

# WEST AFRICAN Journal of ARCHAEOLOGY

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**45 (1 and 2) 2015**  
Revue  
**QUEST AFRICAINE**  
**d' ARCHEOLOGIE**



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# Interrogating Anthropomorphism in Benin and Northern Edo Art: Some Tentative Notes for Historical Clarifications

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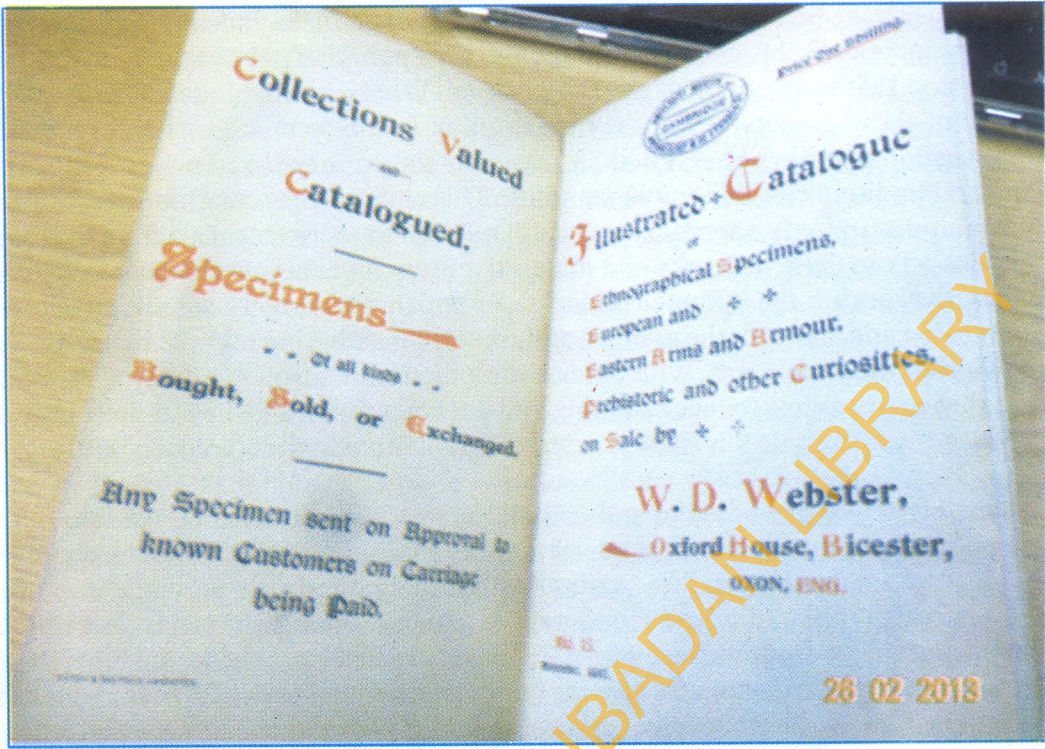
## **Abstract**

This paper interrogates a rare anthropological collection from Edo North gathered together between 1908 and 1910 by Northcote W. Thomas, first colonial government anthropologist in Nigeria. After collection, the objects have been stored up, largely ignored, at the University of Cambridge, Museum for Archaeology and Anthropology. The paper questions the resultant long time de-contextualisation and isolation of these objects that have, over the time, made it remote to link these evidential materials and their producer culture and neighboring cultures. In an attempt to re-contextualize the objects, a comparison is made, of highly anthropomorphic Benin court art, which has for a long time, politically, dominated Northern Edo land but its character is not represented in Northern Edo art and selected anthropomorphic objects from the Thomas collection. The idea underlying Benin artistic production is basically anthropomorphic, revolving around the Benin king and hierarchy and hence a court art, whereas there is paucity of human representations in Northern Edo land which intriguingly also doesn't have the political structure to support it. Using the older language age evidence of forms of Edo language spoken in Northern Edo land, the paper queries the possibility of a south-north movement to create the works under reference. Perhaps there had been an earlier north-south movement and then a later south-north returnee movement whereby the works in the Thomas collection would represent those of the earlier northern Edo autochthons and ancestors of present day occupants. The Thomas collection may be remnants of an earlier tradition before Benin suzerainty gained full grounds in the 19th Century.

