



Ivory Standing cup or Stand. Benin.

AN IVORY STANDING CUP FROM BENIN

BY H. U. HALL

THE Museum has lately acquired a very interesting ivory carving from Benin in the form of a standing cup, or, more probably, a stand for some round-bottomed or ovoid object. It is carved from the hollow part of a large tusk, so that not only its lower portion is naturally hollow, but there is also an opening in the bottom of the cuplike portion which represents the here rapidly diminishing natural cavity of the tusk. This opening may perhaps have been plugged when the vessel was in use, but no trace now remains of such stoppage; and the interior of the bowl shows evidence of polishing as if by friction from some solid object which it may have been used to hold. I suggest that it was used as a receptacle for the egg-shaped objects which sometimes appear in standing cups in the hands of individuals on the bronze plaques. Such objects, made of chalk or pipeclay, were commonly used in Bini ritual or magic, and would probably balance better in a cup with a hole in the bottom than in one made for the reception of liquids.¹

Several elaborate ivory standing cups are in existence, made by Bini craftsmen for, and no doubt under the supervision of, Europeans in the 16th century. This cup, so to call it for convenience' sake, may be classed with the few smaller and simpler examples in purer native style which are known and which date probably from the same period. Its closest resemblances are with two British Museum cups figured by Read and Dalton as Plate II, Fig. 5, and Plate IV, Fig. 1, in the album of Benin antiquities just referred to.

The bowl of the cup figured here is hemispherical. It is divided into two zones by a narrow undecorated band or ridge; similar bands surround the rim and the bottom of the bowl. The upper zone is filled with a continuous guilloche in low relief; the lower is scored with rather deep, firmly executed incisions forming a basket weave pattern. The bowl is supported by five human figures which though carved in the round are carried out rather in the manner of a relief. The backs of the figures have retained the natural concavity of the hollow tusk, and the weapons or implements held in the hands of the figures are only finished on their anterior faces; with the exception

¹ C. H. Read and O. M. Dalton, *Antiquities from the City of Benin*, Pl. XXVIII, Figs. 1 and 5. Cf. *MUSEUM JOURNAL*, September, 1924, p. 193.

of the long spear or staff held by one of the figures, in which case there is a halfhearted attempt to continue the simple linear decoration on one of the three remaining sides of the two raised bands. The fingers of the right hand of this individual, also, are represented on one side of the staff, while the details of limbs and extremities and the other features of the remaining figures are all modelled on the anterior surface only. Where the body cicatrization, or scar tattoo, characteristic of the Bini is put in at all, only three of the five long lines which should, typically, score the trunk are represented; the two which run, normally, from armpit to hip are omitted. On the other hand, the pleats of the loin cloths are duly put in at the sides as well as in front.

The whole treatment of the figures is somewhat diagrammatic, but the simplification has not gone so far as to make the style anything but purely Bini. The modelling of the facial features and the trick by which the thumb is made a continuation of the forearm, in the same line or at a more or less considerable angle to it according to the position of the limb, would by themselves be sufficient to stamp the cup as a product of Benin if no other characteristic marks were there.

Such characters are conspicuously in evidence. The three short vertical cicatrizations over each eyebrow of each figure combined with the body markings, even though these latter are cut down from five to three as a concession to the convention by which the carver has chosen to bind himself, are a Bini tribal mark. The close association of two catfishes with the head of the principal personage of the group which supports the bowl, together with his wearing of a simple roundabout waist cloth; the similar garments of the two supporters of this personage; the difference between that of the independent figure with staff or pike and battleaxe and these other waist cloths; the guilloche of the brim and base of the vessel combined with the basketry design of the lower zone of the bowl; all these are features or combinations of features which are unmistakably Bini.

One figure, whom we have just had occasion to distinguish by his costume, stands alone. His garment is that which is typical for Bini men as represented on the carvings and bronzes. It consists usually, as here, of two loin cloths so put on that the upper one opens at the left side, where it is held, sometimes, as here, under a belt or sash, by a knot, one of the ends of which was by some means unknown to us stiffened so as to stand up often as high as the shoulder of the

wearer. It is rather singular that this striking peculiarity of costume seems to have escaped the attention of, I believe, all but one of the early European observers of Bini manners; and he, if indeed his remark can be taken to refer to the Bini proper, only in a manner not quite unequivocal speaks of "a cunning knot under the arms" by which the cloth is fastened.¹ Under this was worn another cloth, fastened on the right hip, so that both right and left flank and thigh were covered. The individual pictured here has only a moderate upward extension of the knotted corner of his upper loin cloth; the silence of the writers on Benin on this point from the 15th century onwards suggests that the fashion as depicted in the native art is an exaggerated stylization.²

