

destruction of its spiritual world, which, in his eyes, was the only thing that mattered.⁽³²⁾

This demonstrates that the BAKUBA culture, the most developed and refined in Central Africa, was losing its original attachment to tradition and to faith long before the days of European penetration. In BAKUBA art, more national than religious, more aristocratic than popular, not a free art, but one attached to impraiscriptible canons, this state of things is accurately mirrored. Compared to the artistic production of less politically developed tribes, BAKUBA art appears, for all its splendor, frigid and distant. Mr. Alain Locke finds in a BAKUBA head-cup the quality of austerity and mystic restraint of early Buddhist works.⁽³³⁾ As a matter of fact, the BAKUBA have carefully preserved their wonderful technique, and its "academicism" is a solid guarantee of the survival and perhaps even of a possible Renaissance of what has been called the "BUSHONGO miracle."⁽³⁴⁾

Two events, which have taken place within sixty years of each other, illuminate the astounding historical adventure of the BUSHONGO kingdom.

Today, after explaining how the *Nyimi* generally chooses his successor among the sons of his sisters (matrilinear succession), tells us that as soon as the king had passed away, the government was, for the time being, in the hands of the late king's oldest son, who acted as a *Canterengo*. One of his principal duties was to guard the royal treasures, and another to choose the victims to be immolated on his father's grave. Then followed a reign of terror, a hunt for those who were to die. This lasted during the three days the body remained exposed. When old Bope Mobinjil (in whose time, in 1884, Dr. Wolf came to the country's frontier) died, his son had two thousand people killed in his honor without counting the wives and slaves buried with him . . . very probably an exaggeration.⁽³⁵⁾

In his beautiful book, *Congo*, published in New York in 1945, with fine photos by André Cauvin, the young American poet John Latouche, whose untimely death was deeply lamented by his many friends in U. S. A., Belgium and the Congo, has given us an interesting report of the incumbent *Nyimi*'s activity. The present king owns many antique statues, masks, and cloths, which have been partially destroyed by the native habit of storing those objects in butts, where they are at the mercy of termites, mold and weather.

Encouraged by the government, the king, after years of persuasion, was erecting a large brick museum in which to house his treasures. He was also instructed in the art of preventing natural hazards from still further impairing relics of such value.⁽³⁶⁾

The present writer visited Mushenge in February, 1951. The museum is a brick construction, the only one to be found in the *Nyimi*'s capital. There, on three large display tables are shown ancient cups with geometrical patterns and carved boxes (those in the shape of a half-moon are particularly beautiful). No BAKUBA statue is to be seen in the museum, although the *Nyimi* still possesses several ancient sculptures, not exposed to the public. Along the walls, a series of BAKUBA masks are displayed, together with high carved drums. This museum, furnished and controlled by the natives themselves, is the first of its kind ever built in Africa.

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The BALUBA constitute an important ethnic group whose separate tribes are to be found in vast regions in the South of the Belgian Congo, from the Kasai-Sankuru valleys up to the shores of Lake Tanganyika (the Urta or Warua being but a geographical denomination of diverse tribes under BALUBA influence, as those which Mr. Verhulpen, in his work on BALUBA culture, calls *Balubatsés*). The history of this culture is little known, although the artistic production of the BALUBA is one of the most important of the African continent. But little by little, the material facts of BALUBA history are revealed to the patient investigators. Mr. Verhulpen⁽³⁷⁾ recounts the successive rise and decline of two BALUBA empires, the first founded in the region of the Lomami by Kongolo, a conqueror of BASSONGE origin who, after extending and increasing his possessions, had the miserable ending that befalls black as well as white conquerors. This took place in the beginning of the XVIIth century.

The dynasty of Mbili Kilube (Kongolo's father) continued to reign over the second BALUBA empire, which extended its frontiers from the Tanganyika and Moero lakes to the upper course of the Luabala (Congo) and the Lomami.

His patient researches, pursued in the encampments where he led the elders to speak of their ancestors, permitted Verhulpen to establish a chronological list of the BALUBA rulers. He also made comparative lists of the chiefs of the BALUBA dynasty with

the dynasty of the Christian kings of the Congo. (A) and with the much talked of and little-known dynasties of the LUNDA kingdoms, that is to say, little-known to English, French or German speaking peoples, but not strangers to the Portuguese. These intrepid pioneers have never ceased their penetration of the unknown continent, from their Angola bases on the African coast, striving to connect their Indian Ocean possessions with those on the Atlantic.

