

Facial Scarification on Ifè Brass Heads: An Alternative Hypothesis and Its Implications.

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Abstract

The discovery of the Ifè heads in the early 20th century stirred the global art community. By the mid 20th century, the metal heads had become a sensation and source of pride to the Yorùbá nation. Prominent striation on some of the heads however raised many questions as the pattern could not be appropriated into any existing Yorùbá scarification pattern or stylistic philosophy. This paper examines these scarification patterns and explores a possible origin for it outside the Yorùbá nation. The central question of this study is - if the patterns are not indigenous to the Ifè Yorùbá people, who then do the heads truly represent and where are they from? Through formal examination of the pattern on the heads and against the backdrop of historical data, correlation analysis with several facial scarification patterns within a predefined study area was carried out. The findings suggest that the scarified heads are not a representation of any proto-Yorùbá group or practise and that the source of the stylistic inspiration for the facial design is not Yoruba.

Keywords: Scarification, Ife, Brass, Facial identity, Yoruba

1. Introduction

Ifè heads are a group of naturalistic head sculptures made generally of brass, bronze and terra cotta. Found mostly in and around Ile Ifè - the spiritual capital of the Yorùbá people. The existence of such sublime works troubled the imagination of scholars for the most part of the 20th century. Beyond their acclaimed beauty and naturalism, a feature that makes the heads peculiar is the pronounced surface pattern seen on a number of the pieces.

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The pattern is an unmistakable and deliberate series of parallel lines (striation) running from the fringes of the hairline down to the chin. These striations are regarded as a stylistic signature for Ifè classicism. The attention the lines command is significant and scholars of African art history have responded to it with such glee. In fact, so definitive are the striations on the Ifè heads that other works found outside the geographical sphere of Ifè that feature striations some worth similar to those on the Ifè heads are without reluctance assigned to pre 17th century Ifè corpus. A good example of such batching can be seen in the case of the *Seated figure of Tada* of the *tsoede* bronze group.²

Over a hundred years after these heads were discovered, debate on aspects of the pieces still linger. While reasonable progress have been made in some regard -- though not always conclusive -- it is important to continue the quest for absolute knowledge of these heads. This study will investigate the possible origin of the scarification on the Ifè heads and use this as a guide to formulate an alternative position on who the heads represent? While the idea that the heads represent ancient Yoruba kings of Ile Ifè may not be totally wrong, this idea is certainly not absolute as some visual characteristics of the heads do not support the 'portrait of Ifè king' idea. This study will investigate this gap and present an alternative and justifiable view.

2. Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to seek a logical origin for the scarification patterns on the Ifè heads. The objectives of the study are to identify the source of the scarification patterns found on the heads. Against this backdrop, the study will then proffer a functional hypothesis on who the heads truly represent. The study is also interested in the implication of the above stated objectives on the long standing relationship between the Yorùbá and the tribe from where the stylistic ideology was derived.

3. Brief Background And Methodology

Over the years, many Yorùbá art history scholars have discussed the heads from a variety of positions. Therefore, ample papers on different aspects of the Ifè heads are available. In a very instructive work, Willett (1960) presents a reliable introduction to Ifè arts and the potentials of the archaeological wealth of Ifè and the Yorùbá nation as a whole. In another work, the critical analysis of the Olokun Head by Fagg and Underwood (1949) gives a sense of depth to the artistic corpus of the Yorùbá people.

²For details on Seated figure of Tada and Tsoede bronzes – See: Fagg W. & List H., *Nigerian Images* (National Commission for Museums & Monuments. Lagos, Nigeria.1990)

Other important scholarly work on issues surrounding the heads and Yorùbá sculpture in general include Bascom (1990), Warner, O. and Willett F. (1975), Drewal H. (1989), Herbert E. W. (1973), Lawal B. (2001), Chikwendu et al. (1989), H. Barker (1965), Adepegba C. (1986) and Blier P. S. (1985) and (2012) to mention a few.

