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URHOB0 STATUARY FOR SPIRITS AND ANCESTORS

PERKINS FOSS

The Urhobo peoples, who live on the western fringe of the Niger River Delta in southern Nigeria, have two distinct traditions of nearly life-sized wooden statuary: one for spirits and another for real and semi-mythic ancestors.¹ Each figurative tradition includes statues which are dramatically sited within small buildings; each stands as testament to a highly refined sculptural and architectonic sensibility. The present study will first consider those groups of figures, known as *edjo re akare*,* which are maintained on behalf of mythic village-founding warriors; the latter part will focus on those single statues, known as *eshe*, which honor ancestral might and authority. In conclusion, we will look at one particular statue in which an artist has transcended the more frequently observed sculptural types and, appropriate to the specific metaphor involved, has created a form that seems to synthesize the two traditions into a single, coherent visual statement.

Urhobo religious thinking centers on those singular and collective spiritual

forces that exist in natural phenomena—bodies of water, certain trees and plants, certain pieces of land, and even the air itself. These spirits, known as *edjo*,² are pervasive forces whose powers encompass nearly all aspects of Urhobo life. Certain generic categories of *edjo* are recognized: *edjo* of water (*edjorame*), of land (*edjoto*), of the atmosphere (*edjenu*). Conceptualizations of the *edjo* usually operate on more locally defined and specific levels. That is to say, each community has its own particular *edjo*, which, while assignable to one of the three above-mentioned categories, is usually defined in more specific terms. A body of water that passes near the town may be the realm of one *edjo*; another may be a specific genus of tree that exists in or near the settlement. Others find their inspiration from more arcane sources; especially prevalent in this category are the supernatural powers said to have been brought to a community by its founding members.

In a single community, various *edjo* may coexist. While there does not seem to

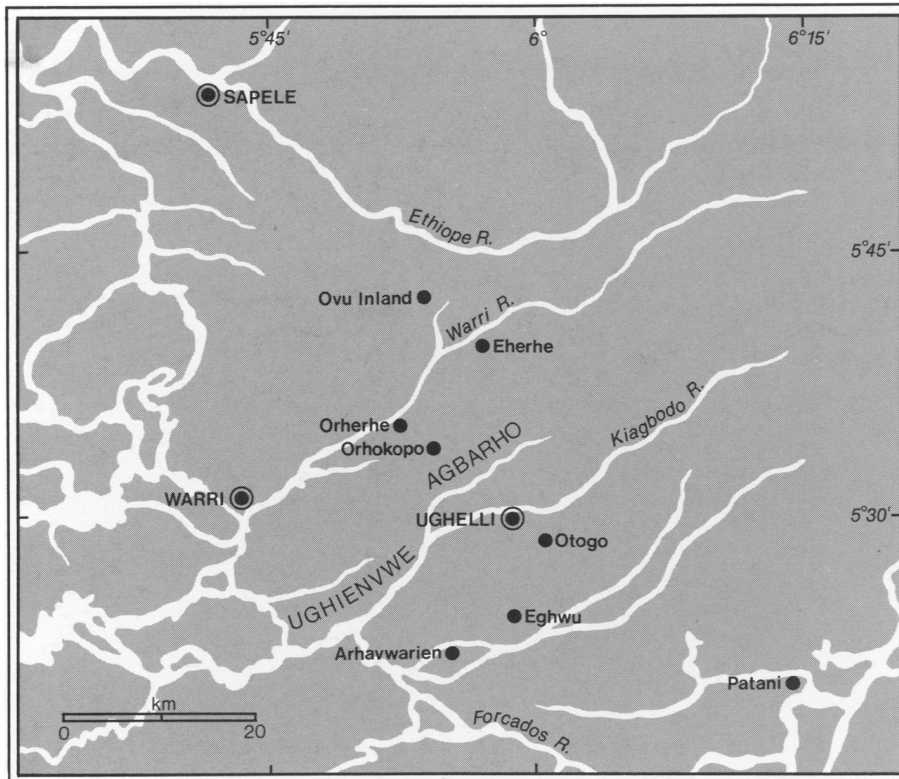
be any theoretical limit to the number of *edjo* that appear in a given community, it is widely believed that at any one time a large community (for the Urhobo this would mean a town of perhaps two thousand) would not pay allegiance to more than four or five distinct spirits, and a small town (of perhaps five hundred) would not have more than one or two.

In any size town, individuals may have affinities to more than one such spirit. Usually upon advice of divination, one may be told that he is being troubled by one of the *edjo* in the town, and in order to alleviate his suffering he will be advised to provide it with regular offerings. At the same time, however, one particular *edjo* in the community is usually recognized as the spirit of the town (*edjo r'ovwodo*).³ It is in this final type that the artistic expression of the *edjo* receives its fullest manifestation. Here are found assemblages of up to a dozen carved statues housed in a single shrine building;⁴ accompanying the images is an elaborate hierarchy of titled priests and priestesses who act as the spiritual leaders of the cult. In addition, the community stages large annual festivals in honor of the spirit-for-the-town; on these occasions, numerous elaborate dances are performed, often complete with masquerade performances, lavish meals and extensive displays of wealth.

Edjo sculptures assume a variety of physical forms, in a variety of media. Let us briefly consider some of the types. Certain *edjo* are given non-representational forms: at the southern community of Arhavwarien, an accumulation of bent sticks forms the physical nucleus of the *edjo* known as Ogeyi,⁵ a water spirit that controls the fate of fishermen (Fig. 2). Here crooked pieces of wood, fragments of mangrove roots, or strangely shaped branches of any number of types of trees are piled in a domical heap in a small shrine building. Fishermen are the most common devotees of this cult, since it is they who are said to suffer at the hands of Ogeyi. They collect the bent sticks that entangle their paddles and nets and bring

*For technical reasons, *African Arts* is unable to reproduce the orthographic conventions utilized in the Edo language group in this and following articles.

1. STATUE FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): FIGURE FROM OWEDJEBO GROUP, EHERHE, AGBON CLAN. WOOD, CHALK, CLOTH. HEIGHT 220cm.







2. SHRINE FOR *EDJO OGEYI*, ARHAVWARIEN. WOOD, CLOTH, CHALK. APPROXIMATE HEIGHT 90cm.

them to the shrine as gifts to the spirit; in return, they ask for safe journeys and bountiful harvests.

Other *edjo* receive their physical manifestations in metal. Such a spirit receives honor at the town of Eghwu. In this cult, known as *Urhienu*, devotees bring to the shrine any piece of metal that they find in the course of farming or fishing. The resulting sacred accumulations of metals—ranging from bells of the so-called Lower Niger style to rusty nails—are held to be messages from the spirit world, physical signs of life in the other world.

Certain *edjo* are made of clay and are known as *edjo re amare*, “spirits in molded form.” These images, usually rendered as seated human figures, may well be an indigenous reworking of the clay-modeling traditions so well developed by both the Benin peoples to the north⁶ and certain Igbo groups to the east.⁷

Transcending the abovementioned examples, the most highly developed tradition of sculpture for the *edjo* exists in the medium of wood. Wooden statuary for the spirits, known as *edjo re akare*, “spirits in carved form,” brings a truly dramatic presence to the abstract concept of spiritual powers. Housed in small, enclosed buildings, carefully sited to provide maximal visual impact, these figures rank among the greatest of Urhobo artistic achievements.

Only in certain very localized situations does an individual own and maintain a shrine for the spirits.⁸ One’s personal



3. STATUES FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): TWO FIGURES FROM OWEDJEBO GROUP, EHERHE, AGBON CLAN. ca. 1875. WOOD, CHALK. HEIGHTS 150cm., 142cm.

images, instead of alluding to the powers behind the cohesion of the community, refer to the powers of the individual; especially prevalent are figures alluding to personal aggression (*iphri*) and the hand (*obo*). *Edjo* art is conceived on a more elaborate, generalized scale; its imagery alludes not to the individual but rather to the community as a whole. The collective nature of the *edjo* themselves relates to the collective nature of the images. All individuals are affected by the powers inherent in a given body of water or piece of land. The spirits here control and direct all members of the community.

Permeating most examples of wooden sculptures for the spirits is the theme of martial prowess. The figures exhibit military paraphernalia: they hold swords, cutlasses, clubs and spears; they wear a variety of medicines and other accoutrements especially designed to provide the fighter with the magical powers necessary for success in war.

Following a similar orientation, the oral literature associated with the figures employs martial imagery as its most recurrent theme. Praise names and songs of honor, recited upon occasions of serving, allude to the superhuman abilities of the spirits in times of war. Perhaps the most dramatic example comes from the Agbarho town of Eherhe, in conjunction with the serving of Owedjebo, an *edjo* held sacred by the entire town. The following narration, as supplied by Chief Arubi Omamohwo, characterizes the *edjo* as a decoy, through which the people of Eherhe deceive the enemy into thinking that he is a human being:

When we wage war
Owedjebo stands up!
Stands up in a dignified manner;
Orindjerhe goes in front.

5 Leader-of-the-warriors follows him,
Following him, going to the battle.
Owedjebo stays at the back;
He has his sword; he has his cutlass.
When,
at the moment-of-confrontation,
10 Standing ready in a dignified manner,
Owedjebo stands up!
The enemy shoot: kpe, kpe, kpe;
Owedjebo stands up!
Thinking him a real person
who can be shot,
15 Not hitting him!
When all shooting is over,
All our people all this while
Who were lying on the ground
Start shooting over there.
20 They shoot over there to the end!
Owedjebo returns to his house;
Then we rejoice: Hooray! Hooray!
To wage war and to win,
That is all.⁹

Two central Urhobo communities, located some sixteen kilometers apart on either side of the Warri River, harbor magnificent groupings of *edjo* imagery. In both the Agbon clan town of Ovu Inland¹⁰ and the Agbarho clan town of Eherhe, elaborate sculptural ensembles afford dramatic visual foci to those spiritual forces which, according to legend, provided the founders of each village with invincible magical powers.

