

# Eastern Nigerian Art from the Toby and Barry Hecht Collection

**Introduction by ROY SIEBER**  
**Captions by BARRY HECHT**

**S**ometimes a passion for collecting springs from mundane circumstance. For Toby and Barry Hecht, it began as a matter of interior decorating: after moving into a new house about eighteen years ago, a friend suggested that an African mask might go well with their contemporary furnishings. As Barry Hecht tells it, "We visited two galleries in New York and bought a few pieces that turned out to be reproductions. However, my interest was kindled, and I started visiting exhibitions at the Museum of African Art on Capitol Hill (which later became the National Museum of African Art). Every few years the museum would offer a course to be a docent. I took it, and I stayed on for ten years. I now serve on its board and on the Acquisitions Committee at the Baltimore Museum of Art."

At first the Hechts collected African art from across the continent. Later they focused on northern and eastern Nigeria, including the Benue River Valley, the Niger Delta, the Cross River, and the Nigeria-Cameroon border area. The decision to specialize was influenced by the 1985 exhibition "Igbo Arts: Community and Cosmos" and exposure to the William Arnett collection, presented in "Three Rivers of Nigeria" (1978). Besides, Barry Hecht says, "I reasoned that I could acquire higher-quality material and learn more if I concentrated on one area. Since there are a large number of ethnic groups with a variety of styles in this region, I did not feel limited in any way."

Hecht is an exceptional collector in the balanced attention he gives to the aesthetic and the scholarly: the place, time, and function of an object as well as its provenance. As a result he has amassed an extensive, indeed outstanding, library—well used, nearly memorized, and a constant source of delight, second only to the works of art. He stresses patience and scholarly preparation in collecting, which includes visits to museums and reputable galleries. "I've set up a filing system so that I can easily retrieve a number of examples of a particular type of object I am

considering for purchase. It consists of photos and references to journals and auction catalogues. Illustrations in Ph.D. theses are underutilized resources. I sometimes contact scholars to share with them material I have seen and to get their input about the origin and use of an object. To me, the pleasure of collecting and writing about African art derives from the aesthetics of the objects, learning about their origin and use, and making a contribution to the art history of eastern Nigeria."

The following examples represent about one-third of the collection. The captions, written by Hecht, include his notes and references on style and origin together with published references to similar examples. □

Mangam mask. Kaleri, Nigeria. Wood; 63.5cm (25").

These masks are associated with the cult called Mangam and with promoting an abundant crop (Rubin 1969:110–13). Although often ascribed to the Mama (or Kantana), they are also used by nearby groups such as the Rindri, Kaleri, Bu, and Chesu. A number were photographed in the field by K.C. Murray in the early '50s, and others by Christian Duponcheel in 1965 (personal communication, 1993). A few Kaleri masks collected by O. Temple in 1910 are now in the Liverpool Museum. A rare photograph of a dancer wearing a mask and costume was published in 1955 (Fievet 1955: figs. 11, 47).

Temple makes brief reference to the religious festivals: "On these occasions two men don carved wooden masks, with long horns, in representation of some animal, and fringes of dried grass depending therefrom effectually conceal the countenance of the wearer, who is thought to represent some person or thing long since dead" (Temple 1919:268–69). According to Duponcheel (personal communication, 1993) these masks represent not a bush cow, as is often thought, but Ubawaru, a mythical ancestor who gives knowledge to the people. Elsy Leuzinger (1977:210) also refers to the masks of the Mama being used in the Kamboon mask play of the "Udawaru" society, and worn for funerals and sacrificial cults. Other masks in this style have been illustrated in the literature (Leuzinger 1977:221; Eyo 1977:224; Sieber & Walker 1999:96).





Opposite page, counterclockwise from top left:

Oglinye mask. Idoma, Nigeria. Wood, fiber; 27.3cm (10.75").

According to Sidney Kasfir, the Oglinye masquerade entered the Idoma area with the Akweya and Igede, two groups who had prior contact with Ogoja, an area located between Igede and the Middle Cross River (Kasfir 1988:85-108). It is performed on the last day of a cycle marking the second burial of a deceased member of the Oglinye society. This crest mask represents a woman and is worn with a white mesh suit, which extends over the head of the masquerader. Initially Oglinye came into Idomaland as a head-hunter's dance, but it later lost this function. Today an institution for social control, it still relates to male aggression as it is manifested through the emergence of manhood and the values of a warrior.

A frequently illustrated field photo of an Oglinye crest was taken by Roy Sieber in 1958. This mask was attributed to Ochai, the most revered Idoma carver of the twentieth century (Sieber 1961:8). Other examples have been illustrated by Kasfir (1979: figs. 115, 117, 118).

Masks. Afo, Nigeria. Left: Wood, metal, abrus seeds; 22.9cm (9"). Right: Wood, abrus seeds; 28.6cm (11.25").

Left: This mask is clearly of Afo origin, although no similar example has been published. The construction is typical: the underside (here and in the other mask as well) reveals a vertical wooden tubular structure which has a perforation presumably for the attachment of a cord that would help secure the mask to a dancer's head. In addition, the two figures display facial scarification similar to that seen on figures attributed to the Afo (Vogel 1981:163; Sieber & Walker 1987:39), and the animal heads (their bodies now missing) that surmount them may represent chameleons, as seen on other Afo masks. The Jos Museum owns two masks attributed to the Afo, which are similar to the present example; they are adorned with a cockscomb and horns but no chameleons. They too have figures on opposite sides of the mask. No other information is provided in the museum card catalogue (supplied by Roy Sieber). One could assume that these masks are variants of the chameleon-and-cockscomb superstructure of the Afo Ekpesi, seen in the mask at the right.

Right: Sidney Kasfir has discussed a similar mask formerly in the Tishman Collection (1981:152-53). It bears the chameleon-and-cockscomb superstructure worn by the drummer known as Ekpesi, or "featherman." According to Kasfir, the two curving horns probably relate to power and fertility. The chameleon has the ability to bring long life or death, fecundity or barrenness, depending on its color. The cock is a messenger of God and symbolizes abundance. The drummer wearing the headdress may perform at burials or accompany Afo chiefs on visits to neighboring villages. There is a similar Afo headdress in the British Museum (Fagg 1963:141).

Figure. Jukun, Nigeria. Wood, nails; 75.6cm (29.75").

According to Arnold Rubin (1969:78-93), the Jukun can be divided into mask-using and figure-using areas. The latter is in the Upper Benue or Northeast region. Here the king's responsibilities include fertility of the land and the security of his people. The carved wooden figures represent deceased chiefs. One or two sets of male and female figures, the latter representing royal wives, serve the community. At the start of the rainy season, the carvings are brought from their shrine to "sleep" at the chief's palace. Additional ceremonies take place at harvest time, when they are given the first fruits. In cases of impending crisis, special appeals can be made to the figures on behalf of an individual or the entire community.

