

# BEMBE ART

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1. (ABOVE) POLYCHROME PLANKBOARD MASK WITH WOODEN HORNS, USED REGIONALLY IN VARIANTS OF BUTENDE CIRCUMCISION RITES. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 26 3/4". 2. (RIGHT) STANDING FEMALE STATUE, IN BLACKENED WOOD, USED IN ANCESTRAL CULT. ONE OF A GROUP OF 7 STATUES COLLECTED BY DANIEL BIEBUYCK IN 1951 AMONG THE BASIKASINGO OF TULUNGU, MIDWESTERN RIM OF BEMBELAND. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, Tervuren. 17".

Writings on African art make casual reference to standing figures, polychrome panel and bell masks, and some other carvings from the Bembe (also written as Babembe and Wabembe).<sup>1</sup>

Most of the interpretative arguments revolve around a relatively small number of monochrome, black, standing figures of both sexes, that are made in wood and range from about 16" to 34". These figures mostly exhibit a combination of the following features: a large, somewhat triangular or lozenge-shaped head; a broad round front; large bulging coffee-bean eyes; a long

and massive nose; a large, oval and somewhat protuberant mouth; a beard-like, dentelated motif adorning the cheeks and chin, and a slender body with the shoulders somewhat thrust forward (Figs. 2 and 26).<sup>2</sup> The arms and hands are carved in various characteristic positions: hands to nipples or chest;<sup>3</sup> to hips or navel area;<sup>4</sup> to midriff section;<sup>5</sup> left or right hand to lower cheek and right or left hand touching the elbow of the raised arm.<sup>6</sup>

The second category of occasionally illustrated art works are the polychrome, more or less rectangular panel masks, which range between 13 1/4" and 20" (Figs. 1 and 13).<sup>7</sup> The masks represent a stylized face, but it is not easy to say whether the face is animal or human, and therefore the term anthro-zoomorphic may help to underscore this ambiguity. They may have upright, outward or downward curving horns, but essentially they consist of two large, whitened concave ovals within which there are small, crescentic or coffee-bean shaped bulging eyes with narrow slits. There is further some nose indication, a small conically shaped protuberant mouth, and a set of geometrical, incised designs (triangular, crescentic, cowrie-shaped).<sup>8</sup>

Only in the recent literature is some attention given to a third category of monumental, polychrome, bifronted, mostly monoxylous, bell-shaped masks (Figs. 3, 4, 6, 7).<sup>9</sup> This impressive mask is adorned with a rich headdress of feathers and porcupine quills, dressed with a broad collarette of fibers, and when used, also with a long fiber-costume that is wrapped many times around the body. The front and back sides of the mask are composed of two large juxtaposed white ovals, each containing a large black lozenge. On each side there is a small circular hole near the rim through which the dancer can peek. The two other sides of the mask differ somewhat from case to case. In one instance they consist of a



3. (OPPOSITE) MONOXYLOUS, POLYCHROME BELL MASK OF THE 'ALUNGA ASSOCIATION. COLLECTED BY J. P. HALLETT BEFORE 1960. MUSEUM OF CULTURAL HISTORY, LOS ANGELES. WOOD. 18 3/4".





plane with two short horns, one set of two sliced cones, one set of two truncated cones, and four small sweat holes. The entire rim of the mask may be decorated with incised cowrie-like ornaments; similar triangular decorations may also occur around the large ovals.

There are, in addition to the more unusual carvings,<sup>10</sup> also significant categories of Bembe art which are not illustrated in the literature. These include: art works related to the *bwami* association (Figs. 8-10, 15-17, 23-25); art works related to the *'elandu* initiations (Figs. 14, 19-20); and art works connected with healing practices (Fig. 11). Since the thirties, there was also a well-known artist who, working in the traditional vein and with great skill, produced art works for the resident westerners (Figs. 12 and 28).

For lack of published material about the Bembe, it is understandable that the general cultural data and the specific information about the geographical distribution, the form, function, meaning, and context of usage of Bembe art are very poor. Bembe art is

generally enumerated with what is variably identified as the northern or northeastern Congo style area, that is the region of the allegedly poor artistic traditions of Central Africa.<sup>11</sup> Von Sydow (1930, pp. 20-21), however, groups Bembe with Boyo and Holoholo as part of the Luba-Hemba area and adjoining groups, and Maesen (1960b, p. 243) groups them with a vast number of other populations, such as Luluwa, Songye, Luba as part of the styles of the grasslands of the southern Congo. Most authors, simultaneously, trace close stylistic affinities between Bembe and northern or eastern Luba, on the one hand, and between Bembe and Lega and the forest styles, on the other hand.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, there is a tendency to consider that Bembe art is transitional between the northern and southern Congo styles.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the position of Bembe versus Lega is fairly clearly indicated, the relationship of Bembe to Boyo (a Luba-ized group with whom they are most directly in contact) is not well isolated. Burssens (1960, p. 789), however, considers that it is difficult to differentiate Bembe and Boyo, and that, whereas both are undoubtedly related to Luba, they have characteristics of their own.

There is meaning and value in all these classifications and assertions, and Burssens' statement is of particular significance. Much ambiguity and imprecision arise from the partial treatment of Bembe works, and from the tendency to deal with Bembe art as a whole rather than distinguishing the different categories of art. In this respect, Sieber (1968, p. 112) makes an important distinction between the figures which he views in relationship to Luba, and the masks which in his view belong to the equatorial style complex. A clear understanding of the situation obviously requires a total grasp of the cultural and historical

setting and a consideration of all types of art work involved.

The position of Bembe art is further complicated in the existing literature by a number of other confusing details. Some authors mistake Bembe for Bemba, a well-known matrilineal people from Zambia. (Offshoots of what is known as the Bemba-Bisa-Lala cluster are found in the extreme eastern Congo as far north as Bembe-land.)<sup>14</sup> Other authors attribute objects mostly referred to in the existing sources as Bembe to such ethnic units as Boyo (Buyu, Buye), northern or eastern Luba, or Kasingo (Basikasingo).<sup>15</sup> The situation is particularly acute when some objects, whose provenience is well-known, are misascribed and re-assigned new labels by certain authors.<sup>16</sup>

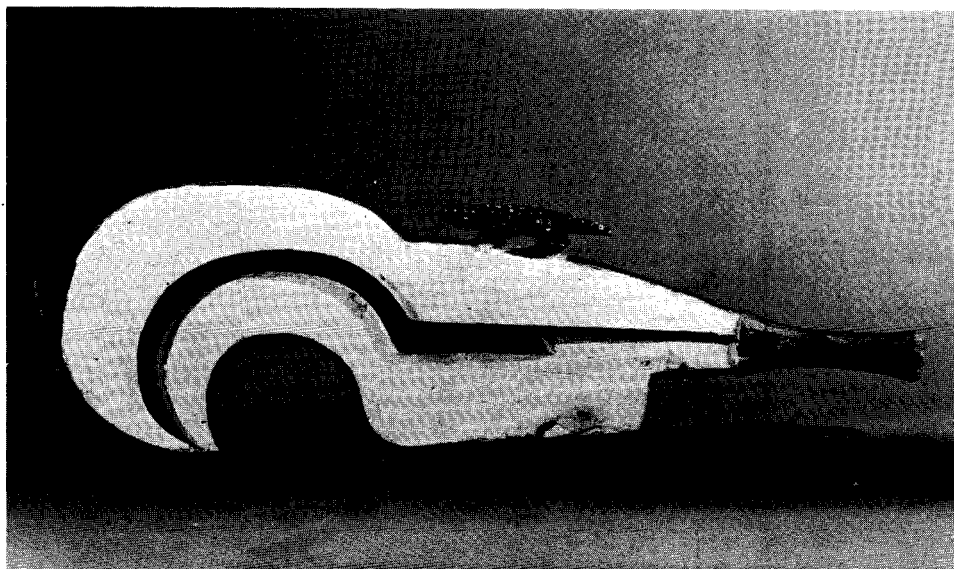
The prevailing state of ignorance is flagrantly demonstrated when the highly tenuous indications of function and meaning are examined. It is of no importance to quote many examples here, but obviously something is wrong with the explanation when, in the absence of a centralized political system, the standing figures are nevertheless identified as portraits of royal ancestors.

The reasons for so many misinterpretations and guesses to proliferate in the study of African art are easy to understand in reference to the Bembe example. Students of African art have made esthetic, stylistic, functional and other interpretative statements, and speculations, around small numbers of limited, isolated, and inadequately documented art objects, mostly collected out of context, and deposited in the museum or collection with scanty primary information. In the present case, many critical points and questions have remained completely out of focus. Who are the Bembe? What is their internal composition and structure? What is their cultural position in



4. MONOXYLOUS, POLYCHROME BELL MASK OF THE 'ALUNGA ASSOCIATION. PRESENTED TO HM KING BAUDOUIN OF THE BELGIANS ON HIS STATE VISIT TO THE CONGO IN 1955. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. WOOD.

5. POLYCHROME HORNBILL WOODEN BILLHOOK WITH CHAMELEON FIGURE, USED TO GUIDE MASKED 'ALUNGA DANCER. THIS PIECE WAS EMPLOYED WITH THE MASK IN FIGURE 6. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE IN SOUTHEASTERN BEMBELEND. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 22%".