The founders are remembered both as families and as warriors. Within the confines of small shrine buildings, images of men, women, children and attendants stand poised in carefully orchestrated tableaux. Most important to the shaping of the imagery is the fact that the founders were soldiers, who had to wage innumerable battles to secure and maintain their new land. Appropriate to this context is the dominant theme of the central Urhobo *edjo* shrine: martial power and authority.

The sculptural ensembles in both communities are divided into two separate and distinct groups: one male, sited near the center of the town and alluding more directly to military imagery; the other female, sited at the edge of the town near a small body of water, alluding to the feminine powers of procreation. The two shrines complement each other. One is not complete without the other; in addition, they are firmly linked both in sculptural style and in metaphoric intent.

The physical and religious focus of the *edjo* is the shrine house (*oguan redjo*) where daily, weekly and, most important, yearly rites of consecration are held. This building is conceived as a single small rectangular room usually about 2.5 meters deep and 4 meters long. It has three windowless mud walls and an entrance facade on the longer side divided by two structural columns into three approximately equal sections. At either side of the entrance, the outer sections are partially

enclosed by mud "curtain walls"¹¹ which rise about one meter from the ground. Over the entrance and over the areas above the curtain walls hangs a screen of raffia (*omwen*), which dramatically conceals the interior of the building and, most important, establishes a sacred barrier that identifies the interior of the shrine house as an inviolable space. The use of raffia here epitomizes the communication between spiritual and mortal realms. The two are clearly separated by the raffia, but simultaneously there exist carefully prescribed channels of communication from one to another. The mud curtain walls play an equally precise role in controlling the visibility of the carvings. They form an opaque barrier at the lower sides of the facade; the upper registers of the extremes and all of the center are only partially shielded by the raffia. Thus is established an important void-solid relationship, in which the full bodies of the central figures stand behind translucent vegetation while at the sides, only the heads of the figures can be discerned. Were there simply a conventional door at the center of the facade, and were the curtain wall replaced by solid structural elements, the sculpture would have no rapport with the outside world. The shrine house would no longer operate as a controlling stage; it would be nothing more than an enclosing box. Lost would be the delicate balance between open and closed spaces, between the sacred world of the images and the profane world of the viewer.

Edjo imagery at Ovu Inland appears in two sculptural ensembles: the male-oriented warrior family known as Ovughere (Figs. 5, 6) and the female spirit known as Omwe (Fig. 4). The Ovughere shrine stands near the center of town on the main thoroughfare, at the edge of the

market area (*afeki*). Within this building are nine wooden statues depicting Ovughere himself and his heroic followers. The Omwe group is housed in a small shrine at the edge of town. Here, in a quiet grove adjacent to a small tributary of the Warri River, stand five statues which recall the fertile strength of the wife of Ovughere.

A parallel arrangement of *edjo* imagery exists at Eherhe. Here, some sixteen kilometers away, south of the Warri River, is another pair of sculptural groups that stands in testament to the powers of the founder-warriors. The male group, Owedjebo (Figs. 1, 3), including eleven figures, is placed in a visually controlling position at the intersection of the town's two major roadways. Its female counterpart, Oniemo (literally meaning "mother of children"), borders another small tributary of the Warri River; again this female shrine lies on the edge of the community.

There exists sufficient formal consistency in the sculpture for the spirits from Ovu Inland and Eherhe to merit a generic consideration of the images. Accordingly, the following description should be seen as a synthesis of all four shrines, two male and two female, from both communities.

The sculpture representing the founding father dominates the interior of the shrine house. In frozen postures the family members are frontally aligned on either side of a central figure. Some figures stand with arms held rigidly at their sides while others assume the active stances appropriate to the individual they portray: soldiers hold sword and cutlass (Figs. 1, 6); a nursing mother cradles a child in her arms (Fig. 3). Rare is any physical interaction between one figure and another; they seem to exist first as individuals, perform-

ing specific roles, who have been brought together in a family context.

The face of the *edjo* figures divides into three basic parts: elongated, swelling forehead, angular nose, jutting jaw terminated by two rows of bared teeth. Perhaps the purest manifestation of these forms occurs in the face of Owedjebo himself (Fig. 1). Here the double-tapered forehead keloids (*iwu*) add rhythm to the sweep of the forehead curve. Evenly spaced across the upper facial panel, they give the surface a certain textural drama, setting off the smooth planes beneath the eyes. The sides and back of the head descend without interruption into the neck, which in turn abruptly meets the shoulder and chest plane nearly at right angles. The stylized exaggerated swelling of the upper chest, a prominent feature of most *edjo re akare*, increases the apparent size of the figures. It is almost as if, in order to emphasize the physical might of the image, the artist had chosen to depict him with lungs fully inflated. There is little articulation at the shoulders; from the pectorals downward the torso takes the shape of a barrel, without detailing except for a prominent navel. The figures are either poised with knees bent¹² or are fully seated; the choice seems to remain with the artist.

Coatings of white chalk (*orhe*), a magical sign of purity and otherworldliness which is widespread throughout



ABOVE: 4. STATUES FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): FIGURES FROM OMWE GROUP, OVU INLAND, AGBON CLAN. WOOD, CHALK, CLOTH. APPROXIMATE HEIGHT OF TALLER FIGURE IS 150cm.

LEFT: 5. STATUES FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): OVUGHERE GROUP, OVU INLAND, AGBON CLAN. WOOD, CHALK, PAINT, CLOTH, FEATHERS. HEIGHTS OF MAJOR FIGURES: 158cm., 110cm., 142cm., 145cm.



southern Nigeria,¹³ elevate the images to a sacred ancestral realm. Each of the figures as well as the side and rear walls of the shrine house are coated with a liquefied layer of this substance. The chalk, then, unifies the works of art with each other and with their background. The overall whiteness both maximizes the luminosity of the interior space and minimizes any of the gloom that might be expected in such a small enclosure. For a striking comparison, one only has to turn to groups of carvings that have been neglected by their now-Christian owners. In the latter cases, dark images lie in deep recesses of what seems to be more of an unlit cave than a shrine.

At the central Agbarho town of Orhokpokpo is an *edjo* that commemorates the magical powers of the bombax or silk cotton tree (*ohahe*).¹⁴ The spirit is known by this same name; both its literary and sculptural allusions continue the theme of martial strength observed in the imagery from both Ovu Inland and Eherhe. *Ohahe* is praised in the names *igbolo* ("the Conqueror") and *irokprokpro* ("He-who-cuts-through-all-enemies").

Another praise name, *ichiyirigidigidi*, alludes onomatopoeically to "the stamping of feet." All these terms refer to the physical and magical powers that *Ohahe* brings to the warriors of Orhokpokpo. The sculptural forms extend the metaphor, for here again the male figure bears full military paraphernalia: sword, spear, medicines and bells.

In a shrine building that in December 1971 was in a state of collapse are two free-standing wooden figures for *Ohahe*. One male and one female, they are positioned side by side in the rear of the shrine room. The structure of the shrine building itself, though in disarray in 1971, deserves some comment, for here appears an important modification in the siting system seen at Ovu Inland and Eherhe. The interior of the building is divided into two spaces: an inner and an outer meeting room, which are separated by a low, waist-high dividing wall. Upon occasions of serving, these two spaces are occupied by individuals of two distinct ranks. The outer area is filled by the town elders (*ekpako*), lineage representatives and minor cult officials, while in the interior space are the priests and priestesses. Thus the lesser dignitaries are physically blocked off from the sculpture; the more senior individuals are afforded access to the sacred inner room, which contains the physical presence of the *edjo* itself.

Although informants assigned the two figures to the same hand, namely that of one Akpojivi, it appears that the male figure is handled with much more skill

than the female figure. The male (Fig. 7) is positioned in what may best be called the classic Urhobo sculptural pose: half standing, half sitting. Although the legs are supported by a seat-structure behind, the artist has introduced, quite intentionally, an ambiguity of posture, and by doing so, he has established a vital tension between posture-of-sitting and posture-of-standing. Complementary to the leg positioning is the arm positioning, and in the most superb examples of this central Agbarho style, this leads to a formal unity of the highest degree. Arms bend at the elbows, with biceps flexed and forearms angled slightly downward. Torso and chest are rendered with equal tension and balance. The chest, swelling almost pneumatically, is mediated by a single vertical lineage mark which extends from sternum to navel. Below the navel appears a new military accoutrement: the belly is encircled by a "belt-for-war" (*igbele re ophowwi*), an ancient piece of medicinal armor composed of a tube of leather that has been stuffed with appropriate herbal ingredients. From the belt hang a number of small, spherical bells.

The swell of the shoulders is further delineated by a curving, raised ridge that extends from shoulder to shoulder. This ridge is a stylized rendering of the single strand of beads worn by members of the title society, *ohonworhin*, and as such, it does not contain a direct reference to aggression and military power; instead, the beads-for-titled-leader extend the allusion beyond that of a military figure into the more general realm of leadership and titled power. In addition to the larger beaded band, there is a smaller cylindrical bead at the neck; this bead, known as *ophara*, is also associated with the *ohonworhin*; it establishes still another element of rank and title. A calabash, placed between the pectorals at the center of the shoulder-spanning necklace, establishes both a formal and medicinal focus. The calabash gourd mediates the vertical axis in the center of the chest. At the moment of greatest swelling is positioned the most powerful and significant element of medicinal power: that vessel which contains the herbal ingredients that ensure successful military exploits. Indeed, the gourd contains the force that allows the chest to swell with military confidence and bravado.