Rubin also refers to a cult called Mam that uses Jukun figural art. Predominantly concerned with human fertility, it is represented by an ithyphallic male figure. As with the royal figures, there is also a wife. Possession of devotees by the spirit of Mam is a prominent part of the ceremonies.

The present sculpture displays several characteristics that Rubin associates with the nuclear style. They include nails for the eyes; hard wood; large, perforated earlobes; bands of cross-hatched, incised facial decorations across the eyes; pronounced facial overhang; conical cap; long arms curving forward to meet at the hip level; and feet and legs as undifferentiated masses. The earliest figure in this style was collected by Frobenius in 1912. There are several examples of the nuclear-style Jukun figure in the literature (Schmalenbach 1988:177; Eyo 1977:228; Robbins & Nooter 1989:297; Flam & Shapiro 1994: cat. 44).



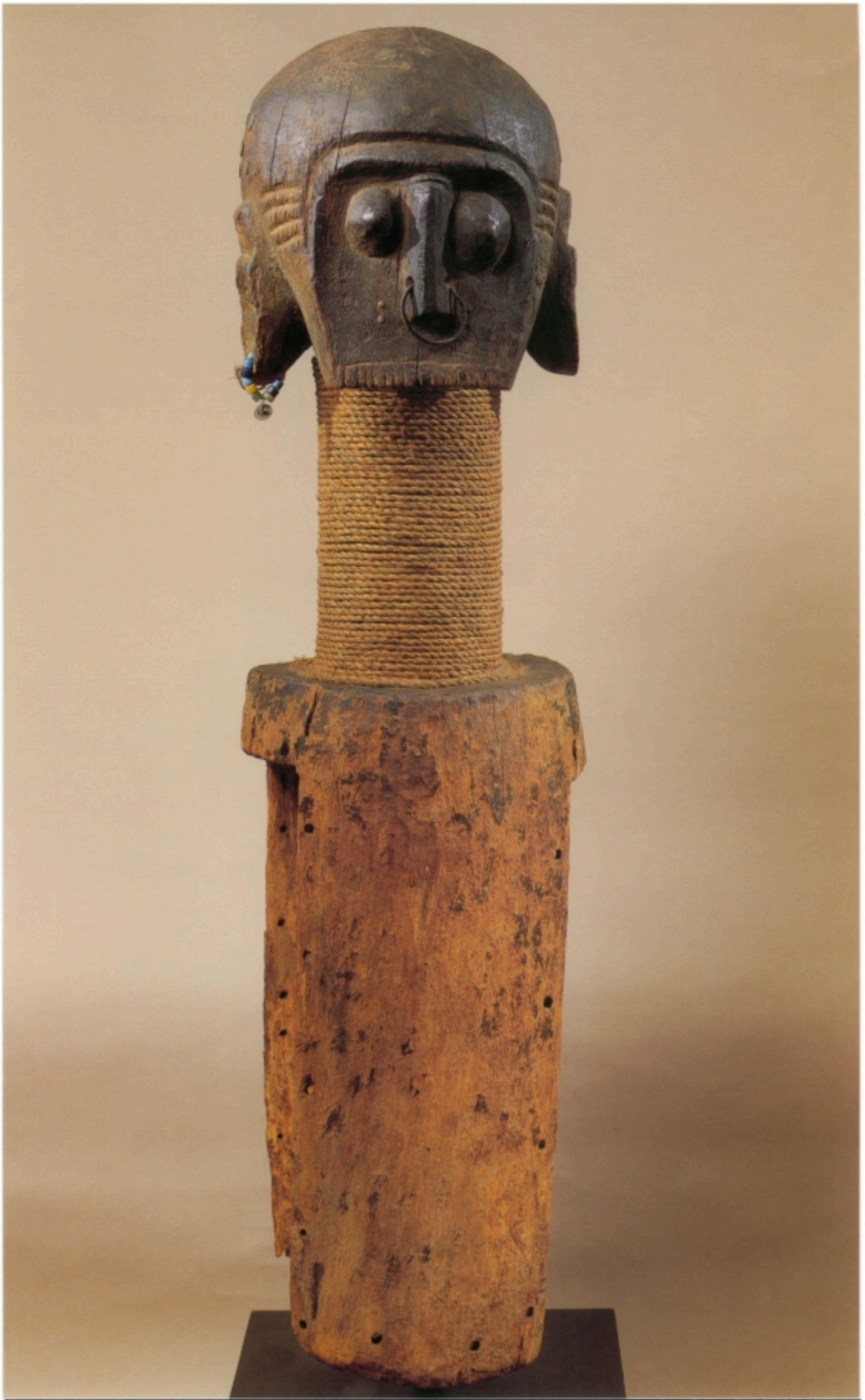
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Akuma mask. Jukun, Nigeria. Wood; 59.7cm (23.5").

Called Akuma Wa'unu (Rubin 1969:66-71), this mask is one of four types of wooden male masks of the Akuma cult. The other three are horizontal. The accompanying female mask is made of netted fiber. Here the eyes are represented by pierced cylinders on either side of the nose, but it is the rectangular mouth opening (not visible in this view) that provides the main means of vision for the masquerader, who wears the mask tipped back thirty degrees from the vertical. The Akuma Wa'unu performs at important funerals, greets important visitors, and helps to celebrate good fortune (Rubin 1985:60). Arnold Rubin was told that the pointed projections under the nose were teeth or fangs, and the spotting on the surface represented marks of the leopard.

Rubin encountered a similar vertical plank mask form among the neighboring Yukuben, who call this mask Augum. There it is used in controlling witchcraft and in connection with the maize harvest in June and guinea corn harvest in December.

For several other examples in the literature, see Dorsingfang-Smets & Claerhout 1974: no. 54; Rubin 1969: figs. 76-85; and Rubin 1985:60.





*Opposite page:*

Mask. Wurkun, Nigeria. Wood, fiber, metal; 114.3cm (45").

Yoke masks (presumably worn on the shoulder, though evidence suggests at least some were worn on the head) have been described in the literature as used by the Mumuye, Jukun, and Wurkun. Jörg Adelberger (1993) has done fieldwork in the Muri Mountains and has provided some information regarding their function. The Wurkun, who live in the western region of the mountains, are today composed of the Piya, Kulung, Kwonci, and Kode; the Pero may have been a Wurkun people in precolonial times. To the east are a number of groups forming a large unit called the Bikwin. This yoke is peculiar to the Bikwin, but the type can also be found among the Kulung. Kept in secret places in the bush, where they may not be seen by outsiders, these powerful and potentially dangerous objects are used to maintain the well-being of the community. Smaller figures of similar form are used in fertility cults. Both types of objects have been incorrectly attributed to the Waja in the literature.

