OKPELLA MASKING TRADITIONS

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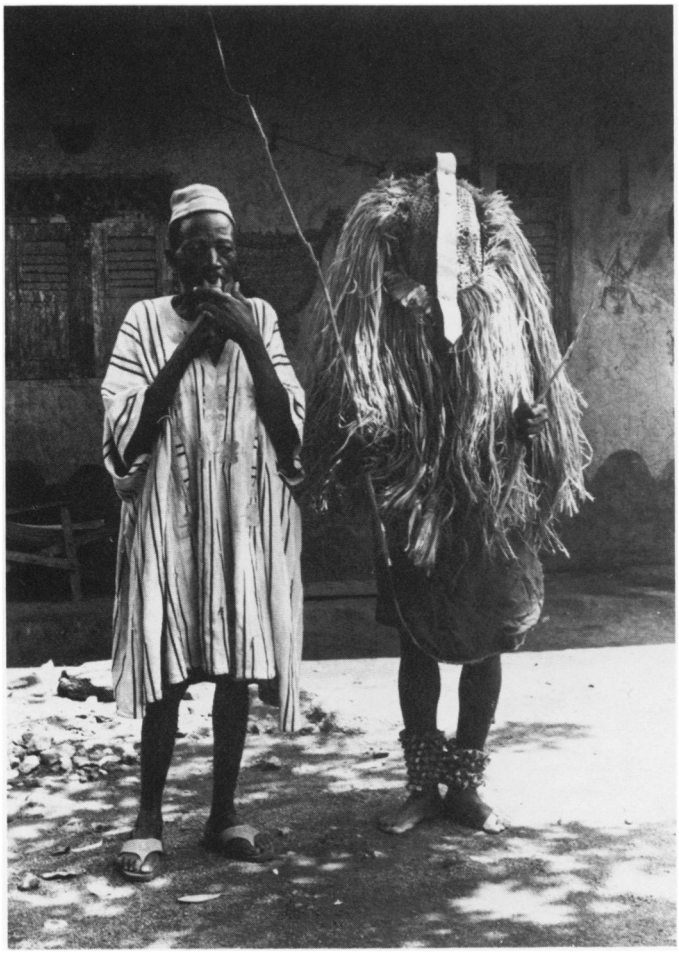
The Okpella (Ukpila)[1] are an Edo-speaking people living approximately 120 kilometers north of Benin City and 24-32 kilometers west of the Niger River. Located in what is now north central Bendel State, Okpella counts among its neighbors to the south, east, and west other Edo-speaking peoples, and to the north, the Igbira. Like many other northern Edo groups, Okpella traces its origins to Benin, and its migration is of uncertain date.

Traditionally, the northern Edo—a designation that replaces the older, pejorative term "Kukuruku"—are small, acephalous societies speaking related, but often mutually unintelligible, languages. The more northern groups remained on the fringes of the Benin empire and maintained only nominal allegiance to the Oba by the nineteenth century. After the mid-nineteenth century, the history of the area was one of upheaval and disruption as many small villages fell prey to Nupe raiding parties from the north. Many of the villages, including those of Okpella, were broken up as inhabitants scattered, seeking refuge deep in the hills. The villages reformed around the turn of the century after the establishment of the *pax Britannica*.



1. *AMINAGUE* MASKED SPIRIT ACCOMPANIED BY A CUSTODIAN PLAYING THE FLUTE.

Today, the Okpella number about 24,000 people[2] living in nine villages and utilizing approximately 518 square kilometers of communal land. They recognize two major subdivisions, corresponding roughly to east and west, representing the two sons of Okpella, the clan founder. Western Okpella comprises five villages, and eastern Okpella, three. A remaining village represents the descendants of earlier settlers from Benin who were culturally dominated by Okpella. Traditions of autochthonous peoples persist in both eastern and western Okpella.[3]

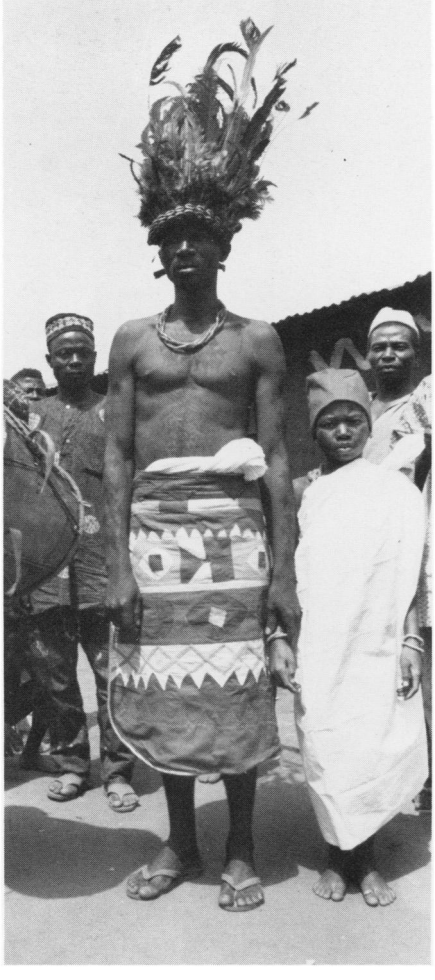
Ritual and kinship link the villages of Okpella rather than political authority, although the British established the position of paramount chief shortly after the turn of the century. Political authority at the village level is vested in a council of titled elders (*Itsogwa*) (Borgatti, 1975). Paramount ritual authority is in the hands of a night society (*Ilukpekpe*), organized at the quarter level, although the leadership of the two organizations overlaps.

Traditionally, the Okpella people believe in a supreme deity Eshinegba,[4] creator of all things in the material world (*agbo*) and the spirit world (*ilimi*)—paralleling Bini belief (Bradbury, 1970:52). However, the spirits that most concern an individual are his/her immediate ancestors or the collective ancestors of any group to which he/she belongs. For example, an artist (*atsona*) may invoke the spirits of past artists (*ilimi itsona*) before undertaking a new work. Individuals and small cult groups may also serve shrines dedicated to spiritual forces localized around certain natural phenomena and sometimes identified with mythical heroes, again paralleling Bini religious practice (Bradbury, 1970:56). Men, and some women, may also belong to one or more cult groups-cum-masquerade societies whose focus is the control of anti-social forces, chiefly witchcraft. *Ilukpekpe*, a night society and paramount ritual authority, is found in all Okpella villages. A second night society, *Iyabana*, junior and prerequisite for *Ilukpekpe* where both are found, is widely distributed but not universal. An ancestral cult organized around a powerful medicine called "Something that kills quickly" (*Ogbedughulu*) is found only in the three eastern villages and four of the seven quarters of the largest western village. A fourth cult, *Aminague*, is found in all Okpella villages but one, the smallest village of the eastern sector. *Ilukpekpe*, *Iyabana*, and *Ogbedughulu* members act in concert in an annual masking festival (*Olimi*) held in those villages or quarters housing an *Ogbedughulu* shrine. The *Aminague* cult operates independently of *Ilukpekpe* or the *Olimi* festival complex. An additional masking society, *Okakagbe*, functions primarily in the social realm.

1. *OLIMI* FESTIVAL HERALD *(ANOGIRI)*.

At the end of the dry season, traditionally the end of the year, each compound head offers food-for-the-dead (*akhilimi*) to propitiate ancestral spirits for the year to come. Prior to the advent of Islam and Christianity (prior to 1880), the largest western village held the festival of *Aminague* at this time as well. Since the turn of the century, however, four of the nine Okpella villages, including the largest western village, have begun holding the *Olimi* masking festival instead to honor the ancestors and purify the community for the new year. The history of the masking groups—*Aminague, Olimi,* and *Okakagbe*—and the network of relationships they reflect are the focus of this paper.

