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COVER: Dogon masqueraders during a traditional performance staged for special visitors at Sanga, Mali, in February 1968 (see p. 34). Photo by Rachel Hoffman.

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Over the years, I have had many opportunities to see the performance of masks that take place at the "end of mourning," or *dama,* ceremonies of the Dogon people of Mali, and to pursue the meaning and symbolism of these events. I have been able to study the masks, both in the strictly regulated processions and in the dances and mimics that take place in the public square. The masks appear individually or in groups of men wearing the same type.

Marcel Griaule recorded the first commentaries concerning Dogon masks in *Masques dogon* (1938). The information he was given stemmed from what the Dogon call "front speech" (parole de face, or *giri so*), which is an early stage of knowledge given to children, circumcised adolescents beginning their education, and, of course, to strangers. It consists of an anecdote or tale, such as a hunting or war story, that is purposely enigmatic in form and is intended to awaken the curiosity of the listener.

Since Griaule's initial publication, the study of Dogon cosmology has necessitated a reconsideration of the subject of the masks. The Dogon classify cosmology as "clear speech" (parole claire, or *so daga*) or as "speech of the world" (parole du monde, or *aduna so*). It is revealed to highly instructed men and women, to those in charge of a section of Dogon society, to initiate responsible for a cult, and to those who persevere in penetrating more deeply into Dogon knowledge. According to interpretations begun as early as 1946, masks, as well as the costumes, ornaments, accessories, mimes, songs, rhythms, and dances that accompany them, can be integrated into the cosmology, mythology, and history of the Dogon. "The society of masks,"

Ogotemméli told Griaule, "is the entire world. And when it moves onto the public square it dances the step of the world, it dances the system of the world. Because all men, all occupations, all foreigners, all animals are carved into masks or woven into hoods" (Griaule 1948:179).

The Dogon term *imina,* which is translated as "mask," refers not only to the objects made of carved and painted wood or of plaited and dyed fibers, or the huge wigs that entirely conceal the wearer's head. It also designates the costume the dancer wears and the accessories he carries. As is generally the case in West Africa, the wearers of masks among the Dogon remain mute, with the exception of the ritual shouts they voice during the processions.

The term *imina* has still other meanings to its users. For example, the participants in the *sigi* ceremony, held every sixty years (see Dieterlen 1971:1-11), are called "masks" although their faces remain uncovered. They sing while they dance, wearing a special costume that consists of a bonnet, cowrie-shell vests, and other ornaments; those who participated in the preceding *sigi* wear everyday garments. All males, from those fifty-nine years old to the small boys who can barely walk, take part in the processions and the dances in the public square, remaining in strict age order. As "masks" they represent themselves, that is to say, the generations that have flourished since the last *sigi*.

New mask types such as "madame," "tourist," and "policeman" were invented as people with new functions appeared in the Dogon area, but they have been only temporary. In contrast, the masks that are permanent, that are always included in each *dama,* are those that evoke mythic personalities or events. These are always described in relation to astronomy, as it is conceived by the Dogon, and include ancestors, animals, plants, and even objects that played an important role during the long history of the planet and its occupants.

When seen in performance, the masks bring to life "ancestors" that may be human, animal, or vegetal. In form they resemble their subjects, seen from the perspective of the Dogon aesthetic. The colors with which they are painted, their costumes, and their ornaments reveal the presence of the four basic elements. Black refers to "water," red to "fire," white to "air," and yellow or ochre to "earth." These "four things" (kize nny), as the Dogon call them, are the "same," that is, they are the matrices with which the Creator Amma brought the universe into existence (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:65). For the Dogon, a mask that is not painted brilliant colors — or not repainted if it had been carved and used for a previous *dama* — is nothing but a piece of wood, elegantly sculpted but devoid of life, without any value.

Except for the ritual shouts they utter to evoke the actions of the Fox, the mask wearers remain mute. Nevertheless they wear a long band of white cotton cloth knotted around their hips, the ends of
which reach almost to the ground; this is the symbol of oral speech, which was revealed to men and which their mythic genitor, Nommo, in the earthly form of a fish, wove between his teeth with his forked tongue, in the water of the first pond.

Griaule has already described the symbolism of three types of Dogon masks in terms of the uppermost level of Dogon knowledge. These are the *kanaga*, *ammana* tã, and *sirige* masks (Figs. 2-4) (Griaule 1938:470 ff., 596 ff., 587 ff.). Each of them refers to different stages of the cosmogony, revealed either by a detail of their form or by the steps of their associated dances, which follow each other and are accompanied by changes of rhythm. All three represent events that took place at the beginning of the creation of the universe by a single God, Amma, who is immortal, omnipotent, and omnipresent. They refer to the movement that Amma impressed on the stellar universe after he created it, and the descent of an “ark” containing all that was to live on the Earth.

The *kanaga* mask represents the movement imposed upon the universe by Amma. “The trembling of its wearer’s outstretched arm is the movement of Amma’s hands creating the world.” Amma tã. “Amma’s door,” represents Amma “open” so that the totality of creation can emerge from his breast, or “closed,” after he has finished his work.

