

AFRICA'S CROSS RIVER

ART OF THE
NIGERIAN-CAMEROON
BORDER REDEFINED

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In the thickly forested Cross River area of the Nigerian-Cameroon border live a number of independent but linguistically related peoples whose artists have produced some of the most awesome and powerful sculptural forms in Africa. The best known of these groups are the Ejagham ("Ekoi", Keaka and Obang), the Anyang and Banyang, and the related Mbembe, Boki and Yako. The masquerade headdresses and other art works from this area were first identified in the literature as "Calabar", the coastal port-of-call where early examples were collected. After 1915 they were often attributed to the "Ekoi" one of the first of the important groups of this area to become well known and illustrated in the literature. In the last two decades, these works have usually been more broadly defined as "Cross River", a geographic term which more accurately reflects the diverse proveniences of these arts. Several neighboring peoples — certain Idoma, Ibo (Aba, Bende, Aro, and Ezzi), and Ibibio (principally the eastern groups and the Ejagham-related Efik) — who border on the western and southern banks of the Cross River produce related masking traditions. To the east, the Wdekum, Bangwa, Bafo, and even certain Grasslands and Fang groups also employ various related art forms.

A History of Collections and Research

Headdresses from the Cross River have been known in the West for a considerable period. Governor Beecroft collected two such works at Old Calabar in 1843 (Sadler 1935, p. 54). One of these (published by Willett, 1971, pl. 66), was previously part of the Bankfield Museum collection at Halifax and is currently in the Nigerian Museum in Lagos. Leo Frobenius also illustrates a number of early "Calabar" headdresses in his 1898 *Masken und Geheimbunde*. Soon after the turn of the century when the area's missionary activity and European palm oil trade was at its height, more extensive collecting was undertaken in the Cross River area. A number of pieces from this period are now in the Museum für Volkerkunde, Berlin.

Alfred Mansfeld, working in the Cross River area between 1904 and 1907, was one of the first to do serious research on the Ejagham, the Anyang and the Boki. Many of the art works which he collected are now in the Institute of Ethnography, Leningrad (published by Olderogge, 1969) and the Museum für Volkerkunde, Berlin (illustrated in Krieger and Kutscher, 1960). Charles Partridge also did considerable work in the Cross River area during this period, particularly among the Mbembe. He was the first to note the important stone monoliths of this region. Undoubtedly the most prolific and thorough of these early writers was P. A. Talbot. His important and widely read Cross River material, covering many groups but especially the Efik and Ejagham, came out in 1912, 1923 and 1926. Many of the works which he collected are in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford, and the British Museum, London.

The next forty years saw a number of additional Cross River studies, including those of Forde (1964), Harris (1965) and Ruel (1969). This was

also the period when the brief but important artistic investigations of G. I. Jones (1938, 1945a, 1945b) and Kenneth Murray (1949, 1951) were undertaken. Many of the headdresses which Murray collected for Nigeria are in the Nigerian Museum in Lagos. More recently we have the excellent field analyses of the Ejagham and Banyang arts by Robert F. Thompson (1974) and the Boki and Wdekum works by Keith Nicklin (1974, 1979). Marciene Wittmer has added important notes on Cross River style (1977, 1978). Outside of a small exhibition and catalogue of Cross River headdresses organized by Helene Kamer in 1976 (mysteriously titled *Les "Duen-Fubara"*, the name of the Ijaw ancestral screens), there have been few other African art exhibitions dealing exclusively with the Cross River materials.

Art Styles of the Cross River

Art forms of the Cross River area are distinguished by several important stylistic features. In masquerade headdresses, these characteristics include: 1) the use of skin covering usually over a carved wooden core; 2) a predilection for fully rounded cap-like forms supported on a basketry base; 3) an emphasis on the juxtaposed Janus in which the two sides are often differentiated through color, decoration, or iconography. While each of these features is particularly important in the Cross River area, not all are exclusive to this region, nor do they all necessarily appear together in each Cross River work.

Skin covering, fastened while still pliable rather than "cured" like leather, is undoubtedly the most distinctive feature of the works of this area. This skin, drawn taut over the bone-like wooden substructure, provides the work with a strong and powerful sense of sculptural realism. The common use of inserted, separately carved teeth of metal, cane, or wood, with the frequent inclusion of attached clear-focused shiny eyes, and the occasional employment of actual human hair, develop this skin-covered realism still further. The construction of some Cross River headdresses from actual animal or, occasionally human skulls is perhaps the ultimate example of this theme.

The appearance of headdresses carved fully in the round and attached to a basketry base worn on top of the performer's head further amplifies this strong tendency towards realism. This form of cap elevates the image of full head above the norm, transforming this vision into one of super-real enormity. The Janus with its requisite use of multiple faces, provides a further dimension of sculptural realism in the Cross River. Some of these works, conceived as helmets rather than cap headdresses, give a double, triple, or even quadruple impression of this quality.

