

## STRUCTURAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS IN IBIBIO ART

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### ABSTRACT

*Ibibio art has not had comprehensive documentations of defining qualities. There has not been highlights or analyses of Ibibio art in art analogies, just some few documentations on different arts by Ibibio. There is a dearth of comprehensive documentation on the subject. Structural and philosophical components are ingredients that define the artistic identity of any people. Structural contents of art are the elements and principles that array for identification through physical components. Such components include symbols and icons, colours, depth, and their interpretations for understanding. Alternately, the philosophical insights include the unseen ethics, customs, traditional implications, metaphysical, and epistemological standpoints. This study features the structural and philosophical insights of arts of the Ibibio, an ancient people of Nigeria and Cameroun, recognised as some of the earliest settlers in the regions. It investigates the purposes and implications, and what transpires as Ibibio art, and analyses its categorisations and contents. This study contributes to knowledge at interdisciplinary scopes of visual, and theater arts, literary studies, and anthropology. The knowledge promotes aspirations through art practice and innovation as community members build upon shared ideas and traditions. This in turn supports regional economy through tourism, cultural events, art sales, and the creative industry, and articulates to preserve the communal heritage of the people. Primary and secondary data sources are used in the descriptive essay, whose findings include that a purposeful synergy of artistic components can promote social impacts and drive economic growth.*

**KEYWORD: Structural, Philosophical Insights and Ibibio Art**

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### INTRODUCTION

Studying people's heritage is a rewarding experience in the humanities. Besides preservation of traditions and culture, understanding people's heritage can be of valuable advantages. It is impactful in highlighting the diversities of human experiences, and insights into contemporary development. It can promote social harmony, foster economic growth, and foster community interests which can help relevant stakeholders in strategizing toward attaining responsible administration in the polity. Through the ages these knowledge have been significant in documenting histories, adopting anthropologies, creating contents for theater, and providing subject matter and themes for tourism, and studies in the liberal arts. In a nutshell, these provide channels for economic sustainability, social relevance, academic and scholarly insights, and vocational advancements.

The Ibibio are a people that live predominantly across the coastal areas of the Cross River basin region. Though officially unrecorded, there are predominant Ibibio resident

populations still existing within their aboriginal homestead in the south Western Cameroun province, around the Ekondo Titi, Bamuso and the Ndian surroundings. There are unrecorded Ibibio population still resident in Equatorial Guinea, offshoot of seafarers that sailed across the area which was popularly called Panya amongst the Ibibio. In Nigeria, there are significant Ibibio population in Cross River State though not certified as resident tribe, there is same in Abia State. In Akwa Ibom, the State is predominantly occupied by Ibibio, and it is the predominant language in Akwa Ibom State, with dialects that include Annang, Oron, Ibeno, and Andoni, even Efik is a dialect of Ibibio Language. What constitutes Ibibio may create debates as some people that are Ibibio reject and claim not to be. To this, Northrup (1973) asserts that the Annang, are a numerous branch of Ibibio- speaking people, and further on in same analogy declares Efik and Oron equally as branch of Ibibio extraction.

The Europeans and other foreigners at the 16<sup>th</sup>/ 17<sup>th</sup> century referred to the Ibibio as Egbo Sherry. In his geographical ontology and dictionary, Goldie (1862), asserts Annang as a district in Ibibio, and even refers to Efik as previous settlers in Ibibio. As asserted by Forde, & Jones (1950), there are 3 dominant sub groups that make the Ibibio race; Eastern Ibibio (Ibibio proper), Western Ibibio (Annang), Northern or Delta Ibibio (Eniong), (Oron and Efik). (Forde, & Jones 1950), assert that Ibibio is both an ethnic and linguistic group, that all Ibibio spoke the same language, and that the dialectical difference among the different sub groups are attributed to territorial isolations over a long period of time. They sum that linguistic homogeneity decreases with rise in population, and expansion of occupied territories.