6. (ABOVE) BIFRONTED, POLYCHROME BELL MASK IN WOOD, CONSISTING OF TWO SEPARATE MASK SEGMENTS TIED TOGETHER. THE LONG FIBRE COSTUME IS WRAPPED SEVERAL TIMES AROUND THE DANCER. MALE MEMBERS OF 'ALUNGA, TO WHOM THE MASK BELONGS, AND SOME OF THEIR WIVES, ACCOMPANY THE MASK WITH DANCE AND SONGS: THE MASK'S GUIDE DANCES IN FRONT BRANDISHING A WOODEN POLYCHROME BILLHOOK (FIG. 5), UNSEEN IN THIS PHOTO. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE IN 1947, SOUTHEASTERN BEMBELAND. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 19¼". 7. (RIGHT) BIFRONTED, POLYCHROME BELL MASK, SHOWN IN ACTION IN FIGURE 6.



the eastern Congo? What are their relationships with surrounding groups? And, of course, it is not sufficient to match one ethnic unit against another, as wholes. Their respective component parts must be examined as well. We must be willing to question the ethnic, cultural, and distributional maps with which we have been working traditionally, and reexamine the actual historical and cultural reality. What importance must be attached to some of the scanty information which is sometimes provided with a particular carving? For example, what does it mean when a certain object, now in a museum, was ascribed by its collector early in the century to a certain place, say Baraka?<sup>17</sup>

We must come to realize that the historical, cultural, and artistic situation, in and around Bembeland—as elsewhere in many parts of Central Africa—is immensely more nuanced and varied, and also less confused, than many of our traditional interpretations permit us to think. It is my purpose to elucidate some of that context.<sup>18</sup>

The Bembe live in the administrative territory of Fizi and in the Itombwe division of Mwenga territory, in the extreme southeastern part of what used to be called the Kivu Province. The

area in which they are located forms a polygon of irregular shape, situated between 28° latitude, and the northwestern shores of Lake Tanganyika, and between 3.30° longitude and 5° longitude. This is an area of montane forests, highland grasslands, and wooded savannas, intersected by several major rivers. The Bembe and Bembe-related population living within this territory could be estimated at about 62,000.<sup>19</sup> From the second part of the nineteenth century on, this was an area of considerable turmoil caused by slave raiding from the Ujidi and Nyangwe centers, Arab domination, antislavery campaigns, and the so-called Tetela revolts. Throughout the colonial period this remained an area of restlessness. This was enhanced by considerable territorial movement and shifting of the population, by political dissidence, and by the very direct interference of the colonial administration against local practices and institutions, not the least against the abundant semi-secret associations. The Bembe were an extremely proud and tough people. Thousands of them had settled in villages outside of Bembeland: along the western shores of Lake Tanganyika as far as Albertville (Kalima), along the eastern shores of the lake in

Burundi and northern Tanzania, in the vast Luama plain northwest of Bembeland, in the territory of Kambambare.<sup>20</sup>

The Bembe neighbor in the north with the patrilineal, pastorally and agriculturally oriented, politically centralized Nyindu, Furiiru (Fulero), and Vira. In the northwest they are in close contact with the patrilineal, hunting and cultivating, politically acephalous Lega. Their southwestern boundary is with the matrilineal, hunting and cultivating Boyo, who are organized in petty states. Their southeastern neighbors are a variety of small matrilineal groups such as Bagoma, Bakwamamba, Bakwakalanga—many of them great fishermen. Some of them are of northern Luba origin, and others have their roots in the Bemba cluster. Fragments of the same groups are also established along the northwestern shore of Lake Tanganyika, in Bembeland and northward among the Vira. These populations, known as Zoba, Sanze, Bwari, Lumona, Cimba, Tongwe, Goma, and so on, were partially absorbed by the Bembe in their expansion from the highlands towards the shore areas. This intimate contact led, of course, to much reciprocal borrowing and cultural adjustment.

Thus, various sections of the widely scattered, politically decentralized,





Bembe have been exposed to highly different cultural influences. Accommodation with the neighbors has generally been easy for them. This is manifest already from the simple fact that many Nyindu, Vira, Furiiru, and even Rundi and Barhinyi (an offshoot of the Shi) immigrant individuals and families are well established in traditional Bembe villages.<sup>21</sup> This is even more apparent when we look at the internal composition of the Bembe and at the distribution of the population within Bembeland. The bulk of the Bembe clans trace their origins, without discussion and with accuracy, back to the Ikama and Shile divisions of the Lega, a fact which is explicitly recognized by the Lega themselves.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the bulk of the Bembe consider that they are immigrants from the northwestern forest regions into an area which was already occupied by various offshoots of at least six distinctive groups of different origin. All these still exist within Bembeland, and all of them also trace relationships with population segments found outside Bembeland. The first group, generically known as Mbote (sometimes also referred to as Cwa, Pygmies), comprises a variety of small, scattered units known under many names, such as Basi'asumba and Bahonga.<sup>23</sup> These are highly mobile groups of hunters (with dogs, spears, and nets), famed as gatherers and particularly as honey harvesters, who have none of the great initiations and associations which are so typical for the Bembe, but specialize in the worship of nature spirits, including the spirit of the earth. The second group, collectively known as Zoba, encompasses a sizable number of differently named units (such as Bwari, Sanze, Goma, etc.) which are all established in small villages along the western shores of Lake Tanganyika, and on the Ubwari peninsula, from Uvira to Albertville. Their skill and devotion as fishermen of Lake Tanganyika char-

acterize them as a group. Their origins are multiple: the northern Zoba villages are linked to the patrilineal, pre-Lega populations that were settled in the Itombwe mountain complex (in the extreme northwest of Bembeland); some of the central Zoba villages have their roots among the matrilineal Boyo, and Tumbwe; some of the central and southern Zoba villages are the northern-most offshoots of the Bemba-Tabwa-Bwile-Ushi. Although both the Mbote and the Zoba have obviously undergone many Bembe influences, they have nevertheless maintained their own cultural distinctiveness. On the contrary, the next three groups have become a much more intricate part of Bembe culture. They include the Basim'inje and related clans, who claim local origins in the Itombwe mountains (in the extreme northwest of Bembeland), where presently Nyindu, Lega, and Bembe cultures meet. They trace historical connections with various groups scattered among the Nyindu, Furiiru, Vira, and eastern Lega, and must be considered as a strongly pygmy-ized pre-Lega population of Bantu speech. There are the Bahese and related clans, who have connections in Legaland which are classified as pre-Lega (they are probably of Kunda origin). There are the Basi'alangwa and related clans who trace linkages with some groups found among the Bahutwe-Boyo and the Bakwamamba (Tumbwe). The Basi-kasingo of Tulungu deserve special mention. This group of 17 villages, located on the rim of the Luama plain, on the boundaries between the Bembe and the Boyo, was alternately incorporated with the Boyo in Kabambare and with the Bembe in Fizi territory. This is a mixed group, which com-

prises components of northern Luba, Zimba (Binja), Lega, and Bembe origin. Among the Bembe elements present, it is the prementioned Bahese group that predominates.

Ethnohistorically, then, the group of people that calls itself Bembe and that has the feeling of either belonging to Bembe culture or being affiliated with it, constitutes a complex entity where several cultural traditions (Lega, pre-Lega, Pygmy, Boyo-Kunda-Kalanga-Lumbu, Bemba) converge and partially merge. In this process of amalgamation and blending, groups of Lega origin have been the most numerous. The Lega type of culture is predominant among the Bembe and Bembe-related groups.

Like the Lega, the Bembe place high social, economic, and ritual value on the hunt. The Bembe adhere to patrilineal kinship which places strong emphasis on seniority. Connections traced through the nonconnecting parent, grandparents and great grandparents are of great social and ritual significance. The Bembe segmentary lineage and matrimonial systems are very close to the corresponding institutions in Lega society. Most sig-

8. (OPPOSITE) (TOP-LEFT) HEAVILY PATINATED, ASEXUAL, ANTHROPOMORPHIC IVORY FIGURINE, USED IN BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. 5¼". 9. (TOP-CENTER) FEMALE, ANTHROPOMORPHIC STANDING IVORY FIGURINE, USED IN BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. 5¾". 10. (TOP-RIGHT) JANIFORM HALF-FIGURE IN IVORY FIXED ONTO A BUFFALO TAIL WITH LIZARD SKIN. THIS "FLYSWATTER" IS A STATUS SYMBOL OF A SENIOR MAN WHO HAS GONE THROUGH THE BWAMI INITIATIONS AND EXCELLS AS AN ORATOR AND ARBITER. 5¼". OBJECTS SHOWN IN FIGURES 8-10 WERE RECEIVED BY D. BIEBUYCK IN 1950 FROM A HIGH-RANKING INITIATE IN NORTH-WESTERN BEMBELAND. 11. (BOTTOM) SET OF SMALL, WOODEN, ANTHROPOMORPHIC CARVINGS. ALTHOUGH EXHIBITING DIFFERENT STYLISTIC TRADITIONS, THEY WERE KEPT TOGETHER IN A BAG BY A PERSON WHO WAS PROBABLY A MEMBER OF THE MPUNGA ASSOCIATION. COLLECTED BY E. VAN HAMME IN 1923. SOUTH-EASTERN BEMBELAND. HEIGHTS FROM 3¾" to 5". COLLECTION D. BIEBUYCK.



