

# african arts



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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *African Arts*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Apr., 1977), pp. 8-15+87

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3335295>

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# MAMMY WATA

JILL SALMONS

In a recent issue of *African Arts* (IX, 2, 1976) a photograph of an Ibibio carving of "Mammy Watta" is published and described as "the only known example from that tribe, in joined wood, pigments, and leather" (p. 66). The piece formed part of a collection on show at the Endicott-Guthaim Gallery, New York, in October and November 1975. In fact, carvings of Mammy Wata,<sup>1</sup> a water spirit used both for cult purposes and in entertainment masquerades, are still being produced in large numbers by Ibibio carvers and other artists in Cross River State, Nigeria. In this article, I use some of my research material to describe the various manifestations of the Mammy Wata spirit and cult, the development and diffusion of the Mammy Wata carving style, and its variations among carvers in different areas of Cross River State.

A network of rivers and creeks traverses the palmbelt zone between the Niger Delta and the Cross River in southeast Nigeria. To this day, people living near such rivers generally believe that there are spirits dwelling in the depths of the water who can occasionally appear before human eyes. Descriptions of such spirits differ greatly from area to area, some being said to resemble men, others women; some having the face of a baby, others showing mermaid-type tails. Nearly all the spirits, however, have the common characteristics of being very beautiful, fair skinned, and with long, soft hair of European or Indian type. Sometimes they are wreathed in snakes or are surrounded by a large number of fish, and occasionally they are guarded by fierce animals such as leopards or what are said to be lions. (There are in fact no lions in this part of Nigeria.) Some spirits sit on rocks, combing their long, silky hair, while others can only be seen peering up from the depths of the water. Most spirits are naked, but some are said to wear beautiful jewels and gold medallions.

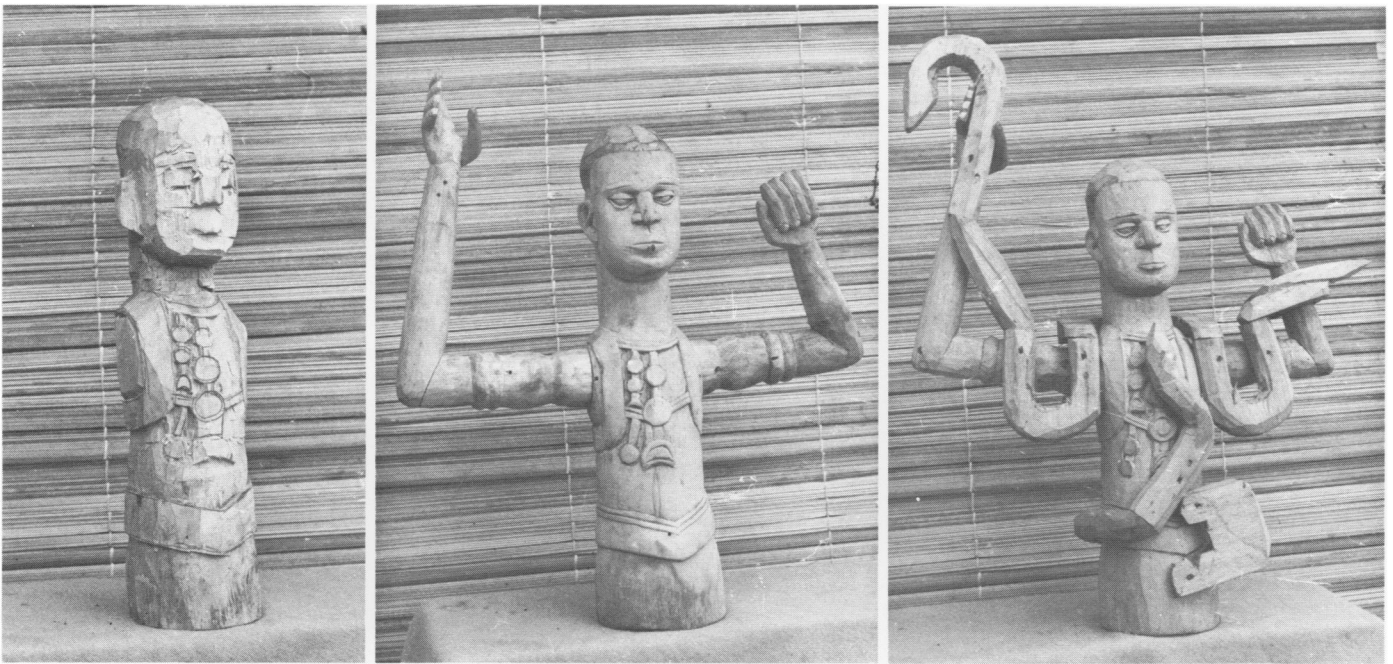
There is an ambivalent attitude toward the spirits, which can wreak havoc or bestow great riches according to whim. For example, any boat accidents that occur on the journey between Oron in "mainland" Cross River State and Calabar, the capital, on the other side of the estuary of the Cross River, are attributed to the wrath of the water spirit. In this area, as in the Niger Delta, the idea of a "human-type" water spirit may derive from the fact that the African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*) frequents the Niger and Cross rivers; this is a mammal that has breasts and suckles its young and could therefore be given human attributes by the local people. The concept of the spirit resembling a mermaid could also derive from this source but may possibly be due to the fact that European schooners sailed along this coast and landed at such ports as Bonny and Calabar as early as the sixteenth century. Such ships quite possibly had figureheads of mermaids that could have influenced local beliefs.

