Ritual Masks of the Chokwe

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The majority of the Chokwe, a matrilineal Bantu people estimated to number more than 600,000, inhabit northeastern Angola between the Kwango and Kasai rivers. At some point in a history that dates back to the end of the fifteenth or the sixteenth century and remains rather obscure (Bastin 1978: 30-41), Lunda chiefs invaded what is now Angola, conquering the local people, who may have been of Mbwela stock. From these origins the Chokwe emerged to develop their own culture. From 1860 on, they grew at an astonishing rate (see Miller 1969). At the end of the nineteenth century, the Chokwe had expanded into the regions of Kwango (Bandundu), Kasai, and Shaba, located in present-day Zaire, where a large number still reside (Boone 1961, 1973), and in the first decades of this century, they pushed into northwestern Zambia (McCulloch 1951).

Chokwe culture seems to have reached its peak during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the era of the great chiefdoms. At their courts a prestigious style of art unfolded, but it disappeared when the important chiefdoms of the original homeland fell into decline; the almost seminomadic lifestyles of the Chokwe of the outer territories did not incorporate works exalting the sovereign, such as statues of the chief and scepters. The deterioration of the ancient courts was not only a result of expansion: famine and disease, mainly smallpox, ravaged central Angola in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and the situation was aggravated by war and the new colonial presence. Nevertheless, the chief (muwananga) today retains his political, legal, and, above all, religious authority over his subjects, ruling with the support of the ancestors, to whom a cult is devoted. Traditional culture has been little disturbed by the various upheavals of the past: despite expansion, the language shows only a few regional variations in pronunciation, and the social and religious traditions are characterized by remarkable continuity and homogeneity. This paper will deal with some aspects of Chokwe ancestral beliefs as they relate to certain masks, using information obtained mainly from two Chokwe chiefs, Sachombo and Sakumbu.

Hamba

A hamba (pl. mahamba) is an ancestral or nature spirit to which a cult is dedicated. Mahamba are represented by trees, pieces of termite mounds, intentionally simplified figurines, and by masks. It is through these symbolic representations that prayers, offerings, and sacrifices are sent to the spirits in order to insure their protection in everyday life and to soothe them if they have been angered by a follower’s neglect, a dispute among their descendants, or the failure to observe some act of homage. An angry hamba may cause the offender to fall ill. Women may have gynecological problems, and a man may be unlucky in the hunt. A Chokwe may also become sick if he is caught by a malevolent spirit. When walking through the bush or near a river, a person might chance to step on or touch scrapings of medicine or clothing abandoned after an exorcism. The banished spirit still remains in these materials and possesses its new victim.

The Chokwe distinguish between the ancient mahamba (mukuluma) of the ancestors and the parasitic mahamba (yipwiy), which have become attached to the former. Some of the yipwiy are foreign in origin. They are at their most dangerous when they cause illness, and they are also the most difficult to appease.

The mahamba mukuluma include the aijmu, who represent the lineage’s paternal and maternal ancestors and are symbolized by two termite mounds (Fig. 1). A displeased aijmu causes only minor illness, which the cult priest, the ancestors’ highest-ranking descendant, can cure by simply crushing a leaf between the palms of his hands. Other mahamba mukuluma bring good luck to hunters, insure the fertility of women, and aid diviners; they have their own cults and rituals. Only those mahamba that cause sickness (yikola) will be considered here.3

When a Chokwe falls ill, his relatives treat him with medicine considered effective. If the desired result is not obtained, a doctor who is knowledgeable about plants, either with respect to their healing powers or their symbolism or magic significance, is summoned. Should the illness continue or worsen, a relative consults the diviner (tahiti). Of the several traditional Chokwe divination instruments (ngombo), the one presently in most widespread use is the ngombo ya cisuka, a round basket containing sixty small symbolic objects (Fig. 1). The tahiti shakes the basket, and the subsequent pattern reveals the cause of the illness, usually a hamba spirit that the tahiti specifically names.