12. (ABOVE) POLYCHROME OVAL-SHAPED FACE MASK IN WOOD, A MODERNISTIC VERSION OF THE BUTENDE MASKS IN FIGS. 1 AND 13. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE BEFORE 1947, SOUTHERN BEMBELAND. COLLECTION D. BIEBUYCK. 8". 13. (LEFT) POLYCHROME PLANKBOARD MASK IN WOOD, REGIONALLY USED IN VARIANTS OF THE BUTENDE CIRCUMCISION RITES. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 8¾".





14. FACE MASK. HIDE, CLOTH, COWRIES, BEADS, FEATHERS. USED BY MEMBERS OF 'ELANDA ASSOCIATION. COLLECTED BY D. BIEBUYCK AMONG SEGMENT OF BASIMNYAKA CLAN, NORTHEASTERN BEMBELAND AT LAKE TANGANYIKA, 1950. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 9 1/8".



15. POLYCHROME, HORNED FACE MASK. WOOD, CHICKEN FEATHERS. USED IN NGUWE AND PINJI RITES OF BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. RECEIVED BY D. BIEBUYCK FROM HIGH-RANKING INITIATE OF BASIMNYAKA CLAN, NORTHWESTERN BEMBELAND. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 17 1/4".

nificantly, the cyclically held circumcision rites and the dominant *bwami* association operate in Bembe society along the same principles as in the Lega. In all these spheres of life the influences of the other component entities are visible to an extremely limited extent. It is in the technology, in some aspects of the economy, and particularly in the ritual and associated artistic spheres that the impact of the non-Lega ethnic components is most manifest. This could be illustrated, for example, by the canoe building, fishing or hunting techniques, but the religious beliefs and ritual activities are of more relevance for our topic. In contrast with the Lega whose religious system rests exclusively on the ancestral cult, the Bembe, in addition to worshipping individual and lineage ancestors, celebrate Pygmy nature spirits (*bahombo*), river and mountain spirits (*maseko*), earth spirits (*m'ma*), and the spirit of Lake Tanganyika (*Mkangyalkulu*). In contrast with the homogeneous and closed Lega, where the *bwami* association is so elaborate and so dominant that it has excluded or practically assimilated most all other forms of initiation or ritual, the *bwami*

association among the Bembe has accommodated with a variety of associations that were in existence among the non-Lega components or that were invented or introduced by them. The most important of these associations are *'elanda*, which has its roots among the Basim'inje; *'alunga*, which was introduced by the Mbote and Riverain groups; and *punga*, which stems from the northern Luba.<sup>24</sup> Some of the associations and cults use highly distinctive types of art objects in small quantities. It is this framework which we should now examine.

The initiation is found in almost all Bembe clans, except among the southern Babungwe, who pretend to have lost it, and the Basi'alangwa who never had it. It also occurs in some of the northeastern Lega, called Baliga. The Bembe consider *'elanda* to be an ancient legacy with which they immigrated from Legaland. The *'elanda* association was disbanded in 1940 by an arrest from the colonial administration allegedly because it was "contrary to civilisation and constituting a threat to peace and public order." Little of its activity was visible by the time of my research, and whatever was done was kept very secret.

Membership in *'elanda* is purely male. It is achieved through an initiation process by men who are still in their youth (i.e. some time after the circumcision rites which are held at an advanced age; the men are in the process of marrying their first wife or have already obtained a wife; but they have not yet acquired a grade in the *bwami* initiation). The explicit will of the ancestors revealed through dreams or sickness, moral and social pressure from the initiated kinsmen and villagers of one's age group, the last will of a dying father, transgression of an *'elanda* taboo followed by inducement, voluntary or involuntary misdemeanor against the person or the property of a member are among the most important reasons and occasions for initiation. But there is also a widely prevalent pattern of co-initiations, whereby two or more close kinsmen are simultaneously initiated.

The initiations themselves are held in a house surrounded by much secrecy. They center around the revelation of the *'elanda* mask (Figs. 14, 19-20), which is accompanied by songs and dances, the transmission of knowledge and prescriptions which are connected with membership, and

the payment of fees and distribution of goods to initiates, and to a wider network of kinsmen. All closed performances of the mask are preceded and followed by its ceremonial entrance and departure from the village (Fig. 20). The ranking of persons within the association is linked with special occupations and privileges exercised by different individuals. The organization of the initiations and the possession of the mask and its paraphernalia operate on the basis of a set of localized lineage groups of the same clan. Abangwa is the key personage in this respect. The position is ascribed to a specific lineage within the local group, but the status is achieved and not simply inherited by a member of that group. The same holds true for the two other key positions of Mliki and M'mele. Abangwa is the head of the local 'elanda cell. He decides when initiations will be held, organizes the proceedings, decides on the conditions of entrance, settles disputes inside and outside the group and the membership, distributes initiation goods, and so on. He also has the exclusive right to wear the mask and its full paraphernalia. This is an expression of power, prestige and status, but the privilege also requires skills: the shivering and trembling dance movements, and the very difficult speaking in a raucous, ventral voice (*cui*) which may have taken months to learn in great isolation. The second personage, M'mele, also holds a senior position in the association. He is the guardian of the mask and its paraphernalia which are kept in a basket in a shrine-like hut (*lwelo*) in a secret place outside the village. The total paraphernalia include the following objects. The face mask, called 'amgeningeni or 'acwe, is made of bark and the hide of a lamb (later replaced by a piece of cloth), studded with cowries and beads and trimmed with chicken feathers (Figs.

14 and 19). The mask's paraphernalia include a hat (*sala ya buhembwehem-bwe*) made of chickens' chest feathers, a python skin trimmed with feathers ('enyamamba), small hat-like bags adorned with goat beards (*tubumbu*) to cover the hands, and numerous animal hides (*ngubo*), about 25 of them, primarily made of genet and 'e'ungu monkey. A wooden shield with white and red designs (*ngabo*), and a wooden billhook knife painted white and red serve as protectors and guides of the mask. A small net (*bu'ila*) made of feather ropes (raphia fibers plaited together with chicken feathers) is part of the mask's attire, but is used by the servants of the mask to be placed in a certain manner in the proximity of persons and places that are warned and threatened by the association.

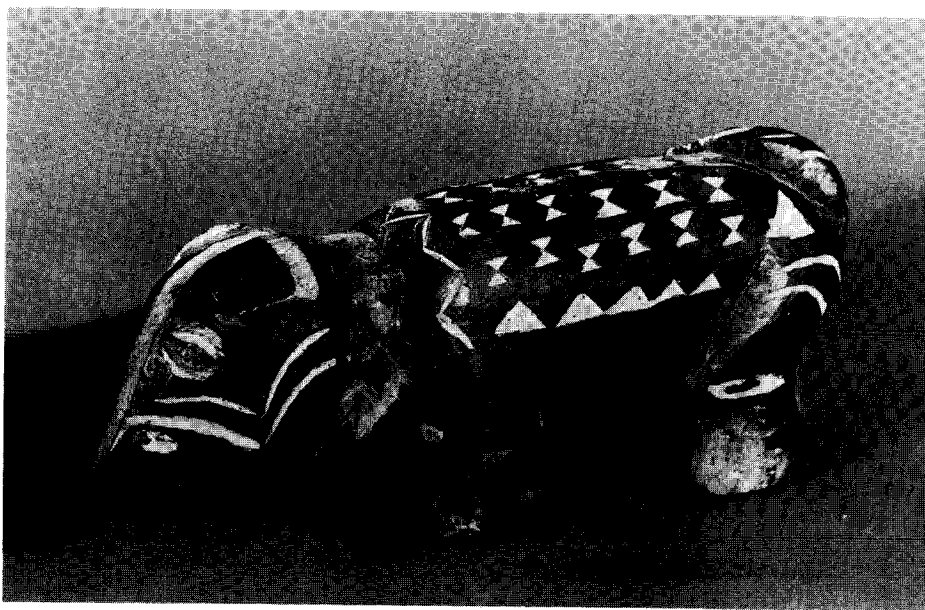
Mliki (Fig. 20) is a third personage of significance. He must be a funny person. He is entitled to carry on his back the entire mask attire, ingeniously wrapped in a large bundle (*pumbula*), when the mask enters the village before the proceedings and leaves it at the end of the activities. In the opinion of the noninitiates, Mliki is the carrier of a spirit. His face is painted black with charcoal, his head adorned with a feather hat, and in his mouth he carries a genet hide. He moves cautiously and hesitantly, step after step, bent under the imaginary burden of the spirit. Mliki himself cannot wear the mask, but he helps the designated mask-wearer to dress, and dances before him with the polychrome shield and hornbill. He distributes the animals which are paid as fees or as fines to the association, and also administers the ordeals imposed by 'elanda.

