DU
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N


Bamana
Senufo
Baule
Fang
Kota
Tsogo
Lumbu
Kongo
Lwalwa
Lega
Hemba
Atlantic Ocean
Indian Ocean

Mali

Female Ancestor Figure

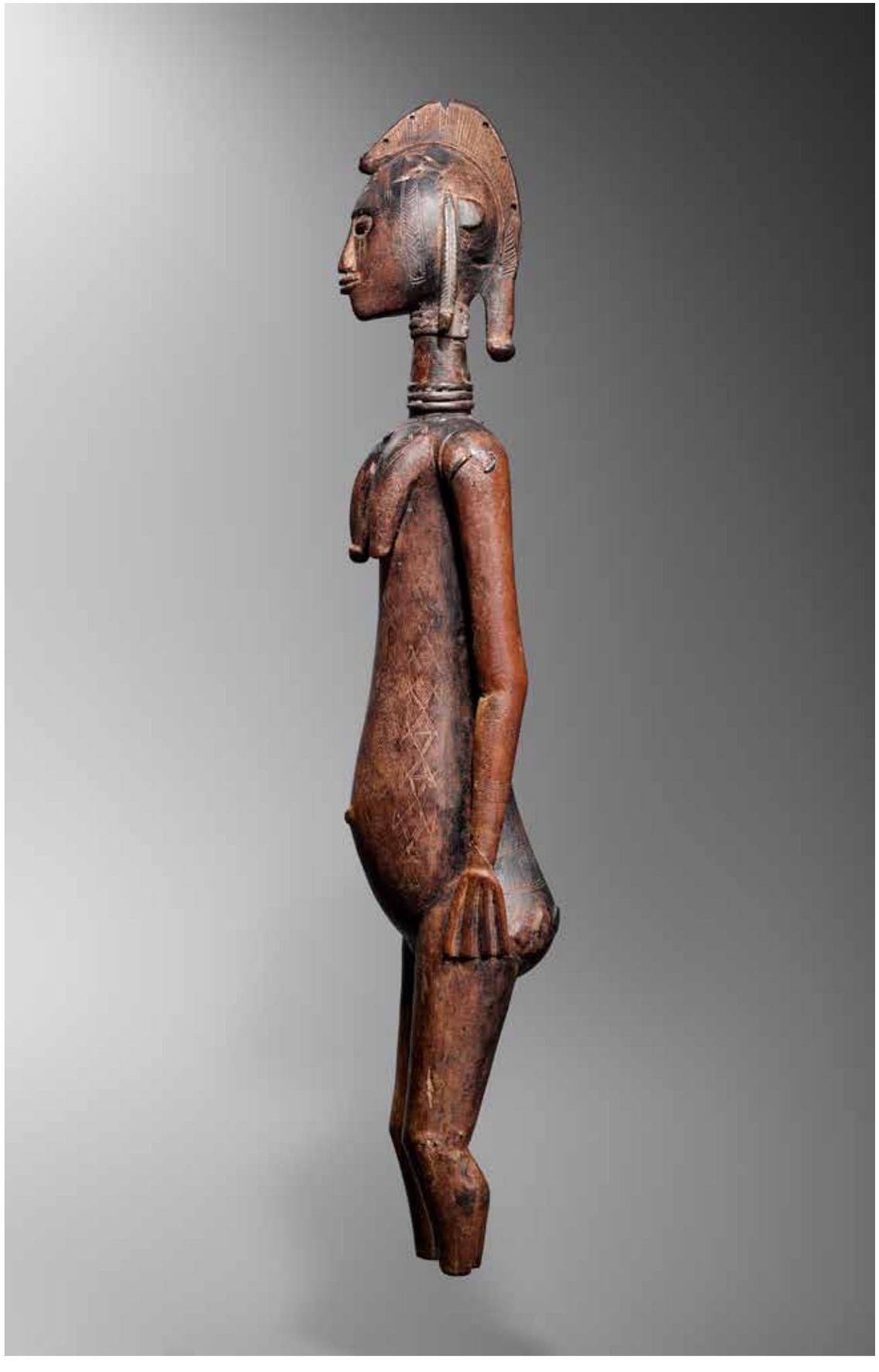
P. 8 → Text P. 91

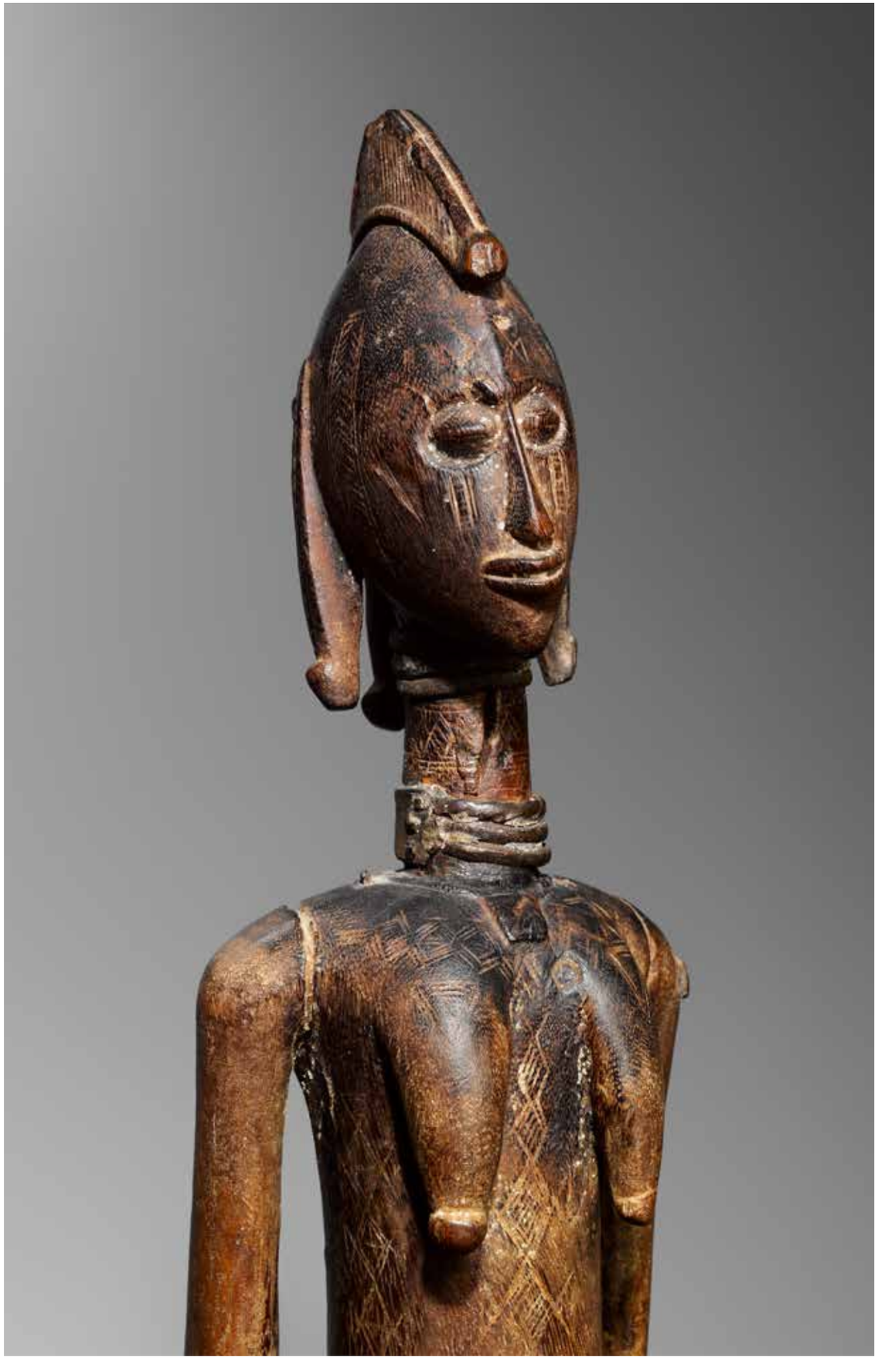
Bamana People

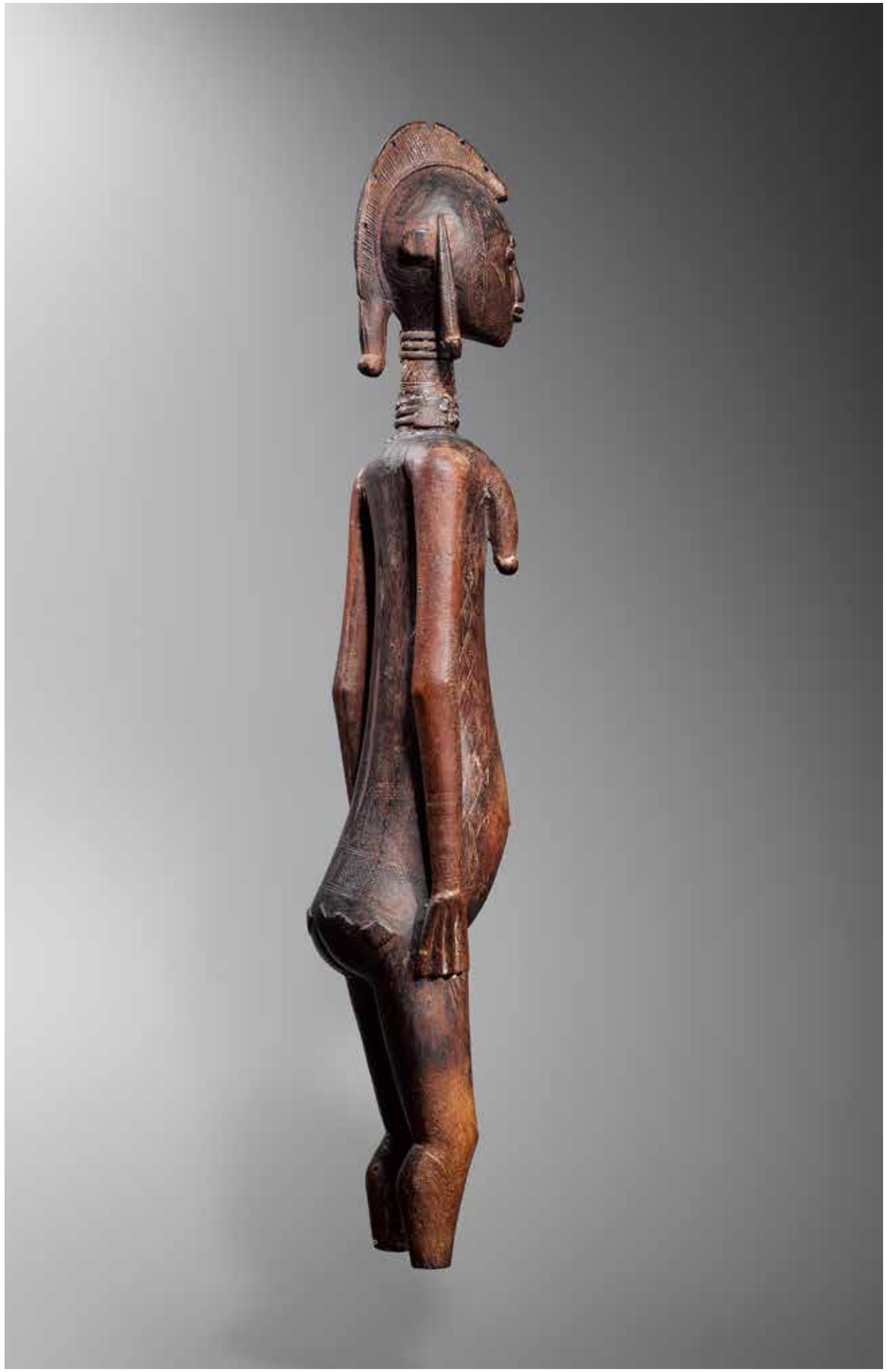
16th Century (c-14 tested)
Hardwood with rich overall patina,
iron, brass
Height: 61 cm

Provenance:
Gustave & Franyo Schindler Collection, USA

Publications & Exhibitions:
Masks and Sculptures from the Collection of Gustave and Franyo Schindler, Museum of Primitive Art, New York, 1966, cat. 48







