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King Glele of Danhomè, Part One: Divination Portraits of a Lion King and Man of Iron

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# KING GLELE OF DANHOMÈ

Part One



PHOTO MUSEE DE L'HOMME, PARIS

## Divination Portraits of a Lion King and Man of Iron

SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

### *A Midnight Ceremony of Dynasty and Destiny*

Try to imagine for a moment that you are a Danhomè (Dahomey) youth just returning from the midnight ceremony in which you learned what your life will hold.<sup>1</sup> You were told by a Fa diviner in this secret rite what incidents will mark your life's course, good or bad, when important events in your adulthood will be achieved, and what will become of your family once you have died (Maupoil 1981:321). Imagine, moreover, that you are not just an ordinary youth, but a Danhomè prince living in the second quarter of the nineteenth

century, a prince who one day will assume the throne of the most powerful and rich kingdom known (to you) in the world. In the course of this midnight rite, you yourself drew the pattern of your life's sign, *Abla-Lete*, in the soft earth of the forest grove, using your finger to make the single and double linear strokes that characterize this sign:<sup>2</sup>

| |  

After you had made these marks, the diviner recounted to you the rich and

varied phrases that distinguish *Abla-Lete* and serve to differentiate it from the other 256 signs in the Fa divination system. More than a dozen of these parables were told to you that evening. Most of these verses were pronounced by the diviner in terse yet poetic phrasing. A few were sung, and others were announced in the form of short stories, one of which told how the lion, hornbill, and crocodile had become kings of their realms.<sup>3</sup>

While you cannot remember all the phrases that were conveyed that night, certain ones you do recall with great clarity. One such phrase, "The cultivated field is difficult to move" (*Glele Igele*

OPPOSITE PAGE: 1. STANDING LION-MAN. 1858-71. WOOD, 170cm. ARTIST: SOSA ADEDE, LIKOHIN KANKANHU. MUSÉE DE L'HOMME, PARIS, 93.45.2.

2. ROYAL STAFF (MAKPO) WITH CONES SIGNIFYING TWINSHIP (DETAIL). 1858-89. WOOD, IRON; ENTIRE STAFF 63cm. ARTIST: UNKNOWN. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-2-35.

*lile] ma yon ze*), one day will be the source of your kingly name, Glele. Another Abla-Lete expression, "No animal displays its anger like the lion," will mark one of your "strong names," *kini kini kini*, "lion of lions." Lions are a subject that will frequently appear in the arts of your reign (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> So important is the Abla-Lete sign to your identity and later rule that others of its varied phrases also will serve as a basis for key features of your rule and the arts you commission.

For now, however, the phrases identified with your sign may be less important to you than recalling those things which the diviner instructed you to avoid as an Abla-Lete sign holder: the red bean paste (*abla*), the sweet meat and milk of coconuts, the tasty and filling yam known as *kokolo*, the widely consumed manioc (*lio*) paste that has been wrapped and tied with cord.<sup>5</sup> Also not to be consumed, the diviner had explained, is the succulent meat of the pigeon,<sup>6</sup> as well as the meat of any animal with spotted or striped skin. So too, he had noted, you can never wear the *akoko* cloth. Sleeping in a round house and attending funerals of any persons except your parents also are forbidden. Finally, he had stressed, you cannot eat anything offered to Sagbata (the earth god) or Dan (the serpent-like god identified with whirlwinds), for these are the deities most closely linked to Abla-Lete<sup>7</sup> (Ayido 86:5:264<sup>8</sup> and 86:5:269-70; Dewui 86:6:939).

While you may not know the basis of all these restrictions, other than that they refer to things that appear in the phrases of Abla-Lete, as a Danhomè youth you do know about the gods Sagbata<sup>9</sup> and Dan, and what benefits they promise to their worshipers and those identified with them through divination. Sagbata, the often vengeful earth god, visits illness (including the dreaded smallpox) on those who counter his moral commands. You yourself survived a bout with smallpox—its marks still cover your face. As you know, Sagbata not only provides its worshipers with destructive powers but also endows them with physical strength and determination. To paraphrase the Abla-Lete parable that serves as the basis for your name: "Those associated with Sagbata (the earth, cultivated field) are hard to



PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

move." The whirlwind and motion god, Dan, for his part, promises you and his other worshipers the potentiality of great abundance, creativity, and wealth. Recalling these features of a "pleasant life," sweet things—bananas and sugar—are Dan's favorite foods. Sponsorship by Sagbata and Dan gives to you the assurance that your life will hold both difficulty and sweetness. One of your *makpo* (royal scepter or staff; Fig. 2) will appropriately identify your kingdom as being like a set of twins, one having a calm, good character, the other characteristically angry and antipathetic (Adande 1962:94).

The above-described divination ceremony was not the first time that Fa had been consulted on your behalf. Your parents had seen a diviner on many previous occasions concerning your health and welfare. Already, they had determined through divination that your *djoto*, or sponsoring ancestor, was a man named Agbanlikoçe, "the striped antelope [guib harnaché] that is blessed with



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beautiful things."<sup>10</sup> This man, a son of King Agonglo (your grandfather), was a *tohosu*, in other words, a child who either died in infancy or was born with extraordinary powers or features (including deformity).<sup>11</sup> One of your court songs will make reference to this sponsoring ancestor:<sup>12</sup>

Agbanlikoçe who gave birth to me  
I should not go hunting  
and come back empty handed  
If I go hunting, I will find  
and trap things  
It is in this way  
that I will trap things always  
Because it is the one  
who gave birth to me  
who made offerings for me  
(Agbidinukun 86:7:1788)

Images of a striped or spotted antelope will appear both in the bas-reliefs of your auxiliary palace, Djegbe, and in the doors commissioned by you for your tomb house. A sculpture representing your sponsoring ancestor in the form of a striped antelope also will be commissioned in your honor by your son, King Agoli Agbo (1894-1900)(Fig. 4).<sup>13</sup> This work will form part of the collection of the Musée Historique in Abomey.<sup>14</sup>

Agbanlikoçe is also known by several other names: Bokodaho, "the great diviner," is one; Avundegla, "the audacious dog who knocked over the owner and took his house," is another (Agbidinukun 86:5:857, 86:6:432; Glele 86:5:941; Maupoil 1981:382). Like the antelope sculpture mentioned above, a figure of a

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4. ANTELOPE. 1896-98. WOOD, BRASS, ALUMINUM; LENGTH 53cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJI, TAHOZANGBE. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-7-28. PHOTO: JUNE 1986.

3. DOG. 1896-98. BRASS, WOOD; LENGTH 39cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJI, TAHOZANGBE. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-7-23. PHOTO: JUNE 1986.



5. MEMORIAL STAFF (ASEN) SHOWING HORSE, DOG, UMBRELLA, AND BAT (DETAIL); DEDICATED TO KING GLELE BY HIS SON, KING AGOLI AGBO. 1894-1900. IRON, COPPER; DETAIL APPROX. 23cm, ENTIRE STAFF 165cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDI, TAHOZANGBE. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-27.

in turn surmounts the dog (Fig. 5). According to your grandson Agbidinukun, Kplankun (86:6:432), in this work, the horse (*so*) alludes to the quarter (Duton) where Bokodaho lived: horses often wear bridles, which are called *duton* in Fongbe, the Danhomè language (*du*: chew; *ton*: transpierce). The umbrella at the top of this sculpture is said to symbolize kingship. The dog, for its part, recalls this sponsoring ancestor's ancillary name (Avundegla). The image of a bat, suspended from the horse's saddle, draws together the essential identifying features of your sponsoring ancestor, since the word for bat, *avunso*, incorporates the phonemes linked to both this ancestor's name ("dog" [*avun*]) and residence ("horse [*so*] bridle"). Another dog, this one white and shown barking, will be observed decorating your "spirit house" at Djegbe palace by the late-nineteenth-century English traveler, J. A. Skertchly (1874:424).

**Divination and Destiny in the Reign of Glele**

Today, looking at King Glele<sup>16</sup> and his reign a full hundred years after his death (in 1889), it is clear that he was not a common king—however common any king in Africa or elsewhere can be. During his reign, which began in 1858, news of this powerful monarch—his vast wealth, military prowess, and elaborate state ceremonies—reached the courts and government houses of numerous foreign

PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

dog will be commissioned by your son Agoli Agbo in your honor (Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> It too alludes to the name of your ancestor, since the word for dog (*avun*) forms the first part of his name, Avundegla. Other dogs associated with you and your ancestral sponsor will appear on your tomb house door and on *asen* (memorial staffs) in the Musée Historique collection associated with your reign (Mau-poil in Mercier 1952:65). One of these works portrays a rectangular house surmounted by a lion and dog.

Another *asen*, this one with somewhat more complex imagery, portrays a dog surmounting a horse; an umbrella



6. ASEN SHOWING A HAND HOLDING A SHEAF OF GRASS (DETAIL). 1894-1900? IRON, BRASS; DETAIL APPROX. 15cm, ENTIRE STAFF 177cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDI, TAHOZANGBE? MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-2.

PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER



PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

7. ASEN SHOWING A HAND BESIDE A JAR. 1889-94. IRON. DETAIL APPROX. 20cm, ENTIRE STAFF 137cm. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-146.

tion of Abla-Lete and key features of Glele's reign. His divination sign clearly had significant impact both on his life and on his associated arts.

In Glele's life and still today, the inner workings and meanings of Fa in some respects are highly secret. A person rarely will tell another his or her Fa sign, for fear that enemies will learn of it and then take actions intended to contradict it. Particularly if one was a prince and future king, there was great danger in revealing the sign to anyone other than one's parents. Diviners, however, who constitute a brotherhood of persons knowledgeable in Fa, may discuss a king's sign once he has died, passing on such knowledge to young diviners who have apprenticed with them. Knowledge of these signs offers us important historical insight into the reigns of Danhomè kings, providing rich information on the concerns that shaped their lives, court policies, and arts.<sup>17</sup>

Presented below is a portrait of King Glele developed through an analysis of the impact of his divination sign on central features of his reign and art. Glele, it is argued here, clearly knew he was fated to be a great ruler and, accordingly, set out to prove the validity of this assessment. A range of arts drawing on features from his Fa sign is, as we will see, an important part of Glele's identity. In this light the forthcoming analysis is less concerned with the role of oracle *per se* and its influence on Danhomè history and art than it is with the *psychology* of oracular belief and how it affects associated artistic traditions. Of related interest is the process by which a ruler manufactures charisma—through art and other means—in the course of seeking to reaffirm the veracity of a particular divination proclamation.

states in Europe and the Americas (especially Brazil). For an African king to achieve such notoriety, a wide variety of factors—political, social, economic, personal, and historical—necessarily played a part. For Glele, a propitious Fa divination sign—what ancient Greeks called the Fates—also was critical.

Were Glele living today, he would be surprised to know that his great-grandchildren now can learn about the range of features associated with the 256 signs of Fa in a popularizing book by Remy Hounwanou (1984). He would not be surprised, however, by what Hounwanou has written about his Fa sign, Abla-Lete, and its propitious cluster of signifiers (1984:184). Of this sign, Hounwanou observes:

Abla-Lete: Predisposed to great moral force and physical poise. Sign of both activity and longevity. Augmented possibilities of creation. Favors precocious unions and augments the heat of affections. Favorable to money and earthly joy.

Indications: Render strife less painful and victories or triumphs will come easier; ameliorate relationships with one's entourage with a view toward diminishing blows.

Hounwanou's text offers a clearly Westernized view of this Fa sign and the other 256 signs, emphasizing explicit annunciation of features and traits rather than the subtle development of them in the form of poetic phrases, as would have been the more traditional manner. Nonetheless, as will be seen below, there is a striking similarity between the qualities expressed in Hounwanou's descrip-



DRAWING: D. SNOODGRASS

It is interesting in this light to think of Glele as an individual who, like a number of great leaders in history, knew he had both a special destiny and a difficult burden. Like other similar historical figures, in the course of his life he pressed both himself and those around him toward this destiny. While Glele's divination sign was not the sole source of imagery for arts commissioned by this important ruler, many of the best-known and most striking of these arts derive essential features from this source. Because divination verses and parables played such a vital role in Glele's life, this analysis allows us to examine Glele, his art, and his times in both a new and clearer light.

### *Sibling Rivalry: The Cultivated Field Is Difficult to Move*

In Danhomè, a future king is selected from among the ruling king's sons on the basis of character and personal qualities rather than exclusively through primogeniture. As a result considerable discussion and dispute often accompany the naming of a new crown prince. Glele's case was no different from that of other Danhomè rulers in this regard; the opposition from his brothers was considerable. Two phrases in Glele's Fa sign are said to refer to the problems Glele would encounter from his brothers after he was named crown prince. The more important of these Abla-Lete phrases is *Gele lile ma yon ze*, "The cultivated field is difficult to move." The phrase, as noted above, became the source for this ruler's ranking royal name, Glele or Gelele. A. Le Herissé notes that in taking power Glele specifically took the name "The cultivated field is difficult to move" both because of the

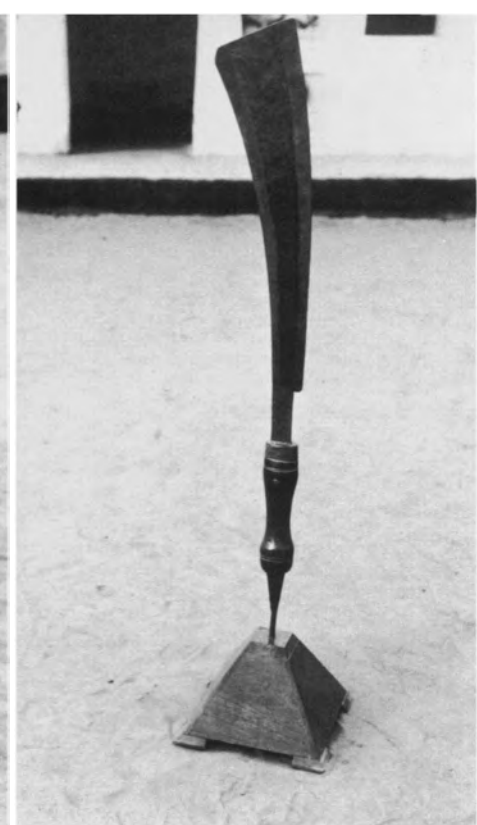
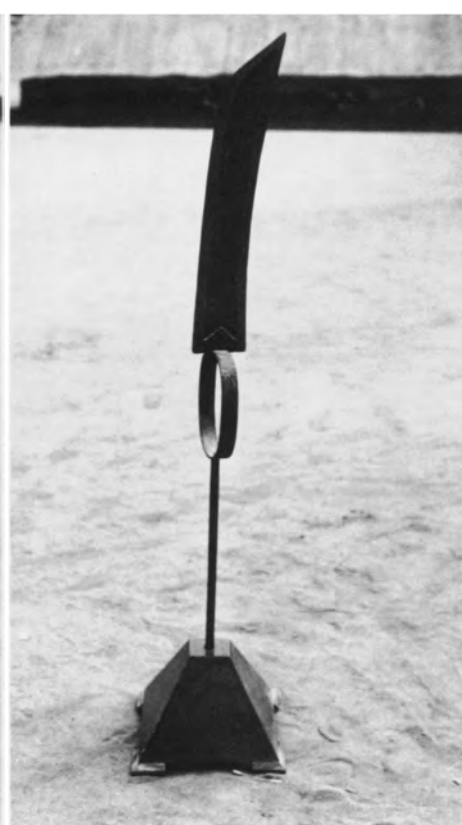
PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER



9. BRACELET. 1858-89. SILVER, DIAMETER 11cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJ, GANHU? MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-4-16.

8. DRAWING OF A PECTORAL (AFTER THOMPSON 1983:PL. 111). 1858-89. BRASS, DIAMETER APPROX. 14cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJ, GANHU? PRIVATE COLLECTION; FORMER COLLECTION CHARLES RATTON, PARIS.





PHOTOS: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

LEFT: 11. GIGANTIC GUBASA SWORD. 1858-71. IRON, 144cm. ARTIST: AKATI, AKPELE KENDO. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-129. PHOTO: FEB. 1986.

CENTER: 12. GIGANTIC KNIFE WITH RING CLASP (ATAKLA). 1858-71. IRON, 148.5cm. ARTIST: AKATI, AKPELE KENDO. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-130. PHOTO: FEB. 1986.

RIGHT: 13. GIGANTIC HWI SWORD. 1858-71. IRON, 149cm. ARTIST: AKATI, AKPELE KENDO. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-8-124. PHOTO: FEB. 1986.

attacks to which he was subject as crown prince and because he wanted to make it clear how strong his hold would be over the kingdom (1911:20). The image of a cultivated field, when translated somewhat differently as "The hand that takes the grasses cannot take a cultivated field" (Ayido 86:5:262), appears in an *asen* (memorial staff) commissioned by King Agoli Agbo in memory of Glele. This *asen* (Fig. 6), which is today in the Musée Historique, displays a hand holding a sheaf of grass.<sup>18</sup> Another *asen* in the same museum (no. 45-8-104), showing a mortar positioned between two hands, also was dedicated to Glele by Agoli Agbo and refers to a related adage, "This country is in your hands." A third *asen*, this one showing a hand beside a jar (*gben*; Fig. 7), illustrates still another saying associated with Glele: "One cannot raise the jar with just one hand." In this sculpture we see characteristic Danhomè use of artis-

tic word play, since the word for jar (*gben*) is close in pronunciation to the word for grass (*gbe*).

Among the other arts identified with Glele's reign that make reference to his Fa sign and to his difficulty in coming to power is a brass necklace called *togodo* ("The mountain [*to*] is [*do*] tied [*go*]") (Fig. 8).<sup>19</sup> This work takes the form of a circular disk with a swirl of metal filament on top. According to Agbidinukun (86:5:99):

Glele's divination phrase states *glele ma yon ze* ("The field that is cultivated is difficult to move"). Glele wore this pendant as a sign around his neck. *Togodo* refers [to a related Abla-Lete phrase] "The wind cannot make the mountain dance."

