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Source: *African Arts*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Aug., 1982), pp. 52-91

Published by: UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center

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# MOSSI CHIEFS' FIGURES

CHRISTOPHER D. ROY

The Mossi states were founded over five hundred years ago<sup>1</sup> when a group of horsemen from what is now northern Ghana rode into the basin of the White Volta River and imposed their political authority over the acephalous agriculturalist groups who originally occupied the land.<sup>2</sup> The invading horsemen and their descendants, who held all political power in traditional Mossi society before the arrival of the French, and still have considerable power at the vil-

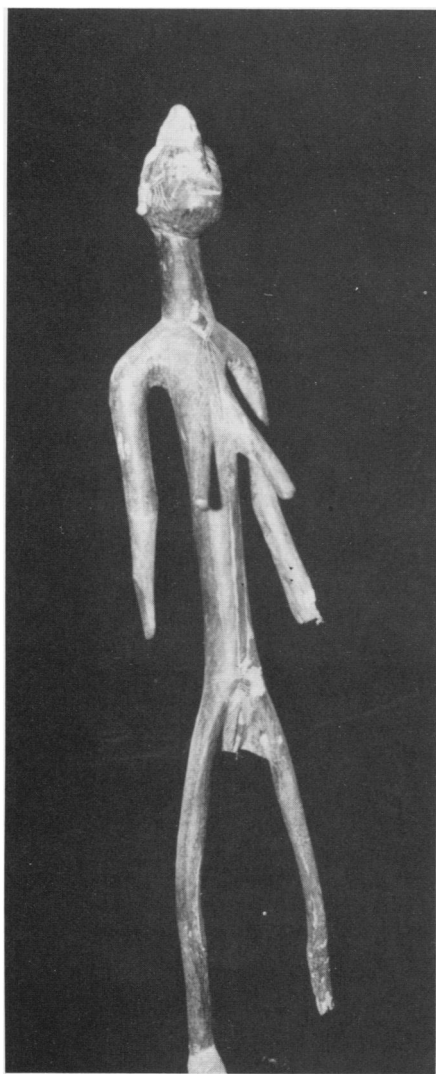
lage level, are called Nakomsé ("children of the *nam*," the *nam* being the right and power to rule).<sup>3</sup> The diverse groups that were subjugated by the Nakomsé are called Tengabisi ("children of the earth"). The large group of Tengabisi may be further broken down into the blacksmith clans (Saya, sing. Saaba) and the clans of farmers who are collectively called Nyonyosé ("the old ones"), without regard for the ethnic group to which they originally belonged. Mossi society, as it has existed since the arrival of the horsemen from Dagomba, is an amalgamation of the descendants of the Nakomsé, who hold all political power, and of the descendants of the conquered Tengabisi, who, by right of first ownership of the land, exercise all authority over the use of the land and are responsible for the propitiation of the earth deity, Tenga, through the offices of the earth priest, the Tengersoba.

The Nakomsé and Tengabisi both complement and conflict with each other. The Nakomsé maintain order in the community and intervene with their powerful ancestors for the benefit of the community, while the Tengabisi propitiate the spirits that permeate the environment and manipulate the forces of nature, the elements, for the common good. Both groups are aware of the "stranger" status of the Nakomsé, and the Tengabisi express resentment about the power the Nakomsé hold as a result of their centralized political and military organization. At the same time the Nakomsé fear the magical ability of the Tengabisi to turn the forces of nature against their enemies. The use of sculpture parallels the division of Mossi society into these two strata: masks are used exclusively by the descendants of the subjugated groups, and figures are used by the Nakomsé as symbols of political power. The chiefs and their relatives who use the figures never attend the Tengabisi funerals at which masks appear, and the Tengabisi rarely participate in the celebrations in front of the chief's dwelling in which figures are used.<sup>4</sup> In this article I will describe three types of Mossi chiefs' figures, in both wood and brass, how these figures are used, and the functions they serve in the traditional political system.

Mossi figures are monoxylous, ranging in height from 40 to 100 centimeters. The majority of human figures are female. The most notable characteristics are the tall, central ridge running from the front to the back of the head, representing the female coiffure called *gyonfo*, an attenuated, cylindrical torso, arms extended rigidly at the sides with forearms parallel to the thighs, pendulous breasts, prominent umbilicus, and incised facial and ventral scars that imitate the scars traditionally worn by Mossi women. The face may be slightly concave in profile. The sex may be clearly indicated. It is important to remember that not all Mossi figures are female, and so may lack the sagittal crest that is too often used as the sole basis for attribution to the Mossi. Very few figures display all of the characteristics I have described.

The examples illustrated (Figs. 2-4) include some of these characteristics. The figure in the Stanley collection has the flattened face, semicircular head, with a small lobe of the hairstyle echoing the shape of the head, and the sagittal crest that are typical of the Mossi style (Fig. 3). The piece in the Whipple collection has a heavy, projecting brow, curved shoulders, and hands held palms forward rather than against the thighs (Fig. 4). The figure in a St. Louis collection is quite similar to the Whipple piece, with palms held forward, and with similar chest and belly scars (Fig. 2). It bears the vertical parallel lines between ear and eye, "cat's whiskers" at the corners of the mouth, and horizontal lines at the corners of the eyes; in combination, these markings are distinctly Mossi.

While all of these examples conform to the conventions of the Mossi style in some ways, they are also quite different from each other, illustrating the extreme diversity of individual artists' styles that is so evident in Mossi figures. This diversity has led to many problems of attribution of objects in public and private collections outside Africa. Mossi figures are sometimes ascribed to other groups in Upper Volta, especially the Bobo, while the sculpture of groups across the Western Sudan is sometimes erroneously ascribed to the Mossi. The variety of carving styles may be the result of any number of factors. Artists in each of sev-



1. MOSSI FIGURE, N/WANA. WOOD, 106cm. MUSEE NATIONAL, OUAGADOUGOU. MUSEUM DATA: "MOSSI FUNERARY STATUE FROM YATENGA."



2. MOSSI FIGURE. WOOD. 63cm. PRIVATE COLLECTION.



3. MOSSI FIGURE. WOOD. 56.5cm.  
COLLECTION OF MR. & MRS. C. MAXWELL STANLEY.



4. MOSSI FIGURE. WOOD, BEADS. 63.5cm.  
WHIPPLE COLLECTION.

eral geographical areas of Mossi country have been influenced by the styles of the groups that originally lived in the area: an artist working in the northwestern Yatenga area may carve figures similar to those carved by the original Dogon inhabitants of the region, while an artist working in the southwestern Ouagadougou area may carve figures that have been influenced by the sculptural style of the original Gurunsi inhabitants of that region. This has led to the extreme diversity of Mossi mask styles described in my dissertation (Roy 1979) and in several papers I have presented since 1977. In addition, each Mossi artist may produce only one or two chiefs' figures during his lifetime for one or two traditional chiefs in his region. A group of figures in the ancestral spirit house of a single Mossi chief may represent the work of several different carvers working over a period of decades for several generations of chiefs in one community. Because an artist who has been asked to carve a figure for a chief need only satisfy the demands and re-

quirements of a single client, unusual objects result, such as the figure of a soccer player (Figs. 12, 13). Finally, although chiefs' figures are placed on view in the community once a year, they are far more private works of art than are the wooden masks, which are used by a different segment of the Mossi population. While the masks travel from one community to another to perform at funerals of clan members who have left their home villages, resulting in stylistic influences that extend over a broad geographical area, chiefs' figures never leave the compound of their owner and are seen only by the local population and by one or two artists living near by.