Ivory Coast

Standing Cup-Bearer Figure

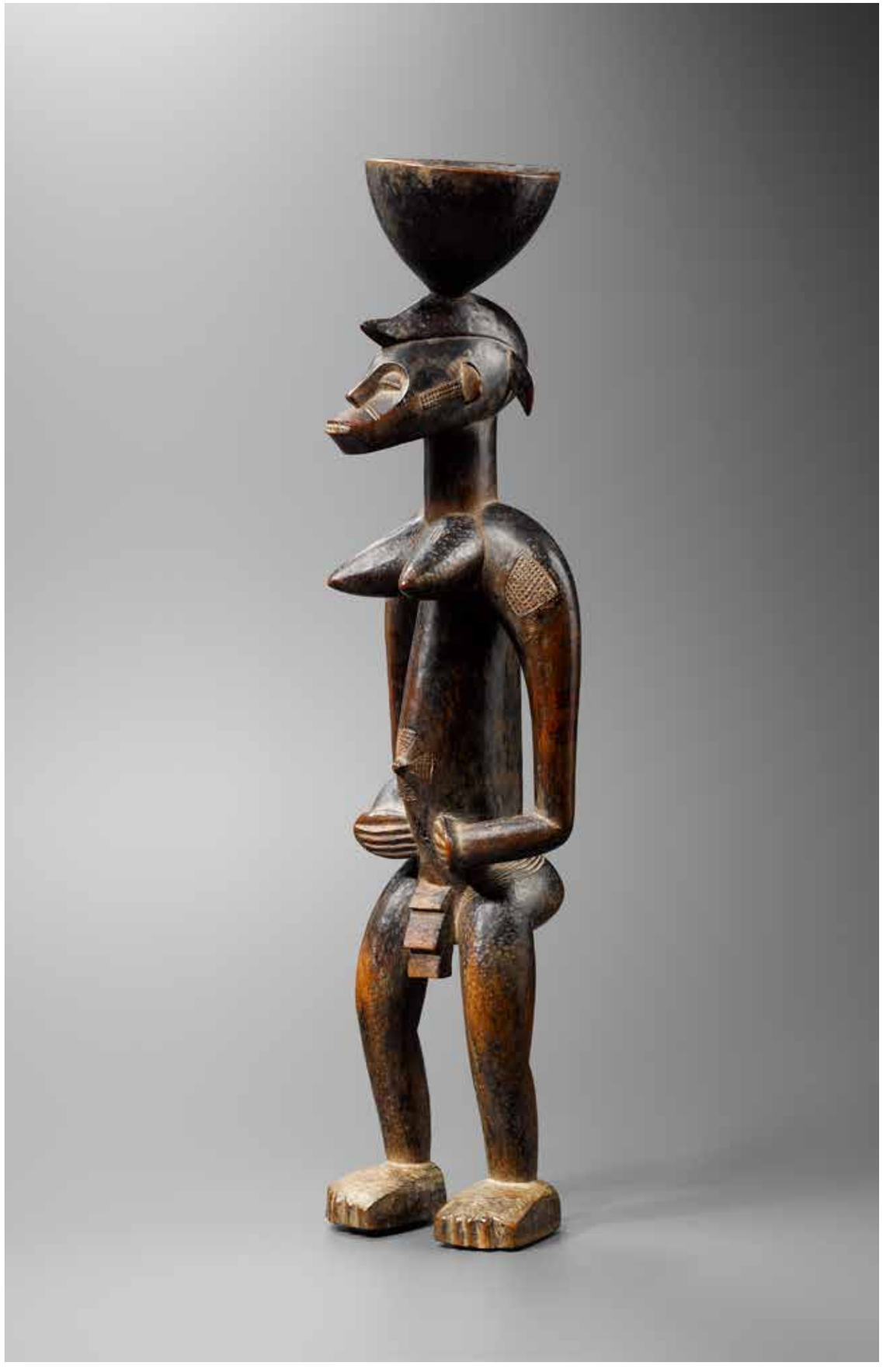
P. 14 → Text P. 93

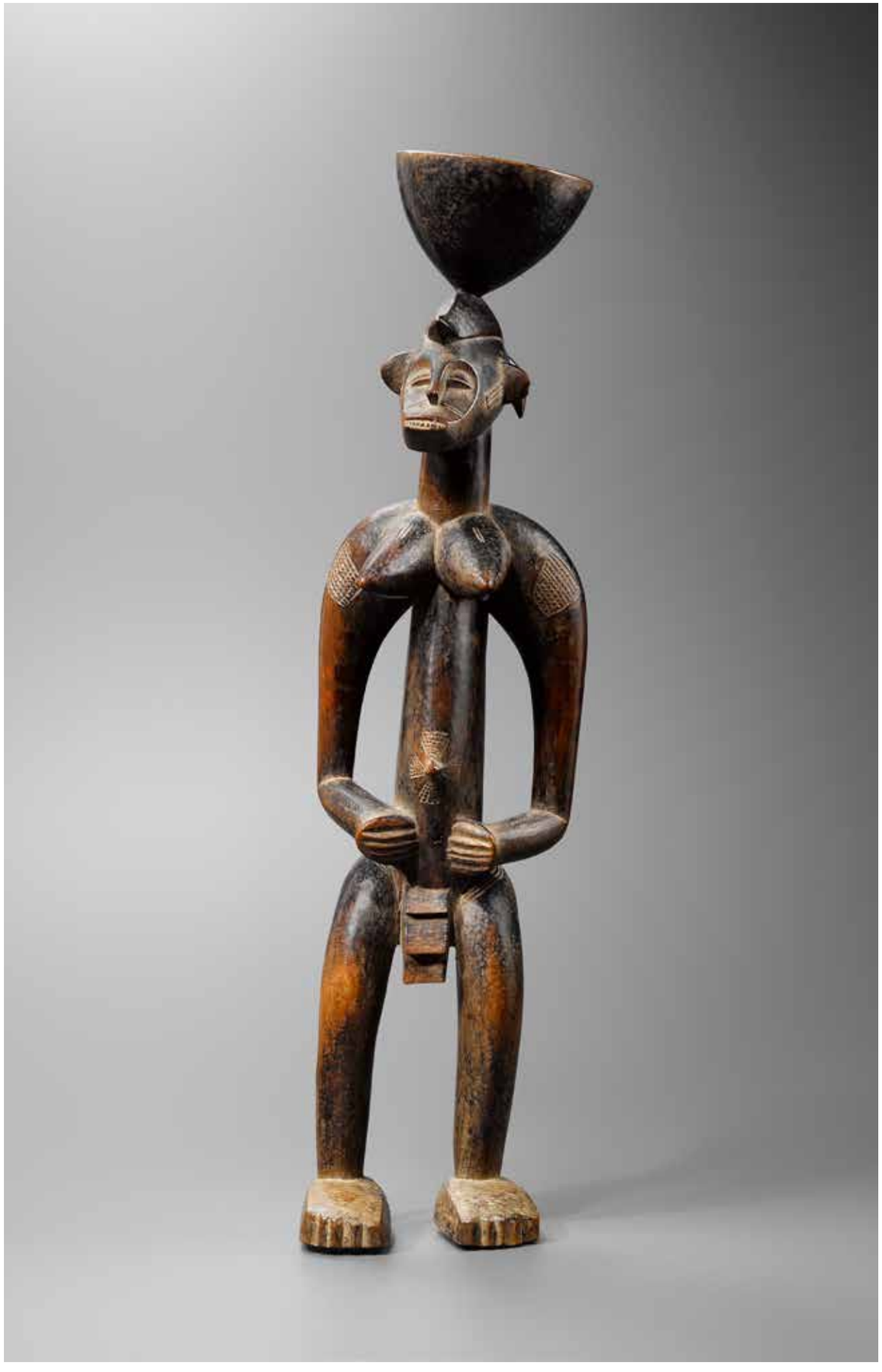
Senufo People

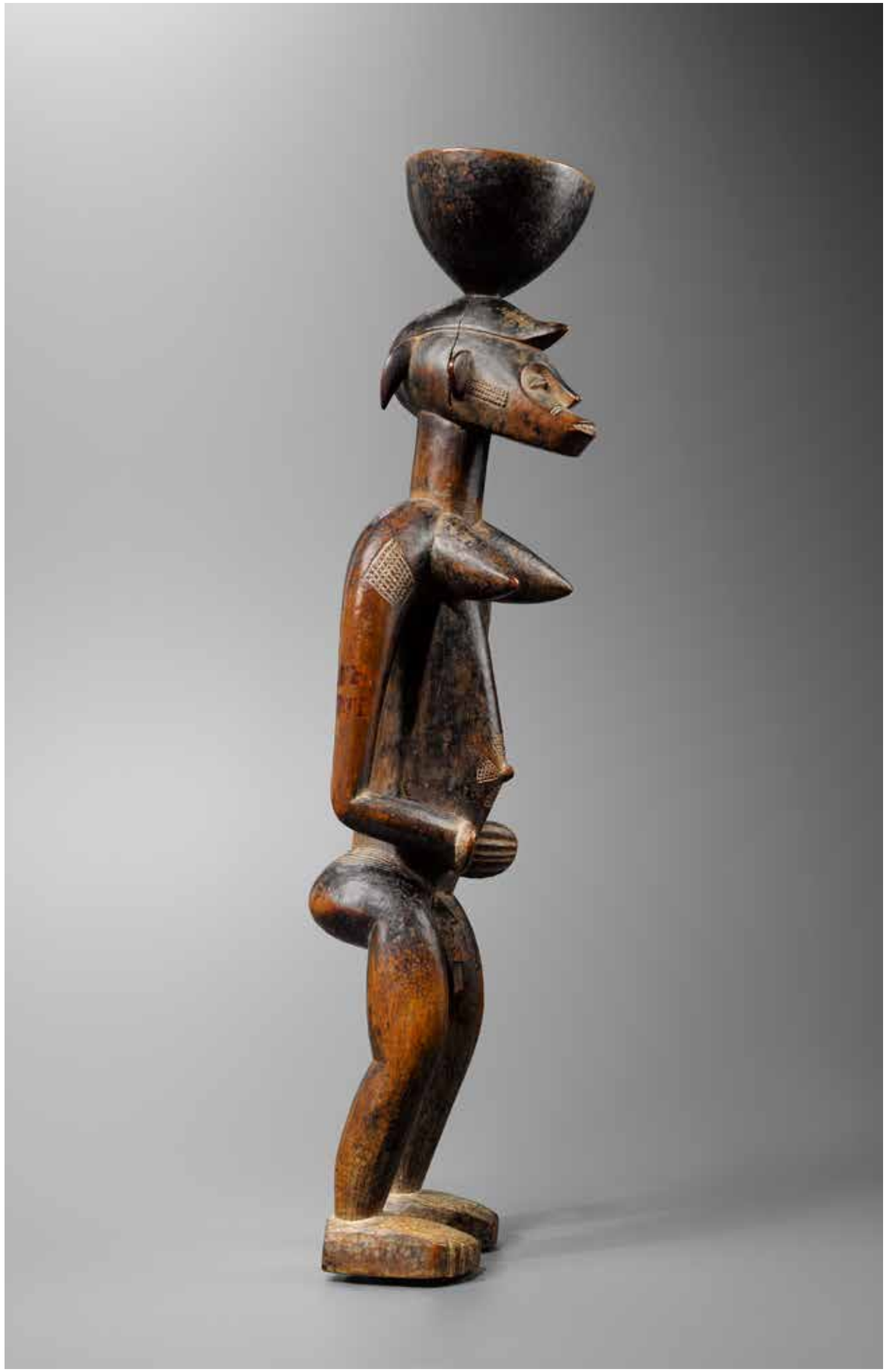
19th Century
Wood
Height: 67 cm

Provenance:
Henri Kamer, Paris
Jacques Boussard Collection, Paris
Private Collection, Paris

Publication:
“Senoufo, trésors inconnus des collections privées,” Burkhard Gottschalk; trans. Anne Kneip, *L’Art du Continent Noir*, Vol. 3, 2009, nº 105







Ivory Coast

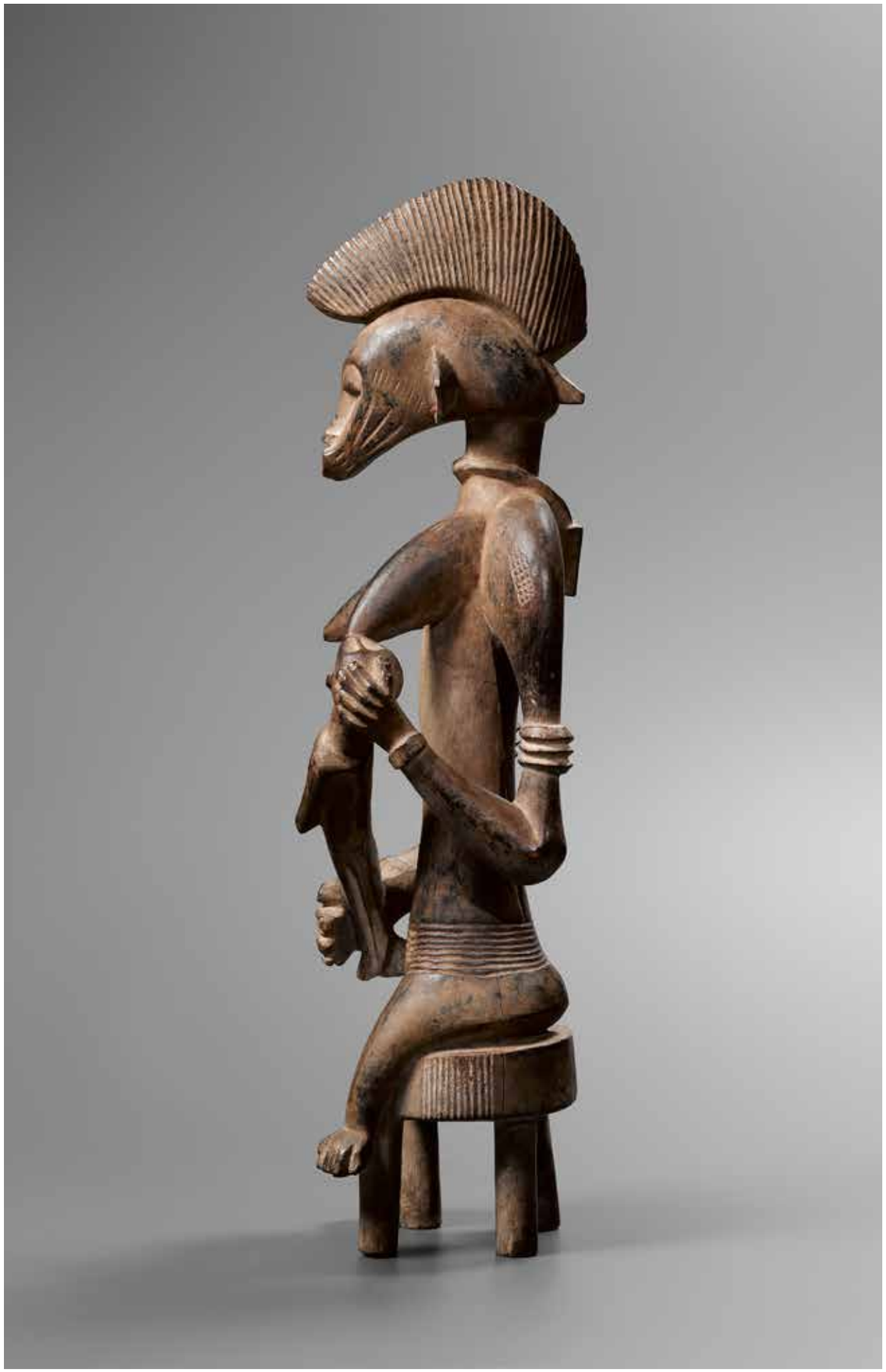
Mother and Child

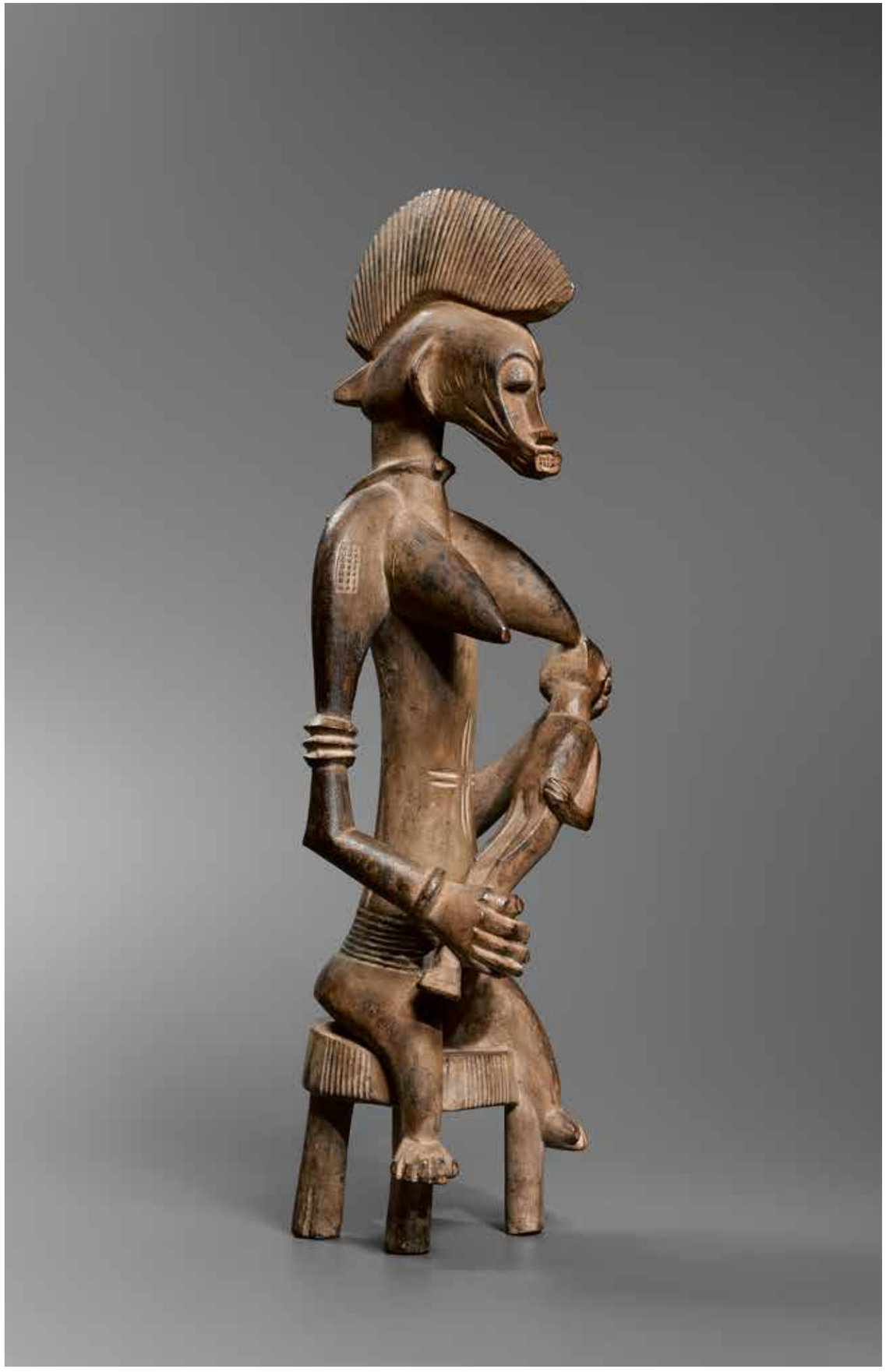
Senufo People

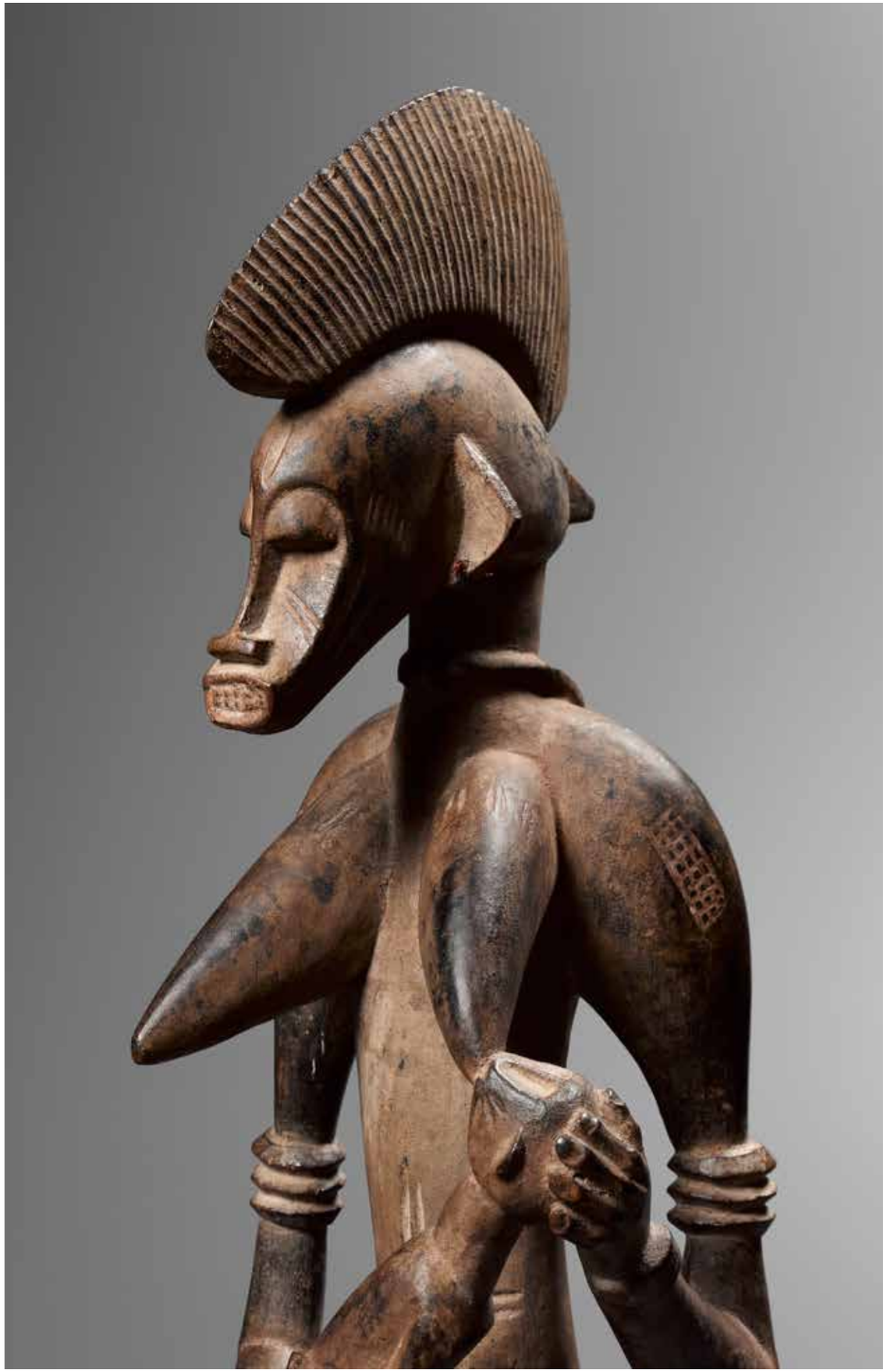
19th Century
Wood
Height: 68 cm

Provenance:
Collected *in situ* at the end of the 1950s
Jean-Michel Huguenin Collection, Paris

An example carved by the same
artist belongs to Afrika Museum
in Berg-En-Dal.







