Cotton thread and indigo dye.
29.2 cm x 18.1 cm.
UCLA MCH X83-792.

SOCIAL AND SACRED CONTEXTS

This compendium of domestic use gives some idea of the gourd’s fundamental value. The gourd’s domestic utility enhances its ability to communicate social as well as economic values. Among most of the groups represented here, large collections of decorated gourds are an essential part of bridewealth payments and dowries. Among the Karekare, for example, traditional marriage customs dictate that a bride take to her new husband as many as thirty large water containers, forty medium-sized food bowls, and thirty smaller drinking vessels, all decorated. The considerable effort or expense involved in assembling such a collection indicates the importance of a woman’s transition to full marital status. Collections are often amassed over a number of years, drawing on the services of many close relatives. While forms of payment may vary, it is likely that an artist’s investment of time is repaid through reciprocal social obligation. It is interesting to note that among the Yungur, who require the groom (or groom’s family) to give the bride gifts of decorated gourds, men have recently taken up the art.15

Because the products are needed by men, it is apparently legitimate for men to make them even though Yungur women traditionally provided the service for their male relatives.

The culmination of marriage agreements often involves more than simply an exchange of gourd capital; some form of community display is also required that usually includes all of the household items that have been amassed. Such public exhibitions demonstrate the woman’s ability to set up an independent household and her husband’s capacity to provide. The size of the collection varies, however, as does the kind of ceremony with which it is displayed, both at the time of a girl’s wedding and thereafter. Among the Ga’anda, a special wickerwork basket (kan ‘lan’ nda) is made to present all the decorated gourds collected by the bride (Pl. 7). Their neighbors, the Yungur, hold a final marriage ceremony (kohn seketa) where the bride dances with a similar basket (gilango) balanced on her head (Chappel 1977:14). It is filled with all the calabashes and other gifts given to the bride by her suitor and relatives. While wearing a special string skirt (gofo) made of twisted baobab pith dyed with red ochre, the Yungur bride is presented with a final gift by her
husband—usually a decorated gourd—thus signaling that he may now make sexual advances. This gift, called a dinge gabo ("gourd of the skirt"), was explained by Chappel’s informants as "the gourd which loosens the bride’s skirt." If the bride accepts it, it signifies that she will abandon her girlhood tradition of wearing string aprons and adopt a covering of cotton strips that marks a woman’s elevation to full marital status. Berns’ Yungur informants added that before the bride formally joins her husband, she lines up a series of decorated gourd bowls (dinge gabo) extending from his compound entry to the door of their conjugal room. Still wearing her string skirt, she walks along this path, straddling the gourds with her feet. This act similarly acknowledges her formal acceptance of marital responsibilities.

The importance of a woman’s gourd collection in establishing social and economic status is nowhere clearer than among the pastoral Fulani. A young girl sets up an independent household and gains full marital status two or two and a half years after the birth of her first child. Her formal entry into her husband’s homestead is marked by two complementary ceremonies, both called bangal, that publicly establish the respective economic positions of each partner. At the first, a man is given a herd that is his symbol of economic independence. At the second, a girl is elevated to the status of wife and mother through the formal gifting and exhibition of household items including gourds, mats, cloth, and a bed. The large number of milk gourds in her dowry marks a woman’s right to milk her husband’s herd. After this inaugural public display, a Fulani woman always keeps a part of her "trousseau" carefully wrapped up for ceremonial occasions in a pack called a kaakel. A kaakel can hold fifty (or more) elaborated calabashes nested in sets of ten—each set completely encased in a woven mesh—and all supported on two wooden poles (Beckwith and van Offelen 1983:20). This portable bundle is kept near her bed and is ready to be loaded onto a pack ox whenever the group moves. The "working" portion of her calabash collection remains accessible for daily use. Whenever a new camp is made, the wife arranges her working gourds on a special platform "in order of decreasing size and running in the feminine direction north to south" (Chappel 1977:10).