The rest of his costume is scanty. In common with the two figures on his left he wears what appears to be a close-fitting cap or hood which covers the back of his head and neck and seems to be fastened under his chin. Except that it does not cover the forehead it recalls the head portion of the closely fitting hood attached to a short cape which was worn in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Attached to it in front and hanging down the middle of the body are two strips of cloth, presumably, which pass into, or from which depends, a rectangular ornament, from the bottom of which, in turn, there hangs another object of similar shape. A plaque figure of a European which appears in Von Luschan's *Altertümer* on page 44 shows a similar arrangement except that in this the strips, of whatever material, are held together by the left hand of the wearer. On this person's head is a cylindrical hat with a narrow brim of a pattern which, as Von Luschan shows from a drawing by Dürer, was worn by Europeans in the early 16th century, and which appears several times on the heads of Europeans on the Benin plaques. Von Luschan considers the side pieces of what I have called conjecturally a hood, together with these long strips, to be simply hat strings ("Sturmband") and remarks that they are represented by a misunderstanding as brought close together under the chin while there is no visible means by which they are held there.³ This criticism is not necessarily valid, as we shall see presently, even if hat strings are represented; and if they are cords passed into the hem of a hood and intended to draw it close, the holes

¹ H. Ling Roth, *Great Benin*, p. 24, footnote.

² Cf. F. von Luschan, *Die Altertümer von Benin*, p. 66. Berlin and Leipzig, 1919.

³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 44, 47; Figs. 48, 53-55.

by which they would pass out of the hem, close together, might very well seem too inconspicuous to the sculptor to be represented on carvings or bronzes of reduced size. In this case the flat objects into which the cords pass might be regarded as clasps intended to keep the ends of the strings together, the upper of which could be pushed up to the chin if it were desired to draw the hood closer. In any case the combination of cylindrical narrow-brimmed hat, though with the slope of the sides somewhat more marked, with hat strings or hood, in the cup figure here, is quite sufficient to relate it to the plaque figures of Von Luschan, and to show its connection, like theirs, with a European fashion of four hundred years ago introduced into West Africa, probably by the Portuguese, the first Europeans known to have reached those parts, and transferred by them to negro imitators. Of this transference our cup figure and his two neighbours on the left are witnesses.

The central figure of three on a bronze plaque which appears as Fig. 6 on Plate XXI of Read and Dalton's album wears a head-dress which shows that, in some cases at least, hat cords were worn by the Bini of the early sixteenth century. It also helps to explain what Von Luschan considers a misunderstanding on the part of Bini craftsmen. The cord attached to what is evidently the European morion worn by this negro is quite thick and would presumably be rather stiff and intractable. Its ends are attached to the morion so that it forms a loop hanging in front of the chest of the wearer. Over this has been slipped a clasp which confines the portion of the cord thus doubled, and though this clasp has been pushed up as far as it will go, it fails to bring the two portions of the cord, which, above, follow the contour of the face quite closely, snugly together. This is the condition which in Von Luschan's examples the artist has, rather characteristically, exaggerated.

It is possible that the flat objects through which the strings pass, or which are suspended on the strings, may be intended to represent bells such as were worn hanging on the breast by persons of importance. Such bells were usually rectangular in cross section and were narrower at the top than at the bottom, which is the case with all save one of these ornaments worn by the three cup figures in question. As the bells were of metal and fairly heavy they might, in this case, serve a practical as well as a decorative (and possibly magical) purpose by keeping the hood strings drawn. I know of at least two instances in which two bells were worn, one above the

other, though not suspended, it is true, by the same string.¹ This is in the case of two figures of warriors, on a socketlike bronze object in the Berlin Ethnological Museum. The lower of the two bells is of the long, conical, partly rounded kind figured by Webster, one an actual example, the other a representation on a small plaque.²

The isolated figure to whom allusion has hitherto been principally made, is also a warrior; he holds in his right hand a pike or spear, of a kind which, even when allowance is made for simplification, has no exact counterpart, so far as I know, among Bini weapons, and in his left a battleaxe with its butt carved into the semblance of a human hand. The latter weapon is also, to my knowledge, unrepresented by any other example in the Benin arsenal. The hand, as an appendage to apparently unrelated objects and forms, notably in a class of staves said to represent ancestors, occurs frequently in Benin wood carvings and bronzes.

