, 19th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1900,0427.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The bulk of gold was meant for personal adornment at public occasions, and it still fulfills that role (Figure xxx). Both an expression of wealth and power and an expression of spiritual vitality, it marked



Figure xxx. This cast gold ring takes the form of a scorpion. L 3.5″. Asante male goldsmith, Ghana, first half of 20th century. Detroit Institute of Arts, 78.15. Founders Society Purchase; Eleanor Clay Ford Fund for African Art. Public domain.

rank and protected it. Rulers' regalia, as well as that of their family and attendants, were adorned with it, as the latter reflected the prestige of the former (Figure xxx). Rings (Figure xxx), bracelets (Figs. xxx and



Figure xxx. Beaded bracelets with gold ornaments were elite items that afforded spiritual protection; this one is composed of European glass trade beads with cast representations of human molar teeth. D 3.82″. Asante male jeweler, Kumase, Ghana before 1891. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1891,0114.2. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Both male and female aristocrats wore beaded bracelets with gold elements. D 3.15″. Asante male jeweler, Ghana, before 1961. Wereldmuseum Rotterdam, RV-3784-3. Creative Commons BY-SA-4.0.



Figure xxx. The Asantehene's chief sword bearer, marked by his headdress and its splay of eagle feathers, wears an *akrafokonmu*. Single frame from Mponponsuo TV's 2017 video "The Kingdom of Gold, 2."

xxx), and necklaces were worn in abundance by those of high standing, and were melted down and recast when change was desired.

One expression of the goldsmith's skill was the so-called soul washer's badge (*akrafokonmu*), a circular pendant suspended on the chest from a cord. Sun-like, its decoration took many directions (Figure xxx). Individuals who wear it can be male or female, and included several high-ranking courtiers, such as some swordbearers (Figure xxx). They are particularly associated with the *okra* ("soul washers"), good-looking young people who were born on the same day as the ruler, offered him some spiritual protection, and were charged with the duty of renewing his soul through specific rites.



Figure xxx. A double-disc funeral pendant, probably gold-plated brass. Asante metalsmith, Kumase, Ghana, 2017. Photo by Kathy Curnow.

Doubled *akrafokonmu* are worn by female courtiers who hold the royal flywhisks, but they are increasingly seen at funerals. The chief mourner often wears two, suspended side-by-side. Their shape and central projection heighten their resemblance to abstract breasts, representing the fertility of the ruler and the abundance of his matrilineage. In independence-era Ghana, there has been a democratization of certain objects and materials formerly restricted to the nobility–at least outside the immediate palace environment–that are become prominent at times of family display, such as female puberty rites, maternal public outings after a first birth, and funerals. The double-disc necklace is now often the gift from one spouse to another when the recipient's parent dies, in consolation for that individual's now-parentless status (Figure xxx).

All *akrafokonmu* discs, which can be smithed or cast, exhibit a multitude of types of decoration (Figure xxx). Their techniques vary–some are cast, while others are repoussé sheet gold Some are purely geometric in their motifs, while others incorporate references to ornate European patterns of the late 18th and early 19th century, a period when a desire for trade brought many luxury imports to the court.

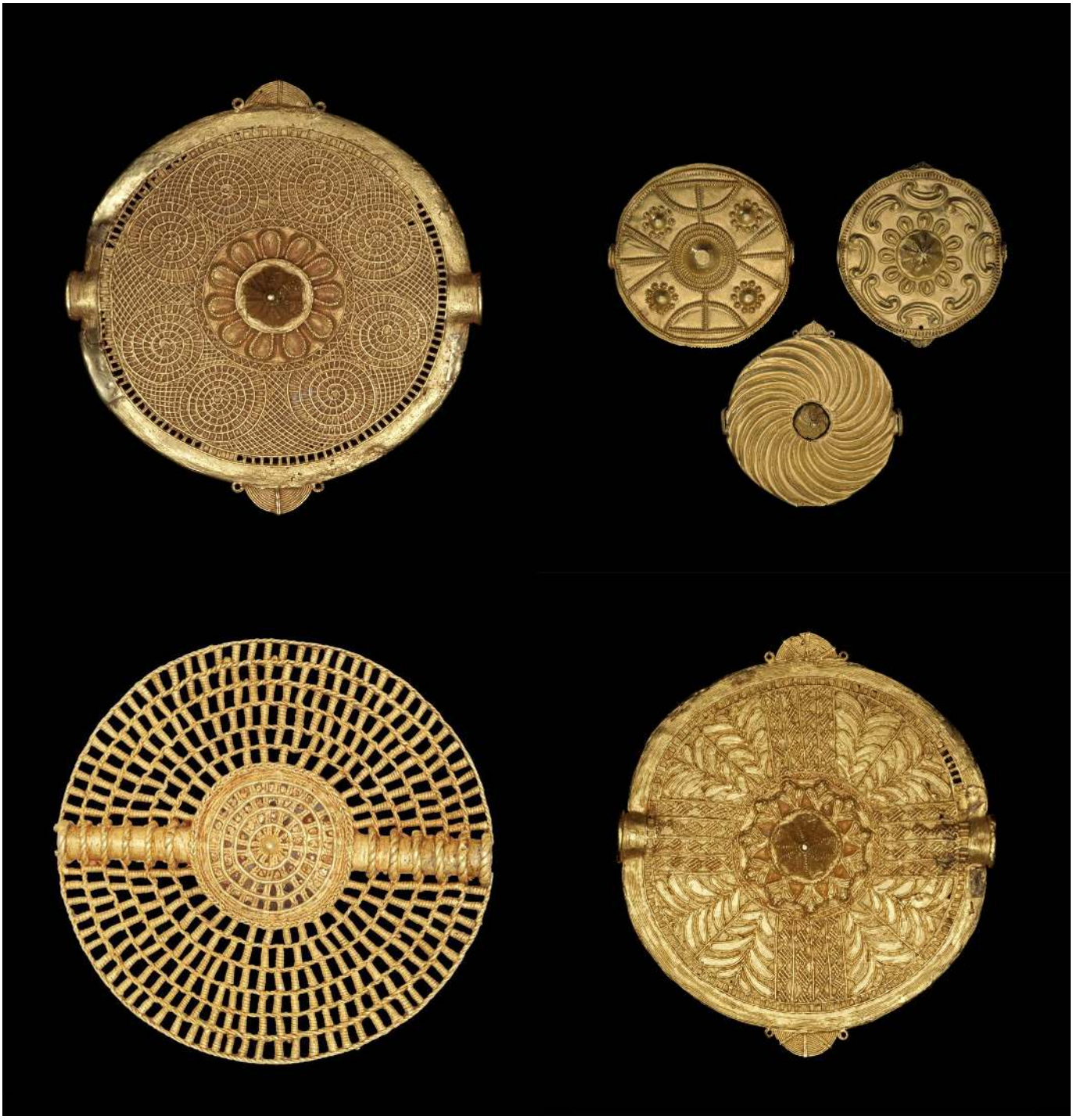


Figure xxx. These akrafokonmu vary significantly in decoration. **Top Left**: Lost wax casting whose spiral motifs symbolize regeneration. Asante male goldsmith, Kumase, Ghana, 19th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1900,0427.23. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Top Right**: upper left: This sheet gold disc is decorated with repoussé work. D 3.74″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1900,0427.25. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; upper right: Cast gold disc pendant. D 3.42″. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1942,09.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; lower: This akrafokonmu is made of sheet gold that has been worked from the back into spiral ridges, but its central projecting boss was cast and soldered on. D 3.62″. Asante male goldsmith, Kumase, Ghana, 19th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1900,0427.11. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Lower Left**: Cast gold openworked disc. D 2.36″. Asante male goldsmith, Kumase, Ghana, before 1817. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1818,1114.5. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Lower Right: Sheet gold disc exquisitely worked in repousé designs from the back. The fern that appears here is symbolic of defiance. D 3.9″. Asante goldsmith, Kumase, Ghana, 19th century. © The Trustees of the British Museum, Af1900,0427.24. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Imported sandals of all styles are available in Ghana, but traditional leather sandals are still popular and widely available. Photo by ZSM, 2014. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. The gold-leafed wooden ornaments on these sandals represent a mixture of beetles and their grubs, and refer to a proverb that relates to palatability: “If you don’t like the bitter flavor [of this beetle variety], think of its [tasty] grub.” It alludes to a ruler’s decision–perhaps unpalatable, but made for the state’s benefit. L 11.93″. Asante, Ghana, 20th century. Afrika Museum Berg en Dal, AM-534-5. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. Cropped.



Figure xxx. These scorpion-shaped leather sandals have a velvet band decorated with coiled snakes made from wooden ornaments covered with gold leaf. L 13.25″. Akan male artists (possibly Asante), Ghana, 1895-1905. Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 97.1507.A; .B. Gift of Alfred C. Glassell; Jr. Public domain.



Figure xxx. This pair of leather crocodile-shaped sandals has had its leather uppers completely covered in gold leaf. L 14.5″. Akan male artist (possibly Asante), Ghana, 1900-1910. Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 97.1349.A,.B. Gift of Alfred C. Glassell, Jr. Public domain.

Jewelry is not the only status marker that distinguished the dress of the ordinary Asante person from that of the nobility. Many aspects of dress were also subject to sumptuary laws, as well as affordability. Today many of the rules governing dress have relaxed, and daily clothing, as opposed to court attire, may be sharply differentiated, but prestige attire can still be distinguished. Sandals, for example, are an everyday item for many (Figure xxx) today, though in centuries past many individuals walked barefoot. They are still worn at ceremonial occasions by rulers–whose feet are forbidden to touch the ground–and their chiefs, usually bearing cast gold ornaments or those made from wood but gold-foil covered (Figure xxx). At palace occasions, one removes one's sandals before approaching an individual of higher rank as a mark of respect.

Sandals, like so many items that make up Asante regalia, often have proverbial associations. In a formal procession, a ruler's courtiers display his various sets of sandals as they walk before him, conveying a variety of non-verbal messages. These sandals can take on even more fanciful formats, as their leather soles are sometimes cut in the shape of animals (Figure xxx). Some show further status escalation, the leather itself being covered in sheet gold (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. Indigo blue and white *kente* cloths were the first to be made, and are still used. Until recently they were required attire for the Akwasidae ceremony held every six weeks to honor the ancestors. This one is made from cotton. L 10.19' Asante male weaver, Ghana, late 19th/early 20th century. Detroit Institute of Art, 2002.194. Gift of Dr. Nii O. Quarcoopome. Public domain.

The Asante are known for their exquisite narrow-strip weaves, known as *kente* (Figure xxx). These include some of the most complex patterns in Africa, and are commonly made of cotton. Some, however, are made from silk, a practice that began centuries ago when imported silks were picked apart thread by thread in order to redye them and create textiles more satisfying to local tastes. Although these are still made, they very are expensive,



Figure xxx. This silk and cotton *kente* cloth is known as *adweneasa*, or "my strength is exhausted," because it incorporates a tremendous variety of patterns united by the same color scheme. It was formerly worn exclusively by the Asantehene and other members of the royal family. L 9.79′. Asante, Ghana, late 19th/early 20th century. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002.195. Gift of Dr. Nii O. Quarcoopome.



Figure xxx. Woman's silk *kente* shawl. 7.9′. Asante male weaver, Bonwire, Ghana, 20th century. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. Ethnological Museum | Africa; © Photo: Ethnological Museum of the National Museums in Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 40744. Collected by Brigitte Menzel. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

so rayon threads create a third version. The Asante sited the royal weavers at Bonwire, a village that is now a Kumase suburb. In centuries past, they produced certain cloths that were exclusively for the Asantehene, as well as others for royal family members and the nobility (Figure xxx). Each pattern has a name and symbolic associations, and over 300 exist. Since the early 20th century, *kente*'s use has been democratized, and new patterns and color combinations continue to develop (Figure xxx). The most complex silk cloths remain costly, and are commissioned.

The proportions of finished cloths differ for men and women. Men's cloths, worn by aristocrats like a toga over the left shoulder (Figure xxx), are generally about 8′ wide and 12' long, while women can wear the traditional cloth tied above the breasts and falling to the ankles (sometimes with a shawl), as a waist-tied wrapper with a blouse or shirt, or tailored into a blouse and skirt.



Figure xxx. Male and female dignitaries at the Adae Ese festival at the Kumase palace. Asante male weavers, Ghana, 2016. Single frame from jaderoo2's video, "Adae Festival – Kumasi – Ghana."

Kente has become internationally known as not only a Ghanaian symbol, but more generally as a representation of Africa and African heritage internationally. This journey began as early as 1960, when head-of-state Kwame Nkrumah wore it in New York to address the United Nations, an event widely covered by the press. That year Ghana also gifted the U.N. with an oversized *kente* wall hanging, its pattern known as *tikoronkoagyina*, or "one head does not constitute a council." The world-wide craze for *kente* peaked in the United States in the 1990s, when demand was so high that

some Asante women at Bonwire defied tradition and began to weave like their brothers and fathers. Most abandoned this within a decade, due to social pressure and the production of printed imitation cloths.



Figure xxx. Calabash stamps for *adinkra* are carved in relief; a tripod handle made from reeds is attached to the back. Asante male artists, Ntonso, Ghana, 21st century. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.



Figure xxx. This may be the oldest surviving *adinkra* cloth, brought out of Kumase by Thomas Bowdich in 1817. This hand-woven strip cloth includes a large variety of motifs within 33 squares. L 9′.
© Trustees of the British Museum, Af1818,1114.23. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0.

A second type of valued cloth is *adinkra*, a cloth whose symbolic decoration is traditionally stamped onto a plain-colored cloth, which may be hand-woven or imported. *Adinkra*'s origins are said to lie in the state of Gyaman, in what is now Côte d'Ivoire. Their ruler's name was Nana Kofi Adinkra, and the Asante viewed his attempt to copy the Golden Stool an outrage. They conquered and annexed his state, bringing him to Kumase for execution, where his patterned cloth drew interest and is said to have developed into a new Asante textile form in the early 19th century. If this story is indeed true, it is puzzling, for the defeat of Gyaman is said to have occurred in 1819, yet Bowdich took home a heavily-patterned *adinkra* cloth from Kumase two years earlier. Whatever its origins, *adinkra* production is centered in the village of Ntonso, just outside Kumase.



Figure xxx. Anthony Boakye prints an *adinkra* cloth with a calabash stamp in Ntonso, Ghana, 2008. Photo by Carol Ventura. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Adinkra stamps (Figure xxx) are made from calabashes, and the dye that is used is made from a specific tree bark that is pounded in a mortar, then boiled down for a week until it has a tar-like consistency. Clothes are then sectioned off with a comb-like implement, and varied stamps traditionally are used to fill in the resulting rectangles (Figure xxx). Today stamps are larger than they were a century ago, and silk-screening with traditional dye is now the most popular technique to create wearable textiles; this also permits innovations in motifs (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. This detail of an *adinkra* strip silkscreened onto a cotton hand-woven cloth juxtaposes an image of President Obama with the traditional symbols of *dwannini mmen* (ram's horns, signifying strength and humility) and *adinkra'hene*, the chief of designs. Asante male artist, Ntonso, Ghana. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

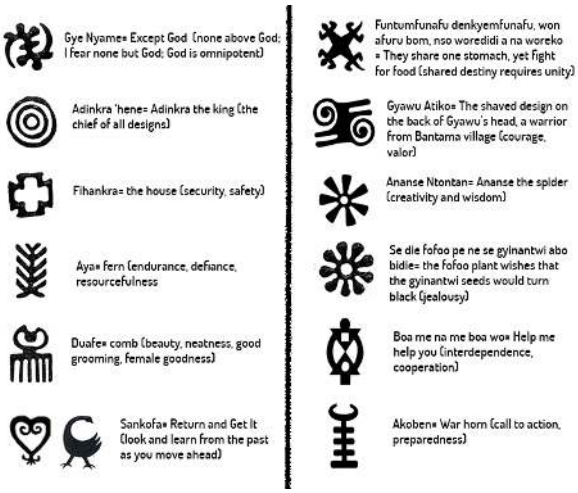


Figure xxx. A small selection of common *adinkra* patterns. Chart by Kathy Curnow.

Nonetheless, the communicative symbols of the past are still extremely popular. Each has a name and, like other Akan arts, an associated proverbial meaning. While there are several hundred *adinkra* motifs, those in common use are more limited in number (Figure xxx). They form a symbolic vocabulary that allows dress to communicate, as does the background color of the chosen



Figure xxx. Several individuals wearing the popular large-motif *adinkra* clothes at the thanksgiving service for the Ohemaa's funeral; at the funeral itself, red or black *adinkra* would have been worn. Single from from KINGs Tv. GH"s 2017 video "At Manhyia Palace Thanksgiving Service in Honour of Omemaa Funeral Rites – Kumasi."

cloth. Black or red *adinkra* cloths are used for funerals, while white or bright colors are used for celebratory purposes, including festivals and Sunday church services (Figure xxx). Because of their technique, even the most complex of these cloths are far less costly than *kente*.

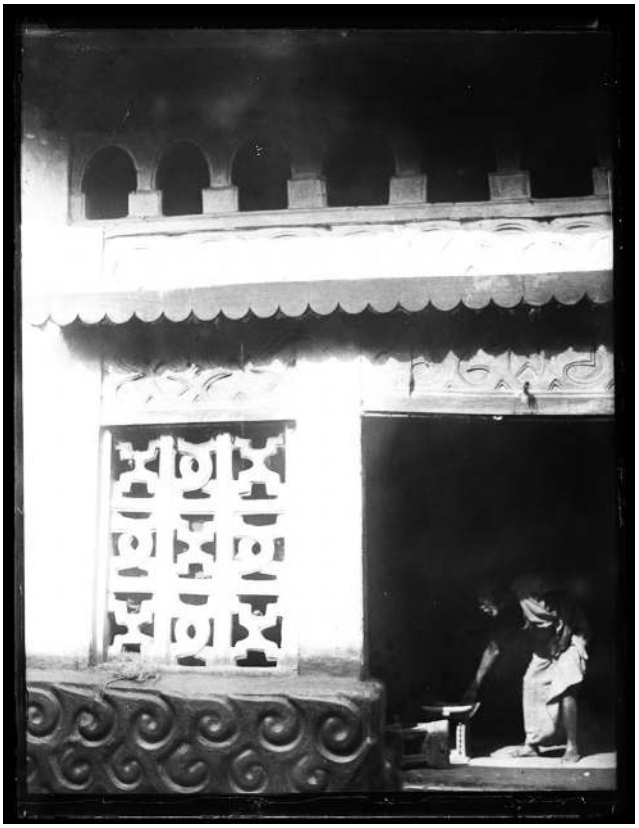


Figure xxx. The lower part of this temple courtyard wall bears the *adinkra* symbol *nkinkyim*, referring to the way a priest or priestess dances in a twisting style. It alludes to spiritual protection from malevolent forces. The window screen features a stool design and an interlocking curve motif; called *mmoatia adwa*, it is a communication from the deity to spirits known as *mmoatia*, inviting them to seat themselves and work cooperatively with the temple priesthood. Asante male artists, Abirem temple, Ghana. Photo by Robert Sutherland Rattray, ca. 1921. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.312.14.1. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND-4.0.



Figure xxx. The Golden Tulip Hotel in Kumase, Ghana, remodeled in 2008. Photo by ZSM, 2008. Creative Commons BY-SA-3.0.



Figure xxx. This house gate bears the motif *pempansie*, which means readiness or prepared for action, a motto reinforced by the warning about the guard dog. Asante male ironmonger, Kumase. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

Adinkra symbols have a life that has expanded throughout the Akan world, and appear on both old (Figs. xxx and xxx) and new architecture (Figure xxx), architectural features (Figs. xxx, and xxx), jewelry, plastic chairs (Figure xxx), and other domestic items.



Figure xxx. Upper-middle-class home's exterior wall bears *adinkra* symbols on its metal fencing. Asante male ironmonger, Kumase. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

Adinkra iconography has become a regular feature of certain Ghanaian artists' works. Several painters who teach or taught at Kumase's Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) incorporate adinkra symbols into their non-objective works, either mixed with other motifs or as emblematic repeats that become the focus of the work.



Figure xxx. Molded plastic chairs with the *Nyame* symbol are in use throughout much of Ghana. Kumase, Ghana. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.

Such artists may be well-known regionally and have influenced younger generations of painters; some have also garnered international recognition through overseas residencies and awards. Their external reputation as African contemporary artists, however, pales in comparison to that of Kwesi Owusu-Ankomah, and exemplifies how the internal/external directions of contemporary African art can affect artists of the same background but differing trajectories.

