

**THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE KUBA CLOTHS FROM ZAIRE**

by

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SUMMARY

Textiles may be used as a vehicle to penetrate and exemplify a society's customs and traditions. This dissertation concentrates on the Kuba cloths from Zaire and particularly focuses on the social and political implications associated with these textiles. Part One explores the economic aspects of the cloths and the values of work, wealth, status and titleholding among the Kuba. The Kuba's aesthetic preference for pattern and design will be contemplated in relation to the cloths and as an illustration of this culture's concern with decoration and display. Part Two of this study examines the occasions for which these cloths are adorned. It will be observed that these celebrations and rituals, in conjunction with their ceremonial modes of dress, not only underline the importance of the nation and its ideologies and customs (as examined in Part One) but serve to acknowledge ethnic identity, as well as maintain and perpetuate the social and political order of the Kuba.

Key terms:

Kuba cloth; Kuba kingdom; African art; Zaire; Textiles; Dress; Costume; Regalia; Socio-political implications; Weaving; Raffia; Celebrations; Festivals; Geometric pattern; History; Tradition; Identity.

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PREFACE

Approximately seven years ago, I set my eyes on my first Kuba cloth. I could not help but be captivated by the aesthetic nature these cloths exuded, with their linen-like quality, numerous decorative techniques and their geometric designs. I was intrigued as to who created these cloths and for what purposes they were made. I wondered to what degree these cloths in their material and aesthetic nature referred back to the socio-political system of the Kuba kingdom, especially as it is a highly centralized form of government. Furthermore, I had to ask why these cloths were still being fabricated in the face of competition from modern readily available industrial fabric and clothing. Upon further examination, it became clear that these Kuba cloths were once a form of daily attire but are now reserved for ceremonial occasions. Thus, the nature of these occasions has to be examined in terms of connections to the cloths and to the socio-political structure of Kuba society. Concurrently, a study of textiles and dress may additionally emphasize issues concerning the use of material resources, the division of labour and the economic system of their makers. It may also demonstrate the consequences of history and technological change, as well as indicate indigenous aesthetic ideals and preferences. These all relate to issues involving one's role in society, the socialization process and the political structure, as well as cultural identity, beliefs and values. This dissertation endeavours to examine the above myriad of issues with the intention of gaining further insight into the perseverance of these exceptional works of art and their makers.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Anitra Nettleton, for all her assistance, prodding, insight, and for coming to the rescue; Professor Estelle Maré, my joint supervisor, for her valuable comments and interest; Andrea Goldsmith, for all her help and for being my second pair of eyes; my parents, for their constant support, love and encouragement; and my husband for his love and faith, and for being the best and most patient sounding board in the world.

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INTRODUCTION

Textiles, like other forms of art, reflect the cultures from which they come. Each culture develops its own distinctive fashions that serve to distinguish or differentiate its society from other societies and from other groups within the same society. It can be proposed that textiles have the potential ability to convey personal, social, religious and political aspects of the culture that both produces and wears them. According to Peter Bogatyrev, as noted by Ronald Schwarz:

Costume is like a microcosm where one finds mirrored in their relative intensities the aesthetic, moral and nationalistic ideals of those who wear it. In order to fully comprehend the role of costume as folk ethics, we must recognize the ethical ideals reflected in a costume's form (in such things as the restrictions as to who may wear it) and we must have knowledge of the general ethical ideals of the people as well. Otherwise we might miss or fail to understand certain expressions of such ideals in the functions of the costume (1979:33).

Furthermore, textiles can be perceived as an invaluable medium for circulating ideas from one culture to another. As Peggy Gilfoy notes, "textiles offer insights about a culture, they are linked to the fabric of cultural life" (Gilfoy 1987:8).

Nineteenth century industrialization in textile manufacturing resulted in the "fact" that most textiles in Western societies are regarded as sensible and functional, and as ultimately consumable materials. However, many non Western societies still perceive textiles as important and relevant expressions of cultural values. In Western societies, one can note that particular events in one's life, such as birth, marriage and death call for special forms of attire. This also occurs in non Western societies, and here one can add other rituals to this list whose function and context encompass both the physical and spiritual worlds. In many African cultures (as in Western ones), textiles may function as wrappers, covers or spatial markers. They can be regarded as cultural expressions of a society's amassed wealth and knowledge, as well as denoting the status of their wearer or

owner. Furthermore, throughout much of the African continent, textiles were, and are still, regarded as prestigious items which are traded for other desirable commodities.

This dissertation will focus on the cloths made by the various communities that comprise the Kuba kingdom situated in central Zaire in between the Kasai and Sankuru rivers. The principal cloths which will be examined are those that are worn primarily as skirts or wrappers. These cloths are made from raffia fibres and are decorated and embellished with diverse techniques, and when completed they are generally comprised of complicated geometric designs and patterns. Special attention will be given the Bushoong, who are the ruling ethnic group of the entire kingdom. This is primarily due to the fact that the majority of the literature concerning the Kuba centres on this prolific and powerful nucleus of the kingdom. In addition, this ruling ethnic group is characterized by an extraordinary amount of pomp, pageantry and regalia which, in turn, explicitly illustrates the hierarchy that pervades the Kuba nation and is materially manifested in the production and use of these textiles. The central hypothesis of this study will examine to what extent these cloths refer back to the Kuba's socio-political structure. For dress can be seen as embodying a prevalent role in externalizing the values, ethnic identities and the histories of their producers. One must consider the connection between art and social organization. As James Faris suggests:

...all symbolic manifestations (here aesthetic traditions) are ideological: they are statements about what a people view as the social relations symbolized. Since it is a fundamental premise that the relevant social relations are those of productive activity, those dictating aesthetics are those in control of the products of their labour or in control of the production of others, or otherwise in a position to command resources or people (Faris 1978:337).

As this study proposes to examine the political and social implications associated with the cloths the Kuba produce, it is relevant to note that while other neighbouring communities such as the Pende and Kongo have long ceased to fabricate these textiles, the Kuba have still continued the art of weaving raffia garments. This art form still endures regardless of the wide availability and easy access to factory produced patterned

cloth. The possible reasons for this continuance will be addressed throughout this study. Chapter One will introduce the Kuba and will examine the art of weaving among the Kuba and how it is related to the greater economic structure. Issues such as labour, wealth and the material value of these cloths will be underlined. Furthermore, one must also consider the fact that in spite of the pervasiveness of "modern" textiles, the Kuba, who dwell within the kingdom, still choose to expend up to three years of part time labour in order to complete one embroidered wrapper. Chapter Two will provide a detailed analysis of how a cloth is fabricated. Technical concerns will be the main focus of this chapter, however issues such as the gender-based division of labour will also be examined. As Ruth Barnes and Joanne Eicher suggest:

In order to comprehend the role of dress in a given society, a study of the creative act of fabricating dress is integral. Typically, the production of objects that are to be worn is in itself gender specific. The gender specificity of textile production may be directly correlated to the meaning and significance of cloth in a society (Barnes and Eicher 1992:4).

This chapter will also highlight the historical significance of these cloths in terms of their function, as they were once a form of daily attire, and how their modes of dress have slowly transformed throughout the present century. As Jan Vansina notes:

Works of art are always transformations of whatever kinds of realities people experience. And in a given time, the nature of the art of a culture evolves as a response to realities- seen, felt, or taught- which artists then record... in objects that may be descriptive, symbolic or decorative. As social and cultural values of a people change with time, so do the substances, statements and aesthetics of their art (Vansina 1984:4).

Dress and adornment are able to communicate many subtle relations that exist within any social or political structure. The symbolic nature of dress and appearance announces identity, for specific items of clothing tend to serve as labels. For example, dress can distinguish the rich from the poor, the powerful from the weak, royalty from the commoner and men from women. Thus, the symbolic nature of these cloths varies

according to who owns and wears them and consequently, dress forms an integral part of identity. For, through the character of their dress, individuals tend to identify and perceive themselves in specific roles. Evaluations of social importance are frequently made on the basis of personal adornment. As Mary Roach and Joan Eicher contend, in societies with distinct divisions of class, adornment that illustrates the most desirable symbols of social worth may be restricted to the upper class elite as noted among the Kuba. The members of the elite claim a monopoly on these symbols as long as they maintain a monopoly on wealth, for lack of economic resources impedes the lower classes from utilizing adornment that could declare for them social importance which is parallel to that of the upper class. (Roach and Eicher 1979:12.) Adornment has long held a place in relation to power. It often depicts one's position or status within the hierarchical power-holding structures. Often a political figure may have a unique form of adornment that helps to distinguish him/her in his/her exalted position of leadership or authoritative role. This is especially significant in the Kuba kingdom where the intricate political system that characterizes Kuba culture encourages a proliferation of titleholders. This is aptly illustrated in the numerous forms of emblems and insignia worn by specific titleholders. Chapter Three will study the pervasive role of titleholding within the social and political spheres of the Kuba kingdom. Issues such as status and wealth will be stressed in relation to the cloths, as well as matters that pertain to insignia and regalia. The wrappers of specific costumes will be examined in order to illustrate the existing hierarchy within and outside of the Kuba court.

The Kuba are renowned for their ubiquitous art forms which are characterized by an elaborate use of decoration. Examples include plaited mats and architectural walls, wooden utensils, masks, musical instruments and textiles. The fact that the Kuba take the time and effort to decorate a vast array of media is perhaps an indication that patterning or embellishing an object may serve other purposes beyond that of mere decoration. Chapter Four will examine the use of decoration and geometric patterning found on the Kuba cloths. It will examine whether it is possible to suggest that this prevailing use of decoration may, in fact, carry and express broader cultural dimensions

in relation to the Kuba. As Vansina notes:

As art expresses culture, so style, theme and motif are closely associated to the perceptions and the representations which are a common cultural good. Generally the themes expressed in art are those principal in culture... One must establish a repertoire or inventory of representations found in any given culture. The repertoire gives a profile of the principal positive ideas, values, gods, spirits, ancestors, mystical forces, whether they be religious or not. Therefore the inventory of the visual arts in any culture reveal what its dominant concerns are, banning those it was prohibited to depict (Vansina 1984:129,130).

The Kuba cloths or wrappers are primarily used as a form of attire. From the beginning of the Seventeenth century the Kuba have worn textiles made from raffia fibres. While more modern types of dress are now used for daily attire, the Kuba still adorn themselves in these decorative cloths for specific ritual and festive occasions. Celebrations and rituals are generally connected with culturally shared events and each kind of ritual, festival or ceremony is coupled with special forms of attire, music, food and drink. (Turner 1982:14.) These communal performances are inclined to exalt and promote the essential values and virtues which pertain to its organizing and participating society. Furthermore, a society's mores and aesthetic preferences are exemplified during these special occasions. In many rituals of social life such as feasts, dances and funerals, dressing up in clothes with more finesse than those one normally wears on a daily basis is expected. Attire used for such occasions generally denotes "putting on a mood". (Cordwell 1979:18.) Herbert Cole and Doran Ross suggest that "when an individual self consciously dresses up he or she becomes conscious of a public personality and subsequently clothing appears to take on a greater richness of significance" (1977:14). Agreement on what one wears can be seen to strengthen a common consciousness that holds the members of a particular community while unifying the social structure of that society.

Part Two of this study will explore a number of celebrations and festivals during which these cloths are worn by both the observers and participants. Chapter Five will consider

the importance and authority of the king. This will be illustrated by reviewing the rules and regulations concerning kingship and additionally emphasized by examining the costumes which characterize his enthronement. It will establish how cloth reinforces and entrenches the king's position. Chapter Six concerns the *itul* festival which not only highlights the importance of the king and his authority, but also illustrates the relevance of the Kuba cloths in terms of material wealth and status. For here, both the participants and the observers are adorned in their required ceremonial attire. Chapter Seven examines these cloths within their funerary context. In this instance, it is not only the mourners who are adorned in their required wrappers but also the body of the deceased. The Kuba cloths in this situation not only serve to denote the status and wealth of the deceased and his or her clan who supply the cloths, but here ethnic and clan identity is projected into the afterlife. Chapter Eight will focus on initiation and the use of raffia and the Kuba cloths in the initiation ceremony. Unloomed garments and woven raffia textiles are used here to delineate the initiation process, and to distinguish the novice from the initiated. The symbolic nature and significance of the woven garment will be ascertained as it is associated with adulthood, society and hence the maintenance of the Kuba culture. Thus by examining the celebrations and rituals when these cloths are adorned and displayed, perhaps one can ascertain a dimension of their relevance to the Kuba's social and political structure.

Literature Review

The area of study this dissertation explores has not been previously examined in any significant amount of depth. There exist only a handful of articles which deal with Kuba textiles. "Kuba embroidered cloth" (1978) by Monni Adams and "BaKuba embroidered patterns" (1980) by John Mack both focus on the embroidery techniques most often found on the Shoowa cloths. "Dressing for the next life" (1989) by Patricia Darish examines the Kuba textiles in relation to their funerary function. Her essay "Dressing for success" (1990) examines the use of raffia cloth during funerary rituals and initiation. All of these articles do contain valuable information pertaining to how these cloths are

fabricated, the division of labour in terms of gender entailed in producing these cloths as well as indications as to when these cloths are both worn and displayed. However, regarding their connection to the social and political aspects of Kuba cloths, these articles merely provide an ample starting point for this dissertation.

The monograph by George Meurant entitled *Shoowa design* (1986) is the only sizeable account of the Kuba textiles that to this date has been undertaken. This work primarily focuses on the Shoowa cloths of the Kuba. Meurant mainly concentrates on the motifs themselves, from the point of view of design and the nature of their geometric composition. He does not delve into any of the social or political aspects that may be associated with these cloths.

There are numerous books and articles concerning Kuba cultural practices, art, their social practices and their political structure. The majority of what is understood about the Kuba people derives from the reports of Emil Torday and the research of Jan Vansina. In the first decade of the Twentieth century, Torday led an expedition into the interior of central Zaire for the British Museum. Although his perceptions lack a scholarly nature and bear a somewhat personal tone, his firsthand insights and observations regarding Kuba life and culture remain worthy resources for this study. Works such as *On the trail of the Bushongo* (1925) and *Notes ethnographiques sur les peuplades communément appelés Bakuba, ainsi que les peuplades apparantées; Les Bushongo* (1910) composed with T.A. Joyce contribute relevant information pertaining to the central and dominant group of the kingdom, the Bushoong. Here, he records his meetings with the king and he observes both quotidian life and the celebrations that characterized the region's capital. Hilton-Simpson who accompanied Torday on one of his voyages records similar information in his *Land and peoples of the Kasai* (1911). The illustrations which accompany his account are used as a pictorial source in this dissertation. While the questionable nature of these illustrations is acknowledged, as his colonial mindset and perception and the audience for which he is writing certainly bears an influence, these illustrations are included for they provide one with a "sense" of the textiles and modes of dress worn during the turn of the century. Although their historical

accuracy may be problematic, they enable one to sense the type of garments worn during a particular historical period.

Jan Vansina studied the Kuba in the field between 1953-56. His more academic approach provides valuable insight into such aspects as Kuba mythology, history, religion, economics, social political structure, and the kingdom, including its nobility and judiciary system. These observations are recorded in such works as *Les tribus Bakuba et les peuplades apparentées* (1954) and *Le Royaume Kuba* (1964) and they are at their most comprehensive level in *The Children of Woot* (1978). This work provides an ample overview of the Kuba, however he merely touches on this culture's numerous forms of art. Vansina's colonial study "Du royaume Kuba au territoire des BaKuba" (1969) recounts the period of 1875-1920. He is the only author who has studied the first half of colonization in any depth. However, this is an historical account which concentrates on the socio-political and economic repercussion of colonization and does not delve into any other aspects of Kuba life such as their art forms.

Joseph Cornet's *Art royal Kuba* (1982) is a very useful source, in that he provides a concise overview of all the art forms associated with the royal court. He examines the use of pattern and motif in Kuba art and provides a description of the costumes worn by members of the royal court as well as the breakdown of the hierarchy of the wrappers themselves. His study is mainly descriptive and offers very little in terms of analyzing the socio-political significance and implications of these textiles and art forms in terms of the court as well as Kuba society in general. The above noted references are the main sources used in this dissertation however, there are numerous others which are referred to throughout this study and noted in the bibliography.

In addition to the main references noted above, there are those books and articles that focus on the correlation between the textiles and the adornment of the African societies that produce and use them. For example, these include *African textiles and decorative arts* (1972) by Roy Sieber, *Textiles of Africa* (1980) edited by D. Idiens and K.G. Pointing, as well as *African textiles* by J. Picton and J. Mack (1979). *Cloth and human experience* (1989) edited by A. Weiner and J. Schneider and *The Fabrics of culture* (1979)

edited by J. Cordwell and A. Schwarz comprise a compilation of essays that explore the textiles of different cultures. They are examined on numerous levels and include issues such as their economic, political, social and aesthetic nature. There are also those studies which deal with the idea of dress and identity. These include Judith Forney's study *An investigation of the relationship between dress and appearance and retention of ethnic identity* (1980) as well as *Dress and gender* (1992) edited by Barnes and Eicher, which is comprised of essays concerned with women's dress modes and textiles as woman's labour from different cultures and historical periods.

It is significant to note that, as mentioned, none of the available resources has examined the Kuba cloths in relation to their socio-political significance in great detail. There are those references which deal primarily with the historical, economic and socio-political nature of the Kuba and those which focus on the textiles and other art forms. As this study is primarily based on the work of other scholars, it endeavours to unite these existing works in order to discern the significance of these textiles in relation to the Kuba's socio-political structure. For dress is one of the entry points into the conceptual life of a people or society. Adornment is as much a symbolic language as verbal structures themselves. Similar to language, dress and adornment encompass an internalized transformational type of grammar that establishes the rules for conveying meaning and provides keys or codes for ascertaining their implications. The examination of textiles and forms of adornment adopted by any given culture provides an accessible method to studying a social order and its social precepts.

CHAPTER 1

The Kuba, Weaving and Economics

A Brief Historical Survey of the Kuba

In between the Kasai and Sankuru rivers in central Zaire lies the renowned Kuba kingdom (fig 1). Figure 2 depicts the geographical location of the Kuba and the Zairian groups ("tribes") that surround it. The kingdom itself, in terms of area, is quite small. It measures two thirds the size of Belgium or Swaziland. According to Vansina (1978:3), by 1880 its population was estimated between 120,00 to 160,000 inhabitants but it has since decreased to approximately 75,000 residents. (Adams 1983:42.) Adams does not suggest the reasons behind this decrease. However, one could propose that it is the result of urbanization and the economic prospects offered by the city.

The Kuba kingdom was created after a long stretch of migrations which carried some of the migrants as far as the extreme southern regions of the continent (1). The Kuba are Bantu speakers and their migrations originated in the Cameroon region where the Benue and Niger rivers unite, and date as far back as the first millennium A.D. The migration period ended for the Kuba at the beginning of the Seventeenth century when they settled in their present day region. Until the reign of Shyaam a-Mbul, the first Kuba king in circa 1630, the Kuba people belonged to numerous chiefdoms which were only moderately consolidated. Shyaam (or Shamba) began the transformation process of uniting these chiefdoms into a kingdom dominated by the Bushoong group. He instituted a political system, a centralized form of government and established a capital which operated as a bureaucratic centre. (Vansina 1978:68.)

The name Kuba was given to these people by the Luba, their neighbours to the south and was later adopted by early European travellers and traders. The Kuba had no specific name for themselves or their culture, however amongst themselves they were known as "the people of the king". At the end of the nineteenth century, this culture was comprised of a large number of local ethnic groups which all shared cultural and/or

linguistic affinities. Vansina has categorized these societies into five groups. The first group is the central group that dominates the kingdom and imprinted its cultural characteristics as well as its language over the other groups. It includes the Bushoong, the Pyaang, the Bulaang, the Bieng and the Ngeende. The Bushoong are the ruling ethnic group of the Kuba. They are situated around the royal capital, hence they form the nucleus of the kingdom. Their chief is the king of the entire Kuba nation, he is the sovereign leader. The second group are the peripheral Kuba. They include the Kel, Ilebo, Leele, Idiing, Kaam, Kayuweeng, Shoowa, Bokila, Ngoombe, Maluk and Ngongo. One must note that three Ngongo villages are found outside the kingdom. The next group includes the Kete and the Coofa. The Cwa form their own group as do the Mbeengi. (Vansina 1978:4-6.) This can be seen in figure 3 which illustrates geographical locations of the numerous groups that comprise the Kuba kingdom. Generally, these ethnic groups are culturally similar, however their languages differ.(2) (Vansina 1978:4.)

Aside from the Cwa, Coofa and Mbeengi, the Kuba maintain a line of matrilineal descent (matrilineal clans) which were subdivided into minor lineages whose magnitude did not surpass that of extended families. Matrilineal descent resulted in the fact that there was a high degree of geographical mobility. In Kuba society, descent groups do not have a great deal of influence. They are significant in that they provided an ascribed status and play an important role in marriage, inheritance and hereditary succession to office. However, strict succession appears to have been a rare occurrence and inheritance was restricted to transportable objects. Even more significant is that by belonging to a clan, one was not classified as a slave. It was a sign of freedom. Except for the chiefs and the king, the institution of marriage among the Kuba is monogamous. Age grades appear to have played a minor role, except among the Shoowa. (Vansina 1978:6.)

This intricate network of societies is bonded by the institution of kingship and honourary titles or titleholding. All of the groups that constitute the Kuba kingdom participate in the same ideological and political structures. (Meurant 1986:21.) The integrated chiefdoms in the area enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy from absolute

subjection to the central and dominating group, the Bushoong, to almost complete independence, that depended on their size and distance from the governing nucleus. The military strength of the Bushoong kept the kingdom united. The chiefdoms were made up of a number of villages each with its realm and political arrangement; the villages were comprised of a number of small localized clan sections. (Vansina 1967/8:13.)

It appears that from 1680-1835 Kuba society maintained a stable period. Vansina categorizes this as the classic period. This is a problematic term or proposition as it assumes that what has transpired since this period is less worthy. As Sidney Kasfir proposes, it suggests a colonial mentality or foreign point of view that is attempting to assess another culture by imposing Western standards of history. It is akin to using the term "traditional" to express a culture's art. It seems to measure the authenticity of the Kuba culture with a before and after scenario of colonization, in that, before large scale colonization, this culture has demonstrated qualities which have labelled it "classic". In turn, this suggests that the post colonial Kuba are somehow less classical or less authentic due to colonization and the many changes it introduced. This assumption negates the potential influences of African or other foreign contacts as well as the changes that materialized within the culture itself. (Kasfir 1992:40,41.) This implies that, for the most part, the Kuba had a timeless past before colonization and to a large extent remained static and unchanging from the kingdom's inception to colonialism. Rosenwald makes a similar value laden suggestion when she uses the term "Golden Age" in order to describe the period that marks the beginning of the kingdom, the middle of Seventeenth century. (Rosenwald 1974:7.)

Meurant notes that until the onset of colonization, the Kuba maintained a comprehensive trade system through their internal markets with the Songye in the east, the Katanga, Lulua and Loanda in the south. Therefore, an expansive area of cultural interpenetration was dominated by the powerful Kuba kingdom and was founded by affiliations with its various neighbours. (Meurant 1986:121.) While the Kuba maintained extensive trade links with border markets in the mid Nineteenth century to the late Nineteenth century, it was forbidden for any foreigners to enter the capital and

anyone condemned of assisting such an indiscretion was subject to a penalty of death. (Adams 1983:42.) It is unclear from the literature if this restriction applied to all foreign people including neighbouring African nations, or if it specifically pertained to Europeans. It appears that for over three centuries the Kuba kingdom (particularly the central Kuba) was isolated from any personal (first-hand) contact with European foreigners.

The period from 1875- 1920 was distinguished, in part, by the invasion and implementation of Belgian colonial rule. This period was marked by many civil uprisings within the Kuba kingdom and against the Compagnie de Kasai Belgian trading company, a series of fatal epidemics, the Kuba's loss of their key intermediary trading position, a co-government of the region between the Kuba and Belgian colonizers in 1905 which lasted until independence, and the creation of Zaire in 1960. (Vansina 1969:10-51.)

At the end of the formal colonial period the Kuba were practically entrenched in a new society: the Congo. However they were not fully assimilated. They did not lose their identity. Regardless, the Kuba adapted their society to their new circumstances. In the economic sphere they accepted the monetary signs and hence they became integrated in the Congo economy. However, their revenue was still dependent on a market that was founded on accessible and indigenous goods, which was the case before 1874. One can note that the introduction of new plants was without any great impact. Socially they were forced to liberate the slaves who lived in groups during this period, however they could keep their personal ones. Initiation and the poison ordeal were abolished in those areas situated closest to European authority. In the political structure, the smaller chiefdoms suffered the most and the representation of the Bushoong in their own forms of government signified less than before because the importance of the councils and advisors had diminished. Notwithstanding, all of the above remained quite negligible in relation to the continuation of "traditional" life style and the nation's resistance against colonial policy and integration. (Vansina 1969:52.)

In terms of their cultural framework, traditional religious ideologies were reinforced

and the effects of the missions on their religious structures were reduced in comparison to their scholarly plans. The Kuba were successful in maintaining their society in terms of their economical, sociological and ideological systems. (Vansina 1969:52.)

According to Cornet, when independence emerged, insecurity erupted. He notes that this insecurity was particularly violent among the central Kuba. During the span of a few months in 1959, over five hundred suspected witches were inflicted with the poison ordeal, with the belief that the social system of the colonial past would be dissolved and that subsequently the nation would enter a joyous future. Cornet suggests that King Mbopey Mabiintsh lived with a certain anguish in regards to the rise of independence because the equilibrium that was established between the colonizers and the Kuba risked, according to his sentiment, being disintegrated. (Cornet 1982:37.) Concurrently, adaptations of neo-African tradition were gestating in the cities and countryside. (Vansina 1990:248.) The integration into the new polity reached its conclusion under his successor, the Kot a-Mbweeky III, the present day king. This culminated in the direct participation of the king in the government of the State, with a commissioner who represented the Mweka zone (Kuba kingdom territory) and their membership in the Central Committee of the Republic. (Cornet 1982:37.) (3)

Weaving and Economics

The Kuba culture has managed to capture the art historian's attention and regard with their multitude of art forms. One such example is the art of weaving. It is one of the richest examples of Kuba art and material culture which is still produced today. One of the most significant presentations of this art form is the fabrication of textiles woven from raffia palm fibres. There are numerous forms and uses for these raffia cloths. These include the Shoowa cloths, which are composed from at least one square and up to several units of embroidered raffia cloth seen in the context of marriage and funerary ceremonies; a coarsely woven cloth which is used for utilitarian purposes such as storage or as clothing primarily worn for hunting or other forest activities; and cloths which function as wrappers worn by both men and women as a form of attire. (Darish

1989:121.) (fig 4, 5.) As previously mentioned, this dissertation will mainly focus on these last cloths which will be referred to as Kuba cloths, wrappers or skirts. However, the Shoowa cloth will also be discussed when it pertains to its use as a form of attire and in regards to embroidery techniques with its application of pattern and design (4). (fig 6,7.)

Since the beginning of the Seventeenth century the Kuba have clothed themselves in raffia textiles. This raffia cloth replaced the more common form of attire made from bark cloth which is still used during funerary ceremonies. (Vansina 1978: 55.) The art of weaving is most often associated with Shyaam, the first Kuba king. It is believed that, among numerous inventions, he introduced the skill of weaving and the art of weaving raffia cloth. This royal and historical connection is noted in a proverb which serves as a response to an unreasonable request. It states: "As Shamba said 'Get up from your loom so that I may weave my cloth'" and the requester was shamed into silence." (Torday 1925:139.)

The Kuba cloths that are worn today are mainly worn for ceremonial occasions. They form one component of a larger outfit or costume and are usually richly decorated and sumptuously embellished. However in the past, that is until the introduction of Westernized and mass produced industrial clothing, these cloths were worn as a form of daily attire (fig 8). They were generally unadorned and lacked embellishment when they were worn as a daily garment, while those of the nobility were most likely more elaborate and indicative of their status (fig 9). However, even then the most splendid cloths were reserved for festivals and rituals, regardless of the wearer's status. Emil Torday, the early Twentieth century ethnographer, noted on his visit to Mushenge (the capital) that:

All men wore the kilt, very like that of the highlanders, only that the upper part passed over a belt and formed a secondary, narrower band; a leaf shaped knife about a foot long with a beautifully encrusted handle stuck in the belt on their right hip; in front a long pocket of skin, from which the hair had not been removed, dangled like a sporran; their heads were surmounted by a conical cap of lace-like fibre, fixed to their hair by

needles ornamented with a miniature bell. ...[T]he women wore a great length of cloth wound spirally several times round their body, and it seemed to hang so loosely that one expected it to fall at any moment... (1925:111, 112). (fig 10,11.)

While the basic or most obvious function of these cloths is a form of adornment or attire, they also maintain an extensive historical significance for the Kuba nation which involve issues concerning economics, labour, wealth and status. Until the middle of the Nineteenth century, raffia squares were the main form of currency which were then replaced by cowries. The Kuba used raffia squares (*mbal*) as a local currency and in their trade with external markets as this type of cloth was also traded further west. (Vansina 1962:197.) Vansina notes that an alternative name for the Bushoong, the leading group among the Kuba, is Bambal which can be understood as "people of the cloth". It is inviting to surmise that it could be a nickname, given by outsiders and accepted by the people themselves, which could be seen as a reflection of one their primary trading commodities- cloth. However, as Vansina points out, this name is detected in a praise poem which suggests that it is a term which dates back to the Kuba's creation. (Vansina 1978:19.) If this is the case, this connection implies that for the Kuba, cloth has an historical significance which is associated with their establishment and creation. In addition, it is possible to suggest that the Kuba found significance in separating themselves as "civilized" people from other non-cloth wearing groups. However, one must also acknowledge problems of accuracy concerning oral tradition (Vansina 1985:90,91.), for these types of distinctions are often made in retrospect in order to confer legitimacy on claims to supremacy.

At the beginning of the Twentieth century ten raffia squares or the average length of a fabricated ceremonial wrapper equalled a considerably large unit of value. (Darish 1990:179.) For the more important payments, the Kuba used a unit of 320 cowries sewn to a piece of raffia cloth known as *mabiim*. The price of these items was fixed by the law of supply and demand, and was influenced by the rarity of the product, the mass of materials used, the production time, the cloth's luxurious quality, and the state of

conservation of the object. (Vansina 1964:23.) Both decorated and simpler cloths are recognized as being highly prized objects of value and, in turn, they were given as gifts, and were used in establishing relations of reciprocity. According to Patricia Darish, raffia cloth, along with other goods including dried foodstuffs, salt, iron, utilitarian and decorative objects, constituted a portion of the annual tribute payed to the king at the end of the dry season. Sums of raffia cloth were also given by dependent chiefdoms at the death or installation of a high ranking official.

In the Nineteenth century, raffia cloth and decorated skirts formed a part of marital contracts among certain Kuba groups. Darish notes that the Kuba system of marriage involved the exchange of a great amount of bride wealth. (Darish 1990:179.) Among the Bushoong, the bride price was composed of material goods such as raffia cloth, decorated mats and services rendered which included the weaving of raffia textiles. These services could also entail clearing a field or constructing a house for the groom's future mother-in-law. In addition, the future bridegroom would also weave a skirt which his mother or sisters would have embroidered and he would have offered this to his prospective mother-in-law for his future bride. It is accepted that later, the bride's in-laws will benefit from the duties performed by the wife. The tangible objects of the bride price would be payed at the time of the marriage or soon after, incorporated cowrie shells in mass or in the form of *mabiim* (320 cowrie shells sewn on the backing of a raffia cloth), camwood, raw raffia cloth (*mbal*) or decorated mats. (Darish 1990:179-180.)

Raffia cloth and decorated skirts also figured in numerous legal settlements, such as those involving divorce, adultery and theft. In one recorded adultery case the guilty man was obliged to pay the village tribunal three hundred cowries as well as a man's skirt and a ceremonial knife to the afflicted husband. Another case recounts the incident of a fight which culminated in bodily harm. In this situation the guilty party was severely fined and his settlement included iron gongs, spears, swords and raffia cloth. (Vansina 1964:147.) In situations of divorce the person who initiated the divorce was responsible for reimbursing the bride price to the other family. Pawn marriage, another type of

marriage practiced by the Bushoong in the past (before the Twentieth century), involves a significantly higher bride price. Documented bride prices in these cases listed several men's and women's skirts, *mabiim*, beaded bracelets, necklaces and hats. (Vansina 1962:192.) Vansina does not note if these items were presented over a period of time or all at once.

The palm trees from which these fibres are transformed are also significant. The Kuba make use of four types of palms, and the raffia palm is one of the more important trees. It provides wine, weaving and building materials and even the grubs that inhabit it are a form of food. (Vansina 1962:190.) However these are cultivated palm trees. There are also wild palm trees which grow in the forest zone and the distinction between these two types of palms and its significance in terms of the Kuba cloths will be discussed in chapter eight. (5).

For the general adult population, weaving and decorating raffia skirts (Kuba cloths) is an important daily activity. The production and decoration of textiles are usually relegated to short work periods. According to Darish, some men are responsible for preparing the fibre, others for setting the warp or perhaps completing one of the first stages of weaving or dyeing the cloth early in the morning before going off to the fields, to hunt or trap. Women are often able to sit and embroider or complete another stage in the decoration or fabrication of a skirt after they have finished working the field and before they begin to prepare the evening meal. (Darish 1989:123,124.) During his visit to the Kuba kingdom Hilton- Simpson observed village life and daily activities surrounding weaving. He notes:

Beneath the shade of other similar structures men always engaged in the manufacture of cloth from fibre of the raffia leaf and the continuous 'thud-thud' of the hand looms tells that work is in progress from early morning till dark... The women, in addition to their ordinary agricultural and household duties, spend a good deal of time in embroidering with coloured patterns the raffia cloth woven by men (Hilton-Simpson 1911:93). (fig 12).

Torday also observed this daily activity, he recorded the following observation:

Though the day was still hot the village was busy as a hive. Everybody was working, the looms of the weavers were beating, the hammers of the smiths clanging, under sheds in the middle of the street men were carving, making mats or baskets and in front of their houses women were engaged in embroidery. The very small children were bent on some task, some working the smith's bellows, others combing the raffia for the weavers, or making themselves generally useful (Torday 1925:81).

There are particular periods when people typically expend more time working on cloths. This occurred during the first half of the dry season as men and women are able to dedicate more time to textile fabrication as they were not occupied clearing fields, planting and harvesting. During the period of mourning, the immediate family of the deceased are restricted to the village; women stay in their houses all day long. During this period, which usually lasts about three to nine months, a significant amount of time is reserved for sewing and embroidering. This work is needed in order to restock the family's collection of cloths which is significantly exhausted at funerals. (Darish 1989:124.)

According to Darish (1989:123) the importance of raffia textile production is emphasized in many proverbs. For example, in Northern Kete an older man or woman might say to an unmarried woman, "If you want to marry (well), consult the diviner so that you will find a man that will make you a skirt". The implication being that man can weave cloth, and the proverb suggests that the ability to weave raffia textiles is appreciated in Kuba culture. Consequently, this ability can perhaps be regarded as an important factor in the provision of social and economic security in Kuba culture.

The Kuba are farmers. Women work in the fields and plains, while the forest zones are attended to by men. Agriculture is not associated with any form of prestige, in that it does not enhance a man's importance, unlike hunting, an activity practised by almost all men during the dry season. Even though hunting is less productive than trapping, it is perceived as a prestigious activity. The Kuba also fish with fixed and flying nets dragged by canoes. The status of fishing is measured against the dangers and risks of the water. Collecting and gathering are economically significant activities, both as a form of

nutrition and as a source of raw material. Up until the 1960s, at least, the Kuba were well acclimatized to their environment and had advanced beyond a mere subsistence economy. According to Meurant, working activities were divided equally over the whole year. The majority of activities were not executed by everyone haphazardly. The distribution of work depended upon gender, occupation and region. Men cleared the fields, hunted, fished, made fish traps, tapped wine, repaired houses and made tools. Women occupied the plains, gathered, fished with landing nets, and cared for the children. In addition, they were responsible for the housework, collecting water and wood, cooking, and softening and embroidering textiles. Women and men jointly cultivated the fields. Both maintained an economic presence at the marketplace as buyers and sellers, however this was primarily a woman's responsibility. (Meurant 1986:122.)

Vansina suggests that specialization of artisans was the result of surplus production which, in turn, permitted certain people to work the land and enabled others to practise diverse or additional occupations. Full time specialists were relegated to the realm of political chiefs. All other specialists participated in these additional activities on a part time basis where the remainder of their time was devoted to the production of food. Exclusive specialists included shamans, diviners, political dignitaries, smiths, jewellers and mask makers. In effect, they were the only ones who exclusively practised their professions. Nonexclusive specialists included fishermen, hunters, sculptors, fish net fabricators, hat makers, musicians and dancers. Others worked in these occupations but specialists were allowed to spend more time as their work is of a superior quality. The artisan specialisations favoured the exchange of goods because the specialist possessed a surplus of certain goods and required others. This was reinforced by the presence of a market economy. Thus, due to a surplus production of foodstuff, this allowed the time for artistic production in the form of exclusive and non-exclusive craft specializations. Regional specialization was the result of two factors: a favourable environment and the presence of different cultural traditions. (Vansina 1964:18,19.)

The division of labour is an essential element in understanding the social structure of

the Kuba. In addition, there are collective activities that are of interest to all. The production of a raffia skirt exemplifies this collective activity. It is an activity that requires separate gender specific tasks to reach its completion. Men are responsible for weaving the cloth itself, while women are entrusted with its decoration. Raffia weaving and skirt fabrication and ornamentation are not reserved for specialists or specific clans or lineages. Everyone is allowed and expected to participate in its fabrication.

Decorated raffia skirts and cut-pile cloths (Shoowa cloths) are regarded as material wealth that all Kuba desire to amass. One informant related to Darish that textile fabrication is just as important as hunting. (Darish 1989:123.) If however, a craftsperson is renowned for his/her work, he/she is then able to devote more time to his/her artistic talents or skill. Embroidery is an example of this type of activity. Meurant notes that although it is traditionally executed by pregnant women, the economic value associated with it enables more talented embroiderers to specialize in this field of creation. (Meurant 1986:122.)

Darish studied the ownership of these collectively created textiles. She found that, primarily among the Bushoong, most decorated raffia skirts are neither created nor owned by a single person, but are the result of collaborative labour of the men and women of the clan section of a matrilineage. This may be seen for example in the production of a long woman's skirt which may be the work of half a dozen women of different ages. (Darish 1989:124.) This circumstance calls into question Western ideas of artisanship, ownership and authorship. A single raffia skirt may be understood as a representation of social relations and communal artistry. In addition, she suggests that, although particular individuals may be acknowledged for the value of their work, it is unusual to find that a long decorated skirt is made by only one person. Even when cloths are the output of one person they are never regarded as the sole property of the maker. (Darish 1989:125.) However, Darish does not indicate how they are distributed when they are worn, if they are kept in a communal storehouse or if they are kept by their individual wearers but are ultimately regarded as the property and assets of the clan. She has noted that the mourning period allows the deceased family ample time to embroider

and sew raffia cloths in order to restock the family's collection of cloths. This question of ownership will be explored in further detail in chapter seven.

Many Bushoong proverbs recorded by Darish embody this conception of collective cloth ownership, as noted in the following examples. "One person can weave cloth, many can wear them". "There is no one else who can weave as well as the this man, but when someone in his family died, they buried him nude. His cloth is only for sale (to someone outside his clan section)." "The weaver is weaving, the blacksmith's helper is working the bellows, but they are all wearing leaves". (Darish 1989: 126.) The last two proverbs allude to the person who does not execute his/her responsibility of partaking in and advancing the collective effort of textile production. Therefore, it may be suggested that while the role of the individual is significant in the production of raffia cloth, it is often disguised and must be examined in relation to production within the clan section. This is especially seen in the production of women's skirts, due to the labour-intensive and time-consuming decoration techniques of fine embroidery and applique. For example, one long woman's skirt may be composed of more than thirty individual embroidered units, each comprising black embroidered designs which are finely stitched on double sections of raffia cloth (fig 13). If one person were to decorate this type of long skirt it would take several years to complete.

