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COVER: Dogon masqueraders during a traditional performance staged for special visitors at Sanga, Mali, in February 1988 (see p. 34). Photo by Rachel Hoffman.

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MASKS AND MYTHOLOGY AMONG THE DOGON

GERMAINE
DIETERLEN

Over the years, I have had many opportunities to see the performance of masks that take place at the "end of mourning," or *dama*,¹ 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 mimes 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 dogons* (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 cosmogony has necessitated a reconsideration of the subject of the masks. The Dogon classify cosmogony as "clear speech" (*parole claire*, or *so dayi*) or as "speech of the world" (*parole du monde*, or *aduno so*).² It is revealed to highly instructed men and women, to those in charge of a section of Dogon society, to initiates 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 cosmogony, 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,³ 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.⁴ 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 nay*), as the Dogon call them, are the "same"; that is, they are the matrixes with which the Creator Amma brought the universe into existence (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:61). 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.⁵

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

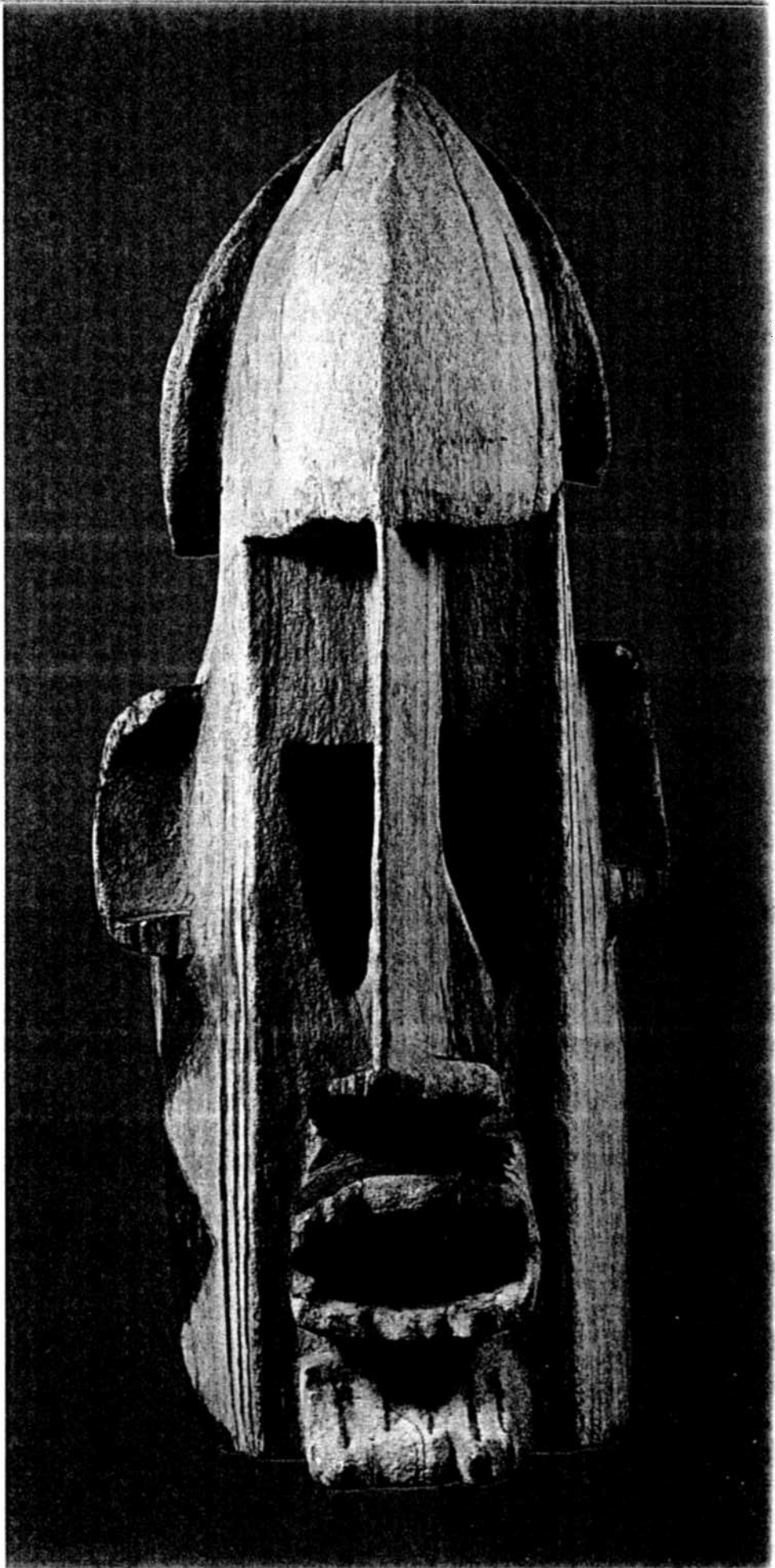
which reach almost to the ground; this is the symbol of oral speech, which was revealed to men and which their mythic genitor, Nommo, in the earthly form of a fish, wove between his teeth with his forked tongue, in the water of the first pond.

