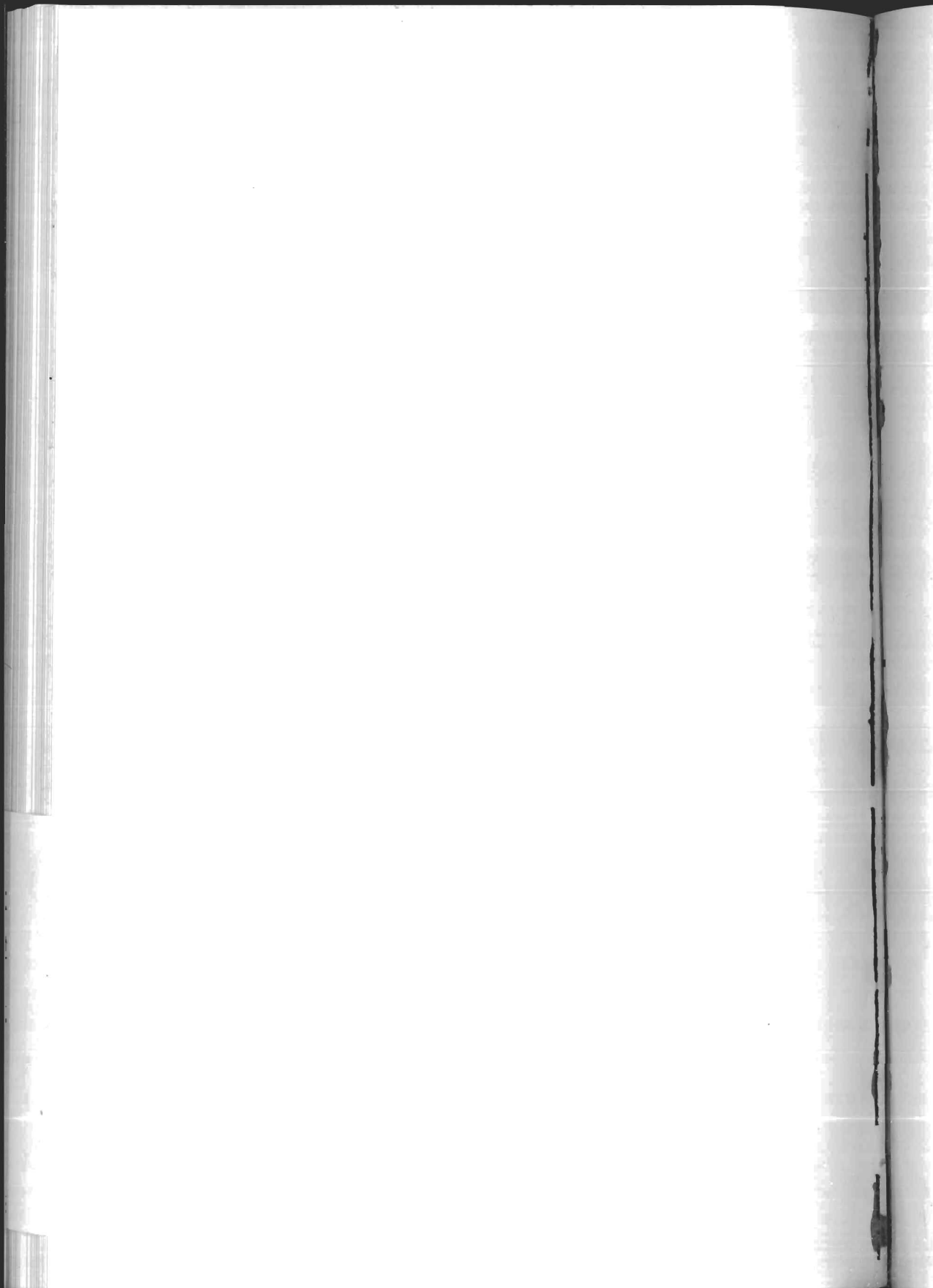


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THE MACKENZIE COLLECTION
A STUDY OF WEST AFRICAN CARVED GAMBLING CHIPS

BY

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PREFACE

The artistic products of African natives are becoming increasingly better known to anthropologists and contemporary artists. It is chiefly through the efforts of field ethnologists, however, that interest in primitive creative work is flourishing at the present time. Although the formal principles of primitive art received close scrutiny and analysis, too little attention was directed towards those facets of art which reveal, upon further examination, far-reaching social and cultural connections. This study is, in a sense, an attempt to indicate some of these lacunae by means of a demonstration of the genuinely functional nature of primitive art objects.

The present study was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation. Professor Frans M. Olbrechts, of the University of Ghent, Belgium, sponsored the study. I take this opportunity to express deep gratitude for his sustained interest in the inquiry, and for the valuable aid he so kindly gave in the solution of difficult problems of research and organization. I also wish to express my appreciation to the Faculty of the Department of Anthropology, Columbia University, for help most generously given. Professor George Herzog helped unstintingly in problems of translation; Professor Ralph Linton allowed me to quote from his field notes which are as yet unpublished. Professor Franz Boas suggested numerous working hypotheses which proved of great value. To Professor Ruth F. Benedict I owe a great debt for a most unflagging and inspiring interest throughout the course of the research. Above all, I wish to thank Dr. Gene Weltfish under whose direct guidance this study was worked out.

The late Mr. Arthur A. Schomburg, Director of the Negro Division of the New York Public Library, and his assistant, Mrs. Catherine A. Latimer, extended every courtesy and made my work at their branch a most pleasant labor.

MORRIS SIEGEL

December, 1939

TO MY WIFE

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“Die Neger Afrikas! Menschen, verachtet
und gescholten, erniedrigt und in
Sklaverei entführt, und doch, welch eine
Kunst!”

(H. Kühn—*Die Kunst der Primitiven*)

INTRODUCTION

THE subject matter of the present study is a collection of one hundred carved gambling chips deriving from West Africa. Each chip has a design carved on one side. It is proposed here to examine the collection from two points of view: first, the use of the chips as a function of the social milieu; and second, as objects of art. The latter involves, in turn, a division into two parts which, simply stated, are governed by the following headings: 1) the content of the decoration as a function of the native culture; and 2) the style of the decoration as a function of the esthetic tradition of the tribe.

I

The chips are used as dice in a game that, with minor variations, is played over a large part of Africa. A game of dice, or any game for that matter, holds no particular significance as such. When, however, it is viewed in terms of its function in the social and cultural framework of which it is an integral part, a game then attains an importance in proportion to its place in the life of the society. Gambling in any society is not intelligible if taken *sui generis*. Yet, it becomes both meaningful and significant as soon as questions of motives arise, for it is then found that gambling (and other forms of play, too) is most intimately connected with the basic cultural forms which provide the life's blood to a society. A few words about gambling in Western civilization will serve to clarify this point.

It is well known that many forms of gambling are pursued in Western society. Millions of individuals in all parts of the world occupy themselves in this way for a part of the time, involving a staggering amount of money. The general attitude towards gambling is one of more or less benevolent tolerance. It is true that certain forms are prohibited by law, being classed as illegitimate activities; nevertheless, numerous gambling practices are legally permissible, and even conceived as most legitimate occupations. Stockmarket play, for instance, has been dignified with the name "speculation," but for the greater number of "speculators" who pursue this play, it is essentially gambling. This is so because these "speculators" understand little, if anything, about the mechanics of the market and the manipulations of stocks, subjects that require an extensive knowledge of the whole economic and political system under which the stockmarket functions. An unadulterated example of gambling, without even the slightest pretense given to mask its nature, is horse racing. Several other forms of gambling are indulged in surreptitiously, having fallen under the ban of the law. These are, however, almost universally viewed with tolerance.

Among the various reasons generally recognized as sufficient motives for gambling, the following are widespread. People gamble in order to spend idle hours or as a recreation which they have learned to enjoy. In such cases the objective is escape from boredom, or pleasure, with gain becoming incidental to the play. Another motive for gambling is the desire to "get rich quick." All three motives may be traced back to the special social and cultural environment which, on the one hand, fails to provide forms of pastime or recreation preferable, from an intellectual point of view, to gambling, and which, on the other hand, sets up as a life's goal the accumulation of wealth. The fact that the struggle for subsistence drains off most of the energies of the great mass of Western populations is in large part responsible for the persistence of gambling as an important pastime and recreational activity. The reason is simply that certain more valued activities, intellectually speaking, require more extensive pre-training than gambling, and that lack of wealth makes other activities inaccessible to the mass of people. It seems clear, then, that inquiries into the social and cultural forms of Western society aid in throwing light on hidden facets of the phenomenon of gambling.

Gambling in primitive societies partakes in some degree of the character of gambling in Western civilization. This is true with respect to the hold that it has on the natives, as well as the material considerations involved. Primitive gambling, however, is inextricably tied up with matters pertaining to the supernatural world, a characteristic which distinguishes it from "civilized" gambling. This intimate relationship between gambling and religious conceptions is probably the reason why gambling is viewed so seriously in primitive life. While gambling in Western society is, with the exception of the few who make it their life's work, an incidental occupation, it is an endeavor of profound significance to the native, and rarely, if ever, taken casually. It is not alone the material losses incurred, nor the fact that he may lose his freedom and that of his family which fully explain the importance of gambling to the native. It is the non-worldly aspect of gambling which imposes a crucial character on the venture. The primitive only stakes his all when he feels that the invisible powers that control his destiny are in favor of his venture, that, in other words, he is in harmonious accord with those powers which define his universe. He performs acts of magic, propitiation, and supplication in order to influence in his behalf the controlling forces. As Lévy-Bruhl phrases it, "It is often observed that before the native gambles he goes through a series of methodical preparations. He fasts, he purifies himself, he dances, he seeks to procure himself certain dreams and only risks his stake when he has obtained them."¹ A primitive gamble

¹ L. Lévy-Bruhl, *Primitive Mentality and Gambling*; in *The Criterion*, Vol. II (1923-1924), p. 189.

becomes, in a sense, a definite test of the native's rapprochement with the invisible world. If he succeeds, all is well, which means that he is, so to speak, the "darling of the gods"; if he fails, the fault generally devolves upon him, not upon the invisible beings. Failure indicates that he has been lax in his sacred obligations, that he has fallen into practices disagreeable to the extra-worldly protectors, or other like deficiencies or delinquencies.

As soon as the religious connotations of primitive gambling are known, the application to it of such terms as "immoral," "vicious," "brute passion," etc., becomes futile and misleading. The fact that natives become involved through gambling in situations that lead to slavery, bloody quarrels, and murder does not of itself characterize these natives as victims of uncontrollable impulses. On the contrary, primitives gamble with a deliberateness and eagerness that flow directly from impulses trained in the rigid sphere of ceremonial religion. This does not mean that material considerations are completely lost sight of, but that other considerations are ever present, sometimes in a dominant role. When this point is clearly understood, it is less surprising that severe losses in gambling, affecting even non-players who have no voice in the play, are accepted by all members of the group with relative equanimity. For the wishes of the invisible powers are as much concerned in gambling play as the wishes of the participants.

The Yaunde culture in which the carved chips function as dice presents certain special features which serve to accentuate the material side of their gambling. Although these natives, like most primitives, cannot entirely divorce their gambling from supernatural meaning, their social institutions are of such a character as to lay tremendous stress on material matters. In fact, the institutional organization of the culture explains in part the Yaunde preoccupation with gambling. Or, to put it the other way around, Yaunde gambling play is unintelligible without a knowledge of the social milieu of which it is a part. The same is true, of course, of all societies in which gambling is practiced. This paper, however, is limited to a discussion of the Yaunde, a culture which presents a group small enough for intensive examination, and whose social structure is simple enough to reveal the intimate relationships existing between one phase of culture and the rest.

II

As mentioned above, the carved chips each have a design on one side. These game pieces are themselves the products of certain cultural forces; moreover, they have the added feature of presenting designs which, in a sense, reflect many aspects of Yaunde custom and belief. The chips are carved with designs representing various objects which generally have significance in terms of native practices or institutions or mythological ideas.

This does not mean that the design-motifs are symbolical in intention, but only that the carvers naturally drew upon the store of themes provided in the culture. Among the designs are found those of animals important in Yaunde food supply and religious life; utensils used in everyday activities, in rites and ceremonies; and objects which show the influx of European civilization. Obviously, everything familiar to the native does not become the subject of decoration. There must be certain forces at work which determine the selection of some subjects in preference to others out of the great mass of possible decorative themes. Or, to put it in the form of a question: Why does the native artist choose some themes from out of a great number of possible ones as his subjects of decorative design? The primitive artist surely does not make his choice in haphazard fashion, but is bound by tradition to those themes considered worthy of special attention as developed in the culture. It is this writer's contention that the motivating factors lying behind the selection of decorative motifs are to be found in the culture of the people. In accordance with this belief, it is proposed here to reveal the cultural settings in which the subjects of decoration function, in an effort to throw some light on the reasons that lie back of the constant use of decorative themes.

In the same way, the style of the decoration stems from the esthetic tradition of the tribe. Just as the style of a single art-form, the decorations on the Yaunde chips, in this case, is inseparable from the tribal art tradition, so is the tribal art inseparable from its social and cultural background. The particular environmental situation is a further factor influencing the art of a tribe. A short discussion of general primitive art is necessary at this point in order to expose the full significance of the above statements.

Primitive art is generally differentiated from the art of Western peoples in several ways. Here, because of space limitations, only two of the traditional distinguishing characteristics are noted. It is claimed, in the first place, that while primitive art is essentially a useful art, the greater part of Western art is purely decorative. It is a fact that nearly all the artistic activities of primitives are devoted to objects that have a use-value to the people. Their works of art are in the main objects used either in the religious practices of the natives (*e.g.*, cult statues and sacrifice receptacles), or in magical activities (fetishes), or in everyday life. Elaborately decorated carved utensils are examples of the last. In extremely rare cases primitive objects-of-art are encountered which serve no other purpose than decoration. According to Professor R. Linton of Columbia University,² among the Sakalava, a tribe in Madagascar, the walls of native dwellings are covered

² Private communication.

with small, highly-decorated mats. These are put up much in the same manner, and for the same end, as are pictures and paintings in Western homes. Decorated baskets of the most fantastic shapes also hang from the house walls, serving no purpose except decoration. The Antandroy, also of Madagascar, keep finely-woven baskets on special shelves attached to the rear walls of the better native homes. These baskets are purely decorative. Such instances are so seldom met, however, that they hardly affect the general statement regarding the utilitarian nature of primitive art.

The fact that primitive art objects are primarily utilitarian in purpose caused innumerable controversies over the question of classifying these works as objects-of-art. A sharp dichotomy was drawn for a time between objects created for utilitarian ends and those which clearly represent "art for art's sake." Indeed, many scholars refused to class the former among objects-of-art precisely because they were useful objects. This narrow viewpoint is a consequence of the conditions affecting Western art, where art works seem to have lost all functions but that of decoration. Careful analysis will reveal, however, that even Western art objects function in more ways than the single one of decoration. Murals, paintings, and sculpture frequently serve the ends of propaganda of one kind or another, without detracting one whit from their artistic value. Recent developments in architecture show that factors of health and sanitation are considered along with the purely esthetic features involved. Finally, economics plays an important role in Western art, as proved by the existence of art galleries with admission prices, by the profession or hobby (a decidedly costly one) of art-collecting, and by the great emphasis placed on the price of an object-of-art as an indication of its artistic value. It is true that primitive art productions fulfill utilitarian roles different from those stressed in Western civilization. Both are nonetheless functional in their respective social and cultural milieus. The real distinction lies in the fact that Western society tends to emphasize the overt decorative function of art while primitives stress the utilitarian aspect. Furthermore, primitives apply their artistic activities to all manner of objects, decorating their spoons, plates, hairpins, etc., in the best way they know, regardless of the amount of labor involved. In this respect, the esthetic impulse appears to be more highly developed among primitives than in Western civilization.

African Negro art is in large part inseparable from religious ideology. Hardy says, "It is this (Animism) alone which permits an explanation of their art. . . ."³ According to Baumann,⁴ "From the store of religious

³ G. Hardy, *L'Art Nègre* (Paris, 1927), p. 9.

⁴ H. Baumann, *Afrikanische Kunstgewerbe*; in Bossert, H. Th. (Ed.), *Geschichte der Kunstgewerbes Aller Zeiten und Völker* (Berlin, 1929), Vol. II, p. 52.

forms, nearly all figurate motifs are drawn." A further comment, which by no means exhausts the possible citations relevant to this point, is given by Clouzot and Level, who say, "Negro art is essentially a ritual art of religious and magical utility."⁶ In order to understand African art, some knowledge of the natives' socio-religious background is, therefore, requisite. This is true, likewise, of Western art, to a large degree; for many art productions (paintings, architecture, etc.) inspired by the Church in Western civilization are to an extent unintelligible without an understanding of the socio-religious conditions which brought about the florescence of this art. A few examples from African art will illustrate this point in relation to primitive artistic creation.

The creation of curiously disproportionate statues and hideously grotesque masks can only be understood in terms of the native practices in which these objects have roles. Generally, the special character of the Ancestor Cult and their usages in ceremonial dances influences the creation of statues and masks respectively. Disproportion between the upper and lower parts of statues is not due to a lack either of artistic talent or technique. The exaggeration of the upper half becomes reasonable when it is known that, according to native conception, the essential powers of the individual repose there.⁶ The widespread use of the lizard as an ornamental motif is characteristic of African ornamental art. The fact that this animal holds an important place in the mythological and spiritual beliefs of African natives in some degree explains its recurrence in art production. Similar examples may be cited for nearly all the chief traits of African art.

The primitive artist expresses his artistic impulses in ways that differ markedly from Western artistic execution. The manner in which the native handles masses, lines, decorative themes, as well as the selection of the themes themselves, depends almost wholly on the cultural traditions to which he is bound. Hence, discussions of primitive art objects that deal only with the objects, without reference to their cultural background, necessarily remain bare and, to a certain extent, meaningless. Maes and Lavachery have expressed a similar point of view in their discussion of Congo art, saying, "In order to understand the profound beauty of Negro art in general, . . . it is necessary, above all, to place the object in relation to the life of the native, to discover the personal meaning, and to pierce the veil which hides the 'why' of the work created by the native artist."⁷

Regarding differences in artistic execution between primitive and West-

⁶ H. Clouzot, and A. Level, *L'Art Nègre et l'Art Océanien* (Paris, 1919), p. 33.

⁶ Cf. E. Vatter, *Religiöse Plastik der Naturvölker* (Frankfurt am Main, 1926), p. 33.

⁷ J. Maes, and H. Lavachery, *L'Art Nègre* (Bruxelles-Paris, 1930), p. 6.

ern artists, there is a sharp divergence in the use of models. The primitive artist, as a rule, works from memory. As Vatter⁸ has it, "Even figures with complicated parts are made directly from memory." Even when models are used, native artists, unlike Western, do not attempt realistic reproductions but emphasize instead those features of the object or design traditionally required. The result is a most consistent individuality instead of an exact copy. In this connection, Dr. Reichard noted, "It is a commonplace that primitives seldom make two objects exactly alike. . . ." ⁹ Some observers have criticized what they called the "inability of native artists to make detailed naturalistic reproductions," in derogatory terms. But such criticisms obviously miss their mark if the artistic traditions of the natives are taken into consideration. In order to avoid confused judgments of the order noted above, studies of primitive art must go beyond the limits of the abstract principles involved in the art.

The extent to which culture moulds artistic activities is profound, yet an analysis from this point of view does not solve all the problems, especially regarding style. This holds particularly for African art. There is a remarkable stylistic difference between the northern and southern parts of Africa. It is well to note in passing that with the exception of the Makonde tribe practically no products that could be called objects-of-art have been produced east of the great lake region of Africa. The northern area exhibits in the main a stiff, schematized, elongated style, in contrast to the warm, rounded, naturalistic art of the more southerly tribes. The best examples of the northern style may be seen in the products of the Bambara and Habbe tribes.¹⁰ Excellent and typical examples of the southern style are found in the artistic productions of the Pangwe tribe.¹¹ Among the explanations offered for this singular stylistic difference, that which explains it on the basis of the physical environment is of considerable interest. The northern style is the product of tribes inhabiting the Sudan, where the sun sheds a powerful, blinding light which effectively influences perception. The strong glare of the sun in that treeless, desert-like country gives to objects perceived an aspect of sharp lines and deep shadows. Consequently, lines and shadows are emphasized in artistic creation. The southern tribes, on the other hand, live in the forest area of Africa, where the sun's glare is screened off by dense foliage. The resulting soft light tends to accentuate masses instead of lines.

⁸ Vatter, *op. cit.*, p. 51

⁹ G. Reichard, *Melanesian Design* (New York, 1935), Vol. I, p. 4.

¹⁰ Cf. C. Kjersmeier, *Centres de Style de la Sculpture Nègre Africaine* (Denmark, 1935-1938), 4 Vols., Vol. I, plates 1-17; 18-24.

¹¹ See pp. 55-59 below.

These forest tribes execute their creations with close attention to mass-effects, and minute working out of details in the decorative designs.

In spite of the plausibility of the physical hypothesis, it is well to heed Hardy's cautioning statement on the matter. He says, "Everything cannot, however, be explained on the basis of the . . . environmental situation; only certain tendencies can be pointed out in the art style and production."¹² It is undeniably true that the character of the environment consciously or unconsciously affects creative work. Not alone is perception influenced, but the very materials with which natives operate are largely dependent upon the resources provided in the environment. Nevertheless, the history and manner of life of peoples seem to be the most decisive factors in their art expression.

III

The discussion given above states, in substance, that a single phase of culture, whether it be gambling, or art production, or anything else, is intelligible only in terms of the total situation, environmental, social, and cultural, of which it is the product. In the attempt to demonstrate the truth of this position, data from the three basic levels are included in the analysis of the Yaunde gambling chips. Information relating to obscure points in the Yaunde material is drawn from other African tribes, wherever such information may throw additional light on these obscure matters. The same procedure is followed with more or less rigor, depending upon the subject under discussion, in the analysis of the decorations on the chips and the formal style of the decorations.

