

# Objects from a Colonial War

## The Dyer Collection

Simon Ottenberg

ALL PHOTOS BY CAMILLE OWENS, EXCEPT WHERE OTHERWISE NOTED

Some ninety-two Nigerian objects in the Museum of Vancouver, British Columbia were collected by Captain James Harold Dyer between 1902 and 1909 during the colonial conquest of southeastern Nigeria. Born in England, Dyer trained and served in the British Army at home, then went to South Africa, where he traded among the Zulus with a trek wagon and oxen until the Boer War (1899–1902), when he joined the South African Constabulary. He was the last dispatch rider to reach Mafeking before its siege. General Robert Baden-Powell, who led the defense, recommended Dyer for military duty in Nigeria, where he went shortly afterward (Menziés ca. 1937; Winsby 1937).

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Towards the end of nineteenth century the British, having gained control of the southeastern Nigeria's coast, were determined to open up the interior to trade and for missionary work. The interior was dominated by the Aro, an Igbo people, with their headquarters at Arochukwu,<sup>2</sup> some fifty miles north of the port of Calabar. From Arochukwu they had spread throughout the southeast, establishing settlements, controlling much of the internal trade in slaves and goods among the various ethnic groups there, and trading with coastal Africans who then traded with the Europeans. The Aro also controlled a famous oracle at Arochukwu which settled disputes and was linked to their trade (Dike and Ekejiuba 1990, Jones 1937).

The British wished to gain control of the export trade in palm oil and kernels from the interior and to trade their Manchester cloth and other manufactured items inland, requiring an end to the Aro oracle and the Aro's trade controls. The Cross River, extending north from Calabar and then turning eastward, another potential avenue for British trade, was dominated by several cultural groups

who prevented free passage (Partridge 1905; King 1844; Johnston 1888; Goldie 1885, 1890; Afigbo 2005b, 2005c; Waddell 1970; McFarlan 1957; Smith 1902; Partridge 1905).

A British-led military force was assembled by 1900 at Calabar, with Hausa and Fulani soldiers from northern Nigeria and Yoruba from the country's southwest. Arochukwu fell in December 1901 after only a few days of fighting (Heneker 1907, Afigbo 2005a, Nwabara 1968), with its oracle destroyed, although it continued secretly to exist. The entire southeast came under British administration during the next ten years.

The Museum of Vancouver records suggest that Dyer was involved in the fighting at Arochukwu, and that he acquired African objects there and elsewhere in the southeast in subsequent years. He served as Commissioner at Unwana, just south of Afikpo, in 1901 and at Afikpo, after a brief battle there,<sup>3</sup> becoming an administrative officer between October 1902 and July 1903, returning in 1907 and in 1909. On April 11, 1909 Dyer died at Afikpo of blackwater fever (from persistent malaria) and was buried there (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup>

### DYER'S COLLECTION

Although Dyer obtained objects between Obubra and Afikpo to the north and Calabar, Oron, and the Eket area in the coastal south, there is little in the museum's files to indicate how they were acquired—probably by seizure, as gifts from local leaders, and through purchase. While Dyer appeared to have collected objects at Arochukwu, this wealthy trading center had obtained them from all over southeast Nigeria and even beyond, creating difficulties in establishing their provenience. In 1935, the museum's curator, Thomas P.O. Menziés,<sup>5</sup> a cousin of Dyer's sister in England, who arranged the collection's transfer to Vancouver, wrote to her<sup>6</sup> that the collection was to be displayed under



1 The metal grave of Captain James Harold Dyer near the Government Station, Afikpo, rediscovered by the Afikpo elder Gabriel A. Agwu and others in October 2010, after clearing the bush away. The posts were probably once linked by a metal or rope chain. H: 1.58 m.  
PHOTO: SIMON OTTENBERG

the heading "South Nigerian Exhibit. Afikpos District." Menzies obtained information on the collection through correspondence, face-to-face contact with Dyer's sister, or from Dyer's notes or letters, if they ever existed.

Menzies wrote an unpaginated brochure (ca. 1937), probably for the exhibition's docents, where he wrote in dramatic British colonial style rather negatively of Africans and their cultures;<sup>7</sup> a talk on Dyer's collection by an Elizabeth Winsby (1937) at the museum contained similar views, which are not those held by the museum today.

The objects from southeast Nigeria reflect Dyer's probable movements between Calabar in the south and Obubra in the north, drawing from a range of cultures and subcultures collected over an eight-year span.<sup>8</sup> Some objects in it existed widely in Nigeria's southeast, so that without documentation their origin is difficult to determine, while others were associated with only a single cultural group, but their location within is unknown; still others can be linked to both a culture and a place.<sup>9</sup>

Mirror glass, iron, brass and copper rods, and other metal came from Europe, but there was also indigenous mining and native metallurgy in southeast Nigeria. Some musical instruments, hats, and other items probably originated in northern Nigeria through Hausa and Fulani colonial military in the southeast, or they traveled south through trade.

#### FIVE IBIBIO MASKS AND A STAFF

The collection is graced with five interesting Ibibio masks and a staff, only confounded by their Ibibio group. Forde and Jones (1950:66–94), include six culturally related groups having dialects of Ibibio: Eastern Ibibio or Ibibio proper, Western Ibibio or Anang, Northern Ibibio or Enyong, southern Ibibio or Eket, Ibibio Delta or Andoni-Ibeno, and Riverain [*sic*: River-



Map 1  
Eastern Southeastern Nigeria

ine] Ibibio, including the Efik in Calabar and its environs. I will employ Ibibio for the six groups together when an object cannot be identified with a particular subgroup.

