

# WEST AFRICAN JOURNAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY

PUBLISHED ON BEHALF OF THE WEST AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

**EDITORIAL OFFICE:**

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA.

Telephone: +234(0) 8033936868; +234(0) 8068110175  
Cables & Telegrams: UNIVERSITY IBADAN (WAJA)



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4<sup>th</sup> March, 2016

Chioma Ifounu Pogoson,  
Institute of African Studies,  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Dear Ifounu Pogoson,

I wish to notify you that your paper on "Some Utilitarian Objects from Edo North and the Northern Edo and Benin Artistic Relationship," is accepted for publication in our International journal of *West African Journal of Archaeology*, Volume 46(2), 2016. I congratulate you for this unique opportunity.

Yours faithfully,

Prof David A. Aremu,  
Chief Editor.

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## Some Utilitarian Objects From Edo North And The Northern Edo And Benin Artistic Relationship

Ohionna Ifouanu Pogosen  
Institute of African Studies  
University of Ibadan  
Ibadan.

### Abstract

The history of Northern Edo land, Nigeria has been subsumed in the history of Benin kingdom and indeed, due to oversimplification, northern Edo history has been reduced to the history of Benin. Presently, the only available means to salvage the history of Northern Edo land remains the art objects collected by Northcote Thomas from Edo land, between 1908 and 1914. The collection is now domiciled at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) of the University of Cambridge, unutilized. The paper therefore undertook a comparative iconographic study of selected objects from the Thomas' collection with Benin art, in an attempt to make some more specific and perhaps categorical statements about a possible Benin-Northern Edo artistic relationship. Some of the works analysed from the collection include kola nut bowls from *Otu*, *Uzebba* decorated kola nut bowls, *Agbede* bowls, and *Okpe* decorated ladle out of others. Evidently these artworks are prestigious objects, yet the Edo north community is devoid of such powerful central administrative system that could be in demand of such objects. This raises questions about the peopling of the region. From the available evidential materials, under consideration, it was then postulated that there could have been the possibility of north-south movement and a later south-north movement in that region, which has caused a thinning-out of the culture that produced the Thomas' collection. The paper concluded that the makers of the selected objects from the Thomas' collection might be different from the present day inhabitants of the region.

### Introduction

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) of the University of Cambridge holds easily the largest known number of artistic materials from Northern Edo land, Nigeria. These materials were gathered together and collected by a British anthropologist, Northcote Whitridge Thomas, who worked in the area between 1908 and 1914. A large portion of the materials he collected for the British government finally found its way to its present abode in the MAA after his contract in Nigeria was abruptly terminated due to some internal crisis, and he was recalled to England. The social history of these materials in the United Kingdom, where

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there is evidence that they moved around a bit from one institution to another before finally being domiciled at Cambridge, still needs to be clearly written out. Part of it may be found in Basu (2016: Forthcoming) and Blench (1995: 20-28) and in the records of the MAA. The significance of these materials lie in the fact of their being perhaps the only extant examples of the material culture of the people of Northern Edo land, Nigeria, from that period.

### Location of Northern Edo land

Northern Edo land is situated north of Benin and is contiguous to the ancient Benin Kingdom. Benin City, capital of Edo land since early times, is now the capital of Edo State. The state has a population of about 6 million people distributed into ten local government areas. The northern part of the state, bordering the Yoruba, the Igala/Nupe/Igbira, and the river Niger, consists of four local government areas. These are *Akoko Edo*, *Etsako*, *Esan* and *Owan*.