Weaving is therefore an economic activity and the act of weaving and decorating cloths is an important form of labour. In Kuba society labour is highly valued. According to Vansina (1978:190) the Kuba people are hard workers, with about two thirds of their time allotted to work. Almost one third of it is allocated to the production of goods for trade rather than for subsistence purposes. This suggests that the Kuba maintain a tradition of production beyond mere subsistence as part of their cultural values. Vansina questions why the Kuba press for increases in production. In 1892, most Kuba worked from six in the morning until eight at night. A work ethic certainly existed. (Vansina 1978:184.) There are Bushoong proverbs that confirm the respect and significance of traditional work such as "a calabash without purpose is hanging over the hearth" and "a man without work? We'll give him black mushrooms to eat". Black mushrooms, being

the food that children and women eat, are considered unsuitable for men. Both these proverbs insinuate that someone without work to do is judged as unproductive. (Darish 1989:123.) Vansina also notes that Kuba mythology, as taught to boys in initiation, paralleled laziness with the ultimate evil- witchcraft and sorcery. However it is doubtful that this was the motivating force behind production and their subsequent economic development. (Vansina 1978:184.) It is most probably associated with political authority and the hierarchal titleholding system which characterizes the Kuba's socio-political structure which will be examined in later chapters.

For the Kuba, wealth is a principal means of obtaining prestige power and status, and prestige is one of the fundamental values of this society. Wealth is exhibited in order to acquire status and should be displayed in the forms of luxurious clothing, furniture and hospitality. This has generated or resulted in a rich and diverse material culture which is not detected in any other of the surrounding cultures. If one compares the inventory of two houses, one of a common man and the other of a high official, it is evident that both contain an adequate amount of equipment in order to be comfortable; however, the official is wealthier in regard to clothing and ornaments. (Vansina 1962:191). In addition, if one compares the neighbouring Lele economy with that of the Bushoong's economy, it is possible to ascertain the significance and substance of the Kuba economy. The Lele have a similar climate but have not moved beyond a mere subsistence economy, whereas the Kuba have surpassed this with their surplus production. They have adapted to their environment in a remarkable way and have successfully exploited it in terms of economic production. Mary Douglas notes that for the Bushoong, work is the method by which to acquire wealth and the way to gain status and prestige. (Douglas 1962:224.) The Kuba ardently stress the value of individual effort and accomplishment and they are willing to participate in group efforts over a sustained period of time when it is imperative to assure output. The Bushoong continually speak and dream about wealth, and proverbs that allude to its association with status are continually recited. (Douglas 1962:224.) Thus, for the Kuba the display of wealth further perpetuates and advances the production of all kinds of goods as well as their own potential stature.

Wealth is an essential goal in life. Most Kuba desire to become rich and acquire a position of status, a title. It is the most significant stimulus to work and it is the cause behind the driven development of the indigenous economy in this region. In 1954 production constituted double what was required for subsistence needs. Even in the pre-industrial era, the variety of manufactured products that flowed out of the regional markets was surprising. (Vansina 1954:902,903.) A variety of proverbs illustrates this desire for wealth and the tensions that result, as seen for example in "The desire of cowries surpass the desire of men", which implies that social life is not possible if someone is only searching for wealth. However its positive value is expressed by praising cowries "The cowrie, God of the sky, that goes with work. Man who does not work does not see the cowrie." (Vansina 1954:903.)

Vansina maintains that economic cooperation is one of the reasons that explains the flourishing state of the Kuba economy. It allows for a more efficient use of methods of production than the individual techniques, and the investment of wealth in material devoted to common enterprises. Economic cooperation is also a substantial part of security. Therefore, economic exploitation is obviously not possible without a favourable environment, and it also demands an adaptation of socio-political attitudes to material, work, security and values. In turn, this exploitation, if profitable, opens the possibility of sustaining an existing political structure because of the surplus of production it stimulates. However, these surpluses are in themselves the consequence of an orientation that perpetuated and insured these structures in the first place, but the two are interdependant. (Vansina 1964:12.) Vansina suggests that the use of economic products can be divided into three categories: the consumption of subsistence, the investment of economic nature and the investment of non-economic nature. (Vansina 1962:24.) Everything that is considered to be surplus is destined to be investment. The investment of a social nature can be divided into investments following the social and political rights and the investments of prestige. (6). Prestige investments consist of effected expenses with the aim of displaying wealth and most of all with exhibiting one's social or political status. It includes the purchasing or fabrication of jewellery, clothes,

insignia, furniture, specially sculpted or decorated objects and a large quantity of food and drink. Through their acquisition one attracts the respect of the community and creates a circle of partisans over whom to exercise a certain authority. Moreover, the investments of this genre often succeed in granting a political position that, in itself, further augments the owner's prestige. The Kuba environment is rich and is exploited in a remarkable fashion and because of group organization, an intrinsic work ethic and a driven specialization, a system of distribution that is highly detailed as well as a series of limitless social investments are the outcome. This economic system created a mentality of surplus production that favoured an economic, political and religious specialization. It eliminated a good number of risks in the production of subsistence goods, assured comfort to certain men and gave them free time to create works of art or to reflect upon their situation. (Vansina 1964:24-26.)

It is also relevant to consider these textiles in terms of their economic capacity as part of the Western art market. This category encompasses textiles that are collected by Western art and anthropological collectors and includes both old and new cloths as well as those cloths which have been fabricated for a "tourist" or commercial foreign market. For the Kuba cloths have found their way into art galleries, department stores, and from the markets of Johannesburg to the streets of Soho, New York. Today, these textiles are being produced (sometimes mass-produced) for these markets and consequently, the Kuba cloths (and Shoowa cloths) have found a new market and their manufacture provides the Kuba with an additional source of economic income.

Raffia cloth and its transformed mediums of wrappers and ceremonial attire clearly exemplifies this issue of prestige investments. Raffia cloth still retains an association of value among the Kuba and this is clearly noted in the various contexts in which it is used. Historically and even today raffia textiles are regarded as a form of wealth for the Kuba. A Shoowa man is said to have related to Darish that, after all is said and done, "The raffia cloth is *mbaangt*". *Mbaangt* is the name given to designate aristocratic clans among most of the Kuba related ethnic groups. It is from these clans that the eagle feather chiefs and other main titleholders are elected. Darish suggests that her informant

meant that the highest title of all must be applied to the raffia palm from which abundant forms of Kuba material and art emerge. The following Bushoong proverb attests to this idea, "You can take from a raffia palm but you can never deplete its supply." (Darish 1990:186.)

CHAPTER 2

The Fabrication of a Kuba Cloth

Throughout the Kuba region cultivating and weaving raffia palm textiles are exclusively male activities, and Darish notes that even bystanders and observers who gather around the weaver's shed are always boys and men. (Darish 1989:121.) While most Kuba men are adept in the art of weaving, there are specialists who produce very refined cloths. The Kuba cloths are woven on a single heddle loom which uses unravelled single lengths of raffia fibre for both the warp and weft. The loom itself is a simple apparatus and is composed of a heddle and two horizontal bars between which the warp is stretched. Only men are permitted to set up the loom. Compared to vertical looms from other areas around the world which are set at a ninety degree angle, those built by the Kuba are set at an oblique angle. (Adams 1973:34.) (fig14). Once the warp has been set it takes approximately two to three hours for an experienced weaver to complete one piece of cloth. Therefore, its fabrication generally amounts to an afternoon's work. These units or squares form the basic elements of a wrapper as the pieces are later sewn together after they are decorated. (One unit forms the basic component from which a Shoowa is made, the square is then dyed and embroidered).

The following is a descriptive sequence outlined by Monni Adams which demonstrates how the cloths are made and the technical aspects of the work involved in completing a wrapper so that it is ready to be decorated. Raffia fibre in plain weave constitutes the basic material for the cloth. Raffia is a fibrous product consisting of epidermal strips of the leaves of the *Raphia ruffia* palm. The leaves are gathered by young boys and are split either by hand or with a raffia rib comb. Women partake in the preparation of the fibre for the purpose of embroidery. They split and smooth the fibres with the aid of snail shells and the fibres are made even more pliant by rubbing them in between their hands. After they are treated they are tied into skeins and they are ready to use. The size of the weaving is determined by the natural length of the palm leaves. It is forbidden to secure

the fibres together either by tying them or by using any other artificial methods, thereby enlarging the size of the panel. In general, the panels of a cloth are made into two shapes: a rectangle which measures approximately 30 x 60 centimetres to 50 x 100 centimetres; or a form that comes closer to the dimensions of a square measuring about 50 x 60 centimetres to a metre square as its largest format. In order to produce raffia cloth which is soft and flexible, even linen like, another stage of treatment is necessary. Here, the woven panel is dampened in water and kneaded, beaten or rubbed between the hands. After it has dried it is beaten again.

The next stage consists of colouring the cloth and embroidery yarn, this is done by women. The undyed colour of raffia is an ecru/blond hue. Usually, the completed panel and yarns are dyed before the decorative stitching is applied. Colour tones vary within some ethnic groups of the Kuba kingdom, however, there are a few basic hues used by all groups and many shades can be obtained by varying the process. Early reports mention four fundamental colours: ecru or beige, red, black and brown. In the past, all dyes were acquired from regional plant sources. (Adams 1973:34-36.) One can also observe the use of mauve or violet and blue. Cornet notes that the Bushoong choose to use four basic colours to decorate their textiles: black, yellow, red, and the 'natural blond colour' of raffia. Black is obtained from various plant and mineral materials, yellow comes from the tree roots of *Rubicaea* family, and red from Camwood. (Cornet 1982:184.) Each one of these ingredients is mixed with boiling water, and the raffia fibres or cloths are dipped in and cooked until the desired shade and its intensity is acquired. In terms of the significance of the coloured cloths one can only draw a distinction between the use of red and "white" (1) as seen in the *labot lanshesh* and *labot latwool* wrappers. The red costume is obligatory for mourning; it also denotes danger. A red costume is the first costume worn when the king dies and it is also worn by the women who partake in the *itul* dance, it expresses the misery of the people. Cornet maintains that for all other circumstances, one is at liberty to choose the colour of their wrapper. (Cornet 1982:186.)

After the dyeing process the cloth is ready to be decorated and fabricated into a wrapper. It is relevant to note that the fabrication and decoration of a wrapper is

generally gender specific. Men are responsible for composing and decorating their skirts, while only women are permitted to assemble and decorate women's skirts. However, as Darish notes there are several decorative techniques which are employed by both men and women. These consist of various types of embroidery stitches (fig 15,16), applique (fig 17,18) and reverse applique (fig 19), patchwork, dyeing, stitch dyeing and tie-dyeing (fig 20). Only women, though, are permitted to practice certain embroidery techniques such as cut pile (fig, 6,7) and open work (fig 20). (Darish 1989:121.) Most Kuba embroidery involves two forms: stem stitching (linear stitching) and cut pile or plush stitching. Cut pile stitching results in the velour or velvet resemblance which characterizes the Shoowa cloths. However, it is also seen in numerous wrappers as part of their decorative facet. In addition, a Shoowa cloth may use only stem stitching but usually combines the cut pile and stem stitching techniques. One must also note that when the Shoowa or cut pile cloths are composed of two or three raffia squares, they are also worn as a form of attire over a longer wrapper (fig 21).

Exquisite and refined plush cloths are created over a period of months or even years. Due to the significant amount of time and labour it takes to fabricate a cloth, wealthy and royal men who have many wives or concubines have an advantage as they have more embroiderers at their disposal to decorate their cloths, and thus more cloths and wrappers. According to Adams, the decorative work on the cloths is usually conducted in the afternoons, after a morning's work in the field. Even the Queen mother worked in the fields in the morning and only embroidered in the afternoon, just as other women do. The embroidery work is generally practiced by women close to their domiciles where they sit on a stool in a shaded spot outside their houses. (Adams 1973:36.) (2).

This gender specific activity reflects a Kuba social custom. For it is believed that during her pregnancy a woman must remain seated at home because if she walks on the footsteps of the child's father misfortune may ensue. (Torday and Joyce 1910: 110-111.) In addition, it may be suggested that by regulating women's embroidery work to the area of the home, it is, in effect, a way to secure their position as the "homemaker" and nurturer as they must also attend to the children during these afternoon hours.

Furthermore, it also limits their contact with village life in the main communal areas where men gather to weave, gossip and discuss affairs of the village, nation or kingdom. For even though women partake in tending the fields and selling and buying products at the markets, this ensures that their access to the concerns of the village remains restricted. While women do maintain a certain amount of economic power and respect, this may be one way to assure that they do not acquire too much power and knowledge concerning the affairs of the village which are generally the domain of men. Their place in the home is thereby secured and perpetuated.

The Kuba, aside from the Cwa, Coofa and Mbeengi, are a matrilineal culture. According to Vansina, marriage was ideally virilocal. Men lived with their fathers until the latter died and then they moved to their mother's brother's village. However Vansina adds that the combination of matrilineage and the rules of residence resulted in a substantial geographic mobility. Consequently he suggests that up to half of the married people did not in fact reside in the village where they should live according to the "rule". (Vansina 1978:6.) In addition, Torday and Joyce note that while a new wife generally goes to live at her husband's village, it frequently occurs that a man remains in his wife's village for five to six years or even permanently. (Torday and Joyce 1910: 272.) Thus, it appears that the rules of residency are not fixed or entrenched. However, if a woman does reside in the village of her husband's father and then at his maternal uncle's village rather than her own, (suggesting the virilocal "rules" are followed) the idea of her staying at home has added dimensions. For in this instance, she is a stranger, and may feel isolated, thus her emotional and economic dependence upon her husband is heightened. In addition, it ensures that the growth of the matrilineage remains restricted. This coincides with Vansina's findings that matrilineal clans were divided into shallow lineages and limited to extended families. (Vansina 1978:6.) Thus, this assures that the balance of power remains in the hands of the patriarchy or at the very least it does not enable women to maintain a position of power in the same way as men, which is what would transpire in a "true" matrilineage.

Darish outlines the fabrication and decoration process of a wrapper, using a woman's

skirt to exemplify this process. She records that the female head of the clan section usually manages the cloth fabrication of several women in her clan section. She first selects the design and style of the skirt. She then obtains the cloth from her husband or another male relative or purchases it herself. The cloth then is softened, the dimensions are determined and it is hemmed. Often holes result from the pounding softening process, and these are covered with applique patches. This initial repair procedure has been transformed into a form of decoration itself (fig 17,18). At this stage she may dispense one or more completed sections of the cloth to other women of her clan to embroider. If the cloth is given to a less experienced or novice embroiderer, she may first outline the designs on the cloth. This may also be done for married women who live far away from the matriclan. When each unit or piece of embroidered cloth is finished, it is returned to the clan section head and sewn to the sections of the skirt which are already completed. (Darish 1989:126,127.) Therefore, the assembly of the skirt follows a systematic procedure which may continue for a few years. Aesthetically, the completed skirt records the diverse talents and abilities as well as the repertoire of available traditional designs and patterns of the women who have participated in its fabrication. However it is unclear from Darish's study as to which clan she is referring in her reference to the female head of the clan section. Is she referring to the matriclan or the patriclan? Or is she suggesting that clan in general is divided into sections based on gender each with its respective head? One would have to assume that she is referring to the matriclan, as the art of fabricating a woman's skirt is being described and women are responsible for this art form. In addition, as previously mentioned, Vansina notes that the Kuba (with the exception of the Cwa, Coofa and Mbeengi) were organized in matrilineal clans. (Vansina 1978:6).

The skirts worn by both men and women are comprised of several pieces of cloth which are sewn together to form a larger panel which measures two to three metres in length. A completed man's skirt is called *mapel* and a completed woman's skirt is referred to as a *ntshak* or *ncak*. Men and women's skirts are distinguished from each other by their length, the configuration of the skirt's panels, and by the design of the

border. The combination of style and decorative techniques employed in fabricating a man's skirt calls for a different working order from that of women's skirts. Unlike women's skirts where each section is compositionally distinctive, most men's skirts duplicate the same design or designs throughout the complete length of the central panels and the borders. As a result of this decorative linear repetition, most men's skirts are produced in an assembly line manner. However, this does not suggest that it takes less time to create a man's skirt. (Adams 1978:30.)

Men's wrapper's are generally half to twice as long as women's skirts. Normally, a *mapel* is constructed by a central panel of square sections sewn together, framed by thin combined borders and completed with a raffia bobble fringe or pompom fringe (fig 22,23). Men gather their skirts around their hips, folding the upper end over a belt, while the lower edge hangs down below the knees. Before the introduction of raffia cloth, men's ceremonial skirts were made of bark cloth and these were generally characterized by red and white checks and were embellished with special border decoration comprised of small checked pieces, plush bands, fringes and tassels. (Adams 1978:30.) It appears that this tradition of a checked pattern was maintained in many of the men's raffia wrappers and then further preserved with industrial cloth. Together with these skirts, special additional accessories such as caps, feathers, belts and pendants and hand held objects visibly indicate the titles and status held by their wearers.

The Parts of a Mapel (a man's wrapper) and a Ntshak (a woman's wrapper)

According to Cornet each wrapper is characterized by five different elements: the central part, *mbom*; the two lateral borders, *mitshwey*; the border that finishes the wrapper, *nkol*; the other border, *mbalishiin* that is hidden when the wrapper is draped; and finally the edge the whole wrapper, *kwey* (fig 24). The following section describing the components of both men's and women's wrappers is based on the research of Cornet (1982:189-192).

The *mbom* is the principal part of the wrapper. It is characterized by numerous variations and therefore involves the use of an expansive vocabulary. It is generally

composed of raffia; thus it warrants the name *ilaam*. Sometimes the raffia is replaced by a fabric of European or Western origin, called *mbeengy*. This particularity appeared under the reign of king Kot aPe, who reserved this style (or use of foreign fabric) for the members of his royal family. For this reason, and because of the magnificence of the fabric ordinarily chosen, the *mbeengy* is superior to the *ilaam*. However, according to Cornet (1982:189) the Kuba purists or traditionalists prefer the *ilaam*, not only for its nationalist and Africanist characteristics and hence its "authenticity" but moreover because of the considerable amount work it takes to compose an *ilaam*. Hence its labour is valued. The ordinary *mbom* is not decorated. However in the most splendid examples decoration is achieved from the composition itself, from the integrated designs, and by additional designs which are either sewn or embroidered. Rather rare and less appreciated by the Bushoong is the type of decoration obtained by wetting or soaking the cloth, known as the *Banhwoong* method which carries the name *Kumingwoong*.

According to Cornet, the most revered *mbom* is composed of a large surface of checks, be they uniform checks (a *kotilaam*) or those alternating with rectangles (fig 22,25). These are characterized by two types: when the raffia fabric is alternated with a rich European fabric, the wrapper is a *mhaat lambeengymbeengy*, and when the checked rectangles are alternated with others that can, but do not have to, be decorated it is called a *ndwoong akwey* wrapper (fig. 26). A last example is a *mbom* which is composed of transversal bands in two different tones: in this instance the wrapper is known as a simple *bangweemy*.

When a *mbom* is decorated by means of motifs, the preferred forms of embellishment are those which constitute an array of complex designs. The most acclaimed designs exhibit a luxurious quality, they are composed with cowrie shells as seen in royal wrappers or more ordinarily by additional pieces of fabric or ribbon called *kweemintshwey* (fig 43). These incorporate alternating rectangular shapes in different colours, which are often white and blue, and the edges are decorated in pompons. The ribbons are initially fabricated on a large scale and are then cut out and sewn according to the scheme of the design, an activity which demands a great amount of patience. The

wrapper carries the name of these ribbons- *kweemintshwey*.

The fabrics which use openwork decoration are not considered to be as lavish as those which use cowries but they are superior to the *kweemintshwey* textiles. Generally, these include the use of sombre coloured fabrics such as black or red and they are covered in embroidered designs. Certain parts use openwork as further embellishment (fig 27). The openwork consists of two different styles: the *mishyeeng*, "the teeth of saw" which are the long rectangles and the *ngeentshy* "boils" which are little embroidered circles assuming the form of a buttonhole. The openwork cloths require an admirable amount of patience and are reserved for members of the royal family and for the king's successors.

The most notable *mbom* are decorated in beads or cowries. If the design is composed in beads it is called *mayeeng*, and if it is created in cowries it is a *mbomandyeeng* (fig 28).

The *mitshwey* or lateral borders play a significant role in the hierarchy of the wrappers. They are almost as important to a cloth's name or title as the central *mbom*. The superior wrappers have borders which are more or less as rich as the surface of the *mbom*, however their appearance is generally different. For example, the *mbom* and the lateral borders can be created with different fabrics. If the fabric is foreign it is a *ntshwey mumbeengy* (fig 29). Often the borders are embellished with embroidery or cut pile (velour). The most common design is the *lakiik*, and in the most recent wrappers it is almost always composed in velour. Cornet maintains that regardless of this luxurious quality, it is not assumed that the cloth's owner belongs to the nobility. There are also borders which are fashioned in little alternating triangles called *mashesh'l* and those in the shape of hexagons called *mayul*.

The wrappers of the great notables are often bordered with checks. These either assume the shape of rectangles, *kotilaam* (fig 30) or for those who claim a greater status they are composed of squares, *matweemy*. Furthermore the number of divisions of the square base must also be considered: three divisions are seen in the *matweemy mambokishet*, two divisions in the *matweemy mambokipey*. Cornet notes that these distinctions must be strictly observed.

The *nkol* is the principal finishing band (fig 31). Its width varies considerably, but it tends to be superior to the lateral borders when the *nkol* is specially decorated. They are generally ornamented with embroidery or the cut pile (*velour*) technique. In the luxurious wrappers, attention is drawn to this part by the changes in beading or in the bands of skin from the genet, or leopard which can additionally be encircled with beads and overworked with little metallic insects encircled with beads. In certain examples, the corners of the *nkol* are decorated with an eagle's feather.

The ends of the wrapper, the *kwey* or *mmom* also range in hierarchy of denoted value and prestige. The simple ends or ones with a straight border of alternated rectangles are called *ikook imween*, "the last of the ends". They are the easiest to fabricate and are consequently the least appreciated. Many wrappers have fringes, *kumishiing* sewn along the edges. The children of the royal family and a certain number of notables of modest stature wear this style, however they are not exceptionally valued. Often the wrappers are decorated with pompons on their borders. The little pompons are called *kweemintshwey*, and the larger ones, *ndyeenl*, are prized the most. They are attached to bands which are rather large where an alternation of colours permits them to be attributed with the name *kwey*, leopard. In addition to the use of pompons, cowries often decorate the borders of royal wrappers.(fig.28). They are referred to as *miin mambyeeng* "the teeth of (the fish) *mbyeeng*". The significance of cowrie shells can be seen in their association to prosperity, as they were once used as a form of currency.

According to Cornet, the name of a superior wrapper is obtained from two aspects of the cloth. The first part of the name is either *ikuuk* or *ntshwey*. A wrapper is named *ikuuk* when the *mbom* assumes the dominant characteristic, and *ntshwey* is used when the most typical element is observed in the border. The second name is chosen from the part which is the most admirable, either from the *mbom* or from the border *ntshwey*. Generally, the name which has priority is taken from the part of the *mapel* which has required the most amount of work. Furthermore a wrapper that has a *mbom* with openwork is an *ikuukmishyeeng*: *ikuuk* because the openwork is in the *mbom* and *mishyeeng* from the openwork parts in general. (Cornet 1982:192.) The following

illustrations exemplify this classification system. Figure 32 consists of a simple *mapel* without any other particularities except for the fringe. It is called *ntshweykumishiing* because the principal part is the border with the fringes. Figure 33 depicts a *mbom* in simple raffia fabric; the border is also simple but is made of foreign material and thus prioritized. It is thus named *ntshweyumbeengy*. The wrapper in figure 34 is composed of simple raffia and is bordered with a band where the velours form a *mashesh'l* design. It is *ntshweymashesh'l ntshwey* because the border is principally *mashesh'l* due to the design. Figure 35 is called an *ikuukmishyeeng*: *ikuuk* because the *mbom* captures the presence of openwork and *mishyeeng* because of the openwork parts. The abundance of beads and cowries in figure 36 suggest that this a royal wrapper. The borders are in cowries but the *mbom* conceals them on the point because the cowrie design is a giant *kweetbwiin* pattern. The name of the wrapper is *ikuukkindyeeng*: *ikuuk* for the *mbom* and *ndyeeng* for the cowries applied on the central material. (Cornet 1982:192.)

While men's wrappers are referred to as *mapel*, the specific name of women's wrappers is *ntshak*. Women drape their decorated skirts (*ntshak* or *ncak*) around their bodies. A woman's long ceremonial skirt can measure six to nine yards in length and basically it does not have a border. As a garment, it is wrapped around the body three to four times and is sometimes affixed with a belt. They are not folded over a belt as seen in the *mapel*. The lower edges of the skirt reach below their mid calves. Cornet notes that the distinctions of the women's wrappers are not as complex as observed in the men's. However, there also exists a noteworthy hierarchy among the women's wrappers. The ordinary *ntshak* is fabricated from red or white raffia material. At the most basic level one can distinguish the *ntshakampap'l* from the *ntshakiswepy*. The *ntshakampap'l* is red cloth with designs and the occasional addition of red embroidered linear stitched designs, little else is visible aside from some cowries or pompoms at the edge (fig 37). The *ntshakiswepy* is a white wrapper with numerous embroidered designs in black (fig 38). However, sometimes the colour of the linear stitching varies. This type of stitching also outlines small appliqued patches of cloth which are sewn onto the skirts (fig 16). The applique patches are usually dispersed over the surface of the cloth in and around the

opulent embroidered stitchery (fig 17, 18). The arrangement of designs demonstrates the same preference for irregularity as seen in the plush cloths and stitched designs. Over this voluminous wraparound skirt, a woman often adds another smaller skirt on top which roughly measures one and half yards. This skirt is characterized by a central panel of embroidered black motifs on raffia cloth or of small pieces of dark bark cloth and a border of plush designs as seen on men's skirts. This skirt also possesses an edging which is bound over rattan stick, which is peculiarly twisted called *ntshakakot* (fig 39, 40). The *ntshakakot* of the royal family are often characterized by a sombre coloured border. (Cornet 1982:194,195.) This accessory adds an element of motion to the grand sculptural costume. As these skirts are usually worn as dancing attire, this element of motion is further enhanced by the wearer's movements.

The *ntshakubwiin* is the most luxurious woman's cloth. As its name indicates, it is a wrapper with designs. Generally, the *mbom* is in velour that conforms to one or the other classic designs and the border is embroidered with a variation of the same design or in another motif. This wrapper is evidently a sign of nobility. It is worn elegantly over an ordinary wrapper. If the designs are created with pompon ribbons it is called a *ntshakashoomaloong*.

According to Cornet, the most exceptional *ntshak* is the *ishyeen*. The *mbom* is composed of alternating black and white fragments of tree bark, patiently sewn into little triangles. The borders are embroidered (fig 41). All women are permitted to wear it. The *ntshakandyeeng* is also called *ikuukindyeeng*, its red velour centre is decorated with cowries. Only three women are permitted to wear this wrapper: the king's mother, his first wife and his first born daughter. (Cornet 1982:195,196.) Darish suggests that it is possible that in the past specific styles of raffia skirts worn by men and women may have been reserved for high ranking titleholders. (Titleholding will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.) However, today this does not appear to be the custom. She asserts that her research found that patterns and styles recognized by informants as those fabricated and owned only by important families were evenly divided among people of all classes. The only occasion when textiles denoted status or title is when an eagle

feather chief added decorative elements in the form of cowrie shells or brass repoussé to their costumes. (Darish 1989:120.) This appears to contradict Cornet's findings in which he claims that there did and does exist a hierarchy among the wrappers. This hierarchy can be divided into two categories which can also overlap. The first category encompasses the cloths which are reserved for royalty and the nobility. In this instance one can note that fixed categories do exist. For example, Cornet notes that wrappers that contain open work in the central panel as well as the use of ribbon are reserved for royalty. Cowries that decorate the ends of a wrapper also denote royal characteristics. In addition, the *ikuukdyeeng* woman's wrapper is reserved for three specific royal women. There are those wrappers that are attributed to the nobility. This is seen for example when the lateral borders are comprised of checks and in the *ntshakwiim* women's over-wrapper. It is significant to note that the luxurious nature of the cloth does not necessarily imply that its wearer is connected with the royal court. Often these types of cloths are available for all Kuba to wear. This can be seen for example in the use of the cut-pile design on the lateral borders of a man's wrapper. However, it is most probable that the wrappers which were greatly revered were more costly, thus the issues of wealth and status come into play as to who was able to commission and afford these expensive cloths. Their availability today is open to all in terms of regulations concerning the status of the owner, meaning if one was willing and able to pay for an expensive cloth there would be no restrictions. This is connected to the second category or sub-hierarchical delineations associated with cloth. For here wealth plays a central role. An expensive cloth may not denote the wearer's title or status, however, it does allude to the idea that the wearer is wealthy and as a result has probably acquired a title. It appears that in Kuba society one of the prerequisites of being granted a title is a person's wealth. Wealth, status and title are all interconnected. Even if the wearer is not a wealthy person and dons an expensive cloth this is also of significance. For he/she acknowledges the associations between cloth, wealth and status.

These two hierarchical divisions overlap when the wearer is a royal or noble and wears a cloth of their choice, one that is not specifically reserved for him/her as this seems to

be permitted. It does not appear that a particular wrapper reflects a person's title, rather the wrappers seem to be classified in general categories such as those that are reserved for royalty and the nobility while the majority of the wrappers do not retain any restrictions. Although the form of the textile itself may not be a symbol of one's status or title, the cost and its place in the hierarchy surely suggests their value and stature or at the very least the importance of stature in respect to their choice as well a class consciousness. It should be noted that discrepancies between Cornet's and Darish's findings may be accounted for in the respective area where each did their field-work. Cornet centred his work around the court and royal art forms. Although Darish concentrated on the Bushoong group, it not clear from her findings which segments of the population she actually studied.

One also has to question the possible disjunction between the notion of ownership and status. For if the cloths are owned by the clan, as Darish suggests, presumably the clan can control who wears them. However, she does not indicate how the cloths are distributed on ceremonial occasions. Are they merely on loan to the wearer and who decides what cloth a particular individual is entitled to wear? In addition, one must note that when a person dies, they are buried with their Shoowa cloths and wrappers. Perhaps there are those which are owned by the clan, however, it does appear that these cloths are also individually owned as they are valued in terms of their material aspects and in suggesting the wealth and status of their owner. The connections between cloth and funerals will be discussed in further detail in chapter eight. This question of ownership carries further dimensions when one considers that, today, cloths (both old and new) are sold to foreign or local collectors and middlemen. While it is most likely that there are numerous examples made specifically for this market many older cloths are also traded. If they are clan owned who decides which cloths are to be sold? It is just as probable that individuals sell their own cloths just as they are buried with them. This problem will also be discussed in chapter seven.

This chapter has also touched upon the influence of foreign fabrics. It is important to note that the Kuba kingdom remained closed to foreigners and the colonizing forces for a

considerably longer period than their neighbours. This was due to their geographic location, situated in the centre of what is now Zaire which was protected by forest and rivers along their borders, but also it was a conscious effort made by the ruling kings during the onslaught of colonization and ethnographic exploration. According to Adams, the Kuba kingdom remained closed to foreign visitors of any kind (Adams 1983:42.) (3) The king decreed that any invaders should be killed and anyone assisting entrance to these travellers would also be sentenced to death. This xenophobia is noted by Stanley Shaloff. In his study of William Henry Sheppard, the late Nineteenth century American missionary, he notes that Sheppard was well aware of the difficulties surrounding his endeavours in 1892 to reach the capital. Shaloff writes:

The path he chose to tread was not an easy one, as he well knew, for in the previous nine years several administrators and merchants had been rebuffed in their attempts to enter the kingdom despite their proffers of rich gifts. Except for Silva Porto, who had conferred with the late ruler at the market centre of Kapungo in 1880, and Dr. Ludwig Wolf, who had encountered the reigning monarch at a frontier village in 1884 before he came to power, no European had managed to establish meaningful contact with the Kuba. Certainly no one had ever reached the capital of the confederation as Sheppard intended doing (Shaloff 1967-8:54).

Thus, the Kuba were able to maintain their indigenous forms of dress for a longer period than most. When they were influenced before colonization, it was a choice that they made, incorporations took place in a slow and subtle manner. The overall transformation of "traditional" dress appears to mirror the pace and history of colonization and that of the Kuba kingdom as well. (4) As Vansina notes:

Society, culture and the arts are in reality so closely intertwined that it seems evident that a change in one must be accompanied by change in the other. Art is an integral part of culture and individuals participate in social life through the medium of culture. Moreover, visual arts are often directly tied to specific institutions, which use art objects as tolls. So the axiom that change in art reflects socio-cultural change seems well founded (Vansina 1984:154).

This is demonstrated for example in the idea that Shyaam (Shamba), the first king, is believed to have introduced the art of weaving and the art of weaving raffia. Thus, the connection between raffia cloth as a form of attire and the establishment of the kingdom is clearly made from the outset. Picton and Mack note that the first European traders who tried to establish connections with the Kuba found that in order to do so they were required to trade goods to the east of the Kuba territory where they were able to purchase slaves, the one trading "commodity" that interested the Kuba. (Picton and Mack 1979:203.) When Torday visited the region in the first decade of this century he detected that the Kuba were only starting to adopt European textiles but even then they were frequently dyed with *tukula* (camwood) in order to simulate traditional cloths. In terms of imported European cloth he notes: "One very rarely sees trade cloth worn at Misumba, the people preferring the manufacture of their own material, which is much more durable and rougher in texture" (Torday 1925:95).

It is relevant to point out that before the reign of Kot aPe, the wearing of European cloths was forbidden. Cornet notes that king Kot aPe himself authorized the addition of luxurious European materials to the raffia components of these traditional wrappers. However these amalgamated cloths were a royal prerogative. (Cornet 1982:182.) This combination of indigenous raffia material mixed with Westernized fabric is noted in figure 42. The central part of the wrapper is made of raffia while the borders are composed of modern material. However, one can note that the modern checkered material with its gingham pattern resembles the checkered borders of older wrappers which were composed entirely from raffia. Thus the overall integrity of the traditional garment is maintained, while adapting to new circumstances and availability of modern industrial fabrics. This transformation or interest in European cloth was noted by Hilton-Simpson, who accompanied Torday on one of his first expeditions in the first decade of the Twentieth century. He noted that "The men can very often find employment whereby to earn some European cloth by carrying loads to and from the Kasai Company's factory, and the cloth thus earned is rapidly replacing the palm fibre material formerly worn around the waist" (Hilton-Simpson 1911:201). Cornet notes that, later on, the use of

European clothing became authorized and accepted. This he suggests was especially due to Luba who mocked the Kuba for walking around with uncovered torsos, which was seen as backward. (Cornet 1982:182) For a long time this form of garment (European attire) was restricted to a grey fabric which resembled a military type of material. In addition, Cornet maintains that the present Kuba king forbids the wearing of traditional costume, except when worn for traditional ceremonies. (Cornet 1982:182.) However one must question if this decree applies only to the "costumes" or to the wrappers as a form of daily attire. For Darish notes that, while currently many younger women wear imported clothing or "modern" attire for daily use and younger men prefer to wear Western fashioned trousers and shirts, it is primarily the older generation who still continue to wear plain undecorated raffia cloth skirts. In addition, some older Kuba men and women copy the traditional style of attire by obtaining imported cotton cloth and machine tailoring it in the same manner as traditional raffia styled skirts (Darish 1989:123.). Although the styles and fabrics have changed for daily garments, woven raffia cloth and fabrication of raffia textiles are still important quotidian activities.

CHAPTER 3

Titleholding

The social reality of the Kuba is characterized by an intricate structured hierarchy. Today, there are three main social classes: royalty, nobles/officials, and the "common" population. Prior to colonization there existed a fourth class that was comprised of slaves. (1) The number of titled nobles within the Kuba society is extraordinarily high and, as a result, titleholding and its accompanying forms of prestige are central characteristics of the Kuba socio-political structure. It involves a complex division of titles and statuses conscientiously measured one against the other. For a Kuba man, success is synonymous with titleholding. From the earliest published reports, visitors to this kingdom were amazed at the substantial number of titled positions and the display of insignia and emblems affiliated with titleholding. In the 1950s, Vansina found a political structure still intact that stressed competition for achievement of titled position which he believes developed throughout the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. He notes:

Any free man could become a *kolm* (noble) and acquire corresponding prestige. The offices became so numerous that any man over forty had a good chance of holding at least one minor title. By 1953 one quarter of the men held a local title and half of the men in the capital- virtually all older men, excluding slaves- were *kolm*... Every man over forty therefore took one chance in two of becoming a *kolm*... Despite their large number, titles were highly desired as a public recognition of success. Their prestige justified the ambition and struggle involved in obtaining one (Vansina 1978:77).

David Binkley notes that competition is just as intense in the village domain as it is at the capital. It may even be intensified in some villages because hereditary succession does not play a part in the selection procedure. (Binkley 1984:77.) Thus, there are more possible competitors contending for fewer titled positions. The king's is the only title which is based on heredity. While the majority of titleholders are men, as they comprise the village councils which act as the local governing body, there are two female

titleholders who represent the women of the village. However, they do not partake in council meetings on a regular basis. (Darish 1989:199.) (2). Different responsibilities and benefits are associated with the hierarchy of titleholding. (3).

In the Seventeenth century, Shyaam unified a consolidated chiefdom which was comprised of several titled offices. Shyaam and his successors created a bureaucracy out of these offices by establishing new titles that complemented those offices which already existed and generated the notion that together all of these titles constituted an exclusive, overarching system. As a result, the rulers created not only territorial organization but an array of clear and fundamental institutions at the capital. These were so successful that eventually the bureaucrats, being the *kolm*, made up a power league in their own right and became the basis of a new social class; the nobility. The system of social stratification was consequentially transformed and social class formation became more apparent. (Vansina 1978:128.)

By the late Nineteenth century there were three groupings of office: the king, the *ngwoom incayaam* (members of the crown council) and the *kolm* (nobles/officials). It is not known when the Bushoong declared itself as the monarchy, meaning when the Bushoong chief professed lordship and kingship over all the other chiefs. Vansina suggests that its advent can be traced back to the reign of Shyaam. However, whether it was Shyaam or his successors, military victories were necessary in order to achieve a persuasive assertion of a consolidation, which was advanced by both Shyaam and his successor, Mboong aLeeng. Royal power developed so rapidly that by the middle of the Eighteenth century King Kot aNce (the seventh Kuba king) could banish and execute eagle feather chiefs with impunity; those who were previously considered equals of the Bushoong had now become subordinate. (Vansina 1978:128,129.)

Each *kolm* possessed a different title, a different office and brandished his authority in a manner distinct from that of the courts or councils he might have belonged to. No one person in the political sphere could possess two titles, nor vacate their title in order to acquire a more or less important one. In addition, two people could not share the same title. Recruitment was founded on realized status. The *kolm* were nominated by the king

or in other chiefdoms by the eagle feather chief. The more prominent offices had to be sanctioned by their peers in council, and some of the more important offices necessitated that the *kolm* belong to a class with accredited status such as belonging to an aristocratic clan, being the sons or grandsons of a king, belonging to one specific aristocratic clan or a combination of these. Thus prestige and status in this circumstance was gained by the powerful nature of the family. Less prominent titles were granted by the king and were therefore completely attained statuses in themselves. (Vansina 1978:131.) Vansina suggests that the Kuba culture was disposed to produce political dignitaries and these existed in order to gravitate around the king. Vansina maintains that for the Kuba, royalty is a "marvellous collective dream" realized to give order and stability. (Vansina 1978:135.)

Even though the statuses and associated roles of the *kolm* were highly diverse, they all pertained to a single administrative system. The methodical nature of these offices are depicted or exhibited by insignia. The principal symbol was the use of different feathers of a selected species of bird such as the eagle, owl, parrot or guinea fowl. These were worn in order to distinguish the *kolm*'s place in the political hierarchy. Each *kolm* has a distinct feather and the feathers were organized in sets; for example, birds of prey symbolized officers associated directly with the king. In accordance with the title, the feather could have been worn vertically, at an inclined angle in a hat or headdress or held in the corner of the mouth. The same feather could be worn on the head by one *kolm* and in the corner of the mouth by another even though they belonged to the same set. The king and the other chiefs wear an eagle feather- the king of birds. Furthermore, each title affords other privileges such as the right to wear specific belts, hats, hair pins or to carry official staffs of office. For the highest ranked officials, intricate traditions are linked to installation and funeral rituals. (Binkley 1984:79.) According to Vansina (1978:131), by the end of the 1880s at least one hundred and twenty titles existed in the capital alone. However, it was easy to recognize a titleholder by the sign of his feather which functioned as an insignia of rank. The Kuba state was envisioned so that no office at any level replicated any other.