## **Introduction**

Collections of African art exist in very large numbers and quantities outside their producer-continent. Many of them were deliberately removed from their producer cultures for various reasons. Primary among these reasons, it is said, was to study the cultures that produced such art that was so different from what their collectors thought of as art. However, the forcible nature of the seizure of these works, coupled with the fact that on arrival in Europe they were exhibited as curiosities to be sold to lovers of exotica, tells a different story. It is a narrative that has endured to this day.





**Plate 1:** The opening pages of No. 15, November 1897 W. D. Webster sales catalogue of anthropological materials from all over the world but containing cast metal objects from Benin City under the head 'Ethnographical Specimens'. The punitive expedition of Benin took place in February 1897. Source: MAA Museum library collection, Cambridge

Thus began the denigration of African art and their black producers. Today, such vilification continues, in spite of attempts at reaching a better understanding of the issues involved. Many of these artworks are now held 'captive', locked up in cases often in damp and unattended environments and, in a number of instances, without as much as token attention being paid to them. From the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne to the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, from the Volkerkunde museums in Friburg to Berlin, incontrovertible evidence exists of this disregard of collections of African art in Germany, as in many countries in Central Europe, England and France, as well as in America<sup>1</sup>.

In perhaps all the cases with these collections, they were 'badly' collected. That is to say that the works were often poorly accessioned, poorly gathered such that, in *W. Afr. J. Archaeol. Vol. 45 (2) 2015*



many cases, the provenances of many of them remain in doubt to this day. This has further increased the puzzle surrounding a category of art that was at best ill understood at the inception of their acquisition. What is available as information for many of these objects where they exist today in the west are bits and pieces of information that have best relied on reasoned conjectures based on local histories and oral traditions for their understanding. This situation has conditioned the use of the multidisciplinary approaches, even in relation to more recent art from the same regions where these artworks and material culture objects were removed. We also know that during the colonial period the African was largely subservient to the colonialist and, as such, the manner of the colonial gathering of these materials can be viewed, in all fairness, with at least a modicum of suspicion today. This point here has implications for accessioning and documentation and, hence, there may be good grounds to argue that there are misrepresentations in the colonial collections.

As the history of pre-colonial and colonial Africa becomes clearer, we find that a number of these materials have started to play significant roles as material evidences for understanding cultures and their products previously poorly understood. Oral traditions, iconographic studies, family histories as well as linguistic studies are some disciplinary endeavours that have shed valuable light on these objects that unfortunately are far removed from the reach of African scholars. It is now tedious to embark on studies of traditional and ancient African arts in foreign lands over the fast growing contemporary arts of Africa. Besides, western scholars who have easy and ready access to these materials because most of them are domiciled in western museums, lack the sensibilities for their in-depth studies. As such many of the works are now redundant. The few foreign scholars that show interest in them are at best only able to study them perfunctorily. Collaboration between western and African scholars, which might have helped to salvage the situation, is unfortunately not much encouraged. Then the continuing poverty of Africa makes it impossible for local funds to be made available to its own scholars to visit the places where these materials are currently in keeping and residence. Even moving these works to Africa for exhibition purposes is cumbersome and expensive. The result is that these works are not sufficiently or properly exposed to their original owners and the offspring of their makers, let alone local scholarship.

When objects of culture are removed from their immediate producer-environment, the process of de-contextualization that takes place is ordinarily quite enormous. When they have been inappropriately removed for a very long time, their history becomes lost. What we find is that with some luck we may begin to record a new social history for them, but such objects must have been in active use in their new



abodes for the recording of a social history to become possible. Rather than stored away, they must have been exhibited and showed, moved around, and comments on and about them carefully recorded and preserved. Academic activity around them needs to have been encouraged and sponsored. Today, with the huge possibilities that the Internet provides, they ought to be made available to their producer environments, if known, in order to allow for and permit local sensibilities to participate in the discourse around them. This has been possible in the case of ancient Benin artworks, such that many of them in various collections outside their producer culture have been studied, and such studies have been merged with those of local scholars to shed much desired light on their enigma.

