

Sculpture from the Eastern Zaïre Forest Regions: Metoko, Lengola, and Komo

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For the first and second parts of this series, see *African Arts*, Volume IX, Number 2 and Volume X, Number 1.

Our ethnographic and artistic documentation relating to the complex, large-scale, voluntary *bukota* association and to the Metoko and Lengola themselves, is unfortunately very scanty. Significant cultural information is found in Aurez (1930), Dereine (1959), Jak (1938, 1939), Marmite (1934), Moeller (1936), and Van Belle (1925, 1932 a-b). Visual, frequently repetitive documentation on Metoko sculptures occurs in Bascom (1967, p. 71), Burssens (1960, p. 784), Claerhout (1971, pl. 51), Leiris and Delange (1967, pp. 107 and 111), Maes (1938), and Maesen (1960b, pl. 42). Until recently, Lengola sculptures were generally not documented (see Delange, 1967, p. 163; Leiris and Delange, 1967, pl. 284; Maesen, 1960, pl. 42), but recently Cornet (1975, pp. 124, 126) has provided some important additions.

The *bukota* association reaches its greatest intensity among the Metoko, but it also occurs among the Lengola (who seem to have received it from the Metoko) and overlaps among some Songola and southwestern Komo. The ethnographic data allow us to relate *bukota* directly to the *bwami* association of the Lega (Biebuyck, 1973a). If we

include in this picture analogous associations, called *esambo* among the Ngengele and *nsubi* among the Songola, an uninterrupted continuum between *bukota* and *bwami* may be observed. Both associations have numerous common features in organization, structure, and ideology; it is not within the scope of this study to retrace them in detail.

Bukota has a large male and female membership (with some wives of male initiates occupying complementary female grades), which is based on secretly held initiations. The precise structure of the hierarchically organized grades is unknown, but among the Metoko the highest-ranking initiates are respectively called *nkumi* and *kasimbi*, as opposed to the lower membership grouped under the title of *mukota*. Numerous privileges and rights are exercised, at various levels, by the initiates. For the purpose of this study, it is important to realize that, among both Metoko and Lengola, initiates of *kasimbi* rank (*mokoli* among the Lengola) organize and control the circumcision rites. The membership exerts control over the disposition of various sacred animals, including elaborate rites for slain leopards. Occupants of high grades also are entitled to special burial ceremonies. For initiation and other purposes, the *bukota* association uses and monopolizes a variety of objects, the range of which is undocumented but which includes natural ob-

jects, assemblages, and wooden sculptures. The members of the two highest grades (*nkumi* and *kasimbi*) hold exclusive rights over some objects, but individual incumbents of other grades and holders of special titles also own specific objects.

Compiling the available information, we conclude that there are several functional categories of wooden sculptures over which the *bukota* association of the Metoko has rights of usage and ownership. Similar to the Lega, all figurines have specific names, which refer to "characters" (protagonists, models of certain types of behavior). However, the nuanced levels of meaning that they express elude us. Following, then, is a synthesis of the categories known.

I. Initiatory functions

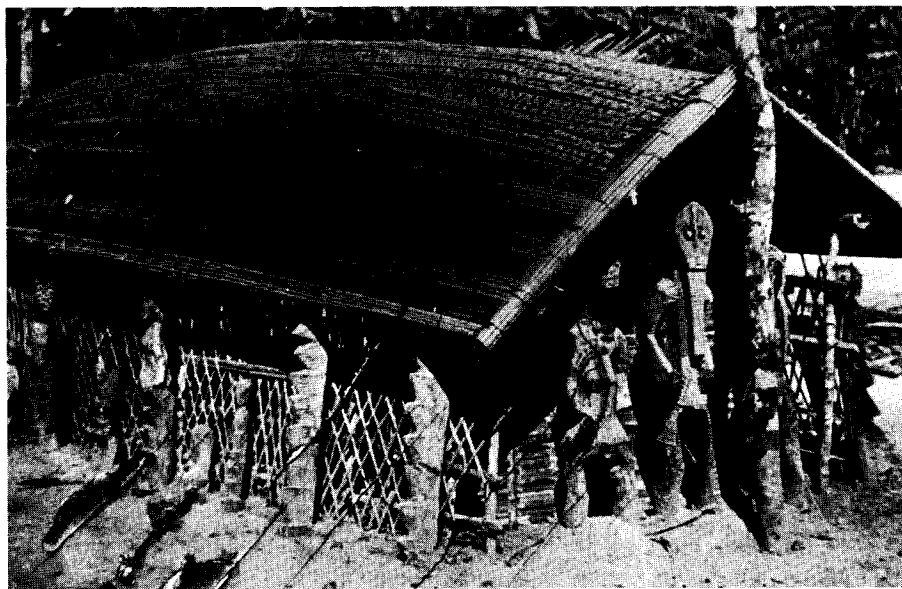
1. Two figurines, the male called Ntanda and the female Itea, representing husband and wife, are interpreted during the rites for obtaining the grade of *kasimbi* (Moeller, 1936, pp. 422-423).

2. Two figurines, a male called Ibubi and a female whose name is unknown, are interpreted in a closed initiation house during unspecified rites (Moeller, 1936, pp. 423, 425). In some rites these two sets of figurines occur as part of a larger configuration of objects, including resin torches, marble-like balls of clay, seeds and pods of certain fruits, knives, spears, axes, and adzes. These combinations are also typical for Lega initiatory procedures.

Such sculptures may not be seen by non-initiates; they are in the possession of the highest initiates (*nkumi*) and, when not in use, are hidden in the roof of the *nkumi's* house. Similar procedures are followed, in some instances, by the Lega.

