Artists the world over shape knowledge and material into works of unique historical importance. The artists of ancient Ife, ancestral home to the Yoruba and mythic birthplace of gods and humans, clearly were interested in creating works that could be read. Breaking the symbolic code that lies behind the unique meanings of Ife’s ancient sculptures, however, has vexed scholars working on this material for over a century. While much remains to be learned, thanks to a better understanding of the larger corpus of ancient Ife arts and the history of this important southwestern Nigerian center, key aspects of this code can now be discerned. In this article I explore how these arts both inform and are enriched by early Ife history and the leaders who shaped it.1 In addition to core questions of art iconography and symbolism, I also address the potent social, political, religious, and historical import of these works and what they reveal about Ife (Ile-Ife) as an early cosmopolitan center.

My analysis moves away from the recent framing of ancient Ife art from the vantage of Yoruba cultural practices collected in Nigeria more broadly, and/or the indiscriminate use of regional and modern Yoruba proverbs, poems, or language idioms to inform this city’s unique 700-year-old sculptural oeuvre.2 Instead I focus on historical and other considerations in metropolitan Ife itself. This shift is an important one because Ife’s history, language, and art forms are notably different than those in the wider Yoruba region and later eras. My approach also differs from recent studies that either ahistorically superimpose contemporary cultural conventions on the reading of ancient works or unilinearly posit art development models concerning form or material differences that lack grounding in Ife archaeological evidence. My aim instead is to reengage these remarkable ancient works alongside diverse evidence on this center’s past and the time frame specific to when these sculptures were made. In this way I bring art and history into direct engagement with each other, enriching both within this process.

One of the most important events in ancient Ife history with respect to both the early arts and later era religious and political traditions here was a devastating civil war pitting one group, the supporters of Obatala (referencing today at once a god, a deity pantheon, and the region’s autochthonous populations) against affiliates of Odudua (an opposing deity, religious pantheon, and newly arriving dynastic group). The Ikedu oral history text addressing Ife’s history (an annotated kings list transposed from the early Ife dialect; Akinjogbin n.d.) indicates that it was during the reign of Ife’s 46th king—what appears to be two rulers prior to the famous King Obalufon II (Ekenwa? Fig. 1)—that this violent civil war broke out. This conflict weakened the city enough so that there was little resistance when a military force under the conqueror Oranmiyan (Fig. 2) arrived in this historic city. The dispute likely was framed in part around issues of control of Ife’s rich manufacturing resources (glass beads, among these). Conceivably it was one of Ife’s feuding polities that invited this outsider force to come to Ife to help rectify the situation for their side.

As Akinjogbin explains (1992:98), Oranmiyan and his calvary, after gaining control of Ife “… stemmed the … uprising by siding with the weaker … of the disunited pre-Odudua groups …. [driving Obalufon II] into exile at Ilara and became the Ooni.” Eventually, the deposed King Obalufon II with the help of a large segment of Ife’s population was able to defeat this military leader and the latter’s supporters. In Ife today, Odudua is identified in ways that complement Oranmiyan. As Akinittan explains (p.c.):4 “It was Odudua who was the last to come to Ife, a man who arrived as a warrior, and took advantage of the situation to...
important autochthonous Ife resident and as an opponent to “Odudua.” A number of remarkable granite figures in the Ore Grove were the focus of ceremonies into the mid-twentieth century. One of these works called Olofefura (Fig. 4) is believed to represent the deified Ore (Dennett 1910:21; Talbot 1926:2:339; Allison 1968:13). Features of the sculpture suggest a dwarf or sufferer of a congenital disorder in keeping with the identity of many first (Obatala) dynasty shrine figures with body anomalies or disease. Regalia details also offer clues. A three-strand choker encircles Olofefura’s neck; three bracelet coils embellish the wrist; three tassels hang from the left hip knot. These features link this work—and Ore—to the earth, autochthon, and to the Ogboni association, a group promoted by Obalufon II in part to preserve the rights of autochthonous residents.

The left hip knot shown on the wrapper of this work, as well as that of the taller, more elegant Ore Grove priest or servant figure (Fig. 5), also recalls one of Ife’s little-known origin myths within the Obatala priestly family (Akin titan p.c.). According to this myth, Obatala hid the ase (vital force) necessary for Earth’s solidity within this knot, requiring his younger brother Odudua, after his theft of materials from Obatala, to wait for the latter’s help in completing the task. Consistent with this, Ogboni members are said to tie their cloth wrappers on the left hip in memory of Obatala’s use of this knot to safeguard the requisite ase (Owakinyin p.c.). Iron inserts in the coiffure of the taller Ore figure complement those secured in the surface of the Oranmiyan staff (Fig. 2), indicating that this sculpture—like many ancient Ife works of stone—were made in the same era, e.g. the early fourteenth century (see below).

An additional noteworthy feature of these figures, and others, is the importance of body proportion ratios. Among the Yoruba today, the body is seen to comprise three principal parts: head, trunk, and legs (Ajibade n.d.3). Many Ife sculptural examples (see Fig. 4; compare also Figs. 15–16) emphasize a larger-than-life size scale of the head (orí) in relationship to the rest of the body (a roughly 1:4 ratio). Yoruba scholars have seen this head-privileging ratio as reinforcing the importance of this body part as a symbol of ego and destiny (orí), personality (wú), essential nature (lwú), and authority (àse) (Abimbola 1975:390ff, Aibiodun 1994, Abiodun et. al 1991:12ff). Or as Ogunremi suggests (1998:113), such features highlight: “The wealth or poverty of the nation … [as] equated with the ‘head’ (orí) of the ruler of a particular locality.”

Both here and in ancient Ife art more generally, however, there is striking variability in related body proportions. Such ratios range from roughly 1:4 for the Ore grove deity figure (Fig. 4), the complete copper alloy king figure (Fig. 15), the couple from Ita...
Yemoo (Fig. 8), and many of the terracotta sculptures, to roughly 1:6 for the taller stone Ore grove figures (Fig. 5) and the copper seated figure from Tada (Fig. 11). Why these proportional differences exist in Ife art is not clear, but issues of class and/or status appear to be key. Whereas sculptures of Ife royals and gods often show 1:4 ratios, most nonroyals show proportions much closer to life. In ancient Ife art, the higher the status, the greater likelihood that body proportions will differ from nature in ways that greatly enhance the size of the head. This not only highlights the head as a prominent status and authority marker, but also points to the primacy of social difference in visual rendering.

