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HORSES IN WEST AFRICAN SCULPTURE: SOME FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR DEPICTION

My colleague Dr John Mack of the British Museum tells me that the Zafiminy of Madagascar frequently represent horses in their sculpture. However, in the whole of Madagascar today, there are very few horses. The Zafiminy have no horses of their own, moreover, and until fairly recently there were no horses in the island. Yet horses are, and were, carved in considerable numbers.

Today, of course, horses are known in Madagascar from films, photographs and television. Horse imagery is found in several areas of everyday life. A favourite Malagassy beer is called Three Horses, and has a label decorated with three horse's heads. When the Soviet Embassy in Madagascar started to distribute posters showing the heads of Marx, Engels and Lenin in the same sort of arrangement, these Soviet heroes were soon being referred to as the Three Horses, to the puzzlement of Soviet diplomats and aid workers.

I have quoted this frivolous anecdote to make the obvious point that ideas about horses, and representations of them, may occur in a culture even when it almost entirely lacks the animals. The mere fact that images of horses are found in a society does not mean that it has many, or even any, hors-

es. Nor does the presence of horse images mean that actual flesh and blood horses are important to the society's existence. In some circumstances the idea of a horse, or of a horse and rider, may be more important or more useful to a society than the presence of the creature itself. Furthermore, this Madagascar anecdote can also remind us that images of horses which already exist in a society can be used analogically or metaphorically to encompass new cultural phenomena: even the triumvirate of great Communist heroes can be subsumed under existing horse imagery if visual (or other) similarities provide a sufficient stimulus. Horse imagery, once established, can find new functions, new meanings, even when horses themselves are no longer present.

This lecture tries to identify and disentangle some of the influences which affect the way horses are depicted in the sculpture of West Africa. It considers both technical and stylistic factors and how these relate to the way the horse was used and perceived in a number of societies.

Horses as a subject for sculpture in West Africa have a particular interest because, when one looks at the total body of West African art, the horse is one of the few creatures which is regularly shown in conjunc-

Fig. 1 - Brass snuff-ring, Tiv., Nigeria. Height 11 cm. (British Museum)



tion with human beings or, rather, with male humans. Of course some other animals are depicted singly, that is each one by itself, (e.g. dogs, leopards, lions, elephants, crocodiles, antelopes), and some animals are also modelled as masks or head-dresses worn by human actors. However the most usual West African depiction of humans and animals together in a single sculpture shows humans with horses; other sorts of beasts in conjunction with people are depicted far less frequently. Where they are, I believe, they are mainly concerned to express relationships of power.

My interest in the how and why of representations of the horse in West Africa first

arose when I saw a modern brass casting, a "gold-weight", being made in Kumase in 1966. The casting was one of many that were being turned out then, intended for sale to European and American visitors. The maker produced these weights in considerable numbers, casting twenty or thirty at a time, assembling the original waxes from parts prepared by his apprentices.

Gold-weights, for those of you who are not familiar with them, were small lost-wax brass castings used to weigh out gold dust, the local currency, in simple scales. They were made in two basic sorts, "geometricals", that is rectangles, squares, pyramids, discs etc., and ones representing a very large number of things, creatures and human situations. Geometrical weights outnumber representational weights by about 15 to 1. The latter sort of weights were often linked to one or more of the thousands of proverbs known by the Asante: they had a verbal and conceptual dimension.

The modern copy weight I had seen being made raised in acute form the question of what it actually represented. The weight showed a horse and rider. The rider was protected by a rectangular shield and carried a bow over his shoulder, in one hand he clasped a gun, in the other he held a lance. The armament did not end there: a small cannon was mounted, facing forward, just behind the horse's neck, (and positioned so it would blow off the horse's head if it were fired) and another cannon pointed backward over its rump.

It was very hard to see this weight as a direct representation of the reality of horses and riders, of observable actuality. It did not take much thought to conclude that it was either an amusing exaggeration, or a deliberate overstatement, of the fact that, for the Asante, horsemen were associated

Fig. 2 - Terra cotta horse, uncertain date as lacking archaeological provenance, Mali. Length 24 cm.



with warfare and, more particularly, with the mode of warfare practised in the savannah lands to the north of the dense rain-forest which was the heart of their empire.

