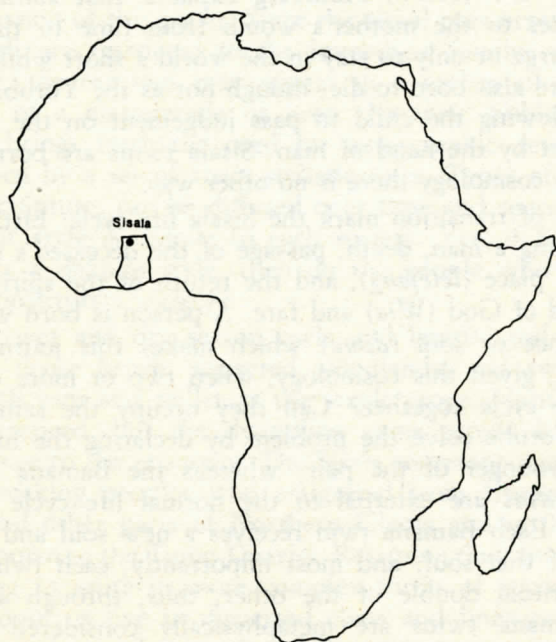


SISALA TWIN SURROGATE SCULPTURE AS A RESPONSE TO AN INFANTICIDE PRACTICE

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West African rituals associated with the birth and death of twins are of special interest to the African art historian, for twin sculptures which frequently are a part of these rituals, reveal much about the African attitude toward art. Moreover, they betray man's response to fortune and misfortune in the light of his cosmology¹. The birth of twins in Sisala-land is certain to bring the death of one, and a carving (*daaliering-daang*, 'tin stick') must be made to appease the hostility of the deceased twin spirit. Considering that the Sisala have few types of wood sculpture and that practically all traditional wood objects have disappeared, it is significant that this medium is used in making the figures. It demonstrates, I believe, the gravity of the situation.

¹ *L'Uomo*, Vol. V - n. 1, 1981

According to Marilyn Houlberg (1973: 23), twins are special to the Yoruba of Nigeria; for *ibeji* carvings representing the spirits of deceased twin protect against evil and bestow good luck to the bearer of the carvings or to those individuals who patronize them with gifts and money. Discussing the fate of the child 'born to die' (*abiku*) Houlberg explains that *abiku* is the one who comes to the mother's womb from time to time, but refuses to emerge or only to stay in the world a short while. Some Sisala twins are also born to die, though not as the Yoruba would have it by allowing the child to pass judgement on the state of the world; but by the hand of man. Sisala twins are born to die because in the cosmology there is no other way.

Six points of transition mark the Sisala life cycle: birth, name giving, becoming a man, death, passage of the deceased's spirit to the ancestor's place (*lelejang*), and the return of the spirit to the timeless world of God (*Wia*) and fate. A person is born with one spiritual essence or soul (*dima*) which makes this journey. But what happens, given this cosmology, when two or more children appear in the cycle together? Can they occupy the same social niche? The Yoruba solve the problem by declaring the first born twin as the younger of the pair; whereas the Bamana of Mali ordain that twins are external to the normal life cycle of soul reincarnation. Each Bamana twin receives a new soul and a spiritual double of that soul; and most importantly, each twin represents the spiritual double of the other, thus, through a binary operation Bamana twins are metaphysically considered as one (Imperato 1975: 52). Unlike the Sisala, the Yoruba and Bamana have rationalized the birth of twins, avoiding a contradiction with their cosmologies.

Dominique Zahan (1970: 24-27) believes that twins will be negatively or positively received depending on the society's view of mankind and the emphasis being placed on the fertility of the mother or the birth of the twins. If the mother's fertility is emphasized then twins are likely to be well received. However, if the twins occupy the center of attention, especially in a society where an individual's role and rank are determined by the birth order and where long intervals between births by the same mother are strictly enforced, then twins may be catastrophic. Zahan notes that twin cults may be characteristic of sedentary agricultural economies in Africa, yet more than material and environmental restraints it is man's view of himself, he concludes, that determines the manifestation of twin rituals. The force behind the making of twin figures

in Sisala grows out of a contradiction that the twins pose to the cosmology and perhaps of greater significance, the link between the harshness of a subsistence economy and the way men justify their actions under adverse circumstances.