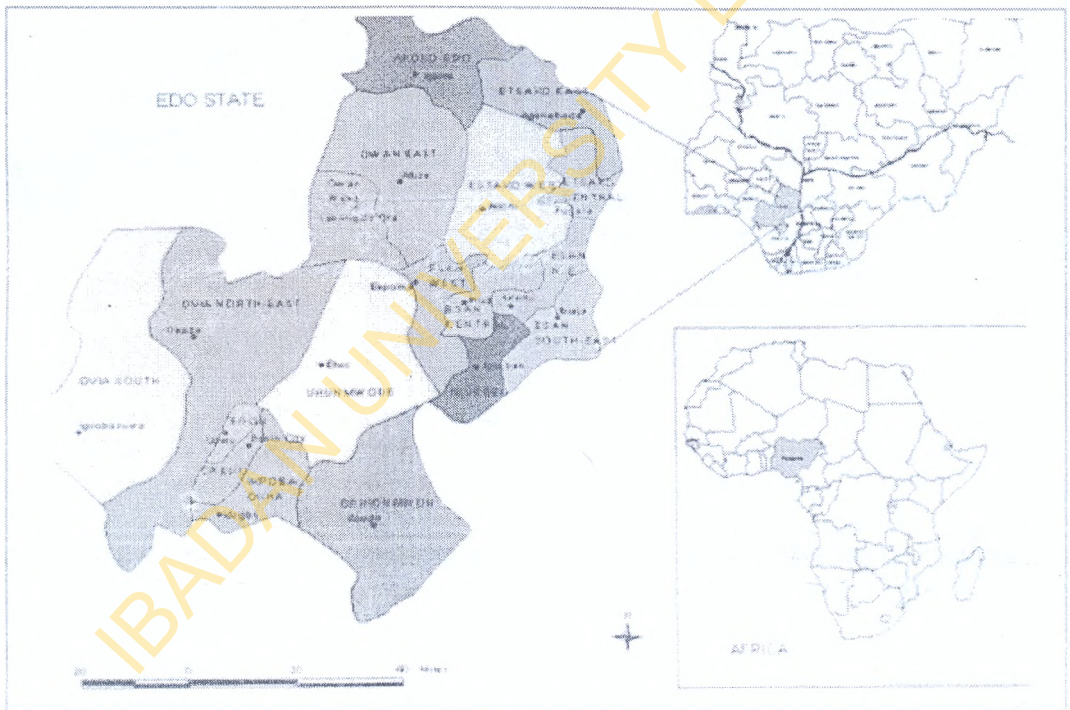


Fig. 1: Edo State Local Government Areas (LGAs)

One of the major problems facing cultural studies of the northern region has been that of over-assumption and the oversimplification of the history of the area because of the long history of dominance by the Benin Kingdom in the southernmost parts of the state, to the extent of reducing the history of Northern Edo to the history of Benin. That Benin Kingdom had control over the entire area to its northern reaches and, to a large extent, to the south, even extending westward on to Lagos, has been noted. But evidences coming from the study of the languages of Northern Edo have instigated a rethink and created the impetus for this study. For instance, it is now known that the languages spoken in the entire region are of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo family, and that the Edoid sub-branch originates from the Niger-Benue confluence area. (Elugbe 1973). Although the variants of this form are more or less mutually intelligible all over present-day Edo State, the dialects spoken in the northern parts are said to be older and more archaic versions than what is spoken in Benin City today. The older forms of Edoid have been retained in and among the hill populations of Northern Edo.

The above raises new hypotheses. If the Edoid dialects spoken in Northern Edo land are older than the variant spoken in Benin, could the Benin Kingdom have taken off in the northern parts? Does the linguistic evidence of a relationship resonate with other aspects of the culture in the north and southern parts? Benin arts are quite well known and the art of brass casting continues to date, but there is virtually no evidence of similar arts in Northern Edo land in spite of these linguistic and historical evidences of a close relationship. There are scant evidences of plastic arts in Northern Edo land today, and indeed practically nothing in the Benin style. What can we make out of this? Unlike in Benin, where the art was basically to serve the court, Northern Edo land has no monarchy. Leadership is by the age grade system and so groups of elders of a certain age grade preside over the community. I suppose, as a result, masks and communal initiatives take precedence. Borgatti (1979: 36-51) and Picton (1991: 34-49), as well as a few others, have studied the masquerade traditions and festivals of some sections of the area. This paper aims to undertake an iconographic study of some of the decorative art forms from the MAA collection with a view to comparing them with Benin art in order to make some more concrete statements about a possible Benin-Northern Edo artistic relationship.

### **Historical Relationship of Benin and Northern Edo**

As indicated earlier, Northern Edo land consists of four local government areas. Of these four, Owan seems to have the closest filial relationship with the monarchy where among the Ora, one of the sub groups in Owan, it is said in their oral history that they are direct descendants of Oba Oguola, a powerful Benin King whose reign

Egharevba (1968) puts it at about the mid-16th century. It is for this reason that an Ora man is exempted from curtsying before the Oba of Benin. Such a privilege is only permitted among the Ora in Edo state today. It is said that this is confirmation of the filial relationship that existed between Uguan, founder of Ora, and the Benin monarchy. The histories of the origins of the Akoko Edo, Etsako and Esan local government areas is rife with accounts of their relationship with Benin but not in any aspect of their intergroup interactions with the Benin are any of these peoples accorded the kind of respect accorded the Ora. Writing on totems in Owan, Ogbomo (1997:19-21) noted common totems between the Benin monarchy and Owan as indicative of a relationship, which, he noted, occurred during the second wave of Owan migration from Benin. He said this migration occurred between 1504 and 1537 as a result of what he identified as a "royal exodus" from Benin. He reports that Uguan, founder of Ora, left Benin in the same generation as when Ohiobo and Ima left to found the neighbouring towns of Ihievbe and Emal and establish them as a people respectively.

It is widely recorded that movements out of Benin to found communities in Northern Edo land were conditioned by the exigencies of periods of tyrannical rule, and only groups such as the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Etsako and Esan are known to have retained the chiefly lifestyle of Benin. According to Ogbomo, the Owan people rejected the more hierarchical system of rule in Benin and created an acephalous society in Owan when they settled there. Ogbomo (1997: 19-21) thinks that this suggests not only an opposition to the heavy-handedness of chiefs in Benin but underscores an entire rejection of the chiefly system.

