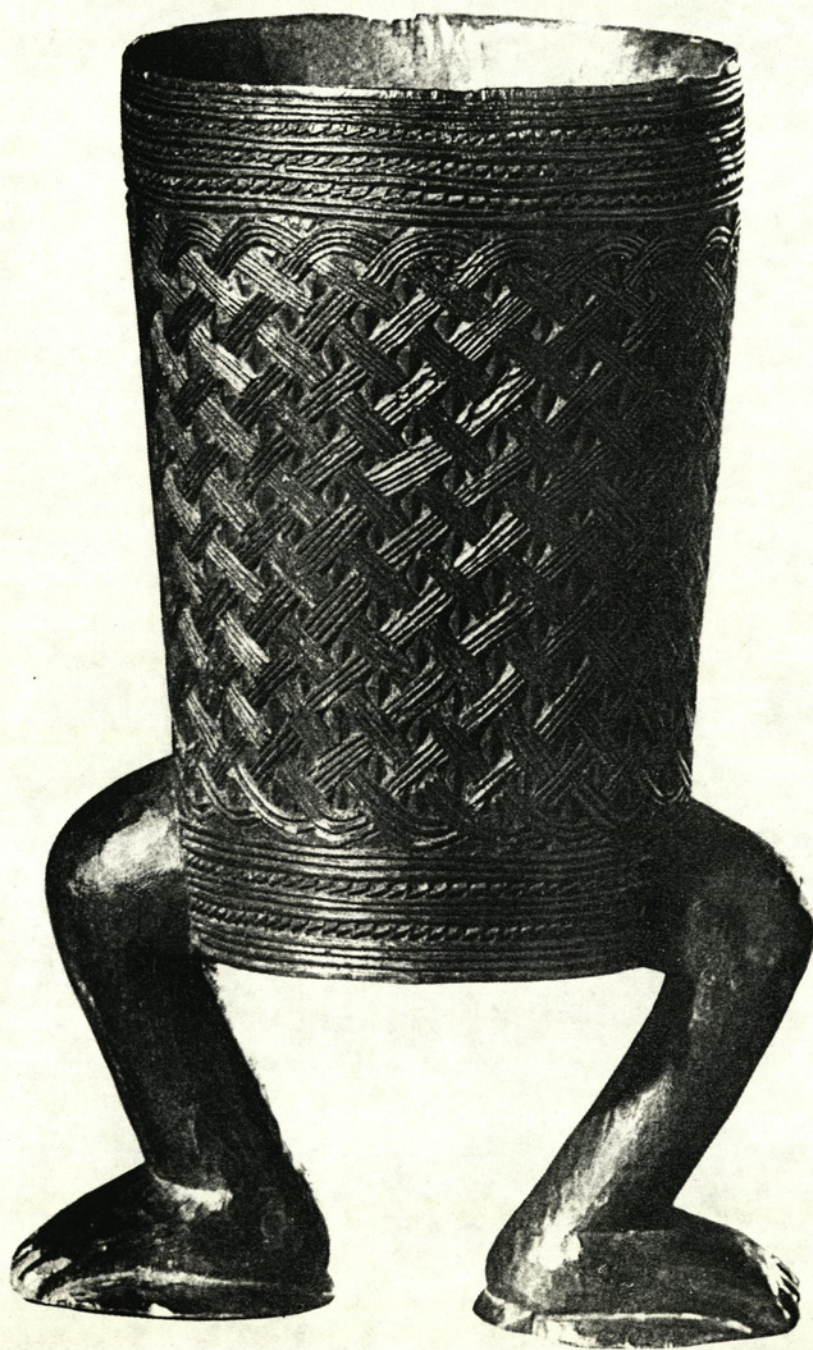


## SOUTHERN ZAIRE

Another large style area of Equatorial Africa is southern Zaire, in the vast basin of the Kasai River, a tributary of the Congo. The basins of the rivers emptying themselves into the Kasai



204 Palm-wine cup standing on human legs. Bakuba, Zaire. Brown dark-stained wood with slightly glossy patina. The fine relief carving imitates a thinly woven mat. Height 21 cm, diameter 10 cm. Náprstek Museum, Prague.

divide this area not only geographically but also culturally. Although the western and northern borderlands of this area receive some influences from the old centres of power and culture on the banks of the Lower Congo, the tribes settled along these rivers have created a number of characteristic styles of their own, which may be divided into a small number of distinctly different groups.

