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# Mumbira: Musical Instrument of a Nyanga Initiation

DANIEL P. BIEBUYCK

The Nyanga live in the rainforest area, in the eastern part of the Zaïre Republic.<sup>1</sup> I have elsewhere analyzed various relevant aspects of their culture, which will not be repeated here.<sup>2</sup> The Nyanga are generally not known as an "artistic tribe" and are, therefore, one of several Central African ethnic groups that have not yet found a place on the stylistic maps of Africa. In a recent study in *African Arts* (VI, 2: 20-25, 86-92, 1973), I discussed the intricate meanings of the hide and bark masks and hoods that are used by the Nyanga in conjunction with their elaborate boys' circumcision rites. I now examine an extremely rare type of woodcarving that is made by some Nyanga subgroups for use in the *mumbira* initiations.<sup>3</sup>

Under the name *mpa*, the Nyanga classify a fairly large number of esoteric initiations that originate with the circumcision rites (*mukumo*) for mature young men, and continue at various stages of life under such labels and forms as *mbuntsu*, *mangwe*, *mpande*, *mukuki*, *kima*, *nkekuya*, *ukanga*, *kakoka*, *kasindi*, *bubire*, *mwari*, *bundia*, *nyamosoku*, and *mumbira*.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the initiations centering around circumcision (*mukumo*), none of these *mpa* are universally distributed among the Nyanga. Celebration of the rites and knowledge of the initiations are restricted to specific local kinship groups dispersed in sections of Nyangaland. Any particular group or village may hold several of these initiations. Some rites like *mumbira* and *nkekuya* involve men only; others like *mpande* include both men and women; a few like *bubire* or *mwari* have an exclusively female membership. The initiations are not structured on a hierarchy of grades and statuses but follow the kinship pattern, helping to consolidate the bonds within local kinship units and between affinally and matrilineally related individuals across the local units. But there are no linkages of such groups into broader ritual communities. All of the initiations are typically Nyanga in character, but some of them have a distribution that widely overlaps into sections of other ethnic groups adjoining the Nyanga. Apart from the circumcision rites which follow a similar pattern among such more or less related ethnic groups as Nyanga, Komo, Pere, forest Bira, Rumbi, and Lega, the *mbuntsu* initiations form an intrinsic part of the *bwami* association among some subgroups of Lega, whereas *mpande* and *nkekuya* are found also among some Hunde groups. Aspects of the *mumbira* initiation are present, as will be indicated later, among a range of forest-dwelling populations located to the north and northwest of the Nyanga, such as the Pere, Bali, Ndaka, Mbo, and Mbuti Pygmies.

The initiations are secret, but all of them are fairly simple in scope and content. Sickness, barrenness, death, lack of hunting success, and some other general misfortunes may bring about such initiations which are thought to result in a change of fate. The initiation itself involves exchanges

of goods, payments of fees, dances and songs, the viewing (and, in some cases, the audition) of one or more secret initiation objects, the learning of symbolic interpretations and of prescriptions, and the transfer of certain initiation objects and paraphernalia.

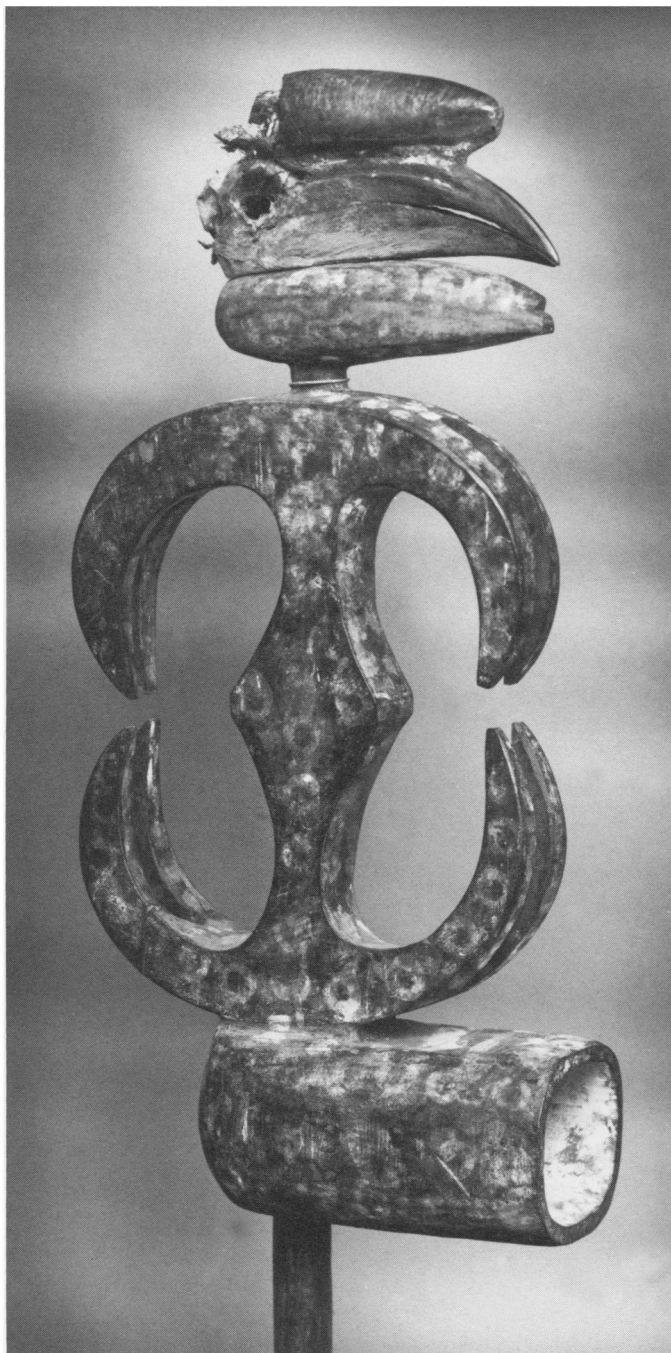
One or more highly specialized and secret musical instruments plays a central role in several of the Nyanga initiations. In the circumcision rites these instruments include the bullroarer, two mirlitons, and "talking sticks"; in *mbuntsu* they are dogbells without clappers; in *nkekuya* they are the bullroarer, the *kumamba* percussion sticks, and a hollow trumpet-like piece of wood that is blown in a jar containing banana beer; in *mumbira* it is the carved figurine which is analyzed in this study. Similar musical instruments are also central to the initiation systems of many forest-dwelling populations in eastern Zaïre.