In this necklace, first published by Robert Farris Thompson (1983:174), the wind is represented by the filament swirl, the mountain by the circular disk. Interestingly, in Fongbe the word *to* means "country," "circle," and "mortar" as well as "mountain." Thus not only is the circular shape of the work essential to its meaning, but in its imagery it alludes to Glele's immovability from power.<sup>20</sup> This necklace suggests that Glele, like the country, is "tied" and difficult to move.<sup>21</sup> The image of tying or knotting suggested in the name *togodo* also is found in other jewelry forms (Fig. 9) identified with Glele's reign (Nondichao 85:10:136-37). According to Bernard Maupoil (1981: 482) the cord or rope was a special symbol of the divination sign Abla, which carries with it "the power to

attach everything. This symbolism expresses the power...of all that humans accomplish."<sup>22</sup>

#### *His Father's Son: Audacious Knife, the Vengeance Continues*

Glele's father, Guezo (1818-58), by all accounts was a great and powerful king. Although King Guezo came to power in a coup d'état, he was able to gain popular support by completing the process begun by his predecessor (King Adandozan), of gaining economic and political freedom for Danhomè from the powerful Oyo Yoruba nation to the northeast. From the time of Agaja (1708-40), Danhomè had paid a hefty yearly tribute to that Yoruba city-state. Glele saw himself as following in his father's footsteps by insisting on maintaining Danhomè's independence. At every opportunity he continued to attack the Yoruba. Although it might be a natural dream for any young African king succeeding a great father to wish to follow his course, in the case of Glele, this was also something that was suggested within his divination sign.<sup>23</sup>

The phrase of Abla-Lete that refers most clearly to this idea asserts: "The audacious knife [*basagla*] gave birth to Gu [God of war and iron] and the vengeance continues" (*Basa gla ji gu honlon ma don*) (Adande 1976-77:149; Adjaho 86: 7:573). In the words of Agbidinukun, this phrase signifies: "As you already have an armament, when the enemies of your great-grandparents see you, they will flee" (86:5:101). Stated more simply by the diviner and Glele descendant Sagbadju, Atinwulise (86: 6:945): "Glele's



14. ROYAL BAS-RELIEFS ON GLELE'S PALACE  
ADJALALA BUILDING. 1882-89? CLAY.  
ARTIST: ASSOGBAKPE, SODJEKAKE.  
PHOTO: JAN, 1986.

15. WARRIOR FIGURE. 1858-59. IRON, 165cm.  
ARTIST: AKATI, AKPELE KENDO.  
MUSÉE DE L'HOMME, PARIS.



PHOTO: MUSEE DE L'HOMME, PARIS

said by Mercier to represent Gu; the round hole, Age; and the triangular shapes, Lisa.

In the course of his reign, undoubtedly propelled by this provocative image of a dangerous knife within his divination sign, Glele also commissioned a series of gigantic knives of various shapes and identities (Figs. 11-13). These were called collectively *hlon ba djivi* ("knives that look for vengeance"). These knives, which were made by the smith Akati, Akpele Kendo today are in the Musée Historique. They were intended, the court minister, Adjaho, explains (86:8:585-86), "to show that there would always be vengeance; these he did to show his force." Mercier notes that "all the arms employed in the name of the king had [large] replicas mounted like *asen* [on iron termini] and kept in the palace. On these offerings were

father was very powerful and he, in turn, gave birth to a very powerful man." The court minister Adjaho, Humase explained (86:7:183): "It was his father who stopped the tribute payments to the Yoruba; Fa said, the knife that is courageous gave birth to Gu and the vengeance continues."<sup>24</sup>

Glele, for his part, not only selected the name Basagla as one of his "strong names," but also chose the *basagla* sword as a special weapon and symbol of his reign.<sup>25</sup> In this context, the audacious knife referred to in Abla-Lete, *basagla* (literally, "audacious thigh-baton"), is more frequently called *gubasa*, "sword (*basagla*) of Gu." This sword (Fig. 11), with its characteristically curved blade and pierced triangular, circular, and other cut-out forms, is considered to be the "chief of all weapons" (Nondichao 85:10:229). Bas-reliefs, appliqués, *asen*, and other objects identified with Glele's reign frequently incorporate *gubasa* swords as a sign of this ruler.<sup>26</sup> Somewhat reminiscent of an English fish-serving knife, Skertchly calls the *gubasa* Glele's "fish slice sword" (1874:262). He notes that such swords were carried by members of Glele's bodyguard of female warriors. The symbolism of these *gubasa* swords, Paul Mercier suggests (1952:59), makes important references to the power of Gu, the war god, and to the related gods Lisa (a god identified with the sun and moon) and Age (the forest god). On the *gubasa* blade, the pierced lozenge is



17. LION. 1894-1900. WOOD, BRASS, IRON;  
LENGTH 66cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJ, TAHOZANGBE.  
MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-7-21.

16. WAR BO (POWER OBJECT) FROM CANA.  
FROM *PETIT JOURNAL*, NO. 165 (NOV. 26, 1892).



PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

made so that killings committed in the name of the King would not be dangerous for their executioners" (Mercier 1952:58). Skertchly appears to be describing these knives (although he identifies them as foreign) in his account of the parade of court objects in the annual ceremonies, or "customs" (1874:362), which served to honor the royal dead and gods, punish state criminals, pay and promote court officials, display the royal wealth, and celebrate state military might. In this celebration, he observes, there appeared

A number of girls...with swords of every possible shape, Malay crosses, Turkish scimitars, and Arab yataghans being represented. All were mounted in silver scabbards, the hilt also being covered with ornaments of the same metal, and they were carried wrapped up in cloths, Ashanti fashion, leaving only the upper portion of the sheath and hilt exposed. Crimson, blue, green, and bright orange sashes were attached to them, and some had two blades, like scissors. These were the private property of the king, whose vanity seems to be gratified by the number and variety of these instruments.<sup>27</sup>

These arms, which are far too heavy to have been carried any distance in war, are said to have been a focus of prayers and ceremonies associated both

with Glele's military campaigns and with the Danhomè war and iron god, Gu. Before as well as after battle, these gigantic weapons were brought together in the *adandjeho*, "courageous house of beads," in Glele's palace, where offerings were made to them. In this room, the knives were positioned in a circle around the life-size iron figure of a warrior commissioned by Glele for his father, Guezo (see below; Fig. 15). "One says [to these swords] that one wants to go to war and return victorious. One kills a cow and gives them a piece of the prepared meat and then one leaves for battle. When one is victorious, one again offers a cow in thanks" (Nondichao 86:10:226). Also located in this room is a large, multipart *asen* dedicated to the memory of Danhomè troops felled in battle. This work is characterized by its inclusion of multiple miniature iron weapons that are attached in *asen*-style to iron staffs. A gigantic *gubasa* sword (see Thompson 1983: fig. 106) found in this room similarly incorporates a wealth of miniature swords and knives.

Armaments of various sorts (especially swords) as well as scenes of combat likewise dominate the bas-reliefs on Glele's palace *adjalala* building (Fig. 14).<sup>28</sup> On the earthen supports of the veranda of this structure are found three rows of bas-reliefs. The top row consists of various bladed weapons and *makpo* (*recades*, royal staffs or scepters); the bottom row incorporates images of lions. The middle row includes scenes of battle, sculptures based on Glele's *Abla-Lete* sign (a hornbill, *daguesu* sculpture, chameleon, etc.), and imagery drawn from his "strong names." In this bas-relief program, Glele's divination imagery is positioned so that it frames various scenes and objects identified with his rule. Historical events in this

sense are situated within boundaries that are associated with his divinely sanctioned mandate for rulership.

Perhaps the most famous of the works related to Glele's divination phrase "The audacious knife gave birth to Gu..." is the life-size figure of a warrior in iron, now in the Musée de l'Homme (Fig. 15). The work was created by Akati, Akpele Kendo, the same smith who forged the gigantic palace swords.<sup>29</sup> This sculpture portrays a man dressed in a war tunic (*kansa wu*), striding determinedly forward, with raised arms and clenched hands. The figure's head is crowned with a circle of weapons similar both to the gigantic knives that once surrounded the work in the palace and to the *asen* that served as memorials to Glele's warriors. A *gubasa* sword and bell originally were held in the figure's hands. The work is said to have been commissioned by Glele for the *hwetanu* ("customs") ceremonies that he presented in honor of his father, Guezo, soon after Glele's ascent to the throne (Akati 86:7:1210). According to Akati, Gunon (a direct descendant of the artist), when Guezo died, Glele called upon this artist to forge the work in memory of his father. "Glele said that if he was to complete the burial ceremonies for Guezo, he had to have something to represent him" (Akati 84:7:122).

