

House of Stones: Memorial Art of Fifteenth-Century Sierra Leone

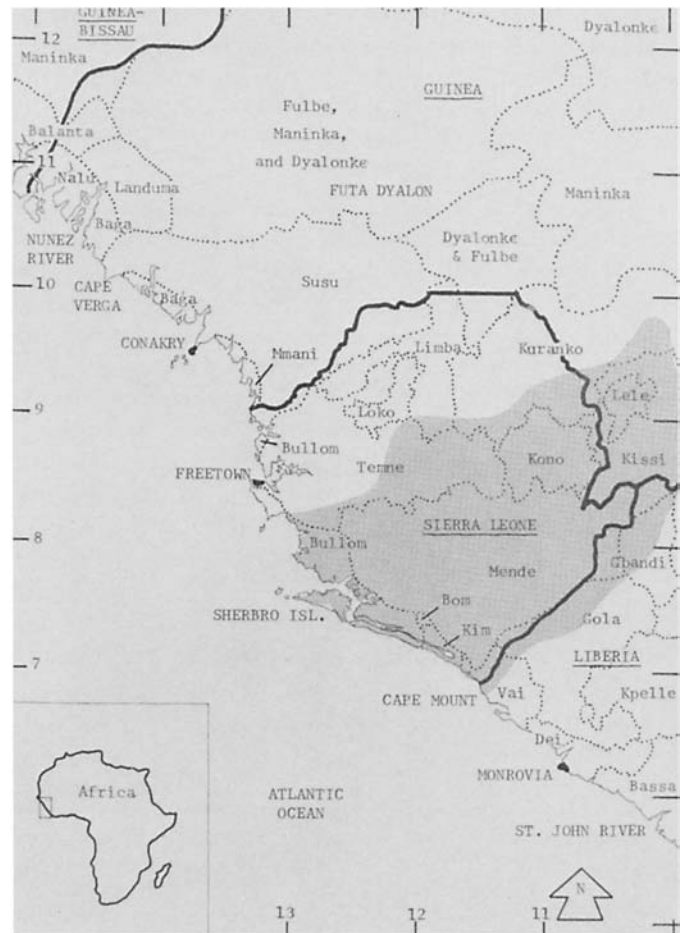
Frederick J. Lamp

In 1850 George Thompson, an American missionary in southern Sierra Leone, came across a group of carvings in stone.¹ "Evidence of the depravity of man," he immediately pronounced them. In his journal, dated May 21, he wrote:

This evening I found a nest of old, broken graven images. ... There were five of them, lying at the foot of a small tree, where a town once stood, which was destroyed by war. ... They are made of stone, intended as imitation of something, perhaps of human beings — if so, very comical ... I made a captive of the best one to act as a preacher, to plead for Africa.²

From the turn of the century a plethora of publications appeared in English and German with more enthusiasm for the place of these stone figures in African history. Some linked the discoveries to ancient Egypt or Phoenicia and others to the great civilizations of medieval Nigeria.³

It is now known that the figures may be found throughout an area of some 60,000 square kilometers of the southeastern half of Sierra Leone and the neighboring area of the Kissi and Kuranko peoples in Guinea (Fig. 1).⁴ No archaeological discoveries have been made, although in 1909 a Major Anderson reported what appeared to be a carving workshop in a collapsed cave, with some incomplete and miscarved specimens intact. Anderson was told consistently by many chiefs of the Kono, Temne, and Mende that "all the Nomoris [stone figures] were found in caves or recesses of worked-out steatite."⁵ Another source, F. Ryff, was told that the figures were found often in clusters of up to fifty buried in tumuli.⁶ More often they have been found singly, lying in the farm soil, beneath the underbrush of forested areas, or in river beds. The majority are carved of steatite.⁷ Like other area peoples, the



1 Ethnic groups of the West Atlantic Coast (shaded portion: area in which stone figures have been discovered, revised from Tagliaferri and Hammacher, 9).

¹ Although Alldridge (pp. 163-64) is given credit in recent publications by both Allison (p. 36) and Tagliaferri and Hammacher (p. 10) for first mentioning the stone figures, he is preceded not only by Thompson (as noted by Atherton and Kalous, 304; and by D. Fraser, "Note on the Stone Nomoli Figures of Sierra Leone," *Art Bulletin*, LIII, 1971, 393) but also by J. Schön (*Vocabulary of the Mende Language*, London, 1884, 80) and J. Büttikofer (*Reisebilder aus Liberia*, Leiden, 1890), and he cannot be considered earlier than Rüttimeyer.

² G. Thompson, *Thompson in Africa*, New York, 1854, 289-90. Four years later he had a collection of at least ten — see G. Thompson, *The Palmland* (1858), London, 1969, 415.

³ See Dittmer; Rüttimeyer; Edwin. See also W. Fagg, *Afro-Portuguese Ivories*, London, 1959, xx; and W. Fagg and M. Plass, *African Sculpture*, New York, 1964, 22-23. I believe that the ethnographic and historical

sources on Sierra Leone itself, ignored by these writers, are more fruitful in explaining the significance and origin of the iconography of the stone figures.

⁴ Tagliaferri and Hammacher, 9-10, 26; Rüttimeyer, 198; and *Arts connus et arts méconnus de l'Afrique Noire*, exh. cat., Paris, 1966. Some affinity is suggested with figures found far afield among the Dogon of Mali and the Bijago of Guinea Bissao.

⁵ T. Joyce, "Steatite Figures from Sierra Leone," *Man*, ix, 40, 1909, 67. See also n. 8 on the name "nomori."

⁶ Rüttimeyer, 197.

⁷ For analyses of the stone, see Rüttimeyer, 198-204; Atherton and Kalous, 303; and E. Jeremine, "Étude des statuettes kissiennes au point de vue minéralogique et pétrographique," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, xiv, 1945.

Temne of central Sierra Leone today frequently find such stone figures (Figs. 3, 13-14) and call them *ta-mal* (sing., *ka-mal*).⁸ They are convinced that the figures were made by spiritual beings.

In addition to full figures, stone heads (Fig. 2) about life size have been found, principally in the Mende and Bullom areas. These heads are known generally by the Mende term, *mahei yafeisia* (sing., indef., *maha yafa*), signifying "chief's spirits."⁹

Stylistically, the figures of most concern here, from southern Sierra Leone, bear almost no resemblance to the work produced by the groups currently occupying the area. The stones do bear a significant resemblance, however, to the recent work of the Baga of Guinea and their linguistic relatives, the Temne, especially near the Guinea border.¹⁰ The most salient common feature is the forward projection of the large head (cf. Figs. 4, 6, 2, 3, 13-14, 25). Eyes are bulbous. Ears often sweep far to the rear in a C-shaped arc. In profile the nose is dominant, although in a frontal view the difference between the stone figures and the Baga figures can be extreme (especially among the northern Baga where the nose is narrow, whereas the ancient stone noses are broad). Elaborate scarification of the face and neck in geometric patterns is common (cf. Figs. 4, 14-16). A vertical ridge marks the forehead (cf. Figs. 4, 3, 16). Hands are often held to the chin (cf. Figs. 4, 3, 5, 21). In others, hands are clasped in front of the figure (cf. Figs. 6, 7). Scapula are pronounced (cf. Figs. 4, 5, 25). And the image of a large figure holding a smaller adult figure before it is common (cf. Figs. 9, 10), as is the position of the kneeling woman.

Today the stone figures are used in a variety of ritual

situations by the Mende, Bullom, and Kono peoples, and this has been documented amply in many sources.¹¹ But their use today relates to their discovery as foreign objects and may have little to do with their original function, which is the focus of this discussion. The Mende and Kono peoples came into being as the result of several invasions of Mende peoples (called "Mani" in the early literature) into the area, primarily in the sixteenth century, invasions that originated in the vicinity of the Upper Niger River in present-day Guinea. Previously the area was occupied by the people known to the Portuguese traders of that time as the "Sapi," of which the Baga, Temne, and Bullom are the linguistic descendants. The Mende today believe that the figures in stone represent the previous landowners, and both the Mende and Kono say that the figures were already extant when they originally arrived.¹² A Mende term for the figures is *mali yafeisia* (sing. indef., *mali yafa*), "discovered spirits."¹³ It is my contention here that the clues to the function of the stone figures may be found not in Mende practice, as commonly cited, but in Temne. The Temne ritual of particular concern is that of the placing of stones in a shrine called the "house of stones," the *am-boro ma-sar*.

I have chosen for this study a number of stone figures with elaborate articulation of form, because they yield the most information. The forms of hundreds of figures are less detailed and voluptuous. Some are mere cylinders vaguely resembling the human body and are probably of more recent origin.¹⁴ Others are clearly zoomorphic.¹⁵ It is not my intent here to deal with a range of possibilities of function or form but to single out a principal function suggested by the figures that is most responsive to

⁸ At least one ancient stone figure (in the collection of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, No. 43.23.1) was collected as far north in Temnland as Makeni, although it is not clear where it was found originally. The term, *mal*, may mean "ancient."

Various names are used to designate these carved stones among the groups of the area. The Mende call them *nomoli* (pl., *nomolisia*), properly the term for the African bowstring hemp (*Sansevieria senegalensis*) planted on graves and used in "medicines," but applied more generally to any object with "medicinal" or spiritually efficacious properties. Among the Ko-Mende the term *ngafotui* (spirit-stone) is used (M. Hill, "Archaeological Fieldwork in Sierra Leone, 1967-1968," *West African Archaeology Newsletter*, xi, 1969, 15). Schön (as in n. 1, 80) gave the apparently archaic term *male-yafa* (sic), which applied as well to the brass or iron rings discovered with the stone figures (*mali* = "discover"; *yafa* [*ngafa*] = "spirit"). The southern Bullom use the term *ithom* (image) (W. Pichl, *Sherbro-English and English-Sherbro Vocabulary*, Pittsburgh, 1967, 134). The Kissi use the term *pomdo* (pl., *pomtan*), meaning "the dead." The Kono call them *nyana dinne*, "children of the image" (Parsons, 74).

⁹ I.e., "spirits belonging to chiefs"; the Mende term does not necessarily signify that the figures represent chiefs as spirits. This term is also applied to the rings often found with the stone figures. These rings are powerful "swearing" objects used in court cases, implying royal sanction (L. Rüttemeyer, "Weitere Mitteilungen über westafrikanische Steinidole," *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, xviii, 1908, 170-71).

¹⁰ The similarity to Baga sculpture was first pointed out by W. Fagg (*African Tribal Images*, Cleveland, 1968, fig. 50).