In 1955 in the village of Myanga, I received two *mumbira* sculptures (Figs. 1, 2) from the two senior members of the local Bangara descent group. The overall form of both carvings is the same, but there are slight differences in size and in certain details of the morphology. The sculptures are monoxyle carvings in light wood (*bukombo*-species) blackened and completely adorned, except on the tail-like excrescence, with rows of large white and red dots and circles. The length of the carving in Figure 1 is 26¼" (minus the natural hornbill beak that is attached to it); the length of the carving in Figure 2 is 24½". Both sculptures consist of four clearly demarcated parts:

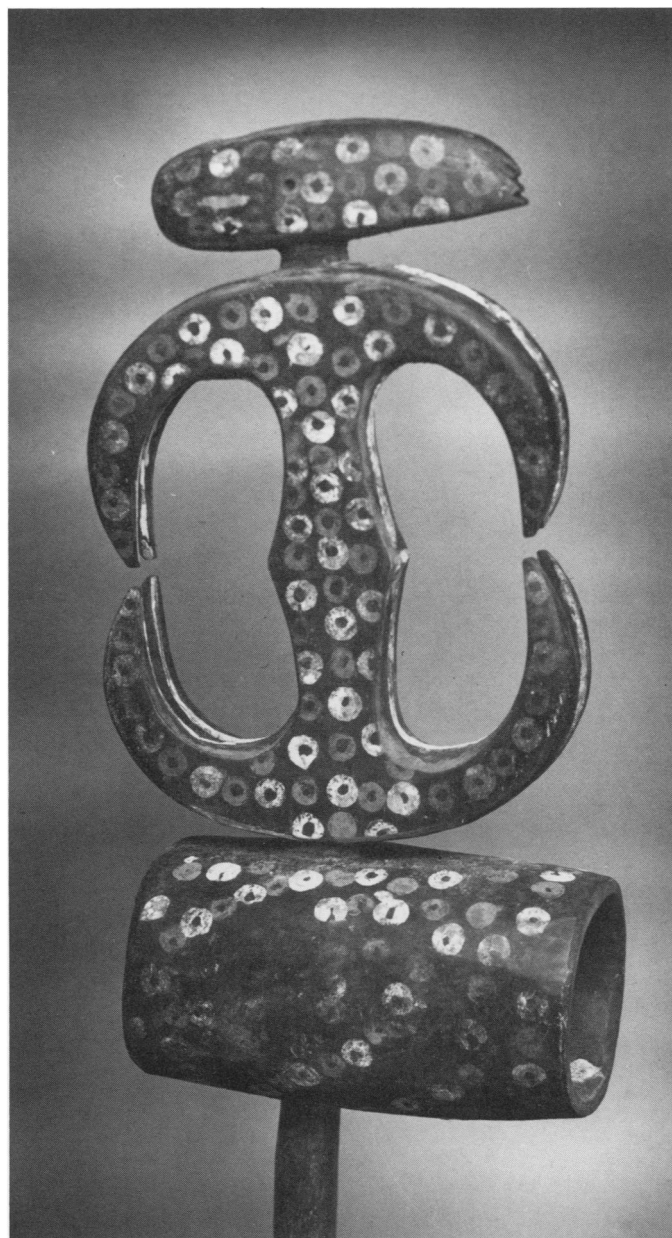
1. A flat, compressed, drawn-out head that very closely resembles the lower part of a real hornbill beak (respectively, 7¼" and 7" long, and 2¼" high at the maximum). The beak-like head ends in small nose- and mouth-like dents. The carving in Figure 2 has two small and shallow holes toward the middle of each side of the head. No eyes are indicated, but the placement of the dots gives the impression that there are eyes.