Following the descriptions of different postulations that above analogy is derived from, the confines of what is Ibibio language and ethnicity are defined to include dialects and sub groups of Andoni, Annang, Efik, Ibeno, Ibibio, and Oron. This definition thereby defines the confines and distinctions of the art of Ibibio people (Ibibio Art).

In his analogy, Peters (2022), reports the art of Ibibio people as possessing depth in exhibiting African materials and culture in various forms with aesthetics considerations. The study highlights value in Ibibio art, and influence as it permeates into the global sphere of aesthetics to boost economy, tourism, entertainment, cultural awareness and creativity. Though with no clear definition of what Ibibio art is, the analogy highlights the experiences in Ibibio artistic contributions to boost ingenuity, diligence, creativity, and further development of the arts in Nigeria and Africa.

Ibibio art refers to the traditional art forms of the Ibibio people. It is the metamorphosis of the ancient creative practices through the evolution of innovative experiences. It is characterised by intricate wood carvings, exotic pottery wares, spectacular raffia tapestry, and other creative expressions that portend the community's wealth of cultural heritage which they transform to be perceived in media and techniques within their reach and acumen. These include folklore; tales, songs, odes and dirges, and traditional games and plays. These all custody avenues of preserving the community's identity, promoting cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs, with a harmony of symbolic traditional significance. Patterns of physical organisations in Ibibio art replicate geometrical designs, natural materials, communal subject matters and themes that exude the peoples reverence

to the earth their habitation, the connection with their environment, and the recognition of the roles and efforts of their ancestors in the individual and communal existences.

The compositions of Ibibio art are numerous. Within the structural and philosophical perspectives, they include materials, patterns, techniques, and methodologies. This study attempts to delineate these composites within the framework of structural contents to include; types of arts, materials in use and techniques, characteristic features, and the significance of the contents. And the philosophical contents that include concepts of community and social bonding, nature and the environment, ancestral relevance and the concept of life after death. The study also delves into the spiritual and supernatural content of metaphysics and its correlation within Ibibio sociology. This analogy employs a multidisciplinary approach and combines art education and historical analysis, cultural anthropology, and philosophical interpretations to elucidate these aspects of Ibibio art and the impact, as a subsidiary of Nigerian art in particular and African art in general.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study adopts 2 theories as frameworks to analyse this analogy. The first is the Structuralism in art history approach. This is for the interpretation of art and its historical context as postulated by Saadi Hassan. The second is the theory of intertwining art and philosophy as postulated by George Smith. These 2 theories are adopted because they relate to the 2 concepts of art under study within the contexts of structuralism, and art philosophy. These 2 postulations are adopted based on their connection to the studied subjects, and are used to express and interpret their features as embedded in Ibibio art. The theories present fundamental principles and concepts that underline art in the physical, and how the components relate with the realities of man as a being in nature and existence.

Hassan (2002), in the theory of structuralism in art history examines the underlying structure or forms of a work of art, looking at the relationship between the elements and principles of the work, and considering the way they interact to produce meaning. The analysis asserts that structuralism in art seeks to identify portrayed patterns, relationships, intent, symbolism and codes that embody the creation of art and how such embodiments are interpreted. At the contextual level, structuralism evaluates the physical and social contexts which artworks are created and analyses such works within the scope of a communal system, than focusing on individual artists and their styles. Structuralism is very relevant and effective in incorporating semiotics to analyse characters and their latent meanings in art works. Deep insight in structuralism explores the implications of the physical attributes of art in aesthetics and human existence.

In the second theory, George Smith explores the intersection of art and philosophy. Smith (2018), observes the artist as both a philosopher and a creator intertwined in an effort to understand and express the reality of human experience. The theory proposes background that incorporates the creative and intuitive aspects of art, challenging the traditional notion of philosophy in art that had immense preoccupation in aesthetics, expressing that the philosophy of art is beyond the relationship with aesthetics. The theory observes that aesthetics alone cannot dissect the depth of artistic relevance within the context of man and his environment, that aesthetics must be sieved through the scrutiny,

analysis, and in correlation with epistemology, the knowledge then presents adequate methodologies to highlight the role of art in shaping the context and understanding of humanity and existential reality.

