

**QUEEN IDIA
A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HER MAJESTY / TRIBUTE
TO HER MAJESTY**

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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DECLARATION

I declare that this project “Visual Representation of Queen Idia” is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under the supervision of Dr. Njoku. All ideas are product of my personal research and where the views of others are used in the work, they are duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this project work was carried out by ENA EMOKPAE with Mat. NO. ENV1906008, Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, who in His infinite mercy has seen me through this academic journey.

And

For His unending protection and provisions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I want to Thank God for the Success of my concluded project for giving me the grace and mental health to complete it.

As for my supervisors of persons of, Dr Njoku and Prof Egwali who has been an inspiration to me and my concluded project. And Thanks goes also to my class mates who has been there for me when I needed them most.

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ABSTRACT

Idia was an ordinary little girl who had an extraordinary dream about a brave female warrior with magical healing powers. Curious, she begged her father to teach her how to be a warrior and her mother to teach her the art of magic and medicine. Little did she know that she would become the brave warrior in her dream as well as the first Queen mother of the ancient Benin Kingdom. This story of perseverance and courage to learn about the history of one of Africa's most illustrious queens.

The kingdom of Benin has indeed experienced so many reforms and development at different periods of its history. These reforms were not solely carried out by men but these were some outstanding women who made great impact in Benin. These great women who made immense contributions to the rich cultural heritage of the land of Benin cannot be over looked in the study of the kingdom; most prominent among them was Queen Idia the first female warrior that ever lived in Benin kingdom. Idia was said to have been a very beautiful and strong-willed woman who had unusual super natural powers. She is described as an extraordinarily-power personality who continues to loom large in Benin cultural imaginations: she changed the status quo and made remarkable developments both in the political, cultural and social spheres of the empire. She is credited for being knowledgeable in esoteric and was also very strong in the use of occult powers. According to Osewengie Ebohon, "Idia was not an ordinary woman"

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Queen Idia was the wife of Oba Ozolua, the Oba who reigned in about 1481 AD. Queen Idia became the first Iyoba (Queen Mother) of Benin when Esigie conferred upon her the title and the Eguae-Iyoba (Palace of the Queen Mother).

Idia was the mother of Esigie, who reigned as Oba (king) of the Edo people from 1504 to 1550. Historians do know that Idia was alive during the Idah war (1515 – 1516) because she played a role that led to a great Benin victory. It has been argued that Idia, therefore, was the true power behind the throne of her son. She played a significant role in the rise and reign of her son, being described as a great warrior who fought relentlessly before and during her son's reign as the Oba (king) of the Edo people. Queen Idia was instrumental in securing the title of Oba for her son Esigie following the death of his father Oba Ozolua. To that end, she raised an army to fight off his brother Arhuanan who was supposed to be the Oba by right and tradition but was subsequently defeated in battle. Esigie's mother became the 17th Oba of Benin.

She played a very significant role in the rise and reign of her son, Oba Esigie. Queen Idia is the famous warrior who became even more popular when an ivory carving of her face was adopted as the symbol of FESTAC in 1977.

1.1 STATEMENT AND PROBLEMS

She played a very significant role in the rise and reign of her son. She was a strong warrior who fought relentlessly before and during her son's reign as the Oba (king) of the Edo people. His son Esigie controlled Benin City while another son, Arhwaran, was based in the equally important city of Udo about twenty miles away. The ensuing civil war severely compromised Benin's status as a regional power and undermined Benin City's place at the political and cultural center of the kingdom. Exploiting this weakness, the neighboring Igala peoples sent warriors across the Benue River to wrest control of Benin's northern territories. Esigie ultimately defeated his brother and conquered the Igala, reestablishing the unity and military strength of the kingdom. His mother Idia received much of the credit for these victories as her political counsel, together with her mystical powers and medicinal knowledge, were viewed

as critical elements of Esigie's success on the battlefield. To reward and honor her, Esigie created a new position within the court called the iyoba, or "Queen Mother," which gave her significant political privileges, including a separate residence with its own staff. Queen Mothers were viewed as instrumental to the protection and well-being of the Oba and, by extension, the kingdom.

Queen Idia's role in the Benin Kingdom was crucial, as she helped to unify the kingdom and bring about political stability. During her husband's reign, the kingdom was facing external threats from neighboring tribes, and internal conflicts among the nobility. Queen Idia played a key role in helping her husband overcome these challenges, using her political and spiritual influence to support him. She also accompanied her husband on military campaigns, providing strategic counsel and inspiration to the troops. After her husband's death, Queen Idia continued to be a powerful figure in the kingdom, serving as a regent for her son Esigie until he came of age to rule.