Illness caused by mahamba other than aijmu requires a ritual process that can be quite lengthy. Treatment is directed by a cimbanda, a man or woman who has been exorcised of the same spirit and has subsequently become a member of its cult. It takes place in front of the entire village and some of the victim’s relatives who have come especially for the ceremony. Armed by the sound of tambourines and the clapping crowd, the cimbanda induces a fit of possession in the sick per-

I. DIVINER SAMBAU MIRANDUMBA WITH HIS DIVINATION BASKET (NGOMBO YA CISUKA) WITH THE RATTLE (MUSAMBU) HE CASTS OUT EVIL SPIRITS. THE MOUNDS OF EARTH IN THE BACKGROUND REPRESENT HIS MAHAMBA AJMU. VALODIA, OCTOBER 1978.
son (mwenji), who lies on a mat. In the atmosphere of collective frenzy, the patient becomes feverish. He begins to tremble and have violent convulsions, speaking loudly and sometimes, if the spirit is foreign, incoherently. The cimbanda rubs him with medicine made from plants and clay, particularly the purifying white clay (pemba), which symbolizes innocence.

The spirit must leave the body if it is to be appeased. Exorcism is achieved when the mwenji, feeling the hamba move progressively from his feet to his head, cries out its name in a final liberating spasm; it is believed that the hamba leaves through the patient’s mouth. In naming the spirit, the mwenji confirms the tshi’s diagnosis, and an appropriate cure can now be chosen. Frequently a statuette (or one of a variety of objects), also referred to as hamba, becomes the exorcised spirit’s resting place. After a purification ceremony during which everything that has come into contact with the sick person is thrown into the bush or the river, the cimbanda initiates the patient into the cult. A domestic hen or bush antelope (depending on the type of hamba) is sacrificed in the village, a little of its blood is rubbed onto the figurine or symbol, and the animal is then cooked and eaten by the mwenji and his spouse in the presence of the cimbanda. After this meal of communion, the statuette is placed under the new initiate’s bed or in his small personal sanctuary (katunda) (Fig. 2). Once restored to health, he must perform a monthly ritual on the appearance of the first quarter of the moon or risk falling ill again: outside his house, he coats his body with the proper medicines and white clay, prays to the spirit, and honors it with a sacrifice. These curative rituals vary according to the affliction. The objects used to represent, shelter, and honor the spirit also vary, ranging from trees and termite mounds to statuettes and masks.

Mukishi

The Chokwe use the word mukishi (pl. akishi) to refer to an ancestral or nature spirit that is incarnated by a mask. The masquerader is completely covered by his disguise, wearing a skintight costume made of woven fibers and including gloves and foot coverings. Above the face mask is a sturdy but sometimes crude wicker headdress. The accessory elements of the headdress and of the costume represent in various but always traditionally correct ways the mukishi spirit to be summoned.

The mukishi is generally believed to be a person returned from the dead who rises from the earth in an area of the bush. Until recently, women and uninitiated children were forbidden to approach it or sometimes even to see it. During the bush school (mukanda), the newly circumcised adolescents were taught that the being they feared was actually an initiated man wearing the mask. Despite this revelation, however, the Chokwe preserve the belief that he who dons the mask loses his human qualities and becomes the incarnation of the spirit.

There are certain hereditary or acquired prerequisites for wearing the mask. In 1956, I asked an informant to put on a mask belonging to the Museu do Dundo so that I could photograph him; he refused, fearing the supernatural consequences, but summoned a friend authorized to wear the mask, who spit on it before placing it on his head. Alfred Haunstein (1981) who spent long years in Angola and the Ivory Coast, did a brief study of the importance of saliva and spitting in African rituals. He indicates that the act of spitting is at once a benediction, a purification, an offering, and a way of presenting a request. A Chokwe spits on the inside of a mask before putting it on to obtain the spirit’s protection and eliminate any danger of evil possession.

The Chokwe distinguish three categories of masks. The first type is the sacred sacrificial Cikungu or mukishi wa muvungana mask, representing the chief’s ancestors. Made of resin, it is carefully preserved in a small hut built in the bush on the outskirts of the village. Cikungu is brought out only on rare occasions, when a sacrifice is required for the well-being of the community. No one, male or female, is allowed to see it, except for a few aged dignitaries.

