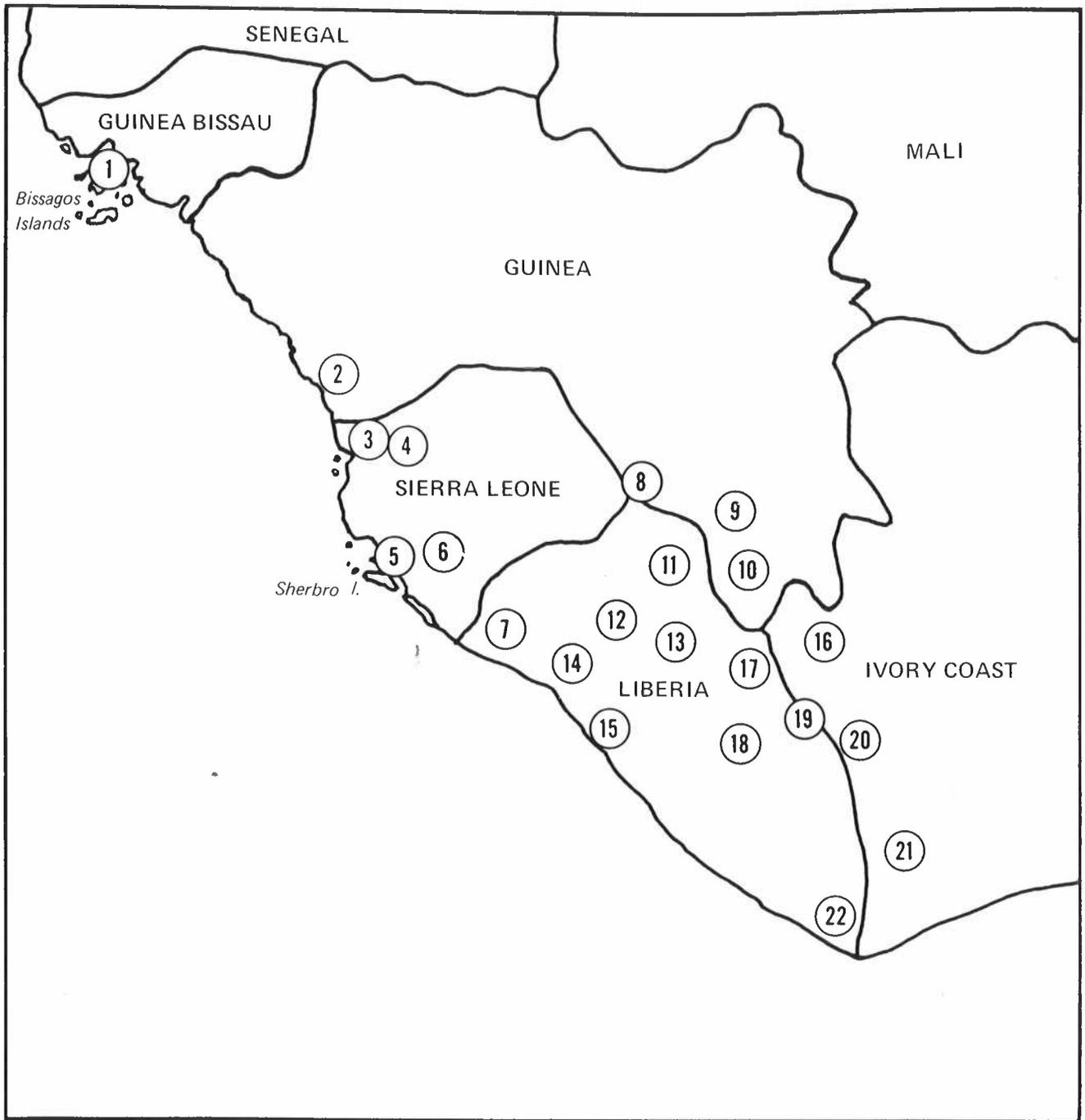


AFRICAN ART



The WEST GUINEA COAST

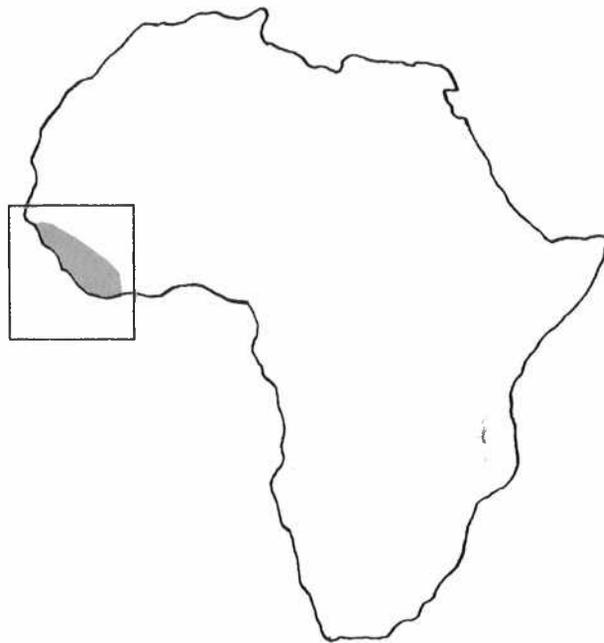


TRIBES SHOWN ON MAP

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 BIJOGO | 12 GEH |
| 2 BAGA | 13 MANO |
| 3 LIMBA | 14 DEI |
| 4 TEMNE | 15 BASSA |
| 5 BULLOM-SHERBRO | 16 DAN (YACUBA) |
| 6 MENDE | 17 GIO |
| 7 GOLA | 18 KRAN |
| 8 KISSI | 19 NGERE |
| 9 TOMA | 20 WOBE |
| 10 GUERZE | 21 BETE |
| 11 KPILLE | 22 GREBO |

Front cover:
 MANO
 Miniature mask
 h. 4"
 Brass

The WEST GUINEA COAST



An exhibition of African Art
from the collection of
William & Robert Arnett

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

Dalton Galleries, Dana Fine Arts Building
Decatur, Georgia

April 27 — May 26, 1975

Foreword

The William and Robert Arnett collection is one of the most prodigious arrays of art to be found anywhere in the world. In a relatively short period of time the young brothers have put together a comprehensive collection of art works ranging from Asia and the South Pacific to the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean and Western Hemisphere. They have over 250 pieces of Chinese jade now on display at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, where recently their Southeast Asian collection also was featured in a major exhibition.

But it is in the area of African art that they are now focusing all of their time and energy. With the fervor of the unrelenting collector, and with increasingly discerning taste, they have accumulated well over a thousand significant pieces. One is visually awed by the profusion of fine examples from most of the important tribes of West and Central Africa. With dedication the Arnetts seek out examples of the traditional styles as well as exciting variations and rarities. The words of Sherman Lee, Director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, could apply here. In describing another remarkable collection, he equated it to a "monster, engulfing and devouring its creator with demands for space and care. Each addition demands another; each problem requires a solution through study and research."

At a time when people are becoming increasingly aware of the historical importance and artistic merit of African art, the city of Atlanta is fortunate to have this collection in its midst. The Arnetts have been extremely generous in welcoming visitors ranging from school groups to international experts. It is with a sense of pride and affection that they explain and discuss the individual pieces. Their intuitive spiritual affinity with their collection is very much apparent.