Two lines only of the body scarmarkings of this individual are shown. The upper four fifths of the central one would be concealed by the pendent ornaments, the short remainder is, probably with that excuse, omitted. The two outside scorings are, for a reason already referred to, omitted altogether. The same is true of the two figures next in order on his left, whose bodies from the waist upwards, inclusive of the head, are accoutred in an identical manner.

Their costume, equipment, and attitude differ from those of the former individual, however, in several details. The second figure from his left supports with his left hand the right arm of the principal personage of the group, whose right hand is placed on the former's left. This definitely assigns to him the same function as the individual on the left of this important personage; they are the arm supporters of the god or half god who ruled in the sacred city of Benin. The rôle of the first figure on the left of the warrior first described is not so clear. The fact that he holds in his right hand a particularly serviceable looking club may indicate that he too is a fighting man; on the other hand his closer association is not with his military neighbour on his right but with the court official on his left: with his left hand he assists the latter to hold aloft a spindle-shaped truncheon which has some unexplained association with the office of arm supporter. It is borne by these functionaries also in two groups on an ivory cup in the Berlin Museum, in one of which

¹ Op. cit., p. 322, Fig. 468.

² Catalogue 29, Nos. 46 and 91.



EXTENSION OF DESIGN OF CARVED IVORY CUP FROM BENIN. ABOUT 2/3 SIZE.

M. LEWIS BAKER

groups they support the same personage who is represented here though not with identical attributes, and in the other the queen mother.¹ King, queen mother, and commander in chief of the army in Benin, were attended by arm supporters; the individual first described, who is not directly connected with the group formed by the other four figures, may be the "captain of war" represented without supporters.

These two cup figures wear a pleated waist cloth supported by a belt. It is in other respects quite simple and the opening is, unlike the upper cloth of the warrior on their right, not visible. The obvious inference is that it opens behind. This fact relates it directly to the women's cloth, which, according to Nyendaël (late 17th century), sometimes was fastened at the back. The second supporter, on the other side, of the principal personage here represented also wears a cloth of this description, as does that personage himself.

Now this second arm supporter is a rather enigmatic figure. The upper part of the body is unencumbered save for a necklace of large diameter resting on the shoulders. It is possible that this is so through the deliberate purpose of the artist and that he had one or both of two objects in view, viz. the revealing of the sex of this individual or a more nearly perfect exhibition of the body cicatrization. It is true that the bosoms of men in Bini ivories and bronzes are often quite opulent in their modelling, but it is rather remarkable in this instance that although the chests of the other individuals are sufficiently bare to permit an indication of breasts, on this figure alone should these be shown and that with a clearness rather conspicuous when also the general schematic nature of the execution of the whole is considered. Is this a woman and of such importance that the other members of her company are constrained to adopt in compliment to her the woman's cloth? This is not likely. On the other hand, the presence of a woman, if this be one, in this triad is, so far as I know, without parallel among known objects of Bini art and yet is not without an echo, as we shall see, in the facts concerning these individuals so far as we know them.

The central figure of the triad has hitherto been known, chiefly on account of the close association of the catfish with him in his representations on the tusks and bronzes, as "catfish man," "fetish king," "catfish god," and, in a special sense of the epithet, as a "de-

¹ Von Luschan, *op. cit.*, Fig. 825.

monic being," where "demonic" means, presumably, very much the same as spiritual, supernatural. In his most typical form catfishes take the place of his legs and his most constant attributes, aside from the catfish, are the crocodile and the python. Thus he appears with a crocodile issuing and depending from each side of the crown of his head, and two pythons, one at each side, either form a part of his girdle or issue from his flanks through the girdle, while a third python issues from between his catfish legs; or a catfish takes the place of his headdress, two others form his legs, and two serpents depend from his flanks; or, the other attributes being the same as in the first case, a crocodile appears between the legs; or he has human legs, a catfish on his head, two in a position corresponding to that of the more usual pair of pythons, and two held aloft in his hands.¹ The close association of the creatures represented by these attributes with the individual from whose body they proceed or form a part of makes certain his identification with the personage of our cup from whose head the most constant attribute of Von Luschan's "demonic being" proceeds, although this is the only example I know of in which the catfishes are placed in this position. However, in *Great Benin*, H. Ling Roth figured an ivory bracelet the carving of which includes a human figure with a python issuing from each side of his head; we have seen that crocodiles are thus represented; and this figure then completes the list of "demonic" attributes so placed. The figure appears sometimes without supporters.