G.I. Jones, referring to the Ibibio as a whole, wrote: "Igbos greatly admired Ibibio masks and there were plenty circulating in the Arochukwu area in my day (1926–1946) and probably in Dyer's" (1989:1), which suggests that some of Dyer's objects from Arochukwu came from elsewhere. He continues to comment that the five masks and staff at the Vancouver Museum were "probably, to judge by their refinement, carved in the Anang area (Ikot Ekpene and Abak divisions)." He may be correct for the first three masks discussed here (Murray 1950:55, Jones 1938:107), but not for the two others.

One mask has a male, symmetrical face with keloid marks on the forehead center and in the temple areas (Fig. 2). Its articulating mouth is more typical of coastal Ogoni, a non-Ibibio group west of Calabar, although it sometimes occurs in Anang and Eastern Ibibio masks (Wittmer and Arnett 1978:Figs. 149, 155, 157). Jill Salmons, a scholar of Anang art, writes<sup>10</sup> that the hinged jaw "is more typically found in a number of the villages of the [Eastern] Ibibio and Anang area.... I suspect that the use of the hinged jaw was probably imported from the Ogoni into Anang land rather than the other way around." At some point,



2 Ekpo mask of the Anang  
Wood, string, surface browned; H: 22 cm

3 Wood plaque mask, of either Okobo or Eket origin.  
Wood, traces of color; H: 30 cm

4 Small circular mask from either Eket or Oron  
Wood; H: 13 cm

Salmons had written on the mask's museum acquisition page: "Anang-Ibibio. Used by Ekpo, a secret society," a society concerned with ancestral spirits and human ghosts, who return as masquerade figures for a few weeks once a year (Messenger 1973:120–23; Jones 1984:129–31, 182–83; Akpan 1994; Wittmer and Arnett 1978:64–73)."

Jones writes (1938:106–107) that Ekpo masks are either beautiful or ugly and that of three main Ibibio groups—Anang, [Eastern] Ibibio and Efik—the Anang "are responsible for most of the good masks and carving from this region. Their finest productions are the old black Ekpo masks" (ibid, p. 106). Dyer's mask has many characteristics of Anang masks and is probably from there. Eyebrows are not shown, but the grounded hollows beneath them are over emphasized, the eyelids are carved and, with the eye holes, are large, oval, and placed very wide apart, the lips are full and prominent and carefully modeled, and the teeth are rarely shown. Eyes and lips are distorted till they appear approximately the same shape and size and are spaced so as to form almost an equilateral triangle, of which the eyes and line of the brows form the base and the lips the apex. The nose is snub and is reduced in size until it forms a small triangle within the larger ones. Tribal marks, when shown, consist of a series of raised keloids or scars arranged to form a vertical line on each temple and a vertical line down the center of the forehead (ibid., p. 108).

Menzies (ca. 1937) calls two unusual rectangular masks surrounded by flat boards "bracket carvings" (Fig. 3). Both are of approximately the same height, each hollowed out in the back, and each having a bearded face. They appear awkward to wear and were probably filled out with raffia or cloth. Anang masks (Akpaide 1982:28, upper left mask) usually lack this board feature, although Jones (1984:Fig. 82, 1989:1) depicts such a mask and others are reported in the literature.<sup>11</sup> Both of Dyer's masks have many of the characteristic Ibibio features described above by Jones. Their use is unknown but their origin is probably Anang, Eastern Ibibio, or Southern Ibibio.

Two similar small circular masks, each with a human face (Fig. 4) are probably from the Oron or Eket in the southern Ibibio region. Each piece has a short nose, quarter-moon cut-out eyes, minimal lips, a closed mouth and a very rounded quality. One of them has incised rectangular images on its edges and both have suggestions of coloring beneath their browned surfaces. There is a notation by Keith Nicklin on the museum acquisition sheet of one of them, suggesting that it was "probably from the Okobo area near Oron." Okobo is a small Ibibio group north of Oron at the Cross River's mouth, opposite Calabar. The Eket are contiguous with the southwest Oron, and François Neyt (1979:17, 130–31, Figs. 17–18), depicts two similar masks associated with the Ekpo society that appear at Eket yam festivals and funerals; there is a similar mask published in 1902 labeled Efik-Ibibio style (M'Keown 1902:162). Dyer's two masks are of either Okobo or Eket origin.

A ceremonial staff (44.7 cm) has a Janus sculpture at its top with similar face whose features resemble those of Eastern Ibibio and Anang masks. Janus masks and figures occur among a number of Cross River ethnic groups, including the Ibibio (Von Sydow 1932:16 and Plate 1). Jill Salmons writes of Dyer's staff:

The staff head is sporting an Idiong ring which indicates that the owner of the staff was a member of the Idiong society—the main diviners in the Anang/Ibibio area. Such staffs would have been carried as a symbol of office, but also within the context of divining when an Idiong priest would evoke the ancestors by knocking the stick on the ground. It is believed that the ancestral spirits live in the underworld and will respond to libations, chanting and the calls of an Idiong priest, who would need their help and guidance in dealing with individual cases. The staff head is sporting an Idiong ring which indicates that the owner of the staff was a member of the Idiong society—the main diviners in the Anang/Ibibio area. Such staffs would



5 Afikpo Mba mask  
Browned wood, raffia, string; H: 42 cm

6 Mkpere style Mba mask from Afikpo  
Browned wood, raffia, string; H: 46.5 cm

7 Stool, possibly from Arochukwu  
Browned and shined hard wood; H: 24 cm;  
D: 32 cm



have been carried as a symbol of office, but also within the context of divining when an *Idiong* priest would evoke the ancestors by knocking the stick on the ground.<sup>9</sup>

This staff is probably *Anang*, although its style may be found among other *Ibibio* groups.