Figures from the Cross River are somewhat less documented than the masks and headdresses. The familiar stone monoliths, and the more rarely illustrated wooden sculptures from this area have several characteristics in common. These sculptures, like many Cross River headdresses, often incorporate raised ethnic "keloid" marks at the temples or foreheads. In addition, both stone and wood Cross River

sculptures often display a distinct indented ring which delimits the neck and separates the head of the figure from the rest of the body. Often this "ring" dips to a point at the chin, forming a beard-like element. When wooden Cross River sculptures have this feature, in conjunction with the common tubular or button-shaped eyes, they are quite reminiscent of Mambila wooden sculptures from near the Cameroon-Nigerian border.

A close look at the literature and the collected Cross River work reveals the complexity of sub-styles and related forms in this area. Headdresses acquired early by Mansfeld show the vitality and diffuseness of styles found in core Cross River groups such as the "Ekoi", "Keaka", Anyang and Boki. Nicklin's recent research with the Boki (1974) suggests that there is also considerable stylistic divergence in this area, which earlier was often associated with a single, relatively "classic" sub-style.

Several recent stylistic groupings proposed independently by Thompson (1974), Wittmer (1977, 1978), and Nicklin (1979) are of help in sorting out the masking forms of this area. Though differing slightly, each suggests a division of the Cross River into three major geographical sub-style regions: the Lower Cross River, including principally the Efik and other eastern Ibibio; the Middle Cross River area, dominated by the Ejagham; and the Upper Cross River region, with the Banyang, Anyang, and Grasslands-related Widekum.²

Formal qualities of the masquerade headdresses from these areas bear out this tripartite sub-style division. Lower Cross River works (of the Efik, "Calabar" groups, etc.) tend toward a certain "rounded or fleshy naturalism" with fuller, almost plump features, and an emphasis on exuberant coiffuring; both characteristics which are related to Ibibio styles from around Ikot Ekpene further west. The rounded ball-like shapes and contrasting color details of early "Calabar" style headdresses suggest close ties with the southern Ibo *Ekpe* works.

Middle Cross River headdresses of the Ejagham emphasize a more pronounced "skeletal realism" with sharp, bony ridging of the jaw, cheeks, nose, and forehead. The headdresses of this area, particularly those of the Akparabong clan, display wide foreheads, with sensual mouths which are parted to display separate teeth notched in the center. Elaborate facial designs are also common on some of the lighter pigmented Ejagham Middle Cross River headdresses.

Upper Cross River works (of the Banyang, Anyang, eastern Ejagham, and certain Widekum) are characterized by a form of "skeletal abstraction". These headdresses often have little of the fleshy naturalism or skeletal realism of the Lower and Middle Cross River areas. Instead, they tend to emphasize small, bulbous heads surmounting very tall, thick necks which are sometimes longer than the head itself. The jugular vein is also frequently quite pronounced, and the jaw, which is often no wider than the neck, is commonly filled with a widely stretched, almost grimacing mouth. In addition, surface painting on these headdresses is generally less common, skin pigments are often darker, and faces show a more pronounced (Grasslands-like) faceting or roughness of surface. Arms and legs are sometimes added to these tall heads, transforming

them into miniature figures.

Headdresses of the Boki, which are defined by Nicklin as Middle Cross River and by Wittmer as Upper Cross River, seem to suggest a grouping into themselves. The earliest collected Boki works often emphasize dominant button-shaped or tubular eyes with some stylistic affinity to sculptural works from the Mambila area in the north. More recent Boki works are often quite indistinct from those of their neighbors the Ejagham. Boki architecture is different from that of other Cross River groups, being closer to northern savanna traditions, thus giving further substantiation for grouping the Boki separately.

Cross River Related Styles

In the recent or distant past, a number of groups bordering on the Cross River cultural area have taken up related style motifs (skin-covering, cap headdresses, or juxtaposed Janus images). Often these people maintain their own particular stylistic approaches to these works. The Widekum, Bangwa, Idoma, North-Eastern Ibo, Southern Ibo and Eastern Ibibio are some of the most important groups with artistic traditions related to the Cross River area. The Widekum, who frequently use "classic" Anyang/Banyang skin-covered headdress forms, also carve works with their own distinctly Widekum version of the Cross River style. The Widekum skin-covered headdresses generally display a Grasslands-like interest in heavily delineated and enlarged facial features, pierced areas, more dynamically faceted surfaces, and strongly opened mouths. Many have characteristically Widekum rectilinear mouths, eyes, and headshapes incorporated into half-helmet masks which cover the face and the top of the head. The Bangwa skin-covered Janus and cap-form headdresses reflect a similar concern for powerfully faceted and dynamic facial cavities but here these elements are incorporated with typical Bangwa emphasis on repeated elliptical shapes around the eyes and mouth.

Moving to the west we find that the Idoma often carve Cross River related multi-headed headdresses with a distinctly Idoma use of heavy black detailing (particularly on the nose bridge, nostrils and eyebrows) against a white facial surface. The central forehead line and the corners of the mouth frequently bear distinct dark pigmented patterning. Headdresses of the North-Eastern Ibo sometimes display characteristic Middle Cross River Ejagham features in addition to the careful, crisp facial detailing, and brightly painted crescent or wheel-shaped coiffures reminiscent of those found on *Mmo* masks of Western Ibo groups around Onitsha. The Ezzi (Wawa) juxtaposed Janus "elephant" masks exhibit a mingling of the two styles.

