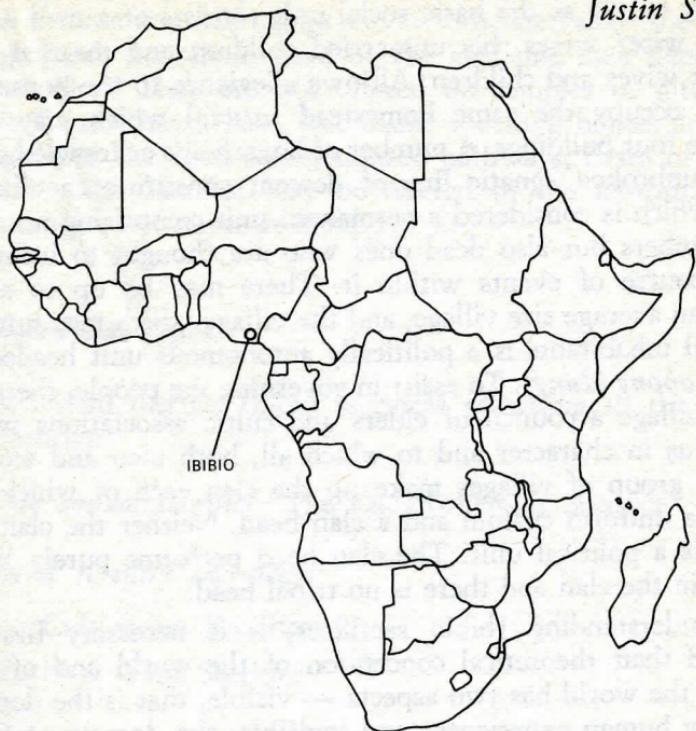


IBIBIO SACRIFICES¹

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This paper is a brief study in the sacrificial system of the Ibibio people of Nigeria. It involves a description of the different sacrificial types offered by the Ibibio and a theoretical reflection on their religious significance. Attempt is also made to explicate in footnotes some ritual symbols, as a full treatment of this aspect is not possible within the space limitation.

1. Background

The Ibibio, one of the smaller tribes of Nigeria, number about 1.5 million people spread over ten clans in the South Eastern part of the country. They dwell mainly in villages with farming, trading and fishing as the principal occupations. Their society is structured

around a patrilineal system of descent with significant matrifocal elements. The household (*ufok*) which today is giving way to the elementary family as the basic social unit consists of a man as the head, his wife/ wives, his unmarried children and married sons with their wives and children. All owe allegiance to the household head and occupy the same homestead (*otung*) which may comprise up to four buildings. A number of households acknowledging a common unbroken agnatic line of descent constitute the lineage (*ekpuk*) which is considered a permanent unit comprising not only living members but also dead ones who are thought to influence still the course of events within it. There may be up to seven *ekpuk* in an average size village, and the village which may number 1000-5000 inhabitants is a politically autonomous unit headed by the chief (*obong idung*). To assist in governing the people, there are in every village a council of elders and cultic associations which are religious in character and to which all, both men and women belong. A group of villages make up the clan each of which has a dialect, a uniform custom and a clan head. Neither the clan nor the tribe is a political unit. The clan head performs purely ritual functions in the clan and there is no tribal head.

For understanding Ibibio sacrifices, it is necessary first to understand their theoretical conception of the world and of life. For them, the world has two aspects — visible, that is the domain of ordinary human experience; and invisible, the domain of God, the gods and the spirits. We shall refer to these two aspects as « the world visible » and « the world invisible ». Human life passes through these two domains in a cycle: the adult becomes aged and passes into the world invisible to be re-incarnated and born again as a baby into the world visible. Birth and death are therefore moments in the life cycle. But premature birth, twin birth and birth with legs first as well as death by accident, the death of young persons and even serious illness are considered as abnormal and are attributed to the influence of unfriendly invisible powers.

The Ibibio believe that there is a high God (*Abasi*) who created all things including the gods (*ndem*) to whom he also gives charge of the different aspects of human affairs. Thus there is *ndem isong* (fertility goddess) to look after land fertility, *ndem udua* (market god) to protect the interest of those who buy and sell in the market, etc. Below the gods are unincarnated spirits like *eka abasi*, the spirit mother who looks after young children. There are the

spirits of the dead who may be good like the ancestors, or bad like the spirits of wicked people. All sacrifices are directed to one or other of these invisible beings and are officiated at by the clan head, village head, household head or the medicine man depending on the occasion. They are not offered on temples or altars as the Ibibio do not have these, but inside dwelling homes and at such open places like cross-roads, unused pathways, bases of trees and the riverside. Sacrifice may be offered in the morning, evening or midnight, but never at midday.

2. **Sacrificial types**

We shall discuss Ibibio sacrifices according to the following classification:

A. *The annual sacrifice*: The End-of-the-year Sacrifice

B. *Land fertility sacrifices*:

1. Cultivation Sacrifice
2. New Yam Sacrifice

C. *Sacrifices at preiodic phases of the life cycle*:

1. Sacrifice at the Naming Ceremony
2. Sacrifice at Puberty
3. Sacrifice at Death

D. *Initiation sacrifices*:

1. Sacrifice at Chieftaincy Initiation
2. Sacrifice at Initiation into Cultic Associations
3. Sacrifice at Initiation into the Guild of Diviners

E. *Installation sacrifices*:

1. Sacrifice at Chieftaincy Installation
2. Sacrifice at Installation of the Lineage Head
3. Sacrifice at *Inam* Installation

F. *Initiating sacrifices:*

1. Sacrifice at the Founding of a New Market
2. Sacrifice at the Erection of a New Building
3. Sacrifice at Undertaking a Long Journey

G. *Sacrifices connected with offences:*

1. Obom (wanton destruction of life)
2. Adultery
3. Taboo Breach
4. Direct Offence against Evil Spirits

H. *Sacrifices relating to connections in the world invisible:*

1. *Ndem Okpongo* (namesake god)
2. *Ebe Abasi* (spirit husband)
3. *Eka Abasi* (spirit mother)
4. *Ndem Mong* (water goddess)
5. *Okpo Nsanga* (age-set)
6. *Uyo* (resolution made in the word invisible)

I. *Sacrifices connected with negligence of the gods or the dead:*

1. Negligence of the gods
2. Negligence of the dead

J. *Sacrifice on the occasion of witchcraft affliction*

- In the above classification and in the study that follows, we do not include informal sacrifices, that is, offerings which people make without following set rituals. We shall use the term « officiant » for the minister of sacrifice, and « offerer » for the person on whose behalf the sacrifice is offered. As many of the sacrifices are no longer being offered owing to the influence of christianity and the success of western medicine, we shall indicate as we discuss each sacrificial type, to what extent it is still current.