The name and image of *Aminague* embody the English-language concepts of the "incredible"—something never before seen and therefore unbelievable—and the "forbidden"—something with which one's relationship is necessarily restricted. Accompanied by a custodian, the masked figure carries a switch and wears a woven raffia headdress framed by a waist-length raffia fringe (*abunuku*), a cloth appliqué apron (*obete*), and rattling ankle sheaths (*ikolo*) made of palm fronds folded to encase clusters of seeds (Fig. 1). The "head" is polychromed red, black, and white, and



3. *ATSOGWA* TITLE CANDIDATE WEARING THE REGALIA ASSOCIATED WITH THE *OGHALO* CEREMONY.

elaborated with a strip of cut aluminum (*adema*) (Fig. 6). In some instances a ribbon hangs from one end of the aluminum strip, giving the visual impression of a snake's tongue. The raffia fringe may be blackened or left its natural straw color.

Although these elaborations were said to have symbolic significance, specific meanings could not be revealed to the author because of ritual prohibitions. However, polychromy utilizing the principal colors in Okpella "make it good (*ti*)," suggesting completeness in terms of the ramifications of *ti*, and the cloth appliqué apron indicates a submerged link with the institution of titled elderhood (*Atsogwa*). The candidates undertaking both the preliminary (*Otu*) and final (*Oghalo*) rituals for the *Atsogwa* title wear similar aprons (*obete*) (Fig. 3), and *Aminague* masked spirits must dance at the funeral of a titled elder (A., May 1, 1973). Snake imagery appears in other contexts in Okpella as well: the python (*inyokoko*) symbolizes legitimate authority in art associated with the ceremonies of titled elderhood (Borgatti, 1975), and the viper (*oyemi*) symbolizes power associated with the forces of night and the forest, provinces of the senior night society (Borgatti, 1976).

Today, membership in the cult is achieved through the payment of fees to the association and completion of ritual tasks during the *Aminague* festival. It normally is restricted to men, although some women (*Ozu*) hold limited membership through oracular pronouncement. According to one western Okpella chief, his village holds a festival every second or third year to induct new members and create new masks (B., May 5, 1972). Here they seem linked to age sets, as are masquerades in neighboring northwest Edo villages. In the largest western village, members entered the cult annually during a festival held to mark the end of the year (A. quoted in a letter from C., December 25, 1974). Although theoretically, a person of any age can join here, *Aminague* songs recorded in this village reveal explicit associations with youth, aggression, and coming of age. An aspiring member's father pays his fees: a share of 200 tubers of yam, 28 naira ($42.00) to the association leaders, and 28 naira to the association for clearing the fourteen paths to the forest sanctuary (*egua*). But once a candidate has completed his festival tasks, he may sing, "No one can beat me as he would a child (*Ai gbe me na okha*)," signifying his new adult status, and boast of his sanctioned aggressive behavior with the words, "The left-handed spirit-figure climbs a rock (*Olimi ni o gobo, O nga ololo*)." (In Okpella belief, the left hand is rough, uncontrollable, and merciless.) In a spatially separate quarter of this village, respondents stated that only certain kindreds or quarters had the right to participate in the cult. No citizen of the quarter owned an *Aminague* mask, and so, spirit-figures from a neighboring village were called when they were needed (May 10, 1972). Different kindreds, but only one in each of the two villages, sponsor *Aminague* in the two eastern Okpella villages that utilize the cult. According to the chief in one of these villages, his kindred acquired the right to cult practices when his great grandfather purchased it from a western Okpella community prior to 1880 (the Nupe period) (D., May 6, 1972).

Membership entitles a man to own and activate an *Aminague* masked spirit. Observation of *Aminague* outside the festival context suggests that only elder (in chronological age) cult members own them, while younger (and probably related) ones wear them. This is consistent with the behavior associated with other Okpella masking traditions. Within the *Olimi* festival complex, for example, only persons of elder status may own masquerades, and it is their personal power acquired through age and experience that protects the young performers who exist in a limbo between the living (*agbo*) and the dead (*ilimi*) while wearing the regalia.

Any individual desiring to marshal supernatural forces to cope with a problem may petition an *Aminague* owner to activate the spirit-figure and the cult medicines on his behalf. The community as a whole may also call out *Aminague* in force when threatened by pestilence or disease. For example, during the recent outbreak of cholera in southern Nigeria, *Aminague* swept through one village, beating the houses and touching each village entrance to cleanse and fortify the community (E., May 10, 1972). In the past, during smallpox epidemics, *Aminague* were responsible for removing infected persons who would not leave the village voluntarily. As spirits, they were considered immune, and as an institution, they were immune, since any cult member could impersonate the spirit.

Powerful, even more powerful than the senior night society according to some, so powerful that the cult's curse is no longer controllable (A. and C., May 1, 1973), *Aminague* may be the most ancient of Okpella's extant masking traditions. Although the cult is not well enough documented to compare it conclusively with Bini institutions, the visual symbol—the masquerade—has no prototypes in terms of documented Bini masks. The legacy of power, the variation of cult rules within Okpella, and its distribution—a clustering in western Okpella with some penetration into the eastern sector—suggest that *Aminague* was borrowed, albeit early, and possibly derives from more than one source even in western Okpella. However, it should be noted that the term for the forest sanctuary associated with *Aminague, egua,* is cognate with the Bini term *ogwa,* which denotes the forest sanctuary associated with the *Ovia* masquerades (Bradbury, 1973:203), a shrine room, or meeting room where sacrifices

are made to ancestral spirits (Melzian, 1937:161-162).

Similar images exist in Akoko-Edo in a number of northwest Edo village clusters—Atte, Ikpeshi, Oja, Erhurun-Uneme, Dagbala, and Akpama-Uneme (made in Dagbala)—and in the Yoruba-speaking town of Imeri (S.C. Picton, 1969; Borgatti, 1972), where they are explicitly linked to age-set title grades (Bradbury, 1970:118-119). Among the northwest Edo, however, two types of netted fiber masquerade costumes are used within the same age-set ritual context. The alternative to *Aminague* is also used in the northern Edo (Ivbiosakon) villages of Otuo (Fig. 5) and Ikao (Fig. 4) where they are definitely linked to elders' age-set promotions. If these two types, the *Aminague* and its alternative, can be considered variations on a theme, the tradition has a wider distribution than hitherto noted, and the relationship between the Okpella *Aminague* and the titled elders (*Itsogwa*) becomes less obscure.[5]

Okpella's *Aminague* also speak in the northwest Edo dialect of Oja—a reasonable indication of influence, if not origin, in terms of other Okpella masking traditions—and a belief persists in Okpella that Oja is a stopping point for Okpella souls on the way to the land of the dead (C., January 29, 1973), suggesting old and important links between them. In addition, at Oja, according to Bradbury, the title grade that presents masked dancing is joined by members of an age set who present the village headman with 200 tubers of yam, as in Okpella (1970:118-119).

A tradition of netted fiber masks also extends north and east of the confluence along the Benue with visual analogues of Okpella's *Aminague* photographed at Keana (Nzekwu, 1964:272), among the Geomai (Sieber, 1961:ill. 27) and the Montol (*Ibid.*, ill. 8), although the images are not well documented as to function.

In Okpella, however, the cult of *Aminague* is on the wane. The initiates can no longer completely control the forces associated with the cult, for a curse once invoked may rebound upon the head of the caller. The largest village in western Okpella, the stronghold of the cult, no longer holds an annual *Aminague* festival. Islam, Christianity, and the *Olimi* festival complex have usurped a significant proportion of the cult's membership, and the existing membership cannot sustain the expense. A festival is still held every seven years, or when there is sufficient "interest," to induct new members.