1.2 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVE

Queen Idia's most enduring legacy, however, was her contribution to the cultural and artistic heritage of the Benin Kingdom. She was a patron of the arts, and it was under her patronage that some of the most iconic works of Benin art were created.

The most famous of these works is the ivory mask of Queen Idia, which is now housed in the British Museum in London. The mask depicts Queen Idia with intricate details and elaborate headdress, symbolizing her political and spiritual power.

Queen Idia's legacy continues to inspire people today, not only in Nigeria but across the world. Queen Idia of the Benin Kingdom is celebrated as a powerful and influential woman in African history, and her story is a testament to the strength, intelligence, and leadership of women in Africa. Her story serves as an inspiration for women in Africa and around the world to break down barriers, challenge gender stereotypes, and fight for their rights and equality.

Queen Idia's story highlights the important roles that women played in traditional African societies. Despite living in a patriarchal

society where women were often marginalized, Queen Idia rose to a position of power and influence through her intelligence, strategic abilities, and spiritual prowess. She was able to use her influence and position to shape the military tactics and strategies of the Benin Kingdom and to protect and empower her son, the king.

Furthermore, Queen Idia's story underscores the importance of education and mentorship for women. As a mother to the king, she served as a trusted advisor and confidante to her son, passing on her knowledge and wisdom to the next generation of leaders. Her legacy serves as a reminder of the importance of education and mentorship for women, as well as the critical role that women play in shaping the future of their communities and societies.

Overall, Queen Idia's story is a powerful testament to the resilience, strength, and leadership of women in Africa, and it continues to inspire generations of women to break down barriers and strive for their dreams. She will forever live as the heroine of the African history.

1.3 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Queen Idia was a remarkable woman who enjoyed the privilege of recommending her choice of Chiefs to the Oba, who then conferred the title on them. She was the first woman to go to and fight in war, and she used her magical powers and knowledge of medicine to help her son overcome his enemies. She was a fearless Army General who led the Armies of Benin on several successful battles. One of such was the Idah War of 1515 – 1516 A.D., which was won by her Army who fought bravely. She also acted as the Oba's Agent in some Villages.

The Benin Empire was one of the oldest and most developed states in the coastal hinterland of West Africa. The empire was a well-organized and sophisticated polity that existed before the major European colonial interlude. The Benin Empire rose to great heights due to the contributions and sacrifices of many men, women, leaders and warlords.

One of them was Queen Iden, whose sacrifice helped shape the Benin Kingdom. She was the queen during the reign of Oba Ewuape, in around 1700 AD. Her husband ascended the throne in very turbulent times. His kingdom and chiefs rebelled against him, and his palace was empty,

except for the Queen. The oracle divined that for peace to be restored to the kingdom, a human sacrifice was needed. Queen Iden offered herself as a sacrificial lamb to restore the monarchy. She was given a befitting burial and her tomb lies close to Oba market (in Benin City) till date.

This beautiful sculpture of Queen Iden pays homage to her heroic sacrifice.

1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Queen Idia of the Benin Kingdom was known for her military prowess and strategic abilities, and she played a significant role in shaping the military tactics and strategies of the Benin Kingdom after the king's death. As a mother to the king, she was also a trusted advisor and confidante to her son, Oba Esigie, who was a famous warrior king.

One of Queen Idia's most significant contributions to the military was her use of spiritual and mystical powers to protect and empower the Benin army. She was known as a powerful priestess who could invoke supernatural powers to influence the outcome of battles. She used her spiritual abilities to bless the Benin warriors, boost their morale, and protect them from harm. This made the Benin army more confident and

effective in battle, which led to numerous victories against neighboring kingdoms.

In addition to her spiritual contributions, Queen Idia also played a role in the development of military infrastructure in the Benin Kingdom. She is credited with introducing the use of the “Ikhuen” bronze insignia as a symbol of military rank and the use of specialized military units, such as the “Uzama” or palace guards. These innovations helped to organize and professionalize the Benin army, making it a formidable force that was feared and respected by its enemies. The military tactics and infrastructure of the Benin Kingdom were crucial to its success in battles and its growth as a powerful empire in Africa.

During her regency, she helped to establish trade routes with neighboring kingdoms, further strengthening the economic and political power of the Benin Kingdom.