Figures in collections outside Africa are unclothed. When exposed to public view in Nakomsé year-end ancestral sacrifices, they invariably wear a small cloth wrapper that covers the lower portion of the body and the thighs in imitation of traditional female dress (Figs. 12, 13). The head may be wrapped in a cloth tie, and cheap earrings and strands of beads are usually added. The same rules of modesty that respectable Mossi women fol-

low apply to the wooden figures. It is considered a breach of etiquette to cover the breasts in the presence of a chief or an important clan elder, but when a European appears, an older woman may discreetly cover the breasts of the figure with a bit of the cloth wrapper, as women do on visits to large urban areas like Ouagadougou.

Although male Mossi figures are rare outside Africa, they are not unknown. There is a male-female pair in the collection of Katherine White (Fagg 1968, nos. 40, 41). The recently carved male soccer player belongs to the Nakomsé chief of La Titon (Figs. 12, 13). There are also a number of male figures, including a tall example in the collection of Paul and Ruth Tishman, that once belonged to pairs at the entrances to chiefs' compounds.

Less well known outside Upper Volta, but apparently more numerous in Mossi country than human figures, are

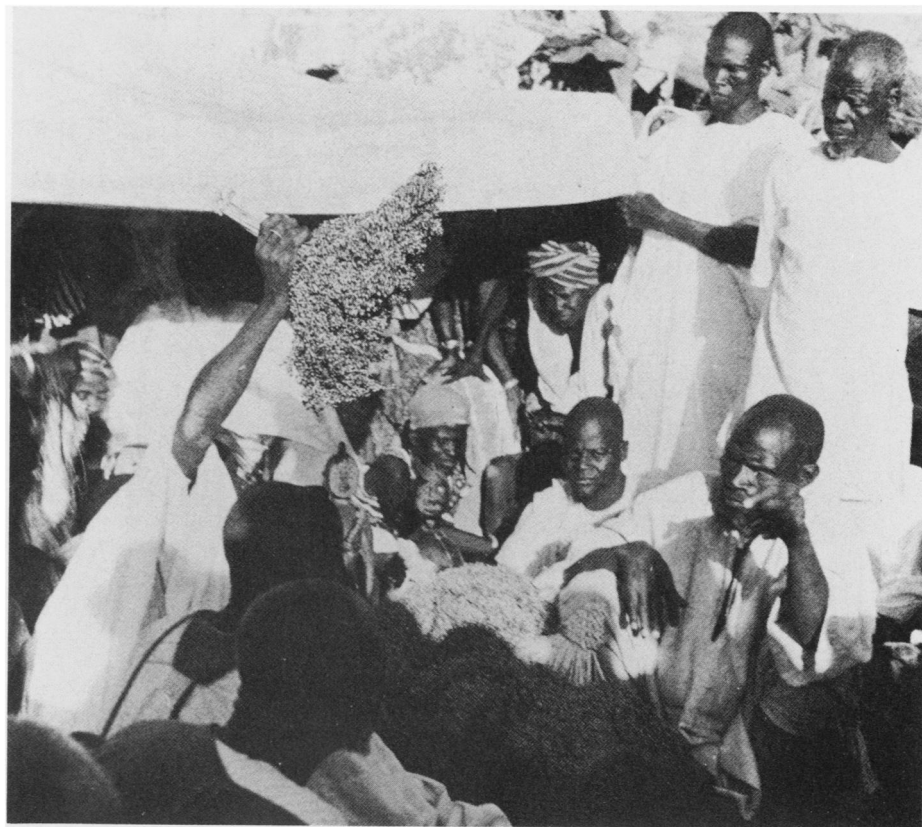
wooden carvings of animals (Fig. 9). There is a well-carved figure of a hornbill in the Musée National in Ouagadougou (Fig. 8). In the Yako region the most frequently carved animals are the ram and the guinea hen, both commonly associated with the Nakomsé and frequently used as offerings to the royal ancestors.

All of the figures I have described are freestanding and easily portable. A second type, also of wood, is made as part of a short post to be placed in the ground at each side of a doorway, where it holds the straw-mat door against the side of the building (Figs. 10, 11). These posts appear in pairs that are usually recognizably male and female. Finally, the Mossi produce figures cast in brass that represent deceased Mossi emperors, or Mogho Naba. These are carefully guarded in a small village several kilometers northeast of Ouagadougou. All Mossi figures, regardless of size, sex, function, or material, are called *ninande* (sing. *ninana*), which simply means "modeled figures."

#### Literature

The earliest published mention of Mossi figures is provided by the French ethnographer Ruelle, who notes, "Men carve wooden figures representing people or animals" (1904:683). Louis Tauxier states that "images of divinities" do not exist among the Mossi, and that "the Mossis and the Foulés do not have representations of their ancestors or of any divinity whatsoever. This distinguishes them from the Bambaras and from the Mossis in the Ouagadougou region who frequently have wooden statues made by the smiths which represent their ancestors and to which they offer sacrifices. This is not to say that in Yatenga wooden statues, the 'mani bambara,' which are here called ouannedas or ouango-nedas, are totally unknown; some *timisobas* [*tengsoba*] make them for themselves, especially the Ouangos have them, and dance with them at funerals when they place them on their heads; but this is quite rare and one must look for a long time to find them" (Tauxier 1917:384).

It appears that a few chiefs also have, as ornamental objects, statuettes representing women (Tauxier 1917:384). Tauxier's notes are quite important, for they state clearly that, at least in the south, wooden figures represent ancestors. It is impossible to understand his use of the word "mani-bambara" in the context of a discussion of Mossi carving, and his description of the use of wooden figures by the "Ouangos" (*wando*, masks) is ambiguous; it is not clear whether he is describing freestanding figures carried on top of the head by the people who own masks, or figures at-



5. FIGURES AT THE NA-POOSUM, ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THE CHIEF OF GOURCY. FROM YATENGA: TECHNOLOGY IN THE CULTURE OF A WEST AFRICAN KINGDOM BY PETER B. HAMMOND, 1966.

tached to the wooden masks that to this day are called *karan-wemba* (*wemba* mask) in some areas. A statement by Frobenius (1926:94, cited in von Sydow 1954:54) that "at burial dances the members of the 'Wango' place wooden statues on their heads" does not help clear up the question. In a similar vein, Himmelheber quotes a statement by Emil Storrer that he never saw any freestanding figures in Mossi country, and that, "in his view, all Mossi figures, which arrive in Europe, are cut from masks" (Himmelheber 1960:83). My research indicates clearly that this is not the case—that freestanding wooden figures used by Mossi chiefs were never attached to masks.