This procedure allows a woman to project publicly the dynamics of her changing economic position—the size of her gourd collection increases with each addition to the size of her household. Also, whenever a girl is born, more decorated calabashes are added to the kaakel pack in preparation for the time a woman will pass them along to her own daughters when they marry. It is clear that among the pastoral Fulani, a woman’s prestige is intimately tied to her reproductive powers, i.e., the increase of the size of the domestic work force. The size of both gourd collections thus reflects the economic viability of the household and a woman’s satisfaction of essential familial and social obligations. The elaborate displays of the contents of kaakel packs at communal celebrations held each wet season provide an additional arena in which women can publicly proclaim their successes (Pl. 8). Such dramatic statements about personal wealth complement the way a man’s presentation of cattle declares his economic position.

Gourd containers are ideally suited to a nomadic lifestyle because they are light, durable, and portable. And because they can be tightly nested, it is possible for women to accumulate them in enormous numbers. Chappel has convincingly demonstrated that the kaakel pack and its elaborate display are objects of considerable aesthetic attention (1977:24). The amount of care and skill lavished in arranging the kaakel represents more than a desire to produce "a convenient and manageable load." The fact that its contents are carefully laid out for public exhibition shows it to be appreciated more than a reflection of its owner’s economic and social prestige. Whether embellishing a domestic scene or a ceremonial occasion, these gourds are treasured for their aesthetic value.

There is ample evidence that the ornamentation and display of decorated calabashes serve the same purposes for other groups living throughout the northeast. The aesthetic and expressive importance of gourd display is elaborately resolved among the Tera. One year after a woman is married, a low mud platform (kankame) is built along the inner wall of her sleeping room. The platform provides a permanent stage for the exhibition of calabashes, pottery, and other household items (Pl. 9). Pots can be stacked up to four high and two deep, with each pile surmounted by hemispherical gourd bowls nested in groups of three or four. This kind of arrangement does not make for easy accessibility. The Tera room illustrated in Plate 9 reflects the conscious aestheticism of these exhibitions despite the fact that it contains no mud platform. It reveals especially well the careful placement of each item, including the circular mats (faifai) on which gourd ladles are aligned in pairs. The possibility exists that the permanent, linear arrangements of Tera household items may have been influenced by the seasonal exhibitions of the pastoral Fulani. Although the Tera tradition is waning today, some women still enhance the interiors of their rooms by painting their mud
platforms with red and white pigments and laying tesselated potsherd pavements dotted with encrustations of cowries.

These Fulani and Tera displays make a dramatic statement about a woman’s marital status. At the same time, individual decorated gourds are ubiquitous emblems of women’s household roles, obligations, and accomplishments. They can embellish any of the domestic contexts in which they appear; the rather stark interiors of rooms are enriched by calabashes drying on a rack, covering water pots, or even hanging on a wall. Among the groups living in the Potiskum area, large gourds are fitted with twisted leather thongs both to make them easier to handle and to allow them to be suspended so that the interior painted surfaces show. This ornamental aspect explains why so much attention is lavished on decorating a surface that most likely is not visible when the container is being used. In fact, the painted interiors of many gourds from this area are dull and dark from the smoke of cooking fires in the rooms where they are displayed. Mbugi women suspend tall stacks of calabashes bound up in twisted rope nets (taluqu, “dish road”) in their rooms (Fig. 21). Other groups, such as the Dera, store their collections in large wickerwork baskets. Mbugi women mount clusters of gourds on tall pottery stands that are positioned around the interior of their rooms (Fig. 22). While storage may be the ostensible purpose in most cases, the Mbugi example shows that gourds are intentionally arranged so as to be pleasing when looked at and thus worthy of admiration. Moreover, as these objects also represent original dowry or bridewealth payments, they may be regarded as indicators of status in much the same way as they are for the Fulani.

