

african arts

Regents of the University of California

African Creation Myths as Political Strategy

Author(s): Suzanne Preston Blier

Source: *African Arts*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Explorations of Origins (Spring, 2004), pp. 38-45+94

Published by: [UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3338011>

Accessed: 25-07-2015 14:26 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center and Regents of the University of California are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *African Arts*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

African Creation Myths as Political Strategy

SUZANNE PRESTON BLIER

Creation myths reflect the unique contexts of their inception, revelation, and later ritual, social, or political practice. Those myths complementing the handsome artworks from Africa displayed in "Genesis: Ideas of Origin in African Sculpture" are subject to multiple and often competing readings, and it is not surprising that some of the most heated debates with regard to African art history have centered on the interpretation of certain of these accounts. For example, the French school scholarship of the ethnographer Marcel Griaule on the Dogon (1965) has been contested by scholars as diverse as the American literary theorist James Clifford (1988) and the Dutch anthropologist Walter van Beek (1991, 2001). The Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch (1982) and the Dutch American historian Jan Vansina (1978, 1983) sharply disagree about whether Kuba genesis accounts can (and should) be understood as classic (ahistorical) creation narratives that can be analyzed in Structuralist terms, or whether instead they should be viewed as historical documents containing vital details of the Kuba past.

1. Seated couple. Dogon peoples, Mali, 16th–19th century. Wood, metal; 73cm (28¾"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1977. 1977.394.15.

According to the Dogon myth of origin advanced in the writings of the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule (1965) and others, this figural pair represents the "primordial couple." This interpretation has since been challenged.

These and other such disputes have been the focus of a significant number of scholarly articles, and the charges leveled by one side against the other suggest just how contentious these issues inherently are. Similar passionate debate of course characterizes discussions of many texts concerned with genesis—the Bible being a primary example. In this article I explore the competing strategies at play in coming to understand the creation accounts and related arts of the Dogon, Batammaliba, Kuba, and Bamana, and of the ancient culture of Ife.

Dogon Scholarship, Social Change, and the Invention of Origin

Artworks of the Dogon people of Mali reveal the unique ways in which scholarly approaches complicate ideas of genesis myths. The rich Dogon myths of origin collected and elaborated by the French ethnographers Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen (Griaule 1965; Griaule & Dieterlen 1965)—accounts of Nommo (pseudo-humans in the form of serpents), celestial theft, defilement—are now all too familiar elements of the general understanding of Dogon artistic form and meaning. The early reading of the seated Dogon figural pair now at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a "primordial couple" (Laude 1973: fig. 37; Fraser 1974:13–21) exemplifies this approach (Fig. 1). Many other sculptures were assumed to reference the Dogon mythic world or its aftermath. In the depiction of two seated *balafon* players (Fig. 2), features of twinning and androgyny (breasts and beards) historically have been seen to be im-

portant Dogon genesis motifs. The musical instrument was also linked to complementary ideas such as *nyama* (life force), the primacy of the fertilizing word, and connections between sound and the organization of world principles (Klobe 1977:34–35).

More recently the validity of Griaule's and Dieterlen's accounts has been called into question. James Clifford has deconstructed this mythic paradigm (1988), suggesting that these narratives reflected, at least in part, French Surrealist interests of the era; Walter van Beek offers a quite different critique (1991, 2001), namely that his own interviews with the Dogon, some fifty years after those of Griaule, reveal little if any evidence of this mythic base. In his view, rather than being mythmakers, the Dogon carry an aura of groundedness and pragmatism. If there is a case to be made for the scholarly shaping of ethnographic subjects, the Dogon example expresses this in particularly striking ways.

The reception of Dogon art (and creation myths) in the West also is part of this story. In retrospect it seems clear that whatever its validity, Griaule's view of the Dogon as a peaceable place of mythic primacy offered a cogent counter model to the horrendous atrocities of World War II, which cut short Griaule's fieldwork period. So, too, the dominant mythic view of Dogon art promoted in various exhibitions and publications in the 1960s and early 1970s following Griaule's widely read works, especially his *Conversations with Ogotemmêli* (1965), coincided with the antiwar and back-to-the-earth movements in the United States and France. Dogon arts (and the creation accounts associated with them) spoke to Western



audiences as vibrant exemplars of a better, more connected world. These stripped-down artistic forms, with their balanced horizontal and vertical elements, seemed both to reinforce this idea and to complement modernist aesthetics of the era.

It is not clear how any of the reaction in the West fits with the views of the Dogon themselves concerning their genesis narratives and arts, but understanding the political and historical situation of the Dogon offers an important lens into genesis ideation. As is now generally recognized, the Dogon did not arrive in the Bandiagara region as a unified cultural whole, but instead comprised multiple populations and migration flows—Gur, Mande, and other—each cultural substratum modifying the underlying matrix of the local setting (Huet 1994:48). Many of these diverse populations sought refuge in the remote Bandiagara escarpment as a result of the enormous violence and disruption promoted by the empire building that extended from the fourteenth to late nineteenth centuries involving the succeeding Mali, Songhai, Bamana, and Fulani states. One of the most difficult eras was that of the nineteenth-century Islamic Fulani emperor Seku Amadu, who forced many Dogon into servitude and slavery (Huet 1994:121; see also Blier 2003). That Van Beek found traditions very different from those recounted by Griaule may not be all that surprising.

