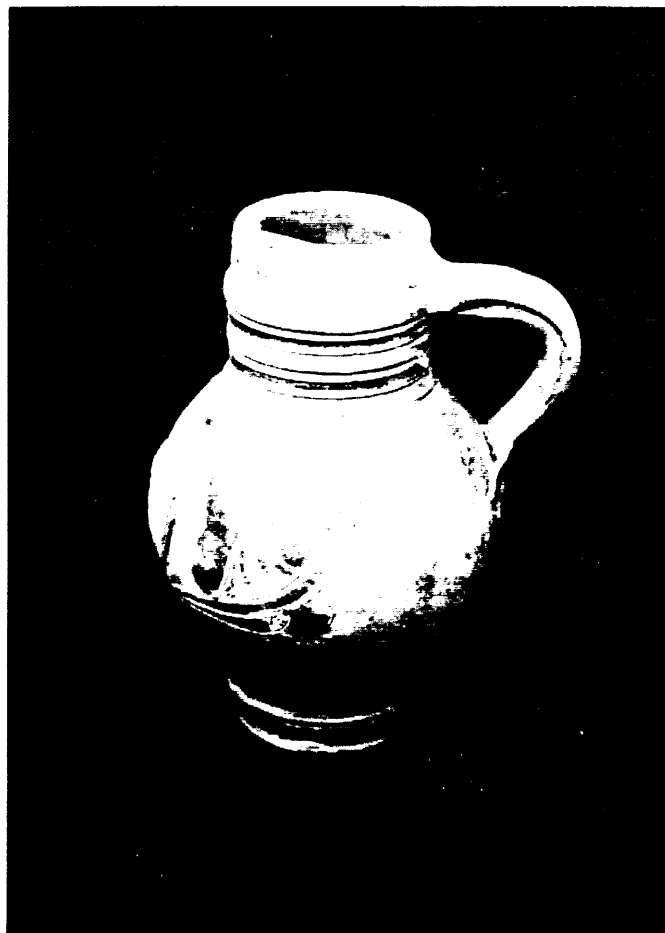


**CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF WEALTH  
AMONG  
THE BAMBOMA (LOWER ZAIRE)**



by  
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EDITED BY  
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African Studies Program

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## PREFACE

Norm Schrag was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1947. He came from a closely-knit family in the Mennonite tradition and throughout his life had a strong commitment to social action. He attended a Junior College before moving to Goshen College in northern Indiana, where he graduated with a B.A. in history in 1970. As an undergraduate, he spent a study semester in Haiti where he first became aware of African culture transplanted to the western world. His interest in syncretic religion and art forms dated from this experience.

After graduation, Norm volunteered as a teacher with the Mennonite Central Committee. He spent one year studying French at the University of Grenoble and then, from 1971-1973, served as a teacher at a Kimbanguist secondary school at Nkamba in lower Zaire. During this time he travelled extensively throughout the region and developed a deep attachment to the local people and a lasting interest in their historical and cultural traditions.

On his return to the United States, Norm worked for two years as a Curatorial and Research Assistant at the Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., specializing in the art of Central Africa. In 1975, he started work on a Ph.D. in African History at Indiana University where he was awarded a NDFL Language Fellowship to study Lingala. He also served as an instructor for a university Independent Study Division course in African History. A Fulbright-Hayes doctoral

disssertation research award allowed Norm to carry out archival work in Europe and to return to the lower Zaire area to do field research. He was awarded a Ph.D. in African History at Indiana University in 1986.

Norm Schrag died in Baltimore after a short illness in February 1988. At the time of his death he was working with the United States State Department as an Escort-Interpreter for visiting scholars and dignitaries. Norm Schrag never lost the strong commitment to social values and human relationships which were part of his Mennonite background. He was a sensitive, warm and amusing person. One felt the better for being in his company.

Norm Schrag's emergence as a scholar of Central African history was cut short by his early death. In his memory the African Studies Program at Indiana University has decided to publish an excerpt from his doctoral dissertation.

The dissertation is entitled: "Mboma and the Lower Zaire: a Socioeconomic Study of a Kongo trading Community, c. 1785 - 1885". What follows here is the dissertation abstract which gives an overall view of Norm's findings, and an edited and abridged version of the final chapter. This portion of the dissertation has been selected since it well displays Norm's interdisciplinary interests in African history, art, folklore, religions and anthropology.

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Bloomington, Indiana

April, 1990

Mboma and the Lower Zaire: a Socioeconomic Study of  
a Kongo Trading Community, c. 1785 - 1885.

Mboma, which emerged as the most important slave port on the Lower Zaire (Congo) at the end of the eighteenth century, has been the subject of considerable speculation but only passing scholarly interest. This study shows how Mboma's inhabitants, who formed a highly organized and vibrant trading community, embarked upon a century of remarkable commercial achievement in the transatlantic trade, while simultaneously creating an ethnic identity and a ministate.

Five major types of documentation have been used to reconstruct the history of Mboma. Secondary sources in history, anthropology and art history provide the study's starting point. Archival materials, published primary sources by Europeans and Americans who visited and lived in Mboma, oral traditions collected in the field or deposited in archival collections, and material culture located in the field or in museums, are also used to recreate the Mboma past.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Mboma's trading community developed an export trade in slaves and other commodities, initiated by Liverpool merchants and expanded by Americans and Luso-Brazilians. After 1840, Mboma furnished great numbers of slaves during a period of clandestine trade, when Brazilian and Cuban demands, as well as a French scheme to transport indentured labor across the Atlantic, led to an intensification of commercial activities at Mboma. Chiefs and

officials, in collaboration with neighboring Kongo groups and foreign slave traders, developed a sophisticated internal slave-supply network and external slave-export system.

During the period of effective suppression of the slave trade in the Lower Zaire in the 1860s, Mboma's trading community developed a large export trade in commodities that included palm oil, peanuts, rubber, sesame, gum copal, and ivory. This was primarily carried out in collaboration with Dutch, British and French firms. In the mid-1870s, a disastrous famine and a toll war with foreign traders resulted in the loss of Mboma's commercial independence. With the Leopoldian colonial conquest in 1885, Mboma lost its political independence as well, and shortly thereafter became the capital of the Congo Free State.

Mboma chiefs and commercial officials, who controlled the nineteenth century flow of trade in the lower Zaire, became wealthy and powerful individuals through the acquisition of prestige goods. Success in the social, political and ritual spheres became directly linked to successful participation in trade. Large numbers of charms were used to assure success, while the display and destruction of prestige goods and an elaborate funerary art became its emblems.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF WEALTH AMONG  
THE BAMBOMA (LOWER ZAIRE)

Introduction

The surge of wealth brought about by the successful and unprecedented mercantile activity during the nineteenth century had far-reaching consequences for the Mboma trading community. It restructured social institutions and injected new tensions into social relationships. The BaMboma developed a unique and complex set of attitudes to the wealth that brought about these changed social circumstances.

The BaMboma did not define wealth exclusively in terms of local currencies, such as raffia cloth squares (mbongo) or beads (nzimbu), but, broadly, in terms of prestige goods which also served as currencies. Slaves, frequently referred to as mbongo or nzimbu, were a form of wealth and the highest "denomination" of local currency. They were liquid assets that readily changed hands. Foreign-manufactured trade goods especially cloth, alcohol, guns and gunpowder, also served as currencies.

