

- ▶ V rámci parametrů příjemce, multimédii sdělované zprávy a efektu komunikace fungují principy postavené na intenzitě a povaze sdělení v rámci jednotlivých kognitivně-senzoricky vymezených médií (obraz, zvuk). Pro tvůrce komunikace jsou tyto principy vodítkem pro její efektivní realizaci a naplnění cílů, díky čemuž dochází i ke společenskému zapojení a výtěžnosti informací z kulturního dědictví.

DALŠÍ VÝZKUM

Na základě tohoto článku budou provedeny rešerše aktuálního stavu využívání multimediálních nástrojů v prezentaci kulturního dědictví v České republice a v zahraničí. Cílem bude identifikovat klady a záporů a vyvodit závěr o stavu užívání konkrétních nástrojů v segmentu kulturního dědictví. Pro každý nástroj bude dále zpracována dílčí metodika včetně metodiky obecné.

Všechny tyto metodiky budou posléze porovnány mezi sebou a dojde tak k formulaci postavené na teoretickém i praktickém přístupu, neboť cílem je vytvořit metodiku, která bude vycházet z teoretických praktických oblastí vzájemně propojených a potvrzených. Mimo multimédia coby výrazové prostředky existuje velký apel na informační síťování a dostupnost informací o kulturním dědictví skrze databáze a internet.

V rámci přípravy metodiky se budeme zabývat dostupností a přehledností virtuální informační sítě ve vztahu k různým cílovým skupinám a jejich požadavkům. Věcnou součástí metodiky bude také finanční studie návratnosti investic do multimediální komunikace vzhledem k omezeným zdrojům správců kulturního dědictví.

Pojem kulturní dědictví odkazuje na entity fyzického i významového smyslu nesoucí obraz minulosti, který je tvořený člověkem nebo přírodou.

ZÁVĚR

Arts management a jeho naplňovatelé jsou skrze animaci kulturního dědictví odpovědní za komunikaci informací obsažených v jimi spravovaném kulturním dědictví. Multimédia představují pro kulturní dědictví příležitost ve vědecké, společenské i ekonomické rovině.

Nabízejí možnost efektivnější komunikace informací skrze postupy, které prokazatelně zvyšují kvalitu předané informace a znalosti. Dochází tak k naplnění principů animace kulturního dědictví, zvyšuje se efektivita komunikace a obecný zájem cílových skupin. V rámci textu byly zmapovány základní myšlenky pro přípravu metodiky multimediální prezentace kulturního dědictví a vysloveny hypotézy pro další zkoumání. Požadavky na metodiku byly vysvětleny skrze definici kulturního dědictví a animaci kulturního dědictví.

Komunikace jakožto nástroj animace byla zkoumána tradičními přístupy a byl navržen model komunikace přizpůsobený požadavkům metodiky. Byly specifikovány cílové skupiny a jejich reprezentanti rozdělení na laiky a odborníky. Multimédia jakožto nástroj komunikace byla popsána v návaznosti na animaci kulturního dědictví a modely komunikace jako nástroj odpovídající a reagující na požadavky animace prostřednictvím principů odvozených od aktivního a pasivního vnímání a teorie kognitivní zátěže, jež jsou nástrojem regulace efektu komunikace u cílových skupin. Další postup práce na metodice bude realizován v rámci projektu NAKI s cílem vydání ověřeného výstupu v roce 2015.

Sacral rituals of kingship in the late 20th century former Kingdom of Benin

The kings of Benin, known as Oba, moved from the status of warrior kings to sacred kings

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ABSTRACT:

The episodic kingship rituals and the annual refresher kingship ceremonies in Benin City guarantee the transition to hierarchical authority, the natural abundance of the land and the prosperity of the population through kingship. The notion of a social contract between sovereign and populace promoted for generations a crafting of identity within a system of hierarchy, but also a separation of powers.

KEYWORDS:

Sacral rituals, Benin, Africa, Cultural anthropology, Cultural change

INTRODUCTION

Rituals should be studied as both ideological recreations and as historical documents. Like books and maps, rituals embody, synoptically and symbolically, many components of a past cultural world: artistic styles, geographical knowledge, political organization, and social formations. Every ritual to some degree encapsulates a history of the past and a connection to a system of beliefs and values. The embedded ritual expressions of the former Kingdom of Benin are not just about ceremony. They are also about the civic and social landscape, an environment that reeks with symbolic significance: crossroads are pathways to the other world, trees serve as mystical foundation markers, and shrines demarcate historical sites while also functioning as religious beacons in contemporary urban secular life. They are the guideposts of life for many of the citizens of Benin City and the Edo (Bini).