In the early twentieth century, just prior to Griaule's research, Dogon communities were still rebuilding from this earlier devastation, with French colonial authorities playing a critical role in the related resettlement and pacification process. To Jean-Christophe Huet (1994:48) the "Dogon" homes and communities that were being constructed in the Bandiagara at this time represented not so much sites of "origin" but rather places of new emergence and renewal. Dogon art and architecture—like the associated genesis myths collected by Griaule—appear to have played a critical role in promoting this sense of newfound communal identity and unity. As "models" of uniformity and ancestral primacy—a much needed salve in an era of pain and dislocation—they simultaneously fit the needs of the Dogon and Griaule.

Knowledge Realms and Changing Form: A Personal Perspective on Batammaliba Myths of Genesis

In the 1970s, during the heyday of both French Structuralism's and the Griaule school's fascination with myths of origin, I went to Togo to complete doctoral research in the small mountainside Batammaliba (Somba, Tamberma) community of Koufitoukou. Residents there spoke a dialect of the same Gur language of many Dogon groups. While my focus was ar-



COURTESY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH STUDIO, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

chitecture (Fig. 3), I also hoped to find accounts that would complement Griaule's and Dieterlen's about the related Dogon. In the course of my fieldwork I posed the requisite questions concerning Batammaliba origins: Where did your ancestors come from? Who came before them? Before them? Before them? In a very short time I collected long lists of the names of living people, ancestors, and villages. Most respondents stopped at the third or fourth generation. No one posited anything that could pass for a myth of genesis.

I addressed my questions to elders, to diviners, to heads of initiation societies. I recorded songs and observed family and local rituals. I soon came to realize that Batammaliba family histories, unlike those of the Dogon, did not seem to jump the

taxonomic chasm from known history (i.e., accounts of actual individuals or events) to narratives of origin. I eventually gave up on this line of inquiry and continued on with my other research.

Eight months or so into my fieldwork, I began to turn to questions of environment and science—plants, minerals, types of earth, reckoning time, the stars. One day during a heavy rainstorm, I was interviewing N'tcha Lalie at his home in a nearby village. We talked about constellations and the importance of the appearance of certain star groupings such as the Pleiades in determining the onset of planting and other key events. Thinking about the seeming movement of star clusters across the heavens from east to west through the course of the year, I asked

Opposite page:

2. Pair of xylophone players. Dogon peoples, Mali. 16th–20th century. Wood, metal; 39.3 cm (15⁷/₁₆”). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979. 1979.206.131. Features of this sculpture might be read as references to the Dogon creation myth.

This page:

3. Batammaliba house. Koufitoukou village, Togo, 1987. Photo: Suzanne Preston Blier. During her research on the architecture of the Batammaliba people, the author inquired about stories of origin that might complement creation myths of the neighboring Dogon.

Lalie where the stars came from. “No one knows,” he answered. “How about the sun?” I asked. “Where does it come from?” “Oh,” he said, and his face tensed in reflection of some distant recollection before he slowly offered:

Well...I’ve heard things; we don’t really believe them. But one used to say that there were these two men, one was Liyeyani “the sun that comes out”—he was the younger brother, and he was red—and the other was Liyelo “the sun that falls”—he was the older brother and was black. And they pull the sun across the sky each day to [the sun’s] village in the west of the sky. The younger brother Liyeyani is married to Puka Puka, “the early morning,” the other brother is married to Kuiyecoke, “afternoon.”¹

(Blier 1994:50)

As he spoke I sensed a new world of Batammaliba knowledge opening up before me.

The discussion continued. Lalie told me how Kuiye, the sun, created the earth, the trees, and the animals, and “hatched” the first humans. Succeeding interviews provided an account of how the larger universe had been formed and populated. I realized during these discussions that to Lalie, the story was almost an inconsequential one. Indeed, he was somewhat embarrassed by it (“I’ve heard things, but we don’t really believe them”). What I also recall clearly was how much the telling of this account was dependent on the type of questions I posed. For Lalie—and it seems the Batammaliba more generally—myths of origin are not seen to fall into the realm of history—something that is knowable, certain, concrete, tangible. The origins of the world are part of what could be said to constitute the field of metaphysics. Related accounts are framed by conjecture, premises, and theories, supported by evidence that comes largely from the natural world—in short, they are in the realm of science.

Whatever its taxonomic base, this account served in many respects as a polit-



ical charter for the bipartite structuring of Batammaliba communities into red and black lineage sections whose leaders have long headed the village governance. As Lalie’s account suggested:

Kuiye [the sun]...positioned the two sons with care. If s/he had put them together, on the same side of the sky, it would not have worked, for one side would have remained empty. This way, the two of them pull together, each wanting to bring the sun to his side, each saying he wants to have Kuiye with him.

(Blier 1994:50)

In much the same way, when Kuiye made the first humans out of earth, this god is said to have created twins, one black and one red, a detail that further underscores the importance of political balance and consensus. Not only was this account important as scientific theory, but it also served as an important political charter.

