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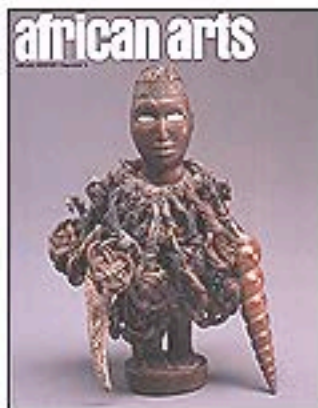
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Mambila Figurines and Masquerades: Problems of Interpretation



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1. *Tadep* figurine. Mambila, Nigeria. These woodcarvings, generally about 30 centimeters tall, were usually made as a male-female pairs and placed outside ritual storehouses associated with the ritual complex called *sùàgà*. The hand-to-chin gesture is characteristic of *tadep*. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, N45.

Gebauer, who worked among the Mambila in 1936–50, provided only sketchy and minimal notes for many of his photographs. All of his photos are archived in The Robert Goldwater Library, Paul Gebauer Collection, and The Photograph Study Collection, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Sculptures of the Mambila of Cameroon and Nigeria are well known, having been included in large touring exhibitions and illustrated in catalogues (e.g., Thompson & Vogel 1990, Northern 1984, R.F. Thompson 1974, Preston 1985). Yet there is very little information available about the Mambila and the social system that forms the context for the production of these objects. Indeed, the catalogues all quote the same two sources for the names, uses, or meanings of the sculptures: Paul Gebauer and Gilbert Schneider, both American missionaries who were interested in art and anthropology. They were the first missionaries to work for any length of time in the Mambila area—Gebauer in 1936–50, Schneider primarily in 1947–52.¹ Until I began my fieldwork among Mambila in Cameroon in 1985, the only anthropologist to have worked with the group was Farnham Rehfish, who spent a year in the village of Warwar in 1953–54.

My research on Mambila religion and society (Zeitlyn 1987, 1990ab, 1991, 1992, forthcoming) has led me to examine the sculptures in Western collections and to attempt to relate them to my fieldwork. This essay sets out to analyze the uses and significance of some of the figurines called *tadep* and *kike*. These carvings are mainly anthropomorphic, although there are some animal figures. Discussion of *tadep* and *kike* leads to a consideration of masquerades of the association called *sùàgà*, and their accompaniment such as *tawon* flutes with carved mouthpieces. *Sùàgà* lies at the heart of Mambila religion, and a later section considers how it might best be approached.

The Mambila

The Mambila are found on either side of the border between Nigeria and Cameroon, the majority living on the Mambila Plateau in Nigeria.² A smaller number (approximately 12,000) live in Cameroon, especially at the foot of the Mambila Plateau escarpment on the Tikar Plain. My fieldwork (1985–92) was restricted to these latter groups, and in particular to the village of Somié (population approximately 1,000, according to the 1986 tax census). Self-sufficient in food produc-

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tion, the villagers have grown coffee as a cash crop since the early 1960s.

Cameroonian Mambila society closely resembles that of the Mambila in Nigeria, as described for the Nigerian village of Warwar by Rehfish (1972). However, Nigerian Mambila did not have the same type of institutionalized chiefship found in Cameroon. Villages in Nigeria were organized on gerontocratic principles and largely lacked political offices. The office of chief was principally a ritual one. In Cameroon elements of the chiefship found among the neighboring Tikar³ were adopted in precolonial times, lending political authority to the Mambila institution. Most villagers in Cameroon are Muslim or members of either the Catholic or Protestant church. Despite this, much of the indigenous religion remains.

Little is known of Mambila history. Based on his research in Warwar village in 1953–54, Rehfish wrote:

The Mambila have no origin myths. Much time was spent enquiring into the origin of the tribe, all to no avail....Some of my informants said that comparatively recently, perhaps about a hundred years ago, some of the Mambila groups now on the plateau had emigrated from the lowlands in what is today the French Cameroons. The villages from which they came were located near settlements occupied today by Mambila-speaking peoples.

(Rehfish 1972:10)

In contemporary Cameroon, Mambila say that they come from the highlands, on the Mambila Plateau. The last wave of Mambila appears to have arrived on the Tikar Plain in the last half of the nineteenth century (see Zeitlyn 1992).



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Tadep and Kike

Although both Gebauer and Schneider made major collections of Mambila artifacts, their publications do not provide much detail about the uses to which these objects were put or the belief system within which they were used (see Gebauer

Left: 2. *Tadep* figurine. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, N47.

Below: 3. *Tadep* figurine. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, N48.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

1964, 1979; also Gebauer 1968, 1971a; Schneider 1992).⁴ In this regard Gebauer has stated, "The Gebauers did not ever reside among Mambila and do not have any certain answers to these questions" (1979:333). Nevertheless, both he and Schneider had the considerable advantage of being in the field before the Mambila Plateau was emptied of sculpture by art traders, apparently during the 1960s and 1970s. This is not to say that everything to do with Mambila religion as it existed circa 1940–50 has disappeared, but it seems to be true of the small, collectable statuary. Masquerades are still performed in contemporary Cameroon, although those I have seen lack carved headpieces.