Benin art is essentially court art that was meant for the glorification of the monarchy (Duchateau, 1994). Mostly found in bronze, the Benin artists also worked in wood, mud, leather and other materials. Bronze casting ensured that the artworks remained more or less permanent unlike work in other materials that are less permanent. Bronze became the exclusive preserve of the king, just as carving done with the tusks of elephants killed within the Oba's territories. Other citizens were permitted to produce their images in other materials. There is, in fact, a saying in Ora, as well as in some other Owan towns, that when a hunter killed an elephant, and there were many elephants in the area in those days, he had sent himself on an errand to Benin. The reason for this saying is that the Oba, as a matter of right, had to be given one of the elephant's tusks, just as he also had the first right to buy the other tusk. At any rate, considering the high value placed on ivory, few could afford to buy it. This saying demonstrates the influence of Benin in that part of northern Edo land and the Ora/Benin relationship. So powerful and respected was the Oba that only the best was reserved for him, and his subjects were supposed to present him with

majestic gifts willingly, freely and happily. If tyranny truly accounts for the movements out of Benin, then it is not baffling that the monarchy was not replicated in northern Edo land.

On the issue of the descent of *Ora* and Uguan from the Benin monarchy, it has already been mentioned that no *Ora* male may curtsy or genuflect when greeting the Oba of Benin. This is particularly significant because all other subjects had to. The *Ora* male simply had to raise his fist right hand supported at the elbow with his left palm or briefly bow, and immediately the Oba would know that this was a descendant of his royalty from the *Ora* extraction. As a young man, I had accompanied my late father, then a police officer in charge of Benin province, to the Oba's palace and watched what I have just described play itself out. Today, *Ora* people pride themselves on their filial relationship with the Benin palace. Even though other peoples in northern Edo land also claim descent and movement out of Benin to found their own independent groups, no examples are as vivid as the *Ora*. However, the whole idea of migration from Benin has been queried since linguistic evidence indicates that older forms of Edoid are spoken in the northernmost parts of present-day Edo State.

To interrogate the issues of migration from and to Benin within the area from the west bank of the river Niger to the east banks of the Owan and Ose rivers (see Figure 2) is to understand the peopling of the northern Edo region.

If the inference from linguistics is true that the most archaic forms of Edoid languages spoken in the northern parts of Edo are an indication of origins of the Edo from the hill sites of Northern Edo land, the questions that are immediately raised are: When did they move down south to form the kingdom? What instigated the move? Was it the move that gave impetus to the kingship before trade with the Europeans on the coast consolidated and empowered the Oba? We may also probe further, as a means of understanding supposed movements backwards towards the north when, as has been suggested, tyrannical rule in Benin might have conditioned a return to the lands from which the people had originally come. To throw light on these pertinent questions, a lot of archaeological work needs to be done both in Benin as well as all over Northern Edo land. It is also my supposition that material culture studies would provide tentative hints about the true position of things between Edo and its northern neighbors. It is true also that in tracing the popular origin of Benin from Ife, the western track has often been pursued to the exclusion of a direct northern path, thereby ignoring research in the northern direction. The Ife myth of origin seems to relate only to the descent of the Benin royal house or the



Fig. 2: Some Major Extant Villages in Northern Edo Land

monarchy. But the myth of origin from the northern hills could relate to the descent of the mass of the Benin people. It is not an uncommon phenomenon in history for royalty to constitute a foreign element in relation to the people or society over which it exercises power. The western track goes from Benin in the direction of Owo, even though no known core Benin towns of significant historical importance exist in that direction.

One of the biggest efforts at understanding the Benin past is what resulted in Graham Connah's *Archaeology of Benin* (1975). The results of Connah's efforts were not as exciting as had been hoped for, and after him no serious digs have taken place at any of the numerous high potential sites. Ancient Benin defense walls and the surrounding moat are also yet to be thoroughly investigated for their antiquity. Therefore, establishing the true age of the areas occupied by the Benin Kingdom is an impossible task at the moment. I have no record of any archaeological work in Northern Edo land. Some reconnaissance work carried out by an archaeologist in

the Northern Edo working group in 2002 evidenced many of the hill site communities and their inhabited slopes as possessing good potential for archaeological investigation. It seems to me therefore that in the absence of direly needed archaeological information, we may only at this stage depend on the studies of the material culture of both areas if we are to make reasonable assertions about relationships among current inhabitants of the areas.