Because it was the rainy season when Lalie and I began discussing this set of beliefs, and he and other men had to focus their attention on farming, our interviews were put on hold. When next I met with Lalie, I asked him to clarify and elaborate on a number of points in his account. One of these later interview segments centered on the identities and origins of the first two humans created by Kuiye. Lalie repeated the story he had told me originally, but with an important difference. In his first version he stated that Kuiye had created two men, one red and one black, and that these two people were responsible for the peopling of the world. In his later recounting of the same myth, he explained that the first two men were black and white, and that the white man, in turn, gave birth to a red man. On

reflection during the intervening period, Lalie seems to have decided that Kuiye must have created white people at some point and that these foreigners had to be incorporated into his narrative.

In short, the Batammaliba genesis account reported to me by Lalie was not seen by him to be a fixed form but rather one open to later clarification. The changes he made did not seem to reflect an error in telling or a memory lapse but rather suggested his realization that the ideas presented in the earlier telling no longer fit the material evidence of the situation. As Lalie thought about the world and the cosmos, he apparently saw contradictions in the first version and altered his account (the theorem) to reflect this new knowledge. Whether viewed primarily as scientific exegesis, political charter, or origin myth, Batammaliba perspectives on genesis suggest how complex many of these stories can be.

Between Drunken Kings and Historical Verity: Kuba Arts and the Subaltern

The case involving the Kuba is in some ways both similar and very different with respect to how questions of inquiry help to shape related discourses about origins. The heated dispute between Luc de Heusch (1982) and Jan Vansina (1978, 1983) goes to the very heart of how knowledge is framed within the context of creation mythologies. Dogon scholarly debates have been largely defined within a single field, anthropology (and, to a lesser extent, in Post-Structuralist literary critique). In the Kuba context, however, the main arguments are a central feature of two very different and competing disciplines—anthropology and



ROBERT HASHIMOTO, COURTESY OF THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

history—which were each seeking legitimacy as the principal voice that would address Africa’s rich cultural and knowledge base. The anthropologist Luc de Heusch saw in the Kuba myths—among these the prominent trope of a drunken king (1982)—a rich and detailed tableau of complementary dualisms, which could be seen to frame at once social institutions and systems of belief. To the historian Jan Vansina, in contrast (1983), these myths should be understood primarily as accounts of Kuba dynastic history—valid “documents” from which one can begin to reconstruct the world of the past. If one of these scholarly interpretations of Kuba genesis accounts was deemed “true,” the other necessarily was “false.” In the end, although de Heusch’s perspective proved in some ways to be the more eloquent, Vansina carried the heavier stick. By the 1980s, when the de Heusch-Vansina contestation took place, both models of scholarship (de Heusch’s adaptation of French Structuralism and Vansina’s promotion of oral traditions) clearly were moving out of fashion—whatever the respective merits of each approach.

As with Dogon scholarship, in the Kuba case, scholarly perspectives on related myths of origin to a large degree have left out significant sociopolitical issues that offer important insights into these genesis accounts and related arts. The masking triad of Mwaash aMbooy (the king; Fig. 4), Ngaady aMwash (the king’s sister and lover; Fig. 5), and Bwoom (the Mbuti “pygmy” and competitor for the affection of the king’s sister; Fig. 6) thus has been generally described as evoking a performance image of detente and symbiosis in keeping with Kuba genesis narratives. Yet, within the context of this mythic account, considerable unresolved conflict is in evidence. Questions of incest in the royal family among other things served to “mark” and “other” local rulers in a way consistent with the supernatural authority granted to kings in many parts of Africa (Blier 1998: 34–36, 236–41). At the same time these accounts (and associated arts), though underscoring the symbiotic relationships among the king, the king’s family, and the Mbuti forest dweller, also reify the difficulties experienced by local hunter-gatherers (Mbuti) of the Ituri forest in the face of expansion

and dominance by Kuba and other agriculturalists within their native land. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, colonial plantations and forced labor probably made the situation worse. Kuba myths and related mask forms can be seen in this light to have served as political charters conveying to the dislocated Ituri dwellers both primordial and subaltern status. To some degree this same idea of political charter is evidenced in the royal attire of Bushong monarchs and royal *ndop* portrait figures. In both instances, the king often wears a headdress in the form of a hoe blade, making clear the supremacy of the Kuba agriculturalists over their Mbuti neighbors.

Ci Wara: Forced Labor and the Art of Resistance

The extraordinary grouping of Bamana *ci wara* headdresses on view in “Genesis” (Fig. 7) offers another provocative frame from which to address the competing sociopolitical strategies at play in African genesis myths. Here again, one can view the art-myth interconnection in a new

Opposite page:

4. Mask (Mukenga, of the Mwaash aMbooy type: the king). Kuba peoples, Western Kasai, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Late 19th/mid-20th century. Wood, glass, beads, feathers, cowrie shells, raffia, fur, fabric, string, bells; 57.5cm x 22.9cm x 20.3cm (22½" x 9" x 8"). The Art Institute of Chicago, Laura T. Magnuson Fund. 1982.1504.

This page:

Top: 5. Mask (Ngaady aMwash). Kuba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo. 19th century. Wood, pigments, beads, cowrie shells, fiber; 33cm (13"). Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Photo T 769.

