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# 18th-Century Kuba King Figures

MONNI ADAMS

The arts of large sub-Saharan African courts fit more readily into the familiar categories of European art history with regard to subject, purpose, and applicable method of investigation than the arts of small village polities do. In African courts, such as Dahomey, Asante, Benin, and Kuba, images, ceremonial insignia, and costume were displayed prominently to enhance the appearance of power. Such works share characteristics that distinguish arts of leadership elsewhere; they appear in more precious materials, more complex techniques, and more elaborate compositions than the arts outside the elite sphere. As in Europe, African court arts indicate the locus of authority, identify officials, and convey messages about the rights and powers of the elite to a wider public. The emblems worn or figures represented are meant to be recognized and understood. Oral traditions preserved by court archivists, combined with descriptions by European explorers, colonizers, and ethnographers of their encounters with African courts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, provide references to art of the past. As a result, the arts of these large courts are to a considerable degree accessible to famil-

iar methods of iconographical and historical investigation. This can be demonstrated by a description of the steps taken by scholars to identify and date five wooden figures from the Kuba court. This example is of exceptional interest because of the quantity of twentieth-century documentation on Kuba court culture that permits the scholar to move beyond identification and dating to an interpretation of style in terms of cultural values.

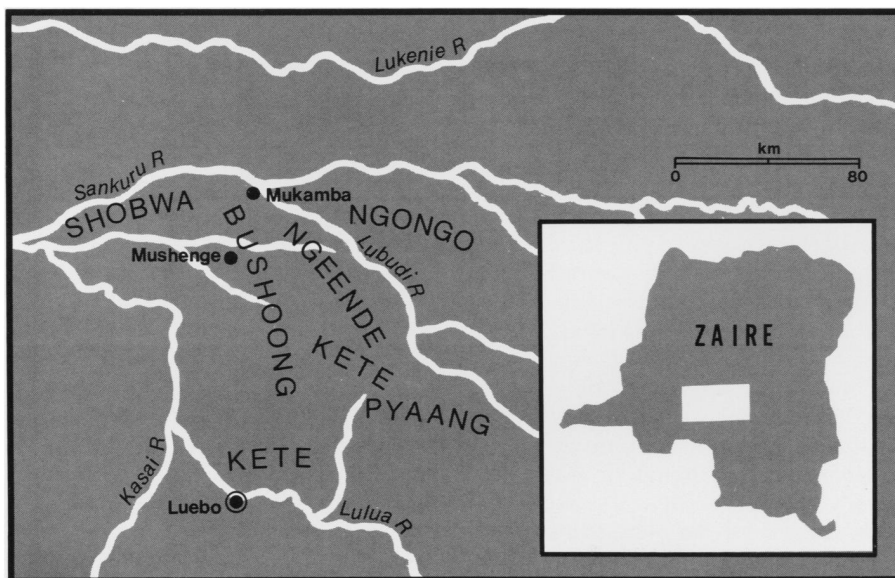
The Kuba kingdom, which occupied the territory between the Kasai and Sankuru rivers in Zaire (see map), became well known in Europe because the British Museum sent an expedition to the region in 1907-9, led by Hungarian ethnographer Emil Torday. His description of Kuba institutions in his folio-sized volume (Torday & Joyce 1910) remains an impressive account of the elaborately organized court. According to the historian Jan Vansina, Torday's works carried the prestige of the Kuba so far that it led the Belgian Government, which after 1910 became the colonial authority, to respect the autonomy of such "an old and civilized state" to an unusually large degree (Vansina 1975:137). Thus Kuba society was able to maintain much

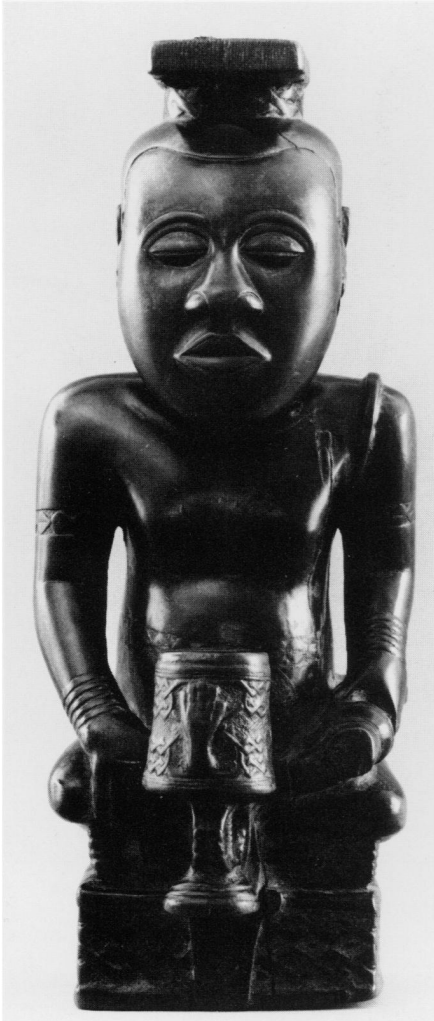
of its culture and structure, as Vansina found during 1953-1956, when he conducted an intensive study of the kingdom.

