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KUBA EMBROIDERED CLOTH

MONNI ADAMS

The breezes I felt while traveling up the Kasai River in central Africa gave me a historical shiver, as I thought of Bateman's adventurous first ascent of the Kasai in 1889 and Hilton-Simpson's difficulties in 1905 with the wood-burning steamer in which he accompanied Emil Torday on the now-famous British Museum expedition to the Kuba kingdom. Although my voyage on the Kasai lasted only an uneventful half-hour while our party and jeep were hauled up the river in a motorized raft to a landing site on the other side, I too was on my way to Kubaland to fulfill a long-held dream of walking in the streets of Mushenge, the fabled royal capital. I was inspired by Torday's admiring descriptions, by Jan Vansina's careful study of Kuba institutions in the 1950s, and most intensely by the beautiful textiles that were produced in this area.

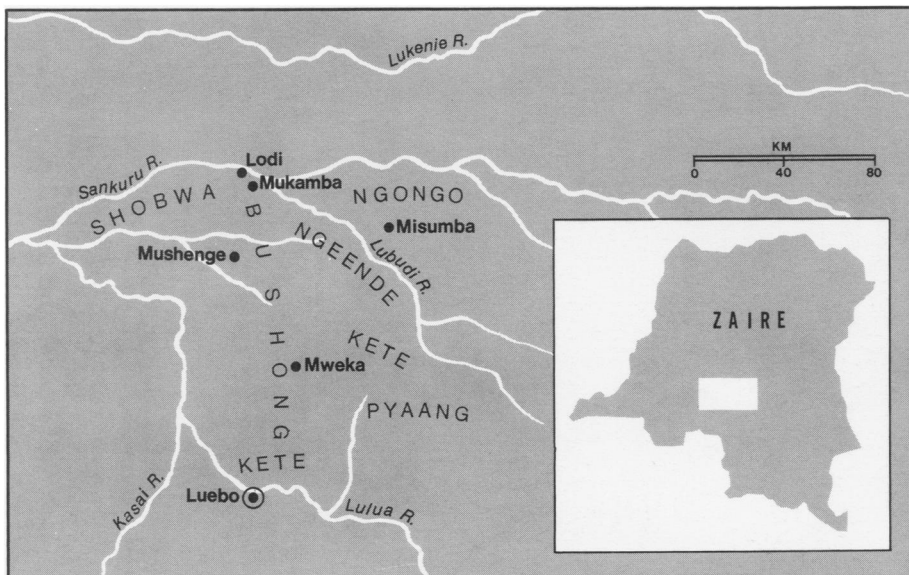
The multi-ethnic Kuba kingdom, probably organized in the early seventeenth century, is set in a fertile area of central Zaire between the Kasai and Sankuru rivers. The various peoples who live within and near this kingdom display an unusual range of artistic expression that includes varieties of poetry, abundant and skillful carvings, and spectacular costumes worn by men and women on special occasions. Kuba

textiles used as costume stand out from all others in Zaire in their elaboration and complexity of design. In terms of surface decoration, the most outstanding are rectangular or square pieces of woven palm-leaf fiber enhanced by geometric designs executed in linear embroidery and other stitches, which are cut to form pile surfaces resembling velvet. Only women can turn a simple raffia cloth into a valued plush, often referred to as "Kasai velvets." These decorated panels, some dyed in soft, rich colors, are not only beautiful but they also reflect something significant about African aesthetics.

One of the liberating and enriching lessons of modern art is that the artist does not have to be tied to measure, to regularities, to conformity either to the rules of the past or to fixed units. Although art historians often acknowledge the influence of African sculpture on modern artists, little attention is given to the possible influence of African two-dimensional design on Euro-American taste. For the most part, in our textile tradition we expect regular repetition of design units. However, in the past generation, a slow change has been taking place, evident in the introduction of varying designs in one piece of cloth, the juxtaposition of different design units in

one garment. The change opens the way to greater appreciation of African design and of African craftspersons who have for so long practiced this approach to composition. Fortunately we have a very large corpus of work from one of the richest textile traditions in Africa, that from the Kasai-Sankuru region, which can be used to demonstrate the aesthetic preferences of the Kuba in a solid fashion. From studying splendid exemplars in museums, I began to understand what I now consider to be a fundamental feature of African preferences in design: within any entity, the Africans show a taste for interrupting the expected line; they compose through juxtapositions of sharply differing units, through abrupt shifts of form.

In earlier times, this difference from our taste led to a denigration of, a certain condescension toward, African design. The craftspersons' skills—"the clever hands"—were admired, but the odd shapes and irregularities of pattern were greeted with bemused tolerance and were attributed to the whimsicality of "folk" culture, the spontaneity of native inspiration, or the casual, episodic nature of artisans' attention to their work. Today we are better able to appreciate the African approach to numeration, mathematical play, and geometric form and pattern. The work of Claudia Zaslavsky (1973) has called our attention to the measuring and counting systems of Africa. Mathematician Donald Crowe (1971, 1973, 1975) has analyzed, in particular, the two-dimensional designs of Benin, Yoruba and Kuba arts and has shown the extent of the Africans' explorations into the formal possibilities of geometric variation. In their art, the Kuba have developed all the geometric possibilities of repetitive variations of border patterns, and of the seventeen ways that a design can be repetitively varied on a surface, the Kuba have



1. EMBROIDERED RAFFIA-CLOTH PANEL DECORATED WITH LINEAR STITCHING AND PLUSH (CUT-PILE) IN BLACK AND NATURAL-COLORED RAFFIA. ATTRIBUTED TO THE SHOBWA. THE YELLOW TONE OVER MOST OF THE SURFACE DERIVES FROM RUBBING IN THE DYE AFTER DECORATION. COLLECTED BY LT. G. MACKENZIE IN THE EARLY 20th CENTURY. 66 x 39cm. PEABODY MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY (PMAE), HARVARD. 17-41-50/B2048.



exploited twelve. This exploration does not mean that they confine themselves to repetitive patterning in confronting a surface to be decorated.¹

The character of Kuba design accords with Robert Thompson's observation that some African music and art forms are enlivened by off-beat phrasing of accents, by breaking the expected continuum of surface, by staggering and suspending the pattern (1974:10-11). In textile design, the Africans of the Kasai-Sankuru region do not project a composition as an integrated repetition of elements. Until recently, Euro-American attitudes on this point were so fixed that we called a textile design a "repeat," and expected to find a unit of identical imagery repeated over the surface. This kind of integration is not typical for African two-dimensional arts.

The example in Figure 1 illustrates this point for Kuba "velvets." Within the hemmed border, we find a tessellated composition in which the design unit varies and different images are juxtaposed. This freedom is all the more remarkable because the freehand embroidery is applied to a foundation cloth of plain weave, consisting of rigidly repetitive, right-angled crossings of two

strands. The underlying modular framework would lead one "naturally" to pursue the rhythmic pleasures of exact repetition of a single motif. The Kuba artist, however, draws on a range of other effects.

Liberties with the image unit can be accepted because there are other links that hold the surface together. African artists do use repetition and contrast, theme and variation in composition, but they disperse these principles through a wide range of sensory elements. The surface of Figure 1 exhibits constant elements: the diagonal ordering of the designs; the rectangular shapes of the individual units, uniformly outlined in light and dark lines; the color variation and the velvety pile texture within and between rectangles. These similarities of direction, shape and texture override the sharp differences in image units and permit innumerable variations in detail. The artist has held other variations to a narrow range: the motifs are made up of only two shapes, triangles and rectangles, and only two colors, black and beige. However, both of these pairs are played off as intensive contrasts. Thus, sensory links are distributed over various elements of the whole and take their effect subtly, while the visual changes in image are striking. Combining several different kinds of images together, they create restless, provocative and continually interesting compositions. In fine examples this distribution of sensory correspondences yields a dynamic balance that led Torday, who paid attention to art production, to observe of the Kuba: "Their principal trait is sureness of design" (1910:209).

Other compositions illustrate the preference for changing patterns. The panel on the cover is organized by two sets of interlaced bands. But the interstitial areas contain design units that have

marked differences from one side to the other, the combination of designs counteracting the integrating dominance of the interlaces. A detail from a Kuba mask costume (Fig. 3) shows the common use of rectangular outlines, but each of the interior spaces, marked by purple stitching, is of different dimensions.

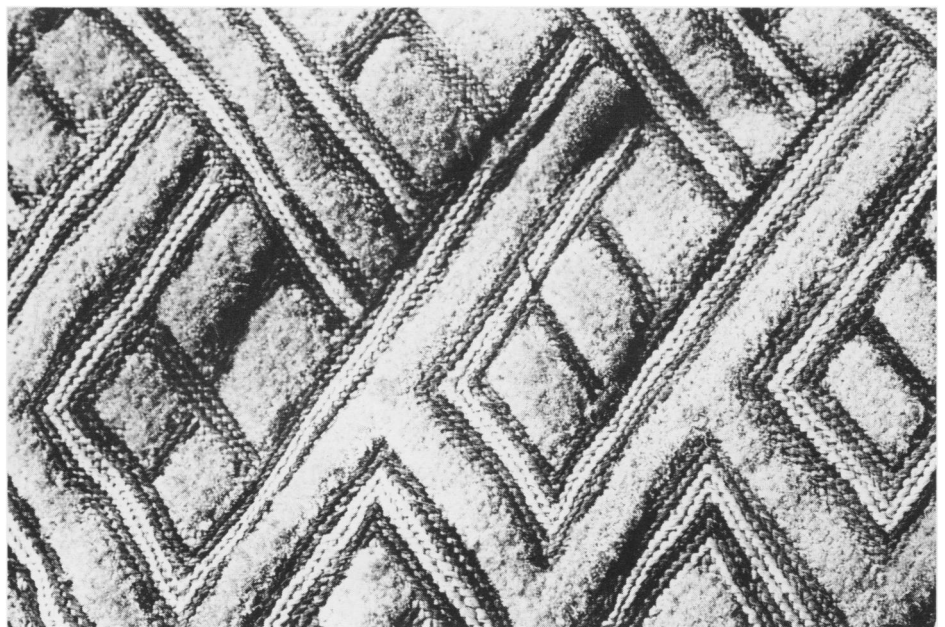
In cloths that repeat images, one is likely to find contrasts of color or technique and marked variations in detail: changes in thickness, in width and length of line, in degree of angle, in shape-and-color relationships. If a single plush image is repeated, it is likely to be an off-balance form or to be altered by color accents. Embroidered lines usually intrude on the continuity and break up the surface into sections. The mixture of plush and stitches on a panel, the irregular interpenetration of design lines, and the shifting placement of color accents upset another deeply held expectation of Euro-American aesthetics that designs will have a figure-against-ground relationship.