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*, *amma 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."⁶ *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 (Griaule & Dieterlen 1965:165, fig. 48; 170-72, fig. 53; 438, fig. 101).

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



1. SAMANA (SAMO) MASK. WOOD, PAINT. 42.2cm.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,
GIFT OF LESTER WUNDERMAN, 1979

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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, alone, 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 genitor 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.

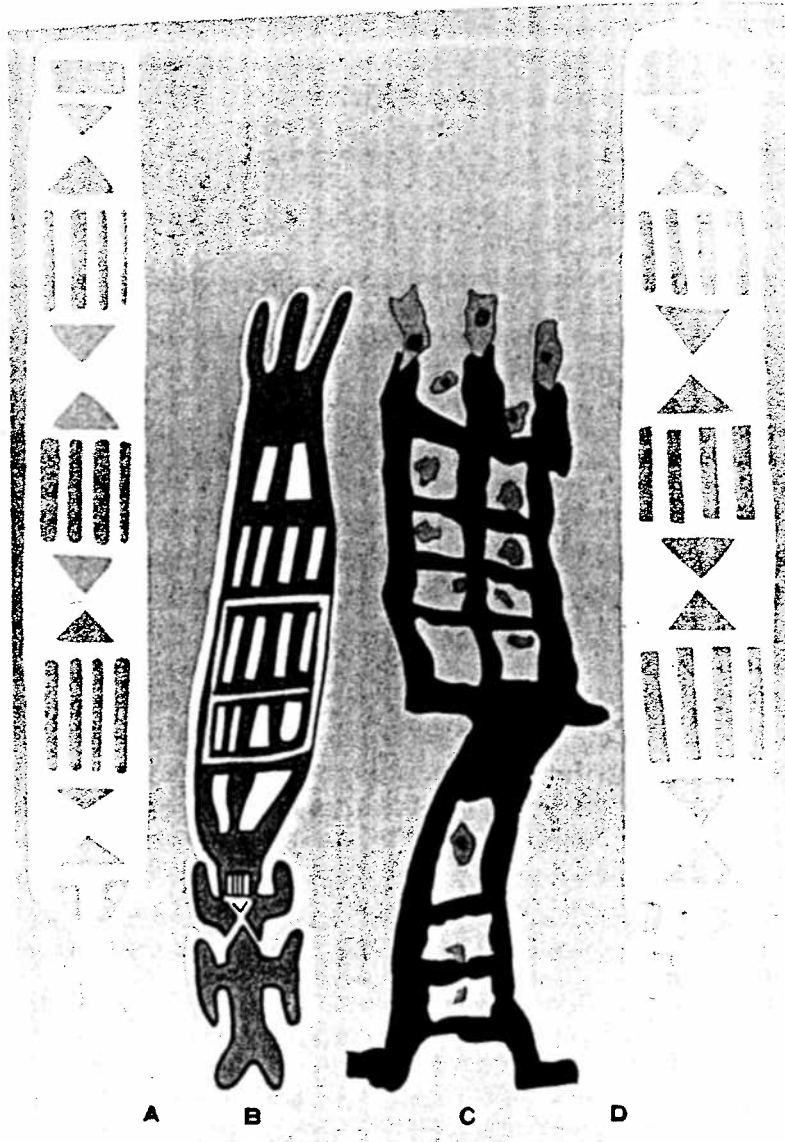
Amma made *walu* responsible for watching over the path of the sun, the Fox's transformed placenta, which the Fox is always seeking in order to take possession of his female twin. Unable to attain the sun, the Fox plots his revenge on the antelope. He digs holes in the earth and lies in wait. Running from east to west, *walu* falls into one of these holes and gravely 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