#### AFIKPO MASKS

The Afikpo are a mixture of Igbo who moved there from the west several hundred years ago, partially absorbing earlier non-Igbo Cross River peoples. Afikpo has a prehistory of over three thousand years, beginning with a pre-ceramic culture belonging to unknown peoples (Chikwendu 1998). Dyer's collection contains two finely sculpted Afikpo Mba masks in excellent condition (Figs. 5–6), better in quality than those made for Ottenberg by the Afikpo sculptor Chukwu Okoro in the 1950s (Ottenberg 1975a:27–31, Plate II and Figs. 6–7), although lacking colors other than brown and black, whatever their original colors were. Roy Sieber wrote of the two Afikpo masks in the collection: "These two masks were probably cleaned in oil, perhaps motor oil, as was the custom in the early twentieth century England with African artefacts as a preservative and 'to make them look nice'" (Ottenberg 1975b:2).

Dyer's two masks, probably the oldest existing ones from Afikpo,<sup>14</sup> would have been associated with the village men's secret society, which all adult males joined. Both masks have narrow faces, long pointed noses, small oval mouths, protruding

noses, triple cheek lines, and abstract designs, features common in Afikpo masks today. Neither show much sign of wear and both have raffia twined cord backings, characteristic of Afikpo masks and those of their Igbo neighbors; but rarely found elsewhere among the Igbo.

One Mba (Fig. 5, and Maranda et al. 1982:85, right) has triangles, parallel lines, and oval designs on its top board. Its vertical keloid forehead markings and its watch-spring sideburns are commonly found on southeastern Nigerian masks, as its projecting mouth and teeth are typical of many Igbo masks. Small bits of raffia hang from the top board, absent from the 1950s masks that I observed. The mask is unusual in having a raffia string roll tied around the top piece's base, perhaps containing medicine to protect the masquerader from jealous rivals and to ensure a spirited performance. In the 1950s at Afikpo, Mba was often worn by Akparakpa masqueraders, recent young initiates into the village men's society, who danced counterclockwise in a circular line to music between the skits and songs of the satiric *Okumkpa* masquerade (Ottenberg 1975a). However, some Akparakpa wore other mask forms.

The other Mba (Fig. 6) has fuller raffia hangings, suggesting that the first mask may have lost most of its own, and it lacks the open projecting mouth and teeth of the first mask. This Mba differs from those existing at Afikpo in the 1950s in having black rectangular keloid sideburns as well as the raffia hangings. Its top board has cutout designs found in the 1950s on a type of Mba called *Mkpere* (Ottenberg 1975a:31, Plate II right and Fig. 7), and



(this page)

**8** Decorated Igbo ceremonial pepper sauce dish with removable cover.  
Browned wood; H: 9.5 cm, W: 36.8 cm x 33 cm

**9–10** Front and rear views of a double pipe, probably from the Kwale Igbo region  
Terracotta; H: 12 cm, W: 17.8 cm, D: 10.8 cm

(opposite)

**11** Decorated pipe from southeastern Nigeria with the typical watch-spring designs of the region  
Brass and wood; L: 30 cm

**12** The collection's smallest drum  
Wood, skin, and fiber; H: 26.6 cm

**13** Motifs inside the smaller drum



it was employed in ceremonies of a man taking Omume, the highest Afikpo title, rather than in the Okumkpa.

There are questions concerning the Afikpo provenience of the two masks, despite Ottenberg's Afikpo masquerade book (1975a). Similar masks are found in the contiguous and historically related Igbo groups of Unwana, Edda (Nzekwu 1963), Amaseri, and Okpoha, the five collectively called Ada by Forde and Jones (1950:53–54). Two other Igbo groups contiguous with Edda, Nkporo (Jones 1939a) and Akaeze (Forde and Jones (1950:53–54), share some similar masking features.<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to be sure from which of these groups the two masks came.<sup>16</sup> However, Dyer's government headquarters was at the Afikpo village-group and since he apparently labeled them as from Afikpo, it is likely that they came from there.

#### A STOOL AND A BOWL

Menzies (ca. 1937) lists Arochukwu as the provenience of an elegantly sculpted stool (Fig. 7) made from a single piece of hardwood (his notes call it "Ram wood"). There are incised triangles on the seat's edge and incised squares in its supporting sections. It was probably once owned by a wealthy man or a community leader. It could be from anywhere in Nigeria's southeast.

A fine bowl and cover (Fig. 8), of a kind owned by southeast

Nigerian families, is often associated with the Igbo. Yet Menzies (ca. 1937) wrote inside the lid: "Dyer Collection Chop" Dish. Carved by Okon natives and commonly used by natives on the Cross River." I have been unable to locate Okon; perhaps he meant Oron, a group in the lower Cross River area related to the Efik, or Ikot Okon, an Efik area some twenty miles north of Calabar. Some lids have two human faces carved on them facing one another (Ottenberg 1975a:Fig. 30). Pepper sauce in a palm oil base was usually placed in its center cavity and kola nut, meat, or dried fish was cut on the small round platform on one side of the bowl's surface and dipped in the sauce with a stick or the fingers and eaten. Dyer's bowl has holes at each end, probably for a cord to carry it. Ottenberg wrote (1975b) that the "black surface suggest some refinishing after being collected to preserve it. It may have been newly made for Dyer, for it shows little evidence of wear." Called *ochichi* in Afikpo Village-Group, it has been employed at the commencement of feasts and in greeting persons who came to visit its owner's home. Some bowls are simpler in construction, whether rectangular or circular, and without



decoration. Cole and Aniakor (1984:63, Fig. 101) depict an Igbo bowl and lid from the Ezza of Abakaliki north of Afikpo, writing: "Elaborate kola bowls are most common among eastern and northeastern Igbo, who are doubtless the inventors of the type. Many fine containers originating among the Ezza, Izzi, Bende and Okigwe peoples, however have found their way into other Igbo areas by trade." Dyer's bowl is likely to be Igbo.