2. The head is connected by a short, cylindrical, neck-like junction (respectively, ¾" and ½" long) to the second part of the sculpture, which may be regarded as the main body. This part (12¾" long and 10" wide in Figure 1; 10¾" long and 8¾" wide in Figure 2) consists of a central elongated lozenge with four pairs of inward curving prongs. It can be viewed in various ways. Looking at it horizontally, it gives the impression of a flattened, drawn-out, stylized crab or spider with emphasis in each case on the excrescences. Looking at it vertically, it can be viewed, both frontally and in profile, as the stylized bodies of two joined personages with arms curving downward and legs curving upward.

3. The third part consists of a barrel-like hollow cylinder (8" long in Figure 1, and 8½" long in Figure 2). In Figure 1 the back end (i.e., that part which is aligned with the back



1. MUMBIRA SCULPTURE. BLACKENED WOOD, WHITE AND RED DOTS. A REAL HORNBILL BEAK IS ATTACHED AT TOP. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.



2. MUMBIRA SCULPTURE. BLACKENED WOOD, WHITE AND RED DOTS. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

of the head) of the cylinder is closed; its front end (3-4" in diameter) is open. In Figure 2, the cylinder is open at both ends (diameter 3¾") but it is divided into two parts on the inside, thus forming a shallow, cup-like container at the back, and a deeper, mug-like container at the front. In the second sculpture the barrel is joined to the main body by a small cylinder (½" long).

4. The fourth part consists of a tail-like excrescence (6½" long in Figure 1; 5¾" long in Figure 2) which is hollowed out and connects with the barrel through a small hole. The end part of the tail is transversely slit like the mouthpiece of a flute. A hornbill beak has been fixed by means of an iron pin to the carved head of the sculpture in Fig. 1.

Stylistically speaking there are few, if any, examples of this kind of carving that come to mind for this part of Africa where composite carvings, ambiguous in representational form and in content, are rare. The objects that are sometimes referred to in the literature and that are used among

other ethnic groups, such as Bali, in contexts similar to *mumbira* have not been seen, described or analyzed. An incomplete description by Bouccin (1936, pp. 207-208) of Nasasa, the bird of the *mambela* initiations among the Bali, comes close to the Nyanga sculpture. Here the representation of Nasasa is said to consist of a hollow piece of wood in the form of a large pipe which ends in the representation of a hornbill beak. The closest type of carvings that can be thought of are the famous wooden, anthropomorphic trumpets from the Pere [Etnografisch Museum in Antwerp (Fig. 4)], and from Batangi, a subgroup of the Nande [Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren (Fig. 3)].

The uniqueness of the form of this sculpture can perhaps best be understood in terms of Nyanga thought. The Bangara, of Myanga and Mutongo villages, who are great experts in this initiation, tell the following story about the ori-

gin of the object. Two female members of the Bangara descent group, Nyabisheo and Nyabiora, were collecting crabs in a river when suddenly they saw, near a cataract, something resembling a bird. They returned home with it. The men concluded that it was a nice thing to have; they took it away from the women and called it *mumbira*. The Nyanga see a relationship between this term and the verbal root *be* which designates the murmur produced by a small cascade. Therefore, they say, the *mumbira* initiation sounds like a murmur, a complaint. They transformed *mumbira* into the central object of an initiation. When the original object was old and broken, "they carved a new piece of wood in the form of the first object." In Nyanga thought, the sculpture is thus the more or less accurate replica of a natural object of unusual appearance that was found near the water. Since both common and unusual things found in the natural environment are used as initiation objects by eastern Zaïre populations, there is no reason to question the veracity of such a statement. Was it a natural object transformed by the action of the water? Or a manufactured object transported from elsewhere by the river? There is no way to trace the exact nature of the original piece, since the Nyanga have no theory or explanation for it. The main point is that the Bangara regard the *mumbira* sculpture as an unusual and mysterious object which they decided to keep as a sacred and distinctive patrimony, and to transform into an object of initiation and learning. In its essence, the *mumbira* sculpture is to the Nyanga a bird-like being, ambiguous in identity—something like a *kirimu*, an extraordinary creature that cannot be easily conceived of or described.

The sculpture is the central object in the *mumbira* initiation. For the members of the Bangara descent group, the sculpture and the initiation that centers around it are a *ntungo*, a sacred patrimony and privilege, which they own by virtue of an old tradition and not through purchase or transactions with other groups. Almost all male members of a group having this "tradition" are initiated. Outside the group, the transfer of the initiatory knowledge of *mumbira* is to the sororal nephews.

The actual use of the sculpture is simple. It must be viewed and heard secretly both by the initiates and the candidates in the house of the main candidate's mother. The context is one of singing, dancing, eating and beer-drinking, and the setting creates an atmosphere of awe, terror and suffering. It will be remembered from the morphological analysis of the sculpture that its hollow tail is connected through a small hole to an open cylinder; the piece can thus be used as a wind instrument. During the initiation it is placed on its head with the tail pointing upward and a kazoo-like reed is introduced into the tail. An expert singer murmurs, hums, sings and talks into the kazoo while he or his helpers elicit with cupped hands various sound effects from the hollow cylinder which is used as a sound box. The sounds of different animals such as the hornbill, *rongo*-bird, *mburu*-monkey, *itewa*-rodent, as well as the murmur of the rapids of a small river are reproduced.