The BaMboma prized such items more for their prestige value than for their practical uses. They exchanged and displayed them on significant social occasions such as the birth of children, marriages, funerals, and special celebrations. They used them to pay legal fines and fees of ritual specialists. Prestige goods were displayed in political contexts to demonstrate the wealth of chiefs and

other notables. They were both indicators of personal power and status symbols in relation to other groups. The display of wealth served as an assurance to the chief's dependents that all their needs would be met, including marriage indemnities, funeral costs and fines. Chiefs exchanged prestige goods among themselves to obtain political titles, while vassal chiefs used them to pay tribute to overlords. Prestige goods were exchanged for lemba wives. Mboma chiefs accumulated prestige goods, with the exception of slaves, in the luumbu lua mfumu or mbongi, the chief's treasure house.(1)

#### The Egalitarian Ideal

It has been argued for people of the central Zaire basin that they held a holistic view of human activity, which made two important assumptions.(2) The first was that economic activity is a zero-sum game, where there is a fixed amount of wealth in the world; one person's gain is another person's loss. This belief contrasts sharply with the view, current in the industrial West, that economic activity creates constant growth with more wealth for everyone. The second assumption was that material wealth, physical health and social tranquility were interrelated in such a way that an individual who wanted more than his perceived fair share of wealth had to accept less of the other two. The idiom that articulated these assumptions was witchcraft. Individual BaMboma shared this set of assumptions, but only to the degree that they lacked wealth and power.



Nineteenth century BaMboma believed that foreign-manufactured goods had a magical quality. According to one account of this belief, foreigners did not weave the cloth that they brought to Mboma's port. This was the work of simbi spirits who lived beneath the ocean which the trade vessels crossed on their way to the African coasts. The foreigners, who had found the hole leading to the aquatic simbi factory, simply steered to the simbi hole and rang a bell whenever they needed cloth. The bisimbi responded by pushing up the end of a piece of cloth through the hole. Ships' crews pulled on the cloth for several days until they had all they wanted. As payment to the bisimbi, the captains threw into the hole the bodies of BaMboma and other Africans who had been sold to them through witchcraft. The vessels then made for land, as the crews cut and folded the cloth for sale. Africans who had been thrown to the bisimbi turned white and became slaves who made cloth and did menial work for their bisimbi masters. The BaMboma further rationalized that the cotton cloth which foreign traders brought was too finely woven to be the work of humans with two eyes. Its fine texture was the work of the bisimbi, who had the sight of two eyes concentrated into one.(3) Guns and gunpowder were seen to have equally magical qualities; guns filled with gunpowder were used to rouse charms to activity and shoot at witches.(4) When ships arrived at the port, each commercial house transferred the trade goods to a warehouse that the BaMboma called nkisi or

feitico. These two terms mean "charm" and indicate the other-worldly qualities that the BaMboma and their neighbors ascribed to European-manufactured goods.(5)

In popular belief, the acquisition of these magical trade goods often involved kindoki or witchcraft. In this way the BaMboma explored how individuals could both get rich and at the same time protect themselves from the greed and jealousy of others. Oral traditions and proverbs reveal the widespread belief that individuals sold human souls through witchcraft to gain wealth. The BaMboma distinguished between slaves sold through normal channels and those sold through witchcraft. Those sold directly, that is physically, to the foreign slave traders did not go below the ocean and were not transformed into whites.(6) The indirect slave trade was considered to be synonymous to witchcraft, as reflected in the Mboma proverb, "No one knows what the trader has in his sack, but a person with special insight knows that it contains a slave when it is put on the scales."(7) This proverb served to explain why some producers received more trade goods for their peanuts and palm oil at the factories than others did. In the popular mind, the weight and quantity of produce had little to do with the price paid for it. If a trader received more for his produce, it was assumed that he had added the soul of a kinsman to it, which tipped the scales in his favor and earned him a higher price from the foreign traders.(8) The BaMboma and their neighbors referred to an individual who practiced

witchcraft to increase the weight and value of his produce as kiyungu (from yungula: to bewitch goods, produce).(9)

Dependents greatly feared witchcraft of this type by chiefs and maternal uncles since they believed that the wealthy amassed their riches through antisocial means, usually at the expense of a maternal nephew or niece. When dependents died, chiefs and maternal uncles were among the first to be suspected of responsibility for the deaths. Such witchcraft beliefs were a constant source of tension within the lineage. If, for example, a foreign trader visited the house of a chief and received a chicken as a present from the chief, and several days later a family member died, it might be assumed that the chief had magically sold the deceased to the foreigner and put his soul into the chicken. For this reason, chiefs avoided frequent visits from foreigners. Chiefs, who typically received more trade goods than ordinary vendors because they sold higher volumes of produce and because the foreign traders often gave them special gifts to promote trade, inadvertently contributed to this belief. In order to avoid arousing jealousy, they and their trade caravans preferred to return from the factories to their home villages at night. This practice only intensified the belief among dependents that chiefs clandestinely sold bewitched souls to the foreign traders. Dependents were equally fearful of the chiefly ntwadi a bandoki association where two friendly chiefs united for cooperative witchcraft. When chiefs formed such an

association, they secretly agreed to "eat" together (a code word for witchcraft) and took turns selling the souls of their dependents for mutual profit. Witchcraft, which usually took place within the lineage, was less frequent between lineages, where it was considered to be a more serious matter that threatened entire lineages and could lead to interlineage conflict. If witchcraft between lineages was suspected, chiefs were always questioned about ntwadi relationships. (10)

The traditional egalitarian ideal held that one person's gain was another person's loss. In this context, Janzen has demonstrated the distinction between "naturally caused" and "human caused" diseases and deaths in Lower Zaire belief systems. (11) The BaMboma attributed most human-caused afflictions to the evil intentions of others. They believed that acquisitiveness, envy or situations in which individuals were at cross-purposes with one another generated witchcraft. The acquisition of wealth through witchcraft was socially condemned as a violation of the egalitarian ideal. Enterprising and wealthy individuals who did not participate fully and properly in social redistribution drew attention and conflict to themselves and were vulnerable to charges of witchcraft.

The north-bank Lemba cult was an overt representation of the egalitarian ideal. Therapy rituals functioned to protect wealthy Lemba members and their families from the envy of others. They were also believed to relieve symptoms

of envy, such as dreams, nightmares, spirit possession, and a range of physical ailments. Conflicts of interest between trade and a social order that stressed the ethic of redistribution may explain, according to Janzen, why Lemba, a word meaning "to calm" (lembikisa) took the form of a therapeutic association. The usual victims of the Lemba "illness" included chiefs, commercial officials, traders, and ritual specialists whose commercial abilities and aspirations to wealth made them vulnerable to the envy of kinsmen. Lemba therapeutics recognized that the forces making one wealthy and influential also made one sick unless there was some form of protection. Therapy consisted of a confession of what the sufferer had seen in dreams and nightmares, followed by a prescribed Lemba marriage and redistribution of goods to patrilineal children and others. Lemba's therapeutic functions went beyond the individual and family to the society at large, where an effort was made to restructure social relations along traditional egalitarian lines.(12)

The corpus of animal folk tales common to the Lower Zaire in the nineteenth century and still recounted today reveal the presence of the egalitarian ideal. While it is easier to discern the attitudes of the rich and powerful in matters of wealth, the thinking of the poor and weak is more difficult, but not impossible, to uncover. The tales reflect the attitudes of the powerless in a lineage society

towards wealth, and reveal that the egalitarian ethic was most clearly present among them. The context in which the tales were recounted is important. Dennett, a trader for the firm of Hatton & Cookson in the late nineteenth century, noted that small ragtag crowds often gathered with storytellers at night, seated around fires in the open spaces of village centers. There was lively interaction between storytellers and audiences.(13) The animal tales that storytellers recounted did not merely provide amusement. They dramatized the struggle over scarce resources, which pitted the poor against the rich, the "little people" against "the big." Some versions, such as the "leopard and antelope" tales, make the social comment explicit by casting the rich and powerful in the role of a leopard and the poor and oppressed in the role of an antelope.(14) The leopard was a powerful symbol of chieftainship. Only chiefs were allowed to own and use leopard skins, which they sat on to show their lulendo or meanness and strength, the same attributes associated with leopards. The antelope, on the other hand, was considered to be a small, gentle and timid animal, the prey of more powerful animals, such as the leopard. At the end of the stories, if not in real life, the antelopes always turn the tables on the leopards.(15)