Owusu-Ankomah (who uses his surname exclusively) is an Akan artist who grew up in one of the Fante communities in coastal Ghana. He attended art school in Accra, then left for Germany when he was in his twenties, and has remained Bremen-based since then. There he developed his style that earlier featured monochromatic red or blue compositions with muscular human representations and rock art or *adinkra* references, and now concentrates on large-scale black and white canvases that include transparent, almost invisible, naturalistic and idealized male nudes that exist within a forest of flat symbols. The majority of these symbols are *adinkra* motifs, but Owusu-Ankomah is interested in graphic communication, and also includes road symbols, trademarks, Chinese ideograms, and Japanese kamon crests, among other signs (see here for the Mitsubishi trademark at right, or here for several mandalas).



Figure xxx. This work by Owusu-Ankomah is an acrylic painting entitled "Free," created in 2006. W 6.56'. © The Trustees of the British Museum,2012,2012.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

His painting *Free* (Figure xxx) was one of three created for London's October Gallery to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in its exhibition "From Courage to Freedom" in 2007, its title a reference to Frederick Douglass's 1845 autobiography. This exhibition, which also included commissioned works by El Anatsui and Romuald Hazoumé, is just one example of the high-profile projects the artist has been involved in. October Gallery, which represents Owusu-Ankomah, is one of the premier showcases for contemporary African art, and its imprimatur ensures the international museum and collectors' world will be aware of its artists' work. Owusu-Ankomah's musings about global symbolic interconnectivity, philosophy, and beliefs in extra-terrestrial impacts on pre-Egyptian cultures make him press-worthy, as does his extolling of the "microcron," which he describes as "the symbol of symbols," key to secret knowledge. In short, his access to the international art world (although he exhibits in Ghana as well) is extensive, sustained, and curated, bringing *adinkra* not only to museum galleries but to other popular spheres. Through the auction of his official painting *Go For It, Stars* (and its subsequent high-end art poster) he entered the sports world in the 2006 World Cup FIFA Art Edition Project, when Germany hosted the World Cup. The world of couture saw his entry when Giorgio Armani adopted his symbol designs for T-shirts in a 2007 (PRODUCT) RED collaboration intended to benefit the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis in Africa. High-profile projects like this have exposed *adinkra* motifs to more people than ever before, even if they cannot identify the symbols by name or meaning.

Seats of Power



Figure xxx. This unisex stool was known as *mframadan dwa*, or "house of the wind's stool" since its pierced central support resembled window screening. L 12.4″. Asante, Ghana, late 19th/early 20th century before 1927. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1927; 0308.6. Donated by the Gold Coast Commercial Intelligence Bureau. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The Asante, like most other Akan groups, consider stools to be something beyond places to sit, although most can also fulfill that basic function at one point in time. Domestic stools belong to an individual and are identified with that individual. When an Akan person sits on their stool, it is believed to absorb something of their



Figure xxx. This is a standard type of stool that husbands presented to their brides to mark the solidity of their relationship. W 16 5/8″. Akan male artist (probably Asante), Ghana, ca. 1900-1930. Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 97.1357. Gift of Alfred C. Glassell, Jr. Public domain.

essence (*sumsum*), a phenomenon that increases with every use. When not occupied, stools are turned on their side so that malevolence cannot seat itself.



Figure xxx. This stool variety, called *kotoko* (porcupine), was named after the Asante symbol and was meant for royal council members only. W 13.98″. Asante, Ghana, before 1927. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1927; 0308.12. Donated by the Gold Coast Commercial Intelligence Bureau. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The intimacy between a stool and its owner is palpable. Ordinary citizens–men, women, and children–used to receive stools at key points in their life: at the point they began to crawl, demonstrating they survived the vulnerable stage of infancy, at the time of a girl's puberty rites, at the time of marriage. Some of these practices have fallen by the wayside; puberty rites are not often practiced in the same way, with the girl seated on her new stool, for example. The basic shape–a monoxyl structure with a flat base, intervening support element, and a slightly curved, rectangular seat–is fairly consistent, but supporting elements have varied



Figure xXX. This stool design, called *sakyi duo koro dwa*, or the stool with one central support, was used exclusively by the priesthood, and would normally be whitened by sacred chalk/kaolin. L 13.39. Asante, Ghana, late 19th/early 20th century before 1927. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1927,0308.2. Donated by the Gold Coast Commercial Intelligence Bureau. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

from the abstract to representations of persons, animals, and inanimate objects. Particular shapes and decoration once gave some indication of ownership and occasion. Although some stools could be used by either gender (xxx), a husband usually gave his new bride a stool with a perforated cylindrical support and pillars at the edges (Figure xxx). Size and other salient details differentiated these from others that might belong to specialized officials (Figure xxx), priests (Figure xxx) or chiefs (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. One type of a chief's wooden stool throne with gold ornamentation. Asante male artist, Ghana, 19th century. L 31″. Detroit Institute of Art, 2006.70. Museum Purchase, Friends of African and African American Art. Public domain.

Chiefs', rulers', and queen mothers' stools differ from those of ordinary citizens in type, purpose, and potential decorations. Most of all, they differ in intent, taking on a significance beyond that of the individual. Title stools represent a titled position



Figure xxx. This stool pattern was meant exclusively for the Asantehene. Known as *kontonkorowi mpemu dwa* (the divided circular rainbow stool), it has no metal ornamentation. W 13.98″. Asante male artist, Ghana, before 1927. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1927; 0308.8. Donated by the Gold Coast Commercial Intelligence Bureau. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. This wooden stool decorated with silver repoussé bands was given to a British trader as payment for a debt in the early 19th century. Its large size, design, and ornamentation suggest it belonged to a ruler. W 23.43″. Asante, Ghana, first half 19th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1953; 05.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

and serve not only as a throne but as a rallying point for community constituents. They embody the state, not just the titleholder. The Asantehene and other major rulers and their mothers own multiple stools of varying complexity, often carried before them in processions (Figure xxx). Some monarchs and queen mothers have stools decorated with gold or silver repoussé bands (Figure xxx); others bear attached bells and ornaments. A select few are more thoroughly



Figure xxx. Military might is sometimes proclaimed in state stools. This sheet-brass encased wooden stool is supported by a gunpowder keg and two rifles. Repoussé motifs on the seat include state swords, the *sankofa* bird, and marching captives. W. 24.25″. Akan male artists (possibly Asante), Ghana, 19th or 20th century. © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, 2007.1. Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. Creative Commons CC-BY-NC.



Figure xxx. This stool may have belonged to a Queen Mother, and depicts a turtle and snail, cannon, a gun, and a drum–symbols that mix martial and peaceful activities. Akan (perhaps Asante) male artist, Ghana, 1940-1965. Photo by Wendy Kaveney. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, 67.459.1. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

metal-plated (Figure xxx) or bear figurative or proverbial supports (Figure xxx). While most restrictions regarding sumptuary regulations are no longer in operation, state stools that appear to copy famous state stools would still be problematic, unlike those owned by ordinary people from once-forbidden designs.



Figure xxx. Main entrance gate of KNUST. Kumase, Ghana. Photo by Kathy Curnow, 2017.



Figure xxx. This presidential office and residence take the form of an abstract stool. Accra, Ghana, 2008. Photo by Jessica Garner, 2009. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

In 1927, Rattray described 31 stool types and their meanings, noting he was only selecting a limited sample of a much larger stool repertoire. As the 20th century progressed, many more variations emerged: trucks, cocoa trees, drummers, and other subjects. While rulers and courtiers still regularly commission stools, those who are less palace-oriented do not buy them as frequently as they once did. Nonetheless, the stool as a symbol of unity and nationhood still stands, and has expanded into new environments. The entry gate of KNUST takes the shape of a stool (Figure xxx), as does the official office and residence of Ghana's president (Figure xxx), the building called variously Flagstaff House or Jubilee House, constructed on the former administrative site of the colonial British Gold Coast government.



Figure xxx. *Asimpim* wooden throne with brass ornaments. H 27.36″. Asante male artist, Ghana, probably 20th century. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1989.84.2.



Figure xxx. *Akonkromfi* wooden and leather armchair with brass ornaments. H 32.5″. Asante male artist, Ghana, 19th century. Brooklyn Museum, 85.200.2. Purchased with funds given by Marcia and John Friede; Dr. and Mrs. Abbott A. Lippman; Mr. and Mrs. Milton F. Rosenthal and Carll H. de Silver Fund. Creative Commons-BY.

While new rulers' ascension to their thrones is referred to as "enstooling," rulers do not always sit on their thrones when they are on public display. Instead, one of several types of backed chairs is usually their seat of choice. These developed from different types of imported European wooden chairs whose leather seats and backs were attached with brass tacks, but they are lower than most foreign versions. These would have first been used at the coast, then traded inland and reproduced locally in both areas. *Asimpim* (Figure xxx) ("I stand firm") are thought to be the oldest of the three. They are also the most common, owned by even minor rulers. *Hwedom* are similarly armless wooden chairs, but they are larger and painted black, their struts carved in imitation of lathe-turned wood, and usually bear silver or gold ornaments; the Golden Stool itself uses one as a throne (Figure xxx). The last takes the form of a European folding chair as its prototype, though it does not itself collapse. This is the *akonkromfi* ("praying mantis"); it and the *hwedom* are less common and used solely by those of highest rank.

Spiritual Spots and Substances

Akan traditional religion centers belief on the High God Nyame, and simple altars to him–composed of an offering bowl placed in the branches of a small stripped tree– were once ubiquitous.

Religious observances centered on other deities and the ancestors. Those deities most honored with temples and priests were those associated with the Tano River, whose source is in Techiman and flows southward, eventually forming the border between Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Only ten of the old temples survive, and they now serve as both religious structures and museums under the protection of the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board (since the 1960s) and UNESCO's World Heritage List. The key ingredient of shrines is a brass basin filled with sacred water, but *kente* cloth, state swords, and other regalia items also serve as decoration.

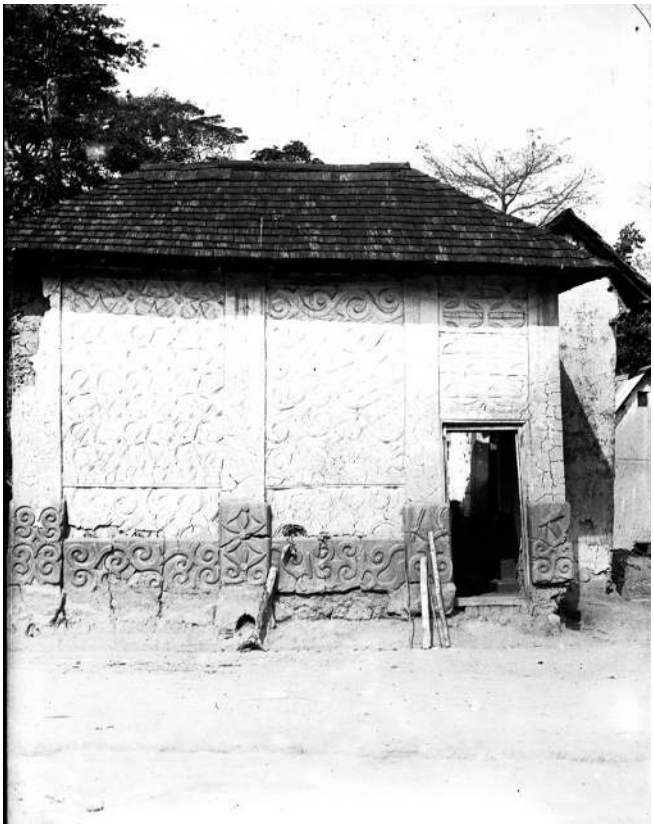


Figure xxx. Exterior of a temple in 1921; the thatched roof had already been replaced by shingles. Asante male artists, Abirem temple, Ghana. Photo by Robert Sutherland Rattray, ca. 1921. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.312.16.1. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND-4.0.



Figure xxx. Shrine to Nyame in the corner of the interior of the Ejisu Besease shrine south of Kumase. Asante, Ghana 19th century. This 2011 photo ("Asante Buildings" by Midway42 Minnesota) is courtesy of TripAdvisor.



Figure xxx. Interior of the Ejisu Besease shrine south of Kumase. Asante, Ghana 19th century. This 2011 photo ("Asante Buildings" by Midway42 Minnesota) is courtesy of TripAdvisor.

Shrines were built on the same model as the domestic house–four buildings around a courtyard. Exteriors might be whitewashed and plain (Figure xxx, above) or decorated with relief designs (Figure xxx). These structures had open porches on the interior (Figure xxx). One held drums, another shrine furniture, a third the shrine essentials. The kitchen rounded out the designated areas.



Figure xxx. This frontal Queen Mother figure proffers her breast, but–as is typical in African art–mother and child do not look at one another. Asante male artist, Ghana, 19th century. H 19 11/16″. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2017.18. Museum Purchase; Robert H.Tannahill Foundation Fund. Public domain.

Free-standing sculpture was not a standard aspect of shrines, although they might serve as a repository for successful *aku'aba* fertility figures (see Chapter 3.3) or the occasional figure.

Because of the disruption and looting that took place during the Anglo-Asante wars and subsequent colonialism with wide-scale adoption of Christianity, the original function and location of the relatively few Asante figures are uncertain. This sculpture depicts an Asante Queen Mother (Figure xxx) seated on a throne, her sandaled feet elevated. She and her baby have slender bodies with elongated torsos and legs, their faces flattened like *aku'aba* figures, their simplified features stressing brows and nose in a similar way. Because the Asante are matrilineal, the female line is essential to royal continuity, and the Queen Mother's political role is a critical one. This might have once stood in a shrine meant for a queen mother's protection, or have been part of an ancestral stool room.

While stools in use–royal or not–are carved from light-colored wood, after death the stools of the great take on a religious function. Intentionally blackened by



Figure xxx. In a procession related to the Queen Mother's funerary rites, black stools are carried in procession. Asante male artists, Ghana. Single frame from a video by Geoffrey Kutuah of #HotGh_News_TV_Channel, 2017, "Watch how the Ashanti black 'stools' enters the Manhyia Palace."

egg yolk and soot, the stools of rulers, chiefs, and queen mothers are placed in a joint lineage stool room. After the death of their owners, they are consecrated and invoked, so that the activated souls of the deceased enter the stools and can remain active on behalf of the royal families. Blackened stools are the focus of offerings and prayers, providing protection to their descendants. Placed on their side on animal skins on an elevated earthen altar, they are removed and carried in public procession when another stool is added to their number (Figure xxx).



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=1014

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The Benin Kingdom

Nigeria's Benin Kingdom offers an unusual opportunity to examine the pace of change in African royal art, both in terms of object types and style, for it



Figure xxx. British officials seated in the remains of the Oba's palace with some of the thousands of objects they looted; most of the items visible are brass plaques. Photo by Reginald Granville. Benin City, Nigeria, 1897. Public domain.

is the only African polity outside of North Africa, Nubia, and Ethiopia with 500 years' worth of extant court art. This is due both to the materials palace artists most commonly used–brass and ivory–and the fact that Benin never endured a successful invasion until the British conquest in 1897. This began with an ill-advised effort by Britain to secure exclusive trading rights with Benin. A signed treaty to that effect–poorly understood and undesired by the Edo officials involved–did not have the desired effect. An ambitious British colonial officer decided to take advantage of his superior's holiday and advance toward Benin City in order to argue for royal adherence to the treaty. He was warned to delay his trip, since he had timed it during a festival period when foreigners were excluded from the city. Ignoring this advice, he and a few Europeans marched ahead, accompanied by a large contingent of African carriers. Some Benin chiefs, indignant at his disrespect toward their

monarch, intercepted the officer and his party, killing most of them. In retaliation, the British mobilized the Royal Navy, invaded the kingdom, and took over the capital. Thousands of objects from the palace, shrines, and other structures were stripped and shipped to London for auction (Figure xxx), ending up in private and public collections around the world. After a trial that saw the involved chiefs hanged and the monarch exonerated, they nonetheless exiled the Oba of Benin for the remainder of his life. In his absence, they razed parts of the palace grounds for new roads, administrative buildings, and living quarters, and set up their colonial government. In 1914, the exiled Oba's son was allowed to take the throne as Oba Eweka. He rebuilt the palace–albeit on a smaller site–and the hereditary royal guilds began to cast brass and carve ivory and wood once more to decorate the palace and ornament the bodies of the monarch, his chiefs, and other aristocrats.

The Palace, its Altars and Royal Ancestral Shrines



Figure xxx. This plaque shows a section of Oba Esigie's palace, already featuring the non-functional towers that persisted until 1897 and may have been present earlier. Plaques of four Portuguese faces decorate the visible side of each wooden post. Edo male artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 16th century. H 20.55″. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8377. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

The current dynasty, which has been on the throne since about the late 13th or early 14th century, replaced an older dynasty that seems to have ruled since the 11th century. The newcomers built their palace on the cemetery of the indigenous rulers, laying claim to the land through its ancestors; this rite, however, was reenacted with each ruler "buying" the land from the representative of its autochthones. While this original earthen palace is long gone, we know it followed a building pattern that still exists: a walled royal compound consisting of multiple buildings constructed around open courtyards, their thatched roofs overhanging a walkway around the rooms themselves. By the 15th century, each monarch customarily built a new residential courtyard and reception hall when they came to the throne. They were eventually buried in their residential courtyard, with a royal ancestral altar constructed over the site. Annual ceremonies honoring past rulers took place in succession, each occurring in the courtyard of the Oba being celebrated.



Figure xxx. The late 19th-century Yoruba palace of the Oyo Kingdom had a thatched roofline marked by numerous tower-like projections over its entrances. Engraving from Robert Brown's *The Story of Africa and its Explorers*, vol. 2 (London; Cassell & Co, 1892): 466. Public domain.

In the 16th century, Oba Esigie erected his own royal quarters, and their appearance was partially recorded by a royal brasscaster (Figure xxx). Though the use of hieratic scale emphasized the court attendants more than the building, we still have a sense of the structure and its galleries. The latter were supported by wooden pillars, four of which appear in the plaque. Each post originally had four brass plaques nailed to each side of its surface. The



Figure xxx. This hinged brass box depicts a section of the palace that includes the characteristic horizontal fluted walls reserved for the Oba and his chiefs, as well as one tower ornamented by snakes on both sides and a bird on top. The roofline also shows two armed Portuguese shooting at additional birds, an allusion to an event in Oba Esigie's lifetime. They may have been present in earlier centuries, but were not depicted on the more restricted view of the building on the 16th-century plaques, nor did visitors describe them. Edo male artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 18th century. H 12.24″ x L 23.58″; weight 36.49 lbs. Photo by Martin Franken. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8488. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

partially-broken plaque also refers to several other key palace features. One was the existence of non-functional towers that are reminiscent of those marking major entrances of Yoruba palaces (Figure xxx). Another was the use of nailed wooden shakes, rather than thatch, for the roofing, a technique foreign to West Africa, and a third was the attachment of a snake and a bird (now missing) to the side and top of the tower. Like successive rulers, Oba Esigie used this prominent structure to project his wealth and innovative tastes.

Seventeenth-century palace visitors commented on the vastness of the palace. The Dutch publisher Olfert Dapper compiled information by an anonymous mid-17th century Dutch East India Company trader who had been resident in the area. He described the palace complex:

"The King's court is square and stands on the right side of the town when you enter the gate [which leads] from Gotton [Ughoton, the river port where European ships docked]. It is easily as big as the town of Haarlem and enclosed by a wall of its own, similar to the town wall. It is divided into many fine palaces, houses and rooms for courtiers, and it contains beautiful long square galleries [other contemporary authors mentioned three or four] about as big as the



Figure xxx. Benin chiefs–marked by their still-typical hairstyles of a transverse crest–seated outside the palace. Photo probably by Reginald Kerr Granville. Benin City, Nigeria, 1897 or 1898. Pitt Rivers Museum, 1998.335.8. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND-4.0; mat trimmed.

exchange at Amsterdam, some bigger than others, resting on wooden pillars, covered from top to bottom with cast copper, on which deeds of war and battle scenes are carved [actually cast]. These are kept very clean. Most of the palaces and royal houses in the court are covered with palm-leaves instead of shingles, and each is adorned with a turret tapering to a point [tapered, but actually flat-topped], upon which are skillfully wrought copper birds, very life-like, spreading their wings."