The general social and physical settings in which the viewing and audition of the *mumbira* sculpture take place can be briefly summarized. For reasons of sickness or misfortune, or for some other less specific causes, a man consults the oracle and is told to acquire the sacred patrimony (*ntungo*) from his mother's people. He promises to do so, and ties a few rings of *butea*-fiber money to the wall near

his bed as a mark of his genuine intention to undergo the initiation. He then assembles the necessary goods (one goat, banana beer and other foods) and accompanies his mother to her village. It is the mother who must ask her people to proceed with the initiation and who must provide them with the gift of a rooster and a *kisindi*-rodent. Mother and son are requested to return home while her kinsmen prepare for the transfer of the sacred patrimony with offerings and the wrapping up in hides and leaves of the sacred object to be shown during the actual initiation. Male representatives of the mother's group (excluding the senior head of that group) then take the bundle to the village of their sororal nephew. The package is carried on the back with a raffia rope by the head of the junior descent line in the mother's group. Near the village of their sororal nephew, the visitors dress in skirts of leaves, speckle the forehead and shoulders with white dots, and enter the village drumming, singing, and dancing. The songs mention many distant places to emphasize that they would have travelled to their sororal nephew, however far away he was born or had settled. The visitors then enter the house of their female relative (i.e., the mother of the man to whom they bring *mumbira*), and place the package not far away from the hearth. They receive food as welcome gifts and run around in the village. In the evening they kill the goat presented by their sororal nephew as part of the fee, and eat a lavish meal. In the meantime, the father of the candidate recruits from among his kinsmen two to three men to undergo the initiations with his son.

All non-initiates must then leave the house while the visitors prepare the initiation setting. A raffia rope is hung from wall to wall, and pieces of dry barkcloth are attached to it. Many thorny vines with pieces of cloth also stretch from wall to wall. The *mumbira* object is unwrapped and, setting the figurine on its head and placing a kazoo in the hollow tail, an expert singer hums and sings into the kazoo to produce various animal sounds. The pieces of bark cloth are lit, the candidates are called in, and they enter, following their tutor, called "father-of-the-candidates," in quick pace. While they run around in the house, the initiates shake the rope and the vines so that burning sparks and hot ashes fall on the candidates and their bodies are scratched by the thorns. After the candidates are seated near the *mumbira* object, the initiates remove the rope and the vines, and wrap them in banana leaves. The mistress of the house deposits food near the threshold. While songs are sung, the object is packed again in a hide. The head of the junior line among the visiting maternal uncles then invokes the ancestral spirits and the other spirits of the Nyanga pantheon, asking for plentiful game, food and other good things, for liberation from sickness, and, generally, for their help and their blessing. The *mumbira* bundle is left for the night in the mother's house while all participants scatter to sleep. In the morning the packages containing the vines and pieces of barkcloth are thrown away; a bundle containing a kazoo and a bullroarer is hidden against the wall near the hearth of the mother's house. The visitors receive food and some valuables (*butea*-money or iron tools) and return home. The next day the new adepts must fish for small fish with tackle and bait, and give them to the "father-of-the-candidates" and to those in their village who were initiated before them.

The new initiates now have several weeks' time to provide the meat and the banana beer that is needed for the shaving

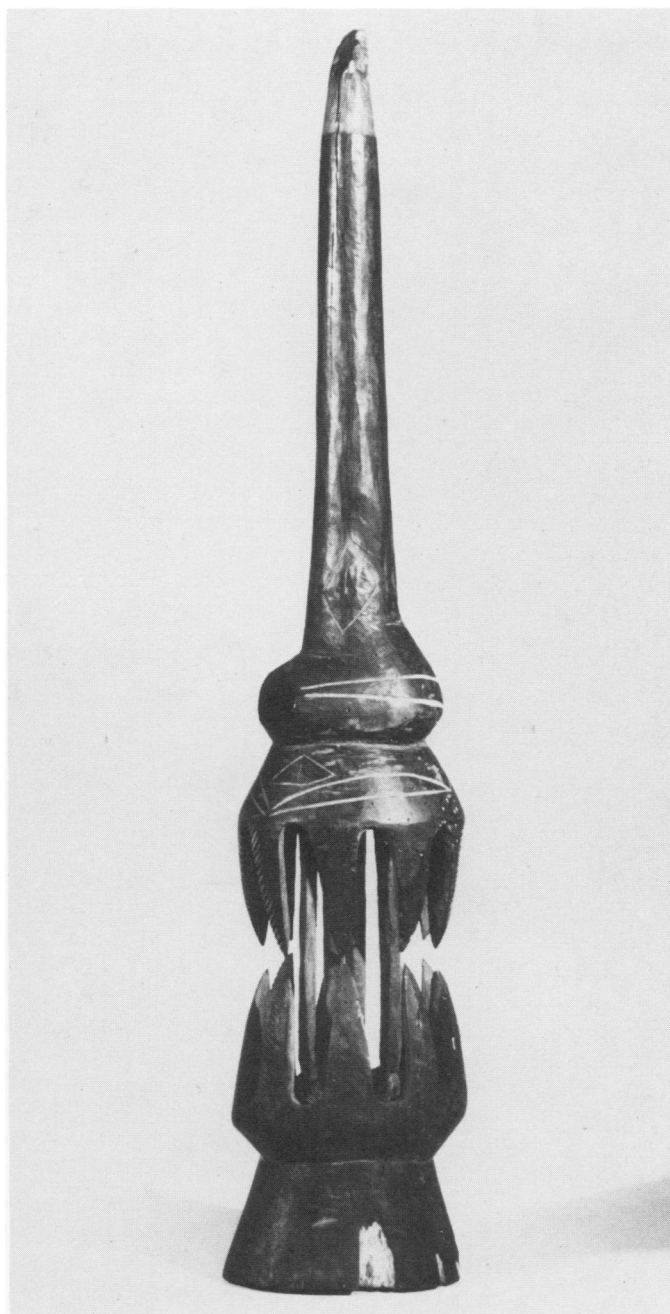
ceremony. When everything is ready, representatives of the maternal uncles are called in, and the new initiates are shaved in the house of the "father-of-the-candidates" (for this, the hair is wetted with banana beer for "beer is the oil of the initiation"). The new initiates wrap their hair in leaves and hide it. The entire procedure ends with a ritual bath in a nearby river.