The implications of above includes the essence of knowledge advancement in life. The theory implies interdisciplinary approach in scholarship in order to bridge gaps between art, philosophy, and other discipline. This definitely propels to challenging old notions which may have become moribund and obsolete, and encourages a rethink at previous assumptions. Creativity implies innovation, therefore introducing multidisciplinary approaches highlights the importance of imagination, explorations and adaptations, and knowledge advancement in the inquiry of existential realities.

The essence of interdisciplinary scholarship is highlighted in this report. The relevance in the academia cannot be overemphasised. (Smith 2018) asserts that it bridges gaps and integrates different scopes of knowledge in solving problems, thereby solutions presented to issues are ultimately impactful. It promotes whole understanding of complex challenges combining perspectives and techniques from multiple scopes to address militating anomalies. Interdisciplinary approaches in art scholarly adaptations foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving skills that enables practitioners to tackle real world problems from diverse perspectives. Interdisciplinary adaptations also promote deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of disciplines, leading to innovative solutions, new research questions, and a more nuanced comprehension in existentialism.

In analysing the theoretical framework of structuralism and philosophical insight in art, it can be summarised that structuralism examines the larger components of art structures, seeking to identify patterns, motifs, relationship, and codes that engulf art creation and interpretations. This approach considers the historical, cultural, and social, contexts in which artworks are produced. Structuralism provides a deeper understanding of the meanings and symbolism in artworks. On the other hand, philosophical insights into arts as informed by structuralism explores the nature of beauty, class, and standards in arts as quantified by aesthetics. It goes on to attain equilibrium between beauty in art and relevant knowledge of implying other components through distinct knowledge; epistemology, and the existence and reality of art (ontology). The insight encourages critical thought and analysis, and interpretation of works of art, dissecting the components and correlatedness of art and other spheres of knowledge.

### **STRUCTURAL INSIGHTS OF IBIBIO ART**

As asserted by Abraham (1990), categorisations in structuralism in visual arts includes sociocultural and historical contexts. The framework stress consistencies in structural patterns to include design and composition, art styles and typology, cultural influences and implications. Smith (2012), in a different perspective emphasise on the influences that motivate artists to produce. He asserts that even when style is a distinct form through which art is expressed, yet it is not fixed but evolves with time, experiences, cultural and historical factors, individual innovations, and very essentially environmental factors. He identifies form, space, colour, line, and schemas as components employed by artists to

express their arts which conform to the cultures and histories and identification of art toward particular pattern; identity.

In another perspective, Arnheim (2021), in his analogy links composition in art structures to the visual process in psychological terms and describes the creative way one's eye organises visual materials according to specific psychological premise. He lists components to include balance, shape, form, dynamics, expression, and growth, space, light, colour, movement. The study asserts that the components of art are organised in hierarchical structure, with the basic elements combining to form more complex units as forms, patterns, and composition. The analogy equally observes that artistic production are not just functions of individual creativity, but also relies on a shared visual language that is deeply psychological, with its own set of rules and conventions. Observing different scopes of analysing artistic components, this study adopts 4 categories of assessing structural insights of Ibibio art to include; formal classifications, semantic classifications, cultural classifications, and historical classifications. Each are segmented for detailed analysis and insights.

### **FORMAL CLASSIFICATIONS**

The classifications discuss the distinctions of style, medium, and composition of creative features that are known as art of the Ibibio. However in the analogy those features are arrayed within contexts of styles and types of arts, materials and media of use, and techniques, characteristic features, and the significance of the contents towards aligning to what qualifies such art.