Eugene Mangin, who lived in the village of Koupela, far to the southeast of Yatenga, describes figures made of a deceased chief's clothing, which are used in funeral celebrations long after the burial of the real corpse: "The death of chiefs is, in principle, kept secret, and the poor man is buried without ceremony. When the descendants have gathered together whatever is needed to provide for their father the funeral he deserves, they spread far and wide, one Saturday morning, the news that the chief is dead. A mannequin, made from the clothes of the deceased, is placed in the hut of his senior wife, or in his own hut, and all of the ceremonies are carried out that Saturday afternoon as for an important burial. The mannequin is carried as all corpses are carried and the earth which covers the tomb is partially removed and

the clothing is tossed in" (Mangin 1921:75).

Additional details concerning the use of figures at "second burials" are provided in a remarkable description of the death and burial of a traditional chief in the Koupela area forty years after Mangin's research in the same region (Kabore 1961:7-8). Kabore notes that the death is kept secret so that the traditionally lawless interregnum preceding the election of the new chief will be as short as possible. The corpse is quietly interred immediately after death, but no one outside the immediate family is notified. When the time comes for the official ("second") burial of the old chief, the elder courtiers use a wooden figure "... carved from the trunk of a shea-nut tree. This effigy was about one meter long, carefully carved, it had everything a man has on the outside in the way of limbs and organs: legs, arms, head, eyes, mouth, ears, etc. . . . in this figure the person of the deceased chief was re-created. They pretended to shave its head, after which they completely washed it. Clothing, tailored to measure, was placed on the body: shirt, robe, trousers. The head was covered with a pointed cap, over which was placed a large [straw] hat. They even placed slippers on the feet. After all the clothing was carefully arranged, without forgetting anything, they now had to bury this so-called corpse. It was rolled up completely clothed in a large, white blanket, then in a special mat. It was placed at last on a litter made of two long,

parallel bars crossed at intervals by shorter sticks. A black cloth covered the entire affair. Then it was necessary to announce to everyone outside that all was prepared. Everyone crowded toward the door of the hut to await the appearance of the body. The drums doubled their beat, the funeral songs began. Several people who were first able to take hold, carried the litter in their hands, raised high above their heads. At that moment the dances around my grandfather's house began, with the litter always raised high and violently bounced up and down. Everyone crowded around. We slowly advanced, with measured steps, to the sound of the musical instruments, songs, and the unceasing blasts of old muskets. In this manner three circuits of the large compound of my grandfather were completed—then came the time for the burial. The *laghda* [grave digger] who is qualified to place the corpse in the tomb (for among us there are special requirements for this) jumped down into the grave and was given the body, which he placed in the requisite position. Then he remained in the grave to receive the offerings and commissions which were thrown in. All of this was carried out in exactly the same manner as I have described above for the real burial of my grandfather's body. Each offered what he could, what he had. . . . The *laghda* mumbled a sort of prayer of his own, then covered the entrance to the tomb with a large jar which was later covered with earth. Fi-

nally, with the tomb closed in this manner, he tossed a few handfuls of cowries on it. In this manner the funeral was ended."

Briefer notes in the literature on African sculpture are usually based on the field observations published by Tauxier. Kjersmeier states that "crudely carved" wooden figures are either images of ancestors or "decorative female figures which the chiefs place in their huts" (1935:27). Von Sydow summarizes all of the early literature on figures, including the notes by Frobenius (1954:54). Lem published a dramatic wooden female figure he collected in Yatenga, which he describes, presumably on the basis of information gathered at the time, as a "female ritual figure, representing a protector ghost" (1949:55, pl. 9 and 38).

More recently, Hammond provided the only published photographs of wooden figures (*ninande*) in a traditional ritual context (1966:97, 201) (Figs. 5, 7). The figures are arranged before the seated chief of the village of Gourcy, in southern Yatenga, at the annual ancestral sacrifice called Na-poosum. In one photograph, two of the figures are visible beneath a cloth awning as local clan elders offer bound heads of the first sorghum crop of the year (Fig. 5). In the second photograph, three figures can be seen standing just in front of the chief (Fig. 7). The figure on the right wears a head cloth and a wrapper at the waist, as well as a string of beads. Ventral scars are clearly visible, as are the distinctive

Mossi scars on the face. The three figures appear to have been carved by the same hand, and the style conforms to the norms of the Mossi figure style: arms are held rigidly at the side with hands parallel to the thighs. Faces are oval and flat, and the traditional Mossi woman's coiffure is clearly indicated.

Hammond was not concerned with the objects when he took the photograph and has no memory of their use or function, except that they were exposed at Na-poosum, or "chief's salutation" marking the end of the traditional agricultural cycle of the year:<sup>5</sup> "At a village Na Poosum the elders of all the kin groups whose members comprise the local population pay tribute to the chief, making him gifts of millet and assuring him of their continued reliance upon his political power and intercession with his powerful ancestors in order that the village may enjoy peace throughout the coming months of the dry season and early rains at the beginning of the next year. . . . the chiefs at Na Poosum receive the representatives of the lineages of the community before the entrance to their residence and similarly greet the elders by name and commend their adherence to the ancestor's way.



6. FIGURES BELONGING TO THE CHIEF OF GOURCY. 45cm. THE LEFT FIGURE MAY BE THE SAME FIGURE SHOWN IN A CLOTH WRAPPER ON THE RIGHT IN FIGURE 7. LEFT: 7. FIGURES AT THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THE CHIEF OF GOURCY. FROM *YATENGA: TECHNOLOGY IN THE CULTURE OF A WEST AFRICAN KINGDOM* BY PETER B. HAMMOND, 1966.

"With the Na Poosum all of the sources of power—social, political, and supernatural—upon which the Mossi's well-being is dependent have been rewarded for their support throughout the past year and encouraged by the generosity of their supplicants to continue their benevolence through the season to come" (Hammond 1966:202).

The Gourcy chief who appears in Hammond's photographs was still alive in 1977, and it was possible to see at least two of the three figures that were exposed at Na-poosum (Fig. 7, extreme right, and Fig. 6, left). Information supplied to me by the elderly chief in 1977 will be discussed below.

Toumani Triande, Director of the Musée National de la Haute Volta, published, in a catalogue of the museum collection, a tall, very attenuated wooden Mossi figure, which, in agreement with the descriptions of Mangin and Kabore, he calls a "funerary figure representing an ancestor . . . carried in a procession preceding royal funeral corteges (1969:25) (Fig. 1). Triande is evidently the source of notes accompanying a photograph of the same object published by Fagg (1970, no. 41). Fagg echoes Triande when he indicates that the figure is a "funerary effigy representing an ances-

tor and is carried in procession, preceding the funeral cortege of a dead king." Most recently, Kamer published a number of Mossi objects that he calls ancestor figures, stating uniformly that they are "generally used as altar pieces, [and] are also carried during certain processions" (1973:91, nos. 56-60, 65-67, 75). Kamer indicates the figures are called "nee-naade." He attempts to assign each to a specific geographical area, but fails to indicate whether his attributions are based on style, on the areas in which they were actually collected, or on information provided by Triande. Kamer's figure 65 (1973:98) is described as being of "a style typical of the Mossi in the north of the province of Yatenga" and is then attributed to the region of Kaya. However, the regions of Yatenga and Kaya are separated by 150 kilometers of very poor roads over a major mountain range and across three intervening Mossi states.