The *sirige* mask represents the stars in great number, implying infinite multiplication and suggesting a series of galaxies and their movements in space. It also refers to Ogo’s journey between Heaven and Earth, when he was trying to find a remedy for his incompleteness: to the descent of Nommo’s ark; and to the many-storied family house, which shelters the ancestral altars and whose architecture clearly recalls the preceding events.

Until this point in the myth the Earth was a heavenly body occupied by only one of Amma’s creations, Ogo, who was born prematurely. Because of Ogo’s incompleteness and his revolt against Amma, he was lowered from his original human condition and transformed into a quadruped, the Fox. The three masks refer to the habitation of the planet by Ogo’s celestial “brother,” Nommo, the mythic genitor of humanity; and by his “sons,” primordial ancestors of the present peoples who came down in the ark.

My own research revealed the nature and function of various humans, animals, and plants that appear either dur-

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1. SAMANAA (SAMO) MASK. WOOD. PAINT. 42.2 cm.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.
ing the stages of creation that follow these events, or in the course of the actual history of the Dogon. I give a few examples here of how they are represented by the masks.

Pullo, the Fulani

When Griaule collected information on the mask known as pullo, “Peul” or “Fulani” (Griaule 1938:569-72, fig. 150), his informant described it in terms of “front speech,” parole de face. The real name of this mask is dyobi, “the runner” (Fig. 5). It is always worn by very young men who have just joined the society of masks after leaving the retreat that follows circumcision. The performer of this mask wears a white tunic and a cord around his neck from which fibers hang to his knees. In one hand he holds a gourd, in the other a lance; between his legs is a small wooden horse. The dyobi is the first mask to appear after the drum call. He does not dance, but rather runs here and there in disorder. Although keeping to the edge of the performance area, he later rejoins the series of other masks that appear after him in single file.

The dyobi represents Ogo before his transformation into the Fox. Although the mask emphasizes his primary, infantile aspect, it also shows his characteristic independence. It refers to Ogo’s tearing out a piece of his placenta that would become the ark; finding himself alone and incomplete; stealing seeds from Amma, which he put in a gourd, likewise stolen; holding a weapon; and riding a horse, thereby recalling the journeys he made between Heaven and Earth in an attempt to recover the rest of his placenta and his lost twin. The red fibers worn with the mask are the blood of the wounds inflicted on Ogo—a cut tongue, wounded larynx, and circumcised genitals—when he attempted to expropriate for himself the souls of the Nommo who was sacrificed; he was thus deprived of speech and of his primordial androgyny. After all these events, he was transformed into the Fox and condemned to remain on Earth (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:175-223, 225-384). The knowledge that Amma accorded Ogo in the beginning and never removed from him would be transmitted to men on the divination tables where they would read footprints of the Fox’s descendants. These are not, however, obligated to tell the truth.

Various features of the dyobi mask evoke the status and life of the Fox. For example, the dyobi comes and goes; he ambles about in the fields without order or any particular direction, or lines up with the procession of other masks. Similarly, the Fox’s divination tables, drawn in the sand, are never oriented in a particular direction. This is in contrast to buildings, furnishings, altars, and rock paintings, which, whenever possible, are placed in accordance with the cardinal directions.

As sedentary farmers, the Dogon have inserted a bit of irony in their first level of interpretation of the pullo mask. The pullo, the young “Fulani nomad” herdsman, is like the Fox; he is without land of his own. Provided with a gourd for carrying water and with a lance for attacking or defending himself, he wanders tirelessly, algae from pasture land to pasture land, leading his herd.

Walu, the Antelope

This antelope appears quite early in Dogon cosmogony (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:289, fig. 98). Walu was born at the time of the sacrifice of Nommo, the mythic generi of humanity, which took place in the heavens. Walu is the material support of one of Nommo’s spiritual principles. His story continues on Earth.

Amma made walu responsible for watching over the path of the sun, the Fox’s transformed placenta, which the Fox is always seeking in order to take possession of his female twin. Unable to attain the sun, the Fox plots his revenge on the antelope. He digs holes in the earth and lies in wait. Running from east to west, walu falls into one of these holes and gravelly wounds his feet. One of the first ancestors, Dyongou Sérou, tries to heal him, but without much success. Walu gets up limping. He tries to reach the Blacksmith, the twin of Nommo, to

2. KANYACA MASQUERADERS FROM SANGA. FROM MARCEL GRIAULE. MASQUES DOGON. (1935:471, FIG. 110 K).
ask his help, but dies of his wounds at the Blacksmith's side. Walu's mate joins the Blacksmith and delivers her young on the spot, thereby assuring the continuity of the species. This part of the myth is represented by various objects and wall paintings in a series of rock shelters and caves in the region of Upper Sanga. Traveling from north to south over more than a kilometer, one can clearly 'read' the path Walu took to his tomb.

