

# MANGBETU



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Claes Gallery

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mangbetu occupy the Uele river area in the Northeastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Around 1800 a number of small chiefdoms were consolidated into the first Mangbetu kingdom. Although this kingdom only lasted three generations, a tradition of courtly prestige continued in the region. The name Mangbetu refers to the whole amalgam of people they ruled. In the last quarter of the 19th century they impressed early travelers with their political institutions and their highly developed art and music; especially their remarkable skills as builders, potters, and sculptors. They also became renowned for their supposed cannibalism and for their practice of deforming the heads of babies by binding them tightly so that they retained through life a curiously elongated form. With this publication Claes Gallery wants to present a carefully selected group Mangbetu objects of the highest quality, contextualised with similar examples and in-situ field photographs.

## CONTEXT AND USAGE

In the colonial period, the European presence greatly expanded the market for certain types of regional art in Congo. The number of Europeans in northeastern Congo was never great (about 100 had been in the area up to 1900), but even there this new patronage did have some consequences for the local material culture. One was that it encouraged the development and spread of certain types of art already present in the region. Anthropomorphic harp necks, boxlids, and knife handles were produced in greater numbers, and their use and manufacture spread to new places. Furthermore, the new patrons encouraged the adoption of anthropomorphic shapes on newly introduced objects such as the European-style pipe. European influence even transformed certain kinds of traditional objects: for the first time they became vehicles for anthropomorphic sculpture. Pottery is the prime example; sculpted heads and bodies were added to the rich inventory of existing shapes. Finally, the European presence lent new prestige to the Mangbetu head style. Art depicting a Mangbetu-style head was called “Mangbetu” no matter who produced it. Most colonial officials and Europeans on collecting expeditions worked through chiefs to obtain artifacts. Chiefs collected and commissioned objects for these visitors. The chiefs mediated between new patrons and local artists and encouraged artists to produce the kinds of works that Europeans admired. Talented artists responded to the challenge and soon created a phenomenal body of work in which they expressed their interpretation of the events going on around them: they portrayed Europeans and Africans and began to caricature African ethnicity. Artists seized on visible expressions of cultural identity and put them into their works. The practice of using art as tribute thus encouraged the development of workshops in which rulers employed carvers who worked in distinctive styles. Art was made for secular rather than religious purposes and these gifts were all the more necessary in uncertain times, as in the period of Arab and European contact. The era of colonial rule threatened the continued operation of the court system.

Many of the arts that flourished in the very early colonial period gradually died out in the years after the death of chief Okondo (in 1915) and other rulers. Administrative

changes were rapidly reducing the formal power of chiefs. Okondo was one of the last chiefs who could still command sufficient resources to create the material splendor of the Mangbetu court. After his death the Belgians divided his territory among many lesser chiefs. Once the system of colonial rule became firmly established, chiefs were less inclined to use art to win favor with colonial officials. With the Belgian bureaucratization of colonial administration, gifts of art became less useful as a means of communicating with the colonial authorities. Once the patronage of chiefs was gone, the quantity and quality of anthropomorphic art decreased. As the interests of the Europeans shifted, resident officials turned their attention to the production of cash crops. One after another of the various art forms that had flourished in the first decade of the century disappeared.



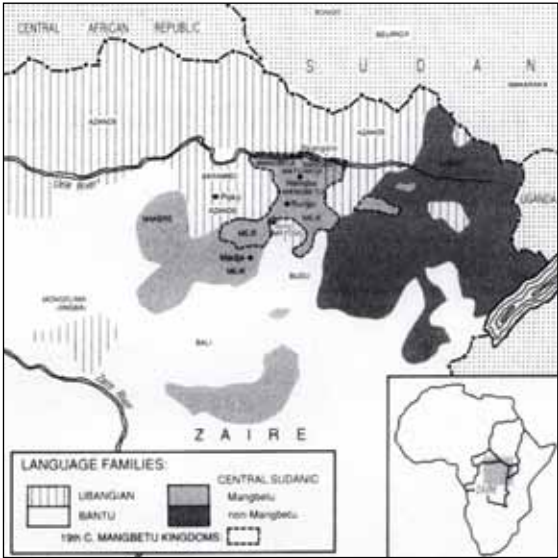
One of the oldest barkboxes known, before figurative elements were added. Horizontal these also functioned as headrest. The Dutch explorer Juan Maria Schuur collected it in Southern Sudan (from a Zande soldier?) between 1881 and 1883. *Collection Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, The Netherlands (#2668-24).*

# NORTHEASTERN CONGO ANTHROMORPHIC ART IN THE EARLY COLONIAL PERIOD

“Mangbetu art” in Western collections usually refers to a particular style of sculpture found on knives, pots, standing figures, horns and harps that depicts a distinctive turn-of-the-century fashion of upper-class Mangbetu women: the elongated wrapped head and the halo-like coiffure. Old photographs show that the anthropormphic carvings were naturalistic renderings of the Mangbetu “look”, even if they were more problematic as examples of the work of Mangbetu artists. In tracing the history of particular objects, there are many instances in which one can document that works regarded by collectors and museums as most typically Mangbetu were in fact made by Barambo, Bangba, or Zande artists (for example Chief Songo). The art known as Mangbetu is thus not the exclusive work of Mangbetu artists, but is rather an expression of the political and cultural preeminence of that group at the time it was created. Nevertheless, in more than one hundred years of European contact with northeastern Congo, the Mangbetu have been the object of much more research and comment than other regional peoples.

The ethnic and political complexity of the region has often made the interpretation of material culture difficult. The concept of region, unlike the simpler concept of tribe, does not inherently imply clear geographical or cultural boundaries. The problem is compound in northeastern Congo by the fact that linguistic, cultural and political boundaries, let alone the later boundaries imposed by colonial authorities are not congruent. The Zande and Mangbetu, for example, speak quite unrelated languages but share some features of culture and political organisation. The Zande attribute much of their art to the Mangbetu and the Mangbetu say the same of the Zande. Speaking unrelated languages, having competed and fought over territory and allegiances for a century before colonial penetration, the Zande and Mangbetu nevertheless continually exchanged objects and technology and, by the early colonial period, frequently intermarried. Cultural exchange among the peoples of

northeastern Congo was encouraged by the rise and fall of kingdoms; captives were taken from one kingdom to the next, tribute was sometimes paid in the form of art, and artists moved from the patronage of one ruler to another. Music and dance, as well as styles in carving and design, were exchanged throughout the region. The rise of ruling lineages – the Avongora among the Zande and the Mabiti among the Mangbetu – promoted the exchange of ideas and specific art forms, but these two peoples had different policies in regard to cultural integration and diversity. The Zande deliberately spread the culture of the ruling lineage, insisting, for example, that all subjects adopt their language. Mangbetu royal styles also spread, but mainly through their prestige, and were adopted even by some peoples never incorporated into the kingdoms. Moreover, Mangbetu rulers were more likely than the Zande to adopt the practices of their subjects.



According to Evans-Pritchard the Zande had something of a reputation as wood-carvers, but nevertheless they were ready to admit that they learnt their more elaborate modes of carving from peoples beyond the Uele, and more particularly from the Mangbetu, who, as is well known, are skilled carvers - their skill, according to Schweinfurth, being largely due to their knowledge of the use of single-bladed knives which allow control by the index finger. Evans-Pritchard understood that Zande culture incorporated art styles from neighboring peoples but he did not realize that exactly the same could be said of the Mangbetu. Sorting out the

direction of influence between these groups (and between both groups and their neighbors to the east and west) will probably remain difficult. There is evidence that anthromorphic styles moved from north to south, though not exclusively. Certainly the earliest harp from the region, as well as anthropomorphic pipes, were collected among the Zande and the Bongo at a time when they were not yet in use among the Mangbetu.