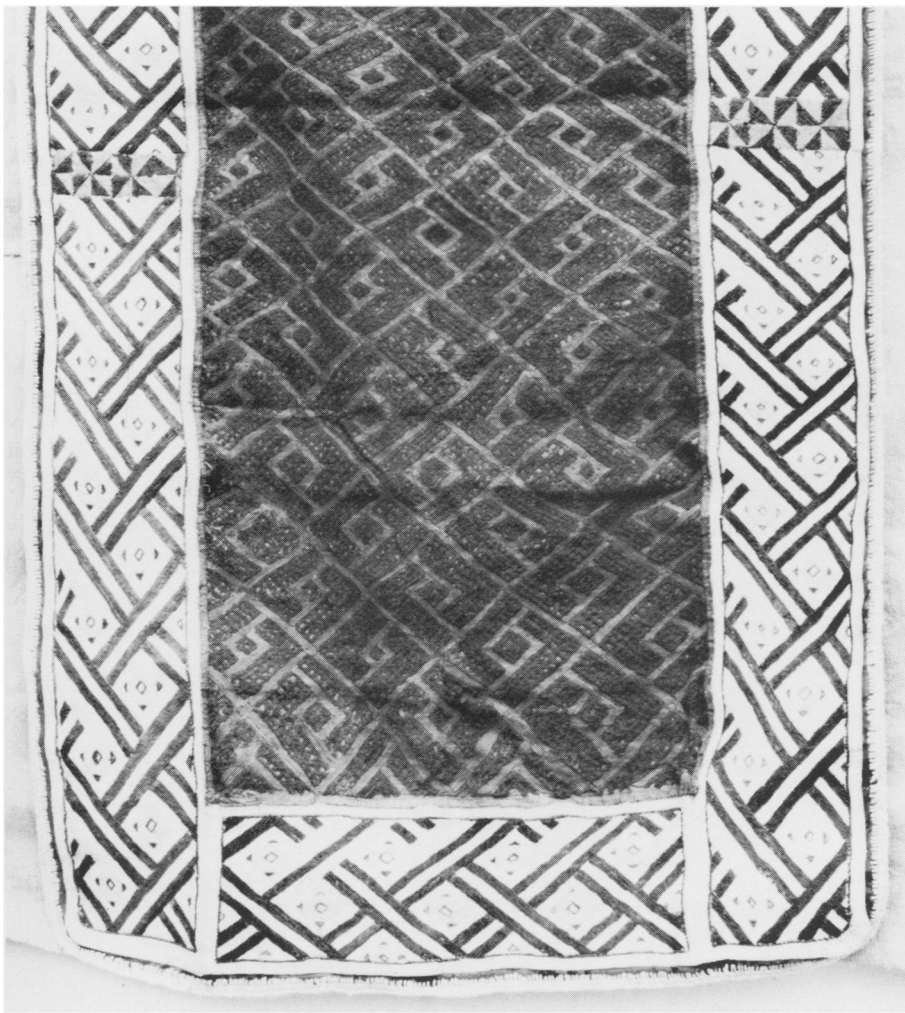
Because of these formulas of variance, it is difficult to neatly label individual designs or to name cloths by their design units. But it is helpful to distinguish large groupings by employing two other visual criteria: one is the arrangement of designs as diagonal (Fig. 1) or parallel (Fig. 7) to the edges of the cloth (we will find that the diagonal arrangement predominates), and the other is the relationship of design units to each other. Some lie flat, as either isolated units or linked as in a network (Fig. 27). Others appear plaited; the design elements seem to move over and under each other (Fig. 24).

In Torday's time (1907-08), the Bushong, who were the ruling ethnic group in the central Kasai-Sankuru region, were noted for their excellent embroideries and plush cloths. Their gar-



2. DETAIL OF A LONG NARROW PANEL MADE UP OF TWO CLOTHS OF UNEVEN ROSE GROUND WITH VARI-COLORED PLUSH AND THICK EMBROIDERED LINES. EARLY 20th CENTURY. 129 x 34cm. PMAE 17-41-50/B2005. RIGHT: 3. DETAIL FROM A MASK COSTUME. INSTITUT DES MUSEES NATIONAUX DU ZAIRE (IMNZ) 73.531.1.





4. TYPICAL BUSHONG CEREMONIAL SKIRT SHOWING "STONES" DESIGNS IN CENTRAL PANEL. IMNZ 73.608.21.

ments tended to show less range in color than those of the northern groups he visited. "They excel in making velours but their garments gain their effect more by perfection of stitching than by color," Torday observed (1910:190). These velour garments combine stitched lines with plush effects (Fig. 4). The central panels of the ceremonial skirts, usually all beige or all red in color, show the most regular arrangement of designs, but the border that is added to form a wraparound skirt provides an arresting contrast with the centerfield in both design and color. The border design itself may be interrupted by a sudden shift of pattern and color. Perhaps this type of colored section was first introduced to strengthen joints in the border; however, it occurs frequently where there are no seams. When we see the corpus of Kuba textiles, we know these craftspersons explored the links and discontinuities to a remarkable degree.

These richly ornamented textiles are represented in many museums in the United States and are included in very early collections.² The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (PMAE) at Harvard University possesses several pieces of plush (PMAE accession nos. 64-47, 65-3) of Kuba style dating from

1890 to 1893, obtained by a missionary who lived during that time at Kinshasa, and two other pieces collected by one of Henry Morton Stanley's American officers in the former Congo Free State, probably in the early twentieth century (Fig. 6). About fifty other works (PMAE 17-41) date from a pre-World War I collection of Lieutenant G. Mackenzie, who was stationed mainly in the Kasai-Sankuru region for the Congo Free State, and therefore prior to 1910, the terminal date of the Congo Free State (Figs. 2, 5, 7, 8). These early cloths show close similarities in design, composition and technique to textiles collected later in the twentieth century by the Musée du Congo Belge, now the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC) at Tervuren, and to examples at Zaire's Institut des Musées Nationaux in Kinshasa (IMNZ) which were collected in the Kuba region in the 1970s.

Most of the Kuba textiles that come to foreign markets today consist of single, fringed, square raffia panels, embroidered with an all-plush surface; they lack the alternation with stitched lines. Although enlarged and often simply repeated, the motifs are drawn from the traditional angular design inventory. According to one nursing aide formerly

at Mushenge, the Bushong capital, the mission there began even in the thirties to encourage the making of such plush cloths for sale. Shipments out of the Bushong area today are still assisted by the missions, although the occasional traveler may buy up all that is available in accessible villages.

The most spectacular use of Kuba textiles is in the costumes of which Torday made a remarkable photographic record from 1907 to 1908 (1910:102-108). Historian Jan Vansina described these costumes brilliantly, referring to the Bushong king's entry onto the palace plaza with his officials to attend an *itul* festival in the 1950s: "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-colored feathers, a meter 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" (1964:124). The last great costumed ritual occurred at the installation of the present *nyimi*, or king. This event in 1969 was captured on film in a reenactment for the noted photographer Eliot Elisofon.³ Since that installation, the grand aspect of court ceremonial has declined, but recent information and photographs of events and ritual scenes in the region add to the ethnographic record and help answer some basic questions about the making and uses of Kuba cloths.

Even in everyday life, men of the ruling ethnic group, the Bushong, wore a distinctive, gathered skirt of red barkcloth or woven palm fiber. On festival days, traditionally occurring at least once a month, one saw a burst of visual variety in the costumes, and a full panoply of textile arts made its appearance.⁴ The most elaborate costume is the white outfit of the king, which he wears at its fullest only at his installation and burial (see cover of Fraser and Cole 1972; Cole 1970:no.38). In this costume he is almost covered with cowries as a sign that he is a descendant of Woot, the mythical founder of Kuba culture who

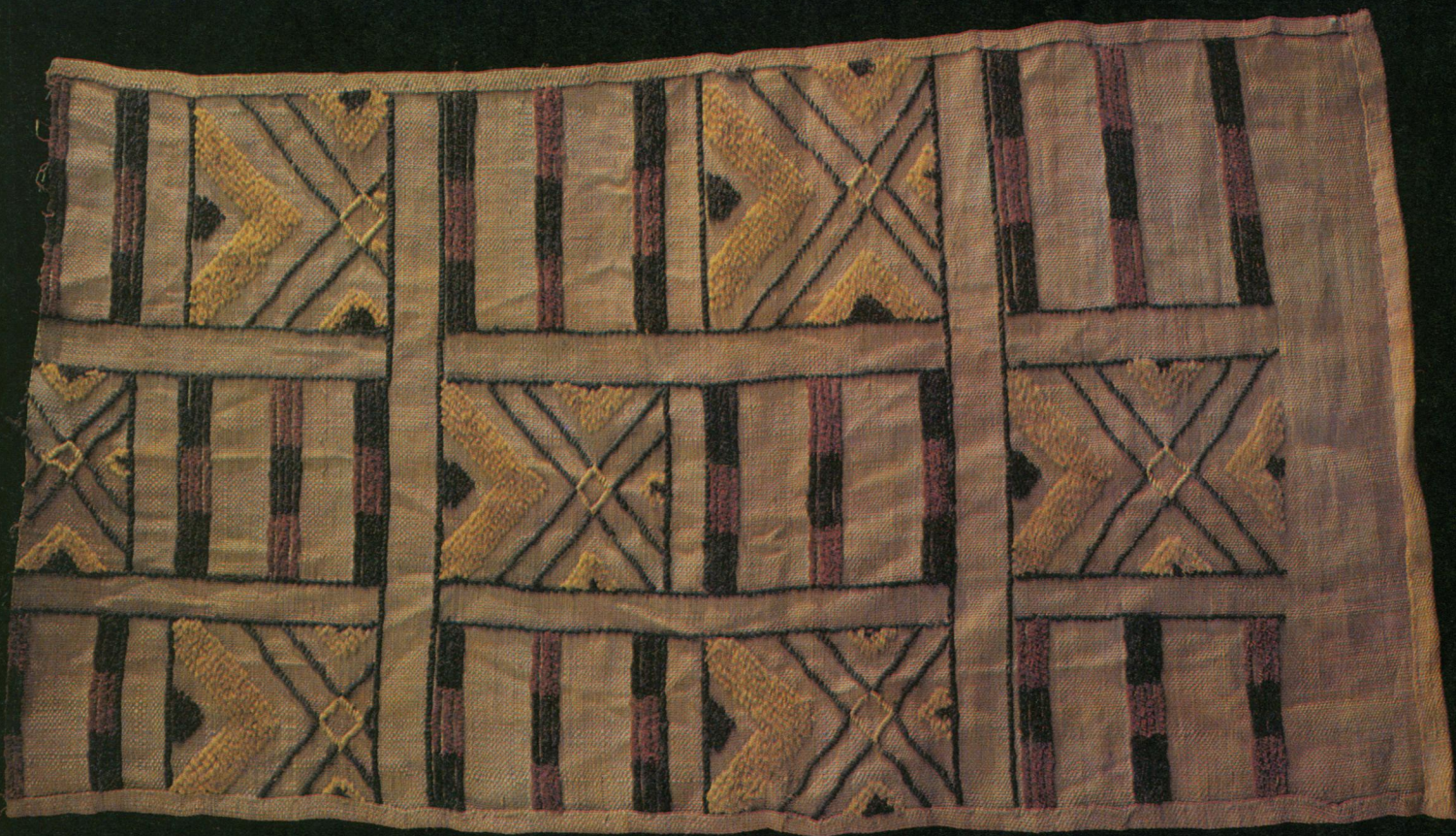
FOLLOWING TWO PAGES: 5. CLOTH WITH PURPLE GROUND, ATTRIBUTED TO THE NORTHERN KUBA REGION. EARLY 20th CENTURY. 65 x 60cm. PMAE 17-41-50/B2025. 6. KUBA-STYLE TEXTILE COLLECTED BY ONE OF HENRY MORTON STANLEY'S AMERICAN OFFICERS IN THE FORMER CONGO FREE STATE, PROBABLY EARLY 20th CENTURY. IT CONSISTS OF ONLY TWO PANELS, BUT ONE HALF IS FURTHER DIVIDED INTO SECTIONS BY EMBROIDERED LINES. WHOLE CLOTH 133.5 x 56cm. PMAE 15-28-50/B693. 7. ONE-HALF OF A CLOTH MADE UP OF TWO PANELS. IN THE STRAIGHT PLUSH LINES ONE ROW OF STITCHES FORMS TWO ROWS OF PLUSH. EARLY 20th CENTURY. 74 x 41cm. PMAE 17/41/50/B2017. 8. PURPLE CLOTH. ATTRIBUTED TO THE NORTHEASTERN KUBA REGION, PROBABLY NGONGO. 70 x 56cm. PMAE 17-41-50/B2012.



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came from the sea (Vansina 1964:109). The king and other members of the court possess several complete outfits, required for different occasions, consisting of various decorative elements and color combinations; the main textile in these costumes is the skirt.

Skirts for both men and women comprise several pieces of cloth forming a panel two to three meters in average length. Men's skirts are gathered around the hips, the upper end folding over a belt, the lower edge hanging down below the knees. Men's ceremonial skirts made of barkcloth (now largely replaced by industrial cloth), often checkered in red and white squares, display special border ornamentation consisting of small checked pieces, plush bands, fringes and tassels. Examples of these were worn by the Bushong official (Fig. 13) and the Dekese chief (Fig. 14) we met near the Lukenie River on the northern margins of the Kuba kingdom. These skirts and further special accoutrements such as caps, feathers, belts, pendants and hand-held objects publicly indicate



9. MWAMISHI BITETE, ONE OF THE WIVES OF THE FORMER KING, DRESSED IN AN EMBROIDERED AND APPLIED WRAPAROUND SKIRT AT THE *ITUL* CEREMONY. SHE HOLDS A WOODEN SWORD. MUSHENGE, NOVEMBER 1974.



