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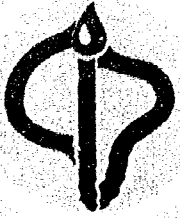
*Chair of the Moroccan African Heritage
Lectures Series (12)*

**A Comparative Study of the Fulani
and the Moroccan Decorative Arts
Another Look at the Historical
Study of African Material Culture**

Cornelius O. ADEPEGBA

Director of the Institute of African Studies
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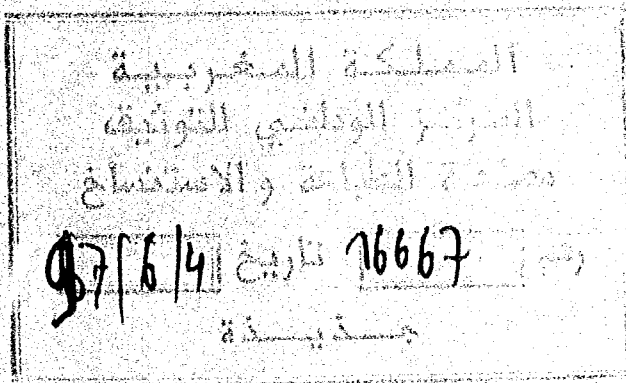


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This text reproduces the lecture given by Professor O. ADEPEGBA within the activities of the Chair of the Moroccan-African Heritage Program, at the Institute of African Studies on April 22th, 1993. The academic stay of Professor ADEPEGBA has been possible thanks to the kindly assistance of the Moroccan Agency of International Cooperation.

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الفن التقليدي المغربي وفنون الزخرفة الفولانية دراسة مقارنة

(ملاحظات حول تاريخ الثقافات المادية بإفريقيا)

ملخص :

تهدف هذه المحاضرة إلى إبراز القواسم المشتركة في مجال الثقافة والفن بين شمالي الصحراء الكبرى وجنوبيها، وذلك اعتماداً على مقارنة بين الفن الزخرفي الفولاني وبين نظيره الأمازيغي ببلدان المغرب. وقد ركزت الدراسة على تحليل نماذج من الزخارف على الأواني المتخذة من الدباء لدى الفولانيين وعينات من الفخار الأمازيغي المزخرف، ثم الرسوم والصبغات الحائطية المتداولة لدى القبائل (بالجزائر). وللتأكيد على ضرورة اهتمام البحث بهذه التماثلات الفنية والثقافية، أورد المحاضر بعض خلاصات استكشافاته حول النقوش الصخرية في صحراء تيسيلي نجر وهي ذات خصائص فنية أمازيغية وفولانية. وخلص إلى أن مثل هذه الاستقرامات الميدانية كفيلة بأن تبرز المشترك بين الثقافات المادية في مختلف المناطق الإفريقية. ويحتاج الأمر إلى المزيد من التوسع في دراسة العلاقات بين مختلف المجموعات الثقافية بهذا القطر، لمعرفة أصل التقاليد الثقافية الإفريقية المشتركة، دون حصرها في المقاربات الاثنولوجية والاثنوغرافية.

Etude comparative de l'art traditionnel marocain et des arts décoratifs fulanis (une autre approche de la culture matérielle africaine)

Résumé :

Cette conférence est une analyse des modèles décoratifs en usage chez les nomades Fulani et les Berbères du Maghreb. L'étude porte particulièrement sur lesalebasses des Fulani et sur la poterie et les décorations murales des berbères.

Les Fulani s'inspirent généralement de la technologie de leurs voisins, mais pour la décoration desalebasses, ils adoptent des techniques spécifiquement autochtones, notamment dans les régions du Nord du Nigéria. Toutefois, on note une similitude frappante entre les dessins desalebasses fulani et les figures des peintures murales dans des régions en Afrique du Nord en général et en kabylie en particulier. Les lieux de convergence entre les deux espaces culturels peuvent être éclairés par les investigations portant sur des peintures rupestres explorées dans le désert du Tassili N'ijer. Elles représentent des figures humaines et animales caractérisées par des motifs de style à la fois berbère et fulani. Sachant que la tradition de la poterie marocaine est aussi antique que l'art rupestre, il est évident que c'est là un domaine de recherche susceptible d'élucider les traits définitoires communs à la culture matérielle dans les différentes zones d'Afrique. Ainsi, une approche élargie des relations inter-ethniques semble être la plus appropriée à la saisie des origines et du développement de la tradition africaine, dans une perspective qui outrepassé les limites ethniques.

