



Smithsonian
National Museum of African Art

Chief S.O. Alonge photographic
collection, EEPA 2009-007, 1926-1989

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2011

Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art
Title:	Chief S.O. Alonge photographic collection
Identifier:	EEPA.2009-007
Date:	1926-1989
Extent:	100 photographic prints (black and white, hand-colored.) 4 photographic albums 1,800 negatives (photographic) (120 mm.) 150 negatives (photographic) (glass plate)
Creator:	Alonge, Solomon Osagie, Chief, 1911-1994
Language:	Undetermined
Summary:	<p>The collection consists of approximately 1,950 glass plate and large format film negatives, 100 hand-tinted and black-and-white prints and four photographic albums containing prints of various sizes, taken by Chief Solomon Osagie Alonge, the royal photographer to the Oba of Benin, Akenzua II (1933-1978). These images span six decades (1926 - 1989) and represent a dynamic, continuous record of the Benin Royal Court in Nigeria. Alonge documented the pageantry, ritual and regalia of the Obas, their wives and retainers for over a half-century, including the coronation of the King and the Iyoba, or queen mother. The collection also documents historic visits to Benin by Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip (1956), Princess Alexandra (1960), foreign dignitaries, traditional rulers, political leaders and celebrities. The collection preserves an important historical record of Benin art and culture during the periods of British colonial rule and Nigerian independence in the 20th century. The rarity and historical value of the collection are enhanced by Alonge's privileged access to the Palace as a chief in the Iwebo Palace Society, a position which presents a unique insider's view of Benin royalty. The quality of the collection is testament to Alonge's technological skills in photography and his professionalism in keeping the collection ordered and well-preserved despite the heat, humidity and tropical climate of Nigeria.</p>
Container:	Item EEPA.2009-007

Administrative Information

Provenance

Purchased from Alonge Family Interest Corp., 2009.

Preferred Citation

Chief S.O. Alonge Photographic Collection, Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original records requires an appointment. Contact Archives staff for more details.

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to reproduce images from the Eliot Elisofon Photographic Archives must be obtained in advance. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Chief Solomon Osagie Alonge (1911-1994) was the first indigenous photographer of the Royal Court of Benin and one of the premier photographers of Nigeria. His significance as one of the earliest indigenous photographers in West Africa has been documented in detail by anthropologist Flora Kaplan. Alonge learned the craft of photography as a youth in Lagos during the 1920s and saw his profession as an honorable and distinguished calling. He clearly demonstrated an inclusive documentary perspective in his efforts to photograph many aspects of the world around him. In 1942, Alonge established the Ideal Photography Studio in Benin City and documented colonial society, the establishment of churches and businesses, and the formation of new civic organizations and social groups like the Benin Social Club (1940s). As a commercial photographer, Alonge photographed individual and group portraits, preserving a visual record of the everyday lives and peoples of Benin City. Alonge's studio portraits illustrate how local Africans presented themselves to the camera and engaged with the practice of photography during the early to mid-twentieth century.

Arrangement

Arrangement of negatives reflects the original order established by the photographer.

General

Title provided by EEPA staff.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Cultures:

- Bini (African people)
- Coronations
- Cultural landscapes

Diplomats
Kings and rulers
Rites and ceremonies
Royal households

Types of Materials:

Albums
Black-and-white photographs
Hand coloring
Negatives
Photographic prints
Portraits

Names:

Alexandra, Princess, 1936- (granddaughter of George V, King of Great Britain)
Elizabeth II, Queen of Great Britain, 1926-
Philip, Prince, consort of Elizabeth II, Queen of Great Britain, 1921-

Geographic Names:

Africa
Benin (Kingdom)
Nigeria