Turning now toward the coast, the Cross River style headdresses of the Southern Ibo from Aba and Bende often combine skin-covering and rounded, ball-shaped, cap headdresses with sharply delineated concave facial planes, suggesting some analogies with certain Ijaw human-form cap headdresses. Still further south, the Western Ibibio Cross River-related works display skin-covering over wooden headdress forms with

otherwise traditional Ibibio features. To the east, some cap headdresses and juxtaposed Janus images which were collected early in Duala and other coastal regions of the Cameroons (see Frobenius 1898) seem stylistically linked with the Southern Ibo and "Old Calabar" headdress forms. However, the use of bright, carefully contrasted colors in these works are clearly within the "Duala" tradition.

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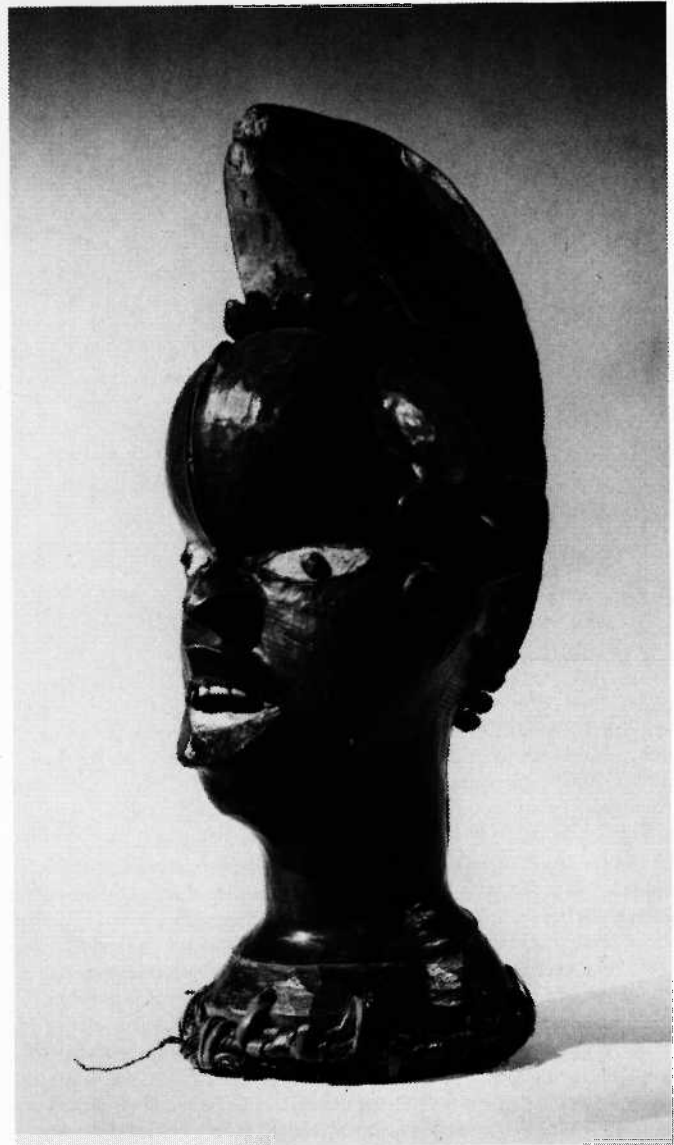
Style Dissemination in the Cross River Area

A greater understanding of the wide distribution and considerable stylistic complexity of the Cross River related arts in this and adjacent areas can be realized with a brief look at the history of contact and movement within this region during the last several centuries. Calabar, the port city near the mouth of the Cross River, was known to the Portuguese as early as the fifteenth century. The Cross River itself was sometimes mistakenly called Rio del Rey. Calabar became one of the major stopping places along the West African slave route. The Efik (Ibibio) and the Aro (Ibo) traders plied the great Cross River and its tributaries in search of potential slave prisoners, trading inland both European goods and indigenous farm products. From the seventeenth century onwards, commercial contact with the Dutch, British and, later, other Europeans was continued through these principal intermediaries.

The Efik and Aro maintained their powerful and remunerative monopoly of the area by several means, one of which was the men's society called *Ekpe*. This society, and another related association, *Nqbe*, employed Cross River style masks as one of their powerful controlling societal "images". Villages who wanted to participate in this elaborate trading network were often required to purchase rights to become part of this society, in the process acquiring its masks and other art-related accouterments. At first, these art works had to be purchased from pre-existing *Nqbe* and *Ekpe* associations in the sponsoring village. Later local artisans might be commissioned to copy these forms.

The second major institution which was important in the wide dissemination of Cross River style masquerades and other arts was the great oracle of the western Cross River area located at Aro Chuku. This oracle was controlled by the Aro who, like their neighbors to the east, employed Cross River style headdresses and belonged to the *Nqbe* graded men's society. The Aro Chuku Oracle served as an all-powerful supreme court of appeal (the decisive final voice for important legal and religious questions) drawing people from great distances to hear its pronouncements (Webster and Boahen 1967, pp. 175-80). At its height this oracle was known as far away as Gabon. It brought people together and provided them with an opportunity to see new forms. Accordingly it may have been important, particularly in the Ibo areas, in disseminating certain Cross River symbols (*nsibidi*) and headdress styles.