Bottom: 6. Bwoom mask representing a Mbuti who competes for the attention of the king's sister. Kuba peoples, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wood, glass beads, cowrie shells, seeds, fabric, copper strips; height 49cm (19¼"). UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History. X87.1452.

The narrative involving the mythical royal ancestors represented in these three masks can be read as expressing political tensions among the Kuba during the colonial period.

way. In recent years historians have begun focusing attention on the vast agricultural collectives of the Bamana empire in which slave and serf labor defined by *ton* work associations were forcibly removed from more distant regions and ethnic groups, obliged to work largely for the interests of the state (see Djata 1997). The tradition of slave villages in this area extended back to the earlier Mali and Songhai states and continued through the Bamana empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Servitude and forced labor in agricultural contexts to some extent also carried into the early twentieth century in the era of French colonial rule.

Bamana *ci wara* headdresses once featured prominently in local agricultural contexts. Originally these masks are said to have been performed on fields during the labor-intensive process of cultivating the land in preparation for planting. A range of scholars have looked at the unique *ci wara* forms from the vantage point of Bamana creation myths—particularly as they relate to the sacred origins of agriculture (Imperato 1970; Zahan 1980; Colleyn 2001; LaGamma 2002). What this literature for the most part does not address, however, is the extent to which *ci wara* masked personae were being performed on fields farmed by forced labor. While we await future scholarship for answers, it is tempting to speculate that *ci wara* masquerades incorporate key references to the difficult circumstances of such work in many Bamana areas.

Within the creation mythology of *ci wara*, one learns that Ci Wara is a spirit half human and half animal that sacrificed itself to protest the carelessness and waste of those humans who had control of the land and were responsible for its productive use. One can hypothesize that this tradition is making a vital reference to

spring 2004 • african arts



COURTESY OF THE PEABODY MUSEUM

DON COLE © UCLA FOWLER MUSEUM OF CULTURAL HISTORY



the dire social and political situation of many agricultural workers, particularly evidenced in the physical context of *ci wara* performance itself. The dancer is forced into back-breaking crouch, stoop, or hunch—a posture not dissimilar to a subaltern's bent acquiescence to his lord—and his head (and headdress) is transformed into a hoe blade (Fig. 8). The form of the headdress also almost completely replicates the form of the short-handled agricultural hoe.

The performer holds two short stick forms resembling crutches. As such they seem to suggest the crippling process of the state with regard to its poorest members. Bound to these crutches are *boliw*, the same empowered elements that bound the Bamana empire to the authority of its king. The male and female *ci wara* paired masked performers are themselves tied together by *boliw*: to walk between the two is said to bring grave harm. The two bent-over *ci wara* performers recall the rows of laborers laboring side by side under the authority of their overlords. This attribute of servitude is reinforced visually by the *ci wara* costumes, whose mud-caked fibers make these farmer-performers visually synonymous with the soil they are obliged to farm.

The fact that *ci wara* headdresses reference roan antelopes (*Hippotragus equinus*) might offer additional insight into the political contexts of early performance models. *Ci wara* masquerades are distinguished by their heads carved in the form of antelopes, brown fur-like fiber costumes, and quadruped “legs” (the masker's legs plus the two stick crutches). The image is of a wild game animal, the ready quarry of a Bamana hunter. Significantly, in the period of the Bamana empire, local hunters famed for their skill also, and equally importantly, served as warriors of the Bamana army. In the latter capacity they hunted young men from more distant areas to serve as labor on state farms and to fill the needs of the international slave trade of which the Bamana empire was a key supplier (Djata 1997).

The shapes of the *ci wara* antelope horns in these artfully carved headdresses suggest key forms of both response and resistance to the threat of empire and servitude. The male horns, in keeping with the horns of the male roan antelope, curve backward—in part so that fights over female antelopes will not be deadly. In contrast, the female's horns—consistent with her need to protect her defenseless young—are pointed, capable of skewering an enemy. In short, the male antelope underscores the importance of self-protection, and his spiky mane evokes defense of the sort a porcupine might offer. The female *ci wara* headdress with its straight, sharp horns holds out a model of a very different sort of response—that of active fight and re-



COURTESY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH STUDIO, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

sistance. That she carries her baby on her back in human fashion suggests that she and her male partner are meant to be seen as references not only to animals or even a creation myth, but also to the human condition.

Ife's Odudua Myth: Validating Land Appropriation and Political Hegemony

One of Africa's best-known creation narratives is that from Ife, the ancient Yoruba city-state that gave rise to some of this continent's most striking early arts. The myth has come to serve as a charter for the primacy of Yoruba culture more generally. Overlooking, for the moment, current views that the Yoruba are not one unified ethnic group or polity but rather represent a diversity of groups

brought together largely through colonial intervention (Peel 2000), one notes that this genesis narrative also carries within itself key characteristics of political refashioning.