Both explorers and merchants proceeded symmetrically — one could say — to the famous *Bandetrantes*, the Brazilian pioneers who, from Santos and Sao Paulo penetrated the tropical jungle, the *sertao*.

Lacerda, the *Pombeteros* or native-trafficers (1806-1811), Monteiro and Gamitto, Silva Porto, Serpa Pinto, Henrique Dias de Carvalho, between 1798 and 1885, organized several expeditions all of which crossed through the LUNDA kingdoms. In the description they give of the court of the *Cazembe*, the ruler of a kingdom which was to a certain extent a vassal of the LUNDA empire, Monteiro and Gamitto relate that they were received, in November 1831, by the *Cazembe*, seated on a throne placed between two parallel rows of half-length figures of human beings with horned heads. Another smaller image was placed in a wicker basket at the chief's feet⁽³⁸⁾

But the real seat of the LUNDA state was the residence of the *Muata-Yanvo*, whose dynasty, allied to the BALUBA rulers, began to expand in the beginning of the XVIIIth century (the first *Muata-Yanvo* being a contemporary of Shamba Bologongo, the wise BUSHONNGO sovereign).

In Mr. Verhulpen's learned work, we see coordinated for the first time the scattered historical developments of Central African nations. Thus, year after year, the clouds are lifted, and we have a glimpse of the *Africa Tenebrosa* of yore.

It is highly regrettable, however, that Mr. Verhulpen, who describes so minutely the memories and customs of the BALUBA, has omitted any mention of visible objects.⁽³⁹⁾ And yet what a

(A) He gives us a list of about thirty successive monarchs bearing Portuguese names such as Joao, Alvaro or Antonio, that reigned in San Salvador from 1491 to 1710. The beginnings of this epoch (1491-1541) have been studied intensively in Msgr. Cuvellier's excellent book, *L'ancien Royaume de Congo*, Brussels, 1946.

profusion of these objects there were! Statues and masks, carved implements and goblets and the famous stools supported by human figures! These works do not attain the material perfection that enchants us in BAKUBA art. The BALUBA craft is more rudimentary and less ornamental. It has a kind of stylistic sobriety, a moderation in the decorative details. But when it endeavors to represent human beings, it attains a high emotional intensity, a powerful and dramatic expression.

If we wish to make a comparison in terms familiar to every art student, we should say that a BALUBA statue is to a BAKUBA what a Tuscan fresco of the XIVth century is to a Florentine painting of the late *quattrocento*.

One of the themes frequently treated by the BALUBA sculptor is the so-called *mendiante* figure, a kneeling woman holding a large bowl, as if she were begging for alms. The most famous of the many statues of this kind, at the Teruren Museum, is a touching achievement of BALUBA art. The pathetic face of the elderly woman is sculpted in plane surfaces and despite the skillful stylization, it shows a deep feeling of humanity. The emaciated limbs contribute to the general impression of suffering and despair. The tragic figure, has been subject to various interpretations on part of ethnologists. It was first considered as the figure of a mourner; then it was thought to be a *Kabila ka Villie*, a daughter of the spirit; a protective image of maternity. We were told that during the last days before childbirth, the statue was placed on the threshold, the passers-by dropping their obol in the bowl held by the *Kabila*, in token of good wishes for both mother and child.⁽⁴⁰⁾ According to Dr. Waldecker, assistant curator of the *Musee Léopold II* in Elisabethville, the *mendiante* is really an instrument used in divination art. The bowl filled with beads and kaolin powder was shaken by the faithful and the witchdoctor interpreted the response of the oracle.⁽⁴¹⁾

In Yorbaland, hundreds of miles away from the country inhabited by the BALUBA, similar statues are found, with exactly the same artistic characteristics. Such simultaneous representations in lands remote from each other, peopled by totally different tribes, are a frequent and mysterious phenomenon of African Negro art. Prof. Olbrechts has established that the famous Teruren statue is not a unique specimen of its style and perfection. In

European museums and private collections, he has identified at least nine more plastic works (eight caryatide stools and one standing male figure) that bear somatic, technical and aesthetic resemblance to the Teruren *Kabita*. He has ascribed them, if not to a single artist, at least to a particular school or workshop and has distinguished them from all other BALUBA production under the denomination of LONG-FACE BULLI STYLE, after the village of Bulli on the river Luabala, where the Teruren statue and one of the caryatide stools were found. All the other specimens of the same style, and many more that bear influences of the LONG-FACE technique, come from the same Urta or Warua region, between the Luabala (Congo) and Lake Tanganyika.