The dance and mime of the Walu mask (Fig. 6), performed during the processions and in the public square, eloquently evoke these events (Griaule 1938:441-49). The wearer holds a long stick in his hand to support his steps. From time to time he approaches the procession of other masks that he accompanies, and makes a show of giving furious blows with his horns, as if to chase away the Fox. If he encounters a Dyoh mask he redoubles his attacks to make it flee. The Walu mask walks on to the public square, fighting all the while, and then falls to earth as if wounded. The 'healer' mask, which represents

Dyongou Serou, draws near him in order to heal him, but the Walu gets up and continues his path, limping painfully until he finally exits.

Satimbe

The face of the Satimbe mask (literally, 'superimposed sister') is surmounted by a female figure carved in wood (Fig. 7). She is dressed in a skirt and ornaments made of red fiber, and coiffed with a hood of braided black fibers. Her forearms are raised, and she brandishes a calabash in her left hand and an imitation of a flywhisk in her right hand. The first level of interpretation of this mask situates the person represented in the domain of the Andoumboulou, descendants of Ogo prior to his transformation into the Fox. The mask represents an Andoumboulou woman who was the first to discover the red fibers — whose origin is not stated in the Sigi language — and who used them to mask herself in order to frighten the men. The men took the fibers away from her, affirming their authority, but she was named 'sister' of the masks, to commemorate her discovery.

On the level of 'speech of the world' or 'clear speech,' the figure on the mask represents Yasigi, the female twin of Ogo after he became the Fox. Yasigi belonged to the generation of Nommo and the Fox, that is, the oldest generation of all. The calabash that the figure holds in her hand recalls the fundamental role of woman at the celebration of the first Sigi. It was she who, as an elder, brought and distributed the beer made by the women. This drink was consumed by all the participants, who thereby celebrated the revelation of
“speech” transmitted by Nommo to the ancestors of mankind. Yasigi became the first dignitary of the ceremony; her title, *yasigne*, means “woman of sigi.”

The red fibers adorning the figure recall another episode of the myth. Encouraged by the Fox, Yasigi cultivated the fonio that he had planted, which became red and impure. The same happened to the hibiscus that grew on the edge of the field. This was because Yasigi had with her clitoris, thereby exciting herself and impregnating the earth and the plants with her own blood. Later, after other events, the red hibiscus fibers came to be used as ornaments on the costumes worn with the masks.

Throughout her life, Yasigi, who had the same character as her twin, the Fox, and who was often counseled by him, committed error after error and freely broke all prohibitions. Having gone too far, she was chastised by Amma and died while pregnant. Despite her sins, Yasigi was buried apart from the others, since she was the first *yasigne*. Her body was covered with red fibers recalling her past experiences, and another *yasigne* was chosen both to replace her and to represent her during the celebration of the second *sigi*, sixty years later.

Today, during the installation of a *yasigne*, the elder who officiates at the altar of the masks says: “Here is the sister of the masks.” When a *yasigne* dies, her body is displayed dressed in skirts and bracelets made of red fibers. Before being carried to the cemetery it is greeted by masks from all the areas that had been told of her death (Griaule 1938:275, 337 ff.).

During the *dana* ceremony, performed for all the recent dead, a mask called *satimbe* was carved to recall Yasigi’s role during the first *sigi*. One of the songs that accompanies the dance of the *satimbe* mask in the village of Touyougou testifies to the character and tragic destiny of Yasigi: “The cunning Yasamma (literally, ‘wife-sister’) has fallen dead.” The two dances accompanying the *satimbe* and their corresponding rhythms are related to the seeds the Fox sowed by broadcasting, and the cultivating done by Yasigi, that is, how she covered the seeds with earth.

Sa ku or Azagay

The mask called *sa ku* (literally, “head of *sa*”) or *azagay* (Fig. 8) refers to a basic stage of Dogon cosmogony. After Amma created the universe and handed over its operation to the Nommo monitors who maintained the order he had established in Heaven and on Earth, he momentarily stopped working (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:506). The Fox, who had always acted in opposition to the Creator God, declared that Amma was dead and he was taking power. He decided to brew beer from the seeds of the grains he had hidden from Amma. He would drink it and dance on the terrace of his “father” to celebrate his funeral. At the same time the Fox wanted to demonstrate his domination of the Nommo who resided in terrestrial waters and who watched over the spiritual principles of human beings, his “children.” To do this he pulled off the bark of the *sa* tree, the earthly symbol of the sacrifice and resurrection of Nommo, and fabricated a mask with it. The torn bark was red like blood, and this act had the effect of slaying Nommo alive, of repeating on Earth the sacrifice that had occurred in Heaven. The Fox drank a bit of beer, but his container was immediately struck down. Wearing a
mask, he danced a bit, but was chased; he fled, abandoning his mask and seeking refuge in a cave. The next day, Nommo caused a su tree that was alive and full of leaves to dance; men, the descendants of Nommo, had also made a mask from it. The Fox remains the first to have initiated funerary rites, and to have created the first of all the masks, the sa kú. The rivalry for primacy between the sa kú and the masks made of leaves (sanagur, literally, "sa nest") has never ceased.

