

112. MASK

Gabon, Ngounié River
Wood, H. 11¾ in. (29.8 cm.)
19th–20th century

Except for their color, the black masks made and used by various peoples on the west bank of the Ngounié River in southern Gabon (e.g. Ashira, Punu, Lumbo) are identical to the much more common white masks of that region. White masks are used by stilt dancers at funerary celebrations. It has been suggested that black ones were worn by judges capable of discovering sorcerers (Perrois 1979: 253).

K. E.

Published: Paris 1966, no. 85; Jerusalem 1967, no. 161; Sieber and Rubin 1970, no. A24 (ill.).



113. DOOR

Gabon, Tsogo
Wood, paint, H. 55 in. (139.7 cm.)
19th–20th century

Of all the peoples in the Ogowe River basin, the Tsogo (or Tsogho) are among those who value the decorative arts most highly. The last surviving representative of an authentic African style in Gabon, Tsogo art is characterized by a tendency toward abstraction, especially in masks and in the decorative motifs applied to utilitarian objects (stools, tool handles, weapons, fly whisks, and doors).

In villages, houseposts with a human head at the top are not unusual. In the sacred enclosures of the *ebandza* (temples for the Bwiti cult), many statues, masks, and decorated boards attest to the taste for sculpted expressions of the great concepts of life: the creator gods, cosmic signs, and good and evil spirits.

The door here is similar to many found as recently as twenty years ago in the bend of the Ogowe River and in the valleys of the Ofoue and Lolo, among the Tsogo, Sango, and Vuvi peoples. The stylized anthropomorphic figure surmounting a barricade could represent a protective spirit of the household. Its face is treated in the pure Tsogo style found on masks—an inverted omega for eyebrows, a flat triangular nose, and oval eyes and mouth carved in low relief. Curiously, the lozenge form of the legs recalls the legs of Kota reliquary figures (nos. 118, 119).

Such objects were generally painted, mainly in white (kalin), ocher (clay, ferruginous earth), and black (charcoal).

L. Perrois

Published: Paris 1966, no. 88; Jerusalem 1967, no. 156; Sieber and Rubin 1968, no. 113 (ill.).



FOR SPIRITS AND KINGS

African Art from the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection

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Translations and additional research by Kate Ezra
Photographs by Jerry L. Thompson

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, New York

16.131