*This page:*

Figure. Mumuye, Nigeria. Wood, metal, leather; 69.9cm (27.5").

According to Arnold Rubin (1978), most Mumuye figurative sculpture is used by diviners and healers. Although these sculptures are given names like Jagana, Lagana, and Janari, there is no correlation between names and formal attributes. Other figures, called Supa, underline the role and status of important elders, and are indistinguishable from those used for divination and curing. In this figure, the sagittal crest represents a coiffure. The projections in the form of a loop on either side of the head seen on some sculptures probably depict pierced and distended earlobes, although they could also be part of a coiffure. Often one can also note a transverse perforation of the nasal septum into which a section of guinea corn stalk is inserted as a representation of body ornamentation.

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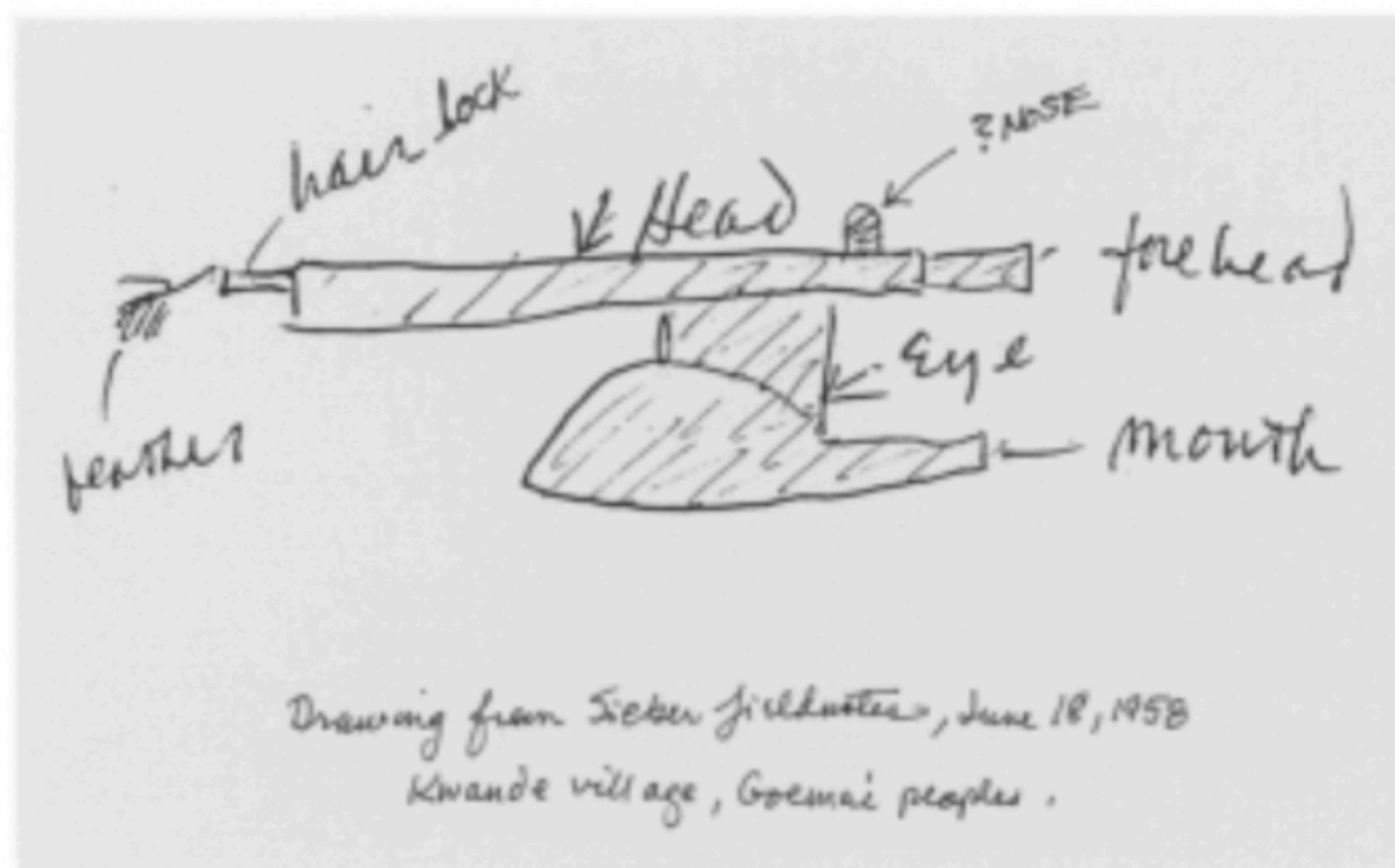
Top: Figures. Koro(?), Nigeria. Left: Wood; 113cm (44.5"). Center: Wood; 118cm (46.5"). Right: Wood, fiber; 115cm (45.25").

A figure resembling the three illustrated here appears in *Africa: The Art of a Continent* (Phillips 1995:364), but that source provides no useful information regarding its origin or use. Among African-art dealers, pieces such as these are usually ascribed to the Koro, and at least one individual suggested that they were used as pounders of grain. The attribution seems reasonable, since the heads of these figures are similar to the better-documented Koro figurative cups, *gbene*, from which ritual palm wine is drunk during ceremonial sacrifices and second burials. The Koro carve these cups mostly for their Jaba (Ham) neighbors (Sieber 1961:12-13; Thompson & Vogel 1990:151). The use of the three figures as pounders is implied by the well-patinated area of the neck and the fact that all widen toward the base. Several other examples have been published (*Christie's* 1985:72; *Arts Primitif* 1997:26).

Bottom: Mask. Goemai, Nigeria. Wood, abrus seeds; 63.5cm (25").

Several authors have noted a likeness between Jukun *Aku maga* masks (*Tribal Arts* 1998:29; *Arts d'Afrique Noire* 1999a: front cover, 1999b:52) and certain Goemai examples (Rubin 1969:105-10). In the latter sculptures the oval top plane is continuous with the upper jaw. Goemai masks are said to be worn horizontally, as shown below in the field drawing by Roy Sieber, whereas the Jukun examples are tipped down in front. Both mask types are felt to represent a highly stylized human head.

This mask, called *Mongop* (Sieber 1961:10), appears to be the authority symbol for chiefship and is associated with agriculture as well. It officiates at the installations and burials of chiefs and otherwise appears once a year, during the dry season. The only examples in the literature are field photographs (Sieber 1961: figs. 6, 25, 26).



Opposite page:

Komptin figure. Montol, Nigeria. Wood; 47cm (18.5").