A. The annual sacrifice

The End-of-the-year Sacrifice (uwa iwuot isua)

The hot dry period from late November to early January is traditionally for the Ibibio the period of transition from the old year to the new year and is also regarded as a very turbulent time in the cosmic cycle during which people refrain from going on long journeys. It is a period guarded with rituals and is ritually referred to as *ini ndok* (time for closing activities). The first ritual to mark the period is called *utuak ndok* (starting the closing activities) which consists of cleaning up the shrines of the gods and ancestors and decorating them with palm fronds. This is closely followed with a sacrifice called *uwa iwuot isua* (the end-of-the-year sacrifice) offered for the whole village to « send off » the old year and to « welcome » the new, to request the gods and ancestors for a peaceful cosmic transition, to thank them for past favours and beg for a prosperous new year. This sacrifice which on account of the influence of christianity is no longer being offered today, traditionally takes place late in the night at the shrine of the village god, and after it, libations are poured at the shrines of the other gods and of the ancestors. The village chief officiates assisted by the village elders all of whom must abstain from sexual intercourse² during the entire period of the « closing activities ». The following materials are required: *nsei* (a yellow substance in the form of chalk but softer than chalk), a billy-goat, a cock, hen and wine.

The sacrificial action begins with the ritual crushing of *nsei*. The officiant standing in front of the shrine, puts a piece of *nsei* in his left hand and crushes it between the right forefinger and the right thumb at the same time invoking the ancestors and requesting their assistance and personal protection in what he is about to do. He then uses the *nsei* powder for invoking the village god. Spraying some of the powder in the shrine, he prays that the occasion should bring honour to the god, that he should be propitious to the people so that the turbulent time may pass without any incident in the village, he asks for forgiveness for the people and thanks him for favours received during the year. He then pours a libation to « send off » the old year. After a short pause, he prays again asking the god to let the new year be good and prosperous without abnormal deaths, epidemics and twin births. He prays for good

health and peace for the people. At that, he pours a libation to « welcome » the new year³ and then slaughters the victims. The heads of the victims are cut off and hooked on stakes fixed in front of the shrine for that purpose. The village drum is sounded and all move in a body to the shrines of the other gods and of the ancestors. At each shrine, the god or ancestor is invoked, given a libation and requested to protect the people through the passing old year to the new year. All the shrines having been visited, the participants assemble at the chief's house and consume the drink left over from the libation. The meat is shared raw among them and all disperse.

B. Land fertility sacrifices

Ibibio villages have a number of separate farmlands which are cultivated one after another with the shifting cultivation method. In every farmland, there is a shrine to *ndem ikot* (farmland god) who is supposed to dwell in the farmland and look after the growth of the crops. Besides *ndem ikot*, there is also *ndem isong* (goddess of the earth) who is responsible for land fertility but has no shrine. Every year, before cultivation begins, a sacrifice is offered to the god of the farmland to request his protection for the people during farming activities and for the crops during the farming season. Before new yams are eaten, another sacrifice is offered to the goddess of the earth to thank her for the gift of new crops. Only very few villages still offer these sacrifices.

1. *Cultivation Sacrifice (uwa ikot)*

The cultivation sacrifice takes place around the first week of January. It is offered in the morning at the shrine of the farmland god in the presence of the villagers with the village chief as officiant. A billy-goat, a cock, a hen, a tortoise⁴, a basketful of yams, wine and *nsei* are offered. The chief holds the basket of yams up high, shows it to the people and prays asking the gods to receive the sacrifice, to grant that the cultivation activities may be carried out without any snake bite or injury, and to watch over the crops about to be sown. He sets the basket in front of the shrine, sprays *nsei* powder on the yams and silently pours a libation. He then slaughters the victims and places their heads together with some yams in the shrine. Guns are fired and the village drum is sounded

to announce the end of the ritual. All now retire to the chief's compound for a sacrificial meal.

2. *New Yam Sacrifice* (uwa nsuk udia)

This sacrifice offered in the month of July commences the celebration popularly known as « new yam festival ». In the morning of the appointed day the people go into their farms to harvest the new yam for the first time. In the evening, the heads of households bring one yam each to the chief's compound for the sacrifice and all the yams are heaped together in the open. In addition are offered a nanny-goat, a cock, a hen, a tortoise, wine and *nsei*. The village chief officiates. He crushes *nsei* with the usual invocation of the ancestors and sprays the powder on a spot near the heap of yams invoking the earth goddess. He thanks her for the gift of the new yams, prays that its arrival may be a sign of prosperity both in the farm and in the market and that the people may eat it in peace without suffering, illness or death. The prayers over, he silently pours a libation, slaughters the victims and buries their heads at the spot of sacrifice. Then follows a sacrificial meal.

C. **Sacrifices at periodic phases of the life cycle**

For the Ibibio, life is an eternal reality whose path, as we have seen, cuts through the world visible and the world invisible in a cycle. Three moments in this cycle — birth, when a person arrives into the world visible from the world invisible; puberty, when a person becomes an adult; and death, when a person passes from the world visible to the world invisible — are regarded as most significant and are marked with rituals involving sacrifice. Today however, while the sacrifices at birth and at puberty are no longer offered, that at death is still being offered for non christians.

1. *Sacrifice at the Naming Ceremony* (usio enying)

Traditionally, within a few months of its birth, a child is given a name at a ritual naming ceremony which may be solemn or simple. The first boy is named after his paternal great grand father and the first girl after her paternal great grand mother, the second boy after his paternal grand father and the second girl after her paternal

grand mother. The rest of the children may be named after other people but generally the third boy is named after its father and the third girl after its mother. By the ritual, a relationship called « *okpongo* » (namesake) is established between the child and the person after whom it is named. The person is also called the child's *okpongo* and the child is in turn called the person's *okpongo*. The solemn ceremony involves sacrificing and is mandatory for the first born while the simple ceremony which does not entail sacrifice is carried out for the other children. The Ibibio still practise the naming custom but the ceremony is simple without sacrifice. We are here however concerned with the sacrifice that traditionally attends the solemn ceremony. The ritual takes place at the home of the child's father and is officiated at by the head of the father's lineage. The child is laid down naked on the floor and the officiant spits⁵ on it and calls out its name for all to hear. He then crushes *nsei* with the usual invocations and sprays it on the child invoking the ancestor after whom it is named. He prays that the ancestor be honoured by the child being named after him, that his spirit may come to dwell in his young namesake and the child may live to ripe old age and people the lineage (if a boy) / bear children (if a girl). He then pours a libation silently and slaughters a cock cutting off its head which is later taken away and buried. All now stand outside the building and the officiant holding the child stands beneath the eaves of the house. Water⁶ is thrown on to the roof so that it descends and falls on the child. At that, the officiant prays that as the child is now washed with the water of this world, it should have nothing to do any longer with the world invisible, that any connection it may have had there should have no bad effect on it so that it may live and flourish in this world. He spits on it again and hands it to its mother. Then follows a sacrificial meal.

2. *Sacrifice at Puberty* (mbobo/nkuho)

While in Ibibio tradition arrival at puberty is not marked with any ritual in the case of boys, for girls however, it is marked with the fattening-room institution and its accompanying rituals. The girl is confined in a room for a period of six months to one year during which she is instructed on marital responsibilities and the problems of womanhood. Among some Ibibio neighbours, clitoridectomy is performed on her at this time, but the Ibibio do not practise this.

