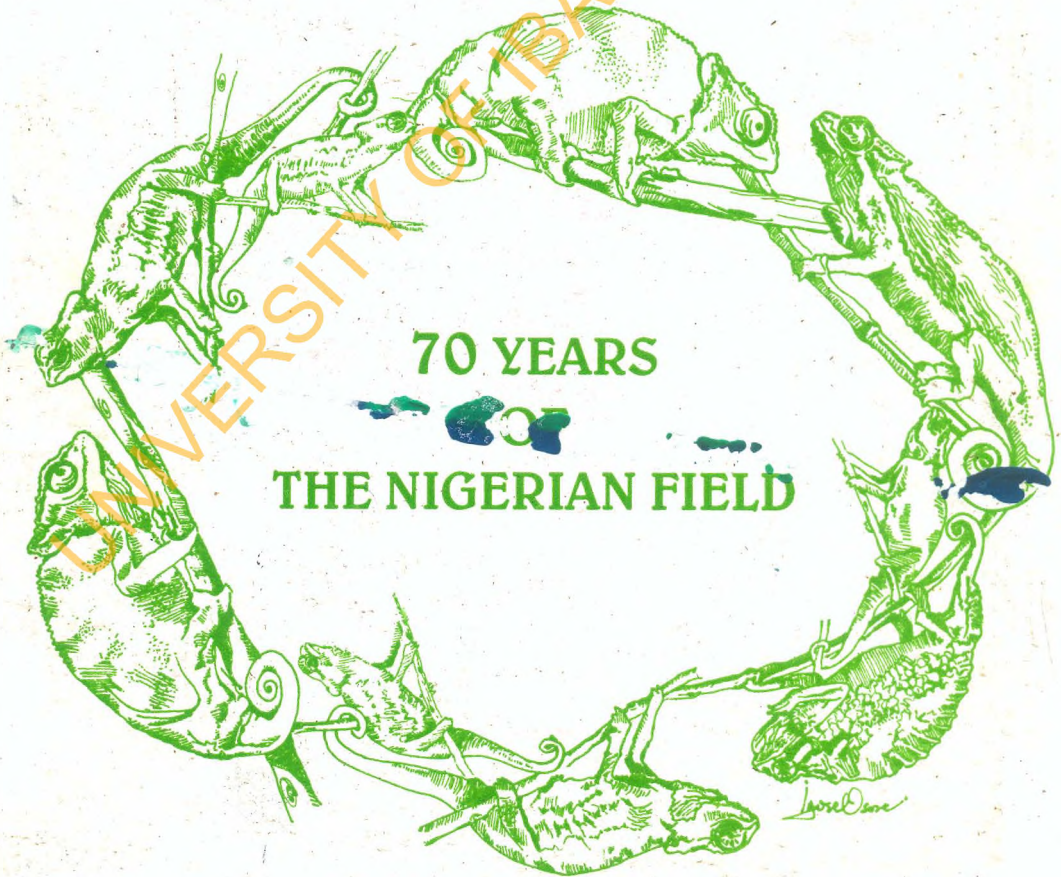


The Nigerian Field

Volume 66 Part 1

April 2001



THE NIGERIAN FIELD

Volume 66, Part 1

April 2001

EDITORIAL

The following is the Editorial written by Frank Bridges for the first issue of *The Nigerian Field*, which appeared in 1931, and the list of contents of that issue. Gardening remains one of the interests of the Society. In this current issue, appearing at the beginning of the rainy season, the time to think about making a garden, is a reprint of Margaret Brook's light-hearted but informative article, "Lazy gardening".

EDITORIAL

Sporadic efforts were made to get support for the idea of a field society, but nearly everyone approached, while agreeing that some such society was desirable, was of opinion that the difficulties in the way of carrying the idea into execution in a country like this were too great to be overcome. Gradually, however, individual enthusiasts came forward, and on the 3rd October 1930, the Nigerian Field Society came into being with a membership of nine. By the end of the year this number had increased to 70, mainly in Enugu and the South Eastern Provinces. This was on account of the difficulty of getting into touch with people in other parts of Nigeria; it must not be supposed that there is any intention to confine membership to the provinces east of the Niger.

