

IYARE! Splendor & Tension in Benin's Palace Theatre

November 8, 2008 – March 1, 2009

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Glossary



“A” is for agbaka (crocodile). “E” is for ezuzu (fan). “I” is for iyan (yam). “O” is for okpa (rooster). “U” is for ukpa (lamp).

This brief wordlist includes some common terms relating to artworks, the palace, and daily life. For much more comprehensive sources, see dictionaries by Rebecca Agheyisi or Hans Melzian. Each syllable of the words is pronounced, although they are frequently elided. Open, undotted vowels are pronounced as follows: a=ah ("father"), e=ay ("ail"), i=ee ("ego"), o=oh ("Ohio"), u=oo ("hoot"). Dotted vowels are pronounced ẹ=eh ("ten"), ọ=aw ("hot"). Edo includes several diphthongs; gh=a guttural rolled g, kh=an aspirated k, vb=an aspirated v. Edo is a tonal language, in which high or low pitch on a syllable may change a word's meaning, but tone diacritical marks are not included here.

Basic Glossary

(This glossary does not follow proper Edo orthography, in that dotted and undotted letters are alphabetized together)

A

ada=ceremonial sword that symbolizes ruler's power over life and death

agbaka=true crocodile

agbɔn=this world

Ague=fasting period from new yam and certain other crops

akpata=harp-like stringed musical instrument

ama=image or design

asoro=spear

asa=shield

atalakpa=true wild leopard

avan=thunder

azeṅ=witch

E

ebakhue=red tailfeather of African Grey Parrot

ẹben=fish-shaped ceremonial sword owned by monarch, chiefs, priests

ebo=European

ẹboo=medicine; charms or amulets

ẹbo=deity

ebuluku=gathered full skirt

Edaikẹ=Crown Prince; eldest son of ruler

ediṅ=elders

Ẹdo=Benin City; Benin Kingdom; language and people of Benin

ẹdun=bitter kola

ẹgbele=cloth square worn at hip by chiefs and monarch with some ceremonial dress

ẹgbo=forest

Eghaẹvbo n'Ogbe=palace chiefs

Eghaẹvbo n'Ore=high-ranking generals; chiefs who are counselors

ẹghodo=open courtyard

ẹghughu=smaller variety of less aggressive crocodile; usually called “alligator” in

English by the Ẹdo

egile=snail

egogo=gong-like bell

eguae=palace

egui=tortoise

ehen=fish

ehi=conscience; “guardian angel”; your spirit double who alternates with you in being
reincarnated

ehonmwēn=purification

ekete=throne

ekhui=pangolin

eki=market

ekire=frog

ekita=dog

ekpen=metaphorical leopard; the Oba (ekpen n’owa) and his animal counterpart (ekpen
n’oha)

ekpokin=bark and leather cylindrical box

ekponmwēn=chiefs’ thanksgiving procession through town

ekuyē=spoon

ema=pounded yam

emila=cow

Emobo=palace ceremony honoring Oba Esigie and driving evil to Udo, his half-brother’s
stronghold

emuada or emada=palace pages

enigie=provincial rulers or “dukes”

enogie=a provincial ruler or “duke”

erha=father

erhe=cylindrical stool used by priests

erhu=cap or hat

erię=harem

erinmwın=the other world; the supernatural, watery world

erokhin=chameleon

erõnmwõn=brass

esi=bush pig

ęsin=horse

esõn=senior wife

eto=hair

etuu=cannon

ęvbęe=kolanut

ewa=guild that wakes the king in the morning

Ewaiseę=a guild of traditional healers and medicine makers

ewawa=divination technique of Osun priests

ewi=type of mudfish that is usually sold coiled and smoked

Ezõmõ=member of Uzama chiefly group; one of major generals of the past

ęzuzu=round leather fan

I

iba=clay bench

ibi=charcoal

ibota=moonlight play

idunmwun=town quarter

Igbesanmwan=guild that carves ivory and wood

ighibięrię=harem pagegirls

igho=money

Igue=celebration that thanks the head for the luck of the past year

Igun Eronmwon=brasscasting guild

ihue=nose

ikhian=transformation; shape-shifting

ikhinmwın=tree that is planted when new settlement and household are built; *Newbouldia laevis*

ikpigho=cowries

ikpin=python

iloi=queens

Iron=palace ceremony that commemorates Ọba Eęsigie’s quarrel with the Uzama chiefs

ise=amen; “let it be so”

Isiokuo=defunct palace celebration that honored Ogun, god of war

iso=sky

ivie=coral and red stone beads

Iwebo=palace society that cares for regalia and formerly managed trade

Iweęguae

iwu=old Edo tattoo marks on chest and back

iya=system of walls and ditches that surrounded communities

iyan=yam

Iyase=the chief who heads the Eghaevbo n’Ore nobles

iye=mother

iyeke=the back; behind

iyin=anti-witchcraft bark from sasswood tree

Iyoba=title of the Queen Mother

ize=rice

O

Oba=the king

obọ=arm, hand

ọbo=doctor; ritual priest

obobo=flower

ọbokhian=welcome

ọbotan=good evening

ọbowię=good morning

odighi=lake

odo=mortar

ododo=imported red woolen felt

oduma=lion

ofen=rat

ofigbọn=palm oil

Ofọe=messenger of Ogiuwu, god of death

Ogbelaka=a royal “superguild” that includes many different types of musicians and
singers

oghohọ=vulterine fish eagle

ogi=egusi; melon seed

Ogiamien=the chief who descends from the leader of the egalitarian autochtones who
ruled Benin before the present dynasty began

ogie=leader, duke, high chief

ogiukpo=dais-like altar

ogwẹga=system of divination using strands of seed pods; ominigbon

oha=forest, bush

ohẹn=priest

ọkhọkhọ=hen

okọ=canoe

okpa=rooster

okpan=calabash bowl

okpọmwan=a powerful man

okuku=beehive coiffure with upward arching braids, decorated with coral beads

okun=ocean

okuo=war

olio=a queen

omada=a palace page

ominigbọn=system of divination that are linked to memorized verses

omọ=child

omọmọ=baby

omwan=person

orhirhi=electric mudfish

orhue=white kaolin, called “chalk”; symbol of peace, purity, prosperity

oro=vertical protrusion from crown or hat; part of some of Oba’s crowns, hats of Chiefs

Osa and Osuan, members of the Uzama

oroķe=flywhisk made from a handled horse tail

Osanobua=the High God

osisi=gun

Osun=deity who is the personification of medicine

otuẹ=salutation; also, the eve of an important palace ceremony

oviẹn=slave

owa=house

owe=leg, foot

owẹn=sun

ozi=crab

ozuọ=idiot

U

udahae=chiefly beaded headband

udin=oil palm

ugbo=farm

ugie =festival

uhunmwun=head

ukhurhe=segmented wooden rattle staff used to call the ancestors and placed against back
wall of ancestral altars

uki=moon

ukọ=messenger

ukpa=lamp

ukpo=bed, bed platform

ukpon=cloth; wrapper

ukuse=calabash rattle covered with netting strung with seeds or beads

uloko=iroko; mahoghany-like tree

umozo=war sword

unu=mouth

urho=gate or door

uwawa=terracotta cooking pot

uwɛnrhiɛn=whip

uwɔnmwɛn=soup (American stew)

Uzama=class of seven chiefs often called the “kingmakers”

uzo=antelope