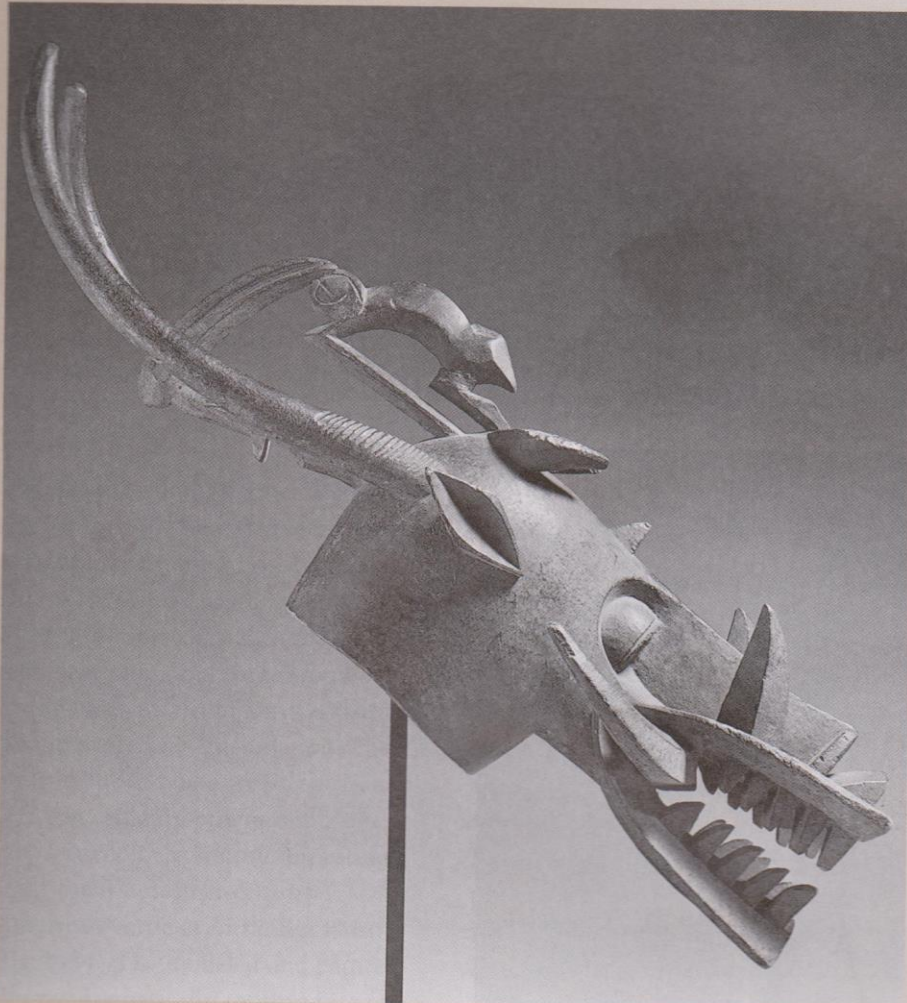


5

The Western Sudan



5-1. KPONUNGO ("FUNERAL HEAD MASK"), SENUFO, EARLY 20TH CENTURY. WOOD. LENGTH 40" (1.05 M). UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, IOWA CITY. UNIVERSITY OF IOWA MUSEUM OF ART. THE STANLEY COLLECTION

In parts of Senufo country these masks belong to men's antiwitchcraft associations outside of Poro. Both Poro and non-Poro masks of this form call upon spiritual powers that can be invoked against witches or criminals, the marauding spirits of the dead, or malevolent bush spirits. As the kinds of masks "sent by death" in legends, these powers engage in a kind of psychological and supernatural warfare, combating any forces that might disrupt the well-being of the community.

THE WESTERN SUDAN IS OFTEN defined as the broad savannah region whose heart is the great arc of the Niger River. In this book the term is given a more limited scope, and is defined as the lands bordering those of the peoples of the Central Sudan to the east (here placed in chapter 3), those of the Akan peoples to the south (here placed in chapter 7), and those of the Mande peoples to the north and west (here placed in chapter 4). Yet all such divisions must be arbitrary. For example, the Bobo, one of the major populations included in this chapter, are Mande speakers, as are some of the Senufo peoples whose art is discussed here.

The ancient empires were partially Islamicized from about the tenth century AD. Like the Bamana, however, most of the peoples examined in this chapter resisted Islam and its way of life for centuries, preserving their religions and other cultural traditions into the twentieth century. Linguistic borders in the Western Sudan tend to mark artistic borders as well, with each language group cultivating its own forms and styles. Dogon, Senufo, and the diverse Burkinabe peoples speak mutually incomprehensible languages. But the complete linguistic picture is still more complex, for the Dogon language includes several diverse dialects, while the Senufo actually speak several languages—even a single Senufo village will contain occupational groups with varied origins and different languages. There are, for example, cultural and histori-

cal links between Senufo and some Burkinabe peoples and the Mande. This situation reflects a long history of political decentralization, migrations, and interchanges among neighboring peoples, and it has led to a great variety of styles and substyles in the arts.

Despite such artistic and linguistic complexity, however, the peoples of the Western Sudan share belief systems, economies, and cultural institutions. Dwelling largely in rural towns and villages, they are farming peoples who raise subsistence crops in the rather dry climate of the savannah and semi-desert Sahel. With the exception of the Mossi, a Muslim Burkinabe people, they have neither kings nor any other kind of centralized political system. Their most common building material is clay, and their architecture generally has

a sculptural, earthbound quality. Some groups embellish their buildings inside and out with visually striking, symbolically rich designs, invariably painted by women. Almost all of them focus great attention on masquerades, ritual, competitions, and display. Across the region masquerades aid in transforming deceased people into productive and helpful ancestors and dramatize the crucial importance of good harvests in areas of poor soil and relatively little rainfall.

Finally, throughout the Western Sudan as in much of the rest of Africa, sculpture and masks are less literal representations of life forms than they are embodiments of complex ideas. Countless altars and shrines throughout the region are dedicated to nature spirits and ancestors that are embodied in wood,

metal, or mixed media sculptures. Blacksmiths are often the primary sculptors, and their wives are responsible for other art forms, especially pottery. Along with other artisan groups such as carvers and weavers, blacksmiths are usually segregated within the community and accorded considerable ritual power.

THE TELLEM

Running parallel to the Niger on its northward swing through present-day Mali is the Bandiagara escarpment (fig. 5-2). A spectacular cliff some 125 miles long and up to 2000 feet in height, it presides over an austere and dramatic landscape. For several centuries the cliff region has been home to the Dogon people, discussed later in this chapter. The Dogon were preceded in the area by a people

5-2. THE
BANDIAGARA
ESCARPMENT,
MALI.
PHOTOGRAPH
1979





5-3. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS, TELLEM, 11TH–15TH CENTURY. ENCRUSTED WOOD. HEIGHT 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (48 CM). KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT VOOR DE TROPEN, AMSTERDAM

known as Tellem, whose burials, granaries, and artifacts have been discovered in the numerous caves that dot the cliff.

The Tellem seem to have flourished from about AD 1000 until the arrival of the first Dogon migrants some five hundred years later. Artifacts testifying to Tellem culture include carved figures and neckrests, pottery, implements such as hoes and knives, and the earliest known examples of woven cloth in West Africa. The artistic boundaries between Tellem and Dogon cultures are improperly understood. Several sculptures thought to be characteristically Dogon have recently been shown to date from the Tellem era, while a particular style long associated with the Tellem now seems to have continued into the twentieth century (see fig. 5-5). Clearly, Tellem and Dogon sculpture cannot be distinguished on the basis of style alone, and the nature of the relationship between the cultures remains a mystery.

By virtue of an early radiocarbon date, a fragmentary sculpture illustrated here is almost certainly Tellem (fig. 5-3; see p. 58). The body is simplified, showing an enlarged navel, pendulous breasts, and a proportionately very large head with a projecting chin or beard. Widely spaced eyes and a shelf-like mouth define the otherwise indistinct face, a lack of clarity increased by being covered with a thick encrustation. The legs are partly missing. The figure projects in high relief from a flat, partially notched plank (broken off on the right side), which, in its upper portion, becomes the figure's raised arms, connected at the hands. The entire surface is cov-

ered with hardened sacrificial materials. Undoubtedly a shrine figure, the carving cannot be further identified as to use or meaning, although its raised-arm pose is common in other Tellem statuary and is often found in later Dogon imagery.

THE DOGON

The Dogon migrated into the Bandiagara region mainly in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Oral history traces their origins to the Mande territories to the southwest. Linguistic and cultural evidence, however, points to origins in the southeast, in the Yatenga region of Burkina Faso. Both theories may be correct, as the Dogon may well have multiple origins. Clearly they share some art forms with their neighbors.

In earlier centuries the Dogon built their villages on the top of the Bandiagara escarpment, on its rocky bluffs, or snuggled up under the vertical cliff faces on its steep talus slopes (see fig. 5-2). Such difficult-to-reach locations afforded some protection from periodic invasions by Mossi and Fulani cavalry. After the French colonial government established control over the region in the first decade of the twentieth century, many Dogon left the cliffs for the more welcoming Seno plain. Today, a Dogon population of nearly 300,000 is dispersed through some 700 villages, most of them averaging fewer than 500 people. Dogon country once supported abundant wildlife—leopard, lion, antelope, crocodile, and other animals—which the Dogon hunted and depicted in their art. The wildlife has largely disappeared, however, and like other people in the region, the Dogon

now rely on agriculture. Excellent farmers, they manage to wrest subsistence grain crops and onions as a cash crop from poor soil in an area that receives little rain.

The Dogon have been among the most intensively studied of all African peoples. Led by the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule, who first visited the region in the 1930s, scholars have constructed a vision of Dogon life and thought in which every detail of the culture can be seen to reflect the symbolism derived from elaborate creation legends. This cosmology, ripe with many layers of meaning, has provided a fertile resource for theorizing about Dogon art, and compelling interpretations have been based on it. Recently, however, scholars have called many such interpretations into question. Field workers among the Dogon have been unable to verify earlier findings, while on-site observations of how the Dogon actually use and think about their art have suggested less complex symbolic readings. In light of these disputes, many scholars now advocate a more conservative approach to interpreting Dogon art, relying on documented evidence of use and referring only cautiously to creation legends.

Sculpture

Most Dogon sculpture is created by blacksmiths, who work in wood as well as metal. As elsewhere in West Africa, Dogon smiths comprise a hereditary occupational group, respected and often feared for their deep learning and occult powers, and living somewhat apart from Dogon farmers. The works of these artists

are visually compelling as well as diverse in form and style. Their exact functions and meanings, however, often remain obscure. Virtually all scholars agree that Dogon sculpture was made for shrines. Most agree as well that the figures themselves are altars in the sense that they serve as consecrated repositories of sacrificial materials, which may be left nearby or dripped or rubbed over the figures for solutions to such problems as illness, infertility, or drought. On some images these materials have built up a thick crust, as on many Tellem figures.

As in most African cultures, the human figure is the most frequent sculptural motif. Such works have often been referred to as ancestor figures, yet the degree to which they actually represent legendary or historical ancestors is contested. It may be that they were originally created to represent shrine owners or other living petitioners to ancestors. If this is true, then most Dogon sculpture can be interpreted as orants, or praying beings, whose purpose was to intercede with the spirit world on their owners' behalves.

The most distinctive Dogon motif is a single figure standing with one or both arms raised, illustrated here by one of the largest Dogon sculptures known (fig. 5-4). Although the right arm of the sculpture has been broken off above the elbow, clearly it too was raised. The raised-arm pose has usually been interpreted as exemplifying prayer, especially for rain. Yet a variety of other meanings also may be implied. For example, the gesture may indicate penance for having caused a drought by breaking ritual law. It may relate as well to the ceremony of



5-4. STANDING FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS, DOGON, 16TH–20TH CENTURY. WOOD. HEIGHT 6'10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (2.1 M). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

casting grain from shrine roofs at the beginning of the planting season, and it also resembles a ritual motion made to ward off evil sorcery (defined as the harnessing of forces to cause action—see glossary) or other dangers.

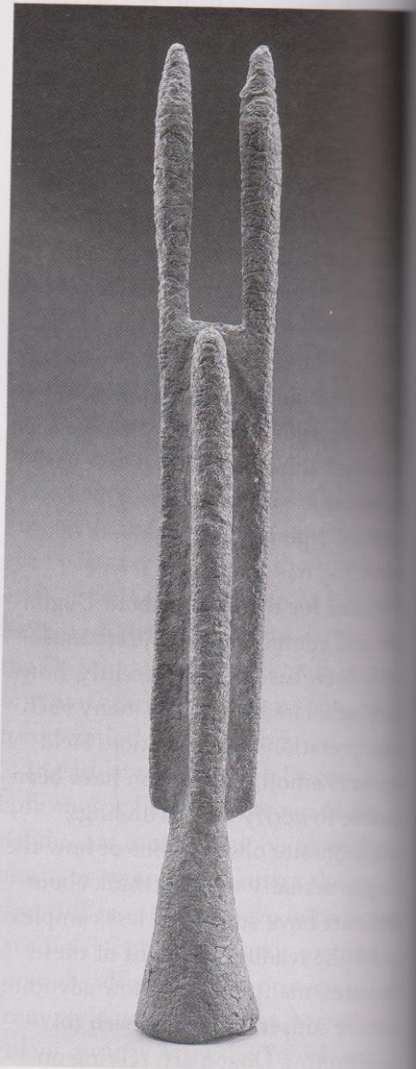
Dogon sculptural styles vary from region to region. While not all sculpture can yet be assigned confidently to a particular area, the naturalistic, fleshy style of this life-size statue is associated with the Tintam region of northern Dogon country. Despite slightly bent knees, the figure stands with a stately erectness further emphasized by its elongated neck and strong oval head. Ample pectoral swellings, strongly suggestive of female breasts, undercut the clear masculinity of the figure's genitalia and beard. Bisexual images occur with some frequency in Dogon art, and so this figure too can be seen as androgynous. As such it may relate to aspects of Dogon thought about beings called *nommo*.