While many Ife (and Yoruba) scholars have focused on how the head is privileged in relationship to the body, what also is important, and to date overlooked, is that the belly is equally important. The full, plump torsos (chest and stomachs) of Ife figures depicting rulers and deities complement modern Yoruba beliefs about health and well being on the one hand, and wealth and power on the other. Related ideas are suggested by the modern Yoruba term ọdù (“full”) which, when applied to an individual, means both “he has blessing in abundance” and “fortune shines on him” (Idowu 1962:33). A full belly is vital to royals and deities not only as a reference to qualities of wellbeing but also as markers of state and religious fullness. In his extended discussion of the concept of ọdù, the indigenous Ife religious scholar Idowu notes (1962:33) that the same term also indicates a “very large and deep pot (container)” and by extension anything that is of “sizable worth” and/or “superior quality.” This word features centrally in the name for the high god, Ol-ọdù-maře. According to Idowu (1962:34) the latter use of the term signifies “He is One who is superlative,” ọdù here invoking his very extraordinariness. Because large ceramic vessels called ọdù were employed in ancient Ife contexts as containers for highly valued goods such as beads and art (including the Ita Yemoo king figure, Fig. 16), this idiom offers an interesting modern complement and descriptor for early Ife sculptural portrayals of gods and kings as containers holding many benefits. A complementary feature of many ancient Ife works is that of composure or inner calm (àìkominún, “tranquility of the mind” in modern Yoruba; Abraham 1958:388). This notable quality finds potential expression through the complete repose shown in their faces of early Ife art (Figs. 1, 15, 16), a quality that increases the sense of monumentality and power in these remarkable works.

The ancient Ife arts from Ife’s Ore shrine, which appear to have been carved as a single sculptural group, include a stone vessel with crocodiles on its sides (Fig. 6). On its lid a frog (or toad) is shown in the jaws of a snake. The latter motif references the contestation between Obatala and Odudua for the center’s control (Akin tititan p.c.; Adelekan p.c.). According Akin tititan (p.c.), this design addresses the less-than-straight manner in which Odudua asserted control over Ife, since poisonous snakes are
thought not to consume frogs (and toads). The crocodile, like several other animal figurations from this grove, honor Ore’s hunting and fishing prowess. Carved crocodiles, giant eggs, a mudfish (African lung fish), and an elephant tusk reference the watery realm that dominated primordial Ife. A granite slab from this same site shows evenly placed holes (Fig. 7). This work served perhaps as a real or metaphorical measuring device for Ife’s changing water levels, in keeping both with frequent flooding here (referenced in local accounts about Obalufon II’s wife Queen Moremi) as well as Ife origin myths in which the Earth is said to have been formed only after Odudua sprinkled dirt upon the water’s surface (Idowu 1962, Blier 2004). One especially striking art-rich Ife site that also seems to have been identified with Obalufon II and his famous political truce is Ita Yemoo, the term yemoo serving as the title for first-dynasty Ife queens. This temple complex lies near the site where the annual Edi festival terminates. The Edi ritual is dedicated to both autochthonous rights and trade. The work is stylistically very similar to the Obalufon mask (Fig. 1). Both are made of pure copper and were probably cast by members of the same workshop. Although the forearms and hands of the seated figures are now missing, enough remains to suggest that they may have been positioned in front of the body in a way resembling the well-known Ogboni association gestural motif of left hand fisted above right (Fig. 12). This same gesture is referenced in the smaller standing figure (also cast of pure copper) from this same Tada shrine (Fig. 13). Obalufon descendant Ololujudo reaffirmed (p.c.) the gestural identity of the standing Tada figure. As I have argued elsewhere (1985) Yoruba works of copper are associated primarily with Ogboni and Obalufon, consistent with the latter ruler’s association with bronze casting and economic wellbeing. Another notable Ogboni reference in these two copper works from Tada is the diamond-patterned wrapper (Morton Williams 1960:369, Aronson 1992) tied at the left hip with a knot.

A second copper alloy figure of a queen from the Ita Yemoo site is a tiny sculpture showing a recumbent crowned female circumscribing a vessel set atop a throne. She holds a scepter in one hand; the other grasps the throne’s curving handle (Fig. 9). Her seat depicts a miniature of the quartz and granite stools identified in the modern era primarily with Ife’s autochthonous (Obatala-linked) priests. The scepter that she holds is similar to another work from Ita Yemoo depicting a man with unusual (for Ife) diagonal cheek mark (Willett 2004:M26a), a pattern similar to markings worn by northern Yoruba residents from Offa among other areas. The recumbent queen’s unusual composition appears to reference the transfer of power at Ife from the first dynasty rulership group to the new (second) dynasty line of kings, here symbolized through a queen, what appears to be Queen Moremi, the wife of Obalufon II.

Another striking Ita Yemoo sculpture, a Janus staff mount (Fig. 10) shares similar symbolism. The work depicts two gaged human heads positioned back-to-back, one with vertical line facial marks, the other plain-faced, suggesting the union of two dynasties (see below). This scepter likely was used as a club and evokes both the punishment that befell supporters of either dynastic group committing serious crimes and the unity of the two factions in state rituals involving human offerings, among these coronations. This scepter mount’s weight and heightened arsenic content reinforces this identity. A larger Janus scepter mount from this same site depicts on one side a youthful head and on the other a very elderly man, consistent with two different dynasty portrayals, and the complementary royal unification/division themes.

A large Ife copper figure of a seated male was recovered at Tada (Fig. 11), an important Niger River crossing point situated some 200 km northeast of Ife. This sculpture is linked in important ways not only to King Obalufon II, but also to Ife trade, regional economic vitality, and the key role of this ruler in promoting Ogboni (called Imole in Ife), the association dedicated to both autochthonous rights and trade. The work is stylistically very similar to the Obalufon mask (Fig. 1). Both are made of pure copper and were probably cast by members of the same workshop. Although the forearms and hands of the seated figure are now missing, enough remains to suggest that they may have been positioned in front of the body in a way resembling the well-known Ogboni association gestural motif of left hand fisted above right (Fig. 12). This same gesture is referenced in the smaller standing figure (also cast of pure copper) from this same Tada shrine (Fig. 13). Obalufon descendant Ololujudo reaffirmed (p.c.) the gestural identity of the standing Tada figure. As I have argued elsewhere (1985) Yoruba works of copper are associated primarily with Ogboni and Obalufon, consistent with the latter ruler’s association with bronze casting and economic wellbeing. Another notable Ogboni reference in these two copper works from Tada is the diamond-patterned wrapper (Morton Williams 1960:369, Aronson 1992) tied at the left hip with a knot.