The second type is the mukishi a ku mukanda, which plays a role in the mukanda initiation. These masks, most of them of resin, are numerous and have a variety of headaddresses (Bastin 1961a: pls. 233–41). They control the mukanda, keep women away from the ceremony and, when necessary, fetch food prepared by the initiates’ mothers from the village, the women taking refuge in their homes when the masks approach. At the end of this rite of passage, the masks are burned with the bush camp. In the past, the initiates would remain at the camp for months and sometimes for years.

The third category is the mukishi a kahangana, or dance mask, made of resin or wood. They are the best-known Chokwe masks, appearing in numerous museum and private collections. Several types have lost their ritual meaning, but Cikongu and Pae, the two main types, and the oldest and most noble, have retained their magical-religious significance. The others, even in the past, were used mainly for entertainment, although they were still regarded as akishi, and therefore could not be approached or touched with impunity. Mask worn by this third type and their costumes are kept by their owners, the only ones authorized to wear or dance them. One can either inherit a mask or order it from a sculptor if one has shown skill as a dancer during the mukanda, when all the types of
dances are taught. All of these masqueraders are propitious as long as they are ritually honored.

The Chokwe have on occasion used a mask (mukishi) as a hamba, as the object of a cult: it must be worn and exhibited regularly, and, when necessary, be used in an exorcism ceremony. Cikunza, the most important mask used in the mukanda, has been known to possess this dual mystical quality of mukishi and protective spirit hamba (Baumann 1935; Bastin 1964 a; Lima 1967, 1971). Through my informants, Sachombo and Sakumbu, I have learned that the Cikungu, Cihonge, and Pavo masks also had this characteristic. These four masks will be the subject of the following discussion.

Mukishi-Hamba Cikunza

The mukishi wa Cikunza, the patron of the mukanda circumcision ritual, is a resin mask featuring a high conical ringed headdress (Bastin 1962: 11). In Chokwe, cikunza refers to a kind of grasshopper, known for its procreative powers; this mukishi, in evoking this insect, symbolizes fertility. The pointed headdress, made of wicker covered with a material made of crushed bark and decorated with grated rings, represents the horn of a large roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus), a symbol of power and virility. The Cikunza mask seeks out those to be circumcised and leads them to the bush. On approaching the village the masquerader lets out a long, strident cry so that the women will flee. In one hand he carries the mukwale sword or assegai, and in the other a citête branch (Baumann 1935: pl. 23). Cikunza is the main protective spirit for the circumcised boys during their initiation.

The hamba wa Cikunza aids hunters and infertile women. Baumann, calling it “damon” (1935: 110), indicates that its cult is widespread outside the mukanda bush camp and that it will occasionally possess a person. However, I received only favorable reports on this spirit’s influence. Small amulets representing him—with his tall headdress in the shape of a ringed horn—are carried by hunters on their rifle butts and by infertile or pregnant women on their belts (Fig. 5).

Similar in appearance to Cikunza is a small figurine used in the divination basket (ngombo ya cisuka, a microcosm of Chokwe life). Called Samukishi, it symbolizes all masks. Samukishi also has a place in the ancestral shrines of both the community and the family along with all the other protective spirits. It takes the form of a miniature table at the center of which is a small post roughly carved in the form of a Cikunza.

Mukishi-Hamba Cikungu

The mukishi wa Cikungu (Fig. 3), the largest Chokwe mask, belongs to the mwanangana and represents the malemba spirits, family ancestors. The mwanangana makes regular sacrifices to these spirits, killing a goat (pembe) or a rooster (indleka kasumbi) with the mukwale sword, symbol of power, and attaching the sacrifice to a pole of the large cota hut, the village forum and tribunal in the center of the village.

As with all masks used in rites, Cikungu’s face is made of resin. Its facial features are reputed to be larger than those of any other masks. The imposing headdress, composed of a fan-like structure in the front and back, with wings or large disks at the sides (Bastin 1962: 10), is said to represent the black stork kasumbi: (Sphenorhyncha abdimi), and the saw-tooth pattern that usually decorates the headdress is called yenge lya kumbi, which means “viper of the stork,” a poetic and esoteric allusion to Chokwe animal fables. The band of decorative triangles seen on numerous Chokwe objects is called yenge, representing the Gaboon viper (Bitis gabonica), or mapembe, representing the triangular designs on the viper’s back. The names of other Cikungu

3. CIKUNGU MASK WORN BY MWANANGANA FROM THE REGION OF CHINGUVO. ARCHIVES OF THE MUSEU DO DUNDO.
headdress patterns are known by all the members of the community, who regard them as a kind of ideogram. In the case of the ritual masks, the lateral disks represent the sun, the crescent above the forehead represents the moon, and the small dots represent stars. Thus a kind of cosmogony is inscribed on these magical objects, charging them with the forces of the universe.