The essence of *nommo* in Dogon belief is not altogether clear. Long understood by scholars following Griaule's lead as primordial, prehuman ancestors, *nommo* has recently been translated as "master of water," and may refer as well to a collectivity of powerful water spirits. Either way, *nommo* are bound up with ideas about couples, twin-ness, and sexual duality, all of which are important in Dogon thought. Like *nommo*, androgynous beings are associated with two presocial states of being, infancy and childhood. The Dogon practice both male and female circumcision; they believe these operations remove the female element from males and vice versa. Circumcision thus creates a

wholly male or female person prepared to assume an adult role without the ambiguities of childhood. Androgynous sculptures may thus refer to ideas of precultural, primordial beings—perhaps *nommo*, perhaps children—who preceded civilized institutions as they are now known. At the same time the figure's beard, as well as the jewelry worn on the arms and around the neck, suggest that the statue represents a personage—whether divine or human—of a social stature that matches its great size.

Dogon styles have surely varied over time, as well as from region to region. While not enough works have been scientifically dated for the construction of a chronology, tests conducted thus far indicate that simpler, more abstract figures are generally older than more detailed and naturalistic works. Thus the nearly abstract, encrusted figure in figure 5-5 is probably older than the life-size carving in figure 5-4. Here the torso is radically reduced to an elongated cylinder projecting from a flat, rectangular back and shoulders. Two more cylinders project upward as arms. Rising from a conical base, the work exerts an upward thrust that seems to embody the force of the gesture itself.

Human couples are the second most prevalent theme in Dogon sculpture. One of the finest of known Dogon works depicts a couple seated side by side on a single stool (fig. 5-6). The figures are virtually identical, to the point of near androgyny. The male is slightly larger and dominates by virtue of his apparently protective gesture, his right arm around the woman's neck, fingers resting on her breast. The man's left hand is con-



5-5. FIGURE WITH RAISED ARMS, DOGON, 16TH–EARLY 20TH CENTURY. WOOD AND SACRIFICIAL MATERIALS. HEIGHT 16¼" (42.5 CM). MUSÉE DAPPER, PARIS

The simplicity and encrustation of this figure, formerly enough for scholars to label it as Tellem, are no longer deemed sufficient for such an attribution, although the possibility of its having been made by Tellem peoples remains.



5-6. SEATED COUPLE, DOGON, 16TH–19TH CENTURY. WOOD AND METAL. HEIGHT 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (73 CM). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. GIFT OF LESTER WUNDERMAN, 1977

5-7. HORSE AND RIDER, DOGON, 19TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. WOOD. HEIGHT 31 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (81 CM). MUSÉE DAPPER, PARIS

between arm and torso or the torso-width space between man and woman. At the base of the sculpture, four smaller figures help support the stool the couple rests on. These may refer to the support that ancestors or other spirits are believed to provide for the living.

Equestrian figures are a third common theme in Dogon art (fig. 5-7). As here, horses are usually rendered more simply than their riders (compare, for example, the horse's curved, seemingly boneless legs with the rider's clearly articulated joints). Horses are generally associated with

connected to his genital area, suggesting references to procreative powers. The woman carries a child on her back (not visible in the photograph) signaling her role as a nurturing mother. The man similarly wears a quiver, which implies his role as hunter, provider, warrior, and protector. Both torsos are elongated tubular shapes, with articulations more schematic and rectilinear than organic. Facial features too are highly conventionalized. Lightly incised straight lines, recalling scarification, appear on the faces and

torsos, reinforcing the rectilinear composition. This schematic, geometric style is associated with the southern Dogon region.

The work appears to be an idealized model of a nuclear family. Man and woman are here seen as interdependent and complementary, ideas expressed by their nearly identical portrayal, their unity on a common base, the visual bridge of the man's arm, and the rhythmic alternation of positive and negative spaces of equal weight, as in the arm's-width space





5-8. LIDDED CONTAINER WITH HORSE AND RIDER, DOGON, 16TH–20TH CENTURY. WOOD WITH METAL STAPLES. HEIGHT 33 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (85.8 CM). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. MICHAEL C. ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL COLLECTION. PURCHASE, NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER GIFT 1969

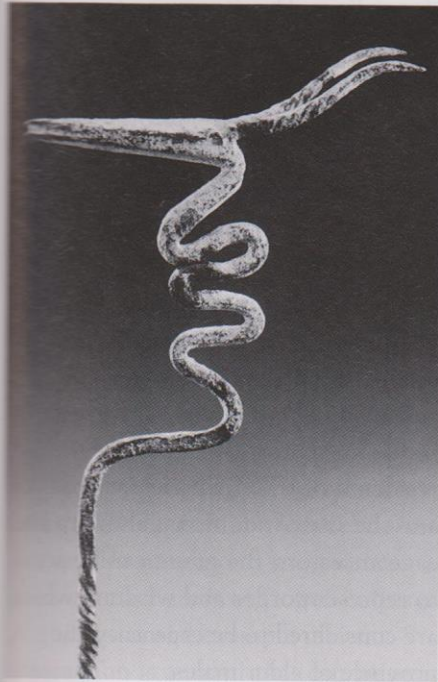
wealth and power in West Africa. Rare and expensive, they are often owned by leaders. One of the few members of Dogon society likely to own a horse is the *hogon*. Priest of the worship of Lebe, a legendary ancestor and deity concerned especially with agricultural fertility and crop growth, the *hogon* is the most powerful person in the community. Dogon equestrian figures are thus often believed to depict *hogons*. Yet historically the Dogon have also known riders as invading warriors and as emissaries of foreign leaders, and these possible meanings should be kept in mind as well. The rider here wears a sheathed knife on his upper arm, and both rider and horse are adorned with carefully rendered ornaments. These signs indicate that the subject is an important personage, while the large size of the sculpture indicates that it is itself an important work. Note too that quite similar terracotta equestrian images are known from Jenne and other cultures linked to the kingdom of ancient Mali (see fig. 4-1).

An equestrian image more firmly associated with the office of *hogon* forms part of one of the more complex Dogon figural carvings known (fig. 5-8). This lidded bowl was owned by a *hogon* and was used to contain food at his rites of investiture. Elaborate embellishment marks it as a prestige vessel, possession of which indicated high status and probably wealth. The lower section, carved from a single block of wood, comprises a bowl ringed by eight seated figures and supported by two horses standing on a flat base. The separate lid is ornamented with small figures in relief and crowned with a large equestrian, which may invoke the

first *hogon*. Horses are often depicted on food containers. They may represent the primordial beings described in legends as having guided a sacred vessel to earth during creation time. This vessel contained everything needed for life, including eight original prehuman ancestors descended from the first *nommo*. It is tempting to interpret this sculpture, which contained life-sustaining food, as a more recent metaphorical extension of that original sacred vessel. The eight encircling figures would represent the eight ancestors, the figure between the two horses on the base would depict the original *nommo*, the equestrian on the lid would be the original *hogon*. All we can be sure of, however, is that the container is a virtuosic display of the woodcarver's art.

The iconography and use of wrought-iron figures are apparently similar to those of wood figures, although even fewer contexts for them have been recorded in field research. They are known to have appeared on shrines to Lebe, ancestors, and other spirits. The majority are (or were) attached to stakes, hooks, or canes that were both carried and inserted into the earthen bases of shrines.

Most iron figures, whether human or animal, are highly simplified, economical renderings, which stems partly from the difficulty of working iron. Several spare human figures in iron repeat the common arms-raised posture. While a number of very simple wrought-iron horses exist, antelopes, like the one shown here, are rare (fig. 5-9). Here the smith has created a delicate but forceful sculpture with a few twists and bends, omitting the animal's



The rounded forms and fluid lines of sanctuaries may be interpreted as a manifestation of the natural realm, while the rectilinear checkerboard design often painted on the façade, as it is here, may refer symbolically to the ordered realm of culture.

Scholars have for some time pointed to such oppositions between the realms of nature and culture in various Dogon structures and symbols. While these interpretations can surely be taken too far, aspects of them seem to hold up under scrutiny. The mystical flow of water and energy in nature, animated by supernatural forces, is associated especially with women in Dogon thought, and is shown graphically as flowing or

5-9. STAKE WITH ANTELOPE HEAD, DOGON, 20TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. IRON. HEIGHT 8 1/4" (21 CM). MUSÉE DAPPER, PARIS

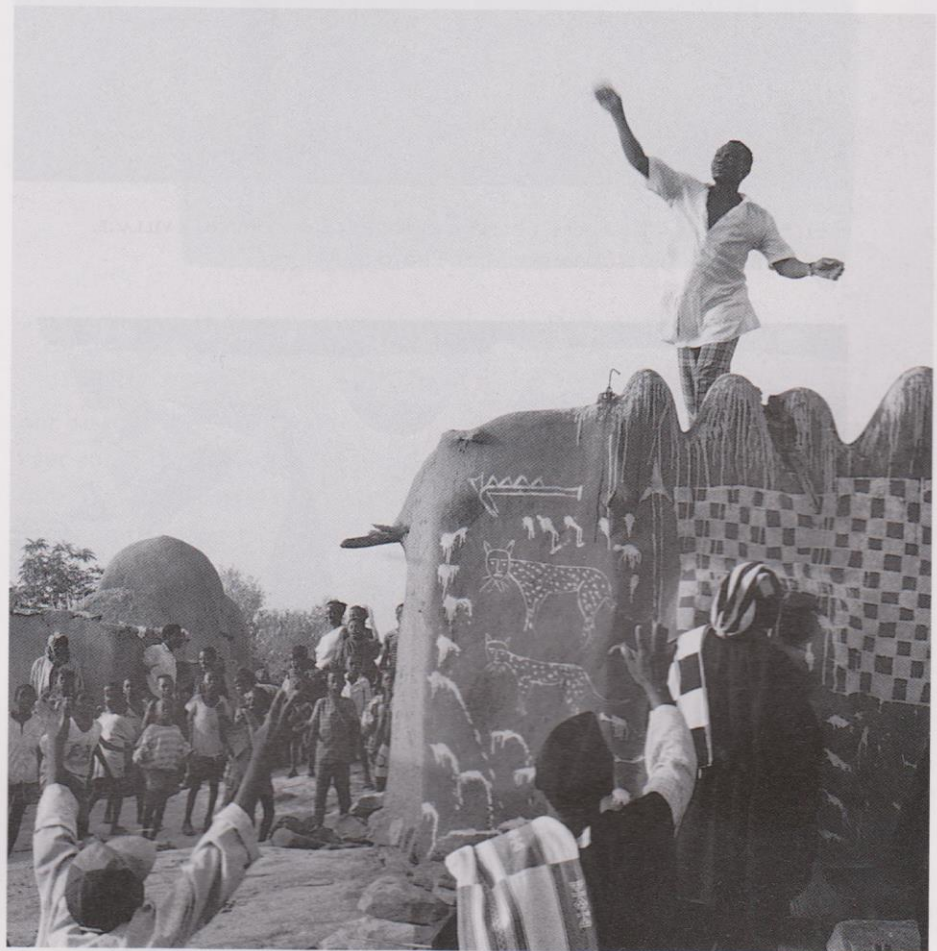
body entirely, and playing with the fanciful neck curves.

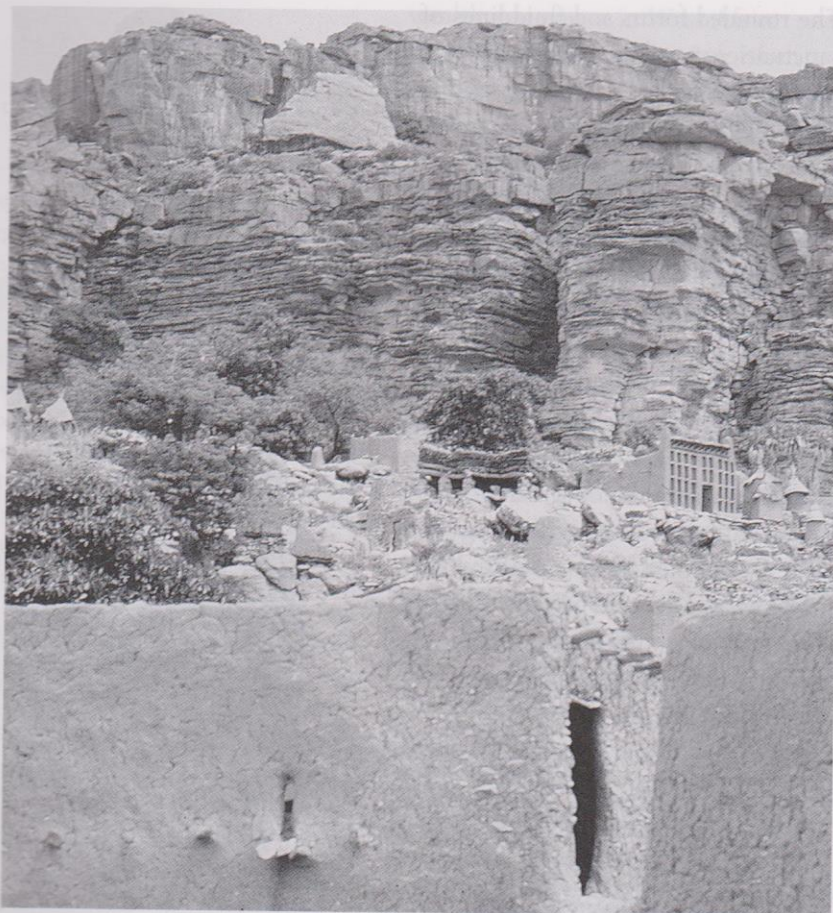
Architecture

Like much clay or mud architecture, especially in the African savannah, Dogon buildings are strongly sculptural. Some structures emphasize rounded, organic forms, while others are more severely rectilinear and geometric. The most fluid, organic Dogon structures are sanctuaries (fig. 5-10). Sanctuaries are dedicated to *binu*, immortal clan or lineage ancestors. *Binu* and their priests have several roles, but in the largest sense they are concerned with achieving and maintaining a balance between the supernatural world and the present world, itself divided into the two realms of untamed nature and human culture.

5-10. DOGON SANCTUARY WITH SACRIFICE IN PROGRESS ON THE ROOF

Visible at the far left is a granary. Typically tall, flat-walled rectangular buildings with circular thatched roofs, granaries are numerous in all villages. Each family has several, as if to indicate the importance of life-sustaining grains—and sometimes family shrines—contained within. Some reports accord granaries an elaborate symbolism derived from creation legends. These legends see the granary both as an anthropomorphic female and as a cosmological structure formed by god, with dozens of references to natural and man-made events and things. Regrettably, however, this intriguing and complex symbolism has not been confirmed in recent research.