The crouching figure supporting a stool or a head-rest is a favorite theme of BALUBA sculpture. The stool is an emblem of power, used by the mighty on solemn occasions. Some of these stools are conceived along purely decorative lines, and bear no figurative element; an admirable specimen of this type can be seen in the Brooklyn Museum.

The stool supported by one or more human figure is a very characteristic feature of BALUBA art. The concept of chastisement, the affirmation of might and power, were the primitive inspirations of the subject, psychologically akin to that of the Greek Caryatides. A similar intention can be traced in the sculptures of Gothic cathedrals, where the figures supporting archways or entablatures are mostly demons, dragons, grotesque and diabolical faces, but never angels or holy creatures.

In Central African cultures, it is a kingly prerogative to sit on a living throne, on the back of a slave. The *Nyimi* of the BUSH-ONGO, in stately ceremonies, still places a foot on the body of a prostrate servant. And Cavazzi, in the middle of the XVIIIth century, gave us a charming description of the visit that Queen Djinga Bandi of Matamba paid to the Portuguese governor of Angola. (⁴²) During the audience, one of the Queen's maids in attendance, squatting on the floor, *le servi di sgabello* (served as a stool) to Her Majesty. In our opinion, it is more than probable that the BALUBA stools supported by carved figures of men or women are but an artistic elaboration of this symbolical gesture.

BALUBA art is animated by romantic transport. The masks bear visible traces of such a spirit, which we find also in carved ivory charms in the form of human faces. We may add that all-

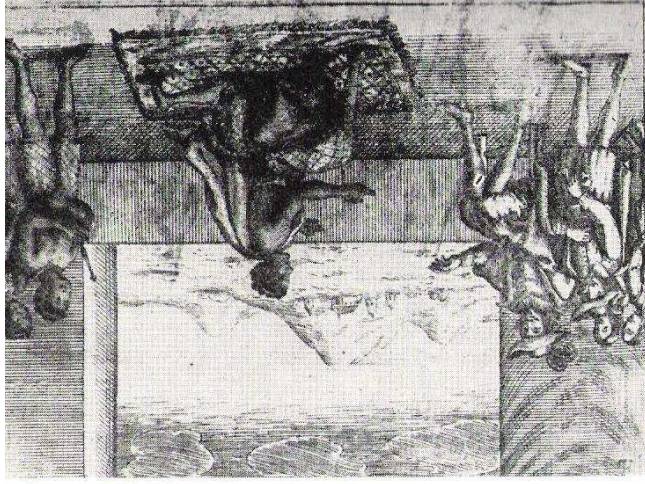
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though the BALUBA have occasionally created authentic masterpieces (such as the famous Teruren *Kabita*), their production is rarely on such a high level. In the works of recent times, a decadence is clearly noticeable. On the contrary, BAKUBA art, by reason of its classical tendency and its traditional technique, retains today, in its most usual applications, the pleasing qualities of an ingenious grace and an innate style.

The BALUBA are keen agriculturists. Today also calls them the most musical of all Negroes and wonderful story-tellers. Many cargoes of BALUBA slaves were brought over to the New World and their descendants are innumerable in the United States. (⁴³)

The BASONGE tribe that lives in the present Congolese province of Luabourg, and is influenced by the BALUBA culture, is renowned for the stylized masks that were called *Kifwebe*, according to the first scholars who described them. (⁴⁴) The black painted face of the mask is traced with parallel or rather, with concentric lines, which follow the contour of the features. The real name of this mask, according to Dr. Waldecker, is *Kya Lubilo*, and it personifies speed: the bearer being supposed to use it as a kind of *magic carpet*, or as the *Teltandum* of the Wagnerian tetralogy. (⁴⁵)

The very finest specimen is to be found in Philadelphia, in the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. Its perfect stylization of a noble and thoughtful human type calls to mind the best achievements of archaic Greece. Here, we are no longer confronted



Reception of Queen Djinga Bandi by the Portuguese governor of Angola, from an illustration in Cavazzi's *Historica Descrizione del Regno del Congo, Matamba et Angola*, Bologna, 1687.

with the expressionistic and deeply emotional aspects of BALUBA art. The similar *Kya Lubilo* masks, carved by the BALUBA in a spheric shape, are, in spite of their monstrous appearance, less im-

pressive and less beautiful.