Apart from the actual initiation, the *mumbira* sculpture is also seen and heard when the senior head of that kinship group which holds it as a sacred patrimony makes offerings to the ancestors and to the other divinities. On such an occasion, all male members of the group bring banana beer and a goat. The senior head of that group may also invite members of other kinship units established in the village to participate in the rites and to be introduced to the secrets of *mumbira*.

Whenever the sculpture is not actually in use, it is kept near the roof of the men's house of the *mumbira*-owning kinship group. The custody of the object is actually entrusted to its senior head (*mutambo*), but his two junior partners (*muhunga* and *mukungu*) are also intimately linked with its ownership and use.

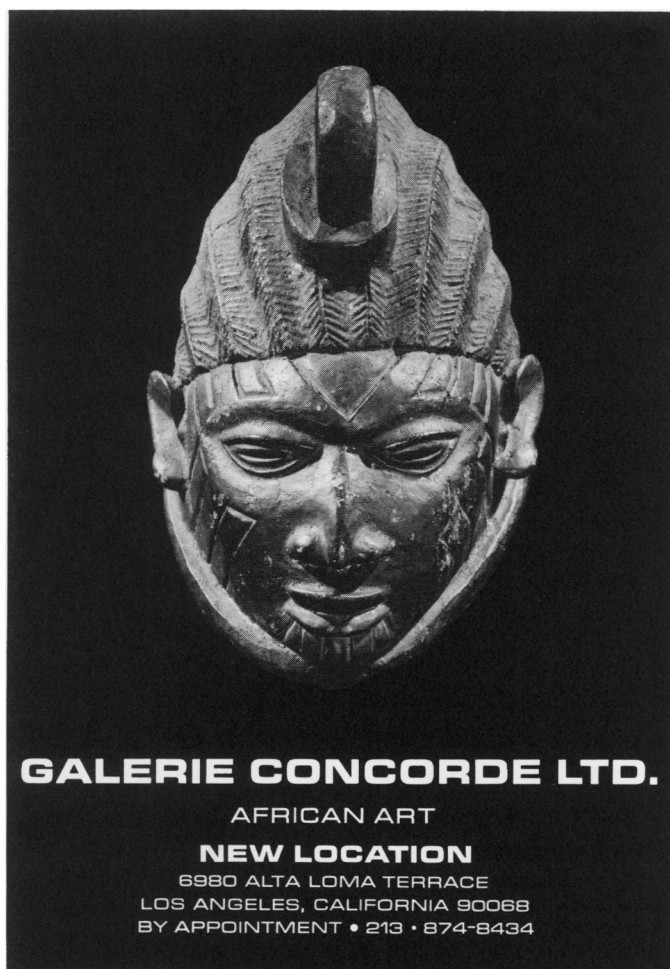
In Nyanga thinking, the *mumbira* sculpture represents a bird, and its connection with the hornbill (*mombo*) is quite obvious. As pointed out earlier, a real hornbill beak may be affixed to the sculpture, and in one song context, the carving is spoken of as "Big Hornbill with big noise." This bird is of major ritual significance in the Nyanga and Komo circumcision rites, and in some initiation cycles of the *bwami* association among the Lega. Its beak adorns the masks of the Nyanga circumcisors. Among both the Nyanga and the Komo the bird is said to inflict the wounds of circumcision. Women, therefore, must avoid it and may not eat its flesh (since the bird "sees" how the men are circumcised, the

*Continued on page 63.*



3. WOODEN TRUMPET FROM THE BATANGI, A SUBGROUP OF THE NANDE.  
MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, Tervuren. 34".