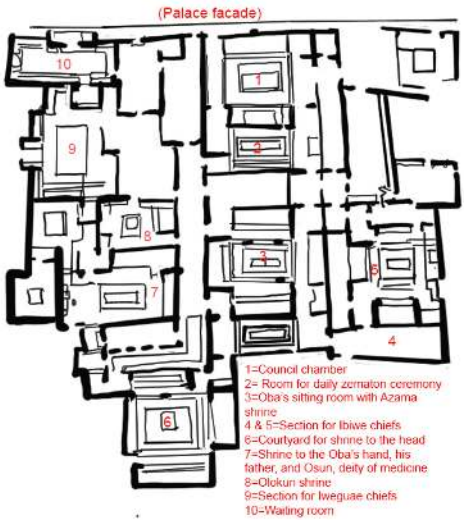


Figure xxx. Partial plan of Oba Akenzua II's palace, sometime between 1958-1965. After the plan by Z.R. Dmochowski, *An Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture, vol. 2: South-West and Central Nigeria* (London: Ethnographica, 1990): 1-18.



Figure xxx. The Oba's Palace, forecourt, and many outbuildings were transformed for the 2016 coronation of Oba Ewuare II. Benin, City, Nigeria, 2018. The central structure, with its Postmodern columns, houses his new reception court. Photo courtesy Ose Schalz.



Figure xxx. This late 19th-/early 20th-century photo depicts mud sculptures that represent a seated deity, his chiefs, wives, and children; their clothing and hairstyles mimic those of the royal court. These large figures were and are usually made by women, and are painted. Today most shrines of this type are dedicated to Olokun, god of the sea and wealth, but neither the central figure's wrapper nor the stones in front of him suggest this identity, for Olokun usually is dressed in white and has a cowrie-encrusted object in front of his figure, as well as a pile of chalk before him. Some deities' worship has fallen into disuse since 1897, but figurative shrines of this type to other deities (such as Ake the hunter) persisted into the mid-20th century. Stacked pots are arranged behind the figure; shrine *ukhurhe* staffs lean in front, along with the whips often found at shrines. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af; A46.12. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Oba Ewuare II had this entrance constructed, its structure combining a streamlined Greco-Roman appearance with traditional aristocratic horizontal grooving. Images of the Idia ivory pendant are attached to the gate. Photo by Dauda Salu, 2019, courtesy Google Earth.

Subsequent centuries showed continued innovations and changes. An 18th-century heavy brass box demonstrates that the shingled roof still protected the roof of some parts of the palace. Despite fires that occasionally destroyed sections of the palace, particularly during an early 19th-century royal power struggle, by the late 19th century the palace continued to be a huge complex, with Oba Ovaramwen introducing the novelty of corrugated metal roofing, as well as imported inset mirrors in his own quarters. When the palace was rebuilt on a smaller scale in 1914/15, its earthen structure lacked towers but was mostly thatched by leaves used only for the palace. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed the structure and, when it was rebuilt in 1922, it was completely roofed by metal. Subsequent 20th-century additions included some cement structures, air conditioning, and a billiards room. The interior includes sections dedicated to each of the palace's three chiefly societies (and off-limits to non-members), as well as the harem and private living quarters. Its warren-like structure allows privacy and reflects organic growth over time (Figure xxx). The palace's latest incarnation occurred in 2016 with the ascent of Oba Ewuare II to the throne. This Rutgers-educated former ambassador to Angola, Sweden, and Italy paved the palace forecourt, created a new facade, and had his own reception court and living quarters constructed as a two-story mansion (Figure xxx). A new main entry in a similar style–its horizontal grooves referencing traditional royal and aristocratic architectural privilege, replaced a simpler gate (Figure xxx). Nonetheless, earthen sections of the building were not razed–they are simply not visible to the casual visitor.



Figure xxx. This long-destroyed shrine stood at the time of the 1897 British Punitive Expedition. Incorporated into the palace wall. Like most Edo altars, it occupied a shallow raised clay altar and was open to one side, through protected from the elements. The skulls suggest it could have been dedicated to Ogiuwu, god of death, or possibly Ogun, god of war and iron; both stood near each other in an open courtyard where the army assembled before heading off to battle. The Ogiuwu altar formerly stood along the King's Square roundabout–no longer part of the palace. Practitioners of traditional religion attribute the many accidents at that spot to the deity's demands to be fed, despite his lack of a shrine. Photo by the German trader Erdmann taken in 1896 or before and published in von Luschan, *Die Altertumer von Benin* ([1919] 1968):

As the limited floorplan above of an earlier layout indicates in part, the main palace includes numerous shrines to the deities of the waters and wealth (Olokun), medicine (Osun), iron and war (Ogun), the national deities (Uwen and Ora), the guardian of the Oba's children (Azama), and others, including his head and right arm. Additional shrines are found on the royal compound's grounds, while other royal shrines are visible elsewhere in the city and throughout the kingdom. While photographs of more recent interior palace shrines to deities have not been published, images of older shrines are known–if imperfectly identified (Figs. xxx and xxx). The reason for the latter is due in part to poor collection of information by the British colonists, and



Figure xxx. Both the interior and exterior of the air-conditioned Holy Aruosa Cathedral bear the horizontal grooving that marks high-status Benin buildings such as the palace and chiefs' homes. This is the Oba's official home of worship, made from concrete in 1945 on the site where one of Benin's first three Catholic churches is once said to have stood. Still from a video by Independent Television and Radio entitled "HOLY ARUOSA CATHEDRAL BENIN CITY," 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xyZFm_MrifQ

in part to a continuing diminution of traditional worship practices. The High God Osanobua is the subject of many exclamations of shock or surprise. His major shrine was constructed in a basilica-like form in the 20th century on the site of what is believed to be a late 15th/early 16th-century Catholic church (Figure xxx). Numerous state and private shrines to Olokun, deity of the sea and wealth, still exist, as do private shrines to Eziza, the whirlwind, or Ogun, god of iron, technology, and war. However, some of Benin's former major deities, such as Ogiuwu, god of death, and Obiemwen, goddess of fertility and farming, no longer have public shrines in Benin City. Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal churches abound, as do mosques. A Hare Krishna temple can be found in Benin as well.

Within the palace, the royal ancestral altars are key sites of veneration. Originally built individually in the residential courtyards of the various monarchs, they were reconceived in the early 20th century by Oba Eweka II. The 1897 destruction of the palace, subsequent parceling of its property, and the 17-year gap in occupation meant that some former altar sites now stood outside palace walls. His solution



Figure xxx. The royal ancestral altar dedicated to Oba Eweka II includes brass heads of monarchs mounted by carved tusks, as well as metal sculpture, bells, a ceremonial sword and *ukhurhe* royal staffs. Edo male artists, Benin City, Nigeria, 1935. Photo by Edward Harland Duckworth. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.194.79. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND-4.0

was to build a large freestanding courtyard in the forecourt. Within it, most monarchs were honored by a single altar, while the altars of Obas Adolo and Ovaranmwen were erected independently on a gallery. Since then, they have been joined by those of Obas Eweka II, Akenzua II, and Erediauwa (Figure xxx). This gallery acts as the dais during many major ceremonies, and the seated Oba thus visibly and metaphorically has the backing of his royal ancestors.

Because the British had ripped the former altars of their treasures, the hereditary carving



Figure xxx. This royal wooden *ukhurhe* ends in a clenched fist. Edo royal artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th or 20th century. Benin Museum.

and casting guilds had to create new altar decorations. Although brass and ivory objects are their best-known aspects, the only essential element for all altars–royal and commoner alike–are the *ukhurhe* wooden and occasionally brass staffs that lean from the earthen altar against the wall (Figure xxx). *Ukhurhe* are carved in imitation of the segmented form of a particular shrub's branches, and represent the segments of a continuing lineage. When an Edo man "plants" (buries) his father, an *ukhurhe* must be placed on his ancestral altar. Royal *ukhurhe* usually end in a clenched hand or a hand clutching a mudfish; elephants and other finials sometimes top them. Chiefs and citizens use *ukhurhe* topped with a human head. Deities' shrines also bear the staffs, but they are usually thicker with human figures interrupting the shaft. All *ukhurhe* are actually rattles; each includes a chamber with a trapped rattle. When holding and praying with the staff, it can be stamped on the ground or shaken to attract the attention of ancestors and deities.



Figure xxx. An unknown Briton painted this watercolor at the time of the 1897 invasion. Relatively few photos of the palace at the time of the sack were taken; the "feathers" on the heads suggest this altar was dedicated to a 19th-century monarch. A photo of a royal altar taken earlier that decade is the only one that shows an intact royal ancestral altar. W 14.17". © Trustees of the British Museum, Af2006,Drg.20. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Shrine furniture includes brass heads of monarchs. These were placed in pairs or sets of pairs on and beside the altars (Figure xxx) and are not intended to be portraits of the deceased. They are emblematic rather than individualized, with an emphasis on the high status conferred by the beaded collar and crown, and on the powerful stare conveyed by iron-inset irises–the latter would have been intensified by their darkness contrasting with the surrounding brass.

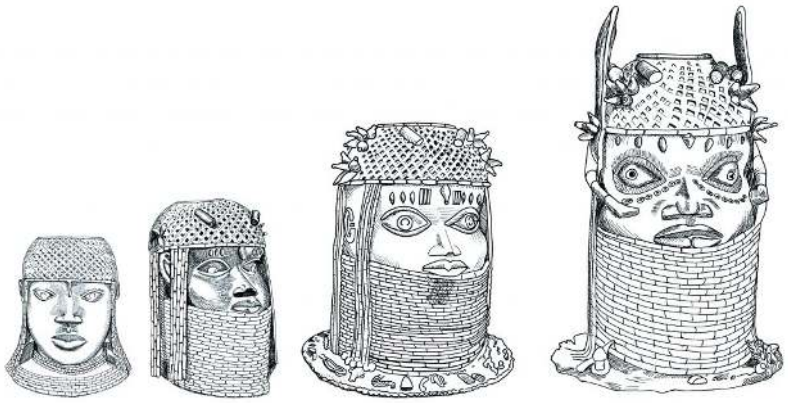


Figure xxx. Scale drawing of four centuries of Benin royal ancestral heads, representing (from left) the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Illustration by Linda Herman for Kathy Curnow.



Figure xxx. This naturalistic rendering departs from earlier royal altar representations in several ways: its format changes, eschewing the head for a bust; only one depiction appears, shifting to a central placement; and the style drastically avoids abstraction and ephebism. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria. Detail of a photo by D. Anthony Malone, 1994.





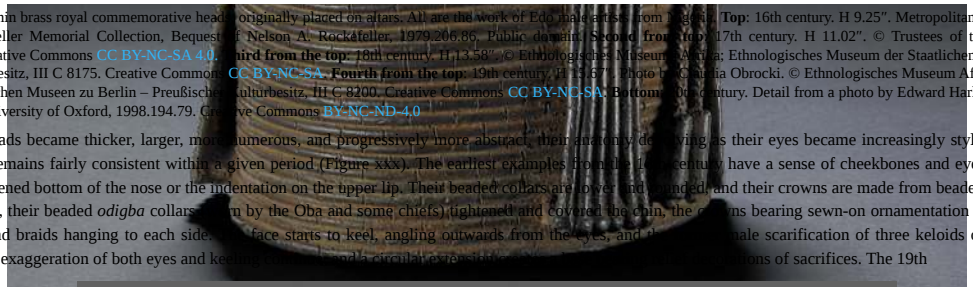


Figure xxx. Five Benin brass royal commemorative heads originally placed on altars. All are the work of Edo male artists from Benin City. **Top**: 16th century. H 9.25″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979.206.86. Public domain. **Second from top**: 17th century. H 11.02″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1897,1217.2. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Third from the top**: 18th century. H 13.58″. © Ethnologisches Museum Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8175. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA. **Fourth from the top**: 19th century. H 15.67″. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. © Ethnologisches Museum Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8200. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA. **Bottom**: 20th century. Detail from a photo by Edward Harland Duckworth. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1998.194.79. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0

Over the centuries, these heads became thicker, larger, more numerous, and progressively more abstract, their anatomy describing as their eyes became increasingly stylized and huge (Figure xxx). Their stylistic progression remains fairly consistent within a given period (Figure xxx). The earliest examples from the 16th century have a sense of cheekbones and eye sockets, although there are abrupt transitions at the flattened bottom of the nose or the indentation on the upper lip. Their beaded collars are low and banded, and their crowns are made from beaded netting, with long hanging strands. By the 17th century, their beaded *odigba* collars (worn by the Oba and some chiefs) tightened and covered the chin, the crowns bearing sewn-on ornamentation of single beads and rosettes, with both beaded strands and braids hanging to each side. The face starts to keel, angling outwards from the eyes, and the female scarification of three keloids over each brow is indicated. During the 18th century, the exaggeration of both eyes and keeling [illegible] circular expressive [illegible] tions of sacrifices. The 19th



Figure xxx. The imagery on this carved ivory tusk suggests it was made to honor Oba xxx. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, ca. 1820. H 77-11/16″. The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1968.284. Gift of Katherine C. White. Public domain.

century saw the addition of "feathers," vertical crown extensions that flank the temples and curve forward. Many examples include two beaded strands that curve forward in front of the eyes. In the early 20th century, the revived guilds generally followed 19th-century structure and style, but the foreheads lengthened and the faces flattened, the ears becoming more circular. One late 20th-century head abruptly shifted to a naturalistic representation (Figure xxx).



Figure 740. This tusk is in Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum collection, III C 7751.

Heads of the 18th and 19th century supported carved ivory tusks; some 17th-century examples may have similarly done so, but 16th-century heads probably are too thin and light to have done so, unless the tusks were very small. Surviving tusks are from the 18th and 19th century; palace fires seem to have destroyed some earlier ivories, and burn marks are evident on some extent pieces. Ivory was a royal monopoly, and added further status to the object. The tusk probably refers to the vertical extensions (*oro*) on some of the crowns, a feature shared by some priest-chiefs' headgear. All call attention to the head itself, the most critical part of the body. Seat of many senses, it guides the body and houses destiny. The tusks' low-relief imagery shows stacked registers (Figure xxx). Figures of humans are all vertically-oriented, as are many of the animals. Unlike most Benin art forms, tusks often feature both women and men–although the women in all media were restricted to depictions of the Oba's mother (Iyoba) and her attendants. The tusks' meaning can be deciphered by their references to specific rulers, both in their human form and as fish-legged representations of Olokun, deity of the sea and counterpart of the monarch (Figure xxx).

Before the British stripped the ancestral altars, the variety of additional decorative sculpture was considerable, and included representations of courtiers who woke the Oba, hornblowers who accompanied him during processions, equestrian figures and Portuguese with guns and other weapons. Although these had their origin in the 16th century, later casters copied them for subsequent graves–their style, however, reflects that favored by contemporaneous heads (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. These two brass Portuguese figures both stood on royal ancestral altars, but their creation was separated by a century or more. The figure became a stock form, and 19th-century examples are also known. From the life-like pose of the first generation of [illegible] armed soldiers–which highlights hunched shoulders and crossing, non-frontal legs, the figures progressively straightened and became more Edo in facial appearance, their dress more and more anachronistic. Edo male artists, Benin City, Nigeria. Left: 16th–early 17th-century. H 14.76″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1928; 0112.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Right: [illegible] century. H 16.93″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1947,[illegible].7. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

While these sculptures were discontinued in the 20th-century revival, the idea of a central figurative group on a rectangular base–the *aseberia*, which seems to have been an 18th-century innovation–has continued. Unlike the heads, these brass tableaux are individualized by emblems, though not by facial features. One *aseberia*, for example (Figure xxx), depicts Oba Ewuakpe, a late 17th-century monarch who holds a spiritually-charged pestle in his right hand. Meant to negate curses, it is his identifier on both this altarpiece and on carved ivory tusks (see above, Figure xxx). Ewuakpe suffered the rebellion of his subjects and was driven from the palace, forced to work for a living. It was only though through his literally self-sacrificing wife that he was able to regain the throne. Here he is shown with few royal accoutrements–he wears a hat, rather than the beaded crown, and his high color, anklets, and other necklaces are far more limited than the usual kingly regalia. He is supported by two



Figure xxx. This brass *aseberia* would have been centrally placed on Oba Ewuakpe's ancestral altar. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 18th century. H 22.83″. Photo by Claudia Obrocki. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8165. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

attendants whose facial marks and lean bodies suggest they are foreign slaves, rather than loyal courtiers. Nonetheless, his return to the throne marked an upswing in monarchical control, and his successor commissioned this work to honor Oba Ewuakpe, alluding to both his downfall and recovery.

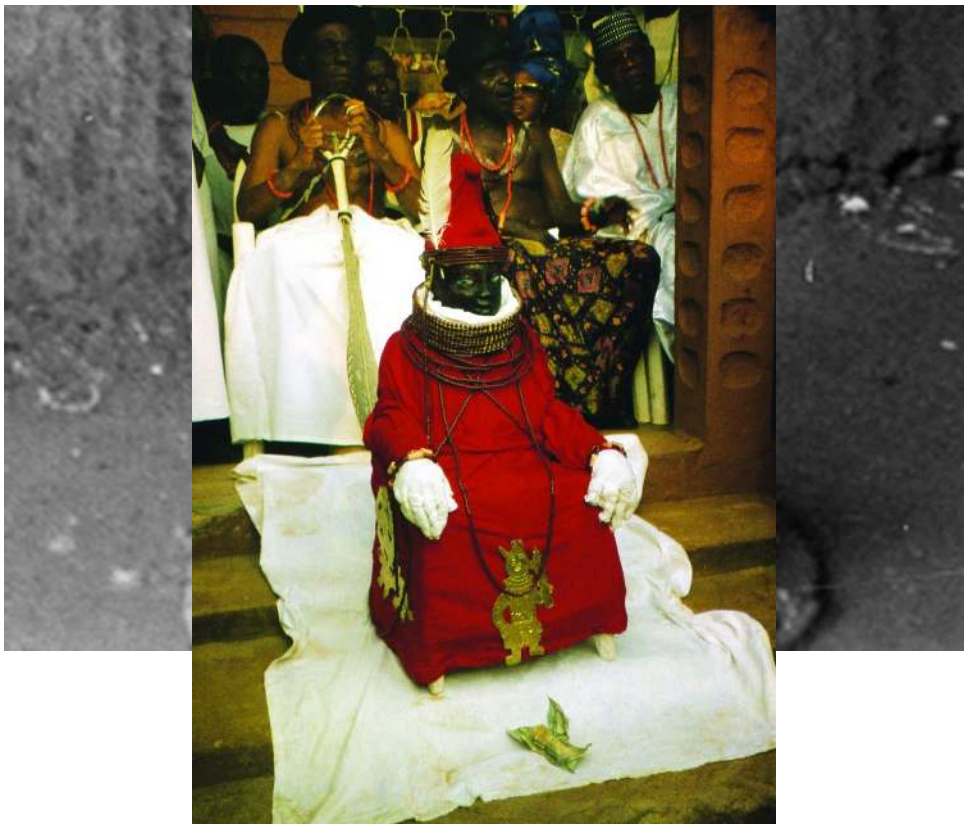


Figure xxx. The Iyoba is honored by a funerary effigy. Dressed in red *ododo* cloth, she wears a chiefly hat with vulturine eagle feather, a high *odigba*, *ikele* circlets, crossed beads, and brass decorations like a chief of her class. Edo male artist, Nigeria, 1998. © Kathy Curnow.



Figure xxx. These three brass heads represent the Iyoba, the monarch's mother, and stood on her altars in matched pairs. Edo male artists, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria. **Left**: 16th century. H 16.14″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1897,1011.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Center**: 17th century. H 18.7″. Courtesy Penn Museum, AF5102. **Right**: Late 18th century. H 17 1/8″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.821. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg. Public domain.

Monarchs are not the only ones who are honored with metal objects on their ancestral altars. Beginning in the 16th century, rulers created ancestral altars to their mothers, as well as their fathers. The Iyoba, or queen mother, receives her title a few years after her son took the throne. She is the only female chief, and technically belongs to the group of chiefs who are self-made men and made up the bulk of generals in past centuries–but she does not attend their meetings. The Iyoba has her own palace, chiefs, and attendants but traditions state she cannot see her son after her accession. At the time of her death, she is celebrated with a dance performed only for the Oba, and she–like the monarch–is represented by a funerary effigy (Figure xxx). Altars are set up in her honor at her own palace and the Oba's palace. Pairs of brass heads depicted her with a "parrot's beak" hairstyle, its shape mimicking that of the hats her chiefly group wears; a netted bead



Figure xxx. This *aseberia* was dedicated to an Iyoba, and shows her surrounded by her female pages. Until the 20th century. she and her attendants were the only females that appeared in Benin court art. This is one of the most elaborate examples extant; attendants are not usually placed on the base. Edo male artist, Benin Kingdom, 18th century. H 10.24″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 20301. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.