The rest of the local membership (*ba'wa 'elanda*), older and younger, participate in all the procedures but do not wear the mask. They accompany the mask with songs, percussion (on

sticks and old hoes), and drums, and surround Mliki during the ceremonial procession on entering and leaving the village. Special recognition is given to 'ebula, a member of the masker's lineage and his possible successor. He precedes Mliki during the ceremonial entry into the village.

The 'elanda mask is not to be seen by noninitiates; it does not perform in the open. It is the hidden and feared force behind the association. It is not an ancestor, nor is it a nature spirit. It is an 'ebu'a, something hidden, unseen, unrecognizable, undefinable. For those who are not versed in its mysteries, it is terrifying and terrible because it is never seen, but its mysterious voice is heard. For those who are familiar with it, the mask provides a sense of solidarity and in-group spirit. It gives its members a certain immunity against sickness and danger. The mask exercises social control at a distance; it remains in hiding, but its members engage on its behalf in various forms of law enforcement. Everyone is exposed to certain prescriptions and obligations when the mask comes to the village; the members of 'elanda impose fines for transgressions of taboos, and enforce viola-

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16. (ABOVE) JANIFORM, SCEPTER-LIKE HALF-FIGURE IN BLACKENED WOOD, USED IN THE BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. RECEIVED BY D. BIEBUYCK IN 1950. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 3". 17. (LEFT) POLYCHROME, FOUR-LEGGED ANIMAL FIGURINE, USED IN BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. RECEIVED BY D. BIEBUYCK IN 1950 FROM HIGH-RANKING INITIATE IN NORTHWESTERN BEMBE-LAND. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. WOOD. 4 1/8" by 10 3/4".



and fails to even indicate their functional diversity. Moreover, the provenance, cultural meaning and historical implication of other illustrated art objects—including all the utilitarian pieces, are totally ignored. The brief consideration of music is especially lacking. To state that “drumming is the music of Africa” and to disregard the role of cordophones and aerophones is inexcusable. In all fairness, the illustrations and historical material of *African Kingdoms* do serve as a concise and meaningful introduction to Africa for the non-specialist.

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## AFRICA: IMAGES AND REALITIES

Eric Robins and Blaine Littell  
Praeger Publishers, New York 1971  
250 pages, 170 color plates, \$18.50

This large and expensive book at first appears to be one of those presentation volumes promoted in the pre-Christmas season at a “special” price and commonly referred to as “coffee-table” books. Its initial appearance is deceptive. Seduced by some of the most magnificent photographs of Africa ever gathered, including some by Eliot Elisofon, the viewer or idle page-thumper may be induced to become a reader. From the book’s intelligent text he may learn more about Africa than can be conveyed by picture, and much more than he is likely to get from articles in *National Geographic*.

A sweeping survey of Africa attempted in only 106 pages of text (roughly some 55,000 words) is bound to suffer from too-selective treatment on the one hand, and over-generalization on the other. But as a primer, it could make a fair start for a large number of readers whose image of Africa is a compound of myths, misinformation, misconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. One reviewer (*Africa Report*, December, 1971) has complained that the volume subtly reinforces stereotypes. He refers, for example, to the “three basic elements of East African corn: elephants, Mount Kilimanjaro and Masai herdsman,” and goes on to make note of “worn-out themes” such as “Big game . . . Olduvai Gorge . . . West Africa: From Slavery to Nationhood”. To the professional Africanist who takes himself very seriously, these may be clichés. But to those making their first discovery, these are familiar landmarks, no more to be passed over in a survey of this sort than the Grand Canyon or Golden Gate Bridge could be omitted from a pictorial survey of the United States.

The authors divide Africa into eight sections which establish convenient areas of concentration for the beginner: East Africa, West Africa, French-speak-

ing Africa, Congo (Kinshasa), Portuguese Africa, Ethiopia and Liberia (“Early Adventures in Independence”), Arab Africa, and South Africa. While many fine points, not to say nations and territories, are inevitably lost as a result of this compartmentalization and necessarily brief treatment, it is remarkable how much information is conveyed.

And there is more than information. There is a concerned point of view that raises the proper questions and pointed facts about such problems as Portuguese rule, military coups, too-rapid Africanization of universities, and South Africa. Unfortunately, the quality of the text (particularly that of the introductory chapter) does not always measure up to the uniformly high quality of the photographs. There are errors and distortions, stereotypes, unwarranted generalizations, and non-sequiturs; in discussing “dash” (bribery) in Nigeria—“It took a partnership of black and white to create the venality that prevails in Lagos. But the partnership could never have flourished had not Nigeria been rich. What is more, there would never have been a Nigeria had not the British invented it.” The largely Catholic Ibos are credited with having “grasped . . . the entire Protestant ethic”, rather than being described, as they more often are, as the Jews of Africa. The style is also occasionally questionable. The urge to write vividly at times overcomes the urge to make sense: “The roar of traffic is shut out and the babble of voices becomes a murmur; shouts hurled into the air settle to the ground in phrases and then sentences.” But at moments when enthusiasm for the text wanes, one turns the page to a magnificent photograph that catches the West African marketplace just as one remembers it.

The point remains that the average person who buys this book (or receives it), will be better informed after he reads the text. If he does not read it (which is a likely fate for large format “picture books” in the hands of the average consumer), he will have rejoined in the illustrations of the varied beauty of traditional and modern Africa. This cannot convey the whole truth of Africa, but it can make something of a beginning for many Americans. To say, as did the reviewer quoted earlier, that *Africa: Images and Realities* “does not work” and lacks “originality”, and to imply that it is “empty headed” is snobbism. At least, it misses the point. Since neither readers of *Africa Report* nor *African Arts* are likely to be prospective buyers of this book, it cannot be judged by the exacting standards or requirements of such an informed audience.

Paul O. Proehl

## BEMBE ART

Continued from page 19

tions and omissions. If somebody refuses or neglects the payment of fines or refuses an induced initiation, the members secretly set up signs as ultimatums: the feather rope or a pack of dried banana leaves are placed at night before his door (a warning of death). Ultimately, 'elanda' subjects people to ordeals.

The *bwami* closed voluntary association belongs to the most genuine tradition of all Lega and Lega related groups. It occurs throughout Lega and Bembeland and is everywhere based on the same structural principles. There are great differences, however, in the nomenclature, the principles of organization, the types of paraphernalia and initiation objects, and so on. The Bembe form of *bwami* represents a highly reduced variant of the association. Basically, the Bembe distinguish two categories of initiates: the initiates of the hats (the junior ones) and the initiates of the leopard or of the drum (the senior ones). The latter are subdivided into a hierarchy of three grades: *pinji*, *itimbu*, and *biciba*. Membership at all levels is achieved through a set of initiation procedures, exchanges of valuables,



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payment of fees, transfer of paraphernalia. But no initiation, and no advance in grade, are possible unless there be full cooperation of the kinship group and unless the candidate be acceptable on moral grounds to the other members.<sup>24</sup>

The initiations to each grade consist of a number of ritual cycles which are all structured around dance and song performances and the display and manipulation of objects (natural and manufactured ones). Among the Lega hundreds of different objects, including many types of art works, are made and used for this purpose. The number and diversity of initiation objects (*bi'o'o*) among the Bembe are much more reduced. They include leaves, nutshells and pods, snail and mollusc shells, skulls, hides and other exuviae, and a number of manufactured items such as belts, hats, discs in wickerwork, and so on. The number of carvings made in ivory, elephant bone, and wood, is very limited. In my dealings with *bwami* among the Bembe I have come across the following carvings: miniature ivory stools (*'ecumbe*), small scepter-like pegs in bone (*mcumbo*) (Fig. 23), animal sculptures in wood (Figs. 17, 23), anthropomorphic sculptures in wood and ivory (*m'meci* or *'ase'a*) (Figs. 8-9, 16, 23-25), scepters (*m'munga*) in the form of a flyswatter consisting of an ivory handle frequently representing a human figurine and a buffalo tail (Fig. 10), and wooden face masks (*'eluba*) (Fig. 15). In the fifties these objects occurred in extremely small quantities; the *bwami* association had suffered severe hardships under Arab and colonial rule, and the art objects had never been abundant. The initiation objects, including the art works, are hidden in shoulderbags (*mlimba*) which are traditionally kept in a small

*ngolo* grass house. During the initiations they are displayed in various combinations (Fig. 23), danced with, moved around, and interpreted in sung proverbs. The art works are used only at the higher grades. They have no relations to the ancestral cult or to magical practice. They are emblems of rank, symbols of status, expressions of the ritual and social autonomy of particular lineage groups, and above all, iconic devices which help to underscore the high moral and philosophical principles of the association. The peg-like scepters in bone are used as supports for a small sacred fence made with a feather rope; inside the fence various initiation objects are displayed before being shown and interpreted (Fig. 23). The scepter is also used as a symbolic hammer with which the chest of the initiate is beaten while he receives the knowledge of the association. The miniature stool in ivory is connected as a symbol with the special privileges which the highest initiates exercise in the organization of circumcision rites. They are allowed to sit on a four-legged spherical stool in wood which is covered with genet hides on top of which the miniature stool is placed. The wooden face mask (Fig. 15) is the only mask of that kind which I have seen among the Bembe. It was used in an imposing ritual sequence leading to the *pinji* grade. It was worn before the face by an initiate of the *pinji* level, who was otherwise dressed with an abundance of hides (genet, monkey) and feather hats; he carried a boa skin trimmed with feathers across the shoulders. The masker was seated behind a fence made out of bamboo sticks and bark-cloth, and decorated with beaded necklaces and round mats studded with cowries. The fence was erected inside the initiation hut. The drumming, trembling, and bobbing masker is revealed to the candidate by singing and dancing high-initiates who repeatedly lift parts of the screen. This ritual provides the candidate with the right to wear a hat of otter skin.