1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Born in the 15th century in Uzeghudu (now Edo State), Queen Idia was married to Oba Ozolua and her son, Osawe, was crowned Oba of Benin Kingdom with the title “Esigie” (Oseigie) and he reigned from

1504-1550 A.D. The Eguu-Iy'Oba (The Queen Mother's Palace) was built for her in lower Uselu, and it still serves as the final resting place for every Iy'Oba (Queen Mother).

Queen Idia was a remarkable woman who enjoyed the privilege of recommending her choice of Chiefs to the Oba, who then conferred the title on them. She was the first woman to go to and fight in war, and she used her magical powers and knowledge of medicine to help her son overcome his enemies. She was a fearless Army General who led the Armies of Benin on several successful battles. One of such was the Idah War of 1515 – 1516 A.D., which was won by her Army who fought bravely. She also acted as the Oba's Agent in some Villages.

Several symbolic images of art identified with Queen Idia indicate her early contacts with the Portuguese and have become some of the most popular works of art in world black history. These include the Bronze ancestral Queen-Mother Head, the Bronze Bells, the traditional Sword ("Eben"), the carved wood rattle Staff ("Ukhurhe"), and many more.

The image of Queen Idia is the popular Festac Head that was used for the celebration of the Nigerian FESTAC '77 – Festival of Arts and

Culture in 1977 that was attended by dignitaries all over the world. Queen Idia also started “Ekasa” – a special dance which forms part of the Royal Ceremonies till date.

Queen Idia’s tomb is located at Eguia-Iy’oba, Urelu, Lagos Road, Benin-City. She played a significant role in the rise and reign of her son, Oba Esigie, and was the first Iyoba (Queen Mother) of Benin when Esigie conferred upon her the title and the Eguae-Iyoba (Palace of the Queen Mother).

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

What are good question to ask about art?

What is sculpture made of?

What are the materials used in sculpture?

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 PHILOSOPHY AND SCULPTURE

Ekiuwa Aire was born and raised in Benin City, Edo, Nigeria. She moved to England when she was nine and it was here, away from all she had grown up with, that she discovered her passion for writing. Ekiuwa co-wrote her first book while finishing high school and continued developing her craft while earning a Bachelor of Economics and a Master of Business Administration. She is passionate about African history and incorporates the richness of many cultures into her books. When she encountered difficulty finding a publisher for *Idia* she self-published.

2.1 AUTHORIAL IDENTITY

According to Aire, there is a deep divide between the truth of African history and the common understanding of it. Her desire is to make African history more mainstream, to help fill a void that has existed for years, which will help have a positive impact on modern generations of children by providing a sense of identity.

Aire's first book, entitled, *Idia of the Benin Kingdom*. The book depicts Idia's transformation from a daughter of a village warrior to the heroic Queen of the Kingdom of Benin.

2.2 Unique challenges

Of course, starting a company during a pandemic brought with it a unique set of challenges.

"I had planned to do in-person book signings, but with the pandemic that was no longer possible," Aire explains.

"The tours were completely scrapped. I had to pivot and suddenly I had to figure out social media and build a presence for myself on sites like Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest. It was hard, but social media actually helped me to open up and now bookstores are reaching out to me instead of the other way around, which is a big win."

Aire wants to write more books like *Idia*, filled with positive stories that showcase Africa's vast collection of legends and heroes that will inspire kids to explore African culture in a meaningful way.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 PROJECT METHOD AND MATERIALS

Following are the tools and raw materials required for traditional cement sculpting:

Cement: The base material with which the sculpture is made.

Sand: Its used to mix with cement to make concrete.

Bricks: Its used as armature in the sculpture.

Sculpture Pottery Tools: These tools are used to lay concrete along with bricks.

Water: Its used to mix with cement to make it semi liquid.

Brush: To dust off unwanted materials from the sculpture.

Painting Knives: Its used to give shape and detailing to the sculpture.

3.1 MATERIALS

Making Process

Making of cement sculpture requires strong and powerful skills as well as experience in shaping an object into a sculpture. Artisan uses a rotating stool on which the sculpture is made. Rotating stool helps the artisan to sculpt the figure in all angles by rotating it at will in his

convenience. The process starts by making of concrete. Artisan mixes cement, water and sand using garden trowel in a container. The consistency of mixing water with cement is controlled by the artisan. Bricks are broken into small pieces using a trowel. These bricks are going to be the armature for the sculpture.