¹¹ The most useful sources are the following: Rüttemeyer, 196-98; H. Michell, "Some Notes on the Mende Language and Customs," *Sierra*

Leone Studies, iii, 1926, 89; T. Joyce, "Steatite Figures from West Africa in the British Museum," *Man*, v, 57, 1905, 99-100; Allridge, 163-64; Atherton and Kalous, 311-14; H. Sawyerr, *God: Ancestor or Creator*, London, 1970, 84; Thompson (as in n. 2), 1854, 290, and 1969, 416; W. Addison, "The Nomori of Sierra Leone," *Antiquity*, viii, 1934, 337; Edwin, 161; W. Harris and H. Sawyerr, *The Springs of Mende Belief and Conduct*, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1968, 71; Parsons, xiii, 72-74.

¹² *Ibid.*, xiii; Tagliaferri and Hammacher, 14.

¹³ See n. 8; and also Dittmer, 185, for an interesting explanation of their origin.

¹⁴ Dittmer, 186; Tagliaferri and Hammacher, 16, 19.

¹⁵ Atherton and Kalous (pp. 314-15) suggest that the stone figures resemble Thomas's description of *ang-kirfi* (spirits): "One has only to look at any collection of *nomoli* to see these features represented ... 'Some physical deformation ...; their fingers are bent and they are wry-necked ... Other *krifi* are born with hands against their heads.'" In my opinion their observation is casual and unjustified; no ancient stone figure from Sierra Leone remotely fits Thomas's description. Atherton and Kalous are misled by an unfamiliar aesthetic which emphasizes particular features and simplifies others.

Rüttemeyer first suggested that the zoomorphic figures may represent the dead as animals. This view deserves a detailed study. Each clan among the peoples of Sierra Leone is linked to a totemic animal (*tana* in Temne) which is said to have figured in its origin. It is not clear that the clan is thought actually to descend from the animal, nor is it ever said that the dead return to this animal origin. Nevertheless, the totemic animal is sacred and must be associated somehow with the spiritual world of the dead. This is an aspect of kinship that needs the systematic study of an ethnologist.



2 Male head, steatite, 24.5cm. Baltimore, private collection (photo: Baltimore Museum of Art)



3 Male figure, steatite, 14cm. London, Museum of Mankind (courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



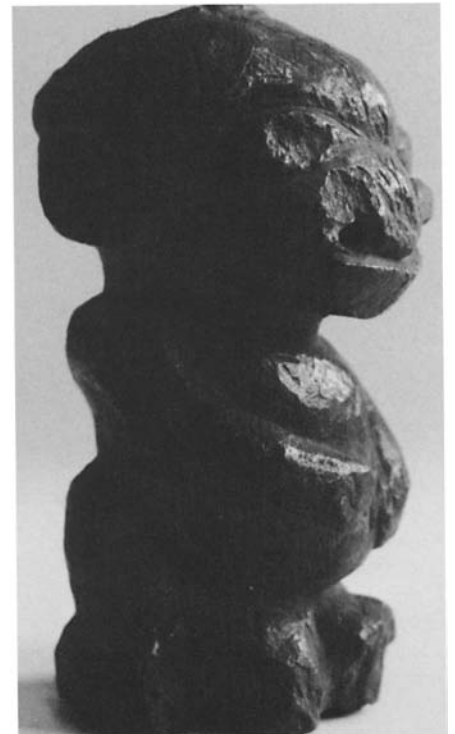
4 Baga, Female figure, wood, 64cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (photo: Museum)



5 Male figure mounted on a leopard, steatite, 19cm. Monrovia, Collection René Guyot (photo: Arno Hammacher from Kay Reese & Assocs.)



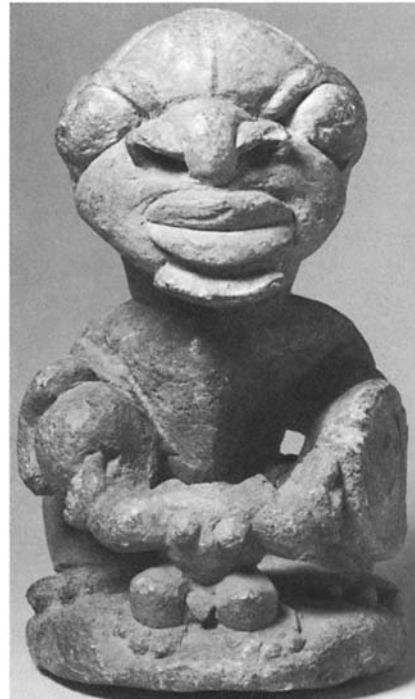
6 Temne, Female figure by Pa Aluseni Kamara (in progress) (photo: Frederick J. Lamp)



7 Male figure, steatite, 17cm. Liverpool, Merseyside County Museums (photo: Frederick J. Lamp)



8 Side view of Fig. 9



9 Figure of a warrior holding a smaller figure (fragment), serpentine, 19cm. Bern, Bernisches Historisches Museum (photo: Museum)



10 Baga, Caryatid drum with smaller figure, wood, 101cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1968 (photo: Museum)

iconographic analysis.

Nor is it my intent to cover the full range of style distribution. Other scholars have distinguished between the so-called *nomoli* (pl., *nomolisia*) of the Mende and Bullom area and the *pomdo* (pl., *pomtan*) of the Kissi.¹⁶ This distinction I find of little use. Style areas widely overlap and examples of stones may be found from distant sites bearing similar style and seeming to come from a single school of carving or perhaps even from the same hand (e.g., a Bullom style, Fig. 27, from the Kissi area, and a Kissi style, Figs. 13-14, from the Temne area). The broad distribution of particular styles suggests that the artists may have been itinerant or that an extensive network had been established for the marketing of their work.

The use of the discovered stone figures by the Kissi today is of special interest and may represent a continuity of function. This is also a subject that cannot be included here; it has been well documented elsewhere.¹⁷ I have chosen to discuss several objects from the Kissi area because they may represent a contiguous and concurrent carving tradition for the reasons given above and because their iconography, often quite elaborate, aids in comparison to clarify that of the figures from southern Sierra Leone. Similar representation, however, does not preclude the possibility of varying function.

To identify a plausible function of the stones from southern Sierra Leone, one needs to look at both the earliest historical sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and recent ethnographic documentation. First, I will compare the iconography and form of the stones with such evidence in order to identify their

¹⁶ Dittmer; Tagliaferri and Hammacher.

¹⁷ See D. Paulme, *Les gens du Riz*, Paris, 1954, chap. x.

representation and their source. Second, I will attempt a chronology of area occupation in order to establish a dating of the stone figures and the place of the Temne in their study. Third, I will examine the historical data for evidence of relevant ritual contexts. And fourth, I will look at the current ritual of the Temne *am-boro ma-sar*.

The Mani and Sapi and the Representation of the Figures

Among scholars of the art and culture of Sierra Leone, there has been some discussion as to whether the stone figures bear the marks of an imported Mande (Mani) tradition or of a Sapi tradition prior to or apart from the Mande influence. The chronology of Mande migration and the dating of the figures seems to discourage the former view, but this is a subject to be discussed later. Suffice it to say here that the beginnings of a limited Mande presence in the area in question may coincide somewhat with the era of stone carving, so it is instructive to examine the iconography of the figures with respect to some cultural distinctions. It should be kept in mind that, simply stated, the Mani are the (Manding) linguistic ancestors of the present-day Mende, Kono, Vai, and Gbandi in this region, and that the Sapi linguistic descendants are the Temne, Bullom, Bom, and Kim in Sierra Leone and the Baga, Landuma, and Mmani in Guinea (see Fig. 1) who, together with the Kissi and Gola, today constitute the Mel language family designated by David Dalby.¹⁸

Many figures display teeth filed to sharp points (Figs. 2, 11, 12). Kunz Dittmer believes that these represent a Mande influence because of other iconographic characteristics, but he is contradicted consistently by the early sources.¹⁹ Duarte Pacheco Pereira wrote of the Bullom at the beginning of the sixteenth century that "these negroes have their teeth filed and sharp as [those of] a dog," and William Finch, a century later, wrote the same of the Temne.²⁰ André Alvares d'Almada said in 1594 that "the [Sapi] men and women file their front teeth, those below as well as above; and the Manes don't."²¹ And Alonso de Sandoval explained in 1627 that the Sapi did it for aesthetic reasons:

The markings that the Zapes bear ... are very beautiful and pleasing. ... [They] regularly have their teeth cut and shaped, more for niceness and finery than for cleanliness. ... Among themselves they are of little esteem if they lack shaped teeth. They neither go out in public nor have close personal or commercial relations



11 Kissi, Figure, steatite, 23cm. Marseilles, Collection M. Pierre Guerre (photo: Arno Hammacher from Kay Reese & Assocs.)



12 Standing figure, steatite, 23cm. Monrovia, private collection (photo: Arno Hammacher from Kay Reese & Assocs.)

¹⁸ D. Dalby, "The Mel Languages: A Reclassification of Southern 'West Atlantic,'" *African Language Studies*, vi, 1965.

¹⁹ Dittmer, 188-89, 211-12. Furthermore, not all "grinning style" figures come from the Kissi area (see Figs. 12-14, 26) as he assumes.

²⁰ D. Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (1506-08), Lisbon, 1905, 96: "estes negros tem os dentes limados e agudos como de cam." My translation. Purchas, 2.

²¹ D'Almada, 76: "Limam os homens e mulheres os dentes dianteiros, assim os de baixo como os de cima; e os Manes não." My translation.

with people until their teeth have been cut.²²

The practice of filing or chipping the teeth continues today among the Temne, Bullom, Kissi, and Limba.²³

The sharpened teeth therefore are bared to show status, but the open mouth may also express a smile. The Bullom and Temne words for "smile" (Bullom: *nyey*; Temne: *ngay*) mean "to show the teeth." It is rare today to find such representations in carving, and its appearance here may allude to something special and specific, such as expectation. "One does not smile for nothing," one ethnologist was told. "Perhaps he sees something good or hears of some good news in store for him, hence he smiles."²⁴ The source of joy may become clearer in the discussion later on the original function of the stones.