Figure xxx. This brass rooster altar decoration reinforces the Iyoba's status as the only female chief, for it represents a permanent male animal sacrifice to her. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 18th century. H 19 7/8. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.17.54. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls. Public domain.

covering holds it in place. Like the royal ancestral heads, only later examples ever supported ivory tusks, and the images grew more and more stylized over time (Figure xxx). Fewer examples exist. *Aseberia* (Figure xxx) were also made for Queen Mothers, as were brass roosters (Figure xxx). The latter were among sacrifices made to male ancestors, on the altars of Iyobas because they became, in a way, honorary men. *Ukhurhe* also stood on their altars as did ivory figures of female attendants.



Figure xxx. This stylized wooden ram's head would have decorated a chief's ancestral altar. Edo male artist, Benin Kingdom, 19th or 20th century. H 12.4″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 40264. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.



Figure xxx. This wooden chief's head once decorated a chief's ancestral altar. Edo male Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 19th century. H 15.63″. Musée du Quai Branly, 71.1900.44.1.

The altars of commoners–with the exception of the brasscasters, who can own terracotta heads–bear only carved wooden *ukhurhe*, but those of chiefs are more distinguished. In the past, wooden representations of ram or antelope heads decorated chiefly altars, the animal displaying the valued male qualities of aggression and tenacity (Figure xxx). An 18th-century French observer described the tomb of a "big man": "On the top are placed beautiful elephant tusks each weighing forty to fifty pounds, well carved with images of lizards



Figure xxx. Wooden hens are both appropriate sacrifices for women and suitable decorations for the ancestral altars of chiefs' mothers. Edo male carver, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 19th century. H 17.52″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 18076. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

and snakes. These tusks are set on crudely carved wooden heads of rams or bullocks."

In the first half of the 19th century, chiefs received permission to decorate their altars with wooden representations of chiefs' heads (Figure xxx). These show chiefs wearing *odigba* beaded colors and coral headbands with a vulturine eagle feather. Their tiered hair shows, and the three archaic scarifications men once wore occur over the brow, inlaid (like the pupils) with a darker wood. Those chiefs of high status were granted the privilege to add sheet brass strips, evidence of strict controls over this prestige material.



Figure xxx. This brass head is an extremely thin casting of a foreign enemy. Its economic use of metal, as well as its idealized naturalism, suggest an early date, although these heads were made for centuries. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 9″. Courtesy Penn Museum, AF2064A.

Although some powerful chiefs added ivory tusks to their altars in the late 18th century, this is rare today. Likewise, only a limited number of chiefs are allowed to create altars for their mothers. These are decorated with *ukhurhe*–shorter than those used for male ancestors–wooden hens (Figure xxx), and wooden sculptures of female attendants.



Figure xxx.

One type of brass head has been confused with those found on royal altars (Figure xxx). These do not, however, represent Benin royal ancestors, despite the use of valuable metal and the color of beads worn at the neck. They are not crowned, and the Oba is never seen bare-headed. Instead, they are permanent depictions of high-ranking defeated enemies, whose actual heads were taken in battle. They bear four, rather than three, keloid scarifications over each brow, the mark accorded a Benin female or a foreign man. A photo taken in the late 19th century shows two such heads hanging from a medicine staff in the palace (Figure xxx); similar staffs were carried into battle. While some of these heads date from the 16th century, they continued to be made through at least the 18th century, reminders of glorious victories.

Prestige Materials: Coral, Ivory, Brass, and Red Ododo Cloth

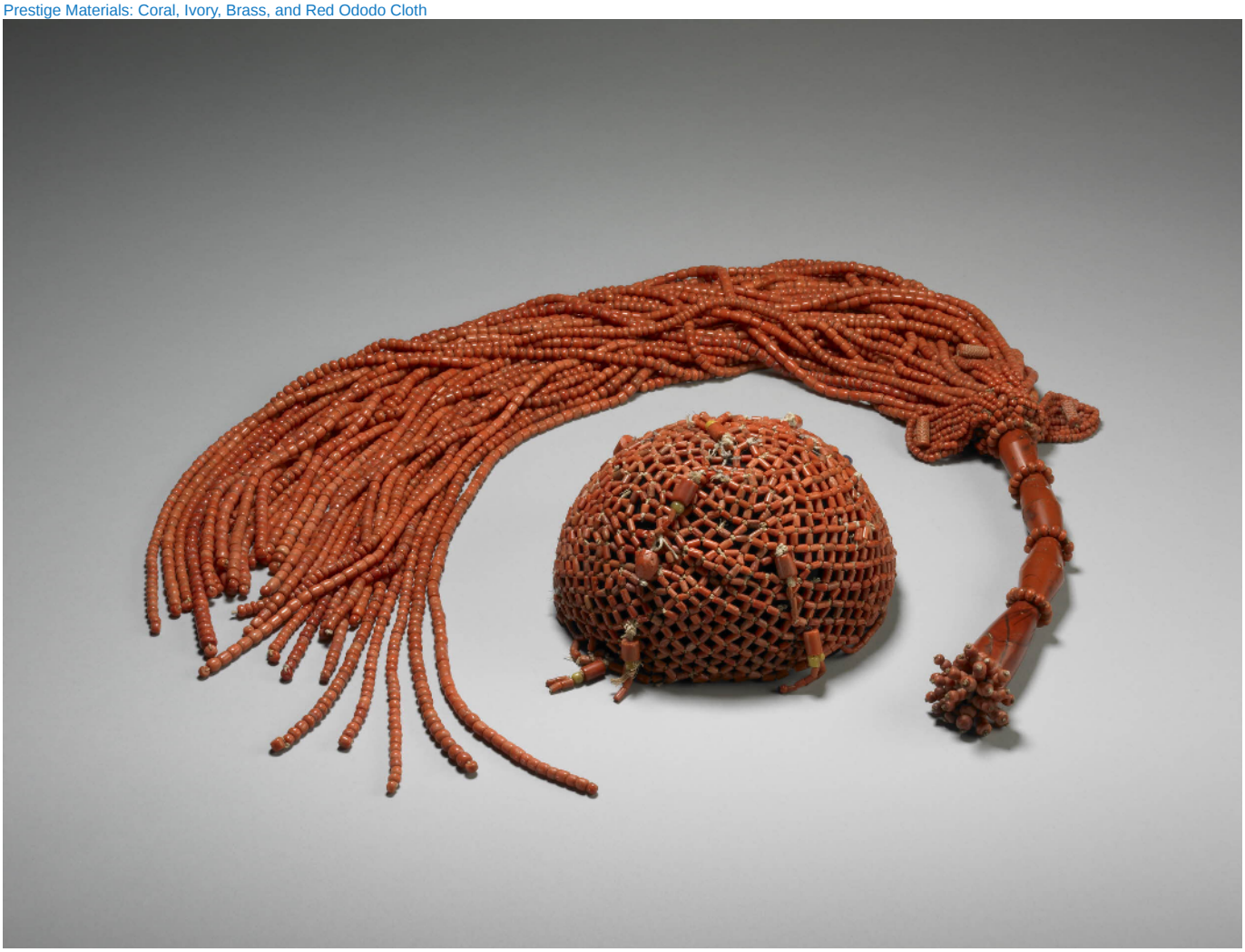


Figure xxx. This netted coral crown was a more informal, lighter form of royal headgear. The beaded flywhisk imitated the more standard flywhisk made from a handle and a horse or other animal tail, but was considerably heavier. Flywhisks are used by rulers to salute citizens, wave at crowds in acknowledgment of their cheers, etc.; they are not really used to swat flies away. Tassled Crown: Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century or earlier. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898; 0630.5. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Flywhisk: Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century or earlier. L 40.55″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898,0630.3. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Coral–whether for necklaces, bracelets, anklets, crowns or netted garments–was strung and repaired by members of the Iwebo palace society, whose duties include looking after and repairing the monarch's wardrobe. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century or before. L 27.95". © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1944; 04.63. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The red and pink coral beads that Oba Ewuakpe lost and regained are one of Benin's most striking dress elements. First imported by the Portuguese in the late 15th century, they were eagerly purchased, perhaps because reddish-brown stone beads made from jasper or chalcedony already served as marks of high status, and coral's brighter color and status as a luxury import made them equally desirable. Red is a key color in Benin symbolism, as is white. White is associated with peace, prosperity, coolness–white kaolin "chalk" paints parts of the palace interior, and anoints people during ceremonies as a sign of luck, while ivory is also white. Red is associated with blood, war, power, and things threatening. The Edo categorize colors as white, black, cool (blue, green, violet), or hot (red, yellow, orange). Brass (when kept polished) is thus red, as are coral beads.



Figure xxx. Oba Ewuare II wore a full complement of coral attire on his coronation day, including netted wrapper and shirt and his most formal crown with an *oro* projection. The outer two figures are chiefs; both wear *ikele* circlets and bracelets, but only the chief at right wears an *odigba* stacked collar and crossed coral chest bands. Single frame of Channels Television's "Special Report: Coronation Of The Oba Of Benin, Oba Ewuare II Pt 2," 2016.

No one wears or owns more coral than the Oba, whether marine coral or stone "coral." His regalia Figure xxx) includes not only a selection of crowns, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, the high beaded collar called *odigba*, and crossed chest bands, but also coral-ornamented shoes, flywhisks, and netted beaded wrappers and shirts (Figs. xxx and xxx). Because these items are heavy, most are not worn on a daily basis. A cloth cap can serve as crown, and netted garments are reserved for festival appearances. A coral circlet (*ikele*), coral bracelets and anklets are, however, standard.



Figure xxx. Chiefs' wives have the privilege of wearing a hairstyle like that of the royal wives on ceremonial occasions. Ordinary women can imitate them on their wedding day or in cultural performances. These women are attending the palace ceremony of their husband's chiefly title. Photo by Kathy Curnow. Benin City, Nigeria, 1994.

Chiefs are awarded an *ikele* when they take a title, and also own an assortment of bracelets, anklets and necklaces, as well as a beaded headband. The high *odigba* collar, however, or one of half height, is awarded to only certain titleholders. The Oba's wives and children own *ikele* and coral ornaments, and chiefs' wives and children are allowed to wear coral necklaces and bracelets. The royal wives, chiefs' wives, and brides also wear coral ornaments in their hair when they wear a special ceremonial hairstyle that features a bee-hive arrangement with braided arches (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. The Oba of Benin would have worn this ivory armlet at the wrist, with its pair on his opposite wrist. Despite the damage it incurred over the centuries, it was not discarded. It bears the heads of straight-haired Portuguese, inset with abstract brass shapes inserted into carved receptacles. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th-18th century. L 5.12". © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1922; 0714.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Coral beads have amulet-like protective powers, as well as prestige. Those belonging to the royal family and the chiefs are recharged during a palace festival by the sacrifice of a cow. In centuries past, a slave was sacrificed over them, a rare occurrence that spoke to their significance and power.

Ivory is another precious material that is normally restricted to the Oba. It also is a medicine–literally. The carvers' guild keeps all ivory shavings, for they are critical ingredients in certain mystical preparations. Because the color white represents peace and joy to the Edo, ivory has assumed those associations. For centuries, the Oba has worn ivory armlets at the wrist (Figure xxx), as well as pendants at the waist.



Figure xxx. This pair of matching ivory waist pendants depict Idia, the mother of 16th-century Oba Esigie. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. Left: H 9.65″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1910,0513.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Right: H 9.38″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, 1978.412.323. Public domain.



Figure xxx. Side view of the ivory pendant shows the upstanding braids behind the transverse crest. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 9.38″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, 1978.412.323. Public domain.



Figure xxx. Oba Ewuare II wears an assortment of ivory pendants at his waist during the annual palace Igue celebrations. Single frame from Iyamu Imuetinyan's video, "Day 2 of Benin Kingdom Igue Festival Celebration. Oba gha tókpére…. isèèè," 2018.

Among the latter are some of the most prized art objects from Benin: a 16th-century pair of waist pendants that represent Idia, the mother of Oba Esigie (Figure xxx). Their matching grain confirms they were made from the same tusk, and the same artist carved them. Though a pair, they are not absolutely identical, as indicated by the row of heads at the top and the flat area below the beaded collar. Idia was recognized as a witch, and Esigie honored her in multiple ways since she used her supernatural powers in multiple ways to secure and hold the throne for him. In these two pendants, she is idealized and shown in her prime. Accorded the privileges of a high chief, she wears a collar of beads at the neck, but the artist could not replicate the special hairstyle she wore on contemporaneous bronzes (Figure xxx above) because the thinness of the ivory section would have prevented a forward projection, and it would have proved an irritant to the wearer. Instead, her hair is dressed in short, upright braids, each topped with a bead (Figure xxx), and, at the front, a mass of drilled projections, now worn down. An arching row of either Portuguese heads or Portuguese heads alternating with mudfish lays in a transverse crest at the top of her head. Their prominence speaks to the assistance a handful of armed Portuguese gave to Esigie in several wars early in his reign. Their association with the mudfish–a liminal animal associated with the deity of the seas, rivers, and wealth–on one of the pendants is one of many pieces of evidence that they, too, were considered Olokun's creatures because of their sea travel and exotic luxury goods. Small pieces of brass inlay various details of the work, but originally iron was inserted in the irises, around the eyes, and in two strips between the brows, as also occurs on brass heads of both the Oba and his mother. The two vertical lines are a stylized frown; combined with the other iron, it demonstrated the power inherent in the Iyoba's gaze because of her supernatural abilities. The four worn relief vertical marks over the brow mark the face as female.

These were not the only two face pendants that represented Idia. As breakage and loss occurred, they were replaced by other versions. Some had iron-inlaid "frowns," but none had the delicate brass inlays of these earlier versions. Even today, stylized faces are part of the royal ceremonial regalia (Figure xxx). Past Obas valued even the damaged versions, though he no longer wore them. When the British invaded, they found them in a wooden chest inside the Oba's bedroom.

Brass has always been a valuable material, controlled by the monarch. Its reflectivity and–according to Edo terminology–reddishness have accorded it power, and its rarity before direct contact with Europe established it as a luxury metal. Obas have used it



Figure xxx. This damaged plaque shows two soldiers of equivalent rank with bows and swords. The much smaller figure between them is an adult, but of much lower rank. Their belled attire suggests they are participating in a ceremony. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 13.78″ x W 14.17″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8370. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

not only for royal altarpieces, but for architectural decorations, like the plaques that once



Figure xxx. This brass cylindrical box (*ekpokin*) is a royal version of the leather boxes used to deliver ceremonial gifts or messages. Made from sheets of Muntz metal, a patented brass that began British manufacture in the 1830s, it features repousée decorative patterns as well as abstracted images of the Oba and Ofoe, the messenger of Death. Squatter than the usual *ekpokin*, it may have held poisons; Ofoe did not normally appear on casual items. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century. H 3.75″ x D 18″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.17.68a. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls. Public domain.

decorated Oba Esigie's reception hall, or the brass snakes on palace towers, or objects that decorated the royal interiors.



Figure xxx. This unusual plaque is one of very few that shows people working in an outdoor environment. The crouching figure–presumably a boy or unmarried male, since he is nude–has a large bag across his chest, meant to gather the pods. This seems to be a kola nut tree; a stick is often used to know down the pods, although damage to the harvester's hands and forearms prevents us from knowing if one has originally held. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 19.29″ x W 13.58″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8383. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

The plaques–over 800 were once nailed to the wooden posts that supported the courtyard roof of his reception hall–demonstrated the Oba's great wealth and taste to any visitor. These rectangular plaques featured numerous subjects: primarily courtiers (Figure xxxbelow), relatively few images of the Oba himself (Figure xxxbelow), numerous animals–especially mudfish, snakes, crocodiles, leopards, and birds, the Portuguese, and a few inanimate objects. Most depictions of people are formal, frontal, and iconic; when multiple figures appear, their faces are shown identically, and hieratic scale indicates their relative importance (Figure xxx). Less-dignified individuals were sometimes experimentally placed in a three-quarter, turned pose, a treatment most often accorded to the Portuguese, whose foreign printed sources probably served as



Figure xxx. This plaque contains only one frontal figure, and its hieratic scale demonstrates that he is the least important figure. Four members of the Benin forces attack what is probably an Igala mounted warrior: he has a large gash across his chest. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 15.75″ x W 15.75″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898,0115.49. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

models for the position. Other unusual treatments that seem to have a foreign impetus are references to foliage (Figure xxx) and even to action, which occurs in a handful of battle scenes (Figure xxx). While courtier depictions ranged from the monarch and his noblemen to guild members (Figure xxx) and even low-ranking page boys, no women appear on the plaques. The plaques include highly unusual examples of still life depictions in African art–fans, gongs, aspects of ceremonial attire, a bag, a leopard pelt–but they are formally presented, without environmental



Figure xxx below for a later example. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 18″ x W 11.42″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8451. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

references (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. Two chiefly drummers–members of the Ogbelaka guild–play with a kneeling assistant. The spatial distribution around figures is somewhat arbitrary, as it often is; two figures' heads nearly touch the upper edge of the composition, while there is plenty of space below. In addition, the junior musician is not kneeling at the same level where his colleagues stand. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 17.52″ x W 15.35″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898; 0115.128; Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Brass had many personal uses for the aristocracy. Monarchs have also consistently granted many chiefs the privilege of wearing brass armlets (Figure xxx) and hip pendants, as well as other accessories, all marks of royal favor. Chiefs' wives and women with minor palace titles stick thin brass "feather" ornaments into their *okuku* beehive-style coiffures.

Most Benin brasses in museum collections have darkened through oxidation. In Benin, however, most are polished at least annually with lime juice and sand in order to maintain their sheen.

Ododo is a red cloth associated with the Oba, very high-ranking chiefs, and certain masquerades. It was imported by the Portuguese, its prestige associations cemented by its priciness, sumptuary laws, and its red color. While the original *ododo* was made of felted red wool, the textile's near unavailability has led to substitutions of other varieties of red cloth.

Related Benin legends talk about the introduction of coral beads, brass vessels, and *ododo* to the kingdom. Some say they were wrested from the palace of Olokun, god of the sea and wealth, by Oba Ewuare in the 15th century, while others claim his right-hand man Okhuaihe was their procurer. This likely stemmed from a more prosaic occurrence. The Portuguese had landed at the coast and initially made contact with the Itsekiri people to Benin's south. Some foreign trade goods found their way to the Benin court, and the Oba probably sent one of his courtiers south to discover the source and direct the Europeans to Benin's port of Ughoton.



Figure xxx. This brass armlet is one of a matched set that would have been worn by a chief. Its imagery features the stylized heads of Portuguese foreigners and mudfish. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century. L 6″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.17.78. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls. Public domain.



Figure xxx. The pangolin metaphor in Edo chiefly dress. **Top**: The curled-up, invulnerable pangolin. Wildlife Alliance, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0; cropped horizontally. **Middle**: A brass plaque depicting two high-ranking chiefs in "pangolin skin" at a place ceremony. Edo, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 16th century. H 18.31″ x 13.5″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898,0115.58. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. **Bottom**: The Obasogie of Benin Kingdom, a high-ranking Eghaevbo n'Ore chief, in procession with "pangolin skin" cloth, his eben raised. Photo by © Kathy Curnow, 1997.

High-ranking chiefs often own special gowns used today only for palace ceremonies. Made of *ododo*, they have a long history; some of Esigie's plaques show war chiefs wearing them for a festival, holding their ceremonial *eben* dancing swords. Made from overlapping scalloped strips, their surface is petal- or feather-like, but they actually represent animal scales–the scales of the pangolin, a mammalian anteater who curls itself into a ball when threatened (Figure xxx). When thus protected, as an Edo proverb states, "Even the leopard can crack its teeth on the pangolin." As such, this

garment, known as “pangolin skin,” reminds the monarch and spectators that chieftaincy at their level is not to be taken lightly. In their progress through chiefly ranks, they had to combine political cunning with supernatural medicine for self-protection. If the Oba tries to dispose of them, he may find it difficult or impossible.

Precious materials–coral, brass, ivory, and ododo–are frequently on display at palace ceremonies, as can be seen in the video below.

Symbols of Power



Figure xxx. A low brass stool throne in the form of intertwined mudfish. Edo, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th c.? A similar throne in the National Museum, Lagos probably replaced this damaged work. H 4.92″ x W 14.17″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1923,1013.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Like many African societies, Benin’s imagery is a rich reflection of metaphors drawn from proverbs, divination, and other oral references. The pangolin is only one example; Benin art is full of significant depictions that have meanings beyond the obvious. The chiefly armlet in Figure xxx, for example, includes representations of both mudfish and Portuguese heads. Both refer to the watery world of Olokun, lord of riches, because of their associations with water, and the Oba is considered Olokun’s counterpart on earth. One of his thrones shows interlocked mudfish (Figure xxx), a reference both to Olokun and his own liminality.