While most of the contexts just described represent private aspects of display, there are times when decorated gourds are publicly visible and likewise carry a socioeconomic and aesthetic message. Despite the widespread adoption of industrially manufactured deep enamel basins, women from most groups often prefer to use large gourd containers to transport food and other provisions (Frontispiece; Fig. 12). As Plate 10 and Figure 23 show, women also use hemispherical bowls as “bonnets” for protecting their infants from the hot sun or from the rain.9 Many groups use gourds in this way and, among the Bura, a baby’s “layette” typically includes a number of “hats” in various sizes that are often passed around within a family (Fig. 24; B. Rubin 1970:23). Yet, as the illustration here reveals, ornamented gourds also make a bold visual statement. Today they form a part of an aesthetic display that involves
various machine-made wrappers and baby slings, as well as imported blouses, polyester headscarves, and plastic jewelry. An early photograph of a Pabir woman included in Meek shows that before the adoption of factory-made goods, a baby was carried in a leather satchel covered with a cloth binding (1931 I:143). The mother wore only a large homespun wrapper so that the ornamented gourd bonnet was a striking addition to other traditional aspects of self-display, such as facial scarification, elaborate coiffure, and beaded or metal hair, lip, and ear ornaments. Such ensembles (either traditional or modern) of which the distinctive designs on a gourd helmet or carrier-container form an integral part, function as ethnic identification. A woman’s membership in a particular group and her marital status are conveyed in explicitly visual terms that have special relevance in areas that are ethnically complex and fluid. Nomadic Fulani women lavish considerable attention on their appearance before traveling to markets—sometimes fifteen or more kilometers away—to sell their wares. The milk gourd on a woman’s head is carefully integrated into a program of personal adornment intentionally designed to be visually pleasing, and some of the complex motifs engraved on the gourd are often depictions of facial scarifications (Fig. 25), There is some evidence that particular gourd designs once served as modes of identification for individual Fulani lineage groups; by repeating certain facial markings, group membership could be visually reinforced (Chappel 1977:30).

Visual and symbolic associations of women with gourd containers extend to festival contexts. Many groups in this region organize elaborate communal gatherings to celebrate life-cycle transitions. As indicated above, a new bride’s collection of gourds is frequently exhibited once she marries. Additionally, young women who participate in marriage festivities often carry a decorated gourd in one hand as a part of the costume that distinguishes the occasion. Among the Dera, a series of special dances is performed each year at Ilela, a festival traditionally held to honor newly initiated boys, and girls who had completed an elaborate program of body scarification. Initiation and scarification are no longer practiced in Dera communities as essential prerequisites to marriage. Ilela, however, has been preserved as a social event where boys and girls who will soon marry, publicly display their finest ornaments and exhibit their dancing skills. During the festivities, a line dance called Bwalin is performed by young brides, each of whom vigorously jingles a decorated calabash bowl (lib’ e wu) with leather straps threaded through brass rings (Pl. 13).
23. Bura woman using a gourd bonnet (dambelam) to protect her baby from the sun; Wandali. 1969.
24. Bura gourd bonnet (dambalan) with leather straps. 22.5 cm x 24.3 cm. UCLA MCH X83-760.

25. Pastoral Fulani milk gourd (tappande). 33.3 cm x 36.2 cm. UCLA MCH X83-785.
Gourds are worn by male participants at a preliminary dance held before Xono, the Yungur initiation ordeal. Chappel regards the gourd helmet, "covered with a layer of beeswax in which ears of corn are embedded, and also the red seeds of the Crab's eye vine," as essentially an armature for the additive elements that carry either a decorative or symbolic meaning (1977:14). The corn may be a reminder of a young man's obligation to maintain an independent household by farming, as the gourd bowl reminds a young woman of her domestic responsibilities. Chappel notes that at the completion of Xono, the father gives his son a hoe and his mother gives him a gourd (1977:14). Again, the message conveyed concerns the fulfillment of familial obligations. The fact that the boy usually passes the gourd given by his mother to the girl who has brought him food during his period of seclusion (whom he may not necessarily marry) suggests that the calabash bowl is associated with female nurturing.

Although gourd bowls that figure in dance contexts are frequently associated with women and women's roles, an interesting exception is the calabash dance rattle (kichibyok) carried by Dadiya men at Kal festivals held every five years to celebrate the coming of age of young men (Fig. 26). The male aspect of this calabash is established by the iron stirrup-shaped handle attached to the gourd with strips of leather. The crest of the handle takes a distinctive and elaborate form, with a wrapped extension and an open basket of twisted strands threaded through small rings. This iron-handled dance attribute complements other iron regalia carried during Kal and other Dadiya dance festivals celebrating the activities of men. For example, forged iron daggers (nyansanye) are used to acknowledge publicly the skill and bravery of young men during battle or in the hunt (cf. Fig. 27). The handle of a ceremonial dance sickle (jënt nyì; Fig. 28) carried by men during Kal, even more closely resembles the iron portion of the kichibyok. The association of iron regalia with the role of men as protectors and providers has transformed the gourd "dance rattle" into an emblem of male rather than female status.