What might be called the diversity of style of Sisala twin sculpture vis-a-vis the Yoruba *ibeji*, for example, is another point of discussion of this paper. Since the ritual parameters of the Sisala twin cult are restricted to the immediate family, without public scrutiny, the carvings may appear in a variety of styles. In the context of a masquerade or even the *ibeji*, public exposure of objects brings forth the need for iconographic detail which may be shaped by a set of strict stylistic rules. Types of art, like twin figure sculpture, can be diffused over time and space rather easily, but their style is unique to each society. Yet, if Sisala figurative art lacks a definite style, then do the people who make the art really constitute a society?

The wet and dry season cycle and laterite soil of Sisala-land support dense brush, scattered woodlands, and swidden agriculture with yam and millet as the staple crops. Hunting is occasionally practiced, but the dwindling game supply has reduced its importance to the economy. The Sisala represent a cross section of Grusi-speaking peoples who emigrated from Upper Volta, Ivory Coast and other parts of Northern Ghana and settled in what is today known as the Tumu District. Retaining their own customs and unwilling to unite in more complex forms of social organization they choose to live in dispersed clans and lineages with villages consisting of one clan or several lineages representing many clans. The office of the Tumu chief (*Tumu Kouro*) and the twelve divisional chiefs introduced by the British have been the only institutions to have cut across these lineage boundaries. There are no age-grade, initiation, or men and women's societies.

The Sisala twin figure cult is most likely related to the Degha twin sculpture (*kayere*) reported by René Bravmann south of the Sisala on the Black Volta river. Both groups are members of the Gur sub-family of languages (Greenberg 1966: 8). Although the Degha are said to have borrowed the surrogate twin tradition from the Ashanti during their northern expansion, the full-bodied style of the *kayere* is closer to the Sisala and Gourounsi twin figures of Upper Volta and Northern Ghana (Bravmann 1970: 42)². Except for the flat stylized Akan-like head of the Degha images, the well developed upper and lower limbs reflect more of the general Gur style. According to Bravmann, the Degha (also

known as the Mo) migrated from the Sisala region during the seventeenth century and after settling in their present location they adapted the *kayere* from the Ashanti who call it *akua-ba*. Bravmann, however, observed that the Ashanti rarely use the more popularly known *akua-ba* as a surrogate for deceased twins, except in the northern region. This indicates that the Degha, Sisala, Gourounsi and Bamana traditions of twin images may share a common origin in the Mande-Gur cultural checkerboard embracing the Niger and Volta river basins, leaving the Ashanti carvings, most likely, to another origin.

Disease, malnutrition, and low population density in Sisala make the acceptance of twins extremely difficult (Grindal 1972: 422). The largely unoccupied areas of Sisala-land foster human molestation by wild animals and the spread of disease, thus accelerating the infant mortality rate. Polaris and Hilton (1968) have reported that *onchocerciasis* (river blindness) and *trypanosomiasis* (sleeping sickness) occasionally destroyed entire villages and whole settlements would have to be moved to prevent complete annihilation. The nineteenth century slave raids also contributed to the reduction of population; and in areas where this occurred wild game returned bringing with it the tsetse infestation. Once the land was covered by the bush, it required tremendous energy to reclaim it; consequently people remained on the old soil, thereby accelerating erosion and poor crops. With the marginal production of food in the district, the feeding of twins in an awesome burden requiring that their introduction to the life cycle be managed carefully within a ritual framework.

After a twin dies, the father visits a diviner who places certain kinds of code objects, taken from his goat skin divination bag (*vugutu purang*), on the ground between himself and his client. The diviner holds the top of the divination wand (*vugutu daang*) with his left hand and the client the bottom with his right hand. The stick is moved through the air, occasionally touching the ground and the code objects, in this way answering questions during the consultation (plate 1). With his right hand, the diviner shakes a gourd rattle to summon the ancestors to assist him in finding the cause of the twin's death. Although this is the common procedure, the father of the deceased twin may bypass this step and go directly to a carver. Once, however, a diviner discovers the cause of death, he recommends that a sculpture be carved to represent the spirit of the deceased. Frequently he suggests a specific person to make it.

Once the artist has been commissioned, the father gives him some tobacco, a fowl, kola nuts and cowries all amounting to three cedes (about two dollars). Usually the carving takes two to three weeks depending on the experience of the artist and the detail he includes in the sculpture. Twin figures vary in complexity from simple cylindrical bodies with ball-shaped heads to fully treated figures with upper and lower limbs, scarification, and cowrie shell eyes. This variation often depends on the spiritual orientation of the carver, who is likely to develop his skills through a ritual association with the bush spirits which support individuals in the various fields of incipient specialization³.