5-11. GINNA (LINEAGE LEADERS' HOUSE) AND TOGUNA OVERLOOKING A VILLAGE, DOGON, BANDIAGARA ESCARPMENT, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1979



5-12. TOGUNA (MEN'S MEETING HOUSE), DOGON, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1989

zigzag lines. These are seen to contrast with the finite and crafted order of culture, which is associated with men and is represented in the geometry of weaving, the orderly divisions of cultivated fields, and such rectilinear structures as lineage leaders' houses, *ginna* (fig. 5-11).

Ginna have numerous rectangular niches that create a grid pattern on the façade (fig. 5-11, right); a geometric precision that contrasts with the Binu shrine's organic quality. As the residence of the elder lineage head and the site of additional altars to lineage ancestors, the *ginna* can be seen to represent order and wisdom, which are considered to be especially the province of elder males.

Similar geometrical concerns inform the men's meeting houses, *togu na* (fig. 5-11, left, and 5-12). Literally a "house of words," the *togu na* is considered the head of the community. Often sited in a high place overlooking the village, the *togu na* is an exclusively male domain; it is here that men convene for work and rational deliberation, the essence of civilized life. An open building supported on numerous vertical posts, its layered roof is made of stacked millet stalks laid down successively at right angles. The geometry of the *togu na* contrasts with the oval, closed adobe structures that women retreat to during their menstrual periods. These are organic, womb-like containers that suggest the promise of fruitfulness.

Many of the supporting posts of the *togu na* illustrated here are carved in symbolic representation of women, with simplified facial features, abbreviated bodies, and large protruding breasts. *Togu na* posts are frequently carved or decorated, with the female

form appearing as the most common motif, especially on older structures. One *togu na* originally had an astonishing 105 posts, each one carved with large breasts. Since only a fraction of this number of posts would be needed to support the roof, the repetition must be essentially symbolic. While the *togu na* is a male domain, it is said that female ancestors visit at night to share in the deliberations, and the female posts can be said to represent this feminine presence. More subtly, multiplied female symbols in such a male context reinforce the gender reciprocity and balance seen in other areas of Dogon culture. A quintessential example of such interaction is a motif that can be seen equally as a female head on a long neck with breasts, or as a male phallus with testicles. Visible on several of the posts in figure 5-12, this striking visual pun simultaneously refers to male sexuality and female nurturing and abundance.

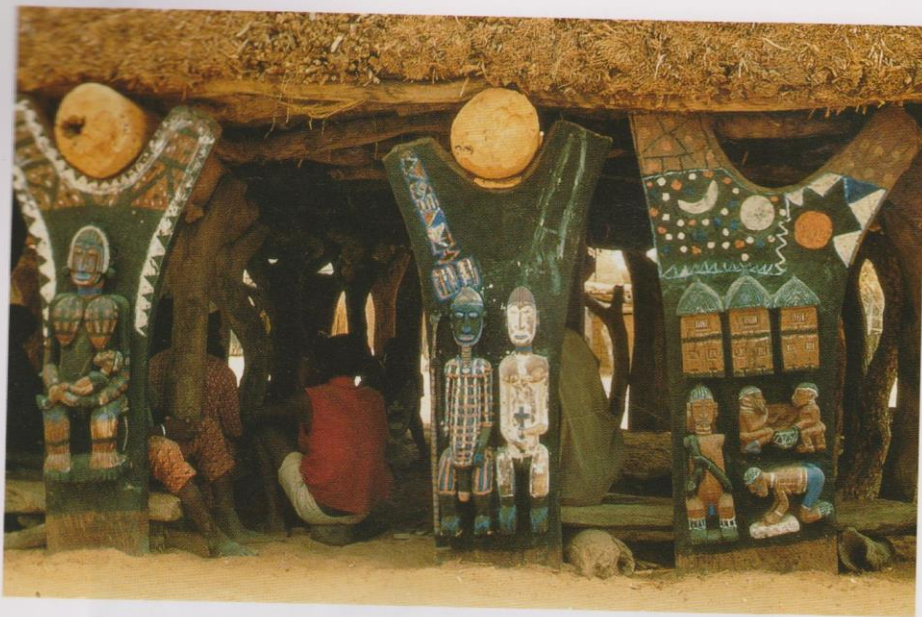
Other Dogon architectural sculpture includes doors or shutters to granaries, shrines, and *ginna*. These may be carved from a single plank, or formed from two or three boards connected with wrought-iron staples. Motifs include lizards, birds, human figures, breasts, and geometric motifs, often in multiples. Older doors most commonly feature rows of simplified, vertical, attenuated figures (fig. 5-13). This door also includes a lock carved with a pair of figures that seem to be sitting atop the bolt case. The figures have been interpreted as male and female lineage founders, while the twelve figures on the lock case panel (the left panel) are said to be six pairs of male and female twins, symbols of fertility. This interpretive reading is



5-13. GRANARY DOOR WITH LOCK CASE, DOGON, 20TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. WOOD. MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER, GENEVA

not based in field information, however, so we cannot be sure of its accuracy. Working against it is visual evidence on the door itself that the figures do not seem to be differentiated in gender, nor are they depicted in pairs. Although the exact symbolism of this door eludes us, we may still see it as a valued marker of a passage-way to an important enclosure. Thresholds are often viewed as vulnerable transition points. Here the transition is probably on some level guarded by multiple symbolic ancestors or spirits.

Although many forms of Dogon architecture changed little over the course of the twentieth century, *togu na* posts erected since about 1980 have introduced new and varied subject matter. Now they often feature more descriptive, even episodic and narrative scenes, sometimes brightly colored with imported oil paints (fig. 5-14). Greater naturalism and realism are evident, and some include written inscriptions. There are numerous small motifs, including airplanes, cars, iron plows, equestrians, hunters and their prey, and even a mosque. It is as



5-14. TOGU NA (MEN'S MEETING HOUSE), DOGON, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1989

though the singular and symbolic motifs that served an older, more self-contained Dogon world have given way to a kind of multicultural collection of images showing contact with wider and more diverse worlds. The artists responsible for these modern posts have been recognized in competitions.

Masks and Masquerades

Dogon masking ostensibly has a funerary function, but it touches upon many aspects of life and thought. Masquerades are performed by a powerful corporate body called Awa, into which virtually all men are initiated. Awa itself is led by elders, or *olubaru*. The *olubaru* initiate youths and are masters of *sigi so*, the ritual language of the nature spirits that the masqueraders make manifest. All Awa initiates learn *sigi so* along with mask rituals, dances, and gestures.

Awa has as its principal shrine a thirty- to fifty-foot tall Great Mask, also called the "mother of masks" (fig. 5-15). The mask commemorates the first death in Dogon culture as recounted in legend, the death of a personage named Lebe Serou, who was transformed into a snake that is symbolized by the mask's towering superstructure. Having absorbed the spirit power released by death, a Great Mask is exceptionally powerful. Stored in natural rock shelters outside the village, it is essentially an altar. It is not worn and danced in the usual sense of serving as part of a transforming disguise, but rather is called upon to energize all Dogon masquerading.

When an adult man dies, for example, the Great Mask is brought from its cave and stood against the *ginna* where the body lies. A live chicken is attached to the top of the mask, and the death is announced to the mask as

though it were a living being. After sacrifices are made to this mask-altar several men dance collectively with it before returning it to the bush. Public rites take place after actual burial and after the *ginna* has been purified. There are mock battles by men, wailing by women, and mimicry of wild animal behavior. The next day, a procession of mourners moves away from the community, symbolically expelling the dead man from the village. On the following day a masking sequence called *bago bundo* is performed by five masked dancers, four with masks of fiber and cowrie shells called *bede*, representing women, and



5-15. GREAT MASK WITH ATTENDANT, DOGON, MALI.



5-16. SIRIGE BEING DANCED, MALI. DOGON.
1988 OR 1989

one with a tall male mask named *sirige* (fig. 5-16).

Bago bundo has been interpreted as a symbolic reenactment of male and female roles, at the same time stressing the chaos and destruction brought on by death. *Sirige*, which dominates *bago bundo*, appears to be the public and visible representative of the Great Mask, though it also has other associations of its own. Smaller than the Great Mask, *sirige* is usually painted with orderly triangular motifs that alternate with grid-like openwork rectangles; both patterns are repeated vertically on its long plank. The openwork rectangles have been interpreted as the many generations of a great family. The mask is called the "tree," "ladder," or "big house" (*ginna*), which it symbolically represents.

A far more elaborate Dogon masquerade is a collective funerary rite

called *dama*. A complex, multifaceted art form, *dama* takes place over a period of six days once every several years (thirteen is average). The rite effects the permanent expulsion from the human community of the souls or spirits of those who have died since the last *dama*, and their incorporation into the supernatural realm as ancestors. Dozens, even hundreds, of varied masked spirits participate (fig. 5-17). The wealth and prestige of both the living and the commemorated dead are expressed by the size of the *dama* masquerade celebration and its audience, and a village may accumulate costly resources of food and drink over a period of many months or even years in preparation. Awa members are secluded in rock shelters for a period prior to the start of *dama* to prepare and renew their masks, musical instruments, and costumes. With

pigments containing sacrificial blood, they paint designs on the walls of the bush shelter and touch the masks to them. *Olubaru*, who make sacrifices to the Great Mask for each *dama*, oversee this activity.

Dama begins with a serpentine procession of several dozen masked spirits from the bush into the village, made sacred by the presence of *olubaru* and the Great Mask. The power, danger, and ritual knowledge lodged in the wilds now enter the village. Women, who may not wear masks or even come close to maskers, watch only from a distance. The community is transformed for six days by the authority of these masked supernaturals, called into action by drums. On the first day maskers dance around the ritual seats of the deceased in the village plaza, and the legend of the Awa society's founding is recited.



5-17. KANAGA MASKED DANCERS. SIRIGE MASKED DANCERS IN THE BACKGROUND. DOGON, SANGA REGION, MALI. PHOTOGRAPH 1959

On the second day masked dancing alternates between the village square and the roofs of *ginna*. On the third day maskers dance on or near the *hogon's* fields, as well as in the plaza, while further individual and group dances mark the remaining days, often to huge audiences from surrounding communities. The liminal mourning period ends when the initial processional route is reversed: the maskers return to the wilderness, the Great Mask is returned to its shelter, and the many masked spirits leave the village. The classic three-part structure for rites of passage is followed here, for as the dead, ritually separated from the living, are incorporated as ancestors, the living community is reincorporated into ordinary time (see *Aspects of African Culture: Rites of Passage*, p. 413).

The masqueraders to the right of figure 5-17 wear masks made of fiber and cowrie shell representing maidens of the Fulani people, identified by their high-crested hairstyles. The tall masks in the background are known as *kanaga*. *Kanaga* and *sirige* have been seen by some scholars as a conceptual female-male pair. Like *sirige*, *kanaga* is unusual in its abstraction, and again like *sirige*, it has several interpretations. With its four-part, cross-like superstructure, *kanaga* is considered both a female spirit and a bird, possibly a stork. It is also interpreted as a lizard or a hand. *Kanaga* masks are supposed to be carved by individual Awa initiates and are linked to circumcision rites. The dances and gestures of both *kanaga* and *sirige* are unique in that their superstructures are vigorously whirled and swung down in an arcing

motion to touch the ground. The meaning of the gesture is unclear, though it appears to signify direct communication with earth spirits.

Kanaga and *sirige* take their place in an impressive array of Dogon mask types. Marcel Griaule recorded more than seventy-eight types of masks representing animals, male and female characters from within and outside Dogon culture, and abstract ideas. Recent scholarship has analyzed this large corpus into several conceptual sets, emphasizing dualistic but not necessarily parallel oppositions between male and female, wet and dry, death and rebirth, nature and culture, wilderness and village, destruction and order, predatory and non-predatory, masks of fiber and wood, masks danced and not danced. Thus head-conforming fiber masks such as those representing young Fulani women in figure 5-17 are associated with birds, water, and rebirth. Other fiber masks embody intermediaries between this world and the supernatural realm: *hogon*, priest, blacksmith, and doctor. Wood masks do not conform to the head, but rather project forward in front of the face. They largely represent human or animal characters. Almost all are male, and associated with dryness, death, and transformation. Masks that do not actually dance usually embody negative, aggressive, or liminal characters—foreign men, priests, bandits—who interact with the audience by talking, begging, and provoking fear or anger. Yet no maskers actually speak, for these are bush creatures, who can only utter animal-like cries, and who are spoken to not in Dogon, the language of civilized people, but in the secret spirit language, *sigi so*.



5-18. SATIMBE ("sister on the head") MASK. DOGON, MALI, 20TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. WOOD, PIGMENT, ENCRUSTATION. HEIGHT 43" (110.5 CM). THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK. MICHAEL C. ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL COLLECTION. PURCHASE, BEQUEST OF NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER GIFT, 1961

Satimbe ("sister on the head") is the only wooden mask to depict a specific type of Dogon woman, the *yasigine* (fig. 5-18). These few female members of Awa stand for the collective women who, in origin stories, first discovered masks. This occurred in primordial time before men took over the privilege for themselves exclusively, barring all women except *yasigine* from contact with maskers or

the mask society. Notably, these are the only Dogon women whose deaths are honored with a *dama*. *Satimbe* masks display a simplified, schematic, large-breasted woman who stands atop the vertically slotted, rectangular facial covering common to most Dogon wooden masks. Three stick-like extensions of equal length signify two up-stretched arms and a head on a much distended neck. We may suppose that in addition to representing *gasigine*, such dramatically female carvings also refer to the nurturing role expected of all Dogon women.

Dama is a dry-season rite that commemorates death. But it is also a festival in which varied levels of male-female opposition, embodied in a kaleidoscopic array of maskers, human and animal spirit characters, and other participants who sing and dance, celebrate life, which will resume again once the rains begin. Multiple forms of power and wisdom, materialized in the masks, have entered the village as if to revitalize it. *Dama* is therefore also a rite of hope, renewal, and fertility, an artful melding of masquerade, symbol, song, dance, prayer, and sacrifice that evokes the complexities of life itself. Notably, men are the performers, as if to say that they, not women, are in charge of power and fertility.