The general name for the water spirits throughout the southern regions of Nigeria is Mammy Wata, regardless of whether they are male or female, although different areas have their own local name. The generic Ibibio term is Ndem Mmo (*ndem*, spirit: *mmo*, water). The spirit can never be seen by anybody who is looking for her (hence the reason I have never seen her!) but will fleetingly appear and vanish unless she wishes to entice a hapless watcher to her home under the water. Various stories were told to me of people who had been lured into the water by the beckoning spirit, who entertained them in her palace, showing them wonderful riches before allowing them to return home. After seven days, such "victims" are believed to come out of the water with bone-dry clothes and beautiful, remote-looking faces. Such people are then referred to as Mammy Wata followers, or priests and priestesses of the cult. Chinua Achebe describes one example in his short story about Ibo life on the river Niger, "The Sacrificial Egg" (in *Girls at War*, 1972:43): "Some of the beautiful young women you see squeezing through the crowds are not people like you or me but mammy wata who have their town in the depths of the river . . . You can always tell them, because they are beautiful with a beauty that is too perfect and too cold. You catch a glimpse of her with the tail of your eye, then you blink and look properly, but she has already vanished in the crowd." In many areas, a girl who is particularly beautiful and remote sometimes finds it difficult to marry, for it is feared that she may be a Mammy Wata follower and will therefore be sterile. The general belief is that a disciple of this spirit becomes very rich, powerful, lucky and beautiful but can never have children. Consequently, although some people are happy to be Mammy Wata followers, others seek to free themselves from her influence.

One local doctor, the self-styled Professor Ekanem of Ikpe Annang, Abak division, specializes in dealing with those who want to break loose from the Mammy Wata bondage. His clients come from a wide area: from Port Harcourt on the Niger Delta, Ibeno on the Kwa Ibo estuary, and those parts of Iboland bordering the Imo and Niger rivers. Such people are brought to his "healing home" by their families. According to him, they appear as if they are in a trance and are able to talk only at certain times of the day; at other times, they will rush to try to jump into the nearest water. Those seeking help are taken to a nearby river, where the Professor makes sacrifices to the Mammy Wata, begging her to free the person from her power. The possessed person then inhales some "chemical evil-spirit protection powder." This drug, concocted by the Professor

1. MAMMY WATA GROUP IN A CANOE, BY JOSEPH CHUKWU, AN ANNANG IBIBIO CARVER. ORON MUSEUM. PHOTO: OCTOBER 1976.





2. CARVING SEQUENCE OF MAMMY WATA TORSO BY AKPAN AKPAN CHUKWU, SON OF THE FAMOUS ANNANG CARVER AKPAN CHUKWU. ORON MUSEUM.

from a mixture of modern chemicals and native herbs, causes the patient to momentarily lose consciousness, after which he is free from the spirit's influence. I was assured by the Professor that his cure is "infallible."

I interviewed two female Mammy Wata followers who are proud to be under the influence of the spirit. Neither woman has any children. The first, a young Ibibio girl named Ikwo, works for Indians as a housegirl in Uyo, the chief commercial center of mainland Cross River State. She used to be a fervent follower of a local spiritual church. On several occasions in church, she was overcome by such violent convulsions that her friends and relatives began to worry about her. Then one night she dreamed of a very beautiful woman with long, flowing black hair, completely covered with writhing snakes. From that time, people recognized that Ikwo was being "worried" by the Mammy Wata spirit. She obtained leave from her employers and went home to her village, which is near a tributary of the Cross River. Here she was put in the care of a Mammy Wata follower, who acted as her tutor. Various sacrifices were made at the Mammy Wata shrine in the tutor's house, and at the end of a week, all the local followers met in the compound to initiate the girl into the cult. A further series of sacrifices was performed, followed by eating, drinking and dancing. Ikwo was made to dance all through the night, and at five o'clock the following morning, a small pit was dug in the compound into which was put cigarettes, snuff, food, palm-wine and local gin, *ufofop*—these were offerings to the spirits of the ancestors who had been Mammy Wata followers. On that day, the girl was accompanied to the nearby river carrying a tray on top of her head containing gifts for the Mammy Wata. On the banks of the river, all the members disrobed and walked into the water. At a

certain spot near the middle of the river, Ikwo removed the tray from her head and placed it on top of the water. The tray sank with all its contents, except for some pieces of chalk and camwood that floated on the surface. There was then great rejoicing by the onlookers for the fact that the Mammy Wata had accepted the gifts and had allowed the chalk and camwood to float to indicate her thanks. The girl was rubbed with soap and herbs and was then immersed seven times in the water. After drinking some river water, she came out, dressed and returned to her compound, accompanied by the rejoicing cult members. Nobody was permitted to look back at the river, for it was believed that the spirit would follow them back to the compound to see that no harm befell Ikwo, but that it did not wish to be seen.

The girl's employers claim that since she was initiated into the cult she has been very moody, and they say that she blames particularly despondent moods on the Mammy Wata spirit that comes to trouble her. Ikwo assured me that the only way she can prevent these depressions from continually recurring is by performing an even more elaborate ceremony, which at present she cannot afford. In this ceremony she would be kept inside a room for several months, fed high carbohydrate food, and bathed and massaged continually in much the same way that Ibibio and Efik girls were traditionally treated in the *mbobo* "fattening room" process before marriage. On the day that she finally comes out of the fattening house, a huge celebration would be held and rites conducted similar to those already described, only during this final process she would also be taught all the secrets of the cult and be imbued with the powers of divination. Henceforth, she would be regarded with great awe and respect in the community, which would believe that she possessed mystical

powers similar to those held by members of the powerful *idiong* diviners' society.

Traditional Ibibio society is male dominated. Virtually the only instance in which a woman is accorded status comparable to that of a man is when she has the faculty to be possessed by the *idiong* or Mammy Wata spirit and has been able to afford to join the associated cults. It is possible that the desire of a young girl such as Ikwo to be a Mammy Wata follower derives at least partly from a desire to enhance her status in both her home village and the urban community of wage earners in Uyo. The day on which a prospective bride emerges from the fattening room is the one day in her life when public attention is focused on her—she receives praise and congratulations, as well as numerous gifts. As a Mammy Wata neophyte conducting practices and rites that are analogous to those of the *mbobo*, the girl gains a degree of recognition that is denied most Ibibio females. In this sense, Mammy Wata serves as a deprivation cult that satisfies the material and ritual demands of women otherwise suppressed.