The Oba himself is identified not only with Olokun, but with the leopard, who shares the Oba’s beauty and fierceness. The Edo view the feline as the king of the forest, or bush; one of the Oba’s praise names is “leopard of the home.” So strong is this identification that there are many leopard euphemisms that refer to the monarch:



Figure xxx. Brass leopard. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th or 17th century. H 15.5″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.412.321. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection; Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Public domain.



Figure xxx. This fragmentary plaque depicts two very high-relief leopards, one gnawing on an antelope. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 11.01″ x W 7.09″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8485. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.



Figure xxx. Actual and cloth imitation leopard pelts worn by soldiers. Left: Detail of a plaque. Edo, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 18″ x W 12″. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979.206.97. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller. Public domain. Right: This military tunic was made of imported red wool flannel applied over a rawhide base. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 19th century. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1897,-.520. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

"the leopard is in the shelter' (the Oba is sleeping) or "the leopard is sick in the bush" (the Oba is very ill). Royal guilds for capturing, taming, and sacrificing leopards existed in the past, and depictions of the feline could be found in many secular forms. The palace contained both sculptures of leopards and leopard vessels (Figure xxx). They appeared on numerous plaques with and without bells at the neck, the marker of the domesticated cat. On both castings (Figure xxx) and carvings, a leopard attacking an antelope stood for the Oba's destruction of his enemies. Only the monarch had the right to take life, but he conferred this right to his military officers, frequently with visual markers. Some wore actual leopard pelts on their chests, while others bore cloth tunics embroidered so their whiskers and eyes made the feline correspondence evident (Figure xxx). Both the Oba and certain military chiefs wore leopard head pendants at the waist or hip, though the mediums differed (Figure xxx).



Figure xxx. The Oba generally wore a series of pendants at the waist, while chiefs wore one at the hip. Left: Royal ivory leopard pendant. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 17th or 18th century. H 7.87″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 12536. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA. Right: Brass leopard pendant. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 18th or 19th century. H 6.5″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1956,27.227. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure xxx. Brass plaque in the shape of a crocodile. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 18.23″ x W 7.68″. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8270. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

Similar pendants representing crocodile heads were also worn, and multiple representations of the reptile were found on courtyard plaques as well. The crocodile is viewed as Olokun's military enforcer, but a proverb also refers to the Oba's tenacity: "When a crocodile grips its prey, it doesn't let go."

Snakes frequently appear in Benin art as well: on the palace turrets, on plaques, emerging from the nostrils of ritual specialist on brass heads, pendants, and vessels, and on other objects. Most Benin animal portrayals are not species-specific, so it is often difficult to know which variety of snake is depicted. Poisonous snakes are



Figure xxx. These two royal brass thrones were made for Oba Esigie (left) and Oba Eresonyen (right), respectively; Oba Eresonyen's was a copy of Esigie's. Both were made by Edo male artists, Benin City, Nigeria. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photos are from Felix von Luschan's Die Altertümer von Benin. Berlin and Leipzig: Walter De Gruyter & Vo., 1919, figs. 814 and 813. Public domain. Left: 16th century. H 15.16″. Right: 18th century. H 15.75.

often associated with ritual specialists and their medicinal power, said to extend to their breath. The puff adder is allied to riches, while the non-poisonous python–since it is at home in the water as well as the land–is part of the world of Olokun. Two royal thrones are supported by snakes that are presumed to be pythons (Figure xxx), their surfaces covered with land and water animals. While the seat of the earlier



Figure xxx. A chief's priestly stool. Edo, Benin City, Nigeria. Photo by Hamo Sassoon, 1930s-1970s. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 2005.113.209. Creative Commons BY-NC-ND-4.0.

is example bears two crocodiles and two mudfish, as well as patterns, the later version is covered with blacksmith's tools, simian faces, an elephant with trunk-hand, and two pythons who have swallowed a human being each, a fist protruding from each mouth. While the meaning of some of the imagery remains obscure, each includes references to supernatural medicines and to power. In form, they do not resemble the modern throne, but they have a wooden analogue in the shape of stools still owned by priests and chiefs acting in a priestly capacity (Figure xxx). These stools are also supported by two intertwining pythons, and frogs–a reference to medicine–frequently appear in relief on their bases. It's possible that the thrones were used by the Oba during altar activities, rather than at public festivities.

Mudfish frequently appear on Benin art. Plaques show them–as they do other fish–swimming in the water, as well as coiled and skewered, the way they're smoked for sale and consumption. But Benin has many varieties of mudfish. While all are related to the water, and all constitute liminal animals, only one type carries an electrical charge. This electrical mudfish is associated with the Oba, because he is said to have the power to shock and awe those in his presence, just as the mudfish physically shocks individuals. Frequently the Oba is depicted with mudfish legs, a feature that aligns him with Olokun, ruler of the waters, his divine counterpart (Figure xxx). This is a glorifying image; here, the Oba shows his mastery of his bush counterpart, the leopard. Carved tusks and other ivories frequently show him similarly holding crocodiles. However, these images hold two messages: one stresses the divine nature of the ruler, the other reminds him of a cautionary tale.



Figure xxx. The Oba, clothed with beads, including the bead that makes others tremble in his presence, is seen with electric mudfish replacing his legs. This is a reference to the deity Olokun; in one sense, all Obas of Benin are identified with the god. On the other hand, he is clearly the Oba and not the deity, for he holds two tamed palace leopards, as marked by the bells around their necks. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 16th century. H 15.16″ x W 12.6″. © Trustees of the British Museum, Af1898,0115.30. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

In the early 15th century, Oba Ohen was on the throne. He chafed at the control the chiefs had over him, even restricting his movement outside the palace by confining him with a constant entourage. At night, he snuck out of the house and even went outside the city walls. While the Oba can marry just about any woman he chooses, he is forbidden to marry his relations and the offspring of a few other families. A young woman from one of these families caught his eye, and he began to court her surreptitiously. One of his chiefs was suspicious of his nocturnal movements and followed him.

When he saw he crossed a bridge, he confronted him the next day, but the monarch claimed he had stayed at home all night. The chief collected a slow-acting mystical poison and placed it under the bridge, cursing it: “This shall harm no one but the royal one who denied; if he crosses the bridge, may it strike him.” He also vowed to discover what the monarch was up to. The Oba almost was caught by a search party, but was warned by a young palace page who was standing watch outside the young woman’s house. He quickly dressed the two of them in a cloth and stuck some feathers in it, dancing out of the house with the page, and bringing her into the harem in the guise of a masquerade (see video below).

The Oba didn’t need to leave the palace again, but the chief continued to watch him carefully. One day the Oba felt a numbness in his lower legs. They grew rubbery, and he could no longer walk. One cannot sit on the throne with a severe physical disability, and he was concerned for his survival. He convinced his pages he was transforming into Olokun himself and instructed them to keep his secret. He had always waited for his chiefs to enter his meeting room before coming in himself, but now he would already be seated before the first chief appeared, and wait until they departed before leaving for his private chambers. The poisoner thought his medicine had worked but wanted to be sure. He hid when the chiefs were dismissed and saw the pages helping the Oba move. Oba Ohen caught him spying, however, and executed him. The chiefs were suspicious since their colleague had never left the palace, but the monarch denied he knew anything about the chief’s fate. Rebellion was in the air. The chiefs dug a pit before the throne and covered it with a handsome mat. As the Oba approached it on a meeting day, the mat gave way and he was trapped. The chiefs entered the room and stoned him to death with rocks painted white to resemble lumps of chalk. Because of the awe the Oba inspires, he is said to never drink or eat–except for chalk, the substance of joy and purity. In this way, regicide had an innocuous yet cynical face–his chiefs were “feeding” him. Every year during a ceremony, high-ranking chiefs mime an inquiry for their missing chiefly leader, and the Oba then shrugs, as if to say, “I don’t know.” Through both ritual and imagery, the monarch is reminded that, great though he is, even he must pay for the consequences of his actions.

Masquerades and Ceremonies



Figure xxx. Ovia masqueraders dancing during their annual festival. Edo male artists, Ugbineh village, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 2017. Single frame from Independent Television and Radio’s video, “Ugbineh Community Festival Features on Heritage.”

While the Edo do have masquerades, most are village-based. Many are tied to the worship of hero-deities who lived in the distant past, transformed into rivers out of pique or vexation, and became deified. These include Ovia, a woman who married a king, suffered from the jealousy and conniving of her co-wives, and turned into a river in her despair. A set of villages—far from the majority of Edo—are dedicated to Ovia and perform an annual (or periodic, depending on the village) festival in her honor. During this celebration, which can last for one to 12 weeks, male participants camp away from home in Ovia’s sacred grove. They abstain from women, instruct younger members in a secret language, and some appear every other day as masquerades that represent former Ovia worshippers—that is, their most recently deceased paternal ancestor. The masquerade’s performance is meant to reconcile the sexes for common goals and ensure peace, but masqueraders also visit private homes. In exchange for small gifts, they bless or curse at the petitioner’s request. Like many other Edo masquerades, Ovia followers wear cloth covered with fresh palm fronds, a substance whose smell is believed to repel evil. They lack wooden masks, instead covering their faces with cloth and wearing fiber headpieces ornamented with red, black, and white feathers. Lappets of red cloth and applied mirrors spin out and flash in the sun when the dancers perform acrobatically.



Figure xxx. This wooden mask’s use was confined to Ughoton, Benin’s river port. Its extremely geometric abstraction originates with the Ijo people who are famed canoemen on the Niger Delta’s rivers and have a settlement in a nearby village. The British confiscated seven or eight different mask types in 1897. Edo male artist, Ughoton, Benin Kingdom, 19th century. L 24". Indiana University’s Sidney and Lois Eskenazi Museum of Art, Raymond and Laura Wielgus Collection, 78.11.2.



Figure xxx. This wooden mask represents a chief wearing a high beaded *odigba* collar and the *udahae* beaded headband. This and many other different entities are depicted in Ekpo masquerades. Edo male artist, Nigeria, 20th century before 1970. H 14.17″. Musee du Quai Branly, 73.1970.2.2.

There are some Edo masquerades that do include wooden masks. These too are village-based, and none are found throughout the kingdom. At Ughoton, the kingdom's old river port, abstract masks represent water spirits, placated to ensure smooth canoe passage and successful trading. Ekpo masks, found to the southeast of the capital, are part of an



Figure xxx. This is one of the original seven Ododua brass masquerade crests. It represents the male "baby" of the group–who is its leader–and feathers would have been inserted in the projection on top. Emanating from both corners of the mouth are stylized elephant "trunk-hands" holding medicinal leaves. Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 18th century. H 12.87″. Photo by Dietrich Graf. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 8060. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA.

ensemble meant to combat communicable diseases and purify the land. Like Ovia performers, these masqueraders wear fresh palm fronds. They represent a panoply of society members—the masquerade's early 17th-century founder, ritual specialists, chiefs (Figure xxx), policemen, deities–and animals. While they appear at annual, home-based festivals, they can also be called in to provide entertainment for chiefly functions. Though spiritual, they are held in less awe than Ovia masquerades.



Figure xxx. The seven Odudua masqueraders, their headpieces cast in the early 20th century as replacements for the 18th-century versions that were looted in 1897. Single frame from NTA Benin's video "Oba of Benin celebration of Ugie Ododua Day 1," 2019.

Other localized masquerades are performed throughout the kingdom, but only one is a royal masquerade that performs exclusively at the palace. This is the Ododua masquerade, whose costume is made of red cloth, not fresh palm fronds, and whose crests are brass with decorative feather additions (Figs. xxx and xxx). The masquerade, introduced by Oba Eresoyen in the 18th century, is associated with purification and fasting.

Another masquerade, Ekoko n'Ute, visits the palace annually (see video below), but is based in a village outside the city walls. It consists of two figures with feathered headdresses–the male, whose face is disguised by cloth, and the female, who wears a wooden antelope mask. They generally pay homage to the Oba during one of the minor "greeting" days before a major December festival. They depict the historical early 15th-century Oba Ohen and the wife he smuggled into the royal harem, mentioned above.



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Self-Referential Historical Art



Figure xxx. A 2017 calendar featuring Oba Ewuare II. Benin City, Nigeria, 2016. © Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika; Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, III C 45604. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA, color strip cropped.



Figure xxx. This commercially-printed textile bears the portrait of the late Oba Erediauwa, and marked his 30th year on the throne. Benin City, Nigeria. © Trustees of the British Museum, 2009; 2022.1. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The Edo are quite aware of their history, and many homes in Benin City include framed photographic portraits of the monarch or calendars that bear his image (Figure xxx). On public occasions of celebration or mourning, his visage may also appear on wax print cloth, which usually quickly sells out at the market (Figure xxx). The Edo are proud of their Oba and the kingdom's history, with many schools and streets named after past monarchs. When citizens spot what they perceive to be disrespect towards the Oba, they are quick to respond. When one of Nigeria's top singers put out a video showing her dressed in the attire of a Yoruba Oba, a Hausa emir, and



Figure xxx. Both the palace sculpture of Oba Ozolua and the wall relief of Oba Eweka II were made from a mixture of clay and cement. The sculpture of Ozolua was made in the late 1940s, as were a series of reliefs. Weathering necessitated replacement of the latter in the early 1960s. Ovia Idah, Edo male artist, Benin City, Nigeria, 20th century. Photo by Lillian Trager, 1973. University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Library Collection, UWPMC040_B10_F04_035. © The University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0.



Figure xxx. Popular Nigerian singer Yemi Alade performs in attire that mimics that of Benin's Oba. This music video had much longer sequences that depicted a Hausa emir, a Yoruba ruler, and an Igbo chief, but received a hailstorm of criticism on Instagram and YouTube from Edo who felt that a woman wearing similar attire was a mark of disrespect. Single frame from Yemi Alade's "Oga," 2019.



Figure xxx. Statue of Emotan and detail. John A. Danford, British sculptor, Benin City, Nigeria, 1954. **Left**: Single frame from gabriela Moneyrewards' video, "Benin City," 2010. **Right**: Single frame from Independent Television and Radio's "HERITAGE: EMOTAN IN BENIN HISTORY," 2017.



Figure xxx. Public sculpture of 16th-century monarch Oba Esigie, with a kneeling Portuguese envoy before him. Edo sculptor, Benin City, Nigeria, 21st century. Photo courtesy Ose Schalz, 2018.

While Obas' brass heads appeared on ancestral altars, Esigie appeared on certain plaques, and emblematic royal portraits were carved into altar tusks, truly public representations of royals–as opposed even to palace imagery placed on or outside the building's exterior beginning in the 1940s (Figure xxx)–have a more recent history (see also Chapter 3.8). The burial place of Emotan, a woman who assisted the 15th-century Oba Ewuare to gain the throne, had been a shrine since her death, its position near the marked by a tree. After two instances when the tree fell, it was replaced in 1954 by a naturalistic bronze sculpture (Figure xxx), but the work remained a shrine sculpture, not true public art. In 1987, however, the Bendel Arts Council revealed the first four public sculptures in the city, calling for individuals and organizations to sponsor more. Within ten years these had multiplied to about a dozen, yet none depicted former or present rulers.



Figure xxx. This public sculpture depicts the 15th-century monarch Oba Ewuare, flanked by Chiefs Osa and Osuan. Edo sculptor, Benin City, Nigeria, 21st century. Photo by Samuel Egohman, 2018, courtesy Google Maps.

In the 21st century, however, naturalistic depictions of rulers appeared along the ring road just outside the palace, the work of academically-trained sculptors. These cement images of past Obas stand high on plinths (Figs. xxx and xxx) in the center of Benin, constantly passed by vehicular and human traffic. They are almost like morphed versions of multi-figural16th-century plaques, shifting from reliefs to free-standing figures, from hieratic to natural scale (except for the leopards, which far exceed their natural size), from generic physiognomies to individualized faces. They are a constant reminder of the glories of the past, featuring selected monarchs in what is meant to be a growing royal gallery.

With these works, the historical underpinnings of the monarchy are reinforced outside as well as inside the palace, and history looks large over indigenes and non-indigenes alike through large-scale figures and felines whose watchful eyes oversee the busy junction that once was part of the palace.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Analyzing and Discussing African Art

2.1: Elements of Design

2.2: Principles and Considerations of Design

2.3: “Rules” for Traditional African Art

2.4: Stylistic Analysis

2.5: Contextual Analysis

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2.1: Elements of Design

Learning Objectives

- Identify key elements of design in two- and three-dimensional works
- Identify whether a traditional artwork conforms or departs from standard African approaches to art
- Analyze the stylistic traits of single and comparative artworks using art historical vocabulary
- Analyze the contextural traits of single and comparative artworks using art historical vocabulary
- Record key information about the context of an artwork in lectures and readings
- Memorize the ethnic group/artist, name, country, and century that identify an artwork.
- Create a study plan and an effective test strategy
- Identify key sources and plan research

The study of art history, whether that of Africa or any other part of the world, requires a specific way of looking at objects and describing them through the use of a discipline-based vocabulary. **Stylistic analysis** recognizes key visual aspects of two- and three-dimensional objects, characterizing them by discussing the **elements and principals of design**. The elements of design vary, depending on whether an object is flat (two dimensional; i.e., can be measured only via length and width) or not (three dimensional; i.e., its length, width, and depth can be mentioned. Although there is overlap, we will examine them separately.

Two-dimensional Objects

Drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, flat textiles, flat basketry (like mats), and collages are all two dimensional. We can consider them in terms of their line, shape, tone, texture, depth and (if the work is not black and white), color. In traditional African art, two-dimensional work mostly consists of flat textiles and some flat beaded panels, as well as Ethiopian paintings and Islamic illuminated manuscripts. Contemporary African art includes drawings, prints, photographs, and collages throughout the continent. Though style, theme, and impulse may vary considerably, the elements of design do not.



Figure 94. Betty Manyolo, “African Fable.” Uganda, linocut. National Archive, Contemporary African Art Select List number 128.

Line

Two-dimensional artworks may include actual, contour, directional, and implied lines. Actual lines are created by the artist’s hand movements, and are the marks made by moving a tool from one point to another. They may be curved or straight. The latter can be horizontal (parallel to the top and bottom of the surface), vertical (parallel to the sides of the surface), or diagonal. Lines have varying width and can be light or dark depending on the pressure on the tool. Lines, like all of the elements of designs, have their own character and personality. A light, looping line may have a carefree or sensual feel, while **verticals and horizontals create a sense of stability**. If an artist wants to insert a feeling of motion or power, **diagonals indicate action**. While lines can simply

indicate a mark, they can also describe an object–an outline. Placing them close together and crossing them may produce the effect of shade, or they may be rhythmically spaced to create a pattern.

Contours indicate an object's edges, but they do not have to be actual lines where one object's edge is perceived against a background or against another object, that non-drawn edge is considered a line, and can have a personality like a drawn line. Likewise, a limb or other section of an object has contours, but the whole of the limb can also be considered a non-drawn line describing a direction. Lastly, there are invisible lines that are psychological in nature; when two figures in an artwork look at each other, or a figure looks at a thing, there is an invisible sightline between the two.

Look at Figure 94 and consider what kinds of lines dominate; they are illustrated by the red overlay in Figure 95.

Shapes



Figure 95. Curving lines dominate Manyolo's print.

Shapes can be descriptive, identifying something in the real world–a person, house, rock. When the objects are natural, such as human beings, animals or plants, the shapes are often described as **organic**. Shapes can also be **geometric**, describing squares, circles, ovals, rectangles, etc. These do not necessarily have to be mathematically precise. Sometimes shapes do not result from the artist producing a shape, but from thebackground spaces around, within, or between created shapes; they are then the result of **negative space**.

Tone

Tone has to do with **lightness and darkness**; in a black and white work, tone refers to the distribution of black, white, and a range of greys. In a painted work, tones have to do with the relative lightness or darkness of a color section–if they were copied on a black and white photocopier, would two colored section be the same grey or would they be clearly differentiated by tone?

Tone can affect our perceptions of depth. A flat circle suddenly looks like a sphere when tone is added–**shadows** makes things appear to recede, while **highlights** make them seem closer. When you watch the video below, notice how the artist makes the face look three-dimensional through his manipulation of tone.



