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## ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF NIGERIAN SCULPTURE

Even towards the end of the twentieth century most people have a stereotyped image of African sculpture as abstract and cubistic in character so it is not surprising that when, in 1910, the German explorer Leo Frobenius made the first discoveries of the art of Ife – a crowned bronze head and a number of terracotta sculptures in a style of portrait-like naturalism – that he was not at all sure what to make of them. He decided that he had found the remains of a colony founded in the thirteenth century B.C. by people from the western Mediterranean and abandoned by them around 800 B.C. One of his finds – the leg, perhaps from a bowl for Ifa divination, carved from a block of quartz, and representing an acrobat with his arms and legs intertwined – does show by the exaggerated size of the head, that this piece at least owes nothing to the artistic canon of the Mediterranean area. (Plate 1)

Eight decades later we have more evidence on which to base our interpretations. From about the middle of the first millennium B.C. to roughly the middle of the first millennium A.D. there flourished over an extensive area in the north of Nigeria a people who made terracotta sculptures. They spanned the transition from the late stone age to the iron age. The initial discoveries were made in tin mines around the village of Nok, so Bernard Fagg gave the name "Nok Culture" to their remains. They were an agricultural people who lived in villages on the banks of rivers. For many years the only finds were from the tinbearing gravels which resulted from the erosion of granite rocks further upstream. The river had also eroded the remains of these farmer-sculptors and redeposited them further downstream. The tin ore is of a higher specific gravity than the terracotta sculptures so the two types of material were deposited in different places within the tinwash. The miners recognised this and knew that if they found terracotta sculptures they would not find tin ore, so they

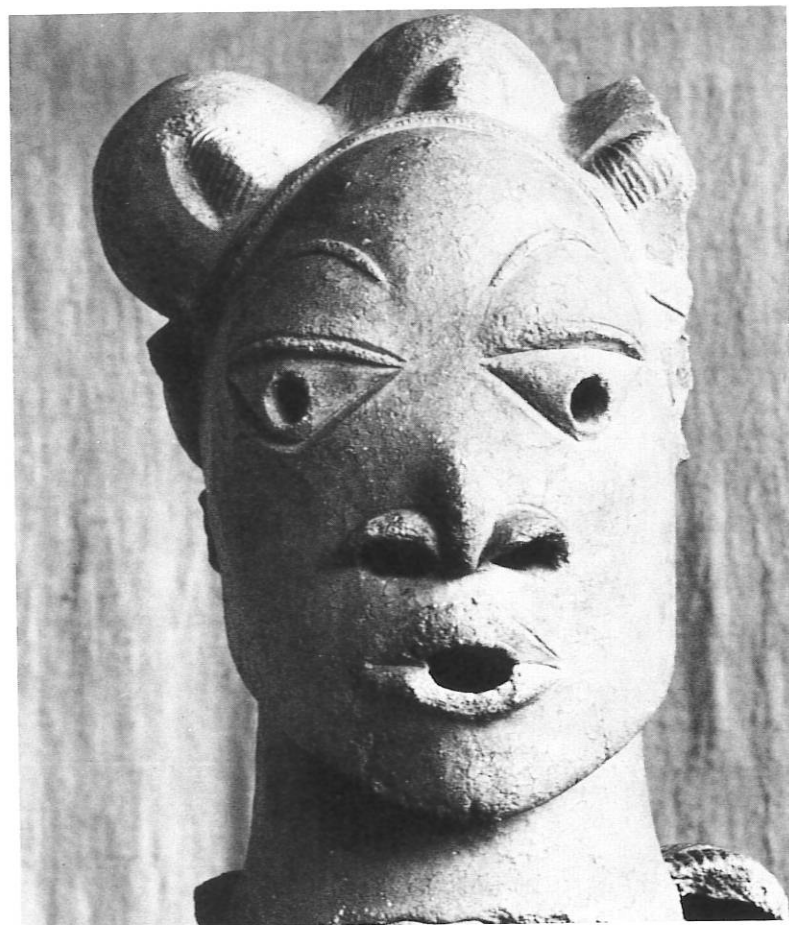
smashed them up. Fortunately Colonel J. Dent Young, a mine owner, saved the terracotta head of a monkey found at Nok in 1928 and put it into the little mining museum that had been established at the Department of Mines Headquarters in Jos. In 1943 a further discovery was made, of the so-called Jemaa head, from the Tsauni mine, forty miles away from Nok. Bernard Fagg, a Cambridge-trained archaeologist, then employed as a cadet administrative officer, was told of the discovery and went to investigate it. He soon learned of other finds that had been made and with the help of the government he set up a reserve for future archaeological exploration. He also arranged to engage a local man to visit the mines regularly to ask the miners to keep any potsherds or sculpture they might find and instituted a system of payments that would compensate the workers for their trouble. In 1946 the Department of Antiquities was established and Bernard Fagg was appointed to it as Government Archaeologist the following year.

Initially a tentative dating was established on geological grounds, by attempting to equate conditions of erosion and deposition in the Nok area with the pluvial and interpluvial phases in East Africa<sup>1</sup>. This was a bold step to take but some years later radiocarbon dating came into use and later still thermoluminescence dating, and these confirmed that the Nok Culture flourished between the middle of the first millennium B.C. and the middle of the first millennium A.D.<sup>2</sup>

The sculptures show a clearly defined style most apparent on the heads representing human beings. (Plate 2) The eyes are usually carefully modelled to form either a segment of a circle or sometimes a rather triangular shape. The eyebrows are represented in relief and often echo the curve of the lower lid, sometimes forming a very precise circle. The pupils of the eyes, the nostrils, the ears and usually the mouth are all pierced right through the

1. Quartz leg, probably from a bowl for Ifa divination, found by Frobenius in 1910 at Oke Tasi in the centre of Ife. Ht. 8 cm.