This, in the face of Nigerian conditions, may be considered satisfactory progress, particularly when one takes into account the fact that there has been no attempt at over-persuasion. The objects of the Society have been simply brought before those who seemed likely to be interested and allowed to speak for themselves. Everyone will probably agree that this is the soundest policy; it cannot be to our advantage to enrol unwilling members, members who join because they think they ought to and not because they want to. And here let it be said that this policy extends to contributions to this journal; membership does not impose any obligation to write articles, as some people seem to fear. It is not that we do not need contributions, but we hope that as the membership (and consequently interest in the Society) increases so the proportion of contributors will increase.

Every effort has been made to ensure that all branches of the Society's interests shall be adequately represented in this first number, not only in fairness to present members, but also in the hope that new members will be attracted thereby. If our efforts are deemed successful we ask for assistance to make future numbers even more successful —if not, we crave indulgence and will do our best to improve.

Frontispiece: Wild flowers of Nigeria, by Mrs. M.B. Williams

2 The Nigerian Field

The following is a list of the subjects the Society is interested in:

1. Fauna (Animals, Birds, Butterflies and Moths, Reptiles, Insects and Fishes).
2. Flora (Flowers, Trees and Grasses).
3. Historical (Tribal and other history, Tribal legends and customs).
4. Native Arts and Crafts (Pottery, Music, Carving, Brass and Leatherwork, Ironwork).
5. Scientific (Geography, Geology, Mining, Engineering, Astronomy, Meteorology, Wireless, Motoring and Photography).
6. Gardening.
7. Dogs.
8. Horses.
9. Sport (Shooting, Fishing, Sailing, Games).
10. Poultry, etc. (Ducks, Geese, Turkeys, Bees, Goats).
11. Household and Hobbies (Household notes and cookery-Music, Literature Art, etc.).

All with particular reference to Nigeria. Fiction is not desired

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY

PRESIDENT:

Eng. N.O. Oyelola, P O Box 30385,
Secretariat Post Office, Ibadan

VICE-PRESIDENTS:

Mr Paul Tuley, 43, Mount Place, Guildford,
Surrey, GU2 5HU, England
Dr Lucas Ojo, University of Agriculture,
Abeokuta

SECRETARY:

Mr Wil van Trier, 13 Osborne Rd., Ikoyi, Lagos
Fr Prof. Joseph Kenny, O.P. Department of
Religious Studies, University of Ibadan

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Dept., University College Hospital, Ibadan

BUSINESS MANAGER:

Dr. A. Jayeola, Dept. of Botany, University of
Ibadan

EDITOR:

Dr Pat Oyelola, Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan

Please note: With effect from the year 2001, the April issue will be designated "Part 1" and the October issue "Part 2".

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The views of contributors are not necessarily endorsed by the Society.

ERRATUM

The caption to the frontispiece of Volume 65, nos. 3-4 should read:
 "Top: Senegal hartebeeste. Bottom: Western hartebeeste."

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE JOURNAL AT 70

At the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Nigerian Field Society in Ibadan on Oct 7th 2000 I said, during my welcome address:

We are proud of our journal, *The Nigerian Field*, which is one of the longest continuously published journals in Nigeria, if not the longest. I give my sincere thanks to all those who have struggled through thick and thin to keep the publication going. I salute, in particular, all our editors over the years. The Journal will celebrate its own 70th anniversary next year (2001), the first issue having seen the light of day in 1931. To our various authors I say, keep the ink flowing. One of the greatest legacies of the Journal is that it has documented the changes in the environment over seven decades. Researchers today can follow the changes that have taken place if they care to scan carefully the eye witness accounts, as well as personal records, set out in our Journal.

The decision of the founding fathers to start a journal in 1931, soon after the establishment of the Society itself in 1930, proved to be a very wise one. The fact that the annual subscription entitles every member to the Journal has proved to be the main sustaining force behind the Society. Both the Society and the Journal, growing up together and one supporting the other, have survived a catastrophic world war (1939-1945) and devastating civil strife in Nigeria (1967-1970). If that dedication and doggedness we have shown over the years continue, the duo should live forever.