This copy weight raised in a very obvious way one of the very basic questions about images: how far they are derived from direct observation or how far they are based on other sources of information. One part of this lecture explores this problem and tries to indicate its wider importance to the study of African images.

Thinking about this isolated Asante case also pointed to a common, even essential, feature of the representation of the horse in African sculpture: the fact that the animal is almost always shown carrying a rider.

If the corpus of West African sculptures showing horses is examined, it will be seen that the vast majority are shown with riders and almost all these riders are males (fig. 1).

This pairing of men and horses is important. I think that we must accept that in most African depictions of the horse we are not dealing with an image of the horse it-

self, that is with the horse as a separate and distinct entity (or even with some sort of balanced relationship between horses and men) - we are dealing with the depiction of a male rider accompanied by a subservient horse, a horse which he controls. The horse is physically and morally inferior, it is not a subject on its own, it is something additional to the human and it is almost always shown as a human attribute. It is the human element of this pairing, the fact that the rider has control over the beast, which is important in West African imagery. Thus, I think, it is safe to generalise, horses are only of interest to makers of images while they are under human dominance or can be used to express human dominance and/or serve as a metaphor for other sorts of control and inequality.

At the very least then, in the West African sculptural tradition, the horse is usually seen and depicted as part of a single subject matter, the rider-with-horse, and it appears as an appurtenance, or symbol of power, which is used by male humans. The images which show horses are therefore images express-

Fig. 3 - Stool in the form of a horse, Barmana, Mali. Length 94 cm.



ing an unequal, man-centred, relationship. The horse is rarely, if ever, of interest to the sculptor in itself. The contrast with other traditions of equine representation, including our own, is a strong one.

In exploring the factors which determine how horses are depicted one must start with the technological elements. If we look at the depiction of horses in different parts of West Africa there are clear instances where the materials and techniques used play the main role in determining form. Horses modelled in clay and then fired to terra cotta tend to be far more sturdy, even lumpish, than those made of wood or cast in metal. This, clearly, is because one cannot successfully model a horse with thin, delicate legs in damp clay. If the legs are too long and thin they cannot support the weight of the body and the model will inevitably collapse before it can be fired (fig. 2).

Furthermore there appears to be a broad relationship in clay or terra cotta horses be-

tween their absolute size, and hence their total weight, and the sturdiness of the supporting legs. Small clay horses, sometimes made by children, tend to have fairly thin legs, because the relative strength of the clay permits this. As the volume and the mass of the body increases, the legs become commensurately thicker and shorter to support the ever increasing weight they must carry. The broad formal difference between terra cotta and cast metal horses is also obvious: the latter tend to be closer to the actual form of the animals, and to have longer and thinner legs. Wax, and the subsequent metal, are substances which have far greater strength than damp clay and permit less sturdy, ponderous images to be made.

The form of some wooden horses can also be shown to be related very directly to the materials and techniques used. In the illustrated example of a horse shaped to serve as a stool, from the Bamana of Mali, it is very clear that the head and body of

the horse have been made by modifying only slightly the natural form of a suitable branch. The legs, attached by binding and nailing, are also pieces of branch which have been split and trimmed to size: little else has been done to them. Clearly the thin, leggy, appearance of this horse owes a great deal to the raw material which has been modified, rather than greatly altered, by its maker (fig. 3).

As one would expect, horses and riders which are carved from solid blocks of wood, rather than assembled from pieces as the Bamana one is, show a great range of variation for the material allows the makers considerable freedom. But there are still technical constraints on form. The most difficult parts to carve in a way that is even a general approximation to the form of an actual horse are the legs and tail and, where the horse is shown with accoutrements, the reins. To represent these accurately means that they have to be made relatively thin, and consequently they are weak. Carving these features in the types of unseasoned timber usually used in West Africa means that they will probably split or even break away as the sap dries out from the wood. The precise sort of weakness will depend on the way that the grain of the wood is utilised. If the grain runs vertically through the carving then forms which cut across it can split vertically and break away; if the grain runs horizontally then the weakness, and most likely the eventual breaks, will be in that plane. Some of the more able carvers seem to make a virtue of these problems. In many Senufo carvings the two front and rear legs are each shown as single blocks: the technical problem has been subsumed under the overall sculptural quality of the piece.

