

Joan Wescott Research Archive Finding Aid

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Biography

Joan Arato Wescott (1931-1989) was an anthropologist who specialized in Yoruba art, culture, and witchcraft. She collected Yoruba artifacts throughout her life and donated the majority of her extensive collection to the Lowie Museum of Anthropology (now Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology) at the University of California, Berkeley shortly before her death. The British Museum also holds donations from Wescott and the Metropolitan Museum, New York holds objects collected by Wescott..

Wescott was born Joan Mildred Arato on May 19, 1931, in Brooklyn, New York. She started her BA in English literature at Hunter College from 1948-1951 but would take a break in 1952 to marry Roger Wescott (1925-2000), an anthropologist. She continued her bachelor's at Boston University adding minors in both philosophy and psychology. After graduating in 1955, she briefly worked as a reference librarian for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This same year Roger Wescott received a Ford grant to conduct field research in the Nigerian Yorubaland, and Wescott accompanied him, conducting research of her own. While in Nigeria, she took extensive photographs of her experiences with local people while conducting participant observation ethnography. During a break in 1956, she traveled to Europe to explore private collections of Yoruba art before returning to Nigeria. It was at this time that she also began her academic collaboration with British anthropologist Peter Morton-Williams (1923-2018) who was also on the trip.

After returning from Nigeria, Wescott went on to study for her master's degree at University College London, this time specializing in anthropology. She worked closely with Morton-Williams using her ethnographic data from the Nigeria trip to write papers on Yoruba culture and art. In 1958, she divorced Roger Wescott although the two had been separated since at least 1956. In 1962, her master's program had to be delayed due to health concerns. Wescott's doctor believed that she'd contracted a bowel infection in Africa and she was also suffering extreme fatigue from hypothyroidism. Although her health problems continued, she was able to complete her master's and go on to do a PhD also at University College London. During her doctoral studies and later postgraduate work, she wrote many more papers on Yoruba culture and began studying English witchcraft. She wanted to compare witchcraft in these different countries in a book called "The Invisible Society." Although this book was drafted and sent to editors, it appears to have never been published.

While in London, Wescott sold many of her photographs and bought Yoruba art from auctions, creating a personal collection of sculptures and artifacts. She continued to travel to view museums and private collections of art and surrounded herself with academics. These trips included Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, and Denmark where she visited the museum of her friend the Danish painter Asger Jorn (1914-1973). She also traveled to Jamaica in 1966 to study rasta culture with Francis Huxley (1923-2016), although she did not publish any academic work from this research.

Wescott's academic career came to a halt once again in 1969 when her hypothyroidism returned and worsened to the point of myxedema. In 1971, she finally received a proper diagnosis and treatment plan for her disease but lost much of her social and academic life during this time. In 1978 she once again found herself in poor health when a carpet beetle infestation in her London flat left her with a prolonged allergic reaction. In an attempt to rid the flat of the beetles, she used pesticides which instead poisoned her, worsening her condition. These allergies and pesticide poisoning were very frustrating for Wescott, who had only recently begun to feel healthy after her long struggle with hypothyroidism.

After living in London for 24 years, Wescott moved to Lake County, California in 1981. Her extensive collection of over 200 Yoruba artifacts and her library of 2,000-3,000 books remained in storage in London. In 1985, she started the process of donating these collections to Lowie Museum. She was friends with Phyllis Bischof, the Africana librarian at UC Berkeley, and believed that her donation would be a good addition to the pre-existing Bascom collections. In a letter to the Chancellor, she made an outright donation of her collections and library with the intention of them being used for teaching and research.

The university was originally led to believe by the shipping company that it would cost around \$3,000 to ship Wescott's collection to the museum. They soon found, however, that the storage company demanded unpaid storage charges be paid as well as a repacking fee for some of the items that were not in condition to be shipped. The total fees soon increased to \$9,000, and the university was reluctant to pay despite having already accepted Wescott's donation. Faculty in the Anthropology department were concerned that the collections could be lost if they were not shipped quickly because the storage company in London was going out of business. Phyllis Bischof and Lowie staff, Frank Norick even went as far as donating \$1,500 each to the shipment of the collection. Eventually, after many letters discussing the issue, it was decided that the Chancellor's circle funds would be used to pay for the shipping in total. Finally, after four years, the collections were shipped in 1989 and accessioned into the collection at the Lowie Museum on July 25, 1989. Wescott's friends were present at the arrival of the items to separate Wescott's personal belongings from the collections, but she could not be there herself.