In the 70 years of its existence, the Journal has had only 6 editors: Frank Bridges, father of the Society and its Journal, was the founding editor (1931-34), as well as chairman and secretary of the Society. He was followed by E.F.C. Haig (1934-76), who carried the burden of editorship on and off for 42 years. Beverly Halstead (1976-83) gave the Journal a new cover design. Jim McKenzie (1983-85) brought the Journal home to Nigeria. Joyce Lowe (1985-94) breathed new life into it, maintaining an extremely high standard of efficiency. Patricia Oyelola (1994-) is continuing to uphold the character and standard of the Journal. I salute you all. However, we must remember that whatever the editor does, the standard of any journal is set by its contributors.

Once again, I congratulate *The Nigerian Field* and pray that the Nigerian Field Society will continue to produce dedicated men and women to keep the Journal alive. The centenary of the Journal in 2031 will be a day to look forward to!

—Engr. N.O. Oyelola
President, N.F.S.

NEW LIGHT ON THE EQUESTRIAN FIGURES FROM ANCIENT BENIN

Ohioma I. Pogoson

Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan

The identity of the personage represented in the famous Benin bronze horseman series otherwise referred to as "equestrian figures" has been a thorny one for quite a while now. Indeed spirited efforts have been made by eminent scholars to unravel the mystery surrounding the identity of the rider. Although his identity was not originally intended to be a puzzle, problems of history, culture, time and the inaccuracies of oral tradition have raised questions about who the rider truly is.

From von Luschan¹ (1919) to Karpinski² (1984) and Nevadomsky³ (1986), the debate continues to expand. But a conclusive and widely acceptable identity for the horseman is still elusive. Several scholars have made attempts to unravel the identity of the subject, including Dark⁴ (1960), Fagg⁵ (1963), Fleming⁶ (1979) and Tunis⁷ (1979) who have made the most radical and representative approaches to this puzzling subject.

In order to package the numerous views on the identity of the Benin equestrian figure, I have classified them as follows [a.] Those which propound a foreign identity for the horse rider, including all suggestions pointing to a non-Benin origin for the rider [b.] Those who claim that the horseman represents the Oba (King) of Benin and [c.] those who claim that the rider represents the Atah (King) of Idah. Of the first two we have a fair idea of what is meant. But of Idah, little may be known, especially of its connections with Benin. Idah is a town situated about 200km northeast of Benin with which it maintained very close ties between the 15th and 16th century but with which Benin engaged in one of the bloodiest battles recorded in its history and oral tradition. In each case, evidence to substantiate the position held has been

¹Luschan, Felix Von. (1919) *Die Altertumer von Benin*. New York: Hacker Art Books.

²Karpinski, P. (1984) A Bronze Horseman at The Merseyside County Museum. *African Arts*. 17, 2

³Nevadomsky, Joseph (1986) The Benin Bronze Horseman as the Atah of Idah. *African Arts*, Vol XIX, No 4.

⁴Dark, Phillip, J. C. (1973, *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁵Fagg, William\ Herbert List (1963) *Nigerian Images*. National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Lagos in association with Lund Humphries, London.

⁶Fleming, S. (1979) Of Igueghae and the Iguneromwon, *MASCA Journal*, 1.

⁷Tunis, I. (1979) Cast Benin Equestrian Statuary. *Bassler Archiv*, 27.