In a way which similarly circumvents

this problem virtually all Yoruba horse carvings have the reins greatly simplified and made part of the overall sculptural form of the piece. They are still there but the necessity to create such an inherently weak, free-standing element, is subjugated to the overall conception.

Horses and riders carved out of ivory also demonstrate the powerful determining role of the material used. Often the horse has to be fitted within the dimensions of the lower part of the inverted tusk. Consequently its form, and especially the neck and head, becomes squashed inwards while the rider's form is stretched vertically. Some Yoruba ivory carvings of horses and riders show horses with relatively tiny heads, the reduction being caused by the need to create the whole image within the volume of the original tusk.

Useful technical comparisons can sometimes be made in those cultures where horses are depicted in two different materials. In the early horses excavated in Mali, illegally and without documentation in most cases, there is a greater lightness in the wooden representations than the terra cotta ones. This is as one would expect. However, since it is so very difficult to be quite sure of the authenticity of some of the pieces involved, perhaps one should not place too much credence on such comparisons.

I have suggested that there are numerous examples of where technical factors affect how horses are represented in West African sculpture.

Despite the different types of material used, in the majority of these carvings there is another characteristic common to depictions of the horse: that is the horse and the rider are both shown with similar proportions. In most cases the head of both rider and steed is much larger than is the case in

life. Here the conventional African way of depicting the human figure seems to have been extended to that of the animal bearer. There is further feature which is frequently encountered: the horse is depicted as smaller than life-size by comparison with its rider. What has been called "social perspective" is being applied to animals as well as to humans of lesser status.

Occasionally "African proportions" are not found. One of the more interesting cases arises in regard to the Afro-Portuguese ivories and to some of the stone carvings which seem, in some way, to be part of the same tradition. Quadrupeds are known from the pre-historic stone-carving culture(s) of Sierra Leone but in many cases one has to accept that it is virtually impossible to decide what animal they are intended to represent (see Fagg and Bassani, fig. 61). This ambiguity extends to some of the Afro-Portuguese ivories. A quadruped with a female rider on the lid of an ivory salt, the rider lying on her back along the beast's spine, may, I suppose, just be interpreted as a goat, perhaps a witch's familiar, as Bassani suggests, because it seems to have horns (*ibid.*, fig. 59). However horses, where they are unmistakably identifiable, have rather non-African proportions. Interestingly, when some Afro-Portuguese ivories depict creatures and humans which are very probably derived directly from European woodcuts - huntsmen, deer, dogs and horses - there are also other indications that the carvers were not fully conversant with the horse. One such carving, for example, seems to show the horse with toes (*ibid.*, fig. 119). Here there seems to be a case of an alien horse imagery being borrowed wholesale and there being no possible corrective or alteration derived from local knowledge or traditions.

The images in metal and ivory of horses and riders originating from Benin are at first sight easier to interpret, although Fagg has suggested that some of the quadrupeds are more likely to be donkeys than horses. The depiction of horse-like animals with European, ("Portuguese") riders on ivory salts initially seems fairly straightforward. The ivory carvers depict the creatures with the sorts of bridles, reins, stirrups etc. which would have been used by European riders. One might guess that such accurate detail, compared with the far more generalised depiction of horse trappings found elsewhere indicates direct observation of horses by the artists. However, Bassani and Fagg have suggested that the dominantly European iconography of these carvings suggests they were based, not on observation, but drawings provided to the carvers by their patrons.

By contrast, in another related area, that of Benin brass casting, the details of most costumes and weapons shown on Europeans are not sufficient to allow accurate dating and placing of them to a particular country and century. Yet these castings must have been based on direct African knowledge and observation of European visitors. So in the case of Benin looseness in depicting details need not mean ignorance and a lack of observation, and accuracy need not mean direct acquaintance.