Just a month after her donation arrived in Berkeley, Wescott died on August 28, 1989, in Sonoma County, California. She was 58 years old. Her collections along with her personal documents and extensive photo albums remain at the Hearst Museum.

Summary of Accession Acc.4428

Acc.4428 catalog numbers:

- 5-10900 to 5-10996 (narrow band weaving samples)
- 5-14864 to 5-14901 (Ibejis)
- 5-15196 to 5-15240 (various Yoruba: thorn carvings, figures, masks, pulleys, amulets, emblems)
- 5-15243 to 5-15270 (textiles)
- 5-15300 to 5-15317 (wood objects)
- 5-15382 to 5-15385 (Egyptian Ushabti, Amulets)
- 5-15460 to 5-15462 (Textile samples, Peulh tribe, Mali)
- 7-9663 (weights and scale components)
- 8-9351 (Demeter figurine, central Greece)
- 9-18670 to 9-18675 (Various Asia, chinese fabric panel, Japanese Netsuke, Buddha figurine, Indian ritual spoon)
- 9-18696 (Folding Koran stand, Turkey)
- 11-43901 to 11-43918 (Arrows from Papua New Guinea, clubs, staffs, spatulas, mask, Maori Taiaha, paddles from New Caledonia and Bougainville)
- 18-1588 to 18-1594 (Indonesian Hindu puppets, Malaysian Kris handles, figurine)

Box List DOC1957.1: Archive Boxes ARCV-97 through ARCV-105

Box ARCV-97

1. Folder with typewritten draft of book and handwritten annotations
2. 6 folders of thesis materials: information on Yoruba cults and gods, bibliography paper on Eshu Elegba co authored with Morton Williams, correspondence surrounding thesis and bibliography
3. Notes on Iconography with drawings/charts
4. Book of "Primitive Art Bibliographies" from the library of the Museum of Primitive Art in New York
5. Drafts of papers written during years at University College, London
6. Information on how field work was conducted in the 1955-1957 trip to Yorubaland
7. Three maps of Nigeria
8. Miscellaneous photographs (copies from ones in photo albums)
9. Two stacks of notecards with notes
10. Correspondence with Daryll Forde for thesis, University College London
11. Box with reading notes and field notes on religion, art, and crafts
12. 2 boxes of index cards with alphabetical notes and definitions of Yoruba words/citations for papers

Box ARCV-98

1. Photographs of Wescott and Peter Morton-Williams in Nigeria 1955-1957 as well as New York 1958 and a childhood photo of Morton-Williams
2. Envelope of photographs of Wescott in Nigeria
3. Loose photographs of Yoruba sculpture
4. Bag of metal artifacts TEMP 2018.304 - two pieces of reworked scrap metal and one chain
5. Bag with worked stone artifact shaped like a semicircle TEMP 2018.283
6. Brown box of notecards and newspaper clippings
7. Newspaper clipping from The Listener December 9, 1971
8. Stack of typewritten papers with handwritten editing
9. Envelope of photographs of Wescott and Ray Tongue
 - a. Photo of group labeled Wescott, Ray Tongue, ?, Jack Hearst, Janet Grayson, Theo(?) Grayson May 19, 1956 Nigeria
 - b. Newspaper page from The Observer November 20, 1960 labeled "Ray Tongue"
10. Three large note cards with handwritten notes on twins from mythology
11. Typewritten draft of a paper "The Trickster-Archetype in Schizophrenia" by Philip Metman with handwritten notes
12. Copy of paper "Note on the Autonomous Psyche and the ambivalence of the Trickster Concept" by John Layard January 1958
13. 1956 paper "Identification with the sacrificial animal" by John Layard
14. Stack of letters concerning photograph sales by Wescott
15. Draft of review of "Radih's The Trickster" by John Layard
16. "African Symbolism" by Edwin W. Smith
17. Stack of paper drafts by Wescott and correspondence
18. Three boxes of index cards for Yoruba Bibliography
19. Stack of extra index and note cards
20. Folder of assorted papers
 - a. Draft of "Notes Towards a Study of Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations" paper by Wescott
 - b. Handouts and diagrams about prenatal development
 - c. Invitation and reply slip for event by the Clinical Theology Association December, 1979, London
 - d. List of papers by Frank Lake (leader of Clinical Theology Association)
 - e. Clinical Theology Association informational pamphlet
 - f. Red notebook with handwritten notes
 - g. 5 pamphlets by Frank Lake
 - h. Leaflet to subscribe to the Clinical Theology Association
21. Folder labeled JW;s Photographs for White Man/Black Man
22. Folder of two Wescott articles on witchcraft and psychosocial techniques
23. Drafts of "the Invisible Society" book by Wescott