How the ancient Ife seated sculpture (and other works) found their way to this Tada shrine has been a subject of consider-
able scholarly debate. I concur with Thurstan Shaw in his view (1973:237) that these sculptures most likely were brought to this critical river-crossing point because of the site’s identity with Niger River trade. As Shaw notes (1973:237) these works seem to be linked to Yoruba commercial engagement along the Niger River “… marking perhaps important toll or control points of that trade.” Specifically, the seated Tada figure offers important evidence of Ife’s early control of this critical Niger River crossing point. Copper alloy castings of an elephant and two ostriches (animals identified with valuable regional trade goods) which were found on this same Tada site likely reference the importance of ivory and exotic feathers in the era’s long distance trade. The goddess Olokun (Fig. 14) who spans both the first and second dynasty religious pantheons, is closely identified with promoting related commerce.

**CONTESTING DYNASTIES: POLITICS OF THE BODY**

Two copper alloy castings depicting royals (Figs. 15–16) offer important insight into early Ife society, politics, and history. One is the half-figure of a male from Ife’s Wunmonije site, where a corpus of life-size copper alloy heads (Figs. 27–28) was unearthed. The other sculpture is the notably similar full-length standing figure from the Ife site of Ita Yemoo, the locale where the royal couple (Fig. 8), tiny enthroned queen sculpture (Fig. 9), and metal scepter (Fig. 10) were created. Based on style and similarities in form, the two works clearly were fashioned around the same time, conceivably during Obalufon II’s reign. Their crowns are different from the tall, conical, veiled are crowns worn by Ife monarchs today. The latter crown a form also seen on the tiny Ife figure of a king found in Benin (Fig. 17).

Based on both their cap-form head coverings and the horn each holds in the left hand, the figures have been identified as portrayings rulers in battle (Owedale p.c.). Not only are the rulers’ caps reminiscent of the smaller crowns (arinla) worn by Yoruba rulers in battle, suggests Odewale (p.c.), but historically, antelope horns similar to those carried in their left hands were used in battle. These horns were filled with powerful ase (authority/force/command), substances that could turn the course of war in one’s favor. When so filled, the horns assured that the king’s words would come to pass, a key attribute of Yoruba statecraft. The two appear to be competitors (e.g. competing lineages) vying for the Ife throne, references to the ruling heads of Ife’s first (Obatala) and second (Odudua) dynasties shown here in ritual battle.

While these two royal sculptures are very similar in style and iconography, there are notable differences, including the treatment of the rulers’ faces—one showing vertical line marks, the other lacking facial lines. There are also notable distinctions in headdress details, specifically the diadem shapes and cap tiers. The diadem of the Wunmonije king with striated facial marks (Fig. 15) displays a rosette pattern surmounted by a pointed plume, this motif resting atop a concentric circle. The headdress diadem on the plain-faced (unstriated) Ita Yemoo king figure instead consists of a simple concentric circle surmounted by a pointed plume. The rosette diadem of the king with vertical facial markings seems to carry somewhat higher rank, for his diadem is set above the disk-form, as if to mark superior position. Moreover, the cap of the king with vertical facial markings integrates four tiers of beads while the plain-faced king’s cap shows only three.
These differences both in crown diadem shapes and bead rows suggest that, among other things, the king bearing the vertical line facial marks and rosette-form diadem (the Wunmonije site ruler) carries a rank that is both different from and in some ways higher than that of the plain-faced royal.

There also are striking distinctions in facial marking and regalia details of these two king figures, differences that offer additional insight into the meaning and identity of these and other works from this center. Similar rosette and concentric circle diadem distinctions can be seen in many ancient Ife works. The Aroye vessel (Fig. 18), which displays rosette motifs and a monstrous human head referencing ancient Ife earth spirits (erunmole, imole; Odewale p.c.), may have functioned as a divination vessel linked to Obatala, a form today in Ife that employs a water-filled pot. The copper alloy head of first dynasty Ife goddess Olokun (Fig. 14) also incorporates a rosette with sixteen petals. Ife chiefs and priests today sometimes wear beaded pendants (peke) that incorporate similar eight-petal flower forms or rosettes. These individuals include a range of primarily Obatala (first dynasty) affiliates: Obalale (the priest of Obatala), Obalase (the Olourogbo priest), Obalara (the Obalufon priest), and Chief Woye Asire (the priest of Ife springs and markets). Rosette-form diadems such as these also can be seen on ancient Ife terracotta animals identified with Obatala, among these the elephant (Fig. 20) and duiker antelope heads from the Lafogido site. These rosettes suggest the importance of plants (flowers), and the primacy of ancient land ownership and gods to the Obatala group.

Concentric circle-form diadems, in contrast, seem to reference political agency as linked in part to the new Odudua dynasty (Akititan p.c., Adelekan p.c.). In part for this reason, a concentric circle is incorporated into the iron gate at the front of the modern Ife palace. Agbaje-Williams notes (1991:11) that the burial spots of important chiefs sometimes are marked with stone circles as well. Concentric circle form diadems are displayed on the terracotta sculptures of ram and hippopotamus heads from Ife’s Lafogido site. Both animals seem to be connected to the Odudua line and the associated sky deity pantheon of Sango among others (Idowu 1962:94, 142; Matory 1994:96). If, as Ekpo Eyo suggests (1977:114; see also Eyo 1974) the group of Lafogido site animal sculptures were conceived as royal emblems, their distinctive crown diadems suggest that these works, like the two king figures, were intended to represent two different dynasties and/or the gods associated with them. The king figure with vertical facial markings and a rosette-form diadem instantiates the first dynasty or Obatala rulership line. The plain-faced ruler with concentric circle diadem evokes the second or Odudua royal line.

Number symbolism in diadem and other forms is important in these and other ancient Ife art works serving to mark grade and status. According to Ife Obatala Chief Adelekan (p.c.), eight-petal rosettes are associated with higher Obatala grades. That the Wunmonije king figure wears an eight-petal rosette (Fig. 15) while the Aroye vessel (Fig. 18) and Olokun head (Fig. 14) incorporate sixteen-petal forms is based on power difference. Eight is the highest number accorded humans, suggests Chief Adelekan, whereas sixteen is used for gods.

**Facial Marking Distinctions: Ife as a Cosmopolitan Center**

One of the most striking differences in the two royal figures and other Ife arts can be seen in the variant facial markings. Scholars have put forward several explanations for these facial pattern disparities in Ife and early regional arts. Among the earliest were William Fagg and Frank Willett (1960:31), who identified vertical line facial marks with royal crown veils and the “shadows” cast onto the face by associated strings of beads. This is highly unlikely, however, since many ancient works depicting women and nonroyals without crowns display the same vertical facial patterns. Moreover, of the two copper-alloy king figures (Figs. 15–16), only one shows vertical marks, and they both wear a kind of cap (oro) that does not include a beaded veil. Modern woodcarvings of Ife royalties wearing traditional veiled crowns also do not show vertical line facial marks. Due to related inconsistencies, Willett would later retract his original shade-line theory and Fagg would not again discuss this in his later scholarship. As suggested above, the presence and lack of vertical facial marks on the two Ife king figures further reinforces the identity of these rulers as leaders of the two competing dynasties.