10. WOMEN IN EMBROIDERED SKIRTS DANCE AT THE *ITUL* FESTIVAL. A CHORUS OF KNEELING WOMEN, ACCOMPANYING THEIR CHANTS BY POUNDING CALABASH RATTLES, ARE DRESSED IN DEEP-RED, WRAPAROUND GARMENTS. MUSHENGE, NOVEMBER 1974.

the special titles and ranks held by individual officers.

Women drape their ornamental skirts (*nshak* or *ncak*) around their bodies, the lower edges reaching below mid-calves. These wraparound skirts in white or red woven raffia fiber are covered with linear designs in black embroidered stitching, which also outlines small applied patches of cloth (Fig. 9). In some cloths these appliques are added only to cover holes resulting from pounding the fibers to make them supple (see the longer skirt on the woman on the right in Fig. 15, and Sieber 1972:159, 166). One skirt (PMAE 17-41-50/B2039) owned by the Peabody Museum shows such sparse decorative elements. More typically, however, the patches are scattered over the surface amid abundant embroidered stitchery (Fig. 9; Fig. 15, in the longer skirt on the left). These schematic shapes formed by parallel lines create a visual network of handsome effect. The arrangement of the designs shows the same preference for irregular distribution that I mentioned earlier for the plush-and-stitched designs. Over this voluminous wrap, a woman adds a smaller skirt, consisting of a central panel of embroidered black designs on raffia cloth (Figs. 10, 15) or of tiny pieces of light-and-dark barkcloth (see Sieber 1972:156), and, as on the men's skirts, a border of plush designs. This kind of skirt possesses an edging bound over a rattan stick, which is peculiarly curled, adding an element of motion to a bulky, sculptural costume.

As highly prized objects of value, these decorated cloths are used as gifts in establishing relations of reciprocity. For example, at a betrothal a youth's female relatives embroider a skirt that he has woven for the bride-to-be, and later the in-laws will benefit from the work per-

formed by the wife. Men's or women's decorated skirts serve as compensation in legal settlements, as in adultery or divorce cases (Vansina 1964:121-122, 147).

The use of decorated garments is integrally linked with public ceremonies. Kuba rituals, including masked appearances, take place in the daytime and feature dance events, festive food and drink. Formerly these festivals took place frequently, especially at the Bushong capital where a large plaza was available for gatherings, and the population lived off the liberality of the king and his tributes. Dance festivals occurred at the installation and death of an official, at the end of mourning, and any time the king ordered. In recent times, other than the installation and burial of a king, the most elaborate of these rituals has been the *itul* (Fig. 10), a festival at which royals and officials enhance their prestige, the former sponsoring theirs in the capital, the latter in the villages. Recent descriptions refer to *itul* sponsored by children of the king (Vansina 1964:122-125; Cornet 1974, 1974-75). An *itul* is expensive, and the sponsor has to pay for the costs of preparation, which formerly lasted several months.

After a number of dance events, the festival culminates during the final two days in a dance-drama, in which the display of elaborate costume is a prime marker of achievement and success. *Itul* means "striking viper" and suggests the theme of the event. The story of the dance-drama concerns a dangerous but noble animal that is terrorizing the region—it could be an eagle, crocodile, leopard or a four-footed feline called lightning (a civet cat?). The sponsor, who may be male or female, takes this threatening role. The ravaging animal is symbolically killed by other dancers, and

its skin or entrails in the form of a decorated textile is taken as a trophy to the king.

In the several scenes of this dance-drama, we recognize a routine familiar in black Africa: a mimed encounter between humans and a wild animal, a struggle and a final defeat for the animal.⁵ In the court context, this confrontation resonates as a ritual of conflict between powerful groups. In the filmed rituals of the court of Benin in Nigeria,⁶ for instance, we see a portrayal of a power conflict in a dance-battle between the hereditary nobles and the forces of the palace. In the Kuba court, however, tensions arise between the children of the king and the successors to the throne, who are not the king's children but members of his mother's line, that is, his brothers or his sisters' sons. At the 1953 *itul* scene described by Vansina (1964), that this tension over power is felt and underlies the Bushong dance-drama was made clear by the king. Following his arrival at the plaza, he rose and announced through his herald that this festival was given by his daughter Kyeen, a *mwaanyim* (the class title for the king's children), but that those who held the highest rank in the kingdom were the *matoon*, the successors. This festival then exalts the state of the king's children and that of the successors who also participate. In the mime the king's children fight against the successors and are finally vanquished by them. It also shows, as Vansina points out (1964:124), that all quarrels end before the king, master of all and arbiter between the two powerful groups of the nobility.

This festival and the two *itul* witnessed by Brother Cornet in 1974 at Mushenge were sponsored by women who were king's wives or children. However, not all possible candidates or children of the king, who has many wives, can be sponsors, but only those who win his favor and who are rich. In 1953 the cash layout for the final two days of the *itul* amounted to more than 1,000 Belgian francs (for food for the drummers, chorus and fees to the representative of the successor lineage), not an unmanageable sum in itself for Kuba royals.

Obtaining sufficient costume cloths is the significant cost, for this depends on social relations with the powerful. The sponsor must be able to give ten ceremonial skirts to the representative of the successor lineage; these are in turn partly supplied by the king and by the successors. The sponsor must buy back the cloth representing the wild animal trophy from the successor at the price requested. Each ceremonial skirt is worth about 1,000 francs, but a complication arises here. Skirts are not freely sold. Ceremonial skirts provide, in other words, a standard of value but are not a medium of market exchange. One ob-

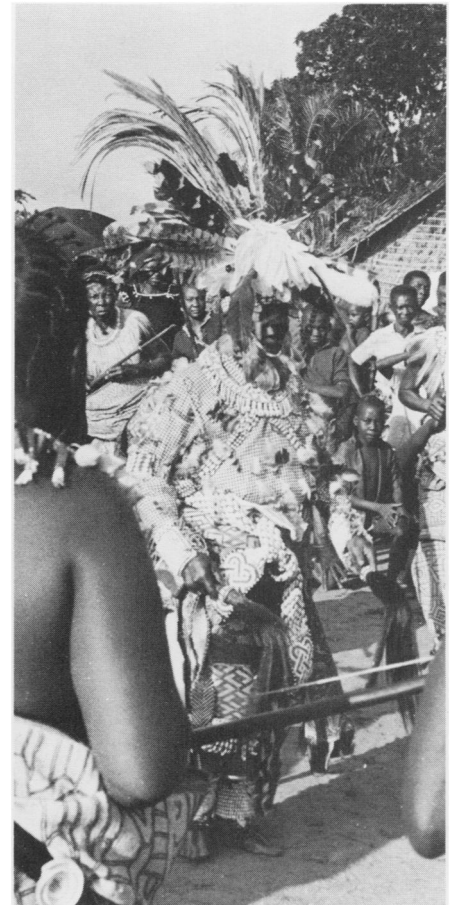
tains them only by inheritance, by making one or by receiving one in compensation. A sponsor must rely upon his good relations with his clan section, with the successors, and with the king, who has many textiles in his storehouses. Only a very rich clan section could supply three of the ten, plus enough cloths for outfitting its own members in the white and the red costumes required for the dancers during the last two days, and also dress the sponsor, who must wear a different costume for each dance and jewels of special character (Vansina 1964:125).

In the three reported *itul* rituals, the royal women who appeared as the principal figures wore costumes nearly as elaborate as the king's. Figure 12 shows the costume on the first day of the final ceremonies that the royal women sponsored at Mushenge in 1974. She wears a red embroidered skirt and cowrie-bedecked waistcloth along with a leopard-tooth necklace and feather headdress. One of the most interesting elements of her outfit is a belt of pendants that is exclusive to royalty. The pendants consist of shells or miniature imitations of various objects formed of redwood material (*tool*), encrusted and sewn with beads and shells. It includes the royal symbol, the interlace, *imbol*, familiar in textile design. Each element symbolically restates the strength and power of the king. The next day, in a costume representing a leopard, she was "killed" by feminine successors using "magic" shots from guns.⁷

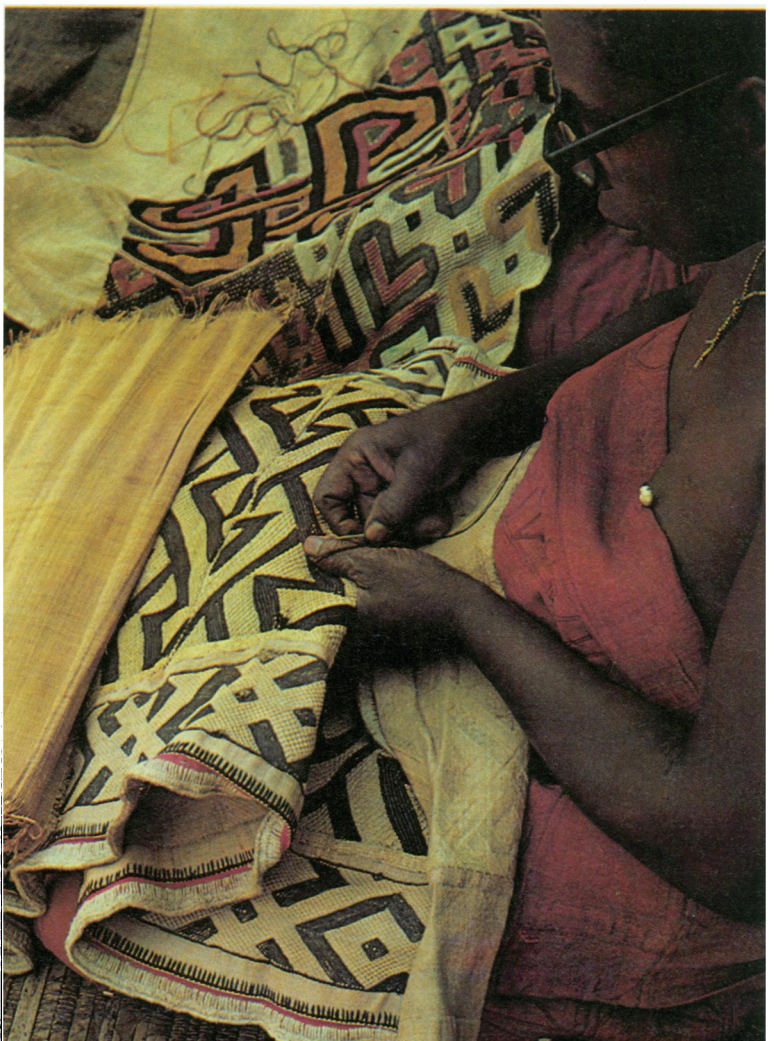
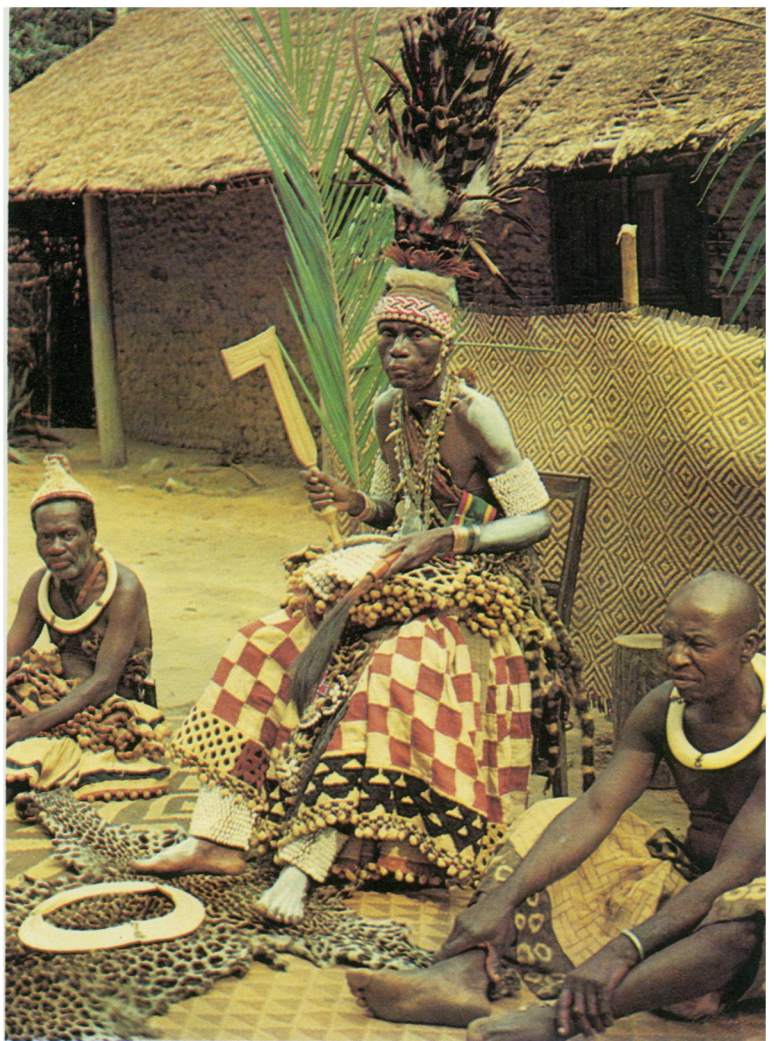
Figure 11 shows another female sponsor, the second wife of the former king,

playing the part of a ravaging bird of prey, an eagle, on the final day of an *itul* festival at Mushenge, again in late 1974 (Cornet 1974:153). She is in splendid array with painted red face and elaborate costume including a red plush skirt with a wide embroidered border. Before appearing before the king and public, she shook the supports of her shelter located across the plaza. Then she emerged to make forays against the feminine successors, who danced in a counter-clockwise circle. The sisters of the king evaded her and, armed with weapons, announced to the king that they would kill her. After several encounters they succeeded in bringing down the creature. In Vansina's account of the *itul* in 1953, the king's sister then took one of the cloths that the beast wore, which represented its entrails, showed the trophy to the king and disappeared with it (1964:125).