24. Notes on The Invisible Society and seminar paper 1967-1971
25. Folder of various notes from 1968
26. Notes of Yoruba art collections at various museums
27. Various letters from museums and anthropology departments about selling photographs, Wescott using their collections (including Bascom), 1957
28. Book "The Yoruba Husband-Wife Code, A Dissertation" by Edward Ward
29. Paper "The Yoruba Ogboni Cult In Oyo" by Peter Morton-Williams
30. Folder of notes on "Primitive Erotic Art" by Philip Rawson
 - a. Stack of photographs for Rawson's paper
31. Folder with all correspondence for Wescott's master's program at University College London

Box ARCV-99

1. Folder of publication drafts (2 of 2)
2. Folder of photographs of Yoruba Gelede art
3. Folder of photographs of Yoruba people, landscapes, architecture
4. Folder of miscellaneous photographs
 - a. 1959 Sweden and Denmark trip with Asger Jorn (Danish painter and museum curator of Jorn museum)
 - b. Folder of negatives including images from 1966 Jamaica trip and possibly Scandinavia
5. Folder labeled "file from desk about carpet beetle" 1978
 - a. Informational pamphlets on beetles, weevils, ants
 - b. Letters to doctors from Wescott about her sickness from carpet beetle infestation, insecticides
6. Box of index cards, miscellaneous notes

Box ARCV-100

1. 1980 Australian museum calendar
2. Folder of postgraduate anthropology notes (part 1 of 2)
3. Folder of postgraduate anthropology notes (2 of 2)
4. Miscellaneous photographs and notes
 - a. 1977 photographs with Joseph "Elfenheim/Elfenbein"
 - b. Notes on religion
 - c. Correspondence on sales of Nigeria photographs
 - d. Miscellaneous Yorubaland photographs
5. Box of index cards on Yoruba culture, citations

Box ARCV-101

1. Box of notecards on Yoruba art

2. Folder with childhood/young photographs of Wescott, notes to accompany Nigeria photographs
 - a. Photographs with ex-husband Roger Wescott and cats in the late 40s and early 50s
 - b. High school photographs of Wescott, portraits, personal photographs
 - c. Map of Nigeria
 - d. Childhood photographs of Roger and his parents
3. Folder of photographs
 - a. Correspondence for use of Wescott's photographs in a book 1978
 - b. Negatives of Nigeria photographs some which are present as positives in earlier photo albums, some which are not (some envelopes with negatives taken out, presumably sold)
 - c. Receipts of photograph sales
 - d. Personal photographs from the Nigeria trip and a trip to Jamaica (1966) with Francis Huxley
 - e. Another stack of Nigeria photographs from the 1955-1957 trip (some duplicates)
4. Folder of publication drafts (1 of 2)

Box ARCV-102

1. Folder of information on Yoruba arts, readings with notes, bibliography
2. Folder of newspaper clippings and letters from/about Nigeria
3. Book of outline for TV program about Yoruba Life
4. Folder of Ibeji book information
 - a. Correspondence about writing contract and deadlines
 - b. Notes and outline of book
 - c. Pamphlets on Yoruba religious cults
 - d. Draft of book
5. Three 1964 Life magazine issues: international version May 18, 1964 American November 13, 1964 and spanish edition June 8, 1964 all include article about English witchcraft by Wescott
6. Correspondence with Julia Blackburn about her book "The White Men" which used Wescott's work and photographs
7. Folder of papers from other scholars on witchcraft
8. Folder with letter May 22, 1974 to Department of Health and Social Security about Wescott's hypothyroidism and handwritten letter from Peter Morton-Williams, notes from someone going through the box
9. 5 articles by Peter Morton-Williams from journals
10. Folder of photographs with note "To: Lowie"
11. Newspaper clipping from The Guardian March 18, 1979 on female mutilation practices in Africa
12. Notes on Yoruba dance and sculpture