An array of early and later artistic evidence supports this. Among these is a Lower Niger style vessel (Fig. 21) collected near Benin that displays a human face with vertical markings beneath the head of an elephant, an animal that in Ife is closely identified with Obatala and the first dynasty. This elephant head has its “shadows” cast onto the face by associated strings of beads. This is highly unlikely, however, since many ancient works depicting women and nonroyals without crowns display the same vertical facial patterns. Moreover, of the two copper-alloy king figures (Figs. 15–16), only one shows vertical marks, and they both wear a kind of cap (oro) that does not include a beaded veil. Modern woodcarvings of Ife royalties wearing traditional veiled crowns also do not show vertical line facial marks. Due to related inconsistencies, Willett would later retract his original shade-line theory and Fagg would not again discuss this in his later scholarship. As suggested above, the presence and lack of vertical facial marks on the two Ife king figures further reinforces the identity of these rulers as leaders of the two competing dynasties.
with vertical facial marks also was buried (Eyo 1974). Nineteenth and early twentieth century royal masks of the Igala (a Yoruba-linked group) associated with the ancient Akpoto dynasty (who are ancestors of the current Igala rulers), display similar thin vertical line facial markings referencing the early royals of this group (Sargent 1988:32; Boston 1968:172) (Fig. 22). The ancient Ife terracotta head that represents Obalufon I (Osangangan Obamakin, the father of Obalufon II) displays vertical marks (Fig. 23) consistent with the king's first-dynasty associations. Vertical line facial marks such as these appear to reference Ife royals (as well as other elites) and ideas of autochthony more generally. The fact that some 50 percent of the ancient Ife terracotta heads and figures show vertical line facial markings suggests how important this group still was in the early second dynasty era when these works were commissioned. The second largest grouping of Ife terracotta works—around 35 percent—show no facial markings at all, in keeping with modern Ife traditions forbidding facial marking for members of Ife resident families.

Ife oral tradition maintains that facial marking practices were at one point outlawed. Accordingly, late nineteenth to early twentieth century art and cultural practices display a strong aversion to facial marks of any type. Most likely it was Ife King Obalufon II who helped promote this change after his return to power as part of his plan for a more lasting truce. This change, and the need sometimes to cover one's historical family and dynastic identity for reasons of political expediency, is also suggested by two masks, one of terracotta and one of copper, both identified with Obalufon II. One of these (Fig. 1) is plain-faced and the other (Fig. 24) has prominent vertical markings. Consistent with Obalufon II’s role in bringing to Ife, and serving as a key early art patron, his association with masking forms that shield (cover) the identities of the once-competing Ife groups is noteworthy. Like a majority of ancient Ife sculptures with and without facial marks, these works appear to date to the same period, underscoring the fact that different groups were living together at Ife at this time.

Like the Wunmonije king figure (Fig. 15), the bronze head associated with the goddess Olokun (Fig. 14) also has vertical facial marks and a rosette-decorated crown. Olokun, the ancient Ife finance minister and later commerce, bead, and sea god, is said to date to Ife’s first dynasty. The copper alloy head now in the British Museum, with both vertical facial marks and a concentric circle diadem, appears to reference a chief in one of Ife’s autochthonous lineages (e.g. a number of first dynasty elite) who lived in Ife in the early second dynasty era before the ban on facial marking took effect.
Several Ife heads show thick vertical facial lines. These marks seem to depict individuals participating in rituals in which blister beetles or leaves (from the *bùjé* plant) were employed to mark the face with short-term patterns on the skin (Willett 1967:Fig. 23). These temporary “marks” may have served as references to first dynasty elites or their descendants during certain Ife rituals (Owomoyela n.d. n.p.; Willett 1967:Figs. 13–14, pl. 23; see also discussion in Fagg and Willett 1960:31, Drewal 1989:238–39 n. 65). Interestingly, sculptures depicting these thick lines characteristically show flared nostrils and furled brows, suggesting the pain that accompanied facial blistering practices such as these. Several Florescence Era Ife terracotta heads (roughly 5 percent of the whole) display three elliptical “cat whisker” facial marks at the corners of the mouth (Fig. 25) similar to those associated with more recent northeastern Yagba Yoruba, a group who later came under Nupe rule. In one such sculpture, the marks extend into the cheeks in a manner consistent with later Yoruba *abaja* facial markings, indicating an historic connection between the two. According to Andrew Apter (p.c.), a group of Yagba Yoruba occupy an Ife ward where the Iyagba dialect is still sometimes spoken. Most historic Yagba communities are found in the Ekiti Yoruba region where early iron working sites have been found (Obayemi 1992:73, 74). It is possible that Ife’s Yagba population was involved in complementary iron-working and smelting activities at this center. This tradition also offers interesting insight into Benin figures holding blacksmith tools with three similar facial marks, works said to depict messengers from Ife.

A rather unusual Janus figure from ancient Ife shows a man with diagonal facial markings similar to those of historic and modern Igbo Nri titleholders, suggesting the role a similar group may have played in early Ife as well. Today it is Chief Obawinrin, head of Ife’s Iwinrin lineage, who represents Ife’s historic Igbo population during the annual Ife Edi festival. Associated rites are in part dedicated to Obalufon II’s wife, Queen Moremi, who is credited with stopping local Igbo (Ugbo) groups attacking Ife in the era in which she lived. Today Igbo residents also live in nearby regions south of Ife, among these communities such as Igala (Abimbola p.c., Lawal p.c., Awolalu 1979:26). These Ife-area Igbo populations appear to be distant relatives of autochthonous Igbo families, many of whom were forced out of the city by members of the new Odudua dynasty. Sculptures from Ife’s Iwinrin Grove, an Ife site closely linked to Ife’s “Igbo” population, characteristically show vertical line facial markings consistent with works linked to first dynasty Ife history and autochthony.

Another 5 percent of Ife sculptures portray Edo (Benin) style facial marks (forehead keloids) or patterns today characteristic of northeastern Yoruba/Nupe communities (a diagonal cheek line and/or vertical forehead line). The remaining 5 percent of the extant Ife terracotta works show unusual “mixed” facial patterns (generally “cat whisker” motifs along with other forms). These marks may reference intermarriages (social or political) at Ife in the early years of the new dynasty. The notable variety of these facial patterns in ancient Ife art makes clear the center’s importance as a cosmopolitan city sought out by people arriving from various regional centers. Features of Ife cosmopolitanism revealed in part through these variant facial markings are consistent with Ife’s identity as a center of manufacturing and trade. Similar issues are raised in Ife origin myths that identify this city as the home (birthplace) of humans of multiple races and ethnicities.