The Philadelphia BASONGE mask, pervaded with a sense of majestic serenity, bears the traces of a supernatural vision. When it was worn, it must certainly have given the spectator the impression of a great spiritual power, materializing suddenly in order to bring a particular message from the invisible world to the throngs of the faithful.

The BENA-LULUA art is also connected with the BALUBA. But this tribe, adjoining the BAKUBA, has developed a quaint, eclectic sculpture, that bears many characteristics of *baroqueism*. The BENA-LULUA are temperamentally very different from the BASONGE. To the BALUBA they owe a realistic sense of detail, and a real gift for catching the likeness of a human being; they owe to the BAKUBA their love of ornaments and geometric patterns. Their statues of chiefs with pointed beards and long elaborate beard, of mother and child, with tattooed faces, the woman's body and arms covered with tattooings and laden with necklaces and bracelets, are among the strangest ever sculptured in Africa.

The BAPENDE, the majority of whom live in the Southern part of the province of Leopoldville, between the rivers Kivu and Loange, have produced carved figures less powerful in style and expression than those of the BAKUBA and BALUBA. But the BAPENDE have been and are up to the present day, among the most active mask carvers to be found in Africa. They produce two very different types of mask. The carved and painted wooden images worn by the dancers of the *N'Buya*, (an authentic *Com-media dell'Arte*, with its "harlequins," its pulcinellas" and "taraglias") have generally a mild and smiling expression: triangular in shape, with slightly bulging forehead, elongated eyes and eyelids, a small up-turned nose and graceful curved lips. Some of them are surmounted by three or four horns, probably a stylization of the BAPENDE coiffures. Others have a rectangular chin appendix, perhaps the stylization of a beard. A somewhat "macabre" figure with distorted mouth and protruding teeth also takes part in the *N'Buya* dance. All these masks are naturalistic, with a touch of humor and caricature. On the contrary, the masks worn during

the ceremonies of the circumcision are purely abstract. They are intended to scare the women and the non-initiated and to keep them away from the place where the rites are performed. The men who wear them are called *Mingangi*. The masks are made of straw, round, and have as sole feature two small cylindrical eyes. In olden times, during the period following the initiation, the boys wore the so-called comb-masks, that were fixed upside down in their hair so as to cover the face. Nowadays, these comb-masks have disappeared; the boys, returning to the village, have their body smeared with the red paste called *n'tukula*; then, they receive the small protective amulets delicately carved in ivory or in the stone of a fruit, that are suspended on a string and worn round the neck. They are commonly supposed to be tiny models of the *N'Buya* masks. We are inclined to think that they represent the same gentile or personages figured in the life-size masks. Many of them, more specially the ancient specimens, are intensely expressive. However, their chief merit lies in their decorative quality.

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The BAKONGO are the direct descendants of the population of the famed Realm of the Congo. San Salvador, the capital of the Christian kings of the Congo from 1491, still exists as a borough in Portuguese Angola.

Now, the BAKONGO, whose separate tribes are: Western BAKONGO, or BAWOYO (KAKONGO), BASOLONGO (MUSEKONGO), BAVILI, BAYOMBE (MAYOMBE); and Eastern BAKONGO — dwell on the shores of the ocean, the mouth of the river, the Mayombe forests and the banks of the Congo between Matadi and the Stanley Pool.

Few traces have been found of their former conversion to Christianity, although ruins of churches are still to be seen in San Salvador and a few church bells, baptismal founts and crosses have come down to us, together with brass crucifixes and statues of Saint Anthony. At the end of the XIXth century, the returning missionaries were aghast to find that images of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints had descended to the level of pagan genti and were worshipped as such.