A thread of egalitarian moralizing runs throughout the tales. They cast the antelope as a trickster in a manner

that echoes other Kongo tricksters, such as Moni-Mambu.(16) Trickster characters have in common not only cunning, but also weakness. Their adversaries are distinguished by strength. The trickster genre pits the little against the big, the poor against the rich, the underprivileged against the powerful. The antelope trickster violates society's rules and prohibitions--when he kills the leopard and takes possession of his goods, for example-- and at the same time draws attention to the importance of the rules being violated. No doubt the poor and weak derived some satisfaction from the antelope outwitting the leopard, much as they tried to outwit the wealthy and powerful in daily life.

Numerous proverbs also embodied the egalitarian ideal. One north-bank proverb admonished: "It is the peanuts that you tie up in a leaf and give to a friend that are talked about and appreciated, not the larger pile of peanuts that you keep for yourself in your house."(17)

#### The Conservative Response

The wealthy and powerful, however, focused more and more on the larger pile of peanuts in their houses during the course of the nineteenth century. Within their ranks a conservative response emerged to challenge and weaken the egalitarian impulse. It should not be surprising that in a society where there were two opposing ideal political

models, one egalitarian and the other authoritarian, there were also two opposing ideal economic models, one egalitarian (embodied in cults such as Lemba) and the other self-aggrandizing (embodied in the notion of kimvavama). Those who benefited most from the burgeoning nineteenth-century trade within the increasingly authoritarian political system at Mboma, sought devices to maintain their prerogatives in the face of tremendous economic growth and the accompanying social upheaval.

On the one hand, witchcraft gained a powerful foothold among the BaMboma. The traditional egalitarian values of reciprocity, redistribution and cooperation necessary for survival in a harsh environment conflicted sharply with individualistic strivings for personal advantage made possible by expanded trade. Lineage communities projected onto witches an individualistic, negative identity--greedy, envious and aggressive. Blaming witches for a growing list of inexplicable phenomena--deaths, droughts, famines, epidemics, commercial recessions, political hostilities, and social dislocations--enabled the BaMboma to name and punish the afflictions in their midst. It gave them a sense of control.

On the other hand, the rich and powerful BaMboma aspired to consolidate and capitalize on the gains of their commercial activity during a century of unparalleled economic growth. Most individuals and groups within a



society are forced to chose between countervailing tendencies at certain points in that society's history. Among the BaMboma during the era of burgeoning trade, one of the principal choices had to do with the accumulation of wealth and influence in a society of egalitarian expectations. MacGaffey has noted for the BaKongo in general that the point at which personal success conflicts with the public interest is largely a matter of judgment. While greed and its primary manifestation, witchcraft, are condemned, it is also true that Kongo terms for people who totally lack witchcraft power or entrepreneurial spirit are largely derogatory. It is assumed that people who enjoy success obtain it directly through power from the other world.

The leading members of Mboma society came down on the side of unfettered personal aggrandizement. For this segment of lineage society, the market principal came to supercede reciprocity and redistribution.(18) It discarded the notion of a fixed amount of wealth in favor of constant economic growth. The simbi spirits manufactured unlimited quantities of cloth in their underwater factory and one could pull out as much cloth as one wanted from the simbi hole. The factory stores were filled with desirable foreign-manufactured trade goods. Ships continually unloaded new trade goods at the wharfs of Mboma's port. These were constant reminders of the mercantile activity

that transformed Mboma into a capitalist emporium, into Kimboma Chyengo, the Mboma of happiness and comfort, and Kimboma Wolo, Mboma the golden.(19)

Lemba did not manage to thwart the more exaggerated forms of elitism among the BaMboma, as it did inland. The tendency toward monopolistic exchange among a small clique of adherents eclipsed egalitarian exchange between all segments of society. It served to stimulate regional trade between Mboma notables and those of the interior. Lemba marriages strengthened alliances among the rich and powerful. It identified the natural power bases within Mboma society and in neighboring societies, and brought wealthy individuals together in a kind of exclusive regional club. In short, Lemba made its Mboma adherents richer and more powerful. This is best exemplified by Lemba's material culture.

In the decentralized polities of the north-bank hinterland, the consecrated Lemba charms consisted of copper bracelets and anklets worn by members. The nkobe, a large cylindrical bark box, contained a variety of symbolic substances collected during the initiation ceremony. These were used later for purification or for the adherent's own future healing activities. The drums used in the Lemba couple's initiation into the cult were frequently reproduced in miniature. The cavity was filled with plant substances (bilongo, medicines, powers) to retain or conjure spells,

and hung over doorways of houses or on statues, or worn about the body as charms. These objects were the instruments through which Lemba "power" was captured and used. (20)

Among the BaMboma, as well as in the older coastal states of the BaVili, Bakwakongo and BaWoyo, Lemba's material culture changed. The charms--bracelets, anklets, drums, staffs--were more ornate with elaborate raised or incised figurative and geometric designs. They also appeared in the form of miniature drums, figurines, and necklaces. The portable nkobe declined in favor of a fixed shrine house (nzo), surrounded by a well-maintained garden of trees and wild plants. The nzo became a treasury, a repository of wealth, mainly imported trade goods. (21)

These variations in the form of Lemba artifacts--from portable shrines in inland areas to fixed shrines at Mboma, from less elaborate charms among inland adherents to more elaborate charms among Mboma adherents--corresponded to a political shift among the BaMboma when commercial activity intensified in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Instead of an acephalous polity, a centralized, hierarchical ministate emerged. This was paralleled by a shift in commercial interest from investment in long-distance caravans to investment in trading ventures between resident merchant-chiefs and foreigners at the river port.

If Lemba's place was in the interstices between centralized polities, why did it also gain a following among the Mboma, where it competed with a variety of other minkisi cults? There were several reasons. The BaMboma probably acquired Lemba sometime in the eighteenth century, or even earlier. Lemba emerged in the coastal mercantile society of Loango in the seventeenth century and consolidated its strength in the eighteenth century when it spread inland.(22) The BaMboma collected the Lemba charm along with other charms as they were elaborated and became available. Few of the charms present among the BaMboma appear to be exclusive to the Mboma area; most existed throughout the lower Zaire. The number of mercantile charms employed by the BaMboma during the nineteenth century indicates a major preoccupation with trade. In manipulating a large variety of charms, including Lemba, the rich and powerful at Mboma adopted a multi-layered approach to insure themselves against the potentially harmful effects of their economic ventures. The Mboma case parallels the complexity and diversity of charms that evolved in coastal Loango society.