Hemispherical gourds are held during annual agricultural rites, again usually by women. For example, Ga'anda women carry small gourds during Xombata, the major event when thanks are offered for the passage of the year and for a successful harvest. At a similar festival performed by the Dera called Menwara or Menjoli ("beer of acclamation"), women from the chief's household dance with decorated gourds or with elaborate pottery vessels balanced on their heads (Fig. 29). In Shani, a

29. Dera women from the chief’s household dancing with ornamental pots (wunda) and calabashes (lib’e) during Menwara; Shani. December 10, 1980.
major Dera town, this event has largely been translated into a Moslem festival honoring the chief. Nevertheless, certain traditional elements have been retained to distinguish the “ethnicity” of the proceedings. In addition to the procession of women bearing the pots and calabashes that signify their role in the economic success of the previous year, a program of dance performances from surrounding localities is staged, including Bwalin (see Pl. 13).

Infusions of Hausa/Fulani culture, as well as Western modes of dress and adornment, have strongly influenced the appearance of both men and women in festival contexts. Early photographs however, especially those taken in more remote and hilly regions, show how prominently gourds were once used as expressive ornaments on ceremonial occasions. One illustration of the Fali, who live in the Bossoom region just across the Nigerian border in northern Cameroon, shows a funeral rite at which every woman and girl is carrying a gourd in one hand and a digging stick in the other—all that is “worn” other than highly conventionalized forms of jewelry and body decoration. As ornaments, these essential tools may be emblematic of women’s roles in an agricultural society—the stick may signify their participation in cultivation while the gourd marks their responsibility in converting produce into food and beer. By carrying these insignia, women symbolically offer spirits of the deceased the same nourishment they provide during life (Huet et al. 1978:106).

The significance of women as food preparers should not be underestimated and the gourd container, used to present the endproduct of this effort, is a meaningful emblem of this role. Men depend on women for their meals, as well as for the beer that households must contribute to various social and ceremonial activities. According to the rules of etiquette followed by most groups, only women can cook and prepare the staple foods of the diet. Additionally, women often are the sole cultivators and gatherers of supplementary foodstuffs used in preparing the soups and stews that accompany the main carbohydrate staple. These labor-intensive activities are the primary means by which women maintain considerable household leverage and authority. Men who are, or who become, bachelors must find a female to cook their daily meals, putting them at a distinct social disadvantage. A husband will often go to great lengths to secure his wife’s loyalty and to reduce her temptation to seek a more satisfactory arrangement. Meek’s observations of the Gabun (Gabin), a Ga’anda subgroup, provide one particularly revealing example of the relative strength of a woman’s household position:

If a wife chooses to leave her husband she can usually secure another without difficulty, and I observed among the Gabin many elderly men who were wifeless and were dependent for their food on the wife of a younger brother. Many elderly men have to do their own cooking. Wives are the beer-makers, and they do not hesitate to prevent their husband distributing beer to friends of whom she does not approve. A wife may even prevent her husband from attending a cooperative day’s work on a neighbor’s farm (at which beer is freely distributed) if she considers that he would be better employed at home. A case came to my notice in which a man’s wife prevented him from carrying out an order of the chief, until he had finished his work of hoeing her farm. I also came across an instance of a wife living with her husband and children in the home of her parents, because she could not endure her husband’s relatives (1931 II:380–381).

Thus a woman’s gourds are not symbols of domestic drudgery, but rather reflect the pride she can take in her social and economic position. Indeed, when a Longuda woman decides to run off with another man, she secretly sends all her best calabashes to her new home before absconding in the dark of the night (Meek 1931 II:338).