Rituals also involve the manipulation of history through ideology. Every ritual incorporates cumulative truths and cumulative errors and, perhaps, notions of a shifting political order that encompasses multiple and overlapping themes, meanings and trajectories. The episodic kingship rituals and the annual refresher kingship ceremonies in Benin City guarantee the transition to hierarchical authority, the natural abundance of the land and the prosperity of the population through kingship. The notion of a social contract between sovereign and populace promoted for generations a crafting of identity within a system of hierarchy, but also a separation of powers.

The kings of Benin, known as Oba, moved from the status of warrior kings, through several centuries of political turmoil, to sacred kings and with that transition went an effort for increased ceremonial

commemorations coalescing important events, or fragments of events, into a historical event horizon that ritual adumbrations emphasized and consolidated. And while the symbolic imagery of individual village communities with the kingdom were often unique and retained a local autonomy, connections between the center and periphery could be discerned. Royal ritual guaranteed this because of the ways these sometimes idiosyncratic and specific links were expressed through rituals connecting them. These royal rituals helped consolidate the power of kingship; they also became memorable, historically remembered expression of it.

Arab merchants and European explorers heard about the fame of African kings. These fabled kings became part of the European idea of savannah and tropical Africa, often more fantastic than real. Europeans searched vainly for Prester John - in Ethiopia and along the West African interior - a mythic figure whose wealth would support the crusades. While Europe went through its Dark Ages, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel of Africa exploded with an efflorescence of kingdoms and states. There were conquest kings, pastoralist kings, appointed kings, elected kings, kings who served on a rotational basis, and kings by primogeniture descent.

In the years 1988 and 1991 Paris Match photographer Daniel Laine spent a year on the African continent tracking down and photographing figures of royalty, and leaders of kingdoms, emirs, potentates, and kings alike, including some important chiefs. During this time he managed to photograph 70 monarchs and descendants of great African dynasties, as pictured in his 2000 book Kings of Africa (Laine 2000).

Wikipedia lists many more kings, extinct monarchies as well as extant ones, that testify to

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► the position of kingship in many historical societies as conveying a sacral meaning, perhaps not as a god-king, though that sense may be there, but more like a judge or a high priest without the idea of theocracy where temporal authority itself has a ritual-religious significance.

One must make a quick distinction here between kings and dynasties, both puzzling and anomalous to a European understanding of Africa where a cultural understanding is based upon the supposition that sub-Saharan Africa is a village based continent and the lion is king of the jungle (lions are savannah creatures, the leopard is lord of the forests). Kings are not as rare as one often thinks in Africa. Even in the Interlacustrine area of East Africa, and the pastoral kingdoms, kingship was not unknown among herding societies nor is it odd.

What is rare, however, are African dynasties with long and traceable royal family lineages. Aside from the famous dynastic continuities in ancient Egypt, Ethiopia and Benin kingdom offer the most enduring, recorded, and substantial instances of dynasties in African history. In fact, the dynastic development of the Benin kingdom reminds one of the royal traditions associated with regal traditions of China, India, Japan and Europe where there are well-known examples of the emergence of a single royal family that lasts for a very long time. Indeed, if one knows about the British historical monarchy, for example, and then studies that of the Benin kingdom dynasty, there is a sense of *déjà vu* as one slides from the study of one to an understanding of the other, albeit with cultural idiosyncrasies.

In fact, the Benin dynastic stories bear more comparison to the Scottish Stuarts or the English Tudors than, say to the neighboring Yoruba kingship system based as it was upon a strong clan base and its evolved rotating kingships.

As a matter of fact there are still a few kings in Africa in spite of the steady erosion of kingship from the world scene. In 1977 the marriage of a Swazi princess to Goodwill Zwelethini, the Zulu king, united two royal houses. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda restored the kingships of four traditionally powerful kingdoms (Ganda, Toro, Bunyoro, and Ankole). The son of the late Sir Freddy Mutesa (deposed by Idi Amin and known to his Western friends as King Freddy died in exile in England), in 1993 assumed the Ganda throne as the 36th king of Buganda. As Ssabasajja Ronald Muwenda Mutebi III he has a cabinet of ministers and according to his website oversees “the cultural responsibilities as a traditional leader of his kingdom” spearheading “all development activities in the kingdom” including “education, economic empowerment, social, cultural and health.” In Nigeria, Ibrahim Dasuki,

an Oxford trained investment banker and founder/chairman of the Nigerian branch of Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI), became the Sultan of Sokoto in 1991, and arguably was seen, until the present Sultan of Sokoto Alhaji Muhammed Sa’ad Abubakar III, as the most powerful traditional leader in the country.