Let me now return to the depictions of horses in Akan-Asante goldweights. An examination of a considerable number of genuine, i.e. pre-1900, Akan-Asante goldweights depicting horses and riders confirmed that they did not depict horses singly; I was never able to find a gold-weight which showed a horse alone. This examination also showed that many of the weights depicted horses carrying what were clearly

warriors. Many of the weights show riders who are heavily armed, virtually all of these riders carry swords, shields and guns, often all three, sometimes they also have bows and lances. Many of the horses support guns and gunpowder barrels. In general, Asante horses are war horses. This conclusion echoes Robin Law's statement that in West Africa the horse was only of interest as a warhorse (fig. 4-6).

But if these horses fitted the broad West African scheme of the sort of horses that should be depicted, what was it that determined the forms they were given? Were they modelled from life, from direct experience of, and interest in, horses or were other factors of far greater importance in shaping their form?

In examining Asante images of horses it is fair to note that there are some areas of uncertainty. Some of these images unavoidably raise the question of what exactly is being depicted. Sometimes what seem to be horses - in Asante and in other cultures - are very odd beasts. Many of the genuine, as opposed to more recent (reproduction or fake) weights, depict creatures which it would be difficult to identify as horses if they did not have riders. One makes the identification of them as horses by the fact that they do have riders - but a small act of faith is still needed.

This lack of immediate certainty about what creature is depicted is unusual with gold-weights. Despite the small size of most gold-weights, which are usually about five to seven centimetres in length, it is usually possible to identify without difficulty the creature concerned. The several different types of antelope known to the Asante, for example, can be distinguished without difficulty, hens can be separated from cocks, even different types of wild bird are de-

Fig. 4 - Gold weight in the form of a mounted warrior. Length 5.2 cm.

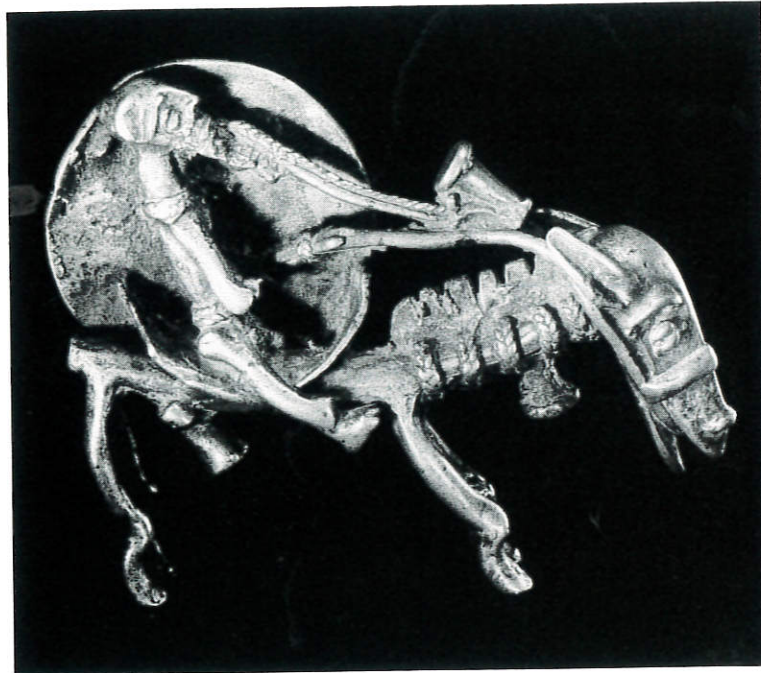


picted clearly and unmistakably in weights less than one centimetre long. This is not so with horse weights.

One such weight has a head more like that of a chicken than a horse (see Menzel, fig. 894). Others seem to be merely antelopes, a far more frequent subject of weight makers, to which saddles, reins and riders have been added (see Menzel, fig. 893). In some cases, by comparing details and overall style, one can see that the same caster has made both antelopes and horses and riders. From these it is clear that some of the makers who turned out considerable numbers of antelope weights merely adapted their usual forms when they turned their hands to depicting riders and horses.