2. The largest terracotta head of the Nok Culture so far found, from Nok. Ht. 36 cm.

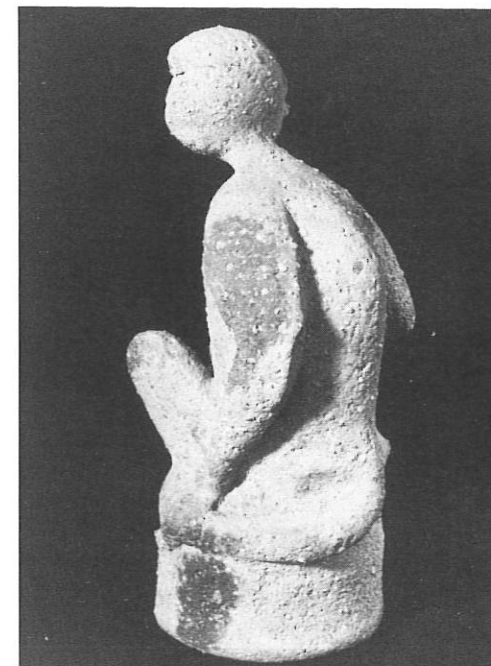
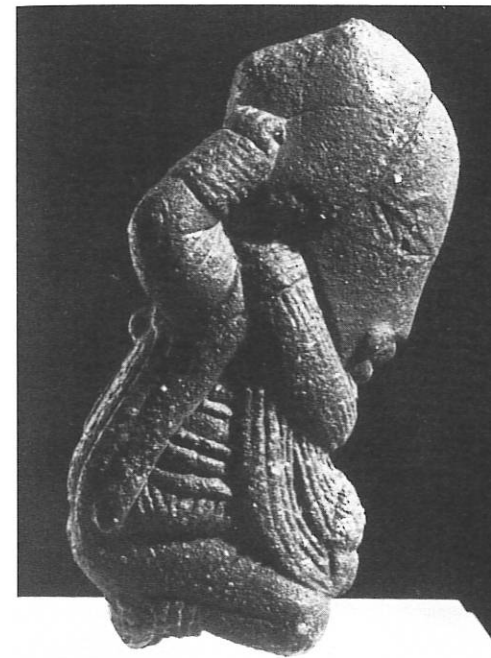


clay. The hair is represented as elaborately dressed in a wide range of patterns. The trunk and limbs are cylindrical. A heavy neck-ring of beads is often shown. The heads in all cases have been broken from complete figures. It is mostly heads that have been recovered because they are easily recognised as being of interest whereas fragments of limbs or of the trunk are less conspicuous. They are of geometric shapes – the sphere, the cylinder and the cone – which have an innate strength that has saved them from destruction. It is interesting to note that these are the very forms that Cézanne said the artist should seek in nature. The Nok artists seem to have shared this attitude, though I do not suggest that they had an aesthetic theory about it.

The scale of the sculptures varies greatly from a kneeling figure only 10 cm. high (Plate 3) to a head 36 cm. high (Plate 2) which implies a figure well over a metre tall while the fragmentary seated figure excavated at Katsina Ala would have a standing height of about 1.4 metres. The fragments of a figure from Kuchamfa are more than half a metre high to the waist and show the identical artistic convention to represent the hem of the garment that we see later in sculpture from Ife and Owo. (Plate 4) Beadwork too is worn in a similar way on both the Nok and the Ife figures, with a heavy neck-ring of beads, strings of small beads hanging over the chest, and longer strings of larger beads hanging below the abdomen. I have discussed the similarities between the subject matter, the style and the technique of the sculptures of these two centres in greater detail in two other papers which should be read in conjunction with each other in order to see the visual data.<sup>3</sup> This evidence may be summarised as: these are the only two ancient traditions of terracotta sculpture so far discovered in Africa ever to have attempted sculpture of human beings at anywhere near life size; they share a number of artistic conventions; and they appear to share a

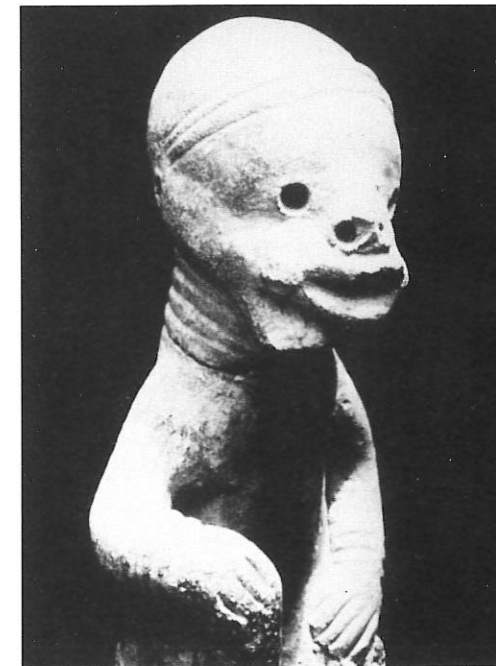
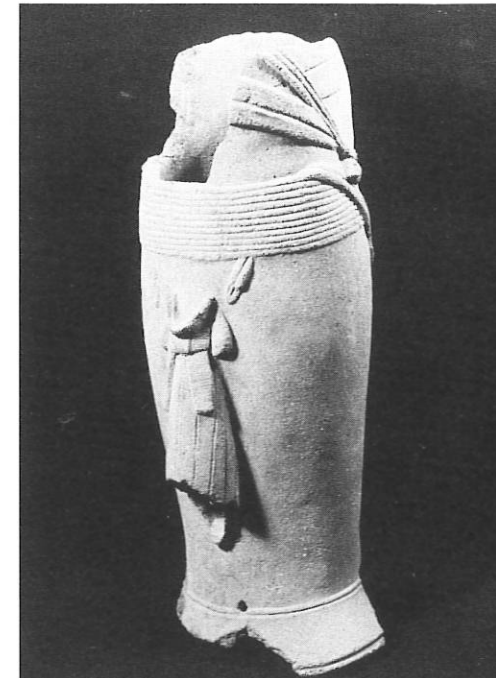
3. Kneeling figure of the Nok Culture, from Bwari, near Abuja. Ht. 10 cm.