In order to maintain a formal continuity in this paper, the mass of cultural and extra-Yaunde information is given in smaller type. This plan serves the purpose of separating the two orders of material, and, at the same time, the reader is kept in constant touch with the kind of data which leads to a deeper insight into the meaning of the phenomena under consideration.

The chips composing the collection were gathered during a prolonged stay in Equatorial West Africa by Jean Kenyon Mackenzie, a missionary.¹³ The collection is unique in the United States, so far as this writer is aware, and it is on exhibition at the Museum of Negro Art set up by the New York Public Library.¹⁴ Miss Mackenzie obtained the gambling chips from Yaunde natives with whom she had frequent contacts. The English reading public has little knowledge of these West African natives due to the fact

¹² Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹³ See appendix for a short biographical sketch of the life and works of J. K. Mackenzie.

¹⁴ The New York Public Library, 103 West 135th Street, New York City.

that there is no English description of either the Yaunde sub-group or of its mother tribe, the Pangwe.

The Yaunde constitute a sub-tribe of the Bantu-speaking Pangwe tribe who inhabit an area in West Central Africa which extends from 1° latitude S to 5° latitude N, and from 8° longitude W to 12° E. This area is in large part covered by true primeval forest. Numbering from 300,000 to 400,000,¹⁵ the Pangwe embrace several sub-tribes which, however, are not conscious of their bonds in common and are constantly at war with one another. The more important of these sub-groups are the Mwele, the Bene, the Bulu, the Ntum, and the Yaunde. The last, numbering nearly 70,000 members,¹⁶ live in the northwest section of the Pangwe area, on both banks of the Njong River. Their habitat is a mountainous plateau from about 850 to 1100 feet above sea level, with the western and northern parts richly forested. Abundant streams flow through this land of luxuriant vegetation.

Various kinds of evidence indicate that the Pangwe tribe, including all its sub-groups, originated in East Africa, probably in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. They migrated to their present domicile along the northern tributaries of the Ubangi, Congo, and Ogowe Rivers. According to native tradition, the Pangwe traveled west in order to renew contact with their God. It is said that He forsook them because of a sin in connection with sexual intercourse. A more probable cause was the fierce craving for salt which was the driving force behind the westerly migrations of many East African tribes. Another theory concerning the Pangwe movement maintains that the tribe sought to reach the source of certain trade commodities that were highly prized by them. It is true, in this connection, that the Pangwe exhibit an extraordinary emphasis on material wealth, a trait that distinguishes them from neighboring West African tribes.

Kjersmeier writes that several centuries ago the Pangwe began "an exodus towards the southwest, driven . . . by the religious desire for a happy land that was to be found in the west, there where the sun disappeared every night."¹⁷

A striking characteristic of the Pangwe is their amazing capacity to assimilate the tribes with which they come into contact during their travels. The tribe is still spreading over the large West African territory, "imposing its character on the tribes" they encounter on the way.¹⁸

¹⁵ Estimate by G. Tessmann, *Die Pangwe*, 2 Vols. (Berlin, 1913), Vol. I, p. 50.

¹⁶ G. Tessmann, in *Petermann's Mitteilungen* (1932), Vol. 78, p. 9.

¹⁷ Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Cf. ibid.*, p. 13.

CHAPTER I
THE YAUNDE GAMBLING CHIPS AS A FUNCTION OF THE SOCIAL MILIEU

I

THE game in which the carved chips serve is called Abia by the natives. Aside from identifying the sex (male) of those who play, none of the writers who have described the Abia game have given any further information regarding the players. The same prevails throughout the accounts of gambling in Africa, no matter how significant such data might have been in the light of revealing the motivations of primitive gambling. With the Yaunde, however, the particular status organization of the society is of a character which provides clear motives for gambling on the part of the natives. The most striking feature of Yaunde culture is the stress placed on wealth as the means to achieve a high status. Through the medium of wealth natives establish themselves as chiefs and acquire those assets which insure them a following of men poorly endowed with worldly riches. Among the institutions dependent on the possession of wealth, marriage is particularly outstanding.

Marriage follows the widespread African system which demands that a bride-price be paid for the woman. The bride-price usually consists of a variety of goods with spearheads constituting the bulk, and it is handed over to the woman's father by the groom-to-be. According to Tessmann,¹ about 6000 spearheads make up that portion of the bride-price. It is a heavy expense to the majority of Yaunde men, many of whom can never hope to amass such a small fortune through gainful labor. At the same time, native women prefer the official form of marriage, that is, with the regular payment of a bride-price.

In view of these conditions it is evident that rich men dominate the marriage situation. These rich men are generally chiefs because the office of chief depends directly on economic position, and only secondarily on blood inheritance. In fact, if a chief happens to become impoverished, his followers soon desert and attach themselves to a wealthy native. An important reason for the desertion is that in the process of impoverishment a chief loses the many wives with whom he holds his followers. The large part of women available for marriage are monopolized by rich natives. Lacking material wealth, poor men possess only one thing of negotiable value, namely, their services. Therefore, they become the liegemen of chiefs, to whom they owe certain services. In return for these services, the chief "lends" the men wives. The services include labor, military aid, etc., and terminate when the "loaned" wife is withdrawn. It is clear then that a man's status is dependent upon

¹ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 260.

the number of wives he owns. Hence he buys as many as he can and thus gathers to himself followers from among the ranks of the poor. Although the most distinguished chiefs sometimes possess one hundred wives, they usually avail themselves of the personal services of only from three to five. All the rest are "loaned" out to followers, and occasionally to friends. When friends receive such "loans," they repay the chief in gifts, generally spearheads, the size of the gift depending upon the duration of the "loan." As Tessmann says,² "The women are money with which he (a chief) buys for himself the work, war services, and votes of his people; they augment his wealth and his influence; through the possession of women he gets to be and remains the head of the village, the chief,—as the Pangwe say,—the 'very rich one'."

War captives are held as slaves. They have the same privilege of obtaining "loaned" wives as the so-called freemen. However, they may not leave their masters at will.

On the basis of this status organization among the Yaunde it appears that only chiefs are in a position to indulge themselves in gambling. The opportunity to get rich quickly, however, must be a powerful incentive to all natives, especially to those who have everything to gain and the least to lose. It is also possible that the liegemen are able to accumulate small sums during the course of time, over and above what they work out in the service of a chief. The character of the Abia players is discussed further below.

The Yaunde hamlet, which is the unit of their social life, is constructed in the following manner:

A man erects a house, preferably on the plateau, for his wife, or one each for his several wives, as the case may be. He also constructs a large dwelling called a Men's House for the express purpose of receiving and entertaining men of the hamlet, occasional guests from other hamlets, and passing travelers. The Men's House is a structure with features that serve to differentiate its architecture from that of the family dwelling. In the first place, the edifice is usually finished with great care, and decorated profusely with an arrangement of bamboo sticks and small wooden tablets in which designs have been carved. "These (designs) represent diverse animal figures, such as lizards, snakes, etc., or symmetrical lines which are then covered with coal, redwood powder, or white clay, so that the design appears either white and red on a black background, or the other way, red and black on a white background."³ A singular custom, but one in keeping with the fierce Yaunde desire to be a "great" individual, is the practice of suspending just under the roof-top numerous skulls obtained from small wild animals and dogs.⁴ Larger skulls, deriving from

² Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 207.

³ G. Zenker, *Yaunde*; in *Mittheilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten* (Berlin, 1895), Vol. 8, pp. 38-39. The preparation of other colors is not known.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39. The Yaunde consume a large number of dogs.

buffalo, antelope, swine, and apes are placed on the roof in order to impress passing strangers with the fact that the owner of the house is both an expert and fortunate hunter.⁵ The Men's House is frequently large enough to contain as many as thirty beds.

While the followers of a chief, the slaves, and the women and children busy themselves with the material chores of agriculture, fishing, and the carrying of water and clay, the master haunts the Men's House. Towards midday, however, all the inhabitants are again congregated in the hamlet, the daily tasks having been completed. Then, says Zenker,⁶ "The men play (games) and smoke; the wives cook dinner; others make pots, boil oil, weave baskets or rope. . . ." It may reasonably be inferred, therefore, that the Abia game is open to both chiefs and their followers. Otherwise, there should be a scarcity of men available for most kinds of social activities, for, as noted above, the Yaunde live in tiny hamlets, not in large well-populated villages. The fact that vertical mobility is possible to all males except slaves, that is, no hereditary bars to advancement exist in the culture, in some measure indicates that gambling, among other activities, is not taboo to the poorer natives. The question of the relationship between density of population and gambling play is not answered in full in the above description. The Yaunde are great visitors, traveling to and fro between their hamlets with a material end as the chief motivating force. Instead of regular markets for the disposal of and exchange of goods, these natives have developed an elaborate and unique system of exchange-visits which have become institutionalized and are carried on according to fixed procedures. Such exchange-visits, if prosecuted extensively, insure the presence in a hamlet of several persons who do not properly belong to the hamlet. The exchange-visits are handled mainly by chiefs, or what is nearly the same thing, household heads. It is evident, then, that a larger number of economically able individuals are available for gambling in a hamlet than the arrangements of the hamlets would indicate. The question is whether or not the increase by means of exchange-visits augments the roster of possible players sufficiently. Without additional evidence this question must remain unanswered, though this writer is inclined to believe that all freemen enjoy the privilege of gambling.

In exchange-visits, a man visits a friend (infrequently, a relative) for whom he brings along gifts of an unimportant character. He remains as a guest for about a month and then notifies his host of his intended departure. The host, on receiving

⁵ The Yaunde are very fond of hunting, but they are considered poor at it, depending mainly on pitfalls to capture wild game.

⁶ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

this notice, bestows on the guest diverse gifts, such as salt,⁷ hats, and spearheads. The guest then sets out for his own home. Accompanying him is the host with a wife, both of whom now in turn become the guests of their former visitor. After staying as guests for a time the couple make ready to leave, and their host gives them gifts of property. These return gifts are at least equivalent in value to those originally received, more generally, however, with a surplus.

This system of exchange-visits is practiced extensively in the Yaunde area. It sets up a medium of exchange in which various objects are circulated throughout the tribal domain. Status, incidentally, plays a significant part in determining the nature and quality of gifts given in exchange trade. Tessmann writes,⁸ "In Yaunde, it (the gift) follows the guest and his purse; for one man a hen is estimated as adequate, for another, a sheep or goat."

The problem of the character of the Abia players is vital to the discussion of the game as a social force. It is through this gambling play that the social structure is often affected, for in many cases a native's status is changed from that of chief or freeman to that of serf or slave. The fact that gambling plays such a disruptive role in the social life of some African tribes makes it all the more remarkable that so little has been recorded about the gamblers themselves, their social status and the changes in status as a result of gambling losses and gains. The gap in the Yaunde material is less harmful due to the fact that the culture emphasizes material gain as a goal, and provides social institutions which act as a powerful incentive to gambling play as a means to acquire the necessary wealth. These facts establish a fairly strong basis for the inference that all free Yaunde natives may occupy themselves with the Abia gambling game.

II

Gambling is one of the cultural traits found in primitive societies which was not introduced by the carriers of European civilization. "In most so-called primitive societies about which we have adequate information, gambling was known before the arrival of the whites."⁹ Many observers were impressed with the powerful hold that gambling has on the people. Lévy-Bruhl remarked that "... the passion (for gambling) is sometimes so violent with them, that the gambler risks and loses even his wife, his children, and his own person."¹⁰ Regarding the Ibo, Basden says, "Some men become

⁷ "Salt is a strongly desired article; formerly, slaves were sold only for salt." Cf. Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁸ Tessman, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 209.

⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁰ Lévy-Bruhl, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

greatly addicted to the game and lose all sense of control. Men have been known to gamble away their money, their property, and even their children at the game of 'Igba-ita.'¹¹ Among the Kpelle, "a man gambles away his wife, his children, yes his own liberty and leaves the game as a slave."¹² According to Schmitz, "the Muholoholo is a passionate gambler. He remains for hours, even entire half-days, seated on a mat playing with his friends. . . . The more he loses, the more stubbornly does he pursue the play. He gambles away without the least regret his whole fortune, his wife if he is married to a slave, and even his child, under the tacit condition that he may redeem the last."¹³ With the Warega, "(gambling) ruins a large number of individuals."¹⁴ Likewise, the Bangala native is a gambler who "spends days at play, losing his wife and slaves."¹⁵ Van Overbergh gives an eye-witness account, saying, "I have seen (natives) risk their liberty for a term or for life at (this game), selling themselves as slaves in order to begin again in the hope of vanquishing the winner." In his discussion of the dice game played by the Bakongo, Weeks notes that "It is at this game the natives often lay heavy stakes, and sometimes slaves."¹⁶

An interesting statement concerning native addiction to gambling appears in *George Grenfell and the Congo*. It says, "The natives of all Southern Congoland and of the western Congo are great gamblers. Some of the tribes of the Kwilu-Kasai basin play with a rude form of dice. It is well known that for two hundred years at least gambling in all this region has often been an assistance to the slave trade, for after pledging wives and children a man would finally pledge and perhaps lose himself."¹⁷ In his account of the Baya tribe, Tessmann states that "The amount of spearheads (Baya coin), hens, goats, etc., which is lost (in gambling) is often very considerable; indeed, many have already lost all their cattle and other possessions; even a wife has been gambled away. Children are already passionate slaves to this vice, but they play only with earth-nuts, which they naturally steal from their

¹¹ G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London, 1938), p. 354.

¹² D. Westermann, *Die Kpelle* (Leipzig, 1921), p. 71.

¹³ R. Schmitz, *Les Baholoholo*. Collection de Monographies ethnographiques, Vol. IX (Brussels, 1912), p. 431.

¹⁴ Delhaise, *Les Warega*. Collection de Monographies ethnographiques (Brussels, 1909), Vol. V, p. 277.

¹⁵ C. Van Overbergh, *Les Bangala*. Collection de Monographies ethnographiques (Brussels, 1907), Vol. I, p. 317.

¹⁶ J. H. Weeks, *Among the Primitive Bakongo* (London, 1914), p. 127.

¹⁷ Sir H. Johnston, *George Grenfell and the Congo* (London, 1908), 2 Volumes, Vol. I, pp. 707-708.

mothers."¹⁸ The Bakoko tribe play the same game found among the Yaunde. It is also called "Abia," and, says the author, "It impassions the natives and causes them great losses. It is interdicted by the religious missions to their followers."¹⁹ This author believes that the Bakoko borrowed the Abia game from the Yaunde.

The above citations do not by far exhaust the ethnological data with regard to primitive gambling, but they should suffice to show that games of chance are decidedly integral parts of native life. There is a large body of information about dice games as they are played by North American Indians. This information is found in Culin's monograph on Indian games.²⁰ Lack of space prohibits the inclusion of this material here.

It has already been noted that the Yaunde tribesman is passionately fond of hazard games. In this respect, Zenker remarks, "Besides war games and death-games there is nothing that the men love more than gambling."²¹ Those who play frequently suffer serious losses of property, and, in the attempt to recoup their fortunes, natives will take loans from more fortunate players during the game. An individual who cannot repay such loans is generally sold as a slave unless his family ransoms him immediately. The amount of the ransom payment must be larger than the original debt. The customary practice is to place the defaulting debtor in the stocks, and, if he is not soon ransomed, he is sold into slavery at high noon of the next day. Ten to fifteen pounds of salt are paid for a slave. It also often happens that the upper parts of the ears are cut off from one who cannot pay debts incurred during the Abia play.

A few words about Yaunde concepts of law and justice may be illuminating at this point. Theft was formerly punished by enslavement, or else the thief was placed in the block (*i.e.*, the stocks) until his family bought his freedom. It appears that defaults on gambling debts were equated with theft. Crimes such as murder are relatively common, and death through negligence often occurs. Punishment for these crimes (negligence is not a mitigating factor) depends directly on the degree of blood relationship between the slayer and his victim. For example, there is no punishment imposed if one accidentally kills an own brother, but if the deceased happens to be a step-brother, a woman is paid as compensation. For the deliberate murder of a brother the penalty is death by drowning. "The murderer of his mother

¹⁸ G. Tessmann, *Die Baja* (Ergebnisse der 1913 von Reichskolonial ausgesandten volkerkundlichen Forschungsreise nach Kamerun, Stuttgart, 1934), Band II, pp. 210-212.

¹⁹ Y. Nicol, *La Tribu des Bakoko* (Paris, 1929), p. 199.

²⁰ S. Culin, *Games of the North American Indians* (Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, 1907), No. 24.

²¹ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

goes absolutely free; his father may perhaps 'bawl him out' for his hastiness, but nothing else happens to him. Similarly, murder of a sister is not punished . . . '22

Zenker reports that the Yaunde love to lure strangers from other tribes into playing the game and that he had often witnessed the application of sharp practices. Such crooked play occasionally brought on quarrels of a more or less serious nature. "This disastrous game is often the cause of family feuds, murder, and manslaughter."²³ Zenker treated a great many natives for knife wounds which he believed were received in disputes arising from gambling, but he always received evasive replies when he asked about the origin of the wounds. The German Colonial Administration, which was in control at the time (1895), strictly prohibited the Abia game. It was nevertheless played with great frequency.

Tessmann's comments are of the same order. He also notes that money and goods are gambled away at this game. These are usually piled up in heaps in front of each player in order to facilitate immediate payments. "The losses that a Negro incurs during play are considerable; if he has no more money or wares with him, he obtains loans from luckier players in the hope that he will win with a later throw and thereby repay his loans. By this means many fall so deeply into debt that in the end they must give their wives to the creditors. Occasionally, quarrels arise; yes, murder, blood-vengeance, and war were often the results of this passion for gambling. Although in recent times (*i.e.*, before 1914) the game has been prohibited, under pressure from the German Government, very much homage is still paid in secret to this gambling devil."²⁴

Finally, a warning against Abia play is embodied in the last paragraph of the native myth mentioned below (page 30).

With the Abia game it is as follows: when someone is rich and says that he plays Abia, it soon comes to pass that his richness is gone. For sensible people do not play Abia; but only the people who are inclined to steal. When someone is no longer rich, that is to say, as soon as his possessions have been lost in the Abia game, he thinks, in his heart, only of stealing. Therefore, all other people must not play the Abia game.²⁵

Summing up the data concerning the Abia game among the Yaunde and the information on gambling cited from other African tribes, it is found that several features are held in common by the peoples who gamble in dice. In

²² Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 229.

²³ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

²⁴ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 317.

²⁵ Heepe, *op. cit.*, p. 290.

the first place, the passion for gambling is intense in spite of religious and governmental prohibitions, even where these are applied with vigor. Secondly, large stakes are risked involving not only property but persons as well. The consequences of losses entailed while gambling are not limited to those who indulge themselves in this passion, but the liberty of non-players is often pledged and lost without regard to the wishes of the latter. A last and not unimportant aspect is the stimulus given to violent actions on the part of gambling natives, often leading to fatal fights and prolonged blood feuds. It may be concluded, therefore, that gambling in Africa is a significant social force, for through it the social structure can be dislocated, property holdings liquidated, and the peaceful existence of the very social group itself threatened. In view of these facts, it is to be lamented that ethnologists have not recorded more precise data about gambling, particularly regarding the social position of those who play.

Success or failure takes on vital significance to the native, in the light of the evidence mentioned above. Naturally, then, the native does not leave the result of gambling play to the uncertain whims of chance. Just as primitives, before undertaking any venture of a serious character, try to win the favor of those supernatural powers which hold their lives in the balance, so do native gamblers woo these powers in order to insure success in games of chance. The Yaunde tribe is no exception to this general principle. To bring them luck, the players make use of a "whole series of medicines."²⁶ Most of these medicines consist of spicy plants which burn (*Boehmeria*, *Urticac*), plants that are sharp and peppery (*Spilanthes*, *Compositae*), and plants which make one strong (*Carpolabia*, *Polygalac*). It is believed that the properties of plants are carried over to the game chips.²⁷ Another technique used to make success certain is to keep special burrs (*Desmodium*) and other things among the objects designated for the stakes.²⁸

Medicine men do not enjoy a special status or command extra honor among the Yaunde. Their skill, however, is recognized and acknowledged. Any member of the tribe may learn the techniques of "making medicine," for the knowledge is not the possession of certain families. In general, the craft is highly specialized; one medicine man prepares medicines to cure certain diseases, another makes a concoction which helps avert specific dangers, a third puts together medicine to bring luck in love, in marriage, in hunting, and in gambling.

Tessmann states that there are eight medicines in use to give luck to Abia gamblers. Unfortunately, he gives no further information regarding

²⁶ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 317.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

either the medicines or how they are used. The existence of so many "luck medicines" indicates, however, that the natives place a good deal of reliance on such aids.

An instance of the use of magical aids in gambling play is noted by Westermann. He writes of the Kpelle that "Every player has his game magic, . . . for which up to twenty dollars is paid; but these are not brought to the playing place for fear that they (the magical objects) may be killed (*i.e.*, made impotent) by some much stronger magic . . ." ²⁹

It is highly probable that Yaunde gamblers avail themselves of the techniques of divination to learn whether or not they may safely embark on a gambling venture. "In the eyes of primitive man divination makes known either that the invisible powers are with him—in which case his desire will be granted, his action will have the power of attaining its end—or that they are deaf to his prayer. . . ." ³⁰

The ability to divine is held by special persons among the Yaunde, but it is learned, not god-given. Anyone may become a diviner by paying the price of a sheep and obtaining the "chief divining medicine." This "chief divining medicine" is kept in an antelope horn and shaken violently while the diviner leaps about on the ground in making his divination. Dreams are interpreted by means of special methods. The Yaunde most frequently employ a Spider-Oracle to obtain signs, or omens, favorable or otherwise, for projected enterprises.

Strangely, the Yaunde do not have any form of "Lot Casting" among their numerous divination techniques. "The most widespread method of divination among the African tribes is that of the casting or counting of dice (or knuckle bones), stones, mussel shells, tablets, nuts, beans, boards, and the like." ³¹ The Yaunde, however, depend upon various "medicines," the Spider-Oracle, and ordeals to contact the invisible powers, or to prove guilt or innocence in cases of suspected murder, theft, or sorcery. The last has a particularly sinister role in native life since all illnesses and deaths are attributed to it.