13. Stack of poems attached to article on the concept of taboo
14. Folder of miscellaneous notes on project ideas
15. Wescott's seminar paper from February 1968
16. Notes from 1971, paper from 1957, miscellaneous notes
17. November 1968 analytical psychology paper drafts/notes
18. Notes on witchcraft/sources
19. Draft of paper
20. Ghost Club Lecture at College of Psychic Science April 2, 1971 titled "Mischief and Witchcraft"
21. Article on Art in Nigeria 1960, by Ulli Beier, newspaper clipping from Nature showing Yoruba art
22. Paper Yoruba Responses to the Fear of Death by Peter Morton-Williams
23. Notes on twins
24. Notes on Yoruba culture
25. Paper by Peter Morton-Williams
26. Article on taboo by Franz Steiner, Wescott's notes on the subject
27. Possible letter from Frank Lake, notes from 1979 phone conversation, poems
28. Folder of miscellaneous photographs
29. Folder of Wescott's publications (Newspapers, journals, magazines)
30. Folder of Wescott's notes and drafts of her book "The Invisible Society"
31. Folder of publications in magazines and journals
32. Plastic bag with 5 metal keys

Box ARCV-103

1. Folder labeled "reviews, etc."
 - a. Sunday Times Weekly Review newspaper (London-based) September 20, 1964
 - b. Nine (9) copies of 1957 publication in the "Man" journal (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland) by Wescott on Yoruba collections in Germany and Switzerland. Outlines the contents of each collection, locations, collectors.
 - c. Society for Education through Art (SEA) London publication "Athene" Volume 11 no. 4, Autumn 1965. Note by advertising employee Rachel Blake on a previous error made to a Wescott review article corrected on page 24.
 - d. Athene The Journal of SEA volume 11 no 3 summer 1965. Pp.34-35 Wescott review on African Mud Sculpture essay by Ulli Beier. Includes pencil corrections of errors.
 - e. Man a Record of Anthropological Science Vol. LXIV articles 176-211 September-October 1964 published by the Royal Anthropological Institute. P. 161 is mentioned in pencil which is article 206 "They Shall Take Up Serpents: Psychology of the Southern Snake-Handling Cult" by Wescott. Focuses on

Freudian theories explaining the psychology of a snake-handling Christian cult in the Southern United States.

- f. WBAI (New York radio station) program listing folio January 18, 1965-January 31, 1965 vol. 6, no. 2. Many programs circled or starred with red pen.
 - g. British medical abstracts and therapeutic progress October 1968 volume 8, no. 10. Wescott review on page 441 of "The African Witch" by Michael Gelfand. Letter from secretary to the editor Margaret M. Bailey on sending this edition of the journal to Wescott on this page.
 - h. The Journal of The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts Manufactures and Commerce June 1964 no. 5095 vol. CXII. Review by Wescott p.545.
2. Photographs Africa I
 - a. 1. To Africa; Yorubaland 1955-1957 with Peter Morton Williams
 3. Photographs Africa I
 - a. 2. Sala at Ilorin - 1956-1957
 - b. 3. Jebba - 1956
 - c. 4. Basa Dance - 1956
 - d. 5. Gna Gna Dance - 1956
 - e. 6. Fulani Dance - missing November 9, 1992, label in ARCV-105
 - f. 7. The Road North - 1956-1957
 - g. 8. The Plateau - 1956 (first picture of Wescott)
 4. Photographs Africa I
 - a. 9. Bida - 1956
 - b. 10. Kano - 1956
 5. Photographs Africa II
 - a. 1. Yoruba House and Palace Posts from Ife, Dyo, Idanre, Ilesha, Ondo, Iseyin - 1956
 6. Photographs Africa II
 - a. 2. Yoruba Secular Sculpture: tools, doors, etc.
 - b. 3. Yoruba Figures for Sorcery
 - c. 4. Misc Nigerian Dancing
 - d. 5. Drums, Drumsticks, Drumposts
 7. Photographs Africa II
 - a. Yoruba Christian Art (Missing November 9, 1992) (crucifix image in ARCV-101 negatives may be part of this missing photo collection)
 - b. Yoruba Crafts - woodcarving, calabash carving, men's and women's weaving, adire and dyeing leatherwork, pottery, basketry, bida metal and bead work, keffi skin bottles, fulani hats
 8. Photographs Africa III - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 1. Orisha Funfun cult of the creator gods
 - b. 2. Orishaoko cult god of agriculture