### A Corpus of Remarkable Copper Heads Personifying Local Ife Chiefs

A striking group of life-size copper and copper alloy heads (Figs. 27–28) was unearthed in the 1930s at the Wunmonije site behind the Ife palace along with the above-discussed king figure (Fig. 15). In addition to the original corpus of fifteen life-size heads from this site, a clearly related 4.25 inch high fragment of a copper alloy head consisting of a portion of a face showing a
nose and part of a mouth also was collected at an estate in Ado-
Ekiti and has been described as “identical with those from Wun-
monije” (Werner and Willett 1975: facing p. 142).

These sixteen life-size heads appear to have been created as part
of the truce that Obalufon II established between the embattled
Ife residents. One of the heads (Fig. 27) indeed is so similar to the
Obalufon mask as to depict the same individual.24 Frank Willett,
who published photographs of many of the life-size metal heads
in his monograph on Ife, suggests (1967:26–28) that these works
had important royal mortuary functions in which each was dis-
played with a crown and robes of office, in the course of ceremo-
nies following each ruler’s death.25 Willett proposes further that
the heads were commissioned as memorial sculptures (ako) con-
sistent with a later era Ife and Yoruba tradition of carved wooden
ako effigy figures used in commemorating deceased hunters. This
theory, which identifies the corpus of life-size cast heads as effigies
of successive rulers of the Ife city state, however, is premised on an
idea (now largely discredited; see also Lawal 2005:503ff.) that the
works were made by artists over a several-hundred-year period
(the reigns of sixteen monarchs). This theory is problematic not
only because the styles and material features of the heads are con-
sistent, but also because the heads were found together (divided
into two groups) and share a remarkably similar condition apart
from blows that some of them received during their discovery. The
shared condition indicates that they were interred for a similar
length of time and under similar circumstances.

The formal similarities in these heads have led most scholars,
myself included (Blier 1985), to argue that the works were cre-
ated in a short period of time and by fewer than a handful of art-
ists.26 With respect to style, as Thurstan Shaw notes (1978:134), “…
you are of a piece and look like the work of one generation, even
perhaps a single great artist.” These heads, I posited in this same
article, were cast in part to serve as sacred crown supports and
used during coronation rituals for a group of powerful Ife chiefs
who head the various core first and second dynasty lineages in the
city.27 These rites appear also to have been associated with Obalu-
fon since related priests have a role in Ife coronations still today.

The site where the heads were found today is identified as Obalu-
fon II’s burial site (Eyo 1976:n.p.). Ife Chief Obalara (Obalufon II’s
descendant and priest) crowns each new monarch at a Obalufon
shrine (igbo Obalara) near the Obatala temple a short distance
Today, when a descendant of King Obalufon wishes to commis-
sion shrine arts in conjunction with his worship, two copper alloy
heads, one plain faced, the other with vertical line facial markings,
are created (Oluymeni p.c.) (Fig. 30).

Some of these ancient Ife life-size heads have plain faces. Oth-
ers show vertical lines. These facial marking variables support the
likely use of these heads in coronations and other rites associated
with the powerful early Ife first- and second-dynasty-linked chiefs
who were brought together as part of Obalufon II’s truce. The
grouping of these heads, which in many ways also resemble the
Obalufon mask (Fig. 1), together reference (and honor) the leaders
of key families (now seen as orisa or gods) who had participated
in this conflict. Obalufon II also created a new city plan as part of
this truce, one in which the homesteads of these lineage leaders
were relocated to sites circumscribing the center of Ife and its pal-
ace (Blier 2012). In the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries, when the
city came under attack, the heads appear to have been buried for
safe keeping near their original shrine locale after many centuries
of use and their location eventually forgotten.

There are several ways that the heads could have been dis-
played in early Ife ritual contexts, among these earthen step-
form altars and tall supports similar to one photographed with
heads in Benin in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 29). The latter
staff would account for the presence of holes near the bases of
these works. Wooden mounts such as those known today here
as ako were fashioned to commemorate Ife elephant hunters.
These also could have been used for display purposes. A perhaps
related Ijebu-Ode known as okute and discussed by Ogunba
(1964:251) features roughly 4-foot wooden staffs with a symbolic
human head. These pole-like forms were secured in the ground
and “dressed” during annual rites commemorating early (first
dynasty) rulers of the region.
A striking terracotta vessel (Fig. 30) buried at the center of an elaborate potsherd pavement at Obalar’a Land, an Ife site long affiliated with the Obalufon family, also offers clues important to early display contexts of these heads. This vessel incorporates the depiction of a shrine featuring a naturalistic head with vertical line striations flanked by two cone-shaped motifs described by Garlake (1974:145) as crowns. The scene seems to portray an Obalufon altar with different types of crowns and an array of Obalufon and Ogboni ritual symbols that find use in coronations, among these edan Ogboni, consistent with the use of the Ife life-size heads in chiefly and royal enthronements overseen by the center’s Obalufon priesthood.

In a community outside of Ife, I learned of an important tradition that offers additional insight into this corpus of ancient Ife life-size heads. In the local Obalufon shrine are found sixteen copper alloy heads. While I was unable to see these works, in the course of several interviews with the elderly temple chief, I learned a considerable amount about them. He described them as erunmole (imole, earth spirits). This identity underscores the likely association of the heads as sacred icons honoring ongoing offices and/or titles (Abiodun 1974:138) rather than simple portraits (i.e. references to a specific person) (Underwood 1967:nos. 9, 11, 12).

Consistent with this, each of the sixteen copper alloy heads located in this rural Obalufon temple is said by the priest to have been identified with a “powerful” individual from Ife’s distant past who was subsequently deified, among these Oramfe (the thunder god), Obatala (god of the autochthonous residents), Oluorogbo (the early messenger deity), Obalufon (King Obalufon II), Oranmiyan (Obalufon’s adversary, the military conqueror), Obameri (an ancient warrior associated with both dynasties), and Ore (the autochthonous Ife hunter). These names harken back to important early personages and gods in the era of Obalufon II and the Ife civil war when the Ife life-size metal heads were made. The descendants and priests of these ancient heroes still play a role in the ritual life of this center. As explained to me by the priest of this temple: “These imole are sixteen in number, all sixteen heads are kings [Oba, here meaning also deified chiefs], the sixteen kings of erunmole.” The Ogboni association, of which this rural priest also was a member, similarly comprise here sixteen core members (titled officers). Lisa Aronson (1992:57) notes for the Yoruba center of Ijebu-Odu that nearly 90 percent of the chiefs in this center are members of Ogboni. There are other connections between the tradition of Obalufon metal heads honoring historic leaders and Ogboni arts. Not only are a majority of modern Yoruba copper alloy sculptures identified with both Ogboni and Obalufon, but the “sticks” (staffs) said to be secured to the modern Obalufon heads during display (Oluyemi p.c.), a ritual and aesthetic continuum extending back to the ancient Ife Florescence Era.