There are numerous versions of the myth (e.g., see Drewal et al. 1989), but the principal strands are as follows: the land of Ife was once a watery plain. Obatala was sent by the high god Olodumare with the power (*ase*) to transform this space into viable land and to provide it with all that was necessary for life to flourish. On the way to earth, Obatala got drunk on palm wine and fell asleep, so Olodumare sent Odudua to do the work in his stead. Arriving here by way of a chain, Odudua scattered a packet of sand and positioned a five-toed chicken atop it; on the once watery terrain was created solid ground (land) on which Odudua formed a new dynasty. Overlooked in standard versions of this myth—though often added in re-

Opposite page:

7. Pair of antelope headdresses (*ci wara*). Bamana peoples, Mali. 19th/20th century. Wood, metal bands; height of female 71.1cm (28"), male 90.8cm (35 3/4"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1964. 1978.412.435, 436.

These sculptures represent the half-human half-animal spirit said to have sacrificed itself to protest the careless use of land by humans.

This page:

8. Postcard of a photograph by Edmond Fortier showing Minianka *ci wara* masquerades in southern Bamana country, ca. 1905–6. The Photograph Study Collection, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The stooped posture of the masquerade dancers may suggest not only a four-legged animal but also the servitude of those who cultivated the land before and during the colonial era.

lated discussions—is that when the earth was still a marshlands at Ife (i.e., before the arrival of Odudua), a hunter named Ore had his home here, and in the years ahead Ore would come into frequent conflict with Odudua before finally being subdued by him.

One of the things referenced in this genesis myth is the city's unique landscape. Situated at the juncture of savanna and forest, Ife is surrounded by seven steep, largely bare hills, an environment aptly if somewhat inelegantly described as a bowl. These hills frame an open area eight to ten miles in diameter. Equally importantly are several wetlands, which remain moist through the course of the year and encircle the city like a natural moat. Frobenius' observations on first entering the city are insightful (1980 [1913]:268):

The Holy city is built in the midst of this watery landscape....On coming from Ibadan to Ilife we had to pass over a dam, or causeway, which was laid down over miles of waterlogged marshland. A swamp has to be crossed on the road leading west to Modakeke. Towards Ilesha there is bogland; going southeastwards to the Idena shrine, one again walks on water-soaked country; there are still more swamps to the southward. Thus the city is unshiftable, surrounded by swampland. It is therefore, not only firmly entrenched, but impregnable for ordinary African methods of warfare.

In addition to being surrounded by hills and wetlands, Ife is distinguished topographically by a sizable hill at its center, which takes on the attributes of an island. The above-cited story of a chicken scratching particles of sand over a watery realm to make the first small island of earth at Ife is clearly shaped by



COURTESY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH STUDIO, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

the specific physical setting. The palace was constructed at the center of the city, very near the highest ground. Nearby is the site of *igbo idio*, the famous temple to Odudua. It is said that here earth was created out of the ocean. These unique landscape features serve both as a source for and a means of validating and legitimating Ife's famous myth of origin.

This factor of legitimation is of further importance in light of vital political considerations within this narrative vis-à-vis the city's early and often violent dynastic history. In this myth, as we recall, Obatala, though sent to create the earth, had to be replaced by Odudua; Obatala's drunkenness served as ready justification for the takeover of Ife (and its autochthonous population) by the newcomer. At the same time, the reframing of this myth acknowledges the importance of Ore, the early hunter representing the city's indigenous residents who together worship Obatala as their patron deity.

Works from the era of Ife's artistic florescence (Cover) that incorporate vertical lines of facial scarification appear to reference the indigenous Obatala-linked population; sculptures without them are linked instead to members of the new Odudua grouping (Blier forthcoming). Whereas Ife's main origin myth serves to underscore Odudua's political primacy, the prominence of this scarification offers vital evidence that the indigenous Obatala supporters retained a prominent place in this center. Indeed members of this Obatala-linked population are thought to have been the principal artists of Ife's early terracottas.

Ife's genesis account and oral traditions about early art and about city siting here provide evidence of how creation myths may not only draw on prominent physical features of locality but also serve to chart political change. The possible date of the Ife creation myth is of interest in this

regard. While purporting to address the origins of habitable land and humankind at Ife, this account clearly was created relatively late in the city-state's history, when the deities of its indigenous populations were brought together under the rubric of Obatala. When this occurred is not clear, but there is some evidence to suggest that Ife's king Obalufon (identified in many king lists as directly following Odudua), who ruled in the fourteenth–early fifteenth century, figured prominently both in the promotion of Obatala and in bringing about a truce between Ife's battling local and Odudua supporters. In a certain sense the "creation" of Ife, as we know it through its arts and myths, also figured centrally at this time.

As we have seen in these examples, African origin myths are shaped by a range of concerns. They reflect in various ways the means through which knowledge itself is shaped. In some contexts, myths of origin may be viewed as history; in others, such narratives lie more in the realm of science. Elements of local culture and politics feature prominently no matter their broader contextual frame. By their very nature genesis accounts are also defined by factors of time and place, reflecting diverse social, political, and historical considerations. Because most of these myths are elaborated through oral transmission, they often change over time, not haphazardly or out of neglect for the most part, but rather as circumstances affect their core elements. Moreover, these accounts frequently reflect the periods and interests of their modern-day "tellers" and "listeners." In various ways, such creation myths and the arts associated with them enrich and complicate our understanding of the nature and role of art and, more generally, of society. ■

References cited, page 94

Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Rio de Janeiro) DL 29, documento 17.