Sharply contrasting with the powerful *Aminague* is the lively and entertaining *Okakagbe,* its name embodying the concept of something difficult skillfully executed—a reference both to performance and costuming. The *Okakagbe* ensemble (Fig. 8) consists of five or six anthropomorphic characters clad in brilliant cloth appliqué, accompanied by a bush-beast costumed in assembled forest

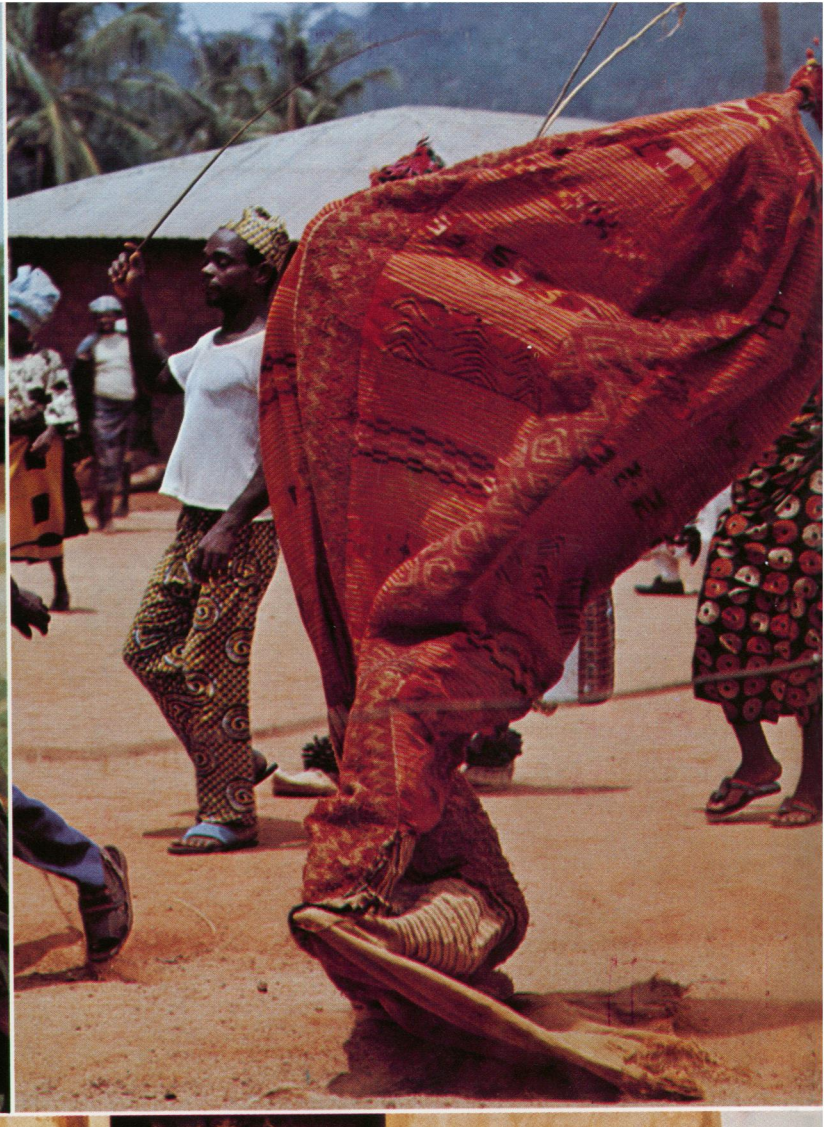
4. COSTUMES ASSOCIATED WITH ELDER'S AGE-SET PROMOTIONS IN IKAO, SOUTHWEST OF OKPELLA, SET UP ON POSTS IN THE AREA OF THE FOREST SANCTUARY. THE BASIC BELL-LIKE NETTED FIBER COSTUME, HERE EMBELLISHED WITH A HAT-LIKE HEADDRESS, IS THE TYPE WORN BY THE NORTHWEST EDO AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE *AMINAGUE*.

5. COSTUMES ASSOCIATED WITH ELDERS' AGE-SET PROMOTIONS IN OTUO, SOUTHWEST OF OKPELLA. THE BASIC BELL-LIKE NETTED FIBER COSTUME IS HERE EMBELLISHED WITH A VARICOLORED NIMBUS OF STIFF PLANT MATERIAL.

materials. The senior character, *Odogu,* or Ancient Mother, supports stuffed cloth children on her headdress (Cover) and displays old, flat breasts—graphic evidence that she has suckled many children. Ancient Mother's mask is made of yellow cloth on which features are embroidered or appliquéd. The broad brim of the headdress and a collar of appliquéd triangles frame the face. Below the "collar," the "shirt" displays an overall pattern of appliquéd six-pointed stars; the "trousers" have large triangular patterns defined by thin strips of appliquéd cloth and filled with lines of couched thread embroidery. The costumes are white, red, yellow, and green against a background of black. A dancing child, dressed similarly, a yarn wig replacing the headdress, accompanies Ancient Mother.

The second most important character and leader of the dance line is *Otugo,* a figure often costumed like Ancient Mother but whose brimmed headdress carries an intricate system of yarn-wound and tasseled hoops rather than "children." The remaining characters, another female and two males (the latter distinguished only by *not* having breasts), wear body costumes embellished with designs in couched thread embroidery and headdresses of loops and tassels, which rise directly from the mask structure rather than a brim.

The bush-beast *Idu* rears a magnificent and horrific head featuring the broad



horns of the buffalo and a variety of antelope horns (Fig. 9). The face, anthropomorphic but snaggle-toothed with a row of peccary tusks protruding from the mouth, is modeled in gum or beeswax over a basketry or wooden core. The body covering consists either of split seed pods sewn lapped onto a net suit—reminiscent of the scaled skin of the pangolin—or a suit of dried and bushy raffia. Both types are embellished with a ruff of porcupine quills. *Idu,* with his uncostumed young male keepers, parades around the village to alert people that a scheduled performance is about to begin. During the dance, the bush-beast functions as a crowd control mechanism, preventing the excited audience from encroaching on the dancers.

The people of Okpella consider the *Okakagbe* dancers to be spirit-figures (*ilimi*) like the *Aminague* and other masked performers, although they are said to represent a particular category, bush spirits (*Alijenu*). However, characters' individual names are descriptive or refer to performance—to the character's place in the line of dancers, for the dancers enter the performance area in single file led by *Otugo,* with Ancient Mother last as is appropriate for a figure of importance. The dancers remain in a line, executing a complex pattern of stamps, leaps, and twirls, their movements synchronized. Ancient Mother and Child solo while the others rest, lending variety to the performance.

Widely distributed in Okpella and surrounding northern Edo peoples, *Okakagbe* functions primarily in the social realm, appearing on any occasion when it is incumbent upon the host to provide entertainment. *Okakagbe* comes out to entertain the community at the end-of-the-year ceremonies in Avianwu (northern Edo) towns east of Okpella. In Okpella itself, the dancers' performance lends a dash of visual spice to the funeral and second burial ceremonies of important men and women and helps to establish the deceased as a person of rank in the next world. Muslim communities occasionally hire *Okakagbe* dancers to entertain at important occasions, like the formation of the boys' age grade or the turbanning of a chief. Today, local government officials also act as patrons, calling upon the dancers to provide a "cultural display" for visiting dignitaries.