The *'alunga* association and its mask (Figs. 3-4, 6-7) occur only in some clans distributed among the south-eastern Bembe, the Boyo, the Bakwamamba, and the Bakwakalanga. Bembe tradition holds that *'alunga* was introduced by the Basi'alangwa; the latter explicitly state that they learned it from hunting groups, known as Bahonga and Basi'elukwe, which still occur in parts of southern Bembe and in the areas inhabited by the Bakwamamba and Bakwakalanga. The mask among the Bahonga was a "protector of honey"; it exercised social control in relation to the honey harvest. Frightened by its deep, raucous voice,

(TOP TO BOTTOM) 18. NEWLY CIRCUMCISED MEN PERFORMING A DANCE AS THEY ENTER THE VILLAGE OF 'ELANGA, SOUTHERN BEMBELAND. THESE FIBER MASK COSTUMES ARE USED REGIONALLY IN VARIANTS OF BUTENDE CIRCUMCISION RITES. 19. 'ELANGA MASK, DESCRIBED IN FIG. 14, PERFORMING IN CROUCHED POSITION NEAR DOOR OF INITIATION HOUSE. AT RIGHT IS ONE OF MASK'S PARAPHERNALIA, A POLYCHROME SHIELD WITH TYPICALLY LARGE EYE-SOCKETS. 20. 'ELANGA MASKED DANCER WITH HIS PARAPHERNALIA IS SLOWLY CARRIED BY THE MLIKI IN CEREMONIAL PROCESSION AROUND THE VILLAGE, FOLLOWED AND PROTECTED BY SINGING ACOLYTES. 21. MASK COSTUME OF DRIED BANANA AND OTHER LEAVES MADE AND USED BY CHILDREN FOR THEIR GAMES, REPRESENTING FUNNY CHARACTERS, AND IMITATING THE 'ALUNGA MASK. 22. INITIATES OF THE BUTENDAMWA ASSOCIATION WITH PAINTED FACES AND HEAVY BODY ADORNMENTS PRIMARILY OF GENET AND MONKEY HIDES. THEY SEEK TRANCE STATES IN THEIR DANCES AND PRACTICE HEALING AND OTHER METHODS TO WARD OFF EVIL. 23. TYPICAL DISPLAY OF INITIATION OBJECTS (ANTHROPOMORPHIC WOOD FIGURINE WITH FEATHER HAT, 3 ZOOMORPHIC WOOD FIGURINES, LEOPARD SKULL, COWRIE-STUDDED WOVEN DISCS) IN A BWAMI RITE, NORTH-WESTERN BEMBELAND.

fascinated by its song and dance, the Basi'alangwa managed to be initiated into its secrets, and also transferred it to some other neighboring Bembe clans. For the Bembe, 'alunga is in the first place an 'ebu'a, something that is hidden, nonrecognizable, and mysterious. It is also a m'ma, an ancient spirit of the bush which unlike a multitude of other minor nature spirits, called *biseko*, has no specific dwelling place on a particular mountain, valley or river. During the initiation, the mask speaks as follows to the new initiates: "Alunga is not a man, but a thing, something from the bush, something from very remote times, something very powerful and awe-inspiring. Never profane its mysteries, or you will die." The maskers also like to identify themselves with certain mysterious animals (e.g. *cwecwe*, owl) or with omnipresent ones (e.g. *omba*, civet cat). To us 'alunga appears primarily as an initiation system and a semi-secret association, with a ranking of specialized membership that has certain attributes and privileges. The great bell mask (*ibulu lya alunga*) with its large feather and porcupine quill hat ('ehala) and its long costume of fibers ('asamba),

together with the wooden billhook (*ibemba*; Fig. 5), and a buffalo horn painted white and red (*lu'embi*) are the focal points of all activities. The initiation procedure is a fairly simple affair. Young men, even before circumcision, are eligible for accession to 'alunga, and frequently several young men of the same lineage group are co-initiated. These young adepts learn the mysteries behind the mask, place themselves under the oath of absolute secrecy, learn the various songs, and accompany the 'alunga masker on his visits to the village. They do not, however, exercise any of the more significant ritual or socio-political functions. This requires maturity, experience and further initiation. Among the more important privileges and functions are the following: *M'ma mwitu* (lit. the spirit of the bush) is the expert senior who knows how to dance with the mask and to sing with the special raucous voice (*mbelele wa'alunga*). *Ba'wa icwalelo* are those seniors who are experts in making the large dance costume in fibers (besides dried banana leaves and banana bark strips, such unidentified fibers as *m'mungu*, 'anonya, 'eko, and 'alele are used). They also know how

to fix it to the holes of the mask before the dance performance. Special recognition is given to *m'wa ibemba*, the initiate who knows how to dance with the wooden billhook knife in front of the masker, to guide him. This personage precedes the group of initiates to announce the arrival of 'alunga in the village and to "provoke fear and uncertainty in the hearts of women and children." *M'wa lu'embi* is an expert horn blower, who handles the painted *lu'embi* horn to call together the members of 'alunga in neighboring villages. Because of the severe restrictions which the colonial administration had imposed on 'alunga and its members ('alunga was banned by a governmental *arrêté* in 1947), it is impossible to know the various phases of activity in which the mask and its adepts were involved. Basically, its area of activity centers around four places: the cave (*lwala*), its permanent place in the remote bush, where it is kept when no initiations or dances are performed; the shrine (*lutanda*) located outside the village where it is brought for the initiations and also where it is dressed before it can perform in the village; the men's house (*lubunga*), where it is brought on very



24. FRONT AND REAR VIEWS OF DOUBLE, YELLOW-BROWN, FEMALE ANTHROPOMORPHIC STANDING FIGURINE IN IVORY, USED IN BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE BEFORE 1947, WESTERN BEMBELAND. COLLECTION D. BIEBUYCK.

25. FRONT AND REAR VIEWS OF FEMALE, ANTHROPOMORPHIC STANDING FIGURINE IN IVORY WITH CHILD ON BACK, USED IN BEMBE VARIANT OF BWAMI ASSOCIATION. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE BEFORE 1947, WESTERN BEMBELAND. COLLECTION D. BIEBUYCK.



special occasions; the village place and the stretch of bush between the *lutanda* shrine and the village, where it is always worn by a dancer and accompanied by a group of acolytes. The cave where the mask is kept, under the supervision of that person of the local community who has the right to dance with it, is secret and 'elendo, a forbidden place for women, children and non-initiates who may never see the unworn mask. Piacular rites, in which the lineage ancestors and their corresponding nature spirits of the mountains are invoked and placated for more success in hunting and less sickness, are performed around the cave. Sometimes a young man may be initiated on the same occasion to make the effects of the

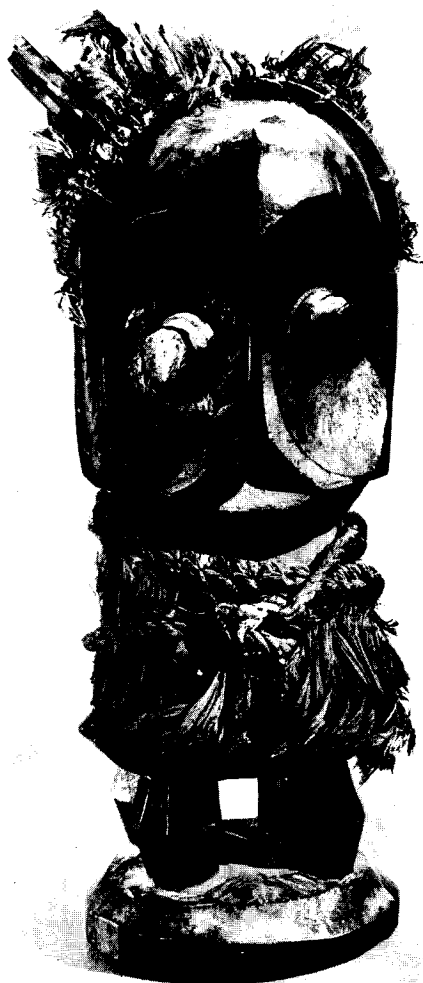
reconciliation with the supernatural stronger. In this rite a goat and a chicken are sacrificed and some of their blood sprinkled on the feather hat of the mask. When subsequently a hunting expedition is organized the mask is brought to the men's house in order to transform 'alunga, the powerful *m'ma mwitu*, spirit of the bush, into a friendlier, less potent driving force behind the nature spirits, should he still not be fully placated. For the initiation of new members, and before the mask enters the village for dance performances, it is brought to a *lutanda*-hut-shrine, especially built somewhat near the crossroads of the village. Here the mask is dressed with the costume and worn in the greatest secrecy. During the initiation of new junior members emphasis is placed on the omnipresence of the mask as the spirit of the bush; the initiates play a game of hide and seek which is abruptly interrupted by the sudden imposing emergence of the masker. For its performances in the village, the mask is led from the bush in ceremonial procession: the sequence of dances, in which it is involved, is supported by sung proverbs, drums, dance, and singing by the membership grouped in a large circle around the mask. The dance is frequently interrupted by a longer pause during which the mask

