



116. RELIQUARY HALF-FIGURE

Gabon, Tsogo

Wood, metal, pigment, H. 16 in. (40.6 cm.)

19th-20th century

Ancestor worship, known among the Tsogo as *mombe*, is illustrated in a meaningful way by full or half-figures placed in a *bumba* Bwiti. This receptacle consists of a sack made of antelope skin and basketry or simply of a basket containing various relics: human and animal bones, brass rings, grain, shells, coins, and jewelry among them. The figure is usually set in the *bumba* Bwiti up to the level of its abdomen. In most cases, though not in this one, the lower part of the figure has been eroded.

These figures function as guardians. Other statues or marionettes may intervene in spectacular rituals for meetings of the *evovi* (the traditional judges) or of the Kono, Ya-Mvei, Boo, and Ombudi brotherhoods.

The forms of Tsogo figures are usually more curved and closed and more realistically conceived than those of Tsogo masks. The convex forehead of the full face is decorated with a wide brass sheet reminiscent of the frontal plaques on Mahongwe objects. Eyebrow arcades are slightly hollowed out, the nose is strong, and the mouth is wide open. The position of the arms of the figure is typical: they hug the sides, with hands brought up in front of the chest.

L. Perrois

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117. JANUS FIGURE

Congo, Kuyu

Wood, paint, H. 32 1/4 in. (81.9 cm.)

19th-20th century

Our knowledge of the Kuyu is based on observations made in the early part of this century (Poupon 1918). The western Kuyu liken the chief to a panther, and initiation ceremonies teach the secrets of this animal's powers. Among the eastern Kuyu, the serpent Ebongo is the focus of initiation (*djo*), and his ancestors and offspring are represented in the carved wooden heads that are the best-known form of Kuyu sculpture.

Kuyu figures are far less common than heads. Small (sixteen inches) male-and-female pairs said to represent the serpent in human form are carried on a stretcher during the *djo* initiation. At the same rite, the ghosts of the serpent's ancestors are represented by seated figures who "speak," frightening the initiates.

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Edited by Susan Vogel

*Translations and additional research by Kate Ezra
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