Much of the information concerning this type of figure comes from the fieldwork carried out by Roy Sieber in the Benue Valley in 1958. Similar ones are used among the Goemai, Montol, Yergum, Angas, and other peoples (Sieber 1974a). The first examples collected from this area were by Vischer in 1905 (Boser & Jeanneret 1969: no. 21).

These figures are used in a men's healing society called Kwomptin (Goemai) or Komtin (Montol), whose activities are kept secret from women and uninitiated men. The basic symbol of the society is a pair of bush cow horns carried by its leader. Sacrificial blood and cereal beer are poured over the figures. Their owners—diviners or healers—determine the cause of clients' afflictions by consulting a bowl of water that holds a sixpence and by interpreting the person's dreams. Disease can be due to malignant spirits or witches. The doctor then makes an appropriate medicine. Figures such as these are also used in cases of possession.

Other examples can be found in the literature (Sieber 1974; Sieber 1961: nos. 28-29, 32-34, 44; Sieber & Walker 1987:77).









*Top left:* Headpiece or head of a figure. Mambila, Cameroon. Wood; 28.6cm (11.25").

This object may be a headpiece from a masquerade of the Mambila male initiation cult. According to David Zeitlyn (personal communication, 1998), it is often called Suaga due (Big Suaga), but contrary to earlier sources is not identified as a bush cow or crow.

Alternatively, this sculpture may be the head of a protective figure. The extended tubular structure of its back could have been connected to a long fibrous tube, as illustrated by Nancy Schwartz in her catalogue of the Gilbert Schneider collection of Mambila art (1972:31). These figures with their snakelike cloth bodies are protective devices and are found beneath the storage building for ritual objects, which is raised on stilts. Suspended by a string, they swing in the wind. As with most Mambila art they are painted red, white, and black.

*Top right:* Mask. Widekum, Cameroon. Wood, skin; 26.7cm (10.5").

The black color and cap place this crest mask in the Widekum area (Upper Cross River, Cameroon). Most Widekum helmet masks have this type of head covering, which represents a woven cord skullcap that is worn by males of the region even to the present day. The facial features are usually more cubistic, however, and crest masks normally incorporate a full figure or a head and torso without limbs. However, K. Campbell (1988:17-27) breaks down the Widekum designation into nine related groups; some of these groups of masks have more naturalistic features. One of the more naturalistic semi-helmet masks is illustrated by Marceline Wittmer (1977:98).

Skin-covered crest masks are used mainly by the Nchibe association. Called Mpoh, they are often covered with animal bladders, which are thinner and more elastic than the animal skin used in the larger masks. Mpoh masks are used by entertainment groups at funerals and other celebrations (Nicklin 1979:54-59).



*Opposite page bottom left:*

Skin-covered mask. Keaka(?), Cameroon. Wood, skin, fiber; 38cm (15").

The naturalism of this mask places it in the Middle Cross River area, probably from a subgroup of the Ejagham such as the Keaka. Its dark color and stern countenance indicate that it is a male mask, and probably a beast character. These types often danced with masks representing the beautiful female. Other examples in the literature suggest that at one time this mask had hair and a beard made of raffia (*Christie's*, 1985:70; Wittmer 1977: no. 100). Concentric circles are painted on the temples. The mask probably performed at rituals such as initiations and funerals of members of the association that owned the masks. It could also be worn at periodic rites connected with agriculture (Phillips 1995:376).

*This page:*

Figures. Keaka(?), Cameroon. Left: Wood; 49.5cm (19.5"). Center: Wood; 48.9cm (19.25"). Right: Wood; 45.7cm (18").

Although some authors have raised questions about the origins of these figures, I believe there is enough information in the literature to suggest a Keaka provenance (Harter 1994:45–48). William Fagg proposed a Keaka origin for a similar carving in the Frum collection (1981:54). There is also an example in the Institute of Ethnography, Leningrad, collected by Mansfield between 1904 and 1907 among the Keaka. A standing male figure with a crusty patina, it is said to be a container (Olderogge & Forman 1969:98).

Jill Salmons proposes a Keaka origin as well for eleven similar figures in the Franklin collection (1986:72–75). She alludes to the confusion of names in the literature, referring to the Keaka, who are an eastern Ejagham group in Cameroon neighboring the Banyang and to the west of the Bangwa, as opposed to the Kaka, a Tikar-related group residing in the Mbem area of Cameroon, south of the Mambila. Salmons cites fieldwork done by Hans-Joachim Koloss among the Keaka in 1980 and the description of nature healers using medicine called *enok atang* (fighting alone), which is located in an anthropomorphic figure. Herbs and blood from a sacrificial cock were applied to the body of the carving. These figures may be used to control witches and may relate to the Njoo figures of the Bangwa. Salmons compares features of the Franklin examples with similar ones seen in masks and figures of the Bokyi, Keaka, and Bangwa, as well as bronzes from the Cross River area. Lastly, when I submitted photographs of these three figures to David Zeitlyn, he felt that they were most likely Keaka (personal communication, 1998).



Mask. Boki. Wood; 20.3cm (8").

This crest mask can be attributed to the Boki area based on similarities to published single-, double-, and triple-faced crest masks. Single heads can be seen in the Barbier-Mueller (Schmalenbach 1988:158) and Endicott (Vogel 1988:46-7) collections; janus masks in the Oron Museum (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:43), Ratner (Drewal 1977:46), and Ratton (Fagg 1970:132) collections; and a triple-faced example is in the Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin (Krieger & Kutscher 1967: no. 27). P.A. Talbot illustrated similar pieces in *In the Shadow of the Bush* (1912:260) with the notation "Dancers

with JuJu Masks at Ekuri Eying," which is southwest of the Boki area. Based on Keith Nicklin's reference to K.C. Murray's fieldwork, this mask may have been used in the Nkuambuk cult. Many small holes on top of the head could have held porcupine quills, feathers, or hair plugs, and a larger hole amid the smaller ones could have contained medicinal substances or an animal horn. The back of the neck has vertical parallel lines, which are seen on some female Boki masks (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:40-41).



*Left, top and bottom: Mask (two views). Boki(?), Nigeria. Wood, hair, metal; 21.6cm (8.5").*

Most janus cap masks have been attributed to the Boki area of the Cross River. A high degree of realism and inset eyes and teeth are often associated with skin-covered masks of the Middle Cross River region. On this example, dark brown pigment was applied to both faces initially, and white pigment was later overlaid on one side.

Keith Nicklin refers to small cap masks associated with the Nkuambuk cult. This mask is different, however, because it does not have any vertical padded cloth projections (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:41). K.C. Murray first described Boki janus cap masks when visiting the Ikom area in 1948. No information was available with respect to their use, since they had been abandoned for a considerable period of time. Nicklin (1974:15) tells us that the Boki skin-covered mask associations are called Nkang (for warriors), Egbege (dealing with the affairs of women), and Bekarum (for hunters).