The historical development of the Kuba kingdom seems to fit the pattern of several other, larger "empires" in Central Africa, in which a conqueror organizes a number of agricultural village communities into a state having at its center a sacred ruler and a royal court with supporting officials. In the late nineteenth century this aristocratic kingdom comprised eighteen different clusters of people dominated by the centrally located Bushoong. The hereditary chief of the Bushoong people was the acknowledged sovereign of all other ethnic chiefs. The strength of the kingdom provided protection against outside slave raiders who increasingly in the nineteenth century disrupted other Central African communities. Kuba society seems to have been a stable and prosperous one in which values emphasizing work and wealth stimulated a development of material culture of a richness and diversity not found among surrounding peoples of Zaire (Vansina 1967-68:13). The Bushoong developed a rich constellation of art objects: wooden sculpture, embroidered textiles, and decorated architecture (Cornet 1982; Adams 1978:24-39, 106-7; 1983:40-55).

Visitors to the capital, Mushenge, in the late nineteenth century found a planned court layout and a large population (estimated at 10,000), consisting of the king with his hundreds of wives, relatives, officials, and nobility, along with a number of specialized craftsmen such as tailors and sculptors. The Kuba maintained extensive trade links at border markets, but the king forbade the entry of foreigners under penalty of death. The first outsider to penetrate the capital of this well-ordered kingdom was a remarkable black American Presbyterian missionary to the Congo, William Sheppard, who was received in 1892 by the king as a putative descendant of a past ruling family (Sheppard 1917:107-8).<sup>1</sup>

Sheppard provides the earliest documentation of the sculptures of Kuba kings, subsequently studied by several

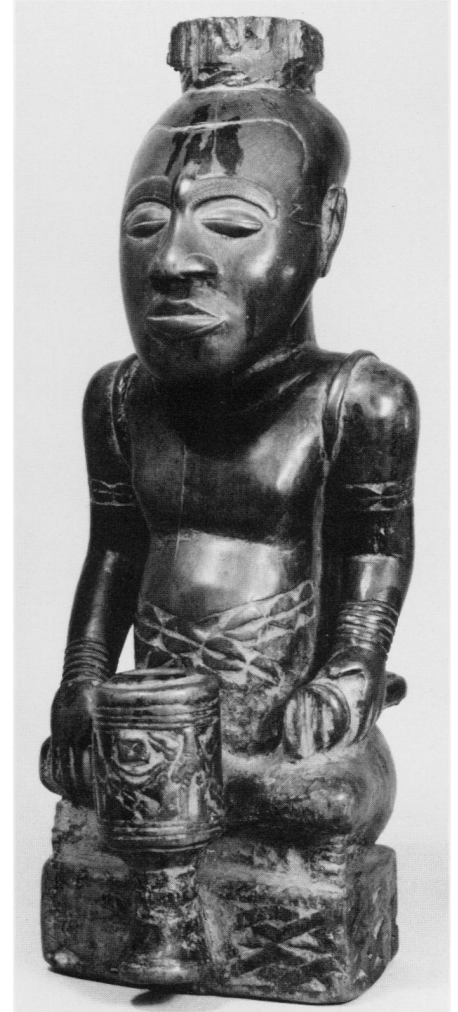




1. KING FIGURE, MISHA MI-SHYAANG A-MBUL (?), FORMERLY MBO MBWOOSH OR BOM BOSH. WOOD, 49.4cm. BROOKLYN MUSEUM, GIFT OF MR. & MRS. ROBERT E. BLUM, MR. & MRS. ALASTAIR B. MARTIN, MR. & MRS. DONALD M. OENSLAGER, THE MRS. FLORENCE E. BLUM FUND.