#### TWO PIPES

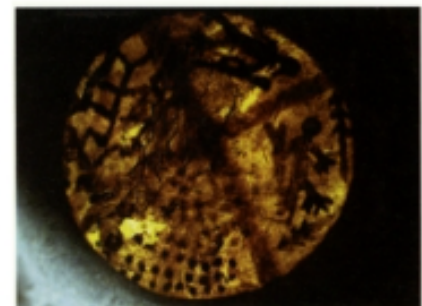
A prize of the collection is a rare stemless, double-bowled terracotta ceremonial pipe (Figs. 9–10). Between its two bowls sits a naked woman, with a raised vertical mid-forehead line and a peaked headdress, typical of some female-faced Igbo masks and of Igbo women's ceremonial hair dress. There is a neck piece with a charm hanging from it, full breasts, a large umbilicus, not unusual in Igbo wood figures, and a well-developed vulva. The fingers of her right hand clutch a side of the pipe bowl; the left arm is broken off at the elbow. Camille Owens, an associate curator at the Museum of Vancouver, suggests that the reddish color of the object's bottom indicates that the clay was high in iron. Menzies (ca. 1937) writes that Dyer obtained the pipe during the Arochukwu campaign. This is possible as it is a special piece, reserved for ceremonial use, an object the Aro would have the resources to obtain from elsewhere.

Terracotta forms existed independently in various Nigerian sites (Oyelola 1984)—such as among the Izzi and Ezza Igbo in the Abakaliki area, north of Afikpo—which are of unknown time depth. However, the style differs from Dyer's piece (Cole and Aniakor 1984:81–82, Figs. 149–50, 152).<sup>41</sup> Terracotta pottery dating from the fifth to the fifteenth century, attributed to the Qua, a small Cross River group at Calabar by V.I. Ekpo (1984), also differs in style. Cole and Aniakor (1984:78) provide a convincing case that Dyer's double pipe "is assuredly of Kwale Igbo manufacture—having thus travelled well over 100 miles before the turn of the century" to Dyer's area of activity, an attribution based "on the forehead relief 'stripe'"<sup>42</sup> shared by a number of Kwale figural terracotta, although they admit that Abakaliki terracottas sometimes have this feature.

There are a number of terracotta sculptures in European col-

lections in the Kwale (also called Ukuane) area west of the Niger River, in the southern part of the western Igbo (Anioma) area. These are almost the same in style and bear some resemblance to Dyer's pipe, including several complete pieces in the British Museum collected without detailed documentation over a number of years<sup>43</sup> and three fragments found in 1955 in the Kwale village of Osisa (Berns 1993:137). Each complete terracotta is composed of from three to five human figures, almost always with a central male image with a female on each side, also occasionally with animal images. These differ from Dyer's double pipe, and it has little facial resemblance to the faces in these figural works. However, the basic arrangement in the Dyer pipe of a major central figure, here a woman rather than a male, with bowls at its side rather than females, is similar in style to the Kwale terracottas, as is the busy quality of the surface in the pipe's front and back. Berns (1993:137) and Schaedler (1985:196–97) suggest that the Kwale ceramics were probably made by women.<sup>44</sup>

The researches in the Kwale region of the art historian Perkins Foss at Osisa and neighboring villages in 1968 confirmed the existence of ceramic figures similar to Dyer's pipe. In 2000 Foss visited another Kwale town of Ishiagwu, where he saw much pottery. He suggests that Dyer's double pipe is probably from Kwale "based on the rouletting that appears not only in Osisa-wear yam cult and related imagery, in the form of bowls, small figurative work, on objects made of terracotta. Also the 'coffee-





decoration. Cole and Aniakor (1984:63, Fig. 101) depict an Igbo bowl and lid from the Ezza of Abakaliki north of Afikpo, writing: "Elaborate kola bowls are most common among eastern and northeastern Igbo, who are doubtless the inventors of the type. Many fine containers originating among the Ezza, Izzi, Bende and Okigwe peoples, however have found their way into other Igbo areas by trade." Dyer's bowl is likely to be Igbo.

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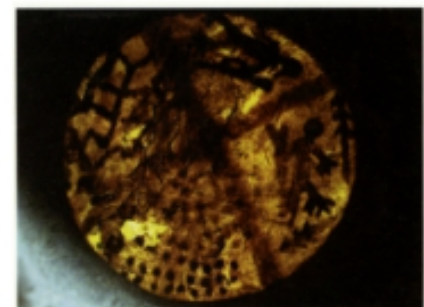
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14 Two well-decorated rattles  
Wood; L: 29.3 cm and 30.8 cm

15 Decorated bells with watch-spring and other designs, one of them possibly from Ekuri  
Copper alloy; H: 15 cm and 14 cm

16 A small, well-crafted gong whose provenience in southeastern Nigeria is unknown  
Iron; L: 31.6 cm

bean eyes' seem correct for the area."<sup>23</sup> Barry Hecht, a collector of southeastern Nigerian art, writes that the "face on the Vancouver piece reminds me of the [wood] figures on the *Nwamuo* dance trophies illustrated by G.I. Jones among the Ika Igbo,"<sup>24</sup> a people living near the Kwale. The face on the Dyer pipe little resembles those on these wood pieces.