This exhibition, which consists of a very small portion of the Arnett African collection, is entitled *The West Guinea Coast*. Rather than holding a survey-type exhibition of African art, they elected to concentrate on one region in order to present a more thorough documentation of its tribal styles and sub-styles. Selections from different regions of Africa represented in their collection will be shown in other museums and galleries in the near future. These exhibits will be precursors of a major exhibition of the highlights of the entire collection at the High Museum of Art in the Spring of 1977.

Evelyn M. Mitchell

Instructor of African Art, Agnes Scott College and Georgia State University. Former director of Afro-American Cultural Center, Cleveland State University, and lecturer at Cleveland Museum of Art.

Introduction

When Fra Angelico created a series of frescoes on the walls of his Florentine monastery, he did so with no regard for recognition or financial reward for his efforts. He was motivated by the impulse to create an atmosphere of spirituality, to provide a source of inspiration for the select few who would view his work. It may be assumed that Monet water lilies were created in much the same spiritual mood. Through the ages the true artist has stood between "God" (meaning the Supreme Being, Absolute Truth, or whatever definition one chooses) and Man, to make the latter aware of the presence of the former. It is in this context that the African artist functioned.

To understand African art it is necessary to understand the reasons for its creation, and the relationships formed by the art, the artist, and the viewer. Among African tribes there is a profound belief in a Supreme Being, who is never represented in sculptural form. The religious sculptures contain lesser deified spirits, as well as venerated spirits of ancestors, all of whom are subordinate to the Supreme Being. The objects are not intended to be worshipped, but serve rather as spiritual media through which "God" can be reached. Nor are the objects intended to be studied and analyzed, or admired as "art". The artist was a servant of the powers of the spiritual world which dominate all activities of the material world. It was his responsibility to give form to concept, to make the unseen visible. His work, if successful, created in the viewer a feeling of reverence; it made the viewer aware of the presence of higher authority. The ritual object was not merely a symbol of that authority, it was the very spirit itself. When, for example, a mask was worn, the wearer lost his human identity and became a living incarnation of the spiritual power embodied in the mask. When he spoke, his voice was not his own but was that of the spirit of the mask.

A significant aspect of African art is its stylistic continuity which has endured over a period of centuries, even millenia. Unlike Western art, African art was not subject to the tastes of prevailing ruling classes, nor to commercial demands. African sculptural styles, varying considerably from tribe to tribe, were determined by traditions rooted in the distant past. Each succeeding generation of carvers continued these traditions. Spontaneity and innovation were not precluded, however, as long as basic stylistic requirements were not violated.

The role played by African sculpture in the development of 20th century Western art is now well documented, though as yet it has not been explored fully by most art historians. There was hardly an im-

portant Western painter or sculptor during the first half of this century whose work does not reflect close contact with, and understanding of, African sculptural forms. Indeed, among the first serious collectors of African art were the leading artists and art dealers of Paris in the early 1900's.

On all continents of the world, among all races, art began as a vehicle of religious expression. In non-technological cultures art retained its original purpose. In "developed" societies, as material needs overcame spiritual ones, art dramatically reflected changing values. African art has been the last major holdout in the 20th century against such change. There appears to be little likelihood, however, that African art can survive the advance of modern civilization. Nonetheless, it has provided us with a wealth of examples of the power and vitality that art can possess when it is what it ideally was intended to be.

This exhibition covers an area of the West African coast some eight hundred miles long and two hundred miles wide. It begins in the north with Guinea Bissau, continues through Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, and concludes with the southwestern region of Ivory Coast. Most of the tribes of the West Guinea Coast are related either by language or artistic style. Stylistic similarities result largely from the influence of the powerful and pervasive *Poros* male secret society, which governs tribes throughout Liberia and in parts of Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. The two northernmost tribes of the West Guinea Coast, the Bijogo and the Baga, have little in common with the tribes to the south and are included here primarily for their geographical location.

Bijogo

The Bijogo live in The Bissagos Island of Guinea Bissau (formerly Portugese Guinea). Their sculpture consists of a wide variety of objects, the principal one being a spirit figure. It was placed upon an altar apparently to house the soul of a deceased ancestor. The object may take either the form of a human figure or of a human head atop a pedestal.



1.
BIJOGO
Ritual object with attached head
h. 22½"
Wood, eggshells, vegetation, metal eyes



2.
BIJOGO
Ancestor figure seated on stool
H. 18 ''
Wood, red and black coloration with tacks as eyes

3.
BIJOGO
Spirit figure
h. 13½''
Wood, traces of eggshell, tacks as eyes
This piece has an atypical abstract face.





4.
BIJOGO
Ancestor figure seated on stool
h. 11"
Wood, red coloration, metal eyes



5.
BIJOGO
Seated male figure
h. 11 1/4"
Wood, metal eyes

6.
BIJOGO
Ritual tablet with double head
h. 18½"
Wood



7.
BIJOGO
Spirit figure
h. 9¼"
Wood, feathers, vegetation



8.
BIJOGO
Spirit figure
h. 14½"
Wood



9.
BIJOGO
Ritual tablet with head
h. 17"
Wood, encrustation, eggshells





10.
BIJOGO
Standing male figure
h. 21"
Wood

Baga

The Baga of Guinea are thought to have migrated from the Upper Niger region of the Western Sudan several centuries ago. Most of their sculpture serves the *Simo* Society, which dominates tribal life. Baga carving more closely relates in form to the abstract tradition of the Western Sudan than to the styles of the other tribes of the Guinea Coast.



11.
BAGA
Nimba
h. 46¾"
Wood

The *Nimba* can either be carried on the shoulders as a mask or used as a free-standing ceremonial figure. It represents a female deity who ensures fertility for both women and crops.



12.
BAGA
Snake (Banjonyi)
h. 63½"
Painted wood

Its form inspired by the python, the *Banjonyi* is used in ritual combat between competing villages at young men's initiation ceremonies.



13.
BAGA
Ritual object (*Anok*)
l. 25"
Wood, brass earrings, tacks as eyes

The *Anok*, a composite bird and human head mounted in a vessel-like pedestal, contains the protective spirit of the *Simo* Society. It is used in agricultural rituals.

Bullom-Sherbro

The ancient kingdom of Bullom occupied Sherbro Island and parts of the coastal and interior areas of Sierra Leone. The Bullom produced numerous small stone statues, mostly of steatite (soapstone), which are called *nomoli*, and are thought to relate to the worship of royal ancestors. The Bullom were driven from the mainland by the Mende invasion of the 16th century. In later years when Mende farmers would accidentally uncover these *nomoli* they would place them on altars in the rice fields to guarantee good harvests.



14.
BULLOM-SHERBRO
Nomoli
h. 4½"
Steatite

16.
BULLOM-SHERBRO
Nomoli
h. 5"
Steatite



15.
BULLOM-SHERBRO
Nomoli
h. 4"
Steatite

Mende

The Mende of Sierra Leone are best known for their black helmet-type masks used by the *Bundu* (or *Sande*) Society for women. These masks appear in an initiation ritual which concludes the period of preparation of young girls for womanhood. The masks are worn by women who have attained a high rank within the society. The *Bundu* mask is one of the very few religious objects in West Africa made expressly for and used solely by women.