Of all Mambila figurines, only *tadep* and *kike* have been widely collected and hence are well documented. *Tadep* (Figs. 1–3) are usually male-female pairs, carved of low-density wood (silk-cotton tree:

4. *Tadep* and *kike* in front of a painted screen (*baltu*) outside a *sùgà* storehouse. *Kike* (second and fourth from left) are made from three pieces of raffia pith pegged or tied together. Like *tadep*, they are usually carved in male-female pairs. Late 1940s. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 354/24.



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Clockwise from left:

5. Storehouse for "ritual objects," with *baltu* screen. Resembling miniature granaries, *sùàgà* storehouses are built on a raised platform. San, near the Nigerian Mambila village of Warwar, January 14, 1938. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 45/19.

6. *Kike* covered with a net outside a *sùàgà* storehouse (Gebauer's "fetish hut"). *Tadep* appear at the far right. Mbamnga village, Cameroon, November 25, 1939. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 115/23a.

7. *Tadep* hung in a net in front of the painted *baltu* outside a *sùàgà* storehouse. The other objects appear to be birdscares made of raffia pith. Kabri village, Nigeria, 1936. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 13/43.



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Ceiba pentandra). *Kike* (Fig. 4) are carved and pegged figurines made from the pith of the raffia palm (often called bamboo in the literature).⁵ These statues, which I will discuss further below, and other figurines representing animals were stored in granaries (illustrated in Gebauer 1979:51, bottom; Schneider 1955:116). Other sorts of statues were kept on display outside the granaries, which sometimes had paintings on the exterior walls (Tong 1967:9).

Both Gebauer and Schneider use the term "ancestor figure" to describe these figurines. I would suggest, however, that the association of these objects with "ancestor cults" rests on the false assumption that all groups in the region have such cults. Rehfish did not find one in Warwar, nor did Viviane Baeke in the village of Lus among the Wuli,⁶ nor did I in Somié among Cameroonian Mambila.⁷ It is unlikely that an ancestor cult, along with its shrines and the sculptures, could have vanished so completely that no traces have been discovered by my research.

It is possible that the objects did not belong to ancestor cults but were the sacra

of associations concerned with illness and healing, as is the case in Lus, according to Baeke. This theory would account for the similarity between the granary-like storehouses and terracotta figures among the Mambila and those described and illustrated by Baeke (1984, 1985) among the Wuli. It also has the merit of explaining how the associations could vanish so completely, since healing societies are notoriously vulnerable to fashion.⁸ As I shall demonstrate below, most *tadep* and *kike* were part of the *sùàgà* complex, which (in Somié at least) has replaced healing associations and become central to the traditional religion. *Sùàgà* has, however, also become simplified. Many of the ritual paraphernalia such as the statuary are no longer in use. Yet the essentials seem to have remained unchanged, maintained by a continuity of ritual practice.

Important evidence for the connection between the figurines and *sùàgà* is contained in field notes⁹ made by Gilbert Schneider during a return visit to the Mambila area in 1959–60. These notes make it clear that we must distinguish

sùàgà storehouses from those of healing associations. The *tadep*, *kike*, and painted screens called *baltu* were only found on *nggob*¹⁰ so ("store *sùàgà*").

Schneider documented three healing associations, called *Cugli*, *Leli*, and *Kuli*. Each had its own storehouses, which were undecorated and much smaller than ordinary granaries and *sùàgà* storehouses. Little is known of these associations. *Leli* is connected with illnesses of the stomach (*li*). According to Schneider's notes, induction into one of the three (*Cugli*?) included the bloodless killing of a goat (it was beaten to death); the animal's blood was then spilled into one of the dished stones set on pillars that both Gebauer and Schneider have photographed standing in compounds near *sùàgà* storehouses (e.g., Schneider's photograph in Schwartz 1972:25, fig. 12 foreground).

The picture that emerges from the available, mainly photographic, documentation shows that the sacra of the *sùàgà* masquerades were kept in granary-like storehouses, described below. The sacra of other curing rites that are only

loosely connected to *siàgà* masquerades, if they are connected at all, were kept in similar structures. These consisted of a platform about 1.5 meters high, supported by four vertical forked tree trunks, upon which sat a structure with a steeply pitched thatch roof. The larger storehouses appear to have had square bodies, the smaller ones round bodies (Fig. 5). The outer wall of the larger storehouse was made from lengths of palm rib. In front of one face was the *baltu* screen, made of raffia pith and decorated with paint. Typically two figures were painted on it with a rainbow above them. In front of the *baltu* was a net in which objects—dead birds, chicken heads, feathers, and sometimes figures—were placed. Their purpose is unknown. Small figures were usually attached to the storehouse structure or suspended in front of the screen (Figs. 6, 7).

Mambila granaries often have fireplaces on the ground below the platform so that smoke can rise into the stored grain and help preserve it. Ritual storehouses usually had fireplaces near them rather than under them, and other types of objects, such as pots or painted stones were placed below. Schneider has a photograph of two pots painted with large round eyes, placed one on top of the other beneath a *siàgà* storehouse. A string connects the pots to the floor above (Fig. 8).