A rich and telling collection that lends itself to social history analyses is that of the British anthropologist, Northcote W. Thomas. The collection is yet well studied by British or Nigerian scholars. This paper will look at the works from the Northern Edo part of Nigeria from where Northcote W. Thomas, took quite a large number of cultural objects to the United Kingdom, which later found their way to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. Thomas also took about 9000 photographs of the region from which he collected the objects. An attempt by Roger Blench and Mark Alexander in the mid-1990s to reconstruct and record the history of the works from the time they first started arriving in Britain in 1909 did not see the light of day, they managed to publish an article each in the Nigerian Field. (Blench, Personal Communication 2012) Since then, one or two other attempts to look at aspects of the collection, not necessarily pertaining to its stock of objects from Northern Edo, have been made by Paul Basu<sup>2</sup> and Joseph William<sup>3</sup>. Basu has studied the works that Thomas collected from Sierra Leone, but more important is the fact that he has offered them back to Sierra Leone by way of Sierra Leone Heritage. (<http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org.about/>) Joseph Williams, in his own case, had just commenced research for his Ph.D and hoped to look at the materials from Eastern Nigeria in the Northcote Thomas collection. He later wrote back that he could not come for the work.

### **Collection of Northcote W. Thomas from Northern Edo land**

Coming back to the Northern Edo materials in the Thomas/MAA Cambridge collection, it is pertinent to say something about the region from which they were collected before proceeding. First thing to note is that in art-historical scholarship little was known of the northern parts of Edo land when Thomas ransacked the region to gather the materials he collected between 1908 and 1910. But in contrast, the popular Benin kingdom had become well known shortly after the British punitive expedition of 1897 that triggered the dispersal of Benin palace art outside

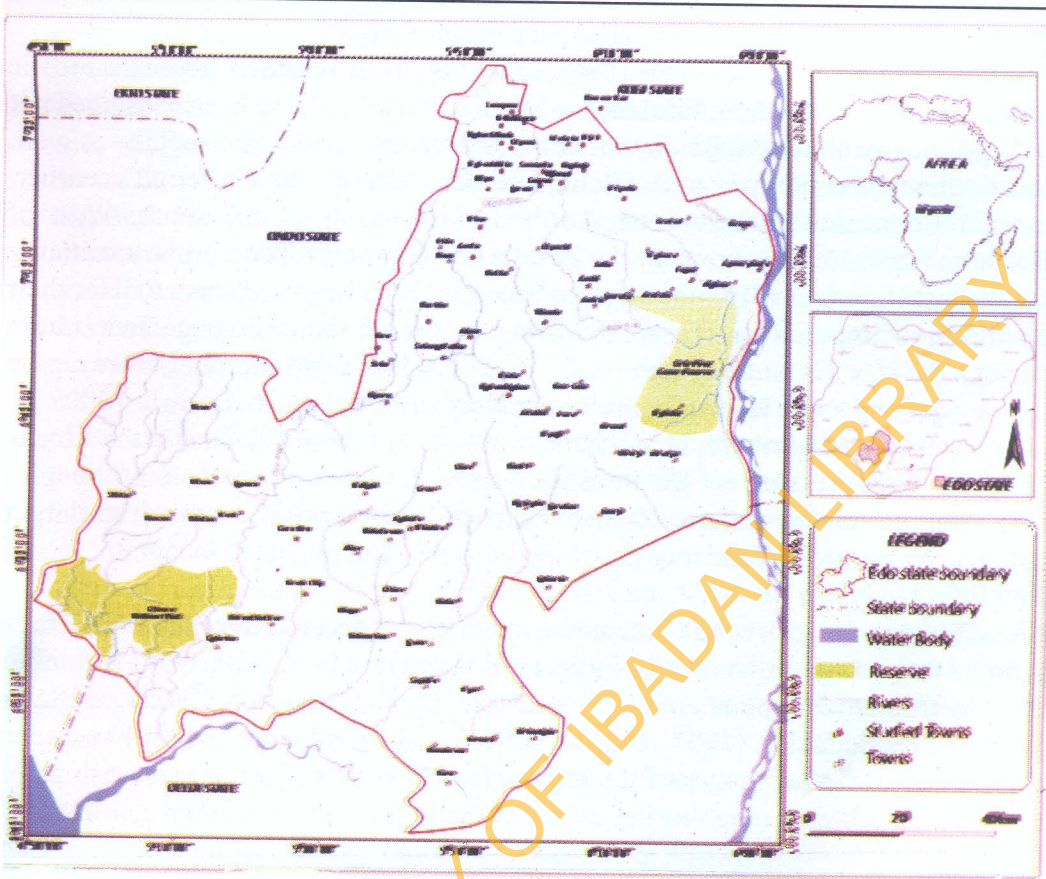


their producers' culture and environment. Benin artworks were taken out to Britain shortly after the punitive expedition, and subsequently spread around the rest of Europe and America. The Northern Edo area was incontrovertibly under the control of Benin. The name Benin itself is thought to be foreign and there are a number of accounts relating to its coinage, but we now know that the kingship and people of the town refer to themselves, their language and their town as Edo, and this is the name used to refer to them even in Northern Edo land.