II. Funerary functions

Several sources (Aurez, 1930; Dereine, 1959; Maes, 1938; and the field photographs by De Jaeger and Jak [see Biebuyck, 1976, pl. 8]) indicate that large figurines, collectively called *kakungu*, are placed on the tomb of high-ranking initiates. The tomb is made in the plaza of the village, and a carefully constructed rectangular house, with lattice walls and a roof in carapace shape, is built above the grave. Several figurines, visible from the outside, are displayed near the entrance and on the sides of the house; some of the external poles that support the roof are notched and occasionally adorned with a bust or head (Figs. 1, 2). The roof may be decorated with a large, four-legged animal, possibly representing a



1. METOKO TOMB OF A HIGH *BUKOTA* INITIATE. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, Tervuren. (M.R.A.C.).

pangolin (Fig. 5). It is unclear whether these are the same figurines that are also utilized in the initiations; Moeller (1936, pp. 422-433) asserts that the Ntanda and Itea figurines adorn the tomb. Approximately one month after the burial, the tomb is dismantled and the figurines and poles are discarded deep in the forest. Apparently, the figurines are erected near the tomb to serve as a temporary dwelling place for the soul of the dead initiate, who in this manner is able to ascertain whether or not adequate mortuary rites were conducted. At the conclusion of the rites, the soul leaves the figurines for an undetermined destination.

III. Peace-making functions

Some of the figurines, like Ibubi and his wife, help to promote peace between two feuding lineages or villages. The solemn appearance of the images in a social context that includes representatives of the feuding groups is a sign that their quarrels should be peacefully resolved. Likewise, wayward children are placed in the presence of the figurines, in a form of exhortatory ritual, to pledge an oath and to help them overcome their bad habits.

IV. Functions in the circumcision rites

One type of Metoko carving, called "bâton fétiche" in the references cited, is a scepter-like object, composed of a bust or head mounted on a short staff (Fig. 3). This staff is the supreme emblem of *kasimbi*, a high initiate who is responsible for organizing the circumcision rites. At the beginning of these rites, a narrow corridor flanked by bamboo fences is built in the village. It extends from between two houses to the center of the village, where the staff is positioned for watching over the procedures. One by one, the boys are circumcised near the figurine; the prepuce is then buried *in situ* by means of the staff. The object is also used in peace-making ceremonies when the feuding parties are assembled in ceremonial context. This staff, called *ikuo* or *musikongo*, is hidden in the roof of *kasimbi's* house when not in use.

Starr (1912, pl. 129) also illustrates two rudimentary half-figurines, male and female, painted yellow, which stand in front of the rounded, bark-covered entrance to a circumcision lodge. These carvings are different from the other known Metoko figurines and are very similar to sculptures occurring in the family ancestral cult of some Bembe groups (Biebuyck, 1972, pl. 30). Their presence near the circumcision house would indicate that artworks, different from the staff, serve as guardians of the lodges where the circumcised boys heal and undergo a series of systematic teachings in techniques and values. Large, standing statues, not very different from those placed near the tombs, are identified by Jak (Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale [MRAC], Tervuren, photographic archives) as "figurines de circoncision" (Fig. 4). Lastly, the Metoko use well-carved spherical stools (*kitumbi*), on which the boys are seated for the operation, and which are owned by the *nkumi* and *kasimbi* initiates.

It is interesting to note that, according to Aurez (1930), the right to carve *kakungu* figurines is acquired in a specific rite called

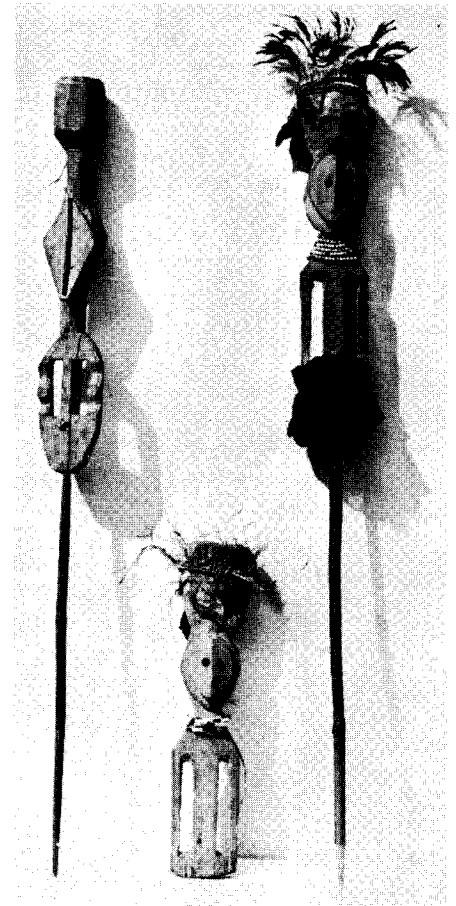


2. METOKO SCULPTURED POLE, POSSIBLY FROM A BUKOTA INITIATION HOUSE. M.R.A.C.

itea. Aurez provides a list of rites, all part of the *bukota* initiations, that entails specific titles and privileges (e.g., the power to heal or to arbitrate feuds; the right to practice circumcision or to perform certain dances). Each of these rights apparently is materialized in the ownership of distinctive objects (natural or manufactured). It is uncertain, therefore, whether the *itea* rite confers the right of carving the figurines or rather of owning them.

According to Dereine (1959), *kakungu* images, of which he brought three "modernized" ones back to Tervuren (Fig. 6), were placed near a specially built hangar (*tanda*) where the boys, before the actual circumcision began, were gathered together for preliminary rites. The images signified to the villagers that the initiations were now in process and admonished non-initiates to stay out of sight. When the operation was completed, the boys were escorted to a forest lodge and the house was destroyed; the images were held in trust by an initiate who was the village headman as well.