Ibrahim Dasuki once said that the ordinary man still looks to traditional institutions as his last resort. For many, it had become clear that Nigerian traditional rulers represented the main social reality for many people, providing meaning amidst clashing and ineffectual ideologies, and promising security in a fragile polity. Until recently, Nigeria had a House of Chiefs as part of its governmental structure, but disbanded it as Nigeria switched to a bicameral senate-and-house of representatives arrangement. Indeed, the



Indeed, the Government Gazette ranks traditional rulers by First Class, Second Class, etc.

Government Gazette ranks traditional rulers by First Class, Second Class, etc. Between 1960 when Nigeria gained its independence from Britain and now, Nigeria has experienced parliamentary and military governments, insecure leadership, and turmoil. Traditional rule provided the necessary security blanket.

Now, new religions seem to be usurping that sense of security as people often turn to a conservative Islam for solace or to one of the evangelical religions for support in an uncertain world of shaky democratic politics, conflict resolution, economic uncertainties, and complexities of globalization. Still, kingship retains an important hold on group identity. Simply put, people look to the Oba for guidance and security in a world they are uncertain

of changes they don’t understand or know how to negotiate, and have strong feelings for traditional ways of behaving and believing.

Accounts of kingship have played a significant role in the shaping of political theory. Attention usually focused on the issue of power and state development while the question of sacred kings retained the curiosity only of those interested in the history of ideas. However, studies of kingship that confine their analysis to exclusive consideration of political and secular implications run the risk of incompleteness by ignoring the role that rituals play in support of hierarchy and cultural definitions of identity.

Kingship rituals are more than mystical. They are a special kind of power. A study of political theory alone cannot answer the question: What is it about kingship that gives it an aura of authority? What is it that, even in the modern world - kingships in England, Japan, Spain and Monaco, not to mention the myriad of pretenders – takes the rites of rulers out of the realm of make-believe and endows them with potency?

The answer begins with ritual. Kingship systems cannot be without rituals, the pomp and circumstances adding to the aura of authority or popularity. In Marxist terms they are webs of mystification, ensuring legitimacy, “consensual examples of collective effervescence” as David Cannadine and Simon Pierce referred to them in his 1987 study *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cannadine & Pierce 1987).

In symbolic terms, they are webs of cognitive efficacy offering a powerful image of the world and through enactment, an emotional attachment to that image. As models of society kingship rituals serve a sociological function, contributing to the maintenance of the social order. As models for society, they inscribe the categories and relations that shape consciousness; they create meaning; and they structure perceptions.

State dramaturgical performances reinforce hierarchy and hierarchy gives rise to ritual embellishments. In other words, royal rituals should be considered not only as ceremonial exemplars but as historical documents. Like books and maps, royal rituals embody, synoptically, many components of a past cultural world: artistic styles, geographical knowledge, political organization and social formations. Every royal ritual to some degree encapsulates a history of the past and therefore kingship rituals incorporate cumulative truths and cumulative errors, as well, perhaps, changing views of the moral order. Constructionism is the heartbeat of the Benin Kingdom; indeed, it is said that every king makes his own rules but yet, every kingship is also governed by Historicism, those traditions of the past



Chief Isekhure, Benin City, Nigeria. © Daniel Lainé, 1980.



A chief salutes the Oba at the annual refresher rituals called Igue. © Robert E. Bradbury, ca. 1953.

that mark the campaign of rule, dictate its structure, and guide its propriety.

Rituals of kingship do it in particular ways. In some instances they involved the manipulation of ideology. The rites of kingship in Benin City, Nigeria, are a case in point. The present king re-presents the authority of the center over the autonomy of the peripheries. The palace inserts itself into various observances such as Igue, the annual renewal rituals during which the king honors his ancestors at the same time that he is fortified with herbs and the blood of animal sacrifices. These refresher rites guaranteed the natural abundance of the land and the prosperity of the population, interlocking the local notion of social contract forged over the centuries between sovereign and populace. Throughout the year other palace rituals resurrect historical memories, serving as constant reminders of royal rule.

The rituals of Igue, described by R. E. Bradbury in 1959, were once spread throughout the year until Oba Akenzua (r. 1934–1978) consolidated them sometime in the 1950s into the time period of the Christmas holiday season to take account both of the festival atmosphere of the Christian season and school holidays (Bradbury 1959). The Igue now incorporates Oro that recalls the war fought against the rival kingdom of Idah located on the eastern shore of the Niger River, and the symbolic receiving of the Ewere gifts, “leaves of joy,” from chiefs that represent an historical connection to Ife, a Yoruba kingdom. Commemoration coalesces important events, or fragments of events, into a historical chronology that ritual adumbrations consolidate.