The second Mammy Wata follower who gave me an account of her initial contact with the cult is Eka Ete Ubom of Ikot Ebak, Ikot Ekpene division, a woman in her forties. A few years ago she was fishing in the Cross River near Calabar, and instead of fish, she caught a bundle of keys in her net. She took these to her father's compound and hung them on a nail in the house; deciding that there must be some significance in the keys, she resolved to visit the *abia idiong* (diviner) the following day. During the night, however, the keys dropped from the nail and the whole house was inexplicably flooded. Her father recognized that this must be the work of Ndem Mmo. He took Eka Ete immediately to the diviner, who advised her to throw the keys back into the water; when she attempted to do

this, she started to have convulsions. She was taken back to the diviner, who then advised her to make sacrifices to the water spirit. Since that time the spirit has stayed with her, appearing both day and night. Although the woman sees the spirit as if in a dream, she described the figure to me as being “just like a European with long, white hair, and with normal arms and legs” (i.e., without the mermaid fishtail). She always sees the spirit in the form of a woman, but she thinks that it must really be a man, for sometimes she dreams that they sleep together, and in the morning she actually feels as if she has had sexual intercourse. The spirit tells her what its needs are, and she makes the sacrifices at the nearby stream accordingly.

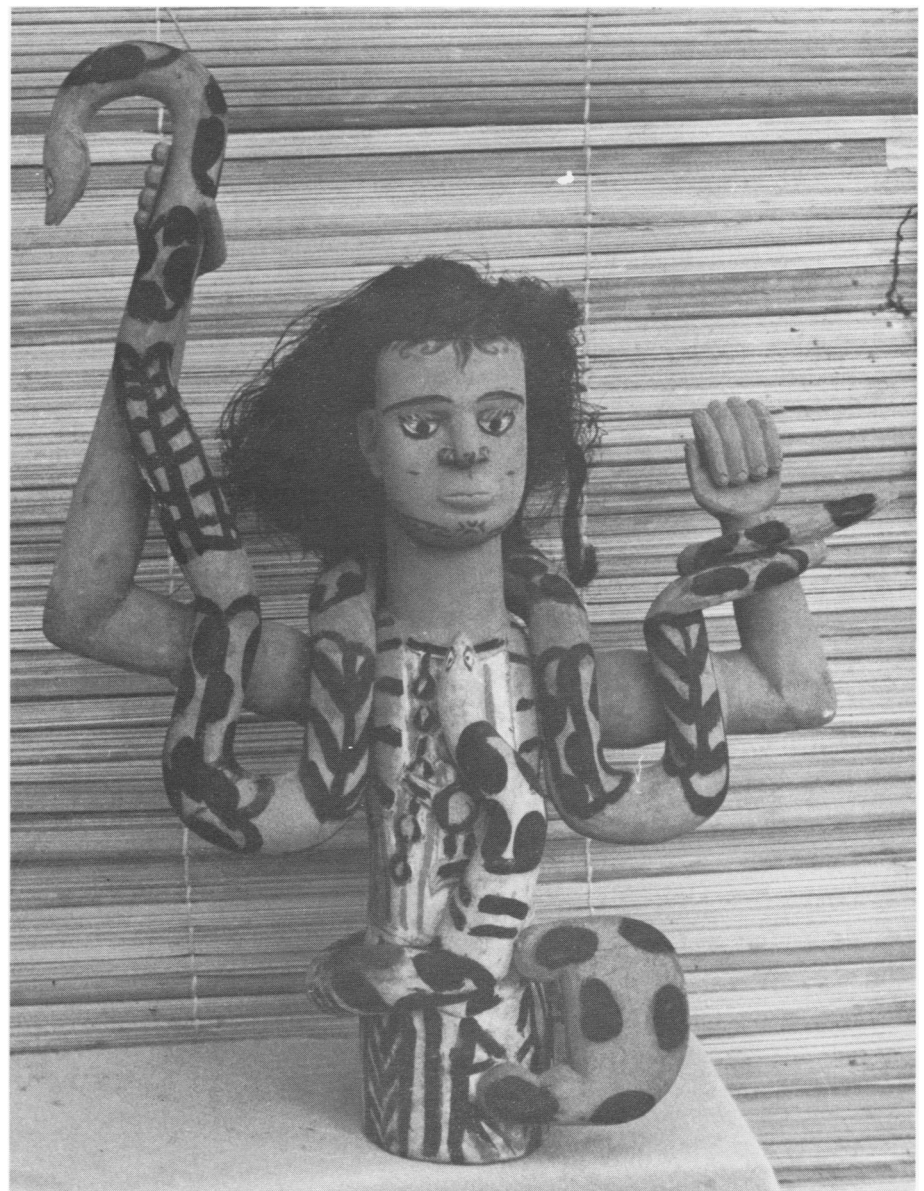
One day, while I was staying with a traditional carver near her village, Eka Ete came and ordered a Mammy Wata carving, stating that the spirit had urged her to build a shrine, complete with a carved image of itself inside. She therefore commissioned a carving for 14 naira (approximately 21 dollars), and she told the carver he should portray the spirit as a female figure standing in a canoe with six paddlers. The carver, a capricious old man, was slow in finishing the work but was finally bullied into completing the carving by the appointed day, even though the paint was literally splashed on at the last moment and the piece was carried to her compound on a bicycle, dripping wet. The woman had insisted that the carver use native paints—colors obtained from local chalks and crushed seeds and leaves—because the carving was to be used in a traditional ceremony. This is in contrast to the general habit nowadays of using imported enamel paint.