Many of the figures have beards. Some form a raised, horizontal line across the chin; some appear as one, two, or a series of protruberant knobs, some as a crosshatch or honeycomb pattern all over the jaw, and still others as two braided columns hanging from the chin, frequently grasped by both hands (Figs. 3, 21). The latter is of some interest if we compare the description given in 1836 of Pa Suba, a Temne chief at Magbely on the Rokel River, Marampa Chiefdom: "His beard, plaited and curled, is a talisman: it is singular enough in itself; but he believes, and all believe, that upon its continuance depend the lives of the old men in the district; if cut off, they would all die."²⁵ This invites comparison with the hand positions of several other figures. Figure 13 holds the hands at the chin and from them extend the smaller standing figures of a man and a woman. Although this solves a technical problem of internal support, it also suggests the relationship between lineage and beard. Today it is rare to find a Temne man bearded, and the beard is associated with old men as heads of lineages. One figure from the Kissi area exhibits a phallus suspended by means of a looped beard (Fig. 15).²⁶ Prolific reproduction is associated by the Temne with the spider, Pa Nges. In a story recorded in 1861 by the missionary Christian Schlenker, "a stone grows a beard" (i.e., the spider's web) and provides the support system for Pa Nges' family. His prey, the bush goat, deer, antelope, bush cow, and duiker, failed to recognize the beard as symbol, and were vanquished in its webbing.²⁷ Several stone figures suggest that the beard is associated with sustenance and fecundity: the figures each

hold a bowl into which extends the braided beard (see Fig. 16). A Temne proverb advises, "One whose head is bigger than yours has more hair than you," i.e., the beard is the insigne of the aged and the wise, who deserve your respect.²⁸

The cutting of the hair, as in the biblical stories of Esau, the hairy brother of Jacob, and Samson, the strong man, is said by C. Hallpike to signify control by society, whereas the growing of hair without restriction signifies a separation from society.²⁹ The cultivation of a beard among those in authority served to distinguish them from ordinary people and to announce that it is they who control the people and not the reverse.

Coiffure is often elaborate in the stone figures; in some cases the hair is braided in sagittal crests from the forehead to the nape of the neck, much like that of recent carving of the Bullom and Limba (cf. Figs. 15, 17). Others, especially the *mahei yafeisia*, bear elaborate patterns in crosshatching or knobs, often culminating in a bun at the crown (Fig. 2). There seems to be nothing gender-specific about the manner of hairdressing and it is found similarly on figures that are decidedly male or female. William Finch said of the Temne men at the Sierra Leone Estuary that "the haire of their heads they cut into allyes and crosse paths; others in other foolish formes."³⁰ Dierick Ruiters said that "the hair on their heads is about one talie [approximately five centimeters] long, and is held in a thick curl which they braid in a wooden hair-pin, or in a cap that lies on their heads like a hair-net."³¹ The plaiting of hair is associated today as in the past with persons of quality and cultivation. Plaiting patterns are likened by the Temne to fine and aesthetically pleasing linear patterns in the tilling of the land and the cultivation of crops, and metaphorically to the patterned civilization of man, organized through the delineation of law, etiquette, and custom, and exhibited through the refined presentation of the body.

The linear patterning of agriculture and of personal cultivation is symbolized as well by the lining of body scarification, which indicates kinship and membership in a ritual association. To be unlined is to be raw, *sauvage*, indistinct. Elaborate scarification patterns are found on many of the figures, located on the neck, face, arms, chest, and back (Figs. 3, 13, 15, 19). Scarification of the body is found among all the groups in Sierra Leone today and was

²² P. Hair, "Sources on Early Sierra Leone 3): Sandoval (1627)," *Africana Research Bulletin*, v, 2, 1975, 89-90.

²³ An illustration and description of filed teeth among the Mende may be found in J. Staub, "Beiträge zur Kenntnis der materiellen Kultur der Mendi," *Jahresbericht des Bernischen Historischen Museums*, 1936, 23. I am grateful to Adam Jones for pointing this out to me; he writes, however (and I concur), "this is the first I've heard of the Mende filing their teeth." It should be considered that Staub elsewhere includes quite a bit of material from the Bullom without always making a distinction.

²⁴ Pichl (as in n. 8), 82.

²⁵ F. Rankin, *The White Man's Grave*, London, II, 1836, 251.

²⁶ This figure is discussed at length in H. Néel, "Statuettes en pierre et en

argile de l'Afrique occidentale," *L'anthropologie*, xxiv, 1913.

²⁷ C. Schlenker, *A Collection of Temne Traditions, Fables, and Proverbs*, London, 1861, 67-73.

²⁸ H. Kamara, *Amump Yi Emang Ka Kathemme*, Bo, Sierra Leone, n.d., 9: "Owe thas mu ra-bomp ra-bana-e thasi mu a-fon a-gbathi," My translation.

²⁹ C. Hallpike, "Social Hair," *Man*, iv, 1969, 260-62.

³⁰ Purchas, 2.

³¹ P. Hair, "Sources on Early Sierra Leone 4): Ruiters (1623)," *Africana Research Bulletin*, v, 3, 1975, 59; it is not clear, however, to which ethnic group Ruiters refers, as he describes in general the people of both the Freetown peninsula and the vicinity of Sherbro Island.



13 Male figure with three smaller figures, steatite, 32cm. Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum (photo: Museum)



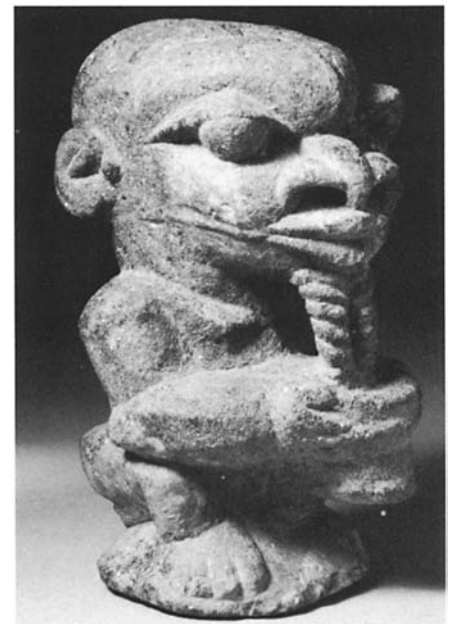
14 Side view of Fig. 13



15 Kissi, Male figure, steatite, 27cm. Formerly Paris, Musée de l'Homme (photo: Musée de l'Homme)

probably practiced by both the Sapi and the Mani of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to some degree, but the descriptions from the time refer to the Sapi, who, it was said, were more civilized. William Finch said that the Temne "are all, both men and women, rased and pinked on all parts of the bodies very curiously," and John Sparke wrote in 1564 that the "Sapies ... do jag their flesh, both legs, arms, and bodies, as workmanlike as a jerkinmaker with us pinketh a jerkin."³² This was illustrated in 1582 by John Maddox, a chaplain who accompanied the voyage of the English captain, Edward Fenton (Fig. 18).³³

Jewelry either is carved on the objects or was attached, as suggested by piercings of the ears or nasal septa (Figs. 8, 16, 19). *Mahei yafeisia* often bear rings in both nasal alae (Fig. 2). Several sixteenth-century reports tell of the elaborate goldwork worn by the Sapi, but of the Mani there are only the reports that they vandalized the graves of the Sapi to steal the jewelry that was buried with their dead.³⁴ Temne and Bullom men until recently were known



16 Male figure holding a bowl, stone, 17cm. Baltimore, Collection Professor and Mrs. James E. Lewis (photo: Baltimore Museum of Art)

³² Purchas, 2; and Payne, 16. Sparke accompanied the voyage of John Hawkins to the Sierra Leone Estuary.

³³ E. Taylor, ed., *The Troublesome Voyage of Captain Edward Fenton, 1582-1583*, Cambridge, 1959, pl. viii. Paul Hair, who is familiar with the original manuscript, writes (in personal communication with me) that the woman pictured was a slave, and therefore perhaps not Temne or even

Sapi. Nevertheless, the site was Temne territory at that time, bordering on the Bullom shore, and there is no sufficient evidence to conclude that the woman in question was not local.

³⁴ Payne, 16. Dittmer (p. 191) feels that any representation of jewelry indicates a dating prior to the 16th century when gold would have disappeared through "Portuguese greed."



17 Bullom, Cutlass finial, wood and metal. New York, F. Rolin & Co. (photo: Frederick J. Lamp)



19 Male figure reclining on a board, steatite, 36cm. London, Museum of Mankind (courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)



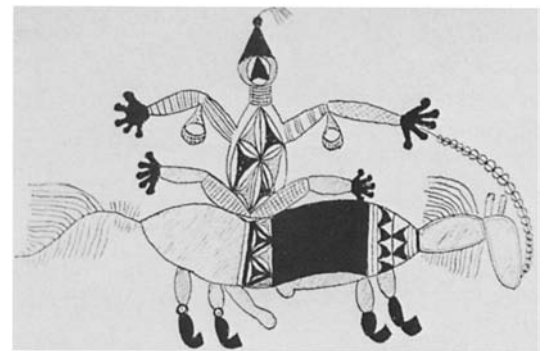
21 Seated male figure, steatite, 20cm. Norwich, University of East Anglia, Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection (photo: Eliot Elisofon, National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives)



18 Female scarification at Sierra Leone (from Taylor, as in n. 33, pl. viii)



20 Front view of Fig. 19



22 Kissi, Wall painting of a man on horseback (from Neel, as in n. 26, 450)

to wear earrings, and it is still the custom of the paramount chief of the Temne at Matotaka to wear a heart-shaped gold ornament pierced through his nasal septum.³⁵ In Figures 19 and 21 ornaments resembling crotals are suspended from the elbows. A similar object is found on a mounted figure painted on the wall of a Kissi house in Guinea (Fig. 22). An equestrian figure in this part of Africa is always a member of the elite, usually a warrior-king; therefore such ornaments would seem to be associated with status.

Many figures wear a twisted band around the head (Figs. 5, 13-14), most certainly representing the kind of turban worn, among the Temne and others, exclusively by chiefs at their installation ceremonies today (Fig. 23, second from right). By the end of the sixteenth century, at least, the Sapi were said to have adopted Fula dress, introduced to them through the Susu, of which the turban is an aspect.³⁶ One figure found in Kissi country is of special interest (Fig. 11). The head seems to be wrapped, and from it a wide panel falls to the base resembling a train. This may refer to a variant of the turban, the chief's crown (*anio*), worn today by Temne paramount chiefs (Fig. 23, four on left). This is a broad length of cloth bound around the head by a separate band and left to fall down the back.

Figure 12, seeming to represent a captive with his hands bound, may refer, rather, to a stage in the coronation proceedings. In the election of a new Temne chief the designate is captured and forcibly taken to the house of seclusion (*ang-kangtha*), where he remains in custody until his initiation is complete. Today this capture is largely symbolic, but d'Almada reported on the making of a Sapi king in the sixteenth century: "As soon as the king dies, after the death and funeral rites, they shut in a house [him] who is to inherit [the crown], ... and they bind him, and give him a whipping in the Royal House, where he is conducted."³⁷

³⁵ The chieftaincy and perhaps a large percentage of the Temne at Matotaka are of Kuranko origin, but it is not clear whether the custom of wearing the nose-ring was brought by them or imposed upon the chief by the indigenous Temne. I have not seen evidence of the practice among the Kuranko. I suspect that it is an ancient Temne practice (as I was told by a learned informant in Yele) maintained by the one royal family of Temneland which most crucially needs to assert its legal prerogative.