manifests its desires and makes known the will of the association. The masker and his acolytes also frequently withdraw to the *lutanda* shrine so that those who have the right to wear the mask may relieve one another. This practice aims at allowing the masker to rest from an arduous task, but also at preserving the anonymity of the masker by increasing the confusion through different voice, dance pace and rhythm. It is in its public performance, of course, that the mask's role as an agent of social control is manifest; it is here that the mask can enforce some of the desires of the association. However, this character of the mask must be placed in its correct perspective. The Bembe have a classic type of segmentary lineage organization: large localized segments of patrilineal clans, subdivided into cascades of larger and smaller lineages, operate as functional entities and coherent wholes at various levels in the social, ritual, political and economic sphere. The patrilineal structure of these groups is complicated through the incorporation of small groups of cognatic and affinal relatives. These local homogeneous communities are relatively small groups (comprising a few villages, rarely more than 15, and mostly much less), where all members feel and act as kinsmen. The problems of internal order and enforcement of the law are therefore relatively minor. The essential problems arise around the maintenance of group cohesion and group spirit, the balanced allocation of tasks, the distribution of privileges and offices, and the respect for goods and persons. It is in this perspective that the members of such a local 'alunga cell qualify as a police force which is "at the disposal of the *bwami* initiates to maintain a supervision over the work." There is a strong belief in the power of 'alunga - 'alunga *ale na buti*, 'alunga has a destructive power—a power which can be activated for the worse by the ancestors, a power which can be placated by the living through appropriate offerings (including the libation of animal blood on the feather hat), through initiation, dance, and gift-giving.

Because of the troublesome situation around 'alunga I have little information about the carver and his art. I knew personally a couple of specialists, and interestingly enough, they were at the same time the carvers of the mask (*mlongi* or *mkeci*) and the expert senior maskers, but this is not a pattern. The art is learned within a very close



26. STANDING MALE STATUE IN BLACKENED WOOD, USED IN ANCESTRAL CULT. ONE OF THE GROUP OF SEVEN STATUES NOTED IN FIGURE 2.

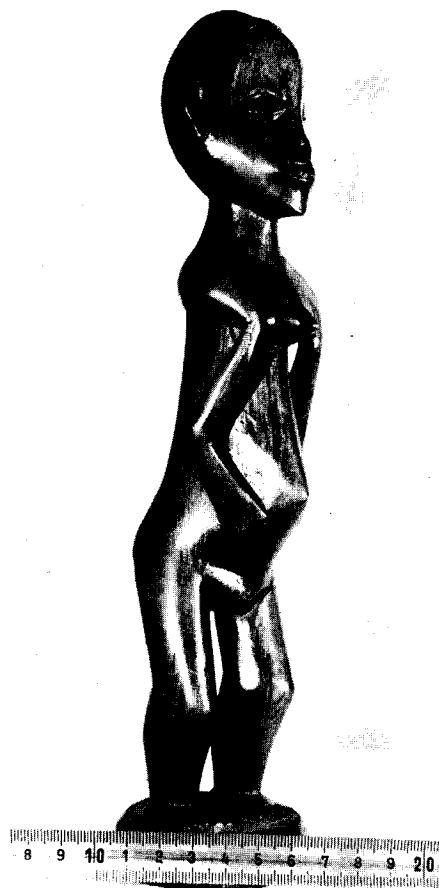


27. MONOXYLOUS STATUE WITH BIFRONTED 'ALUNGA MASK-SHAPED HEAD SUPPORTED BY A NECK AND A FOUR-LEGGED SPHERICAL STOOL. BLACKENED WOOD AND FIBERS. ONE OF THE GROUP OF SEVEN STATUES NOTED IN FIGURE 2. 13".

family line. In most cases that I know of the expert carver had learned the technique from his father and grandfather. The mask, made in *ngoman-goma* wood, is carved in great isolation in the bush; the work lasts four weeks (at the rate of a few hours a day) and every day the carver chooses another location. For all this time the carver must abstain from sexual contact, lest the child born from such a union have the monstrous head of the mask. Purchase of the mask is made through the efforts of a local *'alunga* community (a village and/or a lineage) at the rate of from  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the prevailing marriage payment rate (in the fifties this was about 40 units of payment, including goats, cloth, iron objects, etc., which was the equivalent of about 3,000 to 4,000 Congolese francs, an amount close to \$100.00). The carver has considerable obligations towards his agents and towards the person, or his representative, who has taught him the art. No special rituals pertain to the making of the mask, but before it can be worn for the first time the carver must libate it with the blood of a chicken. Also, when the mask is first used by a new *m'ma mwitu*, chicken blood is libated over the feathers, while the *bwami* initiates rub the masker with their buffalo tail sceptors to "give them force."

The Bembe consider that the circumcision rites belong to their most ancient traditions which they brought with them from Legaland. Many non-Bembe and pre-Bembe groups have learned the circumcision rites from the Bembe—some others (e.g. several divisions of the Mbote hunters) never adopted them. In the fifties, the traditional circumcision rites practically disappeared in Bembeland, as a result of governmental and missionary interference and in some areas at least also under the influence of the *yando* form of circumcision which was introduced in the Lake Tanganyika area by Swahilized groups.

In the ancient tradition, the organization of the circumcision rites among the Bembe is completely geared to the *bwali*-circumcision of the Lega, under the direct control and leadership of ranking initiates of the *bwami* association. The circumcision rites spread cyclically, following fixed sequences between interconnected clans, from village group to village group. These cycles were irregularly held, possibly only every seven to ten years. In the beginning decades of white rule, which was not firmly established in Bembeland until 1900, the Bembe maintain that only two such cycles were organized, before the entire system collapsed. The circumcision itself was done on young men of different age,



28. STANDING FEMALE FIGURINE IN BROWN WOOD; HAIRDO BURNED BLACK. MODERNISTIC CARVING BY SAMBAO, A BEMBE OF THE BABUNGA CLAN. COLLECTED BY A. DE RYCKE BEFORE 1947. 11".

but the average age was about 18 to 20. The circumcised spent most of their time—the seclusion lasted one year—in the *lukole* lodges which were constructed in the bush.

The central symbols of the circumcision are *'imbili'iti* and *'abile*, represented as kinds of spirits which manifest themselves through two senior experts singing in a kazoo-like reed, and imitating distorted male and female voices. The Bembe make a distinction between two kinds of circumcision ceremonies: *butende bwa silamo*, where no masks are used, and *butende bwa 'eluba*, where one type of mask occurs in small quantities. The first tradition is the genuinely ancient one as it also exists among the Lega. Immediately after the circumcision, and for a couple of weeks until the wounds are healed, the young men do not wear anything else but a little apron (*bilemba*). Then they receive the large *masambwa* disguises, made of dried banana leaves, strips of banana tree bark, and other grasses, which are fastened around the head so that the entire body is covered by them. These costumes are usually surmounted by a semi-circular, painted, crown-like structure (*isembo*) made of



29. MALE STANDING STATUE IN BROWN WOOD, USED IN THE ANCESTRAL CULT IN RELATION TO KIZANGUNGU, THE PRIMORDIAL ANCESTOR OF THE BACIMBA, A SMALL GROUP OF FISHERMEN IN 'AHELA VILLAGE ON LAKE TANGANYIKA, SOUTHEASTERN BEMBELAND. COLLECTED BY D. BIEBUYCK IN 1950. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 18 3/4".

bark and stuffed with grasses or mosses (Fig. 18). In this form of disguise the young men regularly visit the villages, in quest of food. Moeller (1936, p. 339), following information obtained from a former administrator in Bembeland, makes reference to the fact that the young men are led to the circumcision lodge by a masked *ngalipa*, who is also dressed in leopard skin. I have no direct knowledge concerning this fact, but it is quite possible since the *bwami* initiates in charge of the circumcision may use one of their face masks (see, for example, the one reproduced in Fig. 15) for this purpose. Some Bembe have the *butende bwa 'eluba* tradition, in which one type of mask (Figs. 1 and 13) occurs in small numbers. These masks, specifically called *'emangungu*, are fixed on top of the banana leaf and banana bark strip costumes which the young men wear over the body, or attached to a

small cone-shaped hat made of bark. The mask tradition in the Bembe circumcision rites is highly reduced, and in social and ritual terms, is largely insignificant. Only a small number of Bembe groups use *'emangungu*. In the field, I have seen very few of these masks, and where I have found them, the groups in question, like the Bahese, had a non-Bembe origin. The question of these masks and their exact origin remains a problem. On the one hand, they have strong morphological and stylistic connections with those of *'alunga*, of which they are simplified versions. Their tradition takes us, therefore, back to the pre-Bembe groups. On the other hand, the Bembe have a young men's and children's dance society called *'atende*, which they also ascribe to the ancient patrimony from Legaland. Boys and young men, mostly at the invitation of their father, could become members of *'atende*, before having gone through the circumcision ceremonies. In those *'atende* dances (Fig. 21) which I have seen, a young man was usually dressed in a large *samba*-costume made of dried banana leaves. The costume covered the head, and was adorned with a collarette (*msuli*) reminiscent of *'alunga*. I was informed that a wooden face mask (*mahala* or *'eluba*) might be attached to the costume, and that the mask was a simplified representation of the *'alunga* mask.