It should not surprise us that antelopes form a sort of prototype for the depiction of horses. Not only are there far more goldweights of antelopes than of horses, per-

Fig. 5 - Gold weight in the form of a mounted warrior. Length 7.4 cm. (two views).



haps forty or fifty times as many, but this preponderance is almost certainly because antelopes played an important part in Asante life as food, and appeared far more often as the protagonists in stories and proverbs than horses did. They were far nearer the centre of the Asante cosmos than horses were.

Horses are the subject of proverbs or aphorisms in Asante, like antelopes and many other creatures. Some of these turn on the horse and rider relationship, others compare the horse to other animals. In the first category is the saying "Though the horse is a fool, it does not follow at all that the rider is," and "A horse does not turn to the side without a cause" (i.e. it moves in answer to the rein). Both these are typical Asante proverbs in the sense that they imply a particular pattern of relationships which can easily be applied to other situations. Proverbs provide paradigms by which complex situations can be clarified and ex-

pressed in neat and amusing ways.

Other proverbial sayings turn on the fact that horses' tails were used to prepare powerful charms or talismans and carried by military leaders in war: "If a horse does not go to war, its tail does." In the nineteenth century horses tails were imported into Asante from the north and used for making these charms and I think that the exotic origin of the tails was part of their efficacy. Certainly many other medicines which the Asante judged powerful came from outside their own society. The way their cosmos was arranged meant that mystical power came from beyond the normal margins of life.

The Asante use of animal tails from different creatures is also referred to in the proverb "A horse has a tail and an elephant has a tail, but that of the horse is a little larger (longer) than that of the elephant." Once again the proverb incorporates a relationship of inequality.

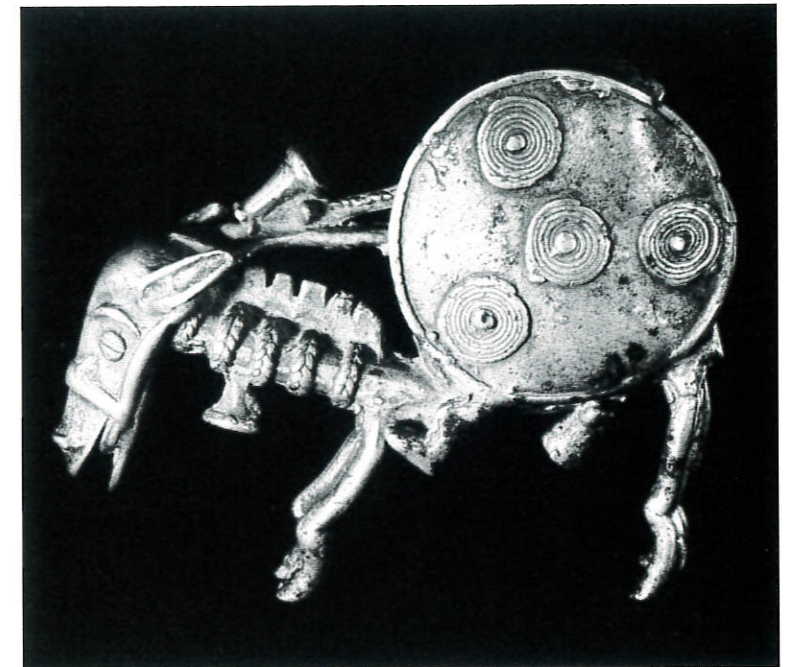
The elephant's tail was of considerable importance in Asante for showing status: elephant tails were used as a sort of fly-whisk by the attendants of very senior chiefs and the tail also served as a status symbol of certain high ranking offices around the Kumase court. The inequality expressed in the horse and elephant tail proverb similarly expresses the hierarchical nature of Asante society.

The proverbial mention of the horse's tail going to war even if the horse itself did not go, once again draws attention to the role of these animals in warfare. Although weights showing horses and riders have a definite, even exaggeratedly martial character, it is noteworthy that horses were generally of no importance to Asante armed forces except as a weapon used by their enemies. In the dense Akan forest horses were

of little use in fighting: Asante battles were a matter of infantry tactics and, usually, of superior fire power. The dense tropical rain-forest, heartland of the Asante Empire, was an environment hostile to horses; it was also infested with tsetse fly.