I was told that the Cikungu masquerader was always a muwanangana and wore the chief's floor-length skirt of black flannel bordered at the bottom with red striped cloth. The masquerader carried the mukwule sword or a rifle. Walking slowly and solemnly, like a chief, he announced his approach by blowing into a kind of small kazoo (fun-dan) through a hole in the mouth, which produced long, low sounds resembling howling wind. It could only be viewed safely by other great chiefs or persons of importance. Upon his arrival in the village, men and women fled to their huts. In the case of an accidental meeting, a person risked being beheaded by the sacrificial mask.

Cikungu is represented by a mask, but never in sculpture. However, as the incarnation of the chief’s ancestors, this venerated and feared spirit is evoked by all statuettes of muwanangana with the characteristic winged ceremonial headdress (Bastin 1982: figs. 18, 20), as well as by carved heads depicting the chief, particularly on scepters. All of these extraordinary Chokwe creations exalt the sacred power of the muwanangana and his beneficial influence on his subjects.

If Cikungu was abandoned, or if a person forgot to honor him, the masker could attribute the illness of someone in the chief’s family to the spirit’s anger. Usually this person would be his nephew, brother, son, or principal wife. During the divination session, Cikungu was shown to have caused the illness if the musikishi figurine appeared amid the marks on the rim of the basket along with a piece of red cloth (chilela) between the accumulated dabs of white clay (pemba) and red clay (mukunzu).

A sacrifice to appease the Cikungu was then organized. The muwanangana put on his mask early in the morning in the mutenji hut constructed in the bush, and then appeared in the village holding the sword and the cisukulo “medicine,” a leafy branch of cisungu (a small savanna plant), cisuku (idem), or mutundu (a plant with edible red fruit).7

Preceded by two drummers with hourglass-shaped drums called mukupela, symbols of the chief (Bastin 1982: fig. 169), the masquerader headed for the cote hut, where he was awaited by the elderly men of the village. Cikungu killed a goat by striking it in the neck, sucked its blood, and gave the leafy branch to the eldest man near him. Then he returned to the mutenji hut. The leaves of the cisukulo were given to the wife of the sick person or the wife of the chief himself, who pounded them and mixed them with the white ritual clay (pemba), a symbol of innocence and health. The medicine was rubbed over the patient’s body. This done, the chief’s brother or nephew would cook the head of a goat in the mutenji, to be eaten by the chief and his relatives with cassava mash (condu). After the remainder of the animal was eaten by the community in a meal of communion, everyone went to sleep.

The following morning a hunt was organized to kill an antelope—a kaseshi, a kai, or a khongo—which was brought to the mutenji.8 A small amount of antelope blood was rubbed with one finger on the head of the mask as an offering. Then the male members of the chief’s family, sometimes joined by the eldest men in the village, cooked and ate the animal. These honors accorded Cikungu demonstrate the important place of this mukishi within the hierarchy of masks and its function as a protective spirit, or hamba, exclusively linked to the chief’s family.

Mukishi-Hamba Cihongo-Cimyanji

The Cihongo dance mask is very well known (Fig. 4). It represents the spirit of wealth and was worn only by the chief, his son, or his nephew. In the past they would go on tours with this mask that
sometimes lasted several months, dancing in the villages and receiving gifts in exchange for the magic force provided. These gifts were also a kind of tribute to Chongo's power. Lima mentions that in ancient times, Cihongo was an instrument of justice, accusing spectators of crimes that were often punishable by death (1967:160).