Willett (1960) in his *Ife and its Archaeology* stated that the Yorùbá civilization, as revealed by the artefacts found, may have been a result of a fusion between the proto-inhabitants and a small ruling class of migrant who brought ideas from 'outside', contributing to what became a highly artistic citystate in the area. This submission is pivotal to this paper.

A substantial part of the work done for this research is based on physical and formal analysis of the surface patterns on the Ifè brass heads and correlation analysis of these patterns with those of selected tribes in a predetermined geographical sphere. This study also carried out interviews with Baba Oluyemi³, staff of the National museum in Lagos and Ifè, Tera tribesmen of northerthern Nigeria and Ifè Locals. The study also used secondary data collected from two major Libraries - National Museum Library, Onikan, Lagos and the Obafemi Awolowo University Library, Ifè. This study selected a sample size of nine heads from the Ife corpus – seven brass and two terra cotta. The selected heads all have tribal scarification in order to fit into the scope of the study and they all adequately represent the naturalistic practise of Ifè style. While some of the famous Ife heads do not have tribal scarification, they all generally present the same artistic style and were made from the same casting technique. The outcome of the formal analysis of the striations on the selected heads was correlated with patterns seen on different Yorùbá groups and also with tribes from predetermined locations outside the Yorùbá nation. These analyses were guided by the Yorùbá visual and cultural aesthetics. Correlated patterns were further subjected to scrutiny against data on prehistory and myth of origin.

4. Importance of Scarification Patterns to Historical Studies

Scarification patterns are usually purposeful and predetermined. Almost all African tribes have defined patterns which carry certain tribal meaning. In Sub Saharan Africa, fixed designs are used not only for beautification but also for identification and as such it is rare to find uncontrolled proliferation of patterns. Because scarification is mostly for identification, beautification and/or ritual, they are generally consistent and unique to groups. Therefore, pattern designs are a veritable indices for tracing the origin, purpose or affiliation of the wearer be it a tribesman or on a piece of art.

³Oluyemi is the last surviving early 20th century Ile Ife traditional brass and bronze caster

When similar patterns are in fact noticed, they are often within geographical proximity and tribes with such similar patterns usually have historical links. It is not uncommon in ancient Africa to find groups of the same lineage split up due to political or social disputes. Such rows may send one half of the group some distance away from the other while still sharing many similarities in visual and material culture. In an important early 20th century documentation of the tribal scarification patterns in the Northern part of Nigeria, Tremearne (1911) remarks instructively that the knowledge of scarification patterns might be very useful in certain circumstances, as these marks, to some extent, define the tribe, status and sometimes position in the family of the wearer. Irving (2007) in an independent study agrees with this position.

5. Striation And The Ifè Heads

The last time a ground breaking archaeological discovery was made which had any significance to the study of the Ifè heads was in 1957, at Ita Yemoo, Ifè, when seven objects were found, five of which were bronze works. It should be noted that other landmark archaeological discoveries related to the Ifè heads were recorded in 1903, 1938, and 1939. Willett (1967) has argued that -- we shall have to rely increasingly on archaeology to throw light not only on the history of art, but on the whole history of human progress in Nigeria. An opinion that Lawal (1977) agrees with. Lawal states that the only debatable works we have at present are those recovered by archaeology, and it is on these that the art history of Nigeria is being built.

These positions are about 40 years ago and while the idea of archaeology feeding art history is still a valid approach, if one considers the current state of comatose of archaeological practice in Nigeria, we may be forced to seek a new methodology. In line with this thought, if we were to wait for more archaeological discoveries in order to break the impasse we are currently experiencing, we may never arrive at a conclusion in the study of the heads. An alternative approach is to return to the heads for more answers and insights to our study. Taking time to critically examine the art pieces under study and exploring whatever knowledge one can garner from it may reveal far more than art historians suppose. Karickhoff (1991) reflects this principle in a paper, which closes with the questions, "Does an art speak, does it move you, and is there communication between the viewer and the art? If so, then the art has succeeded".