# MATERIAL CULTURE

## ART OF THE DAILY LIFE

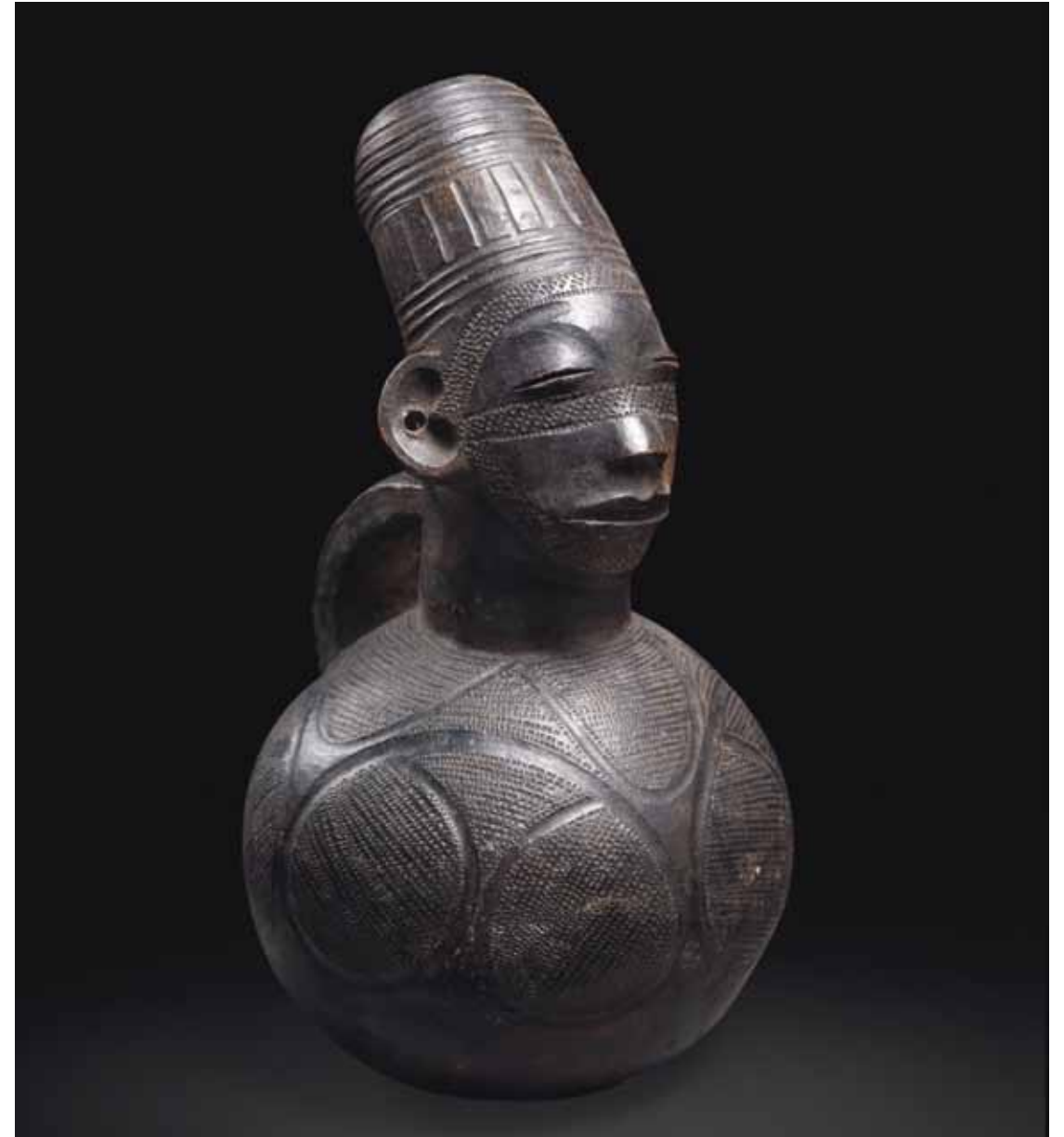
The peoples of northeastern Congo manufactured even the most ordinary tools and utensils with skill and with an eye for beauty. Fine craftsmanship was valued in the construction of virtually all household objects; the care given to the appearance of an object was to make it beautiful and to show the intelligence of the creator. People demonstrated their wealth and position by the fine decoration on their utilitarian possessions.

### Pottery

Like other types of Mangbetu anthropomorphic art, the pottery appears to have been created during a relatively brief period that coincides with the onset of Belgian rule in northeastern Congo. It is clear that this genre was based on preexisting aesthetic traditions found in many parts of the region, particularly among the northern neighbors of the Mangbetu. The basis for the anthropomorphic pots are the water jars, which are graceful, elegant, and subtly decorated. It flourished in its “classic” form from the end of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, and has now virtually disappeared. While these famous anthropomorphic pieces are of the greatest significance from the point of view of the Western art collector and historian, they are in fact a sidelight to a more extensive ceramic tradition. Most of these pots were virtually identical in shape and surface design to the long-necked water jars made



Abarambo water jar. Collected by Herbert Lang in 1914 in Poko. *Collection American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA (#90.1/3901) (height: 20,5 cm, diameter: 11,4 cm).*



Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934. This classic Mangbetu anthropomorphic pot has a base similar to the water pots made during the same period and earlier, especially in the northern Mangbetu town of Niangara. The head is an idealized portrait of Mangbetu feminine beauty. Next to the four pictured similar pots, two other vessels by this artist are known. One collected by Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vindevoghel between 1916 and 1942 and sold at Christie's, Amsterdam, 6 December 1999. (*Lot 229, height: 24 cm*). And another published in “Afrkanst - Inperationskälla för den moderna konsten/African Art - A Source of Inspiration for Modern Art”, Malmö Kunsthall, Malmö, 1986 (*#178, height: 23 cm*)





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1. Published in Roy (Christopher D.), *Art and Life in Africa. Selections from the Stanley Collection, Exhibitions of 1985*, Iowa: The University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1992:107, #72, Collection: The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Iowa, USA (height: 27 cm)
2. Private Collection, New York, USA (ex collection Marie-Jeanne Walschot) (height: 21,5 cm)
3. Private Collection, Belgium. Published in Kerchache (Jacques), Paudrat (Jean-Louis) & Stephan (Lucien), *L'art africain*, Paris: Mazenod, 1988:439, #653; *Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische prive-verzamelingen*, Brussels, KB, 1992:#42 & "Corps Sublimes", by Falgayrettes-Leveau (Christiane), Paris: Editions Dapper, 1994:131 (height: 26,5 cm)
4. Ex Lance Entwistle, Paris, France

at the same time, and probably earlier, suggesting that the head was added as an embellishment to an already accepted form.

The style of figurative pottery is naturalistic, depicting the typical elongation of the head. The opening of the pot, at the top, is formed by the Mangbetu woman's coiffure. Facial features are full and sensual, and the head rests on a slender neck and rounded base. Pots were made by the coil method and fired over an open fire. Surface designs were applied with the hands or with small tools, including shell scrapers and wooden roulettes.

Next to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) Congo Expedition (Herbert Lang, 1909-1915) there were two other expeditions to northeastern Zaire during the same period. These were the German Central African Expedition (1907-1908 and 1910-1911) with Jan Czekanowski and Hermann Schubotz, and the Belgian Ethnographic Mission to the regions of the Uele and Ubangi rivers (1911-1912) with Armand Hutereau. The latter resulted in a large collection, now in the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC) in Tervuren, Belgium, but there are no anthropomorphic pots in it. Those held by the AMNH are therefore the earliest definitively dated examples of "Mangbetu" figurative pottery. Schweinfurth found a great elaboration of pottery shapes among the Mangbetu, but it was not until Lang's time that Mangbetu anthropomorphic pottery was described or collected.

Evidence suggests that anthropomorphism, found in the art of the region in the nineteenth century, was introduced into Mangbetu pottery in the very early colonial era - between the beginning of the Congo Free State period (1891) and the early years of Belgian rule (from 1908). The emerging presence of Europeans in the region created a new market for locally made goods. Evidence from Herbert Lang and other early collectors shows that kings and chiefs patronized the arts and employed artists to make objects that were presented as gifts to visitors. The strong possibility exists that some types of objects that were especially admired by Europeans were commissioned for or even by them. While foreigners may well have encouraged the production of anthropomorphic art, we also know that it was made for local use. Herbert Lang's field notes confirm again and again that in his time many of the figurative pieces were created to demonstrate wealth and status. In Lang's only reference to anthropomorphic pottery being used, he says that "distinguished men" liked to carry them around when they were traveling. There was a constant need for new prestige objects, particularly those, like knives, that could be worn. Rulers stimulated the production of luxury pottery for upper-class consumption and exchange. Objects in these upper-class styles then caught on among subjects and neighboring peoples, and became appropriate objects for prestigious gifts. While none of the original 19<sup>th</sup> century pots incorporated