Still another source of stylistic dissemination in the area, particularly in recent years, has been the proliferation of age-linked entertainment societies each of which has its own masquerade forms. It is through societies of this type that contemporary Cross River style headdresses



have traveled to Sierra Leone, with young men going there in search of employment. (John Nunley, Personal Communication, 1980.)

Display and Performance of Cross River Art

The artistic centers of every traditional Cross River village were the association houses. These houses and those of important society members and chiefs, served as storehouses for local art. The association house, often the first building to be constructed in a village, was commonly the most elaborate and carefully decorated architectural form (Talbot 1912, p. 39). Ornate paintings, many depicting society masquerade images in performance, covered the walls. Inside the structure, on a dais running along the back of the wall, the association's masquerades and attached costumes were sometimes displayed. At other times, these headdresses were rolled in mats and secured in the house roof, above the fireplace to keep them dry and free from insects. Sculptures which depicted humans and powerful animals were also associated with these centers, emphasizing the power and prestige of these village "clubs".

Cross River masquerade performances are elaborately choreographed. Talbot describes one such funeral presentation where the stage was appropriately set with sculpture and other furnishings for the arrival of the masked dancers (Talbot 1912, p. 223). He explains:

In the principal compounds stands had been dressed much like the stalls of a country fair. These were spread with blankets and other bright cloths, and hung around with gay hankerchiefs and gaudy prints. On them were set out an array of china . . . and groups of cottage figures.

During these performances, the various Cross River masquerades appear to fall into two general categories representing human-featured gentle beauties (usually female) on the one hand, and fierce beasts of various forms on the other. In the Lower and Middle Cross River areas, gentle "beauties" have clearly defined, more naturalistic human features and reddish brown or ochre flesh tones. They commonly are depicted with elaborate coiffures formed by tall horn-like extensions, short pegs, actual hair, or, occasionally stained patterns depicting traditional shaved-hair designs. Flowers and feathers are sometimes placed upright in holes at the crown of these headdresses; disk-shaped keloids are often represented on foreheads and temples. Lines of a darker color are sometimes applied to the female mask surface to accentuate facial features and to represent the traditional beauty patterns of women preparing to marry. Secret *nsibidi* symbols defining societal ideals and values are sometimes drawn on the mask in this way as well. (Thompson 1974, pp. 180-82).

The fierce Cross River headdresses have a very different appearance. These headdresses are usually covered with dark brown or black skin surfaces and their coiffures and painted designs are less complex. As with similar masks of the Ibo and Ibibic, these masks fall into three

distinct formal groups. Some represent frightening darkened human or animal skulls, while others depict dangerous animals (crocodiles, hippopotami, monkeys, rams). Still others portray deformed or diseased humans with distorted features such as flapping ears, huge or rudimentary noses, long-hanging tongues, and off-center mouths.

Costumes worn with these opposing headdresses emphasize the differences between them. The costumes of the gentle "beauty" maskers often consist of elaborate multi-colored flowing robes of woven native cloth or imported fabric. In contrast, the fierce maskers usually wear darker, less elaborately colored costumes, or costumes consisting of rough, torn or dirty fabrics. Robes for both the gentle and fierce dancers emphasize the aggrandized height of these images. Some also have wide hoop bustles around the waist to add to their girth.

Dance choreography of the Cross River maskers continues this juxtaposed gentle / fierce theme. Gentle Cross River "images" often carry "cool" props such as leaves while performing their carefully choreographed calm dances. Fierce maskers tend towards erratic, impulsive and violent movements, often attacking people with a variety of weapons. This choreographic distinction is brought out clearly by Mansfeld (1908, p. 121) who describes one dance with three performers wearing hot or fierce headdresses doing a rough, fast-paced dance. They are followed in the presentation by eight gentle "wives" who make high pitched "yodel-like" calls and try to cool their husbands with fans. Another Cross River performance was observed by Jones (1945a, pp. 194, 196). He writes, "the fierce one appeared first and drove off the crowd before the arrival of the so-called "beautiful one" whose visual attributes were more elaborate".

Cross River Art Patronage

Masquerade images are central to the identity, prestige, and power of Cross River men's and women's societies called *okum*. Indeed *okum* or "club" is also the term by which the general class of masquerade images are known, with individual masks being named for the specific clubs they represent. According to Talbot (1912, pp. 44-5) there was considerable competition between associations to see who could produce the most elaborate masquerade forms.

The *okum* which employ these various arts are of diverse types. Most can be described as mutual interest, age grade, or occupational associations which draw their power from nature spirits or "familiar" (*njom*) whom they have come to control (Talbot 1912, p. 49, Jones 1945a, pp. 192, 196). Many of the masked performances are associated either with the funerals of societal members or with special associated celebratory events (battle victory dances for warfare societies, etc.). The principal Cross River *okum* patrons include leopard societies (*Ekpe* and *Ngbe*), ancestor societies (Ibo *Ekpe* and others), warrior societies (*Nkang*, *Ogrinia*, *Ngkpwe*, etc.), wild-game-hunting societies (*Bekarum*, *Ekarum*), witch-hunting societies (*Akpambe*, *Basinjom*), women's societies (*Egbege*, *Ako*), and various age graded entertainment societies.