With the above as a backdrop, this paper posits that the unbroken vertical lines on the Ifè heads are indeed tribal marks. Evidence to support this claim will be presented in this paper shortly. Firstly, this paper will examine some counter positions. It has been argued that the striations on the Ifè brass heads are artistic representations of the beaded strings seen on a Yorùbá beaded crown.

This is unlikely. When one studies the striations on the heads, it is observed that the lines curve around the chin. Beaded strings on Yorùbá crowns do not take such a course when the crown is worn. In his book *Yorùbá Beaded Crown*, Ulli Beier (1982), using photographic illustrations of traditional Yorùbá crowns of the Òkukù people of southwest Nigeria, demonstrates how the strings on a Yorùbá beaded crown drop vertically when the crown is worn. The function of this is to occlude the *Oba's* (king) face from the public. In the early days, the *Oba* was seen to be a spirit being with supernatural power.

The *Oba's* bare face must not be seen by his subjects, as this was believed to have dire consequences. Crown placement and the covering for the *Oba's* face is a deliberate routine among the ancient Yorùbá to ensure the perpetual covering of the king's face. Like most caps, crowns are delicately designed to sit comfortably on the head of the wearer—and in the case of Yorùbá crowns; they are designed to be worn with the apex pointing skywards. (Akande, 2011). Except for specific reasons, the rim of head-gears is relatively straight running through a defined axis around the wearer's head. Illustrations in Fig. 1 demonstrate how the crown or cap sits on the head of a wearer.

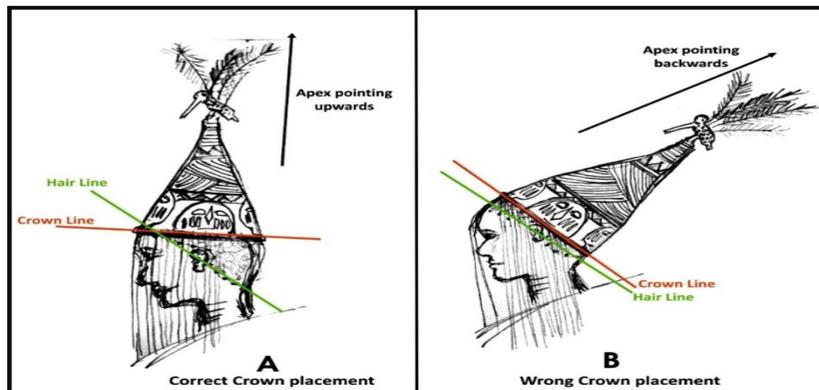


Fig. 1: Diagrams showing the relationship between hairline and crown base on a human head when the Yorùbá crown is worn typically (A) and otherwise (B). Sketch by the author.

These illustrations clearly show that the holes found along the hairline of some of the Ifè heads are not used to hold real crowns or head gear of any type in place as some may argue. It is more probable that materials intended to mimic human hair are inserted into the holes in order to complete the presentation of realism. The pointing skywards of the apex of Yorùbá crowns is to signify the godhead as shown in illustration 'A' of Figure 1.

When the crown is worn in this correct manner, it will be noticed that the rim does not align with the path of the hair line holes as seen on the Ifè heads. However, should the crown be worn in a manner shown in illustration 'B', it would be noticed that the apex of the crown would point backwards. This is not consistent with the traditional and spiritual fashion of Yorùbá royalty. Further, should the crown be worn as shown in illustration 'B', it will result in the drastic separation and falling of the fringes designed to cover the face (*iboju*) hereby defeating the purpose of face covering as shown in illustration 'B'.