The *bukota* association is also known among the Lengola, and particularly among those Lengola who are in contact with the Metoko. However, it is not the sole pervading social force that it evidently is among the Metoko. The *lilwa* association, which I analyzed in the second part of this study (*African Arts*, IX, 1), exists among those Lengola who are in contact with the Mbole and Yela; and some Lengola who are on the boundaries with the Komo possess certain kinds of *esumba* initiations of the Komo-Pere variety (IX, 1). The sculptural activity of the Lengola is thus not exclusively monopolized by the members of *bukota*; nevertheless *bukota* holds a dominant position and maintains a



3. METOKO HALF-FIGURINE AND TWO STAFFS SURMOUNTED BY FIGURINES. M.R.A.C.

close association with the other initiatory activities.

1. Paraphernalia associated with healing practices

The members of *bukota* play a role in specific healing practices (Jak, 1938). When the sickness has been diagnosed by a diviner (*mufumu*), he notifies members of the association of the appropriate treatment. In some instances, this involves the use of wicker rattles, percussion sticks, and the *molimu* (presumably a type of trumpet, which is also found among the Nyanga, Nande, and Pere). On occasion (e.g., the *lilwa* treatment for blood disorders), the ill person is first secluded for several days without food or drink. He is afterward rubbed with ashes and brought before an initiate who wears a mask (made from bark or hide?) and a bark costume. This personage symbolizes a leopard spirit searching for other leopard spirits. The masked initiate disappears into the forest and returns with similarly dressed personages. Thereafter, the medicines are prepared.

For certain diseases, there is an even more elaborate treatment (*biaba*), which is also strongly developed among the Komo. The patient remains for weeks in a house containing the *biaba*, which possess the power to chase the sickness from the body. These *biaba* consist of intricate configurations and assemblages (interconnected poles, parrot feathers and feathered ropes). At times, a figurine or human-like assemblage made of

banana stipes, with white feathers adorning the arms and legs, is included. This type of figurine is typical for the Komo. Persons who have no children are forbidden to see the *yaba* figurines (Jak, 1939). Bull-roarers assure that women and children stay at a distance.

II. Figurines connected with healing

Dereine (1959) collected a tall, very slender, rudimentarily carved figurine with broad chest and stump-like arms, blackened and covered with white dots (Fig. 7). The figurine, called *akunga molimu*, is in the possession of female healers (*ekongo*) and stored in a house containing several other unidentified figurines. The figurines may not leave this house and cannot be seen by men. This raises the interesting, unanswered question of whether they are carved by women, or whether they only become secret after consecration. When a woman is seriously ill, she is taken back to her home village by her female kinsfolk to be healed by a woman. Until she is well, the woman must reside in the house with the figurines. Nothing is known regarding

other aspects of the treatment, which involves dances and the rare drumming by women.

III. Figures related to circumcision rites

There are three types of sculptures identified by Dereine as *mosilo*, which are related to the circumcision rites. The first is a free-standing, elongated, full figure (86.1 cm). The second type includes two tall scepters; one is carved as a janus-faced, double half-figure, standing on a janus head (86.5 cm.) (Fig. 9), and the other consists of a half-figure positioned on a stool, which stands on the head of a bust-figure (49.8 cm.). The third type is a half-figure with janus face (27.6 cm.) (Fig. 8). The figurines are sculpted by a lineage head (member of *bukota*?), or by another carver commissioned by him, at the beginning of the circumcision rites. They are displayed near the house of the person who is in charge of the circumcision rites, indicating that the ceremonies are evolving. The figurines are left to decay after the initiations are finished. According to other sources, these "bâtons fétiche" also called *okenge*, function as peacemakers and are planted between contesting parties. Furthermore, they suggest the "spirit" of divination.

The Lengola make impressive double or triple stools (see Biebuyck, 1976, pl. 2), referred to as *usugu*. They consist of two or three spherical seats that are interconnected by a large, lozenge-shaped, hollow case, which could be closed like a box to store shell money. De Jaeger (MRAC, Tervuren, field photograph, 1937) identifies this exceptional object as a circumcision stool. Van Belle (1932) associates the stool with the highest initiates as being their exclusive privilege.

IV. Figurines of the *bukota* association

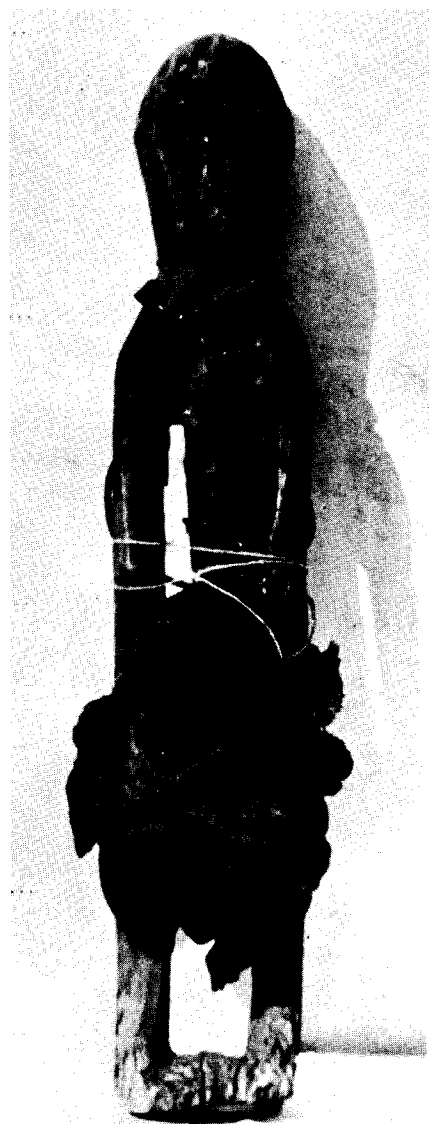
Little or nothing is known about the actual initiation procedures among the Lengola. The association comprises a hierarchy of grades, the highest of which are *dumanga* and *mokoli*. The person who achieves the lower grade of *mokota* has completed a succession of even lower initiations. Association members are very influential in the organization of the circumcision rites, in the treatment of certain diseases, and in the settlement of disputes and feuds. In addition, they assume special funerary roles for high-ranking initiates. During

the initiations, the candidates must witness and learn about "spirits," which Van Belle (1932 a-b) identifies under the names of Ibubi, Kasa, Kelemba, Diba, Ilanga, Bwandima, and Punju. These terms, which certainly do not stand for spirits, are reminiscent of similar concepts among the Lega, Bembe, Nyanga, Komo, and Metoko. Ibubi, for example, is, as earlier mentioned, the name for one of the Metoko figurines used in *bukota*. It is possible that also among the Lengola some of these names are characters represented in figurines.