No mystery surrounds the origin of this tradition among the northern Edo. Responsibility lies with an itinerant artist named Okeleke from Ibaji, the Ibo-Igala borderland east of the Niger. Sometime around 1920, Okeleke made a set of costumes for a Weppa-Wano (northern Edo) community and taught them the associated dance. So well pleased were the elders of the community that they gave Okeleke a wife, encouraging him to remain in the area. The costumes succeeded spectacularly, replacing what people describe as rather drab homespun or "leaves and grass." (Photos taken by N. W. Thomas circa 1910 in this area do not reveal anything visually exciting and so may be taken to corroborate statements by respondents describing their earlier masquerade styles.) Community after community commissioned Okeleke to make costumes (Allison, 1961; Borgatti, 1972)—including Okpella. Okeleke returned to the east in 1966 when the civil war broke out,[6]—leaving behind him a legacy of beauty, for the northern Edo rationalize their changing masquerade styles on aesthetic grounds. To properly honor their ancestors, they are bound to use the newest and finest things available.

The masking traditions of Ibaji have not been studied. However, a tradition of cloth appliqué extends eastward, documented among the Nteje and Aguleri Ibo (Cole, 1970:ill. 65, 53), at Nsukka (*Ibid.*, ill. 53), Abakaliki, and Onitsha (Nzekwu, 1960: pp. 192, 196-7). *Idu* also plays an important role in northern Ibo masked plays, documented by Boston (1960), Cole (1970), and Henderson (1972). Boston also describes a performance mode for northern Ibo masquerades similar to that for *Okakagbe.*

9. *IDU,* THE MYTHICAL BUSH BEAST

TOP LEFT: 6. *AMINAGUE* MASKED SPIRIT. *TOP RIGHT:* 7. SENIOR DEAD FATHER *(OMESHE)* IN ITS FESTIVAL CONGREGATION, CHOSEN AS THE VISUAL SYMBOL OF THE NIGHT SOCIETY AND SO KNOWN ALSO AS THE *ALUKPEKPE.* IT IS ENTERING THE DANCE AREA DURING *OLIMI* DIURNAL DISPLAY. *BOTTOM:* 8. *OKAKAGBE* ENSEMBLE. THE DANCE LEADER IN WHITE CONGRATULATES THE OKPELLA ARTIST WHO HAS JUST COMPLETED THE COSTUMES, WHICH ARE BEING DANCED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

An elaboration of pre-existing customs, *Olimi* festival began around the turn of the century in the smallest eastern Okpella village, a result of exposure to masking traditions of neighboring peoples and the need to reaffirm ancestral connections at the end of a war-torn era. The festival grew and spread in an atmosphere of rivalry between eastern Okpella villages which competed by adding new masquerades to the festival nucleus, the custom of offering food to the dead *(akhilimi)* accompanied by the performance of the night society *(Ilukpekpe)*.

Today, *Olimi* is the culmination of a three-month period, the end-of-the-year *(ukpeogbe)*. During this time, spiritual power to cope with vital problems is made available to the citizenry through the daily appearance of the festival heralds *(Inogiri)* who are the messengers of the Dead Fathers and servants of the night societies. On the eve of *Olimi*, the ritual activities of night masqueraders—the belled herald *(Ogbanikaba)*, the senior night society *(Ilukpekpe)*, and the junior night society *(Iyabana)*—purify the community, and on *Olimi* day, the return of ancestral spirits *(ilimi)* in the guise of masked performers—commemorative masquerades for men *(omeshe* or *aja)* and festival-titled women *(ilimi izu)*, and the elders' masquerade *(Efofe)*—celebrate their success:

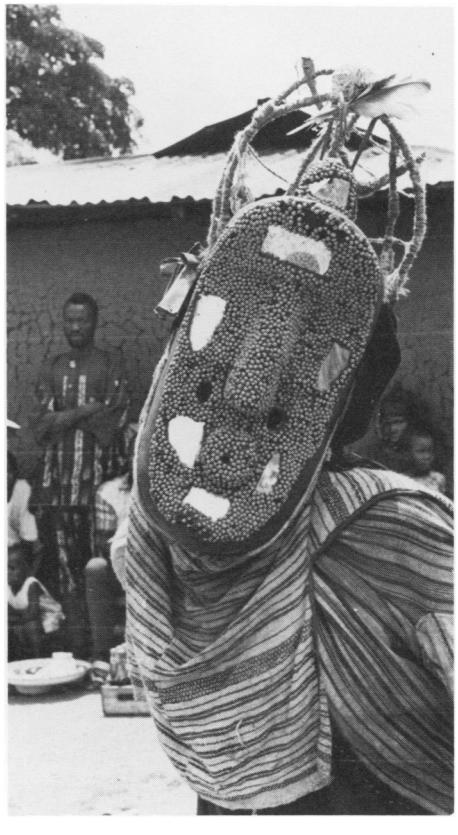
10. FESTIVAL HERALD *(ANOGIRI)* WEARING A CLOTH HOOD MASK.

the triumph of order over disorder, and the continuity of life.

The Okpella consider the night society *Ilukpekpe* an institution brought from Benin. All nine Okpella villages have *Ilukpekpe* societies. A cognate institution with social control functions exists in North Ibie, a neighboring northern Edo group (F., May 24, 1972), and in Idua in northern Ishan (Thomas, ms., n.d., n.p.). However, as an association of "elder dead" with living counterparts among the village elders, *Ilukpekpe* resembles Igala and Ibo institutions to the east rather than documented Bini organizations to the south.

In Okpella, *Ilukpekpe* maintains a forest sanctuary *(okula)* and the village *Ogbedughulu* ("power that kills quickly") shrine. It keeps an *omeshe* masquerade as its visual symbol and sponsors the elders' masquerade *(Efofe)*, which climaxes the diurnal dance display of *Olimi*. Membership is theoretically secret, but all men (in the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian era) over the age of forty are members. In nocturnal performances, darkness masks the dancers, and rhythms and sounds create character. The society is publicly represented by an *omeshe* masquerade—a cloth tube sewn at the bottom and gathered at the top around a wooden stem covered with cowry shells and sacrificial remains—called the *Alukpekpe* in this context (Fig. 7).

Ilukpekpe singers introduce themselves with the enigmatic words, "I am Eguola, Aidenomo of Eguola, Eguola of Benin." Aidenomo is the name of a hero in Okpella tales, and Eguola is not the name of a Bini village, as was posited by one Okpella chief (D., May 8, 1973), but the name of



11. *ANOGIRI* WEARING A WOODEN HELMET MASK

an Igala non-royal clan (Boston, 1968:120). Furthermore, *Ilukpekpe* bears structural similarities to the Igala institution *Abule*, a night society embodying the collective authority of the dead and having the corresponding power to curse in the name of the land, to purify the community, and to exercise social control functions *(Ibid.*, 155-6, 255). Significantly, the term *Okula* designating the forest sanctuary of *Ilukpekpe* is cognate with the Igala term *an'okula*, denoting the grove sanctuary for the ancestral shrine *(Ibid.*, 130).

Since the inception of the *Olimi* festival in Okpella, *Ilukpekpe* as collective dead have been linked with the individual deceased ancestors through the figure of the *Alukpekpe*, which may actually be the senior commemorative masquerade in the area governed by a night society. Conceptually, this distinguishes the Okpella night society from that of the Igala, for the Igala collective dead embodied in *Abule* are clearly differentiated from individual deceased ancestors who are represented by staffs *(okwute)* or masquerades similar to *omeshe (egu afia)* (Boston, 1968:159). Thus *Ilukpekpe* echoes the northern Ibo elder dead, described by Henderson as an Igala-derived institution dating from the early eighteenth century—an inner council of the incarnate dead *(ora-okwute)* with fearful masked incarnations of elderly dead called *egwugwu (omeshe-* or *egu afia-*type masquerades) (1972:88)—an institution in which the synthesis of collective and individual dead is also made.