A Comparative Study of the Fulani Decorative and the Moroccan Traditional Arts : Another Look at the Historical Study of African Material Culture

Introduction

A comparative study of the Fulani decorative and Moroccan traditional arts may appear incongruous. The Fulani are a West African people while Morocco is a North African country. They are separated from each other by the broad belt of arid desert, the Sahara, which divides North Africa from sub-Saharan Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. But in an earlier study of the art of the Fulani nomads (Adepegba : 1986), it was observed that the designs employed by Fulani nomads on their decorated calabashes are very similar to those employed by the Kabyle Berbers of Algeria in their pottery decorations. The observation led to efforts to identify possible connections that might have led to the two peoples' aesthetic similarities. However, the Kabyles in Algeria are only one Berber group : other Berber groups exist in sizeable proportions in the population of other North African countries such as Tunisia and Morocco. These other groups in one way or the other have contributed to the traditional arts of their different countries. Thus this study is to be seen as a follow-up to the earlier research. Its findings raise questions concerning a

fragmented ethnic-bound approach to the study of African cultures ; rather the relevance of cross-cultural studies is highlighted.

The Fulani Nomads and Their Arts

The Fulani are the only nomadic pastoralists in West Africa. They live on the southern fringe of the Sahara, extending as far into the adjacent grasslands as is considered safe for their cattle. Suitable grazing land is not the only consideration ; wherever they decide to stay must be free of insects and other elements that are harmful to the animals, and they move with their cattle as the seasons vary from dry to wet. They are found across West Africa from Senegal to the Cameroons and they speak a common language, Fulfulde, which they generally combine with local languages, facilitating symbiosis with their sedentary neighbours. The nomads among them live mainly by exchanging their dairy produce for grains and other staples, and materials they need and do not produce themselves.

Their Islamised kin established themselves as rulers in Macina, Sokoto and Adamawa through the holy wars (*jihads*) of the early 19th century. Their descendants are mainly city dwellers and they, together with others who have lost their cattle, have given up nomadism for sedentary lives.

Nomadism normally poses constraints to material acquisition. Thus, the Fulani are not generally engaged in the production of

arts and artefacts. In Nigeria, especially where the nomads are concentrated, they are so dependent on the technology of their sedentary neighbours that the sticks with which they guide their cattle are cut and sold to them by the Hausa in local markets (Adepegba, 1986 : 8). They live in temporary shelters usually made of stalks of guinea corn and grass and, besides body ornaments, the items of which are usually not made but only bought and displayed by them, their only craft is calabash decoration. They even practise this only in the north-east, outside the area of commercial influence of the Hausa. Among the Hausa, decorated calabashes are designed and sold to the Fulani nomads by the itinerant Hausa craftsmen.

Another famous art of the Fulani in West Africa is blanket weaving. But this is done only by the sedentary Fulani of the Senegal valley. Hence the only art known to be done by nomads themselves is calabash decoration.

In northeastern Nigeria, where Fulani nomads practice calabash decoration, most other ethnic groups also practice this craft. This has attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Barbara Rubin (1971) and T. and T.J.H. Chappel (1977) have worked on the calabash decoration of the area. Their work does not specifically focus on the Fulani nomads but treats the products of various peoples, showing their techniques, artistic richness and cultural significance. It is only in northern Cameroon that specific attention has been paid to the calabash decoration of the Fulani (Jest, 1956) and this is only in a very

short article which briefly highlights the design components of the decorations and the various types of calabashes decorated.

Chappel's work, however, differentiates the techniques and styles of the Fulani nomads from those of the other ethnic groups in northeastern Nigeria. The nomads, according to him, use cold tools to engrave their patterns while other peoples around them employ red-hot tools. Their two styles of decoration have been identified with two different localities. There is the spiky design style from Balala district (figure 1). Its patterns are mostly combinations of fine lines made into rectilinear forms such as rectangles and triangles, invariably placed to hang from the rims of the calabashes. The design components according to the author, are named after the local face markings that they resemble, and after their position on the face. The second style (figure 2) is called the Girei style, after the locality in which it is common. It is more complex and not associated with face markings. Its components, like those of the first style, are made of combinations of thin lines sometimes inter-played connected in networks or scaffolds which make the unadorned areas in-between appear void and open. In both the first and second styles, the lines are mainly straight and rectilinear. Curves are scarce even when they are used for representational or figural designs. A decorated calabash of the nomadic Fulani in the collection of Jos museum in Nigeria (figure 3) is a good example of their use of lines for figural designs. Camels, Fulani women pounding food in mortars and floral forms are made up of rectilinear shapes.