Dyômune, the "Healer"

The mask called dyômune represents a "healer," a specialist consulted by one and all for every sort of problem (Fig. 9). In one hand the wearer of this mask holds a carved wooden cup, an imitation of the pottery vessel in which healers macerate plants and other therapeutic ingredients. In his other hand he carries a flywhisk. He walks alongside the masks during the processions and moves around alone during the performances that take place in the public square. Squandering his medicines, he pretends to plunge his flywhisk into the bowl and to sprinkle the masked dancers and the audience as soon as any disorder occurs. If a mask breaks or if fibers fall to the ground during the dances, they are picked up immediately by an elder or an unmasked dancer. The dyômune sprinkles the ground where the incident occurred, to purify it (Griaule 1938:552ff., fig. 147).

The mask refers especially to Dyongou Sérou, one of the primordial ancestors who came down on Nommo's ark. Dyongou Sérou was the first expert in healing. He tried to heal the wounded antelope, waã, and as a result he invented medicine and the knowledge of healing products. This accomplishment is underscored by the form of the wooden mask. For knowledgeable viewers, the carved figures surmounting the face of the mask clearly evoke the appearance of death on Earth, first among the Andoumboulou (the descendants of Ogo after his transformation into the Fox) and then that of Dyongou Sérou, who was the first human to die. These sequences of the myth lie outside the scope of this article.

"Old Woman"

The "old woman" mask consists of a braided hood with a wig of undyed fibers imitating white hair (Fig. 10); two oblong boards are suspended at chest level to represent her flaccid breasts (Griaule 1938:534). This mask represents a metamorphosis, or deity, of Amma, who according to legend intervened during the migration of the Dogon. Seated across a path on the edge of the cliff, the "old woman" observed the behavior of the new immigrants, both that of the el-
ders who stepped over her without greeting her and that of the young Adouon, who stopped to talk to her. She identified those whose attitude bespoke the ability to effectively assume supreme authority, and then helped them.

For all those familiar with this sequence of the legendary history of the Arou, the mimicry done by the wearer of this mask is clear: He slaps himself on the shoulder as if to chase away flies. He also holds a calabash containing fragments of fruits or rags, which he distributes to the youngest spectators during the dances. His slaps on the shoulders are not to chase away flies, but to recall the young Adouon, abandoned on the road by his elders. After greeting the “old woman,” Adouon complained of hunger; she told him to climb on her shoulders and the nape of her neck, and to take the rice that he would find on her head. Then she gave him several objects that he would find useful. Rejoining his starving older brothers, he gave away the major portion of these gifts in order to nourish them, thereby acting like a noble, generous being despite having been abandoned and insulted by them (Dieterlen 1982:114-16, 166-67).

The behavior of the audience also reveals the meaning of this mask. “When the mask has made the rounds of the audience it sits in the center of the square and receives offerings of cowries that the spectators make while kneeling, a customary gesture of respect toward elders” (Griaule 1938:539). It is even more revealing when one knows that the mask bears witness to the presence of Amma.

Samana, “the Same”

The Same are an ensemble of lineages that occupy part of the region surrounding the village of Kani Gogouna. The same mask depicts a member of this ethnic group (Fig. 1). Only one same mask participates in the ceremonies, unlike other masks, which appear in multiple examples. Its face, displaying scarification marks, is very elongated and is generally surmounted by a thin blade of wood, the whole painted a brilliant white. The wearer brandishes a lance in his right hand and a sword in his left (Griaule 1938:579, fig. 155).

The same mask and its behavior have been described many times by Griaule. “The exaggerated skull of this mask is an important comic element that plays a role in the mime of the dancer” (Griaule 1938:797, n. I). The wearer performs an exaggerated pantomime when he must take his turn stepping across a wide break in the rocks, a part of the same ritual that occurs on the second day of the celebration (Griaule 1938:374). He executes patterns with his weapons and acts the boaster (p. 574). While the wearers of all the other masks remain mute, “he addresses the spectators and cracks jokes, crudely imitating the Same dialect... After a lengthy mock battle with an imaginary enemy, he falls exhausted on the ground” (p. 803), provoking hilarity from the audience.

Although comic, this mask and the attitudes of its wearer recall a historic event. In an exceptional alliance with the Fulani, the Dogon waged war in order to resist the military incursions of the Tukulor, propagators of Islam, who were led by El Hadji Omar. The Same represented by the mask was a traitor who trafficked with both sides and paid for it with his life. Even though in the end the Tukulor occupied a part of Dogon territory and imposed their domination, the battles ceased and a compromise was initiated when a prestigious Tukulor chief “miraculously disappeared” in a cave in Dogon country, close to Bandiagara. The presence of the same mask and its gestures evoke the courageous — and in part glorious — resistance with which the Dogon have faced occupation and conversion by others.