**Style:** From origins, Ibibio people are not known to be loud and showy. They are reserved, and care less about establishing impressions. They are easily contented and are known to show little considerations for class and sophistication. Even Talbot (1915), asserts this in an observation of describing the Ibibio as lacking in sophistication and class, though demeaning and derogatoryly presented. These attributes have played out in their art. Traditionally, the major materials of art production across Ibibio include wood, clay, raffia, and palm produces including fronds, stalks, stilt, and canes. Over the ages, the Ibibio have employed the listed materials to produce their arts, adorning them with modest designs, with major preoccupation towards the utilitarian values than aesthetics. Ibibio art is known for features in naturalistic forms, these include human figurines, plants, animals, and descriptions to depict deity and creations that are spiritual. In other situations decorative patterns are adopted to provide balance, or written as inscriptions to inform. These arts are most times rendered in undetailed realistic manners, but sometimes based on the imaginative strength of the artists and their media manipulating strength, elements as anatomy, balance, and proportions may be compromised, especially amongst unschooled artists, such works may appear with distorted forms, however some others may be stronger and have better defined features. These have contributed to establishing artistic characteristics and identity in some art forms. There are also some known styles of intricate designs, shapes, and symbols which adorn their arts telling stories as milestones and heritage.

The Ibibio believe that strength is fierce, both amongst humans and spirits, hence the ancestors are represented as strong spirits, scary, and with awe. These are represented in numerous *ekpo* masks which are scary and with awe, to command influence and extract

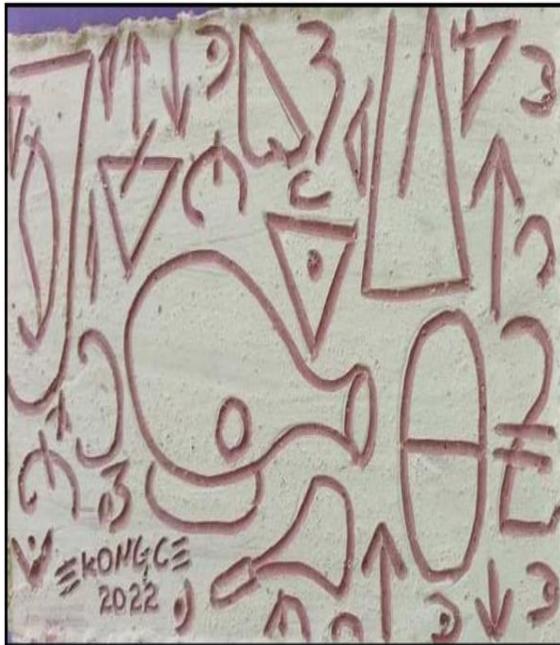
obedience and respect to communal ethics which *ekpo* acts as police. *Ekpo* masquerade carries machete, this confirms the intended awe it is to depict. It is represented with black face, geometrical shapes to represent the features as nose, eyes, and the lips, though the artists try to make the features close to real as they can. On the other hand, the mermaid, *ndem*, is seen as a meek spirit, beautiful and benevolent with attributes of protectiveness. This the Ibibio represent with masks that are smaller, more intentionally made beautiful with thin and tapering lips, straight nose and fair complexioned, depicted in pink, yellow, or hues closely related with fairness, for feminine beauty. *Uyai* and *mfonn* are Ibibio words both representing beauty, though *uyai* better represents female beauty.



The Ibibio concept of beauty are multi-faceted. *Uyai* and *mfonn* are concepts that can interpret Ibibio beauty within the categories of gender or ranking. *Uyai* may represent feminine or higher level of beauty when compared to *mfonn*. *Mfonn* relates more to goodness and proper arrangements while *uyai* directly translates to beauty. In masculine beauty there is little care on details, but there can be representations in shapes to represent objects as in *ekpo* masks mentioned above. *Ekpo* mask cannot be termed fine if it is beautiful and welcoming, but can only be considered beautiful if it commands the awe and fright desired to scare onlookers.