Masking and other art forms have been affected by the encroachments of Christianity and Islam, of course, as well as truncated drastically in "authentic" entertainments performed many times a year for tourists in Dogon villages. Some Islamicized communities have ceased *dama* rituals altogether. But masking is still strong, and will continue to be buoyed up by Dogon cultural pride.

New mask forms representing such characters as learned Muslim, Mossi horseman, and white man have appeared, reflecting forceful outside influences. The earliest "white man" masks depicted French colonial officers; today such masks depict a visiting anthropologist and tourists who jostle through the crowd taking pictures with wooden video cameras. In some areas where foreign visitors are frequent, both older and newer mask forms are now faithfully sketched by young boys using donated paper and colored pencils or markers. The boys sell those drawings and toy figures of masqueraders. Men carve extra masks these days because tourists want to buy them, just as blacksmiths sell replicas of sacred figures. While *dama* today is probably less orderly than this discussion has made it seem, it is a ceremony that continues in many Dogon communities, if simplified as a display for tourists in some areas, and with some new commercial dimensions.

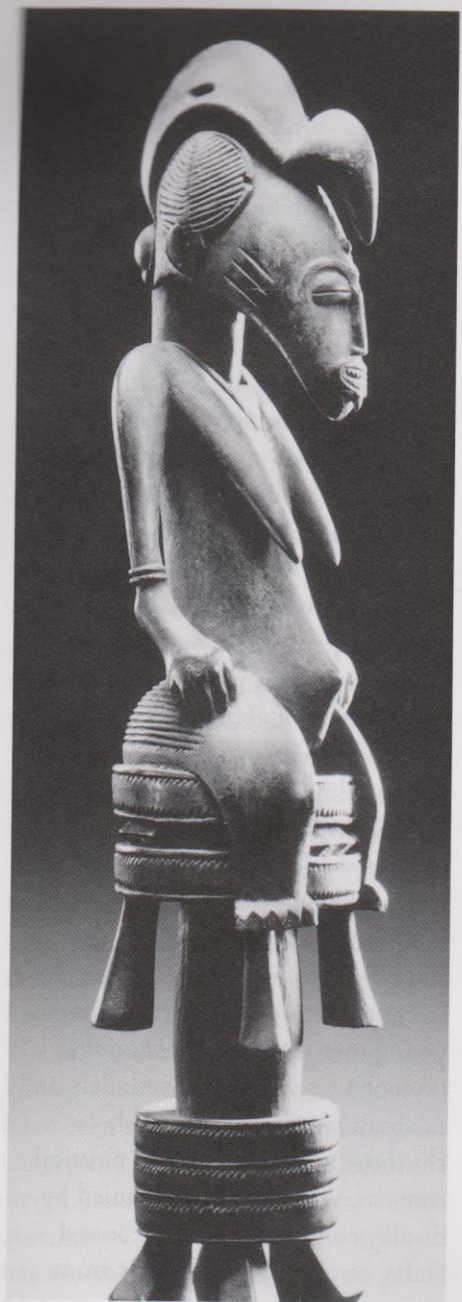
THE SENUFO

Nearly a million and a half people who live in northern Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso are known collectively as Senufo. Village communities are the principal social units in this large area. Each community is divided into distinct residential areas, or wards. A single community may contain two or three wards for farmers, and two or three other wards for other groups. In one of those wards, the women make pottery. Their husbands may be blacksmiths, weavers, or leatherworkers. At least one ward is reserved for *Jula* weavers or traders, who are Muslim and who speak a Mande language. Another ward hous-

es Kulebele woodcarvers. These farmers, artisans, and traders have diverse origins and speak separate languages, yet all are considered Senufo.

The multiculturalism of a Senufo community is reflected in the varied forms and styles of Senufo art. Yet common institutions and common themes link art works and their performance contexts throughout the Senufo area. In numbers, at least, farmers are dominant in most villages. The great importance of farming in Senufo life is signaled by a carving called a "champion cultivator's staff." Most of these works depict a seated girl in the bloom of youthful beauty (fig. 5-19). Full-breasted, perhaps pregnant, she is a clear symbol of abundance and potential productivity.

The calm repose of the carved girl is a deliberate contrast to the active, striving work of the male farmers. Annual hoeing competitions are multimedia events, at once ritual and play, which celebrate values of strength, skill, and endurance among young men. Drums and *balafons* (xylophones with wood sounders and calabash resonators) establish rhythms for these grueling physical contests, which are accompanied by displays of one or more decorated staffs, carried by young girls from row to row. The winners of the competition bring honor to themselves, their lineages, and their wards. Heroes of the community, they gain high respect, an opportunity to marry the finest women, and the right to the most elaborate funerals. The staffs are held in trust by elders for successive champion cultivators in each age set, and are displayed at the funerals of champions and their mothers.



5-19. CHAMPION CULTIVATOR'S STAFF, SENUFO (KULEBELE), 20TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. WOOD. HEIGHT OF FIGURE 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (35.5 CM). MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER, GENEVA

The relationships manifest in the cultivating contest between youthful male farmers and young girls are aspects of larger male-female relationships also manifest in the art of the two central Senufo institutions, the male Poro society, and the female Sandogo. In both of these institutions, sculpted images of couples play important roles.

Poro

Poro provides the principal framework through which men learn and practice their social, political, and spiritual roles in society. Each occupational group in a Senufo community has its own Poro society, and all men belong. Males enter and pass through Poro in age groups. The solidarity and brotherhood of each group is sealed by the shared rigors of the protracted initiatory process, which takes place in three phases over the course of some twenty years. Young women participate in the first two initiatory phases but are excluded from the third. Graduation from the third and final phase of initiation signals that a man—now aged twenty-eight to thirty-two—is ready for responsibility and leadership in the community.

Art plays important roles in Poro activities; it is used and stored in the society's sacred grove, *sinzanga*. Located outside of but adjacent to the village, this grove is usually fenced off, or surrounded by huge and ancient trees. Access is restricted to members, who, over the course of their own and others' initiations, will attend countless rituals, ordeals, and instructions within its borders.

Among the art belonging to Poro societies are pairs of medium-size or

large carved figures. Each pair portrays a male-female couple. Often called Poro, the spirit figures are brought out to reinforce the teachings of the society at initiations, and they appear as well at funerals of Poro members and their wives. The instructional uses of the figures are probably many. Few, however, have been confided to outsiders. We know that the paired figures are emblematic of marriage, that they represent as well the primordial founding ancestors spoken of in creation legends, and that they also represent twins, which are sacred to the Senufo.

In some regions paired images—which are also spirit figures—are carved with particularly massive bases. Known as "rhythm pounders," such figures are carried in procession by initiates, who swing them from side to side, striking the ground rhythmically (fig. 5-20). This is said to purify the earth and to call ancestral spirits to participate in the rites. The male figure here wears a Poro age-grade emblem headdress. While the headdress and extended base make his figure the taller of the two, his actual body is portrayed as smaller than the woman's. Senufo society is matrilineal, and the dominant female presence often found in such paired figures reflects the importance of females in Senufo life and thought.

The importance of women is explicitly acknowledged in statues of a personage known as Ancient Mother, who is typically depicted holding a small child on her lap (fig. 5-21). Ancient Mother is considered the head of Poro, as exemplified by the saying: "Poro is a woman." The sacred grove is considered to be her ward, or compound. She represents

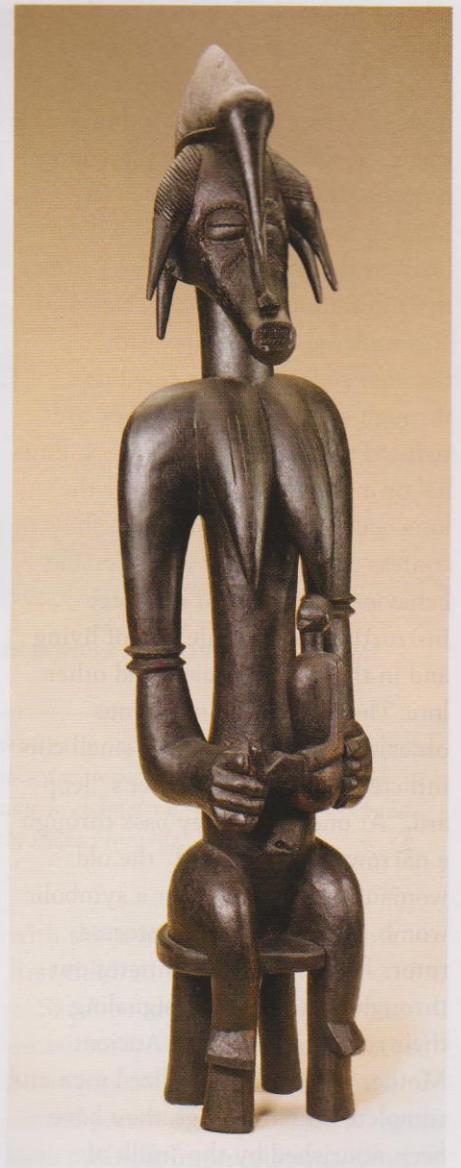


5-20. PAIR OF "RHYTHM POUNDER" FIGURES, SENUFO (KULEBELE), 20TH CENTURY. WOOD. HEIGHT OF MALE 45 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (115.9 CM), HEIGHT OF FEMALE 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (96.8 CM). COLLECTION OF MILTON AND FRIEDA ROSENTHAL, NEW YORK

the female aspect of creation and is the founder and guardian of the matrilineage. She is the spiritual mother of all Senufo males who pass through Poro, and, metaphorically, the mother of the community itself.

According to some scholars, carvings of Ancient Mother are deliberately non-naturalistic so as to empha-

size her symbolic rather than her biological roles in Senufo culture. A statue of Ancient Mother is shown to novices during the Poro learning process, in part as a reminder that beyond the obvious lies the hidden, an idea also exemplified by the secret Poro language learned by novices. Initiation begins with boys being

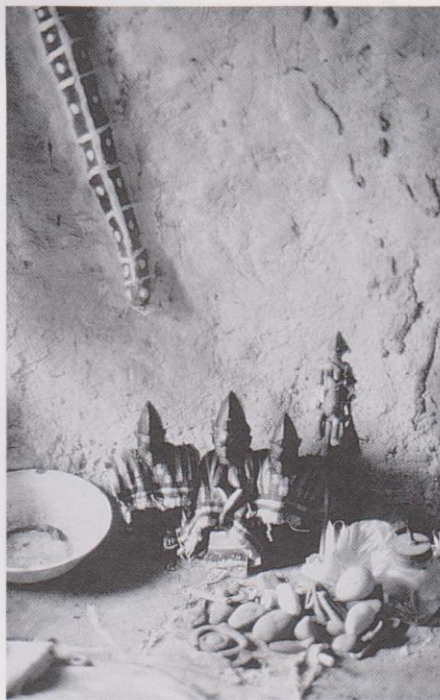


5-21. FIGURE OF ANCIENT MOTHER, KULEBELE CARVER FOR SENUFO PATRONS, EARLY 20TH CENTURY. WOOD. HEIGHT 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (89 CM). THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, WASHINGTON, D.C. GIFT OF WALT DISNEY WORLD CO., A SUBSIDIARY OF THE WALT DISNEY COMPANY

taken from their biological mothers to enter a period of dislocation in the compound of Ancient Mother and under her care. Ancient Mother is said to absorb or swallow the young novices, who are not yet seen as human. She will symbolically give birth to them many years later, after their initiation is complete. New initiates undergo a symbolic death through such rituals as crawling through a muddy tunnel. They are reduced to a kind of emptiness, a liminal or in-between status. Over the long course of their initiation, they confess their breaches of acceptable behavior, and undergo intensive instruction in the male arts of living and in the Poro language and other lore. They submit to numerous ordeals and tests, including small cuts inflicted by Ancient Mother's "leopard." At one point, they pass through a narrow opening called "the old woman's vagina" to enter a symbolic womb. At the end of the process, tutors lead graduating initiates out through an actual door, signaling their rebirth as issues of Ancient Mother. Now fully socialized men and complete human beings, they have been nourished by the "milk of knowledge" at their Mother's breast, as is keyed in the carving's iconography. Only superficially a biological nursing mother, then, an image of Ancient Mother is a veiled and rather abstract sign of the systematic body of knowledge acquired by Poro initiates.

Sandogo

The women's parallel to Poro, Sandogo, is a society that unites the females of a Senufo community. Its members, called *sando*, are trained as



5-22. INTERIOR OF A SENUFO DIVINER'S SHRINE, CÔTE D'IVOIRE. PHOTOGRAPH BY [illegible]

Fo, the messenger python, is meditative, painted on the wall behind a group of carved figures depicting male and female bush spirits. The figures wear garments made of a sacred fabric called fila, which is woven of cotton and dyed with mud and vegetal pigments by Jula craftsmen. Making their will known through the diviner, spirits might order a client to wear a similar fila tunic for protection or to heal. The pile of objects in the foreground includes varied symbols of the bush spirits consulted by diviners, including metal jewelry such as bracelets and rings.



5-23. SENUFO DIVINER WITH CLIENT, 1975

diviners. Collectively, they protect the purity of the several community matrilineages and maintain good relations with a hierarchy of supernatural beings.

Diviners' shrines, which function as consulting chambers, are themselves works of art and they contain others. Shrines are small, round houses barely large enough for the diviner, her client, and her apparatus (figs. 5-22, 5-23). Invariably there will be images of the sacred python, *fo*, the principal messenger between humans and supernaturals. Pythons appear in shrines as relief sculpture in mud, always on the inside and often outside, as well as on diviners' metal bracelets and rings. There will be a calabash rattle for calling the spirits, too, and an important set of small objects—castings, stones, bones,

shells, and assorted other items that are sifted and "read out" by the diviner to determine the needs of a client. Shrine statuary nearly always includes a fairly small female and male couple in wood, often one or more small brass figures, and sometimes a horseman. These represent nature spirits believed to inhabit the bush, streams, and fields beyond the village. Ambiguous and capricious, these spirits both cause and cure sickness and other problems, and it is they who order, through the diviner, a course of action for the client.