### **Material Culture of Northern Edo and Benin**

Fieldwork attempts to locate extant ancient arts in Northern Edo land did not prove very successful. After three concerted seasons of fieldwork and numerous annual visits to the area between 2007 and now, not much has turned up. Some metal work still goes on in the area largely controlled and fired by the *Uneme*. They basically produce farm implements, pots and some containers, and, in a few cases, staffs and walking canes for wealthy clients for prestige purposes. There is a thriving pottery industry for domestic consumption in *Ojah* and the entire area. But it is only in the masks and masquerades of the area do we perceive any idea that professional carver artists exist, who produce the highly decorative and colorful head masks and costumes of the region. Of these masks and masquerade traditions, Picton (1991: 34-49) and Borgatti (1979: 36-51) have written significantly about their thriving in some towns in the area and north of it. Closely associated with the local culture, these masking traditions are integrally linked to different rites of passage, festivals and celebrations. They serve principally communal purposes. Now, what is responsible for this dearth of artistic accomplishments in Edo north in spite of their close relations with Benin? Is it the lack of a monarchical structure, as is known in Benin, that has depleted the arts of the areas and concentrated extant ones in the hands and authority of the community? Why did the later south-north return movement not take along some of the core cultural values of an established and powerful Benin Kingdom whose influence reached the northern-most boundaries of the area?

Thomas walked over Northern Edo land, and is recorded and represented to have visited practically every important town. It is on record in the collection at the MAA that he visited the following towns, among others: *Afuze, Agbede, Agenebode, Aroko, Okpe, Otuo, Ora, Uromi, Ubiaja, Irrua, Fugar, Uzairue, Somorika, Ososo, Uzebba, Warake, Auchi, Ibie, Ozalla* and *Ibillo*. He was known to have had a keen interest in collecting common everyday household and personal objects among his other personal interests. His collection is reputed to reach about 2,500 pieces. Certain personality traits have caused him to be described as a loose cannon and a shutterbug. It is indeed a historical curiosity how this one man was able to collect



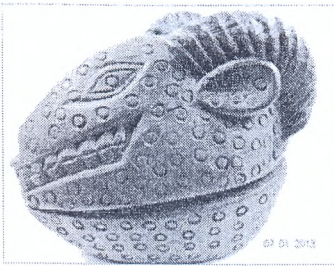
and cart away the entire artistic heritage of groups of people in Northern Edo land. A study of what motivated him is urgently required. Even way back then, he shot over 9000 pictures, and was known to have cracked jokes and poked fun at the inhabitants he interacted with. After several hours of work at the MAA stores in Shorts, Cambridge, looking at the Thomas collection, I have selected randomly ten decorative utilitarian objects for this study. My sample is random because not all the towns represented in the collection have carved wooden containers. Besides, the cataloguing and description of the objects have passed through several modifications making it quite a huge task to find objects in the huge store. This notwithstanding, I have managed to select representative objects from the collection. Their distribution unfortunately does not include anything from Benin's closest relatives in that direction, the Ora. However two Owan towns, *Otuo* and *Uzebba*, are well represented.

Starting from the zoomorphic Benin bowl (Plates 1a, b and c) carved in the representation of a leopard, one is drawn to Edo attachment to the leopard, an animal of significance in Benin culture. The leopard is well represented in metal whose exclusivity to the Oba confirms its royal importance. The leopard is regarded as fierce and powerful, stealthy and patient. It has innate capacities to demonstrate the balance between opposing forces, a trait considered essential to every Oba's success on the throne. Ordinarily when such animal figures are represented in wood, the objects could be more easily associated with the common people, but when the artworks serve a domestic function and are yet not commonplace, they may be seen as utensils meant for the use of important personages. Plate 1 is a container, perhaps a bowl or container for serving kola, just like many of the other utilitarian objects I have selected. A basic means of identification, for me, is the spotting and the great deal of attention paid to details of features such as the ears, eyes and teeth of the work. The accession records of this work refers to it as in the "shape of a ram's head" because of the presence of what may be twisted horns. But considering the importance of the leopard in Edo culture and the use of similar spots in full-figure leopard representations in metal in Benin art, I am of the opinion that this is a leopard representation. This work is what artists would consider "strong carving" today. Judging by the similarity, precision and the accuracy of the spots, they would appear to have been stamped on. A study of the entire work evidences professionalism in the tool strokes and knife marks not to be found among amateurs. Here is again another indication that the work might have been put to a prestigious function. The style is typically Benin as it falls within the stylistic classes of extant Benin sculptures in wood in the National Museum's collection in Benin, which I observed some years ago. As Benin art is made basically to glorify

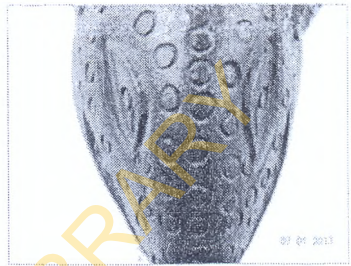
the king and other noble personages, I am inclined to think that this piece might have been originally from the collection of an important person. Prominent anthropomorphic as well as zoomorphic woodcarvings are not much known in Benin art.