When the twin stick (*daaliering-daang*) is ready the carver sends word to the father, who after making a final payment returns with the carving to the compound and hides it from his wife until the following night. While she is asleep he places it by her side. Having discovered the image the next morning she feeds it crushed yam (*fufu*) and flour mixed with water, and then bathes it in a pot of water kept in her sleeping room. The mother may turn the sculpture over to the surviving twin in infancy, or if she has retained a traditional respect for the cult she will store it out of the child's reach caring for it herself until the surviving twin is old enough to do so (plate 2). In instances where Islam has taken hold, figures are not carved and in the case of young mothers the carvings are soon destroyed by the rough treatment they receive from the other children of the household.

Several of the elder women explained that in the old days one could see many twin sculptures strapped to the backs of women who came to the Tumu market or to the clinic where the twin images would receive injections along with the living twin. In the 1950s, parents of school children still demanded that the surrogates be given pencil, paper and a slate; the same as the living twin. Two women in their mid-forties continue to care for twin sticks representing their deceased sisters. One of the women at the time of this research was visiting her father's village; and to protect herself on the journey she brought along the sculpture (plate 3). About thirty years ago a woman from Tasow had triplets, which died soon after birth. To assuage the ill will of the three spirits a sculptor of her lineage carved images of them for her protection. Every day at noon in the privacy of her room she washes and feeds the carvings the flour-water mixture and yam (plates 4, 5). Once for the author she fed them in the courtyard where they could be easily photographed. A Tumu family did not

permit photographing of their sculpture until the living twin returned from Accra. Her father, Alidu, believed that if the twins were not photographed at the same time, the spirit of the deceased might, out of jealousy, bring sickness to the family. The carving is currently kept in the mother's room, but according to Alidu, it is neither bathed nor fed (plate 6).

The history of a twin stick owned by one woman shows contemporary social forces at work on the tradition. In the late 1960s, she married a Christian from Nigeria and eventually gave birth to twins. One died and the matter was taken to a diviner who advised the couple to have a carver make them a figure. Later, the family moved to Yedji on the Volta river where the husband fished for a living. There, the woman claims her spouse destroyed the twin stick believing it was not a "Christian thing". Unable to reconcile their differences over the matter she returned to her patrilineage at Chinchin. Without the carving, however, she frequently drank too much and was driven to madness, until finally, her mother commissioned another image from a carver at Sekai (plate 7). She gratefully accepted the image and sacrificed a fowl to it. Having fully recovered she now blames her previous affliction on the hostility of the deceased twin's spirit wick, according to her, was angered by her husband's actions.

The ultimate concern of families of deceased twins is that they can placate their spirits and prevent misfortune or the death of the living twin. The projected threat to the survivor often grows out of the general sibling rivalry occurring among children born to the same mother, particularly children of adjacent births. The Sisala express a preference for spacing their children at least three years apart, or waiting until the last born has been properly weaned. Not until this child is eating "true food" may a husband return to his wife's sleeping room in the evening.

The spacing of children is one of the adjustments the Sisala must make in their bid for survival, especially with shortages of food so critical at the end of the wet season prior to the harvest. The anxiety over child nutrition reveals itself in the common practice of women leaving a few grains of food in their dishes to show the unborn that they may enter the womb in preparation for birth knowing that they will be well fed. The concern with subsistence is also seen in the ritual of "cooling" the next youngest sibling after a new birth in the family. On the third or fourth day after a child is born (three for a male and four a female) the infant is introduced into the courtyard (*kaala*). This signifies the

child's entry into society and from this point he is referred to as *nibiing*, child among people. Even adults find it difficult to live in community, especially when the distribution of a dwindling grain supply is in question; during these times males of the lineage become angry at one another. Some of them move to the farms to be close to their privately consumed crops and most importantly, to remove themselves from the possibility of mortal conflict. In this respect the "cooling" of the next youngest sibling is an adult projection of the conflict over the distribution of food, for when the older child is brought to the courtyard with his new sister or brother his anger at the new child's place at the mother's breast is intense and must be appeased. Mendonsa (1973: 105) describes this ritual:

On the day that the child is taken out into the *kaala* for the first time, the elder sibling is summoned and is seated near the *bachakira* (midwife) who holds the infant on her lap, and an egg is given to the eldest child to hold. While holding the infant on her lap, the *bachakira* takes water into her mouth and spews (pose) it over the elder child holding the egg, who then eats the egg.

With this ceremony the next youngest sibling, who views the new arrival as a thief (*gaaru*) coming to steal the mother's breast, is cooled and accepts the new child's relationship with the mother. The hostility of the deceased twin spirit, likewise, stems from competition over the attention of the mother but its anger is not so simply cooled.

