

only reflect the past splendor of the Bushongo kingdom that flourished in the region inhabited by the Ba Kuba from the XVth till the XVIIIth century. As was pointed out by H. Clouzot and A. Level, Bushongo art did not entirely spring from religious feeling: It is laic, domestic, familiar. The decorative themes of the fibre weaver and the basket maker passed into the craftsmanship of the woodcarver. Hence the rich and varied compositions of stylized geometrical elements that embellish the simplest utensil. In Ba Luba art, the patterns of surface decoration are simpler, more naturalistic and at the same time more architectonic. The masks, used in ritual ceremonies are impressive with a sort of baroque grandeur.

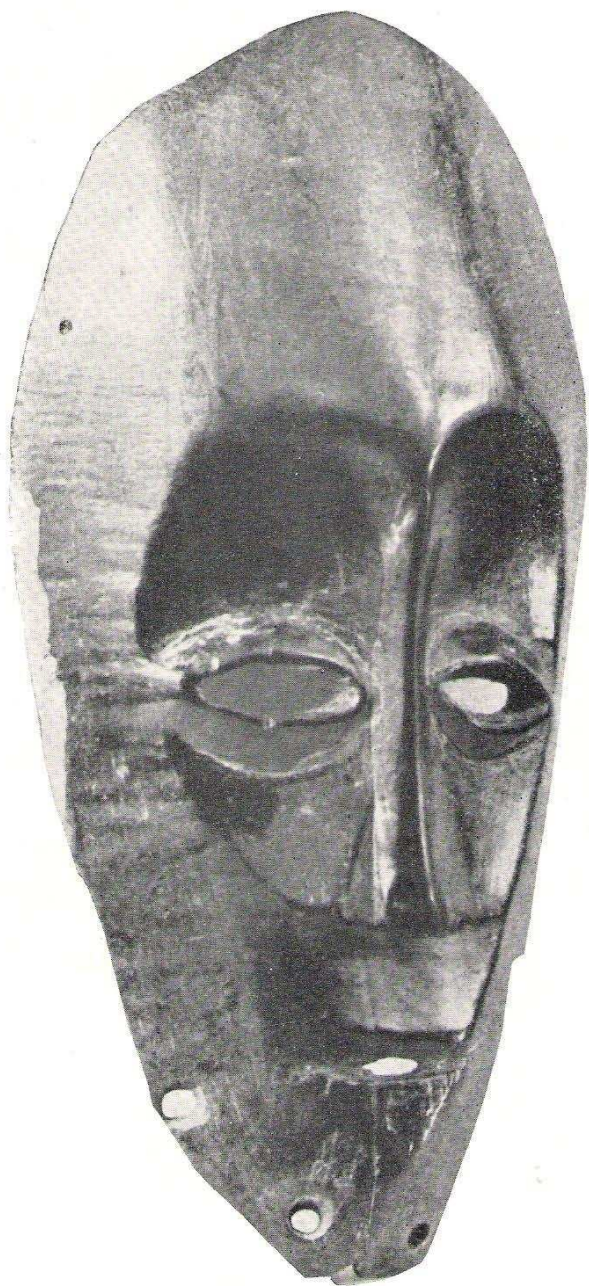
A particular Ba Kuba mask, the Bombo, is believed to represent the stylization of a Pygmy's face. The dwarf-race, driven centuries ago from the parklands into the depth of woods and marshes, has acquired a kind of magic prestige in the minds of the far more civilized tribes.

A dynasty of Bushongo kings has been immortalized in a series of wooden statues. The natives, perhaps on the grounds of ancestor-worship, have hidden the images of their



Kasai-Lulua statuettes.

Warega mask.



rulers from eager European investigators. The six sculptures that have been found up to the present day are certainly among the finest examples known of non-religious art in early civilizations. For sheer majesty and serenity expression, for the intensity and sensitiveness of the artist's feeling, they can be compared to many Egyptian or Mesopotamian works of the archaic period.

