



Fig. 6: Ritually prepared rice in wooden bowls (*pwa*) and soup from the head and hocks of a sacrificed bull in the iron pot, adorned with protective fiber cords and leaves (Diboke village, 1985).

stained black and ornamented by carved designs. They may not be touched or removed from where they hang on the house wall without ceremony, requiring the sacrifice of a chicken, the firing of rifles, and the laying out of a mat. Another indication of the importance of the insignia is that these objects are named. One pair of bowls was called "heaven" and "earth," but most pairs and spoons were more commonly identified by proverbs.⁹ Other women who perform similar tasks for lesser feasts may have smaller versions of the bowls. The *klowainyno* always has one or two close aides who are younger wives in the lineage, one of whom is likely to be designated as her successor.

As in so many matters, no one would claim a fixed procedure for selecting the titleholder. Wom-

for all the local *wunkade* (plural form). During a public procession each of the *wunkade* carries the spoon filled with rice kernels, peanuts, and coins which she and her followers throw into the air, her aides singing to incite her to ever more generosity. From outside the area, several notables are invited to be impartial judges to determine which woman holds first rank. Men wearing respected masks sing the praises of the winner and her predecessors. The aging *wakede* passes the spoon on to a successor she has chosen from among other wives within the lineage. To be publicly accepted by the community as the titleholder, the younger woman must fulfill her tasks at a commemorative feast for her predecessor.

⁹ George Harley, a medical missionary in Liberia, made brief reference (1950: 40) to an earlier head woman in Kran country (the name given We speakers in Liberia) who prepared food at a feast for all the people. She was called *ma boa*, "What thing do I lack?", and she and her aide were said to be depicted on the handle of the spoon. He noted that the spoon was ordered by the woman's husband about 1860; it was used at public feasts to offer food to ancestral spirits. It is not uncommon presently to refer to the *klowainyno* by the proverbial spoon name.

en may claim to have undertaken the tasks because of a motivation given by God (Gnonsoa) but they invariably credit their own initiative and eventual selection by other women, a mother-in-law who held the title, or other wives within the husband's lineage, always emphasizing the support of other women in the village. Elders of the husband's lineage may also take the initiative, and in any case their support must be sought. It is the men who order and pay for the carved wood insignia.

The festival is the setting for public display and praise for the *klowainyno*. The day before the slaughter, she, her praise singer, and her closest aides, dressed in fine clothing and accompanied by numerous helpers waving ladles, bush knives, and axes, that is, implements women use daily in food-preparation, parade through the village chanting the special phrases that announce their intentions and call on other women to help. They visit heads of households and other active or aged *klowainyno*



Fig. 7: Ceremonial wooden spoon, *poloh*, carved ram's head at handle (1985).

to assure them of a good meal, thereby receiving token gifts, usually coins. At a large festival, after the death of the bull, there is a competition for the honor of cooking the bull's head between local wives and visiting groups of married women. At competitions I attended, after extended verbal debate among the groups of women, the winner was determined by internal politics, rhetorical skill, and gifts.

When the feast food is ready, the *klowainyno*, wearing a long, decorated robe (equivalent to an elder's gown), and her aides in their best three-piece outfits or fancy long gowns proceed to the dance clearing where the community and guests are assembled. The Generous Provider carries the spoon or a sword in her hand, an aide headloads the pot of meat, and one or more young of the husband's lineage bring in the great covered bowl(s)