The Oba of Benin, whose influence shortly before the punitive expedition was said to have shrunk as a result of various political and social strife, ruled Benin as a divine sovereign and had political influence on the diverse areas collectively known today as Northern Edo land. Colonial pressures from within and farther afield are blamed for the gradual shrinking of the empire even though the northern parts under reference continued to owe allegiance to Benin. At the height of his success and power, the influence of the Oba of Benin is reported to have spread as far as Lagos and Badagry towards the south, Otun towards the north-west and beyond Onitsha in the direction of the east. (Brabury, 1973) So large was the influence of Benin that several other outposts reportedly willingly volunteered to come under its umbrella by paying taxes and tributes. Undoubtedly this was the reputation of Benin that the British heard of before they got to the city. This brought them into a fairly long but open communication for commerce and led to the subsequent conflict that later resulted in the punitive expedition. Therefore, it is understandable that within a decade of the fall of Benin, a British anthropologist was sent to Benin province to gather data on the people that produced the fantastic bronze casts that were now in foreign custody and had become well known all over Europe. But why Thomas ignored Benin, so to say, and decided to concentrate his efforts on the northern parts is still a puzzle<sup>4</sup>.

Northern Edo land (Fig. 1) is a hilly and very difficult terrain. Some of the heaviest rainfall in the region occurs in this area. Most of it is dense forest merging into wooded grasslands. I daresay today that the region might not have recorded very significant changes in the terrain since Thomas was there. It remains the least developed part of present-day Edo state. The people eke out a living as subsistence farmers.

Auchi, Igarra, Ibillo and a few of the other local government headquarter towns are perhaps the most populated and more modern places in the region. The present inhabitants of the region are now mostly Christians, though there are sizeable numbers of Muslims and traditionalists, while a great number combine their



**Figure 1:** The research area covered in proximity to Benin and other boundaries.

imported religions with local ones. Festivals and the performance of various traditional rites still occupy a central place in the culture of the region. Imported goods brought from the bigger nearby cities, such as Benin City about 100 plus kilometers away, and a few locally manufactured products dominate the markets. Some of the more popular locally made products include utilitarian objects manufactured from wood and metals, pottery and woven cloth. In the service of the traditional religion and festivals, masks and masquerade paraphernalia are sometimes produced; wood and metal staffs (Pogoson, in Egbokare, et al., 2011) are made as symbols of authority and power. There is evidence of the people's creativity in the diversity of their handmade products and in the intricacy of their designs.



### **Benin and Northern Edo Art-historical Relationship**

It is some wonder now that in the 21st century very little is known about the artistic productions from Northern Edoland, so much so that they have been subsumed not only politically under the Benin, but culturally, economically and socially as well. The dominance and power of the Benin kingdom, which I have referred to earlier, exerted tremendous pressure on Northern Edoland from the south. West of Northern Edoland is the home of the Yoruba (see Figure 1). The Yoruba are among the earliest Nigerians to imbibe western education and they used it as a tool for their own kind of imperialism. Thus the Yoruba instituted their language and culture through the establishment of some of the earliest schools and churches in the region thereby gaining some level of control over Northern Edoland in the early 1900s. To the (Pogson, in Egbokare, et al., 2011) north of Northern Edoland is the Ebirra. They too bore pressure on the numerous small groups of “acephalous” peoples inhabiting the region under reference. Surrounded by such pressures from larger cultures, Northern Edoland thus developed sparsely and remained incognito.

The attention of linguists was first drawn to the region because this rather small area is home to the largest diversity of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Quite a number of linguistic studies pioneered by Northcote Thomas (Blench, 1995) and later furthered by Schaefer, (1987) Elugbe, (1973) and Egbokhare, (1990) have been carried out on the languages of the region, their diversity and the relationships of these languages with neighboring others in the region. These studies confirm that forms of the languages spoken in Northern Edoland are older and more archaic than that which is today the dominant major language spoken in Benin from where inhabitants of Northern Edoland claim to have originated. Therefore, taking off from this point that the languages spoken in Northern Edoland are anterior to Benin language, one wonders how this linguistic situation may have arisen if indeed there was a south-north migration to populate Northern Edoland. In that Northern Edoland is located in the hilly parts of the region, I suspect that the early autochthonous inhabitants might have used the hills as protective cover from the slave raiders of the mid-15th century. Many communities in the hilly areas of Northern Edoland have abodes both at the top and at the base of hills. The cultures of those on the hills might have been preserved intact as a result of limited contact with other peoples.