There are other examples of wooden janus Boki masks in the literature (Drewal 1977:46-7; Fagg 1965: fig. 5).

*Right: Mask. Boki, Nigeria. Wood; 30.5cm (12").*

A mask by the same hand that created this example is illustrated in the Monzino Collection catalogue (Vogel 1986:102-3). It was photographed in the field by Keith Nicklin and labeled "Boje, Boki, Ikom" (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:41). Nicklin refers to "a stylistic continuum of an 'archaic' style of face mask from the Idoma country, in a broad sweep across eastern Ejagham communities on the Cameroon side of the border" (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:41). The style consists of a vertical scarification in the middle of the forehead and, often, horizontal markings on each temple. The treatment of the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth (especially with metal teeth coated white) described by Nicklin is similar to that seen on a number of skin-covered masks. The present mask lacks the leather flaps on each side of the face.



*This page:*

*Top:* Mask. Middle Cross River area, Nigeria. Wood, metal, cloth; 21.6cm (8.5").

Keith Nicklin illustrates a similar mask from the Osokom clan, Bokyi people, Ikrom; it is a funerary Okua mask (one of a pair), and in the field photograph's caption is said to have been carved by Ayim Nsado of the royal Nkene lineage, which has sole rights to its use (Nicklin 1983:123-27). Elsewhere (Nicklin & Salmons 1984:28-43), Nicklin speaks of these masks as resembling some of the Idoma face masks, though the latter are white and those from the Cross River are black. He feels that one of the finest examples is in the Linden Museum (Koloss 1982:68, A14). It is embellished with vertical scarification in the center of the forehead. The marks on each temple in that mask and the one shown here are similar to those found among masks of the Igbo and Ibibio. Several other examples are illustrated by Neyt (1985:91, 132-39).

*Bottom:* Mask. Efut(?), Lower Cross River area. Wood, skin, metal; 55.9cm (22").

Masks resembling this example were employed by Ikem, a song and dance group founded among the Efut and Efik of Calabar. According to Keith Nicklin, the secular nature of this masquerade allowed it to survive when other institutions were being suppressed by the British administration and the Christian church (Nicklin & Salmons 1988:126-49). K.C. Murray learned that the Ikem play was introduced between 1895 and 1901. The best-known mask makers were the Efut, and the present example was probably carved by Etim Abassi Ekpenyong, based on information obtained by Murray in 1936. The Efut carvers of the Ikem-style mask supplied masks for groups in Calabar, others farther north on the Cross River, and west to the Oron, Ibibio, and Ika. Charles Partridge described the coiffures of the prenuptial "fattening house" custom to which Ikem masks relate (1908:163-64):

The women spend hours slowly dressing one another's hair... it is plastered up with palm oil and grease into most fantastic designs, and remains in that condition for months....Some of the fashions are as follows: an upright horn on top of the head, with its top projected over the forehead as does Punch's cap; arranged in three horns, two of which project over the sides and a third over the back of the head, from the forehead to almost the nape of the neck, the spaces between them being bridged over with knitting needles and porcupine quills; one solitary horn rising straight from a little mound of hair on the top of the crown; a sort of coronet of small horns; a number of little horns all over the head...patterned into a number of little tassels, which are often colored with camwood, etc.

Other examples of Ikem headdresses appear in an article by Nicklin and Salmons (1988:126-49) and elsewhere in the literature (Celenko 1983:149; Vogel 1981:166-68; Leiris & Delange 1967:318).

*Opposite page:*

Mask. Eket, Nigeria. Wood; 63.5cm (25").

Figural crest masks such as this one are illustrated by François Neyt in *L'art eket* (1979: figs. 2, 3). In Keith Nicklin's review and discussion of Eket headdresses (1980:2), he refers to their stylistic similarity to sculptures called Ogbom among the Bende Igbo. He states that the correspondence may be due to old trade routes between the two areas via the Kwa Ibo River. In addition, both groups worship an earth divinity that the Igbo call Ala and the Ibibio call Isong. G.I. Jones draws the same relationship between these figures and those used in the Ogbom trophy dance (1984:184). However, in a later publication, Nicklin reassesses the origin of the round "Eket masks" whose features mirror those of the "Eket figures." He attributes them to an area east of the Eket region and refers to Murray's description of an Okobo substyle of masks (Schmalenbach 1988:170).









*Opposite page:*

Ogborn mask. Igbo, Nigeria. Wood; 83.8cm (33").

The majority of this information comes from Eli Bentor (personal communication, 1991) and an article by K.C. Murray (1941:127-31). G.I. Jones states that Ogborn (or, sometimes, Oboborn) existed among the Ibeku, Olokoro, and Obono groups and the nearby Ngwa subgroups (Jones 1984:200-206); he and Murray visited the Olokoro near Umuahia in the late 1930s. In an exhibition organized by Murray for the Zwemmer Gallery in London in 1949, there were eleven Ogborn sculptures, one of which is almost identical to this crest mask figure.

Murray (1941) provides a description of the entire masquerade:

Around the bases of the carvings, which are cylindrical, a cane or palm branch stand is woven like a basket. These are sometimes as much as two feet tall. At the bottom of the stand is fixed a head-pad, which elevates the carving to be tied to the head of a dancer. Through a hole in the base of the carving, a stick is fitted, so as to protrude horizontally at the front and back. On the front, a conical basket, a few feet long, is affixed and on the back, an arrangement of cane and raffia shaped like a wheel are present. All of that is called *Ide Ogborn*, and is covered with fine cloths and parrots' feathers. The cloths are shaped to fit tightly over the cone. The face and body of the dancer are completely covered with a special white coloured native woven cloth, which reaches down to the feet; bells are tied to the back of his head and to his ankles and a small narrow conical basket called *Ike Ogborn* is tied to the bottom of his back, so that it sticks out like a kind of tail, and is covered with streamers of cloth.

Most villages played Ogborn in honor of the earth deity, Ala. Jones and Murray were told that it helped make children more plentiful. By the 1930s it was no longer being performed. Men wore the headdresses, but their identity was not concealed (thus they were not supernatural beings), and these carvings had not been made since the nineteenth century. Jack Sargeant Harris collected Ogborn carvings in 1939. According to notes by Harris dating to 1954 (supplied by Eli Bentor), an Igbo informant told him that all of these were made by Ibibio.

*This page:*

Top: Ekpo mask(?). Ibibio, Nigeria. Wood; 12.7cm (5").