In the North, in the more open and drier savannah country, things were different. In many of parts of the savannah mythology and history ascribed the foundation of local kingdoms to incursions by mounted invaders. There the Asante encountered and fought against opponents mounted on horses. Many of the enemy, allied, or subject peoples in the north were fully experienced in using horses in a way the Asante themselves were not. Although the exact role played by mounted warriors in battles against the Asante is still not clear their presence was clearly a matter of interest, perhaps even fear, to the Asante and the Asante saw horses largely in terms of their military potential to their enemies. The north was, in broad terms, a world in which the horse was far more important in every way than it was in the Asante homeland. Although some of the more northerly Asante chiefs, for example the Mamponhene, used northern horse-related items of dress, perhaps even rode horses, on special occasions, in the heart of the Empire horses were a comparatively rare phenomenon. Where the horse was encountered, it generally represented the exotic and dangerous.

In part their rarity in Central Asante must have been due to the fact that horses do not seem to have survived for very long in the forest. Even where there was adequate amounts of fodder available, disease probably meant that any imported horses had a comparatively short life-span in the humid forest zone. Nevertheless many Asante must have known about horses, either by obser-



vation or by hearsay. Asante living in the capital, or near the roads running between Kumase and the north, or those who had travelled in the savannah either in war, or pursuit of trade, would have observed horses for themselves, possibly from a rather cautious distance. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there must always have been a few horses to be seen in Asante. Usually these were associated with Moslem northerners resident in the capital or travelling to or from it for purposes of trade or diplomacy. These horses were to some extent a matter of prestige and ostentation for their non-Asante owners as early white visitors noted. Bowdich, one such visitor who was in the capital in 1817, showed off his own equestrian skills on a borrowed horse. He claimed the Asante were astonished to see how well he handled it. The point he was making was that the Asante had little direct contact with horses. Indeed the Asante word for horse, *oponko*, is almost cer-

tainly derived from a Manding root, this derivation emphasising the association of horses with the alien north, with Islam and with trade.

If horses were of little military importance in the forest zone they also had little use as beasts of burden. When goods had to be transported they were almost always carried by humans, often slaves, as headloads. Nor were horses used as draught animals in the forest zone or even on the more open coastlands. When the Dutch proposed to send a European wheeled carriage as a diplomatic gift to the King of Asante, and a British missionary eventually managed to deliver one, both parties made it clear that they were expecting their gift to be pulled by humans between the shafts, not horses. That is what happened at Kumase when the carriage finally arrived and it was also the case with the far more numerous wheeled vehicles used in the nineteenth century on the coast. (Although these vehicles must have been a matter of considerable interest and word of them must have spread widely, as far as I am aware they do not appear as gold-weights.)

The Asante representation of horses, therefore, had little to do with their use in their own culture.

How far then does this curious position of the horse in Asante life affect the way it is depicted? In the case of genuine weights, as we have seen, there is a very considerable range of horse forms. The difficulty we face is in trying to isolate the reasons for this variation. On the one hand we could argue that the oddness and variety of horse depictions results from the Asante having little familiarity with the creatures and little interest in them, on the other technical or other factors may account for this obvious variety of forms.

One difficulty in teasing out the factors that affected how horses were depicted arises when we try to put the surviving weights into some sort of temporal sequence. As yet nobody has come up with a satisfactory way of dating weights. In looking at any selection of weights, therefore, we may be looking at works made two or three hundred years apart. Similarly it is not possible to know where individual weights were made. The majority, one can guess, were probably made in and around the Asante capital, Kumase, but in any randomly accumulated group (and that includes virtually all public and private collections) there may be weights made in several different casting centres ranging, perhaps, from Takyiman or further north to some of the Fante towns on the coast.