Kingship rituals are also rites of passage, those crucial moments - like birth, marriage and death - that traverse movement for the individual from one state of being to another. Rites of passage do this by taking the collective wisdom of a culture and re-presenting this knowledge as affecting and

comprehensible - if secret - dramas. Arnold Van Gennep, one of the French scholars associated with the journal *L’Annee sociologique* founded by the great Emile Durkheim, in his 1907 *Rites of Passage* delineated the tripartite structure of rites of passage that apply to every society: separation from society, the liminal in-between phase, and the reintegration into society under a new social status (Van Gennep 1907). This elegantly simple formulation is the key to understanding how the rituals of kingship dramatize transition and obliquely express the moral order of the society.

It is the cultural ambiguity of kingship that provides the source of our fascination. Analytically we again look to Van Gennep’s notion of liminality where the subject, as the symbolic anthropologist Victor Turner says, “becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there...he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state” (Turner 1969). People placed in this area are in but not of the world. They are different but alike, feared but held in awe, capricious and hence dangerous, yet they provide the basis of the social order and of security, the most dangerous sorcerers but also the fount of well-being.

Rituals of hierarchy and kingship in the former Benin kingdom offer a remarkable case study. The Benin state developed sometime in the 15th century, a gradual consolidation of local and autonomous social formations collectively known as Ogisos (“sky rulers”) suggesting a shift from one form of government to another and used earth embankments to delineate territory - the longest earth embankments in the world according to *The Guinness Book of Records*. The emerging state’s warrior kings of the 15–16th centuries set on expanding the empire became the 17th–18th centuries kings of crises focused on legitimization, and negotiating serious internal strife, culminating in the sacred kings of the

19th century hedged in by ritual. Royal ceremonies began to occupy more of the calendar year, with each king performing rituals that protected the king, honored his ancestors and offering spiritual protection to the city and its residents. Like the emperors of ancient Rome, the kings of Benin were transformed from mortal human beings to leaders with great religious authority, demi-gods in short, sacred kings invested with sometimes supernatural authority.

The kingdom succumbed to a British military invasion in 1897. The then reigning king, Oba Ovonramwen, was sent into exile at Calabar, in southeastern Nigeria, never to return. The British torched the palace, and the attendant court ceremonies fell into disuse. In 1914 the British restored the monarchy in attenuated form as a response to the Colonial Policy of Indirect Rule and as a necessary contingency of World War I. The palace, on a much reduced scale, was rebuilt and Eweka II, according to the rule of primogeniture, Ovonramwen’s eldest son became Eweka II, and was crowned king. In 1933 his senior son, Akenzua II ascended the throne for a reign lasting 45 years. In 1979, his eldest son, Solomon Akenzua became the 38th king, taking the name Erediauwa.

Born in 1923 he studied law at Cambridge University and did a year of public administration, the Devonshire course. For two decades he served as an administrative officer in the Nigerian Civil Service rising to become Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Mines and Power and later of the Ministry of Health. He also represented GOCON (Gulf Oil Company of Nigeria). He has recently published the first volume of his autobiography, *I Remain, Sir, Your Obedient Servant* (2004), chronicling his student days, civil service experiences up to his retirement, and his ascension to the throne.

When, as local newspapers announced, “the leopard has returned to its lair”

► (a euphemism for the death of Oba Akenzua II) Solomon Akenzua had to follow three ceremonial sequences to ascend the now vacated throne of his father. The investiture ceremonies made him the Edaiken, or Crown Prince. This was followed by the Emwinekhua or “The Big Things” - the formal second burial rites for his father. Finally, the accession took place. Altogether these succession rites lasted more than a year and marked the transformation of the social person of Solomon Akenzua into a sacred persona.

**INDUCTION:
THE MAKING OF AN EDAIKEN**

The rituals of succession began with a series of inductions during which Solomon Akenzua had to be guided by the highest ritual officers of the land. First he had to “enter the palace,” that is, to initiate into one of the three palace societies charged with the state regalia, the harem, and the king’s person. Regarded as “a bride of the Oba,” Prince Akenzua wore white garments, a sign of purity. In public he covered his mouth with a white cloth to show that he would never speak ill against the king, just as the dutiful wife never speaks ill of her husband. Like a bride at her wedding, he feigned shyness and walked haltingly. Rites of passage such as this draw heavily upon images of liminality that enhance the sense of being on a threshold, but they also note the humility title-holders are expected to show to authority, a very effective means of symbolic centralization.

Dressed in chiefly regalia, on several occasions the celebrant danced to numerous “national” shrines that commemorate the kingdom’s heroes and its history: archetypal reminders of Edo moral values. Accompanied by an exuberant crowd of thousands, the prince performed Ekponmwen Obo and Ekponmwen Orere (thanksgiving?) visiting some 14 shrines in the city that all chiefs are bound to acknowledge in the course of their sanctification and the validation of their titles, a total distance of about six kilometers. These included shrines to Osa, the European creator God, said to have been constructed on the sites of churches built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Local interpretations of the public outings hinged on the historical and mythical origins of the shrines themselves. But mostly the shrines are in honor of deified culture heroes whose feats of human greatness have become transformed into a mythic status of extraordinary greatness, and embedded in the cultural consciousness of the Edo. They emphasized the continuity of the kingdom and obliquely pointed to the collective values conveyed by the origin narratives and Benin’s history.