2. KING FIGURE, KOT A-NTSHEY (?), FORMERLY KOT A-MBUL. WOOD, 51cm. MUSEE ROYAL DE L'AFRIQUE CENTRALE, Tervuren.



3. KING FIGURE, MISHA PELEENG A-NTSHEY. WOOD, 52.8cm. MUSEUM OF MANKIND, LONDON.

scholars. During his visit to the royal palace, he saw four wooden statues that he said were "highly prized and sacred," placed on an earthen platform near the king in the council chamber. They represented former kings who were identified according to an attribute carved in front of each statue: one, a gameboard, belonged to a king whose name Sheppard recorded as Xamba Bulngunga; another, an anvil for a former king who favored the art of smithing (Sheppard 1917:112). In the troubled period that followed the beginnings of European commercial and political endeavors in the region, the mission failed and nothing was heard of the figures until sixteen years later, during Torday's expedition.

At the end of Torday's stay, the king Kot a-Pey presented him with four statues of former kings (Figs. 2,3,5,8) (Torday & Joyce 1910:33). Measuring about 48-55 centimeters in height, they are carved of hardwood,<sup>2</sup> which is unusual in African art, and they are in a

posture that is equally rare in African sculpture. Each sits crosslegged on a square base from which a small wooden object projects. Torday was informed of the figures' identities according to these emblematic objects. The one with the gameboard (Figs. 7,8) he identified as the king called Shamba Bolongongo. According to later research, the name of this ruler is more appropriately represented as Shyaam a-Mbul a-Ngwoong or Shyaam a-Mbul a-Ngoong (Vansina 1963:294).

Oral traditions at the Kuba court include an account of the kingdom recited by the king at installation, royal genealogies (*ncaam*), and references to past kings and queen mothers preserved in song form, which are chanted on ceremonial occasions, mainly by a chorus composed of the king's wives (Vansina 1960:257-70). A list of kings is not a traditional category, but Torday sought and obtained a long recitation of 121 rulers going back to the Creator and including many leaders prior to the founding of the Bushoong kingdom. In this list Torday found Shyaam to be the ninety-third name. Although these

numbers later proved to be erroneous, Torday was able to set a correct period for Shyaam's reign because of remarkably specific facts remembered of the reign of Mbakam Mbomancyeel, a king following shortly after Shyaam. According to Kuba traditions there was a solar eclipse during Mbakam's reign. Because meteorological records indicated an eclipse in 1680, Torday estimated that Shyaam began his reign in the early seventeenth century (Torday & Joyce 1910:30, 36).<sup>3</sup>

Shyaam is a culture hero to the Kuba. According to popular tradition, he instituted the political councils and taught the use of new plants for food, the making of cloth from raffia palm, and the custom of carving the king's statue. He is remembered for his cleverness, and his wise sayings are still quoted. In giving the statue to Torday, the king in 1908 quoted Shyaam as saying to his people: "When they look at this statue, they will be able to remember me, and think that I

watch over them, consoling them when they are sad, giving them inspiration and fresh courage" (Torday & Joyce 1910:27).

Torday believed that the figures he collected were ancient, that each was carved during the reign of the king represented. They were also considered important because of their rarity, as few other large human figure sculptures were known from the Kuba. Three of the statues, including Shyaam, were deposited at the British Museum (Figs. 3,5,8), the remaining one at the colonial museum at Tervuren, Belgium (now the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale) (Fig. 2). In the following year the Kuba king gave the Belgian Minister of the Colonies, J. Renkin, a comparable figure. It has become part of the collections of the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 1).

Many copies subsequently appeared on the European market. The continuing faith in the antiquity of figures of the Kuba kings rested on Torday's belief and the list of 121 names that he recorded. In 1937 Frans Olbrechts, the director of the

Tervuren museum, assembled eighteen statues, some of which he considered modern, for an exhibition of Congo art. He proposed that the statue of Shyaam and the four others collected in the early period constituted an "archaic" style, but he doubted that each figure was contemporaneous with the king represented (Olbrechts 1982:42-44).<sup>4</sup>

The carving of Shyaam can be considered representative of the first five king figures in the archaic style (Figs. 6-8). The king's body is presented naturalistically, except that the upper part is proportionately larger than the lower limbs, in a manner seen elsewhere in African art that can be termed a "descending perspective." The king is shown frontally, seated with legs crossed so that the bottom of the foot turned forward rests under each knee. His right hand rests on the corresponding knee with the fingers extended and the thumb articulated. The left hand holds the Bushoong parade weapon, the *iloon*, reposed on the left knee, its pommel with an emblem of the

sun facing outward. The square base represents a padded rectangular throne-seat, *bulell*, or the royal platform, *yiing* (Cornet 1982:58; Vansina 1972: 51).