If the vertical lines on the Ifè heads are meant to be a representation of the stringed beads used on Yorùbá crowns to cover the wearer's face, it fails to reflect the details of beads on the strings in the way relief sculpture should. Because the artist(s) who created the Ifè heads followed a strict canon of naturalism, it becomes improbable that those lines represent the beaded strings. Also, the striations on the heads cannot be a representation of the beaded strings of a Yorùbá crown because the same lines are found on other Ifè works that represent courtiers and even slaves. Those individuals would indeed not be documented wearing the beaded crowns. Another notion argues that the striations represent natural skin wrinkles. Physical evaluation of the works quickly dismisses this theory. The arrangements of the striations do not resemble wrinkles in any way. Moreover, a number of the pieces are evidently of young people, who are unlikely to have wrinkles in any significant form or amount – certainly not in the magnitude represented by the striation on the Ifè heads.



Bascom (1938) argued in his description of the heads that the striations are very likely to represent scarification. Other credible researchers of Yorùbá ancient culture, such as Babatunde Lawal, Adepegba Cornelius, Frank Willett and Bernard Fagg have also argued in favour of this view. While several renowned scholars have suggested that the striations on the Ifè heads are facial tribal scarification, this study moves a step further to present evidential prove. Indication that the striations are tribal scarification can be found on the faces of some northeastern tribes in Nigeria. The Tera tribe of Biu Emirate in the W'ayo local government area, the *Marghi* of the southern Niger Republic, the Bura tribe of northeastern Nigeria, and the Jara tribe, also of northeastern Nigeria adorn facial marks that keenly resemble the Ifè style striations. This study found that within the geographical space of Nigeria, the highest correlation in design and pattern with the Ifè style striation is found in the patterns of the above mentioned tribes. See photos of Tera tribesman in fig. 2

Fig. 2: Photo showing facial scarification of Tera Tribesmen (Photo by Abimbola Akande)

Mallam Zarma (in the first two photos of fig. 2) is from a tribe called the *Nyimathli*, though they are popularly known as *Tera* people or *Terawa*. A close study of his facial scarification reveals a striking resemblance in pattern, style and ideology with the marks on the Ifè heads. The similarity between Zarma's pattern and those on the Ifè heads are far more than any markings used within the Yorùbá nation – both currently or in the past. Beyond mere conjecture, with the evidence presented in figure 2 and conclusions derived from the visual and correlation analysis of surface patterns on the Ifè heads, this study confirms that the striations on the Ifè heads are indeed tribal scarification. If this deduction is valid, it then becomes important to examine the implication of this against the reality that the original royal families of Ifè particularly maintain that they do not adorn tribal scarification of any kind. If the heads are portraits of Ifè royals and the Ifè royals do not adorn any form of scarification, where then is the origin of these pronounced facial marks?

6. Alternative Hypothesis for the Origin of the Scarification on the Heads

Many Yorùbá art historians have hitherto looked within the Yorùbá nation to find answers to the issues of that pertain to Yorùbá art history. The time may be right for historians to look outside the geographical area of the Yorùbá nation to answer some of these lingering questions about Yorùbá art. After all, Yorùbá city-states were a melting pot for commerce and political alliances. Therefore, to look more closely at the influences from outside the nation, especially in earlier times will not be out of place. It will be safe to assume that the culture of Ile Ifè in the early times was an amalgam of several subcultures. Ifè was a religious capital and commercial hub of the Yorùbá nation around 1000 – 1700CE and as such both skilled and unskilled immigrants were welcomed, provided they contributed to the overall growth of the town.

As already suggested, the striation patterns on the Ifè heads strongly correlates with the pattern on the faces of the northern tribes of Biu emirate. So if the striations on a sculptural piece appear to be from the northeastern part of Nigeria in design, why then were they found in the Yorùbá country? In attempting an alternative hypothesis for this question, this study will use the *Olokun* head as a case study. It should however be noted that while the *Olokun* head is a prominent piece among the Ifè corpus, it is by no means unique in treatment and features. This study believes that the insight given by the *Olokun* head can be interpolated and related in many ways to the other pieces with the Ifè style striations.