Where Dyer obtained the pipe is unknown, but his sphere of activity, so far as we know, was at least a hundred miles from Kwale. However, Cole and Aniakor (1984:78) and Isichei (1978:171-72) provide examples of Nigerian pottery traveling long distances and the Aro expert Eli Bontor writes<sup>25</sup> that Aro people linked to Arochuku traded in the lower Niger River area, although no Aro settlements existed there, bringing objects to Arochuku through their trade network. The conclusion is that the Dyer pipe came from the Kwale area of the southwestern Igbo region.

A brass pipe, which would have had a prominent owner, has a wood stem and midsection and a metal mouthpiece and bowl (Fig. 11). The watch-spring design on the bowl is endemic among the Igbo (Isichei 1978:Fig. 3a) and is found elsewhere in southeast Nigeria. Three brass loops on the bowl's bottom make it possible to hang the pipe up and a hole at the bowl's bottom suggests intensive wear. The museum file reads: "Native pipe Aro-Chuku District," but it might have come from anywhere in the southeast, probably made from brass rods imported by European traders. However, Ekejiuba (1967) argues that Nigerian metalwork was not entirely dependent on European metal, noting that at Arochuku there were ample copper-alloy castings owned by elders and that lead-zinc deposits existed to the north in the Igbo area of Ishiagu and Abakaliki and copper in the latter place (Craddock et al. 1997).

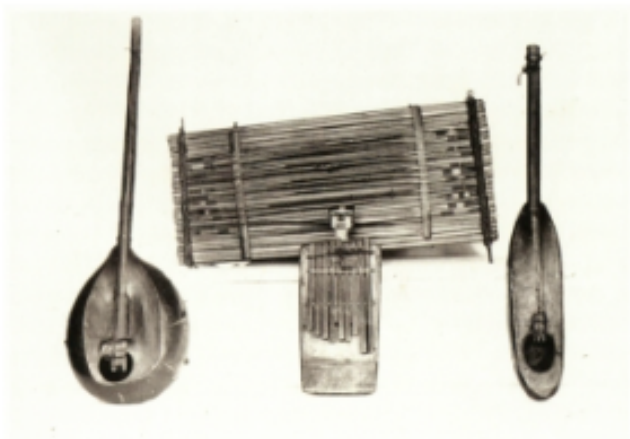


#### RHYTHMICAL INSTRUMENTS

A number of musical instruments were collected by Dyer, suggesting that he had an interest in indigenous music. They were mostly played by males; women's gourd rattles, flat wood clappers, and ceramic musical pots are missing.<sup>26</sup> Dyer's gong (43 cm x 29.2 cm x 8.8 cm) is classified by Echezona (1981:16) as an *ekwe*, an Igbo term that stands for a variety of wood gongs. He depicts one similar to Dyer's from Orlu, an Igbo group west of Afikpo. Jones (1989:2) writes that the "wooden slit drum (anthropologically known as a gong) is a typical Ibo instrument, but common elsewhere in the southeast." Akpabot (1986:14-15, Fig. 12) notes its presence among the Ibibio and the coastal Ijo (Ijaw) as a solo and an ensemble instrument; in the latter case it has "rhythmic and colourist functions."

Eli Bontor<sup>26</sup> believes that the smallest of the three drums in the collection is a typical Aro drum called *igba*, an Igbo term for drum (Fig. 12). The Igbo scholar Johnston Njoku writes that it "is common among and traditional to the people of the Afikpo/Calabar Cross River Basin area."<sup>27</sup> Looking at the drum's skin from inside with a strong light on the outside, as museum curator Camille





**17** Decorated lamellaphone (center); L 28 cm (11.0")  
Two-string lute (right); L: 52.5 cm  
Single-string lute (left); L: 60 cm  
Zither; L: 50.2 cm probably of northern Nigerian origin  
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER PHOTOGRAPH (1937)

**18** Personal objects:

Straight-handled wood-framed mirror (right); H: 62 cm  
Wood-framed mirror with a with a carved head (left); H: 42.5 cm  
Fiber-coil cap (upper left); H: 14 cm  
Cotton cap; H: 14.8 cm  
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER PHOTOGRAPH (1937)

**19** Two wood combs from Umon with decorated handles.

Right comb; H: 24.6 cm  
Left comb; H: 25.2 cm  
Other objects include hair pins, two flat ivory bracelets, and at center a long brass bracelet which is not, in fact, attached to a narrow decorated metal bracelet above it  
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER PHOTOGRAPH (1937)



Owens suggested, there are paintings of a mother and child, a man with a gun, spears or arrow points, dots and cross-hatch designs, none visible from the outside (Fig. 13). The outer side of the skin is treated to preserve it and perhaps for concealment. Motifs inside the smallest drum might be *nsibidi*, found in the Efik and southeastern Igbo areas (Battestini 1999), which might be associated with the influential men's Ekpe society. The scholar Eli Bentor doubts that these are ancient *nsibidi* writing, but Njoku indicates that they are *nsibidi* and that he has seen a drum like Dyer's.<sup>28</sup>

Another drum a little taller (30.5 cm) but similar in style, lacking any motifs, is of a form widespread in the southeast (Akpabot 1975:19 and Fig. 1, right image). A third drum, 27.7 cm tall, with an attached copper rod for handling is similar to the other drums except for a three-leg wood extension down the drum's sides, on which the drum sits. Akpabot (1986:16) writes that "the Ibibios have a unique three-legged drum called *Ibid Ekpo* used for ritual music of the *Ekpo* society" (and see Akpabot 1975:Fig. 2).