To carve this kind of figure the royal sculptor works with an adze, which has a wooden handle to which a metal blade is attached at an acute angle. It takes fine coordination of hand and eye to bring out details with this simple tool. In addition to the naturalistic shape of the facial features and body parts, the sculptor reproduces realistic detail on the body, as in the collarbones and outline of the lips.

During the 1920s this sculpture became the best-known object of Central African art, partly because, identified as the ninety-third king, it was considered to be the oldest wood sculpture from black Africa and partly because of the style. Its appeal to collectors was based on its moderate naturalism, smooth surface finish, and expression of quiet reserve. Its popularity was such that in the 1940s and 1950s, the carving of Kuba king figures became a major source of income for sculptors at the Kuba capital and elsewhere (Vansina 1972:50).

Eventually, by comparing lists of kings made by colonial authorities and by his own research into genealogies, ritual songs, and other oral traditions at the court, Vansina was able to present a more detailed and corrected version of Kuba court history. He found additional confirmation for the regnal date Torday had assigned to Mbakam Mbomancyeel, the king in the third generation following Shyaam. Vansina states: "According to Kuba traditions there was a solar eclipse and it snowed during his (Mbakam's) reign. Two days for this eclipse are possible — 1619 which is manifestly too early for Generation III and 30 March 1680. The latter date is confirmed by learning that austral Africa experienced a period of extreme cold in the early 1690's (Schove). So Mbakam Mbomancyeel was ruling in 1680 and ruled . . . at least until 1691 (Vansina 1963: 282, 312; 1975:143-44).<sup>5</sup> Shyaam, the culture hero, was the first true king, the founder of the current Matoon dynasty. Vansina estimated that from Shyaam's reign in the early seventeenth century to Torday's time in the early twentieth century, the minimum list of kings was eighteen, with the likelihood that unfortunate or disliked rulers were omitted. The current holder of the royal title, Kot Rene, is the twenty-second in the dynasty.

From his research in the Kuba court Vansina could add information on the commissioning and use of the figures. After the rites of investiture were completed, the king ordered a sculptor to carve his statue, called *ndop*, and his drum of office. Only one *ndop* could be made for a king, and if he was not pre-



4 & 5. KING FIGURE. BACK AND SIDE VIEWS. MBOPELYEENG A-NTSHEY WOOD, 53.6cm. MUSEUM OF MANKIND, LONDON.



6, 7, 8. KING FIGURE, BACK, SIDE, AND FRONT VIEWS. SHYAAM A-MBUL A-NGWOONG. WOOD, 54.6cm. MUSEUM OF MANKIND, LONDON.

sent it could not be carved. If the figure decayed, it was permissible to carve as exact a replica of it as possible. During the king's life the *ndop* was supposed to house his double, the counterpart of his soul. The statue was kept in the women's quarters, and when a woman of the harem was about to give birth, it was placed near her to insure a safe delivery. In the absence of the king it served as a surrogate, which women of the court would anoint, stroke, and fondle. After his death the *ndop* was removed to a storage room but taken out to be exhibited on certain occasions, such as on Sheppard's visit (Vansina 1972:44-45).

Vansina agreed with Olbrechts that the five early examples, which were assigned to kings who reigned over a period of a hundred and fifty years (1650-1800), exemplified an "archaic" style. He thought that because the court carvers would follow the model of earlier *ndop* as closely as possible, this archaic style could have been maintained by different hands over that long time. Moreover, rubbing the statue with red-wood powder and palm oil, which gave it its fine patina, also would have pre-

served it from hazards of rain and insects (Vansina 1972:48). However, after comparing details of the five early figures, Jean Rosenwald declared them to be carved all by the same hand and within a short span of time. She proposed that a politically motivated change of cult practices in the eighteenth century inspired the creation of the statues. According to Vansina's history of reigns, successors to the reign of the seventh king, Kot a-Ntshy, in a period of expanding royal power, put an end to the cult tendered to the ethnic spirits, that is, to the nature spirits (*ngeshi*) identified with the several ethnic groups that made up the kingdom. With the end of these cults, which would have divided the loyalty of the people, the increased prestige of the king could be materially expressed in the creation of the *ndop*. Thus, Rosenwald submitted that the tradition of the king's "portrait statue" was begun in the late eighteenth century (1974:26-31, 92).