**Plate 1a:** Leopard head from Benin



**Plate 1b:** Full image



**Plate 1c:** Close up of leopard head

Using this Benin example as representative of non-royal art in Benin, I shall now examine similar utilitarian objects in Northern Edo land to understand what similarities may exist. For a start, as has been indicated earlier, artistic representations in Northern Edo land were more communal than royal. This is because the area did not have the same social structure as Benin. If their decorated objects were not done for the aesthetic value of prestige, then they might be for the common enjoyment of the entire community. I have selected two carvings each from *Aghede*, *Otuo* and *Uzebba*. One has come from *Okpe*, the only town in the entire Northern Edo area that claims descent from Ife and, for which reason I have paid some attention, elsewhere, to other objects from there; and the last two of work are of unknown provenance but have been selected for the high quality of the carving. Going by today's administrative dichotomy of the area, *Otuo* and *Uzebba* are in Owan West and Owan East Local Government Areas respectively, *Okpe* in Akoko Edo Local Government Area, and *Aghede* in Etsako West Local Government Area (Figure 2).

Starting with the *Otuo* carvings, *Otuo* belongs to the Owan group that claims the strongest filial relationship with Benin. Going by the two pieces selected, the anthropomorphic hen bowl and the other square kola bowl, we notice a very high level of carving potential equal to what we find in the Benin one discussed earlier. The hen's feathers are perfectly arranged and detailed making it on the whole very naturalistic. The proportions are also good and the storage function for which we believe it is meant is well hollowed out for the space to keep things. The decorations on the hen were obviously dictated by the artist's quest to represent naturalistically, hence his carving proficiency could be adjudged to be of a very high standing,

considering the realistic naturalism he managed to attain with this piece. It would not surprise me therefore that the artist might have had some affiliations with Benin, if Benin was the point from where this excellent realistic and non-royal art watered down from. Then the base of the bowl, the actual part that holds things, is actually decorated in a cross-hatching manner, tending towards basket weaving (Plates 2, a b and c). The other piece from *Otuo* under review here is the highly decorated and well-polished rectangular container. The space to be decorated was first split into five breadthwise and into two along the length of the bowl. The artist then fills the spaces created with spirals separated by lines in the middle, crossed by short parallel lines. Though busy, the surface is highly decorative and beautiful. The level of professionalism of the artist can be perceived in the way and manner the design and decorations have been handled. The entire surface, front, top and sided, save the bottom, are decorated (see Plates 3a, b and c). Finally, right in the middle of the work is a circular elevated knob in form of a relief, which I suspect is to serve as the handle of the lid of the container. Generally speaking, all considered, including its function and its decorations, this item would be regarded as an item of prestige.

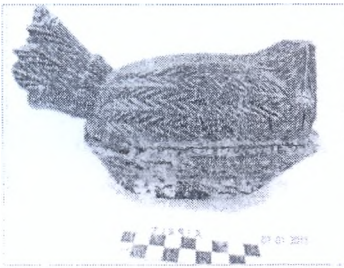


Plate 2a: Otuo kola nut bowl.



Plate 2b: Close up showing basket type weaving carved on bowl.

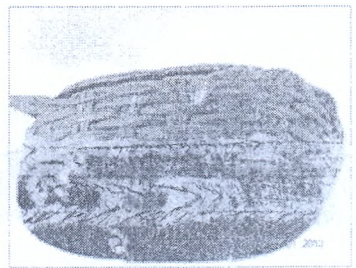


Plate 2c: Side view and bottom of bowl.

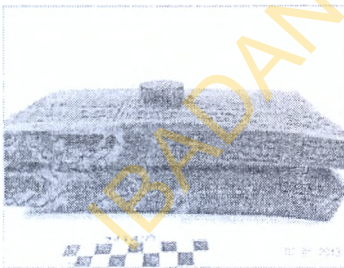


Plate 3a: Another bowl from Otuo

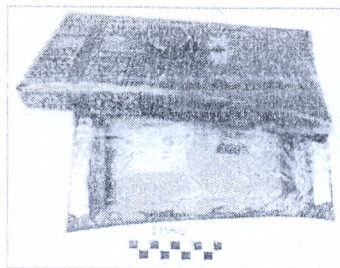


Plate 3b: View of inside of bowl.

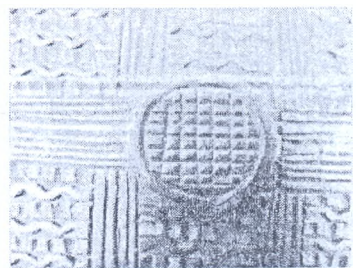
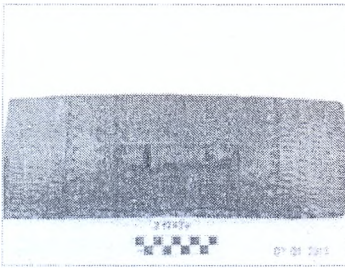