- c. 3. Osamasimi royal ancestral cult
- d. 4. Yoruba cult of Alajogun and Aje in Oyo
- e. 5. Ogun cult, god of war and metalwork
- f. 6. Yemaja cult goddess
- 9. Photographs Africa III - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 7. Osanyan, god of medicine
 - b. 8. Iyamapo, mountain goddess and tutelary deity of potters
 - c. 9. Imole, ancestral cult in Ekiti (sacred cave in rock hill)
 - d. 10. Shopona, god of smallpox
 - e. 11. Erinle cult, water spirit
 - f. 12. Misc. religious sculptures

Box ARCV-104

- 1. Photographs Africa III - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 13. Yoruba antiquities: Ife, Tada, Esie, Jebba
- 2. Photographs Africa III - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 14. Yoruba Royal and Chiefly Events
 - b. 14a. Alafin of Oyo and Beri Festival of high chiefs dancing before palace 1956
 - c. 14b. Ijebu-Ode Royal Ancestral Shrine
- 3. Photographs Africa IV - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 1. Yoruba cult of Shango, god of thunder
- 4. Photographs Africa IV - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 2. Yoruba cult of Ifa, god/process of divination
- 5. Photographs Africa V - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 1. Gelede society
- 6. Photographs Africa V - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 2. Yoruba cult of Oshun, river goddess and wife of Shango, knows witchcraft
- 7. Photographs Africa V - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. 3. Yoruba Ancestral Cult of Egungun
- 8. Photographs Africa VI - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. Eshu-Elegba part 1 - shrines, sculpture (pictures from museums), dance, worshipers, priests/priestesses
- 9. Photographs Africa VI - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. Eshu-Elegba part 2 (part 1 and 2 61 photographs) - loose photographs instead of album format like other folders
- 10. Africa VII - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. Ibeji cult of divine twins Part 1 1955-59 - sculpture
- 11. Africa VII - Yoruba Religious Life
 - a. Ibeji part 2 - details of sculpture, domestic care, hairstyles 1955-57

Box ARCV-105

1. Photographs of Yoruba Secular Sculpture, crafts (weaving, pottery, woodcarving, calabash carving, leatherwork, blacksmith, tie-dying, spinning)
2. Photographs of Yoruba ceremonies and other occasions (bere festival Oyo, 1957, circumcision oyo, 1957, Oba's festival Ondo, late 1950's, De colonization Oyo, royal festivals and paraphernalia)
 - a. Smaller photo folder of Nigerian dance and musical instruments
3. Photographs of Ogboni (society of elders who worship the Earth), Egungun, Epa at Ekiti: Sacred Cave 1956-1957
 - a. December 1962 Hôtel Drouot catalog of artifacts being auctioned which includes Nigerian artifacts (in French)
4. Photographs of Nigeria, Northern Plateau (Fulani dance, Basa dance, Gna Gna dance, Landscape and Market) (1955-1956)
 - a. Includes repeated photographs from the Africa I file
5. Photographs of Yoruba Owo, Ogun, Oya, Yemaja, Alajogun, Osanyan, Obalufon, Religious art, Ijebu bells, Other royal paraphernalia, Kabba age set staffs, antiquities at Ife, Tada, Jebbe, Esie, Yoruba Christian art, sorcerer's figures
 - a. Folder of negatives of the same photo of a sculpture
6. Photographs of Yoruba Oshun, Orishaoko, Orishafunufn, Oshpma, Lyamapo (divided in 3)
 - a. Hand-delivered "highly personal and confidential" newspaper clipping (1962) from the Office of the Yoruba Consultative Council on Sexual Hygiene
7. Photographs of Yoruba Shango, Ifa, and Ibeji (some repeated pictures)
8. Wescott's personal copies of African sculpture photographs in a box
 - a. Letter from Robert Goldwater director of New York Museum of Primitive Art interested in an object, 1960
9. 8 boxes of tape recordings of BBC broadcasts and music, sent to Dave Herod with a request to not be cataloged

Associated Photographic Materials

Enlarged contact sheets of Yoruba sculptures taken by Eugene Prince in the museum's collection