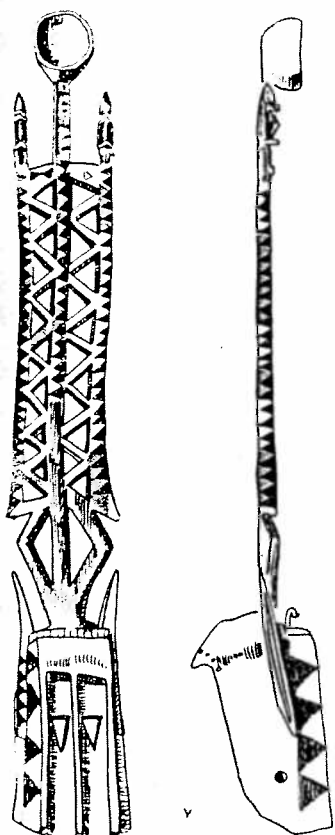
2. KANAGA MASQUERADER FROM SANGA.
FROM MARCEL GRIAULE, *MASQUES DOGONS*
(1938:471, FIG. 110 K).

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 1938:444-49). 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 *dyobi* 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



A B C D



3. AMMA TA MASK FROM SANGA.
FROM GRIAULE 1938:599, FIG. 162 Y

Dyongou Sérrou, 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 Andouboulou, descendants of Ogo prior to his transformation into the Fox. The mask represents an Andouboulou 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

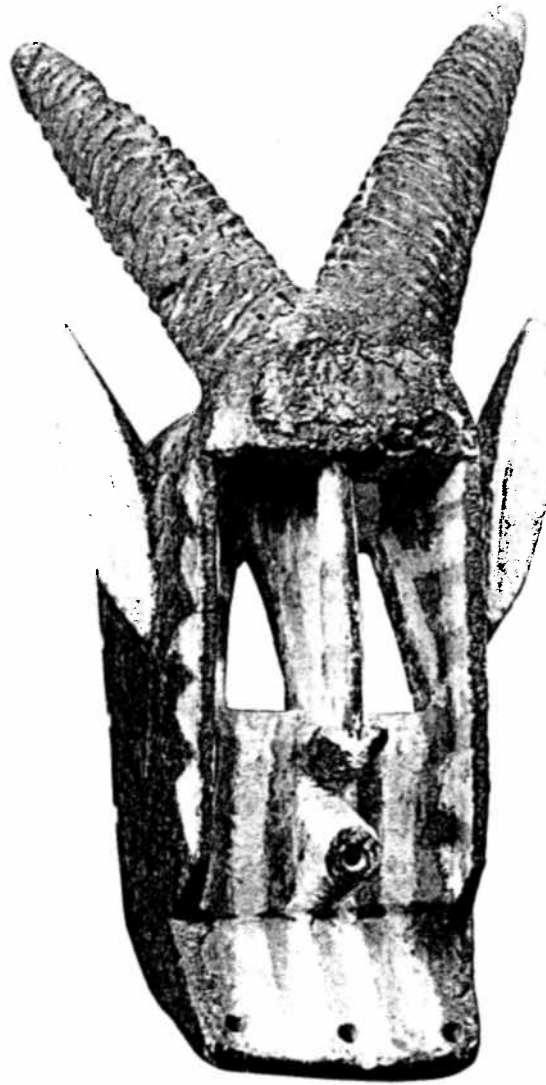
"speech" transmitted by Nommo to the ancestors of mankind. Yasigi became the first dignitary of the ceremony; her title, *yasigine*, means "woman of *sigi*."

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 hoed with her clitoris, thereby excising 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.

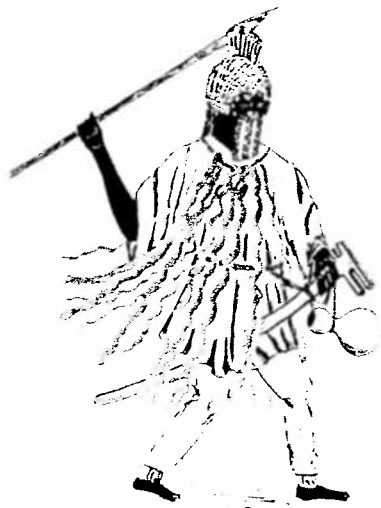
Throughout her life, Yasigi, who had the same character as her twin, the Fox, and who was often counseled by him, committed error after error and freely broke all prohibitions. Having gone too far, she was chastised by Amma and died while pregnant. Despite her sins, Yasigi was buried apart from the others, since she was the first *yasigine*. Her body was covered with red fibers recalling her past experiences, and another *yasigine* 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 *yasigine*, the elder who officiates at the altar of the masks says: "Here is the sister of the masks." When a *yasigine* 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 *dama* ceremony, performed for all the recent dead, a mask called



6. WALU (ANTELOPE) MASK. WOOD, PAINT, 49.2cm
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.
GIFT OF LESTER WUNDERMAN, 1979.