This brief overview of a public festival shows that plush cloth is not common even in ceremonial costume. Plush-decorated cloth appears in greatest



11. THE ROYAL FEMALE SPONSOR OF THE *ITUL* FESTIVAL, WHO PLAYS THE PART OF A RAVAGING BIRD OF PREY, AN EAGLE, ON THE FINAL DAY. THE LOWER FRONT OF HER SKIRT IS OF DEEP RED PLUSH, BORDERED BY BLACK LINEAR EMBROIDERY. MUSHENGE, DECEMBER 1974. LEFT: 12. A ROYAL WOMAN, SPONSOR OF AN *ITUL* FESTIVAL, AT THE DANCES ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE FINAL CEREMONY. SHE WEARS A DECORATED RED SKIRT, A BELT OF PENDANTS, AND COWRIE-BEDECKED WAIST CLOTH, WITH A LEOPARD-TOOTH NECKLACE AND FEATHER HEADDRESS. MUSHENGE, DECEMBER 1974.



quantity at another public ritual, the funerals of high-ranking persons. Deep-red cloths line the large coffin in which the king's body is laid, and at his feet numerous grave gifts include plush cloths. Part of his funerary decor is a plush cloth with a certain pattern, "the house of the king," which is laid on his head for four days of the lying-in-state period (Vansina 1964:112-113). According to Dr. John Todd of McGill University, Montreal, who gave a beige plush skirt (of Bushong style, PMAE 18-22-50/B2103) to the Peabody Museum, which had been obtained in 1905 in the neighborhood of the Kasai River, such cloths were not usually worn but were carefully preserved by their owners to serve as a shroud. "The bodies of wealthy men are sometimes wrapped in many yards of cloth, so that the body can only be placed in the grave by the united efforts of many men," he reported. From a functional point of view, the public piling up of highly prestigious cloths is meaningful because the status of a person is affirmed the most in the course of funerary ceremonies.

Kuba practices in the twentieth century show that plush cloth is applied differently to the costumes of men and of women. Torday reported that the skirts entirely of plush panels are worn only by women (1910:174).⁸ This association of plush skirts with formal female attire is reinforced by a 1971 photograph from Mushenge, a rare glimpse of the familiar Kuba mask representing a female, *ngaady a mwaash*, in costume. She is outfitted with a plush-and-stitched skirt (Fig. 18). The underlying garment of the male who wears the mask is in the form of a barkcloth suit with attached coverings for his hands and feet, thus disguising his human form. The suit itself is spectacular, made of an infinity of tiny pieces of barkcloth of contrasting rust, black and beige colors, interspersed with larger, orange-colored sections upon which are painted white and black linear patterns representing the figure's body scarifications. Over this suit, the masked figure wears a woman's wraparound

skirt decorated with black embroidered lines, while an outer wraparound skirt displays beige plush and linear embroidery in its central panels, which are joined to a border of strongly contrasting black embroidery in a pattern of chameleon claws. Accoutrements include plant, animal, bird and sea-creature elements.

On other mask costumes, such as the one from which the detail in Figure 3 is taken, plush is used in the form of pieces suspended from the basic costume. These pieces are oblong or trapezoidal in shape and hang from the waist as hip or thigh covers over the body suit. Small pieces of plush appear on old examples of *mokenge* masks, as covering for the base of the projecting trunk (Stritzl 1971, no.60548).

A high-ranking man dons a plush or other decorated cloth over his shoulder as a display piece (Fig. 17).⁹ Similarly plush panels are draped over stools that prominent men or women sit on. Single panels were also tucked in front and in back of costumes such as those worn in the *itul* festival. For men, the most consistent use of plush is in the form of a decorative band about 10 to 20 centimeters wide above the tasseled fringes of their ceremonial skirts. On some skirts, the pompons are attached by tiny strips that have been finished in plush (Stritzl 1971, no.79725). In these twentieth-century instances of the use of plush for men's or male masks' costumes, plush

seems to be limited to suspended sections or to trim rather than employed in the formation of garments.¹⁰

Another association of the plush garment with women is conveyed also by a legend of the origin of plush cloth, called *musese* by the Ngongo, recounted in summary form to Torday by a Ngongo ritual specialist in the northeastern section of the Kuba kingdom: "The king announced his intention of marrying and invited all young pretty girls to come dance before him on a certain day. Naturally all girls were very desirous of being chosen to become the wife of the king and they took great care to dress themselves in all they possessed of the most beautiful things. Now there was a girl named Kashashi, who was not only the most beautiful of all but also the most clever. For several weeks before the dance, she hid herself in her hut and in secret covered her skirt with the most beautiful embroidery. When the great day arrived, Samba Mikepe [the Bangongo form of the founder of the Kuba kingdom] had eyes only for her and she became his wife. It was thus that the



TOP LEFT: 13. BUSHONG OFFICIAL IN FORMAL DRESS. FEATHERED CONICAL CAP. GOAT HAIR COLLAR. WOVEN RED RAFFIA-CLOTH SKIRT WITH FRINGE. BEADED ORNAMENTS, STAFF, AND FLYWHISKS. MUSHENGE, AUGUST 1976. TOP RIGHT: 14. DEKESE CHIEF IN FORMAL PRESENTATION. HIS CHECKERED SKIRT HAS PLUSH BORDERS OF VARYING DESIGN. AUGUST 1976. BOTTOM LEFT: 15. ROYAL WOMEN IN CEREMONIAL COSTUME. THE ONLY WIFE OF THE PRESENT RITUAL KING OF THE BUSHONG STANDS AT LEFT IN OFFICIAL DRESS. IN HER SKIRT, RED TRADE CLOTH HAS REPLACED THE PLUSH PANELS. HER COMPANION AND AIDE IN CRAFTWORK IS ONE OF THE WIVES OF THE FORMER KING. SHE WEARS A LONG, SPARSELY APPLIQUED AND EMBROIDERED WRAPAROUND GARMENT UNDER A FLOUNCE-EDGED SKIRT OF LINEAR PATTERNED EMBROIDERY. BOTTOM RIGHT: 16. THE QUEEN MOTHER AT HER EMBROIDERY. SHE IS STILL WEARING THE RED CEREMONIAL WRAPAROUND GARMENT SHE DONNED FOR RECEIVING GUESTS. IT HAS A LATTICED EFFECT IN THE STITCHERY AND ELABORATE BORDERS. MUSHENGE, AUGUST 1976.



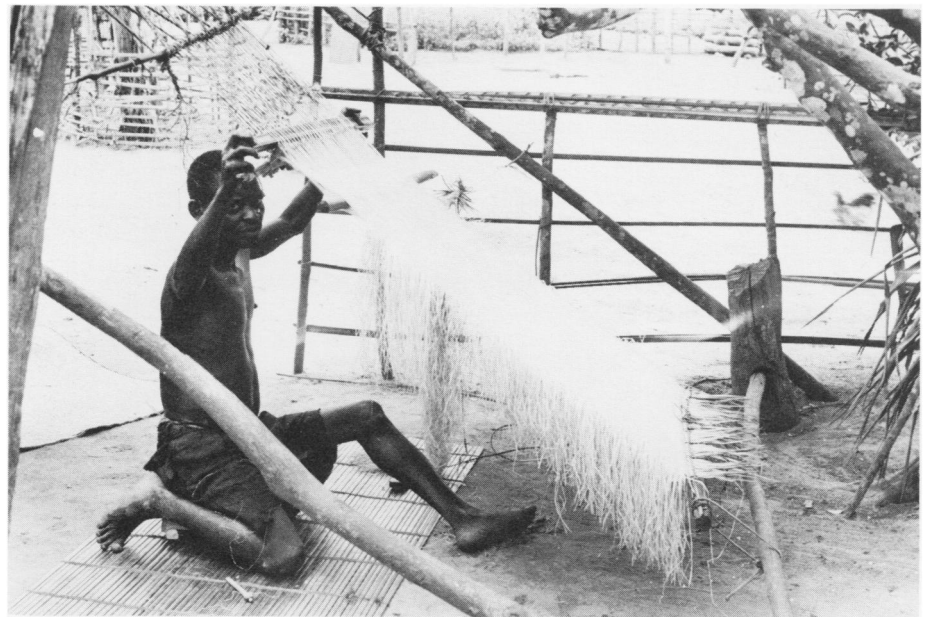
17. THE CHIEF OF A SANKURU RIVER VILLAGE IN OFFICIAL DRESS, WEARING A PLUSH CLOTH OF SHOBWA STYLE OVER ONE SHOULDER. RIGHT: 18. THE FAMILIAR KUBA *NGAADY A MWAASH* MASK WORN WITH A CHECKERED BARKCLOTH SUIT AND PLUSH SKIRT, ENTIRELY COVERING THE BODY. MUSHENGE, SEPTEMBER 1971.

musese cloth was invented by Kashashi" (Torday 1910:249, my translation). The legend conforms to the reality we know in that women are the only ones who embroider the cloths to form either linear stitching or pile decoration. Although no one has studied the practitioners of this craft, it seems from the frequency travelers encountered work in progress that most women knew and practiced embroidery. Certainly the king's many wives and the households of important men were expected to produce a supply of the handsome costumes and cloths for grave gifts. In general, as Torday noted, men are considered the specialists in the lore of carving, while women are known as the experts on cloth designs (1910:216). Nevertheless the making of plush cloth, especially a finished ceremonial skirt, involves a fascinating back-and-forth alternation of work by men and women.

A descriptive sequence of how the cloths are made and how the plush is achieved documents this rhythm and clarifies technical aspects of the work. A combination of sources makes such a survey feasible: data from my trip (Adams 1976); the excellent and abundant visual documentation on Kuba communities developed by Brother Joseph Cornet, who in the 1970s conducted research visits to the region (Cornet 1971, 1974, 1974-5); and the study of the literature and museum collections by Angelika Rumpf née Stritzl (1971).

Raffia fiber in plain weave forms the basic material of the cloth. The yarn for this foundation is obtained from the leaves of the palm *Raphia vinifera*. Young boys strip the fibrous leaves and split them by hand or with a raffia-rib comb. Women participate in the preparation of fiber for embroidery, splitting and smoothing fibers with snail shells. The fibers are made more pliant by being rubbed by hand. After treatment they are bound into skeins for the weavers' use. Only men set up and operate the loom. Most men can weave, but some are known as specialists who produce fine cloths. The size of the weaving is determined by the natural length of the palm leaves because it is not usual to join strands by tying or any other artificial means. Most of the cloth panels are made in either of two shapes: a rectangle measuring approximately 30 x 60 centimeters to 50 x 100 centimeters; or a form approaching a square measuring about 50 x 60 centimeters to the largest, about a meter square.