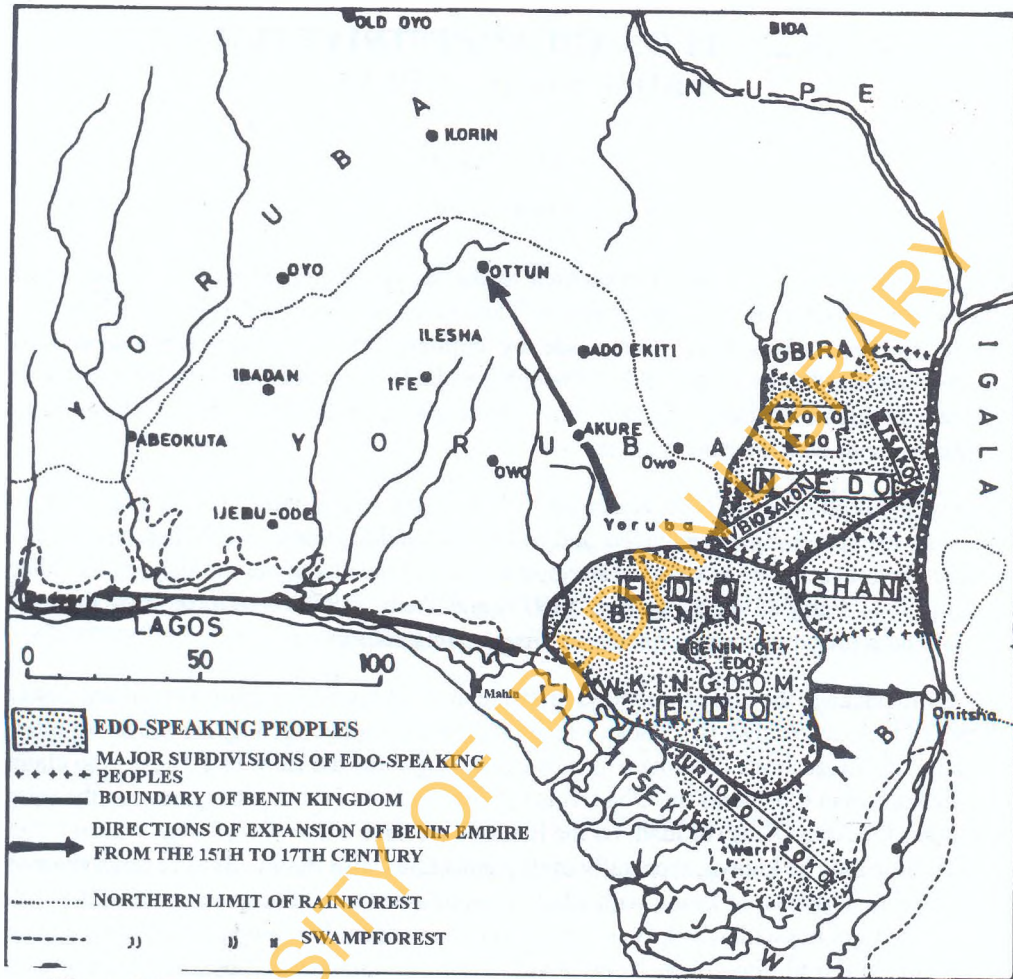


Figure 1: Benin Kingdom and some major Yoruba towns (Bradbury, 1973, p. 47)

succinctly advanced and well articulated to the extent that each case must be handled with expertise and caution. This is more so as there is a paucity of relevant material, oral, historical or otherwise, to handle the subject. These attempts at unravelling the mystery surrounding the identity of the horse rider still remain inconclusive and highly speculative.

Nevadomsky's⁸ most recent attempt at unravelling the identity of the rider is worth

⁸Nevadomsky, Joseph, (1986) The Benin Bronze Horseman as the Atah of Idah. *African Arts*, Vol. XIX, No 4.



Plate 1: Benin Equestrian Figure, c. 1600 AD

thoroughly examined, and such figures are easily recognizable and less controversial and puzzling to decipher. While Luschan was obviously referring to a non-Benin personage as the equestrian, he excluded European visitors to Benin.

But it is the foreigner element in Luschan's hasty suggestion that has appeared to shape and condition later discussions. Dark¹⁰, Fagg¹¹ and Fleming's¹² positions are basically the same

⁹Luschan, Felix Von. (1919) *Die Altertumer von Benin*. Hacker Art Books, New York.

¹⁰Dark, Phillip, J. C. (1973), *An Introduction to Benin Art and Technology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹¹Fagg, William\ Herbert List (1963) *Nigerian Images*, National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Lagos in association with Lund Humphries, London.

¹²Fleming, S. (1979) Of Igueghae and the Iguneromwon, *MASCA Journal*, 1.

mentioning here. He not only draws from earlier attempts at resolving the problem, but also relies heavily on oral traditions recently gathered in Benin. However they are often unreliable unless thoroughly sieved with the expertise and caution required, making sure that they are substantiated in many cases by extant material, historical and cultural evidence. I will now take a brief look at the other attempts to resolve the question of the identity of the bronze horseman in Benin, returning to Nevadomsky later.