The charms themselves developed a remarkable versatility in BaMboma hands and overlapped in function.(23) Mumba Luangu, in addition to its role as a major earth diety, played a central role in Khimba, a secret male initiation school under chiefly patronage. Khimba promoted

and monopolized trade with the interior and reinforced the commercial control Mboma chiefs held over the lower river. Mbumba, together with a host of rain charms (minkisis mvula), was invoked to produce rain, thereby assuring agricultural production and the commodities trade. In addition, the BaMboma used Mbumba as a war charm to protect Mboma's commercial hegemony over the lower river.(24)

The Mpinda charm, which had its own special priest at Mboma, was also invoked to protect river trade. The charm appears to have originated either in seventeenth-century Loango or in Sonyo, where the first major port in the sixteenth century bore the name Mpinda. It took on the representational form of a life-size human figure or bust and appears to have been more concerned with external trade than with that of the interior.(25)

The BaMboma used numerous Khondi charms, including Mabiali Mandemba, Mangaka, Mbuku Dabinda, Makwanza, and Mbwaka, as judicial instruments. They usually took the form of carved wooden human and animal figures embedded with mirrors and nails. Bastian makes it clear that many were of recent nineteenth-century development and represented a proliferation of subsets of Khondi charms.(26) Khondi charms frequently appeared at Mboma markets to be "nailed." This operation consisted of transporting the Khondi statue from market to market. In front of assembled crowds, the magician invoked the charm and announced the reason for the

invocation, such as accusations of theft or witchcraft. As he spoke, he slowly drove a nail into the statue, signifying the solicitation of the charm. All who heard the invocation were required to help bring the malfactor to justice under pain of death by the charm. If the nail did not remain embedded in the statue, it meant the charm refused the invocation. As soon as a nail which the charm had accepted was withdrawn, all effects were nullified. It was the magician's hand that controlled the action of the nail, and it was wealthy individuals who controlled the action of the magician's hand.(27) The major adjudicatory function of the Khondi in the acephalous societies of the interior was partially usurped by strong chiefs at Mboma who acted as supreme judges.

There were mobile versions of many of these charms which Mboma brokers and traders carried with them on long commercial trips. One such charm was Mbumba, in the portable form of a statuette in a pot or calabash. It was invoked to control rain, thereby protecting goods from getting spoiled or lost and preventing caravans from delay from adverse conditions and missing markets. Traders employed Mbumba to guard against ambushes, gunshots and theft. Mambili was another charm, in the form of a double gong or rattle, that was reputed to produce thunder and lightening when provoked. If the broker-trader encountered inhospitality in a village, he would rub the charm on the

ground, frightening potential troublemakers who, "stretch[ed] out their arms and cri[ed], 'the whole earth is yours,' in order not to be struck by lightning." (28) Trade caravans, before setting out for Mboma, called upon ritual specialists to make charms for good luck on the road and in trade at the factories. Traders wore Luevo charms that consisted of leaf assemblages to dominate trade at the foreign-run factories, whistle charms to frighten away spirits and wild animals, and numerous charm satchels and amulets for good luck. (29)

Empirically, the charms did not protect or promote anything. What they did was to provide a tool for the wealthy to exploit the poor. The economic aspect of minkisi cults was conspicuous; all involved expensive initiation fees, fines and therapeutic dues. The power of a charm depended directly on the amount that was paid for it. The most "powerful" charms, that is, those which were the most respected and feared, were available only to the wealthy and beyond the reach of ordinary people. The magicians who fabricated them charged high fees, which accounted for a large part of their personal fortunes. In addition, a charm required periodic offerings, usually once a month, in consultation with the magician to reinvigorate the medicines he had put inside them. Offerings usually required a slaughtered chicken or goat, whose blood was poured over the charm. Sometimes offerings necessitated cloth, which the

magician appropriated for himself. Often the charm was "thirsty" and demanded gin or rum; in reality, it was the magician who was thirsty. When animals were slaughtered, magicians required part of the meat, usually a hind quarter. The manipulation of charms among the BaMboma was essentially a conservative device used by the rich and powerful to maintain their prerogatives. Charms established a kind of balance of power among wealthy individuals who feared each other's witchcraft. They also protected and promoted Mboma interests in the lower river, since they were backed by more resources and force than those of Mboma's neighbors.(30)

#### Funerals: the Ultimate Expression of the Conservative Response

The funerals of the rich and powerful were unparalleled occasions for the ostentatious display and destruction of prestige goods. Funeral practices were conservative in the sense that they effectively destroyed large amounts of wealth, thereby preventing the development of a large oligarchy and preserving the old ways. Cemeteries were the ultimate repositories of wealth. In the funerary context, prestige goods were badimbu (signs) that exemplified the individual attributes of the deceased. They also demonstrated the wealth and prestige of the deceased and his lineage vis-a-vis others. Death and burial among the BaMboma were two distinct events. Corpses were sometimes



buried years after death. The reason, as Bentley noted, was that the goal of every notable was to have an opulent burial, to have his corpse wrapped in large quantities of foreign-manufactured cloth, and to have his grave strewn with trade goods: "then the report goes that so and so was buried, and that he was wound in 200 fathoms of cloth, and that 50 guns were buried with him." (31) When Tuckey visited Mboma in 1816, he reported that an individual asked him to make a contribution of cloth for a woman's burial. She had been dead for seven years and was to be buried shortly, since the mass of cloth wrapped around her corpse had arrived at a size "to make a genteel funeral." The layers of cloth around a corpse multiplied as it could be procured by relatives of the deceased. In the case of a wealthy individual, the bulk attained was limited only by the human strength needed to convey the cloth-wrapped body to the grave. Before burial, the corpse was kept in a specially constructed hut, which was often rebuilt several times over to accommodate the expanding shroud. When the cocoon-like corpse reached an immense bulk, it was interred in a deep grave. (32)

The funerals of the rich and powerful were costly. The death of a notable was announced by gunshots. Frequently, all the gunpowder belonging to the deceased was burned up, explaining in part the enormous consumption of gunpowder among the BaMboma. In some cases, the lineage of the

deceased sent livestock--chickens, pigs or goats--along with funeral invitations, depending on the importance of the invited guests. The guests arrived at the funeral with as many wives, dependents and slaves as possible in order to make an impressive show; all had to be fed for several days at the expense of the deceased's lineage. Every invited guest gave a present consisting of trade goods; usually it was cloth to wrap around the corpse. Funeral presents rarely equalled funeral expenses. In some cases, expensive funerals bankrupted individuals and lineages permanently. Sometimes dependents had to be sold into slavery to clear funeral debts. An individual's wealthy enemies could ruin his lineage at his death by their lavish funeral presents, most of which were in the form of cloth that was buried with the deceased, and which needed to be reciprocated in future return funeral presents.(33)

The most spectacular funeral recorded in European sources at Mboma was that of a leading commercial official in the early 1860s:

His bier was a kind of palanquin covered with crimson cloth and gold tinsel. It had three horns or prominences, two capped with empty black [gin] bottles and the central one bearing the deceased's helmet. The coffin was eight feet long and five feet wide and said to be quite full ... Some 600 pounds sterling in gold and silver were buried with him, in addition to cloth, beads and ornaments. The bier was born by slaves. The grave was a pit, fifteen to twenty feet deep, cut like a well.(34)

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the corpses of Mboma chiefs were buried upright on Chinsala Island, the hallowed birthplace of Mboma chiefship. When Bastian visited the area in 1873, he noted that one of the Mboma chiefs had broken with this custom and had a cemetery established for himself and his dependents near his village. Others continued to maintain the tradition of burial on Chinsala. Apart from the cemeteries of chiefs, many others belonging to commercial officials and local lineage heads dotted the countryside, usually just outside their villages. Cemeteries were divided into two distinct parts; one for political and commercial notables, the other for dependents. Slaves also had a place in the dependents' cemetery, but in a segregated section. (35)

In October 1979, the author together with Joseph Cornet participated in a month-long expedition, sponsored by the Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre, which visited old cemetery sites in the Mboma hinterland. The expedition served to demonstrate that Mboma cemeteries are rich commercial, social and political documents for the nineteenth century. They are microcosms that depict chiefs and commercial officials, slavery, economic activity, politics, and social practices. Esteemed foreign trade goods, and objects of local manufacture are striking evidence of a vanished golden age in Mboma history. Many nineteenth-century travelers who visited the lower Zaïre

commented on Kongo cemeteries for their impressive displays of prestige goods. But it was the Mboma cemeteries that were especially spectacular for their large amount of foreign-manufactured trade items and their array of the finest Kongo funerary art.