When the carving arrived at her compound, it was placed on the ground in front of her house, and a bottle of Fanta (a brand of orange soda) was offered as a libation to the spirit. Several female cult members, dressed from head to toe in white, then offered the following objects in sacrifice: a small rack of dried fish, a stick of camwood, an egg, some cake and breadcrumbs, groundnuts, cooked rice and some old pennies (Nigeria changed from the use of pounds, shillings and pence to

decimal coinage in 1972). A white chicken was then tied around the neck of the carving, which was carried down to the nearby stream on the head of the owner. Here the claws and wings of the bird were cut off and thrown into the water as a sacrifice, together with other offerings. The cult members then returned to Eka Ete’s house where they were lavishly entertained. A week later, she carried the carving on her head to the local market, where a goat was sacrificed to it. She then danced around the market, carrying the carving on her head for everyone to see. After receiving gifts from the onlookers, she returned to her compound and completed the construction of the shrine to house the carving. This public display advertised to the community that Eka Ete was now a full-fledged priestess of the Mammy Wata cult.

Another expression of her affinity with the spirit is a smaller version of the shrine carving that she placed on top of a pole about 2.5

meters high at the entrance to her compound. Attached to this carving is a thin rope, which leads to Eka Ete’s house. This is called a Mammy Wata telephone, for it is claimed that the priestess is warned by this means of any stranger coming into the compound, as well as the purpose of their visit. Many *abia idiong* in the Annang area are also members of the Mammy Wata cult. The Mammy Wata telephones in their compounds have the dual purpose of warning the diviners about the advent of strangers and advertising that this is a place where the power of the water spirit is present. Such diviners are thought to be extra powerful, being backed by two of the strongest spirits in the area. Most *abia idiong* have a variety of carvings inside their shrines, but generally the paraphernalia connected with the *idiong* spirit is kept in a separate shrine from that of the Mammy Wata. However, this is not always the case. One diviner showed me his *idiong* shrine where the Mammy Wata



ABOVE: 3. COMPLETED CARVING SEEN IN FIGURE 2. THE STRANGE EXCRESCENCE AT THE FIGURE’S LOWER LEFT REPRESENTS THE INSET IN THE GERMAN PRINT. ORON MUSEUM. LEFT: 4. PHOTOGRAPH OF THE GERMAN PRINT OF A SNAKE CHARMER THAT HAS STRONGLY INFLUENCED CROSS RIVER CARVINGS OF MAMMY WATA.



spirit was represented by an ordinary stick tied with a piece of red cloth. He claimed that he did not have a carved representation of Mammy Wata because the area where he lives is far from any big river; consequently, none of the carvers in the area have seen the spirit and do not know how to depict her. The more likely reason, however, is that the diviner could not afford a carving.

It would appear that the carved representation of Mammy Wata is a fairly recent and localized innovation. Although traditionally, people from this area believed in water spirits, one *abia idiong* implied that the actual idea of a water spirit in human form is a new concept. This also appears to be true in Iboland, for Herbert Cole, in his article "Mbari is Life" (1969:10), described an Ibo *mbari* shrine erected in Owerri province, north of the Ibibio, and stated, "Another [mud figure] is Mamy Wata, a mysterious recently introduced deity who controls snakes as pets; she may bestow great riches on man, or insanity, depending on how she is treated." Certainly all the old carvers interviewed in the Ibibio area confirmed that they had never made Mammy Wata carvings in their youth and that such carvings had only been prevalent in the area over the past thirty to forty years.

One particular subgroup of the Ibibio, the Annang of Abak and Ikot Ekpene divisions, has long enjoyed a wide reputation as craftsmen, particularly as wood carvers. Although there are very few remaining traditional carvers in other areas of Cross River State, the Annang sculptors are still immensely productive, selling their work both to local masquerade groups, diviners and medicine men, and to the large craft village of Ikot Ekpene, which caters to local demand and the tourist trade. Kenneth Murray, who as Surveyor of Antiquities worked in southeast Nigeria for many years, traced the probable innovator of the carved representation of Mammy Wata. In 1944, Murray visited Akpan Chukwu,<sup>2</sup> from Utu Etim Ekpo, Abak division, probably the greatest Annang carver of this century. Chukwu showed Murray a Mammy Wata carving that he had made for the people of Degema, a town about 128 kilometers to the west on the Niger Delta. Murray discovered that Chukwu had been influenced by a German print of an Indian snake charmer, depicted waist deep in a stream and entwined with snakes (Fig. 4). The print was published by Arnold Schleisinger of Hamburg as "Der Schlangenbandiger." Unfortunately, Murray did not collect one of

Chukwu's carvings of a Mammy Wata (though in his notes he expressed his intention to do so<sup>3</sup>), and Akpan Chukwu died in 1952. However, Akpan Chukwu's brother, Joseph, is still carving today (Cover), and from him I was able to find the story behind the carving. According to Joseph, Akpan first saw the print when a British District Officer, one "Hudson," brought it to him to ask if he could produce a wooden carving of the snake charmer so that he could take it home as a present when he next went on leave. Joseph assured me that "Hudson" was in the area before "Ntokon" ("hot pepper"), which was the nickname for M. D. W. Jeffreys, an anthropologist who became a district officer. As Jeffreys was in the area as early as 1922, it is possible that the "Hudson" Joseph talks of was G. F. Hodgson, who first came to the area in 1909.

Murray wrote of the carving that he saw at Akpan's: "He did not properly understand the print which had a subsidiary picture of the snake charmer in a small inset. Hence in his figures of Mammy Wata there is a curious excrescence on one side which actually represents the small inset picture on the print." Akpan's son, Akpan Akpan Chukwu, who was taught to carve by his father, still portrays this very strange "excrescence" that represents the original inset picture (Fig. 3). When I asked him what he thought it represented, he said it was the Mammy Wata's "purse." Akpan Chukwu's first carving depicted the spirit from the waist upward, for in the print she stands up to her waist in water. The carving that Akpan showed Murray in 1944, however, was a "life-sized, seated, clothed female Mammy Wata." Joseph, his son Alphant, and Akpan Akpan Chukwu now carve many varieties of Mammy Wata in different sizes and poses—seated, standing, or traveling in a canoe flanked by paddlers. Joseph told me that because the carving of Mammy Wata is a complex piece of work, involving various carved segments that have to be joined (Fig. 2), apprentices were often taught how to make the less complicated sections, for example, the pieces of snake that wind around the spirit's body. The master carver would instruct his apprentices over the carving of these small units, while he himself made the central trunk and head of the figure. Joseph was taught in this way by his brother, and he still uses the same proportions that his brother originally showed him, which are carefully worked out in pencil on the wood before carving.