Much rarer than the *Bundu* mask is the large *Gongole* ("ugly") mask. It is virtually the only West African mask which apparently has no particular spiritual connotation. Its purpose is primarily to provide entertainment at otherwise solemn ceremonies.



17.
MENDE
Female figure
h. 30¼"
Wood

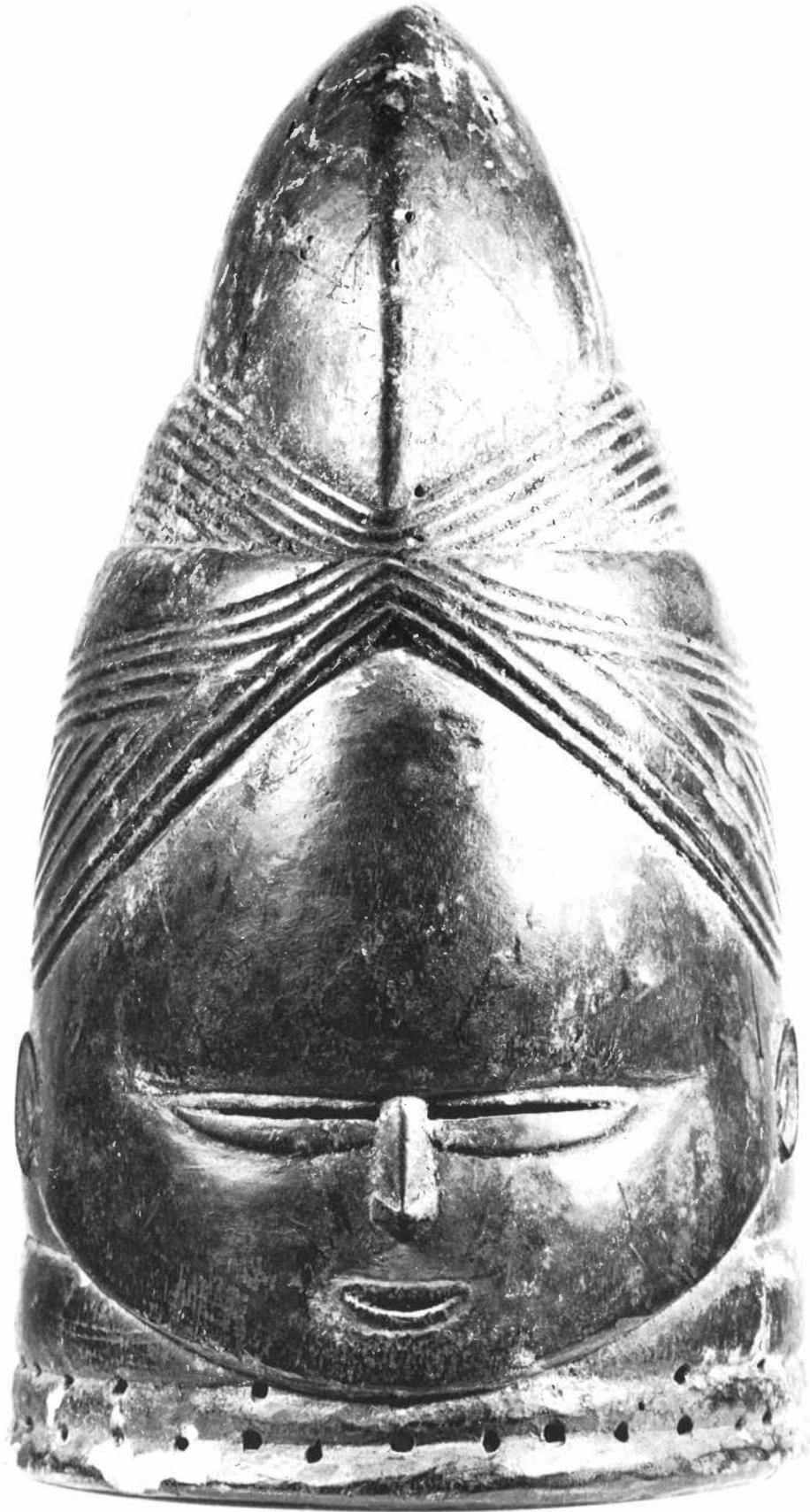
Figures of this type, used by the *Poro* Society, are fairly common among tribes of the Dan group in Liberia and Ivory Coast but rarely are found among the Mende. (see catalog nos. 76–78 and 103)



18.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Wood, silver ornamentation



19.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
Wood



20.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 15 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
Wood