In the work from which I have several times quoted in this article, but which I had not had the opportunity of seeing when the notes on some of the most important objects from Benin in the University Museum appeared in the MUSEUM JOURNAL four years ago, Von Luschan published, with some reserve, a statement which had been obtained from Eduboa, the last independent king of Benin, who was deposed by England in 1897. The communication was not received directly, but through a friend of the Berlin Museum, who, being in Africa, had an opportunity to question the ex-king. Eduboa "gave the native name olokum for the slender catfish and at the same time asserted that it was a 'god.' He gave the same name for the man having catfishes for legs. To the two attendants beside the god he assigned the names osanobuwa and obieme."² In

¹ See Von Luschan, op. cit., Figs. 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744; Read and Dalton, Pl. VII, Fig. 2, p. 15; H. Ling Roth, *Great Benin*, Fig. 226; MUSEUM JOURNAL, June, 1922.

² Von Luschan, p. 275.

the Index, under Olokum, we find: "The man (or 'god') who carries catfish or has them for legs."

Concerning information received from this source, which is also cited on two other points at least, Von Luschan remarks that he is inclined to believe that Eduboa was giving such answers to his interlocutor as he supposed the latter expected or wished to receive.¹ While this is a form of politeness from which observers and recorders of the customs of strange peoples have often, even unknowingly, suffered much, and while Von Luschan's strictures may, on the whole, be justified, there is no reason to suspect the putting of a leading question in this case, since nobody knew what, in this connection, to lead up to. Also, however faulty his knowledge concerning other matters, Eduboa may reasonably be supposed to have had correct knowledge of the identity of the most important personage represented on objects, such as the carved tusks, which were closely connected with the ancestral cults of his own family; so that a simple statement like this, involving no interpretation, may well be accepted at its face value.

What, besides Eduboa's statement, do we know of Olokum? The facts known directly or by inference concerning him from Bini tradition and from that of the Yoruba from whom Benin received its dynasty and many elements of custom, government, and religion will not take long to set down, though the implications of these facts lead into bypaths which cannot all be traced here.

A few words must first be said as to the forms of the names, as Eduboa's interviewer heard them. Von Luschan will not vouch for the exact correctness of the phonetic representation of these as it was transmitted to him; but a survey of the Bini Olympus reveals three divinities who only could possibly be intended by the names, which, however, do not quite agree in spelling with the hitherto accepted forms. They are respectively those of a god, or demigod, whose name Dennett spells Olukun and Thomas, apparently more correctly, Olokun; of the high, apparently rather indifferent and otiose god of the Bini, who appears in the literature as Osa, Osalubwa, Osalobwa, Osalobua, and Osalobula; and of a deity of ambiguous sex, who is only known to me from Thomas's brief notes concerning him (her) as Obiame.² As to the forms Osanobwa—Osalobwa which

¹ Von Luschan, pp. 223, 265.

² N. W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Edo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*, Index to Vol. I; R. E. Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, London, 1910, p. 10; R. E. Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, London, 1906, *passim*.

provide the only marked difference in consonants, Thomas, who himself furnishes the last three varieties of Osa's name, remarks that cerebral *n* and cerebral *l* are almost indistinguishable;¹ and according to Ellis *n* and *l* are interchangeable among the Yoruba,² who speak a language distinct from that of the Bini, though the latter have borrowed divinities, name and all, from them.

Both in Yoruba and in Benin or Edo several divinities are identified with rivers. Thus, Dennett says that Olukun is the Benin River, which forms the southern boundary of the kingdom.³ Thomas⁴ tells us that he is a sea or river god, and in his Edo vocabulary gives the meaning of the word *olokun* as sea, the god *Olokun*, west. His emblems are pots containing water, pieces of chalk, peeled rods and white cloth, says Thomas; while from Dennett we learn that his "sign" is a pot of water, that his altar is to be found in every great house, and on or near this are placed a pot of water, a fringe of small leaves, stones in a small earthenware pot, chalk cones, fishbones, etc.⁵ The water and the fishbones are particularly significant, and the chalk cones are no doubt the same objects which Cyril Punch saw among other offerings placed on the fetish altars along the road between Benin town and Gwato, the outpost of Benin's power toward the sea during the last two centuries; these things were "egg-shaped objects made of white substance, probably kaolin or pipeclay,⁵ and were perhaps the ovoid articles borne in processions referred to here in connection with the probable use to which our cup was put. Is it extravagant to suggest that the undoubted connection of this cup with Olokun worship gives added probability to this explanation?