Von Luschan's⁹ early contribution to this subject which has been described as "eminently sensible" because of the manner with which he dodges specificity, refers simply to the rider as a foreigner. But one thing that is clear, in my own opinion, is that Luschan's "foreigner" excludes European visitors to Benin in the early part of the empire. The representation of Europeans in Benin art has been



Plate 2: Ejube jailo, Benin type mask – a part of the regalia of the Atah of Igala

identifying the horse rider as the Oba (king) of Benin. Karpinski associates the rider very closely with Oranmiyan, legendary founder of the ruling Benin dynasty, but the son of Oduduwa, who is also credited with the introduction of horses into Benin. Again, this smacks of a foreign connection, but how foreign? According to oral tradition, having established the Benin dynasty by fathering a child by a Benin lady, Oranmiyan left Benin to found Oyo. For this reason he is never really regarded as a Benin person *per se*. After summing up all the available evidence, Karpinski compounds the mystery surrounding the person riding the horse by saying that his identity will remain enigmatic for a long while to come. But Tunis is more daring. To him the rider represents the Oba of Benin, Ehengbuda, dressed in the outfit of the

but are modified and presented at a slightly different level. The unusual or non-Benin features of the equestrian figures lead Dark to suggest that the horseman represents a Yoruba warrior while Fagg and Fleming simply say that the figure represents a messenger from the North. The key difference in these three authors appears in the main to be in how far north the equestrian figure is believed to have come from. The Yoruba are in the southwestern part of Nigeria (see map) just as the Benin kingdom is, but Yoruba territory is situated west and northwest of the Edo. When Fagg and Fleming refer to the “north”, I suspect that they mean the north of Nigeria and North Africa respectively. These two suggestions are implausible for the identity of the Benin equestrian figures because no such distant relationship is known in Benin oral history and tradition. Dark’s modified position is that the horseman simply represents a warrior, which could mean a Yoruba or someone from another nearby group.

Tunis¹³ and Karpinski¹⁴ have also attempted to solve the problem by

¹³Tunis, I. (1979) Cast Benin Equestrian Statuary. *Bassler Archiv*, 27.

¹⁴Karpinski, P. (1984) A Bronze Horseman at The Merseyside County Museum. *African Arts*. 17, 2

Oyo cavalry. He contends that in modelling the Oba as an equestrian, the bronze casters may have symbolized Ehengbuda's victory over the Oyo cavalry forces. Indeed, the Oyo army had a mounted force of formidable reputation, but the Benin defeat of the Oyo army is an unpopular story in both Benin and Oyo-Yoruba traditions.

To come back to Nevadomsky.¹⁵ Relying heavily upon oral traditions he recently gathered in Benin and its environs, he suggests that the equestrian figure is the Atah of Idah. The Atah, ruler of Igalaland, had been engaged in a fierce war with Benin in the 15th/16th century. Before this, Benin and Idah had maintained very close relations. Indeed a Benin type mask (plate 2) is still part of the royal regalia of the Atah. When they came into conflict resulting in war, it was so fierce that accounts of it remain indelible in the history, art and oral traditions of Benin. However, the battle is not so vividly remembered in Idah among the Igala. This is understandable.

The Benin-Idah war according to Egharevba,¹⁶ foremost traditional Benin historian, was fought during the reign of Oba Esigie who it is believed to have ascended the throne of Benin around 1504, at the height of Benin's success. At this time, much of the strength of the Benin army relied on the supply of goods and weapons manufactured by the Portuguese, which were being bartered for local products such as palm produce, slaves and spices. It is recorded in Benin traditional history that during the Benin-Idah war, two white men featured prominently. Armed with obvious advantages, Benin was assured of the eventual defeat of Idah and according to Nevadomsky, this defeat resulted in the capture of the Atah. It is pertinent to note that the general circumstances resulting in the war with Idah placed Benin in its most precarious position ever, perhaps only next to the Punitive Expedition that eventually led to the fall of Benin in 1897. No other war ever fought by Benin is so well represented in the history, art, songs and rituals of Benin. It is believed that the Idah army came very close to the ancient capital before European fire-power helped the Benin people to beat back the Idah army and eventually defeat it. So tough and fierce was the battle that Benin history and culture is rife with vivid accounts up till today. It is from these accounts that Nevadomsky draws to arrive at his conclusion that the Benin equestrian figure is a representation of the Atah of Idah, the great Igala king who, as I have indicated earlier on, was reported to have been captured. He is represented in defeat.