**Fig. i. *Ekpo* masquerades depicting masculine and feminine. Observe the blackness in the male, and the yellow pigment to depict the fair lady (Yellow sisi/ Mami water/ Mermaid)**

Though Ibibio are known for naturalistic art forms, there are prominent exercises in decorative Ibibio art patterns. These are in forms of providing balance, filling spaces or as inscriptions. Since the early years and even till present day, there are recorded Ibibio



decorative arts, prominently displaying *nsibidi* or other native motives. *Oberi okaime* is another Ibibio script writing system which like *nsibidi* is gaining more prominence as the days go by. Beyond *nsibidi* and *oberi okaime*, sometimes these decorative patterns often feature as geometric shapes and spirals that are used for embroidery on pottery wares, fabrics, and carved wooden furniture used as decorative panels for doors. Most times these decorative depict significant symbolism as myths and legends that tell tales and convey meanings in respective adaptations.

**Fig. ii. *Ibid Abang- Clement Ekong (2015): Oberi okaime figures adopted in ceramics plaque art depicting Ibibio traditional musical instruments.***

#### **MEDIUM**

**Wood:** The most prominent media of Ibibio art is wood, this has been so since early origins. Boat making was a popular trade amongst coastal Ibibio natives, Itu, Uruan, Oron, Ibeno, and Ikot Abasi are known boat makers. They produced different designs of boats to float their sea trawling expeditions. There are also wooden wares like mortars and pestles, spoons, plates, equipment and tools. The coastal people of Oron, the Delta Ibibio are known for the *ekpu* figurines, masks and figures of stylised human innovative forms. Ikot Ekpene, (Annang)- Western Ibibio too are known for wood carving of massive masks, carved seats, and tables. Structurally, most Ibibio wood crafts are adorned with naturalistic forms but with blends of geometric designs for symmetry. Symbols and motifs are common and most compositions are centralised for symmetrical balance and intended proportion. Ibibio wood works are commonly produced with geometric forms intricately combines with naturalistic patterns.

**Clay:** Clay is another major material as far as Ibibio art is concerned. The people showcase their modeling mastery in pottery and general ceramics creativity. These are ranges of functional and decorative wares including water storing pots, cooking pots, plates, urns and cups, and storage vessels. There are known crafts ornaments as beads and pendants, and also clay figurines of animals, humans, and mythical beings, these are ornamented on the wares produced as decorative and serve as ritual objects of religion. Clay wares are some of the most favorite ware that Ibibio artisans depict decorative of their *nsibidi* and *oberi okaime* and reflect their community's cultural identity, values, and history. Prominent ceramics industrial centers in Akwa Ibom State include those at Ikot Ebom Itam, Itu Local Government, and Ikot Abasi, Etinan Local Government Areas. But local industries of pottery abound as in Ikot Esse in Uruan, and Uruk Uso in Ikot Ekpene. Structurally most Ibibio pottery are of simple forms in modelling. However introductions of decorative patterns create elegance

and the rare characters of motifs give them very unique and traditional looking identity which Ibibio clay wares are known for.

**Weaving:** What constitutes the geographical environment of the Ibibio have several materials that are used to produce different aspects of weaving. There is raffia, palm fronds and stalk, sisal, mat-plant (*mfang aya*), and shells ranging from sea animals, coral shells, and nuts. Raffia and palm fronds are popular in basketry, canes are used for baskets too but since its stronger and less flexible it is difficult to be manipulated but more expensive in purchase as the materials are more prominent. There are weavings of bags, shoes, and other apparels that are woven from a range of these materials. Mats from *aya*, ropes from *ndidi* (sisal), cane chairs and tables from *obong* (cane), are popular wares of woven materials. The structural implication of weaving crafts embody intricate patterns like stripes, chevron, and spirals. Natural colours are sought in the environments and even till date, there are different shades and colours of kaolin that are adopted for pigmentation in the wares. In this aspect of production, Ibibio crafts are known for characters which reflect community's identity, values, and history. However advancement and technology have replaced most techniques and materials previously used. Most dyes are now manufactured chemicals and machines aid as looms and other manipulating accessories.