21.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 16"
Wood



22.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 16"
Wood



23.
MENDE
Janus Bundu mask
h. 14"
Wood



24.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 17½"
Wood, metal



25.
MENDE
Bundu mask
h. 14"
Wood, fiber



26.
MENDE
Trumpet
l. 28"
Ivory, animal skin and fur

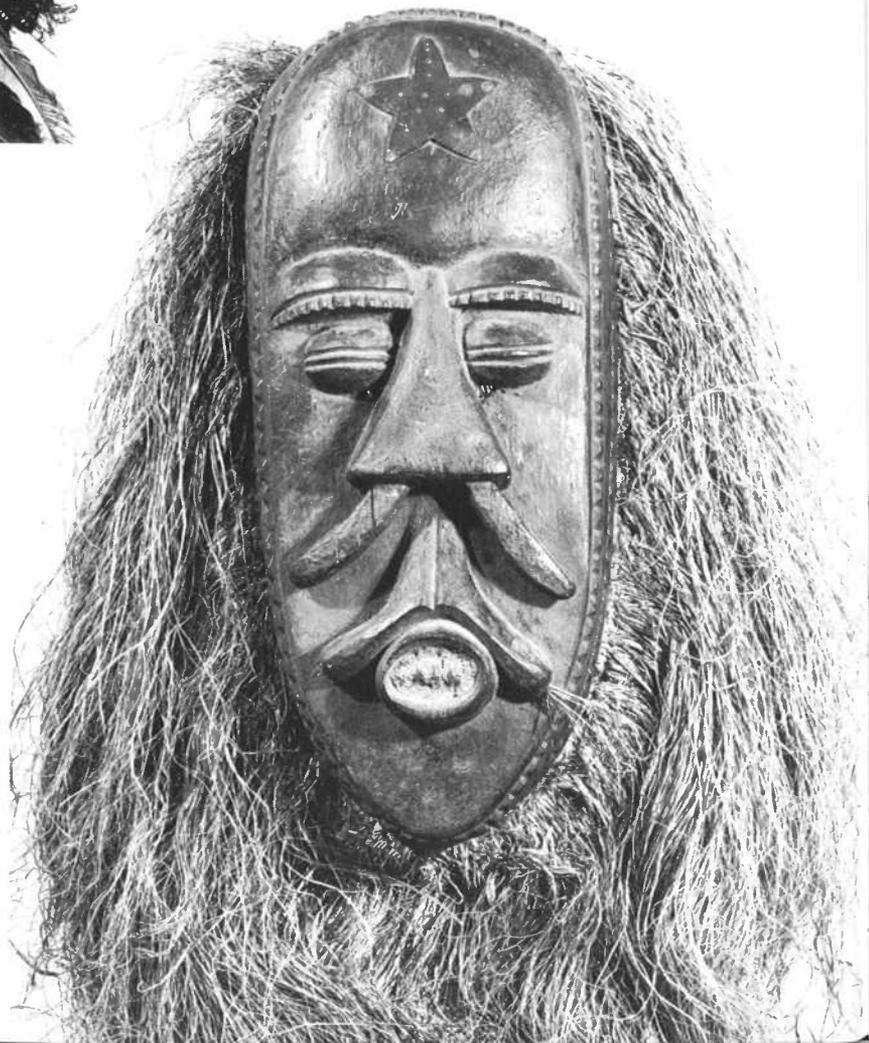


27.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 20¾"
Wood





28.
MENDE
Gongole mask with feather cloak
h. 15" (mask only)
Wood, cloth, animal tusks, feathers



29.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 24"
Wood, raffia

30.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 18 1/4"
Wood



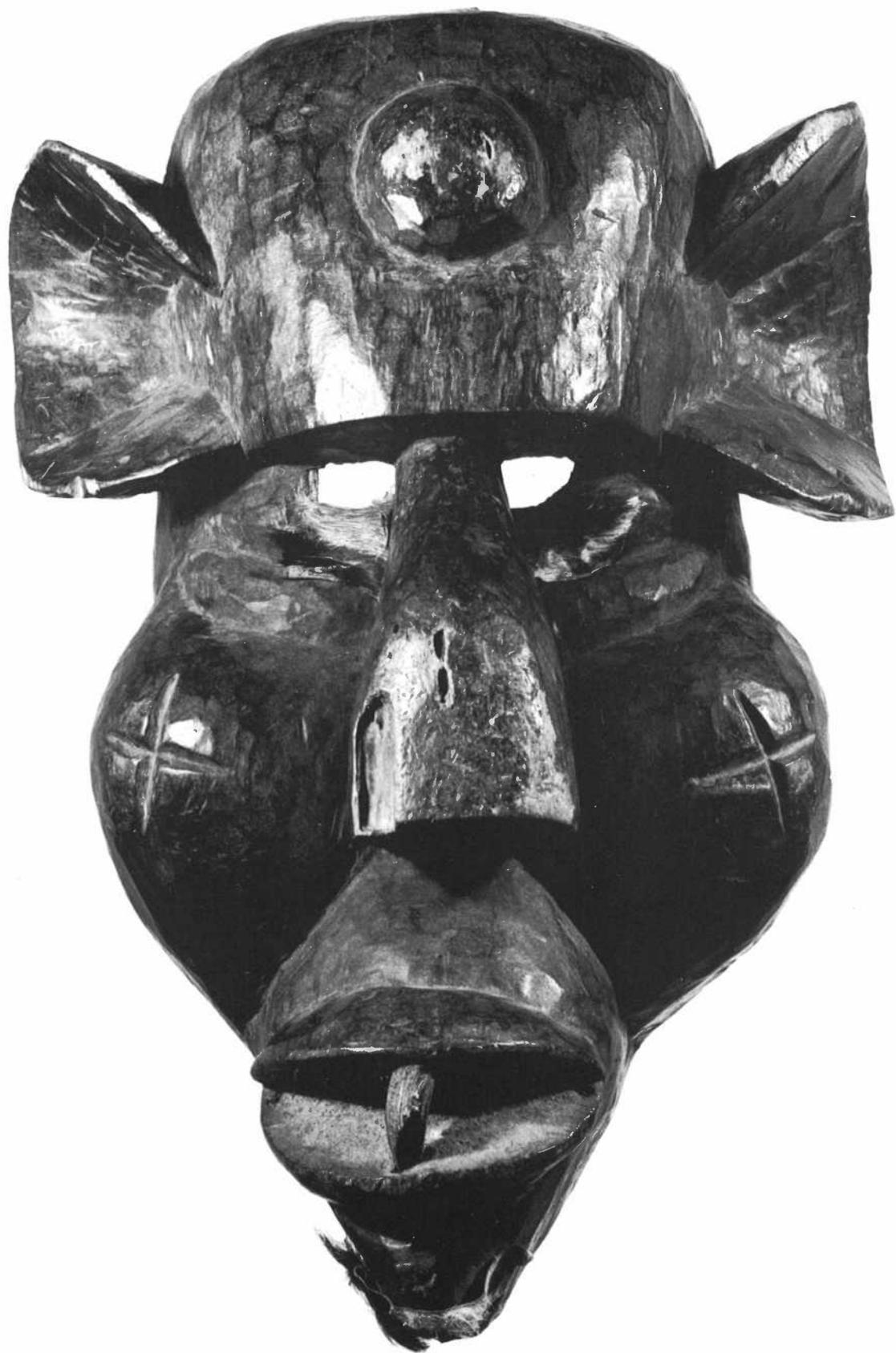
31.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 24"
Wood, red paint



32.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 25"
Wood, animal tusks



33.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 18 3/4"
Wood, nails



34.
MENDE
Gongole mask
h. 26½"
Wood, animal fur and tusk



35.
MENDE
Female figure
h. 23"
Wood

Figures of this type, called *minsereh*, are used by priestesses of the *Yassi* Society in divination and spiritual healing rites.



36.
MENDE
Male figure
h. 21"
Wood

This figure, which shows a great deal of use but whose purpose is uncertain, illustrates obvious colonial influence.

37.
TEMNE
Horn with female figure
h. 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Wood

The Temne live in the northern region of Sierra Leone. Their sculpture relates somewhat to the Baga in Guinea as well as to the Mende.





38.
LIMBA
Female figure
h. 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Wood with tacks as eyes

The Limba, who belong to the Temne group in Sierra Leone, produce figures which relate in style to the sculpture of the Baga. There is a striking facial resemblance between this piece and certain Bijogo carvings from Guinea Bissau (see catalog no. 4).



39.
LIMBA
Female figure
h. 10¼"
Wood, glass beads

40.
TEMNE
Female figure
h. 21¾"
Wood, rope, fabric, cowrie shells



41.
KISSI
Fertility fetish
h. 18½"
Wood, cloth, bird beak, metal, agate beads
The Kissi live in southwestern Guinea and neighboring areas of Sierra Leone.



42.
GOLA
Helmet mask
h. 26½"
Wood, metal

This piece and number 42 below are initiation masks of the *Sande* Society. Masks of this type, which closely relate to the Mende *Bundu* masks, are found among the Gola and Vai tribes in Liberia. The female heads atop the superstructures show strong influence of both the Mende and the Bassa.



43.
GOLA
Helmet mask
h. 25½"
Wood, raffia

Toma

Most of the art of the Toma, who live in southwestern Guinea, relates to the *Poro* Society. The Toma use a number of Dan-type masks but their most impressive sculptural form is the *landa*, uniquely Toma, a large flat cubistic animal mask which represents the bush spirit of the *Poro*.



TOMA

44.
TOMA
Mask with bird beak
h. 20" (50" including
feather headdress)
Wood, metal, cloth,
cowrie shells, feathers

This *Poro* Society mask
is similar to some masks
of the Dan group (see
catalog no. 51).