Mambila domestic cookery takes place inside houses on three firebricks, or sometimes two firebricks placed near a wall which acts as the third support. These ovoid mud bricks, decorated with small

finger-made indentations, are made by married women. Ritual cooking, however, takes place outside and on firestones, not bricks. The Mambila word for hearth or fireplace is *kò*. *Kò ló* (lit., "hearth treatment") is the term for ritual fireplaces. *Kò* is also used metonymically for firebrick or firestone, so *kò ló* could refer to a fireplace used to prepare treatments, or to one of its firestones. Different treatments have their own fireplaces; therefore a man who knows and prepares several different treatments will have several fireplaces in his compound. Gebauer's and Schneider's photographs show that this has been the case for at least the last fifty years.

The *siàgà* storehouse contained masks and suits as well as pottery and wood figurines, gourd megaphones, and trumpets (Fig. 9). "Medicines" were kept there as well. In his field notes Schneider mentioned that the *ndip so* (*siàgà* storehouse)

belonging to Lel of Mbamnga village contained medicine for rain and "for those killed by lightning, so the matter would end."

The figurines are of several different sorts. The type that is easiest to distinguish is *kike* (*kiki* has also been recorded), a simple anthropomorphic figure made from three pieces of raffia pith pegged (and sometimes tied) together. Extra pieces were added to make arms and male genitalia. They were usually made in male and female pairs and decorated with red, white, and black paint.

Other figures were carved from a single piece of wood (usually) or pith (rarely). *Tadep* (*tadup*, *tadip*, *tatschop* have also been recorded) were commonly made in male-female pairs, but in the photographs they also appear as singles, or as multiples of one sex, more often than do *kike*. Approximately 30 centime-

Below: 8. Two clay pots called *mvù*, with painted eyes. The pots are connected by twine to the floor of the storehouse above. Warwar village, Nigeria, n.d. (ca. 1950?).

Right: 9. The inside of a storehouse, probably from the Yamba (Kaka), a group neighboring the Mambila in Cameroon. Its contents include musical instruments and figures. January 1937. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 18/31.



PHOTO: GILBERT SCHNEIDER



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PHOTO GILBERT SCHNEIDER

10. Stone figure located in a family compound near several ritual storehouses. Approx. 75cm–90cm (30"–36") above the ground. Mambila Plateau, Nigeria. 1960.

ters high, *tadep* are painted black with white and red facial features and sometimes have a few feathers stuck into the crown of the head. Commonly the left hand clasps the chin, while in other cases both hands are raised to the chin. Similar gestures are to be seen in carvings from the Cameroon Grasslands and on carved doorposts among the Bamileke considerably to the south of Mambila.¹¹

Both the *kike* and *tadep* so far described were placed at the bottom of the *baltu* screen or in the net in front of it. Since the *sùàgà* storehouses were in the compound and not fenced off in any way, these figures were visible to both women and children. Rehfisch noted that in Mbamnga, but not Warwar, what he calls *tatschop* figures were placed in granaries (field notes, Nov. 1, 1953). Judging from Rehfisch's unpublished photographs, these appear to be *tadep*.

Other carved wood figures are larger but stylistically very similar to the *tadep*. However, these were kept inside the storehouses, out of the sight of women. It thus seems plausible to assume that they had a ritual significance or use different from that of the small *tadep* outside. Gebauer and Schneider also called these larger figures, which they collected, *tadep*. It is possible that Mambila did not linguistically distinguish between the two sorts of wooden figurine, even though they are functionally distinct. Or perhaps there was a qualifying term that went unrecorded; for example, *tadep dua*¹² (by analogy with the nomenclature for the *sùàgà* masquerades, this means "big *tadep*") could have referred to the larger figures found inside the storehouses. Or finally, perhaps a completely different name existed that went unrecorded.

One note in particular is important for the light it throws both on this point and on the putative identity of the *tadep* as ancestor figures. In his field notes

Schneider wrote that the "long-headed *tadep* is called *ndeng* like the long-headed *juju*, and the stubbier *tadep* is called *bò* like the *juju* figure." The black fiber suits that masqueraders wear without a headpiece were called *sùàgà ndeng*. The name *bò* has not been recorded in the context of masquerades.

To sum up, the figures are found only on storehouses for *sùàgà* objects, and there is some evidence for identifying the *tadep* figurines with *sùàgà* masquerades. There is no evidence for an association with Mambila ancestors apart from the repeated use by both Gebauer and Schneider of the term "ancestor figure" when providing documentation for their collections.

Other Figures

In addition to the *tadep* and *kike*, other figurines of Mambila manufacture have been documented. There are, for example, children's toys consisting of paired figures (approx. 8 cm high), threaded on strings, which slide together in imitation of the sexual act. These are considered highly amusing by adolescent onlookers. Those I have seen in Somié were made by Nigerians but are identical to those from Ngambe Tikar, far to the east, which date from 1912 or before (illustrated in Thorbecke 1914–24).

Stone sculptures are known to exist, but little can be said about them. Pierre Harter makes reference to, but does not illustrate, Mambila granite figures (Harter 1986:322, 326, 337). The only documented



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example was photographed in the field by Gilbert Schneider in 1960 (Fig. 10). Carved by the compound head, it stood exposed for all to see. It was located near several ritual storehouses, including one for *sùàgà*, and special fireplaces for preparing different "medicines." In his field notes Schneider observes only that the sculpture overlooked the rest of the compound and that the carver had wanted to make a male figure as well but had been prohibited, for unspecified reasons, by his father. No clue is given as to the object's name, use, or significance.