Plate 3c: Detail of top of bowl

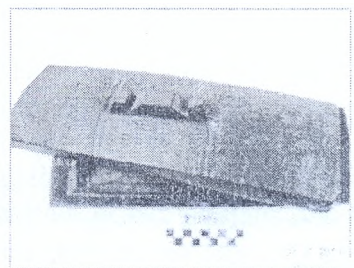
Also from the *Uzebba* of Owan clan are plates 4 and 5. These are also basically containers similar, in suspected purpose, to the Otuo one discussed above (i.e. Plates 3a, b c.). They may have been used as kola bowls or to hold other dry items needed for keeping or use in entertainment of sorts. Both are carved and decorated wooden bowls. They are of slightly different sizes; while one is rectangular on the long side, the other is shorter and boxier and like a square. The lid of the first one (Plates 4 a, b and c) has an interesting handle that is made up of five raised small semi-circular protrusions from the top of the lid. The lid is then divided into five sections with each section being crosshatched in tiny little squares that are slanted at both outer sections, with the middle one slanted in the other direction, giving it a different look. A line running round the box demarcates the edge of the lid. The edges of the box are simply decorated with distinct lines separated in the middle by being cut across to create a rather busy and heavily decorative design. As part of its accession records show on the inside part of the lid in Plate 4c, it is a kola nut bowl.



**Plate 4a:** Uzebba decorated kola nut bowl.



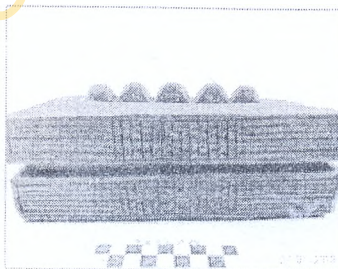
**Plate 4b:** Full view of bowl.



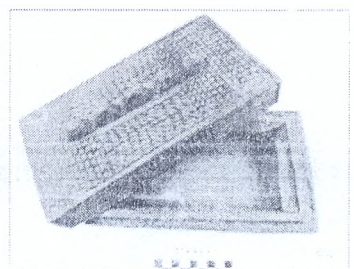
**Plate 4c:** Bowl showing lid and base



**Plate 5a:** Uzebba decorated bowl (top)



**Plate 5b:** Side view of bowl.



**Plate 5c:** Cover and base of bowl.

The other long and rectangular piece from *Uzebba*, plate 5, also has an interesting handle to it. This one is constructed in three segments, which are all squared up except for the middle part, which slants down to its base, forming the root of the other two smaller outer segments. The top of the lid is then covered up with zigzag and linear decorations carved into the five sections identified earlier. It is incontrovertible that the opulence worked into these designs would not have been for ordinary common people in the society of the time they were made.

From Agbede are two carved containers, Plates 6 and 7, a rectangular one similar to the *Uzebba* one in Plate 5, and another, a round plate, or rather a bowl. The difference between the rectangular bowls from *Uzebba* and *Agbede* is only in the designs carved on them. The rectangular container from *Agbede* has five circular designs carved on top of its lid and is bordered right round at the edges with lines into which are carved some triangular designs. The sides are in plain linear patterns running right round the work. This is rather simple without much attention given to improving the aesthetics of the container. Even though Thomas the original collector described it as highly decorated, I do not think it stands in the class of the bowls from Owan, which we have described earlier on in this paper. This may not be a surprise at any rate since Agbede is in fact a little further north of the *Owan* area, and farther than it from Benin. The rounded bowl is simple, with only some short vertical lines running from the top of the side of the rim to the base, with zigzag lines on the rim itself. Then on the brim, at opposite ends, are lines drawn perhaps to aid the easy holding or carrying of the bowl or plate. The accession record by Thomas refers to it as *ukbeku*, which doesn't translate to much in the language spoken in Agbede today. It is my view that this is merely a container for holding things. Another supposition is that it might have had a decorated lid in the past, but, even so, I doubt it is as well decorated as the ones from the Owan towns of *Uzebba* and *Otuo*.

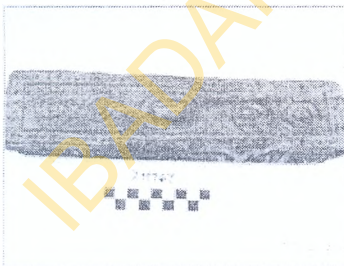


Plate 6a: Rectangular Agbede bowl.

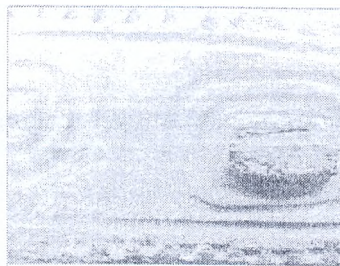


Plate 6b: Close up of bowl.

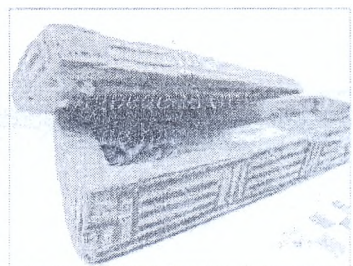
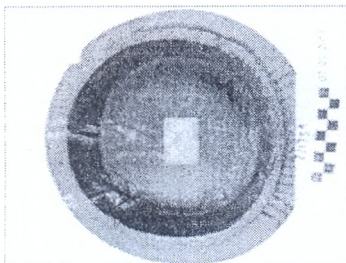
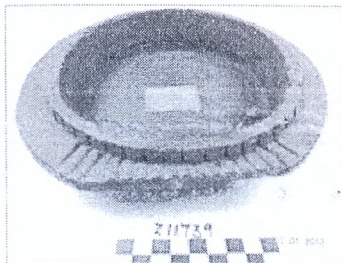


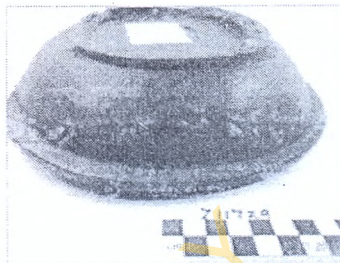
Plate 6c: View of top and base of bowl.