In the evening of the day the girl is to enter the fattening-room, a sacrifice is offered to the village god to implore his protection for her. All the girls who are to enter the fattening-room the same day, accompanied by their parents go to the shrine of the god each with an egg, a cock and some local gin. They approach the shrine one by one, present the sacrificial materials to the village chief who officiates, and undress standing naked except for a frontal flap secured by a cord tied round the waist. The chief rubs each girl's forehead with the egg while invoking the god requesting his protection for her during the fattening period. He then smashes the egg against a pot permanently kept at the shrine, slaughters the cock leaving its head beside the pot, and pours a libation of gin. Turning towards the girl, he dips his hands into a bowl of water also permanently reserved at the shrine and with his wet palms pats her head, face, abdomen, back, legs and feet meanwhile praying, dedicating her to the god. The girl now returns home with her parents to take her seat in the fattening-room, and a sacrificial meal follows. At the end of the period, another cock is offered in thanksgiving.

3. *Sacrifice at Death*

When abnormal deaths occur, that is the death of young persons and death by accident, the Ibibio consult the oracle to find out the reason for the death and if necessary offer sacrifice. Such deaths may have to do with committing offences, connections in the world invisible, negligence of the gods or the dead, or with witchcraft, which are all treated later on in this paper. Here however, we are concerned with normal death, that is death at ripe old age.

The Ibibio describe normal death as *unyong*, that is, 'a departure', 'a going away'. The destination is the assembly of the ancestors. However, to be actually admitted into this assembly, one must have belonged to the traditional cultic associations in the village while alive, and at one's death a sacrifice must be offered by each of these associations to their dead members who have also become ancestors. This sacrifice is still being offered today for non-christians. The principal victim offered varies in accordance with the dignity of the dead person and of the association in question. For a chief, *ekpo* and *ekpe*, the most important men's associations offer a bull while for other members a billy-goat suffices. The other associations offer a goat on behalf of every member. Other mate-

rials offered in addition include yams, fowls, dried fish and wine, all provided by the relations of the dead person. In the case of *ebre*, the only women's association, the sacrifice takes place in the compound of the dead person while in the case of other associations it is offered at the different shrines of these associations, and the heads of the associations officiate. In every case, the ritual starts with a libation to the ancestor members. They are prayed to accept the offering and give the dead person an honourable place among them. The person's good deeds are enumerated and it is emphasized that he was a good and faithful member. The victims are then slaughtered and their heads left at the spot of sacrifice to be later taken away and buried. A piece of the yam and parts of the fish are also left there. Then follows a sacrificial meal.

D. Initiation sacrifices

Among the Ibibio, formal induction into the status of a chief, into cultic associations and the guild of diviners involve sacrificing. These sacrifices are still being offered today in some parts of Ibibioland.

1. Sacrifice at Chieftaincy Initiation

The chieftaincy is for the Ibibio a lifetime post and a sacred post, and God himself is supposed to make the choice of a new chief through the oracle. Traditionally therefore, nobody campaigns for a vacant chieftaincy seat, for whenever such a vacancy occurs, the elders of the village consult the oracle for a choice. The person named then offers a public sacrifice to God, the acceptance of which confirms the voice of the oracle and qualifies him to be installed as the chief of the village. The sacrifice takes place in the morning at the main village square officiated at by the candidate himself in the presence of all members of the village. At the centre of the square, in full view of all, he pours a libation of local gin invoking God, the gods and the ancestors. He then lifts up a two week old chick⁷ and prays to God asking him to confirm the voice of the oracle by accepting the sacrifice. Concluding the prayer, he strangles the chick and casts it a little distance away in front of him. As he does so, vultures⁸ descend on the chick and pick it.

This is a sign of the acceptance of the sacrifice. The crowd then cheers the new chief and all press on him to congratulate him.

2. *Sacrifice at Initiation into Cultic Associations*

To become a member of an Ibibio cultic association, a person must pay an enrolment fee and provide the materials for offering a sacrifice to the dead members of the association and these include a goat, a fowl, dried fish, yams and local gin. The sacrifice takes place at the association's shrine and is officiated at by the head of the association. Dead members of the association are invoked and given a libation. They are prayed to receive the sacrifice on behalf of the person being initiated. The victims are slaughtered and their heads and feet are cut off and left at the shrine together with a piece of the fish and one of the yams. A sacrificial meal then follows.

3. *Sacrifice at Initiation into the Guild of Diviners*

A person may become a diviner either by his own free choice or by being selected by the ancestors. In either case, he undergoes an apprenticeship with someone already in the practice after having offered a sacrifice of initiation. When the choice is free, the sacrifice offered is like that of initiation into cultic association described above, but when a person is chosen by the ancestors, the process is more complicated and it is what we shall now describe.

If an ancestor in a lineage was a diviner (*abia idiong*), so that the practice of divination may not depart from that lineage, after his death he selects a young man in the lineage to take over the practice. Normally the choice is manifested by some bad spirits being sent to afflict the person with an illness generally in the form of psychosis. This is called *nkpo nsop* (spirit possession). It is the oracle however that identifies the affliction and prescribes the sacrifice. The officiant is a diviner and the ritual takes place in the compound of the candidate. Carrying an earthenware pot on the head and a chick in one hand, the candidate accompanied by the officiant, goes out of the house to an open place in the compound for a preliminary sacrifice. The officiant waves⁹ the chick all over the candidate's body and then slaughters it while praying the ancestor to take away the affliction. To show his readiness to do what the ancestor wants, the candidate breaks the pot on the ground and both return to the house for the main sacrifice. At a pre-selected corner in the house, the officiant prepares a shrine by

fixing some sticks on the floor and placing near them three earthenware saucers. He slaughters a cock and a hen and while placing their heads in the shrine, prays the ancestor to receive the sacrifice and make the person worthy to enter into his service. He offers some dried fish and pours a libation of wine, puts a manilla¹⁰ on the person's hand, then takes it off and places it in the shrine, waves some morsels of cooked food round his head and then places them in the shrine. He rubs some egg mash on the candidate's head and face and prays for good luck and the ancestor's protection in his new vocation. A sacrificial meal then follows.

E. Installation sacrifices

By installation sacrifice is meant the sacrifice offered on the occasion a person is formally and publicly placed in an office or position. Such includes the installation of the chief, the lineage head and the secluded priest (*oku inam*). Of these, only the chieftaincy installation with the attendant sacrifice is still current though only in a few places, and while *inam* institution has completely disappeared, the headship of the lineage is still in vogue but without the traditional installation ceremony.

1. *Sacrifice at Chieftaincy Installation*

The installation of the village chief takes place shortly after the initiation sacrifice described above and is officiated at by the clan head. The new chief is led in procession to the village square where the ceremony takes place. At the shrine of the village god located in the square, the officiant sprays *nsei* powder invoking the god and dedicating the new chief to him. He rubs some of the powder on the new chief's forehead, cheeks, breast and back and then pours a libation of local gin. Meanwhile a bull is slaughtered and the officiant places its head in the shrine with prayers offering it to the god and asking his protection for the new chief. In a mat hut prepared near the shrine, the new chief now takes a bath attended to by a virgin girl¹¹ of about eight years of age. He comes out of the hut wearing a loin cloth and sits on a throne near the shrine. The officiant again rubs some *nsei* powder on his forehead, puts the royal dress and the royal cap on him and then presents him with the staff of office. The village drum is sounded and guns are fired. A sacrificial meal then follows.