Perhaps it was after this routing that *ejube jailo*, (plate 2) a Benin type bronze hip mask, which is now part of the royal regalia of the Atah, was adopted. The presence of an obviously Benin mask in the regalia of the ruler of the Igala situated north of the Niger/Benue

¹⁵Nevadomsky, Joseph, (1986) The Benin Bronze Horseman as the Atah of Idah. *African Arts*, Vol. XIX, No.4

¹⁶Egharevba, J. U. (1968) *A Short History of Benin*. Ibadan University Press (Fourth Edition).





Plates 3a & 3b: Front (opposite) and side views of the Benin plaque in the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, Hamburg

confluence has raised many questions. The name *eju b'aju jailo* according to Nyet and Desirant¹⁷ means "the face that brings fear to other faces" What is important to note is that masks are not part of the regalia of the Oba of Benin. The only other place nearby where such a Benin type mask forms part of the regalia is Nri. (See Thurstan Shaw, 1970, plates 511, 512 & 513) Indeed intercultural exchanges between Benin and Nri, the cradle of Igbo civilization, are not hard to identify in both Benin and Igbo oral traditions. The association of the huge pendant mask with fear in Idah should therefore suggest some form of subordination. It may have been used to establish some form of sustained Benin superiority. This appears very plausible in the case of Idah defeated by Benin whose oral traditions clearly recall the fiercest battle in Benin history. The same phenomenon it seems to me can be investigated in Nri, among the Igbo. With regards to the Igbo/Benin connection, Oguagha¹⁸ points out two sets of traditions about Igbo origins which he gathered in Igboland. The first makes a straightforward claim to an ancestral home in Benin, while the other is the Ezechima tradition which from its name appears to suggest Igbo refugees fleeing from Benin attacks. Substantiating the position further, he adds that the Igbo kings called *Eze*, wear regalia and maintain courts like their Benin counterparts although they are not as politically powerful as the latter. Clearly therefore, the influence of Benin in the region to the north and east (see map) appears to have been as great as that in the direction of Yorubaland.

The central theme of Oguagha's work is Igbo-Igala relations. But his cursory look at the whole Igbo region provides invaluable insight into (a) the fluidity of relationships in the region, (b) the influence that Benin wielded in the region and of course (c) Igbo-Igala interactions. This holistic approach has proved to be a valid method of establishing authority, politics and power play in the region. Although his subject is outside the scope of this paper, knowledge of it facilitates comprehension of the advantages enjoyed by Benin as a result of its trade and interaction with the Europeans in the early days of the empire and beyond. Indeed, it also helps in understanding Benin and her neighbours.

Benin developed an art tradition that has become respected the world over. Ancient Benin art is a court art. It was meant to serve the king *in toto*. Being so, all the art works that were produced in the land had a close association with the Oba, his family, his court and indeed the whole nation which he presided over. According to Eweka, all directives radiated to the length and breadth of the empire of those days from the palace of the Oba. So strong and powerful was the Oba that he controlled all the craft guilds that were efficiently organised under him. It seems plausible to me, from this premise, to assume that whomsoever the rider

¹⁷Nyet, Francois and Désirant, Andrée (1985) *The Arts of the Benue to the Roots of Tradition: Nigeria*. Editions Hawaiian Agronomics.

¹⁸Oguagha P. A. (1983), *Igbo-Igala Relaticns up to 1900 A.D.*, Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation. History Department, University of Ibadan.