45.
TOMA
Landa mask
h. 41½"
Wood, leather, cowrie shells, glass mirror, berries, horn, basketry

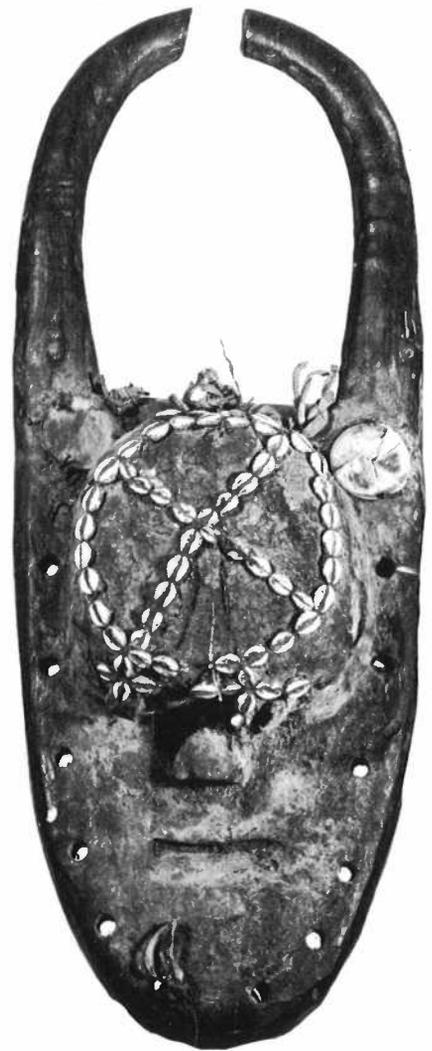


46.
TOMA
Landa mask
h. 30"
Wood, cloth, glass mirrors, animal horns



47.
TOMA
Animal helmet mask
l. 25"
Wood, metal, raffia

The form of this mask, consisting of an animal head with crocodile jaw, is very similar to the so-called "firespitter" mask of the Senufo tribe. The mask's vertical *façade* is more similar to the *landa*.



48.
TOMA
Landa mask
h. 31"
Wood, fabric, cowrie shells, animal skin, glass

Dan and Ngere

The terms "Dan" and "Ngere" are commonly used to describe not only specific tribes but also artistic styles belonging to a larger group of related tribes. These tribes are found primarily in Liberia, but they extend into western Ivory Coast and southern Guinea. Each of the tribes is dominated by the *Poro* Society and almost all of their sculpture relates in some way to the activities of the *Poro*.

Among the Dan and Ngere tribes the principal art form is the mask. Masks of the Dan type are more naturalistic and refined than those classified as Ngere. The wood is carefully selected, carved with an eye toward symmetry and delicacy, and polished until the desired surface appearance is achieved. The result is a mask which conveys great spiritual power in an aesthetically pleasing manner. In contrast, the Ngere type, which normally represents a somewhat abstract face combining human and animal features, is generally fierce and grotesque. This impression is often heightened by the addition to the mask of animal horns and fur, hair, various pigments and dyes, metal, and materials obtained through commerce with Europe (cartridge cases, textiles, paints, beads, etc.). Like the classic Dan mask, the Ngere mask communicates to the viewer a presence of spiritual authority, but the method of obtaining this sensation is totally different.

Function and form are consistent among the Dan and Ngere masks. Each type of mask is conceived for a specific purpose; its form identifies that purpose. There is a particular mask worn by *Poro* elders who train young men to accept the responsibilities of tribal life. Another mask is worn at the subsequent initiation ceremony. There are masks whose spirits can inspire wise decisions in matters of law, social disputes, war and peace; masks which house protective spirits for households or for special groups; masks which can control the elements of nature, assure fertility, and preside over rituals of every sort. There is hardly an aspect of religious, social, or political life for which there is not a corresponding mask.

Positive identification of "Dan/Ngere" sculpture according to tribal origin is often tentative at best. Any tribe in the group may employ, depending upon the occasion, masks of either the Dan or Ngere type. Also, members of one tribe frequently commission works from carvers of another tribe, and pieces are sold or traded among tribes. Thus, even though the sculpture of each tribe possesses certain distinguishing characteristics, other factors sometimes complicate the task of attribution. The broad terms "Dan" or "Ngere" must then suffice.

Among the principal tribes whose works are classified under the Dan/Ngere heading are:

The GUERZE, who live in Guinea and adjacent areas of Liberia, where they are called KPELLE. Their sculpture is typical of the northern Dan classic style. (There is virtually no difference between the Guerze and Kpelle carvings; identification is based upon the geographical origin of the piece when this can be determined.)

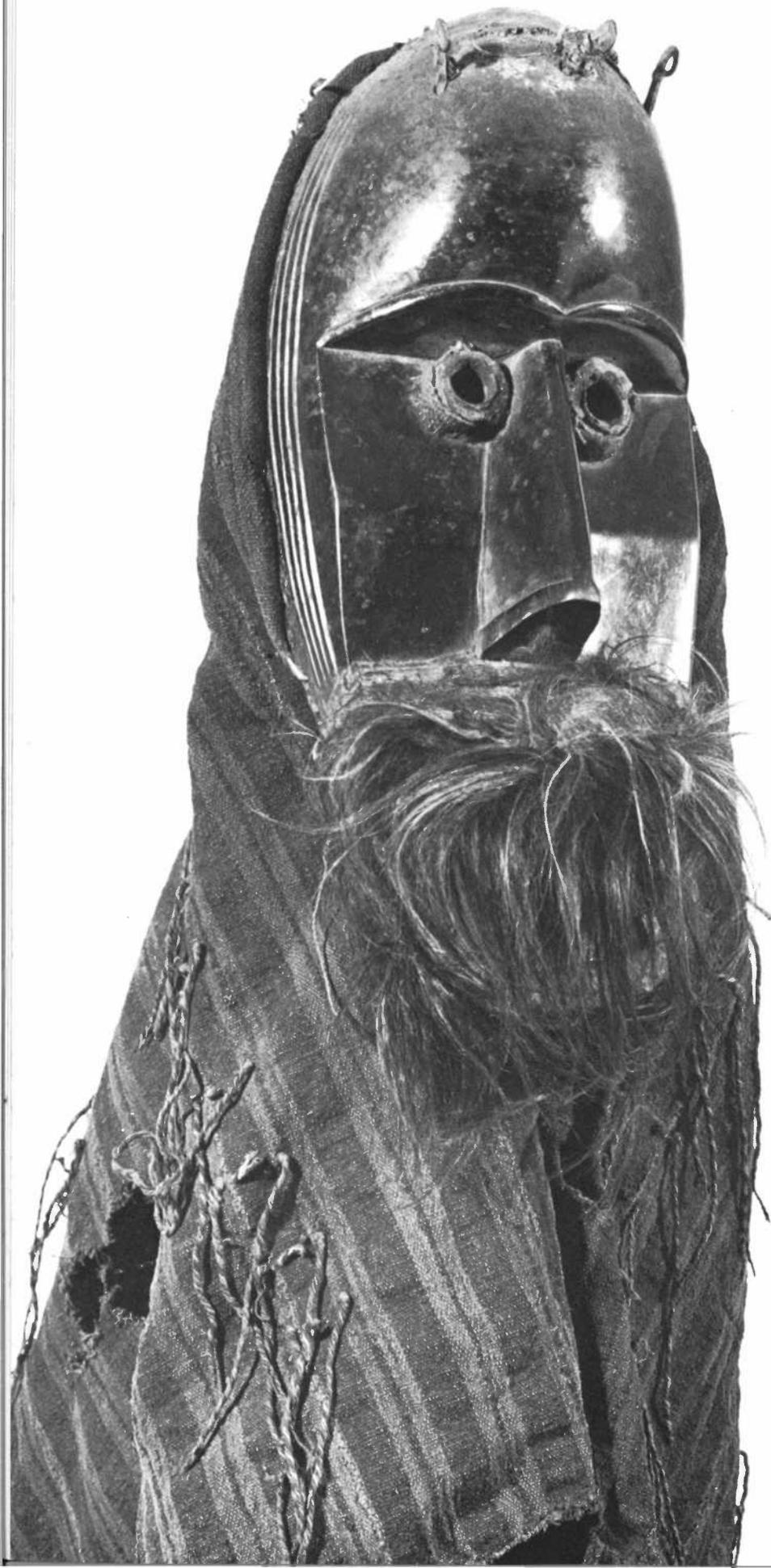
The MANO and GIO in Liberia. They belong to a common linguistic group with the Guerze and Dan, and their sculpture is generally identified as Dan. (The Gio are the Liberian branch of the Dan or Yacuba tribe of Ivory Coast.)