There are only a few descriptions of the cast brass "portraits" of deceased Mossi emperors, which are stored at Loumbila. Dim Delobsom states that at the death of the Mogho Naba ("emperor of the Mossi") a wax statue is made in his image and is later replaced by a brass figure (1928:410).<sup>6</sup> The living emperor must never see either the statue of his predecessor or the artisan who created it, lest he die. Capitaine G.E. Lambert states that "the statuettes *nenandi* representing all of the Naabas who have reigned, are stored at Lumbila Raogo" (1907:159). Lambert describes the appearance of the brass "portraits" of the deceased Mogho Nanamse at secret ceremonies celebrated seven days after the festival of Tinse, when sacrifices are offered in Oubri-tenga (the region around Guilongou, 30 km. northeast of Ouagadougou) in memory of the Nyonyosé mother of the first Mogho Naba: "The effigies, representing the deceased Moro [Mogho] Nabas, placed under the responsibility of the chief of Loumbila, are carried out and placed in a vast enclosure of woven straw mats. Each royal image is accompanied by those of servants carrying in their hands a calabash for libations of *zom-kom* (millet

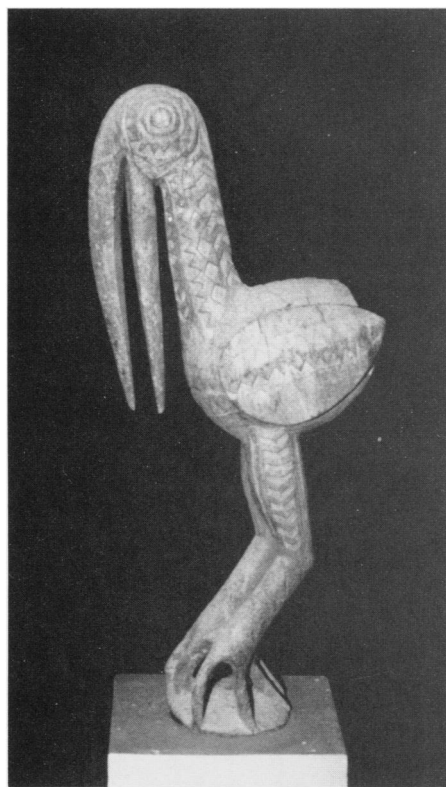
flour water) and of beer. No one may approach the enclosure of straw mats if he is wearing a hat, sandals, an axe, or hoe; if this should occur, the objects are confiscated and thrown into the interior of the enclosure. These statuettes are produced by the *nyogse*, specialized smiths, from Ouagadougou" (Lambert 1907, cited in Pageard 1965:25). Most recently a description of the figurines and the rites at which they are exposed appears in a study of the bronze casters of Ouagadougou (Hoskins 1976:40-44).<sup>7</sup>

In summary, the literature on Mossi wooden figures indicates they have two separate uses: some are decorative figures of women or animals (Ruelle 1904) to be placed in the chief's hut (Tauxier 1917);<sup>8</sup> other ancestral figures (Tauxier 1917) are perhaps carried on the head during burials (Frobenius 1926) or borne in funerary processions (Triande 1969, also quoted by Kamer and Fagg) as images of the deceased (Mangin 1921, Kabore 1961).<sup>9</sup> These same ancestral figures may appear in sacrifices when the spirits of the royal ancestors are asked to provide for the well-being of the community (Hammond 1966), but are placed on altars during intervening periods (Kamer 1973). Brass portraits of the deceased political leaders (Delobsom 1928, Lambert 1907) are carried in processions during the Nakomsé ancestral sacrifices called Tinse (Lambert 1907).

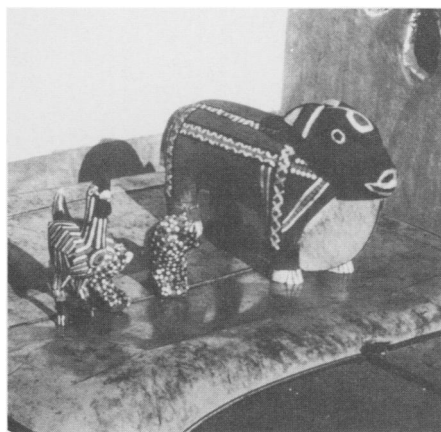
#### Function: Posts

Male and female figure pairs, carved as posts to be erected on each side of the entrance to the chief's compound residence (Figs. 10, 11), are the traditional sculptures that the casual visitor to Mossi country is most likely to see in their original context. A pair of these posts stands at the entrance of the Mogho Naba's palace in Ouagadougou, in his official *samande* (courtyard).

In the important Mossi village of Sapone (36 km. southwest of Ouagadougou) Chief Sanom erects two new posts at the entrance to his compound each year (Fig. 10). The posts are placed just far enough from the mud wall of the entrance hut that the intricately woven straw mat that serves as a door at night can be slid between the posts and wall. The figure on the right side of the door is female, with crested coiffure, pendulous breasts, ventral scars, and facial scars characteristic of the Mossi from the area south of Ouagadougou (a single line slants across the left cheek, and a small cross marks the right). The male figure, on the left, lacks the coiffure and breasts, and bears the three vertical lines at the side of the face and the diagonal scar on the right cheek that Mossi men are given before reaching puberty. In each case, details are burned into the wood with a hot metal blade.