Dereine (1959) brought back to the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale five figurines, which are not functionally identified (Fig. 11); other figurines in Tervuren are ascribed to the *bukota* association. However, their general meaning and usage within the context of the initiations are unknown. A field photograph by De Jaeger (MRAC, Tervuren, photographic archives, 1937) illustrates a large and most unusual Lengola figurine, placed against a wall of jointed, narrow, light-colored parasol planks, decorated with black dots (Fig. 10). This may be a section of the inside of a *bukota* house. Cornet (1975, pl. 95) shows a most extraordinary, very tall (2.13 m.) and elongated standing figurine with outstretched arms, which consists of six adjustable pieces. This figurine, called *ubanga nyama*, represents Suway, an ancestral founder of the Lengola. It is only exhibited in the center of the village, after the burial of the high-ranking *mungamba* dignitary, to allow men to make invocations. The exact connections with *bukota* are undocumented.

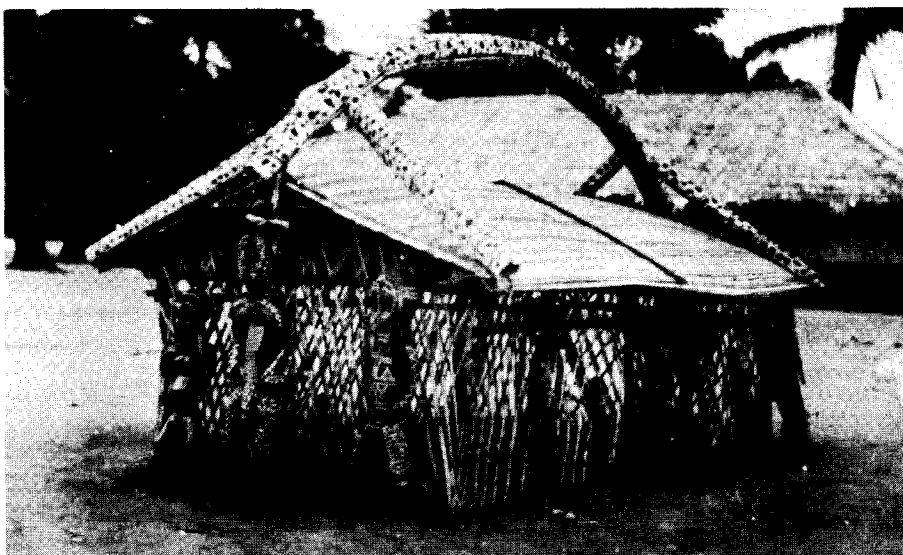
THE KOMO

The Komo are a large, widely scattered population. On all sides of their vast territory they are surrounded by other peoples, with whom they have exchanged culture elements. They have an extremely fragmented clan and lineage system. It is not surprising that considerable cultural differences are observable within the Komo unit, but detailed analyses have not yet been made. However, it is fair to say that central to the entire social fabric are the so-called *esumba* rites. In recurring and



4. METOKO FIGURINE. M.R.A.C.

5. METOKO TOMB OF A HIGH *BUKOTA* INITIATE.



varying forms, these *esumba* are in evidence everywhere among the Komo, as well as among some neighboring groups (e.g., Pere). The ethnographic data, though not abundant, are significant; for our purposes the more important sources of information are: Biebuyck (1957), de Mahieu (1973), Galdermans (1934), Gérard (1956), Moeller (1936), Soors (1924), and Van Geluwe (1956), who synthesizes a great deal of the information available before 1953. The visual documentation on Komo sculptures is scanty (few general books on African art include any material on the Komo) and limited to: Ancelot, Goldstein and Lamote (1955, p. 84), Cornet (1975, pl. 96), Huet, Jeanson and Delmarcelle (1958, p. 132), I. H. and R. L. (1972, p. 8); Moeller (1936, twenty unnumbered field photographs); Simpson (1966); Wauters (1949, p. 16).

Moeller synthesizes the data contained in various reports compiled by colonial administrators and is an essential source of information. He describes *esumba* as any kind of esoteric practice, any object that can be viewed merely by initiates, and foods that can be eaten only by certain initiates (1936, p. 351). Gérard (1956) identifies *esumba* as a material item employed in an initiation. The term encompasses a multitude of closed initiation rites, during which the revelation, viewing, interpretation of, and exposure to specific objects are of fundamental importance. The moral authority of the seniors and elders of the fragmented lineage- and clan-groups is validated through these initiation rites, the organization and secrets of which are controlled by them (de Mahieu, 1973). The sources are usually vague about the relationships between these initiations and the officeholders who control them; there is no evidence about any kind of hierarchical ranking of them. Gérard (1956) makes a distinction between major and minor *esumba*; in the minor initiations, objects are shown and explained in a relatively simple action context to those paying the fees; the major initiations include the elaborate circumcision and tattooing rites for young men and the hierarchically structured initiation rites of *mpunji* (or *mpunzu*). There exists, however, an intermediate group of rites, which entail prolonged healing sessions. Many of these initiations involve an exclusive male membership, but others are strictly limited to females. For several of these initiations, sculptures and assemblages are reserved; included are wooden masks, wooden and ivory figurines (human, zoomorphic, and highly abstract), scepter-like carvings surmounted by a human head, and hoods and costumes in bark and raffia.