The KRAN in Liberia, who belong linguistically and artistically to the Ngere group. Their masks range from rather small and cubistic to large typical Ngere types, heavily adorned with animal horns, fur, etc.

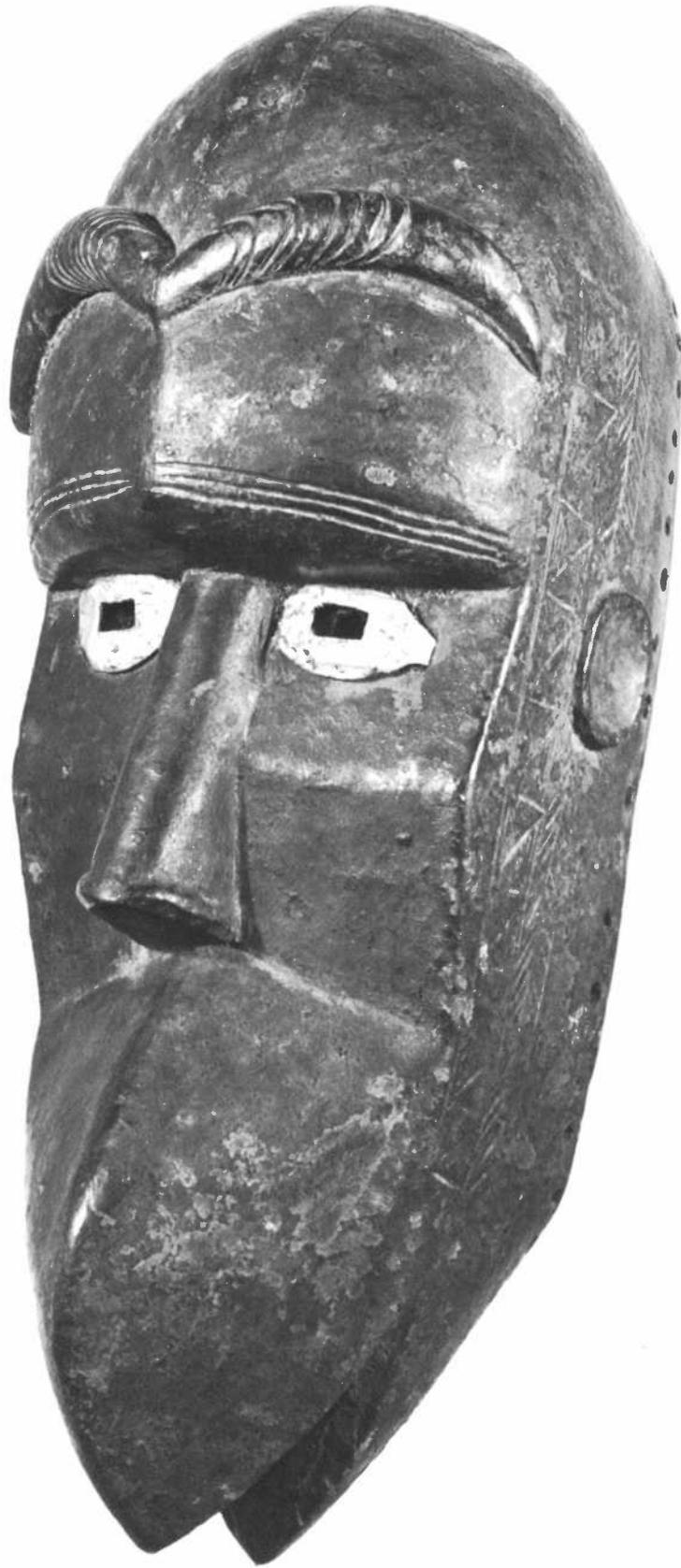
The WOBE in western Ivory Coast. Their masks are generally identified as "Ngere" or "Ngere-Wobe." One type of mask represents a bush spirit, and has the appearance of a fierce forest animal. Another type has the appearance of a naturalistic human face with Negroid features. Both are often heavily ornamented in the Ngere tradition.

The GREBO, who live along the coast in Liberia near the Ivory Coast border. Their sculpture resembles the works of the Kran and Ngere-Wobe.

The BASSA, a Liberian coastal tribe. They produce two distinct types of masks. One is an easily-identifiable small mask which shows Dan influence; the other is a helmet-type which belongs to a family of masks found among tribes stretching from the Bassa to the Mende in Sierra Leone.



49.
GUERZE
Mask with feather costume
h. 15" (complete costume and headdress, 73")
Wood, cloth, feathers, basketry



50.
GUERZE
Mask
h. 16½"
Wood, metal

This mask is from the border area between Guinea and Ivory Coast.



51.
GUERZE
Mask with bird beak
h. 21½"
Wood

52.
KPELLE
Mask
h. 11"
Wood, metal teeth, cloth





53.
GUERZE
Mask
h. 9½"
Wood, metal, cloth



55.
GUERZE-KPELLE
Baboon mask
h. 10"
Wood, monkey fur



54.
GUERZE
Bird mask
h. 9½"
Wood



56.
GUERZE-KPELLE
Figure
h. 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
Wood



57.
KPELLE
Baboon mask
h. 16"
Wood, animal skin and fur, horns, encrustation
This type of mask is often identified as Geh, a related tribe
in Liberia.

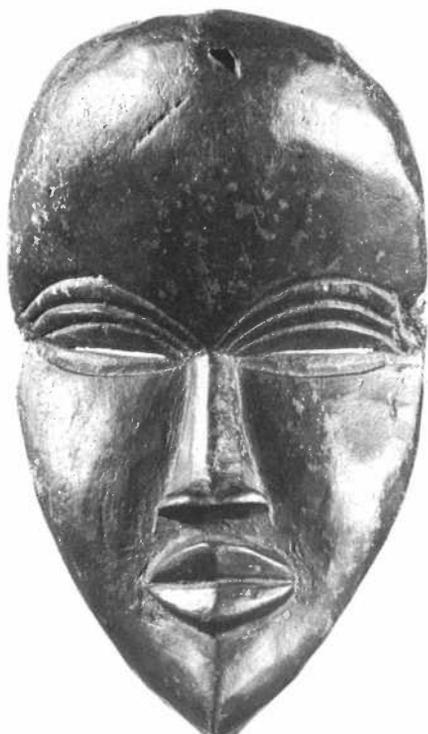


58.
KPELLE
Mask
h. 9 1/4''
Wood

59.
MANO
Mask
h. 8"
Wood



60.
MANO
Mask
h. 9 1/4"
Wood



61.
DAN
Mask
h. 8"
Wood



62.
GEH
Mask
h. 14"
Wood, nails



63.
GIO
Head
h. 10"
Wood, white paint

This piece and the following two pieces are thought to act as guardian or protective spirits, similar in function to the miniature *ma* masks (catalog nos. 66–68).