The weapons held by the warrior need further comment. In his right hand he holds a cutlass, the nineteenth-century weapon *par excellence*. In the left hand he holds a spear, pointing downward. The cutlass, to be used aggressively as the forward-moving, swiftly striking force, is wielded in the right hand. In the left is the spear, whose downward positioning suggests its stabbing into the earth, as a medicinal message to the powers of the earth, while the upward direction of the sword indicates mortal destruction.

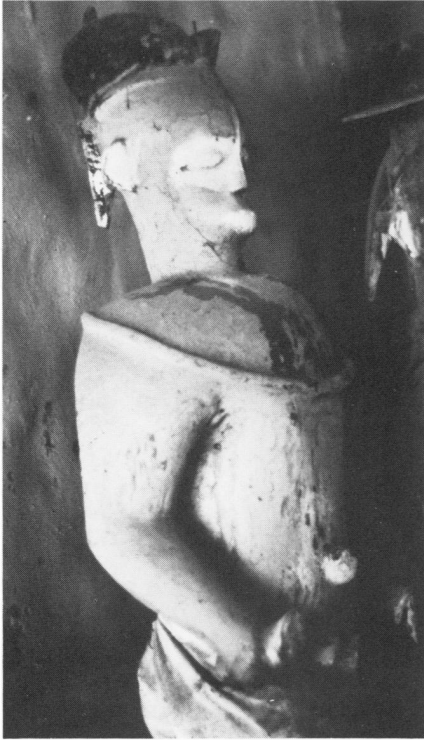
The head of the female figure (Fig. 9) of this pair is particularly well rendered. Indeed, although informants related that both pieces were carved by Akpojivi, on the basis of pure form it seems more likely that the senior artist himself was responsible only for the head and shoulders of the female figure, and that he allowed apprentices to handle the remainder. The arms, torso and legs, as well as the form of the nursing child, are not handled with the same skill as the head and shoulders; indeed, it is entirely possible, and consistent with Urhobo practice, that the former were subcontracted to a lesser artist. When presented with this hypothesis, those responsible for the shrine of *Ohahe* concurred that such may well have been the case, but that the only name associated with the two figures was that of Akpojivi, and that all memory of any apprentices was lost.

The head of the female figure merits special consideration as the work of an exceptional artist. With the linear precision exemplary of the best of Urhobo art, the forehead sweeps outward in an even curve, while the nose is given a contrastingly crisp angularity; at the mouth, two planes meet at an oblique angle to form teeth-revealing lips. Delicate, low-relief lineage marks punctuate four discrete areas of the face. On the back of the neck, three marks are joined together, and



7. STATUE FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): MALE FIGURE FROM OHAHE GROUP, ORHOKPOKPO, AGBARHO CLAN. ARTIST: AKPOJIVI OF ORHOKPOKPO, ca. 1875-1900. WOOD, CHALK, CLOTH. HEIGHT 150cm.

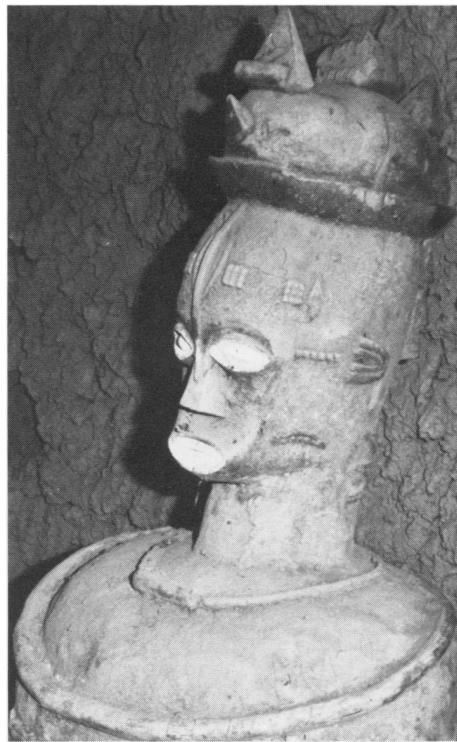
6. STATUE FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): DETAIL OF FIGURE FROM OUVUGHERE GROUP, OUVU INLAND, AGBON CLAN. WOOD, CHALK, PAINT, CLOTH, FEATHERS. HEIGHT: 158cm.



8. STATUE FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): FIGURE FROM OGUN GROUP, ORHERHE, AGBARHO CLAN. WOOD, CHALK, CLAY, PAINT, CLOTH. APPROXIMATE HEIGHT 140cm.

as they approach the sides, they range crescentially outwards. Minute, delicately incised squares activate the surface of these marks; a more pronounced central line accentuates each curve. A much simpler pair of crescent-shaped marks defines the cheeks; their upward curves respond to the opposite sweep of the lower jaw. At each temple is a horizontal ridge segmented by vertical incisions into six compartments. On the forehead appears a notable variation upon the double-tapered lineage marks (*iwu*) common to a wide range of Urhobo sculpture. Here are four precise squares, each of which is divided further into nine minute sections. Such an unusual formula leaves the expanse of forehead exceptionally bare and at the same time establishes a nervous tension between the tight compression of the mark itself and the open sweep of the forehead. Above each temple is a single lens-shaped mark, which seems to terminate the lateral curve of the forehead; its shape is not unreminiscent of the most common Urhobo formula for conceiving the human eye.

Ceremonial coiffure defines the top and rear sections of the female head. Cascading from behind is a triple-tiered form, etched by fine vertical grooves, which extends the outward swell of the head. The upper part of the hairstyle, arranged along the front-to-back axis, is composed of three gently curving crests, from each of which emerges a sharply pointed tuft. This ensemble of upper tufts and layered rear elements is known as *ig-*



9. STATUE FOR SPIRITS (*EDJO RE AKARE*): HEAD (TWO VIEWS) OF FEMALE FIGURE FROM OHAHE GROUP, ORHOKPOKPO, AGBARHO CLAN. ARTIST: AKPOJIVI OF ORHOKPOKPO. WOOD, CHALK. HEIGHT OF FIGURE 150cm.

beton; it was said to have been worn by women of titled rank throughout Urhoboland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵

Those examples of Urhobo statuary-for-the-spirits discussed so far are rendered exclusively in wood. However, the next example introduces a subtle but significant shift in medium. The five statues for the *edjo* known as Ogun at the Agbarho town of Orherhe, although carved in wood, have been coated with a thick layer of chalk. In 1969, five images for Ogun, along with their shrine house, stood in a most dilapidated state: the walls were crumbling, the pieces themselves were missing limbs. The overall decay of the site suggested that the shrine had all but been abandoned; informants concurred that since the death of the senior priest some five years earlier, little energy had been invested in maintaining *edjo Ogun*. However, it is readily apparent that the figures seen here present an important variant on the usual rendering of *edjo* imagery.

Although those interviewed were unable to supply a full accounting, this particular *edjo* was identified as being owned by the entire town (*urhoeje*) of Orherhe. It was said to have been “discovered” by one Erhowho, a man who died in the nineteenth century, after he had assumed the title reserved for the oldest male in Orherhe (*okpako ode*). Furthermore, the method of said discovery follows a pattern observed frequently in Urhoboland: “It came to Erhowho in a dream.” Upon the advice of divination, he erected the shrine house and had the images carved. The name Ogun was translated to mean “to repair” or “to care for.” The term seems

to be a homonym for the Yoruba and Edo deity of iron;¹⁶ although informants at Orherhe were adamant that there was no connection between the two terms, it seems entirely possible that this powerful Edo spiritual force influenced the naming of the present shrine.

The five statues represent Ogun himself; Oyinko, his “messenger”; his wife, known as Ejumemuwo (an enigmatic name translated as “Forsake sin and act with virtue”); the daughter-in-law of Ogun, called Aghemoriakpo (“She brings life to a body”); and the son of Ogun, known simply as Omogun (literally, “child of Ogun”).

The statue of the son of Ogun is the only figure of its kind seen in relatively complete form (Fig. 8). The figure stands with flexed legs and arms; originally he held implements in his hands but they had been broken off by 1969. Around a swelling chest runs a single necklace; the head is rendered according to the pattern normal to the form: broad forehead, sharply pointed nose, lens-shaped eyes, and an open, teeth-revealing mouth, which juts forward from the plane of the face. In these terms, the figure should hardly be considered exceptional. However, the entire surface of the sculpture has been redefined by chalk. Nearly all the sharp angles, especially those at the elbows, armpits and neck, have been softened by the riverain chalk. The harsh angles normal to Urhobo wooden statuary have been tempered and made seemingly pliable by the addition of chalk.

The reasons for this unusual sculptural treatment cannot be definitely given. Those interviewed at Orherhe stated that the thick chalk coating was dictated by

divination, that in doing so, they were following the orders provided by an herbalist-priest (*oboepha*). However, elsewhere in Urhoboland chalk (*orhe*) is the prime substance synonymous with the spirits of the waters (*edjorame*). It is presented to the water spirits as food; large piles of chalk are seen in front of any shrine that relates to water spirits. In addition, certain statuary is made exclusively from chalk; these are known as *edjo re amare* (spirits in molded form), and in most instances they too are classed as water spirits.

Although present data do not spell it out, the use of a heavy chalk veneer would suggest, then, that there exists a connection between *edjo Ogun* and water spirits. However, without further research the question must remain unanswered. What is especially important to our present consideration is the manner in which a new medium has redefined the physical form of the statue. Malleable chalk imbues the wooden form with a dramatic plasticity rarely seen in Urhobo art.