Guilt of the parents is certainly reason for making twin figures as this eases their consciences over the death of the infant. By ritually caring for the image of the deceased, both parents and surviving twin may apply to the needs of the child which could not be cared for in life. Recognizing the impossibility of providing for both twins, the Sisala probably "select out" or kill one of the twins at birth. Infanticide is practiced in other respects, for children born with birth defects, teeth, and infants who present by the breech are killed and buried in the bush far away from the compound (Rattray 1932). The killing of these infants contributes to the survival of the family group. It is simply unwise to expend food and energy on a new born whose chances of maturing and contributing to the community are negligible. Choosing one twin for survival also solves the impending contradiction in the idealized cosmological order discussed earlier.

One problem with this assertion is Robert Rattray's (1932:

499) statement that the Sisala do not kill twins. The issue is not so much one of substance, but one of interpretation. It is significant that Rattray, having asked his informants about the killing of twins, included a number of questions about other kinds of infanticides. The sensitiveness of this material would have made it difficult for him to obtain objective responses from his informants. If such probing would not have been sensitive, Rattray certainly would have discovered the twin figure cult; yet he did not. For such a thorough researcher this oversight is puzzling. The friction caused by his queries, however, may have terminated further discussion about twins and thus, information about the surrogate tradition.

The findings of Eastman and Hellman (1966: 67) lend further support to the existence of Sisala twin infanticide:

All authorities agree that the total perinated mortality in twins is two to three times that in single births... The many complications of twin pregnancy, such as prolapsed cord, placenta previa, premature separation of the second placenta, contraction ring, and malformations, obviously contribute to the higher mortality associated with multiple than single births.

The study shows that the major cause of death of one or both twins is underweight of the infants. One would expect in Sisaland that a small or malformed child might not be accepted by its parents or that its feeble attempts at the mother's breast would be taken as a bad sign.

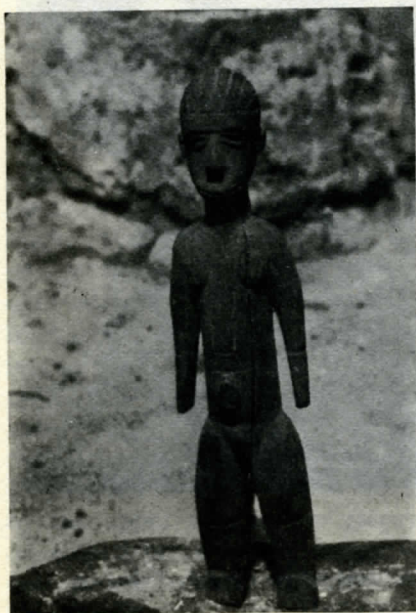
The incidence of breech births in twins offers conclusive evidence that twins are part of the Sisala infanticide pattern. Eastman and Hellman (1966) note that the number of breech births in all deliveries increases with infants in the lower weight groups. Since twins, on the average, weigh less than single children, one would predict their incidence of breech presentations to be higher than in single deliveries. In many cases premature or small fetuses have a greater mass and motility in the vertex (cephalic pole, including the head and upper limbs). In normal fetuses, the lower limbs (podalic pole or breech) in later development overtake the vertex in these respects. When this occurs the fetus reverses its position in order to take advantage of the greater space offered by the upper part of the uterus. If, however, the fetus has not developed properly the vertex is likely to remain the prominent feature and it will, therefore, stay upright and present by the breech. Eastman and Hellman (1966: 315) find that in twin



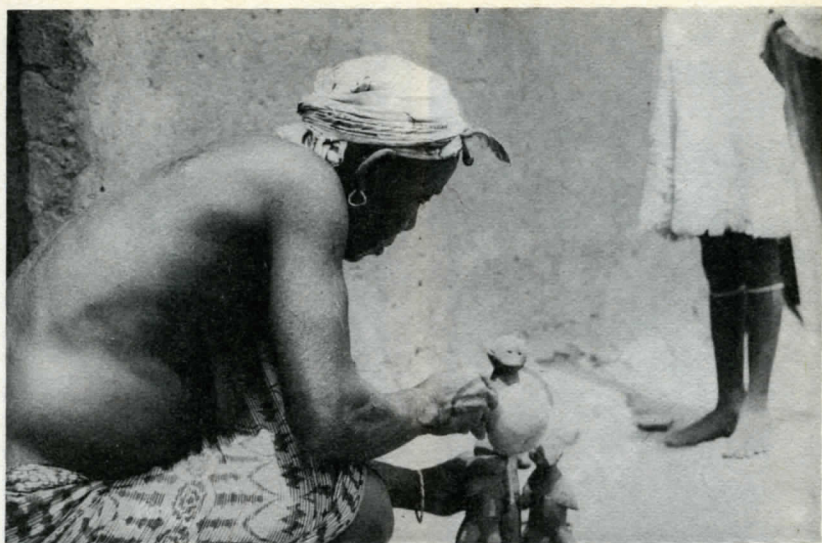
1. Semani Wisituwo with a client (left) receiving advice through divination.