Ivory Coast

Female Figure

P. 26 → Text P. 107

Baule People,
Sakasu Master

19th Century
Wood
Height: 48 cm

Provenance:
Private Collection, USA

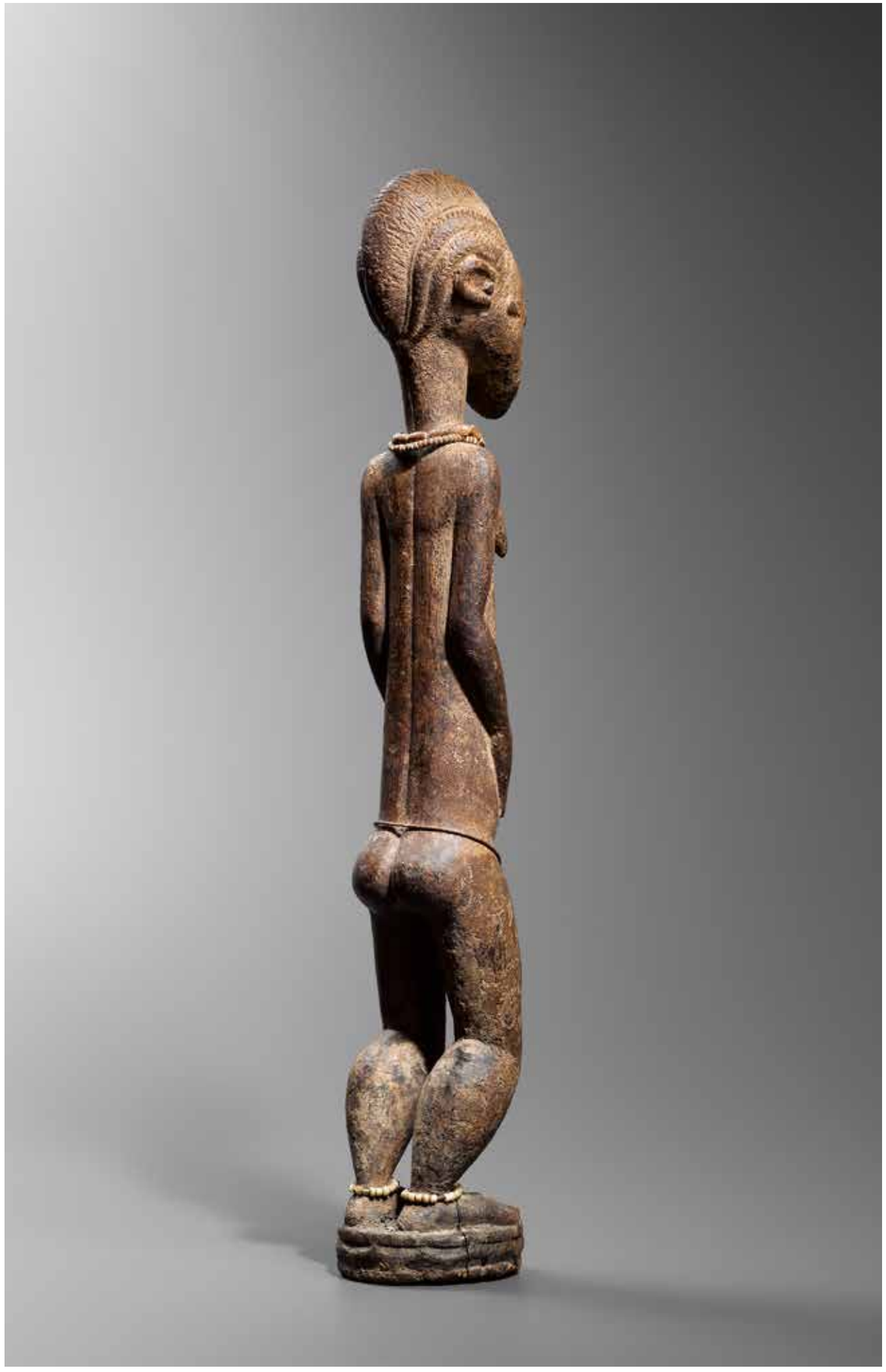
Publications:
Arts d'Afrique Noire, nº 69,
Spring 1989, cover
Masterhands, Bernard de Grunne,
2001, p. 75, cat. 16

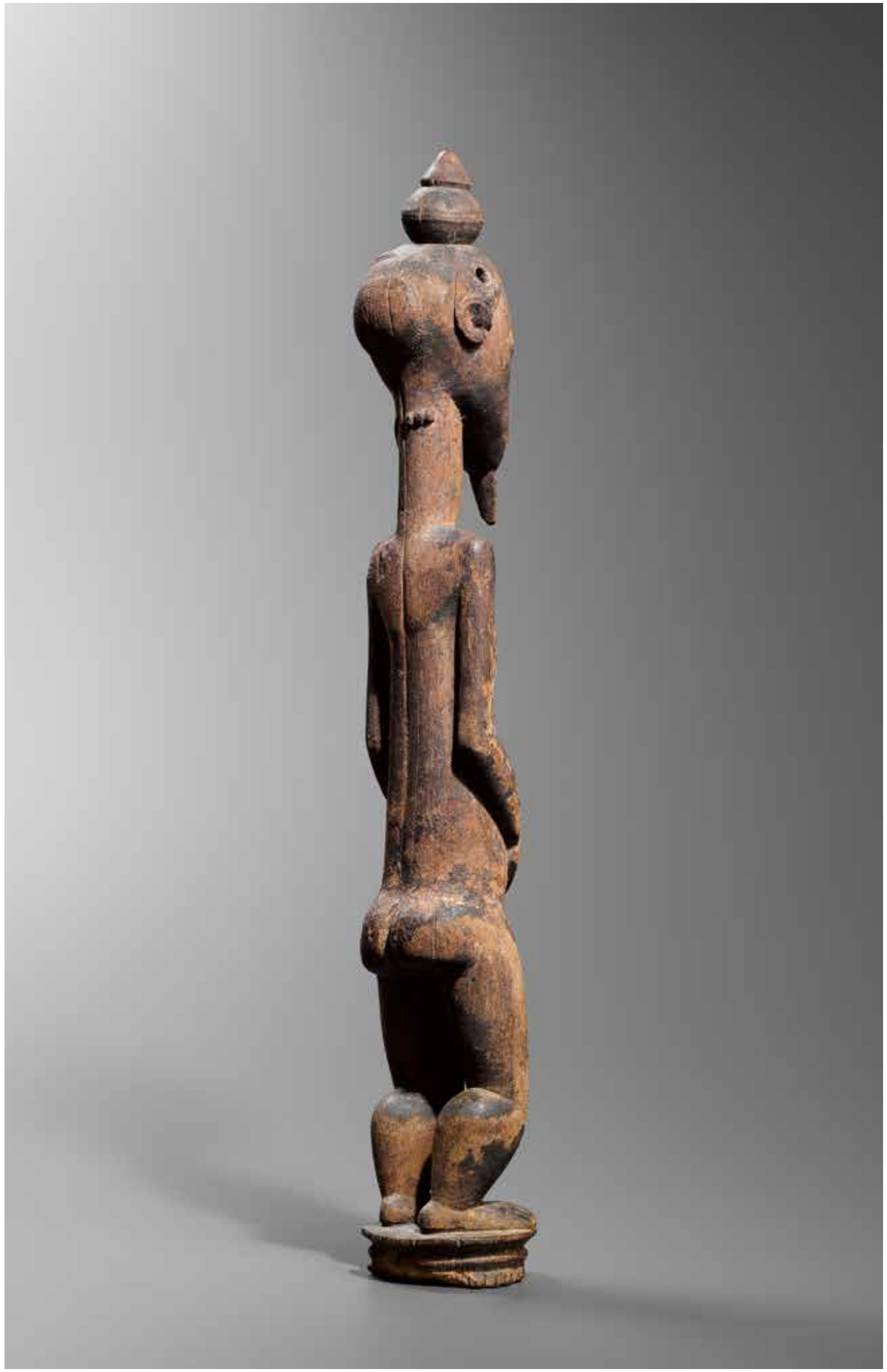
Male Figure

19th Century
Wood
Height: 48 cm

Provenance:
Private Collection, USA

Publication:
Masterhands, Bernard de Grunne,
2001, p. 76, cat. 17





Equatorial Guinea

Fang-Okak People

Ancestor Figure, Eyema Byeri

P. 32 → Text P. 111

19th Century
Wood with black oozing patina, metal
Height: 58 cm

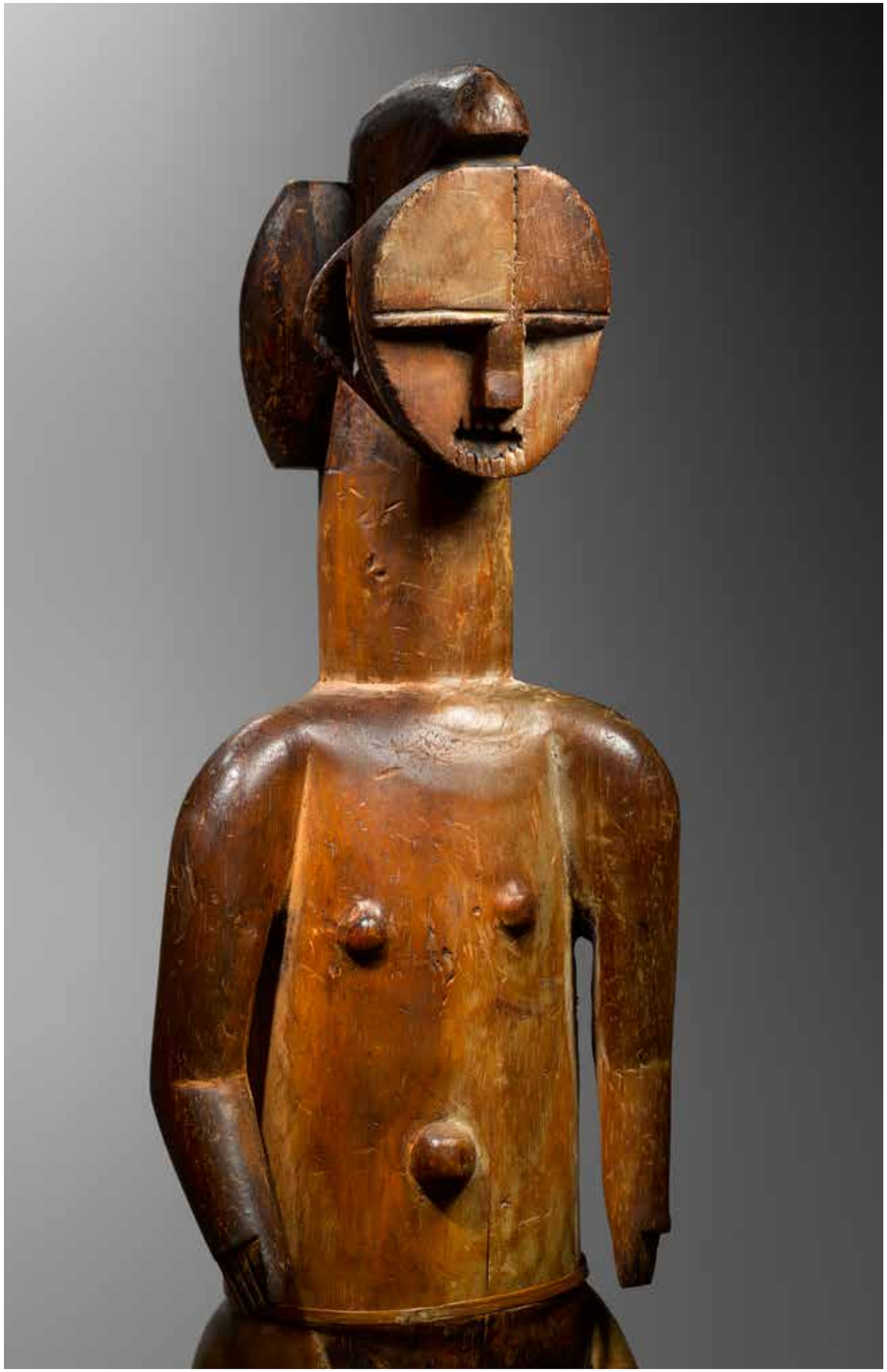
Provenance:
Collected in situ, pre-1930
Jaume Arnal Collection, Barcelona
Private Collection, USA

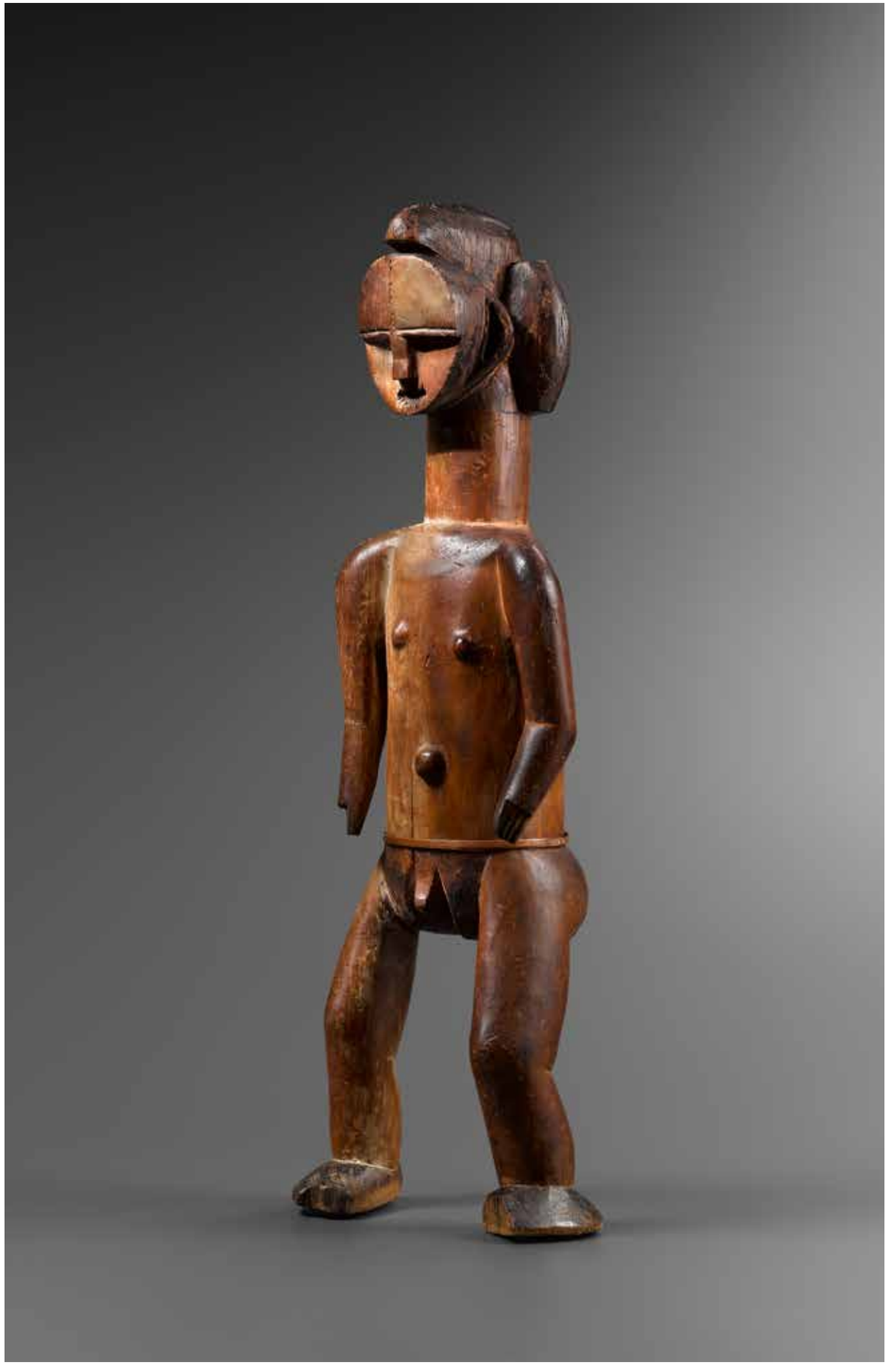
Exhibition:
Mothers, Fathers, and Legendary Ancestors: Selections of Classical African Sculpture,
Studio Museum in Harlem,
New York, 1995

Gabon-Congo Female Statue P. 38 → Text P. 112

Kota-Aduma People 19th Century
Wood, kaolin, wicker
Height: 49.5 cm

Provenance:
Jean Cuisenier Collection, France





Gabon

Reliquary Figure

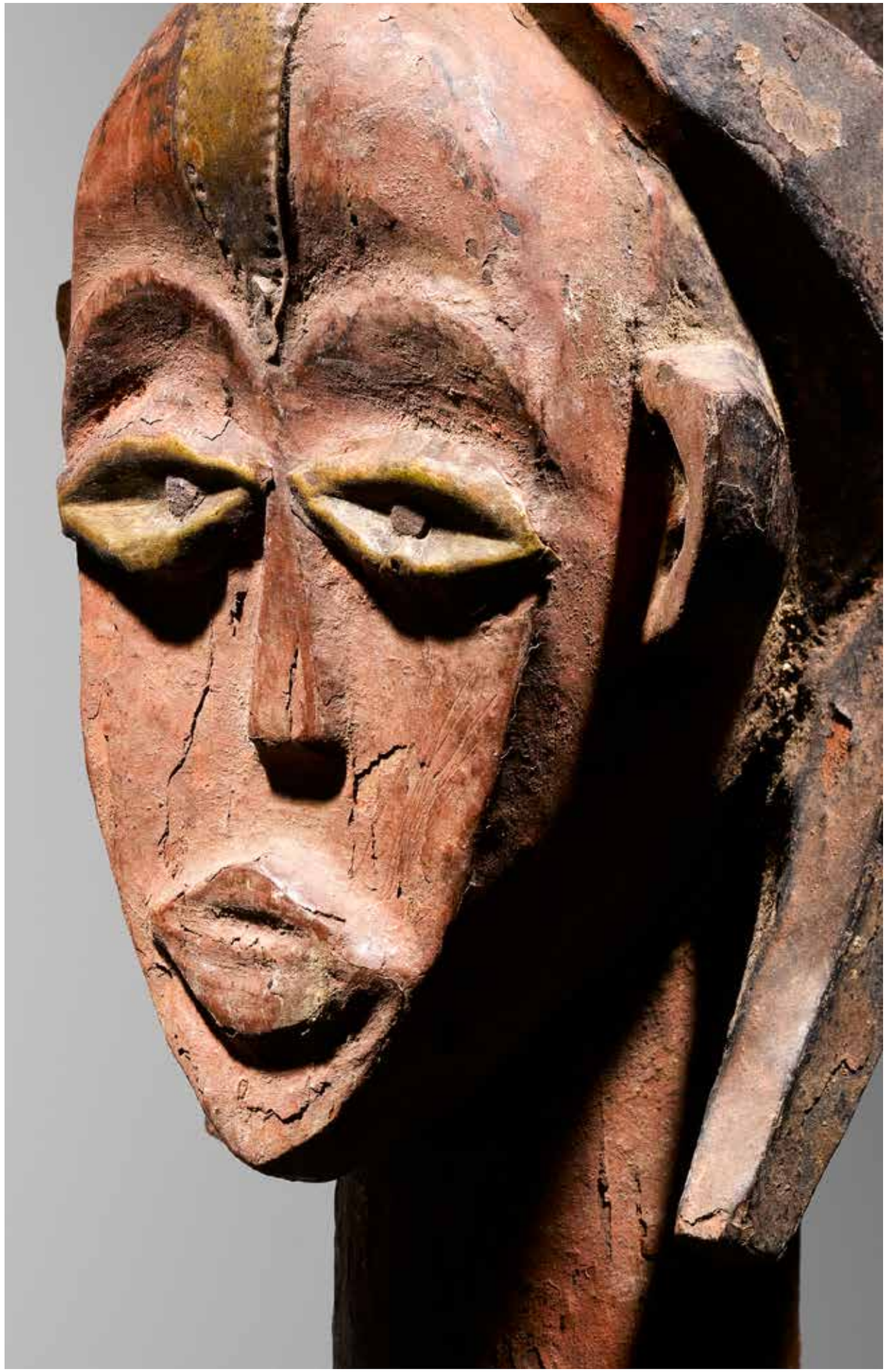
P. 44 → Text P. 114

Tsogo People

19th Century
Wood, natural pigments, metal
Height: 40 cm

Provenance:
Collected in situ pre-1923

Publication:
Tsogho, les icones du bwiti, Bertrand Goy, Gourcuff Gradenigo & Gal. B. Dulon, 2016, p.124



Gabon

Reliquary Figure, "The Young Girl"

P. 50 → Text P. 115

Tsogo People

18th–19th Century (c-14 Test)
Wood, copper, padauk, kaolin
Height: 44.5 cm

Provenance:
Collected in situ pre-1923

Publication:
Tsogho, les icônes du bwiti, Bertrand Goy, Gourcuff Gradenigo & Gal. B. Dulon, 2016, cover & pp. 185, 188, 189

Lumbu People

19th century
Wood
Height: 13 cm

Provenance:
Collected in situ pre-1923

Publications:
“La statuaire lumbu, un art tout en finesse révélé au début du XXe siècle,”
Charlotte Grand-Dufay, *Tribal Art Magazine*, nº 77, 2015, p.125, fig. 35
Les Lumbu, un art sacré,
Charlotte Grand-Dufay,
Gourcuff Gradenigo & Gal. B. Dulon,
2016, pp. 180-181, fig.121 (a&b).