We can now discuss the various contexts in which the artworks occur. It is necessary to recognize that many of the usages are apparently restricted to certain subgroups within the Komo ethnic unit.

I. Circumcision rites

Although there are many local variations, the elaborate rites are held at irregular intervals for boys of approximately ten years of age; they are organized and controlled by a specially constituted body of Masters-of-the-

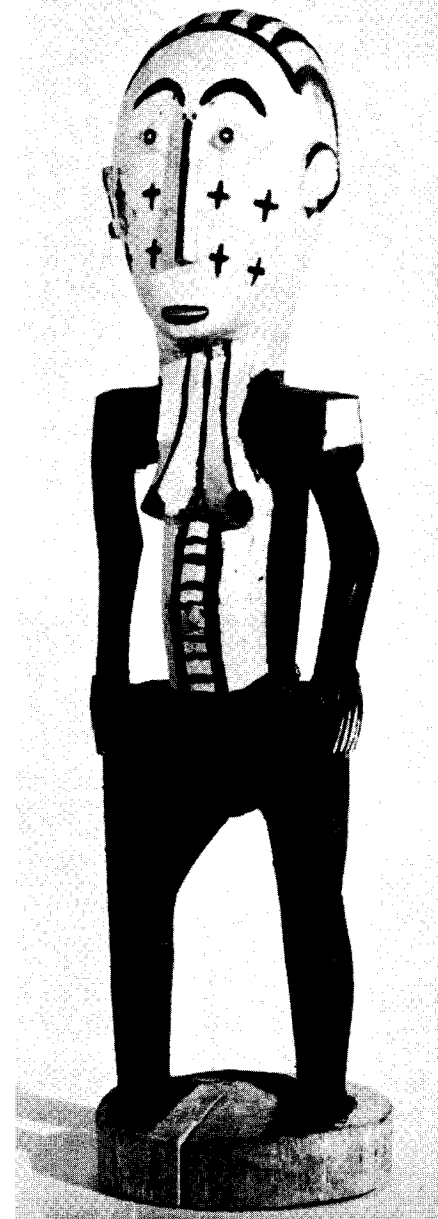
circumcision (*meneganja*). These personalities wear distinctive paraphernalia but seemingly do not exercise control over artworks. There are, however, two masked personages who appear during the rites. Kikulu is completely covered in a raffia dress. He acts also on other occasions and sometimes has the role of an executioner, but no specific data are published about his activities in the rites. Ndukwu (or Nduka) is dressed in a long robe of barkcloth with a hood that is decorated with red and black lozenges. He carries a wooden knife and wears many hides hanging from the belt, along with anklet bells. He emerges after the seventh child's operation (the first children are circumcised intermittently, during which time various ceremonies are conducted).

Small sculptures, called *bayinji*, are exhibited at different stages of the rites in various subgroups. They are mentioned in a rite both at the end of the actual operations and at the "coming-out" ceremonies. Two small figurines (20 cm.), one male and one female, are displayed inside the house of the Master-of-the-circumcision. Following a sequence of dances, held during the middle of the night, the figurines are removed from their container and placed on a mound or tree stump. They are rubbed with white clay and positioned between a hornbill beak, a piece of copal, and a jaw of the forest crocodile (all objects possessing extreme healing powers). The sculptures, illustrated by Moeller (1936, last two plates), are highly abstract carvings: one is a short pole surmounted by a lozenge-shaped top (suggestive of a phallus?); the other is a pole deeply incised in a spiraling design. No other data are recorded about the usages and meanings of these objects, which otherwise are seemingly closely related to carvings used in the *mpunju* initiations and to some Pere figurines.

II. The *mpunju* (or *mpunzu*) initiations

In some parts of Komoland these are, together with the circumcision rites, the most important initiations; they are highly secret and restricted to adult men with children. They are also found among the Pere, the easternmost Komo (submerged under the names Asa and Tiri among the Nyanga), some Nyanga, and even toward the north among some Bali and Rumbi groups. Gérard (1956) distinguishes three levels of initiation (*bunganga*, *eyanga*, *mpunju* itself), whereas Galdermans (1934) classifies the lower rites as "mpunju of the outside" and the higher rites as "mpunju of the inside." The lower rites entail numerous physical and moral tests and hardships. The highest rite, celebrated in the "house of *mpunju*," is essentially based on the revelation, contemplation, and interpretation of *mpunju* itself, materialized in objects.

Galdermans (1934) refers to only one highly patinated, ivory half-figurine, approximately 25 centimeters high. The figurine is carefully hidden in a basket that is placed behind a shield in the *mpunju* house; it is guarded by the "master or owner of *mpunju*" (a person who at his circumcision occupied the rank of *aluta*, i.e., someone who, because of his father's seniority, was the first to be



6. METOKO FIGURINE OF MODERN TYPE, COLLECTED IN 1959. 53.4cm. M.R.A.C.

circumcised among a large group of young men). For the actual initiation, the figurine is removed from the basket and displayed in the middle of the *mpunju* house, set on top of a turtle carapace, and surrounded by hides and feathers of animals reserved for the *mpunju* membership (e.g., monitor lizard, viper, water rat, certain monkeys, parrot). A small drum is beaten, and the candidate contemplates the objects and learns their interpretations (which are not recorded in the sources).