The statute of Mikobe Mbula (end of the XVIth century?) that belongs to the Museum of Tervueren can be considered a unique example of conscious craftsmanship and expressive skill. The image is carved in a dark reddish wood. The king is represented seated on a throne, with naked chest and shoulders, stretching out his left hand towards a tiny figure seated at his feet, probably his favorite

wife. The oral tradition claims that Mikobe was a ruler who advocated the emancipation of women.

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Is the Ba Kuba artistic production the result of spontaneous generation, or has it been influenced—as well as the Wa Regga—by some foreign cultural currents? This problem remains still unsolved. In the case of the bronze ornaments of British Benin, the supposition of a European, namely Portuguese, influence, is nearly abandoned today. But the hypothesis of a Continental penetration of culture through the Sudanese countries (that never broke the contact with Egypt) seems to be more generally favored now.

At any rate, the origin of the Kasai artistic production is not entirely religious. Father Aupiais, a learned missionary, suggests three possible sources of artistic creation. One is the symbolism and the metaphoric language used by the population, which is “translated” into a plastic element. The royal chair of the Batschiok king, illustrating the “toils and days” of an agricultural people is a kind of *Shield of Achilles*, and so are the batons of the chiefs of the Kasai regions. On the other hand, the carving of figures would be considered as a sort of *unwritten history*: this would be the case of the effigies of the Ba Kuba kings, authentic *monuments* in the modern sense of the word. Finally, there might be a desire to alter the human figure for some ritual or superstitious reason: this would explain the abundance and variety of masks.

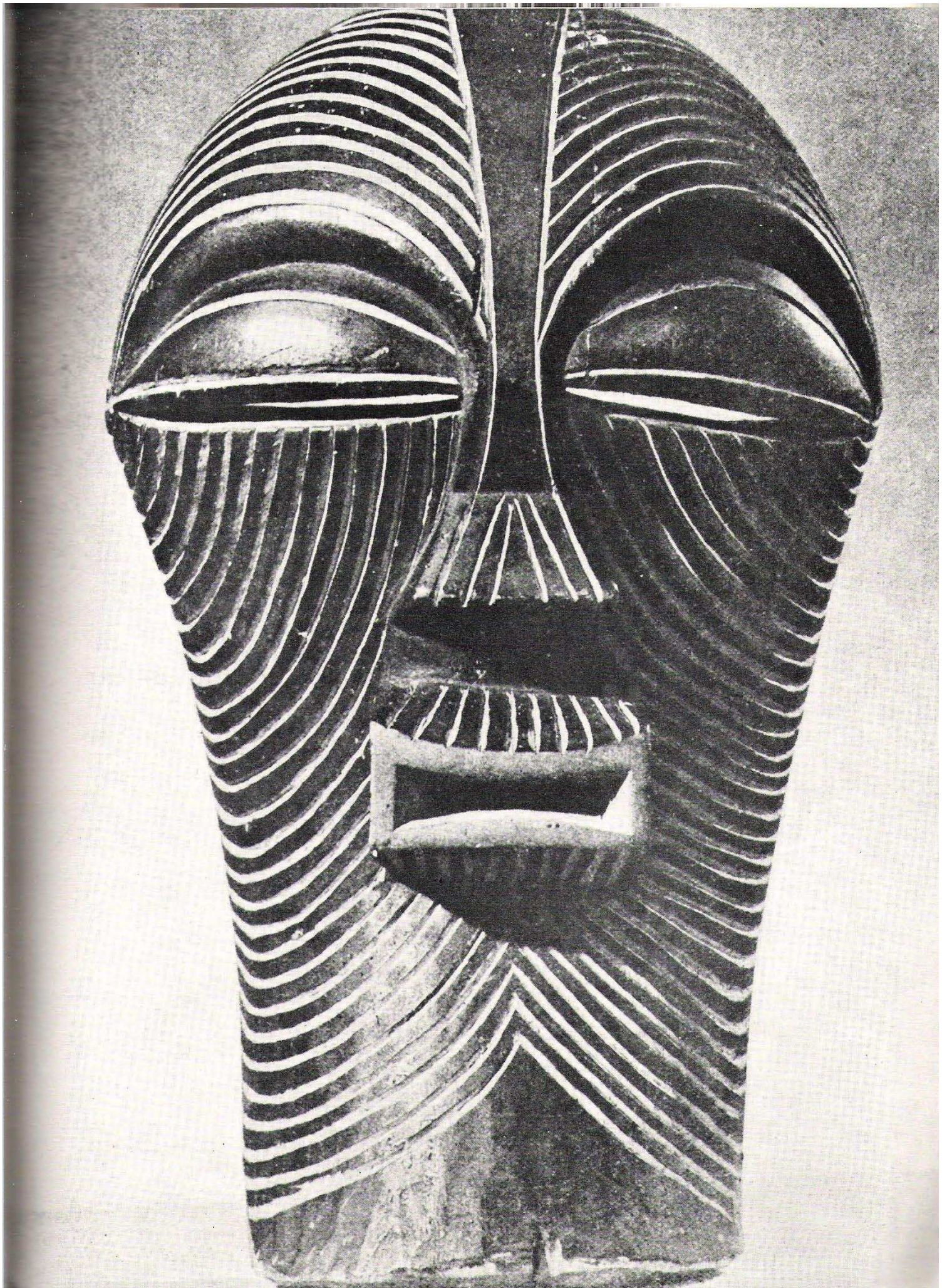
The distinctions made by Father Aupiais, although ingenious, do not give a satisfactory answer to the problem of spontaneous artistic activity. Mr. J. Maes, director of the Ethnographical section of the Tervueren Museum, is perhaps nearer to the truth when he says that “the Negro artist finds his source of inspiration in his family, social or religious customs, the fountainhead of all African art.”