Two decorated wood double rattles with wood knockers would have been rotated by the hands in midsection—too soft in sound to play with other instruments (Fig. 14). David Pratten<sup>29</sup> indicates that the Anang call it *Nkwom* and diviners use it. Eli Bentor saw one in each hand of a musician accompanying a masquerader in an Aro play. The drum is widespread in

southeastern Nigeria (Lo-Bamijoko 1983:Fig. 6), and Echezona (1981:50–52) claims its use in Uyo Ekpo society masquerades.

Of two similar copper alloy bells<sup>30</sup> lacking their clappers (Fig. 15), Menzies (ca. 1937) writes that they and an iron gong in the collection (Fig. 16) were from Arochukwu. One of the alloy bells is listed in the museum files as being made of copper and "made by Ekuri natives from Biase using imported metal by the late Royal Niger Company." Ekuri, slightly south of Afikpo on the Cross River's east bank, is a non-Igbo Cross River group. Cole and Aniakor (1984:53 and Fig. 78) write that the Igbo blacksmiths at Abiriba, between Afikpo and Arochukwu, who were well-known for their iron work, also worked in bronze (Nicklin 1982). Ekejiuba (1967) supports this view, writing that Arochukwu elders owned copper alloy and iron objects from Abiriba, where they had contacts. This information broadens the possible metal sources in the southeast. Both bells have watch-spring designs and other linear elements.

There are three known similar bells from Oron (Nigerian National Museum n.d.:62, Fig. 37). Neaher (1979:Fig. 5) mentions a similar tulip-shaped, bronze waist bell in the British Museum obtained between 1907 and 1916 in the Eket District by P. Amaury Talbot. She writes (1979:46): "In eastern Igbo regions under the hegemony of the Aro, messengers with bell racks sig-



(this page)

**20** Large brass bracelets or anklets with a nine-cowry shell design  
Both objects: H: 3.9cm (1.5"); Diameter: 11.4cm (4.5").

**21** Large bracelet or anklet with parallel leaf designs  
Brass; 6.3 cm x 5.7cm

(opposite)

**22** Knives, spears, three metal bells and the iron gong  
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER PHOTOGRAPH (1937)

**23** Brass and copper rods (about 43 cm), five manilas, an ivory necklace and a metal bracelet  
PHOTO: MUSEUM OF VANCOUVER PHOTOGRAPH (1937)



naled the arrival of important personages," associating bells with leadership. Dyer's two bells were not rare in the southeast.

Despite looking like a knife case, the object in Figure 16 is a gong. It was probably struck with a metal rod or wood stick, one of many iron gongs of various sizes and shapes in southeast Nigeria, sometimes in double-gong form. Igbos call it *ogene*. Dyer's style of gong existed in Efik cultures (Lo Bamijoko 1983:34). Akpabot (1975: Plate 7, second from the left) calls it an Ibibio ritual gong associated with Ekpe masquerades and the women's Ekere society.

Two raffia rattles, each about 13 cm high, have looped handles, interior seeds or pebbles, and a leather base, although some rattles have metal bases. They are "used principally in ceremonial orchestras and seldom played solo" (Akpabot 1975:145, Lo-Bamijoko 1983:21 and Fig. 9, Echezona 1981:65, 68). Usually a male instrument, females sometimes also play them (Echeruo 1998:145; Lo-Bamijoko 1983:21 and Fig. 9; Echezona 1981:65, 68).

#### MELODIC INSTRUMENTS

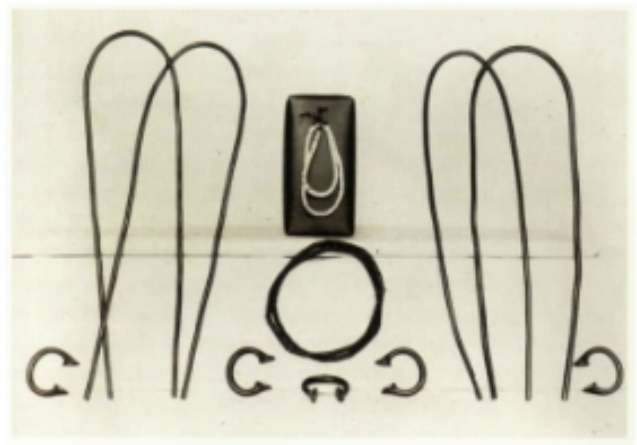
Despite Western belief in the dominance of rhythm in African music (Agwu 2003), Dyer collected four melodic instruments also present in the southeast. The lamellaphone<sup>11</sup> (*ubo uka* in Igbo), a popular solo instrument in the southeast (Okosa 1962:5–14, Echezona 1981:142–49, Akpabot 1975:15), is held in both hands and played with the thumbs. Dyer's instrument, 28 cm long (Fig. 17, bottom center), has nine bamboo tongues of various lengths set on two backing boards sealed together. It is unusual in having

a sculpted face at its top. Other instruments use a half gourd as the resonator; both types occur today with metal keys. An informal solo instrument rather than a ritual one, it is often played in the evening by a peripatetic male singer.