Figure 96. Detail of Chris Ofili's "Princess of the Posse" (1999), showing the actual raised texture of paint and other materials. Photo Rocor, cropped. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

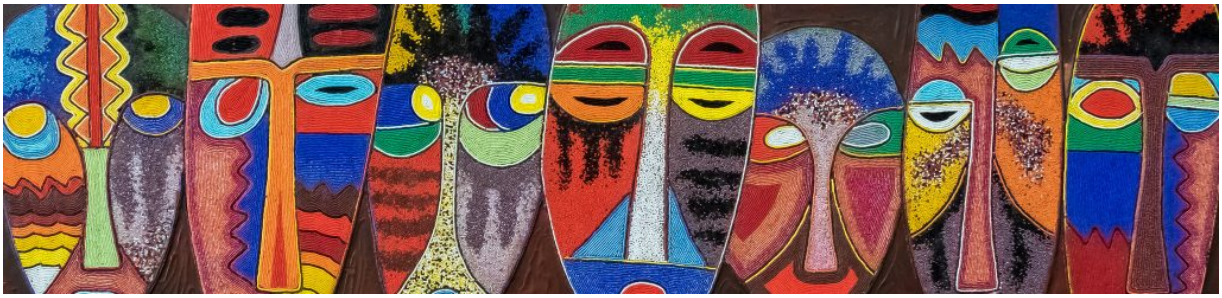


Figure 97a. These details of Nigerian artist Jimoh Buraimoh's "Masks," at the African Union Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has an actual texture produced by the beads he used. Photo Andrew Moore, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0, smaller detail cropped.



Figure 97b.

Texture

Texture relates to the way **things actually feel** (thick paint strokes, for example, that are raised from the background) (Figs. 96; 97), or to the **illusion of known textures** (a surface that is made of paint, but looks exactly like fur or metal because the artist understands how these materials reflect light and is able to mimic that). The video of one of Kelvin Okafor's pencil drawings below demonstrate that–even without color–illusionistic textures can be produced by considering how different materials absorb and reflect light.



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Depth

By definition, two-dimensional art cannot have actual depth. However, artists often try to create the illusion of depth through a variety of techniques. One of the simplest is **overlapping**. When we see one shape clearly, and it partially hides another shape, we perceive the complete shape as being in front of the blocked shape.



Figure 98. These cows overlap each other, and our eye interprets their relative positions–the cow that is blocked by another is "in front of it," even though all are on a flat surface. Rock painting, Tassili, Algeria, 5000-3000 BCE. Photo Patric Gruban, 2006, cropped. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0. Click to ENLARGE.

The **position** of two equally-sized shapes on a flat surface can also suggest a distance relationship–things at the bottom seem closer to the viewer than things at the top do. Figure 98 includes a dark cow at the top that no other cows overlap. Nonetheless, because it is at the top of the composition, we read it as being farther away. This something operates with size–if two objects are the same size in the real world, and one is larger in a painting, our real-world cues can suggest the larger one is closer to us, depending on what other cues are present.

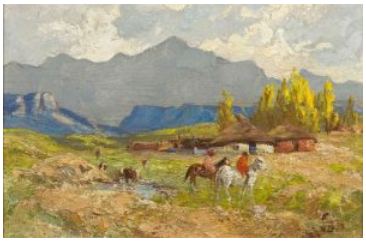


Figure 99. Allerley Glossop's (South Africa, 1870-1955) "Riders in Lesotho" illustrates the traits of atmospheric perspective and how it indicates deep space in a landscape. Public domain.

When an artist is painting a landscape vista, several factors can suggest a deep space: objects in the foreground are crisp, while those in the distance are less focused; objects in the foreground have more distinct colors, while those in the distance tend toward grey; objects in the foreground are dark, while those in the distance become paler. This combination of traits in landscape depictions of deep space is known as **atmospheric perspective** (Figure 99). It mimics actual traits that can be observed in nature, when our perception of color shifts depending on distance, as does our perception of sharp focus and fuzziness.

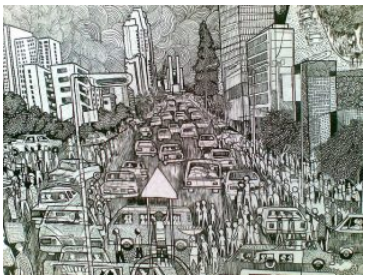


Figure 100. This detail of a cityscape by Malodi, an academically-trained artist from Kinshasa, DRC, demonstrates a loose but confident adaptation of one-point perspective while deviating from its scientific precision. Photo Fred R, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Scientific perspective is a systematic, mathematical effort to reproduce–on a flat surface–the way objects are perceived by our eyes in reality: standing in the middle of railroad tracks, the parallel rails appear to converge at the horizon, even though we know they don't. Those who are accustomed to the realism of photographs and film find scientific perspective to be the most realistic way to show depth, because we are trained to read those flat images as representations of three dimensions. Artists trained in this system refer to one-point perspective, two-point perspective, and so on–each of these posits a shift in the viewer's position. Some artists do not know the technical rules of scientific perspective, but are able to observe some of its characteristics, such as the apparent diminishing of structures as they recede towards the horizon. They may employ these observations to create an imperfect **perspective effect** that nonetheless indicates depth. Other trained artists are comfortable with scientific perspective, but bend its rules in places for a looser effect (Figure 100).

Color



Figure 101. This pigment color wheel includes primary, secondary, and tertiary colors, with complements directly opposite each other. Image Sakurambo. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

Not all two-dimensional work uses color, although tone is a constant element even in color work. In two-dimensional art, color is created via the application of **pigments**, or coloring agents. These may be combined with a **binder** that makes them usable (rather than dry powder) before they are (usually) and allows them to bond with a surface. The pigment and binder may need a **diluent** that allows them to be more liquid during application. The binder and diluent together are sometimes referred to as the **vehicle**. In oil paint, the pigment is combined with the binder of oil and the diluent is usually turpentine. Acrylic paint combines the binder with acrylic and uses water as the most common diluent; when dry, the liquid acrylic turns to plastic. Watercolor uses gum arabic as the binder for pigment, and water is its diluent.



Figure 102. This Johannesburg mural is nearly monochromatic, full of browns. Even the red and green are of very low saturation. Photo Pascal Parent, 2012. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

There are three **primary colors** or **hues** of pigment that, mixed with each other or with the addition of black or white, produce all other colors. These are red, yellow, and blue. **Secondary colors** result from mixing any two of these (yellow plus blue=green; yellow plus red=orange; red plus blue=violet). There are six **tertiary colors** resulting from a combination of primary and secondary colors (yellow-green, yellow-orange, blue-green, blue-violet, red-orange, red-violet). Primary, secondary, and tertiary colors can be arranged on a **color wheel** (Figure 101) that cycles from yellow to orange to red to violet to blue to green and back to yellow. When colors are opposite one another on the color wheel, they are known as **complementary colors**. When placed next to each other at full strength, they show the greatest contrast and almost vibrate. When mixed together, they become brown. We refer to hues in their purest, brightest form as **fully saturated**, and the addition of a complement reduces their saturation. When white is added to a color, it becomes lighter, also known as a **tint** of the color. If black is added, it becomes darker, or a color's **shade**. These terms (together referred to as **values** of a color) apply to pigment only, and are theoretical. That is, different pigments produce varying kinds of blue–there is not one blue alone. Likewise, colors used in lighting operate with completely different primaries.

The effects of color vary considerably. Artists can use them to replicate colors in the real world or apply them abstractly according to whim. When their works are basically variations on one hue, the word **monochromatic** describes the artwork (Figure 102). Other paintings may favor **warm colors** (yellow-orange-red) or **cool colors** (violet-blue-green). Colors can have **symbolic meanings** that vary according to culture, with associations to power, purity, melancholy and other characteristics or moods.

Three-dimensional Objects

Sculpture, ceramic objects (other than tilework), and architecture all are three-dimensional. We can consider them in terms of their line, form, light and shadow, texture, color, and mass. Most traditional African art is three-dimensional and includes carvings, castings, pottery, basketry, jewelry, clothing that is not merely flat, and buildings. Contemporary African three-dimensional art includes sculptures, ceramics, jewelry, much clothing, basketry, and buildings.

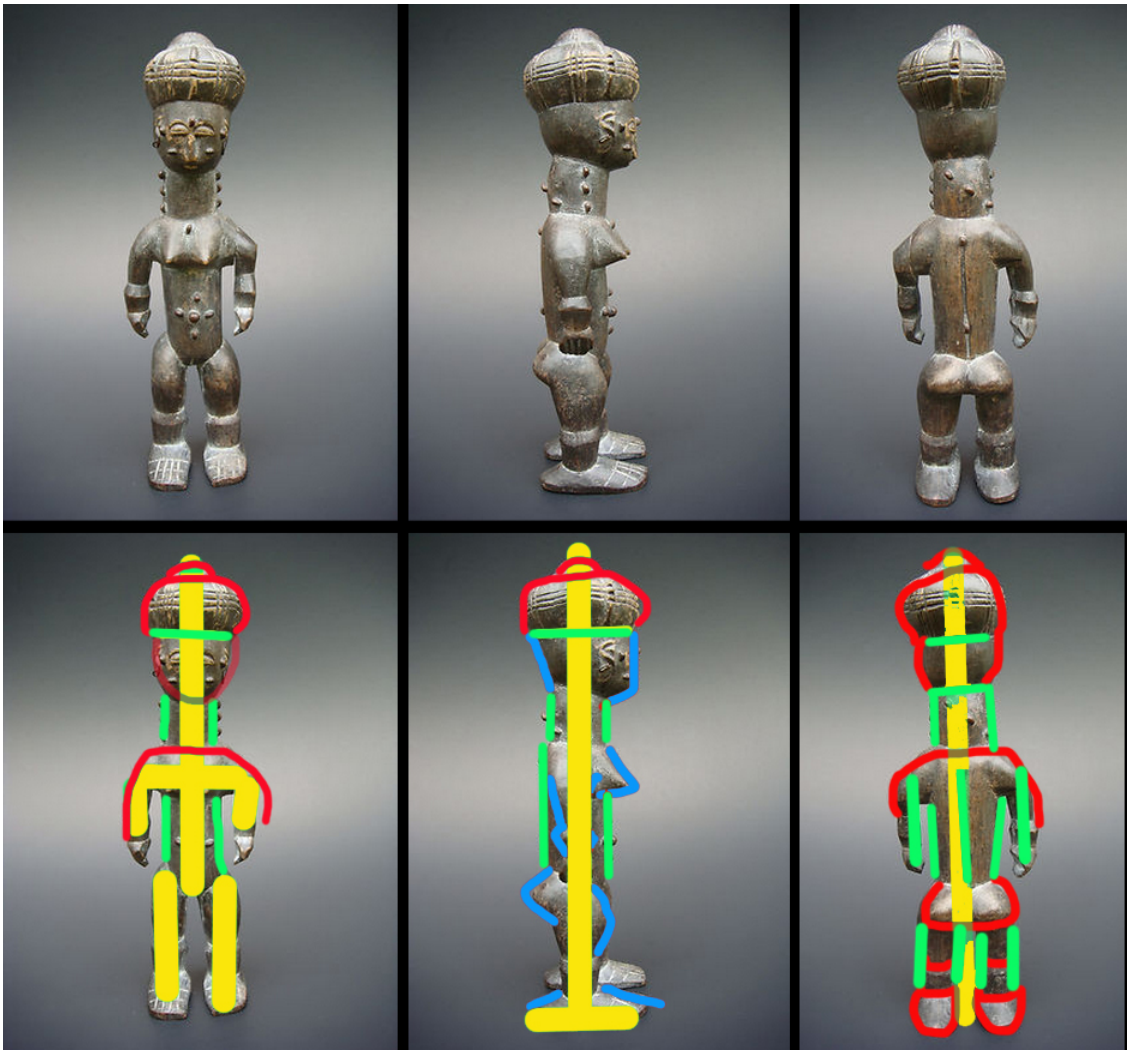


Figure 103. The diagram of this Attie sculpture demonstrates how certain contour lines shift their domination, depending on the viewer's position: red represents curves, thin green lines represent verticals and horizontals, blue represents diagonals, and thick yellow lines represent the basic verticality of the figure's posture. Attie figure from Cote d'Ivoire.

In three-dimensional work, we aren't actually referring to the mark a theoretical point makes as it moves, but typically discussing the lines produced by the edges of forms, or invisible directional lines made by forms (a sculpted figure's outstretched arm, for instance, might create a horizontal "line") (Figure 103).



Figure 104. Hausa home in Zinder, Niger. Photo Roland, 2007, duplicated with diagram. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.



Figure 105. This Ijo mask from Nigeria can be described in terms of geometric shapes and solid forms. It has cylindrical eyes, a nose that is a triangular solid, a circular face with a forehead that is a semi-circular solid. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.323. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Photo Tony De Camillo. Public domain.

When considering buildings and some sculpture, lines can be created not only by the edges of the structure, but by the decoration of its surface. In Figure 104, the Hausa building is a basic rectangle with some vertical extensions along the roofline. The area around the door is built up, however, creating two more verticals, and the individual rectangles that decorate the upper surface of the house are arranged in a thick horizontal band. That "line" is parallel to the horizontal edges of the building's roof and foundation, as well as the top of the door frame. The reinforced verticals compete with the horizontals–does one actually dominate, or do they balance each other out? Often the answer is clearer than it is in this example.

Form



Figure 107. The almond and coffee-bean eye conventions. Clockwise from top left: detail of a Baule heddle pulley, Brooklyn Museum, Museum Expedition 1922, Robert B. Woodward Memorial Fund, 22.814. Creative Commons-BY; S N Barid, Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0; Paul, 2009, Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0, cropped; Detail Akan terracotta figure, Ghana. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.422. Gift of Charles B. Benenson; B.A. 1933. Public domain.



Figure 106. Fang, Gabon. Marionette Head?; 19th century. 12 5/16″ x 6 9/16′ x 5 15/16″. Brooklyn Museum; Gift of Corice and Armand P. Arman; 1991.169.3. Creative Commons-BY 3.0.

Form is the three-dimensional equivalent of the 2-D term "shape." Some African sculptures are based on geometric solids (Figure 105), while others employ organic shapes, whether they are sculpture or architecture. Certain forms are common in human representations and specific terms describe them. One is the "heart-shaped face" (Figure 106). This convention, often seen in Central African traditional art, confines the facial features to a sunken area, the browline forming a heart-like double arch, with the mouth often positioned where the point of a heart might be.

Sometimes individual facial features are stylized in ways that resemble other objects, and their names are used as descriptors, such as the "coffee-bean eye" or "almond eye" (Figure 107).

Light and Shadow

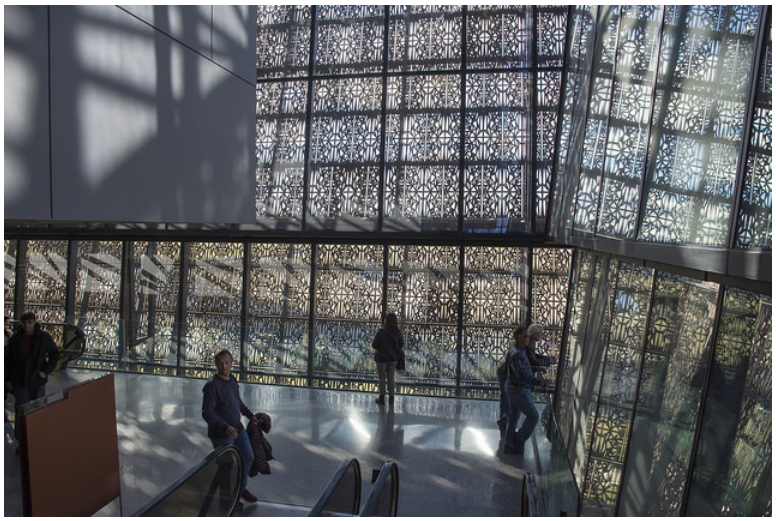
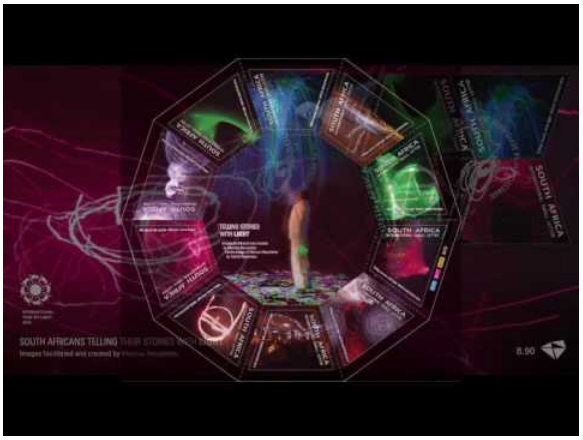


Figure 108. The exterior of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC was designed by David Adjaye (Britain/Ghana) and includes metal screening. When sunlight passes through it, interesting shadows are cast on the interior, a planned effect. Photo Tim Smith, 2017. Creative Commons CC BY-NC 2.0.

Light and shadow are not consistently discussed when considering 3-D objects and structures, since they are often out of the artist's control.

Sculptors and architects do, however, sometimes consciously incorporate light and shadow as a design feature. This can be done through the use of materials that actually illuminate, such as neon, LED lights or glow sticks (see video below), or may result from planned interaction with natural sunlight's refractions or broken shadows (Figure 108).



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: pb.libretexts.org/africa/?p=145



Figure 109. This Kongo sculpture from the Democratic Republic of Congo is wooden, but feathers, nails and other metal bits, cloth, a mirror, resin, a horn, shell, and seeds add to the work's complex textures. Courtesy Quai Branly, 73.1968.7.2.

Three-dimensional texture always refers to actual rather than illusionistic texture. It is produced both by the material and the artist's working of that material. Some artists create works with all-over textures, while others contrast smooth expanses with areas of submerged or raised surfaces.

In African traditional art, texture also frequently result from the use of multiple mediums in one piece. A wooden sculpture, for example, might have a feathered headdress, be dressed in actual cloth, and wear a beaded necklace with metal earrings. These all provide varied tactile sensations for those allowed to touch the artworks. Even without actual touch, viewers are experienced in the sensations produced by those materials, and can conceptualize what the surfaces feel like (Figure 109).

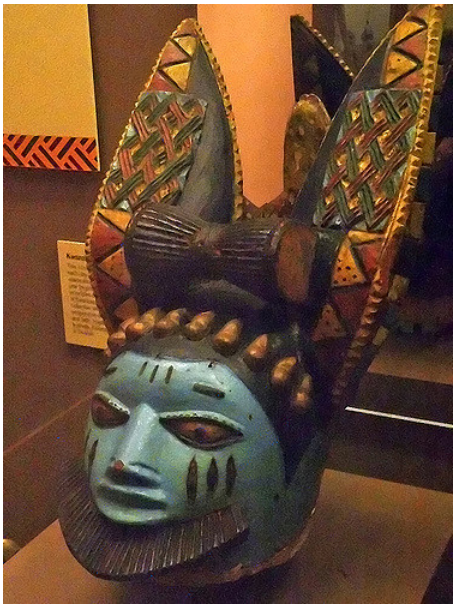


Figure 110. This wooden Yoruba mask from Nigeria (in Chicago's Field Museum) uses blue for the skin color, although a human being is being depicted–it's the artist's choice. Photo Mary Harrsch, 2005. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Color

Color can be painted onto a surface or the material used may have a color. Like two-dimensional usage of color, it can mimic observed colors in the real world or be simply the choice of the artist (Figure 110). Its use can be symbolic or selected for its visual effect alone. Concepts relating to primary, secondary, tertiary, and complementary colors are identical to those of two-dimensional work, as are the definitions of tints and shades.

Mass



Figure 111. This Mambila sculpture from the Nigeria-Cameroon border is quite massive, with minimal space flowing in and around the figure–although the open mouth lightens its mass somewhat. Quai Branly, 73-1986-1-88. Photo Siren-Com, 2008. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0.

In three-dimensional art, mass refers to the apparent "weight" of the object, not to its size. A solid block of stone, for example, is equally massive whether 3″ square or 3′ square. If an artist wanted to lighten the mass, he or she would remove segments of the material so that parts of the original block are gone; these could be on the surface or could cut right through the block. How massive is a work? It's often a term used comparatively, in order to state that Work A is more massive than Work B. Envision yourself as an employee of a packing company trying to crate an artwork in the smallest possible box. Any remaining space must be filled with small styrofoam particles. A truly massive work would fill the box without room for any particles. The more imaginary particles the packer needs, the less massive the work is (Figure 111).



Figure 112. The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, designed by Ghanian-British architect David Adjaye. Photo Macfawlty, 2016. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0.