Ngbe and Ekpe Leopard Societies in the Cross River

Many Cross River art works are associated with the *Ngbe* or *Ekpe* society and its grades. *Ngbe* (*Nkpe*), meaning "leopards", is thought to have originated with and to have disseminated from the Ejagham peoples who were famed for their ritual prowess and control of bush spirits (Talbot 1926 III, p. 779, Anene 1966, p. 10). *Ekpe* (*Egbo*), the Efik society also meaning "leopard", is comparable in many ways to *Ngbe* (Forde 1964, p. 159, Ruel 1969, p. 250).

Unfortunately there is considerable confusion about *Ngbe* and *Ekpe*. In the last century and perhaps earlier, several Cross River groups, principally the Efik Ibibio and the Aro Ibo, adopted *Ngbe* (Ruel 1969, p. 250). In time they appear to have modified its structure and dominant warfare emphasis for their own political and commercial purposes. They were influential in the diffusion of its now-altered form back west into the Ibo area, north into Idoma country, east into the Cross River, as well as further east into the Cameroon forests and grasslands (Talbot 1912, p. 37). Most early European travelers and later scholars have referred to this commercial version of *Ngbe* as *Ekpe* or *Egbo*. *Egbo* appears to be a corruption of the Ibibio word *Ekpo*, the name of the unrelated Ibibio ancestral society with which it is sometimes confused. Many scholars even recently have mistaken the two.

There has been further confusion since, in addition to the traditional Cross River *Ngbe*-Leopard society and the newer commercial *Ekpe*-Leopard society adapted by the Efik, there is also a separate and unrelated ancestral *Ekpe* society which is found today among some eastern and southern Ibo. Thus *Ngbe* and *Ekpe* seem to exist as three distinct societies: *Ngbe*-Leopard (the more or less traditional Cross River society), *Nkpe*-Leopard (the newer Efik-derived form of *Ngbe*), and *Ekpe*-Ancestor (a traditional southern Ibo society with some Cross River parallels). Many scholars have not differentiated between these societies; in the literature both the societies and their arts are confused. This problem is aggravated even further by the fact that in many villages the various grades of the societies each have a distinct name and are often treated as separate and unrelated societies. Despite these problems, some generalizations can be made about these associations as art patrons.

Ngbe-Leopard and *Ekpe*-Leopard comprise a hierarchy of ranks or grades, usually seven, nine, or eleven, each having a distinctive costume, ritual, dance, and special mask, headdress or net garment (Parkinson 1907, p. 262, Talbot 1912, pp. 40-41, Simmons 1956, p. 16, Jones 1956, p. 37). These art forms generally fall into the categories of gentle or fierce, each type belonging to a different grade. Special facial markings and added heads also indicate grade level differentiations (Leuzinger 1972, p. 226, Wittmer 1973, p. 24). Masks of the highest grades (*Nkanda*) are usually Janus with opposed male and female imagery. Various feathers or emblems, the badges of successful warriors,

are placed in the crowns of some of these helmet masks, and are one indication of possible warfare associations of this grade. Some *Nkanda* grade headdresses are also said to depict warriors (Parkinson 1905, p. 211, Talbot 1912, p. 14).



In addition to, or as a related function of these grade-associated masks and headdresses, the society as a whole had one or two masquerades (Jones 1945a, p. 196, Ruel 1964, p. 4, Forde 1964, p. 159). The Yako *Ngbe* society, for example, is represented by a masquerade pair consisting of a male (*Ikoko*) and a female (*Nyampe*) (Forde 1964, p. 159). The costume of the female consists of many richly colored strips of cloth; the male wears a rough, black, netted costume with bells. Among the Bangwa, one section of *Ngbe* (*Angbu*) also has two associated maskers (Brain and Pollock 1971, pp. 109-10). The fierce one wears a black, horned helmet mask and costume consisting of rough natural fibers with bell attachments. The gentle female images conversely appear in light colored masks with long, elaborately coiffured hair. They wear brightly colored European dresses as costumes.

The Ibo Ekpe-Ancestor Society

In the *Ekpe*-Ancestor societies of the southern Ibo around Owerri (Aba and Bende groups), we also find Cross River related headdress forms. The *Ekpe*-Ancestor society, however, unlike many Cross River associations, had ancestral veneration as an essential part of its celebrations. The festivals of this society occurred at the time of yam planting and harvest to insure both human and crop fertility (Talbot 1926, p. 784, Jones 1973, pp. 61-63). *Ekpe*-Ancestor "images" also performed at funerals, title-taking ceremonies, and society initiations (Murray 1951, pp. 324-5).