D. R. of Congo

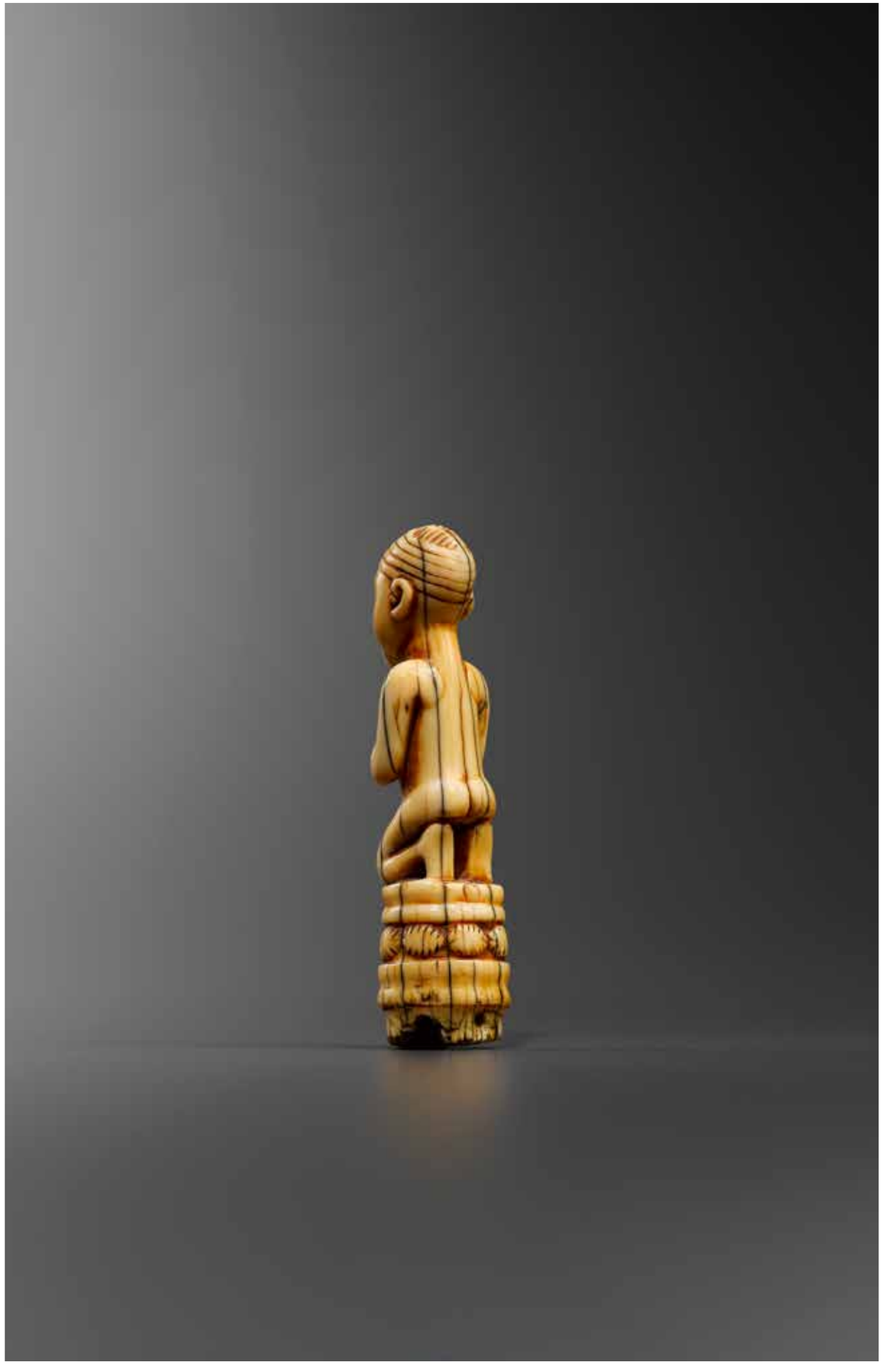
Pommel for Scepter

P. 62 → Text P. 120

Kongo People

19th Century
Ivory
Height: 12.2 cm

Provenance:
Private Collection, UK



D. R. of Congo

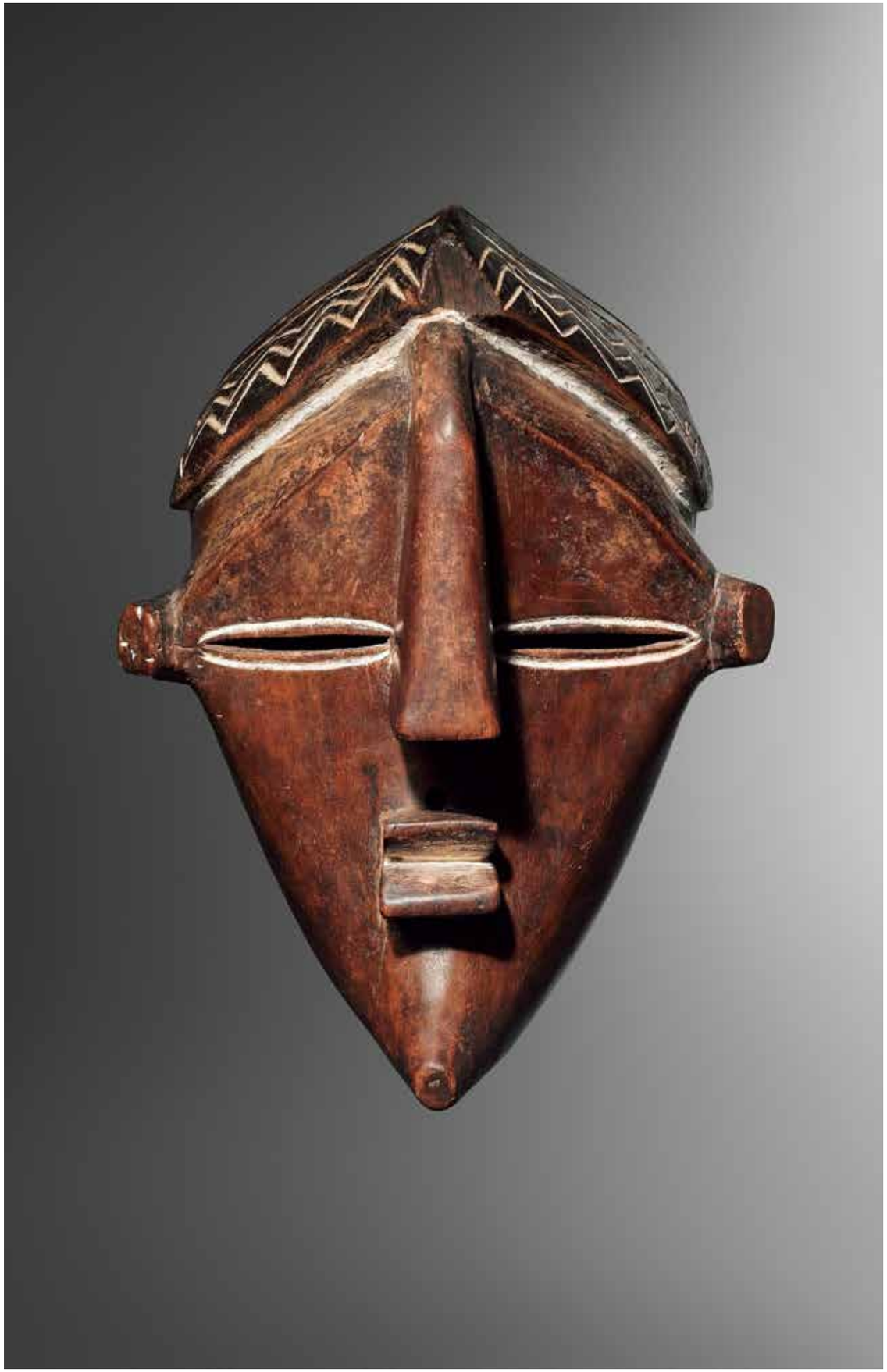
Mask

P. 68 → Text P. 121

Lwalwa People

19th Century
Wood
Height: 30 cm

Provenance:
Private Collection, Brussels



D. R. of Congo — Male Ancestor Figure — P. 74 → Text P. 123

Hemba People
Niembo Style

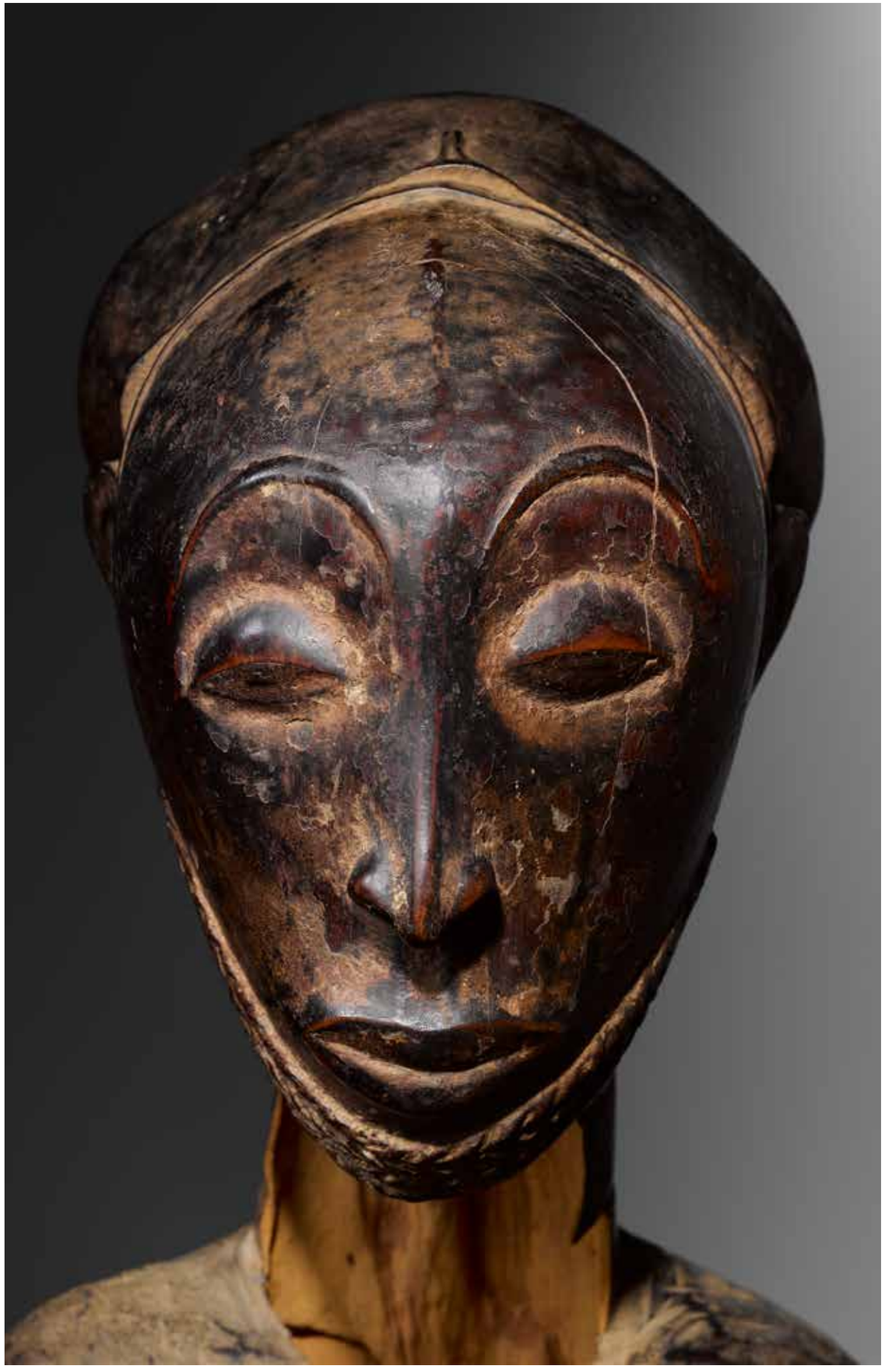
19th Century
Eroded wood with black patina
Height: 73 cm

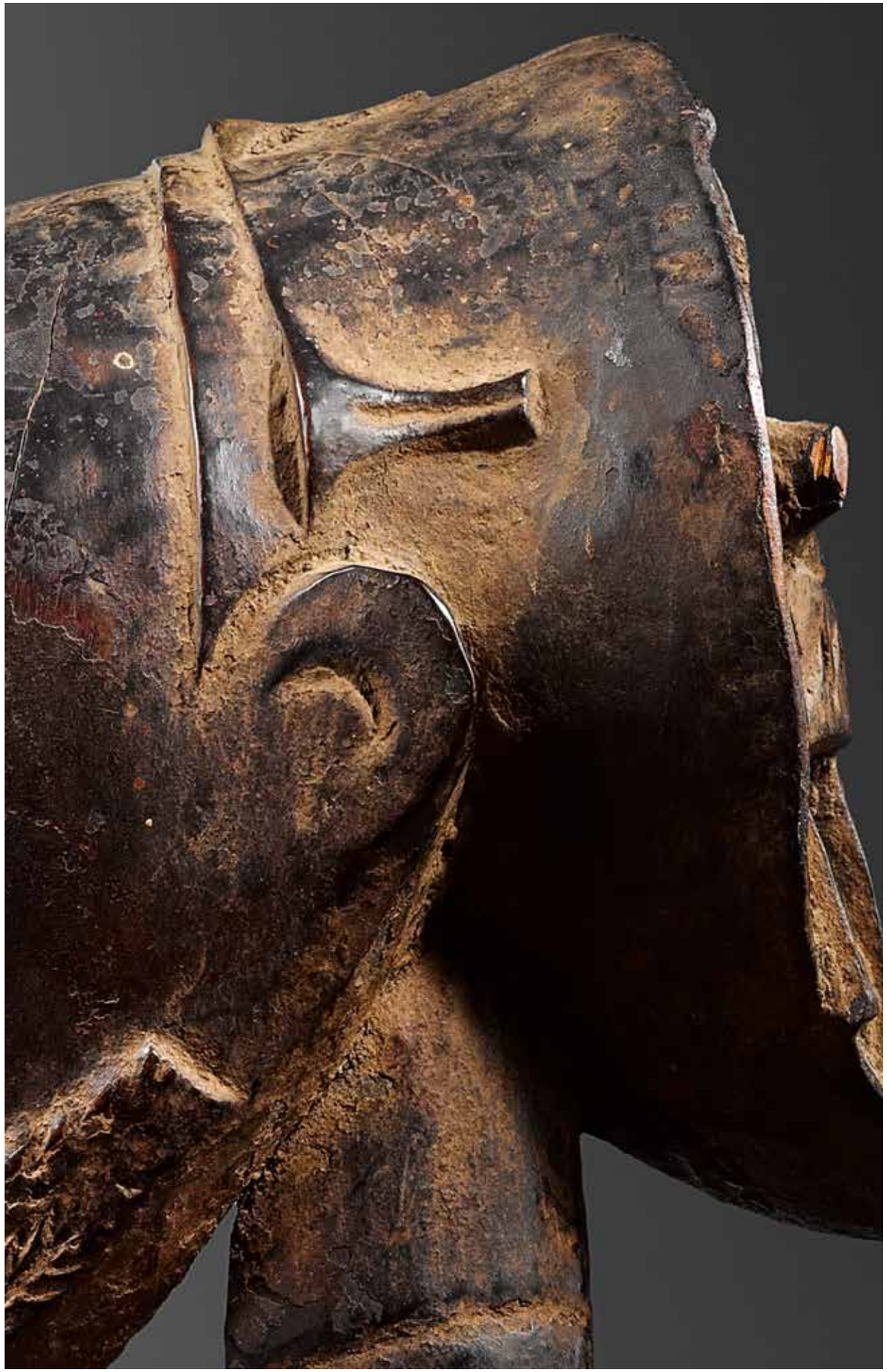
Provenance:
Baudouin de Grunne Collection, Brussels
Private Collection, USA

Publications:
Approche des arts Hemba, François Neyt
& Louis de Strycker, 1975, cover & plate 23
La grande statuaire Hemba du Zaïre,
François Neyt, 1977, p. 95
Heroic Africans, Alisa LaGamma, 2011,
pp. 244-245, fig. 209

Exhibitions:
Heroic Africans: Legendary Leaders,
Iconic Sculptures,
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
2011-2012; Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 2012

"At the apogee of the exquisite works in this style is one that survives vestigially via the outer shell of the body and head, which were preserved when the core of its wood body decayed."
Extract from *Heroic Africans*,
Alisa La Gamma, p. 234.