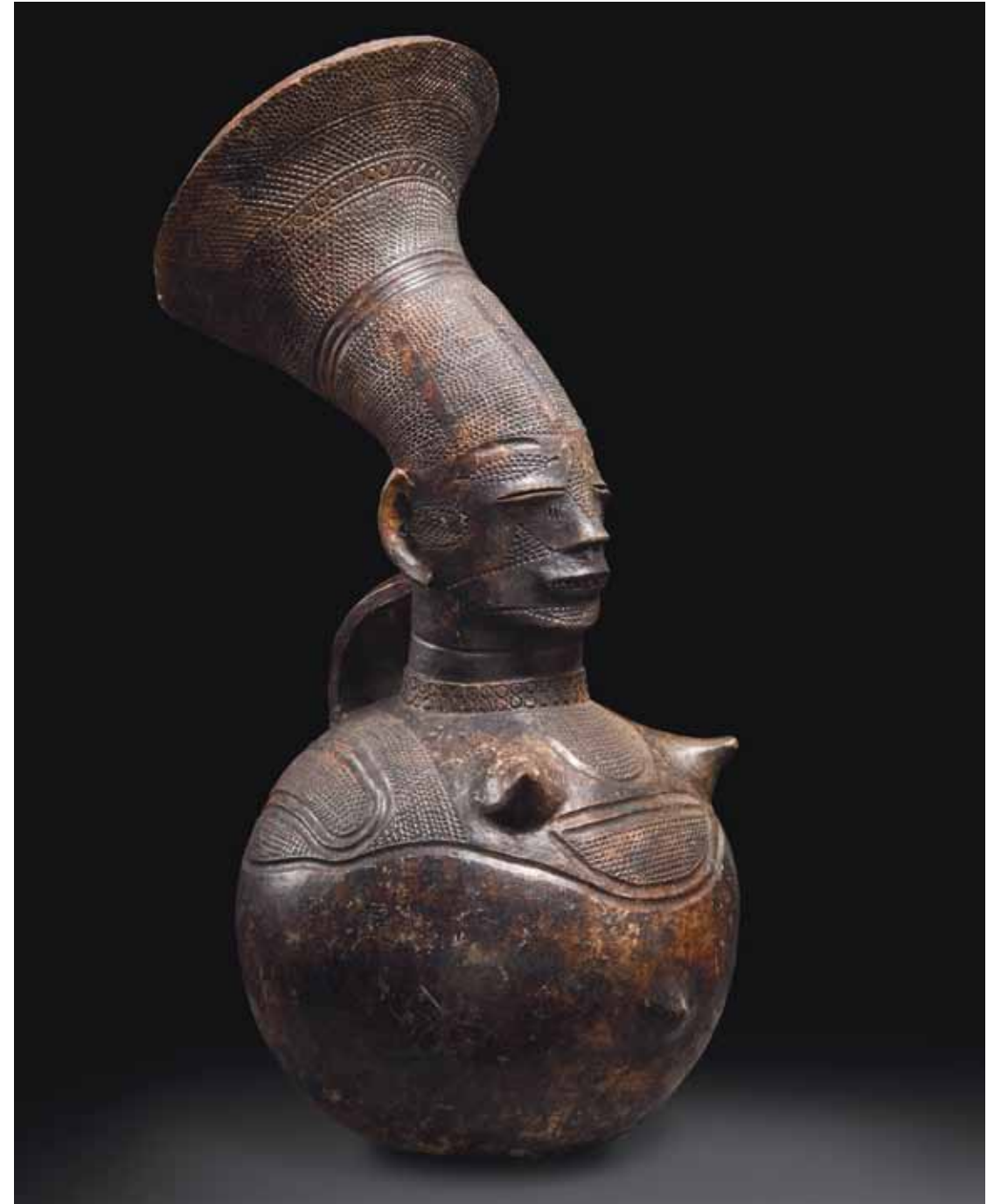


the human head, the emphasis on elaboration and innovation paved the way for the emergence of anthropomorphic pottery in the north.

The Mangbetu kingdoms, never very secure in their hold over outlying territories, were greatly divided by the time the agents of King Leopold II entered the area. Pressure from the Azande to the north, the ravages of the slave trade, and inherent weaknesses in the political system had fractured the tenuous centralization evident in Schweinfurth's time. The rulers at the beginning of this century were attempting to bolster their uncertain power, and although many resisted the incursions of European administrative rule and military power, others sought to curry favor where they could. This jockeying for power occurred while the Belgians were tightening their grip on the region and precisely when the great early collections of Mangbetu art were being formed. Lang specifically states that chiefs often presented anthropomorphic pots as gifts to passing officers to maintain their reputations as men of importance.

Were the earliest anthropomorphic pots usually made by Mangbetu, or were they made by Azande or another people? All of the earliest examples in the AMNH collection, those in the "classic" blackened Mangbetu style, come from the cosmopolitan center of Niangara or from Okondo's village a short distance away. Okondo himself, although a Mangbetu ruler, was of Matchaga origin, and like other chiefs, employed artists from other areas. Lang specifically refers to one male potter as Mangbetu, but some other artists who created typically "Mangbetu" images were said to be from different groups. Many of the anthropomorphic sculptures in pottery, ivory, and wood that have been identified as Mangbetu were made by Azande, Barambo, Budu, or others. They were, in fact, portraits of the Mangbetu in which the characteristic head shape and hairstyle were naturalistically rendered. The fact that many of the artists in the Mangbetu courts were Azande or Barambo from areas to the north bears on the question of the gender of the potters. Among the Mangbetu, utilitarian pottery was, and still is, made by women. Figurative pottery, however, was the work of men. Lang notes that men make all "artistic" pottery (note 1915), an ambiguous statement that may refer to some of the elaborately shaped nonanthropomorphic vessels as well as to the figurative pots. Among the Azande, however, all of the evidence indicates that even the most utilitarian pots were sometimes produced by men.

After the First World War, production of anthropomorphic pottery decreased. In the 1920s Carl and Delia Akeley collected Mangbetu-style figurative pots (now in the Brooklyn Museum and the Newark Museum) that are reminiscent of those made for Okondo. The French Citroen Mission (1924-25) collected at least three examples (now in the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens), and the Dakar-Djibouti expedition in



Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934. Another one by the same artist and from the same collection was published by Pierre Loos in the 2010 *Bruneaf* catalogue.

the early 1930s collected several more. In the late 1930s, Martin Birnbaum visited the Mangbetu in search of art, but he found no anthropomorphic pottery.

The fact that anthropomorphic pots and harps were never well integrated into the daily lives of ordinary people partly explains their disappearance. The former were impractical as containers, could not be used for cooking, and in some cases would have been difficult to use at all, except perhaps if one drank from them with a straw. (Straws were in fact used.) They may have been used as drinking vessels for a brief time, but only by important men as symbols of status. Furthermore, neither the harps nor the anthropomorphic pottery ever had any ritual meaning, despite Westerners' frequent assumption to the contrary.



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1. Private Collection. Published in *Utatombo. Kunst uit Zwart-Afrika in Belgisch prive-bezit*, Brussels, 1988:69 (height: 33 cm)
2. Ex Dr. Georg Kegel, Hamburg, Germany (before 1940). Published in Stössel (Arnulf), *Afrikanische Keramik. Traditionelle handwerkunst südlich der Sahara*, Munich: Hirmer, 1984:334, #307. (height: 35 cm)
3. Ex Merton D. Simpson, New York, USA. Sold at Sotheby's, New York, 19 November 1999. (Lot 325, height: 34,9 cm)

Historical and contextual evidence shows that the Mangbetu made anthropomorphic pots as prestige items for powerful insiders and some selected outsiders, but they never really produced them for commercial purposes, at least not on any large scale. For a short period, a few artists who normally worked in other media turned to clay. Chiefs, the primary patrons of the arts among the Mangbetu, solicited figurative pots for themselves and for others as gifts. However, no market for these goods ever evolved within Mangbetu society, and no significant commerce obtained between the artists and outside purchasers. By the 1920s the colonial system had become so bureaucratic and the Mangbetu area had been divided into so many tiny administrative units that the chiefs' need to curry favor with an array of European officials was expressed in other ways; they no longer required this type of pottery, and it died out.

Unlike many figurative ceramic genres from other parts of Africa, which are usually understood to be expressions of the spiritual concerns of their creators, that of the Mangbetu was entirely secular. Nevertheless, despite its appeal to outsiders, it cannot be seen as tourist art. The anthropomorphic pots were an innovation built upon a longstanding tradition of decorated utilitarian pottery, to some extent drawn from neighboring peoples, which briefly became important to the Mangbetu for essentially political reasons.