By quite another route, Joseph Cornet also arrived at an eighteenth-century origin for the tradition. He made several research visits during the 1970s to the Kuba court. According to his infor-

mants, the *ndop* were sculpted after the death of the king as commemorative monuments for his wives in order to perpetuate his almost sacred presence in the harem. This view, plus Cornet's analysis of the king figures by means of a technique of connoisseurship derived from the work of Giovanni Morelli, led to a convincing stylistic seriation that changed the identification of two statues, reordered the sequence, and placed the creation of all five early figures in the eighteenth century.

Torday's early accounts, Vansina's field and historical studies of Kuba society, expressed in over fifty publications, and Cornet's recent research in the Kuba court provide a documentary resource for a more detailed analysis of the royal sculptures. Those sources confirm the conventional identification of the figures and provide information on the social context. This contextual record makes it feasible to interpret the symbolical values the carvings embody. Considering a work of the late eighteenth century in the light of Kuba values current in the mid-twentieth century is justified in this case on the basis of the protected position of

	A	B	C	D	E
1 Upper surface of hat					
2 Upper edge of hat					
3 Inner edge of hat					
4 Hairline					
5 Nape decoration					
6 Shape of ear					
7 Temple scarification	-	-	-	-	-
8 Eyebrow shape					
9 Eye form					
10 Arm ring					
11 Main belt					
12 Outline of buttock cover					
13 Designs on base					
14 Number of shoulder rings	1	2	2	2	2
15 Number of forearm rings	5	5	5	5	6
16 Head to body proportion	39%	40%	39%	36%	37%
17 Height in mm.	494	511	550	555	545

9. DETAILS ON EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY KING FIGURES. CHART ADAPTED FROM CORNET (SIEPIEL, MILAN, 1982). COLUMN A REPRESENTS MISHA MI-SHYAANG A-MBUL(?) (FIG. 1); COLUMN B, KOT A-NTSHEY(?) (FIG. 2); COLUMN C, MISHA PELYEENG A-NTSHEY (FIG. 3); COLUMN D, MBOPELYEENG A-NTSHEY (FIGS. 4, 5); COLUMN E, SHYAAM A-MBUL A-NGWOONG (FIGS. 6, 7, 8). IN COLUMN B, LINE 2, CORNET DID NOT SHOW THE CARVED BEAD ON THE HAT EDGE. IN COLUMN C, LINE 12, HE DID NOT INDICATE THE BROKEN CORNER OF THE BUTTOCK COVER. IN LINE 7, TEMPLE SCARIFICATION DOES NOT APPEAR ON THESE FIVE CARVINGS.

Kuba culture in the nineteenth century, the continuity of court and culture through the colonial period, and the conservatism of court traditions.

Contemporary features of Kuba court costume support the identification of the figures as royal personages. The Shyaam figure, like the other four, wears no common clothing but displays emblems that can be recognized as attributes of elite or royal costume (Fig. 8) (Cornet 1982:58-59, 97-98, 201-32). The wide belt, *yeemy*, crossing on the abdomen is a type worn by prominent men and women. According to Vansina, the narrow plaited belt below it, *mwaandaan* (visible in Fig. 6), identifies the wearer as a member of the crown council and the highest judicial court (1972:51). Cornet reports that the *mwaandaan*, which cannot be untied, signifies that the wearer is able to keep the secrets of the state. There is a council charged with supervising those who are entitled to wear the belt and their adherence to discretion. Over the buttocks hangs a padded hide that adds to the bulk of elite ritual costume. The upper armband appears to be the *mabim*, made of cloth sewn with cowries. In current custom the king is entitled to wear a greater number of cowrie shell rows than other members of the court or commoners. (Cornet identifies the upper armband as the *shop*, which, when made of metal, is worn by the king and certain other royals.) The multiple forearm rings, *ntshyaang*, in brass are worn by the king and his mother. The discoid ornaments over the shoulders, *paang-angup* (hippopotamus teeth), which are made of decorated cloth stitched over cane hoops, are especially reserved for two of the king's costumes. The stepped hairline called *bosh* is outlined in black pigment at great festivals. The knob on the back of the head (Fig. 6) recalls a cluster of cowries, *lapash lakwoon*, to which elite coiffures are attached. The projecting panel, *shody*, shading the face refers to the visor supported by a pillbox hat and covered with cloth decorated with cowries. This hat is one of two most important headdresses of the Kuba king worn with certain costumes, a privilege that is extended to regents and regional chiefs. Oral tradition in the court confirms that numerous kings had an emblem, *ibol*, specific to each, linked to their reign. For Shyaam, the emblem is the gameboard, *lyeel*, as indicated on the statue.<sup>6</sup> These are the features that for the Bushoong would identify the image as a king figure.