Any free man could become a *kolm* and obtain the coinciding prestige. As previously mentioned, these offices became so abundant that any man over forty had a good chance of retaining at least a minor title. By 1953 one quarter of the men held a local title and half the men in the capital were *kolm*. By that late 1880s, titleholding had increased even more in the small chiefdoms, where almost every man held one. However, the extent of the offices had deteriorated to the stage where many were merely honorific distinctions. Regardless of their large numbers, titles were greatly desired as they indicated the acknowledgment of success. The status which accompanied a title explains the ambition and effort related to its acquisition. Support for the regime followed from this. The bureaucratic system therefore had the side effect of engaging most or all of the men in the affairs of the administration and inciting enthusiastic approval of the regime. The system enabled the Kuba to become so engulfed with organization and above all with public honours, insignia and pageantry, that the image of the feather had become the symbol of primary value or importance in the political arena. Each title was accompanied by praise names, emblems and symbols and the most significant ones even gloried in their funeral and installation rituals. (Vansina 1978:132.) Thus, the outward display of status came to characterize Kuba culture. Each titleholder had his exterior signs of authority.

Undoubtedly each title had its own principles and rules. According to Vansina, these regulatory elements were associated with hierarchical sets. The appearance of each *kolm* elicited its associated system and its doctrines, while it concurrently distinguished the individual title and situated it within the several hierarchies which embodied that specific network. (Vansina 1978:132.) This is demonstrated in the following example. At the capital, the provincial governor (the *nyaang*) was required to be from an aristocratic clan. He governed one specific region, as other governors supervised their required areas. He wore a white oxpecker feather, as did three other governors. The king wore this feather when he donned the hat of his great costume, which also included every other feather used in the system. The *nyaang* wore a special hat, like the other governors, and carried a wooden staff similar to those carried by the *ngwoom incyaam* (a member of the crown

council), but his was of a lower grade. He wore a red copper hat needle which two other notables were permitted to wear. He wore an adze over his shoulder and two tiny bows were worn under his shoulders, as other governors did (other *kolm* wore bowstrings, and the king wore the tusks of a hippopotamus on his shoulders). The *nyaang's* bark belt was part of a set that was worn by the higher ranked council members and a lower ranked embroidered belt worn by a lesser *kolm*. The back ornaments he wore were shared with all the major *kolm* and the king. He wore rings around his wrists and ankles of diverse metals and of raffia, sometimes studded with cowries, which all varied in accordance with rank. (Vansina 1978:132, 133.)

Vansina points out that the *nyaang's* insignia were identical to those of one other governor, the *nyimishoong*, who preceded the *nyaang* in rank; he was positioned before him in public processions and just after him in the speaking order at councils (4). The *nyimishoong's* iron staff and the blades of his adze signified the difference between these two titleholders. The *nyaang's* adze looked like a rake with four teeth, while the *nyimishoong's* had two entwined blades of a different shape. (Vansina 1978:133.) It is most probable that such a complex system grew from the time of Shyaam to the post-colonial period, it could not have been created by one king.

In each chiefdom the eagle-feather chief dominates the hierarchy. The king is the eagle feather chief of the Bushoong and is therefore at the head of their hierarchy. The Bushoong chiefdom rules the kingdom, however there is not a standard system of titles which pervades all chiefdoms. For example, the *kikaam* (the highest official) at the capital only represented the Bushoong *kolm*. There was no one person who represented all of the *kolm* throughout the kingdom or all the eagle feather chiefs. The title common to all was the *nyim*, meaning king. This is also the special chiefly title held by the king. Alone he theoretically united or connected all the chiefdoms and villages in a common or shared hierarchy. He was *ncyeem nkwoonc*, "God on earth". Even though his insignia depicted him at the top of the Bushoong pyramid and although he was equal to the other eagle feather chiefs by his own eagle feather status, a chasm existed between the king and all others. In their own chiefdoms, the eagle feather chiefs held the highest rank but

their prestige and rank were modest at the royal court. (Vansina 1978:133-135.) (5)

Titleholding fostered pervasive competition among the Kuba, not only due to the power and wealth obtained and associated with it, but also because it required a certain amount of prosperity to acquire a title, which hence signified status. This situation is the source of a dynamic search for prestige and certainly contributed to rendering the population attentive to the affairs of the nation. The redistribution of responsibilities is perpetual. The political regime is not only accepted by all, but all participate in it in varying degrees. In turn, this assures the position of the king and the underlying hierarchy of the Kuba's socio-political system.

Vansina maintains that it is almost certain that elaborate cloths or wrappers were once associated with the differentiation of social class and status. He suggests that the first such cloths may well have been a part of the luxury imports from beyond Kwilu in the Seventeenth century. The admiration accorded to artistic innovation is also best defined or interpreted by identifying it with prestige. According to Vansina, special patterns were not reserved for certain ranks, however this is based on contemporary research and this may not have been the circumstance prior to Twentieth century investigation. He notes, though, that rank was valorised by the novelty of pattern, the skill in execution and the labour expended on the object. (Vansina 1978: 221, 222.) This can be seen in regards to the wrappers whereby unique fashion trends, which necessitated substantial expenditure of labour, promoted these textiles as favoured objects among the nobility.

Those cloths that belonged to the king and his entourage procured the most attention and admiration. According to Cornet, wearing an honourable costume is one of the main sources of pride for the Kuba. The king's family, in particular, dominates in this area because the greatest and most favourable costumes and adornments were reserved for them. (Cornet 1982:181.) This is due to the fact that they have the available resources to commission the most cloths and to employ the best weavers. The highest personalities or notables, those that own many costumes, enjoy the luxury in certain circumstances of selecting several elements from any particular costume in order to compose their costume of the day according to their needs or desires.

The hierarchy of costumes is very complex, as the notables and titleholders are numerous and the status of each one is marked by well-determined particularities. In regards to a specific costume, numerous hierarchical elements based upon one's title and/or relation to the court can intervene in order to justify the wearing of a particular costume. One has to take into consideration the wearer's function as well as the prerogatives that relate to the fact that the he/she can belong to a privileged cast. Invariably, these particularities transpired over the centuries and are indicative of an extensive tradition.

At the beginning of this century, the traditional costume held all its prestige. This can be observed in the following anecdote related by Torday.

We saw a young man who had done his military service come back in European dress; the following day of his arrival his pants, vest, hat and the other strange effects were quickly sold to some Baluba of the mission and he was dressed in Bushongo clothes. He was however absent for several years and almost forgot his maternal language, asked why he made such a radical change he answered: I am a Bushongo, do I not have the right to be beautiful (Torday 1919:77).

This anecdote suggests that not only is dress associated with a cultural concept of beauty but also with the sense of one's ethnic identity. As Judith Forney has observed, dress is an intrinsic cultural characteristic in which standards of dress and appearance are a demonstration of group identity. (1980:4.) Thus, one may propose that dress can be employed to generate inferences regarding affinities and differences of a group's cultural values and beliefs.

The wrappers that form an integral part of these costumes or outfits are only one component of the entire ensemble. Belts, headdresses and their accessories, neck ornaments, necklaces, pendants, back ornaments and leg and arm and hip ornaments, gloves and shoes all play a part of the overall costume and they all play a part in distinguishing the wearer's status. Fraser and Cole note that :

Leaders usually have the capacity to distribute goods, honours, and statuses to their subjects. The most important function of art in this regard seems to be the differentiation of roles. In the elaborate courtly societies a great many distinct roles must be identified; hence it follows that courtly art forms are more numerous and specialized than is the case in acephalus, loosely organized groups... By making political rank, occupational specialty, or social status visible, art reflects and reinforces the prevailing socio-political system (Fraser and Cole 1972:312).

Generally, the problem of choosing and composing their costume is easily resolved for the notables for some possess only one. When they own two costumes, one is a white costume *labot lanshesh* and the other is a red costume *labot latwool*. In this instance their choice is based on the occasion for which they are adorning themselves, for example, mourning requires a red costume. (Cornet 1982:233.)

According to Cornet traditional rules were set concerning the adornment of these costumes and these were jealously controlled and supervised. Transgressing these regulations could result in a stiff fine. He adds that previously, the great notables were so uncompromising on this point, which profoundly involved their honour, that they manifested their disapproval when the king showed too much generosity by permitting exceptions. Usually it is understood that one must not wear a costume that is too formal in the presence of the king in order to heighten or emphasize the dignity of the king. (Cornet 1982:181.)

While these costumes are comprised of numerous elements as mentioned above, only the wrappers will be examined as they pertain to this study and the title or position of the individual in question. They range in order of the status of their owner and his or her place within the hierarchy. A detailed description is available in Cornet's *Art Royal Kuba* (1982). The *nyimbal'k* is a notable of a rather humble category. He is responsible for judging cases which are the result of accidents. He must be the son of *nkaanyim*, meaning he is a great grand son of the king. The *mbom* or central part of the wrapper he wears lacks any ornamentation (fig 42). The border is fabricated in foreign material, thus the wrapper is a *ntshweyumbeengy*. (Cornet 1982:234-236.) The chief of the royal artists is considered to be a noble. In addition to the royal tailor and the royal sculptor

there exists a *nyimbatudy*, "the ironsmith of the king". As he is also the son of the king, and he enjoys certain special privileges in the area of dress. The costume here is the *labot latwool*, a red costume (fig 43). The wrapper is composed of several bands of decorated material and is bordered in checkerworked squares. The name of the wrapper, *ntshwey matweemy*, is attributed to the border, which dignifies the central part of the cloth.

(Cornet 1982:236.)

The royal costumes surpass all those owned and worn by all other notables in their splendour and opulence. The king and many other members of the royal court possess a number of complete outfits prescribed for particular or specific occasions. They consist of numerous decorative components and colour combinations; the main textile component is the wrapper.

The *bweemy* is the presumed successor of the king. He is usually the king's brother or nephew. His status imposes numerous duties and great privileges. The *bweemy* in figure 44 is Mbopey Mabiintsh. He owns many costumes of which the most formal or solemn is described here. It is a red costume, a *labot latwool* (fig 44). Here, he is depicted in front of the historic *mwaan ambul* house and surrounded by his family. His costume is, first of all, distinguished by a wrapper of high standing and fabricated with foreign red material. It is enriched with *kweethwiin* designs, however the border with its two rows of checked squares imposes the name : *ntshwey matweemy mbokishet*. (Cornet 1982: 236.)

The *labot latwool* costume of the king finds its corresponding female counterpart in those costumes which belong to the greatest dignitaries of the royal family. They are the richest costumes in the female world of the Bushoong. Figure 45 depicts the king's grandmother and his great aunt in front of the sovereign. Their *labot latwool* costumes are comprised of an underneath wrapper, which is an ordinary *ntshak*. This *ikuuk mayeeng* wrapper is decorated in beads and the border is embellished with cowries. (Cornet 1982: 240.)

The most sumptuous costumes are reserved for the king. They are the most exemplary. Fraser and Cole note that just as individual leaders and administrative units are more highly visible in differentiated societies, so too are the elitist functions of their art forms

more easily recognized. Paramount leaders often have "paramount" art forms. (Fraser and Cole 1972: 299.) To dress in prestigious costumes is, in itself, a real ceremony for the king. As king, he must display strength and dignity, and wearing the most expensive and luxurious costumes constitutes proof of actual vigour. The lengthy operation of dressing is accompanied by the songs of ownership. The area where the king is dressed is a sacred space. It is only accessible to certain people, such as the *nyibiin* or the royal tailor, the *bannumy bakum*- "married princes", the *baan banyim*, and for security some *basho banyim*. The king may possess an unlimited number of costumes, however he is at the very least obliged to possess three specific ones that shroud his body after his death. (Cornet 1982:233.)

The king has numerous costumes at his disposal. The majority of them are chosen by him at liberty, according to the importance of the ceremonies or by simply following his whim. If he desires, he can wear very simple costumes. (fig 46, 47). However, for the most important costumes, there exist rules that are fixed by tradition. These rules sometimes concern a particular element of the costume. The most important rules are those that oblige the king to maintain the harmony of the costume. This means that he is required to judiciously select those accessories which are the most appropriate to the character, nature and colour of the costume.

The king is perfectly free to compose numerous different costumes which he adapts to diverse circumstances. In figure 48 the king is going to attend an *ibaantsh* dance. The costume is relatively modest but it contains several elements of notable luxury and quality. He is wearing the royal *labot lanshesh* costume. The wrapper is a *ndwoong akwey* in which the *mbom* is created with a large checkerboard composition. It is ornamented with European fabrics which form a design that may be interpreted as an example of *ntshuum anyim* motif. The border is a *ntshwey matweemy*. (Cornet 1982:238.)

It is significant to acknowledge that only Cornet has studied these costumes in detail, this approach has not been undertaken by any other author. While this is limiting to the purpose of this dissertation, it perhaps also indicates an approach concerning the study of

African art history. For Cornet's research on this topic can be dated to the early 1980s, while other leading scholars in the field of Kuba art, such as Vansina, published their major works prior to this period. Authors such as Vansina and Torday did not entirely ignore the issue of textiles, however they only briefly touched upon their significance. It is probably not a coincidence that this interest in costume and textiles parallels the emerging trend of studying African textiles and their relevance to both art and anthropology, for traditionally, the study of African art has privileged sculpture and its related expressive forms such as masquerade. Until quite recently (the late 1970s and early 1980s), weaving and textiles have been considered a lesser type of art form. In the hierarchy of what constitutes "art", weaving has (or had) been relegated a position within the decorative art or craft categories. (6)

The Kuba regard prestige as synonymous with political society. In contrast, the neighbouring Lele society obtained influence by passing into an older age group. (Adams 1983:43.) These positions were associated with status and prestige, consequently a pervasive air of competition characterized Kuba society as these positions were greatly sought after. All promised economic benefit for the titleholder and the kingdom in the form of fines, fees or other rewards. Most important was the fact that securing a political title was the mark of success and public acknowledgement, and status followed. As MacAloon notes, this is externalized in those objects that serve as the insignia of chiefs or other political notables. They are displayed for example in the garments and ornaments whose rarity or laboriously produced materials, limited quantity, workmanship, or ritual transformation from commonplace objects into prestige bearing objects delineate the leader or ruler from his subjects, people of higher rank from those of lower positions or accomplishments. Equally, each is a highly contained emblem of the bonds that connect the leader and the led, the ruler and the subject, the high and the low in a collectively shared social world. (MacAloon 1982:257.)

These costumes and their accessories play a significant role in the regalia that denotes rights, privileges and prerogatives of leadership offices, and titleholding as well as custodianship and skill. A leader and titleholder can increase his or her presence through

the use of these forms of regalia. As Fraser and Cole suggest, "Hierarchically organized socio-political systems usually have a visible hierarchy of art objects (including regalia) which reflect and uphold ranked social positions. A network of roles calls for a network of symbols" (1972 :299). This is illustrated not only in the spectacular display of the costumes themselves, but also in the elements of the costumes such as the headdresses, headbands, belts and necklaces. These accessories are often associated with the wearer's position. In addition, the use and number of cowrie shells and beads as forms of decoration and ornamentation to these costume parts also signify the wearer's status.

The Kuba cloths, which form one component of these costumes, can be viewed as part of an overall ensemble and as such they serve as a vehicle for illustrating social hierarchy, cosmic order and lineage. Costumes which are less important precede those of greater significance during ceremonial performances. In addition, those which adorn the most important titleholders, when compared with lesser titleholders or even the common man, are visibly more prominent. Douglas Fraser notes that the contrast between courtly dress and common dress rests primarily in the noticeable differences in the value or quantity of the materials. (Fraser cited by Sieber 1972:12.) For example this is noted when one compares the costumes of the nobles (the *nyimbal'k* and the *nyimbatudy*) to those of royal members such as the *bweemy* and the king. The costumes and wrappers belonging to the *bweemy* and the king are more sumptuous and ornate. This is also noted among the Kuba with less important titles as their dress differs in wealth and abundance from both the common and the courtly styles. A hierarchy of dress is clearly exhibited along all social classes. Adams suggests (as emphasized by Fraser and Cole) that:

in regard to physical properties, elite arts are distinguished from those of lesser leaders or of the common people by contrast which may take varied forms such as elaboration, miniaturization or monumentality. The elite corpus is further characterized by more complex techniques of fabrication, more imported materials, more complex iconography and a proliferation of types and varieties of objects (Adams 1983:40).

However, one must question if in fact the wrapper itself plays this type of symbolic or distinguishing role. If one compares the *nyimbal'*'s wrapper with the wrapper of the *bweemy* or the king's *ndwoong akwey* wrapper, it does appear that particular wrappers are associated with title and status. In this instance, the wearer's status reflects the amount of decoration. As an individual's title is elevated, so too is the amount of embellishment on the wrapper. The same inferences can be made in comparing the *nyimbatudy*'s wrapper with that of the others. His wrapper is richer than the *nyimbal'*'s but less grand than the *bweemy*'s or the king's. However, this distinction does not appear to apply to the wrappers of members of the royal court. For upon examining those of the *bweemy* and king, it is noteworthy that the *bweemy*'s wrapper is more ornate than the one worn by the king, as described in this instance. What appears to be of significance here is the fact that the occasions for which the costumes are adorned are pivotal in establishing the ways in which cloth is associated with status. Cornet (1982) does not mention for what events or situations particular costumes are worn, and aside from the king's *labot lanshesh* costume does not discuss their importance. If royal members possess more than one costume and certainly more than a few wrappers, one has to question if the circumstances reflect or require the wearing of specific outfits. This appears to be the situation for the king as mentioned and this will be demonstrated in chapter five, however Cornet does not include these observations for any other members of the royal court, aside from the general custom of donning red wrappers for funerals and mourning.

One may also question if specific costumes are steadfastly associated with particular accessories or components. Cornet has suggested that one can, in fact, interchange the various accoutrements or elements (including the wrappers) one owns at will when dressing for an event which requires ceremonial attire. This exemplifies Vansina's assessment of Kuba cultural ideals which are characterized by both an individuality and respecting and conforming to the hierarchy, as will discussed in regards to pattern and motif in chapter four. In choosing the appropriate elements that could be used to compose a costume, the wearer is reflecting his/her independence or individuality and is concurrently accepting the act of dressing in his/her finest attire as well as in the mode of

attire which is reserved for their status. Thus he/she is respecting not only the Kuba customs and cultural practices, but also the hierarchy which shapes the society and imposes the very act of titleholding and its various forms of display.

In the two princess's costumes (fig 45), it is important to note that, to a large extent, they do not seem to vary from one another. This similarity also pervades women's wrappers in general, whether they belong to the nobility, royal court or to the populace. While one can draw a distinction in terms of class between women's wrappers, they remain quite similar to the nature of their status. The added *ikuuk mayeeng* wrapper over the simple *ntshak* illustrates this, as does the use of beads and cowries which decorate the border of the overskirt. However, when examining photographs in Cornet (1982,1980) and Adams (1978) one can even detect a general similarity pervading through women's simpler wrappers as seen in figure 44. This is also noted in the heavily embroidered wrappers, as seen in figure 49 and 50 with its embroidered overskirt and underwrappers. This lack of differentiation or similarity in the wrappers worn by both the royal and common women perhaps exemplifies the status or position of women within Kuba society, as discussed in chapter two. The fact that there exist only two titled women perhaps explains why women's wrappers are less distinct from each other, especially when compared to those of men. A woman's lack of public persona additionally does not require the same scale of differentiation in wrapper types, as detected with the men's garments. However, Cornet does not discuss the wrappers or costume types of noble women. Thus, one has to question to what extent they differ from each other and compared to those of royal women and those of the populace. For, if the Kuba nation is preoccupied with the display of wealth and status, one would have to surmise that this also enters into the domain of women and would be exemplified in their modes of dress as well. The question of ceremonial occasion in connection to attire may also be posed here, for in Cornet's description he merely states that these women are dancing in front of the king. However he does not mention for which occasion they are performing. Therefore one can ask if specific occasions call for particular forms of attire in regards to women's costumes as well.

The Bushoong court appears to pay particular attention to regalia in that they are regarded as symbols of this sacred kingship. This is noted in photographs of the court from the early Twentieth century and into the 1970s. A great deal of the regalia is shared with court officials and regional chiefs. In its entirety the nature of the art of the Bushoong court typifies the arts of leadership.

It is also noteworthy that while a humble or common citizen would wear his or her best wrapper and ornaments in terms of their bulk and the mass of their ornamentation, it does not compare to those of higher titles or stature. It appears that the costume increases in size or sheer bulk in connection with the elevation in political status; from commoner, to noble, to royalty. This is exemplified when one compares the nobles' wrappers (the *nyimbal'*k's wrapper and the *nyimbatudy*) with each other and then with the *bweemy*'s and the king's wrappers. However, this is also a problematic observation, for appearances can be deceiving. There exists no actual data which suggests that the amount of material used corresponds to a person's status or title. Hence, this increase in bulk may be the result of the abundance of accessories which adorn the body of the individual in question. Furthermore, the event for which any of these costumes may be worn may also play a part in determining which accessories comprise a particular costume or wrapper. For the addition of necklaces, belts and money purses, which are often decorated with beads and cowries, certainly increases the bulk of the costume and the appearance of grandeur of its wearer. When one compares women's wrappers to those of men, it is clear that these costumes compress against a woman's body and thus accentuate it. When compared to the aggrandizing effect of men's wrappers, the sense of bulk in women's wrappers is less prominent. This perhaps can be seen to parallel their less dominant role within Kuba society. However, in terms of women's costumes themselves the use of the over skirt, primarily worn by noble or royal women, certainly creates a more substantial effect than the simple wrapper worn by the common woman.

This idea of an object's dimension is examined in Adams' study of dimensions of the Kuba art work. It is important to examine the form, materials and features of an art object when considering it within a cultural and political context. Adams has considered

the form of the object in terms of its dimensionality. She examines the depth or degree of the thickness of the art objects themselves. It appears that the art of the Bushoong, the ruling ethnic group of the Kuba kingdom, provides a fitting example of the structuring of dimensionality within a political context. Adams contends that the distribution of works of two and three dimensions among the population can be seen as indicative of Bushoong perspectives toward access and admission into political authority and power. (Adams 1983:40.)

Fully rounded figurative sculpture is a rarity among the Kuba, it appeared only in the royal or courtly sphere. These are known as the *ndop* or king figure statues for example. Conversely art works created in two dimensions, such as plaited walls, woven cloth or designed mats and textiles and scarification found on women's bodies are available to the common people. (Adams 1983:42.) These two-dimensional arts are created openly and in public in the central plaza. These products are then sold in the internal markets where both men and women are able to participate. (Adams 1983:48). The most relevant point to this study are those objects which combined the two and three dimensions that often functioned within the aggressive domain of political competition. These include the numerous carved and decorated boxes and wine cups which are three dimensional carved objects in themselves, but are embellished with low relief designs drawn from the two dimensional variety as well as the elaborate bulky costumes built up from flat two dimensional textiles. These objects formed an integral part of the competitive activities by which men won political status, nomination and prominence. (Adams 1983:42.)

The character of the costumes creates a striking and ennobling figure, which is emphasized in the bulky way they are worn as they are continuously wrapped around the body and belted at the waists and splayed out in all their glory. The combined two and three dimensional objects have a restricted accessibility in comparison to the two dimensional arts. (Adams 1983:52). It is possible to assert that a social significance surrounds these objects. One can note how the luxuriant proliferation of symbolism is linked with political structure as seen in the abundance of titleholders and the fact that these costumes and textiles denoted wealth. As noted, ceremonial costumes and objects

were regarded as insignia that depicted the rank and status of the wearer or owner. In order to gain prestige, one had to attain stature through the display of furnishings, opulent clothing and hospitality. Status of court nobility was exhibited and reinforced at, and reliant on, public festivals where the display of wealth in lavish costumes and fine service objects were flaunted and made visible for all to see. The clothes one wore, the objects one handled and the emblems one acquired were all exhibited and paraded during these public and ceremonial occasions. Perhaps the considerable use of status symbols explains why the Kuba transform so many of their everyday objects into decorated forms. Artistically made objects, among the Kuba, were regarded as significant factors of political prestige. Possessing decorated costumes and utensils promoted and advanced the prestige that was necessary in order to acquire authority and political distinction.

CHAPTER 4.

Pattern and Design

The Kuba appear to decorate an extensive array of the material objects which are used for both utilitarian and ceremonial purposes. Design is found everywhere on plaited architectural walls (fig 51), basketry, mats, masks (fig 52) and even on the most commonplace objects such as wine cups (fig 53) drinking horns (fig 54), bowls (fig 55) and cosmetic boxes. One of the richest forms of design is found on textiles. The Kuba wrappers are embellished with a vast array of geometric designs and patterns. As noted, these are comprised of various techniques such as embroidery, cut pile embroidery, open work embroidery, linear stitching, applique patches and cowrie shell and beaded patterns which are reserved for the notables. The motifs or designs which decorate these textiles are considerably similar to those found on many other objects, whether they are made from wood or fibres, and are also depicted on the human body as seen in the scarification on women's torsos (fig 56, 57). Torday believed that development toward complete decoration may have reached its conclusion only in the Nineteenth century. (1) Vansina suggests that over time textiles like other objects including drums were entirely covered by a bold pattern which progressed from a simpler form of decor. (Vansina 1978: 222.) According to Vansina, Torday and Crowe believe that most patterns that decorate the textiles originated from weaving and possibly from the technique of plaiting as seen in basketry and matting. (Vansina 1978: 221.) This can be seen in a significant number of Kuba designs that are based on interlacing patterns, which is very similar to the effect of weaving and plaiting. For example this can be noted in the *Imbolo* motif, the most common motif used in Kuba geometric patterning. Its design is derived from interlacing two pairs of strands and is suggestive of the very nature of weaving. (2)

The significance of pattern can be noted in the fact that upon his installation, the new king must create or select a new decorative pattern which is used on his dynastic statue (*ndop*) (fig 58), and sometimes on his drum of reign. (Vansina 1967-68:21.) (fig 59). This pattern then becomes associated with his persona. This importance of pattern is

also detected in an anecdote related by Conway Wharton, as noted by Vansina. Conway relates that in the 1920s, a group of missionaries showed the king his first motorcycle. It appears that the king was not impressed by the machine but rather with the innovative pattern the tread marks made in the sand. Consequently he had the pattern copied and attached his name to it. It is known as the Kot Mabine design. (Vansina 1978:221.) Another anecdote recounts the episode of Kot Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen where during a voyage in the north of his kingdom, to the Bangyeen, he was struck by the beauty of certain hut designs. When he returned to the capital he had them copied and depicted on many royal objects; these designs are known as *kweethwiin* (fig 60, 61).

Meurant suggests that when comparing Seventeenth century cut pile designs, designs seen on mats, engravings and scarification marks from the Kuba, and from former Kongo regions, it is possible to perceive a common geometric rectilinear imagery which is characterized by right or oblique angles. (fig 62, 63, 64.) (3) The examples Meurant provides are problematic as he has drawn the illustrations himself. One can not discern if and how they differ from the actual designs and objects he uses to exemplify his assertion. This same rectilinear and geometric imagery still distinguishes the designs found on wrappers today, both in the form of applique, stem stitching and cut pile embroidery. (Meurant 1986:113.) Both Vansina and Meurant suggest that the Kuba embroidery techniques were influenced by those from the Kingdom of Kongo and reached the Kuba by the Seventeenth or Eighteenth century. Meurant notes a similarity between this type of design and European embroideries of liturgical vestments of the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries and medieval heraldic patterns (fig 65, 66, 67, 68.) He maintains that the similarities are too strong to be merely coincidental. He therefore surmises that European designs were transformed into African designs which already existed, and that these African designs then reduced the European design into a vocabulary of very archaic signs. (Meurant 1986:112.) He acknowledges, however, that for over three centuries the Kuba kingdom was isolated from exterior influences outside Africa and, as a result, their own original designs were able to thrive. (Meurant 1986:115.) What is problematic with this statement in terms of his argument is that he

has already proposed outside influence through the Kongo up until the Eighteenth century, is he then suggesting that from the 1700 onward there was no contact between the Kuba and the Kongo? This is highly unlikely as there are many instances of borrowing among the different Kuba groups and those beyond the immediate Kuba circle.

However, one must question the validity of Meurant's supposition of European influence on various levels. His comparison of Twelfth and Thirteenth century medieval heraldic patterns to Kuba and Kongo design seems an improbability as a European presence had not yet reached Africa. In addition, his proposition reeks of a Eurocentric or colonial attitude towards Africa and African art. To eliminate or overlook the possibility that the Kuba may have developed these designs on their own suggests such a Eurocentric perspective. This is even further verified when he examines the designs of other "primitive" cultures who also have a tendency to depict or utilize geometric patterns in their ornamentation. In addition similar designs are found on objects in parts of Africa where no European influence could have penetrated. Perhaps in terms of design or geometric design the human mind works in a similar way throughout the world. One must also question what or who influenced these designs found on the liturgical vestments of the middle ages, for these types of designs are found in cultures throughout the world which predate European civilization (4). Vansina also draws a similar connection but suggests that some of these embroideries reflect a technique similar to the Richelieu embroidery technique. This technique, he maintains, was favoured by the Italian clergy in the Seventeenth century. As the Italian clergy most likely had these types of vestments in the Kongo, he believes that the similarity in techniques suggests that the Kuba borrowed this technique from there. This could be plausible as cut pile cloth is not found anywhere else in Africa. In this instance, the technique, not the designs may well have been adapted by the Kongo/Kuba. He notes further evidence of this in linguistic affinities between the word *ncak* (woman's dress), used by the Kuba which he believes is derived from the Kongo word *enzaka* used to denote these type of textiles in the Wamba-Kwango region of the Kongo, as reported by Duarte Lopes in

1583. However this is problematic for there is no indication that the *ncak* (female skirts) were ever fully embroidered and many male garments contain elements of embroidery. Notwithstanding, if this were the case, one therefore has an inter-African influence. In this case the Kongo would have influenced the Kuba rather than the exterior influences of a foreign colonizing force as a means to explain the similarities, and the fact that the Kuba and the Kongo kingdoms could have created such intricate and exemplary embroideries without European intervention. However, Vansina does not completely discredit the fact that the Kuba may have developed these designs independently. Regardless, one must also take into consideration that when a technique is borrowed or learned from other sources, designs are likely to accompany them. However, designs are liable to be modified very easily, developed and changed. Kuba design is Kuba, even if the origins are borrowed.

The Kuba geometric designs are passed down from old women to young girls, and even though the cloths they decorate may be intended for the king, the process of designing them remains separate from him. The geometric rectilinear script has its roots in the sphere of women even if it is utilized on textiles that are traditionally woven by men. Meurant suggests that the uncommonly rich evolution of Kuba design is likely to be the result of a particular association of circumstances: the position of women within the Kuba who are regarded with a great deal of respect (the Kuba maintain a matrilineal line of descent); their privileged economic circumstances which are upheld by the Kuba value promoting the acquisition of wealth; and two centuries of a peaceful existence, which limited the role of men. (Meurant 1986:129.)

While it is tempting to suggest that these geometric designs are merely decorative and serve no other purpose beyond ornamentation, this would be a mistake as well as inaccurate. For as Meurant suggests, "The script of a language formulated by the design alone, the sum total of elements which together give man his place in cultivated nature and the reading and writing of this script are part of the world development" (1986:130). (5). Although these designs are, in part, generally regarded as decorative they are also viewed as a vehicle for ideological discourses which have signs and memories projected

onto them. In addition, one must also consider that perhaps there are no universal meanings which lie behind these patterns and motifs, in that they are interpreted according to one's experience. They are at once multifarious, contextual and encompass endless texts, thus no one meaning can be assumed to exist. (Meurant 1986:130.) Perhaps when this nation was a more coherent unit the names or understanding of a design or motif held one common meaning. However this does not appear to be the situation today and one cannot even speculate if this was the case in the distant past. According to Torday, Meurant and Cornet different Kuba groups and even members within the same group appear to have different names and meanings for the same design. And while the name of a pattern with numerous designs or motifs is mainly named from the most obvious or predominant motif, the question as to which is the principle motif as well as its name is usually an issue for discussion. This will be exemplified and examined further in a later stage in this chapter.

Vansina attributes an instructive quality to Kuba geometric design. Many images confirm the hierarchy of powers; there is no Kuba official or dignitary, no matter how inconsequential his role, that is not given a sign, object, feather or insignia. Formerly the symbols of royal power were natural objects such as sea shells, talons, claws, animal skins; the depictions of natural objects such as the sun; and stylized depictions of the above-mentioned natural objects or those of man made objects such as an anvil. The geometric style of design is found on the borders of the oldest royal portraits and in the royal wardrobe, thus at least in some figures or forms, one can observe a relationship between signs and kingship. He notes that approximately seventy figures comprised the abstract royal Bushoong imagery using beadwork, cut pile, embroidery and engraving. There are also those figures which are more directly inspired by European impulses that are more closely identified with royal power; they have not become part of the morphogenesis of designs experienced by the Kuba from which the representations of the wardrobe is essentially drawn. Some motifs or designs are reserved for the king or for local chiefs. They share a similar square design. All the other dignitaries and officials have similar structures, however, they are sufficiently different as any potential

confusion could result in a legal case and a fine. (Vansina 1967-68:21.)

What one is able to discern is that these designs are characterized by a distinct symmetry. There is a substantial indication of orderly structures noted in the objects decorated by the Kuba (6). Crowe discovered that the Kuba embroideries utilize at least twelve out of a possible seventeen methods whereby a design can be repetitively and symmetrically distinct on a given surface. (1971:178.) However, as Adams suggests one can also detect an irregularity of a completed flatwork composition or cloth. (Adams 1989:36.) This can be seen for example in a Kuba (Bushoong) overskirt (fig 40). The central section of this cloth is composed of regularly repeated embroidered designs which is distinguished from the border by the incorporation of embroidered plush design, and is noticeably different in its colour. These interruptions and contrasts within the borders and central panels make the composition appear to be unsteady and off balance, and no attempt is made to compensate for this imbalance. One can also note that the border patterns and designs on the central pattern are often composed of dissimilar motifs as noted in figure 21, a characteristic of the Shoowa cloths. In addition, border patterns on many skirts are interrupted by little groups of tiny designs which are dissimilar to the border motifs.

Symmetry produces an impression of stability while asymmetry or irregularity stimulates a sense of movement that in these cases is perceived as an indication of life and vivacity. Accordingly, Adams refers to E. Gombrich who suggests that asymmetry is experienced as unstable, and this is partially due to our own perception of physical balance and partly because a sensation of movement is reinforced by lack of geometric accuracy. He proposes that incompleteness, a term that suits these interrupted juxtaposed designs, also strengthens an impression of swift movement because the viewer accelerates his/her glancing or inspection in an attempt to understand the visual arrangement. (Adams 1989:37.) (7). This is further enhanced when the textiles are danced with, and seen in the context of a festival or celebratory environment (8).

It is significant that this combined use of symmetry and irregularity of design appears

to be associated with the nature of Kuba culture and their social order. The Kuba appear to be a particularly ordered society. Vansina suggests that not only is their art regular but their life is regulated. According to Adams (1983:38) when constructing a new town the Kuba first lay out an ordered street plan. Life itself is regarded as an orderly process, and death which obliterates this order is the definitive disorder (9). Adams suggests that the alternations in pattern and the abrupt juxtapositions are not only usual but are altogether intended devices. Thus, one can suggest that this irregularity is perhaps an aesthetic choice, that this preference of instituting the creative, the new and the random is completely intentional. However, she notes that this inventiveness or originality takes place in a fairly structured domain. Although the emphasis is on the non-repetitive, it should be added that the experiments with composition basically variate from a common theme. The patterns are generally rectilinear in form, comprised of chevron-shaped configurations, squares, crosses and crotchets. One rarely encounters curvilinear shapes in Kuba embroidery. They appear to be used on more representational motifs found on carved pipes, boxes and on certain applique dance costumes. (Adams 1989:42.) Thus the women, who decorate the textiles, are productively limited in their non-repetitiveness to a given scope of geometric possibilities. John Mack also suggests that the designs or patterns are generally established in the embroiderer's mind and are then used in both linear stitching and cut pile techniques. It is rare that any substantially visual guide is traced out on the cloth itself. Therefore, the designs themselves are rarely repetitive. The Kuba women primarily work from memory which might explain this play with geometric designs. (Mack 1980:167.) One possible explanation for the irregularity of pattern may be that these are simply mistakes. However, if exact repetition is deemed appropriate it would make sense that these designs would be planned out on the cloth before embroidering begins; this would avoid any mistakes. It is also possible that some Kuba embroideries and appliques depict an irregular or off-balanced composition because they are the result of the work of several different people. Adams proposes that this perhaps suggests an eagerness to maintain the individuality of each contribution. (1983:42.) (fig 12). (10.)

In connection to these ideas of symmetry and order Vansina notes that Kuba decoration and sculpture were commended for their technical perfection but have been evaluated by some Western art historians as less creative than those of many other cultures because they exhibit too much adherence to basic canons, too much regard for the grammar of form and pattern, too much repetition from object to object. These characteristics suggest that although the drive toward individual creativity is abundant, there is still a general homogeneity and conformity. These judgements mainly apply to Nineteenth century art and exclude the creation of new types such as the dynastic statues and the unique Kuba objects which are not widely known. However Vansina suggests that there is a certain credence in this criticism. It coincides with the Bushoong's own concept of their ideals: to be independent and individual, yet to concurrently demonstrate appropriate respect for the hierarchy. Within the Kuba culture, people were impressed less by the facet of conformism and more by the deviations from the presumed norm. Individual variations stood out more distinctly, even in minor variations in decorative patterns. The objects themselves, which were made as masterpieces of virtuosity and were so meant by their creators, appeared to the Kuba to be intense digressions from the norm. (Vansina 1978:223.) This art belongs to this complex society- a creative movement in Kuba culture which led to a variance of shapes, volumes and ornamentation as substantial as the diversification in symbols or political titles. As Vansina suggests, there does exist a significant correlation between the arts and society as seen in the artistic refinement, as well as in the regard for rules and the creativity within that structure which corresponds to the virtues expected from an examination of the political and economic spheres. (Vansina 1978:224.) (11.)

According to Vansina, Kuba art or Kuba design is characterized by two styles. The first type is the flowing style seen on scarification that adorned women's torsos, on drinking horns used by men, on certain women's wrappers and in paintings on certain of the royal robes. The second type is an angular style employed in all other circumstances. Upon closer inspection the angular style is actually geometrical, whereas the flowing is not. The designs seen in the flowing style are generally self-contained and are usually non

repetitive. In symbolic aspects this suggests that the whole surface of a box, for example, can be covered with a single motif or pattern; one symbol. Conversely, the surface of a drinking horn can incorporate some twenty motifs, which appears much closer to depicting an interesting story or narrative than does the box. The flowing style embodies true graphic nonrepresentational art and is the appropriate opposite of representational pygmy hunting scenes. The symbols on the horn do not relate a story like a written chronicle would since the juxtaposition of the motifs elicits different reactions from different people. (Vansina 1967-68:22-24.)

Why is this style retained for specific objects and prohibited for others? Vansina suggests that the opposition between the two styles in decoration indicates a basic dualism in Kuba thought between the sacred and profane; male and female; forest and savanna etc. The flowing style is associated with fertility and the sacred; the angular style relates therefore to the profane. As an obvious presumption one can suggest that the Kuba style in art is regulated by the qualities of symmetry and balance, a characteristic called 'mood' to indicate the subjective element. Dignity, restraint (even when movement is presented) and calmness are elements of this mood. The mood is "Apollonian". This certainly coincides with the behaviour and deportment of the Kuba. According to Vansina, Frobenius was impressed by their "aristocratic" temperance in public behaviour and he emphasized that this etiquette was not restricted to particular classes. Men, women, children (whatever their position) behaved with orderly dignity. (Vansina 1967-68:24,25.) The balance in Kuba art forms is paralleled in Kuba life with their ceremonialism, their systematic and composed procedures and their balanced political structures.

However, balance by no means indicates the entirety of Kuba life. It is Vansina's opinion (1967-68:25) that the disagreeable aspects, due to the competition for wealth and status, and the gossip and jealousy that accompanies it, as well as fear of sorcery and witchcraft and anxieties about evil, are not present in their art forms. Kuba life and art appear to be generally placid and peaceful. However, he notes that this dormant volcano is apt to erupt, for the display of wealth and power provoke competition and jealousy

which introduce the use of sorcery and witchcraft. How come this intense competition, and this fear is not portrayed in their art ? He suggests that perhaps this contradiction between Kuba life and the mood in Kuba life may be the result of their idea of aesthetics. He notes that "Aesthetics as a cultural value can be roughly assessed not only by the extent to which beautiful things are used to express wealth and power but also by status accorded to artists" (1967-68:25). Kuba artists had a respected status, smiths were especially esteemed and sculptors followed suit. They were regarded as artisans rather than artists in the Western sense of the word. The artist was the creator of suitable and pleasing objects; he did not intentionally produce with the singular point of getting his message across. This explains why there were no revolutionary deviations in artistic conventions, even though innovative creation did occur. In the Kuba view, smiths and sculptors created in the same way as God created man. Artists are acknowledged for the quality of their work. However, artists are perceived as individual creators and the works were remembered by their names, at least when they achieve a certain degree of superiority. (Vansina 1967-68:25, 26.)