5. Terracotta figure of a monkey from Nok. Ht. 26 cm.



4. Lower part of a human figure of the Nok Culture from Kuchamfa. Ht. 55 cm.

6. Terracotta figure from Yelwa showing simplification of the Nok style of sculpture towards the end of the first millennium A.D. Ht. 20 cm.

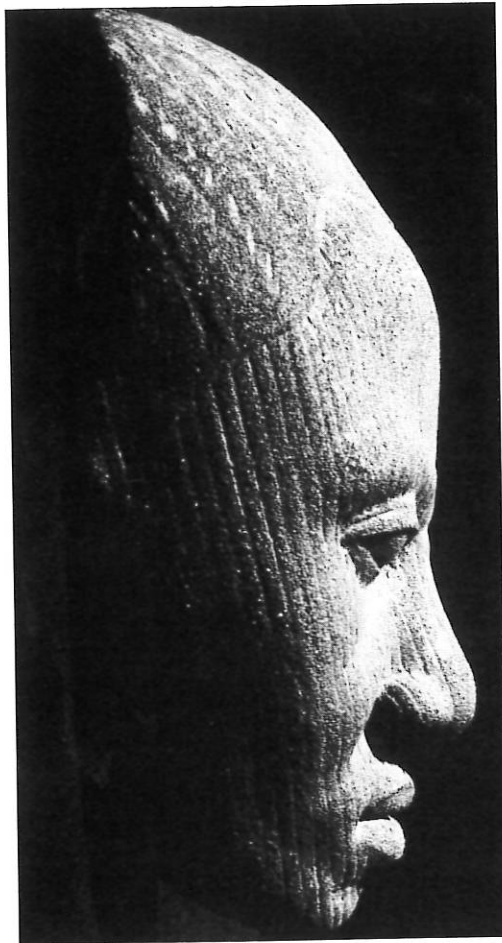


cultural tradition in the costumes and hair styles they wore and in cults that required the representation of diseased people. How-

ever, with the paucity of our knowledge of other ancient sculpture from West Africa, we cannot say whether the art of Ife is a



7. Terracotta fragment from Ayelabowo, Ife.



direct lineal descendant of the art of Nok or whether both are offshoots of a common tradition that has not yet been identified.

The human figures represented at Nok are mostly highly stylised. In contrast the animals are often represented in a remarkably naturalistic way. (Plate 5) Clearly the avoidance of naturalism in the human figures was deliberate. A number of African artists in the twentieth Century have declared that they avoid representing individuals in a recognisable manner for fear of being accused of witchcraft. The concept of witchcraft is so widely spread in Africa that we may be justified in supposing that it was the cause of the same in-

8. Ritual pot excavated from a pavement at Obalara's Land, Ife in which it had been set, apparently in order to receive libations. Ht. 27 cm.