Of all the spiritual allegiances held sacred by the Urhobo, that of the ancestors is most prominent. On every level—individual, family, quarter, village, village-group and even clan—the deceased family members must receive, on regular bases, the honor due them. When a person dies, he or she is believed to leave this world (*akpo*) and to enter the world-of-the-dead (*erivwi*), where life continues much as it was on earth.¹⁷

In addition, at each level there exist physical foci, or shrines for the ancestors, at which prayers and offerings are made. On the individual and nuclear family level, the shrine for ancestors is of a very minimal type. It consists of nothing more than a small piece of wood, called *ofo*, cut from the tree of the same name which has been planted at the center of the three-

sided Urhobo compound. It is usually wrapped with a band of cowries and is kept on a small mud dais in the corner of a central room in the compound. Offerings, in the form of small quantities of food and drink, and prayers are given on every *edewo*, the day of rest in the Urhobo four-day week.

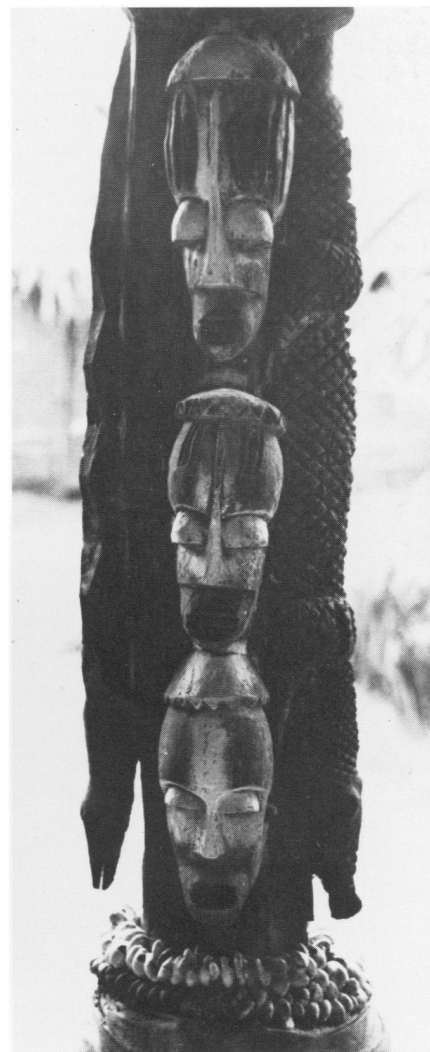
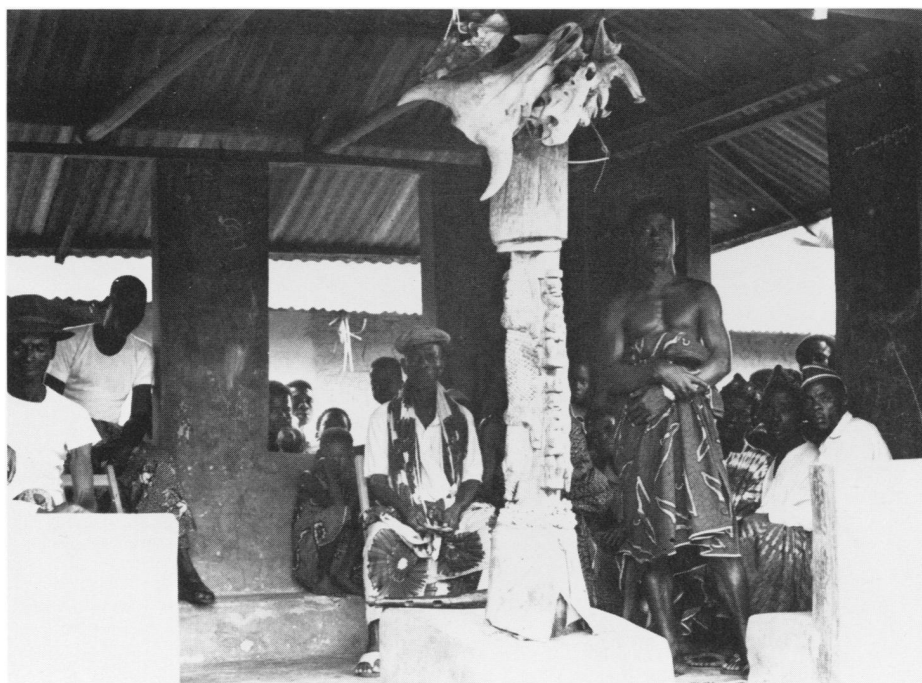
On the lineage level, the ancestors are often afforded a visually more prominent and complex shrine. Its central focus is a single, massive piece of figurative sculpture, often janiform, which stands as a solitary testament to the real or semi-mythic founder of the lineage. In generic terms, this statue is known as *eshe*, a term that informants have described as an allusion to the *esemo re akare*, or “ancestors-in-carved-form.”¹⁸

Single ancestral images (*eshe*) appear in many areas of central and southern Urhoboland, including the following clans: Eghwu, Ogo, Ughelli, Agbarho and Uke. In addition, the form is known in Otorughienve (Ughienwve clan) but in a strictly non-figurative version.¹⁹ Five of the finest examples of the form are to be considered in detail here; in both formal and geographic terms, these examples provide a broad-based survey of this aspect of Urhobo art. Not all examples are carved in the same manner. Some seem to be regional variants; others reflect the status of the group maintaining them. These differences are worthy of careful scrutiny, for within them lie significant insights into the social as well as artistic consciousness of the Urhobo.

A statue of considerable antiquity comes from the town of Eghwu, where the Uweya lineage maintains a magnificent image sited as a central supporting member of the facade of their meeting hall (Figs. 10, 11). In connection with this sculpture, Chief Esiobise Aghere, the spokesman for the Uweya lineage, sup-

plied a most revealing definition of the term *eshe*: it is a figure to represent the “first father of the lineage” (*ose ovo re ekru*); the meeting hall is the “house of the [first] father” (*uwewwi rose*). Standing on a square cement base, the column rises approximately 1.5 meters to support the timbers at the eaves of the facade. Approximately one meter of the central area is carved on four sides to include the following images: facing inward are three heads, heavily coated with white chalk and arranged vertically. Opposite, facing outward, are two full-bodied human figures in exceptionally high relief: a female below and a male above. At the sides are elements from the animal world: on one side, a crocodile, on the other, a snake. Each of the animals is seen from above and faces downward, as though descending the column.

The ancestors maintain both the physical well-being and the moral order of the community. To translate the testimony of Esiobise, they bring illness



ABOVE AND LEFT: 10, 11. FRONT AND BACK VIEWS OF STATUE FOR ANCESTORS (*ESHE*) OF UWEYA LINEAGE, EGHWU. SITED IN MEETING HALL OF LINEAGE. FIG. 10 SHOWS VIEW FROM INSIDE THE HALL, FIG. 11 FROM OUTSIDE. WOOD, CLOTH, ANIMAL SKULLS. HEIGHT OF CARVED PORTION 87cm.

and misfortune to anyone who “does bad by way of witch,” i.e., anyone who, through the use of aggressive medicine, practices witchcraft. The only way that one can recover is to confess, in front of the *eshe*, the crimes committed. In addition, sacrifices of food and money are also to be given; these too must be presented in the meeting hall, in front of the *eshe*. In a closely related role, the ancestors also ensure the safety of all those engaging in hazardous occupations: soldiers, hunters and deep-water fishermen. Before embarking on a potentially dangerous mission, these persons bring offerings to the *eshe*; upon their safe return they present additional gifts in thanks for the protection given them.

The iconography of the Uweya family *eshe* speaks to the more aggressive aspects of ancestral authority. All the forms—both human and animal—allude to their ability to seek out and to counter anti-social activity among mortals. The human elements, in the form of three faces and two full-bodied figures, are known as *iko* (sing. *uko*), a term generally translated as “messengers” but in this context emphatically interpreted to mean “searchers” or “detectives”—those who have the ability both to identify transgressors of the moral code, and to elicit confessions from them. The reptiles—crocodile (*agbakara*) and snake (*ikpin*, a boa of unidentified sub-species)—allude to the animal counterparts of the ancestors. When these animals appear in the feverish nightmares of a sick person, they are seen as signs of ancestral displeasure. In such a situation, the crocodile and the boa are able to cross from the world-of-the-dead to that of the living, in order to bring messages of ancestral authority to the mortal realm.

The column, charged with ancestral imagery, is sited so as to bisect the otherwise open facade of the meeting hall. A continuous low bench runs around the other three sides of the room; during their deliberations, it is on this bench that family members sit according to a rigidly prescribed pattern. The eldest individual present (*okpako*) sits at the rear-center of the room, on axis with the carving. Flanking him are the lineage spokesman (*otota*) and the leader-of-the-warriors (*onotu*); on either side of these three individuals, in descending seniority according to age, are representatives from the various families composing the lineage.

Thus the meeting is arranged according to a very strict hierarchy at the center of which, on axis with the eldest man present, is the ancestral image. In such a situation, gerontocratic rule, in the guise of a wooden statue, presides metaphorically over the assembled mortals. From within the chamber, the carving projects maximal visual impact. The three vertically aligned heads stare out at the assembled mortals, their features dramatically emphasized by thick applications of white

chalk. From the seat of the most senior elder, they appear to be flanked by serpentine silhouettes. Accordingly, at this key position, animal and human ancestor attributes are afforded their most dramatic opposition.

The meeting hall of the *Ovie* of Ogo clan is presided over by a tableau of three images of ancestral power (Fig. 13). On a raised mud platform at the center of the longer, open side of the building are three *eshe*, each of which represents a predecessor of the present *Ovie*, His Highness Adjara II. Only one of these three columns is rendered in a carved form; the other two are plain, unadorned columns of wood. Each represents a past *Ovie*; at the far left is Akemu, the great grandfather of the present ruler; at the center is the father, Adjara; at the far right, in carved form, is Ogbede, the grandfather of Adjara II.