Like us, the Dogon have experienced various degrees of teaching. Like us, they have classified their discourse into various categories of “speech,” which encompasses everything we call their “oral literature.” We must distinguish the explanations they give concerning the meanings of prayers, mottoes, invocations, and the like, which are pronounced during public ceremonies, from the stories, proverbs, and legends that they recite to relatives and friends, generally in the evening. All are related to the level of knowledge of their hearers, and to their willingness to be taught. All the levels are valid.

A procession of masks represents the ensemble of the universe. Of course, the walu represents an animal of the forest that one hunts and kills in order to eat. This is the source for Griaule’s commentary, which is a hunting story. But the mask also represents an antelope ancestor that played the mythic role described
cel Griaule and I followed a method taught at the Institut d’Ethnologie by Marcel Mauss. When confronted with a mask and a commentary stemming from a hunting story, a legendary episode, a tale, or a simple anecdote, we would ask in “speech of the world” what such and such an individual or animal did or what happened to such and such a plant to cause it to be represented so many times by a mask. Such questions were always answered, situating the mask in mythology, history, or on the level of social organization.

briefly above. Similarly, the “old woman” mask represents any aged woman, maintaining her place in society. But she is also the symbol of Amma’s deputy who intervened during the Dogon migration. This event is described in the legendary history of the Arou, the Dogon group that assumed supreme authority and has preserved it to this day (Dieterlen 1982). The “healer” mask is a specialist who treats the sick, but more important it represents the first healer, the ancestor who cured the toatu.

Other examples of the multiplicity of meanings of Dogon masks abound. The hare mask (Figs. 11, 12) and two masks representing birds are symbols of game pursued by hunters. First and foremost, however, they are three mythic animals who died because they ate part of the first tonio harvest. This grain, planted by the Fox and cultivated by Yasigí, became red and impure. Likewise, on one level the monkey masks (Fig. 13) undoubtedly represent those dreaded destroyers of crops who devour the heads of millet on the stalk in fields far from settlements. But on another level they are evidence of the cathartic alliance uniting the Dogon of the Sangá and Bamba regions. This alliance brings with it the obligation of mutual assistance, such as purifications for the gravest violations of prohibitions. It also calls for the exchange of gibes and insults. For example, when a person from Bamba arrives at the market, one can hear a Dogon from Sangá call out to him joyfully: “Greetings, old monkey from Bamba!” to which the other replies in the same insolent and comic tone.

In order to understand the role of the masks in relation to the Dogon system of thought, when we were in the field Mar-
The initial information concerning animal masks contains abundant references to the invention of masks for the protection of hunters. The hunters, and their descendants as well, were vulnerable to attacks by the vital force (yama) of their vengeful victims. This is why hunters and warriors surround themselves with multiple protections such as altars, special plants, and amulets. The mask was a means of affixing the force to an image of the animal or the enemy killed. Through a sacrifice, this image could be integrated into a series of such “dead” beings, which were depicted by the masks during the dama as they were when alive.

Griaule collected much evidence on this function, but as early as 1938 he felt this interpretation was lacking. He believed that at the base of the institution of masks there must be something other than a rite performed to protect hunters and warriors from the attacks of their victims.12

Our present goal is not merely to offer a comparative analysis of the commentaries obtained at the beginning of the investigation of masks among the Dogon and those resulting from later research. In cases where one can examine the two interpretations, it is clear that an apparently banal story, fable, or song often reveals a subtle association with mythology. The male walu antelope was trapped in a “pit” made by the hunter, like the ancestor of the species who fell in a “hole” made by the Fox (Griaule 1938:426, 445). The male ka antelope was killed by the arrow of a hunter, like the antelope that was pierced three times by the ancestor Dyongou Séro’s arrow in order to prevent it from pursuing the walu it wanted to attack (Griaule 1938:426, 445). The study of the meaning of masks, like those based on hunting stories cited here,13 will permit new approaches to those who are interested in language, oral literature, and systems of thought.

A performance of masks, described many times by Griaule, is an enormous aesthetic demonstration. The appearance of the characters, bursting with color and movement, provokes the enthusiasm not only of local residents but also of outsiders. Those who are able—generally elder men—honor the procession of masks with a “greeting of the bush” on the first day of their performance, and continue to praise and exalt them afterward.14 In addition, diverse “encouragements” are repeated for each mask as it dances, and these most often include not only allusions to their actions but also to the rhythms accompanying them.

The importance of the drums in the performance of masks should not be overlooked. Drums are mentioned frequently in the speeches pronounced in sigi language during the ceremonies: “The drums have beaten, have beaten well; the men have danced with their legs, danced with their arms” (Griaule 1938:132, 137, 139, 151, 342, 515, 538, 544, 592).15 The songs and mottos pronounced during the funeral or dama ceremonies when these masks appear, have been studied, as have the dances or pantomimes performed by those who wear them. Their meaning is most often associated with mythology. But what precisely is the contribution of the numerous drummed rhythms that support and direct them? Griaule recorded the names of more than eighty rhythms accompanying the mask performances and underscored their importance: “The rhythm is represented as if it existed independently before the dance” (Griaule 1938:800).