The Ungur maintain an interesting custom that reinforces the conceptual link between gourds, women, and household stability. At second funerals of elderly men or women (Wora) held annually during the early planting season, wives of the deceased’s sons gather together and ceremonially break one decorated gourd each. They then retrieve a large fragment and dance with it during the Wora festivities. The significance of this gesture is two-fold: on the one hand, it marks the separation of the dead from the realm of the living; on the other, it conveys a message to the deceased about each wife’s commitment to look after and feed his or her offspring.

Communal beer drinking, ranging from the purely social to the highly sacred, is another context where gourd containers figure prominently. In most areas, beer made from guinea corn or millet is served in a calabash bowl, often sealed on the inside with red or black pigment. Like palm wine in southern Nigeria, beer is an “important social lubricant, indispensable for hospitality and conviviality” (Northern 1984:134). Beer made from grain has also long served as an important nutritional supplement. It appears that beer consumption in traditional times was restricted to a number of sanctioned social or ceremonial occa-
sions. Substantial quantities of beer were available during the farming cycle, when households provided it in payment for assistance given during days of communal clearing, planting, and harvesting (when caloric boosts were most necessary). More recently, however, brewing beer has become a profit-making enterprise, and women sell it to neighbors or take it to local markets. The hub of men’s social interaction, whether in the village or in the market, is usually wherever beer is being sold (Pl. 12). Although round bowls are often used, elliptically shaped gourds are especially suitable for drinking purposes because the narrower end helps prevent spillage.

While decorated gourds are usually used in secular contexts where beer is consumed, there is a strong prohibition against using them during ritual activities or for sacrificial libations when sharing beer is a primary means of cementing ties with powerful spirit forces. This may be because the exclusion of women from sacred contexts is extended to the objects made by their hands and with which they are so intimately associated. In fact, among the Ga’anda, the same proscription is extended to the food bowls used regularly by ritual priests—they may never eat from the decorated containers a Ga’anda wife typically uses for serving her husband’s meals.

Ceremonial beer drinking is a key part of the Kwefa festival held by the Ga’anda in the dry season following the death of a chief or a high-ranking community leader. In Figure 30, lineage heads representing the main families living in the Kancikta ward of Gabun (one of the three Ga’anda subsections) are preparing to honor the spirit of a recently deceased community leader. Each elder is given one undecorated elliptical gourd (sambata) filled with a special kind of sweet, unfermented guinea corn beer (yemnda) brewed only on such ritual occasions. This beer is also poured into the ceramic vessels (hlefenda) where the spirit of the deceased has been localized. They are removed from the room where they are kept after the burial of the corpse to participate in the event held in their honor (Fig. 31). What is significant about this procedure with reference to the subject at hand, is that a small calabash bowl is always kept over the mouth of the pot. While it functions to prevent dangerous forces from entering

31. Ga’anda flutists serenading the vessels (hlefenda) containing the spirit of the deceased during Kwefa; Gabun. Note the gourd bowls protecting the mouth of the vessel and serving as the spirit’s drinking “cup.”

November 24, 1980.
the *hiefenda* unbidden, it also suggests that, like their living counterparts, the spirits of the deceased must be provided with an appropriate container for drinking beer. To further distinguish their ancestral identity, the gourds kept on *hiefenda* are not entirely plain, but are dyed red, a color that has strong ritual connotations for the Ga’anda and other groups. It is associated with various activating substances used for invoking the aid of spirit forces. Red hematite (*Fe₂O₃*) is one such substance and it may be a substitute for animal blood that is used for sacrificial propitiation.