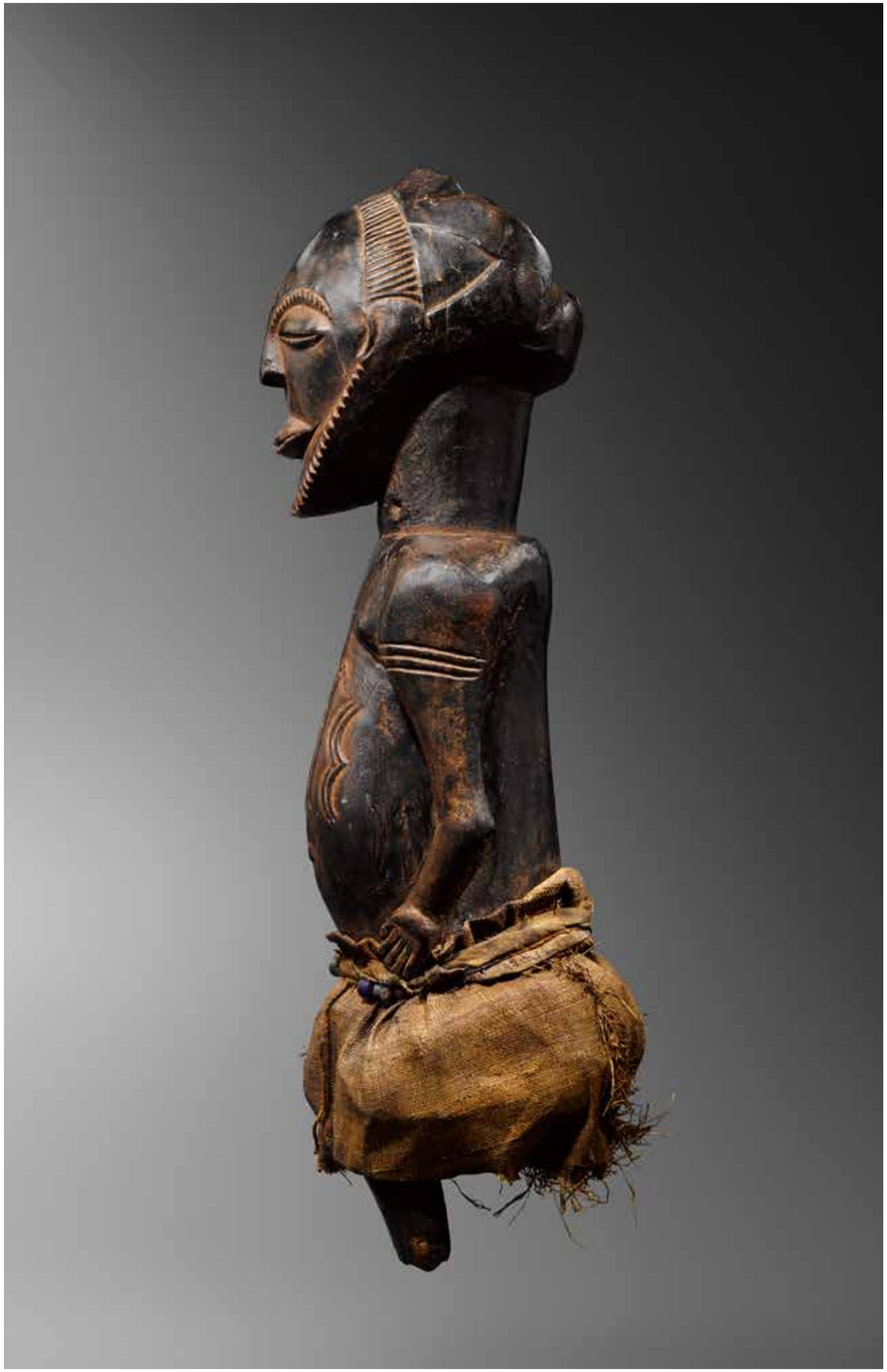


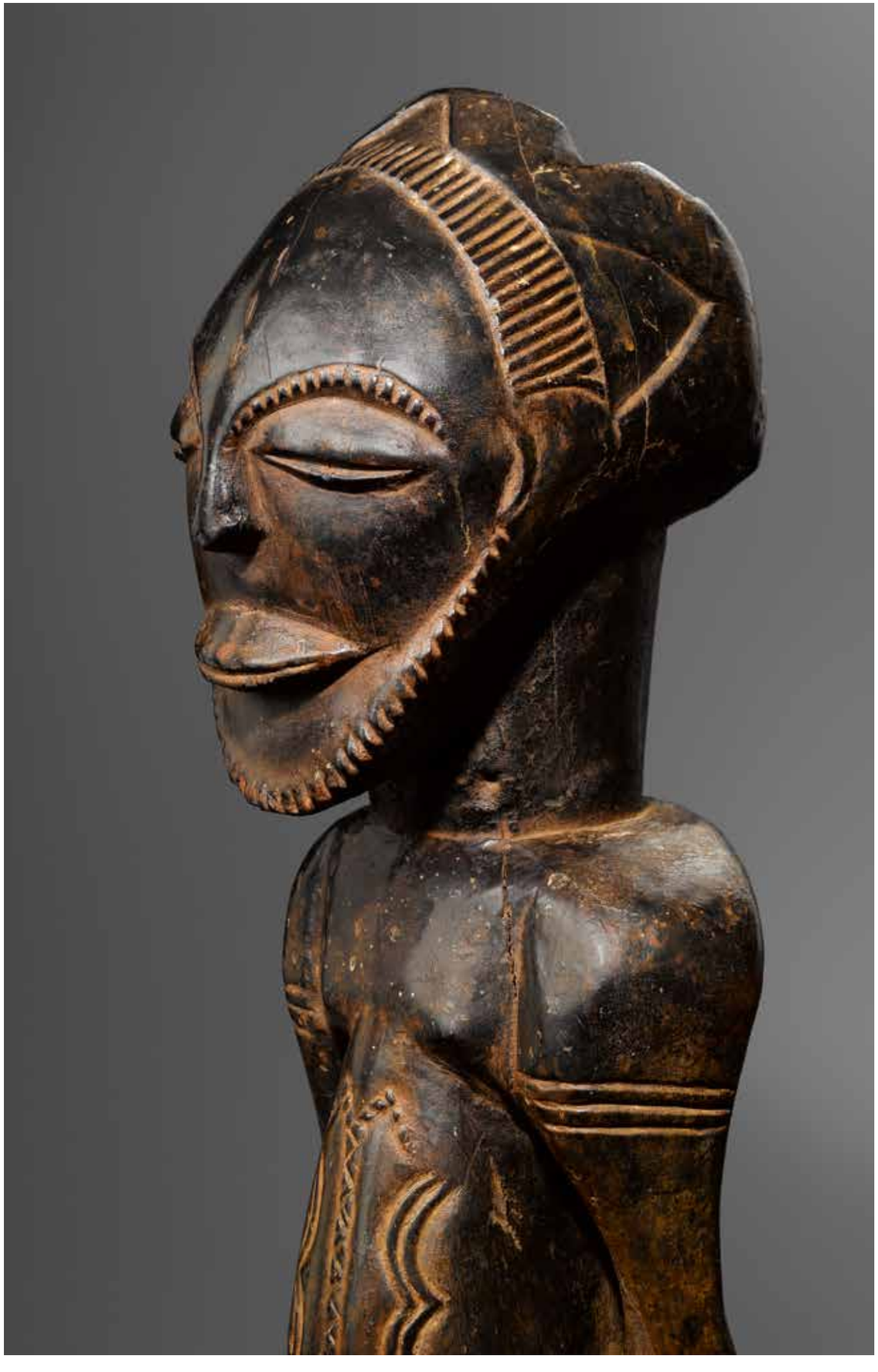


D. R. of Congo Ancestor Figure P. 80

Hemba-Kusu People Wood, fabric, beads
Height: 54 cm

Provenance:
Merton Simpson Collection, USA
Private Collection, New York





Lega People

19th Century
Ivory
Length: 28 cm

Provenance:
Louis Carré, Paris
Charles Ratton, Paris
Private Collection, Brussels

Exhibitions:
Exposition d'Art Primitif, Louis Carré, La Villa Guibert, Paris, 1933
African Negro Art, James Johnson Sweeney, MoMA, New York, 1935
African Folktales and Sculpture, Paul Radin and James Johnson Sweeney, Bollingen Fondation, New York, 1952

Publication:
African Negro Art, James Johnson Sweeney, MoMA, New York, 1935, nº 472

Lega People

19th Century or earlier
Ivory, shells
Height: 11 cm

Provenance:
Charles Ratton Collection, Paris
Françoise & Alain de Monbrison
Collection, Paris
Private Collection, Paris

Publications:
Primitive Kunst, Werner Muensterberger,
Goldmann, Munich,1955
Première exposition rétrospective internationale
des arts d'Afrique et d'Oceanie,
Palais Miramar, Cannes, 1957
The Sculpture of Africa, Eliot Elisofon
& William Fagg, 1958, p.243
Primitivism in 20th Century Art,
Vol. II, William Rubin, MoMA,
New York,1984, p. 413
African and Oceanic Art, Margaret Trowell
and Hans Nevermann, Abrams, 1968

Exhibition:
Première exposition rétrospective internationale
des arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie,
Palais Miramar, Cannes, 1957

Bamana People · A Female Figure of the Djo

Bertrand Goy

Before the veil was lifted on the long brown lady's touching beauty, she spent an interminable existence in the shadows of the quinqueliba trees, secretly hidden away in her sanctuary hut in a Bamana village, somewhere in the Dioila or Bougouni regions. Her head lightly inclined at the extremity of her endless neck, she seems to be viewing the world with the indulgence of age. Although it is protected by an amulet, her throat evinces the stigmata of time, her body is covered with scarifications and has a deep brown patina acquired from tirelessly repeated anointments. Confirming other analyses performed on similar works [1], she may have first seen the light of day between the second half of the 15th century and the first half of the 17th.

It is paradoxical and frustrating to have had to wait for the first signs of their decline for the Djo initiation societies, known to have been the commissioners of these remarkable sculptures – among the oldest from Mali – to be studied and recognized.

In 1953, the ethnologist Viviana Pâques noted how little information had been assembled on this once flourishing institution of culture and worship in the southern part of the country, near Bougouni and the surrounding area. She undertook to find a means to preserve the memory of these ceremonies, which she deemed to be "manifestly in danger of extinction." [2]

To the rhythm of the sowings and harvests, she thus followed the "sacred buffoons" in their evolution, faithfully describing the phases of their initiation and the objects attendant at the performance of the rites – but without ever mentioning the existence of statues of the type we present here, or of ceremonies in which they might have played a role. Was this omission the result of the Bamana's discretion with regard to their religious practices? The fact they took great

1 Bamana figures at the Met present an age date equivalent to a sample taken from the figure in this catalog (c-14 test; mass spectrometry analysis).

2 Pâques, "Bouffons sacrés du cercle de Bougouni," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 1954, pp. 63-110.

pains to hide their Animist beliefs from their Muslim masters, including the famous Hadj Oumar, is undoubtedly the explanation for how these primordial liturgical objects could be transmitted undamaged from generation to generation. From 1847 to 1866, the explorers Anne Raffenel and then Mage and Quintin made no allusion in their accounts to statues or figures of any kind – in spite of the fact that they were held hostage at Segou for an extended period of time.

One can understand why sculptures were not a priority interest for them, but, on the other hand, if Viviana Pâques – the faithful student and disciple of Leroy-Gourhan and protégée of Marcel Griaule – makes no mention of them, it can only be because they were scrupulously hidden from her. She even mentions this in her description of the Djo sanctuary when she writes: "There are undoubtedly other ritual objects in this house of which we have no knowledge." [3]

In this case, as it turns out, the dealer preceded the ethnologist – since a contingent of these figures crossed oceans and borders with no questions asked about their identities before being shown and admired in 1960 at the first Bamana exhibition that ever took place in the United States. In the absence of any other information – besides the royal demeanor they evince and the tiara-like coiffure they wear – the art historian and New York Museum of Primitive Art's director Robert Goldwater called the female figures among them "queens."

This case is not unique. A few hundred kilometers from Bougouni, in Senufo territory, and in the same 1950s period, the threat of extinction, brought about by the destructive rage of the Mage of Massa, weighed on a culture, and caused the hitherto unknown *Déblé* masterpieces of Lataha [4] to come out from hiding and find their way onto the art market.

Nearly 30 years after Viviana Pâques's expedition into the Bougouni area and the appearance of these spectacular sculptures, Salia Malé and Kate Ezra [5], inquiring about the exact state of the Djo and its attendant events and objects at the end of the 20th century, and basing their research on testimony given to them by elders, divided the effigies into two groups, according to the times at which they were displayed in the course of the initiation ceremonies. The exceedingly rare *Jomooni* – Goldwater's "queens," escorted by a few male figures – appeared at possibly secret annual events, while the *Jonyeleni*, the only ones mentioned by Viviana Pâques [6], participated in ceremonies held every seven years.

The statue presented here definitely belongs to the first group, in spite of the fact that its slender silhouette makes it one of the lightest of its type [7]. Its very great age, the soft roundness of its shapes, the coiffure, a face whose volumes could have inspired Giorgio de Chirico, and the very particular patina that covers its entire body very clearly identify the figure as belonging to the very restricted corpus of the *Jomooni*.

In contrast with its younger sisters at the Metropolitan Museum who triumphantly display their motherhood, this figure is the moving and melancholic portrayal of a more mature woman, who is on the verge of reaching the status of elder.

3 Pâques, ibid. p. 80

4 Goy, "William Wade Harris, un bon prophète," Arts et Cultures, Barbier-Mueller Museum, Geneva, 2015, p. 111.

5 *Bamana, the Art of Existence in Mali*, Catalog for the Museum for African Art, New York, 2002, pp. 130-165.

6 Pâques, op. cit, photo PL II C.

7 It's the same size as the statue in *Bamana, the Art of Existence in Mali*, nº 127, p. 137.

Ivory Coast

Senufo People

Bertrand Goy

Standing Cup-Bearer Figure

P. 103 → Plates P. 14

Senufo Aesthetics: A Source of Inspiration for the Painter Jacques Boussard

The exceptional quality of these two Senufo sculptures, which stimulated the creativity of painter Jacques Boussard for a major part of his life, has undoubtedly contributed to hoisting the sculptural patrimony of the border area of the Northern Ivory Coast to the summit of the African arts hierarchy.

The statue which is the subject of this text played a central role in the heart of the female *sandogo* society in "divinatory ceremonies to conjure maleficent spirits and to invoke the primordial ancestors." [1]

1 Knops, *Les Anciens Senufo*, Afrika Museum, Berg en Dal, 1980, p. 228.

← An agricultural ritual to promote a successful harvest. Photo: Knops, pre-1928.

Its ritual importance justifies the great care that was taken to manufacture it, and that excellence is complemented by the originality revealed by the oppositions seen in its essential symbolic traits. Its face seems to hesitate between that of a human and an animal, and is reminiscent of the intermediary position that *sandobele* priestesses living on the border between the bush and the edge of the villages occupied. In spite of the presence of a bowl – or, as Father Pierre Knops put it, a "mortar or harvesting basket" [2] – on its head, a quintessentially female attribute, this figure with a voluptuous body made of dense African mahogany and displaying a lustrous rich patina under which the fine adze (*katele*) strokes remain visible, is intriguing by virtue of its seductive ambiguity, with virile and feminine characteristics, both of which are exacerbated. The full breasts, which Fénéon compared to French butter pears, contradict an almost military posture, while a loincloth extends as far down as the middle of the thigh as if to conceal an outstandingly large sex organ.

The figure, firmly planted on its lightly bent legs, exudes a feeling of power, which is even more palpable when it is viewed from behind. This impression of strength derives from the musculature of the back, indicated by firmly rendered contours that contrast harmoniously with the rounded, wide and rearward-thrust shoulders and the bottom.

Only a few examples of this type of sculpture are known, which are of intermediate size and range from the relatively common tugubele statuettes, manufactured to obtain the madebele spirits' good graces by rendering them in an idealized manner, and the massive and imposing deble ancestor sculptures. In situ documentation of this type of work and its use in ceremonies is unfortunately very scarce. Thankfully, Father Knops offers us a rare and precious account in his work *Les Anciens Senufo*. In the middle of "an agricultural ritual performed to ensure a succesful harvest," a woman brandishes a sculpture very similar to the one described here above her head. It can be assumed with reasonable certainty that this scene occurred at Sinematiali, in the middle of Senufo country, and the village where the priest

2 Ibid, p. 228.

of the Society of African Missions lived between 1923 and 1928. Aficionados are very eager to get precise information about the exact origins of the objects they covet, but the attribution of a so-called Senufo statue to one or another components of the group is not a simple matter. The Senufo territory owes its foundation to an artificial construct – a practice dear to the French administration in the early colonial period. In 1908, Maurice Delafosse defined its contours, which have been universally recognized up to the present, and particularly so in books about African art. However, not only were the peoples officially identified as Senufo (who disregarded these borders) also settled in the Kenedougou region in Sudan (now Mali), the Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) and in the Korhogo area of the Ivory Coast, but they also inseparably mingled with other ethnic groups. The objects collected by Léo Frobenius, who was in the area from 1907 to 1909, have thus made it possible to associate the Sikasso Cercle with a style now recognized as Nothern Senufo – even though the ethnologist labeled them as Pomporo, Parara and Dyula.

← Portrait of a Senufo woman.