**Plate 7a:** Round bowl from Agbede.

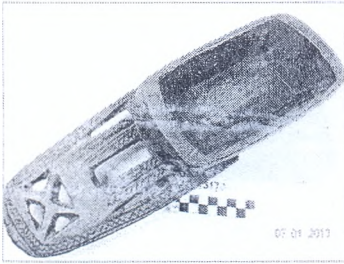


**Plate 7b:** Detail of round bowl.

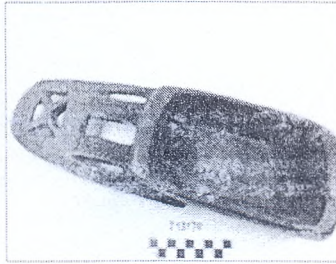


**Plate 7c:** Side and bottom view of bowl

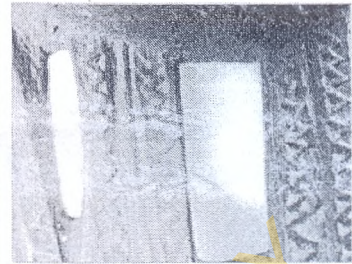
*Okpe* is a town at the western corner of Northern Edo land (Figure 2). It has an interesting tradition of origin in that it is one town among many others in the area that does not claim descent from Benin, but rather its tradition says that the people in the town migrated from Ife. Evidence from the administrative organization of the town does not, however, support this history of origin. Like most other northern Edo towns, a council of elders governs *Okpe*. However its proximity to Yoruba land makes the use of Yoruba language quite strong in the activities of the town. There are other towns, such as the *Ora* towns, which also have a strong Yoruba language presence but are unequivocal about their filial relationships with Benin. What Thomas has described as a bowl for tobacco (Plate 8) is the item I'd deliberately selected for this work. It is also an unusual piece in this category within the collection. It is an oblong piece divided in two, one part being the container and the other part being what I would think is the handle. Thomas refers to it as a bowl, possibly, for the use of sorting out tobacco. But my major interest is in the handle, which is carved exquisitely and with negative spaces, with an obvious attempt at embellishing the handle to high standards. When confronted with such decorations, the supposition is that it must have been one for the use of local nobility or persons of high ranking and position within the community. The bowl is carved in the style of all the other containers from the Northern Edo area that I perused in Cambridge. The handle that contains the stylistic evidence displays the linear and zigzag patterns used elsewhere in the decoration of wooden containers carved for prestige purposes. It seems to me therefore that it may have only been fashionable at a point in time, as I have noted elsewhere for Edo communities in and around the vicinity of the Yoruba, to create ways of association with the Yoruba in order to be able to gain access to education that permeated the region first from Yoruba land. One needs to ask in *Okpe* if there are other variants of their oral tradition of origin. In the meantime, until further evidence is got, we can safely assume a reasonably possible origin of the *Okpe* from Benin on the grounds of their arts belonging to the same mainstream Benin art continuum, on the grounds of similarities in the language, and on grounds of similarities in other matters of culture.