It was reported that formerly whenever an important person died, from two to six, or more, individuals were killed (violently) because they were believed to have induced the death by means of sorcery. ³² "Among the Yaunde it is generally believed that when a man dies his wives have poisoned him, and for that reason they

²⁹ Westermann, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁰ Lévy-Bruhl, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

³¹ O. Fischer, *Divinations-Formen der Primitiven Afrikas* (Munich, 1929), p. 14.

³² Cf. Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

were formerly executed."³³ In the event that a family chief expires, his wives and slaves always suffer punishment; sometimes, in fact, the dying man declares that his illness was "wished" on him by these unfortunates. In such cases, the suspects must undergo a special ordeal in order to clear themselves of the dreaded accusation; the outcome of the ordeal hinges on whether the ailing chief recovers or departs this life. Not so long ago, writes Zenker, the regular procedure in these sorcery cases was as follows:³⁴

"Shortly before the impending death (of a chief) the suspected wives and slaves were fettered and locked up in a house. If death came, it was followed by drum signals and the firing of guns. Regardless of the time of day in which the death ensued, all the chiefs gathered together to hold a 'death court,' while the women of the group assembled and wailed their expressions of lamentation and grief. The accuser is generally the oldest male of the family, who henceforth takes the place of the deceased. He brings loops made of twining plants, and bark taken from a poisonous tree. These are tied with a triple-forked branch decorated with ferns and grass, and they are then placed in front of the executioner of the sentence. . . . The executioner has meanwhile smeared himself with black and white paint to hide his identity. A small signal drum sounds in rhythmic tones to notify all persons living in the neighborhood that the execution of the condemned is taking place. (The victims) are brought out singly, smeared from top to bottom with white clay, and their hands are tied behind them. They are given some Ellong pills (a poisonous substance) to swallow. Then a loop is thrown around the head of each victim, and all are dragged along the ground to a tree where they are hung on branches for some time. Frequently their hands are skinned by means of knives, or their skulls are split open.

"Pregnant women are not spared; children of the deceased are also accused of poisoning and killed in the same manner. A Yaunde chief explained that the practice of bringing accusations of sorcery or poisoning against wives and slaves was instituted by married men as a safeguard against premature death at the hands of their nearest kin and servants."

The powerful fear of sorcery as a cause of illness, death, and misfortune in general, implies the following inquiry: Does a native believe himself to be the victim of sorcery when he suffers heavy losses in Abia play? In view of the fact that this game often leads to bloody quarrels and lasting hatreds, it seems likely that malevolent magic is appealed to in an effort to exact vengeance upon those specially favored in gambling. Although there is no evidence to show that any techniques of sorcery are used in order to foil the supernatural guardians of opposing players, the possibility that this is so is

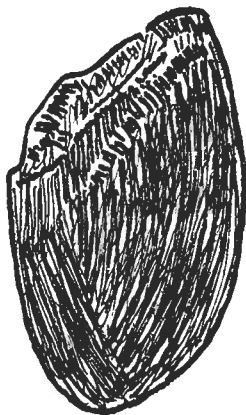
³³ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 224.

³⁴ This citation is from the German text of Zenker, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68, and it appears here in free translation.

highly probable. The very nature of sorcery activities is such that information about it is scant, as far as the Yaunde are concerned. The fact that magical medicines play a part in the Abia game, together with the fact that the supernatural phase of primitive gambling is vital, point to the utilization of all the means available in the culture in order to "prove one's worth."

III

The Abia game is decidedly a game of chance, a kind of dice game in which small disks, carved or marked chips, and a woven plate are used. The



Fruit of the *Mimusops*
Congolensis
(After Reche)

disks are made from calabash bark, being simple, undecorated, and circular. According to Tessmann,³⁵ the chips are prepared from the shell of a fruit produced by the *Abam* tree. A Yaunde native, one Paul Messi, stated, however, that the *Abam* is a large tree which bears great, round, edible fruits with kernels so small that it would be impossible to cut pieces from them sufficiently large for game chips.³⁶ It is the fruit of a tree called *Elan*, insisted this native, which is utilized as raw material for the making of gambling chips. "A walk through the rich fruit collection of the Hamburg Mu-

³⁵ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 315.

³⁶ O. Reche, *Das Abia-Glückspiel der Jaunde und die Darstellungen auf den Spielmarken* (Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg, Hamburg, 1924), Band IX p. 4.

seum of Applied Botany," says Reche, "under the guidance of Professor Voight and the native, Messi, confirmed us that it was the fruit of the *Mimusops Congolensis* with which we were concerned."³⁷

Messi said that the flesh of the fruit as well as the contents of its kernels are exceedingly poisonous for man and beast. Professor Voight noted that these fruits are rich in saponin, a soapy substance, and that it was possible they contained a poisonous ingredient, too. The nuts from these fruits are split lengthwise so that each nut provides two pieces which can be used to make chips. Messi's remarks, translated freely, are as follows:

"*Elan* is a large tree in the forest. *Elan* used to bear fruit only once every two years. The *Elan* fruits are poisonous. If anyone eats them, he dies. Therefore, we used to do as follows: when the *Elan* tree bore fruit in the forest, women and children went to it during the time when its fruits fell to the ground and gathered up those overripe fruits that had fallen to the ground. Women and children, sometimes grown people, used to bring the fruits from the forest. They did not return to the village with the fruits, but brought only the hard nuts. They were afraid to come into the village with the *Elan* fruits because they feared that the domesticated animals,—goats, chickens, and pigs,—would die because of them (the fruits). If the animals should eat *Elan* fruits they would die. When they came with the *Elan* nuts, they sold them to the Abia players. The Abia players strike open a nut into two parts and carefully prepare them and carve chips out of them. Then they play the Abia game with these chips.

"The *Elan* tree is a truly dangerous tree: just like the fruits, so also are the contents of the nuts poisonous. Likewise, the *Elan* leaves; if anyone eats them, he dies on the spot."³⁸

Drawing further upon the native's account, it is found that the nuts were decorated by means of carved designs "even in the beginning," and that the chips were always produced according to the same formula. Each player generally bought nuts for himself, split them, and then carved the designs. "Ready-made chips," observed Messi, "actually can never be bought, no one here practices the carving of game-chips as a profession, or trade."³⁹ However, when a player loses all his possessions and can no longer play Abia, he may then sell his chips. A finished chip costs about five small iron bars (the form of currency in the area), whereas the raw nut costs only two such bars. Although each individual usually does his own carving, it occasionally happens that a native is hopelessly unskilled at this fine work. In

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁸ Reche, *op. cit.*, pp. 4ff.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

such a case, he asks a "good friend," who is particularly skilful in the art, to prepare the chips from nuts supplied by the former. "If the friend is willing, compensation is immediately agreed upon; formerly, 4m. cloth, or two hundred iron bars were paid for the carving of fifty chips."⁴⁰ A skilful carver can produce five or six finished chips in one day.

IV

The Abia game itself agrees in general with the main pattern of African dice games; that is, the essential features of the game are alike throughout the continent. Information regarding the playing of the Abia game derives from two sources; Zenker's account of the Yaunde, and Tessmann's monograph on the Pangwe. There are also two native Yaunde texts which refer to the Abia game. In view of the relatively limited data it is perhaps best to include material from all the above sources despite some repetition of details.

The Abia game, writes Zenker,⁴¹ resembles the game of dice. Each player possesses several chips. A number of these are put into a woven plate. The plate is then shaken to mix the chips well, and then the director of the game tosses the plate to the ground with a twisting motion. The chips are now under the plate. Stakes are placed while the chips are still covered. The plate is raised, exposing the positions in which the chips have fallen. It is the business of the director to go in turn to each player and to decide which ones have won on the throw. "If a player has lost one hundred chips, or iron bars, he is, according to the rules, *awu*, that is, dead."⁴² This bare account is all that Zenker gives.

The "game of luck," as described by Tessmann,⁴³ is played with circular disks which are simply cut out of the rind of the calabash. Counters, or chips, are also necessary to the game. Each player brings along these chips for himself. They are made from the hard shell of a fruit. On their smooth surfaces, the chips have various designs carved in relief, including animal representations and human figures. There may be an unlimited number of players, but the minimum of four is required to play the game. A woven plate is needed in which seven *disks* are placed; these remain for the whole

⁴⁰ Reche, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴¹ The following notes are drawn from Zenker's report, which is in German. Cf. G. Zenker, *Yaunde* (Mittheilungen von Forschungsreisenden und Gelehrten aus den Deutschen Schutzgebieten, Berlin, 1895), Vol. 8, p. 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴³ These notes are drawn from Tessmann whose account is in German. No exact translation is intended. Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 315-317.

course of the game, and they are unmarked. At the beginning of the game, each player places his *chips* alongside the *disks*. The director of the game, who does not play himself, then shakes the plate, throws the *chips* and *disks* into the air, catches them on the plate and quickly flings the whole bunch to the ground with the plate on top. After a short pause the plate is removed. Winning or losing depends upon which sides of the *disks* and *chips* are uppermost, that is, whether the blank or marked sides (the designs) of the *chips* are exposed, and the numerical ratio of these to the *disks*. The *disks* have a blank side (the smooth inner surface) and a rough side (the outer surface). "Right" means marked and rough sides, and "wrong" means blank and smooth sides, of the *chips* and *disks* respectively. The following rules⁴⁴ govern the results of each toss: If all the *chips* lie either with their "right" (carved) sides uppermost, or their "wrong" (blank) sides uppermost, the throw is invalid and must be repeated. If, however, all the *chips* do not expose the same sides, the outcome is judged as follows: 1) In case all the *disks* lie "wrong" or up to 3 *disks* inclusive lie "right," those backing the "rights" lose only when the *chips* of all the players minus one lie "right"; 2) in case 4 to 7 *disks* lie "right," those backing the "rights" always lose when more than one *chip* lies "right."⁴⁵

When the necessary four players are not available, a "dummy" player is used. A "blind" chip is placed for the "dummy," and, if this chip turns out to be the sole winner, the throw is considered invalid. But when there are two winners, one of whom is the "dummy," the latter's share of the winnings belongs to the other.

The two myths containing information about the Abia game are incorporated in a volume of native texts published in the Yaunde language along with German translations.⁴⁶ They are presented here nearly complete and with their form only slightly altered.

THE TALE OF THE DICE GAME BETWEEN LIGHTNING AND THE ANIMALS⁴⁷

All the animals assembled and said that they wished to play the game of dice with Lightning. They came with extraordinary riches, altogether uncountable. Then they took a strange man (who was impartial), seated him near the "casting-plate," and told him to cast the plate to the ground in order to expose the game pieces to

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

⁴⁵ The reader should be careful not to confuse *disks* with *chips*; each set has a different function in the game.

⁴⁶ M. Heepe (Ed.), *Jaunde-Texte* (Abhandlungen des Hamburgischen Kolonial-instituts, Hamburg, 1919), Band XXIV.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.

view, and that he should also adjust all disputes. The game then began and they put their chips into the plate, and the stranger, he who was seated near the "casting-plate," raised the plate aloft and flung it to the ground. This stranger . . . belonged to no side, you know, and he was the one to settle all disputes (that arose) in the circle of players. The plate having been thrown to the ground, each player placed his stakes (iron bars) on the ground. The plate was then removed and it was found as follows: the Chimpanzee played alone. And the Chimpanzee gathered up the stakes, put them together and sat down again on the ground. Again they cast the plate to the ground and placed their stakes on the ground and removed the plate and found it as follows: the Lion played alone. And the Lion gathered up all the stakes to himself and sat down again, and they threw the plate to the ground and placed their stakes on the ground exactly as before, and the plate was removed and they found it as follows: the Gorilla played alone. And the Gorilla gathered up the stakes from the ground and sat down, and thus all the animals had already played. Then they put all their game-pieces together and placed them in the plate, and the young man (the stranger) raised the plate aloft and flung it to the ground, and they staked their iron bars. During the whole dice game that was played in this manner, it was as follows: if anyone won some pieces, he rejoiced; now when the young man removed the plate, it was found that Lightning played alone.

At this, Lightning got up and struck "C-R-A-C-K," and all the animals who had played with him were struck dead as corpses; the only one who remained alive was he who had sat near the plate (the stranger). Thereupon Lightning packed up all the riches and went above (to the upper regions). This tale teaches us that no one should play with a monster. If you play with a monster, then he kills you and you think afterwards (sic), if I had known it, then I would not have played with that scoundrel who kills me. And in this way Lightning killed all the animals, because they had let themselves play a game with him.

THE TALE OF THE DICE-GAME (ABIA)⁴⁸

In the Abia dice-game one proceeds in the following manner. The people come with iron bars and money and seat themselves in a circle in the courtyard. Each player has his own chips and they also bring along a plate woven out of grass. They put the chips into the plate and also put in the other seven disks. These other disks are called Sa-disks⁴⁹ of the Abia game. Then they take someone who understands the game and seat him near the plate. And he (who is impartial) decides all transactions that affect the circle of players.

As soon as the players have put their chips into the plate, he raises the plate aloft and flings it to the ground. While the plate still covers the disks and chips, the players make their bets. When the plate is removed the players agree as to which ones have won. It is the seven accompanying disks which have been put into the plate that designate the winners.

⁴⁸ Heepe, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-290.

⁴⁹ "Sa" means "ware" or "article"; cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 314.

If six Abia chips are with seven disks and two or four chips are lying with their designs uppermost, and two or three of the disks are also lying with their backs (the outside or rough surfaces) uppermost, then you know: the two, three or four chips lying with their backs up are the winners. The three or four that rest on their backs, however, have lost. If a single chip falls the same way as the seven disks then you know that this player has won. If it so happens that one chip falls one way, and all the disks plus the other chips fall the other way, then you know that the single chip wins, and the others have lost (they are dead). In the event that two chips fall the same way as the seven disks, then you know that these (two) have lost. If the chips fall with their designs on top, and the disks with their backs (rough sides) underneath, then you know that the throw is invalid.

It is readily seen that the playing details of the Abia game as given in the myths are fairly consistent with Tessmann's description. The rules of the game are relatively simple; the ratio between chips and disks on the basis of "right" and "wrong" sides uppermost being the deciding factor in gains and losses. The use of two sets of counters makes the Abia game somewhat more complicated than the dice games found elsewhere in Africa, as will be seen below, yet the main features are obviously similar.

V

The frequent references above to dice games in Africa similar to the Abia game calls for a description of some of these games. The recorded data varies greatly in content, with some authors noting only the bare essentials of the game (generally inadequate for a clear understanding), while others describe a bit of the social background as well. Van Overbergh, for example, merely says, "the game is simple: heads or tails, even or odd."⁵⁰ On the other hand, Westermann gives an interesting account, noting details of the Kpelle gambling game and, also, the grand social occasions which such games foster. His description is deservedly quoted in full below.

The Warega dice game (*mbale*) "is most frequently played with flat pieces of bark (or rind) cut in the round. Each player has his own and makes a special mark on them. The bark is rough on one side and smooth on the other. Each player places his stakes. The pieces of bark are assembled and thrown in the air. The winner is the owner of the counter which falls with its rough side uppermost."⁵¹ Among the Mandja, "the most widespread (gambling game) is the game of ossicles because it is unimportant what fragments are used, cowries, a calabash rind, or small pebbles, provided they present two very distinct sides. The Sango of Ubangi call this game *patara*;

⁵⁰ Van Overbergh, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

⁵¹ Delhaise, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

the Banda, *ghedi*; and the Mandja, *kuka*. It is generally played with four cowries which, shaken in the hollow of the hand like a dice-box, are thrown in the space around which the players are seated. In order to win, it is necessary that all the cowries present the same side or that two be heads and the other two tails: those who win pick up the stakes coming to each throw. . . .⁵² Congo tribes of the Kwilu-Kasai basin play the gambling game called *Lobesi*. "Six counters (*mbesi*) are used by each person playing. One side of the counter is light (*nkei*) and the other dark (*mpili*). Two throws are allowed. The stakes (*ndongo*) are taken when in both throws either the counters fall dark sides up or light sides up or three of each color up. The person putting down the stakes is called *mobetì o ndongo*. . . . The circle of players is called *ngala*. . . ."⁵³ Basden describes the Ibo game "Pitch and Toss" (*Igba-ita*) as "one of the fastest ways of winning and losing money ever devised by man."⁵⁴ The players, who number from two to a dozen or more, use cowries as counters, and "squat round in a circle, each man placing a heap of cowries before him to serve as a bank. . . . The challenger take twelve (in some districts four only) cowries in his hand. He raises his hand and calls to the others to speculate on the throw. Each player may stake what he likes, six, twelve or more shells. Immediately the calls cease, the challenger gives a peculiar twist to his hand from back to front, causing the shells to spread as they fall."⁵⁵ The same author gives the following game rules: "The challenger (banker) wins if all twelve fall alike, that is, with either tops or bottoms lying the same way, (or) if six fall one way and six the other way. The only other variation which can secure a win is eleven one way and the remaining one the other, whether eleven tops upward and one bottom upward or vice versa. Any other combination means loss to the challenger, with the exception of seven and five, which is regarded as a 'dud' throw."⁵⁶ Basden goes on to say that "A lot of gambling is done in this crude way. . . . At some markets it is a regular institution, half a dozen or more groups being busily engaged at the edge of the market square."⁵⁷

Tessmann gives a short account of the gambling game played among the Baya, calling it the "most important adult game." It is played with shells,

⁵² C. Van Overbergh, and F. Gaud, *Les Mandja* (Collection de Monographies ethnographiques, Brussels, 1911), Vol. VIII, p. 377. Cf. also, A. M. Vergiat, *Mœurs et Coutumes des Manjas* (Paris, 1937), pp. 137-138.

⁵³ Johnston, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 710-711. Cf. also, J. H. Weeks, *Among Congo Cannibals* (London, 1913), pp. 153-154.

⁵⁴ Basden, *op. cit.*, p. 352. See p. 355 for illustration of Ibo "Pitch and Toss" game.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-353.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 353.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

both snail and cowry shells, the latter particularly among the Baja-Buli, who obtained their cowries from Haussa traders. The Baya game is called *mbaadi*. The pieces of shell "are about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cm. long, and the insides are commonly filled in with wax so that this (heavier) side would fall to the ground. For casting, a funnel-shaped woven plate is used. . . . Each player brings along his triangular shells, which are never confused with those of his fellow tribesmen because of the designs and other slighter differences. After each one has brought out a definite sum of money, wares, or cattle, all put their chips (the shells) into the funnel-shaped plate, and the director of the game shakes the plate and flings it to the ground. Those players whose chips show their right sides up (*i.e.*, the outer surfaces of the shells) have won, and they share the money. The players whose chips show their undersides to view have lost—are dead, '*a fio*,' as the Baja say."⁵⁸

The Bakongo tribe of the Lower Congo also have a similar gambling game. It is called *wadi*, and "is played by adults and young men, with eight disks (*mpanza*), either of calabash or crockery, having one side white and the other colored. They are rattled in the hands, and then thrown. When the pieces are thrown, if even numbers turn white side up, 2, 4, 6 or 8, the player loses, and such a throw is called *zole*, and when 8 whites turn up it is named *kaya*. When odd numbers or no white sides show, 0, 1, 3, 5, 7, the player wins. . . ."⁵⁹

"In gambling," says Westermann of the Kpelle, "the dice game with which the men occupy themselves with great passion and in which high stakes are risked is to be named before all. It is a pure game of chance. Four cowry shells are used as dice . . . the backs of which are broken out and pasted with black wax. These are taken in the hand and thrown, after a bit of shaking, onto a mat; the result then depends on how many dice have the black sides up and how many have the black sides down. . . . Usually, play begins with rice, palm-oil, palm-nuts, later, money, other valuable objects, persons, members of the family and even one's own person are gambled.

"A large gambling party can last for weeks, even months. To such a party, men are invited from the whole surrounding region . . . ; the gambling place is designated, permission is obtained from the chief who has police control over the participants during the game. He adjusts dissensions that arise and everyone must submit to his decisions. The terms of play are established: how long and for what stakes; if every one will be responsible

⁵⁸ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-212.

⁵⁹ Weeks, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

for his own support or if the chief, for remuneration, naturally, will feed and lodge them; the status of the chief is considered in the payment of the expenses. Such a game means an event for the village, even for the whole region; spectators are found in crowds, women and girls are provided by their owners to serve as dancers, singers, vendors of liquor and food . . . ; drums, songs and yells fill the place. Friends encourage and reward the players with shouts of applause, so that soon an unrestrained excitement takes hold which carries the players into the greatest imprudences. . . ."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cf. Westermann, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71

CHAPTER II

THE CONTENT OF THE DECORATION AS A FUNCTION OF THE CULTURE

THE hundred Yaunde gambling chips that comprise the Mackenzie Collection exhibit diverse designs carved in relief on one side (the outer one) of each chip. These designs include human representations, animal figures, reptiles, birds, fish, double figures, symbolic patterns, representations of native artifacts, and several designs impossible to identify. The various representations fall into more or less homogeneous groups. Because of this large selection of design-motifs, the carved chips present an unusual opportunity to discuss the motifs in terms of a wider background than would ordinarily be required. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that these carved pieces represent a single art-form.

The Yaunde carver apparently draws upon a great many subjects, animate and inanimate, for ornamentation. He appears to be thoroughly familiar with these subjects. They are for the most part meaningful to him in the course of his daily life as means of bodily sustenance, as religious and ceremonial objects, and as instruments with which he forges the artifacts necessary to his existence. It should, therefore, be profitable to explore the design-subjects from a point of view usually neglected by students of primitive art. That is to say, the significance in native life of the subjects used in art deserves mention, for such information may expose new facets of meaning in the artistic products that had hitherto escaped notice. Furthermore, additional light may reveal the reasons behind the use of certain artistic themes which prevail in the tribal art, and which also recur over a large part of Africa. It is not the intention here to force interpretations regarding the use of artistic motifs. The object is to show the cultural attitudes and situations which necessarily influence, perhaps unconsciously, the native's choice of themes deemed worthy of representation.