The *Olokun* head is by far, the most controversial and possibly the most popular of the Ifè brass heads. The head was brought to public notice by Leo Frobenius, the German anthropologist, in 1910. It was the first brass head to be reported in scholarship. (Willett, 1976). Fagg and Underwood (1948) published a detailed account of their examination of the *Olokun* headpiece. While this study will not go into every detail discussed by the duo, it will point out an aspect of their account that is relevant to the discussion here. In their description, the two researchers noted a significant feature on the head, using the early accounts from Leo Frobenius' important work titled "The voice of Africa" as their reference. The striations behind the left ear (on the original) show that they were extended downwards by cutting in the metal; they are much less regular than if they had been cut entirely in the wax model; yet 'these cuts were not made in the present head, for the un-chased casting surface is continuous, even in the deepest furrow (Fagg and Underwood, 1948)

This observation gives insight into how peculiar scarifications behind the ears are. Primary data for this study reveal that the act of scarring behind the ear is very rare, and when done, it is deliberate.

Therefore scarification lines behind the ear can be seen as an important index for determining possible relationships among tribes. The scar lines behind the ear of the *Olokun* head give this researcher a basis for comparing the *Olokun* head patterns with the patterns seen on the Tera people of Biu Emirate. Furthermore, through the course of this study, it was not to be seen anywhere in the Yorùbá nation where facial scarification extends behind the ear or where the Yorùbá have anything near the number of scar lines as featured on the Ife heads or worn by the northerners. Thus the striation lines behind the ear of the *Olokun* head, as it is on most of the other Ifè brass heads, are a unique index that may be used to trace the origin of the scarification pattern on the heads or the people the heads represent.

Mallam Zarma features similar striations behind the ears as delivered on the *Olokun* head and other Ifè head pieces (See Fig 3a and b). Though Zarma mentioned that the total number of lines on the face of the *Tera* people now vary, he claims the number was a lot more than he currently adorns. He stated that the number started dwindling as the good *wamzamai* (scar masters) died off. Zarma's facial markings are for tribal identification, and both male and female from his tribe wore the pattern. Though no *wamzam* was available for us to interview in Zarma's village, Zarma noted that the scar masters conform strictly to the acceptable codes of the tribal pattern, which the *Tera* people have worn since the early times. According to Zarma, a standard was adhered to when the villagers wore the mark; hence the pattern is on one as it is on all others, including the gashes behind the ear. Zarma claims that extra care was taken in the scarification process, at this point, as a cut too long and too deep may rupture a delicate vessel. Over the years, the facial pattern of the *Tera* people has become their tribal code.



Fig. 3a

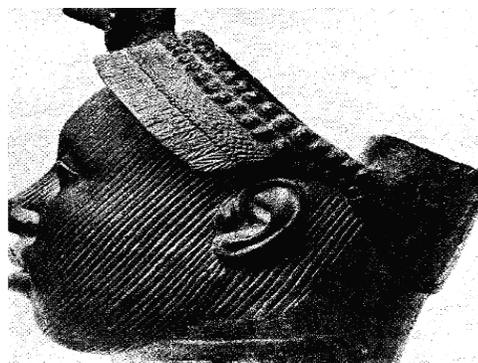
Fig. 3b⁴

Fig 3a: Side view of Zarma's face showing Ifè style striations. Notice the lines behind his ear.
 Fig 3b: Side view of "Olokun" Head with Ifè style striations. Notice the lines behind his ear.

⁴Olokun head photo in Fig 3b, Fig. 4 and photos in Fig. 5 are used with kind permission from The Hunterian Museum.

After physical formal analysis, this study posits that the similarity between the tribal marks of the Tera people as seen on Mallam Zarma in Fig 3a and the striation pattern on the *Olokun* head appear too closely correlated to be over looked. Base on this finding, this study concludes that there is a relationship between the ancient *Tera* people of the Biu Emirate and the individual represented by the *Olokun* head and, by extension the other Ifè heads.