**Organic materials:** With civilisation, technological advancement, and contemporary evolution in art, Franklin & Kaplan (2019) observe that all traditional wares have advanced. The analogy presents discourses in different array of disciplines, and how concepts of development are used in relation to the arts. Recent evolution in art includes adaptation of local materials in contemporary arts. Such materials include natural materials. Even beyond this stage, synthetic, recycled, and processed materials have been incorporated in Ibibio art. Such materials include animal hides, feathers, shells, nuts, and found objects. Others are the synthetics which include dyes, paints, metals, fabrics, plastics, etc. the recycled materials include processed woods, upholstery, leather, etc. these are injected with features to project the characters that define identity and scope of what quantifies Ibibio art. The incorporation of synthetic materials in the production of traditional art has been a gradual process. Many factors contribute to the gradualness, including modernisation and globalisation.

The availability of materials of various substances inspire explorations and motivate innovation, these become media where artists inject their cultures, values, symbols of traditions to explore into new perspectives. This expand creative possibilities and introduces new materials, media of delivery, and methods of manipulations. Maintaining their traditional essence while incorporating them in the experimentations of modern styles and materials have contributed to the contemporary structuralism that Ibibio art is viewed for today.

**Composition:** Analysing composition in artwork based on elements and configuration that make the work ensures effective examination of structural contents. Observing composition reveals organisation of the physical components. There are rules that order compositional analysis, one is as asserted by Dow (1998), a rundown of the rules include symmetry, asymmetry, balance, and proportion. These are effective tools in creating sense of order and coherence, and guiding the viewers' eyes as they glance through to perceive the art. Understanding composition is a pivotal factor in structuralism in art. It ensures understanding the composites of the art, symbolism and purpose, and interpretation of both latent and secular meanings in the art depending on the subject matter and theme. Effective

balance and harmony of visual elements ensure that artists control viewers' aesthetic response as they navigate through viewing such art. Composition in Ibibio art convey cultural values and symbolism, with intricate patterns and motifs arranged in a way that reflects the cultural influences on the art vis-à-vis the heritage of the community.

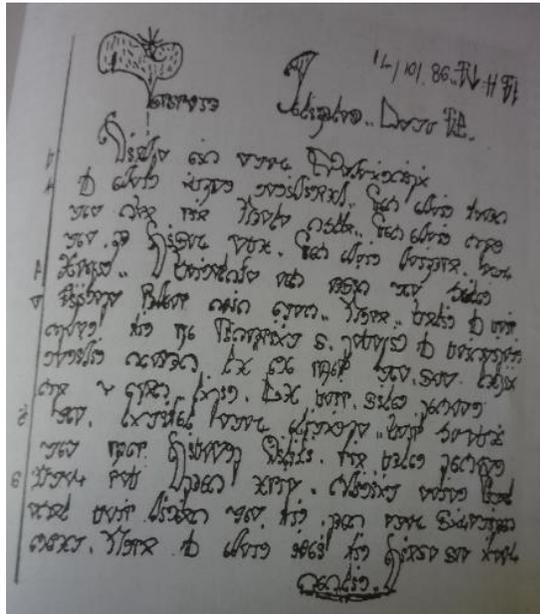
### SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATIONS

Meanings are sacrosanct in all Ibibio aspects of life. The people have avenues of presenting their meanings in every concepts and contexts. These span various perspectives including linguistic, cultural, historical, and semantic contexts. These express different facets of life especially given the fact that the peoples' traditions are involved with religious and spiritual, which are interwoven with esoterism and concealed and restricted activities.

**Iconography and symbolism:** Ibibio people are used to using symbols, motifs, and images to convey meanings in general communications. These are used to express complex ideas and beliefs through visual representations. Such representations have immensely contributed to contents of what constitutes Ibibio art. They believe in belonging, and as observed by Talbot (1912), the Cross River basin area was infested by cult practices, from *ekpe, ekpo, obon, abang, akata, ibaan isong*, etc. This caused needs for restrictive communications, and it was one of the reasons *nsibidi* was adopted as restricted language for specified communications. These were creations of signs and symbols to represent meanings. Till today, *nsibidi* has stood out as one of very prominent feature as far as Ibibio art is concerned. The features do not only enhance communication, but the visual values and the complex arrangements present beautiful and intricate patterns that engage the eyes in pleasing manner. This, Ibibio people have really maximised the uses recently.