This dance mask, made of resin or wood, had a fan-shaped headdress made of light wicker and traditionally decorated with feathers (ngoma) from cisekele, kites or sparrow hawks (Milvus migrans parasitus); ngungu, a large bird with black feathers and a red beak (Bucercus caffer); kangeri, a guinea hen of the bush (Numida meleagris); or kolomei, a forest bird (Bastin 1982: 9). More recently, the fan on the headdress has been covered with cloth, also a sign of fame and wealth. A panner (cikapa) is also characteristic of Chongo. It consists of an oval hoop frame, extending out at the hips, to which are attached several rows of grass fringes (mukinda). The heavy cikapa rustles and sways back and forth when the dancer rotates his hips. This mask is often depicted on decorative objects, particularly chairs, where it can be easily identified by the headdress's fan shape (without lateral wings) and by the fringes.

My informants indicated that Chongo was formerly called Cimunji. Lima mentions having heard it on occasion (1967:160, n. 3), but the author did not explain its religious connotation. Indeed, Cimunji was a hamba as well as a mukishi, causing infertility in women, sickness in men, or unsuccessful hunting if displeased. The Chongo-Cimunji mask was kept with Cik'ungu in the mutembi hut. If the chief decided that a propitiatory sacrifice was necessary for the benefit of the village, he would announce that Cimunji was to dance the following day and that no one could leave the village. Early the next morning, he arrived in the village, carrying the mask and holding the leafy cikako, and went to the central square where everyone gathered near the cota.

There the namata, his principal wife, sacrificed a hen over the head of the mask, thus indicating that the wearer was the chief himself. The muungaga then began to dance. He handed over the cikako to the wife of the afflicted person, ordinarily a member of his family, who would later mix the pounded leaves with pemba to be rubbed over the body of her husband. Throughout the day, Cimunji danced without stopping, receiving gifts in exchange. At the end of the afternoon, he went back to the bush to undress in the mutembi hut and returned home for the evening meal with the gifts.

This description of the exorcism ceremony as it was performed in the distant past contrasts with my observations of Chongo by Samuzanga in the Dundo region. When his maternal uncle Sachombo, a Chongo dancer, died, Samuzanga inherited his mask. He danced with it once in the region of Kakalo, Mwachiri (more than 240 km away), and left it there. One day, back in his village, he fell ill. The taiko told him, after the Samukishi figureine appeared on the rim of the divination basket, that his condition was caused by his abandoning the mask. To be cured, he had to have a new one carved, honor it, and dance again with it. Samuzanga ordered a mask from the sculptor Mwachoni, wove himself a costume of fibers, and also made the cikapa. When all was finished, he killed a hen, poured blood over the mask, gave the bird to his wife for cooking, and danced in the village square near the cota. On his return, he placed the mask in the katunda hut that he had built in the bush at the rear of his house, and where he also kept his personal mahamba (Fig. 2). To end the rite, Samuzanga and his wife ate the hen. The cult is maintained at each new moon with prayer and an offering of a little cassava, which has replaced the rare white clay, and the blood from a bush animal, although the mutata admits it is now very difficult to obtain the latter.

Mukishi-Hamba Pwo

This popular female mask (Fig. 6) is also a hamba in nature, but only for its owner. Although usually sculpted of wood, some examples were made of resin, brought back by Théodore Delachaux in 1933 from the Upper Cunene region of Angola, and are in the collections of the Musée d'Ethnographie in Neuchâtel, Switzerland (Bastin 1982: fig. 38). The name of the mask is Pwo, "Woman," or Pwo Pwo, "Girl." It used to represent a mature woman who had proven her fertility by having a child. More recently, because of a shift in African values—perhaps under European influence—this mask has represented a girl and the hope of more offspring.

The male masquerader, incarnating the female ancestor, grants fertility to the spectators during his performance. He has fake breasts and wears a loincloth draped around his hips and a heavy beaded belt in the shape of a crescent, which bobs up and down as he moves his back. In the past these gestures were restrained and elegant in order to teach women graceful ways. When commissioning a mask, the dancer gave the sculptor a brass ring, the symbolic price of a fiancée. Treated as if it were a person, the mask was often buried after the death of the dancer, whose profession was generally passed on to his nephew.