Concrete is laid down on the stool. Brick pieces along with concrete is positioned according to the size of the sculpture. The torso of the sculpture is done first. Concrete is laid around the brick pieces and the bricks are not slightly visible. Smaller pieces are placed over the torso and concrete is placed alongside to make the article sturdy; this being the neck region of the model. Artisan lays a single vertical brick piece for the face of the sculpture. It is strengthened around with concrete. Large-scaled pieces are arranged with concrete by nine feet tall; above the face region as a high bun of the sculpture as I am making the presentation of Queen Idia. Concrete is placed on the rear of the model from the bottom of the base to the full structure of the armature

Cement powder is deposited on the armature, starting from the down of the armature to the rest body structure of the work region to give

toughness to the sculpture. Using painting knife, extra concrete is etched out and given detailing for the base of the model. The structure cement work is coated with a slightly more liquefied concrete layer all over. Painting knives of different sizes are used according to the shape of the region. As the concrete is wet, it becomes more versatile for the cement structure (Queen Idia) to give definite detailing to the facial features, ears, hair etc. Specific minute characteristics are given using a thinner painting knife. Extra blobs of concrete are brushed off using a painting brush at this stage, as once when the concrete solidifies it is non-viable to changes.

Post sculpting, water should be poured on the Benin cement structure (Queen Idia) two times a day for 3 days for curing purpose. Painting process can be started only after 15 to 13 days after the sculpture is made.

3.2 Tools and Raw Materials

Following are the tools and raw materials required for traditional cement sculpting:

- ✓ Cement: The base material with which the sculpture is made.
- ✓ Sand: Its used to mix with cement to make concrete.

- ✓ Bricks: Its used as armature in the sculpture.
- ✓ Sculpture Pottery Tools: These tools are used to lay concrete along with bricks.
- ✓ Water: Its used to mix with cement to make it semi liquid.
- ✓ Brush: To dust off unwanted materials from the sculpture.
- ✓ Painting Knives: Its used to give shape and detailing to the sculpture.

3.3 THE REASON AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MATERIALS

Cement is mainly used as a binder in concrete, which is a basic material for all types of construction, including housing, roads, schools, hospitals, dams and ports, as well as for decorative applications (for patios, floors, staircases, driveways, pool decks) and items like tables, sculptures or bookcases.

Cement is very important building material among other in construction industry. Cement has replaced all other building materials, like clay and lime, which ruled high for hundreds of years, in construction from last century. It has an ability to hold the structure together

Cement is now used in many construction trade items like plain cement concrete, reinforced cement concrete, mortar, plaster, grouts, paints and in pre-cast elements.

One of the characteristic of a developed country is its growing infrastructure and hence cement is an important element for the development of country and its economy.

As on date natural materials like lime has many limitations, while modern binder materials like polymers, epoxy etc. are very costly and hence Cement is the best alternative. Thus polymer and epoxy have solved many limitations of cement as a binding material.

- ✓ Cement can be produced in large volumes in controlled condition, packed and transported.
- ✓ Cement is a several times stronger binding material than lime and clay.
- ✓ It can be mixed and used at will with locally available materials at site.
- ✓ When stored properly in ordinary atmosphere it does not deteriorate for reasonably longer time (at least 3 to 4 month).

- ✓ When mixed with water, starts setting and gain sufficient strength in a day or two, where as other binding materials require much longer time. Hence increase speed of construction.
- ✓ It can withstand compressive stresses well. Where tension and shear stresses occurs it gives good bond to steel reinforcement and transfers excess stresses to steel.
- ✓ It is produced from the materials like limestone, hematite, bauxite, clay, etc which are plentifully available in the upper crust of the earth.
- ✓ It imparts strength and durability to building elements. Not only that with cement, the speed of construction also gets faster.
- ✓ It is comparatively cheaper material.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Detailed description of studio production processes in sculpture.



F.g :1Feeding With Concrete To Material Shape



Detailing



Feeding With Concrete To Material Shape



Detailing



Feeding With Concrete To Material Shape



Finishing stage

SUMMARY

Queen Idia was an ordinary little girl who had an extraordinary dream about a brave female warrior with magical healing powers. Curious, she begged her father to teach her how to be a warrior and her mother to teach her the art of magic and medicine. Little did she know that she would become the brave warrior in her dream as well as the first Queen mother of the ancient Benin Kingdom. Read this story of perseverance

and courage to learn about the history of one of Africa's most illustrious queens.