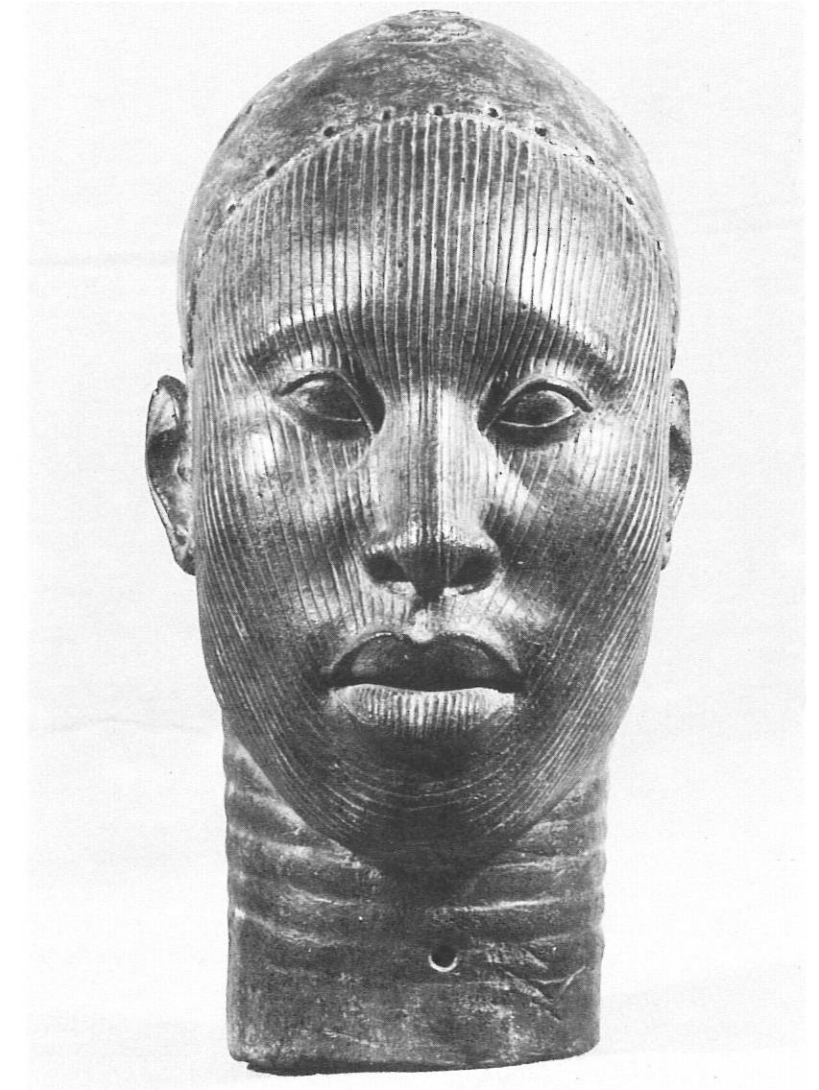


hibition on the part of the Nok artists.

The construction of the Kainji Dam in northern Nigeria was preceded by archaeological investigations that identified two sites that produced terracotta sculptures that appear to show the decline of the Nok art style in that area. They are the Baha mound with radiocarbon dates from the 1st or 2nd century B.C. to the 10th century A.D. and RS 63/32 near Yelwa with dates ranging from about 100 A.D. to about 700 A.D.<sup>4</sup> (Plate 6)

The city of Ife was occupied from the end of the first millennium A.D. up to the present. There is a single earlier radiocarbon date but it needs to be confirmed by further excavations. So far no terracotta sculptures have been found from the earliest occupation deposits in Ife. My own excavations at Ita Yemoo produced the first radiocarbon dates for Ife sculpture. (Plate 13) These indicated that the sculptures were deposited between 979 and 1427 A.D.<sup>5</sup> Combined with thermoluminescence dates obtained later they indicate, to two standard deviations, i.e. with a probability

9. Life-size head cast in copper found at Wunmonije Compound, Ife. Ht. 36 cm.



of twenty to one, a date of deposition of the sculptures between 1183 and 1345 A.D. An undescribed glass-working site excavated at Ayelabowo by J. Adeduntan has been radiocarbon dated to 1158 to 1362 A.D. It produced a particularly sensitively modelled human face in terracotta. (Plate 7) Peter Garlake's excavations at Obalara's Land produced a large number of terracottas with dates averaging 1247 to 1443 A.D. (Plate 8) These dates serve to indicate that the great flourishing of what William Fagg and I have called the Classical Period of Ife art was from the late twelfth to the fourteenth or early fifteenth century. Recent thermoluminescence dates from the core inside two life-size bronze heads from Wunmonije Compound fall within this time range: 1221 to 1369 A.D. Earlier datings, produced when the technique was less refined, had suggested that the castings from this site were considerably later (1452 to 1560 A.D.) despite the very close similarity of the broken figure of a king from Wunmonije Compound to the complete one from Ita Yemoo.

The naturalism of Ife is far removed from that of Nok. It is little wonder that Frobenius could not believe that he was seeing an indigenous African art tradition. Even in 1938 and 1939 when the next discovery of bronze-castings was made in digging foundation trenches of a house in Wunmonije Compound, their naturalism made it impossible for them to gain acceptance as genuinely African work. (Plate 9)

The find was of sixteen life-size heads, two rather smaller crowned heads and the upper part of a royal figure. The life-size heads had holes around the hair-line as if they had been intended originally to wear either a wig or a crown. Comparison with the crowned heads and with the representation in terracotta of crowned heads showed that the holes followed the outline of two types of crown. Moreover the upper part of the head had often been either built

up or else cut back in the wax of the original from which the casting was made. This would not have been necessary for a wig, but seems to have been made necessary by the need to accommodate a crown that already existed. I have suggested that these crowns were likely to have been those of deceased kings for whose second-burial ceremony these heads may have been made and fitted to wooden bodies.<sup>6</sup> Susanne Blier has subsequently suggested that the effigies may have been made all at one time

10. Brass figure representing an Oni (king) of Ife, found at Ita Yemoo, Ife. Ht. 46 cm.



for use on a shrine associated with kingship.<sup>7</sup>

In describing these finds, William Fagg pointed out that the head of the broken figure would have been a quarter of the overall height if the figure had been complete, a proportion totally different from the art styles derived from that of the ancient Greeks which tend to represent the head in proper proportion or even to reduce it. In contrast, African artists normally represent the head as occupying a quarter or even a third of the height of the entire figure. He concluded that the artists were indeed African. The discovery of another group of bronze castings at Ita Yemoo in Ife in 1957 produced a complete figure that was almost identical to the broken one found earlier. Its head was exactly one quarter of the overall height of the

11. Brass sculpture of an Oni and his queen found at Ita Yemoo, Ife. Ht. 28 cm.



figure. (Plate 10)

The same proportion was shown in the casting of a pair of royal figures found with it. (Plate 11) There could no longer be any doubt that this was the work of Africans, while the thermoluminescence dates subsequently obtained from two of the pieces and radiocarbon dates from other parts of the site demonstrated that they had been made before Europeans first set foot on the coast of West Africa in the late 15th Century.

The site at Ita Yemoo, up against the city wall on the northeastern edge of Ife, was revealed by labourers who were leveling the site ready to build a store for cocoa, the main cash-crop of the area. The first piece they came across represented an Oni (king) and queen 28cm. tall with their arms and legs intertwined. (Plate 11) Their

asymmetrical pose is unusual in African art. The blow of the finder's pick-axe struck off both heads, shattering the queen's face to smithereens. The metal in this part is little more than a millimetre thick and examination of the broken edge with a lens shows that the individual crystals composing the metal are as long as the thickness of the casting. It would appear that the missing face shattered into its constituent crystals. Little wonder then that we were unable to recover any part of it despite sieving eighty cubic metres of the earth disturbed by the builder's labourers. The metal in all the Ife castings that have been examined shows this same phenomenon of large crystals. It is caused by allowing the casting to cool down naturally instead of chilling the mould with water and immediately extracting the casting as is the usual practice with the modern smiths whom I have studied. They seem to be anxious to check whether their work has been successful. The patience of the Ife smiths is perhaps an indication of their self-confidence.