Its distance from the coast and the precariousness of the situation in the region, once under the domination of Samory Touré, made it impossible for visitors to the area to interest themselves in its material culture. Marcel Treich-Laplène was preoccupied solely with getting treaties signed in the course of his difficult trip to Kong in 1888, and Moskovitz, who had previously collected Agni sculptures for the Musée du Trocadéro, died of fever shortly after reaching the mythical town in 1894. Only Binger, whose accounts were published in his work *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée: Par le pays de Kong et la Mossi: 1887-1889*, gives us a glimpse of several elements of the culture of the populations located in what is now Senufo territory, from Sikasso to Kong.

It would not be until 1904 that Father Bedel of the Lyon Missions and Captain Tombalpa, the first local French colonial commander, settled in the area. This state of affairs explains why, even though a few Senufo objects arrived in Europe early, there was a very unfortunate dearth of information about them.

More would be learned in the 1920s thanks to Father Knops. Then, in the following decade, the ethnologists Albert Maesen, Carl Kjersmeier and Ferdinand H. Lem made more precise studies of regional styles. In the 1950s, the administrator Bochet and Fathers Convers and Clamens followed suit.

It is interesting to dwell for a moment on Lem. In the period immediately following the Great War, this multifaceted individual seems to have been at the heart of the Paris art world, contributing to building the collections of Doctor Chadourne and Helena Rubinstein – especially with works from the Kenedougou area, where he stayed in the 1930s. He was such a model administrator that the Department of the Navy and the Colonies entrusted him with the task of writing the *Carrières Coloniales* publication, a guide which was aimed at promoting the virtues of a temporary posting overseas. This character of the early colonization period, knowledgeable in all artistic genres, became a contributor to the very classical *Connaissance des Arts* periodical. He also penned the introduction to a catalog of Oceanic art works published by Galerie Olive in 1947. Last but not least, he authored a series of monographs on the Marseille painter Pierre Ambrogiani and Paul Cézanne, among many others.

All of which led him to patronize the "seconde École de Paris," a small circle that included a number of aficionados of these sculptures from "faraway lands," brought together by the Musée de l'Homme in 1967 for the important *Arts primitifs dans les ateliers d'artistes* exhibition. The painter Jacques Boussard made important contributions to this show, thanks to essential pieces he had acquired after becoming interested in these art forms, undoubtedly at the end of the Second World War.

It was difficult to escape African art in the Parisian Montparnasse neighborhood of the period: Boussard, exhibiting at Galerie Kaganovitch at 99 Boulevard Raspail, was only a few doors down from number 141, where Pierre Vérité had opened his tribal art gallery in 1937. Being friends with Isaac Païles, who had discovered tribal art in the 1920s, would also have nourished both artists' interest in the field when they got together, and when they exhibited their paintings concurrently at the same gallery.

← Boussard. *Atelier with Senufo*, c. 1950.

The figure that Boussard depicted in his painting, dated 1950, was most likely acquired from Lem, who was very close to Païles. The latter's primitive sculptures were the subjects for most of the illustrations in an article titled "Réalité de l'art nègre," which the art critic – ever faithful to his past as a colonial administrator – published in the December 1950 issue of *Tropiques, Revue des troupes de marine.*

It is not unlikely that Lem was also behind the acquisition of the second Senufo, which we are humbled to present here, if only through his sound advice. It might actually be rightfully thought of as the first, if one uses the widely talked about record prices they both made when the painter's estate was sold at auction [3] in 1990 as the yardstick.

3 Auction at Hôtel Drouot, Dec. 18, 1990, lots 16 and 24.

Ivory Coast

Female Figure
Male Figure

P. 107 → Plates P. 26

Baule People
Sakasu Master

Bertrand Goy

North of the Ivory Coast lagoons, the Akan area extends from east to west between Volta and Bandama, to the Abron Kingdom located in the northwestern part of the country around its capital, Bondoukou. In the course of the 18th century, both the Agni of Indenie and the Baule settled on either side of the Comoe after fleeing the Ashanti Kingdom on the Gold Coast, the victims of wars of succession. In spite of their exile, all of these groups managed to preserve many of the specific traits of their original cultures, and thus remained part of the Akan sphere, sharing its language, form of royalty, symbols of power, clans and family structures. While the Agni – and to a lesser extent the Abron – produced anthropomorphic statuary, the uncontested champions in all categories of this discipline are without any doubt the Baule. Their territory remained off-limits to Westerners until the end of the 19th century. Captain Binger was even forced to take a more easterly route in the course of his travels "from the Niger to the Gulf of Guinea" in 1888 and 1889 on account of the dangers his originally planned itinerary would present.

Some years later, Parfait-Louis Monteil had the unfortunate experience of encountering their resistance, with the fiasco that ensued, when his Kong Division engaged in battle with Samory Touré's *sofa* troops. The first European to break this isolation was Jean-Baptiste Marchand, the unfortunate future hero of Fachoda, when he entered Tiassale in 1893. Dr. Etourneau, the expedition's physician, collected the first Baule figures at the time, and they were given to Ernest-Théodore Hamy, curator at the Musée du Trocadéro, in exchange for the promise of the French Academic Palms. The statues of this region quickly gained the admiration

← Baule figure from the Charles Ratton collection at MoMA, 1935.

of European aficionados in the 1910s when the dealer Paul Guillaume made brokers and runners out of a few of the many junior officers who were part of the large contingents of military forces involved in the pacification of the Ivory Coast.

The famous Africanist Maurice Delafosse, administrator for the Baule area from the moment of French penetration onward, differentiated between two types of anthropomorphic sculptures: the first supposed to be representations of ancestors, corresponding more or less to the *asye usu* category sculpted to attract the attentions of the bush spirits, and the second being "toys or trinkets which serve to amuse the young girls or decorate living spaces." [1] We know now that these personal objects had to do with the world of the *blolo,* the residence of the ancestors, and the place of origin and destination of all mortals. From the moment of birth onwards, every Baule person is considered to have left a "spouse on the other side" – his *blolo bla* if he is a man, and her *blolo bian* if she is a woman.

The lives of people are paced according to the capriciousness and moods of these supernatural "sister souls," which are considered responsible for ills and troubles here on earth. In order to appease them, it is customary to commission a statuette which one honors with sacrifices on a specific night each week, behind closed doors, in a special space reserved for this activity. Whatever its role, Maurice Delafosse provides a very pertinent analysis of this statuary, and also expresses admiration for the precision of line, sophistication of the faces, elaborate coiffures and fine polish it so often displays.

"One thing which catches the eye of any observer is the extent to which the Baule sculptors strive to capture the characteristics of the human or other subjects they want to represent, and then render them as exactly as they possibly can. Another thing is noteworthy: Baule sculptors do not omit any details, even the very smallest ones. When sculpting a head for example, they will render the hairs on it almost one at a time. The projections and contours of the muscles are never overlooked…" [2]

He nonetheless expresses regret that this art appears as if it were made "in uniform and conventionalized molds, which almost annihilates individual initiative and gives the works a monotonous and ultimately tiresome character."

While the attention to detail and precision of execution which were praised by Delafosse are perfectly fit to describe the works shown on display here there is nothing "uniform or conventionalized" in these outstanding sculptures.

The first of the statuettes, the male figure, made its first appearance on the tribal art market on a warm and humid afternoon in May 1979, in a courtyard along Avenue 11, Rue 10 barrée, in Treichville, a popular neighborhood in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

The very lucky individual who acquired the piece was named André Blandin, a collector well known for his discernment and in-depth knowledge of the peoples of the Bandama Valley and his reference works on the bronzes of the area. Nearly fifty years later, the author of the present article still regrets having arrived onsite two minutes too late because of a traffic holdup caused by a throng of people exiting a mosque on Avenue 7 after prayers. He remembers having watched powerlessly as the transaction was concluded, and a tidy bundle of CFA Francs exchanged for not one, but two sculptures of equal quality [3]. To assuage the pain of this double disappointment as best he could, Issa, the affable Treichvillian gallery owner, gave a detailed account of the circumstances that led to his concluding one of the best sales of his career. "The figures traveled last night," and had come from an Agba village, very near the small town of Dimbokro, located in the Western Central Baule area [4]. While he refused to divulge the name of the village, one can at least, given the track record for reliability he had established over the years, have faith that the details he did disclose about its origins are accurate.

As it happens, the information he provided could fuel the disciples of a recent "ideology" who propose including this figure and its female companion – which have been brought together for the duration of an exhibition – in a corpus of works first attributed to a hypothetical "Master" of Sakasu and later to an Essankro colleague. More recently and more reasonably, they see in these sculptures, first judged to be the work of one individual, the hands of several artists who belonged to the same stylistic group.

1 Delafosse, *"Sur des traces probables de civilisation égyptienne,"* Masson et Cie, 1901, p. 14.

2 Ibid., p. 11.

3 This statuette was sold at the Hôtel Drouot on Oct. 16, 1998, lot 223.

4 According to van Rijn, this figure also came from Dimbokro.

Regardless of the origin of these figures (Agba, Walebo, Nzipri, or Baule) all one really needs to retain about this ancestor figure – a perfect image of serenity – and about the beautiful young *blolo bla,* is that they are of exceptional quality and deserve to be seen as among the most remarkable examples of the classical aesthetic of the region.

In spite of their very elongated torsos, out of proportion with their lower limbs, their silhouettes appear slender. Their slightly bent legs, their arched backs that highlight the buttocks and their perfectly rendered contours, the position of the hands, the scarifications, their globular half-sphere eyes, their sensual mouths and broad noses are all testimonies to their pedigree.

The style of the chignon at the top of the male figure does not have any equivalent in reality, or at least is not known in the available iconography relating to dignitaries or common people. Sophisticated and imaginary coiffures of this kind contribute to conferring an idealized image of human beauty to masks and figures. As it happens, the mysterious little appendage in the shape of an Achatina snail [5] undoubtedly has symbolic meaning, independent of gender, since a similar ornament is seen on the head of a stylistically very similar female figure in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [6]. Another example, which is like a twin, has another kind of highlight which one might say resembles a clay canary. Once the property of Charles Ratton, and subsequently of the collector Pierre Peissi, who penned the hagiographies for Antoine Pevsner and Auguste Herbin, this work was seen in the legendary *African Negro Art* exhibition at the MoMA in New York in 1935.

While remaining faithful to the precise stylistic canons that Delafosse refers to as the "uniform mold," the creator or creators of these masterpieces of Baule art, from whichever area he or they might have come from, had the prowess that enabled them to render subtle details with genius and to express the full gamut of differences between the subjects – youth and femininity for the first and great age and serenity for the second.

5 The image of this snail is among the golden regalia objects at the Musée des Civilisations de Côte d'Ivoire.

6 The Met, nº 1970.206.113.

Equatorial Guinea

Fang-Okak People

Louis Perrois

Ancestor Figure, Eyema Byeri

P. 111 → Plates P. 32

This beautiful and rare *eyema byeri* statue from Equatorial Guinea, whose face is unusually expressive, is also exceptional for the type of headdress it has, made up of large rolled-up braids decorated with round-headed nails.

The figure has stocky proportions and a tri-partite composition, featuring a voluminous head, shoulders and arms spread away from its narrow trunk, and fleshy legs in a seated position. The manner in which the limbs are rendered is typically Fang. The muscles are rounded and have emphasized reliefs (shoulders, forearms, thighs, ankles). The figure holds its stylized hands in front of its abdomen, and the fingers are tightly joined. At the figure's center, the navel is rendered as a prominent rounded protrusion.The back of the shoulders is streamlined with a rounded indication of the shoulder blades, whose lines join at the upper back and constitute a long furrow along the spinal column that extends directly down to define and separate the fleshy buttocks.

← Fang Okak female ancestor figure, Equatorial Guinea.

One of the particularities of this work is the scarification designs on the upper torso and shoulders, made up of a triple row of punctate lines on the shoulders and the upper arm on the right side. This use of decorative scarification designs is customary for the Fang Okak of the Rio Muni, and is observed on several works in the National Museum of Anthropology in Madrid, including an example brought to Europe by the Ossorio expedition in 1886.

← *Eyema byeri* ancestor figure, collected c. 1907 in Rio Muni. Note the rounded head, small ocular orbits and short nose.

The morphology of the rounded face is characteristic of the Okak variant of Rio Muni. Beneath the rounded quarter-sphere forehead, the face is animated with brass pupils set deeply into the small orbits on either side of the very short, wide and flattened nose, which is a downward extension of the forehead. The cheeks are curved inwards and hollowed, and this sculptural detail highlights the large open mouth. Several punctuate lines at the temples and around the mouth denote scarification marks and are arranged

← Types of headdress, braided and postiche (nlô-ô-ngô), of the Beti-Fang at the beginning of the 20th century.

symmetrically. G. Tessmann observed body ornamentation of this kind while doing research in Rio Muni between 1907 and 1909 (cf. *Die Pangwe*, 1913, vol. I, plates 215 through 220). Each of these designs had significance as an indicator of identity as well as a symbolic meaning, and most were related to elements of nature. The unfinished curve design (as a simple line or as parallel ones, seen here in a row of four) was called *evuda* (ibid. p. 263). The figure must originally have had a coiffure consisting of a bouquet of feathers (*asè-kô*) on its head.

This figure's headdress is of a very specific and rare type, made up of large rolled-up braids divided into three masses terminating in two kinds of tails at the nape of the neck. The tresses at the top of the head are decorated with round-headed upholstery nails. The sculptor reproduced a fairly elaborate type of headdress that was commonly worn, as one may infer from photographs and sketches dating from the early 20th century by a variety of voyagers, including Tessmann and Schulz, among others. It should be noted that among the Fang, these coifs were worn by both men and women, and that even in daily and routine life appearance was an important concern for everyone.

The patina on this work is blackish and very thick. It testifies to the piece's significant age, with the object probably dating from the end of the 19th century.

Gabon-Congo

Kota-Aduma People

Bertrand Goy

Female Statue

P. 112 → Plates P. 38

When one finds oneself confronted with an exceedingly rare kind of African sculpture, evaluating its provenance by comparing its resemblances to other objects is by definition out of the question, since its very originality makes it impossible to label or to consign to a particular compartment. In the present case, the task is all the more difficult because the statuette we are concerned with, rather than taking us to "shores no mortal knows," instead displays a wide spectrum of possible identities. At first glance, one observes some traits that reveal it is without any possible doubt Gabonese or from the

← Aduma women of Lastourville, photo: H. Arsandaux, pre-1933.

Congo's frontiers. More specifically, these elements suggest it originated from an area around the Ogooué River, the backbone of Gabon's waterways, or from the areas near some of that major artery's confluents, which run into it along its upper course in the Lastourville-Franceville-Okondja area.

The first indication, the perfectly oval shape of the face, which has a large cantilevering forehead bordered by the arch of the eyebrows, is strongly reminiscent of the wooden armature that is the foundation of the Kota Obamba figures, which are covered with copper plaques. Things get even more complicated – and the analogy to the latter reaches its limits – upon examination of the longitudinal crest coiffure, which extends down the nape of the neck, and the boxer's broken nose. These signs, coupled with the division of the face into four parts as if a cross had been imprinted on it (two opposite sides of which still retain signs of having been covered with kaolin), irresistibly orient us toward the Aduma, their masks with concave noses, perhaps borrowed from the Fang, and the ceremonial coiffures of their women. [1]

The population that lived around the Lastourville area had a widespread reputation for the professionalism of its oarsmen, who were deemed vital to the success of upriver expeditions. It is reasonable to suppose that they would, in the course of these frequent trips, have disseminated certain elements of their culture and that, conversely, they might have borrowed others from those whose areas they passed through.

The prospects for identification become confused when one sees the rare standing three-dimensional figures from this upper Ogooué region, the Mbede (Mbete, Ambete) territory. Only the faces of these sculptures present some similarities to that of the piece we are considering here, if one excludes the general shape of the face, which is closer to that of a lozenge than that of an oval. The figures have the same disproportionately large forehead, extended by a crest coiffure, and – especially – the same mouth, with incisions in the lips to denote the teeth. However, most of the figures in this group were used as reliquaries, as may be inferred from the presence of a cavity containing a magic charge in their backs. Moreover, their pose, with hands crossed on the abdomen,

1 See also Grébert's drawings (218 and 219) in *Le Gabon de Fernand Grébert 1913-1932*, Éditions D, 2003, for the shape of the nose.

← An ambete pair, Sotheby's sale, New York, Anatole France Collection.

and their disproportional tubular torsos, have little in common with our object. The temptation is great, in the face of such uncertainty, to delve further into the past in search of a type of representation that, over the course of decades, might have fallen out of favor with its creators and users.

A first pair of statuettes [2] – unfortunately equally enigmatic – displays undeniable resemblances to ours. It belonged to Anatole France at the beginning of the 20th century and was in his collection at the Villa Saïd in Paris, where he kept mementos of his father, who was a "passionate collector of curiosities," as he mentions in his work *Le livre de mon ami*.

Earlier on, in 1884, the naturalist Thollon and the navy physician Schwebisch, members of the Mission de l'Ouest Africain expedition, had given the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro a pair of standing figures that display a number of similarities to our piece. The explorers' joint attribution made it possible to delimit the possible origins of the objects more accurately. The period of time they spent together in 1883 was limited to four months, during which Schwebisch, albeit with some reticence, accepted being assigned to Franceville by Brazza, to become director of this "outpost of progress." One can safely suppose that the duties he had to perform there would have prevented him from venturing as far away as the Ambete region, and that the objects they found must have come from near his area of residence, or from the Aduma region, which he and Thollon crossed together to reach the historic outpost on the Ogooué.

The mystery of the origins of this figure remains to be solved, and one can take pleasure in this fact, since it contributes to generating the profound emotion that contemplation of this moving and sensitive sculpture elicits.

2 Drouot auction, Nov. 30, 1981, lot 46.

Gabon — Reliquary Figure — P. 114 → Plates P. 44

Tsogo People

Bertrand Goy

The "long-necked" mbumba are generally anchored to their reliquary bundles by a base identical to that of the Tsogo "busts with arms." This manner of attaching statues of this type to their reliquary is original if one compares it to the methods preferred by other Gabonese groups. Among the Lumbu, the attachment of two elements to one another is accomplished by gluing them together with okoume resin.