While stringed instruments were not common in the southeast, mostly deriving from the country's north, a two-stringed lute (Fig. 17, right) called *okome* in Igboland (Ottenberg 1975b) is plucked or bowed, with a narrow sounding box of wood and rawhide. Nevertheless Akpabot (1986:39) writes that it has been universally found in the southeast and could be of Ibo or Ibibio origin. Of Dyer's singled-stringed instrument (Fig. 17, left) with a leather-covered sounding gourd, Jones (1989:2) writes: "The single stringed fiddles are common in Northern Nigeria and are sold in the South by Hausa traders. They were not used by local musicians." A zither (Fig. 17, top center), is made of many reed strings with strips of bamboo wrapped in fiber framed to a board by raffia-twined crosspieces placed near the ends, with other crosspieces at each end. Backside strings act as resonators. Omibiyi (1977:32) writes: "It is held in both hands and played with the two thumbs. It is a solo instrument." It is not often found in the southeast as it is too soft in sound to appear in an ensemble. A side-blown, undecorated elephant tusk horn, 39 cm in length, might be from anywhere in the southeast. It is associated with status and political power.

#### PERSONAL OBJECTS

Although in Dyer's time individuals in the southeast generally lacked a strong weaving tradition (except for Akwete cloth), and dressed simply in contrast to northern Nigerians, yet they used a variety of personal items, which he collected. Two European mirrors are in African wood frames; one has triangular border incisions (Fig. 18, right) and a back incised with hourglass and quatrefoil designs, the other more elaborate mirror (Fig. 18, left) has a carved human face on its handle tip, complex triangular incisions on its front, and curvilinear and triangular incisions in its back. Such mirrors were often carried by titled women as



display items at various rites. Their patterns were sometimes reduced versions of those found on wood doors and panels.

Jones (1989:1–2) writes that caps were “a characteristic headgear of Cross River peoples and ranged from imported coloured wool ones to ones made locally out of local material.” The Amaseri tribe was famous for making “war caps.” At Afikpo in the 1950s, caps of twined raffia coils tied together were employed mock-fighting contests. Menzies (ca. 1937) claims that a cap of black and white twined cotton (Fig. 18, upper right) was worn by Afikpo secret society members, while Bentor told me that it is in an Aro style. A flat brown fan of light wood, (not pictured here, H: 16 cm) shows European influence in its leaf designs on front and back. A comment in its file states: “Probably Calabar Efik type of ceremonial fan carried by girls from the fattening room with pyroengraving typical of the area.”<sup>12</sup> Wood combs listed as from Umon in the museum records were common in the southeast (Fig. 19). Figure 19 also depicts copper, brass, and ivory hairpins and bracelets or anklets. Menzies (ca. 1937) claimed that two brass bracelets or anklets (Fig. 20) were from Arochukwu. A long brass bracelet or anklet (Fig. 21) is of unknown origin.

Not surprisingly for a soldier, Dyer collected knives and spear points (Fig. 22). The center knife is of a style formerly ritually employed by the Afikpo Yam Priest. Bentor<sup>13</sup> states that the knife at the right is typical of Arochukwu knives.

The major Cross River currency was copper rods from Britain and other European sources, beginning in the 1600s, and also brass rods (Fig. 23) starting about 1850 (Jones 1958:46). Africans carried or head-loaded rods into the country’s interior. Other currencies of European origin were secondary, more common further west in southern Nigeria, including iron bars, cowry shells, copper wire, and bags of salt. Plain or decorated European-made manillas in various sizes, bracelet-like objects with flattened ends of copper or copper alloys (Fig. 23) were less frequently used than rods in the southeast (Nigerian National Museum Oron n.d:64–65, Fig. 38; Grey 1951).

#### CONCLUSIONS

Dyer was not the only military or administrative officer to acquire objects during and after the Aro campaign.<sup>14</sup> As in the case of other colonialists, Dyer’s life in Nigeria was paradoxical. He fought against Africans; he administered in British style over them in order to “civilize” them by altering their politics, cultures and lives; and his actions assisted British economic domination over them. On the other hand, and this is speculative, he may have admired some of the African objects he collected, and some that he did not, for the artistic skills involved in creating them, such as the terracotta pipe and the masks.

Dyer probably held popular ideas of the time on human social evolution, viewing his objects as representatives of an earlier stage of social life, wondering, as some colonial officers did whom I met in the southeast in the 1950s, whether Africans could ever “catch up” on the social evolutionary scale. Or did he gather objects to contrast his African cultural experiences to British home life, to help explain the strangeness of Africa in contrasts to British life? Did he obtain objects simply through an urge to possess them? Did he collect because other military and non-military colonial officers and missionaries were doing so? Did he observe African masquerades and other rituals, or did he keep his distance from them? All we know is that he collected. His objects provide glimpses into the cultures of southeastern Nigeria at a critical point in its history, a small reminder today of dramatic changes that were just beginning. His grave at Afikpo was forgotten, although he became part of the oral history of Afikpo.

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## Notes

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1 Previously known as the Centennial Museum and before that City Museum.

2 In the literature also spelled Arochuku, Aro Chuku, and Aro Chukwu.

3 The author's field research notes from 1951–1953 at Afikpo (pp. 153–54) present the fighting there from the African viewpoint through comments by Chief Okpari Nkama of Kpogrikpo and Nwata Ibe of Mgbom (pp. 156–17). The author's field notes are at the Anthropology Archives, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Also see Heneker 1907, who led the fighting against the Afikpo. For a more recent account by an Afikpo-born historian see Aja 1992. For a follow-up of events after the fighting at Afikpo see Afikpo District Intelligence Report 1927, in the author's archives (D-33-37).