5. PULLO (FULANI) MASQUERADER FROM SANGA
FROM GRIAULE 1938 570, FIG. 150

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 flaying Nommo alive, of repeating on Earth the sacrifice that had occurred in Heaven.⁸ 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 *sa* tree that was alive and full of leaves to dance; men, the descendants of Nommo, had also made a mask from it.⁹ The Fox remains the first to have initiated funerary rites, and to have created the first of all the masks, the *sa ku*. The rivalry for primacy between the *sa ku* and the masks made of leaves (*sanagur*, literally, "sa nest") has never ceased.

Dyönune, the "Healer"

The mask called *dyönune* 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 *dyönune* sprinkles the ground where the incident occurred, to purify it (Griaule 1938:552 ff., 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, *walu*, 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 deputy, 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-



7. SATIMBE MASK. WOOD, PAINT, 110.8cm.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART,
THE MICHAEL C. ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL COLLECTION.
PURCHASE, NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER GIFT, 1961.

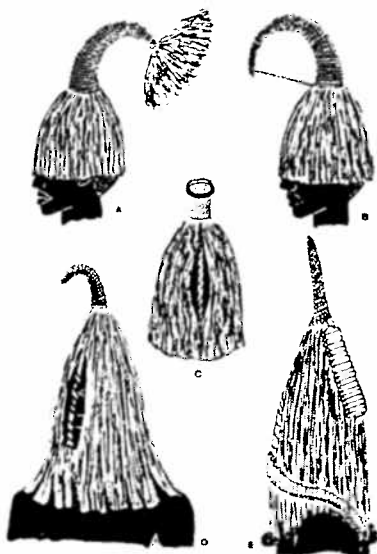
ders who stepped over her without greeting her and that of the young Adouon, who stopped to talk to her. She identified those whose attitude bespoke the ability to effectively assume supreme authority, and then helped them.

For all those familiar with this sequence of the legendary history of the Arou, the miming 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 Samo"

The Samo are an ensemble of lineages that occupy part of the region surrounding the village of Kani Gogouna. The



8 SA KU OR AZAGAY MASKS
FROM GRIAULE 1938 566 FIG. 149 A-E

samana mask depicts a member of this ethnic group (Fig. 1). Only one *samana* mask participates in the ceremonies, unlike other masks, which appear in multiple examples. Its face, displaying scarification marks,¹⁰ 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 *samana* 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. 1). The wearer performs an exaggerated pantomime when he must take his turn stepping across a wide break in the rocks, a part of the *dama* ritual that occurs on the second day of the celebration (Griaule 1938:374). He executes patterns with his weapons and



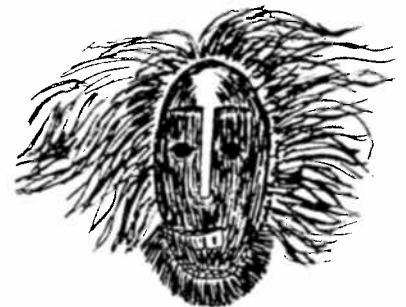
9 DYONUNE (HEALER) MASQUERADER
FROM GRIAULE 1938 554 FIG. 147

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 Samo 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 Hadj Omar. The Samo 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 *samana* 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, mottos, 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



10 OLD WOMAN MASK FROM YANDA
FROM GRIAULE 1938 536 FIG. 138

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11. HARE MASQUERADER FROM SANGA.
FROM GRIAULE 1938:471, FIG. 110 L.

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 *walu*.

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 fonio harvest. This grain, planted by the Fox and cultivated by Yasigi, 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 Sanga 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 Sanga 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-

cel Griaule and I followed a method taught at the Institut d'Ethnologie by Marcel Mauss.¹¹ 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.