As Erwin Panofsky pointed out long ago, another aspect of the primary identification and meaning of a human figure lies in its mood or expression (1955:26-28). Although certain emotional expressions have been shown to be recogniza-



10. KING KOT A-MBWECKY III (KOT RENE) IN REGALIA. MUSHENGE, 1970.  
PHOTO BY ELIOT ELISOFON. ELIOT ELISOFON ARCHIVES, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN ART.

ble cross-culturally (Ekman 1982:128-43), the interpretation of foreign facial and postural representation can be problematic. Close examination of the visual facts is a first requirement for interpretation. The seated, cross-legged pose of the Kuba king presents a relaxed, calm, motionless image. The body position, with the large head placed close to the chest and the arms held alongside the torso to rest at the knees, conveys an impression of compactness, containment, and stolidity. The emblem projecting from the base increases the distance be-

tween the viewer and the figure, adding to its air of detachment.

In the total composition there is a noticeable clustering of elements in the upper part of the body and around the base. In between, parts of the body are recessed and designs appear in low relief. In the upper part the projecting face is dominant, its features naturalistic in proportion and perfectly symmetrical. Calm immobility is the physiognomic quality. The large, oval shape is a quiet form, the eyes are closed, the lips relaxed. There is no dynamic given to the

facial expression by the direction of a gaze.

These obvious features are reinforced by qualities of a more abstract character. The carving can be seen as fitting into an imagined, rectangular column arising from the square base. The substance of the figure fills most of the space within that rectangular outline, creating a massive effect. The dense grain of the wood contributes to the sense of compact heaviness. The unity of the impression is enhanced by the somber monotone and even patination. Except for the hat brim in profile view, there are no strong, interrupting contrasts. In the lower part of the composition, the thick lines of the relief decoration and the masses formed by the crossed legs, the high base, and the emblematic object convey an impression of bulk and weight.

If one accepts this characterization, the significant question arises: how does this expressive form relate to the immediate political context of the royal sculptures? Comparing the king figures to the image of the king in photographs of the 1920s, one sees a similarity in the massive dignity and immobile appearance of the king. According to Vansina (1967-68: 13-27), and readily evident in the filmed scenes of the king in 1970 (Fig. 10, photographed at the same time as the filming), there is an ideal of deportment. The king walks with slow, ponderous movements, and to embody an ideal of stable, restrained authority he maintains a majestic calm throughout his ritual appearance.

This ideal of composure runs throughout Kuba society. Visitors in the early twentieth century and later have been struck by the aristocratic restraint of all classes going about their daily activities. This ideal is explicitly formulated and epitomized in the proper way of dying—in a calm and unruffled manner. Kuba ceremonies have a quiet, elegant character (Vansina 1967-68:25). The people have a fondness for long, slow, mimed pageants. The royal statues can be seen as embodying certain ideals of kingship and behavior held by members of this society.

This mode does not tell the whole story of Kuba kingship or behavior. The mood of measured tranquility has the placidity of a volcano (Vansina 1967-68: 25). There are eruptions in the intense competition for titles and for positions of power. The open display and flaunting of wealth and rank on certain occasions create jealousy, a leading cause of the use and accusations of sorcery. This undercurrent of tension comes to vivid public expression in the agonizing poison ordeals for witchcraft or sorcery (Vansina 1969:245-60).

There is in addition a negative ideal attached to kingship. The people believe that kings are sorcerers. Kings are associated with filth (*nyec*) and a lack of

shame (*bushony*) because upon installation they repudiate their kin group and commit ritual incest (Vansina 1964:102-3, 109), violating the two imperatives that restrain the ordinary man. By virtue of going beyond the basic norms of Kuba society, the king is believed to possess supernormal capabilities. In addition he gains an omniscience and authority beyond his limited constitutional powers by the expectation that he possesses *paam*, the power to exercise arbitrary and violent force. (However, he must do these violent things in secret, or lose face; Vansina 1964:104-5). The art form of elite sculptures seems restricted only to the positive ideals that are identified with the king. Even if that sphere is important, one should recognize the specificity of the artistic statement.