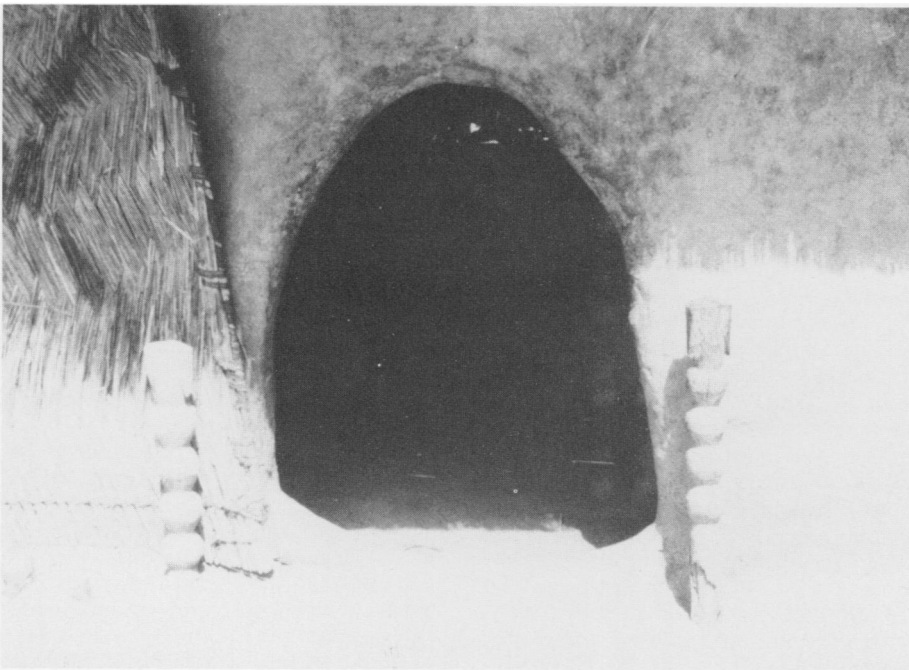


8. FIGURE REPRESENTING A LARGE BIRD. 35cm. MUSEE NATIONAL, OUAGADOUGOU. RIGHT: 9. FIGURES (A CHICKEN, TWO GUINEA FOWL, AND A RAM) BELONGING TO THE CHIEF OF YAKO EXPOSED AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CHIEF'S COMPOUND, NA-POOSUM FESTIVAL, 1977. THE RAM AND GUINEA FOWL ARE PARTICULARLY FAVORED BY THE NAKOMSE FOR USE IN SACRIFICES. THE CHIEF OF YAKO IS MOSLEM.





10. DOOR POSTS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE COMPOUND RESIDENCE OF NABA SANOM OF SAPONE. THE LEFT FIGURE IS MALE, THE RIGHT FIGURE FEMALE. 60cm. DECEMBER 1976.



11. CARVED DOOR POSTS (*LUNGRI*) AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE COMPOUND RESIDENCE OF THE CHIEF OF SABOU.

The posts are changed each year after the annual sacrifices following the harvest, when the chief's ancestors are thanked for providing for the well-being of the community during the year.<sup>10</sup> The old posts are buried like human corpses. The figures serve two purposes: they are symbols to all visitors that the house belongs to an important chief, and they guard the entrance of the compound to prevent dangerous spirits from entering and harming the family.

A pair of posts belonging to the Nakomsé chief of the village of Sabou (88 km. west of Ouagadougou) are far more abstract than the figurative posts in Sapone. Each post consists of a series of stacked rings (Fig. 11). Although the senior advisors of the chief refused to

comment on the meaning of the forms, their similarity to shelter posts in the north and in Korsimoro indicates that they are intended to be abstract representations of the human form, or at least recognizable indicators that the house they guard belongs to a chief.

#### *Animal Figures*

At least two of the higher level chiefs in the Yako region (the Yako Naba and the Kwaltangen Naba) own freestanding wooden figures that represent animals (Fig. 9). The most frequently represented animals are the ram and the male guinea fowl, which are favored by Nakomsé chiefs for use in ancestral sacrifices. The Mossi believe that these animals exhibit a character trait that is highly regarded in a

successful chief: they remain calm and "cool" in the face of danger, and do not cry out as their throats are cut in sacrifice. Many chiefs keep large and very old white rams as house pets, giving them the freedom of the compound.<sup>11</sup> The animal figures in the Yako region are, like freestanding human figures elsewhere, exposed to public view at the annual chief's salutation, Na-poomsum, when the members of the community reaffirm their allegiance to the chief and their dependence on his intercession with the royal ancestors.

#### *Human Figures*

Freestanding human figures (*ninande*, sing. *ninana*) probably never very numerous, are becoming rarer as increasing numbers of traditional chiefs embrace Islam and either discontinue the use of figures they own or sell them to dealers in antiquities. The Gourcy chief, pictured in Hammond's photograph at the Na-poomsum (Fig. 7, right), still owns at least two wooden *ninande* (Fig. 6), although he has been a devout Moslem for many years and made the pilgrimage to Mecca ten years ago. The figures have not been publicly exposed for ten years, but are carefully preserved in the chief's own bedroom. One of the two (Fig. 6, left) is the same figure seen on the right in Hammond's photograph, dressed in a head-cloth, wrapper, and beads. It is in good condition, although slightly abraded, and still clearly shows the characteristic facial and belly cicatrices visible in the earlier photograph. It does not bear any traces of blood sacrifices or of the successive applications of vegetable butter that give smaller Mossi dolls a polished, well-handled appearance. The second figure (Fig. 6, right) is clearly by a different hand. It is very attenuated, closely resembling the piece in the Musée National in Ouagadougou (Fig. 1). The Gourcy chief's carving is provided with a base, unlike most freestanding figures. However, the base shows no sign that the figure originally might have been erected as a door post. It apparently was provided only to prevent damage to the thin, fragile legs and to give the figure additional stability.

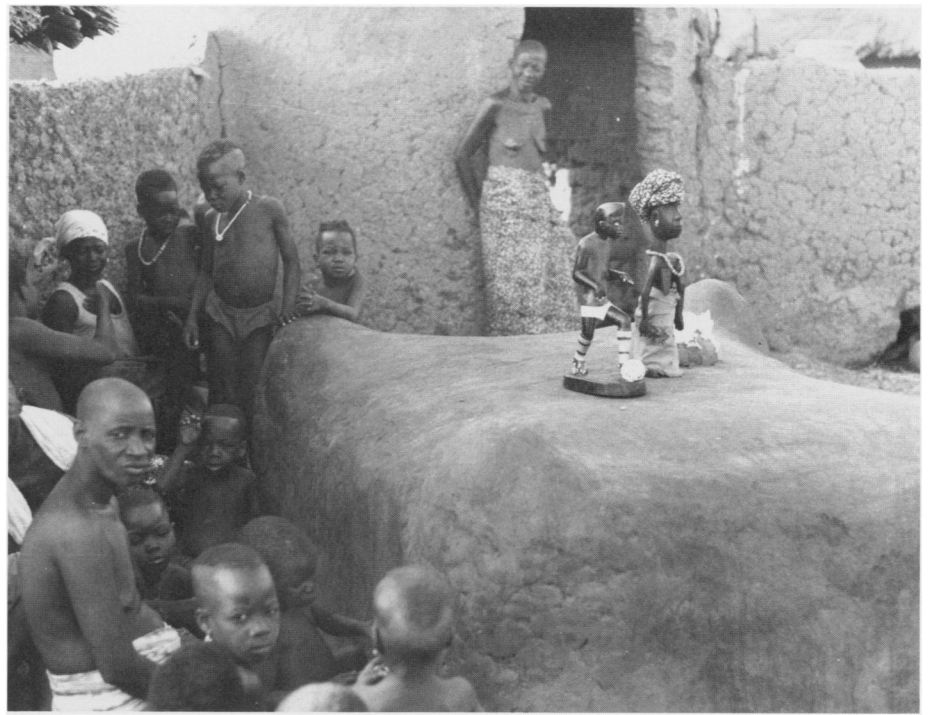
Because the Gourcy chief is Moslem, he refused to comment on the role played by his wooden figures at the Na-poomsum. He clearly was embarrassed by my questions about the relationship between the figure and the royal ancestors, whose help the chief and his subjects solicit by the offering of the "first fruits" of the year. The statement by Tauxier that, in the south, such figures "represent their ancestors" (1917:384), and the prominent position the figures in Gourcy once occupied during the sacrifices to the royal ancestors—the deceased Gourcy chiefs—lead to the con-



12. FIGURES AT LA TITON. THE SMALL BLACK BISEXUAL FIGURE IN THE FOREGROUND WAS OWNED BY THE PRESENT CHIEF'S GRANDFATHER, THE FEMALE FIGURE IN CLOTH WRAPPER BY HIS FATHER, AND THE SOCCER PLAYER HAD BEEN COMMISSIONED AT THE TIME THE PRESENT CHIEF, NABA KOM, SUCCEEDED TO THE RULE OF LA TITON.

clusion that the figures at least symbolize the ancestral spirits' presence at and participation in the Na-poosum sacrifices.