The masks of the *Ekpe*-Ancestor society reflect a Cross River origin not only in their forms, but also in their symbolism. These headdresses depict various powerful spirits of a "nature familiar" (as opposed to a *Mmo* ancestral) type. In theme, however, the *Ekpe*-Ancestor headdresses, like many Cross River masks, conform to a gentle/fierce dichotomy which also characterizes Ibo and Ibibio art forms. Balogun (1969, p. 436) observed that the Aba "fierce" maskers "were so terrifying and so aggressive that people would often scatter and start running on hearing [their] drums. . . ." They portrayed dangerous elephant and monkey spirits, their generally dark colored headdresses emphasizing animalistic features such as tusks, horns, large ears, or simian muzzles. In contrast, gentle *Ekpe*-Ancestor headdresses had calm, small featured faces, sometimes ornamented with Cross River type ethnic marks (Jones 1938, p. 106). *Ekpe*-Ancestor headdresses of this more gentle form were thought to represent the wives of the fierce elephant and monkey spirits.

Cross River Warrior Societies

Warrior societies (such as the Ejagham *Ogrinia*, the Boki *Nkang*, the Bangwa *Ngkpwe*, and the Yako *Obam*) were once among the most important and powerful of the Cross River men's associations. The various warrior society masked performances were presented following successful battles and at the funerals of important members (Talbot 1912, p. 411, Nicklin 1974, p. 67). Some evidence suggests that the skin-covered headdresses as a whole may have derived from warrior society performances which followed battle. At this time, members carrying enemy trophy heads achieved a visual image which was not unlike that of Cross River skin-covered cap headdresses (see Forde 1964, p1. 13). In the performances of the Bangwa warrior society *Ngkpwe* ("Challenge"), the association masker in a skin-covered cap headdress is appropriately accompanied by men carrying machetes and a bundle containing an imitation or real enemy skull (Brain and Pollock 1974, pp. 92-93). The "image" of the *Ikadum* war related society of the Efik also included an actual skull (Talbot 1912, p. 411).

Several other Cross River warrior society headdresses observed by early writers show striking facial deformities. One dark pigmented, skin-covered warfare mask (illustrated in Talbot 1912, p1. opp. p. 258) had a

long snake-like nose, and was called *Igumi* (a powerful medicine tree). The Mbembe *Nangbei* warrior association headdress discussed and illustrated in Partridge (1905, pp. 215-16) was characterized by a large flap ear deformity.

Many Cross River warfare or warrior-associated headdresses are Janus or multi-headed like those of the upper grade of the *Egbe*-Leopard and *Ngbe*-Leopard societies. These headdresses combine the gentle and fierce human faces on opposite sides of the same form (Nicklin 1974, p. 15, Thompson 1974, p. 175). The darker male side usually faces forward and has eyes which are cut through enabling the mask wearer to see. Quills, feathers, emblems of successful homicides (miniature heads) or other symbols of power may be incorporated in the crown. The view in two directions or into two worlds which is associated with the Janus may have been an important attribute for warriors.

Cross River Hunting Societies

Hunting societies, which function in association with another of the traditional chief occupations of men, the pursuit of wild game, also have a number of important mask and headdress forms. Nicklin describes (1974, p. 15) one such hunting association, *Bekarum* of the Boki, whose headdress appropriately represents an antelope. Eyo publishes a similar antelope form headdress used by the *Ekarum* hunting cult of the *Akparabong* clan (Ejagham) (1976, p1. 219). In the hunting society of the *Aferike* (Boki neighbors), the actual skull of the antelope is used⁴.

Hunting societies of a different type, those charged with searching out dangerous witches in society, also employ masquerade images with dominant animal imagery. A carved crocodile head was used in each of three witch-hunting associations (*Akpambe*, *Mfuor* and *Ekuri Ibokk*) described by Talbot (1912 pp. 45, 52-53). A similar masquerade of the *Banyang*, *Basinjom* society illustrated by Thompson (1974, pp. 208-217) also has a crocodilian form. Costuming for each of these witch-hunting headdresses consists of a dark blue roughly textured robe spotted with river mud.

Women's Societies of the Cross River

A number of women's societies in the Cross River and its environs employ elaborately carved headdresses. The Boki women's society (*Egbege*) which unites village women, governs their interrelationships, and controls the elaborate "fattening house" pre-nuptial rituals, has an associated headdress which is sublimely female. This headdress (illustrated in Nicklin 1974, p. 13) is a finely sculpted, skin-covered portrait of a woman with an elaborate braided coiffure. The Efik Ibibio also have several women's societies, (*Iban Ison* and *Una Eka*) which feature maskless but elaborately costumed women dancers (*Nigeria* 1957, pp. 151-153).

Among the Bangwa, societies for women, called *Ako*, bring together all the women of the village, dividing them into "grades" according to their social status (royalty, chief's wives, ward women), (Brain and

Pollock 1971, p. 111). The elaborately carved and decorated multi-faced Janus masks of the *Ako* are worn by women of this society. Some of these masks present a visually powerful dichotomy in texture, surface, expression, and color. This is achieved in a unique way, for the heart-shaped perimeter of the face at the front of these helmet masks is cut out to frame the dark, softer features of the dancer's own face (Brain and Pollock 1971, p. 53). This "living" face, which is the real focus of the mask, is then juxtaposed with the carved, expressionless, lighter colored, and more fully convex faces which surround the helmet on its other sides.⁵

Associations for the Royal, Rich, and Gorgeous

In the Cross River there are also a number of associations focusing on nobility, wealth, "good looks" and general community entertainment. In dances of the *Efik Ekpakha* association for royalty (illustrated in *Nigeria Magazine* 1957, p. 157), one royal woman wears an elaborate four-faced headdress assemblage. Her dance is very stately, "whatever she holds or carries must be manipulated by her in such a way as to add grace to her body". The *Efik* or *Ejagham Nchibbi* club, which was limited to community elders, also employed a multi-headed masquerade image, in this case one with two juxtaposed heads (Talbot 1912, p. 412).