As with the two Ife king figures (Figs. 15–16), differences in the ancient Ife life-size heads’ facial markings and other features offer additional insight to their identity and meaning. Half of these sixteen life-size metal heads display vertical line marks that I have identified with autochthonous (first dynasty) elites; the others have plain faces complementing the new dynasty’s denunciation of facial marking. As explained to me by the priest at the rural Obalufon temple where the grouping of copper alloy heads were housed: “there were sixteen crowns in the olden days, eight tribal and eight nontribal.” In using the term “tribal” here, he is referring to Ife’s autochthonous residents. Like the new city plan created by Obalufon II as part of his truce, these heads give primacy to the display and sharing of power by lineage heads of both dynasties.

Other features of these works also are important. A majority of the plain-faced heads, but not the striated ones, include holes around the beard line probably for the attachment of an artificial beard of beads or hair. In the twentieth century, beards in Yoruba art often identify important leaders, priests, and others by signaling senior age status and rank. Because all the plain-faced heads include beard holes, but only a few with facial markings do, the plain-faced works seem to be linked to power and/or status different than that of the heads with vertical facial lines. The non-bearded heads conceivably reference ritual status and sacral power consistent with Obatala lineages today; the bearded...
heads instead seem to convey ideas of lineage leadership and political status consistent with the center’s new rulership line.31 Interestingly, four of the eight heads with facial lines are—like the Obalufon mask (Fig. 1) and the two of the Tada figures (Figs. 11, 13)—cast of nearly pure copper (96.8–99.7 percent), a feat that artists of ancient Greece and Rome, the Italian Renaissance, and Chinese bronze casters never achieved. The pure copper heads in this way differ materially from the stylistically similar heads that incorporate sizable amounts of alloys along with the copper (the associated copper content ranging from 68.8–79.8 percent).32 A majority of the latter are without vertical facial lines. The five nearly-pure copper heads additionally contain no detected zinc, a mineral that in the copper alloy heads ranges from 9.3–13.9 percent.33 Since half of the nearly- pure copper striated heads (two of the four) have beard holes, this small subset of works may have been intentionally differentiated in order to identify chiefs of both sacred and political status. One of these pure copper heads additionally displays red and black lines around the eyes (Fig. 28). This feature is said by Adedinni (p.c.) to identify a “most powerful person,” someone who is also a powerful imole (sacral power). To Obatala diviner Akintitan (p.c.), these eye surrounding lines reference someone who “can really see,” i.e., a person with unique access to the supernatural power that imbues one with spiritually charged insight.

Metal differences in these heads also carry important color differences that were significant to the ancient Ife patrons and artists. The pure copper works would have been redder, while those made from copper alloys were more yellow. The redder, nearly pure copper heads may have been linked to ideas of heightened potency or danger. And since casting pure copper is technically far more difficult than casting copper with alloy mixtures, the former heads also display greater skill, challenge, and risk on the part of the artist, attributes no doubt important to the meanings of these heads as well. This material feature, in short, also gives them special iconic power. The use of nearly pure copper in these works suggests not only how knowledgeable Ife artists were in the materials and technologies of casting, but also how willing they were to take related risks to achieve specific visual and symbolic ends in these works.

**DATING ANCIENT IFE ART**

How do the diverse forms and meanings of Ife’s early arts inform dating and other related questions? Dating ancient Ife art has posed many challenges to scholars, largely because many of these artifacts come from secondary sites, rather than from contexts that can be dated scientifically to the period when the works were made and first used (e.g. primary sites). While developing a chronology of Ife art has proven difficult, several schema have been published in recent decades. Following the late Eko Eyo, some Ife scholars have utilized the term “Pavement Era” (and concomitantly “Pre-Pavement” and “Post-Pavement” periods) to distinguish those art works that are linked to the period of Ife’s famous potsherd pavements. However, because these pavements are still seen (and used) in abundance in the center today, and in some cases reveal several different construction periods, the term “Pavement Era” is problematic. Ife historian Akinjogbin instead takes up (1992:96) local temporal terms to discuss Ife chronology. Without attributing dates, he notes that one such local term, Osangangan Obamakin, in some situations designates Ife King Obalufon I (the father of Obalufon II) and in others the early (first) dynasty with which he was affiliated ....34 Drewal ([1989:46] 2009:79) has attempted a temporal ordering of ancient Ife sculpture based on differences in media (stone vs. terracotta or metal) and/or assumed “expressive” qualities, but this has been dismissed by archaeologists due to contradictory evidence from related sites.35 Yoruba archaeologist Akin Ogundiran (2001:27–28, 2003) provides a more scientifically grounded chronology for Ife and the broader area.36 His overview of artifact remains and other sources contributes to my own Ife chronology, one that combines
archaeological with stylistic, oral historical, and other data. For some periods, however, I employ different terms and distinguishing features than does Professor Ogundiran. Most significantly, I have simplified this chronology into three main periods (with sub-groupings) using the term Florescence (cultural “flowering”) for the period of Ife’s major artistic and cultural innovation, along with periods prior to (pre-Florescence) and following (post-Florescence) this era. An early Ife date of c. 350 BCE, purportedly based on radiocarbon (Folster in Ozanne 1969:32), cited by both Ogundiran (2002, p.c.) and Drewal (2009:80), has been rejected by Frank Willett (2004) and others for lack of supporting scientific evidence. I concur with this assessment.37

The main art-producing era of early Ife, what I define as the Florescence Period (Ogundiran’s Classical Period) is distinguished by both roulette- and cord-decorated ceramics. Within a relatively short time span in this period, what I identify as Ife’s High Florescence, most of the early arts appear to have been made. One can date this period to c. 1250–1350 CE based on a range of factors, including the thermoluminescence tests of key metal works and the likely reign era of Obalufon II as delimited in Ife oral histories and king lists. It is this era that appears to mark the beginning of the “Odudua” or second dynasty of Ife. Associated with this High Florescence era are arts not only in “bronze” (Fig. 1) and stone (Fig. 2), but also terracotta (Fig. 24).