2. *Sacrifice at Installation of the Lineage Head*

Normally the oldest man in the lineage is the lineage head, but before he actually exercises authority, he is formally installed at a public ceremony which involves sacrificing to the ancestors. The sacrifice takes place at the ancestral shrine of the lineage and is officiated at by the village chief. With a libation of wine, the officiant invokes the ancestors of the lineage asking them to be pleased with the sacrifice and accept the person as a worthy head of the lineage and to protect and guide him. He slaughters a billy-goat and a cock and leaves their heads in the shrine. He then presents the candidate with the lineage drum and prays that he should have a peaceful tenure of office. A sacrificial meal then follows.

3. *Sacrifice at « Inam » Installation*

Inam is a period of ritual seclusion in preparation for death. It is meant to be a sign of gratitude to God for the gift of life lasting till old age and for the gift of material substance. It lasts one year during which the secluded person who must be very old and rich spends his time offering prayers and sacrifices to the ancestors. Entering into this seclusion involves being installed as *oku inam* (secluded priest). The sacrifice on the occasion of the installation is considered very precious and a bull is offered. It takes place in the candidate's seclusion chamber on an earth mound prepared for that purpose and is officiated at by one who has already gone through a similar seclusion. The officiant begins by invoking the ancestors and offering them a libation. Meanwhile, the bull is slaughtered and he sets its head on the mound praying to the *ancestors* and requesting them to accept the offering on behalf of the person. He then sets a large manilla on the mound and sprays *nsei* powder on the offreing. He anoints the candidate's forehead and cheeks with the powder and presents him with *oton inam* (staff of office). A sacrificial meal then follows.

F. Initiating sacrifices

Initiating sacrifices are those sacrifices offered at the beginning of an important undertaking or project. They include sacrifices offered at the founding of a new market, at the erection of a new

building and at undertaking a long journey. They are still being offered today but in simplified forms. It is however their original forms that interest us here.

1. *Sacrifice at the Founding of a New Market*

Two sacrifices are offered on the occasion of founding a new market. The first is offered to pay homage to the goddess of the earth for the piece of land that is to be taken out of her dominion for the purpose of commerce. The second is offered to request the god of the market for full market attendance and for the protection of those who attend the market.

First Sacrifice: When the site for the market has been decided upon, a small portion of it is cleared for the first sacrifice which is called *utot isong* (informing the earth), that is, paying homage to the goddess of the earth. For this sacrifice which is offered in the morning, a dog, a nanny-goat, a cock, a hen, a tortoise and wine are required and the village chief is the officiant. Pouring a libation to the goddess, the chief begs her to release the piece of land for market purposes, then plants an *okono* stem on the spot¹² which now becomes the shrine of the market god, and slaughters the victims cutting off their heads except that of the dog, and buries them there. The slaughtered dog is tied bundlewise to the *okono* stem while the meat of the other victims is used for a sacrificial meal which follows at the chief's house.

Second Sacrifice: This is offered after the whole site has been cleared and in the morning of the first day the market is to hold, at the shrine of the market god. With a libation of wine, the village chief invokes the market god beseeching him to take up his dwelling in the market and protect those who come there. He places a manilla at the base of the *okono* stem, spray *nsei* powder on it and then slaughters a billy-goat, a nanny-goat, a cock and a hen. The heads and feet of the victims are cut off and buried at the four corners of the market place. Then follows a sacrificial meal at a nearby house.

2. *Sacrifice at the Erection of a New Building*

To erect a building on a piece of land, one must first pay homage by sacrifice to the earth goddess to whom all land belongs. A nanny-goat, a cock and a basket containing yams, fruits and

foodstuff are offered at the site of the building with the head of the lineage of the owner of the building as officiant. Lifting up the basket high, the officiant invokes the earth goddess requesting her to accept the sacrifice and grant protection, peace and health to the offerer and those who will use the building. He calls upon the ancestors to stand by and protect the offerer and the building. He cuts off the heads of the victims and puts them in the basket which he now buries together with all its contents in a pit dug at the spot of sacrifice. Then follows a libation which he pours silently, and the planting of a shoot of *mkpafere* shrub¹³ on the same spot. The meat of the victims is cooked and eaten by all.

This has become today the sacrifice of a billy-goat to the ancestors.

3. *Sacrifice at Undertaking a Long Journey*

Traditionally among the Ibibio, when a person is about to undertake a long journey, a sacrifice is offered to the ancestors to request protection for him. On the night before departure, the head of the household assembles members of the household for the sacrifice. He invokes the ancestors with a libation and prays that they protect the traveller on his journey to and fro, and in his place of sojourn. He scoops some sand from the ground, wraps it up in a packet and gives it to the traveller instructing him to present it back to the household on his return¹⁴. He then slaughters a cock and buries its head outside the house, the meat being cooked and eaten by all.

All that remains of this sacrifice today is the libation and the sand ritual.

G. Sacrifices connected with offences

For the Ibibio, certain offences violate the sacred order and must be atoned for with sacrifice, and these are: *obom* (wanton destruction of life), adultery, taboo breach and all direct offences against the invisible beings. The other offences like stealing, violate only the profane order and do not need atoning sacrifice. Today these sacrifices are no longer offered.

1. *Sacrifice on the Occasion of « Obom »*

Obom is cold blooded murder or violent destruction of animals or crops. The Ibibio regard life as sacred coming from God, and the ancestors as guardians and protectors of life. Sacrifice on the occasion of *obom* is therefore offered to the ancestors. It is officiated at by the village chief at the place where the incident occurred. The ancestors are invoked with a libation of wine and requested to grant pardon. A white cock¹⁵ is slaughtered and its head buried there. Further prayers of reconciliation are offered and a sacrificial meal follows.

2. *Sacrifice on the Occasion of Adultery*

For the Ibibio, marriage is a sacred institution for through it the lineage is kept permanent and eternal, and the ancestors and the living are brought in contact. Adultery therefore violates this sacred institution and when committed, the offenders must pay a fine and have a sacrifice offered in atonement. If however the sin is hidden, the woman when pregnant is afflicted with difficult birth¹⁶ by the spirit of adultery (*ekpo nka owo*). To be relieved, she must reveal her lover and both must pay a fine and have the required sacrifice offered. In either case, the sacrifice is officiated at by the head of the lineage of the woman's husband and the ritual is like that of *obom* sacrifice described above. The victim is also a cock but it need not be white, and it is offered to *ekpo nka owo*.

3. *Sacrifice on the Occasion of Taboo Breach*

Breaking a taboo among the Ibibio means violating the will of the gods or ancestors and an atonement sacrifice must be offered, otherwise a punishment follows. If the taboo is about a matter that concerns the general welfare of the people, the whole community may be afflicted even if the offence was committed by one person; and depending on the circumstances, one person may likewise be afflicted even if the offence was committed by many. For example, if a person cultivates a section of a forest reserved for public rituals, the god of the forest may afflict the whole village with an epidemic in punishment. It is also very usual for one person in a group to be lost in a forest as a punishment for the group going into the forest at the wrong time. If however the offence touches

only matters of individual welfare, only the individual is punished. To be relieved of the affliction, the required sacrifice of atonement must be offered at the shrine of the god or ancestor involved. The officiant who must be a medicine man invokes the god or the ancestor and requests him to accept the offering and pardon the offence. He slaughters a fowl and pours a libation. The meat of the victim is cooked and eaten by all.