The use of gourds in contexts where powerful forces are invoked is fairly widespread. The suitability of the gourd for such situations may be due to its essential and acknowledged role in household processes. David and Hennig’s observation about the contextual versatility of pottery containers also applies to calabash containers: they would hardly have figured in ritual or sacred contexts unless they were already highly valued in domestic and social spheres (1972:28). The fact that most belief structures are organized to perpetuate processes of material survival suggests that objects critical to the latter can assist either actually or symbolically in the efficacy of the former. It should be noted, however, that gourds are rarely used as containers for directly localizing spirit beings, a function in this general region reserved primarily for ceramic vessels of various kinds. For example, the Yungur use terracotta vessels as permanent repositories for spirits of ancestors worshiped during annual ceremonies (see Fig. 125). During preburial rites, however, a gourd coated with red ochre is placed on the head of the corpse where it remains until the interment a few days later (Chappel 1977:16). This gourd is carefully preserved so that if a member of the household falls ill and it is determined that a particular ancestor is responsible, the gourd can be used as a drinking cup by the patient. It is believed that the positive forces associated with the deceased are captured in the gourd and it is thereby effective as an instrument for curing the patient. It is interesting to note that while the same custom is described by Meek, he claims that gourds smeared with red mahogany oil were only placed over the heads of old women who had died (1931:464). In this case, it can be argued that the gourd is an appropriate receptacle for concentrating the forces associated with women and their role in sustaining household well-being. Both Meek and Chappel have proposed, however, that the gourd is used as a substitute for the ancestral skull that might once have been employed for this purpose.28

Another spirit-charged context in which gourds play a significant role was documented among the Mbula. They use large bottle gourds (*du*) as emblems of membership in the powerful men’s secret society, Ngala.29 Young men who are candidates must complete two to three months of intensive training before they qualify for entry. Once initiated, Ngala members are able to cure any illness, physical or otherwise, that afflicts an individual or an entire community. Gourd bottles, *dungala* ("gourds of Ngala"), are also used by members as dance rattles during festivities held by the society.

In every Mbula community, the hamlet head, his spirit priest, his earth priest, and his war chief each maintain a public display area (*tankul*) for keeping ritual paraphernalia. The *tankul* illustrated in Figure 32 belongs to the earth priest, Menzali, who oversees the forces responsible for crop fertility in the Dilli area. The focus of this shrine is a large fig tree, in front of which a three-pronged branch has been erected for suspending certain ritual items. The prominently displayed *dungala* signify the Menzali’s membership in Ngala.

If an Mbula leader dies, all of his personal belongings are displayed on his grave—dug directly in his compound—for one year. The example in Plate 11 was constructed to honor the highest spirit priest of one hamlet in Dilli.30 The number of *dungala* placed on the grave signifies his former rank in the Ngala society. At the end of the year, Ngala members gather at the grave site—each carrying his gourd emblem—to celebrate the final departure of the ancestral soul. The grave itself is then destroyed.31

It should be noted that during the preburial festivities held by the Mbula for a high-ranking elder, a plain calabash bowl is placed on the funeral bier along with the corpse. After burial, the gourd is moved to a forked stand (*kul*) erected alongside the grave. Beer and other offerings are regularly placed inside the bowl during the year the deceased is honored, serving much the same purpose as the small red calabash on the Ga’anda *hiefenda* vessel.

Divination is another context in which gourds play a crucial ancillary role. A number of groups in the region use calabash bowls as divining instruments. Among the Yungur, the diviner (*sife*) uses a plain gourd (*ding pengpeng*) sealed with red ochre to hold water into which various ingredients have been placed to call forth spirits associated with the proceedings (Fig. 33). Essentially, the *sife* asks a series of yes/no questions that are answered by the position of a small gazelle horn dropped into the water—a vertical position (seen in the photograph) is affirmative and a horizontal position is negative.32

Mwona diviners (*felan*) also use a gourd bowl to...
hold a liquid medium for determining the causes of illness. Like the Yungur, the introduction of various objects into the liquid ritually activates them. By touching the places on the body where symptoms are felt with these items and then returning them to the liquid, the diviner reaches a diagnosis.

Other instances where gourds assist in divination were documented among the Pero (a Chadic group who live in the Benue-Gongola Valley) and the Burak (their Adamawa-speaking neighbors). Pero diviners (ankwandul) use two wood figurines (kwandul) to help determine the cause of illness; the Burak call the same type of figurines kapgonol (Fig. 34). The male/female pair each has an iron spike in its base and is embedded in the ground wherever the diviner is called to work. The figures are rubbed with red ochre and further activated through offerings of water, beer, and/or sorghum placed in tiny calabash bowls wedged directly into their mouths. The intervention of the two wood figures in decision-making is supported by the diviner’s name, ankwandul, “one who masters the kwandul.” Actual divining takes one of two forms. In one, a gourd bowl is employed and, as in the preceding examples, it serves as a tool that is essential for manipulating the primary divining device. The medium in this case is a small animal skin (shinu) with the head attached, studded with abrus seeds and pierced by an iron ring from which two bent-iron bells are suspended (Fig. 35). One end of the skin is tied in a loop and placed around the diviner’s toe, while the shinu’s head rests on the edge of the gourd. The animal then dances up and down “on its own volition,” jingling vigorously, until the diviner has arrived at the correct answer.