Plate 4: Benin bronze head in the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, Hamburg

in the Benin equestrian figure is meant to represent must be closely associated with the palace. This is more so as the equestrian figures are believed to have been used to adorn ancestral altars. Then of course their function has implications for their identity and meaning. I believe that they were put on altars as a constant reminder of an event in the history of Benin. Such an event must be sufficiently significant to attract the attention of the ancestors. It is therefore not to be expected that the rider would be someone with whom the Oba had never interacted, or indeed one with whom he had a superficial relationship. The fact that horse riders are also represented in plaques is a pointer to the significance of the subject. The plaques were custom made for the explicit dissemination of significant court events.

Plaques, as I have indicated elsewhere, are used in Benin to give information about the court life of the Oba, to concretize Benin history and to record important events in the life of the Oba and the state. They are executed in low relief bronze. As distinct from sculpture in the round which is three-dimensional, relief sculptures are two-dimensional, resembling a plate, tablet or slab. According to Freyer¹⁹, "although some plaques show battles and other scenes suggestive of a narrative such as sacrifices and hunts, others depict symbolic animals, such as crocodiles, pythons, mudfish and predatory birds." Many others also show one or two isolated male figures posed in court regalia. Multi-figure plaques often combine the same personages found on single and double figure plaques. The subject-matter of the plaques covers every facet of Benin traditional life. Well over 1000 plaques were reported found and removed from the

¹⁹Freyer, Bryna (1987) *Royal Benin Art in the Collection of the National Museum of African Art*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.

Benin palace when it fell to the British in 1897.

These plaques tell stories and provide information about Benin, especially the Oba and his court. Therefore knotty problems such as the identity of the famous equestrian figure must take cognizance of whatever information can be gleaned from the plaques. Little attention seems to have been given to the plaques in previous attempts to resolve the problem of the identity of the Benin horse rider. Another pertinent question is, why represent a horse rider in the most sacred of places in the palace? This will be the central thrust of the following section.

A unique plaque (plates 3a and 3b), tucked away in a distant museum in Hamburg caught my attention and has conditioned this paper. The *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* (Museum for Arts and Crafts) does not fall within the category of museums which specialize in African art in Germany. However, I had become aware of the presence of three Benin pieces with an interesting history in this museum in Hamburg while in search of Benin art in Northern Germany, especially Berlin and Dresden. I was informed that the three pieces of Benin sculpture had just been brought back from the museum in Dresden. The works consist of two plaques (one of them has three figures while the other is multi-figured with at least eleven figures) and a head. They are all three possibly of the late period. While the three plaques (see the other two Benin sculptures in the collection of the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, Hamburg) (Plates 4 & 5) are typical, one of them in high relief (Plates 3a & 3b) caught my attention because of its potential for resolving the problem of the identity of the equestrian figure in Benin art.

In a personal communication (September 1997) with the Director of the Museum, Dr. B. Heitmann, I was to learn that the work had been moved to Dresden for safekeeping during the 2nd World War. According to him, Dresden was regarded as the cultural capital of Europe at that time and so people believed that it would be spared destruction in the war. It was therefore seen as a haven for the storage of delicate cultural materials. According to Heitmann, the works remained in Dresden until the Russians overran the town and took back with them to St. Petersburg all materials of high cultural value that they found in the *Museum für Volkerkunde* and elsewhere in the town. In Dresden, as in St. Petersburg, the works remained in storage until about four years ago when legislation enabled them to be sent back to their original owners in Hamburg. Interesting also is the fact that the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* caters for the history of World Civilization. The presence of Benin works of art there will fill gaps in world art history as soon as the management is able to integrate them into the structural framework of the objectives of the museum. At the present time the works remain in storage, but their import is not lost to management and indeed, I am informed that efforts are under way to place them in their rightful position in their exhibition of world cultural history. The movement of these African objects from one place in Europe to another provides an interesting history of African art in the diaspora. I have been able to find out that



Plate 5: The other Benin plaque in the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*, Hamburg

the very same plaque under reference was illustrated on the last page of Von Luschan's influential book on Benin art which came out in 1919, 22 years after the "Punitive Expedition".²⁰ (See Felix Von Luschan, 1919, Tafel. 129) By the time Luschan's book came out, the plaque was in the possession of the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg*.