The thin linear character of the designs seems to reflect the nomads' physical build, slim bodies with thin, seemingly frail limbs and narrow faces. The decorated calabashes are done by their women who use them not only as vessels but as ornaments for beautifying themselves when carried, or their environments when displayed in the corners of their huts or on platforms erected outside. The first type of design also echos the nomadic women's way of wearing jewelry, especially as attachments round the head or pendants or necklaces usually arranged hanging down.

In Nigeria, calabash decoration is not confined to the northeastern part of Nigeria and neither can it be said to be a recent craft. Other ethnic groups such as the Hausa, the Tiv and the Yoruba in the southwest also decorate calabashes and the association of the decorative patterns on the cast metal objects from Igbo-Ukwu, in southeastern Nigeria have been dated to the 9th century A. D. But in no other Nigerian calabash decoration traditions are the two kinds of designs found. The usual practice in the calabash decorations of other Nigerian groups is the initial division of the calabash surfaces into units with thick lines and the patterns scraped off or left untouched with carved surroundings in the middle of the divisions. By this, design components are confined to their individual space without suggesting any freedom or movement.



Figure 1 : Fulani Calabash
Decoration Design Type 1

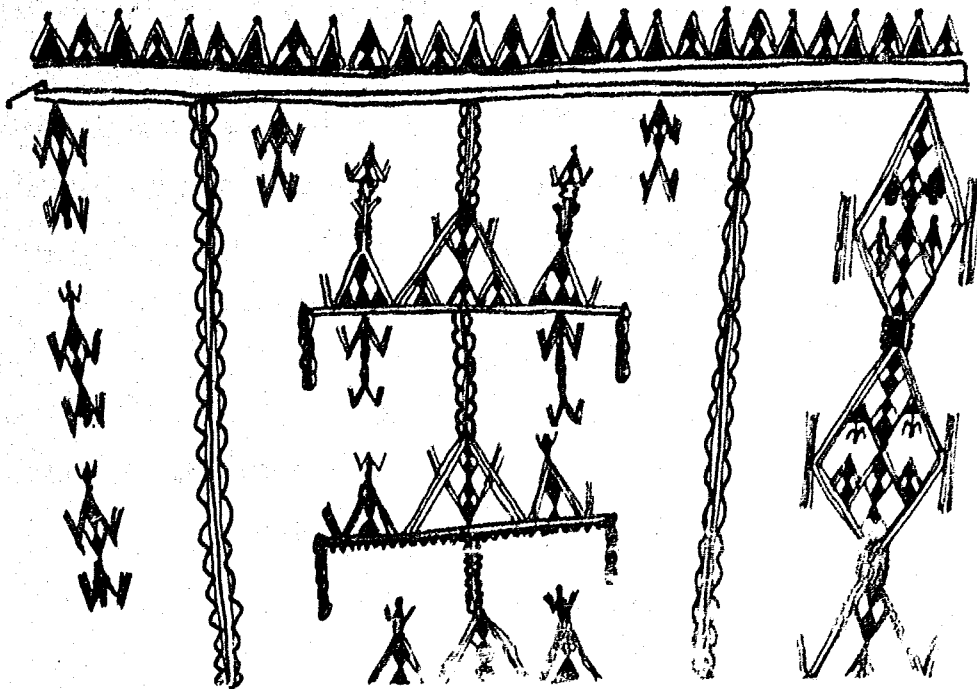


Figure 2 : Fulani Calabash
Decoration Design Type 2

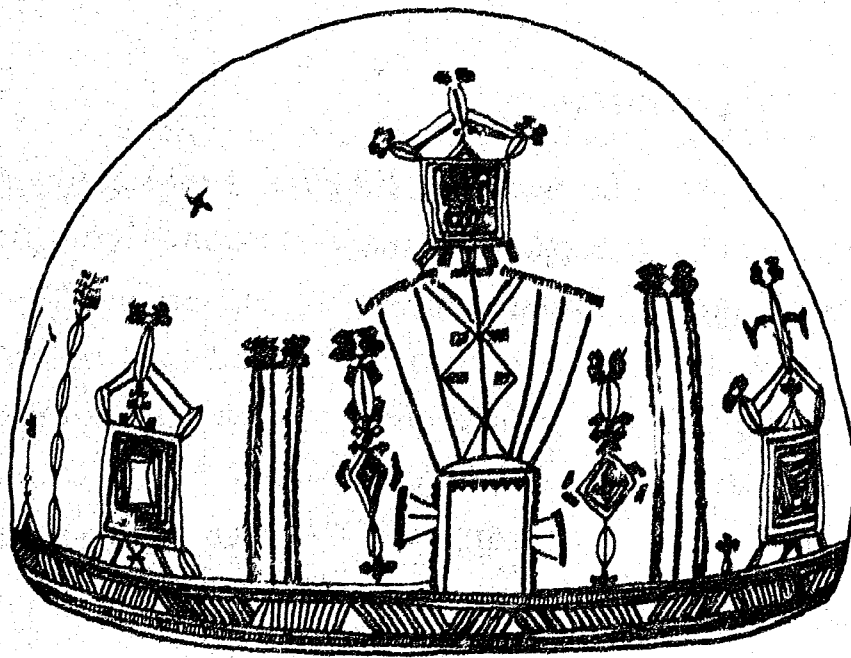


Figure 3 : Fulani Figural Design on a Calabash in Jos Museum, Nigeria

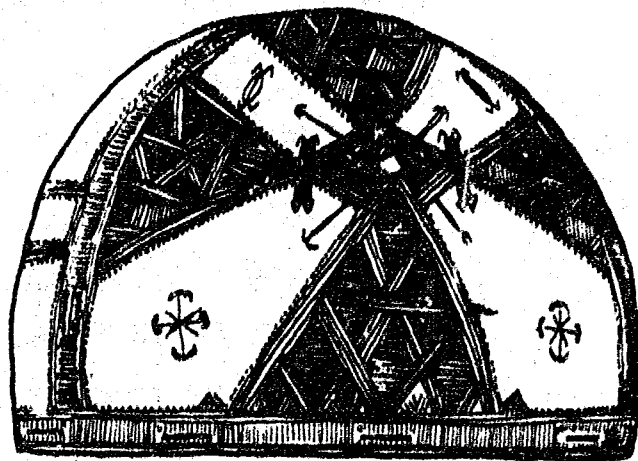


Figure 4 : Kabyle Berber Mural decorations from Quadhias in Kabylia after Westman

Historical Investigation

The Fulani nomads claimed that their first style, the spiky Balala type, was brought to their present location in northeastern Nigeria from the north of the area. They are, however, silent about the origin of the second type of pattern. The north of the area was visited and it was discovered that the same type of patterns was employed by other Fulani women in eastern Niger which, according to Delange (1974), is the migratory route of the Fulani nomads.