I

The first group of chips (Figs. 1 through 11) exhibits representations of human beings and anthropoids. They are rather stylized and relatively crude in execution. The human likenesses show some interesting features, not the least of which is the conspicuous variation of details manifest in each figure. Representations 1 and 2, for example, although closely similar in many ways, as witness the round heads, neck shapes, abdomen forms, eye delineations, and the handling of hands and feet, nevertheless differ in other respects. Fig. 2 has horizontal decorations across the chest and abdomen,

whereas Fig. 1 is bare; again, the knees in Fig. 2 are cut sharply; in Fig. 1 these are done in curved lines. Fingers and toes are clearly delineated in Figs. 1, 2, and 3, but not in Figs. 4, 5, 6, and 7. Fig. 4 is the only human representation that has a mouth indicated by means of a short line. The individual in Fig. 5 is standing next to a native knife of characteristically exaggerated size, yet the reason for this disproportion is not apparent. The curious dorsal appendage attached to Fig. 6 identifies the representation as being a woman, according to Messi, the Yaunde native. He said, "Man and woman are . . . wholly alike, only a woman is represented with a raffia-leaf skirt on her hind-side; we recognize her thereby. . . . If a woman did not have (such) a skirt, then she would only be termed a person, for we could not know what she is, whether woman or man. . . ."¹

The decoration above the head of Fig. 3 most probably represents some form of head-dress, of which the Pangwe are inordinately fond. A decorative plume is found on most Pangwe ancestor figures.²

Fig. 7 discloses a person standing adjacent to an elephant tusk. This representation, though done in profile, contains both eyes, one under the other. Similarly, in the representation of a gorilla, Fig. 10, two eyes are present in a profile. Figs. 6 and 9 lack eye-markings; the omission may be due to any of several reasons, either neglect on the part of the carver, conscious omission, or, perhaps, the design was not finished. The representation in Fig. 8 is singular in certain respects. The head could easily be that of a lizard or crocodile or snake. This ambiguity is further emphasized by the highly stylized execution of the long upper limbs and the squat, foreshortened lower appendages. Hence, exact identification is not possible. Fig. 11 appears to be a monkey in conjunction with an elephant tusk. These tusks are frequently used as receptacles for love-medicines.³

Figs. 9 and 10 represent a chimpanzee and a gorilla respectively. These anthropoids play such significant roles in the religious ideas of the natives that a short account of the concepts seems advisable.

The Pangwe conceive the world and its inhabitants as divided into two orders, the one "good," the other "bad." The members of the tribe are grouped into "good people" and "bad people." The first group includes the uninitiated natives, those who "do not know shame," *i.e.*, sexual life.⁴ "Bad people" are those who indulge in

¹ Reche, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

² Cf. Vatter, *op. cit.*, p. 64; also, P. Guillaume, and T. Munro, *La Sculpture Nègre Primitive* (Paris, 1929), p. 38.

³ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 160, fig. 55.

⁴ The status of "good," or uninitiate, is considered an extenuating circumstance in cases of crime.

sexual intercourse. The connection between sin and sexual intercourse is vital in the native ideology, as seen above in the migration myth. Nature is also dichotomized: the Sun represents "good" while the Moon is considered the chief representative and begetter of evil in life. Besides, the Moon is conceived as the universal guardian of sexual intercourse, the sin that may only be practiced secretly under cover of night. Fire is believed to be "good," but Water, "bad." Various cults exist which are directed to the propitiation of the powers conceived as representing "good" and "bad." Thus, a Moon Cult is practiced by most Yaunde groups, while the southern Yaunde have in addition a Sun Cult and a Fire Cult. Clearly expressed in the cults is the belief that man's inner urge to perform the "act of sex" is a sin against Nzambe, the Supreme Deity.

The conceptual dichotomy extends as well to animal life. The chimpanzee, for example, represents the principle of "badness," and the gorilla is "good."⁵ An important part in one of the cults is devoted to a Chimpanzee Dance.⁶ The Ngi Cult, one of the most important and widespread, represents the "purifying Fire," in the form of the gorilla.⁷ The elephant is significant in the Schok Cult, which is the cult of Water.⁸

The Sso Cult is, according to Tessmann,⁹ nearly the primary idea behind the spiritual life of the Yaunde. It is the Moon Cult, and it is represented in the form of an antelope. A summary of the initiatory rites of the Sso Cult will serve to acquaint the reader with the typical pattern of entrance into cults as found in West Africa. These rites are also interesting from a psychological point of view.

At the beginning of the dry season, in October, a distinguished chief usually arranges for the ceremonies of initiation into the Sso Cult. The neophytes consist of males ranging from seven to twenty-five years of age, and they come from a widely extended region which converges on the Chief's village. There are occasionally thirty or more individuals in this group. Four days before the festivities begin, the neophytes are marked with the symbol of "death consecration." The ceremonies open with a phallus dance which the neophytes perform on a specially constructed platform. This dance demonstrates the sexual act. Two days later the second series of rites begin. Torture is applied in order to discover whether or not the novices can accept pain and fright stoically. Each boy is assigned to a leader who is a member of the cult, and the latter prepares his charge for the next day's activities. During these activities all cult secrets are revealed to the newcomers. At this time, women and uninitiated persons must abandon the village. The cult members then go into the bush and collect nests of a species of prickly ants, and, also, certain spiny

⁵ Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 78-79, for discussion of "good" and "bad."

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 62-73.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 78-93; also, figs. 26-34 and plates XXII, XXIII.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 73-77.

⁹ Cf. Tessmann, *ibid.*, pp. 47-49, and figs. 2-4.

branches from trees in which ants live. These are assembled in large numbers, often about two hundred pieces, and are placed in small, specially built huts which consequently swarm with ants.

The novices are then brought together and the trials begin. The first trial consists of eating a horrible concoction composed of ill-smelling plants, human excrement, oil, and a generous dose of pepper. After eating their shares the young men are dragged roughly across the village square and soundly beaten. Meanwhile, terrifying howls are directed at them, chiefly the menacing phrase, "You shall die." The final test is given after a short pause. In this test the neophytes must crawl through the ant-infested huts. Cries of "death" are again hurled at them by the cult members, who raise a most terrific din during the ceremony. After having successfully passed through the trials, they are ready for "death" and "rebirth" into the tribe. The neophytes are naturally in great pain due to stings and lacerations of the flesh caused by the ants, but these must be ignored. The concept of "death" and "rebirth" constitutes the crux of the whole ceremonial ideology in the initiation. The young men are now fed and gradually inducted into the esoteric practices of the Sso Cult. This induction lasts about one month, during which time they go about entirely naked. They live in the bush far from all people and surrounded by all sorts of rigid taboos. When the month is at an end, conditions improve, for they are permitted to enter a village and meet women and uninitiated persons. They now wear certain special penis ornaments, and are covered from head to foot with a whitish clay.¹⁰ The initiation is soon over and the young men take their places as regular members of the Sso Cult.¹¹

It is not surprising that this group of chips, especially those with human representations, is rather crude. The human ornament is generally very backward in African decorative art, being found more commonly in plastic than in surface ornamentation.¹² Anthropomorphic figures appear as surface decorations in the ornamentation of the Kaffirs, "on neck-rests, arm-rings, and knives in Loango, or as bamboo scratchings on the snuff boxes of several East African Bantu tribes."¹³ Yoruba, the Cameroon Grassland, and the Southern Congo basin provide a great many examples of the use of human ornaments in plastic decoration. Utensils which function in cults are specially decorated with human figures. "Examples are the supports of sacrifice bowls (Weida, Togo), footstools (Yoruba), fetish drums (Dahomey), ceremonial staffs (Bakuba)."¹⁴ Musical instruments

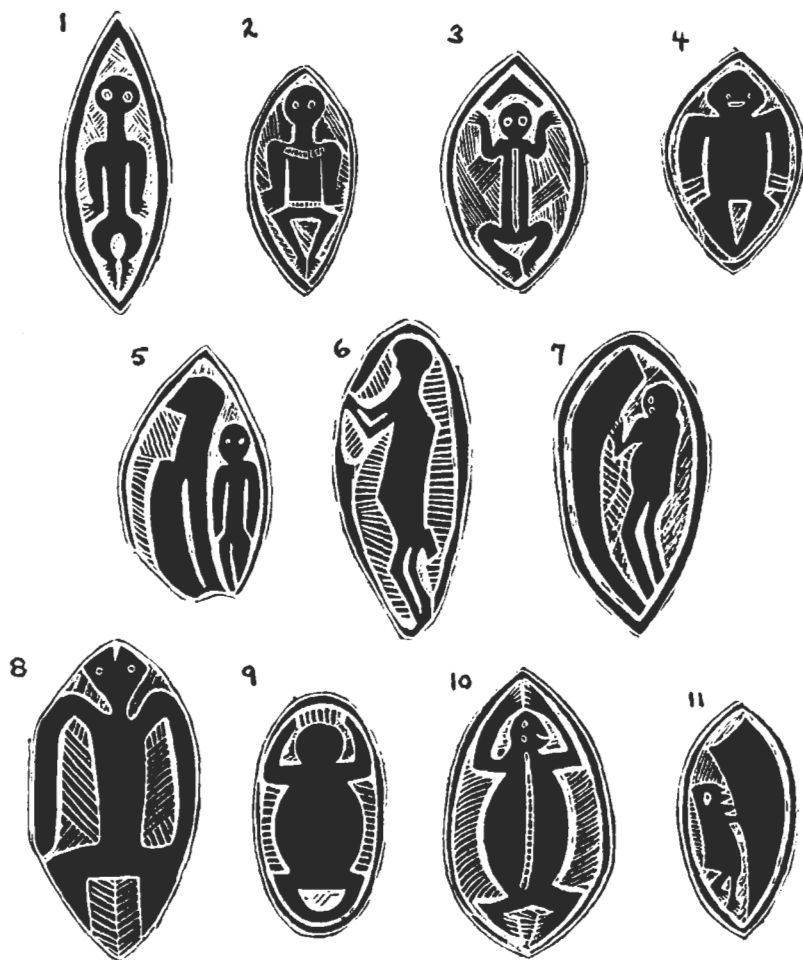
¹⁰ Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 47-49, and figs. 2-4.

¹¹ The above account is drawn from Tessmann; cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 45-51.

¹² M. Heydrich, *Afrikanische Ornamentik* (Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Leiden, Holland, 1913-1915), Band XXII, Supplement, p. 40.

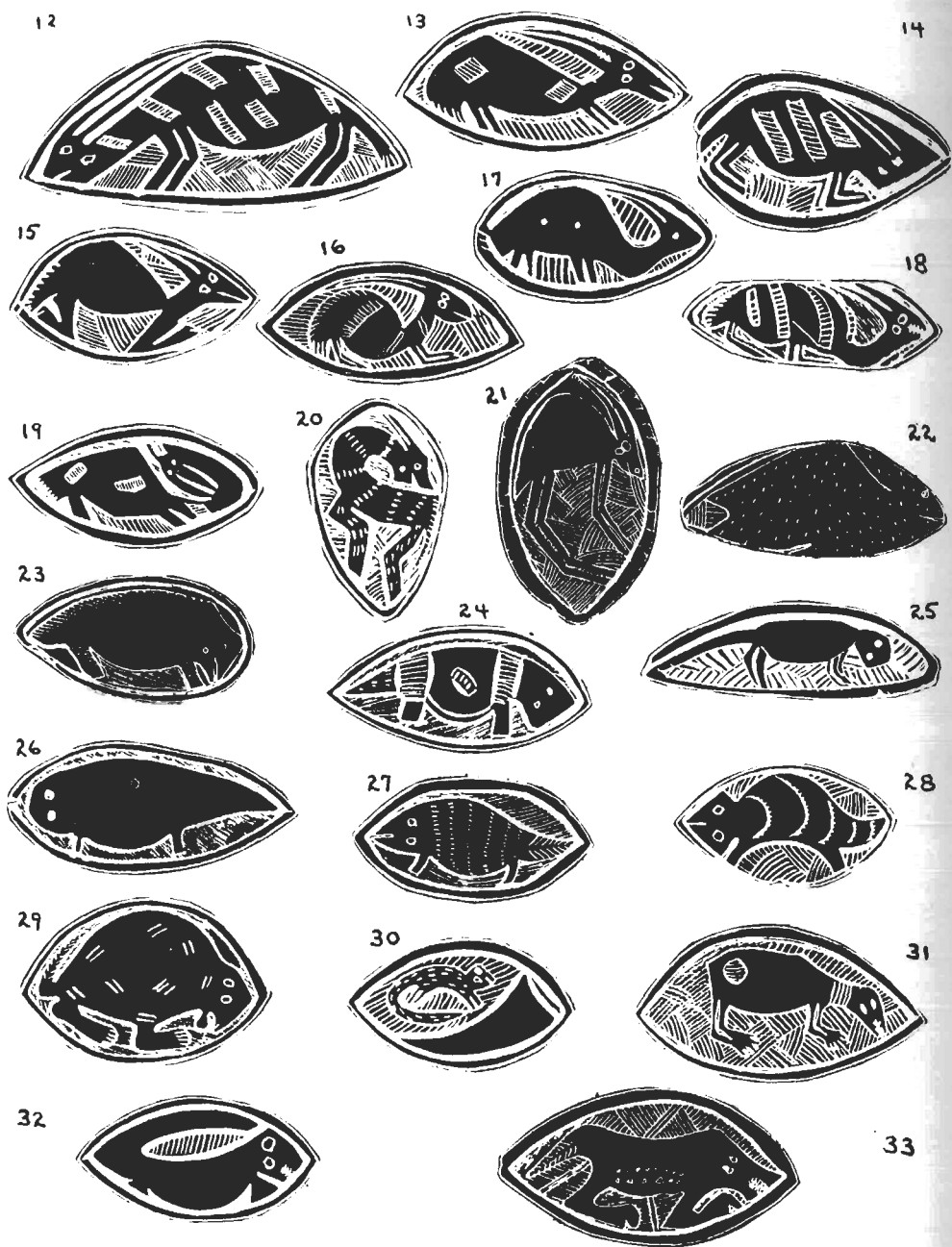
¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.



Figs. 1-11.

All the representations reproduced in this study are photostatic copies of original drawings executed by the artist, Agnes Beschnitt.



Figs. 12-33.

commonly have human decorations. In East Africa, anthropomorphic forms are rare in decoration but not entirely lacking. An instance is the Usaramo tribe who "put human figures on the ends of war-horns, walking sticks, hairpins, and on the covers of tobacco boxes and on stool-supports."¹⁵ According to Heydrich, "anthropomorphic decorations are most commonly found on the smaller carvings."¹⁶

II

The next group of chips includes several antelope representations (Figs. 12-22) and diverse animal figures (Figs. 23-33). Some of the finest specimens of the entire collection are found among the antelope designs, particularly Fig. 12, which is at the same time the largest chip, measuring nearly twice the size of any other chip. These representations display many noteworthy features, outstanding among which are the fresh quality and warm naturalness so readily apparent to the observer. Conventionalism appears slightly in Fig. 14 in the treatment of the head, which is not clearly delineated. It is presented so that the animal's horns form part of the head proper. The remaining representations, excepting possibly Fig. 22, exhibit heads which are in correct contour and accurate bodily proportion. No mouth-marks are indicated in Figs. 14 and 17, but these are present in Figs. 18 and 19, together with lines denoting teeth. Although all the antelopes are shown in profile, the most part have two eyes indicated, one above the other; Figs. 17 and 22 are exceptions. Odd variations occur in the treatment accorded the tails. They are chiefly short and cut straight, and, in a few cases, fringed. The rear appendage of the animal in Fig. 12 is realistically proportioned. Four legs are clearly outlined in seven representations (Figs. 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, and 21). The size of these limbs varies consistently, with an extreme form appearing in Fig. 21 where the limbs have been greatly elongated with a corresponding foreshortening of the animal's body. The result is an almost grotesque creature.

A singular treatment of the head is disclosed in two representations, Figs. 19 and 20. This "twisting backwards" of the head into a most unnatural position, one which an antelope cannot possibly attain, bothered some writers on African art. Heydrich, for example, noting a similar handling of animal heads was moved to remark that "the most difficult problem to solve lies in the position of the head."¹⁷ In view of the excellent execution of the heads in the other figures, his remark loses force. Furthermore, it is now

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

known that the heads of antelopes are twisted backwards to show that representations of dead animals are intended.¹⁸

Among the different animals represented in Figs. 23-33, several are difficult to identify. It is well to note in this connection that the native, Messi, stated that the Yaunde carver did not always depict specific persons or animals or objects, but that a vague approximation of something was all that was intended.¹⁹ Identifications must, therefore, remain tentative wherever the representation is not clearly recognizable. Fig. 23 undoubtedly represents a porcupine, the design being nearly identical to the porcupine figure given in Reche.²⁰ The chameleon in Figs. 24 and 25 differs somewhat from the image of that animal reproduced by Reche,²¹ while Heydrich's chameleon figure²² is totally unlike those in this collection and Reche's as well. The animal representation which Heydrich calls a chameleon closely resembles the figures which Messi identified as pangolins, or scaly ant-eaters. The native said that pangolins are always represented with the tails underneath, running along the length of the ventral portion of the animal and that this characteristic served to distinguish the pangolin from other animals.²³ Figs. 26, 27, and 28 probably represent members of the rodent family; the second clearly depicts a rat. Judging from its general appearance and because of the position of the tail, the animal in Fig. 32 most certainly represents a leopard, even though the spots, an element characteristic of Yaunde leopard representation, are lacking. According to native report, a leopard's tail is always placed over the dorsal portion of the animal in design.²⁴

Antelopes abound in this region of Africa forming a significant part of the natives' food supply. Therefore, it is not unusual that the Yaunde carvers utilize the antelope motif in their decorative art. The fact is that the antelope motif is very popular in the art productions of many African tribes.

Antelope horns, as mentioned before, act as the receptacles for the "chief divining medicine," among the Pangwe groups. An exceedingly common decorative motif in African ornamentation is the antelope horn which is used to represent the whole animal. Antelope heads or feet, especially small antelope horns, the "beloved ornament," appear as decorations over the whole region extending from the East African

¹⁸ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, plate V, No. 14.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, plate VIII, No. 6.

²² Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, No. 42.

²³ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

coast to the border of the Congo area.²⁵ The most striking utilization of this animal in design is found among the Bambara of the western Sudan. Kjersmeier says, "The most interesting part of the Bambara art is that of the head-masks of stylized antelopes. These masks are both male and female; the male is larger, having long horns strongly bent which sometimes attain a height of one meter. The female mask has short and straight horns, a ring in the nose and in the ears."²⁶ The Habbe also utilize a stylized antelope head in their masks, this type being one of the most common in their culture.²⁷

The chameleon is an animal which plays a specially significant role in Yaunde culture. It is connected in native mythology with the origin of death in the world. Before giving the mythological concept in which the chameleon has such a sorry role, a few words describing Yaunde creation beliefs are necessary to supply the relevant background.

The natives distinguish between an organized world and an unorganized world. In the beginning there was only unorganized matter which later, by means of an unexplained process, evolved into the earth, the sun, and the moon. Nzambe, the Supreme Deity, did not create the world, but is himself a product of its development. "Although . . . God was not present from the beginning as a personality, and did not make the earth, sun and moon either, yet he organized the unorganized matter, that is, created living beings and thus 'built up' the universe—after which he himself retired to the sky."²⁸ According to another version, the entire earth, together with everything on it and above it, originated from a large egg-like structure which grew on a tree. This egg was the real primordial mother of the world. "Just as an eggshell, or fruit-rind bursts when ripe, likewise did the egg burst asunder, and Heaven and Earth, which originally formed a closed eggshell, separated from one another."²⁹

Before becoming an otiose deity, however, Nzambe sent death into the world. There are several versions of this story in the native mythology, one of which is that God, incensed because Man had committed the "original sin," sexual intercourse, against his expressed prohibition, revenged himself by imposing death on Man as a punishment. In this myth the serpent again plays his insidious role in leading original man astray. The most widely distributed African tale of the origin of death, namely, the story of a race between two animals, one carrying a message of eternal life, the other a message of death, is also found among the Yaunde. The messengers are the chameleon, harbinger of immortality, and the lizard, carrier of finite existence. Nzambe sent both forth, but the chameleon lingered on the way, and when

²⁵ Cf. Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 56.

²⁶ Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 16; also, figs. 6-17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

²⁸ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

he arrived to deliver his message found that he was too late; the lizard had already pronounced the words of death.

The chameleon is valued generally in Africa as the messenger of the world and as the image of life. It is a very popular ornamental animal in Guinea, where it is used as a theme in tattooings, in gourd decorations, and in plastic ornaments.³⁰ On the Ivory Coast, the chameleon "is carried as a ring to avoid leprosy."³¹

Leopards are very valuable animals to the natives. Above were discussed the hardships facing individuals who desired marriage when these men were without a relatively good portion of worldly wealth. Tessmann³² records an interesting note in connection with marriage and the role of the leopard in Yaunde life.

It sometimes happens that a father loves a son deeply, yet he is without the means to buy a wife for this son. Under such circumstances, it is the father's duty to transform himself into a wild animal hunted by the Yaunde, particularly a large, beautiful leopard. While in the shape of a leopard, he lets himself be shot by his son. The son by selling the leopard then obtains sufficient money and goods to buy a wife. Formerly, a leopard was worth as much as a woman. Every part of a leopard is put to use; the skin for belts, the meat as food, the bones and teeth for medicines. The tail vertebrae of leopards are carried by native men to increase their sexual powers.³³

Parents and children form close bonds among the Yaunde, especially between father and son. The father functions as the teacher of his children and he takes pride in their education. The following values are stressed: "how to behave to become rich"; "politeness to the co-mothers in view of the possible inheritance of these women"; etc. Notwithstanding this relationship between fathers and children, gruesome possibilities are ever present for the youngsters. Tessmann writes, "Children are defenseless against their father; he may kill them without exposing himself to any reproaches or punishments whatsoever, and the Pangwe avails himself of this right occasionally, as soon as the children become in some manner unpleasant or burdensome."³⁴

The ambivalent attitude of the fathers in this culture is further emphasized by the mores relating to sex generally. Until marriage, the Yaunde girl is free to grant her favors as she desires, to slaves as well as freemen. "Free love," says Tessmann, "reigns in the boldest sense of the term; the girl may give away her favors without any restrictions, to whom and when she pleases, and she has only to follow the

³⁰ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 and 66.