Another very prominent herald of iconography in art of Ibibio people is the *oberi okaime* scripts. As recorded by Abasiattai (1989), the *Oberi Okaime* was a Christian movement founded among the Ibibio in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They developed a special language and scripts which aided communications. The scripts, also known as *oberi okaime* was made of intricate symbols and signs. There are similarities with, though not as popular as *nsibidi*, it has been adopted recently as a prominent feature in Ibibio art. Prominent artists that adopt *oberi okaime* in modern art includes Prof. Johnson Ekanem and Prof. Clement Ekong, both indigenes of the areas of origins; the old eastern Ibibio, and art lecturers in the University of Uyo. *Oberi okaime* does not involve any esoterism, it is even intended for simple understanding of all and sundry. The scripts and symbols contain pictorial attributes and depict meanings, they have stylish patterns that present appealing motifs that are relevant as aesthetic items in design. Example includes as previously displayed from Clement Ekong's adaptation for ceramics design.

Ibibio art in general have aspects of iconic and symbolic perspectives, the wooden sculptures



contain traditional figures that are encodings to interpret events, milestones, age, or intents. It is common to see ceramic wares, baskets, calabash, and wooden furniture with inscriptions to denote roots or identity. On the whole iconage and symbols combine as one of major representatives of identity as far as the arts of Ibibio people are concerned.

Fig. 3. Psalm 23 written in *Oberi okaime* scripts (source: Abasiattai (2008))

### Cultural classifications

The relationship between Ibibio culture and their arts are reciprocal, each concept influences the other. Ibibio art transmits the embedded features

of culture and at the same time preserves them as they propagate from age to age. The many representations of productions that can qualify as art in Ibibio becomes thoroughfare to the world-view of the people. The norms, religion, values, beliefs shape the themes, styles, and techniques employed to produce the arts. The Ibibio imageries encoded in their art are the structures as skeletons of their culture. They depict the myths, folklore, and convey complex themes and subjects. They had different methods of displaying these arts as previously mentioned through sculptures, pottery, textiles, organic materials etc. Body art and hair styles were other ways the Ibibio easily depicted their art. As observed by Umoetuk (1985), these were measures to emphasise beauty. Different patterns both abstractive and pictorial were employed by artists to present intentions.

Body arts depicted different patterns drawn on female bodies to represent childbirth, weaning, or the fattening room era (*mbopo*). Body adornments regarding the men could be witnessed during inter-tribal wars when they were adorned in white kaolin (*ndom*), coloured kaolin (*iduod, nsang*) or charcoal (*nkang*), depending on the gravity of the intent. Sending messages or practicing divination, or for social implications had different modes of designs or medium of application. Men could also practice body art for social reasons like masquerading, and to depict grade or title. Beyond aesthetics, culture carry significant tales of the history, customs and traditions of the people. Culture supply contents that feature symbolic representations of milestones and heritage, the art of Ibibio has contents which includes obeisance to ancestral spirits, commemorative recognitions to heroes past and present, and serve as souvenirs of communal.

### HISTORICAL CLASSIFICATIONS:

The art of Ibibio in particular and traditional arts of Africa in general has a way of linking with histories of such people. The art of Ibibio people in their sculptures, textiles, pottery wares, and sundry technical produces provide valuable insights into the early day practices of the people. The symbols and imagery of the arts most times are hinged on past events. They depict mythological beings, deities, and legendary figures. These provide

outlays into their collective memories. The ancient Ibibio tombstones depicted trades and offices of the dead, craftsmen sculpted beings to represent the dead, adorn in their occupational apparels to depict what they were, chief, hunter, etc. The *nwommo*, Ibibio traditional house of dead, made from thatch and sometimes mud was insight to Ibibio ancient architecture since the rectangular patterns was in replica of what they lived in. Even till now, some arts depict the ancient trades of the people, contemporary arts depict scenes of fishing, hunting, farming, trading, or wars, and marriages. These are artistic ways of telling tales of the ancients. The proportions have been pruned from exaggerations to semi-realism and realistic styles, it has revealed the impact of historical events as patterns of migrations, trades and crafts, and sundry practices of the people.