The spirits may order a client to commission and wear one or more brass amulets (fig. 5-24). Made by the lost-wax process, these small sculptures are the work of brasscasters who live in their own ward in the community. Amulet motifs include chameleons, turtles, crocodiles, snakes, birds, various quadrupeds, and twinned images. The motif of twins presents another aspect of the male-female duality that permeates Senufo thought. As is the case among many African peoples, the birth of twins is an auspicious yet equivocal event for the Senufo. Twins are considered lucky, but of course they bring special burdens to their mothers, who are more susceptible to disease and mortality than mothers of a single child. Following creation stories about the first Senufo couple giving birth to identical twins, a girl and a boy, twins should be of opposite sex, as paired diviners' carvings are. If they are of the same sex, or if one or both twins should die, their spirits can bring either danger and misfortune or, if properly placated, blessings and prosperity. Thus many people in families that have or in the past had



5-24. AMULETS AND YAWIIGE CHARMS, SENUFO, 20TH CENTURY OR EARLIER. BRASS. PRIVATE COLLECTION

These divination ornaments are worn as protective charms as prescribed by Senufo diviners. Animals especially associated with spirits of land and water, and as messengers to God, include from upper left to right: tortoise with mudfish, chameleon ring with a twins band, twins; lower left to right: tortoise, twins, python bracelet, crocodile.

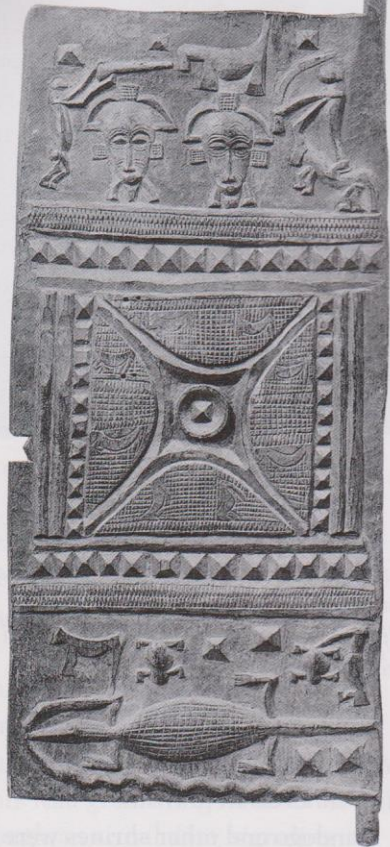
twins take various precautions to acknowledge and invoke twin spirits, including the wearing of twin amulets.

Many forms of Senufo personal adornment, including scarification, amulets, and other jewelry, and certain garments, serve multiple purposes. Pleasant to wear and behold on the one hand, they are also a form of communication with unseen spirits and reminders or reiterations of basic values or cosmology. Women, for example, wear four sets of scars radiating from their navel, like those depicted on the statue of the woman in figure 5-20. Called "male-female twins," the scars celebrate each woman as a source of life and the guarantor of lineage continuity. They link her with Ancient Mother and

with the primordial couple, whose first children were twins.

Sandogo and other shrines were occasionally fitted with finely carved doors (fig. 5-25). The motif on the central panel of this example seems to have multiple interpretations, all of which reflect upon each other. At the most abstract level, it evokes the four cardinal directions that order the cosmos. It can also be seen as a bird's-eye view of the orderly divisions of a farmed field, a symbol of human culture. The circle at the center has also been convincingly interpreted as a navel, and the radiating elements as evoking a woman's scarification pattern and its attendant symbolism. In the lower panel are depicted at least four, and perhaps all five, of the primordial creatures that shared the

5-25. DOOR WITH RELIEF CARVING, SENUFO, C. 1920S. WOOD. 67 $\frac{1}{16}$ " X 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (171 X 65 CM). COLLECTION HELMUT ZIMMER, ZÜRICH AT MUSEUM RIETBERG, ZÜRICH



earth's beginnings with the original couple: python, tortoise, hornbill, crocodile, and chameleon. This lower panel may also be seen as portraying the idea of wilderness, competing supernatural forces, or untamed nature. The upper panel in contrast appears to present the spheres and symbols of civilized human life: a hunter and a leader (or warrior) on horseback, and face masks exemplifying Poro, the main unifying and socializing institution in Senufo culture. Creation stories credit the hunter with separating the humanized world of the village from the wilds beyond. If this interpretation is

correct, doors like this marked the potentially dangerous threshold between the profane world outside and the sacred interior of a shrine by portraying several levels or types of order, power, and knowledge, including as well the essential creatures that populate these worlds.

Shrines and other enclosed buildings contrast in northern Senufo areas with large open shelters, called *kpaala* (see fig. 5-30). These structures, like Dogon toguna which they closely resemble, are also men's shelters. The similarity suggests historical relationships between segments of these two Gur-speaking peoples. Ideally stacked with six and one-half layers of branches laid down at right angles, the *kpaala* roof alludes to the Poro initiatory process, each phase of which lasts six and one-half years. The roof reminds the elders who convene there, and indeed all members of Poro, of their obligations, and of their rebirth as men from Ancient Mother.

Masks and Masquerades

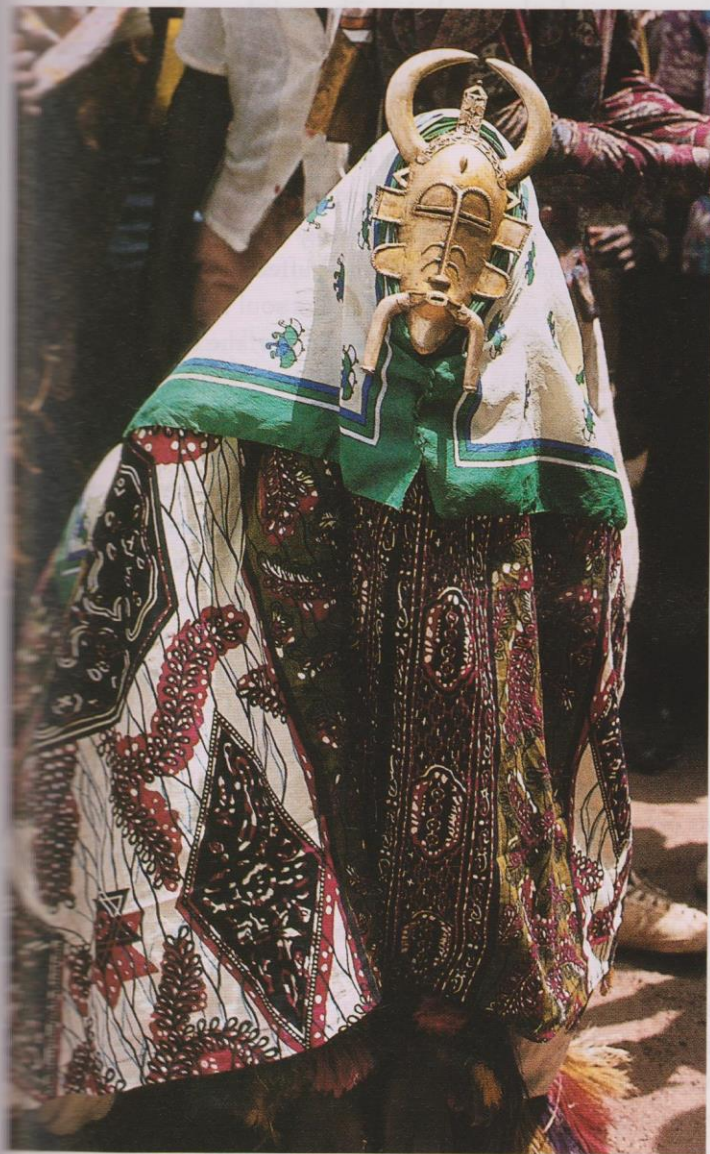
The male-female dialogue so evident in Poro and Sandogo arts is implicit as well in Senufo masking. The Senufo have a large corpus of masks. Most masking is directed by Poro, and much of it is involved with the progress of initiation in its various phases. Maskers also perform at funerals and other public spectacles, and it is these contexts that are explored briefly here.

The most recurrent type of mask is a small face mask with clear, refined features (figs. 5-26, 5-29). Danced by men, these masks perform as female characters. They exist in hundreds of variations, with many different

names. Their symbolism is usually both rich and esoteric; invariably they represent far more than meets the eye. Many encode Poro knowledge and appear in restricted Poro dances as well as in public dances that anyone may attend. Still others are owned by non-Poro organizations. Different versions, too, are made by carvers, blacksmiths, and brasscasters for their separate Poro groups, as well as by Jula weavers. For these reasons, it is normally impossible to understand the full symbolic ramifications of any one mask without complete field data.

The masquerader shown here wears a mask made of brass. He was photographed at the funeral of a female elder in a blacksmith Poro. One of several maskers, all initiates of the middle grade, who danced at this event. Funeral dancing is competitive, yet it is most essentially a celebration of the life and family of the deceased. The youthful energy of the dances is reinforced by the bright scarves and cloths worn by the masker as emblems of civilized life, and by active arm movements. In contrast, the mask itself is meant to remain nearly motionless. These forms, materials, and gestures are all considered *nayiligi*, "freshly beautiful," by the Senufo, and it is the complete character in motion that needs to be understood as a work of art, not its individual elements of mask and costume.

One popular female character, called "Beautiful Lady dance mask," wears a wooden mask with glistening black surfaces (fig. 5-29). Performed by a man, the dance incorporates women's gestures. A masker, for example, might rest "her" horsetail flywhisk on a ruler's shoulder to honor him, as a woman would do.



9-26. BRASS MASK IN PERFORMANCE AT A SENUFO FUNERAL, BRUNDIALIANA, 1950S; PHOTOGRAPH 1984

9-27. GBON AND OTHER MASKERS PERFORMING AT A SENUFO FUNERAL, PORO DIKODOUGOU DISTRICT, 1970

In this picture the Gbon masker swishes his raffia skirt over the wrapped body of the deceased three times to recall the three stages of life the man went through before becoming an elder, but of course the transition/transformation here is to revered ancestor, effected by this ritual.

9-28. MASQUERADE FOR A PORO ASSOCIATION, (SENAMBELE) SENUFO, COLORED FIBER, CÔTE D'IVOIRE. PHOTOGRAPH 1980S.





5-29. "BEAUTIFUL LADY" MASK, SENUFO.
WOOD. MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER, GENEVA

The other most recurrent Senufo mask type is the zoomorphic helmet mask, a form common to many West African peoples (fig. 5-1). Viewed as male, these composite, horizontal masks usually play more spiritually forceful, even violent and threatening roles. Like their female counterparts, they exhibit many variations in name, style, animal references, and

symbolism, and they appear in both Poro and non-Poro contexts. Generically, the Senufo call them "funeral head mask," or "head of Poro," *kponungo*. Some types walk through, spit, or otherwise manipulate fire, giving rise to the name "firespitter," an outsider's designation that should be used cautiously, as many other masks of similar form have nothing to do with fire.

The mask illustrated in figure 5-1 includes many iconographic details that relate to the origin of the world, to important legends, and to the roles of certain animals in carrying out obligations to both ancestors and nature spirits. Quintessentially composite and even deliberately ambiguous, it fuses elements of antelope or buffalo (horns), crocodile (jaws), hyena (ears), bush pig or warthog (tusks), and humans (eyes), while incorporating a stylized hornbill and chameleon between the long horns. The latter two animals, present at creation, refer to specific sorts of knowledge to be mastered by Poro initiates. Combined, the animals are an embodiment of aggressive supernatural power associated especially with the wilderness, powers that are reinforced in Poro through blood sacrifices and incantations.

These bristling masks are critical participants in certain funerals conducted by Poro, when they help to expel the soul of the deceased from the living community. The mask seen walking over the wrapped corpse in figure 5-27 is a variant called *gbon*, an antelope-baboon composite. The soul of an important dead person is believed capable of escaping from the body during the period between death and burial to wreak havoc among the

living. Thus maskers, along with drummers and other supernatural forces marshaled by Poro, must control the soul until it is expelled. When other masqueraders attend, *gbon* straddles the cloth-wrapped corpse and, moving from head to foot three times over, effects the expulsion of the soul. The soul is sent to the ancestral village; the body is buried. Interestingly, the same maskers are also present at the symbolic death of new Poro initiates. Here, their purpose is to aid in the creation of a new being; there it is to create a new ancestor. In both instances maskers guard and guide dangerous and uncertain liminal periods, times when human beings are transformed from one status to another.

Secondary or more popular masqueraders dance for the large crowds attending important funerals, often attended and urged on by musicians and a dozen or more initiates who collect the cowrie shells showered on the masked dancer to honor his skill. Principal maskers also greet elders, chiefs, and other important onlookers. Masquerades therefore provide entertainment at the same time that they fulfill ritual obligations on behalf of Poro and the ancestors.

Quite a few other mask types are danced by Senufo men both within and beyond Poro and funeral contexts. Various types of fiber masquerades (with fully concealing costumes) are important beings in all Poro groves, and are normally renewed for each initiation cycle by members of the senior grade (fig. 5-28). The maskers shown here, called *yelimidy* (or *yarajo*), speak through a voice disguiser for Ancient Mother, the ancestors, and the elders. At once satirical

downs and serious spokesmen of Poro values and wisdom, these spirit beings have multiple and crucial roles in initiations, funerals, and as an instrument of policing and social control. The mask wearer must be particularly adept in aphorisms, punning, and other eloquent uses of Poro language. His costume is variable, being reinvented periodically and within a spirit of aesthetic competition: a harlequin-like assemblage of colorful stuffed fibers and bright textiles with metal and cloth appliqué, braiding, yarn, and other decorative flourishes. The masking ensemble represents well the Senufo aesthetic of *nayiligi*, which references vigorous youthful beauty, a much sought after quality. At funerals *yalimidyó* extorts money from participants and mocks those wearing Western clothes or otherwise flouting accepted behavior. Part of his ritual duty is to challenge the men present, in the secret Poro language, to determine which among them may remain for the burial rites restricted to Poro initiates. The masker also blesses people in the name of the ancestors, calling for good health, prosperity, and many children. His deliberately pregnant belly refers metaphorically to the rebirths signified in both initiation and funerary rituals.

Celebrations

The foregoing discussion of Senufo arts may mislead readers into thinking that art is present and constant in everyday life, which would strongly distort the true picture. In fact, day-to-day life is repetitive and not very exciting here as in much of the world. Whatever art may be present is large-



5-30. KPAALA (PUBLIC SHELTER), SENUFO. PHOTOGRAPH 1979

ly hidden away in diviners' chambers, in shrines, and in Poro groves for occasional use. When displayed during funerals or initiations, art forms emerge as transient and ephemeral phenomena, affective and striking breaks from the relative monotony of normal life, providing color, drama, vibrant action, pulsing music, crowds, and feasting.