It is interesting to explore how Cornet, an art historian, arrived at the new eighteenth-century sequence and important also to recognize the new identities that he has established for two of the king figures. After repeated visits to the Kuba court, he examined the royal sculptures according to a technique based on the work of Morelli (1816-91), who attributed works of European art to individual artists by comparing details such as fingernails, nostrils, and ear lobes, an approach subsequently broadened to include seriation of significant formal traits (Kleinbauer 1971:45). Cornet compared the first five figures (along with five statues collected at later dates and in manifestly different carving styles) according to the following details: (1) upper surface of the visor; (2) upper edge of the visor; (3) band of the supporting hat; (4) outline (*bosh*) of the hair at the temples; (5) knob at the nape; (6) shape of the ear; (7) scarifications at the temples; (8) shape of the brows; (9) shape of the eyes; (10) upper armband (*mabiim/shop*); (11) principal belt (*yeemy*); (12) outline of the back-cloth (*mbyo*); (13) designs on the base (*yiing*); (14) number of shoulder rings; (15) number of forearm rings (*ntshyaang*); (16) proportion (%) of the head to body; (17) height of figure. He published a chart that illustrates the results (Fig. 9). This comparison has produced a convincing stylistic seriation on the basis of which Cornet proposed that four of the five archaic figures represent

four successive kings who reigned between the early and late eighteenth century; the fifth is a commemorative statue of Shyaam made in the late eighteenth century. The five remaining figures were assigned to kings of the nineteenth century (Cornet 1982, chap. 3).

Interpreting the comparative analysis according to an art historical hypothesis that changes in art style are progressive and tend to increase in complexity, Cornet rearranged the sequence of king figures, putting the simpler, smaller ones at the beginning. He placed the Renkin-Brooklyn image as the earliest because it had only one shoulder ring against two for all the others, because the eyebrows and nape decoration were simple, and because it was the shortest (Fig. 1 and Column A). The Shyaam figure (Fig. 8 and Column E), instead of being the first or oldest carving, occurs in a style group of three statues that includes Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey, who reigned between approximately 1760 and 1780. The latter figure (Fig. 5 and Column D) enjoys a secure identification because of the close correspondence, noted by Torday, between the carved image and the traditions about this king. As depicted, his emblem was the anvil and, according to court tradition, he was of great size, which is reflected in the statue by an embonpoint and folds of fat at the nape (Figs. 4,5). Cornet points to another supporting detail; in oral tradition this king is credited with inventing the *mwaandaan* waist belt with double knots, and his statue is the first to show this feature (Cornet 1982, chap. 3:94) (Fig. 4). A third statue (Fig. 3 and Column C), identified by Torday as Misha Pelyeeng a-Ntshey, retained its position in the sequence, prior to Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey.

But two important changes in identification among the five early figures resulted from the new stylistic analysis. In the new sequence the Renkin-Brooklyn carving (Fig. 1), which had been identified as Bom Bosh or Mbo Mbwoosh, a seventeenth-century king following Shyaam, is rechristened Misha mi-Shyaang a-Mbul, who reigned at the beginning of the eighteenth century; and the statue Torday had identified as Kot a-Mbul, who reigned at the end of the eighteenth century, is renamed Kot

a-Ntshey, who ruled during the first half of the eighteenth century (Fig. 2 and Column B). An interesting point that seems to support this newly assigned identity is that the front edge of the visor of Kot a-Ntshey displays a bead, and Cornet links this to the fact that in an account of his reign, the first mention of beads occurs (Cornet 1982, chap. 3: 91). With one minor adjustment, the emblems on the newly identified statues are in accord with the traditional list of emblems collected by Cornet for the eighteenth-century kings.