Several other small Ibibio masks in an angular style appear in the literature. G.I. Jones illustrates an Ekpo society mask now in the British Museum that was collected in the Eket district. He attributes it to the Anang, an Ibibio people (Jones 1984:130). An even closer example is present in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Krieger & Kutscher 1967: no. 22), collected by Stefanelli in 1904. Labeled "Child's Mask, Eket," it is 14 centimeters high. A third closely related mask is in the Barbier-Mueller Collection (illustrated in Martin 1997:278).

Bottom: Ekpo mask. Ibibio, Nigeria. Wood; 21.6cm (8.5").

A mask similar to this one is, again, illustrated by G.I. Jones (1984:180), and is attributed to the Anang for use in their Ekpo society masquerade. Other examples appear in *Animals in African Art* (Roberts 1995:162), two of which are said to be from the Ogoni and one from the Ibibio. Allen Roberts tells us that these masks, called *Imuen Ekpo*, or *bird Ekpo*, personified ancestral spirits and enforced laws made by the Ekpo society, which governed the Ibibio area. Keith Nicklin (1999:42) presents a field photograph that he believes is from the 1910s, showing representatives of the Qua Ibo Mission. One is holding an Ogoni mask with a bird's beak.







Opposite page, clockwise from top left:

Mask. Ogoni, Nigeria. Wood; 48.3cm (19").

In *Life in Southern Nigeria*, P.A. Talbot was the first to illustrate masks similar to the present example. He designated them as *Ibibio* (Ogoni) masks (1923:82). Another, illustrated in *Elephant: The Animal and Its Ivory in African Culture* (Ross 1992:184), is in the British Museum and is listed as an *Ekpo* society mask of the Ogoni. One of the masks at UCLA from the Wellcome Collection, acquired prior to 1921, resembles the present mask (Altman 1965:81; "Nigerian Art at UCLA," 1981:28). In his discussion of the Ogoni area and its art, G.I. Jones (1984:190) refers to two similar masks collected by K.C. Murray:

Murray also collected two large heads, this one with movable lower jaws and cane grilles behind them. One was a naturalistic representation of a forest hog, the other, an abstract composition said to represent an elephant (local carvers in this part of Nigeria had never seen an elephant and so tended to fall back on abstract forms).

These later pieces are illustrated in Willett (1971:140–41).

Ekpu figure. Oron, Nigeria. Wood; 66cm (26").

The Oron people live on the west bank of the Cross River, just inland from the Atlantic Ocean. A figure would be carved upon the death of an Oron elder and joined with others in the meeting house, where they would receive sacrifices and appeals for the community's well-being. K.C. Murray supplied the first description of these Ekpu figures (1947a:310–14). Later, P.O. Nsugbe felt that the figures were monuments to the dead and were occupied by the spirits of the ancestors—heads of lineage groups—they represent. In this way they were an aid to social memory (Nsugbe 1961:357–65).

The most detailed analysis of these figures is supplied by Keith Nicklin. He points out that the beard and headgear—top hats, billycock hats, or woolen stocking caps—are symbols of senior male status. Nearly all the figures display a vertical line of scarification in front of the ear and centrally on the forehead. Decoration on either side of the abdomen may consist of spirals or animal motifs, and in this area of Nigeria, a prominent navel with surrounding scarification is a sign of beauty. The hands may hold a ceremonial staff or horn. Smaller human figures on a few of the Ekpu figures may represent other persons holding important positions within the lineage system, but in a subsidiary status. The buttocks and penis are often exposed, since a band of gathered raffia cloth is the only thing represented below the abdomen (Nicklin 1999:77–92).

Based on his analysis of 130 photographs, C. Slogar has also written recently of the workshops that may have carved groups of Oron figures (1999:38–53). Other examples have been illustrated (Lunsford 1975:96–99; McClusky 1984:32–33; Poyner 1984:50).

Mask. Etsako, Nigeria. Wood; 71cm (28").

A similar mask, illustrated in *African Sculpture* (Fagg & Plass 1964:101), was collected by Northcote Thomas early in the twentieth century from Fugar village in Kukuruku country. In a personal communication (1987), Arnold Rubin said that John Picton had attributed the mask to a northern Edo group, the Etsako, and had felt it resembled a mask photographed in Fugar by K.C. Murray.

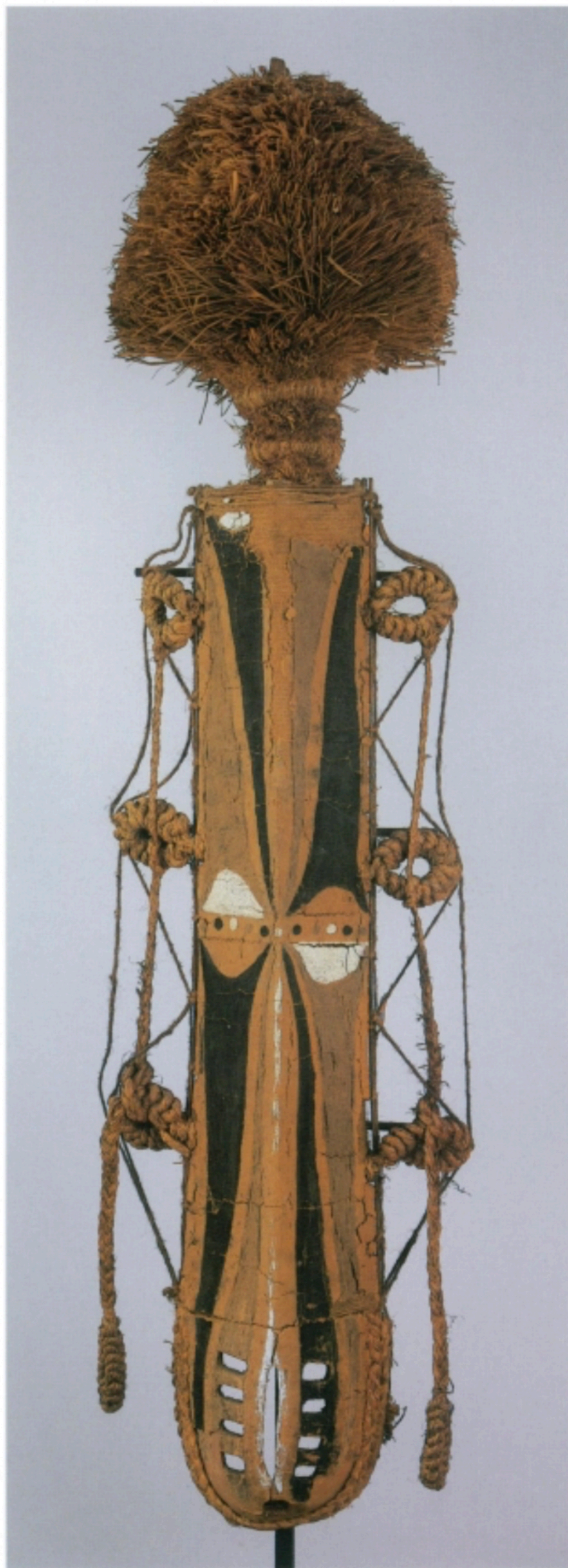
This page:

Mask. Igbo, Cross River, Nigeria. Wood, gourd, fiber; 111.8cm (44").