4. *Sacrifice on the Occasion of Offence against Evil Spirits*

If a person offends the evil spirits, he is sure to be attacked by them and may eventually be killed unless a sacrifice is offered. Such cases are: *mbiam* (juju) and *ekpo mum* (evil spirit attack).

a. *Mbiam Sacrifice*: A person may be attacked by a juju if he swears falsely by it, touches anything put under its protection or violates its rights. To get well, he must offer in sacrifice a young premature goat and a fowl. The ritual is performed by a medicine man who invokes the juju and requests him to accept the sacrifice and release the person. He slaughters the victims and leaves them there. Nothing of the offering is eaten.

b. *Ekpo Mum Sacrifice*: The Ibibio believe that if a person commits certain offences like stealing, the offended person, by performing certain rituals, can get evil spirits to attack the offender. The rituals make the evil spirits look on the offence as committed against them and so seek to avenge it. To get rid of the attack, a sacrifice is offered by a medicine man at a place far away in the bush where there is an old unused pathway. He waves a cock round the person's head and body and slaughters it there asking the evil spirit to accept the offering and release the person. Next, he offers a basketful of premature plantains cut into pieces, and then pours a libation. Like in the case of *mbiam* sacrifice, there is no sacrificial meal, all the offerings being abandoned at the place of sacrifice.

H. *Sacrifices occasioned by connections established in the world invisible*

The Ibibio believe that a person may have certain connections in the world invisible on account of which he may be afflicted and

required to offer sacrifice. These connections which are only revealed by the oracle when consulted on the occasion of afflictions concern:

1. *Ndem Okpongo* ('namesake god')
2. *Ebe Abasi* ('spirit husband')
3. *Eka Abasi* ('spirit mother')
4. *Ndem Mong* ('water goddess')
5. *Okpo Nsanga* ('age-set')
6. *Uyo* ('resolution made in the world invisible')

1. *Ndem Okpongo Sacrifice*

Ndem Okpongo is the god that guards the namesake relationship established at the naming ceremony. He sometimes requires a sacrifice on behalf of a newly married girl as a sign of the recognition of the namesake relationship she contracted at her naming ceremony and as the god's share in the bridewealth. He manifests his will by afflicting the girl with miscarried pregnancy. This sacrifice which is normally prescribed by the oracle when consulted on the occasion of a miscarriage is dying out today owing to the success of western medicine. It is offered at the home of the girl's namesake or of any of the namesake's descendants if the former has died. A billy-goat, yams, cloth, wine and money (N. 10.00, about \$ 15.00, are required)¹⁷, and the lineage head of the place where the sacrifice is offered officiates. *Ndem Okpongo* is invoked with a libation and requested to accept the offering as his share in the bridewealth paid on behalf of the girl and so allow her be healthy and fruitful. The goat is then slaughtered. If the namesake is alive, the cloth and money revert to her, otherwise they revert to the descendant in whose house the ritual takes place. A sacrificial meal then follows.

2. *Ebe Abasi Sacrifice*

Before coming into this world, every woman is supposed to have had a husband in the world invisible called *ebe abasi*, who may still continue to have marital relations with her at night though altogether unknown to her. Such marital relations result in miscarriages whenever the woman after normal relations with her real husband becomes pregnant. It is the oracle when consulted on the occasion of a miscarriage that identifies it as *ebe abasi* affliction and prescribes the sacrifice which effects a ritual divorce of the spirit

husband. A billy-goat, a cock, 20 manilla and basket filled with different kinds of foodstuff and fruits are offered, but this sacrifice has disappeared today. The ritual takes place at the base of an oil bean tree and is officiated at by a medicine man. The officiant first places the basket on the woman's head invoking the spirit to come down and accept the offering, then waves it seven times round her head before putting it on the ground. Each manilla is waved round the woman's head in the same manner and the spirit is prayed to accept the money as a return payment for his expenses on the occasion of the previous marriage. The officiant then sprays *nsei* powder on the head of the cock and calls on the woman and her husband to do the same. He waves the cock all over the woman, the husband and himself and then slaughters it. All there¹⁸ again spray *nsei* powder on the goat's head and then touch it before it is slaughtered. The heads of the victims are left in the basket which together with all its contents is abandoned there at the base of the tree. The meat of the goat and the cock is cooked and eaten by all.

3. *Eka Abasi* Sacrifice

Eka abasi is the mother every child is supposed to have had in the world invisible before coming into this world, and under whose protection the child is for the first few years before he gets to know the things of this world. For her services as « mother », she may sometimes demand a sacrifice, and she manifests her demand by afflicting the child with a fever. This sacrifice has died out today as most sick children are successfully treated in the hospital, but it used to be a very popular sacrifice. It takes place in the evening officiated at by a medicine man. A mat hut built beside a plantain plant at the back of the house serves as a shrine. In it the officiant fixes a stick, places a small earthenware pot filled with wine, an earthenware saucer and one manilla, and holding a basket filled with different kinds of foodstuff he invokes *eka abasi* requesting her to accept the offering and restore health to the child. He slaughters a hen leaving its head in the shrine and bathes the child with coconut juice. In front of the house, he pours a libation and offers a cock to *ete abasi* the husband of *eka abasi*. Children for whom such a sacrifice has not been offered are forbidden to partake of the sacrificial meal that follows lest they should also be attacked by *eka abasi*. After the sacrifice, each time the child eats, he throws a morsel into the shrine for *eka abasi*.

4. *Ndem Mong Sacrifice*

Some children, particularly beautiful girls are supposed to have the water goddess (*ndem mong*) as their spirit mother. Thus mothers of very beautiful babies are often worried lest they should be *ndem mong* children. As a rule, *ndem mong* attack occurs at teen-age or adulthood. It takes the form of psychosis, the person feels very weak and is deprived of the normal use of the senses. At the beginning it is mild and sporadic with long lucid intervals, but as time goes on, it becomes more severe and frequent. Each attack lasts only a few days. It is however the oracle when consulted that reveals it to be *ndem mong* attack, and the process of getting relief involves setting up a shrine and sacrificing to the goddess. This ritual is still being practised today. The officiant is a man assisted by a woman, both of whom must have had a similar attack and had gone through a similar ritual. At a nearby riverside, both offer to the water goddess in a white basin,¹⁹ different kinds of foodstuff and a white hen, praying the goddess to accept the offering and restore health to the person. The hen is thrown alive into the river together with the basin and its contents, and the person is bathed with the river water. After this, another sacrifice is offered in a small white-painted hut built at one corner of the patient's compound. The hut serves as a shrine to the water goddess and in it is placed a small table covered with white cloth. On the table are a white saucer, a white cup, a mirror and a comb. The male officiant slaughters a white cock invoking the goddess to come down to the shrine and accept the offering while the woman assistant slaughters a white hen, and both slaughter a goat. The heads of the victims are buried near the shrine and then follows a sacrificial meal.