The nomadic Fulani migrate through Niger in the Tahua, Gao and Madua regions and extend to Nigeria among the Bororo Fulani, stubborn pagans, protecting their archaic pastoral traditions with pride. It is probably among these people that we will find the purest Fulani characteristics along with the most spontaneous application of their aesthetic feelings.

In the same publication (a chapter in her general text on African art), she states :

In Senegal, Guinea, Niger, Nigeria and Northern Cameroon, the Wolof, the Tuculeur, the Sarakole, the Dialonke, the Bambara, the Baga, the Susu, the Songai, the Hausa, the Djerma and the Kirdi provide artistic techniques and decorative themes for their

Fulani conquerors. But over this immense Fulani trail, which touches the Saharan fringe in the African lands, and over these pliant black cultures hover the Moorish and Tuareg arts.

The Tuareg, whose art, she says, has had influence on Fulani art, are found in various numbers in Niger, Mali, Algeria, Libya and Upper Volta. Niger, where they are most numerous (about 500,000) (Chakari : 1989, 10), is directly north, adjacent to the area where the Fulani nomads decorate calabashes in Nigeria. They are also a splinter group of the large Berber groups found from Morocco to Tunisia along the Mediterranean coast. The connection therefore suggests a need to look northwards for the source of the Fulani nomads' calabash designs.

The art of the Tuareg, particularly their leather work and metal engravings, was examined. Their designs, like the designs on the calabashes of the Fulani nomads, are linear and mostly non-representational. The lines, particularly on their engraved jewelries, are not only fine but precise. The precision characteristic of the designs is not matched in any of the nomads' calabash designs, though engraving is used both for the Tuareg jewelries and Fulani nomads' calabashes. Decorations appear to be absent in the metal engraving, most likely because of the differences in the materials on which the designs are made.