However Okpella acquired the institution, it was sufficiently long ago to be validated by collective memory and incorporated into the tradition of a Bini heritage. Nonetheless, the network of relationships it reflects extends eastward, and a precise determination of its relationship to other Edo institutions depends upon additional fieldwork. The use of the cloth tube *omeshe* and the synthesis of collective and individual dead, however, is traceable to the turn of the century in Okpella.

The use of commemorative masquerades began in the smallest eastern Okpella village, whose settlers must have included members of the senior night society but no one with access to the power of *Aminague*. According to respondents' accounts, these settlers had witnessed the masked plays of their North Ibie neighbors whose land they had shared during the Nupe period, and one man, Adoga of Imireke kindred, is credited with bringing the masquerades to the new settlement. This village dates the origin of the *Olimi* festival (*Olimi* signifies "shade" or "masked performer") to the reign of the chief presiding when the Europeans arrived in Okpella circa 1906.

The second village to celebrate the festival dates *Olimi* to the reign of the chief who ruled from 1914 to 1952. Tradition further indicates that the festival did not begin there until a group of people

12. OKPELLA *IYABANA'S* HUT

from the first village moved into the vicinity of the second, circa 1920, after a dispute over succession. One man, Idogu of the same Imireke kindred as Adoga, traveled to Okene in the course of his work as an herbalist and "saw Igbira doing the same *Olimi*" as he had known. He reported what he had seen to the elders, who seized the opportunity to inaugurate a festival like the one they had participated in while living at their old site. Arrangements were made to learn the secrets of the Igbira festival masquerades, and so commemorative masquerades like *omeshe* (*Ekuoba* in Igbira) and their servants *Inogiri (Ekueçiçi)* appeared in the second village. (The festival then spread to two other Okpella villages, the third village acquiring the right from the first village, and the fourth from the second.) True to their Igbira heritage, Okpella's *Inogiri* speak only Igbira, although the *Alukpekpe* speaks Ibie—a reference to its formal derivation. Presumably, the belled herald *Ogbanikaba* with its counterpart in the Igbira *Ekuahete* (J. Picton, 1974:personal communication) was introduced at the same time as the festival herald *Anogiri*. Once introduced, each festival character or mask type spread rapidly among the participating villages, and the relative sequence suggested here is inferred from the age of existing masks in villages, the manipulation of the symbolic content of the masks, and stated traditions of origins collected in seven festival congregations.

In Okpella, then, the cloth tube *omeshe* stems from two outside sources, the North Ibie, a northern Edo people, and the Igbira from Okene. The masquerade as a type, however, is widespread, its distribution following the paths of the Niger and Benue rivers. Ekperi and Weppa-Wano peoples (northern Edo) living to the east of Okpella employ a similar masquerade, *omese* (dialect variant), which, although not commemorative, is the senior figure in their complex of masquerades (Borgatti, 1972). John Picton has documented the type to the north among the Igbira (NML report, n.d.) and to the east among the Igala of Dekina (NML 68.8.19 documentation); Nzekwu (1964) at Keana in the Benue Valley north of the confluence; R. G. Armstrong in Idoma (1972:personal communication); K. C. Murray in Ishan (NML 9.9.41); and Henderson among the northern Ibo (Onitsha) (1972:363). The Oyo Yoruba commemorative *egungun* described by Thompson (1974) and Adedeji (1970) may be seen as a westward extension of the tradition.

Returning to the festival herald, *Anogiri* appears in his most awesome aspect wearing a three-quarter wooden helmet mask, a pajama suit of homespun, and ankle rattles made of many small tin bells (Figs. 2, 11). Although the formal realization varies somewhat, the mask is generally carved with an overhanging forehead, a recessed facial plane, an elongated and pronounced nose, and a small pursed and projecting mouth. Finally, it is blackened and decorated with red *abrus* seeds, cowry shells, and mirrors. Alternatively, *Inogiri* disport themselves wearing cloth hoods (Fig. 10) which allow them greater freedom of action during the whipping contests and general hell-raising of the week preceding *Olimi*. Picton has documented analogous cloth and wooden masked characters in Okene (1974:40), including an *Ecane* festival figure with the name *Onogidi* (simply a different transliteration of *Anogiri),* although he suggested in a personal communication that the style of Okpella's masks may owe something to eastern Igbira traditions (1974).

Accruing to the festival is a second night society *Iyabana,* prerequisite for *Ilukpekpe* where both are found. It is reputed to have come to Okpella around the same time as *Olimi,* although it is more widely distributed than the festival and predates the festival in the last village to acquire the right to perform *Olimi,* the largest western Okpella village. Both night societies have powerful anti-witchcraft and social control functions—the junior society acting as the arm of the elders in bringing offenders to justice. The power of the senior night society is normally held in reserve for emergencies. Both societies perform within the context of *Olimi* festival to purify the community and remind the citizenry of social norms.

Again, *Iyabana* has no counterpart in Benin court or Bini village culture. Neither specific traditions nor linguistic clue points to its origin, for *Iyabana* sings in an esoteric, composite dialect. Okpella, however, probably borrowed the institution from its immediate northern Edo neighbors, the Uzairue. Uzairue maintains a cognate institution which is central to traditional religious life and sings in Uzairue dialect. Weppa-Wano, a northern Edo people living to the east of Okpella, maintains a similar society *(Ikwawa),* and analogues are found among the northern Ibo. In Onitsha, these groups are known as *Ayaka* and *Onyekulum* (Henderson, 1972:352), and elsewhere as *Ayaka, Abelle,* and *Mgbado Obodo* (Boston, 1960:61).

Like *Ilukpekpe, Iyabana* performers are masked by darkness and create character through rhythms and sounds. In order to participate in the diurnal dance displays of *Olimi,* however, *Iyabana* developed its own visual symbol, an architectural masquerade constructed of dried plantain leaves. Single fringes of plantain leaves *(abunuku)* protect the entrance to the inner sanctum of the forest sanctuary *(Okula)* as well as the nocturnal dancers. Multiple fringes create *Iyabana's* Hut *(Iyabana okholo)* (Fig. 12), which shelters numerous society members and shimmies and vibrates to internal drummed rhythms. Members of Uzairue's nocturnal *Iyabana* wear analogous costumes, individual cones of plantain leaves. Furthermore, Okpella's *Iyabana* music, although characterized by an Okpella signature rhythm, is not unrelated to Uzairue's (R. Witmer, 1974:personal communication).

Two additional mask types were added to *Olimi* festival early in its history, the elders' masquerade *Efofe* and a mask commemorating festival-titled women. *Ilukpekpe* and the elders sponsor the *Efofe,* the character whose appearance marks the climax of the diurnal dance display of *Olimi.* The village to first inaugurate *Olimi* festival also brought out the first *Efofe,* sometime after 1920, possibly in an effort to regain superiority after its rival introduced the festival heralds to accompany its Dead Fathers *(omeshe).* The elders commisssioned Okeleke, the Ibaji artist resident in Weppa-Wano, to make something spectacular. He did—by combining the elements of the *Okakagbe*

ensemble into a single figure, which the Okpella named *Efofe* or *Uzuabino* (Inside Front Cover). *Efofe* translates as "The more you look at it, the more you will have to look; you can never fully understand it, so you must continue to look at it." *Uzuabino* translates as "It rolls you over." An appropriate English colloquial equivalent is "Knock Out," which will be used henceforth.