Animal figurines, made from wood or pith, and some of terracotta, were collected by Schneider: carvings of dogs, snakes, and hippos have been observed.¹³ These were hung beneath ritual storehouses. Schneider describes them as "protective" or "totemic." Gebauer collected some small terracotta figures (one now in the Portland Art Museum, another in Gebauer's personal collection) which have a human-like torso with a head resembling that of the *sùàgà* masks (Fig. 11). These were used in palm groves when wine was being made. It is unclear whether the figures were intended to prevent theft or to ensure that the wine-making went smoothly and good wine was produced.



Left: 11. Earthenware figurine, identified as a dog by Gebauer, with a head resembling that of a *sùàgà* mask (see Fig. 13). Animal figures like this one, made of wood, pith, or clay, were hung beneath ritual storehouses. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, N80.

Above: 12. Clay figurine held by its sculptor, who appears to be Marami of Mbamnga village, Cameroon. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, R108.

Opposite page: 13. *Sùàgà* mask with fiber costume. Gembu town, Nigeria. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, R63. This helmet mask (length 53cm/20.75") is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Fletcher Fund, 1972, 1972.4.7.

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Gebauer also described some figurines he called *mantab*. In February 1961 two informants in Mbamnga told him that they were used to guard palm-wine groves; thieves were held to become impotent or sterile if they stole wine protected by a *mantab*. The owners of such figures were believed to have other powers, such as the ability to transform themselves into leopards (a power usually attributed to witches). A *mantab* was often buried after the death of its owner, although it was possible, after a sacrifice, to transfer it to a new owner. In 1961 similar figures were still being made, but these were called *nki* since they lacked the holes into which "medicine" could be placed.

Today Cameroonian Mambila have a variety of anti-theft devices called *soꝛo* that are attached to such objects as fruit trees. They differ in the plants used to make them and in the effects they are believed to have on any would-be thief. Most that I have observed include knotted pieces of grass. In these cases two pieces of grass are doubled up so that a growing tip is at either end, alongside the roots of the other piece. A knot is tied in each end. I have seen no figurines used to prevent theft.

Apart from the protective figures mentioned above, other terracottas are of human figures which were kept inside ritual storehouses. Four in particular appear to be by the same sculptor, Marami of Mbamnga village (Fig. 12). He made the pair of male figures that was collected by Schneider and is now in the Milwaukee Public Museum (nos. 21591-60593, 21591-60594); and he appears (on stylistic grounds) to have made both the broken figure that was collected in the Donga Valley in 1937 by Gebauer and is now in the Portland Art

Museum (no. 70.10.45) and the female figure now in a private collection (see Preston 1985:62, no. 58).¹⁴

Gebauer's notes on his broken figure are as follows:

The maker of this object is unknown. Its last owner admitted to its usage by his ancestors in circumcision rites. He himself kept the figure in his personal storage. Appreciating the perfect heart-shaped face he made it the prototype of all his sculptures in clay, terracotta and wood.

(Gebauer 1979:219)

Calling them "special Mambila ancestral figurines," Schneider provides this description of the male pair:¹⁵

These two pieces are always kept within the house itself. These are not shown to women in Mambila. They are kept within the ancestral hut, not on the outside. Many of the other male terracottas, the pith figures, the wooden *tadeys* and *kikes* are all kept on the outside of the ancestral house. These two are always kept on the inside and women are not allowed to see them. They are also not labeled by any particular Mambila man's name.

Mention should also be made of terracotta vases decorated with faces like those found on *tadep* sculptures and, in at least one example (Northern 1984: fig. 131), *sùàgà* masks. These appear to be of relatively recent origin, but are nonetheless authentically Mambila. Their distribution is concentrated in the Gembu-Dembe area.¹⁶ It is possible that such vases were used to serve guinea corn beer on special (ritual) occasions. Vases

(called *bògò*) are used by Mambila in Cameroon today. Those meant for everyday purposes, such as carrying beer to work parties in the fields, have a single straight neck, while those used for ceremonies have a double or triple neck but are not specially decorated.

Distribution

It is clear that among the southwestern Mambila, Mbamnga village was a religious center.¹⁷ It enjoys a reputation as such until this day. When Gebauer and Schneider were in the field (1940-60) it would appear that Mbamnga was a center for the production of such ritual objects as pottery figures and *sùàgà* masks. In conversation with me Schneider has commented that in the late 1940s there were ritual storehouses in more compounds in Mbamnga than in Warwar. It remains an open question whether the groups to the north of the Donga River got their ritual paraphernalia from Mbamnga or whether carvers were active elsewhere; the latter seems more likely. Nevertheless Mbamnga's prominence in the southwest

Left: 14. Kung, one of the principal organizers of the *sùàgà* rite, treating the *sùàgà* masquerader with a bundle of special leaves and plants so that his back will not be stiff after the dancing. Every participant was treated in the same manner. Somié village, Cameroon, May 12, 1988.

Center: 15. Kung helping someone don the *sùàgà* masquerade suit. Somié village, Cameroon, May 29, 1988.

Right: 16. Beginning of the men's *sùàgà* masquerade. The participants form a procession and walk backward into the enclosure made for the rites and dances. The masquerader, followed by the chief and Kung, carries a bundles of leaves and grasses picked by the neophytes. Somié village, Cameroon, May 29, 1988.