Naba Kom, chief of the district of La Titon, displays two wooden *ninande* during the annual celebration and sacrifices called Oumbila, at his residence in the neighborhood of Loungo (which lies 25 km. west of Yako, 40 km. south of Gourcy (Figs. 12, 13). The purpose of the Oumbila festival at La Titon is the same as that of the Na-poosum at Gourcy and Tinsé in the south;<sup>12</sup> the elders of each of the clans in the district reaffirm their allegiance to the chief and present him with the first fruits of the most recent harvest, asking him to intercede with his royal ancestors to procure their benevolent participation in the affairs of the community during the coming year, and to thank the ancestors for their help during the past agricultural season. Over the course of three days, the Nakomsé chief travels on horseback to each of the clan residences in his district to receive the salutations and offerings of the people, whether they are Nakomsé, Nyonyosé, Saya (smiths), Yarse (weavers), or Silmi-mossi (herders). Each morning, just before setting out for the day, the chief mounts a low earthen platform that has a small, raised mound near the center, located just inside the entrance to his residence. A white chicken is sacrificed



13. FIGURES IN PLACE ON THE ANCESTRAL SHRINE OF NABA KOM AT LA TITON (LUNGO) DURING THE ANNUAL CHIEF'S FESTIVAL, OUMBILA. FEBRUARY 1977. THE CHIEF'S WIVES AND CHILDREN ARE AT THE LEFT, AND THE ENTRANCE TO HIS PERSONAL COMPOUND IS IN THE BACKGROUND. TRACES OF CHICKEN SACRIFICES ARE VISIBLE ON THE SHRINE TO THE RIGHT OF THE FIGURES.

to the royal ancestors on his rounded altar, and as the chief leaves his courtyard, two wooden figures are placed on the platform next to the ancestral altar (Fig. 13). The figures remain in place until the chief returns home at sunset, when the ancestral sacrifices are repeated.

In the past, a third figure was exhibited with the others, but it is now kept in the chief's ancestral spirit house because of damage to its legs, which prevents it from being placed in a standing position (Fig. 12). This smoke-blackened figure is the smallest and oldest of the three, once belonging to the chief's grandfather. It is bisexual; it displays a woman's traditional crested coiffure and a woman's ventral scars, but it has male sexual organs. The feet have been destroyed by insects.

The next oldest carving belonged to the present chief's father (Fig. 12, right). This is a female figure, dressed, like the figure in Hammond's photograph, in a cloth wrapper and head tie, with a strand of beads. Scars on the face and chest are clearly indicated, and the lips are painted red. After I had been in the compound for a few minutes, one of the chief's wives rose and discreetly covered the figure's breasts with a bit of the cloth wrapper, knowing that white people are discomfited by the sight of naked breasts.

The newest of the three sculptures belongs to the present chief Kom of La Titon, and was carved following the death of his father and his installation only the year before (1976). It reflects the character of the present chief, who is educated, has served for many years as a middle-

level government administrator in a prefecture in southern Upper Volta, and who enjoys playing soccer (Figs. 12, 13). The figure represents a male soccer player dressed in shorts, jersey, brightly colored athletic stockings, and red shoes, with a white soccer ball. The imported European paints are quite fresh and bright.

When the figures are not being used at Oumbila they are stored in the hut of the chief's senior wife. This hut is called the *kimse-roogo* and is the ancestral spirit house for the chief's clan. Because of the sex and size of the three figures, the chief's wives refer to the male figure as the *baba* (father), the female as *ma* (mother) and the small, black, bisexual figure as *biiga* (child) in spite of the fact that the "child" is clearly the oldest of the three.<sup>13</sup>

#### Brass Figures

The celebration of Tinsé, at which wooden royal ancestor figures appear, also serves as the occasion for the procession of the cast brass portraits of deceased Mossi emperors in the village of Lumbila. Lambert (1907) provides a description of the procession when the brass figures are placed in a great straw enclosure. He does not, however, describe the figures in detail, beyond noting that each portrait is accompanied by the figures of "servants carrying in their hands a calabash for libations of *zom-kom* (millet flour water) and of beer."

The objects themselves have been best described by the brass casters (Nyogsê) who make them. Bila Toure, the senior



elder of the Toure clan of brass casters in Ouagadougou, has cast portraits of two Mogho Nabas: in 1942 for Mogho Naba Kom and in 1957 for Mogho Naba Saga. In each case, the order to cast the figure was given about six months after the installation of the new Mogho Naba. The senior Toure clan member is commissioned to go to Lumbila with several young assistants to carry out the work.<sup>14</sup> The casters are installed in a special house in the Nomgaane neighborhood in Lumbila, where they work in absolute secrecy. No one, not even the village chief, may enter the compound while they are working.

The portraits consist of a group of up to twenty figures in brass, representing the servants and musicians of the Mogho Naba, arranged in a circle around the central, cast silver, equestrian figure of the chief himself. The figure of the Mogho Naba on his horse stands about 18-20 centimeters high; the others are smaller. Because the objects are mounted on a convex base, the chief at the center stands slightly above the others. The base is circular, and is attached to a cast brass ring about 10-15 centimeters high, with vertical sides, which is in turn mounted on a second ring of smaller diameter (Fig. 14). A hole is provided in the smaller base into which a tall, wooden pole is fitted. The pole is placed in a hole in the earthen floor of the ancestral spirit hut, *kimse-roogo*, where the images are stored so that the group is raised above floor level. In the Tinse procession, the figural group is carried on the pole high above the crowd, making the portrait visible to everyone.

Each of the cast portraits of the deceased chiefs is the same. No attempt is made to portray the chief as he appeared in life,<sup>15</sup> and only the attendants in Lumbila are able to identify the specific chief each figure memorializes.

As soon as the work of casting has been completed, the chief of Nomgaane places the portrait in one of the several *kimse-roogo*, in which the other figures are stored. The senior brass caster is paid for his services, and the casters tear down the hut in which they have lived to use the bricks in the construction of a new home outside Ouagadougou for the chief caster, who must never return to the city. It is believed that if he were to meet the new Mogho Naba face to face after casting his father's portrait, one of them would die. For his portrait of Mogho Naba Kom in 1942, Bila Toure was paid 5,000 cowries, a horse, a cow, a wife, a pair of sandals, and a traditional shirt and trousers. Before 1942, the casters were paid larger sums because they had to hire diviners (*bougba*) to prescribe sacrifices to propitiate the spirit of the deceased Mogho Naba so that it would not bring misfortune to the caster. Because Bila is a devout Moslem, he does

not fear the ancestral spirits and has not consulted diviners, nor has he exiled himself from Ouagadougou, but he does avoid seeing the new Mogho Naba.