Olokun is a deity likened to the Greek Poseidon – the god of the ocean/sea. *Olokun* means the owner of the ocean. There is however, no ocean or sea within a hundred mile radius of Ifè, thus it is unlikely that in ancient times there would be a deity dedicated to ocean/sea worship in the Yorùbá area. Indeed many of the ancient Yorùbá of the central and northern part of the country never saw or knew about any great water mass, until the frequent entrance of the Europeans around the fifteenth century CE. Though Willett has suggested that the globular pots found in the *Olokun* shrine near *Obaleru* may have been used to store ocean water fetched from a nearby water mass believed to be the remnant of a once great ocean. This is unconfirmed and unlikely. Further, the geography of Ile Ifè simply does not support the theory. *Okun Ijio*, a pool in the *More* quarter of Ifè was certainly never large enough to have once been a great mass of water - and definitely not large enough to be qualified as an ocean. Though the Yorùbá of the central and northern areas of the country venerated other small water bodies such as streams (*odò*) and rivers (*òsà*), this study maintains that the knowledge of the ocean among the ancient Yorùbá was sparse and there could not have been enough awareness of the concept to warrant the worship of such.

An alternative explanation then for *Olokun* may be appropriated as follows. Giblin(2010) recounts that the northerners (often generically called Hausas) who lived and worked among the Yorùbá in ancient time were known for rope making amongst other things such as bead making, trading, rearing cattle and petty labour. For this reason, it is probable that the issue may have arisen from a dialectical and/or tonal error where *Olokun*– owner/maker of ropes – may have been passed on as *Olokun* – Owner of the ocean. Pronunciation and dialect are widely varied amongst the Yorùbá even till this day.

The notion that rope making was an occupation practised mainly by the northerners is confirmed by Mutalab Rimi, a rope maker in Sabo, Ibadan. Rimi claims he is practising the act of rope making the way his grandfather taught him. He asserts that his family have been rope makers since ancient times, and that they have always lived below the Niger River (i.e. the southern part of Nigeria) trading. He adds, however, that his ancestors did more than just rope making. They also traded in onions and raw spice. To Rimi, however, rope making is the main family craft that has been passed down through generations.

Tijani (2008) in his study of Hausa communities in urban centers hinted at the presence and prominence of Northern rope makers in Sabo areas of Yorùbáland offering their goods and service to all – particularly kolanut merchants. Johnson (1921) while discussing manners and customs also stated that the barbers and rope makers in ancient Yorùbá land are mostly Hausas and Fulani, as these professions are rarely practiced by the Yorùbá.

In answering the question therefore why the tribal marks on the piece are like those of a far northern tribe and why were they found in the Yorùbá country? This study suggests that the individual represented by the “Olokun head” is not an Ifè king or Yorùbá individual or deity. Instead, it is probable that the “Olokun head” represents a wealthy northern immigrant merchant and skilled artisan who settled in Ile Ifè. The merchant may have been a successful rope maker and/or trader in commodities such as beads. This individual was successful enough to afford a near-life brass self-portrait made by a caster or the cast may have been made in his honour after his death. The caster will most likely be an itinerant artisan who will travel to and temporarily stay in flourishing metropolis of the time.

Beads fragments and a crucible have been found in the *Olokun Walode* groove in Ifè. The northerners were also credited with bead making, the *erinla* and *esuru* beads popular among the Yorùbá were said to have been imported into the Yorùbá towns from Kano and Sokoto in quantities by merchants. It is not clear however, if the northerners served as skilled or unskilled labour at the bead making factories in Ifè. Bead making is nonetheless still very popular among the northerners in Nigeria today. A city called Bida located less than 30 miles from the Niger River is a Mecca of sort for bead making in Nigeria. On the other hand, not so much can be said for bead making in Ile Ifè now.

The question may arise that if the individual represented by the “Olokun head” is not Ifè royalty, why does the sculpture have a tiara? The tiara or coronets on the Ifè heads are markedly different from the one seen on the sculpture showing the full royal couple with interlocked limbs or the half figure of the *Ooni* (king). This could mean that the individual represented by the “Olokun head” was not an Ifè king but may have been a ward chief of his group and that entitles him to wear a form of head piece to distinguish himself. Such a skilled and successful individual would have a large number of dependants– family, staff, slaves etc. These dependants or colleagues (possibly rope makers or traders) may venerate him after his death by making a cast of him with a coronet. This act of creating a mnemonic object in honour and remembrance of a person appears to be rather popular in the early days.