The labourers found next a pair of staffs with human heads on top, 23.5 cm. and 25.5 cm. in length. One of the heads was gagged. With these was found a small sculpture referred to by the finders as an ashtray. Only 11 cm. high, it represents a queen holding one of these staffs and coiled round a globular pot which is set atop a stool of specifically Ife form. This is composed of two discs separated by a cylindrical column, with a loop running from below the upper disc, looping outwards and joining the column about half way up. This loop is supported on a four-legged stool. Such stool combinations are represented also in terracotta at life size from the Iwinrin Grove (Plate 12) and from a shrine dedicated to Obalufon at Akeran Compound and from unrecorded sites discovered by Frobenius. They represent originals in stone of which several sets still exist in Ife.

Nearby was found the complete figure of an Oni already mentioned (Plate 10)

12. Incomplete terracotta sculpture of a pair of stools forming a throne for a human figure who sits with the feet astride the loop of the main stool, from the Iwinrin Grove, Ife. Ht. 76 cm.



together with two ovoid staff-heads 7.5 and 8.9 cm. tall, each decorated with two gagged human heads. On the larger staff-head, a young and an old man are represented, a very unusual phenomenon in African art, where human beings are normally represented at some indeterminate prime of life. The presence of five gagged heads, apparently sacrificial victims, suggests either that the objects may have been intended for use in ceremonies associated with human sacrifice, or else that they were for use in ceremonies involving people who had power to command such sacrifices.

Excavations at Ita Yemoo revealed the remains of an extensive settlement with many pavements made of broken potsherds forming the floors of passageways and of verandahs around open courtyards. On the edge of two such pavements shrines with terracotta sculptures representing kings, a queen and attendants were revealed. One



13. Excavation in progress of a shrine at Ita Yemoo, Ife. This site produced the first radiocarbon dates for the use of terracotta sculptures. Scales in inches and feet.

14. Rescue excavation in progress at Lafogido, Ife, showing the head of an elephant wearing a crown, fragments of a small terracotta stool and part of a small human head.



13)

On my last day as an employee of the Nigerian government I conducted a small rescue excavation just behind the Palace. This saved the crowned head of an elephant in terracotta which had been eroding from the surface and a few other sculptures in the same medium. (Plate 14) Ekpo Eyo was later able to investigate the site more thoroughly and revealed a potsherd pavement edged with globular water pots some of which had retained the terracotta animal heads that had originally been placed on their necks. Local people declared that this must be the burial place of the Oni (King) Lafogido, and Eyo was told not to disturb his remains. He obtained a single radiocarbon date which dated the site to somewhere between 1015 and 1415 A.D.

In the same season of excavations Eyo also investigated the site on Odo Ogbe Street where a classical style Ife head in terracotta had been found by schoolboys. This proved to be a secondary site, i.e. a shrine where an ancient terracotta sculpture had been found, long after its manufacture and placed on a shrine. The single radiocarbon date from the layer from which the head appeared to have been recovered showed it to have been deposited between 1473 and 1673 A.D. Deeper down he found what he has called pit and pot burials that produced another single radiocarbon date of 980 – 1295 A.D.

Peter Garlake's excavations at Obalara's Land in 1971 revealed a wide variety of potsherd pavements from an extensive occupation site. Buried in the centre of one pavement was a globular pot with relief sculptures of objects used in rituals. (Plate 8) It portrayed, among other motifs, an altar with three terracotta heads, one in a naturalistic style but the others in the abstract style found on a number of other heads already in the Ife Museum. Clearly the art of Ife was not exclusively naturalistic and these highly stylised heads were

of these shrines yielded the charcoal from which the first radiocarbon dates for the use of such sculpture were obtained. (Plate

15. Storehouse for ritual objects as reconstructed after Thurstan Shaw's excavations at Igbo Ukwu. Reproduced by kind permission of Professor Thurstan Shaw.



in use alongside the naturalistic ones as William Fagg and I had claimed in 1959.