The ancestral cult (*bushumbu*) is a pervading force in Bembe society. The ancestors are an activating power behind dreams and nature spirits.



30. (ABOVE) WOOD PLANKBOARD WITH HALF-LOZENGE SHAPED FACE IN SLIGHT RELIEF. CONNECTED WITH ANCESTRAL CULT AMONG THE BASOMBO CLAN OF WESTERN BEMBELAND. 30". 31. (RIGHT) THREE WOOD HALF-FIGURES, PLACED NEAR A HOUSE ENTRANCE AND CONNECTED WITH THE ANCESTRAL CULT AMONG THE BASOMBO CLAN IN WESTERN BEMBELAND. AVERAGE HEIGHT: 15".

They appear in dreams to make their will directly known; they strike people with sickness and death; they cause other forms of misfortune in hunting, fishing etc.; and they drive and direct the nature spirits. On their behalf, oracles are consulted, ordeals administered, shrines erected, sacrificial and other rituals organized. A large number of the initiations into the many different kinds of associations are also thought of as direct responses to the desires of the ancestors. Leaving aside the cult of the Bahombo, who are defined as the ancestors of vanished hunting groups turned into nature spirits, there are essentially two levels at which the ancestral cult operates: the family and the lineage cult. Both men and women actively worship *'Oci*, the spirit of close male and female relatives: agnatic (one's father or father's father), matrilineal (one's mother's father), or affinal (one's dead spouse). The lineage ancestral cult operates at various levels of the segmentary structure; it is part of the responsibility of the head of the lineage to adequately assure this cult.

The actual worship of the ancestors manifests itself concretely around the many types of shrines (small tables on low or high feet; smaller or larger bee-hive or spherically-shaped constructions). In the fifties ancestral worship was still the most evident form of ritual activity. One was able to encounter scores of such simple, unadorned shrines in a single Bembe village, which often included some of the following objects: a calabash with white clay; a sprinkler; hunting trophies (e.g. horns, a tail, a piece of ivory); a hunting knife; a spearpoint; or a powder gun. Because of the very close association with the nature spirit cult, there might also be several stones or a mushroom-shaped termite nest. Food, a piece of the sacrificial animal (chicken, goat), or a sample of the first fruits of the harvest might also be left in the shrine.

The question now arises as to the origin and function of the imposing standing statues commonly ascribed

to the Bembe (Figs. 2, 26-27). In the course of my field research, I have visited all Bembe villages, and taken detailed inventories of many villages, houses and shrines. I encountered carvings connected with the ancestral cult only in some villages located on the southern rim of northwestern Bembeland, both in the mountains and in the Luama Valley adjoining these mountains, among representatives of the Bahese (Basilugesi, Basu), Basombo, Basibweka, and Basikasingo.

These carvings are extremely limited in number and in type, and whether well finished or rudimentary, they all exhibit the same style characteristics. In one case, among the Basombo, the object was a rectangular shield-like carving with a triangular face carved in relief (Fig. 30). It was fixed on the outside of a shrine by a man on behalf of his father's spirit and on account of his ailing son. In another case, among the Basombo, three rudimentary half-figures in light, uncolored wood (height about 12"), were placed, slightly stuck in the ground, against the outside wall of a house near the left side of the entrance door (Fig. 31). A man had consecrated these images on behalf of his sick grandfather (i.e. his own father's senior brother) to celebrate the spirits of his own father, his grandfather, and great grandfather. In another village, belonging to the Basibweka, there was one spherically-built shrine which contained three rudimentarily carved half-figures, consecrated by a man on behalf of a senior brother, a junior brother, and a senior wife. The female figure was simply represented by a pole slightly sharpened towards the top, without any indication of facial traits. On the two other pieces facial traits were indicated, and one half of the face was painted white, with the other half red. In still another shrine in the same village, three similar images were combined with two mountain stones for the worship of nature spirits (or for the betterment of the place where the ghosts of specific ancestors were said to dwell). A set of small sticks for percussion (*ngwasa*), and a dogbell (*lu'eke*) were also included. The most significant sets of images connected with the ancestral cult, such as those illustrated in Figs. 2, 26-27, were found in a group of villages established on the rim of Bembe- and Boyoland among the Basikasingo. It has already been noted that the Basikasingo form a group of 17 villages inhabited by lineages of heterogeneous origin; some, like the Basikamanya, Balambo, and Babinja claim to come from Lubaland; some, like the Basilumembe trace their origins from the Zimba (Binja); some,





like the Basikihala have their antecedents among the Lega. A majority of lineages, called Basilugesi, and Basu, recognize their position within the Bahese clan, a Bembe-ized pre-Bembe and pre-Lega group that might be of Kunda origin. The Basikasingo were already recognized in 1908 as an autonomous grouping within the Kalembelembe sector. They were, in later decades, alternately incorporated in the Boyo-Bahutwe sector of Kabambare territory and in the Lelenge sector of the Bembe in Fizi territory. In the villages inhabited by the Bahese lineages I encountered several shrines in hangar-form (*sese ya misi*), which contained sets of the aforementioned large standing statues. In one such shrine, located at the crossroads of the village of Masembe, six of these statues stood together: five in a single row and one in front of them. They were connected with the names of six "grandfathers" (*batataulu*) of the local group: the senior, Luhanyo, and his four juniors Lukuca, Asinola, Pacwe, 'Asangala, each representing a different lineage, and their common sororal nephew, Mwamena. In another such shrine, located at the crossroads of the village 'Emanga, was a row of six such statues, with a seventh statue and four stones placed in front of them. The images were linked with the names of the following persons: Yaunda, the father of the present head man of the group; Mkumbo and Nambo, two of his "servants" respectively from the Luba-Hemba and the Boyo-Bahutwe; Alunjwe and his junior Ebula, both considered as the "seniors of us all"; Nema, the representative of another lineage with whom they had allied in their fight against the Luba. The seventh statue was linked with the name of 'Alungulungu, a "grandchild" of this group. The four stones were related to four named areas where the group and its ancestors had formerly resided. In another shrine, situated in a village of Itota, inhabited by the Basu, a lineage related to the Basilugesi of the earlier mentioned village of 'Emanga (both of Bahese origin), the same cult was centered around three statues which were related to the names of the headman's father, paternal grandfather and great grandfather, while four stones set up around the statue of the great grandfather designated his four wives. In one of the several villages inhabited by the Basilugesi, I was able to obtain a set of seven carvings, all displayed in the house of their owner (Figs. 2, 26-27 show three of these carvings). The statues were linked with the names of the owner's father, Fundi; his father's three uterine senior brothers, Lu'oci (Fig. 26), Mwema,



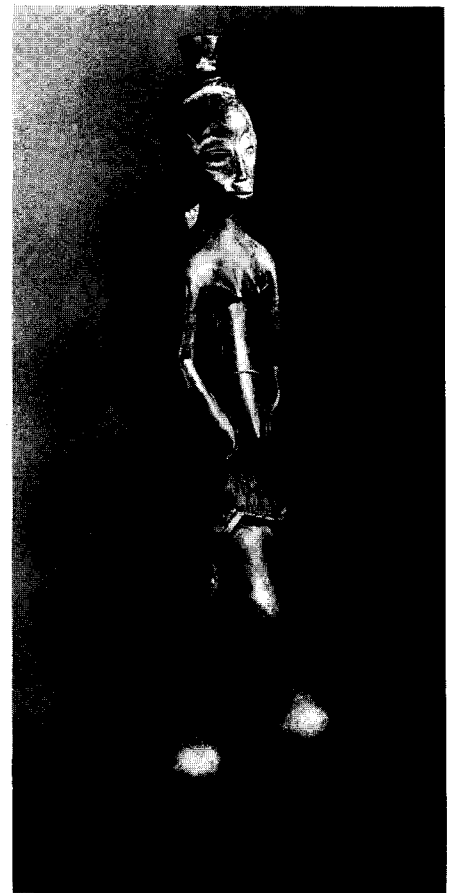
32. MALE WOOD HALF-FIGURE FIXED ONTO A CALABASH, USED IN THE BUKABO, MWANJALULU, AND ANCESTRAL CULT AMONG THE BAGOMA. CARVING BY SAMBAO. COLLECTED BY D. BIEBUYCK IN 1950. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 20%.