The idea of beauty was perceived as goodness and conversely that which was ugly was seen as evil. One could draw the conclusion that since beauty and goodness are one and the same, consequently the Kuba did not depict evil things. (Vansina 1967-68:26.) (12.) Instability, lack of control and Dionysian moods existed in Kuba demeanour, as seen in the poison ordeal, but expressions of anxiety and evil were not represented in art. The less desirable and evil aspects of life were avoided by artists and others in their ideal and public portrayals of life. Public demeanour ignores that which is unpleasant or undesirable, which is perhaps best substantiated by the appropriate way of dying in a composed and orderly manner and in the fact that no one will readily talk about witches or sorcery, unless a crisis occurs and a public allegation disrupts the ideal world or its pretence. Concurrently, artists ignore evil probably because their work is intended for public display and admiration. Public display entails conformity with accepted ideas. (Vansina 1967/68: 26,27.)

This is connected with the function of art as an instrument for the exhibition of wealth

and power, the two principal values of Kuba society. As display is associated only with conceded ideals, that which encompasses evil cannot be depicted. However, as Vansina points out it is possible that the Kuba's understanding and notion of aesthetics are influenced by this function or role of art and thus beauty had to be "good". (1967-68:27.) One must also note that art is capable of expressing culture and generally the themes expressed in art are those principal to the culture which produces it. As Vansina notes, art, style theme and motif are closely associated to the perceptions which are a common cultural good. (1984:129.)

Patterns and Names

These geometric patterns and motifs which are seen primarily on wrappers which combine cut pile embroidery and other forms of decoration (as well as in the Shoowa cloths) are assigned individual names. (13) Approximately two hundred names are known although they vary from group to group and from period to period. These names enable one to discern different signs and could occasionally tempt one to believe they have a literal interpretation. This is seen for example in figure 69. The upper part, where the design was started, is called 'stones under the water' and the lower pattern is referred to as 'snakes'. (Meurant 1986:131.) The names of some old elements and many variants are still unknown to Western scholars. Vansina suggests that very few patterns in fact demonstrate that they once had meaning in the first place. They basically appear to allude to analogies between shape and design or a natural shape or suggest the name of the inventor (Vansina 1984:117.)

The vocabulary of royal Bushoong motifs is the most comprehensively documented. However, these names are insufficient for a reconstruction of their morphogenesis. Several motifs from the provinces have been synthesized into the royal vocabulary where their development has been arrested. For example this is noted in the *Kweetbuin* designs (the designs of *Kweet*) (fig60, 61). As noted, King Kot MaKyeem travelled through the Ngongo region in 1922-24 and had several designs copied with which his name is still associated. (Meurant 1986:131.)

A large number of names are assigned to the completed patterns. A standard assortment includes names such as *molombo* (the finger) and *missinga* (the strings). Picton and Mack assert that the names merely refer to a noted similarity between a particular design and a specific physical phenomenon. However the way in which a name becomes connected to a configuration of motifs is interesting. (Picton and Mack 1979:203.) According to Torday, the Kuba chose one distinguishable factor in a pattern and named it accordingly. He suggests that the simple interlacing of lines as seen in figure 70, called *Imbolo*, can be manipulated into numerous other patterns and concludes that nearly all Kuba patterns are derived from variations of this theme. In addition one can also note patterns which are composed with curvilinear designs. (Torday 1925:221.) Thus, the naming of patterns and motifs is basically a matter of interpretation.

However one must consider what is actually suggested in the custom of naming the patterns. The act of naming is an act of classification; it discerns a phenomenon as being of one type than of another, and thus it ascribes significance. The Kuba seem to have an obvious idea of the significance of applying names. The classification of patterns is only one example of a conscientious and systematic custom of mind which typifies the Kuba position in relation to their material and social environment. (Picton and Mack 1979:203.)

According to Torday, another reason behind this question surrounding these names can be traced back to the makers of the patterns and motifs. Both the carver and the embroiderers use similar motifs and patterns but can name them differently, thus a man cannot comment on an embroidery pattern and a woman is not at liberty to comment on the carvings. This is possibly one of the reasons behind the confusion. (Torday 1925:219-220.) Different designs mean different things to the embroiderer or carver. One aspect of the same design may be exaggerated and another understated within the same design and thus they would be named differently. What may be significant to one artist is not necessarily the case for the other. However, Torday (1925), Cornet (1982) and Meurant (1986) do not offer any examples. In addition, it would be of interest to know whether this distinction exists between men and women in the domain of

decorating the textiles. While the men are not responsible for many of the embroidery techniques they do however decorate their textiles with other media such as cowries and beads that use the same geometric patterns.

This uncertainty or inconclusive tone which surrounds the naming of a pattern or design may also result from the existence of a broad repertoire of named patterns which have been passed down from one generation to the next. Geometric designs were passed down from older women to younger girls during the process of decorating the cloths. This extensive base is sure to have influenced the embroiderers at one time or another. According to Mack, in many situations inventiveness or creativity is more likely to be subtle rather than obvious. This includes an unanticipated presentation of a familiar design which can perhaps take the form of an unusual juxtaposition, or one cloth may depict a combination of several named designs (Mack 1980:168). Thus, naming cloths is basically a subject of interpretation, in that patterns that may convey the same name may not in fact be identical, and one or more pattern names may be used to interpret a design which is, nevertheless, innovative.

Mack notes that among the names Torday collected there are several which contain the prefix *idyaklala*. Torday translates this to mean 'spoilt' or 'faulty'. This most likely implies that the embroiderer has in one way or another been unsuccessful in rendering a specific or customary design. Unavoidably there must be situations in which a design has not been interpreted effectively. However, Torday's translations are questionable and not always completely accurate as he was not fluent in the Kuba language. Thus, Mack suggests that it is possible to speculate that the word *idyakala* used to describe and name a pattern is not necessarily a comment on the cloth's quality and interpretation but rather perhaps recognizes a cloth's inventive characteristics. Such a recognition may be seen in a case where the design includes particular references to a well known pattern, but it is adequately diverse to merit some attention to its unique design features in its given name. It is probable that there must be a range of flexibility in executing even the most familiar designs. (Mack 1980:168.) However, the problem with Torday is that while he often refers to the Bushoong in his study, in his section on design many of his examples are

based on Bangwoong patterns and information. Cornet notes that the Bangwoong and the Bushoong practice different customs and that they differ, in particular, in the area of decoration. (Cornet 1982:157.) Vansina believed that the patterns were supposed to be read in previous centuries, and he suggests that some meanings may have been connected to the juxtaposition of patterns such as "moon", "knot", "knife" which are found on drinking horns. (1978:221.) Perhaps this was also the case with the patterns found on textiles? Vansina, though, does not comment on what this juxtaposition could mean.

There are patterns which are named after the objects found within the Kuba environment. A cloth, as noted, may contain a variety of motifs and patterns. The following examples are based on Cornet (1982) and Meurant (1986). For example the *imbolo* pattern (fig 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75) means basketwork or knotting. As noted, this design (and its variations) is the most common pattern used by the Kuba. There are names of patterns which assume a naturalistic affiliation. These patterns generally tend to reflect the object which bears their name. This is depicted in the following examples: *Iyul* (turtle) (fig 76, 77, 78); *Mbish angil* (back of the black monkey) (fig 79, 80); *Iteem ikok* (chicken feet) (fig 81, 82); *Bisha kota* (back of a crocodile) (fig 83, 84); *Ikuun igoong'dy* (chameleon's stomach) (fig 85, 86); *ikweek inweng* (the frog) (fig 87, 88); and *Lansyaang lantshetsh* (glory of lightning) (fig 89, 90). To what extent these names and their associated patterns refer back to anything but themselves is difficult to ascertain. For example, one could question if they contained a mythological association for the Kuba. In terms of their creation myth it does not appear that one can draw an unquestionable connection, except in the example of the crocodile which was one of the nine animals attributed to creation.

Other patterns are named after specific people. This is seen in the tire-tread pattern called *Kot Mabine*. This is also noted in the pattern called Woot. Woot is the mythological founding ancestor of the Kuba- he was the first man (fig 91, 92, 93, 94). Here one can undoubtedly draw a mythological association. Numerous personal names are in fact female and they have been used to record (and recognize) the embroiderers who first created a specific pattern. (Mack 1980:167.) This is seen for example in the

pattern named *Mbul bwiin* (fig 95, 96) which means 'the design of Mbulapey'. This was the name of a wife or sister of Miko mi-Mbul who invented this pattern. The acknowledgement of such an ability is significant in the fact that it is attributed to a woman, for although the Kuba are matrilineal, the most prestigious activities are still preserved and maintained by men. This recognition stresses, once again, the relevance connected to a skill that enables one to conceive imaginative and innovative geometric patterns. Pattern-making is undertaken by kings, carvers and embroiderers, and as Mack notes, it is an activity in which each practitioner can attain a certain social respect. (Mack 1980:169.) There are completely new patterns which are created and they are appropriately given a name, and it seems quite evident that a significant amount of prestige is associated with these innovations.

In terms of the debate surrounding names one also has to consider that perhaps the Kuba do not regard design in the same way Western scholars do, meaning they do not consider design in its whole or entirety. Cornet suggests that generally designs can be regarded in two ways because they form two contrasting parts in which one can be read as the ground and the other read as the figure form and vice versa. (Cornet 1982:158.) This is seen for example in figure 97. The design A of this figure can be understood as comprised in two different manners: either it is likened to B and called *mweeny* or C and named *ntshuum anyim* which is its simplest form of design. This design is also noted in the ruins of Mbopey Mbaintsh ma-Kyeen's palace and *ntshuum anyim* means "the house of the king" (fig 98). In the border of the royal costume (fig 99) the red beads and the chevrons also depict this design, but alternatively the design of little red and black squares suggest that the design can more readily be interpreted as *mweeny*. (Cornet 1982:158.) (14).

When a pattern is modified from an existing pattern it is usually identified as a new design by assigning it a name. While change here does not necessarily reflect a change in society or culture it is associated with the encouragement of innovation in design, which is in itself related to the growth of the Kuba aristocratic or noble classes and their need for novelty in order to distinguish themselves from others and to stimulate rivalry

between themselves. In turn, as Vansina notes, this is associated with the growth of the Kuba bureaucracy from the Eighteenth century onwards. While the invention of a new pattern is independent, it does nevertheless relate to a climate of historical change. (Vansina 1984:156.) The use of new themes or patterns denotes the adoption of new metaphors which in turn signify the establishment or development of new ideas. Vansina maintains that the autonomy of art rests in its formal evolution and this could only transpire in a society whose bureaucracy is constantly expanding, as was the situation within the Kuba kingdom. "Society, culture and the arts are in reality so closely intertwined that it seems that change in one must be accompanied by change in the other. Art is an integral part of culture and individuals participate in social life through the medium of culture" (Vansina 1984:154).

It is most probable that elaborate textiles were once associated with the differentiation of social class and status. The admiration accorded to artistic innovation is also best defined or interpreted by identifying it with prestige. Vansina maintains that, as it is known today, special patterns were not reserved for certain ranks. However rank was valued by the innovation of pattern, the skill in execution and the labour expended on the object (the wrapper). Thereby, unique and new fashion trends, that necessitated substantial expenditure of labour, prompted these textiles as favoured objects among the nobles. (Vansina 1978:222.) As Cornet notes, this great variety of designs and the inventive spirit are thus witnesses to the force or strength of the administration. (Cornet 1982:158.) Thus, it can be suggested that the need to create new patterns was indicative of the textile's importance as a prestige object and as an emblem of the wearer's status.

While Vansina has divided the motifs in terms of their flowing and angular styles, Cornet has taken this one step further and has categorized the motifs with their appearance on particular objects. However, one must be careful to acknowledge that his findings only pertain to the Bushoong and to the specific time period (late 1970s to early 1980s) during which he accumulated his information. The same motifs can appear on numerous objects. Aside from the broad geometrical divisions made by Vansina, it does not appear that objects within the same category have "rules" as to which motifs can be

depicted. The artist does not seem to be restricted in his choice, unless otherwise specified or requested by the patron. The following examples are common designs which Cornet (1982) found on the wrappers and costumes:

Nshiin intshak (fig 100, 101): As its name indicates "the edge of the wrapper", it is a design often employed in the borders of wrappers. This design also appears on certain box decorations. (Cornet 1982:162.)

Lantshoong (fig 102, 103): This design should not be confused with the preceding one, it is typically found on the beading which decorates the pendants of royal costumes. (Cornet 1982:165.)

Lashalmbap (fig 104, 105): A design used on the border of a wrapper that is similar to the *lantshoong* design. (Cornet 1982: 165.)

Myeeng (fig 106, 107): A pattern that is frequently seen in king's clothing and that of great notables. The name derives from a particular species of fish. The design most likely alludes to the scales of a fish. One can note that this design has three principal variations. When C does not possess alternate colours it is called *mbish akot*, meaning "the back of Kot's wrapper". It is mainly used for ordinary headdresses or hats.

(Cornet 1982:165.)

Mikomingom (fig 108, 109, 110): This expression signifies the "drum of Mikobi or Mikopey", alluding to the drum created by king Miko mi-Mbul for his reign. This is also a commonly used design and is seen on mats, sculptures, beaded surfaces, and velour textiles. (Cornet 1982:169.)

Lakiik (fig 111, 112, 113): This design meaning "eyebrow" is frequently used on the borders of a wrapper. (Cornet 1982:172.)

Lo liyoong'dy (fig 114, 115, 116): This design called "the arm of the chameleon" is frequently used among the Bushoong and decorates wrappers and funerary objects. (Cornet 1982: 172.)

Twool apwoong (fig 117, 118): The name of this design means "the eagle's breast" as it simulates the spots that characterize the body of the bird. It is typical of particular

dance costumes. (Cornet 1982:174.)

Mwaan mwikaangl (119, 120, 121): This design, meaning "the palms of the palm tree" is often realized in cowries and is reserved for the very luxurious wrappers owned by the king and his close relatives. (Cornet 1982: 174.)

Although an inconclusive tone surrounds the actual names and meanings of the patterns and cloths, the use of geometric pattern and design does perhaps carry implications regarding the Kuba culture. This is seen for example when new patterns are named after their inventors, suggesting that this is an accomplishment that merits recognition and thereby emphasizing the importance of pattern and design. The socio-political significance of pattern and design is also noted in the combined use of symmetry and irregularity, for this amalgamation is perhaps indicative of a stable and structured society which values individuality and vivacity, notwithstanding an overall adherence to conformity. This dualism is also noted in the two styles that categorized Kuba art; the flowing and the angular. Vansina suggests that the flowing style is associated with fertility and women while the angular style is connected with men, the profane. Accordingly, it is interesting to note that the flowing style is detected on some women's wrappers, which Adams suggests are most notably seen on appliqued wrappers, and the angular style is associated with patterns on men's wrappers. However, one should bear in mind that this dualistic theory is a problematic hypothesis, as there are no indications that the Kuba have made these associations themselves.

PART TWO

The most splendid use of Kuba cloths is seen when they are transformed into costumes and ceremonial skirts. Celebrations are generally associated with anticipated cultural events. These are seen, for example, in life experiences such as birth, death, puberty, marriage, and community festivities. Each type of ritual, ceremony or festival is combined with particular types of music, dance, food, localities and moods. In addition, these celebratory occasions are usually associated with particular forms of dress. Part two of this dissertation will examine the Kuba cloths in relation to their celebratory contexts. I will explore how these types of cloth or attire, worn both by the performers as well as the observers, relate to the underlying socio-political themes of the celebrations. In this respect, the power of the ceremonial and the ceremonials of power are of interest to this essay. For political action and political discourse include a society's art forms such as those associated with kingship. MacAloon maintains that objects used in rituals, especially political rituals, designate both social differentiation, conflict, unity and solidarity. (MacAloon 1982:256.) These art forms displayed at communal festivals and celebrations are associated with issues concerning the nature of the ruling hierarchy and the cosmic order or transcendental hierarchy. They are used by the ruling group as a means of arranging their spheres of power and maintaining their physical dominance. As Fraser and Cole suggest:

Personal regalia, elaborate architecture and furnishing, and various objects used by leaders render themselves more conspicuous and thus enhance their superior status and power to control. The visible contrast between a leader's person and environment and that of his followers provides visual corollary to their socio-political differentiation. A basic function of these arts, then, is to set off in many ways (including aesthetically) the elite from the common people (1972:309).

These celebrations which allude to the political and social orders are symbols of power.

The rituals of rulers and the symbols of power are not merely incidental, but rather, essential components of the structure and workings of any society. Whether displayed in established images and productions or represented in the immediacy of the social experience, a celebration honours the fundamental values, morals and virtues of its organizing and participating society.

The use of Kuba cloths is associated with public ceremonies. Most of the Kuba rituals, including masked performances, take place during the hours of daylight and they emphasize dancing, festive food and drink. These festivals used to take place frequently in the kingdom's capital. The burial and installation of a king were the main occasions at which dance festivals were celebrated, as was the end of the mourning period and any other time the king ordered. In more recent times, the main occasions for these festivals, other than at the installation and burial of the king, were at the *ilul* ritual.

CHAPTER 5

The King and his Enthronement

The monarchy is the pivotal and central structure of the Kuba nation. The Kuba maintain that God instituted the monarchy, therefore it is sacred. The king is regarded as the lieutenant of God and he delegates power to those who were predestined to receive it. All authority derives from God and is exercised by the king. Thus, the monarchy is invested by divine right. This is not only a theory proclaimed by the king in public meetings, it is also confirmed by his title, *Nyim Bushoong* "God of Bushoong, God on earth". The king, however, is not God, he merely replaces him. This notion is also emphasized in the Kuba myths of origin. For Woot, the first man and king, received the monarchy from God and all that existed on earth. Later, Woot had to choose a king among his successors. The judgement of God was put forth in the form of a contest and the winner was proclaimed as king. (Vansina 1964:98,99.) (1)

However, the monarchy is more than a rule of divine right. Many Kuba attribute the king with possessing special supernatural powers. According to Vansina, Shyaam had originated the idea that the king was a *ngesh*, a nature spirit. The king is considered as the dispenser of fertility and the rites of the monarchy let one assume that he possesses at least a certain form of control over the earth's fertility and the people who inhabit it. (Vansina 1978:208.) Some supernatural royal powers are seen in relation to the moon, which, for the Kuba, is the symbol of fertility. When the moon leaves at five in the morning it is known that it will disappear for several days. Woot, himself, asked that this event should be commemorated each month. At the new moon, the king cannot leave his house. His sister, who guards certain charms associated with the moon, cannot leave without covering her head. (Cornet 1982:30.) Certain notables, "the guards of the royal basket" (*bungwoom intshyaam*), perform secret rites. According to Vansina the myth that explains these rites is based on the idea that Woot lost the new moon for nine days. When he came back from his search the moon reappeared in the sky. At the palace the women sing songs of particular *ngesh* (spirits) in order to call the moon back. These rites

are associated with the fertility of the earth because the moon is a symbol of this fertility. During the period of a new moon, a man should not die and woman cannot give birth. However, Cornet and Vansina do not suggest how these natural events are regulated or adhered to. Nor do they provide any insight into the consequences if these should occur. When this dangerous period has passed the king recovers his powers. The new month is proclaimed when, at night, the moon is sighted for the first time: thus the Kuba, in effect, have a lunar calendar. The king and the moon are believed to have the same powers. The cemetery of the king's predecessors is called the "resting place of the moon". In the absence of a moon, a king cannot show himself in public and he cannot act in a supernatural manner. The Kuba believe that the rites of the new moon protect the king during a period when he loses his powers and compensate for the absence of the fertility-giving moon. (Vansina 1964:99.)

There are many other rites that also demonstrate the sacred nature of the monarchy. For example, when there is lack of rain or when it is too hot the people come to the king and ask for rain. After a storm they run to congratulate the king and, if the situation arises, request moderation. When the harvest is unprofitable in a village, they find the king and request his assistance. He takes white kaolin and throws it in the air, recites an incantation and the village regains its prosperity. He intervenes in a similar way for successful hunting. A special dignitary, the *iyol a Nkong*, is responsible for keeping the king informed about all the pregnancies in course at the capital. The king sends a symbolic gift to these women which is believed to facilitate the birth. When his wives give birth, the *ndop* statue is placed in front of them which is assumed to facilitate delivery. The king can also curse a village and take away its fertility. Vansina notes that this occurred in 1920 to a Kete village that refused to pay tribute in the form of income tax. (Vansina 1964:100.)

The king is also obliged to observe a series of restrictions. While these are simply questions of etiquette, they are also acts that are believed to preserve the fertility of the earth. The health of the king is of great importance for the kingdom, as the fertility of the earth is connected to him. Thus, the sickness of the king is considered to be a

malediction. The king cannot walk for a long time, sit on the ground, cross a field, eat in front of his wives or in public. The secret of the king's meal rests no doubt in an exigence of security (many cases of vengeance were executed by poisoning). In addition, the king did not want to enlighten his people who had such a high idea of him that they presumed that the king did not require the needs of simple mortals. It was believed he ate the powder of cowries and other shells. When Kotmwaaan a-Kweet asked his father Kot Mabiintsh if he was hungry, he was answered 'Do I eat?' The king is not permitted to cast his eyes upon wounds, corpses or tombs, and he cannot cross the Kasai river. It is maintained that if he sees or comes into contact with any lifeless substances his power diminishes. Conversely, direct contact with the earth provides him with too much power and "the earth would be burned". Similarly, it is said that when the physical power of the king deteriorates, he was to be detained or dethroned because the regression of his physical power affected a decline in his fertility-giving power. However, this rule is not truly followed and history only mentions this happening to one king. (Cornet 1982: 30,31.) The *ncyeem ngesh* songs often express this association between the monarchy and fertility. Thus, one can draw a connection between the king, Woot (the first man) fertility and the moon. They are all intertwined as life-giving forces that sustain the Kuba nation both from a spiritual and physical point of view. (2)

This interconnection is also noted in the idea that people applaud when the king sneezes and they collect his saliva when he spits, as well as his hair and nail clippings. According to Vansina, these acts are observed because the sneezes, expectorations, and hair and nails are symbols of the king's life, fertility and vitality which is akin to that of the country's. In addition, this is also associated with common general belief that in order to harm someone, something personal is collected which is then used for the purpose of sorcery. In order to eliminate or avoid this danger, the king's hair, nail clippings, and spit are carefully collected. It is maintained that if these observances or royal restrictions are not respected, a poor harvest would follow. (1964:100.) (3)

The king is someone who always has to present himself in a perfect dignified fashion. Etiquette requires that he maintain and exhibit a grave manner of speaking, a majestic

walk and that he can never show his intoxication or ecstasy. (Cornet 1982:30.) Historical stories which chart the monarchy recount that, in origin, the king is head of all other authorities and this absolute authority is expressed in Kuba proverbs such as "you are the stone that is lifted with raffia string". (Vansina 1964:103.) Here one perhaps can draw a connection between the importance of raffia and the king. For the raffia palm tree, like the king, furnishes the Kuba with shelter, clothing and food, and thus maintenance and stability.

The king is also the first and model dignitary. His authority is the archetype and the source of all authority. It exemplifies the principle of political authority itself: the rights of a person to command others who must obey him. The royal authority is one which, in its universal recognition, unifies the kingdom. This idea is reflected in the following proverbs. "The king is the string that sews the multitudes, he is the string that unifies the chiefdoms" and "It is him the needle of God that sews the Bushoong." (Vansina 1964:103,104.) Here, one can note a metaphor which recalls the act of embroidery and the fabrication of wrappers. Whether or not this carries any real significance is debateable, however the fact that it is mentioned suggests that these were activities practised by the Kuba, as proverbs tend to recall that which is familiar. As Cole and Ross suggest, proverbs encompass suppositions regarding relations between various parts of the universe. What is vital to the use of proverbs, in varying circumstances, is the ability to draw analogies between nature and people. (Cole and Ross 1977: 10.)

The sorcerer king, the *Paam* king (4), the liberal king are all aspects of royalty. All these behaviours are meant to maintain his prestige, to safeguard his authority: the supreme authority. However, this ideal role does not necessarily correspond to the constitutional place the king occupies in the Bushoong political structure. Constitutionally, he is the unique chief of the administration but his legislative and judicial powers are limited. There are the councils that decide the nature of which politics to follow. The king only plays a supervising role to those other determining counsellors. The king can only control questions of life or death. The opposition between the constitutional powers and the ideal role of the king are real. Many *Paam* acts are

executed in hiding by the king's slaves. For example, death sentences are inflicted on those that come into relation with the king's wives. (Vansina 1964:105.) It appears that the king surpasses his constitutional powers to augment his royal prestige, to inspire fear, to affirm his authority. That is why he has to act in hiding. Discovered, he loses face and his authority weakens.

This strange relation between the ideal role and the constitutional rights of the king assures the omnipotent nature of royal authority. The exercise of royal power is subject to a series of controls. In practice, it is controlled in such an effective way that Torday and Crowe were able to question if the king possessed real power. The institutions that limit the royal power are, above all, the *ishyaaml* council which treats the current affairs and after each one of his meetings he informs the king of his opinion. (Vansina 1964:105.) The foundation of the royal authority resides in the last analysis, in the fact that all Bushoong can participate in the political affairs of the nation. The immediate efficiency of this authority depends on the fear and attraction the king can inspire.

What the king owned, the tributes, his wealth and its dispersion amounts to and represents loyalty. The *nyim* (king) is by far the richest man of the kingdom and his wealth is a source of pride for all. The treasure of the king is everyone's treasure. He is honoured with gifts, well made works of art and victuals. Every year the king prepares a type of public exhibition of the principal acquisitions of the palace. The sources of the royal fortune are multiple and regular. They are comprised of annual tributes from all the villages, taxes, services of village slaves, fines and the work of the king's numerous wives. The king also spends a considerable amount of money. He feeds his many servants, he purchases wives and he continuously gives gifts. However, the revenue gained exceeds his expenses. At his death in 1969, Mbopey Mabiintsh had filled five large warehouses with his goods; he had one hundred and fifty guns, forty defense elephants, sixty leopard skins, and tons of precious wood. (Cornet 1982:30.) The traits of the Kuba king can be seen to exemplify Fraser and Cole's notions of leadership. They maintain:

...the leader remains the patron...he provides both bread and circuses, and in the socio-economic web of gift exchange and money redistribution, he keeps the upper hand. Tribute in goods and money from the people usually precedes the ceremony, but the resulting feast emanates from the leader. His control of wealth also enables him to reward the faithful with political privileges which are often expressed in the form of art objects. Compact, permanent, and obtainable only through the chief's patronage, these make treasured documents of service... or emblems of acquired rank or titles: as such, they function as ideal reminders of the social political hierarchy and of close relations with its source the paramount leader (Fraser and Cole 1972:310).

The powers of the king and his unconditional superiority are expressed in the symbolism of his royal insignia. They are numerous. They are intimately linked to the person of the king. Certain examples of regalia are unique and specially realized for the king. Others are common to the king and certain dignitaries. However the royal objects are the most expensive and ornate and their nature implicates multiplicity. The list of regalia is quite long. It begins with the king's residence, which is a complex palace which occupies an important part of the whole city. (Cornet 1982:34.) The king is distinguished by having his special space, the royal capital, which is separated from the other common settlements. The capital is the king's personal realm, each successive section is enclosed by walls. During public appearances, the king is shaded and elevated, thus again he is spatially separated from the populace. He is marked by contrast, as exemplified in his cowrie shell covered costume which appears white in contrast to the red garments of his wives, officials and nobles that form part of his entourage and surround his person. His costumes are the most elaborate and are decorated with innumerable designs and variety. His garments are fabricated from the most precious and luxurious materials. In addition, he adorns himself in leopard skin which is regarded as a royal privilege. (Adams 1983:42.) (5). The idea of sorcery is often linked to the leopard and for the Kuba the leopard is the animal which symbolizes royalty. It is maintained that if someone kills a leopard he must be purified in order to protect his sanity and the skin of the animal is honoured and sent to the king. (Cornet 1982:28.) The red textiles that form the skirts of his wives and the other men are fabricated from local

palm fibre and dyed with a redwood imported from neighbouring peoples. However, the cowrie shells that embellish the king's wardrobe are imported from a considerable distance- the Indian Ocean. (Adams 1983:42.). All of these objects assure and emphasize the king's visibility. This concept of visibility has been explored by Fraser and Cole who propose that :

Personal regalia, elaborate architecture and furnishings, and various objects used by leaders render them more conspicuous and thus enhance their superior status and power to control. The visible contrast between a leader's person and environment and that of his followers provides visual collary to their socio-political differentiation. A basic function of these arts, then, is to set off in many ways (including aesthetically) the elite from the common people (Fraser and Cole 1972:309).

These royal insignia are highly symbolic. Their immediate significance indicates that royal authority is supreme, that it is unique. Sometimes they are accompanied by a motto or historical legend that communicates their role, origin and their symbolism. The ideology which infers that everything encompasses royalty can be deduced from the signification of these insignia. The royal *bwaantshy* costume, the *mbombaam* knife and other insignia recall that he is the descendant of Woot and the chiefs that came from the sea. Each object invokes one or more aspects of the monarchy and each arouses an emotional reaction among the Kuba spectators, most of all among the people of the court. These insignia recall the royal ideology and authority, they also contribute to supporting the monarchy as a living and concrete institution .

Vansina notes that throughout the Nineteenth century royal symbols and protocol continuously evolved, as seen with the numerous praise names and songs. Pageantry emphasizes the king's unique situation not only as the leader of the bureaucracy, but also as a person who obtains his legitimacy from kingship itself. The king represented the kingdom; the realm never procured a name separate from that of the king's title. By the 1880s, the king's spiritual and worldly powers and his wealth far surpasses that of anyone else. His arbitrariness and imperious right were emphasized and praised and his inherent

sense of justice was paradoxically concurrently validated. (Vansina 1978:129.)

The uniqueness of kingship was manifested in the rituals associated with the burial of the king and the installation of the new one. By the end of the Nineteenth century these lasted for a full year and embroiled or concerned every section of the population. It was constantly made apparent that the king epitomized the realm and that society without a king would wane and "civilization" would disappear. Articulate evidence is required in terms of the development of the network of institutions, practices, ideas encompassing kingship, however it is evident that the as real power of the kings grew the idea of kinship was concurrently enhanced. The rituals involving accessions are so complex and involve so many diverse social groups that they must have developed and evolved since the inception of the kingdom and throughout its expansion. Objects of royal adornment must have developed along similar lines. The great royal costume, the *bwaantshy*, (described below) weighing one hundred and fifty pounds is associated with the enthronement and burial of the king. Each part of the costume and each decoration, whether it be stitched, painted or attached, held a particular message or significance. As Fraser and Cole maintain, "Complex compositions and profusion of detail also frequently show a tendency toward exquisite execution, a structural feature which seems largely confined to the rarefied atmospheres of courts" (Fraser and Cole 1972:305).

The connotations or messages symbolized that the king was unique and singular, that he was the personification of the bureaucracy, and the representative of the people. The rich and prolific use of symbolism associated with costume could not have developed in a short period of time, instead it must have developed throughout the period. Perhaps only several Kuba comprehended all the evocations animated by the numerous details, however all the Bushoong and, to a lesser degree, all the Kuba ethnic groups responded to at least some of these and were overwhelmed. (Vansina 1978:130.)

The royal *bwaantshy* costume is the most ornate costume possessed by the king (fig 122). It is the only ensemble reserved for the king. However, during the interim period between the king's death and the actual announcement of his death to the populace, it is worn by the first regent who becomes the king in the meantime in order to ensure that the

royal authority is not interrupted. Vansina notes that during this three day interim period, the deceased king is referred to with such sayings as "his descendants possess the *bwaanc (bwaantshy)*". According to Vansina, this saying signifies that the king's orders must still be obeyed and that his sons still have their power that derives from their father, the king. (Vansina 1964:112.) This royal costume is most notably worn by the king at his burial. Thus, the symbolic nature of this costume is clearly connected with the persona of the king and his authority. The following description is based on Cornet's account, as he is the only Kuba scholar who offers a detailed description of this regal garment. One of the most characteristic components of the costume is the use of abundant cowrie shells that decorate the king from head to foot. The use of cowrie shells indicate his relation to or descendance from Woot, the mythical founding ancestor of the Kuba who came from the sea. Upon his enthronement, the new king must commission a new *bwaantshy* as every *nyim* is buried with his own *bwaantshy*. The name *bwaantshy* is an expression that means "eating the python". The costume is extraordinarily ornate and its composed of numerous elements which originate from other royal costumes. The costume owned by the present king, Kot a-Mbweeki III weighs eighty four kilograms when it is complete. It is not surprising that it is rarely worn. Kot Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen only wore his three times during his reign. When the king emerges in this costume, all those who come to admire the ceremony are expected to present him with a gift. It is a form of compensation for the laborious or painful effort imposed on the king by bearing the weight and responsibility of this mass of ornamentation.

The principal piece is a tunic made of intertwined thongs called *latok labwaantshy*; it adopts the same cut out as the dance tunics but is much more sumptuous. The thongs are fabricated from raffia and are abundantly decorated with white beads. The *latok* tunic is completed by two open pieces which cover the largest part of the lower limbs. The king adds an extravagant wrapper over the tunic, a *ikuukindyeeng* which is often unique and carries his personal name. It is called *ikuuk* for its dominant characteristics are found on the *mbom* and *ndyeeng* as the cowries are applied to the *mbom*. As noted, the inclusion of cowries and/or beads on a wrapper is usually a characteristic of royal garments. (6)

Close to fifty distinct elements are necessary to constitute the *bwaantshy* costume which are regarded as being the supreme expression of the quasi- supernatural dignity of the chief of the Bushoong. (Cornet 1982:245-246.) What is problematic with Cornet's description is why he associates this costume with the colour white. (7). The whole ensemble appears to be multicolored aside from the cowrie shells and the feather on the headdress. Perhaps the wrapper is a white raffia cloth, however this can not be distinguished in the photograph he provides.

This costume, with its extravagant nature, probably best exemplifies Fraser and Cole's notion concerning proliferation of detail. They propose that "*Proliferation of detail* (or particularization) in single art objects is also an elite characteristic... complexity of grouping and proliferation of detail correspond in the aesthetic realm to the elaboration and differentiation of roles and institutions in the socio-political sphere" (Fraser and Cole 1972: 305).

It is relevant to note that, according to Cornet, the king has his royal tailors, and he and his entourage are always ordering new garments. A king who wants to be worthy of his status is constantly enlarging his wardrobe. At his death, a large part of his finery was buried with him, and his successor would need many years to reconstitute the essential elements of his obligatory costumes. The tailors or *biin* therefore always have a renewed task. The *nyibiin*, is the head tailor with the most responsibility (fig 123). He is chosen by the king for his artistic and organizational qualities. It is the *nyibiin* that receives his orders, discusses them with the king and delegates the tasks to his subordinates. They all work at the palace, a requirement of all royal workers. The *nyibiin* always has to be present at the ceremonies which necessitate dressing the king. The tailors have to oversee all aspects of the costumes: the components, the level of richness of decoration, colours and even the length of certain elements. (Cornet 1982:182.) The luxury of employing a "private" royal tailor further distinguishes the king from the rest of the population.

Enthronement

The enthronement of the king is one of the few occasions when the Kuba and the king display their finest attire. The ceremonies of enthronement are marked by a rich symbolism. Vansina (1964) and Cornet (1982) are the only authors who have recounted the rituals revolving around the enthronement of a new king. According to Cornet, the procedure lasts one month however, Vansina records that the ritual in fact takes place over the period of a year. (Vansina 1964:113.) As a result, the accounts of Vansina and Cornet undoubtedly differ, however for the purposes of this dissertation Cornet will only be examined, as Vansina unfortunately does not consider any costumes or modes of adornment in his description of this occasion. In addition, one should consider that perhaps this discrepancy relates to the period in which the two authors did their research. The implications of this disparity have already been discussed in chapter three which examined other royal costumes.

There are numerous costumes the king must wear during this period. At his installation, the new king was adorned in his coronation robe, a simple white/natural coloured wrapper. The first great ceremony was a rite of dressing. The son of the deceased king then presented the king with the elements of the royal costume. Fraser and Cole suggest that:

The distributive function of art has particular meaning when leadership status is transferred from one person to another... The moment the new leader is invested with the material signs and symbols of his rank, his authority is legitimized and validated. Taking on regalia is therefore, really tantamount to beginning a new life... (Fraser and Cole 1972: 312).

The simple white/natural coloured wrapper the king wore at the commencement of his enthronement ceremonies may possibly be significant. For it is as if he commences his role as a clean slate and blank canvas, as one who is unadorned and, in this instance, waiting to receive his regalia and therefore his new identity. The modest character of the wrapper perhaps also alludes to his humility and recalls his connection to the populace as well as his humble position, all of which are about to be transformed. This is not to

suggest that the new king maintained a modest background, the individual in question has been groomed for the position for numerous years and has been part of the court. However, in comparison to the new role he is about to assume, one can propose that the difference in stature is immense. In addition, the use of a "white" wrapper appears to be applicable to this grand ceremonial occasion, as it is not a day which celebrates death, rather it is an event which honours life and the "birth" of a new king.

On the second day the village rejoiced in dance but these were not masked dances. During this second day the king is required to wear the royal *labot latwool* costume (fig 124). The king possesses only one formal red costume. This costume is often named *ishyeengl ingwal*. It is the first formal costume that he wears on the second day of his enthronement. Certain parts of the costume are very old, however the majority of the pieces were renewed under the reign of Mbopey Mabiintsh ma-Kyeen. The wrapper, *ikuukmayeeng* is decorated with a border of cowries which are designed in squares; the *kwey* has a row of accompanying cowries of other kinds of little natural shells. (Cornet 1982:238-240.) Both Cornet and Vansina note that after the first day the King was transported to the *kikaam*, the chief of the officials, where he remained in seclusion for several weeks. Here he was taught the secrets of his sovereign profession. This stay is considered as a type of initiation. It is unclear how this costume with its red wrapper relates to the activities that surround the king on this day, as Cornet and Vansina do not provide any information about this particular day. Perhaps one can suggest that the king wears a red wrapper as a symbolic gesture of mourning his old life. Additionally, it may possibly denote the gravity of the this "initiation" period.

It is interesting to note that when Torday recorded that customary regulation concerning the king he maintained that he may not wear red cloth as it symbolizes mourning. (Torday 1925:195.) Perhaps Torday was unaware of this costume or it could also be a later addition to the king's repertoire. His lack of knowledge is most likely the reason behind this question, as the ceremonies which revolve around the enthronement appear to be quite rigid and delineated in terms of tradition and custom.

During the third day of his enthronement the king wore the *labot lapuum* royal costume

(fig 125). This costume assumes its name from the *lapuum* headdress which is a required element when the king renders proof of the ordeal of the *ibaam*. (8) This costume can also be called *ikuuk mishyeeng*, which is the name of the wrapper. It is a "white" costume. It is maintained that the costume was created by Shyaam a-Mbul himself. The horns which the king holds in figure 125 are a vestige showing the origin of the first costume, which was created in the Sixteenth century. For the other visits to the *ibaam* the king can wear another costume, but it must always be worn with the *lapuum* headdress. He is also permitted to wear the costume without the headdress in question for other important ceremonies. The "white" wrapper is covered in open work embroidery. The *mbom* (central part) is fabricated from seventeen pieces of raffia cloth. Each one contains a different design. The border is composed of cut-pile embroidery with *mikomingom* designs in blue and finished with little pompoms. The terminal band *nkol* is violet with a straight border in red and embellished with big pompoms. (Cornet 1982:242.) After he has passed the *ibaam* ordeal he is able to wear the *lapuum* headdress and *mwaandaan* belt. The headdress is an important symbol of his newly attained status, for only the king, *kikaam* and his confidants who accompanied him at the *ibaam* are permitted to wear this headdress. The use of a "white" costume in this instance perhaps correlates to the achievements of the king at the *ibaam* and corresponds to the pertinence of *lapuum* headdress and all it symbolizes. The significance of this costume is further noted in its connections to Shyaam. Its continued use possibly parallels the perpetuation of the enthronement ceremonies, kingship and, by extension, the Kuba kingdom.

After the end of his seclusion the king travelled to the *Muyuum*, (the holder of the royal charms) at night, during the full moon. The day he returned is marked as the end of the mourning period for the deceased king and the inclusion of the new one. It was principally distinguished by masked dances and numerous ceremonies. People were dressed in their finest attire. The king was then able to circulate freely. (Cornet 1982:44.)