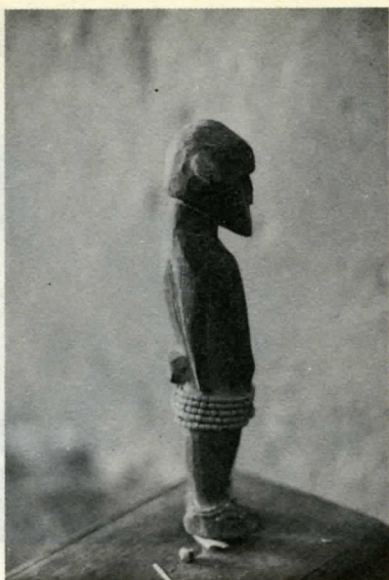
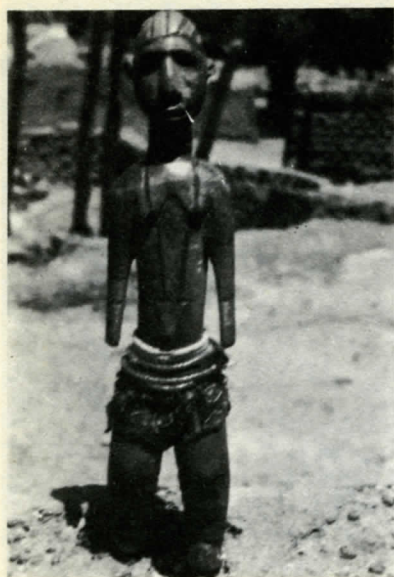
2. A twin stick which has been turned over to a young child who, out of rough play, will soon destroy it.



3. Hellia of Challo brought this carving to Sekai to protect her on the journey. 13 in. high.

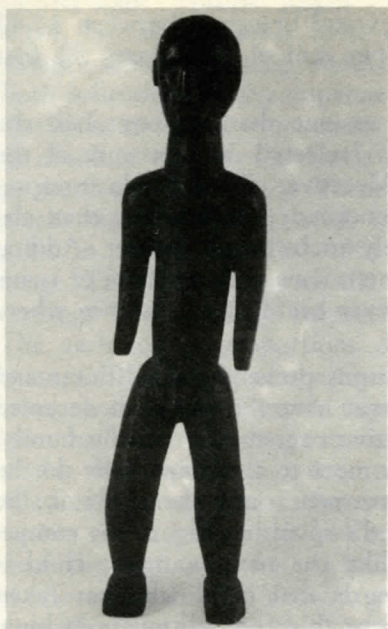


4-5. An elder of Tasow feeding the three carvings made by an artist of her lineage. The center figure is about 15 inches.

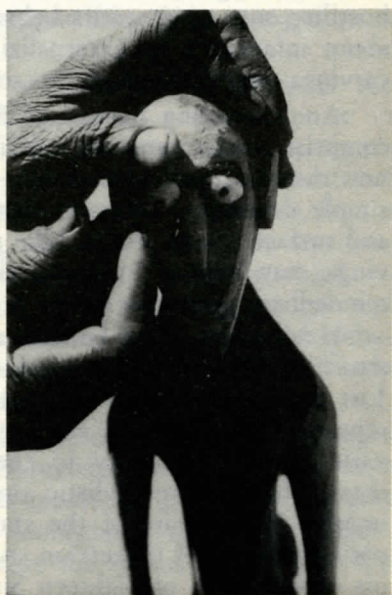


6. A twin stick carved by the sculptor who made Alidu's surrogate. 10.5 in.
 7. The second figure made for Hellia of Chinchán which her mother commissioned. 11.5 in.
 8. A twin stick given equal time at the mother's breast to "cool" its anger over the surviving twin who has taken the mother's breast. 11 in.
 9. A carving from Gwollu with minimal detail. 11 in.





10-11. Ntowie carved this image which is praised for the articulation of body parts. 13.5 in.