³⁶ D'Almada, 73. The Susu, though Mande, were not part of the 16th-century invasions to the Sierra Leone Estuary and they were then somewhat northeast of their current location on the coast (see maps, Figs. 1, 31-32). See A. Kup, "Early Portuguese Trade in the Sierra Leone and Gt. Scarcies Rivers," *Boletim Cultural da Guine Portuguesa*, xviii, 1963, 120 (quoting Francisco de Lemos Coelho in 1669); Fernandes, 80; d'Almada, 73; Pacheco Pereira (as in n. 20), 95-96 (claiming that the Susu were about twelve or fifteen leagues inland), who is supported by Hair, 1967, 255. The Susu throughout the 15th century were in a process of migration, however, and it is likely that their position by the early 16th century was only recently attained. This is suggested by words used at their southwesternmost kingdom of Bena, as reported in Hair, 1978, 80, 85: the king's servant's title is given as *cassane*, a term certainly suggesting Temne construction. Hair suggests that "it may be a corrupt representation of an obsolete derivative of Temne — *sim* 'sacred,' which has a modern derivative *Pa-mi-sim* 'official in charge of sacred rites,

Quite a few mounted figures are represented, usually called equestrian in exhibition catalogues (Figs. 5, 24-26), but are they really? Horses have always been extremely rare in this region, although historical data appear now and then on singular examples of horse ownership.³⁸ One quadruped (Fig. 24) is most definitely an elephant and several others appear to be the same (Fig. 25). Other mounts seem feline, with broad, flat noses and puffy jowls (Fig. 26). There is no record of elephants (much less cats) ever having been used to carry riders in West Africa, but this is most certainly a metaphorical rather than a literal juxtaposition: the Temne today frequently indicate hieratic or socially supporting relationships through the use of vertical superstructure in sculpture (for example, a person standing atop an elephant, surmounted by a bird). For the Temne there are two animals associated with royalty: the elephant and the leopard. The elephant is a metaphor for the king's strength based upon the support of a broad constituency,³⁹ and the leopard represents his unbridled power to administer justice, to seize what is rightfully his and to protect his people through aggression toward their natural enemies. The supporting of a human figure by an elephant or a leopard would refer to the legitimacy of royal prerogative.⁴⁰

Some figures hold what appear to be whips, axe blades, clubs, or spears, always in the right hand (Figs. 26, 27). Some also bear a round shield in the left (Figs. 8, 26, 27). The shield was probably made of leather, like those used recently by the Bullom, as documented by H. U. Hall in 1937 at Shenge, just south of the Freetown peninsula.⁴¹ There it was part of the regalia of the Laka, the messenger and guard of the men's Poro association. Alvaro Velho in 1499 and, later, Valentim Fernandes, Baltasar Barreira, and André de Faro together describe the Temne and Bullom use of round shields made from the hides of elephants or buffaloes.⁴²

chamberlain of the chief' (Dalby)." It is more likely that the title derived from the verb *ka-sane*, "to be obedient." In addition, the term at Bena for "spirit" was given as *corofin*, which is certainly the Temne term *kirfi*.

³⁷ D'Almada, 71: "Tanto que morre o Rei, depois de morto e feitos os funerais, logo dão in casa de quem há-de herdar, ... e o amarram, e lhe dão alguns açoites na Casa Real, onde é levado." My translation.

³⁸ See Rankin (as in n. 25), 295; and Hair, 1978, 80-81.

³⁹ The rafters of a house and the radiating staves of an umbrella are called "the elephant (o-rank)" in Temne, as they support the sheltering element. The umbrella is an insigne chiefly of authority.

⁴⁰ Leopards, and figures mounted on elephants, are depicted elsewhere in West Africa, most notably in ancient Benin and modern Yoruba. In Benin the leopard represented the power of the king while the elephant stood for the power and support of his chiefs (S. Vogel, "Art and Politics: A Staff from the Court of Benin, West Africa," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, xiii, 1979, 92-95).

⁴¹ H. Hall, *Sherbro of Sierra Leone*, Philadelphia, 1938, fig. 43.

⁴² W. Hirschberg and A. Duchâteau, "Die Glaubensvorstellungen in Sierra Leone um 1500," *Wiener Ethnohistorische Blätter*, iv, 1972, 13; Fernandes, 94; Hair, 1978, 93; A. de Faro, *Peregrinação a Terra dos Gentios* (1664), Lisbon, 1945, 86.



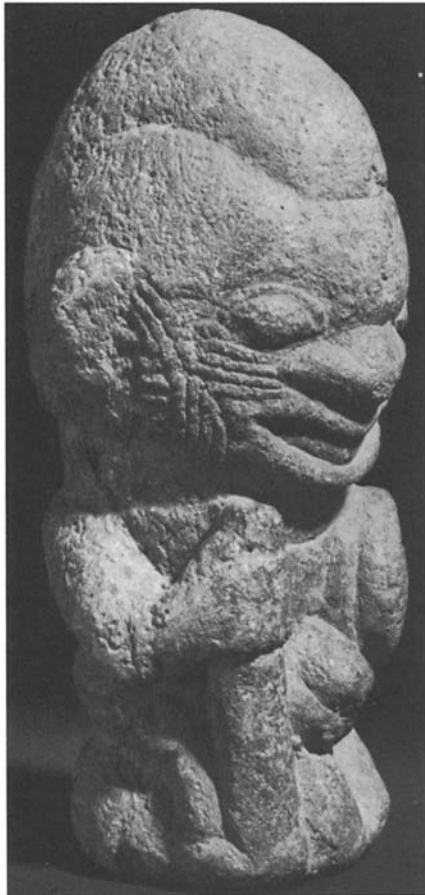
23 A convocation of Temne chiefs, Port Loko, 1975 (courtesy of Paramount Chief Bai Alimamy Kanutu, Makali, Kunike Barina Chiefdom)



24 Male figure mounted on an elephant, steatite, 15cm. London, Museum of Mankind (photo: Eliot Elisofon, National Museum of African Art, Eliot Elisofon Archives)



25 Male figure mounted on an elephant, steatite, 11.5cm. Baltimore, Baltimore Museum of Art (photo: Museum)



26 Warrior mounted on a leopard, steatite, 18cm. Munich, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde (photo: Museum)



27 Male figure surrounded by decapitated heads, steatite, 19cm. Milan, Collection Franco Monti (photo: Arno Hammacher from Kay Reese & Assocs.)



28 Kneeling figure holding smaller kneeling figure, steatite, 15cm. Hamburg, Collection Boris Kegel-Konietzko (courtesy Klinkhardt & Biermann, Publishers)

Fernandes's description of the burial of a Sapi dignitary in 1506 seems relevant to the stone images:

They place the deceased seated in a chair with most of the garments he owns ... and they place a shield in his hand and in the other a spear and a sword in his belt.

And if he is a man who has killed many men in battle, they put all the skulls of the men he has killed in front of him.⁴³

Compare the imagery in one stone carving (Fig. 27): seven heads surround the figure on the ground and two more are suspended by a sling from the head of the central figure. In both the funeral ceremony described by Fernandes and the imagery in stone, the scene seems to be one of the commemoration of the deeds of a warrior-king.⁴⁴

One figure seems to be devouring a lesser person (Fig. 28). The consensus in the early literature was that although the Mani were cannibals, the Sapi were not, with the possible exception of the Bullom.⁴⁵ A reference, however, may be found in the current coronation ritual of the Temne. The Temne monarch is said to subsist, symbolically, through eating and drinking his subjects. The paramount chief of Mambolo takes as his title "Bai Sherbro Wuni Kaber," i.e., "the king who 'taps' people" (as a palm-wine tapper taps palm-wine). In his coronation the chief asks his installing officer:

Ques. What shall I subsist on during my rule over this territory?

Ans. You are to live by the people.

Ques. What else belongs to me?

Ans. All living creatures both man and beast, land and water; you are to rule over them all; they are your meat.⁴⁶

Finally, one figure seems to refer specifically to death and burial rites: a person lying upon a flat panel with legs crossed (Figs. 19-20). One other (Fig. 21) is seated, also with legs crossed, in a way most unusual for this area. The common manner of sitting, for both men and women, whether upon a stool or on the ground, is with the legs parallel in front. Crossed legs are rarely seen and then only in the case of the aged. In other areas of Africa,

specifically among the Kongo, crossed legs are used especially in funerary or ancestor figures, and refer to a "silence and negation," a "respect," or "anguish," and the enclosure of the figure within the four-cornered royal wall of moral rectitude.⁴⁷ A similar motif, the "X", among the Temne refers to a four-moment cycle of life in which the dead are regenerated into the living.⁴⁸ The spirits of the departed officials of the men's Poro association are represented by their own femurs crossed in the form of an "X" in the headdress (*am-bong*), worn by a living Poro official.⁴⁹ Twisted patterns also refer to the devious methods of spiritual beings.⁵⁰

This suggests a ceremony performed today and in the past among the Temne, Bullom, and Kissi, following a person's death to determine if it was a result of evil design. Among the Temne the body of the deceased is borne on a wooden platform (*a-sangka*) on the heads of two men. In response to an investigator's questions, the corpse either rocks from side to side or rushes forward, ostensibly on its own power, to answer no or yes respectively. The Jesuit Father Barreira reported the ritual in 1606 precisely as it is performed today.⁵¹ One ancient stone figure found in Kissiland (Fig. 29) illustrates the carrying of the corpse on its bier. Among the Kissi today, the corpse may be replaced on the bier by a found stone figure wrapped with amulets, sacrificial blood, and strips of cotton in order to invoke the power of the deceased (Fig. 30).⁵²

The evidence given above indicates that these prehistoric figures were carved to represent the Sapi peoples. All refer to persons of high rank and distinction. And several are certainly commemorative of the dead. If the body of works executed in particular areas were intended for a singular function, that function would seem to be that of a memorial among the Sapi. It will be seen that some historical evidence exists for such a ritual context and that the use of stone as a medium further supports this thesis.

Historical Occupation of Southern Sierra Leone and Dating of the Stone Figures

The iconography of the figures also suggests that they were carved by the Sapi before the Mani invasions. The early sources are unanimous in their descriptions of the cultivated Sapi and the barbarous Mani. D'Almada wrote

⁴³ Fernandes, 90: "Entã põem o morto assentado em hũa cadeyra cõ os melhores vestidos q̄ elle tem ... E põe lhe hũa darga na mão e em outra hũa azagaya e hũa espada na çinta.

"E se homẽ q̄ tem mortos muytos homẽs em guerra põem lhe tâtas caueyras de homẽs diãte delle quãtos tem mortos." My translation.

⁴⁴ For a similar depiction in ivory from the same period, see V. Grottanelli, "Discovery of a Masterpiece," *African Arts*, VIII, 4, 1975, cover.