Adjara II stated clearly that although an *Ovie* must maintain an *eshe* of his own (deceased) father, whether or not it assumes a carved form is decided primarily by divination. In this particular instance, only his own father received such an instruction, and accordingly, only the image of Ogbede is carved. This statue is janiform. Sharing a common set of arms, which rest quietly at the sides of the image, a double-head rises from swelling chests. One faces inward toward those seated along the opposite wall; the other looks outward upon the open plaza in front of the meeting hall. The two faces are virtually identical, rendered with austere, sharply pointed planes. Two attributes of kingly power embellish the chest of the inward-facing torso: worn tightly at the neck is a single, cylindrical bead, often called *obiola* and reserved for natural rulers, and in the middle of the chest is a single calabash, known as *ukokorogho*, and said to contain the potent medicines needed by an individual of high rank and authority.

In an unusual display of asymmetry, the sides of the janiform head are decorated with different coiffures. Seen from within the hall, the left side has a double-tufted pattern above which is a nearly square area of small bosses. The right side is treated with an entirely different pattern: two vertical columns of six larger bosses are terminated at the bottom by a square, abstract motif in low relief. Although no precise identification of these hairstyles was forthcoming, the *Ovie* and his court agreed that each represents a particular antique hairstyle (*eton ochrirhe*) favored by men of high rank in the nineteenth century. In the janiform context, the differing hairstyles bring exceptional wit to the sculpture. The artist creates significant visual tension in a figure intended to be seen entirely in the round: from different angles, different hairstyles appear on each of the faces. Accordingly, an element of change and visual surprise is invested into an otherwise static figure.

Where the ancestral image from Eghwu

relates to an entire lineage, that of Otogo is associated exclusively with a royal line of descent. Each of the three columns recalls a particular king; together, they depict the three generations of deceased *Ivie* (pl. of *Ovie*) who have reigned at Otogo since the establishment of the community early in the nineteenth century. The change in emphasis is appropriate to the change in setting. The meeting hall at Eghwu is a private site, to be frequented only by a small fraction of the populace of the community; however, at Otogo, the sculpture marks a communal gathering-place for the entire clan. In the same light, there are also significant changes in metaphoric intent, which are appropriately reflected by changes within both the sculpted form and its setting. No less than seven separate figural elements emblazon the Eghwu statue; they encompass both human and animal worlds. Powers of the past are overseers of the present; they maintain the moral order on a very real, day-to-day basis. Multiple images allude to the collective leadership, which prevails on a lineage level, where gerontocratic consensus outweighs individual authority. At Otogo, on the other hand, ancestral art embodies both the image and the power of the individual clan leader and his immediate paternity. Appropriately enough, a single human form appears here, presented in a janiform mode in order to better control the site. In this instance, where prime emphasis is placed upon the individual ancestor, form follows function. A single figure, displaying beads of high rank, potent protective medicines and prestigious coiffure, controls the threshold of the most important meeting hall in all of Ogo clan. It is here that delegates travel from throughout the clan to deliberate the social, economic and legal affairs of their people; it is most fitting that an image of leadership marks this site.

Some significant changes are manifest in three examples of ancestral imagery at the Agbarho clan town of Orherhe (Figs. 12, 14, 15). In this once wealthy trading center, three separate ancestral shrines preserve the memories of a similar number of palm oil traders who amassed considerable fortunes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Each shrine contains a single carved statue depicting the particular individual. The three ancestors are Ovwaha, Itive and Owhe. Legend describes these men as exceptionally influential traders who attained immense success in the palm oil trade with the neighboring Itsekiri, who traveled up the Warri River to Orherhe in order to obtain cargoes, which they in turn sold to European interests along the coast. Itsekiri trading was so intense in this area that the town of Orherhe itself is often referred to by its Itsekiri name, Mogba.

Of the three men honored by ancestral sculpture in his community, that of Ovwaha is associated most clearly with the

Itsekiri, and especially with their most powerful and influential trader, Chief Nana Olomu. Ikime vividly cites the connection: "In the Agbarho clan, Olomu's commercial success was closely connected with his deep friendship with Ovwaha, who was the clan head (*osivie*) at the time. Olomu, it is said, used to give generous presents to Ovwaha as well as advance goods with which to obtain oil. Ovwaha on his side encouraged his people to sell their oil to Olomu's 'boys.' Relations between these two families were consequently very cordial."²⁰

Appropriate to this most prestigious relationship, the largest and iconographically most complex of the three *eshe* at Orherhe is that of Ovwaha himself (Fig. 12). He appears seated and bears both military and ceremonial accoutrements of high rank. At his forehead is a band of alternating cylindrical beads and teeth; this piece of military paraphernalia is known as *ibiako resi*, the teeth of the bush pig, and was commonly worn into battle by nineteenth-century Urhobo warriors. Immediately above this piece of aggressive, war-related imagery is a top hat, painted black, of such a general type that its specific sources of inspiration are indeterminate. Top hats are frequent motifs in Urhobo art; they appear in similar figurative forms in the arts of both the Western and Eastern Ijo, as well as the Kalabari.²¹ Fagg and Plass comment that the top hat "was quickly adopted as a status symbol of chieftainship or civic importance by the Nigerian coastal tribes in the early nineteenth century."²²

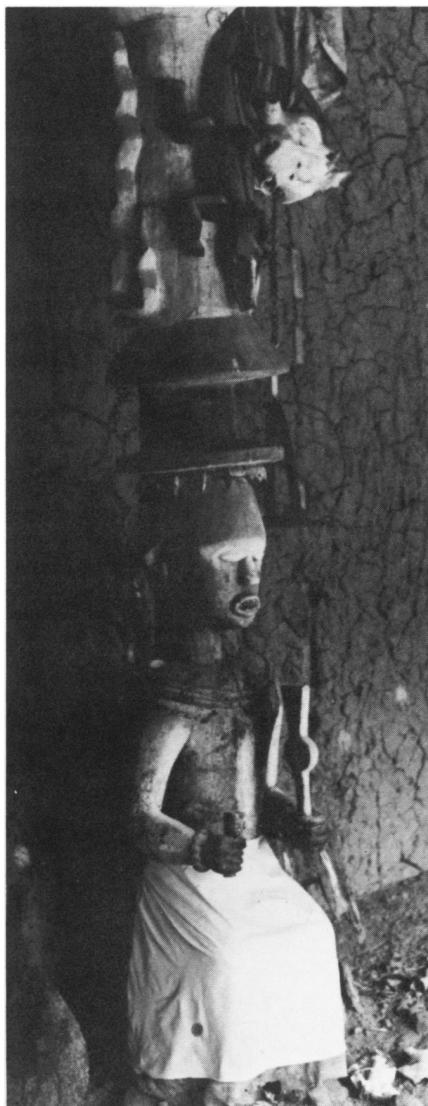
Supported by the top hat is a massive cylinder on whose longitudinal surface appears an assemblage that is highly reminiscent of the ancestral column from

Eghwu. On each side are single, sinuous snakes, one facing downward, the other upward. A large and imposing crocodile, painted in a contrasting shade of black, controls the front of this display of riverain power. Hidden at the upper rear of the column is a single female figure, rendered in high relief. Identified simply as the wife of Ovwaha, she stands calmly, with full breasts and arms at her sides. Her visibility is drastically reduced by her siting, since she can only be seen when the statue is viewed at a most awkward angle, from very close to the wall.

Although these upper elements contribute dramatically to the visual and metaphoric impact of the sculpture, even more significant is the handling of the human form below. Here we see a rigidly seated man who transmits an aura of dynamic ancestral poise. He displays numerous elements of earthly might: his chest is expanded to a full, rounded form; it is marked by a double strand of beads indicating senior membership in the *Ohonvworhin* society of titled elders. He holds his arms in a pose of static calm. With elbows grasped firmly against the torso, his forearms extend horizontally, at right angles to the biceps. Tightly clenched fists hold allusions both to earthly and ancestral powers: in the left is *adjarha*, a hunting knife to be owned only by the most illustrious of warriors. In his right hand he holds a small ceremonial drinking cup (*uko rudi*)²³ employed by priests to serve locally manufactured gin to ancestral and other spirits. These implements portray Ovwaha as both a leader of mortals (through the knife) and a communicator with the spirit world (through the drinking cup). Finally, his eyes are charged with other-worldly might

by means of a band of white chalk, which elevates the visage to a plane of priestly wisdom, far removed from mortal concerns. The *persona* of the individual disappears, and in its place appears a distant, transcendental gaze.

Elsewhere in Orherhe, an exceptionally lavish display of ancestral might is maintained by the Itive family through not one but two separate *eshe* in honor of Itive himself and his illustrious son, Owhe. Sited some 27 meters apart in the quarter named after Itive, the two shrines speak to the wealth and influence of this particular family. The appearance of two ancestral columns within the confines of a single lineage is most unusual for the Urhobo; indeed, in terms of available evidence, this is a unique instance for which there exist



ABOVE: 12. STATUE FOR ANCESTORS (*ESHE*): OVWHA FIGURE, ORHERHE, AGBARHO CLAN. ca. 1890. WOOD, CHALK, PAINT, CLOTH. HEIGHT 193cm.