Knock Out's counterpart exists nowhere else among the northern Edo, although the forms are familiar from the *Okakagbe* ensemble common in the area and introduced by the same artist. Okeleke's response to the commisssion was inspired. The costume of cloth appliqué with its swaying panels is elaborate and costly as befits the masquerade sponsored by the elders. The configuration of figures on the headdress indicates seniority and power with its concomitant social responsibilities. The elders and *Ilukpekpe* look after the community with the diligence of a mother. The visual analogy between Knock Out and Ancient Mother *(Okakagbe* ensemble) is clear: Ancient Mother supports a similar group of "children" on her head and her old flat breasts signify the many children she has nourished. Knock Out has the face of *Idu,* the mythical bush-beast that accompanies Ancient Mother and her followers. As king of the forest, *Idu* is likewise an appropriate metaphor for the elders, "kings" of the village. (Paula Ben-Amos [1974] documents comparable use of animal metaphors in Bini plastic art.)

The combination of mother and monster in a single image is both visually and socially dramatic. According to the people of Okpella, it is this combination of human and animal that renders the image at once captivating and incomprehensible, unnatural and awesome—hence its names. A positive metaphor, culture—in the form of headdress, costume and panels of human manufacture—surrounds nature, the horrific face of *Idu.* The dangers of the bush—symbol of the unknown and unpredictable—have been subdued by civilization through the agency of the "elder dead" *(Ilukpekpe)* in which the power of the elders is concentrated and weighted with ancestral authority.

13. DEAD MOTHER *(OLIMI OZU)*

Although Bini mythology explicitly articulates a "primordial antagonism" between man and animal, village and bush (Ben-Amos, 1974:2), Knock Out's form has its antecedents east of the Niger. Okeleke, from the Ibo-Igala borderland, might well have been familiar with the lineage tableaux of the Nteje Ibo (Cole, 1970:ill. 65) or even with Abakaliki's *Zemma,* king of spirits (Nzekwu, 1960:197)—both featuring cloth panels similar to Knock Out's and functioning as climactic artistic experiences in their respective cultures.

The bead-embroidered panels of the Bamileke "elephant" masks, featuring triangular and rosette patterns, may represent a southeastern extension of the tradition dating from the turn of the century (Northern, 1975). Conceptually related too are the appliqué panels of the Yoruba *egungun* and *gelede* masked dancers to the west, although executed in leather and featuring more specific Islamic motives (Thompson, 1974).

The last masquerade in chronological sequence is the *Olimi* commemorating deceased festival-titled women, Mothers of Spirits *(Inyilimi* or *Ozu).* A Dead Mother wears a white-faced, three-quarter helmet mask of wood (Figs. 13, 14), or a variant in cloth appliqué similar to that in an *Okakagbe* costume, and a pajama suit costume of imported trade cloth. Women own the masks, costume them, and accompany them in the diurnal displays of *Olimi* when they are danced by young kinsmen. There is no tradition of origin associated with the masks. They are said to have come around the same time as *Olimi* itself. However, the oldest masks documented date from the 1930s and were carved by Weppa-Wano (northern Edo) carvers to the east of Okpella. These masks were documented in the second and third eastern Okpella villages to celebrate the festival, and one wonders whether the second village sought to upstage the first after the introduction of the elders' masquerade Knock Out, or if the third village simply entered into the competition itself. Stylistically, the masks clearly relate to the white-faced "maiden spirit" masks used by the northern Ibo as well as other Ibo subgroups. Dead Mother masks are now carved by Okpella men, although none documented dated earlier than the mid-1950s.

The festival-title *(Ozu)* has a precedent in Okpella culture associated with the netted fiber *Aminague* masquerades, and a related institution *(oniku)* exists among the Igbira according to Okpella statements. However, *Olimi* festival-titled women achieve their status not only through oracular pronouncement but also by birth (during the two days of *Olimi*), or, more importantly, by economic means; and they are entitled to own and be commemorated by masks, which sharply distinguishes them from the *Oza* of *Aminague.* Although masks represent women in a general sense among the northern Ibo (Henderson, 1972:351), and female characters appear among Etsako masqueraders (Borgatti, 1972), the use of masks in commemorative ritual comparable to that for men is specific to Okpella and to the *Olimi* festival. It relates to a complex of factors, most importantly the ability of Okpella women to amass significant amounts of capital through inheritance and trade, aesthetic interest, and the desacralization of masquerades (weakening of taboos) borrowed from other peoples.

In summary, the senior night society *Ilukpekpe* is found in all Okpella villages and is considered an "indigenous" institution, brought from Benin according to the orthodox history. It forms part of the nucleus of *Olimi* festival, an aggregate of institutions and visual symbols which dates from the turn of the century, beginning in one eastern Okpella village, spreading rapidly to the other two eastern villages, but penetrating western Okpella only in the mid-1930s. The night society itself resembles Igala and northern Ibo societies rather than documented Bini institutions, and the imagery associated with the *Olimi* festival reflects traditions found among other northern Edo living to the southeast of Okpella, the Igbira to the north, and the Igala and Ibo living east of the Niger. *Okakagbe,* the cloth appliqué tradition, was introduced into Okpella circa 1920 from the Ibo-Igala borderland. Both eastern and western Okpella villages own dance costumes and sponsor dance troupes that function in the social realm. *Aminague,* the netted fiber masquerade, the most ancient of Okpella's extant masking traditions, is associated primarily with western Okpella although it penetrated the eastern sector in the nineteenth century. The imagery of *Aminague* reflects the traditions of other northern Edo peoples living to the west of Okpella and, in particular, neighboring northwest Edo village clusters. These images and reflections raise questions about the nature of masking in Bini culture, about the ability of ritual institutions to weather catastrophe (the Nupe invasions of the nineteenth century) assuming the Okpella "brought" institutions from Benin, and about the ethnic make-up and orthodox history of the Okpella people. □

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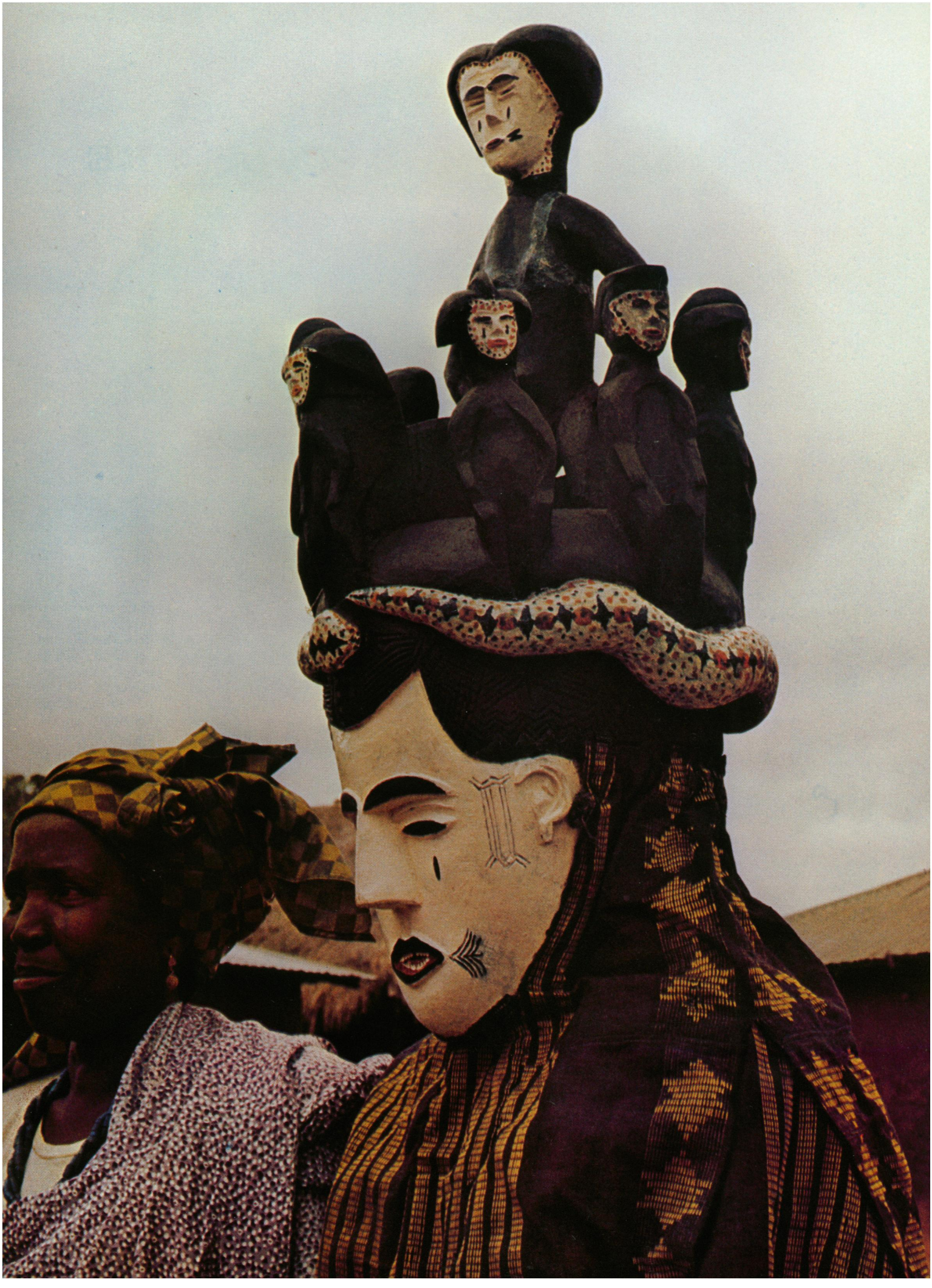
14. DEAD MOTHER ACCOMPANIED BY OWNER-CUSTODIAN