Of the use to which the chalk was put we learn from Dennett³ that this was closely related to the cult of Olokun. He describes a temple to Olokun at Ewesi, where chalk is given to people who "put it round their eyes and on their bodies" "as a protection against evil." Worshippers, of both sexes, kneel and touch with their heads the step on which the feet of the image of Olokun rest. "An old priest" in charge here gives them the chalk to mark themselves with. A passage from Burton, quoted by Ling Roth,⁶ throws some further

¹ Thomas, Edo II, p. 134.

² A. B. Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, p. 36.

³ *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, p. 222 ff.

⁴ Edo I, p. 32.

⁵ *Great Benin*, p. 57.

⁶ *Great Benin*, pp. 61, 62.

light on this practice. The leader of Burton's "boys," native servants and porters, brought with him on the road to Benin "a little daughter and two wives; these ladies began by decorating their foreheads and bosoms with chalk, picked from the roadside fetish-house and made into a paste with water in the palm. It is a prophylactic against the works of the enemy." "Almost every turn of the road showed some sign, a suspended calico cloth, a pot of water, or a heap of chalk sticks placed under . . . a pent roof." The pot of water, the chalk, and the white cloth seem to leave little room for doubt that these were shrines of Olokun; and the prophylactic chalk or pipeclay was evidently peculiarly associated with him as defender of the faithful against the powers of evil. Again, at Igo there is a mound with an altar to Olokun on which, under a shed, are placed chalk cones and cowries.¹

At Ugwaton, or Gwato, there is a temple of this "great spirit or power" which was, according to Dennett, who, perhaps, is here only following an expression of opinion by Ling Roth, the same as one described by Burton in 1862. Burton took for a figure of the king an image which Dennett asserts to have been that of Olokun.²

In Ling Roth's book, the first compendium of the history and ethnography of Benin, there is no mention of Olokun by that name. He appears as Malaku. It was Dennett who revealed the identity of the two. Malaku, he says = Oma Olokun;³ and from Thomas we learn that oma or ma means "good."⁴ By Struck,⁵ malaku is identified with a Yoruba word, moloku, the sea. It is clear enough from what we are told of Malaku in *Great Benin* that he is the same person as Olokun. He is "the spirit of big water, i. e., the sea, big rivers, not creeks" (C. Punch).⁶ That Gwato is there named as the headquarters of his cult is probably simply due to the fact that nothing was then known of the particular gods worshipped in Benin city. There are two facts which seem to support the statement that Edo (Benin) was not the seat of his cult, but they are susceptible of another explanation. Esige, the king of Benin whom Bini tradition associates with the first Europeans who visited Benin and who may have reigned about the end of the fifteenth century,⁷ is said to

¹ Dennett, l. c.

² Dennett, p. 225 and footnote; Ling Roth, p. 59.

³ Dennett, p. 225, footnote.

⁴ Edo II, Vocabulary.

⁵ Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 1922, p. 169.

⁶ Ling Roth, p. 53.

⁷ B. Struck, Chronologie der Benin-Altertümer, Zeitschrift für Ethnologie, 1923, pp. 127, 135.

have travelled from Gwato to Benin to be made king. Following a great flood "over all Benin" which took place during his reign, he drove the Malaku, who as god of great waters must have been responsible for the disaster, back to Gwatun, and confined him there, driving iron pins into the ground near the town to fix the limit beyond which he might not pass in the direction of Benin city.¹ Another tradition which appears on the face of it to mean that the cult of Olokun had been abolished in the sacred city of the kingdom of Edo is related by Dennett: "They say that Ehaizaai [or Ahezai], King of Benin, because it [a shrine of Olokun] was unhappy in Benin City, sent it to Igo. They say they knew it was unhappy because of the sickness it caused in the city."² Consideration of the first story in the light of the second shows, I think, what this apparent banishment of a god really means. It was not the deity in his generalized character, so to speak, who was banished, but a particular manifestation or personification of him in his shrine or image.

This differentiation of Olokuns accompanied by a sort of individualization of each manifestation of the god has a parallel in Yorubaland, which, as we have seen, was the original home of Bini kings and of Bini gods.³ There an orisha or god who has given some special evidence of his power in a particular place acquires as a special epithet the name of that place, e. g., Shankpanna of Ilesha, and his fame may draw worshippers of Shankpanna from Oshogbo, who will say "Shankpanna of Ilesha is stronger than Shankpanna of Ologbo." They are the same Shankpanna ultimately, yet at the same time individuals since they have the power of performing separately acts differing in quality if not in kind. It is of course a phenomenon not unknown in lands and ages remote from modern Benin and Yorubaland.