I seek to use material culture evidence to attempt to corroborate what the linguists have established. Unfortunately, however, there was until just recently, scant extant ancient evidence of the traditional artistic productions of the people to study and





The materials in the collection range from utilitarian objects to carved decorated objects in wood, such as combs, jewelry boxes, pipes, hairpins and bottle covers and a few anthropomorphic sculptures in wood and metals as well as decorated objects for body adornment, festival paraphernalia and accouterments, and masks. They remain well preserved with minimal deterioration of their physical quality. They are wrapped up and boxed in a conditioned environment and are seldom brought out except when there is occasion to do so, such as when a qualified approved researcher comes by. In this particular paper, my attention focuses mainly on the anthropomorphic full figure objects in the collection in comparison with Benin figures to make some statements concerning the implications of the anteriority of Northern Edo land to Benin, as the linguistic evidence strongly suggests. I am interested in studying selected anthropomorphic objects in the Thomas collection against the background of the well-known figures from the ancient kingdom of Benin. This initiative shall hopefully lead to making a few comments about the question of the relationships between Benin and Northern Edo land, filial or not.

Anthropomorphism is basically the idea of conceiving non-humans in human terms or forms, or the ascription of human attributes to some non-human entity. It is also loosely used in African art history to describe works after the human, just as zoomorphic is used to describe animal representations. This concept has been understood for a few centuries and scholars have studied the idea in different contexts. As a philosophy and a way of organizing thought, anthropomorphism is commonplace in traditional African art. For a very long time, Africans have placed man at the centre of their every thought and represented the human form in all their physical products and outputs and in various contexts, from religion to the political and the utilitarian. Humanity is, in fact, celebrated in African spirituality. Anthropomorphic objects are known all over Africa, in every African culture, and they range from the production of anthropomorphic masks in bronze to ceramic objects, and from full figure woodcarvings to mud altar objects. In the southwestern part of Nigeria in particular, three-dimensional sculptures representing human beings abound. In Benin, the famous court art of its palace boasts good examples of anthropomorphic works. Outside of the palace, there are scant examples of anthropomorphic representations except, of course, for the important mud sculpture representations of the Olokun cult, a water spirit cult, whose worship spreads across all of the southwestern parts of Nigeria, especially in the coastal parts and areas with fairly big rivers.



### Northern Edo Art Works

Until recently, figural works in Northern Edo land were unknown. Three seasons of fieldwork in Northern Edo land between 2002 and 2004 and my recent work in Northern Edo land following Thomas's route have yielded very little in terms of figural works in any of the commonly used representational materials in the region. What I found in small numbers were masks, usually face-masks and a few helmet masks used in ritual display during the numerous festivals of the people. In the farthest northern part, around Ososo, their owner-users claim that outsiders, principally the nearby Ebirra, their closest immediate northern neighbours, produced these masks. Interviews conducted in Ososo during the *Echiane festival* reveal that the local wood carvers have ceased to produce masks and other religious items; hence they now have to look elsewhere for their sculptures to be made. The work of local carvers is now limited to the production of farm and household utility objects. Of the masks produced for them by their neighbours, it was reported that a model is provided that the external carvers copy. The forms of the works produced are fixed, these masks must replicate the forms of the models provided for them to qualify for use within the community. Besides this, many of the masking traditions now known in Northern Edo land, particularly between Igara and Ososo at the eastern end, have strong roots in Ebirra culture. Enwan, Dagbala, Ojah, Ojirami and Uneme towns located between Igarra and Ososo. Brass casters in the Uneme towns, which number about four in the region, were noted for their prowess in metalworking, and were credited with very proficient carving skills in the past, but there is no evidence of that today. The Uneme, famed metalworkers now produce all the farming implements and tools as well as guns for hunting game. It seems that towns such as Ibillo, Okpe, Ugboshi, Somorika and Ugbe, with closer proximity to Yoruba land, tend to depend on their Yoruba neighbours for their own products and hence there is a close stylistic affinity in their artistic productions. For instance, works from Okpe in the Thomas collection that I paid some attention to in a forthcoming paper share undeniably close stylistic affinity with artworks in Yoruba land.