It is not unlike the portrait photograph or painting we use these days to remember individuals. Spirit and ancestral worship is also not alien in this region, hence the possibility that over time the cast became an object of worship and the devotees may be the descendants of his followers.

Curious enough, when one studies the tiara on the “Olokun” head piece, the protruding tip that points upwards and the round band that sits on the head do in fact look like objects crafted from the weaving of ropes and beads. (See fig 4) In the ancient times they may have used ropes made from some kind of organic thread as part of the materials used for the tiara that was represented on many of the Ifè heads. This makes it significantly different from the fully covered beaded royal cap we find of the half and full brass figures of the Ooni and miniature royal couple figure showing an Ooni and his wife. This difference in style may suggest that the scarified heads with the ‘rope and bead’ tiara are generally not images of Oonis (Ifè kings) rather portraits of other immigrant or ward chiefs.

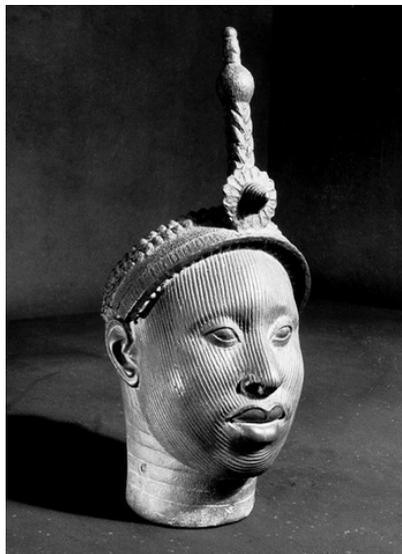


Fig 4: The Olokunhead

We may further query the origin of this hypothetical individual represented by the *Olokun* head. This study presumes that the individual in question is a northerner and not an aborigine – Why? The northerners integrated well into the culture and life of the Yorùbá since early times and at that time, it was not strange to have northerners serve even within the royal courts. An example that supports this position can be seen in the story of Lajuwa the royal chamberlain who temporarily seized power after the death of *Ooni* Aworokolokin – Obalufon’s successor.

Lajuwa reportedly hid the corpse of the late king and took the royal regalia -- using it as a disguise, he impersonated the king until he was eventually caught and beheaded. (Lawal, 2001). A terracotta head was made to represent Lajuwa. Historians put this event at around the late fourteenth – early fifteenth century CE.

Another example of northern integration may be seen in the account of Frobenius (1912) stating Bida as the name of the interpreter to the king. Bida is a northern name; hence this suggests that the interpreter is of Hausa ethnicity. Ancient oral tradition as documented by Johnson (1921) also pointed out a Hausa slave was sent alongside a Yorùbá courtier to Nupe (central area of Nigeria) by the *Alaafin* (king) Sango on the mission to find out Sango's mother's name.

As the Yorùbá capital cities grew in power and prestige, the cities drew people and cultures from surrounding countryside. (Obayemi, 1971). Several layers of migration occurred from the early times and the accounts of Yorùbá prehistory of the beginnings of Ifè show this. It explains that an immigrant Northeastern clan entered into early Ifè and seeing the aborigine were a generally agreeable people, the immigrants tactfully took over the affairs of government from a dynasty of early plain face kings of Ifè– this event, believed to have happened around 700CE. The usurpers facial identity (scarified) was eventually integrated into the Yorùbá kingship order through intermingling with the aborigines. Ifè chiefs from the proto line continue to state that traditionally, the Ifè royals and people did not wear facial marks. The foreign pattern has survived in almost its original state among some tribes in the northern part of Nigeria, but clearly has been significantly modified among the Yorùbá people.