It was at Gwato that travellers on their way to Benin were detained until they received permission from the sacred king to enter the sacred city. During the festivals which required the sacrifice of so many human beings, no stranger might enter Benin city, and it was the Malaku or Olokun of Gwato who saw to it that this rule was observed. During this period anyone going towards Benin from Gwato "would meet an old man walking towards Gwato with a bag over his shoulder. If he saluted the old man he received a

¹ C. Punch in Great Benin, pp. 54, 55.

² At the Back of the Black Man's Mind, pp. 224, 225.

³ L. Frobenius, *Und Afrika Sprach*, I, p. 312.

polite reply, but, after passing, if he turned, he would see no one on the road, and then he would know he was doomed, and would in fact sicken and die within a few hours. . . . Along the roads are many little fetish altars, and passers-by deposit offerings of food, cowries, palm oil, fowl feathers, and above all egg-shaped objects made of white substance, probably kaolin. . . . The old man with the bag is supposed to be a spirit sent by Malaku, who collects in his bag all the offerings on the Gwato road and on arrival at Gwato disappears with his bag into the big water"¹ which was the domain of Olokun, identified, otherwise, with Olokun himself.

A seventeenth century writer tells us in this connection that the Bini "offer great yearly sacrifices to the sea, to dispose it favourably towards them, and their most sacred oaths are those made upon the sea and upon their king."² One hundred and fifty years later we are told that three or four human sacrifices were made annually at the mouth of the river as votive offerings to the sea.³ From a writer of the 18th century we learn that "the seat of bliss or torment in the future life they imagine to be the sea."⁴

A short survey of Olokun's position in his old home, Yorubaland, will help to fill out our not very extensive knowledge of this interesting character. He is the great sea Orisha of the Yoruba. Orisha means god, or perhaps rather demigod, and is the equivalent of the Bini ebo. By Johnson, a native Yoruban, he is placed among other sea gods;⁵ while Ellis, like Dennett, makes him the god, par excellence, of that element. From Dennett also we learn that he and his sister-wife Olosa are the orishas of fishermen, and from Ellis that Olosa supplies her votaries with fish; and with her husband turned the stars into fishes. Another wife, Olokun-su, in the harbour at Lagos, is part fish, the fish in the waters over the bar are sacred to her and must not be caught at the risk of the penalty of being drowned. Crocodiles are the messengers of Olosa and must not be molested.⁶

In Ife, whence, according to both Bini and Yoruba tradition, the dynasty of Benin was derived, Olokun, the sea, and Olorun, the sky, were coequal and existed together before the creation of

¹ C. Punch, quoted by Ling Roth, p. 57.

² Dapper, quoted by Ling Roth, p. 53.

³ Adams, in Ling Roth, p. 63.

⁴ Nyendaël, in Ling Roth, p. 52.

⁵ In *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, Appendix, p. 245.

⁶ Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, pp. 144, 190; Ellis, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, pp. 76, 77, 83, 171.

Earth.¹ There is nothing in all this to support Thomas's assertion that "the cult of Olokun seems to be confined to the women";² the cult indeed is quite clearly of general and even supreme importance in Benin, no doubt through the connection with the royal house, and seems to have been of considerable importance in the Yoruba country. To the Yoruba Olokun human sacrifices were made as we have seen they were to him of Benin.³

A certain connection of Olokun with the kings of Benin was known before Eduboa's statement was published. One of the titles of the King was "offspring of Olokun."⁴ Now that the figure with catfishes for legs, or with the catfish otherwise in close connection with his body, issuing from or forming a part of it, as in the case of the cup, is known to be a representation of the great sea god, we can see clearly the importance in regard to this connection of Dennett's other statements that "the Kings of Benin had to be supported under each arm by two chiefs whenever they attempted to walk, because they claimed to be descended from such a deity as mentioned by Barbot"—a god in the form of a fish—"and by way of proof they say that one of their kings, Ehenbuda by name, was born with legs with no bones in them."⁵ The catfish god is Olokun; in his character of ancestor of the kings of Benin he appears in the carvings on the tusks which they regarded as representing their ancestors as a personage with catfish attributes. There seems to be little doubt that the particular species of fish represented is *Malapterurus beninensis* Murr., a creature known to be regarded with awe for its peculiar quality of being able to deliver an electric shock to anyone who takes hold of it; it would therefore be especially liable to association with the sea god and his descendant and representative.