**Bark boxes**

In the early colonial period the Mangbetu became well known for their bark boxes with carved heads on top. However, the earliest known container with a carved head was a fine and unusual wooden box collected by Junker in the 1880s among the Azande (now in the Ethnographic Museum in Leningrad). Bark boxes were collected by the emissaries of King Leopold in the Uele region around the turn of the century. Some had heads on them and others did not. Boxes in horizontal form also served as headrests, and they too come with or without anthropomorphic carving. Lang and Hutereau collected both the horizontal headrest boxes and the vertical containers. There is reason to believe that the boxes, like many other forms of household art incorporating sculptural elements, were undergoing change during the time of these expeditions. These bark boxes have been described in many exhibition catalogs as honey containers or receptacles for ancestral relics, but they were most often used for holding trinkets, clothing, charms and other personal treasures. Lang described: 'A sort of box (*nembandi*) made of bark and two pieces of wood for a bottom and a cover. Generally oval in shape, round ones exist also. They are used to carry the smaller effects of men during voyages and also to store them away in their huts. Most of the objects stored are ornaments, charms, or clothing'. (note 591)



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1. Ex Merton D. Simpson, New York, USA. The presence of a miniature vessel on top of bark boxes is a very uncommon, only three other examples are known – one by the same artist. Compare the top to the earlier illustrated water jar.
2. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium
3. Ethnographic Collections, University of Ghent, Belgium
4. Ethnographic Collections, University of Ghent, Belgium

## Stools

Herbert Lang wrote in his fieldnotes that the ‘famous stools (*nobarra*)’, carved from a single piece of wood, used by the Mangbetu women ‘were made by special artists who enjoy a wide reputation. They sign their work on the lower end by a mark deeply cut into the wood and rubbed, usually with redwood powder, which is an expression of good wishes for a future owner. These stools accompany their owners (women only), on their visits and voyages and wherever they go. The strap fastened through the hole (in the rear) is laid over the forehead, the stool hanging down the back, the seat against the skin. Sometimes also the strap is laid upon the right or left shoulder, the stool hanging down the side. Important chiefs’ women have a special woman to carry the stool behind them. They are suprisingly light.’ (note 387) Only the stools of the most important women were decorated with metal studs, but all the women attached to a chief’s household, including the chief’s mother, wives, sisters, and daughters, had finely carved stools. They were an integral part of one court dance in which women, seated in a great circle on their stools, with their knees together and their feet apart, moved up and down with the rhythm of the drums. Although men did not sit on the small blackened stools made for women, several Mangbetu chiefs had a large double version that enabled the seated chief to remain taller than his female attendants. Today stools are rare and wood carving in general seems to have declined for all but the most necessary implements like axe and adze handles.



Chief Okondo stands to dance, wearing a costume for the occasion, while his principal wives sit on stools behind him. Photographed by Herbert Lang in Okondo’s village, December 1910. (AMNH, #111884)





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1. Ex collection Willy Mestach, Brussels, Belgium. Published in *Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische privé-verzamelingen*, Brussels, KB, 1992:63, #19 (height: 30,5 cm)
2. Collected by Herbert Lang in 1914. Collection American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA (#90.1/3334) (height: 23,5 cm, diameter: 36 cm). This stool studded with gilt tacks belonged to a wife of Chief Akenge of the Azande (Panga, south of Poko). Because of its decoration, Lang considered it the best example he had seen.



Songo, brother of Akenge, an expert engraver of figures, with two of his wives.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Poko, August 1913. (AMNH, #224057)*  
 Songo was one of the most famous sculptors and engravers from the Mangbetu complex, though he was actually a Zande artist from the Avungura clan.

## Knives

The dagger (*sape* or *sapi*) was worn in the belt, usually in a sheath, and served as both ornament and implement. The earliest documented examples of anthropomorphic carving definitively associated with the Mangbetu are found on this type of knife. The *sape* is also found among the Azande, although theirs rarely have figurative carving on the handle.



Ayana, an Abaramba woman. Notice the small knife she is wearing around the neck.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Poko, August 1913. (AMNH, #225094)*



Ex Collection Menist, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The handle depicts a Mangbetu woman with an elongated head.

While foreigners may well have encouraged the production of anthropomorphic art, we also know that knives with anthropomorphic handles were made for local use. Herbert Lang's field notes confirm again and again that in his time many of the figurative pieces were created to demonstrate wealth and status. All important men wore these beautifully worked knives, that were both utilitarian items and prestigious ornaments.

According to Lang daggers were used by both men and women with or without sheath. Those without a scabbard are generally kept near the house and used by women though men may wear them in the belt. As a rule men carry these knives in nearly sewn scabbards of elephant hair, pigskin, or antelope-skin. The scabbard is usually reinforced above and towards the tip by brass or tin beaten out in thin bands which surround the leather and often adds to its nicety and finish. The men wear these knives on their back hanging down from their belt, the handle downward, the point upward. The knife is retained in his scabbard through the pressure created by the tin liners of the sheath.



1. Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium (EO.1958.35.3.). Acquired from M. Dumoulin in 1958 (height: 28,4 cm). Published in *Trésors d'Afrique. Musée de Tervuren*, Tervuren: Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, 1995:258, #231.
2. Private Collection, Belgium. Published in *Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische privé-verzamelingen*, Brussels, KB, 1992:75, #53 (height: 39 cm).
3. Private Collection, Belgium. Published in *Mangbetu. Afrikaanse Hofkunst uit Belgische privé-verzamelingen*, Brussels, KB, 1992:77, #58 (height: 28,5 cm).



## Shields

Mangbetu shields (*nengama*) were distinctive and effective, both as weapon and as symbol of ethnicity and political organization. The Mangbetu rectangular shield made of wooden planks with woven reinforcements was distinctive in the region. Azande shields, in contrast, were elegant oblong structures, constructed of twined fibers that were painted with intricate geometric designs on one or both sides. Mangbetu chiefs' shields were decorated with skins and feathers specifically denoting royalty. Shields were sometimes used as doors for Mangbetu houses. The rectangular shape is thus a distinctive marker of Mangbetu identity; in battle these shields could easily be distinguished from the oblong Zande shields.



Okondo's warriors. Okondo is in front; his shield is whitish in color, whereas the others are nearly black.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Niagara, December 1910. (AMNH, #111949)*

In his fieldnotes Herbert Lang writes about a shield he collected in Medje: *A most highly valued piece and privilege of only the chiefs to carry such decorations. Usually their women or men bear it after them, but when they arrive in a village after having beaten their drums and gongs, these shields are held high and swayed to and fro in a very peculiar manner. The lower end of the shield rests then usually on the left forearm (bent at a right angle). They take hold of the strap about at halfway its length and moving the left arm in a semicircle, they jerk at the band so the feathers will sway up and down and sideways. They always call the name of their chiefs and some wishes*

*for his health. The shields of chiefs are usually cleaned so the whitish natural color will at once denote the position any chief has taken, in battle where he usually takes its position on a slightly elevated position, on meetings where his shields are held high or hung up conspicuously. There are always about two or three bundles of spears with them (each bundle about ten). About another shield, that he purchased from chief Medge, he writes: At visits, or at their arrival in the open place of the village where they made their visits, one special man carries the shield, sometimes back of head, standing perpendicularly on his shoulders, sometimes he holds it high and sways it continually crying aloud 'Nairye Nedua.' A big chief is coming.' At the same time the gongs or drums are beaten furiously. By the string above the handle the shield is hung up in their huts. By the long strap the shield is carried during mere voyages, the strap resting upon the left (usually so, sometimes on the right) shoulder. The shield hanging down on the side. The longitudinal axis being their horizontal. The shield of important men as well as most of their spears are usually carried by their women during all the marching only when fighting is close the warriors actually take hold of their shields and arms. During the fighting, they hold the shield in the left hand the four fingers passing into the handle, the thumb clutching 4 or even 5 javelins, spear head down (the top of the spear being only about a foot and a half from their hand). The long slender stick passing above in oblique direction backward. The band, emakwabo, above and below keeps the shield from splitting.*