The shrines anchor the social geography of Benin. Historical narratives are not the only way of describing the importance of the

palace. They are also about the civic and ritual landscape. Even today, as the annual rites of Igue show, and as the rites of kingly accession testify, the physical environment itself reeks with symbolic significance: crossroads are spiritually charged internet-like connectors to the other world, trees serve as foundation markers, and shrines demarcate key historical sites while also functioning as religious beacons in urban secular life. These shrines have been aptly referred to as stations, as in train journeys, pilgrimages, Stations of the Cross, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, or even that great bicycle journey, the Tour de France - appropriate analogies.

Like European vassals who publicly acknowledge fealty to their lord, Solomon Akenzua acknowledged his loyalty to his deceased predecessor. On hands and knees he performed



Dressed in chiefly regalia, on several occasions the celebrant danced to numerous “national” shrines that commemorate the kingdom’s heroes.

a rite (Egie Ekete) that literally means “the plastering of mud on a house,” but figuratively suggests manual labor and, by metaphorical extension, the prince’s submission to the king’s (his father’s) and his ancestors’ authority. As Victor Turner tells us, neophytes are both passive and malleable. They must first be “ground down,” made object instead of subject, so a new identity can be built up. Every Crown Prince lives in a makeshift palace on the outskirts of the town where he completes his training in the etiquette of kingship. The structural equivalent of the one in town, this palace is built anew for each successor and then abandoned after he ascends the throne. Politically this prevents the emergence of an alter axis mundi while symbolically it defines the temporality of the liminal state.

This is an intriguing move. To understand it one must know that when one of the queens are about to give birth, she is sent to Uselu, just outside the city, where she births. The young heir is brought up there and, as crown prince, lives nearby in his own abode. Upon his accession to his father’s throne, that abode is left to decay, and rebuilt for a new crown prince. One has to know that primogeniture is still the traditional system of transmission in Benin City and among the Edo, unless otherwise stipulated in a will. Although primogeniture is common in other monarchical systems, and the urge to pass ruler-ship to a son is strong even in recent times (North Korea, Iran, Libya), almost unique is the political separation of the senior son at a distance removed from the palace or center of authority and rule. In the Benin case this both separated the senior son from his father and protected both father and son. It protected the son from engaging in palace intrigues to remove a long-lived father, and although birth rituals of succession were undoubtedly performed for the next in line, it protected the son from harm by his half-brothers intent on usurpation.

It is here, at Uselu, that the prince consummates his position as Edaiken, or crown prince, by performing Iyan-ehien - roughly the Ph.D. equivalent of chieftaincy rites, during which time the titleholder is accorded honors similar to the king. Only the wealthiest of chiefs undertake them, and few in Benin City have done so, or can afford them. Over a two week period the prince distributed enormous quantities of cloth, food and money. Dance groups welcomed him as he emerged every morning from the makeshift palace. His status now enabled him to bestow body titles on his wives. His status now enabled him to bestow body titles on his wives. In the past, these wives accompanied him in death.

The prince wore a “crown of good fortune” made from white clay, chalk and herbs. In a reed pavilion lined with scarlet cloth attendants rubbed his body with chalk. A large loaf of chalk spotted with red represented his ehi, or guardian spirit, his incorporeal antithesis in the spirit world. Red implies spiritual potency; white denotes that which is socially beneficial. Animals from a chicken (the most common sacrificial animal) to a cow (the largest) were sacrificed. A ritual double of the prince (who represented his ehi) carried the cow’s head to his late father’s palace. Solomon Akenzua, now the Edaiken, did not carry the cow head offering because, among other reasons, that would have blatantly highlighted the latent tension inherent in the roles of father-senior son in a society where the senior son inherits all of his father’s property and titles. It would have been a rude reminder of the incumbent king’s mortality, a less than

subtle hint that the Crown Prince eagerly awaited his father’s demise.