Festivals compress into short compass and expressively integrate the most revered values of Senufo life. Funerals reiterate and make public arts normally restricted within Poro groves, adapting them to public spaces and assemblies. Overt displays of *balafon* and drum music, singing and dancing, costuming and masquerading, drinking and feasting may prevail in these relatively brief public versions, but many of the more covert and esoteric symbols and gestures are there too, as if to remind Poro initiates and elders of the cosmology, history, and

values of their people. Dangerous nature spirits are there, though controlled, in the open jaws and sharp-quilled accumulations of composite masks, and guests present for the funeral are tested in their knowledge of Poro traditions by the only apparently jocular *yalimidyó*. The founding couple of the senior matrilineage is there symbolically (or at least was before such figures began to be stolen and sold to art dealers, around 1960), in the carved female and male figures displayed near the *kpaala*, Poro's public shelter in the center of northern Senufo villages (fig. 5-30).

Tourist Arts in Korhogo

By the middle of the twentieth century, continuing modernization, conversions to Islam and Christianity, and local iconoclastic religious movements had diminished local demand for the works of Kulebele carvers. At the

Aspects of African Cultures

Export Arts, Copies, Fakes, Authenticity, and Connoisseurship

Since the late fifteenth century, when exquisite ivories were carved for Portuguese visitors to Sierra Leone and the kingdom of Benin (see chapters 6 and 9), African artists have created art works specifically for foreign clients. Much later, in the 1950s and 60s, thousands of outsiders flocked to eastern Africa to view wildlife, and artists/craftworkers invented hundreds of new forms of art to sell to these crowds. Ebony (blackwood) carvings of wild animals, of elongated Maasai warriors, and of women carrying pots, as well as wooden salad servers, watercolors of idyllic landscapes, and a host of other things, were sold to tourists or exported abroad (see chapter 13). While none of these objects had ever been used in Eastern African cultures, some began to be sold to wealthy Africans as emblems of status and modernity. The manufacture and sale of these objects provided gainful work for thousands of Africans during this period, and "tourist arts" continue to allow people to make a living today (see p. 463).

Other forms of export art evolved in West Africa in the 1960s and 70s, when foreigners began to visit West Africa, often in search of their ancestral heritage. Artists then made copies of masks, figures, stools, staffs, metalwork, and other objects: replicas or interpretations of art used (or formerly used) in ceremonies or in domestic life.

However, Europeans and Americans who were building collections of African art sought to buy only objects that had been used in a "traditional" (preferably

sacred) context. They insisted that only well used family heirlooms, or ceremonial objects that had been stolen or abandoned, were "authentic" African art. Traders found it difficult to sell them new things, no matter how well made, no matter how respected the artist. Even art works made by an African artist, owned by an African client, and used in an African context would be rejected by these collectors if the object didn't conform to styles and forms they recognized as typical of "authentic" art from a region.

Thus began what is today a widespread practice: the creation of new objects that are careful copies of works illustrated in books on African art. These replicas are artificially aged to seem old and rare. Traders can often sell them at high prices. Today there are perhaps more of these artificially aged African art objects in collections, in shops, and on the internet, than there are antique art objects in museums. When Africa traders and artists see the exorbitant prices fetched on the international art market for fine old pieces—Benin bronzes, Dan or Songye masks, a Dogon figure—they naturally turn to creating more of them so as to enter that market. And again, many Africans have made a good livelihood by making and selling these objects.

But this situation creates confusion for curators and collectors who care about the difference, who want to sort out genuinely old pieces made for African use, and actually used, from newly minted copies made to look old from the application of artificial surfaces (producing a deep shine, as if from decades of handling; or textured encrustations, from libations of cereals or blood), or by creating cracks and

abrasions, breaks that are repaired, and so forth. Here enters the connoisseur, meaning "the one who knows." Through years of experience in seeing and handling thousands of objects, such people believe that they can discern which artefacts show signs of recent manufacture and inappropriate use and are thus "inauthentic." This increasingly small group of experts can determine the aesthetic quality (and economic value) of an art object in relationship to other African works in public and private collections. They know materials and styles, the hands of individual artists, the iconography appropriate to a specific genre or historical period, and many other formal nuances and details that come from object-centered study.

But the definition of "authenticity" is contested. Some researchers contend that the connoisseurs are intimately familiar with only a small proportion of African works—those that have circulated in Europe from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century. These scholars argue that works in European collections do not represent the full range of artistic creativity in Africa, and they insist that works used by African communities during the post-colonial period should also be considered to be "authentic." Finally, some academics claim that any object that is made by an African artist is, in fact, African art, and they applaud fakers whose products can fool the "experts." We thus face several questions to ponder. What, exactly, does "authentic" mean when applied to African art? Can outsiders determine whether or not a work was used locally or is of high artistic value? If so, how, why, and by or to whom? HMC



5-31. TOURIST WARES ON DISPLAY, KORHOGO, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, 1979

In addition to wood sculpture by Kulebele and other carvers, figures made by brasscasters are also popular with tourists, along with paintings on cloth of animals, simplified versions of local masks, and adaptations of sacred fila cloth. Some of these wares are also visible on and hanging behind the trader's table here.

same time, the arts of Africa, including those of Côte d'Ivoire, began to attract a broader audience in Europe and the United States. The Kulebele and other Senufo artisan groups have responded by creating art works for this new and growing market. Since the 1950s, they have in all likelihood produced more art works than were created during the entire nineteenth century. The expanding city of Korhogo, in Côte d'Ivoire, has been the main center for this production and its trade, and it was there that this photograph of wares was taken (fig. 5-31).

Two factors have helped Kulebele carvers cultivate this market for their work so successfully. The first is their long-standing asserted right to fell trees and use their wood without payment to people whose land they grow on. This assumed prerogative links with the second factor, control by Kulebele of supernatural sanctions located in a powerful deity called Kafigelejo, who is materialized as a wooden image wrapped in cloth soaked with supernaturally charged substances (fig. 5-32). Threats of Kafigelejo's powers give them an advantage in many transactions.



5-32. FIGURE OF KAFIGELEJO, KULEBELE, SENUFO, 20TH CENTURY. WOOD, FEATHERS, QUILLS, CLOTH. HEIGHT 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (73 CM). MUSÉE BARBIER-MUELLER, GENEVA

Kafigelejo thus represents a recently introduced power figure—a wooden figure with composite additions that we might easily assume was “old and traditional” if we were not aware of its history.

RELATED PEOPLES OF BURKINA FASO

The various peoples of Burkina Faso are agriculturalists, and most speak Gur languages. Archaeological finds from the country consist mainly of enormous burial urns which have not been dated and are difficult to link to

modern peoples. On the other hand geometric grave markers of stone in the north of the country have evidently been carved by a population now known as "Yatenga" for over a thousand years. Formerly known to scholars as the Voltaic peoples (after the former names of the three rivers that drain the region: the Black, Red, and White Voltas), the inhabitants of Burkina Faso are now referred to collectively as the Burkinabe. Among these are a dozen or more groups, some quite small, with distinctive art forms and styles. Aspects of the arts of five of these peoples will be surveyed briefly here: the Lobi, the Bwa, the Mossi, the Bobo, and the Nankani. All except the Bobo (Mande speakers, like the Bamana and other groups) speak Gur languages and are sometimes called *gurunsi* peoples.

Lobi Sculpture and Metalwork

About 160,000 Lobi live in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana. Formerly warlike, even among themselves, they occupy defensible compounds with narrow openings and fairly high walls. They are primarily agriculturalists, like other groups examined here, with millet, sorghum, and corn fields surrounding their somewhat randomly dispersed compounds. These house from about a dozen or so people to sixty or eighty members of an extended family under the leadership of one older man, the family head.

The boundaries of Lobi communities are difficult to discern visually, for there is no center. Villages are comprised simply of several compounds living under the rules, protection, and beneficence of a particular



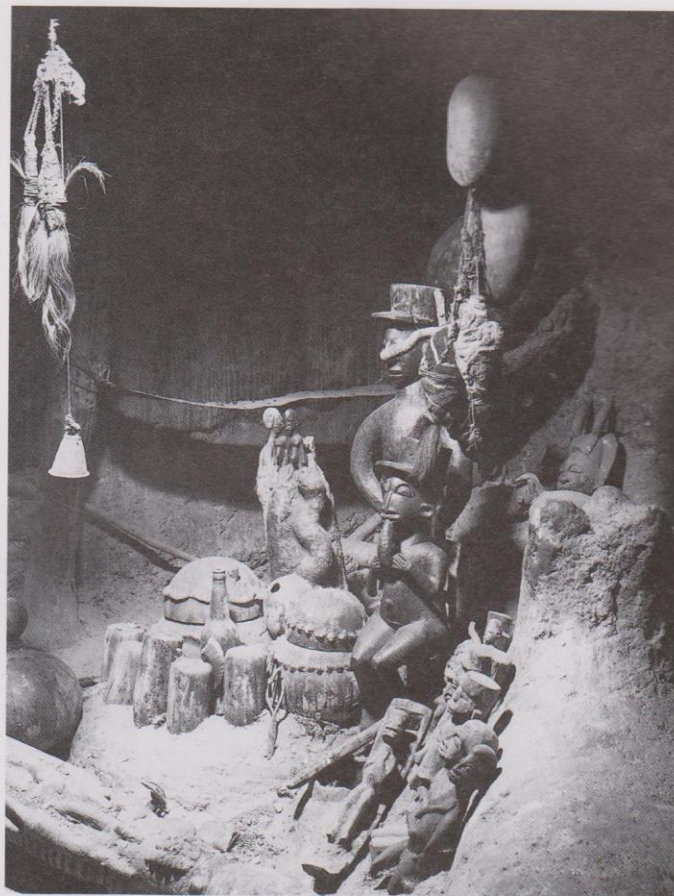
5-33. FIVE BATEBA FIGURES, LOBI. WOOD. HEIGHT 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ –18" (26–45.5 CM). MUSEUM RIETBERG, ZÜRICH

deity, *thil* (plural *thila*), associated with their land. Each family compound too has at least one presiding *thil*. Social behavior is regulated and adjudicated by these *thila*, whose will is passed to ordinary people by priests and diviners. It is *thila*, for example, who order sculptures and other art forms to be made. The most important of these forms is the clay or wood sculpture called *bateba* (fig. 5-33). Human-like in form, a *bateba* acts as an intermediary between a particular *thil* and the human community.

Lobi carvers derive no special status from their work, perhaps in part because anyone can carve without specialized training. They are paid little; indeed, some *thila* are said to adversely affect a carver who takes any money at all. As a result, Lobi carvings are highly variable in style and degree of finish, a fact that does not in the least hinder their effectiveness in shrines. What seems to be more important to the Lobi, or better to their *thila*, is that a *bateba* act, for it is considered a living being able to see, communicate, and intervene on

behalf of its *thil*. While stylized, *bateba* are complete in having the usual body parts, although most are highly simplified in their artistic renderings. Normally heads are enlarged, perhaps so the work of the god will be more effective. Other features may reflect specific powers. *Bateba* expected to fight for their owners, for example, have big hands. Others, considered dangerous, block entrance to harmful forces such as disease or witchcraft, and are depicted with one or both arms held up. Still others have sad expressions because their function is to mourn for their owners. Figures with two heads represent deities whose ability to see in several directions at once makes them exceptionally dangerous and powerful. Images without any specially defining posture or expression, and considered "ordinary" by the Lobi, nearly always have faces that can be seen as grim or angry, for it is thought that only in such a state can the *bateba* act forcefully. Such visual clues to meaning are not always clear, however; the Lobi themselves have conflicting and ambiguous interpretations of their imagery, and regional variations complicate things further. Thus it is always preferable to have data from specific shrine contexts.

Thila may be "found" or "taken." A deity is "found" when it appears as a piece of iron in the bush or when it affects someone strongly, usually through sickness or misfortune. A deity is said to be "taken" when its *bateba* is bought from the original owner and set up in a new shrine, where it continues its work. While shrines may be similar in appearance, each is in fact the unique result of orders received from the resident

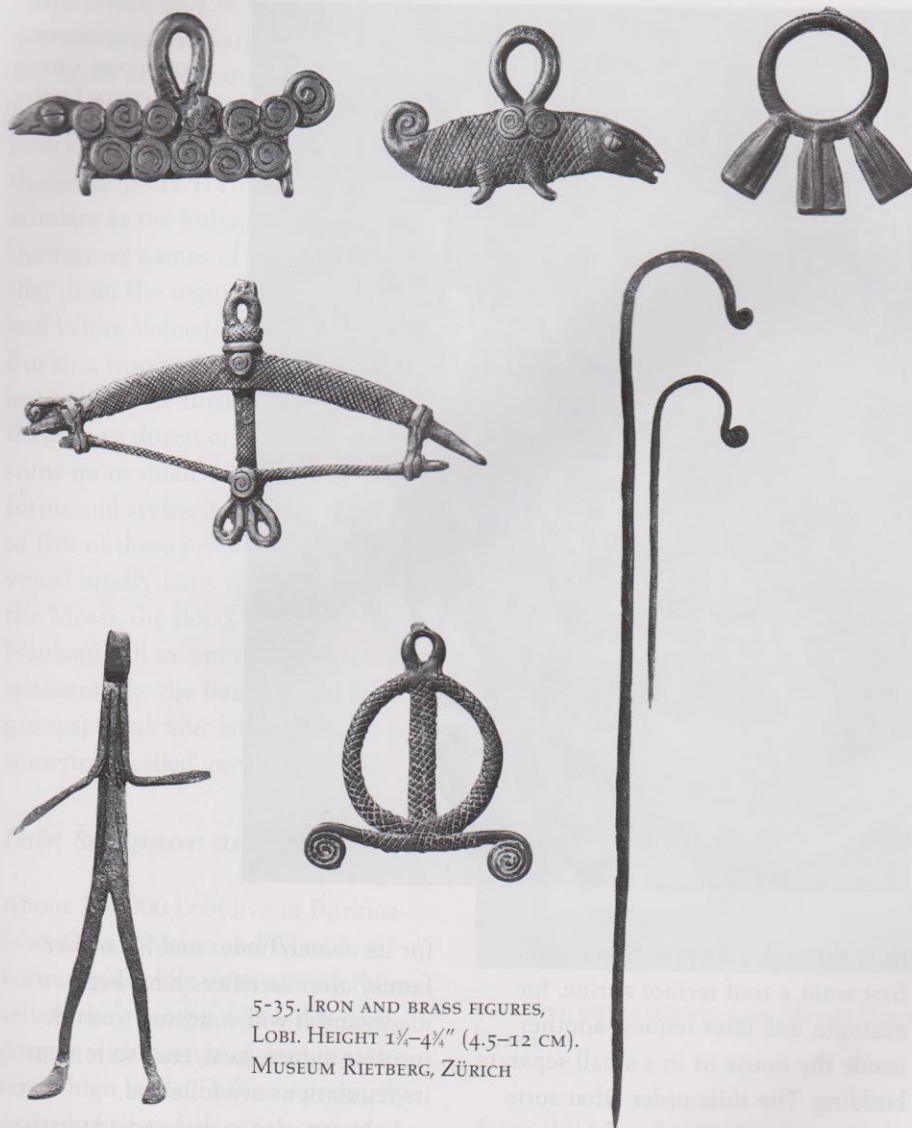


5-34. SHRINE WITH BATEBA FIGURES OF WOOD, CLAY, AND TERRACOTTA, LOBI, MIDEBDO REGION, 1980

thila through a diviner. Some *thila* first want a roof terrace shrine, for example, and later request another inside the house or in a small separate building. The *thila* order what sorts of things the shrine must be equipped with; these often include sculpted figures of wood, clay, or metal, implements such as canes or bells, and ritual pottery. Many of these are present in the shrine in figure 5-34, which also includes bottles, other containers, and seashells, all as ordered by the god. A deity's request can be quite detailed: material, size, pose or gesture, facial expression, and other attributes may all be specified. Many of these differences are meaningful in the context of the god's shrine, priest, and work. A god is believed to work

for its owner/finder and his or her family after sacrifices have been made, and it will continue to work (protect, injure, heal, etc.) so long as its regulations are followed.