The mbumba shown here was collected before 1923 by a colonial administrator active in the Bandjabi District, the main town of which was Mbigou. In 1976, not far from there, Pierre Amrouche photographed a reliquary of the same type in a large Sango village [1]. The morphology of the face displays features that liken it to works from the east of that area, although it preserves a few features borrowed from the Tsogo, particularly the pancake-shaped base and strip of copper adorning the forehead. Similar to the wooden armature of a Kota figure, the volume of the head is reduced to fit into a plane. In characteristic regional style, the coiffure is made up of three tresses, one of which extends from the forehead toward the back of the head, while the two others, which are lateral, move away from the face like those of an Ekuma Fang head, or the pendants of a Southern Kota reliquary. The lozenge-shaped mouth matches the eyes, which are highlighted with copper. A series of three holes at the top of the head was undoubtedly used for the attachment of feathers.

1 Amrouche, *Regards de masques*, Presence Africa, 2015, ill. 32.

Gabon — Reliquary Figure, "The Young Girl" — P. 115 → Plates P. 50

Tsogo People

Bertrand Goy

"The dimension of individual creativity is not sufficiently taken into account in the sometimes too general categories."

This point of view, expressed by Dr. Andrault on the sculpture of this remote part of Gabon, has been supported by the female statuettes found by the chief of a subdivision of the "Bandjabi district" prior to its integration into the "N'Gounie district" in 1923. The fashion of the moment very quickly led to their presumed author being dubbed the "Master of Mbigou, or of the ears of the fauna." Thanks to the Carbon 14 tests performed on three of these sculptures, science, for once, supports intimate conviction: "The dates obtained are

← "The teenager." Wood, traces of red pigment, iron, gray-blue beads, height: 41 cm.

← "The aged woman." Female figure with brown patina, traces of kaolin, glass beads, height: 42 cm.

← "Long-necked" mbumba, wood, copper, traces of padauk and kaolin, height: 32 cm.

homogeneous and show that all of the works are contemporaneous to one another. It is consequently possible that all of them were the work of a single individual or of a group of people who lived at the same time.

The dating shows that the sculptures were manufactured between the 18th and 19th centuries." Prudence would require that one speak of a workshop rather than of a single creator, but one cannot help but see evidence of the personal attachment of an artist to his model in these very sensitive portraits.

These female figures, which one imagines to be representations of a single person, but at different times in her life, can definitely be identified as being in the traditional regional sculptural style. She is "neither completely the same, nor completely different" in her various iterations. The arms are attached to the sides of the body, the fists are firmly clenched, the red ochre color and the metal eyes remind of the work of the Tsogho artists that created the "busts with arms", but the resemblances end there.

While respecting the differentiations, the author of these works has allowed himself a few variations. His first sculpture is a rendering of a barely pubescent adolescent girl. The gentleness and fragility of childhood characterize this plump figure, with its nascent breasts and its rounded face. A compass could not have traced the arch of the eyebrows, the dividing line between the forehead and the hair, the finely curled ears and the slightly open lips any better. One is moved by the figure's both sad and penetrating look, which is astonishingly vital in spite of its metallic coldness. The pale nuance of the tin used for the whites of the eyes distinguishes that part of them from the irises, inside which the pupils are denoted by inlays of dark-blue Venetian beads.

In the second version created by the artist, his muse has grown, but the passage of the years has only barely marked her. One can at most observe that the bust is somewhat more slender. The copper imparts a more determined expression to the figure's gaze, and the coiffure, which is pressed closely to the scalp, is made up of very narrow tresses. Unlike the first figure, the young woman here undoubtedly once brandished accessories, as the orifices between the thumbs and inde.x fingers, very much in Tsogho style, suggest.

The third portrait in this saga is that of an older woman with emptied breasts and an almost emaciated body, whose skin, with its old leather-like patina, has lost the tone of youth. The figure's pose has nonetheless preserved its energy, and the same blue beads continue to impart a sparkling quality to her gaze. The passage from adolescence to old age has taken place without an intermediate step. The figure of the mature woman, if there ever was one, remains a mystery. Could it have been the long-necked mbumba, with the skinny face and the expression of astonishment on its face? No one can say for sure if it is male or female, but it obviously shares a common background with the other works in this group.

Gabon

Amulet, Muswinga

P. 117 → Plates P. 56

Lumbu People

Charlotte Grand-Dufay

"Another amulet sculpted atop a ring is exceedingly beautiful. It is 13 centimeters high, has large almond-shaped eyes, a slender nose, a mouth with curling lips, and its coiffure-headdress with a ponytail is supremely elegant."
Les Lumbu, un art sacré, p. 183.

Amulets – The Crown Jewels of Lumbu Art

The refined art of the Lumbu reaches its apogee in the *miswinga* (singular: *muswinga*) which date to the 19th century and which are referred to as charms, talismans, idols, drum hooks or even gris-gris in the literature. Like the Lumbu masks and figures, these amulets also found their way into the major collections, like those of Paul Guillaume, Charles Ratton, Josef Mueller, and Pierre Guerre, and disappeared from the market in the 1930s. They are astonishingly expressive patinated objects, rubbed with Padauk wood powder, and evince a sacred beauty that was believed to offer protection in various aspects of social life, against illness, poisoning, and sorcery, and to ensure success in hunting, fishing and pregnancy, among other endeavors.

In his transcription of a 1770 document, Monsignor Jean Cuvelier tells us that the people of the Loango "almost all wear a small idol hanging at their side, which is ordinarily some crudely worked human figure made of wood or ivory." [1]

In 1776, the Abbot Liévin-Bonaventure Proyart makes reference to amulets: "Several wear small figures, or fish teeth or bird feathers on their belts for protection against accidents or harm they are, or believe themselves to be, threatened by." [2]

Paul Belloni du Chaillu, an American voyager of French origin, and the first to reveal the existence of the Punu in his work *L'Afrique Sauvage* in 1868, had described a *nganga* (whom he refers to as an "ouganga") in 1863: "Pieces of leopard hide and of the hides of other animals covered his body and hung all around him. A charm was attached to each piece of this savage attire." [3] At the end of the 19th century, the English dealer Richard Edward Dennett wrote: "It is the custom of the indigenous people to attach charms to their wrists, belts, or legs, or around their necks and heads." [4] Monsignor Alexandre Le Roy says that "the amulet or gris-gris is a small object one wears on one's person, which, in some secret, mysterious, immanent or unconscious manner, is supposed to protect against misfortunes, illnesses, accidents, and maleficent forces, and simultaneously procure success in travels, hunting, fishing, domestic tasks, etc." [5]

According to Frank Hagenbucher-Sacripanti in the beginning of the 1970s, these "portable idols" probably incarnated *mati* (sing. *buti*), a concept and term "whose originality defies any faithful translation (…) using the ordinary vocabulary of sorcery (…). A living being made up of a body and a spirit, [the buti] can be assimilated exclusively to a talisman." [6] The amulets belong to the *nganga* and are most often transmitted between the members of a same clan, which may explain why some amulets display faded or dulled facial traits. They are sometimes handed down from father to son when the latter reaches majority (having been initiated to the *Nkisi Mbumba* and to the men's *liboka* dance) or to an intimate *nganga* (diviner-healer) friend, who has requested it be given to him. They are not really spirits, but a "material incarnation of an invisible reality," a support in the physical world of a spirit in vassalage to the *ndotchi* (or *ndoki*) – the sorcerer who possesses it [7] – or to the *nganga*, the diviner. The amulets remind us of the myth of "a prestigious chief named *Bun:zi* who was deified after his death, and whose sanctuary is located at Moanda. It was said that when he reached the mighty obstacle of the Zaire River (Congo River), *Bun:zi* parted the waters by striking himself on the thigh from the top of which numerous talismans (*mati*, singular *buti*) were hanging, and then crossed the riverbed with the followers he was guiding in tow." [8] The *mati* also exist among the Vili and the Yombe, but are not necessarily amulets properly speaking, and can be pipes, beads, pieces of cloth, plants, or animals. In order to possess this kind of object, one had to have the knowledge – the *likundu* of the *nganga* or the *ndoki* (*ndotchi*), the sorcerer. "The creation, the preservation and the use of a *buti* have to do with the most secret and undisclosed behaviors (…). They consist for the most part of the body of an animal captured in the *ni:mbi* (the other world), whose head the sorcerer has severed in order to replace it with that of a human being he has killed, and whose invisible double he has appropriated (…). This material incarnation of an invisible reality proceeds from the imperative of hiding the *buti* from the other sorcerers who are active in the *ni:mbi*." [9] Again, according to Hagenbucher-Sacripanti, the *buti* can only be created as the result of the death of a person from the *ndoki*'s clan, and must be nourished with menstrual blood, or blood obtained and conserved in the course of childbirth. The *ndoki* is "obliged to kill to feed his magical powers and will prefer to attack a young child, whose blood is deemed to be more nourishing, who is less able to defend himself against sorcerers than adults, and who will succumb more quickly." Several Yombe sorcerers have affirmed that

1 "Documents sur une Mission française au Kakongo, 1766-1776," Institut Royal Colonial Belge, *Mémoires*, tome XXX, 1953, p. 53.

2 *Histoire de Loango, Kakongo et autres royaumes d'Afrique*, réédition, Méquignon, 1819, p. 147.

3 *Voyages et aventures dans l'Afrique équatoriale*, Michel Lévy Frères, 1863, p. 270; idem, *L'Afrique sauvage. Nouvelles excursions au pays des Ashangos*, Michel Lévy Frères, 1868.

4 "Sept ans parmi les Bavili," trans. R. Lehuar, *Arts d'Afrique Noire*, 1991, p. 115. (Dennett lived among the Vili from 1879 to 1885.)

5 *La Religion des Primitifs*, Beauchesne, 1909, p. 272. (Mgr Le Roy was the Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost from 1896 to 1926.)

6 *"Les fondements spirituels du pouvoir au Royaume de Loango,"* Mémoire Orstom nº 67, 1973, p. 33 and p. 151.

7 Ibid., pp. 151-152.

8 Ibid., p. 25.

9 Ibid., pp. 151-152.

the *mati*, which have the body of an insect or of a very small bird, must have the head of a child that weighs more lightly on their bodies. This incongruous juxtaposition of physical and spiritual elements becomes a magical instrument for the acquisition of power and "ensures practical and material results: enrichment, a capacity for seduction, and protection against accidents." [10]

10 Ibid., pp. 152, 159-160 and 162.

D. R. of Congo

Kongo People

Bernard Dulon

Pommel for Scepter

P. 120 → Plates P. 62

Among various Kongo populations, including those inhabiting the Mayombe region, scepter-staffs are generally called *mvwala*, or more specifically *koko dia kimfumu*, and are part of the regalia objects held by power-holding men. Most of these *mvwala* were surmounted by a pommel which could be either monoxylous or made of a rarer material like ivory or metal. These sculpted pommels were for the most part representations of female figures, but representations of males were also used. Some subjects – like maternity – are relatively common, but others are more seldom seen. As an illustration of these atypical examples, we might mention one pommel which is a rendering of a woman playing an accordion: in other words using an imported symbol of material wealth which only the notable could accede to. The iconography of the pommel presented here might evoke a pose of Christian prayer and allude to the time of the first Christianization of various Kongo groups in the 15th-18th centuries. It is nonetheless also possible that this Christian iconography was amalgamated with a local symbol – a hand clap that was a customary gesture of deference made in the presence of important individuals. The frieze which decorates the base of the pommel is adorned with elements that at first glance might be interpreted as representations of cowries, but could actually be an evocation of a type of European upholstery tacks that certain Kongo groups had already obtained in limited quantities by the 18th century.

The most famous of the ivory pommels that represent a kneeling person with joined hands was one that was once the property of the former chief of the village of Nemlao. The

← Portrait of the chief of Nemlao holding his scepter-staff with an ivory pommel.

fact that this chief was of Solongo origin is interesting insofar as this Kongo group was among those who accorded considerable importance to the insignia of power derived from Catholic influence – like the *nkangi kiditu* chiefs' crucifixes. It is thus not unreasonable to suppose that one might logically find *mvwala* pommels evoking the performance of Christian prayer among the Solongo.

The Nemlao scepter-staff appears in several photographs taken in the 1890s, including one taken by the famous photographer Herzekiah A. Shanu, who was of Nigerian origin. According to J. Volper and M.L. Felix, the pommel of this staff had been placed on another *koko dia kimfumu* in the 1950s which belonged to Paul Kanu, the *mfumu* (chief) of the village of Kifuku. Like Nemlao, Kifuku was in the greater Banana region and both places were part of a political and territorial entity known as Kinlao. Although it had been observed and associated with two Solongo chiefs, local informants stated that the object had come from the Angolan province of Cabinda a very long time ago (the 18th century?) and had been sculpted by a Vili/Vidi artist.

This may not be an isolated case, because there is at least one other ivory pommel, now in the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Britain, that displays the same iconography as the Nemlao example and unquestionably shows Vili influences, expressed especially by the representation of the drawn tongue. This detail is quite frequently observed in the statuary of this Kongo group.

We can thus envision the possibility that these few rare ivory praying figures could have been created to fulfill commissions given to Vili artists in Cabinda by Christianized Kongo chiefs from further south.

D. R. of Congo

Lwalwa People

Bernard Dulon

Mask

P. 121 → Plates P. 68

The Lwalwa/Lwalu are one of the many ethnic groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Recent demographic surveys estimate their numbers at around 60,000 people. They inhabit what is now the Kasaï-Central province and are especially known in the field of African art for their wooden *ngongo wa shipala* masks of distinctive shapes, also common to those of

the masks used by their Kongo-Dinga neighbors. There are four main types of these masks, called *nkaaki*, *shifoolo*, *mfondo* and *mushika*, which are characterized by the shapes of their noses, and, in some cases, by their coiffures. Three of these mask types are considered male while the fourth, called *mushika*, represents a female. The name is related to the verb *kushika*, which means to shimmy or wiggle one's body.

— Along with *shifoolo*, the *mushika* mask is the easiest type to identify. The female mask characteristically wears a *shikookaba* coiffure, which takes the shape of a large transversal crest at the top of the head.
— *Shifoolo* has a short and massive nose that evokes the snout of the swamp mouse.
— *Nkaaki* has a slender and elongated nose, reminiscent of the beak of the eponymously named black-feathered bird.
— *Mfondo* has a long and relatively wide nose similar to that of the hornbill. This voluminous nasal appendage actually extends down and originates from the mask's coiffure: a sculptural detail that makes it possible to distinguish between the *mfondo* and the *nkaaki* masks, which otherwise share many sculptural characteristics. One also notes that in most cases the *mfondo* is, of the four mentioned, the mask type that most extensively elaborates the "crescent-shaped chin" aesthetic observed on the masks of neighboring groups, such as the *cibwabwa* examples of the Kambulu.

← Types of Lwalwa masks, in the 1950s, from left to right: Nkaaki, Shifoolo, Shifoolo, Mfondo. Photo: A. Maesen.

The twin perforations in this *mfondo*'s philtrum are quite unusual. Normally Lwalwa masks only have one at this location, through which the dancer runs a cord that he holds with his teeth in order to keep the mask in place. The fact this mask has two at different heights suggests it may have been worn by more than one individual, or that it was commissioned by one person but then purchased by another. In the past, the Lwalwa masks that young people wore were used on a variety of occasions. If a hunt had gone poorly, a masked presentation might be decided upon to appease the ancestors responsible for that misfortune. In the dry season, the masks were also often used in a more festive context at dance tournaments for which remuneration was offered.

The Lwalwa also knew other types of masks, quite different from the ones we have described above. These wooden masks, known generically as *ngongo wa shimbungu*, were covered with native copper plaques. These were rare and ritually important objects that on some occasions could be worn by chiefs.

D. R. of Congo

Hemba People
Niembo Style

Vivianne Baeke

Male Ancestor Figure

P. 123 → Plates P. 74

A Certain Gaze

In the course of all the trials and errors that anthropology and art history went through at the beginning of the 20th century, and before the two disciplines united in their efforts to grasp the depth of African art, anthropomorphic statues were too easily referred to as "ancestor figures" in the strict sense of the term, which is to say as representations of family predecessors. But these figures often concealed an entirely different reality. To give but one example, what could be more deceptive than the impressive roof figure that sits atop a Pende chief's house! Far from being the representation of a single respectable ancestor, this female figure holding a child in its arms constitutes the receptacle that holds the vital principle, called *givule*, of an enemy that in former times was captured and then sacrificed when a chief was enthroned. After he became imprisoned in this statue, he watched over the village's well-being. [1]

Even though some of the deceased do often haunt ritual sculptures, the concept of the "representations of ancestors" within the framework of a cult devoted to their worship is only completely applicable to one cultural area in the DRC, and that is between the Lualaba River and Lake Tanganyika, inhabited by, among other groups, the Tabwa, the Holoholo, the Hemba, the Buyu and the Bembe. [2] The ancestor figures produced by the Buyu and the Hemba may be considered the perfect paradigms of these objects. [3] A *lusingiti* Hemba

1 Strother, *Architecture Against the State*, 2004, p. 289.
2 The Bembe adopted ancestor figures under the influence of the Bùyù and the Zoba before the arrival of the Arabs in the Tanganyika area (Gossiaux, 2016) Tabwa ritual figures only became ancestor figures during the period that preceded colonization (Roberts, 1985).
3 For a more in-depth analysis, see Baeke, *Figures of Power, Figures of Memory*, 2017, p. 69-94.

figure like this one does indeed represent a family ancestor in the strict sense of the term. Every head of a family generally had a series of such ancestor figures, which were connected by known relationships, and each of which bore a precise forebear's name.

Among the Hemba, as among the Bùyù, this lineup of ancestors that were kept in the shadows of their sanctuary established the genealogical depth of the family group and legitimized its right to the land it occupied. The ancestor figures testified to their having been that land's first inhabitants. As François Neyt stressed, "The genealogical trees are well known, and they are essential most notably for the defense and justification of land property rights. They may go back as far as eight, ten or even fifteen generations." [4]

These hieratic statues are however not simply commemorative portraits intended to establish the property rights of a family group. They are at the center of the extremely important activity of ancestor worship. The funerary rites and those associated with communicating with ancestors still today constitute the two essential religious armatures of Hemba society. [5] As they were the privileged intermediaries between the deceased and the living, the chiefs maintained a continuous relationship with their forebears through speech, prayers and chants, palm wine offerings and animal sacrifices.