They are also said to be greatly feared objects which, when used by judges, guarantee that order will be kept and truth will be spoken.



64.
GIO
Janus head
h. 7¾"
Wood, white paint

The Janus head is thought to symbolize the ability of the protective spirit to see in all directions simultaneously.



65.
MANO
Janus head
h. 5"
Wood

66.
MANO
Ma mask
h. 3½''
Wood, metal eyes

Miniature masks, which are replicas of larger masks, serve as protective spirits for their individual owners.



67.
GUERZE-KPELLE
Ma mask
h. 4¼''
Wood



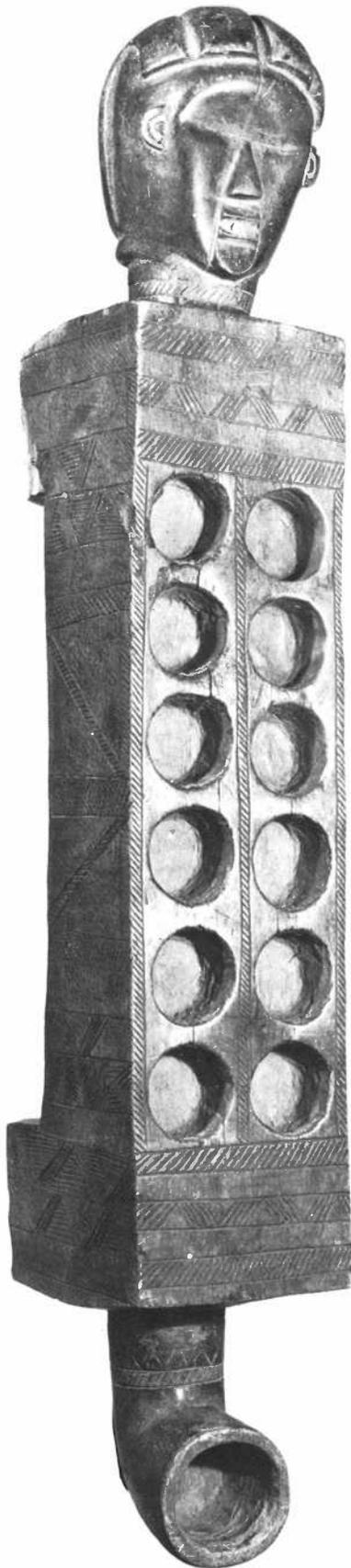
68.
GIO
Ma mask
h. 3½''
Wood



69.
GREBO
Small mask
h. 6''
Wood



70.
GIO
Small Mask
h. 5¼''
Wood, metal teeth



71.
MANO
Gameboard
l. 37½"
Wood

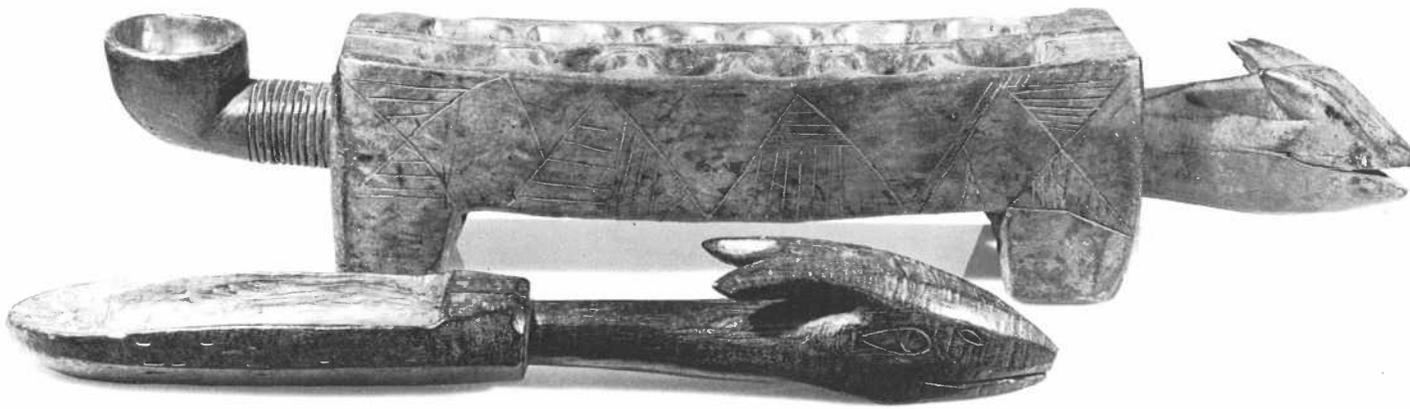
This board is used to play *Wari*, a game which originated in ancient times and is played today throughout Africa.

72.
NGERE-WOBE
Rice ladle (*Po*)
l. 18½"
Wood

Spoons of this type are used at harvest festivals and other special events. On these occasions the wives of high ranking *Poro* Society officials ritually dispense rice as a gesture of hospitality and generosity.



73.
MANO
Gameboard
l. 31½"
Wood



74.
MANO
Rice ladle (*Po*)
l. 22"
Wood



75.
DAN
Gameboard
l. 21¼"
Wood

76.
DAN
Female figure
h. 48½"
Wood, with metal teeth

At *Poro* Society meetings the wife of the highest official should be present. If she is unable to attend, a wood figure may serve in her place as a surrogate "first lady" or "mother" of the Society.



77.
DAN
Female figure
h. 24"
Wood



78.
BETE
Female figure
h. 21¼"
Wood, pigment



79.
KRAN
Mask
h. 14"
Wood, cloth, cowrie shells, animal tusks, horns and fur,
metal chain, red coloration, porcelain teeth



80.
KRAN
Mask
h. 10½"
Wood, cloth, monkey fur, fiber, paint

81.
KRAN
Mask
h. 11"
Wood, cloth, braided fiber, cowrie shells, metal chain, feathers

82.
KLAN
Mask
h. 12"
Wood, cloth, fiber



83.
KLAN
Mask
h. 10¼"
Wood, metal



84.
KLAN
Mask
h. 10"
Wood, white pigment



85.
KLAN
Mask
h. 12"
Wood, fur, feathers



86.
KRAN
Mask
h. 17"
Wood, cowrie shells, cloth, animal horns, animal skin and hair, feathers



87.
NGERE
Oracle fetish (*ga sua*)
h. 7"
Earth, cowrie shells, feathers, metal teeth

88.
KРАН
Oracle fetish (*ga sua*)
h. 13"
Earth, feathers, animal teeth, cartridge cases as eyes



89.
KРАН
Oracle fetish (*ga sua*)
h. 10½"
Earth, feathers, bone



90.
KРАН
Ankle bracelet
diam. 7¼"
Brass

91.
KРАН
Ankle bracelet
diam. 5¼"
Brass

Brass castings such as these two are produced by several tribes in Ivory Coast and Liberia, including the Gio, Ngere, and Kран.