Moeller (1936, p. 369), who otherwise adheres to Galdermans' data, describes three small ivory tusks. Two of them, identified as female objects, are hollowed out and resemble shallow funnels; the third one, identified as male, is solid ivory. For the contemplation, the objects are removed from a leather sheath in which they are ordinarily kept in the *mpunju* house and inserted into a banana stipe (see Moeller, 1936, unnumbered pl. 5). A

chicken is killed over them, and they are covered with genet hide. Sick initiates are administered an enema of salt water by means of the female *mpunju* ivories. In Gérard (1956), several small ivory tusks are cited which are stuck in a banana stipe and concealed with a genet hide. The candidate enters the *mpunju* house in a state of cleanliness (all body hair removed, sexual abstinence). He must then kneel and bend forward; the master of *mpunju* spits some banana beer over his back and gives him an enema by blowing beer through one of the perforated tusks. This is an act of complete purification, in which the body is cleansed of all evil and absorbs the virtue of *mpunju* itself. Next, the tusks are cleaned with salt water; finally, the objects are shown and explained to the candidate. The rite is intended to communicate a special force and a quasi-immunity to those who have undergone it.

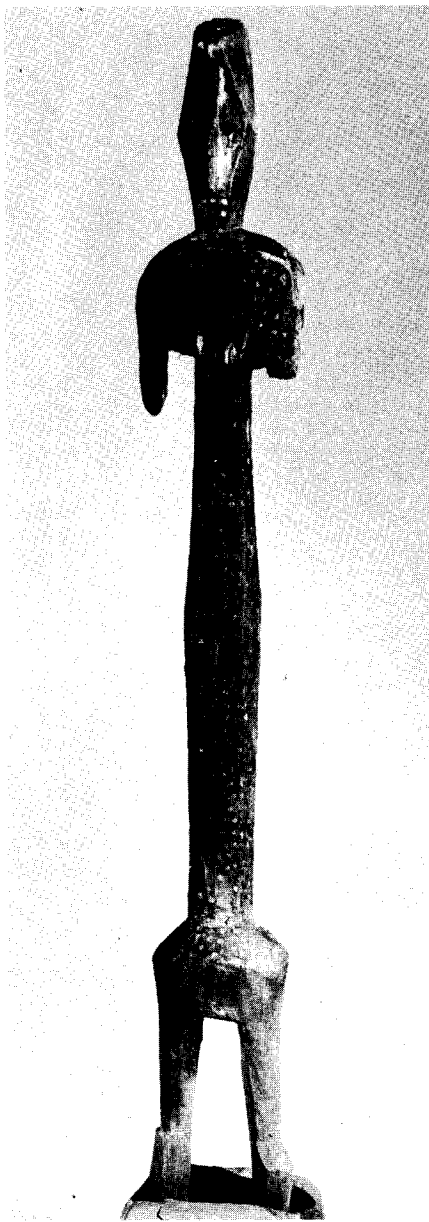
Special treatments against paralysis are also applied by means of the *mpunju* objects. Women and non-initiates are not allowed to see the objects; severe dysentery would result upon viewing them, which could be cured only by having a close relative of the afflicted individual experience the *mpunju* initiations. Once or twice a year, *mpunju* is involved in a wider, public ceremonial during which the hunt is of utmost importance. Young men must engage in a one-month, prolonged hunt. When much game has been killed and smoked, the news is forwarded to the master of *mpunju*. An initiate then transfers the hidden figurines to the location of the hunt; he remains for several days and then returns home accompanied by all the hunters. The meal is deposited in the house of *mpunju*. Many days of public celebrations ensue, at which time much verbal license and self-flagellation occur.

III. *Nkunda*

This is a special initiation for diviners, called *bafumu* or *abankunda*. It is unclear to me whether or not they constitute a special category, as opposed to other types of diviners. They constitute a hierarchically organized association, having distinctive costumes, dances, medicines, houses, and objects. The *nkunda* house, in which the initiations proceed, is circular; and the apex of its conical roof is adorned with a rudimentary bird figure. Two doors made of multicolored planks provide entrance to the house; it has an interior decoration of red, white, and black. From the central housepole hang numerous strings decorated with such things as feathers, tails, and wooden knives. On one side of the house there are superposed lodges strictly for the candidates, consisting of painted and sculptured panels. The candidates reside four months in this house, drinking infusions made

of a specific bark (which has hallucinogenic qualities) and learning the secrets of divination (concerning which there is no documentation).

Moeller (1936, pp. 351-357) describes various aspects of *nkunda*, based on information collected by different colonial administrators. Among the paraphernalia of the diviners, masks are not included. His photographic material (unnumbered pls. 9, 11), however, identifies several masked personages as *nkunda* dancers, in contrast with an unmasked one (pl. 10). All the dancers wear a multitude of beads, hides, feathers, barkstrips, or planks decorated with triangles and feathers, anklet bells, bracelets, and similar objects. Polychrome wooden masks cover their faces, each different from the other, although they all have a large, oval shape. One mask is black; it has large, circular eyes and a wide-open mouth with two rows of saw-like teeth. The eye-orbits are enhanced by a white circle; there is a large, white, inverted triangle on the front, and a broad, white line on each cheek.



7. LENGOLA FIGURINE AKUNGA MOLIMU. 72.2cm. M.R.A.C.



8. LENGOLA JANUS-FACED HALF-FIGURE. 27.6cm. M.R.A.C.



9. LENGOLA JANUS-FACED, DOUBLE HALF-FIGURE, STANDING ON A JANUS HEAD. 86.5cm. M.R.A.C.

Another black mask has the same type of eyes and mouth, but the front is higher. A heart-shaped, white line outlines the entire face; the nose is whitened, and the white line of the nose extends to the middle of the front. The third mask is difficult to describe because of the photograph's mediocre quality. Larger than the others, it is characterized by a huge, crescentic mouth and is heavily whitened around the nose and mouth. The mask might be in hide or bark.

It is unknown whether these masks occur in the initiations into the art divining, or in actual divination sessions, or whether they are merely manifest during the spectacular public, choreographic performances that are given by the members of *nkunda*, in which they enact various personages and animals. It is, of course, possible that the masks are used for all the above-mentioned purposes. Cornet (1975, pl. 96) illustrates a slightly different oval-shaped mask, with large, circular eyes and a broad mouth (which does not appear to be open). Part of the front, cheeks, nose, and mouth are concealed with an uninterrupted patch of white. The mask, called *nsembu*, is linked with the diviners. It is used principally when a member of the diviners' association dies, but is also worn for initiation and divination.