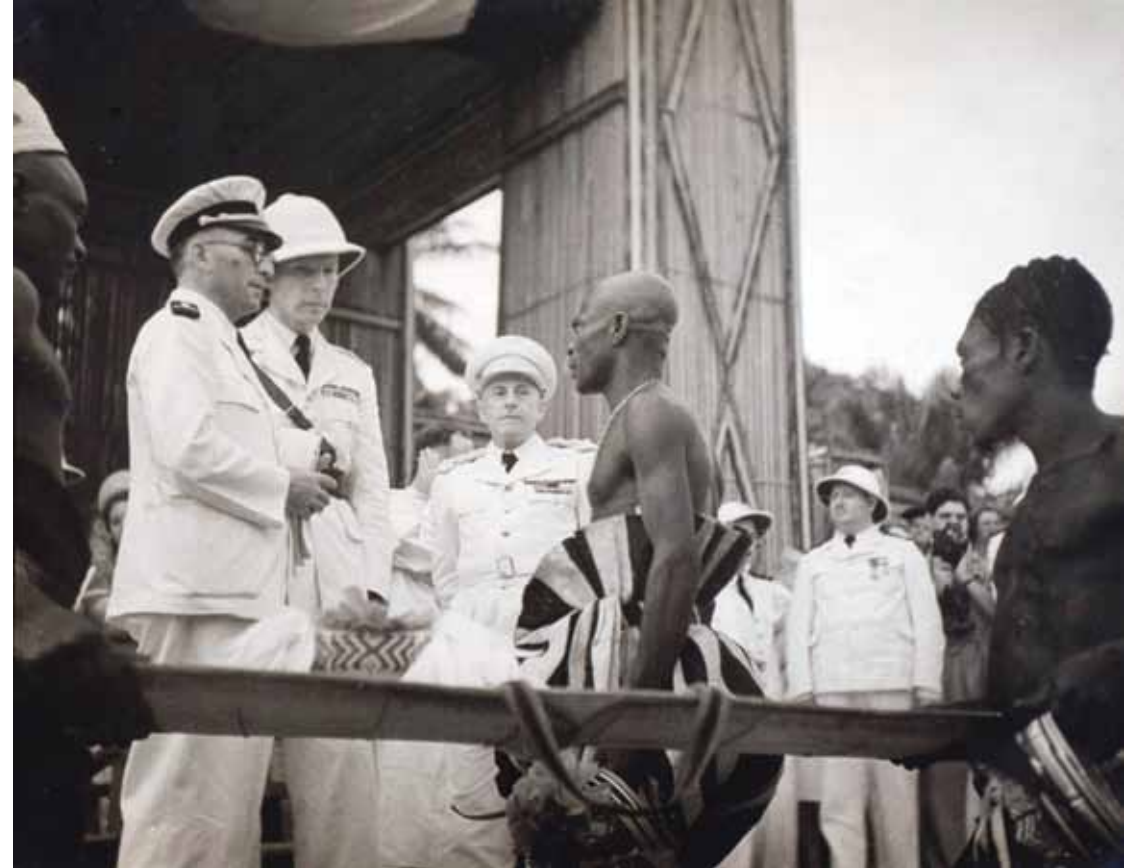


Dance of the Abarambo, called the Bili. The drum only is played. They all sing, bowing in a large circle. The chiefs are carried by others.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Poko, August 1913. (AMNH, #225125)*





Collection Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934 (*height: 123 cm, width: 61 cm*).



In situ picture of the shield being offered to a Belgian general, 1930s.



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1. Private Collection. Published in Elsen (Jan) & Baur (Ivan), *Guba*, vol.2, Brussels, Tribal Arts, 2004:112, #59 (height: 120 cm, width: 60 cm).
2. Collection Marc Leo Felix, Brussels, Belgium. Published in Elsen (Jan) & Baur (Ivan), *Guba*, vol.2, Brussels, Tribal Arts, 2004:114, #60 (height: 125 cm, width: 63 cm).

## MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The social organisation of music has common features among all the societies of northeastern Congo. Ritual or ceremonial music associated with initiations, mourning and feasts is played by ensembles. This music is nearly always accompanied by dance. The music played by individuals, on the other hand, is seldom related to such formal occasions; its primary function is entertainment. This repertoire consists of songs accompanied by small instruments: harps, thumb-piano's (or *sanzas*), and zithers.

Cultural exchanges were common throughout the region and musical instruments clearly spread from one group to another as a result of migrations, cultural assimilation, borrowing, and exchange. We can be quite certain that harps were introduced into the area where the Mangbetu live by two different groups: the Bantu speakers, who came from the west during the last millenium, and the Ubangian speakers, who came from the northwest in the last two centuries.

### Court music

Music and dance were important aspects of Mangbetu political beliefs. A chief's reputation rested, in part, on his ability to dance well. Within Mangbetu culture we can distinguish two musical styles, which in some respects reflect the political and social structures of the groups practicing them. In the region between the Uele and Bomokandi rivers, within the Mangbetu kingdoms of the nineteenth century, the most distinctive feature was court music. After the fall of Mbunza and the last large Mangbetu kingdom in 1873, smaller chiefs perpetuated this tradition, although they themselves were not always Mangbetu. South of the Bomokandi River, however, musical styles were not associated with court life. The most important music of this area was ritual and ceremonial, especially the music performed around circumcision and mourning. This style most probably remains very close to the music of the Mangbetu peoples as it was played before the development of kingdoms.

When Europeans first arrived in the region in the nineteenth century, they were struck by the power and the splendor of the Mangbetu courts. Schweinfurth, in particular, enthusiastically described the music and dance he heard and saw at Mbunza's court. Schweinfurth's account shows that in the 1870s there was an organized court repertoire with numerous musicians. He mentioned all the instruments still played in present-day Mangbetu court-music.



One of the most prominent features of Mangbetu court music is its formal organization. Certain musical instruments are designated for use only in court music, and the court music repertoire is much larger than that of Mangbetu popular music. The musicians and dancers of the court orchestra are an integral part of the court. A musician became part of a chief's orchestra either because his parents were in the chief's court and had taught him the music and dances or because his reputation had come to the attention of a chief, who would invited talented musicians to his court and give them some fields near his residence for their subsistence. There musical instruments were made by a few specialists. Women did not play instruments, but they did dance at the court.



Mangbetu musicians.  
Photographed by Herbert Lang  
in Okondo's village, May 1913.  
(AMNH, #111901)

The musical instruments of the court can be divided into two categories: instruments that specifically symbolize the king's power and those that accompany them. The symbols of power are the double iron bell (*nengbongbo*), the ivory horns (*nambrose* or *nekpanzi*), and a small bell-shaped slit drum (*nedundu*). Other court instruments were bells, rattles, whistles, skin drums, and two more types of slit drums.

**Horns**

Ivory horns symbolized power and prestige for Mangbetu chiefs. These horns were played in chiefs' orchestras for court dances and ceremonies. They accompanied a dance called *mabolo* in which the king, and sometimes his first wife, danced alone. The musicians played alternately so that they could have period of rest. Besides their use in court dances, the ivory horns served to announce the arrival and departure of the king, as well as his victories in war. Small ivory horns were also carried by women during dances. Forty years after Schweinfurth's account of a horn duet at Mbunza's court, Lang and Hutereau collected many of these instruments. Such horns were used to honor Mangbetu chiefs during colonial times but are no longer in use today.



In an image of court display,  
Chief Okondo is carried on  
a litter surrounded by two of  
his wives and several male  
attendants. The shields, the large  
slit drum carried by two men,  
and the horn are part of Chief  
Okondo's regalia. An attendant  
carries a mirror for the ruler to  
view himself and the procession.  
Photographed by Herbert Lang in  
Okondo's village, December 1910.  
(AMNH, #111891)

The horn players, with their large ivory horns, seem to have impressed Schweinfurth when he visited Mbunza's court in 1874: *They proceeded to execute solos upon their instruments. These men were advanced proficient in their art, and brought forth sounds of such power, compass, and flexibility that they could be moldulated from sounds like the roar of a hungry lion, or the trumpeting of an infuriated elephant, down to tones which might be compared to the sighing of the breeze or to a lover's whisper. One of them, whose ivory horn was so huge that he could scarcely hold it in a horizontal position, executed rapid passages and shakes with as much neatness and decision as though he were performing on a flute.* (1874, 2:49-50)



The making of these horns, including carving and piercing of the mouthpiece, was entrusted to the smiths, who had the required metal tools. Carving and shaping a mouthpiece could take several days. Sometimes the point of the tusk was cut off, leaving a small hole that could be covered by the player's thumb to produce more tones. At the time Lang was in Mangbetu country, the points of many of these horns were decorated with carved human heads, and Lang noted that 'conventionalized' heads were the most typical motif. Lang, like some older Mangbetu today, claimed that this motif was introduced to represent Queen Nenzima. The horn could be extended by attaching a wooden tube to its large end. These tubes could be covered with skins of animals such as leopard, lion or okapi. Older ivory horns are sometimes partly covered with animal skin.

Ex Private Collection, Belgium



1.

1. Private Collection. Sold at Christie's, Paris, 11 June 2007. (Lot 128, lenght: 97 cm)
2. Ex Collection Marc & Denise Ginzberg, New York, USA. Published in Ginzberg (Marc), *African Forms*, Milano, 2000:140 (lenght: 127 cm)



2.

The materials used to make horns have changed in response to the changing economy and ecology of northeastern Congo. Instruments of wood, animal horn, and gourd have long been played throughout the region for hunting, signaling, and music. Far more labor and, consequently, patronage were required to catch an elephant and carve a horn out of a solid ivory tusk than to make an instrument of hollow antelope or buffalo horn. When international trade made ivory more valuable, it became associated with foreigners and chiefs' relationships to them. Ivory horns, as a symbol of chieftaincy, became part of the Mangbetu court orchestra. Court dancers often held these ivory horns aloft as royal emblems; their symbolic value may have taken precedence over their musical function on these occasions. When tusks later became relatively scarce and hence more costly, chiefs had fewer ivory horns made, retaining older instruments for a longer time and replacing them with instruments of antelope horn.

### Slit-drums

The power of Mangbetu kings was also symbolized by a flat, bell-shaped slit drum (*nedundu*). It was played during dances but served mainly to show the power of its owner. A king generally gave these slit drums to subchiefs, his brothers, to invest them with authority. The slit drum was carved from a single piece of wood. It was used to announce the arrival of the king or his subchiefs when they traveled. A subchief could also announce his arrival this way when he visited the king's court. They also announced when a chief was drinking palm wine or beer.



Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934. The carrying strap is called *naigogo sasangwe*.



1.



2.

1. Acquired in Rungu from Charles Gilson by Herbert Lang in 1910. Collection American Museum of Natural History, New York, USA (#90.1/2737) (*length: 67,1 cm, width: 30,6 cm*). Lang described this drum as 'an especially fine specimen much esteemed on account of the far-reaching sound. The wood is blackened in mud and extremely hard' (Note 837).
2. Collected in 1902 by Robert Du Bourg de Bozas. Collection Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France (#71.1903.33.500) (*height: 43,5 cm, width: 102 cm*).



**Music for entertainment**

Besides music and dance performed at court or around the chief, other kinds of music and dance mark the important social events in the community, especially circumcision and mourning. Next to this ritual music, music for entertainment, with no ritual function, usually calls for small instruments played by a soloist, who may be joined by another instrumentalist or accompany a singer. This music is also performed by small groups of people in specific social categories: young boys or girls, for instance. The songs accompanied by these instruments are love songs and ballads telling of the difficulties of life. The small instruments played most often are the *sanza*, the stick zither (*nenzenze*), and the harp, which came into vogue around the turn of the century. It was used for entertainment but is now no longer found among the Mangbetu themselves. Without ritual or political context, these instruments were subject to changing fashions. Among the Zande, the harp used to be the most popular instrument; it accompanied praise songs for chiefs and love songs.

***Harps***

Mangbetu harps (*domu*) have been considered in depth as art objects, but little is known of their musical uses (there even don't exist recordings of Mangbetu harp music). They evidently appeared among the Mangbetu sometime after the mid-1870s and reached a peak of popularity during the early colonial period. Beautiful harps decorated with carved heads at the ends of their bows were made in the area at that time. The custom of carving human heads on harps was widespread among the Azande and Barambo in the north, but Schweinfurth asserted that the Mangbetu had no stringed instruments of any kind (1874, 2:117). After the turn of the century,



Man playing a harp.  
Photographed by Herbert Lang in  
Okondo's village, December 1913.  
(AMNH, #111894)

however, many of these instruments were made with carved heads representing the elongated Mangbetu style. These harps may have been introduced into the region of the Mangbetu kingdoms after the time of Schweinfurth's visit. Hutereau and Lang both claimed that the Meje and the Mangbetu adopted the harp from the Azande (Hutereau 1912; Lang fieldnote 2105). Many of these instruments were collected by Lang and others between 1910 and 1915.



3.



1.



2.

1. Collection Museum Rietberg, Zürich, Switzerland. Published in Leuzinger (Elsy), *Afrikanische Skulpturen/African Sculptures*, Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1978: #210 (height: 55 cm). Another harp with two heads from this sculptor is in the Malmö Museum in Sweden (#8261.6) and was collected by Schougaard & Dehlmann in 1923. Published in *Before Picasso, African Art in Swedish Collections*, Stockholm, Liljevalchs Konsthall, 1988:159, #489 (height: 61 cm).
2. Backrest by the same carver. Private Collection, USA. Published in Townsend (Richard F.), *The Art of Tribes and Early Kingdoms: Selections from Chicago Collections*, Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1983:71, #106 (height: 76 cm).
2. Detail





Ex Private Collection, Miami, USA (before 1950). Another harp from this sculptor is in the Marc Leo Felix Collection, Brussels, Belgium; published in the *Bruneaf* catalogue of 2000.



Detail.

Despite the claims of Hutereau and Lang, linguistic evidence suggests that the harp may have been introduced from the south. The Mangbetu use the Bantu name *domu* for the harp. Harps may have been first introduced and used south of the Uele by the Mangbele (now assimilated to the Mangbetu but originally a Bantu group) and the Matchaga. Quite probably some Mangbetu groups, most likely the Mangbele, and other Bantu groups such as the Budu had at first a simple version of the instrument and then modified it in the style of the Ubangian speakers to the north. The carving of elongated heads on the harps is most probably an extension of a northern tradition.



An Azande playing a harp.  
Photographed by Herbert Lang  
in Bafuka's village, March 1913.  
(AMNH, #224095)

The Mangbetu harp had five strings, reflecting the traditional pentatonic tuning system and commonly of plant fiber (more specific the midribs of oil palm leaves). The tuning pegs of the Mangbetu harp were on the player's right (if the instrument was held with the carved figure facing the player), whereas the Zande type (*kundi*) has its pegs on the opposite side. Resonators are usually of an oval or hourglass shape. There is considerable variation in the angle of neck attachment and in the curvature of the bow. Often the conjunction between the neck and body is wrapped with cord. The carved figure forms the entire neck of some the more elaborately decorated instruments. Nearly all those harps cataloged as Mangbetu in the American Museum of Natural History collection have anthropomorphic carving. Some

of the older Mangbetu today claim that the heads on the harps represented Queen Nenzima and King Yangala, and that after their deaths the custom of carving them gradually declined. Many harps produced in the first quarter of the 20th century had full figures – male or female – carved into their bows. Many types of material were incorporated into the carved forms. The bows, of various lengths, were made of wood or ivory. A variety of animal skins was used to cover the resonators, including pangolin scales, okapi and leopard pelts, and the skins of monitors and several kinds of snake. Combinations of the above materials, along with the anthropomorphic bows, created visually striking instruments.

Schweinfurth gave a detailed description about the importance of music in the local daily life: *'Apart from the special characteristics that distinguish them, more or less pronounced marks of race that pick out the different groups of the human family, the Niam-Niams are men of the same nature as others; they have the same passions, the same joys, the same pains as us. I have exchanged any number of jokes with them, I have taken part in their childish games, accompanied by the sound of their drums or mandolins, and I have found in them the same gaiety and verve found elsewhere.'* & *'But the Niam-Niams have other pleasures; they have an instinctive love of art, and owe to it more elevated pleasures. Passionate about music, they extract from their mandolins sounds which resonate in the deepest fibers of their being and which thrown them into genuine intoxication. The concerts they offer themselves are of unimaginable lengths. Piaggia has said that a Niam-Niam would play his instrument for twenty-four hours without leaving it for a second, forgetting to eat or drink; and even though I know well this people's appetite, I believe Piaggia was right. Their favorite instrument is related at once to the harp and mandolin. It resembles the former by the disposition of its strings and the latter by the form of the body. Built precisely according to the laws of acoustics, the soundboard has two openings. The strings, solidly held by pegs, are sometimes made of vegetable fibers, sometimes of giraffe tail-hair. As for the music played on these mandolins, it is highly monotonous; it would be difficult to discern in it the slightest semblance of melody. It is never more than an accompaniment to a recitation, sung in a plaintive (even whining) tone, and of a decidedly nasal timbre. I have many times seen friends going arm in arm playing this way, beating time with their heads, and plunging each other into a profound ecstasy.'* (1874:210 & 222-223)



A Mangbetu figure by the same artist from the Barbier-Mueller Museum, Genève, Switzerland. (height: 61,7 cm)

## **THE ART OF ADORNMENT**

The art of adornment among the Mangbetu and related peoples is closely tied to notions of health and well-being, and it is difficult to describe many of the objects that people wear or apply to their bodies without discussing notions of human development and health. Although beauty was certainly of concern, most adornments were worn to protect the person, enhance some personal quality, or affect the outcome of an activity. The Mangbetu were known for their striking treatment of the body, particularly head elongation, body-painting, scarification, and the wearing of the decorative back apron, but these elements represented only a minor part of what was important to them. More than anything else, they were concerned with obtaining and wearing objects that protected and improved their lives.

The Mangbetu spent thus a great deal of time on their personal appearance. The head was clearly the focus of Mangbetu personal esthetics. The shape of the head, the hairstyle, and ornaments for the head, including hairpins, hatpins, hats, and combs worn by both men and women, were of paramount importance. Mangbetu hairstyles varied considerably according to class of the wearer and the occasion. Wealthier people could afford the time to prepare elaborate coiffures. The specific halo-shaped hairstyle of upper-class women was widely depicted in the anthropomorphic art produced in the early part of the 20th century.

### **Hats**

In Schweinfurth's day, men wore hats fastened to the hair with pins and women wore hairpins and combs made of metal, bone or ivory. By Lang's time women occasionally wore hats, and today they wear them for dances. Lang's collection of nearly a hundred hats shows remarkable variety. Most of them were woven of palm fiber strips. Variety was created not only by the combination of natural and dyed colors. By utilizing the fibers with their glossy cuticle layer facing outward or inward, surfaces were created that reflected light differently. Strips of sorghum, which have a bright buff color, were sometimes woven into the hats as further adornment. Protruding wrapped loops and ribbonlike elements were exuberantly worked into the structure of the hats. Crossed sticks from the leafstalks of the raffia palm were often attached to the tops of the plaited hats by poking their ends through the corners. Bundles of many kinds of feathers were tied together and attached to the hats. The feathers used for hats included those of the guinea fowl, owl, harpy eagle, touraco, the paradise flycatcher, chicken (sometimes from chickens that had been sacrificed to the ancestors), gray parrot and others.



Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934.

Most hats were made to be purely ornamental, but some had special meanings. For example, hunters who lived near the forest south of Medje wore special hats as a sign of mourning after they killed an okapi. These hats were worn long after the hunters returned to their village to ensure that they would not become sick and die. There were also hats for mourning specific relatives, like a child or sibling. Herbert Lang collected a hat decorated with chicken feathers that had passed through some ceremonials to provide the bearer with happiness and good luck.

Eagle feathers, and the red tail feather of the gray parrot were reserved for chiefs although they frequently gave these highly valued materials to their loyal subjects. African gray parrots were kept in captivity so that their feathers could be readily obtained.





Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934.



Men weaving hats. Notice the harp player in the back.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Okondo's village, December 1910. (AMNH, #111923)*



Five Mangbetu chiefs. From right to left: Danka, Duba, Libangula, Niapu & Mamoro.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang in Rungu, June 1913. (AMNH, #111795)*

## Hairpins

Pins were made in a great variety of materials, like wood, iron, copper, brass, silver and ivory. Long ivory hatpins were prestige items and indicators of wealth. The entire end of a tusk was required to make a fine pin with a disklike top. Ivory pins do not appear in collections made before 1910. Herbert Lang wrote about the process: *'Only an experienced artist can hope to carve from the solid tip of an elephant tusk so slender a pin, topped with three large disks. No more wasteful design could be devised, for most of the ivory drops off in useless chips. All Mangbetu men of importance covet pins, most of which, however, terminate in a single concave disk, usually turned toward the front when worn, and supposed to represent the radiance of the sun.'* (Lang 1918a, 540)

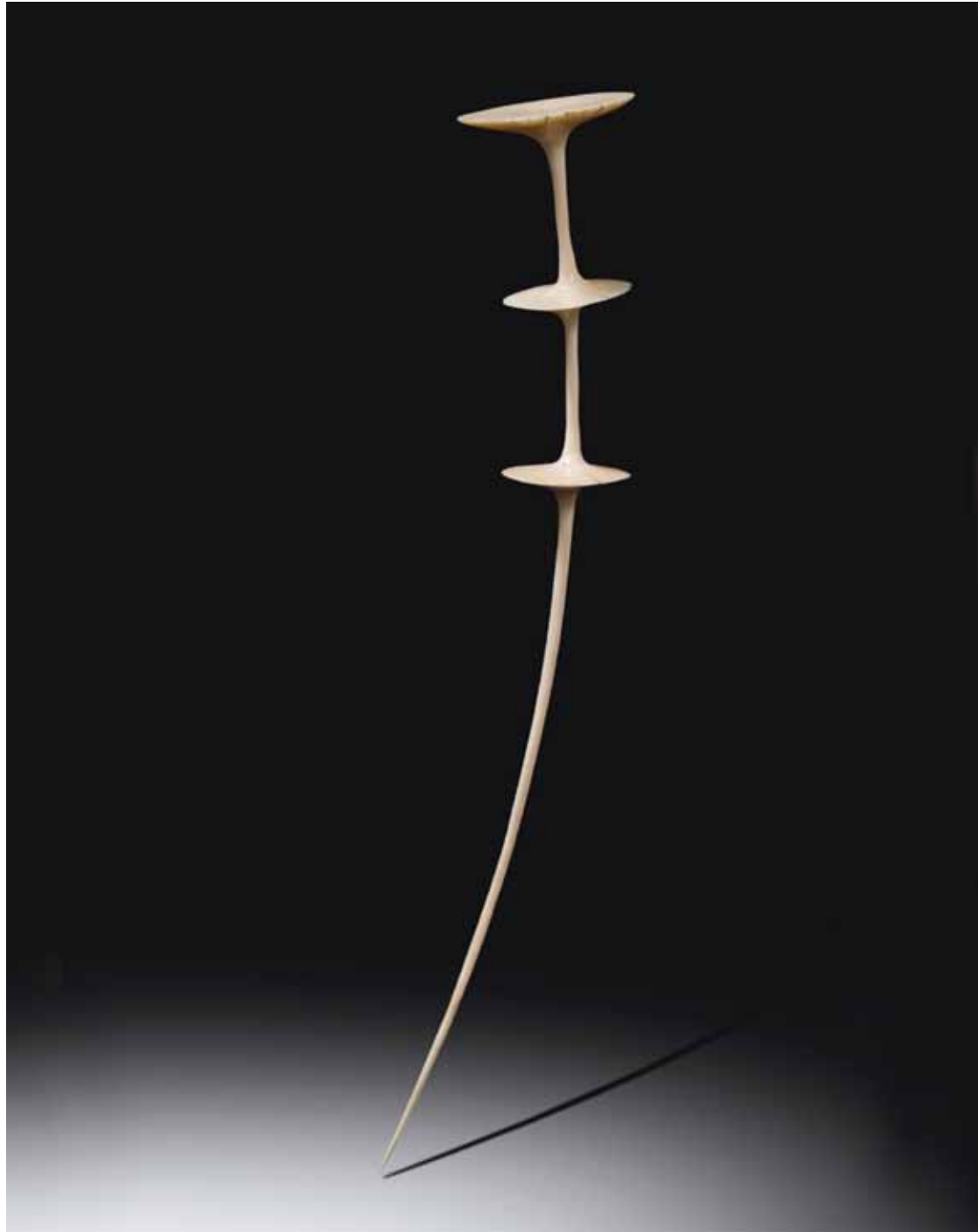
Pins were worn by men and women, by men mostly in hats and by women in their hair. Women rarely wore hats in the beginning of the 20th century, except as a sign of mourning. Like most objects, the pins had multiple uses. Lang referred to them as the Mangbetu woman's 'pocketknife'. Of an iron hairpin, he wrote: *'used for surgical purposes, such as cleaning wounds, taking out jiggers, scraping the finger and toe nails and cutting them. A razor to arrange the fibers that maintain their elaborate hair dress and various other purposes'.* (1986) Hairpins were often exchanged as gifts among friends and even played a part in flirtations. Czekanowski commented: *'Getting a hair pin as a gift from a woman equals an invitation to intimacy'* (1924, 138).



Mangbetu women arranging their headdress. Creating the elaborate headdress of a ruling-class Mangbetu woman was time-consuming. First, string was wrapped around the forehead and much of the head. The long hair was then drawn around a basketry frame to produce the halolike shape. Numerous hairpins of ivory, bone, or metal completed the style. Photographed by Herbert Lang in Okondo's village, December 1910. (AMNH, #224436)



Ex Private Collection, Ghent, Belgium



Detail.



Portrait of Chief Abiengama,  
Mabutu tribe.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang  
in Medje, April 1914. (AMNH,  
#224888)*



Portrait of Kobela, an Abarambo  
chief.  
*Photographed by Herbert Lang  
in Poko, August 1913. (AMNH,  
#224185)*



### Women's back aprons

By the beginning of the twentieth century, upper-class Mangbetu women wore a small plaintain leaf shield, called *negbe* (*egbe*, plural), in the back to cover their buttocks. The women appliquéd delicately cut and colored pieces of leaves onto an oval pad built up of layered plaintain leaves. Colar contrasts in the designs were achieved by blackening the leaves for the appliqué with mud or, occasionally, by adding lighter-colored corn fibers. Many *egbe* had a fiber hood that fit over the belt and into the hollow near the base of the spine. Although Herbert Lang stated that *egbe* were widely used before his time, Schweinfurth neither mentioned nor drew the *negbe*, which suggests that it came into use after his visit. Casati, however, mentioned 'a little apron of doubtful effect' (1891, 1:121) – possibly the *nogetwe* worn in front and not the *negbe*.