4. WOODEN TRUMPET FROM THE PERE.  
ETHNOGRAPHICAL MUSEUM, ANTWERP. 31 1/4".



see anything like [a] lie, there you will be confirmed by pictures . . . this statue of *elemo* confirms the history."

Another Muslim figure stands in the center between the two heads (Fig. 21). His identity and significance were explained in this way: "The carving of a man with a beard was said to be Sule, the founder of Islam in Imala. He was a member of the Onidofoi [Efe/Gelede] cult during his lifetime and helped to carry this mask to the market so when they carved it, they had to carve him." The other figures (females) were also explained: "They are the *iyalase*, the women who worship Onidofoi. They sit before Onidofoi. They represent Apotun [wife of Abodu, the first to worship Onidofoi]. They worship with kolanuts and are also called our mothers."

Thus the imagery of the Gelede mask for Onidofoi contains not merely entertaining or fanciful genre scenes but specific individuals recorded in historical traditions, figures representative of a female ancestor and the living power of the mothers, and animals which recall the mythic power of the cult's tutelary deity. Its appearance at the conclusion of the Gelede performances in effect recapitulates the entire history of the cult and community.

The visual imagery of Gelede documents the philosophical attitudes of patience, reason, and calmness in the evaluation of society sought by the mothers. Social roles deemed valuable in the tightly woven fabric of Yoruba society are recognized and praised. Actions or attitudes which might endanger traditional life, social cohesion or stability are exposed and satirized in devastating anti-aesthetic imagery. The ordering of beings in the Yoruba cosmos based on

spiritual force or *ase* is reinforced in hieratic compositions, while the heritage from the past is preserved and positive innovations are encouraged. All these messages conveyed first in the verbal imagery of Efe songs and then in Gelede imagery honor and please the mothers. Having properly performed the necessary rites, the living can dwell secure in the belief that as long as they continue to act according to accepted norms, they will receive the benefits of the mothers' power channelled to positive ends. □

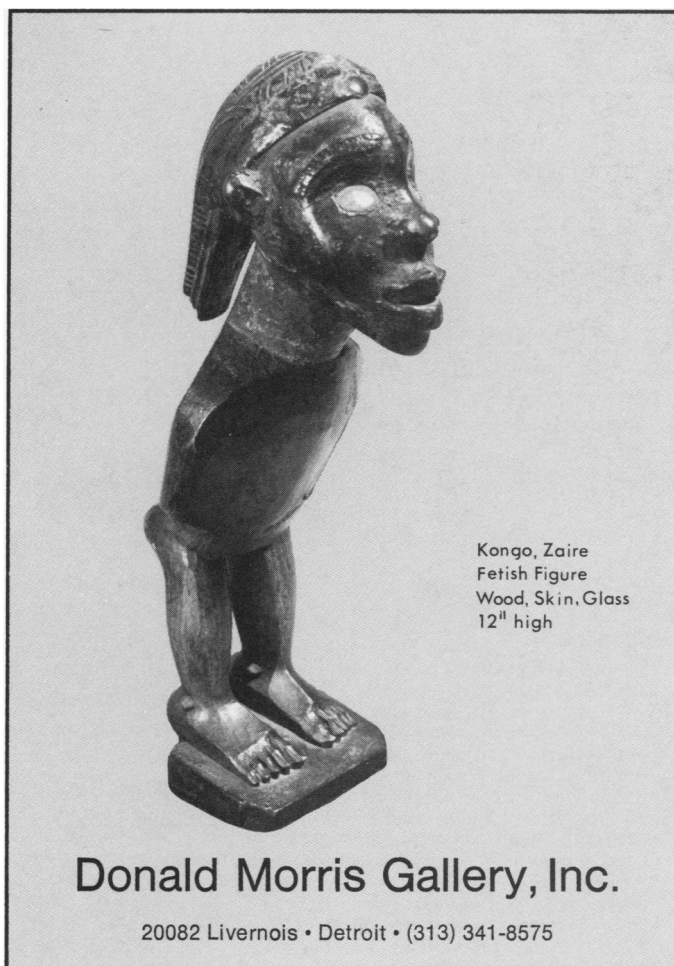
Notes, page 95

## Mumbira *Continued from page 45.*

latter act is equated with women "seeing" the circumcision). Men, however, are allowed to eat it. Although the hornbill is not actively hunted, snares are set up in the banana groves to protect the ripe fruit. Astonishingly, the bird is not otherwise the center of taboos, omens or prescriptions. But he is frequently mentioned in songs connected with the circumcision rites, the *mbuntsu*—and *mumbira*—initiations, and the evening dance performances.

The hornbill is a very particular bird, and the Nyanga are well aware of its biological and ecological peculiarities. Its striking characteristics which form the focus of the Nyanga's symbolic interpretations are the following:

1. The bird habitually nests in a hole that is high up in a tree without strangler vines. This is thought to be an effective means to avoid people, snakes and other predators, and he is thus a symbol of cleverness.
2. Because of these nesting habits, which also include the



closing off with mud of the hole where the female lays her egg, the hornbill is also thought of as a fearful bird. A story recounts that Hornbill learned to build so well in order to avoid the anger of Hawk, who was preying on his chicks.