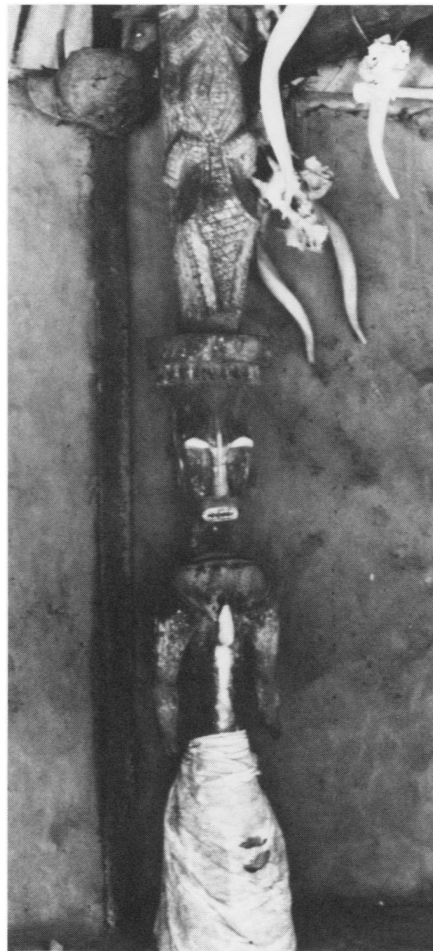
LEFT: 13. STATUES FOR ANCESTORS (*ESHE*) REPRESENTING AKEMU, ADJARA, OGBEDE. COLLECTIVELY OWNED BY OGO CLAN; SITED AT CLAN MEETING HALL, OTOGO. IN BACKGROUND IS HIS HIGHNESS ADJARA II, OVIE OF OGO, AND FAMILY. WOOD, CLOTH, LEATHER HATS. HEIGHTS: 90cm., 158cm., 125cm.



14. STATUE FOR ANCESTORS (*ESHE*): ITIVE FIGURE, ORHERHE, AGBARHO CLAN. ca. 1890. WOOD, CHALK, CLOTH, ANIMAL SKULLS. HEIGHT 158cm.

specific reasons. Owhe, the son, had earned his reputation at another site. During his lifetime, Owhe became so successful in his trading, it is recalled, that he established a large family compound (*egodo*) some five kilometers from Orherhe, along the banks of the Warri River, on a piece of his family's farmland. Upon the death of his father, his family asked him to return to Orherhe in order to reestablish his position as the senior male of the lineage. His own power and influence were such that there had developed two distinct factions within the family, and since there was sufficient wealth, not one but two separate meeting halls were created, each with its own *eshe*. The image for the son could not be located at the newer settlement since it was on farmland and therefore was not eligible to be considered as the proper home of the son's family. For these reasons, two shrines were erected within the same quarter of Orherhe.

Both Itive and Owhe continue the siting tradition established by Ovwha: they stand at the rear center of their respective meeting halls and bisect the longitudinal



15. STATUE FOR ANCESTORS (*ESHE*): OWHE FIGURE, ORHERHE, AGBARHO CLAN. ca. 1890. WOOD, CHALK, ANIMAL SKULLS. HEIGHT 185cm.

axis of the room. However, where Ovwha was sitting, these figures assume full standing postures. A raised clay platform provides further height for Itive; by swelling outward into the room, this dais enhances the centrality and the isolation of the art.

Itive carries in his hands further attributes of power and prestige (Fig. 14). In his right appears a ceremonial drinking cup identical to that held by Ovwha. In his left hand we see an innovative and essentially unique indicator of wealth and status. Here he holds a stylized version of a European clothes brush, a trade item that the Itsekiri brought inland in the course of their trade with mercantile interests at the coast. In structural terms, this attribute assumes exceptional importance, for it is held in the position normally reserved for a weapon of high rank and prestige. Clothes brush, then, is equated with weapons. Military power is replaced by mercantile power. The transformation is especially telling when it is remembered that both the sword and the clothes brush are imported items. The most commonly employed swords derive from Benin traditions, in the form of either the aggressively curved, single-edged *ada* or the more ceremonial, double-edged *ebe*, or occasionally a combination of the two.²⁴ The

clothes brush signals the artist's response to a new social and economic entity: that of the European presence and its resultant material attraction.

The imagery integral to Owhe, the son of Itive, is of a more orthodox nature (Fig. 15). With empty hands, his arms are flexed slightly to provide a hint of motion. His hairline is marked by a regular band of rounded protrusions cut sharply at the bottom. This hairstyle, known as *oyigbi*, was characterized as an "old style" but not limited to any particular rank or office. Descending the column above the hair is a crocodile, repeating the upper motif common to the columns for Ovwha and also that seen at Eghwu (Fig. 10). Here, however, this riverain aggressor is rendered much more perfunctorily than in either of the preceding cases.

The examples of Urhobo ancestral art discussed here are the products of three very different aspects of and attitudes toward descent within Urhoboland. The formal and iconographic constructs, as well as their siting, provide visual statements of the differing themes. At Eghwu, a small lineage presents allusions to collective ancestors in both human and animal guise. Sited at the center of the facade of a meeting hall, these motifs control the entrance in much the same way as the *trumeau* of a Romanesque cathedral.²⁵ At Otogo, the emphasis shifts from a collective ancestral allusion to that of a specific ruling family. Three generations of kingship are marked by three columns, which range across the facade. However, the sculptural inspiration is limited to a single figure; the other two remain as unadorned wooden cylinders. The carved figure, appearing in a janiform mode, presents both an internal and an external vision of kingly authority.

Finally, at Orherhe, visual drama is afforded to those individuals who accumulated exceptional wealth and influence from the palm oil trade. Their images are structurally arranged as ancestral monuments, but the theme is particularized to a greater extent. That is to say, we are here dealing neither with an abstraction of collective ancestral power (as was the case at Eghwu) nor with a monument to kingly prerogative (as was the case at Otogo). Instead the emphasis is placed on the memories of exceptional individuals, whose entrepreneurial skills brought wealth and prosperity to the community.

So far in this essay, a number of examples of Urhobo free-standing statuary have been discussed that relate to one of two types of spiritual forces. *Edjo* figures, sited in family groupings, allude to the magical powers of the natural world; in some circumstances (e.g., those at Ovu Inland and Eherhe) they are also associated with mythic village founders. On the other hand, *eshe* statuary alludes to specific, named ancestors who figured

prominently in the establishment of a lineage, a village or a clan. Each type of sculpture is rendered and sited according to distinct formulae. *Edjo* figures are presented frontally; they stand in a discrete row at the back of an enclosed shrine house. Their visibility is controlled by a careful combination of opaque and translucent barriers. *Eshe* imagery receives markedly different treatment. These testaments to ancestral power stand alone; their very isolation speaks to the individuality of the person so honored. Furthermore, their siting renders them eminently visible. Positioned along the central axis, they form the physical and spiritual focus of the meeting hall. While *edjo* figures are cut off from the mortal world, *eshe* statuary exists in its midst.

The two types are usually maintained as distinct and separable entities, each one with its own role to play in Urhobo spiritual thought. There is, however, at least one example where these distinctions begin to blur, where spirits and ancestors seem to meet. Such is the case of the statue known as Aghwowha (Fig. 16).

Urhobo traditions state that the clans of Ogo, Ughelli, Agbarho and Orogun were founded by the four sons of a man named Owha, who because of extensive family disputes left his home on the Forcados River in Tarakiri Ijo territory. Owha traveled northward and initially settled somewhere in what is now Ogo clan. Upon his death, each of his four sons desired to assume the leadership of the community; in order to resolve the ensuing stalemate, each set off to found his own village; these four communities grew into four distinct clans.²⁶

In most respects, these four clans—Ughelli, Orogun, Agbarho and Ogo—exist today as separate entities with no common traditions, except of course that of their origin. Each has its own groups of *edjo*; various lineages, both royal and non-royal, have their own separate *eshe*. There is, however, one statue that ties the four clans together. This is the carving known as Aghwowha.

Before turning to the image itself, it is important to consider the term *aghwowha*, for here lies the rationale behind the form. Literally translated, it alludes to “the forest” or “the bush” (*aghwa*) of Owha. The term *aghwa*, however, has deeper and more profound connotations than these. *Aghwa* is uncivilized land, those parts of the land that remain exclusively in the domain of nature. It is used in such a phrase as *o kpaghwa* (“He went to the forest”), but it also is used to describe a certain type of anthill that only occurs in remote forest areas and assumes the shape of a human body. Such a form is called *edjo aghwa*; it is considered to be an image, created by natural (as opposed to human) forces representing the spirits of the deep forest. The term also appears in the compound word *agharode*, often translated

as “bad bush” but whose literal translation would be “big forest.” *Aghwarode* is that place in the forest which receives the bodies of “those who die terrible deaths,” i.e., the fatal sufferers of smallpox or leprosy, and those convicted of witchcraft.

Aghwowha, then, can be translated to mean “the sacred, deep, untouched and untouchable forest of Owha.” As such it becomes an allusion to the powers which allowed Owha and his family to establish not one community, but four entire clans.

Aghwowha stands in a shrine located about half a kilometer from the center of Otogo, away from all other buildings in a clearing cut out of the forest. It is enclosed by a larger version of the typical Urhobo meeting hall: a building featuring three solid walls and a fourth, more open facade that has low curtain walls at either side of the entrance. A mud bench runs around the inside of the three solid walls and continues onto the low-walled facade elements.