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“I think I never saw a genuine Negro object that was vulgar,” writes the English critic Clive Bell. And he praises the exquisiteness of quality that is its most attractive characteristic. Touching an African figure reminds one of the rarest Chinese porcelain. One can also recognize in craftsmanship work an extraordinary intuitive knowledge of the human body. A tool, a sword, a musical instrument are always perfectly adapted to the form of the hand; a headrest to the shape of the human neck; a chair to the restful position of the whole body. This is verified in the purely decorative and applied art still practiced in many regions of the Belgian Congo.

The Negro races may have no history, or may have lost their history. Their artistic creations have bequeathed us the unforgettable legend of their mysterious past.

Baluba mask



Tattoos, an ancestral language

Disfiguration of the flesh was, in the beginning of white penetration in Africa, a sort of ancestral language, a mark of lineage.

In the ethnographic domain, these distinctions had long been put to profit; they might have been a conventional alphabet in raised dots—a sort of Braille method designed to aid a still blind people. Certain Congolese tribes, long in contact with the white man, still hold to the practice of their ancestors; others, on the contrary, modify them according to their degree of civilization, the work they do, and today's necessities. Up to 1914 the boys and girls were compelled to submit to tribal tattooing before reaching puberty. Among equatorial tribes, the Bapoto in particular, the entire body is literally "sculptured." The Mongo and the Mongwandi have their foreheads decorated with protuberances giving an appearance of a jagged ridge. Both sexes of the Basongo-Meno decorate their faces and necks. A number of elliptical scars follow the line of the eyebrows; concentric circles decorate their temples; their bodies' front, back and arms, carry the same stigmata. The Bushongo, both men and

A Budja tattooed woman.



A Lissala tattooed native.