Masks similar to those illustrated by Moeller are also shown in Huet, Jeanson and Delmarcelle (1958, p. 132); and, out of context, in Ancelot, Goldstein and Lamote (1955, p. 84); and a photograph in the archives of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (1947). In one instance (Huet, Jeanson and Delmarcelle, 1958, p. 132) two large, oval-shaped masks are worn by two men dressed with the earlier-mentioned paraphernalia. The masks have large, open eyes and broad, wide-open, toothed mouths. The larger part of the masks is white, but the right part of the front in one mask, the left part of the front in the other mask, and the area of the eyes are dark in color. This might be a pair (male and female) of masks, to which Cornet (1975, p. 128) refers. A man standing beside them wears some of a diviner's paraphernalia. In another example (Ancelot, Goldstein and Lamote, 1955, p. 84), which again includes various unmasked performers dressed with the paraphernalia of diviners, there are three masked personages dancing in one row and surrounded by a host of men. The masked dancers wear large, decorated robes, presumably of barkcloth. The arms are wrapped in cloth and, in one case, covered with decorated, narrow planks. The three masks, all painted and with large, wide-open eyes and large mouth, are dissimilar in total appearance, indicating the possibility that they are representative of diverse characters in a choreographic performance.

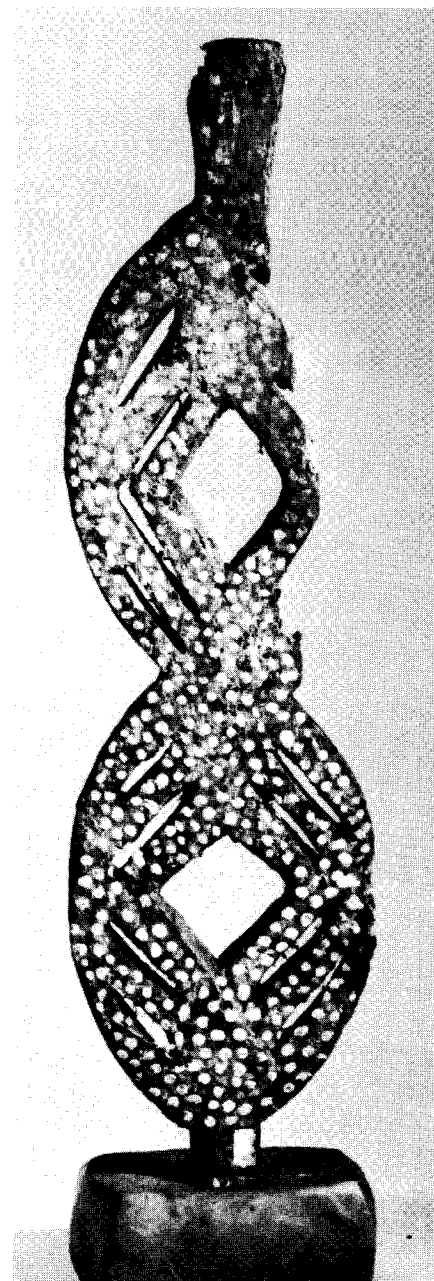
IV. Other male initiations

There are a vast number of male initiations, all presumably connected with the treatment of particular diseases. They are characterized by dances and the prolonged seclusion in a particular house, where the patient is exposed to herbal treatment and to particular objects. Sometimes there are figurines, carved in



10. EXTRAORDINARY LENGOLA FIGURINE NEAR THE DECORATED WALL OF A BUKOTA HOUSE. M.R.A.C.

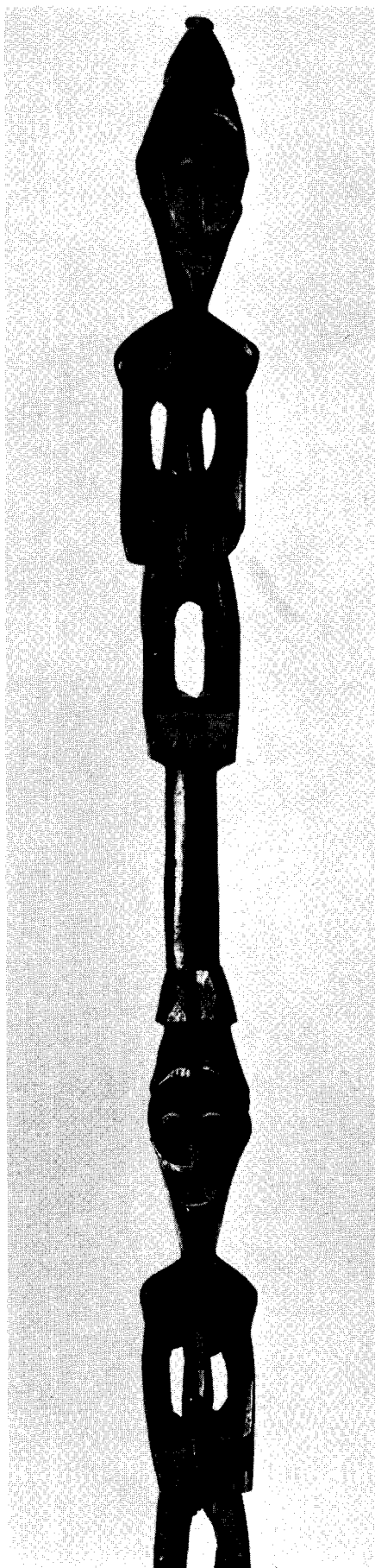
wood or represented by an assemblage of objects. Moeller (1936, pp. 358-388) offers various bits of information about them. *Ntema-yaga* is an initiatory treatment for paralysis and declining health. The patient is isolated in a house together with a large, black, standing figurine (Moeller, unnumbered pl. 3) with large scrotum, called *ntema*. In the village is erected a sculptured pole adorned with a feather hat and dressed with hides and beads (also called *ntema*). Leading to it are two rows of sculptured poles (notched and/or decorated with heads and faces, often in superposition). The two rows of poles are interconnected by suspended, transversal sticks. The participants run through this corridor, jumping over the transversally held poles, and then suddenly sit down before the sculptured *ntema* pole. They are massaged with red powder and showered with water. Then the assistants rub wet sand over the joints and kidney area. Non-initiates, men without children, and women have abandoned the village. After a lavish meal and further dancing, another assemblage figure (called *yaba* and made of pieces of banana stipe, joined together like a human body dressed in decorated barkcloth, feathers, and hat) is placed in the house where the patient resides. The dancers, their bodies painted white and red, overturn the *ntema* figurine and continue with the *lumba* rite. This rite lasts several weeks: the patient receives incisions, which are filled with banana leaf ashes, and is regularly whipped with the soaked stems of banana leaves. He must stay