A professional sculptor (songi) was then commissioned to produce a new mask, a process that formerly took several weeks. He worked in the bush, using as a model a woman whose beauty he admired. To this end he seized every possible opportunity to meet her and observe her physical features, including her tattoos, hairstyle, and jewelry. For this reason, the female masks are often like portraits; although they share the fundamental characteristics of all Chokwe sculpture, each piece varies subtly. The technical mastery of the sculptor, combined with the inspiration provided by his subject, explains the wide variety of sculptural expression always found in Chokwe art.

The mukishi wa Pwo adorns many objects, such as drums, sanzas, and knife sheaths. When a female image functions

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as a counterpart to a representation of the male Giphogo mask. reference is also being made to Pavo.

A Pavo mask owner who became ill customarily consulted the diviner to see if it was the Pavo mask spirit that was causing the sickness. If the dancer no longer had a mask, he had a new one carved and inaugurated it near the tree after his wife had sacrificed a hen over the mask’s head. Then he danced before the assembled guests, usually there was a large feast of communion eaten by the dancer and his wife. The same ritual was followed in the case of someone who had neglected a mask still in use. The Pavo mask was usually kept by the dancer in a mantutu hut outside the village or hidden in a basket in his own house.

 Masks among Neighbors of the Chokwe

The Lwena, who live south of the Chokwe on the plains of the upper Zambezi, possess the Katotala mask, an example of which is in the Museu do Undu’s collection (Bastin 1961b: fig. 10). The Lwena chief Salumbu, who lived in the Saurimo region and was at the museum in 1961, gave it his identification description. It is a mask of a great Lwena chief sculpted in resin on flattened bark. Exaggerated facial features are intended to suggest power and authority: a huge concave forehead, a red cotton strip covering its eyes, and large bulging spherical cheeks (matatuja a Katotala). The headress, in the shape of an oblong fan, bears, in relief, the images of various mutumah (sing. lhambum), which bring fertility and luck in the hunt.

Salumbu told me that the likishi (pl. makishi), or mask, was worn only by the chief and was most commonly used when making a sacrifice to his ancestors. But unlike the Cilienga, the Chokwe chief’s ancestral mask, the likishi Katotala does not actually perform the sacrifice. The masquerader, a flywhisk in each hand, appears in the village square, where a goat is immobilized by a cilienga assistant. Katotala then leans down to wet his mouth with some of the spilled sacrificial blood. With this act, the offering is made to the ancestors, who are incarnated by the mask itself. The makishi was carved on the coiffure suggest that in addition to its religious function, it can also have a therapeutic effect on dis-enrolled members of the community.

According to Turner (1968: 32), the Ndembu, eastern neighbors of the Chokwe, call the mask likishi. They also have a kind of mystical power and participate in circumcision rites, and they are used in funeral ceremonies as well. Turner reports that the Ndembu use the name makishi (pl. atski) to refer to a shade or ancestral spirit who afflicts a relative because he has been forgotten. In 1962—9—what the Chokwe refer to as ha mishi. Thus, different terminology is used for the same concept by these related peoples.

Ndembu masks are rare. Turner indicated that they are believed to be afe, “dead people,” and that they are helped by spirits of

the famous, such as chiefs, great hunters, rich men, fathers of many children, or people with important ancestors (Turner 1967: 235-45). Muchona, one of my informants, supplied me with the name, nature, and function of Ndembu makishi. The two main ones were Mwung’i (called Nkita, “Grandfather”), who was considered their chief; and Katotoni, who was terrible and dangerous. These masks were favorable in healing circumcision wounds. The appearance of Mwung’i was believed to be harmful to the fertility of women.

Currently, the Ndembu make use of Lwena (Luvale) masked dancers because, as they explained to Turner, their men are now working in the copper belt or in local firms, which leaves them no time to carve their traditional masks. The masks borrowed from the Lwena are Cizalaki, “The Mad One,” and Mwana Poema, “The Young Woman.” Several photos of Cizalaki were published by Turner (1967: frontispiece, figs. 6-9). They were taken during a circumcision rite and during a turunda initiation dance for hunters. The face, carved from fine resin, has a beard, which Turner calls “a symbol of chiefly authority.” The dancer holds a flywhisk. The Lwena name for this mask is the same used by the southern Chokwe (Bastin 1961: pls. 246, 247). Among both peoples, the masquerader wears an artificial erect penis attached to the costume.