Lobi arts also include a wide variety of small human and animal images, implements, and more abstract symbols in copper alloy and iron (fig. 5-35). Some of these are worn as jewelry—ordered by a deity and for the most part protective (as among the Senufo)—and some appear on shrines. Their iconography is not fully known, partly because casters some decades ago competed and made lots of varied forms, some only worn as decoration. Yet others of these small sculptures have fairly specific work to do for the *thila* who ask for



5-35. IRON AND BRASS FIGURES,
LOBI. HEIGHT $1\frac{1}{4}$ – $4\frac{1}{4}$ " (4.5–12 CM).
MUSEUM RIETBERG, ZÜRICH

them on behalf of their owners, whether custodians of shrines or the people who wear them as charms. Small human figures of iron ("black metal") or brass ("red metal") fight against visible and invisible dangers, while chameleons bring riches and prosperity. Snakes appear in many sizes and shapes in both metals, worn on different parts of the body—strapped to lower legs, for example, as bracelets or chest ornaments; they are especially common "workers" for the

thila, and serve varied offensive and defensive roles. Spears, knives, or bows-and-arrows are weapons used by *thila* on behalf of their owners and, similarly, miniature pliers are tied around children's necks so the *thila* can "hold"—that is, protect—they well. Protection against diseases, evil spirits, and potential harmful neighbors are common themes.

Notably, the Lobi are surrounded by people who devote much energy to masquerades, but they themselves do

not dance masks. The reasons for this are not clear but may relate to their lack of age-grade organizations.

Bwa Masquerades

The Bwa people inhabit a region in northwestern Burkina Faso and extend into Mali. The Gur-speaking Bwa have been quite receptive to change, having adapted or adopted masks, for example, from adjacent peoples such as the Nuna, Nunuma, and Winiama. Each Bwa village is governed independently by male elders, as the Bwa are hugely egalitarian. Communities comprise three occupational groups: farmers (in the majority); smiths, who forge tools, cast brass, and carve, and whose wives make pottery; and bards and musicians, who also weave and dye cotton and work leather.

A religious organization called *Do*, a Mande-derived term for "secret" or "spiritual," is a major unifying force in Bwa life. Each community has a *Do* congregation, led by the earth priest. *Do* is at once an organization and an anthropomorphic being, the son of the remote creator god. Considered androgynous, *Do* represents and embodies the life-giving powers of nature, especially the untamed bush. *Do* is incarnated at initiations and village purifications, held just after crops are planted, by an otherworldly spirit masker whose "skin" is vines, grasses, and leaves (fig. 5-36). In some areas, the vivid leafy green body is topped, as here, by an arcing crest of brilliant white eagle feathers. A conical tube of basketry in front forms a kind of mouth. Deliberately and radically non-human in shape, color, and behavior, these sacred organic



5-36. DO GRASS MASK IN PERFORMANCE, BWA, BONI VILLAGE, 1985

maskers celebrate life and help renew the forces of nature. Their power extends also to human fertility. The use of fresh verdant plant material in Do's costume directly evokes its function of regeneration. In wooden masks, on the other hand, a more abstract form of symbolism prevails.

Bwa wooden masks embody nature spirits, who imparted rules for the proper conduct of community life and who are invoked—in masquerades—to benefit humankind and the natural forces on which life depends (figs. 5-37, 5-38). Some masks depict spirits of practical or ideological importance



5-37. SERPENT, MONKEY, AND BUFFALO MASKS IN PERFORMANCE, BWA, PA VILLAGE, BURKINA FASO, 1984

more or less directly. The tall mask leading the procession in figure 5-37 represents a serpent. A monkey and a buffalo follow. More abstract masks consist of a shaped, partly openwork plank surmounting a normally circular facial section. These masks embody "the spirit of growth," dwarf



5-38. BOBO BOLE MASQUERADERS PERFORMING AROUND GRAVE IN TONDEROSO, BURKINA FASO, 1985

spirits, or other supernatural and natural forces not readily apparent visually.

Nearly all wood masks are painted in black, white, and red with high-contrast geometric signs given to the people in primordial times. In general these are symbols or patterns of cultural order, whether economic, political, or spiritual. Their meanings are disclosed by older initiates to male and female novices (Bwa boys and girls in the same age-grade undergo initiation together but only boys wear

masks). It seems that at first only relatively simple meanings are imparted; more esoteric content is revealed as the initiates mature. Thus the interpretations of graphic signs vary according to age and initiatory level, as well as region. Few meanings, though, are codified or shared over time or space, even if the signs themselves—chevrons, zigzags, Xs, crescents, checkerboard patterns, concentric circles, sculpted hooks, and others—are widely distributed not only among the Bwa but also among

neighboring *gurunsi* peoples such as the Nuna, Nunuma, and Winiamu, with whom many mask types and graphic symbols originated. Similar signs appear as well on Mossi and Dogon masks. It would seem that the symbolic interpretation of mask motifs is deliberately left open among the Bwa (and other groups), enabling a tutor to incorporate the latest or most important local teachings, thereby best preparing novices for adult life at that particular place and time.

Wooden masks stand in some degree of opposition to Do leaf masks in Bwa communities. Leaf masks are clearly the more ancient and indigenous form, and it is acknowledged that wooden mask types have been borrowed or purchased from neighboring peoples. In addition, wooden masks act as a divisive force in that they tend to foster competition, with families or clans vying fiercely to create the most elaborate, innovative displays. Leaf masks, on the other hand, cut across family or lineage divisions and act as a unifying force. Where leaf and wood masks coexist in the same communities, they perform separately and belong to rival religious associations. In some southern Bwa villages where both types appear, leaf mask owners consider wood mask users as heretical parvenus and forbid them to participate in Do rites. In the northwest, however, the two mask types embody a beneficial nature/culture interaction. There, leaf masks foster growth in the spring, while wooden masks perform after the harvest to help integrate people and foster harmony in village culture by promoting respect for the rules of proper social behavior.

Mossi Sculpture and Masking

Far more numerous than the Bwa are the Mossi people of Burkina Faso, whose society is organized into states. Mossi states were founded during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when horsemen, arriving from a region to the southeast, in what is now Ghana, superimposed both a language and centralized political systems onto the indigenous farming communities. These farmers, called *tengabisi*, "rulers of the land," consist of the *nyonyose* and the *sukwaba*, who are both blacksmiths and sculptors. The *tengabisi* are subjects of the *nakomse*, descendants of the equestrian invaders. This dual aspect of Mossi culture is recognized today in that the king, called the Mogho Naba, and other *nakomse* rulers hold themselves apart from *nyonyose* earth priests, land owners, and elders, descendants of the *tengabisi*, who lived in the region for hundreds of years before the *nakomse* came. Mossi arts too record this double heritage, as certain figural sculptures are owned and used ritually by *nakomse* rulers in political contexts, whereas the *tengabisi* farmers use spiritually charged dance masks owned by clans and lineages. However, the varied styles of Mossi masks and figures signal an even more complex history of ethnic and cultural mixing in this region. For example, Mossi in the southwest, where the *tengabisi* are descended from Bwa and related groups (Nuna, Nunuma, Winiama), have masks resembling those of the *gurunsi*, whereas Mossi in the north, with different origins and influences, have masks related to those of the Dogon. In this region, art is a useful index in

mapping the history of its various peoples: their settlement, migrations, conquest, and other cultural interactions.

The Mossi employ two types of carved wood human figures: the first are full figures owned by *nakomse* leaders, the second are smaller, more economical or abstract renderings of females; they are owned by women or children. Mossi full figures, which represent the secular political power of chiefs, are carved in dynamic styles of simplified naturalism and in active poses (fig. 5-39). Most depict females. Some wear jewelry and cloth wrappers. The expressive pose of this figure, with bent legs, arms akimbo, and dramatic hand gestures, may emulate characteristic dance gestures of this area. The usual annual public outing of such rulers' figures is the year-end sacrificial rite, when royal ancestors are commemorated by dancing and feasting. In some places elders of local families bring tribute in the form of millet or other foodstuffs to the ruler, reinforcing their allegiance to him, while in other areas rulers ride out to their subject villages after sacrifices have been made to ancestors through the figures. As is common elsewhere, ancestors are believed to reward proper behavior with human and agricultural fertility and productivity, or, alternatively, to punish transgressors with disease or misfortune. Ownership of such figures, including those that belonged to earlier *nakomse* leaders, affirms a king's or other leader's secular right to rule.

The very numerous spare, abstracted figures, generally of cylindrical form and without arms or legs, but often with crescent-shaped heads and prominent breasts, represent young



5-39. STANDING FIGURE, MOSSI, 19TH-20TH CENTURY. WOOD, GLASS, METAL BEADS. COLLECTION THOMAS G.B. WHELOCK

mothers and are often owned by them. Many have pendulous breasts recalling those stretched as a desired feature of motherhood, as well as scars radiating from the navel, which were applied in life to commemorate the birth of a woman's first child. The name for these images, in fact, is "child," *biiga*. The illustration (fig. 5-40) shows figures in several regional styles. Many such "children" were acquired by young wives as aids to conception, as well as to insure that a child will live after



5-40. CHILDREN, MOSSI, 20TH CENTURY. WOOD. HEIGHT (L-R) 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (28.2 CM), 13 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (33.8 CM), 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (25.1 CM). COLLECTION THOMAS G.B. WHEELLOCK

birth. In some regions the figure is treated as if it were a child: clothed, played with, offered milk, tied to its "mother's" back, and so forth. A second use was as a plaything, a doll for a girl child, who even at a very young age practiced being a mother with this surrogate child.

In contrast to figures, Mossi masks embody spirit powers, nature or ancestral spirits of the sort found among many farming peoples. In some regions masks are housed within ancestral shrines during periods when they are not being danced, to be augmented by powers that control the earth and productivity, all in the service of the well-being of the people and their natural environment. In some Mossi regions masks represent the spirits of ancestors, while in others, they are totemic nature spirits



5-41. MASK WITH STANDING FIGURE, MOSSI, EARLY 20TH CENTURY (?). WOOD. HEIGHT 42 $\frac{5}{16}$ " (1.09 M). MUSEUM RIETBERG, ZÜRICH

Other masks in this style have tall openwork rectangular planks similar to Dogon sirige masks. Since the Dogon live only about thirty miles away from this region of Mossiland, historical interchange is evident. Prior to the twentieth century, the Mossi tried repeatedly to conquer parts of Dogon country, but obviously shared art forms indicate that peaceful exchange has occurred as well.

belonging to lineages or clans associated often with a specific animal. A typical mask from the Mossi Yatenga region, near Dogon country, has an abstract head section faced with an oval (fig. 5-41). The oval is bisected vertically by a notched ridge, with two angular eye holes on either side. Two sets of animal horns spring from the top, and behind them rises a short plank on which stands a finely carved female figure. (Other Yatenga masks have tall openwork planks much like those on Dogon *sirige* masks.) The mask embodies a merging of bush and human powers, and suggests that human, perhaps ancestral, powers may be dominant. The human or animal figures or parts represented on such masks are spoken of by some scholars as "totemic," in that they represent sacred characters that participated in origin legends told by the clans or families that own the mask. At the same time they represent nature spirits responsible for the protection and productivity of the land and people. Masks dance at burials, funerals, agricultural rites, and other important events such as blood sacrifices to ancestors for the wellbeing of the clan.

Bobo Masking

The Bobo are a heterogeneous, Mande-speaking people with a complex history who have resisted centralized political institutions. Village organization is democratic and councils of elders are the decision-makers. Bobo farmers, especially, are almost certainly indigenous to their current area although some later immigrant groups from core Mande areas further north, such as traders and other

occupational groups, are now part of the Bobo amalgamation. As among the Mossi, there are literally dozens of Bobo mask styles and types in various materials: leaves, cloth, fiber, and wood. An assortment of several can be seen dancing in a circle around the grave of a recently deceased man, to honor him and to insure that his soul reaches the ancestral realm safely. Some Bobo groups hold that a masker—a "shadow man" or *dou-
le*—must accompany a dead person's soul on its journey from this world to that of the dead.