CHAPTER 6

The *Itul* Festival

The *itul* festival is a celebration that relates to the status of the royal hierarchy and, by extension, to the structure of the Kuba kingdom and the fabric of Kuba society itself. The name *itul* means "striking viper" and implies the theme and course of action of this celebration. At first, the *itul* dance appears to be the portrayal of a myth in which an adversary, in the form of an animal, destroys the region and triumphs in a brief victory; it is then hunted and killed and its remains are presented to the king. The oral sources of the *itul* are somewhat obscure, they appear to be associated with the Kuba myth concerning the origins of the universe. One version of this myth recounts the act of creation by a character named Mboom who vomits up nine animals, among them: the eagle, leopard, crocodile and the thunder animal. These creatures are the children of Mboom (*Mboomieentshi*) and they are normally the main players of the *itul* dance drama. (Cornet 1980:30.) Of the two celebrations Cornet recorded the enemy animal took form of an eagle in the first one and a leopard in the second.

Itul dances have rarely been performed over the past few decades for a number of reasons. One of them is their exorbitant cost. Another is that King Kwete Mabintshi maKyeen, who reigned from 1940-1969, was not particularly interested in dances as he was not an expert himself in this art form. (Cornet 1980:30.) During his reign only a few dances are mentioned to have occurred, with the exception of the *itul* organized and sponsored by his daughter in 1953, recorded by Jan Vansina. The ceremony was revived in 1974 at the initiation of his successor Kwete Mbokashaang and is described by Joseph Cornet. His account involves two different ceremonies. The first one took place on December 7-8, 1974 and the second one was danced on December 21-22, 1974.

An *itul* celebration is a vibrant presentation. It provides a significant number of people the chance to exhibit their status and wealth by wearing the most resplendent costumes they are permitted to wear. This pertains to both the performers and spectators. The presentation of elaborate costumes is a principal indicator of success for the Kuba. This

rich display of decorated skirts, belts, necklaces, bracelets and headdresses recalls that everyone must wear exactly what ancient tradition has decreed for his/her position in society. Vansina's described these costumes on the occasion of an *itul* festival in September 1953, at the moment when the king entered the palace plaza with his officials. He notes:

It was a magnificent spectacle; there were more than a hundred of them in full costume. One saw only baldrics and collars, covered with beads and shells, veloured and embroidered cloths, ornaments of metal glittering in the sun, headdresses surmounted with bundles of multi-coloured feathers, a metre in height, and waving in the breeze. Each held in his hand his insignia of office. The dignitaries occupied one of the long sides of the plaza, while the king took his place along the smaller side closer to his palace (Vansina 1964:124).

It is appropriate that this most renowned and honoured ritual can only be approved by the king. As a rule, authorization to sponsor this significant and eminent dance festival was the privilege of the royal family. However, this is no longer a steadfast rule. Anyone who can afford to sponsor the festival is usually entitled to undertake this endeavour, as long as he/she gains the authorization of the king. The festivals recorded by Vansina (1964) and the two documented by Cornet (1980) at Mushenge were sponsored by women who belonged to the court. In the case of Vansina it was the king's daughter, Kyeem, and in both of the festivals recorded by Cornet each was sponsored by the king's wives. As the *itul* is a very expensive undertaking, it rarely takes place. According to Cornet, more than one dignitary who has endeavoured to sponsor this event has lost his wealth in the attempt. Considering this, it seems unusual that two *itul* celebrations were organized within a period of one month during Cornet's research. One has to question if, and to what extent, the presence of Cornet played a role in this peculiarity. (1)

Preparations for the festival were lengthy and detailed and could last, in some circumstances, up to several months and required many participants. During this entire period, it is the responsibility of the sponsor to pay for their enlistment and all the

arrangements involved. Upon selecting the enemy-animal, the framework for the dances must be altered not only to the chosen animal but also to encompass a specific number of scenes or events, many of which are ordained by tradition. The dances take place over a period of two days. Those that take place on the evening of the first day are consistent with the distress over the destruction caused by the animal, and the afternoon of the second day focuses on its capture and subsequent killing. Each segment lasts one or two hours.

In general, Vansina's observations concerning the nature of the *itul* dance itself are quite similar to Cornet's account. However, there are a few differences. For example, Vansina records that the festivities lasted for seventeen days. During the first weeks dances were held only on Saturday and Sunday in order to allow everyone to participate without disrupting the routine of daily life. During the last week dances were held every day and the girls who participated in these dances wore red garments in the morning and white ones during the evening. He notes that during the second to last day the red wrappers were worn and on the last day white wrappers only were worn. The main difference between his report and that of Cornet is that he observed that specific costumes were associated with particular age grades during the last day of the festival. For instance, during the morning dance all girls who were of the age grade of Kyeen (the sponsor of the festival) wore the special *makot mamyeem* costume. The next age grade wore wrappers called *mbul idiim bunem* and the last age grade wore white ordinary wrappers. After the last morning dance the *itul* dance is then performed in the early afternoon. (Vansina 1964:123.)

In both Cornet and Vansina's observations one can note that a significant difference between the second day's dances and that of the first day are the colours of the dancers' skirts. They are no longer red, the colour of mourning, rather the dancers are adorned in splendid festive skirts comprised of natural coloured raffia cloth with embroidered designs in black. On the background of geometrically ordered designs are certain embroidered motifs, they are arbitrarily disbursed over the cloth and simply shaped, as noted by Vansina. This colour differentiation also exists in a similar way in terms of

Vansina's report of the adornment of red wrappers in the morning and white wrappers in the evening during the last week of dances. This could be seen as merely a condensation of the last two days, a foreshadowing of what is to transpire.

The general symbolism of the *itul* celebration is the exaltation of the state of the *mwaanyim* (the children of the king), but also that of the king's successor. The performance shows the *mwaanyim* fighting against the successors and are finally defeated by them. This is due to the fact that as the royal lineage is matrilineal, the king's sons are prohibited from assuming the throne. Therefore, they become rivals of the successors and this is especially the case when the latter attempt to hasten the transferral of power. (Cornet 1980:32.) According to Vansina the beast would therefore symbolize the king's sons vying against the pressures of the successors and finally being suppressed by them. The *itul* ritual also illustrates that every quarrel finishes in front of the king, master of all and intercessor between the groups that comprise the nobility. (Vansina 1964:124,125.) Thus, the performance can be regarded as representing what, in fact, occurs in Kuba society. For the children of the king and successors are political enemies. At the 1953 *itul* festival described by Vansina this tension or conflict over power was felt and further articulated by the king. After he arrived at the plaza he rose and announced, through his herald, that this festival was given by his daughter Kyeen, a *mwaanyim*, however those who held the highest rank in the kingdom were the *matoon*, the successors. (Vansina 1964:120.) This festival accordingly honours the status of the king's children and that of the successors who also participate. The allusions to death do not simply relate to the demise of the beast but are probably also included because it is during funerary ceremonies that a person's status is most substantiated and affirmed. (Adams 1973:31.)

Aside from the prestigious distinction the sponsor receives, the *itul* explains and asserts to all the splendour of their political organization and recalls their underlying ideologies. As Turner notes: "When a society or part of a society celebrates a particular occasion or event, it also celebrates itself... Therefore, it aspires to illustrate in a symbolic manner, what it perceives as its primary and integral life" (Turner 1982:16). This may be

detected in the *itul* for it equally exalts the prestige of the king and all the dignitaries who take part. Thus, the *itul*, being a communal celebration, aspires to illustrate in a symbolic manner, what it perceives as its fundamental and central aspects of life.

Another reason this festival carries such great prestige for its sponsor is that not all of the king's children are able to act as a patron. Thereby in sponsoring an *itul* celebration one acknowledges the sovereignty of the king, and asserts to the fact you are wealthy and favoured by the king and hence implies that you have had success in life. This relates to another interpretation of the *itul* which suggests that the performance is an appropriate occasion to acquire prestige through the display of wealth. This is detected in the costumes and attire worn by all who participate and observe. As for the sponsor, he/she sacrifices money in return for prestige and status through a public display of individual glory that is set in a traditional framework.

Acquiring sufficient costume cloth involves a significant cost and this depends on social relations with those who hold positions of power and authority. The sponsor must be able to supply ten ceremonial skirts to the representative of the successor lineage. However, these skirts are partly supplied by the king and the successors. The sponsor must buy back the cloth representing the entrails' of the wild animal (the trophy) from the successor at the requested price. Each ceremonial skirt carries a predetermined value, for example during the 1953 celebration they were worth about one thousand francs. (Vansina 1964:124.) Ceremonial skirts carry a standard value but they are not mediums of market exchange. They are generally obtained by inheritance, by making them oneself, or as a form of compensation. A sponsor must rely on his good relations with his clan section, with the successors, and with the king who has many textiles stored in his storehouses. Only a very rich clan section could supply three out of the ten ceremonial cloths plus ample cloth for dressing its own members in white and red costumes which the dancers require for the last two days. In addition, the sponsor must be elaborately dressed and she/he is expected to wear a different costume for each dance and very fine jewels. (Vansina 1964:125.)

In the three recorded *itul* rituals the royal women who appeared as the main figures

wore costumes which were almost as elaborate as the king's. During the final ceremonies of the first day at Mushenge in 1974, the royal sponsor wore a red embroidered skirt and a cowrie beaded waistcloth along with a leopard tooth necklace and feathered headdress. Her belt of pendants is exclusive to royalty. The pendants consist of shells or miniature imitations of various objects made from redwood and encrusted or sewn with beads and shells. It included the royal symbol, the interlace motif or *imbol*, which is often found in textile designs. Each element symbolically reasserts the strength and power of the king. (Cornet 1980:32.)

For the Kuba, it does not seem to be of any serious consequence that the exorbitant cost of the festival is able to bankrupt the sponsor. Vansina notes, "As for the *itul* dance, it is as if you had been pursued by sorcerers. You do not have anything left in your pockets, but you do not regard yourself as poor, because you are happy." (Vansina 1964:125.) The case of the *itul* dance is one example, among many others, which illustrates the means to obtain prestige while simultaneously alluding to the nature of prestige within Kuba society itself. According to Vansina it demonstrates that the sponsor (and Kuba society) is subject to three conditions. First, one must be able to possess considerable wealth. Wealth is measured not only in terms of what the sponsor can accumulate in terms of money but also in goods, which are obtained through a channel of social relations that are both extensive and powerful. Therefore, among the Kuba, the search for economic gain is not a goal in itself, for it cannot be integrally converted into prestige. However, personal wealth facilitates the acquisition of relations. A second condition of securing prestige dictates that one should display his/her riches at public events. Among the Kuba, nothing is more contemptible than a miser. The ostentation of one's material wealth and his/her relations elevate social personality. Finally, this deployment has to function in an established procedure and must be sanctioned by tradition. One has to show that the social personality is not usurped, that one's wealth was acquired in a manner accepted by society. Their prestige must, therefore, be legitimate. This case also implies that a person's prestige extends to the other members of their clan section. Prestige plays a collective role, as it is linked to political structures

and institutions. (Vansina 1964:125,126.) Thus, every extension of personal prestige carries a reaffirmation of cultural values connected with a political system and, in turn, the prestige associated with this structure becomes heightened. In order to appreciate this notion of Kuba prestige, it is relevant to comprehend that, for the Kuba, this is the basis of authority: of all political power. However, one must also understand that true prestige is obtained, in all its magnitude, by securing political dignity.

Celebratory objects are rarely accidental or inadvertent. This is exemplified in the Kuba cloths and their role in the *itul* festival, as they are simultaneously multivocal, multivalent and polysemous. They allude to their culture's aesthetic preferences, emphasize their society's socio-political structure as well as their values while remaining a functional object. On one level, the *itul* is a celebration for which the observers dress in their finest cloths. It is an opportunity for all who participate and observe to display their finest adornments and wear their best wrappers and costumes. The importance and traditional relevance of the cloths and the *itul* celebration can be ascertained in this fact alone. The use of wrappers in this context also denotes wealth and status in terms of the abundant number of ceremonial skirts which must be supplied by the sponsor. In order to meet the required costs of not only the wrappers but also the festivities the sponsor must be on favourable terms with the king and receive his sanction in order to endorse the festival. Thus, wealth and status are a prerequisite in this circumstance.

The natural materials from which festival elements are produced are rarely coincidental or spontaneous. In terms of the Kuba cloths, their choice of colour appears to reflect aspects of their culture's aesthetic and ethical systems of classification. This is aptly illustrated in the colours of the cloths worn by the players. As red appears to symbolize mourning and death, it is fitting that these colour cloths are worn on the first day. For this performance depicts the destruction and havoc caused by the enemy animal. Thus, a state of mourning and death is applicable. Conversely, on the second day, natural coloured cloths are worn. These, in turn, are indicative of the day's performance as the enemy animal is vanquished and the kingdom is saved. In addition, the colour red recalls funerary attire and perhaps one can detect an underlying association at play. For it is

when a person dies that his/her status is most understood, displayed and verified.

The *itul* is highly significant for the Kuba. One dignitary, during the 1974 ceremony, recounted to Cornet that if a Kuba residing in Kinshasa heard that an *itul* ceremony was occurring at Mushenge, he would definitely be there to participate. This sentiment, as well as the fact that Cornet witnessed two *itul* celebrations in a month, raises numerous questions as to why a return to this "tradition" has emerged. Cornet suggests that King Kwete Mbokashaang was trying to reestablish the traditional power and customs threatened by modern secular life, and he could not have attained a greater triumph than by revitalizing the *itul* ceremony. (Cornet 1980:32.) For celebrations, such as the *itul*, are principal acts of socialization which use discernible rules, roles and ranks in order to acknowledge significant and essential concerns. (MacAloon 1982:263.)

In addition, if one examines the political circumstances during this period, the revival of "tradition" coincides with the political climate within which Cornet witnessed the two festivals. For after the reelection of Mobutu as president of Zaire, in the fall of 1970 Mobutu's government implemented its plans to "bring about an authentic national Zaire in politics, economics, spirit and culture, through the doctrine of authenticity" (Kazadi 1978:14). Numerous changes were soon to follow. For example, in 1971 the Democratic Republic of the Congo became the "authentic" Republic of Zaire, the national flag and anthem were changed and the remaining cities with European names were renamed after heroes and important dates in Zaire's history. Furthermore, Zairians were ordered to drop their Christian names and use African ones. The impact of authenticity was also seen in modes of dress. Women were prohibited from wearing the "decadent" skirts and pants of the West and were ordered to wear their traditional attire which was soon stylized in order to meet the fashion tastes of Zaire's growing urban elite. In 1974 the ruling party pronounced: "Authenticity is the ideology; authentic Zairian nationalism is the doctrine; and the return to authenticity is the method..." (Kazadi 1978:14,15). Thus, the political climate in Zaire during this period undoubtedly fostered a return to "tradition". The revitalization of a neglected celebration such as the *itul* echoed political policy which sought to foster a nationalist ideology with the intent to wholly distance themselves from

their colonial past. This perhaps also explains one of the reasons why the Kuba have continued their tradition of creating and wearing raffia even though modern and industrial textiles are widely available and economically accessible. Additional aspects of this issue will be examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 7

Funerals

In contemporary Kuba society, funerals are the most common events which call for the display of Kuba cloths. These textiles are noted in the attire of the mourners, as well as shrouding the body of the deceased. Although this is an historic custom, practised throughout the Kuba region, the reports of early travellers only recounted royal funerals. Funerals are also used to emphasize the power and authority of titleholders. Furthermore, funerals provide the main ritual field for the enactment of a wealth of visual and verbal performance representations (1).

The mourners are dressed in their finest attire. Red, the colour of mourning, plays a predominant role. Torday was present at the funeral of one of the royal heralds. He observed that the elders were dressed in their finest garments and that "their skirts were of a rich embroidered cloth, and in their bonnets they wore huge bunches of gaily coloured feathers" (Torday 1925:157). In the early 1900s, Hilton Simpson witnessed one of the first dances, which concluded the nationwide mourning period, observed upon the death of the king's sister. He notes:

As the sun was beginning to set the elders assembled in the dancing-ground attired in all their ceremonial finery. This consisted of voluminous loin-cloths of raphia fibre bordered by strips of the same material elaborately embroidered in patterns, and in some cases ornamented by fringes of innumerable small tassels; around their waists they wore belts covered with beads or cowrie shells, and upon their heads nodded plumes of gaily coloured feathers. they carried in their hands large iron knives, the hilts of which were of carefully carved wood. A throng of ordinary natives and slaves sat upon the ground to watch the proceedings, forming three sides of a square, the fourth side being left for members of the royal household... The Nyimi, dressed in a scarlet loin cloth covered with cowries, huge armlets and leg coverings of cloth decorated with beads, and wearing a large plume of crested eagles' feathers, sat cross legged upon a dais under a canopy of mats, leaning his back on an elephant's tusk planted point downwards in the ground (Hilton-Simpson 1911:201,202).

When the king was seated the dances commenced. Only a few of the people participated in the actual dancing which first began with several individuals dancing a few steps and then sitting down. However, groups of elders danced later and... "lastly, the king himself left his dais and strutted with a peculiar stiff gait around the ground, amid the enthusiastic cheering of his people, preceded by an elder who carefully removed any sticks or other small obstacles from his path" (Hilton-Simpson 1911:202). Not only can one note the composed manner of the king but also the calculated dance steps which are indicative of the Kuba's reserved behaviour, as discussed in chapter three.

The Kuba cloths, while used to clothe the living, are also employed to dress the dead. Generally the body of the deceased is dressed in a number of prerequisite textiles and appertaining accessories such as hats, belts, anklets and bracelets. Mack notes that the body of a high ranking official is often wrapped in yards of cloth which, in turn, makes it difficult to manoeuvre the corpse into the grave. (Mack 1980:172.) The act of publicly piling up these highly prestigious cloths serves a meaningful function. In this manner the status of the deceased becomes visually established and emphasized.

Torday was present, in October 1908, at a funeral of the mother of an important titleholder, the Chikala. He records that:

the corpse had been deposited in a coffin made of the midribs of palm leaves and lined with embroidered mats...we could see the corpse, thickly painted with camwood paste and enveloped in fine cloth. It was lying on its back, and the legs were turned slightly to the right with the knees bent and mats to rest upon, these, reaching from the shoulders to the feet, were turned up over the body (Torday 1925:197).

According to Darish, Wharton described that the casket of *nyim* Mbop aMwbweeky was lined with embroidered cloth and that :

...great quantities of cowrie-shell money were placed near the body so that the king might not want for funds on his long journey. Lest he hunger or thirst, meats of every description and many molds of bread, together with gourd on gourd of palm wine were disposed within the casket. At the king's

feet space was reserved for a trunk, in which were laid piece on piece of the rarest examples of the Kuba art of cloth weaving and embroidery (Darish 1990:184).

This practice of displaying decorated cloths on the bodies of deceased men and women still continues today. Generally, the body of the deceased is dressed with a number of textiles and appertaining accessories. The body is then placed on view for the public for several days and is later buried with the textiles and numerous other forms of gifts such as cowrie shells.

It seems paradoxical that the most elaborate confirmation of ones status and prestige is reserved until the occasion of death. For an official's or titleholder's influence is terminated and his position is now open for competition and the king's support (among numerous candidates who may not even be related to the deceased). However, as Mack points out, this may be exactly what is intended. (Mack 1980:172.) Vansina has noted that ownership of objects which portray an excessive investment of labour, which may even be superfluous in terms of functionality, are an essential component of displaying wealth and rank. The amount of time it takes to carve elaborate and complex designs on a cup or box (including the object's conception) can be seen as an indication of what degree the object and its user may have realized in political and authoritative contexts. For what time delineates in this equation is, not only labour spent on carving, but also labour which is not expended on other productive chores and responsibilities. Therefore, having the ability and means to own an ornately worked object, where a simple unembellished one could serve the same purpose, is in fact making a declaration about the owner's household distance from the domestic economy. It demonstrates that he has moved beyond that of mere subsistence. It is a statement about his wealth, and his capability to assume a nonchalant and indifferent attitude toward the values of labour. (Vansina 1978:222.)

The production of wrappers and cut pile cloth may be seen in this context of nonchalance. These types of goods depict lavishness and overabundance because they are produced in an obvious conflict with time and labour that is not devoted to

sustenance. The significantly large number of hours expended by female members of a household, in creating cut pile cloths and decorating wrappers, exemplifies "wasted" time. By association, this is time that is not required for tending the fields, growing crops and performing domestic chores. This extravagance is even further compounded if, after such a demonstration of nonchalance to the values of labour, the end product is simply stored away for use as shroud and then later used as burial goods. This implies that the ability to hoard the expensive and embellished cloth emphasizes the exhibition of one's persuasion in social proceedings, and subsequently it becomes a politically meaningful exercise.

In addition this allows the court to control its power and standing as it regulates inherited prestige which otherwise would prove to be dysfunctional to the court system. Thus, Mack maintains that the viability of the court system and the kingship is secured since it limits the holdings of wealth and prestige objects by those people who are not members of the court. Without it, there would be illicit (and unachieved) claims on the court and ultimately initiate prominent positions which would operate outside of the court system. (Mack 1980:173.) Therefore, the act of burying the cloths with the deceased, (akin to the act of throwing cowrie shells into the grave) has broader social and political implications than might at first have been perceived.

Funerals are occasions associated with prestige. They indicate a transition for the deceased from the world of the living to that of the dead which is suitably observed by a splendid display, as are other rites of passage. To store away large numbers of prestigious cloths in order to celebrate this occasion may possibly confirm the conceptual and ideological relevance of death.

The capacity to accumulate cloth (including Shoowa cloths) functions as a device for enhancing the status of one's title while he/she still maintains it. As previously mentioned, the production of wrappers and cut pile cloth is a public activity and it is a subject of communal interest and conversation. Lastly, although they are not pretentiously exhibited, raffia textiles may be visible in the house. For example, a Shoowa cloth may be used to cover a stool. The accumulation of these textiles is a

testimony to wealth and authority, but its capacity for pretension is only rediscovered at ceremonial occasions, such as in death. According to Mack (1980:173) this is most notably exemplified with the cut pile cloths.

The majority of the textiles and accessories that adorn the deceased's body belong to his/her clan section. As the textiles are the property of a clan section, they are placed on the body only after a formal discussion between clan members. Darish notes that during this meeting the section decides which cloths and other gifts will be displayed on the corpse and buried with it. The cloths owned by the clan section are unwrapped and each piece is closely inspected in order to determine its quality and workmanship. Any damage observed since the last examination is noted and considered when arriving at the final selection. During all other periods these cloths are safely wrapped and housed with one or more leaders of the clan section. Some informants related to Darish that they were storing away very old textiles for their own funerals. For example, one woman in her seventies had kept a splendid decorated overskirt made by a relative (whom she still remembers) who lived during the reign of Kot aPe (1902-16). (Darish 1989: 130,131.)

The textiles which adorn the deceased may also come from additional sources. For example, the spouse of the deceased (either male or female) is also required to present one or more textiles of suitable value that is acknowledged by the clan section of the deceased. These cloths are usually displayed with the body and subsequently buried with it. The value and aesthetic worth of the cloth donated by the spouse is decided by the clan section of the deceased. At times, the decision is realized after much fervent deliberation as to its merit and consequent acceptance. (Darish 1989:131.) The number of skirts on the deceased's body is related to his wealth and status. (2) These additional sources, that Darish mentions, appear to contradict her earlier assumptions of collective ownership, which this author has questioned in chapters one and two. Comparably, her anecdote concerning the old woman suggests this same discrepancy.

Friends of the deceased are also able to offer textiles and other gifts to the deceased's clan section. These gifts (*labaam*), presented by individuals who do not belong to the deceased's clan section, guarantee that the contributor (or clan section) will be equally

reciprocated on his or her death. They may include textiles, contemporary currency, cowrie and beaded bracelets, anklets and necklaces, or ornamented belts. (Jewellery usually adorns the deceased when the body lies in state.) These gifts may be buried with the deceased or are safeguarded in the clan section's coffers until they are required. Monetary gifts may also be used by the clan section in order to help with the costs of the funeral, such as those incurred by the provision of food and palm wine provided for the mourners. Many gifts exhibited with the deceased may assume a traditional or customary character, however other objects pertain directly to the deceased's rank and status. Certain hats and other items of regalia may also relate to titleholding and therefore they will be conspicuously displayed. This includes types of feathers that mark the title that the deceased held during his/her life. (Darish 1989:131-133.).

The Kuba cloths which adorn the deceased's body, surround it in the form of grave goods and are therefore part of the coffin. They also provide clothing for the manifestations of the world of the dead. For example, Adams notes that the king's body is laid in a large coffin lined with deep red cloths and a variety of grave gifts are placed at his feet which also include cloths. One aspect of his funerary decor is a plush cloth with a ceratin pattern called "the house of the king". This cloth is laid on his head for a few days while the body is in state. It seems that these cloths were not generally worn but rather diligently maintained by their owners to function as a shroud. Plush decorated cloth appears most frequently at the funerals of high ranking people. (Adams 1973:33.)

Dressing the corpse reflects both individual and communal beliefs regarding an appropriate burial. Among the Kuba there is the belief in the land of the dead (*ilueemy*). As a result of this belief, considerable attention is paid to the fact that the deceased is suitably dressed for his/her burial. The Kuba maintain that raffia textiles are the only proper form of attire for the burial. Furthermore, Darish suggests that the Kuba are concerned with ethnicity, in that they want to be recognized by their relatives and other mourners at the funeral, as well as in the afterlife. Together with all the symbols which indicate the deceased's title, he/she is ensured of being recognized as a Bushoong, a Kete, a Shoowa or a member of whichever group and clan they belonged to while they were

alive. (Darish 1989:135.) Among the Kuba, to be buried in anything but traditional dress is akin to be buried nude. According to Darish, even people who have not worn raffia cloth for the past twenty years have stated that they will be buried in traditional attire. A Bushoong proverb illustrates this idea "as bamboo does not lack roots, a man cannot dismiss his origins." (Darish 1989:135.) Thus, one can suggest that the presentation of "traditional" dress at funerals communicates, in a visual manner, a belief in the importance of Kuba cultural heritage. In addition, this can be regarded as intentionally perpetuating and preserving Kuba cultural values and beliefs concerning death and subsequently regarding their ethnic identity. However, one must question if this same ideology exists with Kuba people who have moved or now live in the urban areas of Zaire or even expatriates. Darish conducted her interviews and research with Kuba people living within the parameters of the kingdom, thus an adherence to "traditional" and cultural beliefs are more likely to predominate. It would be of value to discern if people living outside the kingdom feel as strongly about being buried with raffia cloth.

The clan section is also concerned about the suitable burial of their members for other reasons. It is extensively accepted that the deceased have a malevolent (*mween*) spirit and this spirit can become annoyed if all appropriate respect is not paid to the deceased at the funeral. It is believed that the malevolent spirit is specifically concerned with respecting the deceased rank and status and that the clan section recognize this at the funeral. Fear of vengeance acts as an apparent influential force for the clan section. A scorned *mween* may induce problems for the clan section such as unsuccessful hunting or fishing, sickness, infertility or death. The malevolent spirit of a deceased titleholder is perceived as more powerful than the *mween* of an untitled person. An additional reason for displaying the appropriate number and quality of cloths on the deceased is related to concerns of prestige. If the clan section suitably displays the body in required textiles it demonstrates that the clan section recognizes its obligations and honours and respects its members. This, in turn, enables the clan to reinforce its stature and authority. This is especially significant at funerals, as gossip about the textiles is firsthand and pervasive. (Darish 1989:135,136.)

Today in Kuba villages, raffia cloth as everyday attire has been largely replaced by Western styles of dress such as shirts and trousers for men and blouses and printed cotton wrappers for women. However, despite this incorporation of "modern" dress, the display of decorated cloth remains an essential component in the rituals associated with death. There is hardly any question that the aesthetic allure of these textiles in ceremonial and funeral contexts, is obvious and prevalent. The Kuba also have other reasons for endowing these textiles with such a significant role at funerals. The endurance of this tradition is intrinsically connected to the burial of cloths at funerals because the Kuba consider that the process of making textiles is as meaningful as the cloths themselves. (Darish 1989:137.)

Both men and women are integral participants in all stages of textile fabrication. Thus the presentation of textiles at funerals emphatically reconfirms the persisting social relationships that encircle the interrelated and interdependent efforts of men and women of the clan section. These relationships are recognized and emphasized in the social sphere of the funeral. When the deceased is presented in the village, both men's and women's skirts are placed on the body. These cloths are fabricated and donated by the members of the clan section and others who anticipate similar tributes and acknowledgment in return at their funerals. Darish suggests that " In this respect, exchange is a one-way process, moving from the living to the dead as the textiles are buried with the deceased. Yet this very process supports Kuba assertions of ethnic identity and adherence to traditional beliefs in the afterlife" (Darish 1989:137). As Forney notes, dress encourages social acceptance, social approval and a feeling of belonging. By embracing similar and prescribed items of dress the individual adapts to and complies with group standards and thereby claims a connection with the group. In addition, as clothing and appearance are associated with value systems, clothing then becomes a way in which one can express his/her values as well as identifying with and claiming group membership. (Forney 1980:47,49.)

Although Kuba cloths do not recirculate, burying them is not regarded as a dissipation of the process. Members of the clan are always regenerating this aesthetic and unifying

resource on a daily basis. A Bushoong proverb states: "You can take from the raffia palm, but you can never deplete its supply." (Darish 1989:137.) For the Kuba, both the decorated cloths and the materials from which they are fabricated, are powerful signs of affluence and wealth. For centuries the raffia palm has been a continuous resource for the Kuba people. As previously mentioned, it is not only used for decorated and simple garments, but also as shelter, palm wine and food. Moreover, raffia squares have also been used as a primary form of currency and they have constituted the principal share of the Kuba king's wealth. (Darish 1989:138.) The burial of these labour intensive raffia skirts emphasizes these traditional ideas of excess and wealth.

Binkley notes that a main aspect of these rituals is the display of ritual paraphernalia which demonstrates an association with initiation related demeanour. The visual and verbal vocabulary used during initiation is full of metaphorical connections of death and rebirth. These states of being are also evident during funerals. The funerals of initiated men who are senior in both age and status are typically more elaborate. Binkley observed a funeral in 1981 of a Bushoong titleholder. He notes that declarations were made concerning the status of the titleholder and initiated man. The power of the initiation (in general) was also proclaimed. These include, for example: "He the deceased wore an initiation skirt. Never forget, initiation is very powerful" and "Initiation is powerful like the centre rib of the raffia palm." (Binkley 1987: 83.) What is significant in these declarations are their references to the garments worn during initiation as well their reference to the metaphor, which compares the importance of initiation to the raffia palm tree, suggesting that both are relevant and vital to the Kuba culture and more specifically here, to the Bushoong. It is possible to suggest that regardless of the wide accessibility of industrial cloth, the Kuba continue to use raffia cloth for funerals because it is a powerful symbol of continuity, security, stability and maintenance. It dynamically unites the living to one another, as well as to the community of the recently deceased.

It appears that in the context of Kuba funerals, raffia textiles in their multiple guises are perceived as pure expressions of "traditional" values and beliefs. This is exemplified in the numerous contexts in which the wrappers are employed during the funerary

observances. For example, the continuance of adorning the red wrappers as the attire of mourning suggests that the tradition of what is deemed proper to wear within the context of mourning is preserved. This value of paying proper respect to the deceased is further exemplified in the act of burying the deceased with a suitable number of wrappers and cloths which have been inspected by the clan of the deceased. It is also noted in the wrapper's continued association with wealth. For the Kuba maintain that these wrappers, in their overabundance as grave goods and attire for the deceased, acknowledge and attest to the status of the deceased. The idea that this status should be recognized, not only by the mourners who are living witnesses, but also by those who inhabit the land of the dead, suggests an observance of traditional beliefs and values. The relevance of death is also noted in the fact that even today people save their textiles in order to be buried with them. This tradition becomes even more significant when one considers the fact that Kuba wrappers are now a valuable and sought after commodity for Western art markets. Thus, while a wrapper, especially an old wrapper would bring a substantial amount of money for the seller, which seems to be lacking in Zaire at the present, the Kuba still choose, for the most part, to continue burying their deceased with these valuable commodities which carry a value for both the Kuba and the Western collector. In addition, these textiles also exemplify the importance of communal work and the continuance of this "traditional" value. It would be much simpler and less arduous, as well as less time-consuming, to fabricate wrappers from manufactured materials, or for that matter to bury the deceased in "Western" style garments which are readily available and worn on a daily basis. However, the Kuba choose to continue creating raffia textiles. Thus, their "traditional" associations with Kuba values concerning wealth, status, labour and community are upheld and continued.

However, it appears that in the past five years the sale of Kuba wrappers has reached an unprecedented proportion. This may indicate that since the time of Darish's study more Kuba people have been persuaded to part with their textiles. This could possibly be the result of the impoverished conditions and political instability and volatility which presently exists in Zaire. The rural communities are becoming increasingly distanced

from the capital, both in terms of mobility and government intervention. This may indicate that the surplus production of the Kuba economy is waning. The increase in sales of Kuba cloths could suggest that the Kuba are selling their cloths for economic reasons. The disintegration of a surplus production and the lack of economic stability among the Kuba may also be the result of urbanization. As people moved to the cities for economic opportunities, the economic super-structure of the Kuba kingdom may have suffered as a result. Additionally, political instability and the lack of economic security within Zaire has been the impetus behind the expatriation of many middle class Zairians who have left Zaire and moved to other countries within and outside of the continent. These expatriates often enter the art/artefact market and act as middle men who buy and sell Zairians artworks. The arts of the Kuba generally appear to dominate these foreign markets. While a handful of "traditional" pieces are presented, the majority appear to be manufactured for a "tourist" market. Therefore one can suggest that the Kuba, as well as other Zairians, may in fact be producing for this market on an unprecedented scale. In terms of the Kuba wrappers, it is again relevant to note that this increase in production may also be the result of the changes that have transpired with the study of African art and the commercial "art" world. For as mentioned, textiles have only recently been examined and included within this field in the past ten years. Thus an increase in the production of Kuba cloths can perhaps be weighed against an increased interest and research of African textiles themselves.

It is also relevant to note that during the past five years one can observe an increase in the number of Zairian vendors within these foreign markets. This not only indicates further political upheaval and turmoil within Zaire, but has also affected the amount of Zairian art entering foreign markets such as South Africa. Today the market place is flooded with Kuba cloths. Within the past five years one can identify a tremendous difference in terms of quality and adherence to tradition. The evidence of mass production is visible. On the most apparent level, the majority of Kuba cloths do not seem to have been used or worn. Their pristine condition suggests that they have recently been made. Furthermore, the raffia cloth itself is coarser and stiffer, which leads

one to surmise that the number of softening processes the cloth has to undergo have been decreased in order to expedite a cloth's production. These shortcuts are also evident in the lack of holes or loosened fibres which result from the pounding procedure when a cloth is softened. The use of chemical dyes is often apparent and this implies a hastened procedure as well. Also noted, are the dimensions of the newer cloths. They seem smaller and less grandiose. Production for this market can also be detected in the disproportionate number of available applique wrappers, as this decorative technique is the least time-consuming. This idea of minimized production time is further observed in that the number of applique motifs appears to have decreased. They appear to be more spread out or less confined and as a result a more limited number of applique designs decorate an individual wrapper. Time-saving devices can also be seen in the lack of borders in men's wrappers and/or the use of tie dye or resist dyed borders instead of the checkered pieces of raffia which are sewn to the central part of the wrapper. Similarly, it is possible to discern a lack of beading cowries and pompoms. Furthermore the evidence of cut pile embroidery on a wrapper is becoming increasingly rare. If it is employed it is coarse and less plush or velour-like. This is also noted on the Shoowa cloths. This suggests that time-consuming steps and expenses have been cut down or eliminated altogether. In many instances, it is almost as if the cloths have been stripped down to their bare minimum and include only their basic characteristics.

The use of traditional patterns is still discernable, however they appear to rely on only a limited repertoire. Adams notes that the designs which are seen in foreign markets today are often enlarged and simply repeated throughout the cloth. (Adams 1978:27.) This is especially noted on the Shoowa cloths with its use of cut pile embroidery. New types of geometric motifs have recently surfaced on the appliqued wrappers and they appear to be influenced by "Western" symbols and signs as seen for example in the heart, arrow, hand print, crescent moon, and star shapes. Taking all the above in to consideration, this increase in production may have enabled the Kuba to reserve their "traditional" cloths for their own traditional and indigenous use.

CHAPTER 8

Initiation

For the Kuba, the inventor of initiation (*nkaan* for the Bushoong and *buadi* for the Kete) was Woot, their mythical founding ancestor. In fact, it is maintained that all creation was invented by Woot. All Kuba are cognizant of the creation myths which explain their origins and those of the world. They know that Woot committed incest with his sister and fled upstream afterwards. Since he was the dispenser of fertility, the Bushoong followed him to ask him for his magic protection. This is the usual tale the Bushoong used to explain the initial migrations and the inception of the Bushoong royal line. However there are several *nkaan* versions of the story which recount that Woot was drunk, committed incest and was found naked by his sons who mocked him while his daughter walked backwards and covered him (1). Vansina maintains that the whole initiation is a reenactment of the punishment Woot inflicted upon his sons. This punishment also took the form of rewarding his daughter by implementing a matrilineal line of descent. Woot was not only the first father of the Kuba but he was also the first king and this is also indicated and underlined in the initiation ceremonies. (Vansina 1955:144.)(2)

Initiation rituals occur infrequently in Southern Kuba villages, every fifteen to twenty years. (Binkley 1987:75.)(3). The Southern Kuba region is inhabited by several groups and among these are the Bushoong and the Northern Kete. In this same area there are also groups called Southern Bushoong *Matoon* (4). These three groups share a similar form of initiation. During initiation the boys are taught how to become men, how the Kuba's social and political structure functions, their history and their role in society in order to maintain their culture's stability and continuance. The two main authors who have studied Southern Kuba initiation are Vansina and Binkley. Vansina was initiated in 1953 in the Southern Bushoong village Mapea. Binkley was initiated in the Northern Kete village of Kambash in 1981.

During the same year he researched Southern Bushoong initiation, which was based

primarily on interviews with many titleholders and other initiated men. The accounts of both Vansina and Binkley do differ, however for the concerns of this dissertation and this chapter's focus on raffia, they remain similar. Any differences, as they pertain to the issues of this study will be noted. It is also important to take into consideration that Vansina and Binkley are foreigners and, as a result, one must question if certain aspects or secrets of initiation were not, in fact, concealed from them or not fully explained. It does not appear, from the available literature, that Kuba girls/young women undergo this kind of ritualized and organized initiation, or any type of initiation for that matter.

According to Vansina, initiation among the Bushoong can be divided into four parts or stages: the preparatory stages, the period in the shelter, coming out of the shelter and the closing ceremonies of the initiation. (Vansina 1955:138.) What is of significance to this dissertation is the use of raffia during these periods, thus its connection to the initiation process. All the instruments of *nkaan*, the rope, the walls of the shelter, the initiation clothing, the masquerade costumes and all the small tools used during initiation, were made with raffia. Darish suggests that the role of raffia, raffia dress and woven raffia textiles during initiation rituals creates a foundation for interpreting the symbolic implications and the metaphorical meanings of the use of raffia textile within other contexts. (Darish 1990:180.) For raffia is one of the most important raw materials for the Bushoong, as previously discussed in chapter two.

During initiation among the Bushoong, the dress of the novices was an important factor. From the beginning, raffia dress emphatically stressed the initiate's separation from his status as an uninitiated person. Initiation commenced with the preparatory stage. It is an introduction or teaching period when the boys were taught that they cannot become men without undergoing the rites of initiation. During this stage the initiates departed from the village for the secret forest camp and the younger men and boys were given an emblem of their new status as beginners. This emblem was a small piece of raffia tied around their neck. It was worn throughout the initiation and was the principal sign of this novice status. It visually signified and symbolically connected the novice to the unfolding procedure of the rite which transpired during the following two months.

The adornment of the raffia fibre neckpiece signalled the beginning of the period spent in the shelter. The Bushoong word *nkaan* (initiation), meaning secret or initiation, derives from the verb *akaan* which means to tie or bind. This strip of raffia tied around the neck illustrates the Bushoong initiation proverb: "Initiation is tied, it can't be untied." (Darish 1990:180.) This is essentially true, for once the initiate had entered the camp he cannot leave or drop out, regardless of the prevailing circumstances. The raffia necklace and the proverb also allude to the notion that the secret knowledge imparted to the initiate during the ritual must never be revealed to an uninitiated person. Even upon the completion of the initiation, the raffia necklace persisted in being a relevant insignia throughout an initiated man's life; it was worn during funerals performed for initiated men and during masquerades when the initiation group assembled to perform its duty. (Darish 1990: 180,181.)