Masks like this example are illustrated by G.I. Jones (1984:209–11). After their ritual seclusion, newly initiated males return to the community and perform various masquerades. In the performance of the junior grade, *Isiji*, all the dancers depict similar characters. Each wears a tall conical headdress made of fresh *Thaumatococcus* leaves and raffia sacking on a stick frame; it ends in a calabash that fits over the wearer's face. Jones's photo caption reads, "Parade of Initiates: They are draped in Omo leaves of light green and their masks are colored yellow, black and red, topped with dark green leaves. *Isiji* masquerade, Nkporo tribe, Ada Ibo group, Cross River Ibo."

Simon Ottenberg, in a personal communication in 1987, stated:

They are used in the boys' initiation into the adult men's secret society. I believe that the larger form is employed in the Nkporo village group of the Igbo, where G.I. Jones photographed them. This larger form also exists in the Edda village group next to it, and the larger form is also present in the southern villages of the Alikpo village group, called Anohia and Kporikpo. I have some more firm of it being employed in these two villages, where some examples are over six feet tall and had guide ropes from the top, which the dancer held to help control it and keep it from falling. It is employed after the boys have been in the bush a while, when they appear to dance in public for the first time. They are expected to dance well and there is a certain amount of competition among them. The tall mask, I believe, but am not certain, is worn by the first son only.







*Opposite page:*

Maiden spirit mask (*mmwo*). Igbo, Nigeria. Wood; 50.8cm (20").

A mask illustrated by Talbot (1912:58) and later donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum is probably by the sculptor of the *mmwo* illustrated here. Although this example shows signs of usage, Eli Bentor pointed out to me that the Talbot mask has no holes for attachment and thus was probably never used (personal communication, 1999). Several other masks in this style appear in the literature, some of which also have early collection dates (Wardwell 1986:72-73; Robbins & Nooter 1989:256; Sotheby's 1987; Elisofon & Fagg 1958:139; Leuzinger 1977:232).

Maiden spirit masks are used primarily for entertainment in the Awka region. They are considered the "incarnate dead" who protect the living and deal with abundant harvests, large families, and a general sense of prosperity. They may also perform at second burials of powerful elders. The annual Fame of Maidens festival features Agbogho *mmwo*, representing adolescent females who demonstrate the ideals of feminine beauty. Thus, light complexions, a thin straight nose, small mouth, and elaborately dressed hair are universally present. The facial tattoos draw attention to the beautiful features. This maiden spirit is accompanied by her sister and mother to reiterate the aesthetic ideal (Cole & Aniakor 1984:120-28).



*This page:*

Left: Maiden spirit mask (*mmwo*). Igbo, Nigeria. Wood; 21cm (8.25").

G.I. Jones photographed similar masks in the field called Ogbugulu Mau, from the Igbo of the Nri/Awka region. The characters consisted of a grandmother, mother, and a number of daughters. The masqueraders wore bright harlequin-like tights and helmet masks or, as in this case, small wooden masks and a surrounding headdress consisting of a cane or wire superstructure covered with bright wools and streamers (Jones 1984:62). Other examples are illustrated in *Igbo Arts* (Cole & Aniakor 1984:128).

K.C. Murray also describes this type of mask in the Ayolugbe dance, which takes place northwest of Awka. He characterizes it "as a smallish face of wood fastened to a framework of cane decorated with mirrors, colored cloths and ribbons" (1947b:73-75). While women may witness the performance at festivals and funerals, the masks are otherwise kept hidden from their view.

Right: Owu mask. Ekpeye Igbo, Nigeria. Wood; 49.5cm (19.5").

Masks in this form are used in the Owu masquerade by the Ekpeye Igbo from an area to the west of the Niger River. John Picton, during his stay in Ahoada in 1966, was told that Owu was brought from the Engenni, an Edo group to the west (Picton 1988:46-53). The Ekpeye had many more varieties when compared to the Owu masquerade among the Kalabari Ijo. G.I. Jones illustrates a mask with a similar coiffure that was photographed in the field by K.C. Murray and labeled "Abugunma: Owu masquerade, Edoha village, Ekpeye tribe (1940s)" (1984:158). Picton describes the vast range of characters and the use of face masks, helmet masks, and headdresses among the Ekpeye. The mask illustrated here is probably one of the pretty girls and may represent Adanwonsai, or eldest daughter, based on a similar example illustrated by Picton. Among the Ekpeye, the Owu masquerade differed from those elsewhere. Here it was part of a dramatic entertainment without secret connotation. Similar masks are illustrated in *Igbo Arts* (Cole & Aniakor 1984:213).

Top: Owu mask: Otobo. Ijo. Wood; 40.6cm (16").

There is one other mask of this exact type in the literature and two in a Belgian private collection. G.I. Jones calls it "Utobo (Hippopotamus). Owu masquerade, Nembe State, Central Ijo" (1984:167). The eastern Ijo of Rivers State consist of the Nembe, Okrika, Bonny, and Kalabari. According to Jones, Nembe sculptures differed slightly from those of the better-known Kalabari villages. However, the same secret society, Ekine, was found among the Brass Ijo (Nembe) as among the Kalabari (1984:163-69).

Robin Horton relates that a small fishing village might have masquerades representing thirty or forty water spirits of the Ekine society. Each of the water spirits has a festival at which it is entertained by society members. The cycle of festivals is performed in a fixed order (Horton 1960:27-34). Each masquerade has its own distinctive headdress, costume, drum rhythm, dance steps, and tableau. An expert dancer impersonates the spirit owner, causing the spirit to control the dancer's movements. When the headdresses are worn, the carvings face upward and may be obscured by the costume. The carving has more to do with attracting the spirit than with producing a depiction for the spectators (Anderson 1981:149-50). For another description and photographs illustrating the use of Otobo masks, see Chadwick 1953:30-33.

Bottom: Cast-metal sculptures.

William Fagg first suggested the term Lower Niger Bronze Industry to temporarily classify a group of copper-alloy sculptures previously attributed to Benin, which have "iconographical, but not stylistic affinities with the Benin court style" (1963:8). Once this term began to be used, specificity disappeared and it became a catch-all phrase for all problematic Nigerian metalwork (Lorenz 1982).