After taking the initial steps to commission the work, Glele left on a military campaign in the Nago (Yoruba) area of Doume, which lies to the east of Abomey. Venance Quenum suggests that this was the first of Glele's military campaigns and dates the conquest to 1858, the year he came into power (1986:16). While in Doume, Glele is said to have come across a sculpture in an Ogun (god of iron) shrine that eventually would serve as a model for this object (Nondichao 85:10:227; Akati 84:7:122).<sup>30</sup> Akati's war-



18. ONE OF GLELE'S APPLIQUÉS SHOWING A CARVING OF A RAM-HEADED WARRIOR CALLED THE MALE DAGUESU (DETAIL). 20TH CENTURY. CLOTH. HEAD OF APPLIQUÉ ARTISTS' COMPOUND: YEMADJE, MENOGBWE. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY.

PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

rior figure, it was explained, is "an assemblage of all the objects in metal that are associated with Gu [Ogun]....It completes the power of Gu that was here already" (Nondichao 85:10:227). While modeled in part on a foreign object and ritually grounded in shrine traditions identified with the war and iron god, Gu (Ogun), the features of this work also have an important source in Glele's divination sign, Abla-Lete. In this sculpture, it is explained, "Guezo represents the courageous knife [*basagla/gubasa*] that gave birth to Gu [the iron figure—also Glele] and the vengeance continues" (Agoli Agbo 86:8:361).

Agbidinukun suggests that this sculpture was called *agojie* ("Watch out above" [*ago*: "Watch out!"; *ji*: above]) and had an important role in the protection both of the king and of the kingdom at large. As he explains (86:5:96–97):

The sculpture stayed next to the king. If something was about to happen to the king, [it announced] "Watch out! It is I who will be there first of all, and you will have to see me first"....[with its spiky crown of swords] we designed how the country is—all these things that you see [on its head] show that the country is awake and full of courage.

Records at the Musée de l'Homme indicate that the sculpture was found on the Danhomè coast at Whydah; it was identified as representing Ebo or Gbo, god of victory (Vogel & N'Diaye 1985:137). Like many of the other Fon

19. A LIFE-SIZED FIGURE CALLED *GBETINSA*. 1858-89. WOOD, APPROX. 165cm. ARTIST: HOUNDO, SOMISSI. PRIVATE COLLECTION, ABOMEY. PHOTO: JUNE 1986.

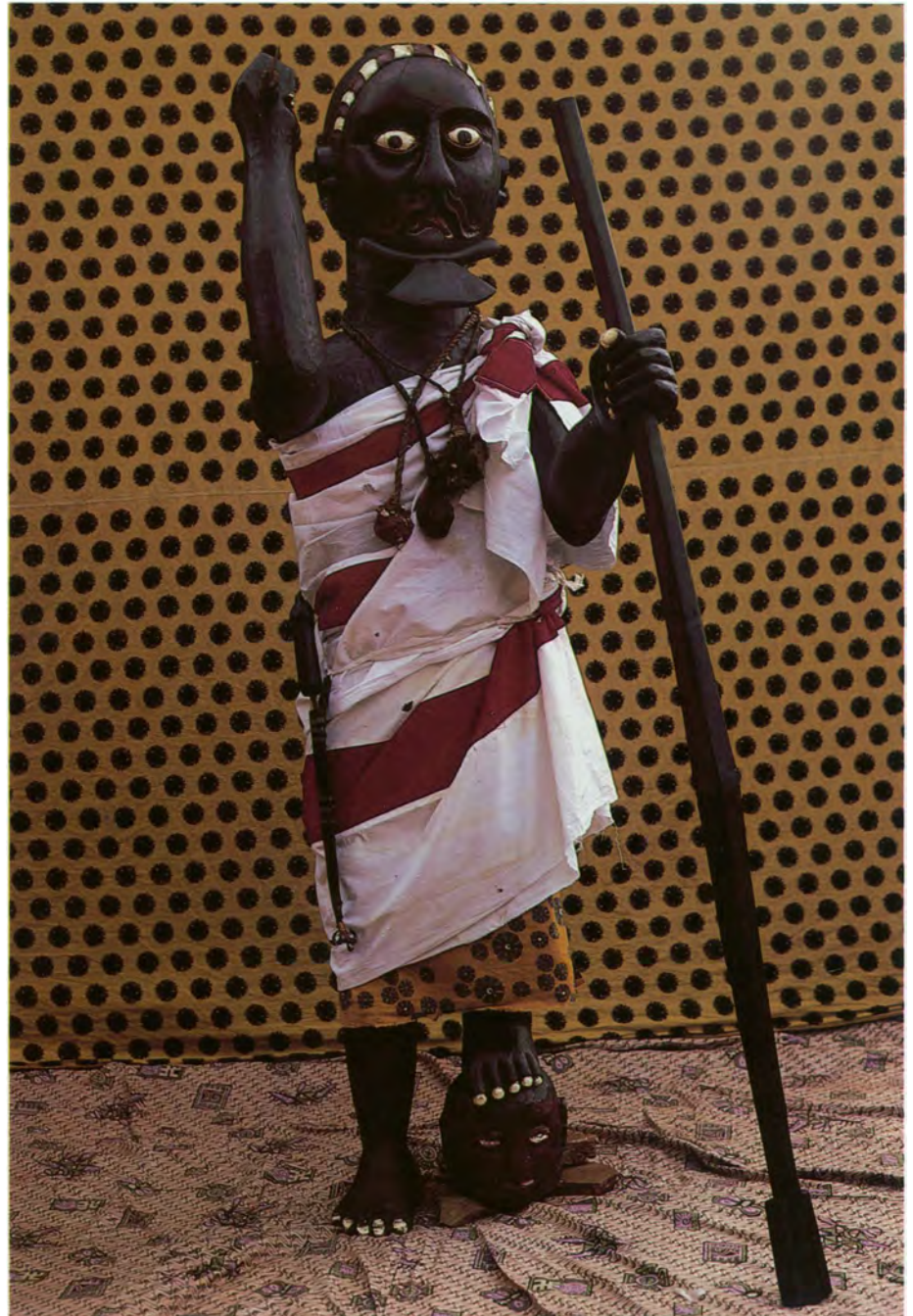


PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

derived from spent bullet shells. In Fongbe, the terms for iron and brass have the same root (*gan*—brass is called "red iron"); thus both metals are identified with Gu. The brass warrior figure in this way also represents a visualization of Glele's divination phrase "The audacious knife gave birth to Gu and the vengeance continues."<sup>33</sup> Maupoil explains that this work was found at the site of Dosumwengbonu in the Ahwaga quarter of Abomey (1981:422). As such it was positioned near the main entrance leading into the city. Its positioning undoubtedly was important to larger aims of protecting the city. The sculpture's name, *do su mon majeeto*, "The hole prevents the enemy from passing"

life-size sculptures, this work served as a *bo* (power object) intended to help bring about military victory.

Other statues of men carrying *gubasa* swords are believed to have existed in large numbers during Glele's reign (Ahanhanzo 86:8:327).<sup>31</sup> Among the related works is a striking figure of hammered brass holding two *gubasa* swords (Fig. 10).<sup>32</sup> This figure, formerly part of the Charles Rattou collection, is said to have been made from metal

20. PRINCE GANSREGO WEARING A SILVER NOSE MASK AT THE CEREMONIES FOR HIS INVESTITURE. ENGLISH ROYAL IMAGERY IS PRINTED ON HIS IMPORTED CLOTH. PHOTO: FEB. 1986.



PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

(Maupoil 1981:422), alludes both to the figure's placement, next to the main gate leading into Abomey (which bore the above name), and to the dry moat (*do*, "hole") that surrounded and protected the city at this time.<sup>34</sup>

Another work that serves to represent the above Fa phrase, while no longer extant, is illustrated in several of Glele's palace bas-reliefs and appliqués. This figure, called variously the male *daguesu* and *sogblagada* (*soflimata*), took the form of a ram-headed warrior carrying a sword in one hand and a gun in the other (Figs. 16, 18).<sup>35</sup> G. Waterlot calls this work "Daghissou" and says it represents a "fabulous warrior...created by King Glele to commemorate his celebrated corps of *soflimatan* 'furious antelope' military troops" (1926: pl. 16).

Adande writes about this work (1976-77:155):

The head is similar to the thunder ram and on the arms and legs he has small gourds. Daghessou was placed in front of the army [in war] and he announced victory. As he marched all alone, nothing but his image was necessary to scare the enemy troops.

Nondichao also emphasizes the military role of the *daguesu* figure and its powers of locomotion (85:10:113-14): "These statues of wood walked like men and were the height of men. They were war *bo* [power objects] and accompanied the army to war, staying at the front of the troops."<sup>36</sup> The identification of this sculpture with the ram-headed god of

thunder and lightning, Hevioso, is of interest, for Hevioso is associated with the lightning-like gunfire and cannon bursts of battle. Like Gu, in other words, Hevioso played an important role in war. Skertchly appears to have seen this work paraded in the annual ceremonies (1874:254), describing it as "a wooden man with a ram's head, also in a fighting attitude and mounted on a wheeled platform."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps in conjunction with the *daguesu* image, Glele also commissioned several *makpo* in the form of rams (or antelopes) with stylized celts emerging from their mouths (Waterlot 1926: pl. 21; Adande 1962:51,64). *Makpo* of this type appear in Glele's palace bas-reliefs as well as on one of his tomb doors.