3. When people or animals try to remove his chicks, the bird steadfastly attacks the aggressor with blows of his powerful beak. Therefore, the hornbill is regarded as a symbol of war and violence.

4. Because of the heavy and complex structure of its crested beak (the Nyanga say, because its nose is placed on top of its beak), the hornbill is a bird of wonder. This crested beak also entails an aspect of excess, and so one of the bird's praise-names is Shébutári (Mr. Excess, Mr. Excedent).

5. The hornbill, which normally feeds on insects, seeds and fruits, also steals ripe bananas in the fields, so he is sometimes referred to as a thief.

6. The most important symbolism, however, is linked with the sounds that the hornbill produces when it flies over the villages. The noisy bird is said to speak through its nose like one who suffers from the *binyoho*-disease, and is thus known by the praise-name, *bókabóká* (Noisy-Flyer). Most of all, the bird is said to be scornful of people because its sound, interpreted in Nyanga tonal language, is obscene (*oá, oá, iyoó, kúrao, kúrao*: penis, penis, *iyoó*, remove it, remove it!). As a master of scorn—a perpetual insulter, so to speak—the hornbill has close symbolic connections with twins and leopards.

In Nyanga symbolic thinking, the hornbill is thus truly a bird of wonder and ambiguity—a symbolic referent that entails its own oppositions and contradictions. The apparition

of the hornbill beak on the masks of the costumed circumcisors is explicitly designed to inspire fear in the circumcision candidates and to mislead the women and the non-initiates into thinking that the circumcisor is not a human being, but rather a *kirímu*, a fabulous composite creature of the forest. Because of its strange manners and its inherent ambiguity, the hornbill, like the *kirímu*, evokes the mysterious, the unlikely, the indescribable and unpredictable aspect of the forest.

This association between the sculpture and the hornbill is part of a broader, though less explicitly developed, symbolic system that aims at presenting the initiates with an ambiguous, complex, somewhat undefinable being. The song contexts make this feature further evident. On the one hand, the songs try to confuse the non-initiates by references to contradictory and misleading information. But behind the deceptive and enigmatic element, they also make certain covert statements about the multifarious nature of the sculpture. It was already stated that the songs contain few explicit references to the hornbill. The allusions to the bird-like quality of the representation are made in terms of chickens (Mr. Big-Wings-of-Chicken), the *rongo*-bird (the feathers of the *rongo*-bird), and the feathered dragon who eats chickens. But symbolic references to other types of animals are included as well. The concave contours of the narrow body that connects the head and the barrel evoke the *mburu*-monkey which is admired by the Nyanga because of its deflated belly—a sign of its frugality. The tail suggests a long snake. The anchor- or pincher-like excrescences that adorn the narrow body-strip on both sides elicit the idea of the breasts of a chameleon with young. The lengthy, drawn-out figure evokes the idea of the myriapod. Some other song contexts refer to *tukurukuru*-insects, to the hedgehog “that is rotting in a far-away trap,” and to the *itewa*-rodent, which is a “banana-eating noisemaker.” In these cases the possible connections between sculptural form and semantics are not clear, except for the fact that the Nyanga perceive in this complex sculptural form a conglomerate of several abstractions derived from the animal world, which all together enhance the ambiguous, fabulous and composite qualities of the creature represented by the carving. The animals associated with the sculpture are not selected at random. They include birds, insects, snakes and mammals which represent the essential categories of terrestrial animals recognized by the Nyanga. They include the two cross-cutting categories of noisy and silent animals. Thus the sculpture seems to symbolize the various animal forces of the forest.

The initiation is closely connected, as was pointed out before, with sickness, death, bad luck in hunting and trapping, and other manifestations of ill fate. The song context clearly indicates that the candidate who passes through the initiation is in search of *karamo* (force, strength, good health, long life, recovery from weakness and sickness), and *mahano* (teaching, learning, explanation and understanding, insight). This is emphasized in such song texts as “I am searching for *karamo*” (sung six times at the beginning of the initiation in Mboboro village), “I am searching for *karamo*, for honey; my maternal uncle, cut it (the honey) for me,” “I am asking for *mahano*; I cannot know them by myself,” and “What is there? My maternal uncle has arrived. What is there? I am asking for *mahano*. What is there? My maternal uncle, my mother. I come to take the *ntungo*-patrimony. What is there?”