⁴⁵ D'Almada, 73.

⁴⁶ E. Biyi, "The Temne People and How They Make Their Kings," *Journal of the African Society*, XII, 46, 1913, 197.

⁴⁷ R. Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds*, Washington, D.C., 1981, 120-21.

⁴⁸ Lamp, 232-37.

⁴⁹ See V. Dorjahn, "The Initiation of Temne Poro Officials," *Man*, LXI, 1961, 39 (whose description of the headdress is wrong); H. Hall (as in n. 41), figs. 43-44; and Alldridge, 132, figs. 40-41.

⁵⁰ Cf. V. Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1975, 210. Cf. also C. Bird, M. Koita, and B. Soumaouro, trans., *The Songs of Seydou Camara: Kambili*, Bloomington, Ind., 1, 1974, 59: in the Maninka epic of Kambili the hunter, when the evil wife of Kanji found that her wife-mate, the despised Dugo, had given birth to Kanji's heir, she went to her sleeping hut to plot her revenge, sitting with legs crossed.

⁵¹ P. Hair, "Sources on Early Sierra Leone: 6) Barreira on Just Enslavement, 1606," *Africana Research Bulletin*, VI, 1, 1975, 69.

⁵² D. Paulme, *African Sculpture*, New York, 1962, 70.



29 Kissi, Two figures supporting a reclining figure on a bier, stone. Paris, Musée de l'Homme (photo: Musée)



30 A Kissi diviner supporting a "bier" containing a stone figure (photo: Denise Paulme)

of the Sapi that "the majority are given to pleasures and feasts which they continually have, for the land has everything in abundance."⁵³ John Sparke, who accom-

⁵³ D'Almada, 76: "Os mais são dados a prazeres e festas que continuadamente tem, pela terra ter em muita abundância tudo." My translation.

⁵⁴ Payne, 15-16. Sumba was a derogatory term used for the Mani by the Temne — see d'Almada, 81; P. Hair, "An Ethnolinguistic Inventory of the Upper Guinea Coast before 1700," *African Language Review*, vi, 1967, 52; and F. Lamp, *African Art of the West Atlantic Coast*, New York, 1979, 3, n. 4.

⁵⁵ Rodney, 240-41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 241 (on the spelling of Sapi and Mani that I have used here, see Lamp, 68, n. 9). Several other historians believe that Rodney overstated his case, as the Mani infiltration of Sapi territory came gradually. Nevertheless, the mid-16th century saw a major conquest overwhelmingly registered as extraordinary in the minds of every writer of the period. This seems to represent the first full-scale military and political upheaval in memory at that time. If European historians are unimpressed with marauding units of under a hundred men, it should be noted that

panied the mission of John Hawkins in 1564, wrote of the encounter of the two groups:

These Sapies are more civil than the Samboses [i.e., the "Sumba Mani" of later sources] ... the Samboses live most by the spoil of their enemies, both in taking their victuals and eating [their captives]. ... There is also another occasion that provoketh the Samboses to war against the Sapies, which is for covetousness of their riches.⁵⁴

Manuel Alvares wrote later about the Mani:

Of the mechanical arts they have not a single office with the exception of iron smiths ... It is the fault of these foreign kings that the country is so poor, because they have captured so many master craftsmen, and ... have committed so many vexations on the indigenous people that these latter have become less and less concerned and have given up the exercise of their arts.⁵⁵

The opinion of the late Walter Rodney was that "one of the most disastrous results of the Mane invasion was the destruction of the skills of the Sapes. ... For the coastal peoples the encounter with the Manes must indeed have been a traumatic experience."⁵⁶

Not only was artistic activity interrupted but apparently the preservation of the artistic works of the Sapi also suffered at the hands of the marauding Mani. An interesting account by André Thevet in 1575 on the destruction of stone figures by the "barbarians" is rightly interpreted, I believe, by Paul Hair, as a reference to the type of figure considered here, which may appear to some observers as "gargoylesque" or frog-like:

In this part of the South there is a rock where was found, in my time, the likeness of a great toad or frog, in the [medium] of stone, which was split and broken by the barbarians of the country, as big as the head of a man, so well carved that everyone judged it to be truly lifelike: and around it are a good number of small pointed shells.⁵⁷

even in the past century this was what the indigenous peoples referred to as major wars, and, more to the point, that such campaigns, minuscule by European standards, were often responsible for major and sudden alterations of the political and ethnic composition. The campaigns of the Mani, whatever the scale, did overthrow the Sapi monarchies throughout the area of concern, and this is no mean task in any society.

⁵⁷ P. Hair, "Some French Sources on Upper Guinea 1540-1575," *Bulletin de l'I.F.A.N.*, ser. B., xxxi, 1969, 1032: "'Tirant de la part du Midy, se voit une roche, ou fut trouvé de mon temps le pourtraict d'un gros Crapault, ou Grenouille, au cueur et mitan d'une pierre, qui fut fendue et brisée par les Barbares du país, aussi grosse qu'une teste d'homme, si bien effigié, que chacun iugeoit estre le vray naturel: et autour bon nombre de petites coquilles poinctues.'" Translation by Anne Arnold and Kate Miller Sellers, The Baltimore Museum of Art. Hair notes, "The story may be untrue, or largely imaginative, but it is worth noting that there are resemblances between Thevet's 'pourtraict' and the stone sculptures found today in interior Sierra Leone, called nomoli. These ... are roughly

Sparke's account is the first notice of the Mani in the early sources. He said that they had invaded Sapi territory three years earlier, and this concurs with the date of 1550 given by several early Portuguese chroniclers. This date is generally accepted with some qualifications by modern historians and it suggests when the stones ceased to be carved in the style we have seen. Some carving of some sort may have continued in particular areas of the interior, especially that of the Kissi,⁵⁸ but the tradition of carving by even semi-professional artists in the demographic and political centers near the coast would have been curtailed in the chaos of warfare, slave trading, and the deterioration of traditional patronage.

Dating has also been suggested by a comparison with the ivory carvings from the coast of Sierra Leone found in European collections. Portuguese trading records indicate that the importation of these ivories, apparently carved exclusively for European consumption, ended by the mid-sixteenth century when the attention of the Portuguese turned to points further along the coast.⁵⁹

The prior duration of such stone carving is a much greater mystery. Atherton and Kalous have suggested a concurrence with the emergence of a pottery type bearing chevron, zigzag, and other geometric designs at the Kamabai Rock Shelter in central Sierra Leone, "the appearance of which seems to have coincided with the introduction of iron into the region. Charcoal associated with the pottery has yielded dates of A.D. 690 ± 95 (I-3558) and 760 ± 95 (I-3845)."⁶⁰ This is a long shot, however, based only on the instance of iron rings found with discovered stone figures. Elsewhere Atherton has shown that the soft stone was probably carved with dolorite celts and quartz "micro-chisels."⁶¹ Evidence of this can be found on many stone figures, for example at

of the size indicated by Thevet, and are sometimes gargoylesque squatting figures which could easily be interpreted as representing frogs." I have deleted Hair's note here that these "are often found in the heart of an anthill," because I believe that this is unsubstantiated, and is simply an oblique attempt to explain *au coeur et mitan d'un pierre*, which the translators and I believe is nonsensical if translated as "in the heart and middle of a stone" (*un coeur de pierre*, by way of comparison, means "a heart of stone").

⁵⁸ Dittmer (pp. 211-12, 214) suggests that elaborated stone carving continued well into the 17th century among the Kissi and that some form of stone carving continued there into the 20th century.

⁵⁹ A. Ryder, "A Note on the Afro-Portuguese Ivories," *Journal of African History*, v, 1964; Grottanelli (as in n. 44), 20, 22; Dittmer, 197. See also Fagg (as in n. 3), which is useful only for its illustrations and descriptions of the objects, although he is to be given credit for having first suggested the possibility of a Sierra Leone origin for the ivories (though he rejected it at that time).

Apparently some excellent carving in ivory continued in Sierra Leone through the 17th century, probably for an indigenous market, the best of which was produced in Port Loko, according to the account of Francisco de Lemos Coelho (*Duas Descrições Seiscentistas da Guine* [1684], ed. D. Peres, Lisbon, 1953, 235). Port Loko and the area north of the Rokel River had reverted quickly to Temne control following the Mani invasions (though largely under new dynasties of Kuranko origin — see n. 64), whereas the area of the stone figures, south of the Rokel, remained under direct Mani control (see Barbot, 99; Hair [as in n. 51], 65; P. Hair,

the nape of the neck of Figure 16, where several cuts approximately eight millimeters long bear the impression of a miniature, rounded edge, rather than that of a flat and broader iron adze. If the Kono tradition that the figures pre-date their arrival in Sierra Leone is correct, this may give the figures considerable antiquity since their settlement in the northeast, following their migration from Guinea, is estimated to have occurred no later than the early fifteenth century and as early as the ninth.⁶²

It is clear that the stone figures are largely the product of the Sapi. But the Sapi were composed of various sub-groups at different times, including the core group of Temne, Bullom, and Baga. The Baga today are several hundreds of kilometers from the area of discovery and the Temne are only on the periphery. The Bullom occupy only a thin strip of territory on the coast. For the most part the area is occupied today by groups of Manding-speaking (Mande) peoples: the Mende, Vai, and Kono. It has been commonly assumed, and I believe erroneously assumed, that before the coming of the Mande most of this area was occupied by the Bullom and the Kissi.

The date of the Mende entrance into Sierra Leone has never been established. Suffice it to say that they are probably the result of a small migration of Mande (Mani) war parties which absorbed an indigenous population and gave them their language.⁶³ There is some evidence that they may be a remnant of the Loko-Gbandi invasion (see Fig. 32).⁶⁴ Until recently, published accounts of their migration legends referred only to an unidentified "race of dwarfs" and to the Gola, in the area south of Kenema in eastern Sierra Leone, as the prior residents of current Mende territory.⁶⁵

Contemporary with, or prior to, the occupation by the Gola, the Vai-Kono peoples swept across southeastern

"Sources on Early Sierra Leone, 9) Barreira's Account of the Coast of Guinee, 1606," *Africana Research Bulletin*, vii, 1, 1976, 63; K. Wylie, *The Political Kingdoms of the Temne*, New York, 1977, 16; and Person, 683).

⁶⁰ Atherton and Kalous, 309, 315.

⁶¹ J. Atherton, "Speculations on Functions of Some Prehistoric Archaeological Materials from Sierra Leone," in B. Swartz and R. Dumett, eds., *West African Culture Dynamics: Archaeology and Historical Perspectives*, The Hague, 1980, 265, 270-72.

⁶² Jones, 167, 172.

⁶³ Rodney; and Allison, 40.