Cuvelier, Jean. 1930–31. "Traditions congolaises." *Congo* 2/4 (1930):469–87 and 2/2 (1931): 193–208.

Dapper, Olfert. 1639–89. *Nauekeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten*. Amsterdam.

de Munck, Joseph. 1956. *Kinkulu kia nsi eto Kongo*. Matadi. 2nd ed. 1971.

Dias de Carvalho, Henrique. 1890. *Expedição Portuguesa ao Muatiamvua: Ethnographia e história tradicional dos Povos da Lunda*. Lisbon.

Fu-Kiau Kia Bunseki-Lumanisa, André. 1969. *N'Kongo ye nza yakun' zungidila. Nza Kongo*. Kinshasa.

Gallo, Bernardo da. 1999. "Conto della Villicazione Missionale, o sia Relazione delle Missioni di Congo et Angola, dove missiono 11 anni," fols. 328–328v, mod. ed., in *Una pagina poco nota di storia Congolese*, ed. Carlo Toso, pp. 46–47. Rome.

General History of Africa/UNESCO International Scientific Committee for the Drafting of a General History of Africa. 1981–93. 8 vols. London and Paris.

Hutchinson, Margarite. 1881. *A report of the Kingdom of Congo and of the surrounding countries... (1591)*. London.

MacGaffey, Wyatt. 1993. "The Eyes of Understanding: Kongo Minkisi," in *Astonishment and Power*, eds. Wyatt MacGaffey and Michael Harris. Washington, DC.

Magyar, Lázló. 1859. *Reisen in Süd-Afrika in den Jahren 1849 bis 1857*. Leipzig and Pest.

Necessidades, Francisco das. 1844 [1858]. "Memoria de como veio a nossa christianidade de Portugal...," in "Factos memoraveis," *Boletim Oficial da Provincia de Angola*, nos. 642, 643.

Pigafetta, Filippo. 1591. *Relatione del Reame di Congo et delle cincinquinne contrade*. Rome.

Rodrigues Graça, Joachim. 1890. "Expedição ao Muatayamvua," *Boletim de Sociedade Geographica de Lisboa* 9.

Sangambo, Mose Kaputungu. 1979. *The History of the Luvale People and Their Chieftainship*, eds. Art Hansen and R. J. Papstein. Los Angeles. 2nd ed. 1980.

Savona, Cherubino da. 19796. "Congo 1775. Breve Ragguaglio del Regno di Congo, e sue Missioni scritto dal Padre Cherubino da Savona Missionario Capuccino," in *Il Congo nella seconda metà del XVIII secolo. Il "Breve Ragguaglio" del Regno di Congo, e sue Missioni scritto dal Padre Cherubino da Savona*, ed. Carlo Toso, fol. 41. Rome.

Silva Pôrto, António Francisco Ferreira da. 1942. *Viagens e apontamentos de um Portuense em Africa*. Mod. ed. Lisbon.

Thornton, John K. 1979. "New Light on Cavazzi's Seventeenth Century Description of Kongo," *History in Africa* 6:253–64.

Thornton, John K. 1981. "The Chronology and Causes of Lunda Expansion to the West, c. 1700–1852," *Zambia Journal of History* 1:1–14.

Thornton, John K. 1983. *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718*. Madison, WI.

Thornton, John K. 1998. *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706*. Cambridge.

Thornton, John K. 2000a. "Documentos escritos e tradição oral num reino alfabetizado: Tradições orais escritas no Congo, 1580–1910," *Actas do II Reuniao da historia da Africa*. Lisbon. 1st pub. Luanda, 1997.

Thornton, John K. 2000b. "Kongo's Incorporation into Angola: A Perspective from Kongo," *Africa e a instalação da sistema colonial (c. 1885–1930)*. *Actas III Reuniao internacional da historia da Africa*. Lisbon.

Thornton, John K. 2001. "The Origins and Early History of the Kingdom of Kongo, c 1350–1550," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34.

Toso, Carlo (ed.). 1999. *Una pagina poco nota di storia Congolese*. Rome.

Turner, Victor. 1955. "A Lunda love story and its consequences: Selected texts from traditions collected by Henrique Dias de Carvalho at the court of the Muatiamvua in 1887," *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* 19:1–26.

Vansina, Jan. 1961. *De la tradition orale: Essai de methode historique*. Tervuren.

Wing, Joseph van. 1920. *Etudes bakongo*. Brussels.

BLIER: References cited, from page 45

[This article was accepted for publication in January 2004.]

1. "The disk of sun that they draw is attached to a rope. When the sun wishes to come out in the east, it is Liyelo the west-seated brother who pulls it a bit at a time, so that the sun will move towards him. When the sun arrives on his side, he plays his flute, and Liyeyani, hearing it, begins to pull the sun back toward the east. It is at this time that there is night" (Bliey 1994:50).

References cited

van Beek, Walter E. A. 1991. "Dogon Restudied: A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule," *Current Anthropology* 32:139–58, 163–67.

van Beek, Walter E. A. 2001. *Dogon: Africa's People of the Cliffs*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Bliey, Suzanne Preston. 1994. *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. Orig. pub. 1987.