When the novices were in the shelter period they were physically or geographically in the forest. (Vansina 1955:147.) They represented the world of the forest. Here the boys are educated about life and Kuba society. During this period they were given numerous tasks to complete. One such task was to plait a raffia skirt they would soon wear. Darish notes that these fibres came from the wild palm *makadi* which grows in the forest near sources of water. They did not come from the cultivated palm trees which are used to weave the cloth from decorated skirts. Cultivated palm, called the *Manbondo*, is cultivated at the edge of village or in cultivated gardens in the forest and is used to make decorated textiles, knotted mats and to construct houses. Initiation costumes were thus fabricated from uncultivated raffia palm. It is also significant to note that during the rite, the initiates and the masks always emerged in the village wearing unloomed costumes which were fabricated by elementary hand tying techniques, rather than woven clothing. The initiation garments acquired an additional expressive dimension when one considers that the uncultivated raffia palm, which is used to make clothing, is not only found in the forest but normally grows wild close to lakes and streams where nature spirits are located. (Darish 1990:181.) (5) This, therefore, further emphasized their distance from the village or civilization and their connections or liminality with the forest, that which

was thought to be dangerous uncivilized and inhabited by *ngesh* or nature spirits.

During this period, they also constructed an initiation wall made from raffia fibre: it is a structure decorated with masks which could be seen to correspond to the Bushoong and local organizations. They depicted Woot's teachings and instructed the boys about the social political structure of the Kuba, the Bushoong, royal line as well their history and cultural roots. (Vansina 1955:150.) Thus, *nkaan* gave the novices a world view, as the boys learned about Woot, the creator and the origin of fertility. This myth substantiated the framework of the whole society and the connection between Woot and the present day kingship was emphasized in the shelter itself. Vansina suggests that the shelter was a kingly haven inside which the boys assumed the status of women and were also regarded as Woot's generals. One can note the association between the king, Woot and the dispenser of fertility. Various taboos were intended to restrict their behaviour towards women, they were not allowed to approach or talk to women. However, the boys were allowed to wear the *minyining* mask and go into the village and terrify, deceive and mock the women and children. During the period they were taught songs and riddles which stressed the sexual aspect of initiation. Vansina suggests *nkaan* emphasized another objective, that being, the unconditional control and power of the elders and dignitaries over youth and commoners. It was upon this tenet that the entire Bushoong political structure rests. (Vansina 1955:146.)

Other rules of dress, aside from wearing the raffia necklace, additionally transformed the initiate's appearance at the onset of the ritual process. The initiates were not able to wear typical village clothes. They had to dress in short pants and they were not permitted to wear shirts or shoes. Darish notes that this form of dress was worn until they completed their initiation costumes in the forest camp. (Darish 1990:181.)

When the costumes were finished, the initiates returned to the village to dance adorned in complete ceremonial regalia with accompanying masked figures. These dances, called *keke* or individual dances, presented the residents of the village with a chance to observe the results of the first two weeks of the initiation process. The dances also represented the privileged rank of the initiates in relation to those who remained behind in the

village. The initiates with titles were more elaborately attired, they had the right to wear costumes with more ornamentation and regalia. They received special recognition and they led the initiates into the village and performed the first dance the *keke* dance.

(Darish 1990:182.)

Binkley suggests that the fabrication and display of masks were regarded as essential components of the initiation rite. Masqueraders had to accompany the initiates in their village dances for the initiation to be complete and legitimate. The elders transferred this esoteric knowledge throughout the initiation sequence, thereby manifesting their authority (6). The titles and responsibilities each titleholder held within the village council were paralleled, in some regards, to their position in the initiations. Titleholders in the forest or initiation camp possessed more power than those who did not have a title. A title merited warmer sleeping conditions and fewer physical demands in the daily maintenance of the camp. Titleholders wore various forms of prestigious insignia that included necklaces and headbands which distinguished them from others. As previously underlined, for a Kuba man, success is synonymous with titleholding. Initiates were given a certain amount of responsibility and title by the elders in order for them to practice leadership and implement their authority over their contemporaries and their superiors. For, as Binkley suggests, it was from these initiates that the village would choose its future leaders. (1987:80,81.)

In the context of initiation, it is apparent that the Kuba discerned a correlation juxtaposing the wild forest world to the domestic world of the village; the uncivilized versus the civilized. The character of the initiates, during these village dances, was identified with the environment in which the initiation took place. The initiates were regarded as wild, savage, invisible and dead. These characteristics were emphasized in various substantial ways which included the dress they wore, the forest zone of their shelter and the rules or taboos regarding their liminal status as novices. Binkley proposes that the most distinct connection between the power of initiation and the forest zone was raised when masks entered the village. The powerful visual connection between the initiates and the nature spirits signified through wearing raffia costumes was emphasized

by the similarity of the initiate's costumes to those of the masked figures. Furthermore, the masked figures wore skirts, collars, and anklets. The masked figures might have also worn the same raffia necklace worn by the initiates. (Binkley 1987:182.)

According to Binkley, the form raffia assumed in both the costumes of the initiates and the masks was regarded to be dangerous to the uninitiated, especially to women. These raffia costumes as well other paraphernalia could cause stillbirth, infertility and even death to young girls and women who came into contact with them at close range. As initiation paraphernalia is considered to be dangerous, regulations were maintained which kept the uninitiated at a distance from the initiates and the masks. The separation was enhanced when the initiates danced in the village. Severe rules regarding demeanour were implemented, which physically separated the masks and the initiates from the uninitiated. For example, raffia barriers were set up along the paths leading to the forest camp while other types raffia and leaf markings designated initiation activity. (Binkley 1987:182.)

Only at the end of the initiation, when the initiate has successfully endured the rites of passage of this ritual, could he wear adult male dress. This followed the last dance in the village when they changed their initiation garments and adopted the attire of an initiated adult man, that being, a ceremonial raffia skirt (*mapel*). The white ceremonial skirt worn at the closing dance of the initiation signified the successful conclusion of the rite and applauded the newly secured status of the young men. They were permitted, for the first time, to dance the steps of an initiate or 'adult'. This dance movement emphasized the flow of the long voluminous raffia skirt. (Binkley 1987:183.) It is significant that the colour of the wrapper was white, for as suggested white appears to be a colour associated with life, new beginnings and joyous events, as noted in the enthronement ceremonies, the *itul* festival, and when seen in comparison to the red wrappers that tend to characterize danger, funerals and the mourning process.

However, Binkley does not consider where these adult wrappers come from. Were they donated to the young men by their clan section or families? Are they merely on loan to the initiated or do they belong to the initiation institution? If these wrappers signify

the new status of these initiated men, it would be relevant to know where these textiles came from. For if they did come from the clan section or the family, the wrapper creates a further bond between them and the initiate, as they have recognized the importance and significance of his achievement. By donating the wrapper, an expensive item, a symbol of wealth, they have also sanctioned the institution of initiation and have deemed it worthy of continuance and have acknowledged the relevant role it plays in their society. If the cloth is indeed a gift, is it a new cloth that was obtained by the clan or family for the occasion or an older one? If the wrapper belonged to someone else, perhaps the initiate's father, it then assumes another characteristic, as it creates a bond between the male lineage within the family, which carries its own implications as the Kuba are matrilineal. The same could be presumed if the textile was a gift from the clan section. If the textile is in fact a new acquisition for the specific purpose of the initiation, it once again underlines the significance of the occasion as the initiate's family or clan section have commissioned a luxury item which is associated with wealth and consequently with status. The wrapper, as his possession, would then serve as a memento or souvenir of his accomplishment and status when he would wear it on future occasions.

One could also propose that perhaps the initiate acquired the wrapper himself for this special occasion. For as initiation is a rare occurrence, many of the novices today are already "adults" and have the means by which to obtain these expensive cloths. Perhaps, the initiates use cloths that already belong to them. What though were the circumstances in the past, before colonization, when initiation was practised on a more regular basis? Surely adolescent boys did not have the available resources to acquire these textiles. One must also question how these wrappers, in fact, differ from the attire worn by children. Today, "Western" style clothing is worn by men, women and children on a quotidian level, however this was not the case before colonization. The problem is that none of the literature concerning Kuba dress distinguishes dress between the age grades. Early colonial photographs depict children in simple wrappers, yet one has to assume that even children had special garments for ceremonial occasions. Therefore numerous questions arise from these speculations. Did the wrapper worn by the initiate in fact differ from

that of his childhood and thereby assume a further symbolic association of his newly acquired status? Today, as the "traditional" wrapper differs significantly from everyday attire, one could suggest that it symbolically represents the traditions of the Kuba culture and reminds the initiate of his heritage. However, one must question if it carries the same implications for the initiate in terms of being an element associated with adulthood, as the clothes he wears outside of these circumstances are, today, no longer considerably different from those he wore as a child which were also similar to those worn by the adult population.

Vansina does not mention the wearing of the *mapel* for the closing dance. Perhaps this is a more recent tradition and did not exist in the 1950s when he was initiated or perhaps this is merely a Northern Kete tradition rather than a Bushoong practice. However, in regards to dress, Vansina does mention that the newly initiated are required to wear dark clothing for a few weeks after the ritual in order to remind them of their initiation and their new status. (Vansina 1955:144.) Binkley does not report this practice in his account of initiation. One can then ask a set of similar questions. Has this aspect fallen into disuse or is this merely a Southern Bushoong tradition? What remains problematic with Vansina's account of the wearing of dark cloths is one is not certain as to what he means by dark cloths. Is he referring to modern or "Western" style clothing or is he alluding to "traditional" attire such as the raffia wrappers? In addition, when he refers to dark cloths what colour or colours is he alluding to? Is the idea of colour here supposed to be suggesting a mood or state of mind? If this is the case, it appears that red and white or natural colours are those which are associated with different states of mind among the Kuba. If the dark colours he refers to are akin to the use of red wrappers and the solemn occasions for which they are worn, are the initiated young men supposed to be in a type of mourning, perhaps mourning the loss of their childhood? This idea is also problematic, for it assumes that the Kuba or Southern Bushoong employ the same use of dark colours for mourning as practiced among Western cultures. However, as mentioned the colour of mourning attire for the Kuba is red. Perhaps this use of colour and circumstance was a colonial influence. Yet there is nothing to suggest that these initiated

men are in a period mourning. They could be celebrating their new status, however, white appears to a more celebratory colour, as noted above. Once again, one could also suggest that the two groups, the Northern Kete and the Southern Bushoong merely view the period following the initiation ritual in a different manner.

In addition, Binkley and Darish fail to mention what those who initiate the novices wear. For if the initiators wear the raffia wrapper themselves during the initiation period, its association with the adult male world would be further emphasized. The difference between the novice's attire and those of his instructor would thus be heightened, as is the difference in their status. If the wrapper is only worn by the initiators during the closing dance, its symbolism would suggest something similar, here a lack of difference, an achieved same status and the contemporary or post colonial use of the wrappers in connection to ceremonial occasions would also be underscored. In addition, these authors do not mention what the audience or spectators are wearing during the closing ceremonies. Are the members of the community wearing their finest wrappers, or any at all? If they are indeed adorned in "traditional" attire the significance of the initiation ritual would again be enhanced and recognized as a ceremonial occasion. Until further research is conducted in this field of study, these questions will remain unanswered.

Vansina suggests that initiation is "a typical rite of passage bringing the boys out of the sphere of women and children into that of men. It is a school of technical and sociological training. As a result of this adults have organized numerous symbols of their society into a loose system, each making his own meaning through different combinations of the same symbols" (1955:152). (7) Initiation rituals could vary from village to village and from time to time according to the changing perspectives of their instructors. Initiation rites are therefore a dynamic process which is modified to incessant cultural changes. *Nkaan* underlined the role of the king and the loyalty which he is warranted. This is further reinforced by the association between Woot and the king. It teaches discipline, stresses seniority and gives a sense of superiority over those villages which do not partake in these rituals, it glorifies male prestige, encourages village solidarity (which is often deficient in other villages). Finally it controls sexual

behaviour.

One of the more prevalent teaching symbols used in the Bushoong initiation was the use of raffia in its multiple forms. It is a significant metaphor used during men's initiation in the Southern Kuba territory. Raffia set the stage for the change in status, it denoted and visibly situated the boundaries. First, the nature of raffia itself communicated ideas concerning initiation's transitory and liminal state. The intentional choice of the uncultivated raffia over the cultivated type symbolically isolated the initiation group from the village. Regulations of behaviour which relate to this use of raffia emphasized the isolation of those undergoing the rite. Secondly, the use of raffia palm to distinguish initiation space stressed the separation of the initiation forest camp from that of the world of the village. Third, from the beginning of the ritual the use of raffia as costume visually separated the initiates from everyone else. The raffia necklace worn by the initiates both tied and bound them to the rite and its regulations of demeanour and conduct. The whole costume generated a homogeneous appearance in which all of the initiates appeared at village dances as members of the initiation group. These elements were additionally emphasized by the resemblance in style between the dress of the initiates and the masked figures. Raffia, with its identification as something from the forest, is thus perceived as dangerous to the uninitiated and situated boundaries and established secret knowledge. According to Darish, this secret knowledge relied upon these restrictions. This was a powerful message communicated for all to see when the initiates enter the forest camp and receive the raffia necklace. It was also the similar and central idea that was communicated at the funeral of an initiated man as many as fifty years later when his contemporaries and younger initiated men wore the raffia necklace and danced in his honour. (Darish 1990:186,187.) Fourth, several details of the raffia costume dramatically indicated distinctions of titleholding, and related power and status in the forest camp as well as in the village when each initiate danced before the gathered audience. It was only at the end of the rite that long raffia ceremonial skirts, symbolic of adult male status, were worn, visually heightening the initiates to the status of initiated man and were reintegrated into adult male society. It is only during the last

initiation dance that additional masks carved from wood appeared. The use of raffia masks, at all initiation dances, inherently connected raffia masks to the initiatory process and to the status of the initiates participating in the rite. In addition, one must take into account that at funeral rituals raffia in the form of decorated textiles is the chosen material to bridge the barrier of death. In these circumstances it substantiates social relationships and protects the clan section from malevolent spiritual forces and underlines the status of the deceased. During initiation, raffia actively symbolized altered states of being, it established boundaries, it separated, divided and isolated reestablishing gender and status differentiation.

Raffia as an element used in initiation and funerary rituals is a powerful multivalent symbol, for raffia dress, among other objects, indicates the liminal status of initiation and death. Adorned in initiation costumes, the village dancers honoured the virtues of partaking in initiation and conveyed the desired social values of adult men. Dressed in various examples of traditional raffia textile, the deceased represented and embodied the social status he had achieved in life and delineated the dignity of his clan fulfilling their final duty. In both initiation and funerary contexts, raffia signifies status, honours tradition and is seen as both influential or effective as well as protective. It is a conscientiously selected element that ties thought and action together.

CONCLUSION

Art is an integral part of the culture that both creates and utilizes it. A culture's textiles and modes of dress are one medium by which one can draw associations between the culture and its socio-political structure. The Kuba cloths from Zaire not only proclaim one's identity and inform others who one is, they are also connected to a highly stratified social and political framework to which the individual belongs and from which this sense of identity is fostered and informed. One can discern affiliations between the Kuba cloths and their social and political implications on all levels of Kuba life. These connections are, in addition, all interrelated. In society or culture, ideologies and structures affect one another, they do not rest alone, singular or remain unaffected. In terms of the Kuba cloths, these associations range from the aspects of economics, labour, ideas concerning wealth and status, to issues involving aesthetics, and the circumstances for which these cloths are adorned.

Economically, these cloths not only represent a significant form of labour within any given work day, they are also highly prized objects of value which, at one stage, were a form of currency for domestic and foreign trade and still act as forms of payment in legal settlements, marriage contracts and annual tributes to the king. The production of these cloths affirms a market economy with its surplus production and attests to an economy that has moved beyond mere subsistence. These textiles also reflect the ideology of communal work as they are fabricated by all members of Kuba society and generally, a wrapper represents the output of many artists. This aspect of economic cooperation, in all fields of Kuba labour, provided a climate in which the economy could grow which, in turn, promoted and led to a stable and secure environment. In addition, this prosperous climate was fostered and stressed by the political structures and the court in order to maintain the existing socio-political system. These cloths and their accumulated labour reflect a culture which values labour, wealth and status. For the Kuba, wealth is a principal means of attaining prestige and status, it is one of the more significant

impetuses behind their work ethic. For wealth enabled one to gain status and a title, and hence to hold a position within the hierarchy of the socio-political structure. Kuba cloths are not only valued as currency, but also as investments of prestige by which their accumulation led to the acquisition of political prestige. These textiles also reflect the gender division of labour, whereby men are responsible for weaving the cloths and women are responsible for their decoration in terms of embroidery. This division illustrates the position and roles of men and women in Kuba society. For men who weave do so in the open spaces of the central plaza, while women are delegated to decorating these cloths in the proximity of the home where they can be available to take care of the children and perform the household chores. Thus, the communal and unconstrained nature of men is assured, while the domestic and confined role of women is secured. This is further exemplified in the fact that men generally assume the role of titleholders within Kuba society. Thus, their position and activities in relation to the affairs of the state further emphasize this communal and politically active role. These differences are also reflected in the cloth types, for generally men's cloths assume a greater variety than women's and their hierarchal classification is more complex. This is most likely related to the fact that titles are reserved for men, hence the need for more garments reflects their social standing and connections to the affairs of the bureaucracy and society. However, the question of clan ownership remains ambiguous to this author. This is particularly evident when these textiles form part of the deceased's burial attire as well as his/her burial goods. Furthermore, it is unclear how they are distributed if they are owned by the clan and who is responsible for the decisions concerning allotment. However, if the notion of private ownership is assumed, it is unclear how the cloths are "paid" for, considering the fact they are often the work of many people such as the weaver and the numerous embroiderers it can often take to embroider one cloth. Perhaps some of these cloths are fabricated and decorated by their owners and are hence regarded as their "property", but ultimately they belong to the clan and can be "reclaimed" when and if the cloths are required. Here one can also note a discrepancy between those textiles which belong to the court and all others. For the court "employs" its own

weavers and the king has his many wives to embroider these cloths. Thus, the notion of ownership appears to be more definite in this case. The intrinsic hierarchy of these textiles can be seen to mirror the highly structured socio-political system that characterizes the Kuba culture. They reflect a system where titleholding is pervasive and competitive. The most expensive cloths can only be afforded by those in the economic position to "own" them, and thereby those who have achieved the most influential titles and its associated forms of status, power and political authority. While, today these cloths are not associated with any particular title or position, except for the one worn as part of the king's royal costume, this was probably not the case before colonization. However, the fact that the king remains alone in this circumstance, perhaps suggests his importance and the significant position he holds within the Kuba kingdom.

These cloths exemplify social and cultural history, they mirror the transformations of the Kuba kingdom and its socio-political nature. The Kuba cloths, before colonization, functioned as daily attire, while the most lavish wrappers were worn for ceremonial occasions. This slowly began to change as the Kuba kingdom came into contact with European forces. Prior to colonization, the Kuba kingdom was closed to almost all foreigners and to material goods such as foreign textiles. However, as external forces invaded society their modes of dress changed. Foreign textiles were still rare in the first decade of the Twentieth century, however, when the Belgian government assumed control of the area, changes not only occurred in the power of the king and his councils but also in the modes of dress. Before Kot aPe, foreign cloth was forbidden. He was the first ruler to introduce these non indigenous textiles into his wardrobe. However, this introduction was the prerogative of the king and his family. Today, imported cloth is used as daily attire. Men wear Western style trousers and shirts, reflecting the Westernization and urbanization of the African continent. However, members of the older generation still wear plain undecorated raffia textiles or use imported cloth to tailor garments which are similar to the raffia wrappers. Contemporary history also plays a significant part in the continuation of the Kuba's textile tradition. The independence of Zaire fostered a climate for the renewal of the country's multicultural traditions with the

intention of generating a nationalist sentiment and identity. With the aspirations of shedding their colonial past government policy in the early 1970s, sought to "authenticate" Zaire. One way was to sanction and authorize the wearing of traditional dress. This then could be seen as a further stimulus for the Kuba to continue creating their textiles, as well as reviving traditional ceremonies such as the *itul* and men's initiations. In terms of the past five years, the substantial increase in production of Kuba cloths may reflect a new interest and captive market in textiles that is a result of the recent inclusion of textiles within the field of African art. However, this increase may also reflect the political and economic instability which presently consumes Zaire.

The use of geometric patterns and motifs on these cloths not only reflects the Kuba's sense of aesthetics but also their concern with decoration and embellishment. For one can discern that geometric motifs are the preferred sense of aesthetic used to decorate these textiles and, in turn, the very act of decorating a cloth implies the importance they attach to this process of embellishment. They confirm the hierarchy of power, for those that are most luxuriously decorated are the most expensive and thus available only to those titleholders who are in the position to wear them. Thus, status and title are outwardly suggested and exhibited. While the pattern or motif may not be indicative of a person's status today, one can perhaps still draw a connection between the amount of embellishment and decoration and status. For the more ornate a textile is, the more time and labour has been required to fabricate it and hence it is more expensive. The amount of decoration implies its value and hence the wearer's wealth and thereby indicates his/her general position within the socio-political hierarchy.

These similar ideas apply to the wrappers themselves. While a particular wrapper may not be indicative of the wearer's title, it does appear to denote his/her status, wealth and place within the social structure. It appears that the wrappers are hierarchically divided according to class. There are those wrappers which are primarily worn by notables and royalty. For example, the inclusion of cowries and beads as forms of decoration usually denotes that the wrapper is reserved for members of the royal court. Generally, however, there do not appear to be any regulations concerning who may wear a particular wrapper,

aside from the king. This suggests that if a commoner could afford a more luxurious wrapper, he/she is permitted to wear it. The crux of the issue here, then, is wealth and hence the status of the wearer.

While the wrappers form a major component of a costume, it appears that, aside from the king, they are not indicative of the wearer's title. Rather, they attest to the wearer's status, wealth and social class. In this context, title is denoted by other costume elements such as headdresses and belts.

The composition of these motifs and patterns on the wrappers, Shoowa cloths and many other objects also reflects certain ideological aspects in regards to Kuba demeanour and society. The overall symmetry of pattern (even when irregularity occurs) alludes to a society which is governed by an overall sense of order and balance. This symmetry and balance reflect the ideals of good and beauty, however tension and less desirable aspects of life do enter into Kuba culture. These negative aspects though are not reflected in the art and this may be because these artistic products are intended for public display, thus their overall composition conforms to accepted ideals. These decorated objects thereby depict an ordered and dignified culture which perhaps serves to support and promote its encompassing socio-political structure. The need or demand for such decorated objects when unembellished objects, are just as useful, also tends to mirror both the development and expansion of the kingdom as well those who inhabit it. For as the kingdom expanded, and the bureaucracy developed, more titles were created. Thus the increase in titles instigated the growth in patterns and decorated objects. For as noted, titleholders displayed their insignia and their wealth as a means to identify their particular status and hence their position within the social and political hierarchy. This development of titleholding enabled the participation of a significant number of Kuba citizens, in one form or another, in the affairs of the kingdom, thereby ensuring its continuance and maintenance.

Celebrations and their associated forms of material culture can be regarded as reflecting a society's ethical and aesthetic characteristics and inclinations. This is seen in relation to the Kuba cloths and their role within the ceremonies for which they are worn. If these

elaborate wrappers and costumes are only donned today for specific occasions, one must consider the nature of these events and how they and the cloths refer back to the socio-political character of the nation. When these textiles are regarded as costumes, they not only refer to the Kuba sense of aesthetics as seen in their preference for geometric patterns, but are also indicative of a highly structured hierarchical society. This is noted in the hierarchical ordering of costumes and their association to one's status. Their elaborate nature not only recalls the Kuba's preference for ornate decoration and ostentation but also the importance they placed (and still place) on the interconnected realities of wealth, status and power. Politics and ceremonial do not exist independently from each other. Pomp and pageantry, spectacle and splendour are considered as inherent aspects of the political process as well as the structure of power. The ritual not only endorses existing power structures, it also represents a type of power in its own right. However, questions remain regarding the choice of wrapper and the occasion for which it is worn.

The enthronement of the king exemplifies one such occasion. Not only is the most prominent person in Kuba society being honoured but his position as supreme leader and spiritual mediator is highlighted. This status is further emphasized in the fact that the king must wear specific costumes for his enthronement. These costumes not only depict his preeminence in terms of their ornamentation and separate him from the populace, they also call attention to his connection with God, Woot and creation. The Kuba people celebrate the enthronement of their king and concurrently they sanction the social and political system by the very nature of this celebration.

When viewed in terms of the *itul*, a celebration that exalts the status and sanctions the role of the king and, in turn, confirms Kuba society and culture, these cloths appear to emphasize central Kuba ideologies and principles. The importance of cloth and its acquisition attest to this fact, for textiles in this festival play a dominant role. These underlying cultural ideologies are also recognized, for example, in the idea that the enemy animal refers back to Kuba mythology and the myths surrounding the origins of creation. The very nature of this festival also validates the king's position as well as the

existing hierarchy with its lines of succession. Aspects of wealth, rank and control enter into play in this celebration. While the *itul* can be sponsored by anyone who can afford this privilege, it was generally organized by a royal sponsor. It thereby assumes an association with the court. This correlation remains assured even if the sponsor was not a member of the royal family, for the king must sanction this request and, as noted, the nature of the celebration aligns itself to the circumstances and maintenance of the kingdom.

It is during funerals that these cloths most likely play their most significant role. For here, not only are the mourners dressed in their required red wrappers, but the body and coffin of the deceased are shrouded in cloth. The cloths attest to the deceased's status and their number substantiates his/her wealth and thereby to the position he/she held in relation to social political hierarchy. Thus, by displaying the rank and title of the deceased, the overall socio-political structure of the nation is also being respected, acknowledged and implied. In burying the body with their accumulated textiles, the court also controls its power and standing as it regulates inherited prestige and assures the continuous supply and demand for new cloths. The textiles which adorn the deceased have been donated by his/her clan section. The significance of cloth, in this aspect, can be noted in the fact that they are carefully chosen and must meet requirements in terms of their conservation and decoration. Dressing the body also reflects both individual and communal beliefs regarding an appropriate burial. For the Kuba's belief in the land of the dead is associated with ideas concerning ethnicity. By enveloping the body with textiles from a particular clan, the ethnic character of the deceased is not only being verified as being that of a Kuba citizen but it also attests to the sub-ethnic group of the deceased. This is displayed to the mourners but also to those in the land of the dead. Dress encourages social acceptance, social approval and a feeling of belonging.

This sense of identity and belonging are also emphasized in initiation. The discussion of the textiles used during this ritual raised a number of significant cultural issues. First, the choice of raffia for the novice and the initiated convey ideologies concerning adulthood and the domains of the forest and the village. The uncultivated raffia is used

in the forest during the many stages of the ritual, hence it signifies that which is uncivilized and potentially dangerous as well as the liminal status of the novice. Only when initiation has been completed does the initiate have the right to wear a cultivated raffia wrapper. Thus, cultivated raffia is associated with adulthood, village life and society. Initiation is the process by which young adult males are instructed about the culture's ideologies, values and ethics, in other words all that is meant by being Kuba. Therefore, it is a ritual which inherently secures, maintains and authorizes the existing socio-political structure.

As clothing and adornment are associated with value systems, clothing becomes a vehicle by which one can express his/her values, as well as identifying with and claiming group membership. The Kuba cloths and their continued fabrication clearly represent this notion, whether they are regarded in terms of the economy, labour, history, wealth and status or in relation to the ceremonies for which they are adorned. The fact that they are still being created and worn suggests that their intrinsic cultural associations and values are being maintained by the Kuba. By claiming group membership and by identifying oneself as part of this larger group, the Kuba are embracing and sanctioning all that makes them a member of Kuba society, which includes and underscores their influential social and political structure.

ENDNOTES

Chapter One

1. The nature of this historical survey is based upon a Western methodology of history. It is founded on the theories of Western scholars and the author acknowledges these limitations and its Eurocentric character. Kuba mythology and their beliefs concerning their origins will be discussed as and when they pertain to each chapter.

2. For example, the Kete dialects are closely related to the Luba Kasai; the Cwa and the Mbeengi spoke a southern Mongo dialect; and the Shoowa's language greatly differs from the central and peripheral Kuba in that it can be included within the southern Mongo tradition as well as within the Kuba. The Cwa, the Coofa and the Mbeengi have their own unique social organization in comparison to the other groups and they also vary among themselves. The central and peripheral Kuba share a common culture and their differences lie primarily on separate historical traditions. The central Kuba share a single migration and the peripheral groups recognize their own traditions of descent and settlement. (Vansina 1978:4.)

In addition, ethnic groups were divided into chiefdoms which were not always necessarily adjacent to each other. The Kete, Cwa and the Mbeengi were, for the most part, incorporated into the Bushoong and Ngongo chiefdoms. Thus before 1899, forty three percent of the population in the realm was based directly on the Bushoong chiefdom. This area, which also included the Idiing, Kaam, Kayuweeng, the Bulaang and some Leele, formed the nucleus of the kingdom. The remaining ethnic were groups were not united and, as a result, they constituted a large entity of satellite chiefdoms around the nucleus. As the different chiefdoms of the same ethnic group did not maintain any sort of political unity or association, this allowed the Bushoong to dominate, without any significant opposition. The chiefdoms of each ethnic group shared a similar dynastic clan and common elector clans. However, each chiefdom had its own chief and electors. (Vansina 1979:6.)

3. It is relevant to note that there appears to be a lack of post-colonial data concerning the Kuba's history.

4. A distinction must be made here between the Shoowa and the Shoowa cloths. The Shoowa are subethnic group of the Kuba and a Shoowa cloth is a particular embroidered raffia textile named after the Shoowa ethnic group. While all Kuba groups fabricate Shoowa cloths today, according to Meurant, cut pile embroidery is the main craft among the Shoowa group. Due to the different nature of the wrappers and the Shoowa cloths (also known as cut-pile cloths, Kasai velours and Kasai velvets) it would be easier to

have avoided discussing these two textiles, however the wrappers sometimes combine the use of cut-pile embroidery and the cut-pile cloths are worn as a form of attire when three units of cloth are sewn together and worn on top of the simpler Kuba cloths for occasions such as funerals.

Meurant suggests that the cut-pile technique was first developed by the Shoowa and introduced into Kuba culture after they joined the kingdom. He also notes that cut-pile embroidery only emerged in the royal Bushoong wardrobe at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, which he maintains is due to the commercial success the Shoowa velvets from which it took its technique. In addition, one must note the Ngongo and the Ngeende create a type cut-pile cloth that incorporates a velour that is composed of dots which are juxtaposed in order to form lines and surfaces. Aside from the combination of cut-pile velour with continuous embroidery, the Shoowa also use embroidery without cut-pile. The Ngombe used to make a cut-pile with linear embroidery also constructed with dots. The Shoowa velvets are characterized by their cut-pile covered surfaces, individual tufts are visible. This technique has spread everywhere throughout the kingdom, however only the Shoowa arrange the thickness and thus highlight the surface effects. (Meurant 1982:137.) It appears that all forms of cut pile and linear embroidery which are composed on single square panels have generically been labelled as a Shoowa cloth. However, if a wrapper uses cut pile embroidery as part of its decoration, it is not called a Shoowa cloth, but rather a Kuba cloth.

5. Palm wine is, in effect, the most venerated of all food. Every man is supposed to offer wine to his friends and if he does not own any palm trees himself, he is obliged to pay for the wine with currency. Every great dignitary receives a calabash of wine each night and he is required to finish it in front of the merry donators. They wait for him to make some comments about the quality of the wine. A well brought up man knows a range of praises for the four different species of wine and he knows how to compare the advantages and the faults of each type. The presence of wine is also noted in many proverbs, fables and riddles. The Bushoong call the constellation known as Orion the 'carrier of wine with his calabash in front and his calabash in back'. Wine is more than a gastronomic delicacy. During initiation, young boys occupy some of their apprenticeship period in the forest drawing wine and hunting. These two activities denote masculinity. Initiation is partly paid with palm wine. Wine, like meat is mainly reserved for men, however, according Vansina, women obtain it through stealing and hiding it. While women also want to take part in this merriment, it comprises of masculine symbols and this explains the constraints against their consumption of wine and meat. Female drunkenness is thus condemned, while male inebriation is regarded with amused indulgence. As a proverb suggests in its praise of palm wine, "It kills and it necessitates." (Vansina 1954:901,902.)

6. Slavery existed among the Kuba where about six percent of the population were slaves. Slavery falls into the category of prestige investments. It was used to acquire luxury goods, as seen for example in festival clothing, jewellery and, sculpted objects

which permitted their owner to augment his wealth. The goods of slavery thus increased the prestige of the owner. Slavery was not purely based on economical considerations, for it derived from a cultural conception that values prestige. Slavery, therefore, was not an indispensable institution for the economic structure. (Vansina 1964:20,21.)

Chapter Two

1. Throughout this dissertation the term "White" is used to refer to undyed raffia cloth, which has an ecru or light blond hue and is sometimes almost white-like. This is based upon Cornet's observations. While these cloths may employ numerous decorative techniques, the base of the cloth has not been dyed and maintains its natural colour.
2. Normally the weave of cloth used for embroidery is not any different from a standard cloth, however, customs regarding the quality of cloth may vary according to region or household or clan section. (Adams 1978:34.)
3. However one must question Adams' assertion, as the Kuba did have contact with the American missionary William Sheppard commencing in 1892 as well as the numerous interchanges with West Coast peoples before and after this period.
4. Vansina notes that art history is pertinent to general history due to two special properties; the concrete nature of works of art and the fact that trends in art clearly document substantial changes in general. Trends in art history should also exhibit social and cultural history both in its superficial transformations and in its complex, often scarcely conscious changes. (Vansina 1984:211).

Chapter Three

1. Among the nobility one can distinguish nine founding clans of the kingdom. Another distinction of nobility is divided into the dignitary clans (the *mimbaann't*). There are five degrees: the king himself, the royal clan (*bashimatwoon*), the children and grandchildren of the king (*baan banyim* and *bakaan banyim*), the notables (*kolm*) and the dignitaries of lesser importance (*kumibeky*). The responsibilities are divided into three levels. The first is that of the "uncles of the king" (*kum mabaantshy*), the great notables of the royal government (*Kikaam*, *tshik'l ipaantshl*, *nyimshoong*), and these are followed by the "fathers of the king" (*mbeemy* and *mbeengy*). Two women must be added, the *katyeeng* and *mbaan*. In the second group one finds military chiefs the *iyol* and *sheash*. The third group comprises all the *kolm* in the current sense of the word. These are the very numerous ordinary notables. The creation of all these titles has its history and is told in the form of legends which usually comprise numerous versions. For certain important responsibilities one has to belong to a *mbaang't* clan or be either a son or grandson of the

king. The *kikaam* has to fulfil these two conditions. (Cornet 1982: 34,35.)

2. In addition, Binkley suggests that there is a direct connection between the political power employed by titleholders in the village and over public matters and the power they exert over the secret proceedings at men's initiations. The same people who govern the discussions and decision making at village council meetings also control secret meetings in forest during initiation. (Binkley 1987:80,81.)

3. These are most often expressed in village council meetings. Hierarchy of importance relates to seating arrangement which is divided into the right and left. One's relative influence and persuasiveness at council meetings is also reflected by speaking protocol. The order reverses that of political hierarchy, that is the least important titleholders speak first while the village headman sums up or passes a decision at the conclusion of the meeting. (Binkley 1987:78.)

4. The rank of every notable was confirmed by the status of his title, and for titles of the same rank by seniority of nomination. As noted, rank was illustrated by the standing a notable held in the succession of speakers at all councils. (Vansina 1978:133.)

5. Military organization was not quite as complex. Vansina notes that the principal military offices were the *nyibit* ("king of war"), the *iyol* (policemen) and *shesh* of the capital and the *nyibit idiing*. It is clear that many military titles were added to the older ones. However, generally the proliferation of military offices did not occur. This sector did not yield rewards as great or rich as the offices responsible for the collection of revenue. Some military titles date back to the proto-Kuba period and most of the others date back to the early kingdom in the Seventeenth century. This suggests that the military organization was completed early on and was found to function sufficiently in accordance to its task. A small force could be effective because of the organization at the capital. (Vansina 1978:144,145.)

6. Examples of contemporary studies in African textiles include Weiner and Schneider. (eds.) 1989, *Cloth and human experience*; Gilfoyl. 1987, *Patterns of life*; Idienn and Pointing. (eds.) 1980 *Textiles of Africa*; Picton and Mack. 1979 *African textiles*; Cordwell and Schwarz. (eds.) 1979, *The Fabrics of culture*; Sieber. 1972, *African textiles and decorative arts*.

Chapter Four

1. One must consider that the developmental model Torday appears to use is indicative of a Nineteenth century intellectual context which employ evolutionist models, from the simple to the complex. I do not intend to follow this model, I am merely noting the suggestions concerning the origins of designs as proposed by Torday, Vansina and

Meurant.

2. It is significant to note that interlace designs are common in societies all over the world, many of which have no weaving traditions.

3. These examples are problematic, for Meurant has provided only illustrations he has drawn himself to support his argument. This same problem also applies to fig 65-68.

4. Meurant does suggest that this connection between European designs from the late Middle Ages and its influence on later African designs is analogous to the influence that Middle Eastern designs had upon European designs when they dispersed through Europe from the Fourth century onwards. (Meurant 1986:115.) However, he does not expand on these possible influences any further.

5. According to Meurant the oldest known form of Kuba art is made by men and consists of representational depictions of nature, while women create designs which are essentially rectilinear whose nature lacks any direct representational qualities. These designs are evident and extended to all media. Geometric rectilinear abstract designs were prevalent among the Kuba by the time colonization attempted to halt this dynamic process (while naturalistic forms of expression were diminishing and disappearing). The stylized expressions found in wood engravings transformed into the vocabulary of abstract design. Portraiture had reverted into conventional and mannered stylization. (Meurant 1986:116)

6. Following Dorothy Washburn, Adams suggests that each of the numerous subethnic Kuba groups preferred a specific category of symmetry, which Adams based on the classifications by Kuba women and her investigation of embroidered designs. In addition, she concluded that the most consistent inclination for symmetry was found among the Bushoong. (Adams 1989:36). This is further substantiated by Meurant who notes that the Kuba, in general, are very conservative, however the Shoowa who were the last to join the kingdom are the most imaginative. Conversely, royal Bushoong textiles are hieratic, they are reduced to and absorbed in the sobriety and ceremony that characterizes court art. Their beauty results from the perfection of their craftsmanship, thus their technical aspects. He suggests that the Shoowa and the Ngombe are the only groups who juxtapose several tonal registers on the same objects. In terms of the Shoowa, there are designs where one hesitates to conclude whether the individuality which accounts for their attraction is due to an intentional decision or is result of a fortunate mistake. The notion of making an unintentional creation is not an alien to Kuba thought; the fact that an innovation is dreamed of before it is rendered attests its authenticity which is a characteristic recognized by the king himself. (Meurant 1986:131).

7. Adams draws a connection between the rhythms of African musical styles with

textiles. Relying on Chernoff, she notes that the power of the music results from the clashes and dialogues of rhythms from distinct contrasts and analogous movements. This observation corresponds to the visual formation of African textiles composed of separate and diverse segments of design, as seen in the Kuba cloths. Building on her over generalization that Africans perceive simultaneous contrast as a basis of vitality, she maintains that "The contrasting tightly organized rhythms are powerful- powerful because there is vitality in rhythmic conflict, powerful precisely because people are affected and moved" (Adams 1989: 37).

8. Adams contends that Robert Faris Thompson was the first to study irregularity in visual design and relate it to style preferences that are apparent in other forms of art, and that therefore he maintains that it derives from a ingrained artistic predilection. In music he names this style characteristic as "simultaneous suspending and preserving the beat". (Adams 1989:36.) However, one art form should not be regarded as a prototype for the others. Rather, the interrelationships between dance, music and design imply a distinct preference for an aesthetic that has shaped each art form.

9. In connection with this, one can note the bark cloths which are associated with ceremonies connected with death. They are unquestionably symbolic of the circumstances. This is seen in relation to the lack of symmetry found in fabrics composed of small triangles of bark cloth sewn together in an irregular fashion (Vansina 1981:66). Vansina's suggestion of "symmetry failure" coincides in with the broader concept that notions of social order are embodied in a society's art forms. Therefore, for Vansina, the fact that the Kuba perceive death as introducing disorder into social life is connected to the irregularity and asymmetry detected in the nature of the composition.

10. Adams proposes that the irregularity of pattern has been explained or interpreted as a presentation of vitality; a means of consolidating the invisible forces believed to be inherent in all things; an analogous paradigm of social order or disorder; and a way of garnering power by shielding the secrecy of knowledge. She suggests that an additional explanation can be discerned: the irregularity as a method of particularizing the object by representing its individuality and uniqueness. Aspects of irregularity in a sphere of regularity function in a parallel manner or as something secret as examined by the sociologist George Simmel, who is recognized for having clarified the mechanism and significance of secrecy. According to Adams, Simmel associates irregularity with individualization which Adams deems applicable in this circumstance. Because we are responsive to differences, Simmel concluded that what is denied to many earns a special significance or merit. For the common person, all exceptional persons and superior accomplishments have a mysterious quality about them. Any specific difference causes their mysterious character move to the foreground and be emphasized. Therefore, something mysterious is viewed as being significant and valuable. The "secret" detached from the content it protects grants one a place of exception. According to Simmel the secret is a fundamental aspect of individualization. (Adams 1989:40.)