Further north, however, are the Kabyle Berber whose potteries

are closer in design to the nomads' calabash decorations. Their pottery, like the nomads' calabash decoration, is essentially a women's art and they also share many characteristics with other art forms of the Kabyle Berbers. It is for this reason that Westman (1987: 165) refers to all Berber arts as one. A number of other publications exist on the Kabyle Berber arts. Devulder (1951) wrote on their mural paintings while Balfet (1955) only focuses on their pottery. Mention is also made of the pottery in Fagg and Picton's publication on the potters' art in Africa (1970) and Grumer (1986) on the collections of Berber ceramics in the Frobenius Institute and elsewhere in Germany. The Berbers also practise blanket weaving and this together with their decorated potteries usually catch the eye of visitors. (Westman, 1987: 165-180).

Westman is interested in the symbolic aspect of the arts and likens them to the varied significance of the mirror in Berber culture. Devulder is interested in the significance and forms of the art, paying special attention to the forms, design components and formation as well as the question of identification of style. According to the author, the potters recognize the differences between the work of different potters, although an observer would not find such distinctions easy to make. The various uses of the pots are also pointed out. The potteries which are painted with decorations and those which are not are specified. For example, cooking pots, utensils and big jars are hardly ornamented.

Like the decorated calabashes among the Fulani nomads, Berber pottery serves both functional and aesthetic purposes. They are used as containers, kitchen utensils, wash basins and wall ornaments. The decorated ones displayed on the walls like mural paintings are proof of the energy of the mistress of the house who supervises their fabrication and annual renewal. Very important are the dates associated with the age of the potteries. According to Fagg and Picton (1970), the pottery design has been recognized as preserving with remarkably little change an elaborate and idiosyncratic style first found in neolithic Cyprus about 2000 B.C. Post of such design have also been found in cave burial chambers in eastern Algeria and Tunisia dating from pre-Punic days (Grumer: 1986). The dates suggest a fairly old age for the pottery tradition.

The designs on the Berber potteries, like the designs of the decorated calabashes of the Fulani nomads, are also basically of two types. The two are represented in the three potteries from the British Museum (Fagg and Picton: 1970). The tall jar in the middle of the three is like the sparsely decorated spiky style of calsbash decoration from the Balala district. Also related to this design are some of the illustrations in Balfet's publication on the subject (Balfet: 1955). The same kind of pattern is found in the mural decoration from Quadhias in Kabylia, Algeria (figure 4). The mural decoration tends to be representational as the Fulani calabash decoration now on display in the Jos Museum (figure 3). The seemingly figural patterns in the

mural decoration are very close in form to the seemingly abstract figural forms above the women pounding food in the calabash decoration. The other style of the Berber pottery designs (figure 4) seems to be more ornate and very similar to the patterns on the decorated calabashes of the Fulani nomads from Girei (figure 2). The combination of interplayed lines in the designs similarly form scaffolds that make the unadorned areas look like voids. The roundness of form of the pots that carry these kinds of design, found in the British Museum (Fagg and Picton: 1970), makes the cluster of lines appear to shimmer and reduces the appearance of void in the unadorned area. Such designs, published by Balfet (1955), are, however more, typical.

Deductions from the Design Similarities

Since the Fulani and the Berber Kabyle artistic traditions are still vigorously practised, could their design similarities have arisen out of trade connections ? The northeastern region of Nigeria where the nomad calabashes are produced is directly south of the Algerian area around the same longitude where the Kabyle Berbers produce the pottery. But the Tuareg and other groups who live in between the Fulani nomads in Nigeria and the Kabyle Berbers in Algeria are not noted as traders. The Tuareg until the end of the 19th century were even known for raiding along the caravan routes (Gellner and Micaud: 1973,

345), which definitely could not help the flow of trade between North and West Africa. If the artistic connection was by trade, other groups in northeastern Nigeria should have been similarly influenced.

Although Passarge (1895) and some other scholars are of the view that the Fulani are of North African Berber origin, there is no agreement on the linguistic connection between Fulfude and the Hamitic languages of the Berber. In fact Greenberg (cited by Murdock, 1959 : 415) rejects the use of the herding and milking of cattle as a diagnostic criterion for identifying the Fulfulde as Hamitic.