A life-size sculpture called *gbetinsa* (Fig. 19), "at the foot (*sa*) of the hunter's (*gbe*) tree (*tin*),"<sup>38</sup> also incorporates warrior imagery; it too derives from Glele's divination sign. According to Sagbadju (86:7:101) this work is drawn from the *Abla-Lete* phrase "Everyone will meet under the hunter's tree." Explaining this saying, Sagbadju notes:

When the hunter has finished the hunt he goes to sit under the *fon* tree...saying that the *aziza* [forest spirits] gave me animals to kill. *Fon* trees have hollows where water collects, and when the hunters arrive at such trees after the hunt they take this water to drink and bathe in. It is for this reason that the hunters unite under the hunter's tree (*gbetin*). While they are there, the *aziza* will diminish the force of the animals that they have killed so that the animals' deaths will not cause any problems for these hunters.

Clarifying the meaning of this in the context of King Glele, Sagbadju adds (86:7:101):

If you go [to the *gbetinsa* shrine] you will see a figure of a hunter holding a gun and a machete, and placing his foot on the head of a man. When Glele did his ceremonies, he assembled the people with whom he had worked—those who are now dead, as a result of sickness or battle—and paid homage to them. The people who had gone to war and killed people, they would come here [to the temple of *gbetinsa* for ceremonies]. The hunters who shot animals also came to eat there.<sup>39</sup>

Like the iron warrior, this figure too had an important role in war. As Gbetinon,

the sculpture's priest, observed (86: 6:267), "Before each combat, Glele would come to ask if he could go to war and come back safely." Glele, as we can see from the above, commissioned a range of sculptures that had key functions with respect to war. Although clearly one could not be a king of Danhomè without having a significant war identity, in the case of Glele the especially militaristic character of his art and public image seems to have had vital reinforcement within his divination sign.

**A Violent King: No Animal Displays Its Anger Like the Lion**

In the course of his reign Glele became known by a range of leonine "strong names" such as "lion" (*kinikini*), "lion of lions" (*kini kini kini*), and "lion king" (*kini kini ahosu*) (Skertchly 1874:197; Adjaho 86:7:580). These names in turn became an important source for royal sayings. Thus, for example, Glele in announcing his intention to go to war is recorded as saying, "The 'bush' [will] tremble this year. The 'Lion' [will] get up out of his lair and prowl about for his prey and everyone will quake [with] fear" (Skertchly 1874:380). Like a number of other royal "strong names," the lion also has its source in Glele's divination sign. The *Abla-Lete* saying that most explicitly expresses Glele's lion features asserts: "No animal displays its anger like the lion."<sup>40</sup> Variations of this phrase also have been attributed to Glele. One of these variations notes: "The lion of lions grew teeth and fear arrived in the forest" (*Kini kini lan wu adu bo adla wa gbe*;

Adjaho 86:8:286). Another variant suggests, "The lion does not give birth to an animal that will merely cut its prey with its teeth; the lion's cub instead eats its prey's body whole" (*Kini man ji lan xu adu so e du kpodo agbaja ton bi kpan*; Agbidinukun 86:8:1830). Or more simply stated: "There is no such thing as a small lion when it comes to this animal's attack on its prey" (Adande 1962:57). The following song dedicated to Glele makes reference to his leonine identity (Adande 1962:29):

Only the king is the lord  
of this forest  
Ardent fire, only you are master  
of the forest  
No animal can imitate the walk  
of the lion  
King of the forest

Another court song suggests (Agbidinukun 86:2:235):

King Glele, the one  
who cannot be taken  
Lion of lions  
The animal grew teeth  
and all the forest trembled  
The animal that eats  
the other animals with bones  
The lion is afraid of no animal

In part because of Glele's close association with lions through his *Abla-Lete* sign, these animals appear in numerous artworks linked to his reign. Such works include a silver-covered sculpture of a lion formerly in the collection of Charles Rattou (see Plass 1956: pl. 14A) and two others of wood sheathed in brass in the Musée Historique (Fig. 17). A fourth, the

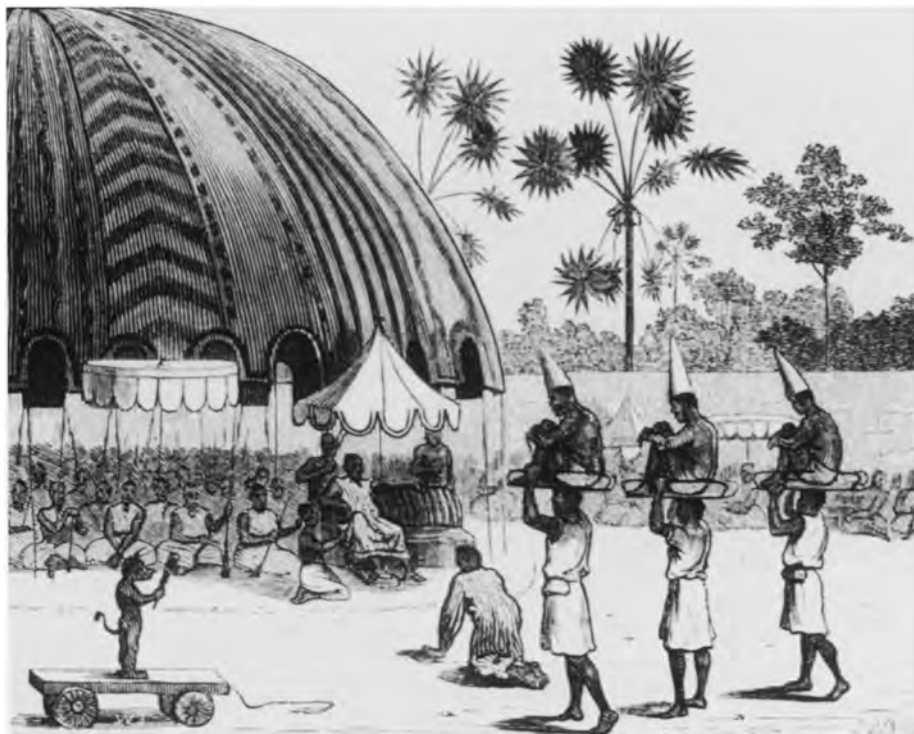
famous life-size sculpture in wood of a lion-man, is now in the Musée de l'Homme (Fig. 1).<sup>41</sup> Skertchly appears to have observed this work in the annual "customs" ceremonies of 1871. While watching the associated parade of the king's wealth he writes (1874:254):

A gang of twelve men then appeared dragging a dray of native manufacture upon which was the wooden figure of a very heraldic lion, rampant, and carrying a sword in either hand....this gang halted before the king, danced, bowed, and were dismissed with a present of cowries and rum.<sup>42</sup>

An illustration of this sculpture (Fig. 21) in front of an enormous appliquéd "Tokpon" umbrella also is published by Skertchly (1874:353). In the course of his discussion of this giant umbrella (p. 354) Skertchly again mentions this heraldic lion figure.

Lions similarly are identified with a diversity of appliqués, bas-reliefs (Fig. 14), and items of jewelry associated with Glele's reign. During his rule as well, the royal hammocks were frequently decorated with lions. As Skertchly noted of one royal procession (1874:261): "First came a blue velvet hammock with a yellow lion on the top of the pole and on the curtains....[then] a white satin hammock with scarlet lions...." So too, one of the king's umbrellas was described by Skertchly as being "surmounted by a green lion rampant regardant" (1874:196).

Lions also appear in many of Glele's *makpo* (Fig. 22). Such sculptures frequently were called *kinikinikpo*, "lion stick," because of their prominent lion imagery (Skertchly 1874:147).<sup>43</sup> Describing the king during one of his ceremonies, Skertchly notes (1874:196): "Gelele who of course was smoking, carried a *kinikinikpo*, or lion stick, carved out of white wood which he held with aristocratic carelessness head downwards or hooked over his shoulder." In the royal *makpo* and other lion images, what often stands out is the emphasis on aggressive qualities identified with this animal's powerful muzzle, prominent sharp teeth, and large tongue. As Agbanon, Ayidonubokunkunglo observes of one such carving (86:3:422): "If you look at the head of the *makpo* and see how it opens its mouth and displays its tongue, you will know that it is something of fury." Perhaps the most famous of these lion *makpo* is the one now in the Musée de l'Homme with an ivory blade carved in the form of a lion. Here too, the lion's fierce open mouth and sharp teeth are emphasized.



21. ILLUSTRATION OF THE ANNUAL CEREMONIES, OR "CUSTOMS" (FROM SKERTCHLY 1874:353). A CARVING OF A HERALDIC ANIMAL APPEARS IN THE FOREGROUND.



22. LION-FORM *MAKPO*. 1858-89. WOOD, IRON, BRASS; DETAIL APPROX. 18cm; ENTIRE STAFF 63cm; ARTIST: UNKNOWN. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-2-54.

PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

Still another Glele art form incorporating lion imagery consists of a silver "nose mask" (*awontimegan*, "metal that stays on the nose") created for Glele by his son Ahanhanzo; similar masks were worn by his successors King Agoli Agbo and Prince Gansregio (Nondichao 86:1:643). These "nose masks" incorporate features of the lion's pug nose, flaring nostrils, and whiskers (Fig. 20). As such, they transform the faces of those who wear them into dangerous "lion-men" personages.<sup>44</sup>

Other ferocious animals (especially leopards) likewise are linked with Glele through this phrase of his divination sign. In this light, Adande observes that a leopard-form *makpo* associated with Glele (in the Musée de l'Homme, 32-88-506) has its source in the phrase "When the animal grows teeth, terror reigns in the forest" (1962:82). Interestingly one of the Ablaléte accounts asserts that when the lion became king of the forest, he selected the leopard as his subchief (Herskovits & Herskovits 1958:206). A figure of a leopard in the Musée Historique, commissioned during the reign of Agoli Agbo, is generally identified with Agasu, the leopard father of the dynasty. The work, however, may also be identified with Glele because of the importance of such animals in his divination sign. Because of the centrality of leopard imagery in the *makpo*

associated with Glele's reign, these objects also are depicted in Glele's palace bas-reliefs.

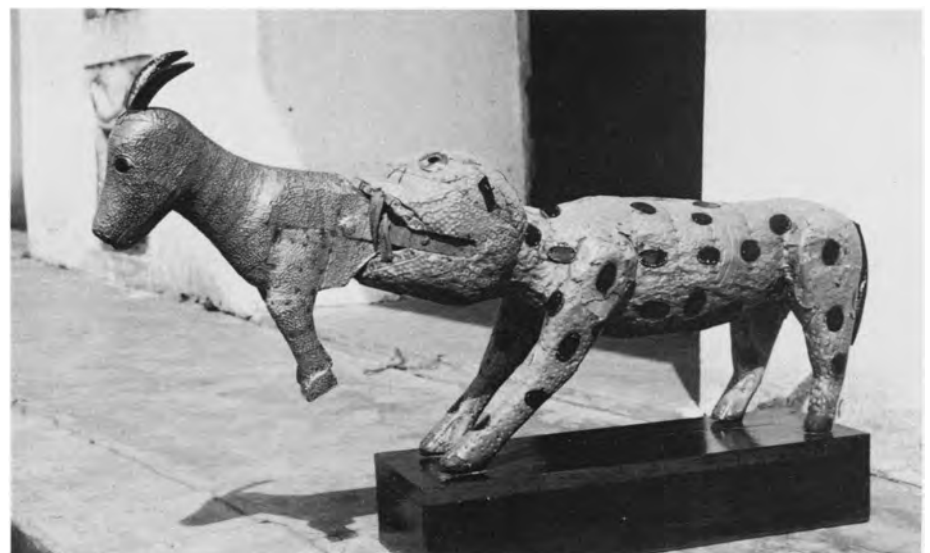
According to the Ablaléte account published by the Herskovitses (1958:262), another subchief designated by the lion is the hyena. For this reason, in one of his court songs, Glele compares himself to this animal (Dunglas 1957:151). Hyenas appear in several works associated with Glele's reign.<sup>45</sup> One of these, described as a *bo* (power object), portrays a hyena vomiting a goat (Agbidinukun 86:6:682). A sculpture showing this subject is now in the Musée Historique (Fig. 23). According to Paul Mercier and Jacques Lombard (1959:34) it evokes the royal saying: "Men are like hyenas who refuse to admit stealing and devouring the

things of others, however, when they vomit, their prey emerge, and thus they are obliged to admit their deeds."<sup>46</sup>

Many of the arts of Glele's reign, as we have seen, are rooted in essential features of his divination sign. Whether they are identified with Glele through reference to his ancestral sponsor, Agbanliko (and represented in turn in arts portraying such diverse animals as antelopes, dogs, horses, and bats), or whether they allude to Glele through various of his Faderived strong names—"The cultivated field is difficult to move" and "lion of lions" among others—it is clear that the strength of destiny provided within Glele's life sign served at once to further heighten this already powerful king's identity and to advance the political and psychological importance of the diverse divination-associated arts linked to his reign. It is of some interest in this light that the most secret and in some ways personally dangerous feature of a Danhomè king's identity, his divination sign, would be displayed and promoted in such a public fashion in both his strong names and diverse royal arts. However, it may be just such an interest in risk and potential danger that helped to foster a sense of heightened charismatic identity for Glele and other Danhomè rulers. This factor of charismatic identity in turn affected in critical ways both the nature of his royal portraiture arts and their reception by the public at large. □

Notes, page 93

In the January 1991 issue, Suzanne Blier will conclude her analysis of the impact of King Glele's divination sign on the arts associated with his reign.



23. HYENA VOMITING A GOAT. 1894-1900. WOOD, BRASS, SILVER; LENGTH 107cm. ARTIST: HUNTONDJ, TAHOZANGBE. MUSÉE HISTORIQUE, ABOMEY, 45-7-25. PHOTO: JUNE 1986.

PHOTO: SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

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**BLIER:** *Notes, from page 53*

1. I am grateful to the following funding sources that provided the financial support necessary to carry out the research and writing of this article on Danhomè (now part of the Republic of Benin): John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship; the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton; Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship; and the Social Science Research Council Fellowship. To the many individuals in the Republic of Benin who helped in this project, I also owe my deepest gratitude not only for granting research permission and for allowing me to photograph objects in the Musée Historique in Abomey, but also for enriching me as to the meanings and histories of these works. All the French translations in the text are my own.

For other studies on Danhomè (Fon) art see especially Adams (1980), A. Adande (1962), C. E. Adande (1976-77), Bay (1985), Blier (1988a, b), Crowley (1986), Herskovits (1938), Mercier (1952), Savary (1967, 1975), and Waterlot (1926).  
 2. The Danhomè system of Fa divination is in part derived from and shares essential characteristics with the Yoruba system of Ifá divination.

It should be emphasized that actions one takes in life—or those of others around one—also are seen to affect one's life's course in significant ways. Thus the Fa divination system does not a priori carry with it assumptions of inalterability or predestiny. Also of importance is that during one's life, one frequently will go to a diviner to inquire about various alternatives with respect to courses of action or problems one may be having. For more information on Fa (and Ifá) divination see especially the works of Bascom, de Surgy, and Maupoil.

Abla-Lete is the Fon equivalent of the Yoruba Ifá sign, Obara-Irete (Alapini 1950:93; Bascom 1969:44-45; Herskovits 1938, vol. 2:214). For a somewhat poetic reading of this sign among the Yoruba see Gleason (1973:263-65).

3. This account appears in Herskovits and Herskovits (1958:205-9). Although they provide no identifying information concerning the source of this "story," its principal themes (domination and the origin of kingship), its primary characters (lion, hornbill, crocodile), and its associated phrases closely resemble those of Abla-Lete. These phrases include: "Life's load does not rest on the head of a simple man; Agbogbolesu [hornbill], it is to you that se [destiny] has given this burden" and "If lion is in the bush, there are no animals nearby. They all run away."

4. A silver lion, formerly in the Charles Ratton collection (see Plass 1956: pl 14A), may be the same work that is described by Skertchly (1874:265) among the objects paraded in the annual "customs." This work was carried along with a group of *asen* (memorial staffs). Skertchly mentions in this light "a crimson cushion supporting a silver lion, most probably of European manufacture...." The lion easily could have been confused with a European sculpture, particularly by an English observer seated some distance from it. Skertchly's visit to the Danhomè court was undertaken in 1871. Thus the work would appear to predate his arrival.

5. Most of the food taboos are based on their association with phrases from Abla-Lete. The Abla-Lete phrase that refers to this particular taboo notes: "When the *pate* and the *wantolo* plant get together and when the *wantolo* leaf goes around the *pate*, they will gather there where they don't want to" (Agbidinukun 86:7:1826). Likewise red bean paste (*abla*) is forbidden because this word appears in the name of this sign.

6. The pigeon appears in Abla-Lete in the context of the following phrase: "The arms attached behind will not kill the pigeon." According to Gankan, Adiwui (86:6:962), even if one has prepared to sacrifice a pigeon and has tied its wings (arms) behind its back for this purpose, if it has made the appropriate sacrifice to the gods it will be saved.

7. Several other deities also are identified with Abla-Lete through its variant verses, especially Gu (the god of war and iron), Segbo-Lisa (the deity of destiny and heavenly light), and Ayido Hwedo (rainbow deity).

8. In this article field-note journal citations appear in the following way: the first two digits refer to the year of research (for example, 85 equals 1985); the second one or two digits, to the month (for example, 10 equals October); the third in this series of digits, to the page(s) of that month's journals.

9. One of Glele's *asen* and bas-reliefs takes the form of a vase whose surface is covered with holes. This vase, called *ajalalazen*, is used frequently in ceremonies for Sagbata (Mercier 1952:42).

10. Glele is purported to have said in reference to his ancestral sponsor: "When the *agbanli* antelope sees the hunter, he laughs in fleeing" (Sagbadju 86:7:1093). The meat of the *agbanli* antelope, like that of other spotted game, could not be consumed by Glele because they are identified not only with the god Sagbata, but also with his ancestral sponsor.