Many of the *Bangwa* Royal Society skin-covered headdress forms are also multi-headed, incorporating two, three, or even four faces on the same image (Brain and Pollock 1971, p. 37). Some Royal Society *Bangwa* Janus masks have frontal cut-out faces like those of the *Ako* women's society. *Oshirikong*, the *Boki* Society for the "rich and gorgeous" employs both Janus and single-faced headdresses in its entertainment and funeral dances (Nicklin 1974, p. 67). Similar societies are said by Nicklin to include *Oyumane*, *Nkpum*, *Ojung*, and *Agnisy*.

Ancestral and Corporate Village Societies

A number of Cross River arts are used in cults or organizations associated with the corporate village identity as a whole. Roughly defined human-form center posts are carved to support roof structures of important family houses. The placing of these ancestral figures seems to reflect the important role of the ancestors as central supports and intermediaries in society. The *Yako* had several maskers with similar ancestral or clan associations. In the *Yako* male initiation ceremony (*Ligwomi*), masked figures portrayed the "ward spirits" (Forde 1964, pp. 137-142). Finally, several scholars have described the Cross River headdresses in general as representing important community ancestors of the past, an attribution which would appear to reflect a certain cross-cutting of the other associations (Mansfeld 1908, Talbot 1912).

Conclusions

In our concluding remarks of the arts of the Cross River, several important themes stand out as necessitating further consideration. The

first of these is the possible relationship between particular masquerade forms and specific types of Cross River patronage.⁶ Animal symbolism for example, seems to be found in conjunction with hunting societies which search out either wild beasts or witches, those beings living outside the confines or guidelines of culture. Female skin-covered headdresses are especially important in women's societies, in ancestor associations, and in "clubs" for the rich or royal in which women play an important role. The rarer male skin-covered headdresses have been employed recently among the *Boki* in age-graded entertainment societies. Cross River human deformity masks, in the few examples which have been published, seem to be linked with warfare contexts, expressing through this vision an appropriate image of fierceness and danger.

The Janus and multi-headed masquerades, with their common joining of male and female in the same form, also appear to have particular patronage ties. These are often the most highly ranked and prestigious of all Cross River headdresses. They are commonly found in association with the upper grade of a society, with powerful warrior confraternities, and with "clubs" formed around royalty or the wealthy. The multiplication inherent in these Janus images seems to reflect the greater-than-normal presence, power, and prestige of their patrons. These Janus headdresses, which are formed by the union of two single headdress modes into one striking composition, have become potent examples of the use of "agglomeration" to suggest increased power and vision. Indeed, according to one *Bangwa* source (referring to a non-Cross River style multi-faced headdress), masks with four faces are reserved for rulers because this multi-focused vision symbolizes their widespread power and influence. "Through the two or four faces of the masks of chiefs and subchiefs the society symbolically surveys the whole land, keeping its four or eight eyes on witches, seducers of royal wives, and thieves" (Brain and Pollock 1971, p. 37). As Talbot suggests (1912 pp. 16-17), similar Janus headdresses may metaphorically recall the binary opposition of sky god and earth goddess, death and life, danger and beneficence.

It is interesting to note that alternative expressions, of this Janus form are also found in the Cross River through the choreographic juxtaposition of "fierce" and "gentle" single-face masquerades performed side by side or in a sequence. This Janus-like contrast is further emphasized by the fact that the "fierce" images often wear darker pigmented headdresses representing skull-like, animalistic, or deformity themes, while the gentle maskers, usually depicting females, often have lighter skin tones or associated textiles. The inclusion, in this total image, of attendants who carry counterposed props such as "hot" whips or "cool" green plants, makes the point even clearer.

Similar masquerade juxtapositions among the nearby *Ibo* and *Ibibio* appear to express a societal dichotomy based on contrasting concerns over the pursuit of individual achievement versus the equally important need for societal cooperation and harmony (Blair 1976b). In the Cross

River, societal polarities of this type seem to be important. For example the *nsibidi* symbolic writing included on many Cross River headdresses representing women, provides them with meanings linked to societal values. Ruel notes likewise that among the Banyang (1969, pp. 191-195, 242) the desire for unity and corporate agreement is contrasted in the minds of the people with the necessity to accommodate the diversity of individuals who seek to improve their status and aggrandize their positions.

The importance of the female masquerade image as the symbol of societal order, or "culture", is evidenced through such maskers' relatively peaceful props (cooling plants and fans), harmonious choreography (calm gentle dances, often in unified groups of performers), and associated symbols of culture (*nsibidi* marks, elaborate coiffures, rich cloths). A similar relationship between femininity and ideals of culture can be seen in the Cross River practice of decorating the bodies of deceased, high-ranking men with the painted patterns worn by young women (Ema 1938, p. 315).