12. HARE MASK. WOOD, PAINT. 40cm.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.
GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. J. GORDON DOUGLAS III, 1982.

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 (*nyama*) 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

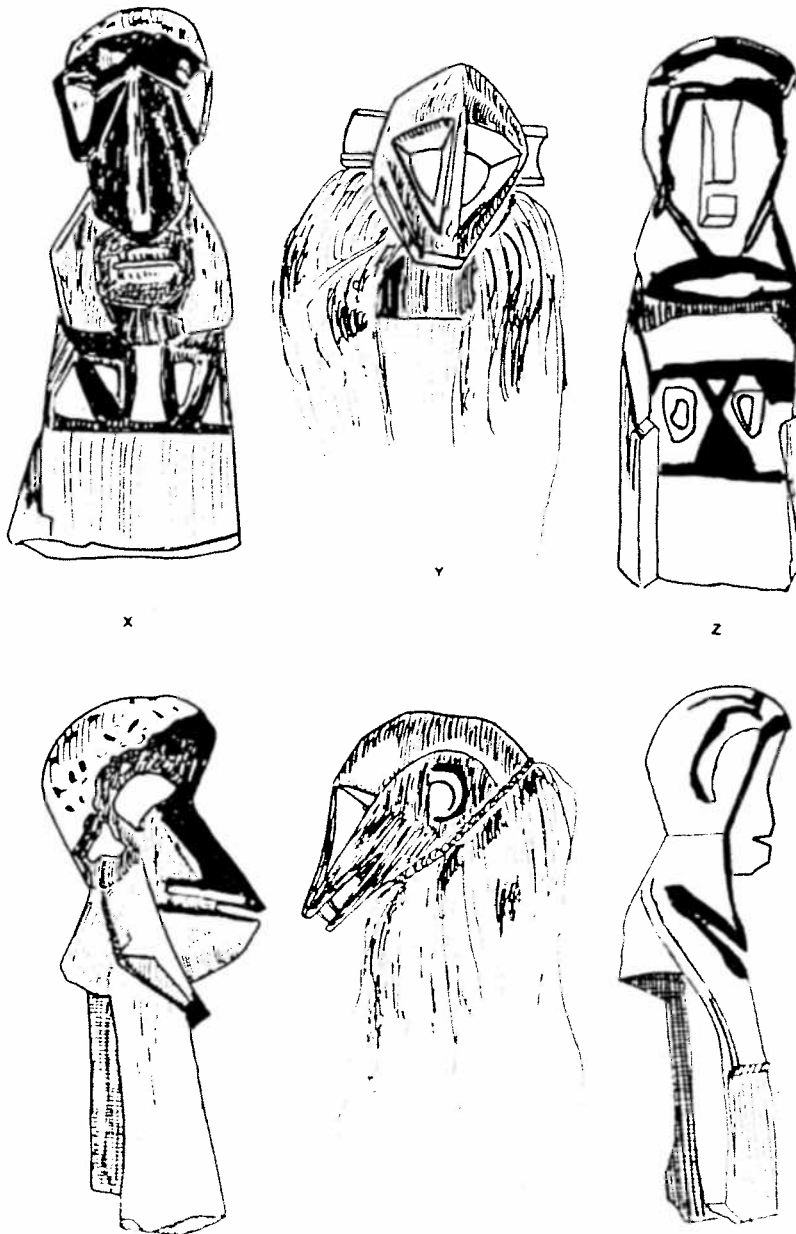
Our present goal is not merely to offer a comparative analysis of the commentaries obtained at the beginning of the investigation of masks among the Dogon and those resulting from later research. In cases where one can examine the two interpretations, it is clear that an apparently banal story, fable, or song often re-

veals 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 Sérou'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 specta-



13 MONKEY MASKS FROM BANDIAGARA AND SANGA. FROM GRIAULE 1938:457, FIG. 103 X, Y, Z.

tors; rather it is the drums that they "greet" before leaving the public square, as when 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.