4 The metal grave, in almost perfect condition, indicates that at the time of his death Dyer was Captain, 3rd Battalion, Southern Lancaster Regiment in military rank and Assistant Divisional Officer in administrative position.

5 Born in Britain, Menzies was an amateur biologist, an adventurer, served in the merchant marine, traveled to Australia and the South Seas, worked in his father's wine business in Karachi, was a fruit farmer in South Africa, and a farmer in Manitoba. See "The Menzies Family" under "Genealogy Page of John Blythe Dobson," <http://cybrary.uswinnipeg.ca/people/dobson.genealogy/f/menzies.cfm>

6 Letter from T.P.O. Menzies to Mrs. Dyer Thompson, October 17, 1935.

7 I have made use of the brochure, comments written on the objects by Menzies, comments in the acquisitions files by various scholars, the observations of the curator Camille Owens, published information, my notes on the collection at an earlier time, a visit to the collection in December 2009, my researches at Afikpo, and personal contacts with scholars.

8 Excluding discussion here of eleven pieces from southern Africa, five from the Pacific, and one from China.

9 African terms are provided for objects and cultural groupings, wherever possible, as identifiers. Recent African terms are sometimes confusing, since within a cultural group an object's name may vary from community to community; this is particularly true of the large Igbo population. Some names cross ethnic boundaries and scholars may disagree as to an object's correct name. The name of an ethnic group may be employed for its subgroups, or for only one of its subgroups, as in the case of the Afikpo and the Ibibio.

10 Jill Salmons, email to author, February 28, 2010.

11 David Pratten, an anthropologist who has conducted research among the Anang and to whom I showed a picture of the mask in New Orleans on October 20, 2009, suggests that the mask also was of Anang origin, but associated with the male Ekong society, which produces humorous masquerades skits, songs, and commentaries satirizing community members and events (see Messenger 1973:117–19, Jeffreys 1951).

Salmons's evaluation seems sounder to me, although I am not an expert on the Anang.

12 Tallbot (1923:opposite page 194) depicts a plaque mask, probably from the southern Ibibio area and possibly Eket, Murray (1950:33, 35) shows four plaque masks of undoubted Ibibio origin, but without any information, and Jones (1938:107) an Anang-Ibibio plaque mask.

13 Jill Salmons, email to author, February 28, 2010.

14 Oldman (1913, August, vol. 10, no. 125) lists, with photograph, a similar *mfa* mask in black and brown, but there is no information as to its collector.

15 Starkweather (1968:figs. 1, 4) refers to those from Afikpo Village-Group as *mfa* and two unnamed masks on the next pages from Amaseri Village-Group, there called *ama'diviri*. Jones (1938:120) writes of similar masks called *akpara obo* or *mwabohi* in Nkporo Village-Group.

16 Since the publication of Ottenberg's 1975 Afikpo masquerade book, if the precise provenance of an object within these seven village-groups is unknown, art collectors, museum curators, dealers, and scholars, invariably label them as from Afikpo. The problem might appear to be even more complex, since the area which Dyer administered was called Afikpo District and included a number of other village-groups beyond the seven discussed here. However, these others had different art forms. Menzies's brochure (ca. 1937) reads: "Ceremonial Masks of the Afikpos Natives of Nigeria," indicating that they were obtained by Dyer in Ediba, a small non-Igbo community on the opposite side of the Cross River from Afikpo, which in Dyer's time was a colonial administrative center. Dyer may have obtained them at Ediba, but it is unlikely that they originated there, as Ediba's arts differ from those of the Afikpo (Ottenberg 1997).

17 This was a colonial slang word for food, which became part of Nigerian Pidgin English.

18 Barry Hecht, the well-known collector/scholar of the arts of southeast Nigeria, kindly supplied me with a photograph which confirmed this author's opinion. Hecht, email to author, December 26, 2009.

19 Herbert Cole, email to author, December 18, 2009.

20 Jim Hamill, Centre for Anthropology, Dept. of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, British Museum, email to author, March 10, 2010.

21 The British Museum information sheet on specimen Af951.01.3 suggests that they were made by menopausal women, as younger Igbo females normally did not make representational and naturalistic figures.

22 Barry Hecht, email to author, December 27, 2009.

23 Perkins Foss, personal correspondence, 2010.

24 Eli Bentor, email to author, January 21, 2010.

25 On Ibo musical pots see Leith-Ross 1970:168; on Ibibio ones see Nicklin 1973.

26 Eli Bentor, personal communication.

27 Johnston Njoku, email to author, March 4, 2010.

28 *Ibid.*

29 David Patten, personal communication.

30 With the associate curator, Camille Owens, at the Museum of Vancouver, we endeavored to determine whether some metal objects in the Dyer collection were of brass (copper and zinc) or of bronze (copper and tin). But only metallurgical analysis or an expert in metals can determine the metal involved. Where I am in doubt I have used the phrase "copper alloy." See Neahr (1979:footnote 1), who employs "bronze" for any object made of copper alloy.

31 Often popularly called *mbara* from the Shona word in Zimbabwe. See Berliner 1978.

32 After adolescent circumcision girls spent many days or weeks in their homes being pampered with food

and attention, finally emerging to display themselves in larger physical form in a ritual where fans were employed.

33 Eli Bentor, personal communication.

34 The British Museum houses the collections of Donald A. MacAlister and W.R.M. Iles, according to Jim Hamill from the Centre for Anthropology, British Museum, Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas (email to author, March 4, 2010). Scottish Presbyterian missionaries also collected objects found in British and Scottish museums.

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