11. Frogs, which often serve to symbolize *tohosu*, are associated with Agbanlikoce as well (Agbidinukun 86:6:431; Glele 86:5:942). While closely identified with *tohosu*, frogs are also linked to Glele through his own divination sign.

12. Or, as was noted in the *Kpaligan* (cart gong player) song at the enthronement ceremonies at Sinwe for Glele's great grandson (86:2:258): "If I reincarnate a child/That child will never eat the male *agbanli*/When he was at war/A large *agbanli* antelope arrived/He asked that one trap the *agbanli*/He took the horns and let the animal go/It is because of this that one says/*Agbanli* blocks the road of the hunter/Glele, the one who cannot be taken."

13. According to Venance Quenum (1986:17), Glele's funeral was organized by Agoli Agbo in 1896. In 1898 Agoli Agbo completed Glele's *djebo* ("bead house"), where his spirit would reside. Most likely this work was commissioned by Agoli Agbo to celebrate one of these two occasions. This sculpture and that portraying a dog (Fig. 3) were made by Hüntondji, Tahozangbe of the famous family of royal smiths (Agoli Agbo 86:8:364; Hüntondji 84:6:68).

14. Discussing the meaning of this sculpture, Nondichao has noted (85:10:119): "The antelope sculpture represents the protective spirit of Glele, Agbanlikoce.... He said, if the enemy comes into this kingdom to make inquiries here for an enemy, this enemy will be like a wild game animal and will be immediately taken. He, like a wild animal that mocks its hunters and goes into the circle of men and never returns to the forest." Because of the close identity between Agbanlikoce and hunting, figures of hunters also are said to be identified with this man (Adjaho 86:7:575-76). It is important to note that Glele was not the only king identified with antelope imagery. Glele's father, Guezo, was as well (Skertchly 1874:424).

15. Mercier notes (1952:35): "The dog evokes the *joto* of Glele, Agbanlikoce, that is the ancestor reincarnated in him. [The work] alludes to the sentence: the courageous dog hits the owner of the house and moves to possess the house." Agbidinukun explains that another name for Glele's ancestral sponsor is Avundegla, "The courageous dog hits the owner of the room and takes the room" (86:6:432). Adjaho suggests, however, that the dog is a reference to Glele himself. He is saying, "I am the quick dog for my father" (86:7:581). Today, a dog is seen by many to be a sign for Pengla, the eighteenth-century ruler (Mercier 1952:65; Bokpe 86:5:834). Another dog in the collection of the Musée Historique at Abomey (45-8-134) was ordered from Portugal by Glele and dedicated to his father, Guezo (Mercier

1952:60-61). Images of dogs also appeared in the annual processions during Guezo's reign (Forbes 1851:231). A *makpo* in the form of a dog (Musée de l'Homme, 89-101-47) is said by Adande (1962:41) to allude to Guezo's bravery in removing his predecessor, Adandozan, from the throne.

16. As a prince, Glele was known by a different name. According to Skertchly (1874:51) he was called Ak-po-toh Boda-hunh. Repin identifies him instead as Bahadou. Maupoil gives his name as Baduzebu but notes that he was also called Zenajegbeyi (1981:382). Glele was a man of around 40-45 years of age in 1860 (Repin 1860:95).

17. Several phrases in one of Glele's court songs make clear the important role divination had in the course of his rule: "If the King's great se [destiny] wants him to do something/He has to do it/Does anything in life exist/That one can do without se?" (Adjaho 86:6:214-15).

18. Mercier, discussing this *asen*, notes that it illustrates several sayings (1952:23): "Dahomey is between the hands of someone"; "That which is held well does not escape"; and, "The termite does not eat the cord that is in the hands of someone."

19. Glele in turn adopted part of this phrase, *togodo*, as one of his strong names. Agbanon, explains similarly (86:2:96-97): "It is because of this *bo* (power object) that Glele took the surname *togodo* saying, 'I will govern all the earth.... throughout the land you will hear the name Glele. It is I who will be the owner of all.'"

20. This necklace was first discussed by Robert Farris Thompson (1983: pl.111). According to Thompson's sources (Sagbaju, Akpalosi, and Ahokpe) (1983:173-74) this pendant symbolizes steadfastness and was worn by Behanzin to evoke the spirit of Glele: "The pendant is a praise name of Glele materially rendered: *Togodo*, The-Circle-of-the-Earth (literally "round thing") a word that connotes a deeper meaning, namely, that Glele, the king (the earth), resists, without moving, the hot, dry, northern winds. The sphere is the earth, and the tangled skein of wire the winds—all of which glosses one of the strongest names for King Glele...the king is a force that can never be dislodged. The resistance of earth to wind cosmologizes the king's collectedness of mind and steadfast sense of mission."

21. One of the enthronement songs at Sinwe makes reference to "knots" and their identity with Glele (86:2:259): "King Glele/The courageous Glele who cannot be moved/I come to ask you permission to talk/The courageous Glele who cannot be moved/You go out of your palace and all the country trembles/The hand does not untie the knot made of stone/King Glele/It is you who are in your house/When you go out everyone hides/It is you who saves/It is you who kills/There are people who hide/There are people who wage war/But they are not able to destroy/King who does not die in war."

22. Moreover, Maupoil notes (1981:422), there is a homophonic link between the name of this sign (*abla*) and the Fonbe word *bla*, "to attach."

23. Another Abla-Lete saying also makes reference to the obligations of a son toward his father: "One must leave the head of the pig to the owner of the pig" (Dewui 86:6:938). In other words, no matter what he does, a son must give credit to his father. Court songs also make reference to Glele's filial commitment to his father. One song notes: "King Guezo, it is the father of fire who also gave birth to fire" (Agbidinukun 86:7:1785).

24. Maupoil explains (1981:421) this phrase as: "If you offended *gubasa*, his child, Gu, will not miss to bring about revenge."

25. One of Glele's strong names notes in turn that "One does not forget the knife that is sharp"—a sharp knife never misses (Agbidinukun 86:6:433). For a different reason, the pocket knife also is identified with Glele. A pocket knife accordingly appears on several of Glele's *asen* (Mercier 1952:34).

26. Those identified closely with Glele, such as his diviner, were given similar swords (Maupoil 1981:207). Of the *asen* with *gubasa* (Musée Historique, 45-8-128 and 129), Mercier notes (1952:59): "The *gubasa* is an attribute of *gu* and the [divination sign] of Glele is particularly tied to *Gu*." As Adande notes (1976-77:150), although Glele did not invent this *gubasa* knife, it was closely associated with and often attributed to him. Gaou, the war minister, similarly has a *gubasa* sword.

27. This would suggest that the knives date to the period prior to Skertchly's visit of 1871.

28. Assogbakpe, Sodjekake—a member of the larger Hüntondji family—was the royal bas-relief artist during the reign of Glele (Assogbakpe 84:7:128). Because some of the reliefs in the bas-relief program represent scenes associated with the Danhomè victories over Ichaga (1863) and Ketu (1882), these sculptures probably date from the latter part of Glele's reign, or perhaps even from the early part of Gbehanzin's reign, since images of sharks appear here as well. The dating is further complicated by the fact that images of sharks also appear in Glele's reign and that the palace bas-reliefs were in some cases heavily restored in this century. In some cases the original bas-reliefs were replaced with others.

29. The placement of this figure in the *adanjeho* palace building dedicated to the rites and arts of war underscores the object's important role in war. According to Mercier (1952:51-52), the knife bell that the figure once held serves as the "arm of *Gu*" and contains the "secrets of *Gu*."

30. Following Glele's victory in Doume, Nondichao explains

(85:10:227): "Glele assembled all their *vodun*, all their priests, all their priestesses, and brought them here. Their Gu became in turn the *vodun* of our king."

31. Other images of warriors, some of large scale, were commissioned during the reign of Guezo and were displayed in the course of the annual ceremonies (Forbes 1851:237).

32. Two Hundondji smiths were active during the reign of Glele (Hundondji 84:6:68). The first, Hundondji, Allodé, is known for his production of "animal portraits in 'white iron' (silver) and 'red iron' (brass)." He died midway through Glele's rule and was replaced by Hundondji, Ganhu, a smith famous for his "portraits of ancestors in red iron." The latter continued to smith during the reign of Behanzin. Because of Hanhu's identity within Hundondji family accounts with ancestral portraits in brass, most likely he was the artist of the famous brass warrior shown here. Mural paintings on the facade of the Hundondji family compound provide us with additional information on these artists. In these murals we find the names and symbols of Hundondji family smiths going back to the founding of the kingdom.

33. Several *makpo* also were commissioned by Glele in conjunction with this feature of his sign (see Adande 1962:27). Such works, while referring to Gu, are said to incorporate imagery as diverse as a cannon (Musée de l'Homme, 21-11-59), a lion (MH 21-11-60), and a horse's head (MH 21-11-59) (Adande 1962:27, 59, 60).

34. In its position near an important entry it shares an identity with the large iron figure of a warrior that was found at Ouidah, the main coastal port.