The above time frame is consistent with the dating for Ife and its arts by Peter Garlake (1977:72), based on his excavations at the Obalara’s Land and Woye Asiri sites, both of which are closely linked to King Obalufon II whose descendant and current priest is Chief Obalara. From work Garlake undertook at the Obalara Land site, he would publish five radiocarbon dates reflecting three likely phases. The first is an initial occupation period of circa the twelfth century CE. The second phase constitutes a c. fourteenth century occupation period identified with the laying of the pavements, the creation of an array of sculptures, along with the site’s eventual fourteenth–fifteenth century abandonment. The third and final phase at the Obalara Land site consists of Post-Florescence era finds subsequent to the main site occupation and abandonment.38

Garlake’s recalibrated radiocarbon dates (1974:146) for the Ita Yemoo site layer of terracotta sculptures excavated by Willett indicate a period potentially coeval with the radiocarbon dates of the Obalar’s Land sculptures (1312–1420 CE). As Garlake observes for this important and diverse group of terracottas (1974:146): “… on the dating evidence presently available, it seems that Obalar’s Land was occupied at the same time as Ita Yemoo although it is likely, but not certain, that Ita Yemoo was first occupied at an earlier date than Obalar’s Land.” The likely period of overlap between these two sites is...
1310–1350 CE, or what I posit as the High Florence Era. Thermoluminescence dates for the clay cores extracted from two of the Wunmonije site life-size heads indicate a similar period of 1221–1369 CE (Willett 1997:28). This period also is consistent with the likely reign era of Ife King Obalufon II. This dating additionally conforms with this king’s identity as the ruler who introduced bronze casting at Ife. A majority of Ife’s ancient arts thus were created in a relatively short time period, within a single generation of artists, in the early fourteenth century.

An in-depth analysis of ancient Ife sculptural style by art historian Barbara Blackmun (n.d. in Willett 1994) reveals that works from a variety of Ife sites show discernable clusters of similarity consistent with artists working within the same broader time frame. Significantly, Garlake also furnishes evidence (1974, 1977) that Ife’s High Florence Era came to a relatively quick end, a change accompanied by a notable shift in pottery decoration forms, specifically from roulette to cord impressions (see also Shaw 1978:155).

Possible outside confirmation for this Ife early fourteenth century High Florence Era is found in a well-known (but unexplored for the Yoruba) written source, namely Ibn Battûta’s 1325–1354 travel account. Here we read (1958:409–10) that southwest of the Mâlli (Mali) kingdom lies a country called Yoûfi [Ife?]19 that is one of the “most considerable countries of the Soudan [governed by a] …souverain [who] is one of the greatest kings.”40 Battûta’s description of Yoûfi as a country that “No white man can enter … because the negros will kill him before he arrives” appears to reference the ritual primacy long associated with Ife, in keeping with its important manufacturing and mercantile interests, among these advanced technologies of glass bead manufacturing, iron smelting and forging, and textile-production. Blue-green segi beads41 from Ife have been found as far west as Mali, Mauritania, and modern Ghana, suggesting that Battuta may well have learned of this center in the course of his travels in Mali.

There also appears to be a reference to Ife on a 1375 Spanish trade map known as the Catalan Atlas. This can be seen in the name Rey de Organa, i.e. King of Organa (Obayemi 1980:92), associated with a locale in the central Saharan region. While the geography is problematic, as was often the case in maps from this era, the name Organa resonates with the title of early Ife rulers, i.e. Ogane (Oghene, Ogene; Akinjogbin n.d.). The same title is found in a late fifteenth-century account by the Portuguese seafarer Joao Afonso de Aveiro (in Ryder 1969:31), documenting Benin traditions about an inland kingdom that played a role in local enthronement rituals. While the identity of this inland ruler also is debated, Ife seems to be the most likely referent (see Thornton 1988, among others).

Ancient Ife art works, as we have seen, are works not only of great visual power, striking beauty, and rare technical accomplishment, but also objects that speak to core issues of history and politics in this early center. As such these sculptures offer unique and critical insight into the social fabric of the city. Looking at the complex visual codes of these remarkable objects through details of body form and proportion, gesture, facial marking, material properties, regalia form, animal symbolism, site locations, oral history, mapping and traveler accounts, as well as modern day Ife beliefs and rituals about this center and its arts allows us to see these ancient Ife works as a vital part of the city’s early history. The artists of these works clearly were interested in the sculptural meanings being known, and through an in-depth analysis of the variant symbolic formula at play, we now have a much better understanding of both this important early city and its arts.

Suzanne Preston Blier is

Notes

This article is drawn in part from a forthcoming book on Ife art, Art and Risk in Ancient Yoruba: Identity and Politics at Ife, c. 1300 CE (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) framed in part around questions of art and risk at this ancient center (Blier 2012). I wish to thank the Center of African Studies at Harvard University for travel support and partial image funding and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study where much of the writing took place. I also wish to thank Allen Roberts for his thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this article along with the many scholars who read parts of the larger text, and have discussed related questions with me over the last decade. Among these are Wande Alimobi, Rowland Abiodun, Biolan Adetividan, Andrew Apter, Barbara Blackmun, Ekpo Eyo, Barry Hallen, Bass Irle, Babatunde Lawal, Akin Ogundrina, Ikem Okoye, Nike Okundaiaye, Randy Matory, Peter Morton-Williams, Adisa Ogunfokun, Jacob Olupona, Prita Meier, Peter Probst, Nicolas Robertson, J.D.Y. Peel, John Picton, Peter Probst, Michael Rowlands, Christina Strava, and Robert Farris Thompson. I also want to thank the many Nigerian museum officials who afforded me the opportunity to examine objects in their collections, among these, Mayo Adelana, Edita Okunke and Bode Adesina. I also owe a debt to various institutions that allowed me to publish related photographs, the National Commission on Monuments and Museums (specifically Directors Joseph Eboriomeri and Abdallah Yusuf Usman), the Museum