7. Presentation Of Findings

Summarily, the findings of this study support a strong correlation between the striations on the Ifè brass head pieces and the facial marks of the Tera people. When examined closely, the two patterns share peculiarities and a common artistic philosophy. The unbroken parallel lines and the striations behind the ear underscore a high correlation between the two. Mallam Zarma, on his part is at a loss about the similarity in the facial marks as he is unaware of any link between his people and the Yoruba. He is certain however that the Tera striation has been in use since their prehistory when his tribe migrated to the Biu emirate (approximately 180miles south of Lake Chad) around 12th – 13th century CE. This migration may have been connected in some way to the disintegration of the first Kanuri Empire. (Adepegba, 1986)

The striation on the Ifè works show that the scarification were once popular in Ifè - possibly during the reign of the immigrant clan, which may be put roughly around 900--1300 CE. After this time the intricate patterns started to decline.

The design however lasted enough to be integrated into the culture of the people and reflected in their art. This study concludes that the striations are however not indigenous to Ifè - Its origin is further north. The pattern was contracted into several simpler versions now worn by the Yorùbá particularly of the Oyo line. (Adepegba, 1986) Furthermore, unlike the Ifè striation, the Tera tribe design features a main mid-rib running down from his forehead, through the ridge of his nose, which then passes the lips down to the chin. The other striation lines take root from this middle artery but run almost parallel to it in the same fashion as the Ifè style. The variations noted in Zarma's design might be traced to factors of tribal disputes and factional break-ups and ultimately a modification of the traditional tribal mark. It must be noted that even among the Ifè head pieces discovered and catalogued by researchers, there are a number of pieces that vary from the fundamental Ifè style. The variation feature a slight slant creating an inverted "V" as seen on Mallam Zarma's head in Fig 2 (middle photo). This "V" pattern can be seen on some Ifè pieces too. See Fig 5. Some headpieces as catalogued by Willett in his work feature this observed "V" pattern on the forehead. (Art of Ife. CD ROM, 2001)



Fig. 5: Terra Cotta heads from Egbejoda area near Ifè showing "V" shaped striation patterns.

8. Conclusion

The need for the documentation of tribal mark designs for posterity cannot be over-emphasised. It is indeed very critical, as the practice is becoming extinct.

In another two to three decades, there might not be any traces left of marks of tribal distinctions. Baba Kadufur⁵ is the last of his generation living in Wuyo village—his generation is also the last with traditional tribal markings. Already, the generation following that of Kadufur is plain-faced. In a few years, there will be no trace of how their ancestors had distinguished themselves from the other tribes around them and an enormous piece of history will be lost. Those who now choose to wear facial markings will most likely opt for any pattern that they fancy and their choices may or may not bear any resemblance to their traditional tribal pattern. This will prove to be a challenge for future researchers who will attempt to gather data related to body modification and/or other information on particular tribes.

Lastly, this study found that the demographics of facial scarification in Nigeria change as one travels from the north to the south. The analysis of several facial scarification patterns from different parts of Nigeria show that as one moves southwards from the North, the following observations on scarification can be made

- Patterns are less intricate in design.
- The lines are fewer in number.
- The space between the lines are wider and less finely delivered
- The lines are generally bolder, and the intervals are not necessarily even.

The above observations of facial and body scarification in Nigeria suggests that the overall influence and dogma of scarifying the body for whatever purpose spread from the northern part downward to the south. The importance and practise of scarification appear to be more entrenched in the fabric of the respective cultures as one move further north. This strengthens the submission of this study that the striation patterns on the Ifè heads belonged originally to a migrant group from the 'north'. Contrary to a belief that the Yorùbá introduced the Hausas (northerners) to the act of scarification, this study submits that reverse is the case. The immigrants introduced the scarification patterns to the Ifè inhabitants and the patterns were eventually incorporated (later modified and contracted) into the cultural practice of the Yorùbá.

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⁵The Man shown in last photo in Fig. 2

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