In the olden days, a carver would generally be invited to work for a period of time in one village, carving all the necessary masks and figures required by the various cult groups and individuals in the village. He could also be commissioned to make certain sculptures in his own home. On completing commissioned works, Akpan Chukwu would send small boys to deliver them. Before setting out with a Mammy Wata carving, however, the boys would be given twelve to fifteen eggs; before they crossed a stream, they had to throw an egg into the water to appease the

water spirit so that they could cross safely. Once the carving was delivered, the boys would be given a white cock, in addition to the financial payment, to take back to the carver. Chukwu would sacrifice the cock on his own carving shrine, for it was believed that unless he did this, the owner of the carving would not be able to satisfy the future demands of the Mammy Wata spirit.

In Akpan Akpan Chukwu's compound one day, I witnessed eight identical Mammy Wata carvings. I presumed that he had made them for traders in Ikot Ekpene, to be sold to tourists, but he informed me that in fact they had all been ordered by one *dibia* (the Ibo equivalent of the Ibibio *abia idiong*). The carver explained that only one was for the diviner's personal use; the other seven were for people "worried" by the spirit and who had gone to the diviner for advice on having their own shrines. Being Christians, they cannot erect shrines in their own compounds for fear of repercussions from their churches, who expel members known to be maintaining "pagan" traditions and burn any traditional shrines they come across in their compounds. By keeping their own shrines at the *dibia*'s compound, however, these followers are able to make the necessary sacrifices to the water spirit without incurring the wrath of their fellow Christians.

Udo Nwa Matthew Ekpe of Ikot Obong, Ikot Ekpene division, worked side by side with Akpan Chukwu when they were both young men, and it was in Akpan's workshop that he first saw a Mammy Wata carving. Whereas the Chukwu family continues to reproduce Mammy Wata figures that bear a very strong resemblance to the original print and carving, Udo Nwa has developed a highly individualistic style. The Chukwu carvings consist of neatly assembled geometric pieces—each section carefully measured with a ruler and marked with a pencil. In contrast, Udo Nwa works in a much more traditional style, carving by eye and consequently producing unnaturally proportioned figures of great originality (Fig. 6). Whereas Joseph Chukwu, in the canoe version of the carving (Fig. 1), has carefully aligned paddlers flanking the central figure, which is occasionally accompanied by a male trumpeter or standing fattening room girl, Udo Nwa avoids conformity. He dresses each paddler differently: some stand, others sit, and all are of different shapes and sizes. Joseph uses a fairly traditional hair covering for the Mammy Wata figure—the dried fibers from a plantain stem; Udo Nwa uses white cow tail hair, which he buys from a local establishment that specializes in the manufacture of barrister's wigs from this type of hair!

I have never seen a life-sized Mammy Wata carving. Joseph Chukwu last made one about fifteen years ago for an *abia idiong* who has since died and his shrine destroyed. Both Abak and Ikot Ekpene divisions were devastated by the Civil War, and there are very few old carvings to be seen in any of the villages in the area. Not only were houses, shrines and carvings destroyed, but many of the tradi-

TOP: 5. STANDING MAMMY WATA FIGURE BY GABRIEL AKPABIO, AN IBO CARVER. IT IS USED BY AN ABAKPA MASQUERADE GROUP AMONG THE BEKWARRA PEOPLE OF NORTHERN OGOJA DIVISION, CROSS RIVER STATE. BOTTOM: 6. MAMMY WATA GROUP IN A CANOE BY UDO NWA MATTHEW EKPE, AN ANNANG IBIPIO CARVER. THE HAIR OF THE MAMMY WATA FIGURE WAS ORIGINALLY WHITE BUT WAS DYED BY THE CURATOR OF THE MUSEUM FOR WHICH IT WAS BOUGHT, APPARENTLY BECAUSE IT WAS FELT THAT AN AFRICAN CARVING SHOULD HAVE BLACK HAIR. THE DYE, WHICH IS OF A MODERN COMMERCIAL TYPE, HAS DESPOILED THE INTRICATE PAINTING IN NATURAL PIGMENTS ON THE FACE AND BODY OF THE CARVING. ORON MUSEUM. PHOTO: OCTOBER 1976.

tional entertainment groups have failed to be reactivated since the war. John Messenger, who conducted fieldwork among the Annang in 1951 and 1952, witnessed a life-sized "Marmee Water" being used by a local Ekong group (1973:119): "The figure whose bewildering movements climaxes the ekong performance represents the female fertility spirit who resides in a number of abodes including shrines, ant hills and streams. In this context she is portrayed as river nnem with a python wrapped around her arms, waist and neck, and she is known as 'Marmee Water' (mother—eka—in the water)." The figure pivoted from side to side in a mysterious manner. Messenger suggested that possibly the carving was hollow and a small child was manipulating the carving from inside. The movements might also have been made through a pulley system that had been secretly buried underneath the ground before the performance, for this method is quite commonly used by the Annang of this area. However, the Ekong society among the Annang and Ibibio, as the complex entertainment group described so vividly by Jeffreys and Messenger, is no longer in existence. Occasionally a few acrobats and dancers who call themselves the Ekong group put on displays for visiting dignitaries, but the spectacular plays and masquerades have not been performed for many years, and the puppet plays of the society are only rarely performed at second funeral ceremonies. Many Mammy Wata carvings, however, are still being made for a masquerade called *ijo*, which is performed in western Annang and the neighboring Ibo areas. The Mammy Wata figures are used as cap masks during this recreational play.