Two other divination procedures have been recorded that employ bottle-shaped gourds as primary instruments. One is practiced by the Tula, a group who live in the hills northeast of the Pero. The diviner uses two gourds, one of which is a sprinkler filled with water and sealed with wax; and a second that is used as a rattle and contains seeds (Fig. 36). To initiate the divination procedure, the bottom of the water gourd is tapped against the rattle. While questions are being asked, the diviner inverts the sprinkler and, depending on how the streams of water are configured, determines whether an affirmative or negative answer is indicated. The rattle is used to announce that a final diagnosis has been reached.

32. Display (tankul) of ritual paraphernalia owned by a Mhula earth priest, including large gourd bottles (dungala) that signify membership in the Ngala secret society; Dilli. Other displayed objects, such as bits of bicycle chain, keys, and iron bracelets, all contribute to the Menzali’s ritual authority over things “found” in the earth. January 1982.
33. Yungur diviner (sife) using a plain gourd bowl as an instrument; Dirma. Note the vertical position of the small gazelle horn in the water indicating an affirmative answer to the diviner’s question. May 1981.

34. Burak wooden divination figurines (kapgonol) with tiny gourd cups wedged in their mouths; Burak. March 1982.
35. Pero diviner (*ankwandum*) demonstrating the position of the divining apparatus—an animal skin (*shinu*) studded with abrus seeds and cowries on the edge of a gourd bowl; Gwandum. March 1982.

36. Tula diviner using gourd sprinkler to determine answers to his questions; Tula Yiri. 1970.
The second divination procedure employing a bottle-shaped gourd was recorded among the Bura. A gourd covered with strips of leather and cowrie shells (satau) is suspended on a string tied to the diviner’s toe and held at the other end by the diviner’s hand (Fig. 37). Questions are asked and if the gourd slips down the cord to the ground—i.e., tension is increased—an answer is indicated.

One final example of divination was documented among the Mumuye who push a long tubular gourd into a deep elliptical bowl filled with water to create a “voiced” oracle (pc:A. Rubin, December 1984). The long flaring gourd is particularly distinctive as it is bound with rope while still on the vine to create deep grooves in its surface. Near the mouth, spider egg sacs are applied with gum so that when the tube is forced into the water, the air rushing out causes the gourd to “speak” with an eerie whistle.

The use of gourds in divination may relate to the symbolic meanings that have been associated with these containers. For example, Chappel argues that for the Yungur, a plain gourd “has the power to restore the status quo whenever the social situation has been, or is about to be, dangerously disturbed” (1977:18). Illness or accusations of witchcraft certainly represent such disturbances and thus make gourds appropriate symbolic as well as instrumental components of divination. Berns was told by Yungur informants that two disputing villages could arrange a truce if a “white” (i.e., plain) gourd was overturned at the crossroads between them. Chappel notes that the “simple expedient of putting down a plain gourd” extends even to disputes that have reached serious proportions in a household, lineage, or village (1977:20). He stresses the symbolic link between a “white gourd” (ding pengpeng) and its power to “cool” or, literally translated, “to make white” (kal pengpeng) a person (1977:18–20). Placing a gourd between two disputants cools them so their anger will be dispelled. According to Chappel, a plain gourd is given by parents to the woman who will perform scarification on their daughter. It acts as a cooling agent and ensures that the woman cutting the marks has the patience to do her work well. While these associations between relieving situations of stress and the presence of a plain gourd seem reasonable, Chappel’s contention that the essential shape and botanical structure of gourds explain why they have become expressive equivalents for the stability and order to which societies strive may be stretching the argument too far (1977:16–18). Rather than a response to the physical regularity and symmetry of this fruit with features like “a mass concentrated around its centre” or “the balanced ‘pull’ of
the dynamic forces irradiating in all directions from a center which, far from being ‘dead,’ is alive with tension” (Chappel 1977:16), the translation of the gourd into a primary symbol of social integration may more likely derive from its fundamental economic utility, a utility that ultimately does depend on a respect for the gourd’s inherent structure. What was suggested earlier based on the observations of David and Hennig should be repeated: gourds were not likely to have become an important focus of ritual and, by extension, symbolic thought unless they already were highly valued in domestic and social spheres (1972:28).