**TRANSITION:
EMWINEKKUA (THE BIG THINGS)**

A week later the most senior town chief stood solemnly in the palace and announced that “the chalk of the Oba was broken.” He dashed a large ball of kaolin to the ground. Bystanders burst into tears. Town criers carried this message through the streets of the city. Market women scurried frantically to close their stalls. It was forbidden to cook food. Weddings and funerals were banned. Pregnant women left town. These events stressed how the king was the fons et origo of power and the guarantor of well-being. These injunctions made it clear that there was no food for the spirit of the dead king to eat; he should enter the other world. There were no unborn children that he could snatch to accompany him; and the closing of the markets suggested that economic chaos was inextricably linked to the absence of a king. While the actual interment of the late king had months before laid his physical remains to rest, entombed on a throne in a burial chamber beneath the palace floor, very similar to the excavated burial site at Igbo Ukwu, in the Igbo area on the eastern side of the River Niger, the second burial rites focused on the incorporation of the king’s spirit in the other world, and the establishment of new relations between the deceased and the bereaved community. Adult males had to “pick dirt” - a court euphemism for shaving one’s head in mourning, a tradition complied with by Edo citizens everywhere, including London and New York.

The shearing of hair is a universal symbol of transition, an archetype of discarding that demonstrates a reduction of status and dialectically, with the growth of new hair, a new status. In the context of a king’s death the loss of hair signaled a loss of mystical energy while re-growth, like the accession of a new monarch, symbolized the revitalization of the kingdom and the



Oba Erediauwa during the Igue rituals with an Idia (queen mother) ivory mask on his left hip, 1985. © Archive of Joseph Nevadomsky.

reestablishment of harmony between nature and man, with the living king uniquely situated as mediator between the transcendent order of the other world and the normative order of routine life. Much of the cultural ambiguity in kingship systems resides in the symbolic mediation of the king between opposed domains. It is this quality that gives kingship its sacred aura.

Great tensions in the city accompanied this period. Edo citizens complied with the head shaving injunction. The forced shaving of non-Edo, the mysterious arson of a large outdoor market still selling banned food, and the destruction by fire of the top floor of a bank that overlooked the palace, led to such unease among the diverse urban population that the army sent in an extra contingent of soldiers to maintain order. In a symbolic way, this disorder was symptomatic of a kingdom without a king.

Throughout the royal obsequies the Crown Prince wore a mourner’s garb of burlap. He appeared in public accompanied by the royal bodyguards who, armed with bows and arrows, swarmed around him like ants, an apt analogy since they are known as “the ants that sting the king’s enemies.” His half brothers carried sheathed knives; his female relatives blackened weaving staves. Chaos prevailed. The world had been turned topsy-turvy. Danger lurked everywhere. Even the spirit of the dead monarch had to be kept at bay and forced to accept its inevitable place in the other world across the sea. The Crown Prince “planted a shrine” in memory of his father, and released his father’s many wives from the harem by delegating his chiefs “to pull the thorn out of them” thereby negating the act that had implanted it. By custom a deceased king’s wives spend the rest of their lives in semi-seclusion for “they ate the salt of the world and then it stopped.”

After a lengthy cooling down period, the Crown Prince toured villages and shrines in the kingdom - on the surface to lay claim over the lands in his dominion

but at a deeper level to mollify regional deities to ensure tranquility. These visits brought to light the dialectical tension between the center and the periphery, with local practices having a prominence not directly visible from the palace in the city. In the court, ritual centers on the king; outside, the autonomy of local deities fundamentally alters that centrality.

The visit brought to light the late kingdom boundaries of Palace hegemony. More visits were made to areas north of Benin City than to the south for instance. Benin kingdom never really had suzerainty over the Niger delta, although it had trade relations with the Isoko and Urhobo, and exercised some cultural influence but its political clout was limited. The present king did send a support delegation of chiefs to the installation of the Olu of Warri, and the Olu did have a brass European-style crown made by the brass casters (never picked up), so a style of Benin authority seemed to be acknowledged, but the myriad of creeks and estuaries did not suit conquest and may have been impossible.

Influence to the east extended vicariously to the Niger, an area inhabited by what are now referred to as the Western Igbo, and largely a cultural influence, tempered by a war with Agbor in the late 16th century and another with Ubulu-Ukwu in the mid-18th century (see Ohadike 1994). Political control ended at the town of Agbor, with Igbo villages intermingled with Edo villages west to about Abudu. After this coronation, the Erediauwa, the Oba of Benin, gave haven to the Obi of Agbor, a young child, his life potentially endangered by a succession dispute after the death of the previous Obi. And to the west of Benin, any acrimony between the Yoruba and the Edo was muted by reciprocal cultural influences and shared notions of origin stories.

To the areas north such as the Ishan kingdoms, and Elkpoma, or Uromi, relations were more intense, the influence deep and abiding (Sidahome 1964). North from Auchi ►

▶ and the Etsako area that influence quickly tapered off, lingering with a whisper in places like Idah, across the Niger River, an early 16th century kingdom that threatened Benin and was defeated by them in the 1515-17 AD Benin-Idah War, with the Attah, or ruler, of Idah wearing a brass medallion of an Oba of Benin. The extent of the late Benin kingdom, and especially current political interests, can be seen in the boundaries of the present day states in southern Nigeria.