By the 1940s, Mammy Wata carvings were being sold in the craft shops of Ikot Ekpene. From there, they were taken to diverse areas of Nigeria to be used for divining or recreational purposes by Ibibios working away from home and by any other ethnic group that needed such carvings. Professor Uche Okeke of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, recalls having seen Annang Mammy Wata carvings being used by Ibo workers in Kafanchan, some 640 kilometers north of Cross River State, in the 1940s and 1950s, and an Annang carver from Ikot Abia Osom was producing Mammy Wata carvings for the people of the Sapele area south of Benin in the 1950s. An example of his Mammy Wata carving is in the Benin Museum. Although no old examples have been found, to my knowledge, around the lower Cross River region north of Calabar, this could be due not so much to the non-use of such carvings as to the destruction and looting that took place in the area during the Civil War, the ravages of some of the extremist churches, and the relative paucity of traditional carvers in the area.

In the Ogoja and Ikom divisions of northern Cross River State, however, I have come across a number of Mammy Wata representations that were either bought from the Annang or produced by local carvers. One example is a cap mask made by Akpan Akpan Chukwu, which is used by the women's

Okwua group in Abijang, southern Etung, Ikom division. Most carvers in this northern area, however, claimed that the main influence behind their carvings has been the same print that Akpan Chukwu first copied. One traditional carver, Achagwu Ogowogwo<sup>4</sup> of Ukelle clan, northwest Ogoja, said that he first carved a Mammy Wata figure some fifteen years ago, having seen the popular print in Abakaliki, an Ibo town 64 kilometers away. During the 1960s, however, he had also seen several Mammy Wata carvings being used by two masquerade groups in the area, called Enyatu and Abakpa. These were full-length figures with carved black hair, pink-colored skin, modern clothes and high-heeled shoes, and were made by an Ibo carver called Gabriel Akpabio, who died during the Civil War.<sup>5</sup> Ogowogwo has carved similar figures but also has made a traditional helmet mask for a nearby group with a Mammy Wata tableau carved on top, as well as a cap mask of a female head surmounted by a small Mammy Wata canoe for an entertainment group called Enegebe. Ogowogwo believes that the carved form of Mammy Wata is definitely a recent innovation, for he cannot recall having seen his father, a traditional carver, producing such objects.

Another carver from the Ogoja area, Patrick Achong of Mbube clan,<sup>6</sup> has also carved Mammy Wata figures and admits to having been strongly influenced by both the print and the carvings of Gabriel Akpabio. In his case, he was first asked to make a Mammy Wata carving for a local diviner. The diviner showed him the print, and Patrick used his own initiative to carve a full-length Mammy Wata figure, with which the diviner was very pleased. Another diviner, Mama Enegebe of Nkim clan, south of Ogoja, also asked Patrick to make her a Mammy Wata figure, together with carved representations of her parents and family. The day that Patrick delivered the carvings to her was a day of great rejoicing; many of the local villagers came to congratulate her on her power and ability to commune with the spirits. Mama Enegebe talks directly to the Mammy Wata spirit through the carving, and with its advice she is able to free girls worried adversely by the spirit and to help women to find the cause of their barrenness and treat them accordingly.

Patrick has also made several standing Mammy Wata figures for local Enyatu groups, all bearing a striking resemblance to those carved by Gabriel Akpabio before the war. I witnessed two fine Abakpa helmet masks made by Akpabio, to the north of Ogoja, and these were accompanied by a standing Mammy Wata figure, which was carried on the shoulders of the leader of the group (Fig. 5). We were told that the figure is a recent innovation and is shown "to add grace to the dance."

The wooden representations of Mammy Wata in Cross River State provide a striking example of the way in which the art of two particular regions have been strongly affected by a specific exotic influence, namely a colored German print. This phenomenon, how-

ever, should be viewed in the context of the nature of traditional art in the area and of the role of carvers of singular artistic genius; general processes of acculturation among modern Cross River peoples should also be taken into account. The latter point should be stressed, as foreign art collectors who are not familiar with the art of the region are likely to misinterpret certain superficial features.

There is every indication that the style range of traditional Annang art included naturalistic and figurative modes of expression, and that such forms were not necessarily related to direct European influence. Many of the earliest known Ibibio pieces that I have examined in museum collections are both naturalistic and figurative. Other art styles in the Cross River area are intensely naturalistic, especially the skin-covered masks. Also, many carvings in the area in question, especially those representing women or spirits, are painted with local chalks and clays in very pale colors. Such colors are traditionally daubed on children, *mbobo* girls in the fattening house, and initiates for various cults. This is done both for religious purposes and for decorative and cooling effects.<sup>7</sup> Yet many Europeans who observe the light-colored figures and masks from the area, which depict the aforementioned people, presume that the light skin pigments must be connected with European influence. Although Mammy Wata figures are supposed to resemble Europeans, it should be noted that very similar carvings of *mbobo* girls are not—the only distinguishing features being the hair and the snakes on the Mammy Wata, not the color of the skin or the shape of the face. It should also be noted that the figures that are used today in many Annang rituals are of exactly the same type as those purchased by tourists and the Nigerian bourgeoisie.

The belief in water spirits is widespread throughout the Guinea Coast of Africa and is probably an ancient one. It appears, however, that the introduction of the foreign print, followed by the carved figure derived from it, served to gel previously diffuse visual concepts of such spirits among the people of southeast Nigeria. In this way, the print and carving have been agents in the diffusion of the belief of a particular kind of water spirit, Mammy Wata. This diffusion is still in process in Ogoja, Ikom and other northern areas of Cross River State, where there is a fairly general belief in a variety of water spirits; some peoples possess the Mammy Wata cult and others do not.