The Mbweela, who live in the Kivu-Kwanavale region in southeastern Angola, have a mask that is remarkably similar to Cizalake, known as Pumaba (Kubik 1981: ill. 1). Their mukisi (sing. likisi) are of diverse origins and are connected with the mukuba bush school that follows the circumcision. According to Gerhard Kubik (1981), Pumaba is the supreme mask, representing Chief Nyumbu who, according to myth, circumcised himself to found the tradition of mkuka. Although this likisi is feared, he never strikes women. His dance, consisting entirely of a “wagging motion” (Kubik 1981: n.p.), inspires respect.

The Mbweela, whose establishment in this part of Angola dates back to well before the Lunda invasion, took their Cilama mask from the Chokwe. They believe that this likisi represents Chief Kanyika, one of the founders of the Chokwe at the beginning of the seventeenth century, though the Chokwe have never mentioned such an association. However, it can be said that this information from the Mbweela establishes that the cult of makishi-hambu-Cilama is an ancient one.

These masks are worn among peoples with cultures strongly similar to that of the Chokwe; the name of the spirit incarnated by the mask is mukisi among the Chokwe, likisi among the Lwena (Horton 1953), likisi among the Ndembu (Turner 1968: 32), and likisi among the Mbweela (Kubik 1981). In addition to these, certain masks of the neighboring Bantu peoples, such as the Pende and Suku of Zaite and the Kongo of northeastern Angola, may be related.

The Pende, of Angolan origin, have lived in the Kwango and Kasai regions since the eighteenth century, after their former homeland was conquered by the Imbangala, of Lunda stock. Leon de Sousberge has noted the chief’s mask Giphogo, of the eastern Pende (Kana) (1946: 64-65). It is a helmet mask with wide half-closed eyes and a large flat chin, decorated with small triangles (Bastin 1961b: fig. 11) and enhanced with red and white clay. A monkey skin is attached to the wooden peg atop its head. The Giphogo is part of the kumu, or treasure constituting the attributes of power. It exercises an influence on the health and fertility of the chieftain, and it confers prestige. Some examples, for example in 1952 in the village of Ngimbou, near Njinji, dancing over a sick woman together with another mask (1960: figs. 67-68). The patient, accompanied by her child, was stretched out on a blanket on the ground. The therapeutic function of the Giphogo (Kiphoko) mask has been confirmed by Malutshi Mudiji-Selingo (1981: 229-30).

Mudiji-Malamba mentions that among the eastern Pende (Kwango) the Giphogo mask comes to men like the salutary sun (1979: 193). Shaped like a half bell, its facial features are sculptured in the purest Katundu Pende style: eyes with lowered triangles, cheeks framed by thick eyebrows flowing together in a V-shape, slightly turned-up nose that reveals the nostrils, and a half-open mouth often with down-turned corners. A very long chin, carved flush with the wood of the face, and a fringe of rafia particularly characterize this mask (Sousberge 1960: frontispiece). The Giphogo is worn horizontally on the forehead. In the case of a sick person afflicted by an evil spell, writes Mudiji-Malamba, the masquerader touches him, attaches a strand of rafia from his costume to the patient’s body, and rubs him with white kaolin.

The therapeutic role of certain masks is also noted by Arthur Prosper Bumbas among the Sukuma (1981a, b). The Katongo mask and the Hembu helmet mask are associated with circumcision rites (ekanda). Katongo is a giant wooden mask, held in front of the face by a handle carved under its chin. Usually it has large eyes split in the middle, a long, narrow nose with small nostrils, and large bulging cheeks, and the rim is fringed with grass. These exaggerated features are intended to impart an impression of power and authority.