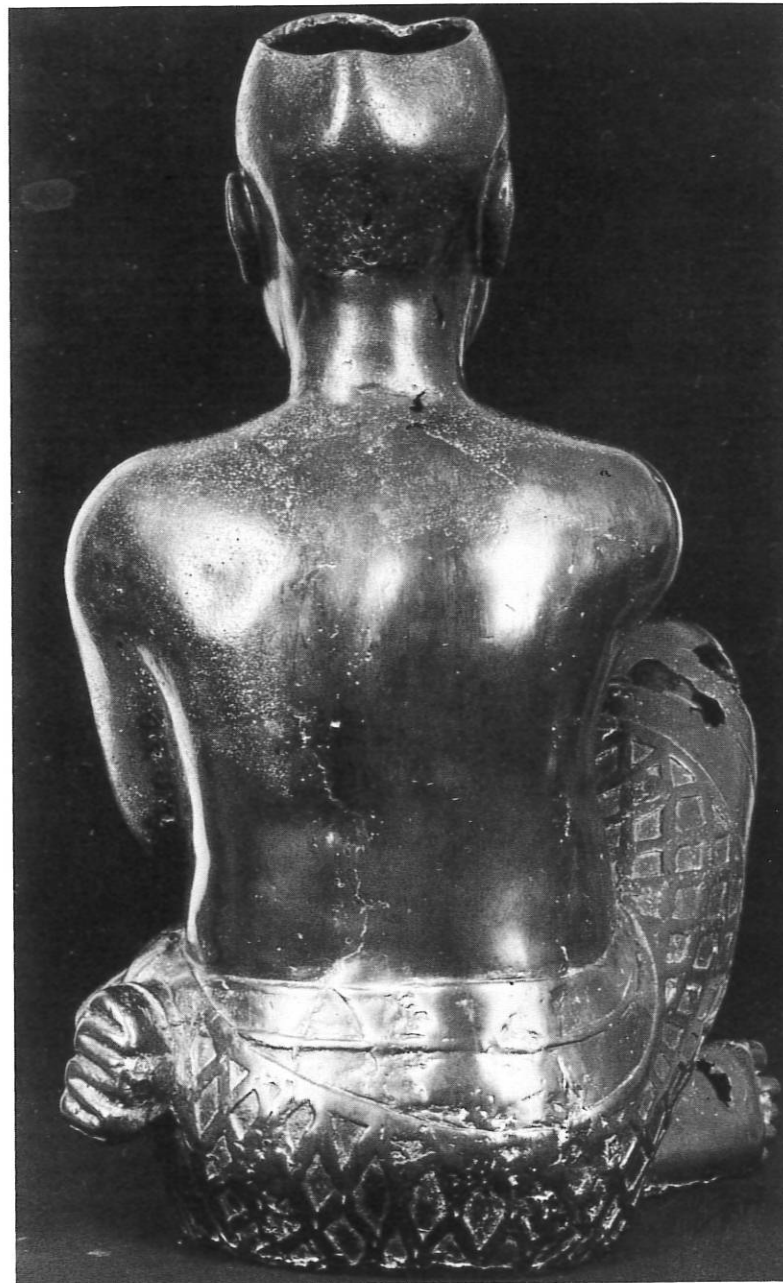
In 1939, at about the same time as the life-size heads were being dug up in Ife, an Igbo man was digging a cistern in his compound on the other side of the River Niger at Igbo Ukwu. He discovered a remarkable hoard of bronze objects quite unlike anything that had ever been seen before. Again it was thought that they could not have been made by Africans and that they were probably no more than two or three centuries old. The site could not be excavated until 1959 when Thurstan Shaw began to work there. He showed that the original find had come from a storehouse of ritual objects, the rest of which were still in place. (Plate 15) Nearby he excavated the grave of a ruler who was provided with bronze and copper objects in a similar style. Later he excavated a pit in which yet more bronzes had been disposed of. The greatest surprise came when the laboratories produced his radiocarbon dates which indicated that the deposits were of about the

tenth century A.D. Further samples have subsequently been dated and there can no longer be any doubt that these deposits date from between 822 and 1082 A.D.

Already the smiths of Igbo Ukwu had discovered that copper was not suitable for casting in enclosed moulds so they worked it by casting it into bars in open moulds and then smithing it into very complex shapes. For casting they used an alloy of copper with tin and lead but without any zinc. Recent study by Paul Craddock of the analyses of these metals has shown that they contain sufficient silver to have been worth refining. Anywhere else in the world at the time the silver would have been recovered. The metal must have been prepared locally. Subsequently, working with V.E. Chikwendu and A.C. Umeji, he has identified probable sources of the ores. The technical skill shown in the castings at Igbo Ukwu is unsurpassed anywhere in the world though in other parts at that time other techniques had been adopted to save labour – bowls were made by hammering

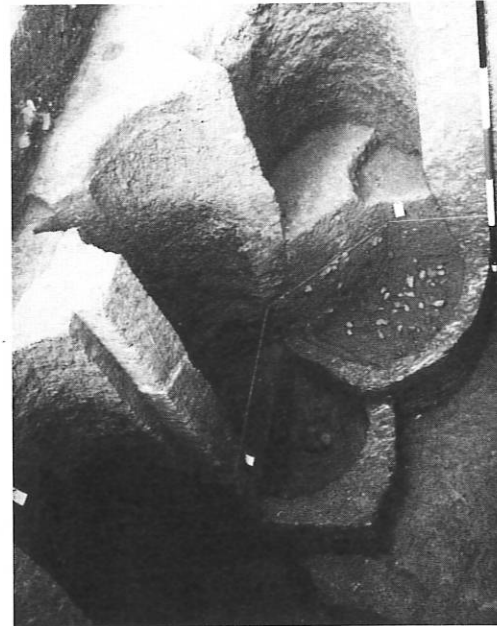


16. Rear view of the seated figure of Tada, cast in pure copper. The different areas visible in the surface appear to correspond to separate pourings of crucibles of metal. Ht. 54 cm.



rather than by casting, cast ornaments were rivetted in position not built into the wax model and cast on. The Igbo Ukwu smiths seem to have been working in complete isolation so it now seem possible that they discovered the art of bronze-casting for

17. Excavation in progress at Orun Oba Ado, Ife, the burial place of the heads of the kings of Benin. These pits provided the earliest radiocarbon dates recorded from Ife.



themselves.