17. Three *sùàgà* masks of the men's masquerade: *swabe*, *gamva*, and *mbom*. Atta village, Cameroon, 1954.

is surprising considering the relative independence of Mambila settlements in most other respects (the main exception being the iron trade). However, independence should not be mistaken for isolation.¹⁸

An Overview of *Sùàgà*

The ritual paraphernalia of the *sùàgà* complex comprises not only the carved wood and pith figurines already discussed, but also wood masks and fiber costumes which were kept in the *sùàgà* storehouses. I shall now discuss the concept of *sùàgà* and how the masks function within it.

Sùàgà is a unitary concept but with two main foci: the masquerades and the "oaths," a blanket term I use to cover a range of related rituals in which the actors swear their innocence. Some of these rites form an important part of dispute resolution.¹⁹ The power of the *sùàgà* oath is reinforced, at least in part, by the imagery of the *sùàgà* masquerade. Mambila explicitly state that there is linguistic and conceptual unity between the two. Neither the masquerades nor the oaths should be seen as the primary or dominant form.²⁰

The masks considered here operate in ritual contexts, but elements of play are evident, especially when they promenade through the village terrorizing members of the other sex. Hereafter, I follow Tonkin's conventions (1979a, 1979b), using "Mask" (with capitalization) to denote the ensemble of actor, costume, and "mask" (carved face piece). Each masquerade (that is, the events at which the Mask is used) has a different dance associated with it,²¹ and one can talk of performing men's *sùàgà* even if no Mask appears and only the dance occurs, as happens during funeral *sùàgà*.

I can describe women's *sùàgà*, the women's masquerade, only in the broadest terms. My knowledge consists, in the main, of those parts of the rites that men are allowed to see. These include proceedings that they normally do not watch because the activities are shameful to male eyes: they involve the women mocking men and the sexual act.²² Mambila say the rites are important for women's fertility, and they also seem to function as an expression of women's solidarity in opposition to men. The Mask itself, worn by a woman, appears to be an inchoate assemblage of leaves and rags without a carved headpiece.

Similarly, men's *sùàgà*, the male masquerade, promotes male fertility and solidarity in opposition to women, but the latter aspect is less pronounced than in women's *sùàgà*. Men's *sùàgà* is in principle an annual occurrence, although the dancing and all-night ritual are not, in fact, performed every year. When the



PHOTO: JEAN HIRPAULT

main rites, which include the initiation of youths into *sùàgà*, do not take place, only the ritual component called "burying the village," which protects it against witchcraft, will be performed. Women's *sùàgà* takes place every two years and begins with a rite called "burying the village." This is also performed in the years between their main rites.

Sùàgà Masks

The costume of the men's *sùàgà* Mask takes the form of a knitted suit, worn with or without a carved headpiece (Fig. 13). The Mask is active in the rites early on the main day of men's *sùàgà* (Figs. 14-16). Toward the conclusion of the rites proper, all the young boys in the village are brought into the *sùàgà* enclosure and treated with a small dab of river mud. As they leave the enclosure they are "attacked" by the Mask, who terrifies them until they cry. Later the Mask parades through the village accompanied by groups of men, some of whom may blow whistles (notch flutes), make noises through gourd megaphones (*kùrùm*), or shake bundles of gongs.²³ They bang on roofs and scatter firewood while women and children hide inside the houses. In Nigeria the performance of men's *sùàgà* is closely associated with wrestling, in which young men attempt to win renown by throwing a succession of opponents. The fights are carefully controlled by senior men to ensure that they do not get out of hand.

Different *sùàgà* suits and headpieces have different names (Fig. 17). Some villages have several masks, each controlled by a group within the *sùàgà* association that shares its name. Initiation into each group is separate. Once a man has been initiated into *sùàgà*, he can join one of the groups and acquire the right to wear the suit. Initiation into a group always involves being shown a set of leaves that is then eaten with a chicken. The initiate provides the live chicken and must, holding wings and legs in his hands, roast it until it is dead.²⁴

Two principal names for *sùàgà* masks have been recorded by Gebauer and Schneider: *sùàgà due* and *sùàgà bur*. A Mask is given the same name as the mask being worn. Some of the suits are also named.²⁵ Tong (1967:8) describes the Masks as being ranked, with *sùàgà bur* ranking higher than *sùàgà due*. However, my informants in Somié said that *sùàgà due* was the most important. This is consistent with the meaning of the names: *due* means "wide," or more generally "big"; *bur* means "dog" (*bɔr* in Somié dialect). The suggestion of rank seems to me to overformalize the differences (see Zeitlyn 1993c). What is certain is that there were several Masks, of which at least two (*sùàgà bur* and *sùàgà due*) had prominent horizontally aligned, theriomorphic helmet-masks with protruding eyes. In general form they resemble masks found among the Mumuye and the Chamba (ills. in Wittmer & Arnett 1978:92; Rubin 1985:98-99). Like the



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18. A *tawoy* flute, embellished with a carved head (left), and a highly eroded *tadep* figurine (center). Horns, which are often used to store medicines, appear to be hanging directly above the *tadep*. San near Warwar village, Nigeria, January 14, 1938. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 45/13.