11. LENGOLA OBJECT IDENTIFIED AS A SCULPTURED BOARD. 46.2cm. M.R.A.C.

secluded from people other than his wife who cooks for him and the initiates of the *lumba* rite.

In some areas, this rite is more complicated if the patient has a married or unmarried daughter; she is secluded with her father and receives henceforth the special title of *kilanga*. In this case, a wooden figurine "representing" the *kilanga* woman is displayed inside the house. If the woman has a child, the figurine represents a mother holding a child in her arms. When placed in the healing house, these figurines, made of *ojombo* wood, are polished with red powder and dressed in cloth and a necklace of leopard or crocodile teeth. The marriage of a *kilanga* woman is surrounded by special rites, in which the diviner-healer of *lumba* plays a role. During the betrothal ceremonies, future wife and husband are seated on two stools and solemnly receive the diviner's permission to



12. KOMO FIGURINE. 159cm. M.R.A.C.

marry. Before the actual marriage ceremony, the woman is again brought in contact with the *kilanga* figurine "to ensure numerous offspring" (Van Geluwe, 1956, p. 141). Under the name *mbungu*, another assemblage made of banana stipes, midribs of banana leaves, sticks, phrymium leaves, and cloth, and which suggests an animal, is also used in this context. The house where such treatments occur is designated with two white sticks, and the enclosure of the house is adorned with feathers and wooden pigeons.

Butwali is a multipurpose treatment in which three figurines (the male called *mwami*, the female *abonza*, and the animal *agembe*) are displayed in a house. Blackened bananas incrustated with pumpkin seeds are positioned around them; sticks, which are agitated like a carillon, hang from the ceiling.

Women, called *amampombo*, with special social status (some of them appear to have special sexual privileges) form a healing corporation. In some of the medical treatments, they deal with various diseases resulting from the transgression of prescriptions set by them; they use wooden *boli* pigeons (which must fly away with the disease). Another corporation of women, called *amamukuma*, handles small, wooden figurines (*mukuma* and *atuwa*) that are wrapped in barkcloth and applied to

the affected parts of the body. The patient stays for an indefinite period of time in a house with the images. Some of the figurines are male; others are female; still others represent the children of such couples. Some have a blackened head and a body colored red. Others are blackened but have red legs and a body covered with white dots. These are rudimentary, standing figures, without arms. In the same medical ritual, usage is also made of blackened poles and plankboards ornamented with white dots (some of them symbolizing *boli* pigeons).

The Komo seem to have had a fabulous number of specific initiatory treatments, monopolized by diverse, closed corporations of male and female experts. There were very definite regional differences in the types of treatment given and the kind of objects employed. Invariably, however, prolonged seclusion, exposure to "sacred" objects, treatment with herbs, and scarification of the body formed an essential part of the procedures. I have observed similar, complex, initiation-like treatments for sickness, without the usage of carvings, among the Nyanga (*bushake*), the Bembe (*bubu'i*), and the Lega (*nkago*). A widespread, common pattern underlies all of them.

The story of the usage and meaning of Komo art is largely unknown. It is puzzling to me how much of this is still retraceable, particularly because of the deep effect that the *kitawala* messianic movement exercised among many Komo in the forties and fifties. Some unique features of function and meaning were associated with this art.

In my opinion, the few sculptures in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale ascribed to the Komo fall into at least three morphological categories. Some figurines stylistically and thematically closely resemble Lengola carvings (Fig. 12). This is not astonishing. There is a prolonged history of interaction between certain western segments of the Komo and Lengola. The Lengola are sometimes considered as an avant-garde of the Komo. There are territorial contacts between the two groups, and there is a certain overlapping of institutions, including *bukota*. At least one standing, wooden figurine, with cowrie eyes, is very similar to some northern Lega carvings (Fig. 13). Here again, close contacts exist between some northern Lega and southern Komo. As a result, between the two ethnic units is a buffer group, called Kwame, where a mixture of Lega- and Komo-derived cultural elements, including *bwami*, can be detected. The few wooden masks (Biebuyck, 1976, pl. 12) are clearly distinguished from the surrounding areas and can be considered as typically Komo, although some of them may be found among the Hunde-derived, Komo- and Nyanga-influenced Tembo. Furthermore, there are some tall (54.7 cm. to over one meter), elongated, standing figurines (Fig. 12) (Biebuyck, 1976, pl. 1), characteristically spotted with white dots, which may be considered as genuine Komo. These figurines are, however, dissimilar from the ones identified by Moeller as *ntema*, *kilanga*, and *mukuma*. □

Bibliography, see *African Arts*, X, 1 (99-100)



13. KOMO FIGURINE. 36.3cm. M.R.A.C.