Another major theme in considering Cross River arts has been the unique use of skin covering in the headdresses of this area. Cross River masks often overpower one with the raw force of their realism. The oiled luster of this skin provides them with a human-like, almost living surface. When we add to this the power of inserted and painted eyes, the individually placed and brightened teeth, bony wooden cranial substructuring, and human hair beards and coiffures, it is hard to imagine an art form with greater realistic power. Indeed, if we place a Cross River headdress beside the more classically naturalistic Nigerian works of ancient Ife, the force and vitality of this uniquely Cross River realistic mode is particularly striking.

The question quite naturally arises as to why, in this area, realism is such an important concern. One answer, of course, lies in the possible origin of this Cross River art form from the tradition of wearing trophy heads superimposed on their bearers' heads in celebratory performances after a successful hunt or battle (see Forde 1964, pl. 13). Members of the warrior societies, and the upper grades of some associations in the Cross River, were often required to possess such a skull as a prerequisite of membership. In addition, skin-covering is a technique used almost exclusively on the trophy-resembling cap headdresses and helmets. Its employment on the wooden sculptures of this area has not to our knowledge been documented.

Still another possible explanation for this distinctly powerful form of realism may be found in the not infrequent use of these headdresses as memorial portraits representing important men, women, and even animals of the past. Incorporation of precise ethnic markings, elaborate coiffures, and individually painted facial patterns suggest that the idea of a memorial head may be an inherent part of the meaning of these forms. Shiny skin, clearly rendered eyes, precisely coiffured hair, and specially defined teeth — the central components of this realism — are also defining

characteristics of individual identity, beauty and good health. These are features which accordingly would be important in memorial portraits.

Finally, we should recall that these headdresses are also central to the prestige, identity, and power of the associations which employ them. Their names indeed are often the same. The use of skin in this regard appears to have a particular importance vis-a-vis the Cross River stress on power through metamorphosis and transformation, a central feature of some Cross River associations. Keaka (Ejagham) men of power for example, were able to pull out of themselves a "kind of body or skin" when displaying their control over forces such as lightning (Talbot 1926 III, p. 969). Similarly, skins of leopards were commonly laid down in the village at the arrival of the leopard spirit (the sign of its transposition from forest to village) to announce its presence. Finally, we note the custom of painting the skins of recently deceased persons with symbols just prior to burial, apparently as a sign of their metamorphosis into ancestors.

In sum, Cross River masquerade arts, by drawing on the important societal ideals of a Janus-like balance of individual power and community harmony; through simultaneously providing a distinct image of potent conquest victory; by incorporating the heightened realism of a portrait-like memorial; and in carrying an inherent association with spirit metamorphosis (the changing of skin), have become sculptural and symbolic visions of the most potent kind. They display and define a precise interworking of aesthetic, iconographic, and functional concerns which, rather than expressing compromise, convey instead a dynamic multi-focused visual and symbolic fullness.

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Notes

1. The skin covering of these headdresses is generally taken from freshly killed antelopes. See Nicklin 1974 for a thorough discussion of this technique.
2. Thompson (1974) employs the name "Calabar" for the Lower Cross River forms, Akparabong for Middle Cross River works, and Widekum for those of the Upper Cross River area. Wittmer (1977, 1978) and Nicklin (1979) both use the terms Lower, Middle, and Upper Cross River, Wittmer placing the Boki with the Upper Cross River groups while Nicklin puts them with the Ejagham in the Middle Cross River area. Von Sydow earlier (1954) used the terms Middle and Upper Cross River to distinguish these works as well.
3. In the Cross River area there are also a number of net-covered dancers who appear completely disguised in tight-fitting garments. These dancers, like those wearing carved masks and headdresses are also fierce and gentle in their performances (Jones 1945a, p. 196, Thompson 1974, p. 181). The important Janus-faced masks of the Cross River define this juxtaposition even more clearly. Although they include in themselves both the "beauty" and the "beast" in performances they often take on one of these attributes more strongly than the other. Jones (1945a, pp. 194, 196) observed one such image which played a "gentle" role and was accompanied by a "fierce" dancer.
4. Among the Yako, the hunting association (*Leko*) uses contrasting gentle and fierce human-form headdresses for funerals of important members (Forde 1964, pp. 155-6). In the example described and photographed by Forde, the fierce dancer is depicted in an undecorated human skull, while the two gentle female "beauties" who appear with him wear carefully carved, elegantly featured, and coiffured cap headdresses. In this performance the fierce masker was dressed in a rough natural fiber costume. His gentle "wives" were presented in long lengths of expensive multi-colored cloth. He carries a sword, attacks the audience, and must be restrained by a rope; the gentle female "images" do an elaborate smooth-swaying dance.
5. This is also consistent with a general tendency in African Art for women mask wearers to leave the face uncovered.
6. These very tentative conclusions are not intended to reflect any exclusivity vis-a-vis headdress themes and particular forms of patronage. There are many distinct exceptions. Rather, with this grouping we have tried to show the few thematic trends emerging in the literature.

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