⁶⁴ See Barbot, pl. D ("Hondo"); Jones, 171; Hair, 1967, 256; M. Hill, "Towards a Cultural Sequence for Southern Sierra Leone," *Africana Research Bulletin*, 1, 2, 1971, 9. Temne tradition maintains that the Mende were contiguous with the Loko prior to and ending with the coming of the conqueror, Bai Farma Tami, whom I have identified with the Kuranko of the mid-16th century (see E. Sayers, "Notes on the Clan or Family Names Common in the Area Inhabited by Temne-Speaking People," *Sierra Leone Studies*, x, 1927, 21; and Lamp, 13). This contradicts Jones's theory (after Hill) that the separation of Loko and Mende was effected by the eastward movement of the Temne relatively recently.

⁶⁵ K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone*, London, 1967, 225; and Dalby, 1963b, 50, 52. See also W. d'Azevedo, "Tribe and Chiefdom on the Windward Coast," *Rural Africana*, No. 15, 1971, 17.

Sierra Leone (Fig. 32).⁶⁶ The Kono remained in the East where they were later driven somewhat farther north to their current area by the Mende.⁶⁷ The Vai pressed on to the coast at the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia and there is evidence that their political influence was felt as far north along the coast as the Freetown peninsula.⁶⁸ At about the same time, perhaps in their wake, an extinct people by the name of Dama, whose language is related to the Kono-Vai, occupied the area just south of Kenema (halfway between present-day Kono and Vai territory). The Vai were located on the coast by the first decade of the seventeenth century by Manuel Alvares, and he identified them by the name of "Quoja".⁶⁹ The date of their arrival is quite open to question. Adam Jones argues convincingly that at least small parties of Vai had formed a corridor of trade from Kono territory to the sea roughly 500-1000 years ago, but his evidence for settlement (archaeological discoveries of pottery related in style to that of the Upper Niger River) is less than satisfying.⁷⁰ Trading does not necessitate or imply settlement, and may be conducted efficiently and thoroughly by a very small party or number of individuals, as it continues today throughout Sierra Leone by the Maninka. Most other scholars, supported by the oral tradition of the Vai themselves, are reluctant to date the settlement of the Vai on the coast earlier than the early sixteenth century, and then in small numbers.⁷¹ It is certainly doubtful that Fernandes, and especially Pacheco

⁶⁶ See O. Dapper, *Umbständliche und eigentliche Beschreibung von Africa Anno 1668* (1681), Stuttgart, 1964, 195-96.

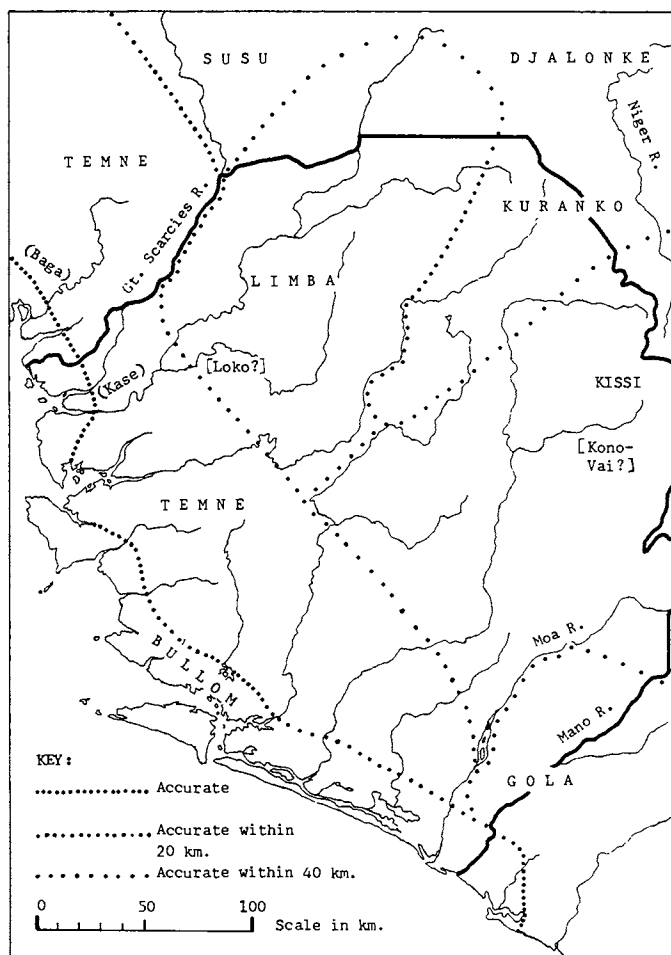
⁶⁷ Parsons, xiii.

⁶⁸ See Barbot, 103. The Temne east of Freetown since the 16th century have been called Koia (or Quoia) perhaps after the archaic name for the Vai, Quoia. See Hair (as in n. 59), 63.

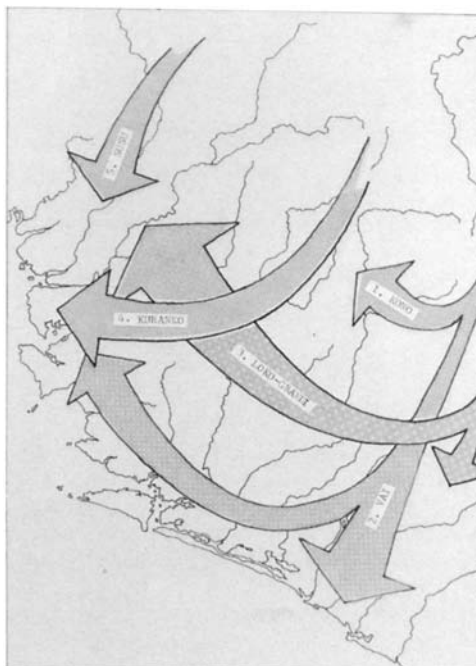
⁶⁹ C. Foray, *Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone*, Metuchen, N.J., 1977, 5; Person, 677. This is by way of a retraction of my former association of the Quoia with the Dei or Bassa (Lamp, as in n. 54, 5, n. 13, as taken from d'Azevedo, 53).

⁷⁰ Jones, 172-77.

⁷¹ Hair (1967, 256), d'Azevedo (as in n. 65, 17), and S. Holsoe ("The Cassava-Leaf People: An Ethnohistorical Study of the Vai People," Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1967, 60-68) set the date of arrival in the first half of the 16th century. Jones's (p. 163) objection to this is based on a quite tenuous identification of an early ethnonym "Cobales" with the Vai, which is contradicted by Person (p. 681: equals Gola). I say "tenuous," because the original reference by Pacheco Pereira is not only second-hand but also self-contradictory, as there is no river "half a league west of Cape Mount" fitting his description of the "Ryo dos Monos," which would seem to describe not the Mafa (as Jones would have it) but the Mano, upstream ("30 leagues," according to Pacheco Pereira) of which we would find the northern extreme of the Gola, now and probably also then. Another source cited by Jones states that "'the start of the ... Couballes'" [Gola?] was at Cape Mount [probably their southwesternmost point — see Fig. 31], which he uses to justify the early placement of the Vai on the coast. "Cobale" sounds suspiciously like Gola, which is a northernmost dialect of the Gola today (D. Dalby, "Mel Languages in the Polyglotta Africana, Part II: Bullom, Kissi and Gola," *Sierra Leone Language Review*, v, 1966, 148). If my interpretation is correct, it contradicts the information of d'Azevedo (pp. 53-54) that the Gola at this time occupied only the mountainous area of present-day northeastern Liberia. Perhaps that was true only for the Kongbaa dialect group, from which his information comes. Nevertheless, it should be



31 Probable areas of ethnic dominance in the 15th century



32 Mende invasions to the mid-16th century

noted, in support of Jones, that two other scholars argue for at least a mid-15th century date for the arrival of the Vai on the coast (Person, 676-77; and Hill, as in n. 64, 9).

Pereira (who was familiar with Cape Mount), would have completely missed noting their presence on or near the coast, considering their obvious linguistic distinction, if they had been there in any force by the first decade of the 1500's. It is probable that they formed a flank of the group known in the mid-sixteenth century as the Sumba-Mani, at which time the Sapi were finally vanquished.⁷² Little evidence exists for the ethnic composition of the interior of Sierra Leone prior to the seventeenth century and it is impossible at this point to determine whether Mande groups were sudden arrivals or had infiltrated the area during the previous centuries in a less dramatic way.

There is considerable evidence of a Temne occupation of parts of large areas of the South prior to the coming of the Mande peoples.⁷³ The existence of certain Temne words in the Vai-Dama complex, such as *boro* (house) and *kirfi* (spirit), indicates that these two groups were at one time in contact.⁷⁴ Both Mende and Vai legends of migration maintain that it was the Temne whom they met when they invaded southwestern Sierra Leone.⁷⁵ Many place names in the area are of Temne origin, such as Bumpe, southwest of Bo, and Baga, near Sumbuya.⁷⁶ "Liquid history," i.e., the consideration of the names of rivers, lakes, and swamps, regarded by Jones as more reliable than place names, indicates, through the use of the Temne/Gola class marker, *Ma-*, that either of these two groups may have preceded the Mande in the area.⁷⁷ The Mende currently occupying most of this region are called "the different (or apart) Mende," the Kpa-Mende. The most important men's ritual association of the Kpa-Mende, the Wunde, is thought to have derived from the Temne.⁷⁸ Several Bullom ritual associations on the southern coast are said to have derived from the Baga-Temne and the ancestral figures used in their ritual are

said to represent "Baga" (probably Temne) ancestors.⁷⁹ And as late as 1929 a ritual was described from the area of Bumpe in which an archaic language called Banta was used by the officiant.⁸⁰

David Dalby has identified the nearly extinct language of Banta in the Banta and Banta Mokele Chiefdoms of Moyamba District of the South as a dialect of the Temne cluster related to the dialect used today in the Yoni-Mabanta area now at the southernmost point of current Temne occupation.⁸¹ The earliest historical reference to this group was made by Nicholas Owen in 1754, in which he located the Temne just inland from Sherbro Island, the Banta beyond them, and another Temne group, the Tene (probably referring to the Temne of Tane [Tane] Chiefdom, now north of the Taia River) farther to the East which would place them considerably south of their present location.⁸² A Temne tradition at Yoni tells of a group of Banta-Temne who drove south from there and occupied the area between the Jong River and the sea, although it is not specified whom they met there or when this took place.⁸³

I would suggest that the ease with which these Banta apparently entered southern Sierra Leone was owed to the prior occupation of the area by Temne speakers, and that the spread of the coastal Bullom inland was a more recent phenomenon, following their displacement in the far South by the Vai. This is supported by the earliest Portuguese documentation on the area. Fernandes said that the area designated as Sierra Leone began at the Isles de Los (Conakry) and ended at Cape Mount (Liberia) and that "among this people of Serra Lyoa are two languages: Bolões, who live along the length of the sea ... [and] Temjnis are the other people and language beyond them and live in the interior."⁸⁴ Fernandes went on to describe

⁷² Person, 676-77.