What are the specific relationships between rhythms and dances? How do they relate to other aesthetic forms? According to an often repeated Dogon expression, “The mask goes to the drum.” Like a call, the drums open all ceremonies; the procession of masks follows. The masks never turn toward the spea...
tors; rather it is the drums that they "greet" before leaving the public square, as the wearer of the sirige mask tilts its long mast until it touches the ground. When women appear in the square during funerals, they always approach the drummers and dance in front of them. Aware of the symbolic value of these instruments, they pay homage to them.

The first rhythm to appear in Dogon cosmogony was played by the ancestor of the genealogists we call priors. He beat on the skull of the sacrificed Nommo in order to punctuate the revelation of the "oral word" and the teaching it contained for the ancestors of mankind. Later they danced the sigi and drank the communal beer (Dieterlen 1982:78). From this it seems that all articulated language is inseparable from rhythm, or that rhythm also is a language "without words" that confirmed and supported speech.

How can we understand the many admirable rhythms, tirelessly repeated throughout entire nights during Dogon funerals? They are organically dynamic and ineffable, and plunge those who execute them and those who hear them into an almost painful euphoria, perhaps because of their transcience and the fact that they must end at daybreak.

Evidence of the importance of drums — and of the age attributed to this instrument — is provided by the number of lithophones that are used in Dogon rituals. These sonorous, uncarved rocks are found in almost all the caves, rock shelters, or faults in the plateau in which the stages of cosmogony are represented by various furnishings and wall paintings. They also beat on round stones on a precise spot on their surface or corner, visibly worn by the blows. In general, young goatherders played these drums to amuse themselves. They also played them during the execution of annual rites that they alone were responsible for performing. 16

It is also important to study another musical instrument, the bullroarer, in terms of the Dogon perspective, and to understand the symbolism of its humming sound (Fig. 14). In the region of Sanga, three bullroarsers called inima na are carved before the sigi ceremony by its participants. The young initiated dignitaries called dularr, "masters of the bush," are responsible for the rites pertaining to the "Great Mask" that bears the same name as the bullroarsers and that is carved, painted, and consecrated for the ceremony. The dularr have completed a long retreat, during which they have learned the special language of sigi as well as the handling of the bullroasers, which they generally make hum at night before and during the entire course of the ceremony.

Elongated oval wooden boards, these instruments are pierced at one end by a hole in which a long twisted cord is attached, allowing them to be spun and turned. 17 On the level of myth, each of the three bullroasers is a tongue. The first is that of the Fox, which was cut at the same time as his larynx when he tried to appropriate Nommo's souls at the time of his sacrifice. The second is that of the silure fish, symbol of the human lotus, which was fished improperly by the ancestor, Dyongou Sérou. Dyongou Sérou wished to place it on the altar he established for his own benefit, without the authorization of the resuscitated Nommo, the mythic generator of mankind. The third bullroaser/tongue is that of Dyongou Sérou himself, who was sacrificed to pay for this outrage and to make possible mankind's development on Earth. After various transformations, including a resurrection in the form of a serpent followed by a new death, a long, wooden serpent called the "Great Mask," inima na, was carved for the sigi to represent Dyongou Sérou as an ancestor.

For the Dogon, these bullroasers speak. Their words are: "I swallow, I swallow, I swallow men, women, children, I swallow all." They are evidence of the appearance of death on Earth — that of the fish, that of the Fox who was ultimately condemned, and that of the first man to die. After striking the ancestor, sooner or later death would inevitably strike all living beings. The bullroaser bears the same name as the Great Mask: in effect, it too is a mask.

The bullroaser is the speech, or what is left of it, of a dead person. This explains the emotion that grips the listeners when it is sounded at midnight, during the funeral. All fires accompanying the mourners are extinguished, everyone disperses into the neighboring streets, all the drums fall silent: then one hears the repeated hummings, from low to high and from high to low, of the bullroaser that accompanies the appearance of the Great Mask. Held vertically on the shoulder of a bearer, the Great Mask ar-

![Bullroarsers Made of Wood and Iron](from Griaule 1938:263, Fig. 43)
design of the book, in a few instances significant art details that are discussed in the text and captions are obscured by the binding (e.g., pl. 81). Some historical photographs on facing pages bleed into one another, their busy backgrounds merging into abstract chaos.

Despite these concerns, *From the Land of the Totem Poles* makes a fine contribution and has broad appeal. The photographs are spectacular. Equally important, Jonaits has confirmed that it is valuable to examine the history of a collection of tribal art. It is encouraging to see the important holdings of the American Museum of Natural History receiving well-deserved attention in this striking volume.

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**notes**

**DIETERLEN**: Notes, from page 43

This article is an extension of the special issue on Dogon art, organized by Kate Ezra for *African Arts* (vol. 21, no. 4, 1988).