12. A twin image made by Buyugo of Sekai who claims that it was his own experience (*Me wujiming*) which taught him to make the eyes with cowrie shells and resin. No other Sisala carver uses this technique. 17 in.

deliveries the combination of vertex and breech is between 34-40 per cent and in approximately 70 per cent of these cases the first twin presents by the vertex.

Given these statistics, we can assume that in about half the cases in Sisala, one of the twins is "selected out" because of the practice of killing breech infants. Moreover, if the Sisala interpretation of breech includes other abnormal presentations then the practice of twin infanticide is likely to be much greater. Adding to this is the fact that during the interviews with mothers of twins and twins themselves the author never heard of an instance where both twins survived.

To the Sisala twin figure sculptures prevent death, illness and social disruption in the family. Never have the spirits of deceased twins been known to make a positive contribution to the family. Why are these spirits so hostile, or more to the point, why do the parents project this kind of temperament onto them? It is the parents' conclusion that the deceased's spirit has lost in the competition with the living twin, and like the next youngest child it "feels" resentment and anger towards that child who has taken the mother's breast (plate 8). Where this competition is lacking, as in cases where both twins die, no images are carved. The two deaths eliminate the need to placate one of the twins to insure the well-being of the other. Ultimately, the parents' projection of hostility onto twin spirits helps alleviate their fears, and anxieties about infanticide by externalizing the problem. By caring for the carvings their feelings are, to some extent, displaced.

An interesting feature of Sisala twin sculptures is that they comprise a wide range of individual styles, and as a group they do not make up an identifiable "tribal" style. Images vary from simple cylindrical forms to complex treatments of mass, volume, and surface (plates 9-12). Like people, the Sisala explain, twin carvings may appear in many shapes and sizes. With this open-mindedness pieces are never rejected on aesthetic grounds.

Having seen many collections of the Yoruba *ibeji*, I have been struck by the well-pronounced style that identifies these sculptures. Just how many and how precisely characteristic features are repeated in works of art to form a recognizable constellation varies from community to community, and in this respect, the *ibeji* exhibit more stylistic uniformity than do the Sisala twin images. Well aware of the statistical problems involved in comparing samples of objects on stylistic grounds the author compared his observations of eighteen Sisala twin images with a sample of

twenty-eight Yoruba pieces⁴. The number of Sisala figures is small, but it represents most of the carvings of the twenty-two villages which make up about one-third of the Sisala population. Both collections were compared in terms of absolute measurements, variation in figural proportions, and range of traits. The variation in absolute size of the Sisala figures, as was expected, is much greater than that of the Yoruba figures. The height of the Sisala works represents a 9.5 inch range, the width from foot to foot a 2.6 in. range, and the width for shoulder to shoulder, a 2.3 in. range. This compares with the same measurements of the Yoruba carvings with a range respectively of 5.5, 1.55 and 1.5 inches. The variation in proportions of the two sets of carvings as, for example, the height of the figures to the length of the legs, torso, arms, and head is much closer and the results, therefore are less conclusive. The range in the proportion ratio is actually greater in the *ibeji* sample, but the number of characteristic proportional relationships are about the same. In other words, in the Sisala figures the length of the heads and the widths are usually shorter than the legs, and the width and arms shorter than the length of the torso. In the Yoruba group the leads are generally longer than the legs, the width shorter than the length of the torso and the arms longer than the torso. Appraising stylistic consistency in the above respects reveals that the Sisala images exhibit more variation in absolute measurements while the proportional relationships and number of repeated proportions of the two groups is nearly the same.

The most revealing indicator of stylistic consistency is the number of "baseline" traits which appear in every sculpture in each group. Comparing the range in traits from figure to figure in the Yoruba group all the sculptures have well articulated facial features (except where they were worn down by use) hands, feet, a pedestal, shoulders, buttocks, neck, sex organs, stomach, scarification, and hairdo. Most of them were painted. The Sisala sculptures vary in complexity from cylindrical bodies with stumpy legs and spheroid heads to carvings with articulated body parts and elaborate surface decoration of paint, pyro-engraving and oil. The Sisala figures exhibit fewer "baseline" traits than the Yoruba works.

Marilyn Houlberg (1973: 26) has observed that recent images of the *ibeji* may also appear in abbreviated form, as is the case with a Yoruba muslim family who apparently prefer the abstract carvings in concordance with the iconoclastic dictates of Islam. Citing Sieber, Houlberg suggests that the recent variation in the

ibeji style is the result of rapid social change in Yoruba society which has brought about the break down of the tribal self-image and concomitantly the "tribal" style. In Yorubaland, conformity has been replaced by variety in the wake of social change (Houlberg 1973: 27). The variety of styles currently seen in the Yoruba twin images has existed in Sisala twin images since the start of the twentieth century or more likely, since the images were introduced in Sisala-land. There may not have been, at any time, a prominent Sisala figure style.