Clockwise from left:

a. Leopard skull. Cast copper alloy; 17.8cm (7").

In 1904 A.A. Whitehouse collected two skulls of copper alloy near the Andoni settlement of Allabia in southern Nigeria. They were later TL dated to 1680±40 and 1655±40. The former was identical to a bronze carnivore skull dated to 1645±30, discovered by Keith Nicklin at Oron in Cross River State. The local chief felt that the skull was part of a predecessor's grave goods. The earliest dated bronze carnivore skull was discovered at Igbo Ukwu by Thurstan Shaw (ninth century C.E.). Nicklin suggests that the coastal distribution of carnivore skull castings, from the Niger Delta to the Cross River estuary, reflects the movement of itinerant Igbo smiths and traders (1978:104-5).

b. Staff head. Benue Valley. Cast copper alloy; 19.7cm (7.75").

This piece was originally published as a Lower Niger staff head (Auld & Phillips 1979: no. 126). Another example, probably by the same hand, was published recently with a Benue Valley/Tiv attribution (Martin 1997). Roy Sieber field-photographed a staff head in 1958, describing it as ritual equipment belonging to the Long Kwande (chief of Kwande), which is a Goemai (Ankwe) city (field notes provided by Sieber). It was said to have been made at the time of the present chief's grandfather. One of two other examples published in *Traditional African Metalworks* (Rolin 1977: nos. 20, 21, 41) was given a tentative Tiv attribution by Arnold Rubin, who believed it to be a bronze example of the Imborivungu. This is also known as an owl pipe and as a cult emblem used as a ritual musical instrument (Brincard 1982:118).

c. Bell. Cross River area (?). Cast copper alloy; 12.7cm (5").

This bell falls under what Nancy Neaher calls the "inverted tulip style" (1979:42-47). Although the spiral decorations are typical, it has many more decorative motifs than most other examples. Bells can be found on shrines and among burial goods. Chiefs may be accompanied by individuals carrying racks of bells, and in a few instances face bells have been documented as being danced as masks. The Bini use bells as a sign of military rank, as seen on some Benin plaques. I have also seen a Qua terracotta pot with a bell worn on the forehead of the figure, thus suggesting that, in addition to those found at Igbo Ukwu, bells were worn at least one thousand years ago in southern Nigeria.

The spiral decorations, individually and in pairs joined by a loop, and the schematic lizard on the opposite side of the bell, suggest a Cross River origin.

d. Figure. Cross River area. Cast copper alloy, 20.3cm (8").

In 1977 Keith Nicklin photographed a group of three cast metal figures in an Asunaja shrine in the Middle Cross River area (Fleming & Nicklin 1982:53-57). During the New Yam Festival, appeals to the Asunaja spirit can be made for abundant crops, livestock, and children. Two of the figures were tested and dated to 1827 and 1855. These examples were coated with sacrificial material, especially camwood. Two others collected by K.C. Murray, a hippopotamus and a male figure, have similar dates of manufacture. The present figure has similar spiral designs on the head and upper chest. During his

fieldwork, Nicklin learned that it was Abiriba and Awka smiths who manufactured much of the metalwork in the Middle Cross River area, although there is also some evidence for indigenous production.

Other types of bronzes from this area include representations of quadrupeds, skeuomorphs of horn and gourd palm-wine vessels, and tulip and waisted bells. Examples of these bronzes can be found in the Barbier-Mueller and Menil collections (Schmalenbach 1988:156; *The Menil Collection*, 1987:137).

e. Plaque fragment. Cast copper alloy, glass beads; 20.3cm (8").

Although previously described as a bell fragment, I believe that, based on its construction, the present bronze is more likely a fragment of a plaque (Roberts 1995:157). The looped handle on the top is attached only to the front surface, and the rear of the torso is indented in a manner similar to that on Benin plaques; a double line runs down from the right shoulder to the left waist area. A circular object to the right of the head has an outline similar to a mudfish, and at the base of this projection are remnants of red, white, and yellow glass beads. The plaque depicts a bird-headed human figure holding two objects. I am unaware of any object published in the literature that is even remotely similar. Shortly after acquiring this work, I showed photos to Henry Drewal, who did not feel that it originated from the Yoruba (personal communication, June 1993). Some have suggested that it might be from Igbo Ukwu, but it is unlike any of the published material (Shaw 1970). It has not yet been tested for age.

f. Face bell. Cast copper alloy, 14cm (5.5").

An almost identical bell is published by A. Jacob (1974:4). The bell is distinguished by horns, extensive facial scarification, and the absence of a mouth. The casting is quite thin. As opposed to other face bells in the literature, it has only diagonal scarification. Three other bells that are stylized are said to be from the Niger Delta (Fagg 1960:31, 33-34). They are distinguished from the Forcados-type bell heads, which are crowned, decorated with beaded necklaces or collars with pendants and tassels, and exhibit medallions and horns. The name of the latter derives from the fact that some were included in a hoard of bronzes discovered near the Forcados River southwest of Benin. The other two types of face bells include those with animal heads and those with human faces of a grotesque nature (Lorenz 1982:52-60).

g. *Ofo*. Cast copper alloy, 15.9cm (6.25").

This object would appear to be an unusual form of an Igbo *ofo*. *Ofos* usually have four legs rather than two; the human head is rarely represented, and then not as prominently as in the piece illustrated here. According to Eli Bentor (1988:66-68), an *ofo* can be made from a sacrifice-encrusted stick, a bundle of twigs, a combination of wood and iron, or a cast metal object. They occur among the Igbo, Urhobo, and Isoko, and their production is probably related to the travel patterns of Igbo craftsmen.

The *ofo* represents the idea of justice and prosperity. Providing ritual validation in social, economic, and religious acts, it is employed during meetings, prayers, and oath taking. The *ofo* can be used to prove the innocence of the bearer and can be carried to meetings in a leather bag, where it may receive libations. It provides protection during a journey, helps in fighting, and can be used to cast a spell. It may be placed on the ancestral shrine after death, if the owner was important. The *ofo* is the most important symbol of all property owned by a senior son.

h. Container. Igbo Ukwu style. Cast copper alloy, 15.2cm (6").

The initial discovery of bronzes in this style occurred in 1938 in the village of Igbo Ukwu near Awka. In 1959 Thurstan Shaw began a formal excavation of the site. Some of the material was found in what was later felt to be a storehouse or shrine, and a second site revealed the burial chamber of an important person. These sites date from the ninth to tenth century C.E. The container here is similar in design to a crescentic bowl from the compound at Igbo Ukwu called Igbo Isaiah. That bowl is shaped like a small flat calabash cut vertically (Eyo & Willett 1982:20-21; Shaw 1970).

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