

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

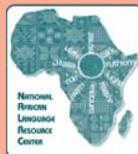
The Idoma people are predominantly farmers. They grow yams, millet and sorghum, and place these cultivations at the heart of their festivals. And as farmers, they have a long market tradition in a region of neighboring ethnic groups who have intermarried with one another. The Idoma people are also renowned face and helmet mask makers, which they display during their festivals. These masks are worn by dancers during funerals, typical for them are specific shape of scarification, with an open mouth and smooth coiffure.

They consider worship of ancestors an important aspect of daily life. The resurrection of the dead is an important element of their religion and the cult of the spirits of nature, *Anjenu*, is celebrated through the mediation of figures preserved in shrines. Idoma religion focuses on honoring lineage ancestors. Funeral ceremonies among the Idoma are often quite dramatic, with greater attention afforded to members of the community who have reached a combination of advanced age and prestige. Extensive funerals are held for both women and men in preparation for sending them on their final journey away from the village to the spirit world across the river. A memorial service, is held some time after the original burial in order to ensure that the dead pass on to the ancestor world in proper style.

STUDYING IDOMA IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at

<http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



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IDOMA



IDOMA WOMAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

WHO SPEAKS IDOMA

They are primarily found in the lower and western areas of Benue State, Nigeria, and kindred groups can be found in Cross Rivers and Nasarawa States in Nigeria. The Idoma are known to be warriors' and 'hunters of class, but hospitable and peace loving. The greater part of Idoma land remained largely unknown to the West until the 1920s, leaving much of the colorful traditional culture of the Idoma intact.

The population of the Idoma is estimated to be about 3.5 million. Many Idoma kindred claim an ancestral homeland called Apa, north-east of the present day Idomaland due to pressures of Northern invaders as recently as 300 years ago. The historical Apa was part of ancient Kwararafa Kingdom (Okolofa Kingdom), a confederacy of several peoples. Informants in other ethnic groups have corroborated existence of this kingdom, chiefly the Jukun who also believe they once ruled a confederacy called *Kwararafa*.



Festival of Idoma gods

WHY STUDY IDOMA

Linguistic evidence suggests that Idoma have lived in their present day region for at least four to five thousand years, and that they probably moved into the area from the north along with the forbearer's of Yoruba, Bini, and Igbo peoples sometime before that. All of these peoples belong to the Kwa family of languages, and linguists are able to estimate separation times based on the differences in their individual languages. There is a lot of knowledge of African tradition to be learned from Idoma people, particularly the elders who have a lot of history stored up in memories, and most of whom only speak Idoma language.



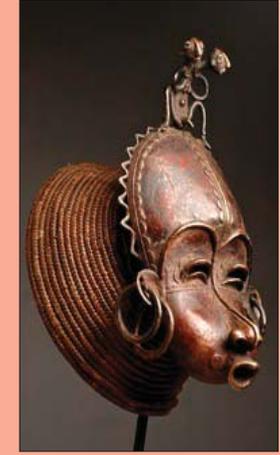
Idoma Traditional Attire



Idoma man at Agila carnival



Face mask



Helmet mask



Idoma drummers at a wedding



Idoma people celebrating their annual carnival at Agila