There is, however another suggestion concerning the origin of the Fulani which may be related to the appearance of the same designs in the Fulani nomad and Berber arts. This is the view of Delafosse that the Fulani, because of their sharply contrasting physique and culture relative to their immediate neighbours, descend from Syrians of Semitic (Aramaic) speech who allegedly penetrated Negro Africa from Cyrenaica about 200 A.D. This theory, which is said to be widely favored is supported by fact that the type of Berber pottery has been found outside Africa, precisely in Cyprus, dating from about 2000 B.C. (Fagg and Piction: 1970).

The Fulani too might have not been restricted to West Africa as they are at present. Lhote's observation of rock paintings, depicting cattle and a group of figures wearing body

ornaments, suggests this. According to him, they are likely to be the people now called the Fulani (Lhote, 1970, 91-102). A Fulani scholar in Senegal, Hampate Ba, also confirms that the abstract symbols in the paintings in Tassili N'Ajjer, the location of the paintings to which Lhote refers, are the symbols the Fulani in Senegal and Gambia use in their initiation rites, which he himself has undergone (Brain, 1980, 65). According to him, individual objects represented correspond to representations in the initiation rites, particularly pertaining to clothes, the formation and malformation of cattle horns, sacrifices and shrines. The hermaphroditic cow in the paintings also corresponds to elements in the Fulani myths taught during the initiation rite. The initiation field is also graphically represented with the sun surrounded by a circle lined up with heads of cows as different phases of the moon. The braid of hair hanging to the back of the female figure in the painting is even typical of present-day Fulani women.

The locations of the paintings are directly north of the area where Delange says the purest Fulani characteristics can be found. The Tassili N'Ajjer area where these pictures have been found is most likely their ancient settlement and it is much closer to the Berber territories. In fact, certain figures painted in white in the rock paintings have been identified as Berbers by Brentjes (1969: 72).

The dates when the rock paintings were made may not be known. But the paintings are much older than the historic times

when the Fulani were reported to have first been found in West Africa. The area of the rock paintings, much wetter than it is at present, therefore must have been a point of interaction between the Fulani nomads and the Berbers and the origin of their aesthetic similarities.

These findings are very significant for reconstructing the movement and spread of the Fulani in West Africa. The common claim that the Fulani were first seen in the Senegal Valley, from where they have over time spread eastwards to the Cameroons and the Central African Republic, is not confirmed. Their aesthetics, rather than spreading east from West, seem to have spread from north to south.

The Berbers and Traditional Moroccan Art

Of the peoples of different descent now inhabiting the Maghrib, the Berbers are certainly the oldest in the area. However, they have been constantly exposed to outside influences from Western Asia and Europe. Agriculture and domesticated animals spread to North Africa from Western Asia, and in classical times, the Berber areas, especially along the Mediterranean coast, were first occupied by the Phoenicians, then the Greeks and lastly the Romans. Then in the 7th century A.D., North Africa was conquered by the Arabs and the conquest was followed by the arrival of the Bedouin Arabs from the Syrian desert in the 11th century.

The presence of these outsiders, especially the Arabs, has greatly affected not only the Berber culture but also their physical features. Coon observed that it is easier to tell a Berber from an Arab by dress and behaviour than by external physical features (Hiernaux; 1974, 1975, 46-47). They are Muslims and they often speak Arabic very well.

However, some of their Berber peculiarities still show despite their present Arabization. They have their own languages which are not mutually intelligible but are closely related and constitute a distinct Berber sub-family of the Hamitic language stock (Murdock; 1959, 116). Distinctive designs also appear in present-day Berber traditional arts, especially those of Morocco on which a number of publications exist. Some of the publications focus on particular art forms, while there are others which treat all the arts together. The latter tend to be locally published and more up-to-date. Notable among them are the works of Benabdellah Abdelaziz (published at the University of Rabat, 1961, unfortunately unavailable for this lecture), Flint Bert (1973), Sijelmassi (1974) and Terrasse and Hainaut (1988). They cover the traditional designs used in arts such as pottery, jewelry and blanket weaving. In some, the patterns are seen in terms of their symbolism. Westermarck (1935, 34-75) sees the patterns as protective charms against the evil eye, "mauvais oeil". Sijelmassi, however, divided the traditional arts of the country into the rural and urban arts and differentiates between those patterns that are Islamic and more

universal and those that are exclusively local and indigenous. He also closely observes the characteristics of the design features from the objects in the collections of various local museums.