This point is supported by the ways a gourd is used as a vehicle for symbolic verbal expression. The Hausa proverbs presented earlier are clear examples of this application in common speech. Additionally, the nickname purportedly coined by the settled Fulani for the “pagan” groups living in the Ga’anda Hills—the Ga’anda, Gbinna, and Yungur—is “Lala.” Temple defines this word as “an old calabash broken into many parts,” referring in a derogatory sense to the scattered and decentralized populations of this rugged area (1919:255). This definition implies that the Fulani regarded such settlement and organizational patterns with disdain, having as little utility as a broken gourd. The Kanuri, who also saw themselves as culturally superior, apparently gave one of the groups living around Potiskum its name—Karekare. According to Meek, the name derived from the composite character of the group, which resembled “a patched-up calabash” (wasak kere; 1931 II:230). Whether the origins of these ethnic designations and their meanings can be attributed to Fulani or Kanuri sources remains equivocal. However, what continues to be important is how gourds have been used, both actually and metaphorically, as expressive devices.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN SOCIAL AND SACRED CONTEXTS

Gourds, both decorated and undecorated, figure in various public festival contexts not only as ornaments and symbolic attributes, but also as musical instruments. During sacred or ceremonial events, gourd instruments can create distinctive tonal “voices” that link the community to the forces regulating its survival. One of the more notable examples is the large drum (dimkedim) played at the Wora funeral celebration held by the Yungur (Pl. 14). Two large globular gourds, joined together with rope covered in dung, create a hollow wood cylinder fitted with an antelope (duiker) skin head. Only at such funerals are three of these spectacular drums played together by male members of one royal lineage (Bera Kumla; Fig. 38). The origin of this drum configuration is not known, although the Yungur claim the first set of dimkedim was brought by early migrants from their ancestral homeland, a hill named Mukan. This ascribed provenance historically legitimizes these drums and associates them with powerful ancestral forces that are traced to this site and upon whom the Yungur depend for survival. Beating these drums at funerals may be a way of establishing contact with the spirits of family ancestors, including the recently deceased, who are collectively honored on such occasions.

A related tradition is maintained by one Longuda subgroup, the Dumna Zerbu, who use a calabash wind instrument (sumeh) to communicate with powerful supernatural forces (Fig. 39). The sumeh is made from one large spherical gourd to which a long curved tubular extension is attached with gum and rope. This trumpetlike instrument is offered sacrifices to ensure the efficacy of its voice. It is blown at dances held at the end of the farming season to thank the forces responsible for the successful harvest. It is heard again during festivities that inaugurate and promote the success of dry season hunts. The sumeh used on such occasions is kept in the village and is replaced if broken. It is regarded as a copy of the first instrument given to the Dumna Zerbu by their spirit guardians; the original’s sacred voice is heard each time an elder dies, emanating from the nearby hills where it is thought to be enshrined. This suggests a certain consistency in the association of resonating gourd voices with the transition of the living to the realm of the dead.

In Bodwai, a Gbinna village located near the Gongola-Hawal confluence, an unusual gourd trumpet (muhanna) accompanies a band of xylophones (shilan′ja) at funerals (Fig. 40). It is approximately 1.5 meters long and is made from four tubular gourd sections, each one fitting into the other, increasing in diameter from the mouthpiece downward. The joints are rendered airtight with an application of the rubbery substance produced by sweat flies.36 Similarly constructed and contextually related gourd trumpets, called vadāsō, are used by the Mumuye in Vabó masquerade performances associated with collective funeral celebrations (“all souls festivals”; Fig. 41).37 The trumpets’ voices evoke the presence of ancestral spirits who are called forth during such celebrations.