In architecture, a building's mass can be lightened not only by changing its shape, but by making it transparent via a glass/plexiglass external surface. This kind of transparency has a visual effect similar to that of carving away the surface, although the surface remains solid. It is particularly apparent when illuminated from inside at night, which maximizes the transparent effect (Figure 112).

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2.2: Principles and Considerations of Design

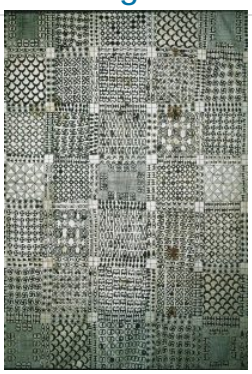


Figure 113. This cloth is united by its overall color scheme and the use of rectangles, but varies in the dimensions of the rectangles and the patterns that fill them. Adinkra cloth, Dagomba people (Akan), Ghana, 19th century. © British Museum, Af1818,1114.23. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The elements of design that we've just examined act as the artist's building blocks. They work together in an arrangement that follows basic principles and considerations. That combination is known as the **composition**.



Figure, early 20th century. 25″ x 8.25″ x 6.5″. Brooklyn Museum, 2004.75.1. Gift of Dorothea and Leo Rabkin. Creative Commons-BY.

Unity and Variety

What makes one artwork better than a similar one? While personal taste is certainly a factor, this sort of judgment devolves upon the artist successfully balancing **unity** and **variety** within a composition. If the elements of design are not unified by some means, they will seem to have been randomly included, without visual cohesion. Varied shapes might be united through a similar use of line or via color, or an all-over texture might unite disparate forms (Figure 1130.

Too much unification, however, can be boring. If a work is dominated by rectangles, for example–a unifying element–they might vary in size to provide variety. If color unifies, as in a monochromatic painting, it might vary in its saturation, or through a spectrum of tints and shades. Sometimes the individual components of a piece can be well-executed, but if the delicate balance of unity and variety is not achieved, it can seem lacking.

Balance

There's another kind of balance artists consider: a balance of elements that avoid making a work seem visually lopsided. This can be achieved in varied ways.



Figure 115. In African art, bilateral symmetry sometimes is not absolute. This wool-and-cotton wall hanging is fairly symmetrical, balanced on either side of a horizontal axis, but there are minor variations of pattern and color. Still, it is more symmetrical than not. Fulani (?) weaver, Northern Ghana or Mali, 19th century. H. 51″ x W. 120″. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1971.30. Rogers Fund, 1971. Public domain.

One of the most effective ways to achieve a balanced composition is through symmetry, a principle of identical or similar forms that balance each other around an axis. There are various types of symmetry, but **bilateral symmetry** is the most standard choice, perhaps because our own bodies follow this kind of organization. In bilateral symmetry, the objects on one side of an imaginary axis are the mirror image of those on the other. That is, if you drew a line from the middle of your head to the space between your evenly spaced feet, one side is exactly like the other: one eye on either side of the axis, half a nose and half a mouth, an arm on each side, a hip on each side, a leg similarly placed. In art, that imaginary line can be vertical or horizontal (or, in square compositions, diagonal) in order to create bilateral symmetry (Figure 114).

In African art, symmetry is not always a precise mirror, but more often a close approximation (Figure 115).



Figure 116. This Edo brass lid from the 19th-century Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, is an example of radial symmetry (although the single snakehead demonstrates that this work only approximates complete symmetry). From A.H.L. Pitt-Rivers, Antique Works of Art from Benin (1900). Public domain.

Although bilateral symmetry is the most common kind of formal balance in African art, it is not the only type. **Radial symmetry** radiates from a central point, with forms or motifs balancing each other around that point Figure 116).

While symmetry is an effective manner of achieving balance and, particularly in the case of bilateral symmetry, achieving stability, it can appear bland to Western eyes because we have been trained to favor a more informal balance in many media. Symmetry, however, has certain advantages if a traditional artist is trying to convey, for example, a sense of dignity and permanence in a carved or cast figure. His choice has less to do with producing an “exciting” composition than it does with a result that satisfies societal requirements.

Asymmetry or Informal Balance

In an asymmetrical composition, any two halves of a work are not the same. If poorly done, the work loses appeal and seems unfinished and unbalanced, but if done well it can be a dynamic choice. The artist’s challenge is to satisfy the eye and mind by balancing through the use of shapes, color, tone, or texture. A large dull area, for instance, might be offset by a small bright section,

or a large smooth area with a small textured section. Our eyes are caught by the area that is different, that contrasts with its surroundings in some way.

Sometimes informal balance works with elements that appeal to the mind. Our brains are trained to recognize faces, and a composition full of a variety of plain geometric shapes might be balanced by one face placed elsewhere in the composition, since that stands out to us. Likewise, we are trained to be attracted by text, and the appearance of one relatively small word might prove an effective counterbalance to a large area of complex texture.

If we look at Victor Ekpuk's temporary installation below (Figure 117 and video), you'll notice a large dark shape at right, enclosing an abstract figure. That dark area is the largest, darkest shape in the work, and it's placed off to one side. How is informal balance achieved? Three figures are needed to balance its visual weight. The one at the extreme left works hardest–it is differentiated by the second largest black expanse, its filled-in body, and by the large white shape that backs it. In addition, it's placed on a diagonal, unlike the other figures, which draws the eye.

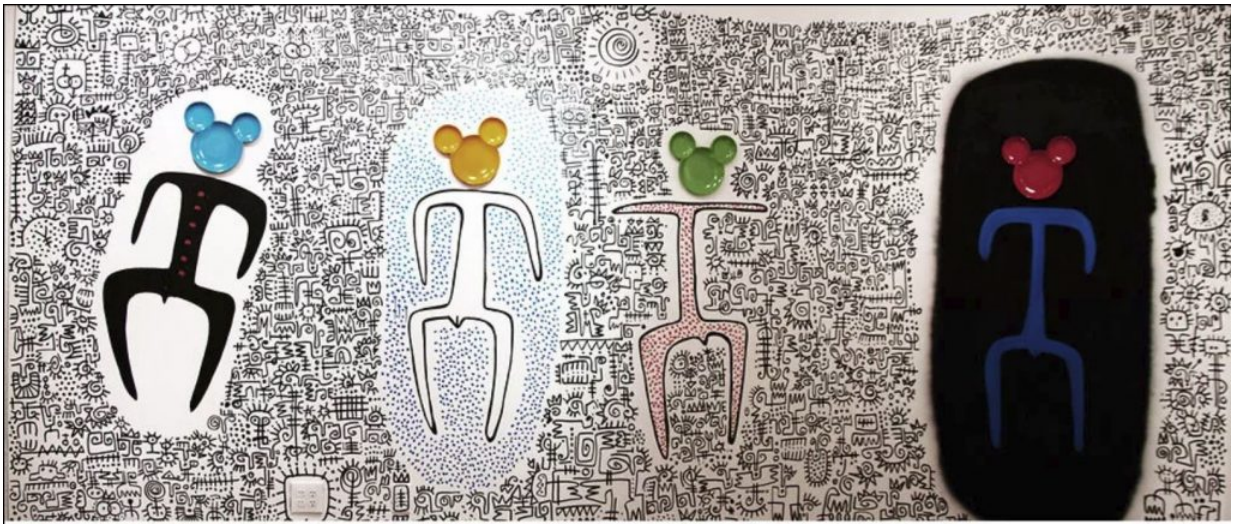


Figure 117. Victor Ekpuk, "Mickey on Broadway." Site-specific performance installation, Washington, DC, 2011. Ibibio, Nigeria. 21st c. Single frame of video below.

vimeo.com/36424841

The Focal Point and Moving through the Composition



Figure 118. The focal point consists of the two standing figures at right, but our eye is led left by the gesture of the white'uniformed man and the guns of his soldiers. Even the diagonal roof edges of the church at the rear lead our eye down to the shooting victims or back to the standing duo. Tshibumba Kanda Matulu. "The Martyrs of the Union Minière du Haut Katanga at the Stadium Formerly Called 'Albert I'; now 'Mobutu'." Democratic Republid of Congo, ca. 1975. Brooklyn Museum, 2010.1. Purchased with funds given by Ellen and Jerome L. Stern. Creative Commons-BY.

An artist might distribute shapes or colors or textures or tones evenly throughout a symmetrical composition. Without contrast, our eye tends to look at the center of such a work. The artist, however, may wish to force the viewer to look at a particular area first. That is called a focal point, and it can be anywhere within a composition. Artists use the elements of design to direct our eyes to the focal point. Often it is an area of contrast, or our eye is led to it through line or shape. After the focal point attracts our attention, other elements may lead us to explore different points of the composition. How? we may move along a directed path of lines, colors, shapes, or textures, or randomly search for like elements elsewhere in the composition (Figure 118).

Ekpuk's "Mickey on Broadway" accomplishes this by using the large dark shape and its enclosed figure as the focal point. We may next look at the white shape and its enclosed figure at left, because it has both a large black and a large white expanse. Next, we probably look at the two figures in the middle, because human shapes continue to draw our eye. After that, where? The black marks on the background may make us bounce through the composition, but the likelihood that the first set of these that we notice consists of the slightly larger circular shapes with radiating lines is fairly high–from like to like, the surrounded outlet, sun-like spiral at the middle of the top, smaller sun-like line drawings at the upper left and the mid-right.

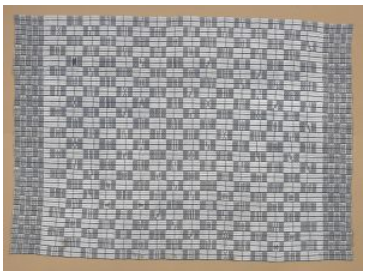


Figure 119. Asante kente cloth, Ghana, 1925-1950. H 113 3/8″ W 79 5/8″. Indianapolis Museum of Art, r; 2007.125. The Budd Stalnaker Collection of African Textiles. Public domain.

Ekpuk (Figure 117) unifies the work with similar line widths, though he varies their length, spacing, and direction. His drawn shapes are echoed in various parts of the background and the overall small patterns are all black, unifying the total. The four similarly-shaped figures vary in size, placement, and color. Notice other ways Ekpuk unifies the work. A dull red wash is behind the dots that fill the body of the second figure from the right, uniting it with color to the head of the figure on the extreme right. Larger dots of the same dull rod act as buttons on the figure to the extreme left. More dots (same kind of line) unite it to the second figure from the left, but this time they're placed in the white surround. While those dots are blue, they shift in color from top to bottom; the top blue is that of the extreme left figure's head, while the bottom blue dots are those of the body on the extreme right. The only two colors that appear once are those of the yellow and green heads, but they're placed in the middle of the composition and don't throw it off balance.

Rhythm



Figure 120. The Ewe men's strip cloth from Ghana syncopates its elements, creating a lively appearance. 1925-1975. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1984.212. Public domain.

When similar shapes, colors, or textures reoccur in a work, our eye movements as we move from one to another create a kind of rhythm. Some rhythms have absolute regularity (Figure 119), with equal intervals, intensity, and size. Others build to a crescendo or diminish to a descrescendo, while still others appear in an irregularly staggered, syncopated manner (Figure 120). We look at from one rhythmic component to the next, again to the artist's manipulative tune. Rhythmic components aren't necessarily prominent or even apparent in every artwork, but when they are, they employ one or more elements of design.

Scale

Scale is a term that relates to size, particularly to the size of a human being. That is, a small-scale artwork



Figure 121. This 17th-19th century
Akan chair from Ghana is actually a brass miniature counterweight for gold dust–it's only 1.5″ high. Detroit Institute of Arts, 2014.1029. Gift of Douglas H. Mayhew and Roberto J. Caballero in memory of Catherine Baker Mayhew.



Figure 122. Yinka Shonibare (Britain/Nigeria) "Nelson's Ship in a Bottle" (2010) is about 17.55 feet long, much larger than a typical ship in a bottle. It's scale insists on the viewer's attention. Made for Trafalgar Square; now at London's National Maritime Museum. Photo Tony Hisgett. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

is small in comparison to a person (Figure 121), while a large-scale piece is something an adult would consider big. In reproductions, this concept has little meaning. In person, however, size means a great deal. Large objects tend to have a greater visual impact than small ones, no matter other considerations. Like many design elements and principles, scale can add to the mood or personality of a work. Does it impose on the viewer or is its diminutive size admirable for the artist's ability to create a detailed miniature?

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2.3: “Rules” for Traditional African Art



Figure 123. Even a whistle often bears a human image. Holo artist, Democratic Republic of Congo, 19th-20th century. Ivory. Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art, 1969.S.62. The Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture, gift of Eugene and Margaret McDermott

Africa is immensely varied in visual expression. Even though our course concentrates on art south of the Sahara desert (with one upcoming exception), the variety of traditional art is still immense. Nonetheless, a group of traits applies generally to most figurative African traditional art. When these rules are broken, which sometimes happens, it is noteworthy.

Human-Centered



Figure 124. This Tsonga headrest from South Africa or Zimbabwe incorporates a rare depiction of an inanimate object without a human presence. © British Museum, Af1954,+23.1824. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Traditional African art is human-centered. This is true even in abstract terms: body arts are by definition concerned directly with human beings, structures are built on a human scale, textiles are meant to wrap around a person or decorate their environment, pots are meant for their direct use. Many utilitarian objects that require no ornamentation–combs, cups, spoons, whistles (Figure 123)–are nonetheless ornamented with human faces or bodies. In figurative terms, it is clear that most traditional African representations typically depict one of two things: human beings or animals. Landscape references do not exist, for the most part, nor does still life imagery of inanimate objects or flowers and fruit. When such portrayals occur, these exceptions deserve comment (Figure 124).



Figure 125. This machine-embroidered Asante textile from Ghana includes the elephant as a symbol of leadership, along with other leadership metaphors, including some inanimate object. 20th century. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 86.100.42. Gift of Roberta and Richard Simmons. Public domain. CLICK TO ENLARGE



Figure 126. The crocodiles on this masquerade's brass headpiece emerge from the nostrils of a deified ritual specialist, signifying the power of his very breath. Ritual specialists are believed to be able to move from this human world to the supernatural world. Edo artist, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 18th century. © British Museum, Af1944,04.12. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.



Figure 128. The child on his mother's back turns his head, breaking frontality. Children are not expected to be consistently dignified. Yoruba artist from Oyo, Nigeria, first half 20th century. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1989.723. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg.

This concentration on the human form (even if it represents spirits or deities, which it sometimes does) is greater than what is found in most parts of world art history. When animals appear, they are rarely just allusions to the human habitat. While they can represent simple game in a hunting society, they are more likely metaphors for certain types of human beings or for human traits. Leopards and elephants, for example, often relate to rulership or leadership, because of their deadliness or power, respectively. They are not simply observed animals who happen to appear locally. Many of these are part of the verbal world featuring in commonly-used proverbs that make their visual occurrences easily interpretable to their audience. An Akan proverb from Ghana states, "No one following an elephant has to worry about vines catching him", i.e. the elephant plows down all obstacles in its path. This refers to a chief or other powerful man, who clears the way for those who are attached to him. Because verbal references like this are part of the culture, representations of the elephant instantly call to mind the chief (Figure 125).

One category of animals frequently occurs in art: the liminal animal. **Liminality**, in general, refers to a state of in-betweenness; the word's Latin origin means "threshold," and defines a state that is between two defined identities. In the insect world, a caterpillar and a butterfly are two distinct identities of one insect, and the cocoon marks its liminal state. In African cultural life, some

societies mark the liminal state of man's changing identities of child and adult with initiation, a period of transition and transformation. The **liminal animal,** however, is at a threshold of a different source. This is a class of animals that regularly lives in two distinct worlds. Some liminal animals commonly depicted in African art move between land and water, such as tortoises, crocodiles, pythons and other water snakes (not snakes in general), and mudfish, a catfish-related animal that can crawl on damp earth or survive in mud for extended periods. Others move between land and sky, such as most birds. Animals like this can represent people who move between the two worlds of humans and spirits, that is, priests/priestesses, ritual specialists (Figure 126), monarchs, and witches.



Figure 127. Frontal figure on a Kanyok waterpipe from Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th/early 20th century. Dallas Museum of Art, 1969.S.18. The Clark and Frances Stillman Collection of Congo Sculpture, gift of Eugene and Margaret McDermott. Public domain.

Frontality

Frontality refers to the position of the body in both two and three dimensions. In a frontal depiction, the head and spine are perfectly aligned in a straight line (Figure 127). The position of arms and legs is immaterial, but the head cannot turn or tilt. This reinforces formality; it is a pose that artists have employed throughout world art's history when representing deities and rulers. Frontality imbues a figure with a sense of permanence and dignity. The concept of frontality only applies to human beings, since animals' heads and spines are not normally aligned, and it only refers to representations that at least include a torso; i.e. masks are not referred to as frontal.

In traditional African art, the non-frontal figure is usually negligible–a child (Figure 128), a member of an entourage, or some lesser being. Even these individuals are usually depicted frontally, however.

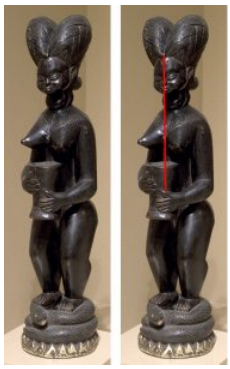


Figure 129. Although this Mende figure from Sierra Leone has been photographed in a three-quarter view, you can "draw" an invisible line down the middle of the face and it continues between the breasts through the rest of the torso–it's frontal. 1920-1950. Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1995.131. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison Eiteljorg.



Figure 130. The self-composed expression of this Fang head is typical of traditional African art. 1875–1925. Photo Thomas R. DuBrock. Museum of Fine Arts Houston, 2009.485. Museum purchase funded by the Alice Pratt Brown, Museum Fund. Public domain.

It's vital to remember that photographers often prefer to take object photos from an angle, so a viewer's immediate impression may not be that of frontality. If the alignment of facial features on a vertical axis conforms to the known line of the spine, however, discernment of frontality is easily achieved (Figure 129).

Stillness

An emphasis on dignity and permanence also favors the representation of stillness in figurative art. Movement is temporary and implies some form of work, however tangential. Stillness underlines the innate qualities of an elevated being. Although the mother in Figure 128 above is not quite frontal, since her head's angle does not match that of her spine, she is shown in a still, kneeling position of maximum dignity.

Self-Composure (Expressionlessness)

With very few exceptions, traditional African art does not display human emotions. This is a reflection of desirable public display (a ruler at a festival, an initiation girl when presented to the public, a politician posing for a formal photograph). The ideal "face" is that of serene self-composure, unrocked by moods and reactions to others. This same ideal applies to artistic imagery. Figures normally have a restrained, dignified expression on their faces, without scowls or smiles (Figure 130). When figures do show their teeth, it may be meant as an aggressive gesture (Figure 126 above).

Ephebism



Figure 131. This Ewe twin figure from Togo represents a child that died in infancy, yet the carving provides her with full breasts, allowing her to achieve the ideal age she was never able to reach.

Ephebism refers to ideal age. Culturally, age is valued and venerated in Africa, with privileges not found among the young. Nonetheless, representations usually show individuals at a fully adult age that is still replete with physical vigor, yet without youthful recklessness–the maturity and power of someone in their early 30s. Even when a sculpture represents an elder, his face does not reflect his age. Instead, cultural cues (which vary according to ethnic group) may indicate advanced years. In Baule sculpture, for example, a beard is visual shorthand for an elder, yet the faces of bearded figures lack wrinkles or sagging skin (Figure 130). Youthful musculature usually also marks the elder's physique.



Figure 130. The beard of this early 20th-century Baule figure indicates an elder, yet his face is smooth and wrinkle-free. Brooklyn Museum, 22.1091. Museum Expedition 1922, Robert B. Woodward Memorial Fund. Creative Commons-BY.

Hardly any artworks depict visible older individuals, but those rare instances that do are usually representations of those who lack social position and therefore do not need to be flattered. Conversely, although we see infants held by their mothers, older children cannot be distinguished. There are even times when infants are represented as adults because of ideal age–that is, in some West African cultures, twins who died in infancy are carved as fully grown adults, visually appeased by providing them with the bodies they never attained. (Figure 131).