Herbert Lang wrote in his notes about these aprons: 'The portion of their clothes that covers their hind. It is very simply adjusted. The lengthened piece on the back is simply pushed down the natural furrow, the string between the narrow and flat piece. The Mangbetu women do not like that their hind quarters are exposed to the looks of men, but when making their toilet they are well satisfied to take a piece not larger than the width of a finger for covering this portion of their backside. In front they take then a piece of bark cloth the size of their hand, so as to cover just that portion which is covered with hair. In this one branch the women create the most astonishing variety of patterns and each woman changes the pattern continually. As a rule they use only banana leaves in making them. They are easily blackened and have a great resistance. Formerly much in use, now it is difficult to get them. There are only two women in the village of Okondo who know how to make them. They are woven of bast. Some have a lengthened portion that lays flat on the. They arrange first the leaves and sew bast through. They sometimes produce good patterns. Very few of the women are able to do this kind of work. Usually it takes about a day to make one of these covers for their back, but they never work continuously. The leaves are first sliced deep and pressed between the mats of their bed. They sleep upon a week or so, sometimes there are several bunches like this between the mats for future working. The outside leaves are then collected and blackened. They usually work one hour or two in the morning (before they do other work) in making these covers and in this may spend several days. The women admire the creations of their friends and the more experienced ones very often give their welcome advice. They only use a needle, (best to sew and tie) a pointed stick (to make the knot) a knife to cut the designs. The designs are cut out without making preliminary indications for the pattern (free hand).' (notes 1008 & 1055) Most of the appliqués *egbe* designs were highly symmetrical and geometric. The flapping of the *egbe* was considered desirable, especially in dances. Styles of *egbe* changed over time. Those collected in the 1930s and 1940s include raffia braids and tan banana leaf patterns. Today similar are worn for dances.



Collected by the Soeurs Missionnaires Dominicaines de Namur, 1934.



Mangbetu woman with apron.  
Photographed by Lammeretz,  
1930s.



Mangbetu woman with apron.  
Photographed by Lammeretz,  
1930s.

## RÉSUMÉ

Au début de la période coloniale, les rois et chefs de la région de l’Uele, dans le nord-est de la RD Congo, tentaient de plaire aux visiteurs européens par l’échange de cadeaux. Ils faisaient réaliser ces objets d’art par des artisans renommés afin de les offrir aux européens. De cette manière, ils stimulaient le développement des ateliers. Ce patronage eut d’importantes conséquences pour la production artistique, qui s’adaptait de plus en plus au goût européen. Ce sont surtout les traits ‘mangbetu’ typiques, très populaires au début du vingtième siècle, qui plaisaient aux étrangers. Par conséquent, la production de l’art anthropomorphe des peuples voisins fut également attribuée au mangbetu. Les expéditions de l’American Museum of Natural History (*Herbert Lang, 1909-1915*), *German Central African Expedition (1907-1908 and 1910-1911)*, et le *Belgian Ethnographic Mission to the regions of the Uele and Ubangi rivers (1911-1912)* avec Armand Hutereau ont montré que beaucoup des objets et d’artistes étaient en effet zande, même si leur travail reflétait la mode du moment dans le pays mangbetu. À ce moment-là, l’art était produit plus pour des raisons séculières que pour des raisons religieuses.

L’influence européenne transformait certains types d’objets traditionnels; pour la première fois ils devenaient des porteurs des éléments anthropomorphes. La poterie est un bon exemple: des têtes étaient ajoutée à une longue tradition de pots d’utilité en pratique et décoré. La poterie figurale se manifestait au début de l’ère coloniale. Le style de la poterie figurative était naturaliste, c’était surtout l’allongement typique de la tête qui s’ajoutait à l’ensemble. L’ouverture du pot était formée par la coiffure d’une femme mangbetu. Ces pièces figuratives n’étaient pas utilisées quotidiennement, mais suffisaient juste à démontrer le statut et la richesse de la propriétaire. Souvent cette poterie anthropomorphe trouvait une fonction comme cadeaux prestigieux.

Au début de l'époque coloniale les mangbetu étaient aussi réputés pour les boîtes en écorce à couvercle anthropomorphe. Ces boîtes sont, comme beaucoup d'autres objets de ménage, un bon exemple de l'influence européenne, comprenant des éléments figuratives. Beaucoup de publications décrivent ces boîtes incorrectement comme des récipients pour le miel ou des reliques des ancêtres alors qu'ils étaient généralement utilisés pour y garder des bibelots, des habits, des trésors personnels et des porte-bonheurs. Malgré le fait que les étrangers stimulaient la production de l'art anthropomorphe, on est convaincue que des couteaux à poignées anthropomorphe étaient en effet fabriqués pour usage locale. Beaucoup de ces pièces figuratives étaient produites afin de montrer la richesse et la position sociale de la propriétaire. Tous les hommes importants portaient ces couteaux magnifiquement décorés. Les couteaux n'avaient d'ailleurs pas seulement une fonction d'utilité mais aussi une fonction de prestige. Les femmes du ménage du chef, comme sa mère, ses femmes, ses sœurs et ses filles possédaient les tabourets. Seul ceux des femmes les plus importantes étaient décorés avec des clous en cuirs. Ces tabourets accompagnaient leurs propriétaires féminines partout. Les boucliers mangbetu étaient efficaces, non seulement comme arme de guerre, mais aussi comme symbole d'ethnicité et d'organisation politique. La forme rectangle du bouclier marquait l'identité mangbetu; c'était notamment pendant la bataille que ces boucliers étaient faciles à distinguer des boucliers oblongues zande. Les boucliers du chef étaient normalement nettoyés pour qu'une couleur blanche naturelle apparaisse. C'étaient aussi uniquement ces boucliers qui étaient décorés avec des plumes.

Trois types d'instruments de musique étaient utilisés chez les mangbetu. En dehors de la musique et la danse performée à la cour du chef, il y existait de la musique rituelle et de la musique destinée pour le divertissement. Chez les mangbetu la musique et la danse étaient une partie intégrale de la vie politique. La réputation du chef dépendait en partie de ses talents de danse. Certains instruments musicaux étaient uniquement utilisés dans un contexte royal, et symbolisaient le pouvoir et le prestige du chef, comme les trompes en ivoire et des petits tambours à fente. On jouait ces trompes dans l'orchestre du chef pendant des séances de danse cérémoniale de la cour. En outre, ils étaient utilisés pour annoncer l'arrivée et le départ du chef, aussi bien que ses victoires de guerre. Après l'arrivée des européens, la valeur de l'ivoire augmenta considérablement, par lequel la fonction des grandes trompes devenaient plutôt symbolique, comme objet de prestige. Le pouvoir des chefs mangbetu était également symbolisé par un tambour à fente plat. Il était utilisé pendant des sessions de danse mais montrait surtout le pouvoir de sa propriétaire. Le tambour de fente était également utilisé pour annoncer l'arrivée du chef quand il voyageait. Dernièrement, il signalisait aussi la consommation de vin de palme ou de bière par le chef. La musique destinée au divertissement était jouée par

un soliste, accompagné d'un chanteur ou d'un autre musicien. Il jouait sur des petits instruments comme le sanza, la cithare sur bâton et la harpe. Généralement, il chantait des chansons d'amour et des ballades. La harpe en particulier devint populaire lors du début du vingtième siècle. L'évidence linguistique suggère que la harpe a été introduite depuis de la région du sud. Par contre, les éléments anthropomorphes montraient probablement une influence nordique.

Les mangbetus aristocratiques passaient une majorité de leur temps à leur apparence physique. La tête était clairement le focus de l'esthétique personnelle. La forme de la tête, la coiffure et les ornements (comme des épingles, des chapeaux et des peignes), portés par des hommes et des femmes, étaient d'une grande importance. Les hommes portaient des chapeaux qu'ils attachaient à leur coiffure à l'aide d'épingles. Souvent des plumes aussi étaient attachées au chapeau. Des plumes d'aigle et le panache rouge du perroquet gris étaient réservés pour les chefs. Pourtant les chefs donnaient parfois ces matériaux hautement considérés à leurs sujets loyaux. La plupart des chapeaux étaient uniquement utilisés comme objet ornemental, mais certains avaient une signification spécifique. Par exemple il existait des chapeaux destinés au deuil suite au décès d'un parent comme un enfant ou un membre de la famille. Une grande variété des matériaux comme du bois, du cuivre, du fer, et de l'ivoire servait pour la production des épingles. Ce sont particulièrement les épingles en ivoire qui étaient prestigieuses et qui indiquaient la richesse. Notamment, toute la partie pointue de la défense d'éléphant était nécessaire pour produire une seule épingle fine se terminant par un disque (qui était censé représenter le rayonnement du soleil). Les épingles étaient portées par des hommes et des femmes: les hommes pour fixer leur chapeau et les femmes dans leur coiffure. Les épingles étaient souvent offertes comme cadeau entre amis et jouaient également un rôle dans le jeu du flirt. Au début du vingtième siècle, les femmes mangbetu portaient un cache fesses pour couvrir leurs derrières. Les femmes créaient une variété étonnante de dessins et chaque femme avait son propre style. L'habitude était d'utiliser des feuilles de bananes parce que celles-ci étaient solides et facile à peindre en noir. La plupart des créations étaient géométriques et symétriques. Le mouvement du cache fesses était considéré comme étant désirable, spécialement pendant la danse.



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Portrait of Akido, Mangbele tribe. Photographed by Herbert Lang in Okondo's village, May 1913. (AMNH, #224173)



Portrait of Ganzi, Mangbele tribe. Photographed by Herbert Lang in Niangara, May 1913. (AMNH, #224185)



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