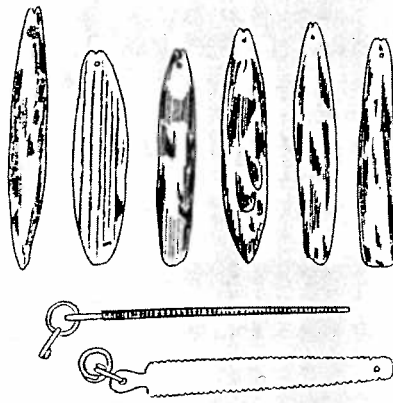
The first rhythm to appear in Dogon cosmogony was played by the ancestor of the genealogists we call *griots*. He beat on the skull of the sacrificed Nommo in order to punctuate the revelation of the "oral word" and the teaching it contained for the ancestors of mankind. Later they danced the *sigi* and drank the communal beer (Dieterlen 1982:78). From this it seems that all articulated language is inseparable from rhythm, or that rhythm alone 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 transience 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 are beaten with round stones on a precise spot on their surface or corner, visibly worn by the blows. In general, young goatherds 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 bullroarers called *imina na* are carved before the *sigi* ceremony by its participants. The young initiated dignitaries called *olubaru*, "masters of the bush," are responsible for the rites pertaining to the "Great Mask" that bears the same name as the bullroarers and that is carved, painted, and consecrated for the ceremony. The *olubaru* have completed a long retreat, during which they have learned the special language of *sigi* as well as the handling of the bullroarers, 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



14. BULLROARERS MADE OF WOOD AND IRON. FROM GRIAULE 1938:253, FIG. 43.

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 bullroarers 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 fetus, 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 genitor of mankind. The third bullroarer/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," *imina na*, was carved for the *sigi* to represent Dyongou Sérou as an ancestor.

For the Dogon, these bullroarers 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 bullroarer bears the same name as the Great Mask: in effect, it too is a mask.

The bullroarer 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 bullroarer that accompanies the appearance of the Great Mask. Held vertically on the shoulder of a bearer, the Great Mask ar-

rives in the public square; it circles the altar consecrated to the Nommo to ask him for the soul that had been refused because of its impurity. It obtains it and returns to show its thanks. Then it goes to the terrace of the deceased's house. A member of the deceased's family attaches a live chicken, representing the soul that has finally been granted, to the top of the Great Mask. It then returns to the public square to thank its genitor. It is his speech that is translated by the humming of the bullroarer, which continues to sound while the carrier places the mask in the cave consecrated to it.

The Dogon are not satisfied merely with setting up their own categories, and with establishing correspondences between them. Whether it concerns a ceremony or a familial event, the analysis of a ritual text or a simple inquiry, everyone questioned seemed to have a keen taste for speculations. As Griaule said regarding information about certain roles attributed both to rock paintings and to masks: "Rather than contradictions, these should be seen as differences in interpretations, as are found in any dogma" (Griaule 1938:423, n. 1). Those Dogon who have penetrated deeply into their traditions and their interpretations become scholars in their own fashion. They learn to manipulate an exegesis of reflections that their own customs, beliefs, and arts have inspired among their people. This is their work, and the reason why, in view of their age, function in society, and competence, they are respectfully listened to during meetings and sought out when a problem arises in their community.

Performances of a mask and its actions are always accompanied by various texts — "speech" — and it is clear what value West African societies accord this term. Masks are witnesses of the dead that "enchant" all of society by their lively presence. As such, are they also, as a competent informant suggested, the "twins" of those who created and then wore them in order to tell their story? Just as one does not kill or eat one's totemic prohibition, one never makes or wears a mask depicting it. On the other hand, this particular mask can be made and worn by someone with whom one has a "joking" relationship, who assumes a cathartic role in regard to the person whose prohibition it is. The joking relative can wear it with impunity, as a sort of mockery.

If we look once again at Dogon cosmogony, we see that the Fox, who created the mask, made it to represent his original twin, to defy and combat him, but also to recall his sacrifice and temporary death. He was immediately countered by this twin, who the next day made the same tree "dance," green and fully leaved. □

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ery of Northwest Coast
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covered the captives from
gh blackmail (Abrossin
Howe Bancroft, *History of*
1841, p. 111).

design of the book, in a few instances signifi-
cant 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 spectacul-
ar. Equally important, Jonaitis 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 Mu-
seum of Natural History receiving well-
deserved attention in this striking volume.