I have carefully identified and made a selection of anthropomorphic works, full figures and masks in the art of Northern Edo land in the Thomas collection as discussed below. These materials have never been displayed or exhibited. They are even unknown today to the present inhabitants of the places where these works were collected from by N. W. Thomas. Generally speaking, carved full figures from the region are scant and not naturalistically rendered; rather they are angular but with attention paid to the details of body parts (see plate 3b and 4). As with the Yoruba,

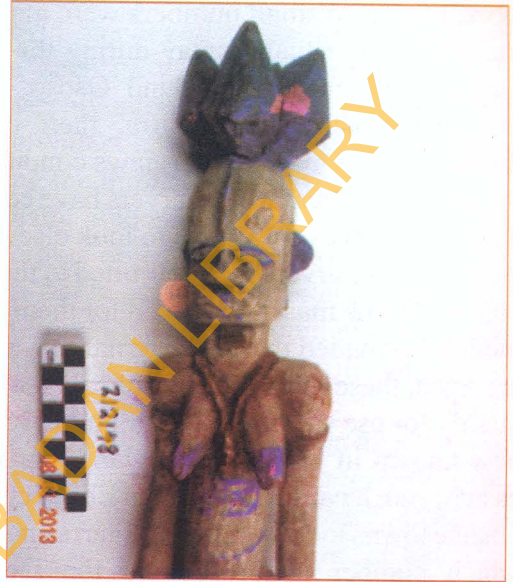
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the common belief is that one's destiny lies in one's head. Where there is coiffure, it is intricately done in a highly decorative manner as in the masks; parts of the head are sometimes depicted in a merely suggestive manner, with the eyes represented by simple shapes such as dots, slits or just rounded holes.



**Plate 3a**

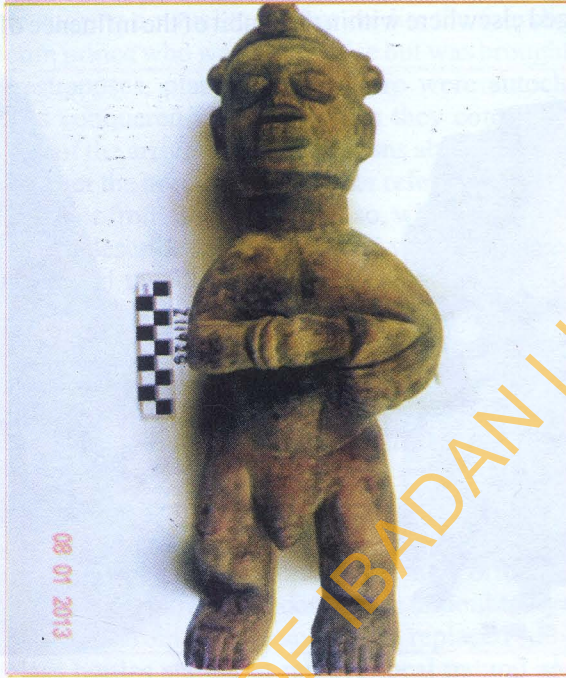


**Plate 3b**

**Plate 3a** Close-up of torso and limbs on a base and **3b** Close-up of torso and head. Typical carved wooden figure from Northern Edo land in the Northcote Thomas collection at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Notice the attenuation of the limbs and the use of colour. The coiffure is large and elaborate.

The eyebrows may be raised lines above the eyes or they may be two-raised horizontal lines or even two half ovoids. The anthropomorphic works are generally roughly carved with the lines of the knives showing clearly. Minimal attempts are made at smoothening and rounding them out, the reason for the prevalence of cubic works. Perhaps this situation occurred because of the scant tools available for smoothening and sanding. Their carving implements were clearly limited to very basic cutting and shaping tools. Indeed, the whole idea of representations in the shape of human beings starts with the representation of the head and its features and that is why masks equate to full-bodied human beings, even when the masker is absent or the mask stands alone. Among Northern Edo peoples, as earlier indicated, the tradition is that the head is the most important part of the body and in it resides

some of the equally very important units of the human being. The eyes, mouth, nose and ears are highly ranked organs. Of course, in the head itself lies the power of the intellect, which transmits wisdom.