Simmel's observations concerning adornment as secrecy are also noteworthy especially considering the fact that we are examining textiles and their function as garments. (Adams 1989:40.) The secret functions as an adorning possession- as a value appended to the owner. Adornment maintains a structure that is similar to that of secrecy itself in differentiating the individual who retains the adornment object while counting on those who do not for its impact. According to Adams, Simmel observes that adornment demonstrates the desire to please others, however, conversely there is the desire for those favours to be returned to the adorned in the form acknowledgment and admiration credited to his or her person. Adornment, like secrecy, has the function of personal importance; it combines superiority to others with a reliance on their admiration and then integrates their good will with envy. Therefore pleasing adornment and secrecy may become a way to acquire power, heightening the possessor and causing others to feel inferior. Whether one has a secret or wears a special adornment, irregular factors or elements tend to individualize the possessor. Adams suggests that on a pragmatic level the probability that irregularities in design may relate to individualizing the object denotes a rationale or basis for the circulation of some design variations. These differentiations or variations may be intended to personalize the object and its maker. It may be in fact a signature or function as label which adds value. (Adams 1989:41,42.)

11. Vansina suggests that the classification of decorative art, geometric or not, reveals the same spirit that created a trial by a panel of judges and a political system that offsets councils one against the other. (1978:224.)

12. When one investigates this hypothesis it is found that the Kuba did not, in fact, represent witchcraft or sorcery in their art. When examining the more than two hundred decorative designs, not one of them portrays the witch or sorcerer. (Vansina 1967:26.)

13. When a Kuba wrapper includes patterns and motifs, often, it is very difficult to distinguish the patterns and designs, unless they have been photographed in detail. Their complexity becomes increasingly difficult to discern when cut-pile embroidery is employed on a wrapper. Thus, for the sake of clarity, the majority of the cloth illustrations in this chapter are examples of Shoowa cloths, for the patterns and motifs are more clearly defined due to the nature of this cloth.

14. This chapter has focused on designs as they appear in one type of decorative system in which the components are similar and interchangeable. However, according to Cornet there exists many different designs which each have their laws of composition, their motifs, their vocabulary and their own grammar. He divides these into five spheres, where the most important and the most complex concerns the techniques of architecture, sculpture and masculine clothing. The other four domains are those found in female tattooing, women's wrappers, funerary objects and drinking horns. They are less normalized than the first group. In particular, he notes the funerary objects in camwood paste (*besham twool*) that are decorated by women with an imaginative quality that often

avoid the strict norms of design detected in the first group. (Cornet 1982:158,159.)

Chapter Five

1. One can draw a further connection between the king and Woot that transpires at his initiation. For the Bushoong, initiation is the reenactment of the Woot's incestuous encounter with his sister. Through the king's initiation ritual and by a symbolic act of ritual incest the king is separated or removed from common men. Thus, by reenacting Woot's acts of incest, the act of creation for the Kuba, he further aligns himself with Woot, the first man, the first king and father of all Kuba. As, the king no longer has any kin, he thus rises above others as a genuine nature spirit. This aspect of sacred kinship dates back to beginning of the kingdom. (Vansina 1978:129,130.)

2. Perhaps this also explains why polygamy is the prerogative of the king. Marriage among ordinary Kuba men and women is monogamous, with the exception of slave women who could have been taken as concubines and thus their children belong to the clan of the husband and the legitimate wife, in accordance with preestablished conventions. The women or wives of the king are divided into two different categories. There are those concubines that the king possessed before he acceded to the throne and to these women he adds others that he finds specifically agreeable. They live in a special area of the harem which is differentiated from the other part in terms of dimension and is the most richly decorated of the dwellings. All the other women are the *baady*. They live in two rows of little houses on parallel streets. These women were offered to the king by each chiefdom and each clan. The connection of the *baady* with their clan remains important, because their children, who are *baan banyim* "sons of the king", are brought up in the clan of their mother. (Cornet 1982: 32.)

3. These interdictions are also associated with the education of the king. The history of a king begins with his education. The royal aspirants are the object of particular attentions. They are confined to the *nyoom*, the person who is responsible to the royal family. He undertakes their education and supervises their growth and maturation. He must ensure that they are not physically harmed, as good health and well being are indispensable for every future king. They are raised in semi seclusion and sheltered from all potential harm. They cannot dance, play with other youngsters, eat with others, climb trees or hunt. For ceremonial occasions they are permitted to wear wrappers of quality. (Cornet 1982:38.) However, Cornet does not mention if or how these wrappers differ from their other wrappers or how and if one can draw a distinction between these princely forms of attire from those that more "common" children wear. In addition, he does not mention if these royal children's wrappers differ from those worn by royal adults.

4. In connection to the King's supreme authority, he is also associated with an ideal comportment. This behaviour is expressed in the word "*paam*" that can not be translated. It designates a power and a way of acting which is difficult to explain and be precise, but one that must be attributed to a fearsome character. The *Paam* is, in some way, the force of the king which cannot be tempered when the king wishes to exercise it. It by this that the *nyim* asserts himself above others and laws. According to Vansina, *Paam* is the quality of fire that burns, the rays of the sun that redden, of the leopard that attacks. *Paam* is an attitude that provokes *mapec*, (difficulties and miseries) for the subjects of the king. *Paam* is the arbitrary royal authority. *Paam* is the violence of the outraged royal authority. The king is *Paam*, his authority is not usurped. One does not enter into competition with royal prestige-the *Paam* of the king. The king is also associated with the qualities of the sorcerer, as noted. A third royal quality is liberty. All of the above qualities are characteristics which serve to defend the royal authority. (Vansina 1964:104)

5. There are numerous forms of insignia associated with the king. They symbolize his authority and emphasize his status. They form an integral part of his regalia and underline the pageantry associated with his person. These include his personal emblem, the royal drums, the royal seats, the royal arms, the wisdom baskets, musical instruments, canes and flywhisks and the palace basins. In addition, as Vansina notes, there is the kaolin which he anoints himself with during his enthronement ceremonies. The kaolin comes from a place situated outside the country where the first two kings were anointed. (Vansina 1964:108.)

6. In addition to these essential pieces, he wears one or many examples of all his suitable accessories that correlate to "white" clothing. For example, these include the *ntshuum aniyim* headdress which assumes the form of a little house surmounted with numerous feathers and accented in the front with a long white feather *mbwwong* and the *mbup mundel* headband which, according to Cornet, is the most luxurious example with its beaded and cowrie fringe. During formal ceremonies the king and some principal notables- the regent, mother and grandmother of the king- receive large black streaks on one half of their face. This custom relates back to a legend regarding Woot and his sons which, again, draws a connection between this royal garment, the king and Woot. He also wears two back ornaments which are particular to this costume. His belt may be a simple *yeemy*, however it is the most ornamental of this category and called the *nduun bushoong*. The *nduun* category represents the plainest belts in terms of their decoration and composition. This type of belt is a simple band of beaten tree bark which knots at the stomach and can measure up to 20 cm. However, it is a sign that denotes dignity. This is probably due to its association with antiquity, as it recalls the era when raffia cloths were not yet worn by the Kuba. The royal *nduun* are called the *nduun bushoong* and are composed of a field of cowries on a raffia background that is bordered by a single row of white beads. It can measure 20-25 cm wide by 4 metres in length. He also carries a money purse that is entirely decorated with cowries and has an added ornament

in the form of a bronze bell, a *mbwéemápush*. He wears two forms of hip ornaments which are the *talwoong* and *mabuk*. These cover his haunches and thereby increase the size of his costume and his overall figure. The *talwoong* are worn in four pieces, one in front, one in the back and one at each side. They are made from animal skin or fabric. They form part of the great formal costumes and are worn solely by the king and his sons. Usually they are composed of leopard skin, but if they are made from fabric, foreign material is preferred. The *mabuk* are worn over the *talwoong*. They are generally made of monkey skins and beads and cowries which are attached to each flank. In this costume, the *mabuk* is made of leopard skin and is additionally ornamented with beads and cowries. This royal costume also has another hip ornament called a *mbintsh* made from leopard skin and encircled in elephant hair. His forearms are adorned with *mipaang* and *mabiim* ornaments, but not over abundantly. He also wears ceremonial *makash manneemy*, gloves with ivory nails are encircled with beads. His feet are ornamented at the ankles with a big metal rings, *myaat mindel*, to which he adds other ornaments with bells and cowries, the *mipaang*, *mabiim* and *shyaan*. His *mateemy manneemy* shoes are in the same spirit as the gloves. The two required accessories of this costume are the *mbombaam* knife and the *mbwoom ambady* lance. (Cornet 1982:245-248.)

7. It is unclear if it is Cornet who is making this association or has he derived this from informants, he does not acknowledge this himself.

8. The enthronement ceremonies are not always triumphant or pleasant. This is seen for example at the *ibaam* (a place at the south east corner of the city) that illustrates an altogether different character. After a couple of days in seclusion the king is transported there. This is not a public ceremony. It is reserved for certain notables. Here the king is insulted and reproached, he must remember his humble origins, his weaknesses and faults are underlined. This institution is important as it permits the people to exert a certain amount of control over royal power. It is after the *ibaam* test that the king has the right to wear the *mwaandaan* belt, the symbol of discretion and the *lapuum* headdress.

Chapter Six

1. For detailed accounts of the *itul* see Cornet 1980, "The *itul* celebration" and Vansina 1964, *Le royaume Kuba*.

Chapter Seven

1. Although this dissertation is not based upon any field work, it is most probable that, within a funerary context, the Kuba cloths and Shoowa cloths are still used and worn in similar ways as described Darish's field work in the late 1980s. Unlike the *itul*

celebration and enthronement of the king, funerals are still commonly held and are the most pervasive occasion for which these cloths are used and worn. Thus, I have chosen to employ the ethnographic present in the treatment of this chapter.

2. A king's funeral is one of the ultimate ceremonies which mark his existence. It is characterized by their abundance, secretive nature and rich symbolism. The first phase is what can be called the time of the secret death. The death of the king is not announced immediately it is kept secret. Sometimes two to three days pass before his death is officially signalled. In principle mourning lasts nine days which allows time to prepare for the funeral and enthronement. The body is displayed in state for at least three days as three costumes are needed to be displayed on the body. The first costume which is put on the body is a royal *labot latwool*. It is accompanied by a leopard skin and eagle feathers. The deceased's back is held up on three elephant tusks tied together. The second costume is the *labot lanshesh*, a "white" costume, with a *nimmbom* headdress. All the headdresses are composed with an abundant number of bird feathers, where the eagle feathers dominate. The last costume of the king, the one in which he will be placed in the tomb, is his personal *bwaantshy*. His head is covered with a *mbelepey* mask. The headdress is generally *ntshuum anyim*, it will be removed at the moment of his burial. The regents then assume the role of *nyim* until the new king is enthroned and they dress in accordingly. The first regent even dons a *bwaantshy* costume in order to warn the people that the kingdom still exists. (Cornet 1982:311-314.)

According to Vansina, during the first four days of the funeral rites for a king, the king is dressed in red textiles and after for the following four days in white. On the ninth day he is clothed in his *bwaantshy* costume with his *mwaash ambooy* mask. (Vansina 1964: 112). Perhaps the discrepancy between Vansina's and Cornet's observations can be related to the different time periods when their research was conducted.

Chapter Eight

1. According to Vansina this is said to explain the Kuba's matrilineal line of descent (Vansina 1955:144.)

2. Creation was initiated by Woot who had nine sons, two of them had a fight and they embody good and evil (initiated evil.) There are several cycles of myths which explain the origins of the world and not one of them is universally accepted by all Kuba. Here, all the children of Woot are the offspring of his incestuous relations with his sister. (Vansina 1955:145.)

3. One must distinguish the initiation for ordinary people from that intended for members of the royal family. This one is more demanding. The initiation of the princes is performed in the houses of the palace. The songs learnt at initiation are songs of war, honour and hunting. Ceratin secret songs must never performed in front of women.

Those who belong to the same initiation class of the king can wear a shell in their belt. (Cornet 1982: 39,40.)

4. These Bushoong *matoon* villages are not only comprised of members from the Bushoong ethnic group, but from numerous ethnic backgrounds. Although the majority of Bushoong villages are regarded as free, certain ones were sentenced to *matoon* status either because they were viewed as prisoners of war or were convicted of a crime. These condemned villages belong to the king and other members of the royal family. Many clans in *matoon* villages claim the Northern Kete as their ancestors. (Binkley 1990:158,159.)

5. An initiation costume is made up of a two part skirt, which comprises a shorter overskirt resembling a ruff worn over a knee length skirt. Accessories to this costume include a headband, a braided raffia necklace to replace the one first given to the initiates at the outset of the initiation and two dance wands or whips peeled from the root of a specific forest tree. the headbands worn by titleholders differ in size based on the distinction of the title. (Darish 1990:181.)

6. Political authority plays a significant role in Kuba initiation. Binkley notes that there is direct connection between the political power employed by titleholders in the village and over public matters and the power they exert over the secret proceedings at men's initiations. The same people who govern the discussions and decision making at village council meetings also control secret meeting in forest during initiation. Unlike many other central African societies, the Kuba do not circumcise the initiates during the initiation ritual. The acquisition of esoteric knowledge forms the essential element of the ritual. (Binkley 1987:79.)

7. The initiation rituals among the Kuba have rarely been practiced since colonialism and aside from those occasionally held at the capital, they may only be performed in villages which pay a special tribute to the king, and these are known as royal villages. (Vansina 1955:138)

GLOSSARY

- Baan banyim*, the king's sons.
Bangweemy, type of *mbom*.
Bannumy bakum, married princes.
Basho banyim, servant
Bisha Kota, design named "back of a crocodile". (fig. 83, 84)
Buadi, Kete term for initiation.
Bwaanc, *bwaantshy* (the royal costume). (fig. 122)
Bwaantshy, royal costume. (fig. 122)
Bweemy, the heir apparent to the king.
Ibaam, a place at the south-east corner of the capital, where the new king undergoes an 'ordeal'.
Ibol, the royal symbol
Ikook imween, type of the *kwey*.
Ikuuk mayeeng, a type of wrapper.
Ikuuk mishyeeng, type of wrapper.
Ikuuk, part of a wrapper's name used when the *mbom* is the central characteristic.
Ikuukindyeeng, a woman's wrapper with a red velour centre decorated with cowries.
Ikuukkindyeeng, name of a wrapper.
Ikuukmayeeng, a type of wrapper.
Ikuukmishyeeng, name of a wrapper.
Ikuun igoong'dy, design named "chameleon's stomach". (fig 85, 86)
Ikwaak'l Woot, design named 'Festive Woot'. (fig. 93, 94)
Ikweek inweeng, design named "frog" (fig. 87, 88)
Ilaam, type of *mbom* (composed of raffia).
Imbol, motif.
Imbolo, motif.
Ishyeen, a womans' wrapper with a *mbom* composed of tree bark. (fig. 41)
Ishyeengl ingwal, the name of a costume.
Iteem ikok, design named "chicken feet". (fig. 81, 82)
Itul, a celebration.
Iyol a Nkong, a special dignitary.
Iyul, design named "turtle". (fig. 76, 77, 78)
Kikaam, highest official.
Kolm, generic term for official.
Kotilaam, checked pattern seen on *mbom*
Kumishiing, decorative use of fringes.
Kuunmbombwoosh, a headdress.
Kweemintshwey, type of decoration on a *mbom* composed of ribbon.
Kweemintshwey, little decorative pompoms.

Kweethwiin, design. (fig. 60, 61)
Kwey, the edge of the whole wrapper. (fig. 24.)
Labaam, gifts given to the deceased's clan section.
Labot lapuum, a costume. (fig. 125)
Labot latwool, red costume.
Labot lanshesh, "white" costume.
Lakiik, design named "eyebrow". (fig. 111, 112, 113)
Lansyaang lantshetsh, design named glory of lightning. (fig. 89, 90)
Lantshoong, design. (fig. 102, 103)
Lapuum, headdress.
Lashalmba,p design. (fig. 104, 105)
Latok labwaantshy, a tunic.
Lo liyoong'dy, design named "the arm of the chameleon". (fig. 114, 115, 116)
Mabiim, unit of currency composed of three hundred cowries sewn to a piece of raffia cloth.
Mabiim, ankle ornaments.
Makadi, wild palm tree.
Makash manneeemy, gloves with ivory nails and encircled with beads.
Manbonda, cultivated palm tree.
Mapel, a man's wrapper.
Mashesh'l, lateral border composed of alternating triangles.
Matoon, successors.
Matweemy mambokishet, type of lateral border with square base divided in three.
Matweemy manneeemy, shoes.
Matweemy mambokipey, type of lateral border with square base divided in two.
Matweemy, lateral borders composed of checks.
Mayeeng, type of design on a *mbom* composed of beads
Mayul, lateral borders composed of hexagons.
Mbaat lambeengymbeengy, type of *mbom*.
Mbal, raffia square.
Mbalishiin, border of a wrapper (hidden when the wrapper is draped).
Mbeengy, type of *mbom* (composed with Western fabric).
Mbish Angil, design named "back of a black monkey". (fig. 79, 80)
Mbom, central part of a wrapper.
Mbomandyeeng, type of design of a *mbom* composed of cowries.
Mbombaam, knife.
Mboom, creator of the universe.
Mbul Bwiin, design. (fig. 95, 96)
Mbup mundel, a headband.
Mbwoom ambady, lance
Mbwoong, white feather.
Miin mambyeeng, a *kwey* composed of cowries; ("the teeth of the (fish) *mbyeeng*").

Mikomingnam, design. (fig. 108, 109, 110)
Minyiing, a type of mask
Mipaang, ankle ornaments.
Mishyeeng, openwork technique named "the teeth of saw".
Misinga, strings (pattern).
Mitshwey, lateral borders of a wrapper.
Mmon, finishing border of a wrapper (also called *nkol*).
Molombo, finger (pattern).
Muyuum, the holder of royal charms.
Mwaan ambul, an historic house.
Mwaan Mwikaangle, design. (fig. 119, 120, 121)
Mwaandaan, a belt.
Mwaanyim, children of the king.
Mween, spirits (malevolent).
Mweeny, design. (fig. 99)
Myaat mindel, metal rings (ankle ornaments).
Myeeng, design (a type of fish). (fig. 106, 107)
Ncyeeem ngesh, songs of the nature spirits.
Ndop, royal statue.
Nduun Bushoong, a royal belt.
Nduun, a type of belt.
Ndwoong akwey, type of *mbom*.
Ndwoong akwey, a type of wrapper.
Ndyeenl, large decorative poppoms.
Ngeentshy, openwork technique named "boils".
Ngesh, nature spirit.
Ngwwom incayaam, members of the crown council.
Nkaan, boy's initiation.
Nkaanyim, grandson of the king.
Nkol, finishing border of a wrapper.
Nshinintsak, design. (fig. 100, 101)
Ntshak, a woman's wrapper.
Ntshakabwiin, type of woman's wrapper.
Ntshakakot, type of woman's wrapper with an edging bound over a rattan stick.
 (fig. 39, 40)
Ntshakampap'l, type of woman's wrapper.
Ntshakandyeeng, a woman's wrapper with a red velvet centre decorated with cowries.
Ntshakashoomaloong, type of *ntshakabwiin* with poppom ribbons as the design.
Ntshakiswepy, type of woman's wrapper.
Ntshuum anyim, a motif.
Ntshuum anyim, a headdress
Ntshuum a nyim, design. (fig. 98)
Ntshwey matweemy, name of a wrapper. (fig. 43)

Ntshwey matweemy mbokishet, name of a wrapper.

Ntshwey matweemy, type of border.

Ntshwey mumbeengy, lateral borders composed of different fabrics.

Ntshwey, part of a wrapper's name used when the most typical element is discerned in the border.

Ntshweykumishiing, name of a wrapper.

Ntshweymashesh'l, name of a wrapper.

Ntshweymumbeengy, name of a of a wrapper.

Ntshweyumbeengy, name of a wrapper.

Ntshyeemy, insects.

Nyaang, an official.

Nyibiim, royal tailor.

Nyim, king, head chief.

Nyimbal'k, official in charge of judging cases that are the result of minor accidents.

Nyimbatudy, the king's ironsmith.

Nyimshoong, an official.

Paam, see chapter five, footnote # 4.

Shyaan, ankle ornaments.

Tukula, camwood.

Twool apwoong, design named "eagle breast". (fig. 117, 188)

Woot, the founding ancestor of the Kuba.

Yeemy, a belt.

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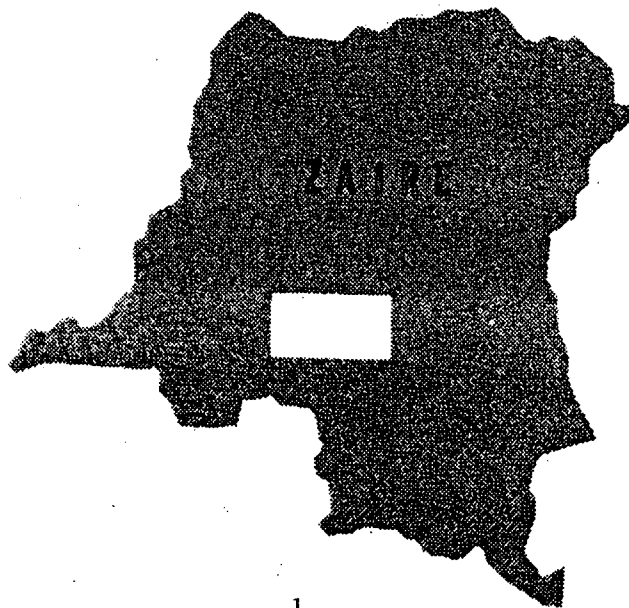
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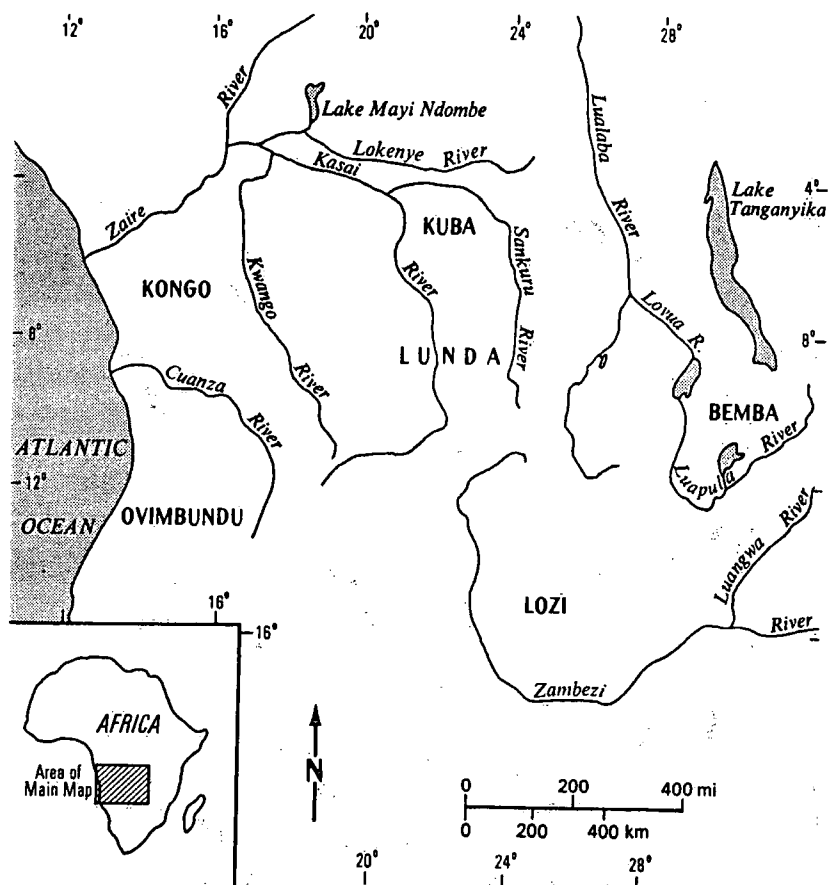
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ILLUSTRATIONS



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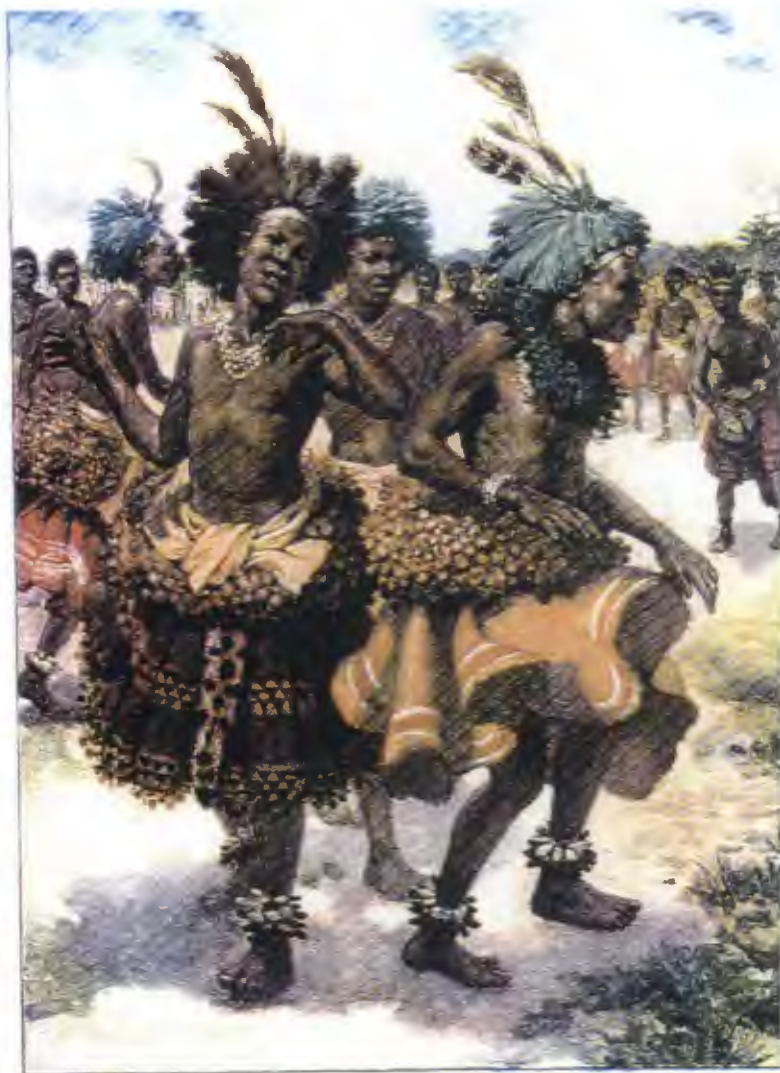
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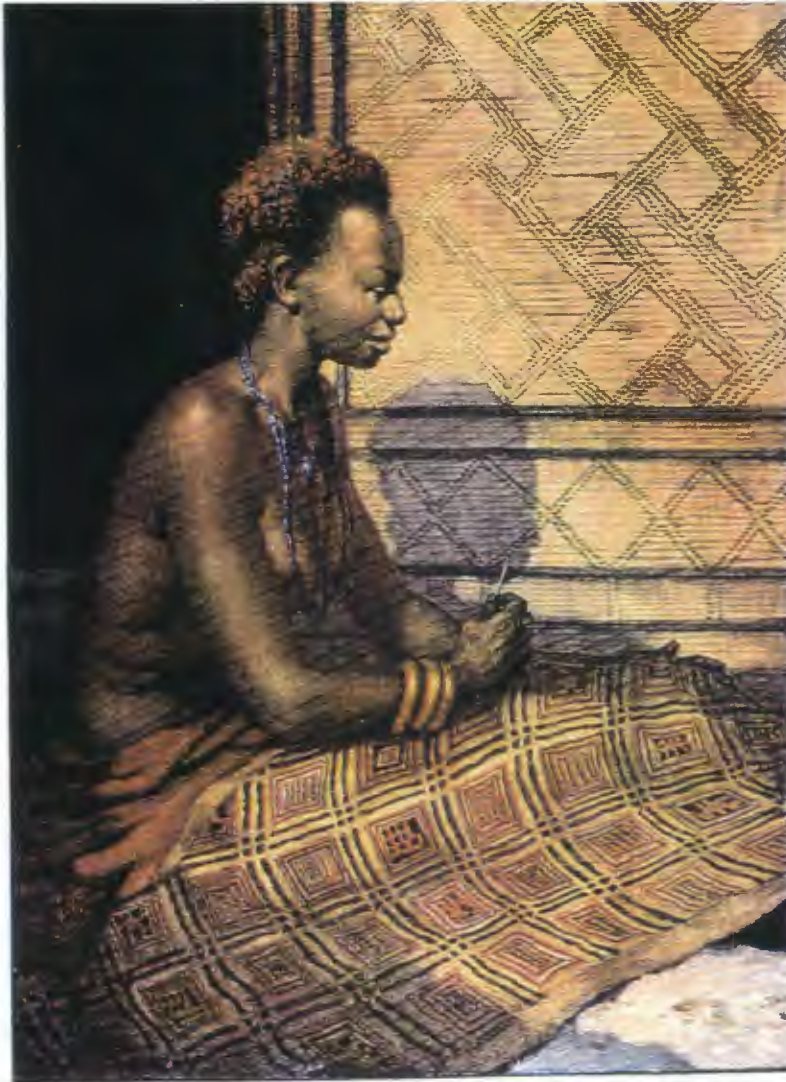
























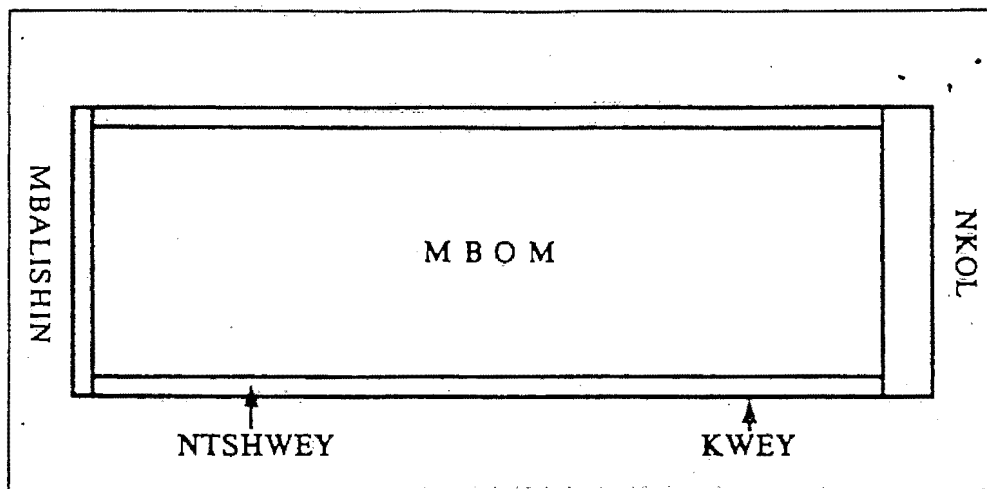


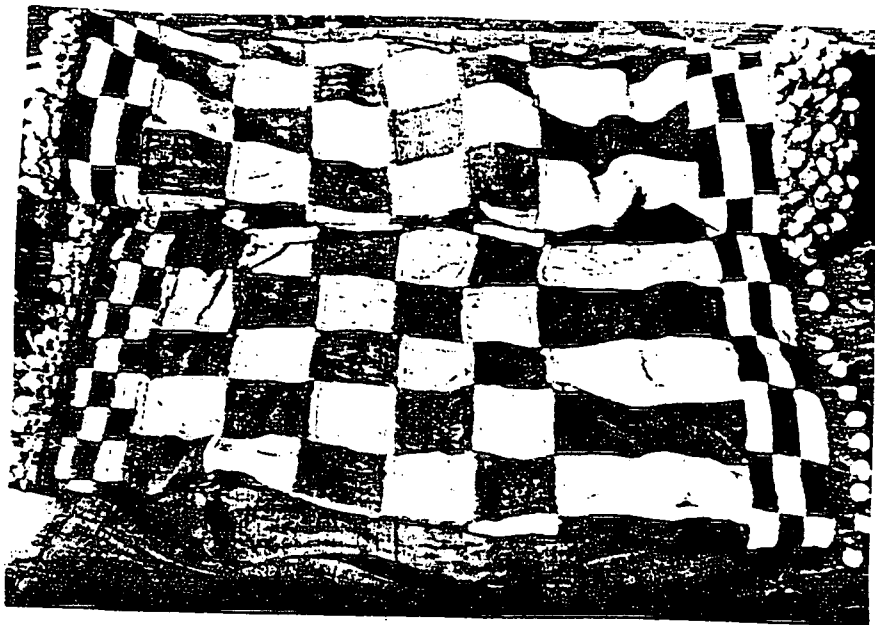




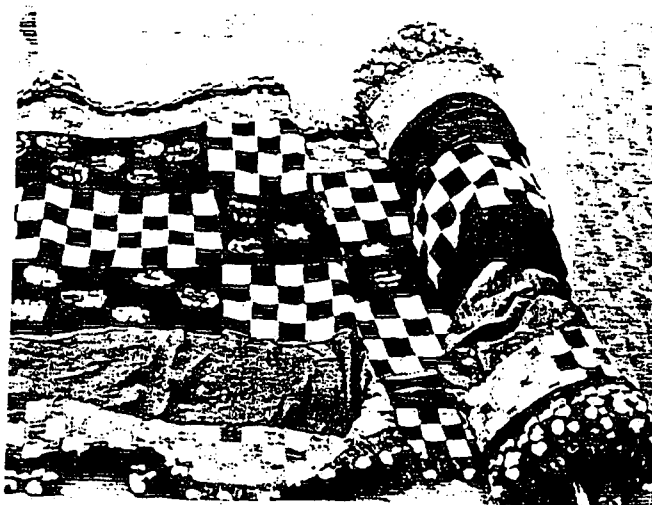








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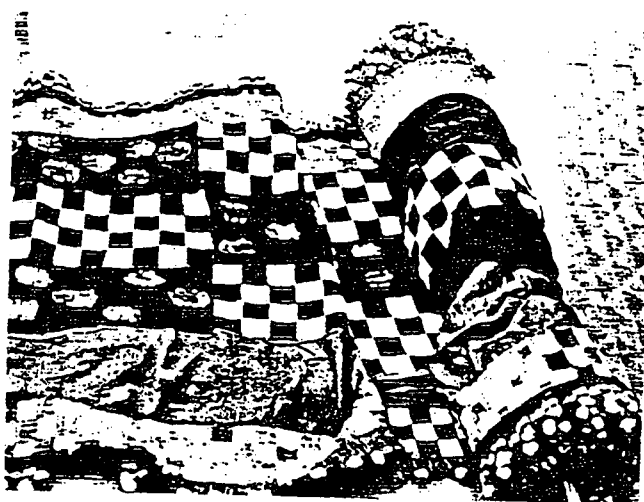


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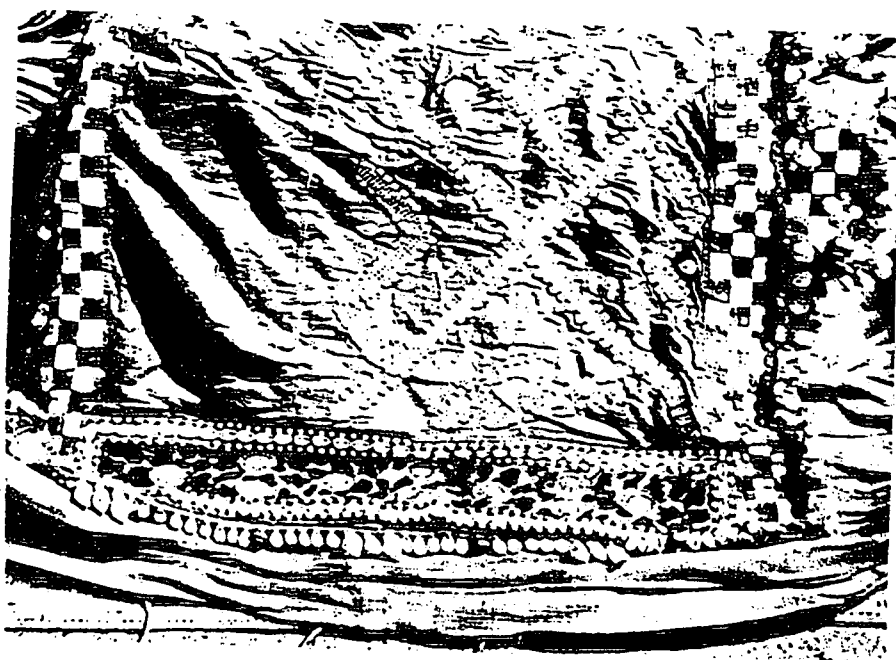