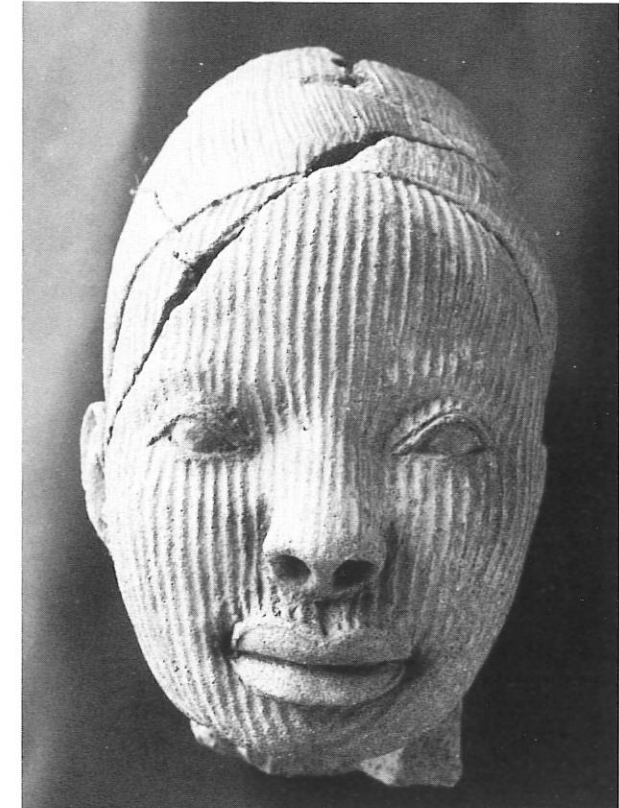
They did not pass their knowledge on to the smiths of Ife however unless the latter simply ignored their advice, for in Ife we find that pure copper was cast in enclosed moulds, probably by joining the mould onto the top of the crucible, thus minimising the oxidation of the copper which produces a thick skin on the surface of the metal that prevents it from flowing. The combined crucible and mould must have been heated in the furnace until the metal was molten and then inverted to allow the metal to run into the mould. The largest copper casting in the Ife style, a seated figure kept in a Nupe shrine at Tada on the banks of the River Niger was too heavy (18 kg.) to have been made in this way. The metal must have been melted in sealed crucibles whose tops would have been knocked off immediately before pouring. The separate pourings of metal can still be distinguished on the casting. (Plate 16)

The most prolific of the bronze-casting centres in Nigeria is Benin City. Excavations there have thrown very little light on

the development of the art so I do not propose to pursue this topic here beyond mentioning that oral traditions in Benin attribute the source of their knowledge of this art to Ife. The present ruling dynasty of Benin was founded by Oranmiyan, a founder hero from Ife, where many stories are still recounted of his exploits. There had been a dispute about the succession to the Benin throne and Oduduwa, the ruler of Ife was asked to resolve it. He sent Oranmiyan who married a princess of the previous ruling family and begat by her Eweka I, the first ruler of the new dynasty. When the kings of this dynasty died, their heads were sent to Ife for burial on the site (Orun Oba Ado – the heaven of the kings of Benin) from which Oranmiyan had set out and bronze heads for the ancestor altars were sent back to Benin together with other bronze items to recognise the successor. Eventually the Benin king Oguola asked the Oni of Ife to send a smith to teach his people how to make these heads for themselves. (This seems to have been towards the end of the fourteenth century). This was done but the actual heads of the dead kings continued to be sent to Ife until 1888. It therefore seemed sensible in 1961/62 to investigate the site of Orun Oba Ado in case we could find there any Benin artefacts that could allow us to link together the chronologies of the two cities. No Benin artefacts were found but several possible burial pits were excavated, though no heads were found in them. (Plate 17) Instead the charcoal samples gave us the earliest suite of radiocarbon dates we have from Ife. The earliest one corresponds to 382-918 A.D. so has been ignored. The four later dates produce a mean age of 811-1079 A.D. Clearly Ife was occupied at this time but there is no evidence of sculpture from this early period.

In 1969 Ekpo Eyo undertook excavations at Igbo 'Laja in Owo, a Yoruba city roughly half way between Ife and Benin which had long been known to possess

18. Terracotta head, excavated at Igbo 'Laja, Owo, in the same naturalistic style as that of Classical Ife. Ht. 17 cm.



potsherd pavements like those of Ife. A group of terracotta sculptures was discovered which appeared to have been inside a hut that had been destroyed leading to the scattering of fragments of individual sculptures. Pieces of one head were found four metres apart. Charcoal from among these sculptures produced a date between 1220 and 1600 A.D. These sculptures share in the same naturalistic tradition as those of Ife especially in the representation of the human face. (Plate 18) The hems on the costume are represented by the same artistic conventions as in Ife but they are more crudely executed. (Plate 19) There are however significant differences in some of the subjects portrayed which are positively blood-thirsty – a leopard gnawing a human leg and a basket of severed human heads. Two fragments of human faces carry Benin type scarifications over their bulg-

19. Fragmentary human figure in terracotta from Igbo 'Laja, Owo, demonstrating the same artistic convention to represent the hem as was used by the Nok and the Ife artists. (Cf. Plates 4 and 10 to 12). Ht. 52 cm.



ing eyes which suggests that there may have been some influence from that city. However the Owo artists appear still to have been in touch with Ife for one of the Owo heads has bulging eyes, flat protrusive lips and very simplified ears, that are characteristic of what I have called the post-classical style of Ife sculpture. The Owo piece is surprisingly similar to the piece from the Mokuro Stream in Ife.<sup>8</sup>

Several pieces with these characteristics are known from Ife mostly as casual finds and thus without archaeological context. Some however have been excavated by Omotoso Eluyemi from sites of what he has described as the Egbejoda Culture which is widely distributed to the west and

20. Solid head in baked clay excavated in the Royal Palace at Ilesha, 32 km. north-east of Ife. Width 13 cm.



south of Ife. He suggests that they may have been used in the rituals of the Ogboni Society which is concerned with the cult of the earth.<sup>9</sup> He has published dates from one excavation at the village of Egbejoda itself ranging from the fourteenth to the nineteenth or possibly the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> These sculptures appear therefore to follow on from the highly naturalistic sculptures that define the classical period. These naturalistic heads have been found long after their original date of manufacture and have been placed on shrines. Two such sites have been dated by radiocarbon, Igbo Obameri and Odo Ogbe Street. Taken together they indicate a date of deposition between the mid-15th and the late 18th century.