The forms of the design elements in the rural arts, according to Sijelmassi, have been divided into closed and open types which respectively are referred to in French as "espace visuel fermé" and "espace visuel ouvert". The first, according to him, are formed by putting together lines which make up basic geometric figures such as square, rectangle, lozenge, triangle and, very rarely, circles. Of the second type, it is observed that the lines take different directions (horizontal, vertical, diagonal, etc.) associated with many positions without forming geometric surfaces by their intersections. Tentatively, the designs have been associated with the Phoenician or Berber writings, the latter of which is called Tifinar.

His illustrations of the first type are pottery pieces in his plates 234 and 235 from the Rif region, now in Batha Museum in Fez, and plate 236 in the Tanger Museum. There is also plate 238 from Ouarzazate region in Dar Si Said Museum in Marrakech. A good example of the second type is his plate 251 also from the northern Rif area and now in the Tanger Museum.

These two styles correspond to the two styles in the Fulani nomads' calabash decorations as well as the Kabyle Berber

pottery designs. The same is true of the pottery designs, mainly from northern Morocco published by Terrasse and Hainaut (Terrasse and Hainaut: 1988, plates II and III on pages 20 and 25). Terrasse and Hainaut illustrate their works from objects in private collections. The spiking out of the designs or in some cases, their hanging down from concentrated fairly regular patterns in the middle or rim, is also echoed in the jewelries from South Morocco in the collection of Gabriel Rcusseau (Terrasse and Hainaut; 1958 plate XIII, 57). Equally notable are the front hangings from necklaces and pendants.

However, similar as these designs are to the calabash decorations of the Fulani nomads in Northeastern Nigeria and to the Kabyle Berber potteries in Algeria, the design traits are not common among the Fulani directly south of Morocco. The only traditional Moroccan art form that is found among the Fulani directly south of Morocco is blanket weaving which has not been dated to ascertain its age.

Assuming it started fairly recently, it further supports the view already expressed that the Fulani, rather than moving eastwards from the Senegal valley, moved southwards to their various present locations. Although there were warfare and trading connections between Morocco and West Africa, they are not as old as the Berber potteries or the Saharan rock art, which have indicated connections between the Fulani and the Berbers.

Implication of this Argument for Historical Studies of African Material Culture

The question raised by this study relates to the historical study of African material culture. It is now a well established fact that forms are not given due attention in the study of African art. Functions have always been advocated and emphasized. But forms certainly determine whether objects are arts or artefacts. In Africa, where documentary evidence is scarce and the functions by which the objects are studied are transmitted either orally or by re-enactment, losing detail and accuracy with time, there is a limit to the dependability of sources. Forms well analysed can elucidate the objects further and even provide clues to the origin and development of practices.

The individual and isolatory study of African ways of life, which is still the academic order of the day, has to be reviewed. Cases where traditions transcend ethnic boundaries are not uncommon. It is not enough to say that such practices exist among such and such ethnic groups without tracing their origin and development, and there are cases where each of the ethnic groups involved would consider it honourable to claim that it is the originator. Forms have to be closely looked at across cultures. Therefore, the present common practice of studying each culture in isolation certainly militates against historical reconstruction.

Equally problematic is the limitation of the study of African

culture to the sub-Saharan region. Without any bias towards the evolutionary theory in which every practice is found to be similar to that of earlier northern civilizations is without justification traced to the north, more and more effort should be made to study the culture, particularly the arts, of northern Africa along with those of other parts of Africa. In this, credit must be given to the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan which as far back as 1980 introduced the pre-Islamic art of North Africa as one of its art courses. Drewal, in a seminar organised by the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in 1987, has advocated that the art of ancient Egypt as well as of contemporary Africa should be seen as part of African art. The suggestion, if heeded, is certainly a right step towards the historical reconstruction of African material culture.

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Sommaire

Résumés en Arabe et en Français	5
Introduction	7
The Fulani Nomads and Their Arts	8
Historical Investigation	14
Deductions from the Design Similarities	18
The Berbers and the Traditional Moroccan Art	21
Implication of this Argument for Historical Studies of African Material Culture	25
References	27

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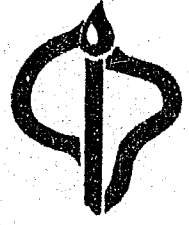
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D 110	
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D 120	

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38

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