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In other words, the Nyanga believe that to learn about *mumbira* entails a guarantee of *karamo*, that is, a revigoration of life force, the dwindling of which manifests itself in weakness, disease, death, and lack of hunting success. This diminution of life force, which is in other circumstances ascribed to the anger of the ancestors and/or of the divinities of the Nyanga pantheon, is attributed here to a force that is linked to the animals of the forest and to the forest itself. Induction into *mumbira* is a way of placating the forces of the forest, of restoring and/or maintaining their good will. The sculpture, which is a synthesis of these forces, acts as a mediator in the process of reconciliation. The parallelism between the Nyanga conception about *mumbira* and the Komo and Pere idea about the role of *esumba* is striking. These include various initiations, esoteric practices, and objects that cannot be seen by women and non-initiates. Here, too, connections with animals and with the revigoration of life force are very close.<sup>5</sup>

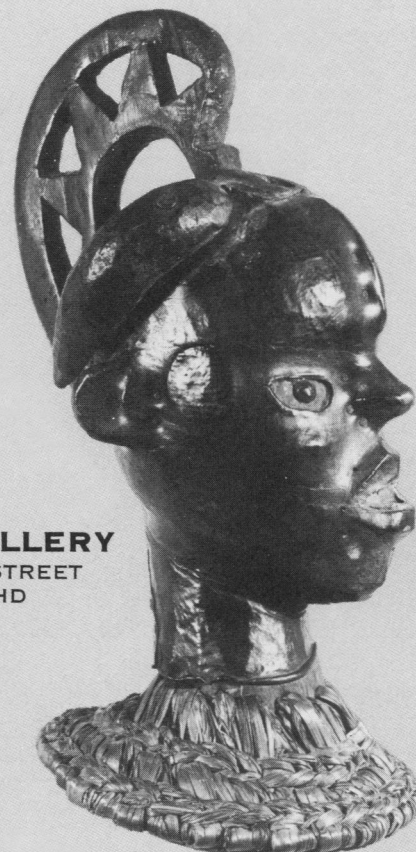
There are also linkages with the *maduali*, or "animal of the *mambela*" among the Bali which is used by members of the *mambela* association, outside the initiation context, in rain rituals (to bring rain or to stop it) and at certain other festivals.<sup>6</sup> There are parallels with the trumpet used by the Mbuti Pygmies in the death *molimo* festival to imitate the sounds of the leopard and elephant, and which is also used in the singing. The general purpose of the *molimo* festival, held on the occasion of death but which is also meant to improve hunting success and to help a sick person recover, is to "rejoice" the forest, to "awaken it," "to attract attention of the benevolent forest deity."

It was stated earlier that, in addition to the ancestral cult and a number of diverse cults for various divinities of the Nyanga pantheon, certain kinship groups hold as a sacred patrimony (*ntungo*) the secrets of a particular initiation. *Mumbira* belongs to the latter group. Those groups that have it find themselves in the special position of exercising a certain influence over the forces identified with the forest. They have, so to speak, an extra power to maintain harmony with the forest, and thus to ensure better *karamo*. This complementary power, exercised within specific local kinship units and transferred to cognatically related units, is complementary to whichever powers are agnatically exercised in relation to ancestors and divinities. For those groups that traditionally hold this power, the *mumbira* sculpture is an iconic proof of it. It is also an element of cohesion around which the members of an agnatic unit, and their initiated cognates and affines, rally and express their unity and solidarity.

*Mumbira* is one of these sculptures, as we find more of them in Africa, that addresses itself to very special spiritual forces which are impossible to identify in terms of such familiar categories as ancestors, deities, spirits or totems. *Mumbira* does not represent, or address itself to, any of these categories. It is a secret object, used in a context of initiation, representing a bird-like, composite, enigmatic being that addresses itself to the forces of the forest, and is apt to preserve and to restore their benevolence and to regulate and harmonize men's relationship with the forest. The preservation and restoration of benevolent forces has for the individual and the groups soterial value. □

Notes, page 96

Ekoi, Nigeria  
Leather and raffia  
on a wooden base  
11 3/4"/29.9 cm. high



## ARCADE GALLERY

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- MUMBIRA, *Notes, from page 66*.
1. Field research among the Nyanga was done under the auspices of l'Institut pour la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Centrale (Brussels). My recent museum and library research on the arts of Central Africa was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
  2. Bibliographical references to my published work on Nyanga are provided in Biebuyck, Daniel. *The Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, The University of California Press, 1969 and 1971, p. 1.
  3. I have not found any of the carvings discussed here in the great museum collections of Europe and the United States. A couple of these objects, however, may have recently been acquired in private collections.
  4. In the published literature there is almost no

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information available on any one of these initiations. A one-sentence reference to five of them is given in Moeller, A. *Les grandes lignes des migrations des Bantous de la Province Orientale du Congo Belge*. Brussels, 1936, p. 410. The same source also briefly discusses the circumcision rites and the *mbunisu*-initiations (pp. 344-345; 374-375).

5. Moeller, A. *op. cit.*, 1936, pp. 351-404.

6. Barns, T. A. *The Wonderland of the Eastern Congo*. London: Putnam's Sons, 1922, p. 202.

Bouccin, "Le Mambela," *Bulletin des Juridictions Indigènes*, IV, 9, 221-226, 1936 (p. 222).

7. Turnbull, C. M. "The Mbuti Pygmies of the Congo," pp. 279-317 in James L. Gibbs (ed.), *Peoples of Africa*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965 (pp. 308-312).

(OPPOSITE PAGE): ROYAL HELMET MASK IN FORM OF A BIRD. BAMILEKE, CAMEROON. WOOD FORM COVERED WITH CLOTH, BEADS AND SHELLS. 26". M. H. DE YOUNG MUSEUM, SAN FRANCISCO. (SEE PAGE 20)

## Acknowledgments

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