³¹ Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³² Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 101-103.

³³ See Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 265, fig. 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

religious taboo which prohibits sexual intercourse during the daytime, and the social taboo prohibiting it between blood relatives."³⁵ After marriage, tribal law permits a wife lovers only with the consent of her husband, or at his command. Faithfulness on the part of the wives is said to be practically non-existent. Wives usually have regular lovers who, when their names become known to the husbands, must pay a fine of three hundred spearheads. In view of such sexual license, paternity becomes inconsequential, and many children are born during the pre-nuptial period. These children belong to the girl's father until she is married, when they are turned over to her husband. The husband pays an additional price for each child, that is, over and above the bride-price. Twice as much is paid for female children, who are potential assets, as for boys.

The leopard motif is well known in African art. It was a common theme in the Benin bronzes and in the masks of the same artistic center.³⁶ The leopard masks of the Shilluk are, according to Vatter, "undoubtedly totemistically motivated."³⁷

III

Reptiles are well represented in the collection by numerous lizard and and snake designs. In this group, Figs. 34 to 39 inclusive, are clearly representations of lizards or crocodiles, and Figs. 40 and 41 appear to be conventionalized treatments of the same animals. Concerning the last identification, it should be noted that the native, Messi, said that similar representations depicted large bats,³⁸ while Heydrich concluded that such designs were derivations from designs of the human figure.³⁹

It is exceedingly difficult to draw any distinction between lizards and crocodiles in design because of the similar treatment generally accorded both animals. If the two animals are known intimately to a culture, differentiation in design can only depend on native identifications. Weule said that "The artistic representations of the lizard extend . . . over the largest part of Africa . . .," but that the "crocodile, which lives over the whole continent . . . appears strikingly seldom in the creative representations. . . ."⁴⁰ He is correct in stressing the great popularity of the lizard ornament in African decoration. The crocodile, however, is more frequently portrayed

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

³⁶ See Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 25-26.

³⁷ Vatter, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

³⁸ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate III, Nos. 21-23.

³⁹ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, No. 30.

⁴⁰ K. Weule, *Die Eidechse als Ornament in Afrika* (Festschrift für Adolph Bastian zu seinen 70. Geburtstage, Berlin, 1896), pp. 171-173.

in Africa than Weule leads one to believe. According to Kjersmeier,⁴¹ for example, the crocodile is one of the animals most frequently represented in the Cameroon and among the Barotse. Again, in the Sudan, the Habbe use the crocodile motif extensively, both in their masks and on the covers of their tobacco boxes. The crocodile is a sacred animal to the Habbe for it symbolizes the history of the tribe.⁴² Though many more instances of the use of the crocodile motif can be cited, these few should suffice to throw some doubt on the accuracy of Weule's comment. It is to be remembered that he wrote towards the end of the 19th century, when the knowledge of African art was very scant.

In Pangwe ideology the lizard and the chameleon are detested alike, the former for bringing the message of death to man, the latter for lingering with the news of immortality. In spite of his malevolent role in Pangwe mythology, the lizard in Africa, like the chameleon, is most generally considered the symbol of life.

Baumann writes that "the strong interconnection between profane house sculpture and religion in West Africa is still evidenced by the fact that the Bahuana remove the plaited door from the house of a deceased and replace it with a wooden door which has the lizard life-symbol decorated on it."⁴³ A widespread African belief is that the lizard has an intimate connection with the soul of man. The lizard "commands godly reverence in Dahomey, Bonny (the Niger Delta), and Loango. It is also a Totem animal in many places."⁴⁴ Appearing commonest in West Africa, the lizard ornament is also frequent in the East, but lacking among the "peoples who have no kind of biomorphic ornaments," chiefly the Pygmies, the Hamites and related tribes, and among "some peoples dependent upon Islam."⁴⁵ Every kind of object is decorated with the lizard; dwellings, clothes, weapons, utensils, musical instruments, and as tattooed designs on humans.⁴⁶ The lizard is found among the charming Ashanti goldweights, reproduced most naturalistically.

Figs. 42, 43, and 44 resemble most closely the representation which was said to be a pangolin by native identification.⁴⁷

The group of snake designs (Figs. 45 through 51) are excellent examples of the Yaunde carver's artistic talents. The pliability of the snake form lends itself to artistic representation especially when objects with limited

⁴¹ Cf. Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 8 and 23.

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 21.

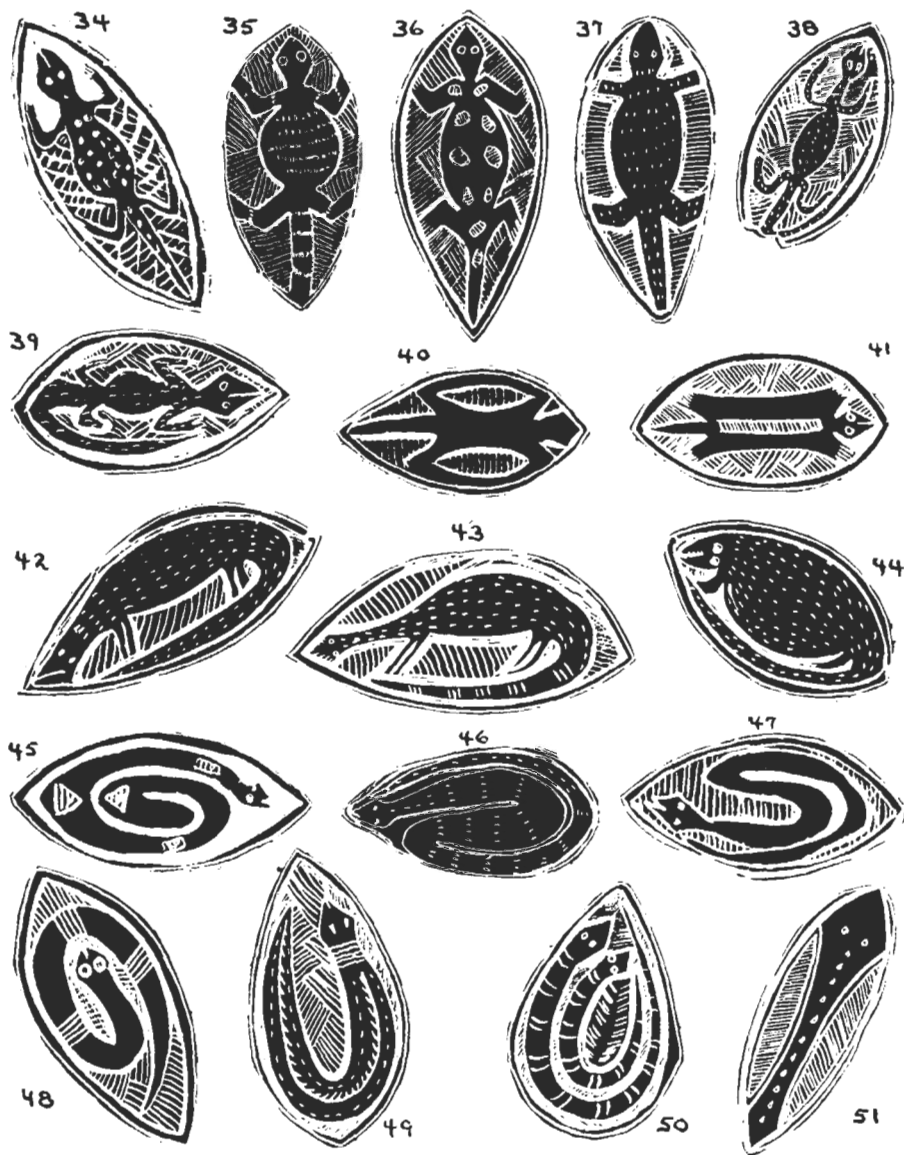
⁴³ Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 90.

⁴⁴ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

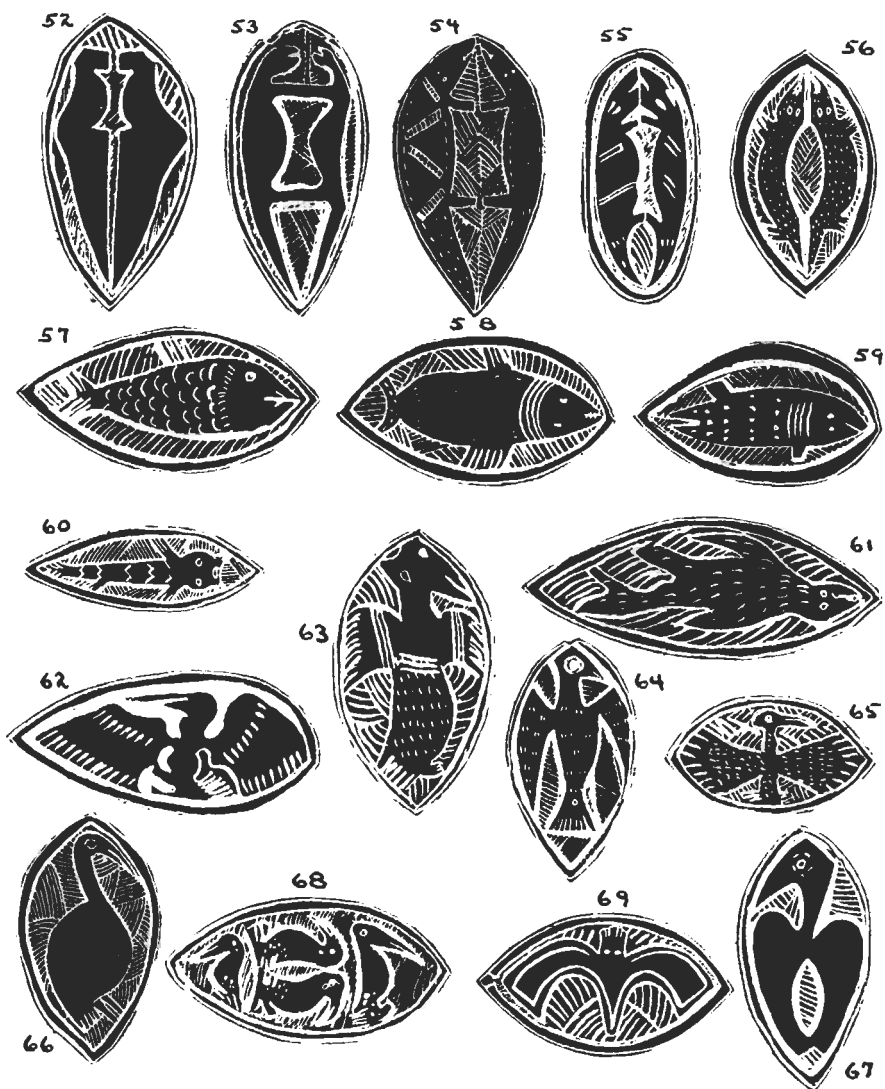
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ See above, p. 40.



Figs. 34-51.



Figs. 52-69.

design-fields are at the disposal of the artist. Each of the designs exhibits individualistic treatment, a feature which dominates the whole collection. Fig. 45, for example, presents the snake with its body curved around on the inside and its head near the outer edge of the field; Fig. 48 reveals the animal in such a position that the head is on the inside and the body curves around it on the outside. In Figs. 46 and 47, both modes were utilized, that is to say, the animals show inside and outside convolutions. Aside from Fig. 54 which is conventionalized, all the snake representations are realistic in execution, each, however, with its own distinctive decorative markings.

Next to the lizard, the snake is the most widely used animal ornament in Africa, appearing commonly both in plastic and surface ornamentation. It receives "godly reverence in nearly all parts of Africa. There are snake cults among the Kaffirs, in Dahomey, and in the tribes of the Upper Nile." The snake motif is used on stool-supports in the Cameroon Grassland; as cult-utensil decorations in Yoruba; and on Togo drums. "As naturalistic surface ornaments, the snake is found on gourds, ceramics, and other objects."⁴⁸ It was noted above that the snake is held responsible for luring man into committing sexual intercourse, the "original sin" for which Nzambe, the Yaunde God, sent death as punishment. According to Tessmann,⁴⁹ "the snake is simply the personification of the penis." He also believed that the native Phallus Cult and the Snake Cult were identical originally.⁵⁰ The same writer goes on to say that male circumcision most probably stems from the native desire to make the penis resemble more closely the head of a snake.

Boys are generally circumcized when from four to six years old. The wounds resulting from these operations are covered with powdered redwood, and heal with great difficulty. After the operation, the penis is covered with a large green leaf. There are no analogous practices for girls.⁵¹

Nearly all kinds of snakes are forbidden to the Pangwe as food, as are also the chameleon, the lizard, and the crocodile. On the Ivory Coast, the python serpent is rolled into rings, bracelets, and earrings, and carried about to "absorb Sleeping Sickness."⁵² "In Loango, the snake plays the role of Fertility Spirit: just as the earth is made fertile by the snake, so is woman made fertile by the snake."⁵³

IV

The group of chips numbered from 52 to 69 comprises representations of double animals, fish, and birds. The double figures (Figs. 52 through 56)

⁴⁸ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 and 66.

⁴⁹ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 32.

⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 99-100, and figs. 35-38.

⁵² Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁵³ O. Nuoffer, *Afrikanische Plastik in der Gestaltung von Mutter und Kind* (Dresden), p. 19, and plates 10 and 11.

exhibit excellent execution, each pair being distinctly different from every other pair. Messi⁵⁴ identified representations similar to Figs. 54, 55, and 56 as wildcats. Fig. 54, however, has some likeness to the pangolin designs, except for the treatment of the tails. Stylization becomes the dominant feature in Figs. 52 and 53, particularly the first. Both figures in this representation show heads, trunks, and a solid, tapering mass ending in a point in place of lower limbs. Neither eyes, mouth-marks, nor arms are indicated in Fig. 52. The images appear to be representations of man, but in view of the conventionalization it is impossible to judge with assurance. Fig. 53 presents the same uncertainty. There is some justice in identifying these designs as lizard motifs.

The representations of fish (Figs. 57 through 61) are characterized by their strikingly realistic execution. Nevertheless, each image differs from the others with respect to both general and specific design elements. True, this differentiation may be due to the fact that different kinds of fish were represented by the carvers. The fins, for example, reveal diversities both in their number and in their positions on the body. In Figs. 57, 58, and 60 the fins are delineated by lines; in Fig. 59 the fins are smooth sections, without either lines or other markings. Fig. 61 exhibits a unique fin design. Scales are indicated on all the representations by means of curved lines, dots, short straight marks, and, in one instance (Fig. 60), by zigzag lines.

West Africa is one of the richest fishing regions in the world, and all the Pangwe sub-tribes utilize this source as an important part of their food supply. With the exception of the Fish Drive, which is done by the women, fishing is men's work. The natives have evolved several fishing techniques, using fish lines, weirs, different kinds of basket traps, snares, and nets.⁵⁵ In the Fish Drives conducted by women the fish are driven into large nets or into dammed-up places. Small flat nets are used to gather up the fish, which are tiny in size.

The Yaunde also use the Fish Drive in large, shallow streams where dams are ineffective. The fish are driven into shallow inlets or onto flooded woodlands. Such enterprises require the cooperation of a large number of persons. The chief, therefore, calls together women from the whole neighborhood. He accompanies them to the fishing grounds and assigns each one a special post. In return, the chief receives part of the catch as tribute, generally one-half.⁵⁶

Among the biomorphic ornaments found in Africa, the fish design is comparatively rare. Heydrich says, "Fish ornaments are used very little, just as fishing plays such an unimportant part in African economy. These

⁵⁴ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate V, Nos. 16-23.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 110-116.

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

decorations are found only among the fishing tribes, such as the Pangwe."⁵⁷ The realism with which the fish motifs are worked out by the Yaunde bears witness to the fact that they are very familiar with this animal form. Fish are used as ornamental designs by the Barotse⁵⁸ and among the Ashanti goldweights.⁵⁹

Birds appear as very beautiful realistic representations on several Yaunde chips. These representations (Figs. 62 through 69) evidence a close attention to detail in design, and the use of bold lines in the delineations of the animals. The group includes reproductions of various kinds of birds; parrots and birds of prey appear most frequently. Figs. 62, 63, and 65 are birds of prey, either hawks or falcons. The present identification follows Messi,⁶⁰ who said that such birds are always represented with wide, outspread wings, particularly the Goshawk. Fig. 65 seems to show a bird with two heads, one on top and the other on the bottom of the representation, but closer examination reveals that the lower, smaller "head" is actually the tail feathers of the animal. Such feathers are usually clearly defined in other bird figures. Parrots are portrayed in Figs. 64, 67, and 68, the last exhibiting four birds worked with great skill into a space generally devoted to one or, at most, two figures. Conventionalization is manifested in Fig. 67, in which the parrot's wings curve downwards to join below, thereby effecting a heart-shaped contour. Fig. 66 presents a representation of a chicken done in simple, clear-cut lines which give a rather good likeness of the fowl. Although Fig. 69 most probably represents a bat, following Messi,⁶¹ it has been included among the birds because of the resemblances in design. Eye markings vary for each representation. They are absent from Fig. 62; single eyes appear in Figs. 64, 65, 66, and 67; two frontal eyes are found on the profile head of Fig. 63; and in the multiple representation, Fig. 68, three birds have each two eyes while the fourth has only one, though all are done in profile.

The bird motif is used relatively seldom in African ornamental art, according to Heydrich, yet it is found among a number of widely separated tribes. The Yaunde commonly represent the animal,⁶² and the bird motif is used fairly extensively in the Cameroon Grassland, particularly on Bali tobacco boxes, drinking horns, and cult-stools.⁶³ The Makonde decorate their medicine and snuff boxes with carved heads

⁵⁷ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁵⁸ Cf. Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 23.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 120.

⁶⁰ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁶¹ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate III, No. 27.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶³ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 44, plate XI, fig. 131; also, Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 96; and Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 8.

of birds.⁶⁴ Heydrich's judgment regarding the frequency of this animal motif is certainly not sustained by the facts. The bird is used as an art theme in the ornamentation of the following tribes: the Bayaka,⁶⁵ the Ashanti,⁶⁶ the Bini of Benin,⁶⁷ the Barotse,⁶⁸ and the Senufo,⁶⁹ among others.

V

Fifteen chips present representations of various Yaunde artifacts used in the daily life of the natives, in their musical expression and entertainment, and in their religious ceremonies. The representations (Figs. 70 through 84) are easily recognizable because of their realistic treatment. It is interesting that the very objects the natives manufacture for utilitarian purposes become in turn the prototypes for artistic design-themes. Aside from the mask designs (Figs. 81-84) which have religious connotations, the remaining representations are of a kind seldom encountered in African ornamentation. Heydrich writes,⁷⁰ "Utensils and other man-made objects are nearly altogether absent from African ornamentation." Though the greater part of writers on African art seem convinced, with some justification, of the essentially religious nature of that art, here, among the Yaunde chips, are found motifs which clearly fall outside any possible religious category. The fact that African Negro art is predominately motivated by religious forces is not surprising in view of the intensely religious character of most African tribes. Generally speaking, the religious concepts of these peoples provide the central core of their cultures. This core extends to nearly all phases of the cultures and becomes particularly accentuated in artistic production. Nevertheless, there is another side of African artistic creation which has been needlessly obscured. Two reasons may be suggested for this unfortunate oversight in regard to objects-of-art which are primarily utilitarian in purpose and exclusive of religious meaning. In the first place, the strikingly exotic character of African religion drew the attention of European observers away from less exciting cultural features. Second, the mundane activities in which such objects as spoons, plates, hairpins, etc., functioned tended to cloud their artistic glamour, though the objects themselves may

⁶⁴ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Cf. Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 20-22.

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 16.

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 25.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 23.

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 30, and fig. 41.

⁷⁰ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

have been subject to the most refined artistic efforts. As a result, studies of African art are mainly limited to the examination of objects having religious significance, such as ancestor statues, fetish figures, cult utensils, and spirit drums. Ethnological reports, however, consistently indicated the artistic value of ordinary objects, with little success as far as art scholars were concerned. But of late the focus of artistic interest has turned in this direction and a wealth of "new" material was uncovered worthy of profound esthetic appreciation. Tribes that expend artistic efforts in the decoration of ordinary, useful objects include the Bidyogo, Baga, Dan, Baule, Guro, Ashanti, Yoruba, and most Cameroon and Congo tribes. This partial list points to the fact that those peoples who may be called artistically minded also apply their efforts to the great mass of objects outside the religiously meaningful class. In discussing the art of an African people, it is, therefore, necessary to examine all relevant objects, no matter what their function in the culture be.

The use of artifacts as design-themes among the Yaunde undoubtedly springs from the great emphasis placed on the artistic working-out of nearly all everyday objects and utensils. The whole Pangwe area is one in which the large part of secular things receives artistic attention both as to form of object and ornamentation.

Figs. 70-72 display representations of bush-knives; the last is said to represent an ancient type. This chip (Fig. 72) is exquisitely carved, and has a high polish found on few chips in the collection. Messi⁷¹ identified a similar representation as a "hatchet (or axe) from the Maka," a tribe which occupies a territory within reach of the traveling Yaunde. Either spearheads or arrow-points appear in Figs. 73 and 74. Fig. 80 shows a flintlock musket of the kind brought to Africa by European traders during the latter half of the 19th century. The cross-bow shown in Fig. 78 is an excellent reproduction of those in use among the Yaunde.⁷² This weapon is never used in warfare but serves only for the hunt.

Before the musket was introduced into West Africa, the throwing spear served as the chief distance weapon. Since the European powers in control of the region forbade the importation of gunpowder (Germany in 1906; France and Spain in 1909), muskets are falling more and more into disuse, with a corresponding re-employment of the native throwing spear.⁷³ The spearheads are made of cast metal by native smiths.

⁷¹ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate I, No. 10.

⁷² Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, figs. 89-90.

⁷³ Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 243-245; also fig. 79.