Wooden masks, though carved by smiths, are danced by both farmers and smiths. Their imaginative reinterpretation of zoomorphic forms is remarkable, especially horns, which can be long or short, single or double, and curve backward or forward. Most are combinations of both animal and human traits cleverly merged. Other inventive masks that are neither human nor animal have long flat faces, sometimes with notched noses or edges, with horns or abstract open-work planks above, some with star-like projections. In earlier times the prevailing coloration of Bobo masks was black, white, and red, but these days a greater variety of colors is employed, including yellow and blue. Some of the heavily stylized and abstract forms represent sacred *dwo* spirits, sons of the remote creator god, Wuro, while other, less powerful masks are danced primarily to entertain. The latter, as helmet or cap masks, take a variety of animal forms: antelope, warhog, ram, monkey, rooster, hornbill. All these wood masks, like those of other Burkinabe groups, are completed by costumes of hibiscus fiber that swings, swishes,

and flows to exaggerate the already vigorous, sometimes staccato, and always athletic dances. Each mask, of course, has its own history, dance, gesture and music style, and name; its specific character also includes its role, vices and virtues, and its interactions with other masks and the audience.

In addition to their attendance at burials and funeral rites, Bobo masks appear in two other vital contexts: agricultural rites at harvest ceremonies, and during initiations. Masks of leaves and fiber (called *Dwo* after the nature spirits represented) help restore the balance between nature and culture; these are similar to Bwa examples discussed earlier (the Bwa are neighbors). These masks absorb evil or toxic forces from freshly harvested plants, which can cause sickness or conflict, returning the undesirable substances to the bush. Millet that is not "cleaned" by masks, for example, is believed to cause disease or infertility.

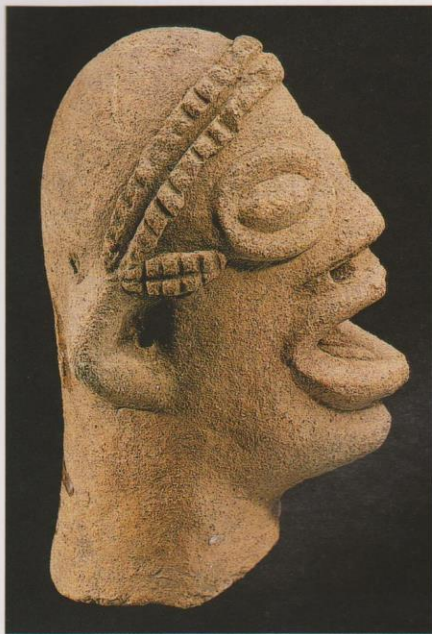
Initiation, which takes place on and off for a period of fifteen years, re-establishes the world order established in primordial times by Wuro, the creator. Masks of leaves, fiber, and then wood are danced, respectively, at the three main initiatory stages during which the novices, all males among the Bobo, are taught the ways of the gods and ancestors, the conduct of orderly village life, as well as the myths and important historical events of their people. They undergo seclusion, ordeals, tests, the learning of a secret language, multiple rituals including symbolic death and rebirth, and other facets of classic initiatory cycles. The making and dancing of masks, both by instructors and the

initiates themselves, has long been central to Bobo initiatory teachings, as are the public performances of masked dances at key times during the long initiation period. All told, Bobo masking is enormously complex, more so because it is in rather constant change, even today.

Koma Terracottas

South of the Mossi states, but north of Asante territories, numerous small populations have lived for centuries. Between about AD 1200 and 1800, in a district known as Koma (or Komaland), in what is now northern Ghana, the dead were buried with both human figures and animals of fired clay. Ornaments depicted on the figures seem to match the amulets and ceremonial dress of modern populations in the area, and archaeologists thus believe that local peoples are descended from the cultures that created these ceramic works.

Koma figures share a distinctive style—their faces have round eyes rimmed with coils of clay, and pierced nostrils (fig. 5-42). Noses and chins vary in shape, and the overall forms of bodies and heads seem to be somewhat haphazard. Few formal features link the Koma terracottas to those unearthed along Niger River sites (see chapters 3 and 4), but they do share some characteristics of the Dakakari terracottas from northwestern Nigeria (see chapter 3). Both Koma and Dakakari clay objects include human and animal figures, both seem to have been connected with funerals, and both include human figures whose mouths appear to be open in a funeral chant. Of course, the two traditions are separat-



5-42. HEAD BROKEN FROM FIGURE,
KOMA REGION, GHANA. TERRACOTTA.
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

ed by several centuries and by hundreds of miles. Much shorter distances of time and territory separate the Koma work from the funerary terracottas of Akan peoples—but the Koma pieces look nothing like their Akan counterparts (see chapter 7).

Nankani Architecture

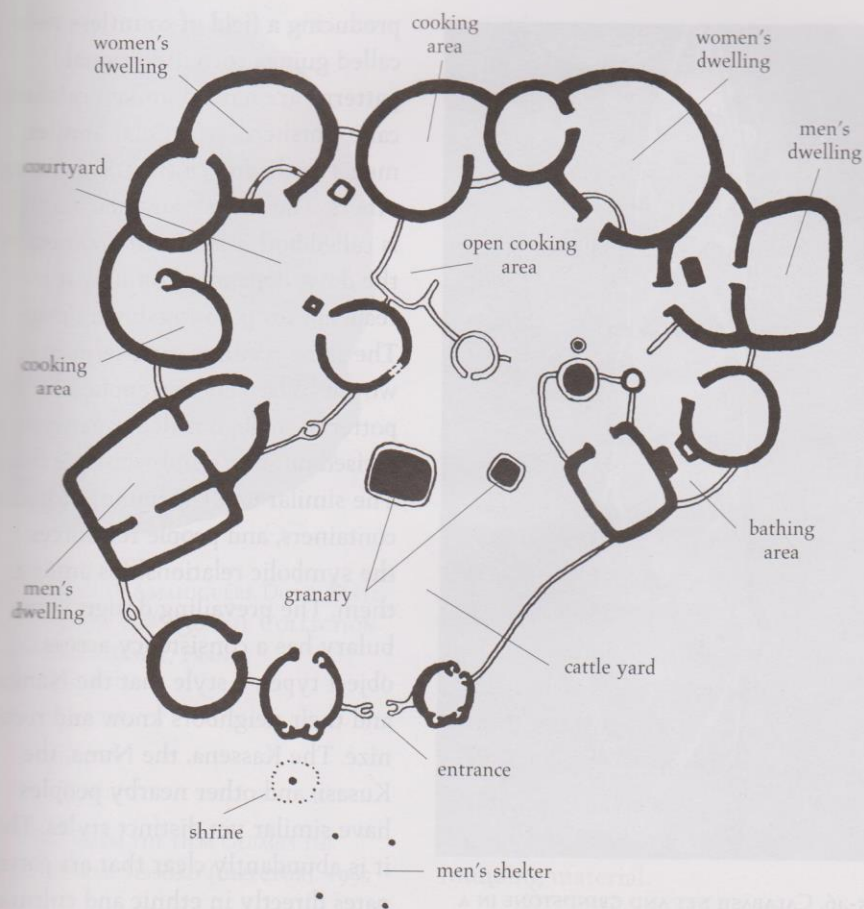
Like the mask styles of Burkina Faso, which tend to combine underlying organic forms with geometric surface patterns incorporating human and animal references, the built environments of the peoples who live in the southern border areas of the region share common stylistic vocabularies while exhibiting striking local variations, the latter being indications of cultural difference. The Senufo and the Lobi are the westernmost exam-

ples of these architectural forms, which can actually be linked to structures as far east as the Jos Plateau in Nigeria (see chapter 3). In fact the domestic structures of this broad band of savannah may represent the African continent's most impressive adobe and mud dwellings.

While many of the communities straddling the Burkina-Ghana border have been well studied and photographed, the homes of Nankani peoples, a Gurunsi group, are especially beautiful (fig. 5-43). As is true of most architecture of the region, walled compounds are surrounded by cultivated fields and scattered across the landscape. The plan in figure 5-44 depicts a relatively small compound, though it incorporates all the forms and ideas of larger versions. A single narrow entrance faces west. Outside



5-43. NANKANI COMPOUND, SIRIGU, GHANA. PHOTOGRAPH 1972



5-44. PLAN OF NANKANI COMPOUND. DRAWING AFTER J.-P. BOURDIER AND T. T. MINH HA



5-45. INTERIOR OF A NANKANI WOMAN'S DWELLING, WITH FOOD STORAGE WALL AND STACKED POTS, SIRIGU, GHANA. PHOTOGRAPH 1972

the entrance in a cleared area is the open men's shelter. Immediately inside the entrance is the cattle corral. Dwellings are at the eastern side of the complex, their entrances oriented on a direct sight-line to the main compound entrance. A low barrier just inside the entrance to each house enables defenders to shoot arrows at invaders from dark interiors, an important feature in a land where farmers needed to protect themselves from unexpected attacks.

The creation of living areas is a cooperative yet gender-specific venture. Men do most of the building, while women decorate wall and building surfaces inside and out. The compound itself is also viewed as gendered. Areas outside the compound are male-oriented, as is the corral inside; the further interior courtyards and dwellings are female-oriented. Visitors thus pass from public and male realms to increasingly private and female ones. The protected interior spaces of women's houses include more private, intimate features: bed, food storage wall where pottery is stacked and food stored (fig. 5-45), grindstone and a net holding nested calabashes (fig. 5-46), interior cooking area, and shrines. The Nankani recognize symbolic correspondences among house, woman, and pottery, stressing the woman as childbearer and nurturer. Women's houses, then, are also wombs and, indeed, the plan shows well the rounded shapes of both women's houses. In contrast, the two houses occupied by men in this compound are rectangular.

A woman's house is a place of fertility and regeneration, where a woman conceives and nurtures her children, stores and prepares food,

and enshrines her most revered possessions. Notably, these houses (and others) are built much as pots are, in courses, as if coiled. Like pots, too, their exterior surfaces are burnished after geometric patterns have been incised and pigments applied. Entries to houses and compounds are spoken of as "mouths"; doorways on women's houses are also called genital openings. Doorways are thus recognized as liminal spaces, vulnerable thresholds between places of contrasting quality and purpose.

Life transitions, too, are articulated architecturally. A woman's sideboard is called the "face of the deceased," for the senior woman, after death, is placed on her bed facing this carefully sculptured storage unit. Her death rituals also involve the breaking of her most revered calabash and her small personal, sacred pot. After a senior male's death, a hole is made in the house he slept in for the removal of his body directly to the farm area; thus the compound entrance itself remains undefiled by death.

The entire compound is embellished with and protected by richly meaningful, essentially geometric patterns (see fig. 5-43). The single most important decoration is a more or less continuous median band, ridge, or series of lines running horizontally around each structure. This is called *yidoor*, "lines running straight," a word that also means "rows in a cultivated field" and is used as well for the two parallel wooden base supports that strengthen the bottom of most baskets. The motif is also called "long eye," which signifies longevity, and it is sometimes rendered as a snake turning back on



5-46. CALABASH NET AND GRINDSTONE IN A NANKANI WOMAN'S DWELLING, SIRIGU, GHANA. PHOTOGRAPH 1972

itself, probably suggesting eternity. All together these various associations imply unity and continuity for the family and dwelling so encircled. The decoration is also practical, as it deflects the course of rainwater and thus impedes erosion.

Other patterns are notable. A bisected lozenge design, visible on the dwelling to the right in figure 5-43, is called *zalanga*, the name for the net sling that holds a woman's private calabash collection and her most revered objects and amulets, including her personal shrine (see fig. 5-46). Shapes are sometimes filled in with close cross-hatched grooves,

producing a field of countless motifs called guinea corn. Additional patterns are named broken calabash, cane, potsherd, triangular amulet, men's cloth, and cloth strips, among others. The same triangular motif is called both filed teeth and neck of the dove, depending on how it is read, apexes pointing down or up. The same rectilinear patterns are woven in baskets and applied to pottery. Analogous dense patterns are incised on men's and women's faces. The similar embellishment of houses, containers, and people reinforces the symbolic relationships among them. The prevailing design vocabulary has a consistency across object types, a style that the Nankani and their neighbors know and recognize. The Kassena, the Nuna, the Kusasi, and other nearby peoples have similar yet distinct styles. Thus it is abundantly clear that art participates directly in ethnic and cultural identity here, as it so often does on the continent.

OUAGADOUGOU AND CONTEMPORARY ART

As noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the peoples of the Western Sudan have been in constant interaction with Mande-speaking populations for at least a thousand years. It should therefore come as no surprise that Dogon artists now work in Mali, or that Ouagadougou (pronounced *Wagadugu*), the capital of Burkina Faso, has a burgeoning art scene that attracts artists from Mali and Senegal and welcomes international visitors.

Dogon artists have studied at the Institut National des Arts (INA) in



5-47. INE-KOUH. AMAHIGUÉRÉ DOLO, MALI. WOOD. HEIGHT 19 1/2" (50 CM). COLLECTION OF SERGIANE CAUWEL, FRANCE

Bamako, the capital of Mali, and some of the art produced by members of the group Bogolan Kasobane refers to Dogon themes (see chapter 4). One of the graduates of the INA, Aminghere Dolo (born 1955) is from a family of blacksmiths, and therefore could have easily chosen to carve images for shrines, masqueraders, and foreign tourists in his home town. Instead, he sculpts twisted figures of wood in a studio located in Segou, a city in Mali whose population is primarily Bamana. His work has been featured in a festival of the arts in Segou, together with painters, musicians, and masquerade performers. Although the surfaces of Dolo's sculptures are clean and smooth, some of his work has the haunting formlessness of Tellem figures (fig. 5-47); their features are barely discernable and appear to have not fully been liberated from the surrounding material.

Burkinabe painters, sculptors, and installation artists are able to display their work in an arts festival in Ouagadougou, which began in the late 1990s. However, the fine arts festival is overshadowed by the influential FESPACO, the Panafrican Festival of Cinema and Television, which was first held in 1964. The winning film at this annual film festival is given a "golden stallion" in honor of the princess who rode a stallion into battle and whose son founded the Mossi state. In 1995 this award was bestowed upon the film *Guimba*, directed by Oumar Sissoko of Mali. The set and costumes for this epic drama of despotism and revolt were designed by the group of Malian artists known as Bogolan Kasobane (see chapter 4). The still photograph shown here (fig. 5-48) is from a scene featuring mounted warriors arrayed in historical costumes.

5-48. STILL FROM THE FILM *GUIMBA THE TIRANT*. OUMAR SISSOKO (DIRECTOR), 1995