In comparison with looms from other regions of the world, those in southern Zaire are set at an unusual oblique position. The loom is a simple mechanism consisting of a heddle and two horizontal bars between which the lengthwise or warp strands are stretched. The lower



19. A SHOBWA MAN AT HIS LOOM. THE LOOSE ENDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL STRIPS OF RAFFIA HAVE BEEN INSERTED AS WEFTS TO FORM THE CLOTH. THE OBLIQUE ANGLE OF THE LOOM IS TYPICAL OF SOUTHERN ZAIRE.

bar is fixed firmly; the upper one is suspended from a cross beam supported by two poles. These poles are set in the ground at a 45-degree angle, so that the plane of the warp leans toward the weaver and he sits under the warp (Fig. 19). After he inserts the crosswise (weft) yarns, he beats them in downward and away from his body.

To thread the loom, the weaver binds all the leaf strands for the warp to a fixed horizontal bar at the base of the loom and stretches and attaches them to the upper horizontal bar. He then inserts the weft strands individually, leaving the ends hanging on either side so that fringes are formed. Thus there are no continuous weft strands being turned back into the weave to form a protective selvedge at each side. To keep the woven cloth from fraying, the fringes are later gathered into small bundles and knotted, or they are cut, in which case the edges are carefully hemmed by folding the cut edges inward two times.

Generally the weave of cloth used for embroidery is not different from ordinary cloth, although customs in regard to quality may vary by district or by household.¹¹ I concur with Stritzl that Torday (1910:188) erred in saying that looser woven basic cloth was used for the velours. The regularity of the foundation weave affects the decoration in terms of straightness of angled lines and size of motifs.

To produce palm cloth that is soft and supple, further special treatment is necessary. The woven panel is dampened in water and kneaded, beaten or rubbed between the hands. To do this the Bushong wrap a new cloth in old pieces and lay it in a trough, where the women pound it with wood piles; it is dried and then beaten again (Torday

1910:186). An early report, probably from the records of the American missionary William Sheppard, mentions pounding the cloth with an ivory implement (see Sieber 1972:159); the Peabody Museum possesses an ivory pestle (PMAE 65-3-50/10709, collected in 1890-93), which was probably used for this purpose. These procedures give some idea of the painstaking attention and the many processes that are given at each stage to produce the decorated cloths that early investigators compared with silk.

After weaving, the next phase of the work — the coloring of the cloth and the embroidery yarn — is done by the women. In general, the woven cloth and the yarns are dyed in advance of the decorative stitching. Color tones vary somewhat within the various ethnic groups that make up the Kuba kingdom. There are few basic hues, although many shades can be produced through variations in processing. Earlier accounts mention four colors: ecru or beige, red, black and brown. But on the cloths, as Stritzl notes (1971:78), colors appear in a wider range of shades: pale rose to wine red, lilac to purple, bright to dark blue, yellow to orange; depending on age and treatment, the raffia leaf varies from white to light brown. All the dyes are obtained from regional plant sources. According to available evidence, Kuba dyers achieve their color tones by dipping cloth into hot or cooked dyestuffs. Some nuances are the result of special usages. From time to time on ritual garments, it is common to rub red or yellow dyestuff into the surface after the sewn decoration is finished. Other color tones may result from fading in the sun and possibly some effect of chemical change over time.¹²

Red is a significant color for the people of this region. In the form of a wood powder mixed with oil, red is rubbed on the body for festive occasions. Because of this custom, many beige weavings are dyed red on the reverse side, which rubs against the body during wear. Obviously red enhances, yet it is also the color of danger and of mourning. The main source of the red dye is a redwood best known from writings on the western Congo region as *tukula* and called *tool* in Bushong. It is not camwood, which is *Raphia nitida*, a species that grows only in West Africa and does not occur in the Zaire River basin.¹³ Very little is known of the procedures for obtaining the other dyes.¹⁴

After the dyeing, the cloth is ready to be embroidered. Most Kuba embroidery combines on one cloth two types of decoration: stem-stitching (also called over-stitching) and cut-pile or plush stitching.¹⁵ The equipment is simple: a needle and, for cut-pile or plush work, a knife. The earlier bamboo or bone splints or native iron forms have yielded to imported embroidery needles. The embroidery knife is a common type in Kuba communities, for it is the same form as the spatulate iron blade used by men as a razor and by both sexes for scraping the skin as part of grooming the body. The thin blade is in a trapezoidal shape with a smaller drawn-out handle. In our society, a knife form has a padded handle and a cutting edge adjacent to the handle. However, the Kuba knife has a bare metal handle over the blade, and the cutting edge lies at the opposite end, at the base of the trapezoid, so that the knife is held upright in the hand. In Mushenge, I saw a woman embroidering plush using a bamboo knife.

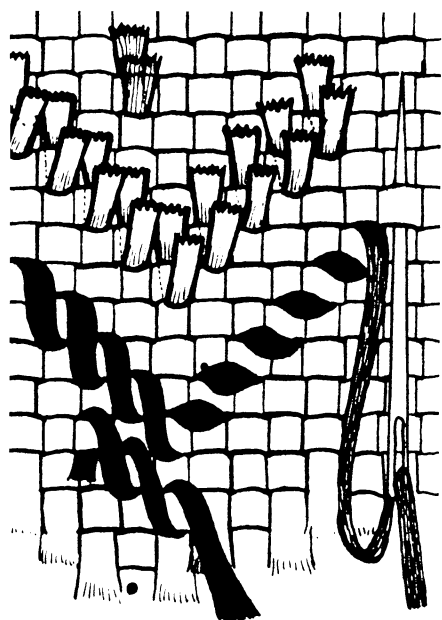
The embroideress needs an enormous amount of steadiness and patience. Because of the time required, prosperous and royal men who have several wives or

concubines gain an advantage in the production of decorated garments. Fine plush pieces are worked on for months and even years. The work is done intermittently, usually in the afternoons, after returning from working in the fields. Even the Queen Mother went out in the morning to work in the fields, and I found her at her embroidery only in the afternoon, just as one sees other women at the capital bending over their stitching outside their houses. The embroideress sits on a stool or a mat in a shady spot outside her house (Fig. 16), unrolls the basic cloth from the protective covering that is sewn on at one end and takes out the colored yarns and equipment stored there. Laying the part of the cloth to be worked on in her lap, she sews at a 90-degree angle to her body, the attached cloth helping to steady the panel being embroidered. She does not turn the cloth while working on it but changes the direction of the stitching, if necessary, when forming the linear designs. She views the designs from one end which, when the cloth is made into a skirt, will be turned 90 degrees.

The procedure for achieving the plush effect is simple but requires dexterity. In her right hand, the seamstress holds the needle between thumb and first finger, and with the three remaining fingers she grips a little knife in her palm, the upright handle of the knife extending through the circle formed by her thumb and first finger. To form a plush stitch she introduces a fiber strand or bundle under the weave, leaving a two-to-three-millimeter tuft at one end. After drawing

the strand through, she cuts it with the knife edge at the thumbnail of her left hand, thus forming another tuft, level with the first. The remarkable point is that she makes no knot to secure the plush strand. Obviously the weave must be tight enough to hold this short bundle firmly in place. The seamstress does not puncture the fiber of the weave but guides the needle under the yarn at a crossing of the weave (Fig. 21). Because the pile strand is drawn under only one yarn at a crossing, it is barely visible on the reverse side. In choosing the yarn under which to insert the pile strand, the needlewoman, according to our preliminary research, selects the direction in which there are a greater number of yarns per square centimeter; that is, the tufts are inserted parallel to the direction in which the weaving yarns lie closest, which secures a tighter gripping of the pile tuft. Thus the needlewoman chooses for the best mechanical advantage. Whether this is always the warp or weft is still under study.

The significant action in creating the Kuba pile effect is the kind that is likely to be missed in descriptions of the stitch alone. Every so often the seamstress brushes the knife edge back and forth across the cut ends (Fig. 20). This splits the ends, resulting in the characteristic fuzzy dot of the pile. Three additional factors contribute to the appearance of the pile: the variable width and thickness of the strands used in weaving the foundation cloth, the thickness of the pile bundle, and the intervals between the bundles. The manipulation of these



20. A BUSHONG WOMAN AT WORK ON AN ALL-PLUSH PANEL TYPICAL OF CONTEMPORARY WORK. SHE IS BRUSHING THE RAFFIA PILE WITH THE EDGE OF THE KNIFE, WHICH SHE ALSO USES TO CUT THE PILE STITCHES. MUSHENGE, 1971.

21. DIAGRAM SHOWING PLUSH IN THE UPPER PART, AND IN THE LOWER PART EMBROIDERED LINEAR STITCHES OVER ONE OR TWO STRANDS OF THE WEAVE (STRITZL 1971: 75).

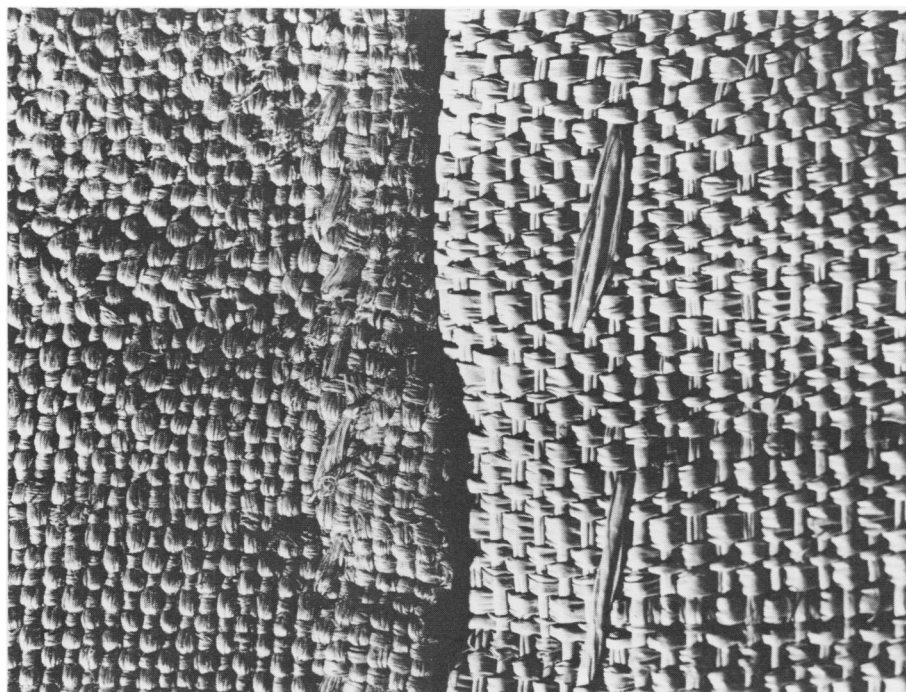
three factors produces a variety of plush effects of which two types are notable. By comparing the reverse side of an example of each of these two types, the details of stitching and the resulting contrast of the two types can be seen (Fig. 22).

The one on the right (reverse of Fig. 7) represents the most common formula. The weave is firm, but the warp and weft are of variable thickness; the pile yarn is a thick bundle, and within the design area the pile bundle is introduced under every other weft (or warp) in both directions. In this way the two pile ends resulting from one stitch remain slightly apart and form two dots of plush. This procedure is repeated to fill the desired shape of the design. The sets of two parallel lines in Figure 7 supply an extreme example of distance between the rows of dots formed by single stitches. In the other type in Figure 22 on the left (reverse of Fig. 1), both strands of the firmly woven cloth are of equal size (they are moderately thick), the pile strands are fine, and within the design area the strand is drawn under *every* weft (or warp) in *both directions*.¹⁶ When the seamstress brushes these ends, the result is an overall plush surface in which the individual bundles or stitches cannot be discerned (cover, Fig. 1).

In the design areas of the densely packed pile, the embroideress can introduce variations. If she leaves two or more rows blank between rows of plush stitching, the pile appears in distinctly grooved rows, or if she leaves blank small squares of the basic cloth, as is typical among the Bushong, a latticed effect is achieved (Fig. 4). Because the seamstress introduces her stitches into the crossings of the weave, which are at right angles, she can produce straight lines either parallel or diagonal to the edges, and although she is free to zigzag and to form short jagged lines, she does not do this. The woman pursues lines in one direction long enough to form distinct shapes drawn from a traditional inventory and uses contrasting color and choice of stitch to produce designs of a remarkable clarity even in the most complicated networks. The plush can be used either to form designs of linear character or to fill in color masses.