The stylistic features I have described as typical of post-classical Ife occur also in a large group of sculptures made in solid clay and rather lightly fired that I excavated on a site which formerly was part of the royal palace in Ilesha, 32 kilometres north-east of Ife. (Plate 20) The site seems to have been a manufactory for these sculptures which may have been intended to be placed beside doorways in the palace as a protective device. Although no scientific dating has been obtained from the site, the sculptures seem to be fairly recent. They

21. Wooden figure (ibeji) representing a twin, carved in the Awori area of south-western Yorubaland in the 19th Century. Ht. 25 cm.



have especially prominent globular eyes crossed by a horizontal, square-sectioned strip of clay representing the upper eyelid, with a similar strip curving round the lower edge of the eyeball to indicate the lower lid. In this they are almost identical with the eyes represented on wood carvings made in Ilesha during the present century.

Yoruba wood sculpture has been brought into Museum collections in Europe since the seventeenth century. Thus the time period of excavations in Nigeria overlaps that of the collecting of ethnographic material in the field. Indeed we may go further, for if we examine the eyes of Yoruba twin figures (*ibeji*) (Plate 21) and those of masks used in the dances of the Gelede Society in southwestern Yorubaland (Plate 22) we frequently see close resemblances to those of Nok terracottas. At first I was inclined to dismiss this as a coincidence. The gelede mask is worn on the head and the wearer needs to see out through the eyes so is it not natural to pierce through the pupils for this

22. Mask for the gelede masquerade at Ibatéfin, southwestern Yorubaland, Ht. 24 cm.



purpose? When I observed a gelede masquerade in action I was able to see that the mask is worn like a cap on top of the head – the wearer does not look through the eyes at all. The eyes are thus an artistic convention that appears to have persisted with little change through some two and a half millennia. Some of the Nok terracottas show features such as the blocking out of the mouth and the incising of teeth that we would expect to find in a subtractive medium like wood (where one cuts away from a pre-existing block) but not in an additive medium like terracotta (where one only needs to add as much as one needs to build up the form). In addition the Nok people were equipped with very delicate polished stone blades which may well have been intended for carving wood as Bernard Fagg pointed out in one of his earliest papers on his discoveries at Nok.<sup>11</sup> Wood does not usually survive into the archaeological record in the wetter parts of Africa, but here we do seem reasonably to be able to infer that it was carved alongside the sculp-



ture in more durable materials that has been the subject of this paper. It was presumably in this way that the Nok eyes were handed on through two and a half millennia.

(Milano 21.11.1991)

### References

<sup>1</sup> G. Bond, A preliminary account of the Pleistocene geology of the Plateau tin-fields region of Northern Nigeria, *Third International West African Congress, Ibadan*, 1949, Lagos, 1956, pp. 200-202.

<sup>2</sup> Dates and illustrations of the bulk of the Nok sculptures will be found in Bernard Fagg, *Nok Terracottas*, Lagos and London, 1977.

<sup>3</sup> E. Eyo and F. Willett, *Tesori dell'antica Nigeria*, Florence, 1984 and F. Willett. A missing millennium? From Nok to Ife and beyond, in *Arte in Africa*, edited by E. Bassani, Modena, 1986, pp. 87-100.

<sup>4</sup> See the works cited in the previous footnote for references to the literature.

<sup>5</sup> Radiocarbon dates are usually quoted with a single standard error indicating a probability of only two chances in three that the true date lies within the range indicated. The use of dates in this form, or worse still without quoting the standard deviation, gives an entirely false impression of precision. Other disciplines use two standard deviations so I have adopted this practice. This is especially important where only a single radiocarbon date is available since there is still one chance in twenty that the real date lies outside the indicated limits. All dates quoted in this article have been calibrated in accordance with M. Stuiver and G.W. Pearson, High precision calibration of the radiocarbon time scale, AD 1950 – 500 BC, *Radiocarbon*, 28, No. 2B, 1986, pp. 805-838. Means have been calculated in accordance with the procedures recommended by A. Long and B. Rippeteau, Testing contemporaneity and averaging radiocarbon dates, *American Antiquity*, 39, No. 2, 1974, pp. 205-215.

<sup>6</sup> On the funeral effigies of Owo and Benin and the interpretation of the life-size bronze heads from Ife, *Man, the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, N.S.1, 1966, pp. 34-45.

<sup>7</sup> Kings, Crowns, and Rights of Succession: Obalufon Arts at Ife and Other Yoruba Centers,

*The Art Bulletin*, September 1985, pp. 383-401.

<sup>8</sup> Both are illustrated in Ekpo Eyo and Frank Willett, *Tesori dell'antica Nigeria*, Florence, 1984, figs. 31 and 32.

<sup>9</sup> O. Eluyemi, The pottery of Egbejoda Culture, *Department of History University of Ife Seminar Papers*, 1979-80, pp. 106-127.

<sup>10</sup> The youngest date coincides with two kinks in the calibration curve of M. Stuiver and G.W. Pearson (see reference 5). This produces four possible date ranges between 1680 and 1940.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Fagg, An outline of the stone age of the Plateau minesfield, *Proceedings of the International West African Conference, Ibadan*, 1949, Lagos, 1956, pp. 203-222.