19. Man playing a *tawoy* flute. It is slightly different from the examples found in collections, whose bells are less pronounced and are often carved. Note the unusual playing position. December 1938. Photograph by Paul Gebauer, 79/23.

Mumuye and Chamba examples they have a trichrome system of decoration in which red (ochre) and white (chalk) accents are set against an opaque and granular black (soot) background.

In Somié, *siàgà due* and *siàgà bur* are said to be the most important Masks; *nyaba* and the black suit *gãmwè* (Figs. 14–16) are less important (described as being the younger same-sex sibling). *Nyaba* is the name of a suit decorated with black patterns (*nyá* means painted or decorated) but lacking a hood or carved headpiece. Rehfish recorded *nyaba* as the name of a Mask he saw at a funeral on November 12, 1953. Leprosy was said to affect the wearer of the suit if it got rained on, but Rehfish could elicit no explanation for this.

Whenever the Masks of men's *siàgà* emerge, they are accompanied by men whooping, screaming, and playing a variety of instruments. Notch flutes called *tog*, photographed by Rehfish, Gebauer, and Schneider,²⁶ are still in use in Cameroon. The photographs also show the use of *tawoy*, "trumpets,"²⁷ which are actually transversely blown flutes with raised mouthpieces (Figs. 18, 19). Gebauer photographed one being played while held at an angle of approximately 45 degrees, pointed at the ground, an unusual position for flute-playing (Fig. 19). The mouthpiece ends have carved animal heads, often with long open jaws, thus resembling *siàgà*

masks themselves. According to Rehfish (pers. com.), *tawoy* were only played in pairs, the two players walking in circles around one another. Yet he photographed the flutes being played by three young boys with two newly carved *tadep* statues in front of them. It was his understanding that the figurines were to be placed in a granary.

Suàgà Oaths

Most *suàgà* oaths involve the killing of a chicken. Unlike other African sacrifices²⁸ these oaths are not directed at a deity, but they invoke powerful consequences—illness or death—for those who break them. In the normal ritual practice of both masquerade and oath-



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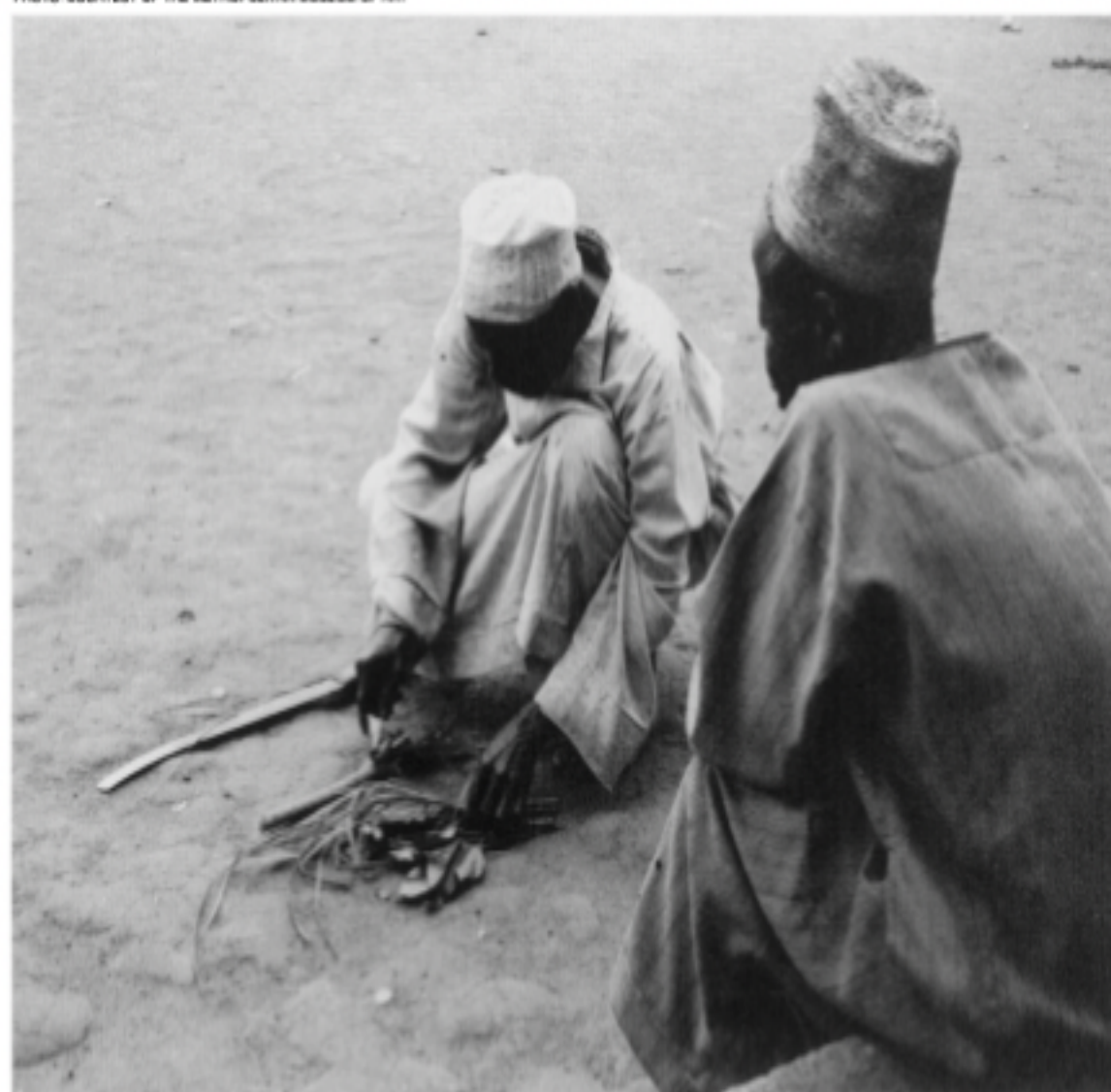