Trade goods were sometimes referred to as "the wealth of the ancestors" in their funerary context. Essential items in lower river commercial transactions were always represented--cloth, alcohol and guns. Most of the trade cloth went underground with the body. The top of the grave was strewn with empty Dutch kelderflessen or case gins--square tapering glass bottles with round shoulders--and large stoneware jugs of German manufacture, but with Dutch and Portuguese commercial markings, that had contained washed gin and rum. Sometimes large numbers of case gins were lined up in neat rows to outline a grave. Such a bottle configuration was equal in value and prestige to funerary art. Since cloth and alcohol were trade goods of the first order and served as currency, they represented great wealth and prestige. Flintlock guns, symbols of superior Western technology and units of account in the trade with the foreigners, adorned the graves of notables and famous hunters. Sometimes carved steatite facsimiles substituted for actual guns on the graves of their deceased owners.(36) The gravesites contained many other foreign-manufactured items. Cannons, swords, sabres, ships' masts,

and anchors, like ivory tusks, were reserved for the cemeteries of chiefs. Highly prized faience in the form of Toby jugs, "GR" mugs, allegorical human statuettes, rhinoceros and other wild animal jars, hen and duck boxes, snufftakers, spaniel mugs, platters and dishes frequently adorned gravesites. The Tobies and small "GR" mugs were especially popular among chiefs. Metal pots and pans (neptunes), umbrellas and a large variety of hardware were also placed on graves. Many of the items were deliberately and carefully damaged to render them useless, thereby discouraging theft.(37)

It is in this context of mercantile opulence that Mboma funerary art must be considered. Leaders of society became patrons of the funerary arts to celebrate the culmination of a lifetime of successful mercantile activity. Nowhere in the Lower Zaire did funerary art achieve the heights that it did in the Mboma trading community. Art developed new forms and expressions in the funerary context, as it entered and interpreted the streams of power and trade among the BaMboma. It became a primary instrument of self-recognition among the rich and powerful. It signaled a new order in the lower Zaire, much as in Renaissance Europe among the rising bourgeoisie.(38) Contrary to assertions of an earlier date by Verly, the funerary art is firmly rooted in the nineteenth century and tied to a century of commercial expansion.(39) It is situated in the primary Mboma area as

well as secondary areas that came under heavy Mboma commercial influence, including the southern Mayombe, south-bank Solongo areas, the Noki-Matadi region, and the western Cataracts district.

The maboondo funerary ceramics were first reported in European sources at the turn of the nineteenth century, even though their art-historical discovery is recent. Professional potters crafted the funerary ceramics, also known colloquially as ta chya boonda (a thing of value), on commission. According to Madituka Djioni (Johnny), the last of the living funerary potters at Loango Nzambi, the ceramics were made "for the honor of the lineage" and aesthetic considerations played an important role in their production.(40) The ceramics are generally cylindrical or quadrangular in shape and frequently sectioned in horizontal registers bearing elaborate incised patterning. Many are perforated with openwork diamonds, triangles or squares. Thompson has uncovered a rich ideography in their designs.(41) Human and animal figures sometimes adorn the cylindrical wall or the summit of the stele. They were deposited on graves in a manner similar to that of the funerary statues.

The bitumba steatite statues, also known as mintadi (s. ntadi: stone), were the ultimate reflections of a society engaged in intense mercantile activity. Their name (from the Portuguese, tumba: tomb) is an indication of heavy

Portuguese commercial influence among the BaMboma. Verly was the first European to make their art-historical discovery in the mid-1950s. The statuary, which functioned as a sign of status and wealth, portrayed chiefs, commercial officials, priests, magicians, hunters, Lemba wives and other prominent members of society. Flintlocks, charms and other objects the deceased owned in life were also portrayed in steatite facsimiles. According to Makanzu Kinkela, a traditional Mboma chief at Kidiaki, the statues could be commissioned either before or after the death of an important individual. In most cases, the lineage of the deceased took part of the deceased fortune and ordered a statue for his grave. Some individuals commissioned their own statues while still alive and kept them in their houses until death. After death and a period of mourning, lineage members deposited the statue on the grave of the deceased and a celebration followed. The tradition of producing funerary statues continued to the 1920s.(42)

Lemba and its material culture were elevated to the status of funerary art. Funerary statues portrayed Lemba priests with their fine clothing, bracelets and anklets, necklaces and staffs. Facsimiles of Lemba bracelets and anklets were carved in steatite, and placed on the graves of their deceased owners to demonstrate adherence to Lemba in life and as symbols of prestige and wealth. Steatite bracelets and anklets from the Mboma area in the collection

of the Institut des Musées Nationaux du Zaïre are laden with Lemba iconography: human faces and figures representing the Lemba husband with his Lemba wife (wives), characteristic Lemba crosses and floral motifs, and crescents. Other charms, such as those of Khondi and Khimba, were reproduced as well, including the "tools of the trade" belonging to priests and magicians.(43)

Mboma potters and sculptors produced funerary art for the wealthy individuals and lineages who alone could afford to commission them. The choice of purchasing either a ceramic or a statue was a matter of personal preference and convenience. Both were of equal value and prestige. Figurated funerary ceramics conveyed episodes in the lives of Mboma's notables, such as hunting parties, procreation and celebrations. Funerary statues were studded with the signs of chiefly power and commercial success, covering the range from royal insignia to case gins; one statue was even carved in the style of a Toby jug.(44) Together, they portrayed the rich and powerful in Mboma society and were self-conscious emblems of a century of successful and unprecedented mercantile activity.



## FOOTNOTES

1. Oral interviews, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 17, 18 and 19 December 1979, and Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979. Leon Bittremieux, Mayombsche Penneschetsen, (Brugge: Sint. Michiel, 1914), pp. 79-80, lists the extensive contents of a north bank chief's treasure house. For discussion of Lemba, see below and, John M. Janzen, Lemba, 1650-1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982).

2. See Robert Harms, River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: the Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500-1891 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 197.

3. John H. Weeks, Among the Primitive Bakongo (London: Seeley Service, 1914), pp. 294-295.

4. Idem, "Notes on some Customs of the Lower Congo People," Folk-Lore, 19, 62 (1908), p. 409.

5. Onno Zwier Van Sandick, Herinneringen van de Zuid-Westkust van Afrika (Deventer, 1981), p. 24; Francisco Jose de Almeida, Jr., Viagem ao Interior d'Africa (Lisbon: Typographia de J.C.A. Almeida, 1880), pp. 10-11; F.A. Pinto, Angola e Congo (Lisbon: Livraria Fereira, 1888), p. 244.

6. Oral interview, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 18 December 1979.

7. Oral interview, Lengo Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979.

8. W.H. Bentley, Life on the Congo (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1893), p. 61; Weeks, "Notes on some Customs", p. 45.

9. Oral interview, Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979. See Bittremieux, Mayombsche Penneschetsen, pp. 80-81.

10. Oral interviews, Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979, and Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 17 and 18 December 1979; see Albert Doutreloux, L'Ombre des fetiches: Societe et Cultures Yombe (Louvain: Editions Nauwelaerts, 1967), p. 250.

