

Nsibidi: A lost script

Nsibidi is a writing script dating back to the 5th century A.D. Used primarily in Eastern Nigeria and Western Cameroon in an Area known as the Cross River region of Africa.



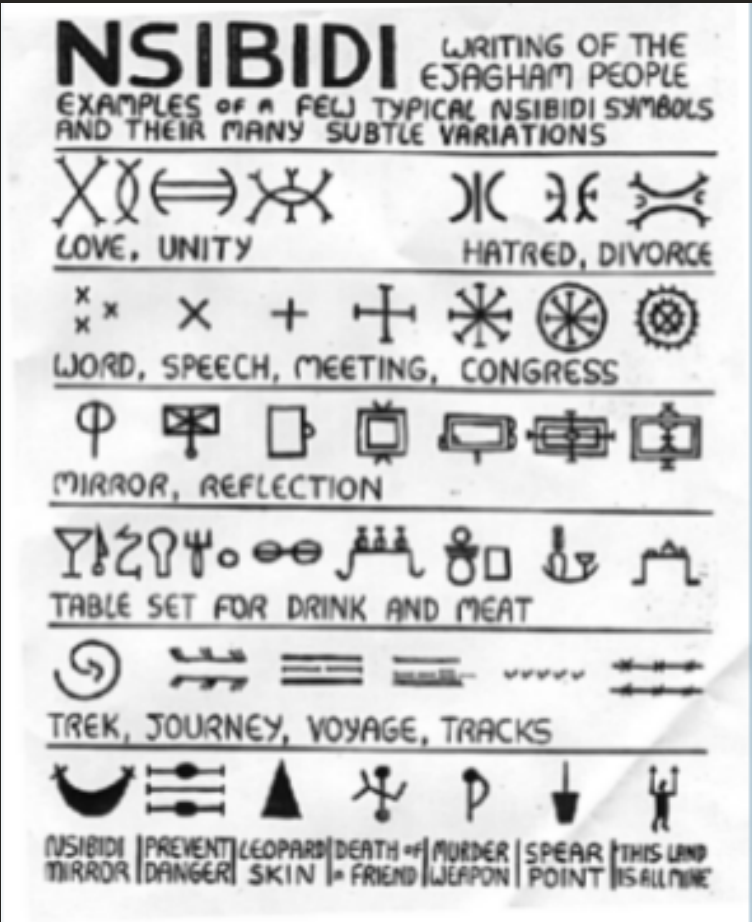
Nsibidi's first use dates back to 400 A.D. with the Ejagham (Ekoi) people of Southeastern Nigeria. The script was also used by various other indigenous tribes in the Cross River region.

Ekoi Mask- Note the inclusion of complex, flowing shapes- similar to the flowing shapes present in the Nsibidi script.



Basics

Nsibidi utilizes an ideographic script, although some logographic elements are also present throughout. Although different regions spoke different languages, they were all able to decipher Nsibidi. The symbols are arranged in groupings in lieu of the linear scripts most are used to. The writing also did not follow any sort of pattern and was most often based on the convenience of the writer and their stylistic choices.



Some Examples of Nsibidi ideograms

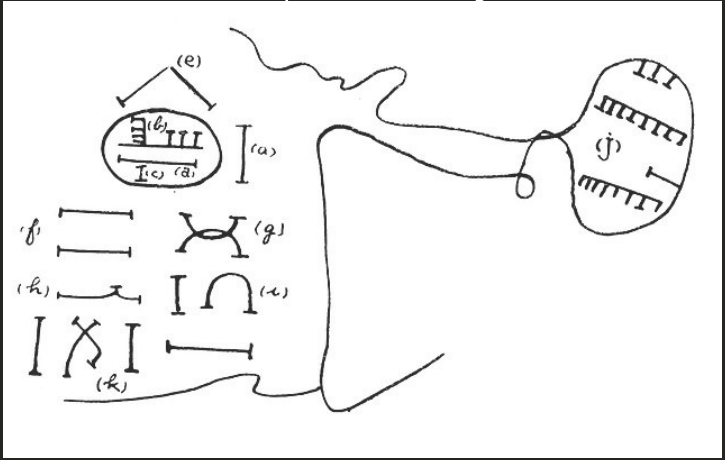
Decline

Nsibidi was used primarily during the 4th-15th century A.D., but experienced a decline during the 1400s when Europe began to colonize Africa. Portuguese missionaries thought the script was too difficult to decipher and did not put in the effort to attempt to learn. The script then began its decline into obscurity and was not heard of again until a few centuries later.

General Use

Nsibidi employed the use of multiple forms of communication. The most common use of the writing script was for the making of Ikpe, which were more complete groupings of symbols that told more complete stories of an event. Ikpe was also used for other civic matters like civil disputes.

An example of Ikpe. Note the groupings used to portray a complex story.



Resurgence

Nsibidi was largely untouched and unheard of in the modern world until the 2018 film *Black Panther*. The movie brought a new resurgence of interest in Nsibidi because Wakandan, the language and writing system used in the movie, was heavily influenced by Nsibidi.

Wakandan alphabet used in the movie *Black Panther*. Note the similarities to Nsibidi.