Mnolwa; his one uterine junior brother, Nyange; their common mother, Lulibu (Fig. 2); and the uterine senior brother of the owner, 'Alunga (Fig. 27).

This art tradition ties the Basikasingo, and particularly the Bembe-ized Bahese lineages, directly to the ancestral statues made by the Basumba, a so-called Boyo group, and more particularly those known from the Basikibidji and Bakihanga subgroups (Zangrie, 1947-1950, pp. 72-77).

Other kinds of sculpture, always in very small quantities and regionally restricted, occur in Bembeland; they are made and used by both the Bembe and groups of non-Bembe origin. All are made for a well-defined ritual purpose.

The groups established along Lake Tanganyika actively worship nature spirits identified as water spirits dwelling in and around the lake. Among the Bagoma, Diza is represented in the form of a rudimentary snake figure made of mud and celebrated in a small hut-like shrine near the shores of the lake or in the adjoining mountains. Similarly, among several of these groups, Mkangyalukulu is worshipped in the form of a mud crocodile. The same groups also have a cult association called *bukabo*, which centers



33. FEMALE WOOD HALF-FIGURE FIXED ONTO CALABASH. THIS CARVING FORMS A UNIT WITH THE ONE DESCRIBED IN FIGURE 32. COLLECTED BY D. BIEBUYCK. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE. 20%.

around the spirits of the lake. A similar organization exists among the Bakwakalanga, and other populations. Half-figures (*mi'eci*), representing males and females, and placed in a calabash (*tubwelulu twa bukabo*; Figs. 32-33) are the central cult objects. These figures are connected with the spirits of the lake, and are known in some areas as *kabwe lugulu*. Among the Bembe-influenced Bagoma, this cult has syncretized with elements of the Mkangyamukulu and the ancestral cult.

Some Bembe and non-Bembe lineages, established in the area of Lake Tanganyika worship the river spirit Mwenemtambala, and his wife. They are believed to reside in river pebbles (*nanga*), but are also represented under the form of a rudimentary crocodile figurine made from the soil of a mushroom-like termite nest. The mud sculpture is built up around a core of reeds collected in the Mtambala River and pieces of wood from two trees. The surface is decorated with the little pebbles in which the spirit resides.

'Yangya is an earth spirit venerated in many parts of Bembeland. Its origin

and dissemination are ascribed to an Mbote group (Basi'asumba). The spirit is located in a mushroom-shaped termite nest. A rudimentary anthropomorphic image, or a simple lump, may be made from this termite nest, and placed in a 'Yangya shrine. It may also be placed in a calabash and hung in the house. 'Yangya is representative of a fertility cult practiced by men on behalf of their childless wives.

Among some of the southeastern Bembe there exists a healing association, called *bunganga*, which was introduced by the Mbote (Bahonga), who allegedly learned it from the Boyo. The association offers special protection against sorcery and poison. Its members, beautifully dressed with impressive feather hats (eagle and guinea fowl feathers), and many monkey hides, perform spectacular dances in the villages which they come to protect. In the old tradition of the Mbote, the central cult object is an 'asongo, the skull from an *i'olo*-chief-tain in Boyoland, which is stuffed with bits of hair and nails from the adepts, by means of which the association maintains control over their destinies. In entering Bembeland, *bunganga* was influenced by the nature spirit cult. *Bunganga* has become a nature spirit located in spirally-shaped stones and activated through a rudimentarily carved pole with a face. The stones and the image are kept in a shrine, together with red soil; banana trees are planted around the shrine.

The Bembe and other groups of Bembeland have a rich set of healing practices (*bubu'i*) in which a great variety of natural and manufactured objects are used. The healing ceremonies are richly accompanied by dances, and various rituals. Many types of amulets are manufactured, each specialized against a particular disease. Carvings are generally not used, except occasionally in the earlier mentioned *bukabo* treatment, and in the *mpunga* practices which were introduced from Lubaland (Fig. 11). In many of the proceedings, pebbles and stones of a certain form (e.g. painted, or dented) are referred to, and used as, "figurines" (*mi'eci*).

The work of one carver, named Sambao, a Bembe of the Babungwe clan, living in the village of Mande, in close contact with several Bagoma groups, must be mentioned. He is a traditional sculptor who originally made sculptures for the *bukabo* cult and other healing practices (the two *bukabo* works illustrated in Figs. 32-33 were made by him). Before the Second World War he had begun to carve objects (figurines, tables, and chairs with caryatids, axes with a carved handle decorated with an

animal, masks) at the request of westerners living in the area. Some of his works, very much conceived in the traditional style of the ancestral figurines, are particularly pleasing (Fig. 28). His figurines are characterized by the broad, forward-thrusted shoulders, an almost pyramidally-shaped belly culminating in a strongly protruding naval point, and bent forward-leaning arms clasping the belly.

This rapid study of the Bembe shows how tenuous the concept of tribe is for the study of African art in this and other parts of Central Africa (Biebuyck, 1966). "Tribes" as they occur on our maps and in our textbooks are often very different from the ethnohistorical and cultural realities which the people are aware of and which the field worker can find if his field survey of a particular area is broad enough, and not restricted to a village or a section of that area. In Central Africa, "tribal territories" are the end result of many pre-colonial and colonial developments. Considerable movements of groups of people, combined with a remarkable capacity for local adjustments and arrangements in the social, political, ritual, and other spheres of life, led to many complex situations whereby groups of different origins and cultures managed to live in very close juxtaposition within a single territory, group of villages, or village. The policy of centralization, merging, resettlement, relocation and regrouping of autonomous groups, which was practiced by the colonial administration over many decades, added considerably to the complication of an already complex cultural and territorial map. The allegedly homogeneous, undifferentiated, clearly isolated tribal territories are to a large extent the product of this unrealistic approach.

The Bembe are a case in point. They themselves are very much aware of the different groups with which they live and interact: those with whom they have made many mutual adjustments, and those that were incorporated and forced into their social system by outside forces. The field worker need not reconstruct the different "layers;" they are there clearly exposed before him and explained with great precision in the oral traditions (particularly in the *mise'eleco*, or traditions of migrations and encounters) of each clan; and they are also partially traceable through a study of the colonial history of the area.

The widespread art of *bwami* and the art of 'elanda represent the ancient traditions of the Bembe properly speaking, that is, those many clans which acknowledge a Lega origin (and are acknowledged as such by the Lega),

and whose general culture is—as the field worker and comparatist can observe—of the Lega type. The art of the ancestral cult is a tradition of some of the so-called Boyo and of a very few Bembe-ized clans, such as the Bahese, which have their origins among, and have maintained contacts with, those Boyo. A second, less well-known art tradition linked with the ancestral cult (Fig. 29) occurs exclusively in a few villages established in southeastern Bembeland and inhabited by remote offshoots of the Bemba cluster. The traditions of the great 'alunga masks and the correlated large feather hats (which are worn separately as coiffures in some dances, such as *bunganga* and *mizuka*, which were not discussed in this study) go back to the traditions of pre-Lega and pre-Bembe hunting groups known as Mbote (these cannot, of course, simply be identified as Pygmies). The plank-board masks, which occur only in a restricted area within the *butende* and 'atende rites, are obviously inspired by the 'alunga masks (and the Bembe are aware of this). The several other types of sculpture, in wood and mud, have their roots among the Lake Tanganyika dwellers, who have multiple origins as was pointed out earlier.

All the various artistic traditions and their functional properties overlap among groups known under different tribal labels. Each tradition has maintained itself very clearly and autonomously within its own social and ritual setting. To a very limited degree there has been some compenetration of tradition. A case in point is the small figurine illustrated in Fig. 16, which is carved in the style of the ancestral figurines used by the Bahese lineages in Bembeland, but which was used as an initiation object in the *bwami* association. It is not surprising that the object was found in northwestern Bembeland in an area of contact with the Bahese, Basikasingo, and Boyo. □

1. Various sources illustrating Bembe art works are quoted with the following passages. Standing figures of the Bembe type were reproduced as early as Fuhrmann (1922, pp. 64-65, but without ethnic identification), Soupault (1929), Maes and Lavachery (1930), and von Sydow (1930, Fig. 14, under Wabembe). Recent studies have increasingly included masks and other works.

2. For good descriptions of the forms see, for example, von Sydow (1930, p. 459), Leuzinger (1960, p. 190), Bodrogi (1967, p. 98). Appropriate visual material is mentioned in the following notes.

3. For illustrations, see von Sydow (1930, Fig. 140; 1954, Fig. 92), Fagg (1964, Pl. 89; 1965, Pl. 107), Frankfurt-am-Main (1968, p. 35, Pls. 70-71).

4. See Soupault (1929, p. 210), Maes and Lavachery (1930), Schmalenbach (1954, Fig. 137), Muensterberger (1955, Pl. 48), Maesen (1960a, Pl. 37, and 1960b, Pl. 123).

5. See Fagg (1968, Pl. 269, and 1970, p. 91, no. 100).

6. See Washington (1971, Fig. 238). The mask-shaped head on a stool which we illustrate in Fig. 27 is a rare example that falls in the same category of objects, although its style and form are completely different. See also