The first group is composed of the tribal styles of the Kwango and Kwilu administrative provinces. The boundaries of this area are the southern tributaries of the Kasai, the Kwango River in the west and the Luangue in the east. The most prolific carvers are undoubtedly the Bayaka, the westernmost of these tribes, dwelling in the Middle and Upper Kwango regions. Centuries long contacts with the Bakongo tribes of the Lower Congo region led not only to hostilities — the Bayaka conquering San Salvador, the capital of the Christianized Congo empire, in 1568 — but also to the operation of mutual cultural influences. Whereas the eastern Bakongo tribe of the Bankanu has taken over the Bayaka art style, among the Bayaka we find fetish figures in a purely local style, the chest being hollowed for putting in a quadrangular box for magic substances. Boxes of this kind seem to have been taken over from the Lower Congo region.

The most distinctive stylistic features of Bayaka wood-carving are the treatment of the nose with its upward curving tip which in extreme cases even turns right back like the trunk of a trumpeting elephant, and the Bayaka 'spectacles', an oval frame around the upper half of the face. The origins and significance of these stylistic features are not known.

Small figure sculptures of both sexes are made as fetishes with special protective functions; some magic material is often attached. Large figures, such as the example reproduced here (plate 189), are very rare, and nothing is known of their meaning. We can only surmise that they represent ancestors. Among magical items, the most remarkable in terms of carving are cylindrical slit drums, used by a sorcerer to call together the villagers for a performance (plate 190). The handles of the drum



205 Human-headed cup for ritual palm-wine drinking. Bakuba, Zaire. Brown wood stained black. A number of features are characteristic of the Bakuba style: the shaved hair-line above the forehead, the bow-shaped markings on the nostrils, and the bridge connecting the upper lip with the nose. Height 18.7 cm. Náprstek Museum, Prague.

are carved in the form of small human heads in typical Bayaka style. Among everyday objects, the Bayaka have perhaps treated artistically only combs ornamented with a human head (plate 191) and headrests supported by caryatids in the form of standing animal figures or humans holding the headrests aloft.

The best-known Bayaka works are initiation masks. After attending the bush school, the initiated boys (*tudansi*) return to the village in a triumphal procession. The best dan-

cers are arranged in pairs with masks, performing dances to a watching villagers. These are painted masks, with a projection below the face which the dancer holds the mask in. The carved face is attached to a human skeleton capped with vividly colored raffia. The top of the mask consists of a hairstyle conveying the wearer's status within the initiation system. A comic or even satiric nature is sometimes in front of the face. These figures are stuffed mannequins made of raffia, the heads and hands being carved. Whereas the faces of the masks are subject only to slight changes, the figures of the masks are modified in order to surprise and amuse the spectators (plate 192). The eyes are sometimes entirely missing on the work helmet, being replaced by a comb (plate 193). Long raffia fringes are attached to the edge of the mask.

The masks called *kakunga* are used for initiation. Unlike those of the initiation masks, the faces are enlarged many times, the characteristic feature being large and swollen cheeks. The *kakunga* masks are credited with extraordinary magic powers and are kept therefore in a special hut in the village. They are used for curing illnesses or controlling the weather, being worn during initiation camp on the day when the initiations are performed. According to records recorded by Himmelheber, the Bayaka have taken over these masks from their neighbours, the Bankanu of the Bakuba complex, although similar masks in the Lower Congo region are not known. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the *kakunga* masks having originated in this area, since the Bayaka art tradition is so long ago that the Bayaka have forgotten its origins and significance.

Although relatively little known, the most remarkable Bayaka carving is the decoration of the circumcision hut. This decoration consists of painted panels with figure decoration in high relief. Its sexual themes are expressed either in realistic hyperbole or symbolically.