Bliey, Suzanne Preston. 1998. *The Royal Arts of Africa: The Majesty of Form*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

Bliey, Suzanne Preston. 2003. *Butabu: Adobe Architecture of West Africa*, text. Photographs by James Morris. New York: Prince-

ton Architectural Press.

Bliey, Suzanne Preston. Forthcoming. *Antiquities from Ife: African Art and Diplomacy*.

Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Colleyn, Jean-Paul. 2001. "The Power Associations: The Ciwara," in *Bamana: The Art of Existence in Mali*, ed. Jean-Paul Colleyn, pp. 200–234. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Museum for African Art.

Djata, Sundiata A. 1997. *The Bambara Empire by the Niger: Kingdom, Jihad and Colonization 1712–1920*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner.

Drewal, Henry John, and John Pemberton II, with Rowland Abiodun. 1989. *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: The Center for African Art in association with Harry N. Abrams.

Fraser, Douglas (ed.). 1974. *African Art as Philosophy*. New York: Interbook.

Frobenius, Leo. 1980. *The Voice of Africa 1*. London. Orig. pub. 1913.

Griaule, Marcel. 1965. *Conversations with Ogotemmêli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. London: Oxford University Press. Orig. pub. in Paris, 1948; in French.

Griaule, Marcel, and Germaine Dieterlen. 1965. *Le renard pâle*. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie.

de Heusch, Luc. 1982. *The Drunken King, or, The Origin of the State*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Huet, Jean-Christophe. 1994. *Villages perchés des Dogon du Mali: Habit, espace et société*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Imperato, Pascal James. 1970. "The Dance of the Tyl Wara," *African Arts* 4, 1:8–13, 71–80.

Klobe, Marguerite. 1977. "A Dogon Figure of a Koro Player," *African Arts* 10, 4:32–35, 87.

LaGamma, Alisa. 2002. *Genesis: Ideas of Origin in African Sculpture*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press.

Laude, Jean. 1973. *African Art of the Dogon: The Myths of the Cliff Dwellers*. New York: Brooklyn Museum and Viking Press.

Peel, J. D. Y. 2000. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Vansina, Jan. 1978. *The Children of Woot*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Vansina, Jan. 1983. "Is Elegance Proof? Structuralism and African History," *History in Africa* 10:307–48.

Zahan, Dominique. 1980. *Antelopes du soleil: Arts et rites agraires d'Afrique noire*. Vienna: A. Schendl.

SCHILDKROUT: Notes, from page 53

[This article was accepted for publication in January 2004.]

1. My contact with the Dogon is based on four short trips over a ten-year period (1992–2002), two of which involved visits to Tireli. On all these occasions, I worked as a lecturer for the American Museum of Natural History's Discovery Tour program, paying as close attention as I could to the interaction between tourists and local people, especially children. My thanks go to Polly Richards and Susan Vogel for reading drafts of this paper, and to Simon Ottenberg, Alisa LaGamma, and David Binkley for comments on a version presented at the 2003 African Studies Association meeting. A larger version of this paper, comparing children's art in Senegal, Mali, and Nigeria, was presented in 2002 at the Rutgers University Center for Children and Childhood Studies Regional Seminar Series.

2. Jean Rouch, sadly, was killed in a car accident in Niger on February 20, 2004.

3. Curtis Keim and I developed this theme in our study of early-twentieth-century Mangbetu art (Schildkrout & Keim 1990); it is discussed in regard to tourism among the Dogon by Walter E. A. van Beek (2003).

4. Van Beek mentions such drawings in *Dogon* (Hollyman & Van Beek 2000) and in an unpublished paper on children's masquerades. Polly Richards has also worked with these drawings, and actually arranged a drawing competition among children (Richards 2003). At the time of this writing I have not read her thesis, but I have had the opportunity to correspond with her. See also Richards 2000.

5. Imperato's description of theatrical performances in 1971 coincides closely with what I observed in the 1990s, and Imperato, in turn, comments on the similarity to what Griaule observed about secular performances in the 1930s (Imperato 1971:72).

6. The article "Peintures rupestres de Songo" in the special issue of *Minotaure* dedicated to the Mission Dakar-Djibouti (Rivet & Rivière ca. 1933) is signed "A.S." I have inferred that this signifies André Schaeffner, who wrote another article in that same issue.

7. According to both Richards (2000) and Van Beek (2003), the Dogon concept of tradition is a way of explaining everything in the present by virtue of the past.

8. Van Beek (n.d.) also describes a funeral for a cat that he witnessed in the 1990s.

9. I acquired three such books for the American Museum of Natural History, one of which was a post-trip gift from a tourist. All the drawings in these notebooks can be viewed at <http://anthro.amnh.org>.

10. While Van Beek says the cycle is done every twelve years, others say that the full *damu* occurs at more frequent intervals (Imperato 1971; Polly Richards, personal communication, December 21, 2003). Apparently it occurs at different times in different villages.

11. Richards points out that Griaule did not discuss these

masks in *Masques dogons* (Griaule 1938b), but rather dealt with them in *Jeux dogons* (Griaule 1938a). She devotes a chapter of her thesis to integrating these masks into the overall masking tradition.