11. See John M. Janzen, The Quest for Therapy in the Lower Zaire (University of California Press, 1978), pp. 47-49.

12. See Janzen, Lemba, pp. 3-4, 45, 51, 77, 250-251, 317, 324.

13. R.E. Dennett, Notes on the Folklore of the Fjort (London: Folk-Lore Society, 1898), p. 25.

14. This analysis is inspired by Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), pp. 9-72. Darnton finds social implications in folk tales like "Little Red Ridinghood." In his view, peasant versions of Mother Goose tales, interpreted historically, record the harshness and cruelty of rural life during the Old Regime. Darnton's work draws from the French l'histoire des mentalités and Annales--school approaches to history.

15. The four tales are found in Weeks, Among the Primitive Bakongo, pp. 136-139, and Dennett, Notes on Folklore, pp. 71-73, 82-84. See also, Appendix 9, Norm Schrag, "Mboma and the Lower Zaire: a Socioeconomic Study of a Kongo Trading Community, c.1785 - 1885", Ph.D.dissertation, Indiana University, 1986.

16. See Janzen, Lemba, pp. 258-272.

17. I am grateful to Robert Niklaus, who collected the proverb and shared it with me, Christian and Missionary Alliance Archives, New York, Notebook 2, no. 22.

18. The debate among Africanists concerning the market principal versus uneconomic thinking is spent. The "formalist" versus "substantivist" debate demonstrated that neither market behavior nor the particular structures in which it took place can be ignored. Both laws of "supply and demand" and rules of "reciprocity and redistribution" shaped exchange. See, for example, A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa (London: Longmans, 1973), for the formalist approach, and Karl Polanyi, Dahomey and the Slave Trade (Seattle, Wa., 1966), who distinguishes between modern economies and "primitive" or "archaic" ones. Both egalitarian and capitalist tendencies were present among the Mboma. See Wyatt MacGaffey, Modern Kongo Prophets: Religion in a Plural Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 143.

19. Kin kela Ngoma, Svenska Missionsförbundet Archives, Stockholm, cathecists' notebooks, Notebook, 84. I am grateful to Wyatt Macgaffey who allowed me to use his copies of the relevant notebooks.

20. See Janzen, Lemba, pp. 141-142, 233, 256-257.

21. Adolf Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition an der Loango Küste (Jena: Herman Costenoble, 1874), I, pp. 102, 171-173.

22. See Janzen, Lemba, p. 58.

23. Kongo min'kisi have been studied extensively. See, for example, Wyatt MacGaffey and John M. Janzen, "N'kisi figures of the Bakongo," African Arts, VII, 3 (1974): 87-89, and Robert F. Thompson, "The Grand Detroit N'Kondi," Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts, 56, 4 (1978): 207-221.

24. Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition, II, pp. 12-14, 20-21; Leon Bittremieux, La Société Secrète des Bakhimba au Mayombe (Brussels: Institut Royal Colonial Belge, 1936), p. 177; idem, Mayombsche Namen (Leuven: Drukkarij der H.H.Harten, 1934), pp. 41, 44, 47; "Questionnaire," Van de Velde response for Mboma, 1888?, AI/1370, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères(MAE), Archives Africaines, Brussels; oral interviews with Paka Matundu Vete, Vwadi Nsiku and Ngoyi Matundu, Binda, 23 October 1979.

25. Maxwell map, "New Survey," 65815(1.), British Library; Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition, II, p. 14; Eduard Pechuël-Loesche, Volkskunde von Loango (Stuttgart: Strecker and Schroder, 1907), p. 377.

26. Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition, I, p. 178.

27. Alex. Delcommune, Vingt Annees de la Vie Africaine (Brussels: Vve. Ferd. Larcier, 1922), p. 97.

28. Oral interview, Mbwilu Nlandu, Boma, 27 November 1979.

29. Oral interviews, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 19 December 1979; Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979. Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition, II, p. 181; J.K.Tuckey, Narrative of an Expedition to Explore the River Zaire (New York: Kirk and Mercein, 1818), p. 194; Richard Burton, Two Trips to Gorillaland and the Cataracts of the Congo (London: Sampson Law, Marston, Law and Searle, 1876), pp. 219-220.

30. Delcommune, Vingt années, p. 99; Père Carrie, "Journal de voyages," Archives of the Pères du Saint Esprit, Paris, 470 - I; Weeks, Among the Primitive Bakongo, pp. 232-233, 235; "Questionnaire," Baerts a Priem response for Solongo, AI/1370, MAE; Tuckey, Narrative, p. 173.

31. W.H.Bentley, Life on the Congo (London: Religious Tract Society, 1893), pp. 45; idem, Pioneering on the Congo (London: The Religious Tract Society), I, p. 178.

32. Tuckey, Narrative, pp. 166-167, 387.

33. "Boma (suite); lettres inédites de Lievin Van de Velde," Cl, 1892, p. 102; Weeks, Among the Primitive Bakongo, p. 268; idem, "Notes on some Customs", p. 430; Bentley, Pioneering, I, p. 174.

34. Burton, Two Trips, pp. 121, 123.

35. Bastian, Die deutsche Expedition, II, p. 12; oral interview, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 19 December 1979.

36. Oral interviews, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 18 December 1979; Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979; Mweba Nkinga, Lungu, 11 October 1979.

37. Oral interviews, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 17 December 1979; Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979; and Mbwilu Nlandu, Boma, 17 November 1979; Henry M. Stanley, Through the Dark Continent (London: George Newnes Ltd., 1899), pp. 350-351.

38. See exhibition catalogues: Robert F. Thompson and Joseph Cornet, The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981), and Joseph Cornet, Pierres Sculptées du Bas-Zaïre, (Kinshasa: Exposition au Centre de Commerce International du Zaïre, 1978).

39. See Robert Verly, "La Statuaire de Pierre du Bas-Congo (Bamboma-Mussurongo)," Zaïre, 5 (1955): 451-528.

40. Oral interviews, Madituka Djioni (Johnny), Loango Nzambi, 17 October 1979; Makanzu Kinkela, Boma 19 December 1979. See Cyr.Van Overbergh, Les Mayombe (Etat Independent du Congo) (Brussels:Albert de Wit, Libraire-Editeur,1907), p. 282.