**Plate 4:** A drummer figure from Aroko in the University of Cambridge MAA collection. This is one of the most naturalistic of the few full figure images in the entire collection. It is deliberately rounded out rather than cubic. It is decorated with bangles, wears face markings and on the head is what looks like a cap with some raised rounded objects possibly charms. This is definitely a depiction of an ordinary personage.

Generally speaking of the Northern Edo, the production of human figure objects in wood, metals or in mud is principally meant to serve as representative objects in the worship and service of particular religious purposes. There is, however, a small group of objects that are not necessarily religious but meant for secular purposes. These include toys such as dolls and some utilitarian objects of common everyday use, which bear human images and decorative designs. Although present in the collection, they are not considered here. They will be discussed in a forthcoming paper. Because Northern Edo consists of largely independent acephalous groups of people with no central potentate, their artistic productions are unlike that of Benin where the glorification of the king was the chief purpose behind the creation of artworks, not disregarding the production of utilitarian, ornamental, and prestige objects.



Northern Edo land was farther into the hinterland and so could not benefit directly from the trade with the coast, as did Benin. Most of the prestigious objects produced in Benin were actually meant to serve the kings and the noble heads of these traditional institutions (examples in plates 5 and 6). There was a hierarchical structure that was serviced in Benin but was not encouraged elsewhere within the ambit of the influence of the Benin king.



**Plate 5**



**Plate 6**

**Plates 5:** Ancient Benin art has a high level of stylization. The plaque showing full figures of possibly soldiers going by their dress and habiliments, but certainly personages of rank and position. **Plate 6** represents the typical Oba head sculpture.

In terms of style, Northern Edo art was representationally schematized after nature but the main aim was to satisfy the cultural needs of the people in their rituals and other socio-economic and domestic needs. They did not have that paramountcy system that accounted for the special circumstances of the Edo king. In Benin, the aim was to glorify the king and, so, not only did his personage dominate the representations from there, he was represented in a perfect state as indestructible and eternal. The style of the few human figures from Northern Edo land are motivated and conditioned by the communality of the society, thus making them representational rather than naturalistic like in Benin where the art was solely meant to serve the kingship.



## Discussion and Conclusion

Now, what are the implications of these conclusions for the history of the peopling of the whole of the present-day Edo region? The kingship that produced Benin art had, ab initio, been traced to relations in Ile-Ife, ancestral home of the Yoruba, even though new materials coming out from Benin suggest a novel twist that credits the founding of the Oranmiyan dynasty to an exiled Benin prince who wandered to Ife but was brought back when the need for him arose. One presupposes, plausibly, that there were autochthonous inhabitants whom the kingship class conquered and over whom they consolidated their power and began to rule. By the time of the arrival of the Europeans about the 14th century, Benin had clearly exerted its power over the northern parts under reference and the latter were already enjoying protection and cover from Benin. If this is so, what was the situation in the region before the Benin dominance described above? Was the whole region populated by bands of acephalous peoples who lived together at their own convenience before they started to come together under powerful kings? How come the forms of the Edoid languages spoken in Northern Edo land are older than what is today spoken in Benin? Why is there no monarchical structure in the administration of Northern Edo land? Why are the arts of Northern Edo land markedly different in form and in style from that of Benin? These and many other pertinent questions agitate our mind in our studies of this area.

The art of Northern Edo land gathered by Thomas are an indication that a lot of art/craft activities were going on in the region long before Thomas and certainly before the influence of Benin started to take root there. The coming of the Portuguese to Benin and the subsequent introduction of western trade and commerce undoubtedly affected the region to the extent that goods imported from Europe and Benin replaced some of their production needs. For instance, glass bottles started to replace local natural and man-made storage containers. I have noted that the introduction of glass bottles conditioned the making of lids for them after their original lids might have got lost or damaged. These carved wooden bottle tops are the subject of another discussion of Northern Edo arts in the Thomas collection in a forthcoming paper.

Regarding anthropomorphism in the arts of Northern Edo land, judging by what is available in the N.W. Thomas' collections, there appears to be very little attention paid to human representations and naturalism even through the idea of anthropomorphism underlies most of the non-secular three-dimensional productions of the people. As I have indicated earlier, the need for naturalistic representation was not present there as there was indeed no structure on which to base such arduous work. In Benin the idea underlying the artistic productions was basically anthropomorphism. The Oba was a god and his representations indicate so. Even in the famous plaques of Benin art, we find that the Oba's figure treated as bigger and is more profusely decorated than other personages that are represented alongside his royal majesty.