In the introduction and growing popularity of the Mammy Wata cult in the Ibibio and Ogoja/Ikom areas respectively, two remarkably talented local artists have played a major role. First I shall discuss the place of Akpan Chukwu in the development of twentieth-century Annang art. This creative carver has had a powerful influence over a wide geographical area for a considerable period of time. A quarter of a century after his death, carvers in other areas are maintaining that he was the greatest Annang carver of his time and that he has not yet been surpassed. Apart



from influencing his immediate family and the carving styles around Utu Etim Ekpo, I have learned of numerous cases where artistically inclined youths watched Chukwu work when he was employed by villages in Iboland and the Niger Delta. Such youths then continued to carve in their own area after Chukwu had returned home, thus perpetuating his style over a wide area.

He was, according to Murray, "the leader of the modern style of carving, and so was appreciated most by the semi-literates who were taken in by his 'realism,' fantasy and bright colours, and preferred his carvings to the traditional carvings." Akpan, according to his brother, was a larger-than-life character, who always carved with a bottle of imported gin or whiskey clasped between his knees. It is possible that his incredible popularity as a carver may have led to his death—it is claimed that he was poisoned by a jealous carving relative. It was Chukwu who first introduced the idea of commercializing his art by displaying prepared carvings at the front of his compound to attract passing traders to order from him; the other members of his family followed his example. In 1946, a local newspaper wrote, "John Chukwu, the owner of the [carving] venture, marries many women who do the painting after he has finished carving these things." In the past, women were not allowed to go anywhere near a carver while he worked, the main reason being that they were not supposed to know that masks and figures used by the all-male secret societies were made by mortal hands.<sup>8</sup> Now, possibly through his emancipating influence, carvers' wives and children throughout Annangland help in the production of carvings. The sons carve the more easily made objects, while the women and young children sandpaper and paint the final pieces.

It would appear that Akpan's genius lay in his ability not only to grasp new ideas when they were presented to him—as in the case of the Mammy Wata print—but also to develop a number of variations in order to cater to the general demand for "original" or "different" carvings. Groups in the area have a tendency to guard jealously any unusual mask or figure and attempt to prevent carvers from making similar works for neighboring groups. However, within the stylistic range of the Mammy Wata carving—in this case, a standing, full-length figure, a half torso or a seated figure, either with or without an accompanying canoe—it is interesting that Akpan had standardized measurements for the various components that made up each carving and that such measurements are still in use today. Among the Annang, the use of measurements in carving is a rare phenomenon, especially among those carvers still maintaining the traditional styles. The only other case of their being used is that of the carving village of Ikot Abia Osom, which provides most of the artwork for Ikot Ekpene.<sup>9</sup> Here, the measurements are used to facilitate the packing of carvings for transport to other areas of Nigeria. One gets the impression that Akpan opened the door to photo-

graphic exactness in carvings. Few carvers in the area have managed to keep abreast with the drastic acculturation taking place in the same way that he was able to, and this accounts for his continuing acclaim.

Little is known about Gabriel Akpabio. Nevertheless, an examination of specimens of his work in both the field and in museum collections reveals that Akpabio was an artist of comparable genius to Chukwu. He undoubtedly exerted a strong influence on the work of two major artists in the Ogoja area, Patrick Achong and Ochagwu Ogwogwo. It is also significant that these two innovators were influenced by the same Mammy Wata print, though at different dates.

The evidence of imported prints influencing indigenous artists in southeast Nigeria is by no means confined to the Mammy Wata example. Near Uyo in Ibibioland, an innova-

tive cement sculptor, Sunday J. Akpan, draws his artistic inspiration from religious and political prints and posters; the Annang carver from Ikot Abia Osom, Etim Akpan Umoh, produces wooden figures based on the print of Blake's Nebuchadnezzar; in Ibibioland, one frequently observes funerary monuments bearing the portrait in cement of Sir Winston Churchill, derived from a print of a painting.<sup>10</sup>

The copying of imported prints by indigenous Nigerian artists in traditional or new media is only one aspect of the way in which recent African art has been influenced by the outside world. As progress is made in ethnographic research on the art of specific areas and as further historical data come to light, a more sophisticated view of the actual processes involved in African art history will evolve. □

*Notes, page 87*



7. MAMMY WATA TABLEAU CARVED BY JOSEPH CHUKWU OF UTU ETIM EKPO. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

The fifty catalogued objects are illustrated with 88 black-and-white photographs. Many of the sculptures are photographed under dramatic lighting, creating dark shadows and expressionistic highlights that tend to hide or distort essential features and details. The Fanti *akwa'ba* photograph (no. 28) is a clear example of the loss of descriptive details from the use of severe dark/light contrast.

A more efficient use of enlarged details would have also aided descriptive clarity. The Bambara *N'tomo* mask (no. 11) and *tji wara* (no. 9) are both illustrated with detail views that offer no additional qualities not captured in the full-figure photos. The *N'tomo* mask, for instance, is allocated three full-page photographs—a frontal view, a three-quarter view and an enlarged detail of the eyes and nose area. The two full views (without shadows) would have been sufficient, since the detail is both dark and out of focus. The Luba standing male figure (no. 41), on the other hand, benefits by multi-views and detail illustrations, since a single photograph does not show all distinguishing details.

With more economical and selective photographs, the format of this catalogue will be a successful model for further museum publications. It is available from the Museum Shop, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Fair Park, Dallas, TX 75226. \$15.00 plus \$1.35 postage, handling, insurance.

Patricia Crane  
Greeley, Colorado

#### ART OF UPPER VOLTA

From the Collection of Maurice Bonnefoy  
*The University of Texas, Austin, 1976. 72 pp., 29 b/w and 2 color illustrations, map. \$6.25.*

This catalogue was published by the University of Texas at Austin in conjunction with an exhibition of Voltaic art that was shown at the University Art Museum from August 8 to October 10, 1976. This is no ordinary catalogue in terms of design. The objects depicted are highlighted against solid black paper backgrounds, imparting to them not only a splendid aesthetic quality but also that sense of mystery and magic inherent to their origins and use. There were 125 objects in the exhibition, all from the collection of Maurice Bonnefoy of Garennes, sur Eure, France, and 35 of them are depicted in the catalogue.

