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Cultural Significance of Ichi Marks and the Role of Awka Smiths in Bronze Distribution Among Igbo Communities

By Chuka Odike

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Son of Eze Nri of Oraeri

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article



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Son of Eze Nri of Oraeri Son of the late Eze Nri of Orieri, adorned with a Benin-style bronze pectoral mask. The elder's facial marks, known as Ìchì, were traditionally given to men and some women in the north-central Igbo region as a symbol of either joining the Nze title system or being born into...

Son of the late Eze Nri of Orieri, adorned with a Benin-style bronze pectoral mask. The elder's facial marks, known as Ìchì, were traditionally given to men and some women in the north-central Igbo region as a symbol of either joining the Nze title system or being born into a family already part of it. These marks varied in style depending on the specific village group and were also referred to as ogba ubì (farm furrows). Those who bore these marks were called mgburuichi. The practice, performed without anesthesia, has long disappeared, leaving only a few elderly men as the last bearers of ichi. Photo by Thurstan Shaw, 1960.

"Awka smiths, working east of the Niger among the Igala, were known not only to replicate but also to purchase bronze items from local casters. These bronzes were traded to northern Igbo communities, where they were used in title taking ceremonies. Based on this precedent, it is likely that Awka smiths, leveraging their expertise in metalwork, facilitated the spread of these and other bronze artifacts among Delta peoples. The deliberate migrations of Awka craftsmen may have significantly influenced the dissemination of diverse bronze styles throughout the Delta."

— Nancy C. Neaher, *Igbo Metalsmiths among the Southern Edo*



(1976).

Neaher, N. C. (1976). Igbo Metalsmiths among the Southern Edo.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuka Odiike

I'm a dedicated civil engineer with a passion for infrastructure development and community empowerment. With a strong background in engineering, my work focuses on creating sustainable solutions for urban and rural development projects. Outside of my professional career, I'm deeply interested in Igbo history and culture. I actively explore ways to impact society by using historical lessons to inspire and educate others about the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people, aiming to bridge tradition and modern development.



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