5. *Okpo Nsanga (age-set) Sacrifice*

The Ibibio believe that just as there are children's age-sets and play-mates in this world, there are also children's age-sets and play-mates in the world invisible. A particular set in the world invisible becomes so closely united that all the children in that set always want to be together. But when they come into this world, they find this impossible since they are all scattered in different villages, and so they all try to go back to the other world. Suddenly one of them dies and begins to call back the others. They then go about in a gang bringing back all their mates in the set. Children affected range in age from five to ten years. Generally it is difficult

to rescue a child who belongs to this group for he takes ill suddenly and dies very briefly after illness. But if the case is detected in time, the child's life can be saved by a sacrifice being offered to turn away the gang. For this sacrifice which is no longer being offered today, a hen, fish and foodstuff are required and the ritual takes place at an old ant-hill.²⁰ The officiant, a medicine man, invokes the gang requesting them to accept the offering and leave the child. The hen is slaughtered and the head waved round the child's head and then thrown into a hole in the ant-hill. All the other offerings are similarly waved round the child's head and thrown in there too. A libation is poured to the spirits and the child is washed with water. A door made by tying twigs together is then placed over the hole. All now return home and then follows a sacrificial meal. Children for whom a similar sacrifice has not been offered may not partake of the meal lest they should likewise be attacked.

6. *Uyo (resolution) Sacrifice*

Some people, according to Ibibio belief, make a resolution before coming into this world as to how and when they will return to the world invisible. Some may resolve to return as children when they begin to walk, others when they reach teen-age, etc. and when that time is up, the person takes ill and dies. If however detected in time, the resolution may be reversed with a sacrifice. This sacrifice which is no longer offered today, is officiated at by a medicine man and takes place far away in the bush where there exists an old pathway that is no longer in use. The child must not be present at the place of sacrifice²¹ but the offerings, a billy-goat, a cock and a basket filled with foodstuff and fruits are waved round his head at home before being brought there. Holding the basket in a gesture of offering, the officiant prays that the child's resolution be reversed with the offering of the sacrifice. He plants an *atama*²² shoot there praying that all trouble should end, then another shoot called *udu eto* praying that the child should live and not die, and then breaks an egg praying that all that is done be successful. He slaughters the victims and pours a libation. The head, the right wing and the right leg of the cock as well as the head, the feet and the tail of the goat are left there in offering, the rest being carried home for a sacrificial meal. The meat of the sacrifice is not eaten by children for whom such a sacrifice has not been offered.

I. Sacrifice connected with negligence of the gods or the dead

If one neglects the gods or the dead, one may be afflicted as a warning until one offers the required sacrifice. The affliction is not a punishment for an offence but a means of drawing attention to an undesirable situation. This type of sacrifice is still being offered today.

1. Negligence of the gods

If for example a trader has been blessed with profit in his trade, he should voluntarily make an informal offering to the market god. If he does not do this, he may be afflicted with misfortune in his trade until he offers a formal sacrifice. The sacrifice takes place at the afflicted person's home and may be carried out by the person himself or by a medicine man. The god is invoked with a libation and a fowl is slaughtered, then follows a sacrificial meal. When the situation involved is one that concerns public welfare, a group is generally afflicted. For example in 1976, a ferry boat « M.V. Oron » which plies the Cross River between Calabar and Oron ran aground late one evening on its way back to Calabar from Oron. It was the only accident in may years. The first boat that arrived on the scene for rescue was despatched to Calabar town for whisky with which a libation was poured to the water goddess. The accident was interpreted as a warning from the goddess that for long no libation had been poured to her by those who ply her waters. A more serious case would have involved consultation of the oracle and a more serious sacrifice.

2. Negligence of the Dead

The dead may be neglected particularly if complete funeral sacrifices are not offered for them. In such cases, they afflict their relations with slight illness until the neglected sacrifices are offered. The sacrifices offered are the same as any of the funeral sacrifices already described.

J. Sacrifice on the occasion of witchcraft affliction

The Ibibio believe strongly in witchcraft (*ifot*) and in the power of sacrifice to secure the release of a person attacked by it. This is still a popular sacrifice today and is offered only at midnight offi-

ciated at by a medicine man who must be a specialist in witchcraft matters. In the house of the afflicted person, a billy-goat is slaughtered and its liver and heart stewed in oil. The officiant accompanied by the sick person and his relations, carries the stewed meat to the base of a silk-cotton tree²³ far away from dwelling homes. There he lays a small table placing on it the meat, groundnuts, bananas and biscuits. He invokes the witches and wizards responsible for the illness to receive the sacrifice and release the person, and then pours a libation. All now return home leaving the offering there, but the meat of the goat is cooked and eaten by all.

3. Religious significance of Ibibio sacrifices

Social anthropologists have always stressed that social institutions involve a framework of action as well as a framework of ideas, beliefs and values (J. Beattie, 1964 : 49). In other words, the observable phenomena in society must be seen as something meaningful and the meaning must be sought within the context of the society's system of beliefs and values (J-P. Colleyn, 1975 : 117-118). We shall therefore now attempt to make a meaning out of the rituals and symbols of Ibibio sacrifices described above and shall present a synthesis of this under a few headings.

1. *Sacrifice a Means of Communication with the Invisible Beings*

In every sacrificial ritual, the Ibibio primarily seek to communicate with the invisible beings and for this purpose they carefully select the place and the time of sacrifice. Since it is believed that these beings share the same world with man, attempt is made to find out what spots on earth are most sensitive (symbolically) to their presence and hence most congenial to contact (symbolically) with them. In fact, certain spots are believed to be sensitive to the presence of only certain invisible beings. Thus while one sacrifice may be offered at a cross roads, another is offered at an ant-hill. Apart from the spot being suitable, the hour of sacrifice must also be suitable. Hence sacrifice is not offered at midday when these beings are supposed to be very busy attending to their own needs.

The idea of sacrifice as a means of contact with the invisible beings is very clearly dramatized in the chieftaincy initiation sacrifice the primary purpose of which is to open up contact with God and openly and publicly receive communication from him regarding his

choice of the new chief. The descent of a vulture on the sacrificial victim indicates God's acceptance of the sacrifice. Thus contact with God is deemed to have been established and a communication from him obtained. The process of communication in all rituals is therefore not verbal but symbolic and the aim is not to make the invisible being serve man but rather through it man pays homage, returns thanks, asks for favours, etc.

Officers at Ibibio sacrifices also attest that through the sacrificial ritual they establish contact with the invisible beings. One of my informants, chief Udo Akpan Uwak, a diviner and medicine man, felt very proud of his profession which makes him associate often with these beings. Asked whether he ever saw them, he said he never saw them with the natural eye but with « ritual eye » (*enyen edem uko*) which he explained to mean that while performing the sacrificial ritual, he feels their presence around him and can communicate with them through ritual action.