### **THE PHILOSOPHY OF IBIBIO ART**

The cultural and traditional practices of Ibibio offer insights into the human conditions as it relates to the natural world and the spiritual realm. The Ibibio believe in the interconnectedness of all things. The relationship of man within his environment, and the dependence on the spiritual to direct the affairs of man within the earthly realm. Within this scope of study, the philosophical implication arrays areas of investigation to include ancestral reverence, community bonding, nature and environment, spirituality and the supernatural within the life of the Ibibio as an entity, and as it influences or is influenced by art. Many of Ibibio art is involved in spiritual, metaphysical, and existential inquiries. The basis include fundamental questions about humanity, reality, and the relationship with the universe. For example, the *ekpo* masquerade is a replication of departed ancestor. Crafting the mask though a purely sculptural process concerns some presumed spiritual rituals intended to invoke the departed spirits to the masks. The spirit of the mask controls the human that wears it, and through communicates with the priests who relates information from the ancestors to the progeny.

The stylised forms and symbolic motifs of most Ibibio art involved philosophical concepts towards balancing the cycle of life and death, and the harmony between humans and the natural environment. Most artistic practitioners in early Ibibio indulged in certain meditation and rituals of spiritual practices to transcend the mundane and link with higher reality. The dexterity and precision involved in the process of producing some kinds of art were believed to be aspects of contemplation and meditation made possible through mindful interaction with the cosmos for deeper purpose and foresight. The Ibibio like to depict mythical and legendary beings with forms of spiritual backgrounds. The *ekpo* masquerade is a clear representation of dead ancestors. This philosophical insight asserts their belief in spiritual implications in shaping human destiny within the scope of the natural world laden with uncertainty and bleakness of knowledge. Again, the conception of *ekpe* masquerade, a high evolution of artistic techniques is believed to have originated from the spirit of the seas (mermaids), the spirits believed to be with effeminate beauty offer design and concept that has been transformed through artistry to the beautiful edifice seen as *ekpe* masquerade.

Ibibio art had deep reverence of the ancestry, this they depict through features symbolising the ancestors in their arts. This is a testimony of the importance the Ibibio hold towards the continuation of life after death, and the belief of the connection of the living and

the dead, through shared heritage and cultural traditions. Through their art, the Ibibio adopts balance and harmony, they advocate equilibrium in life, and encourage balance between physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Ibibio art celebrates community and collective identity. It asserts shared values, customs and traditions, and cultural practices. These philosophical understanding epitomises communal solidarity and community identity, it prompts the inter-relativity and connectedness of individuals, their past, nature, and their spiritual consciousness.

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This study elucidates some insights in assessing the functional attributes of Ibibio art. It reveals some complex and intricate adaptations of patterns as symbols and motifs to represent meanings and interpret structures. It presents the importance the Ibibio hold towards their ancestry, and the reverence to the earth their habitation. The structures and composites of what qualifies Ibibio art was discussed and the yearning of the equilibrium the Ibibio seeks to level all facets of life has been explained. The essence of structuralism and philosophy as composites of artistic whole has been raised. It has been asserted that structural and philosophical elements work together to create rich and multifaceted visual language that reflects Ibibio artistry, and the relevance to interdisciplinary perspectives have been highlighted.

The structural and philosophical insight in Ibibio art have been shown in perspectives of relevance to community identity, interconnectedness of all things, the importance of ancestral reverence, and need to equate balance in physical and philosophical. The study also discussed on Ibibio view of role of spirituality in communal life. Through the different perspectives of patterns, symbols, and motifs discussed in this analogy, this study has presented Ibibio art as a composite of African art, offering views into the complexities and wealth of human existence.

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