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EDO INFLUENCE, *Notes, from page 45*

1. Ekpo Eyo, "New Treasures From Nigeria," *Expedition,* v. 14, no. 2, 1972, p. 2-11.
2. S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840-1893,* London: Longman, 1971, p. 29.
3. J. I. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin,* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960, p. 13, 14.
4. A number of authors suggest that Owo's boundaries stretched far afield. (Ashara, *History of Owo,* 1951; Ojo, *Yoruba Palaces,* London; University of London Press, 1966; and Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba,* London: Methuen, 1969.) Ojo suggests that eastern Yoruba kingdoms had palaces roughly proportionate to the extent of their kingdoms, and that the palace in Owo covers as much as one twelfth of the area of the town, being the largest extant palace in Yorubaland. We may assume, then, that her kingdom was extensive as well. Ojo also notes that this large palace area is a trait that Owo shares with Benin.
5. This relationship has been tentatively dealt with by Fagg in "Tribal Sculpture and the Festival of Britain," *Man,* 51, June 1951, p. 73-76, and Willett and Picton in "On the Identification of Individual Carvers: A Study of Ancestor Shrine Carvings from Owo, Nigeria," *Man,* v. NS. 2, no. 1, March 1967, p. 62-69.
6. Egharevba, *op. cit.,* p. 32.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Paula Ben-Amos called my attention to a masking tradition in the Benin village of Iguosodin that is explicitly said to have been brought there from Owo.
9. Egharevba, *op. cit.* Oshogboye is said to have been the 16th Olowo. (The story as told by Ashara is almost identical to that told by Egharevba. A closer study needs to be done on the parallels between the two histories.)
10. Ipele and Ipenme on the outskirts of Owo town and Idoani and Idogun to the northeast are all said to have been founded by Benin princes or chiefs.
11. Egharevba, *op. cit., passim.*
12. Paula Ben-Amos cautions that title correspondences are more complicated than a simple one-way borrowing. A number of Bini titles are derived from Yoruba. It is possible that some of these came from Owo, that some Owo titles came from Benin, and that both Owo and Benin derived titles from other sources (see Chart I).
13. Paula Ben-Amos (personal communication, January 1976) pointed out that the red flannel outfits of Benin chiefs are explicitly referred to as "pangolin skin," *ikpakpa-ekhui.*
14. A human figure in ivory that was collected in Owo by Maurice Cockin ca. 1910 is almost identical to one used on the *orufonran* costume of the Ojomo of Owo. The Cockin piece is now in the collection of his daughter, Mrs. Celia Barclay.
15. A number of *udamalore* are in European and American collections. One collected in 1878 near Lagos is in the British Museum. (See Fagg, *op. cit.,* plate Fe.) A drawing of this piece is found also in Ling Roth, *Great Benin,* 1903, p. 116, where it is mistakenly called bronze. Another almost identical form but with ivory chains attached is in the Barclay collection, and a third belongs to the Ojomo of Owo and is worn with his *orufonran* costume. A fragment, evidently by the same hand or by one associated with that carver, is in the Tishman collection (see Roy Sieber, *The Sculpture of Black Africa,* 1969, no. 83).
16. *Ako* has been discussed by Frank Willett ("On the Funeral Effigies of Owo and Benin and the Interpretation of the Life Size Bronze Heads from Ife, Nigeria," *Man,* v. 1, no. 1, March 1966, p. 34-45).
17. *Ibid.,* p. 34-35.
18. Both Willett and Fagg have discussed this, and Justine Cordwell saw a naturalistic *ako* figure being prepared for use in 1949. See "Naturalism and Stylization in Yoruba Art," *Magazine of Art,* v. 46, May 1953, p. 223.
19. Willett, *op. cit.*
20. *Ako* was performed in Ipele in 1972 for an elderly woman and in Ifon the same year for a man.
21. Both Willett and Cordwell emphasize the display of wealth. Cordwell interpreted the lavish rites as an attempt to assure the continued benevolence of the dead for the living.
22. There are a few chieftaincies limited to women in Owo, but these are usually held by the wives of the Olowo. At least one Owo chieftaincy normally held by a male is today held by a female.
23. Yoruba shrines are normally referred to as *oju ebo* or *oju'bo.* Perhaps the Owo *oju'po* (pronounced "ojukpo") is related to the Edo *ukpo.*
24. Paula Ben-Amos, personal communication, 1975.
25. R. E. Bradbury, "Ezomo's Ikegobo and the Benin Cult of the Hand," *Man,* v. 6, 1961, p. 129-38.
26. Willett and Picton, *op. cit.*
27. Roth, *op. cit.,* p. 42.
28. Willett and Picton, *op. cit.*
29. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria,* London: Oxford University Press, 1926.
30. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria,* London: International African Institute, 1957, p. 87. Some Ikao people removed to Idoani in Owo District. People of Otwa sought refuge at Owo during Nupe and Ilorin Yoruba raids (p. 86). Also see Jean Borgatti, *The Northern Edo of Southern Nigeria: An Art Historical Geography of Akoko-Edo, Ivbiosakon, Etsako, and Ishan,* unpublished Master's Thesis, UCLA, 1971, p. 24, no. 1.
31. Ikpeshi, Northern Edo, is said to have come from Ipeshi, Akoko, which figures prominently in Owo history.
32. P. C. Lloyd, "The Traditional Political System of the Yoruba," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology,* v. 10, 1954, p. 369-372.
33. A series of grades in Ekiti is also called *otu* (Lloyd, *op. cit.,* p. 372). For an account of the *otu* system among the Edo of Ishan, see H. L. M. Butcher, "Some Aspects of the *Otu* System of the Isa Subtribes of the Edo People of Southern Nigeria," *Africa,* VIII, 1935, p. 149-62; Bradbury, *op. cit.,* p. 69, 89, etc.
34. See Butcher, *op. cit.,* p. 151f; Bradbury, 1957, p. 69. Among the Ekiti Yoruba, one *otu* is called *igbamo* (Lloyd, *op. cit.,* p. 372).
35. Bradbury, 1957, p. 78; Borgatti, *op. cit.,* p. 12.
36. William Fagg makes this suggestion in a note in *Man,* v. 62, 1962, p. 90.
37. Roger de la Burde, "Ancestral Ram's Heads of the Edo Speaking Peoples," *African Arts,* v. 6, no. 1, 1972, p. 28-34.
38. Roy Sieber, personal communication, January 1976.
39. Willam Fagg, *African Sculpture,* New York: International Exhibition Foundation, 1969, p. 123.
40. Frank Willett, *African Art,* New York: Praeger, 1971, p. 202.
41. Paula Ben-Amos points out that the Ishan culture hero *Agboghidi* supposedly introduced the Ekpo masquerade to the Bini area. Ekpo also employs white and black face masks, and *Agboghidi* is represented by one. Although the linguistic comparison of the names *agboghidi* and *agbodogin* may be rather farfetched, they do suggest another direction in which to look.
42. Ben-Amos, personal communication, 1974.
43. Paula Ben-Amos also pointed this out to me.
44. Borgatti, *op. cit.,* includes a description and illustrations of similar Edo pieces.
45. In Yorubaland it is believed that witches can transform themselves into birds, and bird imagery is often used to represent witches or witchcraft. In Owo, a number of *egungun* costumes employ carved birds or real feathers to demonstrate to the witches that all the powers possessed by witches are likewise possessed by the *egungun.*
46. See Bradbury, "The Benin Village" (edited excerpts from University of London Ph.D Thesis) in *Benin Studies,* London: Oxford University Press, International African Institute, 1973.
47. Bradbury, 1973, p. 192.