The plaque is a typical Benin plaque in high relief. Benin plaques of this style have been dated to around the 16th and 17th century, the zenith of the kingdom when the Oba was very successful and his foreign relations strong and rewarding. This success began to be reflected in the art and culture of Benin society. The themes of Benin plaques, according to Duchateau,²¹ were concerned almost exclusively with life at court and related matters. In this particular plaque, there are about eleven figures. Many represent Benin personages, although discernible non-Benin personages, who are clearly delineated by their facial scarifications, are also present. Of all the figures represented, three wear facial scarification marks limited to the mouth region. A similar facemark is also found on the flywhisk from Igbo-Ukwu. These markings suggest those used in the Niger-Benue region at that time. They are not the more popularly known "cat's whiskers."

Also interesting is the fact that a mask similar to the *ejube jailo* that is of obvious Benin manufacture has also been found to be part of the regalia of the Eze Nri. The occurrence of similar Benin type masks in the regalia of important personages in that vicinity could mean one of two things. Perhaps Benin was in a position of suzerainty over much of the region. Indeed the reference to 'conquest' that is suggested in the meaning of *ejube jailo* in Idah might reflect the reality. As I have hinted earlier on, even the facemarks may have been forced on the wearers after Benin defeated them. This certainly appears to be the case in Idah, where the hip mask which is a part of the Atah's royal regalia is meant to convey fear. The fallen horse rider on the plaque bears the facemark. A woman, obviously a captive, also bears the same facemark and so also does a little man in an obviously subordinate position. It seems plausible therefore that the wearers of the marks are captives.

Using the social relationships evident in the plaque, the largest figure is incontrovertibly the Oba. He holds a sword and is poised to decapitate the mounted figure with non-Benin markings, evidently the Atah of Idah. A sword has already pierced the figure that is being pulled down by the Oba. The cap worn by the figure confirms that he must be someone of high status. Interestingly, his size is similar to that of the other figures who are undoubtedly Benin. The figure at the extreme right holds a head, which has similar markings to those on the mounted figure and the only lady in the picture. Aside from the size of the Oba figure that is unique, the size of the Oba's troops and the Atah of Idah is the same. But then there are

²⁰A. F. C. Ryder, (1969) *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897*. Longmans for Ibadan History Series.

²¹Armand Duchateau, (1994) *Benin: Royal Art of Africa*. Prestel Books.

four very small figures. In the case of the two below the Atah, the Benin soldier is seen stabbing his victim who is also wearing the face marks.

Some attention needs to be paid to the lone woman in the picture. The pattern on her dress suggests that she might be related to the Atah figure. A Benin soldier in the background is obviously holding her captive. It is also noteworthy to mention that four of the images represented, including the Oba figure, are dressed in a similar fashion especially with regard to the headdress. As a matter of fact, it is only the figure who holds the woman captive who appears to wear different headgear from the others. The question now is, could all the non-Benin figures with facial markings be representations of the people conquered by the Oba?

Since plaques are clear illustrations of events in court history, I have used this plaque to illuminate the identity of the Benin bronze horseman. The fact that Benin culture is laden with symbolism and references to the Benin/Idah encounter leads one to assume that the event must be well represented in the art. I think that this war plaque might have influenced the iconography of the free standing equestrian figures, in which case they may represent the Oba of Benin himself, symbolizing the defeat of the Atah. The fact that a few of these personages wear foreign face markings requires further investigation. In a personal communication, Adepegba stated that the "cat's whiskers", the markings closest to those represented on the faces on the plaques, are original Yoruba markings, adopted by the people of the confluence area. Is there a connection between the type of marks worn by the figures represented on the plaque and those to be found on the faces of a few of the equestrian figures from Benin? The question of how important the figures are also arises, when one considers that Oba Ovoramwen himself gave one of them as a wedding present to a European visitor, Mr. Swainson, shortly before the Punitive Expedition.

The Hamburg plaque has no doubt given fresh insight into the question of the cultural identity of the horse rider in Benin. The fallen rider on the plaque is in my opinion the Atah of Igala. This only supports the position that has been articulated by Nevadomsky using oral tradition. The freestanding equestrian figures that were in my opinion influenced by the narrative war plaque could have been modified to glorify the Oba of Benin in victory.

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