The exercise of centralization in the Benin kingdom has always been a negotiable one. The palace/town dichotomy with its two distinct orders of chiefs, an underlying egalitarian village age-grade system overlaid by the creation of “dukedom” where the king’s kin control significant communities beyond direct palace control, the patrimonial-gerontocratic structure, and contemporary frictions between appointed or dictated civil and military rulers v. the palace, contain inbuilt, historical structural tensions and dilemmas that surface from time to time or are controlled, creating systemic stresses that must be resolved one way or other.

INCORPORATION: THE ACCESSION RITUALS

The succession rituals commenced with the Crown Prince symbolically climbing the palm tree called “no prosperity without labor,” a type of ordeal common in initiations. Among the Ashanti, a new king was flogged before being enthroned, and the pastoral kings of east Africa underwent ordeals of induction, as is typical anywhere today for new military personnel and fraternity initiations. The Crown Prince was welcomed in the city and spent three days in a “bachelor’s camp” where he symbolically committed incest with someone representing his mother, an act that transformed him into a man without kin and whose status was now commanded by kingship alone.

There followed a period of “advanced etiquette training” at the site of the first palace built by Ewedo, 4th king of the present dynasty. In a remarkable game of magical marbles Solomon Akenzua received the name by which he would be known. Every day royal bards sang scathing songs that chastised the unscrupulous, a rare opportunity to publicly express the average citizen’s disgust with greedy chiefs, selfish businessmen, and lazy civil servants, thus defusing resentment. Anthropologists view such safety valve rituals as sanctioned outlets for the political disenchantment in a restrictive frame for anomie. They allow ordinary citizens to spout off, publicly criticizing those in power without retribution.

In the dead of night, the hereditary kingmakers, descendants of the autochthonous rulers of the land,

proclaimed the prince king, acknowledging his authority to “pronounce over all the land, even to the land of the Europeans.” Dressed in red, he knelt on a mound of cowries, symbol of wealth (a traditional form of currency), and received a crown of coral beads (Mediterranean coral). At sunrise he walked in grand procession to the palace and took possession of his capital. Heavily fortified with amulets and dressed from head to toe in coral beaded garments, he resembled the giant termite mounds ubiquitous in the area. Indeed, one of the praise names for the king is “anthill.” In his right hand he held a talisman known as “red will go to the palace” (that is, go and return safely). Around his chest he wore a coral-covered rope belt called “hunger belt” for suspending hunger (the king eats chalk). To it was attached a coral-covered



At sunrise he walked in grand procession to the palace and took possession of his capital.

bell call “the ground (that is, the king) does not feel the weight of a load”.

The king crossed a make-shift bridge over an imaginary river. The shallow side (Ogotele) and the deeper, far side (Omi) signify something that only an Oba can accomplish or see. River crossings are a cliché, a representation of space (and reality) in a cosmographic model. The image of a king crossing a river is a dramatic metaphor: the king was no longer an ordinary human being but a sacralized person, in some ways even an object. Near the palace at a site crowded with dignitaries, the new king announced the name by which he would be known: Erediauwa (“Ere [a historical figure that assisted an early king of this dynasty] has come to set things right”). He replaced the crown of ede with the crown of oro, the

former without the tall corn husk shaped coral-covered amulet. Representatives of the Nigerian Government presented him with the Staff of Office of a First Class Traditional Ruler.

A week later, a mock battle commemorated the Treaty of Ekiophagha, a historical event preceded by the defeat of Ogiamien’s army, an event that set off Benin’s territorial expansion. (Because it survived the Punitive Expedition conflagration that engulfed much of Benin, Chief Ogiamien’s palace is a UNESCO Heritage site and a National Monument. It is located about a kilometer from the Oba’s palace.) The king’s troops, dressed for war, destroyed the enemy and killed their captain (by beheading a surrogate dog). At a political level the treaty that followed spelled out the terms of surrender. At a more significant level it demarcated the living and immaterial worlds: the earth for the Oba, the other world for the deities. The treaty also ensured tranquility, peace and prosperity.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT OF ROYAL RITUALS

Throughout a king’s reign the ideology of sacredness is regularly expressed by recurring rituals (Bradbury 1959 has a good description of Igue). Annual refresher rites and exceptional rituals cope with calamity; ensure the health of the monarch and the stability of the kingdom. Igue includes Otue, where the king hosts his chiefs from highest to low with kolanuts, the essential fruit of hospitality, and from lowest to high they reaffirm their loyalty. The central rite of Ugie Erha Oba honors the king’s paternal ancestors, and the earth. Iron reenacts the ancient conflicts between the king and the seven Uzama, autonomous rulers, and in their subjugation emphasizes the king’s authority. Kate Ezra says that the ceremony “illustrates the historical consciousness that has motivated so much of Benin art and ritual” (Ezra 1992: 19).