Abstraction

Most traditional African art avoids **naturalism** in favor of **abstraction**, although there is a full spectrum between the extremes of each. There are examples of naturalism, they are simply not standard (Figure 132). Disinterest in realism often seems conceptual; over-sized heads on Yoruba figures, for example, exemplify philosophical underpinnings that equate the head with one's destiny



Figure 132. This Efut masquerade from Nigeria has a very naturalistically-rendered face. Late 19th/early 20th century. Princeton University Art Museum, 1997-6. Gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum on the occasion of the 250th Anniversary of Princeton University. artmuseum.princeton.edu



Figure 133. Maskette (lukwakongo), ca. 1900. Lega artist, Democratic Republic of Congo. Princeton University Art Museum, 2015-6700.

and worthy of honor. Quite a lot of African art is fairly naturalistic, even if exaggerations and distortions occur, but even extreme abstraction (Figure 133) has identifiable characteristics that permit recognition of humanity.

Generic Physiognomy

When a traditional African artist creates a face, his training tends to ensure that face is consistent with other faces he makes. That is, learning how to make an eye, fashion a nose, or abstract an ear becomes habitual, and artists develop a "type" that they tend to reproduce instead of individualizing each face. Producing faces that resemble specific individuals is extremely rare; rather, **generic physiognomy** is the rule. This tends to work hand-in-hand with abstraction, but is evident even in fairly naturalistic works.

While the apprenticeship system partially explains this approach, it may not be the whole story. Avoidance of specificity may have its distant origins in concerns that reproducing someone's face might have nefarious origins, meant to control them or cause harm.

Hieratic Scale



Figure 134. These three figures all represent adults. The one at center is the monarch, flanked by two of his chiefs. Their height disparity distinguishes their social status. He is larger, thus clearly more important. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.194. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain.

Scale, as we've previously discussed, relates to relative size, while hierarchy is a social sorting system–some people are at the top, others in the middle, with still others at the bottom. In art, **hieratic scale** or **hierarchical scale** or **social scale** all mean the same thing: figures whose size indicates their relative social standing. This concept applies only when we aren't looking at single figures. A size relationship must be present, and this cannot be a natural size relationship–babies are naturally smaller than adults, and this does not reflect their social status. Under hieratic scale, three figures of varying heights in an artwork do not indicate three figures who happen to be taller or shorter than each other. Instead, the largest figure is the most important, while the middle one is of lesser significance and the smallest are inconsequential in comparison. This is determined by rank (Figure 134), rather than individual worth or age; the child of an important figure might be rendered larger than a member of that figure's entourage, despite a reverse height disparity in actual life.

Distorted Body Proportion



Figure 135. This Dogon figure from Mali has an elongated torso and very short legs. Quai Branly Museum, 71.1935.60.371

Abstraction in African art often means the exaggeration or distortion of one or more aspects of the body. Some Chokwe figures, for example, have enormous hands and feet. Dogon sculpture can have extremely elongated necks and/or torsos (Figure 135), or Chamba figures may have shoulders that push forward in an unnatural manner (Figure 136).

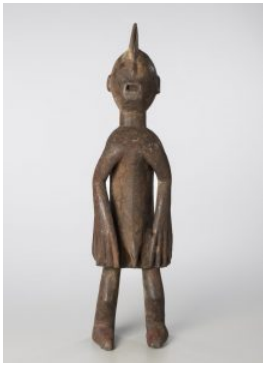


Figure 136. This Chamba figure from Northern Nigeria has huge hands, as well as shoulders that hunch forward in an unrealistic manner. Brooklyn Museum, 2011.31.1. Gift in honor of William C. Siegmann in recognition of his contributions to the study and understanding of African Arts; 2011.31.1. Creative Commons-BY.



Figure 137. Despite the fact that these three adults have differing heights, their head-to-body ratios are all 1:7, natural proportions for adults. Photo of three Yoruba musicians, Aran Orin, Nigeria, 1977. Tropenmuseum. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 3.0, with overlays of heads added.

These are all distortions of the natural body and aspects of style that deserve mention, as are over- or undersized facial features. One of the most notable proportional distortions is that of the head to the body: that is, the head is often significantly oversized in African sculpture and can sometimes be undersized–but it is extremely rare for the head-to-body relationship to be represented naturalistically. What are natural **head-to-body proportions** in an adult (children, whose heads tend to be larger in relation to their bodies than those of adults, are not part of this equation)? They tend to be fairly consistent, despite variations in height, and are expressed in a mathematical ratio. **That ratio is expressed as 1:x**, with one representing the measurements of the person's head, and x representing their height with the head as a unit. How many heads high is that person is the germane question, with the head measured from chin to top, discounting beards, hats, and coiffures. Actual humans' head-to-body proportions are usually about 1:7 (Figure 137)–the ratio always begins with 1 (the head as the measurement) and the second number indicates "how many heads high", and includes the head itself.

African art displays a much greater variety of head-to-body ratios, as can be seen below (Figure 138). Once you can visually isolate the head, you can mentally use it as a ruler to determine head-to-body proportions, using the same ratio of 1(head): x (heads) to describe it. This becomes challenging only when a figure is sitting, kneeling, or squatting, but follows the same principles; one has to mentally wrap the heads (or portions of heads) around the bent joints.



Figure 138. The disembodied heads demonstrate the head-to-body ratios of these figures. L to R: 1) Bamana figure, Mali,19th or 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 76.20.1. Gift of Marcia and John Friede; 2) Lega figure, DRC, late 19th or early 20th century. Brooklyn Museum, 74.66.1. Gift of Marcia and John Friede; 3) Teke. Standing Female Figure (Buti), 19th or 20th century. Wood, 11 1/4 x 2 1/2 x 3 1/4in. (28.6 x 6.4 x 8.3cm). Brooklyn Museum, Museum Expedition 1922, Robert B. Woodward Memorial Fund, 22.111. All photos Creative Commons-BY. Heads and text added, backgrounds cropped.

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2.4: Stylistic Analysis

Stylistic analysis on its own requires the viewer to analyze the image or object by considering the elements and principles of design plus, in the case of traditional African art, the "rules" concerning standard traits. It requires no further contextual knowledge, yet the "rules" can sometimes suggest aspects of cultural interpretation.

While a stylistic analysis might involve considering every particular, usually time limits require the observer to select the chief visual factors present in an artwork. It's usually done by running through a mental checklist and considering whether a particular trait is noteworthy in a given example. Let's consider a contemporary two-dimensional work as well as a traditional three-dimensional work.



Figure 139. Painting by S Anoy. Andre (2011), Burkina Faso. Photo Andrew Moore, 2015. Creative Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

An untitled painting from Burkina Faso by S. Anoy. Andre (Figure 139, which can be seen in greater detail by clicking on the image) is an abstract work that is nearly **non-objective**–that is, it is almost an aggregate of forms that cannot be identified as having any reference to the natural world. A careful examination, however, reveals a bird's neck and beak at the lower right, and additional suggestions of fish or reptiles. The focal point is the central horizontal band of the painting, where smaller shapes and pattern details are concentrated. The color palette is limited to greys, white, and a rusty, low-saturation red, with the greys and creamy whites distributed throughout the work, and the reds more limited in size and number. Curving lines and curving triangular shapes dominate, with several prominent, eye-like circles or ovals concentrated in the painting's lower half. Viewed when magnified, the canvas's most noteworthy feature is its texture. The paint is applied thickly as an **impasto**, a paste-like state that creates an actual texture, and some granular, raised materials appear to have been added to the paint. Some areas that seemed to have been solid medium or charcoal greys are revealed instead to be segments of fine black and white parallel lines.

Visual analyses of three-dimensional works are not fully possible without seeing them in the round in person, or via multiple photographs. Even without these advantages, some information can be gleaned from single photos, though vital aspects may be missed.



Figure 140. Three views of a carving by Bamgboye of Odo-Owa (ca. 1895–1978), Ekiti Yoruba, Nigeria, first half 20th century. Wood and pigment. 29 1/8″ x 14″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.86. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain.

The figural group in Figure 140 is compact, its focal point the **equestrian** female at its core. Attention is drawn to her in various ways: she is by far the largest figure in the composition, **hieratic scale** clarifying her superior position vis-a-vis her entourage, whose presence adds to her status. Her unnatural size in comparison to her steed also emphasizes her social status through hieratic scale. The chalk-white color that **unifies** all the figures and the horse is broken only by a bright blue. Although this **color** is used in small portions throughout the sculpture (the hair of the figure at the back, the horse's tail, half the coiffure of the figure sitting in front of her, and the lining of equine and human eyes), its largest, most eye-catching use can be seen in her conical hairstyle, the rooster in her left hand and the rectangular fan in her right. Her blue-lined eyes and ethnic marks define her features and **reinforce** the blue expanses. Though **fairly naturalistic**, the **frontal figures** all have exaggeratedly large, bulging eyes, broad noses, and mouths treated like curving rectangles, not meeting at the corner; the shape of their ears is highly **conventionalized**. The figures standing on the base have a **head-to-body proportion** of 1:3, while that at the back is about 1:5, because of its unusually long neck. Although the central figure's body is somewhat hidden by her supporters, her head-to-body proportions are about 1:4. The smooth **textures** of the body are offset by contrasting fine line in the hair, horse bridle, hats, fowl, and fan.

The paragraph above ignores certain aspects of the work's stylistic elements, principles of design, and rules. The sculpture's figures display stillness, ephebism, and self-composure, and all share a common generic physiognomy. One could certainly discuss line other than as a way of instilling texture, the blue could be further characterized by adjectives such as "bright" or "highly-saturated". Individual shapes could be defined as organic, with the whole piece approximating a conical shape. Mass could be mentioned, as could the work's roughly radial symmetry. The sculpture's rhythm is regular, and its scale is fairly small in comparison to a human being. Why weren't all these features mentioned? They could be, but some aspects are more critical and noteworthy than others–these are not necessarily identical for each viewer.

While a stylistic analysis can always be applied to a single artwork, comparisons allow for more relative assessments of a piece's appearance. Considering style alone, let's compare two works (Figure 141).



Figure 141. Left) Wooden altarpiece by Bamgboye of Odo-Owa (ca. 1895–1978), Ekiti Yoruba, Nigeria, first half 20th century. 29 1/8″ x 14″. Yale Art Gallery, 2006.51.86. Gift of Charles B. Benenson, B.A. 1933. Public domain Right) Brass altarpiece of Oba Ewuakpe. Edo, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 18th century. H 22.83″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 8165. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo Claudia Obrocki. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE.

These two figural groups (Figure 141) **both** feature a **central figure** whose size relative to their supporters demonstrates their importance through **hieratic scale**. The work at left is **slightly larger than** the other [determined through the measurements, not the photos], but their scale is similar. The work at right is **more** formal in the one-view **organization** of its figures and its **bilateral symmetry**, broken only by the size of the objects in central figure's hands and the single figure at back. The work at right is metal, attesting to its **greater** monetary value; this also lends it a common **unifying** color, while the bright blues at left draw attention because of their **contrast** to the otherwise all-over white. While **neither** work is completely naturalistic, **sharing** an emphasis on overlarge eyes, the face of the central figure at right has a **more of** a sense of bone structure, although this is not shared by its supporting figures. **Both** pieces include figures whose head-to-body proportions differ from one another. At left, the base figures have head-to-body proportions of 1:3, **while** the central figure's head-to-body proportions are about 1:4. At right, the central figure is **also** about 1:4, while his elongated supporters are about 1:5 and lack his sturdiness and enlarged feet. **In both cases**, smooth areas are contrasted with textured details. Although **both** works build to a central apex, their **differently-shaped** bases mirror other emphases. The work at the left carries the circularity of the base into the placement of the figures, as well as employing its curves in the hairstyles, rounded hairline, and chicken's body, **while** at right the prominently rectangular base is mirrored by the squared-off feet, balancing the curves of hat, necklaces, wrapper hem, and base motif. The compact nature of the work at left makes it **more** massive than that on the right.

Again, additional stylistic observations are possible, but the high points of comparison and contrast are covered. Neither piece is simply described separately, but instead compared point-by-point, with words like "both" and comparative adjectives being employed.

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2.5: Contextual Analysis

Normally art history requires a combination of both contextual and stylistic analysis, because artists often use style to support the ideas they wish to communicate. A knowledge of the specifics of a culture and its art is necessary to contextual analysis, as its name implies, whereas stylistic analysis can be applied to objects completely unfamiliar to the viewer. In a contextual analysis, the manner in which the stylistic elements, principles of design, and "rules" support meaning are usually elucidated. In traditional African art, the way an object is used is also discussed. For traditional pieces, the aspects a viewer should address are threefold: style, meaning, and function. Depending on the artwork, these may be addressed equally or one or two may require greater emphasis in a discussion.

For the purpose of teasing out the three threads of a contextual analysis of a traditional African sculpture, phrases will be color-coded, with dark turquoise marking stylistic observations, red marking those of meaning, and purple indicating function.



Figure 142. Two views of a large wooden statue made by Sosa Adede to represent Glele, monarch of the Fon of the Dahomey Kingdom, Benin Republic, 2nd half 19th century. H 5.87′. Musee Quai Branly, 71.1893.45-2.

This unusually large-scale [stylistic] sculpture (Figure 142) represents Glele, the monarch [meaning] of the Fon people of Dahomey from 1858-1889. Half-animal, half-human representations are rare in sub-Saharan Africa, but several 19th-century Fon monarchs were represented this way [stylistic]. Also atypical [stylistic]–particularly for royals–are the figure's break with frontality (it twists slightly at the shoulders), active pose, and lack of self-composure, [stylistic] its bared teeth speaking to ferocity rather than the dignity of most royal representations [meaning]. Some of these surprising features are due to the artwork's purpose. Although it was part of the public display of the king's wealth during an annual ceremony, it functioned as a royal *bo* or *bocio*, a power object activated and reinforced by mystical medicine [function]. Brought to the battlefield, it was believed to influence the outcome positively, its aggression underlined by the bared teeth, the two swords it originally held [meaning], and its forward momentum. Its sense of dynamism is reinforced by the diagonals of upper and lower legs, arms, and inclining chest. The tail helps balance the gesturing arms, its curves mirrored by the rounded rump, calves, shoulders, and the back of the head [stylistic]. The head and torso represent those of a lion, although they are far from naturalistic, only leonine via the teeth and the wavy lines representing the mane on the torso and the back of the head [stylistic]. Each king had several associated symbols that derived from divination configurations that took place even before his reign. These became his "strong names", monikers of praise that might appear as statues, appliqued umbrella motifs, or other forms of visual, as well as oral, expression. One of Glele's names was "lion of lions," and the lion appeared on many of his objects [meaning]. Only in this sculpture, however, was it anthropomorphized, its life-size

royal alter-ego absorbing and deflecting evil intentions and actions. Believed to have the powers of locomotion, it could take measures to strike down enemies and protect the state and the throne [meaning].

Could other aspects of the sculpture be discussed, such as its breeches, the type of swords it once held, and why the artist's rendition of a lion holds little resemblance to the actual animal? Certainly. Even the proportions of how much discussion is devoted to style, meaning, and function can differ, as long as the essential points are covered.



Figure 143. Three views of a 2007 installation by Romuald Hazoume, a Yoruba artist from Benin Republic, entitled "Dream". Top photo: single frame from an interview video by Lidia and Alexander Rosner at documenta 12, vimeo.com/68286059; middle photo; Peter Samis. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; bottom photo: Julian Stallabrass, 2010. Creative Commons CC BY 2.0.

Our contextual analysis of contemporary artworks is partially dependent on how clearly the artist communicates his message, or discusses it in interviews.

Sometimes cultural context may be self-evident, but the artist may obscure his or her meaning intentionally, drawing on personal symbolism that may not be shared with scholars or art journalists.

This installation (Figure 143) places a large boat against a huge photo mural of the West African coast. The vessel is assembled from plastic jerry cans, used locally to transport petroleum. Its name, "Dream", is inscribed on the prow. Romuald Hazoume has

frequently reused these containers in his art, using single ones turned on their side to represent masks or faces with round open mouths, the handles serving as a long rectangular nose [stylistic]. He has also employed them in installation layouts, sometimes as literal references to the illegal and dangerous Beninois trade in petroleum across the Nigerian border. Here he comments on the desperation of some poor Africans who, trying in vain to obtain visas to emigrate to Europe, pay huge sums to be smuggled, first to North Africa, then across the Mediterranean, often losing their lives along the way. Hazoume also refers to his own dream–that the Benin of the photo mural should have good schools, potable water, dependable politicians, and be a safe and progressive country whose citizens have no desire to leave [meaning].In interviews, he has commented that he doesn't want to sell this work, but would prefer to exhibit it in Benin and elsewhere in Africa as a goad to those in power to improve the lot of their citizens and bring Africa onto the world stage in a positive way [function].

The above analysis has little to say about style. Its only comments actually refer to other works the artist has created using the same materials, albeit to a different purpose. It is almost entirely a discussion about meaning. Function might be summed up as "art for a didactic purpose."

Comparing and contrasting two artworks is again a useful way to elicit observations that might not immediately come to mind when viewing a single work. Contextual comparisons also examine **style, meaning,** and **function**, although any given pair may favor one or two aspects over another. Points of comparison might be found in style or in meaning or in function–the viewer has to consider the two works to tease out where the comparisons lay. Contrasting aspects usually become easy to spot.

A full comparison can be found in the two works below (Figure 144). In order to make it useful, we'll use one of the single works whose context we've already discussed, and another whose style we've analyzed, adding contextual information. Again, the descriptive text is color-coded to clarify which parts of the comparison focus on style (turquoise), meaning (red), and function (purple). Editorial comments that are not part of the analysis are highlighted in yellow and placed in brackets. Terms in bold exemplify how a reader can be reminded that a comparison is being made–the two works are not simply discussed separately.



Figure 144. L. Brass altarpiece of Oba Ewuakpe. Edo, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria, 18th century. H 22.83″. Ethnologisches Museum | Afrika, III C 8165. © Ethnologisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo Claudia Obrocki. Creative Commons CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 DE. R: Large wooden statue made by Sosa Adede to represent Glele, monarch of the Fon of the Dahomey Kingdom, Benin Republic, 2nd half 19th century. H 5.87′. Musee Quai Branly, 71.1893.45-2.

While these works **both**represent monarchs of sizable kingdoms [meaning], their interpretations are drastically different. [the author then has to make a choice of what to stress first] The Benin sculpture emphasizes the monarch's dignity and status [meaning] through his frontality, stillness, hieratic scale, and the presence of an entourage [stylistic]. His great wealth is alluded to by the brass used to create the sculpture, as well as his profusion of expensive imported coral jewelry, brocaded wrapper, and the pestle staff in his right hand balanced by the stone axe head in his right, a relic of the god of death that has the ability to make his words manifest [meaning]. These last two objects underline his duality; he has earthly power and supernatural power as a divine king [meaning]. Although the monarch of Dahomey was **also** a divine king, his sculpture emphasizes **only** his forceful aggression, used to protect his country and slaughter his enemies [meaning]. The diagonals of the figure's arms, legs, and forward-leaning posture produce a sense of movement, **unlike** the permanence provided by the multiple verticals of the Benin work [stylistic]. This figure once held a sword in each hand, his sharp teeth underlining his ferocity [meaning]. The court art of **both kingdoms** sometimes depicts rulers who are part-human, part animal. Here the Fon monarch is half-human, half-lion. **While** the Benin ruler is shown here in human form, he is sometimes portrayed with mudfish legs, an allusion to his identification with Olokun, god of the sea [meaning].**Both** portray specific kings. This is Benin's Oba Ewuakpe, who restored the wealth and prestige of the monarchy; he is identified by the decorated pestle in his right hand [meaning]. The Fon sculpture represents Glele, one of whose praise names was "Lion of Lions."[meaning] The **two** works' **very different usage** influenced both their materials and expression. The Ewuakpe bronze acted as the central decoration of his ancestral altar, a portrait [function] of his eternal qualities as a royal ancestor: his posture and expression remain serene and untroubled [meaning]. Glele's representation, **on the other hand**, properly represents the confrontational readiness and potential violence [meaning] necessarily to a royal *bo*, a power figure reinforced by supernatural medicine that was mounted on a rolling cart. While displayed at the king's annual tribute ceremony as a reminder of his supernatural and worldly power, its presence on the battlefield was both psychological–heartening the Fon troops and demoralizing and confusing the enemy–and mystical, for it was believed to be able to move on its own to destroy opposing forces [function].

Again, this analysis could further develop style, meaning, or function. The Benin figure has greater mass, the Dahomean sculpture demonstrates the artist seems unfamiliar with the structure of an actual lion's head. Other lion representations of Glele could be mentioned, or how deceased Benin monarchs were honored at their altars could be discussed. No comparison of head-to-body proportions was included, nor were textures discussed. These could have been added to the comparison, but a discussion of the meaning of the two works and the main elements of design that support that meaning is critical. Neither that discussion nor the purpose of the two works should be excluded.

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