Given this new sequence of rulers, (see chart), the question remains: when were the individual statues carved? Cornet proposes the following account. To strengthen royal power and increase his signs of prestige, King Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey (r. 1760-80) had the *ndop* invented. First he ordered one of Misha mi-Shyaang a-Mbul, who had reigned at the beginning of the century, for the sake of his wives who remained in the court. He also ordered one of Misha mi-Shyaang a-Mbul's successor, Kot a-Ntshey, but from another sculptor, thus accounting for the differences in style (Figs. 1,2). It is not likely that he would have ordered one for his immediate predecessor, Misha Pelyeeng a-Ntshey, because he died during investiture after murdering his predecessor. Because of close stylistic similarities, Cornet believes that during the reign of the next king, Kot a-Mbul, at the end of the eighteenth century, three statues were made: one of Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey, the king's predecessor (Fig. 5); one of Mbopelyeeng's unfortunate predecessor (Fig. 3); and for unknown reasons, one of Shyaam a-Mbul a-Ngwoong, the great king of the seventeenth century (Fig. 8). Thus Cornet attributes the creation of the three similar statues now in the Museum of Mankind, London — Misha Pelyeeng a-Ntshey, Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey, and Shyaam — to the reign of Kot a-Mbul in the last years of the eighteenth century.

Vansina maintains that kings did commission statues during their lifetime and therefore he would date the earliest of the archaic statues somewhat before the 1760-80 period proposed by Cornet (Vansina 1983:12,14). However, he accepts Cornet's stylistic sequence, which places the Shyaam figure out of its regnal order, as definitive; the stylistic seriation that juxtaposes that carving with the two kings who reigned in the latter half of the eighteenth century seems secure. Thus, benefiting from the use of two known methods of art history, which derive from the work of Panofsky and Morelli, the figures of Kuba kings, of Shyaam and his eighteenth-century successors, have become more reliably dated and better understood. □

Notes, page 88

Revised Sequence	
<u>Style Group 1</u>	<u>Estimated Date of Reign</u>
Misha mi-Shyaang a-Mbul	Beginning of 18th Century
Kot a-Ntshey	First half of 18th Century
<u>Style Group II</u>	
Misha Pelyeeng a-Ntshey	Approximately 1760
Mbopelyeeng a-Ntshey	1760–1780
Shyaam a-Mbul a-Ngwoong	Approximately 1625



dimeter with anacrusis (up-beat) and truncation (a rest). Each miniature poem has its own alteration. The definition is from a lecture given by John W. Johnson at the Somali Academy of Sciences and Arts in Mogadishu, April 2, 1987.

4. Personal fieldwork, recording songs in the women's milk market in Hargeisa, October 1986. Communication and translation with Mohamed Hamud Sheikh, Language Department, Somali National Academy of Sciences and Arts; the poet Sheikh Aqib Abdullahi Jama, a cultural advisor at the Academy, and Sadiq Musa Ahmed, Head of the Women's Research Unit at the Academy, November-December 1986 and March-April 1987, Mogadishu.

5. Garad Farah was a nineteenth-century sultan (*garad* in Somali) of Jigjiga. In contemporary legend he is characterized as a trickster who is sometimes tricked himself. He has one very clever wife if not many. Intelligence is admired and is a recurrent theme in Somali folklore.

6. Personal observations and communication with Zam Zam Abdi Aden, Director of the Regional Ministry of Culture and Higher Education; Yousef Abdulahe Elmi, Director of the Museum, and Abdulkadir Aden Mead, Head of the Library in Hargeisa, 1985 and 1986.

7. Personal communication, Mohammed Abdilla Riirash, a specialist in Somali history, and Jama Elme Gode, an artist, in Djibouti, 1985.

8. For an interesting book on this subject, see Dualeh 1982 and Patai 1983.

9. For more information on Somali culture and artifacts, see Arnoldi 1986; Loughran 1986. For a similar nomad culture see Prussin 1987.

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ADAMS, notes, from page 38

1. Although Sheppard and his successor learned the Kuba language, the mission was short-lived and had to move out of Kuba territory.

2. The wood of the sculpture of the last eighteenth-century king, Kot a-Mbul, now in the collection of the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale at Tervuren, Belgium, has been analyzed as *Crossopteryx febrifuga* (Vansina 1978: 359, n. 10).

3. Vansina reports additional confirmation for Mbakam's regnal period (see note 5).

4. Discussion of the remaining, later figures is beyond the scope of this article.

5. He cites another example of quite secure dating: "In the

early years of the reign of Mbop Mabiinc mambul a great comet was sighted. It can be identified with Halley's Comet of 1835 by circumstantial evidence." For the latest discussion of the list of kings, see Vansina 1978: appendix A, 245-47.

6. According to the interpretation of Belepope Mabintch (1981:12), a member of the royal family, the game illustrated the struggle over the succession in which craft and chance played their parts.

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