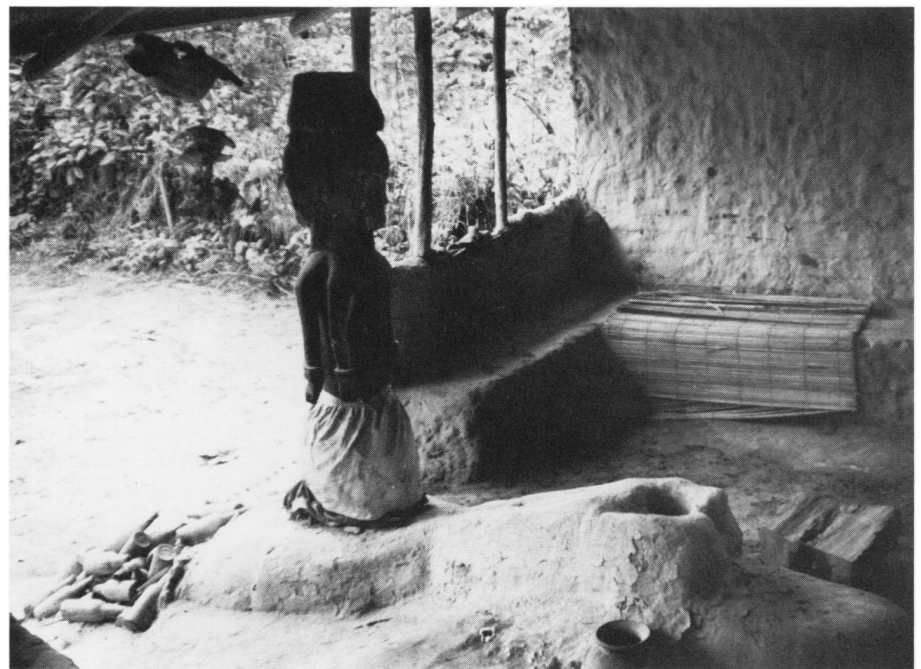
The statue is a janiform creation. One face looks outward into the open expanse in front of the building; the other, facing the opposite direction, looks toward the rear of the room. Rendered as a standing male complete with two sets of arms, it is positioned about one meter inside the entrance, along the central axis of the room. Aghwowha is thus placed in a most unusual space: it defines neither the facade of the room nor its rear wall. Instead it occupies a middle zone, part way from one to the other.

Siting is not the only unusual aspect of Aghwowha. In fact, the interior space is dominated not as much by the statue as it is by a complex clay structure which functions as the device through which

Aghwowha is given offerings. Clay has been modeled to form a base for the statue. Toward the center of the room the clay has been gradually built up to form an inclined ridge at the highest point of which is a square opening. Attached to this ridge, on the other side of the opening, is another, lower mound of clay. While sitting on this lower mound, the priest pours liquid offerings into the “pit of the *edjo*” (*ogodo r'edjo*). These liquids then travel, inside the clay, through a wooden substructure known as the “trough of the *edjo*” (*oko r'edjo*) to the base of the statue. This ingenious device allows one to direct offerings literally into the sacred soil upon which Aghwowha stands. Such an arrangement seems entirely appropriate to this particular shrine, which, it will be remembered, commemorates the ground upon which Owha and his family began the diaspora that led to the founding of four entire clans.

In these unusual circumstances, it becomes impossible to define Aghwowha either as an *edjo* or as an *eshe*. That the shrine contains a single janiform statue suggests that it is an *eshe*, in commemoration of an ancestor; however, its siting contradicts this argument. The allusion of serving into the earth suggests connections with the *edjo*, those sacred powers that enabled Owha to take on new territories. The complex clay serving device further complicates the issue, for here we are dealing with a seemingly unique phenomenon. In the final analysis, Aghwowha should best be considered as a brilliant synthesis of the two major free-standing sculptural traditions of Urhoboland. □

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16. STATUE FOR ANCESTORS AND SPIRITS: AGHWOWHA, FROM OTOGO, OGO CLAN. SITED IN MEETING HALL. WOOD, CLOTH. HEIGHT 142cm.

Lamu: A Study of the Swahili Town, by Usam Ghaidan. 94 pp., 52 b/w illustrations. East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1975. \$7.30.

African Sculpture Speaks, by Ladislav Segy. 341 pp., 436 b/w photos. Da Capo Press, New York, 1975. \$6.95.

Afrikanische Kunst, by Karl-Ferdinand Schädler. Text in German. 332 pp., 466 b/w illustrations. Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, München, 1975.

Ibibio Music in Nigerian Culture, by Samuel Akpabot. Michigan State University Press, 1975. 100 pp.

Sweet Words: Story Telling Events in Benin, By Dan Ben-Amos. 93 pp., 2 drawings, 7 b/w photos, bibliography and glossary. Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Inc., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1975. \$6.95.

The Xhosa Ntsomi, by Harold Schub. Oxford University Press, New York, 1975. 446 pp., \$32.50.

The Sobbing Sounds, by Omunjakko Nakibimbiri. Longman Inc., London, 1975. 118 pp., \$2.25.

Shaihu Umar, by Umaru Laden and Dexter Lyndersay. A play adapted from the novel by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Longman Inc., London, 1975. 51 pp., \$2.25.

African Fabric Crafts: Sources of African Design and Technique, by Esther Warner Dendel. 160 pp., 132 b/w photos, 14 color photos. Taplinger Publishing Co., New York, 1974. \$10.95.

A Guide to Slide and Photograph Collections of Primitive Art from Boston to Washington, D.C., compiled by June Axelrod. Art Libraries Society of North America. \$3.50 prepaid from: ARLIS/NA, P.O. Box 3692, Glendale, CA 91201.

Recordings

Music of Zaïre, Vol. I, recorded by Jacques Jangoux. Iibinza. Ethnic Folkways Records FE 4241. 12" LP, \$8.95.

Music of Zaïre, Vol. II, recorded by Jacques Jangoux. Bodjara, Bamwe, Djamba. Ethnic Folkways Records FE 4242. 12" LP, \$8.95.

Ethiopia: The Falasha and the Adjuran Tribe, recorded and edited by Lin Lener and Chad Wollner. Ethnic Folkways Records FE 4355. 12" LP, \$8.95.

Duro Ladipo's Obakoso, (The King Did Not Hang) recorded by Curt Wittig. 2 record set, stereo. 73 minutes. \$13.98.

Traditional Drumming and Dances of Ghana, recorded by John Tanson. Ethnic Folkways Records FW 8858. 12" LP, \$6.98.

The Griots, Ministers of the Spoken Word, recorded in West Africa by Samuel Charters. Ethnic Folkways Records FE 4178. Two 12" LPs, \$25.00.

URHOBOSTATUARY, Notes, from page 23

1. Field work in Urhoboland was funded by a number of institutions whose help I take pleasure in acknowledging: The Nigerian Federal Department of Antiquities, under whose auspices I worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1966-1968; The Concilium on International and Area Studies, Yale University, which funded a brief visit in 1969; and the Foreign Area Fellowship Program which supplied the means for extensive field research in 1971-72.

An earlier version of this essay is a chapter in my doctoral dissertation. "The Arts of the Urhobo Peoples of Southern Nigeria," Yale University, 1976. Its major points were also included in a paper read on 2 February 1976 at a panel entitled The Arts of the Edo-Speaking Peoples, at the College Art Association meeting in Chicago. I would like to thank the panel chairman, Frank Willett, both for the opportunity to present the material and for the perceptive criticisms which he supplied.

2. The problem of the term *edjo* is extraordinarily complex and indeed is one of the fundamentals of Urhobo religion. Therefore it is appropriate here to consider a number of important references to the term in the literature.

Welch (1937:143) in discussing the neighboring Isoko refers to "A wooden *edo* (cf. *edjo*) carved to represent a man for a male and a woman for a female." Hubbard (ca. 1954:276-77) in discussing Isoko religion comments that "although the *esemo* (ancestors) have general control, yet there are a number of beings called *edjo* who have only lived in *Eri* (world of the dead) and never in *Akpo* (world of the living) except insofar as they have taken human form at odd times to suit themselves." Furthermore in discussing the traditions of Uzere clan (again in Isoko country) he quotes a personal communication from Israel Loho, a native of Uzere: "Eni [the founder of Uzere clan] followed them from Benin; it may have been a family spirit *edjo*, not an ancestor." (ibid., p. 103).

Bradbury (1957:160) reports that the term "appears to have the same connotation as the Benin word *ebo* and the pidgin [West African English] word 'juju'."

3. The term *owodo* refers to any sized community of a permanent nature, that is, all except for temporary farming or fishing settlements.

4. Bradbury (1957:103) notes that the term *edjo* itself "often refers specifically to 'wooden images'"; such all-inclusive usage of the term seems to be an oversimplification.

5. Unfortunately, informants at Arhavvarien were unable to suggest any etymological roots for this term.

6. See Paula Ben-Amos, 1974.

7. See Cole, 1968 and Beier, 1963.

8. For reasons that remain unexplained, individuals often serve their own *edjo* especially in Olomu clan communities.

9. This particular narration in praise of *edjo Owedjebo*, which was recorded on tape by the author at Eherhe on 3 June 1969, is one of approximately twenty such texts heard in Urhoboland. It was selected for the present study because of its particularly rich and vivid portrayal of the military associations inherent in this type of *edjo* lore. The Urhobo text, as translated by William Okorotete with the kind help of its narrator, Chief Omamohwo, is as follows:

Ede chephio ofowwi
Owedjebo de vwre
Mudia gedegbe vwe tiyi
Orindjerhe ko kobaro
5 Olotu ko vwo kphao
Ovwo kphore kekpo ofowwi na
Owedjebo ko kobuko
Ovoshue roye ovada roye
Ede te udogu
10 Ewophiye tiyi re
Owedjebo mudia re
Oboyi sa kpe kpe kpe
Owedjebo mudia
Ke vwo ro rohwo den ra cha sa
15 Asa a
Sioboyi jobi sa renu
Ihwo ravware rhasieye
Ri sheverhe toto
Ke rha sa oboyi
20 Emerha sa oboyi kpa!
Owedjebo ko chuwevwi roye
Kavware ghogho wuwu wewu,

Ephiofowe kparobo

Kene

A number of literary nuances appear in this text; they are especially noteworthy for the manner in which they dramatically concur with the physical features of the actual statuery. For example, in lines 2 and 3, Owedjebo "rises" and "stands in a dignified manner"; the statues, poised with slightly flexed legs, were characterized by the elders of Eherhe as assuming similar stances. When he prepares for battle, Owedjebo holds weaponry (sword and cutlass, line 8) identical to those held by the sculpted warriors. The shrine building for Owedjebo, in which the images are standing, is often termed as "his house" (line 21). Finally, the ending statement, *kene* (line 24) is a standard Urhobo expression to mark the completion of a monologue.