Victoria Wyatt

University of Washington, Seattle

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 called 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 1938:343 ff).
2. "Dogon knowledge can be divided into four stages which are, in order of increasing importance: *giri so*, 'front speech,' the first stage of knowledge consisting of simple explanations in which mythic personages are often disguised, . . . *benne so*, 'side speech,' in which the explanations for certain rites are given and in which coordination appears only within each major division, . . . *bolo so*, '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 1952:27). For more information on the itinerant 60-year ceremonies that occur during seven consecutive years in diverse Dogon areas see Dieterlen 1971:1-11).
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 dyeing 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. The *kanaga* also represents a water insect that, in order to

benefit the Fox, wanted to moor Nommo's ark after its descent. In the end the Fox died, after causing grave disorders on Earth. The *kanaga* mask represents the insect on its back, four legs in the air, imploring his 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 belongs, was composed of mixed twins (Dieterlen 1956). All her life Yasigui remained the female twin of the Fox. The line of the song quoted here is followed by another that informants 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 *yasigine* to the cemetery (Griaule 1938:534).

8. The *sa* tree is the *Lannea acida*. 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. These adventures are represented by objects 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. The Malinke, Soninke, and Dogon are not scarified.

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 — notably 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 considerable contribution of cinema. For example, the films made by Jean Rouch among the Dogon have permitted us and our informants to view and to 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 or history 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, Ambibe Babadye, crouching in front of them, repeating softly in *sigi* 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 titre d'honneur des Aray (Dogon, Mali)* (Paris, 1982).

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ROSEN: Notes from page 53

Okherre ma chaoto e igi mo: "If a palm tree does not cooperate with the ground it will not bear fruit." Without the deep concern and sensitivity shown in this work by my excellent research assistant, Mr. Pius Guobadia, the path would have been most difficult. Mr. Ademola Williams, lecturer in textiles at the University of Benin, who advised on the interpretation of illustrations based on my field notes, was also of great assistance, and Dr. Thomas E. Aigbovia, director of statistics for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Bendel State, offered valuable information and support. I am very grateful to my colleagues at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) for their continuous support of this project: Prof. S. Irein Wangboje, dean, Faculty of Creative Arts and deputy vice chancellor; Dr. Joseph Nwadowsky, head of cultural research, Centre for Social, Cultural and Environmental Research; Dr. Foluso Ogbe, Department of Botany; Principal Health Sister Joan Nwuga; and Mr. Makole Azugbene, faculty officer for Creative Arts.

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I am also grateful to Chief Nosakhare Isekhure (Isekhure of Benin) for giving me advice on ritual matters; Ohen Ebbierhen, Priest Ama Orunwense, for initiating me into the Olokun priesthood; and to Babalawo Azaigueni, priest, and traditional doctor Imafidon Azaigueni for initiating me into the Ifa priesthood. Thanks go to Miss Esther E. Emokpae for her excellent typing and endless patience, and to Karen Kimmons for her organizational skills in preparing the final draft. A very special acknowledgment must be given to my research adviser, Mr. Ikponmwosa Osemwegie, who for numerous hours combed through this material and who directed the course of my field work.

Finally, without the participation and cooperation of the following people, this work would not have been possible: Madam Aigbovia, Igiohen (Chief Priest), Oredo Local Government Area (Fig. 22); Madam Igbinosa Eresoyen, Igiohen, Benin City (Fig. 16); Madam Ighomo Ogbebo, Igiohen, Oredo Local Government Area (Figs. 24, 25); Chief Priest Anthony E. Ogiemwanye, Igiohen, Oredo Local Government Area (Figs. 17, 20); the late Chief Ehiadiaduwa Onaghino, Igiohen, Benin City; Pa Onaiwu Ugiagbe, Benin City (Figs. 21, 23); Chief Priest Uyekpen, Igiohen, Benin City.

1. The information presented in this paper has been gathered solely from field research. My ongoing investigation into the traditional uses of pattern and decoration in Olokun ritual, 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.

I used Agheyisi (1986), Aigbe (1985), Melzian (1937), and A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language (1979) as orthographical sources.

2. Though both men and women can be priests, for the sake of convenience I shall use the masculine pronoun when referring generally to *ohen*. Before an *ohen* can initiate someone else into the priesthood, he must have gone through a third-month ceremony and a third-year ceremony following his own initiation.

3. White chalk (kaolin) is sold in molded form according to size and weight. Pieces are presented as sacrificial gifts to the shrine or river and are also used in prayer; in prayer to Olokun, it is sometimes ground and mixed with salt.

4. *Emaba*, an instrument combining a bell and a drum, is no longer in use. The miniature rattle used in sacrificial river rites is also referred to by this name, as is the stick used to beat a drum.