← *Kabeja makua,* Private collection

The *singiti* figures perfectly incarnate the religious concept that holds that the materialization of the spirit of the deceased with an effigy representing him can give him life. Blakely and Blakely confirm that these ancestor figures belong to the category of *miisí*, or "spirit-invested objects." [6] There is however no magical substance or charm made of an assortment of ingredients that interrupts the pure lines and curves of the figures in this case. We are manifestly not dealing with an object of the same type as the Kongo *nkisi* or the Songye *nkishi* here. [7] There is however a different kind of object among the Hemba, distinct from the *singiti* figures, that has the function of activating the powers of the ancestors, and this type of figure, called *kabeja makua*, does contain powerful charms.

4 Neyt, *La grande statuaire Hemba du Zaïre,* 1977, p. 25.

5 Blakely & Blakely, *Ancestors, Witchcraft and Foregrounding the Poetic*, 1994, p. 407.

6 Ibid., p. 407.

7 The Kongo minkisi are not ancestor figures but traps for capturing spirits of nature or the souls of malevolent and anonymous deceased people.

Moreover, this type of figure, far from presenting idealized traits as the ancestor figures do, instead has those of a monstrous being. At first glance, the *kabeja makua* seems to be made up of two back-to-back figures of the opposite sex. There is an opening above the two heads intended for the insertion of the magical ingredients. In fact the janus figure symbolizes a deformed being with a single trunk, but with two heads, four legs and four arms.

A myth fragment that Neyt mentions accompanies this strange representation: there was once a woman (*abeja*) and a man (*makua*) who had a strange child that fit this description. [8] The Hemba do indeed have a great fear of any kind of abnormality in childbirth, and the birth of Siamese twins seems to be the most dreaded of all.

By splitting the functions of the *singiti* and the *kabeja makua* in the ancestor cult, everything happens as if the Hemba system of thought made a distinction between what is derived from magic and what is part of religion. It was the *kabeja makua* that the chief beseeched to activate the power of the ancestors, but it was the *singiti* he asked to answer his prayers.

By concentrating and trapping all of the dangers that could potentially affect the world of humans into one distinct and monstrous ritual object, and by transforming it into an efficient and operational object, the Hemba ensured the preservation of the spiritual integrity and the benevolent actions of the ancestors, which find expression in the perfection of their sculpted images.

The desire to communicate with the deceased *múfú* (pl. *báfú*) went hand in hand with the concern for finding a worthy abode for him or her. It was expected of the sculptor that he would render the deceased person's traits as faithfully as possible. Most artists worked from a model, and a family would often offer to supply "one of its members who most closely resembled the deceased individual one wished to honor." [9]

Upon close examination of the splendid example here, the harmony and the serenity it exudes make the subtle asymmetry of its face, which imparts astonishing life and personality to its physiognomy, almost imperceptible. Could this be an indication that one of the living relatives of the deceased

8 Neyt, 1977, p. 485. This was undoubtedly a case of Siamese twins.

9 Neyt and de Strycker, *Approche des arts Hemba*, 1975, p. 14.

served as the artist's model? For the Hemba, an ancestor figure constitutes the paradigm for what the face of a polished, refined, respectable, well socialized and open person should look like. The lips are sealed, concealing the teeth, and unraised eyebrows are the rule.

Moreover, when a person communicates with a peer, it is considered normal for him to stare intently, but calmly and unhurriedly, at his interlocutor. To avert one's gaze, or to glance just briefly, is seen as discourteous and even offensive behavior. [10] The apex of visual perception is expressed by the verb úbatízha, which is associated with the acquisition of knowledge through seeing and which the Hemba define as "seeing something or someone in such a way as to acquire a profound knowledge of the subject in question" (*úlóla mpaka góyúa bílegélé*). Blakely stresses that this way of seeing can be described as "dignified contemplation." [11 For Alisa LaGamma, the verb *úbatízha* has to do with the profound visual meditative aspect that Hemba sculptors strive to impart to their ancestor figures. [12]

Curiously, there is a symbolic inversion between the customary behaviors of the living in this respect to those behaviors involving communication with the deceased. While their rules of conduct between living people stipulate that they should fully engage one another visually, the Hemba do not feel any need to cross gazes with their ancestors. In the shadows of their sanctuary, the latter observe the world of the living with half-open eyes. Their inwardly directed look, which is the sculptor's creation, has no need for light in order to decipher and understand the joys, misfortunes and desires of their descendants.

This ancestor's nearly closed eyes seem to be trained on an interior dream that originated in the shadows of the sanctuary he certainly rested in for a great many years. We will never know what misfortune befell the family that owned it, and probably forced them to hide it by burying it to prevent its being stolen. In the absence of the care that would normally have been lavished on a ritual object of this kind, this figure unfortunately fell prey to insects. The ensuing damage does not however detract from the majestic serenity it emanates, an expression of the power of its inner gaze, or *úbatízha*.

10 Blakely & Blakely, *So'o Masks and Hemba Funerary Festival*, 1987, pp. 30-32.

10 Blakely, *To Gaze or Not to Gaze*, 1981, pp. 6-7.

11 LaGamma, *Heroic Africans*, 2011, p. 230.

D. R. of Congo

Lega People

Neck Rest

P. 127 → Plates P. 86

Of Ivory and Mystery

Vivianne Baeke

The unusual dimensions (because it is made of ivory) of this splendid neck rest make it an absolutely unique work. Its appearance in the book *African Negro Art* [1] in 1935 did not however generate any particular excitement, except perhaps among visitors to the exhibition who would have had the opportunity to admire it in the flesh. In the catalog, the dimensions given for it are incomplete and too discreetly stated (height 4 ¾"). The ethnic group this jewel was attributed to did not arouse any particular attention either. Ivory decorated with circle-dot designs was already known to be one of the hallmarks of Lega artists' work. Moreover, in the exhibition, it was displayed next to an ivory mask from the Louis Carré collection, which is unquestionably Lega. And yet.

In 1935, as in 1964 when the work was published for a second time, [2] ethnographic knowledge of the former Belgian Congo area it was supposed to have come from was very sketchy, and Charles Ratton did not fail to mention that fact in 1947 in his introduction to the catalog for an auction at the Hotel Drouot, which included a collection of 29 Lega ivories: "The number of Warega ivories is very limited, and ethnographers know little about them, except that they were used for ritual purposes by the Miwami or, according to Franz Olbrecht, the Moami, society." [3]

With the exception of a few timid articles before then, it wasn't until 1973 that Daniel Biebuyck published his research (which he had however conducted in the 1950s) and his definitive work *Lega Culture* appeared. Even if several authors nowadays question his analysis of the Lega system of thought, [4] the author does give a detailed and comprehensive description of the Lega art that is so closely associated with the *Bwami* initiation society. Other important works on the subject have

1 Sweeney, *African Negro Art*, cat. 472.

2 Radin and Sweeney, *African Folktales and Sculpture*, 1964, ill. 151.

3 Ratton, 1947, p. 14.

4 Muyololo, *Problématiques des arts Lega*, 1974, p. 35; Mulyumba wa Mamba, *La structure sociale des Balega-Basile*, 1977, p. 127; Baeke, *À la recherche du sens du Bwami*, 2009 & "*Rites de passage",* 2013; Gossiaux, "*L'art de l'ivoire,"* 2013, p. 189.

continued to appear since then, and this corpus of literature enables us to attempt to find out more about this neck rest that the Lega are believed to have sculpted.

Biebuyck emphasizes that all Lega artistic production was connected with the *Bwami* initiation society. [5] He reviews the different types of objects associated with the *Bwami* – and there are many [6] – but he does not mention neck rests except to say: "I have never seen an ivory neck rest (*lubigo*)." He goes on to explain that the only one he knows is the one published by Sweeney. He then adds: "I heard the neck rest mentioned only once, in a kindi initiation: 'He who died does not return; he goes away and throws away the headrest.'" [7]

When one learns that every object sculpted for the Bwami association, whether made of ivory or of wood, was scrupulously preserved after its owner's death in order to be transferred to his heir in the institution, one understands that the headrest this aphorism evokes could only be an everyday object with no connection to the universe of initiation. And, as almost all sculpted objects are connected with this society, the proverb probably refers to the piece of wood that was used as a pillow, or the little log one slipped beneath the nape of the deceased's neck, at funerary ceremonies in a symbolic gesture – observed also among the Bembe, who call the neighboring Lega their "big brothers". [8]

When one further notes that neither Biebuyck, nor Marc Felix [9], nor Kellim Brown [10], ever saw any evidence of a neck rest among the Lega, one can infer, with reasonable certainty, as Brown actually does [11], that this magnificent object is not in fact Lega.

Although the Lega did not have sculpted neck rests, they did on the other hand have sculpted wooden stools, called *kisumbi*, which were meticulously polished and patinated and the possession of which was the exclusive prerogative of the members of the highest *Bwami* grades. Some miniature ivory examples of these circulate at the initiation rites. Brown publishes an example whose decoration reminds of that of our neck rest. It is equipped with seven small legs that connect two circular plateaus and the whole object is adorned with circle-dot designs. [12]

← Miniature *kisumbi* seat. Lega

← *Ecumbe hebele.* Double seat. Bembe

The extensive in-depth research done by Pol-Pierre Gossiaux on the ritual universe of the Bembe, who are culturally closely related to the Lega, shows us that they have wooden pillows (*'aseko*), but that they are apparently objects used in everyday life [13] and not part of the ritual paraphernalia of the *Bwamè*, which is an analogous association to that of the Lega *Bwami.*

There are many ivory objects in the *Bwamè* and a singular miniature seat, which is also entirely decorated with *ngata y 'alùngi* circle-dot designs, is among these. While very little information is available on the miniature Lega ivory stool, this object is conversely very well documented. It symbolizes the rule of the succession of chiefs, according to the principle of primogeniture in the patrilineal lineages. [14] The central plateau represents the eldest, the *ula*, of the oldest branch, represented by one of the lower vertical supports, and the upper plateau symbolizes his successor, the eldest of the lineages represented by the five upper vertical supports, all issued fron the first *ula*. The *ngata y'alùngi* circle-dot designs arbitrarily represent male individuals who are members of the lineage.It is possible that the symbolism of the circle-dot designs that decorate our mysterious neck rest could be of the same nature as those that cover these two miniature seats. The neck rest's three vertical supports would represent family lineages while the circle-dot designs would represent its members. Given its dimensions and the perfection of its forms, it is moreover just as likely that the object was once the property and prerogative of an important chief or notable.

In spite of the stylistic connections between these three ivory works, the trained eye immediately observes that the neck rest – with its vertical and parallel supports and especially its rectangular and elegantly curved upper surface – belongs neither to the sculptural universe of the Lega nor to that of the Bembe. In short, what we have here is an object whose material (ivory) and symbolism (expressed by its ornamental structure) appear to belong very clearly to the Maniema cultural universe, but whose style and type (a

5 Biebuyck, *Lega Culture*, 1973.
6 Masks, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures; objects like shears, knives, hammers, spoons and stools.
7 Biebuyck, *The Art of Zaïre*, Vol. II, 1986, p. 200-201.
8 Gossiaux, *Le Bwamè du Léopard du Babembe*, 2006, p. 94; idem.
9 Personal communication, Jan. 2018.
10 Brown, *Crossing the Lega Ivory Spectrum*, part 1, 2013a.
11 Brown, op. cit., part 2, 2013b, p. 136.
12 op. cit. p. 135, ill. C101.
13 Gossiaux, *Babembe*, 2016, p. 56.
14 Gossiaux, *L'Art de l'ivoire chez les Babembe du Sud-Kivu,* 2013, p. 186.

← Exhibition case at *Sculptures et Objets à la Villa Guibert,* 1933.

sculpted headrest) are more reminiscent of the "dream-pillows" from the Luba cultural area. The Lega and the Bembe simply do not have sculpted headrests while the Luba and other cultural groups do – although they are very rarely made of ivory, and never have the circle-dot design ornamentation.

To find a cultural equivalent, which would at least combine several aesthetic and symbolic characteristics of both areas, one would thus have to look to a cultural intermediary zone between the Luba and the Lega – that of the Zimba for example, who, as Marc Felix has very rightly said "have one foot in the Luba world and the other in the Lega world." [15]

In the entire Luba world, and in the broadest sense of the term, only two ivory neck rests exist – and one of them is Zimba. [16] It is very well known, often published and was in the Charles Ratton collection in 1935. It is the ultimate irony that in Sweeney's catalog one can take in both of these neck rests at a single glance: as Ratton's anthropomorphic one and the one with abstract shapes that belonged to Louis Carré are shown next to one another on a double-page illustration. [17] Earlier, destiny had led them to encounter one another in the same display case, in the company of the famous Lega mask, at the *Sculptures et Objets à la Villa Guibert* exhibition in 1933 – which seems to indicate that Louis Carré and Charles Ratton had somehow confusedly surmised that these objects were brothers

Undoubtedly to puzzle African art connoisseurs even more, the artist who sculpted the Zimba neck rest was more inspired by the iconography of his western neighbors than by the purity of the symbolism of Lega and Bembe art – and he decorated it with a female figure in a style that resembles that of the Eastern Luba.

This extremely rare ivory neck rest, unique in its genre, finds its place with ease within two distinct stylistic and symbolic universes, without however identifying completely with either one. This singularity makes it all the more exceptional, because it is a rarely equaled harmonious sculptural alliance of the heat that radiates from the ivory it is made of and the purity of form it displays.

15 Personal communication, January 2018. Biebuyck notes that certain Lega lineages formed close contacts with the Zimba (1986, p. 208).

16 Volper, *"Ivoires sculptés des Luba"*, 2012, pp. 124-126.

17 Sweeney, 1935, cat. 470 and cat. 472.

Lega People

Bernard Dulon

The Lega people, migrants from the north, settled on the eastern shores of the Lwalaba River in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo beginning at the end of the 16th century. The Bwami, an institution that can be described as a hierarchically very structured mixed initiation association, penetrates and animates all of Lega society and is vital to its functioning. It is the mechanism by which the Lega world achieves and maintains cohesion. Its goals are humanistic and its rituals transmit knowledge.

The extent to which their art is formally free makes the idea of the existence of a Lega style properly speaking difficult to apprehend. As aptly summarized by Ralph Altman, "Balega art… consists mainly of an infinite number of variations of a few motifs and forms of sculpture" [1]. Nonetheless, any figurine or mask that is commissioned or adopted by an initiate is indisputably Lega and takes the aesthetic and symbolic place incumbent to it among the different objects that are used in the course of the Bwami initiation rites.

Although they do not constitute a distinct semantic ensemble within the framework of the ensemble of anthropomorphic figurines, the large ivory heads do nevertheless appear to belong to a well-defined and separate category. They were not frequently seen and were carefully taken care of by the highest ranking initiates – or else were actually their property – and they occupied a central position when the statuettes were ritually exhibited. They were customarily individually named with a periphrasis that had to do with the sovereign values of the Bwami.

Repeated manipulations and ritual anointments finally resulted in the creation of a complete sculptural art work which combined and associated the visual, the tactile and the word.

The European history of the head we are considering here is intimately connected with that of the collections of Charles Ratton, a dealer of legendary taste. He was one of the pioneers of the discovery of African art by the Western world and an insatiable ivory aficionado. He was consequently able to acquire three of the most important Lega works

1 Cameron, *Art of the Lega*, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2001, p. 67.

← Charles Ratton, April 1970.

← *The Sculpture of Africa*, Eliot Elisofon & William Fagg, 1958.

known: the mask from the Louis Carré collection that would later belong to Picasso, the headrest with the same provenance that we also present in our exhibition, and the famous head that is the subject of this article. The latter appeared for the first time with its name in a 1955 publication, and was then selected in 1958 for illustration in Fagg and Elisofon's famous work *The Sculpture of Africa*. William Rubin also used it in his remarkable work on *Primitivism in 20th Century Art* for the MOMA in New York.

It is no simple matter to present an icon, but let us draw attention in these few lines to the work's perfect ovoid volume which enables it to nest perfectly in the hollow of a pair of cupped hands, to the perfection of its heart-shaped face, turned skywards as if in mute prayer, and to its superb patina, the result of the so often repeated customary actions, which has penetrated into and embellished the piece in the same way that the learning of the Bwami had in its time penetrated into and elevated the soul of the initiate that used the piece. The harmonious crack lines that are damages in the material, sometimes interrupted by the excrescence of the nose, create a moving and elegant calligraphic design on the surface of the object.

All studio photographs, including the cover and illustrations on page 116: Hughes Dubois

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P. 104, An agricultural ritual to promote a successful harvest: Troppen-Museum
P. 105, Portrait of a Senufo woman: Frobenius-Institut, Frankfurt am Main
P. 106, Boussard. Atelier with Senufo, c. 1950. Musée d'Étampes: ADAGP
P. 108, Baule figure from the C. Ratton coll., African Negro Art, J. Sweeney, MoMA, 1935, nº 69: DR
P. 111, Fang Okak female ancestor figure, Equatorial Guinea: Rietberg Museum
P. 111, Eyema byeri ancestor figure, Collected c. 1907 in Rio Muni, G. Tessmann coll. in the Völkerkunde Coll. at Lübeck: DR
P. 112, Types of headdress, braided and postiche (nlôô-ngô), of the Beti-Fang, early 20th century: DR
P. 113, Aduma women of Lastourville, postcard, photo: H. Arsandaux (pre-1933): DR
P. 114, An Ambete pair, Sotheby's sale, NYC, A. France coll.: DR Sotheby's
P. 121, Portrait of the chief of Nemlao: DR
P. 122, Types of Lwalwa masks, in the 1950s, photo: A. Maesen: EP.1953.74.1579, coll. MRAC Tervuren; 1954, MRAC Tervuren ©
P. 124, Kabeja makua, private coll.: photo Frédéric Dehaen, Archives Bernard de Grunne
P. 129, Miniature kisumbi seat, Lega. Photo: Congo Basin Art History Research Center, Brussels
P. 129, Ecumbe hebele double seat, Bembe. Photo: Congo Basin Art History Research Center, Brussels
P. 130, Exhibition case at Sculptures et Objets à la Villa Guibert, 1933: DR
P. 132, Charles Ratton, April 1970: Philippe Ratton documentation
P. 132, The Sculpture of Africa, E. Elisofon & W. Fagg, 1958, p. 243: DR

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