⁷³ This view was expressed early by d'Azevedo (p. 53), but it was presented without substantiation and has not since been explored in the literature, with the exception of Dalby (1963b).

⁷⁴ Dalby, 1963b, 51; S. Koelle, *Outlines of the Vai Language*, London, 1854, 189. Dalby gives the Dama word *buru*, similar to the Temne *boro*. Koelle listed the following (Temne equivalents in parentheses): *kirifi* (*kirfi*), *gbasa* (*gbasa*), *bari* (*bare*), *Gbese* (*Bese*), *kake* (*kea*), *manyare* (*yari*), *neke-mo* (*neke*), *tombo* (*thomo*), *bo* (*mbo*).

Dictionaries without proper etymologies of course can be misleading. But these do not appear to be Manding words and they do not appear in the available vocabularies from the Mende, the group now dividing the Temne from the Vai.

⁷⁵ D. Cosentino, *Defiant Maids and Stubborn Farmers*, Cambridge, 1982, 3; Michael Smith, Cambridge University, personal communication, 1981. Dr. Smith, who has conducted fieldwork among the Vai, says that the town of Kasi on the Kim-Vai border, in particular, is said to have been originally a Temne town. Cosentino reports the legend of the battles against "an autochthonous race of small people called Banta" at Mattru, near Bo, apparently without a notion of who the Banta really were: i.e., a branch of the Temne (see Dalby, 1963a).

⁷⁶ A. Sumner, "The Derivation of Certain Place Names in the Protectorate of Sierra Leone," *Sierra Leone Studies*, O.S., xv, 1929, 6-7; see also R. Lewis, *Sierra Leone*, London, 1954, 143; and the maps of Barbot, pl. D and p. 107; and N. Bellin, *Gedeelte der Kunst, van Guinée*, Lieden, 1746;

some examples: Baga = "Seized [territory]"; Bumpe = "Head [of land]"; Moyamba = Mayamba = "Yamba's people"; Mawoto = "People of the chimpanzee"; Masanasi = "Sanasi's people"; Kawaia = "To buy"; Imperi = "Good morning"; Kamaranka River = (the name of a Temne spirit).

⁷⁷ Jones, 169-70.

⁷⁸ Little (as in n. 65), 240.

⁷⁹ Hall, A 193-95, 198-99, 201-03. No date is indicated, but the Baga are credited with bringing the associations known as Ntuntung, Thoma, and Gboka. It is highly unlikely that these "Baga" are the Baga of Guinea. Temne in several areas of Sierra Leone go by the name of "Baga" or "Baga-Temne" and the Bullom (Sherbro) Thoma association with its *rong* masks is certainly related to the *e-rong-e-thoma* masks of the Temne Ragbenle association.

⁸⁰ Sumner (as in n. 76), 6-7.

⁸¹ Dalby, 1963a, 23; and Dalby (as in n. 18), 1-2.

⁸² Dalby, 1963a, 23.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 23; this was probably between the late 17th century and 1725 (see Wylie, as in n. 59, 171; and D. Sigge-Taupe, *Die Glaubensvorstellung der Timne und Bullom, 1562-1800*, Vienna, 1975, 123).

⁸⁴ Fernandes, 80: "Serra Lyoa comūmēte he chamada toda a serra des as ylhas dos Ydolos ate o cabo do Mōte. Amtre esta gēte da Serra Lyoa ha duas lingoagēs .s. Bolões q̄ viuē ao longo do mar ... Temjnis he a outra gēte e lingoa sobre sy e viuē no sertā." My translation.

the Temne region of Hatschinel and a village by the name of Catell located somewhere inland to the east of Sherbro Island.⁸⁵ Indeed, if the language of the Banta area today is to be considered a separate language from Temne, as distinct from it as the southern Baga dialects, as Dalby has designated it, it would seem that the migration of Mabanta Temne to the South would predate the seventeenth century. Therefore the southern Bullom were certainly preceded by a branch of the Temne at some early date in the area north of the Moa river, from near the coast as far inland as Bo in central Sierra Leone (Fig. 31).

Pending further documentation, it must be concluded that before the coming of the Mende, Kono, and Vai, the area in which the prehistoric stone figures were discovered was occupied by the Temne, Bullom, Kissi, and possibly Gola, in more or less equal proportions. The Temne and Bullom, constituting, with the Baga and others, the Sapi peoples, had developed a culture worthy of the term "civilized" in the eyes of their European guests, and were the carvers of ritual objects, of which only the ivories and the stone figures remain today. Early styles indicate a pre-Mande aesthetic with continuity principally in the art of the Baga and the northwestern Temne, least influenced by the Mande of the Mani invasions. With the arrival of the Mande on the coast, royal patronage there ended and the stone figures may have been scattered or buried in tumuli. It will be seen, however, that the ancestral shrine seems to have remained, at least among the Temne.

Continuity of Context?

Before 1850 there is virtual silence on stone figures of any kind from this region, with the exceptions of Thevet in 1575 (noted above) and an obscure report of Fernandes, prior to the Mani conquest of the mid-sixteenth century.⁸⁶ In 1506, referring to either the Baga or Temne, he said that "all are idolators and they believe in whatever they wish and love to make idols of wood and stone."⁸⁷ Nowhere again does he specify the carving of stone, but in his lengthy description of ritual sculpture he included an account of the making of memorial figures among either the Temne or Bullom:

It is their custom to make a memorial of all those who

have died. Thus of every one of their honorable men they make idols in their image; those of the commoners and slaves they make of wood done like bowling pins. And they put them in a house covered with dried grass. Each year they make a sacrifice of chickens or goats according to the caliber of person and cast the blood on them [the figures] and put the bones around the [figure's] neck, and eat the meat.⁸⁸

The implication here is that the figures commemorating "honorable men" were made of something other than the wood used for commoners and slaves, just as the character of sacrifices differed according to the rank of the deceased. Stone memorials were common in sixteenth-century Portugal, of course, and the author simply may have overlooked the need to specify that a figure used in a memorial shrine was carved of stone.

In 1619 the French general Beaulieu, visiting the Temne of the Peninsula, wrote of figures and sacrifices without giving a medium:

Nearby [the village] can be seen little figurines grotesquely shaped, made to look like devils, to which they make offerings, giving them the fruits and the beads which are their form of wealth. At the feet of some of these figurines can be seen many heads of monkeys, and other animals. . . . The people are idolators worshipping, as already stated, little figurines of unpleasant appearance, and also little mounds of black soil shaped like sugar loaves (which I have heard are the nests of ants) to which they make sacrifices in different ways.⁸⁹

A century and a half after Fernandes, André de Faro described what seems to be the same sort of shrine, but containing only uncarved stones, among the northern Temne at the Great Scarcies River:

. . . little huts covered with one or two straw mats, furnished inside [with] its miniature altar [made] of the same matting, on top of [which, is] a row of pebbles the size of a hand, each of which stone belongs to a kinsman: [associated with] these . . . are . . . pots [filled] with the blood of the fowl, . . . cattle and other animals;

⁸⁵ Fernandes, 100.

⁸⁶ The reference in Atherton and Kalous (p. 304) to a letter by Antonio Malfante in 1447 is misleading. Malfante was writing from Tuat in the central Sahara and mentioned stone figures "'to the south'" in "'territories, the inhabitants of which are all blacks and idolators.'" Allison (p. 36) is more on target in suggesting that this might as well refer to the stone images of Nigeria. Indeed, European knowledge of Africa before the voyages along the coast beyond Cape Verga was limited to the old Sudan, i.e., the savanna just south of the Sahara from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, and did not include the rain forest belt, of which southern Sierra Leone is a part.

⁸⁷ Fernandes, 75: "todos sō ydolatras e em aquillo q̄, tomã vōtade em aquillo crêe e adorã fazē ydolos de paos e pedras . . ." My translation. Fernandes went on to describe another figure that they called *cru* (Kuru), meaning "God" in Baga and Temne. He is probably mistaken, however. God is never represented today in sculpture and probably wasn't in

antiquity (see Barbot, 104). Nevertheless, his association of the stone figures with an invocation to Kuru may be correct and tentatively places the provenience of the figures with the Temne language cluster.

⁸⁸ Fernandes, 88-90: "Custumã de todellos finados q̄ morrê fazer memoria delles .s. cada hũu dos seus dos homês honrrados fazê idolos aa semelhança delles dos comũus e escrauos fazem de pao fecto como birlos de bola. e pœmnos em casa cuberto de palha fazêlhes cada ãno sacrificio de galinhas ou de cabras segũdo a calidade da pessoa e lãça o sangue sobre elles e os ossos pœ ao pescoço delles e a carne comê." My translation. *Birlos de bola* may be a mis-copy from the original manuscript (which is lost) for *bilros de bola*. Elsewhere l's and r's are interchanged, such as in *creligo* = *clerigo*. *Bilro* can mean either a lace bobbin or a pin (at nine-pins), and *bola* (ball) is used to refer to the game of bowling, as in *jôgo de bola*.

⁸⁹ P. Hair, "Sources on Early Sierra Leone: 1) Beaulieu 1619," *Africana Research Bulletin*, IV, 4, 1974, 43-44.

the place where they customarily put these ... is on the roads, at the entrance, and in the middle of their villages.⁹⁰

De Faro's account concurs most closely with ancestral ritual among the Temne today. Along the road leading east from each town may be found a miniature pavilion (Fig. 33). Within it is a platform covered with a mat, on top of which are laid small stones. Beside the platform on the ground are small, mushroom-shaped anthills (as in Beaulieu's account). The shrine is called the *am-boro ma-sar*, "the house of stones."⁹¹

Several days after the burial of a politically important person a stone is selected from his or her gravesite by a relative and is placed in the *am-boro ma-sar* as a remembrance. It may be any stone but usually is about the size of a person's fist (as described by de Faro) or larger for a paramount chief. The official caretaker knows the identity of each stone. If a village transfers to a new site, the stones are carried along and placed in a new *am-boro ma-sar*. Over generations the identity of particular stones may be lost, as there appear to be no distinctive marks on the stones, and in some parts these are eventually buried in a pit together in a ritual cleaning of the site. In no case, however, are the anonymous stones discarded. Customs vary in different areas, but the most traditional rule seems to have been that only stones representing chiefs and kings were included in the *am-boro ma-sar*.