According to Lambert (1907) and local Mossi traditions, there is a portrait of each of the Mossi emperors dating to Oubri (ca. 1495-1518).<sup>16</sup> Were this true, there would be thirty-four brass portraits in Lumbila. Bila Toure, however, has stated that many of the chiefs are represented by objects associated with their reigns: Warga (ca. 1737-1744, 20th Mogho Naba), for example, is represented by three traditional hoes, which are carried in the procession at Tinse. Bila also says that the first Mogho Naba to be portrayed by a brass figure was Mogho Naba Zoumbri (ca. 1744-1784, 21st Mogho Naba), which indicates that there can be a maximum of only thirteen cast portraits.

Bila Toure has seen the interior of only one of the ancestral spirit huts in Lumbila in which figures are stored. Seven cast portraits, each of which included as many as twenty figures, are placed upright on their wooden poles, distributed around the walls of the circular hut. A large gourd bowl of millet beer (*dam*) sits on the floor before each portrait group. Once a week the attendants pour the beer on the ground and replace it with fresh beer. Each figure of a deceased chief is washed in fresh cream. At Tinse the images are removed from the hut and carried in a procession similar to that described by Lambert.

The Tinse rituals were first outlawed by the French during the reign of Mogho Naba Saga (1942-1957) and were not renewed until 1973 when, during the disastrous Sahelian drought, they were carried around Nomgaane. The chief of Lumbila sacrificed chickens and sheep near the figures, asking the royal ancestors to provide plentiful rainfall for a good agricultural season, health, peace, and the general well-being of all the Mossi. The last objects to emerge from the *kimse-roogo* were the three hoes of Mogho Naba Warga, who was especially skilled as a cultivator. Within minutes of the appearance of the hoes, rain began to fall so violently that the ceremony had to be terminated. Following the 1973 Tinse, the young educated Mossi in Ouagadougou criticized and joked about the superstitions of their elders to such an extent that the Larhalle Naba (who is in charge of the royal tombs) has vowed that there will be no more official Tinse celebrations.

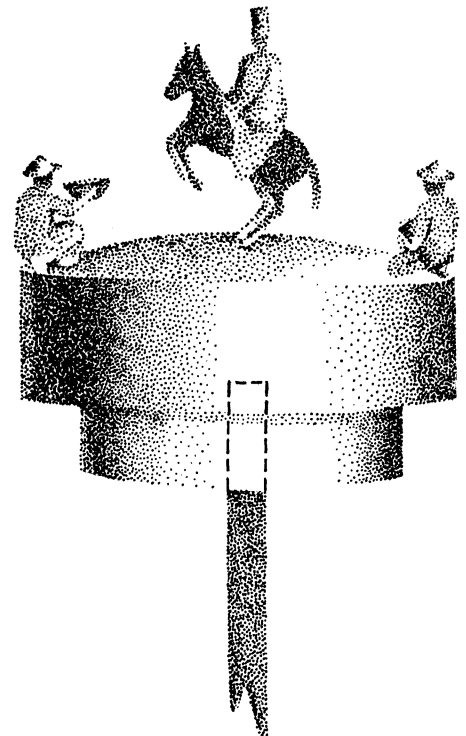
#### Summary

Both the free-standing wooden figures used by the Nakomsé chiefs in the region of the town of Yako and the cast brass "portraits" of deceased Mossi emperors in Lumbila are called *ninande*. These images are stored in the ancestral spirit

houses of the chiefs' clans and are displayed publicly at annual sacrifices when the royal ancestors are asked to provide for the general well-being of the community. Both types of objects are associated with the rule of specific chiefs and serve as memorials to them. They apparently symbolize the presence of the spirit of the dead chief at the ancestral shrine and its participation in the annual sacrifices.

On a second, more direct level, the presence of a deceased chief is made manifest by the appearance, some time after the interment of his corpse, of a wooden effigy, dressed in the chief's robes, which is paraded through the village at the time of his "official" funeral. Here again, the emphasis is on "portraiture"—stylized, idealized, and purely symbolic. On a third level, the chief is again symbolized by the erection of pairs of posts at the entrance to his compound. Carved in the shape of male and female figures, these posts make it clear to anyone who approaches the compound that he is entering the presence of a living ruler. On each level, regardless of the form, size, or material used, the function of the figures is the same: to make tangible the royal ancestral spirits so that they can be contacted and propitiated, enabling the living to control and manipulate the intangible forces that determine success or failure in life. □

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14. BRASS "PORTRAITS" AT LUMBILA, FROM THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CASTER, BILA TOURE. MOGHO NABA IS THE EQUESTRIAN FIGURE AT CENTER, WITH TWO ATTENDANTS AT THE SIDES. THE BRASS BASE IS MOUNTED ON A WOODEN POLE.



Upper Volta in 1976-1977 and was made possible by the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Research Abroad Program and the International Doctoral Research Fellowship Program sponsored by the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies.

3. I have followed Izard's use of the word Nakomse to refer to the horsemen from Dagomba and their descendants. These Nakomse subjugated a large number of autochthonous groups in the basin of the White Volta and welded them into a new society called Mossi. The descendants of these subjugated groups may now be referred to as Sukwaba, Saya, Yarse, Ialse, or Nyonyosé, depending on their origin and occupation. It is a grave error, however, to refer to an ethnic group called Nyonyosé that is distinct from the Mossi. All Nyonyosé are Mossi, and the Nyonyosé do not exist outside the boundaries of Mogho, or Mossi country. Mossi society can best be understood as an amalgamation and synthesis of several diverse groups whose institutions are quite different from those of their neighbors.

4. Although both masks and figures in a single community are often carved by the same part-time specialist artist, these two major types of sculpture never appear together in a traditional context once they have left the artist's workshop. There is no relationship between the wooden Mossi figures I will describe in this paper and the wooden female figures occasionally attached to Mossi masks. I have described the use and meaning of Mossi masks, called *Karan-wemba*, used at the funerals of elderly women who have attained the position in their clans of "living ancestors," in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association in New York on February 27, 1982.

5. Interview, June 23, 1976, Washington, D.C.

6. Here, Delobson refers to the lost-wax casting process, in which the Nyogse form a figure in beeswax, encase it in clay, and replace the wax model with molten brass.

7. Both Hoskins and I obtained our information from Bila Toure, so our descriptions agree in detail.

8. The references to "decorative figures" may also apply to animal figures, which are used frequently by chiefs who have converted to Islam.

9. As described by Kabore and noted by Triande.

10. Interview, January 11, 1977, Sapone.

11. I do not think that the Nakomse look on these animals as the chief's totems, but they are "special," as noted by the Baloum Naba in Arbolle.

12. The royal ancestral sacrifices are given different names in each Mossi region. Oumbila, Na-poosum, and Inse are geographical variations on the name of these sacrifices.