12. This statement derives from the work of G. H. Luquet (1927).

13. According to Van Beek they coexist. I am suggesting that this coexistence may be problematic, in that one cannot assume that one sphere doesn't influence the other (Van Beek 2003).

References cited

van Beek, Walter E. A. 1991. "Enter the Bush: A Dogon Mask Festival," in *Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art*, ed. Susan Vogel, pp. 56–73. New York: The Center for African Art.

van Beek, Walter E. A. 2003. "African Tourist Encounters: Effects of Tourism on Two West African Societies," *Africa* 73, 2: 251–89.

van Beek, Walter E. A. N.d. "Boys and Masks among the Dogon." Unpublished.

Fineberg, Jonathan. 1997. *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Fineberg, Jonathan (ed.). 1998. *Discovering Child Art: Essays on Childhood, Primitivism and Modernism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Griaule, Marcel. 1938a. *Jeux dogons*. Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'ethnologie, Paris: Université de Paris, 32.

Griaule, Marcel. 1938b. *Masques dogons*. Travaux et mémoires de l'Institut d'ethnologie, Paris: Université de Paris, 33.

Hollyman, Stephenie, and Walter E. A. van Beek. 2000. *Dogon: Africa's People of the Cliffs*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.

HRAF (Human Relations Area Files). Document 13, OCMS 524 756 857. New Haven, CT: HRAF 2000. Computer File.

Imperato, Pascal James. 1971. "Contemporary Adapted Dances of the Dogon," *African Arts* 5, 1: 28–34, 68–72, 84.

Lane, Paul. 1988. "Tourism and Social Change among the Dogon," *African Arts* 21, 4: 66–69.

Luquet, G. H. 1927. *Le dessin enfantin*. Paris.

Richards, Polly. 2000. "Imina Sana or Masque à la Mode: Contemporary Masquerade in the Dogon Region," in *Re-Visions: New Perspectives on the African Collections of the Horniman Museum*, ed. Karel Armut, pp. 107–23. London: The Horniman Museum and Gardens, and Museu Antropológico da Universidade de Coimbra.

Richards, Polly. 2003. "Imina Sana (masque à la mode): A Study of Dogon Masquerade at the Turn of the Millennium (1994–2000)." Ph.D. thesis, SOAS, University of London.

Rivet, Paul, and Georges-Henri Rivière. Ca. 1933. *Minotaure 2* (special number: Mission Dakar-Djibouti 1931–1933). Paris: Editions A. Skira.

Schaeffner, André. Ca. 1933. "Peintures rupestres de Songo," *Minotaure* 2:52–56. Paris: Editions A. Skira.

Schildkrout, Enid, and Curtis A. Keim. 1990. *African Reflections: Art from Northeastern Zaire*. New York: American Museum of Natural History; Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Willats, John. 2003. "Child Art," *The Grove Dictionary of Art Online*. Oxford University Press. <http://80-www.groveart.com.oisyou.c.columbia.edu:2048>. Accessed December 22, 2003.

BENITEZ-JOHANNOT: Notes, from page 81

This exhibition preview is based on my introduction in the accompanying catalogue. I am indebted to James Rush and Asuncion Benitez-Rush, whose fine editorial changes considerably transformed that piece. I am particularly grateful to Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller, who challenged me to take on this project and made it possible, over the last three years, for me to conduct research in the storerooms and libraries of many institutions in Europe and the United States. He also insisted that I take two trips to Africa to allow me brief but important field contacts. I thank Anne Dresskell for her professional editing of the text.

1. Publications on the general subject of seats and seating traditions include, among others, Brachear & Elbers 1977; Dagan 1985; *Signs and Seats of Power 1986*; Bocola 1995; Vendryes 1999. Among these, Vendryes's introduction offered the most insightful and useful overview.

2. Interview by Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller with the son of Arthur Speyer, an eminent German collector (May 7, 1985, Wiesbaden). The son (also named Arthur Speyer) explains that his father purchased King Njoya's stool (Fig. 28) in 1928 from Hermann Glauning, brother of Captain Hans Glauning. Archives Barbier-Mueller. See also Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller's article on this interview in *Tribune des Arts* (Geneva), May 7, 1986.

3. Sandro Bocola edited *African Seats* (1995), an exhibition catalogue that included a large number of pieces from the Barbier-Mueller Museum and the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in Tervuren. The cover featured the Barbier-Mueller's beaded stool from Sultan Njoya. Although the essays are highly informative and insightful, the book provides little information on individual seats and seat traditions.

4. King Njoya's beaded stool appears in Bocola 1995:179, fig. 75; Falgayrettes 1993; Harter 1986: pl. 14; Meyer 1991:70; Newton & Waterfield 1995:137; Perrois 1994:23; and Schmalenbach 1988:289.

5. Susan Vogel writes that for many African cultures, beauty is recognized in the artists' concerns with restraint, balance, and proportion, much as it is in the West (1986:X–XII).

References cited

Benitez-Johannot, Purissima. 2001. "Art, Artifact, or Polemic? Entangled Objects on Display," *Arts & Cultures* 2:25–30.