Representative, of course, since the kingship was hereditary, and each successor was in this sense the representative of the family into which he was born. But there is a closer sense in which the king represented his great ancestor. To Bini as well as to Yoruba belief, children reincarnated their ancestors. We have evidence, however, of a more particular kind than this general inference. If the king of Benin was not somehow divine, even actually a renewed personification of Olokun, how could he have power superior to local

¹ Frobenius, p. 309.

² Edo I, p. 32.

³ Ellis, p. 71; Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, p. 110.

⁴ Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, p. 181.

⁵ *Nigerian Studies*, p. 108.

Olokuns to the extent of banishing them from his city and confining them to their places of exile, as we have seen him do? In Yoruba, where Olokun's power does not seem to have been similarly associated with a royal house, it required another god to interfere with and avert the results of his activities. When, as in Benin, Olokun caused an inundation, it was Obatala, his grandfather, who forced him to return to his house and confined him there. According to another version of the story, Olokun, being angry with men, brought about a great flood, some survivors of which were saved by being drawn up into the sky by Obatala.¹

There is, I think, little doubt that Von Luschan's "Malapterurus man" represents both Olokun in the character of king and the king in the character of Olokun. Although Struck represents Von Luschan as declaring that this composite being is not the king,² this is not in fact what Von Luschan says. His words are: "We cannot in this sense speak of the man with the electric catfishes in his varying incarnations simply as 'King.' He is in the first place a demonic being, and where he seems to encounter us as an earthly ruler, he is always at the same time demonic, with that intensification of natural and supernatural qualities which is just as characteristic for the king in tropical Africa as it was, for example, in the ancient East."³

It is not possible, in the present state of our knowledge, to explain the nature of the relation between the Olokun King and the three attributes which are most constantly and closely associated with him—the catfish, the crocodile, and the python. They are all, as creatures either amphibious or constantly living in the water, naturally associated with the god of the sea and of large bodies of water. The peculiar fitness of the association with the catfish has been pointed out and we have seen that the closeness of this association was such that the catfish itself as well as the catfish man bore the name of the god. Of his wife Olosa, if not of Olokun himself, we have seen that crocodiles were the servants. In view of the association of Olokun with Gwato on the Benin River some relation with a crocodile spirit which haunted the Benin River near Gwaton Creek may be suspected. It was in the form of "a huge alligator with a light in his head. The light would be seen at night by people in canoes and moored in the river, and offerings would thereupon be put into the water for the spirit lest it should come and break the

¹ Ellis, p. 71; Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, p. 114.

² Struck, l. c.

³ Von Luschan, p. 94.

canoe."¹ Perhaps this was a part of the spirit organization in charge of the Olokun of Gwato for preserving the sacred isolation of Benin City, of which we have already seen another element in the old man with a bag on the Gwato-Benin road. A great python of bronze guarded the king's quarters in Benin,² and pythons and a crocodile decorated the door of a shrine or temple of Olokun at Ewesi in the kingdom of Benin.³ The cult of the python is connected with that of ancestors in Southern Nigeria.⁴ All this illustrates well the closeness of the relation between Olokun, the King, and these three creatures, but fails to explain it satisfactorily.

I think that the hint contained in the last statement about the python, as well as in the tradition of the existence of a blood tie between Olokun and the king may be taken as suggesting a possible explanation.

In Yorubaland, which has supplied important elements to the social organization as well as to the religious conceptions of the kingdom of Benin, there had grown up a curious form of totemism which guided the exogamous marriage regulations, and which, at any rate in outline, appears again in Benin, where, as in Yoruba, it seems to have been linked with the worship of gods. Every Yoruban had an orisha or god, from whom, according to Frobenius, he believed himself descended and with the other descendants of whom he might not intermarry. From Dennett we learn that each individual had an orisha, and was also subject to three ewaws, or prohibitions, things from which he must refrain, such as the killing of a certain animal or animals, or using them or certain plants for food, or the commission of certain acts not always connected with animal or other food. According to Dennett's rather obscure account of the system, both orisha and ewaws were originally hereditary in continuous line, but are now subject to redistribution by the priests after continuing in the same paternal line for four generations. Frobenius says that the prohibitions pass on continuously in the paternal line.⁵

In Ife, from which town Yoruba and Bini traditions agree in deriving the migration which gave a dynasty and probably a ruling class to Benin, one of the exogamous groups still has Olokun for its

¹ C. Punch quoted by Ling Roth, p. 90.

² See MUSEUM JOURNAL, June, 1922.

³ At the Back of the Black Man's Mind, p. 223.

⁴ Leonard, The Lower Niger, Chapter VI, Section VI.