2. *Sacrifice a Gift to the Invisible Beings*

Ibibio sacrifice is a means of symbolically giving material things to the invisible beings and as in every act of giving, the gift must be worthy of the occasion and acceptable to the person it is given. Thus sacrificial materials are standardized by what may be called « ritual custom » whereby victims are required to possess certain qualities of type, sex and colour considered symbolically appropriate for each sacrifice. For the chieftaincy initiation sacrifice for example, a chick is the appropriate victim for it symbolizes innocence, the basic virtue required of the chief. In *ndem mong* sacrifice, the principal victim must be female since it is offered to a female divinity, and must also be white for whiteness is the symbol of the water goddess. In addition, the prayers and ritual gestures which accompany the gift and the sacrificial portion buried or left at the spot of sacrifice, all express or imply the giving of something to the invisible being worshipped.

Just like any gift, Ibibio sacrifices may be accepted or rejected, but because no officiant would wish his sacrifice rejected, care is always taken to follow the prescribed rituals and to offer the most acceptable victim. Rarely therefore is sacrifice actually rejected, which would mean the officiant being struck down with an illness during the very ritual act. Rejection of sacrifice must be distinguished from apparent ineffectiveness of sacrifice. The difference was carefully explained to me by one of my informants, Ibok

Ekanem. A crop failure for example, occurring after the normal fertility sacrifice has been offered may be due to some hidden violation of a taboo and hence no a sign of the rejection of the fertility sacrifice. An unsuccessful treatment of an illness with sacrifice may be due to wrong « diagnosis » by the diviner. For the invisible beings make the diviner when consulted « see » the situation in his mind and then prescribe the sacrifice. But sometimes the « seeing » may not be very clear and he has to use his ritual experience and acumen, and this may result in his making a wrong pronouncement. An example is the case of a woman suffering from a miscarriage. This affliction may come from either *ebe abasi* (spirit husband) or *ndem okpongo* (namesake god). If a diviner does not see clearly, he may get the woman « treated » for *ebe abasi* affliction whereas she is actually being afflicted by *ndem okpongo*. In such a case, *ebe abasi* will receive the sacrifice but the woman will not be healed. In some cases too, both the diagnosis and the sacrifice may be right but too late. This often happens in the case of *okpo nsanga* (age-set) affliction. For this affliction, sacrifice must be offered before the child consents to follow the members of the age-set into the next world, for once he has given his consent, it is impossible to rescue him from the hands of these spirits. If a sacrifice is offered after the child has given his consent, the spirits will receive the sacrifice all the same but will not relinquish their hold on the child. All these are apparent ineffectiveness of sacrifices but not a sign of their rejection.

How then does one know that a sacrifice is accepted? According to my informants, there is no visible way of verifying this, one only believes that when the appropriate rituals are performed, the sacrifice is accepted, and acceptance here must not be thought of in terms of physical human acceptance which would involve the sacrificial materials being taken away by the spirits. Rather, the whole process of giving and receiving is symbolic.

3. *Sacrifice a means of expressing friendship and communion with good spirits and a means of keeping away evil spirits*

The Ibibio sacrifice to both good and evil spirits depending on the occasion and while sacrifices to the good ones are intended to lead to and express friendship and communion with them, those to the evil ones are meant to keep away these spirits from man. These intentions are also expressed in the symbolism of the materials offered and in the ritual action itself.

In sacrifices to the divinities, the ancestors and other good spirits, the ideals of amity and communion are expressed in the offering of good edible food items and animals, and in the sacrificial meal.

The significance of offering food items in sacrifice is to be understood in the context of the socio-economic life of the Ibibio who are principally farmers and for whom animals and food items are commonly exchanged and valued as gifts among close friends and neighbours.

In sacrifice therefore, the offering of food items and animals expresses friendship with the invisible beings worshipped. The sacrificial meal also expresses this ideal. For it is the common practice among the Ibibio for a group of friends to eat from a same plate. Sacrificial meals are a symbolic eating from the same plate with the invisible beings worshipped. They are therefore a symbolic expression of friendship and communion with these beings.

In sacrifices to evil spirits, the materials offered are sometimes not worth eating. Examples of such materials are premature plantains in *ekpo mum* sacrifice and a premature goat in *mbiam* sacrifice. By such offerings, it is meant to express contempt and unfriendliness. In these sacrifices too, there are no sacrificial meals as the offerings are abandoned at the spot of sacrifice. This symbolizes dissociation from these beings.

In the sacrifice to God however, (and the only instance of it is the chieftaincy initiation sacrifice) even though there is no sacrificial meal and even through the victim (a chick) is immature, there is nevertheless friendship and communion. In Ibibio custom, out of reverence, the ordinary people do not eat at the same table or from the same plate with the chief. Yet this does not detract from the bond of love existing between the chief and his subjects. It is thus to avoid symbolically sharing a meal with God that the Ibibio do not eat any sacrifice offered to God. Also, in this sacrifice, a chick is offered as a symbol of the innocence of the chief-elect and of divine protection for him, not as a sign of contempt or unfriendliness, for the circumstances of this sacrifice are such that it can express nothing else than the special love of God for the offerer.

Thus when offered to God, the gods, the ancestors and the other good spirits, sacrifice serves for and expresses friendship and communion with these beings, but when offered to evil spirits, it serves as a means of keeping them away from man.

4. *Sacrifice a Means of Atonement*

The Ibibio categorize offence (sin) according to the cosmic order violated by the act. While some offences like *obom* and adultery violate the sacred order, others like stealing violate only the profane order. Besides this distinction into orders violated, an offence may be said to have dimensions which are distinguishable into individual, social and (for those that violate the sacred order) sacred. The individual dimension refers to the realm of conscience whereby anyone who commits an offence feels the guilt in himself and may be moved to repent. It is believed that if a person does not repent and turn away from his evil ways, he will be punished. By the social dimension is meant that every offence must always be viewed not only in the context of the individual who commits it, but also in the context of the community and vice versa. Hence the Ibibio believe that the whole community is liable for even the hidden offence of the individual, and similarly an individual may get punished for the offence of a group. For this reason, repentance in some cases, like adultery, must include public confession of guilt. By the sacred dimension is meant that the offence interferes with what is regarded as an essential channel linking the invisible beings with the world visible or is directed to the person of the invisible beings. Adultery for example, interferes with such a channel in that it is through marriage that the lineage, in which the invisible beings also function, is kept alive.

Offences that violate the sacred order have these three dimensions and the result of such offences is the cutting away of the individual or community concerned from friendship with the invisible beings and making these beings no longer protective so that they cannot be invoked with success. The only way to restore the violated order and gain back friendship is through sacrifice. By the sacrificial ritual, a neutral person establishes contact with the invisible beings and pleads on behalf of the offender. By accepting the sacrifice, the invisible beings pardon the offence and admit the offender back into friendship with them. The sacrifice does not however work mechanically, for the person must first accept responsibility for the offence and repent. Atonement by sacrifice therefore involves repentance and reparation at the social and the sacred levels, and the specific function of sacrifice is to establish communication with the invisible beings and with it friendship that was lost.

4. Conclusion

We have in the above identified twenty-eight different types of sacrifice offered by the Ibibio on different life situations. All these are directed to the gods and spirits except one — the chieftaincy initiation sacrifice which is offered to God. It is noteworthy that while this sacrifice is offered to God, the chieftaincy installation sacrifice is offered to the god of the village and this is because by the installation ceremony the chief assumes the responsibility of administering the affairs of the village under the supervision of the village god. There is an element of « do ut des » in some of these sacrifices provided this is understood in the sense of « I give so that I may dispose myself for you to give ». The emphasis is on the giver who by giving places himself under the protection of the recipient from whom he also expects help, though if such help does not come, the recipient is not thereby despised. The giving is not therefore a contract. As all rituals, sacrifice is primarily a means of communication with the world invisible. Its power therefore transcends our world, and whether in its praxis or theoretical conception, it is an expression of the deepest religious convictions of the Ibibio.