The diveristy of the Sisala figural style is not so much the result of the loss of a "tribal" image as in the case of the Yoruba; rather the lack of such an image to begin with. The Sisala are not a tribe but an amalgam of peoples consisting of dispersed clans which migrated to Northwest Ghana beginning in the eighteenth century. The process continues today as the Dagarti from the west establish new settlements in the region causing heated intergroup rivalries. Local linguistic patterns epitomize this lack of social and cultural cohesion. Bendor-Samuel (1965) notes that within the Grusi subgroups of the Gur languages there is more linguistic divergence than among the major Gur groups. Most likely, this is a result of political and social fragmentation that has long characterized the history of the Grusi people. Many Sisala dialects are mutually unintelligible. The establishment of the Native Authority by the British in their making of the Sisala district has been the most ambitious attempt to wield the local inhabitants into a unified society. Lacking a "tribal" identity, the "Sisala" have yet to produce a tribal figure style.

The limited impact of twin rituals on the community also contributes to the diversity of the figure style. Unlike the Bamana and Yoruba, whose twin cults may benefit persons outside the family, the Sisala twin cult does not. Where the public is united by presentation of its art forms one would expect these forms to follow a stricter iconographic scheme with greater stylistic uniformity than is evidenced, for instance, by the Sisala carvings which are confined to the ambits of personal ritual. One might hypothesize that the greater the social impact of the visual arts the greater the consensus of style will be. The inevitable low incidence of multiple births in Sisala partly explains the small impact of the twin figures on the public. I recorded nearly fifty carvings in twenty-two villages all of which had been produced over approximately a forty-five year period. Given a relatively stable population of 18,000 for these villages during this period, the inci-

dence of twins here is well below the Yoruba and Bamana statistic⁵. The impact of twin rituals then, is apt to be insignificant where there are few cases of twin births, especially in areas of dispersed settlement with extremely low population densities.

One survey revealed an inability of the participants to identify artists by their individual styles. The anonymity of the artist and indifference to artistic talent that this implies, further, contributes to the diversity of the figural style. Most participants in the survey believed that a carver could learn from others, but they added that innate abilities (*wujiming*) were more effective in artistic development. Since artistic ability is not traditionally thought to be passed from one carver to another, it is Sisala contention that self-teaching rather than apprenticeship is a far better method for improving one's abilities. Such a conviction leads to the public's acceptance and, inadvertently, the encouragement of highly individualized styles, regardless of talent. The absence of a standardized conception of a carver's education and for some individuals the belief that talent originates in private and individualistic ties with the fairy spirits (sometime-allies of incipient specialists); furthermore, leaves the way open for considerable contrast in personal carving styles. As if to enforce their individualism (*me wujiming*), carvers who are more oriented to the fairy spirit worship are likely to receive high marks for their sculpture. Add to this the aesthetic sensibility of good (*zomo*) carving which does not rule out the acceptance of poorly made sculpture in ritual context, then it is quite possible for sculptures, like people, to appear in all sizes ranging from the beautiful to extremely ugly (*U bi zang* 'it is bad').

The Sisala response to the birth of twins offers one solution to the problems caused by multiple births. The carvings, like other traditional medicines, help prevent and cure physical and psychological afflictions, but never do they assist individuals in positive ways. The killing of one twin probably accounts for the parents' projected hostility of its spirit. Yet it also solves the contradiction that the survival of both infants would otherwise present the cosmology. Twin images, moreover, symbolize the parents' courageous behavior in the face of adversity. The variety of carving reveals the dispersed nature of the society, the public's attitude toward the carvers of the images, and the limited impact of twin rituals upon the community. The lack of public scrutiny of the twin cult and the relative isolation of carvers with their self-reliance in artistry allows for a multitude of ideosyncratic styles.

If, however, the one-tribe, one-style hypothesis is applicable in African art history then it must be that the stylistic divergence in Sisala twin sculpture reveals the absence of a true tribal identity.

Notes

1. The research for this article was conducted from December 1972 to August 1973 in the Upper Region of Northern Ghana. Many ideas for the paper came out of a joint presentation with Marilyn Houlberg entitled *Born to Die: Images of Sacred and Condemned Children in Two West African Societies*. This lecture was given at the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, March 1977.

