Case 6-Afr-Mali-Dogon-Nommo-Crocodile Mask-Bandiagara Cliff-Wood-late 19th c.



Fig. 1. Mali-Dogon-Nommo-Crocodile Mask-Bandiagara Cliff-late 19th c.

**Case no.: African Masks**

**Accession Number:**

**Formal Label:** Mali-Dogon-Nommo Crocodile Mask-Bandiagara Cliff-late 19th c.

**Display Description:**

Nommo is male the cosmological source of water upon which Nyerum’s social control of water is predicated. The dancer wears this crocodile mask horizontally on the top of the head and looks out through the open mouth as the benevolent crocodile totem of Nommo. This is an example of obtuse Dogon metaphoric cosmology. Water spirits (*Nommo*) were, in fact, considered to be the ancestors of the autochthonous people still living in the Bandiagara Escarpment, i.e. the Tellem, before the arrival of the Dogon in ca 1100 CE. They were called "Binu" which was a personal, familial nick-name, because they were, in fact, ancestors of the Dogon family.

**LC Classification:** DT551.42

**Date or Time Horizon:** 19th c

**Geographical Area:** site of Djenné-Djeno, Mali, on the flood plain of the Bani River,3 km (1.9 mi) s of modern town.

**Map:**

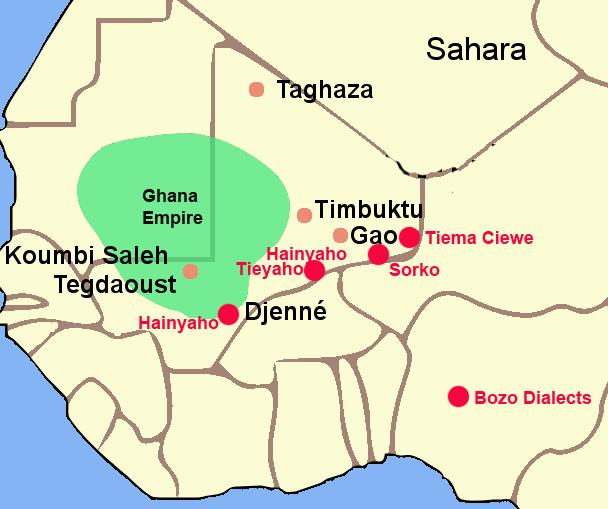


Fig. 2. The Ghana Empire 1000-1400 CE showing the ethnolinguistic groups along the Niger River. After <https://i.pinimg.com/564x/c6/a7/9b/c6a79b7443105f363ff965ebf420b7fd.jpg>



Fig. 3. Trade routes of the Western Sahara c. 1000-1500. Goldfields are indicated by light brown shading. After https://i.pinimg.com/564x/69/15/ce/6915ce6f4fd34025787fe59bd44f9eae.jpg

This trade resulted in an increasing surplus that helped expand urban centers such as Gao, Timbuktu and Djenné.

**Geographical Area:** Mali-Mande-Bandiagara Cliff



Fig. 4. Mali-Mande-Bandiagara Cliff after <https://img.ev.mu/images/attractions/2208/960x640/799108.jpg>



Fig. 5. View of a Bandiagara Cliffside village [14.231845°N 3.487967°W](https://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Bandiagara_Escarpment&params=14.231845_N_3.487967_W_type:landmark_dim:62km). After https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&ved=0ahUKEwj5waPJp5HZAhWBwVkKHZhgBSAQjRwIBw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FBandiagara\_Escarpment&psig=AOvVaw0Ir0wDNT368SI7kOytTx85&ust=1518007144365002

GPS: [14.231845°N 3.487967°W](https://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Bandiagara_Escarpment&params=14.231845_N_3.487967_W_type:landmark_dim:62km)

**Cultural Affiliation:** Dogon

**Medium:** wood

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition: original**

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

An ancient Dogon myth of the world before the appearance of death described elders as becoming too old. When they reached this age they would change themselves into a large water being, a Nommo, like a crocodile/ Then they would dwell in ponds and rivers and begin a new life, helping maintain the source of water for their descendants. Meanwhile, Nyerum, the female counterpart and Cosmic consort of Nommo would enforce the social responsibilities of the Dogon People for protecting the water sources that Nommo has created.

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