The ethnic groups represented include the Bobo, Mossi, Gurunsi, Lobi and Marka. Photographs in the catalogue are arranged accordingly, and for each ethnic group there is a short descriptive essay. A checklist of all the objects in the exhibition is provided, as well as very good data on provenance for each item.

There are a few omissions and possibly confusing areas that should be noted. Donald B. Goodall, Director of Art Collections, wrote a short preface; readers, however, are not told who wrote the text, nor are they given any information about Maurice Bonnefoy and his collection. Also, I suspect that the text and captions were originally written in French: the syntax and the frequent use of terms such as "fetishism" and "tribe" are cues to a French

original. I make a point of this because the French equivalents are still widely used and are acceptable in most circles, whereas their English-language counterparts are not. In addition, a number of Mossi dolls were described as toys used by young girls and later as fertility charms. Other authors have described these sculptures as "twin figures," produced when a twin dies. The present catalogue makes no mention of this, which will no doubt leave many readers confused. Finally, the catalogue would have been enhanced by a bibliography. This is a very minor point, however, and does not detract from a beautiful catalogue, which is highly recommended to all those who are interested in African art. It is available from the Michener Galleries, University Art Museum, P. O. Box 7336, Austin, TX 78712. \$6.25 postpaid.

Pascal James Imperato  
New York City

#### GYINNA-GYINNA, Notes, from page 52

1. Research among the Zara of Upper Volta was made possible through the generous support of the Social Science Research Council in 1972-73 and the American Philosophical Society in the spring of 1974. I also wish to express my deepest thanks to Chief Ali Sanu of Sya quarter, Bobo-Dioulasso, and to Zouma Sanu, leader of the *Lo Gue*, its most accomplished artist and a former master dancer of the *Gyinna-Gyinna*. Their assistance and understanding have made this article possible.
2. For a detailed exploration of the traditional attitudes toward the *Jinn* see Edward Lane (1836, vol. 1, chapt. 10) and D.B. Macdonald (1965, chaps. 5, 10).
3. P.N. Boratav (1951:83-88). A more complete discussion by the same author can be found in his 1958 article (pp. 7-23).
4. Jean Rouch's classic study *La Religion et la Magie Songhay* (1960) should be consulted for a thorough examination of the *holy bi, jinn* and magical beliefs among the Songhay of western Niger.
5. Two articles by Guy Le Moal, anthropologist and former director of the C.V.R.S. in Ouagadougou introduced me to the importance of the Zara or Manding element in southwestern Upper Volta: "Notes sur les populations 'Bobo'" (1957:418-30) and "Enquete sur l'histoire du peuplement du pays Bobo" (1968:6-9).
6. Historical traditions of the Zara were collected in the Zara quarters of Sya and Bolomakote in November 1972 and in May 1974. Bobo versions of the Zara arrival were recorded in January and April 1973 and May 1974 at Kounima, Tounouma and Koko quarters, Bobo-Dioulasso.
7. The history and importance of Wahabu is well assessed by Nehemiah Levtzion (1968:145-52). The most comprehensive account of the impact of the Wattara of Kong on Bobo-Dioulasso can be found in Lucy Quimby's unpublished doctoral dissertation (1972).
8. The position of the *karamoko* as the chief intermediary between the faithful and the *djinn* is also noted by Quimby (1972, chapt. 2) and was a feature of the teacher-cleric's role, which I observed in 1967-68 among the Manding of the Cercle de Bondoukou, Ivory Coast.

9. The idea that the mad are agents of the *djinn* is certainly not restricted to the Zara. It occurs among the Songhai and Hausa and can be found over and over again in the literature and folklore of Islam. Indeed, this association must be ancient, for as Hunwick (1976:16) has noted, the very term for "mad" in Arabic, *majnun*, literally means "possessed by a jinn."

10. This composite picture of the *djinn* is drawn from my research and also from the unpublished sources of Father Montjoie of the Church of Tounouma, discussions with Mr. Sani Sanon of Sya, and Lucy Quimby's observations among the Kong Dyula in her dissertation.

11. For the importance and meaning of *Jombele* within another Manding context, see my comments in *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa* (1974, chapt. 7).

12. A brief description of the Zara region north of Bobo-Dioulasso is provided by Le Moal (1957:26-29).

13. Sani Sanon, "Lo Gué, une fête indigène de Sya," 1928; and "L'Histoire de Tounouma," a compilation of the diaries and notes of the White Fathers of Tounouma. I wish to express my thanks to Mr. Sanon and to Father Alain for allowing me access to these valuable sources.

14. The tradition of borrowing the *Lo Gue* is still very much alive, and Zara villages around Bobo-Dioulasso without this masquerade regularly ask for the masks and dancers from Sya. This has extended even to Bobo communities who wish to honor one of their prominent members who has converted to Islam.

15. A *Lo Gue* performance will generally include the following mask types: *nyanon tala dundu, bolo-furu, kotingo, bolo-yororo, këkérépogo, nyané, të bolo, ligéyara, kikiri dè:ugu and kubèlu*. Each is regarded as a spirit agent with its own personality, but they are all dominated by the two *Gyinna-Gyinna*.

16. The griots of Bobo-Dioulasso indicate that a *Lo Gue* performer can only dance well (*animikiyé*) if his body and spirit have been fully warmed by the music. This warming process begins in the flexed knees, gradually rises through the upper torso, and finally arrives within the head of the dancer, enabling him to perform impressive turning and twisting head movements that have a life independent from the rest of his body. This dance state, of active and pulsating head in contrast to a composed body, is referred to as *amyo*, "dancing with one's head."

17. *Bamba-da*, literally, "the head of the crocodile," is a peaked cap reserved for male elders and must be worn by the griots when playing before the *Gyinna-Gyinna*.

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MAMMY WATA, Notes, from page 15  
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