1. In the Dogon language, *dama* means “prohibition.” The ceremony known by this name has been noted the “end of mourning,” because it marks the end of certain prohibitions related to a person’s death that concern not only close relatives but the entire community (Griaule 1938:345 ff).

2. “Dogon knowledge can be divided into four stages which are, in order of increasing importance: first, *front speech,* the first stage of knowledge consisting of simple explanations in which mythic personages are often disguised, . . . *benso,* side speech, in which the explanations for certain rites are given and in which coordination appears only within each major division, . . . *bolo,* back speech, which completes the preceding category by providing syntheses of the broader groupings, . . . *so dayi,* clear speech, which is concerned with the edifice of knowledge in all its well-ordered complexity” (Griaule 1932:27). For more information on the literature to 50-year ceremonies that occur during seven consecutive years in diverse Dogon areas see Dieterlen 1971:111).

3. Even infants are sometimes present, carried on their grandfathers’ shoulders.

4. The same is true for public performances among the Bamana, Bozo, and Soninke, where I have seen the “governor,” “airplane,” and “automobile” masks. A mask called “electronic machine” was part of the procession at a festival in Bamako in 1962.

5. This interpretation of the fundamental symbolic value of colors as witnesses of the “elements” explains the attitude taken by the Dogon when Jean Rouch, who had their permission to film a *dama*, wanted to film the dying of the fibers and the wood masks. The elders refused gracefully, invoking the importance of this ritual, which always takes place at a distance, out of the sight of those who do not belong to the mask society.

6. *Kumaga* also represents a water insect, in order to benefit the Fox, wanted to moor Nommoo’s ark after its descent. In the end the Fox died, after causing grave disorders on Earth. The *kumaga* mask represents the insect on its back, four legs in the air, implying its creator in vain.

7. The name “wife-sister” given to Yasigui reveals her identity as a “mythic ancestor” because the first generation, to which she belonged, was composed of mixed twins (Dieterlen 1956). All her life Yasigui remained the female twin of the Fox. The line of the sister quadrant is followed by another that informs that at that time could not—or would not—translate. But they emphasized that it is murmured by mourners when they transport the body of a deceased *yamgomez* to the cemetery (Griaule 1938:534).

8. The two trees are the *lannruna* and *adzida*. When removed, its bark is the color of blood.

9. His route, the meaning of the bark fiber mask that men eventually assumed, and the consequences of his actions over time all lie outside the scope of this article. The scarifications are represented by tattooing or rock paintings in various caves. The leaf masks appear independently, just before the rainy season.

10. These scarifications demonstrate the Kakolo origin of the Saman. Tie Malinke, Soninke, & history of the people of the Niger bend, and are represented by masks.

11. Marcel Griaule and I were long-time students of Mauss, and we applied his method in the field. (For more on his work, see Mauss 1968.) Our results were due to the regular frequency of our research missions among the Dogon and among other ethnic groups whom we felt it imperative to observe—namely the Bozo, Bambara, Minianka, Malinke, and Soninke. All of these populations have created their own “archives,” of which the institution of masks is a major element (Dieterlen 1957, 1959-24). Our research has also benefited from the consideration of the Dogon, and from the general situation for animal and mask carving. For example, the films made by Jean Rouch among the Dogon have permitted us and our informants to view and re-view the ceremonies as often as necessary in order to delve deeper into the meaning of songs, prayers, and invocations.

12. Thus, when describing an animal mask carved for the *dama* of a hunter, he records what he was told: “It was hoped that at the sight of his former victim (represented by the mask), the soul of the hunter, which was in a state of inferiority because it belonged to the world of the dead, would be frightened and would flee.” To which Griaule added: “The explanation in the last sentence is doubtful. The informants went back on their words many times” (1938:77, 77 n. 1).

13. There are also examples of Bambara stories in which animals intervene in the mythology of the people of the Niger bend, and are represented by masks.

14. The emotion provoked by the sight of the masks was revealed to me by chance. Entering a room where masks under study by Marcel Griaule were being stored, I found our oldest informant, Ambrunk Ababoye, crouching in front of them, repeating softly in siiy language: “Mask, powerful, powerful, burning, burning.” He was thus translating, for himself, the exultation he felt from all that the masks represented.

15. A film about the analysis of Dogon drumming was made in 1967 by Gilbert Rouget and Jean Rouch.

16. We have attended many of the rituals — or ritual games — of the Dogon goatherds in the region of Sanga, at various times over the years. These refer to important episodes in the cosmogony. The children always act alone; no adult is admitted, not even those who gave them the materials they needed for the execution of the rites. These activities have unfortunately been abandoned for the past 2-3 years, due perhaps to school, the local economy, conversions, and politics.

17. Each of the three bullroarers is distinguished by certain details of form and a completely different humming sound.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

**JAMES DE VERE ALLEN**, a citizen of Kenya, founded the Lamu Museum in 1970 and was its first curator. He has also taught at universities in Kenya, Uganda, and Malaysia. In 1980 he left his position as a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Nairobi University, to write and farm on the coast of Kenya.