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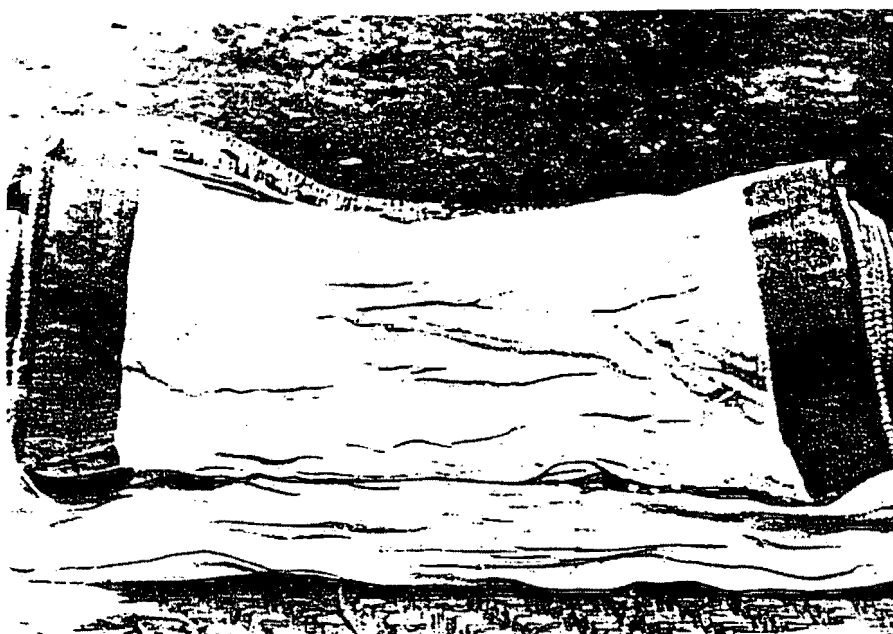
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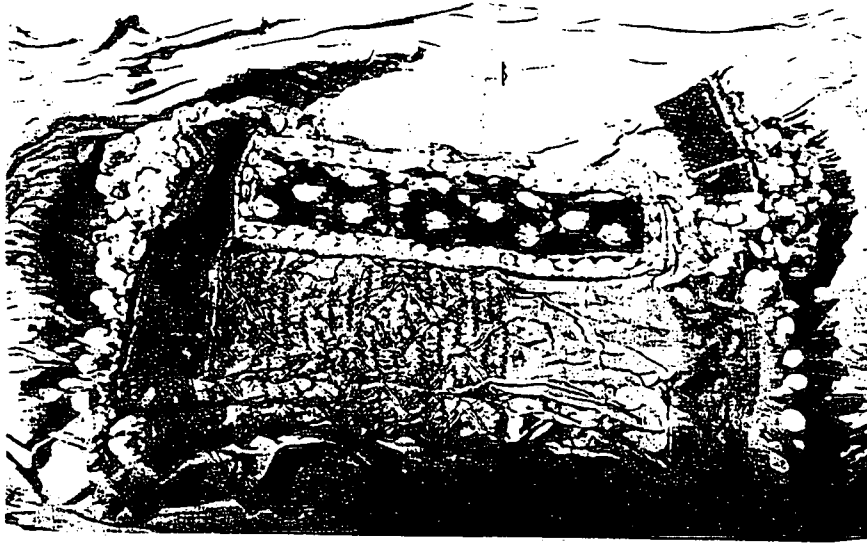
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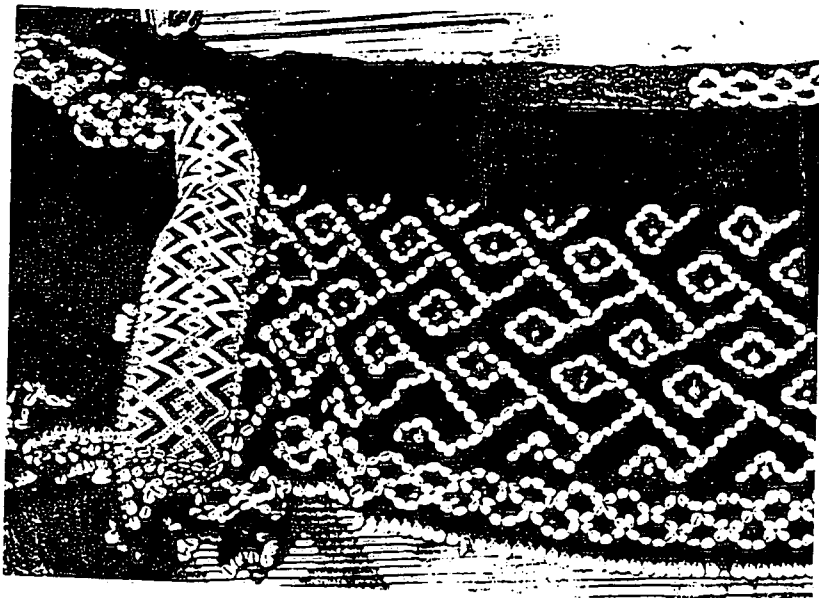
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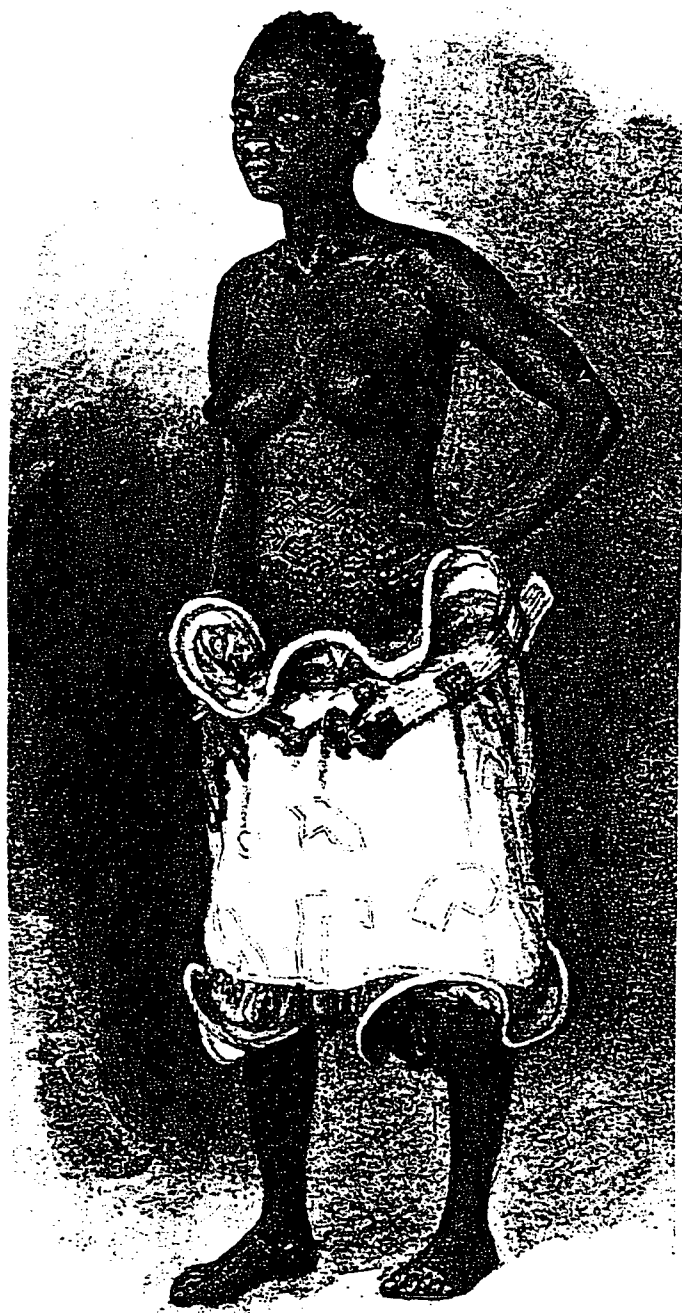
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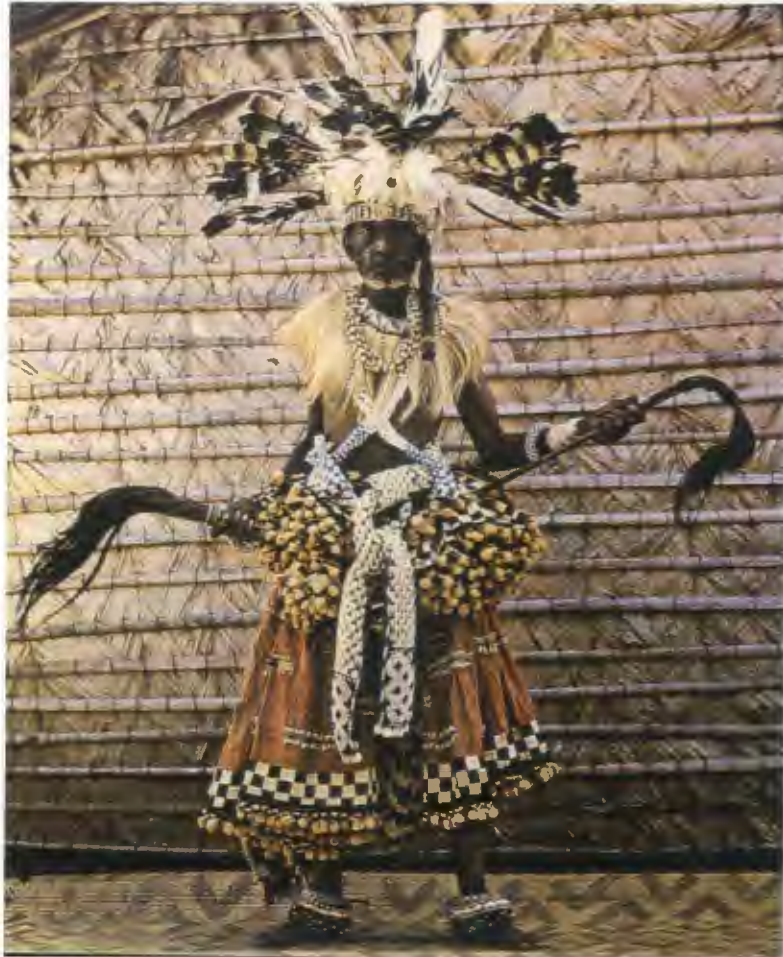






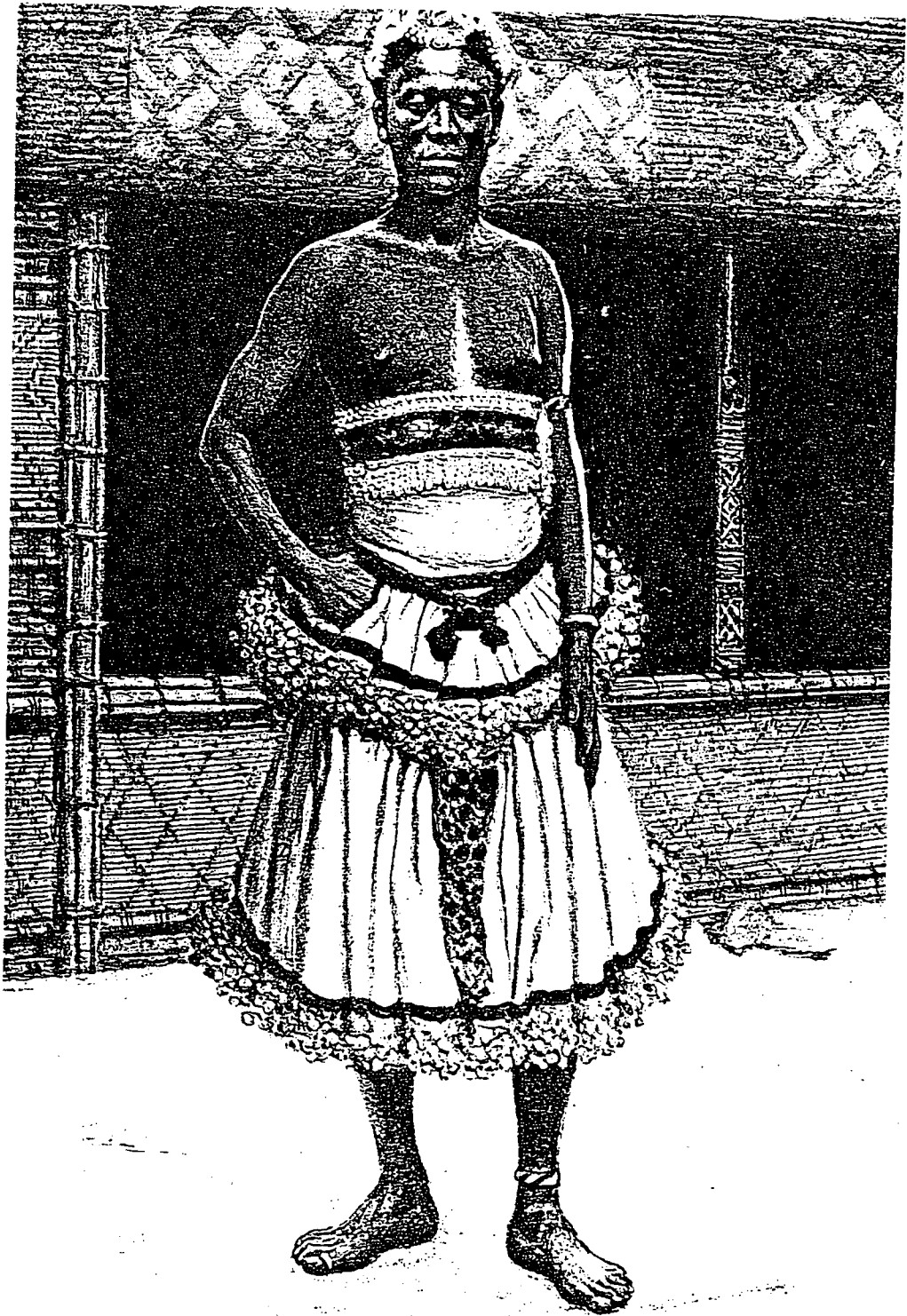
















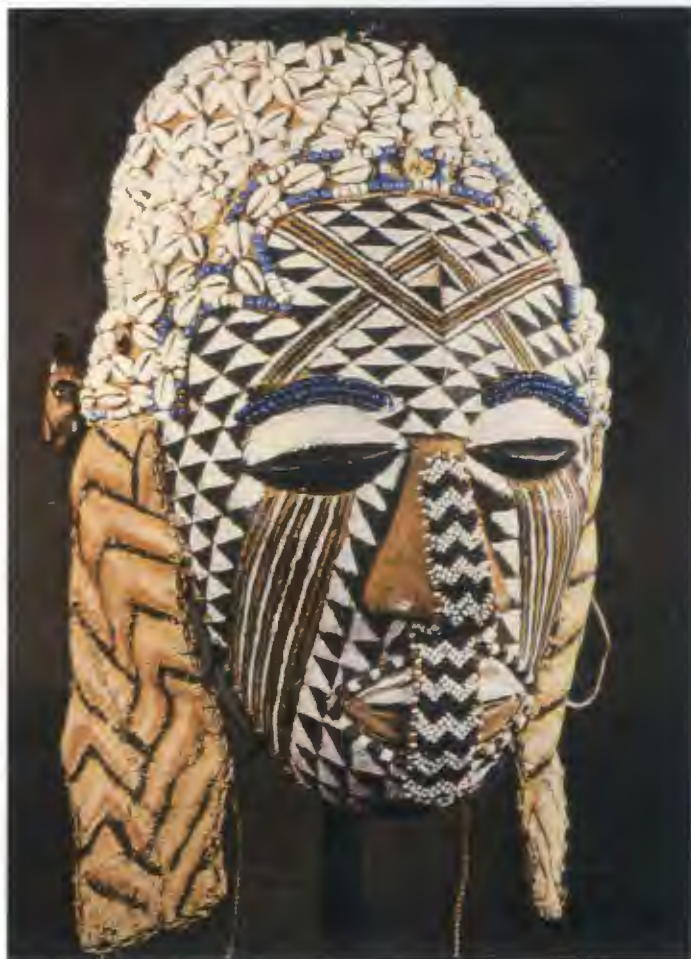


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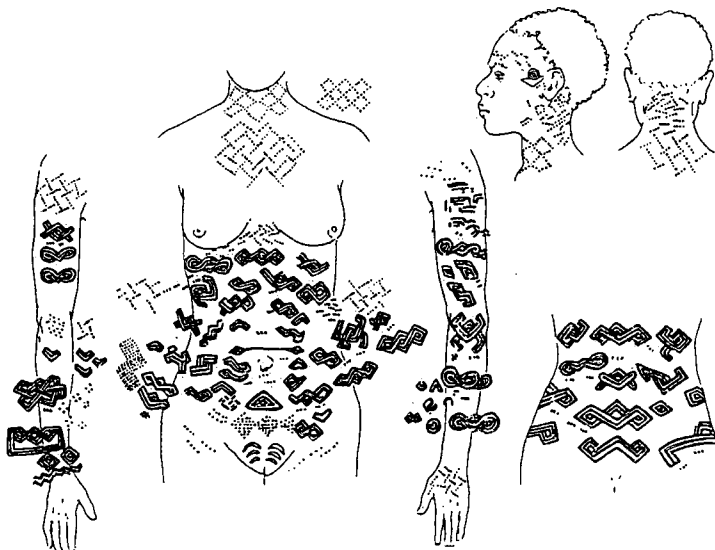


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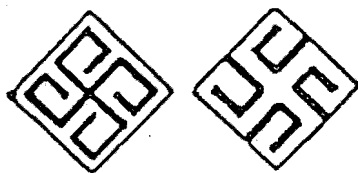




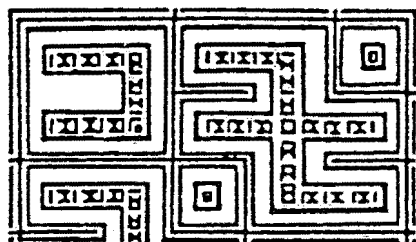
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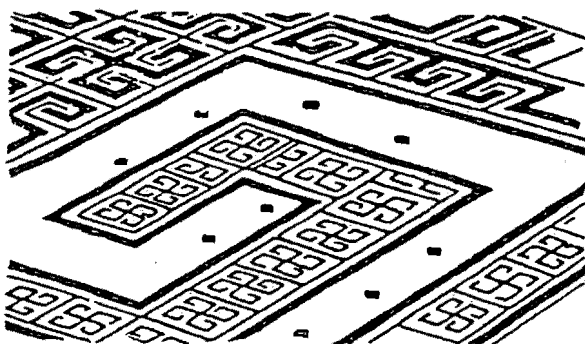
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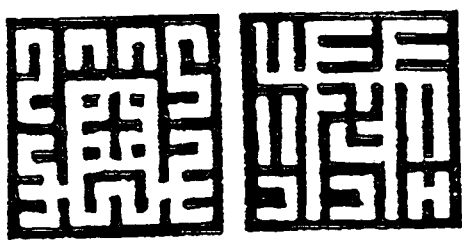
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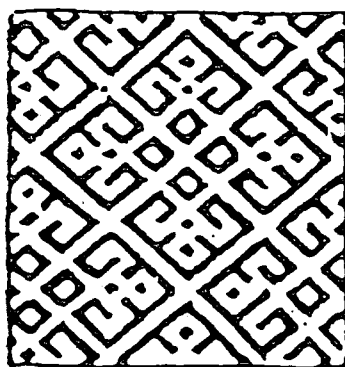
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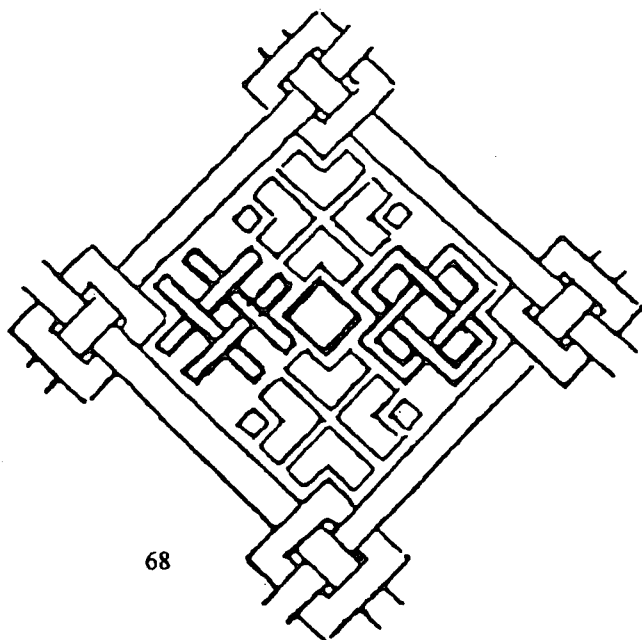
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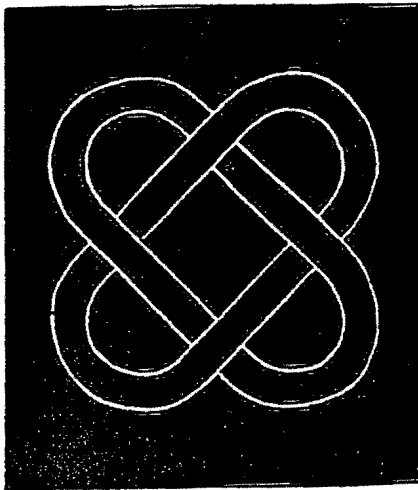


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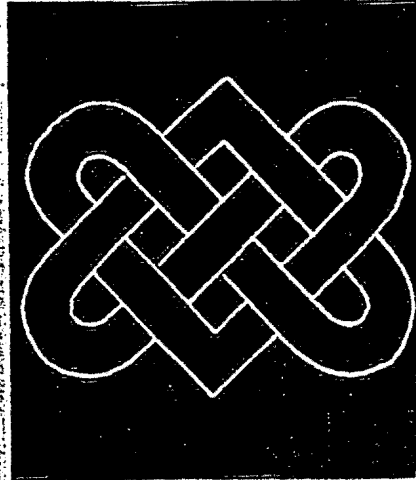


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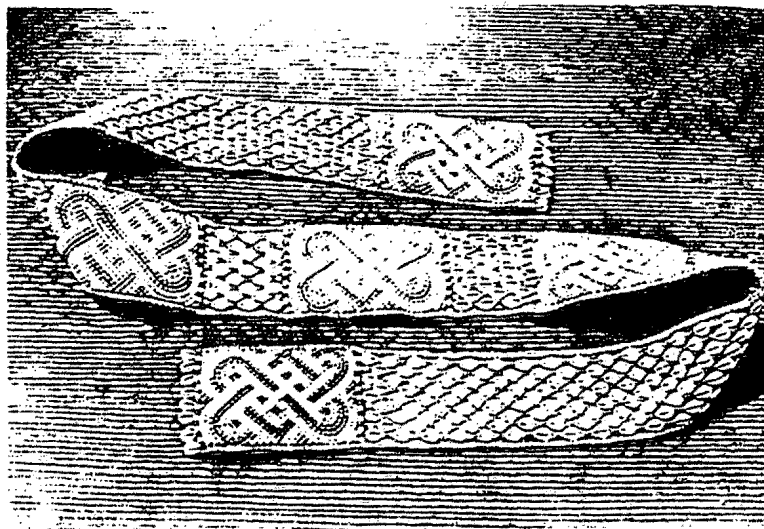
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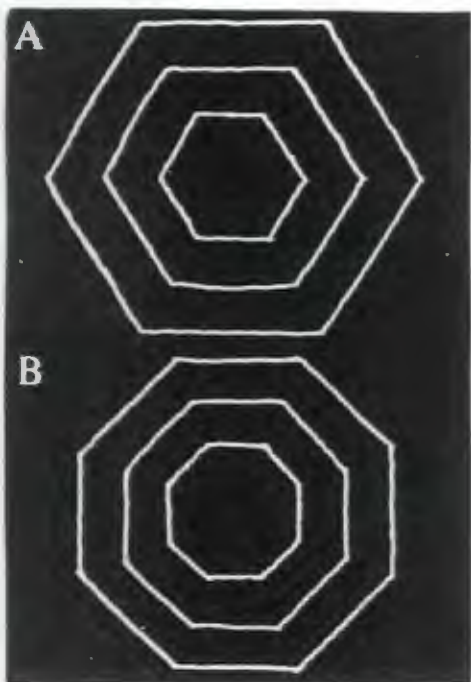
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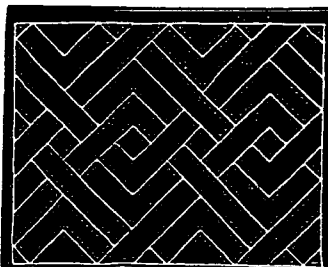
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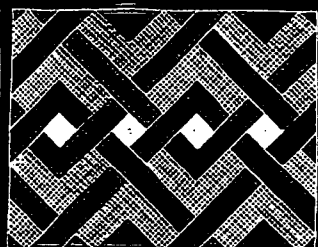
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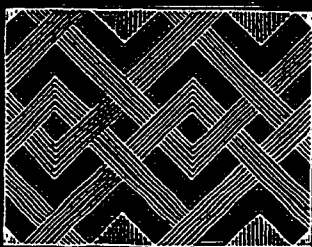
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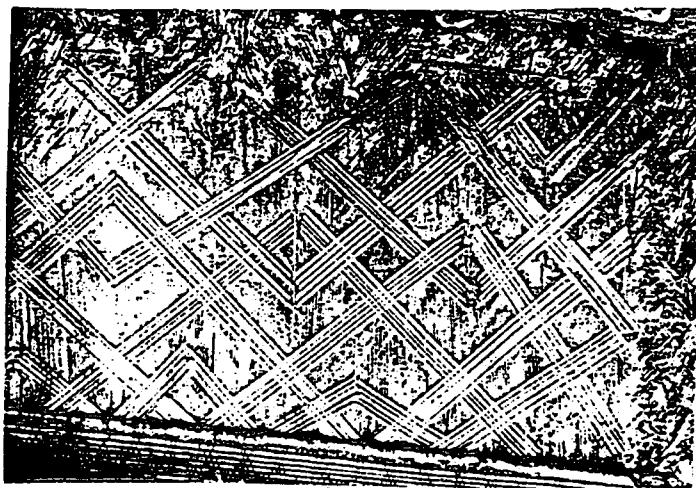
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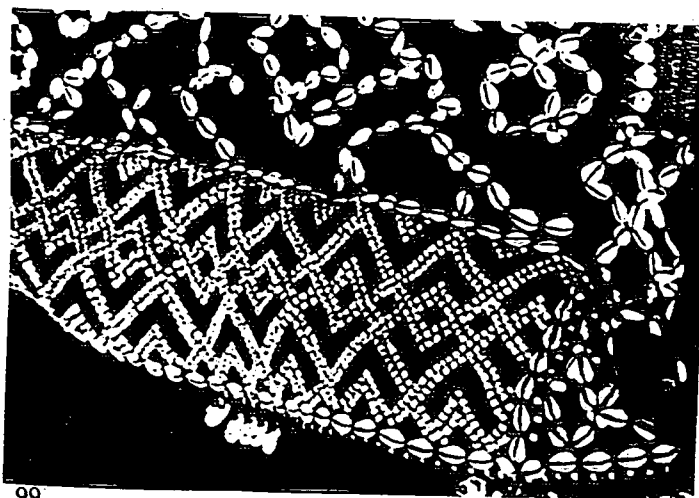
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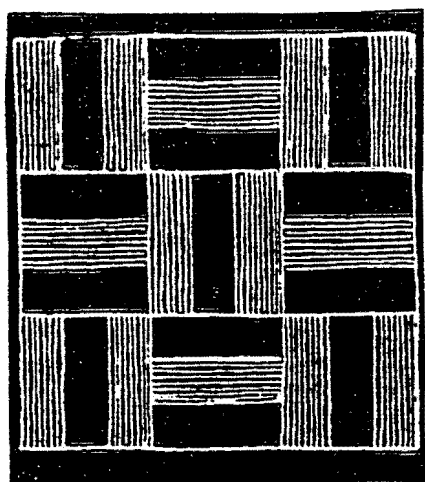
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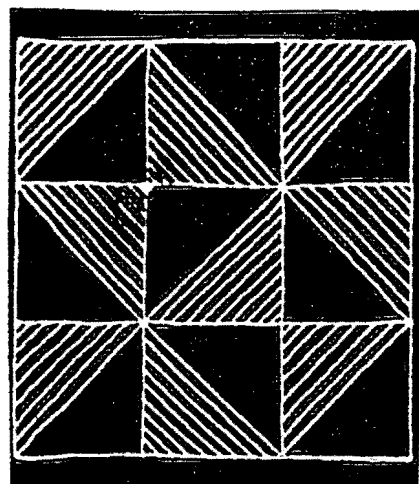
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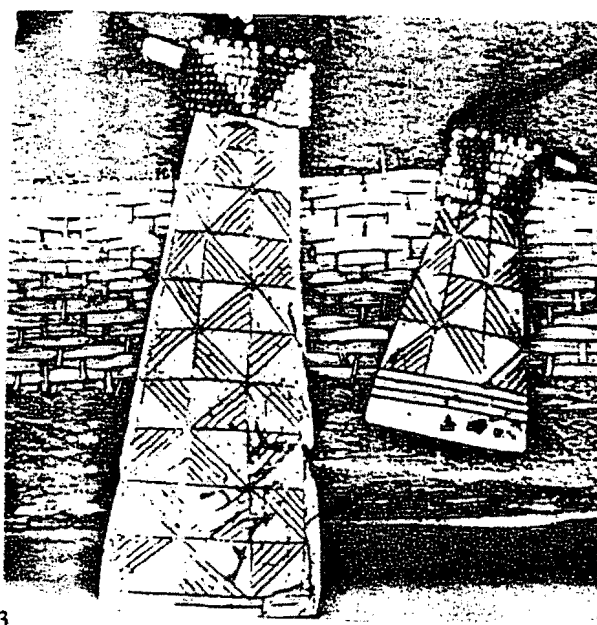
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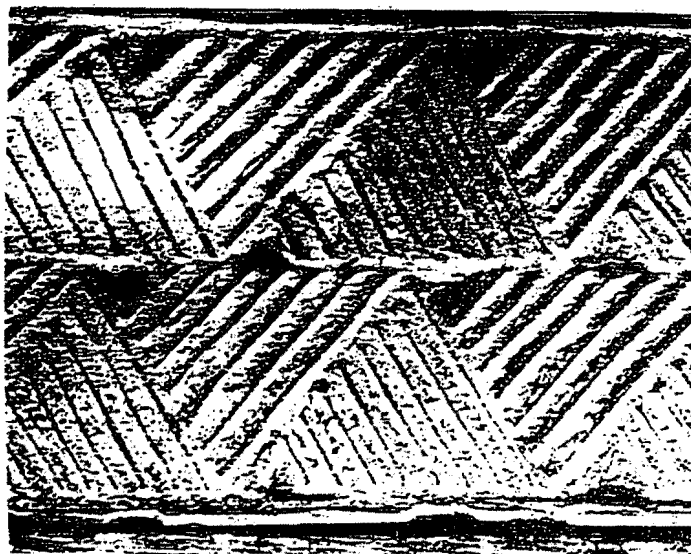
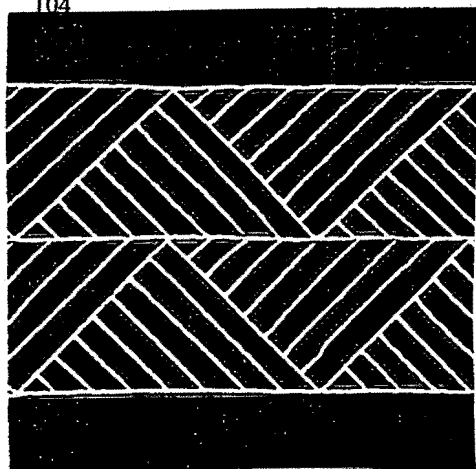
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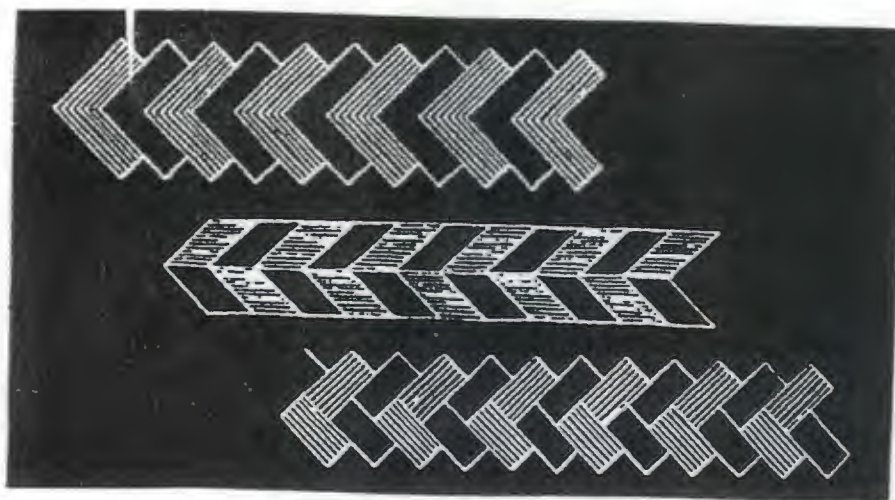


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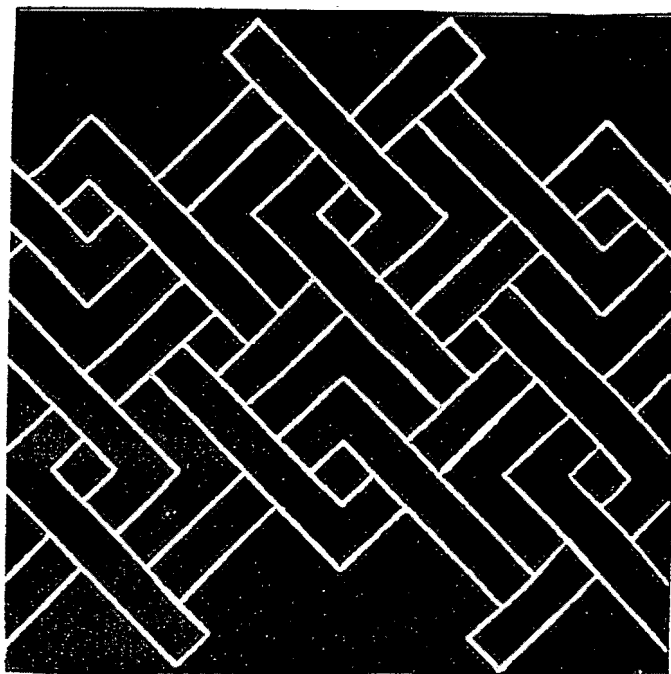




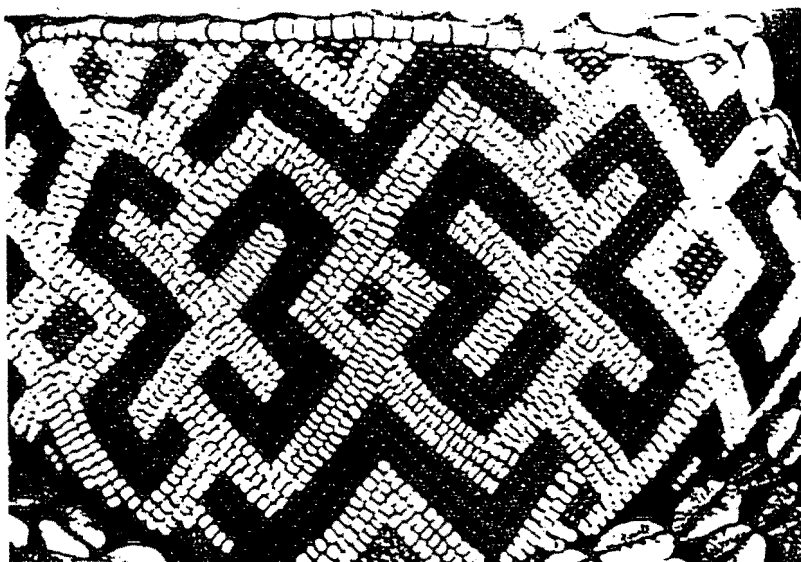
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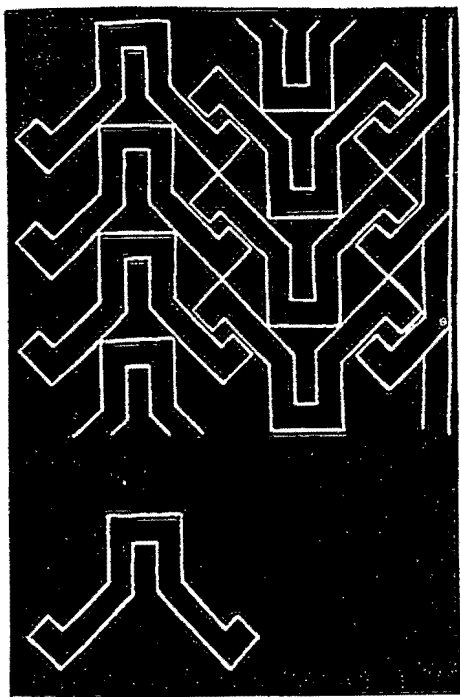
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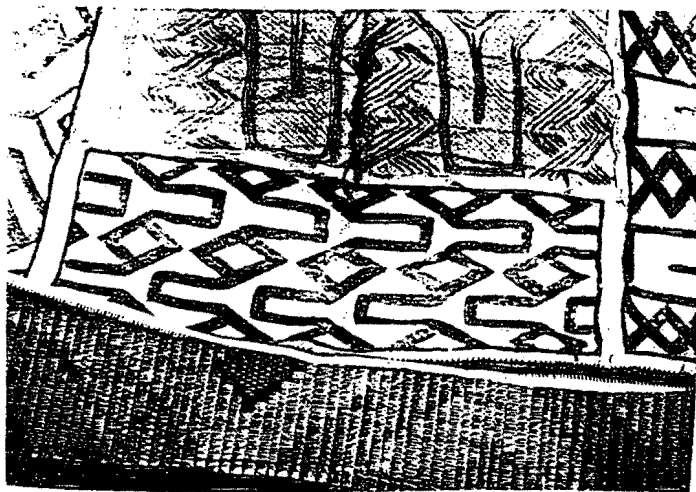
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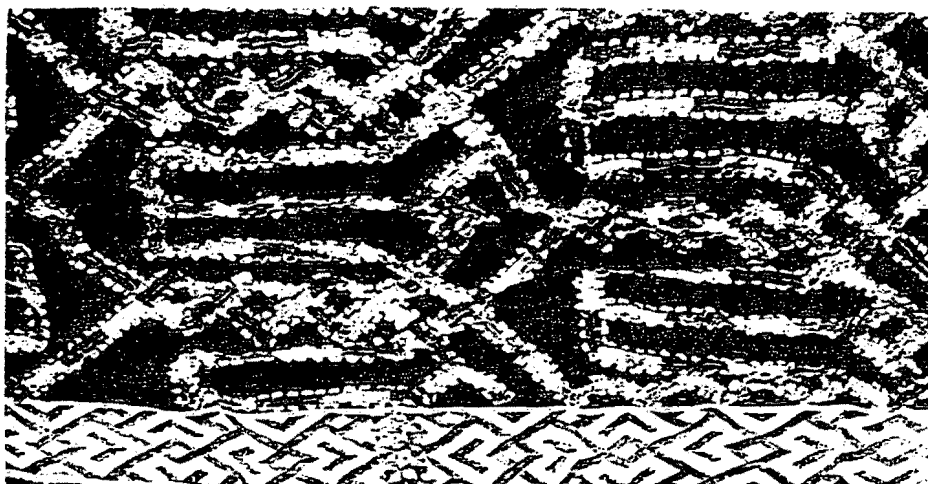
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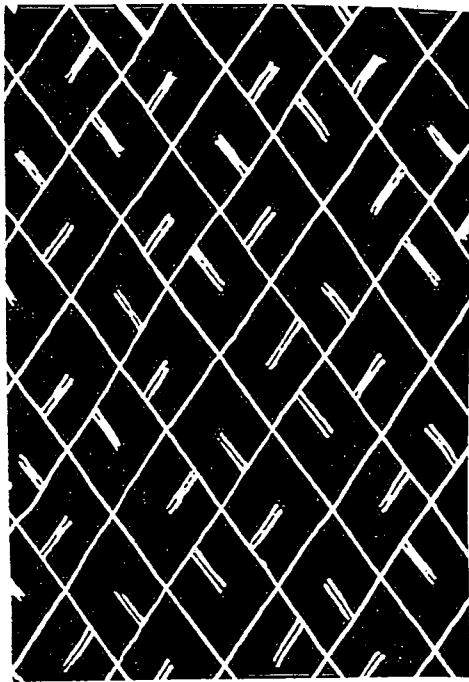
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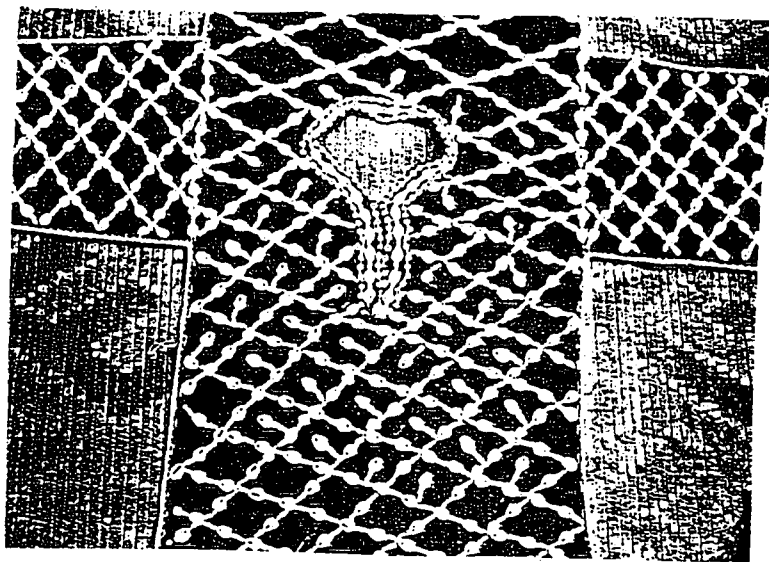
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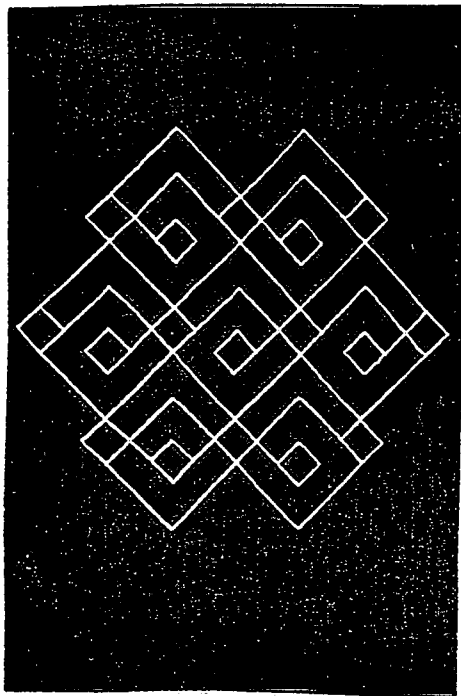
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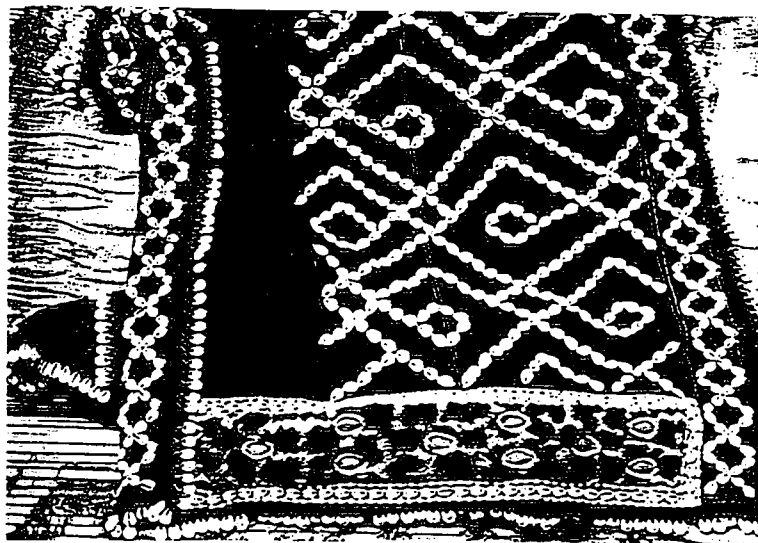
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