Nevertheless I would argue that some of the variation shown in the depiction of weights can be put down to technical factors. These weights were first modelled in bees-wax before being cast by the lost wax process. The use of wax to make what is eventually cast in durable brass allows, even encourages, a freedom in modelling. For most of the year, at the normal outdoor temperatures in Asante, bees-wax is soft enough to be worked easily. Small lumps of wax can be rolled out into rods, or shaped by the fingers into little discs or lumps or incised with a blunt knife blade or a small wooden spatula. If the wax is too hard it can quickly be softened by holding it next to a brazier of smouldering charcoal. Individual shaped pieces of wax can be stuck together to make complex figures by melting one surface of them with a heated blade and then bringing both parts together. Because of the levels of skill achieved by casters, and the great flexibility of their medium, there was no deterrent to making

weights in a great variety of forms. In short, working with wax was easy and making new or complex forms was easy. In these circumstances one would expect variety rather than conformity.

There may also have been forces which pushed weight makers to producing new forms. Gold-smiths, many of whom probably also made weights, were encouraged by senior chiefs and kings to invent new types of casting for their own display purposes. It is also said that some of the Asantehene's gold castings were recast for the annual Odwira ceremonies to convince people of the infinity of his treasure and, perhaps, the inventive skills of those who worked for him. Whether this is true or not, there was clearly a liking among the Asante for new and beautiful forms of gold work. Whereas the use of new gold designs, and of particular types of innovative images, was a matter of status and therefore controlled by the King, innovation in gold-weight design seems to have been allowed much more freely.

In the Asante case we therefore had a making process which allowed, even encouraged, a variety of forms, and a social situation where these were acceptable. Is this enough to explain the range of horse images that we possess and, in particular, what we would regard as their relative inaccuracy? I believe it is not.

If one examines other Asante representational weights the majority of them depict their subject matter far more accurately than is the case with horses. Weights of creatures such as antelopes, monkeys and birds generally show a good level of realism. Artefacts, for example guns, shields, basketry scoops, fans etc., things which were all well known to weight makers, are depicted with great fidelity. Even if one al-

Fig. 6 - Gold weight in the form of a mounted warrior. Length 8.5 cm.



lows for humorous exaggeration or caricature, as in some depictions of elephants, the essential characteristics of animals and things are always unmistakably there. On the other hand exotic items, such as cannons on wheeled carriages, or sailing vessels, are generally less accurately delineated. In the case of horses, therefore, the accuracy of the depiction does seem related to the lack of direct knowledge and interest in the creatures themselves. They are depicted as a type: a piece of foreign war apparatus, and given the trimmings appropriate to that exotic role.

I have dealt with what I see as some of the general characteristics of the images of horses created in West Africa. In some cas-

es I have tried to point out the part played by technical factors. In my examination of the Asante castings I have tried to relate the features of horse images to both the technical factors involved and the exotic, peripheral position of the horse in Asante culture.

To try to understand further the factors which influence such depictions it is necessary to draw attention to some broad differences that exist between what I will call, for convenience, the Western tradition and the African tradition. I am very well aware that this is a crude, even brutal, distinction to draw between two complex traditions of image making which have existed over thousands of years, I also know that it distorts or overlooks a great deal. Nevertheless, at this stage of the discussion, it can help to suggest interesting points to be considered further.

There are many ways in which the images produced in Africa differ from those used in the West. This, of course, makes it difficult to compare directly the two sorts of "art". For example, the physical form and appearance of many African images are deliberately modified during the course of their existence. Their appearance is altered as sacrifices are made over them, as "magical" substances are added, as nails are embedded in them and so on. In the West, by contrast, there is a presumption that most works of art should be preserved much as they left their makers' hands; substantial alteration is frowned upon. If changes occur through time, attempts may be made to remove the changes and to "restore" the work to its original initial state: the recently work on the paintings of the Sistine Chapel is an obvious case of this sort of approach.

There are further contrasts between the

two "arts" in the ways that their images relate to other effects caused by the passage of time and to general ideas about time. The two sorts of image treat the relationship of an individual's physical form to the effects of time in different ways. Direct portraiture, the depiction of individual facial and bodily characteristics as these are influenced by age and experience, is rare in Africa. In the European tradition the accurate delineation of the physical characteristics of individuals, seen at a particular moment, has been a prime consideration of image makers since classical times. Individualizing in images is important in the West, while generalizing and idealizing are more important in determining the forms of images in West Africa.