Notes

1. This paper is an abstract from the first part of my doctoral dissertation — a comparative study of Ibibio sacrifices and Old Testament sacrifices — presented in February 1980 to the Theological Faculty of the Pontifical Urban University, Rome. It is based on my personal experience and field work carried out in the months of January and February 1979. My main informants were Udo Akpan Uwak, Ibok Ekanem, both diviners and medicine men, chief Uko Akpan, a village chief, and Okon Ikpe, the son of another village chief. All come from different villages in Iman area.
2. The Ibibio regard sexual intercourse as a bodily enjoyment that enslaves the spirit. Sexual abstention is therefore practised on certain ritual as well as non-ritual occasions that are regarded as very serious and precarious (for example before a wrestling match) in order to liberate the spirit for maximum spiritual concentration.
3. For the Ibibio, the end of one year and the beginning of another form one period which gradually rolls in and out. It does not therefore mean that the change from the old to the new year takes place at the time of the end-of-the-year sacrifice. Rather the sacrifice celebrates this period of change.
4. The tortoise is a symbol of the earth goddess, the goddess of fertility, but in this sacrifice it represents all wild animals in the farmland who are now subjected to the power of the farmland god so that they may not harm the people during the farming activities about to begin.

5. The Ibibio believe that babies still belong to the world invisible. Through spittle, the officiant establishes contact with the child in that world, so that the ritual becomes effective in both worlds.

6. Washing with water or any juice symbolizes cleansing from influences of the invisible world. Rain water is supposed to be evry potent in ritual and here it is simulated by throwing water onto the roof and letting it fall on the child.

7. A candidate for the chieftaincy must be a good man, not a criminal. The chick symbolizes this quality of innocence demanded of him.

8. The Ibibio regard the vulture as God's messenger and do not kill it but offer it fish and meat whenever they see it. Hence it does not fear people and is always present whenever there is a gathering. There is therefore nothing mysterious about the bird's presence at the sacrifice and its picking the chick.

9. The action of waving the sacrificial victim over the offerer emphasizes his active involvement in the ritual.

10. The « manilla » is a heavy metal shaped like the horse shoe and was the monetary unit used up to the early 1940s. In ritual, money symbolizes monetary transaction with the invisible beings as well as material blessings. Here it symbolizes the buying off of the offerer from the hands of the evil spirits.

11. The virgin girl is another symbol of the chief's innocence.

12. Ritual planting of a stem or branch of a tree on a piece of land symbolizes a claim of ownership. By this ritual the piece of land is claimed for the market god. *Okono*, a spongy slender plant that grows on all types of soil and survives all types of weather conditions symbolizes good attendance at the market at all times.

13. *Mkpafere* is a tough shrub and symbolizes strength and endurance of the building against wind and evil influences.

14. There is supposed to be a mystical connection between the ancestors and their former habitat. The sand ritual expresses the fact that the traveller is being accompanied by the protection of the ancestors during the entire period of his absence.

15. Whiteness symbolizes optimum perfection, and *obom* is regarded as the worst crime. A white cock is used in the sacrifice for symbolic opposition — the worst crime is atoned for with the optimum victim.

16. The Ibibio view the woman's act of adultery more seriously than the man's. This seems to be based on the fact that it is only the woman's adultery that can bring « foreign blood » into the lineage — a thing looked upon as an insult to the lineage.

17. In this sacrifice the currency in vogue is offered because that is the currency in which the bridewealth was paid, whereas in other cases the manilla, an archaic currency is used.

18. Participation of the medicine man and the woman's husband in some of the ritual actions is because these are witnesses to the ritual divorce.

19. Whiteness is the symbol of the water goddess who is supposed to be very clean.

20. An old ant-hill no longer inhabited by ants is a symbol of group desertion and therefore symbolically befits a place to sacrifice to spirits of children who have deserted their parents in group.

21. Since the child had resolved to die, its presence at the place of sacrifice might hinder the success of the ritual, hence it is not brought there.

22. The plants in this ritual have nominal symbolism. *Atama* has as its full name *atama ama iko*, that is the leaf which when eaten brings about the end of trouble; *udu eto* means the tree of life / the living tree.

23. The base of the silk-cotton tree is believed to be the rendezvous of witches and wizards.

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Sommario

L'articolo è uno studio dei sacrifici ibibio condotto da un Ibibio, il quale in aggiunta alla conoscenza diretta della cultura tradizionale del suo popolo ha compiuto una specifica inchiesta sul terreno (gennaio-febbraio 1979), discutendo l'argomento con capi-villaggio, indovini e guaritori. Vi sono ventotto tipi di sacrificio offerti in diverse occasioni, quali la celebrazione del termine dell'anno, l'iniziazione d'un indovino, la cura di malattie. Soltanto in uno di questi tipi — l'investitura del capo — il sacrificio è offerto a Dio, mentre negli altri casi esso è offerto alle deità minori, ad antenati e a spiriti. Molti di questi tipi sono caduti in disuso a causa dell'influenza del cristianesimo o dell'introduzione della medicina occidentale. I principali aspetti rituali includono invocazioni, libagioni, uccisione della vittima e talora un pasto sacrificale. Ministro del sacrificio può essere, secondo i casi, il capo, il capofamiglia o un guaritore; il rito viene celebrato nelle case, al piede di certi alberi, presso i crocevia, sulle rive di un fiume, e solo di mattina, di sera o di notte, ma mai nelle ore centrali del giorno. Le offerte consistono in animali, pesci, denaro. Per gli Ibibio il sacrificio è un mezzo per stabilire una comunione con gli esseri invisibili offrendo loro doni materiali, e così propiziarsi gli esseri benevoli e tener lontani quelli malvagi, ed espiare trasgressioni e colpe umane.

Summary

This is a study of Ibibio sacrifices carried out by an Ibibio. It is based on field work done in the months of January and February 1979 during which the author discussed the subject with several informants including village chiefs, diviners and medicine men. There are twenty-eight sacrificial types offered on different occasions like the celebration of the end of the year, initiation of the chief and the healing of illnesses. Only one of these — the chieftaincy initiation sacrifice — is offered to God, the rest being offered to the gods, ancestors and the spirits. Most of them too have died out owing to the influence of christianity and the introduction of western medicine. The main ritual aspects include invocations, libations, slaughtering of the victim and sometimes sacrificial meal. The minister of sacrifice may be the chief, the household head or the medicine man depending on the occasion, and the ritual is carried out in people's homes, at bases of trees, at crossroads and at the riverside only in the morning, evening or night, but never at midday. Things offered include animals, fish and money. Sacrifice is for the Ibibio a means of establishing communion with the invisible beings in order to give them material things as gift, to draw near the good ones in friendship and communion or keep away the evil ones, and to atone for offences.