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

20. A dispute is heard on the verandah of the chief's palace. The chief is in the chair on the dais. The woman sitting in the doorway is one of the disputants. Somié village, Cameroon, April 14, 1988.

21. At the conclusion of a dispute a *suàgà* oath is taken in the square in front of the palace. Tam Umaru has prepared the leaves and will execute the chicken. Ngiya Jacob, the husband of the disputant in Figure 20, is addressing the bundle as part of the oath-taking. Somié village, Cameroon, April 14, 1988.

manner similar to their annual "burying" of the village.

There are three *suàgà*-oaths that do not involve a ritual killing of a chicken. I have already described *kulu suàgà* and *li suàgà* (Zeitlyn 1990b:59–60³²). The third, *damà*, is very similar to two other non-*suàgà* rites: the rite of pouring of beer onto a father's grave, and the *lom* rite.³³ Both of these include invocations similar to that made in *damà*, but without the reference to *suàgà* that occurs during *damà*. During the *damà* rite, the villagers gather in the square outside the palace. The chief sits on his stool; the others remove their shoes and sit or squat in a circle on the ground. The seating choice made by each individual results in a rough segregation between the sexes. When everyone has assembled, the chief nominates a speaker, either one of his sister's sons or a senior sister. The speaker stands in the middle of the circle, faces east, and raises his or her right forefinger, as does everyone else. During the invocation (typically two or three minutes in length and spoken at great speed) some varieties of good and evil are enumerated. The main thrust is that good things should enter the village and bad things should pass into the bush. Moreover, *damà* threatens evildoers with *suàgà*. The speaker says, for example: "If someone comes to the village with evil intent, what will they see?" The villagers, dipping their forefingers to the ground, respond: "They will see *suàgà*." This is identical to the behavior of the audience when the refrain of the main *suàgà*-oath is pronounced.

The complex of meanings encompassed within *suàgà* formed the context within which the Mambila used the masks and figurines. The carved headpieces and the masquerade rituals provided the powerful imagery that underlay the force of the ritual oaths. Although the figurines and carved headpieces may have vanished from contemporary Mambila society,³⁴ the symbolic system that produced them retains its vitality. The depredations of art collectors may have reduced the available stock of objects, but they have not greatly affected Mambila ways of seeing the world and human relationships within it. □

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taking, Mambila make no explicit connection between the *suàgà* masquerades and the oaths. Initiation into a masquerade society is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for learning to officiate at an oath-taking.²⁹

The most important type of *suàgà* oath, and that to which the word "*suàgà*" most commonly refers, is performed at the chief's palace to conclude the hearing of a dispute (Fig. 20).³⁰ It takes the form of a set of addresses to a bundle of leaves (part of the "medicine" and held to have special properties) and to a chicken placed over them and subsequently beheaded (Fig. 21). It is clearly the same rite as that which Meek calls *Ngub Sho* in

the first published account of the Nigerian Mambila (1931b:552–53).³¹ The addressee pledges the innocence of the speaker and threaten any malefactor with death. Rehfisch (1969:309) noted similar oath-taking in Warwar but did not record a name.

A derivative, private form of the *suàgà*-oath may be taken at home to protect the household against witchcraft. It is often taken when a new house has been built, and it complements another optional rite performed by the five senior women, the *gambge*, or *marenjo*, who are chosen from among the sisters of the chief. The *marenjo* can "bury" a house to hide it from malefactors, in a

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ZETILYN: Notes, from page 47

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1. In addition to occupying the Warwar mission station on the Mambila Plateau for those five years, Schneider subsequently conducted some research in Mbamaga and Warwar villages in 1959-60. Gebauer was in Cameroon between 1931 and 1961.

The first anthropological description of the Mambila was published by Meek (1931). This is an important source of now historical information on the Mambila. I have prepared an electronic version of Meek's chapter that incorporates Rehlich's marginal comments made in 1953. This can be found on the World Wide Web server of the Radcliffe Science Library in Oxford (the URL is <http://rsl.ox.ac.uk/isca/meek/meek-intro.html>).

2. A note on the name "Mambila": In Cameroon the group officially called Mambila call themselves Bô Bâ (The Bâ) and speak Jû Bâ. In Nigeria the group officially called Mambilla live on the Mambila Plateau and call themselves Nôr h3 (The people). Since most of my fieldwork has been conducted in Cameroon I have adopted the Cameroonian convention and use Mambila throughout.

3. I am referring to the Tikar living on the Tikar Plain in the area surrounding towns such as Bankim and Ngambe Tikar (on the other side of the Mbam River). These are very different from the groups in the Grasslands whose royal families trace a Tikar descent.