In the West much art is also concerned to depict bodies in motion, caught and frozen at a particular instant of time. In Africa the human figure is frequently depicted in static poses or, at most, while making a highly formalised gesture. In Africa, in ways contrary to in the West, action and activity reside in the actual use of these images in ritual, dance, and moving display. The images may not depict motion themselves but many of them are certainly intended to be seen in motion and this function affects their form.

These broad differences, of course, are associated with differing ideas about the individual and different concepts of the person held within the two traditions. The way these can - or cannot - be represented through images is a matter of great complexity and it varies over time and between societies. However, there is a distinct tradition in the West where the exact depiction of movement and of individual physical characteristics, supported by a concern to understand and depict accurately the

structure of the human anatomy, have all been combined to create images intended to show the inner moral or mental character of those depicted as well as their individual experience of the world. There is nothing in African art like the great portraits of Rembrandt or Goya or, more recently, the paintings of Bacon, which derive from this tradition of individualisation. Equally there is nothing in the West quite like the great African participatory masquerades in which images are associated with many other modes of communication and expression. These masquerades, in which interplays of music, dance, prayer, offerings and images are articulated, serve to convey deep moral purposes which involve the whole community and what we would categorise as its physical, social, moral and mental welfare.

If the two traditions exhibit these different characteristics, and exist within different milieux of use and creation, they may also bear different relationships to the actual, direct, observation of the entities their images depict. One of the key areas to consider is the interplay between imagery and tradition. When we deal with the making of images we must be particularly aware of the question: is the source of an image the thing imaged which has been directly observed as part of the making process, or is it an earlier image which is being reproduced more or less accurately?

The antithesis is to some extent a false one because it fails to take into account any sense that even "direct" observation may be mediated through known images. All images, of course, can influence what comes after them because people may be moved to see "reality" through them, that is the image can become part of their wider system of perception. Here, of course, it is nec-

essary to define the circumstances in which the image is seen and by whom, and to consider how far the mechanism it can provide can be extended to other circumstances etc.

Similarly, earlier images can shape the forms that other artists subsequently make. Again, one needs to know how far image makers are aware of earlier images, to what extent they are trained in particular style of representation, how far they are free to innovate or have only knowledge of a limited number of possible forms. Most makers of images, of course, are aware of the ways other makers have imaged a particular being or creature. The Yoruba sculptor, for example, will not only have seen many earlier Yoruba carvings but will probably have been taught his skills by an established master. If he sets out to carve a human or animal image he will be following explicit and implicit rules about how this may be done. Even in those societies where there is no great tradition of image making it is likely that someone who sets out to carve or model, perhaps as part of his or her initiation process, will have seen examples of earlier work which are broadly relevant to the task to be carried out. The relationship between "direct" observation and lack of direct observation having the sole or main influence on the image produced, is normally not a question of either/or, but of how far one dominates, how far the other.

But this relationship is of the utmost interest and it has a major part to play in our attempts to understand style in African image making. At its most basic we must use the question to ask whether we are looking at an image of something the maker has observed and which interests him, or are looking at an image of an image, a more or less precise reproduction of an earlier work.

If I were to speculate about the images

of horses made in vastly differing West African societies I would suggest that there is a broad division to be made between those from groups which know the animal at first hand and those that do not. In the former societies the horse is the centre of attention in numerous ways and its possession may be essential for those who aspire to high status. A complex set of perceptions about the horse will exist and there will be a mutually supportive interchange between these and the images of the horse which are produced.

In the cases where the horse is not a matter of immediate and enduring interest this systematic interchange does not occur. The depiction of the horse may be more variable and there is no incentive for a common style and form to emerge. In those circumstances, perhaps, technical factors will dominate. And this brings me back to the Zafiminy of Madagascar. The horse images they produce are intended for sale to outsiders. The images they produce for themselves are those of cattle: the creatures which are central to their social life. Their perceptions and their depictions of the two beasts are consequently very different.

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