**GERMAINE DIETERLEN** has conducted field research on Dogon culture for more than fifty years. She is the author of numerous publications on the Dogon and neighboring peoples, most recently *Le tiers de la maison des Arts* (Dogon, Mali) (Paris, 1982).
I am also grateful to Chief Noakhali Sekhury (bakshay of Berin) for giving me advice as an editor on my book, "Orthoethos," Priest Ami Omumwe, for initiating me into the Olokun priesthood; and to Balabayo Aguizii, priest, and traditional citizens, Madam Aguiru Aguijii, for introducing me to the Ilu priestess. Thanks to Miss Esther E. Emoge for her excellent typing and editorial assistance, and to Kevin Kearn for his encouragement and skills in preparation for final draft. A very special acknowledgement must be given to my research advisor, Mr. Ikpenwomwka Onweoge, who for numerous years has guided through this material and who directed the course of my field work.

Finally, without the participation and cooperation of the following persons, this work would not have been possible: Madam Aigbionia, Chief Priest; Olokun Local Government Area; Chief Oromi Ighodu, Ighodu, Benin City (Fig. 30); Madam Omo Gbogbo, Ighodu, Olokun Local Government Area (Figs. 24, 25); Chief Priest Anthonia Onnoghen, Ighodu, Benin City Government Area (Figs. 17, 20); the late Chief Ehiedu Onaogho, Ighodu, Benin City; Pa Onuwa Ugbaje, Benin City (Figs. 32, 33); Chief Priest Uzupun, Ighodu, Benin City. The information in this paper has been gathered solely from field research. My ongoing investigation into the traditional world and current dynamics in Olokun culture, which began in Benin and its environs in February 1984, has been funded in part by the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria, through the University Research and Publications Committee.


Although my account of the priesthood and the Yoruba culture is based on the work of various authors, I have followed the main sources: Agbeyi (1986), Aigbe (1985, 1985), Meltzer (1937), and a Dictionary of the Yoruba Language (1979) as archaeological sources.

2. Though both men and women can be priests, for the sake of convenience I shall use the masculine pronouns for both persons.

3. Emotion is a process that is often accompanied by emotion and can be seen as a form of communication.

4. This environment encompasses the interior of the shrine, the compound (surrounding it on the north, south, east, and west), and the shrines and shrines of the shrine.

5. It is uncertain whether there is a relationship between the design of shrines and the use of iconography in the shrine.

6. The following are some taboos related to Olokun priests:

   a. Those who meditate or use unorthodox forms of power are not permitted to carry loads on their heads; b. Sexual intercourse is forbidden in the afternoon; c. After sexual intercourse one must bathe before entering the shrine; d. A menstruating woman may not enter the shrine or carry protective charms or other objects that are used for worship, and in fact she will usually lack her shrine and abstinence from any ritual practices; e. It is forbidden to visit a mother and her newborn child; f. One must not walk under the sun or under the moon; g. One must not ride on a horse or a donkey; h. Inclusion in a public gathering of any sort; i. The shrine is considered sacred and should be treated with respect.

7. Olokun is depicted as a Nekheire, a small spreading plant with a fragrant odor, and it is considered a sacred tree during the dry season; the shrine is smooth and has no sharp edges. (Gbedelid 1979:3, 19-90.)

8. In the description of the deity called Adabi in Melzian's dictionary (1972:21), the explanation for "Adabi"—a deity which stands on the boundary between heaven and earth. The shrine serves as a place of rest for people, a white—Adabi is also worshiped by Olokun priests and priestesses. "In certain situations one might perhaps regard Adabi as the spiritual force that operates ogo-odo.

9. In her more recent study, Olokun's domestic role in Benin, "Culture and Mythology in Olokun Religion," the author has suggested that the Olokun religion is fundamentally a domestic cult, and that the shrines are places of refuge and sanctuary.

10. A. Olokun is a deity which stands on the boundary between heaven and earth.

11. She can mean an obstacle: sacred life paths that become blocked by various reasons.

12. Although this shrine is not a visible space, its source can be traced to the palm-wine bar.

13. Kegunmi is a combination of Yoruba and Ibo languages.

14. Most of the shrines I have visited were initiated into the priesthood of other shrines as well. This is a common practice throughout Africa.

15. Medicines that can be used as the basis for different shrines are made from substances that are generally milled and mixed with a little sand, and are thought to have healing properties. The shrines are often used for meditation and relaxation. The shrines are also believed to have curative properties, and are often used by healers and diviners.

16. Grigorov, 1983, has described the shrines in Benin, and has suggested that they are places of refuge and sanctuary.

17. The shrines are often used for meditation and relaxation. The shrines are also believed to have curative properties, and are often used by healers and diviners.

18. Financial aid arrived in the form of a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, which matched a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. We were also offered an aid to the design of the installation.