In producing a ceremonial skirt, the final effort is contributed by men, that is, the tailor who sews a thick, reinforcing hem and stitching along the edges. Usually one short end of the skirt is left unbordered, as that is the end that lies underneath in the wraparound mode of wearing skirts.

The advantage of being on the spot while decorative work is going on is that one can find out how the artist proceeds. For the first time, it is possible to provide a number of illustrations of work in progress, which answer definitely how the



22. REVERSE OF TWO EMBROIDERED CLOTHS. ON THE LEFT (REVERSE OF FIG. 1), THE SHOBWA FIBERS ARE MODERATELY THICK, OF EQUAL SIZE, AND HAVE BEEN SPLIT INTO MULTIPLE STRANDS BY SOFTENING TREATMENTS. THE REVERSE OF FIGURE 7 (RIGHT) IS MORE TYPICAL OF KUBA CLOTHS: THE STRANDS VARY CONSIDERABLY IN SIZE

women, in this case, Shobwa women, form compositions (Figs. 23, 24, 26). The seamstress works her way across the panel from right to left, usually advancing with lines forming angular shapes, the interiors of which are then filled with stem-stitches and plush in either sequence. As she proceeds, she also fills in plush between the lines of the large shapes. In the compositions in which linear stitching is absent, the plush is worked in sections irregularly across the panel (Fig. 25). These illustrations show that, as in embroidery work in many other parts of the world, the Kuba women use neither sample patterns nor sketches on the cloth; they are working from models in their minds.

A final major issue concerns the style characteristics in embroidery among the various ethnic groups within the Kuba kingdom. From twentieth-century data and experience, we can see certain broad regional features,¹⁷ but two factors hinder our ability to assign confidently the various substyles to certain districts. One is the existence of extensive internal trade in textiles (Vansina 1962, 1964:19, 23), and the other is the likelihood that the officials of the Bushong capital may have awarded regional chiefs certain costume elements as part of their official insignia of status. Therefore, photographs of work in progress, presented here, are especially valuable.

Perhaps our most confident attribution relates to the red (Fig. 4) and beige skirts, often decorated by lattice and grooved effects in plush.¹⁸ These are typical of Bushong work, but whether they are also produced in the other areas where they have been found or simply

have been traded there is still undetermined. One skirt (IMNZ 72.652.1) is an example of this problem. The center panel of beige embroidered lines and grooved cut-pile in a locusts-and-lightning design (cf. Torday 1910: pl. 29, 2) fits our notion of Bushong work, although the colorful border is not typical. However, the skirt was recently obtained from the Ngongo (Lobumba village, Misumba sector).

Torday documents examples of two other regional styles. He shows a woman working on a cloth with a purple-toned foundation and widely spaced designs in dark stitches and yellow-beige plush (1910:pl.8) and identifies it as Ngongo work. His colored drawings of Ngongo cloth designs offer additional evidence of the style (1910:pls. 15, 16). The Peabody Museum possesses a purple cloth (PMAE 17-41-50/B2000) resembling his illustration, and on the basis of general similarities, the examples in Figures 5 and 8 can be assigned to this region. As these Peabody Museum cloths show, the Ngongo women achieve a beautiful relationship among the three elements: the rich varicolored ground, the embroidered lines and the light-colored plush designs.

The other recognizable regional style belongs to the Shobwa (Torday 1910:pls. 14-16), a people living along the southern banks of the Sankuru, eastward from the Kasai River to near the Lubudi River junction, approaching Lodi. The Shobwa were not integrally fixed within the political system of the Kuba. Ethnographer Hans Himmelheber (1940), visiting the area in the thirties, reported the Shobwa as the makers of the yellow-

toned and black plush cloths that were then considered in Europe (Clouzot 1931) as the epitome of "Kasai velvets." Cornet's many photographs of Shobwa women working on embroidery confirm this attribution. Several Peabody Museum textiles (including the cover photograph and Fig. 1), are characteristic examples of this splendid work.

Stritzl's description of Shobwa style summarizes its main features (1971:94-95). The basic cloth of natural or red color is evenly woven and feels soft and pliant; the warp and weft are of equally thick bundles. The upper side is completely embroidered in a combination of stitched lines and plush. The lines are fitted close together, and the plush is the densely packed type. The decoration is predominantly two-toned, alternately natural and black or brown. Occasionally red or purple touches or lilac backgrounds appear in their work. Some cloths showing this typical style display a special feature: the plush sections include tiny dots of black and natural bundles, yielding a pepper-and-salt effect (PMAE 17-41-50/B2050).

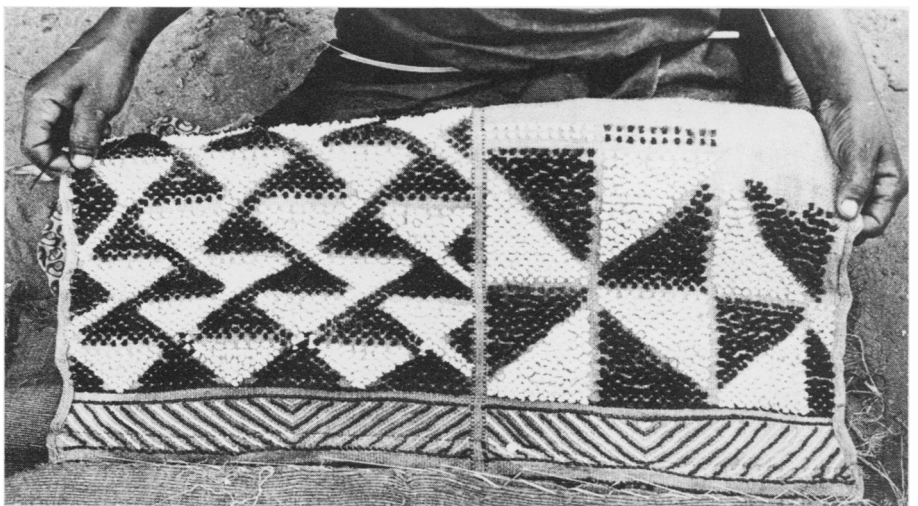
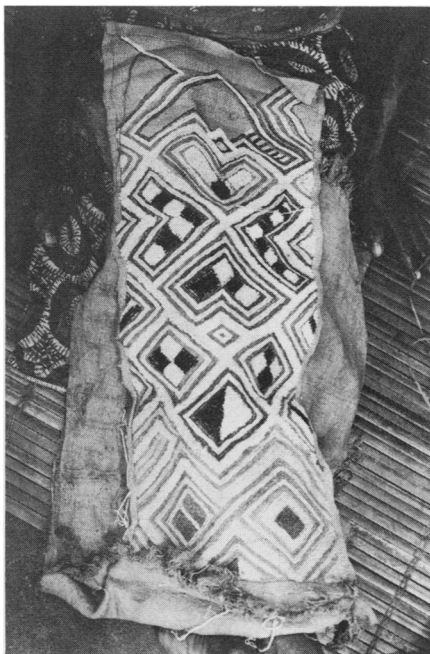
To classify Kuba embroidery styles within collections in Europe (Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren; Musée de l'Homme, Paris; and the Konietzko-Czeschka private holdings), Stritzl employs several criteria (1971:89). Rather than rely on the size and shape of the basic cloth or the designs, she uses the character and quality of the basic cloth, the decorative layout or division of the surface, the amount of plush patterning, the complexity of the motifs and the color. The features of her category, Group I, are useful as the characterization of the work of several ethnic groups within the Kuba kingdom who produce embroidered cloths—the Ngongo, Ngeende, Pyaang—and outside the kingdom, the Nkutshu.



23. EMBROIDERED PANELS WITH LINEAR AND PLUSH EFFECTS IN PROCESS. THE DESIGN WAS GIVEN AS MESHUK, "LIANAS" SHOBWA, GELILEBO VILLAGE

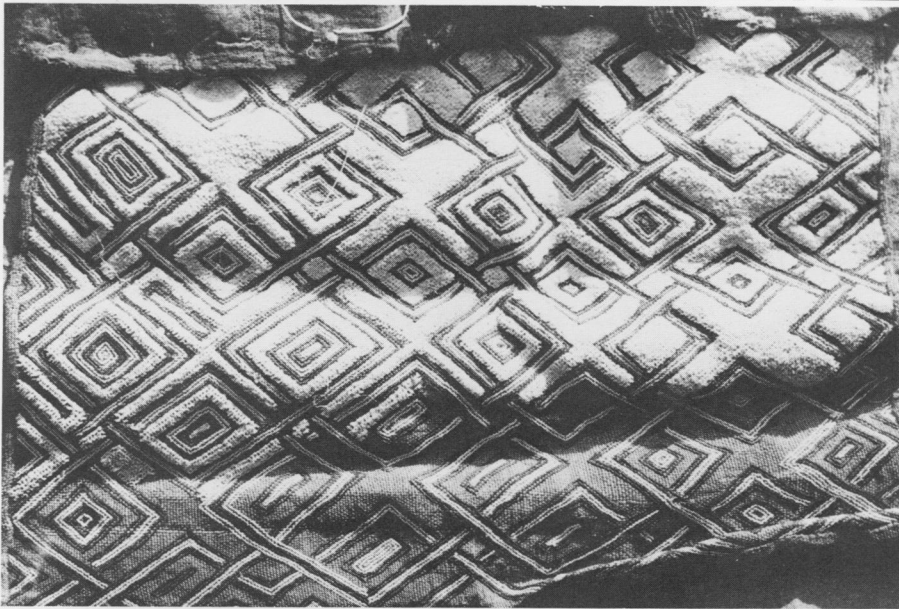
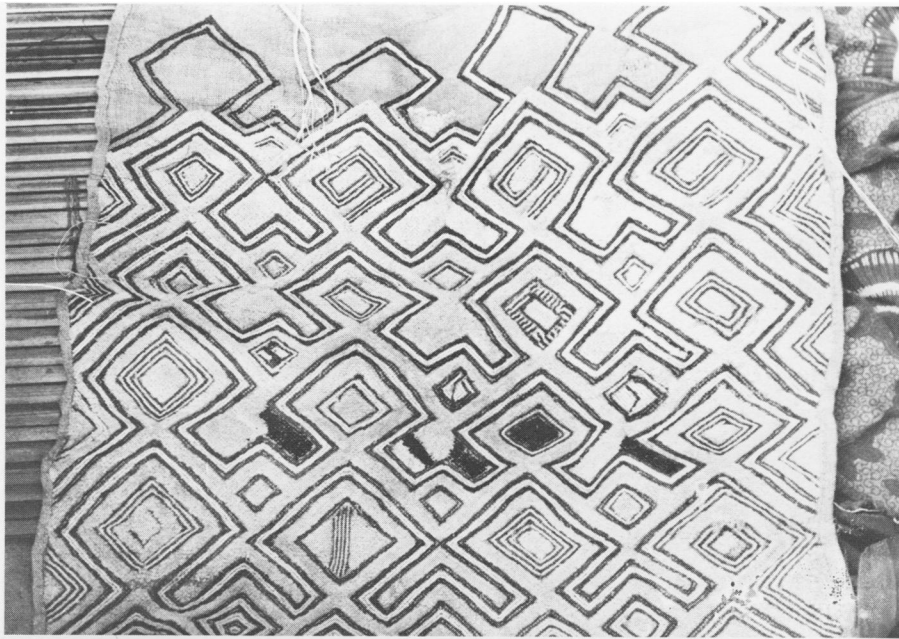


24. EMBROIDERED CLOTH IN PROCESS. THE LARGE DESIGN IS CALLED "SMOKE." SHOBWA, DJANGELE VILLAGE



25. EMBROIDERED CLOTH IN PROCESS, WITH SEPARATE SECTIONS OF ALL-PLUSH DESIGNS AND EMBROIDERED LINES. EASTERN SHOBWA REGION, IKOKO VILLAGE

26. EMBROIDERED CLOTH IN PROCESS. THE DESIGNS JUST COMPLETED ARE MAMANYE, "STONES." SHOBWA, ISHELE VILLAGE



27-29. THREE DIFFERENT PLUSH CLOTHS IN PROCESS IN ONE VILLAGE.
WESTERN SHOBWA REGION, TULUMBU VILLAGE.