5. This environment encompasses the interior of the shrine, the compound (surrounding it on the north, south, east, and west), and junctions in roads closest to the shrine.

6. It is uncertain whether there is a relationship between the description of designs in this myth and the use of iconography in the shrine.

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

a) Those who display the unusual condition of hair growth called *agbiyagha* (hair from the spirit world) 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 *ohen* may not enter her shrine or don protective charms or cloths that are worn for worship, and in fact she will usually lock her shrine and abstain from any ritual practices; e) It is forbidden to visit a mother and her newborn; f) One must not walk underneath a clothesline; g) One must not view or dress a corpse; h) Initiation rites may not be discussed with noninitiates; i) Because of divination, it may sometimes be taboo to eat after sunset; j) One must abstain from partaking of food and drink that are offered openly at public gatherings.

8. *Afo* is classified as *Nekhere*, a small spreading plant with a fragrant lavender flower during the dry season; *ikhinmwain* is *Smooth Neouboldia* (Gledhill 1979: 53, fig. 90).

9. The description of the deity called Adabi in Melzian's Bini dictionary (1937:2) parallels the explanation for *igha-ede*: "ADABI — A deity which stands on the boundary between heaven and the world. On their way to heaven, people rest a while — ADABI is also worshiped by Olokun priestesses and priests." In certain situations one might perhaps regard Adabi as the spiritual force that operates *igha-ede*.

10. As explained by Bini historian Ikponmwosa Osemwegie.

11. *Ese* can mean an obstacle; sacrifices open life paths that become blocked by various problems.

12. Although this song is used in the shrine, its source can be traced to the palm-wine bar.

13. *Daghorome da* is a combination of Ishan and Edo languages.

14. Most of the *ohen* I interviewed were initiated into the priesthoods of other deities as well as Olokun. Many were also followers of Orunmila, Oggun, Sango, and Eziza.

Medicines that can be aided by the use of *igha-ede* were categorized by informants. The first category is *obo*, made from various plant substances that are generally macerated by hand, then cooked into ashes in an earthenware vessel. The ash is ground on a stone or in a mortar, mixed with gin to form a thick paste, and marked on the client's body through razor incisions. The second category, *ukhnmwain*, comprises medicine that can be ingested in liquid form. In some instances roots or barks are mixed with native gin in a bottle. The third category, *oki*, is a bath preparation that is generally made from leaves macerated by hand and squeezed with water.

15. Emokpoluwa, a praise name for the priestess's shrine, was spoken while she was dancing in trance during her Olokun initiation.

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ALLEN: Notes from page 63

1. The Swahili coast or Swahili world is generally rec stretch from Mogadishu (2°N) all the way to Tunge short distance south of Cape Delgado on the Tan Mozambique border (about 12°S), and to include the C Archipelago. The northern border, however, has southward in comparatively recent times.

2. The official account of Napoleon Bonaparte's diso in Egypt was published in Paris in many volumes b 1790 and 1814, simply entitled *Description d'Egypte*.

3. By "Shirazi," I mean following a certain sort of p regime whose links with Shiraz in Persia were tenuo: Allen 1982).

4. (Greenlaw 1976:103-30). Strictly speaking, this sort e work and fretted decoration is known in Sudan. Gr tells us, as *shish*, *shareikha*, or *sharfa*.

5. See N. Bennett's entry on "Furniture" in *Encyc Britannica* 1962.

6. One version of the Swahili *Chronicle* of nearby Pate refers to Siyu as *miji uca mafundi*, "town of craftsmen."

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NUNLEY: Notes from page 75

1. Christine Galt of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourist opened this new window on Carnival for me.

2. The Castros became totally committed to this p going to Trinidad to experience Carnival for them. They later talked to Mr. Innis Goden, a producer of a program that highlights West Indian communities in timore and Washington, D.C., areas. Von Martin, Washington, also advised them about the design of the lation.

Financial help arrived in the form of a generous gran the Rockefeller Foundation, which matched an implem grant from the National Endowment fo Humanities. We were also offered an additional amou the design of the installation.

The following articles in this issue were accepted for p tion after being refereed by members of the *African A* view panel:

- "Masks and Mythology among the Dogon," page 34
- "Chalk Iconography in Olokun Worship," page 44
- "The *Kiti Cha Eni* and Other Swahili Chairs," page 5
- "A Visit to Ogume in 1937," page 64