92.
NGERE-WOBE

Mask

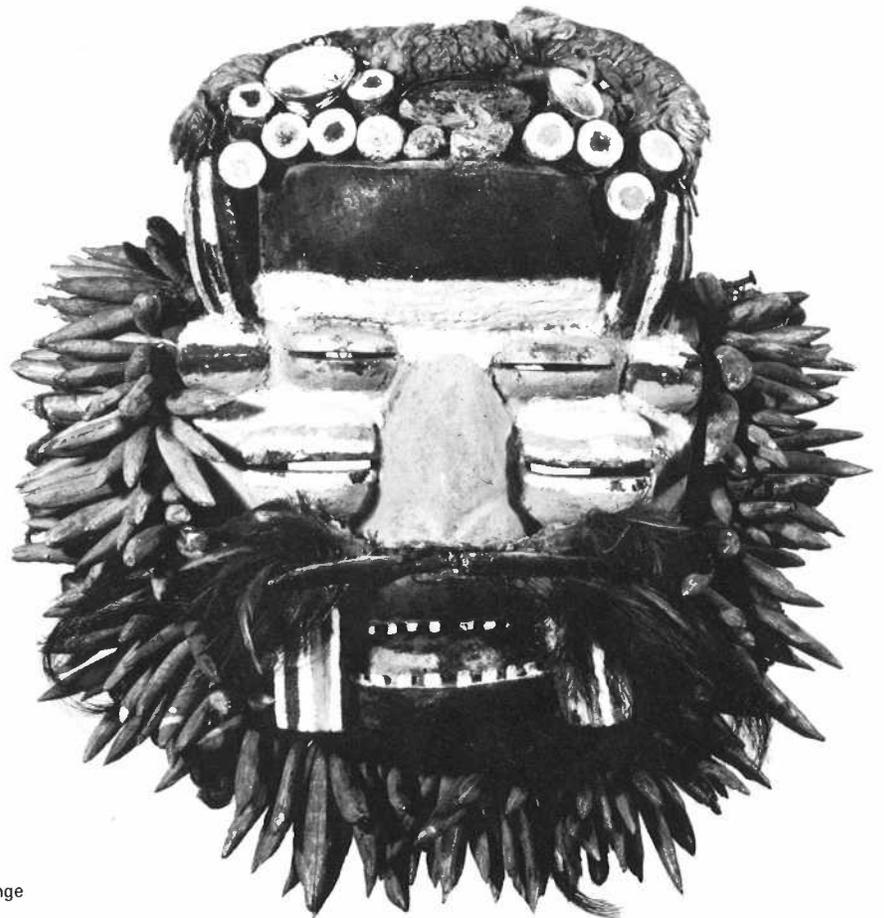
h. 19"

Wood, metal, hair, fabrics, cartridge cases, bone, glass
beads, fur, red, blue and white paint

93.
NGERE-WOBE
Mask
h. 18"
Wood, hair



94.
NGERE-WOBE
Mask
h. 16½"
Wood, cloth, fur, feathers, cartridge cases, bells, red, orange and white paint

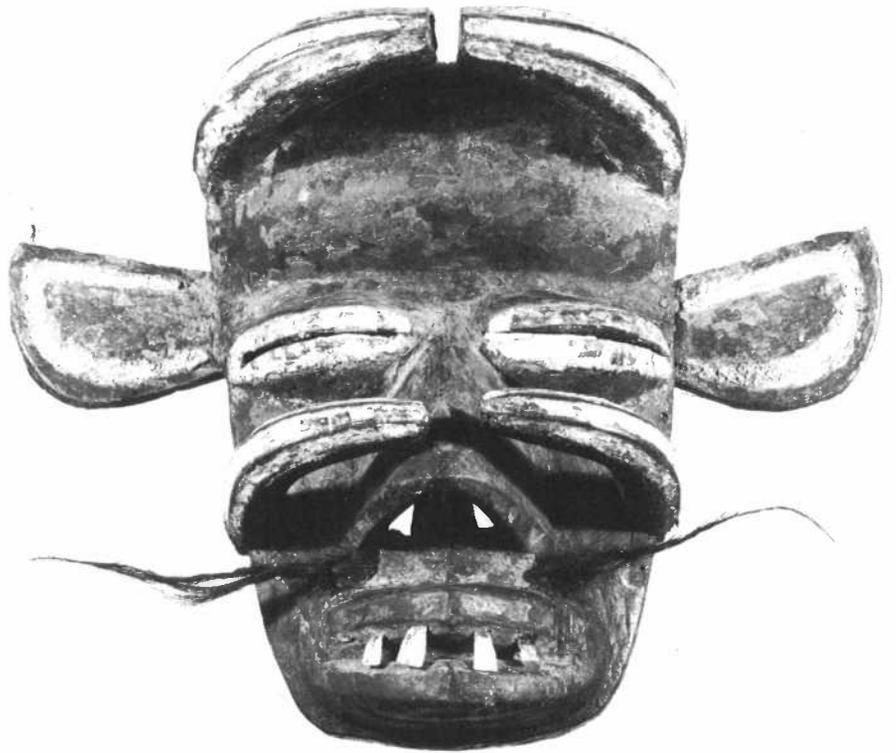




95.
NGERE-WOBE
Mask
h. 15"
Wood, hair, fabrics, brass bells, tusks, red pigment, white paint



96.
NGERE-WOBE
Mask
h. 11½"
Painted wood, cloth



97.
NGERE-WOBE
Mask
h. 12¼"
Wood, hair, white paint, metal teeth



98.
NGERE
Mask
h. 12"
Wood, metal, fur, braided fiber

100.
GREBO
Mask
h. 14"
Wood, hair, woven fiber, raffia, metal teeth



99.
GREBO
Mask
h. 10½"
Wood, hair



101.
GREBO
Mask
h. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
Wood



102.
GREBO
Drum
h. 21 3/4"
Wood, animal skin



103.
GREBO
Female figure
h. 29½"
Wood
(see catalog nos. 76-77)



104.
KRAN
Mask
h. 13"
Wood, fur, metal; red, white and black paint



105.
BASSA
Mask
h. 10¾"
Wood



106.
BASSA
Miniature mask (*ma*)
h. 4½"
Wood



107.
BASSA
Mask
h. 8¾"
Wood, metal teeth, nails



108.
BASSA
Miniature mask
h. 5½"
Wood, encrustation



109.
BASSA
Mask
h. 9¾"
Wood

111.
DEI
Mask
h. 11½"
Wood



110
BASSA
Mask
h. 7¾"
Wood



112.
BASSA
Helmet mask
h. 13"
Wood



113.
BASSA
Helmet mask
h. 15"
Wood, metal, raffia

114.
GIO
Mask (*Gaa wree wre*)
h. 30" (mask and headdress)
Wood, cowrie shells, fur, glass beads,
braided fiber, cloth, bells, metal teeth





115.
MANO
Mask
h. 9½"
Wood, feathers, fiber

116.
MANO
Minature mask
h. 4"
Brass
(illustrated on front cover)



Catalog notes and layout : William Arnett
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Back cover:
GOLA
Helmet mask
h. 14"
Wood
(see catalog nos. 42-43)