4. Curiously, although he met Rehlich in the field, Gebauer never cited his work. Schneider provided the information published in Schwartz 1972 and Tong 1967.

5. However, in 1993 a senior informant in Mbamaga described these figures too as *lape*, using *like* to refer to similarly constructed birdscapes.

6. The Wuli village of Lus is located just across the Donga River from the Mambila Plateau. The population of this area, often called Mfuntse in the early literature, has many affinities with the Mambila.

7. Mambila ancestor cults, including their beliefs and ritual practices concerning the dead, are discussed in Zeitlyn 1991.

8. I have in mind the literature on witchcraft-eradication cults (e.g., Douglas 1963, Richards 1935, Vansina 1952).

9. Schneider has published very little, and he very kindly made his field notes available to me. The Milwaukee Public Museum has some transcripts of taped conversations with Schneider that were made when the museum purchased his Mambila collection.

10. In Somié dialect the term equivalent to *nggeh* is *le*, which means a particular type of storage hut used to house different types of things such as *le yufa* (stone guinea-corn), *le la* (stone treatments), and *le siaga* (stone *siaga*).

11. Examples are illustrated in the photographic collection archived in the Pitt Rivers Museum (AL82A, no. 17; AL82B, no. 6). Others appear in Northern's *The Art of Cameroon* (1984), such as the door frame from Bandeng now in Chicago's Field Museum (p. 79) and a Bamum beaded figure (p. 99).

12. Schneider mentions *lape dzu* (Milwaukee Public Museum, The Gilbert Schneider Collection, *lape* transcript, p. 3) but is referring to the statuette on the outside of the storehouse. He gives little other information.

13. The examples collected are now in the Milwaukee Public Museum: accn. nos. 21591-60573-77 and 21591-60587.

14. Sadly this figure lacks arms, and no other female figures of its type have been documented. One wonders if any female figures were shown masturbating like some of the pottery males.

15. Milwaukee Public Museum, The Gilbert Schneider Collection, *lape* transcript, June 8/9, 1967, p. 6.

16. Michael O'Brien photographed a very similar vessel on the Mambila Plateau in 1964. (This has been archived in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, and is to be published in the forthcoming Barbier-Mueller book on Nigerian art [1018-17].) Examples are in the collections of Barbier-Mueller, the Des Moines Art Center, and the Honolulu Academy of Arts.

17. As Warwar, with its large mission and mission hospital, is now.

18. See Warnier (1985:145) for a discussion of regional trade.

19. They may result from accusations of theft or adultery, or from the suspicion of witchcraft (see Zeitlyn forthcoming and 1993b). A digitized transcript from an adultery accusation is available using World Wide Web at <http://rsl.ox.ac.uk/isca/mambila/mambila.html> or using gopher at rsl.ox.ac.uk within the anthropology corner.

20. Ray and Shaw (1987) have discussed the range of embodiments (their term) of the spirit *Omabe* in an Igbo masquerade. They argue that the masquerade itself is one among a number of embodiments, and that the other forms are in no sense secondary or derivative (although of less interest to art historians). This is also true of *siaga*.

21. For an early photograph of a rehearsal of the dance of men's *siaga* see Gebauer 1979:33 (bottom).

22. In this respect it resembles the descriptions of women using their "power to pollute" among groups to the south. However, unlike the Kom Anlu (see Ritzenthaler 1960) or those described in Ardener (1975), women's *siaga* is routinized. It is very much a "ritual of rebellion" in which the obscene behavior only occurs at the sanctioned time.

23. The use of these was documented by Rehlich at a funeral in Warwar in the early 1950s.

24. This manner of cooking marks "ritual chickens" in a wide range of contexts from "everyday" chickens.

25. At least five sorts of suits are known in Cameroon. Hurault recorded the names in 1954 as *susbe*, *yantu*, and *ndou* (Fig. 17). To this list *siaga bar* and *nyabe* must be added.

26. See, for example, Gebauer Photo Reel 252, no. 256 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; and Schneider photo 60578 in the Milwaukee Public Museum.

27. Rehlich calls the instruments *tanj*.

28. They are described, for example, in five volumes of *Systèmes de Pensée en Afrique Noire* (vols. 2-6), 1976-83.

29. I was initiated into the masquerade society, but have not learned to officiate at the oaths. I am assured that the two sets of leaves used (one for masquerade society initiation and the other for oath-taking) are distinct.

30. Its role in dispute resolution provides a connection between *siaga* oaths and Mambila divination (see Zeitlyn 1987, 1990a, 1993a).

31. Meek also describes double clapperless bells being used in oath-taking among Nigerian Mambila. This is known but not practiced by Cameroonian Mambila.

32. This publication is a revised version of my 1990 Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge. The dissertation is about to be published by Dietrich Reimer Verlag (Zeitlyn forthcoming).

33. *Low* is now defunct, so data about it is hearsay. I suspect that it was a witchcraft-eradication cult.

34. Increasing numbers of Mambila are predominantly Muslim or Christian. Both the shift in religious allegiance and the effects of the trade in international art must have had effects on the contemporary state of affairs. I suspect that fewer Mambila train as carvers because of religious affiliation or education (the two are often related). Hence figurines lost to trade have not been replaced.

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AKPAN: Notes, from page 53

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