**Plate 8a:** Decorated ladle from Okpe.

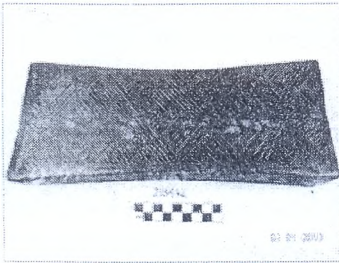


**Plate 8b:** View of Okpe ladle.



**Plate 8c:** Detail showing decorations

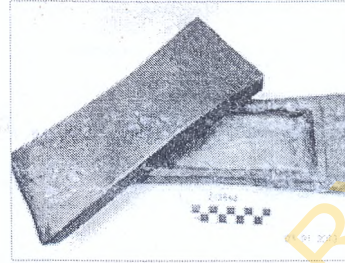
Two other decorated wooden containers that caught my attention during my work in the Cambridge stores are Plates 9 and 10, which on the basis of their stylistic affinities with those from *Uzebba* and *Otuo*, I would ascribe to either of those two towns or to any of the other *Owan* towns in the region. The rectangular Plate 9 is also sectionalized into five for decorative purposes, and starting with triangles from both ends, the artist is able to get three double-upturned triangles, which are decorated with lines all over, following the emerging design. It is heavily decorative but well organized and beautifully made. One interesting thing about this particular piece is that it is extended on its four sides, making it look like the corners of an East Asian pagoda roof. The four sides are covered up with linear decorations in triangular form, while the tips of the edges are demarcated with lines following their reaches. It looks like a thing of prestige. Plate 10 is in close stylistic design similar to Plate 3 from *Otuo*. However unlike the *Otuo* piece, Plate 10 is decorated from outside, with the lid of the container consisting of a square design starting from the outside and converging in the middle towards the position of the handle, simply represented by a small knob whose top is decorated with a cross and a dot in the middle. The immediate edge of this piece is decorated with a design common in northern Nigerian embroidery, consisting of parallel spiral lines intersecting one another continuously till they meet at a point. Northern influence in the area has been known for a considerably long time and it is possible that this design may have passed from cloth embroidery from the north to carving. The entire remaining space now occupying the middle of the lid is decorated in multiple squares lying side by side, containing several lines basically alternated at intervals. In the immediate area of the handle, it is noticed that the artist runs into the problem of reconciling the design and so he simply ends it in no particular order on the immediate left side of the knob handle. All said, like its counterparts, this work is highly decorative and bears very profuse decorations suggestive of the fact that it might have been made for prestige purposes.



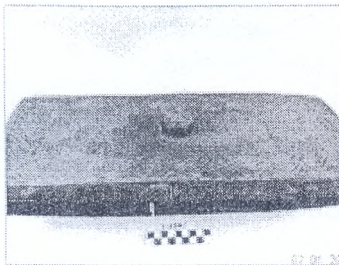
**Plate 9a:** Top of bowl  
(origin: Northern Edo)



**Plate 9b:** Detail of top  
lid of bowl.



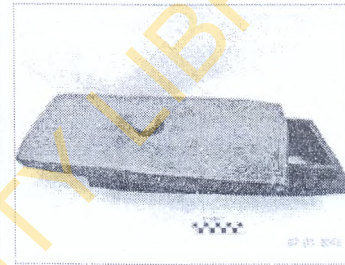
**Plate 9c:** Lid and container  
of the bowl.



**Plate 10a:** View of bowl  
from Northern Edo.



**Plate 10b:** Close-up.



**Plate 10c:** Full view of  
lid and container.

### **Conclusion**

Given the fact that the effects of the Benin monarchy in Benin was watered down in Edo north, one is inclined to think that the productions of the artists of the region would pay minimal attention to objects of prestige and power. However, the fact that there was a system of administration, which depended on the age grade arrangement whereby the elderly groups provided individuals that mediated and presided over social and community matters, gave impetus to the artists to work for the resultant social hierarchy. Besides, there would have been individuals who would have by dint of hard work become successful and became recognized in whatever endeavours they were engaged in. These sorts of people are potential consumers of the arts that I have discussed in this paper. I am curious to establish the true situation of the peopling of the region. Was there an earlier north-south movement of people and a later south-north movement that we all now refer to in the local histories of northern Edo land? Should this be the case, then my proposition is that the lack of a monarchical structure in Northern Edo land, either of autochthones or of late settlers from further south, principally from the established monarchical Benin City, may have structurally affected the artistic productions of



the area, and veered it off the track of a court art in Northern Edo land. Thomas's collection at the University of Cambridge may be the only extant body of materials that can shed light on the history, culture and people of this part of Northern Edo land.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Personal communication with Prof. Ron Peter Schaefer, team leader, Northern Edo Working Group (NEWG) that carried out three seasons of extensive fieldwork in Edo between 2002 and 2004. We attempted to and indeed followed Thomas' trail to attempt and understanding of how he moved and crosscheck word lists and other linguistics data while I identified related material culture. The College and University Affiliations Programme of the US state Department funded the work through grant ASJY1333. Francis Egbokhare (Linguistics), Francis Odemerho (Geomorphologist), Matthew Emerson (Archaeologist/Material culture) were team members with whom I interacted during the trips in Edo.

<sup>2</sup>Between 2002 and 2004, with a team consisting of specialists in material culture, anthropology, geomorphology, geography and linguistics, I carried out extensive fieldwork in Northern Edo land. The result is the publication, Francis O. Egbokhare, Kola Olatubosun and Matthew Emerson, (2011) *Edo North: Field Studies of the languages and Lands of the Northern Edo. Essays in Honour of Professor B. O. Elugbe.* Zenith Book House. We found very scant evidences of any material culture of a significant age. In 2013 and in 2014, I took material from Northern Edo land in Cambridge to two communities but there was no sign of any knowledge of the material by present inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup>Personal communication with Mr. J.O. Pogoso, mni, retired Commissioner of Police and an Odion in Eme-Ora community. June/July 2002

<sup>4</sup>Personal communication with Mr. J.O. Pogoso, mni, retired Commissioner of Police and an Odion in Eme-Ora community. June/July 2002

<sup>5</sup>See Notes and accessioning cards and other related documents at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. Cambridge.

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