41. Thompson and Cornet, Four Moments, pp. 76-94.

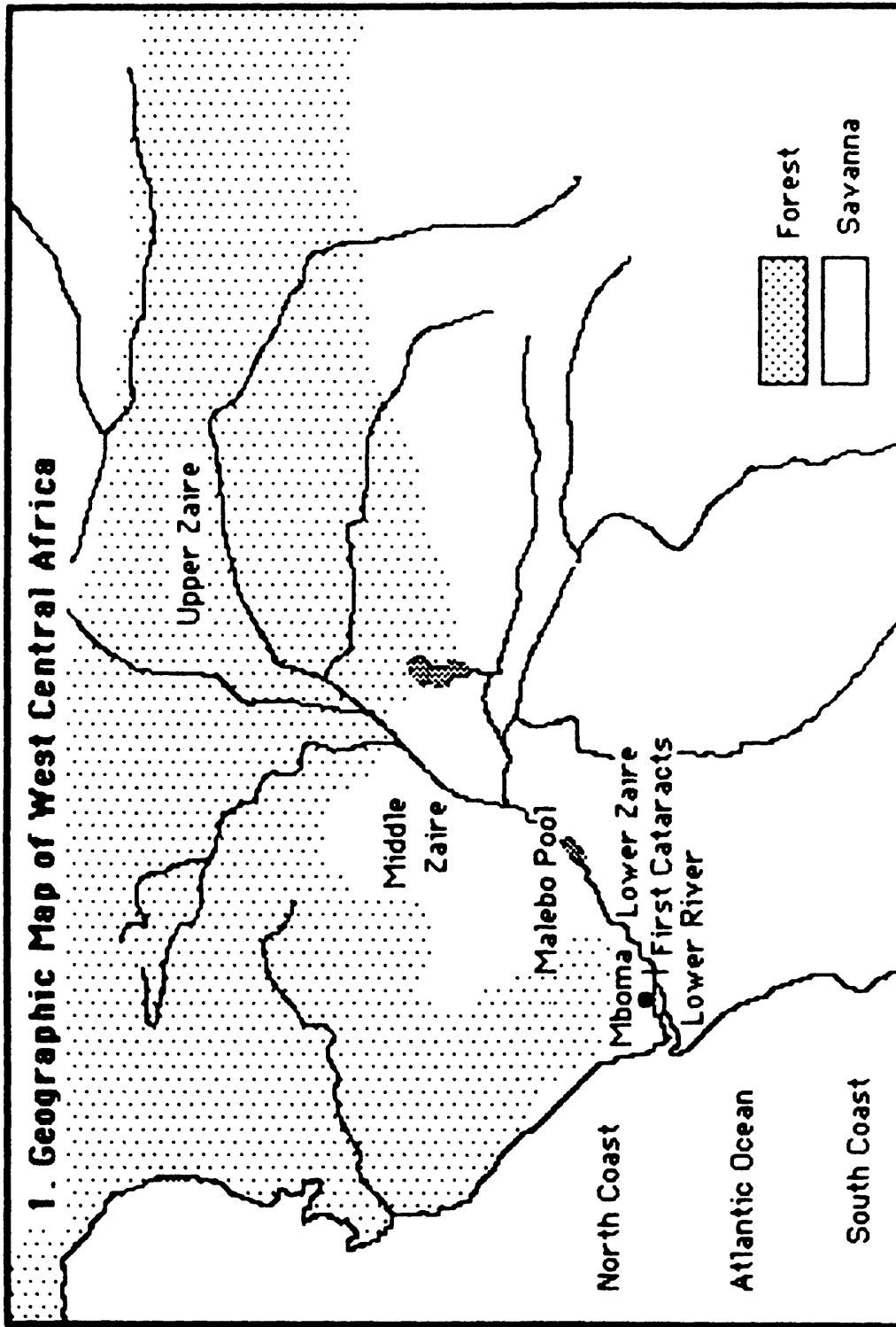
42. Oral interviews, Makanzu Kinkela, Boma, 19 December 1979, and Paka Matundu Vete, et. al., Binda, 23 October 1979. See Verly, "Statuaire," pp. 451-528.

43. See Thompson and Cornet, Four Moments, pp. 112, 122, 239 (no. 57), 243 (no. 76); Cornet, Pierres Sculptées, pp. 20, 44-45. See also Bittremieux, Société Secrète, p. 85,

and Janzen, Lemba, plates 14, 15 and 16. Oral interview, Paka Matundu Vete, et.al., Binda, 23 October 1979.

44. Oral interviews, Mwebwa Nkinga, Lungu, 11 October 1979; Paka Matundu Vete, et.al., Binda, 23 October 1979; Nzuki Palata, Lombe, 3 December 1979. The Toby-influenced funerary statue is pictured in Thompson and Cornet, Four Moments, p. 101, fig. 68.