Igue focuses on the king’s person. By restoring the king’s vitality with herbs from the forest and by blessing his head - seat of his capabilities and wisdom - with animal sacrificial blood, the body politic is made impervious to danger.

Later, town chiefs, some wearing pangolin-like red felt costumes that revealed an implicit threat, tossed their swords in ceremonial salute to the king. In the town chiefs versus palace chiefs dichotomy - an astute checks and balance system - the leopard is king of the forest, a metaphor for the king, but the giant West African pangolin, a metaphor for senior chiefs, can on occasion overpower it. “We acknowledge you as king but don’t tread on us” is the visual cautionary note. At Ewere Festival, “the leaves of joy,” children parade through town giving ewere leaves to elders and at the palace the Oba receives leaves

from various chiefs who represent visitors from Ife, an ancient Yoruba kingdom from which the present dynasty presumptively originated. Finally, during Emobo, lingering malicious spirits are sent back to Udo and Idah, rival challengers that long ago bucked against Benin’s emerging supremacy, and those conflicts resonate strongly even today.

Before the British Punitive Expedition in 1897 state rituals occupied much of the court calendar. From the warrior kings of the 15th and 16th centuries to the sacred kings of the 18th and 19th centuries the nature of kingship had changed and the Obas had become captives of ceremony. When Eweka II took the throne in 1914 he resumed the ritual sequences but in abbreviated form. Under Akenzua II they were grouped into a two-week period in December to take advantage of the school break at Christmas. During the Biafra War in the late 1960’s they became private rather than public. Erediauwa moved them outdoors again and expanded them to include some village masquerades such as Ekpo, a village cleansing rite that because of its wonderful masquerades has been incorporated into Igue, as have traditional wrestling matches and, oddly, cabaret style singing. In a way, the free cokes and orange sodas, and the cabaret atmosphere, have revived Igue and it has reacquired some of its public potency. Erediauwa rallied the people of Benin by revitalizing these ancient rites, reactivating city shrines, and making publicly aired pronouncements.



Oba Akenzua II striking an ivory gong at Emobo, a ceremony to drive evil forces out of Benin. © William Bulter Fagg, 1958. William B. Fagg Archive, The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London.

At ritually designated times of the year the Ugie Ivie, Ododua, and Ugie-Oro are performed. The king’s regalia are washed with cow’s blood - to regenerate their spiritual potency - during Ugie Ivie. Ododua, a ceremony that incidentally coincides with Lent, is a complex rite that honors the king’s paternal ancestors and has both Portuguese and village associations. During Ugie-Oro the king’s chiefs beat the beak of the magical bird oro, the so-called “bird of prophecy” that falsely augured the king’s defeat in his war against Idah, a kingdom that rivaled Benin for supremacy. Other annual rituals include Ague, a new yam blessing ceremony that the king celebrates, followed by his chiefs, for a successful harvest. Yams are the preferred economic staple (like potatoes for Americans and rice for Asians). Whatever the past history of Ague (it is often confused with Igue), it is not now a public ceremony, and is coordinated by the chiefly or commoner households that perform it. The 3rd, 7th and 14th anniversary of the king’s reign were especially honored and reflect the importance of numerology in Edo culture.

On the surface, many of these rites seem to argue for the durability of kingship and its attendant ritual structure in the face of massive social and political change. The elaboration of ritual today represents both a continuation of long-held traditions, and re-elaborations of old symbols to meet a changing world. Enterprising businessmen and loyal adherents are

both given chieftaincy titles. Like honors elsewhere - Britain’s OBEs and MBEs, outlandishly outmoded colonial awards, they nevertheless reflect on the recipients’ honor, certainly precedence, erstwhile dignity, even a semblance of authority. In his inaugural 1986 lecture as Professor of History at the University of Benin, Benin City, the eminent Nigerian historian Philip Igbafe said that for local citizens the monarchy remains the heart and soul of the Benin kingdom, a rallying point and the embodiment of culture (Igbafe 1986). Like the Roman Catholic Church and its “deposit of faith” resistant to change, the Oba’s palace and its support structure are located within a “deposit of tradition” with challenges appearing at every deviation.”

While it is true that a new Oba makes his own rules, great care is taken not to infringe heavily on the deposit of tradition. Everyone who has ever been deeply involved with the palace knows the codes, an envelope of tradition that every activity. Only time will tell how the intrusions of a fast-paced contemporary world and its global web-based economy will affect these and similar traditions in Benin City to the extent that they no longer augur well for the palace and its supporters, or are meaningful to the people themselves. A paramount issue: the need to balance retention of orthodoxy with the requirements of an inclusive progressiveness. ●

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