Going by that acceptance of anthropomorphism as encompassing any depiction of the human form or aspects thereof in art, Northern Edo art, indeed, lies at the other extreme



from Benin art. In the context in which the latter was produced, there was, as is well known, a system of patronage enabled by the monarchical structure of Benin society. In other words, there was in place in the Benin Kingdom a class of people in whose honour and under whose commission anthropomorphic works could be created, works that portrayed the monarch and his functionaries naturalistically and otherwise. The argument of this paper is that it is the absence of this structure of politics that accounts for the paucity of anthropomorphic art in Northern Edo land. There were no big patrons to commission such works or command their production; there were no awe-inspiring sovereigns or leaders in these acephalous communities whose stature would have naturally drawn artistic homage in the form of artworks done to represent their glory and splendour. In that the political society was organized around rituals of communally-held power, ritual art, as opposed to anthropomorphic art, abounds in the Northern Edo collection in the form of staffs and other such ritual objects produced for shrines and not for individual potentates.

It is interesting to note in this regard that even though Northern Edo land later fell under the sphere of influence controlled by the Oba of Benin, anthropomorphic artworks were not produced in Northern Edo land in honour of the Oba. What may one surmise from this? Is it that the Northern Edo artists were more reactive to the immediate conditions of their political society, and did not feel compelled to respond artistically to the context of the larger Benin Empire in which they were located? A related speculation would be that these artists, by force of ingrained customary practice, were not used to producing anthropomorphic works to honour powerful people, and so did not see the need to create such art to represent the form of the Benin monarch and his functionaries. The implications, therefore, would be that the people of Northern Edo land had become accustomed to one form of political society, and the later emergence and vast development of the Benin Kingdom, under whose suzerainty they were to eventually fall, was not enough to shake them out of their old habits. In this specific case, the old artistic culture of not producing anthropomorphic art because there were no human beings worthy of such artistic honour in the communities of Northern Edo land prevailed. Can we then conclude that in the arts as in the linguistics of Northern Edo land old customs die hard, habits that predated the emergence of the Benin Kingdom, habits that had become much too entrenched to be uprooted by later developments in the wider sphere of the Edo experience?

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>I spent six months in 1997, at the centenary of the Punitive expedition, travelling all over Germany and Austria recording and photographing works of art from the ancient kingdom of Benin in cultural Museums and found in them close to a thousand Benin objects. They are largely redundant. Noteworthy are the collections in Berlin, Leipzig, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Bremen, Köln and Freiburg, among many others that I visited.

<sup>2</sup>Personal Communication with Dr. Roger Blench in Cambridge December, 2012  
Dr. Paul Basu has worked with the materials N. W. Thomas collected from Sierra Leone where he went after his tenure in Nigeria was truncated. Basu has also been studying N. W.

Thomas as an anthropologist of some reputation even though he was often denigrated in the literature.

<sup>3</sup>Personal Communication with Joseph Williams in London, June/July 2013. He had organised an exhibition of some of Thomas's photographs in London and was interested in writing about them until, I think, the security question in Nigeria, especially in the eastern part of the country where he was interested in doing fieldwork, scared him off. I think he eventually abandoned the research.

<sup>4</sup>I perused the Thomas papers in the Haddon collection of the University of Cambridge main library to no avail. In some of Thomas's letters however, it seemed clear to me that he preferred to lay emphasis on acquiring common everyday objects from common ordinary people and the study of their language. In doing this he recorded thousands of photographs, which put him ahead of his peers in the introduction, and use of the camera in anthropological studies. He also made wax cylinder recordings of songs and folklore as well as collecting medicinal plants.

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### **Acknowledgement**

This paper was first presented at the End-of-Term Workshop held at the University of Ghana, Legon, Noguchi Centre, Accra, Ghana from the 15th to 22nd September 2013. I am grateful for funding provided for my “fieldwork” work in the UK by the Cambridge Africa Collaborative Programme of the Centre for African Studies, Cambridge University, which offered me the position of a Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College for six months, and to the Museum for Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), which allowed me access to its collection. <http://www.sierraleoneheritage.org/about/>

Fieldwork was conducted in Northern Edo land in June/July 2002. Support for this fieldwork was provided by the College and University Affiliations Programme, ASJY 1333, of the U.S Department of State.

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ISSN 0331-3158