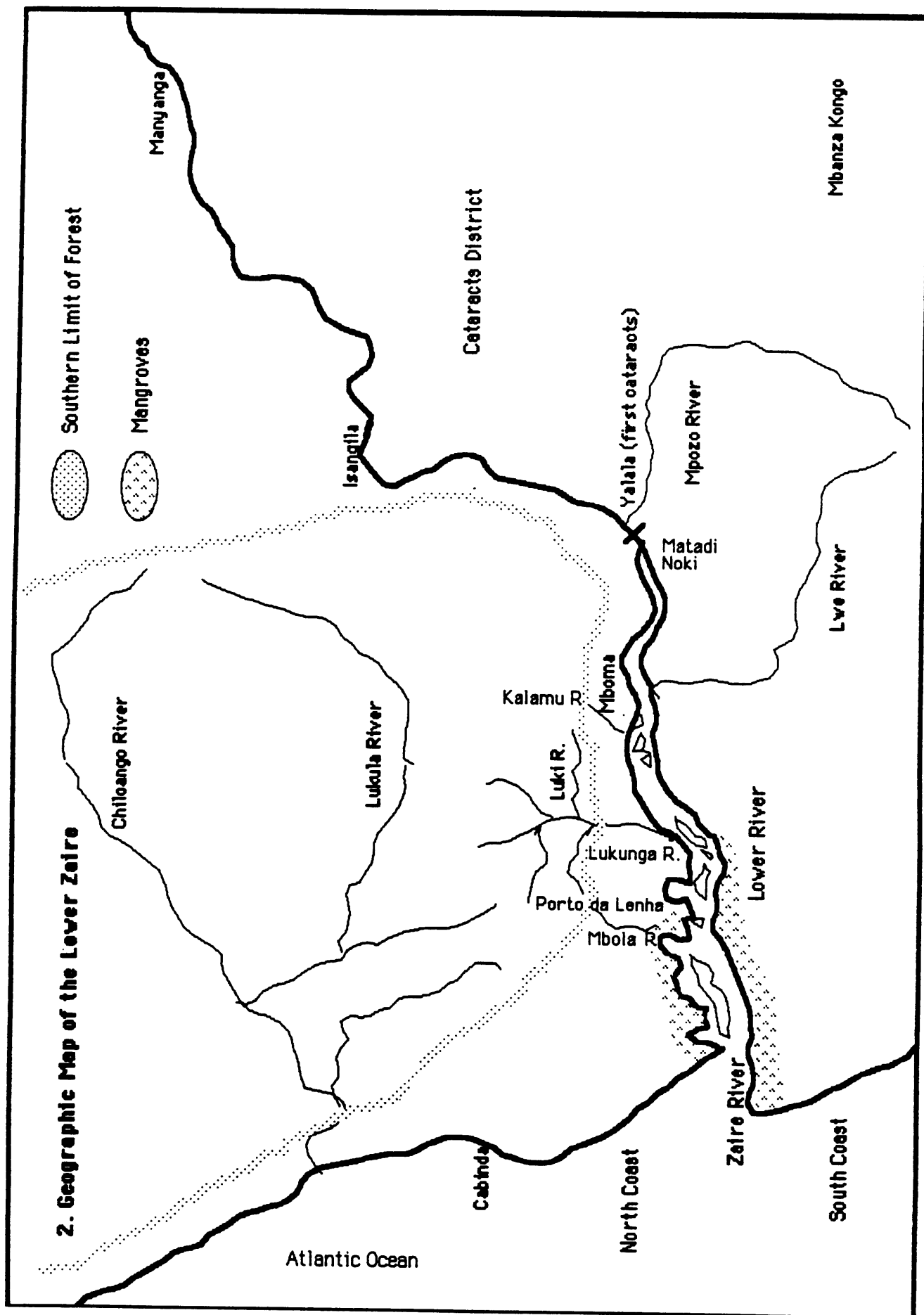
MAPS AND PLATES



## 2. Geographic Map of the Lower Zaire

Southern Limit of Forest

Mangroves





### 3. Ethnic Map of the Lower Zaire

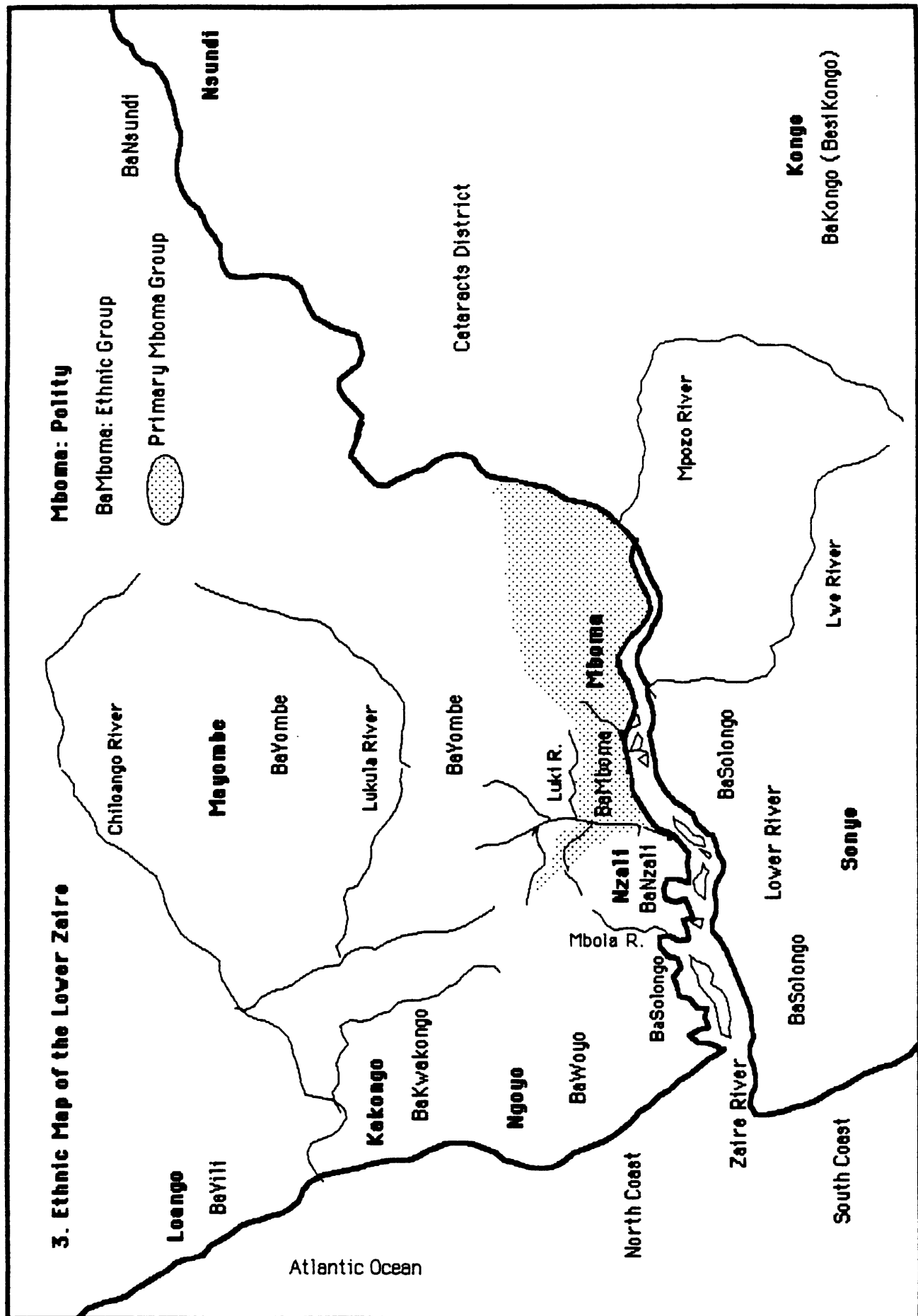


Plate 1  
Toby jug



Plate 2  
"GR" mug



Plate 3  
AHV trade cloth



**Plate 4**  
**Mboma war charm**



**Plate 5**

**Funerary statuette (*tumba*), Mboma chief and wife with slaves underfoot**



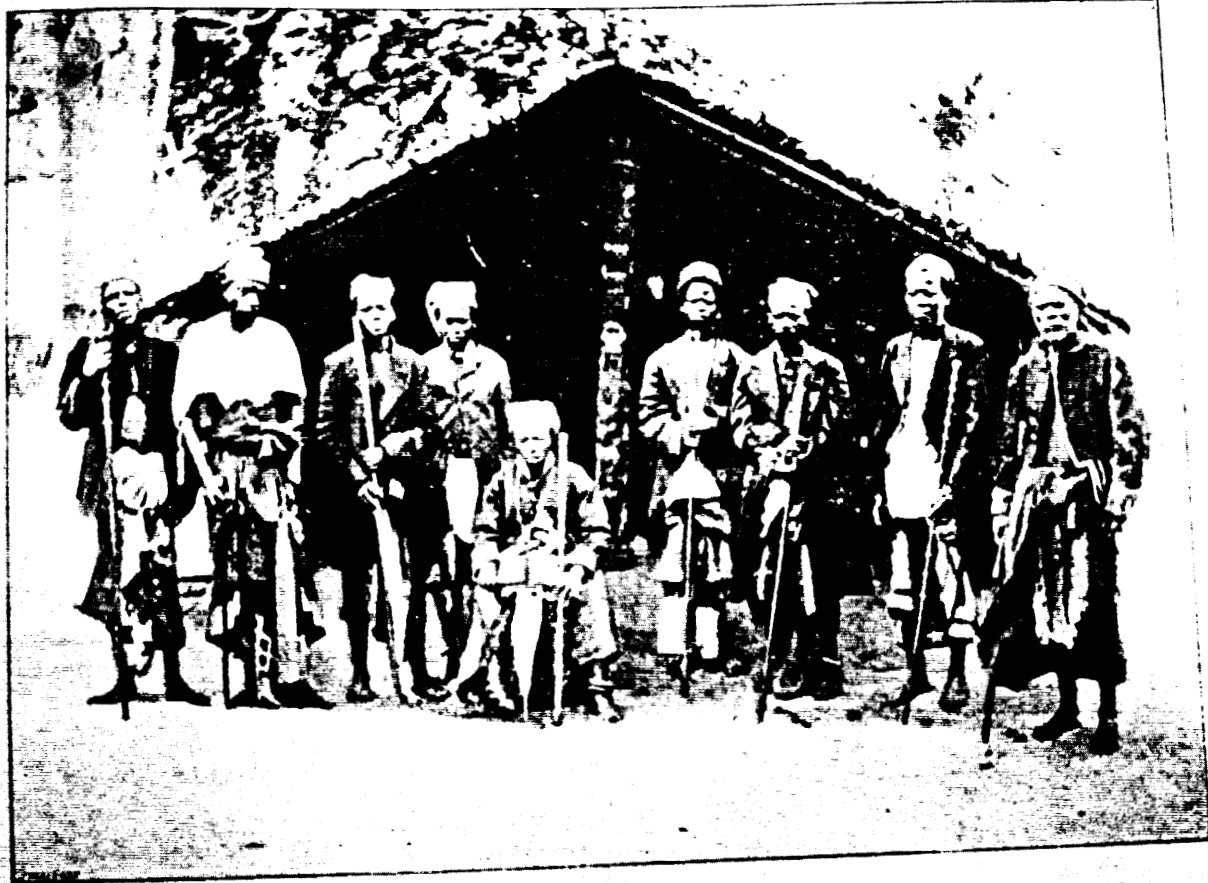
**Plate 6**

**Funerary ceramic (*ta chya boondo*), human figures on summit of stele**



Plate 7

"The nine kings of Boma. (From a photograph by M. Shanu.)"



Les neuf rois de Boma. (D'après une photographie de M. Shanu.)