OKPELLA, *Notes, from page 32*

1. Field research was carried out in Nigeria from 1971 to 1974 under the auspices of the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities and partially funded by the following grants: Museum of Cultural History, Ralph Altman Award; Regents of the University of California, Patent Fund; NDEA Title VI awards.
2. Because of the unreliability of the 1963 and 1974 census data, the 1952 figures were compounded at the standard rate of 2.5 percent per year to arrive at an approximate figure.
3. In cooperation with the Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities, place names and individuals' names have not been included in hopes that this will spare individuals from harassment and that the publication of this article will not endanger the Okpella people's cultural heritage.
4. Compare: *Osanabua,* the Bini supreme deity (Bradbury, 1970: 52), and *Ihinegba,* the Igbira supreme deity (Brown, 1970: 70).
5. The fiber masquerades of Otuo and Ikao are displayed on posts in the forest sanctuary during the festival period in a manner similar to that described for *Ovia* costumes in Bini villages—providing another tenuous link with Benin. Until more research is carried out in Otuo, it is impossible to determine whether or not the fiber tradition belonged to autochthones and was adapted to Edo use patterns, or if the fiber tradition reflects early Bini practices.
6. No one had heard from Okeleke since 1966, and it was presumed that he had died in his homeland, for he was an old man by the time he left northern Edo country.

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CHART I — TITLES

Benin	*Owo*
Edaiken (heir apparent)	Idaniken (heir apparent)
Ezomo of Uzebu	Ojomo of Ujebu
Oliha (crowns the Oba)	Olisa (ranks first in order among the Iloro chiefs, who crown the Olowo)
Uwange	Unwagwe
Ologboshere	Ologboshere
Ero	Ero
Eriyo	Ariyo
Eribo	Aribo

CHART II — PLACE NAMES

Benin	*Owo*
Uselu village (home of Edaiken)	Ushelu (home of Idaniken)
Uzebu village (under Ezomo)	Ujebu Quarter (under Ojomo)
Usama (Oba lives here during coronation)	Ushama (Olowo lives here during part of coronation)

CHART III — PARAPHERNALIA TERMINOLOGY

Benin	*Owo*
Ezuzu (fan)	Ejuju (fan)
Ada (state sword)	Ada (state sword)
Udahae (band of beads worn around head of chief)	Udaigha (head beads)
Ododo (imported red cloth used by chiefs)	Adodo (imported red cloth used by chiefs)

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ISOKO, *Notes, from page 39*

1. The fieldwork on which this research is based was made possible by a National Institute of Health Research Fellowship in Cultural Anthropology (#F01 MH47923-01), 1971-72.
2. See Talbot, photograph facing p. 92, and Cole, 1975, plate 51.
3. Normally Isoko shrines have walls erected on the sides and back, while the front is covered with a raffia "curtain" or in some way marked.
4. Owode, pp. 64-65.
5. *Ibid.,* p. 71.
6. Among the Urhobo clay is specifically used to contain or enclose medicine; thus, the Isoko practice described here may be related—the "enclosing" of the medicine's creator or an important offering. I am indebted to W. Perkins Foss for this information.
7. Owode, p. 29.
8. *Ibid.,* p. 26. Ogholie was Owode's source for all his information on construction techniques.
9. See Fagg and Plass, pp. 33-34.
10. See Cole, 1975.
11. Mud sculptures are also found in shrines for Ake, Akobie, and others (Paula Ben-Amos, personal communication).
12. Beier, 1963; Cole, 1969a, 1969b, 1969c, 1975; Ben-Amos, 1973.
13. Dark, p. 62.
14. Ben-Amos, p. 10.
15. Ibid., p. 95 note 1; see also Beier, p. 62.
16. Dark, p. 62 note 40. Many, most notably R. E. Bradbury, have described court Edo culture as a result of Yoruba elements superimposed on village Edo culture.
17. Talbot, photographs facing pp. 92 and 142.
18. Beier, p. 60.
19. Cole, 1975, p. 113.

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IGBO METALSMITHS, *Notes, from page 49*

1. The term "bronze" will be used to refer to all objects cast from copper alloys since data on their actual metal composition are still incomplete. In addition, it has not been substantiated that African casters made any distinction between bronze on the one hand and brass on the other, as they did between pure copper and its derivative alloys.
2. Thurstan Shaw enhances Lawal's iconographical interpretation of some of the Tada/Jebba bronzes with historical arguments (1973). Also see Thompson 1972.
3. Background information was based on Hubbard 1948, Ikime 1969 and 1972 (chapters I) and Foster 1969. The writer also wishes to thank Philip Peek for his constructive comments.
4. This possibility is discussed in the writer's Ph.D. dissertation, "Igbo Metalsmithing Traditions of Southern Nigeria," Stanford University 1976.
5. In contrast, the Northern Edo had access to the services of local ironworkers, *ineme,* with ostensible roots in Benin (Bradbury 1957: 123ff).
6. This conclusion is based on Horton's and Alagoa's work as well as ethnographic data accompanying acquisitions at the National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.
7. A field study of Awka smiths was unkertaken in conjunction with doctoral research in Nigeria, 1974-75. Research was made possible by grants from Stanford University's Center for Research in International Studies and from the Committee on the Comparative Study of Africa and the Americas, 1974-75, and with the assistance of Nigeria's Federal Department of Antiquities.
8. For an introduction to the *ofo,* see Onwuejeogwu 1973.
9. An *ofo* with human features in the University of Ibadan art collection closely resembles an object from the Lipchitz collection, suggesting it may also be an *ofo* and not "associated with the *Ogboni* cult, Yoruba (?)." "African Art in the Collection of Jacques Lipchitz," *African Arts* 1970, III, 4, p.49.
10. This matter is discussed in detail in the writer's dissertation.
11. Hubbard (1948: 270ff; 273; 236ff) and Ikime (1972: 4ff) give differing versions of the Igbide legend. Sophisticated techniques of analysis must be applied before a true assessment of these oral traditions can be made.

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