Musical instruments are depicted on three chips (Figs. 75-77), representing the musical bow (Figs. 75 and 76) and a wind instrument (Fig. 77). The musical bow is a harp zither, according to Von Hornbostel,⁷⁴ and it is used as a solo instrument by the Fang sub-tribe of the south, and as an accompaniment of songs among the Yaunde. Regarding Fig. 77, though Messi identified one like it as a wind instrument,⁷⁵ Heydrich concluded that the design derived from a human prototype design.⁷⁶ The confusion was probably due to the fact that Messi identified the whole figure, while Heydrich identified the representation on the basis of a part of the design, namely the mouthpiece, which resembles a human head.

"Just as with all so-called nature peoples, music plays an exceedingly large role in the life of the Pangwe."⁷⁷ Though vocal music excels instrumental music, the native songs are generally accompanied by instruments which give the rhythm or carry the melody. In the cult choral songs, drums, the xylophone, or reed-mirlitons are used. Both ritual and profane dances are accompanied by wooden and skin drums.

Among the Yaunde, "Every young girl plays the flute," and "Flute music accompanies nearly all the dances. . . ."⁷⁸ The men like loud, roaring musical accompaniments to their dances, as made by drums, the wooden harmonica, and shells. A great many different dances exist in this sub-tribe: cult dances, dances celebrating the outbreak of feuds, and dances to commemorate the settlement of new land. Drums always accompany the Abok Cult dance and the feud dances. All the Pangwe sub-tribes use the wooden drum to supply the rhythmic accompaniment to their musical numbers, and also to give simple signals. Only the Yaunde and Bulu sub-tribes have developed a true drum language.⁷⁹ The unusual competence with which these two groups utilize the drum language merits special description here.

The signal or talking drum is called *ngu* by the Yaunde, and it is generally kept either in the Men's House or under a specially constructed shed. Zenker describes the function of Yaunde drum language as follows: "By means of this drum news is transmitted from hamlet to hamlet, also the outbreak of strife, etc. Entire conversations are carried on, or the ghosts of deceased family members are called by name to placate them. Each native, man or woman, has his own drum name; similarly, the drum of each hamlet has a name and the natives who live in the

⁷⁴ E. M. Von Hornbostel, *Musik*, in Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 327-328, and fig. 129. See also W. D. Hambly, *Ethnology of Africa* (Guide, Part 3, Department of Anthropology, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, 1930), plate XI, No. 3.

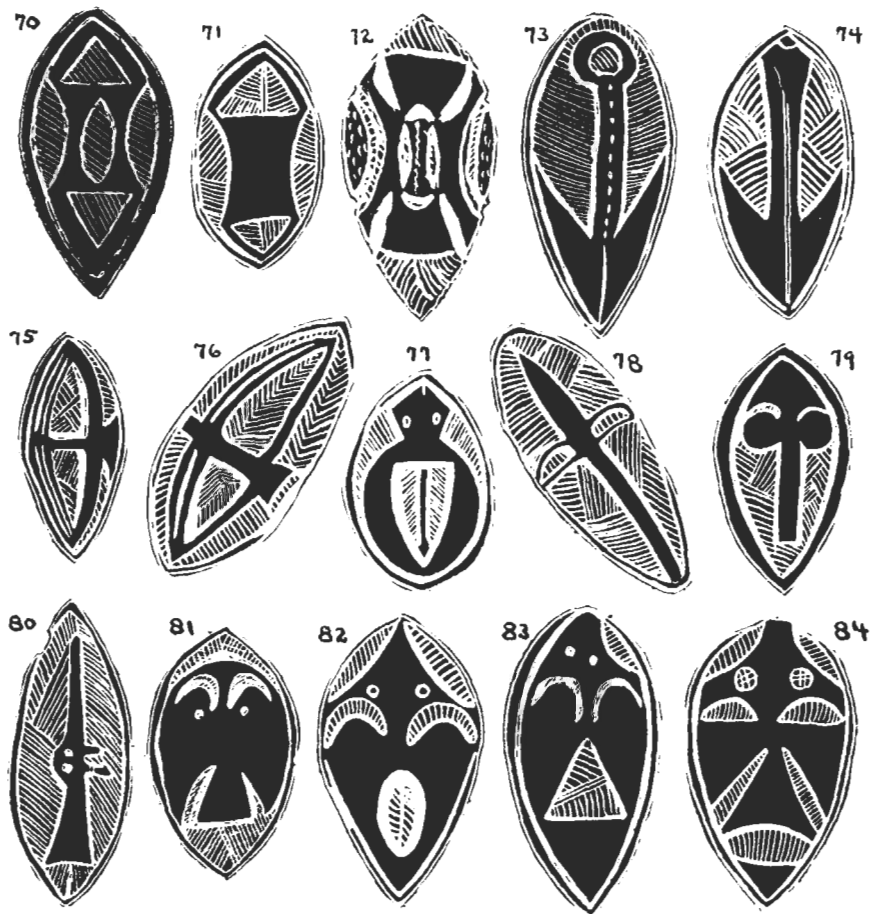
⁷⁵ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate III, No. 9.

⁷⁶ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, No. 28.

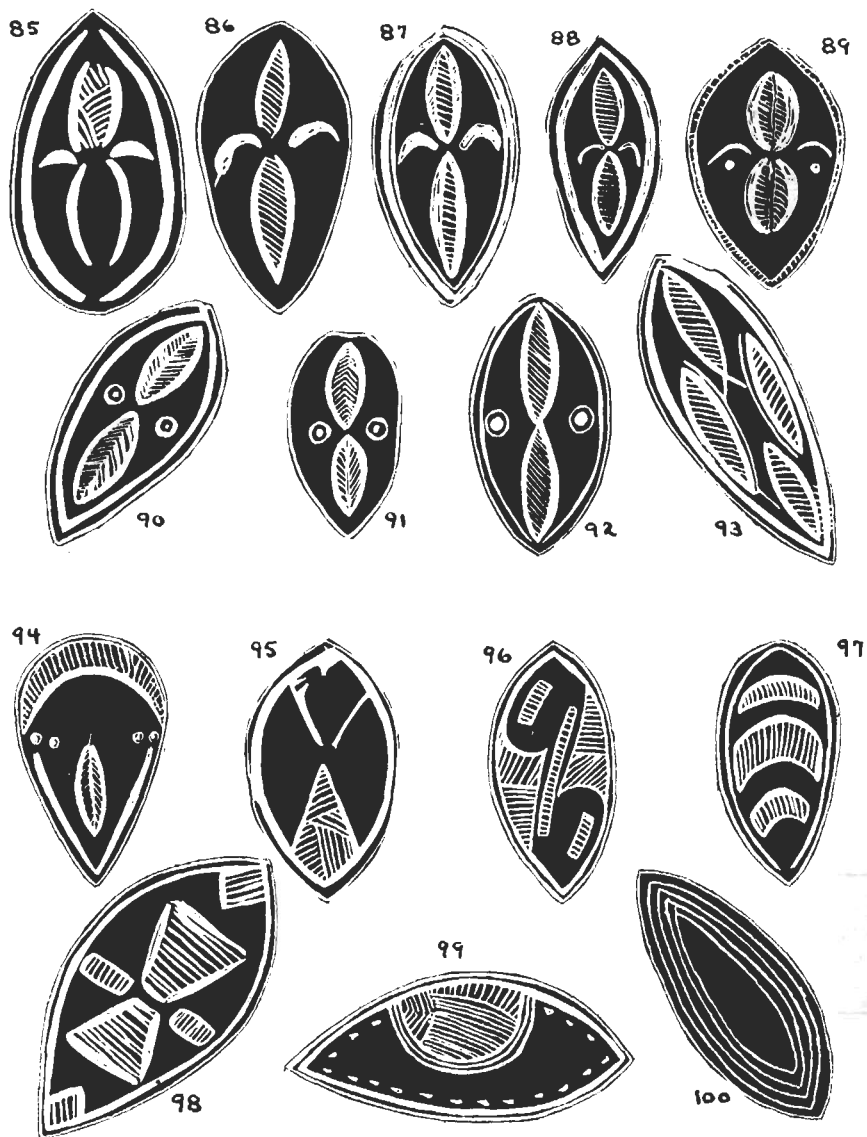
⁷⁷ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 321.

⁷⁸ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷⁹ Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 323.



Figs. 70-84.



Figs. 85-100.

neighborhood know the tone of each drum. Drum signals are understood no matter how faint they sound from a great distance, and they are relayed on immediately, according to the importance of the matter. The Yaunde love to communicate with each other in this fashion, especially in the early hours and in the evening; for instance, what and whether one had eaten, whether or not tobacco, gunpowder, etc., were obtainable. It is extremely difficult to get at the meaning of even the single signals; lies are given to inquiries constantly. With longer stays in the country, one gradually learns to understand at least the main things, such as communications about war and deaths."⁸⁰

Among the Bulu, every adult native possesses a name which is linked to the call-drum, a kind of nick-name. The names are like proverbs. The drum-name of a young girl, for example, was "You are the limit, the limit of beauty." Another was "Don't walk in the towns, your husband is jealous." And finally, "It isn't only your style, it is that I love you."⁸¹

Fig. 79 represents a smith's bellows of a type widely used in Africa.⁸² The smithy is the only relatively highly developed industry among the Yaunde. Here are fashioned spears, knives, hatchets, hand spades, axes, and the currency prevalent throughout the entire region. This money, called *netet*, consists of small slabs of iron with both ends flattened. *Netet* is used chiefly to buy wives, and it is counted in lots of one hundred pieces. Whereas the smith has a special status in the social organization of the majority of African tribes, in Yaundeland, as well as with all Pangwe sub-tribes, the smith holds no such position. He has neither special privileges nor prerogatives.

Among the desert and steppe tribes of the Sahara, the Tuaregs, the Tibbu, and the Fulbe, "smiths form a special group who are surrounded by superstitious awe. . . ."⁸³ The art works of the Bambara are all made by the smiths, "who play a role of great importance in the religious life," and who constitute a "caste meriting special regard. . . ."⁸⁴ The smiths also produce the art works of the Habbe, forming a "caste apart who command great consideration. They furnish their works of art gratuitously, but in return they benefit through certain privileges."⁸⁵ According to Baumann, "Metal work, especially iron, reaches a rare height in excellence in the regions where there is sovereign authority organization, frequently advanced by means of the special profession of smiths as a caste. This is true among the Mang-

⁸⁰ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁸¹ J. K. Mackenzie, *African Clearings* (U. S. A., 1924), pp. 52-53.

⁸² Cf. Hambly, *op. cit.*, plate XVIII, No. 6.

⁸³ A. Haberlandt, *Afrika*; in G. Buschan (Illustrierte Völkerkunde, Stuttgart, 1922), Vol. I, p. 470.

⁸⁴ Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

betu, Bakuba, etc."⁸⁶ In the Mangbetu (or Monbuttu) tribe, "the best smiths live in the residence of the rulers. . . ."⁸⁷

Figs. 81-84 represent masks in their general appearance, though comparisons with similar designs and their identifications by Messi and Heydrich casts some doubt on the present interpretation. Fig. 81, for example, is nearly identical to a representation in the Hamburg Museum Collection⁸⁸ which was identified as the head of a fish. Heydrich⁸⁹ judged representations like those of Figs. 82 and 83 to be derivations from a primary lizard form. These two designs have a great deal of resemblance to designs of antelope and buffalo heads. It may be that features from the animals mentioned were used in these designs in the same way that native masks often borrow animal features. In many cases, masks are worn during certain cult rituals which are identified with animals. The Sso Cult described above is the cult of the Moon, and it goes under the form of a special species of antelope. Horned antelope masks⁹⁰ are used in the celebration of this Sso Cult by some of the sub-tribes.

The production of masks in the forms of animals, or with animal characters added to a human visage, is one of the commonest features of African art. Masks representing the head of a ram are found among the Yoruba and in the Cameroon.⁹¹ The natives of the Cross River district cover their masks with antelope skins.⁹² Innumerable examples can be cited of the use of animal masks in Africa, but space limitations forbid the mention of more than one area, the Sudan and Ivory Coast. Among the Bambara, masks are employed principally in the dances of the religious societies. Each society has its special mask: "the Komo has a mask of articulated horns; those of the Nama resemble a hyena or a fantastic bird; those of the Kono, a hippopotamus. The richest in types are those of the Kore, whose masks represent ordinarily the hyena, the lion, and the red ape, but sometimes also wild animals hard to define zoologically."⁹³ Stylized antelope heads, or human visages with features borrowed from animals constitute the most common Habbe masks.⁹⁴ A Baga mask symbolizes the sacred bird,⁹⁵ while the ox is the subject of Bobo masks.⁹⁶

⁸⁶ Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 76.

⁸⁷ H. Schurtz, *Das Afrikanische Gewerbe* (Leipzig, 1900), pp. 104-105. See also pp. 75-84 for detailed discussion of the social status of African smiths.

⁸⁸ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate IX, No. 6.

⁸⁹ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, Nos. 3-4.

⁹⁰ Cf. Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, figs. 5 and 11, also p. 40 above.

⁹¹ Cf. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁹² Cf. Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 90.

⁹³ Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 16, and fig. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, and fig. 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

"Mossi masks for the most part represent heads of animals."⁹⁷ And among the Baule, "a great many demons are symbolized by masks representing a bull, an antelope head with long horns, another with short horns, and the head of a hyena."⁹⁸

The widespread use of masks in Africa raises the question of their meaning. It will suffice here to cite one interpretation. According to Vatter, "The mask is a covering to hide the face of its carrier. It has a deep and mystical meaning; transformation. In the mask, the person becomes another being, the Totem, Spirit, or an animal, which is embodied by the mask. In the mask, the person spans over the narrow limits of existence, entering into the sphere of the supernatural. It gives him supernatural power, the same as the dead and their spirits have."⁹⁹

VI

A development into a more or less complete symbolism is observed in the group of chips numbered from 85 to 93. Following Messi,¹⁰⁰ the representations signify antelope wallows. His positive identification conflicts with that of Heydrich, especially in regard to designs similar to those found here in Figs. 85-89. Heydrich says¹⁰¹ that such designs are symbolic derivatives from an original lizard design. In the writer's opinion, this interpretation seems rather without a sound basis. Heydrich further identifies a representation similar to Fig. 93 as a design derived either from a primary antelope or lizard form.¹⁰² These animals differ so markedly in bodily form, as well as in design form, that Heydrich's identification becomes merely guesswork.

It is evident that Figs. 85 through 89 are identical in all essentials, with the single exception that Fig. 89 contains additional markings, that is to say, two dots are present under the curved lines $\cap \cap$, giving an eye-like pattern. Figs. 90-92 exhibit another variation in connection with the same markings. In place of curved lines $\cap \cap$, the widely known Mohammedan design-element has been utilized, namely, the dot enclosed by a circle \odot .

This particular design-element, the circle and dot, is distributed over a large portion of the globe. Hence, a necessary Mohammedan diffusion can be predicated in specific instances only when there is strong evidence available to sustain the assertion. In the case of the Yaunde, however, the fact that the tribesmen have frequent contacts and relations with Islamic peoples from the southern Sudan, an area contiguous with the Yaunde area, makes the possibility of independent origin

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹⁹ Vatter, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-106.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate II, Nos. 10-19.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, No. 8.

¹⁰² Cf. *ibid.*, plate I, No. 43.

of that particular design-element less probable, though possible. Furthermore, the Yaunde are believed to have originated in a region long under the influence of Islamic culture.

The final group of chips presents designs which are practically unidentifiable in the present state of knowledge. However, tentative interpretations are given here. Fig. 94 may well be the representation of either a mask or a double animal figure greatly stylized (note the "eyes" in each half of the design). Fig. 95 is probably the representation of a bird, strongly conventionalized, perched on top of enormous wings. The wings resemble designs called "chicken" motifs by Messi.¹⁰³ The general appearance of Fig. 96 stamps it as a kind of musical instrument. The curious design in Fig. 99 is somewhat like a representation identified by Messi as a "section of a sea-coast."¹⁰⁴ Fig. 98 is strikingly like a Maltese cross, yet similar designs are interpreted as derivations from the bird motif by Heydrich,¹⁰⁵ and antelope wallow designs by Messi.¹⁰⁶ Finally, Figs. 97 and 100 may represent patterns used in the weaving of textiles.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate IX, Nos. 1-3.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, plate III, Nos. 1-7.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, plate I, Nos. 26-27.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Reche, *op. cit.*, plate II, Nos. 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, plate I, Nos. 5-6.

CHAPTER III

THE STYLE OF THE DECORATION AS A FUNCTION OF THE TRIBAL ESTHETIC TRADITION

THE carved gambling chips constitute a special form of Yaunde art. This singular and unique art-form, the creation of only one of the several sub-tribes composing the Pangwe, cannot validly be taken as representative of the general tribal art. It is true, of course, that many features found in Pangwe art are reflected in the carved chips, but these features are recognizable only with some previous knowledge of the mother art. It should, therefore, prove of value to describe the essential characteristics of the tribal art which gave birth to the carving of gambling dice. Furthermore, Pangwe art merits description because of its exceptionally high place among the arts of Africa. The relatively intense preoccupation with artistic activities among these natives provides a *raison d'être* for the laborious application of carved designs to the chips even though the designs have no intrinsic significance in the game in which such chips function. When it is known that nearly all objects, whether of daily use or of religious significance, are the subjects of artistic labors it seems less strange that gambling dice also receive careful treatment in the effort to make them more pleasing to the native eye. Undeniable is the fact that the natives take special pains to gratify what may be called their esthetic impulses. But why the esthetic impulse is so accentuated in a "rude and warlike" people is another question, one that cannot be answered in the present state of knowledge. Boas¹ suggests the following in this connection: "We may even say that the mass of the population in primitive society feels the need of beautifying their lives more keenly than civilized man. . . ."

The Yaunde gambling chips may with justice be compared to the objects used in the Western game of chess. Both the African dice and the chessmen receive elaborate treatment in the attempt to make them more pleasing to the players of the Abia game and chess. There seems to be a certain satisfaction in owning and handling lovely objects though in both cases the beautifying of the instruments of play is irrelevant to the games themselves.

I

Pangwe art has intimate relationships with the high art prevalent throughout the great Cameroon area. The outstanding characteristic of

¹ F. Boas, *Primitive Art* (Instituttet for Sammenlignende Kulturforskning. Serie B: Skrifter VIII, Oslo, 1927), p. 356.

Pangwe art is the astonishing homogeneity which extends over the vast area peopled by this tribe. "The same style-type appears among the diverse sub-tribes of the whole territory."² It seems worthwhile then to mention a few words about the general Cameroon art style so as to better understand the art of one of its high ranking exponents.

The essential characteristics of Cameroon art are the emphasis on realism and the powerful urge to decorate every object of daily use. In his discussion of this art, Germann noted the tendency for realism, saying, "It appears clearly that the Negro is a realist in his art manifestations. Only very few art works, chiefly masks, can be designated as fantastic."³ Hardy similarly remarked that, "The art of the Cameroon, in its entirety, reveals more realistic tendencies and boldness in the expression of movement. The heads of the deified ancestors, the masks modelled in round relief, are, in general, true faces, hardly stylized and exposing individual qualities as well as characters of the race."⁴

Everyday objects are usually decorated in such excellent fashion that even the most menial household utensils are esthetically pleasing. One writer said that the people of the Cameroon Grassland take a particular joy in decorating their implements.⁵ Carving in relief has a significant place in Cameroon art. Among the Bali, excellent pipes are produced by means of a modelling process. These pipes are covered with exquisite decorations, and they have become famous over a wide area. In Bamum, beadwork ornamentation is practiced extensively, as is also bronze-casting. Pipes of bronze are here very popular, and their manufacture is a monopoly of the king, who presents the pipes to nobles. Figures are carved on the doors and window-frames of Bamum houses.

Concerning animal representation, Germann has noted an interesting phenomenon. "It is striking," he wrote, "that among the animals that appear on Grassland carvings, we again and again meet certain species. We find them partly on the Ancestor-posts, partly on masks, and, finally, they are employed as subjects for the artistic fashioning of utensils. They are the following animals: buffalo, bull and ram, the elephant, the leopard, the baboon, the bird, the crocodile, the lizard, the frog, the serpent, the rabbit, and the chameleon. They all stand in relationship to the spiritual life of the West African peoples; they have a mythological significance and enjoy, in part, a special veneration."⁶ However, the same author realized that another art, so to speak, existed as well. He believed that Cameroon art "manifests . . . two directions," carvings related to "religious and cult rituals," and objects

² Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 14.

³ P. Germann, *Das Plastisch-Figürliche Kunstgewerbe um Grasland von Kamerun* (Leipzig, 1911), p. 18.

⁴ Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

⁵ Cf. Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 94-95.

⁶ Germann, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

which "though artistically composed and fashioned purely for the joy of making representations, are destined for use in the external life."⁷

The homogeneity of Pangwe art is so apparent that a well-known scholar once remarked that as far as Pangwe statuary was concerned, "having seen one head, we have seen them all, with minor variations."⁸ The greater part of this statuary is used in the native Skull Cult, and consists of human heads on top of more or less elongated necks,⁹ half figures on batons, and whole figures on pillars.¹⁰ The whole figures generally have the hands resting either on the middle of the body or on the upper part of the thighs. Frequently, they carry a tuft of feathers on the head and the eyes are made of copper. The heads, called *biere*, represent men, while the figures may represent both men and women. There are also carved figures which have no place in the ancestor cult. These have movable arms and sometimes attain a height of one meter.

The statues connected with the Skull Cult of the Pangwe are placed on casks made of stitched bark which contain up to a dozen skulls of dead ancestors. According to Kjersmeier, the figures "cannot be characterized as true ancestor figures. Their mission consists only in holding intruders at a distance. They do not represent any definite person and are not the object of any cult."¹¹

Only the skulls of the nearest ancestors are used; first the father's, then the mother's, the paternal uncles, etc. The skulls are disinterred some weeks or months after burial, and cleaned. When one has only a single skull, the practice is to place it among the skulls of another member of the family who celebrates the same cult. The native reason given for this practice is that the "skull feels good only when in the company of its equals." The bark container of the skulls is kept in a corner of the house. The functions of the ancestors represented by their skulls are to see that the family maintains an abundant food supply, and that the members are multiplying fruitfully.¹²

Pangwe masks are alleged to be of feeble artistic value than the statuary.¹³ Each sub-tribe has its own type of mask, quite different from all the others. Masks are found in round and square shapes, flat and convex, and

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ Professor Frans M. Olbrecht, *Lectures on African Art*, at Columbia University, 1936-1937.