2. Triande (1969) illustrates Gourounsi twin figures which are of the full bodies style, unfortunately he does not comment on the cult of twins from that area.

3. The bush spirits or as the Sisala call them the "fairy" spirits (*kantomung*) are described as being very short with hands and feet reversed and with eyes in the back of their heads. They attack certain individuals causing them to go mad, become ill or to experience any number of afflictions; eventually the spirits instruct their victims in divination, carving, black-smithing etc. which cures the particular affliction (cf. Nunley 1977).

4. The Yoruba sample of *ibeji* images is part of the collection of Pierre L. van den Berghe, Seattle, Washington.

5. Imperato (1975: 52) notes that the incidence of twins for Mali is 21.8/1000 and for the Bamana and Maninka it is 17.9/1000 compared with the Yoruba statistic of 45.1/1000.

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Summary

Since the 19th century Sisala plastic arts of Northern Ghana have diminished in importance and number in ritual performance. That twin figure sculpture is yet carved to placate a deceased twin spirit and protect the immediate survivors indicates the importance of this tradition where related arts are in a state of atrophy. In comparative African societies twins are cosmologically accepted and in some cases they are a sign of good luck. In Sisala-Land, however, twins are not a good thing. They pose certain contradictions to the Sisala world view.

This article draws upon evidence from a variety of sources to suggest that a twin infanticide pattern is part of the response to twin births. That these spirits are hostile to the surviving twin or members of the family suggests a projection on the part of the parents. The spirit of the deceased twin must be placated through a carved image. This object is cared for by the mother of the twins and in the past surviving twins took these images with them to school, and otherwise in daily life treated them metaphorically as alive. They were fed, clothed, and carried. A carving placates the anger of the deceased spirit who might otherwise come to steal the mother's milk or cause other siblings to become sick.

The second part of this article addresses an art historical problem posed by the sculpture. There does not appear to be a "tribal" style, a set of formal conventions, which in other African societies like the Yoruba, for example, identify their work. It is concluded that the lack of a tribal style or a style "breakdown" indicates that the Sisala are not a tribe, or if they once constituted such, then rapid social change dissolved that ethnic identity and as well the tribal image which may have once been portrayed by a sculptural style. This analysis tests the one tribe — one style hypothesis.

Sommario

Sin dal XIX secolo le arti plastiche dei Sisala del Ghana settentrionale hanno subito una riduzione, per importanza e numero, nella rappresentazione rituale. Il fatto che raffigurazioni di gemelli vengano tuttora scolpite per placare lo spirito di un gemello defunto e per proteggere i sopravvissuti più prossimi indica comunque l'importanza di questa tradizione nonostante lo stato di atrofia in cui si trovano le arti relative. Presso altre società africane i gemelli sono accettati dal punto di vista cosmologico e talvolta rappresentano un segno di buona fortuna. Nella regione sisala non sono visti invece come positivi, ponendosi in un certo qual modo in contraddizione con la visione del mondo elaborata dai Sisala.

Il presente articolo fa uso di testimonianze provenienti dai settori più diversi per sostenere che il modello di infanticidio gemellare riscontrato tra i Sisala si inquadra nella reazione provocata dalle nascite doppie. Il fatto che questi spiriti siano ostili al gemello sopravvissuto o agli altri membri della famiglia suggerisce una proiezione da parte dei genitori: lo spirito del gemello morto deve essere placato per mezzo di un'immagine scolpita. L'oggetto viene trattato con cura dalla madre dei gemelli, e in passato i gemelli sopravvissuti portavano queste immagini con sé a scuola e le trattavano metaforicamente come se fossero vive in ogni altro momento della vita quotidiana: erano nutrite, vestite e trasportate. L'immagine scolpita placa la collera dello spirito del morto che altrimenti potrebbe venire a rubare il latte materno o a fare ammalare altri fratelli.

La seconda parte di questo articolo si occupa di un problema storico-artistico proposto dalla scultura. Non sembra esservi uno stile "tribale", un insieme di accordi formali che in altre società africane (ad esempio quella yoruba) consentono la immediata attribuzione del prodotto. Si giunge alla conclusione che la mancanza di uno stile tribale o un *breakdown* stilistico indicano che i Sisala non costituiscono una tribù oppure, se in passato ne costituivano una, che i rapidi cambiamenti sociali ne hanno dissolto sia l'identità etnica sia l'immagine tribale che aveva potuto un tempo essere espressa da uno stile scultorio. Questa analisi saggia in conclusione l'ipotesi "una tribù-uno stile".