In his fine study, Bourgeois (1981a) indicates that Katongo is a ikisi (pl. mukisi), the equivalent of the Chokwe hambu. Although its usage ceased in the 1950s, he was able to collect precious information on its subject. When a new Katongo was made, a goat was immolated to protect the lineage that had commissioned it. On the same occasion, a cock or hen was killed and presented to the future guardian of the new mask. The mask, a symbol of enormous power, was brought out only in times of crisis. Worn by the head of the village or the charm specialist (ibikika), it traditionally appeared during the nkanda circumcision rite, assuring the rapid recovery and well-being of the young initiates. While Katongo had an ambivalent role, both favorable and harmful, with regard to pregnant women, he was believed to be able to cure male impotence and
female infertility, diagnosed by a diviner (Bourgeois 1981a: 32,33,36,37,39,46).

The Hembe mask of the Suku is a wooden helmet with white-enhanced facial features carved slightly in relief. The pupils are lowered toward the crescent-shaped slit that allows the wearer to see out. The nose is often painted, and the open mouth contains sculptured teeth. Suku works often have a stylized zigzag hairline, indented about the forehead and temples. The helmet is almost always toppled with a sculpted human or animal figure (Bourgeois 1981b: 32-34).

According to Bourgeois (1981b), this mask type is worn by the most qualified initiates during the closing ceremonies of the sekanda initiation and in particular circumstances in connection with the deceased. Hembe corresponds to the Suku’s collective image of their ancestors, the power of which is embodied by a Mangianese vision: “powerful charm with both dangerous and benevolent properties.” Thus, the opening article, then the grieving ceremonial problems and providing luck to hunters (Bourgeois 1981b: 32,34,37,38).

The Kongo of the Kasai, related to the Dinka and Lwalwa in Zaire, live near the Chokwe in northwest Angola, but their culture is completely different. They possess a Ngonka mask of hammer-headed brass and patinated in 1611: figs. 4-6), worn by the chief during his investiture. It is also brought out for secret funeral ceremonies. The structure of this mask is very simple. The example I saw was imitating in the nobility of its austere facial features, portrayed in a slight relief on the laterally curved metal leaf. Ngonka manere, like the Chokwe kicigu, represents the chief’s ancestors who watch over their descenders. The mask is donned in a ritual ceremony to counter an epidemic or any other disaster striking the community. When not in use it is carefully housed in a small straw shelf, placed in the fork of a large tree, and was always guarded by women and children (Bastin 1980b: fig. 7).

We have seen, then, that among the Chokwe, certain illnesses are believed to be “possession-sicknesses” (Heusch 1981: 75), attributed to a haemti spirit angered by the neglect of his cult. The Chokwe maski is a spirit incarnated by a mask. Its role is benevolent, often involving a kind of social control. Later it was learned that if the maski was not regularly honored by the donning of its mask, like the haemti it would cause illness that was curable only by a ritual atonement. Cikunza, for example, has long been known to possess this mystical power of being simultaneously multiple personalities, probably because it is represented in carved amulets or symbols visible in mahemba sanctuaries. Neighboring peoples also have such masks. However, it was only recently that aged informants, recalling a distant past, revealed to me that the abshi Cikunza, Chihone and Pue once had this dual characteristic, the divining beliefs and practices of the Chokwe. 19 This new information considerably enriches our knowledge of these prestigious masks.

**Notes, page 95**

**NEW PUBLICATIONS**

**The Art of Cameroon by Tamara Northern. Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1984. 208 pp., 35 color and 78 bw photos, 2 maps. $15.00 paper.**


**Magic with Images by Karl-Ferdinand Schaedler. Panterra, Munich, 1984. 50 pp., 6 bw and 1 color photograph, bibliography: $9.00 paper.**


**Costumes and Featherwork of the Lord of Chimu: Textiles from Peru’s North Coast by Ann Pollard Rowe. Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 1984. 100 pp., 242 bw and 27 color illustrations, map, bibliography: $35.00 paper.**


**A Treasury of African Art from the Harrison Eitel Collection by Theodore Celenko. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1983. 248 pp., 369 bw and 60 color photos, 9 maps, bibliography:**

**ARNOLD, notes, from page 31.**

1. The exhibition “Somalia in Word and Image” is funded by a grant from the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education of the Somali Democratic Republic, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and private grants to the Foundation for Cross Cultural Understanding. The show is tentatively scheduled to travel to the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.; the Lowe Museum, University of Miami, the Florida, Gainesville; the University of Nebraska, and the Museum of Cultural History, UCLA; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.


**Bibliography**