⁹ Cf. Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, figs. 16-17.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, figs. 18-21.

¹¹ Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 14.

¹² See Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 115-125, for detailed description of the Pangwe Skull Cult.

¹³ Cf. Kjersmeier, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 14-15.

they are generally painted white. Kjersmeier notes the following in regard to the masks: "While the ancestor cult, which is fundamental in Pangwe religion, is an ancient institution adopted by the tribe since time immemorial, the masks and the many cults which use them seem to be a borrowing from tribes which the Pangwe encountered in the course of ages."¹⁴

Everyday objects decorated with carved figures appear in tremendous quantities. These consist principally of carved batons, spoons, reed-pipes, harps, and drums which usually have a human figure as the ornament, rarely an animal figure.¹⁵ The Pangwe are also expert in rind or bark work, making colored raffia-leaf products and decorating the outside walls of their Men's Houses. "The decorations are chiefly rhomboids, triangles, parallel lines, and curves."¹⁶ The practice of decorating everyday objects is particularly prevalent among the Yaunde sub-tribe. "Each young man," says Zenker, "knows how to carve; they use in this connection a triangular knife of native make. Spoons, platters, gaming chips, combs, canes, large wooden figures—human as well as animal, the latter often of quite fantastic form—and small, wooden blocks which are used to print patterns on their barkcloths are carved."¹⁷

The Yaunde also display a strong tendency to ornament themselves. Young girls bore holes through the nasal septum and stick small ornamental slabs through the holes. "... metals are worn on the fingers, teeth, feet, and arms, (usually) thin in shape; but often heavy, massive rings of several pounds are worn, especially by the first, or chief wife."¹⁸ Young men and girls love to wear ornamental metal bands which cover their arms from the wrist to the elbow, frequently causing boils to form under them. Chiefs wear brass armbands on their left arms, and ivory rings on their right arms. Imported blue and black pearls, as well as home-made ones, are worn as thick necklaces, the more the better. Eye-teeth derived from dogs, apes, cats, etc., are eagerly sought for neck ornaments. The most highly prized objects, however, are porcelain buttons, which are worn on the forehead as a diadem and used for other decorative purposes. Tattooing is greatly in vogue, both cicatrization and regular tattooing. The designs include animal figures, arabesques, and symmetrical motifs; the head, neck, breasts, belly, back, arms, and thighs are tattooed.

A calm, noble attitude is typical of Pangwe sculptures. As Hardy has it, "The Pangwe . . . tend towards a more discreet, a more intimate art. . . . The heads of women (display) features (which) are hardly indicated and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁵ *Cf. ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 90.

¹⁷ Zenker, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

remain like cast in a general expression of serenity or of melancholy."¹⁹ The main characteristics of this statuary are a bulging forehead, concave face, prognathous mouth which protrudes in a rectangular shape, and bulging bodily parts; legs, arms, thighs, etc. "Certain ruling formulas dominate the style which tend to remove it from every reality except those which deliberately agree with the desire for beautiful round volumes."²⁰ Details of the hands, feet, and other parts of the body usually receive minute attention, and they are worked out very realistically. The fact that the eyes are left half closed gives Pangwe statuary an unusual expression. Locke writes that "Nothing anywhere excels it (*i.e.*, Pangwe art) in stylized simplicity and grace. The art of this region is a mystical art, with a baffling refinement and sophistication. . . ."²¹

II

The Yaunde gambling chips consist of carved nutshells many of which are curved. Their designs appear on the convex sides of the shells, and some of them are highly polished. Oval in shape, the shells vary in size from about one-half to two inches in length and from one-quarter to one inch in width. The larger part of the chips are approximately one inch long. Natural differences in coloring are found, the range of shades including dark tans, rich mahoganies, and dark browns. A few which are nearly black were probably treated with a special polish. Artificial colors have not been applied to the chips. The method of carving the shells is to cut away the material so that the designs stand out in relief. The design backgrounds are for the most part decorated. Exceedingly primitive implements are generally used, a feature characteristic of West African wood-carving as a whole. Germann remarked that the "tools with which the Negro works on this material (wood) are the simplest conceivable. They consist of a simple hatchet and a small knife, both being products of the art of the native smith."²²

The instruments of primitive artists in general are poor. They derive from the material which "Nature puts at the disposal of the artists, including stone, bone, animal teeth, shells, etc."²³ The most important tool for large-scale work is the hatchet, and "Finer work is done with knives which, in Africa, are made of iron.

¹⁹ Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 143, and plate XVI.

²⁰ Maes and Lavachery, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

²¹ A. Locke, *Negro Art, Past and Present* (U. S. A., 1936), p. 110.

²² Germann, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²³ Vatter, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

These are of the simplest kind. The finest work is done with slivers of stone, pieces of shell, or sharks' teeth, according to the locality."²⁴

Although the Abia chips are usually produced by the gamblers themselves, all other handicraft activities are strongly specialized. This specialization goes so far that "not even the braces for children, which consist of two leather strips sewn together, may be made by the parents. Anyone who produces tablespoons cannot make other wood-work, not even pot-ladles. A maker of foot-stools only understands stools, a cross-bow carver only cross-bows; one who makes men's baskets only knows this (work), etc."²⁵

The designs on the chips include naturalistic representations of animals and objects, conventionalized figures, and a few that may be classed as symbolic designs. A greater or lesser degree of conventionalization characterizes most of the designs. They show an attractive directness of approach and simplicity in delineation, with the figures standing out in bold lines of a rather remarkable vigor and sweep. This is especially true of the animal representations, where the contours are strikingly clear-cut and forceful. An observer once said that the animals "are alive with a crisp vitality," a remark that penetrates to the heart of the matter. A rhythmic quality appears in many of the animal figures. In these instances, it seems as though the artist sought to capture the animal in movement; running, crouching, or leaping. As a rule, the designs exhibit excellent balance.

The most significant technical (and artistic) feature is the manner in which the artist has suited his design to the very limited space at his disposal. He has overcome this obstacle in many ingenious ways, as described below. Ordinarily, limitation in design-field leads either to incomplete designs, or to increased stylization, or, as among the Indians of the Northwest Coast of America, to an almost complete symbolism.²⁶ The Yaunde artist, however, exhibits an astonishing ability to represent animals and various kinds of objects within a small design area without distortion of the kind that negates the naturalism of the representation. Correct proportions are usually maintained, whether the object represented is an animal or an artifact.

Several excellent examples of naturalistic representations are to be seen among the collection of chips. These include all the snake designs (Figs. 45-51), which are realistic both with respect to shape and bodily proportion. In their wriggling convolutions, a fine life-like appearance is attained.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁵ R. Thurnwald, *Repräsentative Lebensbilder von Naturvölkern* (Berlin, 1931), Vol. I, p. 121.

²⁶ See Boas, *op. cit.*, p. 141ff.

A snake's body is, of course, easy to manipulate in design. This flexibility in the model, however, does not seem to be necessary for the native artist with a limited space at hand. He reproduces large animals whose bodies are relatively inflexible with the same facility evident in the representations of snakes. Moreover, realism is not sacrificed in these instances. Examples are Figs. 62-63, birds; Figs. 57-58, fish; Fig. 42, a lizard or crocodile; and Fig. 12, an antelope. The wild boar in Fig. 23 is also quite natural in appearance. All the fish designs are realistic, as well as all the representations of birds, with the exception of Fig. 67 which has elements of stylization. Artifacts also fall in the group of naturalistic figures. A few examples are Figs. 73-74, spearheads; Fig. 72, the ancient bush-knife; Fig. 78, the cross-bow; Fig. 80, the musket; and Figs. 75-76, musical bows.

Partial conventionalism is well represented as a stylistic element in the collection, without, however, spoiling the realistic appearance of the designs. The representations of humans and anthropoids belong in this category. The outlines of their bodies have been delineated crudely, and little care for bodily proportions is shown. In a few, the digits of hands and feet are designated (Figs. 1, 2, 3, and 10); in others, the lower limbs form a single undifferentiated unit (Figs. 4 and 9). The features of the face are either completely lacking (Figs. 6 and 9), or slightly indicated. When the figure has eyes, for example, these are denoted by dots (Figs. 2-5, 7, and 10), or by a dot with a circle around it (Fig. 1). Mouth marks are present on only three representations in this group, Figs. 4, 8, and 10. A feature common to all these designs is the bend of the knee.²⁷ Fig. 52, which was identified as a double human representation, shows a high degree of stylization. The images lack arms, and their legs have been designed as tapering elongations. Facial features are altogether absent. Conventional elements are found in many animal designs. The antelope group, though very realistic as a whole, discloses a bit of conventionalization which enhances the pictorial qualities of the representations. Figs. 40 and 41 exhibit bats or lizards treated in a radically stylized fashion. Highly conventionalized representations bordering on symbolism are to be seen in Figs. 94 and 95. The last is apparently a bird perched on top of an enormous set of wings. A complete symbolism is attained in the group of representations identified as antelope wallows. This is a direct blow against those writers on Negro art who claim that symbolism is a form of art too far advanced for the primitive Negro of Africa. According to De Zayas,²⁸ "Symbolism does not

²⁷ The bend of the knee is a characteristic of nearly all plastic representations of man in Africa.

²⁸ M. De Zayas, *African Negro Art* (New York, 1916), p. 36.

exist in the art of the Negro," because "his brain is in too primitive a condition to attribute to a thing the significance of an idea." The interpretation in the case of De Zayas seems based on racial prejudice instead of an examination of the facts available for the study of symbolism in primitive art, for he takes as his basic premise the proposition that the Negro is at the lowest level of the intellectual scale, with the yellow race coming next, and the white race, of course, on top.

III

The principle of symmetry is fundamental in the designs on the Yaunde gambling chips. In the majority a direct symmetry prevails, except in the designs of single animals where other formal elements of design exist. The antelope wallow designs (Figs. 85-93), for example, are bilaterally symmetrical, *i.e.*, the left half of the design is duplicated in the right half. Vertically, however, this symmetry does not hold for all cases, slight variations occurring in two representations, Figs. 85 and 86. In both, the size of the areas enclosed by the curved lines differs for the upper and lower portions. Fig. 85 also shows the upper enclosed area with decorative markings while the lower one is bare. Excellent examples of nearly perfect symmetry in design are found in the double animal representations, Figs. 52-56, in Fig. 68 which contains reproductions of four birds worked out as one design, and in the following representations: Figs. 72, 81, 82, 94, and 100. Four individual representations of birds (Figs. 62-65) exhibit symmetrical designs which have been effected by the simple method of showing the animals with outstretched wings. A fine balance was also created in these representations by having the head part of the design equivalent to the lower part in size. Conventionalized designs also exhibit bilateral symmetry, especially Figs. 40 and 41.

Interesting deviations from regular symmetry appear in several representations. Instances of these are Figs. 52-54. Though a perfect bilateral symmetry is exhibited on first glance, closer examination discloses that the figures on the left side of the design are clearly different in size from the figures occupying the right side. A rational explanation suggests itself, namely, that a male and a female animal was intended by the artist, thus accounting for the difference in size. This explanation is, however, merely suggested here, and it is not based on any evidence. Fig. 54 also shows considerably distinct decorative markings for the two figures in the design. The Maltese cross (?) in Fig. 98 is perfectly symmetrical both vertically and horizontally, except that the left rectangle is much larger than the corresponding rectangle occupying the right side of the design.

All the representations of artifacts conform to one design pattern. The object appears in the center of the field and both sides of the figure are worked out identically, according to the particular decorative motif utilized. Bilateral symmetry is exhibited in some representations of man and anthropoids (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9). The gorilla in Fig. 10 is bilaterally symmetrical in all respects with the exception of the head, which is twisted around to profile view. Figs. 6 and 7 are altogether in profile, while Fig. 5 is completely asymmetrical. The lizard or crocodile designs are bilaterally symmetrical, but this does not hold for Figs. 38-39 of the group, in which the animals' tails are curved around one side of the body.

In all cases where the design includes a person or animal in conjunction with an object, the principle of symmetry is lacking. Figs. 5, 7, 11, and 30, particularly the first, are instances in which a person or animal is seen standing next to a disproportionately large knife or other object. The object is far larger than the individual or animal at its side. Partial symmetry is manifested in Figs. 83 and 95. The last exposes a perfectly symmetrical design of a bird's wings, with a highly stylized bird figure on one side of the wings. Fig. 83 is a unique specimen among the designs because of a peculiarity in one detail. Whereas the representation is harmoniously symmetrical in all other respects, the artist saw fit to cut away a portion of the upper right side, thereby breaking the rhythmic balance of the design. This feature cannot be attributed to incompleteness of design because the section that was cut away was filled in carefully with a series of decorative lines. A single example of inverted symmetry is present among the designs. It is found in the design of an object which appears like some sort of musical instrument, Fig. 96.

To recapitulate, several varieties of symmetry occur in the carved designs of the collection. More than one-half have symmetrical designs of a more or less absolute kind. Full symmetry is present among all the different classes of representations, in human and anthropoid figures, in animal designs, and in the group of skeuomorphic (*i.e.*, everyday objects) representations. Several instances of partial symmetry have been noted, and one case of inverted symmetry. Asymmetrical designs are represented by the figures in which more than one distinct subject appears. The presence of asymmetrical designs is particularly striking in view of the fact that asymmetry is, as a rule, rare in African art. A conclusion from the above is that although there is a strong tendency for Yaunde artists to utilize the principle of symmetry in their designs, they do not exclude formal elements of another kind.

The frequent use of symmetry in ornamental design has attracted the attention of many scholars. Heydrich, for example, says in this connection, "The universal distribution of symmetry has as its prototype the bilateral build of the human body."²⁹ A similar interpretation is given by Professor Boas, who says, "We found symmetry to be very generally right and left and suggested that this may be due to the symmetry of manual movements as well as the observation of right and left symmetry in animals and in man. . . ."³⁰

As noted above, the Yaunde artist also used the simple technique of centering his design so that the objects and animals could be represented in full, thus largely obviating distortion and abbreviation. Excellent examples of this technique are the designs of fish. Almost as ably executed are the skeuomorphic designs, particularly Figs. 78-80. It should be noted that each representation is carefully fitted to the available space, and where the design-field is wider or longer, the representation is correspondingly wider or longer. By means of this method the native artist was able to leave only a minimum space for decorative background, a result which seems to have been desired by the carver. One exception may be cited here in connection with Fig. 31. The animal represented appears with its posterior curtailed, and a large background area is thereby left over. The animal may represent a tail-less species, or else the artist saw fit to portray the animal in this fashion for some unknown reason. At any rate, the representation is still artistically satisfying.

IV

The problem of spatial adjustment is significant in all artistic work, especially when the design-field at the disposal of the artist is extremely small in area. This is precisely the situation with regard to Yaunde carvings of gambling pieces. The Yaunde native manifests his inventive ability abundantly in the solution of spatial handicaps. He has cleverly worked his designs into small areas by means of ingenious twistings and distortions. He has, however, preserved the life-like qualities of his subjects, depicting them with a freshness and boldness of line that proclaims him a true artist.

Professor Boas recognized the problem of relating a design to a limited field. He said, "Ornamental patterns must be adjusted to the decorative field to which they are applied. It is not often that the artist is satisfied with representing part of his subject and cutting it off where the decorative field ends. He will much rather distort and adjust the parts in such a way that they all fit in the field that he has at his disposal. When a bird is represented with outspread wings, which would occupy

²⁹ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

³⁰ Boas, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-350.

approximately a square field, and the space to be decorated is long and narrow, the artist may twist body and tail about, and draw out the wings and thus squeeze the design into the available space."³¹

To Weule, however, the primitive method of solving problems of space seemed crude. He complained that the desire of natives to depict whole objects often resulted in miserable productions. He stated that in "ornamentation the factor of space distribution plays a larger role than one commonly tends to assume, and that the dislocations and distortions which . . . are undertaken with the unlucky objects of representation, are actually unbelievable. There are many creatures which emerge from this procedure so badly that afterwards one cannot recognize them any more with the best will; others again, and to these belongs our lizard, are born acrobats, who let the boldest convolutions be done to them without their ever being deprived of their main contours."³² Though Weule, along with others, deplores the primitive system of spatial adjustment in design, it is evident that the Yaunde carver has achieved excellent results in his work.

The eleven representations which compose the human and anthropoid group (Figs. 10-11) exhibit several ways in which the images have been suited to the available space. In four of these, Figs. 1, 2, 4, and 9, the designs are so organized as to make full use of the given area. Figs. 1 and 2 show representations that are relatively long and narrow, and these fit admirably into the long and narrow design field. The trunks of these figures are disproportionately narrow, it is true, and their necks are overlong and thick. Special attention is necessary in discussing the treatment of human and animal extremities because a variety of methods were employed for this purpose. The digits of hands and feet in Figs. 1 and 2, for example, are turned out, with the arms held alongside the trunks. It appears that the artist was forced into this solution because of the difficult spatial problem involved. Similar designs (Figs. 4 and 9), nevertheless, show different solutions to the same problem. Here both figures are short and squat, with the lower limbs stylized and digits absent from all the extremities. Fig. 9, moreover, has its image's arms held aloft. It must be concluded, then, that the carver's will, or taste, was the primary factor in the treatment of these representations. In fact, many different ways of handling spatial difficulties are exhibited in the Yaunde carvings. In some cases the trunks of animals and man are thinned out; in others, the necks are thickened; and stylization is applied to some features as a third technique. Fig. 8 is a good example of designing a representation so that the shape of the head conforms to the natural contour of the design-field, which is at the same time the shape of

³¹ Boas, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

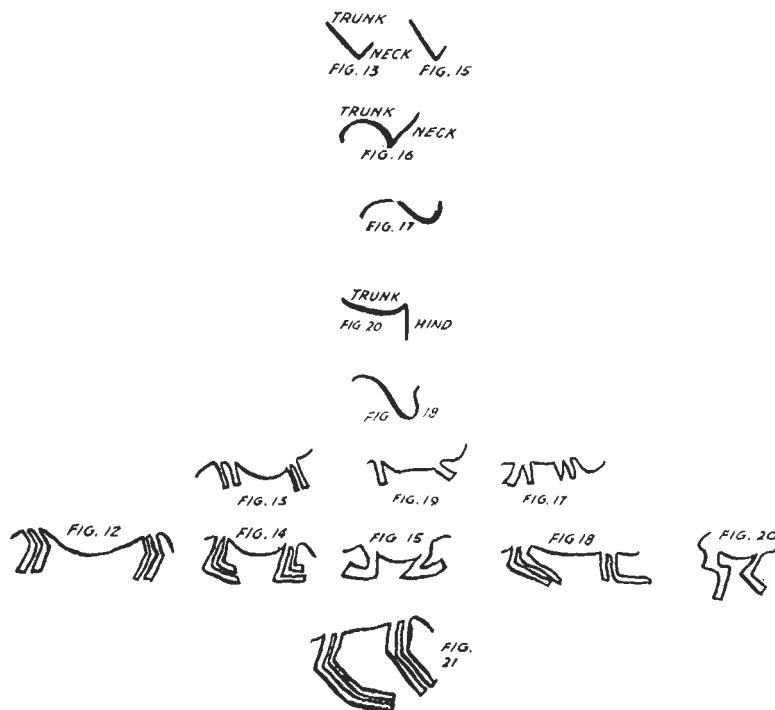
³² Weule, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

the nut-shell. The arms and legs, given in conventional lines, also merge with the form of the shell. Fig. 3, as a contrast, has as its design an individual who appears to be sitting (or squatting). The figure is quite narrow in relation to the available space and consequently, background decoration occupies an unusually large portion of the field.

The profile representation of a woman (Fig. 6) may well be compared with the gorilla portrait (Fig. 10). In the first, the carver seems to have run out of space for hands and feet; these merge into the outside edge of the design field and are not differentiated. The gorilla, however, is seen with its arms held over the head in such a position that they conform exactly to the shape of the nut-shell; its legs have been similarly depicted. The designs of Figs. 7 and 11 again testify to the fact that the artist utilizes his space according to his own wish. In each of these representations two subjects are present, an ivory tusk together with a human, or animal. The individual in Fig. 7 lacks feet, and only one hand is shown with its fingers indicated. Both feet appear in Fig. 11, with the digits clearly delineated; the hands, however, are merged into the ivory tusk, and thus cannot be distinguished.

The antelope representations (Figs. 12-22) exhibit the facility with which Yaunde carvers represent animals in full within a small design area. These representations are characteristically alive in appearance, and conventionalization, as well as disproportion, is strikingly absent. Although certain parts of the body were twisted for the purpose of the design, the natural appearance of the animal was not sacrificed.

A significant feature of these representations is the accurate size ratio between the animal's head and the rest of its body. The nut-shells all differ from one another in size. Yet, by the simple method of designing the body so that sufficient room remained for the long horns the natural appearance of the animal was preserved. The horns, incidentally, are the distinguishing characters of antelope representations. Fig. 12, for example, has the animal's head bent down. This brings about a single, bold curved line which forms the upper contour of the animal from the base of its head clear to the tail tip. The design is given an exquisite grace by means of this sweeping line. Fitting snugly into the narrow end of the design-field is the head, while one horn runs along the edge of the field. As a matter of fact, the whole upper contour of the animal forms a beautiful curve which is perfectly in harmony with the naturally curved shape of the nut-shell. This organization of the design so that a horn parallels the outer limit of the design-field is a feature present in several antelope representations (Figs. 12-18).



The junction of trunk and neck in each antelope design indicates the various methods by which limitations of space were overcome. In Figs. 13 and 15, these anatomical parts are arranged to form a sharp angle. Fig. 16 shows a similar angle formation of trunk and neck in more acute fashion. Here, however, the objective is different from the preceding. The trunk appears foreshortened and hunched up, so that the animal seems to be crouching as if to leap suddenly away. This hunching up of the body adds a kind of movement to the design, giving to it also an expression of force. Variations occur in Figs. 17 and 18; the former has its trunk descending suddenly to join the neck in a graceful curve while the latter presents a natural contour for these body parts, with the junction appearing as a deep, dipping curve. A radical departure from the above methods is seen in Figs. 19 and 20. In both, the animals are represented with their heads drawn back; Fig. 19 has the horns and upper section of the animal's head turned in to run parallel with the downward slope of the trunk; and in Fig. 20, the horns and the top of the head are on the outside. This last

animal is crowded together to fit into the narrow area available across the shorter axis of the design-field. Consequently, the representation is totally out of proportion. The trunk is poorly drawn in the form of an almost horizontal curve with its hind part falling abruptly away from the end of the trunk.