Needlewomen from these groups decorate with combinations of plush and linear embroidery but produce more simple effects than those of the Bushong and Shobwa. The basic cloth feels stiffer and rougher than that of the Shobwa because the fibers have not been refined by the special rubbing and softening treatments. The strands of the weaving are of uneven size, the areas patterned by plush and stitched lines are scattered and spaced apart, and the designs are simple and tend to be repeated. Often the surface is divided into sections by single or multiple lines of stitches (Figs. 2, 5-8). All these ethnic groups produce cloths with undyed raffia ground. However, other color effects appear, which Stritzl uses as a guide for division among these subgroups. Clearly the Ngongo and Ngeende of the northeastern region favor rose, lilac and lilac-blue dyed grounds.¹⁹ These cloths are not evenly dyed but show areas and flecks of varying tones (Figs. 5, 8). The line stitches are also dark-toned and sturdy, and their strongly raised profile plays a part in the visual effect.²⁰ The plush areas combine natural and black or brown. Basing our opinion on examples in Torday and comparable museum pieces, we can say that the Ngongo produce the most complex cloths of these peripheral groups.

Records at the Tervuren museum indicate the makers of a collection of 39 examples of this type (MRAC 27-205) as Kete. As Stritzl points out (1971:101), however, the Kete live as neighbors to the Ngeende and the Ngongo and in villages scattered through the country, so they participate in the cultural inventory of their surroundings, even if not integrated politically.²¹

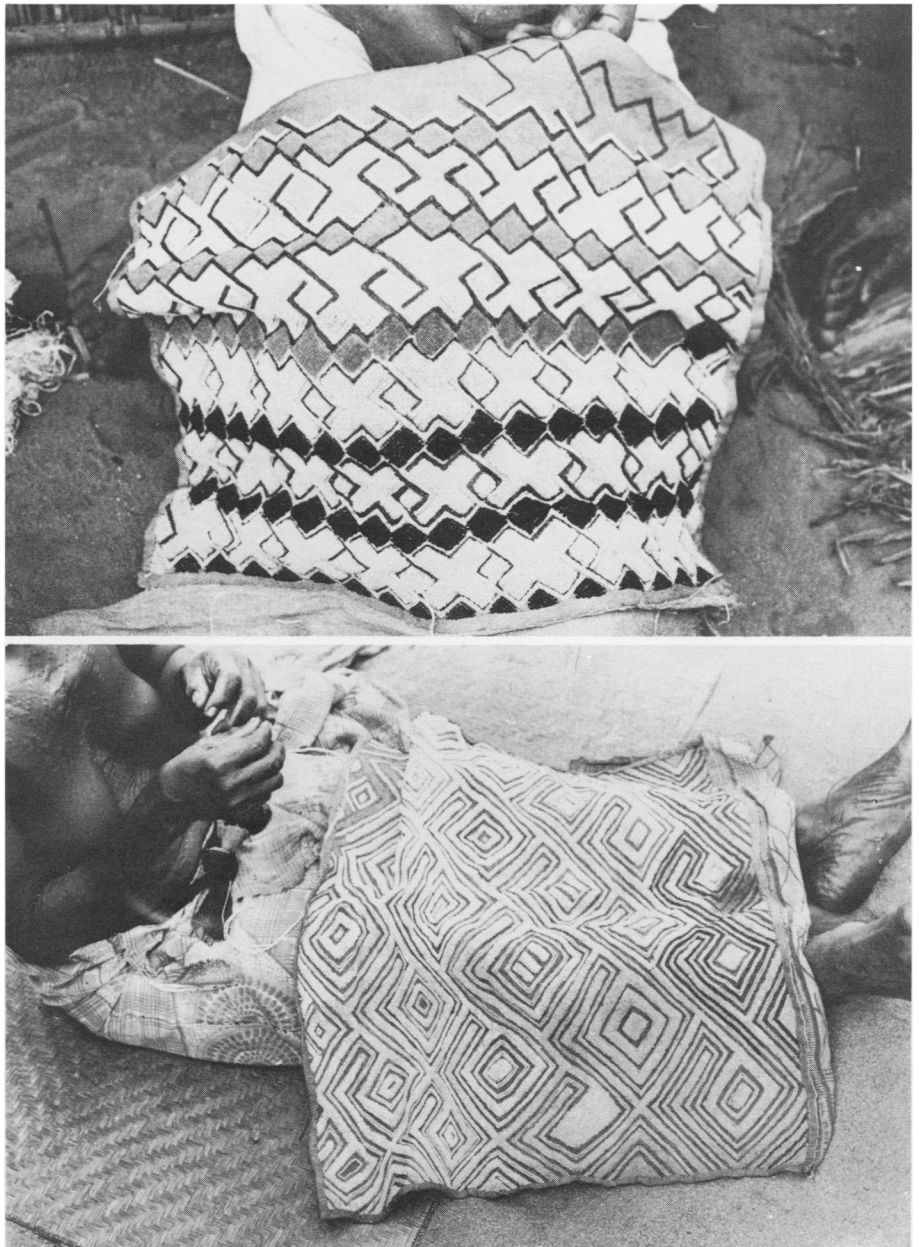
Further assignments within Group I are far more tentative. One type (Ic) that Stritzl assigns to the Pyaang consists of cloths of more delicate character than the Ngongo. It comprises cloths with ground colors in ivory-white, natural, pale rose—without the blue or lilac tones of the Ngongo group. The plush is pale with some red and black touches and often formed into rhomboid shapes; the line stitches, usually very thin, are in black, red or dark brown. One Peabody Museum example (PMAE 17-41-50/B1997) with an ivory-white ground fits this category perfectly, and Stritzl mentions Tervuren examples (MRAC 15.91.36, 47, 59, 83) as typical.

Another subgroup (Ib), is characterized by Stritzl as Nkutshu, a people who occupy both sides of the upper Lukenie River, north of the Sankuru. The basic cloth is finely woven, the plush parts natural and black or brown, and in general, brown tones predominate. Examples of this category from the Tervuren museum (MRAC 51.5.59, 16.4.77 and 16.4.24) are catalogued as coming from the Bassimba in the upper Lukenie

region, which points to the Nkutshu area. Several early examples of Kuba style cloths in the Peabody Museum (Fig. 6) would fit into this grouping. The raffia cloths have become dark beige with age, the plush effects are brown and pale yellow, and the stitching is also brown. However, the weaving of the basic cloths varies from fine strands to coarse. One cloth (PMAE 14-9-50/85440), obtained from S. Wetterling, shares the patterning of a Tervuren example (MRAC 16.4.24). The Peabody Museum catalogue offers interesting information on the origin of another of these early brown-toned acquisitions (PMAE 15-28-50/B693) (Fig. 6): "Congo material collected by one of Stanley's American officers at the time of the founding of the Congo Free State." In the six years (1879-1884) of Henry Morton Stanley's efforts prior to the founding, he mentions having worked with only six American officers (Stanley 1889, vol.2:302). However, the Congo Free State came into the Kasai-Sankuru region with military forces only in 1899. It lasted until 1910 when the Belgian government took over the Congo as a colony (Vansina 1969); these textiles, therefore, were probably collected during the first decade of the twentieth century.

None of these style categories is to be viewed as rigid or exclusive. For example, the Nkutshu use black and ecru yarns in their weaving, and because they trade redwood southward, their use of dyed red yarn could be expected among the embroideries. Outside of the fairly recognizable types within these regions, a great many cloths remain that show numerous variation of color tone and design format, so that the issue of identification is still a lively problem for further study.

In grouping styles, it would be valuable to have some idea of how much variation occurs within one person's work or within a village, in order to know the likely range of colors, format and motifs. Is the situation comparable to customs elsewhere, as, for example, among peasant embroideresses in Hungary (Fél 1965)? There, each village possesses a certain number of basic patterns which, however freely these may be combined or varied by the individual needlewoman, must not be exceeded. Cornet's field photographs (1974-75) of Shobwa women at work along the Sankuru give us a tantalizing glimpse of the possibilities of this kind of investigation. The shots, taken within a one-month period in 1974, show that the dark-light contrast plush style is in progress at both the westernmost (Fig. 23, Gelilebo) and easternmost (Fig. 26, Ishele) Shobwa villages. Three views within one village, Tulumbu (Figs. 27-29), show strong design similarities. However, in another village, Ngelangombe, not far to the



30-31. TWO CLOTHS IN PROCESS. SHOBWA, NGLANGOMBE VILLAGE

west, two cloths in progress (Figs. 30, 31) differ sharply in the design arrangement and in the relationships of colored stitches and plush. At the furthest point east, a simple, plush-only type appears (Fig. 25). Are these sharp differences part of the normal range of styles, or are they due, for instance, to the work of married women who came from other villages? A study of women's marriage patterns and its effect on textile styles would be useful.

These photographed scenes are inspiring. They show a still lively art emerging from the hands of a number of women artists. From each of the topics raised in this article a refrain has developed: the need for further study in the field. Cornet's recent photographs show that such investigations are feasible. Although basic facts are known about the textile

technique, all the questions with wider implications remain open. Fieldwork focusing on textiles could produce valuable information relating to social relations, economic patterns, political history and artistic production. Not only are the great works of Torday and Vansina stimulating, but they also provide a solid background for a focused research project in the Sankuru River region. There are sufficient collections of textiles in the United States and Europe to permit adequate preparation. Zaire's Institut des Musées Nationaux has built up a veritable tradition of encouraging research. There would undoubtedly be problems, but the results could provide us with a better understanding of a great and living African art tradition through the methods of modern field research. □

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The lack of captions directly under the photographs is an inconvenience over which the authors may have had no control. Lighting of the black-and-white photographs has been controlled to favor expression rather than description, and many of the surfaces and textures are lost in harsh shadows or near darkness. The color photographs, however, are far better and do permit a closer examination of surface detail and overall craftsmanship. The illustrations represent object types unevenly, as is most notable in the total absence of a single photograph of a terracotta funerary urn, the distinguishing "Sao" feature. It is unfortunate that from among the large amount of material excavated, better and more wide-ranging photographs could not have been incorporated.

Les Arts des Sao presents a much-needed introduction to the arts of a little-known region of West Africa. The materials the Lebeufs have recovered from their extensive excavations are a unique contribution to the archaeological record. Their number and variety are testimony to the ceramic and metallurgical skill of the peoples who lived south of Lake Chad. The importance of this area for early African history is recognized by archaeologists, geologists and historians because of its dominating position in the center of the continent and its attraction to populations moving southward out of the Sahara.

Among the investigations undertaken by others, one may single out Graham Connah, an English archaeologist, who has done work at a series of mound sites in the Nigerian end of the continuous plain south of the lake. His work at the Daima mound in particular is considered a primary key to the prehistoric chronology of Nigeria. His carefully controlled excavations and meticulous stratigraphic analyses are models for future excavations. A re-assessment of the valuable data collected by the Lebeufs, using a more rigorous investigative approach, should help us better understand the history of peoples and arts of the Lake Chad region.

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A CATALOGUE OF THE
ETHNOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS
IN THE SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM
Eran Gunther

Sheldon Jackson College, Sitka, Alaska, 1976. 168 pp., 134 b/w & 9 color illustrations, bibliography.

Eran Gunther divided this small catalogue into four basic components: the Northwest Coast (primarily Tlingit and Haida), the Athapaskans of the Yukon Valley, the Aleut, and the Eskimo of Western Alaska. Each of these major chapters is logically subdivided into several sections that reflect the make-up of the collections. This approach is probably of greater importance to the scholar than to the general reader. There are, nevertheless, frequent occasions when Dr. Gunther gives precise documentation—at times anecdotal—that adds to the scholarly value and interest of the catalogue.

The black-and-white illustrations are well integrated into the text, as are four of the nine color plates (five are on the front and back covers). The choices of illustration give a balanced overview of the collection, and it is only to be regretted that at times the black-and-white reproductions do not measure up to the quality of the pieces themselves. The contribution of this catalogue lies, perhaps, not so much in any new information it might reveal about the peoples of the far North, but rather in its making available to a broader audience a collection of considerable importance.

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POLAKOFF, Notes, from page 23

1. Rose Slivka is Editor of *Craft Horizons* magazine and author of the book, *Peter Voukos: A Dialogue with Clay*.
2. Jacques Anquetil is the founder and first president of the French craft association La Maison des Métiers d'Art Française.
3. My translation.
4. Bâ, of Mali, was a member of UNESCO's Executive Board from 1962 to 1970 and was the founder and later director of the Institute of Human Sciences in Bamako, Mali. He was the recipient of the Grand Prix Littéraire de l'Afrique Noire for his work, "The Strange Fate of Wangrin," published in 1973.