Each year after the harvest is completed in the month of *Gbaprong* (February-March) a ceremony is conducted in which the people contribute a sacrifice of rice flour and a fowl or goat.⁹² The stones are washed, replaced on a new mat, and covered with new, clean cloths. Palm wine is poured on the ground, the animals are slaughtered, the meat is shared among the participants, and the rice flour and bones are scattered among the stones. As each stone is taken up in turn, beginning first with those of the most recently deceased, a prayer to each of the past chiefs invokes their intercession for the prosperity and health of the village, and the people dance to the beating of the

women's drums (*e-sangbore*). The ceremony takes place in the morning at sunrise. This is the only scheduled ceremony, although special ritual may be prescribed at the *am-boro ma-sar* in the event of ill fortune, for example, famine, unexplained death, or epidemic. Any ceremony in which initiates are released from their training to return to normal life includes a visit to the shrine.

The placement in the East is critical. East is the direction from which the ancestors came, the Temne say. "It is God who created them. He first sent them to the East, and from there they went everywhere in the world. We get sun from the East, and all other good things. It is the East that has power." West is where the dead are buried and ritually it is the West that is associated with the event of death. East is the realm in which the dead are reincarnated into the living. The *am-boro ma-sar* is more than simply a memorial to the dead. It is the place where the benevolent power of the dead is transmitted back to the living.

The stones are laid upon the raised, folded mat, often covered with a white cloth. The mat, used in the home to sleep on, when folded signifies a transition state, as when it is carried in the final ritual of the women's Bondo initiation called "the transplanting" (*e-lukne*), signifying the transition from childhood to adulthood. There is some evidence as well that at some sites the stones are laid in a model canoe suggesting transport through regenerating water in the afterlife.⁹³ Thus the spirits are in the process of transition between one state and another, between the spiritual and the physical worlds. Informants, when asked the use of the cloth cover, responded that the ancestors are just like us — they get cold lying in their beds. The deceased may appear in a dream to complain of being naked and the cover is laid to keep them comfortable and happy.

Stones, though they may be small, are of course dense and comparatively heavy. In this regard, two concepts of the Temne come to mind. James Littlejohn says that "weight," for the Temne, "is a virtue of truth or of the power which becomes equivalent to truth, as it is for us a metaphor for them ('his words carry weight')."⁹⁴ As in

⁹⁰ De Faro (as in n. 42), 89: "... humas cabaninhas pequenas forradas com huma, ou duas esteiras, feito demtro seu altazinho, com a mesma esteira e soubre elle hum Remque de seixos do tamanho de hũa mao, cada qual dos parentes tem ali sua pedra ... destes castas de chinas de pedras, e de paos, he ... das panellas, com sangue de galinha, e com sangue de gado e outros animães: o lugar em que costumão por estas chinas he nos caminhos, á â entrada, e no meio de suas aldeas ..." My translation in consultation with Professor Malcomb Bachelor, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Yale University. This is a most confusing and convoluted passage complicated by the use of *he* (*é*) in the phrase *e de paos, he, a maior cantidade que a neste guine* ... Professor Bachelor feels that de Faro used poor grammatical construction throughout; it is difficult to find the referent for *he* (*is*) and perhaps he meant to use *são* (*are*), referring back to *destas castas de chinas*.

⁹¹ The *am-boro ma-sar* is found in all areas of Temneland. In the far eastern chiefdoms it is called *ang-thungbo* or *a-kang a-bana* and is less visible than in the rest of Temneland, sometimes as merely a collection of stones under the cotton tree at the royal grove (*ang-thurma*). Among the Bullom, the "house of stones" (*kil-te pe*) was documented by G.

Nyländer (*Grammar and Vocabulary of the Bullom Language*, London, 1814, 91) but apparently it has become obsolete. Hall, visiting the South in 1937, mentioned only anthills under pavilions and his Bullom informants regarded the use of stones as memorials to be a Temne custom (A 31, 25). The Loko have a shrine similar to the *am-boro ma-sar*, but it, like many of their customs, also seems derived from Temne (see E. Hirst, "Some Religious Practices of the Lokos of Kalangba," *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, 1, 5, 1958, 6-7).

⁹² N. Thomas (*Anthropological Report on Sierra Leone* [1916], Westport, Conn., 1, 1970, 41) gave the time of hoeing as the time for the ceremony. Farmers who slash and burn early may begin hoeing as early as March but most begin later.

⁹³ H. Sawyerr, "The Supreme God and Spirits," *Sierra Leone Bulletin of Religion*, III, 2, 1961, 52, and "Do Africans Believe in God?" *Sierra Leone Studies*, N.S., xv, 1961, 154. Several model canoes carved with elaborate designs are found in the Museum of Mankind, London — see M. Trowell, *African Design*, New York, 1960, pl. LXI.

⁹⁴ J. Littlejohn, "Temne Right and Left," in R. Needham, ed., *Right and Left*, Chicago, 1973, 297.

American parlance derived from Black speech, the term "heavy" is used by the Temne to indicate matters of great significance or consequence: *ta lel*, "It's heavy." Among the Bullom, the voices of the ancestors are said to be "low, heavy."⁹⁵

Heaviness, owing to gravity, descends (*thora*), just as matters from the ancestors are "brought down." During the coronation of the chief the law is "brought down" to be given to the people. When questioned about the origin of the initiation ceremonies, Temne say that these customs were "brought down" from the ancestors. In the presenting of chiefs and officials of the women's Bondo and men's Poro associations, they are said to be "brought down" from Futha, the mythical origin of life, and the ceremony in which they are installed is called *ang-thora*, "the bringing down." Thus the use of stones and stone figures would seem to refer to a weightiness related to ancestral origin.

Whereas the earth is regarded as hot by the Temne, stones are related to coolness. In ceremonies in which social conflict is resolved, the persons involved sit upon cool stones while ritual is performed to expurge the heat of disharmony. Coolness is a virtue of the spiritual world and is related to water as a cleansing agent of regeneration. In the ritual of ancestral supplication at the *am-boro ma-sar*, the stones are washed to remove impurity and to render them cool, just as cold water is poured on the graves of the dead to mollify their potential for antagonism to the living.

While the stones refer to the regeneration of the powers of the dead and the bringing down of ancestral truth and guidance, the anthill refers to the aged, death, the entering of the earth by the deceased, and the medium through which the dead are approached. When a sacrifice is offered to the dead, if it is carried away by the ants it is a sign that the dead have accepted it. Several Temne folk tales refer to the depositing of the dead behind anthills. A proverb gives the advice, "Go under [behind] the anthill and take the talisman" (*ko pili an-the, ng gbasi ang-sebe*), i.e., "Go to the aged and gain wisdom." (The aged are considered closest to the recently deceased and the fact that both are called by the same term, *am-baki*, "the old ones," implies that they are virtually one and the same.) In Temne *e-bempa* (constructions placed at the entrance to the farms to ward off thieves through their symbolic power), the anthill is used, sometimes carved with facial features, to represent the deceased and the power they might render to the living. In the final ritual of the boys' Rabai initiation, if a boy has died in the initiation grove he is represented in the procession to the village by an anthill dressed in robes like those of the living initiates. In shrines to commemorate twin birth, anthills, dressed in white clothing, represent the twins who have died. Like the corpse, the anthill is an empty, clay shell from which life has departed. It is the visible evidence of the transition from life to death.

The layout of these objects within the ground-plan of the *am-boro ma-sar* (Fig. 34) conforms to the Temne concept of the cosmic cycle. As one approaches from the West, a cycle going under the anthills leads through and under the earth to cool stones on the other side, just as the sun dies in the West and travels under the earth to be rejuvenated in the cool morning of the East. Communication from the dead is received by the living above the earth through ritual in which the stones are held and their coolness is transmitted.

It is not at the burial but some time afterwards that a stone is selected from the grave. One source at the beginning of this century said that the stone is first deposited on the grave and then removed to the ancestral shrine after three days for a male or four days for a female.⁹⁶ These periods represent the time it is thought to take for the spirits of men and women, respectively, to reach the spirit world, *ro-kirfi*. With the adoption of the Muslim forty-days ceremony, or wake, this is now commonly the time when the stone is withdrawn from the grave. At this time the departed one ceases to be a dead person and is a full citizen of a world much like our own in which the processes of cyclical development are set in motion. The ultimate goal, as in life, is the re-entering of the opposing world, in this case, *noru*, that of physical man.

It is not the drums of the men, as customary for ritual occasions, but the drums of the women that are played at the annual *am-boro ma-sar* ritual. Outside of exclusive women's ritual, the women's drums are played at the installation of the chief, who is thought to be the old chief reincarnated, and at the coming-out of young men from seclusion in the Rabai initiation, considered "strangers" newly reborn. Women are the agents of life-giving, as opposed to men, who, in war, are the takers of life. Thus the stones represent not simply the existence of the dead but the vision of renewal of life incarnate in the receiving of the noble ancestral image.

In the Kunike (eastern) Temne area, I was told by one informant, previously quite reliable, that the ancient, carved stone figures found by the Kunike are placed in the *am-boro ma-sar* and are used ritually, just as the ancestral stones are, to secure communal good fortune. The Kunike are regarded by the Temne as the most conservative subgroup. Whether this represents a continuity of tradition maintained by learned religious practitioners or simply a response to the finding of a wonderful alien object as among the Mende, Kissi, and Bullom, I was unable to ascertain.

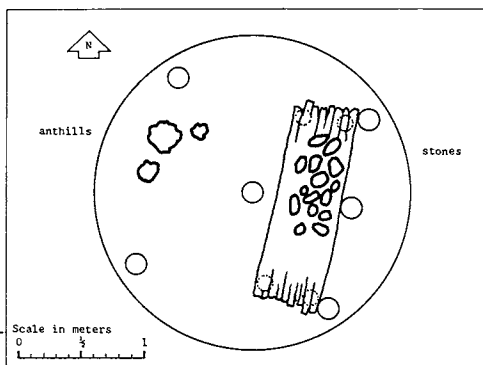
The discovery of the ancient stone figures in numbers of up to fifty suggests that they were used in groups like the plain stones of the *am-boro ma-sar*. The *am-boro ma-sar* today is the principal context in which stones are used in Sierra Leone to commemorate the nobility and it represents a tradition of indeterminate antiquity. The iconography of the carved figures suggests that, like the *am-boro*

⁹⁵ Hall, F 307.

⁹⁶ Edwin, 163.



33 The Temne *am-boro ma-sar* (photo: Frederick J. Lamp)



34 Ground plan of the Temne *am-boro ma-sar*

ma-sar stones, they represent the regenerating force of the identifiable, honored ancestors and the nobility recently deceased. The larger *mahei yafeisia*, like the large uncarved stones of the Temne shrine today, probably represent kings. Today, as in prehistory, it is through the representation of weighty images of nobility that the ideals of an ancient culture give viability to continuing, descending life.⁹⁷

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