10. Many Urhobo towns occupy two separate sites: one at the banks of a river and another as much as ten miles away. The former is designated as the "water-side" and the latter as the "inland" component. As is the case with the Ovu settlements, although once considered branches of one village, the two settlements often develop entirely autonomous identities.

11. Thanks go to Labelle Prussin who, in a personal communication, suggested this architectural term which refers to a non-bearing external or internal wall.

12. The bending of the knees might well here be considered as an ideogram of a dance posture. Such a stance gives the statue a certain tension which would disappear in either a fully standing or fully seated figure. A wide-ranging consideration of such dance related themes in African art has recently been made by Robert Farris Thompson, 1974.

13. White riverain kaolin is used throughout the Niger Delta and indeed throughout most of southern Nigeria as an instrument of religious purity. Hans Melzian (1937:147) defines the clearly cognate Bini term *orhue*: "Chalk found at the river side . . . at every god's shrine there is chalk to be found, and it is widely used for making marks on face, chest and arms as a sign of luck, as well as for 'rubbing' shrines of gods, and for drawing patterns on every shrine before sacrificing."

14. Dalziel (1937:119) identifies *ohahe* as *Ceiba pentandra*.

15. Informant: Chief Arhiaghanoma, the *Otota* [spokesman] of Orhokpokpo.

16. Melzian (1937:136), R. C. Abraham (1958:456).

17. Bradbury, (1957:160).

18. This particular interpretation was first supplied by Meriore Arhirhe of Edjekota, and was confirmed elsewhere by numerous individuals.

19. At Otughienwe the *eshe* takes the form of a cubical mud block, some two feet on a side, on the upper surface of which is a hole to receive liquid offerings to the ancestors.

20. Ikime, (1969:72).

21. Horton (1965: Figs. 2, 5, 18, 56, 63) illustrates numerous such examples.

22. Fagg and Plass, (1964:97).

23. Prior to European contact, these cups were made from small calabashes; today they have been nearly universally replaced by the shot glass.

24. Both types of swords are illustrated in Felix von Luschan, (1919: Tafel E.).

25. Professor Lucie Bauer of Dartmouth College kindly suggested this relationship.

26. This account was supplied by the present *Ovie* of Ogo, His Highness Adjara II. Ikime (1969:9) has published a slightly different version without mentioning Orogun as a son of Owha.

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EDO INFLUENCE, Notes, from page 45

- Ekpo Eyo, "New Treasures From Nigeria," *Expedition*, v. 14, no. 2, 1972, p. 2-11.
- S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840-1893*, London: Longman, 1971, p. 29.
- J. I. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1960, p. 13, 14.
- A number of authors suggest that Owo's boundaries stretched far afield. (Ashara, *History of Owo*, 1951; Ojo, *Yoruba Palaces*, London: University of London Press, 1966; and Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, London: Methuen, 1969.) Ojo suggests that eastern Yoruba kingdoms had palaces roughly proportionate to the extent of their kingdoms, and that the palace in Owo covers as much as one twelfth of the area of the town, being the largest extant palace in Yorubaland. We may assume, then, that her kingdom was extensive as well. Ojo also notes that this large palace area is a trait that Owo shares with Benin.
- This relationship has been tentatively dealt with by Fagg in "Tribal Sculpture and the Festival of Britain," *Man*, 51, June 1951, p. 73-76, and Willett and Picton in "On the Identification of Individual Carvers: A Study of Ancestor Shrine Carvings from Owo, Nigeria," *Man*, v. NS. 2, no. 1, March 1967, p. 62-69.
- Egharevba, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- Ibid.*
- Paula Ben-Amos called my attention to a masking tradition in the Benin village of Iguosodin that is explicitly said to have been brought there from Owo.
- Egharevba, *op. cit.* Oshogboye is said to have been the 16th Olowo. (The story as told by Ashara is almost identical to that told by Egharevba. A closer study needs to be done on the parallels between the two histories.)
- Ipele and Ipenme on the outskirts of Owo town and Idoani and Idogun to the northeast are all said to have been founded by Benin princes or chiefs.
- Egharevba, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- Paula Ben-Amos cautions that title correspondences are more complicated than a simple

one-way borrowing. A number of Bini titles are derived from Yoruba. It is possible that some of these came from Owo, that some Owo titles came from Benin, and that both Owo and Benin derived titles from other sources (see Chart I).

13. Paula Ben-Amos (personal communication, January 1976) pointed out that the red flannel outfits of Benin chiefs are explicitly referred to as "pangolin skin," *ikpakpa-ekhui*.

14. A human figure in ivory that was collected in Owo by Maurice Cockin ca. 1910 is almost identical to one used on the *orufonran* costume of the Ojomo of Owo. The Cockin piece is now in the collection of his daughter, Mrs. Celia Barclay.

15. A number of *udamalore* are in European and American collections. One collected in 1878 near Lagos is in the British Museum. (See Fagg, *op. cit.*, plate Fe.) A drawing of this piece is found also in Ling Roth, *Great Benin*, 1903, p. 116, where it is mistakenly called bronze. Another almost identical form but with ivory chains attached is in the Barclay collection, and a third belongs to the Ojomo of Owo and is worn with his *orufonran* costume. A fragment, evidently by the same hand or by one associated with that carver, is in the Tishman collection (see Roy Sieber, *The Sculpture of Black Africa*, 1969, no. 83).

16. *Ako* has been discussed by Frank Willett ("On the Funeral Effigies of Owo and Benin and the Interpretation of the Life Size Bronze Heads from Ife, Nigeria," *Man*, v. 1, no. 1, March 1966, p. 34-45).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 34-35.

18. Both Willett and Fagg have discussed this, and Justine Cordwell saw a naturalistic *ako* figure being prepared for use in 1949. See "Naturalism and Stylization in Yoruba Art," *Magazine of Art*, v. 46, May 1953, p. 223.

19. Willett, *op. cit.*

20. *Ako* was performed in Ipele in 1972 for an elderly woman and in Ifon the same year for a man.

21. Both Willett and Cordwell emphasize the display of wealth. Cordwell interpreted the lavish rites as an attempt to assure the continued benevolence of the dead for the living.

22. There are a few chieftaincies limited to women in Owo, but these are usually held by the wives of the Olowo. At least one Owo chieftaincy normally held by a male is today held by a female.

23. Yoruba shrines are normally referred to as *oju ebo* or *oju'bo*. Perhaps the Owo *oju'po* (pronounced "ojukpo") is related to the Edo *ukpo*.

24. Paula Ben-Amos, personal communication, 1975.

25. R. E. Bradbury, "Ezomo's Ikegobo and the Benin Cult of the Hand," *Man*, v. 6, 1961, p. 129-38.

26. Willett and Picton, *op. cit.*

27. Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

28. Willett and Picton, *op. cit.*

29. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1926.

30. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Southwestern Nigeria*, London: International African Institute, 1957, p. 87. Some Ikao people removed to Idoani in Owo District. People of Otwa sought refuge at Owo during Nupe and Ilorin Yoruba raids (p. 86). Also see Jean Borgatti,

The Northern Edo of Southern Nigeria: An Art Historical Geography of Akoko-Edo, Ivbiosakan, Etsako, and Ishan, unpublished Master's Thesis, UCLA, 1971, p. 24, no. 1.

31. Ikpeshi, Northern Edo, is said to have come from Ipeshi, Akoko, which figures prominently in Owo history.

32. P. C. Lloyd, "The Traditional Political System of the Yoruba," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, v. 10, 1954, p. 369-372.

33. A series of grades in Ekiti is also called *otu* (Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 372). For an account of the *otu* system among the Edo of Ishan, see H. L. M. Butcher, "Some Aspects of the *Otu* System of the Isha Subtribes of the Edo People of Southern Nigeria," *Africa*, VIII, 1935, p. 149-62; Bradbury, *op. cit.*, p. 69, 89, etc.

34. See Butcher, *op. cit.*, p. 151f; Bradbury, 1957, p. 69. Among the Ekiti Yoruba, one *otu* is called *igbamo* (Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 372).

35. Bradbury, 1957, p. 78; Borgatti, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

36. William Fagg makes this suggestion in a note in *Man*, v. 62, 1962, p. 90.

37. Roger de la Burde, "Ancestral Ram's Heads of the Edo Speaking Peoples," *African Arts*, v. 6, no. 1, 1972, p. 28-34.

38. Roy Sieber, personal communication, January 1976.

39. Willam Fagg, *African Sculpture*, New York: International Exhibition Foundation, 1969, p. 123.

40. Frank Willett, *African Art*, New York: Praeger, 1971, p. 202.

41. Paula Ben-Amos points out that the Ishan culture hero *Agboghidi* supposedly introduced the Ekpo masquerade to the Bini area. Ekpo also employs white and black face masks, and *Agboghidi* is represented by one. Although the linguistic comparison of the names *agboghidi* and *agbodogin* may be rather farfetched, they do suggest another direction in which to look.

42. Ben-Amos, personal communication, 1974.

43. Paula Ben-Amos also pointed this out to me.

44. Borgatti, *op. cit.*, includes a description and illustrations of similar Edo pieces.

45. In Yorubaland it is believed that witches can transform themselves into birds, and bird imagery is often used to represent witches or witchcraft. In Owo, a number of *egungun* costumes employ carved birds or real feathers to demonstrate to the witches that all the powers possessed by witches are likewise possessed by the *egungun*.

46. See Bradbury, "The Benin Village" (edited excerpts from University of London Ph.D. Thesis) in *Benin Studies*, London: Oxford University Press, International African Institute, 1973.

47. Bradbury, 1973, p. 192.

OKPELLA, Notes, from page 32

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

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CHART I — TITLES

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

CHART II — PLACE NAMES

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

CHART III — PARAPHERNALIA TERMINOLOGY

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