ADAMS, Notes from page 39

My research visit to Zaire was made possible by the Harvard University Committee on Art and Anthropology, supported by a Kress Foundation grant. I thank these sponsors and express my appreciation to Brother Joseph Cornet, Adjunct Director General of the Institut des Musées Nationaux in Kinshasa, who invited me to join a museum expedition to the Kuba area in August 1976 and provided unflinching and generous cooperation in my research efforts.

1. For an excellent discussion of the African approach to design and its carryover into Afro-American quilting, see Vlach (1978:44-75).
2. Hampton Institute in Virginia possesses a collection of Kuba art left by the American black missionary William H. Sheppard, the first foreigner to enter and report on the Kuba kingdom. He spent four months at Mushenge in 1892 and several years in the Luebo area at the southern edge of the kingdom. One of the Hampton plush pieces is illustrated in *African Forum* 3/4 (1967-8):20.
3. "The Congo," 2-reel, 16mm film by Eliot Eliosofon, available from Edupac, Inc. See also color slides, Eliosofon Archives, Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.
4. The extant literature on the Kuba, including this article, does not cover all the textile arts. For instance, Torday mentions stamped designs on barkcloth for men's costume (1910:179, no. 242). Other references appear in Sieber 1972.
5. For other examples of animal and human combat see, for Zaire, *L'Art Pende* by L. de Soubserberghe, and for Ivory Coast, *African Dances* by Geoffrey Goror.
6. "Benin Royal Rituals," 16mm color film by Francis Speed and R. E. Bradbury, University of Ibadan (22 min.).
7. Cornet reports the festival as *itul* and the female sponsor's identity as *kueti*, leopard (1974-75:116-119); but Vansina notes in the fifties that kings' sons took the leopard role, adult males the eagle role, and women of either *muaanyim* or successor group played the part of *necce*, the feline called lightning, which accordingly gave its name to the festival (Vansina 1964:122).
8. Most cloths are decorated by plush and linear stitching. However, it is common to refer to them simply as plush or velour cloths. I am assuming then that he refers to cloths decorated by the standard combination and not plush exclusively.
9. Scarves may consist of several plush border strips sewn together; the Peabody Museum example (17-41-50/B2052) combines strips of three different designs.
10. Cornet has had the opportunity to examine many stored textile costumes for men; publication of this material may change our assessment of traditional uses of plush for men.
11. The weave usually is warp-faced—that is, more warps per square centimeter than wefts—but statistical review is still under way. My thanks to Phyllis Morrison for stimulating observations on the fine points of technique and choices made by the craftspeople.
12. The conservator at the Peabody Museum, Dennis Piechota, suggested that tests could determine whether the bluish tone that appears over the surface of many cloths is an efflorescence of substances of resinous content used in the original dye baths for other colors.
13. The following draws on Stritzl (1971), who surveyed the ethnographic literature on dyestuffs. Much of the recent work on wood analysis and plant materials has been done by Roger Deschamps of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale. The *tukula* are *Pterocarpus*, mainly *Pterocarpus soyauxii* and *P. tinctorius*, which grow in the Sankuru River region. Accord-

ing to the species, one can obtain bright red, cherry red and wine red. *P. santalinoide* mixed with black yields the prized wine-red tone. The Bushong need to import the redwood from the peoples on their northern borders. In Mushenge, the women told me that they obtained redwood blocks from Nkutshu and Shobwa traders, who come from the Sankuru region. Bushong women grate the redwood on a grinding stone, adding white sand, water and leaves (*kuwengi*) to form a paste that lasts for years when stored. For dyeing the women heat a mixture of the ground red powder and water in a large basin over a fire, add orange palm oil, and stir in the cloth with sticks. Stritzl reports the addition of *bibao*, which may be a palm that contains an agglutinative resin used as a binding medium. The cloth is twisted to wring out the liquid and laid on a large screen-bed. Then several women kneel down and rub *tukula* paste over and into it (Adams 1976).

14. However, the sources are adduced from native names and available plants. Yellow (*boa*), which appears mainly in the plush embroidery, is obtained from trees of the *Rubiacae* family: *Morinda lucida* and *Morinda geminata*. The roots of *Morinda* of all kinds yield reddish and yellow tones; the bark can also produce red. A yellow-orange shade was reported early and appears in contemporary work; it derives from *Bixa orellana*.

Large Kuba collections include cloths with a foundation color and embroidered lines in mauve and violet. Botanists find that *Cantium rubrocostrum* is the only plant in this region that could be used to obtain the mauve and violet-blue coloring. However, in accounts of dyeing there is no description of this process. The blue dyestuff that appears in the stitchery is likely a product of *Landolphia florida*, for which *Morinda lucida* can be used as a chemical reactive to produce blues. A number of the Bushong skirts I examined at the Institut des Musées Nationaux were embroidered in dark blue.

Black, especially as a color for the linear stitching, is very common. Various plant and mineral materials produce black, and combinations of these substances are known to have been used. Local terms traced to their botanical sources identify the bark of *Cantium rubrocostrum*, the fruit and bark of *Alchornea floribunda*, and the leaves of *A. cordifolia*. These materials are crushed or cut and cooked. Soaking them in certain black mudholes that contain ferrous substances achieves and adds to the black color. Cornet reports a boiled mixture of stones, leaves and bark of the *men* tree used at Mushenge to obtain black (1971).

In spite of the fairly common appearance of brown, there is no information on the source or process for obtaining this tone. Finally, white is attributed to dyeing with kaolin, but again, details of this process are lacking.

15. Torday mentions other stitches, including a chain stitch that occasionally appears in combination with plush (see 1910:186, fig. 257).

16. In a very fine weave, typical of the Pende (Pindi) (PMAE 14-9-50/85441), the pile bundle goes under two strands.

17. The notations in the Peabody Museum catalogue relating to the Mackenzie collection (17-41) of Kuba cloths group some of them by terms in the "Locality" column, such as Njambi Shala Nuana, Dikonga, Katakantangi, Mbangabangi, Ndeke, Itangua, Mukambo, Ikala, Yangala, Nyinga. None of these terms could be found on nineteenth- or twentieth-century maps. The last two terms resemble design names given in Torday (1910), but the rest could not be located either in Torday's glossary or in A. B. Edmiston's *Grammar and Dictionary of the Bushonga or Bukuba Language* (1932, Luebo, Belgian Congo; J. L. Wilson Press).

18. It seems reasonable to credit the Bushong with the bands of plush interspersed with bound holes (*ajour* work), as Stritzl does (1971:100), in view of the other openwork they still produce, which is similar to the black skirt illustrated in Sieber (1972:167).

19. Torday (1926:15) says only a native expert can tell the cloths of these two ethnic groups apart, but in recent times Ngeende cloths have been reported as cheaper than Ngongo.

20. On one Peabody Museum example (65-3-50/10696) from the missionary collection of 1890-93, it is apparent, because of fraying, that the embroidered lines are thick because of an inner fiber strand encased in each line. Usually, however, the stitching is not couched.

21. A traveler in the Mweka area told me that he found the best cloths and carvings among the Kete (Adams 1976). In his opinion, they were aware of having been subservient to the Kuba and were determined to show they could outdo the Kuba in their accomplishments.

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SPRAGUE, Notes, from page 59

1. *Abiku* means, literally, "we are born to die." Children who are discovered to be *abiku* must be paid special ritual attention in order to keep them in this world; otherwise they will surely die and return to their spirit world. See "The Concept of *Abiku*" (Mobolade 1973) for more information.
2. I would like to thank the photographers in Ila-Orangun, and especially Sir Special Photo, for their cooperation in providing information and in allowing me access to their negative files.
3. Newspaper photographers in the cities have adapted a more candid journalistic approach, but their range of subject matter is much the same, predominantly people at ceremonial or other newsworthy events. Many news photographs typical of Western papers, such as accidents, disasters, or action pictures of sports, seldom appear.
4. I am particularly indebted to the thinking and research of Sol Worth, who in his book *Through Navajo Eyes* (Worth & Adair 1972) has demonstrated that members of a culture or subculture who learn to use a new medium of communication (in this case, film) will produce work that is structured in part by their own cultural values and by their culture's perception of the world.
5. This describes the ideal form; sometimes the figure will be cut by the edge of the frame, and occasionally the subject will be smiling. Although minor variations are common, the traditional formal portrait always maintains its distinct identity.
6. Many types of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British photographic portraits were looked at in detail. This included the work of artistic photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron (Gernsheim 1975), commercial studio photographers (Hillier 1976), and colonial British photographs of India (Aperture 1976).
7. The concept of the memorial pages may have been adapted from the obituaries in the *London Daily Times*. But the emphasis on the photograph, the brief tribute in different type faces, and the de-emphasis on text mark this as a distinct form.
8. Betty Wass (1975) has shown that Yoruba dress, as depicted in 600 photographs dating from 1900-1974, does relate to the event photographed and to the social position and education of the subject, and that the percentage of indigenous dress increases from 1900 to 1974 as a function of increased national consciousness and pride.
9. The full results of this research were presented by Houlberg in a paper, "Image and Inquiry: Photography and Film in the Study of Yoruba Art and Religion" (Houlberg 1976b). The profile portrait rejected by the priestess was selected for publication in *The 1973 World Book Yearbook* (p. 95).
10. I would like to credit Marilyn Houlberg who, through her research on Yoruba sacred children during a field trip to Nigeria in 1971, first heard of the existence of this particular twin photograph and its use in traditional twin ritual (Houl-

berg 1973). It was my fascination with this unsubstantiated fact that compelled me to undertake this investigation of Yoruba photography, which was conducted in part with Houlberg's assistance during the summer of 1975. Houlberg has published a similar photograph of Taiwo in connection with her discussion of new forms of *ibefi* and of twin photos replacing *ibefi* (1976:18).
 11. Additional photographs taken by me and by the Yoruba photographers of Ila-Orangun, along with a brief statement of methodology, are being published as a photographic essay entitled "How I See the Yoruba See Themselves" (Sprague in press). These photographs visually present the main point of this present paper as well as show more of the photographers themselves, their studios, and the display of photographs within the context of the community.
 12. A week of searching throughout Kano, a predominantly Hausa area, revealed very few photographic studios or photographs on display. When questioned about this, Hausa traders repeatedly said that I must go to the Yoruba area of Kano, that all of the photographers were either Yoruba or Ibo.

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GLAZE, Notes from page 71

It is impossible to adequately express my indebtedness to the Senufo people, whose hospitality, generosity and understanding made possible my research experiences in 1969-70 and 1975. Special gratitude is due my adopted family relations and the village elders of Pundya, Pulo and Tjemebe.
 1. Some portions of the text concerning *madebele* and *yawitige* are excerpts from my forthcoming book, *Art and Death in a Senufo Village (Kufulo/Fodonon Region)*, to be published by Indiana University Press (1979). A brief section of the discussion on *fila* cloth first appeared in my short note on Senufo graphic arts in *Ba Shiru*, published by the University of Wisconsin Department of Linguistics.
 2. Major categories of ornament not dealt with here include the rich complex of body ornament and dress associated with the Poro initiation system and the whole complex of status-related body scarification designs and hairstyles, all of which constitute important areas of visual expression in Senufo culture.
 3. For technical reasons it has not been possible to employ the *open o* symbol occurring in certain words in this article. *African Arts* has substituted *o*, the nearest equivalent in standard type. For the same reason *e* has been substituted for the *epsilon* symbol, *ng'* for the *eng* symbol, all tone markings have been omitted, and *ñ* signifies nasalization of the preceding letter.
 4. Information concerning Sando divination and related art forms was collected from numerous Senufo of different age and ethnic groups; I am especially grateful for the help of the following Sando diviners from the Fodonon, Kafiri, Tyebara areas: Nande Soro of Pulo, Nerébariga Tuo of Zangboko, Yetigun Soro of Nabunyakaha, and Senyeni Sillue of Solokaha.
 5. Related by master tale-teller Abraham Soro Kudirigina, of Kapile village (now Dikodougou sous-préfecture) recorded July 1975. Translated into French by Sana Soro.
 6. Synthesis of two versions of the tale as related by Zana Soro (Pundya, March 10, 1970) and by Amanu Soro (Pulo, July 11, 1970) both Fodonon elders and Poro chiefs.

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