13. It is important to realize that the relationships that the chief's wives drew between the three figures does not reflect their true function: their description was intended to be playful, for the carvings represent not a family but a succession or series of figures spanning three generations. Traditional Mossi often explain problems they find embarrassing or overly complex by concocting absurdities intended to shame the questioner into silence.

14. The oldest caster is always given the commission, although he may not be the most skilled caster in the community, or may be too old to work. Usually, according to Bila Toure, the younger assistants do most of the work.

15. As is the case with wooden ancestor figures.

16. Dates of the reigns of Mogho Nabas are from Izard 1970:148-49.

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#### KASFIR, Notes, from page 51

1. Fieldwork in Idoma, begun initially in 1974, was carried out between August 1976 and July 1978 under the sponsorship of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Certain place names and names of informants have been omitted to protect the security of art objects.

2. Abakwariga is the name for pagan Hausa in the Middle Benué. The general Idoma term for Hausa is Abakpa.

3. An earlier generation of scholars (most notably Sir H. R. Palmer) assumed that Idoma culture had been "Jukunized" by its contact with the Kwararafa confederacy known to the Idoma as Apá. There is an increasing body of evidence based on fieldwork by Arnold Rubin, J. B. Webster, R. G. Armstrong, and me that much of what has been called Jukun was actually pagan Hausa influence on both the Jukun and the Idoma.

4. The most important are the Akweya and Egede. The complex question "Who are the Idoma?" has been studied in detail by Erim O. Erim (1977). Ethnicity is in part subjective, and while the Idoma think of themselves as "people of Apá," this is strictly true for only part of the population, the others having been absorbed under this rubric during the period of colonial administration. Both the historicity and the location of Apá are the subject of continuous debate. Suffice it to say here that, like Ile-Ife for the Yoruba, Apá is a place larger than life, real but also invested with myth.

5. See for example Edwin Ardener's discussion of Bakweri *liengu* beliefs (1975). James Fernandez has made the same point concerning Fang concepts of space (1977).

6. Idoma women are primarily farmers rather than traders and thus are economically dependent on their husbands. They have few jurial or political rights and are excluded from participation in the earth and ancestral cults as well as the all-male regulatory societies. Aside from informal age-sets formed in early childhood, their main social organization is the dance group. These groups, while important to women, do not offer ritual access to the supernatural. For this they must turn to *anjenu*.

7. R. G. Armstrong, personal communication, 1978.

8. Because the cult is so loosely structured, without formal recruitment or initiation rituals, it is difficult to arrive at membership statistics. While the counting of shrines gives a rough estimate, there may be several members of a family using the same shrine. In one village in Akpa district, there were over one hundred shrines in a total population of about one thousand.

9. The calabash contains, among other things, water and charcoal, the latter from certain species of trees considered the abodes of spirits. This cult emblem is borrowed from the Idoma ritual for propitiating a child's guardian spirit *ekocoyi* (*eka oye eyi*, "medicine which is placed on the head") (Abraham 1967:229) and is employed in *anjenu* possession rituals in which it is placed on the head of the adept.

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10. Fieldwork visit to Afo country, 1974.

11. Because the child on the lap is often carved separately, most museum examples have lost this important addition.

12. The figure was said to have been acquired in the Tiv-Idoma borderland by the grandfather of the present owner, in return for which he paid one slave, one dane gun and a brass armet. It bears Tiv scarification patterns and may derive from the Tiv ancestral figures known as *ihambe*, found outside the huts of wives taken in exchange marriage (Downes 1971:82).

13. There are no visible traces of paint on the *ekwoatame* figure *in situ*, though it has never undergone scientific analysis. Before making its rare public appearances it is oiled and then dressed in waistbeads and earrings. The pigment used for Idoma whiteface masks and figures is made from ground shells or from kaolin. As elsewhere in Nigeria, commercial oil paints have begun to be used on new sculpture and (with unfortunate results) in refurbishing old pieces.

14. A.P. Anyebe, personal communication, 1979.

15. A.P. Anyebe, personal communication, 1979.

16. Abraham's Yoruba dictionary (1958:52) gives *anjenu* as "evil spirits" while Greenberg (1946:28) mentions the Arabic-derived *aljan* (plural *aljanu*) as a synonym for the Hausa *iska* (plural *iskoki*) meaning "spirit." One of Boston's Igala informants said that *alijenu* "appear like little people" (J. Boston, personal communication, 1981). Diké was told that *alijenu* were malevolent female spirits (1976:5/4).

17. Interview of Ada of Upu by Ichakpa Amali, May 23, 1978. The Igala are thought to be very knowledgeable in medicine, as are the Hausa. *Anjenu* spirits are more closely associated with "medicine" (*eci*) than with spirits from the world of the dead (*ekwu*), as they are instrumental in healing and fertility.

18. This statement may well prove to be incorrect. Unfortunately, most field research on Igala sculpture is still unpublished. Chiké Diké described an *alijenu* gourd covered with cowries (1976:5/8-10), but mentioned no carved sculpture. On the other hand, John Picton once photographed a carved female figure in a shrine that was identified as *alijenu* (Van de Velde-Caremans 1976:139). It is also possible that the so-called box or mirror-frame figures have sometimes functioned as *alijenu*. The concept itself is certainly widespread in the confluence area, and was reported by Frobenius (1913:552 *passim*) early in this century. In Okpella, Jean Borgatti has reported masquerades with this designation, personifying forest spirits (personal communication, 1979). The elaborate zoomorphic *alijenu* calabash stopper collected by Sieber in the northern Nsukka village of Ete near the Igala borderland (1961:fig. 17), while frequently cited, seems not to have been reported elsewhere, and may be a local variant. Another of these, reported by Diké (1976:5/7), consists of three cloth figures with mask-like faces, called *ajenu*.

19. Two European dealers made an illegal collecting trip to Idoma in 1972, using Professor Sieber's catalogue *Sculpture of Northern Nigeria* (1961) as a field guide. Fortunately many of Ochai's best pieces eluded them, but the threat of illegal collecting creates a serious ethical problem for scholars wishing to publish such material.

20. Terence Booth has argued that the impersonation of *bori* spirits represents a dissolution and restructuring of Hausa social categories, due partly to the fact that *bori* dancers are men and women at the margins of Hausa society (1978:46).

21. These horned heads, found mainly in Okwoga, vaguely resemble Igbo *ikenga* and Igala *okega*, though I have not been able to trace any direct connection.

22. I am speaking here of *bori* in its rural version. As an urban cult, it attracts marginal men—homosexuals and non-Hausa ethnic minorities—as well as women.

23. A second essay, now in preparation, considers in detail the cult as it relates to Idoma women.

24. She surfaces as far east as Shaba Province in Zaire as *mamba muntu* (Abjanu 1978).

25. I could find no *anjenu* follower who claimed to have seen *Mammy Wata*, but a number were familiar with the concept and some even claimed *Mammy Wata* was synonymous with *anjenu*. Others say that while the former "lives only in the water," the latter "dwells both in water and in the bush." The location of nature spirit abodes obviously depends upon the topography of a region. Among the Bakweri of Mount Cameroon, coastal *liengu* water spirits have been translated into bush spirits by their montane forest environment, yet still re-