The BAKONGO are still attached to their commemorative statues and nailed-fetishes, but nowadays, their average production is rather poor and has little artistic value. However, the BAKONGO attained a peak of perfection in their ancient naturalistic sculp-

ture, together with a certain religious scepticism and a propensity for sensuousness, that characterized — on a higher level of civilization — the sea-born states of Tyre and Sidon in Biblical days, or the Chan-Chan and Parakas republics in ancient Peru, or even Venice during the later Middle Ages.

In the province of Leopoldville, we also find the BATEKE, whose principal abode is in French Equatorial Africa, in the district of the Moyen Congo. In spite of little technical knowledge, the BATEKE'S commemorative figures are often deeply expressive.

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In 1568, according to Pigafetta, the king of the Congo asked Portugal's help against the Jaga invaders. As we already know, the struggle went on for nearly two hundred years and the realm of the Congo was finally overwhelmed. The conquerors settled in the country and their descendants are known today as the BAYAKA. For many years they jealously kept up their ancestral customs, and were very reluctant to let the white people enter into their secrets. However, on May 11, 1927, the Belgian Jesuit Father Pianquaert was able to witness the *Muanda* (imitation rite). He has described the costumes of monkey-skin worn by the masked dancers, who also had clusters of small bells tied to their legs. Their masks were in the shape of huge funnels upside down, surmounted by feather pennants. Of the two masked officials, one impersonated a male spirit, the other a female. It was this male spirit, the *Kakungu*, who wore what was probably the largest mask to be found in the Congo. It was about three feet high, with bloated cheeks and distorted features, rendered more terrifying by thick locks of raffia fibre, representing hair and beard.⁽⁴⁶⁾

During the parleys with other tribes, the BAYAKA envoys held before their eyes a quaint, long-handled wooden mask, with a caricatural face, inscribed in a painted circle and adorned with a huge turned-up nose. Although it is difficult to find a correct interpretation of this strange object, some say it aims to represent the beak of the *calao* bird, shaped by nature in this curious way.

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The BATSHIOKO, or CHOKWE, or VATCHIVOKWE, a very prolific people scattered throughout the Southern region of the Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola, are mainly hunters and warriors. For centuries they were part of the LUNDA empire and endured the domination of its ruler, the *Muata-Yambo*, who

figures. Their figures of mother and child are extremely moving. A

meditative and thoughtful feeling emanates from certain statues of ancestors, especially those that represent men with chin in hand, in the classical attitude of the Muse Clio, or of Michelangelo's *Penitensero*. The BAMBOMA of the Noguè region (on the border of Angola), and the MUSERONGO tribe of the BAKONGO in Africa), who practiced stone carving. Their statues in soft schist, mostly reproduce — with few variations due to the difference of technique — the traditional attitudes and expressions of the wooden statues, the latter being generally of recent date, owing to the destruction by mold, termites and rains of the more ancient ones.

These stone statues were known to the ethnologists for several centuries; the *Pigorini Museum of Ethnology* (Rome) has four of them that used to belong to the so-called *Kircheriana*, a collection of curios established in Rome at the very end of the XVIIth century by the Jesuit Father Kircher. The *Musée de la Vie Indigène* in Leopoldville has another one, and splendid specimens are reproduced in the works of Kjersmeier⁽⁴⁸⁾ and Gaffé (René Gaffé, *La Sculpture au Congo Belge*, Brussels, 1945). However, when in recent years, Robert Verly brought back about a hundred and ten of these statues, mostly found by him in the *Omanene* or cemeteries of chiefs, hidden on the mountain-tops of the region of Noguè, his discovery was deemed a very important one. According to Mr. Verly, the statues were not funeral monuments, but rather *Mintadi*, i.e. guardian-images that would replace the chief during his absence, and were placed later on his tomb or on the grave of his successors.

The BAKONGO statues, carved in wood or sculptured in soft stone, are probably the only African works treated in a realistically carnal manner. The supernatural qualities and the spiritualities that strike us in nearly every Negro carving are absent from the BAKONGO figures. They are definitely earth-bound, some of them emphasizing a feeling of human despair and promethean grandeur, others the voluptuous complacency of their creators. It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for this exception. The fact that these people lived on the banks of the gigantic river, and in the vicinity of the ocean, may have something to do with it. For centuries, the BAKONGO have had contact with many a foreign nation, both European and African. They have known men of different races and creeds, and have probably developed that kind of eclectic cul-