Several methods of delineating the antelope tail are employed. In most representations, the animals have short, stubby tails, some of which are decorated so as to give them a fringe-like aspect. Included in this group are Figs. 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, and 12; the tail of the last is proportionately longer than any of the others. Fig. 13 has some indication of a tail in the fringe that is under the rump of the animal. In this design, lack of space would ordinarily be the reason for denoting the tail in such a vague way. The inference does not hold for all cases, however, because in Fig. 16, where more than sufficient space was available for a clearer representation of the appendage, it was denoted in precisely the same fashion as in Fig. 13. A different treatment occurs in Fig. 20. Here the tail has been depicted realistically, that is, hanging down from the hind-part of the animal. The tail exactly fits the natural curve of the design-field, or shell. Fig. 21 shows a short appendage that ends in a point.

The antelope limbs show many variations. These include both the number of joints and their positions in the designs. The lower limbs in Figs. 13, 17, and 19, all consist of one joint each, with the limbs in the last-named merged so that only two are differentiated. In Figs. 12, 14-16, 18, and 20, the animals exhibit two-jointed legs, with each set taking up different positions. The animal in Fig. 21 exhibits the unique characteristic of having one pair of legs with two joints and the other pair with three joints. It is now clear that the Yaunde artist is not necessarily limited to certain types of designs because of spatial scarcity. The variations which appear so consistently among the chip-designs seem to reflect a native desire to endow the figure with the quality of movement. In Fig. 13, for instance, the antelope appears to be running. The animal in Fig. 12 acts as if it is grazing; and the creature in Fig. 21 is reared backward as if ready to bound away.

Many representations display particularly skilful methods of adjusting animals with long tails to a small design area. Noting this ability of Yaunde carvers, Heydrich remarked as follows: "The decorative utilization of the available space is especially noteworthy. A small, classic example in this respect is the chameleon, whose tail is used cleverly to produce a closed effect."³³ In Figs. 42-44, which represent either pangolins or lizards, the

³³ Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

tails are curved under the animals to complete the design, giving a pleasing effect. As for the lizards and crocodiles, Weule's "born acrobats," the formal treatment varies. Tails are seen in full both in Figs. 38 and 39, curved around one side of the body so as to conform to the natural shape of the nut-shells. In Fig. 34, the animal's tail is long, narrow, and straight, in line with the long axis of the body. A similar treatment appears in Fig. 36, but here the tail is decidedly shorter. Incomplete dorsal appendages are to be seen in Figs. 35 and 37, though these designs were carved into nut-shells equal in size to those with full tails. These representations, in fact, expose a rather inferior spatial adjustment, inasmuch as each animal's extremities end at the design-field limits in an unfinished state. Figs. 34, 38, and 39 contrast markedly with these representations with respect to technical mastery.

An excellent illustration of space utilization which has greatly increased the esthetic quality of the representation is observed in Fig. 32, the leopard. Its limbs are stylized, being given as triangular sections. The tail characteristically curves over the animal's back and closes off the whole design. From the top of the head down to the end of the leopard's trunk, and over again to meet the head, the contour of the figure forms an elliptical curve which is impressive by reason of its sweeping rhythm. Nearly every bit of available space was used for this design, and it is an admirable specimen of Yaunde art. Similarly, the entire design-area was utilized for the representation of a large animal (possibly a hippopotamus) in Fig. 29. Although distortion appears in the treatment of the legs and tail, the animal gives an impression of life and strength of movement.

The snake representations contain interesting features of spatial adjustment. As mentioned before, this reptile is amenable to representation in a small area despite its long body. The Yaunde native, who is apparently well acquainted with the species, has put the animal's flexibility to good use in these designs. They are designed according to three patterns. In Figs. 49 and 50, the snakes appear in the form of U-curves which follow the shape of the shells. The heads and tails of these creatures are parallel to each other. Fig. 50 is especially noteworthy; in it are two snakes of different sizes, the larger enclosing the smaller. A spiral design is disclosed in two representations, Figs. 45 and 48; in the latter the head is the innermost part, or the point at which the spiral begins to take its clockwise turn. Fig. 45, on the contrary, has the head on the outside of the spiral convolution, which is counter-clockwise. Semi or partial spirals are present in Figs. 46 and 47. These snake designs show an almost sinuous grace which has been imparted to them by means of rhythmic, undulating, curved lines.

Again, in the bird representations, good use of small design-areas is seen, with special utilization of the given nut-shell shape. In Figs. 63-67, the heads and beaks are fitted into the narrow upper end of the field, thereby avoiding distortion or stylization. The wings, likewise, suit the field. In the horizontal representations (Figs. 62 and 65), the birds have wide, outspread wings; in the vertical representations (Figs. 63 and 64), the wings curve downwards in conformity with the shape of the design-edge, particularly Fig. 64. The conventionalized bird of Fig. 67 (in the shape of a heart) fits in well with the converging limits of the design-field. Fig. 68 attests to the exceptional technical ability of the artist, for in this representation four birds appear, each a complete figure, yet crowding is not evident. By means of a simple lateral and vertical symmetry, the carver attained a noteworthy result.

The double animal designs provide additional proof of the Yaunde native's proficiency in relating representations to the space at his disposal. The animals in Fig. 54 have been designed so that their outer contours are one with the field limit. The animals face each other, with snouts, limbs, and tails meeting, or nearly so. A rhythmical symmetry is thus effected, lending charm to the designs without entirely effacing their realistic appearance. In Fig. 56, the animals are back to back, with head and tail parts adjacent. The backs curve away from each other to form a central ellipse which is covered with decorations. In order to preserve a symmetrically curved design, the artist has shortened each animal's limbs.

The essential feature of space distribution in certain designs is the utilization of the form of the nut-shell as a defining factor. In the stylized bat representation, for example, the creature's wings have been designed to fit in exactly with the curves of the field. A balanced and harmonious symmetry in design is thus obtained. The animal's head (Fig. 40), which is triangular, suits the converging corner of the shell.

Ancient bush-knives appear as designs on two chips (Figs. 70 and 71). These are particularly well organized in the matter of space utilization. The end portions of both representations, like the corner sections of the shells, form triangles, with the apex of each triangle situated at an end point of the shell. The spearheads in Figs. 73 and 74 exhibit the same organization, as does Fig. 79 as well. Designs which occupy the entire available field are found in Figs. 81-84. In these representations the whole surface served as the body of the design, and distinguishing features were cut away.

V

Sixty-seven out of the hundred chips which make up the Mackenzie Collection have representations of animals as their designs. Some of these

are in profile view, others in frontal view, while a few combine both characteristics. Examination shows extreme variation in the treatment of the eyes. Six, perhaps seven, different kinds of eye-markings appear, two of which are dominant. A total of six representations lack indications of the organ of sight.

The representations that are in frontal positions, that is, facing the observer, and have two eyes indicated total eight in all. Profile representations, each with one eye, appear on seven chips. Two representations, Figs. 31 and 43, show profile bodies with the heads twisted about into frontal positions. Two eyes are present in these figures. Another variation is the treatment of the animal representations in a manner which exhibits them as lying flat on their bellies. Both eyes are evident on all sixteen of these figures; they are representations of snakes, lizards or crocodiles, and fish. The dominant method employed to indicate eyes is the delineation of two eyes on profile figures, one eye under the other. This treatment appears on twenty-eight chips. Heydrich also noted this desire on the part of the Yaunde artist to represent the significant (to him) characters of the design.³⁴

A single representation, Fig. 10, exhibits a further variation in eye-marking. The gorilla in this figure is designed with a frontal body facing the observer, and with the head twisted around to profile position. Two eyes are, however, present, one over the other as in many profile figures.

VI

The practice of decorating the backgrounds of designs appears to be a general ornamental principle in Yaunde art, judging from the present collection of carved gambling chips. This bears witness to Professor Boas' statement regarding ornamentation. He said, "There is a tendency to cover the entire surface with design elements. Vacant places are avoided."³⁵ Nine chips in the collection lack background decorations, but this deficiency, if it may be called a deficiency, is probably due to the fact that the designs were organized to occupy the entire design-field.

Two decorative elements are fundamental in the treatment of Yaunde gambling chip decoration. These are (1) the use of weaving, or basket-work, designs; and (2) the use of straight lines, generally running diagonally. Concerning weaving design patterns, Professor Boas has noted the following: "Weaving in coarse material seemed to be a most fertile source of patterns that are imitated in painting, carvings, and pottery."³⁶ Again, Baumann

³⁴ Cf. Heydrich, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

³⁵ Boas, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

wrote, "The subjects for art decoration in the flat . . . are primarily derived from the techniques of weaving, braiding, woodcarving, and housebuilding."³⁷ The weaving motif is strikingly present in Yaunde designs.

A third type of decorative design is to be seen on a few carved chips. It is the leaf design, which is the sole decorative element on four chips, Figs. 50, 89, 90, and 91. Two representations (Figs. 82 and 94) display background patterns which include leaf motifs and diagonal lines. Leaf ornaments in conjunction with basket-work patterns are found on two chips (Figs. 8 and 76). Another variation is disclosed in three representations, Figs. 48, 59, and 72, where basket-work and straight line decorations are combined. In the main, however, decorative motifs in combination are rare, the general practice being to use either diagonal lines or basket-work patterns. Diagonal patterns are found as the decorative principle in thirty-eight representations, while the basket-work pattern appears in forty-one representations. It is obviously impossible to attribute dominant preferences in decorative patterns to the Yaunde on the basis of the limited material examined here. Nevertheless, the frequency with which certain motifs appear in this small collection suggests that they are popular with the natives, and that they are probably also employed in other artistic production.

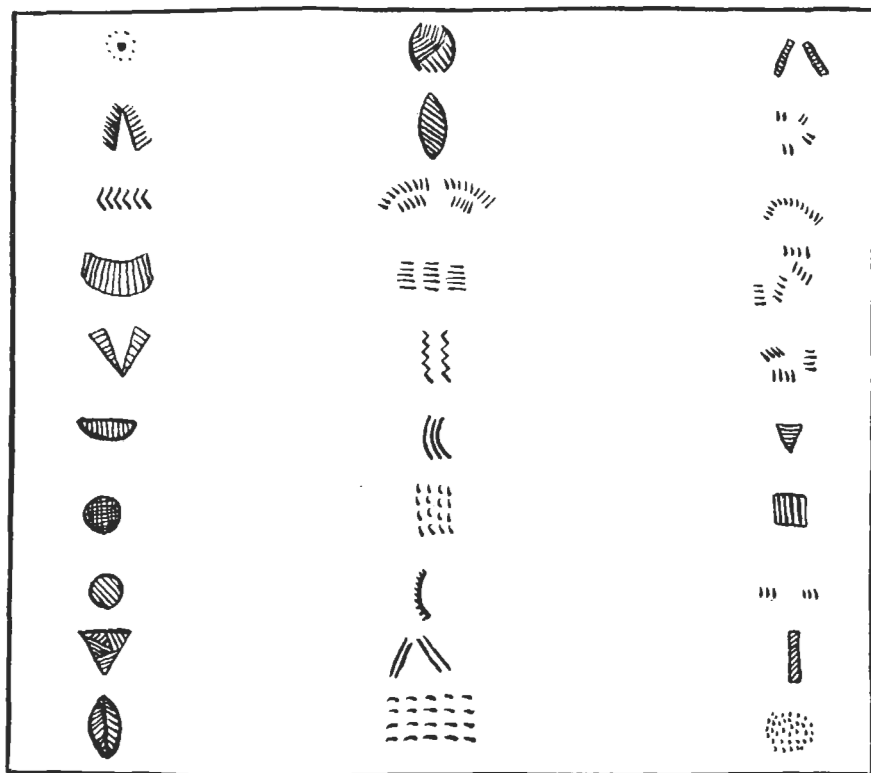
It is clear from the above discussion that six decorative patterns were employed by Yaunde carvers to ornament the backgrounds of their representations. These are (1) the basket-work motif; (2) diagonal lines; (3) basket-work plus the leaf ornament; (4) diagonal lines plus the leaf; (5) basket-work plus diagonal lines; (6) the leaf motif by itself.

The Yaunde carvers have drawn upon a wide variety of decorative elements for the ornamentation of the figures represented. Such decorative markings are absent from twenty-four representations. For the rest, variation of pattern seems to be the most consistent feature. Similar decorative designs appear on different classes of representations, while dissimilar patterns are found on representations of the same group, or animals of the same species. The group of antelope representations, for example, exhibits six different decorative patterns. It is true that all the different patterns contain elements which have a definite affinity to each other. Nevertheless, they have been arranged in distinct combinations, and are, therefore, given individual status here.

In all, thirty different decorative motifs can be found on the seventy-six representations that have such decorations. The decorative element most

³⁷ Bossert, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 92.

commonly used by Yaunde natives in the carving of gambling chips is the dot, which appears on representations of the antelope, chameleon, lizard, snake, fish, bird, and spearhead, among others. In several instances, the application of more than one distinctive decorative motif is to be seen on a single representation, these different elements constituting a pattern entity.



Yaunde Decorative Patterns

VII

Summarizing the discussion of the formal art principles exhibited in the carved gambling pieces produced by members of the West African Yaunde tribesmen, the following conclusions may be drawn. In general, the representations vary from naturalistic designs to highly stylized figures, with a

few symbolic representations included. Inasmuch as the collection here examined represents only a single form of Yaunde art production, it would be rash to generalize about the characteristic features of Yaunde art in connection with the problems of realism and symbolism. Therefore, these summary statements must be understood to apply solely to those features manifest in the collection of chips.

A strong tendency to the use of symmetry in design exists. Partial symmetry, and even asymmetry, are, however, also evidenced in the representations. The outstanding technical achievement of the native artists is their striking efficiency in relating complete representations to design-fields of an extremely limited scope. A single principle of space utilization has not been employed; on the contrary, unique solutions of this vital problem almost invariably appear. The peculiar primitive characteristic of representing vital (to their eyes) identifying characters is amply demonstrated in the many profile representations that have two eyes indicated. The backgrounds of the figures are generally filled in with decorative patterns, with basket-work and diagonal lines appearing most commonly. Finally, the representations, with some few exceptions, are themselves decorated. A great number of decorative motifs are called upon for this decoration of the figures, with no specially favored motifs appearing.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

ONE of the important use-values of anthropological material is the aid that it can give in throwing light on phenomena in Western civilization which tend to remain obscure as a consequence of the vast complexity of this civilization. The primitive peoples, on the other hand, present particularly favorable opportunities for the study of cultural phenomena. In the first place, these simpler societies are numerically small compared with Western society. Furthermore, their cultures are relatively homogeneous, from an internal point of view, and composed of a comparatively limited number of traits. The interplay of the traits which make up a culture are, therefore, more readily observable in primitive societies. Another advantage adhering to the use of non-Western cultural data is the analytic objectivity attainable, granting that it is possible to hold certain native biases well in control.

The point of view taken in this paper is simply that every cultural trait is intimately connected in some way with the total environmental, social, and cultural situation in which these traits function. That, in other words, the traits do not exist *per se*, but are integral parts of the totality which defines the culture of a people. If this is true, it follows that these traits become more intelligible to the understanding the more their interconnections in the totality are exposed to view. The tearing out of cultural traits for the purpose of scientific examination, without reference to their profound ramifications in the totality, inevitably leaves unexplained certain facets which may prove to be of the most vital importance. The utter complexity of Western civilization has the effect of relegating such interconnections and ramifications to an obscurity which, in turn, lends to these phenomena an independence actually foreign to their nature. Gambling in Western civilization, for example, appears at first glance as a phenomenon completely divorced from every other phase of culture. Nevertheless, close examination reveals that it, too, rests on a base which includes several aspects of culture, such as economics, means of recreation, etc.

The collection of Yaunde gambling chips offered an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the thesis expounded here; for the chips function in a gambling game which is most significantly tied up with the social structure and the social goals of the Yaunde. At the same time, they represent objects-of-art. Regarding the latter aspect, it has been attempted in this work to reveal the social and psychological situations which underly the selection

of decorative themes, in the belief that the content of the decoration of a tribe stems directly from certain features emphasized in the culture. Again, the formal aspects of the Yaunde decorations abundantly disclose their relationships with the tribal art from which they derived. A few examples will serve to recall these points.

The powerful emphasis on material things is paramount in the Yaunde culture. Chieftainship and other forms of controlling powers, as well as the institution of marriage, all rest on the factor of wealth. Thus, the greatest goal for the Yaunde is the accumulation of wealth. The lack of hereditary bars to vertical mobility lessens the probability of a passive acceptance of poverty, for poverty means the dependence upon others for the crumbs of status so greatly desired by the natives. The rich man is held up as the ideal Yaunde; with riches, a native buys wives, establishes a family, and takes his place among the rulers of the tribe. Such success also indicates that the man is favored by the supernatural beings, and that he is, therefore, reaping his "just reward." With the possibility of getting rich quickly in the rapid play of gambling always present, it is only natural that the Yaunde should take advantage of this opportunity. When he risks his stake, the native "proves" whether or not it is his destiny to be a leader, that is, if the gods wish to further his earthly career or ignore him. Gambling then supplies a double incentive to the native; it provides him with the chance to rise in the society, and, at the same time, it establishes his relations with the invisible controlling powers. These factors indicate that Yaunde gambling rests on conditions found in the culture which, of themselves, seem remotely related to the game, viewed superficially. It is evident, however, that these seemingly remote conditions must be clearly grasped in order to understand the phenomenon of gambling among the Yaunde.

Concerning the artistic aspect of the gambling chips, it has been shown that the greater part of the decorative themes used by Yaunde artists have meaning in the daily life of the natives. The lizard and chameleon, for example, have significant roles in the mythological beliefs; the masks in religious ritual; the antelope and leopard in both religion and economy, with the latter taking a special role in the economics of marriage. It seems beyond question that the content of the decoration becomes more intelligible in terms of the social milieu. The working out of the decorative motifs exhibits the dependence upon the tribal esthetic tradition. A relative naturalism is present, just as in the tribal art, with a preponderating use of curved lines, or contours. The decorative patterns on the designs and their backgrounds stem directly from the general tribal decorative pattern as found in tattoo-

ing, weaving, sculpture, and painting.¹ Finally, it appears that the Yaunde artist developed a keen sense of space utilization in design from the tribal practice of decorating elaborately all manner of objects, large and small.

The collection of carved gambling chips represents, it is true, a very limited phase of Yaunde culture. If the type of analysis demonstrated in this study has achieved its stated goal, however, the material has served its purpose well. In view of the attempt to establish a somewhat different type of cultural analysis, it seemed advisable to deal with material in which the essential factors are relatively easy to elicit. If the analysis has afforded additional insights into the phenomena examined, there is nothing in the way of its usage in studies applied to matters which may be deemed of more serious import. It should be kept in mind, however, that the use-value of this method varies with the nature of the problems approached, and, of course, with the particular objectives sought.

¹ See Tessmann, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 243-275, for illustrations of decorative patterns used in tattooing, weaving, etc., among the Pangwe.

APPENDIX

JEAN KENYON MACKENZIE was born in Elgin, Illinois, on January 6, 1874. Her parents were the Reverend Robert and Lydia A. (McLeod) Mackenzie. She received her higher education at the University of California and the University of Paris, and, in 1927, was given an honorary M.A. by Smith College. Miss Mackenzie's choice of the missionary calling was probably stimulated by her father, who was a Presbyterian clergyman, and upon whom she looked for "inspiration and guidance," as she has herself expressed it. During her life, Miss Mackenzie published several books containing interesting information about her missionary activities in Africa.

Following a long tradition of missionaries, Miss Mackenzie also exhibits the "ethnological eye" for native customs and practices. Many valuable facts about natives are found in her books and writings published in various American magazines. A few words concerning her books may here be noted with profit.

In *Black Sheep* (1916), Miss Mackenzie recorded her impressions of the long journey to Africa, and her experiences during the trying early days on the Dark Continent. The following year she published *An African Trail* (1917), which treats of the native culture she encountered, and the attempts of the missionaries to bring the Gospel to these primitives. Later that same year, *African Adventures* appeared. In the opinion of the present writer, this work is a real contribution to ethnology because of the excellent exposition of native ways of thinking and acting. Other publications include *African Clearings* (1924), a book of essays; *The Venture* (1925), a book of poems; *Friends of Africa* (1928), essays on problems of Africa; and *The Trader's Wife* (1930), which is a short novel of good quality.

During her missionary work, Miss Mackenzie came into contact chiefly with natives from the Bulu sub-tribe of the Pangwe people. She constantly met natives from other sub-tribes, however, such as Yaunde carriers and Ntum porters. She devoted her full strength to the bringing of spiritual solace and tenets of health to natives who justifiably merit, in some respects, the name "savage," and who inhabit a fever-ridden section of Africa. Nevertheless, all who came into contact with her, black or white, had only praise on their lips. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that she always realized that the natives with whom she dealt were human and subject to the cravings and failings evident among people of every race.

After her death recently, a friend wrote of Miss Mackenzie in the following words: "She was alone in her generation, and generations to come will not, I think, bring forth anyone quite like her. In her the true missionary spirit was without a trace of disesteem for differing opinion, and even the charity that dwelt within her would not have been humanly perfect without her humor and her understanding of the unruly thoughts of men and women."

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C NOV 22 1975	SEP 15 2004
DEC 29 1980	
C DEC 18 1981	
NOV 8 1983	
JAN 12 1987	
DEC 22 1987	
JAN. 12, 1992	
JUN 28 1991 Returned	
DEC 23 1991	
RETURNED	
MAY 15 1997	
DEC 18 1996	
MAY 31 1999	
KEIU DEC 15 1998	



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