30 On vessel from Obalara’s Land, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Terracotta
Detail of shrine showing head with vertical line facial marks, flanked by two conical forms
PHOTO: COURTESY HUNTERIAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
Discussions with Peter Morton-Williams (p.c.) offer confirming evidence for this reading of the Ifa Yemoo couple. Independently a similar conclusion for this sculpture’s referents was made by Lange (2004). 8. Plausibly these Ife works were commissioned in this era to honor Moremi both as Orifi’s native daugh- and as Ife’s famous Queen and new dynasty mother. 9. Mrs. Olowokere’s sculpture is dated (and one of the copper alloy heads as support for the veil theory concerning facial marking. However, not only is this a later era (post-Florence) bead, but its presence here more likely references the added bead-decorated beard or crown. Schilkrodt (ibid.) that “...no life works show attachments for headgear with veils or face coverings, to the contrary, however, all of the life size metal heads have holes around the crown line where beaded elements could easily have been secured. Within the larger corpus of “traditional” African art, including that of the Yoruba, the depiction of facial “shadows” is never shown. Moreover if these facial lines on early life sculptures were intended to evoke ideas of “divine kingship,” as is argued in this volume, one wonders why these same lines also are seen on many non-royal persons in Ife art. Were facial lines important to minimizing reflection, as also has been asserted, why are these lines shown on terracottas? Conversely, why do some equally “shiny” copper alloy cast heads not have these marks? Frank Willett’s argument (1967:Figs. 13–14, pl. 23) that these vertical facial striations represent either Ife-specific “tribal marks” or the grouping of Ife royals seem more plausible. The dynamic interpretation that I offer is more consistent with this latter view. 15 While some scholars (for example, Adepegba 1976) argue the reverse (that the works with vertical line scarification reference new royal dynasties), my reading of a range of evidence indicates that this is not the case. 16. These vertical lines are so fine that most likely they were incised on infants. As a child grows older, skin keloiding (the thickening of the epidermis around a cut) often occurs, leaving the facial markings thick and broader. 17 In part in reference to this, Clapperton (1826, in Johnson 1921:66) observes vis-à-vis facial marking patterns here that “Upon the whole, the people of Yoruba [Yaga] are nearly of the same description as those of Nuofee [Nupe].” 18 Interestingly, the military leader, Oramiyin, also may have had Yagba and/or nearby Nupe family connections.
19 The Yaga living today in the Ekiti area, like Ife Ehu lineage members, are identified as “strangers” (Apter 1926:69), even though this group in both areas is recognized as being among the earliest residents. Apter also has taken up important issues of Yaga religion and politics (1987:1992). 20 Yoruba total variation of the word (Igbo refer- ence at once a “grove” and a bird species. A ritual site outside Ife called Igbo Igbo (the “Igbo grove”) suggests, however, that the term also may delimit an ethnicity, as the term for Ife’s earliest era, Igboomokun (“the dawn belongs to the Igbo”).
21 According to Edo anthropologist Joseph Eboriome (p.c.) the Igbo also are important to early Benin history and city planning. Victor Manfredi notes in turn (p.c.) that in Edo, the term for slave, igbon, alludes to the Igbo population in a form of punning or word association. 22 Interestingly, the ancient Ife Ikedu oral tradition identifies early Ife society as having two main divisions, the more populous being known as Ehele, and the other identified as Igbo (Akinjogbin n.d:12). Among the Yoruba-related Urboho to the south, the Ehele reference a once powerful warrior group.
23 Parts of this section are taken from Blier 1985, Willett (2004) has critiqued both my and Drewal’s writings on these heads; I provide counter evidence in my forthcoming book.
24 Most of these life-size heads and other life copper alloy sculptures were published in Underwood 1949, employing the numbering system still largely in use by scholars today.
25 This theory was elaborated even earlier by Fagg (1918:18), Bertho and Mauny (1932:108), and Justine Cordew (1935). Neither Willett nor later Ife scholars have addressed the roles of these earlier scholars in the development of this theory.
26 In several cases, the heads appear to have been fashioned after the same individual, reflecting the possible use of a shared model—conceivably a living rela- tively of a closely allied lineage or family. In a similar way in Ife today, the two main Obatala lineage priesthoods are represented by a single lineage head, one line having died out.
27 Drewal offered yet another theory (1989:66–67) that seemingly amplifies, without citation, my 1985 Art Bulletin article on the heads that had been forwarded to him for review. He additionally incorporates Beier’s 1982 study of modern crown rituals in Okuku, a kingdom some distance from Ife.
28 The identification of these heads with supernaturals conforms with Ife beliefs at the time they were unearthed (Bascom 1938:176).
29 An elderly Obalufon priest at this center explained that this grouping of sixteen heads is housed within the Obalufon temple, each kept “in its own sepa- rate apartment.”
30 While it is possible that these beard forms dif- ferentiated male from female persona, it is more likely that the beard references served as markers of age or status among males, since most of the names provided for the Obalufon related copper alloy heads are identi- fied with male heroes and lineage leaders.
31 Drewal disagrees (2009:162, 172, n.157) that the lower facial holes shown on the life-size heads reference the male beard line, arguing instead that these holes were employed to “...attach a beaded veil for the lower face” because, according to him, “...the face of a sacred ruler was not to be seen on ritual occasions” (Drew- al and Schilkrodt 2009:162, Fig. 3). This theory is problematic since the sets of hole lines on these life-size heads outline specifically the mouth, mustache, and beard areas in such a way that makes little sense for a
veil because gravity would make the lower holes redundant. Moreover, if the holes were meant to a veil, it is curious that the eyes were not covered as well, since the Yoruba king's veil today is believed to protect the populace from dangers of the Oba, his eyes as much as his mouth. In his theory, Drewal (2009: 172 n.156) cites the work of Fagg and Willett 1962 (sic). Fagg and Willett (1960:21), however, do not concur with Drewal’s conclusions.

32. Werner and Willett offer (1975) a correction to Barker’s earlier analysis, noting that Head no. 4 is “brass” with 13.5 percent zinc content and “practically no lead.”

33. The lead quantities used in these heads vary as well, from 0.1 to 0.2 percent for the nearly pure copper heads to 40 to 49.5 percent for the others.

34. The late life archaeologist Omotose Eluyemi proposed (1980:16) a chronology based on terms drawn largely from Ife oral tradition. While both archaeological and artifactual evidence are lacking for this chronology, the local era names included poetic temporal complements that convey something of local perceptions of how time, history, and cosmology at Ife are interlinked.

35. This rather Western-centric developmental teleology that also integrates purport style distinctions in Ife sculptures lacks not only archaeological but also art historical grounding and has met with notable criticism from Ife archaeologists Peter Garlake (2002:134–35) and Frank Willett (2004). As Garlake points out (2002,11) vis-à-vis Drewal’s attempts to document stylistic changes here based on artifact findings at the Ita Yemoo and Obalarà’s Land sites: “...there is very little if anything to suggest the sites are not contemporaneous.” Garlake (1974, 1977) also questions the Ita Yemoo chronology offered by Willett, a site whose dates Willett also would later revise. While Drewal states (2009:38) that Obalarà’s Land is “...slightly later than Ita Yemoo and perhaps Lafogido,” the scientific evidence, Garlake points out (1977:92), also does not support this statement. The single radiocarbon result for the Lafogido points out (1977:92), also does not support this statement. While Drewal states (2009:138) that “interlinked. [...]

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