35. For other information on this figure see Adande (1962:51).

36. Agbidinukun notes that "the ram-headed sculpture that was carved in the time of Glele was taken and was used to close the frontier. Still today, the place guarded by this sculpture is called Agbotagon (*agbo*: ram; *tu*: head; *gon*: at). The minister Binazon was in charge of the work" (86:7:683).

37. In the procession, this sculpture was preceded by a large rampant lion sculpture (see text below) and was followed by "a black figure with a demon's head, four horns, glaring red eyes, grinning teeth and etc., on a truck followed by a gang of soldiers firing guns as they marched past" (Skertchly 1874:254). The original *daguesi* sculpture must have been created between 1858 and 1871, the time of Skertchly's visit.

38. The word *gbe* also means "life" and "universe." Thus, this is a tree that also can be said to have certain life-giving properties. The artist of this work is identified by Sagbadju, Atinwulise (86:7:102) as Houndo, a well-known court carver who lived in the Hundondji quarter of Abomey and was a member of that famous smithing family. The Houndo family member who sculpted during the reign of Glele was named Houndo, Somissi (Houndo 84:7:129). This same artist carved several works that formerly formed part of the collection of Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan.

39. Agbidinukun suggests (86:6:706) that Glele commissioned this sculpture to honor his father, Guezo.

40. Glele's lion identity came to be associated with both the assumed leonine nature of his character and the close link between Glele and his father, Guezo. In reference to the latter, Agbidinukun suggests (86:7:1820), Glele's lion name means, "When the lion is in the forest and gives birth to the child, this child will always be a lion." Court songs created during Glele's reign frequently make reference both to his own lion identity and to that of his father. One such song observes: "Glele is not possible to take [*mayonze*] / I am the greatest King / King Guezo, the lion gave birth to the lion / The animal grew teeth / And terror was born in the forest" (Agonzan 86:5:935). Lion sculptures accordingly also are said to have been made during the reign of Guezo.

41. These sculptures are said to once have contained bits of carbonized lion skin inserted in holes in the surface, for they also served as *bo*, or power objects, through which the king was said to be able to gain military and other victories over his enemies (Sagbadju 86:7:654).

Robert Farris Thompson was the first to attribute the lionman in Figure 1 to a Danhomè artist (Sosandande Likohin Kankanhou; 1983:169). According to Asogbahu, Vigan (86:5:215), a spokesman for the Sosa Adede family, this artist (whom he also calls Sosa Adade, Likohé) bore the title Da Atinkpato, or "Lord Woodcarver." He began carving during the reign of Guezo (although he appears also to have worked for Glele). His son, Sosa Adede, Medokponon Mawayizo was also a well-known carver. This latter artist is identified with the end of Glele's reign as well as with Glele's successors, Gbehanzin (1889-94) and Agoli Agbo (1894-1900). Several of Medokponon's sculptures that were commissioned by Agoli Agbo are now in the Musée Historique.

There are some questions concerning the dating of this sculpture since it is so close in style to the life-size Musée de l'Homme figure portraying King Gbehanzin as a shark. Clearly carved by the same artist, the two works may have been done during the respective reigns of these rulers. They also could both have been complete during the rule of Glele (with whom images of sharks were occasionally associated [Skertchly 1874:194,435]).

42. In view of this reference in Skertchly, the standing lion figure would have to have been carved before Skertchly's arrival in 1871. In the procession the heraldic lion sculpture was followed by a large ram-headed figure (see text) and another figure with four horns that was painted red. Of the latter sculpture, Agbidinukun asserts (86:6:682): "This statue which was made in the time of Glele is already ruined. It

was called Ato ("male monkey") and was kept in one of the king's storehouses. When I was little I saw it being taken to the market in the annual ceremonies. The *kpmegan* (*bo*-makers) are priests of Ato."

43. Artists who worked for Glele similarly used lion imagery. Thus, in the entry to the Akati, Akpele Kendo family compound is a bas-relief of a lion. Explaining the significance of this image, the artist's descendant noted, "It was King Glele who was King. It represents his sign."

44. I thank Gary Van Wyk for pointing out the feline characteristics of this mask. It is possible that the feline imagery conveyed here is drawn from the leopard, the mythological father of the Danhomè kings. The leopard also was closely identified with Glele through his divination sign (see text below).

45. Images of hyenas also are associated with King Guezo.

46. This phrase may also serve as a reference to the deposed king, Adandozan.

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#### Interviewees cited

- (As is customary in Danhomè, family names precede given names)
- Adjaho, Humase (Abomey). Minister of the Palace Interior (b. 1904).
- Agbanon, Ayidonubokunkunglo (Sodohome). Descendant of King Hwegbadja (b. ca. 1936).
- Agbidinukun, Kplankun (Sinwe). Glele descendant and royal historian (b. ca. 1906).
- Agoli Agbo, Ahande (Abomey). Descendant of King Agoli Agbo (b. 1940).
- Agonzan, Marcellin (Zunzome). *Kpaligan* (gong) player (b. ca. 1946).
- Ahanhanzo, Vigan (Abomey). Descendant of King Glele (b. 1912).
- Akati, Gunon (Abomey). Blacksmith and descendant of royal smith (b. ca.1923).
- Asogbahu, Vigan (Abomey). Elder in Sosa Adede family (b. ca. 1925).
- Assogbakpe, Bertin (Abomey). Carver.
- Ayido, Gnanwisi (Sodohome). Diviner (b. ca.1924).
- Bokpe, Tanmanbu (Abomey). Descendant of court minister during reign of King Kpengla. Museum guide (b. 1954).
- Dewui, Donatien (Abomey). Diviner (b. 1948).
- Gankan, Adiwui (Nbeaga). Diviner (b. 1945).
- Gbetinon (Abomey). Priest of Gbeti (b. ca. 1936).
- Glele, Etienne (Abomey). Descendant of King Glele (b. ca. 1928).
- Houndo, Gbelidji Benoit (Abomey). Carver (b. ca.1935).
- Hundondji, Tahozangbe (Abomey). Blacksmith (b. ca. 1880).
- Nondichao, Basharu (Abomey). King Kpengla descendant and museum guide (b. ca. 1941).
- Sagbadju, Atinwulise (Abomey). Diviner and descendant of King Glele (b. 1957).

#### VISONA: Notes, from page 61

An earlier version of this article was presented at the 7th Triennial Symposium on African Art in 1986. Information in the article was gathered during five months of fieldwork among the Akye in 1981-82, financed by the Art Department of the University of California, Santa Barbara, from funding provided by the Samuel Kress Foundation; and during a nine-month survey of art among the Lagoon peoples in 1984-85, made possible by a Fulbright grant. A dissertation grant from the Samuel Kress Foundation allowed me to conduct research in American and European museums. I am grateful for this support, and I wish to thank the members of the Institut d'Histoire, d'Art et d'Archéologie of the Université Nationale de Côte d'Ivoire for offering me affiliation with the I.H.A.A. during both my doctoral and post-doctoral research. The generosity and hospitality of men and women in over forty different villages greatly assisted me during my fieldwork. I am particularly indebted to the elders, artists, and the patrons of the arts who shared their knowledge with me, and I regret not having the space to thank them all.

1. Until recently there was very little literature available on the general history of southeastern Côte d'Ivoire, although valuable information could be gleaned from the works of Augé (1975) and Memel-Fôté (1980). Current research by Ivorian scholars such as Locou may be changing this situation, however.

2. Several good studies of Harris are available. See Augé (1975) for an account of Harris's impact upon traditional religious beliefs.

3. Some Lagoon dance figures may receive attention only during performances, and may not be displayed or honored at other times. Others may be kept in shrines. Diviners' statues may also be considered dance figures in some cases, for clairvoyants often carry their statuary when possessed by their spirits in public displays. On at least one occasion a diviner has borrowed a figure normally used in a secular dance before going into a trance. Furthermore, some dances allow women to pretend to be diviners, and these dancers may carry identical statues as props for their act.

4. The reader will note that I am unable to determine whether these *lagunaire* figures portray "lovers" or "spouses."

5. Lagoon gold has been discussed recently by Barbier and Garrard (Garrard 1989). Garrard believes that these gold portraits derive from a gold medal presented by the French to an Abure leader in 1853, which was adorned with the Abure king's likeness (1989: 101-2). However, a contradictory viewpoint (probably that of Barbier) immediately follows. The Ivorian gold heads are linked to depictions of human heads on goldweights that "may date back to the seventeenth century" (1989:102), and would, in any case, predate 1853. While the medal struck by the French may indeed have given impetus to the tradition of commemorating ancestors on gold disks, we should remember that most European medals and coins show the subject in profile, and all Lagoon portraits are frontal faces. In my view, Garrard (and Barbier?) also overstate the differences between gold portraits from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, for not all heads from Ghana represent enemies, and not all heads from Côte d'Ivoire represent honored ancestors. In fact, I would agree with their assessment that both "may ultimately derive from a common origin" (1989: 102).

6. Cole's short essay on "The Head as Emblem and Trophy" in his recent catalogue (1989:94-95) underscores the close relationship between leadership, military prowess, and the