⁵ Frobenius, *op. cit.*, pp. 165, 198-199, 307, 308; Dennett, *Nigerian Studies*, pp. 176-188. Cf. S. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, pp. 85-87.

Orisha. In view of the close association of Olokun with the kings of Benin, it seems very likely that the founder of the Benin dynasty came from this group and brought his ancestral ewaws with him. Becoming king, though in a new land, he would, following Yoruba royal custom, be exempt from the laws regulating intermarriage—he would, indeed, almost necessarily, considering the large number of wives recorded for kings of Benin—but might retain the animals representing the ewaws of the family, catfish, python, and crocodile, the more so as the awesome properties associated with these creatures fitted them peculiarly for the rôle of attributes of a royal personage who ruled in a sacred city and was not merely hedged by but actually personified that divinity which proverbially attends a king. From both Dennett and Thomas we learn that a form of totemic exogamous regulations strikingly like those of the Yoruba obtained in the kingdom of Benin. The names given to the regulatory prohibitions, even, are of identical origin; and Thomas, who calls these awaigbe, or family awas (ewaws), believes that, as in Yoruba, they are associated with the cult of certain ebos, the gods or demigods of whom Olokun was as we have seen the most important in Benin, and which are the equivalent of the Yoruba orishas. The ebos, he says, appear to be the property of individual families.¹

Besides Olokun, two other gods are represented among the personages of this cup, if we accept Eduboa's statement as applying literally to all members of this triad wherever it appears. These are Osanobwa and Obieme.

Osanobwa, Osalobwa, or more briefly Osa, is, according to Thomas, the chief god of the Edo or Bini, who resides in Elimi, or heaven, with the ebo or subordinate members of the pantheon. To Elimi go the dead and the sacrifices which are offered to them.²

Obieme, Obiame, appears to be a divinity of uncertain or ambiguous sex. Thomas, in whose Edo Report occur the only references, and those very brief, to Obiame which I know of, calls this ebo the "mother of all mankind, as her name indicates." On the other hand this personage appears in Elimi as one of the "kings of the dead," together with Olokun and others, in Osalobwa's house.³ On the supposition that we have a goddess to deal with, perhaps she is represented by the figure the upper portion of whose body is bare,

¹ N. W. Thomas, *Totemism in Southern Nigeria*, *Anthropos*, 1915-1916, pp. 234, 235, 237; *Edo I*, pp. 61, 62; Dennett, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind*, p. 231.

² *Edo I*, pp. 24, 25.

³ *Edo I*, p. 32; *II*, p. 17.

who supports the left hand of Olokun, and the uncertainty of whose sex was referred to in the earlier part of this article.

Two difficulties occur here. As to the first—why should the high god of the Bini appear as arm supporter to a subordinate deity?—I can only suggest that as West African high gods are benevolent but usually rather inactive, and hence do not often require to be propitiated, they are likely to be somewhat neglected, certainly to be less regarded than those who are capable of doing harm, and may as here, perhaps, actually sink, at any rate on certain occasions, into a subordinate position.

The other difficulty is in accounting for a female as arm supporter to the Olokun King. It is natural to suppose that the supporters of the king's arms, in his divine character, would be analogous to the officials who performed that office for him in his civil capacity. These were men called *nabori*, nobles of the third rank, who belonged to what has been termed the department of equity in the administration of the kingdom. Either *Obiame* was not a goddess—the second element in the name, *ame*, may perhaps be connected with the word for water rather than with that meaning wife or mother—or there may have been occasions of which we know nothing when women performed the office of *nabori*.

The question of the form of the waist cloth is not decisive. Apparently one form of the cloth customarily worn by men, and certainly that worn by the Olokun King when he appears with the attributes with which we have been dealing, opened, like the women's, at the back. The pleats may be due to imitation of a particular form of kilt worn by Europeans in the sixteenth century, which usually appears as a part of the costume of the Europeans on the older Benin ivories and bronzes.

In Yorubaland there is a good deal of confusion of sex among the orishas, some of whom, among them Olokun himself, appear now as males and now as females.

It remains only to speak of the cross on the breast of Olokun. I believe that this cup affords the only known example of a figure having all or any of the unmistakable attributes of the *ebo* which is also furnished with one of the two forms of cross, the Greek, as here, or the cross *patée*, sometimes wrongly called Maltese, which are known in the art of Benin. The cross apparently reached Benin by two roads, only one of which led from Europe of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. It was not a decoration only of the king. Its significance to the Bini has not been satisfactorily explained.