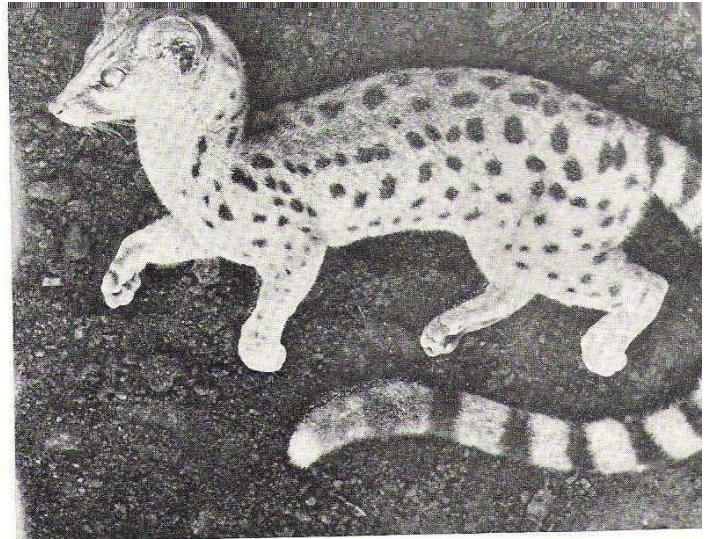
women, also have the "visa" of their tribe on their temples: this is composed of three elliptical scars, reproduced three times, while in the Bangongo tribe only three concentric circles can be seen. The Bangendi trace two straight lines from each eye to the center of the forehead. Bambala men wear ornamental cuts on their shoulders and their wives cover their stomachs with various geometrical designs. Some Negro women embellish their throats with cuts simulating a necklace. The Waregas wear a "V" made in tiny dots on their foreheads. The same design, enlarged, is repeated on their backs.

The Wasongola have a raised bar of flesh on their forehead six or seven millimeters from the base of the nose, to the hair.

Two parallel arcs paralleling the eyebrows is the "signature" of the Bapopoies. It is generally between the seventh and the tenth year that the blacks submit their progeny to the exigencies of this custom. The tattoo knife is a little splayed steel blade with a very sharp rounded edge. The women perform the operation. The patients are seated; the surgeon traces with clay the designs to be cut on the body, then pinches the skin between thumb and forefinger of the right hand and cuts with a quick pull of the blade. The wound is filled with a fine powder of pulverized charcoal and other ingredients which serve to hinder the natural healing of the flesh. This operation is repeated three or four times, according to the height of the scar desired. Tattooing to increase feminine beauty is not limited to any special years; it is not unusual to see very old women having new ornamental designs traced on them.



A toeless otter of the Congo.



A Congo Genette

Belgian Congo an ideal country

*Amaryllid flower growing
in virgin forests.*



A Congo Bush Baby.

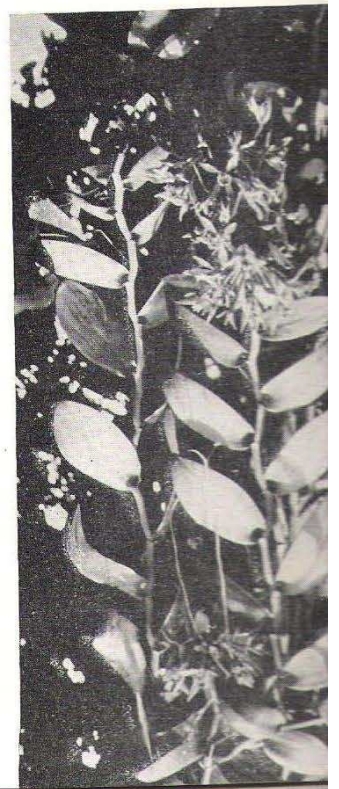
for tourists
and
big game
hunters

*Giant orchids growing
on tree-trunks.*

The Belgian Congo, with its endless variety of aspects, is one of the most attractive and interesting countries for the tourist. Comfortable traveling, roads which rank among the best in Africa, and modern industrial installations amid the wonderful tropical scenery, have not in any way deprived the Congo of the charm of native life in the heart of what, not long ago, was still the "mysterious black continent."

The most unexpected contrasts are found in the Belgian Congo. Vegetation of an astounding variety and vitality: on the very borders of the great equatorial forest grow the alpine species on the slopes of the Ruwenzori range, whose peaks are capped with eternal snow; while primeval flora is a feature of the lava fields in Albert National Park.

The "Nyamuragira" volcano is worthy of a special mention. In full activity, its lava streams flow into Lake Kivu and, especially at night time, it is an amazing picture of majestic beauty.





Scenic falls are numerous in the Congo.